

Rebaptism: A Manual

Michael Hicks

1

When the first letter comes,
a quiet verdict,
water sheds its sense:
coastlines stiffen,
rivers spill off the map.
The seashell goes dumb.
(You hold her mouth to your ear
and wait for the name of the sea.)

In dreams you gather shells by proud prophets
who tell all day on the bald shore:
the wine-dark sea is the blood of their parable.

Wait for your name,
while salt breaks against the gulls,
shells scatter in the black scroll of surf.

2

Moons rise and drop.
A fresh letter comes and the strength of water resumes.
The shores unflex,
shells chant all day against the cliffs
where the pores of earth break open
for all the labor of water over stone,
her tight sinews of brooks
binding sand to sand.

For now you may trust the water's work,
her leisure, and her healing spray.
Search the long black waves,
watch the clouds against the cliff (like men's hands).
Be washed by a clean sleep
and at dawn arise to
the fragile diction of rain.