The Last Ballet

L. Eric Greinke

Grand Valley State University
RETREAT
i will tell you i have known the sea
you will hold your coiled string
and tell me that the path you know
is as a lost man's wandering through the woods.
we have seen the other distant sails
that blow across the sea like leaves
and all the while i listened to the wind
you saw and knew it's destinations
i dreamed and saw the scattering sails.
the lost, the wasted and discarded of the sea
i have gathered on long walks
and kept in dark bottom drawers . . .
i will tell you i have known the sea.
the sun floats slowly to the water
with wings reaching red across the sky
and burns a weld between the night and day.
then began my selfish prayers
and the wind that rose against me,
and drove my soul to pace the reaches of
the shore, died.
all grew quiet in these hours.
the shadows were as blades.
night cut gently . . . our eyes were closed.
it was i who thought the waves were always there,
promises always kept, like pictures on one's mirror.
and it was i who knew from the beginning
that the sea was not my own.
my steps along the sand make only the briefest mark.
i am a story growing old.
my dreams were as a child's in sleep,
not wholly lost in death by dawn
but pictures others hung upon my walls.
i dreamed and saw the scattering sails.
the colors fade, the water washes clean.
i go into the day.
morning tide, the mirror falls away.
retreat . . .

— Richard D. Borisch

THE LAST BALLET (After Tchaikovsky)
The swan sings softly with her
arms: the water-movements of her
arms suggest the writhing of a
dying tree, sizzle-dancing in
the ecstasy of fire, its life
spilling out with the juices of
its blood. The sap of her arms is
boiling in agony too, and the
almost inaudible tone of her
song holds the audience in
mute suspension, because they
too, have danced in this ballet.
The dance conveys the spirit of
the dancer: the water-movements of
her arms suggest a fatal desire to
live forever, with fire's ecstasy
delayed forever, with the sap always
flowing in her veins like stems: her
mute song an eternal note: the
movements of the dying swan
suspended in a final graceful
pirouette: ever seeking
the return to the beginning: ever
lost in a lasting dance.

— L. Eric Greinke