

Two poems by Sandra Burnett



The Acrobat and Le Cirque Bleu by Marc Chagall

Chagall's Circus

(after Marc Chagall's The Acrobat and Le Cirque Bleu)

Fish-scaled in scarlet his heavenly mermaid
suspends a night-sky blended with ocean
pigments and daubed with stars.

On a drumroll of waves she swims his milky way;
seeks her moonfaced lover in a sea
of canvas surf

where black bream begs her coral bouquet,
crow tangos on the bough of her leg,
silver minnows halo her crown

and his emerald stallion waits.

Scales

At first there was one that caught the light
on her freshly showered legs.

Later, as she dressed, a belt of them
beaded her waist.

During dinner she had a thirst;
filled her glass with salt,

drank bottles of water and sucked
on langoustine.

Waiters sniggered as she left;
staggered home on plaited knees.

Next morning with ankles welded
feet splayed, she rolled from bed,

found silver scales on her hips,
thighs, toes;

a siren's wail in her head.

Sandra Burnett writes of the inspiration behind her two poems:

Scales

Scales is about change and one of the changes I was trying to write about was the menopause, but I never felt happy with the poem and went back to it several times over a period of two or more years. Just before sending it to Poems Under Water I looked at it again and made more changes. Ultimately I feel it has become a poem about the random and unexplained changes that leave people misunderstood and isolated.

Chagall's Circus

I saw Chagall's painting The Acrobat at the Chagall Museum, Nice, France and loved it. The truth about Le Cirque Bleu is more mundane. I came across a fridge magnet of the picture and it decorates my fridge. I would not part with it. I love the colours Chagall has used in both these paintings and his surreal images, particularly in Le Cirque Bleu, though I also find them disturbing. My poem is an attempt to convey the artist's power over the worlds he creates in his paintings. I also think it is about the ability to adapt to different environments. Once again it is a poem I have had to keep going back to.