

breathing underwater
by
Sarah Jane Precup

*why did you come to the ocean—you?
because it was summer, or to get away from work?
could you think of no place else to go?
hello?*

underwater we have time to ask each other this, all of us
suspended in the water and the strength of our beliefs
we came because we heard the stories, the answer always is
as the currents curl around us
and stroke our treading calves like hungry cats

we came 'cause there's a city called Atlantis
somewhere down there breathing underwater
stop our lungs for long enough, they'll come and get us
and we'll live down at the bottom of the sea
(what kind of silly person needs to *breathe*?)

so bubbles glide up under kicking feet
and press against the thin film of our sky
don't pull us up, we're fine, we say
down there's a city breathing underwater

Artwork

This creative piece is based around Marie Darrieussecq's *Breathing Underwater* (also called *Undercurrents*). I tried to create the ocean in 3D as best I could, because the ocean is a central part of *Breathing Underwater*—essentially a character in itself. Under each wave is a drawing I did of a character who is tied to the ocean and the idea of “breathing underwater.” The first character (in pink) is Pony, from Hayao Miyazaki's animated film *Ponyo*. This little girl was born a fish but used magic to make herself a girl so that she could explore the land. In the movie, the ocean reflects her moods and the mood of the story by growing large and dark when there is tension or she is upset, and glittering peacefully when everything is well. In *Undercurrents*, the characters moods are also reflected in the ocean. The second character (with brown hair) is Edna Pontellier from Kate Chopin's book *The Awakening*. This book deals centrally with a woman trying to free herself from the world's expectations of her, as the mother does in *Breathing Underwater*. In the end, Edna drowns herself as the ultimate expression of her ability to do as she wills with her life. The third character (red hair) is Ariel from Disney's animated *The Little Mermaid* film. This movie has been a part of my life for as long as I can remember, and it seemed natural to

include Ariel in a piece about the ocean. Although the characters of *Breathing Underwater* and the character of Edna find freedom and escape in the ocean, Ariel and Ponyo feel trapped within it. Both of them are looking up toward the surface and wondering about a larger world. Finally, beneath the last wave is a poem I wrote around the phrase “breathing underwater.” It is unrelated to the characters of *Breathing Underwater*, but I wanted to give the same feeling of the ocean as a place of release.

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