

The monarchs would restore his station soon,
 They must. His words would open, clear their eyes.
 He would return; his mission was Cathay
 And still Cathay: This salt of Genoa,
 This commoner who lived by wool and wits
 And charts to touch Cipangu's fringes, claim
 Them for Castile, was Destiny's own son
 Ordained by God. He would not founder now
 So close her gold reflected in each stream,
 So near he breathed her lotus-perfumed twilights.
 Next voyage, her silk and spice, her lace-carved tusks
 And more would ride his holds low in the sea.

By night he made the stars his rosary,
 Lamenting long to heaven's porchlights, pride
 Still preened, comparing all his griefs to Job's.
 Or softly humming sailors' lusty songs,
 Rattling his shackles like a tambourine.

His thoughts ran constant as the sand in glass,
 Pouring out the hours, turned, repeated.
 And had he governed badly? Providence
 Almighty was his guide. He had no choice
 But execution of insurgents who
 Defied his law. The gall of Bobadilla
 Seizing private papers! And his house!

The captain was uneasy in these waters;
 He sought and took his prisoner's advice:
 Northeast to catch the stronger westerlies.
 This time of year Madeira was the landfall--
 The only words Colón spoke on his journey
 Of humiliation back to Spanish judgement.

The Admiral of the Ocean Sea could walk
 The quarterdeck between arrested sleep.
 At leisure, he reviewed the zodiac,
 Philosophy and legend. Knowledge changed
 A man. A man could also alter knowledge.
 While proving others wrong, teredo worms
 Of error/doubt could enervate his own
 Accepted stock. But one thing never changed:
 The Evil One beset all chosen men
 Proportionate to greatness. Take the jinns,
 Those cursed spawns of Islam loose on earth
 To foul supplies and water, cause a plague
 Or agitate the settlers' discontent.
 Or pour malevolence in ears at court....

Misfortune falls on triumph like a fever.
 Nor yet is either over, guiding angels...
 I rally at this terrible amount!

--Glenna Holloway