

Sea Burial

We don't know where we are going
We are in the hands of Irene
From the funeral parlour
She's told the boatman where
And his boat is cutting
Through the waters
To a spot we are too embarrassed
To ask Irene

We behave as if on a picnic
My mother passes the drinks around
Offers fruit to us, to Irene
And the boatman
She takes out her camera
Snaps us in the boat
Snaps the passing landscape
Which is of huge tankers under repair
And metal industrial structures
Purposes unknown

We surge past the stalled ships
Squinting
Towards the open sea

The drinks drunk, the fruits consumed
We retreat into ourselves
Wondering if you would have liked
To have been laid to rest
Like this
At the funeral parlour
Looking through our options
Somehow this had seemed
The prettiest sending-off

Irene gets up and lurches her way to us
Here, she says, here
Standing by the side of the rocking boat
We scatter your ashes into the sea
In seconds you are gone
The sea, a hungry mongrel,
Has swallowed you
And leaves no trace
To remember you by

This is what you feared
This is what you dared us to do
In your bitterest moments you said
That we should roll you up in a straw mat
And throw you into the sea
For the sea is immense
And the sea is forgetful
It will sweep away your bones
And not tell us where

We watch the empty sea
Hoping for some sign
The murky brown cur
Only stares blankly at us
Wondering if we have more to give
But we have already given too much

WENDY GAN