Stephen Robertson

Dance

Dancing Satyr, bronze, 4th century BCE, recovered in a fisherman's net off the coast of Sicily, 1998. The Royal Academy, October 2012

A quarter of a mile or more
straight up
the Mediterranean waves roll on.
How many years, decades, centuries
have I lain upon this sandy seafloor?
I cannot now recall.

Up there are storms and calms,
earthquake-waves and volcanic dust,
soft breezes and winter gales.
Was I shipwrecked? Or cast overboard to avert shipwreck?
I cannot now recall.

Generations and generations
of fishermen and trading sailors
ply back and forth overhead. Was I carried for trade?
Or in payment of taxes? Or was I a trophy of war?
I cannot now recall.

On the lands bordering the Mediterranean,
empires rise and fall. Battles are fought,
wars are lost and won. Did they rage around me
where I stood for all men to see?
I cannot now recall.

Cities flourish and decay. In forgotten corners,
artists create and sometimes destroy. Did I really
spring from the hands of the great Praxiteles?
I cannot now recall.

No matter! Now, in a stranger place, a colder clime,
with no arms, one leg, no tail, but raised high,
and head thrown back, I can dance.

This poem is reprinted from Slanting Lines, the website of the poems of Stephen Robertson, at https://www.slacktide.site/slanting_lines/