

ON THE BEACH

“Whom to take and whom to leave.
Heartbreaking. Agonizing.”
Those were his words.

He has to go, complete his mission
not remain behind taking only those
whom he feels, will live

The others, left behind with dwindling
breath, without food, without water
nothing to assuage the cringing, cramping
pangs of hunger or that parching thirst.
Let Death be speedy and not linger.
Let Death be merciful.

For whom will there be resurrection?

Lying prone on the shore strewn
with the debris of what's left
of life with glazing eyes, confront
that vast expanse of shimmering blue,
that brine filled ocean on which they made
that hope-filled journey escaping
through the wilderness, reptile infested
of thorn snarled rutty routes
Where were the locusts and the manna,
from heaven to feed their starving
hearts in that hazardous exodus?

“Whom to take, whom to leave behind.”

Just this one life. One brief lifetime
Unrecorded histories and then is nothing left
but to let go of this last breath.
There are parallels.
Dunkirk perhaps is one.
Remember my friend, Frank Coplestone
telling me his story as we stood on that hill

beside an ancient fortress in Fowey, a soldier
who survived the holocaust of the Second
world war. Left on the beach.
Waiting for the boats. Thousands of troops
Retreating. Shells falling all around
but not as the gentle rain from heaven
bombarding that terrain, shattering
the carapace of earth, the Vulnerable
flesh turtle-squirming, upturned,
bleeds to death.

In the here and now do these lost
souls prepare on a new embarkation
for the next lap of their journey before
the final haven's reached?

There's no one here to hold a chalice
to the lips, no one to catch within
the net the wounded shoal of words,
pleas, entreaties, hopeless cries silenced
with Death's hands placed against
the mouths grimacing twist.

The phantom snow goose of a childhood's
tale flies across a peerless sky
in memory.

The shores through time are empty,
desolate.

Where are those boats,
mere planks of rotting wood
the ships, wrecked hulks?

“Whom to take, whom to leave behind.”
The unanswered question.

Jean Arasanayagam