Baigneuse

Portrait d'une Inconnue

The woman steps from the bath
perfumed moistness of her skin
absorbed
in small soft loops of towelling . . . .

she raises her arm
sees it reflected
on the black matting
bright with glass
that frames a sketch:
three Venus Steatopygous
wallowing in the waves . . . .

she drops the towel
raises both arms
one curving line of hip and breast and shoulder
silhouetted against the low horizontals
of bath
and wooden shelf
where the green fronds of a spider plant
sprout from a flowered Victorian chamber-pot . . . .

a slight shift
and she can eclipse its shadow
with her belly's--
moon-round
scarred with gleams of water
dark with memories . . . .
body clean
of the many disguises
it has taken or left:
prim school uniform Sunday hat
gipsy skirts swirling from the hips
Edwardian black stockings
to amuse a lover
spectacles coolly imposed
to deliver a lecture
eyes behind sunglasses
hands
gloved against
the cold dishwater
deep in earth's dirt ....

behind the other arm
she sees
the precise containing window frame
its clear panes
and beyond within
snow crabs
ravaging the dark flourish of evergreens
and again beyond within
the slow horizontal swell
of a winter ocean ....

driftwood
her arm
moves its shadow
over the reflection
of the water
stretches
towards the dark blue sea ....

Elizabeth Jones