PAUL MARIANI

Ferry Crossing

Beyond the granite breakers, a world of roiling
waters & raging spume & graygreen troughing
waves. Gulls hovering in the downdraft of a boiling
wake. Beneath it all, beneath the thrum of chuffing

engines, the endless wailing voices. Three days with my father, old
now, pointing out the same unvarying scenes once more
as I drove his car: those conning towers staring still into the cold
Atlantic, while the waves grind against the battered shore.

Three days. Then, this morning, north to Lewes and Cape May.
Late March, and daffodils unfurling, and snow-white
blossoms on the trembling branch, and spring still hard at bay.
And now the ferry wheezing to keep the further shore in sight.

All my life the chitter of the living has mixed together with the dead.
As now, faintly audible beneath the TV racket and video arcades—
that white cascade of noise by which our daily world is fed—
the charged static of the lost crackling as the world about me fades.

No doubt they want to tell me something they think I need
to hear, but try as I may, I cannot make what they're saying out.
Something about life, no doubt. Or about the end of life, a river feed-
ing the endless ocean, as if they knew what death was all about.

You'd think my father, at eighty-five, would know more
about the final things. But if he does he isn't telling me.
Instead, he'd rather suck the last drop from the rind, poor,
dear man, in spite of his shallow breathing, bad hip, arthritic knee.

And who can blame him? All his brothers & sisters have now crossed
over to the other shore, and both his wives as well. What looms
large for him these days is the Silverado hubcap he says he lost
when the curb attacked his '87 Caddy, and which accouterment he assumes

(rightly) I will replace for him, since it has become the whirling
epicenter of his shrinking world. The Caddy has by now become his wife,
yearning each Sunday for some final spin. Meanwhile the waves keep hurling
against the prow, as we hold on for life, dear mindless, precious life.