Seattle Journal for Social Justice

Volume 6
Issue 1 *Fall/Winter 2007*

Article 23

November 2007

Ode to the Sea

Ibrahim al Rubaish

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Recommended Citation
Rubaish, Ibrahim al (2007) "Ode to the Sea," *Seattle Journal for Social Justice*: Vol. 6: Iss. 1, Article 23.
Available at: http://digitalcommons.law.seattleu.edu/sjsj/vol6/iss1/23

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IBRAHIM AL RUBAISH

Ibrahim al Rubaish was teaching in Pakistan when he was arrested by mercenaries and sold to allied forces. A religious scholar who dislikes hostility and was once a candidate for a judgeship, Rubaish has a daughter, born just three months before he was captured, who is now five years old. During a military administrative hearing, he was told, "If you are considered to be a continued threat, you will be detained. If you are not considered a threat, we will recommend release. Why should we consider releasing you?" Rubaish's response was, "In the world of international courts, the person is innocent until proven guilty. Why, here, is the person guilty until proven innocent?"

ODE TO THE SEA

by Ibrahim al Rubaish

O Sea, give me news of my loved ones.

Were it not for the chains of the faithless, I would have dived
into you,
And reached my beloved family, or perished in your arms.

Your beaches are sadness, captivity, pain, and injustice.
Your bitterness eats away at my patience.

Your calm is like death, your sweeping waves are strange.
The silence that rises up from you holds treachery in its fold.

Your stillness will kill the captain if it persists,
And the navigator will drown in your waves.

Gentle, deaf, mute, ignoring, angrily storming,
You carry graves.

If the wind enrages you, your injustice is obvious.
If the wind silences you, there is just the ebb and flow.

O Sea, do our chains offend you?
It is only under compulsion that we daily come and go.

Do you know our sins?
Do you understand we were cast into this gloom?

O Sea, you taunt us in our captivity.
You have colluded with our enemies and you cruelly guard us.

Don't the rocks tell you of the crimes committed in their
midst?
Doesn't Cuba, the vanquished, translate its stories for you?

You have been beside us for three years, and what have you
gained?
Boats of poetry on the sea; a buried flame in a burning heart.

The poet's words are the font of our power;
His verse is the salve for our pained hearts.

Poem reprinted from *Poems from Guantánamo: The Detainees Speak*, by permission of the University of Iowa Press © 2007.