

Come in, the Water's Fine

In Amelie les Bains

the air is frighteningly clear
and thoughts come
with the hollow thrum of a theremin.

I think to myself spa towns
are like Lourdes for the secular,
built on baptismal waters,
and hear Lautrec tut
at my idealism, and say, sure:
LA is built on tar pits,
Washington on swamps,
there's Cherokee graves under Tampa
and crookback kings in car parks

They said Lake Avernus was the gaping mouth of Hell
but I have sifted my feet in its waters
and come back fine—save for my soles
a little scratched from stones beneath the surface

I find something more spiritual
in the town piscine, in the
Sisyphian cycle I perform
to empty bleachers: climb the diving board
arch into the flat green below,
a lap to the end with chlorine in my nose
then haul myself on to the chipped tiles; go again.

Coming home from the pool
she cossets me,
kisses the top of my head
and sniffs the chlorine aura
like catholic incense, in great

liquid gulps, as if she might
inhale me into the roots of her lungs

Archie Hamerton

3rd Prize in the Young Poets Category

2020 International Competitions - Wells Festival of Literature

www.wellsfestivalofliterature.org.uk/2020-competitions#young-poets-competition