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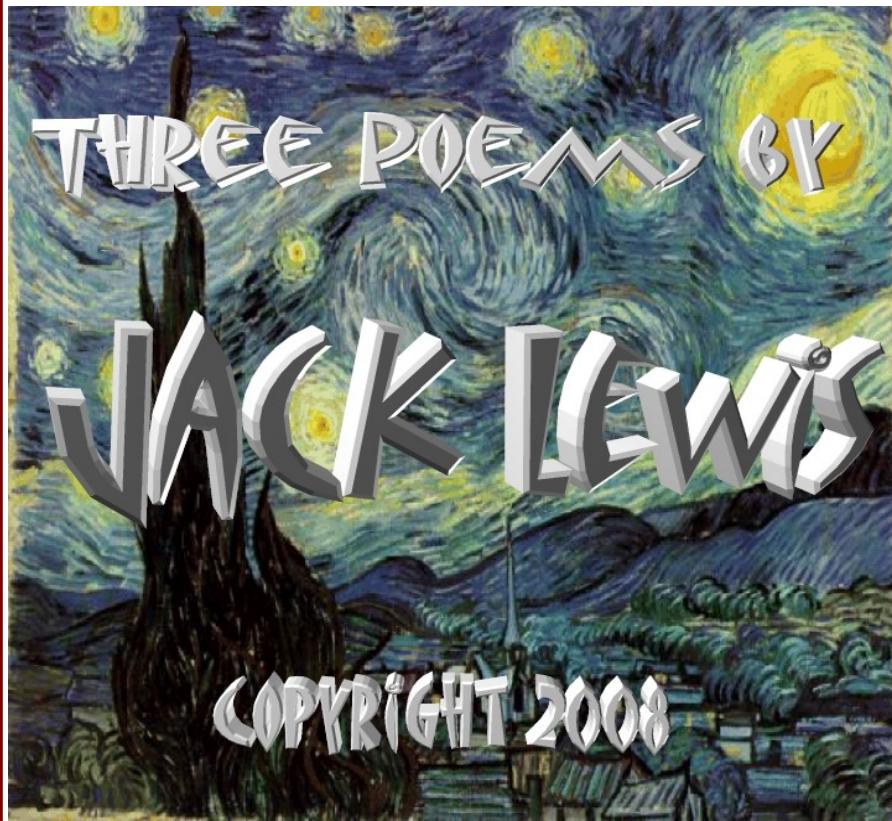
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ocean

mother of waves
you crashed over me
knocked and upturned me
twisted and burned me
floating upside down
a flash of the mystery
the beauty around me
bubbles streaming upward

pressure on eardrums
outward on lung walls
nostrils and eyeballs
a searing fire
a last glimpse
of sun filtering through
the deepening blue
then darkness

oil and water
a separation
a sinking of aspirations
of heart and of soul
while flesh washes ashore
the me of me
finally at rest
pressed to your floor

head dressed in seaweed
dripping with brine
clothed in your trappings
while stripped of my own
more dead than alive
my flesh and my bone
lie sandy and prone

on this deserted isle

ravenous I rise
my blood in the water
calling me back
wasted and wan
I stand and I lurch
arms extended wide
I stride into the surf once more
god I love the sea

Act I

It must be somewhere written
that this will one day end

Will I have played the fool?

Ignorance of the script
has not excused me from the role

I used to thumb the pages
read dialogue aloud
but never found the theme
or understood the character

refused to play the part
as if were waiting wings
to which I might retreat

the scribbled notes that fill the margins
resemble so the auteur's pen
a credit to the acting giants
who learned so well his mind
somehow their ramblings seem
less like light than cloud

I stand unwilling now
before a massive silhouette
an hushed and backlit audience
whose edges sparkle through the tears
the spotlight in my eyes

rather to be dumbstruck
stage-fraught
than plowing through
blowing lines and missing cues
dreading the reviews

I can hear you
hidden in the darkened balcony
whispered urging

but psychic weight of blackened faces
impassive silent blankness
turns laughter in my ears
conjures condemnation
which now is but imagined
but soon may be more real

upon the curtain call

the wild before bed

clarity
circling the memory
on padded feet
retracted claws

round round
piercing through
to where
moments before I stood
inhaling the details
a carnage arush on the wind

stars stand frozen
over the swaying grass
and the feast that awaits
every sense but taste
is satisfied

with haunches low and care abandoned
the words come hard
like forced breaths
to spell
to read my own hand a trouble

I rip the flesh of days gone by
throw back my head and howl
every bloody bite
a drunken passion
heady triumph
though bittersweet

the script scrawls way to scribble
I lay my head to sleep
savoring on my tongue
the morsels of each kiss

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Jack Lewis borrows his pen name from C.S. Lewis. He has written *Axe Against An Elm/Covenant Songs: Two collections of poem selected from the works of Jack Lewis*. *Axe Against An Elm* consists of 34 poems, written from 1992-1999. *Covenant Songs* is an epic 55-part love poem, written in 1999. His poetry has appeared in *American Collegiate Poets*, *In Other Words*, *Reflections*, *Sol Magazine*, *Skipping Stones*, *Pirene's Fountain*. He married in 1995, lives in Georgia, and has five children.