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A PARTIAL GENEALOGY OF SPOKEN WAVES

Bradford Gray Telford

for Nan Worman and j. Kastely

beyond the reach of words

Sophocles

I have two friends—both reading the same tragedy.
One friend's a philosopher, the other a retired dancer.
They both like wine and travel. Both work in the academy.
Both of them will ask a question with a question and an answer.

The philosopher was a medic. Two full tours. Vietnam.
The dancer, upon retirement, became a top-notch Hellenist.
The dancer, upon a *battement*, broke her hip. *Trop grande*.
The philosopher, while a medic, became a (hurried, bloody) optimist.

The philosopher reads from how it works to how it feels.
It doesn't, surprise-surprise, feel good in any way.
The dancer reads from how it feels to how it works. She feels
there's work to do on how she feels about the play.

The dancer, she walks fine despite all her injuries.
Years and years of treatment and she's not even done yet.
The philosopher, he talks in these wry, wry similes—
academic politics? *Like Crimp, like Laos. Like Tet.*

And the play? It's about pain, about time, about what on earth to do.
Whatever can be said and to what kind of spirit.
There is an island, there is a when, is a how. An almost-who.
There is a soul-tree that has fallen and there's no one left to hear it.

No one but a reader, maybe. Okay, maybe an audience.
Maybe a moment shatters on stage and then it's done.
Philosopher, Dancer—maybe they shudder and wince
as a man undergoes his birth—his birth as No One—

undergoes self cracked clean and sheared off the body,
leaving self to trickle and ooze and then dissolve into the sea,
where waves hammer the blank beach—*pappapappapai*—
waves and waves. Not dying. Artistically.