

Provincetown Poems

Summer Night Walk In Provincetown

Like latter-day Nazarenes they can walk past full benches
in the town square unmocked and unscathed, until met by
kindreds who urge them to join in baptismal rites, of sorts,
down by the water.

Young men embrace in the middle of the street as
two older men in matching cardigans pass by, smiling their
approval and showing the scars on their faces, remnants perhaps,
of less accepting days.

All of these men parading hand in hand are joined by
women arm in arm, as well as by young mothers and
fathers who weave in and out with strollers, and little toes,
dangling sweetly.

Grandfathers in old sneakers and grandmothers wearing
floppy hats traipse along with grandchildren, paying little heed
to all around while grossly intent on licking, rather adroitly,
melting ice cream.

The local custom of walking with suspended sensibilities
sadly isn't practiced in many places, particularly where iscarlots
lurk in the shadows on more dimly lit streets, waiting feverishly,
to pass judgment.

#

The Quahogger

He watches the August calendar
waiting for the new moon when
the tide is the lowest of the lows;
then, like Christmas to a child,
it finally arrives.

After sliding into smelly old sneaks
he grabs for his rusted rake and
satchel and is ready for the trek;
he steadily slogs out through
the mud flats.

His eyes remain fixed in the distance as
he trudges past skiffs with algae-green
hulls sitting on the soggy muck; he ignores
gulls fighting over stragglers who missed
the outgoing tide.

He trudges on, out to the oases of blackish
eel grass sprouting from the bay's sandy
bottom, now exposed; more than a thousand
waterlogged steps later, wet and muddied,
he is finally there.

He raises his rake, and stabs and claws
in the rivulets created by the receding
water that run through the dark grass;
he digs and pulls and strains until his
shoulders burn.

Victory finally is had when he feels
the scrape of metal on calcium
carbonate, and heaves a weary sigh;
his prongs lift helpless mollusks out
of their meager hiding.

After cleaning them in a tidal pool, he
holds them in his palm and admires their
shells- painted by gods and etched by devils;
when enough are dug, into the satchel they
go for the trek home.

Back on his deck, with a red sun sinking,
he admires his spoils with a beer and
cigar, and a shucking knife at ready;
alas, he falls off, dreaming of the feast,
giving them reprieve.

#

Hatches Harbor

No boats, wharves and channel buoys
with clanging bells here --
just a quiet, lakelike firth
for baby periwinkles, clams,
lobster larvae and roe.

Such lucky little ones, spawned in the
open sea and pushed through the
inlet's soft mouth by a rising tide,
nestle in its sandy banks
and brackish estuaries.

Here, they're protected from the
ravenous fiddlers, gulls and
fishes of the outer beach,
where, too, they would
be dashed to bits.

Those that thrive will venture back
from this aquatic heaven to the
hellish sea, but all in good
time, on an outgoing tide,
when nature sees fit.

#

Death on the Shore

A cormorant lies sprawled in
the muck at mid-tide while
another drapes a wing over
the head of its dying mate; it
gently preens and pecks at flies.

My pity is soon replaced by
respect as I watch these friends
for life share their final time
together; as I watch I wonder
what they may be thinking.

Does the one feel sadness as
it comforts its dying spouse?
Does the dying bird recall how
they nested and raised chicks
together? Do they sense the end?

In time, froth from an incoming tide
sloshes around the pair and the
sea soon blankets the sick bird;
the other takes wing, circles above
once, and flies down the shore.

#

Zombie Apocalypse at Low Tide

They come in droves like zombies – arms dangling and
legs stumbling – as they plod their way through the shallow
surf and wet muck – dragging along zombie offspring
while zombie hounds run wild, barking and howling.

They all are drawn to the most distant muddy flats,

where they bend and dig and scratch and smell as
they seek shells and bones and urchins and other
treasures the sea has left behind in its retreat.

Some emit bloodcurdling screams when they
step on crabs and mollusks and fish spines
hidden in the muck, while others shriek with delight
as they throw oblong and flat, round objects to one another.

Zombie faces contort as a returning tide takes them
by surprise and surrounds them, and they grab little
ones from the muck and yell to their hounds as they
beat a hasty retreat to the solace of beach encampments.

When the moon again pulls the water out to sea
they again will rise from the beaches and plod
their way to the treasures they crave in the mud flats,
dragging along screaming offspring, hounds running wild.

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