

Recurrence

The Sense of you Lingers

I see you in the headland,
a sullen grey cloud settles
in the small of your back
as you lie sleeping,
stretched out across the bay
where the heedless waves crash.

I hear you in the wind,
whispering invitations
and eerie incantations
like some impish siren
luring lovelorn sailors
down into the deeps.

I smell you in the salt,
in the battered seaweed
that writhes on the rocks,
in the spray off the water
as the cruel storm rises
and catches in my breath.

I feel you in the sand
that nuzzles between my toes,
that clings to my sole
with each stuttering step
like the defiant limpets
who grip the rocky shore.

I taste you in everything,
in the sweetness of memory,
in the bitterness of loss,
on my lips, on my skin,
soaking through my every pore,
entombing me in you.

She Remembers

She is old but she remembers
the coming and going of people.

She remembers
how the lively brook once stanchd
beneath lines curbs and layers
of the devil's excrement
pounded by multitudes on a restless commute
piped channeled culverted dammed—damned—
to a retention pond a constructed wetland and
diverted downtrodden amputated
bubbled again
over age-smoothed stones.

She remembers
mountains scalped by grating yellow scarabs
shorelines rutted with harbors breakwaters piers
rivers dredged by barges stretched into canals
flattened with dams wetlands drained
for endless lawns of corn
beans wheat rice that were
resculpted by floods
reshaped by winds
restored by glaciers
renewed by the ceaseless bump and grind of continents.

She remembers
bacteria fungi crawling and burrowing things challenged
by Barbie dolls baseballs styrofoam peanuts batteries
by paint cans fridges razor blades pesticides
by wrappers and zippers and gizmos and gadgets
by a million tykes bikes trikes mics piled
as mountains landscaped even or floating
on the wide ocean or blowing in the wind
skies opaque oddly thick strangely hued billows
of darkness from oily flues water streaked
creamy frothed slicked of surface upturned fish
ocean gyre plastic island island sanctuary
of net-throttled birds a turtle choking
on a plastic bag a pelican heavy with oily goo
how with new enzymes evolved deployed
slowly munching they brought her corrupted elements back
from death

to life
from the people
new food for the trees.

She remembers
cities (monstrous things) loud overstuffed
that stopped crumbled were overgrown swallowed
the last survivor was a pyramid who was ground down into sand.

She remembers
their steps the people four palms then two feet
bare then sandaled or variously shod
and the length of them set out enfolded in earth
the feel of their passing the rapid decay of
blood

organ

intestine

sinew then

long bone

and tooth

marked by a stone bearing a name
now under moss
now under lichen
now fading
now eroding
now ashes like their bones
now dust like their teeth.

Desert Road

Desert road, sand beneath sore feet, the horizon
curves full circle,
 great arc,
 like an ocean,
but dry, hot, lost.

Nothing moves save the wavering heat and a dust devil
in the distance who swirls himself
into nothingness.

Far-off gray-ocher mountains striated with ancient pigments,
etched by rain, scratched by wind, baked by quavering heat,
by the scorings and scuffings of time unbound, the guttered remnants
of a prairie of bluestem, dropseed, once undulating
amaranthine to the horizon,
 ground down.

 Weather-trammeled.

I pause in my traipse to speak with it but it is too old,
or I am too young, only a phantom wind
murmurs furtive warnings.

Scattered cacti stand like petrified traffic cops directing
dust. Impassive blood-red boulders sit in defiant congregation
like lithic trolls manifested from the underworld by the monotonous
grinding of the earth. Prickly pears jut from the hardscrabble
like tobacco-stained teeth or desecrated monuments guarding
long-forgotten graves.

A rattlesnake eyes me from the shade of a blistered creosote bush.
I pause to look at him but he recoils into a ball, scales scratching,
tongue flicking from a stony grimace.

 We are not friends.

The horizon propagates a plume of dust, builds, approaches,
gathers around like a shroud.

 Do I need a ride?

 No.

 Am I sure?

 No.

A buzzard traces derisive spirals above our conversation, amused.
I walk until I am.

Permanence

How the light refracts through
the pristine water, luminous curves dancing
on the sandy bottom flash
like twirling skirts across sculpted
limestone fissures and channels, glinting
fringes and ruffles pirouette across
a wide fan, gilt-edged, a bulbous cushion
shaped like a swollen brain, a giant clam,
green-frilled mouth agape,
now a thicket of antlers
whose brown fingers, yellow-nailed,
jab at the sky.

Tiny mouths poke
from the very living rock
stirring spirals of food, daubing
calcium to build their homes,
layer
upon layer.

See the fish:

What reckless abundance!
They nibble at polyps,
peep coyly from behind
a sponge. Watch a multitude
on the move: a synchronized shoal
of silver sides shining, a hundred
thousand spinning mirrors.
A squadron of cuttlefish morphs,
shape-shifts, iridescent
as it meanders by.
Now a crimson-emerald angel.
Now a clown who flaunts his hot
orange stripes perusing anemones
who flop from side to side,
drunkards in the pulsating waves.
My breathing echoes in my mask.

My blood pulses.
I suck air from my world, above,
and my head is a cavern,

which draws me underground
to some distant future. Still here,
still in this place, but deep
in the earth, now, standing

in a ghostly cave like some haunted lithic womb,
breathing clean, cold air.

Water drips all around. This water has dripped
for a hundred thousand years.

One precious droplet coalesces at the tip
of a stone dagger catching the light,

blue, green, sparkling,
in suspended animation,
a miniature world entire.

Suddenly, loosed to fall, it splashes
down to an emergent spire who reaches up
to make the catch. The light is prismatic
in ribbons of wet rock
striped yellow,

ocher, orange, red.

A tiny waterfall. Thin curtains of water
dribble over lace-pattered curtains of stone.
Sculpted limestone fissures and channels
drip through this clandestine echo chamber.

Rebounded, blinking, breathless,
remembering where I am—and when—
I emerge from my phrenic cave chilled
and exposed. The wind has risen, erratic,
fierce, gusting up the scarp, flowing rampant
through the peaks,

cols, cliffs, screes,

I lean into it, coat flapping furiously,
eyes watering at the view,
these great, grey, erumpent mountains
crumpled by the restless, rumbling continents,
heaving up from the very living sea,
weathering,

eroding

sculpted limestone fissures and channels,

corrugated reefs,

of solid, unyielding permanence
that undulate to the horizon
and dissolve into the sea.

Where Do You Go?

Where do you go when the cold wind blows
and the rain falls cruel
onto weathered stone
when the autumn frosts
strip trees to the bone
with the chafing rasp
of a love grown old?

Where do you go when the neap tide flows
and the sea draws back
from a lonely shore
when the fox retreats
to a sad, dank hole
and the geese fly south
with a tale of woe?

Where do you go at the season's close
when the petals drop
from the faded rose
and the sad snow falls
as leaves, musty, mold
and the grey wolf howls
in the forest, alone?

When love grows old
with a tale of woe
and you're all alone
tell me—

where do you go?