

Mosquitoes at Sunset

It won't sting much or for long, but it's the price you pay
for watching the sun go down the far side of the bay
Those delicate winged vampires patrol for flesh
and start to drink so gently you would never guess
that soon the urge to scratch will pierce your soul
But even so, to watch this canvas stain from blue to pink,
to feel its fire melting down the sky, the ember-lovely whole
ablaze with lights and colors that you know would sink
even the hardest veteran of some foreign war
For he's the one who owns the land, come hell or flood,
and on this bit of ground, deep into his final tour,
the man looks salted down, or pickle brined, a knotty wood
from some exotic tree, the way the weathered bristles
lap his face, and this is worth his aged, imperfect blood.

Enjoying the ordinary in the here and now, between now and never

... on the shore
Of the wide world I stand alone ...
John Keats

A man walks down the beach one moonless night
to feel the give of sand beneath his feet.

He likes the dark. He feels at home in it,
as if objective boundaries thinned and blurred.

The ocean's constant *suck* and *boom* sounds like
a natal lullaby. Is there a heart,

a great maternal organ pumping life?
Perhaps the moon would have something to say

if she were here, which, clearly, she is not —
the only lights are stars and fishing boats.

What else is there, inhabiting the deep
of ocean troughs, or far, far, distant space?

Who knows! Beside, he's no philosopher.
There's room for everyone who needs and inch

or two to call his own. "Live, and let live,"
a rusty old cliché, but still it's good

to have a rule of thumb, a way to understand
when something unexpected comes your way.

It might be small and green, or full of hair,
it might rise up, breathe fire, and call your name.

Would that be a sign of the apocalypse?
Or would it mean that you should run like hell?

Perhaps the world is just a play of lights,
a scene that might roll up or part, revealing —

what, exactly, he is not too sure.
The sand is wet and cold between his toes

down here with lines of breakers rolling in.
It all feels real to him, that's all he knows.

And this is too much speculation for one night.
He came out here to get a little peace,

to still the thoughts mind candy only curbs.
He bends to gather what's at hand: a polished bit

of mystery, a clue deposited along the shore,
a pitted thing that's traveled long and long,

a lifetime spent beneath the waves, and this
the airy afterlife of mollusk shells.

Some afterlife! Compared to life before,
there's not much going on here on the shore.

What does he know about the life of clams?
This scrimshaw is a map of where it's been,

and if he knew its alphabet, he might
translate the secrets of aquatic life.

Like Yorick's skull, the shells refuse to speak.
If he could make some story up, he would.

But he's poor ventriloquists; he moves
his lips when he pretends to speak for God.

Beside, what part of clam exactly is
the lip? So never mind all this. "Enough,"

he thinks, "and just enjoy the scenery!"
He stops and lets the ocean drain his cares

with its opaque tranquility. It takes
the useless, empty worries from his mind.

He sighs. "Forget the future and the past. "
"Instead, just focus on the here and now,

"this time between them both, my slice of life,
for this is the only piece I'll ever own."

Sermon

No more resolute green
of summer marching home, no more
endless days of oxygen.

No more death by beauty
in the fruited plains
of amber luxury.

Like nicotine ghosts
who drift down dusty halls,
the trees are tamped to gold.

The world is angled toward winter
and we are all in danger
of slipping like drunks, like

storm-tossed sailors in some exotic
odyssey on decks of ice.
But the sun,

that sober clergyman,
keeps preaching his only sermon
to the choir.