

Abstract

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These poems work the geography they possess, moving as fully as their peripheral vision permits; their area delineated by a quietly bidding moment revealing the narrator's uncertainties and desires, and especially her romantic relationship. The visual efforts are detailed and many times drawn from the natural and/or the foreign, traveling from the New England coast to Spain and Argentina, while incorporating translated works from Latin American poets—Heberto Padilla and Dulce María Loynaz—, the wonder at the expansiveness of another place isolating and contrasting.

Spring Tide Wait

by
Julia Leverone

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I

Haze

It wasn't heavy pollen from the trees
in the air today it was their burning,
blown wild smoke from Quebec
and over New Hampshire, descended
around us. The wind we heard would turn
out to sea didn't, fueling, escalating.

I've seen wind on lakes touch down
to give the surface grained
brush strokes, mesmerizing in that
they seemed to move and not move—
then in a second pivot, strike off
and touch the other side the way fire
takes air in, with littered spikes,
erratically, chancing on what's newer
in wakes, waiting for the give.

Safe

Falda del Carmen, Argentina

From far off the heat lightning
is completely soundless, hot color

blooming clouds from their insides
like a flashlight to the finger

and showing the same still vision
across the landscape lying open—

dirt road that old trees can't swallow,
dirt and glass and at times a car traveling.

A family leaves the radio turned up
in the garage when they're away,

the door's green rolling shutters completely
blackened behind the flood light.

Route 1A North

You stayed on the sidewalk
when I crossed into traffic
and moved around to the driver's side,

kept my body against the idling car
as the commuters slowed to go by:
it was my birthday.

It was a stranger's diabetic fainting,
a so-called "heart event,"
disease, PTSD.

The light rain lit in head beams,
the hum of the gloss-black Honda
Accord, his white fitted shirt

gave off thoughts like "safe" or "sane"
and made what I couldn't quite see
seem sure,

even the rhythm of his breath.
I didn't sense the wet
until we finally drove towards home,

after you had shouted to me
that he was waking
as I was knocking by his head,

and he rolled his window down
and let me in his world
and then left me in the lane, alone.

The Sailors

We went to see the tall ships in Boston
and you took to the Uruguayans, friendly,
wearing their good suits, their hometown accents
and ideals close enough to your own.

On deck there wasn't much of interest
where the public was allowed, the reserve anchor
white-coated onto its platform,
some trunks with huge coiled rope, things

neatly put away, neatly out of sight, at least,
according to a discipline instilled not just
by training but behind their placid faces
and across their hardened foreheads.

When I snuck into the boiler room
there was a pin-up of a girl turned backwards
but nothing else was simple, it was loud,
machinery working throughout the mooring.

They still enjoyed themselves as far as I could tell—
white suits mingling among young women,
some by the drum and guitar, singing too,
some getting up and dancing in short fits.

Arcturus and Rigel

Swampscott, MA

The skiff is named *Intensity*. Bastardized, it reposes
by the traps where finches make short games in and out
of painted wire. Sinking from the wash of drainage pipes
far up the incline, it's been full of sand for some time now,

and you step inside it, and sit, staying with the afternoon.
Behind the beach things are cooler in the south-facing homes:
branches climb the stairs, scratching against doorways
tall and old, their shadows licking spaces between brick—

and the ivy, taunted, races into the rough blankness of the wakes.
A few vines from the walls have come free, feeling outwards.
It's a matter of time until they find the lattice canopy below
and latch on to the arced wood, to each other, their own growths.

Then during daylight we can stand beneath the clotted mess
and point out stars, Arcturus, guardian, and Rigel navigating
as we make our way. Less sure, we're heading for the moment
somewhere close enough to home.

Houses

Translation of Heberto Padilla's "Casas"

In the least likely hours there reappears without fail
a house I lived in as a child. Others—
I remember—were not ugly,
but I did not love them.

All the time moving houses,
through my childhood and after—
and for what?
Nothing. I retained them for some years
and went on to lose them.

I wanted to build a shed,
a hallway out of balsam with my hands
and enormous lofts
where I could hide my toy arrows, my rocks,
small piles of treasures.

Porches, stairways, walls,
rusting knives,
pictures of our birthdays and our baptisms
surge faster in my memory
like a plane leveling down to sea,

widening salt lulls in me like waves.
Shipwrecked houses, lost.
Castor, my water dog,
howls incessantly in their rafters.

Residence

Iguazu Falls, Argentina

The Great Dusky Swift

has a coloring soft like attic boxes,

crumbling, in dust and silted piles
above a house that's captained by the new

occupant's two large dogs—the magnolia
still there but looking ragged.

The bird packs dark knives for wings,
unknowingly or knowingly. It sleeps

on updrafts in the misted dropoff—
sails and falls—free to cut

from that thunderous, that incessant place
but remains. We go once, see

what's to see, throw coins or watch in quiet,
dark flecks against the water's thrust.

Driving to Rose Haven

These red-painted barns have no age.
Where they are red, they are red,
on vertical boards seen through
to the other side—that light
more vivid in slit shapes—
and weathered, weathered down
to gray dead wood beneath.
This is Sansbury Road.
I know it from my childhood.

There are sheep over on the next
farm, the only sign of yield
on the slope that leads
right up to the lip of pavement.
There, a black vulture waits
for something inland, one eye watching.
I am the interference I have made
myself to be. I am on my way
to places that have stayed without me.

Now, the facile coastal rural trend
breaks and sidles up with bay—
blue and tall behind the trees
and down the hill—like how one wave
jarred from the smack of a seawall
reverberates back out, meets another
from the open water, strong and paced,
and they raise each other high
and draw their weight away.

Travels in Spain

I/Arbor Fruit

Alcalá de Henares

No one could think of what they were, what they were called—
the ends of the tree branches bent and snapped into fruit
that wasn't fruit, left to hang by some sinister exaction.

The Spanish had forgotten that their word for bean was different,
that the trees are natural to a climate, that east coasts are manifold.

The pods accumulated with trash and cigarettes that washed up
in sectioned plots of dust while the rest just dangled, the same
beans most of the year. The same tree another place that my body

ached to leave, like brick walks cracked by roots: barely closer to you,
I watched the fruit hang on as it aged down to hardened cases.

II/Confines

Valencia

The central market is contained in one structure:
weekly fair-grounds thrive inside an architectural marvel
with a dome and walls tiled in bright formations,
windows stained and shaped, though shuttered high.

Back behind the small east exit, graffitied, a family
slouches out of the sun by their bleak low-rate produce,
hand-written posters, their rowdy kids endlessly
running each other up and down the platform steps—

and the market exhausts itself after a morning,
and vendors pack and go. Emptied box stalls, fish smell,
the metal doors rolled and locked to ground seal
the building in its quiet, sending people elsewhere

through tight alleys, under a lean statue guarding
the angled and thrusting back streets as if an expansive
mausoleum, or just one red apartment—it's Mary,
or a white dog vivid against the startling sky.

III/December Storm

San Sebastián

One floor above the damage. Glass
and concrete across the road. That day
I had to lean to walk up port-heading alleys,
was always going somewhere cold.

Three beaches, three small mountains
and the bay bordered the city, interspersed
with orbed lamppost curls and seawall
lookouts where walkers could stop for waves.

I was enduring newness, barely going out
for food—so enclosed by regularity
that I'd found within myself. Not the self
that told you I would be fine away

and went away. When the biggest wave hit
it must have been around three, and the white
that filled my window clung for full seconds
after the slam that woke me.

But I didn't question much.
What I remember mostly is sitting upright
in the hotel's double bed, coming to
as that wall of water drained down.

Foster

My fingers are enormous to her limbs, slender for an infant.
Her head is also this way, her mother's head, perhaps.

I keep a firm grip to comfort, give some feeling of a guidance,
fill the hold the cocaine had on her. She's captivating, her sheer size,

her tiny back as frail as water—just as she is stunned, in turn,
by voices, by my shirt, by its checkers, black, grey, tan.

Then fusses to exhaustion. Things build up and ease in waves:
I feel the coolness through the porch screens—yet she lends so much heat,

so much does she have to live. These evenings, early spring,
that the birds, returned, have claimed—they take on fullness:

what kinds of music are among us. Redwing blackbirds accelerate
the dusk across the yards and streets, resound beyond my sight—

but soon other holes will widen, gaping: soon the ground
will give its weight to channels working through the root-paths,

water buried from the downpours, cutting against dirt ceilings.
Still, we can't be sure what spots will sink until enough becomes enough.

We can't be sure what will happen, what could be filled or hollowed.
The light's turnover stifles things that move. No one knows yet

that her eyes are navy blue. Right arm free and lulled beneath my left,
I'm holding her for now, and already she's forgotten.

Open Spaces

I

At the edge of the yard of my childhood home there was an entrance declining into forest, among the oaks and layered leaves, the low thin sapling branches. I played as far as the ground remained dry, marsh binding—but mostly kept to a wide trail parallel to my yard,

its open column stretched by ferns and light, across the power-line to the town's main route. There the trail sealed in a pouring of cattails,

tall and seeming stiff until I grabbed hold of a taut outgrowth, exquisite in form, and precipitate, it crushed to down, shed off.

II

I had found a stone foundation neatly retaining a small clearing, the forest floor around it opening too, less to maneuver—but at one of its corners clustered trees and brush extended upwards, densely, higher than an imagined wall. Once, turning it to head home, there were small white feathers strewn all around: I don't remember if that was when the hard body was there, soft gray, or if I even knew they were from the same—sleek togetherness and the underbelly of the mourning dove.

By the Tracks

On a worn railcar body, behind the sliding door
the paint bubbles lightly while rust seeps

through the metal, gradual, pushes inward
with its rough back raised in flecks

the way a spine transforms, a canine ridge
of stiff raised hair shows blackness at the roots,

shows space through flexed tufts.
Air goes right to the skin, to devastation.

The street dogs limped to find a place
in the leaves at night, isolated, small humps.

In La Boca a vendor flirted, laughing
at the retriever clothed in its owner's blanket,

Peruvian, taking its head by the muzzle,
pointing with his right first fingers at the skull

and then recoiling. We should kill it, he said.
We should kill it, *matarlo*.

You

Translation of Dulce María Loynaz's "XXXVII"

Yesterday I bathed in the river. The water was cold
and it filled my hair with deposits of lime and dead leaves.

The water was cold. It poured against my body and
broke into currents that wavered and darkened.

And as they joined the river that kept going, I thought
of you, of what could wash out my flesh and my organs,
wash the burn of a kiss that never touched me, your thirst
that cannot reach me.

Horseshoe River

There I knew it would be so—full, wetness
seeping out of surfaces the water reached—
that green, a green starker than it would ever
be in memory. I almost saw it later
against red, growing from volcanic soil,
iron remains, eroded, another world.

I felt the air inside my skin, but it was more.
Black life opening among rain. I was there
with my parents, I was young, we were meeting
a relative we loved, what I expected
rushing forth only to divert against the real.
Someone I cared much more about in absence.

I felt the water soaking entirely through,
the river cutting down to rock, the misting
air bringing space to senses, enclosing me—
and the one scene below: serpentine, sky-heavy,
dark shores turning into trees I would never
see again. Not from there, not these eyes.

The Lake

As a child I would let things go intentionally,
a hair band underwater, take a breath and turn downward,
kicking from the torpid pull of water meeting air.
Then, the press of cold towards the bottom—

the soft floor layer of residing particles
always frightening me, its unknown depth,
and how stirred, the loose cloud hung for minutes
bigger than whatever act had caused it.

I dove for things that other people dropped,
eyeglasses, once, and for mussel-noses in small patches,
their black bodies making satisfying knocks
up through the water. If I lost hold of one,

it would sidle down, wobbling, descending
faster than I could reach for it.

My suit would reek of lake, the debris of pine needles
stuck between the fabric liner and my clammy skin,

remainders from the feel of water slipping
all around me, that sense of intimacy, lightly enclosed
in a realm where I could stay, for a few seconds,
that pleased, that quiet, disappeared.

The Orchard

*Yo quiero ser llorando el hortelano de la tierra que ocupas y estercolas,
compañero del alma, tan temprano.*

—Miguel Hernández

Where the tide will peak on dock piles, the boards edge off
to stone barricade to tiny sloping beach, more a landing
than a beach, with ribbon streams cutting matte dirt
into flexed sections. A small area of grass, sea grass,
plateaued, still has a thickness of lithe blades that fade in color
at its sides, portending a salted flood. Long ago the rocks
have settled, their deep clefts tinted so, accumulating.
It's Sunday, the dredge won't carve out silt, in mouthfuls
claw at the underlying orchard where dispersed life blurs
with the alluvium, cast. Groups pass on outboards,
attempt to fish, trolling tube eels through the channel and
writhing the black synthetic bodies with motor speed.
If one snags and breaks off, and quiets, in the dark and mire
a marvel species will emerge, ghosts, acorn worm-heads
poking in the undercurrent—descendants of the hemichordata,
fusion of invertebrate and vertebrate. Branchial slits
and iodine smell, tomorrow they'll lift up with the sediment,
pack into colored crates and go off in barges to the sea—
and slowly, later, repopulate the mouthed holes along the shore.
How long they take is anybody's guess, somewhere between
the seaweed-mimic-crab in my palm and the painted ceiling
of the rotunda, light blue, white molding forming a star.

II

Call

Vigil-late, our noises ceased, we carry outside
our heat into pooled moon-spots strong-set
through the pines, the same that rile in day
like in a robust port how sun echoes off the crests,
off tilted hulls, off glass and metal hardware—
and are now completely still. This white slanting
bright enough for travel. We travel lightly, staying
close, over grounds strange like a stage set
so counter to the real are we, to bodies'
clocks, to night and nature, to habit. I for one
have changed so much to be here.
Like what has lifted up to glide, the wind leaving
overnight. Then the loons' call in the morning.

Nightingale

*No te nombro; pero estás en mí como la música
en la garganta del ruiseñor aunque no esté cantando.
—Dulce María Loynaz*

As a solitary bird in the woods close by
opens the space with short resonances,

when you lay your hands aside my hips
and kiss the skin below the navel

I know I have come back to you. And will
again over the slow encounters of our years,

like, elsewhere, systems of marsh channels
dug by tide.

Castle Rock

After Dante's Canto XXXII, Inferno

The path was wet—there had been several rains
that forced the water underground, pressing
on the unfrozen layers, nowhere left to sink—

and shed its surplus in channels, some
free-flowing, some as muted as a seep
on muddy trails we followed, stepping on roots.

I trained my focus on the path while climbing
and didn't know how far I was until
I heard your voice call from ahead of me

and saw, from where the path released its hold,
a castle-rock, clustered rock exposed,
its outgrowths bulging from the hilltop's shoulder.

Its openness fell upon us as we rose,
walked around, looked in all the clefts.
The rock was littered with dead lichens, papered

and crumbling, that once bloomed from almost
nothing—almost distracting from two
round metal plates, markers drilled for reference,

set in the rock like chain fences into trunks.
We tried consulting them but their arrows seemed
to aim astray—not north, not to the airport.

So, abandoning cardinal points, we aligned
our bodies elsewhere, and found a steep cliff
shot with glass, its shelves drenched in shining

white, brown and green, like a distant ocean, and
you rested over this uncovering, legs dangling,
and invited me to look out over the state.

Housatonic Bend

*The shooting stars in your black hair in bright formation
are flocking where, so straight, so soon?
—Elizabeth Bishop*

The train's lights flare in daytime, then the chains
between its cars, loudly across the river
and plainly flanking us, bass

and clanging. The water is wide, the drying needles
accumulated on our ledge matte to the eye—

and the cars, graffiti-struck and rusting, swerve
meridian-bound and undiscernibly,
anatomically, vibrate away from view.

Blind

Translation of Dulce María Loynaz's "Agua Ciega"

I run—black river—in crosses, in angles, towards I don't know
which agonies, towards you, my sea, there past the elusive and fatal
union of our distances.

Summer Home

*La Perla (1975-1979) was the most important clandestine detention center in the province of Córdoba, Argentina, on Rt. 20 heading outside the city limits.
—Nunca Más*

Past the city's reaches and before the foothills
is the cathedral where your great-grandfather
is buried, firm white façade mooning forth
across the brush, where clumps of weed
on low-hanging wires imitate that immaculate arc,
condensed—the Southern stars. Pouring
down through trees, through winter branches,
straight to the trunks, the body, life.

In this place you were brought up, with its dirt
road and Italian garden, the neighbor's horses,
the brook your mother used to swim in
when it was fuller. It's dried up for these months,
one pool reserving the only water, ringed
from minerals and its rope for swinging
vertical over the rocks—for when
as far as you explored you knew was free.

Sound for Things Coming Together

For my brother

A post-natal tone pulses on the weather radio
after everyone's gone home
in the small sense of the word.

Through our cabin's screened-in porch
the static on the lake is visible,
rain stinging the sheet surface—

what I can imagine as the sound in the brain
of a premature child
that makes his eyelids flutter,

swaddled with printed flannelette
so his arms won't fly apart in reflex
at the light air hardly pushing around us.

Swing Seat, Moosilauke

Someone had knotted forks in the front ropes
to fix the tilt, then bent the handles back,
cheap metal to cheap metal. Flicking notes,
one-tone, we make songs whose hums don't last.

We've been there for so long. It's suddenly cold
so the frame of the porch seat won't allow
for solitude, its spaced planks that hold us
letting mountain air pass through, sky-bound.

Now, the heat from your thigh is integral
to my own. And as time begins to pass
more closely, we touch fingers lightly,

we're reacquainting by the unlit cabin,
swinging slower. Tomorrow we will go,
our speeds will rearrange. Our old warmth, cast.

III

Cliff Pond

The state park's trail paths weren't all meant for bikes
and we didn't think we'd go as far, not casually,
halfway around the main pond, strained and tired

from the pushing over roots and the maneuvering,
brush hanging to snare, trunks interrupting—
but we wouldn't turn back. And went on

in tandem, following your lead, insular in the act
of striking strokes, less happy to explore.
Finally down the steep steps bordering dirt cliffs

that gave to beach, I went in with my jeans still on.
That first shock a thrill that drew you after,
further, easy—that tropical-sand-clarity

resplendent against scrub pines twisting from
the shore. This was Massachusetts, this was July,
our fourth summer, the warm wind climbing

from the south. This place becoming something
we would keep. The geese that watched wavered
their shadowed feet close, curious as you were—

who was this one, tossing her keys to shore, tying
her shirt up to her sternum? Not strange, but some
new echo of an old familiar memory, some

season's first colorful debris caught up in watermill
mouthfuls circling evenly, slow. We went again
the next day. We were closer, but it was colder.

Paint

You've painted the back deck over
so many times it's like a ship's, layers
swollen smooth over the nails and joints
the brush couldn't mimic closely.
I'm walking our two bottles down
to the bin, contented, in the moment,
to find it cooler out here, to feel
the softness without shoes, the rounded
corners thick even where the step
splintered at an edge last summer.

The smoky clouds are strewn like spilled
lane paint in the middle of a highway
car after car runs through. My hair
long again and hot across my skin
when I return to lying on your chest.

Rose Haven Beach

In Rose Haven, this is the hour
when the short hill sits in its own shadow,
the harder sand an afternoon blue,

when sparse beer bottles disappear
through the brittle stalks of deadened reeds
and footprints sidestep clumps

of seaweed, black skate pouches
strewn in the line of farthest-reaching waves—
today, the tide is coming higher, high

enough to make the last rock on the jetty black,
to cover the slinking trails of horseshoe crabs
and fill the beach again with shells,

and we use the waves to rinse ours so they shine,
before we pocket them and walk down
the short street,

make the longer drive, and in a new light
examine crushed pieces, dulled now
but knowing we can go back anytime.

Isabelle

The room they had her in
at the end of plastic-tile corridors
and the synthetic trim of the children's ward
was a room of love,

where others entered knowing this
and feeling loss for ways to act.
She was asleep from a fentanyl dose,
and deeply so—

her body opened to the space,
as oysters, when you shuck them,
have to lie belly up to the world.
Her legs lay parted, too, and the floral gown

hitched high around her waist
left her ginger-sweet youth, smooth
and shell-pink, to glow sadly
on the sheets in front of visitors.

I wanted to cover all of her,
her slender width, to pat the sides firmly
so they would stay. And reached across,
five years old.

Dali's Female Figure with a Head of Flowers

It feels like grains have gotten in
her limbs, have sifted through her skin,
from the steady sweep of particles
and dust that is this country.

Faint against the landscape her body
can hardly bear that weight—
but she doesn't shake the way the others
do for her. And goes on, conjuring flowers,

taking up the freshest ones
and starting with a pair for eyes, of peony,
then feverfew and sun rose, pink valerian
and poppy, bewildering her mask—

then flashes slowly, advances
in her way, her head of flowers captivating.

No One Else

*Be patient now, be good, my heart
The dawn will soon be here.
—Anna Akhmatova*

You are difficult to see this time of day.

Liquid dark spills between
harder shadows, and I carry

a thirst for photographic dye,
sanguine, negative light. I am patient

like nothing in this world.
And swallow time

with drops of ether rest
even when you're sharp

and even if you're recent, until the sky
resumes its peeling, conceding stains

and cicatrice, color surging into view
for us and no one else.

Watercolor

Push against the flatness, from above the afternoon-
shadowed inner lip of the extending seawall raise
the lampposts and count away to the next town—

their metal in reality a copper-green, but with the slant
of sun the posts should be the same hue of shallow cracks
in sidewalk slabs, of certain distant housing,

of streaks in the ocean surface—to draw the eye.
Drawing to a wholeness in the sense that pilots have
for the ascent: first the body contracted, rattling pressure

and then discerning when to stop gunning for it, precisely
when to release. So, leave as nothing on the page
the twin airplane contrails, the rising church in the back,

the wet shine intimately pulling on the seawall.
And make the final touches—brush as with a pen the paint
into tiny stairwells, breaks for tiny figures to step onto,

standing with me for a short while. Then broaden the sky,
upwards, deepening.

Still Life

*Ven, flor de frío, quédate hasta muy tarde
conmigo, déjame la ceguera.
—Roque Dalton*

Having come a long way, heavily
from dirt-streaked exit signs illuminated
over decelerating taillights almost
crystallizing on the windshield's flaws,
we've arrived: though you,
half asleep, already forgot about me
and this car and familiar journey,
warmth steadily fading your dense knowledge—
and knowing you so well, I know
the distance that it takes until that blackness,
your patterns. I have counted it
in the smallest colors of your iris,
in the thin gaps dividing evening light
that enters through my bedroom, palette
of the near-water under paint
of a moon-pale cobalt blue
and the washed-out yellow of the streetlights.

Phenomena

I

After I thought the wet spell had ended—
once, at the right time—
starry spots of light
perforated the upper layers of lush green,

immersing the footpath
with little overlapping circles
like specks of water on a lens
aimed near the sun.

But today, rain again. Headlights through
my eyelashes trick into a long
beaded curtain snaking its way home
through the hanging atmosphere.

Too many girls in a sedan
speed by and use bad language loudly,
sitting on laps, hiking their bodies
out of windows—moving, never settling—

with their nautical instinct to go faster
through the blue,
to go farther with the wind,
insatiable as they were meant to be.

II

Can you imagine that afternoon dream
to send a personal camera into space,

or near-space, just because?
All they spent was one hundred

and forty-eight dollars. On Styrofoam,
on hand warmers rigged to a cell phone

so at forty degrees below it would transmit—
then a parachute, and a weather balloon,

and a note for a reward: Dear sir, or madam,
we're sorry if we've startled you,

please return in the name of engineering,
of making the sublime look like child's play,

of breaking from this city
so we can look back down on this, outside of this—

back on the whole blue world,
slipping through the sun-tainted sky

to where the air is thin enough
to see things against clear black of space.

Creation

Translation of Dulce María Loynaz's "Creación"

And first there was water: it slept,
without the breath of fish, without shores
to constrain it. Water was first,
spun taut over a world beginning
from the hand of God.

The ground did not breach
between the waves, still the ground
was alluvium, loose and trembling—
there was no mountain echo yet,
no delta split, no island
cluster. But in the lung of the new water
something held, waiting.

Dawn of the world, stretching out
to peripheries—
stifling the last fires,
the sea in flames beneath black sky.

It was water, first.

Low Tide Flats

Gloucester, MA

The clam diggers woke to low
convective clouds moving faster

than the turn of the earth itself,
and though it was high winter

and the solid snow asphyxiated
the ground cut by tidal channels,

the sky and its dense light
carried the mineral smell

of premature thaw. We drove
past the cluster of their pickup trucks

and had a long walk to meet the sea.
On the way, sand dollars, more

than we had seen at once sat waiting
out the tide: we kept clear

of their small sunk fortresses
dotting the sleek rift-puddles

that interlaced, unparallelled,
coursing from Massachusetts to

the hills of Maine. For whole hours,
the diggers worked with chins tucked

to chests, raking at the mud
that was barely mud.

Island

The first boy we saw was swatting at the brush with a stick, looking for something good to hit just off the path that traversed the island and making his way to one of its ends.

The second was the same age, or just older, driving a heavy plastic wheelbarrow with marked haste in the same direction. Remarkable haste, for the heat—and shirtless,

he was transporting something in a tub of water in that wheelbarrow, down that path, past where the first boy was, past the two of us picking blackberries, you wandering some

and me almost singing to the bushes. We were like small deer, all stopping to watch. We all wanted water without the salt. We all moved slowly, except for the gulls

and the boy not wearing any shirt—there was nothing good to do but give the thing half a chance, whatever it was sloshing at each bump. He was headed for the end

with the tidal pools, bigger and wider where the port area lay once, clear pools in which even we could see everything. There the hordes of gulls had easy pickings.

They trained their sight and dove, watching until the last moment, grasping on, gliding up, tilting their wings for balance, then sifting through their vision for a large, sharp rock.

On that island, the metals in the gulls were the metals in the blackberries and in all of us. We picked without abandon but had to throw out so many that year.

Triumph

We still tried to see it after we didn't think we could
anymore, our miniature raft of reeds and sea grass, hand-tied

with a crab claw mounted on the mast, joint free to swing.
There was a keel, too, and arm supports off either side,

and we named it, tested it before release: then our idle
project, triumphant, caught the current of the escaping

tide, rode past the beach dunes lined with fishing poles
in sawed-off PVC spikes, the hooks that weren't tugging,

the weights that were gradually drawing up to the sand
with each wash of wave pushing, and underneath, eroding
soft barrier into sea.

Bob's Bait Shack

The owner of Bob's Bait Shack worked the shop that afternoon, and was sitting by the door when we came in. He had a deadpan face, even while he gabbed and joked with friends—one that can sometimes mean a guardedness, and did. His right hand wavered in a tick that traveled in slow shocks, constant, carried instinctively against him as he walked us to the back, not yet responding but continuing to gab. We got to a storage case, tall doors taped shut, and covered by a map—the shudders tensed as he brought the hand up—gesturing quicker at the coast until reaching the paper they smoothed to follow depth-lines in water marked precisely. “This is where you'll find some luck: try here, and then just work your way around the point,” and he added, out of earshot, “we'll be going there tonight.” We bought some herring off him in return, dry fingers holding out the frozen bait.

Outwards

Along the back way to the point the abandoned buildings gape, their windows wild with blinds slapping at the sills, or on the east side, holding AC units. The wind through them adds to the sounds from shore, as if some hopeful marina ticking while it waits for use. Here is rock, a balancing act holding land from bay, in places drawing up short jetties into the increasing dark. Winthrop seeps outwards, though, imagining itself as fuller, cleaner, covering all the drops and jags that litter. Boulder facets catch the streetlights for a few unsteady steps, until we see that there's a man out there, where we were headed, sitting with his boxes. Boats toss in their navigation lights, bringing something in but he sits, line out and waiting, not noticing us behind him. We've come late, the current's pull is strong, we shouldn't waste our time casting into snags but there's a small glance of color still over the city, a lighthouse beacon pulses beyond islands, and when he puts his gear away and leaves, he nods goodbye, and we don't stay much longer.

Bell Buoy

After Dante's Canto XXXII, Inferno

This is Bocca, treacherous, singing out in the middle
of the open harbor, alone with the moon.
It's a day or two from being full, a rearing
yellow that's huge and close to the black Atlantic's edge—

and this structure too is not whole, can't quite feel
what's beneath the air, each pang dulled.
Where the dark cold ends is the chest, or about the chest:
water meeting upper back, the plane

above the intercostal muscles, ribs two and three.
The mark, the place foul plant life glances
is where nakedness was handsome once, skin pure,
not shined and magnified from scarring, from excision.

When it gets late, the moon will be small again
and Graves Light off Winthrop will return to its post
of Reigning Brightest Thing on Ocean,
or at least co-king, or every twelve seconds—

and the rantings will become intermittent
so that you can hear your breaths. The dark is massive
and you're tied in it deeply, rectified for now.
This one night, sleeping among the islands.

Surplus Property

Lovell's island is a fort built to resist U-boats
where crabapples are thrown so they might stick,

one wall painted with attempts, base littered
with remains and smelling.

When anyone goes through
it's to leave initials with cement chips in a tree,

along the rebar graveyard where the guns recoiled,
walls rust-stained, cracks sealed with white, the structures

looking older, infected. The hills the battery hid behind
are dense with berries, staghorn sumac and grasses,

and we can't get to the long north beach from there,
or down to where the rocky east point lies. And retrace

to the eroding west slopes, the strewn chunk of staircase
and off the water, broken pier-posts. In the morning

of that first year the tide had filled everything blue,
Boston harbor right up to our landing—and blurred

with the mirage of shoreline fifty or so sailboats
between us and, past the city, home.