

And These Are the Stains We Left (when our ocean was still blue)

Poetry Anthology
8 pages (including bibliography and title page)
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Blue¹

He took her to the beach he'd visit when the ocean was still blue.

Now there is nothing. The sands are grey like corpse flesh, the waters cadaver colourless blue; thousands of plastic silhouettes rising & fall with the waves. On the rocks they pass the cracked shell of a sea turtle.

(fact; these waters once teemed with life, jellies like carcass of vibrant blood, whale ribs beached in first worlds at first dawns, squids forty feet long with writhing pallid tendrils, microplankton incandescent in the summer-gloaming.)

it used to be blue, he said. *like the sky*.

the sky isn't blue, she answered. *its grey*.

(fact; the sea could never host life. in ancient mythologies, it was said that there were peoples who lived off the bounty of the sea. this has, of course, been proven by archaeologists to be false. they believe these boats they found were merely used for ceremony-- cf. viking customs, specifically letting the dead go out afire at sea.)

why did you drag me here again? she asked.

to see the ocean.

(myth; pearls pry open a clam & you will find an iridescent globule so simple it is nearly baroque in its symmetry. called *mergrot* by the saxons, *margarita* by the romans, *hafnýra* by the norsemen-- fictional.)

i dont see an ocean. its all dead. like a desert. translation: *you said it would be blue.*

silence. translation: *it used to be.*

(fact; the ocean was blue, once, but it isn't blue here, now, here and now, & therefore that reality is untrue.)

They stare. The waves drag, out & in, out & in. A tired cycle without meaning.

The girls kicks a can. *can we go?*

sure, he says, *sure*.

She looks at him. He looks out to the ocean, brow scrunched in thought.

c'mon. let's go.

He seems to be snapped out of a trance. *alright.*

The girl turns around & walks back across the beach. He looks to the ocean once again, as if expecting something— dolphins, the sound of seagulls, a blue miracle. Nothing.

He turns & he does not look back. Not once.

Things you can find on a Beach

a rusted shopping cart. tangled plastic net, neon blue. cigarette butts. wine glasses. beer bottles. milk jugs. half a tennis ball. styrofoam boxes. candy wrappers. broken ballpoint pens. blue-raspberry fundip. buttons. bottlecaps from 1972. buckets. god knows what. tin cans. rubber ducks. lots of plastic bags. hypodermic needle. chewed-up surfboards. sneakers. rain boots. wet socks. diapers. wedding dresses. detergents. deodorants. fertilizer. herbicides. 80,000 terabecquerels of radioactive waste. bras. underwear. lingerie. an action figure of godzilla, missing one leg. baskets. camera lenses. toilet paper rolls. yarn. a soggy sweater. tyres. pesticides. flip flops. bags of every colour & every kind: grocery bags, chip bags, sandwich bags, dog bags. mercury. sewage. backscratchers. tampons. condoms. balloons. band-aids. empty spray-paint cans. lightbulbs. avocado peels. broken calculators. mattresses. doll limbs. shovels. hairbrushes. cds. teddy bears. a wooden hairbrush. combs. plastic forks. plastic spoons. plastic knives. rusted coins. needles. showerheads. staples. pins. tissues. automobiles. shutters. clocks. watches. a sink. swivel chairs. a table leg. gluesticks. half of a scissor. everything & anything of *plastic*.

similar to a nearby junkyard.

¹ note: though this piece is formatted like prose, I intend it to be read like poetry.

And you might've escaped (if I had fishnet in my throat)

“Now the Sirens have a still more fatal weapon than their song, namely their silence. And though admittedly such a thing has never happened, still it is conceivable that someone might possibly have escaped from their singing; but from their silence certainly never.” Franz Kafka.

you wash ashore, and there
is net tangled in your throat
and your vocal chords are
hoarse from crying in your
seaside tongue and your sisters
are gone.

(she swallowed a haddock
and a fishhook caught on
the flesh of her throat)

muted, you are simple
as a musical scale; *so fa me rei*
doh. what sailors will
you enchant now, with your
voice screamed hoarse?
what is your power over hearts
without sound?

there is blood in her throat,
and she cracks shells against the rock
because she cannot catch fish

she claws, and scratches,
and screams and flops
on those beaches, crying,
crying for her sisters and her
oceanic father *help me,*
help me, i can't breathe

i can't breathe

is this what the sailors felt like, going to their deaths?

what is a handful of seaman souls
compared to the voice of a siren?

what are the argonauts, beached
on foreign shores
compared to a muteness?

what is oddyseus, drowned
compared to this loss?

Seven Sacrifices to the Gods of Plastic

1 sea turtle hatchlings
we we ate were nurtured by
sargassumbeds in the pelagic
something we drifted in the reeds
we like drifting like the jellyfish
have you ever tasted jellyfish? jellyfish
it is bright like warmwater fish &
it is yummy & we like it much very much

we don't know why we're dying, though

we only ever eat jellyfish

2 sea lion
mommy? why arent you moving?
ive been nuzzling you & you wont
nuzzle me back. mommy? mommy?
im scared. mommy you need
to wake up we need to get fish
im hungry mommy?

mommy?

3 albatross
I spent nine tenths of my life
in the firmament, with the wind
passing like seagrass on my feathers and the years follow
like undulating billows on the surf; nine tenths of my life
in the heavens, the skies, in the clouds-- I've circled the globe
eighteen times by wing.

So it's understandable, at least,
that I'd never thought I'd die here,
on the earth, in the dirt,
with a fishhook in my throat.

4 otter mother
my baby my child she is wrapped
in death & i am trying to get her out she
can't breathe my baby please let go my only
baby let go i want my child i want my daughter
you can't take her from me do you understand
that i love her? please please please help her
untangle she only thought it was a wisp of kelp
seaweed at worst a jellyfish don't take her please
help me get this off her she's tangled please help
help

5 sperm whales
you will cut open our stomachs
to find the squids we last ate,
maybe a megamouth or two
and demersal rays

our bodies will wash on your shore
like the silhouettes of the oceanic gods
we once were

in the seas we are deities,
beached we are remnants of a world
you do not know, removed
from our blue pedestal

we cry in echoes onshore

(at least we die
together)

Seven (semi-oceanic) Haikus with Footnotes

children press their cheeks
against glass to see empty
eyed plastic fish

tanks labeled firefly
squid are lighted by neon
bulbs

powered by rude mechanics
seals flap robotically,
break down over time²

hundred dollar shells
among prehistoric fossils
ocean is privilege³

only the rich can
afford old seawater, jarred
on their windowsills⁴

in california
all beaches are only of
seaglass, only man⁵

the word ocean is
obsolete; the word waste is
an eternity⁶

² scenes from the after-ocean aquarium.

³ and its fossils are as well.

⁴ they collect seawater like they collect vintage wines.

⁵ human waste is as vibrant as every colour of glass you cannot remove.

⁶ what is the word *sea* to a dumpster?

the day there is more trash than water

the sea will be like death, like waste & decay

there will be plastic bags rising and falling with the waves

sand obscured by the multicolour trash brighter than coral reefs

dead fish dead seals dead squids dead *everything*

and a dumpster on the beach

children will ask,

mama, why are all the fishies dead?

*

there will be a race

biologists on all sides of the earth will run to the shores the seas with vials

species will be confused hermit crabs will be housed with the mussels

the press the magazines the reporters they will all be there

there will be photographs live news

it will be too late

for the giant squids

& the whales

& the cuddlefish

& the marcoplankton

& the great flocks of fish that wash dead onshore

*

on the beaches

seals with plastics wrapped around their throats will cry their vocal cords hoarse

bodies of sea turtle hatchlings will be tangled in grocery bags

that fall, the bodies of starving albatross

will litter the earth

in aquariums

you pay

to see plastic fish with empty eyes

in the museums

they will display sanddollars alongside the prehistoric fossils

*

the humans

they won't care

'human pollution had nothing to do with this / mass extinction of more than half of earth's species / no evidence humankind played a part in this / they just want to make corporations the enemy / taking away the rights of the 1% / democratic propaganda / no proof you have no proof'

[the seals will still lie dead]

on television they will complain about the economy the democrats the president a celebrity's awful hairdo etc.

there will be that one friend who says 'the ocean is gone!'

(because there isn't an ocean anymore, there are *waters*, and they are barren and desolate and grey and polluted and they will house no life, not now, not ever)

they won't care

grandparents will tell their grandchildren

about birds that could fly three thousand miles without a flutter of their wings scores of microscopic organisms lighting the waters creatures that could change form in a second an expanse a blue expanse an expanse that teemed with life

the children will scoff

giant creatures with tentacles forty feet long? glowing water? flocks of incandescent jellies?

get real, grandpa

*

80% of our next-door neighbours will be gone

the world will still spin madly on

works cited:

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Kafka, Franz. *The Silence of the Sirens*, "*Das Schweigen Der Sirenen*". 1931.

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Reflection

I consider this anthology as an anthology of comparisons, of the harsh contrast between reality and myth.

As humans we are always wondering, what could happen and what could've happened. The fate of our ocean is like this: these are the worlds that could be, that could've been—our plastic is almost this reality, and the oceans are this myth. 'And These Are the Stains We Left (when our ocean was still blue)'

Some of my poems are harsh, factual, and realistic (see: 'Things you can find on a Beach') while some are whimsical, exploring the effect pollution has on myth (see: 'And you might've escaped (if I have fishnet in my throat)'). Others personify to make concepts or creatures more relatable, to truly pique the emotion of the reader (see: 'Five Sacrifices to the Gods of Plastic', in which the number is also representative of the number of our seas; the numbers of waters we will lose) and some offer visions of the future if we were to continue this way (see: 'Seven (semi-oceanic) Haikus with Footnotes' and 'the day there is more trash than water'). As humans we need to be able to relate to what is happening, at the risk of having no empathy if we cannot.