

Poems

Vera Fibisan

Arrival at Paducah

An insight into the life of the Yellow Blossom Pearly Mussel, *E. f. florentina*

gravel gives underfoot
sandy substrate teased
 into twisters in the current
 cut and scratched
by the shrinking shoal

elliptical bodies
 subjected to stream perturbations
 siltation, erosion, pollution man
 smothered by Zebra mussels
 stretched to their limit upriver

buried in substrate
untethered
move with muscular foot towards extinction
siphon sperm water from upstream

eggs held in marsupial swelling
a chamber for brooding
glochidia scatter in spring
stick to gills of unknown host fishes
encyst

morphing land line
 hinge line curves with restless river bend

feet enjoy the cool
thread blindly
past the spawning beds
stresses reapplied
to flesh
and shell

sentient surface defaced
by dynamic water
gills gilded in heavy metals

sedentary
smaller tooth bleeds
swift's wingtip threads close to the water
sees canopy on surface
survives
darts out of sight

the submerged micro-landscape
is peppered with particles of
colour
camouflaged among pebbles
the honey-yellow periostracum
pinches light

unraveled yarns of rays coat the surface
green irises
folded in
half
blinded
by high turbidity levels

knitting entangled paths with our feet
bluish white nacre
naiad dormant
nestled in sediment

subcutaneous shades fight the current
tailwater twists and confuses the senses
tributary dam tourniquets the river
florentina recoils
reduced to rare specimens
strip-mine conscience culminates
bears absolute absence

a vacant bivalve shell
short hinge ligament
loosened and threadbare
door flaps open
in the current

The Pamphylian Sea

I. Isinglass

in silhouettedsun a woman carved out of the trunk of a teak
tree grew in Nilambur shallow oculus of water deflated
toothed wrack red seaweed dulse coins glint in the cracks of
its body shiny discs of moderate value her tribute across
the sea your hand dives into your pocket fingers curl
around two coins one for each eye you think as long as
they will shut and cease their chipped lacquer glaring
you shake them through your fingers they will not grow into
anything oxidizing leaving their shine on the surface of the
sea glint on the rocks and taking on dark hues of

greenpurpleyellow oil spills in water react on the etching
the female bust unnoticeable the tide pool flattened
this is the place where the vista unravels into a
chess board or a mirror the water makes the first move
against the shore obscured by a heavy coat of weeds the
occupants of these dwellings battle it out when our turn
comes we shift the heavy wooden figure diagonally on the
shore a few squares we should be fine here for a few hours
until the tide's next move the linearity of this square
falls into a cube the damp room of another country things
undisturbed for months spread familiarly on surfaces
cavernous drawers books pressed against each other on a
shelf this strange alphabet of an uninhabited space a scar
on our landscape whose microscopy hits us in the face
peculiar shapes of alive things call this place home the
barren field of in-betweenness frames without doors
windows without glass beds without sheets yet we sleep
here our outlines marked by matching scars

II. In Absentia

leave footprints scars across the sea you know that you are
home when the smell of salt turns into the dark pungent
smell of naphthalene uninhabited house its
windows shut too long in the familiar dim lit hallway the
umbrella on the rack hits you on that day you wrapped its
folds around whilst dripping you cannot use it anymore on
the slippery rocks the soles of your shoes grip hard peeling
fragments off their ragged surface they smell of sea ivory
long ago treaded upon my umbrella smells the same in a
corner the texture of wood on her body my former desk
untouched for weeks the drawers unopened smell of
dormant sheets paperweight presses down on them feel
their harsh skin pad their way onto drawers' insides
envelop it roots grip hard to barren surfaces my thalloid
fingers grow on slanted walls near the sea on that damp
side of the room in the seascape intrinsic waves see their
reflection in the round mirror by the door try harder to
make me seasick homesick on top of the waves the face of a
steerless ship in the forbidden areas of one's house there is
an opening in the wall where the sea breeze kicks in giving
rise to drafts crusty dampened papers ruffle their letters to
a dull blur vowels and consonants roll down the slope
erratically vying in the mind the sight adjusts their wave
function shake through an orbital the looseness of an open
door the shoreline like the edge of this gigantic piece of
furniture facing the vastness of a white space on a sheet of
paper dusted in naphthalene Sea Ivory the fungus has
infested my home

III. Samael

an eyeless ship abandoned on the bottom of this bay pierce
through the blue looking for a mast perhaps or a sail you
listen for the sound of a ship's bell travelling across the
water our bell is engraved with the name of a ghost

its claws into the coast come to life more alive than human
or beast without dwelling a shelterless map wrap rocks in
rags weigh down the words mute monsters' faint
movements as they float again in the dark when the water
creeps back alters temperature salinity the bodily fluids of
the bay revived it lifts the wooden figure on its shoulders
carries it out at sea her payment left in pools coins can't
glint in the dark torch oxidized fill in slits between rocks
where there were none our work complete

V. Parting

grandmother's things went to a pawn shop we walk
down this is street in a window we aren't allowed to look in
the stratified masses of fossils rejected things that have
settled intricately on top of each other shedding their shell
to rock we lean in with sessile eyes the headlights of
passing cars behind the glass on the horizon there is a
window framed by mist we take it onto ourselves to rehome
the things of the people we love in an unfamiliar
room unsettling we are trapped into objects that we cannot
reclaim for ourselves a strange pair of hands turns the
handle dark starts to settle like purple ink a breeze a gentle
murmur swells around our feet this water nymph gone we
split our creatures into blooded and bloodless lymph
phlegm water patrol every season of the mind comb the
shore washed-up thing discarded long ago if we are lucky as
the tide sweeps in the corner of a forgotten relic could peer
at us from the inside of a shell the tip of a claw or the trickle
of sand all these empty winkles are inhabited their
occupants static spectres unseen for a long time who's to
say their choices turn them into hermits they refuse to
emerge from their bone pockets instead delve deeper inside
where all the swirls start spiralling into nothingness the
two ends of this stretch of land meet and move connect
parts of the shore already done but drawing out the lines
that hold them together where there was nothing before
just the illusion of a looseness untied marked by our
dragged steps our home scars where we lie just enough to
leave a mark put lacquer on eyes start the round at the
parting of the sea question whether or not to settle
with the off-cuts of life