

Poems

Luke Fischer

Coastal Idyll

A crescent beach, flour-white sand,
swells—turquoise, emerald—curl and break
bright as bleached linen, porous and
scented with salt. In wetsuit pelts
surfers crisscross waves, absorbed
in the play of elements as sporting
dolphins and seals. Along the headland
hollowed-out sandstone, broken honeycomb,
a Gaudi prototype for the Sagrada Familia.
Fishermen stand on a rock-edge, awash,
their rod lines glistening strands of cobweb
bending in a breeze. In a tidal pool, constellations
of blood-red urchins, tiny glinting fish.
A flock of gulls alights on the shore
with the synchrony of a ballet sequence,
a closing phrase. Limber bodies
keep a ball aloft like a buoy rocked on waves
until a tall figure leaps, spikes it out.

This scene simulating dreamy childhood days
feels like a film that masks a pentimento—
in a smudge of reef beneath translucent green
the glaring, twisted face of an Emil Nolde,

a phantom that stalks you up and down the beach.
Swells turn into noise of static, breaking
up the screen of the Coke commercial.
Through the cracks you eye forests
of bone-white coral—a submarine cemetery—
and the deep sea beyond where an iridescent
slick smothers scales, penguins and albatross
undulate limply among leagues of plastic,
a super trawler rests: nets bloated
with ocean-floor fragments, fish populations,
strangled turtles, seals ... Back on the shore, you tread
over corpses, painted faces, skin caked in blood
from bullet wounds, wooden spears lying
beside them. With the thud of a ball and cheers
reception returns, authentic as a president's pledge.

Mountainous Island

I placed a jar in Tennessee / And round it was, upon a hill. /
It made the slovenly wilderness / Surround that hill.
—Wallace Stevens

You might think it nostalgic
I wish away the sight of phone towers
on the highest peaks,
wish I could rub them off
with a rag like a painter's mistake
to reveal the limpid blue of this morning sky
that should have been left as it was,
or cover them again with the dense cumulus
that yesterday morning
communed with the summits

in secrecy. As if
magnetically repelled
my gaze averts to a lower peak,
a continuous silhouette delineated
by the meeting of stone and sky.

They are no longer exposures
developing the negatives
as birds and clouds glide overhead,
wild sundials—their protrusions
an array of gnomons
measuring the inclinations
of seasons and days—
rough pyramids
hewn and inscribed
by perennial rains and winds,
giants, the first to greet the dawn light—
gold-embossed geography
the vowel *A*
exclaiming wonder
that something *is*,
the opening of a psalter's
antiphon
to the original
let there be.

No longer epitomised
by a cross of transcendence,
abstraction of the primal human form,
vertical and horizontal planes
intersecting the heart, a leaden
figure transmuted by ministrations
of the sun. No longer abodes—
invisible or visible—expressly

reserved for the gods.

Not even treacherous summits
for existential climbers to transgress taboos,
exhilarate in vertigo as they traverse a sheer edge,
authenticate their own godliness.

Feigning to point upwards,
the steel towers of babble
fasten webs of communication
covering the valleys.

Our Times

I

Who, with an open heart, unflinching gaze,
can contemplate the panorama of idiocy and greed,
the devastated landscape, without—
like a holey, leaking vessel, bearing
seekers of asylum, pilgrims of peace,
battered and flooded by storms at sea—
being swallowed down
into the darkness?

II

While the world has always changed
as Jupiter replaced Hadad—
Christ, Jupiter—Mohammad, Jesus—
within the great house of prayer

in the old city of Damascus,
it was always there
like the enduring stones
only reassembled. But today
the threads of life, the vast Persian carpet
under our feet, the patterns of flight
woven in air, are coming undone, and
so quickly it eludes the rate and range
of our perception. However
cruel and turbulent the world,
there remained a steady backdrop
for shifting props, a stage
for the vicissitudes of a human life,
birth and death, its entrance and exit.
Now the globe theatre's in flames,
the land tremors, rolls in waves.
As it's claimed by the sea, we reach
for the nearest 'raft'. With no more
than a stand-up board and paddle
how can one hold one's centre of balance,
stay upright on mountainous swells?

On the Organic Form of Art

There are those who don't believe you
when you speak of organic form,
regard it a mere hypothesis
or wishful thinking, as though you were
proposing poetry as a solution to climate change,
the road to renewable energies. And you
are, obliquely, but that aside, you remember

the concert where within the air, the reverse
side of space, the vast rooms that open
behind the closed curtains of your eyes,
rhythms and melodies became pulsing images,
expanding and contracting forms
like breath or tides, buds and
blossoms, a circle dance of figures
joining, releasing hands, yourself among them...
and the depression you had carried with you
into the hall—the depression of our times
whether diagnosed or not—lifted
unnoticed as dew that bends
grassblades before the dawn. Integrated
in this cosmophony, you left the auditorium
with a lighter gait, the subtle smile of a kouros
on your lips. The street's architecture, the aureole
of lamps—extending the twilight of evening
into night—the fluid lines of *Jugendstil*
seemed the setting of a tale.

But returning to your argument,
the other side of air: Who were
these mobile creatures lining space?
Of music that wouldn't sound without
human endeavour? Human creatures, then,
and yet more than human, what once
were considered daimonic
inventions, dictations of a demi-god:
true as lizards, koalas, cicadas, eucalypts,
similarly unique in their dynamic ratios—
tempo, time and rhythm, their heartbeat and breath
melodic phrases, their expressive action—
so many variations on the one
theme. Though they lived

only as long as the music endured
their harmony reverberated in your sleep
and the strange serenity in which
you woke the next day.

Why share this now?
Outcast from the Self, exiled
from the cosmos, a shadow abiding
in a world conquered by Hades,
in memory you locate the cave-mouth,
the entry to the upper world, this poem
a longing for organic form...