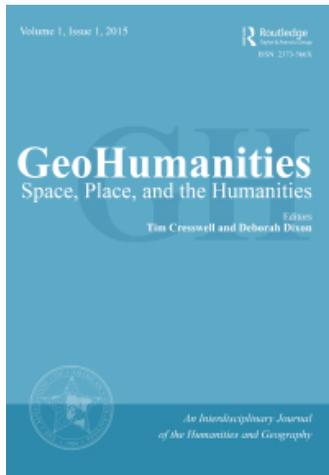


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Two Poems

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PRACTICES AND CURATIONS

Two Poems

Maleea Acker
University of Victoria

HOOK

I miss the grizzled sailors at Telegraph
who smelled of wood smoke, tobacco and rot,
gave us line when ours snagged,
yanked us out when we tumbled from the dock.

I miss the booms, groves filling the sound, ghosts
of toilet paper escaping the through hull, the yellow cloud,
the unbunching turds we scrambled to see. I miss the grey shacks
at Coon Bay while we waited for slack, their white bread, ham fish
hooks, the peeling, beached hulls. A boy my age, lit from within,
ran to the waves, wetsuit askew, alone. I miss
the fires at Montague, the rainstorms we chased to stay
always under the god pelt. Fish condos, docks with red railings,

I miss when the Feds owned everything worth anything on the sea,
prawn boats always full, logs the size of houses, everyone we knew
living aboard or building one in their yard. Then we cursed
out every powerboat on Channel 16, sidled up
to sandstone at Gabriola, nabbed flounder, threw
the same dogfish back cast after cast, his mouth
a bloody mess, still he went
and went for the bait.

I miss the shadowed side of Genoa, water
marine marble—cat's eye
a swirl of orange, someone's old tarp trailing
like a last curtain.

Weather was the first voice: *sea rippled, sea one foot chop*—
it shone doubled with phosphorescent constellations,
oil lamps, alcohol stoves and no regulations
so we floated, mornings, empty Sun Maid

raisin boxes to see if the swans would eat them.
They would. A branch shook on shore
from the left weight of a giant bird
watching summer hook itself in my skin, watching
the last child unencumbered poke her finger
through the net of a crab trap and be punished twice,
once by her father, once by the crab.
Sea amethyst, sea emerald, sea live and jade,
it whirled below the blue-tarped cockpit, under Vega
and the Lyre, a coat we smoothed and dragged and wore—
out of which we could pull, and into which we put,
our shining, unraveling lives.

GONE WEST

*Desire for a nation that is material and experiential
will always be frustrated by our history.*

But Ishmael's tenderness—the whale's roll from crusted back
to rubber duck flipper to the pearl-shell cream
of the underside, its secrecy and erotic sheen.
Carr, at Skeedans, stepping out of the canoe and watching it
scroll to its tether's end, *an empty thing* writing itself on the land.
She has a dog at her side and her arms are laden. The Indians
disappear up the beach into their houses. She's
like a star-struck potato. She sees land glowing from within.

Ten years ago, someone pointed the first real estate sign
outward, toward the ferry and its passel of desires,
fixed atop a cliff in Active Pass. This could be your midden,
your salmon run, sandstone cliff, camas field, transformer rock—
go north now, not just west, find
silent islands, and there, where it is colder,
we are preceded by logging donkeys, alders growing through their treads,
galactic rumble of a cruise ship's exhale of disappointment. To what
can we listen now, that does not spit coins, whir as it cleans
without bleach, pluck toothpick trees like a mythical monster
in a Disneyfied meadow, or needle that old itch to survey and name?

Last night, on the beach outside this cabin we've escaped to,
the ruffled, mineral-delicate borders of clam gardens
materialized in the spring tide midnight, moon-lit aftermath
of a day's downpour. Mussels, barnacles fused, a pelt
knitting the piled lines of rock. Pastures of sheened sand
speckled with clam bubbles. The water
so low we could have step-sunk across the breadth of the bay.
Above us rose the old-small and new-large houses,
their tvs casting cobalt light, fire pits sloughed and mossy.
Oyster shells yawned. Sea lions cajoled from the far side's pier.
The lines of rock and Limoges-thin shell lace radiated out like continuations
of the Point: ghost-thoughts, shell-sharped. We could hear the *worry*
worry of sand pipers, the rust and rubber squawk of a heron,
the million bones breaking every time our feet set down
and the far drone—almost freshet stream, almost wind in firs
almost hand trailing in water as a canoe webs two islands—
of the highway, creature by creature carrying our chances away.

Note: Lines in italics in "Gone West" taken from Misao Dean's *Inheriting a Canoe Paddle* and Emily Carr's *Klee Wyck*.

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