

The Littoral and the Imaginary

Carol Ciavonne



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The Littoral and the Imaginary

What's a rock in water
an uncovered ledge where we crawl out
and disappear into
the wake the planet
leaves in the wake
not footsteps
here in the littoral of space looking out
for light years
the beach is not a beach
littered with shatter, mass upheaval
and pebbled aftermath.

I'm alone like the earth in photos.

To know what happens under rocks,
where the starfish cling
to their kingdom

to know that
cunning world, anemones pink and green
the hermit crabs in stolen shells, small
volcanoes
in the sand.

A man sits on a bench in the aquarium
every Tuesday. He goes early and he's
alone. Behind him, in front of him
swim smooth-skinned fish, large enough
to ride on. I picture him with trident.

I will be sporting an early 20th century
blue gray gown with tidal lace

a necklace of corallina gracilis
and a roaring heart.

without the others we can be ourselves

If it's dangerous
to walk down the steps to the sea, if it's
dangerous to climb up the cliff, if the tide
washes you off the rocks, the little crabs
still scuttle. In the deep are marvels
seahorses like fronds waving
but here only the starfish are in our charts.
What we must imagine for our sanity:
the edge of things
where all creatures breathe and swim.

A knob of kelp and a seal's wet head,
a piece of wood bobbing. The moment
after the spray. I never see a whale.
I consider them imaginary.

Littoral 1

Artefacts of
sound

the moving
languages,

Latin
nearly meaningless now,
except in deep

and Greek only
near, nearby,

nearly, a bridge; a raft of boats.

just to keep afloat like the tide

passerine

came to me in a dream

the birds stop singing
or
stop
the birds are singing

Littoral 2

and feathers
even feathers
which have no origin here

but drifting down

must be considered
part of the province

I only know about love
and how it gathers
flotsam onto a misfit island.

Transubstantiation

I will eat you fishes.

I will eat you crabs.

Kelp I will eat you.

Mussels I will eat you.

Gods I will eat you.

Believe what you want to believe

It's either the ocean
or the refrigerator

It's either the ocean
or the traffic on the highway

It's either the wind
or the ocean

Littoral 3

Taming the heart urchin
stroking
the murderous red spines

put it in your chest cavity
its own circulatory system
they can't touch it.

Out of her body

"the animal constructs
membranous bags"
in which the offspring are enclosed
tied off by the animal with
"a short cord"
the animal constructs.

the pearly children in their gauzy bags
by which the short cord, tied, is
"attached to the surface"
to which the mother is attached.

swaying in the current
the young of the animal
"are protected
until they hatch".

Vellela lata

"sailed for several days through
incalculable numbers of purple, sailed 'floats'"

I descended in their midst; they offered me
everything. I took their gifts,
they explained them to me.

"so thickly distributed that there was,
by extremely rough estimate
one to every square foot of the surface
of the sea as far as the eye could reach."

"A very light breeze will keep the animal
(really a colony of specialized animals)"
(I myself am made in that mode
the little alien mitochondria around which I
grew) "moving through the water."

The wind opens them, they extend--
"drifts of the little blue siphonophore
Vellela lata
strand upon the beaches" in parabolas
parable sans lesson

"The animal
with its diagonal sail like a piece of
cellophane
drifts" in elegant movement
"to the left of the wind"

"storms drive tremendous numbers of the
creatures ashore"
They must know of that country, arrival.

Clam Shell

The clam shell I drew

in order to sing

the ridges on the shell
in all minute
variation

in order to hear it
in me.

The attention is not
always appropriate

but when destiny shines
oh bright day.



Carol Ciavonne's poems have appeared in Denver Quarterly, Boston Review, Colorado Review, Interim, New American Writing, and Tupelo Quarterly, among other journals. Essays and reviews can be found in Interim, Colorado Review, Rain Taxi, Entropy, Parole and Pleiades. She is the author of Birdhouse Dialogues (LaFi 2013) (with artist Susana Amundaraín) and a collection, Azimuth (Jaded Ibis Press 2014). Ciavonne is an editor of the online journal Posit.