

Swift Acquisition/Seam/Keeper's Fee

Meryl McQueen
meryl.mcqueen@gmail.com

These poems explore humanity's complex relationship with the natural world, using the language of exploitation, destruction and (potential) reconciliation. The poems highlight the impact of words by drawing connections between our behavior as a species and the way we describe our intentions. My goal is to simultaneously highlight environmental degradation while offering new ways of talking about our place in the global ecology. The structure of the poems uses deliberately rigid formal schemata juxtaposed against fluid phrasing and line breaks to further draw out these distinctions.

Swift Acquisition

A simple proposition (set to scenes
Of rough humanoids gathered at lake's edge
Before the settled, the certain.) It means
More when you calculate than when you hedge
Innocuous harvest fueled by looped genes

Measured in millennia. There they are
Beside the water at sun's death, narrow-
Eyed and top-heavy, hands ready: sand bar
Dug for clamshells, clay shelf leveled, sparrow
Wings braided with ligament and reed. Far

From harmonic, even those early days
Culled too many from passing herd, black stone
Chipped into arrows. Move through, move on, ways
Laid down with swift acquisition. Crack bone
Into marrow, scrape last hides for warmth, blaze
Routes of other mammals from tracks alone

To memory. No one paid the keeper's
Fee. No one paused to mourn the clean river's
Run, the dodo's bright yellow eye. Cheaper
Still, twist intent to thrive. Hunt delivers
Food, shelter, commerce, power, growth—features

Best aligned with raw cosmic expansion
Than one blue marble's fragile barrier
Against the rot. Considered chance? Branch in
From guileless root. Become the carrier
Pigeon's first sleek hope. Re-write deft scansion

From flushed water's fringe, internecine howl
Drowned by new music. Listen for accord
Drenched in our surrendered deception, cowl
Peeled back. Give and give (its own sweet reward):
Empathy replaces predator's prowl

Carried by history, crafted word by delicate word.

Seam

As if the bottomless pit, well-
Named, spun its damp black silt across
An earth too arrogant for hell
Over high tide, as if the loss
Of tree or sparrow carried sell-

By date marooned by tomorrow
Or cast away into the same
Dim light. Fresh, slick blot too thorough
To dismiss burned our bones with shame
Deeper than the dig, now hollow

And frail. Coal's dark smudge or white ash
Rain scrapes against the touch of sky.
We collate, we collude with brash
Intent. We counter each reply
With cool heads. Open palms. Red cash.

Keeper's Fee

Take the world, its storms and sunrises
Brushed with dust from Alpha Centauri
Or flecked, gray asteroids. Surprise is
This: now and when tells the same story
Snaked and rooted in enterprises
Wrung from the ground. Ripe hope and glory
Spin like fat, lazy fruit. Each buys his
Notion of progress, allegory
Fecund or fetid. Compromise is

Tied with fantasy unpaid in full
View of throttled river or valley
Raked to field. Sift through mounds to re-drill
Purpose from scar or stone. The tally
Scored from rabid evolution: kill
Switch front and focused. Next blind alley
Narrows and chafes. Squint at light distilled
From wave through prism's crack. We rally
Reason, hoard the keeper's fee until

Loose change rattles like bone.