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from THE CALIFORNIA POEM

The prophets told me to put I'm putting these peaches into this Arizona  
desert basement where they will ripen in two years' time; For here in this upper California  
market, there is no room.

Houses falling into clay  
Cliff houses where we do our fingerprint fall down into sand and clay  
Houses falling from the sky  
and people in them, whole families, ready-made and settling  
into California clay & canyons  
And fathers who sell houses falling into clay and mothers who sell them

In this house, the one I live in, *The California Papers* are shelved next to *The Pennywhistle Primer*

The closed system of the ocean opens before us, its  
emotional content rising up in precipitous belief

— That's stupid. What does the ocean believe in? In time-place truths, when applied or if applicable to many seas? the residua to maintain races of rare or common species; the spell of light canopying; the speed of it "conspiring"; of the stony corals, the Orange Cup's walls of jagged skeleton; of rocks shot through with Buckshot Barnacles? The scatterbrained Solitary Green Anemone throws venomous harpoon cysts at a stone; stepping not on stone but onto the yielding bodies of Aggregate Anemones; I too want a fantastic tentacular crown; yet try licking an anemone and it will sting;

Slipping down to the beach at night to sleep under the whipping coats of catamarans—No fear but that the tides would rise against our feet

Stepping back into the blank apartment, faded dizzy sun-print on the eyes  
Spirits of trembling daisies boom forth for our dark & seriously heliographic ears

Had we heard of that arching spiral, the upward panic  
like huge goblets of water dropped  
into the Pacific vat and radiating outward?

Hoary molluscs lie in wait for their Cambrian prey  
ready with radula to  
rasp and bore

Winds from the North, winds  
from the South, Shinook  
was such a dog, a Chow, who fell off a ship

In the last of the days of the Spoon-faced Nematodes

Remember those days I was picked up by a wave and ground into the substrate  
& like the Lug Worm, swallowed sand  
Remember the low-flying helicopters we used to moon

The concept-cool kitchen tile floor of California

Eating medjools in the shade  
of drive-in swapmeet date palms, ransacking  
the scattered lit. of marine invertebrates

The orange's membrane half-swallowed, pulled

back from the throat to be chewed again

Cesar Chavez lifted  
my friend Lilia up on stage & I wept

In the great annals of the Annelids, secrets  
of natural selection in Polychaetes

Remember a member of a ready-made (Stella) trying to kiss you in the night  
because she thought you were her boyfriend Wayne  
or Brett but you were just two girls in bed

JS harpooning sting-rays mid-coitus  
The volume and shape of water in Bays

In the final hour of the fingered limpet, the whorled dogwinkle

Remember the double-edged pebbles, rocky berth of our Haskell's "Hilton"  
(the pebbles and rocks are gone)

Remember the brothers Brett and Wayne\* gunned down on a beach in La Paz

If I could just get over those mountains to the West  
where are stone azurite wings of the Beechey Jay

jaguarundi, leoncillo, ocelot, tigrillo, secretive cats of low quavering

Jumping off piers into the snap of the stunning water, saying  
our fucking-A's on the cliff

Remember Tina's head crushed in  
where her forehead smashed into asphalt  
the roughly transparent night runs  
a trance like iron-ink she lays  
quite young, quite dead, "disremembering  
that sweet land": sleep

We held our flashlights over the surface of the water  
Sea bottom alive with invertebrates  
Isopods and mysids come swarming to the illuminating circles  
Colonies of tunicates have taken shapes like fingers

The tree-frog in the high pool in the mountain cleft thinking This is the pool where I nearly  
drowned swinging out on the rope against all greenery

Sleeping under crags in  
the odor of the cooling earth  
And quiet racer snakes in the cold water

In some summers we may walk the beach with our feet  
higher than our heads  
The intertidal zone and its contiguous waters which taught me what I know about fishes  
is alternating air and water: All water  
will want to return to the sea  
with its corroded chemical cargo of “practically everything”

From that small portion of ocean that can be taken in at the eye: a crown of Slender Sea Pens  
sends flashes of light along its feathers

OCEANS TRADE BODIES

vast sheet a thin skin; deeper

bioluminescent life forms under heavy pressure, sea-  
floor communities at hot tectonic edges  
gigantic red-tipped beardworms chew chemosynthesized bacteria, creatures  
independent

of the  
Sun

Dead bodies throw trace  
elements: molluscs concentrate  
on copper, radiolarians do strontium, Earth accelerates

Ocean waves are born in storms and travel  
to farther shores

The term sea is used when waves have no pattern, the surface is confused

Tell us tales of the magic numbers by which waves move. Some say every seventh wave is big, others the ninth; any surfer knows the nine by nine is the wave worth waiting for.

A train of waves arrives on shore, met by some other train from some other storm in some other sea. Two trains meet mid-crest, they kiss; and the swell is high. If a wave “feels the bottom” in all its particles and motion it will break.

Undertow. Riptide. A current pulls your feet toward open sea.

Headlands draw waves  
headless over passing waters. Sand disappears  
into dunes, canyons, breakwaters, beaches denuded, what

decomposes there “cannot be cut with a burnt stick at night”

Soon to be used by the sea, I  
break the waves but leave plenty

of water for you

You, “the result of some hydrographic accident”

This is “the press of the redstart hand,” the “float and odor  
of hair”

The drag and purpose of the purple jelly’s bell ( *Velella velevella* By-the-Wind Sailor) in pint-  
sized plastic sails drifts

Limpets & periwinkles hold their breath  
till surf rides in; tidal  
creatures scuttle  
for cover under rocks, drawn in

to webs of radiowave and powerport, or retire  
behind the octopus’s ink-laced screen

Neptides, springtides Sun & Moon canceling each other out or augmenting the other's activities and argument

Resonance & reflection within the trembling waters as they shake and giggle in any body      A beautifully advancing

fogbank like a wall of natural wonder to lock us in

And of those who themselves sank in the sea

And in the shadows of the night approached we opulent stars, as suggested by Virgil

Just as the sun's profession is not to turn, our bright burning star so, driving my car into meridians, smashing up

volks wagons, burying the thought  
in the flesh (the will may have no limits  
but there is the matter,  
friends), the dead-black  
waters of the underworld in California  
“the region of the shades, & sleep,  
& drowsy night,” like  
a leaky coracle  
floating on this marshy crack called Earth

Were the sensitive places discovered yet?—“ball of thumb, ear-lobe, skin below the ribs, thigh and lip”  
“and smell of reptiles” and smell of sex “and smell of death” No, no, no

It was the days of sweet fuck-all  
No grim cheerleader for hot sauce behind the counter

but igniting spongy aborescences in the evening trees  
and grunion runs at high-tide nights, the silverside animals flashing in great heaps on the beach