

**Past, Present, and Future: A Poem Cycle**

**And other poems about our climate crisis**

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**Past, Present, Future: A Poem Cycle**

Past

The moor is silent  
In the vaporous distance  
A train whistle blows

We have arrived  
At the mine's maw  
Near darkness swallows us  
Shrouds us beneath the soil  
As we go deeper we hope  
The earth will not collapse upon us. We hope  
We will not make it collapse  
Above us, above the earth  
There is the sky  
And machines  
Churning, belching, smoking  
So that we can rescue the treasure  
The residue of a million dead plants

She stands with him outside the factory gates  
And longs to touch his rugged unshaved cheek  
But those are public gestures that he hates  
Like anything that makes a man look weak

Instead she glances softly toward his eyes  
And meekly waits for him to turn away  
Above the factory smoke a vulture flies  
Its blackish wingspan briefly turning gray

At home she sweeps the doorstep's sooty dust  
She cooks, she cleans, she mends his Sunday clothes  
At times she fears her gnawing wanderlust  
But when the daily factory whistle blows

She'll sense his coming through the chalky air  
To pass his rough hand gently through her hair

A sedan fills the air with its fumes  
And a plane does the same but in plumes.  
Add the methane from cows  
To the air they befoul:  
The result doesn't smell like perfumes



There's a place that I know—it's a small patch of land  
Near the coast, with a house overlooking the sea  
From the porch you can watch the sun set in the waves  
While you listen to trees whispering soft in the wind

I was only a child when I first saw the place  
When I first heard the house rafters creak in the breeze  
While the gulls overhead screamed delight in my ears  
And the blue sky that framed them shone brilliant and vast

As the years turn to decades I yearn for that house  
For the land, for the porch, for the sun in the sea  
I'll return there some day to recover my past  
Until then it remains my North Star memory

Present

Darkening the sky  
Smoke clouds from a thousand miles  
Tint the noon sun red

I have arrived  
Home  
The bay windows, the domed skylight  
Filter the summer sun  
Scratching my skin  
I walk through the living room  
The dining room, the sitting room  
The den, the study  
The hallway  
To the darkened bedroom where  
I clap my hands  
The room is now illuminated  
And cool

She lies upon the sweat-soaked bedding sheet  
Her nightgown plastered to her ancient skin  
He weeps while sitting helpless at her feet  
And begs of God at least to tell him when

A grid more ancient than his dying wife  
More burdened every passing sultry day  
Will cool the air and bring her back to life  
Or will instead just let her slip away

While others sit with their own dying spouse  
Or damp a rag to soak their sweaty brow  
They hear a flat official voice announce  
The grid has lost its power source for now

He leans his head to hear her fading breath  
And prays that he will join her in her death

Does it feel a bit hot in this place  
With the temperature rising apace?  
I'll condition the air  
Since they might need some spare  
CO2 they could use just in case

There's a place I am told—it's small patch of land  
Near the coast where there once was a house by the sea  
There were waves and a sunset and seagulls and sky  
And a porch where one watched them in evening's cool breeze

But all that was before fires ripped through the place  
They laid waste to the house, to the land, to the coast  
While the porch shrieked in anger and trees swayed in pain  
As the gulls circled futilely screaming for help

And now all that remains is a charred stain of earth  
Bits of charcoal and coal flakes where once stood a house  
What was green turned to brown, what was brown turned to black  
What was hope now is ruins, what was longed for is ash

Future



Below the night sky  
In the silence of the moor  
An owl spies its prey

They have arrived  
At the water  
The pool or basin or spring  
They have no word for it  
Or for water  
The journey has been long  
They lost one along the way  
And had to stop  
For a funeral  
They swing their large heads from side to side  
Scanning the horizon for lions or hyenas  
Then lowering their trunks to the water  
They drink

The rain has kissed the jungle canopy  
Its drops caressed the bark, embraced the roots  
They slaked the forest soil's voracity  
While fondling every fern and every shoot

The gibbons catch the scent of gibbon mates  
Their songs of yearning pierce the forest air  
Along the branches lovers brachiate  
To put themselves in one another's care

The trees, emboldened, brush their leaves across  
The limbs of neighbors hungry for their touch  
They penetrate the sod among the moss  
For in this world no ardor is too much

There are no paintings, films, or poetry  
Yet wordless passion finds its addressee

The hyena eats elephant meat  
For the penguin some fish is a treat  
The deer frolic till dawn  
Now that humans are gone  
But forget the bears too have to eat

There's a place that exists—it's a small patch of land  
Near the coast with a view overlooking the sea  
There is grassland and scrub trees and fertile black loam  
And a pine tree whose ridged bark has traces of coal

There are sounds one could hear: shrieking gulls, swaying grass  
Not far off is the lapping of waves on the sea  
The faint scratching of gophers and slithering snakes  
Could be heard if there only was someone to hear

Now a mouse scurries up from its hole in the ground  
Looking fearful it scans the horizon for birds  
As it munches some seeds it keeps both eyes alert  
A branch cracks, the mouse stops, and then scuttles away

### **A Very Late Love Letter to the Earth**

Is it too late to show my love to you?  
Or have I nothing left but to lament?  
Is there no time to act on what I knew?

Is my affection too far overdue?  
The covenant between us wholly rent?  
Is it too late to show my love to you?

Are all the warnings I neglected through?  
Is it too late to slow your fast descent?  
Is there no time to act on what I knew?

Those practices that vented CO<sub>2</sub>--  
Can I no longer offer my consent?  
Is it too late to show my love to you?

Are all these losses fated to ensue?  
Your gifts to me—have they been overspent?  
Is there no time to act on what I knew?

Are we beyond creating bonds anew?  
Or is there damage I can still prevent?  
Is it too late to show my love to you?  
Is there no time to act on what I knew?

## **Battle Hymn of the Fundamentalist**

Environments  
They come and go  
This temporal world  
Is just for show

Our God will rise  
And take us with  
Though not the ones  
Who called Him “myth”

So worry not  
About the earth  
The trees and plants  
Are little worth

He'll separate  
The wheat from chaff  
And offer us  
The final laugh

But maybe we'll  
Be indistinct  
When after all  
We've gone extinct

### **The Poplar**

The poplar is whispering in the dawn breeze,  
Its branches lit golden by the waking sun.  
Shimmering leaves dance, beguiling the morning,  
Chorus in voices old only as the season;  
Their songs have many harmonies, and also many echoes,  
Echoes summoning senses to the irrecoverable past.

A season has yielded and a season has returned;  
A newborn usurpation supplants the warm and silent shroud.  
But each leaf in its birth sings also of its ancestors  
And behind each rite of spring is a soft whispered dirge  
To an image of moments lying stillborn in memory:  
Like dreams upon waking, a world wrested by time.



### **For What Shall We Grieve**

Shall we grieve for the past, for the times that are lost  
For the ice cream man's truck, for the telephone dial  
Shall we grieve for schoolyard when recess arrived  
For the cool summer breeze, for that boy's or girl's smile

Shall our grief be for hopscotch, for stickball or jacks  
Played on streets filled with light on those warm afternoons  
Or the TV with rabbit ears angled just right  
Or the good Dr. Seuss or the Peanuts cartoons

But to think we are grieving when memory shows  
Its pastel magic lantern of innocent days  
Is to err in our sadness, if sadness it be  
For nostalgia's not grief; it's just grief's holidays

Let us grieve for the future, let's mourn what's to come  
When the breezes stop cooling, when night's no relief  
When the streets fill with water, the farmlands with dust  
When there's no longer snorkeling to bleached coral reefs

Let us grieve what will falter and what will collapse  
Let's remember the future and bury the past  
As our children and grandchildren strive to rebuild  
So that their generations will not be the last

### **Colossus Will Not Be Missed**

The ice was nice but fire won.  
Colossus left its legacy:  
The stage, the iPhone and the heat.  
Perhaps a bit of poetry.

Not tall nor strong but smart, with wit  
It tamed the oceans and the land  
And stoked the comfort of its own  
Until the stoking's flames were fanned.

And now there's neither peace nor war,  
The measures of Colossus' world.  
There's only struggle, play, and sleep,  
The words Colossus spoke interred.

The antelope, her calf besieged,  
Has seen the gaping wound dehiscence  
The prey, the predators remain,  
The young ones lost will all be missed.

But not Colossus