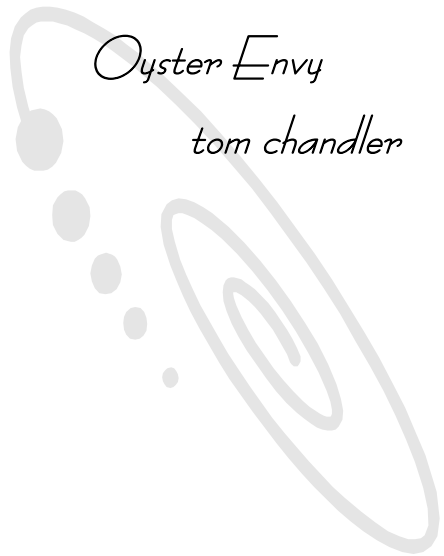


Origami Poem Project

Oyster Envy
tom chandler
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American Backwards

Apologies all around,
the helicopter lifts
from the important lawn,
she gives him back his ring,
he trades in the Hummer,
their children fade
to drooping moons,
all the tiny phones snap shut,
crawl back inside their pockets,
the malls lapse into forest,
the water returns as blue sky,
the wind inhales,
everybody finally gets full credit,
a few get just what they deserve,
she gets accepted to graduate school,
he becomes a nurse's aide,
every veto gets overturned,
everyone gets laid.

Tribal Prayer

Small flawed god,
more us than we are,
stitcher of the deerskin,
flenser of the whale
who built our lives
one million seasons ago
to pull the canoe prow
out into the raging gray
mountains of the ocean
to stuff the nets with salmon,
the river weir with crabs,
push along the rock trail
of this life we never asked for,
who makes up any reason at all
for why you are the way you are:
killer of children, maker
of cruel men, slave owner of the kind,
who decides on a whisper why
we must become whatever it is
you want but won't tell us.

Oyster Envy

There's something to be said for being
just stomach and anus with no mind,
locked away in a little sealed world,
complete with a sky of its own design,
as if we too could trap sand on our tongues
and refuse to talk or eat for years,
close ourselves off between tight
hemispheres, dream vague scenes
of the bottom of the sea or of sliding down
somebody's giant black throat
not caring if we're asleep or awake,
ignoring the rich ache of sandgrit building
slowly into this perfect pearl, this beauty
that's been welling up inside us all along.

Bourassa

We were told he'd been tortured
on the death march from Bataan, that
his hair had blanched white overnight
though he'd been just twenty four.
Creaking his rocker on the porch next door,
starting out at the lake and smoking,
we kids too numb to ever ask, basking
in the whispered music of his pain.
The summer backlit every rain and
fireflies sparked each sunset; we
won the war over and over again,
air rifles and dirt bombs and
Bourassa rose stiffly while we weren't looking,
faded into the crowds of women and men
kissing and dancing in sepiá newswreels,
a sea of hats, the confetti falling like snow
across his secrets.

Lascaux

The plot still unfolds from left to right,
an ancient comic strip in stone
still thicker than a blood clot.

Sixteen thousand years have passed
inside a single minute, but the bison's
horns are still sharp as hunger

and the dancing shaman's handprints
still as intricate as fossilized ferns,
each whorl where he carefully pressed his fingers

unmatched by anyone born before or since,
as if he is still trying to tell us
just exactly who he thought he was.