

Upcountry

Inland wayfarers halt at a ramshackle bivouac
off the beaten track by the vermeil light
of sunup for last-minute victuals
as they ready to surmount hurdles,
their eyes aloft toward the summit distant
and neutral to their quest, at best.

They espy just ahead amid cacti
the bleached bones of carcasses
picked clean by vulturous scavengers,
beneficiaries of time and chance.

Smoke from breakfast fires spirals
afar into the plain, masking chaparral
and startling patterned rattlers
from hidden dens onto the warmth
of earth cracked and peeling.

Equipped to ascend, the living know

well how impartial wilderness remains
toward civilization's refugees
who place themselves at the mercy
of forces amoral and untamed;
yet life ever seeks other life,
undaunted by the pitfalls and perils
nested amid nature wild and awaiting.
Marlon

Tropics

Ships furrow the waters out at sea
while civilization's refugees
anneal on the beach,
their pestering cares a world away.

By the quay a lone stevedore ignores
heat and thirst, dragging hawsers
along the towpath to moor crafts
gently yet securely, his funicular expertise
accrued over many seasons in austral regions.

Below the surface, migrating turtles pause
to munch on seagrass meadows

rich in essential nutrients
while lemon sharks chase rays
through the mangrove's red roots
growing in tidal shores and deluged
twice daily with saltwater.

Aloft the torrid orb parches
equally, the clime's merciless overlord
punishing by its very presence,
conferring both favor and wrath,
defiantly resisting twilight till
the decisor nightfall settles the struggle.

The Great Synagogue of Constanta

Amid the forsaken sanctuary grows a tree
green and lanky, tilting with the wind
ever since the roof partially collapsed.
Standing sentinel is the yellow fleurette
Star of David overseeing the amassed debris
below, a congeries of chipped cement,
smashed stained glass, plaster, and wood beams,
ruins overgrown with shrubs, carpeted with dirt.
Arched colonnades uplifted by blue pillars
attest to the Moorish Revival design
of a halidom once admired by Ashkenazim
from near and far keen on the sublime;
now only mean dogs frequent the detritus,
foraging for kosher remnants of another sort.
Where now there lies a rubble heap
once stood a palace aglow with worship;
where filth now strews the floor
once stood congregants before the upraised scroll,
devotees enthroning on their praise the Most High.
The building is the body but the assembly

is the soul; bereft of its sacred entrails,
the desacralized shell succumbs to the elements,
a bittersweet vestige verging on demise,
its hallowed scenes enshrined in memory.

Marlon

Statesman's Memorial

The deceased, inert in the flag-draped coffin atop a bier
overhears the laudation from a choir of admirers
come from near and far to pay final respects
in a solemn assembly of mourners.

Outpourings of grief, gratitude, and melody mingle
under the vast canopy shading from desert sun
ministers, dignitaries, and grandees
keen to preview what their own funerals might resemble.

The honor guard stands now at attention, now at ease,
as protocol officers direct proceedings,
rabbis mutter prayers, and the cantor's voice
chaperones the soul heavenward unto angels.

Harmonious diapason cedes to sober monody
as attendees rise and watch uniformed pallbearers
shoulder mortal remains and escort them to their
resting place to be inhumed and covered with sand.

None speaks ill of the dead; at such an hour,
elision serves as dignified handmaiden of grace.
Only merits and service are mentioned;
only good intentions are recollected.

Let us warmly praise, and bless, and forgive
and ever bear witness to the good;
may our eyes espy virtues
and our mouths pronounce appreciation.