

Exacting Clam



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Two Poems

LANDFALL

In the dream you type and type until the other coast materializes. Out the porthole, fog and foghorn have reached a truce. What was once deleted can never be deleted again. Stroke, stroke, stroke. Gaze at the horizon if the nineteenth century makes you dizzy. Turn to crimson for the end of the day. Grab a pail and get to work on abstract expressionism. Are you always this insufferable? In dreams you don't have to answer that.

EPITAPH

Here lies all your scholarship. Here lies your poetry.

In 1869, no monument was erected in honor of William Langland at St. Mary's parish church, Shipton-under-Wychwood, Oxfordshire.

No one strides across the Church Green in Shipton on one misty afternoon.

In 2022, after protracted debate, residents of Padua voted not to memorialize the setting of the *Taming of the Shrew* with a tourist center.

In the same year, the University of Padua celebrated its octocentenary.

Illyria, the untamed country, exists on the stage.

Here lies Geoffrey Chaucer. Because he was the first to be buried in Poets' Corner, one could not say Chaucer was buried in Poets' Corner. They buried him in a corner.

Your letter reaches me at a difficult time. I am celebrating my octocentenary as we speak.

A lineage of male surnames could be said. Here lies a lineage beneath the South Transept of Westminster Abbey. Chaucer, Spenser, Drayton, Dryden, South, Johnson, Campbell, Browning, Tennyson, Hardy, Kipling, Laurence Olivier.

You buried Charles Dickens with the poets. Here lies Mr. Dickens.

Here lies Gilbert Murray and Sullivan. Here lies the nineteenth century.

Here lies the horse you rode in on, Elizabeth Willis. Here lies the water you couldn't make him drink.

Here lies the fin de siècle.

Keats takes the form of an epitaph. Here lies the inscription of a surname in water. Is it the same water?

The unnamed country lies south of here. The epitaph is illyrical.

Here it lies. This epitaph is engraven upon Geoffrey Chaucer, father of poetry.

In 1929, no monument was erected to the future world war. Each year in our history is an interwar year. Each father in our lineage is a name.

Letters in the names had already melted off the face of the ice cliff before we arrived.

Here lies lifelikeness in fiction. Here lie Roland Barthes Simpson.

Here lies the unknown. Following this is our postwar period.

In 1869 at the intersection of First Street and South Street in Greenport, New York, not a damn thing happened. Here lies your maritime history. Here lies the North Fork of Long Island, tending northward into sound, formerly administered by the New Haven Colony. Here lies your souvenir shop. What follows is a chanty administered by the sons of colonial subjects.

Here lies your historical memory. Your problematic monument to Christopher Columbus. You can bring a statue to water, but you can't make it sink.

Here lies your statute. Residents voted. In 2024, after protracted debate: what follows.