

Reimagining History: Writing Poems About Early Exploration

A Critical Introduction and Collection of Poems

Julia Castanzo | Honors Thesis | May 14, 2017

Historical poetry is a valuable way to engage with the past. It not only allows readers to gain a better understanding of a prior time period, but it also gives them the opportunity to connect with historical figures, famous or not, in a very intimate way. Even so, for poets, the decision to write historical poetry can be daunting. To write a historical poem, let alone an entire collection of historical poetry, requires an extensive amount of research and dedication. It also subjects the poet to substantial criticism, not just from the writing community, but from historicists as well. Poets of historical poetry struggle with verisimilitude, with the problem of ensuring that their poetic work reflects the historical event or time period they are writing about truthfully, while at the same time making certain to maintain their own creative license. Failing to uphold one of those aspects can either result in a collection historicists consider inauthentic or a collection poets deem unreadable. Each betrays the poet's audience in some way.

Several weeks ago I began writing a historical poetry collection on the maritime pilot Juan De Fuca and his failed attempts to find the mythic Strait of Anián. When I chose to begin writing this collection, I immediately felt the weight of historical accuracy squatting atop my shoulders, fully prepared to crush me at any moment. I had also selected a historical subject whom had very few historical documents published on him, and what documents were published seemed to have all of the same information with little elaboration. This made research difficult. I began to fear that if I did eventually try to publish this work, and even if my poetic work was at its best, there would be a historicist somewhere out there lingering in a dark corner, just waiting to point out even the most minor inaccuracies. I felt an indescribable anxiety, and this anxiety is one that is not unfamiliar to other writers of historical poetry. This introduction will draw upon my own experiences in writing historical poetry, and will focus on the ways in which poets

approach research while writing historical pieces and collections. Further, it will reveal how writers of historical poetry confront their struggles with verisimilitude through finding a balance between history and creativity, between accuracy and imagination. This introduction will also briefly explore the ways in which this problem is different for historical poets than it is for historical novelists.

When writing poetry about history and historical figures, it is crucial to partake in a considerable amount of research about one's subject. For example, when I began writing about Juan De Fuca, I felt compelled to know as much about him as I could. Only then could I truly capture his spirit and his journey. So, I began where most people begin: a basic Google search. The first reputable source I found was a page on the Grays Harbor Historical Seaport website written by Joe Follansbee. This page gave me enough information to get started, such as that he was born and died in Cephalonia, Greece, that he sailed as a pilot in the Spanish Navy, and other basic information about his sea-journeys. I thought I would find more once I searched academic databases. As it turns out, though, other than what Follansbee himself wrote, little is actually known about Juan De Fuca. However, even though scouring databases left me with few answers, it did lead me to what would become my primary source: Barry Gough's book, *Juan de Fuca's Strait: Voyages in the Waterway of Forgotten Dreams*.

While Gough's book provided me with the same historical bones as the other sources I had found, it awarded me with some much needed flesh. Gough paints Juan De Fuca as a dreamer and a tale-teller. In many ways, Gough assigns Juan De Fuca personhood where historical record failed to do so. Gough is a historian, though, and his book is a historical text, not a work of historical fiction, therefore his reimagining of Juan De Fuca relies primarily on

historical accuracy rather than on creative ambition. Still, his book opened doors for me in terms of context for my poems. It became easier to see Juan De Fuca as a real person, someone I could have known, rather than just some distant historical figure. In order to write a collection of historical poetry, though, I had to know more than just Juan De Fuca himself. I had to understand the era in which he lived.

When writing poetry about a historical figure, it is important to learn about that figure in relation to his or her time period. That often means that the poet will have to do a generous amount of research on the historical era itself, to learn things she never thought she would have to. When writing my collection on Juan De Fuca, I had to understand the logistics behind early maritime exploration. This involved doing research on what life would have been like on 16th century Spanish exploratory ships. For example, I had to learn what kind of food the explorers ate on board. A web page published on Palm Beach County History Online told me that “mariners would first eat those foods that spoiled the quickest,” and that “to preserve certain foods, such as meat and fish, they were dried, salted, smoked, or pickled. Sailors did not have cans so the meat/fish may have been packed in wood barrels or crates.” I also learned from this site that “food would often rot or become infested with weevils. Rats and mice were also a serious problem because they ate the rations and would leave their droppings in the food.” This information would become very important to me when writing my poem “Hunger,” which begins with, “The whole ship reeks of food/ gone rotten. What was good,/ the men, or the rats, ate days/ ago” (Lines 1-4). This is only one example of the type of research that is involved when writing a collection of historical poetry. To truly understand the role that research plays, it is important to also look at other poets who have written about history.

Poet Enid Shomer is known for writing about history. In her article “Find the essence through historical research: The process, says and award-winning writer of fiction and poetry, is akin the extracting the valuable oil from flower petals,” Shomer discusses the importance of completing research when writing historical poetry. Shomer states that when writing historical poetry, a poet “must do a ton of research to arrive at an essence that assures credibility- that conveys the aroma, the grit, the look of the period in which [one is] working, and ensures that [one] avoid[s] anachronisms.” Shomer also goes into detail about the research she conducted while writing her book of poems, *This Close to the Earth*. “More extensive research was involved in the poem “Pope Joan” a sequence in...*This Close to the Earth*,” she writes. She states that “over a period of two and a half years, [she] read dozens of books as well as arcane articles on microfilm about this medieval female pope.” Shomer continues:

My method then and now was total immersion. I would have enjoyed research even if I were not a writer, but the fact that I was gave it a purpose and shape. These poems took full advantage of the exotica and the color of historical material and validated my tendency to read deeply and with abandon on a subject even when I wasn’t writing about it.

Shomer’s testaments provide meaningful insight into what it means to take on writing a historical poetry collection. Passion and genuine interest are important, and a well-researched collection is one of the ways a poet conveys that interest and that passion to the reader. The poet must fully immerse herself. She must be willing to engage with history. Historical fiction writer Bruce Holsinger shares Shomer’s views on the importance of detail when writing about history.

While historical fiction and historical poetry are two separate entities, they have a lot in common in terms of how their writers deal with research. In his article “Stretching the Truth: A Scholar Tries his Hand,” Bruce Holsinger discusses his historical novel, *A Burnable Book*, and also takes the time to discuss his extensive research process. Holsinger writes:

Writing *A Burnable Book* has demanded an immersive, challenging, and often joyous process of reeducation as I’ve taught myself everything from the conventions of aristocratic household management to the mechanics of medieval street drainage to, most recently, the technology of the earliest gunpowder weapons.

Holsinger’s book was written from the perspective of poet John Gower. Still, he had to understand more than Gower in order to reimagine him in a way that was meaningful. He had to understand Gower’s world. Poet Natasha Trethewey whose book *Native Guard* is both a historical and modern conversation about The Civil War, and in particular about the treatment of black soldiers during that war, also undertakes extensive research when writing about history.

In an interview with Lisa DeVries from East Carolina University, DeVries asks Trethewey about her research process. DeVries asks, “Native Guard...must require a great deal of research. Do you write or research first?” Trethewey replies:

It goes back and forth. Sometimes if there is some historical question that I have asked myself I will begin writing from what it is I think I already know. Then I conduct research, and at some point try to set it all aside and write from what I have come to know, so that it seems intuitive. There are moments when I become nervous because it seems so organic; once it happens, I sometimes think I must be misrepresenting the facts. Then I have to go back and read again to fact-check. I am always excited to find out that I

have made notes or scribbled in the margins things to remind me of "this is where I found it," that this is indeed something that is rooted in historical fact.

Trethewey's statement does give us a better understanding of her research process. Perhaps even more importantly, though, it reveals her anxieties about struggling to bear the massive weight that is historical accuracy. When writing poems about history, it is important to conjure up a sense of authenticity. One way to accomplish this is to partake in an extensive research process to ensure that the collection at least in some way correlates with historical fact, that it upholds the sense of attaining verisimilitude. This process can often be a strenuous one.

In his article "Children of the Century: For Writers of Historical Fiction, Fact Fades and Feeling Persists," Alexander Chee briefly discusses the ways in which verisimilitude presented as a heavy burden to him when writing *The Queen of the Night*, a historical novel set in 19th century Paris, France. Chee states that while writing his novel, "[he] heard the voice of [his] narrator, as clear as a haunting, a voice in [his] head." He continues:

Everything else I would have to research. I did not begin writing about these times and people because I already knew them or their hair, or their powders, their buttons—I chose them because they called out to my imagination. But the weight of those buttons and coins, the powdered wigs—the verisimilitude—was hard to bear.

While Chee is discussing writing a historical novel, his statements apply to historical poetry as well. That weight- that burden of verisimilitude- is one commonly felt amongst historical poets. Sometimes one minor mistake can lead to a disenchanted reader. It can also result in a formation of distrust between reader and poet, and that trust is necessary for a historical poem or collection

to truly be successful. This notion is especially true for historical poets who choose to write histories that were erased.

Natasha Trethewey discusses this briefly in her interview with Lisa Devries from East Carolina University. When asked by Devries about the burden of historical memory and historical erasure, and whether that burden is difficult to bear or a motivator for her writing, Trethewey replies:

It's both. People do talk about the burden of history, and for me the sort of tongue-and-cheek thing about those lines is that I have come to believe that the burden of history is a burden that I willingly take on, and that willingness is an intimate thing. It means you might have to lie down with it. History is intimate; you sleep with it.

Historical poets do indeed willingly take on the burden of history. That burden becomes even heavier when history has forgotten or purposefully neglected the poet's historical event, period, or subject. Even so, in order for a historical poet's reader to trust her writing, the writing must uphold historical fact to a certain degree. That means it is necessary for a poet to become very intimate with her subject matter. Still, it is also important to remember that historical poetry is often a fictional reimagining of historical events or figures rather than a purely historical text. Therefore, imagination is necessary, and a certain amount of creative autonomy is expected. The true task is for the poet to find a balance between imagination and fact. This is often the historical poet's largest challenge.

When writing my own collection about Juan De Fuca, I often feared I would fail to accomplish a sense of verisimilitude in my work; and regardless of how much research I did, this anxiety stuck with me. Initially, I believed I could overcome this fear by overloading my poems

with historical details. For example, at first “Hunger” included several couplets that depicted soldiers carrying wooden casks of food onto the caravels, and loading them into the ships’ holds. I hoped this would provide historical context, that it would transport my reader back to Juan De Fuca’s time. Instead, the poem shifted into something less poetic. It felt dry, had little movement, and utilized meaningless imagery. I then realized that including too much historical detail was just as bad, if not worse, than including no historical detail at all. That is not to say that being aware of all of that historical detail is not important. As Enid Shomer writes in her article, “creating historical fiction or poetry involves merging with the material until the life and culture you are researching become nearly as deeply experienced, as familiar to you (and thereby your readers) as your own life and era” even if you do not end up using all of what you have learned in your research. Therefore, I had to accomplish some sort of a balancing act, to figure out a way to abide by historical fact and at the same time not drown the poems, and therefore my reader, in historical facts.

One aspect that is important to consider is that I was also writing about a character whom little was known about. This provided both advantages and disadvantages. These are best expressed in a quote found in that same article by Enid Shomer in which she also discusses writing her historical novel *The Twelve Rooms of the Nile*. She writes:

The good thing about writing a novel set in 1730 or 1850 is that there is no one alive today who was alive then to contradict you. The bad thing about it is that this fact doesn’t relieve you of the burden of credibility. Nothing ruins your reader’s willing suspension of disbelief faster than a factual error.

Therefore, while the lack of historical information gave me more freedom in terms of my own reimagining of Juan De Fuca himself, it did not give me license to alter historical fact completely for as Bruce Holsinger writes in his article, “stretching the truth is not the same as violating it.” For example, it is a historical fact that after he claimed to find the Strait of Aniàn, Juan De Fuca stayed in Mexico for an extended period of time awaiting compensation that never came. While no one can be sure exactly what this time period looked like for Juan De Fuca, in my poem “After,” I imagine him as a drunken fool recounting wild tales of his discoveries. Whether he was really a drunken fool is impossible to say. I’ll never know. All that matters is that it was possible. Bruce Holsinger shares this sentiment. He writes:

One of your tasks as a historical novelist is to lie to your audience- and to lie repeatedly and convincingly to those very readers who are so deeply invested in the accuracy and verifiability of your recreation of a particular moment in history. If you choose to write historical fiction, you will constantly be treading that fine line between the true and the plausible. And plausibility can be a wonderfully malleable thing.

Just like writing a historical novel, writing historical poetry truly is a balancing act. The poems must be rooted in historical fact. This sets the precedent for trust between poet and reader. Then, once that trust is established, once the reader is fully immersed in the historical time period or event, the poet is free to reimagine. Only with this balance can a poet’s collection or poem be truly successful. It is also important to recognize that throughout this essay, I have been applying discussions about historical novels to concepts about historical poems. While there is a lot of crossover between the two, it is crucial to acknowledge them as separate entities as well. The

process for writing a historical poem differs greatly from the process of writing a historical novel. This is especially true when discussing the presence of a narrative voice.

Historical novels rely on the presence of a designated narrative voice. More often than not, these novels are written from the perspective of one historical figure whom the reader follows throughout the novel and develops a connection with. For example, Hilary Mantel's *Wolf Hall* takes on the voice of historical figure Thomas Cromwell; Bruce Holsinger's *A Burnable Book* is told from the perspective of poet John Gower. In historical poetry collections, there is not always a set guiding narrative voice. Even though a group of poems may belong to a collection with an overarching theme, they are still each meant to stand on their own, unless the poet designates them as part of a series. Therefore, there might be multiple voices present throughout a collection, or the voice may be ambiguous, or entirely unknown to the reader. For example, Elizabeth Bradfield's collection *Approaching Ice* examines some of the more famous figures involved with Polar exploration. In her poem, "Polar Autumn," Bradfield writes:

The twilight upon twilight
 The letters written and amended
 And added to, then sealed
 In the mailbag, shut to their
 Continuing, as if, once inside,
 They would begin arriving.
 Layers drifting up.

Months of this. (Lines 1-9)

In this poem, the voice is unclear. It could be the voice of a polar explorer. It could also be the voice of Bradfield herself. Still, throughout the collection there are several poems in which the explorer Bradfield is writing on is directly stated. For example this occurs in “Polar Explorer Apsley Cherry-Garrard (1911)” as well as in “Polar Explorer Salomon August Andrée (1897).” As one can see, historical poetry collections often take on a wide array of voices and subjects in a way historical novels do not. This is important to consider when acknowledging the research methods poets use when writing historical collections, and more specifically when discussing how poets achieve verisimilitude in such collections.

As previously stated, while poems may be part of a collection, they are also meant to stand on their own. This means that poets might take on various historical voices when writing historical poetry as opposed to just one set voice. This fact becomes imperative when considering the ways in which historical poets establish credibility, or in other words the ways in which poets established their collections as authentic. In a historical novel, the author would want to establish credibility at the very beginning. She would want it to feel authentic from the start, to fully immerse her reader in the time period she has selected. Then, as the novel continues, the author would ideally build upon that previously established credibility. In historical poetry collections, it is not that cut and dry. With each poem, the poet must establish credibility. Each poem is considered its own separate being, connected but also distant from the other poems in its collection. Therefore, the first poem in a collection might appear as totally authentic, but the poet cannot rely on this poem’s authenticity or build upon it as the next poem might employ a totally different voice, narrative, or idea. Therefore, achieving a sense of

verisimilitude can be even more difficult for a historical poet as she has to constantly prove herself credible throughout the whole of the collection.

Historical poetry allows readers to connect with the past. Even so, this connection relies on the poem's or poetry collection's ability to appear authentic, to obtain verisimilitude. In order to achieve this, historical poets must engage in a lengthy research process to assure that their writings are rooted in historical fact. Still, at the same time, it is important for poets to maintain their own creative license, as historical poetry collections are fictional reimaginings of historical events or subjects, and not purely historical texts. The true undertaking then is for poets to find a balance between historical fact and fictionalization. This balance can be difficult for historical poets to find, but at the same time can result in a marvelously successful collection.

Works Cited

Bradfield, Elizabeth. *Approaching Ice: Poems*. Persea, 2010.

Chee, Alexander. "Children of the Century: For Writers of Historical Fiction, Fact Fades and Feeling Persists." *New Republic*, 3 Feb. 2016,

<https://newrepublic.com/article/128877/can-historical-novel-also-serious-literature>.

Accessed 8 May 2017.

DeVries, Lisa. *Because of Blood: Natasha Trethewey's Historical Memory--Interview*. East

Carolina U, <https://www.ecu.edu/english/TCR/26-6/trethewayinterview.html>. Accessed 8 May 2017.

Follansbee, Joe. "Spanish Explorers: Juan De Fuca." Gray's Harbor Historical Seaport. <http://www.historicalseaport.org/2016/05/19/spanish-explorers-juan-de-fuca/>. Accessed 8 May 2017.

Gough, Barry. *Juan De Fuca's Strait: Voyages in the Waterway of Forgotten Dreams*. Harbour Publishing, 2012.

Holsinger, Bruce. "Stretching the Truth." *Humanities*, vol. 35, no. 6, Nov/Dec2014, p. 34
EBSCOhost,proxy.mul.missouri.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=f5h&AN=99285645&site=eds-live&scope=site.

Shomer, Enid. "Find the Essence through Historical Research: The Process, Says an Award-Winning Writer of Fiction and Poetry, Is Akin to Extracting the Valuable Oil from Flower Petals." *Writer (Kalmbach Publishing Co.)*, vol. 122, no. 9, Sept. 2009, p. 22. EBSCOhost, proxy.mul.missouri.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=mi&AN=43622867&site=eds-live&scope=site. Accessed 8 May 2017.

"What Did Sailors Eat?" Palm Beach County History Online. <http://www.pbchistoryonline.org/page/what-did-sailors-eat>. Accessed 8 May 2017.

* * *

Origin

No one knows where the legend began,
or what to make of it now. They

only know when the strait first appeared
on a map. Placed, as if divinely,

between two serpentine coasts,
the Strait of Aniàn was the passage

they had all been longing for. Convinced
of its existence, explorers set sail,

embraced the passage as if it were a
new religion, as if it were a new

God. No one said *myth*. They
only said *follow*. They would

spend years at sea searching. They
would devote centuries to wanting to believe.

The Pirating of Santa Ana

Blood stains the waves'
white froth as debris

washes ashore. The
sea-wind, thick and torrid,

inflicts smoke and ash
upon the beach which

you were cast. Your
surviving men lie, sprawled

across the sand, defeated,
wounded, their ears still

ringing from canons' blares.
You never saw them coming.

They assaulted, looted,
stole your ship, burned

their own, hung your priest
from the ignited mizzen arm.

You prayed, fought back.
You're shipwrecked. There's

no explaining this. You never
saw them coming.

Marooned

Forlorn, you hail your
remaining men, and begin

to set up camp on the
vacant island. You didn't

notice the wind change,
nor did you notice the ship,

charred and still ablaze,
skirring towards the shore.

The Seizing of "Desire"

You take her to shore.
You let her rest, reflect

on what she lost. You
take her to sea. She's

burned. She's wrecked.
She's still sailing.

The Viceroy's Request

Months have passed
since you docked your

mangled ship on the coast
of Mexico, and now

it is time to go back to
sea. Days ago, he

asked you to find the
Strait of Aniàn. In exchange,

you'll receive money,
obtain glory. You're not

sure how long the journey
will take you. You're

not even certain as to where
the sea will lead. Still,

you say yes. You are
compelled to seek this.

Prior to Departure

You stand on the shore and gaze
at the string of caravels lingering

in the harbor. Before today,
these ships seemed lifeless,

hunks of unkempt hollow wood,
barnacle ridden, besmirched

with sea scum, reduced to resting
posts for desperate seagulls.

Now, they tremble upon the
ocean's surface as they pull

at the ropes that tether them
to the stifling port. Their throbs

disturb the loitering seagulls, cause
the ships' ragged sails to unfurl.

The water quakes. Waves surge
towards you. Their white foam

lunges at your feet, then wraps
itself around your ankles, eager

to pull you in. Go ahead. Succumb.
Let the tide arrest you sweetly.

Shoreline

From the back deck of the ship,
the gulls that circle the beach

look like ink drops splattered
against gray parchment.

You could still hear them singing
an hour ago. Now, all you hear

is the water as it beats against
the rudder. Back home,

you could hear the gulls' hymn,
even a distance from the shore.

It's as if their song reverberated
off the incoming waves.

Out here, nothing echos. The
waves send every note of the

gulls' hymn up towards the harbor,
and leave you void of song. With

your back to the coast, you stare
into the oblivion. Already, you're

waiting to hear the gulls' song again.
You're searching for a new shoreline.

Lullaby

A Pantoum

At home in Kefalonia,
a parliament of owls
would sing you to sleep
from atop the fir trees.

A parliament of owls
would watch you dream
from atop the fir trees
as the moonlight gleamed.

They'd watch you dream.
Your mind would wander far
as the moonlight gleamed
and you slept beneath the stars.

While your mind wandered far,
they would sing you to sleep
underneath the stars
in Kefalonia.

Hunger

The whole ship reeks of food
gone rotten. What was good,
the men, or the rats, ate days
ago. This morning, you cast
your net overboard, and hoped
that the ocean would take

mercy on you, but the fish
don't recognize sacrifice.

You waited hours, sliced
your hand open on soddened

rope, breathed in the stench
of blood and salt. You're filthy.

The whole ship is filthy. When
at last you dragged the net

aboard, you thought what you
had found would be enough

to fill you: some cod and bits of
jellyfish. You didn't realize that you

were so hungry. You didn't know
the ocean could be so empty.

Mutiny

You dethrone your captain
like bees unseat their

queens. You hemorrhage
your own treachery.

Approaching Shore

From where you lean,
you can see flushed reefs,

and the water's dark
green hue change into

a translucent blue. Soon,
you'll be back in Mexico.

You'll hear the gulls'
melody, the waves' strum

against the shoreline. You'll
shiver when the ocean's

spume kisses the backs of
your ankles as the tide sends

you inland, as you press
your toes into the sand,

as you feel the earth's
warmth again.

Hesitation

At night, the sea comes for
you. The tide is so close,

at any moment it'll brush
against your doorstep.

You often dream that the
water waits for you outside.

You see the surf bubbling
up below your windows.

You hear the water's
burble echo. It reminds you

of the journey you didn't
finish, of the strait you

didn't find. Sometimes
you open the door, let the

water flood your home
as it carries you where

it knows you need to go.
Other nights, you hover

behind the closed door,
your eye pushed against

the lock, your faith
somewhere out there lost.

Return to Sea

You've been charting
the route in your head

for months, and now
the ships' sails seem

to raise themselves.
Still, uncertainty follows

you like a sullen current.
And still, you are sure

you must resist the
call to turn back.

Sixteenth Day at Sea

You didn't think you could miss

a cactus until it had been weeks

since you'd seen one. Last night,

you dreamed of orchids

drooped over the rim of a vase,

of poppies, just cut, of a pomegranate sliced open.

When you wake, you see only

ocean and smell only saltwater

and the stench of meat about

to spoil. Hungry, you remember

your last orange. You wish

you had savored it. You

wish you had kept the skin. It will

be days until you see something fresh again.

Prayer

Tomorrow, you swear,
will be the day you

find the strait. At dusk,
you gather your men

and pray, first to the
God you're promised to,

then to the sea. Neither
will answer, but

you cannot go home
with nothing. The strait

lingers on your mind
throughout the prayer.

It's latched onto you
like a haunting.

Between 47° and 48° Degrees of Latitude

When you see the inlet,
you think it is everything

you've been searching for.
You stand, your mouth

fluttering and stare at
its opening. Behind you,

your men groan in disbelief.
You fall to your knees.

It's as if God Himself
has materialized into

this uncharted piece of
geography. You can't

believe you had questioned
it, dared to call it myth.

You've found it. Now,
you must follow it.

After

They promised you riches
upon arrival. Yet, months

after you found the strait,
you're even more

broke than you were
before you left. So,

you spend your days
in Mexico, half-drunk,

recounting the saga
of your voyage to

the wealthy. You say
you followed the strait

for twenty days. You
claim you saw the coast

of China. After a while,
the epic that once

widened eyes began to
provoke them to roll.

And now, even you have
begun to question.

When you sleep, you relive
the voyage up to the

moment the inlet's current
guides you in. It swallows

you up each night, over
and over again.

Setting Out

After two years without
pay, you decide to

return to Spain. You
pack up a ship, hoist

its heavy sails, your
muscles weak as you

lift its anchor off the
ocean's floor. This time,

the sea seems to carry
you differently, its drift

restricted. Oh, how
the sea narrows when

you aim to search
for nothing.

Later in Kefalonia

Where you live now,
the fir trees obstruct

your view of the sea.
You often find yourself

squatting underneath
overgrown branches,

slicing away loose
twigs, as you try to

catch a glimpse of the
waves. It's been years

since you last walked
across the deck of

a ship, and almost a
decade since you found

the strait. Now, all you
want is to go back, to

remember what it feels
like to be brought down

to your knees, to bask
in your own discovery.

Final Return to Sea

At last, you take your
final breath. The windows

and doors in your home
open on their own, and

the waves let themselves
in. Their white foam covers

your body like a sheet. The
tide pulls you underneath.

Notes

Both “The Pirating of Santa Ana” and “Marooned” are based off British pirate Thomas Cavendish’s attack upon the Spanish ship Santa Ana, and the events that quickly followed that attack.

“Between 47. And 48. Degrees of Latitude” takes its name from a Michael Lok quote found in Barry Gough’s *Juan De Fuca’s Strait: Voyages in the Waterways of Forgotten Dreams* which

reads "It was on this voyage that [Juan De Fuca] found the 'broad Inlet of the Sea between 47. And 48. degrees of Latitude."