

Bruce Smith

The Ocean

hurrahing for no good reason.
 The tools to know it
 blown apart by its murderous frisson.
 The tools to talk about it
 caught in the tide
 that is foaming and sighing
 in sounds so absolute,
 it must be homicide
 or a great creamy remaking.

The shore is the story
 of our disposition — how we give up
 our sordid excellence. I can see
 our bias in the broken ribs
 of scallop and the carcasses of skate —
 vertebrae and slick cartilage
 and those satanic cases of its black
 egg. There's a certain tendency
 in the jellyfish fetus, the invisible
 flagellants, shards of whelk, tulip, moon.
 Can you tell if this is the wake
 and the burial or the wedding
 of something and all the dirtless
 earth? Who knows
 what to make of the cords
 of tangled kelp, those blue-green
 tresses. And just how political
 are the shattered mirrors
 and the unbound treaties
 of wampum in the quohog shell?

Among the carnage and the line
 among the human welter and harry,
 junk of the prodigal,

rummage of our cups,
there are lobes of milky quartz
so beautiful you must
put them in your mouth
until your speech will be stentorian
as the sea's or tender enough
to call the lugworm from the mud.
And there are those dark stones
you take for your sensual spouse.