

The Red Paint Grave

A man filters his throat-heavy song
through handfuls of silt. His neighbors, a reef
of Etchimin with their arms flared
open toward their sea, anchor their thoughts
on their sister. Prostrate, she undulates
between the shallow walls of the embankment.
But when the brackish sand swells
beside her, she will not tide
to meet the damp rise.

An after-feast of split oysters, each a half-carin,
mark that the living retain
of the dead only what they internalize—
her black hair after rain as it pearly
mothlight but never again the beads
where the heavy ends waded; never
his Etchimin, never again.

Soon, the man will pigment
his dark melody with ochre. Soon,
he will reconcile his refrain—he will saturate
the silence, embellish the space above
her, between them, pour paint
into her black basin. And soon,
he will address his land as a different man.
In the expanse, he will seek
her in corners where land breaks
from slack water and crests
against blue ice and frozen sky.

He will pace the soft cirques
where floe striates the mountain flanks,
but he will distrust the barren rocks
and boulder clay since it rushes
too quickly into the gravel deltas
where the surf banquets
the sand. And though the sea allots the land
no monument, he quarries
what he can of his Etchimin in veins of oysters,
in blank water, in bright strokes of russet earth.