

David Harsent

Three Poems For The World Wildlife Fund

Ocean

There'll come a day when doors open in the sea
and the drowned emerge to walk the salt lip of the shoreline.
On that day you might hear what seems to be

the fluting of wind on rock, though people say
there's music under the blue-green skim, music in the walls
of water, a slow percussion of drums and bells

in the wave-break; and the dead keep time as they go,
marking the beat with their footfalls,
their voices caught in the tug of the undertow...

They say: Look back from the last of the land
to the last of sky and sea, and know
this is all there is of it; this is all we have in hand.

Rainforest

Between the forest floor and the canopy, a hothouse
that draws this shoot out of the delicate cast
of its pod: catching a blush of bruise as it lifts through the mash

of leaf and bone. Once in a hundred years...and the best
flower only in darkness: a plant so secret, so rare
that no one has seen it or named it or tasted its flesh.

Cure-all; elixir; hope against all hope...and this the last
of its kind. One press of the boot, one cut of the saw,
and who would know or care or count the cost?

Icefield

A place of ice over ice, of white over white
and beauty in absences. There was a time when the only sound
was the wind calling its ghosts, when the skyline was set

clean as a scar on glass, when your heartbeat slowed
with the cold, when your dreams brought in a white bird
on a white sky and music that could only be heard

from time to time on the other side of night.
Now the horizon's dark; now there's a terrible weight
in the air and a stain cut hard and deep in the permafrost.

Breakage and slippage; the rumble of some vast
machine cranking its pistons, of everything on the slide;
and the water rising fast, and the music lost.

See also *New Humanist* magazine, www.newhumanist.org.uk



I was very glad to be given the opportunity to collaborate with my son: first, because he's a first-rank photographer with an intriguing (often troubling) vision; secondly, because the WWF campaign provided a subject that concerns us both.

Many accept that the damage we have done – are doing – to the planet is now critical; a few do not. It's possible to see why those few might think as they do: it's difficult to give credence to a tragedy that is predicted but hasn't yet happened, just as it's difficult to be much affected by the human misery of war or natural disaster in a far country. The savage immediacy of such events stands at odds with a largely uneventful quotidian. Denial is an evidential response, but sensory rather than scientific. While life goes on as normal, the imagination has trouble stretching to a notion of the imminent chaos that climate change is said to promise.

In truth, the agencies of global warming are everywhere, though their effect is only visible to those in the front-line, where rain-forests are logged, where ice-fields daily diminish, where the seas thicken and clog. If the past is another country, so is the future: and a country not so far. The tragedy is there, waiting for our arrival.

These poems were commissioned to accompany photographs by Simon Harsent as part of the World Wildlife Fund/Leo Burnett campaign *Fragile Beauty*. The campaign itself took Silver for best photography campaign at the Australasian Writers and Art Directors Association Awards, and the individual images it was comprised of – Icefield, Ocean and Rainforest – each earned a Bronze for individual campaign photography. They won further prizes at the International Photography Awards, the Caxton Awards and at Adfest. The photographs and poems appeared as posters; the poems were also read on radio as part of the campaign.

The photographs can be seen on <http://www.simonharsent.com>