

The New Criterion

Poems March 2011

Landfill

by Morri Creech

Out here it's the same as ever—the rising piles,
the lined pits layered deep as Troy, and ditches
channeling drainage from the spent riches
that seem to stretch down the dirt road for miles:
flotsam of boxes, soup bones, scrap, the springs
coiling from sunk-in mattresses where dew
and rain have rosetted the stitching with mildew.
Inland seagulls hector with their wings
a strew of rinds and punctured bags. Beyond
the reeking mounds, bulldozers have smoothed the soil
over the sodden diapers and glittering foil
so that, as though some conjurer waved his wand
above a flat expanse of dust, you see
a little island looming at the edge
of vision: hairline of seedling grass, a ridge
with here and there a haggard maple tree,
the burlapped roots buried in beds of peat.
That place where Yeats thought all the ladders start?
At the heaps, a man steers a wobbly shopping cart
and throws in a pair of wing-tipped shoes, a sheet
of Visqueen, and what might be a megaphone
or tarnished trumpet—hard to tell. What brings
us back here? An ascetic's disdain for things,
or a hedonist's wish to claim them for his own?
a making-room-for-what-comes-next, the chair
in fashion from Ikea or Pier One
replacing the BarcaLounge, till we're done
with furniture and the house is sold, swept bare?

Meanwhile, on middle ground, we'll park the truck
to dump the armoire or the Frigidaire,
then stoop to appraise the treasure lying there
—a necklace, broken-clasped yet bright as luck;
a fine-grained cherry table, its legs uneven—
though most leave with nothing. Kingdom of
the junked ham radio and gutted stove,
the whole place shimmers with flies, a feculent heaven
of stuff that's survived its use and, in some cases,
its users. Someone wore those wing-tipped shoes,
dozed on that mattress, read the *Daily News*
bundled and stacked there; surely there were faces
that stared from these empty frames. And if the past
outstrips the present, accumulating year
after year in bags and boxes, it ends up here,
the life that matters becoming the things that last.

Morri Creech is the author of four books, including *Blue Rooms* (Waywiser). His forthcoming book, *The Sentence*, will be published next year by LSU Press.

This article originally appeared in The New Criterion, Volume 29 Number 7 , on page 31

Copyright © 2024 The New Criterion | www.newcriterion.com

<https://newcriterion.com/issues/2011/3/landfill>