

Littoral

Also by Patricia Debney

How to Be a Dragonfly
Losing You

Patricia Debney

Littoral

Shearsman Books

First published in the United Kingdom in 2013 by
Shearsman Books
50 Westons Hill Drive
Emersons Green
BRISTOL
BS16 7DF

Shearsman Books Ltd Registered Office
30-31 St. James Place, Mangotsfield, Bristol BS16 9JB
(this address not for correspondence)

www.shearsman.com

ISBN 978-1-84861-293-8

Copyright © Patricia Debney, 2013.

The right of Patricia Debney to be identified as the author
of this work has been asserted by her in accordance with the
Copyrights, Designs and Patents Act of 1988.

All rights reserved.

Acknowledgements

Littoral was written during a six-week residency in the Little Blue Hut on the North Kent coast. I am grateful to Canterbury City Council for its unconditional support.

'Half-Shell' previously appeared in *Did I Tell You? 131 Poems in Aid of Children in Need* (WordAid, November 2010). 'Onshore Wind', 'Cross Wind', 'Breaking', 'Making Waves' and 'This Time Tomorrow' previously appeared in *slantways: an anthology of prose poems* (WordAid, March 2011). 'Littoral Drift', 'Rising Tide', 'Sea Breeze', 'Doldrums', 'Shadows', and 'Becalmed at Half Tide' previously appeared in *Envoi* (Summer 2011). 'The Fetch', 'Little Blue Hut', 'Perfect Summer's Day 1' and 'Perfect Summer's Day 2' previously appeared in *Shearsman* 91 & 92 (May 2012).

Accompanying definitions taken from the *Glossary of Coastal Definitions*, Washington State Department of Ecology, <http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/sea/swces/products/glossary.htm>, by permission of the Washington State Department of Ecology.

Contents

i.

Littoral	13
Onshore Wind	14
Whitstable Spit	15
Shadows	16
Cross Wind	17
Sea Breeze	18
Doldrums	19

ii.

Tsunami	25
Breaking	26
Rising Tide	27
Gravity Waves	28
Sky & Sea	29
High Tide at the Spit	30
Avulsion	31
Hindsight	32
Making Waves	33
The Fetch	34
Leeway	35
Perfect Summer's Day 1	36
Perfect Summer's Day 2	37
Perfect Summer's Day 3	38

iii.

Cleaving	45
Celestial Mechanics	46
Florida, 1970-1982	47

Near Atlantic City, 1976	48
Kiawah Island, 1980	49
Whitetops	50
No Horizon	51
Collected Shells	52
Hinterland	53
Slack Tide	54

iv.

Little Blue Hut	61
Becalmed at Half Tide	62
Clear Air	63
In Offshore Wind	64
Tankerton Slopes	65
Half Shell	66
What to Wear	67
Neap Tide	68
Almost Gone	69
This Time Tomorrow	70

Littoral

i.

Littoral

Maybe you don't want to look. There, where the sand begins. From the eddies around, it could be a door. Part of a boat, or a warped bit of board someone used to walk on.

Anyway you don't get there quick enough. You watch as it goes under, each swell layering more water—first the navy blue blends, then the edges flare into sand.

It might be there next time, might not. It might be shunted somewhere—closer in, further out, then along some—and left to settle. Work its way into another version of this landscape.

Onshore Wind

In your own back garden, the sun bakes. New leaves unfold as you watch and tulips flood with high colour. The earth greens.

Here the seasons have different signals, and the tides repeat their complex but regular patterns regardless of temperature: diurnal, neap, equatorial, perigean. Algae bloom and fade, and barnacles cling and release, wash up in all weathers.

This is not about you. Or you. Or anything we might think responds to sun or shower, heat or cold, tenderness or neglect.

This blows a wind past you that was going to blow anyway. This sweeps sediment according to size and weight and deposits it further down the shore. This shapes whatever you do and have done.

You thought you had got to grips with the turning and tilting, and your place in it. The vegetable pattern of growth and death, the length of the arcs of parts of this life.

But here there is more grey. And no beginning, no end.

Whitstable Spit

It starts with the usual line of ripples, small crests. Some kind of meeting of the same but different, sixty degrees of separation.

The tide is coming in. The wind picks up. Rough and smooth battle over the high ground, white foam twisting and roiling all along the edge like the tail of a Chinese dragon, mobile as paper.

The sign warns of it. And now, after all this, the pebbled peninsula we stood on moments ago disappears. Horns locked, the sea closes in.

In truth it was never dependable. So the first thing to do is stop crying. Chances are you'll learn to walk along it when you can, and leave before you drown.

Shadows

If I knew how far away they were, and the angle of their advancing, I could work out the speed of the wind.

All morning they've come in rows, from first glance to hut to scarp in seconds, black ink trick, oil slick, dark army approaching.

Fear too comes and goes. Froth rolls grey and dirty up the shore.

While between times the bright sun turns it back to white. Like the clouds themselves when I can bring myself to look, watch them sail across clear blue sky.

Cross Wind

On the other side of the spit, water rages, shoulders some submerged punching bag that never gives an inch.

While over here, the tide curls its lips, laps against the shore, stretches, as if resting.

This morning the wind has swung right around. Which makes a nice change, I admit.

Sea Breeze

Out at sea, the water browns with it. Waves scud along for meters, in a race where no one knows the beginning or end. For miles they break through, foaming, like underwater creatures coming up for air.

I expected wind. But not like this. Some days it pushes me back from the shore. Muscles in around these window frames, up the sleeves of this heavy coat. Some days it literally takes my breath away.

Doldrums

Late afternoon. A cross wind, or offshore. Or onshore, depending. The water shifts minute by minute, and for the first time the turbines hardly turn.

The breeze blows down my neck like a message. Something to remember, or forget. To long for, or reject. Regret. Resist or give in to. Too many useless things to do.

The sun warms one side. White clouds thin. And the tide slinks down the beach, water greying, brown algae emerging, gulls fly in.

All this was bound to happen. You signed on for the duration. Wait now to be moved.