

PASSPORTS

We save them, as we save those curls
culled from our kids' first haircuts, or from lovers
felled too early. Here are

all of mine, safe in a file, their corners
clipped, each page engraved
with trips I barely remember.

Why was I wandering from there to there
To there? God only knows.
And the processions of wraiths' photos

claiming to prove that I was me:
the faces greyish disks, the fisheyes
trapped in the noonhour flashflare

with the sullen jacklit stare
of a woman who's just been arrested.
Sequenced, these pics are like a chart

of moon phases fading to blackout; or
like a mermaid doomed to appear onshore
every five years, and each time altered

to something a little more dead:
skin withering in the parching air,
marooned hair thinning as it dries,
cursed if she smiles or cries.

From PLASTICENE SUITE

ROCK-LIKE OBJECT ON BEACH

The Paleocene the Eocene
the Miocene the Pleistocene
and now we're here the Plasticene.

Look, a rock made of sand
and one of lime, and one of quartz,
and one of what is this?

It's black and striped and slippery,
not exactly rock
and not not.

On the beach at any rate.
Petrified oil, with a vein of scarlet,
part of a bucket maybe.

When we're gone and the aliens come
to puzzle out our fossils:
will this be evidence?

Of us: of our too-brief history,
our cleverness, our thoughtlessness,
our sudden death?

3 FOLIAGE

“a scrap of black plastic—the defining foliage of the oil age”

MARK COCKER, OUR PLACE

It sprouts everywhere, this foliage.
Up in the trees, like mistletoe,
or caught in the marshes

or blooming in the ponds like waterlilies,
gaudy and frilly,
rippling as if alive

or washing onto the beaches, neo-seaweed
of torn bags, cast wrappers, tangled rope
shredded by tides and rocks.

But unlike true foliage it's rootless
and gives nothing back,
not even one empty calorie.

Who plants it, this useless crop?
Who harvests it?
Who can say Stop?

7. WHALES

Everyone cried when they saw it
in the square blue sea of the TV:
so big and sad

a mother whale
carrying her child
for three days, mourning
its death from toxic plastic.

So big and sad
we can hardly grasp it:
how did we do this by just living
in the normal way,

manoeuvring our way through
package and wrapping,
cutting our way to our food
through the layer by layer that
keeps it fresher,
and doesn't everyone?

What happened before?
How did we ever survive
with only paper and glass and tin
with hemp and leather and oilskin?

But now there's a dead whale
right there on the screen:
so big and sad
something must be done.

It will be! Will it be?
Will we decide to, finally?