

Elegy for a Hometown

I'm done now with the dark houses of the East.
My hometown.

The book is closing on my generation.

*

Skinner satin mills
long gone to producing brass & machine gun clips & milk bottle caps
are now themselves long gone.

And the orchard of 10,000 apple trees that fed our insatiable boyish hungers—
a wilderness of stumps and weeds.

*

Even the river's changed course,
leaving Walpole's cove bleached & dry, where, in winter, local farmers
sawed thick blocks of ice,
skidding them up a frozen ramp to waiting wagons,
horses named Belle & Sophie stamping & steaming & shaking their harnesses
until they rang.

*

My Polack neighbor's dairy farm's now a golf course,
tees & greens & easy fairways.

We once killed black snakes there through the long summers
& forking up corners,
saved the sweet-smelling, windrowed hay from oncoming rain,

chaff stinging our sweat drenched bodies like shirts of nettle.

*

So what's to say when a whole chunk of your life comes up missing?

You say to yourself, "Well, there it is."

Or, "Well, there it was. Wasn't it?"

*

God's his own voyeur.

*

After more than half a century,

I walk the town with the only man who knows my name.

*

Soon, I'll bury my own shadow & slip away like sunlight.

*

Simplicity's what I'm best at.

*

In the end,

a small box of a house by the sea.

No electricity.

No running water. Dirt floored.

Prayer,

wind & slapdash from the whereafter.