



To Make Room for the Sea

Adam Clay

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In his fourth book of poetry, *To Make Room for the Sea*, Adam Clay notes, “The line between the public and personal? It depends on the world.” His poems play with the connection between individual experiences and the public, political nature of moving through the world, chronicling the impulses and emotions behind invisible connections and interrogating chance, choice, and linearity.

Clay ruminates with a high level of abstraction that’s asymmetrically paired with the tangible. Haunted by persistent distance and hedging, the poems seem vegetative at times, with a burden and layering of words. Whether they’re bent toward syntactic inversion for the sake of form and lineation, or idiosyncratically using “one”—as in “one wonders / where to find rest again”—their language becomes something overgrown and wild. Long lines are enjambed like continuous trailing thoughts, prepositional phrases are stacked, and additive observations mold the poems’ momentum like friction.

The standout “Mississippi Elegy” states:

*The real wilderness is not out
there—it’s in here, deep inside
the quick run of blood. Every day*

*I consider what going home means
now that I’m here again:*

There’s a deep sense of elegy in the collection’s tone. Utilizing a circular rhythm and logic that bends toward return—whether from sleep to wakefulness, or from abstraction to physicality—the poems evoke a complex wistfulness.

Clay treads a borderland between nostalgia and mourning, but there’s also a vein of optimism: “Not a happy accident, / but more a blur of accidental happiness / smudged with a tone I can’t quite name.” If there’s an *ars poetica* in *To Make Room for the Sea*, it’s that “there’s always a / specific way to feel homesick, a way to chart the path to loneliness / without knowing its sort or its source.”

LETITIA MONTGOMERY-RODGERS (March / April 2020)

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