

# Ode to a Zebra Mussel

George Bradford (David Watson)

“Zebra mussels came from fresh-water seas of Eastern Europe and have no major natural predators in the Great Lakes, which accounts for their spread at a rate of 160 miles per year.

“They showed up in Lake St. Clair in 1987 and rapidly infested Lake Erie to the south...The creatures have already appeared as far apart as Green Bay, Wis., and Lake Ontario...

“The city of Monroe, south of Detroit, rationed water for several days [in December 1989] after a decaying mass of mussels, which are no more than two inches each in length, clogged Lake Erie intake pipes for the city’s drinking water system...

“Zebra mussels breed rapidly and interfere with the Great Lakes food chain. Some experts estimate they could cost the United States up to \$5 billion over the next 10 years in damages and resources...”

—The *Detroit News*, 8 March 1990

nature’s revenge against commerce  
you are taking no prisoners  
your ledge is your ledge  
and let the rest go to hell

.

great ships dissolve in your collective maw  
you shut down nuclear plants (will their  
cold stellar warmth let you thrive as they  
turn us into refugees?)  
somewhere some foul and haunted  
tanker flushes still more of your cousins  
into this delicious frontier

.

you’re only the next wave of  
conquerors after all but then  
no one would have expected you  
the priests read their fish bones their  
burnt offerings the gritty  
residues of their vats  
none of this was supposed to happen  
we have readouts to prove it

.

the residues of the residues  
of the vats they used to fight you  
to poison you and yet their magic

failed (their commerce now long  
standing on its own spindly legs  
surviving even the candle it burns at  
both the world's ends)

.

I drink to you old adversary  
gritty destiny eating away at what can  
be no one's and no  
one

.

you will have your way for a time  
your time  
sand and stone  
shift and settle always lower  
and slabs of rock grind down under  
this terrible eating  
eating everything being eaten by  
nothing

# fifth Estate

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