

POETRY

## Quake

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The author offers up reflections on the 10th anniversary of the Haiti earthquake.

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“The past is never dead. It’s not even past.”

William Faulkner

It has been 10 years since the devastating 2010 earthquake in Haiti. These six poems are a meditation on this 100-year cataclysm, its lasting impact on our psyche, and the meaning it still has to Haitians at home or displaced throughout the diaspora. Some five years ago, a Haitian friend and I were remembering a former classmate who perished in the seism. My friend lamented: “He is still under the rubble”.

The past can split into many fractions, like light through a prism, with each fraction moving at a different speed into the present, and expectant future. For many, the earthquake is a past that they still reside in; while the rest of us have gone on with our lives for nearly a decade. Some pasts recede into the horizon; others are the mirrors, the shields or menisci through which we see, or a veil that drops when least expected.

I have written poems that have returned me to the earthquake, independent of their initial trajectories; as if the threads of inspiration were pulled back by the event’s literal and metaphorical gravity. How many of us have found ourselves in dreams, hovering over the rubble hoping to hear the whispers of friends and countless others, unnamed, lost. For this generation, the earthquake has defined us as much as the bicentennial of Haiti’s independence. This earthquake is still in my present, and perhaps the present of many others.

### Quake

A crack in the crust  
of an apple pie,

subterranean, a microscopic fissure  
in the peel of this pomegranate earth.

A city, a dot, an organic fossil  
in a geological scab.

Can these souls claim amnesty  
in the bosom of Abraham?

Can we ever know the secrets  
that belong to the gods?

## **These colorful retracting ocean waves**

These colorful retracting ocean waves  
the undulations of time

slowly vibrating strings  
sea foam lapping at the moon.

Curves, bends, the hinges  
of decades, of centuries.

Then, 200,000 bodies.

History has a way of folding  
upon our tragedies.

There, in its cloudy indistinct edges  
of yesterdays, is a reverse alchemy:

voices transmuted into molecular fractions,  
subatomic particles, running-away light

receding echoes of matter  
that soon will no longer be heard.

*Memento vivere.* Remember.

## **The Way We Live, 1**

We live at times in the eddies  
the minute dead spaces

the pin-point penumbra  
within the bright flow of days.

We live inside a snake  
on this island we stitched

from rags and rafts  
kept debris born long ago  
of sunken slave boats.

Boukman! Toussaint! Dessalines!  
Ashes of glorious days  
overflow our bright urns.

We are one and alone  
with our tragedies.

We are one and alone  
dreaming  
in our beloved ruins.

## **The Way We Live, 2**

The rhythmic drum metronome of exigent labor.  
Canticles cocooned inside mountains.

Our sweat evaporates, leaving  
nothing more than its earthly gift of salt.  
Our hands sift and lift the dust  
carry it to the shore.

We have brought nothing but psalms  
to barter with the ocean

to trade for an overcoat of algae  
seaweed and moss

a patch of imagined green  
in the baobab's hairy shadow.

## Refugee (The Day of the Dead)

1.

In the land of my ancestors' birth  
there is dancing in the streets today  
*Le Jour de Morts*, and all day  
the living raises the spirits  
then drum them back to peaceful sleep.

Today there was dancing in the streets.  
And at dusk the drums are left out  
in the eucalyptus scented breeze  
to soothe and heal their battered skins.

2.

But here, in the fog of night,  
the drunken moon has overturned,  
bloated belly against the ground.  
Here, insomnia unchains its darkest ocean.

So I walk these streets of opalescent glass,  
tentacular avenues under stroboscopic lights,  
stunned like a revenant, I am the shadow  
of a nameless neon angel, worlds away  
from my down trodden and quarrelsome tribe.

See me wearing my grandfather's straw hat  
A red handkerchief around my neck,  
cactus milk on my face, and salt in both hands,  
to stave off the leaving-dead.

3.

See me escape the city,  
out to bury my recalcitrant love.  
I follow a damp and tenebrous trail  
littered with decaying leaves of almond trees.

I am the guest of honor  
in a gala of gila monsters.

## What Remains

We extricate our bones  
white elongated pearls

Gemstones from a treasure chest  
and leave them out

to whisper their age-old parables  
into the frothy ears of conches.

We leave them out  
to dry on the sand

offer their marrow  
to the hungry tongues of tides.

We leave them among the wrecked ships  
and cathedrals for gargantuan birds

blue-bellied bats  
to fill their conquering hunger.

Soon we will fold our jellied bodies  
into the veil of the ocean's fog

Rest on the coral beds  
in our castles of foam.

## Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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