

## A JUST VERDICT

by

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“A Just Verdict” is published in *Pennsylvania Literary Journal*'s Fall 2022 issue.

Sagaciously haunted by the muckraking ghosts of Sinclair Lewis together with Upton Sinclair, who for a season in their lives came to dwell in this same backyard of John Steinbeck, rapt by these great writers' inversions of imperial tales, mostly panned by the critics of their day, although manna for their readers, he walked along the northern Pacific Ocean's shoreline, a thin white-sand beach, dolorous with sublimity, raw and powerful for its steep descent into the unknown, out about fifty meters a buttress to slow swells, as if taunting mighty turns over their own crests, aquamarine whorls cascading like expertly blown glass, foamy spits and pearl mist just above, this painterly clarion call to every seascape dobbed and swathed across canvases with trembling spatula or brush, on a rich if tumultuously unsure flirtation, for as long as memory allowed, to envision all this with the tinsel restless Tyger's eye of poet William Blake, and then, he reached a jutted point in the craggy, nakedly rocky cliff that framed from behind some sort of magnetic cauldron, with its circadian push and pull, harmony he flowed amidst like hydra, uprooted from bottoms, swaying loose, Carmen Miranda style, in the surf's outer reaches, eventually given over with a kind of gentleness up onto the sand, strand upon strand spangled by ripe and juicy lobes still glistening expectantly, while fruit flies took their feast from clumps of it here and there, uninterested in biting at the ankles of this man, who, at last, came to the end of his sinew and blood's spooled filament, at a horn of

black ore long ago torn ragged by shifting tectonics, his inner plates changing too, no longer fettered in schism of rubbing against themselves, the settling of his continents, as he opened the palms of his hands and laid them against the promontory's hard ravines, pressed gently and firmly down, the way you would comfort a bluebird or phoebe if your fingers curled round it: that's when the assurance came he would not turn himself in, because he was no longer guilty of the crime they charged him with back home, gaining his willing confession, what is more, he had not been censurable all along, rather, the myth had been imposed upon him of something sticky as well as viscous, a lie, which kept him away from the ocean and the shore and this very cliff, his flesh, the black rock's, both of them, all of themselves and everything else that stretched out into the seemingly endless sea, remained steadfastly here, no longer simply seeking the bright and cheery sun, infused, instead, by a gray fog, chilled overcast morning, its burning off, a patch of blue sky around noon, bath of rays for a time, only a brief while, followed by the setting orb that pours gold across the horizon until the glowing lady of the night smiles over the water her silver ripples, which spread into a V the way a gaggle of geese fly, all of this, the sum of these enchanted metamorphoses, their rhythm, the wholeness of coming back to this place he had left millions of years ago when he too must have had fins and gills along with the fish of the ocean, as though Kafka's Gregor Samsa transformed into a beautiful tarpon and not a grotesque beetle—now, leaving his hands right there, for lifting them would surely allow undertow to take him once more down with lower currents corrupted by ancient, unnamable wounds, he understood the crime is in the story that is no humanist fable, but all pop thriller, every question given an easy adolescent answer, almost entirely plot driven with the burden of debt attached to some

invisible contract, this man's, perhaps everyone's, bankruptcy which vanishes upon the rocks that owe nothing to God, a grand jubilee! if, in desperation and tenacity, you make it to the further waters, unfortunately, for him, this much, they had to be the farthest away before delivering up, like seaweed relentlessly and carefully washed ashore, yes, most definitely, his innocence, his freedom. With certainty that had to be the stuff of artists and writers and seafarers whom ever dared originality, this man knew most days he would return here, at the base of this black, rocky escarpment, where he would lay hands on it, to ground him just enough for letting go, once again.

THE END