

Oysters

At night—the soft shuck of everything on earth softly sliding away into space.

--Mary-Alice Daniel

Every now and then you emerge from the soil,
exhumed out of the darkness by a backhoe
on a street in Baltimore. There you are. A body part,
serial-killed by history. An ear who last alive heard
the water-muffled splash of steam-driven paddle wheels.

A layer of flat calcium flakes under the asphalt
and macadam, under bricks and cobblestones.
Strata of progress. Archaeology of amnesia.

On a February rainy night in Annapolis you beckon
from ice in market stalls and raw bars barnacled in your
old-man skin, haired by algae, moist protein bodies inside,
dressed ugly, but the locals' lusty gazes shuck you with their eyes.

Bullets punched outboards and chests
over you. Men died for your flesh.

A beach on the Wicomico down from Salisbury where
the old packing plant once stood: kayakers tread your bones
to get to the tannin'd currents racing past. Women's hands
eighty-years dead last held you, dispatched your silent,
blind, bivalve lives inside with a poke-slip of their knives.

John Smith said he could walk across your shoals at low tide.
You have run aground many a foolish captain who lost track of you.

Once your legion filtered the whole bay in days; now
it takes you a year. There's mercury in the mud. There's lead.
How do you taste without that metallic after-singe?

Give me that cool glide at the back of my throat.
Give me your pornographic flavor.

I'll eat you until my blood runs silver.

Matt Hohner

Winner, 2014 Maryland Writers' Association Literary Contest Poetry),
published in MWA anthology *Synergy: A Collage of Voices*, September 2015.