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Poem by Ayla Goktan



Water in Chicago

I chose this city because of what the lake taught me
the first time I saw it: happiness
is saturation

Part of me believes this, but part of me condemns:
I am too beholden to aesthetics;
I upset myself

Every “I,” every eye, is political—
Mine as I stand on the edge of the sand

Water in Chicago

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The eye of the lake, regarding sky

The eye of the camera that captured the earliest surviving photograph

(For though I thought it would choose a person, it, too, found worth in a view)

And the eye of the temple in Wilmette, reminding me that even beautiful things we think are free go unseen by the poorest among us

(Matthew Desmond writes of a woman native to Milwaukee who's never seen the lake)

So how can I enjoy what lies before me? And yet, I do—

Dusk comes; it changes things,

rippling pinks across the powder blue of lake and sky

Variation gives meaning to distance, and I imagine I can

almost glimpse all the evenings I'm meant to spend here

spread before me; pocket evenings I could hold

in my palm, somehow extending

to the rim of the world

The lake strikes up my hunger, then tames it;

limits the city's searching lights

Years from here, I will know what I don't know now:

Every time until the last time I flew

out of Chicago at night, I looked beyond

the airplane's thumbprint window,

and onto every darkness,

I projected water

Publishing Information

- [“The First Photograph”](#) [4] (circa 1826), Henry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin.
- *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City* by Matthew Desmond (Crown, 2016).

Art Information

- [“Pastel City”](#) [5] © Eric Allix Rogers; Creative Commons license.



Ayla Goktan graduated from Northwestern University in 2017 with bachelor's degrees in psychology and flute performance. She currently lives in Cork City, Ireland. Her poetry has been published in *The Best Emerging Poets of Illinois*, *Driftwood Press*, and *New Plains Review*. She was also long-listed for the 2017 Nâzim Hikmet Poetry Award.

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