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Poetry by Jacqueline Schaalje



Once I Was a Lighthouse

Once I was a lighthouse, set on the soft grass dyke,
my feet propped up by basalt blocks, spit out from a wrinkly
and dried-up volcano that towered some way from the waves.
And these always wavered their chill stream towards me, or so it seemed,
nibbling at my feet, bringing ships into my focus, or attacking
but I was made of the sturdiest material, steel-in-stone,
and my bright stripes red and white and light blue
like a child's romper, indicated my sex wasn't emphasized or bold.
Yes, I stood tall and upright, but did not make a thing of it.
For years I brought ships at my feet. They tugged alongside;

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I signaled to them where I was. I was there! Oh, I was!
You could always find me to warn of the graveyard bar.
Once every while a man (it was usually a man) climbed up
and down (he stooped a little) in my spiral and my light got fixed
(they came in shifts) so I burnt even brighter, much brighter
than fireflies and butterfly eyes that zoomed around me on syrupy
summer evenings. I had a whole deck, a range light of a million-
candles' power, and usually did an excellent job of shoos ships
from their wall of sand. Until one day there were pecks of rust
and there were no men or women in shifts to fix me up.
At first I liked my rust which lit up in the sunrise and sunset,
reposting the sky's glamour. But I found this inexplicable.
All day I bundled my strength in my lantern room and shone,
pushing out my strobe over what was once a graveyard.

Art Information

- [Douglas Head on Isle of Man, Oilette Postcard](#) [5] © The Newberry Library; public domain.



Jacqueline Schaalje has published short fiction and poetry in the *Massachusetts Review*, *Talking Writing*, *Frontier Poetry*, *Grist*, among others. Her stories and poems were finalists for the Epiphany Prize, in the Live Canon and New Guard Competitions, or received honorable mentions. She has received support and/or scholarships at the Southampton Writers Conference and International Women's Writing Guild. She joined the Tupelo Press 30/30 project. She is a member of the Israel Association for Writers in English. She earned her MA in English from the University of Amsterdam.

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