Hear this poem read aloud at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z4AQgK8\_5As

Liturgy to the Mississippi Gulf Coast

by Natasha Trethewey

To the security guard staring at the Gulf

thinking of bodies washed away from the coast, plugging her ears

against the bells and sirens—sound of alarm—the gaming floor

on the Coast;

To Billy Scarpetta, waiting tables on the Coast, staring at the Gulf

thinking of water rising, thinking of New Orleans, thinking of cleansing

the Coast;

To the woman dreaming of returning to the Coast, thinking of water rising,

her daughter’s grave, my mother’s grave—underwater—on the Coast;

To Miss Mary, somewhere;

To the displaced, living in trailers along the coast, beside the highway,

in vacant lots and open fields; to everyone who stayed on the Coast,

who came back—or cannot—to the Coast;

To those who died on the Coast.

This is a memory of the Coast: to each his own

recollections, her reclamations, their

restorations, the return of the Coast.

This is a time capsule for the Coast: words of the people

—don’t forget us—

the sound of wind, waves, the silence of graves,

the muffled voice of history, bull-dozed and buried

under sand poured on the eroding coast,

the concrete slabs of rebuilding the Coast.

This is a love letter to the Gulf Coast, a praise song, a dirge,

invocation and benediction, a requiem for the Gulf Coast.

This cannot rebuild the Coast; it is an indictment, a complaint,

my logos—argument and discourse—with the Coast.

This is my nostos—my pilgrimage to the Coast, my memory, my reckoning—

native daughter: I am the Gulf Coast.