Frontier: A Definition [1]

November 2, 2020 Featured Poetry [2]
TW at Ten [3]

Poetry by Iris Jamahl Dunkle

Frontier: A Definition

1.

(function(i,s,o,g,r,a,m){i['GoogleAnalyticsObject']=r;i[r]=i[r]||function(){ (i[r].q=i[r].q||[]).push(arguments)},i[r].l=1*new Date();a=s.createElement(o), m=s.getElementsByTagName(o)[0];a.async=1;a.src=g;m.parentNode.insertBefore(a,m) })(window,document,'script','https://www.google-analytics.com/analytics.js','ga'); ga('create', 'UA-18260536-1', 'auto'); ga('send', 'pageview');

A border is porous [slipstream]

We used to swim under
river's green skin
dapple of tree's reach

under water violence
is muffled. Current
never caught us

citizens of the same cool
stream, under sun's glare
weaving with cries of bird in air.

2.

Historically: pistol-fisted a band of wasteland between settled

and primitive outpost built from clear-cut and cleaved bodies.

Lay down the steel sentence. On which slides [steel] [weight]

A front line woven with erased footsteps across Natchez Trace—

3. A safety valve lets off steam. Without it. Explosion. A million splinters that pierce—

4. Wilderness looked back at us. Green teeth. Eyes blinking. We had no name that suited it.

5.

A border, continuous [a moving line]

Now the river stops
its quiet speech
with stone teeth

no more threading
our bodies through
its depths and shadows

under muffle of water's passage
we've lost our common tongue
under sandy shoal—

6.

A border is a way of life.

7.

We seek the ocean
to find the edge
of ourselves.

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Perhaps waves will
    satiate this churn
        of desire. Border

that time chews.
    Everything conquerable
        except ourselves. Lone

fort. Mishap of raw
logs. Secrets stoking
the hearth—

[4]

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Art Information

- "Patterns of Privilege: Bodies of Nature 2 [5]" and "Patterns of Privilege: Past Present 1 [6]" (edited) © Kathleen Caprario; used by permission.

Iris Jamahl Dunkle was the 2017-2018 Poet Laureate of Sonoma County, California. Her newest poetry collection, *West : Fire : Archive*, is forthcoming from the Center for Literary Publishing in 2021. Her other poetry collections include *Interrupted Geographies* (Trio House Press, 2017), *Gold Passage* (Trio House Press, 2013), and *There's a Ghost in This Machine of Air* (Word Tech, 2015). Dunkle teaches at Napa Valley College and is the poetry director of the Napa Valley Writers' Conference. She wrote the first full-length biography of Charmian London, Jack London's wife—*Charmian Kittredge London: Trailblazer, Author, Adventurer* [7]—published by the University of Oklahoma Press in Fall 2020.

For more information, visit Iris Jamahl Dunkle's website [8] or follow her @irjohnso [9] on Twitter.

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