

## Frontier: A Definition [1]

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### Poetry by Iris Jamahl Dunkle



## Frontier: A Definition

1.

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.



Perhaps waves will  
sate this churn  
of desire. Border

that time chews.  
Everything conquerable  
except ourselves. Lone

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



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### Art Information

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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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