

Let soldiers stand for violence.
Let the suburbs stand for childhood.
Let paella stand for love.
Let zero stand for death.

The poems in *Arguments for Lawn Chairs* take multiple positions. The poems in *Arguments for Lawn Chairs* don't trust your grandmother's cooking. They have visited Pangea, they have visited Toronto and Montreal, the B.C. Gulf Islands, Tiberias, the tailing ponds near Sudbury, and they are still not satisfied, are still unconvinced, still need more proof. They are suckers for dovetailed boxes, winter fire pits, houses that sit not quite true, a rent garbage bag spilling its guts on Queen Street. The poems in *Arguments for Lawn Chairs* have some choice words for Orpheus, for Eurydice, for Beowulf, for Dumbledore and Hermione. The poems in *Arguments for Lawn Chairs* are devoid of hope, but are joyful nonetheless.

Aaron Kreuter's debut collection presents a new and playful voice—speaking clearly, convincingly—meditating on the environment, geopolitics, and personal identity. These poems engage with the confusions and contradictions of contemporary life in an age of networked subjectivity, but also consider urgent political concerns through poetic acts that reward our attention.

—Stephen Cain, author of *Torontology* and *I Can Say Interpellation*

Aaron Kreuter resides in Toronto. His poems have appeared in *Best Canadian Poetry 2014*, *subTerrain*, *carte blanche*, and *Vallum*, among other places. *Arguments for Lawn Chairs* is his first collection of poems.

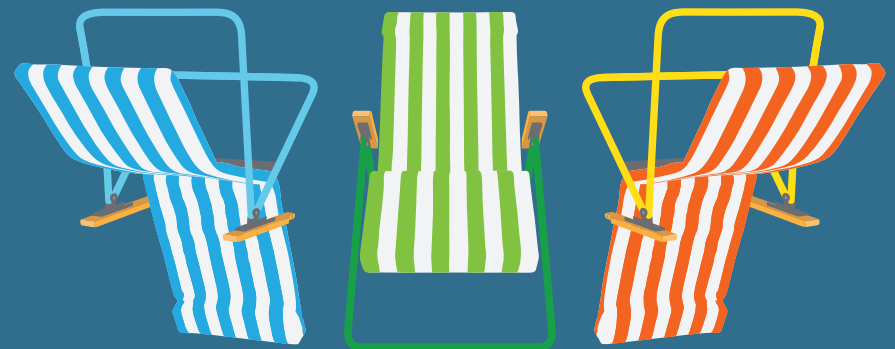


16

ARGUMENTS FOR LAWN CHAIRS

Aaron Kreuter

Arguments for Lawn Chairs



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FIRST POETS SERIES 16



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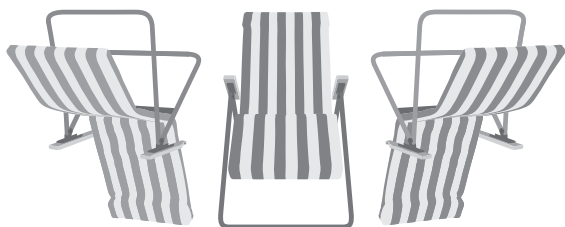
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Arguments for Lawn Chairs



Aaron Kreuter



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For Steph

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Arguments for Lawn Chairs



Playgrounds



Plastic

Ninety-eight percent of my laptop
is reindeer bone.

My pens and water bottles
are beaver tooth.

The necklace you're wearing
is sparrow eyes strung along a length of catgut.

The coat hanger on the back
of your bedroom door? Bear clavicle.

The bristles on my toothbrush are
hardened dog eyelashes,

the shower pouf, jellyfish membrane
(the soap, though, is just soap).

Televisions, cooking utensils, milk liners,
pill bottles, car parts, bike handles, telephones,

a zoo of animal anatomy.
Nothing is wasted.

And when we die we are ground up, refined,
recycled into blankets

to keep the living warm.

Continental Drift

Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto

The ROM on a Friday night
is half price, but no one mentioned
that everyone comes in pairs:

the natural history floor is awash
with twenty-something couples holding hands,
peering up at the Brachiosaurus

head, reading about the corkscrew
dwellings of the ancient beaver,
taking cellphone snapshots next to the skeletal sloth.

A bad night to come looking
for companionship;
a bad night to be alone.

I read about Pangea, whole genera
of animals separated by
ten million years of continental drift.

A couple in matching American Apparel
asks me to take their picture and I find myself
screaming about replicas, death, ossification—

I'm grabbed by security, dragged
downstairs past the Egyptian mummies
and their enviably hollowed-out heads

—only later, in the museum's cool-down room,
do I realize that Pangea is not only
the beginning,

but the end, too.

Math Poem

Let soldiers stand for violence.
Let the suburbs stand for childhood.
Let paella stand for love.
Let zero stand for death.

So: the soldiers invaded the suburbs
looking for precious metals, gold like paella.
They found nothing.

Again. The suburban housewife
fed the billeted soldiers black ink paella,
therefore they laughed and came onto her
in their own language, ate until the plates
were empty, their mouths satisfied holes.

Give the variables room to breathe:
by the third day the paella
was up to the rooftops.
The government helicoptered in the navy,
but by then it was too late:
the inhabitants were dead,
as far as the eye (that glass wheel) could see,
an ocean of saffron-infused rice.

Now for the proof.

An Optimist Thinks About Plastic Water Bottles

It can start with a single podium:
instead of the ubiquitous throwaway
bottle, the speaker shows up
with her own one-litre, stainless-steel job
(will you not at least take *one*
bottle up with you, it's complimentary!)
(no, thanks): midway through her talk
she pauses, takes three big swigs, wipes
her mouth with her hand, and,
on some unconscious level, it begins:
this happening to be a room of Fairly Important People
it is only days before one of them
has their own speaking engagement:
they too eschew the proffered bottles
in favour of their own hard containers,
and this is how it will spread,
seminars, conferences, political rallies,
how-tos, concerts, athletic meets,
spilling out into the populace, caught on
some primordial hook of the mind:
soon enough convenience stores
will stop ordering bottled water,
vending machines will rust,
skids of untouched two-fours will grow
skins of dust in abandoned warehouses:
bottling plants will close,
aquifers rejuvenate,

the tap retake its place of glory,
along with the pump, the intake valve,
the marbled filtration hall: nothing's left
from the passed madness but a lone
half-litre rolling around some hatchback trunk,
a twelve-pack catching flakes of sun
in its mudroom languor, a slight unease
whenever the sight of a river
causes us to smile.

Now That the Water Is All But Gone

From a Misheard Line from Metric's
Old World Underground, Where Are You Now?

Now that the water is all but gone
we hang buckets from the tallest trees,
wash our clothes with sandblasters,
drink our distilled urine with pinched noses,
spraypaint our lawns toxic green.

(If you asked me over for dinner I would still come.)

Now that the water is all but gone
we talk about a straw that could reach the moon.

Summer Garbage Strike

Hockey rinks tower into pyramids of waste.
The runoff is great for dogs, pranks,
late night fights, swimming pool nightmares.
Rats breed like cities, eat like stoned teenagers.
The magic of the curb revoked,
sceptics and urbanites ignore wet dreams
where raccoons learn how to horde,
develop hierarchy, enslave the skunks.
Mowers rust. Clover colonizes the lawns.
Birds thud into picture windows.

With the Grain

A perfect bound book, old forest
friendly, my be-all and end-all;
a box made by my carpenter neighbour,
beautiful, organic, dovetailed;
guitars, table tops, reclaimed barnboard,
wood in all its stable glory;
a well-stocked lumber store, pre-ghosts
of forms in a forest of ghosts;
I walk the aisles, palm the mahogany,
hinge between joy and horror;
logging trucks bomb down the highway,
I grow sick, exhausted;
neat squares of clear-cut on the sat map,
I wish oblivion on us all.

Against the Grain

I dream death on us all
for the neat squares of clear-cut,
exhaust poisoning
for the dreamers of logging trucks,
a match and an apology
for the lumberyards,
though spare me my built-in
shelves, my surfaces,
my stringed instruments,
the black cherry paddle
I tooled with my own hands,
 all my coffee-table books
full of photographed forests,
green, inimitable, gone.

Paddling the Nickel Tailings near Sudbury

*After Edward Burtynsky's
Manufactured Landscapes Photographs*

We put in at the edge of the tailings pond,
our canoe loaded with gear and food
to take us on the four-day loop trip,
our nylon tent and stainless steel pots.
The river at first is like any other river
but not, a photo with the colours twisted,
stunning, rich orange fluorescence,
tailing off into the blackened valley bed.
The slurry so thick it takes a dozen strokes
before we learn how to move in it,
but by mid-aft we're paddling well,
elbowing with the river's curves,
the blades of our paddles sizzling
as we dig through the golden slur.
We pass charred river banks,
stunted trees subsumed in industrial after-thought,
the refinery puffing away on the horizon
busy piping out the iron chaff
that ends in the tailings impoundment
we're set on exploring
(*I think: iron, ironic, nickel*).
We enter a delta and pick our way
through; later, on the only portage
of the day—from Wet Tailings Outflow 3
to Wet Tailings Outflow 7—
the ground gives like fresh bread,
endless salt-and-pepper spongy loam.
The canoe on our shoulders
we sink knee-deep in the gummy effluent.
There are no animal tracks, no
beaver dams to break through

*(I think: terrestrial habitat disturbance,
I think: various tailings disposal alternatives
at a conceptual design level,
think: slurry trench cut-off wall).*
We put back in at Stony Waste Basin.
The sun, coalish through the haze,
is lowering. We're an hour or so
from the main tailings pond, can
smell the tangy iron-oxide (*I think: fact, faction,
factor. I think: Factory*).
Stew, my paddling companion, coughs, says:
"I didn't think I'd miss the insects
as much as the potable water,
the blue sky, green." We
haven't used the bathroom
since parking at the quarry.
It's started raining fire, pitch.
Our faces black, our hands glowing.
We need to set up camp.
We need to find someplace
to hang the food barrel.

Golf Course

An emerald city sculpted into hills, well-watered.
The wizard, anyone approaching a perfected swing,
hard work, no doubt, determination and focus, no question.
A firm grip on manicured progress a must. The lakes are
sucked dry, the deer—surviving day to day, hole to hole—
live off the shrubbery scant behind the club house.
Sand traps reside in the spotless creases of landscape.
Don't ask about the forest. Don't think about the land tax.
And don't you dare say 'ecosystem.' Once all the toads
are pushed out onto the road and opened to the sky
our once real gardens will be nothing but playground.

Books

For Julian

The piles grow and condense,
the shelves haphazard and elastic:
we read and read and read and toss

gleefully between outstretched hands,
stand in doorways shouting quotes,
breathe in passages, cause avalanches—

names penned in 1970s ink, two-for-one bins,
one-hundred-percent post-consumer,
we devour them all, worry the page edges,

thumb the noisy smell out of them—
we construct edgy towers on our chests,
build up walls and smash them down with our heads

so the corners take bites of our skin.
Oh the smack of cover on cover, the press
of paragraph and stanza, sentence after sentence:

a topography of weight and exact spacing,
new orogenies constantly replacing the old,
we laugh and roll, luxuriate and cry,

lie spine to spine
till ink and nerve endings align,
and start again.

One-On-One

Childhood nights on the street
playing basketball with Simon,
one-on-one, Jump, one-on-one again.
The energetic ball, the cool air,
our T-shirts damp on the grass
with our wallets and acrylic cups of water.
We'd play to a hundred,
we'd play for hours,
play till we were sweaty and happy
and exhausted, our hands black
with driveway. And the next night
we'd start again, our T-shirts still on,
lights above the garage heating up,
houses spiralling out in boulevards
and cul-de-sacs and dead-ends,
the mosquitoes out for yet another night
in a millennium of nights.

Handwritten Addendum to the Torah Left on the Moon

The Torah on the Moon team is expected to announce details of its plans, including which team will fly them to the moon, in the next few months.

—“Earth’s Backup: Sending Religious Texts to the Moon,”
New Scientist, May 21 2014

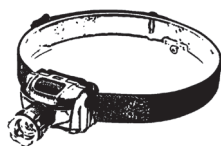
Don’t worry, archaeologists of the future,
alien, gentile, or otherwise:
It’s not as bad as it looks.
The animal sacrifices, the patriarchy,
the genocide at Jericho
are all (mostly) things of the past:
we live in affluent suburbs now,
bore ourselves in front of the television
just like everybody else. And though it’s hard
to get across in these hasty words
what it means to eat a blintz,
live a quota-free life,
have a tense relationship with
the words ‘burnt offering’,
if anything belongs on the moon
with this once-sacred animal-skin scroll,
each of the 304,805 characters
lettered by hand (and where just one mistake
means starting over) it is the knowledge
that throughout our five-thousand year
serialized narrative, nobody,
not once, looked at the blue face
in the night sky and wondered
if any of those craters housed
a Chinese restaurant: somehow,
as you will see once you kiss
the oxygen-deprived parchment,
find your place, clear your throat,

and begin, out of all the rules
and subcontracts and guidelines
contained in these five books,
some biblical-era clerk omitted
the most vital of them all—
that the Earth was all the diaspora
we would ever need.

Everyone

Everyone's writing about Jesus. Not Jesus proper: not curing the blind walking on water preaching on the Mount Jesus, but Jesus resurrected in contemporary society, working a common job, living an everyday life. Jesus the mailman. Jesus the disgruntled bureaucrat. Jesus the guy who drives a 4x4 and picks up downed weather balloons in the Nebraskan backcountry. Jesus whose father is a landlord and all Jesus wants to do is be a clarinetist in a klezmer band like his idol Woody Allen but can't seem to get away from collecting rent and fixing windows and putting mouse poison behind the oven. Jesus father of three who works at an insulation factory placing oversized plastic bags on a metal mouth four times a minute eight hours a day. But why can't Moses don the Starbucks hat and apron and start working the mocha? What about Krishna the piano tuner? Mohammed the dental technician? Apollo the laid-off sessional who drives an all-night bus route in the 'burbs? If more of our prophets and saviours were written into the service industries of our fiction perhaps our world would be a more miraculous place. Better burgers, faster oil changes, more dependable cellphone coverage. Let us pray.

Headlamps



Letter to Irena Sendlerowa

Late November and the sky from Tofino
to Peggy's Cove is wet sagging burlap.
I no longer take strangers' limbs for granted,
am shocked when the girl getting off the bus
has two arms, two hands. Waiting
in line-ups for museums and movies
tiny fossils float on my eyes.

I've never been inside a church
but I cried when I first read your name,
dry silent weeping at the midday foodcourt.

Irena it's too late to send this letter

but yesterday I bought a maroon rolling duffel
from MEC, put in my journals, my guitar,
my wisdom teeth, my mother's violin,
my father's clarinet, and buried all of it in the woods
behind the slowly sinking elementary school.

I had to do something.
I had to lose something.

No, Not the Last

Richler's nephew once asked my mother
to dance, and my father,
nineteen at the time and not yet my father,
wouldn't let him—
picture my father, white undershirt, black afro,
a clarinet jammed in his back jeans pocket—
so they started pushing,
and,
from how it's told now,
would've come to blows
right there at the Hillel House
if my mother's brother—
fresh from a month in an Israeli prison
where he'd lived off canned spaghetti
and whose favourite teenage pastime
was wrecking the family car,
bursting through the door face beaming,
You'll never *guess* who I ran into!—
hadn't intervened, keeping the two
men from each other.
He was a sweet guy,
my mother says, and of course
they knew of his uncle, but hey,
she was in love.
Years later I was born,
my hands already curled into tiny fists,
as if around pens.

After the Shiva

Last night, after the shiva, I found the perfect
ice chunk to kick, one of the best all winter.
Not so soft that it splits in two, then three, then four,
not so hard that it hurts the foot. The right size,

a nice weight, good bounce. We met at the corner
of Einstein and Kildare, outside the house of
fogged mirrors and mourning. Each swipe of my foot

sent it about five meters. I dribbled it through
the grimy Plamondon metro tunnels, held it snug

between my feet on the escalator, at the park

we walked

manmade
grooves
in the
high
snow.

Yehudia Park

A caterpillar wiggles its body in the air,
searching blindly for the next leaf
to pull itself up on.

The stone ruins are not responsible
for the floods, the route closures—
the water is danger. Suck you in.

The green hills pass along, like a series
of kissing mouths, the artillery booms
of the hidden army.

No butterfly sightings.

Monday Evening

The volunteers are stoned and drunk,
the Thai workers are gambling.
Jonathan's studying Arabic
in preparation for his hike across Egypt.
Old man Dave grumbles and farts
as he works late night at the laundry.
The students at the Institute
prepare for a peace rally.
Trucks rumble by on the highway,
the mountains to the east
great slabs of halva
scraped by a giant tooth,
the mountains to the west
heaps of partially melted chocolate.
Forty kilometres south is Eilat,
the Southern Florida town
airlifted to the tip of the Red Sea.
I sit in the library reading
Ferlinghetti and the early kibbutz
ideologues. The cats
behind the kitchen torture baby mice,
Schindler's List plays on TV
with French dubbing and Hebrew subtitles.
Somewhere there's a game of Risk,
somewhere there's talk of politics,
somewhere a girl in a flower print dress
rolls rocks down a mountainside.

Tiberias

Lacking religion we subsist on instant soup
and pastries while the city is closed in observance.
Saturday we walk to the gravel-strewn beach,
sit on a bench on the boardwalk waiting for dusk,
watch the Orthodox standing at water's edge
discussing the compactness of human history.
The lake is a pitted crater full of water,
the river is a seam running through the world.
The falafel stands and jewellery boutiques
are deserted, buses don't run till dark;
last night the hostel owner sat in his easy chair
eating chicken and wine and cigarettes,
laughing cruelly as we huddled in our room,
our headlamps on.

Mountains

Driving fast in a cab towards midnight Tsfat,
the ribbed mountains more present than the ribbon of road;

high on hash and porches in the slanting Nelson night,
whispering below sound and yet entirely heard:

how psychic presences fill an apartment,
how everything shrinks and blooms in the range of death,

how huge and disturbing
my lust for you after only a few quiet sentences—

sitting around a hissing campfire in a deep bowl of peaks,
afloat on the road's whoosh, the river's tumbling gurgle.

Plums

If you don't like being wet
you're not ready for plums.

Cold and delicious,
especially after an all-night session of Scrabble.

Science dictates the pit is poisonous,
but plum-lovers never cared
much for progress.

Mushrooms

An acquired taste:
earth flesh, mind bulbs,
portabello, crimini.

They bloom where two things meet,
at the pressure point,
the squishy membrane.

Honey, Wood Ear,
Matsutake. Velvet Foot,
Comb Tooth, Chanterelle.
Fawn, Hedgehog,
Truffle.

The death cap.

Once you learn how to look
you'll see them everywhere:
the south hillside of a clear-cut,
repurposed aquariums,
lightless shacks adjacent
forgotten hotels—
cradled in blue Styrofoam,
sizzling in buttered pans,
turning the fact of bread
into the truth of decay.

The shape of a cloud.
The wet crease of a book.

Bindings

The entirety of the university library's
David Donnell holdings are piled beside me,
four books of poetry, all small press,
all now cased in monotone hardcover.

I wonder about the unseen room
somewhere in the library's architecture
where technicians roll off spines
and equip texts with these nondescript,

sterile shells: I flip between the dual covers,
think of fruit baskets wrapped in newspaper,
sidewalks that pass nighttime museums,
stare at the art on the once-outside cover—

a mouth-shaped canoe on a page of blue,
a lone figure paddling under the title.
Please, may I try your guitar,
I can keep time, and my hands are clean.

The Shape of Night from the Small of the Morning

His leg hair thinned and went grey
on Mount Baldy. In a past life
he would memorize street signs
to further anchor his immortality,
would trade pieces of poetry
for summer fruit on the thriving
Rue Ste. Catherine sidewalks,
turn to the guitar when it seemed
the best chance of survival.
But on Mount Baldy his leg hair
thinned and his back bent.

A song from a dream:
Give up the robes
Give up the robes and the cold
And come down.

Tired of living with the silence
just past the thatched door
he built himself a band to push
it back, left religion and philosophy
on the mountain.

He is now a voice, enunciating,
pleading, ready.

(Give up the robes
Give up the robes and the cold)

Leonard, I do not think you will
find anything waiting for you.

Geography

High School I

We knew the city like nobody else:
cement parking wells, ladders to rooftops,
garages, parks parks parks, ravines
that zebraed the city like sunken aquifers,
the secret lights of kitchens and bedrooms,
the basement doors we violated
looking for a chair, a table,
fuel for a bonfire by a river buried in trees,
the smooth walls of office buildings.

Richie tagging his initials on a
cube van outside Spadina subway station—
Run! so we ran, our cans of paint
cold and cocked in our hands
as we spread out through backyards,
crashing through plastic lawn furniture
until, exhausted, we wandered
slowly through the Annex
to preplanned meeting spots.

Max, a backpack of beer,
jogging through the tunnel
under the Bloor Viaduct,
on his way from somewhere to somewhere else,
TTC security fanned out behind him,
the Don Valley below
a rush of river and headlights,
the tree tops dark clouds
underfoot.

An Afternoon in the Car, Taking Pictures

High School II

The underpass at Yonge and the 401: RD
An irregular splatter of mailboxes in the suburbs: RD
The backs of buses, with marker: RD
A bathroom stall in Sneaky D's: RD
A bathroom stall in the Royal York: RD
Various vantages along the Gardiner: RD
Garage drywall, practice: RD
A tall fence, stumbled upon one late night,
backpacks clanging with colours and liquors,
an hour spent spraying and laughing
in the pre-dawn before moving on,
finding other surfaces, never found again: RD

RD

RD

Tracks

High School III

That time we went tagging
with our bikes in the snow,
our faces wet, our hands cold,
stained black and blue
as we nozzled the neighbourhood,
pedalled the newly carpeted streets.
And later, Jenny's doorbell ringing
and the Greek man screaming
graffiti on his effin' parking barrier—
he'd followed the bike tracks
through the fresh snow,
our freewheeling double line of carnage
crisscrossing Bathurst,
gliding up to the donut shop on Eglinton.
Now here he was,
face red from the walk,
breathing alcoholic fire breath—
fuck, what a night, the evidence
plain on our sleeved hands
we lied through our teeth
at his sad eyes, his hating mouth,
the three of us walking
backwards towards the crime.

The next day
the snow was gone.

Richie

High School IV

Legs apart,
knees bent, hand
on the can,

frozen in the moment
before he left his mark
on the mailbox.

The funeral a month
into grade twelve,
we stand, children,

his face pudgy with
death, the city's sandblasters
already on their way.

The End of That Story

High School V

Max in the subway tunnels,
jogging through the viaduct,
how we can never agree:
Did he make it out unscathed,
tell us about it (embellishing
no doubt) as we lightened
the contents of his backpack
in some hilly east-end park?
Or did TTC security catch up to him
after he tripped on a rail,
fell, shattered beer soaking
his back: surrounded,
did he catch one of their eyes
as, hanging above the city,
they raised their batons
and showed him one more secret ...

Winter Cottage

For IL

With the shovel borrowed
from the neighbour's porch
carve a path to the buried pit
and dig through three feet
of snow, then mulch,
till the dark ashes become visible,
frozen remnants of past fires.
Now arrange the wood,
strike the match: at first it's moist,
hard to light, small, embers refusing,
but with time the centre gains heat,
grows into a dome of warmth
at the edge of the iced lake,
the disassembled dock,
the cold lifeless horizon.
Take a plastic lawn chair,
and, like some tearful madman,
never far from silence,
begin fanning the flames,
the orange-yellow reflection
on the smooth white snow
giving the flickering impression
that the very floor of the world
is ablaze.

Mouths



Slaughter

**We may not use *Moby Dick* to learn how to hunt whales,
but we get something out of it even so.**

—Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*

The dead whale is chained
fast to the side of the boat,
the fruit of a day's pursuit
over the white-capped history of the sea.
It isn't long before the sharks
hone in on our trophy,
rip and tear its rubbery skin
with greedy little mouths,
hundreds of them surfacing
from the maw of the indifferent ocean.
The thrill of the chase still leviathan
in our veins, we grab our spears
and lower into the roaring water:
we attack without design,
kill randomly, fast and hard
through the slippery brains,
blood and stomachs bubbling around us,
yet the clever sharks rise up
like Hydra's vicious heads—
there's no use but we'll continue to skewer them
on our steel arguments,
each gory death our small claim
to the monster's flesh, the spiced oil
holding her once precious mind
like a warm thick womb.
"The ship is our rock,
the sperm bucket our sling!"
we yell through the spray
as sharpness pierces eyes
and bodies thrash blind through the frenzy.
The sharks still with sight

rage harder, a driving
fire under their endless teeth.
The battle will burn well beyond daybreak.
Solid land is a philosophy
and the only books we read
are sewn of bone.

Operation Sea Lion

San Francisco Museum of Modern Art

Three warships sinking
in a tub
afloat a roiled ocean.

In a tilled wheat field
a coffin,
three cruise ships rising.

Child Nightmares

Children with knives
Children with handguns
Children with fists

Children with stinkbomb grenades
Children with knowledge of your failures
With teeth

Children with cauldrons of hot wax
Children with fat bags of tacks
Children with soft angry heads

With ideas
With rolling pins
With mouths

Beowulf 2.0

Part One, in Which Beowulf Makes Some New Friends

I used to know some pretty great men,
they'd drink beer out of mayonnaise jars,
beat people up they'd meet in the street.
This one guy, Beowulf, had an ass
like a cement truck. I once saw him eat
thirty Big Macs. He and his buddy
Breca used to go snorkelling with automatic
rifles, take down anything that moved.
Anyways, one day some mutant, some monster,
some *other*, got in the habit
of eating musicians from a local jazz fusion
collective. The musicians lived in a condemned
warehouse called Heartattack.
This went on for twelve days, till Beowulf
showed up with his entire kindergarten
class in tow. (Even great men need to
make a living.) There were introductions,
downing of g and ts, some general boasting.
Hrothgar, their leader, had a tat of a saxophone
on his right cheek. They all smoked a joint and fell asleep,
the wind crooning through broken windows.
That's when Grendel struck. (Wait,
did I mention I'm a Darwinist?
I am. We all evolved from tiny, simple
life forms, even our hero, even Grendel,
even politicians.) Grendel slunk in,
slurped up the brains of the trumpeter
(he hadn't paid his dues for a while anyways),
but when he gave a little nibble on our man
B's pinky, the hero lurched into action,
ripping the daemon's arm off and riding it
like a cowboy. "I'm telling my mother!"
G said in French, jumping on his Vespa.

“Well, that’s that,” said B. Everyone cheered,
Hrothgar broke out the Tanqueray, a few guys
started up a jam, everything was groovy.

Fan Fiction

i.

Why didn't Dumbledore do more
as the trains glided into Auschwitz?

Was he honestly too busy in his own affairs
to redirect the train tracks, turn
the showers into the safe rooms of a forest,
the chimneys into towering oak?

ii.

A Tense Press Conference

What's the Ministry of Magic's
position on nuclear proliferation,
on off-shore drilling, on deforestation?

Does the Minister intend to keep
their commitments agreed to
in the Kyoto protocol?

Does the Wizengamut acknowledge
the existential threat of shale gas
fracking?

iii.

Hopefully it's only a matter of time
before Hermione gives some serious thought
to where the food on her plate comes from.

iv.

Even Voldemort, safe in the knowledge
of his horcruxes, anchors
on his life's tenuous web, even he

should give heed to the few remaining
untouched places on the earth,
those hedges against our ignorance,
horcruxes of a very different breed,

that, once gone, no amount of will
could magic back to save us.

Escapology

To escape teleology,
sing “Alice’s Restaurant” backwards.

To escape Little Brooklyn,
take the Queen streetcar in any direction.

To escape from an A Major 7 chord,
play an F# Minor, then a D Major 7, then an E7.

To escape a pressing need to escape
press the ESC key ... *now!*

To escape disenfranchisement
open an Arby’s.

To escape the blues
go green, baby.

To escape credibility
forgo critical theory.

To escape brainfreeze
type, dammit.

To YouTube Double Rainbow Guy

My housemates think you must be on drugs—
mushrooms, LSD, a heady morning
of sweet-grass and marijuana. I, for one,
am less sure, want badly to believe
that such pure joy can still be attained
from nothing but standing on a porch
watching nature do its thing.

What you embody,
YouTube double rainbow guy,
is the full-on immersion in Life
at the disadvantage of the Archive—
what else to explain
your exaltation,
your shaky camerawork,
the thirty million views?

Thanks to you, I see it everywhere now:
in a pod of orca whales
off the coast of Vancouver Island,
in the heart-shaped cavern
carved out by a roaring waterfall,
even in NASA's online database
of pink-and-white astral phenomena.

If nothing else,
double rainbow guy,
consider this my statement of solidarity.
Consider this my call-to-arms.

Say hello to the nascent regurgitation
of our wonder-lack.

Say hello to my mandala colouring book.

The Writerly Life

The novelists were first to go.
With their slow thought and book-long seclusion
it was easy to make them disappear.

Next were the short story writers.
In the journals and bars one moment,
gone the next.

The poets—those who didn't start writing
songs praising the murderers—vanished
not with a bang, not with a whimper. More of a *phht*.

When they came for me
I threw my hands in the air—
“I'm illiterate! I'm illiterate!”

It was as easy as that.
I was given a cushy job,
plenty to consume,

and, in about the time
it would take to write a novel,
I forgot about all that other stuff.

Orpheus and Eurydice

Orpheus, no longer a poet and musician,
has a popular twitter feed
where he quotes Kurt Vonnegut and
David Suzuki and tweets “I feel just like
Nick Cage’s hair in *Raising Arizona*,”

Hades no longer rules the underworld,
but owns a high-tech start-up called Underworld,
recently valued at over a hundred billion;

Eurydice is no longer Orpheus’ lover and muse,
no longer Hades’ coveted, but the mistress
of a much-linked-to blog
all about yoga, food, and fun!

The drama is taken from the cold banks
of the river Styx and resituated
in the former orange groves of Silicon Valley.

It’s not about love, but bandwidth,
not braving the unknown
but unique monthly visitors.

Of course, Orpheus still fails, still
dies alone, but, the stakes
so lowered, no one really seems to care.

Love Poem

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun.

—William Shakespeare, *Sonnet 130*

I saw you on the bus the other day,
your lungs took the air right out of me.

A few nights later I dreamt of you,
your large and small intestines,
the curve of your kidney,
the svelteness of your brainstem,
your appendix useless and glowing.

Now every bowel I see
reminds me of you.

Did you know that if any
of the half dozen bacteria
that digest your food
escaped your stomach
you'd face certain death?

Did you know that some rich asshole
owns Einstein's eyeballs, keeps
them locked in a New York City bank,
connective tissue and all?

Well, here it is, plain as digestion:
I'd give anything to breathe in
your dead cells, draw charcoal sketches
of your bone structure, watch you eat—
perhaps one day we'll sit together as our livers fail,
our muscles slide, our brains misfire,
our openings crust and ooze,
our furious hearts slow,

but for now, I want nothing more
than to plug into your complex nervous system
and never stop tingling.

Posterity

Kerouac Exhibit, New York Public Library

What can it be but a parched scroll
unravelling down the famous library's artery,

readers of the writer, admirers of the movement,
mountain-climbers with theory degrees
circling its sixty foot length like clots in a stream,

peering into notebooks propped open, raw, ripe;
or, maybe, the finished books themselves,

plotted with their critics on one, two shelves,
a broken-toothed smile, a dusty last laugh;
perhaps journals put bleary-eyed through the shredder,

or a friend's broken death wish cementing a name;
how about destroyed in fire, but saved from

backroom collections bought at auction, boxes
stacked like mausoleum coffins, like eyeballs locked
in a safety deposit box: all just scratches

found on a scrolled parchment, a taped-together ream,
unravelling down a library's thickening hall.

Building a House

The floorboards are made of matchheads,
the insulation sugary-pink cotton candy,
the nails melted and wonky.

The foundation is nothing
but a hole in the ground.

Yet the site mills with workers,
hammers in hand,
tool belts laden with planing saws,
rubber cement, and water pistols.

We're still on contract.

I pick up a stack of slimy two-by-fours,
a handful of wormy nails,
find a quiet spot and get to work.

That's when I notice the stilts
leaning against the taupe porta-potty
next to the slowly gestating cement mixer.

Date Bed's Visions Continue

Her fabulous hallucinations, she welcomes them.
The wonders she has seen!

—Barbara Gowdy, *The White Bone*

She sees humans in orange skin,
mechanical animals with strange trunks,
stiff, angled, with scoops for snouts:
they are making a dark smooth river.
She sees a cold cavern, wet, massive,
sunlight captured in glass flowers,
echoes of sharp tusks.
She sees a rock with ears
flying around a green and blue ball.
A mountain with human faces.
A dust storm blooming
in the shape of an acacia tree.
She sees two girls at an open mouth
of white and black teeth. They
press the teeth and make sound,
the white of the teeth familiar, frightening.
She sees grand libraries.
She sees factory farms.
She sees train tracks.

B.C. Orchard

Leading us off the road Thomas tells us
the orchard was a gift to the islanders.

We fan out, walk the small clearing,
inhale the apple and pear trees

as we swish through the island of grass
afloat on an island of pine and ridge.

We stoop, collect felled apples as ammo,
aim, pull back, and toss them soaring

into the trees, listen for the crisp sound
of the pulling fruit cracked loose,

the branch-jarring tumble, the plop
into soft grass. We move through the orchard,

swinging our arms, missing, scooping,
laughing, filling the baskets of our shirts.

The sun knocks the day clean
into the strait and we return to the cabin,

line our bounty on the table,
wonder how many more afternoons

like these, apple trees
producing their automatic apples

till the seasons fall into silence
and the island sinks beneath the waterline.

Song of the Condom Thrower

You will know me by what I leave behind.
The small post-coital moment, the toss off,
each and every experience of body and eyes
poured into an individually wrapped poem—
how cruel those blasphemers of the toilet,
the garbage can, the putrid eternity of the landfill.
I choose the open window,
the full stop of a midtown traffic light.
I mark the city with our love,
plant our history in the folds of the street.
Together let's learn what outlasts what—
the seed, that cloudy body-wash of life,
or its adopted cherry-flavoured plastic skin,
lying shrivelled on the curb,
the basketball court, all the bathroom stall
floors of our passionate journey.

Leaving Academia

Found on the Desk of Dr. Leora Gold

I love it here;
I hate it here.

Well, no, of course it's not as simple
as that.

Let me attempt another way:

Why turn mountains into apartment buildings,
night skies into flawed ceilings?
I'm tired of all the cold steel,
the contempt for well-wrought castles
when the contempt itself is built
of the same brick, knowledge of corners.

What can I say?
I want back in the mystery.

So go ahead:

Problematize me.
Don't problematize me.

Spring in Toronto

Everybody was wearing buttons announcing their politics on their lapels, their backpacks, the spokes of their bicycles. Everybody was posting pictures of the conferences they were attending, the terrific luminaries of their field, Styrofoam cups of thin coffee at early morning booths, the mid-afternoon networking bonanzas. Everybody spoke of the winter as if it was the first one, of spring as if it was not quite living up to expectations. Some of us did spring maintenance on our bikes prematurely, watched as the new chain rusted in the cold. Some of us joined protests for this or that, or at least seriously considered putting on our coats and biking over. No one mentioned that the summer meant war, though some of us thought it. No one woke up in the middle of the night, wondering how many seasons we have left—let's do something about it now instead of continuously putting it off. The ice on the lake couldn't make up its mind. The buried rivers continued humming the oldest songs to themselves. Lawn chairs emerged from indifferent snow. Buildings started their slow, inexorable rise out of the ground.

Notes

“Golf Course”: The poem’s last lines react to images in Marianne Moore’s “Poetry.”

“Paddling the Nickel Tailings Near Sudbury”: The phrases “terrestrial habitat disturbance,” “various tailings disposal alternatives at a conceptual design level,” and “slurry trench cut-off wall” are taken from the January 2007 “Bucko Lake Nickel Project Tailings Disposal Alternatives” report made for Crowflight Minerals Inc.

“Letter to Irena Sendlerowa”: Irena Sendlerowa was a Polish Catholic nurse and social worker who saved thousands of Jewish babies and children during the Second World War. She died in 2008, at the age of 98.

“No, Not the Last”: This poem is written in response to a documentary on Mordecai Richler called *The Last of the Wild Jews*.

“Winter Cottage”: “like some tearful madman, / never far from silence” alludes to lines from Irving Layton’s “The Birth of Tragedy.”

“Operation Sea Lion”: After a painting by Anselm Kiefer.

“Fan Fiction”: The phrase and idea of “hedges against our ignorance” is from the work of David Suzuki.

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About the Author

Aaron Kreuter resides in Toronto. His poems have appeared in *Best Canadian Poetry 2014*, *subTerrain*, *carte blanche*, *Poetry is Dead*, and *Vallum*, among other places. *Arguments for Lawn Chairs* is his first collection of poems.

