

OF CLIMATES & CONTINENTS

POEMS CRAFTED FROM

The Climates of the Continents by W. G. Kendrew (1922)

CONTRIBUTORS

Elizabeth (Betsy) Aoki

Melissa Frederick

Karen L. George

Deborah Purdy

EDITED BY

Chris Campolo

Rebecca Resinski

Summer Isotherms

Let us travel with the pure air
to where the orange
and the lemon tree grow,

where we can map our movements
by silver crests and fine red dust
and the shimmer of stars on fire.

The wind-divide will direct us,
a sharp curve in its backbone
covering us with calm currents

against downpours and cyclones,
fierce continental regimes
that advance with mad bursts

and curse their lack of reach.
The sea lying languid
will be our mirror

and we will float
high above the surface
till we lose the mark of violence

and all life will look at us
and say, that is rare,
that is resistance.

ELIZABETH (BETSY) AOKI

West of where the natives say is conversation

The natives say the frequency of fog is
moist, often
quite saturated, and there is much cloud.

The smoke from the enormous fires started
by the natives is burning:

wood splits, and a man suffers great discomfort
from the dry dusty air. Even this,
the air, is myth:

a wind has acquired the name of “the doctor”
due to evaporation from the observer’s skin.

Thick fogs are frequent in the mind.
The natives, enervated by the interviewers’
hot-house atmosphere, are very sensitive

and light great fires to keep themselves warm at night.
Here the most violent storms

are thunder squalls which often start
very suddenly,
last but a short time,

sometimes only
a quarter of your life.

Interviewers almost always travels from east to west,
and are specially frequent
at the beginning and end of the rains.

blinding lightning misses the point

Natives of these storms ride less rain, but steer
far more violent winds revolving
rapidly with a short radius.

(Interviewers, note: these natives are not like our natives.
These winds are not made of the same air.)
This air is often thick with smoke from the numerous grass fires,
started by natives in the savannas
to clear the ground of dead words.

In the height of the famine there were for weeks
together more than 6,000,000 persons in receipt of relief.

there is no relief from the questions, say the natives

During the heat of the day the natives
retire to underground chambers. They leave
the interviewers to surface chatter among themselves.

*'I used to hold up my hand to protect my face from it in the same way
as one would in front of a fire.'*

Others speak of the sand being hot enough to burn the feet
even through thin shoes. The natives slip on their own secret shoes.
But they warn: there is no relief.

In the morning and late in the evening, when the sun
is below the horizon one suffers from almost frozen feet

everything in view seems
to vanish in brightness and the eye, unprotected by dark glass,
cannot gaze steadily in any direction,

and the natives shiver with the
unusual cold.

These interviewers are always asking at the wrong temperatures to understand.

The sand was so hot that matches burst into flame when dropped into
a small bottle blackened on the outside, shielded from the
air by inserting it in a larger vessel of transparent glass.

The language has been made
to boil by simply exposing it to the sun.

DEBORAH PURDY

For the Same Reason

The whole world
Remains much the same—

The unwary
Beyond the reach of

The ordinary word
Said at the beginning,

The other point of view
A thousand miles distant,

Every line in the landscape
A single day—

A fine dust
On the same map.

KAREN L. GEORGE

Eve Takes to the Air

The wind descends, pronounces her name
says, *Come nearer*, presses his open mouth on hers

fills her with the idea they trade places for a day
he in the lowlands, she high in the sky

She receives him, dissolves
into heat, becomes clear

Comprised of charged pressure
she streams over mountain, desert

develops ways to go lower, higher
more and less intense, how to diminish

still above sea to observe fish
storm through miles of corn

No boundaries, she can range everywhere
reach all latitudes, blow away fog, cloud, rain, heat

Can cause ocean currents
break things apart

By night, a dense heaviness
being open too wide, raw

incapable of distinguishing
herself from air

She projects, radiates
reaches for land

filling with life
falling

PROCESS STATEMENTS

ELIZABETH (BETSY) AOKI on “West of where the natives say is conversation”:

This poem, based on *The Climates of the Continents* by W. G. Kendrew, emerged when I realized I was much more fascinated with the way “the natives” were coping with the weather and all its excesses and violence than the actual weather patterns themselves. Because so often indigenous people never get to speak in older Western historical treatises, my project was to have them speak using fragments I found, as well as language divined from the text itself. I also fancifully supposed there might be nosy and possibly ham-handed interviewers, trying with Mr. Kendrew to talk with the natives about the weather.

MELISSA FREDERICK on “Summer Isotherms”:

I was surprised at the richness and scope of the language in Kendrew’s *Climates of the Continents*. In the text, Kendrew doesn’t just describe temperature variations and weather events. He builds sweeping metaphors of controlling regimes, cursed landscapes, monstrous storms, and the people who have to live in, under, and around them. The language drew me in, especially the section on the Mediterranean, an area I visited twenty years ago and have never forgotten. The image Kendrew constructed from his own knowledge and quotations from other observers exactly matched my memory: a color-saturated space of tranquility and light. As I started putting together “Summer Isotherms” from the word bank I chose for myself (the section on Europe, pages 197-261), I found I was writing a story about both loving a little piece of the world and escaping oppression.

KAREN L. GEORGE on “Eve Takes to the Air”:

I browse the source documents and select words I enjoy the sounds of, or those that suggest intriguing ideas and/or images, writing those words on a lined 8 x 10 tablet in columns according to parts of speech. I then pair a word in one column with a word in another column, for example, a noun with a verb, until images surface and begin to connect to other images, until a narrative forms. It’s an intriguing, magical process for me.

DEBORAH PURDY on “For the Same Reason”:

For “For the Same Reason” I started by compiling a selection of words and phrases from W. G. Kendrew’s *The Climates of the Continents*. From this list I selected a few phrases as candidates for potential titles. Working with one potential title at a time I then began pairing and combining phrases to create meaningful context. The process included multiple revisions and often resulted in the final selection of a title that differed from the original used as a starting point.

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

ELIZABETH (BETSY) AOKI is the author of *Every Vanish Leaves Its Trace* (Finishing Line Press 2009). Her poems have appeared in *Nimrod International Journal*, *Hunger Mountain*, and *The Nassau Review*, as well as in the anthologies *Yellow as Turmeric*, *Fragrant as Cloves: A Contemporary Anthology of Asian American Women's Poetry* and *Fire On Her Tongue: An Anthology of Contemporary Women's Poetry*. She lives in Seattle, Washington, and works as a technical program manager. She also volunteers for Hedgebrook, a non-profit organization that offers writing residencies on Whidbey Island. Online at www.betsyaoki.com.

MELISSA FREDERICK is the author of *She* (Finishing Line Press 2008), and her work has also appeared in *Oxford Poetry*, *Mid-American Review*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *Moon City Review*, and *District Lit*. A freelance medical editor, she lives in suburban Philadelphia and can be found online at *Miss Fickle Reader's Backwater Domain* (missficklereader.wordpress.com).

KAREN L. GEORGE is the author of *Swim Your Way Back* (Dos Madres Press 2014) and *The Fire Circle* (Blue Lyra Press 2016); she is also one of the co-authors (with Donelle Dreese, Nancy Jentsch, and Taunja Thomson) of *Frame and Mount the Sky* (Finishing Line Press 2017). Her work has appeared in *The Adirondack Review*, *Naugatuck River Review*, *The Louisville Review*, and *3Elements Review*. A retired computer programmer, she is the fiction editor for *Waypoints*, and she reviews poetry and interviews poets at *Poetry Matters*. She lives in Florence, Kentucky. Online at karenlgeorge.snack.ws.

DEBORAH PURDY is a retired librarian, and her work has appeared in *Gravel*, *Apeiron Review*, *Found Poetry Review*, *Cleaver Magazine*, and *The American Poetry Journal*. She lives outside Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.