



9-1-2020

Select Poems

Fred Kirchner

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.butler.edu/thenorthmeridianreview>

Recommended Citation

Kirchner, Fred (2020) "Select Poems," *The North Meridian Review*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 1 , Article 9.

DOI: 10.7825/2769-5115.1008

Retrieved from: <https://digitalcommons.butler.edu/thenorthmeridianreview/vol1/iss1/9>

This Prose is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ Butler University. It has been accepted for inclusion in The North Meridian Review by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ Butler University. For more information, please contact digitalscholarship@butler.edu.

Fred Kirchner's chapbook, *Platform of an Unacknowledged World Legislator* (Main Street Rag Publishing), won a national literary prize, and his poetry has also appeared in several anthologies—most notably, *The Art of Bicycling: A Treasury of Poems*. He's curated poetry reading series in Columbus and Dayton and led performance poetry workshops for teens in Clark County at the Springfield Art Museum and the Juvenile Detention Center. He works as a Teen Librarian for the Dayton Metro Library, where he offers programs ranging from chess to banned books, to Lego robotics, creative writing, gaga ball, and bizarre cooking demos (like the program called 'Will it Waffle?'). He maintains a stable of 8 bicycles in the garage adjoining a little Hobbit house he shares with his wife. On pretty much any decent Sunday, he'd ride to Richmond, IN and back for good tacos.

Gravel Road Downhill Nerves

After traversing the haunted rail tunnel, following
the switchbacks up the ridge, and then
ascending to Hanging Rock, I managed
to climb to the top of Hope-Moonville Rd.

Light rain kept me cool, and I figured
there was a sweet view off the knife-edge ridge.
But slick mud kept my eyes on the road,
weaving around dips and potholes.

Gradient changes and jutting granite chunks
slowed me even more. Didn't have any lower
gears left. Just me in my granny, grinding wide

knobbies round in circles up the state forest road.

Was kinda jittery, being out alone this way
for the first time. But oddly, two dudes in camo
had put me at ease. Smoking cigars back
on the bridge next to their truck, they both smiled

and one said *go get 'em buddy*. Part of me
wanted to have a smoke with those fellows and
spit into Raccoon Creek. Maybe throw some rocks.
But I had paid good money in Nelsonville for that
map saying turn right on Llewelyn.

Came upon a dirt crossroad-T. *Llewelyn's* lettered—
woodburner and yellow paint—down a wooden
post hidden in a pine grove. Post about
the size of something Buford Pusser would
use to corral the State Line Mob.

Llewelyn follows the ridge for a bit. Lonely yards
full of grown-over vehicles. Some without hoods.
Quiet though. Was reminded of riding Cherohala
Skyway. Where, after 30 miles uphill, two lean hunting
dogs slunk out of the Smokies sportin' radio collars.

Moments you feel over your head. Just then, found
the downhill on Llewelyn. Chunky gravel spread
down a steep, twisty, one-lane ramp. Even wide knobbies
would chatter over those rocks. Started out squeezing

the brakes, listened for cars, got my nerve up, and

let the bike rumble. That spot of risk between
letting go and squeezing too hard. Couldn't look
at the woods, watching for potholes to bunnyhop
or swerve around. Left bend at the bottom.

Made it down. Maybe even whooped.

Found myself coasting the flat next to moorish wetlands.
Black dark trees. Wildflower color traced strong
creeks cutting oxbows through the fields. There's a graveyard
where Llewelyn meets 356. Sign says *Bethel* Cemetery—
Hebrew for *House of God*. I rolled the bike off the road

and found the grave of the area's first settler, fella
somehow getting out this way in the late 1700s.
Couple headstones over, someone positioned a CD,
Chicago's Greatest Hits, on top a nearby fence post.
Was lost for a bit, after that, then rolled into Zaleski.

A dog there ignored me, licking himself in road shade
next to a stop sign. Took 278 north out of town
next to a Vinton County swamp. Passed Hope Furnace
where enough men smelted iron ore 154 years ago
to support a forest town with 15 saloons and 5 churches.

Edible Bicycle Sunset

—*seen from road bike, Madison County, Ohio*

Wind pulls clouds like taffy.
Flavors change from lemon
through the tangerines to orange.

Orange darkens to strawberry, raspberry,
boysenberry. The berries become cherry.
Cherry ripens to grape; finally, everything's licorice.

Even the road, paved Necco wafer
dusted with powdered sugar and gravel.
You look east, away from the candy shop

above you and discover a hazy moon setting,
silver lozenge melting down roughened throat,
soothing what hurts inside. You're so full of the sky now

it beams from your eyes, shining like hazel dwarf stars.
You want to lick everything. Instead, you yell.
Wonder when you swallowed that big farm cat

mewling from your gut. You will pass a graveyard soon.
There is always a graveyard, always an infant son,
buried long ago without a name.

You imagine the sweetness of innocent death,

headstones breaking off in your mouth
like hard wintergreen candy, sparking

against your white teeth in the rural dark.

It's all about sound and taste out here. Dry corn rustles.

You inhale the wind's saffron dust.

The darker the sky turns, the faster you go.

The moon, sky's healing pill,

spreads its medicine on empty fields.

Kansas

Fields of dead sunflowers droop
like shamed choirs. No exit dirt roads
pass under the interstate
and stretch toward empty horizons.

Before it warmed to 34 degrees
the passing lane was thick with slush.
Semis barreled past, each spewing
shrouds of dirty slush on the cold glass

through which we view the road.
Memory, faith, and tight bunghole fear
kept us from steering into the ditch.
We're on vacation.

A tattered plastic bag, trapped
on barbed wire, ripples in the wind
like a screaming mouth with its tongue
cut out, muted by the gale. Somehow we missed
the wind farm we passed driving out:

hundreds of solitary props,
each facing its own direction,
turning at different speeds. We've been looking
for a post office since we left Denver
to finish the travel bingo game.

Just one more pink window to slide shut.

Just another road sign to read to you:

See the Fick Museum—home of the World's
Largest Prairie Dog and a living 5-legged cow!

Just drive a few more hours until
that Topeka hotel bed.