



KYLA HOUBOLT

Q: How is your chapbook coming on? What can readers look forward to?

A: As you know, Matt, I now have two chapbook manuscripts out in the world being considered by two different presses. The first, longer one, I sent in to a contest because I was given a small gift of money and that seemed the best thing to do with it -- spend it on the reading fee at a press I would adore to be published by! The second, shorter one, I put together because, again, I really like the press I prepared it for, but my first chap did not meet their guidelines as it is too long and not closely enough aligned with their chosen theme for this submission period.

As to what readers can look forward to, I hope anyone who reads my work is entertained, deepened maybe, uplifted maybe, but at least comes away with a sense of pleasure in the words read and enjoyment of the exchange of energy. For me each poem is as a speaking of what I term 'the poetry voice' which wants only to be received by another -- heard and understood. I hope what I convey is worthwhile.

I will know the decisions of both presses by the end of September and that will tell me what the next steps are.

Kyla Houbolt is a widely-published, American poet. In an exclusive and revealing interview, Kyla describes the impulses behind her poetry and her background.

Q: How long have you been writing and what inspired you to become a serious writer?

A: Oh dear. Well, I have been writing since I could write -- since I could form words, I have always played with them and tried to use them creatively in one way or another. As for being a serious writer, well, at this stage I am as serious about it as I get about anything, but I have been surprised at how deeply I have gone into it. For most of my life I have dipped in and out of writing, the 'dipping out' at times when other enthusiasms would take center stage. But writing and especially poetry always has arisen again after those dormancies.

“These days, it is as though most of what I might do or have done has just fallen away, like old leaves perhaps... and poetry is what's left”

Q: How would you describe your poetry? Do you draw on influences in a very direct way or do you prefer to write at a distance from your favorite writing?

A: At this stage, it is the 'poetry voice' doing what it will. Sometimes I have described myself as a working class poet because I have been a manual worker most of my life and have never taken any higher education degrees. I have always cared very much about the intersection between poetry and the larger culture; worried over what seemed to be poetry's lack of roots in the popular mind and

imagination (in contrast to other nations, for example Russia, South and Central American nations, Japan, etc.) When Rap first happened I crowded with delight because it meant verse was surging forth among people again. I have not really participated in the Slam movement aside from a single experience, immediately following which I poured myself into trying to save a river instead of going on to the next Slam competition to which I was invited...

I guess I am blending in to your next question so I will tighten up here a little and say, my influences are wide and deep. I grew up in a household of music and poetry; our mother read poems to us quite often and there were classics on the shelves. I took this very much for granted! Later on in high school I read quite a lot of canon poets as well as some of the Beats. I absorbed a lot. I would have no idea how to try to write in the style of another poet; I think it would go badly.

“Poetry always surged through the cracks of this life as I went along.”

Q: Tell us about your background.

As mentioned, I grew up with poetry, the sounds of it, and with an ingrained and trained ear and appreciation for rhythm and music. I dropped out of college after being convinced I needed to help organize the working class in Baltimore with a group of folks, worked in a factory for a while, sued them for sex discrimination later on of course, this lasted only a couple of years.

Most of my adult life I have struggled with feeling unrooted in any kind of career direction because everything always felt limited and like it was cutting me off from my path and myself. This may sound kind of arrogant and possibly is arrogant, but it was a genuine and painful struggle. Should I dance? Be a musician? What kind? Visual artist? (I did support myself as a graphic artist for a few years) Most of this most often required resources

and finances I never had access to. Then, awakening to the plight of the body of the Earth, I became a gardener in hopes that it would be a path of healing as well as support for my needs. That didn't work for long. Poetry always surged through the cracks of this life as I went along. For a time I read regularly at an open mic I lived near to, in San Francisco, but I never engaged with much else, kept it very low key.

These days, it is as though most of what I might do or have done has just fallen away, like old leaves perhaps... and poetry is what's left. I could say it keeps me out of trouble but that remains to be seen. I am very glad to have found the poetry communities on Twitter, where I feel among like kind. Thank you for giving me this platform to share a little about these things!

Kyla Houbolt was interviewed by Matthew M C Smith, editor of Black Bough Poetry in August, 2019.

Kyla tweets @luaz_poet

Gold

I lean my ride
on the corner of the old store
and sneak into the near field
to steal you a flower.
I almost get lost, choosing.
I gather too many, wish
the old bike had a basket.
Cuts like a knife, to watch
this gold lit hour fall to night.

Kyla Houbolt

‘Gold’ was published in Black Bough 1. This issue was named after Kyla’s phrase, ‘gold lit hour’.