

Misrepresented People

Poetic Responses to Trump's America

Edited by

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Contents

xix | INTRODUCTION

HANIF ABDURRAQIB

1 | It's Just That I'm Not Really Into Politics

2 | & who, this time

3 | I Don't Know Any Longer Why the Flags Are at Half-Staff

KAVEH AKBAR

5 | Unburnable the Cold is Flooding Our Lives

7 | Despite My Efforts Even My Prayers Have Turned into Threats

MARÍA ISABEL ALVAREZ

9 | In America

ELOISA AMEZCUA

10 | When Mexico Sends Its People, They're Not Sending Their Best

12 | Elegy

NIN ANDREWS

14 | Why I Am Not an Orgasm

WILLIAM ARCHILA

16 | This Is for Henry

19 | The Line

FATIMAH ASGHAR

20 | If They Should Come for Us

CHAUN BALLARD

22 | Pantoum on the Presidential Election (from Saudi Arabia)

24 | Pantoum

25 | The Necessity of Poetry

ZEINA HASHEM BECK

27 | the Days don't stop

BRUCE BENNETT

28 | America in 2015

29 | The Lake Isle of Anywhere

ROSEBUD BEN-ONI

30 | And All the Songs We Are Meant To Be

BRIAN BRODEUR

32 | Self-Portrait with Alternative Facts

33 | Lullaby for an Autocrat

34 | Transcontinental

JOEL BROUWER

35 | Some Varieties of Political Activism

NICKOLE BROWN

37 | Inauguration Day, 2017

38 | Trump's Tic Tacs

TINA CANE

40 | Avocado a la Ionesco

CORTNEY LAMAR CHARLESTON

41 | Feeling Fucked Up

43 | Hillary Clinton Said "We Have to Bring Them to Heal"

45 | Postmortem: 11/9/16

JIM DANIELS

46 | Raking, Pittsburgh

48 | Half-Mast

KYLE DARGAN

49 | Americana

51 | Mountebank

DANIELLE CADENA DEULEN

52 | American Curse

53 | On the Uncertainty of Our Judgment

55 | We Are Bored

NATALIE DIAZ

58 | Post-Colonial Love Poem

DANTE DI STEFANO

60 | National Anthem with Elegy and Talon

CELESTE DOAKS

61 | American Herstory

62 | How to Survive When Militants Knock at Your Door

MARTÍN ESPADA

63 | How We Could Have Lived or Died This Way

64 | Sleeping on the Bus

66 | Isabel's Corrido

68 | Jorge the Church Janitor Finally Quits

69 | Alabanza: In Praise of Local 100

JOSHUA JENNIFER ESPINOZA

71 | The Moon Is Trans

72 | [It is quiet in the morning.]

73 | [The woman is about hair]

BLAS FALCONER

74 | The Promised Land

KATE FALVEY

75 | The Line

BRIAN FANELLI

78 | Post-Election

79 | At the Corner Bar, Months Before an Election

80 | Instructions for the Day After

ARIEL FRANCISCO

81 | American Night, American Morning

CHRISTINE GELINEAU

83 | Welcome: for a Grandson Born to Unsettling Times

MARIA MAZZIOTTI GILLAN

85 | The Day After the Election

JENNIFER GIVHAN

87 | The Polar Bear

88 | The Glance

89 | Half Mexican

TONY GLOEGGLER

92 | On the Seventh Day

RUTH GORING

94 | America, if

SONIA GREENFIELD

95 | Alternate Facts

GEORGE GUIDA

96 | Because I'm from His Island

LUKE HANKINS

99 | The Answer

DAVID HERNANDEZ

100 | All-American

102 | These Are Brave Days

LUTHER HUGHES

103 | Not Splendor

109 | Self-Portrait as Crow

KENAN INCE

110 | Sickle

111 | Mollusks

112 | Resolution

115 | Trickle-Down Theory

117 | Ode to United Fruit

MARIA MELENDEZ KELSON

118 | El Villain

RUTH ELLEN KOCHER

119 | Skit: Sun Ra Welcomes the Fallen

DANA LEVIN

120 | Winning

TIMOTHY LIU

121 | Protest Song

DENISE LOW

126 | Andrew Jackson, I See You

GEORGE ELLA LYON

127 | This Just In from Rancho Politico

J. MICHAEL MARTINEZ

129 | The Mexican War Photo Postcard Company

130 | “Triple Execution in Mexico”

133 | “Execution in Mexico”

134 | “Yncineracion de Cadaveres en Balbuena”

135 | “Executing Bandits in Mexico”

136 | “The Executioner’s Palisade”

SHANE MCCRAE

137 | Everything I Know About Blackness I Learned from Donald Trump

SJOHNNA MCCRAY

138 | Portrait of My Father as a Young Black Man

139 | Burning Down Suburbia

140 | Price Check

ERIKA MEITNER

141 | I'll Remember You as You Were, Not as What You'll Become

RAJIV MOHABIR

142 | Inaugural Poem

FAISAL MOHYUDDIN

144 | Song of Myself as a Tomorrow

KAMILAH AISHA MOON

146 | Notes on a Mass Stranding

148 | A Superwoman Chooses Another Way to Fly

149 | What James Craig Anderson's Ghost Might Say (July 26, 2011)

ABBY E. MURRAY

150 | A Story for Our Daughters

152 | Poem for My Daughter Before the March

153 | My Daughter Asked for This

SUSAN NGUYEN

155 | Good Girls

157 | A list of directives:

158 | Nguyen: Also Known As

MATTHEW OLZMANN

159 | Despite the Kicking of Small Animals

ANNETTE OXINDINE

160 | Now That Spring Is Coming, More Decrees

GREGORY PARDLO

161 | For Which it Stands

163 | Written By Himself

CRAIG SANTOS PEREZ

164 | Love Poems in the Time of Climate Change: Sonnet XVII

165 | Love Poems in the Time of Climate Change: Sonnet XII

166 | Thanksgiving in the Anthropocene, 2015

168 | Masturbation Poem in a Time of Climate Change

XANDRIA PHILLIPS

170 | -Bigly-

171 | An Elegy for the Living and Breathing

172 | Social Death: Split-Screen, Rewind

173 | Social Death: Split-Screen, Fast Forward

174 | She Makes Me Notice

KEVIN PRUFER

175 | National Anthem

176 | In a Beautiful Country

177 | The Art of Fiction

182 | The Translator

185 | The Mexicans

189 | Cruelties

DEAN RADER

190 | America I Do Not Call Your Name Without Hope

STELLA VINITCHI RADULESCU

191 | like history a poem

JULIAN RANDALL

193 | The Search for Frank Ocean or a Brief History of Disappearing

CAMILLE RANKINE

196 | Aubade

ALEXANDRA LYTTON REGALADO

197 | La Mano

ALBERTO RÍOS

198 | We Are of a Tribe

199 | The Border: A Double Sonnet

200 | Border Lines

ALISON C. ROLLINS

201 | The Beastangel

203 | Why Is We Americans

LIZ ROSENBERG

205 | To the President Elect

206 | The Real True President Asleep

NICOLE SANTALUCIA

207 | Thumping in Central Pennsylvania

208 | Supermarket Blowout

209 | After the Voting Polls Closed

SAM SAX

210 | Doctrine

LAUREN MARIE SCHMIDT

212 | In Defense of Poetry

213 | Welfare Mothers

214 | Unto Others

216 | The Fourth of July

219 | The Social Worker's Advice

RAENA SHIRALI

221 | Dare I Write It

222 | Between Here & Predictable Characters

SCHEREZADE SIOBHAN

223 | second generation

CLINT SMITH

224 | Pangaea

MAGGIE SMITH

225 | The Parable of the Bear

226 | What I Carried

PATRICIA SMITH

228 | Practice Standing Unleashed and Clean

230 | *that's my***CHRISTIAN TERESI**

231 | Nina Simone Explains Delusions to John Roberts

232 | Nobody Explains Political Myopia to the Unrepentant Voter

233 | Etymology of the Ancient City

LEAH TIEGER

235 | Electorate

VINCENT TORO

236 | The Savages

LEAH UMANSKY

237 | Sonnet II

238 | this is a poem about survival

239 | I Leave

EMILY VOGEL

241 | Orphan Leaves

242 | The New Elected "God"

JOE WEIL

243 | Poem in Which I Shit on Unity

244 | Red Land (A Satire in the Old Irish Poetic Sense)

245 | Early Winter (The Day After)

JAMEKA WILLIAMS

246 | [my heroes lie in boxes]

247 | Thoughts on a Birthday Party

248 | For the Love of God

249 | Black, or I Sit on My Front Porch in the Projects Waiting for God

PHILLIP B. WILLIAMS

250 | *from* Interruptive

JANE WONG

259 | The Act of Killing

260 | Spoiled

JAVIER ZAMORA

261 | Looking at a Coyote

262 | Second Attempt Crossing

265 | ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

271 | CONTRIBUTOR NOTES

Introduction

Donald Trump, as a political figure, is perhaps the most perfect expression of American empire: a contradictory amalgam of naïveté and cunning, fueled by unchecked ego, greed, and the desire for unlimited power, gaudy, brash, petulant, cocky, unrepentant, narcissistic, delusional, and foolishly, unjustifiably, confident; his election stands as the most tangible proof of the ignorance, fear, cruelty, violence, apathy, and casual disregard that underwrite daily life in the United States of America. This anthology began in the days after November 8, 2016 as a direct response to Trump’s campaign and election. From its inception, this anthology has been a time-bound project with immediate goals: 1) to provide a space for expressions of political dissent and social consciousness, 2) to provide a space for poets from misrepresented and underrepresented groups, 3) to decry the ascendancy of right-wing and reactionary ideologies, 4) to raise money for a worthy charity (The National Immigration Law Center). The book you hold in your hands also celebrates the dynamic pluralism of contemporary poetry. This volume contains work from a variety of aesthetic stances, from poets whose personal backgrounds reflect the vibrant multiplicity of our democratic vistas at their most resplendent. The poets anthologized herein bear witness to, rage against, and defy the misogyny, racism, homophobia, xenophobia, and authoritarian impulses that have always surrounded us, but that are incarnated in the 45th president.

Some of the poems in this anthology chronicle, albeit partially and imperfectly, the unprecedented rise to power of Donald Trump. Many of the poems included in these pages were written either during the campaign or during the first one hundred days of the Trump presidency. Some of the poems were written years before Trump was a viable presidential candidate. All of the poems, both directly and indirectly, address the persistent underlying issues of inequity and injustice that have led to the current political moment; the poems contained in these pages resonate with the vision Martín Espada so eloquently expresses in his poem “How We Could Have Lived or Died This Way”:

I see the rebels marching, hands upraised before the riot
 squads,
 faces in bandannas against the tear gas, and I walk beside
 them unseen.
 I see the poets, who will write the songs of insurrection
 generations unborn
 will read or hear a century from now, words that make
 them wonder
 how we could have lived or died this way, how the
 descendants of slaves
 still fled and the descendants of slave-catchers still shot
 them, how we awoke
 every morning without the blood of the dead sweating from
 every pore.

We hope that this anthology will join a chorus of other anthologies aimed at resisting tyranny, bigotry, and provincialism in all of its forms. Although we aimed at inclusiveness in this volume, we recognize that there are many groups who are not represented in these pages. We hope that groups who do not find themselves represented in these pages will continue the work initiated in anthologies like this one. At a time when large swaths of the nation, and of the world, have succumbed to a reality television ontology, the poems collected in this volume offer the terra firma of imaginative empathy only available to us through poetry. We believe in the hard-fought duende of a good poem. We believe that beauty matters. We believe that truth matters. We believe that words matter—on the page, in the digital ether, and in the air. We believe that the voices of poets might counter alternative facts and fake news with the earned communion and the restorative utterance of the lyric and of the narrative. We extend our camaraderie to those of you who believe the same. We extend our love even to those who might oppose us. We echo Whitman by affirming openness as the watchword of true art: “Unscrew the locks from the doors! / Unscrew the doors themselves from their jambs!”

—María Isabel Alvarez & Dante Di Stefano