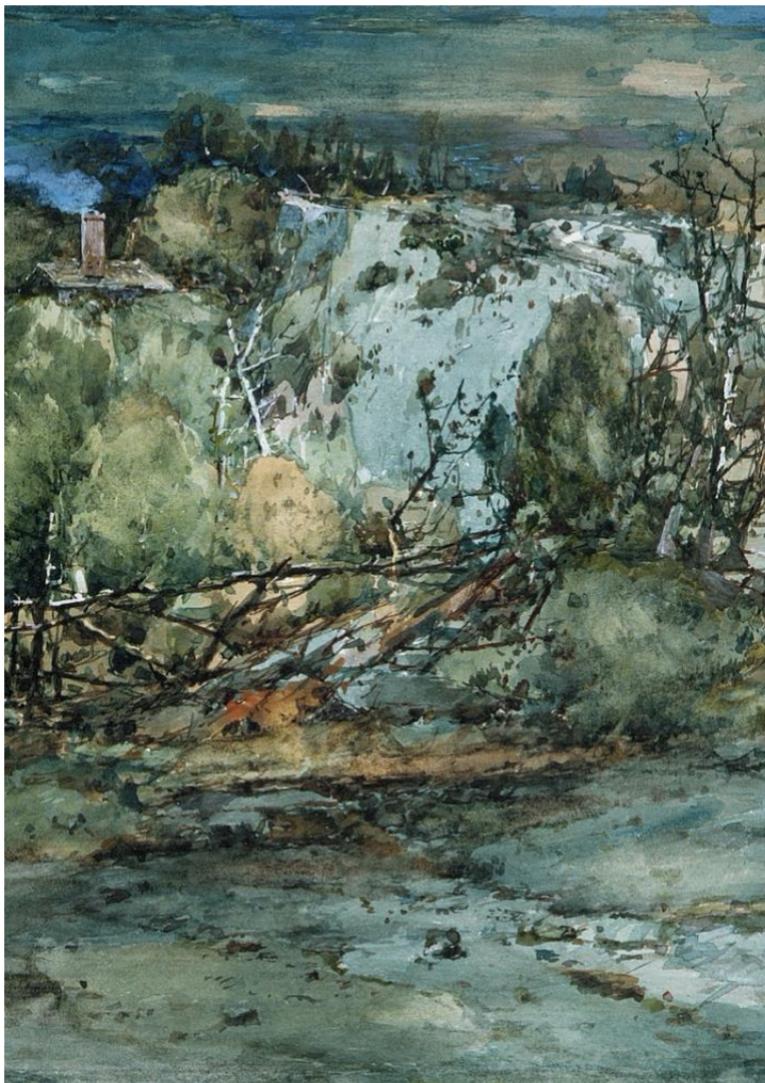


BUTTONHOOK PRESS 2022 PAMPHLET SERIES  
*AMERICANA*

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# CHESTER RIVER REVERIE



PRISCILLA LONG

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OPEN: JOURNAL OF ARTS & LETTERS  
(O:JA&L)

# PRISCILLA LONG

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## BIRDWATCHING IN AMERICA

*Birds on ladies' hats counted by ornithologist  
Frank Chapman within two hours, New York City, 1886*

Consider the heron-hatted ladies shopping  
Fifth Avenue, New York, 1886. Hats feathered  
and furred with plumes of pheasants, faces  
of kittens peeking out, entire merles—that Brazilian  
blackbird—wired to move just like a bird,  
The grey swallow, coveted as millinery ornament.  
And pigeon, pheasant, peacock. Ferruginous hawk,  
harlequin duck. Four robins, a brown thrush,  
three bluebirds, three warblers, three  
black-capped flycatchers, three scarlet tanagers,  
white-bellied swallows, waxwings, a pine grosbeak.  
Fifteen snow buntings, a bobolink, a meadowlark...  
Birds too mutilated to name, wings and beaks, purple  
and blue. *Naturally, I wished to be very stylish...*

## STRIP MINE

*Dickinson County, Virginia*

One old woman still lives  
down in the holler.  
Mineguards block the road  
till the sun sinks, Earth tilts  
its load of fallen trees.

In the Appalachian night  
Brushy Ridge caves  
into Nuce Creek.  
Floodwaters rise to hickory  
root, fox pup, bear cub.

No more the hawk's cry.  
No more, the fiddle's air.

## WHAT HAPPENED THIS MORNING

Dawn roars, beeps, whines.  
A demolition excavator knocks down  
my neighbor Barbara's corner  
of the world: plaster walls  
painted blue, dust and concrete,  
old rebar. Bucket-shears uproot  
the old cherry tree as if  
it were shotweed or chickweed.  
Away white petals of May!  
Before lunch, the skimmia hedge  
gets pulled up, piled up.  
The western hemlock Barbara  
transplanted from her mom's woods  
felled with chainsaw and bucket-butt.  
It booms down on the brush pile.  
Next to go, the apple tree, its apples  
fat, Sudden sun on my side of the fence  
smacks the giant fern, shocks osoberry  
and mock orange. More chainsaw,  
screech and tear, a dirt mountain.

Evening. In sudden silence, I water  
the garden, wash dust-choked  
leaves. I speak to birch,  
huckleberry, maidenhair  
fern, my incensed cedar.  
Look, I say, remain calm.  
We have time, more autumn rains,  
more seasons to flower  
before the future comes  
to rip us out.

## SHE REMEMBERS AMERICA BURNING

That year, 1967, smoke  
drifted over from Detroit or  
was it crazed eyes and smoke-  
choked clothes, fear-sweat escaped  
to Ann Arbor, fire *this* time.  
She and her pals borrowed *bread*  
back and forth, conspired to pay  
the rent, talked politics, smoked  
Kools, cooked spaghetti dinners.  
She worked at the Perry Nursery School.  
*Good morning Miss Long*, the children  
chimed, eager for story hour.

The other story: Going from door to door  
to talk the war, the sweetness of the summer  
of love, jazz in the park, beautiful  
children playing as children will play,  
as Tanya Blanding, age 4, shot  
in Detroit, will never play. Vietnam  
Summer, and then October, the march  
on the Pentagon. That was the music

of that time, her man in prison  
her weekly ride to the prison  
with Jehovah's Witness women  
whose men had also spurned  
the war, kindly asking was he  
the one who believed  
in evolution.

CHESTER RIVER REVERIE

Time is a room to enter,  
to savor the fervor, the long nights  
of talk, the joy of the march,  
youth's proud crazy dream  
*Hell no, we won't go*  
and *Oh, Freedom...*

## CHESTER RIVER REVERIE

*Eastern Shore of Maryland*

I open my eyes underwater to seaweed,  
to green sunlight. I dog-paddle to shore.  
A kingfisher sits on a willow branch.

This is my childhood place, we kids  
swimming like sea turtles or catfish,  
squishing our feet in the muddy bottom

or rowing out to eel traps set  
by watermen, pulling them up  
to watch eels curl and writhe.

Did I even think of beauty, the staggering  
numbers of bugs and birds, the black locust,  
the swans on Fore Creek, the wild geese?

We were dirt-streaked and proud, our bare feet  
calloused, good swimmers, good workers,  
socially competent with cows.

The beauty we lived in, natural as an old boot,  
I see now as a slow wide river, a blue wing,  
turkey buzzards spiraling down.

## ABOUT THE WRITER:

**PRISCILLA LONG** is a Seattle-based writer of poetry, creative nonfiction, science, history, and fiction, and a long-time independent teacher of writing. Her seventh book is *Dancing with the Muse in Old Age* (Coffeetown, 2022). Her two poetry books are *Holy Magic* (MoonPath Press) and *Crossing Over: Poems* (University of New Mexico Press). Her how-to-write book is *The Writer's Portable Mentor: A Guide to Art, Craft, and the Writer's Life*. She is also author of a guide for creators, *Minding the Muse*, and a history of coalmining in the United States. She grew up on a dairy farm on the Eastern Shore of Maryland.

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