

2023 Pamphlet Series

*Poetry: All forms & styles*

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IN PRAISE OF

# COLUMBUS



KIRBY OLSON

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HOT BUTTON PRESS

*Contemporary Issues*

KIRBY OLSON

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## COLUMBUS SAILED THE OCEANS BLUE

*In praise of Columbus*

When Columbus sailed to Hispaniola, cannibals came out in canoes with flowers. Two great civilizations merged. We gave them smallpox, and they returned the favor with syphilis.

A few years before, the Ottomans sacked Byzantium. Columbus sought gold so that Isabella and Ferdinand could push the Muslims from Seville.

Out they went by 1506, when the last minaret fell silent. Turks were stopped at Vienna in 1683, having met little resistance except when Vlad papered the forests with their heads (1462).

The Nina, the Pinta, and the Santa Maria lit the harbor with sails (1492) as Christ came to America, and the New World was born, as depicted by Salvador Dali in 1959. In addition to the Navigator, low-information hooligans from the Nina came too to provide the muscle.

Today, low-information hooligans in Portland knock down statues of Columbus unaware that the astrolabe which facilitated his visit was developed by Islamic mathematicians.

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## ENDLINGS

Each peach in Barcelona  
Every pear in Paris  
The last grape in Berlin  
The first Antarctic wine:  
Global warming changes our products.

Armored trucks cart the cartel leader  
to the maximum security penitentiary.  
Red dots play upon her chest  
as the convicted endling is cross-haired:  
last living member of her family's syndicate.

Searchlights beacon  
as ships knife through the seven seas.  
The sun burns ancient Lydia.  
Frost sublimates upon the steppes.  
Even from Aruba we can hopscotch to Cuba.

Dodos and dinosaurs, Tasmanian devils,  
most are gone. Perhaps even viruses vanish.  
Platypii poke into many dry crevices.  
Tidal waves and hurricanes and tornadoes,  
lightning and volcanoes, but butterflies remain.

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IN PRAISE OF COLUMBUS

SEA CRUISE

Her eyeballs fell into my tomato soup.  
Jumping guabine leaped over the waterfall  
into my eyeballs.  
Red snapper sparkled in the sunlight.  
Glistening manta rays  
glided under the stochastic turquoise.

Flags from Japan, France and Monaco  
bobbled along on toothpicks taped to tortoises' shells.  
Racing reptiles elicited patriotic approval from fervent fans.

*January 1, 2019*

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## THE CONTAINER AND THE CONTAINED

Samsonite has the strength of an orange peel.  
Samsonite is hairless but strong and delightful.

The jet liners had an aluminum casing.

Skyscrapers may have brick cladding.

Trump's Tower has nice planters at each setback.

While Teddy Roosevelt's statue has been removed from  
AMNH,  
Columbus still stands atop his circle at 59<sup>th</sup> and Central Park.

If you enter the Cathedral of St. John's  
you will find the God of Abraham in the stillness.

## BUSSING CIRCA 1969

*"If men were angels, no government would be necessary,"* Federalist 51.

Montpelier sat before the Blue Ridge Mountains an adumbration of heaven. Just over those mountains is West Virginia. Over there were few slaves, but Madison's house was surrounded by fields, slaves worked them, providing yields, of wheat and tares, and barleycorn, while he labored on the problem

of freedom. Before a gorgeous window he squibbed the Bill of Rights, but few of his slaves could read. One wrote a book, and another earned a patent. When I visited, the house belonged to the Federal Government. It was a Landmark. Unable to explain the capacious grace or the spare yet ornate luxury, busy but calm, it was

the day before Thanksgiving, 2012. The trees were not yet all yellow. Madison believed in checks and balances, but wanted the Judiciary to check the Legislature, and thought the judges should not be the barbarous poor with mud on their boots from Alabama. It was the Warren Court who, when I was a boy in Virginia, decided to

send me to a mixed school on a poky bus to solve the problem of inequality, by ridding us of separation. They would put us in one poke. With a stroke of the pen, the race question was settled for us to dodge with spitballs and fast reflexes. Then there was white flight, out of the urban, as whites went to West Virginia, and other rural areas.

My family fled to northeastern Pennsylvania, where blacks were few. I listened to Jefferson Airplane with a black friend. Blacks had been treated like Jews on the plantations. Madison had done better than some, and nearby at Ashlawn,

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Monroe had qualms. Slaves had no families, but some were able to solve equations, or talk turkey.

The tractors' wheels like Roosevelt dimes in northeastern Pennsylvania rolled over the rills before the Johnstown Flood erased the farmers.

The costs have increased a hundred-fold since Jefferson's nickel. Where slaves once ministered to James Madison's fields, the National Trust tills the race course beside Montpelier today.

Federalists wanted the magistrates to review laws: legislation that streamlined the administration and "elevated the level of decision-making"\* to that of a golden quill behind armored fenestration, such that we could have *Brown vs. Board of Education*.

At eleven I was bussed in Virginia near the District of C. Southern whites formed alliances against northern whites. Black gangs formed, too, arming themselves w/slingshots: flying paperclips in the classroom, firecrackers at lunch, knives flashing in the bathrooms – the final arbiter -- the zipgun.

I snoozed on the one-hour morning commute, as Levi-Strauss droned on in my anthropology book, *On the Race Question*. Gangs of kids moved according to ancient variables, while circles of squares at Dupont Circle toasted desegregation.

Many today still think busing was worth the aggravation.

*\*Professor Gordon Wood at Brown University during a conference on Liberty held on Saturday, October 29, 2011 paraphrasing the philosophy of James Madison and the Federalists on the importance of leaving the judiciary in the hands of the highly educated.*



## ABOUT THE WRITER:

KIRBY OLSON has published several poems in *Open* including a chapbook of eight poems about families. He has also published in *First Things*, *Partisan Review*, *South Dakota Review*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, and many others. His only full-length book of poetry is titled *Christmas at Rockefeller Center* (WordTech 2015).

**Image:**

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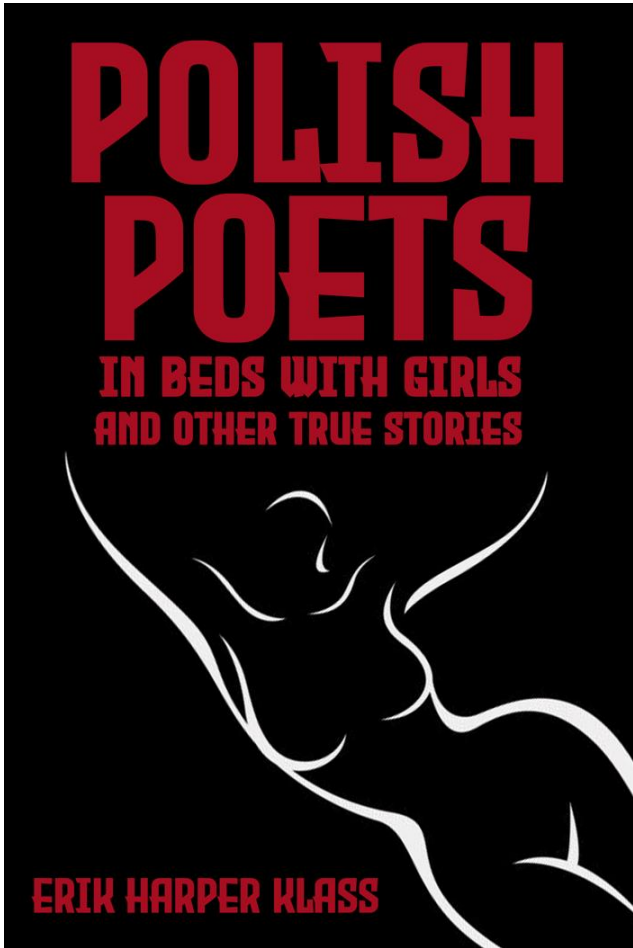
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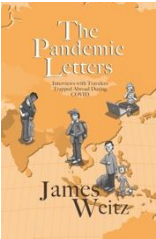
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