

**For SIXFOLD, May 2019 Poetry**

---

**Four Poems From Two Sides of the Border**

**Ceaseless Wind. The Drying Sheaves  
Last Stop on the Chili Line  
Passersby  
The Road Calls**

## **Ceaseless Wind. The Drying Sheaves**

heave in their twine. A man can only  
tie so much, and then move on. How often

have I found this road—two simple tracks  
curving into darkness. They don't explain

their readiness, or their appearance. I don't  
forget who lined this face. Every step I take

I learned from you. Every match I strike  
trembles with your light. The old stone barn

sighs in its ruin. Carla's two gray burros  
flick their tails, doze against a wall. The ancient

towering cacti around my mother's grave  
wave back and forth, with spiked

familiar fingers. We all have nails  
embedded in our hands. Every village

has a bus arriving from the distance,  
each window with its curtains, TV's

that play movies hours after dawn. So long  
I've heard their rumble, deep along the river.

Turn back, my love. Look again, at me.  
Let me comb your hair.

*—Ajuchitlán, Guerrero*

## **Last Stop on the Chili Line**

*—Rio Arriba, New Mexico*

Now the tracks are gone at Taos Junction  
but the stones remain—hammered plinths  
and stelae that marked a freight train's passage,

some still upright, others down to rubble,  
each one etched with miles and chiseled towns,

a distant whistle moaning from Servilleta station,  
the iron clack and thunder of drive-rods  
and wheels, pine-fire steam and pistons  
wheezing up the steep from the Embudo drop.

Henry Wilton in his vest and flannel shirt  
smiling at the door, Susie in the kitchen  
with her two-buck enchiladas. Brown-bottled  
beer stacked in a machine: Ice Cold Coke 5¢.

How it got there is our story  
with its lines bent and fractured, pounded  
seven decades up from Silver City,  
through Socorro, Antonito, Huerfano and north,

how wood became the coal, how the world  
becomes its own harder instrument—  
a two-man broadsaw gone pneumatic,  
a river's floating logs to a hopper freighting ore,  
smoke choking Pueblo and gas fires

smelting steel. How the rails, cars and boilers  
were shipped into the furnace, poured  
into molds, the Rio Grande & Santa Fe  
now just names for history; where a stop

becomes a family or a lifeline or a place of  
deep transference—the vanished town of Stong  
with its rock-wall platform, houses and hotels  
where Henry went to school, learned his  
figures and the tonnage, surveys

for the highway, dorm rooms for workers  
and headstones for the failures the war  
would leave in fragments. Where a man like  
Henry Wilton would still hold on, as Susie

ladles chile; while a group of boys  
in pickups, beards, hemp and desperation  
take their barstools with the others  
at the flask-lined mirror—women  
weaving horsehair, babies wrapped in burlap,

torn men in leather, soot-covered pants;  
waiting with their whiskey, Schlitz  
or soda, waiting for the sawmills, or foundries,  
a hospital in Denver, a shack in La Petaca,

waiting, as we all wait, for the next train north,  
or the next train south. *Who was my father?*  
*When can we go home?*

## Passersby

—San Miguel Allende, Guanajuato

Many have flown or bussed  
to escape the thrall of blizzards, frigid  
months of erasable light.

But the stooped man  
herding two burros past these café doors  
has never seen snow.

His beasts are stacked with bulging  
sun-bleached muslin sacks, from  
the nearby *cerros*—hand-dug planting soil.

They amble easy, slow, through  
robust mango, laurel and banana trees,  
new-blossom lemon, redolent

gardenia. Every small front yard  
a universe of roses, lily, starburst gladiola  
and bird-of-paradise.

The *campesino* carries a mesquite switch  
which he rarely uses. The burros  
know their route by heart: each corner

and *callejón*, each entry that will open  
at the moment of arrival; the woman,  
man or child who'll emerge

with the weekly five pesos, a saucer  
of *galletas*, mug of hot *atole*, two ripe  
apples—or, by fortune, a dish of figs.

For burros, figs are special. Perhaps  
it's in their blood, an ancestral  
taste from their time near Bethlehem.

Always, they've carried gifts,  
human needs, and needed humans  
across the desert. Burros know winter

all too well, and this way of service.  
Once it was Mary, about to birth Jesus.  
Today it's snow white sacks of dirt.

## The Road Calls

Again. As much as I  
deny her, as much as the red pickup  
squeals in its belts, rattles  
in its rust. I love you, says the truck. Always

the two mesas blue in the distance, always  
this wracked highway, steep  
in its declension, twisting like a bullsnake  
down to the village. Always the café

with its wood-fired Ashley, stacked  
split cedar, planked pine tables  
for Mona's enchiladas, her pinto beans and chile  
for the stream of tourists, long-haul freighters,

a family from Chama with their 1950's hay-rig  
tow-roped to the trunk of a Ford LTD,  
Jake Mora's son Merle on his gas-route to Ratón;

two kids from Questa, with a yellow  
bashed Camaro parked behind the dumpster,  
her smeared day-glo lipstick, his left, swollen eye.

Always the dishes, scratched and steaming,  
served in celebration—by Ronnie,  
Mona's sister, hair swept back, who knows  
me like my sleep, every stock word,

knows every idling semi, every awkward gesture  
of the teenagers' hands. They don't reach  
for their sodas, or napkins, but for one another  
as I once reached for her. And the engines

simmer quiet for one blessed moment, while  
I sip my coffee, with a front moving in.  
Until the crack of thunder, a school bus  
rumbling by, the money and the tip. The one

she's knows by now, more or less—  
with a flip in her hair, the wave of her hand,  
and mine, on the shift; half-turn of the wheel.

I love you, says the truck. Hey Ronnie,  
says the truck. Headed up a mountain  
in the oncoming rain.