

Impestuous

by Aaron Pinnix

[Portmanteau Poem #1: Impetuous + Tempestuous]

Shawangunk Ridge is an eastern extension
of the Appalachian Mountains. Location
matters—you are here, you are writing this
poem, you look up to see an old couple
intertwine their fingers, sitting on a
subway car in the Bronx.

Dear friend I miss you
and always that moment in an adventure
when you'd like to share the view with others
but more often, of course, we travel alone.

I am sitting in a forest on Shawangunk
Ridge, camping in Witch's Hole State
Forest, looking north toward the Catskill
Mountains. I am looking down on to a
prison. The impropriety of my freedom
while others are enclosed.

It is 2018 and there is snow on the ground.
I just biked past a family of black bears'
poop
on the carriage road

Doing nothing, doing something, teaching
Petrarchan sonnets in a prison literacy
classroom. Plum a line, cut it, then
surpass it.

In Dollywood the coal train rains cinders
upon the curious and innocent. I saw
burning soot settle into a small boy's
eyes. He is crying now and burying his
head in his grandfather's shirt. As a young
boy (4 or 5) in southern Tennessee I read
avidly a morbid book on coal train
disasters, *Scalded to Death by Steam*. 43
now I am reminded of pictures of trains
twisted and torqued at the bottom of
ravines.

It is 2025. I am older again in the morning
sun upon the cliff faces of Shawangunk Ridge.

The flies are circling with occasional bee.
The prison lights lit up the whole holler
last night while overhead I saw stars,
satellites, the space station leaning
toward the sun like a golden plinth,
streaming, ever screaming, around the
Earth. The impropriety of any freedom
while others are enclosed. Google maps
doesn't allow reviews for prisons.

Yesterday as I was passing through the
mountain gap a group of Harley riders
drove by, their machines' willful
exhumations of motorcyclists' discrete
corpuscular souls reverberating
throughout the forest.

Running quiet on my ebike I
startled a black bear an hour later.

The barn owl turns its head, its piercing
eyes caught first at the edge of your
vision. In turning around to get a better
view it retreats ahead of you, ahead and
ahead, branch to branch, silent scalloped
wings spread forceful, elongated and
swift.

Once, while fishing the Kentucky river with
my brother
we had had enough and gunned the little
outboard motor back for the dock.
A big gray heron took off ahead of us,
led the way.
We followed it for miles downriver—

ancient broad winged strokes more
powerful than our loud two stroke motor,

its shadow slipping over the face of the
water, imperious and free, the bird,
the shadow, the forest, and thee.