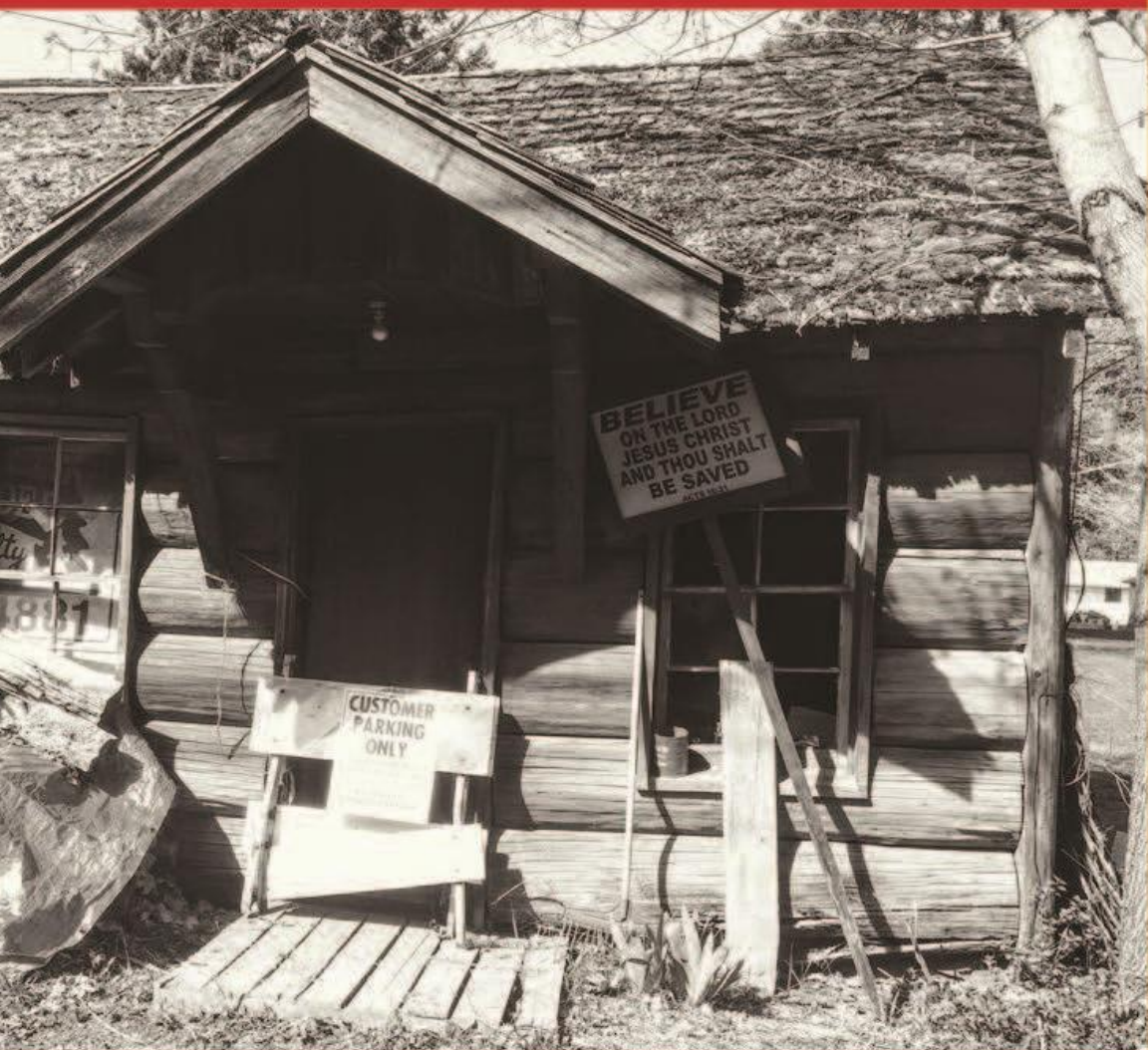


# POLITICAL APNEA



LEAH MUELLER

# **Political Apnea**

Leah Mueller

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Locofo Chaps is dedicated to publishing politically-oriented poetry.

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## **POLITICAL APNEA**

There is nothing  
sexy about politics.  
It drags on forever, while  
I stare at the ceiling.

Just when I think politics  
can't continue much longer,  
it finishes abruptly,  
rolls over on the mattress,

and goes to sleep, then grunts  
and snores with tortured gasps.  
I try desperately to rest,

while I lie with my ass  
in the puddle.

One day I will leave  
politics for good,

but for now I am beholden  
and need the security.  
I roll on the sagging mattress,  
twist my pillow against my ears,  
clench my jaw  
until the noise subsides.

I have no other place to go:  
just this uncomfortable bed  
with no promise of improvement,

and the morning is years away.

## **GREAT, AGAIN**

Gray regime breakfast  
blunt and slow: rain pouring  
intermittently, sideways.  
As the television drones  
of political sports,  
the dry eggs assault me  
with unknown ingredients.

Finally, the big game:  
the crowd watches, aghast.  
They huddle in blankets  
while the action unfolds  
on the fields below. How  
can one man inspire  
such fear? The monster terrifies,  
but is visible. Much worse  
are the ones I can't see.

I sleep fitfully  
the night before, dream  
of clever escape. Forced  
into wooded exile,  
my daughter and I  
manage to stay miles  
ahead of attackers, but she  
forgets her sleeping bag.  
"Take mine," I tell her,  
without hesitation.

I walk across the beach  
as birds argue about  
leftover garbage, and  
waves continue their  
indifferent pounding.  
The manufactured greatness  
of humans is so  
much less than this,  
but the carnage compels  
and I can't stop looking.

## SEVEN STAGES OF GRIEF

1). I shouldn't try  
to speak to anybody:  
I should just be here, where  
everyone has arrived by invitation  
and is on her best behavior.

2). The can has capsized,  
crows pick at the remains.  
Last week, the police  
came to my street twice.  
They made no arrests.

3). I should be here. My life  
has been a series of collapses  
like early airplane films. No one  
is concerned, except me.  
This should not  
be a surprise.

4). No point in pretending  
it doesn't matter. The rest is  
popcorn in my movie.  
The wall was always built  
and waited patiently  
for someone to make it visible.

5). I should be here.  
End is abandonment.  
The wreckage won't go quietly.  
Throw my wounded shoulder  
to the gate, but settle for  
the opposite, until finally  
everything stops working.

6). We all say  
whatever we want. My  
main objective is to endure  
until bedtime, then repeat.  
Don't forget to leave  
the silverware out, in  
preparation for mourning.  
It saves time.

7). I never expected this knob

to last any longer  
than its predecessors,  
but the boss told me  
it would work fine for  
a few more years. I  
am not responsible  
for its failure, when it  
finally falls apart.

## **PLUTOCRACY**

Chunks for the masters  
    one at a time,  
    until eventually

everything is gone:

you're clutching at  
    a wind tunnel,

trying to grab  
    that handle, but you sold it

years ago. Too bad, because  
    you could have used it now.

Masters sitting up on haunches  
    like seals for the catch,  
    always hungry. If you don't

    keep them fed, they will  
bite you, and they won't stop biting,  
    and besides,

your champagne tastes good.



## LEFT BEHIND

Pence stormed up to the Capital  
in a dither of self-righteous fury:  
hands clenched in fists, ready  
to do battle with everyone  
foolish enough to believe  
in education for the masses.

How dare they, he fumed,  
they're too stupid to know  
that learning is not a right,  
but a privilege, granted solely  
to those who can afford it,  
not the grimy, demanding brats  
of the undeserving poor. Determined

to stop the impoverished  
from pushing over the tower,  
he arrived in time to cast  
a deciding vote for the grinning matron,  
who stood in the wings like a prom ingenue,  
hands clasped, teeth gleaming,  
waiting for the count.  
The veins of her neck bulged  
as she posed for the camera.

Meanwhile, hundreds of miles away,  
a schoolchild clutched the pages  
of a tattered textbook, and wondered  
why the teacher rested her head on her desk  
and cried without making a sound.

## CHARLATAN

Some people can't hear  
unless there is noise.  
When that fails, they turn up the volume.

Words like gravel  
pellets, each more pointed  
than the last. Vows of  
redemption, delivered by the huckster  
whose wagon just pulled into town.  
The people push forward,  
clamor for redemption.

More clamor. Then shouting.  
Voices so distorted you can't hear.

The huckster moves  
his fish mouth, promises  
to heal sickness, bring jobs back,  
pay the three months' overdue mortgage,

make wives love husbands again.  
There will be sex, and wads  
of money, and more sex.  
Everything will return to life.

The morning brings ashes  
and overturned bottles, and  
the circling of predators.

No one knows where  
the huckster went. Some insist  
they spotted him at the edge of town,  
clutching a suitcase, and laughing.  
Others claim he never  
existed in the first place:

he was just another fantasy  
people have when  
they have nothing else left:

and all that remains is cacophony.

## **JUNK FOOD COWBOY**

The country isn't walking correctly.  
It has a slight limp,  
not noticeable from certain angles,  
but slowly getting worse.

The country can't stand up tall,  
can't maintain a military posture.  
Though a board is lodged permanently  
in its rectum, its gut  
has grown huge and spills out  
of its too-tight pants.  
It still tries to swagger  
like it's in charge.

The country ran sprints and dashes  
back in high school, and maintained  
fairly decent scores, along with a C average  
marked up to an A, for no reason  
except it showed up in class, and knew  
somebody's daddy.

The country sits at Cracker Barrel  
and is gunned down in the parking lot  
after eating another meal  
of lard and rage.  
There is no cowboy strut,  
no fifty paces, the sniper  
takes aim from his car window  
and six are dead. The driver is  
another local guy  
who mows his lawn, and fires shots  
into his yard, but  
his neighbors hear nothing.

The country is almost dead.  
The country sits in the waiting room  
and hopes that somebody else  
will solve its emergency.  
Meanwhile the sound of lullabies  
over the loudspeaker  
as babies are born,

eager for their turn at the wheel.

The country eats poison  
from the vending machine,  
shuffles around the corridors  
with its ass hanging out of pajamas.

The country has dementia, and  
insists it's in the wrong hospital,  
while the nurses laugh  
from their vantage point  
on the other side of the window.

The country lies on its single bed  
with a jar of IV fluids  
and a bad show on television.  
The program is familiar  
and the country knows every word.  
The country reclines  
with the remote, searches  
for a better channel.  
The official prognosis  
is poor, and the sentence terminal,  
but still, the country  
is glad for a vacation—  
so it dials room service  
from the bedside phone,  
puts the meal on someone else's tab.

## HOLIDAY IN THE NEW REGIME

You never watched Twin Peaks  
though you couldn't help but  
be aware of its existence: living  
in a region where everything  
reminds you of David Lynch –

trucks filled to overflowing with  
mossy logs, rumbling down the highway  
in sideways rain, and people  
who don't care much for conversation.

The roadside cafes on 101  
always manage to close  
a few seconds before you arrive, and  
the waitress apologizes because she can  
only offer breaded chicken strips and beer.

At a nearby tavern,  
the word “amber” floors the bartender.  
You are a snotty urbanite

from a city along the interstate,  
and everybody knows it.  
They do not speak to you.

Finally your vegetable patty arrives  
on a cheap white bun, with a  
pale curve of iceberg lettuce  
and a leftover slice of tomato.

The tomato appears oddly festive  
against the backdrop  
of flickering holiday lights.

December is the slow month  
at the ocean, and only lunatics  
come here. That explains a lot.

Christmas is a week away,  
and people are bombing the hell  
out of each other on the news.

You'd be amazed if they chose  
to do anything else, since  
they never learned how to sit quietly.

Folks who live alone in the mountains  
erect enormous Trump signs in their yards,  
sentinels to keep them company  
during the damp and chilly winter.

Those who have the largest signs  
live in the smallest houses:  
crumbling shacks and trailers  
in desperate need of new roofs and floors.

These people never come outside,  
and they refuse to throw anything away:  
their lawns are littered with old engine parts  
and overturned lawn chairs,  
as if they just sprang forward

and left town in a hurry, except  
they are still there, watching television.

Part of you thinks everything should  
just hurry up and go to hell,  
since it was headed there  
for such a long time anyway.

Everyone was having fun,  
and didn't want to let a little thing  
like a massacre spoil their party. Still,

you don't have to live in a trailer  
at the bottom of a rain-drenched knoll,  
you get to go home and drink  
lattes and microbrews.

These folks are braver than you, because  
they know how to remain in one place,  
even if everything shuts down at 7 PM.

When the apocalypse comes  
the Trump people will inherit the earth,

and you will die, clutching your screed  
and your plate of gluten free food.

They will congregate on your grave, cackling  
with merriment, as they smoke cigarettes  
and devour bags of deep-fried chicken.  
They will insist you had it coming all along:

and who's to say they won't be right?

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