

# Appalachia

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Volume 67  
Number 2 *Summer/Fall 2016: Living with the  
Consequences*

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Article 21

2016

## Monarchs

Todd Davis

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### Recommended Citation

Davis, Todd (2016) "Monarchs," *Appalachia*: Vol. 67 : No. 2 , Article 21.

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## Monarchs

The sky was royal blue,  
and children searched milkweed  
for yellow and black caterpillars.  
They found two in the entire field,  
confirming the reports  
of precipitous decline.

The boy asked  
if they might be changed  
into something new, able  
to fly on wings toward safety.  
Anything's possible,  
but we must consider history.  
We've cut the ridge three times,  
and where the earth was flat  
stripped it for coal.

At the local museum  
the curator entertains tourists  
with stories of small boys  
who fell through pit kiln roofs,  
burned by charcoal fires  
used to forge iron for cities  
and ships that sailed the future.  
More will disappear. Our passenger  
pigeon, a footnote  
tied to a taxidermied leg.  
When I was young,  
rivers caught fire

and all the fish died  
in Lake Erie. Now some swim  
without tumors.  
When I spy a stray monarch  
lighting on the head  
of butterfly weed,  
its stained-glass hinges  
remind me  
that the doors of a church  
should stay open.

*Todd Davis*

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TODD DAVIS teaches creative writing and environmental studies at Penn State University's Altoona College. He is the author of, most recently, *In the Kingdom of the Ditch* (Michigan State University Press, 2013), as well as of four other books of poems, including *The Least of the These* (Michigan State University Press, 2010) and *Household of Water, Moon, and Snow: The Thoreau Poems* (Seven Kitchens Press, 2010).

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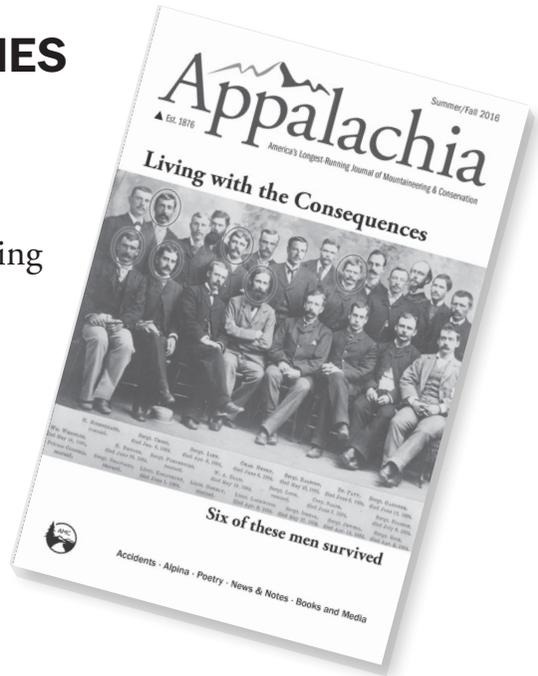
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