

THE AUTHORS SHOW – Poetry

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Black Dog Happy was published by the Finishing Line Press in June of this year. It is inspired by an antique idea, the Pythagorean claim, “everything is sentient”—or, as Gerard De Nerval expressed it: “Often in the obscure being dwells a hidden God.” In Black Dog, Pythagoras and de Nerval take a suburban, working-class turn but I try to stay true to their spirit.

White Wolf Dream (for Patty)

All-night Arctic Express

streaks across the Great Lakes,

snow drifts up our sliding door,

crystals creep down the glass.

In the morning she says:

I try to remember

a dream I have—

it slips beneath

my sleep

and the comforter

we keep

for coldest nights

and all I’ve got

to go on

is a white wolf

leaving hunks of meat

on the patio...

then she puts her head with mine

on the pillow...catch-if-catch-can,

my white wolf dream.

Worms

More wonder is found in’s book,

The Earth Moved,

and Darwin’s essay

on leaf mold

than many a poet contrives.

Both books are Natural Science,

both about worms.

Now when I’m out in the yard feeding birds

I wonder at critters that dive up and down

like fish in the sea.

And even at night when I gaze at the moon,
it gives me a thrill that the soil is moving
beneath my feet.

Poets gaze on azure and green but
Science is grateful for black and brown.

Black Dog Happy

(for Pedro)

Black dog happy is.

Likes to wear silly

jingle-jingle cap—

we laugh, we laugh.

Pedro, he is, who is

Maker of fun and games.

Yes he is who is.

See, Danny, see black dog

drop fuzzy bright balls

in Mommy's clean clothes,

bury like bones

in deep, puffy snow

(doggy looks down,

doggy looks up, down,

up, and then, at last,

Danny gets the point).

Fuzzy ball comes

off the wall,

on the fly...Pedro, catch!

goes plop on the pool,

swim, swim...Danny, fetch!

Poem at 3 in the Morning

On the first day, Lao Tzu fed the monkeys

4 nuts in the morning, 3 nuts late

that afternoon.

It made the monkeys hoot and holler.

On the second day, Lao reversed himself:

3 nuts in the morning and 4 to follow up.

The monkeys all were grateful.

This is called 3 in the morning

In the Book of the Way—

in monkey terms:

“working within the system.”

Raccoon Rite (a true story)

The animal looks at us and we are naked before it.

—Jacques Derrida

Wide-eyed as Jake, I'm

braking for a turn

off S.R. 48, dumbstruck by raccoons

roadside—one strokes another's carcass—

hairs bristle, neck and arms, when,

tragic in its dark mask, it gazes back

at me and

stretches out her twiggy foreleg

in that familiar gesture we call:

supplication.

Thirty years and still her gaze

sticks in me

like the face on St. Veronica's veil.

Museum of the Cherokee

1. Up from wrecks

of American chestnuts

apple tree grows wildwood tall.

On rim trail, gravel strips

are all that's left of the railroad.

These scattered chips

were garden walks:

heart-a-burst stirring in a cold spot.

2. In and out of morning mist,

forest flies, ridges

break, deer and bear appear,
disappear—shifting shape.

Half-way to Double-Springs,
high on a hemlock ridge,
a solitary tombstone, hard
to spot: Sally Sutton, 18,
always looking West.

One name, one date, overlooking
valleys and coves and
a couple-thousand unmarked graves.

3. Oconaluftee sings

in many tongues

as if the day had never been

(will never be)

when Jackson thumbs his nose

at the Black-Robes
and Major Ridge
signs the straight line
on a crooked treaty.

Removal begins.
Lotteries and auctions.
Pots and pans and
purple beads, gone
with the wind.

All because they came...
those so-called settlers
with allotments
and a slender, cottony fungus.

4. At the gas station,
Black Bear paces
round and round
a chain-link pen, or,

to everyone's amusement,
takes a dip in a claw-leg
bathtub, under an EXXON sign.

Business as Usual

At Greasy Grass

the women shoved their needles

into Custer's ear:

"Can you hear us now,

Son of the Morning Star?"

But we just kept on plowing

grasslands, carving Teddy

(spectacles and all)

into blocks of Black Hill.

Brownbag Lunch

always makes me blue

homesick and dyspeptic

eating on the clock

like piece-work
cold cuts, cola, pickle
all kinds of piece-meals
and a plastic pudding-cup
and no matter how thinly shaved
the ham (is there really a Bavaria
or just a “conspiracy of cartographers”)
and no matter how many Hershey kisses,
(is there nothing more shocking than
a bit of foil crushed against a silver filling?)
and no matter how sunny and warm
on the park bench....
brownbag lunch
always makes me feel
I’m a sad little man
in a great big brownbag country

Employment Services

...to write is to renounce being in command of oneself.

—Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*

We are the people of the Bureau.

Not the Bureau people. That's different.

It's only here that we combine, stinking of

cigarettes and fear; and though we lean together,

our heads are not hollow.

Some of us read books. My copy of Inferno wears

a greasy finger-print at line 112, Canto 19.

We come to file claims, appeal claims denied.

This guy with a resume is standing at the wrong desk.

The clerk redirects him to another desk...end of the line.

I want to be nice, speak an encouraging word,

something nice about his resume which no one

here will care about. But I'm busy

looking at a pretty girl. She's explaining

how her right arm was crushed in a punch-press.

And I'm busy hoping that all our moving parts survive

another round of working...and not working.

Life in Captivity: Dolphins

In captivity, they are prone to neurotic behaviors—
such as swimming in endless circles....

—Naomi Rose, PhD

Swim...turn...

swim again and

click the wall

and always clicks

come back

like bolts out of the blue.

Flipper, Flipper,

faster than lightning...

in-a-bottle-lightning

click, clack...tick-tock...

ready to receive

signals from the lost pod.

May as well be scanning

for transmissions

from a distant galaxy.

Life in Captivity: Husband and Wife

Rise and shine,

toe the line,

nose to the grind...

look sharp.

One thing after another...

before you know it,

day is done.

Still, don't you wonder

how often Hymen groans in us,

Orpheus aches like a phantom limb?