

"*Our Father in the Year of the Wolf* is a book of beings and endings and beginnings. More particularly, it is a book about the inevitability of endings, which seem, in these poems, only slightly less fundamental than being itself, and the tenuous possibility of renewal, of beginning again, which only occasionally intersects with being. It is, in other words, a book about family. And it is beautiful. But its beauty is its own: These poems refuse the easy richness of lyrical language while retaining the rhythms of lyrics of high intensity, and so mark an end of one of the many family lines beginning with Hart Crane. In this way, there is no book like *Our Father in the Year of the Wolf*. It is, irreplaceably, itself."

—Shane McCrae

"The making of many books has no end, in one sense, because we must continually reimagine our histories: the stories, Harrity tells us, that "we tell back or let alone or live along or lift up high." His is an intense, complicated rendering. These mysterious lyrical narratives, lush and surprising, dramatize the corporeal manifestations of our most primal emotional and spiritual natures. How like us these formally inventive poems look on the page: broken, yet whole."

—Martha Serpas

"It takes all my strength to hang onto the wild ride of these verses. If not for the resilience of the speaker, the resourcefulness of the prosody, I might be at a loss. Harrity reckons with a father-wound so brutal that it has left him not only raving but vulnerable and exposed. When the honesty seems too much, the book turns unexpectedly liturgical. The muscular language of the earth and all its particulars—"horsewhip" and "amaranth," "melon baller" and "battery acid"—tells us this is a voice in the wilderness that must cry out. I am surprised at how beautiful he makes the sound of his yawp."

—L. S. Klatt

"Dave Harrity's *Our Father in the Year of the Wolf* is one of the most playful and profound books of poetry that I have come across in a long time. Its title includes the father and the wolf as iconic figures of transformation that play off of one another in a duality of the spirit—human and animal. Harrity pushes, thematically, a force, a gust of primal vision, through these poems with such a tender ferocity that one is hard pressed to put the book down while figuring out how to breathe. Harrity is a visionary poet in the spirit of Blake and Rilke and Sexton. He injects the English language with a dreamcatcher's colorful twine. That is, these poems play with language to get at the center of a psycho-spiritual reckoning. They are wickedly primordial, and that is what I love about them most. They have weight and body and funk, and they billow. When you read them you want to eat and scream, preen and sex. As the wolf, as the father, Harrity wants to "open your door and . . . kiss all your people." Eat them too, devour—as food and as celebration, a celebration of the human condition. These poems devour what is beautiful and dangerous in this living life. They are from the head and the heart of a man who is steeple and church, who is body and trope, who is father and who is wolf; and you should read them all, in a hammock, by the campfire under stars, and on the subway, at rush hour, where the throng of human stinks the best."

—Matthew Lippman



DAVE HARRITY

OUR
FATHER

in the Year of the Wolf

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AUTHOR'S NOTES

General Note

This collection relies loosely on hagiography (the biographical narratives of saints) for some of its narrative and metaphor. Tales of mysticism and magical realism are common in this literary form of the early Christian church in which sin, martyrdom, prophecy and repentance are explored in compelling and often unorthodox ways. This book plays with the story of St. Natalis of Ireland, who cursed the unrepentant Altan Clan of County Meath. Every seven years, two men of the clan transform into werewolves as punishment for the sins of their fathers. The curse is eternal and fixed—an endless circus of lycanthropy damning the descendants to live out the arrogance, cruelty and violence of the generations before. Relatedly, some poems in this collection mention “sympathetic wounds.” This term refers to a wound received during a state of lycanthropy that is still visible once the individual has returned to human form, thus leading the human identity of the monster to be revealed.

“Lemniscate”

A reductionist’s definition would be an infinity symbol (∞), two loops meeting at a central point on a plane. The end phrase of this poem, *lupus est homo homini*, translates to “one man to another is a wolf.”

“Her Snow Globe”

Inspired by an exhibition of the glass snow globes and photographs of Walter Martin and Paloma Muñoz, which can be seen in their book *Travelers* (Aperture, 2008).

“To David” Triptych

Numbers stations are short-wave, coded radio transmissions used by the military and clandestine agencies to communicate sensitive information, mission directives or, more simply, weather patterns. Transmissions on these frequencies are often strings of numbers or incoherent Morse code, repeated in unbroken circuit by a synthetic female or child voice.

“Our Father in the Year of the Wolf”

Riffs on language and style from Merton, Tennyson and Eliot. The poem is dedicated to Chris Allgeier.

On Composite Texts

Several pieces of this collection riff on a variety of original sources: The Book of Common Prayer (The Last Rites, Compline, The Confession of Sin, The Holy Eucharist and Collects from the Morning Prayer liturgy); The Book of Psalms (KJV & NIV); “The Sermon on the Mount” and The Gospel of Mark, along with other narratives and parables in the Old Testament or Synoptic Gospels concerning power struggle (Ruth and Boaz; Jesus, Judas, Pilate and Barabbas; Absalom and David; Jacob and the Angel; Moses and Pharaoh; as well as more metaphysical manifestations such as Legion or the Incarnation); “Taste and See” by James E. Moore; “Sympathy for the Devil” by The Rolling Stones; “I’m Trading in My Sorrows” by Jeremy Camp; “The Song of Los” by William Blake. Last, a variety of lines and

sentence structures play on Robert Alter's translation of Qoheleth (also known as Ecclesiastes), especially verses in the first chapter: "All things are weary. A man cannot speak. The eye is not sated with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing. That which was is that which will be, and that which was done is that which will be done."

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Appalachian Heritage: “Eggshells Around His House” and “Mother’s Crossword, #26 Down”

The Curator: “Not Simply Fashion Only Desires Design Over Functionality”

Floor Plan: “Declares Himself,” “Lemniscate,” “Threshing Floor,” “Legion” and “The Only Time He Ever Cooked”

Killing the Buddha: “Nativity in Autumn Grays”

The Portland Review: fragments from “Equi-” (originally published as “Vapor”)

Rabbit Catastrophe Review: “To David” Triptych

Rock & Sling: “Potter’s Field,” “& His Ministers,” “Drift,” “Moonflower,” “Glissando” and fragments of “-Nox” (originally published as “Dissonance”)

Revolution John: “Father in Middle Age, Just Before Nightfall,” “Story Clipped by Mother From the Funny Papers” and “Litany of Aphorisms Learnt At Home”

Revolver: “If the Silver Could Be Given Back & Prophecies Erased” and “Second Law”

Ruminate Magazine: “Meadowland” and “Reverberation”

SAND (Berlin): “& What Is Done So Easily in the Left Is Left”

Softblow: “I Was Told There Would Be Cake” and “A Room of Father’s Cellar”

St. Katherine Review: “Our Father in the Year of the Wolf” (published as “Theophonic”)

Pieces of “Declares Himself” and “Care for the Widow &/or Orphan” were published in *Softblow* as “Dream Coming From the Head of a Staff” and “Dream of Why She Is Body Enough.” The poem “Meadowland” was selected for inclusion in the 2015 *Orison Anthology*.

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All rivers go to the sea, and the sea is not full.

To the place that the rivers go, there they return to go.

. . . The eye is not sated with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.

—Qoheleth



LEMNISCATE

the month he disappeared I slit my chin shaving

it was all white tile & red wine splat
small picks of thin hair & a bright-eyed scrap

of cycloptic tissue shred that told me
I'd become a man & no matter all the times
I did the deed or waxed whatever smooth

the hair came back with each full moon
but father never mentioned how to keep it clean

just like he used to say: *lupus est homo homini*



SECOND LAW

Call it inertia, call it quanta, call it all-expanding star—ordered namings
of erosions or best chronologies of kings. Even as it's done, it's more undone in subtle backness:
cells degrade to cancer,

addiction leaves behind a small slug trail, eggs wither with the womb.
Tomorrow, the stable needs another hosing out & the farrier drives a flaring nail, kneeling
at the quarters. Outside, rain cuts paint a little more

or a screw comes loose & a shingle strides
into the gutter. Inside, the laundry pile grows as shirts give threads away. This string of simple let-downs:
what's bound unbounds; what's fixed

unfixes. & we follow one another forward from a rolling boil,
potential lives ladled from a pot of wax, then paraffin decorations, scratching pins. The insurrectionist
descends the marble stair free & clear

of treachery, so everything turns into easter. Windows
& doors open to the wolves we are & are becoming. One life strung out from another—morning din
rung mescaline—song not sung

so much as hummed, going on to be ignored. Moonlight
tinnitus & two bled shadows sheetless on a bed, haze inside the head like a secret middle name. Keep it:
dormancy of decay. Keep it: tree blasted leafless by the rain. Keep it:

half-red rind resting sloshed
white in the sun, a troop of ants away. Keep it: film falling from your eyes & devil in the chest. & what it
is & that it is: familiar sounds, parsed pitch

ringing backward / forward ringing through the dark.

EGGSHELLS AROUND HIS HOUSE

it wasn't so much his mess but the smell of it waft of uncombed pelts
dried with clots or gluts of meat caked on hooks that dangled from the ceiling
garbage undiminished in pooled wine & battery acid dandruff crust a mealy stink
from the tub's clear liquid & the milked fish flush of wet carpet rolled & moldered
none of that compared to the disdain he held with silence which we each noticed the most
common as a quiver of unfinished arrows or bowstrings slacked appetites the stags
& sawed horns of neglect or the only thing near a smile would be the obtuse
elbow of a load-ready shotgun set out on the workbench our never speaking on the killing
that he did but instead our prayers for some triumphal entry like *o save us*
from the things he did not say *o save us from the coats laid down & branches cut*
o save us from the histories that we were told angers that would flare & fade
kin to curses uttered ages back so easily we'd cover up our shames
these mongreled messes handed down & promises unkept long before we came

IN THE PASTURE THAT PENNED HIS HORSES

A kind weanling, really, but father named him Gluestick & left him out most nights. I remember him best in the dusky gold dust billows. The little guy

loved lying in burnt grass or barreling bareback in soft clover clusters: a slight sweat in sun, a pulse vesseled in his neck, a purple scrim-light tussled on his ear.

POTTER'S FIELD

Across a sweep of grass, a horse is dying—wheezing bullet fragments strayed into his jaw. Blood gloss swell in ivy-leek, blank-field snow now sizzled by clear sleet—a vitiligo flushing out the green

of stories we tell back or let alone or live along or lift up high. This field where we return to mourn, marked small with destinies we noose around the neck. Here's the place

where we don't remember any names, where we all stand up concussed inside a storm. A bullet splits across the head, a boy gets buried underneath a branch:

exits & entrances nearly all the same, which makes an accident a sacrifice you wouldn't choose to make. Doors become windows or windows, doors—each decision made wishing clearer vapor,

some God-sent silver slug to put us out to pasture—like beasts lie down & turn into their bones, like ropes run taut & swing the family pride. What should be boxed

& buried turns to earthly pilgrimage, turns to console the mourning, to the sweet disgust of sympathy we stitch inside, to the wink we give away forgetting that we're flesh:

splinter's edge cleaving at the bed, cuticle bloom of blood streaked across the nail—our bodies live in tiny hells like these. This snow keeps twisting to the ground each year,

& this animal never lets you rest. Belligerent & beaten down with nothing left to give but unnamed angers swallowed back: whimpered horse, broken tower, indulgence to the king—

my God my God you say & yes & forgive me what I can't forget, please sing it back to sleep again. & what can't be counted out is buried under circumstance, what's not discerned we nostalgically divine—

lines chanted over bodies lurched in broken dirt.

NOT SIMPLY FASHION ONLY DESIRES DESIGN OVER FUNCTIONALITY

So much for a burial dress. Instead, patchwork muslin—cynical sleep pajamaed,
stitched selvedge—as if in death one could be dressed enough.

Forget the clothes: weave twill & tatter of time itself, weave
thimble notions measured & cut off. Little devils tightened in the gears

& the gods go on building watches, torqueing up the world—slight machines
wound up & counting back & counting back from center.

Sure, it's theological—ticked equation reckoning—but still there's beauty pieced
& tripping through the balanced act. Sure, that little sound of death

will pinch you down the neck, since who really could ignore such a nimble thing?—
nagging clicks & screeching coils loosening to spring.

IF THE SILVER COULD BE GIVEN BACK & PROPHECIES ERASED

To wish it rewind instead of its roaring stampede toward significance—bellwether wonder
of obscure stars or cliffside holes:

take your place & like it. But this stuff—
what's said long before the event—matters little once you pin up some messiah, creating the event itself.

Old enough to know what's written down might come true, what's wailed in wilderness
comes knocking at the door

asking for honey or money or a warm place
to have a baby in the dead of desert census. & how you talk on such a thing seems silly,

if your side gets told for you, after money changes hands. Turns moths shekkled in a palm,
turns a tree-limb-human pendulum.

Never stopped to ask what it would make—fool enough to beg
the power brokers while temples turn out zealots to the street, mis-repeating everything you didn't say.