



Past & Presently

Dan De Vries

poems



PHOTO: KORI HEPPNER

Born in Grand Rapids, MI. Living in San Francisco since 1991. Before then, Denver, Laramie, Vancouver, Ann Arbor, and periodically up and down the San Francisco peninsula. Grad school in Wyoming and the University of Michigan (Hopwood prize in major fiction in 1980). Author of three novels, *Trees for Tomorrow*, *Blasphemous Rumors*, and *Piggery*, and a short story collection, *The Mountain King*. Whatever else of much importance is in the poems.

“This book is an amazing collection, traveling a lifetime of work from the personal to the political, from religion to the environment to baseball, ringing in tone from righteous wrath to tenderness to hilarity, sounding echoes of fellow, but sadly passed on, poetic travelers Ted Berrigan, Anselm Hollo, and Charles Olson. As enlightening as it is entertaining—and boy is it entertaining—we get intimate glimpses of De Vries’ life and times, ranging from Michigan to British Columbia to California and back again. He speaks of poetry as a life of “wealth without money.” Indeed! It is alive and well in Dan’s living and breathing character. Amen to that.”

—David Schaafsma, *Associate Professor of English, University of Illinois, Chicago*

“Read the whole book. It will give a poetic understanding of now.”

—Washboard Hank, *iconic Canadian country songwriter*.

“The voice has an edge to it, you’ll notice....

There is exuberance in the voice too. Watch for it.”

—Paul Harris, *Professor of History, Minnesota State University Moorhead*

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Past

Sonnet for Foole and Exxon's News

The President's wife takes the hand of
a weird green thing that looks
like it should eat her. The President, she
tells the weird green thing, ignoring reporters,
is doing fine. The President is
obviously one tough son of a bitch.
He stops bullets with his chest. Poison
bullets. Killer bullets. On the White House
lawn the kids push Easter eggs from one end
to another, scrutinized by androids
of TV's cartoon world. Thus, happily,
we celebrate the American Easter;
our leader's lady blessing resurrection
amid forms suggesting his ritual own.

Verbal Assassination, a quibble

Lacking the guts for “real” battle
the sentient being strikes with words.
The urge to kill and the point-
lessness of “real” death are both admitted;
that death may form release, if not reward.

The death of mind and spirit
are another matter.

The undead appear
to govern and make us
like themselves. How now,

Old Zombie? What has been made
the schedule for this gunpowder day?
How many words to be processed?
How many tanks to be filled?
How many coyotes shall we poison?

It is easy to want none of it, these 80s in this America
but a program proves hard to come by.
Verbal Assassination may not work
on the undead much as sense cannot
be made where none exists to begin with.

ARCO

I.

They tested the air blast gun
and found it did not kill whales

They tested the ocean with the air blast gun
and found that it did contain oil

They killed the whales and
examined their air bladders and
found that the blast had not killed them

The whales were out of their route and would not
have been killed if they were not

2.

The Arcadian Commander commanded
they send him dead whales
to prove he had not killed them

We are not, he said
disturbing their migration and we are not,
he said, hunting them. No one knows

for sure, he said, how they
follow their route and they gave
premature birth in cold water.

3.

One dreams only the great blue
stolid immensity of the life of the whale

One imagines only a living sonar
tracking migration through ancestral sea

4.

In another world, another dream later
an eyeless Ahab forgets his orders
and dives deeply in imagination
to frolic with the whale children



Presently

Great Grey Queer

Whitman tending the sick & broken
in Washington hospital, shadowed
by stubby Washington Monument
& half erect capitol dome.

I sing the body broken.

Queer as confederate money
from a Cheerios box.
Erect as plastic
missiles from Wheaties.

Long John, Truthseeker
they gave us these as children
while horsedrawn wagons still
delivered milk on Adams Street
at the foot of Calvin.

We ducked and covered
as best we could & read
the billboards by the station with
the flying horse: I like Ike.

I write in darkness
sleepless in the cocoon of
my own strange existence

and all she says is, why
don't you just leave
the light on?