



NARRATIVE

POETRY



Dean Rader is the author of *Works & Days*, a debut collection that received the 2010 T. S. Eliot Poetry Prize, and *Self-Portrait as Wikipedia Entry* (Copper Canyon Press, 2016). His 2014 chapbook, *Landscape Portrait Figure Form*, was named by *Barnes & Noble Review* as one of the Best Poetry Books of the year. Rader is a professor at the University of San Francisco and the editor of *99 Poems for the 99 Percent: An Anthology of Poetry*.

Photograph by Dana Levin.

Frost on Fire and Other Poems

BY DEAN RADER

Frost on Fire

SOMETHING THAT MELTS can also burn, like a
Thicket of ice in the pond, the cold net
Of stars, even the hard white ax of the
Heart. A man can freeze without getting wet

Just as he can lose without being lost,
But winter finds everyone, even though
We spend our whole life eluding it. Frost
Reminds us of what is to come—the snow,

the sky, the trees, the skin, the sleet, the sleep.
How often have I woken in fear, blind
In my unknowing? The woods are dark and deep,
Even in the day; still the mind will find

Its way into the light, into the bright
Thaw of this life, where we, both flake and flame,
Fire and fall through. Let sun daze, let night
Show day how to blaze, let death drop its name.

Self-Portrait with Obfuscation

THE TREES TURN
in the evening air

from black to blacker
even though the moon's

tiny headlamp lumbers

along through the dark

shaft of the sky's deep
mine. Twilight, strangely

dull, climbs into its
train and chugs back

to the surface where
everything goes on

as before. How does
something acquire

luminous meaning?
How does anything

not happen? What men
in another age called

revelation is blurring
at the edges. Nothing

is clearer than that
which obstructs us.

I'm tired of description
the way I'm tired of

possibility. I want
the light on the other

side of the light.
I want the dark

the darkness darkens.

Self-Portrait in Time

BLACK BELL, ring the blue boat
of my bones back to the beach
of this world, make me an ear

so that I might hear the sound

from the deepest, make me
a mouth—don't let me drown—
don't let me sink the way lives
sink, the way the dead drop into

the endless hum of the end
as when the wind rends the rake—
make me bend the way notes bend,

the way waves blend into the long
crash of the last song, the way
the body bows to the blur of sea and air.

Geographic Self-Portrait

After Bruce Snider

ONCE UPON A TIME in Oklahoma,
there was no such thing as Oklahoma.

When I look out off the coast of California,
I am standing on our farm in Hinton, Oklahoma.

Answer: Because Texas sucks and Kansas blows.

Question: Why is it so windy in Oklahoma?

Knife wind, ice wind, blind wind, hatchet wind, stone wind,
skin wind, dust wind, and must wind all whisper *Oklahoma*.

All roads might lead to Rome,
but all trails take you to Oklahoma.

Where are you, Rhonda Harder, the first girl to kiss me?
I'm sorry your name became a joke for the boys in Oklahoma.

I have often wondered if there is more oil
or blood beneath the soil of Tulsa, Oklahoma.

The stars dragged along in their wagons of dust,
the moon on its cot, the last long light of Oklahoma.

Pawhuska, Nuyaka, Wewoka, Taloga, Oolagah,
Okeema, Eufala. O the missing maps of Oklahoma.

I heart the left in San Francisco,
But I left my heart in Oklahoma.

I think of Bruce Snider floating above the corn of Indiana.
Is he waving at Jesus rising above the wheat of Oklahoma?

My second baptism was in the First Baptist Church.
My first was in the summer rains of Oklahoma.

State amphibian: bullfrog. State beverage: milk. State soil:
Port silt loam. State mammal: bison. State song: "Oklahoma."

The first corpse I saw was my friend Kevin Wright's.
I was six years old in a funeral home in Weatherford, Oklahoma.

It's time to talk about the scent of Denise Barker's cautious
skin. It was like mist on a summer sidewalk in Oklahoma.

Recently uncovered manuscript from Ovid, in
which the gods learn to play football in Oklahoma.

Put down your pen, Lord Death. The names of
my parents are not yet on your list for Oklahoma.

If you ask me what one is to do with this world,
I will tell you that the answer is not to be found in Oklahoma.

Poem of the open prairie, couplet of the spread-out sky,
metaphor of mistletoe and milkweed: who will write Oklahoma?

God has bequeathed himself to the grape leaves of Sonoma
and the fog of San Francisco. Is his next gift to Oklahoma?

My grandfather and my son share the name Dean Rader. This
morning, my son
sinks into our bright bed; my grandfather into the dark dirt
of Oklahoma. 

From Self-Portrait as Wikipedia Entry (Copper Canyon Press, 2016).