

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

David Lazar: Six Poems

David Lazar · Wednesday, September 28th, 2016

David Lazar is a Guggenheim Fellow in Nonfiction for 2015-16. His books include *Who's Afraid of Helen of Troy*, *After Montaigne*, *Occasional Desire: Essays*, *The Body of Brooklyn*, *Truth in Nonfiction*, *Essaying the Essay*, *Powder Town*, *Michael Powell: Interviews*, and *Conversations with M.F.K. Fisher*. Forthcoming from BlazeVOX is *Rock, Paper, Scissors, God*. Six of his essays have been "Notable Essays of the Year" according to *Best American Essays*. Lazar created the PhD program in nonfiction writing at Ohio University and directed the creation of the undergraduate and M.F.A. programs in Nonfiction Writing at Columbia College Chicago where he is Professor of Creative Writing. He is founding editor of the literary magazine *Hotel Amerika*, and series editor, with Patrick Madden, of 21st Century Essays, at Ohio State University Press.

Compliance

If he were to ask me to hit him in the face, I wouldn't punch him really hard, but I might give him a bit of a slap. I might slap his face. If she were to ask me to tie her up, I'd do it, not making the knot too tight. If he were to ask me to pour hot wax on him, I'd probably ask him where. If she were to tell me to call her a filthy name, I'd no doubt get creative. If she wanted to bark at me, I'd shut the window. If they wanted me to watch, I'd sit down and say *start*. If he wanted to be told exactly what he was, just what he had always been, since he first entered the world, I'd say, well, I don't know.

Trade

Rough and gentle are relative, after all. Which is to say they're subjective, and also related. How could anyone be tender all the time? What a bore, I hear Bette Davis say in my mind. But on the other hand, being callous, raw, a bit brutal as a mode of being. How perfectly possible, I think, not at all tedious, almost like a vicious gift to the species.

Side Show

Do we refine ourselves out of existence? Just when we know what we like, it's almost too late to

like it enough. Fevers don't get hotter, they get stranger. I may still call out my grandmother's name when my temperature hits 103, but she's been dead much longer. Our beds are carnivals, and carnivals are dreams. That means we're our own sideshows. On a very hot day, the boy who had two heads stepped into the shadows by the pillows. Ruefully, he thought there was never a big enough audience.

Desire

Pornography is a way of saying I'm sorry, I'm sorry to my desires which I cannot speak. I'm sorry to my desires I cannot procure. I'm sorry to my desires I cannot request. I'm sorry to my desires I cannot mime. I'm sorry to my desires I cannot ask to tea. I'm sorry to desires that will haunt me until the last day I am able to see someone else perform them, unapologetically, and turn to me and say, you were really very sorry, we know.

Notes to Self

Travel more, even if alone. Don't worry; you won't meet anyone.
 When the sunlight hits the pavement, cross the street.
 Give your body away frivolously, but not vicariously.
 Rest your senses, especially the prehensive.
 Never undress without first telling Punch and Judy.
 When the room is most quiet, you should know better.

Self-Defenestration

He wondered if anyone had ever abdicated out a window. Said nuts to power, and ciao to the second empire furniture, did a two for one, letting the air in and himself out. And down. When falling fast does anyone ever think this would really be the time to give me flight, o lord, if you were ever going to break with the gravity thing? And he looks out at the trees, moving up so fast, like strips of brown and green celluloid gone wild. Self-deforestation.

(Author photo by Alexis Rhone Fancher)

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