



DEAR Z: The Zygote Epistles by Diane Raptosh



Dear Z collects verse-letters to a newly fertilized zygote—not quite a person, nor even an embryo—but rather, the great human *maybe*. The speaker delivers the “Z” a taste of what this might mean in poems whose topical range traipses from AutoFill to Idaho, New Zealand rivers to the zombie apocalypse.

AUTHOR PROFILE



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Diane Raptosh's fourth book of poetry, *American Amnesia*, (Etruscan Press) was longlisted for the 2013 National Book Award and was a finalist for the Housatonic Book Award. The recipient of three fellowships in literature from the Idaho Commission on the Arts, she served as the Boise Poet Laureate (2013) as well as the Idaho Writer-in-Residence (2013-2016), the highest literary honor in the state. In 2018 she received the Idaho Governor's Arts Award in Excellence. A highly active ambassador for poetry, she has given poetry workshops everywhere from riverbanks to maximum security prisons. She teaches creative writing and runs the program in Criminal Justice/Prison Studies at The College of Idaho. Her most recent collection of poems, *Human Directional*, was released by Etruscan Press in 2016.

ADVANCE PRAISE

Raptosh's America is razor-wired by Netflix subscriptions, mass shootings, “mouthy and awful” loving, and the digital grift of a click economy masquerading as a heart but shaped like a blob and hell-bent on commercializing everything in its path. In *Dear Z*, we inherit a crushing reckoning with the human experiment, “the self on

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one hand, / a cellphone, the other,” as we direct our bodies, sometimes feebly, sometimes with a swiped-in grace, “toward the arms / of the moans . . .” This is a collection simultaneously anchored to the past and miraculously stretching forward, along the Ethernet cables, into what is entirely, brazenly, Raptosh's time.

—J. Reuben Appelman, *Make Loneliness and The Kill Jar*

Dear Z is a book of dynamite. Or rather, “a hot load of humanity ammo.” What kind of world will a forming zygote be born into? Should we form a zygote to bring into this kind of world? Invoking the moral scaffolding of *Moby-Dick* and lexes from symbolic logic to hip-hop, no line in the book fails to proliferate on second reading. Raptosh proves a masterful mistress of the subtle pun and proverb; the velocity of her sleights of word will leave the reader replete . . . But it also suggests that a world that can embody a mind like this just might be worth being born into.

—Randall Couch, *Peal*

It takes courage to start a book of poems with an explanation of *Moby-Dick*. But it takes something else, some kind of serious playfulness, to address that book to the “Dear Zygote,” even as it transforms into “Life Speck,” with side moments as “Zeitgeist,” “Zero,” or even “teensy homunculus.” Yes, there's humor in all of this word-play, but I prefer the older term, “Wit” – with its implications of gentleness, even of wisdom. In *Dear Z*, we are reminded in every poem that it is addressed to that “life speck,” to the possibility of the future, to its own kind of hope.

—Keith Taylor, *The Bird-while*

Dear Z barebacks the language that made us human, showing how it is making us super- (as in in-) human—or at the very least, why a terrestrial translator is needed to usher a “Life Speck,” a “spec consciousness,” into modern humanity and hurtles through our rampage to “the Zombies, who borrowed / from Big Mama Thornton and copied Sam Cooke,” landing on “*Ameripire's endpoint*,” where “*person / comes uncoupled / from the rank of citizen*.” As Raptosh cautions, “Hang on to the winch of all this shape-shifting!”

—Megan Levad, *What Have I to Say to You*

SAMPLE FROM THE BOOK

Dear Zygote,

You should enjoy your limniad state,
nymph-like and windless, there on two sides

of a threshold. Howsoever, the WordHippo
wonders if I mean to speak *lemonade*.

This saké is murky, and it makes me wish
I could tottle off to that original somewhere

in whom even the wines sip words
and live alphabets draw on that spliff

of night air . . . Life Speck, here
is the ordinal pregnancy:

Without each other, we hole up
within each other. Remember, too,

I have been busy, turning
the soil in the few people's hearts

I plan to rename the grave
when my day comes: Am hoping to sow

the silt-line conditions for a happy death—
choired by Husband *Consciousness*—

that wry spirit-vegetable. That solid air
loyalty. Netflix, elsewhere,

boots into verb, while power lopes in
to daily unheaven the everyone. Still,

for the most part, Ms. Zygote Missive,
you are the test of the great human *maybe*,

there in that mother-hip meadow—
that namelessly face-free state

of between. Dear nymph-dividual:
Let me not spew lemonade,

as I've gotten wind of your balls-out greed
for the good of all species.

BOOK INFORMATION

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