

To the Naked Mole Rats at the National Zoo

Buck-toothed and semitransparent, pretty to no one,
butt of a joke and protagonist of a cartoon,
you make ridicule
seem inescapable,
not at home anywhere
sunlight might penetrate the circuitous air,
or else at home only on paper,
a mockup of a colony on the moon.
What with the light fixtures' shadows and the (exhale, inhale, exhale)
water vapor,
your tunnels look almost opaque,
their entrance strobing like a zoetrope:
some unambitious, sheltering version of heaven,
or mild first level of hell. Alexander Pope
with his grotto and chronic pain, might have had a lot
to say about your lot,
so eager to immure
one another, yet always on view
to the grade-schoolers whose eyes, below woven
caps and sun hats, make a meal of you.
They could see you as unfinished, or as a mistake.
One compared you to severed toes.
Another called all of you "skin tubes," which seems apropos,
if rude; it describes us all, though your motives are pure,
your will therefore harder to break.