

DAVE SNYDER

Bamboo Poem

Nothing loves anything
more than a panda loves bamboo.

They eat from and live in
bamboo exclusively.

Every morning pandas wake
to hushed leaf-rustle.

In a day the panda will devote
fourteen hours solely to eating bamboo

only two hours for everything else

whinnying, grooming, marking territory, playing,
inhaling deeply, barking, performing handstands, and mating

two hours total, ever bamboo-surrounded

I love nothing
so much.

...

Nothing is more
loved than bamboo.

Tragedy is a form
of excess.

Natural forms of excess, blooms,
in a species inevitably lead to its doom.

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Many bamboos bloom only once

a lifetime: flower, fruit, seed, die.
Entire stands have undergone these changes as one.

Scientists cannot tell what triggers loyalty.
I am not loved like this.

In the end, seed drifts may be
ankle-deep.

...

A panda's hands are shaped
specifically to hold bamboo.

They are always empty without bamboo.
In difficult periods when bamboo is scarce

pandas clumsily stomach other grasses,
flower bulbs, insects, small mammals.

Pandas digest these foods more efficiently
but in every case prefer bamboo.

A preference for something less
staggered logic. Pandas understand.

When a panda brings its mouth to a culm
its intention may be to eat it or just to press

it to it.

Grasses prove incapable of
reciprocity, betrayal, or ardor.

...

If we could speak with pandas
they would speak only of bamboo.
and would possess eloquence
humans rarely achieve.

English would borrow new, more florid adjectives
from pandas. Words that wouldn't be but would be like:

wondessorous, cleoquerescent, and radiennée.

"Bamboo" would come to mean among many things,
elegance, certitude, reverie, balance, and ardor.

During carnal seizure panda Don Juans would whisper
my bamboo.

Approximately, the width and shape of a panda's
throat is the same as a bamboo culm.

...

Pandas cannot speak and they are doomed.

During the 1980s, efforts to increase panda
populations saw breeding programs established in

Beijing, Chengdu, Wolong, and Fuzhou.
Wordlessly, pandas conveyed dissatisfaction with these programs.

Without bamboo, captive pandas are asked upon to eat
apples, milk, and steamed buns.

Males become impotent.
Mothers abandon their cubs,

their steamed buns.

Disinclination is a major problem in captive breeding.

In some cases, the appearance of blossoms in individuals forewarns flowering in every other member across the world.

...

Even if, as rarely happens,
a panda cub is born abroad

every panda maintains
Chinese citizenship.

Pandas do not mate for life.

Last year in a Thailand zoo, a traditional Thai
wedding was performed to encourage two pandas to mate.

So far, it has worked.

Outside the zoo bamboo
grows thick and close
culms nodding over walls.

Without: bamboo.

...

Nothing hates anything
more than bamboo hates pandas.

In a day, fourteen hours may be spent
being eaten by a panda.

Even in the presence of better food sources,
pandas, whose teeth are designed to crush,

single out
bamboo.

...

The best theory to date says mass die-off
developed in bamboo as defense

against predators: an entire forest dies together:
that is to say, undergoes together

a change: anything that depends on that forest will be abandoned:
seeds drift into a desiccated maw, out a rotted throat.

...

Love is a war
bamboo is winning.

While bamboo succeeds all over the earth
capable of forming huge forests

there are around 3,000 pandas left in nature.

With these odds pandas should hold a greater
interest in mating but they do not.

Instead they reach out slowly to what surrounds them,
fit their hand around it, then mouth, then throat, then trust.

...

I want to tell you the moral of this story

but I cannot. Where I am

I see the answers outside
thick and close: the world: this I want

to hold without

my hands are empty.