



EVERYONE IS CO₂
POEMS
DAVID JAMES BROCK



A Buckrider Book

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Buckrider Books is an imprint of Wolsak and Wynn Publishers.

Cover image © Berlin.Intim / photocase.com

Cover and interior design: Natalie Olsen, Kisscut Design

Author photograph: Amanda Lynne Ballard

Typeset in Sentinel

Printed by Coach House Printing Company Toronto, Canada



Canada Council
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The publisher gratefully acknowledges the support of the Canada Council for the Arts, the Ontario Arts Council and the Canada Book Fund.

Buckrider Books
280 James Street North
Hamilton, ON
Canada L8R 2L3

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Brock, David James, author
Everyone is CO₂ / David James Brock.

Poems.

ISBN 978-1-894987-83-7 (pbk.)

I. Title.

PS8603.R6225E94 2014 C811'6 C2014-900330-7

1959

Launched on abracadabra, searching steamed rock ruled by the lizards. Where we arrived it stunk from extinction and exhale. One of our crew whispered, *We have landed on Venus*. The navigator

believed him and died from the burn in his lungs. Our map predicted mountain ranges, chartreuse lakes. Instead, hot quarries swallowed sunrise, we kept time by quake strength and sulfur hallucination.

Our instruments lost pace with the paramecia. The rust was proof of oxygen. Still, we grieved for future suffocations. Our vessel started as a notebook sketch from a dream seized by stiff drinks. Escape muscles

calcified, re-entry theories perished and the bones emerged as decorative fossils. The dead machines, benign constellations tainted each drop of our blood water. Amnesia became magic. We dared believe we deserved the home we had.

MERCURY

I will drink this mercury, deliver a boy
by episiotomy, and the boy will make us rich.
I will raise him to embrace the scales
on his skin, to let the calluses pucker.
Should his sclera grey, he will see his steel.
Where no limb exists, no loss is felt. The amalgam
of our organs is the syndactyl hand we showcase.
I will teach him what we make of freaks,
how a forked tongue needs the frame
of a crowd's open mouth. The bottle's glass
is cold on my maternal lips, placing mirrors
in my blood, placing courage in the chaos of his cells.
Let his mind avoid the poison, its confusions,
bend only the body toward its costume.
We are each exhibits in the human zoo,
and only suckers show themselves for free.
So embrace my miscreation, get a ticket, get in line.

CARNIVORES

Farm of cattle, clog of leather, echoing moos, Harley roars,
pings of brass, heavy zipper clicks, mildew stench, and
she bought the coat used, silk lining soft her on shirt-sleeve arms,
she was worn out by cold and salt packet meals
she paid the thrift store in loose change
she could fall apart in the storm as the dimes rained down,

and

new window mannequins holding the clothes
have no faces, white slates worth more than groceries.
Young children stare, wanting lips to grow and answer
for the weight of good boredom. But the world
melts fat beneath the skin, and the fat releases the hair,
and the hair on the skin is the way to know
what a stranger thinks. We are thankfully unfamiliar,

and

unwrapped condoms as street litter are moments for reflection,
eyes grazing over sheepskin tubes, the whole story takes place
in a mind gutter. Ardent vegans yanked the molars from their gums
when the sanguinary genius carved holes in their theories.
From beneath the floorboards of a slaughterhouse, the story
of a wanted fugitive eluding, growing old, knowing that
the posse never looks beneath the blood.

ASSHOLE, WEREWOLF, HANGOVER

From the bed, the spin. The blinds are open.
The sun is a jerk. Last night a werewolf bit me.
I imagine cravings: the squirrels and mice,
the backyard bunny, the raccoon-bastard-dirty-
fighters. Their smell will scatter, then blind me,

and I will start weak, made rubber by the
mephitic. The smell of cut onion waft and no
kitchen fan. That stench of rotten egg scratching
the retina. That stench extending like a handful
of ninja metsubushi, so death to all raccoons.

Out of the shadows, the depressions. I search
for new spirit. I lose ambition. In a sepia photo,
I see fat Russian men wrestling vodka-fed bears.
I fight a bear. Then I chase deer, like Nicholson
in *Wolf*, a how-to for my loneliness. Because

I cannot bear to watch *An American Werewolf in London*,
an uncanny valley reminds me of scenes too possible.
Last night, something clamped pharynx to larynx.
I spoke when I should have breathed. I pulled beating
hearts from their cavities. My big mouth gave fangs

their wiggle room. I spit all the secrets, and now
bar benches will be empty in my circumference.
A guilt-ridden platter of shots. Sorry. There is no
rebuilding after a devouring. The original substance
cannot refreeze, i.e., no take backs. You said what you

said when you said it, asshole. Identify my body
by the teeth. Remember me, friends, whispering
and mild. This morning, my future lies before me.
No excuses. Okay, a werewolf bit me, but forgive
the violence I've achieved. It attacked in self-defence.

LAS VEGAS MOTHERS

The Las Vegas mothers have put those years behind them.
The lights screw off by midnight, and the duvet pins them
to the king-size bed. It wasn't long ago, the Las Vegas mothers
slept without the sheets, got some tongue from the city's hum.

There is peace in the outskirts, and there is safety in the battle
against dust bunnies. One got a Crock-Pot and now
the Las Vegas mothers go nuts for cactus fruit stews. Old stories
are branded to the lower backs. Once daily, the underbelly's buzz

freaks them out, but there's a fun pill for that. Someday their babies
will grow scabs in their chests –
the boys find desert baseball where the heart once was,
and the girls learn of their mothers in the downtown visits.

Each knows who her Las Vegas mother once was when the hoots
come from limousines wrangling tourists off the strip
to the titty bars. The Las Vegas mothers remember
the marquee's hot gas glowing five colours. Having never seen

a rainbow on the outskirts, the prettiest daughters wait beneath
that neon cowboy while his arm jerks a lasso.
The Las Vegas mothers fear for a city learning its lesson,
that maybe this is the time, the boulevard won't let go.

**“WATERFALLS” BY TLC IS A BETTER SONG THAN
“HIGH AND DRY” BY RADIOHEAD**

For Jacob McArthur Mooney

By the end of each weekend, the world is full of horseshit and flicked pennies.

He responded, so I can tell he’s into the next discussion. It’s time!

Left Eye

and T-Boz enter the octagon where Thom Yorke waits and broods.

Our kidneys pump beer urine as we squeeze to conclusions –

we’re the New Wave now. The night Michael Jackson died, no one could agree

on anything. Our sweater sleeves judge nights by tea-light burns at the cuffs.

A stranger flopped down, and based on our tempo said something about Trudeau, Jr., rebounded with a Farrah Fawcett sex fantasy.

It was June 25, and now we argue if it happened on a Thursday.

Fifteen bands

were mentioned, and I pretended I knew my friends’ friends. What is happening with the world’s diets and allergies? Each song costs a quarter, gossip to avoid weather chat. Half the table

hates your favourite sport. One night, I estimated my lifetime handshake tally:

one trillion. Just because there’s a pencil in your ear, doesn’t mean you’re right.

Now don’t spread this, but I want to tell everyone something private.

FAMILY FEUD

Dawson kisses all the cousins on the mouth.

Mother forbids anyone mention Combs's name.

Combs hanged himself in the bedroom closet, *shhhhhh*, and we never saw it coming.

Anderson pops the top button of his dress slacks at the dinner table, and the children laugh when he mimics a donkey.

Karn is the goddamn know-it-all, keeps showing slides from each 1990s trip round the world to landmarks we could have googled.

O'Hurley tells old jokes in a deep voice; he's Dad's kin, silver fox handsome, and each cousin's math works out incest probability. *If only I was born a second cousin! I will die alone!*

Harvey is black. Yes, he is black, and it took mother time to fiddle herself normal.

Mother's not racist, just awkward, and at Harvey's first family gathering, she fumbled, overcompensated, asked him where his family was from.

Harvey's top three answers were *Kinshasa, Gaborone, Ouagadougou*. Just punchlines because actually, *West Virginia*.

We still make jokes about that joke.

Mother's face went faux pas red.

Anderson's face was that red during his famous Christmas coughing fit.

We thought we had lost him, but it was just ginger ale bubbles.

We never joke about that.

No one knew the Heimlich.

Damn, O'Hurley is handsome.

The children laughed as Anderson caught his breath.

Then Karn gave us the goddamn etymology of the word hiccup in the post-din.

One of the children interrupted.

One of the children asked, *Who's Combs?*

Mother dropped a serving spoon, chipping the old-as-hell blue porcelain tureen.

An aunt shrieked, *That was an heirloom!* with too much extravagance for the occasion, and regrets moved the chandelier like a food fight.

Everyone calmed down. Then Dawson gave us all kisses.
Ending the episode.

Dawson gives us all kisses again, and we say goodbye for another year.

We'll see each other next time, fingers crossed.

Dawson seems so fragile.

I SAW ROB REINER'S STAND BY ME WHEN I WAS EIGHT YEARS OLD

We could have grown since morning. Our jitters were bled by the search for our own dead body in a nearby forest. Three years before liquor, the school roof was a crap adventure, and we

were giants weakened by manholes keeping us out of sewers. It was a race: first to pocket 5¢ candy was the group's new lead. Last to tongue a girl, put to the back of the pack. It was no longer seedy

to take leaks down playground slides, smash pop bottles on railway ties. Then the dare came to throw kitchen knives skyward, stop stone still and hope we weren't sculpted by the falling blades. A *wow*

moment when they stabbed only mud at our toes. We gave sky the finger. Made our hand the gun, with lips that fired the bullets. *Fuck-fuck-fuck*. So is this power? The sun is toast against this weapon.

GAS MASK SUMMER

This is our season without reaction and exchange,
of sweat storms. Leather and rubber make for an
inhospitable summer. The same expression strapped
to our faces: round eyes and round mouths –
despite our preparation, we will bear the stunned look
of another apocalypse. I light the candles to celebrate.

This summer we wear gas masks, and everything we say
clusters at our lips, hot particles of trapped speech
would expand if they could. They mock the echo,
echo is the opposite: resonance filtered, prayer squeezed
from sterile breath, and the noxious free to do its stuff.

This doom and gloom needs a smile-shaped respirator,
clown faces hiding reactions we cannot hide. Remove function
and fear from intake air. Fear is the contaminant making us
wet. We are children decorated in sweaters at a July birthday
party on the off chance things go cold, though this summer
we wear gas masks, and we can't blow out the candles.

#4EVA

1. *Cracked Glass*

Fragile glass shatters if her sound can
wedge between the parts. That molecules
destroy molecules is no solace to her soprano hack.

Her rigid lungs a mucus bath with no relief –
no, she wants bread crumbs soaked
in dishwater, clay bricks made mush by vinegar.

Some solids forget what they have eagerly become.
She fights a struggling fear, unable to accept her chemistry.
And when the flame grows hot, she will touch it and shriek.

2. Suit

Put this poem in a pretty book, if I can put these words
in a pretty place, a next-stop-to-heart-sink kind of spot,
a here-lies-the-meaning-of-life sort of joint.

And put my body in the perfect suit if it goes, if it goes,
if it's something fit for viewing. Dress it up
and pin these words to my lapel, just so,

and pretend my style really had panache; make it look
like my arrangement meant the world,
like it said anything at all, or everything at once.

THEY WILL TAKE MY ISLAND

There are no memories of our townships before the onslaught.

They will open my abdomen, decode my genus by
liver tissue, intrude dark and click a stick that looks like
a pen, the notes in sharp, grey scrawl on plated silver tablets:

/- -/'-'-'// (We were wrong. These are not machines.)

/- -\|\|=--- (We have incised the mass from its chest,)

-/\|-| -// (and curious, its island beats.)

They are years away from understanding the science in our parts.

I beg for tendons, my spleen, my lymph juice. It's not too late.
One grabs my tongue, examines that landscape. One sketches
my shapes. Another makes me into data:

-||- - /// -|- || (...strange sounds escape from the ocean on its face...)

-- |||_| (...I wonder if it knows what we are.)

/\|\|----_--\| (If only we could reach it, we could know if
this next procedure hurts.)

1986

Dismantle the launch pad's umbilical structure,
recycle the metal to make corvettes
for ex-astronauts – the Russians fashioned tractors
from their cosmodromes, we can do better.
Jackhammer the concrete blanketing long dead soil.

Optimism: our children will sprinkle grass seed.
The president says, *Eventually*.
Seven years ago, the brain trust claimed we couldn't
clean this mess. In Third World shipyards,
the rabble still uses chisel and blowtorch.

Out here, we can do better. The president says,
Eventually. Someday, the miasma of jet fuel
hanging in fog will no longer be beautiful. Imagine,
reclamation of this good land, that rumble at night,
memories where fires once looked like the sun.