



On Dogs Who Are Poets and Movie Stars

Gabriel Madan

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So Argos lay there dirty, covered with fleas.
And when he realized Odysseus was near, he wagged
his tail, and both his ears dropped back. He was too
weak to move towards his master.

Homer, *The Odyssey*
Translated by Emily Wilson

It is through a playful set of signs that Madan remembers the dead—the former pet bird, the sister who died on the beach, the grandmother whose ashes now take the shape of a starfish. Madan fuses the elegy with the coloring book. In “Elian (11.25.1999),” for instance, the date of the drowning of Elian Gonzalez’s mother, Elizabeth Brotons Rodríguez, is substituted for the order number, 6268, on a paint-by-number kit, “Dolphins #5,” purchased through the Foundation for Hospital Art.

The body of the suffering bird at the center of “On Ghosts and the Overplus” recalls the composition of medieval reimaginings of the crucifixion, or *Arma Christi* (weapons of Christ) paintings. Surrounding the cross in such scenes are the instruments of the Passion, which functioned as mnemonic devices for the lay medieval viewer: the reed, the crown of thorns, the purple cloak, the dice, the blindfold, the spitting mouth, torches, ropes, scourges, whips, the skull and cross-bones, the Veil of Veronica, the cock that crew, and, in some cases, the plucked-out tufts of Christ’s hair.

This is the scene in which Christ was made clown. Heads, hands, and rods float in the open space of the background of such paintings. Sometimes, the *Arma Christi* painting includes the figure of the worshipper at the bottom of the frame. Medieval devotional practices awarded the simple acts of looking and praying, of choosing the right object to revere.

In Madan’s paintings, the animal has become a thinking human—a poet, a movie star, a philosopher. Dog after dog in these pieces looks in the wrong direction—he plays with the clown suit rather than mourning the suicide of the comedian, leans against the tombstone in a state of repose, or follows the movements of the snail while the pheasant behind him bleeds from the beak.

Madan’s ruminating dog may seem unfeeling, or he may remind the viewer of the capacity of narrative—whether visual or textual—to transform death into future possibility.

- Stacie Vos

TWO DOG TALES

Stacie Vos

Outside of a Cafe in Northern San Diego County

“What a cute pair,” she said as she walked past the woman and her two dogs, a small black Pomeranian and a much larger white Bulldog, to which the dog owner replied,

Thank you— cute outfit.

The cafe customer whirled around to say thanks to the dog owner, and “It’s been too long..”

She wanted to say it had been too long since she had received a compliment, but she started to say instead that it had been too long since she had left the house for coffee.

The dog owner cut her off to say,

Oh, I know, I’ve been just wearing whatever from my closet.

I’m like, I’m going to Target.

My Baby

The woman, who often heard throughout the day the neighbor’s calls to his dog—

My baby!

or less frequently,

My beautiful husky!

or

My beautiful girl!

—wondered if she had lost control of her sense when, in another region of the neighborhood, she heard the distinct voice of her neighbor, issuing that familiar call:

My baby!

She looked up to find him, bounding down the grass in his Guinness sweatshirt, having reassured the dog, who had just visited the neighbor’s sister’s dog, that they would be home soon.