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Meditation on Absence

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Through the word—which is already a presence made of absence—absence itself comes to be named

—Jacques Lacan

Our lives are lived toward what

we cannot name—

There are no words for things

not having words.

There are no days in which there is no yesterday.

One day, though,

there will be no tomorrow.

Name *that*.

Today might be an open door

or a closed window.

Who knows what we see when we are not looking.

What if this side is really the other?

What if all you've forgotten is really what you are?

What if everything you have lost

is really some sort of accrual?

Our disease is more than mere affliction,

more than not knowing addition from subtraction.

It has something to do with what lies beneath excess,

or what hides behind it.

This is why time is torn

between history and the past.

And why we may wonder who we will become

and not understand who we are,

the way boy in a boat on his back can never know

the depths of the blue above

or below,

cannot fathom the farthest darkness,

and yet his floating is its own form of belief,

the way sight is its own form of blindness,

writing its own kind of erasure—

as though language, like life,

exists only to end—

glacier *forest* *self—*

O earth—

when have we not shared

the same body?

This poem was originally published in *Tupelo Quarterly*.

Dean Rader has written, edited, or co-edited eleven books, including *Works & Days*, winner of the 2010 T. S. Eliot Prize, *Bullets into Bells: Poets and Citizens Respond to Gun Violence*, edited with Brian Clements & Alexandra Teague, and *Self-Portrait as Wikipedia Entry*, a finalist for the Oklahoma Book Award and the Northern California Book Award. Recent work has appeared in *The New York Times Magazine*, *Harvard Review*, *New England Review*, *Waxwing*, *Kenyon Review*, *Terrain*, *Southern Review*, *BOMB*, *Ploughshares*, *Zyzzyyva*, *The San Francisco Chronicle*, and *Best of the Net*. He is a professor at the University of San Francisco and the recipient of a 2019 Guggenheim Fellowship in Poetry.