

**THE
DEATH
METAL
PASTORALS**
POEMS

RYAN PATRICK SMITH



Black
Lawrence
Press



Black
Lawrence
Press

www.blacklawrence.com

Executive Editor: Diane Goettel

Chapbook Editor: Kit Frick

Book and Cover Design: Amy Freels

Cover Art: "busts" (2013, graphite & gouache) by Connie Mae Oliver.

Used with permission.

Copyright © Ryan Patrick Smith 2019

ISBN: 978-1-62557-807-5

All rights reserved. Except for brief quotations in critical articles or reviews, no part of this book may be reproduced in any manner without prior written permission from the publisher: editors@blacklawrencepress.com

Published 2019 by Black Lawrence Press.

Printed in the United States.

Augury

Reader in your dark red car. The starlings hear the dwindle.
They hear the nozzles of a service station's blue pumps rasp,

the grease trucks filling up behind a neighboring diner, see
every sign raised high on its pole. Read them this way.

They sing to one another in the tree that overhangs the
world's flat roofs, adjust

their feathers like a bevy of hatchets.

Read them this way. The starlings smell famine nearby &
trouble coming the way someone tracking through woods smells rot
in the dark

& know there is a time to eat and time for exile, that nothing
works here but blood & radio. Murmuration. They unfurl against a
low sky into an open script. & know it is time for you, the sky in dusk
& sign-starred,

wondrous. Get out, lock your doors. Get scissors & net, climb
a ladder & haul starlings from the wind. Split their caustic chests.
Track where the steam drifts in the light.

Deathmetalpastoral

the swain who is lost

First words spoken in the woods, among birches, among
downed trees the bark dulled silver of an unlooped necklace / first
words *we* first *hem* or *secrecy*, or what brambles might proffer or the
chicken wire fencing sectioning our wood from the other /

forest & thorn, the tale played out with crows the distant
words on the vellum of understory /

the way of glass, the way of weeds. You can pick the pathway.
You can take the pins & pinch their heads, tell me how small a longing
is & how it fits /

in your forefinger and thumb. I will go with you / still. & if
the trees' limbs above us crosshatch into a nightness, then the leaves
are fog around the stars. Or are smoke. Or what describing would
never tell us: that the far-off utterances are trucks, maybe crashing,
maybe horses /

voice on voice like two shattering bottles. What collision is,
our shins against the tall red growths of this wood where suns want
invitation, want clearing, these horses we will never let in.



Ryan Patrick Smith is a poet whose work has previously appeared in the *Kenyon Review*, *Boston Review*, *DIAGRAM*, and elsewhere. He is an associate editor for *Boulevard Magazine* and teaches in the MFA in Writing program of Lindenwood University. A Kentucky native, he has lived in Lexington, Kentucky and St. Louis, Missouri; right now, he resides with his spouse in Connecticut. *The Death Metal Pastorals* is his debut chapbook.