


POEMS

# ARS POETICA WITH BACON

By Terrance Hayes

July 4, 2016

 Save this story



**Audio:** Read by the author.

Fortunately, the family, anxious about its diminishing food supply, encountered a small, possibly hostile pig along the way. The daughter happened upon it first pushing its scuffed snout against something hidden at the base of a thornbush: a blood-covered egg, maybe, or small rubber ball exactly like the sort that snapped from the paddle my mother used to beat me with when I let her down. At the time the father and mother were tangled in some immemorial dispute about cause and effect: who'd harmed whom first, how jealousy did not, in fact, begin as jealousy but as desperation. When the daughter called out to them, they turned to see her lift the pig, it was no heavier than an orphan, from the bushes and then set it down in their path.

They waited to see whether the pig might idle forward with them until they made camp or wander back toward the home they'd abandoned to war. Night, enclosed in small drops of rain, began to fall upon them.

“Consequence” is the word that splintered my mind.

Walking a path in the dark is about something the way a family is about something. Like the pig, I too, wanted to reach through the thorns for the egg or ball, believing it was a symbol of things to come.

I wanted to roll it in my palm like the head of a small redbird until it sang to me. I wanted to know how my mother passed her days having never touched her husband's asshole, for example.

Which parts of your body have never been touched, I wanted to ask. I'd been hired to lead the family from danger to a territory full of more seeds than bullets, but, truth was, in the darkness there was no telling what was rooting in the soil. Plots of complete silence, romantics posing in a field bludgeoned by shame.

The heart, biologically speaking, is ugly as it pumps its passion and fear down the veins. Which is to say, starting out we have no wounds to speak of beyond the ways our parents expressed their love.

We were never sure what the pig was after or whether it was, in fact, not a pig but some single-minded soul despair turned into a pig, some devil worthy of mercy. Without giving away the enigmatic ending, I will say, when we swallowed the flesh, our eyes were closed.

*Published in the print edition of the July 11 & 18, 2016, issue.*

---

*Terrance Hayes, a former MacArthur Fellow, is the author of "American Sonnets for My Past and Future Assassin" and "To Float in the Space Between."*

## WEEKLY

Enjoy our flagship newsletter as a digest delivered once a week.

E-mail address

By signing up, you agree to our [User Agreement](#) and [Privacy Policy & Cookie Statement](#). This site is protected by reCAPTCHA and the Google [Privacy Policy](#) and [Terms of Service](#) apply.

---

## READ MORE

### LETTER FROM AMSTERDAM

#### How a Notorious Gangster Was Exposed by His Own Sister

Astrid Holleeder secretly recorded her brother's murderous confessions. Will he exact revenge?

By **Patrick Radden Keefe**

### ANNALS OF LAW

#### When Foster Parents Don't Want to Give Back the Baby

In many states, adoption lawyers are pushing a new legal strategy that forces biological parents to compete for custody of their children.

By **Eli Hager**

### A REPORTER AT LARGE

# Trial by Twitter

By Ariel Levy

AMERICAN CHRONICLES

## Britney Spears's Conservatorship Nightmare

How the pop star's father and a team of lawyers seized control of her life—and have held on to it for thirteen years.

By Ronan Farrow

 [Cookies Settings](#)