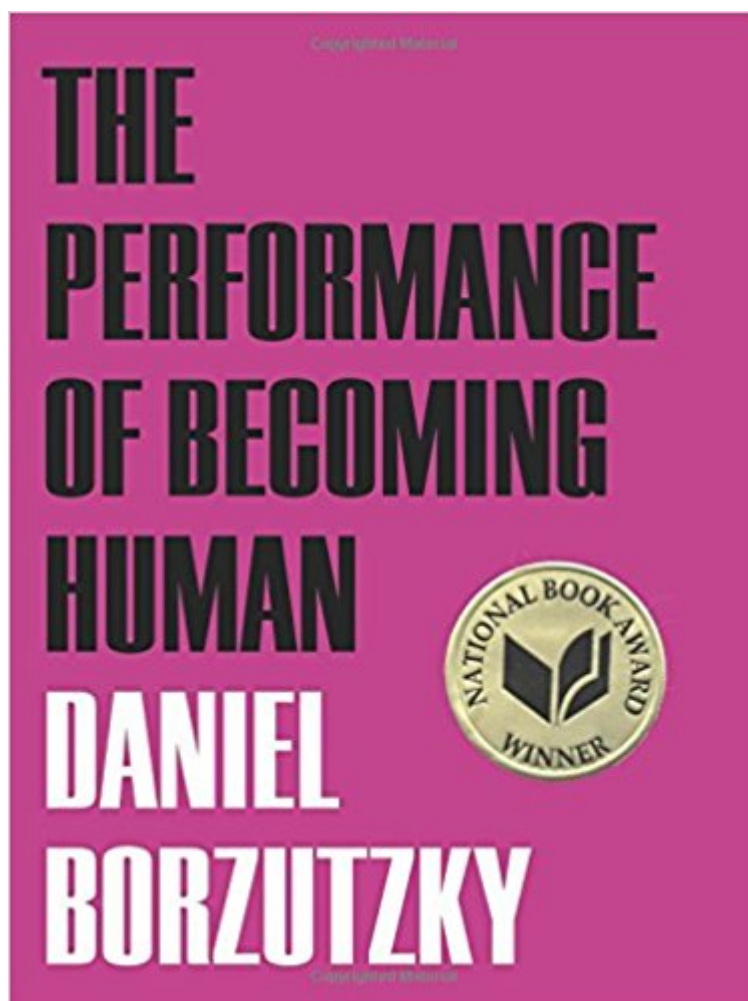




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# The Performance Of Becoming Human



## Synopsis

Poetry. Latino/Latina Studies. 2016 National Book Award Winner. Following in the path of his acclaimed collections *THE BOOK OF INTERFERING BODIES* (Nightboat, 2011) and *IN THE MURMURS OF THE ROTTEN CARCASS ECONOMY* (Nightboat, 2015), Daniel Borzutzky returns to confront the various ways nation-states and their bureaucracies absorb and destroy communities and economies. In *THE PERFORMANCE OF BECOMING HUMAN*, the bay of Valparaíso merges into the western shore of Lake Michigan, where Borzutzky continues his poetic investigation into the political and economic violence shared by Chicago and Chile, two places integral to his personal formation. To become human is to navigate borders, including the fuzzy borders of institutions, the economies of privatization, overdevelopment, and underdevelopment, under which humans endure state-sanctioned and systemic abuses in cities, villages, deserts. Borzutzky, whose writing Eileen Myles has described as "violent, perverse, and tender" in its portrayal of a "kaleidoscopic journey of American horror and global horror," adds another chapter to a growing and important compendium of work that asks what it means to be both a unitedstatesian and a globalized subject whose body is "shared between the earth, the state, and the bank." "Like any good satirist, Borzutzky considers his subjectivity with the same lens he applies to the systems he critiques, and *THE PERFORMANCE OF BECOMING HUMAN* is an apogee of that inquiry. Since *THE BOOK OF INTERFERING BODIES*, Daniel Borzutzky has been the fabulist we most need because he's unafraid to detail the truth of our oligarchy, without pedantry. In his figurative world our bodies are forced through privatized meat grinders, but funnily in the way that all dark horror stories trigger our gallows humor. I'm thrilled every time Borzutzky brings a book in the world, learn the most about reality from him." —Carmen Giménez Smith "In this canticle for the age of listicles, Daniel Borzutzky performs a new political poetry in the crucible of 'overdevelopment,' when 'The city has disappeared into the privatized cellar of humanity.' Here, the socially engaged bro-poet is mercifully broken, relieved of his epic monumentality, and with it of a range of foundational fictions (nation/family/language/subject), leaving behind these gut-cantos (songs/fragments), detestimonios of a spectral self, at once buzz-fed and cankerously/cantankerously embodied. (You can't spell 'Neruda' without 'nerd' and Canto General never rocked 'The Gross and Borderless Body'.) The ugly majesty of these prose blocks echoes the windswept expanses of neoliberal Chile and Chicago, their dead and their debt, their surrender and struggle. To read 'this book that is a country deposited not in your heart but in your mouth' is to confront becoming human as speech act, as language game, and to know the freedom and the terror of doing so. The painbeauty of Borzutzky's virtuoso, multi-register flow (abject punchlines included) is also a counter-flow to the death drive of

capital, sentences for a radical sentence." [UrayoÃn Noel](#)

## Book Information

Paperback: 98 pages

Publisher: Brooklyn Arts Press (April 1, 2016)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1936767465

ISBN-13: 978-1936767465

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.3 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 4.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.4 out of 5 stars 12 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #81,486 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #4 in [Books > Literature & Fiction > Poetry > Regional & Cultural > United States > Hispanic American](#) #35 in [Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > International & World Politics > Caribbean & Latin American](#) #1360 in [Books > Textbooks > Social Sciences > Political Science](#)

## Customer Reviews

"Borzutzky is aware that 'creative consultants waiting to turn this misery into poetry' are always waiting in the wings. This is in keeping with the broader Orwellian inversions and distracting gimcracks of the late capitalist police state he describes, where we sext and Skype and surf the experiences of others far away as authorities instruct us when to laugh and when to applaud. The dystopia here results from the very juxtaposition that is the hope of those migrants dying of thirst in the desert: a world of lack versus a world of absurdly overflowing plenty; a world numb-drunk on accumulated resources versus a world heightened in awareness by its own starvation. But that already romanticizes and reduced; Borzutzky is too clever, in any case, to speak for those who lack." [decomp](#)

"Borzutzky's poetry is part Orwellian nightmare and part politicized call to arms regarding the very real state of the world. The bodies in his collection are bordered. They are have been conquered and militarized. They have been dumped into gulags to fester...Borzutzky manages to instill a hope in his readers that although we remain trapped in our putrid and failing bodies, we, too, will succeed in our spiritual mission to persevere." [American Microreviews & Interviews](#)

"Daniel Borzutzky makes writing about bureaucratic nation-states interesting. We, as the reader, observe communities utterly destroyed, and we are left to question why and how and why and how humans let this happen. In particular, the bay of Valparaiso merges into the western shore of Lake Michigan, which exemplifies the horrors that happen on American soil and

international soil alike—and how they are connected—and drawing the lines between the personal and political poignantly. This is a collection not to miss. Luna Luna "The book, with its unflinching look at our corporatized lives and its condemning critique of the poet's role in it, makes a serious charge. We can choose for ourselves how to answer—but we each must answer." Center for Literary Publishing "What I loved best was the volume's secret insistence that we should not think of it as a typical book of discrete poems, presented in that all-too-familiar scroll show of a poet's various secretions, pressed down onto a series of microscope slides. No, there is something more, some controlling arc or vision." The Brooklyn Rail

Daniel Borzutzky's books and chapbooks include, among others, IN THE MURMURS OF THE ROTTEN CARCASS ECONOMY (Nightboat Books, 2015), Bedtime Stories for the End of the World! (Bloof Books, 2015), Data Bodies (2013), THE BOOK OF INTERFERING BODIES (Nightboat Books, 2011), and THE ECSTASY OF CAPITULATION (BlazeVOX [books], 2006). He has translated Raúl Zurita's THE COUNTRY OF PLANKS (Action Books, 2015) and SONG FOR HIS DISAPPEARED LOVE (Action Books, 2010), and Jaime Luis Huenafán's PORT TRAKL (Action Books, 2008). His work has been supported by the Illinois Arts Council, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Pen/Heim Translation Fund. He lives in Chicago.

Daniel Borzutzky's poetry here is breathless, dystopian, and largely stream of consciousness. Borzutzky's Chilean-Jewish background informs some of the poems which make narrative illusions and historical illusions rich in that history. His third volume of poetry, this particular choice for the National Book Award is interesting in that it deeply political, but almost feels like its from another time and aesthetic period than now. Borzutzky's long lines remind one of Whitman, but his blurring and convoluting of events, his dystopian settings, and his dark social commentary run contrary to that particular impulse. The title, an illusion to Kafka's "A Report to an Academy," informs us of the strange and familiar as well as the absurd and poignant or the gruesome and touching all cut through the work. It's intense, allusive, and deserves several readings, but that very intensity and primal scream element actually makes several readings somewhat hard. Not for the easily exhausted in either content or form, this is a book of poetry like Pasolini's Salò is a film: returning to it makes it richer, but its intensity makes that return daunting. One major criticism is that the intensity of the style and use of long lines makes poems blur together immediately after reading--this seems like an intended affect, but does make it hard to write about. Some changes in style or form could have made the collection a little less daunting. This poems are hard because life can hard,

precarious, biting; and while not without humor, Borzutzky's humor is so dark that it isn't necessarily a relief. I am torn on this volume, but I will reading Borzutzky in the future.

“The Performance of Becoming Human” by Daniel Borzutzky won the 2016 National Book Award for poetry. Last year was a highly politicized year, and it's no surprise that this award went to a collection that's also highly politicized. Borzutzky covers it all. Refugees and immigrants. The environment. Third World sweatshops. (Do you know the people who made your t-shirt? Do you have a relationship with them? Borzutzky asks). Torture. Illegal aliens. Unsafe working conditions. Wastewater treatment plants. Malnourished children. Police issues. The production of garbage. Violence. The style is simple and plain, leading to a more devastating critique, a more devastating impact. As you read this generally long poems (the collection contains a total of 18 poems), you discover you have entered a dystopic world, or perhaps you've been living there all along, and these poems are forcing you to confront that reality. Here is one of the shorter poems in the collection, and at first it seems almost a break in the political narrative.

Dream Song #17

They took my body to the forest  
They asked me to climb a ladder  
I did not want to climb a ladder  
But they forced me to climb the ladder  
If you don't climb the ladder  
we will bury you in the mud  
I had to decide  
should I die by hanging or by burial  
I climbed the ladder and they wrapped  
a belt around the thick limb  
of a tree  
And when I could no longer breathe  
they tossed me into a stream  
And I floated to the edge of  
the village where someone prayed for my soul  
It's like this in a lullaby  
for the end of the world:  
The options for the end are endless  
But this is not really a lullaby  
for the end of the world  
It's about the beginning  
what happens when we start to rot  
in the daylight  
The way the light shines on  
the ants and worms and parasites  
loving our bodies  
about the swarms of dogs  
gnawing our skin and bones  
Do you know what it's like  
when a ghost licks your intestines  
To avoid the hole  
the children must sing sweetly, softly  
To avoid the hole  
they must fill their songs with love

When you consider the poem in its context in the collection, it assumes another kind of meaning. It follows a poem about Third World sweatshops, and it precedes a poem about torture and violence. And you realize that it is describing what happens to dissenters and especially in dictatorships (the poems include references to both Argentina's Dirty War against the left wing from 1974 to 1983 and what happened in Chile with the fall of the Salvador Allende regime in 1973 (Borzutzky's parents are from Chile). Borzutzky has published a collection of stories, “Arbitrary Tales” (2005); three collections of poetry, including “The Ecstasy of

Capitulation (2007), The Book of Interfering Bodies (2011), and The Performance of Becoming Human; and four poetry chapbooks: Failure in the Imagination (2007); In the Murmurs of the Rotten Carcass Economy (2015); Data Bodies (2013); and Bedtime Stories for the End of the World (2015). He has translated several works by Chilean authors, including poet Jaime Luis Huenon and the fiction writer Juan Mas. He is a professor at Wright College in Chicago. The Performance of Being Human asks questions without question marks, questions about politics, about social issues, and about our humanity, what it means and what it can become, or has become.

I know Daniel Borzutzky-this book is amazing and it seems to come from someplace deep within him

I love it.....

5 start

It is quite difficult to assign this book with an overarching theme or multiple themes. If I am being honest in my assessment, this book seems to be your average postmodern work that is compiled of a nice blend of communist propaganda, deconstructionist word salads, and moralizing soapbox identity politics. The author seems have a deep resentment for the condition of being and a forthright disgust for human life. I think we should consider our society fortunate that the poet does not have a very large audience, because I believe, this type of person being placed in the right position of power could prove genocidal. Also, after seeing in the back pages that this book was funded by the National Endowment for the Arts, I have reconsidered my position in supporting the program, Communism is responsible for more deaths than Nazism, its not cool or the hip thing to like. Don't support this poet. It is not good for your health. A cancer on poetry, Sincerely, Cyrus Lee Garner (A young poet trying to resurrect poetry from the depths of Marxist Hell)

Hate this book but will force myself to finish it. I find the poems so far to be difficult and too angry

A wonderful thought provoking collection of poems that rage against the world as it is today. Every person that reads this book may come to a totally different interpretation but that is the joy of it. To me the book is an indictment of conformity in which people are like slabs of meat. The government is also shot on with Borzutzky's guns blazing brightly. Another theme is displaced people forced to struggle with situations outside their control. A well deserved award winning collection.

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