

Telling the Bees: An Interspecies Monologue

Dominic Pettman

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Made up of journal entries written between 2019 and 2023, *Telling the Bees* is Dominic Pettman's insightful, ironic, and brooding meditation on COVID-19, political unrest, technology, and urban isolation.

Writing from his New York City apartment during the COVID-19 shutdowns, the book considers how the pandemic changed the city and exacerbated the empty "pseudo-communication" associated with social media. Citing a long tradition in folklore as well as works by Maurice Maeterlinck, Pettman addresses his journal entries to the bees, which he describes as curious, intelligent, industrious, and highly social creatures sometimes viewed as "winged messengers of the gods." His book includes several clever passages about bees' behaviors and social structures: for instance, Pettman contrasts the wintertime "hum-huddling" of bees in their hive with the anxious buzzing of humans in their "lonely home-combs" with a "million separating walls."

Describing his "deepening sense of trepidation" and his craving for "new horizons," Pettman finds comfort in these reflections on and odes to bees. He writes about meandering walks through the woods of the Ramble in Central Park, visits from a raven and a starling, and his practice of *qigong*, too. Believing that humans lost touch with the "essential texture of life" and true companionship, he describes global disorientation due to politics as well, covering the "reign" of Donald Trump (called the "Idiot King"), the January 6th insurrection on the Capitol, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and regressive Supreme Court rulings in addition to floods, shootings, and current events. He also reflects on his work as a college professor in New York and Amsterdam and his neighbors in various city apartments.

The memoir of a disillusioned academic who felt isolated during COVID-19 shutdowns, *Telling the Bees* is a searching, insightful, and witty text that offers catharsis aplenty.

KRISTEN RABE (January / February 2025)

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