

The Branches, the Axe, the Missing
Charlotte Pence
Black Lawrence Press, \$9.00

Review by Rene Schwiesow

"However the story began, we know/ its middles, know/how taming fire kicked us/out of arrested development." Pence spends time in "The Branches, the Axe, the Missing" delving into humanity's origins and, in doing so, her images may have the ability to kick each reader from their own arrested development, coaxing the reader to ponder historic and personal evolution even as so many attempt to forget personal histories, negate the fact that those histories bring us to the here and now.



In addition to "The Branches, the Axe, the Missing," Pence is the author of two award-winning chapbooks and the editor of "The Poetics of American Song Lyrics," an anthology that considers song lyrics as appropriate for study in a literature classroom. She has received numerous awards including the Discovered Voices award and a fellowship from the Tennessee Arts Commission.

Pence has been widely published and with lines such as "Sit, sit down with me. The darkness quiets if we watch it together," that is no surprise.

*Maybe the first word
we finally said sitting around that fire,
everyone chewing on red
colobus monkey, no one speaking was
Awkward.*

Words, we have found, are helpful to communication and, certainly there are times when silence can be awkward. Still the line, "The darkness quiets if we watch it together," shows a touching beauty in sharing something in silence.

"The Branches, the Axe, the Missing," speaks not only to origins but to change and/or a sense of loss in relationship, in life.

*It is thirty-four degrees.
Drizzling.
She wants to be warm, eat that leftover lasagna, drink one glass of
boxed red wine.
The engine idles.
She has returned from her last act as a married woman:
mailing the new-ex his car title. He wanted a copy faxed and
the original over-nighted.*

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Endings that we cannot forget if we tried.

*. . . jab-jab-jabbing
that dark until the sounds flee back to the
quiet: sizzle-spits. Shifts of logs carboned
and bone-thin. Ashed by morning.*

Pence places nuggets of personal crisis and transformation quietly in between life's origins, its flame, its hunger, its desire to become. This is not a book to be taken on surface content, be ready to fan the embers of your own consciousness and contemplation.

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