

KEVIN RIEL

Against the Campaign to Stomp Out "Awesome"

Awesome, its two-beat life span trochees in and out
of my mouth, a defiance riding the silence
that enjoys us, like I did that chile relleno burrito, or last

week's pinkest sunset, dad's new surfboard, or the news
the darkness on my forehead is benign. Yep, *awesome*
"is elegy to what it signifies," meditates Robert Hass,

as the pleased voice is pleasure's psychopomp;
the just-dead world made word, made, as poem, almost
successfully alive. Yet on public radio some poet

calls me, mom and dad, probably you, *ridiculous idiots*
for saying *awesome/awesome*. *Awesome*
is more gesture than word, is a pumping fist,

nodding head, thumbs up; never *le mot juste*,
none exists. There's nothing precise about *awe*,
its magnitudes are unknown quantities of *some*,

a suffix that suits *The Big Lebowski* to Half Dome
better than those of *wonderful*, *beautiful*, *purposeful*. Yet
it's dreadful, just dreadful, says the Oxbridge pedant,

dreadful, my dear, these youngsters with their fretfully
impoverished vocabularies. Qualifiers are drowsy reflexes:
The astute server says, *the Napa pinot is terrific/*

terrific choice, the sole with farro and peas/have a terrific
evening. Where's the terror? Where's the terrific
fuck I'm supposed to give? Hackneying is not . . . no,

not just thoughtlessness; it's sharing a lingo,
an understanding, a social identity, yes, lost
the more it's shared, just like the thoughtful play

of synonyms can be a bully's game. *Awesome*
means you no harm, just rolled out of bed, and
hasn't done yoga in like a week. But *awesome*

is the monument we'll raise to your *splendorous*,
venerable, your *preeminent* diction of novelty. *Awesome*
will be the natives' education; bedeck our adjectives

in morion, codpiece, and crucifix 'cause who needs readers
when subjects can be got cheaply? Who needs art
when vestments are the rage? Forgive me, *dreadful*

is my overreaction. This hyperbole keeps rupturing its crypt;
it can't stand beadledom, not least of which my own.
Hordes of undead hyperbole to come, the most ingenerate

mode of speech because we all make like *awesome!*
and die. What's there to repel the *dreadful*, *dreadful*
darkening but our persistent *awesome/awesome/awesome?*