

PROSPECTUS

Morte de Smudgie

an original story by

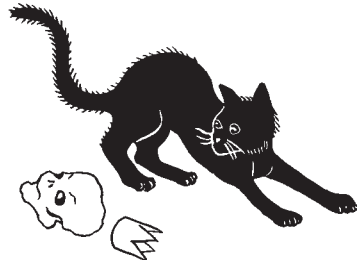
Margaret Atwood

with artwork by

Audrey Niffenegger

published by The Arion Press

The blade of misdirection is never so sharp as when it cuts from loss. Think of all the kingdoms and households which have been torn asunder as the signs pointed one way— and fingers pointed another. The past season of 21st-century Earth has been a real sparkler.



Into a once-in-a-hundred-year-plague, those of us who publish have been intrigued with the original and the haunted.

In this spirit, we are delighted to present an original short story, “Morte de Smudgie,” by Margaret Atwood, paired with the 19th-century epic poem by Lord Alfred Tennyson that gives Smudgie his arc: “Morte d’Arthur.”

Atwood wrote us at the beginning of the project, “In a former life I was a Victorianist, and know Tennyson beginning to end.” She gallantly agreed to write an introduction to “Morte d’Arthur,” so that those new to the work may see what all the fuss is about.

“If there was one thing the Victorians knew intimately it was death. Diseases were rife, ideas about nutrition were odd, opium was given to babies, and mortality— with the attendant periods of prescribed

mourning— was a general obsession. If someone died, you changed your wardrobe to black, you cancelled your social appearances, you gave up laughter. Also, you wept: Victorians wept a lot. Those around you were expected to accept the state of your emotions. Curtains were drawn, noise was curtailed, tiptoeing set in.

“Almost two hundred years later, people are finding they have something to learn from their long-vanished ancestors. Grief has become permissible again.”

Into this séance, we thought to call artist Audrey Niffenegger, a great friend to Arion Press, whose own work was influenced by Aubrey Beardsley. Beardsley’s first major commission of his own art career was Thomas Malory’s “Le Morte d’Arthur.” We had long wanted to work with Audrey, and “Smudgie” seemed irresistible.

She responded in kind, and we knew the game was afoot. She wrote us, upon first reading: “The story gives the feeling of a quiet, disobedient grief that won’t take a telling (much like a cat).”

When Atwood, in turn, saw Audrey’s first sketches, her reaction was like ours: *Astonishing*.

For Niffenegger to take such a legacy, turn it feline, and deliver an image of a dewclaw catching the hilt of the brand—it’s completely unique. We know few others who could take her considered approach to bridging contemporary and 19th-century literature.

Toward the end of our process, I wrote to Atwood that her story of layered mourning made my eyes well up with tears and longing. Was it wrong to alternate with peals of laughter?

She anticipated my reaction. Would I like some anti-Victorian snark examples for remedial dosing?

Yes, please.

She reminded me it was English critic Samuel Butler who said, “’Tis better to have loved and lost, than never to have lost at all ...”

And we certainly have done both.

—Susie Bright, *Editor-at-Large*

THE EDITIONS

The books are printed by letterpress on vintage Utopian cream wove from Deepdene types cast onsite in the M&H foundry, 7³/₈ x 5³/₈ inches, 72 pages, and offered in both Limited and Variant bindings. In addition to three spot illustrations, all copies feature a four-panel, two-color landscape fold-out printed by relief on silver gray Hahnemühle Ingres that depicts the author in a moment of reverie while re-imagining the poignant final stanzas of Tennyson’s poem, effectively bridging the two texts through time and image.

Intricately patterned front and rear endsheet wallpapers have been especially designed—a modern spin on a Victorian tradition.

The Limited edition is Smythe-sewn, bound in full maroon cloth with titling imprinted on gray velour labels recessed in both front and back covers, and presented in a custom chocolate brown cardstock envelope with a decorative label.

The Variant binding is handsewn in a modified dos-à-dos structure constructed of two halves: “Morte de Smudgie” on one side and, on the other, “Morte d’Arthur” together with the author’s meditation on Tennyson’s poem and Victorian grieving. In between the two halves—at the back side of the book—the paneled landscape pops out from its secured niche, permitting the book to be displayed standing open with the two texts visible from the front and the artwork that bridges them extended from the back.

Another drawing, incorporating Tennyson’s line “Such a sleep / They Sleep,” is imprinted across the four panels of the interior-most endsheets in the Variant edition only. Copies are bound in rust-colored silken cloth and presented in a two-part box of maroon cloth and with a raised base, lined in velvety black.

The total edition is limited to 250 copies for sale with 26 lettered *hors commerce*: 190 Limited edition copies, 45 Variant copies, and 15 Deluxe copies.

THE AQUATINTS

In addition, the artist has created two separate box aquatints printed on Sakamoto kozo in cadmium red with black. The first, “Now Farewell,” is paired with copies of the Variant binding in the Deluxe edition; the second, “Shelter,” is offered individually. The prints measure 15 x 12⁷/₈ inches (image size: 9 x 7 inches) and are printed and signed by the artist in

editions of 15 each, plus 3 printer's proofs, 3 artist's proofs, and 1 trial proof. To view images of the prints, please visit our website.

PRICING

- Limited: \$595 *with Subscription* (\$850 retail)
Variant: \$1,200 *with Subscription* (\$1,500 retail)
Deluxe (with "Now Farewell" aquatint):
\$2,000 *with Subscription* (\$2,500 retail)
"Shelter" aquatint (sold individually):
\$800 *with Subscription* (\$1,000 retail)

THE ARION PRESS

1802 Hays Street, The Presidio
San Francisco, California 94129

Telephone: 415-668-2542

Email: sales@arionpress.com

Website: www.arionpress.com/store