

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Barrett Warner: Three Poems

Barrett Warner · Wednesday, January 21st, 2015

Barrett Warner has had stories and poems appear recently in *Yemassee*, *Gargoyle*, *Southeast Review*, *JMWW*, *Four Chambers*, and other places. He's an associate editor at *Free State Review*, an occasional lecturer, and an avid book reviewer. Not one for too much travel, in fifty plus years he has only migrated twelve miles from his birthplace. Since 1994 he has managed his family's *An Otherwise Perfect Farm*, where he is kicked for a living by mares and foals and racers.

Three Weeks after Easter, My Vomit Turns Blue

I hide it behind the box bush,
last night's baked croaker varnished
with lemon and sheaves of nostalgia.

Here, my family won't find my gurge
under musk-scented leaves, or my grandmother's
recipe for fried blowfish paprika,

or the way my father stood in the surf
casting, waiting, quietly dreaming ways
to kill his father. And maybe the rest of us.

How did she know which puffer
had poison and which did not?
Her secret: she didn't know.

To a blind devotion to God,
and Bridge gossip about who had strayed,
she added a weakness for gambling.

Weird. The bones in a fish are all ribs.
In retrospect, I should have spent more time
with my dad gutting skates with pliers.

I should have asked my grandmother
for the recipe before she got so old,

or if Cyanide would win the Derby.

We used to call it feeding the dogs
when I first became sick
and went outside, our Labs trumbling

behind me to reclaim my appetites.
The more I swallow, the easier to retrieve.
amid the dying snowdrops, the low-lying

blooms that can only mean resurrection
and in two months, strawberries,
fruit so fresh it may spoil in an hour.

The Kissing Class

She smells of chalk and dahlias,
tapping theories onto the gray slate.
Close your eyes, the teacher says,
feathering her fingers down my face.
Feel the trickle of my breath.

I close my mouth, ashamed
Of what's hidden inside me.
Each day I fail the kissing class,
One more demerit
Adding to the yellow bouquet.

Gunpowder Falls

I like the un-compassed Blue Trail,
how it jags before plummeting
straight to the water crossing.
Blue stripes are painted on dark
cherry bark every fifty yards or so,
as if it were possible to lose one's way
in spite of the trampled path of sadness.

I've been sick since July and feeling dirty
from the ache, the loss of blood,
but here and there, singing do-gooders
have erected a step or lopped offending limbs.
I pause at Mingo Forks to wipe my face
on my colorful sweater. It's true,
I've been crying at least a mile.

The drop is three furlongs from the steep
glaring geometry to the river's winding chatter.
Answers splash up the bluff, lost
in the beautiful Autumn drab. Sure,
I think about drowning, doesn't everyone?
And then I go back to my unlocked car
where nothing has ever been stolen.

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