

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

George Franklin: Three Poems

George Franklin · Monday, June 12th, 2023

The Body Becomes More Beautiful as It Ages

Don't point out scars, wrinkles, or veins
Rising from the back of your hands. Even if
That were true, it's unimportant. As it ages,
The body ripens, becomes sweeter, calm—
Fingers touch differently, slowly, learning
Whatever can be learned from an arm
Or cheek, to know what *feeling* means,
That shiver arching your spine when my hand
Moves between your shoulder blades, down
Toward your waist. Our eyes are not guarded,
As they might have been when we were younger
And didn't understand what the world expected,
What we could give. Yesterday, we walked
Through a room of Rembrandt portraits and
Self-portraits, of faces that didn't flatter or resist
Age, but stared grimly back at us, visitors
Crowding the gallery looking for something
Beyond a lesson in art history. We wanted to meet
His eyes—so dark we could barely make them out—
To see what he had seen, and maybe we did.
We didn't discuss it. After dinner, we read,
As we often do, then turned off the lights
And held each other even more intensely
Than when we first met. Rembrandt painted
Himself just as time painted him, but the body
Isn't only decay and fever, the anxiety of creditors,
Poverty, and lawsuits from discarded lovers.
As it ages, the body ripens and becomes
More beautiful. As it ages, there is sweetness, calm.

*

Adam Zagajewski Enters Into Heaven

If there is a blast of trumpets, it's pitched higher
 Than a dog-whistle, too lofty for human ears,
 And the angelic chorus hums suspiciously like
 Crickets in a Polish field in summer, a low
 Buzz that stops at the sound of footsteps
 In the dry grass.

Enter then the poet, improbably
 Descending from a railroad carriage, pre-war
 Vintage with wool seat covers and woodwork
 The color of honey. He opens the door
 Of the carriage and, as stated, descends
 To the platform constructed from prayers
 That didn't require an answer. In heaven,
 Everything has its purpose. Of course, there are
 Other travelers already moving toward
 The great doors of the station, where outside,
 Their relatives, lovers, friends who died young
 Wait impatiently to welcome them. Some are pranksters
 And hand the new arrivals an unexpected gift,
 A toilet plunger or a pepper mill. They enjoy
 The look of confusion on the bright immigrant faces.
 Others hang back, the way Dido did when she
 Saw Aeneas. They remember too much.

But for the poet, there is no welcoming committee,
 No angels with cornets and drums, no banners
 Or tall, black-suited chauffeur holding a sign
 With his name misspelled, no car waiting at the curb.
 He walks carefully and alone across the plazas
 And over the bridges of this new city. He doesn't
 Seek to ascend higher than the canals
 And walkways that stretch parallel lines
 To a painter's infinity. This, he tells himself,
 Is enough. Sunlight rests on the terracotta rooftiles,
 And a waiter in a starched white shirt pulls back
 A chair, inviting him to sit. He can smell coffee,
 And watches croissants float in straw baskets
 Above the café tables. He makes himself comfortable.
 There's no reason to hurry.

*

Rabelais

Two editions of Rabelais reproach
 Me from the bookshelf. This is the last year
 Of my sixties. I haven't read either.
 How much longer will God have patience with

Such a slacker? I've watched movies so bad
I could tell you the ending from the first
Shot, or at least the first bullets exchanged,
But I still have books with uncut pages—
And the languages I should have learned but
Didn't? What have I been doing with this
Time I've been awake? Baudelaire prayed for a
Poem that would justify him, allow
Him to feel he wasn't worse than all those
People he despised. I'm not confident
That any poem could justify me
For long. I've avoided hard work as far
Back as I can remember, and I can
Remember a long way back. Rabelais
May have been a good man, but his portrait
On the frontispiece looks mournfully at
My wandering attention. I've moved so
Many times, boxed his books and others, packed
Them in a moving van or the back seat
Of a car, picked them up without bending
My knees and paid a price for that—which makes
It even worse that they've gone unread. I've
Resisted buying Proust for much the same
Reason. Why make myself feel guiltier
Than I do already? If Baudelaire had
Known me, I'm pretty sure I'd have been one
Of those whom he despised. It's already
Dark outside, and I don't know what I did
Today besides fix lunch. *Mi amor*, I'll
Start brown rice steaming in the instant pot,
Get in the car, and drive downtown to bring
You here for dinner. We'll make each other
Laugh and invite Rabelais to share our
Roast chicken, green beans, a glass of our wine.
Nothing fancy, but I think he'd like it.



Conversaciones sobre agua/Conversations About Water by Ximena Gómez & George Franklin

Purchase *Conversaciones sobre agua/Conversations About Water* by Ximena Gómez & George Franklin

This entry was posted on Monday, June 12th, 2023 at 6:44 pm and is filed under [Poetry](#). You can follow any responses to this entry through the [Comments \(RSS\)](#) feed. You can leave a response, or [trackback](#) from your own site.