

# 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.

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## 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.

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

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