Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Richard Jones: Three Poems

Richard Jones · Wednesday, August 3rd, 2016

Richard Jones is the author of several books of poems and editor of the literary journal *Poetry East*. His newest collection is *King of Hearts* (Adastra Press), a book of poems about his late father, a decorated pilot in World War II.

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George Whitman

The photographer Henri-Cartier Bresson
tried to capture what he called
“the decisive moment,”
photographing landscapes
in which human beings
seemed incidental,
though never placed entirely by accident.
Walking along the Seine,
taking pictures of everything,
I feel lucky
just to embrace the indecisive moments—
paving stones, rooftops, trees in bloom, scooters.
In the stalls of the *bouquinistas*,
I find all I could want:
a copy of *Alcools* by Apollinaire,
a volume of Reverdy,
a collection of French novels bound in red leather.
I ask permission and take a picture,
the books as beautiful
as the bouquet of flowers Renoir painted
a hundred years ago
and that stopped me in my tracks
yesterday in the museum.
The *bouquinista*,
face weathered and craggy,
invites me to take all the pictures I want.
Bresson’s photographs are framed

on the walls of museums,
documenting the poetry of the moment,
but my photographs
are like images from a dream
that no one on earth could make sense of,
maybe not even me.
A teacup and spoon.
A pilgrim's seashell.
The blue Paris sky.
Still, I know the photograph of the red books
will one day hang framed in my study
in honor of the *bouquinista*.
If I were Bresson,
I'd take photographs of all the *bouquinistas,*
portraits of the booksellers
before the booksellers vanish.
A proud, valiant, and doomed noble race.
I stroll across the bridge
to Shakespeare and Company.
A thousand years ago
George Whitman offered me a bed
in the bookstore's upstairs room,
a room I would share with a lovely
young woman from Kyoto.
Whitman believed in kindness,
as I do, and I remember
how the girl and I sat in silence
among the walls of books
while the afternoon light
poured through the windows
like the shafts of arrows.
When the girl smiled,
I almost swooned
as the image of her
burned into the film of my memory.
That was a decisive moment.

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Paris Sonnet

Quai des Celestines, the Seine flowing fast
beneath the Pont Marie—turbulent, wild,
golden-green—a sure sign spring is coming.
Hemingway's flat on the Rue du Cardinal Lemoine:
two small rooms, no hot water, no toilet.
He was happy then, living there and writing.
Bronze nudes in the Tuileries, all by Maillot.
His museum was founded by one of his models.

Which one is she, here in the boxwood maze?
In the evening, rain shines mystically
as it falls through the streetlamps. Streetlamps
light the way, one after the other, home.
Redon wanted his paintings to lift the veils of enigma.
Every time I come to Paris, I live on bread and wine.

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Redoute

At the Musee de Luxembourg
I see a watercolor of a rose
by Redoute,
the celebrated painter of flowers.
I'm at the Josephine exhibit,
discovering the life of Napoleon's wife.
Her famed gardens
and her rare cultivars of roses
could only be immortalized,
I am told
by the voice in my headphones,
by such a one as Redoute,
known in his day
as "the Raphael of flowers."
In the artist's lifetime he published
two botanical books,
famous and coveted to this day,
sumptuous collections of his watercolors.
The voice in the headphones
drifts away
and I'm no longer in Paris,
but a child in the home of my Aunt Ila,
her Carolina house.
I'm in the formal living room—
the off-limits room reserved for wakes
and visits from the pastor—
furnished with the frozen elegance
of French provincial tables,
sofa, lamps, and high-backed chairs
no one was allowed to sit in.
I've slipped into the room
to steal some hard candy
from the glass candy bowl
and find myself staring at
Redoute's flowering jasmine,
a cherry drop melting in my cheek.
In the Luxembourg Museum
I realize that as a boy

in the homes of all my Southern aunts—
Opal, Ruby, Mable, Marie, Blake,
and Martha—
I saw Redoute's flowers
framed and hanging in those Southern rooms
as if in the stillness of museums—
the delicate and meticulous roses,
tulips,
camellias, and pansies.

(Author photo by Sarah Jones)
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