

POETS RESPOND TO PRINTS

January 7, 2016 at 6:00 p.m., Channing Peake Gallery, Santa Barbara, CA

Richard Jarrette

Author: *Beso the Donkey* (MSU Press, 2010), Gold Medal Poetry Midwest Independent Publishers Association (2011) and *A Hundred Million Years of Nectar Dances* (Green Writers Press (2015). New poems in: *The Café Review*, *Rare Feathers*, *Sleet Magazine* and *Snapdragon*. Poetry Columnist: *CASA Magazine*.

Blessed Are the Grass Eaters (from *The Beatitudes of Ekaterina*)

I have always hated Nebuchadnezzar—
burning enemies alive in that goddamn fiery furnace.
The twisted bastard lived in terror of waking up with the mind
of an animal among the grass eaters.

My teachers guided me toward the equanimity of your bovine gaze,
womb of endless worlds, possible harmony—all things indivisible, the living,
the dying, the becoming. I'm a long long way from there, my friend,
though *The Heart of the Prajnaparamita Sutra* proclaims:

I've already arrived—*Here, Shariputra,*
no eye, no ear, no nose, no tongue, no body and no mind. No shape,
no sound, no smell, no feeling, and no thought; no
suffering, no source, no relief, no path.

Hallelujah.

From the divine enigma of your obscured Alonke-Watusi expression, flood vivid
scenes from taunting memories spliced with a lifetime of the movies and television—
Apocalypse Now, Marlon Brando dismembered by Martin Sheen's
machete, fast-cut with the strange embraces of my father.

Thich Quang Duc, June 11, 1963, Saigon—
five gallons of kerosene mixed with diesel to prolong the burning.
He lit the match for peace—Tiep Hien Buddhist Order
of Thich Nhat Hanh, who composed the grave
liturgy: *Protocol for Self Immolation*.

The Senior Monk didn't move a muscle as he burned in the twelve inch
black and white box mesmorizing my mother and me twenty-
three days after I found my father dead at home;

nor did he utter a sound, *his outward composure in sharp*
contrast to the wailing people around him—
eyewitness report, David Halberstam,
New York Times.

Only my mother's father cried at Roy's funeral—
I could not imagine why, my nerves knotted
with dread by fate's price.

Katja, Master Hanh said, *This is not suicide*.

*To burn oneself by fire is to prove that what one is saying
is of utmost importance. The monk, or nun, has not lost courage,
nor does he, or she, desire non-existence, nor is this self-destruction
but belief in the good fruition of this act of self-sacrifice
for the sake of others.*

O Ekaterina, Virginia Woolf, Thich Quang Duc—believing
you could spare those you loved further suffering.

*Gone now, released one, far past returning, freed one, suffer no more.
Gate gate paragate parasangate bodhi svaha.*

The old pine backlit by a passing car—
like a shiver of my flensed soul
in the light that went with you.

Sun and moon illuminate heart-shaped
bindweed flowers snaking
in a ditch by the road—

perennial roots fifteen feet below
the surface, almost unailing
spring and summer.

You flung your *beautiful* at eternity—
I held the moon in the river
a gleaming instant.

I've become thready, like a painting of some age you can hold to the light
and see that it really is linen, loosening, the other side
bleeding through warps and woofs.

Chewing your grass and leaves there in repose, how far through me
do you see, old Taurus? I will not offer up your burnt fat
thighs to Apollo to stay his arrows and plagues.

How far through me do you hear?

A few days after I met Ekaterina, she gifted to me the pure
Russian of her beloved Anna Ahkmatova—

*It seemed to me that stormclouds with stormclouds
Collided somewhere on high
And a flying flash of lightning
And a voice of great joy
Descended, like angels, upon me.*

I was so rattled that the otherworldly voice of Adrienne Rich shook out
crooning about my Emily Dickinson—*What I learned from her
was that there are extreme psychological states
that can be hunted down with language.*

We laughed and laughed.

I talk too much, battling the asp of loneliness.
The gold dime under my tongue buys nothing but shame.

On my knees I found the grim-faced pawn lost under our bed;
I loved those flowery battles with your lipstick stand-in,
ardent for your Muscovite tongue.

But remembering you, Katja, is like reliving the skull fracture
when I would reach to open a door with my right hand
only to watch, helpless, the left groping empty air.

Do you feel, sweet fellow, dream?
The stories blowing through my bones
tell me that what I think of as *I* is a mere pinprick.

You've made a savannah of my soul, do you see?
Have you made place for me?

*Apple trees and cherry trees laugh silently at Solomon.**

Blessed are the grass eaters.

*Their tranquil eyes and ears
know nothing of the vigil that they keep.
The serenity of heaven is realized
in their obliviousness of it, grazing there.***

* Tomas Tranströmer, Robin Fulton, Tr.

** Jorge Guillén, David Ferry, Tr.



Nina Ward
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