

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Jay Johnson: Three Poems

Jay Johnson · Wednesday, October 7th, 2015

Born during the Great Depression, Jay Johnson studied at the University of Chicago, the University of Northern Colorado, San Francisco State University and The American Conservatory Theatre. His poetry has appeared in magazines as diverse as *Light*, *The Gay and Lesbian Review*, *Art and Understanding*, and *Blue Unicorn*. Although his works have been noted by John Crowe Ransom, Robert Duncan, John Simon, and others, he has rarely read his work in public. His collected poems, *The Motion Picture Ball*, is available on Amazon. Jay Johnson lives in Downtown Los Angeles and is currently working on his novel, *Bluejacket*.

For a Little Boy I Met on a Beach in Fiji Who Asked His Mother to Help Find the Alphabet on my Leg

I'm sorry, Anthony, there was no "A"
 For you to find upon my tattooed leg.
 These hieroglyphs teach rituals to say
 When I am dust. I do not want to beg
 The Gods to spare me when great Thoth shall weigh
 My soul. Anubis also starts with "A"
 and he is awful if the soul is cursed.
 I have my leg to keep me well-rehearsed.
 Here are some "A's" a boy like you should know:
 May you, in future, be articulate,
 Ambitious to a point, aware of fate
 And its unhinging traumas, accurate,
 assessing chances when you choose to dare.
 Stay brave and beautiful. I shall care.

Senescent Sonnet

A well-chewed nipple is a song of joy,
 If there's a little amyl on the side.
 What use is buggering a saucy boy
 Who isn't singing? I cannot abide

The drip-dry daddies on their bar-stool perches
 Who order “over easy” on their eggs and men.
 I hold an agenda (though it sometimes lurches)
 That praises men who’ve learned to count to ten
 And have enough endurance for a mortal race
 that goes beyond the quip and mirthless laugh.
 Blessed are the players who can hold their place
 As we slide slowly into epitaph.
 Kiss me, Sweet-and-Twenty (even Sixty-Four)
 And blessed he who keeps my heart in store.

Eleven Robinson Street, Subiaco W.A.

Leonard, the budgerigar, swings on his perch
 twittering a phrase of Mozart
 and Peter is dying.
 Today, Peter has pruned the lemon grass
 and the wool tree, and
 fed the goldfish
 staring at them gravely as they emerge
 from their dark reverie beneath the rocks
 even as his parents emerge from their car
 with banksias, grapes and yellow kangaroo paws.
 Peter puts the flowers in a vase
 redder than the goldfish
 and everyone sits on the veranda
 talking.
 Peter has the new medicine
 and with the morphine dripping constantly
 like the fountain in the goldfish pool,
 he can cope nicely.
 They stay longer than usual,
 but Peter does not tire.

He and his friend, Bill, sit and smoke a joint
 afterward and talk about the days in Sydney
 in the darkening garden.
 Peter’s lover, Franz, is in the bedroom
 listening to Mozart,
 changing his clothes for a concert.
 He can do no more.

It is hard for Peter to sit
 and even harder for him to stand.
 He vomits in the morning
 the same way he did when
 he tried the red morphine tablets.

There is no fat anywhere.

The joints are obscene on his Giacometti body. The bones are large.

They could still support him

if he weighed three times as much.

He talks of trying to gain weight

and in the next breath he says he plans to die

when he can no longer leave his bed,

when he cannot see the garden

and the goldfish

and play with the birds.

And we sit silent in the dark

because there is nothing else to say.

(Author photo by Alexis Rhone Fancher)

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