

# Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

## Richard Jones: Two Poems

Richard Jones · Thursday, February 1st, 2018

### The Black Raincoat

I'd like to say a good word of praise  
for my long black raincoat,  
how it reminds me of those heavy wool greatcoats  
once worn by intrepid Londoners  
to fend off the tireless English rain  
or the fur-collared, ankle-length velvet coats  
that warmed the Parisian ladies  
in the chilly days of the Belle Epoch.  
Where I live people wear insulated winter coats  
that look like inflated sleeping bags  
with puffy hoods—  
the raincoat now old-fashioned and out-of-date.  
But I love my old black raincoat  
and find myself at home in it.  
If I were in Paris  
and the French sky thundered and cracked  
and the heavens opened up,  
I'd cry out,  
*"J'adore mon impermeable!  
J'aime la pluie!"*  
I'd think nothing of strolling  
through the Tuilleries in the rain  
or standing under a long-handled umbrella  
in the 8th Arrondissement  
and fumbling with my guidebook  
to my find my way  
on the drizzly Champs Elysees,  
though here in Chicago  
I'd probably search for someplace dry  
and maybe let the rain pass.  
I'd step into a storefront doorway  
as if stepping out of this life  
for a few brief moments.

From my raincoat's inner pocket,  
 I'd take my silver cigarette case  
 and my flask of glass and leather  
 and drink a toast of love to the world.  
 When my best friend on earth died,  
 I walked in the rain to the funeral home.  
 On a silver tray in the parlor  
 I left my calling card—  
 a black card of sympathy  
 with my name in white cursive.  
 I slowly took off my black raincoat  
 and hung it in the hallway.  
 Before gathering myself  
 to go in to the reposing room,  
 I stood there and watched my raincoat weep—  
 a few raindrops stubbornly clinging to the hem,  
 a few raindrops rolling down the empty sleeves  
 and falling.

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## Bedlam

People vanish. They lose their minds  
 and their loved ones no longer find them  
 hiding behind those empty eyes  
 that are no longer windows.  
 In old London the mad were taken  
 to Bethlehem Hospital,  
 which in their thick accents  
 the citizens called "Bedlam."  
 Bedlam was a place where,  
 according to the mayor in 1450,  
 one would find "many men  
 that be fallen out of their wits,"  
 an infamous place known for cruelty—  
 chains and manacles, freezing baths  
 and bleedings, solitary cells for the purpose  
 of depletion and purgation.  
 If it were 1750 and I was seeking amusement,  
 the tour book says I could pay a penny  
 and go inside and walk the wards for the titillation  
 of seeing lunatics starving on their filthy mats.  
 Foucault in his *History of Madness* claims  
 96,000 visitors a year. I shiver. The day is cold.  
 Walking in Bishopsgate, chilled from the damp,  
 I imagine standing outside the tall iron fence  
 of the original, long-lost building.  
 I count the barred windows

and note the glass reflecting waterfalls of light,  
as if there were still hope for desolate humankind.  
In my mind I see the wide gardens  
and hear a cacophony of birdsong,  
London's birds hidden in nests in the winter branches.  
"Bare ruined choirs, where late the sweet birds sang."  
I open the gate to go in. The iron hinge creaks—.  
That someone has come  
after all these years, startles the birds.  
Hundreds lift from the trees and take flight  
as if all the birds had suddenly come to their senses  
and remembered they had wings.

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