

Richard Rose – Two Poems

“All the Men and Women Merely Players”

Age enters silent as a haer,
inveigling slowly over salt washed sands,
chilling bones, stiffening joints,
dulling every wit with cruel North Sea air.

Walking on broad wind braced strands,
shoulders stooped, body leant against a wall of wind,
senses awakened by suck and blow of tide,
with shrill gulls screaming against a pewter sky.
This is what it means to be alive.
This the moment, here and now, never to be recaptured.
Feel the seconds passing, listen for the heartbeat,
celebrate the sting of salt and harsh abrasive sand.
Here where nature’s power and all her elements conspire,
to dwarf pathetic efforts of dissent,
to stop the clocks and hide behind those memories
now mocking all those lies of times long lost,
when running free and careless we denied the fleeting time.

No regrets.
Nature’s way demands that years roll on.
Just as tides and moons must wax and wane
so, must we all embrace the long set pattern,
to see it otherwise would be obtuse.
Each of the bard’s seven ages brings its blessings,
each its tribulations, each its mysteries and riddles.
Who would want it any other way?
Not I for sure

Unknown Others

When it comes to matters of identity
of the central figure there is no doubt.
The ashen flesh that clings to bone
and hangs from bloodied sinews wrenched.
The pierced feet, the weighted head,
the token cloth, false shield to modesty.
Stolen, too late, too late as now
those standing by must testify.
Every stare and knowing gaze
bears witness that this is the man
Ecce Homo hoisted high,
victim of man’s savagery.

See there, the lady swoons and fades,
caught in the arms of those who feel
that they should share with her the pain,
but know that words afford no ease.
This scene of anguish, bitter grief,
cruel recognition of the truth
all are helpless, all actions futile.
A bitter moment, time stands still,
naught but emptiness, all is void.
Darkness and tears all that remain.

Regard those others clothed in finery,
mounted on stallions, gilded and groomed.
Expressions indifferent but there to be seen,
part of the crowd, best seats in the house.
Asserting their stations, each holding a pose,
ensuring that theirs will be places in history.
Immortalised characters captured in tempera,
Fra Angelico gifts them a place for eternity.
Fine furs and silks, gilding and tresses,
each one a witness, bit-parts in a drama.

When working his genius and plying his craft
might the artist perhaps have thought, that today
those who stand in awe of his masterpiece
would recall the names of two characters only?
She who distraught lies tended by friends,
and he the victim of barbarous deeds.
While others here featured as part of the scene
have faded from memory, erased over time,
nameless, forgotten their ambitions thwarted.

A moment in time, portrayed for posterity,
Fra Angelico conveys in his picture a truth.
That most are destined to be side-lined by history,
and that even in this there is a strange irony.
The ones now forgotten when this picture was made,
were there in the flesh in full view of the artist,
while those who today are remembered and named,
were summoned from deep in his imagination.
And so it would seem even those who are curious
and wish to know more of the fine clothed strangers,
must content themselves that they will for ever,
remain to be seen as the unknown others.

Richard Rose is a British writer. His poetry, fiction and essays have been published in literary magazines, anthologies and periodicals in many parts of the world. His most recent poetry collection *A Sense of Place*, was inspired by a lifetime of travel. His latest book *Breaching the Barriers; Short Stories and Essays from India* reflects on twenty years' experience of working in India. His forthcoming collection of short stories *No Strangers Here*, will be published in 2022.