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PREVIEW

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Ronci, Raymond Charles, Ph.D.

The University of Nebraska - Lincoln, 1994

PREVIEW

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PREVIEW

Cricket Cricket

by

Raymond C. Ronci

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Major: English

Under the Supervision of Professor Marcia Southwick

Lincoln, Nebraska

May, 1994

DISSERTATION TITLE

Cricket Cricket

BY

Raymond C. Ronci

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Cricket Cricket: Poems

Raymond C. Ronci, Ph.D.

University of Nebraska, 1994

Adviser: Marcia Southwick

My primary area of advanced literary study has focused on 20th Century American Poetry. In terms of prosody, I follow the tenets set up by Ezra Pound and the Imagists: to use the language of common speech; to be concise, neither "viewy" nor wordy; to create new rhythms; to allow for absolute freedom of subject matter.

What I value most in poetry is clarity in language and imagery; and authenticity of experience. Like many Post-Modernist poets, I acknowledge the role of the self as the primary speaker or "voice" in the poem. Rarely do I use personae.

Aside from American poets like Williams and Stryk, for example, my work is heavily influenced by Chinese and Japanese poetry. The work of poets like Basho, Buson, Issa, Li Po, Wang Wei and so on, transcends time, language and

culture because of its insistence on the personal and the ordinary; things which, despite cultural or political differences, are common to all human beings.

I scan my poems into short lines frequently because I feel that the shorter the line, the slower the pace of the poem; the greater the emphasis on individual words and images, the more intense the concentration.

Reading and writing poetry are, to me, methods of contemplation. I see the very act of writing as a kind of practice which helps me to understand my own mind, to consider my thoughts, to reflect on my place in the world and the world's impact on me and others. Reading poetry can be, by extension, a means by which a sense of community is created, where the joys and sufferings of life are validated and shared by all those who partake in the struggle to know themselves.

Acknowledgements

"Silver Lake" appeared in LA BELLA FIGURA and was anthologized in LA BELLA FIGURA: A CHOICE.

"The Hands" was published in the IOWA REVIEW; earlier versions of "The Drunk" and "The Lover" also appeared in the IOWA REVIEW.

"My Mother's Feet" Appeared in NORTH DAKOTA QUARTERLY.

"Balzac And The Buddha" appeared in the GREENSBORO REVIEW.

"The Sand In My Shoes" appeared in the PROVIDENCE PHOENIX.

Earlier versions of "The Prodigal Son" and "Transient" appeared in PLOUGHSHARES.

"The Hermit" appeared in PLAINSONGS.

"Green Beans," "Leaky Faucet," and "Cheap Shoes" were published in the ROCKY MOUNTAIN REVIEW.

"To Issa" was published in Japanese and English in THE PLAZA, Tokyo, Japan.

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Cricket

In the bush
outside my window
you say the same thing
over and over
with equal enthusiasm.
Whatever it is,
I know it's the truth.
No one could go on
so relentlessly
if it wasn't.
What that truth is
doesn't matter,
finally,
because of your
persistence.
I could hear you saying,
"Cricket-cricket!"
and translate it to
"I am-I am."
And just as easily
I could hear you chirping,
"Fuck it-fuck it"
and be equally moved,
because I'm here,
by the window
where the stars are,
where the half moon is.
Night is your cathedral,
the bush your pulpit,
my ears the tired
astonished congregation
that knows only enough
to say yes, yes,
uncertain as to why.
Each morning,
turning off the alarm,
"Cricket-cricket;"
stepping from the shower,
drying myself:
"cricket-"
tying my shoes,
packing my bag:
"cric...."
When a car comes
you become silent.
Too much noise

shuts us both up;
like you,
I disappear
all day.

PREVIEW

Cheap Shoes

White canvas
slip-ons
with a blue line
like the trim
on a yacht.
Such plain
comfort
for \$5.99
that today
someone said,
"Where
are your shoes?"
thinking they
were my socks.
But I feel
almost luxurious,
tropical,
Panamanian,
and so relaxed
that there are
palm trees,
mangoes, pink
flamingos
every step I take
in this flat,
mid-western
American town.
To match
my mock elegance
I wear my baggiest
blue jeans,
4 inches too
large in the waist,
my blouisiest shirt
open half way,
and a woman
I hardly know
stops me
on the street
and says,
"You're so thin,
have you been
ill?"
But to me,
it's the attire
of a man

with plenty
of time
to get
from one place
to another,
time to sip
an iced-coffee,
to browse the aisles
of the bookstore
and buy nothing,
to saunter
the baked
white sidewalks,
flat-footed,
tanned, slim
and not glossy
with sweat.
These white shoes
conjure up
the old country:
the piazzas,
the chiming
of steeple bells,
the rolled up
sleeves
of unshaven men
playing bocce
in the shadow
of the church,
rough hands
waving black cigars,
juice glasses
of red wine --
the fig trees'
blue shade.
I jingle
a pocketful of change
to the tempo
of some tune
I've made up.
But these shoes
have their own
tune, quiet
as their soft
rubber soles,
they move
in only one
direction:
to their own

demise --
the grid
of the soles
becomes smooth,
the white
of the canvas
becomes dull,
the strength
of the stitch
like sinews
collapsing.
In their end,
perhaps even
with a light
snow falling
on the ground
I'll slip
them on
to take out
the trash.
With heavy
wool socks
they'll be
like two
old men,
too old
to bear much
weather,
bound indoors
spending
their last
few days
as slippers.

Balzac And The Buddha

I've never read Balzac,
but I like to say his name.

It's the name I give to the hostess
while waiting in line for a seat.

It delights me to hear over the intercom:
"Balzac, party of three."

When I was in the Buddhist monastery
the Master would shout "KATZ!"

and I would reply, "Balzac!"
He would hit me with his withered stick.

I once knew a man who was a dyslexic accountant,
he was often black and blue

and looking for work.
When he went to the Buddhist monastery

and the Master shouted "KATZ!"
he punched the Master,

and the Master said, "Balzac."
But the cook, overhearing this encounter,

merely muttered, "Rabelais."
That's why he's the cook,

he knows where his belly is.
When I say the word, "Buddha,"

my two year old son shoots his finger straight
into the air.

I tell him that someday Balzac
will cut that finger off.

He lifts his bottle
and says, "Juice?"

Before enlightenment there is, it is said,
chopping wood and carrying water.

After enlightenment, it said,

there is chopping wood and carrying water.

Somewhere in between
is the ferry.

Balzac.

PREVIEW