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Interglacial

New and Selected Poems & Aphorisms

By James Richardson

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James Richardson's *Interglacial*, a poetry finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award, is like a beautiful river, under the thin surface ice of which rushes an intensely felt life and the yearning for a belonging that might somehow be sustained. These poems are uncomfortable with happiness, and gravitate toward the chill familiarities of loss. Like a river's banks, this is a verse shaped by erosion, by absence and loss and things borne away. And yet what is left behind by the process of attrition is a view of lasting loveliness: "Now the milkweed rattles and the burdock / harboring the last crickets, counting down / everywhere late oxides of a beauty / hardly less beautiful as it browns." For Richardson, whose "inner land" is November, the disappointments of a finite lifetime are soul making; the ravishing compensations of loneliness are the landmarks by which he knows the world and its munificence.

This is a profoundly private poetry that finds its essence in the mirror of an exquisitely disinterested natural world and perceives the wounded, time-outlasting self as a kind of godzilla, disenfranchised of his ability to inspire terror, and debarred by others' perceptions of what he appears to be from receiving whatever consolations might assuage his loneliness:

He's how you look in your bathrobe in the morning,
how you keep smashing through the day,
fired at, invisibly hurt, intent,
litter of ages swirling around your ankles,
the *grit grit* of your soles, those tiny, unheard cries.

Richardson's work addresses a heedless universe, a world he loves deeply, but finds it difficult to live with. Tender in his isolation, he makes kindred spirits of dumb or inanimate things. Stones "suppose that if they could forget enough / they would become stars." Snow, crickets, thunder, moths, rain—all quietly speak their piece between the covers of this remarkable book, so distant from the mainstream of human interaction, and yet so near to the "Sway of a daffodil, struggle of wings." *Interglacial* is Richardson's brave synonym for the miraculous, brief warmth of life and relationship between the time before we existed and the (too soon) time when we will cease to be:

Anyone's story,
dear, ours:

almost didn't happen.
One
incredible day
Between two colds.
The "*O and . . .*"
someone out the door
leaned back in to say. . . .

— Ann Stapleton