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The Essential Richard Outram

Amanda Jernigan, editor
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Richard Outram is not a familiar name to most, and with the exception of a small handful of poets who have broken through to the mass consciousness, poets generally toil in obscurity for years, often working other jobs to support themselves and their art. The beauty of this fact is that not only are there countless excellent poets to be discovered, but also that their subject matter often mirrors the everyday experiences of their readers. Thanks to *The Essential Richard Outram*, a collection of the poet's work selected by Amanda Jernigan, the previously unfamiliar reader can enjoy a retrospective of Outram's amazing poetry.

Richard Outram was the author of over twenty books of poetry, many privately published while he made his living as a stagehand. In *The Essential Richard Outram*, the writer's mature poetic years are represented, in which formidable potential is shown nearly realized. True genius lies in his later poems, such as the "Hiram and Jenny" sequence, in which the poet inhabits the mind of an uncomplicated banjoist and his companion. Outram also writes from the point of view of an elephant named Mogul and other human characters, but his most affecting poems are those that Outram never released in his lifetime, which are personal in a way that only poetry can achieve.

Outram's work is remarkable in the way it can achieve humor but also profound significance through rhyme. Many modern poets seem to fear rhyme, perhaps thinking it diminishes their work to use a device so easily recognizable, and seemingly simple. But Outram grips rhyme tightly and bends it to whatever use he desires, as in "Remark of a Childless Man": "or ended being slowly crucified / in some relentless God-forsaken way. / So. Lux est umbra Dei, I shall say. / We had an only daughter but she died."

Rhyme is not the only technique Outram utilizes to its fullest potential. In "The Flight out of Egypt," alliteration brings a description to life: "But outline was lost. Mass, massive, massy, / the ocean rolled, heaved with a sick slick / onto the vague land, so far and no further,"

The Essential Richard Outram belongs in any poetry collection, and Amanda Jernigan has done a great service in choosing these poems, reminding us of some of those treasures around us that too often go unnoticed.
PETER DABBENE (December 22, 2011)

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