2014

Darkened Rooms of Summer

Jared Carter

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“From beginning to end, this volume has the quiet passion of conviction, the voice of a poet who knows exactly what he wants to say and how to say it. . . . Behind the range of styles and approaches, one recognizes a single honest and contemporary voice.”—DANA GIOIA, Poetry

“[After the Rain] offers proof that the art of poetry is alive and well in America.”—ROBERT PHILLIPS, Houston Post

“Everywhere one looks there are filaments of connection: to those who have gone before, elders, neighbors, laboring men, loved ones; to place, to past, to the earth itself. These are loving poems, delivered in a quiet, authoritative voice; the reader slips into their flow and partakes of a communion. . . . [This] is a remarkable achievement.”
—BRUCE BENNETT, New York Times Book Review

“[Jared Carter is] a poet thoroughly in the American grain. . . . After the Rain has a metaphysical complexity entirely in keeping with its great Shaker virtues of simplicity, clean line, and practical design.”
—ROBERT HOSMER, Southern Review

“Carter’s is a poetry of a resolute middle distance, firmly of this world: between the dust under the earth and the dust of space there exists the place that the poem can illumine.”—HELEN VENDLER, New York Review of Books

“[Carter] writes American poetry the way that William Faulkner wrote American novels. . . . [Carter’s poems] have the homespun flavor of our native music—ballads, country blues, and sweet, clear, understated lyrics.”—SALLY A. LODGE, Publishers Weekly
DARKENED ROOMS OF SUMMER
DARKENED ROOMS OF SUMMER

New and Selected Poems

Jared Carter

Introduction by Ted Kooser
For Candace,
Tutilo, Elisabeth,
and Robert
I remember the days, the hours, the books, the seasons, the winter skies and darkened rooms of summer.

HENRY JAMES
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Acknowledgments

Poems selected from Work, for the Night Is Coming are reprinted by permission of Jared Carter.


The author is grateful to print and online editors in whose publications the reprinted poems in this volume—sometimes in different versions and with different titles—originally appeared.


I have very little patience for long scholarly introductions, which are often so boring that it’s difficult to have faith that something interesting may follow, and I usually skip over them without the least twinge of guilt. I wouldn’t want these words of mine to stand as any kind of an obstacle on your way toward the rich poetry to follow, which you’ll find to be far more moving and engaging than any professional literary opinion I might roll onto your path. Voltaire once said that opinion had caused more trouble on the earth than plagues and earthquakes, and I’m grateful to Voltaire for that. But there are a few things I do want to tell you about this book, which I admire and love.

Several years ago I asked the University of Nebraska Press if every couple of years they would permit me to introduce a significant selection of poems from the life work of a writer whose work, I felt, deserved more attention. Though I was proposing a series of books to be published occasionally, I had only one collection in mind at the time, and you’re holding it now. My first objective in approaching the press was to entice their editors to share my enthusiasm for the remarkably fine poems of Jared Carter, which I had been reading with pleasure, admiration, and jealousy for almost forty years. Other important collections of verse will follow in due course, and I am pledged to that effort, but this is the book that’s rightly and justly in the lead. And its publication coincides with the poet’s seventy-fifth birthday, a fine occasion for a celebration like this.

A few words about the poet: Jared Carter was born in the town of Elwood, Indiana. His father was a general contractor, his neighbors were carpenters, seamstresses, housepainters, preachers, grave-diggers, cooks, and mechanics, working-class people with working-class lives and stories. And though Carter was to attend Yale and Goddard, to work as a journalist and in publishing, and eventually to become a distinguished member of the national literary community, everything he has published does honor to the good, well-intentioned people he grew up among. This poet doesn’t merely write about his people, he writes for them, with affection and hon-
esty, without an ounce of condescension. You’ll find many poems in this book that you can push under the noses of people who say they don’t like poetry, and they’ll discover that they do like poetry, after all, and to their surprise will admit to liking it quite a lot. Sophisticated and artful as all of Carter’s poems are, they are never, by his stated intention, beyond the reach of nonprofessional readers.

His first collection of poems, *Work, for the Night Is Coming*, won the prestigious Walt Whitman Award when Carter was forty-one, and he has gone on to publish a number of justly praised chapbooks and full-length collections during the subsequent years. He’s been awarded National Endowment and Guggenheim Fellowships among a number of other distinctions. Individual poems have appeared in the *New Yorker, Poetry, Tri-Quarterly*, and in many other distinguished journals. But not enough readers know the beauty and emotion his work has to offer.

And skill. This poet can employ the most difficult of literary forms with such remarkable ease and grace that you won’t even notice the scaffolding. He can tell a compelling story on the wings of authentic speech. He has said that his principal objective as a writer is to reach us with his poems, to move us, to touch our hearts. He calls our attention to things within our reach that it seems we’ve never noticed. He has been called a “preservationist poet” because he wants to preserve what he knows and loves, and he does that for us in an unforgettable, inimitable way.

It has been my great pleasure and privilege to encourage him to assemble a number of his earlier books here, and to include a selection of new work. The importance of *Darkened Rooms of Summer* will not derive from its place in American literature, where it shall earn the respect of scholars and critics for years to come, but from its place in the hearts of the broad audience that it will surely find. You’ll want to loan this book to your friends and neighbors, but be sure to put your name somewhere inside because you’re going to have to prove it’s yours when you want to get it back.
DARKENED ROOMS OF SUMMER
They are useless, there is nothing
to be done with them, no reason, only

the finding: letting myself down holding
to ironwood and the dry bristle of roots

into the creek bed, into clear water shelved
below the outcroppings, where crawdads spurt

through silt; clawing them out of clay, scrubbing
away the sand, setting them in a shaft of light

to dry. Sweat clings in the cliff’s downdraft.
I take each one up like a safecracker listening

for the lapse within, the moment crystal turns
on crystal. It is all waiting there in darkness.

I want to know only that things gather themselves
with great patience, that they do this forever.