

Classic Poetry Series

Judson Jerome
- poems -

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Judson Jerome(1927-1991)

Judson Jerome (1927 - August 5, 1991 in Xenia, Ohio) was an American poet, author, and literary critic, perhaps best known for having written the poetry column for *Writer's Digest* for thirty years.

Jerome was also responsible for a controversial amendment to Ernest Hemingway's 1933 short story *A Clean, Well-Lighted Place* ; in 1956, Jerome -- then an assistant professor of English at Antioch College -- wrote to Hemingway to inquire about a section of dialogue which he saw as problematic. Hemingway responded to Jerome with the thirteen words "I read the story again and it still makes perfect sense to me"; however, when *A Clean, Well-Lighted Place* was republished posthumously in *Scribner's Magazine* in 1965, the passage in question had been changed to address Jerome's concerns. The Jerome-inspired changes, and whether Scribner's was correct in making them, remain a subject of debate among Hemingway scholars.

Deer Hunt

Because the warden is my cousin, my
mountain friends hunt in summer, when the deer
cherish each rattler-ridden spring, and I
have waited hours by a pool in fear
that manhood would require I shoot, or that
the steady drip of the hill would dull my ear
to a snake whispering near the log I sat
upon, and listened to the yelping cheer
of dogs and men resounding ridge to ridge.

I flinched at every lonely rifle crack,
my knuckles whitening where I gripped the edge
of age and clung, like retching, sinking back
then gripping once again the monstrous gun,
since I, to be a man, had taken one.

Judson Jerome

Empire In Winter

Love equals people times the square of the speed
of light.

If we but knew the way to split
our atoms of isolation, paradise
might be regained. Pipes are frozen under
the slow snow now. We sleep together mostly
to save our scanty firewood. Maybe need
will mother love's invention.

Doing without
is how we learn to do. The blizzard brings
neighbors together laughing at the store
as tumid pewter clouds let fall the seeds
of oblivion and renewal.

Should any find
these tattered words in the mud of the spring thaw,
carried by the spring flood, caught on the twigs
innocently greening, know words
came between
us, words tasted of apple, words blurred our vision,
built our empire, spread our cancer, words
troubled our sleep like sand, know words,
the curse of Babel, made the many out
of one, yet secretly as tendrils in
the soil these whispered affirmations still
convey the spirit back to one again.

Signed, one
(lost under snow)
who found words husked
of his name could winter well
and bear the light.

Judson Jerome

Messianic

Consider the chalice: both what I seek
And where I find, believing Savior's blood
Was laced with meter and rhyme - my antique
Sacrament. Whittle toothpicks from my rood,
Store them safe in baggies. Probe stigmata -
These wounds were borne to suffer scrutiny.
Dissect and splice fourteen strands of data;
Affect the modern state of entropy
In Faith and matter.
Break it down, around.
Explain cumulonimbus from a God -
Shaped cloud, ignoring iambs in the sound
Of thunder. Drown out cadence as you plod
Rhetorically, arguing rain from skies.
Disbelieve in my Blood. Stone me with sighs.

Judson Jerome

The Unchosen

I guess I have a deficiency. God never
said boo to me when as a boy I stood
straining in church with muscular endeavor
for the sweet squirt of salvation. I never could
see why He spoke to this or that old lady,

sending her, hallelujah, down the aisle.
Was I alone in the congregation vile?
Or was their claim of spirit something shady?
And now when I read poets who simply Know,
drinking their imagery from God's own cup,

whose poems "just come," and then, like Topsy, grow,
whereas I always have to make them up,
with never a tremor saying Break this line
or Save this phrase, regardless of its beat,
hear no obscurities which seem Divine,

and, knowing not God's measure, still count feet,
I yearn that reason give me some relief
(besides those lapses when my mind, not soul,
is not so much inspired as out of control).
Non-linear God, help Thou my unbelief!

Judson Jerome