

## **James B. Nicola – Three Poems**

### **frostbite #11: Appearance of a Path**

A path's appeared across a tossing sea  
of red, though through the vapors rising up  
from it you cannot see well, only know  
you face not this or that but, like a housecat  
tamping with paws where he knows there once were claws,  
feel the precipice has turned to a springboard:

Will you leave and blaze, forsake old ways,  
advancing, or turn back, retrace the rote  
you've known, and which is surer? You've become  
the Greek in the cave, sneaked out a foot or two,  
and the cauldron sun is blinding and begins  
to singe. Your choice requires self-examination  
which smarts and frightens enough to make you  
nostalgic for the self-applied shackles of the dark.

What will you do? The universe has called,  
the world unrolled before you for a while.  
It's hot—Ah, for a cooling autumn's wood,  
the cavern's depth. Childhood. The month before birth.  
But you'll never curl in a womb like that again.

Now you know a little what it's like  
to be me and travel as I travel  
and see the world the way I see the world,  
with many divergences coming up  
and yellows turned to gory reds, browns, blacks.  
You also see that though a moment's choice  
may be left or right, or up or down,  
it's far more important whether you stay  
or go. Then, once you leap and see  
that way is paved in flames, where will you go?  
Retreat at last, or contemplate a different path—  
or, when there is none, blaze one of your own?  
But how? By hewing with a sickle in a mildly lit  
and growing yellow wood, with scimitar  
in a populated landscape pied with foes,  
or with asbestos and extinguishers?

## Rialto

When you get to the top of the Rialto Bridge  
at last, at the height of a sudden run  
in the garishness of a drastic day,  
your blood all aboil from something somebody  
said which in a flash has made  
whatever's been going on become  
insupportable, the crowd will pose  
a problem to what you probably had  
in mind.

Of course it's not far from the top  
to the Grand Canal—it's not like the Brooklyn  
Bridge—so if you stay and play  
the game of finding yourself in the crowd  
from the reflections rippling in the water (at  
the very apex you can: just wave—  
*just wave!*), you'll find yourself (waving back)  
and after a while, you should cool  
down.

But at night, there'll be nary a soul  
and it might be just you in the dark going up  
the slope of one side of the bridge, with the rippling  
of fires reflected beneath, and you can,  
in a flash, see yourself—like a soul  
in the luminous River Styx.

But if,  
instead of indulging the roiling urge  
to dive, the torches mirrored in  
the canal rippling and distorting you  
like a fun-house mirror, you wait awhile  
and descend to one side—the same you came up,  
or the other—you'll see how easy it is  
on the Rialto Bridge to gather yourself  
in a dryer fashion, as you walk away  
from the height and the depth and rejoin yourself  
and the land, thank God, and the rest of—*ah*—

Venice.

## Porches and Possibilities

If you hang out on your front porch  
folks passing by might wave.  
If you live in a town where everyone has a car  
few pass by as pedestrians, prone to wave.  
But if you live in a village where people walk  
there is still a world of possibilities.

However, if it is raining and you hang out  
on your front porch, there will probably be  
fewer pedestrians, if any. But then again,  
those there are might be especially delighted  
to see you. And if they were caught by the rain  
without an umbrella, you might invite them

to take shelter awhile on your porch.  
And they might be even more likely to accept—  
for the duration of the rain, at least. Of course  
when they don't catch pneumonia and die  
they won't necessarily come back to thank you,  
but still—and even more so if you think of the rain

metaphorically—you have invited them to  
a world of possibilities. So when I pass  
a house with a front porch, I always look  
to see if there's anyone there,  
and if so, I nod in that direction  
and if there's a nod in return, I wave.

Do you have a porch? Are you stuck in the rain?  
I have a porch but it's on the 45th floor.  
So won't you consider this poem a porch  
and think of me as right here, nodding?  
And if you're getting soaked,  
just nod back, and I shall wave. . . .

Widely published on both sides of the Atlantic, **James B. Nicola** has several poetry awards and nominations to his credit, with recent or upcoming poems in the *Southwest*, *Atlanta*, and *Lullwater Reviews*. His nonfiction book *Playing the Audience* won a *Choice* award. His first full-length poetry collection, *Manhattan Plaza*, has just been released. Excerpts, reviews, and order information can be found at [sites.google.com/site/jamesbnicola](http://sites.google.com/site/jamesbnicola).