

D. R. James – Three Poems

Down the Stretch

late August:
sad leftovers of once-orange
day lilies. Half-
browned fronds fall, cross-
hatch, amass
their quickly declining
piling. But
from the entry-way window,
I can see again
that runt hosta! It's baring
its buried leaves,
flaunting the flaxen beige
of its variegated
edging, waving its fading
purple pennants
into the post-season.

Still Life with Hair, Brush, and Paisley

—after Chelsea Welsh's photo
"Caught in the Day's Unraveling"

What could be stiller than frizzy hair
snarled in a brush and juxtaposed
on a rumpled paisley bedspread?
There: all the elements accounted for
since you can't actually see the oil
in the strands or feel the plastic handle.
You can't tell if the cloth was stripped
from a nearby window or how cloudy
it is outside that window. You presume
there's a career in photographing
still lifes but can't be certain there's an
ecstatic clientele, one of whom maybe
having already purchased this one and
offering connections to a new gallery
just as the artist begins to grow tired
of arranging random household items
on a contrastingly textured table cloth.
She longs to roam the out-of-doors,

maybe capture falls overflowing
the lip of a granite ledge far from home,
meander back when she wants to,
change subjects abruptly, now focus
on that cloudy sky, now on a neighbor,
his animated arms cradling gladiolas
snipped from his garden. How about
nudes? Her own sepia *The Thinker!*
Or chronicling the way changing light
changes her own study of water lilies.
She could be reinterpreting the misery
of “wifery,” the serenity of “presence,”
the fate of “creature” in a degrading world.
Or she could simply find a soft seat
in the shade, grab some grapes and trail mix
from her camera case, and imagine what
else she might frame by photographic guile.

D. R. James is the author of the poetry collection *Since Everything Is All I've Got* (March Street Press) and five chapbooks, including most recently *Why War* and *Split-Level* (both from Finishing Line Press). Poems and prose have appeared in various journals, such as *Coe Review*, *Diner*, *Dunes Review*, *Hotel Amerika*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *Rattle*, *The Sow's Ear Poetry Review*, *Sycamore Review* and *Writer's Digest*, and anthologies, including *Ritual to Read Together: Poems in Conversation with William Stafford* and *Poetry in Michigan / Michigan in Poetry*. The poems published here will appear in his new collection from Dos Madres Press in early 2018. James lives in Saugatuck, Michigan, and has been teaching writing, literature, and peace-making at Hope College for 32 years. ([amazon.com/author/drjamesauthorpage](https://www.amazon.com/author/drjamesauthorpage))