

SOUTHERN LITERARY REVIEW

ALLEN MENDENHALL INTERVIEWS JULIA NUNNALLY DUNCAN

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AM: Thank you for taking the time to do this interview, and congratulations on your forthcoming book, *Barefoot in the Snow*. This is, I believe, your third collection of poetry. How does this one differ from your earlier books of poetry?

JND: *Barefoot in the Snow* reflects a more mature vision and perspective of events and people because these poems were mostly written in the past two or three years. Some poems in this collection, such as “His Hands” and “My Uncle’s Grave,” took a longer time to germinate and more courage to share. I can’t imagine having tackled these poems earlier in my life.

AM: T.S. Eliot once said that genuine poetry can communicate before it is understood. Do you try to communicate with readers, or do you write for yourself? The answer to that is probably both, so let me rephrase the question this way: do you have a particular audience in mind as you write poetry, or are you more consumed with the craft, with “getting it right,” so to speak?

JND: Unless I am writing for a specific magazine theme or contest, such as the poem “My Mother’s Elm” that I wrote to submit to the Joyce Kilmer Poetry Contest (and for which I was thankfully named a winner), I write only with the intention of composing the most honest and polished piece I can. But even with “My Mother’s Elm,” the poem took over once I started it, and I forgot the contest until I finished it. My goal was, most importantly, to capture a particular tree’s place in my childhood and to select my most poignant associations with the tree.

AM: Why do you write poetry?

JND: To capture memories, to record reflections, and to work out intellectual and psychological puzzles and give them tangible form that others might recognize and be moved by.

AM: You have written in a variety of genres. Which comes easiest for you?

JND: A poem is easiest because, in general, it takes shape and is completed more quickly than a short story, an essay, or a novel. I have also discovered that my poems tend to find a readership more quickly too. My novels might have garnered me wider recognition and usually more regional response, but poems have allowed me more comfortable expression of what's in my heart.

AM: Do you find that poetry demands a certain economy of language that sets it apart from other forms of writing?

JND: By the nature of the poetic form—the condensation of language and attention to rhythm and line structure—I would say yes. However, my poems are narrative, often telling stories, so they're somewhat similar to my prose. I think my prose is lyrical, too.

AM: Who are the writers that have influenced you, and to which writer would you say you owe the greatest debt?

JND: My first response to this question is always D.H. Lawrence, mostly because of his novel *Sons and Lovers*, which was the first work of his that I read as a young teenager. At that time, I was moved by the romance, especially between Paul and Miriam, but now when I read it as an adult, it's obvious that the relationship between the son and his parents and the dynamics between Paul's parents are most compelling and what have affected me.

The English midlands setting of Lawrence's work, especially as described in *Sons and Lovers*, has always reminded me of my Western North Carolina landscape, particularly as it was in my childhood. Lawrence's boyhood coal mining village of Eastwood is reminiscent of the Clinchfield Cotton Mill village where my mother grew up.

As far as poetry goes, Dante Gabriel Rossetti's "Alas, So Long!" is a favorite, and Poe's "Annabel Lee," with its internal rhyme and alliteration—devices I use in my poems—has no doubt influenced me.

AM: Tell our readers where they can buy your latest book.

JND: Readers can order *Barefoot in the Snow* from the publisher World Audience Publishers at www.worldaudience.org. Online distributors such as amazon.com will also offer my book. If readers are interested in getting a signed copy, they can check my web page at www.thereadonwnc.ning.com/profile/JuliaNunnallyDuncan for an ongoing schedule of my appearances in WNC.

AM: Thank you, Julia, for taking the time to do this interview, and best of luck with everything.

JND: Thank you, Allen, for allowing me to share this information about *Barefoot in the Snow* and for giving me the opportunity to reflect upon my life as a poet.