



Stepping Over Seasons

Ashley Capes

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Poetry. STEPPING OVER SEASONS artfully depicts the finer details of life, encapsulating change within people and places as the seasons unfurl. In "Overlook," Capes argues that it's much easier for great poets to romanticise the world's most classic cities by poetically and playfully ridiculing his own not-so-romantic Australian hometown. Asserting that, in this digital age, everything can be recorded in some way, the poem "Late Night" claims there is no longer a need for people to appreciate things "in the moment."

Stepping Over Seasons Details

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From Reader Review Stepping Over Seasons for online ebook

S.B. Wright says

I decided to get serious about poetry last year (and by serious I mean skill up, write, rewrite, resub. and read). Part of that plan was seeking out current Australian poets and reading their work. Something you'd think easily done in the era of the internet.

It's been and continues to be an interesting journey. But it's not been a particularly smooth one. Australian poetry still seems somewhat fragmented to me as something of an outsider, islands of culture rather than one big continent (and perhaps this has advantages). The Best Australian poems series by Black Ink certainly helps but I have been steadily making my way around these various communities, and know that what's to be found in these is not the full story.

Ashley Capes was featured in one of these tomes, but I don't believe that's where I first came across him. Perhaps it was Twitter or his blog. In any case I feel as if I have come to his writing without the imprimatur of some college professor or a salon like group of poets meeting in a bohemian cafe (please, poets still do this don't they). I think these kinds of discoveries, the ones we make ourselves without the influence of others are important, they allow a genuine connection.

Stepping Over Seasons is Capes' second collection and I am late to the party (it was released in 2010) and if I were to pick one defining feature of this collection, it is his striking ability to present clear imagery succinctly, to let just the right amount of words carry the feeling and point of the poem.

That and he can take the most mundane of objects and imbue them with meaning. Maybe he's just deploying focussed attention, developed through his work with Japanese forms of poetry like Haiku and Senryu, which I know he's a dab hand at.

A case or poem, in point is the first in the collection:

other objects

my wedding ring is a plain silver
barrel band. same as dad's, very modest
and very hard to keep smooth,
with scratches I can't keep track of and
don't want to hide. it's no good pretending
the marriage is perfect, no use
hanging all our memories and every
step of the future on just one symbol. other
objects speak of love, too. the weeping
maple we've shifted to every house, the
cup we fill with knives and forks
or the handwritten address you gave me
the night we met, walking the city
and flinging orange peel into hedges, things
that endure, things that have lines
and marks to prove them.

I am suspicious of ebullient expressions of emotion, they can easily ring false (it depends on the Poet and what you know of their life and experience) but Capes is often understated in his expression of sentiment. All this Ink speaks of the struggle of writing, of hoping and believing that this writing is going to lead somewhere:

...

if I sit up tonight and all this ink
becomes poetry, I could point the wheel
to a place we've never been,
watch Venice sink a little more
or show you stability in three bedrooms,
and looking back, you wouldn't see
smoke stacks or the front door.

and August Rain sketches out beautifully the reality of being in that position where sometimes the only thing you can do for some one is be present. This is not to say that the collection is all reserved, contemplative poetry. There's some cynicism and criticism that comes through in Overlook, a piece that criticises the great poets who romanticise their cities, a piece that challenges them to find in Capes' home town "... a moment worthy of haiku, where sewerage and the paper mill meet."

I laughed out loud at Sunrise Today which dryly eviscerates morning television variety shows. Four years on this poem is still right on the money, proof of every claim that Capes lays at their feet.

But I return again to his ability to focus, to deliver succinct, and inspired observations. A stanza from Small Town could be the epitaph of half the regional towns of South Australia with

marks on the footpath
don't fade and the cemetery
never shrinks, only the town around it.

These three lines speak more truth about my experience of rural towns than anything you'll find by Banjo.

In one of those serendipitous moments I happened also to be reading a Ted Chiang short story about a society in which we have the ability to record and recall everything and anything we experience (imagine being able to prove that you had indeed put the toilet seat down). Chiang is seductive in that piece, in that I almost feel that such a thing (as he outlines it) wouldn't be so bad. Then I read Capes' Late Night, and

suddenly the seductive reasoning was a little more shaky. It ends with...

I guess the great lie of our time is capture –

it's comforting to believe

everything can be caught, recorded

and remembered,

so we don't have to appreciate

anything in the moment.

Stepping Over Seasons, continues to resonate with me. Just in writing this review I experience that aha! moment again as I pluck out quotes for you. This collection had a very high hit rate for me. Capes I find to be a keen observer and communicator with his poetry, it's some of the most enjoyable free verse I have read.

I encourage you to discover Ashley Capes for yourself. You can buy the collection in paperback and eBook form, or you could encourage your Library to purchase it like I did.

Ashley Capes says

<http://overland.org.au/2010/05/review...>

<http://rochfordstreetreview.com/2013/...>

<http://anotherlostshark.com/2010/09/1...>

Ulla says

"Stepping over Seasons" is one of my favourite collections of poems. Among the others are "Old Stone" and "Between giants", also by Ashley Capes, the collected poems of Rainer Maria Rilke, Mascha Kaléko, Selma Meerbaum-Eisinger and the collected works of my previous favourite poet Percy Bysshe Shelley.

Some poems describe situations of his marriage and reflect the love for his wife and his longing for her when she is absent. In others Ashley Capes observes other people without judgement but with humour. He writes about his life as a poor poet, sitting late into the night at the desk writing. He shares his thoughts about death and what remains of us then.

He sees the miraculous even in everyday things and skillfully puts his incredible imagination into words.

The poems are very personal, emotional and poignant and his descriptions of nature are really beautiful.

