Donald Justice Biography

Justice grew up in Florida, and earned a bachelor's degree from the University of Miami in 1945. He received an M.A. from the University of North Carolina in 1947, studied for a time at Stanford University, and ultimately earned a doctorate from the University of Iowa in 1954. He went on to teach for many years at the Iowa Writers' Workshop, the nation's first graduate program in creative writing. He also taught at Syracuse University, the University of California at Irvine, Princeton University, the University of Virginia, and the University of Florida in Gainesville.

Justice published thirteen collections of his poetry. The first collection, The Summer Anniversaries, was the winner of the Lamont Poetry Prize given by the Academy of American Poets in 1961; Selected Poems won the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry in 1980. He was awarded the Bollingen Prize in Poetry in 1991, and the Lannan Literary Award for Poetry in 1996.

His honors also included grants from the Guggenheim Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts. He was a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and a Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets from 1997 to 2003. His Collected Poems was nominated for the National Book Award in 2004. Justice was also a National Book Award Finalist in 1961, 1974, and 1995.

In his obituary, Andrew Rosenheim notes that Justice "was a legendary teacher, and despite his own Formalist reputation influenced a wide range of younger writers?his students included Mark Strand, Rita Dove, James Tate, Jorie Graham and the novelist John Irving." His student and later colleague Marvin Bell said in a reminiscence, "As a teacher, Don chose always to be on the side of the poem, defending it from half-baked attacks by students anxious to defend their own turf. While he had firm preferences in private, as a teacher Don defended all turfs. He had little use for poetic theory..."[5]

Of Justice’s accomplishments as a poet, his former student, the poet and critic Tad Richards, noted that "Donald Justice is likely to be remembered as a poet who gave his age a quiet but compelling insight into loss and distance, and who set a standard for craftsmanship, attention to detail, and subtleties of rhythm."

Justice’s work was the subject of the 1998 volume Certain Solitudes: On The Poetry of Donald Justice, a collection of essays edited by Dana Gioia and William Logan.

Poetry[edit]

- The Old Bachelor and Other Poems (Pandanus Press, Miami, FL), 1951.
- A Local Storm (Stone Wall Press, Iowa City, IA, 1963).
Sixteen Poems (Stone Wall Press, Iowa City, IA, 1970).
From a Notebook (Seamark Press, Iowa City, IA, 1971).
Tremayne (Windhover Press, Iowa City, IA, 1984).
A Donald Justice Reader (Middlebury, 1991).
New and Selected Poems (Knopf, 1995).
Collected Poems (Knopf, 2004).

Essay and interview collections [edit]

Oblivion: On Writers and Writing, 1998
Platonic Scripts, 1984

Edited volumes [edit]

Justice edited posthumous selections of unpublished poetry for four poets: Weldon Kees, Henri Coulette, Raeburn Miller, and Joe Bolton.


Libretti [edit]

The Young God - A Vaudeville (opera by Edward Miller), 1969
The Death of Lincoln: an opera by Edwin London on an original libretto by Donald Justice, 1988

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