

The New Criterion

Poems October 1984

Children walking home from school through good neighborhood

by Donald Justice

They are like figures held in some glass ball,
One of those in which, when shaken, snowstorms occur;
But this one is not yet shaken.

And they go unaccompanied still,
Out along this walkway between two worlds,
This almost swaying bridge.

October sunlight checkers their path;
It frets their cheeks and bare arms now with a shadow
Almost too pure to signify itself.
And they progress slowly, somewhat lingeringly,
Independent, yet moving all together,
Like polyphonic voices that crisscross
In short-lived harmonies.

Today, a few stragglers.
One, a girl, stands there with hands spaced out, so,
A gesture in a story. Someone's school notebook spills,
And they bend down to gather up the loose pages.
(Bright sweaters knotted at the waist; solemn expressions.)
Not that they shrink or hold back from what may come,
For now they all at once run to meet it, a little swirl of colors,
Like the leaves already blazing and falling farther north.

Donald Justice is the author of *Collected Poems* (Knopf).

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