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Illustration from Parsifal

by *Richie Hofmann*

for J. D. McClatchy

While resting in the dim-lit inner study,
I pulled a book down from the shelf—a dusty

old retelling of the opera, its once scarlet
cover crumbled now, faded to a claret's

brittle blood-purple. With care, I spread
a page, as one draws back the drapes,

not wanting to be seen. Inside, a youth, golden-
haired, marches undaunted toward his longed-

for future, the margin's blank. Beyond it, the treasure
he seeks. Walking at his back, two austerer

figures: a woman, who grips one dangling tress
of his tawny pelt as her lowered head rests

against his shoulder; and an old man, his beard
meager on a face pinched by hunger for bread,

who carries on his spindly shoulders the past
and in satchels at his side. He taps

the garland of fine-penciled earth with his tapered
staff, as if to stir the souls of those who predate

this moment—under the red dust, the veil
of aging paper, those people who no longer live.

Richie Hofmann is the author of a collection of poems, *Second Empire* (Alice James Books).

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