

# The New Criterion

Poems May 2011

## 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.

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

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