

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

David Rigsbee: Two Poems

David Rigsbee · Monday, May 15th, 2023

Joan

It was no different than any other day.
Already, we were hyper-aware of the clock
Whose poker-face ticked toward nine.

Our teacher was a clueless woman with her
Upswept, stainless pussycat glasses,
Slip strap inching down her sleeveless arm

as she diagrammed sentences that looked
like the cutaway of a ship, words on deck,
then all the way down to steerage.

The late student was a tall girl, Joan,
first heir of integration. I will not say
beneficiary, because it was the day

we tortured her. She seemed a lonely girl,
but it would be more correct to say our prank
only bolded the torment of her being

there, where she belonged, to learn
how language sought the measure,
to release her from the trap of thoughts

unexpressed. Someone had the brilliant
idea to bring a box of thumbtacks
and shared them with us before class.

We leaned over to pour three or four
like spilled candy on the oak desk seat.
Then we returned to our zits and waited,

staring at desktops, books closed.
She appeared, and the teacher looked up,
said nothing, and returned to her chore.

Wishing to be invisible, Joan moved
among the seats, pulling the skirt of her
white dress aside to pass down the row

until she found her seat and looking up
at the gray teacher, sat. She was the color
of plum, of internal sweetness fading,

the jolt of the joke revealed. So much
we could never know passed us then
the way a blanket of blackbirds

suddenly sweeps itself off the sweetgum
and scatters into the Carolina night,
leaving the leaves for a moment shaken.

For she was a child and we were children.

*

Why We Marry

For Kurt Erickson and Heidi Moss

You see it when night returns
and you think, yes, I could have
stayed far away, but did not.

And the night rises immediately
to meet that small affirmative,
bringing with it smoky clouds
that will separate and reform
into a darkening monochrome,
according to the law.

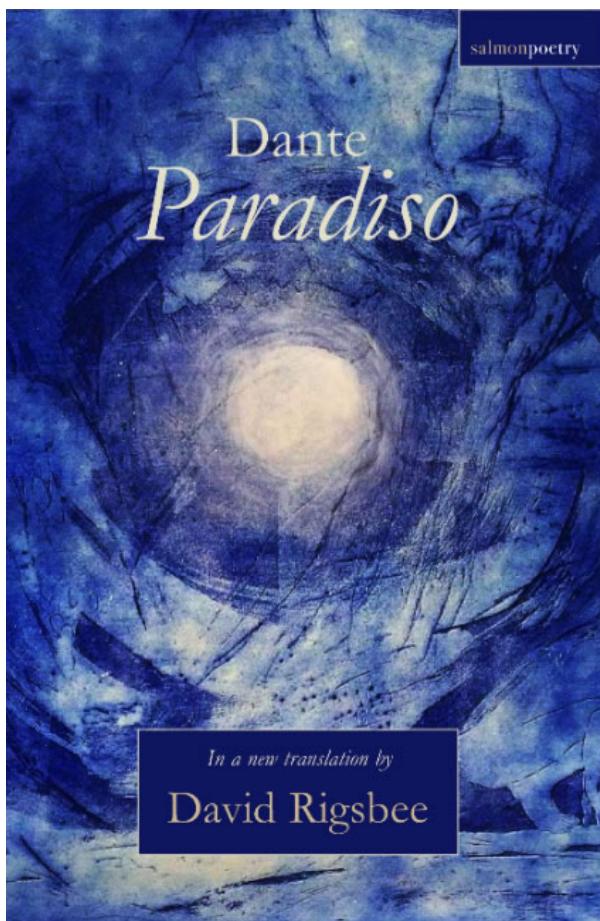
Starlings race across the rooftops
as the west pulls the light after it.
The banter of birds is pronounced,
each insisting on its rights.

A few peel off and fly upward
as if they wanted to see the curvature
of the earth. They remember
how it is, living the days in disbelief.

A man presents his torso to the window
and cars go by below, their missions
useless to speculate upon. Some kids
gather on the corner. One lights another's
cigarette. A third stares down, texting,
her face glowing. Or not unglowing,
and yet clear and not ungracious.

For the night moves each
into a renewed formation, the night

that contains the past, the way the soil
contains every single one of the dead.
Your hand extends on a day in the future
like a small beetle, raising its wingcase
with a flick, which is not an announcement
but a portion of silence, pretending one thing,
and meaning the invisible other.



Dante's *Paradiso*, translated by David Rigsbee

Purchase Dante's *Paradiso*, translated by David Rigsbee

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