

# 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.

\*

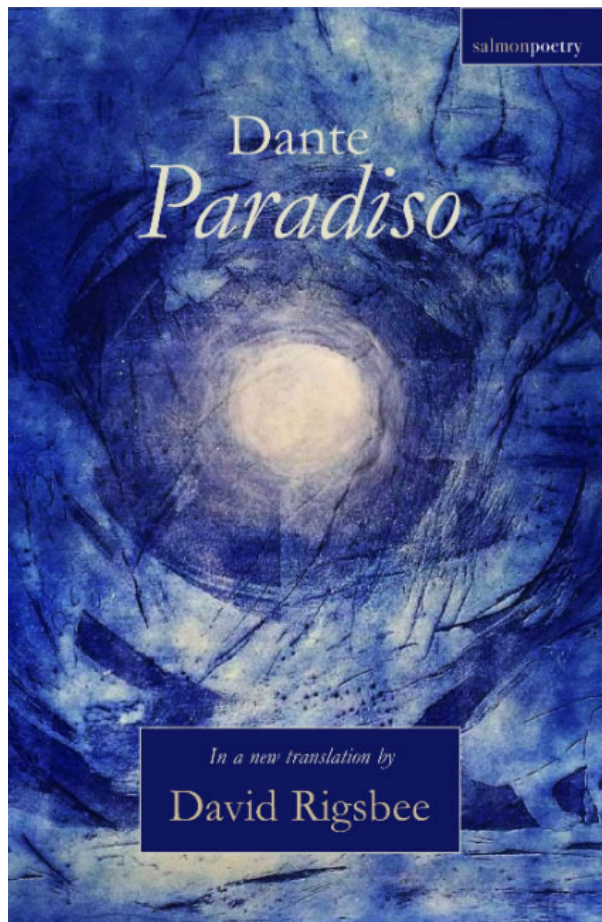
## Why We Marry

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.

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Dante's *Paradiso*, translated by David Rigsbee

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

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