

# Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

## Richard Jones: "Salt" & "Lost"

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Richard Jones is the director of the Creative Writing Program at DePaul University, as well as the author of five books of poetry. The most recent is *The Blessing*, published by [Copper Canyon Press](#).

*Cultural Weekly is proud to premier these poems by Richard Jones.*

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### SALT

I unbolt the lock  
to my father's workshop,  
the small, gray, wooden shed  
at the cottage by the ocean,  
and go inside with an empty box,  
hoping to find something I can take home,  
something I can use,  
though everything is rusted—  
the hammers, saws, pliers, screwdrivers,  
even the locks and toolboxes.  
The dim, flickering fluorescent  
lamp over his workbench  
illuminates all:  
the curved metal blades of a boat propeller  
aged from salt air  
to an elegant green patina,  
a wooden oar smooth and silvered with age,  
a blue and white General Electric  
clock radio (corroded),  
a fisherman's anchor, piled chain,  
and hanging overhead,  
out of place in the workshop,  
a crystal teardrop chandelier  
that once brightened  
my father's cozy parlor,  
the prisms and beads all lost,  
the gilded arms and columns

wrapped in dust and cobwebs.  
 And waiting still in ordered ranks  
 on makeshift shelves of rough boards,  
 a dozen dusty glass jars  
 my father always said were  
 worth their weight in gold.  
 I heft in my hand a jar heavy  
 with screws, washers, nuts, and bolts.  
 I wipe the jar on my sleeve  
 and it shines. For a moment  
 in my father's old shed  
 with its cache of rusted tools,  
 I stand and listen to the ocean's roar;  
 I taste the salt in the ocean air.  
 Which says more about a man's life—  
 the shining jar or the all-pervading rust?  
 When I was just a boy,  
 my father taught me those heavy jars  
 have the right thing for the job,  
 if I'd take the time to look.  
 As for the rust,  
 "All things shine and rust,"  
 he'd say,  
 standing in the shed,  
 putting well-oiled tools back in their place  
 and wiping his hands with a rag,  
 "that's the way it is."  
 Then closing the doors he'd look at his son—  
 my young face must have seemed uncomprehending—  
 and bolting the lock he'd add,  
 "In that, too, you must find happiness."  
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## LOST

When I couldn't find the way,  
 I thought of Blackdog,  
 the blackest dog I'd ever seen,  
 so black that on a dark night  
 I couldn't see her  
 though I knew she was beside me.  
 That night,  
 I didn't know where I was,  
 and stood on the corner, lost,  
 remembering her brown eyes,  
 the muscular tail waving,  
 the joy that made her butt wiggle,  
 and the way she taught me  
 living is all about love,

and more—that one must  
live fully in the moment,  
like a dog, by instinct,  
following one's nose,  
pitiful, tenderhearted, humble.  
Then I closed my eyes,  
wanting the tug of the leash  
in my hand, the pull, knowing  
she was the clever one,  
always deciding  
where we should go,  
days when we ventured forth  
to walk in woods  
or stroll through our small town.  
Even in the battered blue car  
when together we traveled everywhere,  
I would turn  
to her sitting beside me,  
black dog looking straight ahead  
and trusting the road,  
staring through the windshield  
as if only she really knew  
where it was we were going,  
as if even then she knew I was lost  
but would help me find the way.

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