

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Richard Jones: Two Poems

Richard Jones · Wednesday, July 23rd, 2014

Richard Jones is the author of seven books of poetry. This autumn, *Fifth Wednesday Journal* will premier ten of the sixty cantos from his forthcoming book-length poem, *Italy*. And a new collection of poems about his father, *Airborne*, will appear next summer from [Adastra Press](#). Cultural Weekly is proud to premiere these two poems.

Home

As I grow older,
and older still,
my wife will look at
my white hair
and say that I increasingly
resemble my father,
that elderly gentleman in a tie,
the man who could talk
all day about the war,
his years as a pilot,
life's long flight, the sky he loved.
Soon I'll look like him at the very end
in his bedroom at the cottage,
the years stripped down to nothing,
when on his white bed he lay
like the soldier he was,
his arms by his side, ready.
In his final hours
my mother and sister attended him,
anointing his brow with cool drops
from a white washcloth,
touching his arms, his hands.
From his mouth
they took his false teeth,
set them on the bedside table
next to his glasses.

In the stillness they sang
 his favorite hymn—
His voice is so sweet
the birds stop their singing—
 as they waited for the moment,
 its arrival in the room.
 That day
 over the house by the ocean
 the sun blazed
 and noon's all-encompassing light
 cast no shadow.
 When he died,
 my mother and sister saw
 on the windowsill looking in, a bird,
 not the common black-masked cardinal,
 but a rare red finch,
 humblest of birds,
 its black eyes shining,
 wings crossed behind its back,
 small bird sent to gather
 into the tiny hollow of its crimson breast
 my father's last breath.
 One moment the bird was there,
 a presence;
 the next it vanished into empty sky,
 my father's true home,
 the light,
 O my beloved, O beautiful country of air.

Good-bye

My aged and infirm father's health
 faded over the course of three years,
 so that when I'd fly to Virginia Beach
 to see him in his house by the ocean,

I had occasion at the end of each visit—
 knowing each visit could be the *last*—
 to repeat my final farewells yet again.
 In the sunroom I would take his hand

and tell him things I had never said.
 He would slightly shake his head no
 when I confessed I was not a good son,
 that I was sorry, but would lie quietly

when I tried to express the depth

of my gratitude. For my father was
a good father to me, and at the end
I was able to look him in the eye

and thank him for all he had taught me.
Our last visits were surprisingly happy.
I'd said all my heart could think to say,
and we were free to enjoy the light

pouring warm through the windows,
to luxuriate in the sweet slowness of time.
I think that was his final gift to me,
his comfort with time and silence,

and I was reminded of days when
under the hanging lamp at the kitchen table
he and I built model airplanes.
We'd unfold the directions and lay out

all the interrelated parts I found
so difficult to understand or deal with,
and with perfect equanimity he'd explain—
in clear terms a boy could understand—

how the jet engine fit together,
or the aerodynamics of a riveted iron wing.
But mostly we worked in silence,
my father advising to go slow

and think things through,
then fit each piece together exactly,
telling me, sitting beside him, never to rush—
we had all the time in the world.

Top image: Richard Jones (r) with Jack Grapes, May, 2014 – Photo By Alexis Rhone Fancher.

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