

Wilderness House Literary Review 11/1

The King Of Hearts.
By Richard Jones.
Adastra Press, 2015.
46 pages. \$25.00.

Review by Eric Greinke

In *The King Of Hearts*, poet Richard Jones presents sixteen poems to and about his father, a decorated WWII pilot. Many fine nuances are developed in these linked poems. Most of the poems are presented as simple narratives, with one striking exception. Each of the poems transcends narrative to deeper emotional and psychological levels. Taken together, the poems form a larger, remarkably coherent work of poetic biography.

These poems reveal that the poet's father was an impressive, heroic man. How does the son of such a man feel? Is it easy to be a Hank Williams, Jr, a Frank Sinatra, Jr. or a Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.? Richard Jones' father was a man of action. Richard Jones is a man of words. Each is an expression of passion and commitment, though the two activities may appear to be opposite poles at first glance.

For me, the most moving and artistic of the poems in this well-aimed collection is *At the Carnavalet and the Cognacq-Jay*, which departs from the realism of the other poems, instead revealing the poet's ideal relationship with his dream father, set against a visit to both the current and past great cities of Europe. Here is an excerpt, the final twenty-one of the hundred and four-line poem:

from At the Carnavalet and the Cognacq-Jay

*My father's been everywhere,
but never to Venice, city of dreams.
In his honeyed Southern voice
he tells me Venice looks very different
from where he lives now.
I tell him maybe we could
book an overnight train and go there.
We could sleep in the narrow bunks,
like soldiers in army cots.
His eyes brighten. "Maybe," he says.
He leans closer to the Canaletto and the canal,
almost touching the canvas with his nose
to see the master's brushstrokes,
light on water and royal palaces,
the black gondolas, sky, and majestic clouds.
My father and I
didn't talk like this when
we were younger and he was alive—
we were too different;
but now we talk all the time,
and understand each other perfectly.*

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A dream is often compared to travel in a foreign country. Jones makes this familiar conceit fresh, no mean feat. He succeeds because the energy of the poem comes from his deep emotional involvement with his subject. The final six lines of this exquisite and evocative poem are truly transformative. As we age, we reconcile with our parents. It is an internal process that ultimately brings the peace of understanding. *At the Carnavalet and the Cognacq-Jay* is a perfect poem. The gentle, natural language sweeps the reader along effortlessly, as do the flowing associations and images.

Other notable poems: *Flying* is an homage to his father's life and accomplishments. *Certain People*, is a poignant recognition of the barrier between people that prevents complete intimacy, and poses the question of whether we can ever get close enough to a loved one. *Letter of Recommendation from My Father to My Future Wife* tells the poet's story as he imagines his father would tell it. Anyone who had a father should be able to get catharsis or insight from this collection of well-crafted and love-driven poems.

I would be remiss if I did not mention the beautiful production job this little book received at the hands of Gary Metras/Adastra Press. Lovingly printed on fine vellum and laid papers, in letterpress, the pocket-size book is aesthetically pleasing in its heft and craft, the only argument needed against mass-produced, generic books. Bravo.