

The Essential D G Jones

D. G. Jones

Jim Johnstone, Editor

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The Essential D. G. Jones has distilled the essence of the man's work into a small, potent package.

In the latest in its outstanding "Essential Poets" series, publisher The Porcupine's Quill presents a concise but grand retrospective in *The Essential D. G. Jones*.

Jones died in 2016 after a long career as a poet, translator, critic, editor, and teacher, having published many collections of poems. This collection's excellent foreword perfectly describes his poetry as demanding "a change of pace from readers submerged in the digital age."

Indeed, unlike much of modern poetry's stuffed-to-the-gills allusions and references (classical and pop-cultural alike), Jones's poems utilize such devices sparingly, with exception of the poem "Odysseus"—for obvious reasons, given its title. When Jones does use literary references, it's often to deliver vivid imagery, as in "lily-of-the-valley in a glass / stems tangled like Ophelia's hair" (from "Spring Flowers"), or in describing sun and flowers as "Nanabozho's gift" (a reference to an Ojibwe creation myth, from "The Perishing Bird").

Jones uses human creations to illuminate nature and the way human beings relate to their environment. Deceptively simple at times, Jones's poems traffic in subtlety, as if they were a series of still lifes or sound recordings layered atop one another, slowly giving up their secrets, as in "Winter Comes Hardly": "winter is boredom / the slow shift of the light / filtered by shutters, the late afternoon / light under eaves, in the weathering / grain of the shingles".

Vital to Jones's work is the sense of humans as part of nature; he draws a memorable and moving comparison between children and butterflies in the exquisite poem "Beautiful Creatures Brief as These": "So slight they look within their clothes, / Their dresses looser than the Sulphur's wings, / It seems that even if the wind alone / Were not to break them in the lofty trees, / They could not bear the weight of things."

Despite his fondness for nature as a touch-point, Jones shows a number of diverse styles; those more interested in poetic wordplay will appreciate poems like "The Pioneer as Man of Letters," in which Jones gives creative expression to the outdoors using an obtuse alphabetic formula.

Providing a wide representation of Jones's evolution as a poet, *The Essential D. G. Jones* offers poems from eight collections spanning thirty-eight years, with an additional four poems that had gone uncollected at the time of his death. *The Essential D.G. Jones* has distilled the essence of the man's work into a small, potent package that proves itself truly essential for any lover of poetry.

PETER DABBENE (May 18, 2017)

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