

Beyond the Wheat, Behind the Veil

By Jane England

Essay written as an exchange of letters between England and his daughter Jane for *Irreantum's* tribute issue following his passing.

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Dear Dad,

I hope this gets to you. I may end up really carrying on a dialogue with myself rather than with you, but I need to try to talk somehow about all that's going on these past weeks, since you haven't been able to speak. So I'm taking a leap of faith, like you always advised, and hoping for a response. Jennifer's been writing a journal about you every day for months, and I think that's helped her deal with all of this. I haven't been able to—maybe I'm in denial. I've always liked the way you've been able to express even the most personal feelings in writing and speaking—I think that's why so many people feel like they're your best friend (you'd be amazed at the e-mails that have come in with stories about your involvement in their lives), or your daughters' quibble over who's your favorite, even up until the end.

Which is what I want to talk to you about—the end. I keep on wanting, even now, for a different one—a happy one. Like how I've always told you I feel about the ending of *King Lear*. I reread your essay “Shakespeare and the Atonement.” I know dramatically it's more effective for Lear to die, holding Cordelia in his arms, pleading with her to live, rather than have the happy ending the Victorians insisted on performing. But it's too much. I want Edgar to save Cordelia's life, and Lear's heart not to break—for them to have more time together after reconciling. I want another chance. Like what Shakespeare offers us in *A Winter's Tale*. A resurrection after the death. A family together at the end, and not with a 16-year wait. I loved the gift of our time together these last few months. Perhaps death does teach us to love. You dealt with it with such grace.

I also reread your essay “Enduring,” and thought of Edgar's encouragement to his blind father in his time of wanting to die: “Men must endure / Their going hence, even as their coming hither. / Ripeness is all. Come on.” But how? Like you in the essay, “I lie awake sometimes now, as the nights begin to shorten, my mind besieged by woe and wonder.” I need you to help make sense of it all, like you always have. I miss you. But I feel lucky I got to know you both as a daughter and friend and student. That even though you were so generous with yourself—your thoughts and time—with so many others, I felt we had our own time. Thank you for that. And thank you for giving us the gift of getting to nurse you the past few months. It's been an amazing journey.

Love,
Jane

P.S. I have a confession. We found a diary you wrote a few years ago in London. I read a part about a vivid dream you had, describing the next life and seeing Grandpa again. I hope you don't mind—but, is it what you expected it to be?

Dear Jane,

The phone at the house has been constantly busy, so hopefully you're checking the e-mail for Charlotte and you'll get this. A rough journey, but I'm fine. It was wonderful to see Mom and Dad (tell Doug the fishing holes here are fine), and Josephine and Bea, Leonard and Lowell (we're teaching a class together on service this fall). My efforts at getting a writing group together are coming along. So far Shakespeare and Melville are in, with Dickinson (still a recluse) a maybe. I have to admit that some of my assumptions about Will, (as I now call him), were a bit off, but I think he's coming around on my ideas in that essay on the atonement you mention. I approve of the mission you've chosen for the Eugene England Memorial, "Making Peace, Continuing Dialogue." Seems a bit pretentious to have my own motto, but I hope good things come of it for encouraging Mormon studies. The submission for sainthood is held up in committee—apparently I'm short a miracle or two.

I like your reference to Lear. I guess I did feel a little like a king losing his throne and mind, in a way—and yet, at the same time, finding myself. You all played the part of my fools—comforting me, humoring me, even bullying me (with medicines). But, like in Lear, everything else was stripped away—logic, fairness, boundaries, ego . . . like Lear, though blinded, I learned to see it, feelingly.

I've attached my poem, "Kinsman," and a section of "Two Trains and a Dream," the last poem I wrote before I got sick, which should answer some of your other questions about what I'm experiencing. I'll write more later. Am meeting Wallace Stegner for lunch. You and I never did finish reading *Crossing to Safety* together. Tell me what you think of the ending. And I'll send on some of my current poems for your feedback.

Love to you and all,
Dad

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