

WILLIAM CHILDRESS

Wondering How James Dickey Died

I wonder how James Dickey died?
Were his admirers gathered around him?
He might have died in wartime strife,
this hero and veteran of rhyme
who took a much younger wife
(at sixty, no way to buy time.)

I interviewed Dickey once, you see.
I'm a veteran too, and was aware
of his combat quatrains and peacetime foes.
But when I said, "Well, I have to go,"
he threw down his blowgun, bow and arrows,
and I was dismissed. His wife rode me

to the airport, angered by Jimbo's
lack of charm. Still, he could be bold,
as in *To The White Sea*, a Rambo
eluding the enemy; or Gothic,
like the sheriff in *Deliverance*,
his eyes contemplative and cold.

I asked Jim over a few beers
how he thought he compared with his peers
since his own greatness was not in dispute?
His breath whistled like a flute.

“Not one of them is in my class!”
Riding me, his wife said, “He can be such an ass.”

Jim never liked the profile I wrote
about his life, so I never wrote any more.
Looking back, it seemed his quotes
were designed like ads—to sell Jimbo.
His wife and I compared notes.
We loved him, but he could be a boor.

How, then, did James Dickey pass?
Satisfied, sad, perhaps heroic?
When he felt Death bite into his chest,
was he, as always, cool and stoic,
or did he dive his P-38 at that bony ace,
screaming, “Fuck you!”
as befits a god who wears a man’s face?

WILLIAM CHILDRESS is a Korean War veteran and a frequent contributor to **WLA**.