

Adult Education

When I suggested
that he let an idea sit awhile
and take a fresh look later,
he didn't want to;
at his age, sitting time
had begun to seem ridiculous.
Nor was there any "Someday ..."
about the trip he and his wife had planned,
or talk afterwards about a sequel.
He showed me the story he had written
while visiting Sicily with her
(the one I told him to set aside,
which made him scoff).
The night before leaving,
they watched the sun go down behind Mount Etna,
aware that they'd never see the volcano again
and that the metaphor of life setting on them
was too perfect to ignore.
The story was heartbreaking
and I critiqued it gingerly. One needs
a certain depth of acquaintance
to acknowledge to someone
that he's going to die soon,
good health notwithstanding.
You feel a little expected
to fall silent or into embrace.
But he didn't want
to waste time on that either,
though it looked to me
like one black howling misery
of a self-knowledge he'd attained.
It must take practice
to face death so sensibly.
I guess that's what the years are for.