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THE MUSE IN ROOM 24

I has been a customary observation for several years now that poetry occupies a really anomalous place at St. John's. Although many of the books we read are poems (in the narrow sense of metrical composition), we have a tendency, perhaps unavoidable, to read them for their "content" alone without giving too much deliberate attention to the great subtleties that distinguish poetry from prose, or any other means of expression. The Ion and the Poetics give us a standard vocabulary, too readily misleading and easily abused, to take care of a creature called The Poet who is somehow mixed up with dubious processes called Imitation and Inspiration, and, as we are reminded occasionally, Rules of Art. There may be some wisdom in this treatment, but at best it is a rather short-sighted view of a discipline that has persistently endured as a necessary way of getting things said.

It was probably this fairly prevalent attitude that Mr. Klein had in mind when he announced to an audience that was probably just as startled as he seemed, that ironically, there would be a class for the writing and reading of poetry. Of course, extra classes or non-seminar night have been hardly uncommon - the weekly calendar still lists a pretty electric array of such groups - but the mortality has been high, and a class that insisted that people actually write seemed to have pretty little chance for survival. In fact, however, the report is that the poetry class has been convincingly successful, and that the regular members, of whom there were about eight or nine did serious and worthwhile work. The procedure of the class was simple and obvious. Mr. Butman would assign a general topic one that has become a recurring theme in poetry, (like "The Moon", "Reflections in the Water", "Ships and Cargoes") which are suggestive without being confining. We contemplated the topic and several illustrations of how it had been done before excerpted from the range of English poetry and then simply wrote lines. Eventually as the lines got worked into something like a poem, their authors wrote them on the blackboard and they became subjected to the intense scrutiny and the

comments of the rest of the group.

The method had its difficulties. At first, most of us had to regard our verses as bastard offspring, which despite their questionable origin must be protected from the merciless attack of a bunch of unfeeling higher critics. It was too tempting to take the way out of either an exaggerated self-depreciation that was only embarrassing or else a condescending forgiveness of the oh-well-it-will-please-one-day sort. But there was never any whimpering, and very soon the group acquired a seriousness and directness that permitted us to uncover and articulate what was good and what was bad in what we had done. It is unwise to try to sum up what good the class was; those of us who went to it know that we have learned a great deal and on the whole are a little less ready to pick up the old cues about The Poet.

As far as the actual work goes, there was undoubtedly some that was good and even memorable; always it was interesting. Generally, a kind of inherent good taste kept the abominable, embarrassing trash that might have been written from being written. The most disturbing tendency was the inclination to fall into a personal manner and modd - one of us specialized in garrulous, muttering epigrams, another in cultivating fragile cadences voicing soft regret, another in casually dumping a brilliant heap of dazzling adjectives into a flimsy syntactic frame, and still another in exercising that particular old-fashioned pomp and brass that our ancestors so roundly frayed. But this is perhaps unkind - in practically every poem there was at least one flash of originality and vision that showed some alertness and capability.

The next pages contain what is in this writer's opinion the best work of each of the regular member's of the class. (With the regrettable exception of Mr. Kutler, who never saved his). Although these poems are being reprinted for their own merit, it should be pointed out that they are class-room exercises, fortunate fragments perhaps, but not really finished poems. But even so they have enough of the excitement and more than ephemeral vitality that is a mark of real poetry and saves these pieces from the waste-basket. A final word of exegesis: the contributions of Jobs and Taylor rely on the read-

ers familiarity with the line "Come live with me and be my love", which was a favorite Elizabethan theme and was the "topic" for one night.

Birds-Two Studies

I

Carnelian and porphyry (the wanton hues
Of wanton dusk) will part where enters in
An evening bird; he sings,
Not music,
But some single sweet, sweet sound:
A longing more perfect than my own.

II

Stand, stand: the risen sun in clear-singing sounds,
Is heard, in myriad, fluttering, fluting, fresh-waken'd sounds,
In chattering, noisy sounds, damp-air'd with dew,
It sounds new, innocent: forgiving lust and sin forgetting.

Bernard Jacob

Variation on a Theme

Come, love, with me and we shall live
To renew each tired adjective
That poets used in younger times
When love and language, forged in rhyme
Proclaimed fierce youth, and echoing here
Rebukes our blood for timid fear.
Then, disguised in nymph and swain,
Bold passion streamed through every vein
And took its triumph in the night
Through masks of pastoral delight.

In this quick season, let us strive
To prove our love while we're alive,
Catch the green moment hard, and then
Cling fast before it fades again.
Now, while the sun still drives above,
Come live with me, and be my love.

J. Taylor

The Wooing of a Warrior

Come lie beside - that I may see
Thy head, unhelmeted, unshorn
Upon my pillow,
That I may watch thy sleep

Thy sweet, sweet sleep must
So reflect the marching of
Thy strong and tender feet -
Which so caress the earth
Which so delights at sight of thee

As in a darkling mirror -
When, through the brooding dusk
The disappearing morning's trace
Of victor's oil reflects
This hybrid light across thy face
Where all swift shadows are resolved,
Then brought to rest

So that my eyes.
Too weak to see thy brilliance at full noon
May feast on thee at night.

B. Dvorak

(Untitled)

I shall go down to the ancient olive grove
And walk between the rows
Of dead yet standing trees
Whose gnarled trunks
Clutch at the dusty earth like withered hands.

Out under the slate-grey sky
Whose hazy veil filters the drenching tropic fire
I'll wander
And try to learn something of the
Peace and dignity of dying.
For it was here among these silent trees
That love first stabbed me
O God! Now see how I bleed.

John Chase

My Garden's Air

My garden's air is stiff and stayed
And this is why I think it fair,
But he says Nature never made
 My garden's air.

When I--- correctly unaware ---
Stiff down formal paths parade
(Garden and I a proper pair)

He would more freedom were displayed
But change the style he does not dare;
I would not let him so degrade
 My garden's air.

Joyce Potter

(Untitled)

Surfeited and sleepless - the night does not hang together.
Here a moon; there a lake; a cloud; a bat.
To the un-aided eye, its lense of unity broken,
These phantom-copies go their several ways.

But now! From a cypress, from the breast of a mocking-bird,
Comes a stream of crystal spheres.
And seen through one of these, the night once more knows itself,
And its parts fall together into purpose.

Richard Carter

(Untitled)

Though the world be false and old
A shepherd sees the spring reborn
And is in truth and love renewed.
Come then, and be a shepherd's love -
We two shall see and know the spring
More truly than one ever could.

James Jobes

SEVENTY

Why should wife, hearth fire and fatherhood be lean
In memory, but cocks and bottles clear?
Though peace was bought for use, not to be seen:
Still, is blind comfort not to tally dear?
Half my life was lived before nineteen,
And now my son of thirty less a year,
Born in the faded settled times between,
Speaks of glowing sights but echoes to my ear.
Could I recall one adult fact - beautiful
Or strong - which my loud youth will never mar,
Then I would never curse as stale and dull
The married years my mind has thrust so far.
Does old age ease mid-life's paralyzing ills
By keeping open wild youth's chancrous scars?

Tom Heineman

Bringing Richard Home

She took the broom and quite deliberately poked him in the stomach and he fell down quite naturally, quite uncomprehending. Then with her shiny party shoes she kicked at his curled red hand and with a smile stepped on his thumb which had been recently his delight to suck. He cried. As a final gesture she grabbed at his bright blond hair and yanked viciously. And through the eyes which emptied into a head which would never understand more than pleasure and pain, tears, quite undeformed and natural, flowed.

Resisting the temptation to cause him yet more hurt she caught hold of his hand and pulled him to his feet. He was still crying. She pulled his hand and he followed her and slowly she lead him home, past the perimeter of the vacant but brick strewn lot to the steps of an old brownstone building. She led him beneath the stairs to the cellar apartment and rang the bell. A moment passed before a woman in a sweat stained faded blue dress came to the door. The woman looked down at the boys tear stained cheeks and then at the little girl in her shiny black shoes and pink dress.

"Richard was crying so I brought him home. Poor Richard, he was all alone and crying."

"Thank you Loris. It is so good of you to look after him, the other boys and girls won't even play with him. You know Loris, there is something wrong with his brain, he doesn't have a very big one."

"Yes mam."

"Wait a minute deary," she picked up the little boy and looked sadly into his face. It bore no look of recognition though the woman though the twitch that played at the corner of his lips might be the beginnings of a smile and she smiled at him. For a moment she stood smiling at the boy but the bright color of the little girls dress caught the corner of her eye and she started and readdressed the girl. "Wait here while I get you a piece of candy. You are a very good little girl for bringing Richard home."

Peter McGhee

On "History, Logic and Sin"

A supercilious glance at the title of Mr. Thoms' lecture did not immediately reveal that the lecture would be on the liberal arts but this was a rather nice inference. However, Mr. Thoms followed through with his inference and did connect his lecture with the liberal arts. History and logic I shall mention first in attempting to restate his thesis. I shall deal with these together simply because they are connected with a comma in the title of the lecture. Mr. Thoms started with the fairly safe statement that people say things. It also seems that other people attempt to find out what these things mean and why these things have been said. And, occasionally, people even try to make inferences about these things. Without doing any really violent name calling the name logic shall be assigned to this inference-making. Now like all games logic also has rules. These rules try to determine the validity of logical procedures. When an inference-maker finds that he is beating his head against a brick wall while trying to defeat an argument by the rules of logic he often resorts to a device referred to by Mr. Thoms as "ad hominem inference". As you may have already guessed from looking at the Latin; this means that inferences are made about the man, whose argument is in the process of being broken down, and somehow his personality becomes a factor in the breakdown of his argument. Most "ad hominem inferences" are made about dead men through knowledge gained from history since if the men were alive they might defend themselves and this would prove disastrous to the more common type of "ad hominem inference-maker". Contrary to popular belief this sort of inference can be valid occasionally and is not always restricted to its usual connotation of invalidity. According to Mr. Thoms the makers of invalid inferences of this sort are guilty of a sin, an unforgivable sin which was referred to as the secular, intellectual, philosophical sin of arrogance. The term secular was introduced to emphasize that this is a logical sin rather than a theological one. This principle is to be grasped and held firmly as one follows the following discourse on original sin.

We are guilty of this sin or arrogance primarily because we are born with an original sin. However I must hasten to add that this original sin is a result of conditions and is not to be confused with the sin that is a matter for dispute among sophomores and other theologians. This sin is a tendency on the part of everyone, particularly the products of a progressive society believing in democratic equality, to believe that he is at least the equal of or superior to anyone who has preceded him both as an intellect and as a man. This a priori assumption is what leads us to tear a man apart and often unjustly so with the weapon of historical facts which are construed to demonstrate the undependability of the man in certain fields, the particular field usually depending upon the particular objection held by the particular individual who feels himself particularly superior in this field.

A test by which you may determine whether your inference is an arrogant one or not is to resurrect the individual in question and ask him if he would accept your inference. This test is rather inaccurate for two reasons. The first is that if the inference is injurious to your opponent he would be rather inclined to disagree with you on general principles. The second is the technical difficulties that would have to be overcome in a full-scale resurrection. However, we may set up a partial resurrection. This is where the liberal arts education comes into its own presumably because it sharpens your faculties concerning the various problems that you would have to meet in using the method of pretended resurrection which in some cases can be as helpful as an actual resurrection.

The lecture was very well put together and commanded admiration although it didn't say too much that was new but seemed rather to follow very closely a point that I thought was made clear in the discussion period following Mr. Klein's lecture on "History and the Liberal Arts." It was said in the lecture and discussion period that we should be careful of the "historical approach" because this would create in us a tendency to disregard a man's ideas because of certain prejudices we might have about his ideas.

We would attempt to justify this with a historical psychoanalysis of his personality under the guise of trying to determine the state of his sanity, sincerity, or freedom.

Thus Mr. Thoms' lecture seemed to be a valuable and greatly illuminating further exposition of this topic.

The lecture was also an excellent and much needed lesson in humility besides providing a good paradigm in valid sylogistic procedure.

Paul A. Whittenburg