

Providence

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the veritas medal

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The first one hundred days went by so rapidly that I hardly had time to reflect on what had taken place. After about one hundred and thirty-five days I find my first suspicions justified, namely, that none of the problems which the College faces stands alone nor admits of a simple solution. The enhancement of our academic quality depends very much upon our finances. The increase of our funds depends upon our academic growth. The role of government, industry, and private foundations looms as a major consideration. Each problem has its own intricacies requiring special professional competence on the part of the staff. This is impelling us to diversify and share responsibilities. At first I must confess I was overwhelmed by it all. I am not yet complacent, but neither am I frightened, being assured of the cooperation of administration, faculty and students.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "William Paul Haas, O.P." The signature is written in dark ink on a light background.

William Paul Haas, O. P.
President

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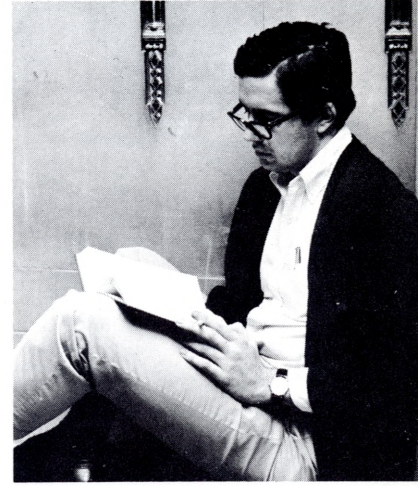
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Volume II

Number I



READING AND THE COLLEGE MAN



by Joseph L. Lennon, O.P.



IT IS AS TRUE as it is trite to say that reading is the bedrock of education and the library is the very heart of a college. This holds true even in this day when the comic book has become the principal cultural manifestation of our speech, plus, of course, such additional inspiration as may be obtained from the sportscar and the local tavern. Unfortunately, education has produced a vast population able to read but unable to distinguish what is worth reading.

But I suppose we should be happy that many people are at least reading something, whether it be comic books or the pocketbooks which have taken the place of the dime novel or the penny "dreadfuls" of years ago. The popularity and low price of paperbacks, plus the increase in literacy, have forced comedians to throw out some of their old jokes about reading. For instance,



there is a story of ancient vintage about the two chorus girls who were doing their Christmas shopping. One of them said, "I sure don't know what to get Mamie this year," referring to another chorine friend. "Well, why don't you get her a book?" suggested the other. "Naw," objected the first, "she's got a book."

Even the college graduate, however, if we are to believe recent surveys, does not have sensitive discernment when it comes to a question of what is the most worthwhile reading material. Newspapers, weekly periodicals and news journals, light fiction, and perhaps a book digest now and then, make up the mental pabulum of the average college man. Many studies have indicated how limited is his breadth of reading, especially in the field of non-fiction. He fares even more poorly as regards the profundity of his reading. It is scarcely one degree above the comprehension of an orangutan. Indeed, the story is told about the college graduate who was asked to comment on "Books That Have Helped Me Most," he replied, "My mother's cookbook and my father's checkbook."

Several years ago, a study was made of the reading habits of the American people. It came as no great surprise that comic books are regularly read by 25 per cent of high-school graduates. Comic books, by their very nature, are peculiarly well adapted to adolescents and adults who cannot read very well. That 16 per cent of college graduates read comic books regularly is, however, somewhat disconcerting: nay, it is downright disturbing. What is even more alarming, however, is the fact that 12 per cent of the teachers in the United States read comic books regularly. In this regard I have always liked the doggerel of Ernest A. Hooten, the late Harvard anthropologist and a humorist of no small stature. When the skull of a baby *homo pithecanthropus* was found in Java in 1936, he penned this verse, entitled "Lines to Homo Somejerktensis."

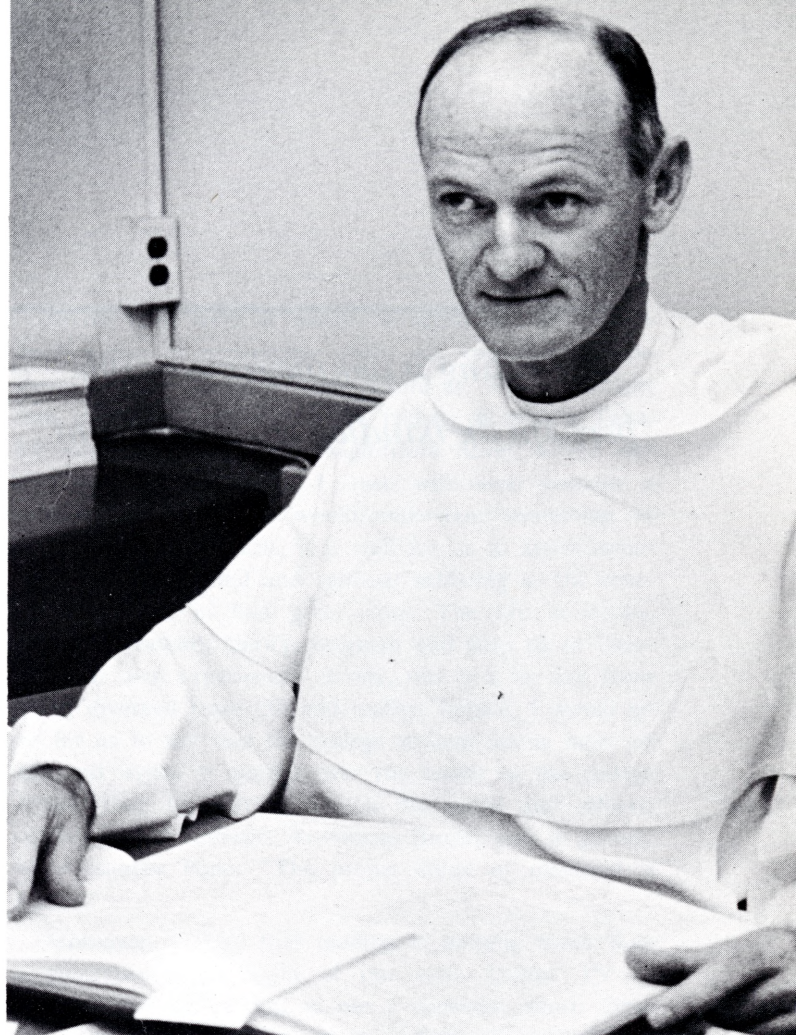
If you had lived to breed your kind
It would have had the sort of mind
That feeds upon the comic strips
And reads with movements of the lips.

The words of Silas W. Mitchell, regarding the relation of reading and personality, are just as pertinent today as when they were penned over fifty years ago: "Show me the books he loves and I shall know the man far better than through mortal friends."

Attendance at college is supposed to cultivate in a man a lifelong love of learning. This necessarily involves a love of reading. To appreciate books with fervor is one of the primary aims of education. To come to know what books are the best is an inalienable right of every college-educated person. That student cheats himself if, during his college days, he fails to cultivate a love of good reading. Moreover, his college cheats him if it

"...Even the college graduate does not have sensitive discernment when it comes to a question of what is the most worthwhile reading material..."

“... The high correlation between academic success and the number of books a student reads is now well known...”



*Rev. Joseph L. Lennon, O.P.
Dean of Providence College*

fails to use every means at its disposal to encourage, yes, and to demand that he acquaint himself with what is best in the written word. As Thomas Carlyle said: “All that a university or a final highest school can do for us is still but what the first school began doing — teach us to read.” That is why I am convinced that every course in college should include some library research assignments which involve the student in library processes and teach him that fields of knowledge tend to be vastly broader than his textbooks and specific reading assignments are likely to reveal.

This entails a firsthand contact with a wide variety of books. Students on the secondary-school level are not made to read enough. Consequently, many of them come to college inadequately prepared to cope with the great amount of reading they will face. Not having read widely, they have developed little ability to distinguish the shoddy from the worthwhile. They are like the literary critic’s five-year-old son who struggled through “The Three Little Pigs,” his first work of fiction. After finishing the story, the lad said judiciously, “Dad, I think this is the greatest book ever written.”

The high correlation between academic success and the number of books a student reads is now well known. Of course, quantity must not be confused with quality.

Perhaps some students engage in too much athletic reading, especially before an examination. To them a book is not a vital encounter, but an obstacle to be overcome. It has been discovered, however, that the student who reads most, also reads more books of higher intellectual content. The more you read the more you get out of reading. A wise man once said, “Reading books in one’s youth is like looking at the moon through a crevice; reading books in middle age is like looking in one’s courtyard; and reading books in old age is like looking at the moon on an open terrace.” This is because the depth of benefits from reading varies in proportion to the depth of one’s own experiences.

Not infrequently the textbook is accused of blighting the ardor for reading. The following lines found on the inside cover of a pupil’s textbook add weight to this charge:

If there should be another flood,
For refuge hither fly;
Though all the world would be submerged,
This book would still be dry.

This charge, no matter how popular it may be, is simply not true. It may have been at one time, but today textbooks are better than ever.

*“...Reading is completely portable,
perhaps the handiest of all art forms...”*

In my opinion, what dampens zeal for reading more than anything else is the fact that youngsters do not spend enough time reading. Social activities, movies and television absorb a disproportionate amount of their time. Nothing succeeds like success, and in this matter of reading the enjoyment from books enhances and spurs on the desire for further reading experience. But pleasure comes only from mastery, and mastery comes only through habit, and habit is formed in only one way: by repetition. One must read and read and read to generate a liking for reading and a settled habit of reading.

And let no one excuse himself from cultivating this habit on the grounds that he is too busy. To plead lack of time or opportunity is to betray a glaring lack of ingenuity. I like the observation of T. P. Cameron Wilson. He said: “God gives to each man, however beset he may be with the world, a few minutes at least daily, when he is utterly alone. I have read Shelley in a public lavatory, and learnt Rupert Brooke’s war sonnets by heart while I was doing my morning duty to this body.”

Reading is completely portable, perhaps the handiest of all art forms. You can read anywhere — while you wait for trains, haircuts, phone calls, primping dates. As with most things in life, so also with reading: where there’s a will there’s a way. I would recommend to every student a period of reading before retiring at night — not only as an antidote to insomnia, but as a prophylactic against ignorance, ennui, and mental malnutrition.

There are two attitudes, however, that sabotage the best efforts to encourage reading. One denies the value of reading by charging that books are divorced from life. The bookworm has always been an object of contempt. The other attitude contends that reading is thinking with someone’s else’s head instead of one’s own. And in these days of a “thinking man’s cigarette,” no one likes to admit that he cannot use his own mind.

But these are not “either-or” propositions. We can agree with Robert Louis Stevenson when he says in his delightful essay, *An Apology for Idlers*: “Books are good enough in their own way, but they are mighty bloodless substitutes for life.” The person who spends all his time wrapped up in books, like a silkworm in his cocoon, misses much that life has to offer. Edith Nesbit says:

Among his books he sits all day
To think and read and write;
He does not smell the new-morn hay,
The roses red and white.

Contact with the world around us, personal experience, learning from the book of nature — all these are necessary if a man is to be well educated. Indeed, the armchair philosopher will never amount to more than a hill of beans until he rises from his armchair and pits his mind against the concrete world and its very concrete problems.

At the same time, it should be noted that the life in books gives us experience which our own life outside them, in most cases, can never afford us. We gain insight into our own feelings and the feeling of others. Take, for example, Dostoevski's magnificent novel, *Crime and Punishment*. You and I, I trust, will never commit a murder, and yet if we would understand something of life in its larger aspects, it is well for us to know something of such mental and spiritual suffering as the murderer endured in that great story. The life in books, then, can extend, clarify, heighten and help us to interpret our own experiences. Surely, this is a far cry from being divorced from life and reality. Indeed, I would go so far as to say that the college student learns more of life and living by poring over the books in the college library than by participating in the social and athletic activities of the college. As Aldous Huxley says in parody of Alexander Pope: "The proper study of mankind is books."

Moreover, I deny that reading is nothing more than a substitute for thought of our own. Unlike TV or motion pictures, reading is not a spectator sport. Once the ideas of another have been understood, mulled over and mastered, they become our own. Perhaps the man of genius can originate and formulate ideas of his own and learn the authorities for them only later on. Most of us, however, start to learn by accepting the word of an authority (teacher or book) until such a time when we are able to see the truth for ourselves. The most brilliant mind in the world will produce only philosophic cliches if it is illiterate and can make no use of already explored ideas. The book is the teacher. It is there to help us to help ourselves. The author cannot substitute his brain for ours. Nobody can do our thinking for us. We must do our own. Only in this way can we avoid becoming, in the words of Pope:

The bookful blockhead, ignorantly read
With loads of learned lumber in his head.

If the student is reading properly he must think with the author. Schopenhauer stated it aphoristically: "Do not read, think!" In short, become an active rather than a passive reader. In this way, instead of merely scanning lines of print the student will understand more of what he reads and he will retain it longer. Moreover, he will avoid the boredom, restlessness and semi-attention which are the products of incomprehension.

The person who sedulously cultivates the habit of reading will be singularly blessed. The reader, in the words of Aldous Huxley, "has it in his power to magnify himself, to multiply the ways in which he exists, to make his life full, significant, interesting."

"... The most brilliant mind in the world will produce only philosophic cliches if it is illiterate and can make no use of already explored ideas..."

THE VERITAS MEDAL

A *Special Report*



"This is the highest award which that outstanding college bestows upon those whom it singles out for devoted service. To receive this award is, of course, a single achievement."

CONGRESSMAN CARL ALBERT of Oklahoma, the House Majority Leader, amply expressed the meaning of Providence College's VERITAS MEDAL to his colleagues on the floor of the House on May 10 of this year.

The noted Congressman, along with many other government leaders, had attended impressive ceremonies in the Capitol Building two days before at which the college awarded its greatest recognition to the Honorable John W. McCormack of Massachusetts, Speaker of the House.

In a sense, the ceremony was also a "signal achievement" for Providence College for the occasion was marked by the presence of the President of the United States, Lyndon B. Johnson, who arrived to assist the college in honoring his longtime friend, Mr. McCormack.

Noting this, the President told the gathering that "I come not to speak publicly but simply to join quietly and privately in paying tribute to one of the most inspiring men I have known — and one of the great Americans of our times."

President Johnson also commented that "it is especially fitting that he should receive this medal from Providence College. When we add up the sum of John McCormack's career, it is clear that he has devoted his public life to making this nation and this world better and safer for young people. There can be no more noble use for life on this earth than that."

The presentation to Mr. McCormack marked but the second time that the VERITAS MEDAL, awarded to persons whose lives have been dedicated to the principles and aims for which the college stands, was presented.

The only other recipient was Rhode Island Congressman John E. Fogarty '30, who was presented with the Medal on Nov. 14, 1960 by the late Very Rev. Robert J. Slavin, O.P., sixth president of the college. The ceremonies took place in the auditorium of Albertus Magnus Hall and also marked the inauguration of the college's Distinguished Lecturers in Science Series in connection with the Honors Science Program.

Congressman Fogarty was instrumental in bringing the Honors Program, which is sponsored by the National Institutes of Health, to Providence College.

The citation accompanying Mr. Fogarty's award read in part: "as an eminently worthy honorary alumnus, as a magnanimous benefactor and as a statesman to whom we are profoundly grateful for your interest in the inauguration of our National Institutes of Health-supported Experimental Honors Science Research Training Program, Providence College gratefully acknowledges your benefactions."

*President Johnson,
Speaker and Mrs. McCormack,
along with Father Dore, left, and
Father McKenna admire
VERITAS MEDAL
at presentation ceremonies
held last May 8 in
Washington, D.C.*



Both Congressman Fogarty and Speaker McCormack have also received honorary degrees from the college in 1946 and 1952 respectively.

The presentation to Mr. McCormack was made by the Very Rev. Vincent C. Dore, O.P., chancellor and then seventh president of the college, and the Very Rev. Robert L. Every, O.P., Provincial of the Province of St. Joseph and president of the Providence College Corporation. The Rev. Charles H. McKenna, O.P., vice-president for community affairs, also represented the college.

The citation accompanying Mr. McCormack's award stated "as an honorary alumnus of Providence College, you have adorned your nation and our college with noble deeds. Your life reveals an awareness of the blessings of freedom, opportunity, and human dignity insured by the Constitution of the United States. Your service to the country and its citizens and your fond devotion to Providence College merit grateful recognition."

The citation also praised Mrs. McCormack who was presented with a gift on behalf of the college from Father Dore. The McCormacks were extremely close friends and one-time neighbors of Father Slavin.

In his acceptance speech, Mr. McCormack said that the VERITAS MEDAL is "an outstanding honor in the catalog of distinctions awarded by Providence College to those whom this society of scholarship seeks to single out for its approval. I am deeply touched in being selected as a recipient of this great honor and award from Providence College and I shall always appreciate and treasure the same."

"Mrs. McCormack and I have a deep feeling for the Dominican Order and a special attachment for Provi-





*First VERITAS MEDAL
was awarded to
Congressman Fogarty
by Father Slavin
in November, 1960.*



dence College," he continued, "for in addition to being one of our outstanding institutions of higher learning with its high intellectual attainments, our late dear and beloved friend, Father Robert J. Slavin, was its president for a number of years."

Rep. Silvio O. Conte of Massachusetts, in a speech on the House floor praising Mr. McCormack on July 15, commented that he was "certain that our Speaker must count near the top of any list of his citations, the awarding of the VERITAS MEDAL to him this spring by Providence College.

"It is always a proud moment for any man to be singled out by an institution of higher education in appreciation of his dedication and devoted service to that institution. Such recognition is doubly gratifying when it is conferred upon one who has not graduated from its campus nor even attended classes there, but who nevertheless believes strongly enough in the educational principles and academic integrity of that school to have earned distinction as one of its most beloved benefactors."

"The VERITAS MEDAL is the highest recognition conferred by Providence College," Rep. Conte concluded. "By conferring the medal upon our Speaker, Providence College gives an added distinction to both. The gesture is perhaps matched only by the spiritual and material assistance which our Speaker has conferred upon the college."

The gold medal, emblazoned with the college seal and the words "Veritas Medal", was designed and made by Dieges & Clust of Providence.

To commemorate the presentation to Speaker John McCormack, the President of the United States privately published a limited number of booklets containing his remarks at the ceremonies. With his permission, a copy is inserted for you.



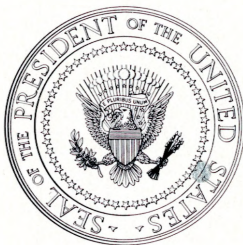
Remarks of the President
On the Occasion of the
Presentation to
Speaker John McCormack
Of the Veritas Medal
The Highest Academic Award
Of Providence College

THE CAPITOL
WASHINGTON, D.C.

May 8, 1965



REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
ON THE OCCASION OF THE
PRESENTATION TO
SPEAKER JOHN McCORMACK
OF THE VERITAS MEDAL
THE HIGHEST ACADEMIC AWARD
OF PROVIDENCE COLLEGE



May 8, 1965



To Speaker John McCormack -
One of the great Americans of our Century,
Whose devotion to his Country and his Colleagues
have made him one of the most valued
and beloved men I have known.

Lyndon B. Johnson

Remarks of the President
on the Occasion of the
Presentation to
Speaker John McCormack
of the Veritas Medal
the Highest Academic Award
of Providence College

May 8, 1965

This is one occasion—and one audience—where the President of the United States is not the principal Speaker.

I say that figuratively as well as literally.

While there are many challenges I am willing to face, thirty years of close observation and study have persuaded me it would be unwise to challenge John McCormack to an oratorical contest on an occasion such as this.

I come not to speak publicly but simply to join quietly and privately in paying tribute to one of the most inspiring men I have known—and one of the great Americans of our times.

In times of peace, in times of war, in moments of tumult and in times of tranquility, John McCormack has shown him-

self to be just that—a great man, a good man, a generous and genuine man.

It is especially fitting that he should receive this medal from Providence College.

When we add up the sum of John McCormack's career, it is clear that he has devoted his public life to making this nation and this world better and safer for young people. There can be no more noble use for life on this earth than that.

The name of this medal aptly describes the Speaker's most outstanding qualities—he is true and noble and faithful.

Theodore Roosevelt once wrote to a Member of Congress saying:

“I entirely appreciate loyalty to one's friends, but loyalty to the cause of justice and honor stands above it.”

John McCormack has always been loyal to his friends. This is why they love him. But that loyalty has never come ahead of his fidelity to the cause of justice and honor. And that is why the nation honors him and will never forget his leadership.

At the White House, Mr. Speaker, I operate under the rules of the Senate—where there is little limit on the length of a speech. In your presence, however, I am reminded of my days in the House where the limitations are somewhat more severe.

So while I have exceeded the one minute rule, I will quit speaking and like any good former Member of the House take my seat before your gavel calls me to order.



Why Not Two Vice Presidents?

By Robert L. Deasy '53

"In case of the removal of the President from office, or of his death, resignation, or inability to discharge the powers and duties of the said office, the same shall devolve on the Vice-President, and the Congress may by law provide for the case of removal, death, resignation, or inability, both of the President and Vice-President, declaring what officer shall act accordingly, until the disability be removed, or the President shall be elected." 1

THIS PARTICULAR clause of the United States Constitution has been interpreted and reinterpreted on three occasions prior to this year and now the Eighty-ninth Congress has seen fit to update this original void by means of an amendment presently before the states for ratification.

Having always been interested in the Office of President and its problems, I was able to investigate this matter in some detail recently while studying at Boston College on sabbatical from the College History Department. Believing that the legislation as framed was somewhat faulty I contacted the office of Rhode Island's Junior Senator, Claiborne Pell, one of the co-sponsors of the measure, to explain my position.

On behalf of his colleagues, Senator Pell extended an invitation to appear before the Senate Sub Committee on Constitutional Amendments of the Committee of the Judiciary on January 29, 1965. Chairman Birch Bayh, Senator from Indiana, the members of his staff, and all the Committee members were extremely cordial and cooperative in listening to my negative claims. One

could not leave the Committee room without the feeling that these men were seriously involved in their work and whatever the final outcome was all suggestions would be carefully weighed. By way of interjection, it would be well for all citizens to watch their Congress in action to see the hard work and painstaking effort that goes into drawing up all measures and it goes without saying that to play an active role in the framing of such a bill was an honor. Too often the press and other news media tend to give the wrong impression of the tedious but important work of these elected officials.

The point at issue was a bill to alleviate the Presidential Disability and Succession problems. It marked the first time that serious attention had been given to the disability concept by any Congress whereas Succession had been handled on three previous occasions. The Act of 1792 provided that after the Vice President the line of succession should consist of the President pro tempore of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives. The Law of 1887 removed these two men and replaced them with the heads of the Executive departments. The 1947 statute reverted to the idea of 1792 but reversed the order of these two men and then listed the Cabinet officials according to the origin of the office. The first of these measures was occasioned by the mandate of the Founding Fathers plus a serious illness that plagued George Washington during his first administration. Because of changing conditions and undoubtedly political plus personal considerations the later revisions were made.

It is interesting to note that the Philadelphia Convention of 1787 was conversant with Roman and English

Robert L. Deasy is an Associate Professor of History and Chairman of the Humanities Department at Providence College.

history and traditions as is evidenced in the writings of its members and this is possibly why they sought to avoid any sort of binding rules and regulations regarding disability. The framers of the 1792 measure were also quite cognizant of the abortive and highly personalized arguments used in the famous regency crisis of George III in the 1788-89 discussions occasioned by his temporary mental aberrations. Not wanting to mix politics and medicine they wisely steered away from any binding type of solution. The lawmakers of 1887 were also aware of the problems caused by the lingering of President Garfield between the time he was shot and actually died and it is obvious that the 1947 lawmakers were all too familiar with the problems of Woodrow Wilson's debilitating stroke. Yet in both cases they followed the lead of 1792 and did nothing.

Now times have changed once again and the present measure envisions a procedure whereby the Vice President may assume the "powers and duties of the office" if the President gives his approval. In the event the President is unable to do this the Vice President with a majority of the Cabinet, or some other body that Congress may designate (not specified in the bill), plus Congress will enable the Vice President to take over temporarily. When the President regains his strength he will return to office unless these same people decide otherwise. At first glance this system seems to provide adequate safeguards but American History is made up of numerous exceptions to the rule.

One of the arguments against the Succession Act of 1792 was that of Congressman Livermore who thought that the death of President and Vice President wouldn't



“...For almost thirty seven out of 175 years, the Vice Presidency has been vacant...”

happen for one hundred years² while Congressman Burke could not conceive of such a contingency more than once in eight hundred and forty years.³ Thus far their predictions have proved accurate. Yet the need for a Vice President at all times is pointed up by the fact that for almost thirty seven out of 175 years, the Vice Presidency has been vacant. Eight Vice Presidents have succeeded to the Office upon the death of the incumbent, seven Vice Presidents have died in office and one has resigned. The office was vacant throughout 1964.

It is obvious, therefore, that I am not in agreement with the thinking of Congressmen Livermore and Burke that nothing should be done, but I do believe that if a change is to be made it should be better than the status quo. The problem of medicine is one that is difficult to pin down particularly when incorporated in the form, not of a statute, but of a complete Constitutional Amendment. With the fantastic advances made in the field of medicine, diseases and debilitating conditions of today may be of a minor nature within the next fifty or even ten years. The present system of agreements between Presidents and their Vice Presidents first used by Dwight Eisenhower and repeated by John F. Kennedy and now Lyndon B. Johnson seems to cover most contingencies and by their very nature are constantly updated every four years to provide better solutions.

Regarding an answer to the Succession problem, the proposed amendment would allow the Vice President upon becoming President through death, resignation, or permanent disability to name his own successor. This tends to frustrate the elective origin of the office. Admittedly the electoral college does not work today as envisioned by the 1787 convention, yet by tradition and innovation — rather than by any sweeping change — it now accomplishes the same end. If this system has to be changed, possibly a better solution would be to have two Vice Presidents elected at the same time as the President. This idea is not new. It was suggested by Representative Dibble of Georgia in 1886, echoed by the then Representative Mike Monroney in 1947, and again recently by former Senator Keating. The argument could be raised that we could use ten or fifteen Vice Presidents if we followed this line of reasoning. This would obviously be an extreme position and if we were to have government by assassination any number would be insufficient. Yet the old concept of a Vice President being superfluous has long since gone by the boards. Beside his original Constitutional mandate to preside over the Senate, the Vice President today is Chairman of the National Aeronautics and Space Council, heads the President's Commission on Equal Employment Opportunities, sits in on the National Security Council, participates in Cabinet meetings, and is the nation's No. 1 foreign ambassador. It should be pointed out that it was just such a Constitutional amendment — passed by

Congress in 1803 and ratified by the states rather hastily after the confused election of 1880 — that first diminished the office. Speaking at the time, Congressman Griswold of Connecticut predicted in debate that “The office of Vice President will be carried to market to purchase the votes of particular states.”⁴ Merely a cursory glance at nineteenth and early twentieth century elections and the type of men who held this position would substantiate Griswold’s dire prediction. Still the Twelfth Amendment, decried by so many, is still with us.

The passage of the Twenty-Third Amendment was a step forward in allowing the people of the District of Columbia a voice in the electoral college. But did not provide for the contingency of an election in the House of Representatives if the electoral college failed to secure a choice. These are just a few illustrations of the fact that often the cure is worse than the disease and, when a reform is put in the form of a Constitutional Amendment, it is extremely difficult to change once it has been accepted. Only the Prohibition Amendment has been stricken from the Constitution.

It is obvious from the testimony of Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach, former Attorney General Herbert Brownell, Justice Michael Musmanno of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court and many others that my fears and reservations are not entertained by some of the best legal minds of the country. Senator Bayh touched the heart of the matter at the hearing when he said that no law can please all men. Quite possibly this law will be the best solution.

The historian enjoys an advantage not shared by the politicians and lawmakers. He can applaud or condemn from his “ivory tower” and later change his position and ideas with ease. Respect for the law when supported by the necessary majority of the states is mandatory if we are to continue to be a nation of law and not whim. Twenty years from now, if the law turns out to be inadequate, I can tell my grandchildren that everything would have been fine had my words been heeded; if it works out I can always tell them I was employing the technique of the devil’s advocate. As an historian, however, this would not suffice and I would be forced to admit that my investigations, line of reasoning, and conclusions were all faulty. This would be the honorable thing to do. It would appear that many so-called historians too often act like grandfathers rather than living up to their vocations. To condemn is one thing; to recognize honest effort and actually do something better is another.

Notes

- 1 United States Constitution, Art. 11, sec. 1, cl. 6.
- 2 *Annals of the Congress of the United States*, 1st Congress, 3rd Session, 1854.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 1863.
- 4 *Annals of the Congress of the United States*, 8th Congress, 1st Session, 674.

*“...Respect for the law is mandatory
if we are to continue to be a nation
of law and not whim...”*



New Tradition: Our College Mace

By Lorana Sullivan

THE INAUGURATION of the Very Rev. William Paul Haas, O.P., as president of Providence College marked the beginning of a college tradition — that of using a mace on ceremonial occasions.

A sterling silver mace — a very contemporary and unique creation of John F. Cavanagh, Jr. of North Providence — was presented to Father Haas at the exercises.

Mr. Cavanagh, a retiring, gray-haired 1935 PC graduate, who is president of the alumni association was asked to design the mace by the Very Rev. Vincent C. Dore, O.P., former president and now chancellor of the college. He developed the design last winter and began the painstaking work in silver in June. It took four months to complete.

The mace is unusual, so unusual, in fact, that Mr. Cavanagh admits he had a few doubts whether PC officials would accept the design. Only Father Dore had seen it, Mr. Cavanagh said, and as the time of unveiling neared, he wondered if others would share Father Dore's enthusiasm. But they did.

"I was seeking a design that would be unique to Providence College, rather than just a staff with college seals as so many maces are," said Mr. Cavanagh. "And I was seeking a symbol of authority since all authority comes from a divine origin."

The unifying symbolism of the mace is truth, and the word "veritas," Latin for truth and PC's motto, adorns the mace's three sides. Above the words, at the topmost element of the mace, is a cross with four arms which suggests, Mr. Cavanagh said, the universality of divine authority. The golden cross rests upon a golden torch of truth, from which authority flows. The torch rests upon the three panels, which represent the three aspects of truth — physical, moral and spiritual truth.

The idea of using truth as the unifying symbol was suggested by Father Haas, Mr. Cavanagh said.

"Father Haas made a remark about veritas shortly after it was announced he would become PC's president," he explained. "He said that too many people thought

truth was something you grasped and walked home with under your arm like a package. He said he wanted to destroy that notion. And that's what I tried to do — to present it in terms of its three facets."

Semi-precious stones are used in the three panels.

Three seals appear under the panels. They include the seal of the Dominican order, symbolizing the beginning of Providence College by the Dominicans, and the state and college seals. The seals are mounted on shields "suggesting a certain militant aspect of authority and truth against error," Mr. Cavanagh said.

The nodes on the handle of the mace are of East Indian rosewood. Besides the gold-plated cross and torch, there are golden rays protruding from the panels which, symbolically, reflect the light of the torch.

The handle of the mace is hammered silver. The panels are repousse and chased — raised from the back and refined from the front. The various parts were soldered together with silver wire. Oxides were used on the panels and shields to give the impression of aging.

In addition to being president of the PC Alumni Association, Mr. Cavanagh and his wife Helen, who is president of Veridames, the women's group attached to PC, have four excellent reasons for maintaining an interest in the college. Two of their sons, John 3rd and Paul, are graduates. A third, Thomas, is a senior, and their fourth, Michael, a senior at La Salle Academy, plans to attend next year. Only their daughter, Eileen, cannot carry on the tradition.

Mr. Cavanagh, who lives with his family at 17 Third St., North Providence, began working with silver 25 years ago. The president of the Cavanagh Co., which makes altar bread, he has designed and made "innumerable" chalices on commission. He also made the communion service presented to Brown University by the First Baptist Church some time ago.

A graduate of the Rhode Island School of Design as well as of PC, he also has executed wood carvings for PC, among them a large crucifix for a chapel and a large panel behind an altar. Working in silver, however, seems to be his first love, for, as he put, "I've always enjoyed hitting metal with a hammer."

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Reverent Blasphemy

The Poet as Maker and Mocker

by Dr. Rene E. Fortin '55



Dr. Fortin is an Assistant Professor of English and Assistant Director of the Arts Honors Program at Providence College.

WE IN LITERATURE look with envy upon teachers of such self-validating disciplines as chemistry, physics, and mathematics, for our very first duty is apologetic: we must, before initiating our students into the intricacies of our discipline, establish first the validity of that discipline, facing unflinchingly the tacit assumptions that literature is either useless or dangerous. What is even more disconcerting is that we must concede the point to the sceptics; the validity of literature rests squarely upon the fact that it is both useless (in the ordinary sense of the word) and dangerous. It could be said, then, that the primary mission of the teacher of literature is to convince his students that the poet is the utterly useless man whom we desperately need, the highly dangerous man upon whom the well-being of our culture depends. He begins his mission in paradox, and he considers his mission accomplished when his students have accepted paradox as the root, bole, and blossom of literature.

Surely the poet himself (I am using the term to refer generally to the literary artist, including the novelist and the dramatist) is acutely aware of his paradoxical situation, the fact that he has committed himself to a life that is useless and in many cases reprehensible to society. In an elegy commemorating the death of W. B. Yeats, perhaps the greatest English poet of the twentieth century, W. H. Auden writes: "A few thousand will think of this day [of Yeats's death] as one thinks of a day when one did something slightly unusual." The death of Yeats, the poetic voice of a generation, barely rippled the surface of current events, for, Auden continues,

Poetry makes nothing happen: it survives
In the valley of its saying where executives
Would never want to tamper.

The poetry, even of the greatest, is in a sense useless and unnoticed by society because it makes nothing happen. But the poet will insist that it is not intended to; despite the perennial tendency of the public to demand that the poet champion popular causes, poetry must remain isolated, narcissistically enraptured by the splendor of its own form. Auden, speaking elsewhere of the poet's vocation, categorically denies that the poet is the man who has something important to say; he is rather the person "who is passionately in love with language," the person "who likes hanging around words listening to what they say." However momentous his theme, the poet's first concern is with language: his aim is to cast language in such a pattern as to exploit the infinite possibilities of meaning. From this point of view, poetry is approached as a challenge to assert one's mastery over words; it is a game in which the poet, agreeing to abide by a set of rules (meter, rime, etc.), struggles against the intractability of words to achieve perfection of expression.

No one who lacks this concern with language can call himself a poet. The truly great poet, admittedly, will express in his "game" the profundities of human experience; poetry, beginning as a game of language, often leads the poet to the brink of discovery. In the words of Robert Frost, poetry "begins in delight and ends in wisdom." But the poet, even when face to face with the almost gratuitous wisdom he has stumbled upon, does not abandon midway the spirit of the game. A poet like George Herbert, who has left in his poetry a record of the most searing religious experiences, remains a poet throughout, even when his poetry assumes an attitude of prayer or passionate submission to the ineffable mysteries of God: he remains simultaneously involved in a search for the Word of God and a search for a rime. One must have the soul of a poet to appreciate how these two activities can be in any way commensurate.

It is in this sense that poetry is useless, in its single-minded devotion to a purity of expression which disaffiliates it from the urgencies of "real life." But even without abandoning his private affair with language, the poet has a shaping influence upon culture. As language and literature deteriorate, so does culture. We may consider Martin Luther's impressive testimony about the crucial importance of literature to theology and, by implication, to culture in general:

I am persuaded that without knowledge of literature pure theology cannot at all endure, just as heretofore, when letters have declined and lain prostrate, theology, too, has wretchedly fallen and lain prostrate; nay, I see that there has never been a great revelation of the Word of God unless He has first prepared the way by the rise and prosperity of languages and letters, as though they were John the Baptists . . . Therefore I beg of you that at my request (if that has any weight) you will urge your young people to be diligent in the study of poetry and rhetoric.

Predictably, therefore, the poet will gauge the condition of a civilization by the condition of its language. Shakespeare, writing at the crucial turn of the seventeenth century frequently voiced his deep concern for the degradation of language: Hamlet finds in his "unweeded garden" of Denmark that traditional wisdom is now "words, words, words"; Richard II sees as symptom of the disintegration of his historical era the fact that "the word is set against the word"; Feste, the clown in *Twelfth Night*, protests that "words are grown so false I am loath to prove reason with them." And over a century later, Alexander Pope prophesies in his *Dunciad* the fall of a poetic tradition — and concomitantly the fall of a civilization; working a brilliant parody on the Gospel of Saint John which announces the Creating Word come to bring Light to the darkness, Pope proclaims:

Lo! thy dread empire, Chaos! is restored;
Light dies before thy uncreating word:
Thy hand, great Anarch! lets the curtain fall,
And universal darkness buries all.

This perception of the simultaneous collapse of language and culture is expressed again and again in our own era, especially in the Theater of the Absurd where language is used, not to communicate, but to dramatize the futility of trying to communicate; words have become unintelligible sounds. "The twentieth century," Denis de Rougemont has said, "will appear in the future as a kind of verbal nightmare, of delirious cacophony . . . a time when words wore out faster than in any century of History, a time of prostitution of language, which was to be the measure of the true, and of which the Gospel says that at its source it is 'the life and the light of men!'" It is appropriate that what is perhaps the greatest poem of the twentieth century, the *Four Quartets* of T. S. Eliot, has a dual aim: the restoration of language and the restoration of Christian values. Eliot seeks initially

The word neither diffident nor ostentatious,
An easy commerce of the old and the new,
The common word exact without vulgarity,
The formal word precise but not pedantic,
The complete consort dancing together.

But his search is to be consummated when he finds the Word behind the words; he seeks at least "Only the hardly, barely prayable/Prayer of the one Annunciation."

If his concern with the purity of language were the all-in-all of poetry, the poet would be at least a tolerable person. But the fact that his game of language inevitably insists upon an ulterior, public significance is what makes the poet dangerous to society. Precisely because he plays his game on the periphery of society, the poet scrutinizes dispassionately and sceptically the shams and illusions of society, refusing to subscribe to the clichés and stereotypes adopted by the consensus. The poet's impatience with stereotypes is demonstrated by Shakespeare who, in his *Merchant of Venice*, begins by indulging a stereotype: he presents as his "villain" Shylock, a grasping, callous Jew who plots to victimize the compassionate, meek Christians living the Law of Mercy. Shakespeare goes on, however, to puncture the stereotype, suggesting ever so subtly that Christian and Jew are not markedly dissimilar, that despite the noble ideal which supposedly animates the Christian, he too often falls far short of that ideal. Shylock addresses his Christian audience: "I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? Fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer as a Christian is? If you

prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die? And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge? If we are like you in all the rest, we will resemble you in that." Shakespeare does not allow the Christian to rest in the comfortable delusion that he is *de facto* a better man; he insists upon unveiling the reality that is hidden by the half-truth of stereotypes. And this is the characteristic effect of great poetry. As Wallace Stevens describes the poet, he is

The man who has had the time to think enough,
The central man, the human voice, responsive
As a mirror with a voice, the man of glass
Who in a million diamonds sums us up.

The poet is dangerous because mirrors are truthful rather than flattering; they insist upon revealing what we would rather leave obscured.

The poet in his public function cannot, however, be conceived of simply as a teacher of the people, a guardian of morality. In fact, the poet in his relationship to society is best described as both the fool and priest of a culture, the destroyer and preserver of its values.¹ The poet-fool, the modern descendant of the court-jester who could attack anyone or anything with impunity, holds nothing sacred, prying sceptically into everything held sacred by society, even its religious attitudes; he is, when most deeply engaged, continually on the brink of blasphemy, for as critic of the "official" religious attitude, he is unafraid to drag out into the light the shortcomings and inconsistencies of that attitude. It is in his role of the poet-fool that William Blake writes "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell," in which he becomes literally a devil's advocate, pleading for those values considered evil by the "official" religion of 18th century England. To a civilization dominated by a restrictive rationalism and a legalistic Christianity, the poet-fool preaches the goodness of impulses, exuberance, energy: "I tell you, no virtue can exist without breaking these ten commandments. Jesus was all virtue, and acted from impulse, not from rules." Blake then proceeds, with a "particular friend," a Devil, to "read the Bible . . . in its infernal or diabolical sense, which the world shall have if they behave well. I have also the Bible of Hell, which the world shall have whether they will or no."

Blake, to be sure, may have been partially moved by a desire to exasperate, but blasphemies of this kind are, on the other hand, recurrent in literature. Herman Melville offered as motto of his *Moby Dick* "Ego non baptizo te in nomine patris, sed in nomine diaboli"; and he confided to Nathanael Hawthorne: "A sense of unspeakable security is in me at this moment, on account of your having understood the book. I have written a wicked book, and feel spotless as the lamb."

Understanding the implications of the poet-fool's blasphemies provides a valuable insight into the psychological

makeup of the artist. The poet is fundamentally sceptical, holding nothing sacred in itself until its sacredness is verified by his own inner experience. "How many poems," asks Auden, "have been written, for example, upon one of these three themes: This was sacred but now it is profane. Alas, or thank goodness! This is sacred but ought it to be? This is sacred but is that so important?" Thus Blake's strident blasphemies are directed against what he considers to be idolatry, false conceptions of man and God which have led a culture into error. Melville, testing in his novel the Christian view of the mystery of evil, has entertained — though not, I think, finally accepted — a diabolical interpretation of the universe. He has, that is, explored the possibility that the God of the universe is indifferent, vindictive, or malevolent.

Certainly these are extreme cases, but this spirit of intense rebellion is in some measure shared by all great writers. Shakespeare must put all of his strength behind Lear's raging on the heath before his resolution of the tragic tensions can be valid and significant. And the resounding affirmation of Christianity in Dostoyevsky's *Brothers Karamazov* rises from his blasphemous "Grand Inquisitor" chapter. As Dostoyevsky himself said, "Even in Europe there have never been atheistic expressions of such power. Consequently, I do not believe in Christ and his confession as a child, but my hosanna has come through a great furnace of doubt." The poet-fool on the brink of blasphemy . . . this is perhaps a way of saying that the mystery of evil must be fully realized and intensely felt before the mystery of good can be affirmed. What is facetiously asserted, in art as in life, is facetiously denied.²

Thus the poet-fool is dangerous, for nothing is safe from his searching scepticism. One becomes involved with him at the risk of being profoundly disturbed, even outraged by his attitudes. But the scepticism of the poet-fool is only half the story, for the poet is often on the side of the angels; his scepticism may be described as a fierce will to believe that seeks a worthy object of belief. The poetic impulse, as Yeats has described it, is an "escape from scepticism":

The one reason for putting our actual situation into our art is that the struggle for complete affirmation may be, often must be, that art's chief poignancy. I must, though /the/ world shriek at me, admit no act beyond my power, nor thing beyond my knowledge, yet because my divinity is far off, I blanch and tremble.

The poet-priest strives to overcome the poet-fool, seeking to convey his vision of order and wonder, of a world that is, however one might define it, sacred. Again in the words of Auden, "It is from the sacred encounters of his imagination that a poet's impulse to write a poem arises . . . Whatever its actual content and overt interest, every poem is rooted in imaginative awe."

“... We must be as ready to embrace a Robert Lowell who rejects a presidential invitation as a Robert Frost who participates with great dignity and reverence in a presidential inauguration...”



Wide World Photo

There is no denying that the poet-priest, the affirmative voice, is more comfortable to live with, but the point is that he is forever accompanied by his other half, the iconoclastic poet-fool. The poetic mind is dialectically organized, in a state of tension between contradictory impulses; thus the poet is simultaneously impelled toward order and anarchy, belief and unbelief, prayer and profanity. It is this “state of dialogue,” as described by Andre Gide, that generates the poet’s psychic energy:

I have never been able to renounce anything, and protecting in me both the best and the worst, I have lived as a man torn asunder. But how can it be explained that this cohabitation of extremes in me led not so much to restlessness and suffering as to a pathetic intensification of the sentiment of existence, of life? The most opposite tendencies never succeeded in making me a tormented person; but rather perplexed — for torment accompanies a state one longs to get away from, and I did not long to escape what brought into operation all the potentialities of my being. That *state of dialogue* which, for so many others, is almost intolerable became necessary to me.

This “state of dialogue” seems not peculiar to Gide; it is verifiable again and again in the great works of literature. Consequently we need not wonder, in view of this inner division of the poet, that he is ambiguous in his identity, elusive in his utterances, unpredictable in his loyalties.³

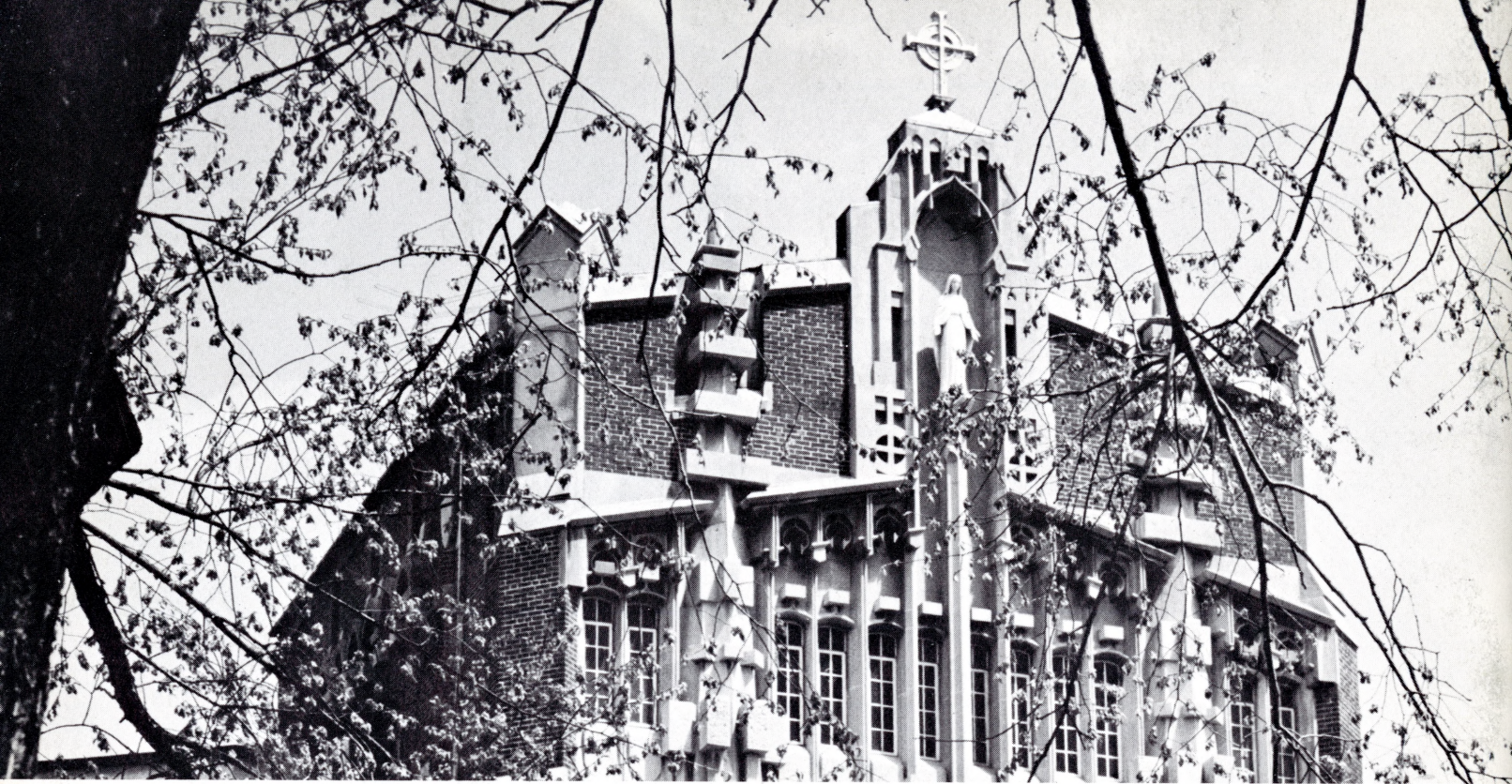
We may now consider the initial paradox — that literature is useless and dangerous yet vital to our well-being — as anything but adventitious; paradox seems to be an inescapable fact of literature. And this is the challenge to the teacher of literature: to bring his students to appreciate a discipline which is completely anomalous, which disdains “either/or” in favor of “both/and.” He must convince his student that the uselessness of literature is an essential condition of its existence, for litera-

ture that forsakes its privacy to become directly useful degenerates into rhetoric, journalism, or propaganda. He must convince his students that the dangerousness of literature is a gauge of its authenticity, a guarantee that the poet has not abdicated his responsibility to come to his own conclusions about popular attitudes. The poet must be both sceptical fool and reverent priest if he is to be genuine. The Norman Rockwell who caters to our expectations — based often on sentimental and self-flattering conceptions of life — is always more comfortable to live with than the Picasso whose art calls into question our very way of looking at reality. The latter is indeed dangerous, a menace to the smug half-truths we all tend to take refuge in.

This is not to say that the poet is always right (though few, I would add, are all wrong); the point is that he is not to be dismissed because he is an anomaly, because he disagrees with us or is disagreeable to us. We must be as ready to embrace a Robert Lowell who rejects a presidential invitation to a White House Arts Festival as a Robert Frost who participates with great dignity and reverence in a presidential inauguration.

Notes

1. These terms have been suggested by Sigurd Burckhardt’s article, “The Poet as Fool and Priest,” *ELH*, XXIII (1956), 291 ff.
2. I am not implying, of course, that poetry must always be explicitly sceptical; it is possible for a solidly committed Christian to write great religious poetry. But even this poet must honestly express the tensions and anxieties of religious experience. The “dark sonnets” of the Jesuit poet Gerard Manley Hopkins, for example, emerge from a struggling rather than a triumphant Christianity; the fervent Hopkins can still, though respectfully, protest to his God:
Wert thou my enemy, O thou my friend,
How wouldst thou worse, I wonder, than thou dost
Defeat, thwart me? Oh, the sots and thralls of lust
Do in spare hours more thrive than I that spend,
Sir, life upon thy cause. (“Thou Art Indeed Just,
Lord . . .”)
3. Gunter Grass’s recent novel, *The Tin Drum*, offers a very significant analysis of the dialectical tension which characterizes the artist.



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