

“Eden Rock,” is a look forwards.

They are waiting for me somewhere beyond
Eden Rock:
My father, twenty-five, in the same suit
Of Genuine Irish Tweed, his terrier Jack
Still two years old and trembling at his feet.

My mother, twenty-three, in a sprigged dress
Drawn at the waist, ribbon in her straw hat,
Has spread the stiff white cloth over the grass.
Her hair, the colour of wheat, takes on the light.

She pours tea from a Thermos, the milk straight
From an old H.P. sauce-bottle, a screw
Of paper for a cork; slowly sets out
The same three plates, the tin cups painted blue.

The sky whitens as if lit by three suns.
My mother shades her eyes and looks my way
Over the drifted stream. My father spins
A stone along the water. Leisurely,
They beckon to me from the other bank.
I hear them call, “See where the stream-path is!
Crossing is not as hard as you might think.”

I had not thought that it would be like this.

After I had been writing and publishing for some years, I
noticed that a number of my poems, never aimed specifically
at the young, were — and I know no other way of putting

it — being taken over by children: this through their introduction into school classes or their appearances in anthologies of verse for young readers. What is “children’s” verse? My conclusion — shared with W.H. Auden — is that there is no good poem solely for children. Clearly, a piece of work that earns its keep as a genuine poem must work for the child *and* the adult. Such poems, written in registers meaningful both to the young and the older reader, shouldn’t be capable of being discarded as though at a certain age we have outgrown them. As children, we include them in our body’s luggage and carry them with us for the rest of our lives.

Here I have tried to tell you something of myself and through this, perhaps, something of what I have tried, and am trying to do in my work. The final poem in a book of new nursery rhymes I published in 1984 is an attempt to do just the same thing, and also to define what I believe to be the essential role of the poet in society. The rhyme is called simply, “I am the Song.”

I am the song that sings the bird.
I am the leaf that grows the land.
I am the tide that moves the moon.
I am the stream that halts the sand.
I am the cloud that drives the storm.
I am the earth that lights the sun.
I am the fire that strikes the stone.
I am the clay that shapes the hand.
I am the word that speaks the man.



New Year’s Eve

by Frederick Feirstein

“So here we are, slightly dead in a dying city,”
You sing, as the millennium rushes in.
B. thumps at his shiny black piano.
“But we don’t care. We’re getting drunk on gin.”
You stand silent at the picture window,
Gaze fifty floors below at the maze of lights,
Squint into time for your childhood building,
Your decimated block, your red brick school
With its surreal Spanish courtyard,
You shaking your windup wristwatch stopped at noon.

You might as well be in *fin de siècle* Europe
And the lights foreshadowing the sparks of war.
These figures dancing like primitives — you abhor
Them, their frantic flirting, their in-unison guffaw.
Will you flee to the streets, to “the masses,”
Murderous for crack and crank, any anti-depressant?
You sit in an armchair with a glass of champagne.
“Happy New Year” you toast, though no one’s hearing.
You absurdly start singing *Old Lang Syne*.

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Anna Mycek-Wodecki

On the Study of History

by Forrest McDonald

American society is in trouble, and not only because our traditional values and institutions are under siege. The nuclear family is crumbling as a result of government policies that are ruthless when they are not mindless. Our once great cities have reverted to a state of nature, in which the innocent are terrorized by hordes of savages who are not and cannot become civilized. Our public schools have lost the capacity to educate, and our colleges and universities are captives of thought police who hate themselves and hate the culture that nourishes them. The government in Washington has metastasized, weakening if not destroying everything it invades, and the federal system is moribund. The economy is sick; public and private morality in an advanced state of decay.

I could try to tell you how all this came about, but the narrative would be a dreary one; and besides, you probably already know. So, instead, I propose to address the question, how does one survive (and I mean survive *as* something) in a world that may not? How does one remain sane in a world that is insane; how does one live without fear in a world in which the only certainty is that nothing is certain; how does one remain civilized even as the Visigoths and the Vandals maraud the streets of the City?

I have four suggestions. Three of them lie within the province of a lifetime commitment to study of the liberal arts. I stress the word *lifetime*, for though education may begin in college (if one is lucky), it must not end there. My fourth suggestion is more personal, and I shall save it until

Forrest McDonald's most recent book is Requiem: Variations on Eighteenth-Century Themes, which he co-authored with his wife, Ellen. In November he received The Ingersoll Foundation's 1990 Richard M. Weaver Award for Scholarly Letters, for which this was his acceptance speech.

the last.

Let me introduce my first suggestion by attempting to define what education is. Education is not the mere accumulation of knowledge. One can listen to endless learned lectures and read all the books the *New York Times* touts as "new and noteworthy," and possibly thereby become informed, but one does not thereby become educated. Nor is education merely training: one can learn how to solve problems in economic theory or build skyscrapers or smash atoms or hone countless other skills, and still be a long way from being educated. Education includes these things, and more, having to do with experience and maturity, but these are not all. An educated person, quite simply, is a person who thinks, and thinks in a fashion that is at once informed, disciplined, and free. The first two of these qualifiers to thought, information and discipline, are relatively easy to acquire, though the second is harder than the first. The third, freedom, is much more difficult, precisely because we in the talking professions are by no means all—or always—free ourselves.

Hence my first suggestion: open your mind and keep it open. I hasten to add that I am not advocating any kind of relativism; as Flannery O'Connor said, some people have such open minds that their brains fall out. Rather, I am saying that we need to distinguish between what is absolute—God alone—and what is relative. To believe that one is possessed of absolute truth, secular or sectarian, ideological or philosophical, or to regard anything but God as an absolute—be it gold, the state, human rights, even human life—is a form of idolatry, a violation of the First Commandment and the deadliest of the sins. Doing so utterly precludes the expansion of knowledge or understanding; and what is more, it prohibits civilized social intercourse. Its inevitable progeny are bigotry and hatred, causes and crusades, gulags and gas ovens.