

POEMS WITH INTRODUCTION

by 45

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Poetry faces exactly what everything else does, change. We are in the midst of a massive one, not yet precisely defined, but involved with a new perspective, that of man who dominates nature.

The two great traditions which have served Western men for over 2500 years, the Judeo-Christian and the humanistic, are dead in the coffins of their definitions, morals, precepts, and terms. They have been the driving wheels in the now almost successful battle to control external nature, but as the mop up operations clean out the last pockets of resistance, the wheels are running out of space, losing their driving power, and suffering the failure of success.

When there was great need to resist a man bent on doing evil and rally people against him, Pope Pius XII could only mumble mild reproofs at Hitler and the Nazis. One of the greatest perils to our existence, the Bomb, is not thundered against in many pulpits and if it were, the AEC would not change its course. The world's three billion-plus people already are too many to care for and will soon double to six billion; yet the Catholic church proclaims against birth control. But then, nobody listens to what it says. Men may attend church with regularity, may contribute to its support, but very few organize their lives around a religious perspective. It isn't the Middle Ages, God is dead as a power in the organization of society, and we've killed Him. "Nothing is revealed."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Bob Dylan, "The Ballad of Frankie Lee and Judas Priest," John Wesley Harding (New York, 1968), Columbia recording CS9604.

Humanism is just as dead. Where religion found its base in revelation, humanism found its in reason. Man is the measure of all things, and he measures them with his reason. Reason's power has not created the good life from the victory over nature. Reason is a whore, a pig, a cult of madness when depended upon to set the tub aright or the ship's course. Freud and World War I booted what remained of the humanistic beliefs, and in the rest of the century they have not shown any tendency to come to life.

Reason has succeeded in creating a technological mastery over the necessities of life -- at least it has done so in the Western industrial nations and Japan. Equitable distribution of goods produced has yet to be solved, but we have the ability to manipulate the external nature of weather, plague, and famine that scourged mankind for millenia. Indeed our manipulative pressures on nature are creating problems she does not give us ordinarily, air and water pollution, for example. The final mark of our mastery of nature is significantly enough not creative, but destructive -- the Bomb. With it man can alter the whole pattern of life on the planet and probably manipulate himself right out of the picture.

We have not yet paid our dues for this flower of technological progress, but the physical, human dues paid during the Industrial Revolution and in the heyday of the factory system are well enough documented to be familiar. Men, women, and children slaved for subsistence and were kept in line by immense amounts of repression. Victorian sexual ethics were intimately connected with the system's need for people who would work to death at things which bore no relationship to their organic

needs which had to be squelched to keep the wheels of industry spinning.

Freud and Marx provided the two most important insights into 19th Century conditions. Marx saw the economic system producing madly, but for profit and not for human need. Freud, with his therapeutic eye closely fixed on the individual, explained conflicts between reality and repressed needs, usually sexual. The repressed needs he called the unconscious. Both developed systems to understand and to deal with what they saw.

Things have changed. Nature is no longer an awesome thing; man has her down and is toying with her. Tout pour le sport: jump out of airplanes, bounce over the desert on 120 m.p.h. motorcycles, sail around the world alone, hold races on January nights through the Canadian brush on snowmobiles (also with 120 m.p.h. capacities), sculpt the face of a mountain for skiing, build a sailplane in the basement, or place a bet on the race to the moon. Concrete, steel, and plastic enclose the action at Miami Beach, and it doesn't stop for darkness, heat, or hurricanes. There are still refinements to be made on the techniques -- there is need for a microbe that eats plastic, for example, though our technological ability to clothe, shelter, and feed the population of the U.S., had we the will, is unquestionable.

But we still pay dues despite our ability to carry the flu to the dark side of the moon. A large part of the trouble we are going through is caused by a failure to recognize what has been won. The manipulation of big chunks of matter and space into human-scale is done. What remains is the conquest of the minute, the submicroscopic, the internal, the human consciousness. The Bomb is built, but not the