

Great Art

Great art, as I define it, is based on cinematic (i.e., especially vivid) downloads from the Holodex. Often, these downloads are called “visions.”

How do I know this? Because it is my experience. Over the past forty years, I’ve written several hundred poems; and the very best of these are all based on dream-visions. The rest are not very interesting, even to me.

Let me show you what I mean. Two poems appear below. The first was written “off the top of my head” as a tribute to a friend who died recently. The second, written more than twenty years ago, originated in a cinematic dream.

A Birthday Poem for the Late Roger Baker (January 13, 1930 – December 26, 2007)

If you’re looking for Roger
Don’t bother with Heaven
He’s in the Great Library
At Focus 27 ...

There he studies with Solomon,
Blackstone et al, preparing
For his next Earthly career—
In Law

Passing away, so it seems,
Just increased Roger’s nettle
He’ll be back very soon
He’s got scores to settle

And here’s the second poem....

The Late Poet

When last seen, he was
Sitting in an empty railway station,
Clutching his bleeding baggage
As he waited, anxiously,
For the last train.

Regarding his state of mind, we have
Little information. He was
Jotting down a few lines, something about
“The pickpocket hands of time,”
When he heard the distant
Wail. His face
Went pale ...

*As the sound of Death rolled
Through the shattered night
And echoed loudly
In the caverns of his fright*

When last seen, he was weeping
In the empty railway station,
Huddled over the ghostly form of a boyhood
Broken on the second cellar stair
Beyond repair.

O when he tried to talk about it
No one would listen. O
Even when he wrote long poems
No one cared ...

*“Of a child man is born,
Of a child from rainbows torn!--
And deposited is a heap
On a winding sheet.”*

When last seen, he was making a fist
To pummel himself
For all he had missed, all
He had not seen ‘til now
In the cauldron of the penultimate minute ...
That he was *really* a poet,

A maker of his world ...

And if the world was a punch in the face
Or a woman melting like evening
Into his being, it was all
His artifice and art.

When last seen, he was waving
From the wavery window of the train,
A slight, soft smile on his face, and tears
Streaming down his cheeks ...
And there appeared

From out of nowhere, a crowd
Of well-wishers--many of whom swear
That he left not by train
But by some apparition of light and music
Beyond the ken of mortal men.

You see what I mean? The first poem is witty. One grasps it in a moment, enjoys it or not, then forgets it. The second poem has “depth” to it. We can spend quite a bit of time contemplating it and still not get it all. As the poem’s based on dream, there are elements in it I myself don’t understand, at least not completely. What, for instance is “the second cellar stair”? The second seal?—the seal associated with victimization. Only my dream-maker knows for sure.

In English literature, the greatest of the visionary poets is William Blake. Blake has only one competitor running close behind him, and that is the author of “The Tempest.”

In American literature, the greatest of the visionary poets are Walt Whitman and the twentieth century poet Delmore Schwartz, who was recognized as the heir-apparent to T.S. Eliot until he published, in 1943, an epic poem highly critical of capitalism. Now, Schwartz is on the forgotten poets list. (Hmm ... where did I put that list?)

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