

# THOMAS PARKINSON

## THANATOS

### I: *As Natural Process*

Up from the canyon in early  
Day the sun pauses, love's presence  
Clings even as I face dawn's light,  
Over the marsh a king-fisher  
Dips and calls, dips and calls.

Who will return to deep earth?  
As Nicodemus: shall I  
Go backward into my mother's womb?  
Yes. The great salmon leaps  
And hunches for her eggs' release,  
That the flesh go rotten  
Up steep rapids, in the water's clash  
And her brute determinate will  
Toward the gravelled pool.

I turn to my ignorant day.  
The bitch-salmon slams her body  
For the last time on the sea.

### II: *As Choice*

Each summer the killer whales cruise Hood Canal,  
Large, silent, and hungry, they flash black fins and  
white bellies,  
Carousing through the fjord. No one dares or cares  
to hurt them,  
And they leave as large and easy as they entered.

For days after there are no salmon. Then they rise with  
the full moon,

Leaping one after one, they break the phosphorescent  
calm water.  
In the shallows of the moon the eyes of small cowardly sharks  
Gleam. Next day the beach is strewn with mackerel.

Low tide, the tide lands stretch out damp but uncovered,  
clams spouting, oysters, geo-ducks, starfish and snails,  
Until life becomes longer and denser than the heart can control,  
And the entire tortured planet screams in the mind, an  
interminable feeding and swelling and expiring.

### III: *As Experience*

You went to the country. You stayed  
Where the mare foaled, sheep roamed the hills,  
Birds migrated each year on time,  
The moon greened the entire night.  
We walked in that natural light,  
Our speech was soft and slow, no bright  
Rapid protective irony,  
No need to make up for lost time  
With time possessed, with time broken.

When I left you I said good-bye  
Thinking you were lost to cities  
That I had lost you to this old  
Simple unruined life as before  
We had lost each other to wives,  
New friends, children, occupations.  
Then your content was my sorrow.

### IV: *As Birthdays*

Thirty seven years old  
Tired, head full of sand  
And when you looked up yesterday  
You had been deserted  
You counted the women who had already  
Gone stringy or gross  
And glared — full of rancour —

At the girls sauntering  
Down Columbus Avenue

The balcony curving rustily over Il Popolo  
The shop window with dried ducks  
The piers

It's all there  
And over it the years and years to come  
Books      poems      meals

*V: As Farewell*

Some day I will leave this room  
Empty. Better not to clutter it then  
And keep the removal  
Painless. Small memories are best.  
Chenin Blanc, the statement:  
"It will give others pleasure,  
Give it to them."

Decidedly different, a mangle  
Of shared pleasure, sang  
Sweet ironies to the leaves.  
Departure of trusted hearts,  
When shall eternities meet  
And sort, neatly, those hurt  
Randoms? Laid out on sills  
And window rests, brilliant  
Linen shrouds my reserves.  
And in declaration of sought night  
Deprived presences assert,  
Assert, a crumbling moon,  
    postfigure of delight.  
Then to the barriers of sleep  
    I commend my body  
And revolutions move me to a  
    city of endless light  
That circling passes to an  
    awakened court.  
Revolve, revolve, O ministers of grace.

# B O O K

# R E V I E W S

*Just Off The Aisle.* By Richard A. Duprey. Westminster: Newman Press. 209 pp. \$3.75.

In his Introduction, and first three chapters, Mr. Duprey displays refreshing candor as he opens up the subject of Catholic criticism. To begin with, he tries to shrug off the rigorism of most Catholic criticism, refusing to indict the theatre and motion pictures *in toto* as the handmaidens of Beelzebub. All too often Catholic critics are clerics, or clerically minded: they bring staunch faith to the theatre, but little else. They are far more concerned with safety than with art. Orthodoxy and chastity are the order of the day, and any play or motion picture that displays the fleshly aspects of life is anathema. He charges two groups with failure to serve the artistic interests of Catholic society: the clergy, and our universities and colleges.

"Sunday after Sunday, our preachers stand forthright and impreguably self-righteous in their pulpits, alleging bad faith to every person in the realm of the theatre, the motion pictures, television, the publishing world, etc., who dares to disagree in any way with their own particular diagnoses of the licit way to achieve artistic wholesomeness.

"These pulpit polemicists, armed with the authority the clerical collar gives them, thunder forth half-truths in the name of God, make unchristian allegations regarding the entertainment-makers and their 'real' intent and so pervert the public image of Christian truth with the blind energy of their zeal that the world shakes its head sadly and passes us

Catholics by, excluding us from the dialogue of those interested in the world of art and anxious to employ it in the 'life enrichment' for which it was intended."

Mr. Duprey then speaks of Catholic universities and colleges, and their contribution to Catholic inadequacy in art. "Our colleges and universities . . . have, for the most part, turned the arts *out* and have been noticeably deficient in encouraging them to positive growth . . . often pleading poverty for an excuse, which really hides a dogged feeling that the arts are not quite safe. They tend to ignore the whole area, to pretend it is not there and needs no curricular attention. . . .

"In today's 'rat-race' of scientific competition, our Catholic colleges which should husband their unique qualifications to safeguard Christian humanism, have squandered much of their limited resources on becoming shoddy facsimiles of M.I.T. . . ."

Of course, Mr. Duprey is entirely correct in what he says. Most members of the clergy won't like this sort of thing being bruited about, since they control our education system. But they can't dislodge the truth. Anyone who is a product of Catholic education or has attempted to teach within its confines knows all too well how thoroughly the creative arts are belittled, set in a corner, or, heavily shackled, are mounted on the campus stage as evidence of a minor fervor.

However, it would be unfair to charge the clerics with ulterior motives. Their major weakness is ignorance. Although they are well trained in spiritual and sacerdotal matters,

they have been denied almost any exposure to the creative arts. This has historical and economic bases, and it can be observed, particularly in the last five or ten years, that more and more clerics are becoming aware of the esthetics of art, and not just their moral dangers.

This, then, brings up the ultimate question of how one should view a work of art. Should a critic have the eyes of a moralist alone or should he possess the double vision of the moralist-esthete? Mr. Duprey answers the questions by posing three questions: 1) What is the author trying to do? 2) How well does he succeed in achieving that end? 3) Should it have been done in the first place?

Quite clearly, the first two questions deal with esthetics; only the third faces moral issues. In other words, Mr. Duprey is saying, let us *look* at the work *qua* work, without interposing moral questions. Only after assaying the material given do we place it in a moral context. Most Catholic critics, unfortunately, leap over the first two questions in order to embrace the third. In so doing, they miss the whole point of criticism. Not only that, but they fail to discover what art is.

Because Catholic education does little to further the arts, there are not too many Catholics engaged in them, particularly the theatre. There is no Catholic prominent anywhere, with the dubious exception of Graham Greene, who is a far better novelist than playwright. The theatre is a great artistic force and Catholics must come to reckon with it, both as participants and as critics. Otherwise, we merely leave the field to