

Daniel Morris

Art Pepper: Speechless Human

In days of punishment and humiliation I sold
Indulgence. Cynical, an unapproachable bull in
Picaresque swag. My blood covered mood, coated
Like a painted bird, fixed its attitude. Trill hues
Subdued lesser cats. (I'd conned outsiders.)
It wasn't for my dented alto they flocked to enter
The privy rank. I was homo alalus. What late
19th C. pseudo facial theorists termed Missing Link.
After urbane procedure – doc cut my tongue -- no surprise:
Inside excluded. Don't fear, I mumbled, dreamy under
Gas, crows won't come out. I got off imagining myself
A peregrine falcon. Unheeded and extremely single-minded.
Of Tod Versus Sterben I chose Sterben most every single time.

Vault

I.

None of them shall be born in Florida, insisted Walt.

This is why the sundry who visit MY PARK

As I imagine it will be of the predatory kind.

2.

It will keep the children away.

Yes, Walt mused. Reassuring.

We must keep the children away for the safety

Of those with others and all reasonable men.

3.

We must locate an environment in which schools and other essential

Public services are modest.

It is like that, I have found, in Orlando, and must also be so

Elsewhere in any state worthy of the Magic Kingdom.

4.

There shall be no sidewalks in or near MY theme park!

I know, I know all about the landscape architects, Alfred.

I know how they will insist. Walter,

Walter, they will plead. We know

You are “The Later 20th Century American Visionary” around here, but please,

On some aesthetic issues you must submit your fragrant will to those

In possession of the gift of rational judgment.

I will have none of it!

You hear me? None of it. Sidewalks

Will remind them of Olmstead. And Olmstead will

Remind them of dirty memories. Dirt is obviously

Inadmissible anywhere near my Brand.

Nor in all of Orlando shall one find

A sidewalk.

Vut Vault! (they will mutter in bigoted

Bavarian brogue. Vut zir, zoo is no longer veeing

Zensible avout zuch a zagrid izzshoo).

Park Streets, Park Place, Parker Houses...

They disremember. This is Disney World.

This is no game you play with kids on paper board

Of primary colors with dice and germs and tiny

Metal objects resembling impoverished memories of boots
And bugs. Think. The vat of mental stimulus my chefs prepare
On site. Sidewalks? Absolutely not. I just can't have it. I just can't
Tolerate the thoughts of their feet hurting me
Like that. It is simply too painful.

5.

Walt waited. Waiting

Was Walt's wild animal.

Half a century. Before he merely

Recreated. Which was when

The little intimates came.

But that was not

When Walt Disney came. He came

Late. But O when he came, he did

Matriculate. No modifiers.

To say such things as he came so fast and so strong

Is to miss the hurricane behind the ratio. He came out.

He came out simply because he had nothing left

To give but glitzy epaulettes and a simple white

Moustache. And that, my friends, is why

He named His Theme Park: Orlando.

6.

“And I Shall Further Divide My Kingdom
Into quadrants of roughly equal
Proportions to nominate the unruly
Measure of the American experience as follows:

Coney Island, Reservations Required,
Help I Need Thumbbody,
Unauthorized Persons Only Holding
Tank, Only the Lonely, William Howard Taft,
The Mirror Stage, Now and Later, Them,
Burnt heaven on a Stick, Leather
Can't Wait, Blame the Victim,
The Raft of Pleasure Drone,
You Moron, My son or daughter is an Honor
Student at Pinecrest Elementary, Blockade
At the Car Wash, My other car is a broom,
Correctional Facility
Maintenance Unit Brigade Number 8,
Area planning commission board meeting
Inner chamber, I-4 Premium Gold and Golf
Outlet, Defunct Dole Pineapple
Canning Facility of the Big Island Cloak
Room and Personnel Development Office.”

7.

On the island of ordinary people
Cast members shall instruct
Guests on finding your husband,
On adjusting to right ear nausea,
On the ups and downs of drinking
From foreign wells and streams,
Laws of distribution versus individual
Usage of oxygen tents near
Golden Park safety matches, use of
Anadapur telegraphy, the subtle
Difference (in translation) of evidence
And probable cause.

For insurance purposes we shall make
Clear we operate by probable cause
In the Magic Kingdom.

8.

Walt: "I have succeeded in what I set out to do,
Ye Mousketeers in Black."

"And why is that, Walt Disney?"

"Why? Because I am a genius
Beyond the genus of the C."

"And how does ye know tis true Vault Bisney?"

"Why, because I took the test."

"What kind of test do measure
Dat extreme O tell us?
What kind of inheritance test?"

"O silly Mouskettoons!
Not an inheritance text,
An insurmountable task!"

Annette to Frankie:

"But he just said..."

Frankie to Annette (many

Years later): "Shh, now, Shh..."

'Put your head on my shoulder'..."

Miles to Go

Devil, never pimped, kinked
Engine malfunction, nor never did complain
Of Chuck Mangione as white. Marianne
Moore played no trick on me. Nor did I
Drift into a political fall out with W.H. Auden, nor cut
My pretty wig over the Discipline of Romance.
Noticed things about our nature later in life I
Hadn't noticed as a child? No. Never sunk to weaving
My hair noticeably, never fired
Relatives. In fact, never did sell my antler or imply
Plastic form, never rented a buzz from
Art Farmer, never got hoot from a
Major corporation like SONY. How unlikely,
How unfair, compare Chettie White Cat to
Miles Dewey Davis. True, at funerals worried face looked like a
Girl in ash, but cared less my legs were thin because I knew
Things in general, very conventional.

All Art Is Quite Useless

As played (and directed) by uncanny Jackson Pollock double Ed Harris in the 2000 film that took him ten years to produce and was the fulfillment of a life long dream, the artist, now famous, but already bearded, puffy, paranoid after abandonment by Clement Greenberg for Clyfford Still at dinner parties on the Hamptons and in the pages of *The Partisan Review*, and drunk following two years sober when he by chance kicked a can of white enamel on the barn floor at Springs on the Island, mumbles to Lee Krasner (Academy Award winning co-star Marcia Gay Hardin) that his co-ed girl friend, Ruth from Bennington, is his “last chance” and that “I love her” and that “I owe her something.”

A tough Jewish broad from Brooklyn, Lee is going to Italy with him or without him. She will leave him for good if he doesn't stop playing with the little girl, merely a privileged brat who is used to getting what she wants and getting Jackson Pollock is merely another prized possession. Lee, as we, can see understands that Ruth is unprepared to deal with a psychotic forty-three year old whom the movie shows has only reached his middle years through Lee's mothering, promotion, and feeding of eggs and milk. I realize Jackson has never gotten over the loss of his mother at a very young age.

Curling his chest hair in bed, Ruth asks Jackson who he would like to be and he answers “you.” It is at this point he cannot even conceal his own lies to himself that Ruth, the self-described “last chance,” will not save him. After trying without success to rescue a dog -- a figure for himself -- hit by a car -- a figure for his moods -- Pollock arrives late to the train station to pick up Ruth and her innocent girl friend Edith, whom Ruth has summoned from Bennington to show off her Prize Pollock. Jackson is, like the care, in no mood.

Pollock is curled in the fetal position. He is on the bed in his overalls and work boots. He is weeping when Ruth knocks on the bedroom door wearing her little black dress. She and Edith are ready to go to the party. They are getting restless. Hadn't he promised they would be meeting Clyfford Still?

Oscar Wilde offers the following remarks about the relationship of life and art, ethics and aesthetics, in the “Preface” to *The Portrait of Dorian Gray* (1890).

- (A.) “No artist desires to prove anything.”
- (B.) “All art is at once surface and symbol.”
- (C.) “Those who go beneath the surface do so at their peril.”

(D.) “Those who read the symbol do so at their peril. “

(E.) “It is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors.”

After viewing *Pollock* at age 49, I agree in most cases with A, cannot see how I can disagree with B., am unfamiliar with the experience of C and D, but strongly agree with E. E, ironically, disproves the Wilde quotation I used as the ironic title of this prose poem. For after renting *Pollock* it became painfully obvious even to me that my fantasy of running off with the 23 year old black stripper from Kokomo named Tray with three kids (one ADD, one Augsburg's, one PTSD), a record, a habit, an ex, a trailer without a.c., a '79 Mazda that needs a new clutch, and half year of credits towards a dental assistant's associate degree at Iyy Tech Fort Wayne isn't going to save me from my life as a paunchy late middle aged, lower middle class midwestern English professor at a Land Grant Engineering college through the long slide from insecurity to irrelevance to invisibility. Following the second of the 12 steps (involving being restored to sanity) I make a rare good move by not making to “Tray the kind of declaration Jackson makes to Lee. Watching *Pollock*, I conclude, not only helped save my marriage, restored me to sanity, and quite possibly saved my life, it also clarified my realization that not only am I not a Jackson Pollock wannabe waiting to stumble over a can of something that will change my life, but I am also not a minor member of Oscar Wilde's camp.