

TO LIVE THE WORLD OF THE POET

by John Claxton

The natural world of wood lot and field reflects little of man's preoccupation with the computable aspects of our punch-card society. But it is often only in the realm of this natural element that the poet can find the peace to pursue and the substance to enhance inspiration. Therefore, it follows that any understanding of poetry necessarily entails a comprehensible communication with the natural rather than an indiscriminate acceptance of the calculable. Perhaps this is the great fault of provincial studies of poetry. In students' attempts to categorize syntax into simple columns of convenience, in their reliance upon Webster to answer any uncertainties, in their search for meanings in minutiae, they have perhaps been blinded by the brightness of their own knowledge, which has cast a shadow over the unpredictable creativity of the poet. And I believe that this gloom of delusion can be dispelled only by a conscious effort to live the world of the poet.

His world of experience starts with the rising of the sun. For the poet greets the morning gold with optimism, with sensitivity, with everything but that indifference with which millions recognize the arrival of just another day (usually manifested in a blank stare of disbelief). As his day continues, he may experience the uncomfortable ride of a suburban commuter, yet still be amused by the genuine smile of a small child. He may experience the uncomfortable warmth of an afternoon sun, yet still take interest in the birdbath antics of a splashing sparrow. His world is one of total awareness, but even more important, it is his task to instill this awareness in others by utilization of his talents. For in attempting to verbalize the heightened emotion of a woodland kingdom pensively anticipating the blossoming morn, the poet can possibly initiate a spark of natural interest in mankind. Failure to live these experiences of the poet results in difficulty with and misunderstandings of the poet's meaning—the prevalent pitfall of traditional poetry studies.

The world of the poet is also manifested in places. Mountain, struggling streamlet, meandering cinder path—now rainy-day-thoughts in the archives of his mind—these were once integral parts of a vivid reality: not a weekend reality sought only for lack of other treasures, but a reality which is part of his daily experience. So how then can

one expect to master the mysteries of the poet if he has not even met the mysteries of the mountain? How can one expect to recognize the world of nature while yet enshrouded in the blackness of the pedantic? However fruitless this pursuit may seem, it is practiced by every student of poetry who attempts to visualize Xanadu, the Lorelei, or the chateau of Chillon. Indeed, there is nothing sacred about the places of the poet: they are common, they are easily found, and they have, at last report, neither ascended nor descended into oblivion. Perhaps their merit lies in the very fact that they are so readily discoverable, an attribute which is apparently overlooked by many.

Ultimately, the poet's world is inhabited by people—not people who are fettered by the chains of society which are worn to restrain their creative impulses, but people who choose to show their true selves to this ignoble world. Having little faith in facades, these are people who kiss because they are in love, fight because they are angry, smile because they are happy. Indeed, the people of the poet are genuine. And only when we become more like the poet's people, becoming indignant of facades, disdaining the entanglements of artificiality, seeking meaningful relationships, only then can we rise into the saddle and ride society—only then can we understand the secret of the poet.

Therefore, the search for the meaning of the poem is not a difficult one if the proper places are investigated. Do not search for the meaning in Webster, but rather in the awakening call of the mourning dove. Do not rely upon the dusty volumes of dormant scholars, but rather upon the immutable wisdom of an aged mountain. And ultimately, the truth of the poem can be found in the truthful man.