

Mad Poetry Project

Inside Out Eye

When did I say goodbye to the easily shrouded eye?

The date is December 2nd, 1988, it's a Tuesday.

A crystal sphere, covered by black wool, clouds of swirling gray smoke.

Hallucinations include the sounds of a chattering bridge club and a squeaking grocery cart wheel.

On my fifth birthday, I saw myself receiving a rectangular diploma,

I wore a jean jacket, and a swirling gray gown, the applause sounded like a slamming cell door,

And in the air, there was a pizza-like aroma.

Delusions of grandeur and narcissistic personality disorder afflict the patient.

I saw myself speeding down an empty city street in a red convertible,

Blinding natural light pored through the iron-barred windows of the easel laden space of my loft,

Where the rent was always free.

Nights were lost to panicked flights and days swirled down into mugs of burning coffee.

Patient self-medicates with nicotine and caffeine,

Has previously responded well to art therapy.

Strokes of red and yellow-blue fill the canvas' torn white hue,

Conspirators paint on either side of me in smocks of flattened gray,

Peals of lightning pause my paintbrush and turn my mind to broccoli stew.

Patient claims that two orderlies stole a special paintbrush.

I snap back into reality to straighten the lapel of my seated labcoat,

Click the spring of my ballpoint pen and watch M smack their head against the padded wall.

The date is December 2nd, 1988, it's a Tuesday, a Tuesday...

Poem Composition Commentary

When I began composing my poem for the mad poetry project, I started by pondering the theme of duality within the mind of a mad person and the dichotomy between sanity and insanity. The internal narrative of someone who perceives the world through an alternative lens seemed like an

important starting point, because in most cases that constant silent/mumbled conversation is the only form of communication a mad person may have within their isolated world. Many mad people completely disconnect from the world around them, instead choosing to exist within a vivid, internal fantasy world where they can exercise the autonomy and freedom of thought that they are often denied in the real world. With my poem, I primarily wanted to present a cryptic narrative through two voices (the italicized voice and the non-italicized voice) that provided both angles of a questionably two-sided conversation. Hopefully, the reader will initially assume that the person speaking/thinking with an italicized voice is the mad person in this scenario; the reader should also initially assume that the non-italicized voice is the sane person in this scenario. In my mind, this poem's narrative takes place in a padded room, within a psychiatric ward, where a person in a hospital gown is curled up on an infirmary bed. This person's voice is presented with the non-italicized text. The second person, with an *italicized* voice, is a psychiatrist wearing a white lab coat, seated in front of the fetal-position patient with a notepad and pen while these two people prepare to begin a therapy session. Setting and character aren't very important in a poem, but I thought I would clarify these elements to explain part of my intention. The primary objective of my poem is to comment on the dichotomy between madness and sanity through the contrast between perception / misconceptions, and the relationship between what we're told to believe and what we really experience or see. With my first line, I wanted to establish that the person in question in question was missing something. On the surface, this was a mislead intended to trick the reader into thinking that the italicize-voiced person is missing their sanity. Really, the easily shrouded eye refers to the imaginative perceptions that we possess as children, but which are ultimately snuffed out by the voices of older authority figures, who manipulate us into abandoning our free-forms of thinking in favor of

a misconstrued perception of reality that others control. In my mind, an uninhabited and creative form of perceiving the world would be saner than an externally controlled and locked world-perception, and that's a part of what I'm trying to say with my poem. The second line is another mislead, intended to convince the audience that the non-italicized voice is a sane person who is beginning a session of some sort by noting the date. The second section of italicized internal speech mentions "a crystal sphere", which is a reference to the clairvoyance that is sometimes attributed to mad people who experience preternatural foresight in exchange for experiencing nightmarish hallucinations. "Black wool" refers to the jaded version of reality that people are forced to accept at some point in their childhood or adolescence. "Clouds of swirling gray smoke" refers to the eye of a blind person, whose perception of reality is muddled, similar to a delusional person, but on the other hand their ways of perceiving the world are more open to imagination and individuality. The fourth line continues the connected narrative surrounding a patient-therapist relationship. This linear sense of connectivity reinforces the notion that the non-italicized voice is the sane person in this scenario, but in hindsight it presents the idea that locking onto a rail-road-like form of world perception can be dangerous. "Sounds of a chattering bridge club" and "squeaking grocery cart wheel" are also images associated with muted domesticity, which led to the madness according to older minds, but more importantly I was trying to connote the idea of feeling locked into a form of cabin fever, forced conversation/games, and wandering through the labyrinth of a grocery store until the end of time. With the third italicized section I was attempting to present a normal memory (high school graduation) through a manic voice to attach a tone of confusion and betrayal. "Rectangular" refers to a cell, along with "a jean jacket" which is something prisoners used to wear, reinforced by "slamming cell door" and all of these images contribute to the theme of feeling locked into a

certain way of living/thinking, which is a form of counter-intuitive insanity which we assume to be normal. The eighth line is a reference to maladies that often afflict people that are considered to be sane, and these vane delusions are also connected to adolescence. The fourth italicized section is a sort of crosshatched snapshot that combines imagination and reality, summarizing what the non-italicized character imagined for their young adulthood (beautiful sights/freedom) followed by what they actually experienced. “Blinding light” refers to the disillusioning effect of reality. “Iron-barred windows” and free rent could refer to staying in an asylum, but they’re intended to represent staying in a dorm at university. Iron bars don’t really need to represent physical confinement, in my imagination they stand for a fragile form of filigree that serve as an allusion to authority-confined thinking. Self-medicating with nicotine and caffeine are common approaches to stress management used by “normal” people, and “art therapy” is something most people need to help alleviate them from the dullness of their reality. In the second to last section of italicized voice, “red” represents anger and “yellow-blue” stands for anxiety followed by depression. A torn canvas is a metaphor for the alien topography of an insane person’s mind, where plunging cliffs and astronomical heights make it difficult to traverse the realm of reason. “Pearly of lightning” refers to electro-shock therapy, and “pause my paintbrush” points to the negative effect of psychiatric treatment on a patient’s creativity. “Patient claims that two orderlies stole a special paintbrush” tells a short story about the theft of a person’s individual point-of-view, whether they be mad or not, simply because they were overpowered by authoritarian modes of thinking. The last three lines draw everything together, revealing that the italicized voice belonged to the sane authority figure all along. This person was free to imagine and remember fragments of their life through an individual lens. The non-italicized voice belongs to an insane patient who simply repeats something previously spoken by an authority

figure over and over, banging their head against the wall until their field of view is immersed in darkness. The implications of the final three lines truly summarize the overall theme of my poem, presenting the idea that imagination and individualized thoughts should be the cornerstones of our general view of psychology, instead of being villainized and given a negative label. The vilest form of thinking is one that is imposed upon an under-developed mind by an authority figure. Accepting another person's thoughts without question is insane, and it can leave us mentally immobilized as we wonder where an intellectual virus led our minds astray.