

CRITIQUE SONG OF K. BRUCE COOK

Kevin Cook

“Spiritus est promptus;
carno est infirma.”

Let us pause then, you and I,
When the morning has leaped up into the sky
Into tenth, eleventh places on the clock;
Let us stay, within some halfway-fathomed lines,
The twining, whining shrines
Of hopeless nights in helpless authors' shells
And dusted dreams marooned in private Hells:
Lines we follow like bacterial lament
With a clinical intent
Which lead us to a weekly essay question.
So watch as thirty sages
Rush away to fill five pages.

In the room the children all succumb
To “Sailing to Byzantium.”

The too-cool air that filters in beneath the weathered doors,
The yellow sun that cools its feet upon this hardwood floors,
Mix essences in corners of the classroom,
Chill chalk definitions, day-old chores,

Let drift within themselves the words that float unspoken,
Slide out the window, make a three-floor leap,
And noting that it is an early April day,
Abandon Jordan Hall, when talk is cheap.

And indeed there will be days
 For the yellow cool that gilds the parking lot,
 Swirling in the quickly taken squares;
 There will be days, to strip the haze,
 To shed the masks that mask the feelings that you feel;
 There will be days to truly comprehend,
 And understand the words of Eliot,
 That like a dividend will then descend;
 Days to know, yet disagree,
 And days for yet a hundred credit hours,
 And for a hundred seen-from-window flowers,
 Before I take a yellow-cool degree.

In the room the children all succumb
 To "Sailing to Byzantium."

And indeed must come the time
 To wonder, "Prufrock's puzzle — must it be?
 Is it all his own fault? Is it me?
 Am I naive, to shun his corpse-esprit?"
 (They will say: "How ideals cling to him!")

My unlined life, a double decade interim,
 My unreceded hair, and search for a synonym —
 (They will say: "What does he want? The seraphim?")
 Do I dare
 Disturb the wasteland man?
 At twenty years there's time
 For judgments that will later seem a crime.

For I have known it all already, known it all:—
 Have known the objects, meanings and designs;
 I have painted all the world in black/white lines;
 I have known far more than others each new fall,
 Have handed out beliefs like valentines.
 Again should I presume?

But now I wonder (once I knew, knew it all) —
 Wonder if perhaps there's more than black and white.
 When this is contemplated, scrawling on a pad,
 When I am penned and writing on the wall,
 Maybe all things *are* mad;
 Guardian angels quickly take to flight, and
 The world's no anteroom.

And now I think, having known it all, known it all —
 Is anything knowable? Do I know?
 (For in the real light, is more than black and white!)
 Is it little bites of fear

That make me stall right here?
 Insects that crawl into my ear, and somehow stop my scrawl
 And can I faith exhume?
 And how can I presume?

Shall I say, I have felt the dust of college halls
 And read the chalk that stays upon the walls
 Of empty rooms; and the fall of Gaul I can recall?

I should have stayed among my high school class
 Acting older than we were, en masse.

But the poem, and the love song, are the issue,
 Penned by wor (1)dy hand,
 Bitter, grim, a hatred grand
 Splashed upon the page, and printed for the few.
 I shall, having read of his devices,
 Have the courage to rebuke his sacrifices.
 For though I've spoken rashly, spoken wrongly,
 Though I've felt my words (grown fully wrong) forced back into
 my throat,
 I am a student—that keeps me afloat;

I have seen the certain truth of knowledge wane,
 And have felt eternal Poets look at me, in pain,
 But now, again, I'll think.

I have seen in his despair song, *after all*,
 Prufrock's failing is the problem of Man,
 He is afraid and unwilling to do what he *can*.
 Asking always: "Would it be worthwhile?"
 Completes the thought with just a futile smile.
 He has not the heart to face what might befall,
 Were he to break the mold, defy them all.
 To say: "I am John Proctor, prepared to die,
 Rather than to aid my own downfall!" —
 Then one, recalling stronger days,
 Might say: "That is a thing that I recall.
 Martyrdom, I recall."

And it would have all been worth it, after all,
 It would have been worth while,
 After empty, hated parties and despairing,
 After the bitter, after the fearful, after the dark that follows
 all the weak—
 All this, a life so bleak—
 It's not impossible to die for what you feel.....
 It would be as if a Samson, now, had brought the temple down on
 him:
 It would have been worth while
 If only one, wondering how it was you grew so tall,
 And pondering your memory, should say:
 "He had the wherewithal;
 Perhaps it's Hope that's writing on the wall."

No, we are not all martyrs, nor were meant to be;
 But we all need heroes, those daring to do
 What we fear, to battle a windmill or two,
 To reach a star, to reach, at least—again,
 For better lives, here, now, to begin,
 Though fearful and tearful and insecure:

Some men would follow, who had been hollow,
And some, in time, unable to endure,
Would fail.
But some would win.

Gloria (Glorious)...
In excelsis homo (man victorious).

Shall I retreat from such a vision? Too ambitious?
Their potential is what makes men more than fishes.
I find Prufrock's love song too malicious.

Any hope is nobler than no hope at all.

Prufrock feels he cannot change his ways,
But his paralysis is all our own.
We must strive for more, or die, alone.

We have lingered in the darkness, dying, small,
Grown stagnant in our wasteful failure-cry.

Man's only glory is the heart to try.