

Sep-1986

## Poetry: A Star's Biography

W. F. Bolton

---

### Recommended Citation

Bolton, W. F. (1986). Poetry: A Star's Biography. *Bridgewater Review*, 4(2), 11.  
Available at: [http://vc.bridgew.edu/br\\_rev/vol4/iss2/8](http://vc.bridgew.edu/br_rev/vol4/iss2/8)

differently, for middle class students with a college legacy in the family, higher education is mostly further socialization, additional steps along a familiar path; for first generation students, however, it is a resocialization and a departure, and a sometimes jarring one at that. Mobility, after all, requires learning the ways of a different social class: its styles of language (accent and vocabulary, for example), dress, aesthetic tastes, conversational topics, preferences in media, the arts, and so on. (Indeed, the classical sociologist Max Weber claimed that the differences between social classes were most conspicuous in the conduct of everyday life.)

There were many examples of this in the interviews. One student, for example, told of returning home for Thanksgiving vacation wearing a tweed sports jacket with patches on the elbows, only to be teased mercilessly by his family. Another reported how she expressed her new, more liberal stands on sex roles and race relations during the family breakfast conversation, provoking angry outbursts that seemed directed more at her than at her positions. Of course, tweed jackets and liberalism are by no means monopolized by the middle class, but in both cases (and in others like them) they were seized upon as symbols of a student's becoming different, of becoming more "middle class." These symbols, then, provided family members with an opportunity to express their concerns about the consequences of change, more specifically, about the possibility of loss. It was as if someone said, "Look, we've all noticed that you appear different in some respects. We may be proud of you, but we still want to know what this means to us as individuals and as a family. Will we still recognize your voice, or are we left only with a fading echo?" The students, of course, had similar concerns, and sometimes purposefully behaved "differently" in order to test the family waters. In either case, I believe what families were really expressing, in an indirect, disguised and sometimes counterproductive fashion, was a sense of "endangered love," and a concern about whether family members might be able to find new ways of loving each

other.

It is difficult to say just how representative these fifteen students are of others who are the first in their families to go to college. They certainly were not selected by a "scientific" sampling process. Most in fact were volunteers responding to ads placed in student newspapers, and a few were found through word of mouth. Perhaps only the ones with the most pressing concerns decided to participate; then again, maybe the ones with the most pressing concerns were too anxious to participate. The important point, however, is not whether or not the interviewed students are somehow "representative," but that they inform or remind us that social achievement is not always entirely pleasant. It is, as we all know, a culturally valued and usually unquestioned goal; but when we focus on the negative side of upward movement we see that the same modernity that creates the possibility of "opportunity" also creates the potential for biographical and social dislocation. It is, I believe, something we ought to investigate about our society, ourselves (if we have experienced it), and our students.

### A Star's Biography

When life has narrowed down,  
One finds oneself become  
Only what one's public will remember:  
A man, a woman, caught by the persona  
Of certain fame.

"This is not what I am..."

Behind the image,  
The presentation, the facade;  
Behind the million words, the gestures  
Learned to perfection, the studied calm  
Of the hidden self,  
Lies the horror.

"This is not what I am..."

Watching one's self float off  
Like a child's balloon  
When one day the child lets go.  
Smaller and smaller, against the sun,  
Black as the whitest bird  
In the brightest sky.

W. F. Bolton



David Wilson

Howard London teaches in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology of Bridgewater State College. His research and publications concern higher education, particularly the areas of student, faculty, and administrative cultures. Professor London has served as a consultant to the National Institute of Education's Program on Educational Policy and Organization, as well as to the National Commission on Excellence in Education.