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Poetry: Betrayal

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Betrayal for Virginia Joki

me from giving a detailed description of good pornography. But judging from my own experience, such materials need not confirm one in the belief that "all women look alike," that -- to quote Professor Mandell -- "women are shown as a collection of orifices waiting to be penetrated." On the contrary, only someone who *already* believed that "all (nude) women look alike" would find nothing but "monotonous regularity" in pornography. Ironically, those who insist upon art or "erotica" may be unwittingly revealing their own ambivalence about the aesthetic resources of the human body. In any event, Mandell endorses the idea that the need for pornography springs from sexual dissatisfaction and misery. Here she ignores the capacity of people to enjoy pornography and fulfilling sex without giving up either. Many people can assimilate a variety of experiences into their sexual repertoire, and couples have been known to rave about the sex they've had after viewing pornography together. People who *want* to enjoy pornography *and* consensual sex are likely to be amused by the (sincere but misplaced) concern Mandell has for *their* sexual fulfillment.

Finally, two matters of more general interest. Some readers were puzzled by the title of my essay. It is of course an allusion to E.M. Forster's essay, "Two Cheers for Democracy." I agree with one of my colleagues who said that a more accurate title would have been "Two Cheers for *Some* Pornography." However, that title might have created the impression that I meant to limit my defense to "soft-core" pornography. I did not.

I regret some of my criticisms of Ann Garry, whose essay "Pornography and Respect for Women" is worth reading for the contributions it makes to our understanding of pornography. Garry has a delicious sense of humor, something sadly lacking in many writers on this topic. Shortly after completing my essay, I met Garry in Los Angeles and I asked her if she had had further thoughts on the subject. She grimaced in feigned discomfort and said, "I've O.D.'d on pornography." I feel much the same way.

This frail form, regal even in death,
Has been betrayed by those she lived to save:
the words, the words, the slipping, sliding words,
have done her in.

Yet no surprise nor shock troubles her sleep,
for she has always known, but would not tell,
how unreliable the words could be:
evasive, self-deluding, double-edged,
ready to rip you open, cut you up,
not with satiric thrust, sarcastic bite,
but rather with the razor slice of Time
that strips us all.

She would have been the very last to say
"Never believe a word of what you hear!"
except to quell some gossip she deplored.

Her faith

was wide-eyed, innocent, rooted beyond belief
in the simple flower, the cast of light,
the glow of candle, soft and gentle sound
of music. Awed by all wonders: the Taj Mahal,
the tabby cat, the mountain's grandeur, and one autumn leaf
held reverently in her hand.

The rose blush deepened at her fond caress.

Each sound she uttered stood

like a quiet benediction. She knew the weight
of words as goldsmiths know their precious hoard.

But words were, after all, only the sounds
we give to things, and things were her domain;
naming them but a pastime.

She listened more and more, spoke less and less,
but what she said stood steady as the sun,
and as reliable.

She used the words to soothe, to seek,
yet scorned

hypocrisy wherever it appeared.

Her words were both benevolence and bane,
and no one ever failed to understand her.

She stripped away the posture of disdain,
of demagoguery and guile and subterfuge;
spoke out for those warmed by the sidewalk grates
of Harvard Square; wept for the weak,
the ill, the underfed,
but never for herself.

Her love for people was too great for words.

O, from your dearly loved but far too lofty
Andean peaks, look down and pity us,
betrayed by words that will not speak our hearts.
And teach the angels how the earth says, "Love."

Harold Ridlon

A highly respected and deeply loved English Professor Emerita of Bridgewater State College, Virginia Joki died in October 1986. An avid traveler, she had visited every place she wished to see except for the Andes. Harold Ridlon is a Professor and former Chairperson of the Department of English at Bridgewater.