

FEATURED POET: ARTHUR BROWN

Editor's Note

I recall holding the view that poetry, and literature in general, have little or nothing to do with truth or inquiry. Elements of analytic philosophy, strongly discursive thinking habits, and so the primacy of arguments, brought me to the conclusion that the poet does not exactly engage reality. I own all the responsibility for this wretched view as it cannot possibly be blamed on the nature of philosophical reason or the methods of analytic philosophy.

The change that came over me was relatively simple but hard fought: truth comes in fragments from relentless empirical and conceptual analysis and truth comes from poetic/literary revelation (and from other sources). "Revelation" here is fully secular and means, essentially, a direct perception of truth. I seemed to have learned, as a necessary aspect of this process, that revelation is perhaps more difficult than analysis (or all the methods of social and natural science but interestingly related to those methods).

The revelation that is achievable from poetry clearly depends on the relationship between words and experience that somehow shape themselves into a synthesis that then seems like an actual perception. There is no formula for this achievement but we do know that it is a craft of incredible insight. Work, for the poet, is in some ways like the work of patience and acuity that drives the field biologist. Inputs from the natural world must be focused and filtered to capture the essential slice of reality. For all its depth and durability, the observations of the field biologist are finally driven by the profound details for proper outcomes. For the poet, the patience of observation is without the need for data. There is then a cognitive opening for a seeing that has no other purpose besides seeing (this point is, of course, akin to Kant's disinterested interest).

Poetry can then categorically alter our capacities as observers. In the poems found here by Arthur Brown, one must appreciate the manner in which the meaning and possibility of truthful observation is challenged and affirmed. What is it to finally recognize our status as observers and what finally is the nature of what is observed? How can these be grasped in their immediacy? One might say that we are not accomplished observers until we finally recognize our fascination with the dynamic between what we observe and our awareness of how we observe: these two cross paths to form the conditions for revelation.

Ultimately "observer" and "observation" seem sterile, the dynamic in the above creates the active, fully engaged and reflectively embodied perceiver. Poetry then creates what seems more like perception than words, as if words could transform themselves into literal perceptions. It is almost always the case that words as perceptions focus on what observation forgets or misses.

These are some of my impressions generated by Arthur Brown's fine set of poems in this edition of Janus Head. Everything I just said, which is non-theoretical and untouched by any theory of poetry, is inspired by Professor Brown's poems. Janus Head remains committed to finding and publishing excellent poets and poetry. We see poetry as inquiry and so as one of the many interrelated ways that human beings seek truth and meaning.

John Pauley
Editor