

A VERDICT:

... A SEMI-COHERENT RAMBLING TOWARDS THE END OF A FACULTY PARTY

"Why are most poets utter assholes?" a coworker asked while munching on a blue cheese cracker with a dark olive thinly sliced.

"I don't know. Perhaps they are lost in their own worlds." I explained while shaking my head slightly, then slowly sipping a glass of lukewarm Belgian beer with a faint wisp of blueberry.

"I can certainly understand why politicians are assholes. You know, that's obvious! Also, it's not hard to see why many attorneys might be assholes, too. But poets?" she teased, shrugging her right shoulder until her undergarment protruded slightly with a mock solemnity.

Letting the cold chill of my umpteenth faculty party settle while glancing at the setting sun through a thinly veiled window curtain, gingerly I assembled a semi-coherent obfuscation, "Think of it this way: poets are lexical politicians. Each word in existence longs to have a voice, but only a few gain the privilege of appearing in ink."

Her eyes furtively moved upward while attempting to process the linguistic garbage I offered. Without question, my words were hardly convincing. My tone of voice blatantly betrayed my intentions: I was not even convinced of the veracity of what I said. However, I was hoping that my speech had at least a fledgling novelty. After a few micro-seconds, a wry smile appeared across my coworker's face as she picked up a dry martini.

"After all, sir, this a-a-ain't a democracy," she jeered with a feigned American accent, delighting in the stupidity. Triumphantly, she then slurped down yet another acerbic cocktail with elegant demur.

"Ah, faculty parties are such boring affairs!" silently I mused while tapping my left foot ever so slightly and scanning the hall of all persons present. How many ghosts in the banquet hall were present? Most teachers seemed like mannequins engaging in conversation rituals with mock solemnity, generally more intent on speaking than listening. A few were lost in their own worlds and focused only on the food in front of them. Only one or two of those present seemed really animated - and I was not among them.

Without bothering to add another word, the professor next to me smiled while intuitively sensing my escalating ennui. To break the awkward silence, she then lamely devised a conversational exit: a graceful way out of the barrage of words that had been laid down on this scattered minefield of discourse. "And I suppose we can say that poets are like lawyers in a sense. Aren't they always trying to justify their words and bend the rules of diction to their favor in the court of public opinion?" Feeling proud of her logic, she took a deep breath before picking up a celery and speared green olive with a bright crimson pimento. Unfortunately, I simply wasn't in the mood for sophisticated chat.

As the alcohol began working more vigorously on my brain, my face became increasingly flushed. About one thing, however, I remained clearheaded: I could discern that this was not the place to say anything significant. Talk about the weather or vacation plans would suffice. I could also feign interest in some popular television drama or sports event. Or at the risk of tedium, even politely ask about another teacher's research field. However, matters of consequence were not the purview of faculty parties.

My coworker - who was eminently keen-witted when sober - pretended that our conversation was structured with impeccable logic. Indeed, as long as the alcohol worked and one did not think deeply, our exchange was almost convincing - or at least relatively harmless. Triumphantly she then proclaimed, "Yep! Makes perfect sense! Poets are assholes, along with politicians and lawyers!"

Smiling faintly, I then added, "Just like the rest of us" before departing to a dark corner of the banquet hall, waiting for the this tedious faculty party to wind down.

- T Newfields [Nitta Hirou / Huáng Yuèwǔ]

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