

1963

Prologue or... The second cremation of Shelley

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Recommended Citation

Fleckenstein, Lawrence C. (1963) "Prologue or... The second cremation of Shelley," *The Angle*: Vol. 1963: Iss. 1, Article 2.

Available at: <https://fisherpub.sjf.edu/angle/vol1963/iss1/2>

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Prologue or... The second cremation of Shelley

Abstract

In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"The members, five in number , (one stated beforehand that he would be late), remarked that the muse was their inspiration and that all apple-judging must begin with an invocation. A picture hanging on the wall portrayed the muse as a cross-legged dwarf, sitting on a cloud with four arms. I asked one of the judges what the four arms were for. "Why", said he, "One is to enable the muse to cover his eyes while judging, the other to hold the apple while his mouth was engaged in mastication, the next to pick the seeds from his teeth and the last to sit on". He had to sit on it, lest he pull the other from his eyes. Another judge remarked that there lay the greatest difficulty in judging: the portrait was too distracting."

Cover Page Footnote

Appeared in the issue: Volume 8, Spring, 1963.

Prologue **or . . . The second cremation of Shelley**

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Once the members sat down, the prize was set out; one solitary apple. Being the only person present without a blindfold, I noticed the apple had a strange tag on it which simply said, Shelley. As all were required to present evidence of capability in judging, they each in turn came forth with a degree from the Higher School of Apple-Judging, a newly founded institution which in its short-lived existence had grown in an enormous number of graduates. This was verified in part because its constitution read that the cornerstone of apple-judging was that everyone could learn it.

The first critic reached out, took the apple and plucked its stem.

"Give me a ruler", he said. With eminent disdain he pro-

ceeded to measure length and width. Having achieved profuse distinction on apple stems, he remarked that it was not up to standards. "Undoubtedly, this one is a poor specimen. Due to the fact that an apple is only judged in relation to its stem, this one lacks the necessary qualities which I feel are a part of a good apple." With this, everyone immediately agreed.

The next judge took the apple in his hands, felt its texture, tossed it in the air, caught it, and tossed it again, saying, "Since it has good texture and I can catch it without seeing it, there must be something missing in its quality". Everyone agreed, while he continued tossing, further remarking that he thought it violated some law of physics.

Two judges fell fast asleep while the others proceeded and presupposing this, they had written their decisions beforehand on little slips of paper. These two were not only graduates in apple-judging, but were also professors of the subject. Hence the singular honor of being allowed to sleep.

The last one was a very heavy-set man, huge in hulk, hearing the constitution of a well contented yet underfed bull. You could not help but perceive that inside his huge head, something was pulsing.

He grasped the apple, opened his huge mouth, bit, and into the very caverns of hell went Shelley. Slowly his huge jaws began to move, the sinews strained like the piston of some giant locomotive. Each time they met, it seemed as if a great punch press were stamping out parts of metal. Slowly, his grotesque mouth gained speed, until it rose to an amazing rapidity. The juice oozed from the edges of his mouth as if he were in a rare, seldom witnessed fit of ecstasy. Here was a true judge and critic! In the midst of it all was a low grumbling. You would have sworn that the same titan was screaming while chained in the cave of rebirth!

He bit again, until only a small piece of Shelley was left. He groped amidst throes of short windedness, spit the seed on the table, and remarked that these were the best part.

The others watched acutely as the mighty pistons spent their force. Amongst a well-reserved expectoration of gaseous matter from his mouth the utterance, "too juicy" was heard.

The final sentence once passed, the great one complained of indigestion, only he could not remember whether he had contracted it before or after he bit into Shelley. The only thing I remembered, was that in addition to eating the entire apple, he had also eaten the very card on which the poet's name was written.

Lawrence C. Fleckenstein