

hours, daily meetings of three hours were held. Although the history and the literature of the period constituted the heart of the course, guest lecturers on the music and the furniture of the Renaissance provided an enjoyable variation in the students' concentration on the subject matter. Two volumes donated by the cultural attaché served a similar purpose; *L'Art monumental* and the fascinating engravings of *L'Ecole de Fontainebleau* afforded visual proof of the classical heritage and the brilliant luxury of the French courts. A book by the distinguished sixteenth century French humanist, Adrien Turnèbe's *Philosophiae et Graecarum literarum regii professoris . . .* (Paris, 1580), was also examined by the students so that they might perceive at first hand something of the nature of French printing and binding of the late Renaissance period. Other visual studies were facilitated by still more gifts and loans from the French Cultural Services: posters illustrating Renaissance *châteaux* and several slide series on the art, scientific discoveries, architecture, and even handicraft of the time.<sup>2</sup>

In spite of the effort required before and during such a course, the experience was a rewarding one, for a number of the students found the experiment as stimulating as it was demanding. The instructors as well found it a challenge to present the complex interrelationships of political, social, and cultural life which provided the foundations for the growth of one of the great nations of Western Europe.

<sup>2</sup>We wish to express our deep gratitude to Monsieur Gérard Roubichou, Cultural Attaché at New Orleans, whose immediate response and generosity contributed to the success of the course.

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## POEMS

by J. AQUILINA

### DYING

Dying must be an extraordinary experience,  
 A sort of examination one sits for only once  
 And can't afford to fail.  
 I wonder what it is like?  
 Do you know?  
 Can you tell?  
 Ever tried to find out?  
 Have you the feel of it  
 As one has the feel of ice or fire?  
 (No need to run away from what is as real as life).  
 You are not a coward, are you?  
 I imagine dying to be something like slipping  
 From one cocoon dream into another –  
 Or slimy slug zigzagging between two unrealities,  
 Perpetual cycle of life,  
 Tinsel and gossamer –  
 Wet, sticky eel that slips from between your fingers,  
 Or like falling off the arms of Mother Earth  
 To lie flat on the hard ground  
 Face upwards, eyes staring into a vacuum  
 Till you are covered over with dust –  
 Black dust, white dust, choking dust –  
 Metamorphosized  
 Into something different,  
 Perhaps rejuvenation  
 Of all dead bones and withered nerves,  
 Or like the scattering of seeds on a patch  
 Of barren soil  
 From season to season,  
 For ever and ever,  
 As we say in our prayers.  
 Really, I am at a loss for the right image.  
 But if you think this is not the right figure of speech,  
 See if you can find a better image yourself  
 To express the extraordinary experience of dying.

I prefer to compare it to  
 Falling off the arms of Mother Earth  
 Sixty, seventy years after birth  
 (The Earth is a woman with a big belly, protracted  
 parturition and hanging breasts,  
 That is why she has always been considered our ancient Mother)  
 Come on, you must agree that  
 Dying can be fun –  
 The flight of the butterfly  
 From the husk of the cocoon:  
 Do not be afraid to die.

20.vii.74

## THE BONDSMEN

We have been given a Hobson's Choice  
 – A very fine strait jacket and a gag,  
 Or a pistol shot in the back;  
 And because we do not want to be shot  
 Like dogs  
 (Could we but live twice over again!)  
 We accept the gag  
 And the strait jacket  
 With a grin,  
 A salaam and a hurrah, pain in the belly  
 As we wave the Flag  
 (*Achtung*, bloody fools, Superman's Fools!)  
 And salute  
 The Brute  
 Praying inaudibly for the gale that will wash away  
 The hovels of the pigs  
 (Grunting, dirty pigs!).  
 By this hope, only by this hope  
 We put up with the bite of the gag  
 And wave the Flag  
 As we stand to attention  
 (Ashen hatred burning dry hearts)  
 To salute  
 The Brute.

20.vii.74

## EPITAPH ON A FANATIC POLITICIAN

Here lies one who died of a mysterious disease;  
 Doctors have diagnosed it as a kind of obsession,  
*Morbus politicus*, something like palsy of the knees,  
 A tumour of the brain, diabolic possession.  
 He lived for party politics, by party politics, all his life.  
 Truly, *Signora Politica* was his only wife.

Pray for the repose of his soul in which he did not believe,  
 But pity him – Wherever he is, he must neither fret nor grieve.  
 After all, politics are a terrible obsession,  
 Really a diabolic possession.  
 A disorder of the mind: forget, be kind!

31.x.74

## BURIAL

They slipped him down the grave, how quickly he went down,  
 Adolph the politician who was also a clown!

31.x.74

## POLITICAL POWER

A philosopher speaking in parables compared  
 Political Power to an outsize cake,  
 With arty icing, Yellow, Black, or Red,  
 Marketed on the principle of give and take.  
 How it makes your mouth water for a slice:  
 Adolph, the Cook, obliges for a price.

31.x.74

## LES BETES

The Adolphs and the Benitos continued the breeds  
 Of the dastardly tyrants who rob us of our rights;  
 Add Stalin to the *pot-pourri* and others of his ilk,  
 And you'll get the sum of the Beasts that blew out the lights.  
 Whilst the Beasts trample on corpses in concentration camps,  
 What else is left for us to do but mend the broken lamps?

## GLORIA MUNDI

Here lies one who in his long career won distinctions galore,  
 Who, being very ambitions and always hungry, like Oliver Twist,  
 asked for more:  
 And when, alas, he reached the end of his adventurous career,  
 And had nothing more to look forward to except the sexton  
 and the bier,  
 Found comfort in the thought that at least his funeral would be  
 A Grand State Funeral different from the plebeian funeral of  
 you and me.  
 The glory of the world (tremendous spur!) was his sole  
 passion and lust  
 Till Death, that has a very wry sense of humour, struck him  
 down and reduced him to dust.  
 Be not hard in your judgement on the man who chased this  
 ambitious dream;  
 Are we not all of us, in one way or another, chasing the  
 some elusive gleam?  
 'The Glory of the World' – its Power and Wealth is what most  
 of us live for:  
 The Golden Calf that foolish mortals cheat for, kill for,  
 hug and adore.

18.xii.74

## EPITAPH

Here lie the bones of a distinguished civil servant  
 Who climbed up the ladder obeying his master's orders  
 Faithfully and uncritically, till Master Death  
 Jealous of the bloated hero of personal cult,  
 Bade him stop the nonsense, pack up and cross the borders.

5.vi.1975

## FACES

Millions of faces that were  
 Beautiful faces everywhere  
 Faces dark faces fair  
 Millions of faces that will be  
 All these and more  
 Flotsam on the sea  
 Of eternity

29.vi.75

## LOVE'S MISTAKE

He sat beside her  
 Remembering the time  
 When he had sat beside another girl  
 Of flowing hair and laughing eyes  
 Forty years before  
 Imagining the sudden return  
 Of his fair lady,  
 Beloved girl  
 Sitting beside him again  
 Shoulder to shoulder  
 Face to face  
 His arms round her waist  
 His fingers in her hair.  
 Closing his eyes  
 He whispered the lost tune  
 Of a romantic song of love  
 Till the girl beside him –  
 The girl in flesh and blood  
 Forty years younger – nudged him.  
 Mumbling his words, he apologised  
 For a silly mistake:  
 'Sorry', he told her,  
 'I mistook you for another girl.  
 Please, excuse me.  
 I had an appointment with her  
 forty years ago.  
 Good Lord!  
 I must not forget.  
 I must hurry to join her –  
 See you again, forty years hence.'

29.vi.75