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Poetry: A Poem for My Father Upon Finding a Brittle Piece of Moss With a Twig In It

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evidence that offenders are differentiated by physique (they are mesomorphic males); by intelligence (they are from the low/normal or borderline percentile distributions on standard tests of intelligence); and by personality type (they are generally psychopathic). The personality psychopathy is then the salient force which constitutes the essential base of criminality. This type is characterized by hyperactivity, impulsivity, distractibility, poor judgement, lack of internal motivation, deficient sense of guilt, anxiety, and deficiency in learning, as manifested in the failure to learn or profit from past experience or punishment. To Wilson and Herrnstein, these personality attributes of psychopathy are critical because they affect the offender's ability to realistically calculate the rewards for non-criminal over criminal behavior. We are told that "...the relevance of (psychopathy) to criminal behavior can hardly be over-estimated, for crime often pits a quick gain against avoiding a remote punishment. Because of (psychopathy) the offender is driven toward the wrong end of the choice."

The authors adduce an impressive array of family, educational, media, constitutional and other data to support both their rational choice theory and their program for the effective control of crime.

The answer to the crime problem seems to be the development of a calculus of punishment that would increase the risks of crime. It is interesting that Beccaria, writing in 1764, with the admonition that the punishment should fit the crime, also thought a calculus of punishment could be developed to deter repetitive criminal behavior.

Wilson and Herrnstein's argument that personal conditions affect the rational choice to commit crime synthesizes a growing compendium of literature used to support an emerging nationwide correction policy of punishment by incapacitation. In the Commonwealth, this policy is reflected in the Governor's presumptive sentencing bill, prison construction program and advocacy of state control of county lockups legislation, which are currently under consideration in the Legislature. Thus, academic research and political policy concerns are joined.

Crime and Human Nature should be a controversial book; for those interested in the mysteries of deviant behavior, it is well worth reading.

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A Poem For My Father Upon Finding A Brittle Piece of Moss With A Twig In It

I

The light green hair of earth, matted and snarled,
twisted around a twig. The winding thatch will not open.
The twig remains stuck -- a nest with a sword beside it,
a crossroad where branch and fur meet, old friends crossing a stream
and if they part they are still entangled.

There is a tea smell down in the earth
like horse hay left in a long abandoned barn;
it still gives off odor.

The stems of the moss are hand-shaped, fingers of a poor one grasping nothing.

II

Old nest, my father! The green of his life did not leave
when the brittleness came. His sword, a hat pin
caught in his mother's hair.

Old nest! Old hounds baying over hills.
My father standing in snow, off any path, somewhere
where the fox would run, somewhere where the rabbits scatter.
He knew where the treasure was, the silent places, the names of things
I do not notice now. Stepping along a path
or walking paved streets I cannot hear his voice;
and at those parties where wine flows easy and conversation
is like the hum of spent machinery, I cannot remember
his face, or how tall he was,
and only when I brush apart the bushes do I remember
the way he could rumble through the bushes or go softly.

I left him, it seems to me, standing in snow
the hounds running farther and farther away.

Fran Quinn

Fran Quinn was born in Easthampton, MA in 1942. He taught on every level from pre-school to graduate school. He has worked for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Council on the Arts and Humanities in the Poets-in-the-School program. A founding member of the Worcester County Poetry Association, Inc., Mr. Quinn conducted a radio program on poetry for seven years. He has read throughout the United States and also in Canada. He lives in Worcester, MA, and this is his first collection of poems.