

The Great Marriage: A Report

By Morton Marcus, © 2004

The prose poem is the offspring of the marriage of prose and poetry, whose families vigorously opposed the union. Worrying about the mixing of "distinctly different genetic makeups," they feared that the offspring would emerge deformed, a mutation of both gene pools. They speculated on all aspects of the nature of this offspring – the psychological, the social, and (inevitably) the political. Would the prose poem exhibit aberrant mental proclivities? Would it demonstrate, asked the poets, a lower, even working-class coarseness in style and behavior? Would it, wondered the prose writers, be republican or monarchist, fascist or democrat?

As with children in any varied population, the prose poem fulfilled all the fears of its grandparents. But there also have been any number of exemplary citizens, who have emerged from the mixed marriages, and the very nature of the new gene combinations has led to exciting ways of being whose personalities in general and visions in particular were unimaginable before their birth and have greatly enriched society.

The most apparent difference in these children from their parents has been in their psychological concerns. The offspring have shown a marked fascination with dream states, whose folkloric and mythic dimensions have allowed the fantastic, symbolic and surreal to dominate their interests. That proclivity has given rise to a fable-like or parabolic mode of expression. On the other hand, there has been a strong "hard-headed" realistic strain permeating the ranks of the offspring as well, which in turn has inspired a number of the children to tear-down and rebuild the foundations of language as we know it.

The social issue was a major concern of both families from the start. Enconced in their separate neighborhoods, both families were afraid the offspring would cross the line between one class and another without compunction. They argued that since prose and poetry were two different classes to begin with, the offspring would never know their place and would not only cross the line between the two classes but would inevitably be drawn--and the poets shuddered at this possibility--to erase the line altogether.

The families were, of course, arguing from a position of pureza de sangre, or "purity of blood." This position was particularly true of poetry's family, which argued that the line itself was the issue, since its use was the main difference between the two families, and provided a necessary difference in background and upbringing which were apparent in the voice, tone, and carriage with which a poem deported itself.

There is no denying this argument. The only retort is to point out the increased variety of manners and methods of self-expression, both in language and courtesy, which the offspring have given us, for the old class distinctions founded on good breeding, it has become apparent, not only dictated inbred modes of discourse, behavior and manners, but also limited ways of perceiving and conceiving the world. Liberation from such restrictions, it seemed to the offspring, was worth not only crossing the line, but erasing it.

As for the political ramifications of the marriages, they haven't manifested themselves as yet.

All in all, the prejudices against the marriages of prose and poetry and their offspring continue to this day, with no end in sight. We can only hope that the extraordinary accomplishments of the children of these marriages will eventually win for them a place of acceptance in our troubled hearts.