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A Room At Arles

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A Room At Arles

Cover Page Footnote

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DICTUM: It seems quite clear to me. Why should
You have any trouble? After all, I am
Only the student! How many times have
You been confronted, yes, and thoughtout
The solution? Once? Twice? Never?
Come, come, Prose. He's only telling
You to think!

A ROOM AT ARLES

J. W. MILLER

Van Gogh once picturized his room, illumined it
For humanity with a sable brush.
I ask your contemplation of his canvas, though I suspect
You have not time; your thoughts are not your own: long ago
The merchants in the temple purchased them.
Yet pause and view the scene. Here pulsate no machines,
Their motors beating rhythmically by calculated friction;
So much is wood and cloth and fibrous glass.
Observe the straw-seat chairs, the pillowed *bed*:
The artist may wish ease; or is he reluctant to stand?
Vertically perhaps he'll run, knowing something.

Peace, not fright, exudes the temper here.
There's no amorphous and imperious lore
Of Buddha and de Sade, no projection
Of desperate self-hatred onto the race of Eve;
Gainsborough's craft is not desired, nor that of Ginsberg,
Who calls the common heart a spade and howls
Because he cannot integrate the prosiness of others,
Whose speech becomes the sole viaticum
Of syncopated minds that mimic their machines—
Minds erupting with the quick, impassioned,
Hollow beat of sax and clarinet, springing

Upward to the consummating crescendo
Of Gabriel's horn: searching, searching,
Carrying their intransigent messages of salvation,
As if they too had infused knowledge of man's end.

The clear quiescence of the artist's room
Suggests that regulation which is his birthright.
There is no hint of the infernal isolation,
The tense, satanic loneliness that melts all grand designs,
Of the despair that consumes, the contemplation
That partakes of death. Where is the painter himself?
Does he softly pace outside the frame, gently,
Ironically deriding his own creation? Or is he
Damning his congested consciousness, the chronic
Claustrophobia of his personality, the thirsting
After knowledge that twisted mankind's root,
The hunger for experience that has no merit?

There is a benefaction here, a serene goodness;
It matters little: to Adam, that first human artist,
That cosmic joker who created Cain,
Goodness was the natural and accustomed
Order of things: yet he chose evil.
To mate, but for an instant, the aged melancholy
With the youthful joy, to still the lusty
Hunting for life-interest!
To banish mental pride and moral imbecility,
To disavow subconscious fancy,
Compact of heaven and haystack, where
Phantom spirits fornicate to string guitars;
To sleep through the Seven Ages of Man;
Or, best of all,
To sit and listen to the myths of gods,
To linger serenely in darkness until the Orderer of all
Again cries *Let there be light*,
And then to stumble peacefully away,
Telling the vision to no one.