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The Pit And The Pencil

Dennis K. Murphy

St. John Fisher College

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The Pit And The Pencil

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

"D. P.: PROSSE ... the usual professor
DICTUM ... the usual student
PASSE ... the yesterday's idea About now

A classroom. PROSSE is in front of his class: DICTUM. PROSSE has been worrying because he has only one student. Shortly after class begins, PASSE enters, and helps PROSSE through the catastrophe."

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THE PIT AND THE PENCIL

DENNIS K. MURPHY

D. P.: PROSSE . . . the usual professor
DICTUM . . . the usual student
PASSE . . . the yesterday's idea

About now, A classroom. PROSSE is in front of his class: DICTUM. PROSSE has been worrying because he has only one student. Shortly after class begins, PASSE enters, and helps PROSSE through the catastrophe.

PROSSE: I can't help it; or perhaps I can
If I had taken the time.
But since the time has passed so
There is hardly time for understanding!
Can it be that I was unfortunate
In my calculations? Is it possible
That HE was wrong? (Certainly John
And the boys knew this would happen.)
Didn't they? What a world!

DICTUM: I can play the part, but to what
Avail? Certainly you should have
Had the essence all wrapped up before
Partaking? Why admonish the fools?
The mind is worth the effort . . . if it's
There! (The mind, that is.) But let's
To the problem at hand. Since you
Have copied, and I might add, to no
Avail, you must conclude that the
Copy was faulty, or that the method
Was all wrong. Since . . .

PROSSE: (Interrupting.) But this isn't all
My fault. You see . . .
DICTUM: Precisely, my dear Prosse, I do see!
If this had happened to you, you might
Today, have more than my mush to mangle.
You had benefit, but belittled it! You
Had fortune, but fought it. You had
Might, but mashed it. You read Aquinas,
Aristotle, and why many others, but
Either failed to see the significance,
Or were too clouded, clinging to the
Facet of far fetched nonsense!
Instead of now, why not then? Why is it
Procrastination had become so deep-set?
What mighty boulder blotted out the
Profundity of it all?

PROSSE: Now just a minute! I am the lecturer
Here. (Were this wise?) See here!
If I had talent then, I have it now,
This is something that is just not lost.
(At least not all of it.) Profundity?
Certainly. They said what I said, You
Know, Aquinas and the rest. But they
Seriously lacked one point:
Society. We live here, so we must be
Adapted. Now, they had made this point
Quite clear: (Of course I mean John
And the boys), That unless you take
The best and mould it into an individual,
You have lost the significance of
The whole thing. Progress is made, only
By taking the sprouting nucleus, and
Developing it into the perfect example
Of what we are searching for, if it
Happens to be in keeping with what we
Have found! (I think!) You see,
Don't you?

DICTUM: Quite clearly. However, the question
Should be: do you? I believe you are
One of the best examples of the mis-users of the 40’s and 50’s. (And a few years before.) Of all the fine teaching gone before, they had mis-construed the Doctor's of the Psyche. They said one thing, you did another. In reality, you are still searching. As a matter of fact, we shall be so until the last day. But, what can you find in nothing? Nothing! As the fish swims around the bowl, he merely retraces his path. So too, man is hardly progressing when he aims at what he has already accomplished.

PROSSE: You sound just like all the other pupils I recently expelled. How long must I teach before you realize that you must learn from me, not caution me about what I think?

DICTUM: But sir, or dear Prosse, I have learned from you: precisely, what not to do or think!

PROSSE: Ah, what am I to do? I try, and try but what ever I do, never seems to right itself. There must be an answer somewhere.

At this point, PASSE enters, and begins to enrich the teacher PROSSE with some of the old points—arguments from the old school.

PASSE: What ho! Who's this? What question? Not that it comes entirely as a surprise, but isn't it a wonder that you have missed so much? Surprise, surprise for the unwise, not wholly here, yet not otherwise!
PROSSE:  Who are you? And what have you to
         Lend to the functional classroom?

PASSE:  O cad, you're quite mad. O what a bother.
         Quick crush the jeer: lend me an ear—o bother!

PROSSE:  Sir, your insolence is not quite in
         Keeping with the dignity of the lecture hall.
         If you don't mind, sir, please paddle
         In another direction—and for another cause.

PASSE:  Don the cap, you merry sap—How rude;
         Humble soul! I will dole—prude!

PROSSE:  I suppose you're about to tell me
         (In that infirmal gibber) Jack and Jill
         Went up the Hill surpasses Auden? Or that
         Crusty argument of my spiritless student?

DICTUM:  It might be well to listen for awhile.
         Is it not true that many have lent ears
         To your deathly treatises, and have
         Conquered only themselves? Is it not
         True that your attempts initiate the
         Individual incentive to cope with all
         Circumstances that embody the wholeness
         Of wisdom to thwart teeming tributaries
         Of now termed "Nonsense?" Now's no time
         To blank the effort of the individual,
         But to lay open the wherewithall and
         See what you have produced,—if this
         Is your production.

PROSSE:  I suppose I should listen, although this
         Victim doesn't appear on my list of
         Graduates. Although I don't suppose any
         Others would have the gumption to strike
         At ME! You there—say what you will!

PASSE:  Clown prince, never since—(O why?)
         The end of the bend... (I'll try!)
         Has it occurred, (O my word!)
         That you are blue, (sound absurd?)
Not because... (a little pause.)
You need a deed,—(close your jaws!)
But here it is: (a short quiz.)
Riddle, raddly, foamy fizz,
I got what really is!
Eat from the plate, O hapless mate,
Food for thought—which is this I brought.

PROSSE: Effortless! No wonder, it's all kindle.
Burned in effigy years ago. Sounds the
Same now as it did them: blabber!
Why, what does this lend to the matter?
The smattering of ignorance is sufficient
To round out the end of the farce. Out!
Boastful solicitor, mimicker of the
Monument, and purger of the prone!

DICTUM: This is rather haughty for a most usual
Occurrence in this classroom. How many
Times, my dear Prosse, have you let men
Ramble, and then in few words, completely
Shatter their whole idea? Why not now?
Does the intruder hinder or hamper your
Style? Is the match finally made for your
Almighty wisdom? Take him, Prosse.
Point out to me, prove your points! Lay
Hold and be firm on your stand—or can't
You? Is he too much, or too little? Too
Strong or too weak? What's the answer?
Why it was only a short minute or two ago
That you confided in yourself. Do it now!
Or don't you understand his intellectual
Tongue?

PROSSE: If the man is to motion to me, he must
Do so straight forward. My mind works so
Acutely that I cannot help but misinterpret
His venture. I find so many innendos—
So much ambiguity. Why can he not say
What he will, and put it out meaningfully?
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 thought? The solution? Once? Twice? Never? Come, come, Prosse. 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 vaticum of syncopated minds that mimic their machines—minds erupting with the quick, impassioned, hollow beat of sax and clarinet, springing