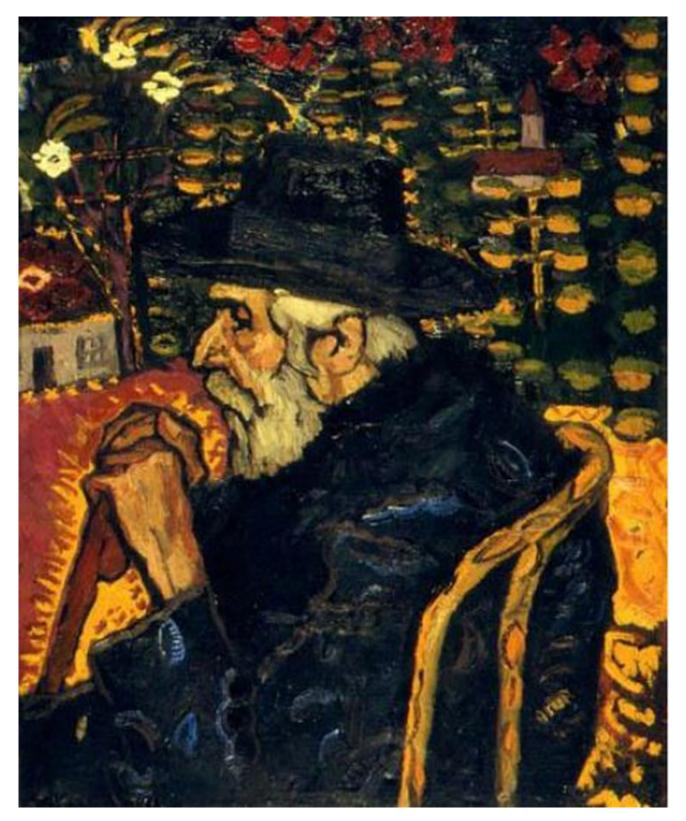
## The Art of Poetry, the Art of Death

by <u>Jeffrey Burghauser</u> (February 2023)



Portrait of My Grandfather, Ion Tuculescu, 20th c

The nimble nurse was giving me the tour About the bolted, candy-colored ward Appended to the fancy hospice where I'd recently applied to work, my dreams Of literary greatness having been Exposed as what they ultimately were. Some radical, appalling penances Had now become, I felt, imperative.

Amid the pointless-seeming human mess That one expects to find amid fatigued, Congested, peppery electric heat, My vision fixed upon a certain man. I thought I saw defiance underneath The fact that he, uniquely, didn't wear The standard-issue, greyish patient gown, But kept the clothes that one associates With sainted grandfathers—the sort of man Dispensing butterscotches to the kids, And, to their older siblings, sound advice On how to test the quality of love Or carpentry. They make us love the world.

However, this effect was undermined By everything that he was powerless To discipline: by all the poltergeists Inhabiting the tendons of the hand, And by the pain apparent in the brow, And by the eyes, and by the head itself: Broad, rusty-spalted, swinging back & forth, Forgotten, like a rustic mansion's door Displaced from half its hinges by a storm.

The nurse observed my curiosity.

"That's Jerry. He was an optometrist," She said, appending (all the wisdom of Her words at disconcerting variance With everything inherent to her tone: Bourgeois, Midwestern, peaceably obtuse): "Poor Jerry still can't really understand That this is what his life is gonna be."

I recollect that it was Donald Hall Who slighted Dylan Thomas, claiming that The Welshman had, though often luminous, Composed not "poems," but merely "Poetry"-Not individual, ferocious things Of excellence, appliances of breath Assigning names to nameless elements, But merely sublunary instances Of something like a Heavenly Ideal.

I'm brushed by hints that Poetry must be To Death exactly as a poem is To dying, to a dying: the discrete Phenomenon-exceptional, perverse. A person is condemned to undergo A dying just as our poet is Condemned in fire to originate Those burning instances & frigid types Of Beauty-species of the thing that Sin Delivered forth into the pulsing world.

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Originality cannot be planned. "Poor Jerry still can't really understand That this is what his life is gonna be." O save my simple soul from Poetry. O find a way You may suspend the breath Without the evil novelty of Death. "O let me be," I beg of Heaven's King, "A perfectly banal, generic thing."

## Table of Contents

Jeffrey Burghauser is a teacher in Columbus, OH. He was educated at SUNY-Buffalo and the University of Leeds. He currently studies the five-string banjo with a focus on pre-WWII picking styles. A former artist-in-residence at the Arad Arts Project (Israel), his poems have appeared (or are forthcoming) in Appalachian Journal, Fearsome Critters, Iceview, Lehrhaus, and New English Review. Jeffrey's booklength collections are available on Amazon, and his website is www.jeffreyburghauser.com.

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