

Two Poems

by [Thomas Banks](#) (September 2020)



On a Raft in Storm on Volga, Ilya Repin, 1870

The Children of Diogenes

Wearing their chins upon their chests, the dour,
The ineffectual scorned prophets frown
Upon the wags their flames failed to devour,
Who mocked their hands, but not their hatred down.

The solitudes their cloven hearts conceive

More than the deserts where they long have slept
Seem lands a devil's laughter could relieve,
Or human tears their sear eyes have not wept.

And in their eyes man's lean and loitering shadow
Becomes more real than its own origin.
They curse the feet of throngs that will not follow.
They say the grapes are sour, the wine a sin.

They sit on high to imprecate the herd,
In caves with jackals for their company.
Despite their spite, the skies remain unstirred.
Nor do the swine rush down into the sea.

The Instructors

After he left the centaur's cave, the boy remembered
The arts he learned there well, and full of furious joy
Left masterpieces on the fields of mournful Troy
Whose sons in hundreds his skilled hands dismembered.

The virtues that were his life's dusty merchandise
The obsolescent sage displayed for a diseased
Young royal mind which forms of darker commerce pleased,
Which, jaded with his never asked advice,

Awarded him at last neither a pension nor
A modest walled estate, but banished him instead
To question wiser minds than his among the dead,
And blight with tedium Hell's farther shore.

The reverend mandarin devoted to the state
The labor of a mind the grateful state rewarded
With a fool's cap on which his errors were recorded.
He also served who died beneath its weight.

«[Previous Article](#) [Table of Contents](#) [Next Article](#)»

Thomas Banks has taught literature and Latin for many years in Idaho, Montana, and North Carolina, where he currently lives. Other writings of his have appeared in *First Things* and the *St. Austin Review*.

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