

# Two Poems

by [Jeffrey Burghauer](#) (November 2020)



*Sleeping*, Lucian Freud

On Reading William Empson's *The Face of the Buddha*<sup>[\[1\]](#)</sup>

Empson nestles into the Imagination's seam:  
India, Japan, Korea, China—where the treasure is.  
Something massive happening before his eyes  
In Cambodia propels the man to theorize:

*The effect of being quite withdrawn into a dream,  
And yet dreaming with profound activity & pleasure, is  
For some reason compatible with great size.*

I don't understand why this would come as a surprise,

For withdrawal seems the precondition of supreme,  
Active pleasure, and fantastic size assumes that leisure is  
Able somehow to compress against such skies  
As the very mind of Size itself may formalize.

Does he find the head unduly big, or does he deem  
Active pleasure weirdly small? Regardless what the measure is,  
Public, wakeful, easy pleasure sans disguise:  
*This betokens the Redemption we shall recognize.*

## Return to Clifftop

*Fayette County, West Virginia*

One has such a lovely sense of *being back*,  
Waking under skies that tender no demands.  
A girl plays "Judson's Waltz" for the Returner,  
Fiddle sheltering inside its sanded works  
Notes we needed to reconstitute a home  
Of a sort transcendent of the technical.

"I'll be back" means "Here exist the technical  
Preconditions of a Back"; so, "I'll be back"  
Means "I *am* back". Ever since renouncing home,  
I have known "I'm back" (like "I'm infirm") demands  
Just as much as it describes. Life's distance works

*Through* the man. Though static, he's a Returner.

*Concepts*, seldom seen as butterfly, turn er-  
otic. Here's the living half of technical  
Metaphors: distress as anise, or the works  
Of Paphian myrtles. "Lord, my God, give back  
Everything I never had," the heart demands,  
Mourning midnights squandered once upon a home.

Show me narrow shoulders syrup'd by the home  
Just beyond some coral sky, faery turner  
Of those rosewood pegs. The eventide demands  
Proof that *human* flesh is expert, technical.  
Neither terns nor minerals long to go "back".  
Longings are amongst Creation's finest works.

I pursue the Master's motives in His works.  
I pursue the pleasure's proxy to its home.  
I pursue the wagonful of fiddleback  
Plum & carob heaped in some arête urn, or  
Wooden palette harnessed to the technical,  
Drawn into the night by *ifs* & tandem *ands*.

Home is anywhere where love makes no demands.  
Home is anywhere where everything just...*works*.  
Any villanelle achieving technical  
Excellence is an Ambassador of Home.  
Back is a condition of the Returner.  
Any forest where the fiddle is, is back

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[[i](#)] Ed. Rupert Arrowsmith. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016. The italicized material in the second stanza is adapted from a quotation on pages 29 – 30:

Cambodia is the only part of the world which made a success

of colossal heads as a unit of architecture. The term “colossal” is often used for anything larger than life-size, but here it is meant seriously: the heads carved in relief on the towers of the Bayon are six feet high. Very big heads were tried fairly often in Buddhist art up to a late date (Burma, northern China, and Japan have the main surviving ones) but they are all as dead as mutton. The Khmer effect of being completely withdrawn into a dream, and yet dreaming with great activity and pleasure, is for some reason compatible with great size.

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Jeffrey Burghauer 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 book-length collections are available on [Amazon](#), and his website is