

Poems

“His lonely singularity”*: Michael Ayrton’s Minotaur in the Arkville maze¹

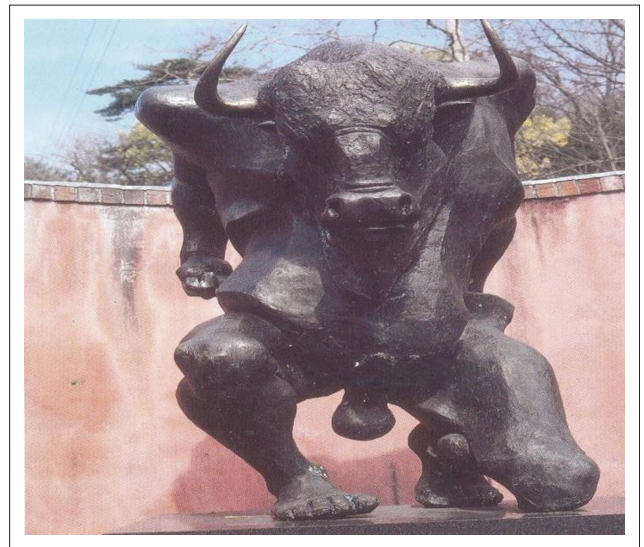
1.
It’s probably my pendulous scrotum you’ll notice first,
then the aggressive stance, the right fist poised for the imminent
piston thrust of the arm, the horns honed to pierce a body through,
the breath’s vulgar heat, the terror of my bloody reputation.
2.
But my bovine bulk is as deceptive as Daedalus’s pseudo-cow,
a necessary subterfuge to help me cope with the unspeakable
hurt of misrepresentation and my lonely singularity.
My deformity attracts attention everywhere,
the body’s abominations monstrous stigma that cannot be disguised
in ways that mental aberrations and perversions can.
3.
My birth made me a royal embarrassment; the public sniggered
at this unsightly, hybrid child, Poseidon’s savage joke.
None of this was my doing yet I am the island’s laughingstock.
Eventually, Minos locked me into Daedalus’s Labyrinth:
LABYRINTHUS: HIC HABITAT MINOTAURUS chiselled ineptly
on the wall, near its forbidding entrance. I have come to know
its every convolution. I have fathomed out the unfathomable.
Yet I remain Minotaurus malformed and misconstrued still
pining for a little sympathy or even love one day perhaps.

1.This is Ayrton’s description of the Minotaur in his book, *The Testament of Daedalus*.

Lunch poem

I once wrote a poem on a paper serviette
for a friend who told me no one
had ever written a poem for her.
I said I would and wrote something
affectionate while we ate lunch.

A year or two later, we bumped into each other;
she had a new husband, she said, and still
had the serviette. She re-read the poem
every now and then; her husband sometimes said
he wished he’d written that poem for her.
I didn’t have the heart to tell her then
that I wished I hadn’t.



Source: Nyenhuis, J.E., 2003, *Myth and the creative process: Michael Ayrton and the Myth of Daedalus the Maze Maker*, Wayne State University Press, Detroit.

FIGURE 1: The Arkville Minotaur.

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Some other time perhaps

1.

At university, there was a girl I studied French with,
she didn't have a boyfriend.
I didn't have a girlfriend either, then.

After several weeks of classes, I asked her
if she'd like to have a cup of coffee.
She smiled graciously, and said
Some other time perhaps.
Then she walked away.

From time to time, I would ask her
the same question: she always had classes,
essays or tests, something to do
that prevented us from spending half an hour
together in the student cafeteria, its plastic furniture
hardly the apotheosis of style or romance.
Eventually, I got the message: I stopped asking.

One day, I asked someone else the same question,
and she said *Yes*.

2.

Twenty years pass. I'm giving a talk to an audience
of school kids. After I've finished, a copper-haired girl
comes up and says her mother wants to meet me.
My brain asks *Why?*
but my mouth says *Fine*.

A moment later, I face a stylish, affluent lady
edging towards or perhaps a little past forty.
I don't recognise her. She has to tell me;
she's my former classmate
two decades and three children later.

It's wonderful to see you again, she says.
My brain says *Why?*
My mouth says *This is a surprise!*
I smile the inane smile of the bewildered.

Over the years, I've often thought of you, she says.
I smile another inane smile; I'm still bewildered.
Strange as it may seem, she says, *I've missed you*.
My brain says *Bullshit!*
My mouth says *Really?*

I should have had that cup of coffee
the first time you asked me, she says
She smiles a tentative smile.
We could have a cup of coffee now, she says.
I smile another kind of smile.
My brain says *Why not?*
My mouth says *Some other time perhaps*.
And then I walk away.

The short cycle

The short cycle my mother said.

Yes dear my father said then put the washing machine on
the long cycle: sixty minutes of soaking tumbling rinsing
spinning instead of the twenty-five my mother thought best.

After thirty minutes my mother came to the kitchen.
Don't tell me you put it on the long cycle again she said.
Sorry dear my father said.

Desperate, he tried for years to get an unbroken hour
or so but he knew the sheer breadth of my mother's talent
for splintering his day into quite unusable fragments.

He rarely got his things started;
he never got them
finished.

He died unfinished
two years
two months
and
two days
before her.

So she said
you finally remembered
the short cycle.

Two

I have no explanation for the way
the number two kept cropping up
in my parents' lives
it seems quite beyond coincidence

My father was born in 1918
my mother in 1920 you can't miss
the two-year difference, of course

And I have no understanding of what mystery
what magic changed these two young people
into a married couple:
love was defined differently in those days

when I was conceived - as part of the war effort -
they had been married for just two months
I relished the safety of being cocooned *in utero*;
I emerged reluctantly into that evil belligerent world
two weeks late ...

after a life not always free of turmoil
and some two months and two weeks
past their forty-ninth wedding anniversary
my father died; as usual my mother followed
two years two months and two days later

given the number two's lifelong presence
in my parents' lives
one question continues to vex me:
why am I an only child?