

首届莎士比亚人文主题征文大赛“散文类”一等奖

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A Separate Peace

The moment I stepped into SISU, the indiscriminate jealousy was vibrantly real. Like stale air in an unopened room, this nagging emotion haunted me and filled my days. So much so that I hadn't even known it was there until the deceptively suppressed but uncontrolled jealousy got the best of me and staked its claim to my whole mind.

SISU, nothing like those time-honored schools (Ivy League i.e.) that emerge naturally from the towns which generate them, stands isolated behind walls and gates in an avant-garde world like a square peg in a round hole. So was I. Born and bred in a reclusive small village, I was sensible of my glaring weaknesses compared to others the instant I joined SES: a strange accent, an extreme shortage of reading, but a far-fetched ambition. It just seemed the closer I sought to get to English, the more defensive and forbidding it became. Doom and gloom were the rhythm of my campus life. Lumbering in the pursuit of English proficiency, I straggled helplessly behind most of my peers despite my relentless efforts.

Fear consumed me and brought on unhinged jealousy. At that time, I was wired like the Hatter and a glimpse of others' achievements would gnaw at my soul---forever. Gradually, peers around me were like mere phantoms of Nemesis to me, and the spiritual epitome of SES---the bronze bust of Shakespeare---loomed up ahead of me like a despot, poised to demoralize me, a self-styled budding English master. Believe it or not, I never understood what had turned Shakespeare into a deity and why generations after generations had hailed his works as the rose of Sharon, the lily of the valleys, in part because however gamely I tried, his grandiose words always came out like shibboleth from nowhere. The green-eyed monster seized and devoured me. Desperately I even convinced myself that all this driveling quest for affinity with English was absolutely a wild goose chase and I, a dweller in a fool's paradise.

Then, an aha moment struck me as Sonnet 29 came my way:

*When in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes
I all alone beweeep my outcast state,
And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,
And look upon myself, and curse my fate,
Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,
Featured like him, like him with friends possessed,
Desiring this man's art, and that man's scope,
With what I most enjoy contented least;
Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,
Haply I think on thee, and then my state,
Like to the lark at break of day arising*

*From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate.
For thy sweet love remembered such wealth brings
That then I scorn to change my state with kings.*

The immortal poet was resenting his bad luck. Sitting all alone and wailing that he was an outcast, he persistently bothered the seemingly deaf God with useless cries. While rattling off the ills and misfortunes of his life, he suffered mental anguish at the successful art of others and the vision of the youth's merrymaking sliced him entirely. However, the recall of the sweet love of his dear friends rejuvenated his spirits; therefore, he no longer wallowed in the unresolved and unhappy past, but embraced his household dictum "what is done is done" and blatantly claimed, "I scorn to change my state with kings."

This sonnet easily took the wind from my sails. It was the herald of the morn, for I had long been living in the sullen earth of jealousy, cursing Shakespeare's perpetual heyday. It turned out that the smoldering ember of disgruntlement was finally quenched, and a jocund, brisk, new day stood tiptoe greeting me: Look, even Shakespeare had bad days, even Shakespeare was harassed by loneliness, even Shakespeare was undone by the black magic of jealousy. Ordinary people like me would not escape this kind of test by Fate; whether and how to get rid of it was up to us.

Back then, I was lucky in that my mind was not cordoned off from dateless refrains. Sonnet 29 saved me timely at my most insecure and troubled. Also, by reading it, I came to recognize one of Shakespeare's most admirable traits, that is, although like us lesser mortals, he sometimes devoted himself to constructing Maginot Lines against enemies he thought he saw across the frontier, enemies who never attacked that way---if they attacked at all, or, if they were indeed our enemies. We might descend into endless self-pity and hatred towards others, whereas Shakespeare, given enough experience and reflection, lifted the burden more easily.

How to sing the praises of Shakespeare? Julius Caesar's well-known dispatch *I came, I saw, I conquered* renders an excellent variation for my tribute to William Shakespeare, who, through his sonnet, extends a soothing hand over my troubled mind of jealousy, namely, *I came, I saw, I concurred*.