

Friends

I have thought about Bob Fonow's open letter a great deal and although I agree with his thoughts on the practicalities of the College's future and urge all others who agree also to write to the college authorities, it has engendered other thoughts which I would like to share with you.

To start off, to be controversial and honest, I don't very much care what happens to the College. Why should I? What should I care about? Memories? The memories will always be there whatever happens to the College. Loyalty? The modern College doesn't much care if I exist or not. It does not know me or care in any real sense about my well-being. I say this without rancour. I have no axe to grind. I was not a shining academic light nor have I involved myself in the college business since I left in 1973. Why should it care about me? Perhaps the following thought best represents our relationship. It is conceivable that I might be asked at some time to subscribe to a new roof for Old Building. And it would be expected that I should at least consider doing so. It is however inconceivable that the college would ever consider subscribing to my new roof, no matter how much I might need it.

The Lampeter I went to thirty years ago has gone forever. In my first year (1970) we still had to wear gowns to lectures and attend formal dinners in academic dress. There were around 300 students and I knew everyone of them to say hello to and over all presided the Principal, Lloyd Thomas, an Olympian, benign, patriarchal figure. I was young, full of fire, extremely social and, generally, drunk both with life and booze. Now I am fifty three, sober and reclusive. Lampeter is a stranger to me and I to it. Of course I realise that, in a sense, everyone's Lampeter is gone for ever, but there is a sameness that market values stamp upon everything that enables me to say that pre-1973 movement was towards change, since then it's been towards stasis - the End Of History. We have forced nostalgia back into the prison of the past. Tariq Ali's *"In the 60's we wanted to change the world, now we just want a job"* has become a truism. I guess it's hard to feel nostalgic about what happens to a job centre, no matter how picturesque its bricks.

It is true that most of my friends now are those I made at Lampeter. They are often a source of great consolation to me. We attend each others weddings and funerals. But like being part of any family that has its problems. Somehow we never totally grow up in such situations. When we meet we often find we have nothing in common but our memories of College life. We find that the shared memories are not always the same. Our common identity is somehow fractured, held together by a span of lost time, an old building, a college song, a recall of energy that in the present too often presents a source of insoluble mystery and regret.

I confess I don't much like the world today. I don't like the rule of the young and I don't like the death of the imagination and adventure that so typified the age of my youth. In 1973 the sixties ended and the footballers took over the asylum. The individual dwindled and the team grew in precedence. We stopped being players and became spectators. When I was young we dreamed of being Kerouacs, of being saints, now we barter and struggle for a seat in the front row.

But I wouldn't want Lampeter to be transformed (though, alas, it wouldn't be a great transformation) into a Conference Centre for Sales Techniques. The Old Man deserves a more dramatic death than that. I would opt for a sudden, unprecedented, cataclysmic, earthquake. An immense rent should open in the earth and the whole kip of it should tumble in. All that would be left would be the 16 Club bench. I see the scene now. The Club gathered around in awe. Gaudeamus would be sung, some Black velvet would be drunk and the Chairman would ceremoniously sit on the bench - which would immediately collapse under him. A joke is better than a thick red line in an account ledger.

And yet, and I say this with some embarrassment, for many years I have had vivid dreams of Lampeter. I have dreamt I am back there, my subconscious using it as a venue for my inner battles, my mundane confusions. Seldom have I had victories in these dreams but thankfully, for whatever takes me back there is not cruel, I have not suffered unreasonable defeats and have seldom come away empty handed.

So, there is still, I guess, something there. Something to do with my dreams, my aspirations, the chance once more to redeem my youth. But all this is ephemeral, beyond the grasp of my reason. Like the Great Hero, the Knight of La Mancha, I find myself confronted by a romance that quite breaks my intellect. Finally it is not the position on the Guardian's list which galls and saddens me - that is a windmill which is nothing more than a windmill - but something much deeper, much more immediate and pressing. At the recent commemoration for the life of a Club member, Peter Alison, another Club member Stuart Blair was set upon by an undergraduate thug and injured. What did the other Club members do? Did they avenge their fallen comrade or did they simply gather afterwards in their safe rooms and consume more alcohol and talk?

I know what Don Quixote would have done, but he, like the College, died in 1973 when I was young.

Brendan Somers

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