

LAWYER POETS AND THAT WORLD

WE CALL LAW

an anthology of poems about the practice of law

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editor

A LAWYER'S EDUCATION

What the Law Is

Lee Warner Brooks

"The law . . ." the law professor paused, as if
Amazed—"Do you know what the law is? Eh?"
He paused again, as if poised on a cliff
From which he spied—arriving all the way

From Magna Carta, like the nick of white
A sail makes when its hull has sunken past
The sea's horizon—ocean waves in tight,
Wind-driven rows, all lunar-woven fast

Together—inter-yarned in unison
By physics too complex to calculate
In alphabets, but whose metrics run
Inerrantly to shore. He didn't wait

For us to answer—or for tide to ebb—
"The law," he told us, "is a seamless web."

Law School

James McKenna

Late each night
at my desk, window dark,
cases were read and notes
taken. Ideas marched
by in the lamp's steady beam
until they seemed
shining, heedless armies.
Then switch off the light.
The street springs to sight:
ragged walkers, limping,
arms, faces lashed,
as though in retreat from
some hopeless class.

Hadley v. Baxendale (1854)

James McKenna

At 23 we quickly married, then
straight to law school, night division.
It was work, school, study.
We kept our heads down.
But Saturdays we studied together.
This Saturday in the Library of Congress,
its small, somber law rooms.
She's taking down *Corbin on Contracts*
and sees me watching.
I'm outlining damages,
the foreseeability of reasonable men,
and feel her staring.
We start to laugh and cannot stop.
She flees to the stacks.
I change tables.
She piles books and ducks her head.
I try holding my breath.
Nothing works.
How could we have known.

Law School

Ace Boggess

Prof. McLaughlin often told me
I would have a chair at the law school
named in my honor:
not a Chair, endowed for a seat
on the faculty or for scholarship;
a physical chair—umber—
tinged & sallow-banded
like striations on the peeled side
of a mountain—the seat where
I spent afternoons
watching lawyers-in-waiting
shuffle down a hall toward the library,
heavy packs of dread on their backs.
I kept my place in the lounge,
listened for arguments featuring
misquotes from the Bible & Sun Tzu.
I inhaled rich perfume,
ghost scents of cigar smoke.
I laughed, waited, let the conversations
come to me.
Journal in hand, I took notes
on the note-takers,
joining their loneliness
when I could. To keep safe,
I had the chair in which I wrote &
dreamt with well-lit eyes:
I picture Wallace Stevens
in law school, safe & happy
searching women
through to the World Soul,
or in the proper
study of Mankind
engaging his imagination
on a frolic of his own.

Herr Doktor

Charles Williams

THE FINALITY OF HOMICIDE

Herr Doktor of Criminal Law
has sprouted his own Sonny Bono moustache.
30 years old, 5'10", 175 pounds,
he has pleasant, but menacing, brown eyes.

His heavy black eyebrows twink
when he lectures on the derelicts
who get their names into these cases.
Instead of "homicide,"
he writes "homocide" on the board.
I wonder if Mein Herr
has unconscious gay issues, or any issues—
So much for that—I'm quitting his class.
He can't spell!

ODE TO WILBURT HAMM

Herr Doktor of Contracts
is a kind gentleman
with fine twinkling blue eyes.
He loves to ask questions
of common sense and facts.
Unlike other classes,
I know the answers here.
They're all just common sense,
nothing ethereal
or things procedural.
"But did you purchase it?"
"And did you know of it?"
"And how and where and when?"
I like Hamm's class the best.

RES IPSA LOQUITUR

Herr Doktor of Torts talks like a duck.
He speaks through his platapine nose.
He instructs us of Boodle's barrels,
how they rolled from above into a street.
Barrels in a street, we are to suppose,
have no explanation that's neat.
The Chancellor held "Res Ipsa"—
"Res Ipsa Loquitur," which means:
"The thing (always) quacks for itself."
And so does our fine Herr Doktor.

CIVIL PROCEDURE

Herr Doktor of Civil Procedure
preaches like Jonathan Edwards
(and takes about as long).
Sinners in the hands of an angry God
are nothing compared to poor law students
in the grasp of an angry Professor.
His classes in Civil Procedure
verge toward their own eternity,
and spark my own divine contemplations
of unending, precise damnations.
Dante foresees a frozen lake of pain—
as cold as the Court's holding in
Palsgraf versus The Long Island Railroad?
Our Baptists believe in a Hell that's hot,
a boiling cauldron of sulphur and steam,
which brings me to the obvious question:
Is Hell hot or is it cold?
I'd say, for now, it's neither—
Hell is a class in Civil Procedure.

THE RULE IN SHELLEY'S CASE

Herr Doktor of Property recites
the Rule in Shelley's Case.
He says it has confounded
jurists for hundreds of years.
But the Rule in Shelley's Case is simple.
Any farmer (like me) understands it:
the Earth outlasts the wills of men.

EPILOGUE

The conceits of the law professor
are
cryptically
endless,
endlessly
cryptic.

After 60 Days of Snow on the Ground

Charles Williams

—for Robert Lawson, who taught Evidence,
and noticed birds singing outside in the thaw,
after long snow cover

Snow retreats and mist arises,
four robins hopping
as if on dew.

Discovery in Law School

Charles Williams

Today I offered myself
to what is left
of myself
and found
inside my soul
two yellow and white puppy dogs,
near-grown, and playful
as the shifting colors
of a new Spring dawn.
To one in Law School at thirty,
a most satisfying discovery.

We Are All Born Lawless as Dogs

Charles Williams

Spring is the tiller of the soul—
That deepest look within the folds
Where East is Vajra
And West is Law,
And all men ought to know
That they are born lawless as dogs.

Law

James Clarke

Law is
a small fire
in a clearing
at night
spilling warmth
& light

But,
step too close
& the blaze
will shock you
cold in your tracks,
give you a chill.