

Chandra Rose

Some Final Thoughts at Bennington College

One night recently I stood in the middle of Commons Lawn I looking at all the lights on in people's rooms. It was a silent Monday night and there was no one outside at all. I imagined people alone in their separate rooms chipping away at ideas, burning their thoughts into typewriters, and laughed at my romanticization of Bennington. There have been so many times here when feeling and conviction welled out of me faster even than I could record, but now, after all these years of conscientious searching, sorting and actualizing, I have arrived at the final quarter of my fourth year feeling only dry and used up. I've been trying to squeeze out one last thing to say about us as a cohesive group, something inspiring, something uniting, but those of us graduating in the morning are a straggly bunch - transfers, returnees, and soul survivors who have seen the exit and arrival of presidents, the effects of rollicking finances, and the drifting away of nearly fifty classmates. We are told we share in some sort of spirit - some sort of commonality of vision which some cling to and some resent as we all wonder if any of this will matter in a few years.

Now it has been decided that I am ready to leave, which makes this spring both laden with and above meaning. Striving for conceptual clarity has given way to striving for a few last glimpses of the giddy intensity that exists nowhere but here, a place where seemingly tiny incidents form or rip bonds beyond all reasonable measure. Suddenly the virtues of lying in these sunlit fields have become inarguable: I see poetic sustenance everywhere and believe in it whole heartedly without lifting a pen. I see every "unproductive" hour as a future memory - and I must collect them all.

On the first warm night of spring in a soft, dense fog that made walking feel surreal and guaranteed apparitions in the road, a stray piece of light flew in front of my car. Rolling a little closer, I realized that this was not a trick - it was a frog bounding across the road. Greenish white and phosphorescent in the glare of my headlights, it leapt as if released, as if each soaring leap was sensual, truly, as if each bound was its first. It was here, in a place this visually utopic, that I was told attributing human emotion to nature was at best fallacious, at worst, corny and self-serving. But this frog's bounds were joyous - there can be no argument. Towards the squawking pond he was hastening faster and more efficiently than any two-footer could, and I was mesmerized by it lit up in my headlights. Without a clear thought to grab onto and pull me back, I kept staring as my car rolled closer. Lazy or half-catatonic, I rationalized: "The frog's hops will be perfectly timed through nature and destiny to miss my car. The frog will be down as I am over, up again as I pass." But then came the sudden bump, far more jarring than you might imagine for the squashing of a frog. Scanning in the rear-view mirror, I backed up to the splotch in the road, but didn't get out of the car; I was afraid to. No one was around, no sound at all except for the echoing pond, but the guilt I felt in front of the night made me afraid to step outside. I sat crying as I stared into the rear view mirror at the frog; it had had such momentum, such intent. All that promise and life so ecstatically airborne - its irredecent wiry limbs - just enough muscle for the weight of leaping into a warm world. But I killed it in all its promise without thought. I saw it in my headlights and didn't stop short because I was afraid of spinning out on bad breaks.

My tears, however, were silly and stupid because huge nature is always utterly indifferent to all pain. Everyday at Bennington I marvel at it

wantonly killing off its own through the seasons; tearing at itself in a way I keep insipidly regarding as violent and extravagant, yet am drawn to as somehow sublime. Nothing changed when Billy died in his new car, no matter how much were cried. He might have been an artist someday, but the hills looked the same. And nothing changed when a boy all the teachers called a genius died of a heart seizure the following term; and now there is a girl who wasted away quietly while we watched, dismayed as the air grew warm and heady with lavender perfume, and the greenery thickened and we grew more and more irresponsible. In fact, on each of these grim occasions, the days were particularly clement and beautiful.

Bennington, as we all know, is a strainer that only certain kinds of people can slither through. Certainly, these people are not necessarily healthier or smarter, thicker skinned or more or less sensitive than anyone else, but we all share the trait of somehow thriving on the uncertainty, loving blind faith in a blind leap, addicted to the search for solitary goals thrown constantly in doubt. In this idyllic setting there is no peace that lasts more than a minute. I will never be able to breathe like this again. I see here an idyllic world I can never fit so neatly into again, and wonder about the arbitrary nature of graduation and why someone decided that four years was enough to learn about enough. It's disconcerting, when everyone is expecting profound sentiment, to feel only willfully shallow and passively reckless, but I keep thinking of that frog and of our classmates who for so many reasons aren't here, and wonder what they would think to see us. Our class is the tying together of many ends, many other classes and schools, many changes. The energy in each of these tiny separate rooms would blow this campus off the face of the earth if it ever materialized physically.

Abandoning reason in the face of increasing responsibility is utterly

irrational but sensual reality, and deflates me as I loll in the priveledge of the present, and even as I am straining to se into the headlights of the future. The life's blood of this place has nothing to do with who is president at a given moment, or with the endless publicity and speculatuion that Bennington has always provoked. [REWRITE It has to do with all the twenty-four hours work cycles, the twenty-four hour burn cycles spinning along in this voluptuous valley.] If somehow all that passion and instinct for living could be harnessed and collected, Bennington would trully be a force to contend with. Separately, we could be seeds of force in a world barren of new thought. We could change things.