

Richard Eberhart

GREAT PRINCIPLES ARE THROWN DOWN BY TIME

You stand thinking of great principles
But they are thrown down by time.
You think your intellect holds them
But your intellect is altered by time.
Time changes, the eyes change, as fate
And the great principles go in time.

What if Aristotle, if Plato were here?
What if they were at the Academy in New York?
Can we imagine it? Are any of our men
Able to withstand thousands of years
And enounce principles that are the great
principles?
We freshen ourselves in throes of difficulty.

Yet the great principles of the live Greeks
Are thrown down by time. I heard
A commissar in Washington in 1960, when I
Got too friendly with Yevtushenko and Vosnesensky,
Discredit the entire classical Greek
establishment,
Say the tragic flaw is a defunct idea.

There could be no tragedy in his country
Because all were equal, none could fall
From a high state to a low state because of a
flaw
In character; like bees or ants, if numbers
Were killed numberless numbers would follow
To keep the hive or hill alive with future.

Individualism inheres in Western freedom,
Dynamism thinks it knows which way to go,
Blake, Keats, and Hopkins shine alive,
Democracy's skin burnishes to one color,
If we want to know what is the matter with
America
Now, we can warm our guts in the blood of Whitman.

We can feel the vitality of our striving
Here and now, in the heart-city of our land,
Can sense the visionary grandeur of our founders
In the erected freedom of our high-sprung spirits,
And when we suffer and fail, hail to America,
We have the strength to throw the evil-doers out.

Great principles are replaced by time
While the eyes see man as teeming, an upward
Animal, begetting love, hope, and belief.
If he joins the brontosaurus, the Incas, the
Aztecs
So be it, and so be it love incomplete.
With poetry he was replete.