

Tabula Rasa

By

Mir Yashar Seyedbagheri

WHY I LIKE IT: Poetry Editor HEZEKIAH writes...

In 'Tabula Rasa' Mir-Yashar fills an empty page with sparkling inked imagery "the lines whooshing over blank spaces," "colleagues who wear flesh-worn faces." "their humor atrophied under stacks of bills." and "invectives that crack your smile." Liquid sunshine, desert rainstorms, a most deliquescent quill scorching arid parchment. He's a must read.

Tabula Rasa

The whiteboard is a tabula rasa and on it you, the youthful teacher, write principles in navy-blue, the lines whooshing over blank spaces, like a train carrying its passenger to some great destination, lines run onward, onward, onward. Students watch, still young to be cynical, so you think. They sit with squeaky voices, waiting, waiting. You write of creativity, nurturing minds, questioning, drawing more divergent lines, another rail line, the lines curved, but smooth. In berets and fedoras, you write, tabula rasa a beautiful whiteboard of consciousness, your voice like a breeze rising and not the whipping voiced colleagues who wear flesh-worn faces. The marker squeaks a little now, but you scribble on, hands flung across the space. The railroad lines descend with grace. Students still watch, though one looks away when you talk principle, right, wrong, soul, karmic justice. But from other rooms, come other whiteboards, and chalkboards and whipping-voiced colleagues with truths screeching like ravens, swooping down onto their perch. Cold walls, winter fortresses. Reality, pragmatism, brutish, nasty, short, profit motive, they proclaim, the teachers in bowties and precise mustaches, the wrinkles and rings collected, their humor atrophied under stacks of bills. You shout back, scrawling, but the markers squeak, wanting surrender, surrender and your baby face stares from mirror. Students disperse, a miscreant snatches permanent marker. Principles couldn't get a job, he proclaims, wielding marker, brandished at the tabula rasa. Another brandishes, and another attacks the whiteboard. Senseless dreamer, senseless dreamer, students proclaim in a newly found baritone voice. Squeak, squiggle, squeak. Invectives cover the rails, the tabula rasa a jumble of lines clashing, crashing, a frowning face chiding you, calling you square, square, senseless dreamer, invectives that crack your smile. You scrub and scrub, whiteboard a sickly gray. The lines clash, the train crashes beyond the boundaries, leaving a sea of broken lines on a whiteboard once as white as fresh winter.

THE POET SPEAKS: *I was inspired by whiteboards, as funny as it sounds. To be honest, it all started with thoughts of drawing funny and crude symbols on whiteboards. But as I thought more about the simplicity of whiteboards, I also started thinking about the notion of them as a tabula rasa or a blank slate, and from there, my piece diverged even more. It began to not only serve as an exploration of blank slates, but of the blank slates and hopes that are ultimately filled with despair and disappointment, especially in the world of teaching. So I brought in all these lines that marred the whiteboard, the hopes, markers that cease to work with each effort the poem's speaker makes. With each squeak, the despair is cemented into the fabric of this whiteboard. The tabula rasa is being destroyed bit by bit.*

I can't attribute any particular poetic influences to this piece, but I think it's important to read and write poetry to understand how others explore the human condition. Unlike fiction, I think there are less constraints in certain ways and subversion is far more possible. And I think good poetry subverts. It pokes the bear, and it makes people uncomfortable, haunted, angry, and so on.

AUTHOR BIO: Yash Seyedbagheri is a graduate of Colorado State University's MFA program in fiction. His stories, "Soon," "How To Be A Good Episcopalian," "Tales From A Communion Line," and "Community Time" were nominated for Pushcarts. Yash's work has been published in The Journal of Compressed Creative Arts, Write City Magazine, and Ariel Chart, among others.