

Ergon

George HS Singer

Ergon: the good arising when something or someone achieves the purpose for which or for whom it was created

What then is the ergon of the hopelessly insane?
In 1948 the good Doctor Walter Freeman
achieved the Aristotelian virtue of realizing
his ergon by setting forth on a pilgrimage through
the archipelago of the mad where treatment
for the poor souls with pseudoneurotic schizophrenia,
or florid psychosis, violent rage, or psychotic nymphomania
were bundled in hot wet sheets and held down
while doctors injected such quantities of sweet
syrup into their veins as to induce a diabetic coma
in the hope they would awaken cured or at least
manageable. But the *ergon* of sugar is not a narcotic
and neither was its purpose to course
through the veins of the abandoned.
That year 600,000 wretched or strange or wild ones dwelt
in rooms with no door knobs. The comatose gathered
in wards like cocoons clumped in trees who, upon waking,
emerged a second time with black ragged wings
beating against the black light from slag and char.
Therefore Doctor Freeman drove his Buick station wagon
from Meadowbrook State Asylum to Pine Crest State
Hospital for the Insane to Fairview State Asylum
and ever onward, stopping for a day at the Iowa State
Asylum at Cherokee, Iowa where on December fifth,
nineteen-hundred-and forty-eight,
in an office converted to an operating theatre deployed
a tool of his making, christened the *luekotome*, derived
from an ice pick, created with the intent to hammer

with a wooden mallet under the eyelids, steadied
against the supraorbital notch of the skull. Walter Freeman, MD
pounded this worthy implement (see patent # US7400927)
into the frontal lobes, the seat of planning and mapping,
the place of comparing and accepting, the loci
of the higher reaches of the mind and the persona.
When properly placed, he worked
the flattened end of the device to and fro,
oblating the offending grey matter
of comatose David Singer and his sleeping sister Evelyn.

The ergon of the eyelids is sleep.
And of the tear ducts is weeping.
That of the socket—to serve as a nest
for the viscous human eye.
And the ergon of ice? To glide
on a frozen lake under an innocent moon.

Thereafter neither Uncle David
Nor Aunt Evelyn spoke again
nor were they visited, not once,
not by Nana S., nor Poppa S.,
not by lovers nor friends,
not even by Walter Freeman
who drove on to the next State asylum
and then the next, achieving
the lifetime record for singleton performance
of prefrontal lobotomies. Neither did
my sorrowing angry father, not ever, not even once,
speak the names of his little sister nor of his
big brother, carrying this secret to his grave
until a safety deposit box provided
the commitment documents whereby
I first understood my father's outrage

when, as a young boy I taunted my sisters,
calling them crazy, thereby causing father
to scream an admonishment that I could
end up living out my life in an asylum.
The *ergon* of silence in a household is strangeness.
What, then, is the *ergon* of the insane?
Perhaps that of the Angel Who Does Not Stay the Hand.