

DEAR MISS AMERICA

by Patrick S. Traynor

That title, and these words, are not for you alone,  
 Who stood, that never-to-be-forgotten night,  
 Bathed in the plaudits and applause of those  
 Who chose you Queen of these United States.  
 They are, rather, for all the misses of America,  
 For girls in every state, of every age and form--  
 The pig-tailed tomboy, pedaling madly on her bike,  
 The freckled, gangly girl, with braces on her teeth,  
 The pretty junior miss, sophisticate in outsize sox,  
 The tailored typist, pencil-poised and cool,  
 The model, mincing proudly on fantastic stilts,  
 And, yes, the brazen, bright-eyed ones as well,  
 The harridan, the shrew, the over-painted doll--  
 All of you, in short, melted down and poured together,  
 Fused, by some strange anchemy, into ONE GIRL,  
 The bewildering amalgam of all the little and big,  
 Rich and poor, old and young, plain and fancy girls  
 That fill our schools and decorate our offices,  
 That stroll our streets and scent out subways,  
 That steal our hearts and marry our men.  
 You are the real, the only, Miss America.  
 It is to you, then, that I speak.

Composite Miss, I scan the changing contours of your face,  
 And wonder toward what shore the troubled tide  
 Of this day's restless sea is bearing you.  
 I stand enthralled, yet other times repelled,  
 Before the thousand guises you assume,  
 Weighing on the scales of my own mind  
 Whate'er I see of wanton and of wise,  
 Of good and bad, emerge, recede, return,  
 To bolster hope or presage our demise.  
 Across the fleshly canvas of your common face  
 A million misses daily trace their sins,  
 Each line and light, each blot, a tell-tale loan  
 From some sweet maid, or vixen's aging mask,  
 Or borrowed from the small girl's innocence.  
 The willfulness of one casts shadow on another's gift,  
 True beauty struggles bravely with the counterfeit,  
 And grace does battle with deformity.

O Miss America, what forces, let grow strong, will dominate  
 Your face, one final day, for better or for worse?  
 What girl, unknowing and unknown, in this great land,  
 Might tip the scales with noble, or ignoble, soul?  
 I study you at work, at play, at prayer!  
 When joy transforms, and grief transfixes you,  
 In all your moods and moments, waiting anxiously  
 To find what makes you what you are today,  
 And what of hope there is for all of us tomorrow.

Sometimes, dear Miss, I almost hesitate to hope,  
 Seeing you on countless corners with your crowd,  
 In the long summer evenings of your youth  
 ...Your jeans and mannish shirt, your close cropped hair,  
 Make mockery of sex with all its sweet disparity;  
 The boldness of your stance, your arrogance,  
 Betray a confidence to far beyond your years,  
 And scorn sounds shrilly in your voice.  
 You jostle boys with noisy, rough equality,  
 Denying them the precious chance for chivalry  
 They need to mould them later into gentlemen.  
 I see you thus, and shiver, thinking of the time  
 Your teacher said, her eyes downcast and sad,  
 "Sometimes I am ashamed to be alive today!"

And, later, in another time and place, I ask:  
 "Is this the girl who guides the destiny of man--  
 This manikin, perched cross-legged on a stool,  
 The neon-lit, provoking goddess of the lounge,  
 Coolly toying with her glass, and with the world--  
 This girl, who has forgotten how to blush,  
 Whose heart, one must suspect, is, like her nails,  
 Enameled to a bright, hard gloss,  
 Whose angel-face just barely hides her own?"  
 I see you strut and grimace on my TV screen,  
 In hungry desperation, begging the appoause  
 That rescue you from sheer absurdity.  
 On street and stage, on beach and promenade,  
 You overplay your role of temptress and coquette,  
 Striving foolishly to meet the challenge of a world  
 That beats upon the drums of your conceit  
 A rhythm in the tempo of these frantic times.  
 There is upon your lipsticked lips today  
 A twist that's bitter-sweet and humorless;  
 Your beautiful composite eyes toooften show  
 A hunger far from healthy, and too much of you  
 Seems driven by the heady, hopeless thrill  
 Of dancing on the thinning edge of the abyss.  
 It is a frightening thing to see you, Miss,  
 Choose to start along that reckless road,  
 So fraught with peril, toward that lonely hour,  
 When the gold you have garnered so gaily  
 Suddenly sounds with a counterfeit clink,  
 And the fearful certainty grips your soul  
 That you have gambled with your destiny, and lost!

But, oh, there is another face you wear, Thank God,  
 That sets the blood to singing hymns of hope again,  
 The while I marvel at the glorious change in you  
 As at a new creation on this jaded earth,  
 For I have seen you, Miss America, transformed,  
 A girl as girls, I think, were meant to be--

Complete with frilly frock and ribboned hair,  
 With unretouched, clean goodness in your face,  
 And schoolgirl giggles spilling out your innocence,  
 With unlearned woman's wiles you set hearts fluttering,  
 A toss of curls, a glance, that slow, shy smile  
 That somehow warns the world to keep at bay.  
 At times I've seen a holy hunger light your face,  
 As you, madonna-like, lift Brother from his crib,  
 Your aching arms a wordless wish for motherhood.  
 And then in Church, with face uplifted to your God,  
 Like maiden-martyr waiting for the welcomed flow,  
 Your solemn beauty sets the world remembering.  
 I've seen you stand, in virgin whiteness veiled,  
 Before the altar, Miss, to pledge your troth  
 Till death, to one who takes your hand and life  
 Within his own strong, dedicated clasp  
 And, oh, it is not hard for one to see in you  
 The noble daughter of our Second Eve, the Maid  
 Whose grace invests all maidenhood with grace.

If I could call you from the beaches and the parks,  
 From schools and streets and corners everywhere;  
 If I could gather you from out your homes,  
 And from behind your counters and your desks;  
 Take you out of rinks and dancehalls for an hour,  
 Away from pin machines, juke-boxes, hoagie shops,  
 Telephones, convertibles, and swimming pools;  
 If I could lure you from the drive-ins and the clubs,  
 And silence in your ear the dreadful din you dance to,  
 Whisper you away from prayer and quiet sleep,  
 I would, dear Miss America, say this to you:  
 "You hold the future of the world within your hands,  
 Your woman's hands, not make for saw or sword,  
 But fashioned for the nobler task of mixing  
 Into stiffening batter of this mortal life  
 Those gentler, tenderer ingredients that God  
 Saw fit to form within your femininity.  
 He made you, Miss, a woman, mystery-full,  
 To be for all men a queen enthroned,  
 The tangible, attainable ideal that lifts  
 Their eyes, and hearts, part-way to Heaven;  
 To temper every wind, to nurse and tend,  
 And to defend, the verities that last  
 Beyond the frantic foibles of this day.  
 Never were you meant to be a gambler,  
 Staking all the happiness of our world  
 Against the pulsebeat in your youthful blood;  
 Nor meant to seek the icing on the cake of life,  
 The laughter bursting briefly on the comic's face,  
 In place of joys that deeper go, and peace  
 That lives and grows long after pleasure dies.  
 When cast with men, equality to you is loss,  
 For in your woman's weakness lies your strength,  
 And sweet compliance is your secret key to power,  
 Your brightest ornament is not the ring or jewel  
 That glitters gracefully from hand to throat;  
 It is that precious stone, the gem of girlhood,

Without which no girl is truly beautiful--  
The pearl of purity, that priceless prize,  
Which must be guarded, treasured, loved,  
Kept bright, beyond all cost or reckoning.  
This is your final castle and your fort,  
Where, safe behind the moat of modesty,  
You keep your court with dignity and grace.

And God has given you, Dear Miss, a Star,  
to guide the fragile vessel of your womanhood  
Through vulgar, noisome waters safely home.  
That Star is Mary, Maiden-Mother, Model Miss;  
She knows full well the traps, the treacheries,  
That lie in wait for youth and innocence.  
She, too, has braved the hidden shoals and reefs  
That threaten girlhood's course through life.  
She is a Girl, who wanted just to be a girl,  
And found herself the Mother of her God;  
A Mother, well content with just her Child,  
Until God willed to her the human race;  
Her girlish secrets, shared with village friends,  
She traded gladly for THE SECRET with her Son.  
She is the Mother and the Model of America,  
The Morning Star, that lights the way for you.  
She wears her womanhood, like her blue cloak,  
With queenly mien and unassuming charm;  
A Lady, ever motherly yet never maudlin,  
Humble always without being humdrum,  
She stands upon the shores of God's Eternity  
And waits for all the broken toys of earth,  
Borne by the tide of years, to reach her feet.  
By the pure light of her shining, set your course,  
O Miss America, and she will lead you home.



## AND THE SUN ROSE

You ask me to speak of my Mother, of what I saw in her this morning, but what can I say?

I remember stirring in my slumber and opening my eyes just long enough to see her filling her lamp. Her cloak was wrapped about her shoulders much like the silence that enfolds her life and Jesus'.

A bit of commotion outside. Some women were shuffling toward the place where Jesus had been laid. They spoke to one another of spices and the hurried burial before the Passover and of how their love of Him prompted them to give His tomb all the ritual possible to them. I thought it strange to see her walking another direction than they, slowly, at peace, erect, only her eyes revealing the drain the past few days had been upon her. Her face was lifted to the stars. Once there had been a special star for her to find among them. Now they were all alike, all special because they are her Son's.

Perhaps I should have followed her to ease her loneliness. I did not even think of that at the time, simply snuggled into the burrow of covers she'd thrown about me that I be not cold and fell asleep.

The dawn awakened me. Yet now I can't remember if it was a sun-beam or the light in her eyes. All I know is that I looked to find her with me, and in her eyes to find that which would be mutilated by any verbal account. Somehow it rolled away a stone and overcame my heart, and she who was vibrantly alive did not need to tell me my Brother lives.

for the Lambs of God

Pascaltide 1966