

COMMENTARY ON THE WORK THAT APPEARS IN NDR

The poems that appear in the most recent issue of *Notre Dame Review* come from two distinctly different bodies of work. “Ambiguity” and “How The Trick Is Done” come from my life long fascination with how the brain sees and/or constructs a work of art; the first two sections from the eight part poem “Prague Suite” published here are part of my continuing efforts to come to grips with the personal implications of the Holocaust for myself and my family. The Holocaust and family history will be the focus of my next collection of poems, “Prague, And Beyond.” The history of the Jews in Prague (the so-called New Jerusalem) and the concept of time in Prague, a city in which Einstein and Kafka spoke in the same salon, a town in which Freud treated Mahler and where Rilke composed poetry, are central to the book. My Father spent the war fighting in the underground and his story is told in a ten part poem “1944”, four sections of which have appeared in *Poet Lore* and the rest of which will appear in *Evening Street Review*. “1944” and “Prague Suite” share a similar structure in that each poem consists of a gang of contemporary sonnets or 14-liners. Among many other things, the book will contain a prose essay from *The South Carolina Review*, a sort of “memoir” of the Prague Spring in 1968, so as to help cover Prague’s history from its beginnings to the present. My family lost about seventy immediate relatives in the Holocaust; my favorite uncle, my first cousin and my stepmother all survived Auschwitz and I was born in Pilsen, the same town where the poet and immunologist Miroslav Holub was born, immediately after the war. In regard to “Ambiguity”, I have spent my life studying the visual system and how its structure and function relate to the analysis of images in both visual and literary art. Recently, I had an opportunity to engage in an anatomical debate concerning the presence or absence of brain anatomy in Michelangelo’s “Creation of Adam” in the Sistine Chapel (see my cover article on “The Creation of Adam” by Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475-1564) in vol.59, issue no.6 of *Neurosurgery*, on pages N11-12, 2006) and pointed out that the brain’s visual system has a tendency to “fill in” missing information, the basis of many well-known optical illusions. I and others have proposed that the brain is a metaphor-making machine; this was also the view of Robert Frost. The difficulties of ordering such metaphors into coherent works of art (i.e. poems) or science are likened to Houdini’s Chinese Water Torture Trick in “How The Trick Is Done”. My hope is that these two poems will be collected some day in a volume of New and Selected Poems, tentatively titled “Necessary Speech”.