

connection between the beards in Shakespeare's plays, but what that connection is, he can't say.

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Every year an original idea is harder to come by. More fresh air and exercise might clear his head — golf, perhaps. But the image of that dimpled, white ball hurtling through space makes him think of the earth suspended in the universe, which reminds him of the stars, angels, ether, the music of the spheres. Which gives him headaches and makes him a very poor golfer.

So he remains in his study, reading The Great Masters, sharpening pencils, stamping the inside covers of first editions with his personalized embosser.

Sometimes he stares at a world map spanning the length of wall opposite him. Or he admires a tall, antique grandfather clock, listening to it tick, tick, ticking, wondering, just wondering, if it might miss a beat.

— Peter Johnson

Providence RI

JUDGMENT CALL

"This is a fine group of three-year-old York boars..." The judge winces as his mike squeals. "These are strong aggressive animals — frothing at the mouth wanting to fight. That's what you look for in a boar." He roots around in his notes. "All right, for the Grand Champion, I'm going to go with number 25. That's just an excellent example of a York boar. Even though the number 40 has more size, I like the structure of the 25. For my money, structure is everything. I especially like the breadth and muscle of this boar. I like the well-developed pastern, and the leanness, combined with the good size and absence of pin-nipples. There's a nice sway to this boar's underside. Just a fine all-'round champion."

Again the mike squeals. The judge grunts something to his assistant, who scrambles away. "Our reserve champion, number 40, is also a fine boar," the judge continues. "But the structure isn't quite as good as on our first-place animal. I'd like to open up the chest of this boar, and drop the whole thing down a fuzz or two. The forelegs are solid, but

there's a little bit of pigeon-toe. I'd like to open that out. Also, the left hock's swollen, but I think that's due to injury, and should clear right up. I like the testicular development very much."

The young owners line up to collect ribbons and/or contain tears. The first-place owner has shiny blonde hair in a thick braid, and bright blue eyes, but they have a sullen cast, and her hips are wide, even at 17. The second-place owner has acne, and a big nose, and plods like an old farmer through muddy fields. The judge stomps around the pen, smoothing sawdust with a push-broom. Fifty pounds of belly bobs and sways over his silver-dollar belt. He drops his weight down on his heels as he walks, boot-toes curled up like an elf's. His hair is black but thinning and the fat around his eyes makes him squint as he lowers his head to scrutinize the vulvular placement of the next group of two-year-old York swine.

BORN TO WHINE

Misfortune smiles on you.
Your limousine never arrives on time.
Your ship comes in spice-laden,
and you ordered tea.

Your parents' failures maimed you;
their success did too.
You've always been too short, too tall, too slow,
too fast, too stupid, too bright for this benighted world.

Your victories are always tainted;
your losses, never fair.
The geiger counter of your brain endlessly ticks
off the world's inequities.

Valdictorian of sorrow,
disaster's pop quiz won't catch you unprepared.
Knight of despair, you clank through life in full armor,
sweaty and chafed, into a cloud of mustard gas.

Your friends flee, frightened by your groans,
which gives you better cause to groan.
Fortunate unfortunate,
bad weather will never disappoint you.

You never lose sleep perfecting an acceptance speech,
or strain credulity making the best of things.
The desert wind will always parch you;
the rain will wreck your hair.