

Thursday 5 May – Saturday 28 May 1988

IMMURED IN PACE JOHN DE SILENTIO

It is certain any conviction gains infinitely the moment
another soul can be induced to believe in it.

– NOVALIS

Story 'watchword' (25239) System E by JBARBOUR
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The figure standing in a corner, face unseen (one imagines him staring at the corner), wearing a dunce's cap – is the image most central to De Silentio's work. It represents the reduction and clarification of all his concerns – and as such, it is both a "self-portrait" and the expression of a "world-view" (to use an old-fashioned phrase from Goethe). To my mind the image functions as a kind of "reductio ad absurdum" – but it is a powerful image – of difference. I am not talking about theory here. The image is a cliché – but what preoccupies De Silentio is the ability of the cliché to endure – its force, if you like. How is it that the cliché endures? Because it is incontrovertibly rooted in experience. Yet the image – or the icon – is also generic – a kind of "racial memory", an archetype (I use all such terms loosely) – as an icon should be. It is an image which has its well-springs in the theatre. At least, in public spectacle – in the ritual of segregation of the one who is marked off. In this case, the picture. Or; in this figure co-exists a certain innocence, as well as a certain sophistication – an image perhaps representing a rather peculiar historical and iconographic "confrontation" (except that there is no violence in this) – between Goya, and Le Douanier Rousseau. Innocence and Experience? The dunce is the one who is, or who is described as being, stupid. One who is unable or unwilling to learn. Who is made to wear the mark or the badge of his stupidity – "branded". Yet there is something wilful in De Silentio's treatment of this image – in its positioning. Some sort of perversity in its refusal of the beholder, and in its occupation of space. Again, I am not talking about theory. I am referring here to "form" – or to formal values. And to a history of rebellion – the rebellion of "content".

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