

A LIFE IN LEUVEN

Ten stanzas in the style of Hillaire Belloc *Proclamation speech by Jonathan Sozek, June 2010*

*Passing 'neath the iron gate
of the Higher Institute
one can sense that one has come
into a place of some repute.
And after many months of time
spent contemplating matters learned
one can say with certainty
that this repute is well-deservéd.
If you'll let me, I shall say
why, to me, it seems this way.*

*Past the archives and salons
and past the lawn and willow tree
and past the secretariat
one comes into the library.
Its collection is superb
(a 'gem' as Friedman once intoned)
and creaky stairs and floors ensure
you won't forget you're not alone.*

*These books work with the lectures
to deepen our conjectures.*

*The lecturers are thoughtful men,
I've studied with a few.
Friedman on the Trinity
and Desmond's metaxu;
Visker questions Levinas
and Braeckman reads Arendt,
Vanbeeswijk reads Gauchet, and Cloots
asks what religion meant.
Van Brakel's scientific virtues,
Martin Stone's Descartes,
Cruysberg's anthropology
and Bernet's course on art;
Steel with friendship is concerned*

*and Raymaekers with Kant,
and Geyskens' talks on Freud reveal
just what we really want.
Breur on modernity
and Moors on Kant, again,
and Burms on intuition –
truly these are thoughtful men.*

*But still these lectures aren't complete.
The HIW's indeed replete
with more to do and see.*

*Take the Thursday Lectures,
and the wine t'which we repair,
(Or the) Card'nal Mercier seminars
this year with Jonathan Lear.
If student company's more your thing
then pass some time with IPSA;
concerts, reading groups, and bread
make for a happy picture.
Just add the Christmas Dinner and
your satisfaction's ready to hand.*

*Despite how sometimes it may seem
there is a world beyond the gate,
and out in Leuven city do
diversions and temptations wait.
You can ride your bike to Peeters';
get a book for thirty euro,
or else hit up a copy shop
(if your income's close to zero).
A famous Alma dinner pleases
all but the gourmets,
though foreigners all war'ly eye
that tub of mayonnaise.
Later there's the nightshop;*

*you can get a drink and then inspect,
while sitting on Ladeuzeplein,
that strange, impaléd, green insect.*

*(And) echo'ing off the cobblestones,
through gray and rain (and sometimes sun),
the sound of bells is hourly heard,
<dun da dun da dun da dun>*

*Yet perhaps the most distinctive
pleasures of the place
come from sitting in the sun
and talking face to face.
At Erasmus you may find
you'll want to never leave;
just speak those magic words you know:
een koffie alstublieft.
Or grab a broodje at Commerce,
a coffee at Pangaea,
kebab and frites on every block!*

*(Though of those last you'll tire.)
If a beer you should prefer,
the Oude Markt awaits you,
Leffe, Duval, Rodenbach, though
next morn' your head may hate you.*

*Of course one needs to moderate
these pleasures of the flesh;
to turn the mind to higher things,
and keep the spirit fresh.
But life in Leuven: it is good,
flesh and spirit both,
with each day another chance
for true and lasting growth.*

*And so these thoughts I here conclude,
lest I should, in time, protrude.
I hope you've found them well construed.*