

Winter 1984

Incentive

Charles Hartman

Connecticut College, cohar@conncoll.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.conncoll.edu/engfacpub>



Part of the [Poetry Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Hartman, Charles O. "Incentive." *Ploughshares* 4 (1984): 205-6 Web.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the English Department at Digital Commons @ Connecticut College. It has been accepted for inclusion in English Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Connecticut College. For more information, please contact bpancier@conncoll.edu.

The views expressed in this paper are solely those of the author.



Emerson College

Incentive

Author(s): Charles O. Hartman

Source: *Ploughshares*, Vol. 10, No. 4 (1984), pp. 205-206

Published by: [Ploughshares](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40349351>

Accessed: 26/03/2013 10:32

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Ploughshares and Emerson College are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Ploughshares*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

Charles O. Hartman

Incentive

You will sit like a scholar, inclined
as if to hear, not fidgeting because it's not time
to shift the legs another way, and there's a long way
to go still. On the desk a silver ink-pot,
unused but indicative, a gift
from colleagues, students, wife, friends, gleams
beyond the ellipse of light and the trapezoid
of open book, an old book with a clasp
of filleted metal; a lion with tucked tail
sleeps on the edge of the step that goes down
from the wide dais holding the desk; two slippers
wait at an angle to each other under the pew
along the window wall. There is the skull
on the sill, minus the mandible. Like Altdorfer,
silent, you will have closed your eyes and seen Susanna
bathed by women among the trees, the elders
hints among tall grass that would exact
such scrupulous strokes. Slowly, you might
bend forward toward a canvas. In the lower right,
the most beautiful of the women walks away
with an empty jug, a bunch of adder's tongue and the edge
of her red robe gathered in the other hand,
in the crook of her arm. She has already set foot
on the stairs up to the terrace, where the market day,
brawling and bow-legged, has spread its wares,
and the townspeople come for judgment;
the elders have already overturned
the sense within them and, your book says, bent
their eyes down, not to see heaven. Were they lilies,

white lilies the woman carried toward the gate,
the crowd at noon, commerce in her heart? Soon
the cries will sound, the story caper
from jaw to jaw, and then its refutation.
Something like this is on your mind, something
you would not recognize. You have other business
that will keep you here hours without moving, without
speech,
relying on chance, time, the motives of others,
fate. Your contribution is your own intensity
at one of those activities so hard
to tell apart: waiting, being present,
hoping, being dreamed. Something has opened you
to the tide like an oyster. In your left hand
a pair of spectacles waits to replace those through
which you watch
distances. Where no one would see it
even if it shivered into the light and stood there, naked,
an idea rises up with a name and face,
touching the lion's head, the skull, not going, sure
your hand is what it has been waiting for.