

The Unpardonable Fault

by Barbara Schwartz

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The collie standard is a beautiful outline of what a collie should look like. It describes the head to the ultimate. It delineates the structure, describes the coat and movement. It details tail set, feet, bite, color and temperament. But the one thing it fails to outline is the unpardonable fault. The one thing that no judge who knows the breed can put up—the ugly or common dog.

Now, do not throw up your hands in dismay. A dog can fit the standard—can have just minor problems—and still be a prime example of this fault. I know of champions that are ugly: they finally finish under judges who equate absence of faults with beauty, as opposed to the judge who evaluates virtues. These are common, often coarse, usually good-moving, nondescript animals that cannot be said to have this major fault or that major fault, but whose parts do not fit together. These dogs lack type. They have no flair, no style, no “class.” They are, pardon the expression, **Clunks**.

As a breeder, of course, one is constantly trying to produce the perfect dog. However, since this has yet to be achieved and one has to have his “druthers”—the typy, beautiful, eye-filling dog is a better bet, both in the show ring and the brood box, in spite of a fault or two, than the common but relatively faultless animal. The latter, I feel, makes a delightful pet Lassie.

What makes up type, or beauty? Well, in our breed, it has to begin with the head. The indefinable but clearly recognizable sweet expression—made up of eye shape and placement, ears, muzzle, eye-color, and length and smoothness of head—is essential. A dog without this expression is ugly, common, crude. It is impossible to describe exactly what is needed: what gives this expression on one dog because of certain combinations will not necessarily do so on another. Yet all great dogs, regardless of their breeding, have it. My old brood bitch has it, in spite of the fact that her eye is a little rounder than ideal and she has a slight drop-off. At eleven years old, she still has a melting expression.

It is the combination of elements fitting perfectly together that creates real beauty. The body of a beautiful animal will set off such a head proudly, therefore the neck must be long and well-arched. This dog will have style. Basically, it will be well-muscled, in good flesh and sound enough to cover ground effortlessly. It will have a good-fitting, healthy coat—but too much coat can coarsen a beautiful outline, while too little coat can make a dog look high on leg, or out of balance. That is the secret **Balance**. The dog may be a bit

straight front and rear, it may toe in or move too closely behind, but if it balances out and moves freely, it is acceptable.

A beautiful dog, like a good painting or a beautiful woman, fits together in a symmetrical whole. Think of any of the great beauties—Sophia Loren, Elizabeth Taylor, Mona Lisa. They are beautiful because their features fit together, not necessarily because they are perfect. Elizabeth Taylor's eyes in Sophia Loren's face would be out of place—out of balance, and the beauty would be marred. Nefretete's nose on the Mona Lisa would certainly be jarring.

In judging dogs, one must look at the whole animal. One must measure the animal's virtues by the standard, but one must not forget to look for beauty—type—the fitting together of all the parts into an eye-catching, exquisitely harmonious whole. This beauty must be considered, not just the individual parts.

One must not judge on faults alone. To do this is to allow the common, the disproportionate, even the ugly animal to represent the collie. That is a crime.

The problem today lies in the fact that too many judges are not able to see virtues because of some particular fault a dog may have. These judges do not have a positive mental image of a correct collie. They lack the experience to know what a beautiful collie feels like. Thus, they are forced to check off faults. We have too many common animals achieving their championships. It is hurting the breed. These common animals produce common offspring, and there are many new people in the breed who really believe that these are quality animals. All art is an educated taste. McDonald's is great if you have never had filet mignon.

People today breed safely. They take no chances. They breed for "nice" dogs, not great dogs. They breed one common, relatively fault-free individual to another just like it, and get safe, relatively fault-free mediocre pups.

"Mediocrity knows nothing higher than itself, but talent instantly recognizes a genius."

Sir Arthur C. Doyle

People who have produced the really great, beautiful type collies I have loved were not of this house-painter quality. They were the artists who would take chances to achieve the truly great dog.

I have been told that Mrs. Browning (and for those of you who have not done your homework, go look at pictures of the Tokalon dogs) would occasionally use even Roman-nosed animals in her breeding program in order to get certain qualities. How many people today would dare to take such chances? Sure, there would be failures—but one must glory in achievement, not fear failure.

Perhaps I sound heartless—but once one has had the privilege of owning a really great dog, have come to appreciate a masterpiece, it is very difficult to settle for less. The risks taken to achieve the great, the beautiful, seem worth the effort, the heartbreak, and the work.

*A pinch of fair, a pinch of foul
And bad and good make best of all;
Beware the moderated soul
That climbs no fractional inch to fall.*

"Nonsense Rhyme"

Elinor Wylie

