

Ambrosia and Pessimism

Anachronistic or antiquarian might be a good descriptor for me. So if this sounds a death rattle amid a celebration of life my apologies. This post may not be for everyone, it may be for no one. It is an invitation to engage in critique against me and my posts. Some of you may need the garden of Adonis, I acknowledge that. I beseech you give me the torrent of Apophis, I seek Beowulf not banquet.

I found the Do This Now activities a bit base... which deserves a preamble. I am a high school dropout who went back to school at 26. I spent most of my youth from 14-24 in one subculture, counterculture, state of rebellion or another and journaling was my life raft. Questioning my thoughts, my reasoning, my readings, authority and beliefs is what brought me back to school, questions are quintessence. I also come from a family of writers, scientists, and university professors so scholarship was kitchen table for me. So I may be arriving at this research class from the other side of the road than many of you. I am here for Daggers and Wands, to bandy with words and battle with wits, to take armament in the firmament of the intersubjective not for confirmation but for temperance. I see now many may not be here for such aims nor welcome the parry and thrust of pen and wicked wit. I may be seeking a dead, if not somewhat insulting tradition of silvered tongues. That's fine, please inform me why I am misled in this missive.

In defense of pessimism, the critic, and the cynic, I have the following to say. We have witnessed the largest proliferation of publication, idea, informatics, data, medium, and influence in the history of humanity in our generation. It has barely been 100 years since the first film screenings and mass media communications. We are but the 2nd generation to know global travel as being attainable in under a year. We are witness to some of the largest power grabs to ever break on the human at scale. Respectfully, we don't need more original ideas or innovation. They are the shibboleth and fuel which seeds one of the most self indulgent destructive cultures in the history of humanity. As a humanitarian, we need Heraclitus, we need Silvia Plath, we need Diogenes. After a flood one of the biggest dangers is a lack of clean drinking water. We have just had a flood of knowledge, what will bring us hale?

So when after 4 years of classes our graduate level research course is asking me to ask questions as some kind of revelatory beginning, I indeed have questions. How has a 2000 year old tradition of erudition and engaged discourse degraded to the point where foundational dialectic inquiry doesn't even begin until the 16th year of formal education when it used to begin at 9 years old? What has happened to the indomitable spirit of human language when discourse among adults must be sanitized to overwhelmingly positive language in public forum? Do we really think the Agora was polite friendly and accommodating space? Have all us so deeply internalized a missive of positive psychology--as rhetoric not science I might add--that

we cannot engage in invective in public? Do we police our own thoughts so completely now? Who benefits from this social compact? Where did we learn to so fully filter our own thoughts such that even in a space dedicated to the refinement of knowledge we pull critique? I question if this proclivity of behavior is from an enlightenment of culture or a deep fear of reprisal, reprisal by who for whom? Who has really benefited from this? Has it actually made a difference in the quality of society we all have? Did no one question the researcher who is telling you these things?

So I ask you in pessimism, truly do none of you have critique against the world that we live in? Do none feel that the quality of publication today differs from the works of Braudel, Lacan, Hildegard von Bingham, James Baldwin, Sappho? In a class of English language savants, raconteurs, defenders of youth, and stewards of culture, we speak not of evils? Where has our Beowulf gone? Does Gilgamesh have no serpent to slay? Do we no longer meditate on the meaning of Leviathan? Does Odysseus now vacillate only between Circe's banquet and the isle of the lotus eaters? What of the Charybdis? Does Zeus now only have consensual conjugal relations? Is Dante now ever trying to reach the highest crown of heaven? Are Milton's lakes of Mammon a new summer festival ground? Can we speak only of Elysium?

Have we become so afraid of our own minds? Become so afraid of our own times that we seek the balm of silk and honey? I have tasted the ambrosia of gnosis and decry the salve of psychologized obsequious pleasantries in my dialectic as mere honey. I can bask in my own glory anytime I have pen and paper, I do not need a garden of nymphs and satyrs to wreath me in garland of flower and wine, a fine plaisir but knowledge it is not. I am here for daggers and wands, do not give me praise lest your encomium purchase power to turn the tide. I am here for the training of the Tower, I came to academy to be rent, forged and tempered, not to be simpered and satiated. So many speak of vulnerability and yet hide their shadows. I do not believe that so many harbor so few demons, nor do I ask you to bare them, but I do invite you to make play with them.

So then what is our task in this place? For me it is the sword, it is fire. I am here to Burn the Dross, to set aflame and shatter that which does not hold an edge. We as a generation have work to do! We must sift through the outgrowth of knowledge in the last 100 years and determine that which is worthy to be carried forward. What criteria will you favor in your measures? What will you weigh? I will accept no less than eloquence bordering the sublime. I may never attain this state in my own research, in my own knowledges, this gamification of being is not the point of scholarship, its not about me. For some of us this is not a job, this is not a check box, this is the hallowed hall, Echo's cave, it is Ariadne's thread. I write for the mother of muses, for the Titan Mnemosyne, to drink from the pool of memory, for here we barter not in journals and theory, for seuth the inheritance of human memory whispers crystalline. As my charge, I take no less than masterpiece.

We should take no less than masterpiece for we are stewards of that which will remain. Masterpiece is not a style, it is not a motif, it is not a lineage, and it is not goal. It is that which remains when all else falls away. It is the Angel freed from the agony of its marble prison by the sculptor. It is that which emerges from that obsession which must be abandoned. As stewards we honor and give eulogy to wonder for it is wonderous in the price it exacts on its maker. It is the infusion of life and passion beyond reason, beyond doubt, beyond our own understanding of limit, it is that effluence which leaves only essence in its wake. I am an alchemist, not for its allusion, not for its allegory, not for its sickening cultural cache, but for its labor. Solve et coagula, the Ars Arcanum, unceasing, relentless in its becoming.

In your questions I simply encourage each of you to dawn that mantle of tradition and inheritance which tempers you, not in restraint but in depth of the forge. Seek favor, seek catalysis, demand it of your query. Your time is precious, burn the dross, be obsessive, be relentless in your research, be unceasing in your learning. I do not want your pleasantries, I want to feel the immolating etch of your senses in searing elegance across time, to know that void is only the age between inspiration. What of your life is worthy of being etched in crippling beauty onto the future of humanity? Find it. Each of us has that capacity. For that is language, that is writing.

I feel like part of the drawback of online comms is that we lose the charm and emotional candor in our exchanges. So, I mean this with a genuine warmth and regard for each of you as an intellectual, as a creative, as wordsmith and as initiates of mysteries millennia old. You need not live a cynics life but I encourage you to take the time to dawn its mantle from time to time and burn the dross.

Michael Pell Blumenthal Martin
2024-09-07