

A few days ago, I got the acceptance letter for my first first-author paper, which will be published in a *Nature* journal. Though insignificant in the grand scheme of things, as every human matter, this is the culmination of three years of work, done in simultaneous with my pursuit of a college degree—which I don’t yet have. I know the paper too thoroughly and well to consider it that good: its flaws are too apparent to me. But regardless of what I think about the paper, seeing what other people think about this «achievement» has made me notice a few ironies in the way other people perceive our own failures and successes.

Since my early adolescence, I had been constantly questioned and doubted by all around me, except perhaps my father. I was deemed at best a lazy and low-achieving adolescent, at worst an arrogant rascal. I was repeatedly told by my elder brother and sister that I had no future—comments which were undoubtedly motivated by bitter grudges rooted in the chaotic history of my family—and this opinion was more tacitly entertained by almost everyone else. Now I suspect they *wanted* me to fail, because I had been the only one who «left» to accompany my father after his divorce, and any failure of my own was seen as proving he was not fit to raise me. I *had* to fail so that they could enjoy a morbid form of vengeful satisfaction.

My terrible performance at school gave everyone ample ground for pseudo-justifications. I was an incorrigibly irreverent young man who deemed—correctly, I should say, but irrelevantly so—that my avid devotion to reading accounted for more of an education than a professor dispassionately spelling out Bhaskara’s formula. I was many times reprimanded for reading during class; a volume of Euripides was confiscated from me once by the professor of «Ethical and civic training»; and once, as I read *Das Kapital* during the class of mathematics, my professor shouted at me «never have I had a student that read so much and did so poorly!».

When exam periods came, I took none of them, but arrogantly handed blank papers in and sat there reading. The only exceptions were the few courses of my interest, such as history, geography, and literature, in which I did very well and was very well esteemed by professors. This «policy» was of course untenable and I had to finish my last year of high-school in an accelerated school, the only one who took limit cases like myself. There I continued freely to read devoutly, all among «problem children», students which struggled with addiction or violence, and even a sweet fifty-five year old woman who had never finished high-school.

When I started college at seventeen years old, I decided to pursue a career in the humanities, a decision which was deemed short-sighted and immature, certainly due to its lack of a financially prosperous prospect. In any case, this

short-sightedness, as was clearly pointed out to me, fell in great accordance with my feeble aspirations and potential in life, and at least we could be grateful that I had finished high-school.

It is easy to shrug at these things now, with a stern or gracious face, but during adolescence this lack of affirmation was harshly felt. However much I faked indifference, these judgments affected me to the point that they became a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy. I was taught I was irresponsible and hopeless, and I took this lesson to heart. Importantly, any intellectual or artistic sensibility I could have would not correct this belief, for the universal agreement was that I was «somewhat intelligent and fond of books» but «too lackadaisical to make any use of these advantages». It certainly didn't help my case that, even though I did always well in university, I changed degrees many times and had a tremendously difficult time finding my purpose in life.

It says a lot that my life turned around not due to a realization brewed within me, sourced from some inner well of meaning, but because I found a person—one far more pure than those which life had placed before me up to that point—which simply believed in me. It would be cooler, I suppose, to feign indifference and say that what others think doesn't matter to me—the truth is I clearly needed someone to believe in me.

The years went by, I straightened-up, and went to accomplish things which, however small I deem them, are socially considered difficult, prestigious or important. I am too aware of my own flaws to let this bloat my ego. After defeat or triumph, nothing of ourselves is transformed, and Kipling was right in suggesting these «impostors» ought to be equally treated. But there is something to be learnt from the way those who always undermined me look, or rather *don't* look, at my achievements. It is all well summed up in the phrase: *nobody cares*. Those former judges, who would have deemed it unconceivable that I become a scientist, don't seem even to remember how laboriously they had set out to chip away at my self-esteem. Everyone shrugs indifferently, no-one recalls.

The lesson is too clear not to be drawn: it is a mistake to think one might be able to disprove those who undermine us, to think a time will come when one might say to them: «you were wrong». The kind of people who, as the song says, «get their kicks stomping on a dream», typically do so with such casual indifference that they do not even care enough to notice a refutation. One must achieve not to deter or disprove indifferent enemies, but in recognition and appreciation of those who love us. It would be easy to claim potential, intelligence, discipline or hard study explain my eventual «reincarnation». If I am strictly honest, and track my

present state to its root cause, it's simply genuine love. A girl appears before a young man—a very lonely one—and tells him she believes in him: then everything around them blooms. There is a lesson there as well.

Now I look at those old judges with eyes more mature. Most are blinded by the pursuit of money, which is their only value; others have lost themselves, like most people do, to self-betrayal; they grind and toil and crawl in a desperate pursuit of accumulation. You will never hear them say a word of self-reflection, all about them screams self-satisfaction. They have not turned their lives around, because the world they've built is so crooked that they think they are standing straight,

sólo a su goce ruin y medro atentos, y no al concierto universal.

And so, like Martí said, some prey upon the souls of others, some give their souls to nourishment the very ones who devour them,

tal como el hierro frío en las entrañas de la virgen que mata se calienta.