

Reflections
III: Commentaries
and Reviews

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An email (on a reading of a new play)

Hi Will

I very much enjoyed your play and reading Da Vinci for it.

I had a few ideas I wanted to share that I thought of after.

Nono and Frida I think can have a stronger counter to Leo and Mic (easier just to write their names in short form for now) bringing them into the debate in a much more substantial way.

Mic is all about God, but Frida's argument is about equality through Communism which of course always gets rid of religion. So here is quite a fertile debate in an evolutionary sense between society being organized by religion (or God) and society being organized by humans (Ideology). Just because we might think that Communism (or Democracy) must be an evolution from Theocracy doesn't exactly mean that it is better or more successful in the long run, even though we think now, anything at all must be better than Theocracy.

There are always two sides to a coin. A thousand years ago the monarchy were just the biggest thugs lording it over everyone. But the other side of the coin is that bridges and ships get built and in no uncertain terms, monarchy and religion (that is oppression) is the foundation of civilization. So, Frida's communism is not the answer to theocracy, but it can make a good debate if you spend the time looking into it. And we can certainly see how communism has completely failed at least in the western world.

And then what is Leo's Battle of Anghiari? It is Nono's Viet Nam. And here Nono can counter Leo by asking why he is choosing to spend his time glorifying war when all humans should be striving for peace. You get the idea. All war is a crime but sometimes one needs to stand up to aggressors. Looking from the outside as an alien, they could write a prospectus and say "every once in a while the entire human race goes stark raving mad and kills themselves off on mass". So, there is a good debate for Leo and Nono, but since Viet Nam was between the "free god loving world" and "commies", well now you have a four-way debate! And most likely Nono enjoys the riches afforded her in a non-communist world oppressive democracy so there is some hypocrisy for you as well! A good mess, have fun!

And finally, the nurturing and matriarchal (Frida and Nono) can be seen as an evolution from the violent patriarchal (Leo and Mic). Another debate in itself.

I do not think though that anything can be resolved completely, though peace is better than war unless you want to reduce the population, and the common good is better than inequality,

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though nothing might get done in the end and you might end up with anarchy instead (hmm looks like a bit of anarchy going on in the democratic world for sure these days!)

So maybe the only reason they are all in purgatory is to broaden their or our horizons and question through self-reflection, though it makes for the perfect fun container for this debate!

Anyways these are all thoughts.

All the best

Juhan

Jan 25, 2023

On reading the “Egyptian Book of the Dead” (or “The Book of Going Forth by Day”)

The facsimile illustrations of the “Papyrus of Ani” are beautiful to look at, especially since it is over 3200 years old. Sadly, considering how long the text is, it never seems to go into any theological or philosophical depth concerning the Egyptian ideas of the soul and afterlife. Instead, the text is an endless repetition or litany of incantations required to pass into the next life, and not an exposition of Egyptian gods and mythology at all, except in passing.

It is hard to follow in a linear way what the deceased’s journey actually is, almost as if the journey and the mythology it is part of haven’t been exactly worked out yet. It is not clear what role or rewards await the reinvigorated body or soul for “millions of years”, that is, if it doesn’t get devoured, and one assumes annihilated, if it fails the judgement.

Concepts of the soul and afterlife do not feel to be well thought through in the “Papyrus of Ani”. It is enough that Ani continues on a journey after death, in a body that still needs food, somewhere in the underworld or overworld or this world.

Ideas of doing good and evil and a moral code and the concept of sin and judgement are found in the text. Of course, since it is the “Papyrus of Ani” he will pass through the judgement after being weighed in the balance. It is interesting for how long and unchanged the ideas of good and bad and particularly sin have been around. One looks for Old Testament proto elements, and if at the beginning of time there might be a single monotheistic creator who in creating the universe also creates the Egyptian pantheon of gods.

The role of which god does what and why, is also not clear, except of course that Ra rises in the east and sets in the west. A list of gods and goddess’s includes Nu, Nut, Ptah, Khnemu,

Khepera, Tum, Ra, Shu, Tefnut, Seb, Osiris, Isis, Horus, Set, Nephthys, Anpu, Thoth, Maat, Hathor and so on. A little extra research fills in some of the details and roles of the gods not found in the text.

The translator and Egyptologist E.A. Wallis Budge in the introduction, in the chapter called “The Doctrine of Eternal Life”, lays out what he deems to be the elements that the ancient Egyptians considered we are made up of.

On pages 58 to 69 we read that a person is made up of a number of different things, but as always, trying to exactly define what is meant by some of these words, even a century and a quarter after the introduction was written, still proves difficult and inconclusive, regardless of how much extra research has been done in the interval. Of course, this is typical of any religion. Words are bandied about like magic talismans, which in the end, when trying to

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understand what they mean, end up meaning nothing at all. Or these words are defined by other words which also mean nothing at all.

So, for our study and to establish memory for future usage, let's take a few moments and try to define some of these elements that we are comprised of, according to Egyptian ideas of our being, as interpreted by Sir Wallis and further research.

- a natural body *khat*, -that is our corporeal or tangible body here liable to decay, (making it necessary to preserve the body after death)
- a spiritual body *sahu*, -a body that has become incorruptible and that can ascend to heaven, having the mental and spiritual abilities of a living body
- a heart *ab*, -the power of life and the source of good and evil thoughts, examined by Anubis, which if it weighs more than the feather of Maat was devoured by the monster Ammit
- a double *ka*, - a not completely defined vital essence or life force separated from the body at death, their spiritual double, which needed to be sustained by funeral offerings
- a soul *ba*, - a not completely defined principal aspect of the soul related to *ka*, which enjoyed eternal existence in glory and could travel between the worlds of the living and dead
- a shadow *khaibit*, -that is able to separate itself from the body, move freely and partake of the funeral offerings in the tomb, but always close to the soul or *ba*
- an intangible spirit or intelligence *khu or akh*, -possibly the immortal, radiant and shining part of a being that transcends death to live among the gods and the stars
- a form *sekhem*, -possibly the incorporeal life force or power of the soul in the afterlife after the judgement
- and a name *ren*, -simply that which defines one's individuality or identity, and the power contained within by having a true name

Jan 28, 2023

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On reading “Medea” by Euripides

The final **Chorus**, a few translations,

*Many a matter is guided by Zeus on Olympus,
And what is unlooked for the gods bring often to pass,*

*Refusing to bring to fulfillment the thing we expect.
For that which we never envisioned the god finds means
To accomplish, and so it befell.*

*Zeus on Olympus hath a wide stewardship.
Many things beyond expectation do the gods fulfil.
That which was expected has not been accomplished;
For that which was unexpected has god found the way.
Such was the end of this story.*

And so, gods and goddesses present us with things we weren't looking for, ensnare us, and then on a whim for their own amusement, tear it all away like a bandaid, leaving a wounded bleeding mess, that bewildered we have to heal from! Thanks a lot!

It never ceases to amaze me, even across two and a half millennia and a completely different language, the logic of language and thought.

Feb 15, 2023

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On reading “Hippolytus” by Euripides

A few passages and a few translations,

*Yet hidden is life beyond our own,
And mystery over the tomb is thrown,
And we drift on tales of dream.*

*Because we have no experience of any other mode of living,
And no proof of the other world;
Myths merely lead us astray.
We know nothing of another existence,
Cannot see a world behind the one we know,*

*For even the words we use to tell of it,
Lead us from the truth.*

I love the logic of language. It is wonderful to compare how the same thought, with subtle nuances can be translated with completely different words!

These thoughts and ideas written twenty-five hundred years ago are precisely the same thoughts and ideas I wrote about in “*Reflections On Being*”. Thoughts and things don’t change, and we will keep asking the same questions till the end of time, and always come up with the same words in reply. Now that is truly tragedy that is so unbearable, that it is honestly better to believe “*dream*” and “*myths*”.

So far I really like this guy Euripides as I am just starting to read his plays!

*I would have only two ways of speaking in the world.
The first would be what we ought to say,
The second what we say in fact.
And so the voice of lies, contrasted with the honest voice,
Would stand condemned and we would know the truth.*

Somehow, that is exactly what I am dealing with in an unsent email, and one day, probably necessary to be sent, and as of yet unwritten second email!

Feb 17, 2023

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On reading "Alcestis" by Euripides

A few passages,

*Every mortal owes this debt of dying,
And not one of them can be sure
Whether he'll live tomorrow through;*

*Because the way chance goes, in front of us,
Is invisible.
It can't be taught you by anyone,
Or found out by experience.*

*Make yourself happy, drink, count the day-to-day
Life your own, everything else as chance.*

*Give honor to the sweetest of all gods for mortals,
The one from Cyprus, Aphrodite-
She is a kindly goddess.*

In her favour the most beautiful and intoxicating. Out of her favour the cruelest of all, even unto death! Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die. Oh, and hope that our offerings may be acceptable too her for her gifts and sole reason to live! If not the sole reason to live, then one of the most beautiful and lovely reasons.

Feb 18, 2023

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On reading "The Bacchae" by Euripides

A few passages,

*...truths uncreated
Before the stream of natural time
Sprang from the ground
In the Spring of things*

*He who lives each day
For the happiness each day offers
Him, I call blessed*

Two lovely passages quite removed from the message of the play, which frightfully is really

*...the immutable laws of balance
Have decreed this
From the beginnings of time*

And while

*The gods should not be like men
In their revenge*

The gods are implacable.

So best to have wisdom enough not to insult the gods, so we can live our lives out peaceably.

Feb 19, 2023

On rereading sections of Aristotle's "Poetics" related to tragedy

*For when a thing can be included or not included,
without making any noticeable difference,
that thing is no part of the whole.*

Such a good point to remember in the creative endeavour. If something isn't adding to the whole it is most likely detracting from it.

*It is...the poet's business to tell...
the kind of things that would happen,
--- what is possible according to probability or necessity*

Again, a good point but much more subtle. As we travel through a play or tragedy we are travelling a route or path that continually at any moment presents us with many possible ways to walk through the forest. The "what if..." and the "if only...". Yet there is only one path, through the unfolding of time, that leads us over the edge of the cliff!

That is exactly the

Fear and pity

Aristotle talks about. I can feel the terror in my mind and body even as I write this!

Feb 24, 2023

On reading an almost complete Samuel Beckett cycle,

which takes months and months of reading endless bleakness and hopelessness and nihilism.

It isn't even sad, it is ugly.

I have a loathe / hate relationship with old Samuel Beckett. I don't understand how a person can spend their whole entire long life seeing nothing but a black and white world of old cracked, decaying grey concrete. The world is beautiful and full of colour and hope and love. We don't just all sit or lie or crawl through the filth with our head hung down because this is the only life we have, and the end is inevitable, so let's focus on that and say it's all pointless anyways!

Beckett isn't an avant-garde writer, he isn't an absurdist. The avant-garde is usually brimming with energy, the absurdist at least are usually funny. Practically every Beckett character is at their end with barely enough energy to lift their heads.

For the rest of us every day brings new wonders and hopes. When we are dancing we aren't making ourselves depressed and miserable by obsessively thinking that soon the music will stop and the song will be over. What is the point in that? This reality is this reality. There is nothing we can do about it. But if dancing is part of this reality as well, well let's go for it and dance through life! Life is for the living.

Some of Sam's works I just loathed with all my being. Here are some of my damning comments on some of his works.

"Proust" and "Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit" (1931 / 1949)

"obscure and impossible to follow" -quote from page 88

this whole thing is a "pensum" – from page 93 meaning "punishment"

"Dream of Fair to Middling Women" (1932)

An endless vomit of words

neither entertaining nor enlightening,

poetic or descriptive, evoking only

misery on how long and insipid it is.

It's all downhill after the title. Dribble.

Unpleasant, arrogant, horrible!

"More Pricks Than Kicks" (1934)

Endless rambling pathetic apathy

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“How It Is” (1964)

Beckett tortures the reader by subjecting them to an endless interminable text of mud and darkness, without a single ray of light, hope or beauty. “Excruciating, painful, Beckett reaches new lows even for himself. Ugly, revolting, nauseous, every word, every line evinces complete disgust on every level possible”. So incredibly ugly, absolute garbage, and if you rearrange some of the letters of the title, a complete “shit show”, all of which Beckett most likely would take as a compliment.

By coincidence Beckett wrote this the year of my birth when he was 58 and I read it at the same age he was when he wrote it. 1906-1964-2022

“Company” (1980)

*“with every inane word”
Seriously what is the point? How long through life can one go repeating the same hopeless, pointless, meaningless words and characters. If the goal is to give the reader nothing of any beauty, purpose, life or love, then Beckett perfectly succeeds in his goal. The same themes over his entire life. Who cares. Life is rich and beautiful and colourful, not endlessly writing on a greyness on the verge of death. Truly inane!*

“All Strange Away” (1964)

“vomitous”

And what did Beckett have to say about his own work?

‘I realised that Joyce had gone as far as one could in the direction of knowing more, (being) in control of one’s material. He was always adding to it; you only have to look at his proofs to see that. I realised that my own way was in impoverishment, in lack of knowledge and in taking away, in subtracting rather than in adding.’

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'I speak of an art turning from (the plane of the possible) in disgust, weary of its puny exploits, weary of pretending to be able, of being able, of doing a little better the same old thing, of going a little further along a dreary road.'

'The expression that there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express.'

Such a poor fate to be stuck with that Credo for one's entire life. One certainly can't say Beckett didn't succeed in what he set out to do.

Sometimes it seems that Beckett is playing with a "Russellian Paradox" in his writings, which in a nutshell is "All Cretans are liars, said the Cretan". For wanting to say nothing Beckett wrote one hell of a lot of words! Or over sixty works including twenty or so stage plays, not to mention works for radio and television, a lot of prose and poetry and essays.

~ ~ ~ ~

I like "Waiting for Godot". I really like "Waiting for Godot" a lot. I have read it many times and have watched many productions. I sometimes wonder, would we even bother with Beckett if not for this one work. If Beckett hadn't achieved the great success he did with this work, if this work didn't exist at all, would he have continued on with his nihilism for the rest of his life? Or would he have brought the ship around thinking that maybe he had said (oh how ironic) everything he wanted to say about nothing and negativity, and maybe it was time to turn back on the colour, and look at the beauty of a rose basking and looking up to the sun, for a change. Did his success inure him (definition: accustom (someone) to something, especially something unpleasant) to his original Credo for the rest of his life?

I can't help but feel Beckett lucked out with this one work. It captured a popular understanding that the audience could relate to, who could leave the theatre at the end of the night piqued and "whistling" so to say, feeling satisfied in having enjoyed the work and its uniqueness. "Yes, we are all in it together and really, our lot here isn't all that bad after all, and maybe a bit humorous".

As a 'tragi-comedy' we can overlook the tragedy and be amused that we can ourselves see the world in a silly and absurd way that doesn't threaten us. Yes we are all mortal, and there is nothing we can do about it, so we might as well laugh it off and enjoy ourselves. "Life is a tragedy to those who think and a comedy to those who feel".....or was it the other way around?

I really don't think the other full plays like "Endgame", "Happy Days" or the shorter "Krapp's Last Tape" have any exit out of their bleakness. There is no happy tomorrow in those plays.

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There is no,

“Well? Shall we go?”

“Yes, let’s go.”

As we smile leaving the theatre.

~ ~ ~ ~

What is the fascination with Beckett? Simply he made things other people could partake of and spend passing their time. Which is more than what most Beckett characters seem to do, which is endlessly waiting for an end that just won’t seem to come. If Beckett gave us nothing, then everyone who comes to Beckett must be bringing their own something.

I would always read a Beckett play first just on the page. Then I would watch a production and read more about it. On the page sometimes a play could be pretty obscure, bland or flat. It is the actors on the stage that breathed their life into it!

There is the brilliant series called “Beckett on Film” which is all of Beckett’s plays filmed with modern film techniques and excellent and amazing modern actors. This film series is not so much a testament to Beckett as to the creativity and energy that these amazing actors and production people can bring to a modern production, that is satisfying on more levels than the original text. Beckett though would have hated anything external or extraneous brought to his work. That was his narrow way.

When brilliant actors old and new tackle Beckett they bring to Beckett their own amazing abilities and talent and humanity. They bring Beckett alive, almost and absolutely in spite of Beckett. Many “Beckett on Film” productions have colour, and cool sounds and amazing scenery. There are also a few other modern interpretations that are excellent.

Almost every single production, in whatever medium, filmed in the past when Beckett was alive, was inevitably in black and white with only the hiss of the medium for sound and the bleakest sets possible.

So, what is incredible is to see the consummate actors and the purity of their craft, which is heightened and transcended, completely in stark contrast to the grey material they are working with. It is like there is the play and separately the acting.

~ ~ ~ ~

I don’t have near any of the same generosity for the academics who think it cool or intellectual to write and pontificate their ego on Beckett. I too can write how the “field” in such and such a

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“work” is really a metaphor for “Napoleon’s cabbage patch” and the “fall” of “modern man” under the “oppression” of “self”. Nauseating. Many times the critical essay is multiple times longer than the original text it is being written on. I don’t have time for it.

So, if Beckett is writing about “nothing” then academics can bring their “erudite” “something” as inane or sycophantic or egotistical as they want. Beckett is like a major make work project for PHD candidates. “Oh yes I did my doctoral dissertation on Beckett’s”. I am damning.

And what did Beckett say about his work in this context?

‘Why people have to complicate a thing so simple I don’t understand’

‘I only know what’s on the page’

‘Godot does not mean God! If I had meant God, I would have written God!’

~ ~ ~ ~

One thing that certainly drove me completely crazy reading Beckett was his deliberate lack of punctuation and exclusion of commas. I understand when the sentences are messy with words that by leaving out commas they can be read in a flow, and read with overlapping multiple meanings. But when you hear anyone reading Beckett whether on the stage or in a radio or television production, or just reading a prose extract, they always read the text with their own commas that they have added to it.

I wrote a poem in the “Solarium” collection entitled “One More for Old Sam B.” that has a small selection of his missing commas. Beckett would be so, so much easier to read if he added commas, and one wouldn’t have to spend so much time figuring out a sentence, to just end up in the end, with what he is saying in the first place, deliberately obscured.

~ ~ ~ ~

And finally, why in the world would I spend so much time on something I am so critical of?

It is a little like the saying, “don’t judge anyone until you have walked a mile in their shoes”. If I truly want or need to condemn something then at least let’s have a more solid grounding and reason than simply saying, I don’t like it.

But there are few things I do like.

I like spending the time trying to go, as possible, through an artist’s life work chronologically. One doesn’t always have to like everything about it to appreciate and learn from it. It still is someone’s work and a manifold way of seeing the universe.

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I very much enjoyed seeing the written word come alive in the theatrical productions. Some of the actors were just brilliant as I have mentioned, and I learned a lot. The bleakness of the text heightened the actor's art.

I very much like the experimental works of the twentieth century which Beckett fits into. I like some of Beckett's more abstract works from the 70's and 80's, or I did more so when I was younger. They can also be a bit shallow though too if you look too closely at them. Do they express universal truths, or after we have seen them a few times do they just lose their novelty?

As I have mentioned I also very much enjoyed the "Beckett on Film" series.

Whether those reasons are good enough or not doesn't really matter.

I have one more major work to read, but I just don't have the energy at the moment to slog endlessly through it. I can hear the academics say "Oh you haven't really read Beckett until you read *that* work", yeah whatever. Maybe next winter.

Spring is coming and there are seeds to plant!

March 18, 2023

On reading the Satanic Verses by Salman Rushdie...

...finally, thirty-four years after Susan gave me a copy in 1989 when we first met.

Without a doubt, this novel is a virtuosic kaleidoscope. It is hard to imagine a mind that has at the ready, this amount of varied information and knowledge, able to wield at will such a flow of colourful and expressive narrative.

And what is the novel about? One cannot any more say what the novel is about than say what life is about. It is a free expression of all that is good and bad about being human. Depending on whose reality we are dealing with, some things thought good can really be very bad, and some things thought to be bad instead are very good. Tell that to anyone with a vested interest in what *they* feel to be good and bad, and the first thing that will most likely happen is *they* (who is this they?), will endeavour to shut down your freedom of expression.

We still live in the Middle Ages. Actually, we still live in all ages. When ever has an idea that differs from the induced or imposed consensus reality ever met with an open and tolerant mind? It is the “reality” of the masses, the “truth” of the masses.

Throw God into the mix, and there are special words for those that question the oppressive words that another human being wrote down a long time ago in the name of “God”. Those words are blasphemer, infidel, heretic, unbeliever. I love it....”unbeliever”.....one who does not believe as we do (who is this we?).

Apostate, free-thinker, iconoclast, disruptor, dissenter, heathen, pagan, idolator, libertine, sacrilegious, godless are all words used by those that have enshrined their “truth” in their “God”, against those that have the courage to say that “not all the doctrines you heap upon our heads are good”, in whatever name or for whatever reason you do so.

But of course, to speak against the written “word of God” is an insult and an affront to “God” himself. It is always “himself”, never “herself”. And written in the “word of God” are usually the words of what must happen to one who “speaks against God”. And when the “word of God” strangles society and people with their laws and edicts, and wields any degree of power, or has been able to impose itself and maintain itself in the law books of the land, punishment is swift and merciless.

Generally, the punishment for blasphemy in many places or historically, right across the board is no less than death. Is it “God” that strikes down the blasphemer? Is it some supernatural force that effects immediate vengeance. No, it is those that find their ideology and beliefs unforgivably insulted that demand “justice”, usually to be enacted by those they would have do

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their bidding, lest their “way” of “love and peace” be stained, sullied and tarnished and in any way thrown into doubt.

“Oh, but we are so far removed from that”, I hear you say. But no, we aren’t. Many European and Western countries still have blasphemy laws punishable by imprisonment and or fine. Most countries that have finally repealed their blasphemy laws have only done so in the last twenty years!

And that is only this part of the world. Of course, in other parts of the world many countries have death penalties for blasphemy or extremely harsh punishments. These penalties can also extend to what is called apostacy, that is leaving the official faith of the country.

To put it succinctly, in 2019, 40% of the world’s countries still had laws against blasphemy. It is not possible to deal with this in any detail here.

This is a very complex issue. Many Western countries have constitutions that allow for freedom of religious expression, and that forbid discrimination based upon race, ethnicity, colour, religion, sex, age, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and so on.

If someone publishes or disseminates literature against a group, for example of a certain sexual orientation or gender identity, then that would immediately be deemed as hate speech and accordingly criminally charged.

Yet, if those same hateful and discriminatory views are written in a religious text they are tolerated. Obviously it is unacceptable to ban an entire religious book based upon a few verses. But maybe in an enlightened society it is time to officially recognize which passages in which religious books are discriminatory, if not actually hateful and inciting outright violence.

But of course, that would go over like a lead balloon with the followers of these religious texts, who believe their entire texts to be the divine revealed word of God, and the basis on how everyone should lead their life, and what should be acceptable or not in society at large for everyone. And to those followers of a religious text, to speak against this text by pointing out discriminatory passages, is in their view a complete discrimination against their right to hold to their own religious beliefs. Why do we exempt discriminatory religious literature in our laws against hate speech?

One may make the argument that in those countries that have the death penalty for blasphemy and apostacy, the government rarely carries out the death penalty. But the slow process of governments and judicial systems rarely have time for the final say. Individuals, religious groups and mobs carry out stonings and assassinations and violence immediately with the least provocation.

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It is a horrific read, even just skimming the surface, when one looks into all the endless acts of violence committed in the name of religion and belief, of all religions and beliefs, since the dawn of time. Hundreds and thousands, hundreds of thousands, die without trial and jury, usually violently, usually at the hands of mob rule, or tyrants that use religion to maintain their power over the masses or persecute a minority people or belief.

And of course, this is what happened immediately after Salmon Rushdie's book was released and began to be burned and protested. People died. They didn't die because of the book. They died because of people, whose only way of responding to what they believed to be an insult against their belief, was to act and incite and perpetuate violence among their followers against the offenders, of course in the name of their God.

What is this mob rule? Is it civility and an enlightened mind? Is it an educated person who has been stoked up to their rational breaking point, finally passing that breaking point where they must fight with their life for what is right and true? No, not at all.

It is an uneducated animal mind who needs no provocation to join their fellow masses in any act of violence, now that they believe their actions are without consequence and justified. Someone has given them justification to release and be the brutal animal that lies beneath the surface of almost every human being. Their inhuman actions are praised as righteous in the eyes of God.

It doesn't matter if it is tearing apart a blasphemer, being accidentally bumped into in the grocery store or being inadvertently cut off while driving. It takes nothing for immediate offense to take place and violent words or actions to follow.

Religious belief, religious offence, it is all a pretense to devolve to our lowest, most primal, pack animal being, to destroy the offender. Highschool peer pressure is an aspect of the same thing, which also many times ends in acts of intolerant violence, believed completely justifiable by the perpetrator. Against a boy wearing makeup or a girl daring to wear jeans of any other colour than blue in the early 80's.

And those in (undemocratic) power, religious or otherwise, maintain their power in precisely this way, by instilling in the masses a belief system, and calling the mob to action when they declare that this, their instilled belief system is under attack. Deadly.

And what is the solution? We as humans in our entirety, not just those affiliated with a religion, behave this way because it is part of the programming built into our mind genetically. No, this hate is not learned, it is inherent in the very code of our being.

Humans by nature are intolerant, xenophobes, racists, violent murderous pack animals, unaccepting, jealous, envious, petty, hateful of anything different or what they don't

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understand. And they will try to get away with anything they can if it is to their advantage. There is no other animal like us that can hold a grudge and murder.

And is this too harsh a condemnation? No, this is the evening news every day, every single day.

All civilization is the striving to enlighten the mind and oppress the animal nature inherent in human beings. We continue evolving on this civil road every day, and some very work hard to continue moving forward on this fragile and tenuous path, gains which are so easily lost in the name of religion.

Only a hundred years ago somebody could be thrown in jail for their sexual orientation, and the majority felt that this was a just punishment, removing from society such vile and ungodly corruption.

So yes education is important, and tolerance is important. But humans really work best with the idea of deterrence, meaning individuals will suffer punishment for their transgressions.

And how is it even possible to transcend with the human mind, when realities vary so greatly and can be so diametrically opposed to one another?

One group may hold a person as a murderer while another group can hold them as a martyr. One group condemns the murder while the other group justifies the murder. Any commonly held reality can justify anything, slavery, subjugation, gender oppression, genocide, you name it. The list is endless.

Yes, we can look back and say how bad and outrightly evil so many things were in the past, which to the population of the time were, and in many cases still are, considered to be good and right.

There is no one code of human ethics that all adhere to and agree upon. Upon what foundation can we build upon? Upon what fundamental code of ethics can we transcend? Where is the cornerstone that will lead to a further enlightened human mind?

Of course, we don't even need to detract from what already exists. Any attempt to introduce a higher form of being and mind, that takes away focus from what already exists, is already to others a form of blasphemy and apostacy, and a fundamental threat to their existence and beliefs, and of course understandably, in their eyes justifiably punishable by death.

Maybe it all comes down to this. The laws in the past have all been based upon "God", but at least now, some parts of the world attempt to create laws based on what it means to be human.

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It is one thing to be “Godly”. It is another thing completely to be an enlightened human being.

April 8, 2023

Continuing to read tragedies from a collection called “Eight Great Tragedies”, in reverse chronological order.

Stupidity isn't tragedy.

Eugene O'Neill's “Desire Under the Elms” is brilliantly written and conceived, that is until the end. That Abbie can kill her newborn baby because she didn't want to lose Eban's “love” is only a tragedy for the baby whose life is lost. It is hard to imagine Abbie, or anyone for that matter, being so mentally deficient as to kill their own flesh and blood. There is no *fear* and no *pity*, only abhorrence and a sadness soon forgotten. It is impossible to have any empathy with characters that are so lacking in the most basic human qualities. Even so, O'Neill is an incredible playwright. Kings or salt of the earth, it doesn't matter. We are all subject to the same desires and passions and pretty much go about appeasing them in the same way.

Moving on to William Butler Yeats' play “On Baile's Strand”. I am not sure what Yeats is attempting here. It isn't a long play and there isn't much depth to think out. Cuchulain the warrior has led a good life full of heroic deeds, and whatever he has desired to put his mind to, whether quarrelling or loving. He is completely his own man, even if maybe he gets a little wild at times. No one dares stand up to him, but it also seems that he has a sense of what is right and justice.

King Conchubar wishes to tame Cuchulain by having him swear allegiance to him. Cuchulain protests such loss of freedom, but after a short while for no compelling reason whatsoever, he does swear allegiance to Conchubar. Within half an hour he has slain his only son that he didn't know he had, and in grief has drowned fighting the waves with his sword. A stupid choice made for no reason isn't tragedy either. I blame this on Yeats. The plot is about as shallow as most opera plots.

I don't know how many times I have read “Miss Julie” by August Strindberg, only because it keeps appearing in different collections of plays. Of course, Strindberg had his own share of mental health issues, which he transfers to the characters in his plays. Again, a wonderfully thought out and written play for only three characters.

We are led to believe that Miss Julie at the end of the play is going to go to the barn and take her own life with a razor. This is ridiculous really. She might go to the barn, get drunk, sleep with the stable hand and pass out. The next day, after returning and making up some crazy excuse to her father about the money in the desk, Miss Julie will just continue on with her destructive, manipulative, disastrous borderline personality life, like nothing happened, waiting

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only for her next emotionally dysfunctional over the top exhausting drama. This is a wonderful psychological character drama but not tragedy.

Henrik Ibsen's play "Ghosts" is also so well written and wonderfully thought out. As we get to know the characters they also grow in depth. This is good drama, as things from the past come to the surface and are laid bare. As a result, everyone's reality is completely overthrown, as coming to terms with different realizations leads them, for better or worse, in completely different and unexpected directions. But that is what good drama is, the moment of implosion and explosion, that in a few moments changes everyone's trajectory. Of these first four "tragedies" I find this play the most removed from the tragic spirit.

At least we know the above plays aren't comedies as none of them end well. If there is any "tragedy" in the above plays it must just be as a general condemnation of human beings in general. Sad are the "thieves" of lust, rage, greed, attachment and ego; and tragic how easily they keep the human mind unenlightened. An unenlightened mind doing unenlightened things and in the end getting punished for it isn't tragedy.

If "bad" things happening to "bad" people *isn't* tragic,
then by multiplying both sides by a positive element means either that:
"bad" things happening to "good" people *is* tragic, or
"good" things happening to "bad" people *is* tragic.

We are always satisfied when a bad person gets their just desserts, and we are always appalled and offended when a bad person goes unjustly unpunished, even more so if they gain even more from their misdeeds.

But, when bad happens to a good person, that we call tragic. This is also called fate.

We will go back three centuries and start hitting the heavy weight Tragedians.

To be continued.

April 22, 2023

Looking closely at King Lear from the collection called “Eight Great Tragedies”.

King Lear is on every list of great tragedies. We are going to look very closely at it, scene by scene. By far, King Lear is the longest play in the entire collection of “Eight Great Tragedies”. It was written by Shakespeare around 1606, just after Othello and just before Macbeth. Hamlet was written around 1601.

Act 1, Scene 1

King Lear wishes to retire in his old age and divide his lands among his three daughters and their spouses, except Cordelia hasn't yet married.

He asks each daughter to tell him how much they love him. Certainly, this is just a vain-glorious satisfaction for his ego. We learn later he has always been rash and never one to know himself.

We can assume that he most likely has led a privileged life as a pompous ass, born to his station in life as opposed to earning it by any merit. Then again narcissistic asses usually well fill the role of rulers and bosses, as they care for no one else's feelings except their own, have no problem inflicting damage on anyone who crosses them, and then walking away unaffected.

So, strike one against King Lear, if as the “tragedy” unfolds, we are in any way to empathize or sympathize with him, or *pity* him.

The two older daughters do lip service to their father's vain ego and receive their lands. If we think about this in hindsight, this is a pretty minor obsequience that makes their father happy, so why not. Obviously they know their father and it isn't a big deal, just part of the ceremony.

Cordelia the youngest daughter, and his favourite, refuses though to speak such shallow and false platitudes. She says she loves her father as completely as she has always done, in full duty to him. She isn't going to “love” him more now just because she is to receive from him the bounty of a third of his lands.

Of course, that isn't good enough for King Lear. He takes offense and takes away Cordelia's third of the inheritance. The Earl of Kent, who points out the error and evil in the King's actions is banished for his efforts. The King further proceeds to embarrass Cordelia in front of the two courtiers who are vying for Cordelia's hand by telling them that she is now worthless.

The one courtier, the Duke of Burgundy, only out for money and power, immediately abandons his suit for marriage. The other courtier, the King of France, though immediately realizes

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Cordelia's worth, and betroths himself to her regardless of her complete loss of status and wealth. (Or does the King of France have an ulterior political motive?)

All in all, not looking very good for King Lear, who at his age one would think would be somewhat more enlightened and self-aware and even generous. We can label King Lear then as a rash, pompous, vain-glorious, egotistical, narcissistic ass. Let's see how things unfold.

Act 1, Scene 2

Shakespeare combines two different stories in King Lear. The first of course is the story of King Lear, derived from and informed by many different historical sources. The subplot involving the Earl of Gloucester, his legitimate son Edgar and his bastard son Edmund is taken from a play by Philip Sidney from round 1580 called "The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia".

Shakespeare could plagiarize the Bible and still be brilliant (if he didn't actually have a hand in translating the King James version!). As Ben Jonson says, "what would be theft in other poets is only victory in him".

In this scene the bastard son Edmund sets his deceitful plan rolling to discredit Edgar in his father's eyes (ha!) and become the heir instead, which is rightfully Edgar's legacy.

Act 1, Scene 3

King Lear originally planned to spend his retirement under the care of his favourite daughter Cordelia, who he has now disinherited. Alternately now, he plans to spend a month at a time with each of his daughters. In no time at all, King Lear and his retinue of one hundred knights run foul of his eldest daughter Goneril's hospitality.

Goneril tells her steward Oswald to have the servants treat them with neglect and coldly so they might depart to her sisters instead.

I don't think we need to think ill of Goneril here. If her words are true and not spiteful, King Lear in his idleness with his men has become vexatious, causing all sorts of discord and riot. He also thinks he is still King by his complaints and meddling. Nothing here needs us to change our initial opinion of King Lear. On top of it all he is an old boor.

Act 1, Scene 4 & 5

The Earl of Kent reappears in disguise and inveigles himself back into King Lear's service. The audience needs some dramatic suspension of belief here.

One of King Lear's knights comments that there has been a general withdrawal of kindness by his daughter Goneril and her husband the Duke of Albany, and their household.

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Enter the fool, who under the protection of being a fool, will always tell King Lear what a “fool” he has been to give it all away. And he also delivers the whole play in a nutshell with the most famous line, “Thou shouldest not have been old till thou hadst been wise”.

Goneril confronts her father of all the disorderly behaviour engendered by himself and his men. King Lear takes great offense and rashly curses his daughter to be barren, or if she has a child, for that child to give her as much grief as he feels he has received at Goneril’s words.

For Goneril these are just the ill-tempered words of an old man in his dotage, behaviour that she has already predicted to her sister Regan at the end of act one. The fool gives a running commentary of the whole interaction and throughout both these scenes.

King Lear departs in great anger with his men. At this point he is probably thinking how he can restore to himself his kingdom and sends letters to the Earl of Gloucester through the Earl of Kent (who is in disguise).

Goneril ponders how nothing good can come of King Lear having a retinue of a hundred knights. It does seem from an earlier line, “What, fifty of my followers at a clap? Within a fortnight?”, that half of King Lear’s retinue has come down with venereal disease. This supports Goneril’s accusations of lust, debauchery and disorderly conduct going on, that has turned her court into a tavern and brothel.

Goneril’s claim then is just. Let’s add to King Lear’s “faults” the sin of general dissolution and debauchery and disrespect and disregard of others. Meaning, that he feels “entitled” to behave in any way he wants, which is of course also reflected in the actions of the men that follow him. The King having divested himself from his position of responsibility is running wild. Or we could say, he is enjoying his retirement!

Act 2, Scene 1

The bastard son Edmund succeeds in turning his legitimate brother Edgar into a villain in the eyes of their father, the Earl of Gloucester. Edmund fabricates a murder plot by Edgar and wounds himself, feigning that he just received it from Edgar’s sword, when he “loathly” resisted Edgar’s “unnatural purpose”. Edgar is now a fugitive in the land.

Enter King Lear’s youngest daughter Regan and her husband the Duke of Cornwall. They have come seeking “advice” from the Earl of Gloucester.

Act 2, Scene 2

Oswald, the steward to Goneril, arrives at Gloucester’s castle at the same time as the Earl of Kent (still in disguise), sent by King Lear. Kent and King Lear both treated Oswald poorly in Act

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1, Scene IV. Now Kent is threatening to kill Oswald who has and wants nothing to do with Kent. Regan, Cornwall, Gloucester and Edmund sword drawn, enter in the nick of time saving Oswald.

Kent has a letter for Gloucester from King Lear. Oswald on the other hand is acting in the interest of the two daughters Goneril and Regan. Kent ends up in the stocks for his aggression and insolence, and also, spoken by Regan, that he is one of King Lear's men vexing her sister's household.

Gloucester attempts to intercede saying it is not wise to treat the King's messenger in such a way. Regan replies that her sister Goneril wouldn't either look very kindly at her steward Oswald being assaulted and abused.

Act 2, Scene 3

Edgar realizing his plight and that there is nowhere to escape to, takes up the filthy and grimy disguise of "Tom the madman beggar".

Act 2, Scene 4

King Lear arrives at Gloucester's castle and is dismayed with disbelief to find his messenger (Kent) in the stocks. The fool again has a running commentary as the role of fools is, at times in riddle, at times with humour, to tell it like it is.

The King is told by Gloucester that Regan and the Duke of Cornwall aren't available to see him. This certainly confuses the King as he has never been treated this way in his life, he was a king after all. Gloucester goes again to try and summon Regan and Cornwall for the King.

Regan takes Goneril's side when discussing with the King his way of behaving at Goneril's court. The King's arguments and protests are met with words that he is "old" and words implying the infirmities of age and dotage.

Goneril's trumpet is heard and she enters. The King further curses Goneril and says he will stay with Regan. But Regan says not so fast. The month at Goneril's is not up yet and if the King wishes to stay at Regan's court he must reduce his retinue to twenty-five men. The King decides to return to Goneril's where he is at least allowed fifty men (that being twice the love), but then Goneril says why does the King need to have any of his own followers when her court has twice as many servants to serve him.

The King loses it in powerless anger and curses revenge on his daughters the "unnatural hags". Even though a huge storm is brewing he calls for his horse and rides into the night. Regan and Cornwall say that the King's willfulness to ride out into the wild night will be his own schoolmaster and retire inside the castle and close the doors.

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Act 3, Scene 1

Enter Kent and a Gentleman in the midst of the wild storm. The King is somewhere, raging against the storm in furies of anger. Kent speaks that there is division between the court of Albany and Cornwall, and that among their servants there are spies of France reporting on the weakened kingdom, now that the King has lost his power. He bids the Gentleman to go to Dover to make report of this.

Kent and the Gentleman try to find the King in the storm.

Act 3, Scene 2

Kent finds the King and the fool and bids them repair to a nearby hovel for shelter from the storm. Kent says he will return to Gloucester's castle to demand courtesy.

Act 3, Scene 3

Gloucester speaks how the use of his own house has been taken from him, and that he has been forbidden to speak of, entreat or sustain for the King. He also tells that there is division between the Dukes of Cornwall and Albany, the husbands of Regan and Goneril.

He confides to (his illegitimate son) Edmund that he has received a dangerous letter that there is power afoot already for revenge for the King. He bids Edmund to be careful and not to reveal this to the Duke of Cornwall, while he goes to find and relieve the King of this information.

Edmund takes this to be the opportunity to betray his father to the Duke and take over all his lands and power. Shakespeare is winding up the spring of intrigue!

Act 3, Scene 4

Kent and King Lear shut out from the castle, exposed to the wild windy and stormy night retire to the hovel. It isn't hard to think that the king is just (or justly!) receiving karma and getting his own back for all the poor and unjust ways he has treated others. Yet at the same time, the circumstances of being coldly shut out by his daughters on such an inclement and wild rainy night turn us against the daughters and also the Duke of Cornwall. Our human mercies are activated, and we incline to caring about the king's plight, and the bodily welfare of all those who are battling against the fierce cold wet storm.

The many faults of the king that we know of, now pale in comparison to the neglect of his daughters and the Duke of Cornwall, the merciless and callous new rulers of the land. The greater evil has eclipsed the lessor evil in our sympathies. So then, tragedy, like life, is not all black and white!

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This is a remarkable scene, a wonderful and rich moment of construction and planning by Shakespeare. Going first inside the hovel the fool finds a spirit (Edgar) already inside and he returns outside in fear. The scene is of three madmen in a tempest storm. The fool by virtue of being a fool is already mad (though incredibly perceptive and astute). Edgar is playing at being mad to save his own skin. And the king is slowly going mad. Is, isn't and becoming!

Gloucester arrives with his torch, finding the king. He can no longer obey the daughter's hard commands. All retire into the hovel.

Act 3, Scene 5

Edmund completes his treachery to towards his family (brother and father) by revealing to Cornwall the letter that shows that Gloucester is intelligent to the advantages of France. For such "treason" Cornwall makes Edmund the new Earl of Gloucester. Cornwall seeks Gloucester's apprehension.

Act 3, Scene 6

One doesn't just read Shakespeare; one takes times time to absorb and taste each word and thought. One doesn't wolf down a gourmet meal. Each bite is delight of the senses, even if one is not sure of the different spices, like different words, that at times might hide their clear meaning.

Madness now has full reign! Kent and Gloucester enter into the hovel followed by Lear, the fool, and Edgar feigning madness. Gloucester leaves for provisions.

The king has completely lost his wits. A life of warmth and comfort and unopposed will has left him ill-equipped to deal with the elements assaulting his body and mind. Three madmen all a-raving leads to a delicious chaos of dialogue, but not a lot of humour considering the circumstances.

Gloucester returns, and having learned of a plot on the king's life, has arranged transport for the king to flee to Dover.

Act 3, Scene 7

The tumultuous, intense and storm driven madness of Act 3 concludes with a seventh violent scene. Cornwall, Regan and Goneril are in a panic as the army of France has landed. They all cry out for vengeance against the traitor Gloucester. Oswald enters and says that King Lear has been conveyed to Dover with three dozen of his knights. Goneril leaves with Edmund to inform her husband the Duke of Albany of the situation.

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Gloucester has been captured and is forcefully brought in, violently treated and bound to a chair. This goes against every sacred civility when the host is abused by the guests. After being interrogated Cornwall puts out Gloucester's eyes.

A servant to Cornwall since childhood, intreats Cornwall to not do so. In the melee with the servant, Cornwall has been wounded and is bleeding. Regan with a sword runs the servant through from behind. It is revealed to Gloucester that it is his son Edmund that has betrayed him.

The remaining two servants tend to Gloucester and lead him away from the bedlam.

King Lear's foibles and vanities seem pretty tame compared to the ruthless violence enacted by Cornwall and Regan. But still, let us not forget that King Lear rashly disinherited his daughter Cordelia and banished Kent under threat of death.

Act 4, Scene 1

A sad scene where the blinded Gloucester is led across the heath by an old man. "Poor mad Tom" (Gloucester's legitimate son Edgar in disguise) enters the scene. He takes over from the old man to lead Gloucester to Dover. Gloucester in Dover wants to be led to the edge of a cliff.

In this scene Edgar speaks the wonderful line "The worst is not, so long as we can say 'This is the worst'".

Act 4, Scene 2

Edmund and Goneril arrive at her husband the Duke of Albany's castle. Goneril wonders why she hasn't been met by her husband and we learn from Oswald that Albany is of a different mind than everyone else. Goneril says to Edmund that it is Albany's "cowish terror of his spirit" implying that he is weak and ineffectual.

Goneril gives Edmund a favor (token) and a kiss on the top of his head which elates Edmund. She sends Edmund back to his castle now that the damage has been wrought on Edmund's father Gloucester. Goneril comments to herself what a man Edmund is and how he deserves a "woman's service"!

Goneril and Albany have a huge argument with a wonderful choice of vitriolic words and insults. It is clear to see that Albany is not of the same mind frame and bent as the rest of the crew, and that he is aghast at how they have treated King Lear. And with such behaviour as that, retribution from above will soon follow.

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Albany speaks a wonderful line “Humanity must perforce prey on itself, like monsters of the deep”. This single line, of all lines, sums up the most damning aspect of all humanity, for all time. Humans are barely more than animals, monsters even, who can commit the most heinous crimes on each other.

We can also use this line to tell us what “modern” tragedy is. In Greek times tragedy involved the destruction of a single individual, usually for nothing they did wrong, but because the gods had willed it. King Lear the play is not a tragedy about King Lear the king. King Lear is a narcissistic pompous ass who loses his mind as he soon as he comes up against any affliction.

King Lear and “modern” tragedy is about the tragedy of all humanity. Of how poorly, violently and brutally we can treat one another. It is what happens when offspring commit the unforgivable crime of betraying their own parents, who are their own blood. It is also what happens when a tyrant is removed from power, as we have seen happen so many times in this century. When the strong arm is removed, the country usually falls apart into factional fighting and civil war. A condition worse than the dictatorship which was supplanted.

It is then for all of humanity that in this tragedy we have *fear* and *pity*. We have all fallen and sown the seeds of our own destruction and demise. Thankfully we have a mind, as did Shakespeare, that struggles mightily against the barbarous and brutal for our enlightenment and salvation.

Besides whatever King Lear’s personality faults are, they are pretty trivial compared to the power King Lear must have wielded to hold the country together against both internal and external threats, by the necessary means required.

A gentleman enters to tell of Cornwall’s death from the wound he received fighting the servant that stood up for Gloucester’s eyes. For Albany it shows how swiftly the powers from above can avenge horrible crimes.

The only thing that perturbs Goneril about Cornwall’s death is that her sister Regan is now a widow in Edmund’s castle; Edmund who is the object of Goneril’s desire!

Act 4, Scene 3

For some reason the King of France has had to return to France leaving Cordelia in the French camp in Dover.

Kent (still in disguise) is speaking with a Gentleman. Kent is inquiring of the Gentleman how his letter to Cordelia, about the mistreatment of King Lear by his daughters, was received.

King Lear’s burning shame keeps him from seeing Cordelia.

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We learn that Albany and Cornwall's powers are afoot. Though their powers are afoot, what choice do they really have than to oust a foreign power from their lands? King Lear would have done the same. We take their actions to be hostile and misdirected only because our sympathies are no longer with the daughters Goneril and Regan. No one can fault them power-wise for following in their father's footsteps and carrying out what is required against a foreign incursion.

Act 4, Scene 4

King Lear in his madness has gone missing. Cordelia commands a hundred soldiers to search for him. Of a doctor she asks if something in nature can provide a remedy.

The British forces are marching hitherward. Cordelia in expectation says her preparations of arms are not ones of ambition but her aged father's rights.

Act 4, Scene 5

We return to Gloucester's castle. Regan is conversing with Oswald who is Goneril's steward. Regan says it would have been better to kill Gloucester instead of just putting out his eyes. Regan is also interested in the letter Oswald is carrying from Goneril to Edmund. The words seem to imply that Regan is using her "charms" to get the letter from Oswald, that she may unseal it and read it. Regan also seems to be implying that Oswald is Goneril's lover.

Regan says that Edmund is much more fitting to be her husband, now that she is recently widowed, than Goneril who is still married to the Duke of Albany. Regan sends her own note to Edmund. Oswald says he will slay Gloucester if he comes across him.

Act 4, Scene 6

Much takes place and intersects in this scene. The focus it takes to read Shakespeare pays itself back a hundredfold. Even then, some passages in their obscurity escape complete understanding.

When we are in the trees of words, we don't always give due credit to the many paths that are winding through the forest. All of Shakespeare's plays are wonderfully thought out for plot and action. Shakespeare must have carefully laid out the structure of all his plays beforehand. The intersection of the different paths is always flawless. One can imagine that only then would the words be written to fill the pathed forest with growing and blossoming foliage.

Edgar is pretending to lead his blinded father Gloucester up a steep hill to the edge of the cliff. There is some bittersweet comedy here. His intention is to cure Gloucester of his desire to commit suicide. Gloucester "throws" himself off the edge of the "cliff" and "miraculously"

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survives on “gossamer” wings. Gloucester is nowhere near any cliff. The writing here is particularly wonderful, descriptive and imaginative.

King Lear who is missing and wandering in madness enters the scene. Our two separate plays join together here. King Lear has gone mad because of the abuse he has suffered at the hands of his daughters. Gloucester is blind due to the betrayal of his illegitimate son Edmund. Both have been abused by their children. Edgar sums up Lear’s mad scene, “O, matter and impertinency (*nonsense*) mixed! Reason in madness!”

The Gentleman and attendants enter finding King Lear, who runs away chased by the attendants. Even this minor planning stroke is wonderful, leaving Edgar to talk to the Gentleman of the impending battle.

While Edgar is leading his father to somewhere he may rest, Oswald enters the scene, sword drawn ready to take Gloucester’s life. Edgar (still in disguise as a beggar) interposes and Oswald is slain.

Letters on Oswald’s person write of Goneril’s plot for Edmund to kill her husband, the Duke of Albany. Again, a plot finely laid out. Battle drums are heard in the distance.

Act 4, Scene 6

Kent reveals his true person to Cordelia but asks that he not be revealed yet to others. What follows is the piteous scene between King Lear and his daughter Cordelia. King Lear, more than fourscore years old, is lost and broken. Whatever King Lear’s faults, a powerful man reduced thus moves us to sadness. Stripped away of all his power and wealth, he is but a frail and fragile human being underneath it all, as weak as his infirm flesh and failing mind. Reduced thus, he is the tragic image of all our fates. The tragic end of all humanity. That is tragedy. It doesn’t matter who we are, our end is the same. What is important is what we do with the time given to us.

We learn again that the Duke of Cornwall is slain, and that Edmund is now leading his forces. Since Kent and Edgar are both in disguise, rumour is that they have both fled to Germany.

Act 5, Scene 1

In the British camp Regan inquires of Edmund if he has been intimate with Goneril, which he denies, whether truthfully or not. Regan intends her own “goodness” for Edmund.

Goneril and her husband Albany enter the scene. Goneril’s has intentions for Edmund herself despite being married to the Duke of Albany. The course of the war discussed is against

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invading France (and by implication Cordelia who is the Queen of France), and not of King Lear and his few supporters, which is just considered a minor domestic matter.

All exit, except Albany is detained by Edgar disguised a beggar. Edgar gives to Albany his wife Goneril's letter to Edmund, that was taken from the slain Oswald. Edgar says that if Albany is successful in the upcoming battle to sound the trumpet for him.

Edgar exits and Edmund re-enters and says the enemy is in view. Albany exits and Edmund in a short passage speaks of having sworn his love to both sisters, each who are jealous of one another. He also speaks that after the battle he will not pardon Lear and Cordelia, even though the Duke of Albany intends to show them mercy.

Speaking or thinking out loud to oneself in short soliloquies and asides is a wonderful and effective way to inform directly to the audience, through the fourth wall, the intentions of the character, and so, in intimacy with the audience, move the plot forward. The audience takes a certain delight in knowing in secret, ahead of time, the motivations of a character that the other characters are still in the dark about, for better or worse!

A character in this way directly talks to the audience through the fourth wall, but the audience is not invited to reply. In other plays this can be unbridled when the audience is given the liberty of reciprocating, usually to comic effect, of trying to tell a character out loud about something they are missing and need to be informed about. Something as simple as "look under the chair!". This is usually done enthusiastically and chaotically by an audience to good and humorous effect.

Act 5, Scene 2

This is a very short scene with Edgar and his blind father Gloucester. We learn the battle has been lost and Cordelia and Lear have been taken prisoner.

Act 5, Scene 3

This is the final scene of the play, where everything has been heading, comes together and ends with tragic effect. Whether tragic effect is really tragedy we will find out.

Edmund is holding Cordelia and King Lear prisoner. In a play already ripe with many good lines, Cordelia says a line that speaks to what can be said to be the true spirit of tragedy: "We are not the first who with best meaning have incurred the worst". In other words the road to hell is paved with good intentions!

Cordelia and King Lear are taken away. Edmund commissions, with a promise of wealth, a Captain to follow and carry out instantly a deed that is written in a note that he gives to him.

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Albany, Goneril and Regan enter. There is immediate tension between everyone. The Duke of Albany states that Edmund (who at most is only an Earl) is not his brother and equal, but a subject of war. This starts Goneril and Regan sparring over Edmund and his rank, as Regan invites Edmund to everything that is under her title as the wife of the late Duke of Cornwall. Regan begins complaining that she is not well.

Albany arrests Edmund for treason and implicates his wife Goneril as a gilded serpent. Throughout the heated exchange between Albany, Goneril and Edmund, Regan continues to complain of a worsening sickness and exits the scene.

Edmund vehemently maintains his innocence. Albany has the trumpet sound three times and Edgar (still in disguise) enters to condemn Edmund as a traitor. They fight and Edmund falls.

Albany condemns his wife Goneril by showing her the intercepted letter she intended for Edmund, to plot and kill Albany. Goneril exits defiantly.

Edmund confesses his wrongs and Edgar reveals himself as his brother. Edgar tells of how their blind father's heart wasn't able to bear the conflict and burst asunder, meaning that he has died. Also, he speaks of meeting the banished and still in disguise Kent.

A Gentleman enters with a bloody knife crying for help. Goneril has slain herself after confessing to poisoning Regan. Edmund who is dying says he was contracted to both and soon in an instant all three will be married, meaning in death.

Kent enters. Albany wishes the bodies of Regan and Goneril to be produced and their bodies are brought in.

Edmund in his death throws wants to do some final good and asks to quickly send to the castle that Cordelia and King Lear's lives might be saved. The commission of their death, given in writ to the Captain, was both from himself and Goneril. The Captain was to make it look like Cordelia has hung herself in her grief.

King Lear enters with Cordelia dead in his arms. We learn from King Lear that he himself slew the Captain who hung Cordelia. King Lear is howling in anguish and pain at Cordelia's death and rambles into madness.

A different Captain enters and says that Edmund is dead. Albany resigns his power back to King Lear, but King Lear after a few more desperate words, dies. In his last words King Lear says, "And my poor fool is hanged!". Do we take these words literally? Is he referring to his fool or to Cordelia who was hanged? Either way the fool disappeared completely after Act 3 scene 6.

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The only three who remain now are the good Duke of Albany, Edgar and Kent. Albany commands Edgar and Kent to rule the realm and speaks a very few closing words: "The oldest has borne the most; we that are young / Shall never see so much, nor live so long".

The bloodbath of this scene includes in order of death: the blind Gloucester, Regan, Goneril, Cordelia, the Captain, Edmund and finally King Lear (and maybe also his fool at some time). Not counting the fool, that is seven deaths in one scene! I wonder if that is greater than the number who die at the end of Hamlet. Earlier as well The Duke of Cornwall, the steward Oswald and a servant also die.

Conclusion

And so ends what some call the greatest work of literature ever written.

But is it tragedy? Is killing off almost everyone at the end tragedy? And who is our tragic hero? Is it King Lear? King Lear is definitely not a tragic hero.

The only person whose death is tragic is Cordelia. Her simple words of dutiful love at the beginning of the play precipitated a whole chain of events that led to everyone's death including her own. Obviously though, her words are not responsible for the ensuing turn of events. Those that are responsible are King Lear, Goneril, Regan, Cornwall, Edmund and Oswald, and they all end up dying. There is not much to feel tragic about in their deaths. Their deaths are brought about by their own evil actions.

By Shakespeare killing Cordelia he succumbs to Hemingway's syndrome, though there is a minor temporal difficulty here. Hemingway didn't *need* to kill Catherine and the baby at the end of Farewell to Arms, and Shakespeare didn't *need* to kill Cordelia.

Killing hope is not tragedy. There can be no pathos without hope. This is one of the reasons why alternate versions were written in the 17th century, that kept both Cordelia and King Lear alive. The end of the play was considered to be too pessimistic and hopeless.

We need to sympathize and/or empathize with someone, and that would be Cordelia, who has lost her entire family. This then would be the sad tragedy of unfortunate, violent and unstoppable events; events that would continue to haunt Cordelia's mind and heart, and so also our minds and hearts. And as Cordelia picks up the pieces of her self-destructed family and moves on, we could also hope for a better and wiser future as well.

Adding Cordelia to the dead is just pessimistic annihilation. We don't relate sympathetically in any way to Albany, Edgar or Kent who are left. We just walk away thinking that tragedy must just mean killing everyone at the end of the play. Must tragedy itself also destroy hope? Must evil destroy the noble and innocent before it itself is destroyed?

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Cordelia's death is the tragic death. She is the tragic character who with "best meaning" "suffered the worst", in events that were beyond her control, doing and responsibility. As with ancient Greek tragedy, events and circumstances happened to Cordelia beyond her control, which finally led to her death. Cordelia was helpless to alter her fate.

Why did Shakespeare need to also kill Cordelia? Cordelia died as simply keeping her alive, wouldn't logically work with the plot. Being Queen of France, and Cordelia being the rightful heir to King Lear after everyone else's death, would mean that Britain would come under the rule of her husband, the French King. Obviously that can't happen.

To keep Cordelia alive means we also need to restore and keep alive King Lear, and that makes even less sense.

One may also question why the French forces had landed at Dover. Was it because Cordelia was leading them to avenge and restore her father? Or was it the French King taking advantage of a power vacuum?

It would be an interesting experiment to rewrite, or if Shakespeare had written, the play from Cordelia's point of view. Shakespeare could then have evoked our *fear* and *pity* for Cordelia and her sad and tragic fate. That would be in the spirit of original Greek tragedy, and the play could then be called "Cordelia" instead.

Cordelia's unavoidable death would then be beyond her control, and that is fate and tragedy; not just killing everyone off in the end. But maybe then, the original Greek ideas of tragedy are too narrow now.

Any which way one looks at it, King Lear is one of the great plays of all time. What can one say against one who has defined and delineated what it means to be human, with all our faults and passions, as finely as one William Shakespeare has?

May 17, 2023

On reading the five books of the “Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy” trilogy by Douglas Adams for the second time now.

Silly yes, light yes, witty, clever, funny, insightful, joyful, positive, easy, imaginative, smart, inventive, lovely, all yeses!

After reading a whole bunch of heavy stuff it is nice to embark upon a fantastical adventure across the galaxy and universe, with a bunch of freewheeling existential aliens and humans.

Douglas Adams, who I feel probably realized himself in Arthur Dent, continuously expands, undermines, and warps our sense of space, time, and reality. More to the point he expands our logical boundaries. In simplest terms, logic can be thought of that which makes sense in our reality.

If the sky darkens with clouds it makes sense that it might start raining soon. On another planet, in another paradigm with a whole new set of physical realities, maybe clouds darken because, let’s use our imagination, giant flying spiral snails are drawing the darkness of space to themselves to feed their psyche.

Scientific ideas that make up our current reality and view of the universe, in Douglas Adam’s hand get twisted and turned, taken apart and recombined. But most importantly they get utilized and realized in wonderful and fantastic ways. Time travel? No problem. Popping around randomly through space? Easy.

If “truth” is just the common belief of a group of people, then “logic” must be something that we hope we can set on a firm grounding, or can we? The Oxford Companion to Philosophy devotes no less than 15 pages to “logic”. We aren’t going to deal with “logic” in a few sentences, except to say logic in the Guide is dealt with in all its self-contradictions and absurdity, and in a freely malleable form.

Paradoxes abound, especially when dealing with time, infinity and improbability. Something infinitely improbable here is to say the same thing as that which is finitely probable. The juxtaposition of fundamentally undefinable concepts leads to a richness of language and thought and possibility. It doesn’t matter whether the concepts connect in any way, their connection through juxtaposition and interaction create new possible realities.

In one way, the entire Hitchhiker’s Guide continuously undoes and twists around parts of sentences, messing with language and defining things in possible, but originally unintended ways. I myself would say that logic resides in language. There is a logic to the way words go together and mean something. Douglas Adam’s shows us just how many ways a group of words can mean something, or even contradict each other or create a paradox.

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Adams consistently skewers logic, along the line of, “it is not logical to think of logic in a logical way”. His strange alternate realities and logics make one want to think about and explore their possibilities, to see if they can really be possible or not. As with “truth” it is open season for logic, physics, space, and time. Simply put, if it can be thought of in the Guide, then it can exist.

This is where pictorial realization of the Hitchhiker’s Guide fails. It is much easier to ambiguously imagine someone with two heads than to see it brought to life on a movie screen. It is precisely because the descriptions are not only of physical reality, but also juxtapositions of ideas and thoughts and concepts, that so much is lost in trying to visually portray them.

Instead of “every picture is worth a thousand words”, it is “every thought is worth a thousand pictures”. Radio works great for the Hitchhiker’s guide because it is words and imagination between minds. Visual depictions just turn out silly, as an image can’t always convey the depth of complexity of thought that it might be related to.

We always hear how our reality is made up of our connection to our senses, which interfaces the mind with the physical reality around us. If portraying the physical reality around us, visually or otherwise, can’t express the depth and complexity of our thoughts, then that is a good argument for the transcendent logic of mind and language. Mind and language may have their basis or origin in physical reality, but they have so far transcended physical reality to be unrepresentable any more by reference to physical reality.

Adam’s writing is beautiful and simple. We don’t have to struggle to figure out what he is saying like we do in Shakespeare. The romance and anticipation of “So Long and Thanks for All the Fish” is beautifully written, delineated and expressed.

The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy is highly recommended, a necessary read in this plane of existence, in the here and now. There is no great moral, just a sense that we are living in a beautiful and fantastic universe, that includes not only the physical world, but a world full of fantastical thoughts and ideas, imagination, and beautiful playful slippery logic!

In the most wonderful and positive way, Douglas Adam’s Hitchhiker’s “trilogy”, like the title of the fifth book, like the entry in the Guide for Earth, is “Mostly Harmless”. I would make this as much a wish as a hope in the world, galaxy, and universe that we live in. We can always use more joy and humour, harmless absurdity, and lightness in our lives. The incredible complexity of this universe in every tangible and intangible form is beyond incredible, beyond understanding, beyond depth.

Even this short elucidation is something complex that never existed before in the universe, but now is part of the ever continuing deep creative potential and possibility of this universe.

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It would seem that we humans must be the most complex and amazing thing possible, being the border or interface straddling both the tangible and intangible universe! We exist physically in the tangible universe and think in the intangible universe. Somehow our senses, nerves and mind translate one to the other, and back again!

Time to continue exploring ourselves, the galaxy and the universe!

And maybe figure out how to write an essay on logic, if that is even possible!

June 1, 2023

On the three Greek tragedies from the collection called “Eight Great Tragedies”.

On “Hippolytus” by Euripides

Greek tragedies are not so much about what humans do, or are responsible for, as what by fate befalls them, (and maybe then what they do!). It is humans who almost always end up suffering the whims and wars of gods and goddesses.

Who are these gods and goddesses that rule our lives, whose bounty or wicked deeds we humans must take the brunt of, while the gods and goddesses walk away unscathed?

Phaedra, wife of King Theseus, stepmother to his son Hippolytus, falls in love with Hippolytus. Anyone who has fallen in love knows how there is no escaping the continuous thoughts of the other. There is no greater feeling when those thoughts are returned, no greater pain when they are spurned: *“The sweetest thing in life: yet bitter too.”*

Phaedra didn't ask to fall in love with Hippolytus. She knew it was wrong, and she kept silent, and fought with all her will, feelings that were flowing through her, feelings that were completely beyond her control. Euripides, almost 2500 years ago knew what it was to fall in love, and how *“Love's Goddess is too hard for human strength”* and that *“Ah, love is no Goddess, but a thing more powerful than any God.”*

Phaedra's mind in a very real way is taken over by her body. We can no longer rationalize in such circumstances. Those uncontrollable feelings that we are slave to, that overwhelm our senses, that rule our very actions, how can we be responsible for them? They become personified in the gods and goddesses that rule our destiny and fate. And Aphrodite, the kindest and cruelest goddess, rules the passions of love.

But Hippolytus spurns love and Aphrodite, and by choice chooses to follow Artemis, the virginal goddess of the hunt. But Aphrodite is not to be spurned, as denying what it means to be human is not to be ignored. If she can't ensnare Hippolytus she will destroy him, simple as that.

Hippolytus is noble and pure in mind and body, and in his devotion to Artemis. He is not interested in being ruled by lust and passion and love. As he says himself *“The human heart, that longs to know all truth.”*

And because Hippolytus pays homage to Artemis, he is also well beloved of the goddess. But Artemis is powerless to save Hippolytus from his fate. The goddess Artemis personifies our desire to lead a pure and natural life, but maybe more balance is needed. The pursuit of nature, beauty and chastity needs also to include a knowledge and understanding of our *own*

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nature, one aspect of which is how easily the mind can be taken over by the body, especially concerning matters of love!

Phaedra foolishly trusts and reveals to her foolish nurse her ailment of lovesickness. When the nurse lacking any depth of understanding reveals this to Hippolytus, Hippolytus responds also without any understanding, first of love's sheer power and then without any compassion towards those under its power. His reaction is one of repulsion. The nurse's ill thought plan and Hippolytus's reaction lead Phaedra to quickly determine to take her own life. Hippolytus, for all his noble and pure pursuits, and adoration of nature, knows or desires to know nothing of the most fundamental ruling aspect of our lives, which is love.

Aphrodite will not tolerate such ignorance. She floods Phaedra with the desires of love, even just to show her power, and has no trouble, as love never has any trouble, in offering up Phaedra as a sacrifice in her plan to destroy Hippolytus.

Phaedra acts nobly, and when her confidence is betrayed, sees no other choice than to end her own life. Hippolytus acts nobly and defends himself with oaths that he hasn't betrayed his father's bed with his wife.

Yet Phaedra doesn't act nobly in setting out to destroy Hippolytus in a suicide note that accuses him falsely of taking advantage of her. And Theseus, when all this comes so suddenly to light, in his grief, blindness and swimming mind, rashly allows his son Hippolytus no trail, rejects his oaths of innocence, curses him and banishes him.

Hippolytus, ever dutiful to the wishes of his father leaves, and is slain almost to death on his road to exile by Poseidon, who is carrying out the curse Theseus, who himself is the son of Poseidon, laid upon Hippolytus.

Hippolytus is carried back to the city and dies in his grieving father's arms, who has been enlightened by Artemis to the truth. It is implied that he too will die soon, by grief most likely.

Artemis can't seek revenge of Aphrodite, but she vows to "*with unerring arrows...smite in retribution that one man, She (Aphrodite) in Her turn holds most dearest.*"

And I wonder what tragedy that would be, for the one who abandons all knowledge, purity and nature for love! Which really is what love makes all of us do anyways!

Is it whimsical and warring gods and goddesses that determine our fate and destiny, or are they just personifications of the animal nature of our body, that in a moment can overrule our mind and thoughts, that together are trying to do all they can, to stay afloat and not drown, in the endless ocean of what it means to be human!

Now this is where Euripides is awesome.

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On “Oedipus the King” by Sophocles

I read all three Theban plays in high school. What god or goddess decrees the tragedy of this play? What necessity shapes the course of tragic events in this play?

This play is about as pure as tragedy can be. There is no god or goddess damning a poor human. There is no character with a tragic flaw deserving of their demise.

All there is, is bad circumstances. It is surprising that there is no “meta-god or goddess” who personifies fate and the universe unfolding in whatever way it chooses. There is only the potential that anything that is possible can happen: “*Luck governs all*” and “*Take life at random. Live as best you can.*”

Oedipus has led a good life. He saved the people of Thebes from a human eating monster. He was rewarded with the Kingdom including the widowed Queen. A strange prophecy though hung in the air that made no sense. Oedipus had fled his (adoptive) parents to keep the prophecy from coming true.

Decades earlier King Laius and Queen Jocasta abandoned an infant to perish, to avoid the same prophecy from coming to pass. Oedipus means “*swollen feet*”, as his feet were pierced and bound together when he was abandoned as an infant.

The prophecy of course was that Oedipus would kill his father and marry his mother. Nobody decreed this to happen except the universe of circumstances. Or as written in the play: “*Alas! What fury came on thee? What evil Spirit, from afar, O Oedipus!*”

Truly for Oedipus “*Thine is the fatal destiny*” with “*Malignant stars at work*”. Oedipus’s life is simply doomed: “*No man is more unfortunate*”. It is not possible to avert something from happening when one doesn’t know that it is happening. What evilly happened to Oedipus happened for no more reason than it just happened: “*’Tis just that Luck of thine hath ruined thee.*”

Sophocles writes majestically. He does not in the least explore *why* things happened. And that is truly the *fear and pity* of this tragedy. There are just no causes, no reasons, no purpose, no lesson to be learned. Something so horrific just happened. That is the fearful nature of our lives and the universe. Anything can happen, anything horribly bad or wonderfully good. For Oedipus the absolute worst possible thing happened.

And what happened to Oedipus is worse than any death or murder. It isn’t our minds that forbid incest. It is our very natural bodies that say that regeneration between parents and offspring must not occur, as it weakens and damages the machine that we are. Regeneration stays healthy by diversity and is severely compromised by inbreeding. I can think of no more blatant example of the body forbidding the mind certain actions.

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I can't imagine anyone finding this a pleasant play to watch. There is simply zero redemption, just an incredibly sickening inevitability. The only moral is one that is so obvious and *inbred* (ha!) in all of us as to be completely forbidden. We aren't going to leave the theatre having learned to be beware of a similar fating befalling us.

The play is almost more a horror than a tragedy. Only by the most convoluted and improbable means could it come to pass, ruthlessly leading to its grisly end. Yet it is a potential possibility in a universe where both good and evil can come to pass and do.

That is true fate and tragedy. That anything good or bad can happen unexpectedly to anyone at any time for no reason whatsoever, just because it is possible. We can't just freeze in fear. We might just as well go out and live our life with abandon, (but with a mindset towards the good), as once again, *"Take life at random. Live as best you can."*

But...if there was a prophecy it means there is foreknowledge. It is interesting that the gods usually have a degree of omniscience as concerning humans. This means we as humans keep ourselves ever fearful, always watchful of something bad possibly befalling us.

Sophocles, in the course of the play, also briefly explores a number of interesting secondary themes.

One such theme spoken by the chorus is summed up, *"If doings such as these be countenanced, What mean religion's holy dance and hymn?"*. Already at this early date religion is understood to be a constraining force attempting to keep humans moral, and that transgressions such as arrogance, pride, vanity, and profanely violating sanctities, will draw punishment from the gods and ultimately cause one to lose their soul.

A second interesting converse is Creon talking about having no desire to become king, with all its burdens, problems and fears, when he can live as good and rich a life without all that trouble: *"Who would be a King, That lives with terrors, when he might sleep sound, Knowing no fear, and wield the selfsame sway?"*.

An interesting case in point is the lives of the Roman Emperors in the first half millennium of this dispensation. To become Emperor for the most part meant severely cutting one's life short by murder, or execution, or suicide. Monty Python could have made a good comic skit from this.

And finally, who is, *"that fair family that grows not old with years, Embraced upon the hills, By roving Pan?"*

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On “Prometheus Bound” by Aeschylus

This is the first play of the collection called “Eight Great Tragedies” (1957). Yet one can convincingly argue that this isn’t a tragedy at all. It is more like a mythological allegory, which in Aeschylus’s hands unfolds more like a poetic ode than any form of drama. It is hard to imagine a convincing and satisfying dramatic performance of this play.

The Titan Prometheus rebels against Zeus and steals and delivers to humankind fire. “Fire” here symbolizes the gift to humans of intellect, technology, and civilization. Through “fire” is given the “reason” that we humans possess.

Uranus, who was the ruler of the Universe, is overthrown by his son the Kronos, the god of time, who like Prometheus is also a Titan. It is interesting that Time overthrows the physical Universe. In turn Kronos is overthrown by his son Zeus, who is the Olympian god of the sky and thunder. We move then from the Universe, through Time, to the planet Earth, and then down to the humans that Zeus was intent on destroying.

In some myths Prometheus is credited with the creation of humanity from clay. When Zeus, for whatever reason, was about to wipe out humans with a flood, Prometheus told his son Deucalion, along with his wife Pyrrha, to build an ark. Of course, this has a direct parallel with Noah’s Ark.

Prometheus is also the god of forethought and therefore could see into the future. At one time humans possessed this in small degree as well and were able to know the time of their own death. Prometheus replaced this knowledge with “hope” instead.

So not only did Prometheus create humanity, but he also instilled humanity with “fire” (knowledge or reason), saved humanity from the flood, and gave humanity “hope”. And for all this, tricking and going against the will of Zeus, Zeus had the smith Hephaestus bind Prometheus to a rock to be tortured for 10,000 years with an eagle daily eating his liver.

Prometheus as the saviour of humanity, and in his suffering for humanity, became an early prototype of the Christian Christ. Christ as the saviour of humanity died for the sins of humanity to appease the wrath of a “just” God. Prometheus instead suffered at the hands of Zeus for defying his will.

Prometheus’s suffering isn’t tragedy. It is the price necessarily paid for our enlightenment over our animal nature. In one way this play transcends tragedy.

In the play “Prometheus Bound”, Zeus does not come off well and is not portrayed positively. He comes off almost as a tyrant or even malicious. Certainly, the sympathies of almost all the characters in the play are not with Zeus but with Prometheus.

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Prometheus could not be killed by Zeus, prophesized the downfall of Zeus, and eventually was freed by Zeus's son Heracles. There is, however, no mention in any classical source of Zeus dying or anyone succeeding in overthrowing him.

The verse translation by E.A. Havelock is incredibly dense and difficult to read. This is probably pretty typical, when trying to both translate the meaning of the text and make it scan or rhyme.

When we look up the name E.A. Havelock we discover the life of a person who was a British classist, who spent most of his life in Canada and the States, was a professor at the University of Toronto, wrote many books, and was involved in the socialist movement in Canada in the 1930's. There are amazing lives lived that we will never know anything of. There are just too many things under the sun!

It is quite amazing how many how many people have translated this play including Henry David Thoreau, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and Elizabeth Barret Browning. It would seem that Prometheus has been an inspiration for artists, writers and philosophers for over two and a half millennia now!

The Romantics Goethe, Byron and Shelley all wrote dramatic or poetic works on Prometheus. Several of Blake's illustrations are of Prometheus. And of course, Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein" is also subtitled "The Modern Prometheus".

Prometheus continues to inspire into the 20th century and even into 21st century film making. Prometheus, as the progenitor of the human race, may also be said to be the dark mythic origin of science fiction.

A study of Prometheus, the creator, enlightener, and saviour of humanity through the ages would be more than interesting! These few words don't even pretend to scratch the surface.

That is enough now of tragedies for a while!

June 24, 2023

On seeing King Lear at the Stratford Festival

It is always lovely to go to the small Ontario town of Stratford to see world class theater. Without a doubt, the Stratford Festival can rival any theater company anywhere. Throw in a picturesque drive through the country to and from, and a lovely picnic by the Avon, and a wonderful day is to be had!

And what of the performance? The acting was stellar, the production excellent, and the darkly emotive and powerful monolithic sets the most wonderful luminous creative and amazing of all.

So, what shall we discuss? Let us discuss performing Shakespeare. Shakespeare stands at the peak of what it means to be human in the civilization of the western world. Even after more than four centuries his plays are still going strong with no signs of abatement. To perform any of the plays is the peak of any actor's skill or theater company's mettle.

Let us look at King Lear. Shakespeare wrote it somewhere around 1606 at the beginning of what is known as his Third Period. The play has 26,145 words. Hamlet is some 4,412 words longer. If we assume a running time of 3 hours, or 180 minutes, or 10,800 seconds, that comes to around 2.4 words per second. That is an incredible continuous rate of word speed that must be adhered to.

Of course, there are usually cuts made to the text, but that is offset by needing to provide the audience with a 20-minute intermission. Even so, the play and intermission still has to be jammed into a three-hour slot so those that took the Stratford bus coach from Toronto can be in time to catch the return bus! There is no possibility then of stretching the play out longer.

But....less than three hours is far, far too short for a play of this magnitude. I once watched a nine-hour Hamlet, though it was deliberately stretched out to that length to include other elements.

Shakespeare is like the most exquisite multi-course meal of the finest delectable flavours and tastes. It took me days and days to carefully read King Lear, and as written above, write a synopsis and commentary on it. Even then, there were some lines that were difficult to decipher. To hear the play performed at breakneck speed is to have to eat our meal non-stop without any chance to take our time and savour anything!

What can one do? Maybe an ideal performance needs to stretch out to four or more hours so the actors may enjoy their words and have a chance to breathe. And more importantly, the audience have a chance to digest the rich and deep words, to contemplate and enjoy the language and its depth of meaning.

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Of course, this brings up the question, is Shakespeare better read than performed? To take time reading Shakespeare is to enjoy his profound insight into what it means to be a human being, negotiating what it means to be both a rational and an extremely emotional creature.

To see Shakespeare performed is also a thrill, though I have a feeling that most of his words just fly above most of the audience's head. Shakespeare has too much depth in his words to absorb, almost at any acted speed.

I spent a lot of time preparing, studying, and writing on King Lear. But even for me, too much just flew by too fast. I can only imagine what it would be like for someone attending just for an afternoon's entertainment with no preparation. As one gentleman exclaimed while leaving, "I think I got the gist of the story", let alone the meaning of the words!

So yes, Shakespeare needs to be read to be appreciated and understood. There is no doubt about that. The only solution then in performance is to take more time so the play doesn't become a three-hour word marathon! A performance is of course going to have a rapid flow of action, despite having an almost unintelligible rapid flow of words.

Maybe the focus of any performance of Shakespeare should be an attempted balance between action and profound depth of meaning. To put it simply, taking more time to convey the incredible depth and richness of Shakespeare's thought.

It is amazing, considering how complex and difficult Shakespeare is to understand in performance, how four centuries later people still flock to attend a play by Shakespeare. The King truly does have clothes. They are of the most spectacular weave and pattern that is not possible to take in with one glance. But we all seem to know, that if we had the time to look very closely, their intricacies of gold and silver would reveal to us the complexity of what it means to be alive and human!

And so, time to close this chapter of tragedies, both on the page and in life, and move forward with hope and positivity!

August 13, 2023

On reading “The Consolation of Philosophy” by Boethius

Sometimes one picks up the right book at the right time.

The year 2024 marks the 1500th anniversary of the writing of “The Consolation of Philosophy” by Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius, and also his death. An exact anniversary of a millennium and a half is not something that comes about every day or year! It is amazing this book was written fifteen centuries ago in 524 AD!

Boethius was born in 480 AD and sadly was executed 44 years later, after finding himself on the wrong side of a political situation. He was still a relatively young man.

Boethius had hopes of translating into Latin the complete Greek writings of Plato and Aristotle. The few works he was able to translate were some of the only copies available during the Middle Ages.

Boethius wrote the “Consolation of Philosophy” while in jail waiting execution. From a high place of honour his star had fallen. It is bewildering even to try to imagine the circumstances under which this book was written.

Even so, Boethius’s book is timeless for all ages. It asks the same questions then, as we ask now. Indeed, these questions are the same that have vexed philosophers since time immemorial.

The absolute clarity and brilliance of Boethius’s mind is completely evident. All his thoughts are incredibly clear and lucid. I have never underlined as many passages as I have in this book! I would be more than interested to know what constitutes his own original ideas, and what is sourced from earlier works.

We look back 1500 years to Boethius, while he looks back eight or nine centuries to the Greek philosophers. Through all our advances and setbacks over the millennia, it is obvious that the human mind thousands of years ago was as advanced (or backwards!) in its thinking as now. We have just had a little more time to develop technologically. And by technology, understand the complex universe and our place in it a little more. It is fascinating to see by Boethius’s subtle poetic descriptions and references, that he held our place to be the center of a geocentric universe! How could he know any different!

Boethius starts with discussing the pursuit of happiness and good and bad fortune. Lady Fortune is one and the same, freely giving with one hand and taking away with the other. With a little paraphrasing the first half of the book could easily be read as a modern self-help book,

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like one would read on the subway on the way to work. It is easy to see how this book has been beloved throughout the ages.

Boethius connects complete happiness and good with God who is the absolute good. He asks the question of how evil can exist if all was created by a good God. He asks how evil can flourish and go unpunished, while the virtuous who seek the good and God are trampled underfoot. He ends with the question of how we can have free will if God knows all from beginning to end. This is a gross over-simplification of his book.

I particularly liked how Boethius puts God outside the linear constraints of time. An atemporal God can see all time while we are bound by the past, present and future as it moves along.

It is brilliant to see the logic and clarity of Boethius's thought process. Our ability to reason logically is what defines us as humans. One can say logic and reason exist in the realm of the intangible immaterial universe, as opposed to the tangible material universe, where call discernable phenomena the physical laws of the universe.

Sometimes, in a few places, I find Boethius's reasoning and logic a little specious. Specious is defined as "superficially plausible but actually wrong" or "misleadingly attractive in appearance". What this means is, words and concepts that are fundamental "truths" to one person aren't necessarily so to others. And so, sometimes words and ideas that are open to subtle and different interpretations, can seem somewhat arbitrarily linked together in the course of a logical or reasonable argument. But generally, Boethius's logic and reasoning is wonderful to behold.

For example, how can we even define the meaning of God? Good luck! Our self-help book would immediately run into trouble if we just said that the road to happiness ends with God, and we left it at that. It wouldn't mean anything as we haven't defined what we mean by God, and it wouldn't end up being a best seller read on the subway!

If though we said that the road to happiness is striving to be good and virtuous, then our self-help book would still be acceptable, as we understand what those words mean. On the other hand, Boethius defines God as being good and virtuous, and that we can only be happy by striving for God. Subtle differences! In the end, we always have to make an assumption or belief of what our "truth" is, as we can't define it factually, though we pretend to!

Fundamentally all ideas exist in our mind, including the idea of God. Of course, many faithful people believe we exist in God, and not that God exists only in us. What is "true" for many people is not "true" for others. We looked at the meaning of "truth" very carefully in the essay on the "Coronation of King Charles the Third".

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As so what everything fundamentally comes down to is the actual definition of the words we use to describe ideas and physical elements. This is no easy task, and if the same word means different things to different people, then we can no longer form a cogent argument. Before monks debate they have to sit down and come to an agreement on what each word means. They may never even get to the debate!

The "Consolation of Philosophy" written by Boethius is an excellent display of what is called the Trivium. The Trivium is considered the lower division of the Seven Liberal Arts. The Trivium consists of three *arts* called Grammar, Logic, and Rhetoric. The word Trivium comes from "tri" and "via", hence where three roads meet.

Now we need to define Grammar, Logic, and Rhetoric. Our definitions will be short, even though we could easily spend the rest of our lives trying to come to an understanding of how those words relate to our mind, being, and sense of reality!

What is Grammar? Grammar simply is the meaning of the words we use to try to define ideas and physical elements.

Logic is how we connect the words, which describe ideas and physical elements, together in a way that makes sense, based upon *our* understanding of reality. It is not only knowing things, searching for cause and effect, the ability to reason correctly and draw conclusions, but even trying to understand what it means to know!

Rhetoric is the ability to communicate Grammar and Logic clearly. Boethius's "Consolation of Philosophy" is a brilliant display of the Trivium. I don't think the book is completely perfect, as we all have different truths and realities, but it is beautifully written and thought out. Interspersing concise thought with poetry is brilliant.

My hat is off to Boethius. It is sad that his life was ended so prematurely.

Boethius is also known for his expositions of what is call the Quadrivium; the meeting of four roads. The Quadrivium is the upper division of the Seven Liberal Arts, and consists of Arithmetic, Geometry, Music, and Astronomy.

Arithmetic is defined as numbers in the abstract. Geometry is defined as numbers in space. Music is defined as numbers in time, and Astronomy is defined as numbers in time and space. This is a lovely and logical way to attempt to define how a construction of our mind, that being numbers, can be connected to the universe we perceive at large.

Boethius wrote a wonderful and extensive "Principals of Music", also drawn from earlier Greek music theorists, which I have and have read. Boethius also wrote a manual on Arithmetic, largely translated from the "Introduction to Arithmetic" by Nicomachus of Gerasa.

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Fragments of a book or commentary on Geometry seem to also exist. We have already seen in the “Consolation of Philosophy” references to Boethius’s understanding of Astronomy current to his day.

It seems that a large body of Boethius’s writings still exist, though it isn’t exactly clear how much of it are translations, commentaries, or original works, and how much of it has been translated into English in modern editions.

Of the 560 volumes of the Loeb Classical Library devoted to ancient Greek and Roman writing, only one is devoted to Boethius, which includes his “Consolation of Philosophy” and “Theological Tractates”. I remember buying my friend, the painter Andrew Miles, the “Meteorologica” by Aristotle in the Loeb addition. It is amazing that there is still extant this amount of ancient Greek and Roman writings.

So, all in all, the “Consolation of Philosophy” by Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius is as an enjoyable, insightful, euridite and relevant read now, as it was exactly 1500 years ago! This beloved book has been translated many times historically, by Kings and Queens, literary giants like Chaucer, and many others.

It is hard to say if Boethius was writing as Christian, though definitely his being made a martyred Saint by the Catholic church would show they believe him to be so.

So, happy 1500th death year to Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius, if that is even a thing!

March 13, 2024

On rereading “The Problems of Philosophy” by Bertrand Russell

I remember nothing from reading this treatise 29 years ago. I came to this short book with expectations of a clear and succinct logical treatment of the philosophical problems of, for example, “how can we know anything”, and so on.

I assumed “The Problems of Philosophy”, would concisely attempt to explain a number of philosophical problems, what progress has been made, and the obstacles that put a halt to a further understanding, knowledge or progress of the problem.

The book presents a philosophical problem, but instead of looking at the problem from several different angles under a microscope, it seems to go the other way, generalizing the problem and using real world examples to try and elucidate the problem.

It isn't that the book is bad. It is though, hard to follow the rambling train of thought. I thought to write a more comprehensive commentary but is hard to grasp a moving target!

Considering that Bertrand Russell and Alfred North Whitehead wrote the massive three volume “Principia Mathematica”, which set out to express mathematical propositions using symbolic logic, I expected a slightly more rigorous logical exposition of the philosophical problems.

So instead, I will just write a few words on the last paragraph of the book:

“Philosophy is to be studied, not for the sake of any definite answers to its questions, since no definite answers can, as a rule, be known to be true, but rather for the sake of the questions themselves; because these questions enlarge our conception of what is possible, enrich our intellectual imagination, and diminish the dogmatic assurance which closes the mind against speculation; but above all because, through the greatness of the universe which philosophy contemplates, the mind also is rendered great, and becomes capable of that union with the universe, which constitutes its highest good.”

That is, the “*highest good*” of the mind. The last paragraph is very poetic. None of its propositions, however, logically follow one another. It is lovely and fanciful, and the last words “*highest good*”, which come from nowhere, remind me of “The Consolation of Philosophy” by Boethius. Boethius worked hard to make his logic, logically flow. I don't find the same A to B to C etc. logic in Bertrand Russell's “The Problems of Philosophy”. Maybe it is just me.

“*Philos*” in Greek means love. “*Sophia*” means wisdom. Words have meaning and much time needs to be spent defining their meaning. And since we generally try to understand and explain something using language, we need to be very clear on what each word means.

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When we start combining words together we start creating a logical structure. What are the rules of “*meaning*” and “*logic*” that together start attempting to define our reality and what is “*factual*”. The word “*fact*” is better than the word “*truth*”.

We can make up our own definition for “*fact*” as “that which absolutely is”. It can take some time to be *almost* certain that a “*fact*” is an exact representation of the reality of our existence and the universe. It was considered a “*fact*” at one time that the sun went around the earth. Now we can be *almost* certain that the earth goes around the sun.

Why the word “*almost*”? It is as if we can never know for certain that some new criteria, say for example a special fourth dimension, might one day alter and redefine the existing “*fact*”.

The words “*true*” and “*truth*”, meaning *real, actual, exact, accurate, in accordance with reality*, attempt to be exactly synonymous with the word “*fact*”. However, “*truth*” can also be entirely based upon opinion, and if enough people believe something is “*true*” then so it is, usually to the detriment of a minority who believe something else.

Then again, a mathematical relation can be said to be “*true*” as opposed to “*false*”, which one would hope has nothing to do with popular opinion!

I could keep writing on and on, getting deeper and deeper into our relationship with the reality of the universe, and since we are part of the universe, our reality!

And so, anybody can become a philosopher. One just needs a good couple of dictionaries, and a sharp clear understanding of how to refine even further what a word means. After that, a clear understanding of what sort of logical construct emerges when different words are combined together.

Not the easiest thing to do or understand, especially since we use words to define the meaning of other words! We can go around and around forever like in a whirlpool! I don’t know, however, if we have any other way or alternative to define words, except by other words. Interesting question!

March 26, 2024

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Concert Reviews

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Georgian Music Concert Series, Barrie  
Dec 3, 2023  
By Juhan Puhm

**And So It Goes...A Cabaret**

Brett Polegato ~ Baritone  
Robert Kortgaard ~ Piano

Part 1

What an amazing concert! In these online days that we live in, we can watch or listen to anything our hearts desire. Why leave our homes and our screens? Why attend a live concert anymore?

For over fifty years the Barrie Concert Association has brought to this (not so small anymore) enclave the finest performers the world over. I myself throughout my adult life have attended more concerts here than I can remember.

But, a few years ago the world ground to halt, and for a while going to anything live became a thing of the past. And so, we had no choice but to turn to online content.

And then sadly , after steering and helming the Concert Association for over half a century, its founder Bruce Owen, a youthful ninety years of age and still working away, suddenly passed away. No longer would I see downtown his familiar form and share a greeting. Online I watched his funeral as attendance was limited.

For a while we all wondered what would become of the Barrie Concert Association. Bruce carried everything in his head; it was his baby. Would it even be possible to continue on without him?

But slowly the world opened back up. The obligations of the concerts that had to be cancelled when the world shut down were fulfilled. A memorial concert was given in Bruce's honour. Just recently at the Barrie Art's Awards Bruce was posthumously given the Cultural Changemaker Award. I could spend the rest of this review and more writing of Bruce's contributions to our community.

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But with a revamped board working hard to fill Bruce's shoes the Concert Association was able to get back on its feet and continue offering its two main concert subscriptions for the 2023/24 season. Old and new challenges abound. How to make concerts relevant in this new age we live in, how to bring in a new audience; how to bring in young people as I once was young attending these concerts.

#### Part 2

From the very first notes sung by the baritone Brett Polegato I knew this was going to be an extraordinary concert. A concert is a special moment in time, that happens at a special place, and that involves a special interaction between the performers and the audience.

A concert, like the theater, is ritual. We leave our homes seeking nourishment for our souls and hearts and minds. We the audience, individually and as a whole, are as much a part of the concert as the performers themselves. We bring our lives, our spirits, energies, joys, and heartbreaks.

And how better to share our lives than with a program of songs from the Broadway theater. From time immemorial, from the Greek amphitheater to the sanctuary of Bethel Community Church, we have gathered together to laugh and to cry. We come together to remember, feel and relive all that we have felt as humans both happy and sad.

The theater is a reflection of ourselves. How wonderful when the theater combines together with songs. Music and songs have always held a special place in our hearts. It is the main creative form of expressing our emotions. This is precisely why the Broadway theater still looms so large, and has so for more than a century.

Today's concert was a wonderful cabaret of songs for the theater. Songs by giants like Cole Porter, Noel Coward, Rogers and Hammerstein, and Stephen Sondheim were interspersed by songs by many other names I haven't heard of yet.

These heartfelt songs covering a range of human emotions were consummately sung by Brett Polegato, accompanied sensitively by Robert Kortgaard on piano. These two seasoned performers have travelled and performed in musical and operatic productions around the world.

Polegato's baritone is stunningly beautiful, clear, powerful, emotive and expressive. Every song as conveyed as well by his body and gestures was a miniature of the theater. Kortgaard's collaboration couldn't have been more natural. It was also lovely that he played a beautiful solo piano work in each half.

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Polegato's reminiscences of his youth and career and the importance of each song to him gave us even more to relate our lives to. Both performers brought the depth and experience of their lives and a life of making music to us. That was an incredible privilege to be part of. Theirs was music making and sharing of the highest order. One had to be there, words can't express this in any way adequately!

And that is why going to a concert or the theater (or both together!) is irreplaceable. We won't get this from every concert we attend, but every once in a while we can share in something profound, something that will never happen again, something that will leave us as richer human beings.

Bruce would be thrilled that we are carrying on his legacy!

Two immediate standing ovations showed the gratitude of the audience to the performers. And in kind the performers bowed to the audience. The one cannot survive without the other.

December 3, 2023

Barrie Concert Association Review

Jan 13, 2024

By Juhan Puhm

**Romantic Virtuoso Piano Concert**

Sheng Cai ~ Pianist

Music is universal. Every people, culture, civilization has expressed and continues to express itself uniquely through its music. There are endless musical styles, instruments, purposes, and rituals on this planet. In the western world alone, there are more styles of music than we can imagine; jazz, country, rock, big band, blues, bluegrass, and so on and on and on, the list is truly endless.

Classical music is only one style of western music. This style of music is called “classical” because we can trace it back for more than a thousand years. We can do this precisely because long ago we developed a way to write down and notate music. Yet even in the classical tradition there are endless styles and types of music.

For 700 years of the last millennium there was no such thing as a piano. From humble beginnings, looking more like a harpsichord, the fortepiano began its evolution to what we now know of as the mighty concert grand. In many ways the piano, like the violin, is the most perfect instrument we have created. Both these instruments are capable of extreme virtuosity, which goes to show how ergonomic they are to our physiology.

Tonight’s program was a complete demonstration of how much two hands and ten fingers can do on a keyboard; how many millions of super-fast notes and loud gigantic chords can be played in rapid succession.

The first piece on the program was Rachmaninov’s Sonata No2 from 1913. The last piece on the program was Tchaikovsky’s Grand Sonata in G major from 1878. Both works are long virtuosic multi-movement pieces with more notes than one can imagine a single human being able to play from memory. Sheng Cai, the pianist of this evening’s concert was completely up to the task of performing such demanding music.

The intentions of both composers were obviously to write as virtuosically as possible for the instrument, which they both succeeded in doing. Yet we can’t have everything. Endless virtuosic passages aren’t very emotional or lyrical, which is ironic, as we think of the Romantic period as one of high emotionality.

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A fleeting moment of lyricism was felt with Brahms's Intermezzo Op.117 No 1 from 1892. Here was expressive music from a man around sixty years of age which he called a "lullaby of grief".

The two remaining shorter works on the program, one of which was an encore were by Canadian composers. Both pieces were also tour de forces of rapidly flowing virtuosity.

The first was by a Canadian prodigy I have never heard of before, Andre Mathieu, written when he was only 11 years old! The encore was a brilliant Scherzo written by Oscar Morawetz for his mother!

And so, with all the possible expressive range of western classical music, from the sublimity of Bach, the ebullient transcendence of Mozart, the power of Beethoven, right through to the biting moderns, tonight's concert focused tightly on the virtuosic piano music of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20th century, curated, interpreted, and performed brilliantly by the pianist Sheng Cai.

Jan 13, 2024

Georgian Music Concert Review

Feb 4, 2024

By Juhan Puhm

**Ladom Ensemble**

Michael Bridge – Accordion

Beth Silver – Cello

Pouya Hamidi – Piano

Adam Campbell - Percussion

Once upon a time I saw a t-shirt. On this t-shirt were written about fifty different styles of music: folk, jazz, big band, rock, country, and so on. Classical was only one style among many.

While most people are happy to just pick up a guitar and be able to sing a few songs, large and expensive institutions exist to train classical musicians to perform at the highest level. The rest of the people who don't play music are just happy to be able to feel and sing along with their favourite popular artist.

For better or worse what is it that keeps popular and classical music, for the most part, in separate worlds?

For starters it takes a lot of training to play classical music, and even more to play it anywhere well enough, and finally a phenomenal ability, that has more to do with being gifted than hard work, to become a concert performer.

And what do classical musicians play? They play notes that have been written down on lined paper by what are called composers. To deviate from the "score" in any way is considered blasphemy. So, the goal of the classical musician is to play the written score exactly, God forbid if they make a mistake, and really in the end channel as best they can, what is called an "interpretation", the so-called written intentions of the composer.

In many ways classical music can be a museum, albeit incredibly meaningful, deep and profound, but since so few new compositions enter the repertoire, it can be questioned whether it is even a living tradition anymore.

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On the other hand, the goal of popular musicians is to express themselves and play music that they feel, and usually write themselves, or at the very least, play older music in new and interesting ways. There is no page of notation to be slave to. Every performance will always be slightly different depending on the energy in the room.

Can the ideals of the popular and classical world meet in any way? It is pretty much impossible for untrained musicians to play classical music well, so let us start with a group of highly trained classical musicians. Let us free them from having to only follow a written score. Yes, they can use a written score when need be, but also be free to play what they feel at the appropriate time. To be able to improvise freely is something that is completely opposite to strict notation.

Maybe it is time to talk about today's concert!

The Lodom Ensemble consisting of accordion, cello, piano and percussion is incredibly rich and colourful. The accordion is a little orchestra in a box capable, like the piano, of the highest and lowest sounds. The cello is the singing voice (as also is the accordion) capable of duplicating the entire vocal range from the lowest bass to the highest soprano.

But, one of the most important things that sets popular music apart from classical music is the inclusion of percussion instruments. Almost every popular style on the above t-shirt includes a drummer or percussionist. I have long ago come to realize that in popular music the drummer is the most important member.

And so, it is the inclusion of a percussionist in the Lodom Ensemble that frees the other musicians to solo or improvise freely over a sustaining pulse or rhythm.

There is an interesting full circle happening in many of the pieces on the program. In the past many classical composers have sought out folk and traditional music for their own classical compositions. The Lodom Ensemble by starting with these written classical pieces and freeing them up to their own way of playing them are actually returning them to their original folk origins!

Who says one can't have fun with Brahms' "Hungarian Dances" or Bartok's "Romanian Folk Dances".

I have always loved Prokofiev's ballet "Romeo and Juliet". Since dancers dance to a pulse how awesome to incorporate the "Dance of the Knights" into a percussion based ensemble. And why not something by Radiohead or any other progressive rock band?

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It is interesting to think of other styles of music that are half notated and half free. All jazz tunes have some sort of lead sheet the performers play from and then improvise around. For me it seems that big band music is the highest expression of this skill. Most of the music for big band is incredibly well arranged for the horns and brass, but at the same time there is plenty of room for solos and a great rhythm section to groove to.

Since we are entering the popular realm now I did miss hearing someone sing, as most popular music of all styles is sung with words. Be that it may, the Ladom Ensemble were all having a really good time losing themselves and breathing life into all the music they played, including a great East Coast Medley. Who knows, maybe they can let their hair down even more and live even closer to the edge!

Finally, classical music, (or is it crossover popular music now?) in order to be a living tradition needs to create new music. Both compositions by the pianist Pouya Hamidi were excellent. Being of Iranian descent, and moved by all the violence and dissent in his country, his composition “Distance” was very moving and completely relevant for this difficult day and age we live in.

My favourite part at the end of the concert was when the pianist turned off his iPad for the last work on the program which was Astor Piazzolla’s “Libertango”. This tango is based only on a repeating progression of four chords. Who needs music in front of them when one can just play freely what one is feeling at the moment?

In so many ways this is what making excellent music is all about! When the performers have a reason to connect with their music, then so will the audience. An excellent concert!

Feb 4, 2024



## *Reflections III ~ Commentaries and Reviews*

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