

7. Post-European Self Revisited (as Bipolar Self)

Fallible all along the way. Shamefully forgetful of myself as if to take a rest from myself. As if even to refute myself at times. Failing more often than not at least at the highest level. All this I have borne as the writer whose reach has exceeded his grasp.

– I see you're still not ready to dispense with me. You want to register your transparency with self-contempt. I want to register it with self-esteem. You want to show the human all too human of yourself. I want to show the superhuman. You want to look into every nook and cranny of weakness. I want to look into every nook and cranny of strength. You want to be moral. I want to go beyond morality.

The course you followed after you left the University of Europe was a very mixed one. So mixed that, to bring it into view, I will say that, on the one hand, it was a vast program of remedial studies addressed to your pre-European self and a vast program of graduate studies addressed to the post-European one. Seemingly more disciplined and structured than anything you had done before, it nonetheless mixed grunt work (physical labour, blue-collar work, solitary athletics) with intellectual and artistic pains. It mixed significant failures with significant successes and moments of lowbrow behaviour with higher interests and pursuits. All in all, it was a very mixed bag and, if you're not particularly proud of this (for it wasn't a quintessentially pure operation), then at least be proud of its bringing you thus far.

Far be it from me to play coy and pretend I'm not proud of a certain steadfastness. But if I delivered up everything into your hands, I would be singing over my non-accomplishments as if they were accomplishments. As if the mere singing over them were an accomplishment.

But I can't ignore that *On Truthtelling* is a sort of singing over non-accomplishment. A treating of it as a sort of yellow brick road (or is it a treading upon it with aims and intentions similar to those of the Tin Man and Scarecrow?) on the way to *this* accomplishment. As if the latter – this Wizard of Oz of a writerly contrivance or conjuration – should justify and redeem the lack of substantial work done in the past.

This word "substantial" is already a prejudice. But calling it a prejudice doesn't make it any less hard-hitting. Any less praise or condemnation when applied to your work as being there or not.

I can make myself out to be a person of substance by focussing on the

education of myself. This partly disguises the fact I failed miserably as a writer. At least thirteen years I spent writing bad plays. (*Now you've got your work cut out for you!*) Thirteen years of writing bad plays! And, what's more, it was mostly writing the same bad plays – or, rather, the same bad play – over and over again. What! Still with nothing to say?

I couldn't master plot, character, dialogue. What was lacking? A good story to tell? But I know I had this at least once. What was lacking? A sense of authenticity? But what do I mean by this? I know it has something to do with staginess. Stagy characters. Stagy action. Stagy dialogue. All showing signs of being forced from without rather than from within. A force imposed on them rather than a force being exposed in them.

You're still keeping quiet. That's good. You're not going to try to do an alchemist's trick and turn lead into gold.

Thirteen years! A big chunk of time to be spinning one's wheels. To be thrashing straw. To be churning out stuff that doesn't hit the bull's eye of a playable, payable script.

– Just as your writing efforts in England weren't in vain, so weren't these playwriting efforts. Just as the first reinforced your memory and made possible an account of your trip that would have otherwise been less sure-footed, so the second honed your skills for writing dialogue and made possible an account of yourself that would have otherwise been less searching and well-rounded.

You said earlier I was committed to exploring every nook and cranny of weakness. It occurs to me now that this constant flattering reveals how far we are from judging others like ourselves. With others the negative judgement often falls like an axe. With ourselves, it is tempered by uplifting statements, qualifications, counter-proposals, reckonings, etc.

I don't dare to declare you wrong in your assessment. But how can I be sure this comes from thinking you're right or from wanting nothing more than this?

– Writing about yourself as truthtelling has given you a way to be clean in your writing. It's the extension of your lifelong writing of yourself as truthteller. As such, you never had a better subject to write about – or a better self – than you do now.

Why couldn't I write about other selves?

– Your failure with other selves or characters was your unseeing commitment to your character. A commitment that couldn't be seen because neither was your egoism so great as to make you think your character could ever be the centrepiece of your creativity nor your character itself so developed as to be this centrepiece. This left you with an egoism only sufficient to persist until you came to the realization that, with respect to other characters, your lack of creativity was insurmountable.

You're the advocate of my better hope, my higher purpose, my stronger self. And yet your honesty and openness are tainted with inhuman considerations that come from I know not where.

You're willing to write my present onto my past with a clear conscience. You're willing to exalt the former in order to make the latter look good as necessary passage. To go with you all the way, to make myself insufferable in my own eyes, would be a kind of blindness. Call it false modesty or an attachment to an outdated Christian ethic, but you're good company for me only as the thing I must resist.

– You're beholden to me not only for your strength but for your chance to wallow in your weakness. To play it off as the more human, sympathetic, moral part of your character.

Alright, but at least it's part of an admission of being at odds with myself. Of even wallowing in this. Of playing it out for all it's worth. Of fictionalizing it. After all, I can't deny this dividing of myself and this dialogue never took place till now.

– Tell me about the fiction that comes from not playing it out. From leaving it alone. From pretending it doesn't exist. From burying it. From speaking with a single voice.

You have other truth-tellers who do this well enough. There, as background to their truth-telling, all inner life is painted as if it were but a white page on which reason writes itself in large script. Or if some initial chaos is there, it's only as pieces of the puzzle that reason's hand must pick up and put together. An assemblage of order out of disorder that comes from an ordering principle itself left out of the picture. As if it sprang from the truth-teller's forehead like Athene, fully armed, from Zeus's.

Guilty of fictionalizing? Take these others who play their social roles so well. Who conceal the private parts of their truth-telling as much as they conceal their private parts in public. Indeed, who comport themselves as celestial – or should I say cerebral? – angels having no private parts whatsoever.

By definition reason is supposed to be without private parts.

– Let him who can, prove it. Let him dig behind that word until we don't just have the word but a full understanding of it. Let him tell us why we can be so sure a dog, a cat, a rat, a horse don't reason but only human beings.

When you stop to think that reason, in countless ways, has been taken high and low, right and left, this way and that way along the most extravagant paths, then what, pray tell, is so settled and secure about it?

The philosopher doesn't consider all wayward reasoning to be reason per se. The latter is supposed to be what corrects the former.

– Why, and here I thought I was describing the course of reason as something taking in the philosopher.

People generally take it that there has been a historical development of reason.

– And so Hegel pronounced it.

This sceptical attitude towards everything makes most people grate their teeth.

– It also gives them the chance to reason a bit more.

Admittedly scepticism – as the great spur of thought – is written into the whole philosophical tradition.

– Something too much of this.

But also an excuse to reason less. It's just a question of where you are in a never-ending dialectic.

– Hume as the great sceptic who drops out of it finally. Kant as the great anti-sceptic who takes up where he left off.

Anti-intellectualism as the great spur of intellectualism. A sort of intellectual anti-intellectualism. And then intellectualism per se rebounding with its own kind of anti-intellectualism. For as soon as it raises a red flag to asking any more questions, as soon it claims there isn't time for them or that it is morally wrong to ask them or simply superfluous, there is always the arbitrary element speaking in the name of some perhaps unannounced faith.

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