

Critical Failure

Political Correctness Rules Contemporary Criticism

Part One: Progressive, True or False?

Modern Masculinism Counters False Feminism

I have a business idea for someone whom regards his or herself as politically correct and 'woke:' create an app powered by artificial intelligence that social media users can pass their potential posts through BEFORE posting them to social media that judges whether or not the statement is politically correct, and is thus permissible for posting. The app can grade the political correctness of the post, and can judge the penalty to be assessed by the political correctness police on a scale from, say, 'mildly insensitive' to 'worthy of cancellation.' The app can tell you which of the modern movements the statement violates, so you know which group you'd be in trouble with. You could even connect the app directly to social media sites so that the purity of the person can be continuously calculated as they continue with their righteous postings, that way we'll all know who the good, progressive, woke people are without actually having to think.

On the positive side, I have *BookLife* to thank for so clearly demonstrating how polarizing, and thereby revealing of sexism, political correctness, and other popular prejudices, *Holier Than Thou* is, likely in parallel with most of my work. Thank you for helping me realize that this attribute is core to the subconscious purpose of this provocative novella, a purpose which it possesses to a far greater degree than the vast majority of books, I'd estimate: to reveal the reader to his or her self and, in the aggregate process, to reveal the extent to which both narrow-minded religiosity *and* narrow-minded 'wokeness' rules the moral and spiritual paradigms of not just this nation, but most globalized nations, being core to the overlap between conventional wisdom and self-righteousness, whether coming from the 'left' or the 'right.' And, from my observationally and contemplatively-considerate perspective, the right and left are at war for the ignominious right to call themselves the rulers of false piety.

In the competition of self-righteous stupidity between the politically correct 'woke' and the traditionally correct right-wing Christian, the problem isn't just that *neither* side is *rationaly* correct (the limited capacity for reason and the manipulation of this limitation by the clever, greedy and unscrupulous is, of course, at the heart of conservatism, and most of the world's problems), and that both sides are easy to program and fail to think for themselves, and that both reflexively say what they're

programmed by their relative purveyors of false piety to say, but that they force that unthinking, reflexive self-righteous standard of pre-programmed thought upon others. Both sides, in other words, are comprised of bullies and bigots forcing themselves upon others. *That's* what should be 'cancelled:' all forms of self-righteous, pre-programmed, conformity-conditioning, mob-mentality 'thinking' that's inherently prejudiced towards, shaming and bullying of anyone else, including the minority like me who think for ourselves, rather than being told how to think and cravenly obeying the moronic mob, giving into them for fear of 'cancellation.'

Hey cancel culture: you do realize that if we're to cancel the work of everyone who has ever done or said anything politically incorrect that it's all a matter of digging before everyone is cancelled and all the value of their work to humanity is discarded with the judgment against them, right? And while I'm on the 'fuck your irrational political correctness' rant, you do realize that the inherent nature of history and causality is such that any culture that interacts with other cultures is constantly 'appropriating' from them, correct? It's one thing to appropriate and utilize inconsiderately, but to deem all appropriation as unjust is not only unjust and ludicrous in itself, but is entirely untenable and against the laws of sociology. Should every Greek like me be offended that the majority of western culture was invented by us and appropriated by everyone else? Do the Italians owe us 'reparations' for the fact that Rome was built on our ideas, and that the rest of the world followed? To think this way can only encourage more hatred, division and misunderstanding. If we follow the 'woke' lead of you brain-dead, wind-up zombies, then everything and everyone is lost to judgment, and no truth can be 'appropriated' without a self-righteous assessment of its source – and this is *without* digging into the fact that the source attributed to anything is typically erroneous. If cancel culture is to be just in its 'cancellation policy,' in other words, and apply its cancellations with uniformity and comprehensiveness, it can only lead to the cancellation of the whole of humanity.

Contained within this broad revelation of self-righteous false piety and its hidden costs, and the fact that these forces tend to compel much of our modern movements, is, relevant to the context of the subject novella, the extent to which feminism has descended into sexism amongst a large contingent of the population. This descension and mislabeling (labelling what's really a form of modernly-prevalent sexism as "feminism") blinds its possessors to the truth, and to their own prevailing prejudice; and, in the case of this book and *countless* other works, proving that such prejudice blinds its possessors to everything they might see and derive from someone's work were they *not* to possess that prejudice, as it's absurd how much the critic who sparked this subsequently expanding essay overlooked and dismissed. This project has, after all, been categorized as a work of 'philosophical or spiritual fiction,' and not a line in the review pertains to the spiritual or philosophical offerings of the novella.

The sad truth of this critique is that it's too difficult to give those aspects of the book

credit, or even due consideration, it seems, whilst minimizing and condemning the storyteller, in the same way that it's far easier to condemn the protagonist and dismiss his story, and all the beauty and truth contained therein, than to consider his perspective within the context of that story that was thereby not *really* read. It's far easier to avoid looking into the mirror and to simply reflexively condemn along popular lines, just as this writer was condemned and the looking glass was shattered and swept under the rug in the real life version of the events depicted herein.

Among 'feminists' like this critic, there seems to be an especially strong prejudice towards men who like young women, which, as hard as it is for them to accept, and which so many women associate with 'creepiness,' all 'older' men naturally do, whether admitted or not. One wonders as to the psychological causes of this particular prejudice, with many contenders, including, again, a religiously-sourced, self-righteous prudery ingrained in the conventional value system and its judgment of sexual relations, a contemporarily-sourced mob mentality of reflexive judgment, a widespread jealousy of those very same, *more desirable*, beautiful young women, even good ol' misandry, which is, of course, wrapped up in the former causes, and is *far* more prevalent than the politically correct can admit.

A misandrist my own age whom I dated while I was writing this book (she spoke hateful words against men as a sex on a regular basis) and who I quite liked, for the most part, was painfully contemptuous of any interest men paid to young women, or vice versa. Her jealousy of the young women and disdain of the attracted men was palpable, triggering an immediate, reflexive animosity that attached itself like a target to both the man and the young woman. Her brand of feminism wasn't simply misguided, but because of her own animosity related to her insecurity and jealousy, felt borderline militant. She wasn't able to separate her self-esteem issues from what she considered her 'progressive ideals,' in other words. It didn't work out between us, needless to say, though she accidentally taught me a great deal about many of the conventional values and beliefs which this book evidently forces to the surface.

There's also a large contingent of feminist-minded men who're compelled, or, perhaps more accurately, *coerced*, to reflexively condemn men who follow the same biological desires, largely for the same aforementioned reasons. I consider this to be a form of shame-based self-repression, whether by conforming to conventional standards out of fear of popular backlash and the need for acceptance, both personally and professionally, or by a false, religiously-based sense of righteousness, or because it's what their 'woke' wives/girlfriends expect, or because they subscribe to the notion that it's wrong for an 'adult' to be with someone who isn't yet mature enough to handle the situation and is thereby automatically being taken advantage of (which is a *long* way from my experience of *many* intelligent young women), all through an embarrassed concealment of their true desires, sometimes not admitting them to themselves, much less to others, for fear of falsely-pious backlash.

Ask any heterosexual 'adult' male (any heterosexual man with a sex drive): If you were single and a gorgeous eighteen-year-old woman came onto you, would you turn her away? Be very wary of trusting any man who answers in the affirmative. They're lying in order to avoid the trap you've set for them, which means, when pressed and their fear is activated, they'd rather lie than face that fear. It's a test of integrity, in other words, and integrity doesn't rule this nation, popular perception does. The fact that women are only in their biological prime for a short time and are most physically desirable within that window shouldn't come as a shock to anyone, sorry. Nor should the possibility that many, even *most*, clever, beautiful young women use this to their advantage is less than scrupulous ways, including by coming onto older men, all while knowing that they can play this card to their advantage should they need to; that they can deal out the ten of swords (a tarot reference), so to speak, and wield the prejudice crafted by politically correct, self-righteous conventional wisdom.

Were the roles reversed, were it an older woman engaging with a nineteen-year-old man, would the judgment be the same? *Of course not*. And why? The more developed mind still has the position of advantage that, lacking scruples, can be manipulated. Is it because conventional wisdom dictates that women are the weaker, more innocent gender? Or that men are more likely to abuse their power? Sorry, not in my experience. In fact, almost every workplace conflict I've been involved with has a woman, or a group of women, abusing her/their power at the center of it, typically whilst subtly employing the protection of political correctness in concealment of their sins. This isn't to say that women are innately *more* abusive, but that a thin slice of the population, including myself, have a natural capacity for both accidentally and, when desired, for intentionally provoking those whom are both politically correct and rationally incorrect, with these two characteristics containing considerable overlap.

It should go without saying that political correction is *highly* attractive to those whom lack the capacity or inclination to think for themselves, because, by enlisting it, they can *seem* correct even without having any clue as to what critical thought dictates the truth to be. They don't actually have to think, in other words, but can appear as though they have, and have come to the 'right' conclusions. It's also true that any contingent of the population that tends to get away with abuses (with males, especially white males, leading this charge *historically*, yes) also tends to commit them *because* of this; because they learn that they can commit abuses with impunity. And in the 'Me Too' era in which the 'woke' ironically tend to be sleep-walking along an uncritical, predetermined line of false propriety, the abuses of women are *far* more likely to be overlooked (or remain unrecognized) than the abuses of men, especially, in overlap with BLM, with the abuses of *white* men, as are the abuses of anyone standing on the politically correct side of any contemporary 'movement.'

Political correction, in other words, conditions the public to associate certain types of wrongdoing with certain narrow categories of people, even when, as is usually the case, the wrongdoers are just as likely to be those typically seen, and reflexively

regarded, as belonging to the category of 'victims.' My point? *Abusiveness knows no demographic*. Give more power, protection and privilege to *any* group, and it'll be used to abuse those with less power, protection or privilege. This has been proven in psychological experiments, though I'm unable to provide citations at this juncture. And this is yet another reason that a *universal* standard of social justice is the only *just* standard to be pursued. And when it comes to common trends, this is amongst the most common, so much so that it tends to be central to all politically correct injustice: various forms of 'progressives' who're just as bad as those they think that they're fighting, only in the opposite direction. They're the *false progressives*.

If we're to accurately consider the subject of social progressiveness, perhaps it's best at this juncture to suggest that, as referenced in the previous paragraph, that there's a foundation for all *true* social justice. If so, what is it? I say that social justice is defined by the fight for equality of rights, protections, privileges and opportunities *regardless* of anything; regardless of demographics; regardless of gender, creed, skin color, sexual orientation and any other typically overly-narrowly-defined form of identity. It's about *universal standards of justice*; about justice applicable to the *entire* population. Justice, in other words, is blind, or at least narrow: it sees but *one* identity: human. Yet, when it comes to the various forms of social justice/progress, to all the battles within the larger war, it's common to find those who believe, and want others to believe, that they're lined up on the 'correct side' as champions of the cause who, in *actuality*, are far less interested in equality and far more interested in finding a socially acceptable outlet for their frustrations in life, and for increasing the advantages of *their* identity, or the identity that it's fashionable to support, leading them to attack those on the historically dominant side of their particular social target. Thus, their *true* interest is in finding any justification that they can for reducing, degrading and slandering those belonging to the historically oppressive 'side,' even when their *specific* targets actually have nothing to do with those injustices.

This rather common contingent of false progressives is actually *far* larger than the that of true progressives, than the far thinner slice of true moral champions, and is driven by the desire to exact some form of vengeance against 'the abusers' and extract some form of increased advantage for 'the abused' that, upon critically-minded close inspection, actually has little to do with justice or equality of treatment, and much more to do with taking advantage of the contemporary trend towards politically correct popular perception in favor of their 'cause.' The false progressive is, in other words, attracted to the related movement not out of any grand idealistic desire for universal justice, as they would have as many people believe as possible, including themselves (their ego-based self-narrative), but, in secret truth, because the selected movement(s) present them with the opportunity to *appear* progressive, and to go on the offensive with impunity. All too often this is driven by anger and insecurities that they attach to the selected movement, rather than being driven by the movement itself, and by the original indignation and worthy intention of that movement: *justice*. It is, in other words, the progressive *persona* that the false

progressive is after; the appearance of righteousness affixable to their egos; this along with whatever else they may gain for 'their people' if/when they gain traction.

True progressives, on the other hand, are about universal principles and standards of justice, so that everyone progresses equally, and, thus, so too does society as a whole. While *false* progressives, of which there are many forms, as many as there are 'causes,' righteous or otherwise, are bigoted in favor of and/or against one or more particular groups, or categorizations, of people. They're myopic, biased, tribal and prejudicial about their 'progress.' If we examine their thoughts, speech, action and especially their *motives* closely enough, we realize through them that, unless what the progressive seeks is the equalization of standards of protection, privilege and opportunity, they're not entirely progressive, for the 'progress' that they seek is advantageous to those in their particular group (or the group that they're supporting), usually one regarded as a minority or an otherwise disadvantaged group, while also necessarily being disadvantageous to and unjust towards everyone outside of that group. It's the justice of divided standards; a form of 'justice' which itself shall need to be remedied; i.e. *injustice*. This form of 'progressivism' is thus undermined by a hypocritical support for the perpetuation of inequality created by the application of divided and unjust, rather than universal and just, principles and standards.

Personally, at least half of the 'feminists' whom I've interacted with are more accurately to be labeled *misandrists*. They're angry, often for various reasons, including feeling powerless (a common feeling amongst *all* people, and more likely rooted in *economic*, class-based inequality), and with many of these reasons having nothing to do with sociosexual inequality, and more to do with men in general being the embodiments of patriarchal abuses, and thus making for convenient targets. And they'll attack whenever they see an opportunity, truth and justice be damned.

To cite another example, recent to this writing I had a date with a woman from a discussion group that I started here in Bend, Oregon. When we got into the subject of this book, in *every* example wherein I related what I experienced as a case of unjust treatment from a woman, both within and without the context of the book (admittedly I was playing devil's advocate, as I often do, in this case to see how far her hypocritical false progressivism went), her reflexive response was to excuse and defend the woman/women, *every time*, regardless of the validity of my arguments, which she reflexively dismissed without due consideration, all whilst continually speciously twisting my words to suit her 'feminism,' as if women can do no wrong, or, when they do, it's only because they're balancing out the wrongs done to them by men, thus making their injustices justifiable, in her highly prejudicial perspective. She is, in other words, for the empowerment of women *regardless* of the disempowerment and impact upon men, including denying men the considerations and protections which feminism is said to fight for on behalf of women. Taken to its logical conclusion, were this type of 'feminism' successful, it would eventually result in men bemoaning 'the matriarchy' much the same as women bemoan 'the

patriarchy.' It would, in other words, trade one form of inequality and injustice for another. Hence, it's a form of false progress, and, I therefore hope, false feminism.

And this phenomenon is by no means limited to the realm of sexism, for it's the same with *many* BLMers. MLK's universal equality and 'table of brotherhood,' the platinum standard for the movement against racism, and for social justice in general, as far as I'm concerned, has nothing to do with the true beliefs and regards of many of the most vocal BLMers. They're secretly of the Malcolm X set that just wants to attack the perceived grouping of persecuting people. Again, name the historical injustice, and you'll find false progressives of this order; 'feminists' who hate men and are at least as sexist as those that they target; BLMers who hate the 'dominant white man' who are at least as racist as he is; homosexuals who hate either heterosexuals or women, or both. They're all looking for an excuse to attack their targets whilst *appearing* to be on the side of social justice, but they're actually just as bad as those they target and they would, by their words and actions, perpetrate the same injustice in the reverse direction if awarded the power and opportunity to do so. Abuse with impunity whilst wearing the façade of victimhood! False progressives of the politically correct order unite, and cancel all reason, truth and justice that doesn't fit your falsehood! Hooray for your 'wokeness!' Any chance of cancelling false progressives? No, I thought not, they're just too many of them to shove in front of this mirror.

The politically incorrect truth is that women are equal to men in the propensity to abuse their power, the difference being the common methods and manner of the abuse, and that the prevailing modern notion of gender power disparity in working relations is largely anachronistic. Whereas men abusing women is more likely to lead to a "no means no" situation, the abuse of men by women tends not to present that opportunity; it's less overt, more deceptive, and more manipulative of popular perception and assumptions. And I would argue that *true* feminism is about the aforementioned equality of rights and protections *regardless* of gender, not about attacking modern man for past patriarchal abuses based upon inequality, and that, therefore, *true* feminists possess the power to recognize the truth of this editorial, whereas the false, self-righteous type of 'feminist' lacks the ability to do so.

Perhaps that's what modern 'masculinism' is really about: not attempting to reinforce outmoded ideas of masculine toughness and self-reliance, like never apologizing or being able to admit wrongdoing or the liking of things associated with a 'soft side,' like poetry and puppies (most of which are based upon insecurity and misinformation, just like false progressivism – in terms of 'manhood,' it takes *far* more strength to admit wrongdoing and vulnerability than to pretend infallibility and invulnerability, ye tough guys); perhaps masculinism is about realizing that *true* strength is being able to admit that we like certain things (including young women sending signals to our biological programming), that we make mistakes (like being too lonely and weak to refuse them when they amplify this signaling and encourage the resultant attractions, in my case, as semi-fictionally told through *Holier Than Thou*),

and that we're just as vulnerable and needing of others as women are, admitting and even embracing all of this whilst simultaneously countering the contemporary current that pushes the narrative that men are the more abusive and 'creepy' sex.

Maybe masculinism can be the first modern movement that not only reconciles itself with the injustices of the past, but which acknowledges that any *truly* progressive movement fights for equality of rights, privileges, protections and opportunities *regardless* of demographic considerations. Maybe masculinism can come to mean this, above all: that *true* men, like true women, fight not on behalf of one or more disadvantaged or misunderstood contingents of contemporary society, but for *all* of society, applying the same standards and empowerments to *everyone*. This progressive fight would entail discarding all that which belongs to the mentality of divided standards and its judgments, and all that which relies upon arguments that aren't only outdated and encouraging of those divided, prejudicial standards, but which recognizes the fact that it's those very divided standards which prevent progress, for they condition the easily persuaded public to fight largely mythical monsters rather than focusing their fight on one universal standard and struggle.

Women have had *more* power, if anything, in the professional realms I've moved in and out of in seeking my best fit in this world, and not just within the organization that inspired this book, where the ostensible 'man in charge' was *highly* influenced, if not outright controlled, by a cohort of female supervisors. Moreover, several of these female supervisors were friends outside of work with the other young women working there, and it was my sense that they were all constantly competing with one another for favoritism within that clique. After my misunderstanding with Miranda, this ultimately led to her supervisor friend employing politically correct presumptions and corporate-liability-based fears to make me look like the monster that was harassing young women, when the truth is that I don't think that I've 'hit on' a woman my entire life, much less pressed unwanted advances (I'm the opposite of this, if anything), and that, in the case of the circumstances of *Holier Than Thou*, it was the young women who instigated the flirtation, and encouraged our ongoing correspondence, *and* constantly gossiped amongst themselves, building this little sociopolitical apparatus at the center of it all, of which I, in my weakness and want of love, became a target. The official judgment, of course, was inconsiderate of *all* of these factors. This was, of course, why I alluded to the Salem Witch Trials by placing this story near Salem, MA. Because *this* is the modern witch hunt. All popular perception, no truth; what things can be made to appear like for one-sided benefit.

For one reason or another I keep finding myself in similar positions, and I honestly believe it's because of my vulnerability; that I love too passionately, and present a target that even a 'good person' can't help but strike at; it's just too tempting, and too gratifying to the ego, to have that much power and never wield it. The only woman that I've ever loved (*not* Miranda) used my love for her against me, through subtle manipulations and purposeful neglects and denials. I tell you this not in the

attempt to provoke pathos, but to demonstrate the fact that my love for particular women has consistently been met with sly forms of emotional and psychological abuse. That's simply my experience. I think I'm inviting it by my vulnerability, loneliness, weakness and desire (there's no separation between these), and it's had the effect to where I now refuse to show any affection for a woman, knowing that to show undeniable desire is to display a weakness that will most likely be exploited.

In the 'real world,' Miranda herself made it clear to me, during her ongoing, overt flirtation which, in truth, made me harassing *her* nearly impossible: "Young women like older men." What she *didn't* say is that it's the older men almost exclusively who pay for anything that goes awry because of this fact, and the fact that the feeling is mutual with the older men, regardless of what your husbands say, ladies. I'm *not* saying this automatically makes it okay for the man to act upon this fact, and that every woman eighteen or older is on the same level and 'fair game,' but if he's unattached, and especially if he possesses a natural affection for her (I maintain that I was falling in love with Miranda, regardless of anyone's judgements), then...

Let me again suggest the possibility that *true* feminists, whether men or women, see through the self-righteousness that plagues the movement, and aren't reflexively condemnatory of men who find themselves in conflict with women; especially women who think like this critic, and like the two women from the previous examples. Can we get an official ruling on this please, once and for all? Is it wrong for men to admit the truth of their programming, or to follow through with it, *especially*, as in this case, when the young women are equally, if not more, inviting of and responsible for initiating such trysts and potential relationships? Is it impossible for a young woman to have a healthy, natural relationship with an older man that's mutually enriching on *every* level? No? Then is calling such an admission by men "creepy" thereby anything but incorrect political correctness, typically spurred by self-righteousness, insecurity and/or jealousy? There are a *lot* of lonely men out there who, by causal nature, happen to be readily beguiled by women in their sexual prime. Does denouncing them as "creepy" thereby do anything but dismiss and extend the pain of their loneliness and pretend that their biological programming is illegitimate?

But back to *Holier Than Thou* and how the review that spurred this essay is a concerning commentary on the largely failing art of contemporary criticism: This critic didn't allow his or her self to explore, understand or appreciate the wealth and beauty of this book as confirmed by other readers, saying next to nothing about the ideas, themes and core events which any *quality* review can't ignore, simply because he/she had an issue with the protagonist talking to the teenagers he was surrounded by (both in the book and in the real circumstances upon which the book is based), and with his having sex with a nineteen-year-old, which isn't illegal or, I'd argue, even immoral. This triggers a critical question: Is it not the job of the reviewer to see past their own narrow-minded prejudices and read the book for what *else* it is, outside of their inclination towards condescending sociosexual judgments? Is flushing the book

down the proverbial drain due to their 'values' not an example of unprofessionalism? One of *BookLife's* editors (and the likely reviewer considering the content of our correspondence), in an email, says that he expects the book industry as a whole to read the book the same way. In other, unspoken words, to not *really* read it.

Having poured so much of myself into this work and being so steeped in the wealth of ideas, allusions and language that it contains, I'm honestly shocked that such an ugly, dismissive result is even possible. I'm experiencing it as 'cognitive dissonance,' similar to how I experienced Trump being elected U.S. President. Like: *Really?! This amoral showboating clown is president?! And if it's to be common to the book industry, as the aforementioned editor predicts, then minds are far more closed and controlled by a need to appear politically correct than I realized, even as one constantly accosted by this fact. It raises a related question as to the critique of literature: Do you even need to like the protagonist to appreciate his story?*

Of all the reactions that I imagined fielding for this book, this wasn't one of them. I didn't think that it was possible that a book reviewer at a top review company wouldn't *really* read the book (a review for which a considerable sum of money was paid before the reviewer shit on it and flushed it down the drain, along with my rent), and could be so narrow-mindedly judgmental and dismissive. From other readings and reviews it's clear that this reviewer became biased against the protagonist, which he/she knew was based upon the writer, and allowed that bias to determine their review thereafter, as *none* of the beautiful language and ideas in the book were given anything but the briefest of mentions. I thought book reviewers were meant to be the opposite: intelligent, open-minded people who can think beyond the lines that narrow the perspective of others. Can allowing one's biases to not just influence, but *dictate*, one's 'professional review,' be considered anything *but* unprofessional?

It makes me wonder to what extent the book industry is thereby constrained and directed as a whole, if books are dismissed and denied their due consideration because of similar value issues possessed by critics who ultimately determine which books are broadly read? Should it not be that the offending books, if possessing laudable attributes outside of a critics' moral qualms, be labeled *provocative* rather than being simply cast into the fire? Certainly this would challenge and edify the readership beyond the capacity of playing moralist and, ultimately, blocker and burner of books, keeping those approved within preset lines. If nothing else it should be ethically incumbent upon reviewers to bow out of the review process of any project with which they're morally misaligned, knowing that they can't provide a fair critical assessment. If *BookLife* is typical of the gatekeepers set between the reading and writing worlds, God help us, as nothing will make it past the guards that too strongly challenges presumptions over what constitutes moral correctness.

Not that we're comparable writers, but D.H. Lawrence certainly faced the same. The reaction of this critic has, as another silver lining, helped me realize how appropriate

the inclusion of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* as an inspiration for the main relationship in the book really is. Miranda and I discussed it a number of times, in fact. *BookLife* is here playing the same role as Lawrence's critics in the early twentieth century: Make sure no one reads this creepy trash! As I finish typing this reflection, all I can see in my head is the woman I dated screaming at Alex for wanting Miranda, and a red-faced middle-aged male reviewer reading *Holier Than Thou* in his bedroom beside his wife while his eighteen-year-old daughter is across the hall with her friends whispering about the boys, and *men*, they want to have sex with, hexing me in his mind, and likely to his wife, whilst simultaneously being ashamed of himself for desiring those friends, secretly wishing it was *he* they were whispering about (*American Beauty*, anyone?), unwittingly trained to think it "creepy" to desire a 'girl' before she becomes a 'woman' after passing some arbitrary age line. It again makes me wonder about the extent to which feminism has been coopted by and inseparably entangled with forms of self-righteous anger and empty indignation; tied to masks hiding the actual source(s) of the issue, those issues coming in many forms, including jealousy, prudery, misandry, insecurity, peer pressure, fear of political correctness and the social and egotistic consequences of going against what's deemed 'correct' by the baaing majority of the 'woke.' Being angry at the flower for blooming, and the bee for being drawn to its scent. Is that what feminism has been reduced to?

On an emotional and psychological level this review, being written about a project and a period of my life that was traumatizing, has been experienced as a re-traumatization. I've been judged and condemned all over again, with the deceitful plotters *again* having been exonerated, and with the editor and his *BookLife* compatriots casting further stones! The same can be said for my date with the woman from my discussion group; I woke up the next morning feeling like my psyche had been raped. And I'd imagine that most women would do the same, and happily, feeling like they're dealing a blow in favor of the good guys, when the truth is that they're dealing a blow *against* a good guy; against a *true* progressive. And here I thought Alex was dead, and would be spared further pain. It seems it's the curse of the intelligent and, by virtue of being uninhibited, unconventional thinkers, of the naturally provocative, to pay the price for the political correctness and coupled rational and moral *incorrectness* of the conventionally-minded majority.

Throughout history the self-righteous have played at policing morals, by which, even absent legal authority and position, they pretend to possess a superiority over those whom they judge, and seldom with good results. Certainly this is the very last role that a critic should play, for whom it must be considered essential to the role of progressing literature that they open minds and suspend prejudices for the sake of more and enriching perspectives, rather than, like this critic, assure they remain closed, and such prejudices be perpetuated. Punish me not for your prudery, whilst I remind you that the history of humankind in most regions of the world, including in America prior to European invasion, considers a woman ready for sex when she's able to become pregnant, and that eighteen is a rather arbitrary number, not one

dictated by absolute moral truth. I say this, again, not to suggest that all young women are 'fair game' when they're able to reproduce, but to suggest that what constitutes moral correctness can't be contained by anything so black-and-white.

As I finish this, I'm just now realizing that there's a distinct possibility that this is an entirely political decision on the part of *BookLife* and *Publisher's Weekly*, relative to the 'book world.' It's entirely possible that, realizing the book doesn't shine favorable light upon a certain major book retailer alluded to herein, they're trying to gut it; to belittle and minimize me and make certain that the broader reading world doesn't pick this up. If this is true, and it makes sense from a motive standpoint, which tends to be revelatory, then this review ultimately constitutes an even more detrimental, dangerous version of censorship. It would essentially constitute ownership of the book approval process; a form of control that isn't unlike the controls which this book battles. No, dear reader, this isn't necessarily paranoia, it's 'just business.'

P.S. Since *BookLife* condemned me as a "creep" via *Holier Than Thou*, *Publisher's Weekly*, their parent company, refuses to review anything that I write, taking their role as 'critic' to the extreme of censor, representing the enemy of open minds: prejudicially prejudging the work of the artist relative to their moral regard of him or her, failing to honor the fact that the most valuable writing doesn't pander to moral or political conventions, but challenges them. The worst thing that a critic can do is play into the 'cancel culture' that dismisses the value of a creator because of a moral judgment, thereby inhibiting the dissemination of his/her work and its value.

Part Two: Machiavellian Modernity Makes for Words of War

From the Introduction of the Poetry Collection *The Empress Needs No Clothes*

"Society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members. Society is a joint-stock company, in which the members agree, for the better securing of his bread to each shareholder, to surrender the liberty and culture of the eater. The virtue in most request is conformity. Self-reliance is its aversion. (Society) loves not realities and creators, but names and customs. Whoso would be a man, must be a nonconformist."

- Ralph Waldo Emerson

In my experience, 'politically correct' is usually a euphemism for *rationality incorrect*. If someone is putting on self-righteous airs in making their point, knowing that most are reflexively conditioned to pat them on the back for towing the pretentiously pious line, chances are that they're wrong. For, in yet another inconvenient, unpopular truth, political correctness tends to be employed by those ruled by fear and popular perception; by those whom are afraid to have a thought, much less say a thing out loud, if it may misalign with what the mob says is correct, and thereafter incur its censure, and be condemned to shame and 'cancellation.' Hence it is that, as Emerson noted, there can be no manhood, nor womanhood, absent the courage to speak politically incorrect truths, without which a man is not a man, and a woman is not a woman, both remaining but boys and girls looking to the tyrannical parents of popular perception for the permission to speak their hearts and minds, their intellectual and emotional faculties thereby not their own, but extensions of the modern tyranny of the mob that rules over them through the pretense of piety. Oft has this oversized net of appearance been cast over alleged wrongdoers, and has the mindless mob instantly begun to celebrate their seizure, and delight in the downfall of the iniquitous thereby seized, and congratulated one another for enforcing their piety, only for the rationally removed sitting on the sidelines to whisper amongst their minority contingent: "There's nothing in the net. Socrates slipped through its holes during their celebration of his capture. They shan't haul him ashore, nor force him to imbibe the hemlock."

In stark contrast to political correctness, philosophy uncovers the classical; that which survives and thrives in all ages, for it's true regardless of time and circumstance. Machiavelli, however, realized that few people penetrate the readily-perceivable surface, and so recognized the superiority of the show in persuading the public by manipulating the majority mind, saying: "Few see who you really are, everyone sees who you appear to be," going on to explain that the few who *do* see the truth haven't the ability to overcome the masses ruled by

what the Greeks called “ethos,” the perception of authority and credibility, or to prevail over the enforcers, whether they be of the state or the mob. Thus does humanity remain mired in Machiavellian rule; not just in politics and business, but in every strategy and art-form; indeed, in every shared thought, action and creation where perception begets deception, in betrayal of morality and divergence from truth.

Because of this, my pen *is* my sword. I’m at war every time I pick it up; at war with the Machiavellian-overlorded masses ruled by popular perception, to start with, but also with the systemic injustices of a bourgeois, conservative society and value system hailing from imperialist history, with the rational incorrectness of self-righteously ‘woke’ political correctness, with self-destructive demons, with the phantoms of unrequited loves, with psychological traumas, and with the myopic judgments of certain critics whom shall never understand Oscar Wilde’s refrain: “To define is to limit;” whom, within the context of this and other poetry projects, define the parameters of ‘good poetry’ in a manner evoking in me a response similar to Robin Williams’ character in *Dead Poets Society*, when he has the class read the intro “Understanding Poetry” that attempts to reduce the sacred art-form into a rating system that produces a value for every poem based upon its objectified artfulness and importance. His response to the reading of the reductive intro: “Excrement.”

I, too, have been regularly reduced in this manner, and, like Williams’ character, believe such hubristic attempts to ‘define good poetry’ based upon some sort of technical analysis, and upon rules as to what good poetry consists of, and what’s not allowed, to be inherently limiting, which is antithetical to poetry, whose power, as I noted in *Rosebud*, comes principally from the fact that it *isn’t* limited; that it laughs in the face of prosaic boundaries and assumptions. Anyone who judges a poem based upon anything other than what it evokes within them, typically inspired by its artistic, romantic, philosophical and spiritual insights, who lets not the wave of it wash over them naturally, and subsume them, such that they become indistinct from it, but whom, instead, acts to divert and constrain that wave, judging the poetry by ‘what’s popular’ or ‘what’s acceptable’ or ‘what’s expected,’ has no business being a critic in my mind. Alas, most critics offer little to nothing but conformity to popular perception and prejudice, either jumping on the under-construction bandwagon as early as possible, so that they may acquire attention in leading its charge, else interceding in its construction, pretending superiority in recognizing inferiority.

My father, having heard me convey my convictions countless times, often to his own irritation, once admonished me: “Don’t take on the whole world at once.” And he’s right, I’ve long been at war with the manmade world, the list going on and on, feeling parasitism imbedded across the whole of the social body: in its prevailing powers and misleading paradigms; in all its mind-narrowing, blind-allegiance-inducing propaganda posing as truth and patriotism; in its plutocracy- pretending-democracy using purchased ‘representatives’ whom ‘lead’ an imperialism-is-now-globalization society built by greed, ego, exclusion, exploitation, manipulation and mindlessly-consuming, overfed customers; in the propagation of petty, overbearing, punitive ideas of a God loyal to one ‘race,’ which occludes the true, perfectly inclusive, non-dualist, inseparable nature of being; in all the

'realists' pretending to be more rational than idealists whilst secretly being the craven, oppressive immoralists hiding behind misconceptions of what constitutes reality and human nature, and with most of that narrow conception of 'reality' actually being an artifice of evolving imperialism used to justify corruption. And yet, while I feel the weight of it all and sometimes feel as though I'll capitulate and crumble, I've never regarded any of this internal warfare, which finds form on the page, as a *choice*.

Much like love, there is no choice. You don't intentionally walk into it, it simply manifests itself from the forces of being bound to nature, like a natural, gravitational force that you *fall* into, and may only fight in futility. My convictions, like my feelings, represent an inherent, inborn truth having nothing to do with choice. So, no, I didn't 'choose' this path, but, whether or not I can confidently repeat the trite 'it chose me' allusion to a higher calling, certainly I *can* say that walking it is compulsion more than intention; more innate than calculated, or even considered.

When one's nature so strongly misaligns with the conventional wisdom and ways of the world, is one's rebellion against that world anything but being his or her self, and having a right to his or her natural existence, following his or her natural purpose? I challenge, provoke and reveal egotistic insecurities by my nature, *not* by malicious intent, as many would like to believe in assuaging their egos by pretending I'm just being malicious. Nope. I'm just that rare, principle-led person, though I do confess that I'm often aware of this natural effect, and that the imp in me that drives people towards uncomfortable realizations likes to come out and play.

And I'd argue that this same imp is alive and well within *all* intelligent, moral, contemplative people, and that only fools conditioned by unwise conventional wisdom sourced from the stale, empty rhetoric of controlling institutions would consider him evil, or condemn the imp and his invaluable role of 'playing Devil's advocate,' a phrase which a Christian family member once implied was offensive because it mentions 'the dark lord,' something which, to me, only reinforces the fact that those who see the world through the Christian bubble have been blinded, and love to self-righteously bully others into submission whilst patting one another on the back for their fight against us 'heathens.' Not to mention the disturbing irony contained in the fact that the common intellectual exercise of exposing any claim or argument to doubt, and the existence of doubt in general, is made to seem a 'sin' and 'lack of faith' that the Church uses to shame any 'doubters' into peer-pressured conformity by associating it with the Devil. Tell me, why would an institution whose power is built on a false form of faith requiring blind obedience condition its sheep to see doubt as an evil promoted by an advocate of 'the dark lord?' Might it be because doubt leads to the revelation of truth, and that the truth sets us free from religion?

In the course of pursuing my natural purpose, I've run afoul of a great many who render judgment based upon various forms of misunderstanding, self-righteousness, insecurity and prejudice. And though I tire of being at war, I've come to accept that this

war represents the purpose of rare principled people like me: to take issue with what needs to be taken issue with, for the sake of truth and progress. I've been censored by *Amazon*, who canceled my 'Amazon Merchant' account because of t-shirt designs that criticized conservatism. And I've had ads "rejected" by *Instagram* on numerous occasions, for attempting to promote an image of a book cover called "Heresies of a Heathen, Revelations of the Spiritual But Not Religious," which they said violated their policy against "profanity and insulting language," a clear enforcement of Christian beliefs based upon the pretense that my 'spiritual but not religious' ideas are offensive, when, to me, the attempt of religion to control what constitutes divinity and to separate people from God is what's *actually* offensive. But it's not just religion's false piety that arms the political-correctness-police whom patrol major media and enforce self-righteousness therein. *Instagram* also rejected my attempt to promote a post and webpage entitled "A Dawning Prophecy," presumably because it was critical of the 'free market.'

And that's not the only time I've been bitten by the Meta Monster. In the past I've also had an ideological project blocked by *Facebook*, for attempting to promote a book called "Time for True Democracy" that suggested that the U.S. is a democracy in name only; that it's actually a plutocratic republic whose construct violates inviolable principles of democracy. *Facebook* informed me that my promotion was 'hacked' and had to be taken down, which I assume means that either they or the intelligence agencies who gather and monitor information and 'threats to national security' through them believe that they have the right to determine who's a patriot and who's treasonous, when all progressive thinkers know that the common conception of a patriot who reflexively agrees with the powers that rule this country is anything but the *true* patriot, who is, by stark contrast, one who fights for the betterment of the *people*, even and, perhaps especially, when those people thereby being protected and served actively condemn you as the enemy.

I'm not even going to begin to get into the number of times that I've faced the most demonic of attacks on social media by self-described Christians for posting writings and promoting literary projects of a 'spiritual but not religious' nature that they'd deemed "satanic," accusing me of spreading the writings of the Devil and often labeling me Satan himself, saying things like "that's exactly what I'd write if I were Satan," all for daring to see through the propaganda and oppressive mind controls inherent to the historical development and contemporary use of Christianity, for *knowing* that God/Spirit will never fit into any one religion, and for identifying and detailing the ways in which religion is antithetical to true spirituality. I've also been booted by numerous *Facebook* discussion groups for, what was it, questioning the language of the BLM movement, in one instance, arguing that many of the phrases that they were using only exacerbated the racial divide, comparing them to Malcom X, arguing that true progress instead requires the MLK tact of tearing down lines of identity and inviting *everyone* to participate in producing universal justice, rather than making it a 'black versus white' issue; and for espousing 'socialist ideas' in

another discussion group that said that socialist rhetoric wasn't allowed, because I was arguing for economic and commercial systems that did a better job of distributing the fruits of the economy, and that awarded some degree of equity to every worker. How can a discussion group that bills itself as 'progressive' and 'philosophical' bar the discussion of socialism, or, indeed, of *any* ideology that takes issue with the status quo? So much for freedom of belief and expression; logic, wisdom and justice be damned.

In oppressive fact, media-based corporations possessing so much power that the individual can't do anything to counter their politically correct censorship, and that enforce that often irrational and immoral political correctness by blocking communications and the promotion of non-conforming projects, not only represents a breach of the supposedly sacrosanct American value of free speech, but also represents a serious threat to the public wellbeing by preventing the public discourse and information-dissemination endemic to the real, once-honored purpose of any truly moral 'fourth estate.' Critics, in fact, have been given too much power in the U.S., and all too often judge the merit of ideas and projects from prejudicial perspectives informed by false, conventional conceptions, standing on artificially high ground, looking down on the *actual* truth-tellers. All told 'freedom of speech' is largely mythical when the major media corporations that control the sharing of information and the production and promotion of literary and other media projects censure that information, production and promotion when it doesn't adhere to their politically-correct, traditionally-based, Christian-value-conforming standards, thereby blocking progress under the pretense of blocking evil, effectively promoting evil themselves, albeit unwittingly. What was it Voltaire said? "To find out who (or what) rules over you, simply find out who (or what) you're not allowed to criticize." In modernity, political correctness is at the heart of this censorship, a force posing as progressive whilst perhaps being the greatest opposition to progression in existence. Telling the truth and being a moral person means *constantly* being at odds with its false truths and fake moral superiority. Speech, it seems, is only free so long as it refrains from rendering judgment against institutions and beliefs that Americans are meant to hold sacrosanct, especially when those institutions and beliefs prey upon the very people who tend, in their conditioning and gullibility, to judge their protectors as enemies. Thus am I the target of attacks by the victims of systemic oppression.

Add that to the list: people who pass judgment absent understanding, and in the prejudicial reinforcement of their own bias, in service of egos bound to political correctness. And not just through social media, but through the control of the art world as well. One particularly vile critic reduced *Rosebud*, a previous poetry collection, to an entirely mechanical analysis, dismissing what I'd regarded as a wealth of progressive ideas, tortured, unrequited romanticism and mystical experience because my technique didn't conform to his expectations, and because he believed poetry to be an unsuitable conveyance for ideology and conviction. I believe this viewpoint to not only be nonsensical, and belonging to a vain, pretentious school of thought sold to the show, but a condemnation of the entire concept

and purpose of the philosopher-poet, half of whom is a *philosopher*, and, thus, dedicated to exploring and espousing *ideas* rich in meaning, not just producing pretty, elaborate lingual patterns and showing off through splendid displays of technical savvy.

Read my other work and you'll know: belief, ideology, conviction... these aren't affects for me, but the very catalysts of creation. They're not added to make my writing *seem* any such way, they are its very provenance; the force compelling its formation. I don't create in order to *appear* creative, or because I want to believe I'm creative, or to be 'on the cutting edge,' and thereby accepted as a 'modern poet,' having once been criticized for sounding more like a Victorian poet than a modern one. Again, I prefer the term 'classic.' For I don't write for any reason except that I'm daily compelled to write, through myriad inspirations, entering into me every day from endless sources; films, books, conversations... Unfortunately, however, my experience dictates that poetry has largely fallen into the Machiavellian trap of popular perception, disregarding anything that seems too 'real.'

Akin to the pretension of 'modern art,' it seems it's not only that the popularity of poetry is *increased* in inverse proportion to its perceived weightiness and substance, but is actually *dependent* upon being entirely devoid of it, as if the reader fills the poem with greater value by its inscrutability, a hollow receptacle that's only of value if it can be filled with anything and everything, the reader *pretending* that what they stuff into it is what it was *meant* to contain, even when such notions never even entered the mind of the poet, like the modern artist. Thus the pretension. It's as though modern art, like poetry, is valued relative to its receptivity to the arrogance of the viewer/reader, meant to be as indefinite as possible so as to act like a gravitational force for their pride and presumption. Like most things, this is a double-edged sword, as it creates a worthy platform for the idea of every work of art being a mirror for the patron, permitting them to exercise their intellects and imagination in the attempt to draw personal meaning from the work, thereby making it customizable to every patron. Yet, if this means that anything with a definite motive and meaning is precluded from being an 'acceptable' form of the art, the philosopher is banned, which, as a philosopher and poetry lover, I find unacceptable.

The conventional wisdom seems to be that the more apparent the meaning, and the philosophical, spiritual or ideological import, the heavier and more opaque the poem becomes, the more it sinks to the bottom of the literary sea, never seeing the light of day represented by the reading public. The 'best poetry,' therefore, is regarded like a floating filament, or a translucent and vacuous vessel reflecting a shiny, unfixed formation, empty of the writers' beliefs and convictions, which, it's insinuated, are only appropriate to prose, and even then tend only to be valued by a thin, well-educated minority of readers.

I'm haunted by the psychological scars remaining from the attacks of the aforementioned critic, whom almost convinced me of the unworthiness of my poetry, giving my work one out of five stars in a review whose derisions included rebukes of my "unconvincing convictions," my "unsophisticated technique," and my failure to live up to his expectations of the stylistic strategies of the "modern poet," as if anything that's about anything of

significance, or that follows the style of previous eras, is unworthy of a contemporary audience, entirely failing to recognize the fact that *classic* means *standing the tests of time*, and that *authenticity* requires *not* imitating a certain modern or accepted style or strategy simply because it's likely to beguile and be rubber-stamped by readers. Were we face to face, dear reader, I may well inquire of you at this juncture, for the sake of exploring this important principle: What do *you* affix to *your* appearance, to bedazzle your way past people's perception of your conventionality, for the sake of popular acceptance? And so we come to my 'caveat lector' forewarning to readers, and to certain types of 'tough critics' whom, like the aforementioned, I've had the displeasure of corresponding with and being woefully misunderstood by on previous projects:

If you believe that poetry should be devoid of meaning and conviction, this book isn't for you. And if you're looking for adherence to traditional forms and/or flashy, 'sophisticated' shows of experimental technique, again, you've come to the wrong place. I employ poetry precisely because I believe it to be the *freest* form of expression; that it can't be confined, or bullied into critical submission. Also, I'm not really a student of poetry, I write more than I read (typically in a free-form manner), my subject matter tends to be provocative and of a spiritual and philosophical nature that is likely to offend or go over the head of the average reader (especially those existing within the overlapping Christian and right-wing echo chambers), and I've yet to emulate popular writers, to the chagrin of the aforementioned critic. In addition, in my own estimation, at least, the convictions compelling me to write result in my placing far more emphasis on substance than on style, which, in my experience, doesn't attract as much attention as those bent on winning readership through 'the show;' through writing in verse judged as more elegant or new-aged; that is, on writing in an ostentatious, pretentious, strategically 'avant garde' manner, as a means of targeting those who place poetry in the same vein as 'modern art,' which I think makes such work deceptive and disingenuous.

Whereas I like to think that I'm classically-compelled, the winners of every poetry competition I've ever been a part of are surface-level impressive, using elaborate and experimental styles which seem to bewitch most poetry readers. They could be writing about almost anything, with the result being much the same. I'll admit that such poetry is entertaining on some level, and that I likely need to open myself up to more experimentation, and yet, ultimately, finding a way to ooh and ahh the reader will never be what actually compels me to write. I write when I'm inspired by the revelation of a truth which my heart recognizes, and whispers to my mind, like the Spirit (or 'God') sharing a secret with a spiritual record-keeper. Sure, it may well be possible to be persuasive on both levels simultaneously, to make the substance sparkle, yet I don't subscribe to the notion that all entertainment needs to be flashy in order to capture the attention of the patron, even as I'm painfully aware of the modern addiction to overly-sweetened, artificial fare, and that the best films are financial flops whilst inane superhero flicks rule the box office.

In fact, most of my writing, whether in verse or prose, seems to be undervalued in this 'style over substance' manner by most critics and readers, many of whom focus on the tiniest

aspect of the bigger picture, and thereby entirely miss the forest for the trees. Reviews come in which criticize this or that element of my storycraft and style of verse or prose without even going into the *ideas* presented in the work, as if those ideas are entirely secondary to a more fundamental, in-demand form of entertainment. *Kirkus*, for example, the big-name review company guarding the gates of popular literary perception, has reviewed two of my books thus far. The book of poems, *Rosebud*, they called "intriguing but uneven..." and *Holier Than Thou*, the novella, they called "imaginative but uneven..." As alluded to earlier in this intro, they labeled my style of verse old-fashioned, "as if belonging to a Victorian poet rather than a modern one." All that seems to matter is that I'm set 'evenly' within boundary lines. Alas, perhaps I should simply be thankful that I'm 'intriguing and imaginative,' but that's not enough to gain any great readership.

BookLife, by comparison, the review wing of *Publisher's Weekly*, turned in the most dismissive and small-minded review of my novella *Holier Than Thou* possible, so much so that I suffered cognitive dissonance whilst reading it. They condemned the protagonist from the outset and thereafter belittled a work filled with spiritual and philosophical value that their prejudice prohibited them from recognizing, or, at least, from giving any credit to. In correspondence with one of their editors, he said simply: "You wrote an intentionally provocative book, and it provoked a response," as if the motives for that response are immaterial to the purpose of reviewing and recommending a book. As I write this (as an addition to the original appendix), I can report that, a few days ago, *BookLife* sent me an email informing me that, with regards to *Holier Than Thou*, "our editors have decided not to send it out for review," even though that review took place a year ago, and I long ago copied and pasted it into the back of *Holier Than Thou*, along with a pair of reflections on the 'art of criticism' which they provoked. Those reflections, especially of the *BookLife* review, which I entitled "*BookLife is Holier Than Thou*," are now inseparable from the work itself, in my mind, completing that work by inviting the reader and the public at large to contemplate the larger context in which all writing is placed: the popular reception of literature. I believe that its good has been thereby unearthed in its capacity to provoke and challenge the evils which this intro takes issue with.

Yet, despite running headlong into the wall of critical and commercial expectation, the narrow scope in which most see 'entertaining reading,' and the fact that I'm clearly not 'proper' enough to be well-received by the majority, I'm not overly concerned with such parameters, even as the *Kirkuses* of the world suggest that I'll have to be in order to pass through their guarded gates and enter the gilded tower. Why? *Because I'm an ideologue*. Again, if you're at all familiar with my work you already know that I've developed my own ideological foundation, and that all of my writing is naturally built upon that foundation. In fact, I strongly identify with Emerson's line on the overlap of philosophy and poetry: "The true philosopher and the true poet are one, and a beauty, which is truth, and a truth, which is beauty, is the aim of them both."

So while I'm bound by heart and principle to the belief that *ideas*, and the big-picture truth which those ideas come together to compose, are of paramount importance, the

surface seems to rule the popular perception; the manner in which the writing is *presented*, rather than what it's about or what it evokes. The result is rather tragic from my perspective: the quality and depth of the ideas, the philosophy, the spiritual allusions etc., receive little, if any, common consideration. It's as if the reading world says: We don't care *what* you have to say, we care *how* you say it. My readers, on the other hand, should I ever come to cultivate them, will be more about the 'what,' the style being but an enhancement of that core value. I write for the slim, underserved customer standing at the margins, peering into the guts of the artificial, inflamed, bloated market, wondering where the heart of it is.

Yes, you shall certainly sense my bitterness at not yet having been valued as a writer or a thinker in a modern world of mass, largely mindless, quick-fix, overly-sweetened, nutritionally-void consumption where both writing and thinking are not only tragically undervalued (ironically, the 'educated' of the Victorian era were *far* better and more broadly educated than the so-called educated are today, where 'education' is mostly about profitable specialization), but seem valued less and less each day, making work that provokes contemplation more and more the fare of the slim customer. But be assured that this introduction was motivated by more than my bitterness and connected frustrations, which I hope you'll read as honest vulnerability more than how one person read it: as "pathetic." I also write this as a wistful longing for a bygone era in which such subjects as philosophy, romanticism and non-religious theology (today most people erroneously conflate the words 'religion' and 'spirituality') were understood and valued as more than 'intellectual masturbation;' more than egotistical, self-gratifying exercises, and in which the *quality of ideas* were revered as much, or more, than how they were presented.

I'll continue to evolve as a writer, and to seek *constructive* criticism, and yet I'll also continue to pair this ongoing development with the seeking of a rare readership: those who're entertained by *more* than the show, and can value something that *doesn't* adhere to traditional forms, pretentious shows of sophistication and easy entertainments, and the expectations that they engender within the vast majority of 'readers,' whom themselves are, tragically, an ever-rarer breed. I sincerely hope that, should you accept the challenge that this book represents, you'll feel some fraction of the elucidation that provoked me to write it.

Part Three: Gatekeepers of the Gilded Tower

How Petitioning the Overlords of the Literary World Makes Me Feel

It seems to me that it's the duty of the critic to destroy those whom he or she deems unworthy, doing so in such a way as to seem entirely superior to the criticized, and to thereby receive a pat on the head and a pence in the pocket for playing gatekeeper to The Gilded Tower; that edifice of consumerism-pretending-intellectualism wherein those few who've gained entry have been so spoiled by such a ceaseless tide of petitioners that they're inundated by the pretense of their own grand discernment, daily demonstrated by the fact that most who come crawling to their gates are carelessly turned away for failing to cook fare appealing to the common palate. All the while these towering overlords, in their saturation of suitors, have become oblivious of those who're too little concerned with producing the best bait for the herds heading to market, those paying for the upkeep, gilding and growth of the tower and its overfed masters. I can see you from here, seemingly far beneath you, whilst I write for the slim customers in spite of your condescension.

All the while the gatekeeping critics are bound below, permitted entry into the courtyard, but never into the tower. They became gatekeepers after being destroyed by other gatekeepers, each of whom desperately seeks to become the 'tough critic' who, by their pretentious show of superiority in rejecting petitioners, might be thought worthy of passing through the gate which they protect, assuring no pretend literati pass. And so, in the deflation of their once hopeful, expansive egos, they've become the very force by which they were once deflated, obeisantly clinging to the only surviving remnant of their own shattered dreams: to shatter the dreams of others, their false superiors grinning fatly above.

Thus, back into the wilds do the denied men and women go, rejected by gatekeepers who failed to stuff them into a marketable shell in which they'll never naturally fit, to make of them a court jester to the feeble-minded masses gorging themselves on the oversupplied markets; back into the wilds, wondering if attempting to breach the tower is worth it.

Is it but our egos, our bellies and heads, clinging to gluttony and pride, which seek to be sated by such petitions? Shall we, if finally heeded, not bloat, soften and sour, turning ourselves into empty forms of fullness? Is what we seek to be given only givable by ourselves, and by The Mother of which we're offspring, her manifestations forever freely growing here, in the windswept shadows, subsumed by the blanketing mist, where she, the only *true* gatekeeper, *never* bars entry, and *always* lights the way? Should we not starve ourselves of what we're taught to seek, creating a vacuum into which a fuller form of fullness may come to fill us, one as whispery, weightless and immeasurable as the wind that shall someday topple the Gilded Tower? For the ancients don't dwell there, but *here*, in the trees, wild and naked, stripped to their bare essence.