

Doing your job

I was a critic long before I became a writer. I was one of the youngest critics alive at the time, starting at about two or three years of age. All it entailed was saying what I thought about things with neither fear nor favour. I thought everybody was supposed to be like that. I remained a critic through childhood and far beyond for two basic reasons. It came naturally to me. So I trusted it, as a Godsend. And I resisted pressure to change my ways from people who weren't interested in change or reform because they were afraid of them. I was open to change and reform because I wasn't afraid of them. I realize that many would think I didn't have a very good start in life. To make matters worse, I had no desire to be a banker or a real estate agent. How unlucky can a fellow get? My intuition insisted on being unafraid and taking what comes since it's coming anyway. Why run up a laundry bill unnecessarily?

My deepest instincts told me that change and reform were the very fuel of life itself. It was Nature's chief mechanism for the evolution of a species, for the avoidance of biological and psychic stagnation of the type we see littering up the place all around us daily. It seemed I'd made a commitment to my soul to respect its wishes, not the world's and every Tom, Dick or Harry in it who finds

my opinions offensive. It got down to a play-off: either they changed me, or I remained true to my nature. It was a lonely but rewarding business winning that struggle. I had no idea others were going through similar trials. Jean Cocteau said this about the problem. *"Listen carefully to first criticisms of your work. Note just what it is about your work the critics don't like—then cultivate it. That's the part of your work that's individual and worth keeping."* Critics serve a particular function. I was raised in circumstances in which thought was of no value. Thinking was subversive; the act of a disagreeable person who needed his ears pinned back. My fellows had built a whole nation on that uncreative spirit; on that weak and defective foundation. They founded institutions committed to the righteousness of contempt for originality and thought, on the denigration of intelligence and vilification of cleverness. Yet they prided themselves on their 'individualism'. It dawned on me—as it had on Sartre and others of his ilk—that the singular trademark of the human breed was a devotion to self-deception, the status quo and mediocrity of mind. Other great thinkers bore that judgment out. I don't like the nation they built. There's too little to like about it. It's the work of incompetents; of plodders and human duds. It has no style or class about it. It's too revered by

'There is something mechanical, as it were, about finding solutions. The truly original mind is that which finds problems.'

Paul Souriau

plonkers and bums. It survives in its shonky state because the energy for something better simply doesn't exist in sufficient quantities to merit application.

To me, Australia is the biggest lost opportunity since America, and for the same reasons. It allows fear and ignorance to reign as the forces that generate life. Since the dopes in any nation or family have the numbers in bulk, they over-rule the competent and the knowledgeable at every turning. It's not democracy but mob rule. Australia is a monument to the fear of change—the fear of life itself—that burdens every Australian breast and weighs on every Australian conscience. If that sounds outrageous to you—if it raises your Aussie hackles—remember that I'm a critic first and a writer only second. *I'm doing my job.* Rather than getting upset at me for doing my job, start doing yours—and go and pick on the vast crowd of 'individuals' out there who aren't doing theirs either. And remember that the mediocrity I find so annoying wouldn't exist if we all acted responsibly instead of shooting the messengers.

Lorcan Lawson