

Put Your Lips Together and Blow

Written by Alex Baer
Saturday, 24 May 2014 17:41

My Muse, lately, has been feisty, haughty, and downright bumptious. Churlish and surly, too, but that is surely an outgrowth of my ignoring it as much as possible. It hates that. Kicks up a fuss something fierce.

It's been unavoidable, though. It's yard work season. Out here in the country-ish places, Nature never stops trying to take back the small encampment it's allowed us for an assortment of the old, small, odd-shaped buildings we call home -- a place where all of the structures and sheds compete against one another to see which one can return its raw materials and minerals to the earth *firstest* with the *mostest*.

During this time of year, before the showers cease and the hot weather sets in, slowing the Leaping Green Growth Spurts hereabouts, I am part person and part mule. Writing and scribbling and helping words jump through any pedantic hoops must wait. My muse is much more amused in the cold and rainy months, when I am inside, and where keeping the pellet stove comfy, cleaned, nourished and well-fed is all at once a vocation, an avocation, and a spectator sport.

Oh, I still kid that we have two seasons around here: Pellet Stove Season and Yard Work Season. This notion blends seamlessly with the reflection that, as I grow older, I notice my planning calendar, going forward -- and my memory, going backward -- has only two pages: July Fourth and New Year's Day. Or so it seems.

In truth, though, there are more reasons for shying away, and not looking my Muse right in the eye. There are the practical considerations in acknowledging the time-and energy-suck caused by the ever-growing greenery. More *gray* areas are thriving, too -- nebulous notions, maybe, but anchored in reason. These are just as hungry for attention.

Here, Nature is happy to absorb whatever labor I chuck at it, and maintain its knowing sneer, overlaid with a thin veneer of a twitchy wink and a nervous giggle. I'm starting to detect the same air about my Muse.

The question gets pretty basic: How does scribbling my observations and my objections,

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alternately shallow and deep, *help* anything? How does forming my thoughts into flaming match heads, to be flicked into the current tinderbox of alcohol-and-avgas sanity delivered from around the country and world, *contribute* in any meaningful way?

More to the point: Why burn my brain cells with the hot oven of existential angst, no matter how leavened, or unleavened with humorous attempts, this loaf of life may be? Who made me Worrier of the Week, Wringer of Hands for the Nation and Species?

Even shorter: Why bother?

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- This hiccup harkens back to a sign seen in an elevator in an ad agency building long ago: *Speed, Quality, Price: □ Pick any Two.*
- The personal correlation elbowing its way into consideration, and the conversation, more and more: *Time, Money, Energy: □ Pick any Two.*

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Admittedly, the writing sometimes happens out of compassion or rage, the keyboard battering acting as a steam valve. There is only so much dunderheaded, dumb-bunny brainlessness and doltish devilry, and devilry, from the modern world that one can actually handle -- unaided, that is, by the portable happy hour of chemical cocktails or the patience-building, dynamic tension provided by thick leather straps and a sturdy lab gurney with 4-wheel drive.

Other times, writing erupts as ice-water-immersion therapy for the bewildering surprises and developments of life, whether personal or planetary. Sometimes, though, it's just for the hell of it -- something to do, a chance to tip over and tumble out the box of words and see what might be made of the collections of letters stored in the nooks and crannies of the mother language. It is of no more profound importance than a stroll to the driveway mailbox and back, or a random pull on a one-armed bandit while passing by in a casino restaurant, or stirring a pot on the stove while someone gets the phone.

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More than once, writing's been used to see what it is I am thinking about. Sometimes, I do not know what I think, not until I string together some sentences and test out the hastily-knit strands of my logic net.

With increasing frequency, though, there are two disturbing developments: One is the world is getting more outlandish in its outrages. *Couple of quick examples?* Sure thing. Republicans -- the RNC and Prince Rebus, I mean, Reince Priebus -- want to blow the caps off donations to political organizations. Unfunny enough, SCOTUS recently came to that same conclusion the other month, noting that limiting donations limits speech, which now means positions for public office are free to invite cash-on-the-barrelhead, winner-take-all, high-bidder mystery auctions.

- *The court's invitation is formal, and is black-gown only -- although, black tie may be substituted, with a donation in the proper amount to the proper organizations, of course.*

It goes on any on like this, every day, increasing evidence that the country has finally lost its collective mind, along with its honor and honesty. Republican think tanks, politicians, and business people have co-opted language to such an extent that Fox is a beloved teller of legitimate truths... Rush and his ilk are earnest newscasters working with unvarnished, unspun facts... GOP politicians care *so much* about the average person... and corporations know best.

Basically, the sniff test is this: If the GOP wants it, *America must have it*. If the One Percent want it, *America must have it*. If the GOP is against it, *whatever it is*, then it clearly represents a vile and reprehensible loss of important and essential American freedoms -- and is *not* just a grab for more power and more money. It is *not* just a demand to take less and less responsibility, down to the point where measurement can no longer detect the slightest activity.

There is the Sanctity of Money, and the subsequent purchase of control. That is all. Sanctity of Life? Tell that one to the trimmers of emergency nutritional programs -- food, in the common

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parlance -- for the poor, for women, for children. Tell it to the hypocrites who slice into the school lunch programs. Tell it to the liars feigning concern about budget deficits while emptying the treasury into favored corporations already bursting from record profits, further fattened and stuffed by an evaporated need to pay a fair share of tariffs and tolls, shuffling money around the world to globe-trotting tax advantage. Tell it to the idle rich lofting trillions off shore -- those who espouse the infamous *You don't work, You don't eat* rule as a policy, while never having worked an hour or a day, but pleased to see the hired help have *finally* maintained the pool and courts to acceptable levels.

It goes on and on like this. It never changes. The Gravy Train keeps barreling on through, and no passenger wants off. No passenger shouts for a new destination. Life is good. *Do not pull cord.*

I find myself scribbling about the same symptoms and problems. I am tempted to carve up any future pieces into a multiple-choice format mirroring a do-it-yourself, spin-the-wheel approach to news: *Guess who and what is involved now?* □ *Guess what they've done?* □ *Guess who's taken the advantage?* □ *Guess who's paying the price?*

And so on.

The other disturbing development? An old, *old* problem: I am increasingly aware, again, that the thick, towering brick walls of all I object to are not being moved one iota, no matter how much I bash my skull against them.

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I feel like Mr. Furious, in the movie *Mystery Men* -- my only super power appears to be the ability to get angrier and angrier, and....

... no, that's it. Just the ability to get angry. *Really* angry. Nothing else.

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I don't mind capitalism -- just the elitist version practiced since *Greed is Good* first raised its head, and upped the ante with *Screw You, I Got Mine*

. I have no problem with politicians -- just those who shaft the very people they vow to protect in hollow, home-turf grandstanding. I have no problem with religion -- just having proponents use it as a weapon to do unending evil. I have no problem with profit -- just with equating money as being more important than people. I have no problem with faith -- just using it as science. I have no problem with entertainment -- just using it as a guise for spreading the racism, fears, scapegoating, lies, and propaganda as news. I have no problem with personal self-interest -- just using it as a reason to sacrifice community. I have no problem with...

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I found myself seeing the new *Godzilla* film yesterday. I had a discount pass. Despite having trepidation for what the latest reboot would do to his good name, me and the Big Guy go way back, so I had to check in with him.

There is a proud tradition in which **all** human interactions in *Godzilla* movies are utter wastes of film -- with terribly painful dialogue, and acting to match -- while the monster segments are always satisfying. Except for Ken Watanabe's efforts, this new film wastes no time reinforcing this mighty tradition, and in spades.

Toward the beginning, there is a great line. An actor whips off his gas mask in a supposedly radioactive environment, sucks in some air, and proclaims the air safe, because, shouting over to someone with him, *he can't smell any radioactivity*.

I lost it. I barked and howled in explosive laughter, during a supposedly dramatic scene, and in a theater audience catatonically immersed, totally silent -- except for all the usual love-making sounds from ardent movie-goers and their copious snack bar loads.

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I may not see *dead* people, but I'm starting to think I might be the only one seeing really *stupid* ones. And not just in the movies.

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We make it difficult, but Life is really simple. *Vote with your action.* If you believe that endless gun-play in books and movies and television contributes to a death-cult, war-like society, and generates constant massacres at home and abroad, stop watching and buying such things.

- *If you think the Second Amendment requires an organized militia (and you know it), clap your hands...*
- *If you think there's been enough killings in the schools and on the streets (and you know it), clap your hands...*
- *If you think the NRA's insane (and all about profits, and you know it), clap your hands...*
- *If you think Australia got it right (and they're still sane, and you know it), clap your hands...*

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If you don't believe in politicians who pledge help for regular people while pushing bills of benefit only to corporations and the rich, don't vote for them.

It's like my advice to people who don't want to have gays marry: Don't marry one. It's the same advice for all manner of things that people on the so-called religious right get crazy about and want to ban by force of law. Hey, it's a lot simpler, folks -- just don't personally do the things you object to.

It's also as simple as being aware, thinking a bit, doing some homework, taking responsibility, and doing what you really believe is best, whatever the consequences. It requires breaking the spell, opting out of the trance, and sending back your zombie suit, marked *Return to Sender with Extreme Prejudice*

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I am nostalgic for a time in which I have not lived.

I liked it better when our country got behind projects that benefitted everyday people -- everyone, all citizens -- and were for the good of the community. I wonder if Social Security and Medicare and the Works Progress Administration and major, coast-to-coast infrastructure creation could all be approved today, in a blizzard of GOP and Tea Party furor, foaming over and railing against such harrowing **socialist** activity?

I liked it better when you didn't know your neighbor's religion, when it didn't matter, when it **never** entered the conversation because it didn't matter -- and, besides, that sort of thing was personal, anyway, and best kept to yourself. I liked it better when the news came on, and they did their best to give you the facts, the truth. I liked it better when the CEO lived up the block, and made 8 or 10 times what average works did -- not in gated, guarded communities where 800 or 900 times the average rate is the standard paycheck, nor counting bonuses, stocks, options, and perks. I liked it better when you knew what was in your food and food was actually served in restaurants -- small, independent operations.

I liked it better when life wasn't rigged and getting a fair shake wasn't an unpatriotic, revolutionary idea. I liked it better when people had value, and weren't thrown away after their jobs used them up. I liked it better when there were more jobs than job seekers. I liked it better when Americans were always on the same side.

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I liked it better when I wasn't so preoccupied with always writing about my abject alarm at the psychoses of what now routinely passes for normal life. Going to have to quit that.

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That said: I still like thinking that all I knew, I learned from saner places -- literature, *Star Trek*, and old, and very fine, black and white films. One comes to mind about now:

Have and Have Not

, from 1944, with Bogart and Bacall. (The title can double, today, as a capsule description of who we are in this country, and what ails the American rift that keeps getting wider.)

This is the film where that famous line about whistling is used, when Bacall tells Bogart: *You know how to whistle, don't you? You just put your lips together and... blow.*

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My Muse is almost down for the count, pouting. Reluctantly, petulantly, It informs me that *scup pernon*

is a greenish-bronze grape, or wine, from the southern U.S., and is the state fruit of North Carolina.

I suppose that's its way of saying *sour grapes, go away, don't bother me*. I had hoped for ideas on the North Carolina primary, and the Chamber of Commerce, and Karl Rove's GOP money machine, *American*

Crossroads

, spending two million bucks to prop up a GOP Senate nomination there...

... and planning to dump a total of \$15 million in ads by August, in just four states with tight races, in hopes of retaking the Senate.

We ain't seen nothing yet. Wait until the big bidders show up, sniffing around the public power trough, looking for even more ways to rig the system and grease the skids from the Treasury and straight into their offshore accounts.

Meanwhile, I'm thinking my Muse, and my country, are both telling me to put *my* lips together

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and
nothing like Lauren Bacall's meaning in the movie.

blow -- but

Whatever puckering-up I can muster, there's damn sure no kiss involved -- unless it's the kiss of death. Coming from the cold shoulder of my moody, sulky Muse, and this ice-cold death cult of a nation, that almost makes sense.

Almost.

RNC & Prince Rebus: http://tbo.com/ap/politics/rnc-files-lawsuit-to-raise-unlimited-cash-ap_politics8f1168ff4162404bbb93a407d16f6c2a

SCOTUS formal auctions:

http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/03/us/politics/supreme-court-ruling-on-campaign-contributions.html?_r=0

WPA: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Works_Progress_Administration

[NRA, Guns, & Australia's solution: http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/05/24/the-nra-s-all-out-assault-on-accurate-information-about-gun-deaths.html](http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/05/24/the-nra-s-all-out-assault-on-accurate-information-about-gun-deaths.html)

To Have and Have Not: http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0037382/?ref=ttqt_qt_tt

[Scuppernong: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scuppernong](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scuppernong)

Politics as usual: <http://www.cnn.com/2014/05/06/politics/north-carolina-primary-takeaways/>

Today's Bonus:

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You think *your* life's a bad movie? Check out what reality, and the Muse, did to some others!
<http://www.theguardian.com/film/gallery/2014/may/23/cannes-2014-the-worst-films-of-the-festival-in-pictures>

Godzilla and humans: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/film/10846101/Godzilla-do-the-humans-matter-in-monster-films.html>

Godzilla science: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ixti7Lp1Ihs>

Perry Mason & Godzilla: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=laJ7UCzCtV4>

Be prepared! <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A89BHSmvpf8>

Godzilla evolution: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ICkldWAXefk>

Bonus Tip:

Laughing helps. A fine double bill to peg your Silly-O-Meter: *Mystery Men* and *Galaxy Quest*. You're welcome.