

## Apparently I Need My Pain

*February 13, 2012*

My memory is not what it used to be.

Of course, that being true, I don't really remember what my memory used to be. Could be I never remembered anything very well and that I am actually remembering stuff better than I once did.

I have been watching more television lately, which is something I never used to do.

Not that I can remember, anyway.

I had been writing instead of watching. I don't know why I stopped writing and began watching but I do know why I stopped watching and started writing again.

Fear.

I fear I am losing my mind. I seem to remember that some historians believe lead poisoning was the principal cause of the fall of the Roman Empire. I also seem to remember that Kurt Vonnegut said: "Future historians will look back on TV as the lead in the water pipes that slowly drove the Romans mad." I don't know when or where Vonnegut said or wrote that, but I am fairly certain it was from Vonnegut. Sounds like him anyway. I am fairly certain I am suffering lead poisoning from watching television.

I am writing to slow down encroaching dementia.

I remember reading a story once but the only thing I can remember is the last sentence and I don't really remember the last sentence exactly. The character said he had just rolled a hundred straight double sixes with a pair of dice and that he was going into hiding. Then, the story ended.

It might have been more than a hundred straight double sixes. The point was that he had just figured out the secret to mind controlling matter. The story had been about another guy who had figured out mind control and who had used it to bring about nuclear disarmament. At least, he had come close to bringing it about, but the world's military industrial complex (using Eisenhower's term or Vonnegut's or maybe George Washington's) had hunted him down because, after all, they needed weapons of mass destruction to make the world safe. The leaders of the world's military industrial complex had assumed the guy doing it was some sort of freak of nature, and that, if they killed him they could go back to using their WMD, but it turned out the secret to mind controlling matter was something that could be passed on and learned. So, the reader assumes at the end of the story that the guy who just rolled a hundred straight

double sixes was going to go into hiding until he could figure out how to once again disarm the world's weapons of mass destruction.

Vonnegut may have written the story. It sounds like something he would write... except it is maybe a little too optimistic at the end. Vonnegut could be optimistic in a pessimistic, ironic sort of way. I, myself, am an optimist. I used to be agathistic but now I am simply optimistic—at least, I am optimistic if it is optimism to recognize that an empty glass is full of air.

Air is a good thing.

I remember some things. I remember that Kurt Vonnegut once said he was taught in the sixth grade (which would have been in about 1934) that the USA had a standing army of just over a hundred thousand men (which would have been after we ramped up for WWI and then ramped back down) and that the generals had nothing to say about what was done in Washington. He said he was taught to be proud of that and to pity Europe for having more than a million men in standing armies and spending all their money on airplanes and tanks. He said his problem with the USA after WWII was that he never unlearned junior civics and that he still believed in what he was taught. He said he got a very good grade.

I remember that, because our founding fathers were so fearful of the consequence of a standing army, soldiers could enlist for no more than a 12 month tour of duty, which meant that Washington whipped the British with a Continental army of amateur soldiers. The American Way, we learned in civics, was best exemplified by Washington who, having led his people to victory against oppression, voluntarily relinquished power. Few have done it. Caesar could not. Cromwell could not—neither could Napoleon, Lenin or Mao. Frodo could not voluntarily surrender the Ring of Power (he succeeded only with the help of divine providence in the shape of Gollum).

I remember that Eisenhower, the only American general who might be said to have standing equal in prominence to Washington, said we could no longer follow the principals of our founding fathers in refusing to commission a standing army, while reminding us of the danger of doing so.

I was five years old when he gave the speech. I don't remember it, though I remember learning about it in civics class. Eisenhower said:

“Our arms must be mighty, ready for instant action, so that no potential aggressor may be tempted to risk his own destruction. Until the latest of our world conflicts, the United States had no armaments industry. American makers of plowshares could, with time and as required, make swords as well. But now we can no longer risk emergency improvisation of national defense; we have been compelled to create a permanent armaments industry of vast proportions. Added to this, three and a half million men and women are directly engaged in the defense establishment. We annually spend on military security more than the net income of all United States corporations. This conjunction of an immense military establishment and a large arms industry is new in the American experience. The total influence—economic, political, even spiritual—is felt in every city, every State house, every office of the Federal government. We recognize

the imperative need for this development. Yet we must not fail to comprehend its grave implications. Our toil, resources and livelihood are all involved; so is the very structure of our society. In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist. We must never let the weight of this combination endanger our liberties or democratic processes. We should take nothing for granted. Only an alert and knowledgeable citizenry can compel the proper meshing of the huge industrial and military machinery of defense with our peaceful methods and goals, so that security and liberty may prosper together.”

I imagine current civics classes in American schools have a post-modern perspective on the standing army issue.

The thing is... Washington could have given the same speech Eisenhower gave. The numbers would have been different—inflation and all that—but it could have been the same speech. The fact is... the world *expected* Washington to give the same speech Eisenhower gave.

Mind over matter. It was Washington’s mind that mattered.

Ever since I read the story I can’t remember I have flirted with the idea of writing my own version—a fusion of two plots. I do fusion. **Grid** is a fusion of a literary criticism essay, a science fiction novel, and a treatise on social and political evolution. The story I flirted with but never married would have been a fusion of a story in which one man (a new Washington) disarms the global military-industrial complex and a story in which a demented genius plots to infect the entire population of the world with a deadly virus.

This blog is about dementia and genius.

There is a delicious plot wondering around out there and the skeleton of it has worn many different clothes (no paper-mache Mephistopheles is he), but the basic story goes like this: a twisted genius intends to kill most of the people in the world except for the few he would lead in a glorious new and improved society. The version I like best is from an old “Wild Wild West” episode in which Dr. Miguelito Quixote Loveless, the demented genius dwarf, had developed a virus capable of killing everyone in the world more than four foot tall.

Of course, I could be wrong about that one. It might be a story I *wish* they had done on “Wild Wild West.”

In my flirting fused imbroglio, the demented genius wants to disarm the world, ridding it of all WMD, but he realizes that the mean people in the world will just develop new WMD or, failing that, will simply resort to more ancient methods of killing people. He realizes that guns don’t kill people, mean people do. So, he develops a virus that will kill all the mean people in the world (turns out there is a “mean gene” that allows him to target the meanies).

The man trying to stop the demented genius is a Captain Kirk character. This is a sidebar fusion. Think about it this way. There are going to be some people who sort of like the idea of a plot to

kill all the mean people in the world—especially if their deaths are painless and if the bodies all just dematerialize so there is no mess. The demented genius has all that figured out. No nice people will be injured in the making of this new world order and all the mean people will simply disappear. It sounds kind of nice—kind of like some of the alien cultures Kirk stumbles upon in Star Trek. How many times did Kirk blow up an alien utopia just because the inhabitants were missing out on a little free will and fun?

Watch “Enemy Within,” in which a transporter malfunction separates Kirk into two selves—a protagonist and an antagonist. The problem, of course, is that this is a Kirk who “needs his pain: it is what defines me.”

Kirk: What’s the matter with me?

Spock: Judging from my observations, Captain, you’re losing the power of decision.

McCoy: You have a point, Spock?

Spock: Yes. Always, Doctor. We have here an unusual opportunity to appraise the human mind, or to examine, in Earth terms, the roles of good and evil in a man: his negative side, which you call hostility, lust, violence, and his positive side, which Earth people express as compassion, love, tenderness.

McCoy: Are you aware it’s the captain’s guts you’re analyzing?

Spock: Yes, and what makes one man an exceptional leader? We see indications that it’s his negative side which makes him strong, that his evil side, controlled and disciplined, is vital to his strength.

Spock: [to Kirk] Your negative side removed from you, the power of command begins to elude you.

Kirk: What is your point, Mr. Spock?

Spock: If your power of command weakens, you’ll be unable to be captain. You must be prepared for that.

Kirk: [talking about Kirk’s negative duplicate] I have to take him back... inside myself. I can’t survive without him. I don’t want him back. He’s like an animal, a thoughtless, brutal animal, and yet it’s me... me.

McCoy: Jim... you’re no different than anyone else. We all have our darker side. We need it! It’s half of what we are. It’s not ugly. It’s human. Human. A lot of what he makes you the man you are. God forbid I should agree with Spock, but he was right. Without the negative side, you couldn’t be the captain. Your strength of command lies mostly in him.

Kirk: What do I have?

McCoy: You have the goodness.

Kirk: Not enough. I have a ship to command.

McCoy: The intelligence, the logic. It appears your half has most of that, and perhaps that's where man's essential courage comes from. For, you see, he was afraid, and you weren't.

In the end, Kirk has to stop the demented genius from ridding the world of all the mean people because... well, what if aliens invaded the earth? We would need some mean people to kick their ass.

It is no fun laying people off. Jobs are scarce. I am acutely aware of the collateral damage. Nice, demented geniuses make bad CEOs. Kirk wins.

Post Script:

*Sometimes it is good to be the CEO of a fairly large business. Mostly, it is not good. It is good when it is good because there are remarkable people working for Ceo's business—not that Ceo had anything to do with their being remarkable. It is good because Ceo can say "Make it so" and the remarkable people make it so. One day Ceo said, "Make me a blog," and remarkable people made Ceo a blog.*

*I needed a blog so I can write and stave off dementia and have a place to put the writing where people can read it or ignore it at their pleasure. Ceo should not require remarkable people to read writing written to stave off dementia, requiring it by making it part of the business of the business.*

Posted online: <http://paultaylorrant.wordpress.com/2012/02/13/apparently-i-need-my-pain/>