

## HOW TO RESIST THE CURRENT VOGUE FOR BEING ALLERGIC TO LEARNING 101

Visit Museums; Read Books. As Ray Bradbury put it so well :: "You don't have to burn books (think Nazi Germany in '33) to destroy a culture. Just get people to stop reading them." In the Wake of the Manhattan Project & the movie 'Oppenheimer,' we've clearly unleashed a Frankenstein-Kaliber Monster. How do we go about reigning in the Beast of Willful Ignorance{?}, which smites me as among the more critical questions of our time. Forget -- if you can -- being bludgeoned with a Khrushchevian shoe; this is far more dangerous! Thus do empires come & go, speaking of Ozymandias & Co. Welcome, if you will, to the JorNada del Muerto, where the HeArt of this mercifully still-ongoing eXperiment has been battered (see John Donne's 14th 'Holy SonNet,' which provided Oppenheimer with his inspiration for the naming of the Trinity site). You like Faustian contracts, stay tuned. Among the numerous books that might be recommended in the AfterMath of the movie 'Oppenheimer' are :: 1) Richard Rhodes's "The Making of the Atomic Bomb," 1986; 2) Kai Bird & Martin J. Sherwin's "American Prometheus: The Triumph & Tragedy of J. Robert Oppenheimer," 2005; 3) Gino Segre & Bettina Hoerlin's "The Pope of Physics: Enrico Fermi & the Birth of the Atomic Age," 2016; & 4) Jim Holt's "When Einstein Walked with God: Excursions to the Edge of Thought," 2018. According to E. M. Cioran, "The troglodyte who trembled in the caves (be they Platonic or Other) still trembles in the skyscrapers." Whereas for the German philosopher/poet/polymath NoValis, "Every good book becomes the vehicle of a lifelong occupation, the object of an inexhaustible pleasure." Besides which, one book has a way of leading to another, the eXample that comes most 'read'ily to mind being Jim Harrison's marvelous memoir "Off to the Side," 2002, introducing me to the former Senior Research Fellow at the Warburg Institute in London & Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton Alum Herbert Weisinger's truly eXtrordinary "The Agony & the Triumph: Papers On the Use & Abuse of Myth," 1964, a copy of which I happened to have tucked away in a book closet. Weisinger was Harrison's Dep'tment Head & Mentor at SUNY Stony Brook during the years 1966-'67, & was in JM's estimation the most brilliant person he ever met. For my own part, I deem Harrison's "Legends of the Fall," 1979, among the greatest works of fiction ever set in Montana. By way of taking the temperature, here are a few eXtracts from Weisinger's study of myth :: "From the observation of Nature have come the symbols of the Tree of Life, the sad cry of the Nightingale, the Lily of the Field, the Rose in the Walled Garden of Truth, the Dove, the Lamb, the Deer, the Wasteland, the Garden of Pomegranates, the Tyger Burning Bright in the Forests of the Night, & the Cherry Orchard. Consider also in this conTeXt the Hero's Journey cōMbinEd with his Quest, the Wanderings of Odysseus/Ulysses, Jason's Quest for the Golden Fleece, the Search for the Holy Grail, Dante's Descent Into the Underworld, the AdVentures of Don QuiXote, the Search of the Ancient Mariner, Ahab's chase after Moby Dick, Hans Castorp's sojourn on & descent from the Magic Mountain, & to cōMplete the Circle, the memorable Day In the Life of that other & later Ulysses" (This eXtensive quote being from Weisinger's cōre-curricular essay 'The Mythic Origins of the Creative Process,' 1960. In other words, Mount Analogue is clearly beckoning. "This process by which the Artist (Keeping in HeArt & Mind that the afore-referenced Oppenheimer was uncōMmonly Versed in the Humanities, there having been references in the movie to not only the "Bhagavad Gita," but T. S. Eliot's "The Waste Land," Picasso, & Stravinsky) reaches out into the Mind & Soul of his or her Audience, the process by which in tUrN the Audience reaches back into the Mind & Soul of the Artist, this process, the creative process, is, then, by its very Nature surely one of the most cōMpelling means of human cōMmunion." To distill this to the archetypal CruX of the Matter :: "The Triumph of Light, Life, & Good through Suffering over Dark, Death, & Evil." Thus do we ascend via a Dark Night of the Soul from Ignorance to Light. As Weisinger

phrases it so marvelously, "No wonder that the central preoccupation of Artist & Scientist alike is that of Metamorphosis," Think, for starters, Darwin's 'tangled bank' morphing into K. Marx's 'entangled net' & Frazer's 'woven web of varicolored threads.'" At least three cheers for entanglement, by whatever name.