

RADICAL TEACHER

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Poetry

A Nation in Need of Invective

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A Nation in Need of Invective

Rome being what it is, it is difficult not to write satire.
—Juvenal, *Satire I*

Forget the compunctions and dogmas
of the 21st-Century literati and book-slingers,
of faddists and ideologues, the literary Mafia,
the hot-shot gatekeepers, prigs, and aesthetes!
Forget the invective manqué of toadies, hacks,
and conspiratorial maniacs!

It is good at times in a nation's life
to place blame rather than
deflect or diffuse it.

If Juvenal had his Lucilius
and Swift his Juvenal and Rabelais,
why can we not clear our vision
with painful doses of veracity,
with *Dunciads* of our own?

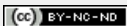
When Ben Hecht wrote
of stockyard owners
importing Billy Sunday
"to divert their underpaid hunkies
from going on strike
by shouting them dizzy with God,"
we see that he should have been another Mencken
(who skewered charlatans, demagogues,
and bawling Tin-Pot Pauls plaguing us still
in the latter-day gasps of the Anthropocene)
rather than a writer of famous screenplays
he respected but little himself.

Why suffer bread and circuses
to divert our gaze from the ego-systems
of our oligarchs and their pols
any more than from the brutalities
visited on children, women, and men
on our old plantations or in sweatshops then and now
or from the cruel follies and meltdowns of Wall Street
or of the global disruptions and wars

or of the neurological catastrophe imposed on
generations addicted to their ubiquitous screens
or of biotic despoliation and renunciations of science?

Who (like some biblical prophet
or outlaw satirist) will name
our scoundrels and miscreants
our hypocrites, conmen, and con-women
whose venalities and corruptions have wormed
into the best dreams of a nation?

Who will give us the Emblems
to scourge our revived gullibility?
Emblems equal to Ashley's Sack—
that coarse-cloth bag into which
the slave-woman Rose
placed a tattered dress,
three handfuls of parched corn,
and a braid of her own hair
for her daughter Ashley
(about to be sold to another slave owner)
and said to her nine-year old girl
she would never see again
"It be filled with my Love always."



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