

Prologue

There is a danger threatening the world. We humans have begun to divorce ourselves from the earth, from the primal essence of nature. We have begun to regard ourselves as masters of all, demanding that our every need be met by the planet gracious enough to birth us. Every resource, every pleasure and every luxury must constantly be available to us, to offer itself up for our consumption, and to make itself ever easier for our abuse. In treating the world as such, we have inevitably begun to regard humans themselves as products for consumption. Identity, individuality – these terms superficially cover up the emptiness which characterizes modern life. We have all become nothing more than units on the shelves of a warehouse, waiting patiently in our skew for the picking machine to wrench us out and drop us on a conveyor belt, our fates already determined for us. What hope do we have now to escape this danger which threatens to turn us all into stock on a shelf? The conveyor belt runs continuously down a fixed path. So long as we continue to allow this danger to persist, we remain fixed to it. We must make an active decision to free ourselves from the current order of things, to stand up and out of the flow which has us in its grasp, and to root ourselves in a stance so that we can disrupt the danger which threatens to doom us all. Let us investigate how this can be accomplished.

Taking a Stance

What does it mean to take a stance? Let us start from the simplest understandings and make our way forward. To take a stance is to stand. When we stand, being humans with a torso attached to two legs above two feet, we stand up. A stance is an upright position. But taking a stance is not limited to standing in a perfectly erect manner. There are all sorts of stances one can take. For example, the boxer enters a stance, the fencer enters a stance, the dancer enters a stance. In this way, taking a stance is entering a posture conducive to an activity. When the boxer stands like a boxer, we realize he is ready to fight. His raised hands tell us he is prepared to throw fists, his bobbing back and forth tells us that he is agile and ready to dodge any punches thrown his way. When the flamenco dancer enters a stance, with castanets in hand raised above her head, we realize she is about to begin a series of motions; the stillness of her stance holds a tension demanding resolution through dance. The stance someone is in, the way someone stands, tells us something about that person, and what they are ready and willing to do.

To take a stance is to stand up. What else can this tell us? When you stand you are not sitting. When you sit you take a *seat*. Standing requires more effort than sitting. It engages the musculature of the body. We take a seat when we need a rest. To stand up, especially after having been seated, requires a certain amount of energy and effort. Standing is not a position of rest. When we do physical labour, we stand. Standing is a tiring position. Standing becomes uncomfortable. After we stand for a long period of time, we would like to take a seat, to take the strain off our bones and muscles and to relax our feet. Standing requires effort; it is active. Sitting requires ease; it is passive.

Let us examine the imagery of standing and sitting. Picture a warrior and a king. The warrior stands beside the king. He is on duty. He is focussed. The safety of the king is placed in the hands of the warrior, and the warrior cannot afford the luxury of sitting. He cannot rest his mind and his body, he must remain alert. Because the warrior stands, his muscles are strong.

The king is seated in his throne. Let us imagine he is handling the affairs of the state. He might be a just king, he might be a tyrant, he might be a king absorbed in the luxuries and pleasures afforded his position. Whatever the case, sitting has the effect of fattening, of softening the muscles, of weakening the bones. This is why the king requires the warrior. He requires a person who is strong and fit to keep secure his position on the throne.

The image of the warrior gives a sense that standing is a proud activity. It requires a discipline to persist through harsh conditions. There are seats available, but the warrior does not ask for one because he takes pride in standing. This is because he stands for something. He stands for his loyalty to the king. He stands for the country he has sworn to defend. He stands for his honour.

Why do some people persist in standing? Because pride compels them to. There is nobility in taking a stance, because in doing so one foregoes a life of ease and comfort. To stand is to forego passivity and affirm activity.

We have now begun to approach the way stance is used in a figurative sense. People often say ‘I stand for this’ or ‘I stand for that’. What do these sentences mean? Taking a stance is not as vapid as claiming an *identity* or executing an act of *self-expression*. You can take a stance with a group, with a collective, with your country, with an idea. To take a stance is to stand *with*; it requires something more than just yourself. One can say ‘I stand for my country, I stand for this idea of mine, I stand for justice’ and in these statements the nature of standing as *standing for* something is revealed. Of course, we also talk about people standing up for themselves, or making a declaration of independence. But in these scenarios when we stand up we are standing up and *against*. We are standing up and against a bully, we are standing up and against an idea we loathe.

The two senses – *standing for* and *standing against* – in which the word stance is used, reveal to us two essential qualities of what taking a stance means. First, to take a stance is nothing so cheap and vain as propagating an identity. No; to take a stance is more akin to finding a cause, to having a purpose. Secondly, to take a stance is to enter into a relationship with something else. We can only *stand for* or *stand against* something so long as there *is something* to stand for or stand against. If an idea we held no longer appealed to us, or the king we defended were to be assassinated, we would no longer have something to *stand for*. Likewise, If the bully who terrorized us were to end his tyrannical ways we would no longer have something to *stand against*. Taking a stance requires something else to stand in relation to, and thus taking a stance is akin to entering a relationship.

To take a stance is to stand with something. We take pride in our stance, because standing provides us with a cause. It is something one lives for, it is motivation to persist in living, for any reason other than habit or comfort. To take a stance is to make a choice. It is to decide to live, it is an affirmation of life. Any stance then, regardless of what the stance is for, but by virtue of being a stance, is a stance against a passive life. A life of circumstance. The passive life is a simple life. It is an environmental life. It is a life akin to a bush or a tree. A plant that buds, grows, bears fruit, withers and dies. The passive life is a life of circumstance because it exists for no other reason than by chance: ‘I was born, I have lived so far, and one day I will die’ says the passive liver. The passive liver does not stand with something, they have not stood up out of their seat, and thus they have no cause and no purpose.

To take a stance is to stand with something. To take a stance is to say – this cause, this purpose, this idea that I stand with, is my friend. When we make a friend, we make an enemy.

Friends and Enemies

To have a friend is to enter a relationship with another person. A friend is more than an accomplice or an acquaintance. It is more than someone you happen to see, to run across, to engage in day to day business with. A friend is someone who you choose to have in your life. It requires an effort made to purposefully see that person. To talk with them over the phone. To go out and eat lunch and go for a walk with.

A friend is someone you respect. It is not someone you dislike, you look down upon, you are disgusted with. A friend is someone you enjoy. A presence that you flourish in. A friend is like the warm embrace of the sun on a flower; it invigorates its leaves and opens it up. A friend is an equal.

Why must a friend be our equal? Because equal relationships are the healthiest sort. When there is equality between two people, one does not overpower the other, and one does not drag the other down. Equal relationships mean both participants are on level ground, and they can work together to move forward. Of course, a friend may help another in a time of need, to help 'lift them up out of their hole' as it were. But this is only possible when the person in the hole is willing to get out, is prepared to walk alongside you, is prepared to face the reality outside of the hole. The person willing to do so does not belong in the hole; circumstance has put them there, and it is an act of friendship to envision equality in another and guide them to its achievement.

Equality is essential to long lasting friendship. Inferiority produces contempt in the superior; he scorns the slower. Superiority produces hate in the inferior; he envies the faster. You might ask, can a friend not admire the other, can a friend not edify the other? Of course. There is always a degree of this in every friendship. No one is perfect, and neither are the two friends identically equal. Their equality derives itself from the fact that the shortcomings of the one are balanced out by the talents of the other, and vice versa. But when we admire too much we become a fan and if we edify too much we become a teacher, a role model. These are not friendship-like relationships. A teacher is not friends with his student. This is because the teacher must behave like a teacher, and treat the student as such, while the student must behave as a student and treat the teacher as such. If they were to behave in ways that did not reflect this relationship we would say that they had a relationship of a different sort. The two can become friends, but only after having terminated their teacher-student relationship.

Enemies are a lot like friends. Enemies are more alike use than we think. An enemy might have been a friend, if circumstances had been different. Someone who at one time may have been our enemy can later become a friend. A friend we have right now can one day become our enemy. All of these are possibilities.

An enemy is only an enemy if they are equal to us. If they are weaker than us, they are nothing more than a nuisance when they enter our presence, and we quickly forget about them. If they are stronger than us, they become a tyrant in our lives. But neither a tyrant nor a flea is an enemy. Our enemy is our enemy only insofar as they are equal to us. A friend is only a friend if both participants in the relationship regard each other as fulfilling that role. The same principle applies to enemies. A tyrant does not regard a peasant as an enemy; he is too weak, too insignificant to be regarded as such. The peasant might despise the tyrant, but that does not make them enemies. But if this same peasant were to start a revolt, to actively work to tear the tyrant down, to *oppose* him, then would he be elevated to the status of enemy. It is only when two people oppose each other that they become enemies, just as it is only when two people accord with one another that they become friends.

Enemies are more alike us than we like to think. They get right what we get wrong. This is why they are a threat to us, because we see that in our shortcomings the enemy has the upper hand. In the same way we pose a threat to our enemy; we succeed where he fails. The battle between enemies continues until one reduces the other to the point of obliteration, or one becomes so powerful that the other cannot hope to keep up, or the two become friends, or one gives up and ‘takes a seat’. If one were to finally succeed over their enemy – over all of their enemies – one would no longer have a position. To be in a position is to take a relative stance. It requires a relationship. A body floating in nothingness cannot have a position. If I ‘lifted’ my arm we could not even say that my arm was above my head, because the concepts of above and below would have nothing to refer to. If the cause I stood for faced no *opposition*, then it would be pointless for me to stand for it. The king with no enemies does not need a warrior by his side. When we take a position, we stand for something that exists in opposition to something else. To stand *for* requires that we stand *against*. When we stand with something, we choose that thing to be our friend, and in the same instant we decide who our enemies are.

Having an enemy gives life purpose. Having an enemy gives the active liver a cause. If you have an enemy, you can be sure you have something to live for. Every hero, in every work of fiction, across every genre and in every culture, requires a nemesis. What would the hero do, if not battle with his enemy? Better yet, would he even be a hero if he did not have an enemy to fight with? We must be grateful for our enemies – just as grateful as we are for our friends.

Here we must note that an enemy, just like a friend, need not be a person. An idea can be our enemy, a culture or sentiment can be our friend. Do not confuse having an enemy with a sort of ignorance. Racism, sexism, any sort of phobia – these ignorances are not reflective of enemy-like relationships, just as blind worship is not conducive of being a friend. In any sort of friend-enemy relationship, there exists a *neighbourliness*. This is because the idea we stand for, our friend, is *near to* and *face-to-face with* the idea we oppose, our enemy. If they had nothing in common, if they were not in some sense related, they could not be our enemy. Our enemies are more alike us than different. This is why we can think like our enemy, we can guess at their next move, their next reaction, their next attack in the battle that ensues.

Despite the nearness inherent in having an enemy, one cannot always be expected to see the perspective of the enemy. There is no perfect solution between having a friend and having an enemy. A marriage between the two will lead to inaction, because action requires motivation, and motivation requires having a cause to motivate you. I can sit and reason all day between two sets of values. It is only when I choose a value to act by, to live in accordance with, that I stand up and act. The only way to resolve this sort of relationship, if even a resolution it can be called, is to sit down, to forego your stance, and to exit the neighbourhood.

Enemies: one gets right what the other gets wrong. But there is a sort of nationalism in standing with your side. I can take the perspective of my enemy and say ‘yes, I can see where I went wrong’. But this does not mean I should not persist in my own actions. When you take a stance you make it your duty, just as it is the duty of the warrior to stand by his king, to fight for your side, even if your side is flawed, even if your king is imperfect. Some may call this nationalism mere stubbornness; I prefer to see it as an affirmation of life.

The stance I take is romanticism. Its enemy, rationalism.

Romanticism

What is romanticism? When I use the word I am not referring to any pre-established theory or academic set of ideas. You do not need to read any historic thinkers on the subject in order to understand what the term here refers to. I have chosen the name romanticism because it is fitting; the word itself conjures up the sentiments of the stance. I have chosen the name rationalism for the same reason.

Of course, romanticism and rationalism are not the only attitudes available to the stance-taker. They are but two in an entire catalogue, a catalogue whose contents change and evolve with the times and the trends. As I have taken a romantic stance, it is necessary for me to depict it by contrasting it with its most apparent enemy. The capitalist is an enemy of socialism, but his arch-nemesis is communism. The romantic is opposed to the rationalist – he stands in the opposite position.

To draw out the attitudes represented by the names romanticism and rationalism, I will now conduct a comparative analysis of the two. The comparisons I will list are gross and exaggerated in nature. The differences between romanticism and rationalism are not so clear cut, not so stark. Enemies are more alike us than we like to think. I use these comparisons only to contrast the opposing attitudes, to furnish the faculty of your understanding, to paint a picture for your mind.

Romanticism is a friend of the rhetoric, and is an enemy of the anti-rhetoric. It is an enemy of the idea that in order to be serious about the truth our language and our thinking must be as bare-bone as possible. The rationalist regards any appeal to attraction as a deviation from the truth, as a passing fancy, as though attractiveness and the truth were incompatible, as though the truth were unattractive. For the rationalist, arrival of the truth must be heralded by dry and dull doddering on a detail. For the rationalist, the haze which shrouds the truth can only be dispersed by an appeal to *reason*. For the rationalist, an appeal to emotion is illogical, illegitimate, illegal. But is not an appeal to reason still an *appeal*? The romantic was not aware that reason had any sort of superiority over the other senses. ‘What is so inherently appealing about reason?’ he asks. ‘Because it fits within our times tables, because it follows a form, because we can calculate it, and because we can calculate it we can predict it, and because we can predict it we can extract from it all that we wish’ replies the rationalist.

The rationalist is devoted to structure. The romantic is enamoured with *destruction*. The romantic does not seek order – he does not delight in naming and classifying. He does not desire everything to fit nicely within a schema he has devised. He excites in the unknown, in mystery and in the clandestine. He wants the world to remain open to possibility, to allow for contradiction, and to be out of his grasp. The world for the romantic is akin to god; it provides for him. The rationalist sees himself as god of the world, able to take and extract from it as he will, for after all, he has given it its laws.

The romantic is opposed to the thesis. To the idea that a body of work can be understood in one sentence, that the nutritious quality of a thought is beheld in a statement, that the body itself does not nourish the mind in ways more significant than the claim which captures it. For the romantic, the effective essay is not one which provides arguments in support of its thesis – instead, the effective essay is one which inspires, which leaves the reader feeling imbibed with the emotion it carries, and abandons them with a new sense of the world after having terminated its pages.

The rationalist is prone to quantify. He prefers the employee who shows up to work on time and goes immediately to their cubicle. To the rationalist, this employee is superior to the one who arrives late, who is liberal with the laws of the office, but who is more passionate about his

work. This is because passion cannot be quantified, the rationalist does not know how to input passion into a spreadsheet.

The romantic is religious. The rationalist scientific. The romantic prefers the outdoors and the wild. The rationalist prefers the indoors and the civilized. The romantic thrives in warmer climates, the rationalist in the cold. When disputes arise, the rationalist seeks to resolve them through the ‘proper means’ and appeals to authority. The romantic advocates for the duel. He is ready and willing to put his life on the line, and put an end to the one which has offended his own.

Enough of these gross distinctions. They are not to be taken as literal. They only offer an approximation of the difference by positing false ends of a spectrum. What better way to depict the distinction than by putting the two stances to practice. I will now conduct a romantic reading of a poem.

A Romantic Reading of a Poem

The first stanza of *Mentiras Piadosas*, by Joaquín Sabina:

*cuando le dije que la pasión
por definición no puede durar
¿cómo iba yo a saber
que ella se iba a echar a llorar?*

Roughly translated, this poem reads, or can be understood as saying:

*when I told her that love
by definition cannot last
how was I to know
that she would start to break down and cry?*

Mentiras Piadosas translates as polite lies. Sabina has written *pasión*, which translates literally as passion, but which I have translated as love. The word passion in English, when used in context with love, carries with it the connotation of *infatuation* whereas love supposedly refers to *true love*. This connotation has the effect of placing passion lower in the hierarchy of emotions, as though it represented a love that was silly and short-lived. In my translation, I have married the meaning inherent in both words. I have reduced the severity of true love, and I have dismissed the apparent frivolousness of infatuation.

When things are spoken, they tend to have the appearance of hinting at something general, at something universal. But when the poet says love does not last, he is not speaking of love as the idea. He is speaking about the love between him and the girl of the poem. Their love cannot last. He knows this. And he is compelled to tell her this. It is not that he is merely infatuated with her, and understands that infatuations come and go. Infatuations are inebriating. When one is infatuated, they are in a state of intoxication. It is precisely in this state that one would be so far gone as to proclaim that their love is eternal. It is in a state of level-headedness that the author tells his girl that love cannot last. But if this love is not an infatuation, if his love for her is true, then why does he feel it cannot last? Because it is apparent to him that though this love is true, it is nothing so great as to demand that the world bend to it, that circumstance wait on its beck and call. He has loved before, and he knows that not all loves are forever. He is not so foolish as to think that because the love he feels is true means that the world must allow it to persist, that it

has any *truth* beyond the here and now, any significance grander than the emotions and people involved.

It is the sign of a sort of insecurity to overvalue a true love, to invest it with something beyond love. It *must* have a deeper significance, says the rationalist. Only that could explain this *unreasonable* rush of emotions, surely? Romanticism is the enemy of deeper significance. It is a friend of the aesthetic, of the superficial. Romanticism falls in love with beauty, with a gorgeous girl, with a handsome warrior of a man. Vanity is not a sin in the eyes of the romantic.

But once again, this contrast is only artificial. It is not that the romantic abhors all signs of significance. The romantic and the rationalist see clarity and significance in opposing subjects. The rationalist regards the world as adhering to certain laws, as being orderable, and as being available for immediate inspection. When the rationalist is confronted with a poem, with an idea which does not make itself immediately available to his methodological mind, he ascribes it some deeper significance, in order to hide behind the vanity his calculable mind makes him prone to. The romantic is vain in the fullest sense; for him the poem is obvious and clear – it is the world itself which is shrouded in mystery, a shroud he cannot pierce. The romantic ascribes to nature a spirit, a mystery, a godlike essence. It is to nature itself that romanticism ascribes a deeper significance.

It is pretence to paint myself as a romantic and nothing more. I have within me the capacity to stand for rationalism as well. But I have chosen to take up arms in the name of romanticism, and thus it is my duty to fight for her until my last breath. I do this to fight the danger.

Epilogue

The danger threatens to consume us all. To combat the danger, we must affirm life by taking a stance. When we take a stance we decide where and how we would like to stand, and in doing so we exit the standing-reserve – the life of a passive product. To take a stance is to *stand with* and to *stand against*. The two are inseparable, for to take a stance is to take a position, and a position can only exist insofar as it has an opposition. A position and its opposition are equals. One is not superior or inferior to the other; in fact their existence subsists off their mutual resistance. Likewise, opposites do not contradict each other in every imaginable way; they are more alike than different, and it is this similarity which draws them into the same neighbourhood and allows them to come face-to-face with one another.

What is the danger? The danger is rationalism. Rationalism, in and of itself, is not dangerous. It is only one stance among many, an attitude open for adoption. The danger of rationalism is the monopoly it has over the modern mind. Rationalism, having touted science and technology as its children and its gift to humanity, has used these credentials to climb into a position of overwhelming power. We have lost the balance between equals; rationalism is now a tyrannical king, romanticism an impoverished peasant. The rationalists have seized the means of production, they control the media, institutionalize our education, and impose their will upon the masses. We are born into a rationalist world, we arrive with their set of instructions, and the world reveals itself to us as they would have it.

Rationalism gets right what romanticism gets wrong. We would not want to rid the world of its presence and its force, it is required for equilibrium, for a balance between equals. The same is to be said of modern technology; the first signs of it were evident in, and it is only the consequence of the first agriculture and the first domestication. Technology itself is not the danger, technology is but a tool, and the purpose and power of a tool is revealed by the hand that

wields it. Those disposed to regard the world in an orderable and calculable way will use and create tools to conduct their work.

The danger is that the rationalists control technology, and in doing so control what sort of technology is produced, and for what purpose. The romantic does not seek a reversal. The solution is not 'going back to the way things were'. Throughout history, one extreme is usually responded to by another. We must not combat dogma with dogma, we must achieve equilibrium, to reflect the workings of nature, to stand for nature and have nature be our stance. Nature is opposed to the unnatural, and there is nothing so unnatural as a monopoly, as a species which devours all others and faces no threat in return. Perhaps this is why rationalism has come to regard itself as a god, as master of the planet which has birthed it.

Currently, the layout of the battlefield is as such; rationalism has a mechanized army behind its back, while romanticism has but a few sterling knights by her side. The knights of romanticism must be extra diligent in the ensuing battle, they will face great resistance, the whole of humanity, the modern way of life, is opposed to them. They must learn to persist in standing through the harshest of conditions, for the battle will not be quickly won. And they must lay their lives on the line, if they ever hope to overthrow the tyranny of rationalism and restore balance to the world. In a world so divorced from nature, romantics are the saving power capable of restoring balance.

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