Reason D'Etre In the Age of Haute Cuisine

Peter John Boyle
PART ONE

BOHEMIA SUCCUMBS TO CONVENTION

I'm sorry to say that sometime this summer I passed a landmark in the steady erosion of my super-sophomoric suburbo-boheme value system...... I realized that I could no longer enjoy eating a HOT DOG.

The relentless onslaught of the a la mode, coupled with the irreversible flow of the au courant had carried me to a space in time where my own pretensions about lifestyle refuted my suburban legacy and rendered me alien to the ultimate icon of classless americana. In Rhode Island they call 'em WEENIZ.

And it wasn't just the fact that I had developed an aversion to the tube steak... whose nearly psychodelic toxin content had fueled my artistic fantasies since I was old enough to squeeze the mustard: Noooo, it was more; much, much more! This was no simple maturation of my taste, it constituted a major deviation in philosophical orientation... RILLY!

After enduring years of propaganda from the advocates of pesto, and the ten thousand other variations of fabulous epicure that currently rule this planet, my commitment to THE OLD WEST EAT-IT-OUT-OF-THE-CAN SCHOOL OF FINE DINING was hopelessly weakened. Where-as I would once have become apoplectic in the presence of a nouvelle waitress performing her recitative of the specials du jour, I soon found myself grumbling if I ate the same meal two days in a row.

The rigors of fabulousness were upon me fast and furious! And before I had a chance to consider the ramifications of these subtle changes... well sir, I found myself more interested in power than in sex appeal.

What had become of the funky, quasi-spartan ethos of western bohemiana; the law of the beat frontier? How did all those hippies metamorphise into oenophiles anyway? From what cryonic suspension chamber was GOOD TASTE exhumed and returned to some Victorian level of uniformity?

Pity the poor bohemian who watches his former playmates fixate on real estate, air travel and fine dining. Pity the last, humane gourmand surrounded by the new breed of epicurean rhinoceros. Pity me, sitting here, wondering WHY, whilst tout le monde is asking WHAT'S IN IT?

PART TWO

BOHEMIA EATEN ALIVE BY EL FAVOLOZO

Recently I suffered through a "vacation" disturbingly akin to a period of indentured servitude. My host/master was a world class megalomaniac and pan-cultural-persona-plus-ultra. Yes! She was very FABULOUS. More than that she was FOB-U-LOUS. And, claiming to be no less than da mamma of de avant gods, she set upon my poor beat psyche with the intention of teaching...
me, among other things, how to LIVe WELL.

Don't waste her time with ho-hum, academic arguments about values or esthetics child! This avant-cosmo-jungle-woman wanted to inject me with nothing less than a taste for truffles!

In the past I had spent a lot of time and energy trying to approach a state of EXISTENTIAL CORRECTNESS and nownhere (or there actually) in VERY sunny Italy, I was being shown the error of my ways. LIVING RIGHT, in the midst of a universally acknowledged web of random, morally neutral phenomena — was, to say the least absurd (and that was its only value) "YOU DON'T WANT TO LIVE RIGHT HONEY" proclaimed my fabulous hostess "YOU WANT TO LIVE WELL... Here, order this, it would cost you 100 dollars in New York!" But the chewy pasta I was served tasted as though it were flavored with 300 year old hamburger helper! And so...

Unable to utter the appropriate (fabulous!) adjective, at a sufficiently enthused pitch (REALLY!), I was promptly declared devoid of an epicurean soul and thrown from the train.

PART THREE BOHEMIA DIGESTED, EXPELLED AND LEFT STEAMING

Well, this is just not fair. I've suffered through dinner with the fabulous, and I still don't know why they are driven through their epic careers to that ecstatic confron- tation with la dolce vita.

LIVING WELL IS THE BEST REVENGE they say, But the only revenge I can imagine wanting would be against people who espouse lifestyle as some kind of short cut to existential impeccability.

This is, without a doubt, the most pernicious concept I've ever encountered in all my years as a devotee of decay. It sounds like a nouvelle variation of JOIN OR DIE. Now I feel like my back is against the wall...

TO EAT, OR NOT TO EAT

Has Raison D'Etre been reduced to a recipe?

PART FOUR: BOHEMIAN MEMOIRE...my life as a nitrogenous waste

Please excuse me, I'm stupid. Maybe... I don't know. It doesn't make sense... this living well business...

It's making me COMPLETELY MENTAL! It seems to short circuit all the classic rationales with which I am familiar. Of course, everybody knows by now that spiritual values are completely uncool in the age of haute cuisine... and you might as well picket the public library in the nude for all the credibility that divine inspiration will get you.

Psychological motives are just about as lame although obsession is still fairly well regarded.

So, what else does that leave other than political (yawn) or social motives (fer sure)

to compete with this SENSORY PRAGMATISM?

Despite the persistence of the classical REASONS, the line of nouveau hipsters awaiting entry to the epicurean pantheon just keeps growing. To the point where it would seem that the ultimate goal of tout le monde a la mode is...

to arrive at a place where it is possible to approach a state of grace via the, um... alimentary canal?

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In desperation I asked a GOURMET/ARTISTE of my acquaintance to explain their idea of the difference between living well and living right.

"LIVING RIGHT IS IMPOSSIBLE" I was told perfunctorily.

O.K., so given the absence of rational alternatives (or, I should say, alternative rationales) TODAY'S RILLY MODERNE up-to-date and totally au courant auteur, abstract painter or autoharp authority is unconcerned with the vicissitudes of moral values.

In constructing their motivational scaffold, the truly modern-types-haute-cuisine-art-dude builds upon the unshakable bedrock of bon gout.

URP!

Perhaps, after all, THINKING WELL IS THE BEST REVENGE.

All this rumination has given me an appetite. Suddenly I've got the urge to throw a couple weenies in the microwave.

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