

A WORD ON THE PARTNERSHIP OF ARROGANCE AND ARTISTS

(Trần Nghi Âu Cơ)

For the sake of this conversation, H, a coworker, is going to be renamed: "Coworker I want to stab in the throat with a ballpoint pen."

CIWTSITTWABP: What are you doing with your writing (English) degree now?

me: I'm...writing.

CIWTSITTWABP: For money?

me: No. Writing just to write.

CIWTSITTWABP: Well...then...why are you working here?

me: To make money to write.

CIWTSITTWABP: Why didn't you major in something else from the beginning?

Look, you dumb twit. In my experience, there are two types of liberal arts people: 1) those who are rich and have extra time and don't know what to do with themselves who think, "Hey, the arts look easy, why not make some money out of that. I can do it, easy peasy." Or 2) a special kind of idiot who makes life decisions based on their heart and not their brain, the kind for whom passion is the strongest drive, not conventional success.

I can assure you that my family is not rich, so that makes me a special kind of idiot. My mom once explained the difference between, say, a med student and an art student. A med student goes to college knowing exactly what he's going to do when he graduates.

Not exactly exactly, but exactlyish. An art student goes to college because art is his passion. Most of the time, he has no idea what he's going to do with his art major.

The reactions my cousin—the political science/law major—and I got when people heard our college degrees were vastly different. Their reaction to her majors: omggg, you're going to go to DC? You're gonna president and famous? We're so proud of you. Their reactions to my major: Oh...oh hey, how's your grandmother doing?

Every field is important in its own right. I've heard many people remark on how pretentious liberal arts majors are. We kinda have to be, don't we? We get put down so much. Our poverty, future and present, is assumed, even by ourselves. Our skills are deemed disposable because they are thought to be unnecessary to the survival of humanity. And when we graduate with our shiny new liberal arts degree, and get a job completely unrelated to our fields, people scoff and say, "Bet you wished you picked something else huh."

We have to be arrogant. Most of the artists I read about are arrogant. They have to truly believe in the nobleness of their craft in order to create truly good works. Admittedly, we are resigned to our low status on the societal totem pole, resigned to being completely ignored and used at the whim of society. My second semester of college, my professor for a British lit class said, "Most of you will probably be poor. That's just how it is for English majors." The whole

class laughed. But that was the exact moment a tiny nugget of pride dug its roots into my heart because I knew my profession is a worthy one. We laugh in the face of poverty. That's a special kind of bravery.

Point is, CIWTSITTWABP, artists are never "too good" for anything because we can create out of anything.

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