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A Poet's Republic

Robert Wood · Wednesday, February 7th, 2018

Plato got it wrong. Poets should not be expelled from the Republic. They are essential to its very functioning. They have the qualities needed to be the best of citizens – ticker, desire, acumen; knowing. The hope I have for Australia is that we can become a poet's republic and a republic of poetry. Why not excite the passions and please the masses? Why not take the piss out of heroes and kings? Why not express our selves in languages of our own making?

We can still be practical; still fix roads and hospitals, build schools and ovals; still be respected in Athens or London or wherever the winds blow our ambassadors to. The republic we have imagined here has not found a place for poets, not so far, not yet but we have not tried too hard. We have been caught up with what to do with our head of state, our coat of arms, our flags and uniforms. And that is a right and proper start, but the next step is to light the fire in the mind, to call out to the people and ask – what is the love of our future? Will it be *liberté, égalité, fraternité*? Will it be peace, justice, solidarity? Will it be care for country?

We do not know the answers yet, but poets are there to ask these questions; to put our thoughts into language and ask of us: who are we? What are we living for? What can we become? Philosophers can ask this too, so can business owners and unionists, and nurses and teachers, and whoever the people are. But, poets give it a little spice, a little beauty, a little dash and daring.

This is because poets do not concern themselves with legislation or policy or white papers. They do not concern themselves with the mundane or the quotidian or the everyday aspects of governing. They do not concern themselves with soundbites or question time or press releases. They are concerned with the texture of life itself, with the substance of our dreams, our ideals. It is the hope of the nation writ into the soul. It is knowing who we are and where we dwell. It is a higher calling that allows our politicians and our bureaucrats and our citizens to get on with their efforts and affairs and habits. It builds tomorrow in the language of our shared imagination. It thinks of the future, it feels, and shows us how to shatter the glass ceiling, the bamboo ceiling, the ochre ceiling, and all the barriers to entry that we are yet to foretell. It is encompassing, freeing, dancing in the street to the sounds of defeat. It gets up off the floor, ducks and weaves, it breathes once more, it rings the bell, it rings the siren, it rings in a new dawn. Tomorrow bright will be the morn, and the day after that and the day after that, the sun will shine and make the frost dew on parliament lawn, and before us, everyone will be singing a song of what it means to live strong and be proud once more, to wake up with a heart aflame in the chest of green and gold.

That is a poet's republic; a republic for more than the huddled masses, more than the exiled and the

homeless. This is for the tired of the tired of the tired. This is for poor of the poor of the poor. This is for the sick of the sick of the sick. This is for the mad, the destitute, the long lost, the cast out, the returned home, the ghosts. This is for the ones who have always been here and helped it grow true despite the efforts of those who stonewalled, thwarted, refused. It's for all of you. That is what a poet's republic can become and allow us to do. That is the oath we make after Plato and for all the tomorrows that we sow right now and forever once more.

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