

the art of pretension

in defense of the snob

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It's not cool to be stupid.

It's not quirky to have no remorse for your lack of education.

It's not okay to let yourself fail in the name of "self-care." It never was.

And at some point, you should start basing your self-worth off your efforts.

You haven't read a book, much less a news article, in years.

Why are you happy with that?

You're letting yourself fail core classes. How are you not embarrassed?

And you're probably not even reading this. You likely haven't even picked up this newspaper, or any newspaper ever, for that matter.

Why don't you care?

What do you mean you have "different goals"? Is your goal to fail? To not try?

Do you even realize how much of a privilege it is to receive an education?...sigh.

I'm frustrated.

There's a plague. Hollow shells walk among us, but they look just like everybody else.

We're in an ugly, jaundice-skinned, wheezing and scratching period of anti-intellectualism.

Pretension is out, and we're all worse off for it.

No one, I would argue, is having a good time.

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I come from a home that values knowledge.

My mother used to ask me to teach her what I learned in school that day, but really, she taught me. She deserves all the credit for showing me there's always more to everything. If she's curious about something, she's typing it

into 'Mama Google.' But even so, when she finds her answer, it's never enough. She has to scour down the subtleties—to know the why behind the why.

My father likes to test me. On long road trips, he'll throw out a question and wait to see where my mind takes it. He's a complex guy—analytical to the core, yet he also has a penchant for the abstract. One hour we're debating—

(No, Baba. If you replace every plank, it's not the same ship.)

and the next hour he's pouring out everything he's picked up from a life spent working in and driving through many parts of this country. *(Yes, Baba, of course I'm listening—but I still think you're wrong about the ship.)*

So, obviously, I'm their greatest experiment.

Knowledge wouldn't feel this alive without them.

You could say I dabble into yearnalism.

There are writings I know more intimately than most of my friends. If you dig into my skull, I'm convinced you'll find *The Brothers Karamazov* instead of a brain. If you dig into the center of me, there'll be *The Symposium* and *The Diary of Anaïs Nin* instead of a heart. And if I bleed, know that the poetries spray-painted on crumbling Palestinian walls might come streaming out.

That's my favorite thing about life—everything can be learned deeply enough to the point of passion. Go learn knitting, astrophysics, clay-making, singing, cutting your own hair, quantum mechanics, philosophy, jiu-jitsu, Icelandic, whatever! Do it scared, do it smart, do it stupid, just *do it* because nowadays, you absolutely can. Knowledge is divine, and sharing it is human.

Everything is, in fact, that deep.

So, after giving you this context—this meager sliver of who I am—you could probably infer why everything in today's climate feels so dizzying for me. A humanities education

is seen as easy, half-baked, and useless; the words art and reading are treated like they're laced with vermin. The next generation of doctors and engineers are bragging about being reliant on A.I. to complete assignments. And according to researchers, we're seeing unprecedented declines in global literacy rates.

To those experts, I say: we can tell.

The thing about *Fahrenheit 451* is that by the time the books were burning, no one was reading them anyway. That, not just the censorship, is crucial.

And if you have no idea what I'm talking about, drop and give me fifty pages.

We are pushed further and further away from our curiosity.

We're labeling ourselves, prescribing our uniqueness.

Nothing is embarrassing or romantic anymore—it's all regressive.

I go through seasons of unlearning, but lately, the seasons have felt longer.

I think we will witness a reversal. We will return to life. It will be slow and staggered, but it will happen. It has to. I don't think it could get any worse.

If you listen closely, you can hear the stomachs growling. People are starving. They're hungry to return to the pure presence of simpler times. To live life through the senses. To experience for the sake of experiencing.

To know for the sake of knowing.

Father, forgive me, for I am pretentious.

But if this column hurts your feelings, good.

If it reassures you, even better.

Death to anti-intellectualism.