

## Dare to Know

A Short Sketch about searching for the light which is inspired from of Immanuel Kant's essay Was ist Aufklärung

(As the scene is revealed, a man in blue jeans and t-shirt is sitting alone in a black room writing on a pad of paper. There's a window which looks out a brick wall. The room is illuminated by a bare light bulb. A door opens and more light spills into the room. A man dressed in 17th Century attire and holding a bright lantern walks into the room)

STUDENT

Close the door.

MAN

Throw off your shackles!

STUDENT

(Looking over how the man is costumed)  
The Fetish club is down the street. But I don't think you'll get in, it's usually too crowded by this time.

MAN

(Ignoring his comments)  
Did you not hear me?

STUDENT

Please close the door.

MAN

I said release yourself from your self-incurred tutelage.

STUDENT

If I followed your direction right now, I'd just be trading up for more shackles. Please leave me alone. Close the door. I'm working.

MAN

Oh you poor little graduate student of another age! You think you have it so hard. I never moved more than 100 miles in my life, but I applied my reason and my research and now my work spans centuries. Throw off your shackles!

(MORE)

MAN (Continued)

Here you are slaving over these papers, have you really been daring to know or are you simply fulfilling what is expected of you? Giving away your time as you march towards that which equalizes us all, your little death?

STUDENT

Look man, I just need to finish this grant application so that I can stave off getting a real job, and enjoy more sunny days with my kids at the beach.

MAN

Lazy coward

STUDENT

Kant?!

MAN

You finally recognize my text?

STUDENT

Yeah, Yeah, I was working on it, but I blew it off to write my novel. Where'd I put your essay, it was right here in front of me.

MAN

(He looks on the floor finds some papers)  
Was ist Aufklärung? Tossed on the floor. These words--The English have won the day

STUDENT

Well you Germans did end up causing a few world wars.

MAN

WORLD wars you say? Sadness, darkness. Not much has changed from my time. Enlighten me, no pun intended.

STUDENT

I can't catch you up on all that has changed since you first wrote this. It would be kinda boring really. Reason has not won the day though. Idealism is in the gutter.

MAN

But the basic principle remains, I am of this time as well. I know taking the step to competence is dangerous for all mankind, not to mention the entire fairer sex--

STUDENT

See, there you go... you are not of this time. How can you leave out fifty percent of the population--there was a sexual revolution.

(The phone rings.)

STUDENT (Continued)

Yeah, Hello? What! Yeah I am working. No I'm not having a beer at the Cambie. I don't know when I'll be home. I told you not to call me unless it was an emergency. Yeah. Okay. Right. Good-bye.

MAN

(Referring to the content of the phone call)  
Nothing has changed I see with the fair sex. No matter the technical means of communication, we are adrift in that regard. The marvelous devices of your age that delight me.

STUDENT

(Somewhat defensively)

She means well. I've been working hard.

MAN

Yes, I can see it in your eyes.

STUDENT

Allergies. It's almost midnight. Really want to sleep, and enjoy the silence of my house. But like Shakespeare's poet in the Sonnets, I'm weary with toil, and my mind won't rest. And I'm sneezing. Damn allergies. What a weakness. My eyes are red at the edges. I see through glossy water. Am I doing the right thing here at UBC in this crazy--what is it again--CCFI program. I'm a playwright, an actor--dammit I'm a theatre artist. Why am I up at night--half-blind with lack of sleep, worry, and these bloody allergies? Oh yeah, I want the SSHRC grant. I want the money. I use safe, conservative words. And I make sure I put the dots, and the commas in the right place on my evergrowing list of references. I'm doing the right thing.

MAN

Then why am I here?

STUDENT

Dreams, who cares. A writer's convention of convenience.

MAN

I am Kant! I'm not a cheap device.

STUDENT

Just exercising some objective self reflection. I can't do this with you right now. I have not the courage you ask for. How can I be certain I am doing the right thing. I won't submit to the hierarchal power of the university--I can't throw off that shackle.

MAN

My work is pragmatic. We must accept the paradox that for our individual power to exist we must acknowledge the power of the state under which we labour.

STUDENT

Power, I have no power except over my own writing. Over my characters. Now, I exercise that right now. Please close the door and take your lantern with you.

MAN

Lost to your formulas, obeying the statutes, your natural gifts laid waste. Run from the academy, run. Tear down your shackles!

STUDENT

I'm an optimist Sir. I love the idea we can within our own private selves apply our sense of reason to our experience and is so doing move humanity forward to a greater understanding. I love the idea. But as I said, you are of another age. And your invention of the concept of race does a disservice really. What did you even know of the subject?

MAN

I studied all the journals. I used you reason--

STUDENT

How do you reason with the idea of slavery, genocide, or own new ability to totally destroy ourselves with weapons your age could never dream about?

MAN

I grant you that. Incremental steps. Freedom may be granted, but it has to be cultivated in the mind.

STUDENT

What is freedom without opportunity to understand and employ it.

MAN

Who are you to presume to question me. No wait, yes. That is what you must do. Discover your own truth. Proclaim it. Only then will you have freedom.

STUDENT

Many great thinkers, some from my own land, Emily Murphy--a campaigner for the rights of women in this country, but still she believed in the forced sterilization of the mentally weak. She fought in the name of what your concept of freedom. They all may have thought they understood freedom, but to paraphrase a writer from the twentieth century, George Orwell, All Men must be free, but some must be more free than others. You see, Sir, we have not found a way to share equally, to understand the golden rule, and as long we place Man's reason as the foundation to understanding, we will never be free.

MAN

You misinterpret my text.

STUDENT

Does it matter? Its not working. Why the division of public and private responsibility. Why can't a scholar-priest question the authority directly and share that questioning with the congregation.

MAN

This took ten dark years of my life--

STUDENT

--Who has the right to bestow freedom as you suggest?

MAN

We must agree on a system--

STUDENT

--Yes! You're right. It keeps me awake at night wondering how each little moment upon all the other moments in our worlds continue on. The inevitability of life, the constant of life, no matter what we do. Long after this building crumbles, we go on.

MAN

Good. Wonder is the first and constant step in the struggle to understand. If I teach you anything, please remember that.

STUDENT

Go. I have my own thoughts.

MAN

Foolish man out of time. You do not struggle alone. All the men who came before and after me are your gift as we search to live always in age of enlightenment. Freedom is a process, not a result.

STUDENT

(Agitated)

Leave. Close the door!

MAN

I go on.

(Man leaves through the door. Student rushes over and slams the door shut. He walks back to his desk and stares at his pile of papers. He goes to the light and turns it off and then calls into the darkness.)

STUDENT

Hello? Is anyone out there still?

END OF PLAY