

Amor Fati, But for the Past

It takes as much equanimity to accept the past as it does to accept the future.

Friedrich Nietzsche (I think) introduced the notion of “amor fati,” or “love of fate” as a way for humans to reconcile themselves to the uncertainty of the future and the disasters it may bring for each of us. The idea? Don’t fear your fate, don’t even just “accept” it – *love* it. If you love whatever comes, and act accordingly, no fate can harm you.

Is your fate to break a leg right before your football team wins state? “Amor fati” would perhaps have you be the best crippled cheerleader/mascot/inspiration you can be, using your injury for all it’s worth as self-motivation, others-motivation, self-improvement, and others-improvement.

“Amor fati” is fine for the future, but what about all else that has come before? As Gus McRae of *Lonesome Dove* says, “the world ain’t nothin’ but a boneyard. . .” We live at the tail end of a long history of life that includes lots of death, injustice, and suffering. When I drive through the beautiful lands of the Southeast United States, I also have to remember that so much of it is what it is because people were kept as slaves here.

What’s more, we each live at the tail end of long personal histories of mistakes, foolishness, regrettable decisions (or indecisions), and pain. We each have to wonder more or less often how things might have turned out differently with us had things gone differently.

I think this is where we need a more clearly defined concept. Perhaps “Amor praeteritum”?

The past can be a horrible place, but (as so many popular songs attest) it’s also what brought us to where we are now. When someone says they wouldn’t “trade any of it,” it means they have accepted the pain of what came before as the price for becoming. This is a viewpoint worth having. As someone who has spent a good amount of time regretting paths taken or untaken, I reckon it’s one of the only ways to sane acceptance of life.

If it is Stoic to accept whatever comes, it is Stoic also to accept whatever has come before. Practice “amor praeteritum” alongside your “amor fati,” if it’s not too tall an order.