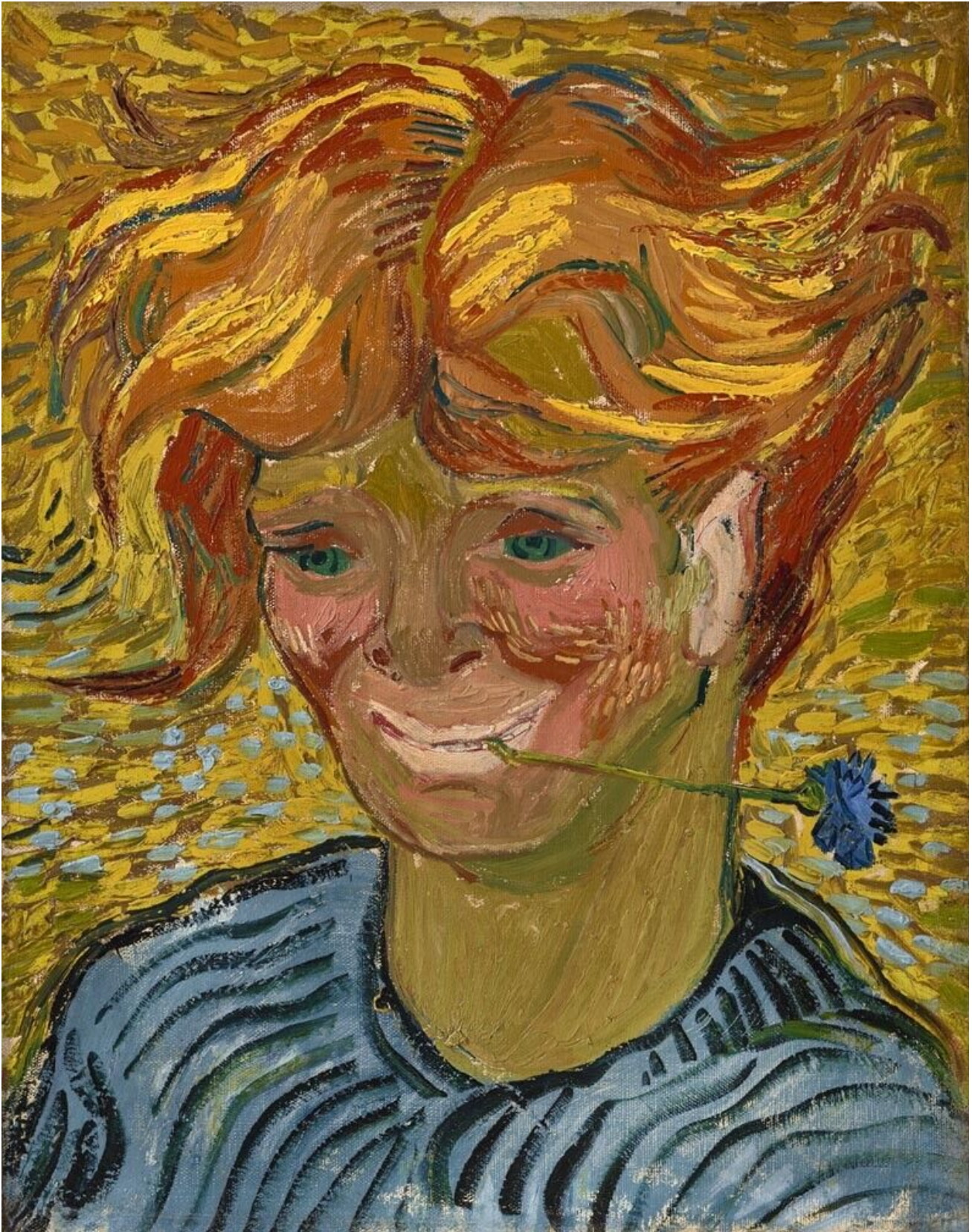


The Child is Father to the Man

by [Larry McCloskey](#) (December 2022)



Young Man with Cornflower, Vincent Van Gogh, 1890

In 1969, when I was 14 years old and in my first year of high school, my uber-Catholic school principal sent busloads of us

impressionable newbies to Toronto, our provincial capital, to protest the lack of equitable funding for Catholic education. Our somber school guardians—priests, nuns and Catholic lay teachers—were antithetical to most things of protest, so we knew the issue was important.

I was then, what can only be described in Irish parlance a 'wee little shite,' so I went on the trip but was never going to protest. We altar boys and Catholic school fraudsters did what we had to do to survive, with a steady eye directed towards what we could get away with. Suffice to say, our fidelity to Catholic orthodoxy and school rules was undermined by our wicked, subversive ways.

While not attending the convention center where the protest was happening, I do remember the thrill of dispersing and activating stink bombs throughout the gymnasium where several hundred protesters were to sleep that night. Since we hadn't attended the protest, we had time to pick up said stink bombs at a sleazy store on sleazy Young Street, then as now the sleaziest street in Canada. As hundreds of young authentic protesters lay on the gym floor fatigued after a day of protesting, we enacted our much-discussed plan of olfactory Armageddon. Our subversive un-fab four walked, single file the length of the gym with number one dropping stink bombs like Hansel and Gretel on a path to the witch's house, as the un-fab three followed, stepping on glass vials and waiting for the anticipated protest—second of the day. We were nimble and mostly silent, hoping to complete the act without raising a stink, while raising a universal stink. Our subterfuge worked, but I was a protest failure.

In fact, my subversive protest of protests was out of sync with the phenomenon of the times. During the 1960s into the 70s, protests were robust, and as far as I can discern, did not involve stink bombs. There were big issues, civil rights outrages and emerging environment awareness (even if it was climate cooling that was feared, with climate warming yet to

be discovered). It was a coalition of eager young people, mothers, funky seniors, university students, left-wing professors, makers of free love and long-haired subversives yelling slogans and "sticking it to the man." It was cool, it was audacious, it was what people who chose to matter did for issues that mattered. The unholy reign of the rich, white, male, who controlled everything and was inclined to change nothing, was over. At least that was what the protest movement set out to do.

The fact is protests can change people's views over time. And here's why. However enlightened or nutty a cause or protest might be, we often have begrudging admiration or can be influenced by those willing to put themselves on the line. If you are willing to lose everything for what you believe, faulty as the belief might be, conviction garnishes respect. Conversely, if protest amounts to histrionics and hyperbole without content or consequence, one is simply a dupe to shifting winds and chameleon opportunism.

Which, of course, is fitting segue for Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. He, of teenager demeanor, loves to present himself as a subversive, an agent of change, a radical of epic proportions. For example, in September 2019, Trudeau joined Greta Thunberg in Montreal to protest the lack of action on climate change. Governments just aren't doing enough, and it's up to the people on the street to hold them accountable on this life-or-death issue. At least that was the rhetoric of protesters.

"If the people in power won't take their responsibility, then we will," Thunberg told a crowd of hundreds of thousands, including many children who skipped school to attend the rally. Not to be outdone, Trudeau marched along with the protesters and thanked dear Greta for "pushing us all to do more."

Hum. And what did that push cost Canadians? One hundred

billion dollars and counting. And what did that push accomplish in reducing our 1.6 percent of global emissions for the world? A net-emissions increase and counting. And did that abysmal failure of said push result in one of the PM's infamous apologies? Not in this lifetime. Besides even if our PM was inclined to apologize—he was not—failure is not his fault because Greta pushed him to do more. Depending on the audience, he was either pushed or else lead the push (which in a fitting and kitschy way sounds like *putsch*).

Fast forward, different issue, same theme. On October 29, 2022, on the front page of Canadian newspapers and in his glory are Trudeau and his wife leading determined protesters on the Alexandra Bridge in Ottawa to show their support for protesters in Iran—so, solidarity as in, “Workers of the world unite.” Protests in Iran were sparked by the death of Mahsa Amini on September 16 at the hands of Iran's brutal Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. She had been detained for violating the dress code for women. (For a perspective on this code, Google photos of how women dressed in Tehran back in the supposedly repressed 1950s, and you'll be amazed at the lack of repression). These would be the same Revolutionary Guardsmen who were created to enforce Iran's brutal control of its people since the 1979 revolution. IRGC is responsible for many hundreds of human rights abuses in the service of a brutal regime, with downing airplane flight PS752 and killing all 176 passengers as a recent memorable atrocity. And what has Trudeau done with the many appeals and overwhelming evidence to declare IRGC a terrorist group under Canada's Criminal Code? Nothing.

Trudeau, the former ski instructor, part-time drama teacher and full-time feminist personhood has refused to do anything, despite there being 73 groups currently in this non-exclusive terrorist club. The question of why Trudeau failed to act lingers but is eclipsed by a greater unfathomable mystery. Why do the Canadian electorate, members of the supporting

coalition party, members of his own party and the state agency media allow the prime minister to act as national leader responsible for making difficult real-world decisions, while simultaneously he acts as a rebellious teenage revolutionary? Sorry for the many questions, but how is it the media doesn't point out that being "the man" while protesting against "the man" is a tad hypocritical?

And on the world stage, it doesn't fool anyone. At the G20 this week, Trudeau decided to bravely and publicly take on President Xi for China's meddling in Canada's 2019 federal election. But Trudeau confused diplomatic ways with public protest by letting journalists know what he and Xi discussed. When leaders discuss issues, it is with explicit understanding what can and cannot be made public, with China particularly sensitive on this subject. Trudeau must have confused his role as a G20 leader with being a Tiananmen Square protester. Once Xi discovered that their conversation was a publicity stunt intended to bolster Trudeau's international image, he dressed Trudeau down in an equally public forum. So, tit for diplomatic tat, with any possible rapport leading to resolution between Canada and China now dead.

Same question asked twice: How do we citizens put up with a leader who poses as protester? The answer or lack thereof may reveal that we have entered into a new age of political cynicism. The Digital Age with infinite access to information was supposed to take us to new levels of knowing, awareness, wisdom; in short, great things in a New World Order. But the actual outcome has been that we are swamped, overwhelmed, marinating in distracted excess rather than discovering knowledge and understanding from our digital supernova. Knowing everything—the promise and the fallacy—has had the opposite intended effect, and we have become surface scratching, frivolous samplers at the virtual smorgasbord of possibility at the expense of knowing, well, anything. Quantity and ease of access did not lead to quality and depth.

Information evolved and we devolved.

Which has had startling, if logical, political consequences. The age of surface scratching has given rise to leadership by the frivolous. Last year in the Canadian federal election, Trudeau and the Liberal Party won a minority government before being given an emperor for life majority by his supposed political rival. True, the leader of the New Democratic Party (NDP) does have the choice to rescind the deal, but the agreement of four years is likely to hold because it is in the interests of both parties to continue absolute rule with a consequence-free hand. The cause is obvious for the Liberals: Absolute power corrupts absolutely. For the NDP—in repudiation of their ‘conscience of the country’ traditional image of themselves—they get to foist ever more leftist policies onto trusting, somnolent citizens from the non-critical shadows. It simply doesn’t matter anymore how Canadians regard issues such as energy, inflation, government spending or hotel rooms costing \$6,000 per night. The fact is, knowing elites that we elected—with citizens unaware of the authoritarian structure about to be imposed—will make all decisions that matter for the next four years. And this monolithic political Frankenstein of our own making doesn’t care.

And yet caring is the currency of the aspirational politician in these cynical times. Not caring by way of weighing, adjusting, receiving input on, critical thinking and possible compromise towards the best possible outcome has about as much political currency as cryptocurrency in these wonky times. For it is the pretense of caring that rules, the ability to convince people or at least the compliant media of caring. It turns out that Trudeau’s thin pre-prime-minister resume —ski instructor and part time drama teacher—undervalued his valuable flair for the dramatic. Pretense rules politics and accountability is for chumps. Who knew?

Trudeau’s handlers knew, and Biden’s too. The America midterm election has been equally instructive. There was the

presumption of a red wave based on evidence of Democrat abject failure on every issue of consequence. Energy, the economy, the border, Afghanistan, China, Russia all speak to mismanagement and American decline, but the Democrat strategy of non-engagement on any issue of any consequence, turned out to be their salvation. Rather than defend their record or articulate a vision for the future, the Dems hunkered down with accusations and conspiracy theories about the end of democracy. The Republicans never understood that Biden's basement politics of avoidance and accusation actually works. Which makes the Democrat's relative success in these critical midterms the most cynical moment in American history.

Ditto for the Prime Minister of Canada—our image-conscious preening protester who gets to chat with the head cheese of China. Once the boy who doubles as prime minister is allowed to throw off his suit in Clark Kent fashion for jeans and a tee-shirt—or whatever revolutionaries wear these days—in order to join protest ranks and stick it to the man, we, the people are well into political entropy.

Trudeau's weird dichotomy is actually strangely and sadly emblematic of these entropic times. Being responsible for things doesn't prevent him from claiming to want to change that thing he is responsible for—but will take no responsibility for because of all the unglamorous warts and blemishes of actually governing. And perversely this perversity reminds me of one of the most enigmatic lines of poetry in English literature:

*The child is father to the man;
And I could wish my days to be
Bound each to each by natural piety.*

The "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of

“Early Childhood” was written in 1807 by romantic poet William Wordsworth. The child is father to the man epitomizes the child-to-father relationship as roles evolve and reverse within an endless cycle of natural progression and piety. It is both a testament to the natural order, and it marries the inevitability of change to the necessity to conserve—bound each to each—all governed by natural piety, our only defense against the onslaught of time and age, beauty’s loss and death’s triumph.

Wordsworth’s concept of continuity and piety is likewise bound to the romantic poets of the 19th century, and to most people of every age in history, in its overarching belief that the world and our life and its purpose are bound up with something greater than ourselves. It was a poetic self-evident truth in Wordsworth’s time, and a truth denied today.

*But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home.*

To Trudeau, Biden and the new progressives there is no natural law, nor anything nor anyone worth preserving or being bound to. The concept of equity replaces natural law, endless change for no particular reason replaces conservation, and fidelity to who we are bound to is pre-determined by membership in our intersectional tribe rather than the unembodied transcendence of relationship.

As a worse insult, us non-progressives are regarded as unfeeling in responding to the world with our objective critical thinking and logic. Feelings are the progressives’ currency, and ideological causes are where we are to bank our reserve. But, living the unexamined life of feeling at the expense of knowing, intuiting, measuring and analyzing has the

ironic affect of dulling feeling as applied to what this world has to offer. Wordsworth, that preserving, transcending romantic fool, knew much and felt deeply.

*To me the meanest flower that blows can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.*

Listening, meeting the eye of a street person or working in a soup kitchen are tangible ways to know as precursor to learning the ways of the world from which we can develop personal values over the ideological protest (borrowed thinking) *de jour*. My stink bomb indifference to protest as a teenager was bad. Worse is inflicting ideological pressure on young people before they get the chance to develop substantial values too deep for tears. But my views, how I think people should come to their own views in becoming responsible and thoughtful adults, no longer has cachet. We have capitulated to the photo-op trailing clouds of vainglory for a prime-minister boy protesting the man he was voted to actually become.

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Larry McCloskey has had eight books published, six young adult as well as two recent non-fiction books. *Lament for Spilt Porter* and *Inarticulate Speech of the Heart* (2018 & 2020 respectively) won national Word Guild awards. *Inarticulate* won best Canadian manuscript in 2020 and recently won a second Word Guild Award as a published work. He recently retired as Director of the Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities, Carleton University. Since then, he has written

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