

Dear Plutarch,

I loved your observation in the third volume of “Lives” – that although at first you were working at the histories in order to bring light to others, you had begun to see that it was illuminating your own path. You learned from the lives of the Great Ones, and kept before yourself daily the examples of Virtue and Integrity they had set. Something you said struck me particularly: that there were different streams or winds in the Air blowing vileness or corruption. You said that it was important to bring around oneself a ‘good & honorable Air”.

I often feel I must keep my reading at a high level; that continuous study of the classics, and of artful books of my own time is a course of medicinal treatment, a kind of Physic if you will. I would fain levy that there be a Moral Reason for reading good literature. In some ways it is a simple Escape from the world and its weight. It can be argued that it causes flaccidity, pomposity, absent-mindedness, & a hopeless old-fashionedness. It can certainly become a dependency. My father became anxious if he did not have a few good books lined up to follow the one he was reading. I sometimes wonder if it might be one of the reasons I fall sick so frequently. My first sensation after giving into the diagnosis is one of intense pleasure as I settle into bed with the prospect of reading 8 or 10 hours a day.

It is not a Moral Argument, such as: “you must read wholesome texts and learn to distinguish the Good”. It is something more like to the experiential point you have made about the Airs. I’m not reading about exemplars; rather, I am immersing myself in the Scores of their wonderful Airs.

They have recorded a kind of music of the imagination and heart and intellect which kindles the original Air, in much the same fashion as does one of Bach’s scores, when someone sits at a piano. I surround myself with Airs of the Masters, and it drowns out those of vileness. Is it that simple, my friend? Are you one of the voices in that choir? Or is it a total two-thousand-year delusion?

I had a powerful impulse to buy your “Lives” in the \$100 edition from a 1580 translation. A feeling of addiction; I had to have it; I would read all eight volumes; be saturated with ancient knowledge in an Elizabethan spelling & diction! It almost swooned me, especially after turning to that passage I mentioned above. Then I felt the ‘real’ world tug at my sleeve. It is March of 2002. You will be the only person reading Plutarch in the Sir Thomas North translation for 1000 miles around. It’s a hundred dollars! It’s too big for your bookcase. Think of all the things you won’t read if you do read this.

So I walked away from you. But not without having seized a snippet of your Air, to add to my collection. I promise not to put a pin through it.

thank you,  
igni minyon