

There was a forest, and within that forest there was a sapling. It was mirror-balled with dew from the night and the most dazzling green. It was full of life and vitality. Its little leaves stretched shyly from its stems, and its roots slept quietly in the warm earth. It was happy.

Unbeknownst to the sapling, a band of monkeys was loping across the forest floor, their chattering a river of noise. They stopped when they came to the sapling, glowing viridescent in the morning light. They clicked their teeth, ruffled their pelts. Then, one picked up a pebble from beneath its feet, and with ferocious aim hit the sapling. It lay there, flattened, bruised, shocked and still. Its leaves were muddied and its stalk broken. The other monkeys took note, chattering among themselves. They too picked up pebbles and began firing them at the sapling crumbling its fragile structure.

The sapling was soon flattened. The monkeys moved on.

You can see where I'm going with this story - we might call it an allegory. We have all had rocks hurled at us, and we have all felt like the sapling. We have all wanted to cry out and say, 'Oi, stop pelting those pebbles at me! I'm tryna grow here!'. We have all wanted to fire those pebbles back at the monkeys - the critics. We have all experienced the gruelling heat of criticism - cheeks flushed, eyes averted, stems shattered. We have all just wished it would stop.

But what if we exit the forest and flip this idea of criticism on its head, the idea that criticism is negative and harmful? What if our message to critics could become: 'Ahahah yeah, keep it up!'. Would criticism have the negative connotations that it does?

Let's step into the real world - into a... totalitarian regime.

You are a member of the public of an official Nazi book burning. The ravenous fire is blazing in the centre of the crowd and the Fuhrer himself has just saluted you and your fellow citizens. He has reached this dictatorial position through scandalous laws and parliamentary acts and gradual omission of the opposition: omission of his critics. These are the characteristics of a Fascist and Totalitarian state - the government is ruled by a dictator, who commands that such obscenities as the burning of books be performed in order to further the interests of the nation. Fear prevails. Let me ask you, would you be standing there, uncomfortably wringing the sweat from your hands if there had been a critical mass of people who challenged Hitler's views and ideology?

Would this terrible tragedy have been allowed to happen?

It seems that there were no monkeys, and this time the sapling was poisonous.

Of course, nothing is that simple...

Let's change perspective and look to other times in history when the voice of critics was there, and brought about change for the positive!

Martin Luther King, an activist in the American civil rights movement, was critical of laws and societal regulations placed upon his people by privileged, white males. Through inspirational words and mass activism, his criticism was a catalyst for the passing of the Civil Rights Act.

In our own country, Vincent Lingiari drove the Wave Hill Walk-off, in which the Gurindji people walked off the Wave Hill cattle station in an act of defiance against their living conditions and pitiful pay, rightfully demanding their rightful land back. It was this criticism of their plight that further empowered the indigenous peoples to establish their land ownership rights and maintain a spiritual connection with country. In these cases, the presence of the criticism - of the courageous undermined - brought about unarguable change for the better, in what really was a David and Goliath encounter.

Now, let's ponder the present for a moment.

Centre down, take some deep breaths - oh wait you're choking on carbon dioxide. It's filling your lungs, stopping up your airways. Now where are the critics? Where are they? Hellooooo? It's up to us, my fellow Gen Z's to be the critics as we accelerate towards a hellish planet, in which the global average temperature is above 2°C, the sea has risen, the ice has retreated and the corals are gone. We must criticise now, or pay later. Most unfortunately, our generation has been saddled with the task of turning this around. It may seem an impossible task. The odds are against us - humanity has never faced such a state of affairs as is coming our way. If we do not think critically, and we do not criticise those in power for the oil-dripping, coal-clustered decisions they make, then what's the point?

So, as you can see, critics have their place. We need our critics in order to bring about change, to challenge injustice and maybe to save our home.

My message to critics? Don't be the monkeys, destroying the innocent sapling for no reason. Rather, target injustice, bring about change. Keep doing what you're doing because a world without critics may well end in a place where "ignorance is bliss, war is peace and freedom is slavery" and you can just see the light of the emblazoned setting sun from your seats on the new sea floor.