

Fashionable Nonsense: Postmodern Intellectual Buffoonery

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by Bill Crouse

Sometime around the middle of the last century there were those with enough foresight to perceive what would happen to serious thinking given the nature of the trends at the end of the Nineteenth. As the ideas of men like Darwin, Marx, and Nietzsche, and later the existentialists, leavened the lump of academia, a few scholars with insight and a tinge of the prophetic, began to respond with rigorous rebuttals and predictions as to what would be the fruition of these ideas. As a college student in the 60's I didn't have the wherewithal to grapple with these ideas on my own. By God's providence I discovered a book by a Christian philosopher which took me by the hand and instructed me how to approach and critique ideas alien to my Christian faith. That book was: *A Christian View of Men and Things*, by Gordon H. Clark (1952). Another book that was exceedingly helpful was: *The Decline of the Intellectual*, by Thomas Molnar (1960). Needless to say, neither of these made any bestseller lists. They were read by relatively few people. I still recommend them if you can find them; they are worth the search. Later in the 70's I discovered *The God Who is There* (1968), by Francis Schaeffer, and, *The Dust of Death* (1973), by Os Guinness. Both of these books show a lot of wear and tear as they've had great impact on my thinking.

Today the ideas of nihilism, naturalism, irrationalism, and relativism, spawned from the above-noted men and their progeny, have come to full bloom and affect all of us at the street level and dictate the direction of our culture. It may be risky on my part to voice the opinion that we may be bottoming out with postmodernism, not that it's going away tomorrow, but there are signs of both a spiritual revival and public reaction against PM. "What do you have in mind, Herr Crouse?"

Judging by the popularity of conservative talk shows and some of the books currently being published, there is evidence of deep opposition to PM and its pop culture. Back in the 60's as a student, as I noted above, I didn't find much help in critiquing the prevailing philosophies and popular culture. Back then critiques of the establishment very rarely got published in the mainstream media outlets. Capable scholars were discouraged from doing so. That filibuster was broken, I believe, with the advent of the internet and talk radio. The scenario goes something like this: A gadfly publishes a powerful critique of our PM culture; popular talk show hosts interview the author; the author broadcasts the address of his website and announces his next appearance at Barnes and Noble; the result is predictable. There is no longer an academic and media blockade.

Whereas the books I mentioned above were obscure, this new genre of critique often makes bestseller lists much to the chagrin of the opposition. These books are hard-hitting as they attack and counter the utterly zany thinking produced by PM pseudo-intellectuals and celebrities. For the most part, these new authors accomplish this refutation with humor, sarcasm, and by merely bringing to light some of the more crazy quotes of these would be elitists and intellectual wannabes. I currently have about a dozen of these books on my desk for review. One of the newest of this genre: *100 People Who Are Screwing Up America*, by best-selling, former old media reporter, Bernard Goldberg. Most of the people Goldberg names and quotes are not ivy-

tower thinkers, with the exception of one or two (Singer and Chomsky). All of them would like to think that their celebrity status puts them above the *hoi polloi* (us commoners) and gives them the right to advise and dictate such things as: economics, politics, personal values, and foreign policy. For example, singer and actress Barbara Streisand (#91 according to Goldberg) advises on her website that people should abandon clothes dryers and go back to hanging their clothes on an outdoor line to save energy. She was also invited to give a major address at Harvard on U.S. Foreign policy. Entertainers are but one of Goldberg's categories singled out for weird and dangerous ideas most having their roots in the radical left and PM view of the reality. There are academics, journalists, politicians (Carter #6, Kennedy #3), one tele-evangelist, a few literary figures, and some businessmen. As far as I can tell, all mentioned are living, U.S. citizens, and are currently popular figures in the old media. I found myself laughing frequently as I read the book, but also felt guilty in doing so, because these people are very serious. I not only agreed with his choices (not necessarily the order) but I wanted to add about 20-30 to his list Norman Lear, Ramsey Clark, Ed Abner, Martin Sheen, Shirley McCain, Frank Rich, Maureen Down, *et. Al.*, and any number from the U.S. Senate on both sides of the aisle. One criticism I have of the book is the author's inconsistency. He rightly criticizes the coarseness of contemporary society but in doing so, he uses some pretty coarse language!

Another book in the same vein is *Surrounded by Idiots: Fighting Liberal Lunacy in America*. By talk show host, Mike Gallagher. Gallagher picks such targets as the Dixie Chicks and people from PETA (People for an Ethical Treatment of Animals) and Dan Rather. From what I've read, this talker is becoming very popular, and his book will undoubtedly be another bestseller. Now you have to ask yourself, why is he popular? And why is his book selling? I think you would have to conclude that the river of public sentiment is flowing in the same direction. What you have to remember is, that none of these talk shows would have been legal under the old Fairness Doctrine that was negated during the Reagan administration. This law, if you recall, stated that if a broadcasting medium dared broadcast something controversial, that station had to provide free and equal time to the opposing view. This law was very effective in squelching freedom of speech. (By the way, who do you think decided what was controversial?)

A book that spares no punches to academia is: *Intellectual Morons: How Ideology Makes Smart People Fall for Stupid Ideas*, by Daniel J. Flynn. His topics are environmentalism, feminism, the sexual revolution, U. S. Foreign policy, and others. If you're a parent and looking for a book to inform you about the intellectual climate at your son or daughter's university, you will appreciate this book. It's also well-footnoted and indexed. Similar to Flynn's work, is the new book: *Hoodwinked: How Intellectual Hucksters Have Hijacked American Culture*, by Jack Cashill. What this book does, is document academic and media dishonesty and fraud like no other book I have yet seen under one cover. Cashill is an investigative journalist of the highest order. It is also interesting in that it is published by the well-known Christian publisher, Thomas Nelson. Cashill divides the book into major areas of outright fraud, plagiarizing, and media suppression. For instance, the second chapter (95 pages) concerns major cover-ups in the media such as *The New York Times*' cover-up of Stalin's massacres, Castro's true identity as a communist revolutionary, and the cover-up of Hiss as a communist spy. He also devotes many pages to academic fraud in science. I believe this is a significant book. After reading it, you are forced to ask: Why? And why is academic fraud on the increase? We've labored in the past in *RRR* to inform that in a PM world it should be expected. When the concept of truth and the laws of logic are spurned, then

how do you decide things? Certainly not by careful argumentation and presentation of evidence. Truth becomes tribal or political, and ultimately is decided by jihad. Remember, as we've said countless times here: *In a PM world all life is political*. That's exactly why we must be so distrusting of what claims to be modern science. Best-selling author, Michael Crichton, has written an entire novel (*State of Fear*) devoted to the theme of ideologically driven science. Crichton confirms in my mind something I have been following now for several years, and that is: one of the biggest lies being foisted on the current public is the myth of the cause of global warming. It's a political issue, and its true goal is a political outcome: mass re-distribution of the world's wealth. I hope to document this in more detail in a future issue.

There are two other books I will mention in passing, since they are similar to the above. We all concede that the major power in the art world today is: Hollywood rules! Occasionally, some good comes from there, but much is poor quality, outright propaganda, and raw sewage. These two books give much insight into the Hollywood juggernaut: *Tales From the Left Coast: True Stories of Hollywood Stars, and Their Outrageous Politics*, by James Hirszen, and: *Hollywood Party: How Communism Seduced The American Film Industry in the 1930's and 1940's*, by Kenneth Lloyd Billingsley.

I'm still not through. If I may, I'd like to just to make a few more bibliographical notes of a different order. There are some other critiques that might interest our readers that are of a higher and deeper order than the above. These are more academic, more thorough in their analysis of our contemporary culture, and have been very helpful to me over the years. The first two were noted here in the past as well as quoted from. They are frequently found on my desk: *Slouching Toward Gomorrah*, by Robert H. Bork. This one is in my top ten. The other is: *Intellectuals*, by Paul Johnson. He gives biographical sketches of: Rousseau, Shelley, Marx, Ibsen, Tolstoy, Hemmingway, Brecht, Russell, Sartre, Wilson, Gollancz, and Hellman, all people who have had great weight in the 20th Century and beyond. There is also the excellent concluding chapter: *The Flight from Reason*.

Still more: *On Looking into the Abyss*, by Gertrude Himmelfarb, one of the most astute critics of postmodernism; *Fashionable Nonsense: Postmodern Intellectuals' Abuse of Science*, by Alan Sokal and Jean Bricmont. (I stole my title from this book.) If you want documentation about the current turmoil and political nature of science, this is the one: *The Burden of Bad Ideas: How Modern Intellectuals Misshape Our Society*, by Heather MacDonald; and, *Ex-Friends*, by Norman Podhoretz. Once a part of the left-wing establishment in New York's elite intellectual circle, Podhoretz departed from these views, and now critiques his former friends: Allen Ginsberg, Lionel and Diana Trilling, Lillian Hellman, Hannah Arendt, and Norman Mailer. Podhoretz later became one of the founders (with Irving Kristol) of the Neo-Conservative movement. Older but still relevant are: *Trousered Apes: Sick Literature in a Sick Society*, by Duncan Williams, and *Degenerate Moderns*, by E. Michael Jones. *Higher Superstition: The Academic Left and Its Quarrels with Science*, by Paul Gross and Norman Levitt, is a work in the same mode as the above: *Fashionable Nonsense*.