

FOOD FOR THOUGHT 9:

WHERE DO WE STAND NOW? AND HAVE WE GONE MAD?

It was good to hear from Thomas McGonigle, even though I'll admit to wincing a little at his monitory sternness. More about that in a minute, but, first, everyone should know that Tom is himself a man of letters and distinguished novelist, author not only of the ambitious time-and-place experiment of *Going to Patchogue* (1992) but of the earlier and equally ambitious—and extraordinarily haunting—political novel (and then some), *The Corpse Dream of N. Petkov* (1987). Look for Tom *and* for the books at the Dalkey Archive site (<http://www.centerforbookculture.org/dalkey/backlist/mcgonigle.html>), although, of course, if you'd rather, you can also find them here at Amazon (http://www.amazon.com/Corpse-Dream-N-Petkov/dp/0810117975/sr=1-2/qid=1161002088/ref=sr_1_2/104-0787893-7936705?ie=UTF8&s=books for *Petkov*, and http://www.amazon.com/Going-Patchogue-Thomas-McGonigle/dp/0916583872/sr=1-3/qid=1161002088/ref=sr_1_3/104-0787893-7936705?ie=UTF8&s=books for *Patchogue*).

Now, as to what Tom said. Here it is, in case people missed it (why are the “comments” in such a tiny font?), written in Tom's familiar (in his correspondence, for those who know him) e.e.cummings-esque manner:

“the use of words like sane and insane when talking about political matters is a rhetorical trick that stops all conversation because it absolves the person or the country so accused of responsibility it also undermines any thoughtful psychology and casts grave doubts upon those who use these words.

“one must remember those psychiatrists and psychologists who labeled Barry Goldwater insane as part of LBJ re-election campaign.

“the defeat of Goldwater led eventually to Nixon (an unacknowledged radical) and then the far cleverer Reagan. . . many conservatives welcome the defeat of Bush as paving the way for a more genuine conservative who only stands to benefit by these rather extreme conspiratorial views Thomas McGonigle”



I hereby accept Tom's remonstrance. After all, I'm the guy who lambasted my own colleagues and the “new professors” for their “conversation stopping” assertions of half truths as if they were whole truths, along the lines of “everything is political,” using such means in order to elbow out, for example, any vitality or independent life in the realms of the aesthetic or the purely emotional, say.

But, *whoa!* My aim in “Food for Thought 6: Is American No Longer Just Blind, but Insane?” certainly wasn’t to stop “all conversation,” but if anything to do the opposite—to try, try, try, try to get readers (and everybody else, for that matter) to be in some way *responsive* to what’s going on politically right now rather than remaining so remarkably acquiescent. Having written *A Nation Gone Blind*, and then seeing the political-cultural situation—in the time since I finished the book—growing not better, or even staying the same, but growing *worse*—well, I’ll admit to possibly having made the error that Tom accuses me of: He’s right, my metaphor, of insanity, is too loose, the equivalent, in political terms, of name-calling.

Correction accepted.

Accepted, that is, as a *political* matter, but not necessarily as a *literary* one. The things I’m writing these days—not only in *ANGB* but in the pieces on my website that I call “Food for Thought” (#8, which he also saw here, is the one Tom is criticizing), I’m ripping at the hinges (trying to pull them out) of the door that separates (or maybe “separates”) the “political” in America today from the “cultural.” Readers of *ANGB* know pretty well what I think of the cultural well-being of the nation today—and, to pick a metaphor, I’m of the view that it’s unwell. That is, sick. Now, the exact nature of the illness or disease is a difficult thing to pin down—and doing exactly that is the single great effort that I made in *ANGB*. And what *ANGB* argues, as readers of it know, is that the mass media have so much *become* the culture that it and the “true” culture can’t any longer genuinely distinguish themselves from one another. That’s why, say, when you pick up a current “literary” novel, you’re more likely than not going to feel as though you’re reading a soap opera, or perhaps a long advertisement, or at best a narrative that has as much the tone, feel, aura, atmosphere, texture, even the paled-out emotions, of something on or in or of the mass media. People’s minds—including writers’ minds—have in this sense been poisoned.

And there you go: another metaphor, this one truly grisly. But I’ll stand by my argument that it’s not an *inaccurate* metaphor.

And so we come back to the use of “insane” the way I used it. Tom couldn’t be more correct that “many conservatives [would] welcome the defeat of Bush as paving the way for a more genuine conservative,” just as, for example, many conservatives—including George W. Bush’s grandfather—might have happier if Hitler had won WWII rather than the Allies; after all, gramps, I understand, kept on doing business with the Nazis until 1943. So it’s very true, a future worse than the Bush-present is a clear danger. *But* I wish Tom hadn’t used that awful word he did use—no, I’m wrong. I just looked back at what he wrote, and he *didn’t* use the word “conspiracy,” but rather said that “a more genuine conservative [would] . . . only [stand] to benefit by these rather extreme conspiratorial views.”

Now, Tom, I’m not totally sure what you mean by “a more genuine conservative” than our present presidential example. It seems to me—after all, we’ve got a congress that, under the influence of the Bush administration, has just stripped habeas corpus

away—from us all—and has just legalized torture. Is this “conservative”? And is it possible that it’s “genuine”? So help me, if this is “genuine,” I’m afraid that *more* genuine than it would just have to be called something else. That something else might be “radical.” And, well, it might also be “fascist.”

Now, the questions become these: Was I really, in “Food for Thought 8,” first, being “conspiratorial,” and, second, was I expressing or holding anything that can or could justly be called “rather extreme conspiratorial views”?

I answer, here, in the negative. In *ANGB*, I argue that Americans can’t even *think* of the Bush administration as a junta, and the reason is that it doesn’t *look* the way they think a junta “ought” to look (that is, the way the mass media, for one, as in the movies, would portray a junta). Unable to see below the surface (that is, being blind), Americans can’t, won’t, may not, and are unequipped to see certain political situations and stances—and actions—for what they actually are.

For an example of a thing unseen in the sense that I’m using the word here: The passage by Congress of the “Military Commissions Act of 2006.”

In my “insanity” piece, I set up a kind of open-ended syllogism. Premise one was that a person is assumed to be normal and a normal member of society. Premise two was that this person signs on the dotted line an agreement that guarantees and necessitates that he or she will and must commit suicide and cannot escape doing so. The “ergo” part of the syllogism came in the form of a question (hence “open-ended”). That question was: Is this person sane? Or is this person *not*?

And, obviously, this “open-ended syllogism” was intended—by me—to be applied to the U. S. Congress, whose members had recently voted, obviously, not to necessitate their own individual suicides, but whose members *had*—arguably if not outright clearly—voted to necessitate the death of the free republic that’s been in existence since—well, since 1776, perhaps, or 1789, depending. Either way, that republic *could not* have come into existence without habeas corpus at its foundation. Everyone knows these words: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”

Please count how many of those three “inalienable rights” are lost with the loss of habeas corpus. I’m not going to give my own estimate of the number. But I *will* say that it’s at *least* one. And that an argument could be made for three.

Now, if, say, your dad, or your mother, or your dear beloved aunt Sally, were a member of Congress, and if, to your shock, surprise, and horror, dear dad or mom or aunt Sally had unexpectedly to you but also unequivocally voted in *favor* of the “Military Commissions Act of 2006” bill—wouldn’t you, when you called up mom, dad, or aunt, or when you saw them at the door that night when they came home for supper, wouldn’t

you look them in the eye and ask, exclaim, or shout: “***ARE YOU STARK STARING NUTS, OR WHAT?!?!?***”

Well, I know that that’s what I, for one, would do.

So where’s the conspiracy? And where, for that matter, is the extremism—does it lie with me or does it lie with aunt Sally?

Yes, in the end, I’ll stand up for my metaphor. I do think it’s insane to move the United States toward fascism. And I’m afraid I think another, even worse, thing. And that thing is that it’s insane—all right, mad—to assume or consider the political situation we’re in right now to be one that can be characterized as “politics as usual.”

Here’s what it looks like: It looks like something closer to the equivalent of Germany in 1933 or 1935 than to “politics as usual.” May the gods—and our leaders, and we ourselves—preserve us from ever reaching our own equivalent, say, of 1938 and Kristallnacht, or, for the sake of the gods, beyond that.

I’ve quoted from this book, and this essay, before, but I’m going to do it again. The book is *9/11 and American Empire: Intellectuals Speak Out* (Northampton, MA, 2006), edited by David Ray Griffin and Peter Dale Scott. The essay is by the sociologist Peter Phillips, along with Bridget Thornton and Celeste Vogel, and its title is the wholly un-extremist sounding “Parameters of Power in the Global Dominance Group: 9/11 & Election Irregularities in Context.” The quote is on page 188. Phillips et alii begin conclude their essay this way:

The events over the past couple of decades and especially the first five years of this century suggest that fascism has taken root in the United States, and there is little indication that a reversal is evident. Vice President Wallace wrote in the *New York Times* on April 9, 1944:

The really dangerous American fascist. . . [ellipsis in original] is the man who wants to do in the United States in an American way what Hitler did in Germany in a Prussian way. The American fascist would prefer not to use violence. His method is to poison the channels of public information. With a fascist the problem is never how best to present the truth to the public but how best to use the news to deceive the public into giving the fascist and his group more money or more power.

Wallace then added:

They claim to be super-patriots, but they would destroy every liberty guaranteed by the Constitution. They demand free enterprise, but are the spokesmen for monopoly and vested interest. Their final objective toward which all their deceit is directed is to capture political power so that, using the power of the state and the power of the market simultaneously, they may keep the common man in eternal subjection.

We are past the brink of totalitarian fascist-corporatism. Challenging the neocons and the GDG [Global Dominance Group] agenda is only the beginning of reversing the long-term conservative reactions to the gains of the 1960s. Re-addressing poverty, the UN

Declaration of Human Rights, and our own weapons of mass destruction is a long-term agenda for progressive scholars and citizen democrats.



Barrie Zwicker has just come out with his own book on these and related subjects, and the book is an extraordinary one.¹ In it, Zwicker devotes a chapter to David Ray Griffin—both to the man himself—whom Zwicker speaks of as a “prophet”—and to his immense contributions to the 9/11 Truth movement. And, in that chapter, he also briefly quotes George Orwell. Let’s end—for now—by citing Zwicker’s quote:

Courage is another defining characteristic of prophets. As Orwell wrote:
“In a time of universal deceit, telling the truth is a revolutionary act.”

And the truth, for me, is that I do think—in a carefully reasoned and at the same time literal sense that those who’ve read *A Nation Gone Blind* may understand better than those who haven’t—in this sense, I do think that we as a nation have gone mad. So there, I’ve said it.

Eric Larsen
October 16, 2006

¹ *Towers of Deception: The Media Cover-Up of 9/11* (New Society Publishers, 2006).