

**THE BLOG**

If You're Reading This, You Must Be Nuts

By Marty Kaplan

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Surely it's a coincidence that the Washington Post ran the piece *"The Left, Online and Outraged - Liberal Blogger Finds an Outlet and a Community"* on the day between the holidays commemorating the crucifixion and the resurrection. But the portrait of My Left Wing blogger Maryscott O'Connor that it paints has an inescapable in-betweenness about, a teetering between tragedy and salvation, ridicule and redemption, tinfoil hat and transcendence. It's a reminder that the press loves to cover politics the way it covers religion: it's all dogma, darlings. We report; you decide. And if not as religion, then as psychodrama: since, insanely, it's taboo to assess the validity of the claims being made, the media tell us everything about the motives behind the claims, and nothing about their merits.

The psychodiagnosis this Post piece offers of Maryscott O'Connor, it also extends to the whole lefty comment-o-sphere. (That means you.) But in making that diagnosis, the article inadvertently holds up a mirror to the sad pathology of contemporary journalism itself.

In the article, we learn seemingly everything about Ms. O'Connor the person; it's a Dr. Phil-worthy bio that enables us to attribute her political anger to her past. Her blogging against Bush, her chain-smoking, her former drinking to excess? Ah, her father, we learn, was "a 25-year-old Marine who died fighting in Vietnam three months before she was born, which she thinks helps explain the...the alcohol, the cigarettes and the very first piece of writing she ever published online, a rant against the war in Iraq that began, 'Every single millisecond of my life was directly affected by the nightmare that was Vietnam.'"

The phrase "which she thinks helps explain" is all the cover the writer needs. It's a license to depict her, and the writers and commenters on Kos, Eschaton, Rude Pundit et al, as a loony, lonely, loutish left which has a psychological problem, rather than a political premise. In this telling, the wingnuts on the right are mirrored by the kooky liberal keyboarders who are working out their personal pain through the vehicle of politics.

We've heard it before. In the '60s and '70s, those anti-Vietnam radicals weren't in it to end the war; they were in it to get laid, and to get even with their parents for not enforcing boundaries when they were little. I wonder how our rude and rebellious Founders would fare under this kind of treatment. Tom Paine? Could his animus at King George have been his way of working out child abuse? Perhaps Ben Franklin's acid wit was actually a symptom of sot-weed

addiction. Or imagine up-close-and-personal coverage of the Reich. Those stormtroopers? Clearly working out repressed homoeroticism. The camps? Talk about a victim complex...

In the profoundly trivial, exquisitely vulgar moment our media today inhabit, there is no such thing as genuine politics; there is merely theater. There are no just values; there are just narratives. Partisan passion is worth covering because it is entertaining, not because it has high stakes. Who cares if there's a scream in the night? From the left, from the right, it's all Bedlam. The only sensible way to watch these damaged creatures do battle is with the tools of pop anthropology.

The irony, of course, is that when they think about Bush, Cheney, Rove, Rumsfeld, DeLay, Abramoff & Co, more Americans feel like Maryscott O'Connor than they do like the denizens of the right-wing echochamber. But elite journalism doesn't know how to deal with that, so it succumbs to the fallacy of false equivalence and the safety of faux Freud.

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