

He explained to another child that you are gay and what being gay means.

STUDENT BEHAVIOR CONTRACT

DATE 11-11-03

Dear MOM

Today I had a problem in school:

What I did: I said bad words.

What happened because I did what I did: lining up for riyces.

What I should have done: Cep my mouf shut

What would have happened if I had done what I should have done: I wud be at riyces.

I need to talk to you about my plan for how to handle a similar problem next time.

Please sign this. I need to bring it back to school immediately.

[Signature] 11/11/03
Parent Signature

MARCUS
Student Signature
TL [Signature]
Teacher Signature

Parent Comments: _____

Murder of Dutch Filmmaker Theo van Gogh Fuels Immigration Controversy

By CHRISTINE NIELSEN

Murder perceived to be in response to van Gogh's criticism of Islam

On the morning of November 2, Dutch filmmaker, social commentator, newspaper columnist, and outspoken advocate of free speech, Theo van Gogh, was riding his bike on an Amsterdam street during rush hour when a bearded man dressed in a Moroccan robe shot him six times. The assassin then approached van Gogh, who was bleeding heavily but still pleading for his life, saying, "Don't do it! Don't do it! Have mercy! Have mercy!" and switched his gun for a butcher's knife. He slit van Gogh's throat, nearly decapitating him, and then plunged the knife into his chest. Next, while hundreds of shocked bystanders in the daily traffic watched, he calmly drew a smaller knife and pinned a five-page declaration of jihad onto the corpse's chest. The police quickly apprehended the killer, later found to be Mohammed Bouyeri, a 26-year-old Dutch-Moroccan Muslim, but the damage was done.

Theo van Gogh was the target of fundamentalist Islamic ire long before his brutal murder. Referring to Muslims as "goatfuckers" and calling a radical Muslim politician "Allah's pimp" are just a couple examples of van Gogh's longstanding, controversial opposition to Islam and Islamic practitioners. His most recent (and apparently most intolerable) sin in the eyes of radical Muslims like Bouyeri, however, was the release of an 11 minute film called *Submission*, written by Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a self-titled "ex-Muslim" and lawmaker. The incendiary film, which aired on national television in the Netherlands this August, harshly criticized Islamic treatment of women by depicting scenes of intense domestic violence. It tells the story of four (fictional) women who are, respectively, beaten by a husband, raped and impregnated by an uncle, forced into an unwanted marriage, and severely whipped for sexual relations before marriage. More problematic to the fundamentalist Islamic community than the subject matter, however, is the artistic license taken to reinforce the message. In one scene a praying woman's face is covered by a veil, but her naked body is only partially obscured by a sheer robe which reveals verses from the Koran written on her torso.

Hirsi Ali had personal reason to voice her protest through the script of *Submission*. Born in Somalia, she spent a large part of her childhood as a refugee in Kenya. She endured female circumcision at a young age, and was on the way to an unwanted arranged marriage in Canada when she escaped during a layover in Germany. Choosing Holland as her eventual refuge, she learned Dutch and assimilated into the Western culture. She studied politics and at thirty-four is a prominent member of the parliament (although she has been in hiding since van Gogh's murder). Hirsi Ali's rhetoric against Islam is harsh—she has called the Prophet Mohammed a "lecherous tyrant"—and her proposed actions to support her rhetoric are perhaps more radical—she supports strict immigration limitations, the deportation of suspected extremists, and the banning of fundamentalist books, a

what you think, our freedom of speech is eroded and it plays right into the hands of Islamic extremists." Although still under police protection and not appearing in public, Hirsi Ali gave an interview stating that she fully intends to produce the sequel to *Submission* that was in the works before van Gogh's death.

Out of a total population of 16.2 million in the Netherlands, about 900,000 (5.5 percent) are Muslims of Turkish or Moroccan ethnicity. Out of those, a report from the General Intelligence and Security Service said 50,000 Muslims in the country may be sympathetic to extremist ideas. Even if this last statistic were false, a cultural dilemma with respect to immigrants in the Netherlands would remain. As Jan Rath, a professor of immigration and ethnic studies at the University of Amsterdam, puts it, "If immigrants arrive and gravitate to a particular neighborhood and wear a different hat or head scarf, in the United States, that is OK, but in the Netherlands, it is considered a problem." In fact, immigration restrictions have become increasingly harsh over the past two years, specifically since the murder of another critic of Islam. Pim Fortuyn, a Dutch politician who campaigned with the

"The assassin then approached van Gogh, who was bleeding heavily but still pleading for his life, saying, "Don't do it! Don't do it! Have mercy! Have mercy!" and switched his gun for a butcher's knife. He slit van Gogh's throat, nearly decapitating him, and then plunged the knife into his chest. Next, while hundreds of shocked bystanders in the daily traffic watched, he calmly drew a smaller knife and pinned a five-page declaration of jihad onto the corpse's chest."

motto "Holland Is Full," was killed exactly 911 days before van Gogh, though by a radical environmentalist and not a Muslim. While the two men were not exactly joined in belief or method of expression, the two murders are overwhelmingly linked in the minds of many Dutch, and to a large extent, the two have become martyrs to their cause. Many citizens have been quoted in the Dutch news media as saying that they believe van Gogh and Fortuyn's anti-immigration, anti-Islam views have been vindicated by their deaths. Amid the piles of flowers, cacti, candles, cigarettes, and beer bottles left by grieving citizens at the site of van Gogh's murder were signs reading "Theo rests his case" and similar.

The ramifications of this event have not stopped with hardened attitudes, however. Theo van Gogh's death seems to have been only the spark which lit the already dry and brittle race relations, and has subsequent-

ly consumed a country which normally prides itself on tolerance in a blaze of hate crimes and fear. Quite literally, in fact, a series of hate crimes have ensued which have included many cases of arson. All told, more than twenty mosques, Muslim community centers, churches, and Islamic and Christian schools have been firebombed or otherwise vandalized. Most Muslim community leaders in the country have condemned van Gogh's assassination, and many Muslim citizens express a fear of the harsh



Ayaan Hirsi Ali, who wrote the screenplay for "*Submission*," directed by van Gogh.

backlash against the Muslim community at large because of the actions of an extremist. Legitimate as that fear may be, Mohammed Bouyeri is not an isolated case. In the words of Hirsi Ali, "Although today the extremists are still a very small minority among our Muslim fellow citizens, the potential influence of the extremists with that group are huge." Dutch police arrested eight men (suspected of falling into that small but influential group) the day after van Gogh's murder, after a 14-hour siege of a residence in The Hague, the self-styled "International City of Peace." Yet approximately 150 suspected militants remain free, forcing several prominent Dutch political figures into hiding. One of those is Geert Wilders, deemed by some the heir of Pim Fortuyn, who was quoted in an AP interview after van Gogh's assassination as saying, "I would stop the immigration immediately for the next five years for non-Western immigrants. Not because I have anything against foreigners or people from non-Western countries, but we have huge problems with integration."

Van Gogh's murderer, however, was not only well-integrated, he was well-educated and born in the Netherlands. Mohammed Bouyeri had not even made it onto the list of 150 before November 2, although many of his friends already had. The five-page letter he left pinned to Theo van Gogh was an exhortation to his fellow radicals to jihad, a death threat to several politicians—Hirsi Ali in particular—and a threat to Christians, Jews, and the Western nations at large. It would appear that Bouyeri expected to die in combat on November 2, since a suicide note of sorts was also found in his pocket when he was arrested (after a brief shoot-out with the police, during which Bouyeri was only wounded in the leg).

Theo van Gogh was the rotund, chain-smoking, antagonistic great grand-nephew of Vincent van Gogh. He delighted in political incorrectness, in intentional provocation, in speaking his mind. He has been called "the Dutch Michael Moore" for his many confrontational and critically acclaimed films—the last of which, called *0605*, is set for release online on the fifteenth of this month and concerns the death of Pim Fortuyn. He was 47 when he died.



Theo van Gogh: "the Dutch Michael Moore," dead at age forty-seven

clear indication of the strength of her feelings on fundamentalist Islam given her general attitude toward censorship. After all, Hirsi Ali came to van Gogh with the script for *Submission* with full knowledge of the death threats she would receive—though perhaps not with the same understanding of the impact it would have as she now possesses. She went through with making the film in part because of a belief she shared with van Gogh; as articulated by him, "When fear holds you back from saying

November 3rd Protest: The Aftermath

By GOZDE "JAZZY" SEVIM

As many members of the student body probably remember, on the day following the election, Wednesday November 3rd, about two hundred students went on a rally headed to the town of Red Hook and sat at the main intersection to protest the results of election. Faced with many police officers, students sat for about twenty minutes before students collectively decided to head back to Bard campus.

While some caught the shuttle back, most of the students chose to walk on 9G to return to the Bard campus. Accompanied by cops, the walk home wasn't as peaceful as the protest in the main intersection. According to the police forces, students did not cooperate and did not follow officers' instructions to not cross the white line that separates the road. According to the police, this caused disruptions to the main traffic. As a result, twelve students were arrested at the intersection of 9G and highway 199 and were then taken to the police station. One was released immediately afterwards the incident, but eleven students are being charged for violations and misdemeanors.

As President Leon Botstein put it, something went wrong, and Bard asked for an investigation. Meanwhile, for the students who had been arrested and are being charged, the first court date is on Thursday, December 9th. President Botstein has also said that each of the students will have legal representation in front of the judge on this date and until the proceedings are followed up completely. During these proceedings, both to stay updated and informed and for the best of students, the administration has kept a personal contact with police through various administrators, primarily through Erin Cannan and Jim Brudvig.

Bard College has stood behind its students. As the Dean of Students Erin Cannan expresses: "It is always our (Bard administrators) role to help the students." However, in this case, Bard's help has not only been limited to getting students back from the police station on the night of November 3rd and expressions of emotional support. President Botstein has offered to personally pay for all the financial charges that students would otherwise have to pay themselves. Despite what the final amount might add up to, Leon Botstein is willing to compensate without any estimation, as he said that whatever the bill would be, it will be. President Botstein sees the motivation behind his generous offer as his support for the protection of right of assembly. He also adds that what is more critical in this issue is the investigation of what went wrong on the way home.

While students are waiting for their first court date next week, the lawyers are trying to figure out if charges that were taken against these eleven students were fair. Initially, students were supposed to go in front of the judge before Thanksgiving; however, according to Erin Cannan, the lawyers postponed the date to have more understanding of the incident by talking to the students.

The post-election protest certainly was not the first time that Bard students engaged in a mass protest. The last protest before the rally on November 3rd took place three years ago when the Iraq war broke out. Erin Cannan says that looking at that incident, the administration was expecting a rally; however, they did not predict a sit-in at the intersection in the town of Red Hook and had never thought that the protest will result in such complications, such as the arrests of students with charges being

pressed against them.

As the arrested students are in silence undividedly about this issue due to liability legal issues, Erin Cannan explains the possible intensity with the town: "Freedom of expression is not always about being popular." The Dean of Students also adds: "What I do want to make sure is that it (freedom of speech) happens even if it is an unpopular idea, it should be expressed."

While helping students by showing them unlimited financial support throughout this process, President Leon Botstein expresses his feeling about the issue: "I am proud of the students who had such an engagement to show their political involvement." By his support, he explains that he wants the rights of assembly and freedom of speech are protected without any compromise.

Although it is not possible to know at the moment what kind of charges the arrested students will be held upon, Erin Cannan predicts that the charges might vary from fine and community service to jail presence, which she thinks is the worst case scenario and the lawyers will do their best to prevent punishments being taken that far. Like any other Bard partisan from administration she sums it up: "It would be great if students were not found guilty."

At the moment, like the students themselves, Bard College is also waiting to see where the proceedings will be headed after the court proceeding on December 9th. This court proceeding, scheduled for Thursday, December 9th, is most likely for the judge to give a date for next time the court will meet to discuss the case.

Anti-Gay Discrimination Enters the Classroom

The cover story

By ETHAN PORTER

Anti-gay activists, perhaps feeling emboldened by Bush's re-election, have taken the battle to a new location: the classroom. An Alabama state legislator recently submitted a bill that, if passed, would ban all literature with gay characters and themes from public institutions, including libraries and school curricula. And in a case that has just come to light because of new legal proceedings, an elementary school student with gay parents in Louisiana was reprimanded for explaining to another student what "gay" means. The teacher in question filed a lawsuit against the student's mother, alleging defamation. A copy of the letter sent by that teacher to the parent makes up the cover of this issue's *Observer*.

"Our culture, how we know it today, is under attack from every angle," explained the state legislator who submitted the anti-gay literature bill, Gerald Allen, R-Cottendale, at a press conference. The bill, he went on to say, will combat the "homosexual agenda," which in his view is now threatening the traditional fabric of American society.

According to Allen, any work that is perceived to present homosexuality as an acceptable, "normal" lifestyle would be banned if the bill is passed. Classic works such as *The Color Purple*, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* fall under this interpretation, explained Allen. Schools would not assign them, state universities would not perform them on the stage, and libraries would not be able to stock them.

Libraries would have a particularly difficult time fulfilling the requirements of the bill. Juanita Owes, director of the Montgomery City-County Library—which, coincidentally, is located a few blocks away from the Alabama Cap-

itol—lamented that "half the books in the library would end up being banned. It's all based on how one interprets the material." Teachers' associations and university communities are also expected to oppose the bill.

A swath of civil rights organizations have already initiated protests against the bill, which to many, reeks of a quasi-fascist attempt to eradicate the existence of homosexuality by eradicating the existence of it as an idea. Assuredly, the worst fears of civil rights groups and advocates were assuredly not assuaged when Allen responded, "I guess we dig a big hole and dump them in and bury them," when asked where the banned books would go.

"It sounds like Nazi book-burning to me," said Mark Potok, a spokesman for the anti-hate group Southern Poverty Law Center. In the words of Ken Baker, a board member of gay rights organization Equality Alabama, Allen is "attempting to become the George Wallace of homosexuality."

The bill, which is in no way guaranteed to pass, is winding its way through the state legislature just as the aforementioned case involving an elementary school teacher and a student's gay mother is finding its way into the national spotlight. The teacher, Terry Bethea, filed a \$50,000 lawsuit against Sharon Huff, who publicized an incident last year in which her son, at that time seven years old, was made to repeatedly write "I will never use the word 'gay' in school again."

The student, Marcus McLaurin, was punished for allegedly pausing on the way to recess in order to explain to another student's query about his mother and the meaning of gay. Huff said that her son responded by say-

ing, "Gay is when a girl likes another girl." For that, the teacher scolded Marcus and escorted him to the principal's office. Huff demanded that the school investigate the incident and the punishment; the school concluded that Bethea did nothing wrong.

"The child was not singled out because his parent is gay," said school Superintendent James Easton. Easton pointed to the child's other behavioral problems as reason for his punishment. Huff contends that the school's internal investigation was a farce from the beginning. She had earlier retained the ACLU for legal representation.

Four ACLU officials were named in Bethea's suit, which contends that in publicizing the incident, Huff and her lawyers distorted the truth. At this time, however, legal experts believe the case has little merit, because the facts, as demonstrated by the disciplinary note sent from the teacher to the parent, appear to be beyond dispute. In all likelihood it is a well-calculated effort to dissuade Huff and the ACLU lawyers from suing the school and the teacher, who are still mulling over what legal path to pursue.

Bard Student Fiction Reading.
Tuesday December 7th.
8 PM at Preston.

The Man Speaks: President Botstein On Education

Just in case you were wondering...

By LAURA BOMYEA

"Do you mind if I smoke?" President Leon Botstein asks as I settle into a doubtlessly antique chair in the great wall-to-wall, floor-to-ceiling expanse of bookshelves that is his study. Not at all, I reply, adjusting my crisp notebook pages and attempting to muffle my thumb as it anxiously clicks away at my retractable Pilot G-2. This is much different than interviewing security guards and administrators, I think to myself, smelling the sweet fog of Leon's relit cigar. In honor of this, I have graduated from my dollar store StenoBook to a Cambridge full sized writing tablet with a gold spiral and perforated pages. I swallow theatrically and switch on my tape recorder.

I am here to talk to Leon about education, politics and my impossible dream of someday saying something halfway intelligent to this man I've overheard give an interview entirely in German. I want to know how American politics today effect American educational systems, particularly institutions of higher education. I am curious about the ways in which the political atmosphere effects Bard both in a day to day conversational, programming sense and in a more lasting curricular sense. On a more specific level, I want to ask him how No Child Left Behind is effecting higher education and the ways in which Bard is prepared to (or perhaps should be considering ways in which to) deal with the ramifications of the political world on the world of academia. Of course, I articulate these curiosities with much less confidence and with a distressing lack of control over my spoken grammar and my use of the phrase "the ways in which," and "um." Ah well.

The first question is rather poorly phrased—"I was wondering if you could speak a little bit about your views on education, particularly you views on liberal education in America given the fact that Bush has been elected for another four years."

Leon's first reaction makes me push my nervous thumb and its click top friend farther into the palm of my clammy hand. "I'm not sure that any specific election or shift in leadership has that direct an effect on how one conducts or fashions a curriculum," he says.

Alright. Don't panic, thumb. We've just asked a very simple, narrow, poorly thought out question to the President of our academic institution. It could be worse.

Once I had a dream that I was fruitlessly trying to defend my position on something to Leon. I couldn't articulate myself in any coherent way and so he kicked me out of Bard.

I looked at my watch—four minutes had passed since I'd knocked on the door. I wondered if I would set any records for the shortest Observer interview ever. But then Leon, in his benevolence, did what he does best, he kept on answering the stupid question.

"The larger political issues are of course," he puffs on his cigar stub, "they're intellectual. For example I would argue that one of the objectives of a college education is to prepare the individual for an active career as a citizen. And that's rhetoric, but behind that rhetoric it seems to me that..." Leon shifts in his chair, pausing. He's looking for the right words. I blink. I resist the urge to click. We try a new direction. "Well, take the issue of the role of religion in American Politics. To understand that one needs to understand first of all something about religion, about religious experience and about history. It turns out that the role of religion in American Politics is not a new issue. It changes its character, its shape. The nature of the theology may change but this is a long-standing relationship that goes back to the founding of the Republic. So there you have a election reinforce the call to study history.

"The war in Iraq creates an imperative, in my view, to study the history of international relations, the history of wars, the history of imperialism, the history of the Middle East, a better understanding of the evolution of the modern Middle East which includes close study of the British Empire. One's undergraduate years are a time when one can, for example, study cultures that are not rooted in the English language, not Australian or English or Canadian—non-Qu'bt'cois Canadian—and also American, requires a shift of interest to the study of languages that seem to have a significant importance. Chinese being one, Arabic being the other, Russian... A liberal education today given today's politics require that someone going to college know more about Latin America and Africa. So there are influences in the direction of interest in the shape of a curriculum that political change can make.

"[Another] very important aspect of this election is the importance of increasing the level of scientific literacy, that every educated individual feels that he or she ought to have. Whether it is the path taken by the stem cell vote in California to the frustration that many advocates of environmental protection feel by what appears to be a low priority for their concerns among Americans. It is the blatant ignorance about biology, chemistry and physics. A lot of the half-baked prejudices that have to do with genetic engineering and biotechnology, medicine, medical ethics and so forth.

"A lot of these issues which we will have to struggle with as citizens depend on the ability to critically evaluate positions and the ability to do so requires not

only the skills of what we call critical thinking analysis, but knowledge, some kind of knowledge base. The agenda of what we call general education is very powerful and the obligation to feel prepared to deal with being a citizen of a world power, the obligations that come with it I think increase the burden on individuals in terms of the range of their curiosity."

It is at this point that I realize that Leon is wearing perhaps the most endearing, yet tasteful, house slippers I have ever seen. Also, he is not wearing his bowtie. Sitting next to him, I can see his black socks and the creases he makes in his forehead when he thinks hard about something. I remark to myself that this interview isn't that much different from any other interview I've done. We're just having a conversation—Leon and I and my Clear Voice Plus tape recorder. Smirking to myself, I realize that I'm probably not the first person to ask him a stupid question. Is it a stupid question if he's gotten that much out of it? Clearly he is not going to kick me out of Bard. Suddenly Leon loses most of his intimidating qualities and I try my best to keep up with his words.

I ask him about the changing curriculum here. The new distribution requirements and the addition of the Rethinking Difference component seem to me to be a positive effort to refine the goals of a Bard education. Is this a result of something political?

"No," he says, "I think it's a shift toward making it more sensible." Of the Rethinking Difference, or Diversity Requirement, he says, "First of all, things have unintended consequences. Many curricular decisions are made in response to short term political pressures. The objection to the diversity requirement has always been

"The point of an education really is to protect ourselves from being manipulated by any handler whether it be Karl Rove or whether it be somebody else, that we are able to not be swept away in one direction or another or to differentiate issues, to think through the consequences of what one does."

that there is a kind of reductionist definition of diversity, that one's identity in terms of gender or skin color or national origin or religion is sometimes used by these proponents of diversity as determinative of how and what you think and what your life experience is. That, I feel, is far too reductionist. One needs only to contemplate Condoleezza Rice and the new nominee for the Attorney General to realize that the phrases that define a group, whether it be African-American, Jewish or Muslim-American, that these are catchall categories that do not provide you a sufficient clue as to how or what people think.

"The real diversity is a diversity in conceptions of reality and the world that are fundamentally different than the ones that one thinks one has. The first step, of course, is self-examination, a critical understanding of what one thinks oneself. One has to come to terms with one's own prejudices about what thing is right or the way the world is or how it ought to be—how you form your value judgments. Then to understand how someone else might come up with a different set of questions and a different set of conclusions.

"The diversity requirement, which was propelled by an older concern about racism, about classic American conflict and tension between black and white, its real benefit, if it works well, will transcend its origins and will explode those categories. Those categories are themselves terrible oversimplifications.

"It is a good thing because a curriculum is not about truth-telling, a curriculum is about a strategy—what's the best way of organizing the very rich resource of a fine faculty and an energetic student-body to create opportunities to study and learn in ways that open up dimensions that might not otherwise have existed. The diversity requirement is a positive step because it will create innovation in the kinds of courses that are put forward and the way the courses are framed. It will develop in ways that those who supported it most vociferously maybe three years from now won't recognize the intention, but it did a lot of good in a direction they didn't quite predict.

"One of the fundamental premises of a modern university, a college that believes in the traditions of analysis, learning, argument, evidence and reason, is that people have multiple identities and that there is also a common existential and intellectual enterprise that they can engage in. That commonality or common humanity is as important a realization and a respect for it is as important a goal as it is a kind of categorization of diversities. It's always difficult on a college campus and in society in general for people to be tolerant of people who

are different from them. The most troublesome intolerance is about differences in ideas and viewpoints rather than the surface differences that we identify with religion, national origin or skin color."

I nodded. Given the attitudes many students here exhibit towards those of a Republican bent, it is no wonder Leon is disturbed by the intolerance of diversity in opinion and political viewpoint here at Bard. While I realize that Budget Forum is loved for its debauchery, I was uncomfortable with watching this semester's forum disintegrate into a Republican bashing contest. I certainly don't agree with many, many Republicans and their ideas. But trying to take the Republican Club's funding on the grounds that they are Nazis just strikes me as really silly. Even if that entire production was in jest, I wonder if there is a lack of heated, civil, debate on campus because everyone agrees or simply because the louder majority doesn't always fight intellectually.

"Not all the people who disagree with your point of view can be classed as either ignorant, corrupt or stupid. In all political camps there are corrupt, ignorant and stupid people. There are also malicious people and they're on both sides. But that is not the issue, the issue is that the overwhelming majority of citizens are, in that sense, morally and ethically neutral. Their intentions are honorable. They don't see the world quite the same way.

"I think that there is more diversity in the student body in political point of view than we encourage. I think that there is a kind of sensibility of simplification of what's right and what's wrong in such ways that people who disagree are unfortunately probably deterred from speaking their minds. It's always the sort of overpowering pressure of the majority sentiment where people cannot agree to disagree in a civilized and affectionate way. The proper university is designed to make that possible—for two scientists who disagree about the solution to a problem can continue to agree or disagree without coming to blows. In a non-sectarian institution, people who have different convictions about the questions of God and religion can continue a conversation.

"The point of an education really is to protect ourselves from being manipulated by any handler whether it be Karl Rove or whether it be somebody else, that we are able to not be swept away in one direction or another or to differentiate issues, to think through the consequences of what one does. At the same time, we have to find a way to converse with people who voted for President Bush, if we think that they made a mistake and try to understand what it is that they were thinking and why.

"Sometimes we will confront people whose fundamental position about life and death is radically different. If people believe in human history, human life, as a temporary way station of a world in which eternal life beyond death and redemption and salvation are significant, that's a very different fundamental construct of the world that leads you to a different kind of politics. It reduces the importance of values such as health insurance or whether or not Alaska is preserved. Those issues take on a different aspect than for someone who believes that there is no life after death, that there is no salvation and there is no such thing as sin, there is no such thing as redemption and that don't believe in God at all and that the only thing to worry about is the way we govern ourselves as human beings within the span of mortal existence. That changes ones view of politics.

Ultimately, our primary responsibility is to educate ourselves. This includes opening up a dialogue that aims to reconcile, not drown out, opposing viewpoints. I think about how dull debates would be if one side spent the entire debate session yelling about how their opponent was wrong. But then I realize that, by normal standards, that would be extremely entertaining. I guess it's fine for Jerry Springer, but it's pretty lame when you're actually trying to have a conversation with someone. If we want diversity, we should start getting more excited about what we believe in. I really think a lot can be learned from a little civil disagreement.

President Botstein and I talked for another half hour or so, but the discussion really seemed to culminate with that issue. We talked about Homeland Security, No Child Left Behind, public school systems and the MAT program. I spent most of the interview nodding and scribbling notes on my sophisticated writing tablet.

When I left, I walked down the path thinking of all of the interesting things I could have said in response. I felt a little discouraged by my utter lack of intelligent responses. But looking back at his house glowing orange behind the library, I imagined this be-slipped man returning to his study, perhaps taking up a book, maybe jotting down some notes. Maybe getting an education has nothing to do with intelligent responses. Maybe it has everything to do with aspiring to the level of conversation that an intelligent response may bring about. A less lopsided conversation. A conversation with Leon in which the substance and meaning of our responses gets a little bit closer to equal. Maybe in a few years. As long as he's wearing slippers.

Ideas: Zizek, A Suffering God

By LEN GUTKIN

The incomprehensible made compelling

I've been knee-deep in the work of Slavoj Zizek all semester, so when I heard that he was lecturing at NYU's Cantor Film Center, I made sure to reserve seats and check it out. The lecture, entitled "The Theology of Secularism," was preceded by a screening of Israeli leftist Udi Aloni's film *Local Angel*, a rather amateurishly-made documentary exploring Palestinian and Israeli resistance to the occupation. The film focused on the activism of Aloni's mother, who heads a pro-Palestinian human-rights group. On the whole, it was tendentious and alarmingly simplistic, failing even once to engage the real consequences, psychological and material, of Palestinian suicide bombing; it did, however, contain some very fascinating footage. For instance, when Mrs. Aloni, speaking to a Palestinian friend, says of the Israeli Right, "They tried to kill me twice but..." and trails off in bitter laughter, her friend responds, "Maybe the same people who tried to kill me." And when a young Palestinian hip-hop artist says, "I know it is terror to explode a bus, but I also know why the bus explodes," the viewer, in spite of his horror, cannot help but admit that it is precisely this "why" which is so urgently missing from the unthinkingly pro-Israeli tilt of the discourse within the United States. On the other hand, when Aloni, in an interview with Arafat, asks, "What would it take for you to forgive us [the Israelis]," the pervasive bias of the film becomes wince-inducingly obvious. In short, what *Local Angel* fails to do is really problematize the Israeli-Palestinian deadlock--it paints a falsely simplistic portrait in which fault lies exclusively with the Israelis and in which Palestinian aggression is barely alluded to.

The film's saving grace, perhaps, is its reliance on Walter Benjamin's wonderful essay "Theses on the Philosophy of History," which is quoted at length in voice-over alongside the powerful image of Klee's "Angelus Novus." That painting, central both to Benjamin's essay and Aloni's film, is beautifully displayed throughout the movie--Aloni's camera makes it cinematic, panning over it, or zooming in and out. The essay's major theme--the need for a redemptive rescue in the present of the countless victims of the past--is integrated beautifully with the film's message. As a great fan of Benjamin, I was delighted to see his work highlighted so explicitly in a contemporary documentary.

Zizek's lecture, fortunately, touched on a great number of issues besides Aloni's

"Secular-humanist reactions are insufficient...something is wrong in the universe...The excessive nature of Shoah points to the need for an address that transcends secular humanism."

-Zizek

film. Watching Zizek, who refers to himself as a "Lacanian-Marxist," speak is a uniquely thrilling experience--the brilliance of his mind manifests itself somatically in the machine-gun-rapid movements of his hands, in his excessive sweating, in the constant swaying and jerking of his shaggy head. He is a born comedian. He kicked off his lecture by saying, "I'm sure you all noticed what I noticed about Aloni's film--that it is not, in fact, about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict at all, but is instead a Woody Allen film about Udi's relationship with his mother." His accent, combined with the speed of his speech and his tendency to wander, helter-skelter, from one topic to another with no warning or transition, made him occasionally difficult to follow, but his wit and his intelligence saved him every time. He began by talking about the need to preserve racist jokes, claiming that when ethnic jokes cease to be popular, something is truly wrong. "Isn't there the risk that the joke will be taken as an authentic racist insult?" he asked, and then answered himself: "Yes, but that's the risk we have to take, my God!" From there, he moved into the more theoretical aspects of the lecture, asking why, when a society finds itself in "deep shit," it experiences an explosion of theological activity. A summary of some of his broader points follows:

First, he asked the question: when we try to rectify the existence of God with Shoah--the Holocaust or other equally brutal instances of horror, ranging from mass genocide to individual acts of murder--how do we do it? How can we rectify evil with the existence of God? He outlined three major strategies: first, we can "maintain divine sovereignty unimpaired"--in other words, God is understood to control everything, and so Shoah is understood as punishment. Second, we can embrace what Zizek calls "character education theory," which manifests itself in an "Abrahamistic test of faith." In this model, the Shoah, in its brute horror, is reduced to a divine test of loyalty or belief. Third, we can accept "the divine mystery"--we can throw up our hands to Heaven and admit that we will never understand God and His incomprehensible ways. He then expanded the problem of Shoah to ask: what does its occurrence say about God's personality? Again, he provided three possible options: first, God is self-limiting, and the Shoah is "the ultimate consequence of His self-limitation." Second, God initiated Creation, and then went all laissez-faire on it--thus, it ran out of control, resulting in Shoah. Third, he articulated "gnostic dualism," the idea that the all-good God is opposed by an all-bad force, like Satan. Finding all of these divine personality profiles inadequate, Zizek stated that if he were a religious man (he is not), he would embrace a fourth option which he feels is advanced both in the New and Old Testaments: our God is a suffering God, or an agonized Christ. "God is life," Zizek said, "not merely a being" that transcends life, but life itself, with its inexplicable suffering and pain. "God is suffering in and through history--the site of real struggle," Zizek said, and continued, "this is the most beautiful moment of theology...it is not 'God help us,' but rather, 'God needs our help.'" This notion of a suffering God, a God who needs our help, relates directly to Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History," and to Aloni's film, both of which call for an engagement with the victims of the past and a Messianic struggle for redemption for those victims. Aloni's--admittedly problematic--question to Arafat ("What would it take for you to forgive us") exemplifies this quest for redemption.

In spite of his own lack of religious belief, Zizek emphasizes the value of the Suffering-God model in that it acknowledges that "Secular-humanist reactions are insufficient" to events like the Holocaust. Such events (and again, the scale is not the crucial factor--a single murder can also qualify) inevitably create the sensation that "something is wrong in the universe...The excessive nature of Shoah points to the need for an address that transcends secular humanism."

Continuing in the vein of theology, Zizek discussed at some length the differences between Catholicism and Protestantism, pointing out the way in which Protestantism, by eliminating the Church as a mediator between the individual and God, "requires extreme alienation." Amusingly, he quoted at length the Johnny Cash song "When the Man Comes Around" as evidence of the way in which Protestantism paints God as "evil personified--people are lined up for a brutal interrogation [and are] informed [of their guilt or innocence] from the outside." He emphasized the purely arbitrary character of this divine justice, and, in a memorable phrase, referred to "the dark excess of ruthless divine sadism" that typifies the justice of the Protestant God. The major insight of Protestantism, he claimed, is "that it is false to oppose this God of extreme arbitrary

cruelty with a God of peace and love."

From here, he moved on to a discussion of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, outlining what he called the "two major cliches" that characterize popular approaches to that conflict. First is the cliché that pits the "tolerant West" against a "fundamentalist Islam." Second, the cliché that views "the West Bank occupation [as the] last stage of European colonialism." He attempted to complicate the entire question by asking for a more nuanced understanding of the very founding of Israel, not, he was careful to emphasize, in order to question Israel's legitimacy as a state, but rather in order to recognize the anti-Semitism that is bound up with England and the Continent's support for the fledgling Jewish state in the first place. He pointed out the formal irony that resulted from the shared interest of pre-Final Solution Nazis, who wanted to relocate Jews to another continent, and the Zionists, capping his argument with the dramatic point that some of the machine guns used by Israelis in the 1949 War were purchased with Nazi money (the result of German financial support for early Zionism). Engaging a roughly analogous contemporary situation, he warned Jews against engaging in "false friendships" with right-wing anti-Semites just because they both support Israel. He called it "the ultimate obscenity" that Christian fundamentalists, based on their beliefs that Israel must be preserved for the coming of Christ, should veil their inherent anti-Semitism to make common cause with Jews. He discussed, also, the protean nature of European anti-Semitism, noting its tendency to swing from one extreme to its opposite (e.g. "Jews are stubborn and old-fashioned" becomes "Jews are cosmopolitan and worldly"). While maintaining that he was certainly pro-Palestinian, he warned against the anti-Israeli sentiments of many Western Europeans, which he characterized as being part of the long narrative of European anti-Semitism that he found even in the British efforts at the founding of Israel itself.

Concluding, he discussed the parallels between the militant abolitionist John Brown, whom he clearly admired, and the militant pro-life murderers in the United States. His point was that the "social form of organization" which has allowed the Left, historically, things like John Brown's rebellion and the French Revolution, "is now typical of the right." He urged leftists "not [to] accept the liberal blackmail" but instead to "change the coordinates"--in other words, to reassume the kind of structural formation that has allowed for victories of the Left in the past. All in all, an exciting, inspiring, and utterly though-provoking event.



Slavoj Zizek, 1997


Other Zizek Opinions:

Zizek on Bush's Re-election:

"Within these coordinates, every progressive who thinks should be glad for Bush's victory. It is good for the entire world because the contours of the confrontations to come will now be drawn in a much starker way. A Kerry victory would have been a kind of historical anomaly, blurring the true lines of division. After all, Kerry did not have a global vision that would present a feasible alternative to Bush's politics. Further, Bush's victory is paradoxically better for both the European and Latin American economies: In order to get trade union backing, Kerry promised to support protectionist measures."

Zizek on the Invasion of Iraq:

Americans have historically seen their role in the world in altruistic terms. "We just try to be good," they say, "to help others, to bring peace and prosperity, and look what we get in return." In fact, movies such as John Ford's *The Searchers* and Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* or books like Graham Greene's *The Quiet American*, which provide fundamental insight into the naive benevolence of Americans, have never been more relevant than with today's global U.S. ideological offensive. As Greene said about his American protagonist, who sincerely wants to bring democracy and Western freedom to the Vietnamese, only to see his intentions totally misfire: "I never knew a man who had better motives for all the trouble he caused." The supposition underlying these good intentions is that underneath our skins, we are all Americans. If that is humanity's true desire, then all that Americans need to do is to give people a chance, liberate them from their imposed constraints, and they will embrace America's ideological dream. No wonder the United States has moved from "containing" the enemy to promoting a "capitalist revolution," as Stephen Schwartz of the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies put it in February 2003. The United States is now, as the defunct Soviet Union was decades ago, the subversive agent of a world revolution."

When the Sperm Meets the Egg 

The Observer's Sex Column

[This is not intended to diagnose or treat a disease
or to be substituted for professional medical advice]

Dear sex column,
I understand that the only way to be completely (or almost completely) safe from STD's is to have all partners tested before sexual contact. But this is often impractical. What about that all-important first (or only) time with someone whose entire sexual history you don't know? If you're having sex, you use a condom, of course. But what if you're limiting your activities to oral ones? Except for the danger of STD's, I love giving head. But in the heat of the moment how do you know they're telling the truth when you ask if they have any STD's? What if they haven't been tested but have no reason to think they have one? I would think that one would have to be a real asshole to lie, but we all know which head guys are thinking with when they are hard. What to do? -craving but concerned

Yes, this situation is an issue for everyone who has more than one sexual partner. This is how STDs get spread, and why they spread fast. This is also why we have such a problem with STDs. There is no way to know if someone has an STD unless they tell you—this is why they spread. So if you want to be totally safe, only have oral sex with people you trust. If you don't trust that someone is telling you the truth about this fact that could harm your wellbeing, then that's a sign you should not be involved with

them.

TAKE YOUR PICK.....

CUZ YOU DON'T WANT TO END UP LIKE THIS.....

Yea Hi,
There was blood in my semen all last week, but now it gone. What was that?

Blood in the semen is a condition called hematospermia. There is no cause for alarm, as the blood in semen is almost like having blood in the nasal tissues during a bad cold. Most commonly, it results from nonspecific inflammation of the urethra, prostate and/or seminal vesicles. This inflammation is usually the result of an infection in one of those organs, the inflammation then causes a small vessel to rupture and the blood appears in the ejaculate. Men anywhere from ages 14 to 75 experience hematospermia, and almost always it goes away on its own with in a week. If the blood does not resolve itself in 3 weeks, go see a specialist, as this could be a sign of a larger infection or even cancer.

send your
FUCKING
questions to
gw876@bard.edu

this is not intended to
replace professional
medical advice.

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YOU'RE INVITED!! Come see Laurence's Senior Project.
Opening 4-9 PM Saturday, December 4th
When??: Show will run December 4th - 9th
Where??: Avery 116, and Avery Gallery.
Opening will include a Piñata.
Show will include a wonderful mix of
Animation, Sculpture, Painting, and Digital Technology



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- FOOD OF CHOICE: Lays

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 It ain't safe no more.

