



Blush: Politics and Other Unnatural Acts

Barry Parham

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Barry Parham is a contributor to the political and social satire blogs on Open Salon (open.salon.com). *Blush: Politics and Other Unnatural Acts* may be a collection of his previously posted entries on this site. The emphasis is on the “may be” because there is no introduction or preface to *Blush* indicating that this is a collection of blog posts. The chapters which are short read like blog postings very much like those written by Barry Parham on Open Salon. The reader is left to his or her own conclusions.

Satire is difficult to write well. When done correctly, satire is the application of wit and humor as a form of social criticism intended to bring about change. It can be a swift vehicle transporting a positive critique of current political events. When done badly, satire sinks into a craven mass of cynicism and anger. For the most part, Parham comes down on the high side. Occasionally his humor is precise and insightful. Describing a Senate confirmation hearing, Parham quotes Senators as saying: “(Harry Reid) If there’s no objection, I’ll now dispense with all history, logic, and common sense. (Arlen Specter) I heartily approve of these bipartisan proceedings, and I heartily disapprove, too.” Every now and again the reader is reminded of scenes featuring Mad Hatters and disappearing cats.

From time to time, in constructing his criticism of current politics, Parham relies on images so common they have become clichés. It is too easy to characterize President Obama using teleprompters, as if no other president has done this. Serious conservative pundits have filled the airwaves and the Internet with references to the President as a messiah, so much so that it no longer has meaning. Portraying the late Senator Ted Kennedy as a person in need of a drink (when he was suffering from a fatal brain tumor) is tasteless. Politics is rich with characters and events worthy of comedic critique. There is no need to follow the herd in this endeavor.

Parham demonstrates clearly that he has a knack for political satire. “Razing Arizona,” a chapter on Arizona’s immigration legislation and “High Noon in Debt Valley,” the last chapter in the book dealing with the inability of Washington politicians to deal with problems substantively, are extraordinarily well-conceived and written. As a broadside, “Brussels Sprouts & Guillotines” is funny and on point.

Blush would benefit from an introduction to put the material that follows in context. Without that, reading *Blush* is a bit like coming into a movie that started twenty minutes ago. At the end, though, it was a movie well worth the price of admission.

JOHN MICHAEL SENGER (June 24, 2011)

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