



Just Three Minutes, Please: Thinking out Loud on Public Radio

Michael Blumenthal

Vandalia Press, an imprint of WVU Press (Mar 1, 2014)

Softcover \$16.99 (120pp)

978-1-938228-77-3

A collection of political essays reflects on the personal experience and opinion of proven polymath Michael Blumenthal.

Just Three Minutes, Please brings to print some of Michael Blumenthal's radio essays, originally prepared for three-minute segments on West Virginia's National Public Radio station.

Blumenthal is a proven polymath and a law professor who has served as Director of Creative Writing at Harvard University. He has written in virtually every genre: poetry, memoir, novel, essays, and short stories.

Here, Blumenthal collects his essays into chapters addressing health care, West Virginia, politics, and more. The brevity of the essays keeps things moving at a brisk pace, but this serves as both a boon and a curse; Blumenthal clearly has opinions to share on a wide variety of subjects, but a few pages isn't always enough space to make a compelling or convincing argument, though Blumenthal is always eloquent. One of the classic techniques for a persuasive essay is to present the opposition's argument and then refute it. But in these short essays, it's often more of a straw man that Blumenthal opposes; it's unlikely that readers who don't already agree with Blumenthal's stance on gun control, for example, will be convinced by cribbed statistics that support his position, without his mentioning the opposition's arguments as anything more than the beliefs of the ignorant and uninformed. Blumenthal writes: "Since Senator Joe Manchin has just wrapped up his 'Common Sense Tour' of West Virginia, I'd like to offer him a bit of common sense. For one, I would suggest it doesn't require a literary mind to realize that it is no great metaphorical leap from a senatorial candidate firing a rifle through the Cap and Trade Bill to that of a mentally fragile twenty-two-year-old firing a pistol through the head of a Congresswoman."

Contrary to Blumenthal's words, it *does* seem a great metaphorical leap, and statements like these border on histrionics. Blumenthal's writing works best when it's grounded in his own personal experience, but when he extrapolates too far, the essays feel like one-sided conversations that have been abruptly halted before the other conversationalists have had a chance to respond. Blumenthal's opinions on gay marriage, levels of taxation, and other political issues tend to fall squarely on the left side of the political spectrum, and much the book reads like well-written "preaching to the choir."

Blumenthal is an excellent writer, and he delivers his opinions clearly, and with a variety of allusions and quotations that only a well-read man, long involved with literature, could.

PETER DABBENE (Spring 2014)

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