

of Christian individualism

Not a peep out of Buckley about this religious criticism, even to label Lenny as a "god-hater" (a favourite tag) or claim he is "hostile to religion." To hear Buckley say it, the only remarkable thing about Lenny was his foul mouth.

In fact Lenny hardly used more "dirty" words than Buckley did in his novel *Stained Glass*. Here Buckley might argue that he only made Harry Truman say "shit", "Christ", "bastards", and "goddamn", because this was exactly how Give-em-hell Harry talked. Well, Lenny, as it turns out, used exactly the same standard.

"I'll never use a four letter word for shock value - it has to fit and swing with the character whom I want to say it."

A fair-minded reading of *How to Talk Dirty* will verify the assertion, as will a look at his films.

But Buckley apparently judged the issue on *Lenny* - a fictional film which caters to the "foul-mouthed Lenny" myth, so perhaps he can plead ignorance. Or can he?

Buckley states that a third of the film consists in (sic) exact reproduction of Lenny Bruce routines. How can he know that, if he hasn't had first-hand experience of the routines? And if he hasn't experienced Lenny's work first hand, then on what basis did he issue this thundering ex cathedra statement:

(Lenny) didn't have as much to say about life in his twenty-year stand-up monologue as Samuel Johnson will tell you in one page of his works.

If Buckley is as well-acquainted with Lenny as he would have us believe, why the perpetuation of the "foul-mouth Lenny" popular delusion? Why the blind eye to Lenny's criticism of the clergy and churches?

Whether Buckley is ignorant of the issues, or merely shiftily evading them, his essay gives off a bad smell, whose bouquet is not improved by lines like:

(Lenny's) search for sensation took him to drugs, and humiliating death, naked in the garret, at the age of forty.

Buckley neglects to tell us what makes him think that Lenny's life was a "search for sensation." Perhaps it was this excerpt from Lenny's book:

Anyway, I wanted to produce my own

(motion) picture. At the time I was sort of swept up with the story of Christ - this big, beautiful man - and the picture I had in mind was about a handicapped bum who wore a hearing aid. His whole ambition in life was to save up enough money to buy a black leather motorcycle jacket. Some day the motorcycle, but first he just wanted to get enough money together to buy the jacket.

There was to be a scene in the picture where he was really disappointed, and his hand was caught in the door and had to be all wrapped up in a bandage, and he was struggling with his suitcase... and he passes this statue of Christ. It's a beautiful statue. It doesn't show Christ being crucified; it shows him very stately, on top of the world, standing there, and he's King of Kings.

The shot was to be this: I walk up to the statue, pass it, look back, gaze at it for a while. There are some flowers on the ground at the foot of this ball which is the earth. I pick up the flowers. I can just about reach his toes, and I put the flowers at his feet, and then I just sort of fall on the globe, embracing it. When we go back to a long shot, showing my arms outstretched while I'm falling there, it looks just like a cross.

Perhaps what Buckley meant was that Lenny was searching for religious sensation.

One feels like shaking the moral Mr. Buckley by the lapels and telling him that it was an overdose of police persecution and the resultant unemployment that did Lenny in, not a search for sensation. And that the humiliation of his death lay in the fact that the police let his body lie naked on the floor until they had called in the press to take some juicy photos.

Or how about this line from Buckley: *At one hectic moment (Lenny) enthralls his youthful audience by motivating the actions of Mrs. Kennedy at Dallas on the day of the assassination in a way that is not only cruel, but unproductively cruel.*

Motivating the actions???? I defy any English professor to say, as *Esquire* did about Buckley's writing, that his phrase has "sparkle and grace." Or even that it has any sensible meaning. One approaches the monstrosity wondering just what Buckley is trying to say, or conceal, about Lenny's

skit. Clearly the charge of cruelty needs some evidential support, but it is simply not there.

One feels a need to counter with some real Lenny Bruce to redeem his good name:

Young boys are sincerely godlike in attitude. A young kid will always help. I think the motivation is for adult acceptance, and the sweet part about it is that you know it's never profit motivation, because when you go to give them some money, they always say, in a shy, awkward manner, "No, that's quite all right, mister." And when you force it on them, they're quite embarrassed.

What happens to sweet, willing young boys? What happens to all of us? We never stop any more and say, "Can I help you, mister?"

This is the man that Buckley said was "smuttily" and "leeringly" engaged in "pandering to obscenity." And note again Buckley's godawful English: Lenny was not pandering to the taste for obscenity, as one might expect.

But perhaps I dwell on Lenny Bruce overmuch. I could make much the same points about Buckley's ignorant (or is it deliberate?) misrepresentation of issues and people by dredging up his frothing denunciation that *The Life Of Brian* is a blasphemy against God, and demonstrate that the film was merely a predictable assault on zealots. Or I could dissect his speech to the New York Police Department Holy Name Society during the mayoralty campaign of 1966 and show why I think that his insinuations that the admittedly much-abused police are victims of anti-Christian collectivists (what else?) is pure demagoguery. Or why his reference to Martin Luther King's assassination as an "execution" is further proof that for all his fancy verbiage, he is still unacquainted with the rudiments of English.

But space is running out, and I promised last week to give an example of the hallucinogenic side of Buckley's conservatism. Here it is, from the Jan. 23, 1981 *National Review*.

Milton Friedman stakes his considerable reputation on the proposition that if all taxes were reduced to a top level of 25%, the revenues of the government

would in fact increase... Instantly. Because, says Friedman, there are 31 million Americans paying more than 25% tax on their top dollar, and these Americans are busily engaged in activity whose only motivation is to seek tax relief. Some work less, some invest in tax shelters, some engage busily in the growing underground economy, avoiding the IRS entirely.

...if Friedman is right, and logic is on his side, the reform could have wonderful repercussions.

It must strike any sensible person as somewhat fishy that tax rates could be lowered and tax revenues increase as a result. In fact, the only way it could be done is if income, profits, and other taxable items increased in value. Assuming these taxable items did not increase, Buckley estimates that tax revenues would drop about 13%. To merely make up for this loss, then, it would be required that income, profits et al increase correspondingly. A bit of rough algebra, using a \$100 hypothetical taxable revenue, and a tax rate reduced from 29% to 25% (resulting - check it out - in a tax loss of 14%) shows that the \$100 would have to be increased by \$16.00 (i.e. 16%) merely to make up for the revenue loss. Let us say, to keep the numbers even, that a 13% lowering of tax returns would be equalized by a 15% increase in taxable revenues. At a maximum tax rate of 25% this would be a minimum 11% increase in real revenues is needed.

In short, Friedman and Buckley are counting on the stimulation of their tax break to raise incomes, profits etc., by at least 11% more than they would normally rise, and furthermore on the hope that none of this 11%+ will be ploughed into the numerous available tax shelters.

Well, I am a conservative in favour of tax breaks and I concur that they are economically beneficial, but it is wishful thinking of the extremist sort to believe that a mere tax-break can cause more than an 11% increase in GNP, and deliriousness to believe that virtually none will escape the tax man.

In fact, such a belief is best described as an ideological hallucination.

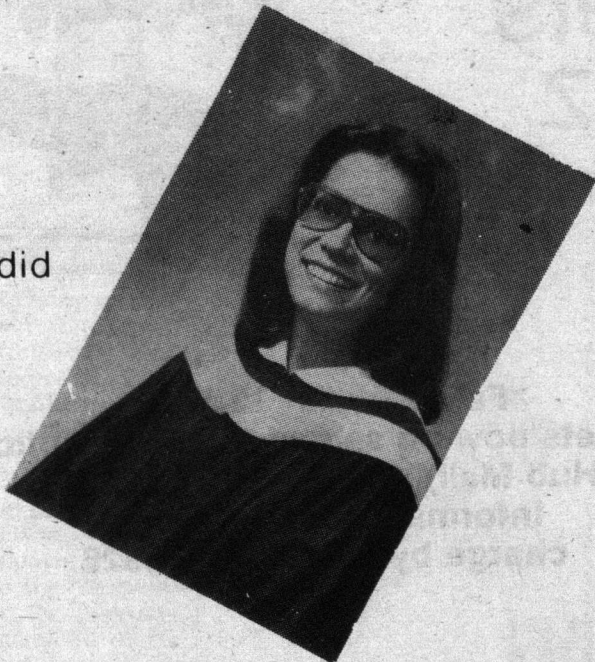
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