



Lone Wolf
Theatre Company

Resources

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Lone Wolf Howl: DON'T DROP BOMBS, PICK UP A PEN

(Originally published in Cochrane Times: February 22, 2006)

for the Cochrane Times — They say a picture is worth a thousand words, but if the words are 'Death to Denmark' (screamed a thousand times) then is the picture worth it?

It's not the first time that someone — an artist no less — has dared to lean his body weight against the rickety scaffolding of fundamentalism. Remember Salmon Rushdie and the publication of his 'Satanic Verses'? The Indian-born author has spent the last 18 years since the book came out — if not in hiding — then forever looking over his shoulder.

If the pen is mightier than the sword, then surely the cartoonist's pencil is mightier than the pen. The final response, however, may well come by way of the sword, brandished by a suicide bomber with explosives strapped around his heart.

One of the cartoons in question was really quite a gem (easily found online). It depicts a bearded man standing upon a cloud with a line of battered suicide bombers waiting to get in to what we assume is heaven. The bearded keeper of the gate is waving his arms in alarm and shouting "Stop, stop, we ran out of virgins." This is good editorial cartooning: it's humorous, the point is clear, and — above all — it sends a very strong, very urgent message to the fundamentalist extremists awaiting a bounty in heaven.

The world has a problem on its hands, and it's a big one. There are a myriad of ways to address the problem, and the printing of the cartoons in Denmark is one of the few ways that does so creatively. The invasion of Iraq and subsequent 'war on terror' deals with it destructively, by shooting at it and dropping bombs on it, or near it, or in the general vicinity of it. But how do you bomb a curdled ideology? Where do you point your gun to hit the bull's eye of religious fanaticism?

Rushdie said, "A poet's work is to name the un-nameable, to point at frauds, to take sides, start arguments, shape the world, and stop it from going to sleep." This is also the cartoonist's work (and, by extension, the work of the newspaper editor). Such work (and it is work) can be deceptively dangerous at times; it never pays as well as it should and rarely gets the merit it deserves, but let's not be so disrespectful as to blatantly exploit it for opportunistic purposes under the guise of defending our first world freedoms. For heaven's sake.

Not only was it emetic to hear Ezra Levant defend his decision to run the cartoons in the Western Standard, it made me so mad I wanted to start a riot in the street. It was the 'key news event of the week', he claimed, and no one in Canada was 'brave' enough to run the offensive pictures. The only thing offensive here was his choice to capitalize on someone else's bravery. What Levant wasn't brave enough to admit had, perhaps, less to do with freedom of expression and freedom of the press, and more to do with the freedom to sell more magazines in our moneymattersmost province. Lots more. Let's be honest: the real bravery lies with the Danes and the original publication of the cartoons. Levant's 'bravery' is laughably myopic in comparison.

All things being equal, one must keep in mind that the fury over the publication of the cartoons in Europe — the riots being run in the streets of Islamic communities — is justified; at least as justified as the cartoons themselves. The 'naming of the un-nameable' always comes at a cost. Just ask Rushdie. Or Jesus. Or Galileo. Or Gandhi. Or Martin Luther King, or...

When this blows over (as it undoubtedly will), it will leave behind a piece of wisdom... as plain and simple as if somebody drew us a picture. The artists — the writers and cartoonists — have a much more effective and lethal arsenal at their

HIGHLIGHTS

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disposal then the politicians to combat terrorists and their one-track, fundamentalist thinking (or lack thereof): it's called creative imagination. Don't drop a bomb... draw a cartoon or write a book. It won't kill anybody (with the possible exception, of course, of the cartoonist and writer). How else do you combat a suicide bomber mentality if not by courting suicide yourself?

So... is the picture worth the thousand words? Absolutely. One of those words just might be the seed – somewhere, sometime – for planting a new tree of level headedness. If not, then we can always use the tree to make more paper to write more books, to sketch more cartoons, to plant more seeds. Sooner or later they'll get the picture. (www.lonewolftheatre.com)

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