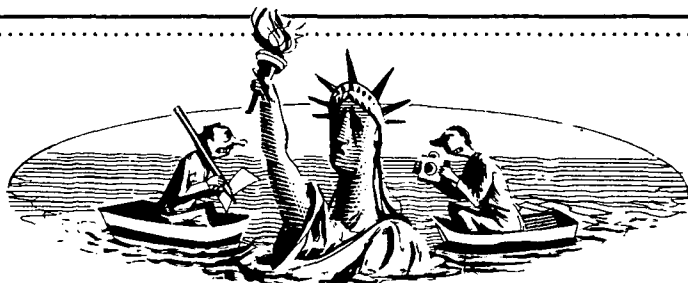


# PRESSWATCH



## BIG MEDIA JITTERS

by Fred Barnes

A wonderful notion is making the rounds in journalism these days to the effect that the press is finally wising up after years of unbridled arrogance, elitism, and liberal bias. Okay, we've made mistakes—the Hitler diaries, the Janet Cooke fabrication, the defamation of Ariel Sharon, the gratuitous trashing of William Westmoreland, the misreporting of the Vietnam war, and year after year of hyped accounts of hunger and homeless men and the perils of nuclear power and the immorality of American allies like Chile, South Korea, Taiwan, and Israel. But all that is changed now in the second term of Ronald Reagan's administration. The press is more sober, mellow, evenhanded, less adversarial, reckless, liberal. Or so the notion goes.

Does anyone swallow such self-serving nonsense? The national press as recovered hysteric and reformed liberal scold? Why, you might as well believe in the compassion of Colonel Qaddafi, the statesmanship of Jesse Jackson, the paranoia of the Soviets, the efficiency of socialism, the possibility of learning while asleep and dieting while gorging yourself, the CIA/FBI/right-wing role in the assassination of John F. Kennedy, and the presence in our midst of little-bitty visitors from somewhere in outer space, perhaps Pluto. But apart from the terminally gullible, I suspect few are falling for this latest bit of self-congratulatory rubbish. It qualifies as one of the Three Great Lies. You know, the check is in the mail, I'm from the federal government and I'm here to help you, and—you can trust the press because it's fair-minded, neutral, and responsible now.

As a vivid reminder that nothing has changed, let me cite the press response to the appointment of Patrick J. Buchanan as the White House communications chief. This was a fleeting episode, I admit, but a revealing one. Even Lou Cannon, the White House correspondent for the *Washington Post*

and no press basher, blanched at the wild-eyed hostility among White House reporters toward President Reagan's hiring of someone who had criticized the "big media" for its liberal slant. "There is something discomfiting about the media reaction to Buchanan's appointment, something that indicates that he may have a point in suggesting that the big battalions of journalism are afflicted with self-importance," Cannon wrote. "Too many of us have reacted by probing Buchanan's view of the media, perhaps because we are preoccupied with ourselves."

That's putting it mildly. The transcript of the press conference at which Donald Regan, the White House chief of staff, announced the selection of Buchanan betrays more than the usual amount of media haughtiness. The attitude was, How dare you pick a fellow who has knocked the media. Sam Donaldson of ABC told Regan: "I'm sure you're aware that Pat Buchanan has expressed an unremitting hostility toward what he calls big

media. He defines that as an Eastern, liberal press corps, ever since he wrote that speech for Spiro Agnew and in his present writings and his present discussion. I'm sure you're aware of that. Why did you appoint him if, in fact, he sees the press as an enemy?" Unsatisfied with Regan's answer, Donaldson went on: "He says in a recent article last fall, 'An ideological bulwark of the Democratic party, polemical and publicity arm of American liberalism, the big media are the strategic reserve of the Mondale campaign.' He doesn't say some reporters, some media. In all his pieces, Mr. Regan, he lumps under the name big media every one of us."

My, my! Imagine someone suggesting that the ideological thrust of national press coverage is liberal! Silence that person. Or at least he must be chastised if he is named to a high White House post. Which is exactly what the TV networks did. Donaldson noted on "ABC World News Tonight" the appointment of several new Reagan

aides, saying that "eyebrows went up" on Buchanan's. Then, he recalled Vice President Spiro Agnew's attack on the press in 1969, and an Agnew clip was shown. "But it was Nixon's speechwriter, Buchanan, whose words Agnew spoke and ever since, in and out of government, the articulate and combative Buchanan has merrily bashed away at what he calls the big media." At this point, a clip from Cable News Network came on, one in which Buchanan castigates the *Washington Post*. Donaldson wound up his spot by raising the specter of a belligerent new tone emanating from the Reagan White House, thanks to Buchanan, and he implied that the press might be a target.

On the "NBC Nightly News," Chris Wallace said roughly the same thing, regurgitating an Agnew clip and harping on Buchanan's criticism of the press. To buttress the point that Buchanan might start an anti-press crusade at the Reagan White House, Wallace gleaned from an interview with columnist Jack Germond a comment about Buchanan's suspicions of press scheming. "He is always quick to see press conspiracies and press plots, because a lot of the press doesn't agree with a lot of things Pat agrees with," Germond says. Yet Germond doesn't think Buchanan will indulge in press bashing for Reagan; that was not mentioned. Wallace concluded with this: "Buchanan said tonight he stands by his criticism of the media, but noted there's a difference between doing a talk show and working at the White House. He said he will serve, quote, my cause and my President. He didn't say which comes first."

Cute ending. *Time* had its own snappy way of warning that trouble might be ahead between the White House and the press with Buchanan on board with Reagan. Buchanan has shown no "mellowing . . . toward the press," *Time* said. "At week's end he was not returning telephone calls from reporters seeking comment on his appointment." Of course, you could say the same thing about nearly every White House official, that he doesn't



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answer all his press calls. I can personally give assurances that many officials don't call back; at least they don't always call me back. Does that mean they are unmellowed critics of the press? Maybe they are, but maybe they can't be bothered or maybe they're just rude. I like to think those who don't return my calls have no manners at all.

Anyway, the Buchanan affair tells us more than merely that the press hasn't changed. For one thing, many reporters missed the crux of the Buchanan story, the naming to high position of a movement conservative who may or may not have influence in the White House. Will Buchanan be an ornament to display to other conservatives, or will he affect policy? I don't know, but that and not the possibility of a White House assault on the media is the real issue. For another, the Buchanan episode shows anew the press inclination to use Spiro Agnew as a weapon, on the assumption that whatever he said is tainted and kooky. The trouble is, Agnew's critique of the press, however ill motivated, still sounds pretty reasonable. ABC, for instance, showed a clip of Agnew saying, "The views of a majority of this [press] fraternity do not and, I repeat, do not represent the views of Americans." Add the word "most" in front of "Americans," however, and you have a statement of quantifiable truth. Who could argue with that? The Agnew clip trotted out by NBC was different: "When the news that 40 million Americans receive each night is determined by a handful of men responsible only to their corporate employers. . . ." Was Agnew fantasizing a conspiracy? I don't think so, and neither does Austin Ranney, the respected political scientist at the American Enterprise Institute who has argued that Agnew's charges should be taken seriously. My point about Agnew is that identifying criticism of the press with his person doesn't invalidate the criticism itself. The Agnewisms, written by Buchanan, just may ring true to many people.

Still another interesting aspect of the coverage of Buchanan is the self-importance of the media that it spotlights. Cannon couldn't help but notice it, and his colleague at the *Washington Post*, ombudsman Sam Zagoria, was harsher still in skewering inflated reporters. Hanging around the powerful "is a heady atmosphere," Zagoria wrote, "and some reporters ease into first-name relationships with the high and mighty; some get into cozy social and recreational associations, and occasionally they are flattered to be asked for their opinion on

pending public policies or of people and their potential. Before long, a few journalists take on the airs of high office, even though they have yet to win an election." Actually, I have a quibble with Zagoria; it's more than a few who are putting on airs. Zagoria made up for this by adding: "While they welcome appointments of one of their own, as, for example, Bernard Kalb's as State Department spokesman, they

found it difficult . . . to accept the appointment of maverick Pat Buchanan. . . . [But] where is it written that White House reporters have the authority to 'advise and consent' in executive-branch appointments?" Only in the grandiose job descriptions that countless Washington reporters have drafted for themselves.

They are operating under the misguided impression that Reagan

needed to bring in Buchanan to handle them. It's like a beaten fighter, hanging on the ropes, barely conscious, yet muttering that the guy who's just beaten him to a pulp is in need of help. Reagan has whipped the press; reporters have flailed away, but they've barely laid a glove on him. There's a word for people like those in the media who can't see themselves as all the world does. Silly. □



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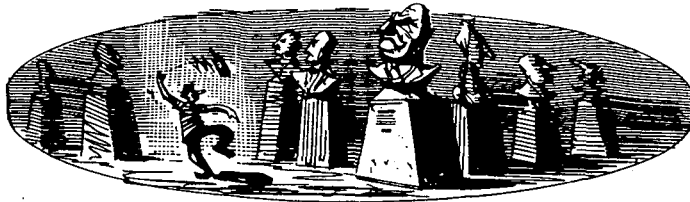
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# EMINENTOES



## THE LOVE DOCTOR

by Andrew Ferguson

The American appetite for cheap thought is well known and apparently insatiable. From the time of Henry David Thoreau, through the days of Dale Carnegie and Aimee Semple McPherson, up to the present age of Carl Rogers and Dr. Wayne ("Your Erroneous Zones") Dyer, some Americans have gladly mistaken felicity of style for profundity and a furrowed brow or a winning smile for wisdom. While affluence gives us unprecedented time for intellectual pursuits, the intellect produces little for some to think about; they have a long lunch-hour, as it were, but the cook is an oaf. Instead of Chateaubriand—to extend the metaphor about as far as it will go—they eat french fries. They seem to like it that way.

Not all American charlatans are fly-by-night operators; some have shown remarkable staying power. *Walden* hasn't been out of print for a hundred years. Among this durable group, apparently, is Dr. Leo Buscaglia, also known to his followers as Dr. Hug, or the Love Doctor. Nominally a professor of education at the University of Southern California, Dr. Buscaglia is possessed of a spirit so robust no classroom could contain him. In the early seventies he took his show on the road. Since then his books have sold in the millions; two of his books were on the *New York Times* Bestseller List simultaneously last year, and his latest, *Loving Each Other*,<sup>1</sup> is at the moment happily ensconced there at number two. His series of televised lectures—in which he prances about before a rapturous audience, mopping his rubbery face with a damp handkerchief and shaking the rafters with his stentorian good will—is hauled out of storage every time a PBS station has a fund drive. And, not incidentally, he has made piles of dough—although he insists that the money hasn't changed his

life; his one concession to prosperity, he told *Newsweek*, was a "chocolate-brown Mercedes."

Dr. Buscaglia's greatest innovation, and his ticket to pop-psych stardom, has been the hug. "I hug everybody," he warns. "Just come close to me and you're more than likely to get hugged, certainly touched." It is his "tendency," he says, to "open arms to others when we meet." And since he is a man wholly inhospitable to self-censorship ("If you feel like crying, you cry. I cry all the time"), it is not surprising that in some unenlightened sectors he has met with resistance. The estimable Judith Martin, for example, was dense enough to refuse a hug when she met the doctor at a public symposium. ("I hugged her anyway.") And a "popular TV interviewer" made a similar entreaty on another occasion. "I'm a man," he pleaded, halting his guest in mid-lunge. "I don't want my viewers to think I'm queer." Still, among the bright-eyed and open-minded, the trade in Hug hugs has been brisk. Phil Donahue, Leo says, was "most receptive to a human hug."

Reading Dr. Buscaglia's books, as I was ordered to do, is probably easier to take than one of his hugs, but it nevertheless requires considerable fortitude and diligence. His *oeuvre* forms a thick, murky Mississippi of moonshine, sweeping the reader along a high tide of jargon, banalities, and half-truths. The effect is so seductive that

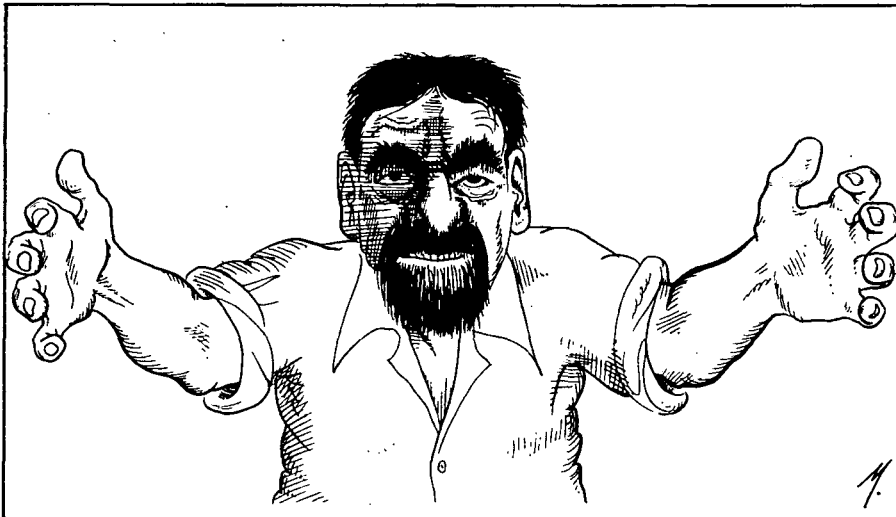
after a couple of hours a careless reader may find himself nodding knowingly at statements like, "Love and self are one and the discovery of either is the realization of both." His subjects are the big ones: Love, Caring, Sharing. These conflow to produce the "subtle art of moving together with others," and he's not talking about the rum-ba; the subtle art, rather, is "relating," which Dr. Buscaglia himself manages to do only on a grand scale. He has never been married and has no children, for he is too busy spreading his message of loving relationships to bother with one. His *affaire de coeur* is with simply *everybody*—most especially the grinning hordes who flock to his lectures and the readers who eagerly plunk down fifteen clams for every new book. At the close of his lectures, he proves his love by vouchsafing the multitude the chance to queue up for a hug from the man himself. "He gives you a shot of adrenalin," cooed one lass who waited an hour and a half for a Dr. Hug wrap-around. "I'm still tingling."

Why has the prof fastened onto the hug as the symbol of successful relating? For one thing, a hug "changes your chemistry toward positive things." Moreover, "hugs make you feel psychologically more secure and together." If you find yourself scratching your head at these elucidations, welcome aboard. Part of the doctor's charm lies in his ambiguity; his pro-

nouncements may mean anything you wish. Language, after all, is full of bear-traps for the unwary, and Dr. Buscaglia knows too well to get bogged down in the minutiae of definition or of concreteness, or even of the minimum requirements for making sense. "Sometimes by opening our mouths we make dreadful errors," he says, without a trace of irony. "It's often so much nicer to just look at somebody and vibrate."

Leo Buscaglia began vibrating in East Los Angeles, in 1924, the youngest child of Tulio and Rosa, who had recently arrived in the New World. Tulio struggled as a waiter in various Los Angeles restaurants, and home life was plagued by poverty. It is curious that Leo never mentions his religious training, if indeed he had any—curious if only because he shares with his readers every other aspect of life in the Buscaglia household, from sleeping arrangements to bathroom habits. But religious or not, some unusual force possessed the Buscaglias, for the family was a regular carnival of relating, to hear Leo tell it—as he does again and again; although here, as elsewhere, his judgment may be impaired by his rather tenuous grasp on life as it is normally lived. After hearing one of these hug encomiums, Leo's brother asked him, "Who are all these people you keep talking about?"

Whoever Tulio and Rosa were, there is the old saying that by their fruits you shall know them, and the mind struggles to imagine a child of man fruitier than Leo Buscaglia. His singular ebullience and zest for life manifested itself at an early age. Before long the neighborhood kids fell victim. Then, as now, there were some who wouldn't understand. "I used to hug my classmates who said I was 'queer,'" he laments. But Leo forged ahead. Every child not big enough to fight back was dragged into the Buscaglia garage, where they sat, slack-jawed, watching Leo perform impromptu, juvenile versions of the juvenile lectures that have



<sup>1</sup>SLACK Inc./Holt, Rinehart and Winston, \$13.95.

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