

October 12, 2007

Dear Education Policy Director,

Another new school year is upon us, and the debate continues to rage concerning President Bush's NCLB Standards-based approach to education, whether its implementation is improving test scores and motivating complacent teachers and administrators or whether this obsession with quantifiable facts and measurable benchmarks unduly punishes those districts struggling against economically impoverished conditions. Rather than read one more dreary, statistic-laden polemic rigged to prove a particular political point, our institute recommends the enclosed novel about public education which explores through a fictional realm the emotional and intellectual dynamic that results from such beliefs in "authentic" data.

*A Diminished Thing, or Sex and One Superposition* examines one year in the lives of a San Bernardino family, the Tethers, during a traumatic period in American history not unlike our own. The father, a high school English teacher, suffers from erectile dysfunction and a quixotic belief in his own ability to perceive the Truth. While trying to solve his sexual impotence, the protagonist also experiences a variety of health problems, careening from the agony of kidney stones to a male enhancement medication which brings about unforeseen consequences. His attempts to compensate for his libidinal failure end only in greater frustration. Meanwhile, his ever patient, though sharp-tongued, wife battles the Standards movement which is slowly demoralizing her "under-achieving" school. In a subplot, their twenty-year-old eldest son, an art school student, struggles to figure out who he is, sexually, psychologically, and vocationally. He survives a typical post-adolescent suicidal crisis, though his visit to a woman known as the Sorry Psychic eventually leads him down a path which he has not fully understood.

Against the background of this family's search for conjugal happiness, emotional maturity, and educational evidence of progress, a bumbling, inarticulate President of the United States presides, one who has invaded several Middle Eastern countries on poorly verified testimony. A compassionate conservative, Herb Plant is the sort of commander-in-chief who prefers to play Hearts in an Internet card room rather than manage affairs of state, a chore he finds too complicated and too time-consuming, and which he prefers to leave to his churlish vice-president, Pete Knotts, and his loyal political advisor, Cap Geiger. Unfortunately, Mr. Plant's quarrels during many a hand with any number of cyberspace opponents persuades him that he is being stalked by a card sharp/assassin. When the civics team from Mr. Tether's school (Polk HS in Rancho Engano) wins a national Constitution competition in Washington, D.C., the brilliance and immaturity of these students comes into direct conflict with the idiocy and insecurity of our country's chief executive.

In this novel, fictional characters become much more authentic than any reality-based set of figures.

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