



The Devil's Pleasure Palace

THE CULT OF CRITICAL THEORY AND THE SUBVERSION OF THE WEST • MICHAEL WALSH

“Look about your daily lives here in early twenty-first-century America and Western Europe, and see the shabbiness, hear the coarseness of speech and dialogue, witness the lowered standards not only of personal behavior but also of cultural norms, savor the shrunken horizons of the future.” —THE DEVIL'S PLEASURE PALACE

How did we get here? In a sweeping and thoroughly original polemic that recalls Camille Paglia's seminal *Sexual Personae*, Robert Bork's *Slouching Towards Gomorrah*, and even Robert McKee's *Story*, screenwriter and critic Michael Walsh surveys Western cultural decline through a lens of sex, religion, high and pop art—and weaves in the fascinating story of how a small band of central European nihilists, known as the Frankfurt School, penetrated and subverted America's psyche.

In 21st century America up is down, black is white, life is death, and male is female. *The Devil's Pleasure Palace* traces our willingness to negotiate away these most obvious truths to the advent of “critical theory,” whose

assault on Western values and institutions, including Christianity, the family, conventional sexual morality, and patriotism hobbled the West's cultural confidence. For while “critical theory” was hatched in the ivory towers of Morningside Heights, Walsh shows how it quickly seeped into the water supply and permeated all areas of American cultural life.

The Devil's Pleasure Palace is a political book with x-ray vision, peering through today's left-right divide to a different set of cultural struggles. It is about Milton versus Marx and Marcuse, the everyday American against the scheming intellectual, and, above all, about redemptive truths versus Mephistophelean fantasies.

The Devil's Pleasure Palace

REVEALS

How neo-Marxist academics known as the Frankfurt School created the intellectual justifications for the countercultural movements that have upended American society.

Why, to understand American politics and culture, it is critical to appreciate Western mythos—and particularly the narrative of God and Satan.

How Saul Alinsky, the father of Left-wing community organizing, drew inspiration from (in his words) “the first radical known to man who rebelled against the establishment and did it so effectively that he at least won his own kingdom—Lucifer.”

Why the Critical Theorists understood that everything flows downstream from the culture—and knew the importance of infiltrating Hollywood.

How the Left succeeded in establishing a Stalinist climate of political correctness in which Americans cannot speak to even the most obvious truths.

Why narrative and storytelling is key to winning in both politics and the culture.



To schedule an interview with Michael Walsh contact
Dean Draznin | dean@drazninpr.com | 641.472.2257

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michael Walsh



Michael Walsh is a journalist, author, and screenwriter, whose work includes six novels, seven works of nonfiction, and a hit Disney movie.

The former classical music critic of *Time* magazine, he is now a regular contributor of political and cultural commentary to PJ Media and *National Review*, and an occasional op-ed columnist for the *New York Post*. Among his awards are the ASCAP-Deems Taylor Award for distinguished music criticism, in 1979, and the American Book Award prize for fiction for his gangster novel, *And All the Saints*, in 2004.

“You’ll love Michael Walsh’s books.”

—RUSH LIMBAUGH

“[Walsh] shapes his brashness into wicked irony reminiscent of C. S. Lewis’ *The Screwtape Letters*, laced with the cunning shrewdness of a twenty-first-century Machiavelli and spiced with the acerbic panache of an H. L. Mencken.”

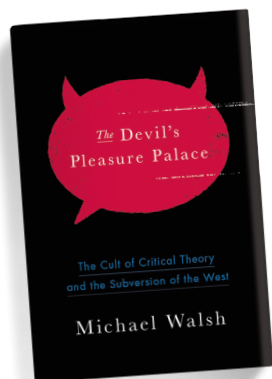
—BOOKLIST

“[Walsh] has never seen an important fight he didn’t want to join, and to this most important of all fights he brings along his full arsenal: the singular attention to detail, the grasp of the big picture, and the surgeon’s scalpel of wit.”

—ANDREW C. MCCARTHY

PRAISE FOR

The Devil's Pleasure Palace



“Ranging over the centuries and across the continents, from high culture to war to American society today, Michael Walsh has written a dazzling, exhilarating, and thought-provoking book.”

—WILLIAM KRISTOL, EDITOR OF *THE WEEKLY STANDARD*

“In this learned and engaging book Michael Walsh takes us on a literary, philosophical, and pop-cultural odyssey of Western society, from the Greeks to the present. He reminds us that in the age-old war for the soul of the West between the bored and nihilistic creatures of affluence and leisure and the autonomous individual who honors his past and seeks transcendence in his religion, the bad guys are exhausted and now meeting their comeuppance.”

—VICTOR DAVIS HANSON, SENIOR FELLOW AT THE
HOOVER INSTITUTION, STANFORD UNIVERSITY

“There is poison in our bloodstream. Michael Walsh works to pump it out by bringing it to the light of day. *The Devil's Pleasure Palace* shows us how we got here and how our souls and our culture are being suffocated. There is hope in knowing our history and wanting something better. This book equips that cause—one aimed toward heaven.”

—KATHRYN JEAN LOPEZ, *NATIONAL REVIEW*



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MICHAEL WALSH

Q & A

“It’s exactly what Satan would espouse if he held a prestigious chair at, say, Columbia University.”

What inspired you to write *The Devil’s Pleasure Palace*?

WALSH: For some time, I’ve been thinking about writing a book about Satan in the modern world, and how we grapple with the problem of evil in a society increasingly hostile to, and devoid of, Christianity. The existential crisis facing the West provided the opportunity for a larger discussion of Western culture and civilization, using the tools of that culture itself (narrative storytelling, poetry, music) to explain the relationship between religion and civilization.

Finally, the influence of the Frankfurt School of cultural Marxists upon the United States, which is just now being felt to its fullest, provided the most immediate example of what I call the satanic (with a small “s”) Left.

Why the “satanic” Left?

WALSH: The term applies to the Left’s advocacy of things that our culture used to recognize as antithetical to a moral society, from the nature of American government down to the social issues—some of which weren’t even issues a few decades ago.

Further, the Left has cast aside much of the mufti it was forced to adopt in the United States—“tolerance” being its principal mask—and can finally be seen for what it is really is: a totalitarianism masquerading as beneficence. If that isn’t satanic, I don’t know what is.

What was the Frankfurt School?

WALSH: The work of the Frankfurt scholars—among them, Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Erich Fromm, Max Horkheimer, Herbert Marcuse, and Wilhelm

Reich—was grounded in an ideology that demanded (as Marx would say) an unremitting assault on Western values and institutions, including Christianity, the family, conventional sexual morality, patriotism, and any institution or set of beliefs that blocked the path of revolution. Literally nothing was sacred.

Where did it come from?

WALSH: Intellectually, the Frankfurt School grew out the works of Karl Marx, who himself borrowed liberally from an earlier generation of German philosophers including Hegel. Emotionally, their work was grounded in the anti-Western animus of Antonio Gramsci and Georg Lukács. And behind them all, of course, was Jean-Jacques Rousseau, perhaps the most pernicious influence in modern Western history.

The Frankfurt School might have stayed confined to Europe were it not for the rise of Hitler and the Second World War. That drove them into temporary exile in the United States, where they found a new academic home at Columbia University in Manhattan.

“Critical Theory is simply an academic name for cultural vandalism.”

Was it a Marxist conspiracy?

WALSH: If not a “conspiracy,” then definitely an “academic consensus,” which amounts to the same thing. It was certainly part of the worldwide Marxist movement

that gained steam after the First World War and snapped into place all over Europe in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War.

What is “Critical Theory”?

WALSH: Critical Theory is simply an academic name for cultural vandalism, the notion that everything can and should be questioned and, if possible, destroyed. In Critical Theory, to be “anti” almost anything is to be on the Right Side of History, surfing the Arc as it bends toward Justice. It’s exactly what Satan would espouse if he held a prestigious chair at, say, Columbia University.

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fascism of the mind—is destroyed,
America is not and cannot be a
free country.”**

Question everything—except their priorities?

WALSH: Women, blacks, gays, the environment, “choice,” and big government all stand as categorical imperatives. They are Good Things; their opposites are not. These individual words no longer have specific meanings but are used to evoke emotions. And thus language is used to silence discussion and criticism.

Is this what you mean when you write: “We live in a free society that cannot speak its mind”?

WALSH: The disparity between the truth and our inability to articulate that truth is causing us to resemble the old Soviet Union, a place in which what we know to be true cannot be spoken, and what they tell us is true cannot be believed. Until Political Correctness—fascism of the mind—is destroyed, America is not and cannot be a free country.

So is the Frankfurt School responsible for the decline of American culture?

WALSH: The Frankfurt School simply provided a handy “intellectual” justification for the worst adolescent impulses in any human society. As luck would have it, the Frankfurters landed in America just as the Baby Boomers were being born, and their vogueish principles fell on very receptive ground.

Of course, for the heirs of the Frankfurt School, the decline of traditional Western society is (to use their word) “progressive.” Just as the villain in any novel or movie sees himself as the protagonist, they view themselves as fighters for “social justice.”

Q: What did the Critical Theorists understand about story and narrative?

WALSH: The Frankfurt School hated the old narrative of a confident, muscular, Christian West that did what it took to create the nation-states of Europe and the United States of America, so they invented a new one, what I call the anti-Narrative. The genius of Critical Theory has been to make normal Americans start questioning their own history.

Is there a path to cultural redemption? Is religion the answer?

WALSH: Part of my thesis in *The Devil's Pleasure Palace* is that religion itself is only the secondary manifestation of the spark of the Divine that every human being instinctively feels within. We are, each of us, the heroes of our own movies, engaged in a Quest for redemption. And, as in so many of our primal cultural stories that antedate organized religions, that Quest very often involves a return “home,” or at least to the status quo ante. This dramatic structure is codified in Aristotle's *Poetics* and used by every screenwriter working in Hollywood today. We all want to go home. And if you don't believe me, ask Ulysses.

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AN EXCERPT

from *The Devil's
Pleasure Palace*

"Intentions are everything, results are nothing."

ON THE UNHOLY LEFT, THERE IS NO IDEA TOO STUPID

to try, no institution unworthy of attack, no theory not worth implementing without care for its results, no matter what the practical cost. Intentions are everything, results are nothing. Results are an illusion; theory is what counts, because theory can be debated endlessly within the safe harbors of academe. The key is to examine what those intentions really are. The answer lies in the Left's own sense of narrative or, rather, anti-Narrative.

The works of the Frankfurt School make up a contrarian manifesto, expressed as a political program. Individual words no longer have specific meanings but stand as categorical imperatives. Women, blacks, gays, the environment, "choice," and big government are all Good Things; their opposites are not. To use the word is to evoke the emotion associated with it, not the noun. ("Rape" has recently undergone a similar linguistic transformation, mutating from forcible sexual intercourse into acts of verbal aggression or "microaggression," or whatever the "victim" dislikes.) Thus language is used to silence discussion and criticism; it is "anti," with "anti" now treated as an absolute good. To be "anti" almost anything is to be on the Right Side of History, surfing the Arc as it bends toward Justice. It requires no thought, only emotions. It requires no reflection upon the conundrum of Chesterton's Fence, only reflexes. It should be an embarrassment to anyone who cannot defend it intellectually, and yet it is not—because it is dogma.

**"Dogma creates its own reality.
You do not have to think about it;
it provides all the answers."**

Dogma creates its own reality. You do not have to think about it; it provides all the answers. It is easy to mock evangelical Protestants or Orthodox Jews who cite the book of Leviticus as the source of wisdom and instruction about food, health, or sexual morality; simply making an assertion from authority by citing scripture is no argument at all. So it is with the leftist catechism as it has evolved in the wake of Critical Theory and political correctness, which has the added advantages of being of recent vintage and widely disseminated by an enthusiastic media. It deserves to be questioned and mocked with every bit as much jollity as the atheists attack Southern Baptist preachers.

What, after all, did "sexual liberation" accomplish? What positive good did it achieve? Other than providing men with greater, easier access to women, how did it improve anyone's life? It promised us liberation from "sexual repression" (what teenaged boys used to call, sniggeringly, DSB), freedom from an old and tired sexual morality. It promised to tear down the Chesterton's Fence that stood between our libidos and our responsibilities. It is easy to see why it was popular, since it partly leveled the sexual playing field for beta males, whose chances of sexual "conquest" vastly improved once "conquest" was taken out of the equation and a woman's natural resistance to indiscriminate sex (or less discriminating sex) was broken down. In the guise of cooperative pleasure, it erected a new egalitarianism between the sexes, told women that their sex drives and their sexual responsibilities were exactly the same as a man's. (It's a mystery why no feminist of the time complained that, in effect, the new doctrine still portrayed women as lesser creatures who needed to raise—or lower—their sexual

sights to the level of a man's.) The newfound "liberation" led to a rapid increase in abortion, HIV and AIDS, and illegitimate children. Finally, wearing the masque of "progress," it returned Westerners to primitive levels of sexuality, kicking out the moral underpinnings of the culture (even if the morals were often observed more in the breach than in practice). Who knew that the slogan "Every man a stud, every woman a slut" could be a winner? It is not for humanity to defeat Sin, but to be wary and canny in our interaction with it. And, in any case, the *Ewig-Weibliche* will never stoop to whoredom.

Whoever thought turning women into men was a good idea needs his head examined. And turning men into women (the necessary corollary, as it turned out, although that bit was less advertised) was even worse. Hence the very real consequences of "no consequences." Above all, the sheer charlatanism of it astounds, nearly a century on. What the hell were we thinking? How was it possible for the intelligentsia of the United States, having just participated in the great American victory in the Second World War, to embrace such an obviously cockamamie philosophy? The Greco-Roman medical theory of bodily humors, the selling of indulgences in the Middle Ages, and phrenology had more scientific bases than Wilhelm Reich's twaddle.

"The "war between the sexes" has rarely been more hostile."

And what has been the effect? The "war between the sexes" has rarely been more hostile. The incidence of sexually transmitted diseases has soared; viruses once contracted only in a bordello can be found at the corner bar. What began as unconstrained sexual license—orgies, multiple sex partners, etc.—has turned into "yes means yes" affirmative consent for even a one-night stand. On campuses, young men and women now eye one another with suspicion: That attractive person you see might be not only a potential sex partner but also a future plaintiff

in a lawsuit. The more sex, it seems, the more heartbreak; the less "repression," the less romance. Public billboards in Los Angeles promote the use of condoms and AIDS hotlines. The promised Venusberg has turned venereal.

Interestingly, it was right around the same time that the sexual-liberation movement got fully under way—the 1970s—that the thanatopic side of it arose in popular culture, in the movies. For this was also the heyday of horror and slasher films, movies about enraged, often immortal serial killers (*Halloween*, *Friday the 13th*, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, *A Nightmare on Elm Street*) who preyed upon nubile, often naked teens in various acts of sexual intercourse. Nearly every one of our perky protagonists wound up on the wrong side of the slasher's weapon of choice, save one: a young woman known in the trade as the Final Girl.

It's as if Newton's Third Law of Motion applied, setting off an equal and opposite reaction to Reich's prescriptions and nostrums: The more sex we have, the less satisfying it is, and the more culturally destructive. In Japan, more and more young men are forgoing marriage and even dating in favor of staying home, watching porn, and playing video games; as a result, the country is now in a population death-spiral, with adult diapers outselling baby nappies. Elsewhere, nudity abounds as an example of female "empowerment," and yet rabid feminists see rapists not only behind every bush but standing at the podium. A kind of insanity has gripped the West, a sexual hysteria far worse than anything Reich conveniently diagnosed in his attempt to get laid as often as possible.

Get laid young men most certainly have, but what has been the upshot? The sexual proclivities of a pasha in his harem or a gangsta with his "ho's," however, have exactly the same deleterious effect on Western culture as they have had on the Mohammedans or the black underclass. What Reich and the other Frankfurters forgot was that "repression" (to use their word) is a *good* thing when it is called by its proper name: "tradition."

"A kind of insanity has gripped the West."