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Editor's Introduction: "Making Sense of the Senseless: A Case for the Insufficiency of Theory and Hermeneutics"

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Editor's Introduction: "Making sense of the senseless: A case for the insufficiency of theory and hermeneutics." / Marc Ouellette

This issue is a wonderful compilation of truly excellent essays. I can assure readers that I have read and appreciated them. Indeed, several of them came through my inbox during various stages of preparation and it is encouraging to see such a healthy roster of scholarly contributions. I wish I were able to do them justice. Please read them. Enjoy them. The work alone should give us hope. People are thinking critically and responding creatively. This in and of itself is a good thing. What follows, then, is a call for more good things. It is part response, part self-directed speech, part thought experiment, part call for action, part apology and part polemic. At its heart, though, is a gaping, festering lemma and a refusal to understand a culture's collective refusal to learn, even in the face of twenty children—babies, really, no bigger than my own—being slaughtered senselessly. The refusal to learn is the one thing educators probably are least prepared to deal with among their students. I thought I'd give it a try.

<1> I do not understand, nor do I care to understand. In August of 2012, American tourist Walt Wawra made headlines for a letter he wrote to a Calgary, Alberta, newspaper. In the letter, Mr. Wawra claims to have been set upon by a pair of aggressive young men who happened to be handing out tickets for the Calgary Stampede. The letter set off a chain of reactions on Twitter and elsewhere. I have even fired off a couple to dip my toes in the waters of #nosehillgentlemen. Mr. Wawra's first, and most compelling reaction to encountering strangers attempting to start a conversation was

essentially "I wish I had my gun." Canadians, especially, found this reaction to be pretty much as ridiculous as it sounds.[1] Mr. Wawra became and is still a laughingstock in Canada (and elsewhere). However, Mr. Wawra, who even manages to invoke Jesus—a problematic figure indeed, since he was the one who kicked ass in the temple but also said to turn the other cheek, love your fellow human, and forgive your brother seven times seven times—remains unabashed, and wrote another letter further declaring the soundness of his position and the dangers of being without his gun in Canada, a country whose violent crime rate continues to fall. This includes a 6% drop in the last year-to-year reporting, to stand at the lowest level since 1973, and continues the current twenty-year-long trend (Stats Can 2011). Further, the overall number of murders for the entire country stands at 598 (Stats Can 2012). This number should beggar belief. To give stat in TV documentary style, the figure would be like wiping out my largest ever survey course for two semesters running. Yet, Mr. Wawra allegedly stands as a responsible owner and, further, law enforcement officer, whose first reaction to (the) unease of meeting people trying to give him free things basically remains, "I wish I had my gun." So much for "What would Jesus do?"

<2> I do not understand, nor do I wish to understand. A little over four months later, the rest of the world and I watched as America found itself in the midst of reconciling the massacre at Sandy Hook. Almost immediately the genuine compassion, mourning, sympathy, and commiseration was met with scapegoats, excuses, moral outrage, and the almost predictable response from some quarters that the answer, of course, is to have more guns. [And, yes, it didn't take me long to notice at least one little boy and one little girl whose images remind me of my own, and sent tears flying from my eyes. Ed.] I don't need to cite a statistical source to know that at least 1,000 have been shot to death in the U.S. since Sandy Hook. It's not a statistic, it's a truism. But I bet the NRA can't easily blame cities and immigration for the fact that the top fifteen cities only account for about one-third of the U.S. total. They're too busy trying to tell us that the President's children should not be guarded as a matter of national interest—though, something tells me they might have approved an MRAP for the Bush daughters' binging—and that as many as four tiny U.S. jurisdictions accounting for less than 5% of the total population have lower murder rates than the U.K. So does my back yard. The day I started typing this in, a shooting occurred at a Texas college, in one of those not large cities. It started with a fight. "Wish I had my gun" had to be the reaction. I do not care to understand. These incidents, coupled with a few other headlines, called to mind the story of brothers Benny and Brian Blades. The former played for my Lions, which is why I remember. An argument erupted between one of them and a former girlfriend. Brian ran inside to get his gun. Of course, that's the thing to do. The downside is that he shot and killed his cousin (Nobles). Over the holidays I watched an ESPN documentary on a star basketball player in Chicago who was killed over an alleged near-bump on a sidewalk (Coodie and Chike). The shooter didn't have to wish. This murder supposedly made an entire city question gun culture. That was nearly thirty years ago. Turns out, the only lesson is that the attempt to impose some kind of restriction on firearms failed.

<3> I do not understand, nor do I plan to understand. My niece and nephew now attend a school in a suburb outside Seattle, WA. Last year they were in a seemingly similar school in Toronto's Bedford Park [Ken, please hug them for me. Ed.]. The differences, however, astound me. Ten months prior to the shootings Connecticut, an eight-year-old in Bremerton, WA, brought a gun to school and shot a classmate—accidentally, it turns out—but this move was only one of several reported anecdotally in stories about the incident (KING5). That is to say, the reports of children in Utah and in New York doing likewise after Sandy Hook are not as noteworthy as reports suggest. This stuff happens many times every year. I think the differences are most profoundly summarized in the absurdity that I cannot send my niece and nephew Kinder Eggs—those delightfully rich chocolate eggs with the toy surprise inside—because they are banned in the U.S. due to the allegedly obvious choking hazard (CBC). Please don't tell the CAS, but my kids got a couple packs for Christmas, and the younger one is not yet two-and-a-half. On the other hand, when my brother has taken my nephew to scouts meetings the first two weeks' activities were slingshot and catapult building. The suggested activity for week three was building crossbows. Here, we had a mild controversy in the fall over the safety of acorns for children with nut allergies at Toronto area elementary schools. I have watched with my jaw scraping the hardwood in my home as the NRA and a variety of other conspiracy mongers have defended the need for assault rifles despite the obvious and omnipresent bullet hazard. Despite the failure of armed guards and/or citizens who were present at mass shootings like Columbine and others to do anything besides endanger more people, these influential lobbyists want more guns around children so that there are more people capable of tossing bullets in their presence. This is a good thing? Piers Morgan, famously run out of Britain following the fake torture picture scandal, but before he could be implicated in the phone-hacking scandal, seems, er seemed, eager to take on these types; that is, until something else came along (Robinson). While I applaud Mr. Morgan's early pluck, I wish he had harangued someone about #nosehillgentlemen instead of giving Ben Shapiro and Alex Jones a platform. Sure, it reminded me of Donahue bringing on the Klan in the 70s, but the other side has a choir, too, otherwise the "Guns don't kill people; the government kills people" refrain of the stereotypical conspiracy loving "redneck," Dale Gribble, on *King of the Hill*, wouldn't be funny. Satire only works if there is a truth involved.

<4> I do not understand, nor am I capable of understanding. Apparently, the infamous Second Amendment is necessary for defending individual homes. However, when pushed, the NRA types always claim that responsible owners pose no harm and, in fact, increase safety. I cannot find even the most remotely hypothetical situation when I would concur with "I wish I had my gun" as a responsible initial reaction to anything but actual combat. In this regard, when statistics and evidence get in the way and the risible ridiculousness of this defense becomes apparent, the Second Amendment also becomes a time machine and we are suddenly transported—without so much as a blink—to the revolution and the apparent need to defend against tyranny, ostensibly from the government. At the recent hearings in Washington, the gun lobby's serpentine acolyte, Mr. LaPierre, managed to dig up this myth as though it were true and unassailable. Perhaps it was . . . in 1776, when professional armies with, among other things, Predator drones and nuclear tipped missiles, didn't exist. Muskets, they ain't. Second, I'd

also like to suggest that any tyranny seems to be self-imposed, from the support for the Patriot Act, for which the Republicans, with their characteristic lack of irony and self-reflection, used seemingly socialistic arguments about individuals giving up a little freedom so we all benefit, all the way to the NRA-led calls for a thinly veiled return to eugenics disguised as a plan to monitor and promote mental health. At this point, I hate to remind my readers, but Mrs. Lanza was a) a responsible gun owner and b) was a responsible gun owner largely because she believed she needed to defend against a breakdown of society caused by the state. However, cynics and the observant will note that disproving the gun lobby position and revealing its lunacy only serves to affirm and to encourage the believers, in much the same way criticism inspires wrestling, MMA, and hockey fight enthusiasts.

<5> I simply will not understand. It occurs to me, perhaps because my own family had connections to the Windsor-Detroit cross-border rum running business (allegedly) in the 1920s, that the Eighteenth Amendment was somehow repealed for being unwise, unmanageable, out-of-date, counter to the common good, etc. To someone schooled in logic and reasoning, as well as the experiences of a considerable amount of labour negotiation, this seems like a precedent. However, that's not my point because it should be obvious that these measures *could and should* be applied to the Second Amendment. I will not, cannot, nor am I capable of understanding otherwise. Simply put, the Second Amendment as it is applied, as it is portrayed, and as it is defended, is an immoral act. However, until such time as someone starts to take apart the culture—and here, I mean the production and distribution as much as the consumption—behind the sentiments in the laughable #nosehillgentlemen letter, I fear nothing fundamentally will change. Indeed, the History Channel and The Discovery Channel unproblematically ran episodes of *Cajun Pawn Stars* and *Sons of Guns*—two shows that typify the glorification of gun culture for the sake of glorifying gun culture—on the evenings immediately following the massacre in Newtown, CT. And yet there were long do not play lists suggested to radio and TV stations after 11 Sept. 2001. I cannot understand how these impulses exist simultaneously. I simply cannot. It doesn't help to recall that the first order of business of every revolution is to put down every subsequent threat of revolution. The French Revolution was swift. The Terror lasted for years. The American Revolution is ongoing, or so it seems. So, as much as this is an academic journal with an admittedly academic reach, we are allegedly educators, too. I call on everyone who can and will authentically and meaningfully interrogate the irresponsible, intransigent irrationality of the ideological framework that incubates and instills the #nosehillgentlemen mentality to do just that as early, as frequently, and as forcefully as you can. I cannot understand how we cannot.

Note

[1] It is probably too late, but before I am accused of anything, I should point out that I grew up around guns. "Fishin', huntin', and rasslin'" were the only three things about which my brother and I had any common ground for conversation with our maternal grandfather, the only

grandfather we knew. To this day, I can shoot apples or pears out of the top of a tree by hitting the stem with a round from a pellet gun. This was a skill learned of necessity, for the lack of same brought great ridicule from our grandfather and uncles. With that skill, though, came nothing at all like the mentality I find buttressing the pro-gun lobby and yet utterly unquestioned by the gun control advocates—or anyone, for that matter.

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