

EXTREME VENTING (after Trump's first six months!)

During his first six months in office journalists variously described our POTUS as being “a wrecking ball,” “the world’s most gifted media troll,” “a gas bag in a red hat,” “a fake president,” “faux tough guy,” “vulgarian in chief,” “flim-flam man,” “Pinocchio President,” “Putin’s poodle,” “the prince of discord,” “the man with the itchy Twitter finger,” “tweeter in chief,” “predator in chief,” “bigot in chief,” “cyberbully,” “the little boy president,” “a morally bankrupt plutocrat,” “the man who would be king,” “the king of mean,” “a pathological liar,” “seems to lie for the pure joy of it,” “a rage-prone obsessive,” “criminally stupid,” “too small to see over his inflated ego,” “the master of low expectations,” “enveloped in a foul air of grievance,” “the accidental dictator,” “the madman in the White House,” “a reverse Robin Hood,” “crazy like a fox” or “just plain crazy.”

Frequently used adjectives have included appalling, authoritarian, autocratic, abusive, aggrieved, absurd, arrogant, baffling, belligerent, bellicose, bizarre, brazen, braggart, boorish, buffoon, cynical, corrupt, chaotic, childish, careless, clueless, clownish, cruel, crude, delusional, dishonest, deranged, despicable, draconian, dystopian, explosive, erratic, exhausting, embarrassing, fragile, greedy, heavy-handed, hostile, hubristic, hypocritical, ignorant, idiotic, illiterate, immature, impatient, impetuous, impulsive, inattentive, incoherent, incompetent, information averse, insecure, illegitimate, irrational, lazy, loony, lewd, lamentable, liar, living id, loose cannon, malignant, mercurial, mendacious, megalomaniacal, Machiavellian, narcissistic, needy, no impulse control, obfuscator, outrageous, opportunistic, paranoid, petulant, pugilistic, provocateur, power drunk, reckless, rageaholic, sad, sexist, shallow, sloppy, self-destructive, self-absorbed, thin-skinned, thuggish, truculent, unstable, undisciplined, unfit, unmoored, unpredictable, unrestrained, unfathomable, unintelligible, unteachable, vile, vicious, volatile, vulgar, weird - and the all-inclusive new label “Trumpian.”

Liberal angst rose so high that some journalists resorted to compound adjectives as if a single pejorative was insufficient. At various times *The New Yorker*’s David Remnick contributed “untruthful, vain, vindictive and alarmingly erratic”; “impulsive, egocentric, and mendacious,” his presidency’s most salient features being “amorality, greed, demagoguery, deception, vulgarity, race-baiting, misogyny,” “an unstable, incompetent man flailing in the wind...[who] spends his days wallowing in fury, self-pity, self-aggrandizement, distraction, defensiveness and delusion..” On another occasion: “Trump appears to strut through the world forever studying his own image... thinks out loud, and is incapable of reflection...unserious, unfocussed, and, at times, it seems, unhinged.” Taking a longer view, Remnick noted that Trump “descends from the lineage of the

Know-Nothings, the doomsayers and the fabulists, the nativists and the hucksters....[Trump] may operate a twenty-first century Twitter machine, but he is still a frontier era drummer peddling snake oil for profit from the back of a dusty wagon.” And in his 100th day summation Remnick observed that the President is “wary of expertise... has the attention span of a hummingbird...has set fire to the integrity of his office...his self-created brand that of an unprincipled, cocky, value-free con who will insult, stiff, or betray anyone to achieve his gaudiest purposes...The clownish veneer of Trumpism is a strategy, a way of clouding our capacity to think, to live in a world of truth.”

New York Times columnists were no less hyperbolic. Maureen Dowd described Trump’s “grandiosity, insularity and scamming...[being] an unlinear, illogical uninformed president... belligerent, dystopian, Darwinian.” At different times Frank Bruni offered “vainglorious, vindictive, impulsive... [a leader] so craven and desperately needy that [he] has an air of danger and pathos...[his talk] childishly intent on superlatives, puerilely obsessed with size, laden with boasts and lavish with discordant asides.” Paul Krugman observed that the world’s most powerful man was “lazy, ignorant, dishonest and vindictive....malevolent, incompetent.” Thomas Friedman cited Trump’s “core ignorance, instability and indecency” while Gail Collins described “a guy who wanders around in an ego-filled cloud, saying whatever the heck pops into his head. It’s a combination of id, ineptitude and bad intent.”

Some Republican journalists followed suit. Conservative columnist Ross Dothan suggested that the President “should go out and get himself a brain (trust)” and described Trump as being “crude, temperamentally authoritarian, undisciplined, self-sabotaging and incapable of normal self-control.” Opinion writer Peter Wehner declared that Donald Trump is “arguably the most disruptive and transgressive president in American history [who] thrives on creating turbulence in every conceivable sphere. The blast radius of the tumultuous acts and chaotic temperament is vast...His disorderly personality thrives on mayhem and upheaval, on vicious personal attacks and ceaseless conflict.”

Frequently there have been lengthy or run-on sentences. The usually sober David Brooks could hardly contain himself: “Our president flails and founders and is too incompetent to recognize his own incompetence. He mistakes his catastrophes for success and so accelerates his pace toward oblivion. Those who ignore history are condemned to retweet it.” Brooks added that the President is “a man whose most impressive wall is the one between himself and evidence, a man who doesn’t need to go off in search of enemies because he is already his own worst one.” At other times Brooks described Trump as “a hollow man...[an] infantalist who lacks all impulse control [his]

thoughts often just six fireflies beeping randomly in a jar....consumed by a hunger for affirmation but, demented in his own obsessions, he can't think more than one step ahead."

Among Trump's most persistent critics was Charles Blow who at various times has described the President as "crude, a liar, a bully and a cheat...insecure, paranoid and brittle, jostling between egomania and narcissism, intoxicated with power...a wounded animal, desperate and dangerous... the grossest of the gross, a profanity against propriety, ...a madman holding America hostage...too small to see over his inflated ego....quite literally overwhelming our human capacities with his mendacity." At other times Blow wrote that Trump has "lowered the office with his whiny, fragile, vindictive pettiness...erratic, self-destructive behavior, [whose] aversion to honesty and authoritarian desire for absolute control may lead to his downfall...his most vexatious qualities [being] perpetual wallowing in self-victimization and the shedding of his own tears for a spurious suffering that only exists in the muddle of his mind....[his] incessant lying is obscene, a collapse in morality, an ethical assault." As if all this wasn't enough: "Trump had hijacked the American Presidency...his very presence in the White House defiles it and the institution of the Presidency....failing every test of the office."

Amidst this vivid compendium of political rhetoric what can be said of Trump-speak? Appalled by his "savage mauling of language," Charles Blow lamented that "degradation of the language is one of the President's most pernicious and grievous sins, his words and grammar a jumble of incomplete thoughts stitched together with arrogance and ignorance....America is suffering under the tyranny of gibberish spouted by the lord of his faithful [base]...a man who has the intellectual depth of a coat of paint...more driven by the limelight than by literature...As a consequence truth becomes relative if not altogether removed....Listening to Trump speak is a dizzying experience for anyone interested in candor, clarity or concision. It is as if he puts language through a meat grinder and what emerges is nearly unrecognizable in either comprehension or certitude."

The English language is being challenged as never before to find words to explain the phenomenon of Donald J. Trump. Keeping up with this ever expanding thesaurus is exhausting and one longs for the sparser rhetoric of gentler times - like during the reigns of Tricky Dick, Bubba and Dubya. But POTUS seems undeterred by the blather of the "nattering nabobs of negativism of the Fourth Estate" - reportedly, he doesn't read.

(VP Spiro Agnew famously used this phrase in a speech in 1970 while criticizing the mainstream media. In fact, it was written by his speechwriter William Safire, later of the "failing" *New York Times*.)

Michael Nevins, June, 2017 (Six months later we erupted in song.)

