

Springtime for Snowflakes: An NYU Professor Takes On Academia's "Social Justice Warriors"

Julian Vigo writes in [*Springtime for Snowflakes*](#), it is the political situation from which the book was born.

After revealing in 2016 that he was behind the Twitter account [@antipcnypurf](#), which railed against political correctness, Rectenwald was put on paid leave from New York University (NYU). To say that Rectenwald has endured a massive campaign of harassment since this moment would be an understatement. Aside from being labelled a "[Declaration of Principles on Academic Freedom and Academic Tenure](#)" (1915), which Rectenwald references, and the US Constitution.

Springtime for Snowflakes is not only a testament of what Rectenwald has gone through professionally and personally. It is also a portrait of the contemporary scene of academic freedom, which is anything but free, and even less academic.

Twitter Satire and Academic Scapegoating

Beginning with a chapter devoted to the Twitter account that he set up as satire, complete with a Friedrich Nietzsche avatar, Rectenwald explains how anonymity freed him from the circumspective culture of academia. He details his experiences as a professor at NYU during the previous nine years, noting the rise of "no-platforming," whereby freedom of inquiry was anathema to the individual's carefully curated identity and where Foucauldian surveillance shifted from the institutional to the individual level. To anyone who has worked in the academy in the United States over the past twenty years, these signs of surveillance and scapegoating are familiar, if not

entirely commonplace and accepted.

Rectenwald shares many of his [tweets](#), most of which [mock](#) the [basket of deplorables](#)” would become Rectenwald’s battle cry against the politically correct forces he faced on social media and in his own department.

Rectenwald describes the eerie scene of being called into his dean’s office after his Twitter identity was made public. There, he is told that the meeting has “nothing to do with” his Twitter account. Yet the encounter quickly turns into a meeting over his “mental health” *because of his Twitter account*. Rectenwald recounts how the dean reported to him that several people had been concerned that his Twitter account was a “cry for help.” The university swiftly placed Rectenwald on paid leave.

Rectenwald elaborates the events that befell him in the months since then, noting how criticism of “political correctness was supposed to be the exclusive province of the rightwing,” adding, “For most observers, it was almost inconceivable that an anti-P.C. critic could come from another political quarter.” Rectenwald shows up the political myopia of the social justice warriors (SJW) by demonstrating their inability to honestly engage in academic debate as they rely on hyperbole and misrepresentation in calling Rectenwald a “right-wing nut-job.”

Autobiography and Literary Theory

Springtime for Snowflakes presents a critical reading of the literary theory that gave rise to political correctness, framed by an autobiographical narrative. In the earlier chapters, Rectenwald writes of his family and eight siblings. He grew up in the 1970s with a father who was a working-class home remodeler and a mother who worried about being able to feed her family. He frames his upbringing, class, and intellectual ambitions within his early Catholic education,

his studies at [University of Pittsburgh](#), and his apprenticeship with Allen Ginsberg in [Carnegie Mellon University](#). There, he was introduced to the [Queer Theory](#), [New Economic Criticism](#), and various [feminisms](#). He notes the rapid increase in terms that populate his studies, all in an attempt to oppose the hegemonic order, such as “[Eurocentrism](#),” “[heteronormativity](#),” “[essentialism](#),” and “[positivism](#),” to name only a few.

Critiquing the current fascination with the gendered self, Rectenwald deftly points to the solipsism involved in an academic field where gender-critical feminists did not “mean to suggest that gender could be altered arbitrarily on the basis of individual will,” but rather that gender-critical feminism views genders as unrepentant social categories where “gender was no less real for being socially constructed.” He compares the transgender social trend current in western culture to the [secret police](#) anyone who questioned his ideas. Lysenkoism is a fitting example of how social and political idealism can be imposed on society, despite having absolutely no scientific merit—just like transgender ideology.

Rectenwald undertakes class analysis by arguing how, generally speaking, self-professed socialists are not even working class but instead are “disaffected intellectuals drawn from the petty bourgeoisie” whose political loyalties are “rooted in envy and resentment for those who have more power and resources, rather than in the purity of idealism or good will toward the working masses.” Like the SJWs studying at elite educational institutions, these theoretical Marxists will likely never understand [poverty](#), [buying a home](#). Rectenwald shows how the political Marxist is no longer interested in critiquing [attacking individuals](#) through “[New Left](#) catchphrase “the personal is the political,” Rectenwald observes that “the individual person is reduced to a mere emblem of political meaning, while politics is reduced to the political (moral) worthiness, or lack thereof, of individual persons. Politics

becomes individual morality based on social justice standards.” Reviewing popular culture paradigms, Rectenwald shows how Derrida’s “there is no outside of text” is the flawed template for the social justice warrior with absolutely no connection to reality.

There are parts of this book that will irk Marxists, Leftists, Conservatives, the #MeToo crowd, and anyone who despises evolutionary biological science. And that is why I find this work refreshing: it offers pure analysis of the hokum that has created the incoherent machinery of selfhood today. Rectenwald’s *Springtime for Snowflakes* offers up passionate intellectual debate in a climate where the discursive righteousness, sexuality, sex, skin color, and feelings of the speaker too often matter more than the thoughts espoused.

Julian Vigo is a scholar, film-maker, and human rights consultant. Her latest book is [?julian.vigo@gmail.com](mailto:julian.vigo@gmail.com)