

BOOKS

Sherwin Wine offers advice for 'Staying Sane'



ESTHER LITTMANN

ple, became suspect during the

Trendiness isn't limited to designer clothes and haute cuisine. Philosophies also come and go, driven by the prevailing attitudes of the times. Beliefs once embraced in the Middle Ages, for example, became suspect during the

18th century, when reason reigned supreme. Later, Romanticism's return to religious fervor gave way to Realism and the revival of a rational approach to life.

Today, writes Sherwin Wine in his fourth book "Staying Sane in a Crazy World" (Center for New Thinking, 1995, \$22), reason lies discredited once again.

Just when the world is fascinated by the creations of science and technology, the search for

religion and spirituality is growing.

But for the founder of Humanistic Judaism and rabbi of the Birmingham Temple in Farmington Hills, reason is not just a passing fancy. It is fundamental to our survival and helps us cope in a world that is frequently at odds with human expectations and desires.

Unfortunately, life does not always correspond with the human agenda, writes Wine. The laws of nature fail to distinguish between the virtuous and the wicked among us. Too often, innocent people suffer and the villains of society go unpunished.

Human beings, who hunger for meaning, are trapped in a meaningless universe that some have called absurd, amoral, or just plain "crazy."

But how do we live in a crazy world without becoming crazy ourselves? Rejecting what Wine calls the "false security" of traditional religious solutions, as well

as the passivity of scientific determinism, Wine insists that we have the tools to forge a meaningful life for ourselves and for others. These tools are reason and the freedom of choice that its use implies.

Wine then proceeds to defend a rational way of life against contemporary attacks that claim reason, if it exists at all, is "cold," too analytical, and out of touch with our inner reality, the unconscious. True, counters Wine, reason is not emotional itself.

But it is allied with emotion. It needs emotion as the motivation to be reasonable, as the driving force to find the truth.

"Staying Sane in a Crazy World" begins with a philosophic framework, an overview of the major religious movements, followed by a discussion of modern ideologies such as secular utopianism and New Age Thinking. Whether religious or secular, all of them share one thing in common, writes Wine. They provide

certainly where there is none and answers that cannot be verified. For the author, a realistic secularism devoid of illusions is the most sensible response to life.

In the second half of the book, Wine applies his philosophic principles to the subject of living with dignity and courage. In his "Ten Steps to Sanity" the author helps us answer fundamental questions of life. For example, what is the nature of constructive love, and how do we practice it? Is there a difference between rational and irrational guilt? Can we transform our hostility into "useful anger"? How do we tame fear? All the while, the author provides a variety of anecdotes to illustrate his meaning, drawing from a wealth of personal encounters with clients and colleagues throughout his remarkable career.

With a style that is both lucid and epigrammatic, Wine startles us out of conventional habits of

thought, forcing us to reevaluate our traditional assumptions. At the same time, he gives advice that is both universal and timeless. In an era when we can fly half way around the world in less than a day, perform heart and kidney transplants, and communicate through cyberspace, many intellectuals claim that reason is ineffectual as a tool of cognition. A book that affirms the power of reason — as well as the existence of objective reality — makes the world a little less crazy and our behavior a lot more sane.

Esther Littmann, a resident of Bloomfield Township, is a former lecturer of English and German at Lawrence Technological University in Southfield. Currently she tutors with Una Duorkin and Associates. You can leave her a message from a touch-tone phone at (313) 953-2047, mailbox 1893. Her fax number is (810) 644-1314.

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BOOKSTORE HAPPENINGS

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Ann Ripley signs her mystery novel "Death of a Garden Pest," 7 p.m. Thursday, June 27, 31150 Southfield Road, Birmingham. (810) 644-1515

BORDERS BOOKS AND MUSIC (FARMINGTON HILLS)
Storyteller Connie Slavish reads "Men, Mirth and Marauders," 8 p.m. Thursday, June 27; Pop/folk singer Phyllis Ederle, 8-10 p.m. Friday, June 28; Pop singer Mary Stuart, 2-4 p.m. Sunday, June 30.

Bob Fuehr, of Innkeeping Consultants and The Inn Broker, Inc., discusses bed and breakfasts, 7:30 p.m. Saturday, June 29, 30905 Orchard Lake Road, Farmington Hills, (810) 737-0110

BORDERS BOOKS AND MUSIC (NOVI)
Folk singer David Folks performs 7 p.m. Friday, June 28; Inn

Keepers from the American Bed and Breakfast Association talks about starting a B&B, 1 p.m. Saturday, June 29, "Shel Silverstein Day" celebration includes a reading of his new book "Falling Up," 11 a.m. Saturday, June 29, 43075 Crescent Boulevard, Novi. Free. (810) 347-0780

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'Scare Tactics' lacks plausibility

VICTORIA DIAZ
"Scare Tactics," by Elizabeth Manz (St. Martin's Paperbacks, \$5.99, 329 pages).
This gory, body-strewn debut novel starts out at a Detroit-area writers' conference, and ends up in never-never land.
I think.
Perhaps its main reason for being is to illustrate that hell hath no fury like a writer who goes unpublished.
But I'm not really sure about that, either.
Obviously, "Scare Tactics" left me pretty confused.
It starts out well enough. At the aforementioned writers' conference on the campus of a local university, best-selling horror novelist Nicholas Cross is just winding up his after-dinner, keynote speech. He's feeling maybe better than he's felt in five years — since the day his wife, Linda, was brutally, mysteriously murdered. He's written his first novel since that traumatic event, and already, the book is on the New York Times

Best Seller List. His teenage son, Jeff, a traumatized ear-witness to the murder, appears to be getting on with his life. And here at the conference a large number of writers have gathered in to listen to him, "looking for that one piece of information that would change them from unpublished hopefuls to published novelists."
Surely, Elizabeth Manz has attended a conference or two. Her opening scenes paint a clear and involving picture, for instance, of the faint desperation that often colors the behavior of many literary aspirants gathered together under one roof, their hands "clutching" or "grabbing eagerly at the empty air."
"It takes a lot to scare me," Nicholas Cross replies to a question from a member of the audience.
Uh-huh. Right away, we suspect that old Nick is going to regret this rather noncommittal answer. Right away, we guess that, pretty soon, "a lot" is going to come along and scare the living daylight out of this Stephen King-like character.
But then, just about the time it's starting to get good, this tale of terror begins to disappoint.

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