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## **P.J. O'Rourke, satirist and conservative commentator, dies at 74**

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P.J. O'Rourke, a satirist, journalist and conservative political commentator who blended caustic wit with moral outrage in best-selling books, gonzo magazine articles and frequent appearances on television and radio shows, died Feb. 15 at his home in Sharon, N.H. He was 74.

The cause was complications from lung cancer, said Deb Seager, publicity director for his publisher, Grove Atlantic.

Armed with pithy one-liners and a slashing style, Mr. O'Rourke worked in the tradition of H.L. Mencken, targeting hypocrisy, pomposity and contradiction wherever he found it. Although he launched his journalism career as a long-haired member of the 1960s counterculture, he soon turned toward libertarian conservatism, identifying himself as a "Republican Party Reptile" in a 1995 essay collection of the same name.

Mr. O'Rourke declared that he and his cohort were opposed to "government spending, Kennedy kids, seat-belt laws, busing our children anywhere other than Yale, trailer courts near our vacation homes, all tiny Third World countries that don't have banking secrecy laws, aerobics, the UN, taxation without tax loopholes, and jewelry on men." By contrast, they favored "guns, drugs, fast cars, free love (if our wives don't find out), a sound dollar, and a strong military with spiffy uniforms.

"There are thousands of people in America who feel this way, especially after three or four drinks," he continued. "If all of us would unite and work together, we could give this country ... well, a real bad hangover."

Mr. O'Rourke wrote books about cars, travel, economics and etiquette, among other subjects. (James Kegley/Grove Atlantic)

Mr. O'Rourke wrote more than 20 books, including the bestsellers "Parliament of Whores" (1991), an indictment of the "huge, stupid, greedy" U.S. government, and "Give War a Chance" (1992), which included essays detailing his disgust toward liberals, whom he characterized as "mealy-mouthed, bullying, irresponsible and victimized."

Other pieces in that book gave him the chance to showcase his freewheeling sense of humor. "I was not prepared to do anything but upchuck and die," he wrote of a trip to Paraguay, "after the eight-hour night flight from Miami on an Air Paraguay DC-8 older than most second wives that flew through the center of five Dr. Frankenstein-your-lab-is-on-the-phone lightning storms and aboard which I was served a dinner of roast softball in oleo."

"Rare is the writer who can make his readers laugh out loud in the privacy of their living rooms, much less in the middle of a crowded railroad car," wrote the arts critic Terry Teachout, reviewing the book for the New York Times. "P.J. O'Rourke is one of those fortunate souls."

In recent years, Mr. O'Rourke edited American Consequences, a digital magazine about finance and politics, and contributed to publications including The Washington Post, the Atlantic, the Daily Beast and the Weekly Standard. He was also a research fellow at the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank, and a panelist on the NPR quiz show "Wait Wait ... Don't Tell Me!," on which he once quipped that his "whole purpose in life" was "to offend everyone who listens to NPR, no matter what position they take on anything."

Mr. O'Rourke was first known for his work at National Lampoon magazine, where in the 1970s he rose to become editor in chief and wrote raucous, politically incorrect articles such as "How to Drive Fast on Drugs While Getting Your Wing-Wang Squeezed and Not Spill Your Drink." He later became an "investigative humorist" for Rolling Stone, filing dispatches about his misadventures in the Philippines, the Soviet Union, South Africa, Nicaragua and Lebanon. He also appeared as a conservative pundit on the "Point/Counterpoint" segment of "60 Minutes."

Far from exempting the right wing from criticism, Mr. O'Rourke often went after conservative politicians and pundits, including Ann Coulter. He was frequently critical of social conservatives, writing that "country club-type Republicans can be stuffy about some things — dope smuggling, for example, and mixing Quaaludes in your scotch, and putting your stereo speakers on the roof of your house and turning the volume all the way up and playing Parliament of Funk at 3:00 A.M."

During the 2016 presidential election, he came out against Donald Trump and endorsed Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton, even as he called her "the second-worst thing that can happen to his country."

"I mean, she's wrong about absolutely everything, but she's wrong within normal parameters," he said on an episode of "Wait Wait." Referring to Trump, he added, "This man just can't be president."

Patrick Jake O'Rourke was born in Toledo on Nov. 14, 1947. His father was a Buick salesman who died when Mr. O'Rourke was 9, and his mother was a school administrator. "I was a fairly unhappy kid with a very active fantasy life," he told Time magazine.

After leaving home as a teenager to stay with an aunt in Chicago, Mr. O'Rourke studied English at Miami University in Ohio, kicking off what he called his "confused early hippie phase, which was like a cafeteria tray of sloppy, semi-Marxist thoughts, absorbed secondhand."

He graduated in 1969 and moved to Baltimore, receiving a master's degree in English from Johns Hopkins University the next year. He also started writing for an underground newspaper called Harry, and said he began to cast aside his left-wing political views after a Maoist group took over the newsroom and forced staffers to undergo 24 hours of "consciousness raising."

Some colleagues questioned whether Mr. O'Rourke's political transformation was authentic, accusing him of being an opportunist who had shifted rightward merely to keep up with the times.

"I'm a journalist, and I like to get stuff published. I like to make money. And I like to get a lot of readers if I possibly can," he told "60 Minutes" in 1994, conceding that he was at the very least

ambitious. “And so have I changed with the times? Well, God, what a strange person I would be if I hadn’t, you know?”

Soon after joining National Lampoon in 1973, he partnered with Douglas Kenney to edit a spinoff project, “National Lampoon 1964 High School Yearbook Parody,” which sold some 2 million copies. The book chronicled a year at fictional Estes Kefauver Memorial High in Dacron, Ohio, home to figures including “the Mad Crapper,” a mysterious public defecator, and student groups such as Future Homemakers and the Slide Rule Club.

Mr. O’Rourke became the magazine’s top editor in 1978 and left a few years later to freelance for publications including Rolling Stone, where he was the foreign affairs desk chief for more than a decade. He also co-wrote the movie “Easy Money” (1983), a Rodney Dangerfield comedy.

His first book as a solo author, the irreverent etiquette guide “Modern Manners” (1983), offered advice on topics including conversation, dating and sex (“Never do anything to your partner with your teeth that you wouldn’t do to an expensive waterproof wristwatch”).

His marriage to Amy Lumet, a daughter of filmmaker Sidney Lumet, ended in divorce. Survivors include his wife, Tina Mallon, whom he married in 1995, and their three children, Elizabeth, Olivia and Cliff O’Rourke.

While Mr. O’Rourke cultivated a persona as a hot-tempered libertine, “he was a deeply kind and generous man who pretended to be a curmudgeon for public consumption,” “Wait Wait” host Peter Sagal wrote on Twitter.

Indeed, Mr. O’Rourke said that his literary persona was “louder and dumber” than he was in real life — in part for literary effect, as well as for more practical reasons.

“I use myself as a clown figure in the work,” he told “60 Minutes.” “It’s nice to have somebody in the story that you know is not going to sue you and that you can say absolutely anything about. And you can make him do any foolish thing and have any ridiculous opinion and they will never, ever sue you.”