

A STUDY & COMPARISON OF THE PHILOSOPHIES OF THOSE TWO ANTICHRIST SUPERSTARS, BILL HICKS AND MARILYN MANSON

By the Preacher

If you're reading this there's a pretty damn good chance that you'd be familiar with Marilyn Manson, but there is a very much lesser chance that you'd be familiar with a man by the name of Bill Hicks. The irony of this will become apparent later on; because while America still loves its rock stars, it absolutely loathes its social commentators. The truth is that while Manson has utilised the medium of music to spread his philosophy of individualism and hatred of hypocrisy and ignorance, so has Bill done with the medium of comedy.

The current situation stands with Manson's popularity having bloomed whilst Bill Hicks is not nearly so well known. This is the ultimate reason for this essay; if you're intelligent, open-minded and cynical enough to enjoy Marilyn Manson, you'll almost certainly fall in love with the work of Bill Hicks. Here are the reasons why:

If you've ever been fortunate enough to witness Marilyn Manson live and have taken the time to understand the meaning of the songs and their relevance to the albums concept, you'll no doubt have realised that all the talk of Marilyn Manson being "fake" is merely the product of ignorance and superficiality. Anyone who puts that much thought and energy into their art cannot be "phoney". The same is true of Bill. How many comedians have there been that have gone in front of a room of complete strangers and tried to assure them that God exists in all of our hearts, and that life is just a ride that we can change if we open our eyes to love and not fear? Not many at all. The funny thing is that Bill always manages to be consistently hysterical, interesting and entertaining while he puts forth his philosophy.

To get a real idea of how Bill performed though, you have to imagine a 30-year-old Texan guy with short brown hair dressed in black that didn't care how many people would laugh at his jokes so long as he said what he wanted to say. He wasn't called a preacher for nothing, ya know. His friend Allan Harvey said, "Bill had a lack of concern. He wasn't concerned with what the audience thought, who would "Boo" him. He wasn't concerned with how it would affect his business, he just said what he wanted to say." Now with your image of Bill in your head, imagine him going into a room full of people who have paid to see some "comedy" and instead witness this: "Why don't you and I check politics on your fuckin' porch while your wife wiggles a fuckin' dong an' fucks her own pussy with it, you fuckin' redneck hillbilly piece of shit you. Fuck America if that's America then fuck you too.... (Some people start "Booing", Bill laughs) Moo! Moo! Couple a' cows are getting arrogant out there... Go back to the herd moron okay?... I assume that you're enjoying this or if not at least emotionally involved which is important, even if it's anger. Really, its okay, that's what this is all about, it's supposed to be a fuckin' catharsis man, ya know, it's supposed to be a release from the daily fuckin' grind.... Wish it worked for me." Indeed, like Manson, it was only indifference in an audience that would annoy Bill. I feel strongly that there is a definite link between the style of delivery that Manson and Hicks employ. Manson said in the very first UK interview courtesy of our beloved rock bible "Kerrang!" that "If people come to our shows with a bad attitude, all they will see is negativity. If people come to us with curiosity and an open mind, they will find a lot of different things." This philosophy matches exactly with Hicks'. For example, in nearly all Hicks shows on tape, Bill will discuss various issues with conviction and leave his audience with many new ideas and ways of looking at things ("All my point is, is that there's a million

different ways to look at the world. So why pick the one shown by TV 'cause it's usually wrong."). But when Bill got a less open-minded crowd, the show would run a little differently ("[a drunk bitch in the crowd yells out "You suck!" very early on during a set in Chicago, and the whole crowd goes "Ooooooooooh!"] Thank you that's my grandmother and uhhhh... "You suck", you fuckin' cunt, get the fuck out of here right now. Get out. Fuck you. Fuck you, you idiot. You're everything that America should be flushed down the toilet [sic], you fuckin' turd. FUCK YOU. GET OUT. GET OUT YOU FUCKIN' DRUNK BITCH. TAKE HER OUT. TAKE HER FUCKIN' OUT. TAKE HER TO SOMEWHERE THAT'S GOOD. GO SEE FUCKIN' MADONNA YOU FUCKIN' IDIOT PIECE OF SHIT...") If you've ever witnessed Manson dealing with hecklers, you will understand the comparison here.

However, the philosophies of Manson and Hicks are not just vaguely similar; they actually overlap at times. Talking about Christian pro-lifers Bill said, "I've always found religion fascinating, ideas such as how people act on their beliefs. Pro-lifers murdering doctors, HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA...Pro-lifers murdering people, HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA...Ya know it's irony on a base level, but I like it...We're pro-life and we're gonna kill your ass." Manson said in Rolling Stone "I also wrote a song called "Get Your Gunn"...as a reaction to the murder of Dr. David Gunn, who was killed in Florida by pro-life activists while I was living there. That was the ultimate hypocrisy I witnessed growing up; that these people killed someone in the name of being 'pro-life.' "

The pair shared both the same respect for drug use and the view that rockers against drugs suck. Manson said, "...if you look at other artists it's when they stop taking drugs that they become...shit." While Bill said "These musicians today who don't do drugs and in fact speak out against them...BOY THEY SUCK! HA HA HA HA HA HA...Balless [sic], soulless, spiritless little corporate fuckin' puppets, suckers of Satan's cock each and every one of 'em."

Both Manson and Hicks loved to highlight the ridiculousness of organised religion, specifically Christianity. Bill said "A lot of Christians wear crosses around their necks...you think when Jesus comes back he's gonna want to see a fuckin' cross...that maybe why he hasn't shown up yet." Manson said, "...Christianity has given us an image of death and sexuality that we have based our culture around. A half-naked dead man hangs in most homes and around our necks, and we have just taken that for granted all our lives. Is it a symbol of hope or hopelessness?"

Every Manson fan knows that the band is in love with the showmanship and potency of theatrics, but Bill also shared this taste. His friend and fellow comedian Dwight Slade said, "He was fascinated by Alice Cooper, rock music, the Hendrix story, Kiss... He was fascinated by those theatrics and that power." Indeed, at the beginning of one of Bill's last taped shows called "Revelations", Bill first appears cast in silhouette in front of a wall of fire to the sound of one of his own rockin' tunes, just like a true rock star.

Both Bill and Marilyn have also noticed the blandness and soullessness of modern popular music. Marilyn actually attempted to counter this with the last album release "Mechanical Animals". Talking about the album he said "[Its the] mark of a new age I'm trying to make sure happens to bring some life back into rock and roll... I think it's been the music industry as well as conservative America that has followed the grunge era and made rock and roll less and less relevant." Whilst Bill asked, "I remember when music had a conscience and music had soul and

music had balls. Does anyone remember that at all?"

Both have drawn attention to the controlling nature of television. Manson said, "In a country like America, that is supposed to be free, you're told what to eat, what to like, how to behave by the media and TV specifically." Bill said, "I believe there's this agenda in the mainstream media, and I think it's fairly easy to back this up, to keep people stupid, docile and apathetic... If television considers itself as a moral arbiter of our society, I think that goes a long way towards explaining the trouble and chaos in existence."

Both Manson and Hicks have utilised drugs in order to bring about an evolution to the next level of humanity. "Evolution didn't stop with us growing thumbs, you do know that don't you? It's time to evolve ideas..." said Bill, echoing Manson's "Man is still at the learning stage, and mankind is so arrogant to think that he's the highest form of evolution on earth... There is something to be said about drugs being able to open your mind up to the possibilities of the next level." And both have come to a similar conclusion: Bill - "Right now we're at the point where imagination and reality are right there together. What we imagine we can create. And that goes for heaven and that goes for hell." Manson - "...It's a matter of will power and self-belief. It's not belief in God, or any supernatural power other than your own... If you believe something enough, then it's real."

Interestingly, the pair have also dedicated a large amount of their time to the subject of the Kennedy assassination. Manson in the lyrics to "Posthuman" and in the "Coma White" video shows himself as the dead Kennedy that the public has made into another model of crucified grace à la Princess Diana. Bill on the other hand loved talking about Kennedy because he was "fascinated that our government can lie to us so blatantly, so obviously, for so long and we do absolutely nothing about it. I think that's interesting in what is ostensibly a democracy.... Sarcasm - come on in". Manson has also recently revealed that one of the many influences for the new album "In the Shadow of the Valley of Death" is JFK.

But their individual opinions and views aside, I think that Manson and Hicks both set out to achieve very similar goals by very similar means. As far as Bill's career goes, his friend Brett Butler said "For all the talk about Bill being like Hendrix or Dylan or Jim Morrison or Lenny Bruce, it was Jesus that Bill wanted to be. He wanted to save us all. But Bill got freeze-framed in the scene where Jesus went to the temple and said 'This is my father's house and you've turned it into a den of thieves.' Because that's what Bill always wanted to do. He wanted to be Christ at his angriest." Manson drew parallels between himself and Jesus on "Mechanical Animals" and said, "I'd assumed the role of destroyer on the last record ('Antichrist...') This role is more of a saviour"

Manson continued: "I think, strangely enough, he's [Jesus] more like me than Christians would like to believe... [Jesus] like myself [was] someone who came from beyond everyone's understanding, and had ideas that people couldn't grasp, and some people wanted to worship him, and some people wanted to destroy him."

Of course, if Manson and Hicks were identical twins there would be no point in checking Bill out. This is however, not the case.

The difference in their styles has a lot to do with the medium they operate in. Both have used shock tactics in their work, but in a largely different way. Manson has cleverly used the fact that to shock America is easy when you're a rock star. By dressing up in his costumes, wearing make-up and signing songs that cannot be understood by the average concerned Christian parent/politician, he has become a contradiction of sensationalism and nihilism. By daring to use theatrics and tailor his band's image, and actually have something intelligent to say he becomes something completely new, and it is this what has caused his chaos in America. This by the way, is why Marilyn Manson cannot merely be an updated version of Alice Cooper, because traditionally "shock-rockers" never bothered to create lyrics, a message or a philosophy with any degree of intellectualism. Thus, Manson has used America's easily offended nature to reinforce what he actually said in the first place. For example, the fact that Christians protest at Manson's shows with phoney affidavits which describe much more disturbing things than Manson has ever done suggests that these Christians are the ones who were dreaming up lies involving rape, paedophilia, and mass violence, not Manson. Bill on the other hand, used shock tactics mainly to make a point more powerful, but also to grab an audience's attention. His forte was describing depraved and gruesome sex acts in explicit detail, but more than that, his opinions on touchy subjects such as drugs, abortion, politics and religion especially, meant that people were often offended by his comedy to the point of walking out. He was, in fact, taken off the air when he appeared for the twelfth time on the Letterman show because his jokes, which were pre-approved for the show, touched on too many "hot spots". One of the jokes he did for that show was about pro-lifers and to really emphasise that freedom of expression is for the highest bidder, during the commercial break when the show was aired, a pro-life ad was shown. Conversely to Bill, I don't believe that Manson's actual beliefs are what stirs up so much controversy, I believe it is a combination of the image, the harsh nature of the music, and the gossip, rumours and lies that follow him like his groupies, that causes this; It is more the hype that surrounds Manson that has shocked the moral majority. Funnily enough, the people who end up so offended by Manson are actually the ones who create, exaggerate and spread the hype in the first place. In interviews Manson claimed not to be against religion, "but more against the guilt that Christianity imposes." Whereas Bill remarked in an extraordinarily flippant fashion: "Anything negative about Christianity is positive."

Both Hicks and Manson have assumed the role of social commentator/preacher, but in different ways. I believe that Manson's work was closest in its views to Hick's work with "Portrait of an American Family". Since then, with "Antichrist Superstar", I think Manson has used his own personal experience more as a way of looking at America and the world in general. However this has changed with "Mechanical Animals" and especially with Manson's film. The film being primarily a study of how human nature gravitates towards violence and why we glorify it while we pretend to condemn it (the title being "Holy Wood", a close reminder I think, of the cold and vicious essence of "Hollywood.") The pair may also be similar in the way they come up with their material, as Bill said in one of his very last taped interviews, talking about where his ideas come from: "Anything that defies my sense of reason. I don't look outside of myself for answers. I kind of feel like everyone has a voice of reason inside 'em. I believe that it's been quelled to a large extent by the multimedia society that we live in." Manson's "voice of reason" is a much more complicated affair; His whole life before he became Marilyn Manson was a struggle with his voice of reason and we can now see the results, in "Antichrist Superstar" especially.

Tragically, Bill Hicks died of pancreatic cancer in 1994 aged 32. I have not been able to find out if Manson is a fan or even aware of Hicks, and Bill died before Marilyn Manson blew up in '96, although the bands Tool, Rage against the Machine and Radiohead have all dedicated albums to Bill. But amazingly, Manson and Hicks even saw each other's professions in the same light. Marilyn - "Comedy is art as well", Bill - "I think there's no difference between good music and good comedy. It's entertainment... And entertainment is suspension of time and space, so that you realise your true nature, which is spaceless and timeless."

Once again, I strongly recommend that you check Bill out, the more Hicks fans are in this world, the better it is. You can download more than a hundred sound clips for free at www.darktimes.com if you're poor, or you can buy Hicks videos or CDs at the sacred cow productions site, both of which you can access through the fantastic www.billhicks.com. If you live in America, Hicks videos are near impossible to find so I'm told, but all four of Bill's CDs are available in all decent record stores, these are "Relentless", "Dangerous", "Arizona Bay" and "Rant in E-Minor". If you live in England like me, you are blessed with the fact that you can also buy both of Bill's videos: "Totally Bill Hicks" (which includes what many say is Bill's finest performance "Revelations") and "Relentless" in your ordinary entertainment store. If you live anywhere else I have no idea how you can buy Hicks stuff other than from the aforementioned internet sites. Every Bill Hicks video and CD is very much worth getting hold of, but my personal recommendation to you is to start with either the hate-filled "Rant in E-Minor" or the darker than dark "Revelations". A special mention must also go to the ultimate in confrontational comedy: the "Hicks Loses It" show from Chicago which you can download from www.darktimes.com.

To finish, one more of Bill's comedic chestnuts: "I believe drugs have done good things for us, I really do, and if you don't believe drugs have done good things for us, do me a favour... Take all of your albums, all your tapes, and all your CDs... And burn 'em.... 'Cause you know what? The musicians that created that music that has enhanced your lives throughout the years.... RRRRRRRRRRRRRRRReal fuckin' high on drugs." None more so than Marilyn Manson.

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-the Preacher.

Songs of Golgotha