

The Nutty Professor

by Smiley McGrouchpants Jr.

"We really shouldn't laugh." (Noam Chomsky, in a 2011 *Tin House* interview)

- Hello, Professor.
- Hello, how are you doing today?
- Fine, fine. I appreciate your sitting down today to answer a few questions. Lots of people are curious about you.
- I know, I know. I am a bona-fide genius and it is gratifying to elucidate the plebian masses.
- "Elucidate"?
- Yes, "elucidate." "Elucidate" the plebian masses.
- But, "elucidate," means, like, "underscore," doesn't it? Or "draw attention to," or something?
- No, that's wrong.
- Don't you mean, like, "educate," or maybe, "enlighten" . . .
- No, no, that's totally wrong. It's clear just from your saying that that you're not a bona-fide genius professor like me. I am a linguist, after all. I'll still deign to talk to you — since you're paying me — but I won't take you seriously, for the rest of this interview, and for the rest of your life.
- Gee, thanks . . .
- Well, you have to admit, I'm pretty smart.
- I guess . . . what do you mean by, "I'm a linguist"?
- Didn't you know? I'm a professor of linguistics. How did you even get in here without knowing that? I've published over a dozen books, and countless articles in very respectable and highly-thought-of journals.
- Not that *you* could read them and understand them . . .
- Gee, thanks again . . . no, what I meant by asking, "What do you mean, 'I'm a linguist'?" is: do you speak several languages?

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- What are you talking about?
- I mean, that's what a "linguist" is, right? Someone who studies languages? Like, you learn lots of different languages, or several anyway, several you can speak fluently . . .
- I really don't see where this is going.
- . . . and you compare and contrast them to see the differences and similarities? That's what you necessarily have to do, or so I thought . . .
- No, no, it's becoming abundantly clear to me that you are not a bona-fide genius. In fact you are in a category that is pretty far from "bona-fide genius."
- What category is that?
- It's a category we Bona-Fide Geniuses call, "Idiot."
- Well, gee, th- . . . you know, I'm starting to wonder how many times I'm going to have to say, "Well, gee, thanks . . ." in the course of this interview.
- You *could* not talk.
- Well, g- . . . (*sighs*) I don't know what to say at this point.
- Well, that's because you're not a linguist!
- Well, neither are *you!*
- I'm interpreting your words 100% correctly and can absolutely assure you that they mean: nothing.
- . . .
- Do you get out much, Professor?
- How so? You mean to lectures?
- No, I mean, you know, say, a walk in the park, or, take in a movie, or, maybe take a chick out to dinner, show her a good time, get a few drinks in the both of you, you know, maybe get laid?
- "Get" . . . what? I'm sorry.
- "Laid." You know, fucking?
- Oh, I don't do that.
- You don't?
- No.
- What do you mean by that, precisely? It sounds like you've taken a position on it or something.

- Well . . .
- . . . or, I guess, taken a position on *not* taking positions.
- It's not for me.
- It's not . . . what's not? The physical expression of love . . .
- No . . .
- . . . or love itself, or both? Have you sworn both off?
- Well, I love *myself*, anyway.
- Yeah, I was thinking that. You can kinda tell, truth be told.
- Yes, it's true.
- . . .
- You must jerk off a lot.
- Well, I . . . this is no good.
- What's no good?
- You're bringing in life experience here. Real life experience *outside* one's head. You see, I don't do that.
- You don't?
- No, I stay in my ivory-encrusted tower and write books for other people to use in *their* real-life experience. I just sit on the sidelines, you see, and comment on that in which I do not partake.
- "On that in which . . ." you mean you're like a referee?
- Yes, exactly. A referee.
- Who appointed you?
- Myself, of course.
- Yes, that always seems to be the way.
- Yes, it is, isn't it? Except, in this case, I'm *right*, so there you go. I comment on the other self-appointed referees . . .
- . . . yes, there's so many, it's hard to keep track . . .
- . . . and let you know what they're doing wrong. Rather than go out and risk making mistakes like the rest of you.
- Yeah, thanks, you've been a great help . . .
- Of course. No problem.
- . . .
- You know, Professor . . .
- Yes?
- . . . it's an indisputably ugly business to suggest anyone's

books be BURNED . . .

- . . . yes, of course . . .

- . . . because of what could happen to other people's books, people's feelings about writing, and life in general . . .

- . . . yes, yes I see . . .

- . . . but what I am going to recommend in my article is that people buy one, new, full-price copy of whichever of your books . . .

- . . . why, yes, thank you . . .

- . . . and take it home and *wipe* their *asses* with it.

- I'm sorry?

- You know, poop? "Poop," professor? When these people, living their real life experience, have to go poop . . .

- . . . well, I don't go poop . . .

- You don't go poop?

- No.

- Not at all?

- No. Why should I? It's beneath me. It's disgusting and dirty.

- Yeah, but . . . I don't understand how this is possible.

- What do you mean?

- How can you not go poop?

- Well, I hold it in.

- You hold it in?

- Yes.

- What do you mean, "hold it in"? Like . . . indefinitely?

- Well . . .

- How long? How long's it been, Professor, since you went poop.

- Well . . . seventeen years.

- Seventeen years?

- Yes.

- Quite an accomplishment, I guess . . . though I'm not sure what kind.

- Well, you couldn't do it.

- Yeah, I guess. I guess I couldn't do a lot of things.

- That seems to be becoming evident. More and more so.

- I couldn't be a linguist without learning several languages
— which you've managed to've done, or "not done," I should say . . .

- . . . yes, yes . . .

- . . . and I couldn't not poop and not fuck . . .

- . . . of course! You have no self-control!

- Obviously.

- You're not a Bona-Fide Genius!

- Of course.

- You haven't attained Mastery of the Self!

- Uh . . .

- You still make mistakes!

- Yes, foremost of which was coming here in the first place. I told my editor this would be a waste of time . . .

- Well, to you, maybe. But what about me? What about my feelings? How would you like to be a Bona Fide Genius, stuck talking with an Idiot?

- Yeah, that must be hard.

- It's terrible!

- You can't imagine how much I ache for the pain you must be feeling right now.

- Thank you! That's very empathetic! And, of course, I deserve it!

- Of course.

- Of course! Yes, you've got it.

. . .

- You know, Professor, I think we've got enough for the article.

- Really?

- Yes, I think this'll be good.

- That's great! You think it'll show me in a light appropriate for me, being the Bona-Fide Genius that I am?

- Yes . . . yes I do believe that it will.

- That's great! I'll sell more books, and have the opportunity to "elucidate" more people!

- Yes, yes, of course.

- You did say you'd tell people to buy my books, right?

Apparently you had some specific purpose in mind, I don't recall . . .

- Don't worry. *I* do.

- You do?

- Yes. I do. I'll do what I can to motivate people to buy copies of your books with that specific purpose in mind.

- That'd be great!

- Yes.

- More "elucidation."

. . .

(holds head in hands)

- Yes, yes of course.

- What is it? Are you feeling ill?

(perks up)

- No. No, professor, actually . . . I think I just need some air.

- Some "air"?

- Yes.

- What is that?

- Well . . . let's just say I need a walk in the park.

- Sounds good! For you, anyway. I'll stay in here.

- Yeah, I figured you would.

- You go out and I'll stay in here and watch you make mistakes. And comment on them. And publish books letting you know what you're doing wrong.

- Well, great, but in order to get to the park, first of all I have to turn the corner there and then you won't see me . . .

- Yes, that's true! Thanks for pointing that out, Idiot.

- Yeah, no prob, look, gotta go though!

- Okay, it was a pleasure talking to you!

- Yes, I'm sure it was mutual.

- What's that?

- Goodbye, Professor.

- Oh, goodbye.

*for Miranda July,
who wrote me back when I sent her a letter in 2003,
and inspired me to move to Portland*

