

Sartre's *La Nausée*. For Chesterton, even this is part of God's creation.

Is all, then, seriousness and portentiousness in Chesterton's verse? On the contrary, even the examples cited here should show the sheer *joie de vivre* that runs through all his work, itself a scandal to the true-blue modern intellectual, who combines despairing sadness with fanatic utopian dreams. Precisely because all is sacramental, all is full of joy for G.K. But even beyond this, he is often gleeful and funny in his poetry. "The Logical Vegetarian" is the best satire ever written on the vegetarianism and even "veganism" that, decades after Chesterton's death, have become so widespread in our society:

No more the milk of cows
Shall pollute my private house
Than the milk of the wild mares of
the Barbarian;
I will stick to port and sherry,
For they are so very, very,
So very, very, very Vegetarian!

And Chesterton is prophetic in other ways. "Elegy in a Country Churchyard" laments not the unrecorded losses that weighed so heavily upon Thomas Grey, but the all-too-recorded loss of English life in futile wars away from home, the Boer War and others. Can we read this poem and not think of another futile war, fought by a nation fathered by Britain, our nation, leading to tragic deaths for which there is no justification?

The men that worked for England
They have their graves at home:
And bees and birds of England
About the cross can roam.
But they that fought for England,
Following a falling star,
Alas, alas for England
They have their graves afar.
And they that rule in England,
In stately conclave met,
Alas, alas for England
They have no graves as yet. ■

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Workshopping Around

By Anthony Gancarski

To the uninitiated or uninformed, the life of a fiction writer seems easy enough. Just a matter of drinking oneself into a stupor then finding a way to commit one's genius to paper before swallowing the barrel of a gun—so runs the traditional conception of a novelist's life. But those in the know recognize such a description as equal parts romance, lunacy, and fantasy. In 21st-century America, the road to literary stardom isn't nearly that easy.

There are two avenues open to the aspiring literary success. The first is situational: if a budding author self-identifies as a paraplegic Eskimo, a transgendered Nigerian immigrant, or the progeny of an Established Figure in the business, then his road is as smooth and uncomplicated as stock tips doled out during Fox News Channel's weekend programming. His output will find sympathetic reviews in such prestigious journals as the *New York Review of Books* or in the book-review sections of major papers like the *New York Times*. Perhaps most fortunately of all, the lucky author might be found on C-SPAN reading to a dozen wayward spirits in some Falls Church Barnes & Noble. Some may scoff at the paltry turnouts for such author events, but they should realize that in the world of "midlist" fiction such performances are cause for celebration. They indicate that the author has made it. The Book Sellers, quick to glom onto the latest hype, happily promote the new product under the aegis of Supporting New Writers.

But this is not to suggest that everyone who gets published is either a legacy or a Diversity Case. The industry isn't quite that monolithic or transparent. Unknowns do get published. Even some white middle-class fiction writers find their way into the literary mix. But to do so, they have to pay certain dues.

Nearly without exception, they punch their tickets by attending a "creative writing" program at one institution or another. In taking such a step, the aspiring student hopes that he will emerge with a contract for publication or, at the very least, an agent.

Not every would-be wordsmith has the bank account or the credit rating necessary for such an ambitious undertaking as an MFA in Creative Writing. Luckily for the paupers, however, half-measures are afforded to them. Many schools with prestigious names host summer "seminars" that last for two or three weeks. At these events, even the greenest of novice writers is worthy of feedback from some of the biggest names in the industry. As the invariably tasteful pamphlets suggest, how could a beginner do anything but benefit from studying with a David Foster Wallace, a Barry Hannah, or a Jill McCorkle? Careers have been launched with far less. Especially considering the talent possessed by (Your Name Here), how could anyone reasonably expect anything but success with such able mentors?

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People do emerge from these summer workshops with book deals. Michael Cahill, author of 1998's *A Nixon Man*, bluntly said while attending the 1996 Bennington Writing Seminars that he was "making the circuit to get a deal." And a deal he got—his book was released by St. Martin's less than two years after his stint at summer workshops. But Michael Cahill is not a typical summer-workshop denizen.

Ordinarily, the students in a summer workshop don't think in such clear, concrete terms. Why would they? Do people who take Carnival cruises expect them to turn out as smoothly as plots on "The Love Boat"? Do middle-aged men at baseball camp expect to be invited to try out for the Devil Rays or Pirates? Of course not! Such thinking would be foolish and would run counter to the actual function of a summer writing workshop—that of a fantasy camp for fiction hacks.

At a well-run summer writing program, there are ample diversions to distract those in attendance from the marginal quality of their work. At the most "legendary" of the summer programs, there is a tradition of holding student readings a few times a week. Held in the afternoon in the dead space between classes and communal cafeteria dinners, these events feature spectacles like blue-haired women spinning extended gynocentric metaphors and

tightlipped men reading about "the war." Good times for all!

The draw of the fiction workshop, despite such diversions, is not the "community of writers," but fleeting interactions with literary figures. The best of the summer conferences often will bring in a few junior "literary agents" (read: the twentysomethings who fetch coffee and slippers for the older folks in the office). Those who enjoy spectacles like train wrecks could do worse than to watch these hapless, harried gatekeepers descended upon by worthies with manuscripts at the ready, in the manner

script, much less to cover the blank space on the pages with scribbled sweet nothings like the following cramped notation from the author of *The Ice Storm*: "unfortunately, the manuscript, while holding closely to the convention of the unsympathetic narrator, breaches both letter and spirit of the convention." Such experiences are not to be missed, as they are every bit as life-affirming as Hillary Clinton teaching Lamaze.

Summer Writers' Conferences are not for everyone, and having been through a couple myself (at Bennington and Skidmore last decade), I wouldn't advise

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of Alfred Hitchcock's "The Birds." After hearing the question "Do you think there's a market for my memoir of my time at the Frito-Lay plant?" a few times, these agents often wind down by readying their résumés while drinking malt liquor through straws. Or so legend has it.

The charms of the agents in attendance, however, pale compared to the opportunities "literary conference participants" have to rub elbows with legends. No amount is too much for a starry-eyed student to pay to have a Rick Moody or a Meg Wolitzer read his manu-

attending one to anybody with a trace of skepticism. That said, there are fringe benefits for even the most cynical prospective participant.

For single men, or those who simply wish to function as if they were single, opportunities for trysts and summer flings abound. After all, no one is more on the make than a single woman sleeping alone in a dorm-room bed. A few words of advice for those going that route: pretend you don't mind the Tori Amos CD on repeat and under no circumstances should you drink more of the Boone's Farm wine (\$3.99 a gallon!) than your date.

Even for those harboring aspirations to celibacy (or those for whom celibacy is a matter of necessity rather than choice), there are inducements to recommend the summer-workshop scene. Little else compares, in terms of off-the-charts surreality, to watching a soused National Book Award winning, foundation-funded author pogo-dancing to "No Future" by the Sex Pistols. Except, perhaps, the realization that the opportunity to see such a thing costs hundreds, if not thousands, of dollars. ■

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"Every time we successfully recover from a technical problem, the computer likes a high five."

The Scarlet “A”



An Israeli ambassador physically attacks an art display in a Stockholm exhibit linked to an international conference on genocide—a display created

by an Israeli artist, incidentally—and Sharon and his ilk denounce the exhibit as anti-Semitic. (Dror Feiler, the artist, opposes the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.) Alicia Colon, a *New York Sun* columnist, writes that while Christians enjoyed the festive New Year season with good cheer, Jewish communities were being inundated with vicious anti-Semitic vandalism. *New York* magazine runs a cover story about the return of anti-Semitism, and announces that hating Jews has become politically correct in many places. Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League, calls the threat to the safety of the Jewish people “as great, if not greater, than what we faced in the thirties.” Arnold Beichman, writing in the *Washington Times*, asks if there will never be peace between Jews and the rest of the world. Finally, Israel Singer, chairman of the World Jewish Congress, levels charges against the European Union for recent decisions he has deemed anti-Semitic. What in heaven’s name is going on here?

It is an easy question to answer. The defamatory accusation of anti-Semitism is the equivalent of a ninth-inning bases-loaded home run when down 3-0 against those who charge that Israel is out of control and point out its misdeeds. If Ariel Sharon can claim anti-Semitism against a peace-loving Israeli artist living in Sweden, what is so surprising when American Jews accuse anyone criticizing Israel with the same charge? Alas, my co-editor Pat Buchanan and I are used to these labels. As are Gore Vidal, Norman Mailer, *Chronicles*, and the *Dartmouth Review*, just to name a few.

What is really going on is that the state of Israel has always exploited alle-

gations of anti-Semitism, never more than when its policies against the Palestinians raise the eyebrows (nothing more would be tolerated) of fair-minded people and governments throughout the world. The line is as follows: no matter what Israel does—withdraws from the occupied territories, dismantles the settlements, and recognizes the rights of the Palestinians—the Arabs will never be satisfied until they drive the Jews into the sea. Well, it’s a good line, but it’s a big lie, as big as the one used by individuals like David Frum when he calls conservatives who did not support the war against Iraq purveyors of treason. In fact, if Israel gives up the illegal settlements and the occupied territories, it

Israel’s decision to murder the elected Palestinian leader, it means that except for the U.S., Micronesia and Marshall Islands, all other countries on the globe are anti-Semitic. Even when a pregnant Palestinian woman is stopped at an Israeli checkpoint and gives birth in an open field, the only lesson to be learned is that *Ha’aretz* journalist Gideon Levy—who reported two such cases [recently], one in which the baby died—is an anti-Semite.”

As I wrote in my last column, much has been made by professional wolf-criers of European anti-Semitism. Jews across Europe are reported to be afraid for the first time since the Holocaust. Yes, if a Jew wearing a yarmulke walks in St. Denis, a Paris working-class suburb where the fuzz fears to tread because of militant Islamists, he will be attacked by unemployed Arab youths, perhaps even murdered. The truth, however, is that if I

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will still be despised by many Arabs, but it will not only hold the high ground, it will enjoy the support and admiration of every democracy.

Neoconservatives, or neo-Jacobins, as Claes G. Ryn correctly identified them in these pages, are as much to blame for abusing “anti-Semitism” as are Israeli hardliners like Sharon, Netanyahu, and American-born settlers. Nothing will satisfy these people until they’ve driven the Palestinians into Jordan.

As journalist Ran HaCohen has written, “When a Palestinian kills innocent Israeli civilians, it’s anti-Semitism. When Palestinians attack soldiers of Israel’s occupation army in their own village, it’s anti-Semitism. When the UN General Assembly votes 133 to 4 condemning

walk there wearing my cross, I, too, will be attacked, perhaps even murdered. And Greece is not occupying any Arab lands, nor does it have any illegal settlements. Does this make the French anti-Semites? Of course not, but you’d never know it by reading the “patriotic” press. Are the Dutch, for the comments of a European Bank chairman’s wife, or the Norwegians, for the words of a Marxist former government minister? It ain’t necessarily so.

As Thomas Friedman wrote, “The Jewish state is in peril ... the withdrawal should be done unilaterally. This can’t happen too soon, and the United States should be forcing it.” Instead, the neo-cons are charging true friends of peace in the Middle East with anti-Semitism. ■