

diates as neo-Nazi. Rather, they are the scions and hangers-on of the neoconservatives who took over and transformed American conservatism in the late 70's and early 80's.

Pathetically, Brock and his ilk lament that they have not (yet) produced "classics" on the order of Irving Kristol's and Norman Podhoretz's writings, while swooning over Midge Decter ("as formidable a thinker and writer as Norman"). You might conclude from such encomia that the "classics" referred to are on a level with the works of Plato and Aristotle. But then, such judgments may be relative. After plodding through David Brock's yammering, even I might be inclined to mistake the temper tantrums of Norman or Midge for timeless thought.

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A Fine Excess

by J.O. Tate

Going to See the Elephant: Pieces of a Writing Life

by George Garrett;
edited by Jeb Livingood
Huntsville: Texas Review Press;
195 pp., \$18.95

The author of these various pieces can truly claim that he has lived "a writing life." George Garrett has been working—successfully—for decades as a novelist and short-story writer, as a poet, playwright, and essayist, and as an editor and satirist. But there is even more to the writing life, which Garrett does not fail to address in all the fullness, and sometimes fulsomeness, of its postmodern reality.

He views his subject from many perspectives: the personal (in accounts, such as his interview with Madison Smartt Bell, that demonstrate his mastery of the literary trade and his own processes of composition); the generational ("How the Cookie Crumbles: Note on a Literary Generation"); and, finally, in terms of personalities and individual achieve-

ments (the "Other Voices" of F. Scott Fitzgerald, Eudora Welty, Fred Chappell, James Dickey, Madison Jones, and William Goyen). Garrett's breadth of coverage is impressive and satisfying, but there is something more, an extra quality, that gives his pages a special lift. Exactly what that something might be should be known to readers of this journal, Professor Garrett's "Cowboys and Indians: A Few Notions About Creative Writing," having appeared in the May 2002 issue of *Chronicles*. In that essay, Garrett told some home truths about creative writing and the contemporary American university in a piece that was rejected by the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, whose editors did not approve of the opinions that they had solicited. They found indigestible his polite and rational account of the contradiction between the nature of creative writing and the demands of a politically correct bureaucracy. But George Garrett's knowledge—as well as the honesty manifested in that statement—are not the whole of the X-factor that distinguishes his writing.

In discussing the duty of the storyteller, Garrett reminds us of Keats' phrase for surprise in poetry: "a fine excess."

To create something new and worthwhile, to surprise by "a fine excess," question all stereotypes, good ones and bad ones, and the shadow assumptions behind them. Turn the full force of your own doubts and skepticism against the commonplace assumptions of your age and, most especially, against your own personal certainties and assumptions.

It seems to me that, in these pages as in others, George Garrett has done just that. He can remember when the parables of Hemingway and Fitzgerald and Faulkner seemed near and accessible, when

Being a writer then became going to war and living to tell the tale, going on safari and shooting lions and other big animals, skinny-dipping in the fountain in front of the Plaza Hotel, and living in a crumbling cobwebby old Southern mansion.

But now he knows, as he tells us, that the gap between the generations is bigger than it once seemed, and the writing game has changed more than a little.

Because of his achieved perspective

and his ability to invert stereotypes, Garrett writes shrewdly about F. Scott Fitzgerald and effectively about Truman Capote, perceiving the artistic strength as well as the authorial self-mythologization coexisting in *In Cold Blood*. Recognizing distinction when he sees it, he celebrates the poetic craft of Fred Chappell and pauses to remark, as he places him in context, "One of the great problems we face in much contemporary American poetry is in its trendy insistence on a central core of unearned nihilism." Garrett knows what to say, even in the face of lies and provocative absurdities, about James Dickey, separating the man from his work. In short, *Going to See the Elephant* is a valuable and enjoyable collection that speaks to the literary experience of the last two generations and to our present sense that something has gone wrong. But, like Vanessa Williams, I have saved the best for last.

"The best" is the ultimate extension of the principle of "a fine excess" or, perhaps, what we might think of as "negative capability." Precisely because he is a charming gentleman in his own person, George Garrett the writer is necessarily *someone else*. And that someone else is sometimes "John Towne," the persona of *Poison Pen* (1986), an irrepressible voice of all that is repressed. John Towne tells it like it is, usually lusting after the super-model celebs he mocks and insulting Howard Stern for his ugliness. In these pages, John Towne addresses the students of the University of Virginia in a highly original and instructive manner hitherto unknown to the president and deans of that admirable institution. He rudely interrupts the discourse of Garrett's essay, "When Lorena Bobbitt Comes Bob-Bob-Bobbing Along: The Sorry State of Popular Culture"—or perhaps we should say that Towne's rude interruptions turn that essay into a dramatization of, rather than a statement about, the sorry state of popular culture. And in "False Confessions," Towne bitterly complains about how Garrett has used him and abused him. The incursions of John Towne across the borders of discursive distinction and tonal probity are proofs—as if they were needed—that, when George Garrett addresses the writing life, we must be there to attend.

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by Samuel Francis

Immigration Reform's New "Palatable Face"

Almost immediately after the attacks of September 11, the open-borders lobby knew it was in trouble. The immediate, obvious, and logical implication of 19 aliens legally entering the country and proceeding to carry out the biggest single act of mass murder in human history is that the United States needs to close its borders, at least for a while. The attacks ought also to have suggested that our immigration policies are seriously flawed and in need of radical reform and that allowing literally millions of aliens to pass through our borders virtually at will creates not only security threats but a vast range of other problems.

Most Americans did indeed perceive these implications of the September 11 attacks, but for the last several months, proponents of mass immigration have fought to smother in its political cradle any effort at reform to which these perceptions might have given birth. The lobby has followed essentially three tactics, each of which is an enhancement of tactics it used before September 11: first, concede the need for some reform (especially in such merely procedural matters as visa security, screening of foreign visitors, and expelling expired visa holders) while avoiding and opposing any and all comprehensive immigration-control measures such as a moratorium or drastic and permanent reductions in numbers of immigrants; second, continue to smear those who have actively supported immigration control as "racists," "extremists," etc., to prevent them from gaining legitimacy or influence through their claims that September 11 proved that they had been right all along about the dangers of immigration; and third, posture as the true or "responsible" advocates of real and effective immigration reform whose efforts are in danger of being hijacked and discredited by the aforementioned "extremists." So faithfully have these tactics been followed by a series of apparently unconnected opponents of immigration control that I would be tempted, if I did not know better, to posit an actual conspiracy among them to pursue a common and concerted plan.

The reason for the urgency that the open-borders zealots felt was expressed by Tamar Jacoby, whose article in the *March Reader's Digest*, "Don't Slam the Door," generally follows the tactics described above. "Phones rang off the hook at radio call-in shows," Miss Jacoby panted in her depiction of the national reaction to September 11.

Angry messages flooded Internet chat rooms. Members of Congress soon joined in, demanding that the country freeze all visas for six months, even station troops and tanks on the borders.

Most Americans probably have no recollection of the sort of xenophobic hysteria she portrays, but readers should recall that Miss Jacoby, a denizen of Manhattan, perhaps harbors a somewhat overwrought view of the national heartland and spies beasts lurking there that few others can see. Nevertheless, allowing for some exaggeration, she is certainly correct that most Americans did grasp that the reckless mass-immigration policy of the federal government was at least indirectly responsible for September 11 and were furious in their demands that it be rectified. As she pointed out, a Fox News/Opinion Dynamics poll found that 65 percent of the public favored "temporarily sealing the U.S. borders and stopping all immigration" until the war against terrorism is over.

Miss Jacoby, however, was by no means the first of the pro-immigration warriors to roll into battle against the popular demand for immigration restrictions. That distinction probably belongs to a gentleman named Stephen Steinlight of the American Jewish Committee, who unbosomed his thoughts to a large audience in New York on November 14 in a speech entitled, "The Jewish Stake in America's Changing Demography." Mr. Steinlight's argument was that American Jews, who have traditionally been in the forefront of support for liberal immigration policies, should rethink their position, not just because of September 11, but because



we cannot consider the inevitable consequences of current trends [in immigration]—not least among them *diminished Jewish political power*—with detachment. . . . We have an enormous stake in the outcome of this process, and we should start acting as if we understood that we do.

Steinlight explicitly endorsed what he called "a pro-immigrant policy of lower immigration," mainly out of consideration of the interests of his own religious and ethnic group, but not at the expense of embracing what he called the

white "Christian" supremacists who have historically opposed either all immigration or all non-European immigration (Europeans being defined as Nordic or Anglo-Saxon), a position re-asserted by Peter Brimelow.

Mr. Brimelow, author of *Alien Nation*, which virtually all sides of the immigration controversy acknowledge as the most significant recent book arguing against mass immigration, soon became the demon of choice for the post-September 11 open-borders witch hunters. Indeed, while Mr. Steinlight's insulting and false characterization of him and his book in the published version of his speech was rude enough, the notes of a member of the audience make clear that the speaker did not hesitate to indulge in a little ethnic name-calling as well. Mr. Steinlight described *Alien Nation* as "a book I abominate; it is entirely objectionable and racist" and called Mr. Brimelow "a Brit continuing cultural Buchananism with a British accent." He also cast aspersions on Mr. Brimelow's character—"I'm honest; he's not"—and motives