



mac's daily miscellany

565

I LIVE IN HARTSVILLE, SOUTH CAROLINA. I AM AN ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF SPANISH AT COKER COLLEGE. I DO NOT PROOFREAD THESE BLOG POSTS. I HAVE AN OPINION ABOUT EVERYTHING, EVERMORE MODERATE. PREPARE TO BE MILDLY ENTERTAINED.

sunday, march 08, 2009

Ara 13 Drawers & Booths My Review

So, about five months or so ago I get a message on my blog asking me if I would like to read a novel by a blogger user named "Ara 13." I message back that I'll be happy to read it, thinking that it wouldn't be anything important. Ara, be sure to read this entire post. I think you'll like it.

Awhile later I received an attractively-printed paperback novel in the mail called *Drawers & Booths*. The cover contains a humorous description of the author as coming "from a long line of primates" whose "ancestors are directly responsible for the fashioning of the wheel and the discovery of fire." It further claims that "one of his ancestors was even the first recorded Homo sapien. Therefore the pressure for Ara to succeed is enormous." Clever humor amuses me, so I began reading the novel with high hopes.

My hopes soon crashed against the walls of a combat novel of military jargon in the 21st Century. The first thirty pages read like a W.E.B. Griffin novel crossed with Wolfe's *I Am Charlotte Simmons*. There's some characterization, the over-attention to detail that seems ubiquitous in the steady stream of guys writing stories about Iraq (or the fictional Cortinia in this version), the annoyingly jocular conversations between different branches of the service; basically, all the stuff you'd expect. At one point I was so befuddled by the jargon that I didn't know that the "enemy" was the enemy because "Op4" sounds like some kind of super secret special forces stuff to the ignorant reader.

Then on page 34, something different happens. Right at the moment when our first religious character should appear, he's even called by name, the narrator breaks into first-person and present-tense narration. In Genettean terms we go from an extra hetero diegetic narrator to an intra homo diegetic one. This will

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happen several times.

So we then go from the wilds of Cortinia to a pseudo-detective chasing a criminal mastermind behind all of the murders that happen. The police may catch someone red-handed, but this detective thinks that there a head honcho calls the shots. Long about page 50, the rhetoric of the novel has convinced me that there is an ulterior motive to what I'm reading. I get the sneaking suspicion that the Ara 13 who commented on my blog has read my dissertation research and my proclamations of faith and that he is an atheist seeking converts. This feeling is then substantiated when I go back and read the kitschy last paragraph of his Acknowledgement section that I had skipped over when I started. He writes, "And finally, thanks to the all the writers. It is my endeavor to be your peer. I especially thank Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, Christopher Hitchens, and Michael Shermer for the education. How did I do?" For those unfamiliar with these men's writings, Dawkins claims that belief in god is a delusion. The four of them comprise some of the more vocal and antagonistic atheists on the planet, those who, like their believing counterparts, can't just leave the other side alone.

For the next fifty or so pages, I admit, I'm reading the novel to get more ammunition to use when I skewer this book in my review. But, then, this guy who I sort of know, and who I talked to about why I was hating this book, pointed out that all my attacks were either ad hominem (e.g. the author is self-absorbed, the author used a vanity press), ones of personal taste (the author's writing is mediocre), or irrelevant to the critique of the thing as a work of art. So, as I fumed over what the novel was saying, how it was saying, and what it was "trying" to say to me, I read more. And then the narrator arrests God and puts him on trial for reckless endangerment. I almost threw it in the trash can...not because I believe in God, but because the idea seems trite and dumb and I get tired of dumb ideas.

At this point, I'm ready to give up, but the desire to shred this piece of crap is too much. And then, shockingly, that's when the novel got good, as in really good. Ara 13 has a solid command of his words, the English language, the law, and the weapons of his critics. It seemed like every critique I had, the narrator would answer with an aside like when Ara 13, the author, is called to testify in the trial. He makes all the characters say only the word "silly" no matter what they try to do, and even though this meta-fictional self awareness of characters has happened countless times (think Kurt Russel's Doctor character freaking out that he's not real in *Vanilla Sky*). So just about the point where I'm ready to scream that this is derivative drivel, the attorney asks "Ara" the author, on the witness stand, "why are you doing all this?" To which he responds, "Short-term, it makes me laugh. In the long-run, hopefully it will be deemed literarily inventive and launch my writing career." That's just one of about twenty instances where he tactically takes the wind out of my sails just as I was about to nail him for being coy, or trite, or sophomoric. He recognizes it himself, and it makes the novel, well, dare I say? Endearing? I don't have time to list more of them, but you can find no fault with a novel wherein the novelist himself points out why something "sucks."

He then goes on to give an honest and clear-cut reason for why Ara 13 is an atheist. While not denying that there could be a God, he denies that there is one because he has seen no tangible evidence to the point. I respect that. After reading the novel, I



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friends!



capital punishment should be

Abolished	0 (0%)
Left up to juries	1 (16%)
Left up to judges	0 (0%)
Expanded	4 (66%)
Reserved only for...	0 (0%)
Left Alone; it's fi...	2 (33%)

Votes so far: 6
Poll closed

blog archive

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- ▶ 2006 (357)
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my favorite posts

- [A Hermeneutic Inquiry into Johnny Cash's "Everywhere Man"](#)
- [A Red Letter Date in the History of Science](#)
- [A Sincere Prayer](#)

feel that even though I'm wedded to hermeneutical interpretation of literature, I at least think that the Author behind the author respects my choice to believe.

Ara 13 completely understands my theory of the Gnostic Reader, and I commend him for a solid novel that I was wrong to judge so quickly. If you read it, be sure to finish it, because the first part will bore you, the second part will piss you off, the third part will win you over, and the fourth part will probably make you glad you read it.*

I don't have the time right now, professionally or personally to take the time to write a philosophical critique of the novel. It's worth a read if you're into metaphysics and reader response theory (e.g. Jauss or Iser).

Ara, thanks for sending me the novel. I wish you all the best.

*There's no accounting for personal tastes.

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posted by mac at 4:53 pm 1 comments [links to this post](#) 

friday, february 27, 2009

When someone dies

Now, maybe this is some deep connection to my ancestors, but when someone dies, I want a bonfire. I want a big-ass pyre that screams my sorrow into the night sky. I want the warmth of the flames to remind me of the embrace of my loved one, and I want the smoke to remind me of ascension of my prayers to my unseen God "up" in heaven. I also wish we could have a one night pass on the Word of Wisdom and all get piss drunk on rum as we sing dirges into the night and tell stories of our fallen friend. A bonfire is cathartic.

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posted by mac at 12:52 pm 1 comments [links to this post](#) 

monday, february 16, 2009

My Fall 2008 Evaluation Comments (All of them)

Don Mac is a wonderful professor!! This is a great class but it needs more hands on activities!

He is the best teacher I've had here. Especially when we learn facts about other cultures. We learn about the world and don't even realize it.

This was my favorite class. The "que pasa en el mundo" made things interesting though we rarely understood at first. Great class!

He's a very great teacher and I learned so much from him.

Really good, helpful teacher, always there when I needed help. A ++ professor. I really liked using Quia it helped a lot. I didn't like audacity at all.

Baseball Porn

Beauty vs. Sexiness vs.

Attractiveness (An Anglo-Saxon American Male Heterosexual Perspective)

Choosing My Daughter's iPod Playlist

Deconstructing Beyoncé

Dissent is not sedition

Doonesbury, Arab

Exceptionalism, and Cultural Bias

Everything Is Derivative

Infant baptism, Tess of the D'ubervilles and the Gall of Bitterness

Katrina Two Years Later

Liberal Bias in Higher Education?

Memory, Brains, Eyes, Henri Bergson, and What a Friend We Have in Jesus

My Dad's Eulogy

My Daughter's Ability to Humble Me at the Drop of a Hat

My funniest teaching moment ever was today -- CUA QUI SER PI NI CU

My Momma Taught Me Better

My Southern Heritage

Native Americans and native Americans

Of Contests and Martyrs

Overheard in Sunday School

Postmodern Hymns

Sex at Duke or Why People Are Generally Dumb No Matter How High Their Test Scores

Speaking of Bad Parenting: Cindy Margolis, Playboy, and "It's for Charity"

The Politics of Selling Drugs

The Red Hat Society and yet another symptom of bourgeois bohemian detachment

Two Conversations with a Three-Year-Old about Gift Wrapping

Tyra Banks Is Phat

The instructor was amazing. This is the first time an instructor deserved all A's!!! I learned a lot in this class and almost considered a Spanish minor.

Wonderful professor - willing to help students as long as they want to help themselves. Makes 1012 work but you learn much. Gracias!

The instructor is one of the best I have had. He is very helpful. Spanish 1012 is a great program.

Great professor!

Always make class enjoyable. Always helps us when we have problems or ask for help. Very good course! I learned a lot and feel a lot more confident about conducting.

Awesome, fantastic, great teacher! Awesome course! Learned a lot!

Dr. Carswell did a wonderful job in this course! He was great! (*Huh? This is a mistake*)

Culture projects helped learn things about Spanish culture. The mundo activities were good too.

I really liked the instructor. He was a very good teacher and had high expectations for his students. I would take his class again.

Wonderful teacher, really enjoyed the class.

He's an excellent instructor and provides many strong resources to do well on the exams. He shows interest in what he does and makes the class fun.

Enthusiastic about course material. Knowledgeable and helpful. Appropriate & interesting.

All of the group work helped me understand the topic.

Dr. Williams is a wonderful professor and is very passionate about what he does. He has made me love Spanish.

Needs to inform classes when assignments are due. Does a good job interacting with students.

Needs to make efficient (sic) records (attendance, class participation, etc.) (*A fair critique; it's true I could be better about taking attendance, but participation is student self-evaluation*)

It's helpful that he is so readily available. "Que pasa en el mundo" is a good way to learn because the student is individually corrected.

By having all of the students work in groups, we are able to learn more about the topics and participate effectively in class. Class discussions were also helpful and expanded our skills in the use of the Spanish language.

He is very concerned for the well-being of his students. He should write things he says down on something. (*I should!*) Good course. It challenged enough without breaking us. My writing skills have

Why I'm Opposed to
Homeschooling

Women!

You All Did See That on the
Lupercal

my other web
projects

Galt's Road Tales

The Dävine Book Club

Maybe Exercise Will Help

www.spanishlanguagehelp.com

Ficciones

i visit

Mickelle's Minute

Marley Time

Susanna

Dia Linn

My Dad (1950-2007)

Tim

Paul

Idelber

Brent

Last Citizen

Amanda

Juan Carlos

Darlamay

Ian

Coker College Experience

Bob

Tied Together with a Smile

Frank

Erin

Annie

Emily

Chattypatra

Daniel Lopes

Coker College

Fark

I Can Has Cheezburger?

eBay Stuff I'm Selling

Eric Snider

greatly improved because of Dr. Williams.

Professor was of much help. Available whenever we had a question. I enjoyed the class. All of the writing tips were very helpful. Some of the assignments made you think. (*I'm sad they all didn't*)

The amount of translation required will be great for native speakers but will most likely be too much for non-native speakers. (*The class is SPA 225, so, translation shouldn't be an issue*)

The instructor brought objects to class as visual guides for our writing. Excellent professor who always gives feedback and thorough in lecture. Course was very helpful because it helped [sic] to better articulate and become a stronger analytical thinker. Course was excellent. Helped my critical thinking and I feel that I have become a better creative writer.

Great instructor, really know [sic] how to treat people. One of the best instructors on campus. The course was interesting. I learned a lot on how to better writing [sic].

He is very interested on [sic] what he teach [sic] and knows a lot about it.

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posted by mac at **11:26 am 6 comments links to this post** 

tuesday, february 03, 2009


Alajuela, August 1993

Alajuela Ward, Alajuela, Costa Rica, August 1993. I sit in the chapel reading something as I listen to my companion, Elder Brent Reed Jensen of Mountain Home, Idaho playing the piano before Sacrament meeting. Elder Jensen was a very strong piano player, a decent hard-working guy, and a lover of classic rock....especially Led Zeppelin.

He had played a fair number of hymns that morning, transitioning flawlessly between numbers without even pausing, so I was only half-listening when I heard some bars out of the pianoforte that confused me as I tried to place them in the hymnal, thinking perhaps he was playing one of the many hymns not found in the Spanish hymnal that we have in English (e.g. "God Save the King"), when what should my wondering ears suddenly hear but the opening notes of "Stairway to Heaven." I shot him a glance of "DUDE!" met by his mischievous back-at-ya grin. He didn't get past "what she came for" when he ended his "set" and stood up to start putting the hymn numbers in the ubiquitous hymn number placard. Several members came up to him and asked, "*Elder, ¿Cuál himno era ése?*" to which he responded, "*La escalera al cielo.*" The name saved him because the members were used to hearing hymns played by him that aren't in the Spanish one.....I'll never forget that moment.....Led Zeppelin in sacrament meeting.....I'm smiling about it right now.

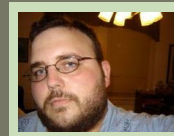
I entered the MTC sixteen years ago today.

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posted by mac at **1:59 pm 2 comments links to this post** 

Cat and Girl

about me



Mac

I try harder


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unique visitors

88071265

[View My Stats](#)

my blog list

 [last citizen](#)

2009? -

3 weeks ago

[Let's Do This](#)

I can't help it, really. - I'm

just kind of in love with


Jimmy Carter. I heard him

today on the radio, touting

his new book We Can Have

Peace in the Holy Land and he was also on the ...

5 weeks ago

 [Marley Time](#)

thefriend - i sow a friend

4 weeks ago

[Mickelle's Minute](#)

You know, I don't consider

myself a sweetheart at all.

But when he says it, I believe

it... - The title of my blog

today is stolen from another

blogger, but when I read it I

couldn't help but save it

because it rang so true for me

and my Dad as well...

6 days ago

[mynameistim](#)

Academy Awards: Arts and

Science, not Popularity. - I

always find it interesting to

hear some of the things that

people say about the Oscars.

In preparation for this week's

ceremony, I'm reminded of

how many...

2 weeks ago

[O Biscoito Fino e a Massa](#)

Apoio às feministas e ao

saturday, january 31, 2009

Lessons Learned from Billy Joel and God

So, yesterday as I left the second-opinion-surgeon's office, in tears, after hearing that my pain has an unknown cause, that I'm too fat to operate on, but I'm "young and healthy enough" for lapband/gastric bypass surgery (wtf? that's way more major than lap choleystectomy), that I should go to a seminar to learn more, and that I need to lose weight (which is what got me into this pain in the first place), I sat in my car and cried for a good ten minutes because of the pain, because the cold I have is making me feel like shit, because I drove three hours and spent \$50 for an appointment that involved the dr taking to me and not even laying a palpitating hand on me, and because pain, long-term pain drains you.

After I got my eyes tear-free enough to drive and I paid for some gas at a ramshackle "El Cheapo" station in downtown Columbia staffed by a coughing hacking rice-pudding-eating Middle-Eastern woman who looked really pissed the entire time I was in her shop to buy an A&W, I got on I-20 and drove home. It was a blustery day in the Midlands. We're at the middlemark of Winter, and all is dead, gray, dreary, and dry. The ground crunches wherever you walk, all feels washed in a tinted-out feel like when you screwed with the tv knobs as a kid, and it feels like the Earth will never Spring up again. I loathe Winter. When I die someday, may it be the end of August when the sun is high, the forest green, leafy, and dank, and the Earth is full of life. O Lord, let me die in an August!

My thoughts on the drive were permeated with twinges of pain from my side since I couldn't take analgesics while driving. I elected to drive in silence, to be alone with my thoughts. I thought, probably the darkest thoughts of my life, that I understood how people in chronic pain could want to end their suffering by their own hand....but that I had too much to live for to ever consider that option....also that my pain isn't always unbearable (this doesn't hurt anywhere nearly as bad as an acute gout attack). Don't worry, it was an academic exercise; this isn't a plea for help, rather, I felt like God was using someone else's vainglory to comfort me yesterday.

You want an explanation...I know, I know. Billy Joel isn't necessarily a tool in God's hands, but as the old yarn goes, "He moves in mysterious ways." "Come out Virginia" is devilishly catchy as a young man tries to get a Catholic girl to sleep with him, and many of his songs contain braggadocio-type lyrics that go against certain Christian mores. About halfway home the silence grew too much to bear, so I turned on the radio, eschewing all the talk radio fiends dicking over anything Obama or Congress may do to fix the soapy economy for some comfort music...first Boston, then "Time of my Life" from that movie where somebody tried to put Baby in a corner, then Billy Joel's "Keeping the Faith" came into my car and the lyrics, while at first listen might seem like Boomer-glory day revisiting came to me as if from On High, the way in November Wyclef Jean might say, "and then my voice comes in Pow!, in the middle of the night, and this is what I told you for Him:"

You know the good ole days weren't always good

CISAM no caso da menina de 9 anos, estuprada em Alagoinha - *Reconhecemos e aplaudimos a solidariedade, compromisso e eficiência que determinou o aborto legal realizado pela equipe de atenção à saúde do CISAM - Ce...

4 hours ago

Several Uninformed Rants, Plus Cute Pictures

Valkyrie - Look, I don't really like Tom Cruise. I often think he plays every character the same. And I'm not particularly excited about Scientology, though as an a...

3 days ago

Sisotowbell Lane

A Thermometer for Every Occasion - I wish that I could have shared him with anyone who needed to be loved because he certainly had enough love to go around for everyone. No pre-conditions.

...

2 months ago

meta

books i've recently read

1. The Abstinence Teacher
2. An Account, Much Abbreviated, of the Destruction of the Indies
3. The Conquest of New Spain
4. Etowah: The Political History of a Chiefdom Capital
5. The Kingdom of This World
6. The Underdogs
7. Rising Tide: The Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 & How It Changed America
8. Un viejo que leía novelas de amor

And tomorrow ain't as bad as it seems

*Now I told you my reasons for the whole revival
Now I'm going outside to have an ice cold [root] beer in the shade
Oh, I'm going to listen to my 45's
Ain't it wonderful to be alive
When the rock 'n' roll plays, yeah
When the memory stays, yeah
I'm keeping the faith
Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, keeping the faith
I'm keeping the faith, yes I am
You know I'm keeping the faith, oh yes I am
You know I'm keeping the faith, oh you are*

Thank you Mr. Joel & thank you God for reminding me that it is wonderful to be alive, even in pain.

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posted by mac at 8:04 am 5 comments [links to this post](#) 

wednesday, january 21, 2009

It's official, I'm getting old.

I just saw a commercial for the latest *Kidz Bop* CD and I didn't know any of the songs that they were mutilating.

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posted by mac at 4:08 pm 0 comments [links to this post](#) 

sunday, january 18, 2009

If I lived within driving/train distance of New York City

This is where I'd be Monday night:

http://www.jalc.org/about/news/2007/pdf/2008-12-18_Jan%2019%20Event%20Announcement.pdf

<http://www.cnn.com/2009/POLITICS/01/16/marsalis.inauguration/index.html>

Wynton Marsalis is a dynamic speaker and a gifted musician. Man, I miss New Orleans during Carnival season.

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posted by mac at 10:05 am 1 comments [links to this post](#) 

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9. One Hundred Years of Solitude

10. Napoleon: Soldier and Emperor

11. The New York Trilogy

12. The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao

13. *Quando los combes luchaban*

14. Foe

15. In Her Absence

16. True Blue: The Dramatic History of the Los Angeles Dodgers, Told by the Men Who Lived It

17. Guinea Ecuatorial: Vísceras

18. Shadows of Your Black Memory

19. Alice's Adventures in Wonderland

20. The United States and World War II

21. They Came Before Columbus

22. Untapped: The Scramble for Africa's Oil

movies watched in 2008 (not necessarily for the first time) 1 to 4 stars

Yes Man (**)

Reefer Madness (no stars)

The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers (HOF)

The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring (HOF)

Dumb and Dumber (HOF)

The Chronicles of Riddick *

The Dark Knight (HOF)

Hancock **

WALL-E ***

The Incredible Hulk ***

Inventing the Abbotts ***

Saving Silverman *

Blazing Saddles ***

Juno ****

Harold & Kumar Go to White
Castle **

Spiderman 3 ***

Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of
the Crystal Skull (no stars)

The Chronicles of Narnia: Prince
Caspian ***

EDtv ***

Big Fish ****

Letters from Iwo Jima ****

Flags of Our Fathers ***

Battlestar Galactica: Razor ***

Layer Cake *

Pan's Labyrinth**

The Libertine *

Confessions of a Dangerous Mind

Lord of the Rings: The Return of
the King ****

Band of Brothers (HOF)

Beautiful Creatures *

Eight Men Out **

O Brother Where Art Thou (HOF)

Superbad **

Knocked Up *

Casino Royale ***

Blood Diamond ****

Babel ***

Miller's Crossing ****