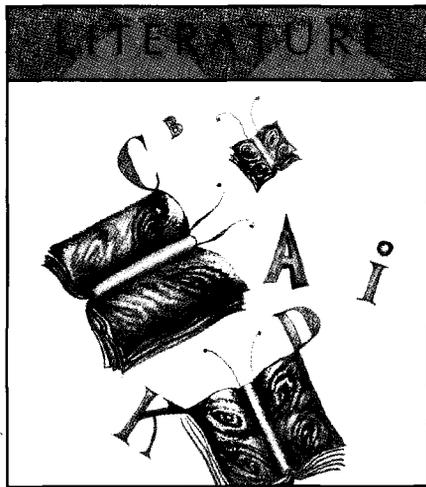


This elaborately produced *Cliff's Notes of Much Ado* is supposed to be high art. What it reminds me of is Tom Stoppard's *Fifteen Minute Hamlet*, which was meant as an irreverent joke.

There are other, smaller problems, too. Keanu Reeve's Don John is a cartoon villain, which he does less well than Mandy Patinkin did Inigo Montoya in *The Princess Bride*. Denzel Washington—as Reeve's half-brother!—is handsome enough but a disaster whenever he opens his mouth. His vowels and rhythms are all pitifully off. Michael Keaton's energetic-enough performance as Dogberry is that of a lunatic out of *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, but it is likely that the fault is more Branagh's than his own.

Where was I going with all this? I had some abstract notions about meddling, the perils of the human condition, and the risks of pride and vanity . . . but let it go. It's obvious and not worth doing.

David R. Slavitt is a poet and novelist living in Philadelphia.



Anna Myreck-Wrodecki

Exclusive by Stephen Provizer

Writer's Mags Exposed

Who's responsible for all those "Writer's magazines"—*Writer*, *Writer's Digest*, *Writer's Notebook*, etc.—clogging the newsstands of Harvard

Square? The unsuspecting peruser who comes to these periodicals seeking professional advice will be disappointed to find that they read like a cross between Norman Vincent Peale and *Robotics Monthly*. The truth is, writing is a rough and lonely trade and, as far as I'm concerned, the ilk of steely stoicism and treachery "inspiration" dished out by these rags just doesn't cut the mustard.

As a freelancer with a propensity toward self-destruction, I feel it is my duty to expose these journals and have therefore distilled a number of their typical stories down to a glistening pearl I call: "Clarence, Its Now or Never! (An Inspirational Yarn)."

"Growing up sixth in a Scotch Presbyterian family of 12 outside Home Fries, Pennsylvania, I didn't have much chance to think about what it meant to be an Artist; I was too busy fighting for haggis at the supper table. Like everyone in my family, it was expected that I would spend my life working in the local potato chip factory, raising an enormous and respectable family and serving as a lower-level functionary in the local church. But there was something different about me, even from the very beginning.

"As a toddler, I used to huddle under my nappy with a flashlight, reading E.B. White on style. In grammar school, I forged notes so erudite that not once did I have to bounce frozen soccer balls off my head in winter gym class. Most tellingly, while the other kids loitered in the penny candy section of the five and dime, I was in the stationery department, ogling the little spiral notebooks and Mont Blanc fountain pens.

"As the years went by, however, I allowed myself to be caught up in the numbing inertia that is Home Fries. I ended up in the chip factory, married with six kids, and while I continued to fill tiny notebooks and got so frustrated I sometimes thought I would kill to get the chance, I never seriously considered pursuing writing as a profession.

"Then, fate twisted the plot: one torrid summer's day, my wife Blossom's bagpipes unexpectedly exploded during the Founder's Day Parade and I was left a widower. Paradoxically, it was at this vulnerable junction in my life that I decided I had to make the great leap into the unknown. I was already 20 years old and time was slipping by—so many novellas unwritten; so many writing seminars unattended.

"My friends and neighbors were less than enthusiastic, pummeling me about the responsibilities of church, nuclear family, and community and trying to convince me I had the talent of a cockroach. It wasn't an easy decision to make, but I figured that, between the double indemnity insurance settlement and the government cheese giveaways, we'd get by. I knew I had to give it a shot. It was now or never.

"Once the decision was made and writing success targeted, it simply became a question of 'buckling down.' In my case, this meant shipping the kids off to in-laws, buying a set of E-Z Writer's Guides to Publication (available through this magazine), canceling my cable TV, locking myself in the den, and changing a few names to avoid litigation.

"Anyone who's been following the best-seller charts and the celebrity pages knows I haven't missed yet. Starting with *A Child's Book of Chips* (the very first book to be packaged in a cellophane bag, with completely edible pages), all the way up to my latest—*A Nacho Chip on My Shoulder* (off-beat humor with melted cheese and a medium-hot sauce)—I've had nothing but devoted readers and (thank goodness) great reviews. It should also be noted that I met and married a beautiful, intelligent model—a former Miss Clam Dip from Encino—and have had a vasectomy. So, my message to all you aspiring writers out there is—You can make it like me! Get yourself some of the little notebooks, insure your spouse, and don't forget to change the names!"

Well, friends, if this is what the canny editors of these magazines are passing off as inspiration, then I say give me blackhearted cynicism any day. When these people find someone whose biggest investment is filing cabinets to house rejection slips, who flies into a jealous rage just hearing the names "Bret," "Tama," and "Jay," whose mood swings Tarzan would get vertigo trying to swing on, *then* they will have my deep and abiding attention.

Until then, I admit I will continue to buy the magazines, but only for the classifieds; I've found a guy can actually make a pretty good living writing sensitive pornography and humorous gag lines for New Age greeting card companies in Maine.

Stephen Provizer writes from Cambridge, Massachusetts.

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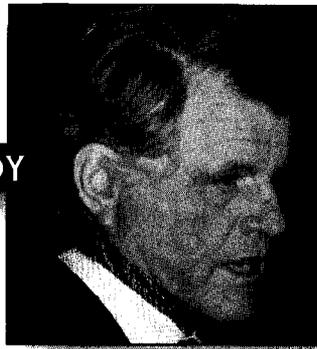
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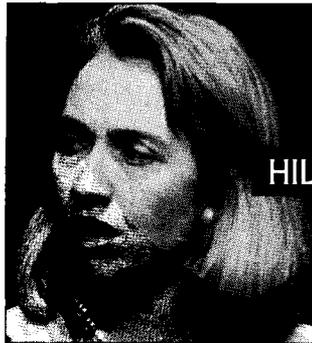
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