

EMIE Bulletin

Ethnic and Multicultural Information Exchange Round Table

Vol. XXII No. 2 Winter 2004

ISSN 0737-9021

American Library Association

C.J. Beck: on *Spiked*, his “Quiet American” in South Africa.

Novelist C.J. Beck talks to Olga Kuharets, Co-Editor, EMIE Bulletin

C.J. Beck joined journalism ‘on the run,’ winning the Student Newspaper of the Year award when editor of his university newspaper and British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw was union president. Several years later he was in advertising, working alongside ANC leader and poet Wally Serote and then briefing antiapartheid activists like Inkatha’s Gatsha Mangosuthu Buthelezi. He uses his experiences during this period as a backdrop to his political thriller *Spiked*.

OK: You stepped out in the middle of a meteoric business career to write *Spiked*. What prompted you to invest so much to write this long multilayered novel?

C.J.B: Twenty years ago I wrote an unpublished novel called *Malundi*. It was my response to the sheer sloppiness of U.S. media reportage on South Africa. I wanted people to share a more three-dimensional experience of that country from all sides and points-of-view. New parts of my nature emerged that I didn’t know were there. The reporter. The empath. The story teller. In 2004, *Spiked* is intended to reach a new audience that may neither know nor care how people felt during those days. Because the action takes place fifteen years back, on another continent 12,000 miles away from the U.S., it can provide a context where people of any color may more objectively empathize with the characters. I will always remember my first visit to the United States in 1976. There appeared, then and even now, more separateness between the groups here than in a country where division was legislated. South Africa offers a safer surrogate for us to consider our differences, real and imagined.

OK: But you only touch on that theme very subtly in *Spiked*. The plot is driven very much by the two partners working together in the story.

CJB: You said it. Working together. From polar opposite

backgrounds and points-of-view. Look most socially-oriented, message laden work loses the plot and their audiences once they appear too preachy. Big shifts in the public imagination require you create appeals that can reach a public outside their usual sand box. Most media, most books preach to the choir. There’s a great market in there for journeyman authors, but little chance of shifting opinions.

OK: So you see the novel as an instrument of social change?

CJB: Only a very few are, by accident or design. Most not. Charles Dickens’ magazine part-works became “novels” that exposed the world of the British working poor in the 19th century. But only to highlight the struggle of his characters. Your readers can probably reel off a list of American writers from Steinbeck to Angelou who have similar impact.

OK: Even your villains have a warm side...

(Continued on page 3)

In this issue...

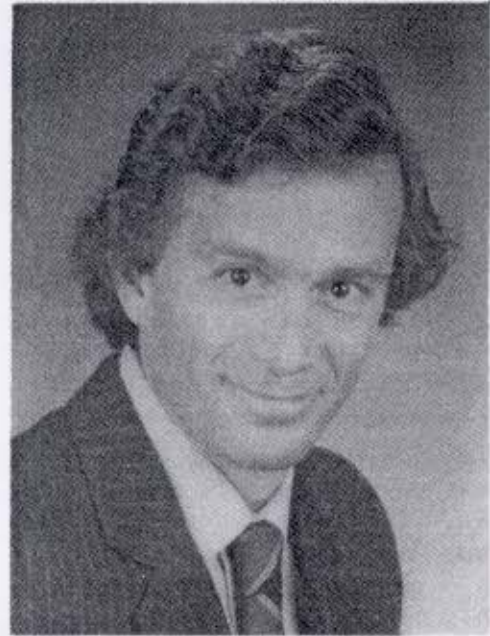
From the Chair	2
David Cohen.....	4
Jewish Info Committee	6
Children’s Reviews	8

CJB (interrupting): People will only appreciate how the corrupt inspire followers when we show their warm side. They succeed by seduction. Evil is an absence of good, not the other way round. Watch animals in the African bush. Have you ever seen willful evil there?

OK: You were raised in Ireland, educated in England and have worked the last thirty years in South Africa, Canada and the United States. How would you define yourself geographically and politically?

CJB: Oliver Goldsmith got it when he referred to himself as an citizen du monde. In *Spiked*, ex-White House correspondent Jim Strachan quotes the words of Marx, Groucho not Karl, saying "I wouldn't join any club that would have me." Strachan eventually realizes that if journalism's aim is to report the truth, it is incompatible with politics. Readers need to choose their writers well. That is, if they seriously want to learn others aspects of the truth rather than just have their preconceptions massaged by the Fox Channel, The *New York Times* or their current favorite book. The numbers show most don't. The sound journalist, like the sound artist, seeks to make the significant engaging and relevant. He advances the story and, more importantly, the human condition if he can reveal the heart of the truth. And surprise, surprise, even the most prejudiced will recognize an unpleasant truth when it is well done.

C.J. Beck, *Spiked*, Xlibris 2002, 466 pages, ISBN 1-4010-4030-6



C. J. Beck

(Continued from page 2)

events took place outside of this week due to the participation of a large number of organizations, including the Mahatma Gandhi Library of Houston, the Harris County Public Library and Fort Bend County Library systems, and the Houston Storytellers Guild. I am pleased to report that I have been involved with this series of exhibits and programs as both a librarian and as a storyteller. Working with the Mahatma Gandhi Library of Houston, I assisted with arranging storytellers for the library locations hosting exhibits and programs, and shared a children's version of the story of Gandhi at several library locations as well as three Hindu temples. After each of the storytelling-sessions, the children would use a quote from Gandhi to create a picture related to the quote. In other events, older youth were involved in speech and essay contests about Gandhi. This has been a wonderful experience and I hope to have a poster display at the Diversity Fair at ALA Annual in Chicago in 2005. I encourage any of you interested in such a celebration event to pursue the possibility with organizations in your area, and to consider similar events which can highlight the sharing and exchange of cultural and intellectual information.

EMIERT Programming Process

In order to enhance the process of planning and implementing EMIERT programs for ALA Annual Conferences, all EMIERT units providing conference programs should be planning at least one year in advance. This will allow for greater coordination of EMIERT programs and avoid any schedule conflicts so EMIERT members and conference attendees can attend all EMIERT programs.

Thus, possible programs for ALA Annual 2006 should be ready for discussion at ALA Midwinter 2005 in Boston.

Further, in order to coordinate the EMIERT programming process, all EMIERT program information should be submitted to Myra who will coordinate and submit the ALA program forms to ALA. Please make sure that all program informational forms are routed through Myra. Thanks!

I look forward to seeing you at Midwinter in Boston!

Cheers, Victor Schill, Chair, EMIERT