

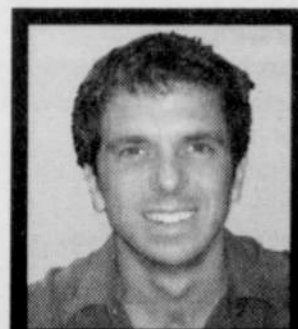
HUMOR

The green-eyed monster

David Sedaris and me

I am not a petty person. OK, that's a lie. I'm a very petty person. If I were a rock 'n' roller, I'd be Tom Petty. If I were in the Navy, I'd be chief petty officer. If I were underwear, I'd be a petticoat.

So it's not surprising that the unprecedented success of humorist David Sedaris would send me into an emotional tailspin. Think about it. He's a gay writer of comic essays. I'm a gay writer of comic essays. He's sold upward of 2.5 million books, packs 2,000-seat auditoriums as if he were the touring company of



The Gospel According to Marc
by Marc Acito

The Producers and owns apartments in New York, Paris and London. I'm...well, I'm going to bed now and pulling the covers over my head.

But it's not just Sedaris' success that I envy; it's his undeniable talent. His most recently published collection, *Dress Your Family in Corduroy and Denim*, once again demon-

strates his gift for saying the thing you think, but in the marvelously clever way you wish you had said it.

Yet while readers may thrill at seeing their own thoughts so eloquently expressed, writers like me mutter contemptuously to ourselves like Salieri in *Amadeus*.

Even a favorable comparison, while flattering, carries with it the implicit message that, at best, you are derivative and unoriginal. Whenever someone says I write like

David Sedaris, I have to restrain myself from snapping, "No, he writes like ME."

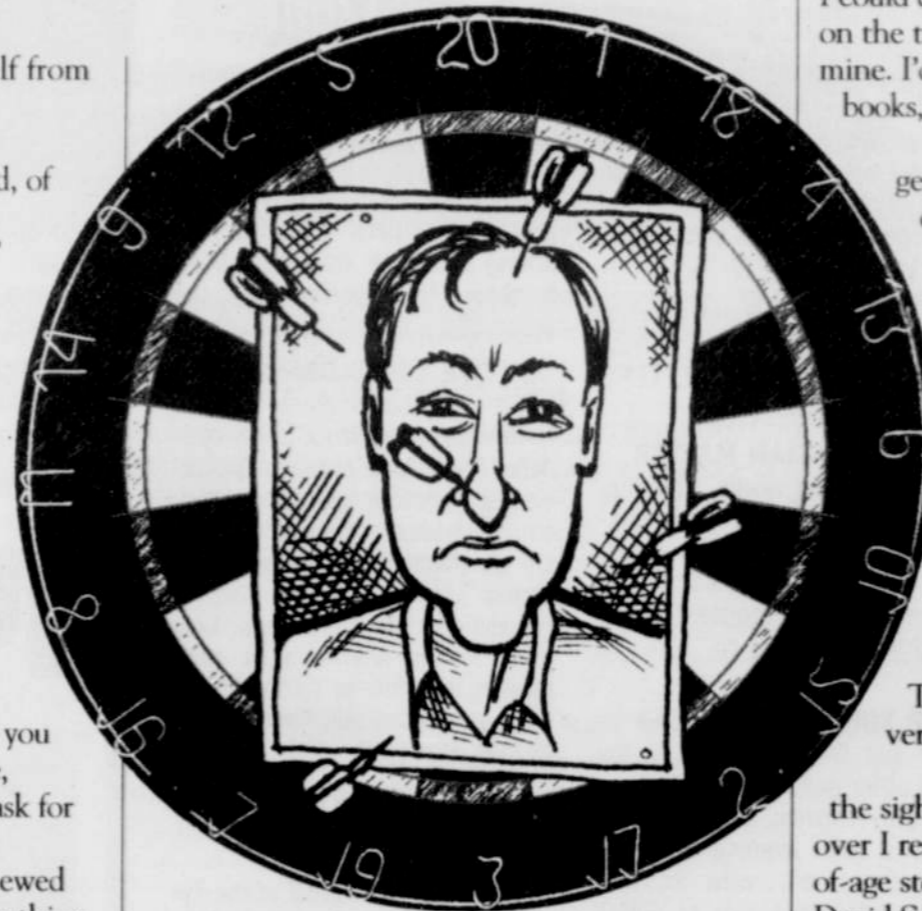
It's not one of my finer moments. Shakespeare wrote, "Beware, my lord, of jealousy; it is the green-ey'd monster which doth mock the meat it feeds on." Now, I don't like having my meat mocked any more than the next guy, but I do actually believe jealousy is a useful emotion.

Believe it or not, I am an evolved enough person not to bear any ill will toward Sedaris. To wish that he, say, suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune is a stingy way of looking at the universe. I truly believe if he can be successful, I can, too.

The way I see it, jealousy is a map, your subconscious mind's way of leading you toward the life you wish to have. For me, Sedaris is the gas station attendant you ask for directions.

I asked for even more when I interviewed him in the summer of 2001. You see, the thing about meeting celebrities is that it's not so much that you want to know about them as you want THEM to know about YOU.

I already knew plenty about Sedaris, but MY life was a total mystery to him, so I spent most of the interview talking about myself, secretly hoping he would turn to me and say, "Y'know, Marc, not only is it obvious you are



you a kindred spirit, but clearly you're a brilliant undiscovered talent. Please allow me to help you advance your career. And let's be best friends forever."

Actually, what he did say was that he missed the structure of having a day job. "There's nothing good about writing full time," he said. "It just means your whole life is based

on a paragraph. If you have to go to work, then at least you have a feeling of accomplishment."

I understood what he meant but, at the time, I owned a business I loathed so much, I wanted to chew my arm off. So it was all I could do to stop myself from flinging my keys on the table and saying: "You want a job? Take mine. I'd be happy to live in Paris and write books, you ungrateful son of a bitch."

For his part, Sedaris was a perfect gentleman—thoughtful, self-effacing, eager to please. He even picked up the tab and sent me a thank-you note in which he wished me luck with my novel. Yet meeting him threw me into a funk that lasted days.

Seven hundred days, to be exact. That's how long it was before Floyd and I finally sold the loathsome business, giving me the freedom to finish my first novel, which, in fulfillment of my most feverish fantasies, sold to Random House and was optioned by Columbia Pictures. The Jealousy Map had led me from a very dark place to a lighter one indeed.

When the galleys arrived, I thrilled at the sight of my name on the cover. Flipping it over I read the jacket copy: "A farcical coming-of-age story, *How I Paid for College* reads as if David Sedaris had reimagined *The Catcher in the Rye*."

Somehow it seems appropriate. And that, my friends, is *The Gospel According to Marc*.

MARC ACITO'S Sedaris-like novel will be published in September. Send ideas for his next book to marc@marcacito.com.

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