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Wednesday, Jan. 2, 2008

Conservative agenda: Mostly mission before luxury

by Ellyn Wexler | Staff Writer

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Fiction is a luxury for Kenneth R. Timmerman. The 55-year-old Kensington journalist and neoconservative political activist published his second novel "Honor Killing" this year, but nonfiction has been the mainstay of his writing career.

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"Fiction has always been my first love, because it allows you to not just write about things, but to actually create characters and places that a reader can see and smell and hear and taste," he explains.

The genre captivated him early. Raised in the New Jersey suburbs, Timmerman "learned to read in the rather voluminous lap of my maternal grandmother ... whose only real joy was taking care of her [four] grandchildren.

"My earliest literary influences, from her, were Kipling's 'Just So Stories,' Lewis Carroll and the Bible."

At Dartmouth, he studied literature and writing, and did his undergraduate thesis on James Joyce's "Finnegan's Wake," then studied with novelist John Hawkes for a master's degree at Brown University. Thus equipped at age 21, Timmerman "traveled to France with about \$500 in my pocket and a novel in my suitcase."

During what became an 18-year stay abroad, Timmerman says he "organized the expatriate literary movement in Paris around Shakespeare & Co., a cultish bookstore" from which he produced Paris Voices, "an occasional literary magazine." He also worked as a freelance journalist, publishing his first story in 1977 "based on clandestine interviews in

Czechoslovakia with signers of the Charter 77 movement, a precursor to Solidarity in Poland."

As the Middle East correspondent for the Atlanta-Journal Constitution during the early 1980s, he "interviewed most of the first wave of political refugees from the new regime [in Iran], the Shah's last prime minister ... the first democratically-elected president under the new regime ... and a host of dissidents of all stripes."

A small British press published Timmerman's first novel, "The Wren Hunt," which he



Rich Gibson/hewsmax
Journalist Kenneth R. Timmerman recently published a second novel.

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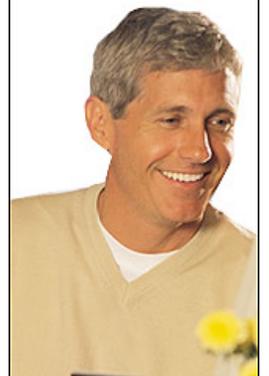
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describes as “a Mediterranean island romance that draws extensively on ancient folkloric traditions of repentance, death and rebirth, in 1982.

Soon after the book came out, Timmerman went to Lebanon as a freelance radio reporter covering the Israeli-PLO war. (He was kidnapped by the PLO and held hostage in an underground cell for 24 days during the siege of Beirut.) Later that decade, covering the Iran-Iraq war, he learned about Iraq’s buildup of deadly weapons.



While based in Paris, the writer also married and fathered five children, worked as a teacher and investigative reporter, and published a non-fiction book, “Fanning the Flames: Guns, Greed and Geopolitics in the Gulf War.”

Timmerman says “the proudest moment of my professional life occurred in 1992,” after completing “a study for the Simon Wiesenthal Center entitled ‘Weapons of Mass Destruction: the Cases of Libya, Syria and Iran,’ which included a listing of predominantly Western companies that were supplying those regimes with dual-use technology.” Nazi hunter Wiesenthal introduced him to an audience by saying, “I have spent my life tracking the murderers of yesterday. Mr. Timmerman is tracking the murderers of tomorrow.”

Timmerman says he has “always tried to live up to that dreadful commission from a man I deeply honor.” Wiesenthal’s words, he notes, meant more to him than a subsequent Nobel Peace Prize nomination for “his work in exposing the Islamic Republic of Iran’s nuclear weapons program.”

In 1993, the Timmermans moved to Washington, D.C., where he would “spearhead investigations into weapons proliferation as a professional staff member of the House Foreign Affairs committee.”

Timmerman produced four more nonfiction books between 2002 and 2005, their titles clearly revealing his political bent: “Shakedown: Exposing the Real Jesse Jackson,” “Preachers of Hate: Islam and the War Against America,” “The French Betrayal of America” and “Countdown to Crisis: The Coming Nuclear Showdown with Iran.”

Finally, says Timmerman, “after writing five successful non-fiction books, I ... had enough money and time to carve out a block of time to return to fiction. I wrote ‘Honor Killing’ mostly at my refuge in the south of France during the winter of 2005-2006.”

The book, he says, “combines two seemingly unrelated stories. The first involves a plot by top Iranian government officials to secretly bring a nuclear weapon into the United States. The second is essentially a murder mystery that begins with the discovery of a body of a 17-year-old Muslim girl ... along the banks of the Patuxent River in Montgomery County.”

Timmerman not only writes books and works as a journalist for the conservative online news agency Newsmax.com. He also does consulting “on proliferation and intelligence issues ... [has] testified as an expert witness in a number of high-profile terrorism cases, and currently is assisting victims of the Sept. 11 attacks in a lawsuit against the Islamic Republic of Iran.” President of the Foundation for Democracy in Iran, Timmerman says the independent nonprofit “has served as a rallying point for Iranian democrats seeking an end to brutal, clerical rule in Iran, and has helped keep Congress and the public informed of ongoing repression and support for terrorism.”

With all these endeavors, Timmerman acknowledges he has much to do “before I get the luxury of returning to fiction.” He has already completed “Soldiers Without a Country,” the first volume of a projected series of novels about Lebanon.

For now, though, he has a different agenda.

“I believe I have been called to bring a greater awareness to Americans of the plight of Iraqi Christian refugees driven from their homes by the recent war,” he says, having recently interviewed refugee families in Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon.

“I firmly believe,” he adds, “that the revival of Christianity in the Holy Land and in the land of Elam is part of God’s plan, and presents the only hope for peace in that region.”