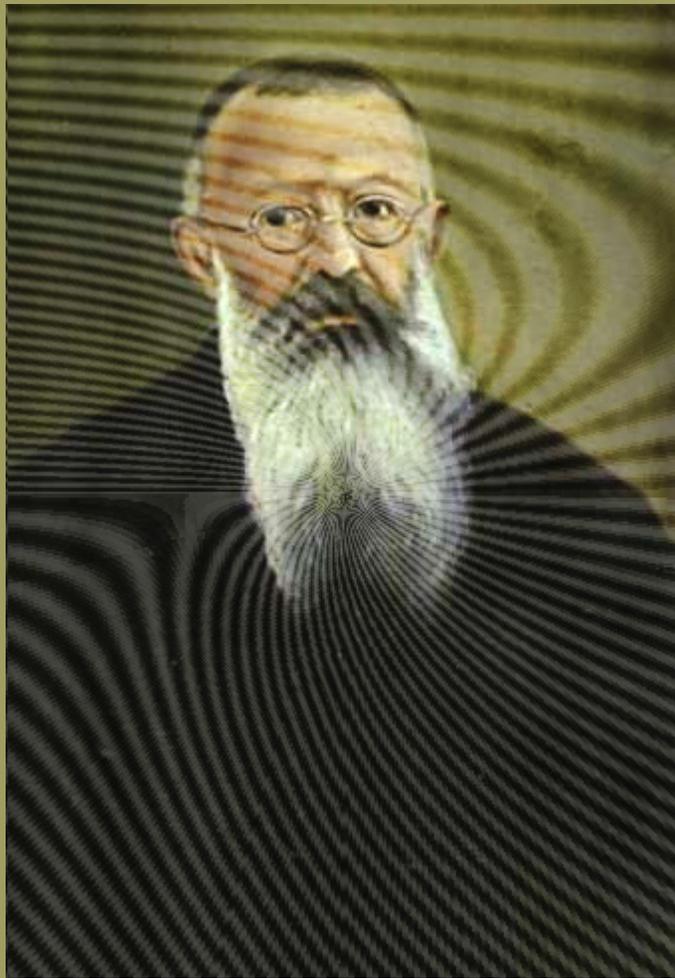


Crap!

Excerpts from the work of
Paolo Honorificas



In Memoriam;
The death of Paolo Honorificas,
With an introduction By Scott Malby

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Portions of the Paolo Honorificas interviews have appeared in print and on the internet in Bathtub Gin, Tin Lustre Mobile, The Swamp, Zygote In My Coffee and the Dream People.



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In Memoriam; The death of Paolo Honorificas

An introduction By Scott Malby

"An introduction is the weirdest of forms. It tells us something about our minds. It's both a summation and a beginning. It's usually written after everything else is over but ends up preceding what it actually followed." Paolo Honorificas, the internet poet

I'm writing this memorial introduction because Paolo is dead. At least we think he is. He's not been seen at his favorite bar, flea market or Laundromat for weeks. He was probably murdered. Anyone who came into contact with him could have done it. He was that irritating. He possessed all the noxious characteristics of a penniless poet.

He was a liar and a cheat. He was unable to tell the difference between his own imagination and reality. He was always writing things down and was both absentminded and forgetful whenever it suited him. He got on everyone's nerves. He borrowed money from people and never paid it back. He never ordered anything at a restaurant but ate off of everyone else's plate. While in the process of stealing a half used roll of toilet tissue, Paolo slipped off the broken toilet seat at the Salvation Army and successfully sued them for second degree bum burns.

Like his writing, Paolo lacked wit and charm. He was clueless. Everything went over his head. He had a yellow, industrial smile and was missing one of his front teeth. He was totally tasteless. He was smug and arrogant. The zipper on his pants was usually broken. He showered only when he felt like it and most would agree he would have been a far more successful writer if he had felt like it more often. His aftershave smelled like a strange mixture of garlic, urine and stale beer.

His one saving grace was his ability to make us all feel both more fortunate and superior in comparison to him. He was a hack. Paolo's lack of success is a lesson to us all. Writers are self destructive. Their lives tend to be one long anticlimactic series of messy, uneventful little procrastinations. What is even more significant is that Paolo was a terrible writer. His work is so bad it will never go out of fashion. Future readers who stumble over excerpts of his journal will find him just as inane and inappropriate as we do today. A hundred years from now conspiring writers will continue to draw inspiration from the fact that if he could get published anyone can. This leads me to the two reasons why I am writing this introductory memorial and not someone else.

While Paolo had many acquaintances, he had few friends. Those of us unlucky enough to know him drew straws to see who would write this. I lost. These very words are coming at the cost of my better judgment. The second reason is that I was stupid enough to buy a box from him at one of his frequent yard sales.

Inside the box was his postmodern journal. It represented a pastiche of reflections, diatribes, diary jottings, indecipherable musings and fragmented, personal notes characteristic of a frustrated unsuccessful writer in the first half of the 21st. century. It thus can be read as a historical document about failure in our time. Future writers will find it invaluable regarding what to avoid in terms of style, structure and thematic presentation.

The fact is that Paolo had no literary life so he made one up. He became the secretary of the Lost Bay Poet's Society. This society met once a month inside his head. Paolo was also a columnist and reviewer for a number of internet journals. This might well explain his many flaws as a writer.

His interviews were infamous. He interviewed God one day and the devil the next. He sought out and interviewed awful poets. From the crypt of his own mediocrity he brought dead writers back to life and proceeded to thoroughly mangle his interpretation of them. His interview with a naked William Blake continues to cause me nightmares. Under the guise of a Mss Puss Wuss, Paolo wrote mean spirited unamusing advice columns of absolutely no redeeming social value.

Paolo would be the first person to tell you that he believed the internet was not a serious venue for writers. He felt it was a flawed medium filled with bad taste and questionable writing. A place he felt thoroughly at home in. A place where the not so good air their dirty underwear in pretentious little ezines run by junior wanna bees buzzing around the fertilizer in someone else's literary garden, unable to tell the difference between a rare flower and a common weed.

It was also Paolo's contention that most online literary journals were edited by frustrated writers who started up their own electronic rags primarily to establish a name for themselves and be interviewed by editors of similar electronic mags so that internet publishing could become one smug family of like minded literary pettifoggery.

Let me hasten to add here that this was Paolo's take on an amazingly vibrant scene and not my own. I couldn't disagree with Paolo more vehemently on this issue. I'm still alive and writing. I depend on these journals regarding publishing my own work. Palo be damned. Even in death he manages to cause me continued grief.

In reading Paolo's material it appears that he might well have been a Sufi in disguise who suffered too many brain hemorrhages. His mind was held hostage somewhere and never ransomed. Left field was his terrain of choice. You didn't have to know Paolo personally to realize how far off base he was. You need only read his questionable journal and you will certainly discover that for yourself.

In editing and translating his journal I took certain liberties. Paolo did not believe in capitol letters, paragraphs or periods. He once told me that writing for him was like climbing up the tree of hard knocks and diving into a waterless cement pool. Like most of his analogies I tried not to search too hard for hidden significance. In this particular case I did ask him what he meant. I was surprised to learn that as a child one of Paolo's hobbies was to climb up trees and dive into empty cement pools. I believed him. There is a certain disorienting,

concrete aspect to his elucidations that can be explained in no other way.

Reality for him was ultimately found at the bottom of life's pool. His warped mind and broken nose bear testament to his forays into a realism he continually found himself spluttering against. To his credit he would get up, dust himself off and suddenly soar into inspirational flights of fantasy before leaving his figural shape in the cement again. Like his life his words are accidents waiting for something awful to happen to them.

My translation of his journal is incomplete. Approximately a third of it has managed to find its way into print. Working on it has been a thankless, depressing task. I have found neither satisfaction, money nor recognition in the difficult job. Indeed, my reputation itself has suffered. There were times I thought I was turning into Paolo myself. My psychiatrist has informed me that I can't continue with this madness. I'm running the danger of developing a multiple personality deficit disorder.

Most significantly, Paolo's death has led me to reconsider my own mortality. I've set aside my own creative aspirations for far too long. It's time I resumed my own work. It's my guess that the person most upset by Paolo's death is Paolo himself. I know if I were the one who died I'd probably feel that way. What about you?

Sincerely, Scott Malby
February, 2004

Wagtail Headed for the Nobel!

An Interview with Edmond Wagtail

Editor of “Scratch” Ezine

Interviewed by Paolo Honorificas

Part I

Philosopher, poet, novelist, essayist, playwright and humanitarian, Edmond Wagtail is not only the editor of **Scratch** but a leading contender in the Nobel race. The author of motivational books on a wide variety of subjects. His latest compilation of poems **“Possession”** was recently published by **Brimstone Press** and has been described in an article by a former President of the American Academy of Poetry as: “...a must read distillation, too hot to handle!”

Wagtail has received numerous awards. Over the years he has been in and out of fashion. His literary output continues to proliferate. Early in his career he was quoted as saying, “I’m out to convert the world and have fun in doing it!”. True to his artistic vision and commitment he has never given up on that promise. This is the first of an exclusive two part interview with the noted writer and editor.

Q: The subject of the interview today is your seminal journal “Scratch”. However, I wonder if you minded commenting on your ground breaking, highly lauded poetry compilation called “Possession”. It just came out. Can you give a short description of it?

A: To talk about a thing is not to touch the truth of the thing itself. Possession represents an anti-lyrical “hellish” voyage into the realm of non-meaning. The approach involves layering feelings and urges, fragmenting them till they melt. My own feelings as well as the feelings of others. What emotions are, what they do for us and how we come to have them is the phenomenological basis of the work.

Q: How does it differ from your numerous, previous publications.

A: “Possession” was an attempt to break out of existing conventions and perceptions. I felt myself stereotyped. I mean, people heard of me but they didn’t really “know” me, not in a “biblical” sense anyway. It represents my side of the story regarding what has come to be more than just a literary

debate between me and my maker.

Q: Remarkable to me is the degree of human understanding evidenced in the work. The poetry in it shows you to be very vulnerable and empathetic.. . you spend as much time talking about the urges of others as you do your own.

A: “Possession” has a great deal of passion in it. I’ve always been very interested in people and what makes them tick. When you open yourself up like I have in my poetry you run the danger of being misunderstood. Disappointment is part of the game.

Q: ...and yet, there is a great deal of sympathetic observation in the volume.

A: Of course. I’m a people person. I’m drawn to them. So much of myself is reflected in what they do. I understand their frustrations and yearnings, so much like my own. Metaphorically speaking, we are suddenly castaways on an unfamiliar shore without a clue as to where we came from and what we should be doing. “Possession” helps to answer some of these questions. It creates a mythos for self discovery. For doing...

Q: What should we be doing?

A: Depends on who you are. Learning to go beyond the limits is important as is recognizing that its all right to have a good time and be self-indulgent.

Q: You graduated from Princeton?

A: Yes and went on for post-graduate work to Cambridge. I recommend both schools highly. What I am today is due to their formative influences. I return often in order to lecture to undergraduates. At Cambridge I developed the “mocumentary” which “Scratch” came to be known for.

Q: You have a strong following in those two places?

A: I like to think so. I know so.

Q: I’m told you have what amounts to a cult following at both schools.

A: Its very flattering to me personally. I don’t deserve it.

Q: How would you define human nature in your work?

A: A very intelligent question. I look at what people do and how they behave. If they do something then we can say its in their natures to do it. Jealousy, anger, lust, hatred and deception are examples. The role of my motivational writings has been to show people how they can make their secret fantasies come true.

Q: What about love and compassion as motivating influences?

A: They are negative constructs. I’ll give you an example. A sense of shame is not human

nature. That feeling is sort of implanted in us by way of the developing ego. The id represents the repository of all our natures. If you mean self-love, its there. Compassion is a frivolous, foreign importation.

Q: From where?

A: From Canada I think.

Q: Now to your journal. It is the oldest literary “ezine” on the web and yet it still sets standards that others emulate.

A: We pay a lot of attention to developing technology. Eighty per cent of the other “ezines” have opted for the black background we pioneered. Flames too were our innovation. We also invented the “rejection slip”. The term “postmodern” and “gothic” were coined by us. Chat rooms and internet pornography were first introduced by “Scratch”. We offer special classes in the summer for aspiring editors and frustrated college professors.

Q: You could go on and on. The second part of our interview will cover some of your literary and social theories but I wonder if you could tell us what you mean by the term “modern” and “postmodern” in your literary oeuvre.

A: I intend them as cultural terms primarily. The modern era is characterized by the rise of the common man, nationalism, architecturally grandiose constructions called sky scrapers, faith in science, humanism, commercialism and a consequent alienation. It a populist term trendy literati and social commentators get paid for using. On the literary side it runs the gamut from faith in the future to a suspicious condemnation and retreat into the realm of the silly. The height of the “modern” came with the development of the atomic and hydrogen bombs. Its decline is seen in our distrust of science and all things institutional, the loss of cultural heroes and in the recognition of our inability to deal adequately with social, political and environmental concerns. We should add that the rise of the term “modern” coincides with the cultural supremacy of Europe and North America. The “postmodern” coincides with the development of internet technology and the rise of the “ezine” at the expense of traditional printing technologies. The influence of Latin American and third world writers is an example of incipient postmodernism. In other words we are at the tail end of one epoch and just entering another.

Q: One innovation I am specially interested in is how you came up with the idea of the paying “poetry contest“. Charging people to read their poetry was a brilliant innovation.

A: It has caught on. The idea of a person expending all their sweat writing something and then finding a way to charge them money for the work they did appealed to me. Its what we call in the trade: “irony”. Essentially it works this way: you start a contest and charge each person a reading fee. Of course, you aren’t paying anyone to read the material. Oh, you might read a stanza or two before you reject the piece, but that’s all. So all the money it brings in is pure cream. The whole contest approach has become an international, erotically charged poetic fetish.

Q: Exactly. What would you say is the role of the literary philosopher in the electronic age?

A: I can answer that in two words, “frustrated confusion”. Our analysts are already moving in the direction of a postmodern obfuscation that mirrors the post-electronic age.

Q: What do you mean?

A: American prose and metrics has reached a new plateau thanks to journals like ours. We obfuscate and tease. I must say we can’t take all the credit. The prestigious college literary “ezine” was primarily created to provide an outlet for writing schools. I mean what’s the use of putting all those thousands of people in debt regarding their tuition if there wasn’t a place they could submit their material to. We work on the intimidation model. We encourage everyone to write uniformly. If it sounds edited or polished in any way we reject it out of hand. Frustrated writers end up back in school which keeps the system in perpetual rotative motion. Its called the “first draft” principle. Standardization is the key. Keep the people guessing so everyone feels they have an equal chance.

Q: I’m sure there is more to being a literary critic.

A: Certainly. We’re just touching the tip of the ice berg here. Its my experience that the more ineffectual the writer the better the editor. At “Scratch” we are edgy and pugnacious under cover of a superficial politeness. As it should be, impotence is the vehicle that propels our sarcasm. That’s just my opinion of course. What we’re after is the narrow, specialized writer who becomes our reader. The whole approach is to remove poetry from its religious and populist roots in an effort to fragment and marginalize it. Over the years we have succeeded in a small way. I’m proud of our efforts in this regard.

Q: What kind of things do you like to see in a poem?

A: A difficult question. Non meaning...egotism...solipsism ...before I read a poem I count the number of times “I” is mentioned. The more adjectives the better. If there are a lot of them I know I will like it. The writer’s obsession with “me-ness” makes my job that much easier. I like poems so intensely personal that it is impossible for anyone but the author to identify with them. There is no such thing as a general reader anyway. Of course, its important to maintain the fiction that poetry has no significance beyond the “illogic” of the words themselves. It is that very “illogic” that goes a long way in fragmenting the individuals perception of the world. The more fragmented and alienated we are means the more frustrated poets there are and the better I like it. The jaded idealistic modernist is a postmodernist begging for conversion.

Q: What should young poets be doing?

A: Anything they want to do. Suffer mostly. Smoke cigarettes. Personally, I recommend having a lot of unprotected sex. Drinking is good. Covering your body with tattoos and body jewelry is cute. Experience and imagination are qualities I would put far down on the list. My best advice is don’t do anything. Take drugs, drink a lot of cheap wine, have a sex change, feel misunderstood and write cheap, pathetic diatribes filled with angst. The young poet who can accomplish such things is assured of my attention.

Q: What are some of your favorite words or sentences?

A: Words dealing with “exile” and “loss” as well as qualities such as “pride”, “arrogance” and “envy” have a fascination for me. The phrase “The devil made me do it” appeals to me for some reason. Can’t tell you why. But really, the devil never makes a person do anything unless that person always wanted to do it in the first place. “Humdinger” is appealing. “Possession” must have some significance for me as I used it as a title. I like words that resonate. Like “damn” or “hell” or phrases like “I promise I’ll pay you back Tuesday”. My personal motto is “Carpe Dementia”.

Q: Your favorite authors?

A: Dante, Milton, Pinsky, Alistair Crowley, De Sade, Penthouse, Billy Collins. I am a great fan of Cliff Notes. Reader’s Digest is good.

Q: Your favorite desert?

A: I love to vacation in the Sinai and eat bits of angel food cake. Devil’s food gives me heartburn.

Q: Thank you for taking the time to speak with us.

A: My pleasure

An Interview with Edmond Wagtail

Part II

Q: This is the second part of our interview with Edmund Wagtail, academician, philosopher and editor of the influential “ezine” Scratch.

Mr. Wagtail, I thought we would devote this second part of our interview to a more technical discussion of some of your deconstructively degenerating social, philosophical and literary theories.

A: Go ahead...nothing means anything anyway.

Q: In your well known article in the New Republic, “The End of the World As We Know It” you correctly predicted the fall of communism, structuralism and the rise of postmodern aesthetics.

A: Yes, I think they are all related.

Q: In what way?

A: Well, all three were and are built on premises that are impossible to maintain. You see man is a finite creature. That kind of limitation makes special demands on the theoretical constructs that are developed. I mean what can you know when we all know that you can't really know it in the first place.

Q: Which means that intellectual theories can't be viewed within their historical and cultural environments?

A: Exactly. Remember as well that a movement is not necessarily a theory. A bowel movement for example can be looked at from a number of vantage points and constructs. Would you describe it as epic, lyrical or narrative?

Q: That depends on the perceivers perception of the event.

A: Right. Is it an act in itself or is it a process having a cultural and biological history with antecedent roots?

Q: Most of us would argue that it is both.

A: Certainly. You can say that because you've experienced it. However, your experience of that specific event may not be another's nor does it say anything about the fact that you may

have different experiences of the same act depending on the time of day, your own ever changing eating habits, constitution and a host of other interrelated factors.

Q: Are you talking about “confusion theory” here?

A: No. Confusion theory is the dominate paradigm both academically and poetically but it is a different thing. Let me use a referent you might be more in tuned to. We have “post-modern”, “Post-Modern” and “postmodern”. These are three very different things. Confusion theory posits for example, that the intellectual community will establish reputations and produce thousands of journal articles confusing the terms so that more reputations can be made and thousands of journal articles written in an effort to redefine and separate the terms into their original referential contexts.

Q: Interesting but what do the terms mean?

A: Whatever you want them to in one sense so why even try defining them except to see what you can personally discover in the act which has absolutely no significance at all. Not even to yourself. That would be a postmodern interpretation. However, for the sake of explication we can say that first there is Toynbee’s term “post-modern” which sort of ends when he coined it, around the period of WWII, I think. The relevance for literature comes in 1959 with Irving Howe’s “Mass Society and Post-Modern Fiction” Then there is the “postmodern” which I alluded to earlier.

Q: But Lemke...

A: What about him?

Q: He suggested that “postmodernism” developed out of post-structuralist and deconstruction theories which, in their turn, were an attempt at pointing out the weaknesses of the structuralist movement.

A: What does that shmuck know. He couldn’t even see the post-structural resurgence.

Q: What are the implications for poetry?

A: Its manifold but to really look at it we have to define what we mean by non-meaning in poetry.

Q: Would you care to define it?

A: To do that I would first have to explain where we now look for meaning to come from.

Q: Where is that?

A: Damn if I know. That’s the problem. Remember, I said earlier that communism, structuralism and postmodernism are interrelated.

Q: Yes...

A: The fall of communism pointed to the fallacy of believing in political constructs. Academic institutions filled in the gap.

Q: Why is that?

A: Because the only thing left to believe in was “education”.

Q: What about capitalism?

A: Are you serious? Communism developed because of the recognized failures of Capitalism both as an economic system and as an ideology. The fact that Communism was an essentially bankrupt ideology doesn't make Capitalism any less spurious. Distrust in the systems themselves have led us to this point.

Q: I see...

A: When you start to look back at a period and begin to analyze it, you begin by building a structure of definitions to separate yourself from it. When terms are defined an artificial, intellectual entity emerges. “Postmodernism” is such an entity. Not real really. Lives are spent and millions of dollars of public funds expended in an effort to prove its existence. We could call the new significance of our educational institutions a form of postmodern cultural fascism. Poetry like philosophy has been co-opted by academic entities that now set the rules and definitions. Its what I call my “conspiracy theory”. You have to recognize that English majors are not the brightest people in the world. If they were, they would have gone into another field. They tend to look elsewhere for their speculative theories.

Q: Where?

A: Better Homes and Gardens, science, anthropology, astrology.

Q: Interesting...

A: I'll say. I love it! What we need to understand is the politics of thought systems and then we can take a look at poetry.

Q: Politics?

A: Cultures themselves have become the new political referents. They are the points of engagement and the focus of friction. Now, here is the really interesting issue. The attack on Humanism as a philosophy represented the opening salvo in the growing disenchantment with our faith in “Education”. In effect, the intellectual has nothing left to believe in. A poet is an emotionally subversive intellectual. I mean by this they are absolutely political but don't have the nerve to say so. How cheaply subversive can you get! What they do is attempt to psychologically treat themselves trying to save bucks by not seeing an analyst.

Q: Is the problem cultural or personal?

A: Problem? Who said anything about a problem? This is the type of climate I thrive in. We at Scratch believe in Art as entertainment.

Q: What about Art as education?

A: Like institutions, all general concepts have become suspect. The deconstruction of reality is the function of the artist and by implication, the poet. It is no longer what you know in terms of knowledge and breath of experience that matters. What does matter is if you can do a specific thing. Understanding of things has given way to manipulation of them. From my point of view this is a very healthy development. We at Scratch applaud it because it represents a personal and public form of masturbation and that is what postmodern poetry is all about.

Q: What impact does this have on the literature of the past?

A: It becomes irrelevant. We are allowed the luxury of re-enacting all the mistakes of the past. I mean who really cares that almost all the major literary devices we use today were developed over two thousand years ago. We get to resurrect them and call them new again. This is known as the “Gotterdammerung Syndrone”. A disavowal and rejection of the past as irrelevant. A period of twilight fumbling in which we reinvent what we need as we need it and call it original. Professional amnesia coupled with a personal abdication of all ethical and moral responsibility as it pertains to the universal is the “new-think” credo and the ticket to an academic sinecure and prominence in the literary world of “doublethink”.

Q: This is true of poets and poetry?

A: Most certainly.

Q: I'd like to spend a little more time on the differences between modernist and postmodernist points of view.

A: Cultures change over time. We would find it very difficult to put ourselves in the mind-set of say, a first century Roman citizen. Its not that our minds are different but that our very values, goals, perceptions and understanding of the world is so entirely different. This is also true regarding Europeans of the Middle Ages.

The Modernist period can be said to have achieved an identity around the time of the French Revolution. Political constructs and cultural attitudes changed. People recognized that they themselves and the times they were living in marked them apart from previous epochs. The emphasis on the individual, materialism, a belief in progress, faith in the future and the power of the scientific method to solve the ultimate questions of the universe stimulated and were stimulated in turn by the industrial revolution. Art and philosophy took advantage of the new tools available to them. Europe and America were at the forefront of developments. The skyscraper and megalithic city planning characterized its later metamorphosis. It took two world wars to lead to a general reconsideration of values. The epochal dividing line between modernist and postmodern periods occurred on September 11, 2001.

Q: The World Trade Center explosion?

A: A very symbolic turning point. The modernist edifice built on the twin towers of technology and materialism has shown itself to be temporary, intellectually suspect and vulnerable. The ideological baggage associated with it has outlived its time.

Q: What shape does the postmodern take?

A: Its still too early to tell. We can look to the arts and gather a little information regarding its direction. There is a danger to this approach however. At what point do you say yes, this is postmodern or that another example is merely a dead end modernist cul d' sac. The work of Koch, O'Hara and others is late modernist. The Pound-Olsen continuum is late modernist. A whimper really. The "representative" postmodern artist has yet to emerge. In effect, everything is up in the air. Even the Hippies are back and boy are they pissed. Incidentally, this is exactly what you would expect during a time of transition as cultural patterns clash before redefining themselves.

Q: I thank you for taking the time to speak with us.

A: My pleasure. Incidentally, Scratch has developed a new all purpose contract for contributors. Its all about advanced placement. Anyone interested in signing one should contact me. All it costs is a minuscule amount of blood.

Q: I'd like to sign one of those myself.

A: Certainly.

(end of interview)

Interview with the poet Poo Ping

The following interview was conducted by Paolo Honorificas with the noted American poet Poo Ping over a period of two weeks in New York and Los Angeles as well as various points in-between. Poo Ping was hitch-hiking to California in an attempt to find warmer weather. He is the recipient of numerous awards and honors. The latest of which is his recent election to the Lost Bay Poet's Hall of Fame.

Paolo: Should I call you Poo or Ping?

Poo: My full name is Poo Ping. I have no middle name. When I'm not called Poo, I'm called Ping. I answer to both. Take your choice.

Paolo: You've been called one of the worst poet's writing in English today. How do you react to that kind of criticism?

Ping: Even critics can sometimes get it right. I'm humbled naturally. It hasn't changed me though. I believe it is the poet's task to persevere. Praise has a danger of interfering with one's work. You know, no matter what praise or criticism you receive you're still the same person inside. Those who think differently are the unfortunate ones. I don't believe in inflated egos.

Paolo: You're a collector of note?

Poo: I'm kind of caught off guard here. You do your research well.

Paolo: I try. You're known for having one of the most extensive collections of rejection slips in the U.S., Canada and England.

Poo: Yes. I have over 200 from the New Yorker alone. I've branched off lately into the "ezine" field of collecting. The Strand, Jacket, Cortland Review, Pif, Fluid Ink Press, as well as numerous magazines such as the Atlantic who have an "ezine" presence are examples. Some of my most amusing moments come from receiving snide criticisms from little university presses. It's cute, they are so serious in referring to themselves in the third person like "Queens" or something. The Smithsonian is in dialog with me about the collection.

Paolo: What does the term "awful" mean to you?

Ping: Lets break it down. You have "ah" and "full". I would define it etymologically as something that is "awe-full". More then the eye can tolerate.

Paolo: What discourages you about writing?

Poo: Getting published. I sent a terrible poem off to the London Literary Review in the hopes of receiving one of their great rejection notices. You know...this was a bad poem...one of my worst...I was so proud of it. I was positive they wouldn't want to touch it let alone read it. The eye strain it caused the editor must have been immense...over 1000 lines of excruciatingly hackneyed crap. I was hurt and shocked to discover it had been accepted. Of course they edited it extensively. I would advise poets just starting out to learn from my example and keep their poems very short. Less chance of other people fooling around with them.

Paolo: What would you say have been some of your formative influences?

Ping: My ninth grade teacher. She had green hair and a mustache. Internet sites that focus on conspiracy theories are a great inspiration. If Pound were alive he would find it a great vindication. Then there was this hell's angel biker I met on Fisherman's Wharf. He didn't say much but his guttural grunts had a rhythm I was later able to exploit to their full potential.

Paolo: Are you speaking about your poem "Tripe"?

Poo: Yes. And others as well. I believe in repeating oneself as much as possible.

Paolo: I'm sure readers would be interested in knowing how you came to write "Tripe".

Ping: I doubt they would. I was bored. I said to myself: "Tripe! Tripe! Tripe!" Everything else seemed to flow from that. It was an epiphany. A special moment in time. Inspiration is a chancy thing. You can't count on it.

Paolo: What would you say is the poet's role in society.

Poo: Depends on what you mean by "poet", "role" and "society". A poet's role in society is a special one. It is to be ignored, despised, discounted and to starve to death. Solitude is my society. I don't like poets. They are deceptive people. Manic depressive most of them. Have you ever met a poet you were willing to introduce to your wife or girlfriend?

Paolo: Male or female?

Ping: Both as well as those in-between. They're always writing something down. They have ink for brains most of them.

Paolo: What for you is the difference between a good and bad poem?

Poo: Interesting question. Never thought about it much. Perhaps that's why my work is so lousy. If a poem looks like too much work to read I won't fool with it. If it attempts to be fresh or new I probably won't like it. Actually I read a lot of the masters of the English language and then try to do the opposite. Seems to work for me. Most importantly, if there is nothing I can lift from a poem, I know my time was wasted.

Paolo: I'm interested in your career as an editor.

Ping: It was my own poetry that led me to publishing the work of others. Fortunately, I was bereft of any latent creative talent. I had to find another avenue for literary exploration. Plus I had all that experience from reading my own bad notices. That helped open doors. A good editor is one who can...at the drop of a manuscript so to speak... whip off a good rejection notice. You know 99% of an editor's job is in the rejection field. Edmond Wagtail was an influential mentor in this regard.

Paolo: You were very successful in that area.

Poo: I caught on, yes. Just look at Mudlark. It's never in or out of print. The Pound-Olson continuum you know.

Paolo: Are you speaking about the poet Charles Olson?

Ping: No, Jimmy Olson. The Pound-Olson continuum represents Ezra Pound in one of his less lucid moments combined with the comic book genre. The pictures you receive are impressionary snap-shots of a momentary brain hemorrhage oozing across linguistic barriers. Of course Ashbery, O'Hara and Koch have the same ability to surprise like rutabagas in a landscape. If they shaved their heads they would be rutabagas. The problem is with the landscape. Where does it fit in?

Paolo: What led you to write the "Poo Ping Manifesto"?

Poo: You mean Crap?

Paolo: Yes.

Ping: It was an insane mistake in some ways. I see it now as my attempt to break away from the suffocating influence of Berryman, Lowell, Plath and the other death poets. Of course the Deconstructionists influenced me as well. After a week of binge drinking as a remedy for hangovers, I tried to find another outlet for my insatiable self destructive tendencies.

French literary theorists provided the answer. They saved my life. They confused me so much I was afraid to take another drink. I promised myself that for every drink I took I would read one of their books. It's also true that their message has been unfairly pre-empted by the American Academic establishment.

"Crap!" was an attempt to bring that message- not to the already converted but to those in the streets and in the bars. To homeless poets, scientists and hookers who have a stake in developing their own literary and intellectual posturing. They've been excluded from the enjoyable aspects of snobbery for far too long. "Crap" was my way of throwing Whitman and Yeats together into a plain brown paper bag and letting them fight it out. A lot of what's in "Crap" was the result.

Paolo: You mentioned scientists in you previous remark. What did you mean?

Poo: Yes. The great age of scientific revolutions is upon us. But where is this reality reflected in our literary fields? C.P. Snow was right. Our culture has bifurcated along the lines he suggested. There are actually five great Cultures in America today. You would think they're mutually interdependent but they're not. One may arbitrarily define them as the Political, the Scientific, what we know as the traditional Arts, the Economic and Popular Culture. One uses the other with the exception of the Arts. That culture is the granddaughter of the bastardized humanities and few with any real power takes her seriously. She's a bad lay, prostituting herself for whatever she can get.

Paolo: I'd like to add here that you've given permission for us to reprint "Crap!" at the end of this interview. Can you give some reasons why the manifesto met the kind of reception it did?

Ping: It struck a nerve, tenaciously stayed there and dug in for the long haul. People hated it. And rightly so. There was nothing else like it. In a dumbed down intellectual environment fecal posturing gets everyone's attention. My idea was to reduce the inexpressible to its lowest common denominator.

After all, the true conspiracy is not about the publishing of bad poets but among food groups. It's about the political nature of aspartame, trans-fats and fatty acids. Awful poetry may seem like a slow death when you're reading it but it's the additive industry speaking out of the mouths of our political leadership that takes a slow death and makes it real. Of course, I'm speaking metaphorically here. Read Edmond Wagtail.

Paolo: You taught at university?

Ping: The dean of instruction thought I did. The money was good. I would take a tape recording of various poetry readings of mine and play them in class. Before playing the recording I would admonish the post-graduate students that they could learn more from bad poetry than good poetry.

Paolo: What did they say to that?

Poo: Don't know. Never stayed around long enough to find out. Neither did they. They simply recorded my recording.

Paolo: I find that hard to believe. You read that somewhere.

Ping: No, you did. What does it matter. Do you expect truth from poets or poetry? The shaman phase is over. Today the only place poets point to is ultimate self-annihilation. I've got to go. A car just pulled up.

The Poo Ping Manifesto

Crap!

Translation As A Sexual Act

1. For some time I have been interested in the art of translation regarding the development of a poetic critique that denies the supremacy of its own construction and in that denial both challenges and reaffirms the supremacy of the specific work of art itself. Is it really possible to demonstrate by example when it comes to translation? Is there any other way? Remember that a translation is always a product of something else. Only by actual immersion in the creative process can one come to any kind of adequate understanding regarding what is being talked about here. The truth may be that only the new can be created because of the problems inherent in the creative act as it pertains to human consciousness.

2. In the Jungian scum pond of creative expression anything is possible and everything is a question of translation. The water is both murky and deep. It is filled with fascinating viruses of which three shall be identified. For the sake of this explication we can label them as History, Identity and Meaning.

3. These viruses are transmitted by way of an active archetypal process that moves from the original artist through the work being translated and finally to the perceiver. This triadic contamination is also perceived as a hierarchy in the viruses and carriers themselves.

4. The sickness manifests itself as a search for both value and significance under the guise of a faithful translation. Immunity is neither possible nor desirable. The cure is intuitively understood by most of us as being worse than the disease because the only effective vaccine would be a lethal dose of non-translation which though desired by some, can be viewed as both a denial and anti-choice that transcends the anarchy of the problem under consideration. Can the only responsible conclusion to the quandary of translation be that is impossible to achieve?

5. The point is not to seek a cure for the problem but to learn how to benefit from the *high* the pathogens engender as a consequence or side effect of the disease. In a sense both language and art may be viewed as a product of aberrations, the unintended consequence of consciousness. All art is a form of translation or process by which the intermediary manifests itself. The intermediary of course is represented by the triadic process mentioned earlier.

6. What makes this issue fundamentally difficult is that the disease of creative consciousness is aware and continually re-contaminating both itself and what it comes into contact with.

This quirky and unintended consequence is here defined as individuality. Can individuality be negated or subordinated during the act of translation?

7. So far no philosophy or theory has been able to develop an adequate filter. There have been many attempts. These attempts are usually suffixed by political, artistic or literary *isms*. New Criticism, Marxism, Nationalism, Communism, National Socialism, Realism and Surrealism are just a few of the many examples, each further compounding the disease in their own unique way. Their primary characteristic is a symbolic castration or *surrender of will* leading to a denial of the very transformational process and contradictions that make the problem so important in the first place.

8. Art may be viewed not as a vehicle regarding the search for beauty and truth but the biochemical manifestation or discharge of a pathogenic condition which is both obsessive and insane at the same time, propagating itself faster than we can reason through it, making all translation fundamentally impossible.

9. Is translation possible or isn't it? Here's the rub for how can one commit to either there is or there isn't when there can't even be a definitive yes or know. A sentence is jailed time. Time evolves, it never is. If such is the case there is no reason to pursue the argument further. All we have to do is return to the beginning again. Thus, an in-exhaustive loop of self-reflection is established that serves as the bedrock for further art criticism caught in the process of this translation becoming an art form in itself.

Poet Bill Blake Speaks His Mind

Interviewed by Paolo Honorificas

At 68 Bill Blake is finally receiving the acclaim he deserves. His career has had its ups and downs. He is no stranger to controversy. His current passion involves fashion design. For the last six years he's lived in a two room flat in the city with his wife Catherine. She met me at the door and ushered me into a space filled with printing paraphernalia where she and her husband edit and produce their famous chapbooks reminiscent of Copper Canyon Press. Through a window I could see a fine view of the city and moving water. It was a hot august day.

Blake came out to welcome me. True to his reputation for eccentricity, he was observed to be wearing nothing but a fashionable tan. The fact that he was seamlessly stitched didn't seem to bother him in the least. We shook hands and sat down as Blake informally adjusted his genitals into a more comfortable position.

He appeared to be preoccupied with an almost invisible piece of fluff floating in space. As he talked he would often raise his hand suddenly in an attempt to capture the floating particle. The motion of his arm and hand created wind that continually moved the offending "fluff" just out of reach. His ability to carry on a conversation and wage a losing battle with a space particle at the same time testifies to his ambidextrous ability to balance numerous projects in the air at once.

Blake: Damn it!

Paolo: What's wrong?

Blake: I think I'm seeing things. Maybe it's a vision. Do you see it?

Paolo: I think I do. What is it?

Blake: Damn! If you can see it too, it's probably not a vision. You know, it could be a piece of angel wing. It's possible. The spiritual surrounds us. It came in through the window. I can't get rid of it. Can't tell its nature. Looks kinda like a shadow and part of the visionary world as well.

Paolo: Shadow?

Blake: The depressive world of 99% of the human population. They eat and sleep. Their heads are made out of concrete. Visions escape them. We would all be much better off if we learned to use our eyes to see through things rather than at them. That's what imagination is for. Poets don't believe in imagination anymore. Everything is prose. When I write I know what I'm talking about. At least at the time I'm writing it. There it is again! Can you still see it?

Paolo: Whatever it is, it seems to flow with the wind. Why not ignore it?

Blake: Ignore what we can't explain? Is that it? The true method of knowledge is experiment. I prefer to sing about what I see but, in this case, I need to get a better look at it first.

Paolo: Your reputation seems to be on the upswing. Are you pleased with that?

Blake: What is now proved was once only imagined. Its made me a less angry man I suppose. Don't you think so Cathy?

Cathy: (answering from the other room) What ever you say dear.

Paolo: It appears you are finding your most passionate admirers among the young artists of today.

Blake: When Ginsberg and Warhol died people began to look for something else. They seemed to have rediscovered me. He who suffers you to impose on them, knows you. John Linnell and Varley have been of great help lately. I call them my "spiritual visitants". They recognize that if a fool persists in his folly he would become wise. Maybe its a ghost of a flea?

Paolo: What? Oh, your airborne guest. Don't know. I read a recent review in the New Yorker where one of their reviewers described you as "a little crazy". Is that how you would describe yourself?

Blake: I've been called worse by fools. I've even been called insane. Whatever I'm called it doesn't matter as long as it doesn't interfere with my work. Some people have accused me of going over the top but you never know what is enough unless you know what is more than enough. I've been fortunate that my reputation reinvents itself every few decades.

Paolo: What are you working on now?

Blake: Some watercolors. Pastorals mostly. I'm also in the process of a new translation of Dante's Divine Comedy. It's not that I didn't like my last one. But I thought if I put in some art work in it I might make more money out of it.

Paolo: It wasn't far from here that you finished your illuminated book "Jerusalem".

Blake: You like the title? That's right. I used to live on South Moulton Street. Had to move from there in the middle of the night. Landlords can be so demanding about something as insignificant as money. No one brought me any work at Moulton. I rented the house on impulse. Fell in love with its size and space. I was thinking with my heart and not my pocket book. They say Jesus acted from impulse and not from rules too. Have you got a few bucks I can borrow?

Paolo: Paying commercial work has always been rather elusive for you. Is that right?

Blake: I've never been as lucky as Warhol in that regard if that's what you mean. That's why I've decided to go into fashion design. Less is more as they say. The man who pretends to be a modest enquirer into the truth of a self evident thing is a knave. It seems the only people coming to me for my genius are modest enquirers.

Paolo: You're known as a water-colorist, engraver and a poet. Which do you enjoy doing more?

Blake: I think it's the combination of poetry and engraving that intrigues me. Exuberance is beauty. When I was 43 I moved to the country for a few years. I was delighted by the natural beauty but found myself wasting my talent on boring commissions. Its only in the city that I can carry on my visionary studies. You know it's a see visions, dream dreams sort of thing. Country life has its charms though...

Paolo: Is that where you got into your infamous confrontation with the military?

Blake: Not only the military but the political establishment as well.

Paolo: Civil liberties are important to you?

Blake: Personal liberties are. A person should be able to paint and talk about what he sees...what he feels. Its rather scary to find soldiers wandering around your backyard. Puts a damper on intellectual exploration if you know what I mean. What were they looking for? Bomb making ingredients? Seditious literature?

Paolo: Was that the time of the Viet Nam War?

Blake: Earlier. Much earlier. But with all the paranoia floating about it was the same sort of thing. Spies were accused of being everywhere. It didn't help that I was known for my anti-government pronouncements. People wondered why I was so paranoid. Maybe I had reason to be. I think people just wanted to get me out of the way. Send me to America or something. I don't know.

Paolo: Tell me about your large scale paintings?

Blake: They were really a natural outgrowth of the printing business that Catherine and I started. We had begun producing my own work and hawking them around.

Paolo: Are you speaking about "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell"?

Blake: I'm speaking about all marriages in general, but yes and I'm also talking about "The Visions of the Daughters of Albion". I was interested in the idea of combining epics with proverbs. Also, the fine line between history and myth fascinated me. Always has. You see I had to take matters into my own hands. I was away from the city at the time. Rural life does not make for a highly stimulating or intellectual environment. We sold things out of our home. Yard sales have always intrigued me.

Paolo: Were you successful?

Blake: Not very. But this was the most productive period of my life. Very fertile. I loved. If a thing loves, it is infinite.

Paolo: One of your biographers...Gilchrist I think, said of that period that you and your wife did everything but manufacture the paper.

Blake: Right! You see my younger brother had died. His spirit departed by flying through the ceiling. On his way to he was kind enough to pause and give me the idea of combining poem with image on a single engraving plate.

Paolo: It was nice of him to take time out from a very important meeting to do that.

Blake: I'll say. My press has never been good but I've always had good luck with spirits.
(Blake knocks on wood)

Paolo: You came from a fairly prosperous family didn't you?

Blake: No. Middle class...my father was in the glove business. He had enough money to feed us but not enough to send me to a good school. Have you ever tried selling gloves these days for a living?

Paolo: Nevertheless, you did manage to go to a painting academy.

Blake: True. It was one of the best. My teachers didn't like my work. I was drawn to artists like Raphael and Michelangelo. Warhol was symbolically interesting but the abstractionists turned me off. I'm old fashioned I guess. When people begin to like your work you're in real trouble. I attended the academy around the time I married Cathy. I was 25 or so and still living in my father's house. I paid my way through art school by selling engravings for novels and catalogs. I might have sold a little pornography on the side to tourists...nothing too unusual. My only live commissions were corpses and they were pretty stiff.

Paolo: Don't suppose they paid very well...

Blake: No, but their relatives did.

Paolo: Who were some of your influences at that time?

Blake: Those I mentioned earlier but also Durer, I also liked Johnson, Shakespeare and Spenser. Oh, and the Gothic...always been interested in that. The Elizabethans were a strong influence. I was considered an unruly sort of child so my parents educated me at home. When I was ten I read a great deal of Milton. Always had a book in my hand. I remember being so absorbed in reading as I was walking that I hit my head on a tree.

Paolo: Is that when your visions started?

Blake: Around the time I met the tree? Yes. When I looked up its branches were filled with

laughing angels.

Paolo: What were they laughing at?

Blake: Me.

Paolo: What would you like on your tombstone?

Blake: I don't know. Maybe, "Those who restrain desire, do so because theirs is weak enough to be restrained", something like that.

Paolo: What about: "Drive your cart and plow over the bones of the dead".

Blake: I like it. Who said it?

Paolo: You did.

Blake: Oh, says something about religion doesn't it. My relationship with God isn't too good at the moment. I said to Him the other day, "If you've formed a Circle to go into, go into it yourself and see how you do."

Paolo: What did He say to that?

Blake: Don't know yet. He hasn't contacted me back but he will. He usually does in one form or another. Maybe as a dust bunny.

An Interview With Elda Furry

Interviewed by Paolo Honorificas

Elda Furry is best known for her imagist explorations in the development of a new expressive form she pioneered called “Magico-Techno Realism”. We arranged to meet in the large studio located on her estate. Upon walking into the room I was overwhelmed by her collection of hats and the photographic equipment she appeared to be in the process of using. A huge bear rug was placed on the floor in front of a roaring fireplace. It was obvious that she was about to have or had just finished a shooting session. An antique couch was draped in a red satin cloth.

In the corner of the studio was a sandbox containing several beach balls. On a table near some chairs was a bottle of chilling wine and two large glasses already filled with the welcoming liquid. She motioned me to take a seat. Handing me a glass she smiled and asked me to wait while she positioned several formidable looking camera lights out of our way.

Paolo: Your studio is a little overwhelming.

Elda: My work is increasingly involved in using more than one art form at a time. I need a large space. The other day I had a few friends over and showed them the studio. One of them said the studio would make a good pornography den. Can you imagine that? It was said in such a funny way I had to laugh.

Paolo: With your hard won reputation that would be funny.

Elda: I have been around a long time.

Paolo: May I ask how old you are?

Elda: No. You may not. You are a very pleasant looking young man. What if you were asked how old you were all the time?

Paolo: I wouldn't like it.

Elda: Right. What does age have to do with art? I must admit though my work keeps me young. If it helps you any I'm 80 something. .

Paolo: That's amazing. You look about 60.

Elda: Is that a compliment? I'm still able to get around.

Paolo: I know your time is valuable. Thank you for consenting to this interview.

Elda: Its important for people who have tasted a little of life's success to help make space for others. If this interview helps you in some way I'm glad.

Paolo: My editor was impressed. This interview means a lot to her.

Elda: And you?

Paolo: To be honest it is a feather in my cap. Speaking about hats I see you have a lot of them around. What do they represent to you?

Elda: Different things I guess. They remind me of experiences I've had. Some remind me of people. I have a hat Eliot wore. One of them belonged to Robinson Jeffers. Most are hats I wore at one time or another. I'm fixated on hats. But I guess you gathered that. That was a nice hat you had on. Who knows, maybe I'll end up with yours before this interview is over.

Paolo: (this interviewer laughs) I doubt it. I'm pretty attached to it. Hats play an interesting role in your....

Elda: (interrupting the interviewer) my poetry of course and my other writing. Last year I came out with a book of photography dealing just with hats. You've seen it of course.

Paolo: No, I'm afraid not...

Elda: Pity, you really should have. At least you're honest. I find that appealing. (Elda laughs coyly).

Paolo: I think its safe to say you're one of the great confessional writers of the age. Forgive me for saying this but in your early work you seemed to spend a great deal of time saying whose been sleeping with who but never who you were sleeping with.

Elda: That was very direct and perceptive. Its not that that kind of revelation embarrasses me. It's an intentional omission on my part. I was saving my reminiscences for this stage of my life.

Paolo: Really?

Elda: My autobiography is in the works. You're the first to know. Would you call that a scoop or something?

Paolo: Our readers will be interested in knowing. Some reviewers have noted a lusty undercurrent welling up out of your more recent poems.

Elda: (fingering a long hat pin angrily) One critic went so far as to say I was angst ridden and adolescent. It was an unfair characterization. You live your life as honestly as you can. The same critic attributed poetry to early childhood language trauma. I think they were writing in Melic or someplace like that. Neo-Freudians suffer from a conservative trauma of their own. I have a pair of shoes that once belonged to Freud. He kept them shined to a

mirror like perfection. Know why?

Paolo: Because he was obsessive and anal retentive?

Elda: No. So he could look up my skirt.

Paolo: You've also been described as a "loose canon on the make". How would you respond to that?

Elda: You can't please everyone. Is it my place to answer such criticism? It's easy to say what you're for but it's what you're against that counts. That's what everyone wants to know about.

Paolo: I don't understand...

Elda: Of course not. You're very young. I didn't expect you would.

Paolo: Could you expand on that statement?

Elda: Hell no. I mean why should I? Look, the object is not to destroy ones inner ambiguity or chaos. Its to work with it. Combining the destructive and constructive tendencies in oneself so that something lasting may be created. It is that tension in balance that supports the framework of a poem or other work of art.

Paolo: Could you talk more about that?

Elda: Don't know if I can. In my creative life I have somehow managed to forge a career out of gossip. I thrive on experiences. Especially on the experiences of others in relationship to myself. Read the National Enquirer. You'll get the idea what I mean. Truth isn't the significant thing. It's the perception that passes as truth that's most important..

Paolo: You actually recommend the Inquirer?

Elda: Certainly. At least everyone knows what they are. It's the reputable journalists and writers you have to be careful of. But lets get down to the elemental. What does all poetry have in common?

Paolo: I would be afraid to hazard a guess. I don't know.

Elda: That's why you're interviewing me and its not the other way around. I'll tell you. It's a form of gossip and people lust for it. Take gossip and shock out of poetry and your left with a husk of barren uninteresting facts held together by grammatical parts of speech.

People are voyeurs. We all are. I mean what are you really doing here? Interviewers symbolically long to become a part of who they interview. Or else to cannibalistically integrate in some way with their respondents. I'm speaking primarily of poets interviewing other poets. There are no secrets but you can't convince another poet of that. What in the hell do my work habits have to do with what I write?

Paolo: Could we talk specifically about some of your poems?

Elda: No.

Paolo: Why not?

Elda: I've discovered that talking about past work prevents me from concentrating on work to come. Besides, a poem should explain itself or it's not a successful poem.

Paolo: You're a difficult person to interview.

Elda: Are you saying that because I'm a woman?

Paolo: (uncomfortable) Do you really believe that?

Elda: Its got me where I am today.

Paolo: I'm trying to get you to talk about yourself and your amazing body of work in a more revealing, in depth sort of way.

Elda: I know what you're trying to do. It won't work. I'm a very private person.

Paolo: But your famous for your confessional poetry. Don't you see a contradiction there?

Elda: Is that a Paris Review sort of question?

Paolo: What do you mean by that?

Elda: What do you think I mean?

Paolo: It seems the tables are reversed here and you're trying to interview me.

Elda: Just trying to get material that's all.

Paolo: Material?

Elda: Drink some more wine. (Elda refills this interviewer's glass and winks at him.) Now, where was I? Oh, material...I mean material to write about. When Thomas Wolf was still around I stole it from him. Its been a long haul over the years. I've got to get my inspiration from somewhere. I'm not young anymore. For a woman that's a complicated issue to deal with.

Paolo: Have you found sexism to be a problem?

Elda: Its always an implied barrier. Take this situation for example. The fact that you're an attractive young man and I'm a successful older woman may color the way we relate to each other. Though I don't see that growing old in and of itself happens to be a sexist thing.

Paolo: Don't you think its easier in this society for a man to age more gracefully?

Elda: You won't let it drop will you? Was that a dig at my age?

Paolo: Pardon me?

Elda: Sex. That's all people your age think about.

Paolo: I'm afraid I don't...

Elda: Come on now, you find me somewhat attractive don't you?

Paolo: I find you a very attractive woman for such an advanced age but also a very difficult person to interview.

Elda: I knew it! My fame excites you. I saw the way you licked your lips with your tongue. You sexist pig! You've got the hots for me. Isn't anything sacred?

Paolo: If I've offended you I'm truly sorry but you've misinterpreted my....

Elda: Can the subterfuge! There, that's an example of how I get my inspiration for writing. I create a situation in reality and see where it takes me. That's what magico-techno realism is all about. You have to first experience it on a visceral level before you can come to terms with it intellectually.

Paolo: Oh! You had me going there...

Elda: Did I? What if I complained to your editor that you tried to put the make on me?

Paolo: Is this another example of magico-techno...

Elda: Just answer the question.

Paolo: With your reputation and stature I don't think it would matter what I said.

Elda: Exactly. Do you want to finish this interview on a positive note?

Paolo: (This interviewer fidgets in his seat) Yes and as quickly as possible.

Elda: All right. We're beginning to understand each other. I want you to drink another glass of wine.

You see I have all the power and you have what?

Paolo: Squat? (this interviewer swallows the entire glass of wine)

Elda: Not exactly...you do have something I want. Here, let me give you more wine. I

expect you to be polite and drink it all. What I propose is this. I'll bet you have gorgeous skin and muscles under those clothes. I'm having a problem finding the right male model for a photography exhibit the Guggenheim has asked me to give.

We'll take a break and take some photos. After that who knows what might develop? When I'm through with you I promise to finish the interview in ladylike fashion. I promise you your editor will be very pleased with what you bring back to her. You really don't have a choice you know.

Paolo: (This interviewer rises from his seat. Sweat falls copiously from his brow) I have two more questions to ask.

Elda: Well?

Paolo: Where do I put my clothes?

Elda: Wait. I want to photograph you removing them. Just let them drop where they fall. You can hand me your hat. Your second question?

Paolo: What comes after that?

Elda: That's easy. The couch, the rug and the sandbox.

Master of the Epic;

An interview with Bernie Bush

Editor's note: On a trip to Mt. Sinai for the editors of the Paris Review, Paolo Honorificas had the good fortune to encounter a burning bush (BB). Before he could put the fire out, it started talking to him. Unable to fulfill his original assignment, Paolo submitted the following as a transcription of the interview with the bush. The original editors were skeptical until they realized it would have been far more difficult for Paolo to have provided an interview with J.D. Salinger. Here follows Paolo's unexpected but highly unusual submission.

Paolo: Ouch!

B.B.: What's your problem?

Paolo: You're burning up! I'm going to fry. You're blocking my path!

B.B.: Yo and no.

Paolo: What does that mean?

B.B.: Yes, I'm in your way. Its on purpose. No, I am not burning up.

Paolo: Yes you are. (This interviewer unzips his pants being unable to think of any other way to put the fire out.)

B.B.: Wait! Hold your water! Do you see me consuming myself?

Paolo: No. But I do see you blushing.

B.B.: What would you expect under the circumstances? I'm not burning up!

Paolo: I don't know. This is confusing. Are you saying you're the flame and not the bush?

B.B.: Exactly. Have you seen Moses?

Paolo: Moses who?

B.B.: Hmmmm...that's what I get for not using instant messaging. I'm late. Hey, you are Paolo aren't you?

Paolo: Who wants to know?

BB: What do you take me for, a bill collector?

Paolo: These are difficult times. Can't be sure who you'll run into. I'm Paolo all right.

BB: Thought you were. You'll have to fill in. I can use a person like you.

Paolo: Are you from my editors or that Pat Robertson fellow?

BB: I freelance. I don't work for anyone. Right now I'm this fire. I'm also the beginning and the end. I'm your father in heaven. Paolo, I'm Bernie! Get the point?

Paolo: Bernie? Bernie who?

BB: Are you ready for this? Don't faint on me. I'm the one and only, Bernie Bush!

Paolo: Who in the hell is Bernie Bush?

BB: Are you kidding? I'm everything and anything you want me to be. I'm bigger than the Beatles, the Patriot Act and the Carnegie Endowment. I'm even bigger than the IRS!

Paolo: Prove it.

BB: What?

Paolo: I want a universal tax exemption. A house in Malibu and a lifetime supply of Yukon Jack.

BB: Are you trying to bargain with me?

Paolo: Why not? Its what humans do best. Isn't that what I'm supposed to do?

BB: Don't provoke me Paolo.

Paolo: Come to think of it, I do know you. At least I think I do but you're not very fashionable right now. I don't know if I want to be seen talking with you. People will think I'm crazy. Unless...You're the fellow who set Solomon up. Right? Do the same for me.

BB: I also set Sodom and Gomorrah up... for a fall that is. Be careful what you say. Have you no faith?

Paolo: Yeah, but that was last week. My interview fell through and my editors are pissed. What faith I had I lost.

BB: I know what you think even before you say it. Cut the crap. You're not a nice person Paolo.

Paolo: I can leave you know.

BB: To where? What prompted you to say you could deliver a Salinger interview?

Paolo: I was bored and hungry. I needed a job. It was the first author that came to mind. I had to promise something.

BB: You're an idiot Paolo. That's why I like you. Why I need you. You may interview me if that will help.

Paolo: No thanks. What good is a burning bush going to do me...even if it talks. Now if you were the devil or Dracula or even Stephen King that would be a different matter. Can you change into a demon?

BB: Aren't I literary enough for you?

Paolo: Its not me. Its my editors. They like gothic stuff.

BB: Paolo, I'm the one who wrote the bible.

Paolo: Sure you did and I wrote "Catcher in the Rye".

BB: Don't be a shmuck I was the mind behind the inspiration you idiot. I moved the hands that wrote the words!

Paolo: Go ahead, prove it. Make me something. You're making me thirsty.

BB: Would you like Boone's Farm or mad dog twenty-twenty?

Paolo: You know me all right. Where have you been all these years? Why aren't you dead?

BB: I was moderating a forum between George Bush, the Pope, Ayn Rand, Salvador Dali and Benny Hin. Boy were they long winded.

Paolo: Am I supposed to take just any crazy bush at its word? All right. I give up. Tell me something about your technique. Do you have a special place that you devote to your work?

BB: What a stupid question. What do you mean. Like a desk or table?

Paolo: Yes

BB: Well, I'm on the go quite often. Eternity is my canvass. I composed "The Earth" in seven days. It was a sustained effort. In that case I sort of hovered in one place. When I wrote the "Bible" it was different. That piece of work took a long time. Almost as long as it takes to read.

Paolo: Longer then it's taking to win the war on terrorism and drugs?

BB: Yep, and just as plagued with difficulties, but I don't like publicity. I like to put myself close to my characters. I also recognize that things change continually. I'll let you in on a

little secret, I'm afraid of being stereotyped. Ever since they started making movies about me my image has deteriorated.

Sometimes I'm a burning bush, sometimes a voiceless wisp of cloud, a voice...those sorts of things. As for my literary forays, I use ghost writers. I tend to be very experiential. My work takes me everywhere. It seems like I've been around forever.

Paolo: You have a lot of imitators. Everyone thinks they're God now.

BB: Yes. A gap exists in people's lives. They tend to fill it with whatever is handy; the New Yorker, Wall Street Journal, a golden calf, the sun, animistic spirits, Lennie Bruce. I really don't mind. Kind of flattering.

Paolo: That's not what your critics say. It's said you are inclined to be petty and jealous.

BB: If someone's got a gripe tell them to talk to me about it! Critics are insatiable. One moment they insist on putting you on a pedestal the next, well...suddenly it's all about tearing you down. Bill Gates tells me he has the same problem. You learn to live with it.

Paolo: Commentators on your work talk about an overall design that threads itself through everything you do.

BB: They would. Everybody's an expert these days. Most of my work is in the form of collaborations. This makes continuity of purpose very difficult. This is not to say its not there...its just that you have to look in order to see it.

Paolo: You have been called hypocritical. For example, in the bible...

BB: Lets make a distinction right here, when you talk about the "bible" you are actually referring to a host of individual experiences compiled into two "best of reader's digest compilations". You need to separate the author from his creations. I may be perfect but people certainly aren't. In the "Old Testament" I was interested in a primeval...eye for an eye...account of man's relationship with himself and the cosmos.

Patriarchal father figures were fashionable at the time, you know the John Wayne, Heston types. The "New Testament" was an attempt at a more loving, personal look at interpersonal relationships. Aesthetic criteria changes over time. A lot has been lost in the numerous translations of my work.

Paolo: You've been compared to Steven Spielberg regarding sensational, special effects and epic plots. Why is it that no matter what genre you choose to work in, huge tidal splashes, plagues and earth shaking natural disasters seem to represent your stock in trade. Don't you think you tend to overdue it?

BB: You can blame or bless my imagination for that. I tend to be a sucker for the miraculous epiphany of expression. It represents my attempt at closure. My canvass is broader than the historical novel, psychological genre, or basic love story. Of them all I prefer mysteries the best.

Paolo: Why is that?

BB: Because in a mystery you can include all the other genres. Individuals like you with their free will and contradictory behavior are wonderfully mysterious creatures in themselves. Don't you agree?

Paolo: You've lost me.

BB: Look, I'll take a character or event and nudge it a little. Then I'll step back and see what happens. If things don't turn out the way I want, I can start over.

Paolo: That's mean. You use people. What other writers do you like?

BB: Besides comic books? I like Dante, Shakespeare, Faulkner, Tolstoy, Barbara Courtland...people like that. Actually I don't have a lot of time to read.

Paolo: What about Milton?

BB: He was always kissing up. He thought he knew it all. Don't like him much.

Paolo: What about Steven King, Anne Rice or...

BB: Burroughs and Miller give me more to work with. You have to be willing to make big mistakes in order to create something that approaches perfection. After all, you're going to fail anyway ...

Paolo: Do you have any thoughts regarding the world's present situation?

BB: The best advice I can give is to wait and see.

Paolo: What about revisions?

BB: What about them? Do you mean do I revise my own work?

Paolo: Yes.

BB: There is really only one book to be written. The idea is to keep trying until you get it right.

The New Testament was as much a rewriting as a sequel to the Old Testament. Its not beyond me to scratch everything out and start over when the need arises.

Paolo: Would you care to talk about some of the difficulties you encounter in your work?

BB: Sure. One of my greatest difficulties is getting my characters to do what I want. Like you for instance. People can be so thick headed. They develop an editorial taste of their own. It wrecks havoc on the overall plot. I can remember one situation where I had to create this huge fish...are you interested in fish stories?

Paolo: Do you mean a whale?

BB: No, a big fish. I get so mad at the confusion. There are no whales in the Mediterranean. Anyway, I had to get this fish to eat this fellow just to get him do what I wanted..

Paolo: You coughed him back up...

BB: Yes, but when I did I was able to change the significance and direction of the plot. Another weakness I have is my affinity for moral endings. You know sometimes, things don't turn out the way you want.

Paolo: How do you feel about poetry?

BB: Are you kidding? Read my Psalms. I like rich, lascivious love poetry that borders just this side of the pornographic. There is as well a poetry in the act of creation itself. What one needs to do is get into contact with it. In my work, whether it's poetry or whatever, I focus in on life itself. I chronicle everything. The bad as well as the good. If things turn out well for my characters well and good. Unfortunately, more often then not, the opposite is the case.

Paolo: Why is that?

BB: That's a question I've often asked myself. Take you for example. I think it has something to do with the failures and complexities resident within the characters themselves. Who is the villain in Geneses?

Paolo: The snake?

BB: Not at all. He was just doing what was in his nature to do. Like cops and criminals the good and bad are closer to each other then you think.

Paolo: Maybe it was Eve.

BB: Adam might have thought so. But that was just his way of projecting the guilt away from himself. He was the weakest character of all. I could never quite identify with him. Nobody likes a tattle tale. No, the real villain of the piece was the choice these two young people had to make. It was a no win situation. A situation where tragedy takes a dive and turns into farce. What would have been your choice? Would you have eaten of the fruit or not? Actually, it wasn't a fruit tree. It was a large bush. A smoking weed.

Paolo: I like gardens and... keeping on your good side is important to me now that I know you're still paying attention to things.. I would have chosen continued "bliss" to an uncertain knowledge of good and evil.

BB: Ah, that's interesting but you're a liar Paolo.

Paolo: What else is new?

BB: The “double-bind” technique in terms of plot development is something I’ve honed into an art. I’m known for it. In a sense, none of my characters can win with me unless they become me. There’s an appealing irony in that. My humor moves in that kind of direction. I’m talking about things that all real creative artists are forced to deal with on a conscious or unconscious level.

Paolo: Humor?

BB: Humor? Oh, I’m talking to you aren’t I?

Paolo: Ever think about retiring?

BB: I’ve thought about it. I’m tempted to drop the whole mess in someone else’s lap. In this cut-throat media environment you can’t afford to relax. Out of sight is out of mind.

Paolo: What are you working on now?

BB: You.

Paolo: Would you care to be more specific?

BB: As myth is my metaphor, the issue of Jerusalem has been on my mind. I want you to dress up in dirty old lice ridden skins Paolo. I want you to come and work for me. You’re perfect for the part I have in mind.

Paolo: What?

BB: You’ll go to Jerusalem dressed in a prophet’s shroud. You’ll drool and wave your hands like a crazy person. You’ll make prophecies for me. You’re a sinner who has been sinned against. What makes you unique is that you’re so unbelievably corrupt. Actually, you’re downright pathetic.

Paolo: Thanks a lot. You don’t need me.

BB: I need a creative writer. Someone everyone can look down on. You will be a sort of comedic John the Baptist for the 21st century. When you arrive in Jerusalem, everyone will laugh at you. “What?” they’ll say, “a messenger from God? Crazy Paolo Honorificas? Don’t be silly!” Of course, it’s a long walk there and what with your wearing smelly animal skins and itching all the time, it will add to the overall comic plot. The point is that everyone is so intent on crucifying everyone else that we can focus their anger and hate on you instead.

Paolo: No way! Just set up a site on the internet.

BB: I don’t want to give the whole plot away. It would ruin everyone’s surprise. Actually, I’m still working it out but I can tell you your opening lines .

Paolo: Please do.

BB: This is Paolo speaking: “I call you fallen, my Jerusalem. A burning tree. Compassion’s coffin. A splinter in the eye of God, a stormy pestilence of vindictive voices. The lost city of hope, cursed by history, grown old and cynical. A fallen sanctuary where no mind is clean, no motive pure, no heart unbroken.” And then Paolo, you curse the entire kit and caboodle in one fell swoop. You wave your hand and I’ll send a plague down. What do you think?

Paolo: Heavy stuff. A downer. I think everyone there is plagued enough. Can’t you cool it a little?

BB: Who said my plan was perfect? Its what I feel. By the way, don’t take any salt. I have a feeling there’s going to be pillars of it around for the taking.

Paolo: I don’t know whether to laugh or cry?

BB: Laugh, Paolo, laugh. It will keep you from crying. In the meantime start rounding up some smelly animal skins.

An Interview With the Devil

Editors Note: Hiding out from bill collectors and publishing deadlines, our correspondent Paolo Honorificas fled to the Sinai where he had the unfortunate luck to encounter a verbal weed by the name of Bernie Bush. Hired for a temporary gig by Bernie, Paolo was suddenly struck down by a pernicious case of “second-thoughts”.

Afraid of being found out- he sought sanctuary in a cave filled with broken pots containing mounds of decaying scrolls. The pottery shards were useless but the scrolls enabled Paolo to feed a small fire as he attempted to fend off the chilly night. As Paolo related to us, while singing to the platonic shadow of himself (engrossed in the task of liberating numerous jars of their manuscripts) he was startled to hear a voice coming from the mouth of the cave.

Paolo: (this interviewer singing to himself) Don't you listen to him Paolo. He's a devil not a man and he spreads the burning sand with...

Devil: Knock. Knock. Did you hear me? I said: Knock! Knock!

Paolo: Who's there?

Devil : One of life's unfortunate accidents.

Paolo: You won't find any life here. Go to hell.

Devil: Been there. Done that. Scratch is the name. The smoke coming out of where you are is righteously nauseous!

Paolo: If you want something come back tomorrow when I'll be gone.

Devil: Knock it off Paolo. We've met before.

Paolo: Are you Bernie?

Devil: You mean Bernie Bush?

Paolo: Yes.

Devil: No. Who would want to be. I've been burned by him myself. I'm from the opposite direction.

Paolo: Am I hallucinating?

Devil: Those scrolls look pretty ratty. Might have fungus on them. Can I come in?

Paolo: If you're a hallucination you can. If you're not a figment of my imagination then there's not enough room. I don't like being crowded. Didn't I promise an article to you?

Devil: Yes. You were paid in advance but that's not why I'm here. Invite me in. I can adjust my size to any space.

Paolo: Why do you have to be asked in? Would you ever leave?

Devil: I make it a practice not to go where I'm not invited. Whenever I'm around Bernie isn't. Are you going to ask me in or not?

Paolo: Chill, fool. I mean that as a compliment. I assure you, there's no greater fool than me.

Devil: Can't. I'm hot. Why don't you come to me? The stars are beautiful out here. They beckon. Or maybe your comfortable in there?

Paolo: (This interviewer steps outside to find an aristocratic dandy smoking a cigarette. He is dressed in a tuxedo with a liquor glass in his hand and looking eerily like a cross between "Eminem" and a young Noel Coward with a big English nose.)

Devil: Remember me?

Paolo: Vaguely. Were you ever in black and white movies?

Devil: Mostly black. I like to travel. Been everywhere. To hell and back you might say.

Paolo: Well, you look none the worse for wear. You're a handsome devil.

Devil: Thank you for saying that. You could look like me if you wanted.

Paolo: No thank you. I stain everything I wear.

Devil: (Impatiently) I meant you could have everything you ever desired handed to you on a golden platter.

Paolo: Nope, I wouldn't be able to lift it.

Devil: Care for a cigarette?

Paolo: God! I've been smoking parchment all day. I'd sell my soul for one!

Devil: Be careful what you wish for. I set up a table for you. You'll find drinks, food and a sterling cigarette case with your name engraved on it. Enjoy! Take anything you want sweetheart. Consider it a taste of the future. What reeks?

Paolo: The smoke?

Devil: No, something else. Its awful! A musky smell. Like wet chipmunks. Its rancid . What are you wearing? I'm going to hurl!

Paolo: Just a few odd animal skins.

Devil: That would account for it. You smell like a decaying animal.

Paolo: Thank you very much. I am a decaying animal. It comes with being human.

Devil: Don't you itch?

Paolo: On occasion . Unfortunately, those occasions are becoming more frequent all the time. I think I've got crabs. At least they know I'm still alive.

Devil: That would explain your smoke. Trying to cure yourself, eh? Thought you were trying to signal somebody. I can have one of my entourage set up a shower for you. Hell would freeze over on a night like this. Would you like some warm clothes?

Paolo: Sounds very tempting. Don't think I can though. I'm on assignment.

Devil: Pity. At least stand down wind from me. Are you permitted to do that?

Paolo: What the hell. O.K. but just this once. (Thunder peals out of nowhere) Maybe not. You'll have to take me as you find me.

Devil: (Looking up at the stars) Bernie must be irritable. If you think his bark is bad you ought to feel his bite.

Paolo: I'll pass on that.

Devil: Understandable. Hang around him long enough and you'll get bitten. Don't worry. Bernie won't interfere as long as you're with me.

Paolo: He can do anything he wants. Power corrupts...

Devil: ... and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Exactly! Actually, Bernie and I have an agreement. He needs me.

Paolo: He doesn't need anybody. He's all powerful.

Devil: That's what he wants you to think. He needs you Paolo, trust me. Pity is, you really don't need him. You're a God, Paolo. You have only to realize it. When you do you won't be intimidated by Bernie anymore. By the way, would you mind freshening up my drink? I'd do it myself but I want you downwind of me and we have a lot to talk about. You drink don't you?

Paolo: Don't tempt me.

Devil: It's my job. I love tempting people.

Paolo: Probably because they love to be tempted. Is that what you do for a living?

Devil: Actually I'm a student of the human species.

Paolo: Like Leaky?

Devil: Not exactly but I'm the one who put those bones in his way. He wouldn't have stumbled over them if it wasn't for me. Almost had to throw them at him. That guy was so nearsighted.

Paolo: That was good of you. Don't know how politically correct it was.

Devil: I do what I can. It's important to me that you apes live up to your true potential.

Paolo: Apes? Can apes drive?

Devil: Excuse me. I meant bipeds. However, when you think about it, the similarities are far greater than the differences. Smell for instance. I'm speaking genetically of course.

Paolo: Small differences can be significant. It's like the difference between munching leaves or fruitcake for desert.

Devil: So true. I agree. Like the difference between going around naked on one hand and world wars, genocide, chemical warfare, nuclear waste complimented by environmental degradation on a scale impossible to believe on the other. Violence and humanity are inseparably linked. If I didn't like people I wouldn't spend so much time with them. Humanity and I belong to a special club. We understand each other. With what we've managed to do to this planet we're practically ghetto mates.

Paolo: (The interviewer hands Wagtail a drink and tastes his own) This is cool. What's it called?

Devil: A recipe of my own. Are you listening, Paolo?

Paolo: Yeah, something about what a gecko makes. I bought some insurance from one once. I don't want to sound prejudiced but boy, was it ugly.

Devil: This is going to be a little more difficult than I thought.

Paolo: Tell me about it. I've got problems of my own.

Devil: You mean regarding Bernie?

Paolo: (the interviewer begins to scratch himself) Don't say that name so loud. This desert is full of ears.

Devil: Just because Bernie asks you to do something it doesn't mean you have to do it.

Paolo: He didn't strike me as the kind of entity that likes to take no for an answer. I could end up as seasoning in a whale's stew.

Devil: Don't be so melodramatic. Millions of people say no to him all the time. He's scraping the bottom of the proverbial barrel when he asks a person like you to do his bidding.

Paolo: True.

Devil: That's why I'm here. To point out the options available to you. The world is doomed anyway. Plastic rules. Change is in the air. Smell the petrol-chemical effulgence in the air. Bernie backs losers. Who in their right mind would plop their chosen people in an area without a drop of oil while a few hundred miles away nations are swimming in it.

Paolo: Its not what I would call strategic planning on his part.

Devil: He's a joker Paolo. By the time you begin to learn the ropes your too old to manipulate them and then you die. What's the use of him giving the gift of life with one hand and taking it away with the other? He lives forever doesn't he? Why can't you? The real corker in the equation is the whole notion of hope. Think how much more accepting, non-judgmental we would be without the curse of imagining that things could be otherwise or that tomorrow will somehow be better than today. Idealism is a virus. Real winners don't play by rules. It's a cosmic scam if you ask me.

Paolo: Those thoughts have crossed my mind.

Devil: Of course they have. Do you actually think you could live up to his uncompromising expectations? You know in your heart you're going to disappoint him. He knows it too. Why go through the farce in the first place? He created you in his image and gave you the power of personal choice and reasoning. Afraid you might use those tools to climb out of the abyss, he also endowed you with compassion, mercy, compromise, hope, forgiveness, charity and love. Those are the seven deadly sins Paolo. They were designed to keep you in your place. All that soul searching, tension and grief is his making. If he is responsible for anything he is responsible for everything. You know that. If your only source of love is God, he's cornered the market and your forced to work through him on his terms. Is that fair? Is it reasonable? Does it make sense to you?

Paolo: I'm too busy reacting to life. Right now I'm itching so bad I can't afford the luxury of answering that kind of question. There are lots of things I don't understand. Who sent you to complicate things? I'll bet you're Bernie trying to test me before turning me into a pillar of salt. Besides, I'd rather deal with a god I'm familiar with even if I don't agree with his decisions. On the other hand, you do have a knack for creating good drinks. Life is confusing enough without having you to stir up unanswerable questions.

Devil: Unanswerable? Would you like me to leave?

Paolo: Will you leave the food and drink behind?

Devil: Afraid not. We're a package deal.

Paolo: Stick around for a while. You are an interesting conversationalist. If this is the end of the world I'd hate to face it sober.

Devil: The Rapture is coming.

Paolo: Rapture? Does that involve sex?

Devil: Depends on how you choose to meet it. The sooner you decide to give the finger to Bernie the sooner we can get this whole thing over with.

Paolo: Don't think so. He'd just find someone else.

Devil: Maybe not. Maybe he'd throw up his hands and decide to start all over again.

Paolo: Wouldn't that put you out of a job?

Devil: I'm not as hung up on time as you are. When one world is destroyed another is created. There will always be someone or something that craves a little temptation in their lives to make things more interesting.

Paolo: What do you want from me?

Devil: I want you to truly represent your species. Act like a man. I want you to stand up for yourself. I want you to take some responsibility for who you are and how things are going.

Paolo: What? You sound like my father. He was a real devil. Besides, I can't change anything.

Devil: How do you know? Have you really tried? You were born with a backbone. Try using it. Confront this power hungry, crafty, dictator god of yours and tell him you'd rather do things in your own way. He'll respect you for it and leave you alone. Trust me.

Paolo: He's only trying to make me better than I am. Can't fault him for that. Can I?

Devil: Do you like to be laughed at? Are you prepared to face a jeering, drooling crowd getting high on your pain as you squirm, scream and involuntarily foul yourself? He wants you to die for him for Christ sake!

Paolo: Well, if you put it that way.

Devil: Come into the house of the Lord, he says, and be reborn.

Paolo: What house? Is it like a symbolic sort of thing or can we get warm in there?

Devil: In your case I don't think so. These days to be different means people will automatically assume that you're taking a lordly, holier than thou sort of attitude. People won't like that. The I.R.S. certainly won't. Freedom of expression is not as valued as you might think. You will be viewed as a subversive, intellectual terrorist. You definitely will if you continue to wear those lice ridden animal skins. Animal rights activists will have a field day. Think of all the grief and pain that religion has brought upon this world. Do you want to add to that? Where is your sanity man? Where in you is humanities' miraculous gift for self preservation? I know its there somewhere.

Paolo: You must have been educated at an ivy league college. You're good. You're so good it scares me. It doesn't convince me of anything mind you but it scares the hell out of me.

Devil: Whose the real fanatic here? Who carries on a conversation with a burning bush? You're too full of yourself Paolo. Too ambitious. What does your god say about arrogance and pride? How dare you dress up like a friggin freak? You're tempting fate if you ask me.

Paolo: I agree with you exactly. That's the problem. I'm weak, corrupt and incorrigible. I'm a terrible judge of people. My inclination is to agree with everything you say at least as long as your booze holds out. To be right about things I have to go with the opposite of my inclinations. Does that make sense?

Devil: Give in to the natural part of yourself. Feel the truth in the pit of your stomach. Listen to it.

Paolo: Good advice. I tried it once. All I got was a bad case of heartburn. My only hope is that I'm bipolar, have sunstroke and am subject to hallucinations. Depressing isn't it. I've come this far, I should get a prize. What I don't understand is why insane things have to happen to inane people. Why can't life be boring? Well, I can't stand here talking to myself all night. Got to be moving along. Got an ocean to cross. Got to find a better place to hide.

Devil: Impressive. See Paolo run. Run, Paolo run. Where are you going to run to? Bernie is very stubborn. You've been fortunate. All you've encountered so far is the heat off a burning bush. What if Bernie decides to pay you a visit as a tidal wave or hurricane or, parish the thought, Beetlejuice?

Best to end it right now. Denounce him Paolo. Emancipate yourself. Let him know that he isn't welcome in your heart or mind. Renounce him. Cast him into the anachronistic midden heap reserved for outworn superstitions. This is an age of science and excess, not faith. Think drugs, women, rock and roll! Think toga parties, plastic credit cards and a life dedicated to the pursuit of every pleasure imaginable. Orgasms are in. A life devoted to helping others is very unfashionable. Prophets are famous for their shortened life expectancies. If you continue to work for Bernie you'll end up in an insane asylum or worse.

Paolo: Would I be guaranteed four meals a day?

Devil: Hardly. The closest you'd get to a menu would be your name in it. If you're into the spiritual thing opt out for being a Hari Krishna instead.

Paulo: You seem to be a knowledgeable fellow. Are you a Sufi? You can crash here tonight . But I'm leaving in the morning.

Devil: Bernie has a habit of deserting people when they need him the most. He's busy. Do you think he's going to spend all his time carrying you? You like all the attention right now. What happens when you get into real trouble and he's nowhere in sight. How will you feel then?

Paulo: Relieved.

Devil: Where are you going to?

Paulo: I know this great diner. It's a Jewish Deli called "Bernie's"

The Mss Puss Wuss Columns

Editors note: Paolo Honorificas wrote an advice column under the pseudonym of Mss Puss Wuss. While his columns are of no lasting importance and severely restricted to the prejudices of their time and place, it was thought advisable to include a representative example that you could see how really mean spirited his period actually was.

My Lesbian Bitch Short Story Writing Sister

Dear Mss Puss Wuss:

My name is Tiffany. Yesterday I had my 16th birthday. I don't know how I've managed to survive so long. Until my friend Brandy told me about you I was going to commit suicide. You are my last and only source of help. Please don't disappoint me. Both my parents are very old. My sister is twenty years older than me and still living at home. I have to share a room with her. She is a fat lesbian who wants to get married and teach at the second grade level. Her name is Shay Lynn. She is my daddy's favorite. Fortunately for her, she has very high self esteem.

She is so large that her thighs are constantly rubbing together. She suffers from a constant rash but won't go on a diet. Shay wears dirty jeans all the time with folded cuffs at the bottom. Being as broad as she is tall, Shay wears humongous 't' shirts with funny sayings on them. For the last two weeks she has been wearing one that says: If you can't play with the big dogs, run with the pack. She probably has breasts but you wouldn't know it. I don't know how she manages it but she is very popular. Everyone wants to be around her, especially the string bean, frilly girls. I guess by comparison, they look very pretty.

Everyone calls Shay "Helen Keller" behind her back. She doesn't like it but admits she can't see very well. Shay doesn't like to drive pretty, little cars. She drives a huge four wheel drive pick up the she swaggers toward but can't climb into. Canola, her best buddy, has to hoist Shay into the seat.. Shay doesn't shave or wear deodorant. She seems to like to sweat. Shay smokes. She flips her ashes into the cuffs of her jeans. When not in use her cigarette package is carried rolled up in the sleeve of her 't' shirt.

Her special friend Canola is the head gardener at our local community college. Shay works there as a groundskeeper. They're always together watching cheer leading practice. Canola weighs about 98 pounds, eats boxes of chocolate candy, drinks diet pop, has a bony behind and lupus. Canola hates me. Her father is President of the local community college in Lost Bay, Oregon.

The problem is that Shay's girlfriend's daddy can't stand Shay because her presence reminds him of the fact that his daughter is a lesbian. Both Canola and Shay have little butch haircuts. A cigarette is always hanging from the corners of both of their mouths and they have tattoos on their arms.

Shay has been taking care of Canola's ten foot snake. The snake is kept in a box beneath our bunk beds. Its very weird but last night Shay took the red bandanna out of her back pocket and tied it around the snakes neck. I guess it is a neck but who can really say. What I noticed was a strange lump in the snake. It was not there two days ago. Yesterday my little poodle, Fi Fi disappeared. I can't find him anywhere! I am so worried. Shay swears that she doesn't know where Fi Fi is. When I ask Canola about it she just smirks and blows smoke rings at me. My parents don't seem to care. What can I do?

Dear Tiffany:

Truth is a strong woman who sees the world with both eyes open. You are very bright. I can tell that from your letter. Tiffany, you of all people should know that there is no such thing as a "lesbian bitch". It's a figment of your teenage imagination. You do a great injustice to the struggling minorities of the world. Lesbians are angelic creatures. They don't wear "butch" haircuts unless they are competitive swimmers. There is nothing "hard" about them at all. Just squint your eyes dear and you'll see through the fictional stereotyping to the truth that all Gods creatures are the same underneath. Sisters are so special Tiffany. We are all sisters. To have a sister is to have a special friend you can confide in.

So many young women who write to me are cursed with mean, nasty brothers. Honestly, men are chauvinistic rat fink pigs. You are fortunate in not being burdened with one. Inside the soul of every man is a bully boy in heat. All they want is candy. They have a special, insatiable craving for sweets. They will say or promise anything to get it. Don't surrender to their horrible appetites. They just want to be kings of the roost and dominate all our suffering Sisters. When it comes to it, men are nothing but tin plated want to be pharos with pigeon dung for brains and a hose between their legs.

Tiffany, remember that this is an age when every family is expected to be positive and supportive of its more unique or closeted members. Believe me when I say that every family has one. Be careful not to alienate them. They have lots of friends and your hate mail could become intense. You need to be more of a friend to Shay and Canola. Have you tried to interest yourself in their activities? By becoming a more caring and intimate friend of Canola you can get closer to your sister. I don't know what happened to Fi Fi. Be very careful of making unfounded as well as unsupportive accusations. Doing so might well destroy any hope of establishing a better relationship with both Shay and Canola.

Consider that Shay might be simply going through a phase. Have you given thought to a different kind of pet? If you decide to get another dog or even a cat please, please, please, remember to place a collar around its neck that has spikes on it. Cruelty to animals should not be condoned. I'm sure all my readers and your friends would agree with that. A

porcupine might be a good choice for a new pet as well as providing you with a source of possible defense in case the snake or Canola decides on attacking you.

What you see as a misfortune may well be an asset. You must get yourself an agent. I can think of three talk shows that would have you on immediately. There are four t.v. shows that would want you if you can prove you've had any kind of relationship with a priest during the last six months. In case you haven't already done so, convert to Catholicism and a priest will be provided to you free of charge.

Tiffany, I predict great things for you. Never forget your less fortunate "Sisters" and give them a helping hand whenever you can. Try my suggestions and make sure to write me back to let me know if my advice is working for you.

With all my love,
Janet Puss Wuss

Paolo Honorificas Interviews himself

Editor's note: Paolo was very fond of carrying on extended conversations with himself. He was also prone to confusion. This led to fascinating contradictions.

In order to obviate the problem he named his various alter egos according to the philosophic questions he was addressing at the time. There are numerous examples of this in his papers. Besides the obvious reference to *The Tempest* in this example, Caliban and Prospero came to represent the light and dark qualities inherent in his own nature.

Caliban: Hi Prospero. I'm surprised to see you here.. How high are we? How high are you really willing to go? There are risks involved. When something ventured holds the possibility of gain failure is more likely and it's a long way down. The window to my brain is open. Come on in. Don't worry. This ledge is over two feet long. Yes. It's windy. I'm after the perfect storm. Hug the sides of my mental constructions. Let the texture of this atrophied edifice get to know you. You'll be fine. Thoughts are like that. Full of windy hovering.

Prospero: While I'm interested in doing interviews with more established authors, such as my interview with Gildzen and also interested in doing interviews with e-publishers...I'll interview you if no one else will.

Caliban: I don't know if I should be insulted or not but I understand the nature of internet publishing. The way literary reputation works depends on whose in the big house. I mean after all, who cares about the milk man? We should though. Don't you think? Besides what does it mean to be established? Who really wants people hot on your tracks always comparing your early best with your present worst. You can't be remarkable all the time. It's why I change my name every year or so. I'm going by the name of Pop Ditty starting next month.

Prospero: How high are you?

Caliban: I don't know exactly. I'd say we're both about a mile up. Don't worry. A little nosebleed lowers blood pressure. Don't you love the color red? This is where I work. Kinda like looking at a video screen as the world passes by. Of course. You can spit if you want. Be careful of the wind blowing back at you! The metaphorical "here" is the closest I can get to flying by the seat of my pants.

Here, the margin between failure and success is a matter of inches. Expressed another way, it's a matter of conception and response. I don't let the possibility of falling bother me. I'm going to fall anyway and I really think there are levels to falling or failure. Don't you think so? What's that bundle of papers in your hand? You always seem to be working on something else. It makes me look lazy.

What's that? Oh. If you have to I guess. I don't want you to wet your pants though we're human and there's nothing wrong with that. It's something else you need to do is it. Well... just face the wall and kind of squat. You can use the papers you're carrying when you're done. God, I hope its not your own work. Someone else's submissions? They aren't mine are they?

This is what its all about. Isn't it? What a rush! As you say: "The scars are complimentary" and this is the vantage point where we can both try to sort some things out. You could say I'm waiting for my alien friends to pick me up. Today I'm an alien clone. I'm here to record this time and place. My dreams are their debriefing zone. The more information and experiences I can cram into my head the better they like it. They could come for us at any time but if they don't, we have both our imaginations to play around with.

Imagination is like bubble gum. It expands with use. Want some? The more you chew on it the more it seems to grow. Don't you think so? Questions that have answers are interesting but the lasting questions are the unanswerable ones... are the most flavorful. The ones I care about. Who I am is a question of debate. I change and so do you. I chew my cud and meditate. In that tension between who we are from one moment to the next is what creation is about. I wish I could say it better. The wad chews you as you chew it until you fuse with it. Now, what would you like to know? Care for a lobotomy?

Prospero: Please describe your background as a writer.

Caliban: Look down. You can see my background frantically trying to sort itself out. I like to throw it over the ledge. Let everything go so to speak. Watch it reconfigure. When it does, the configuration is always a little different. A revolving kaleidoscope if you will, in constant motion. The past simply serves to highlight the present. It makes us more aware of the present tense. I don't believe we ever lose anything. At different times one thing is more important than another. At other times different influences predominate.

Right below us, what look like frantic periods scuttling around are really people I knew or writers who influenced me trying to get my attention again. Take your pick. If it's in English or in English translation I've read it and been influenced by it. Those influences might seem disjointed but they all have a sense of purpose rising and falling somewhere in me. My goal is to expose the interiority of things. Air it out. Give it breathing room. Let it twist itself inside out until different configurations emerge. If you ask me why, it's because I've learned that direction and purpose are subjective things.

I'm insane of course. We all are. Things like faith, love and meaning have no basis in the way the universe runs. Such delusions help us to maintain our equilibrium. You might say that everything is a lie and that's all right. Absurd isn't it. Surreal to the extreme. The true miracle is how we manage to make the insanity work for us. We can't help but do harm but the thing is not to do it intentionally. For myself, I've found it better to love than to hurt though I do both. It's the way we're made.

I never know what unlikely elements are going to come together in my brain. Somewhere out there is someone or something looking down at us. Imagine what we look like to them? That's the way it works. There will always be individuals more creative, brighter, talented or

just more highly evolved. It humbles the ego. Recognize that no question can really be answered unless the answer is already contained within the question. That's what they tell me anyway. So, why ask questions at all? Better I should give you some answers and then you can write the questions you always wanted to ask but didn't know you knew. I call it my flim flam method toward the geometry of the Socratic soul.

We're cosmic bums you know inhabiting some middle plane of existence trying to make sense out of an insane situation but you never know what's going to be valuable to you or catch another person's attention. Maybe this interview will or something about it. You never know whose reading, for what purpose, or what they might find of significance. Very often it's little things. A word or two, a scene. Maybe an approach. To put it in terms of poetry it's all in the power of the line.

Unfortunately, most poets stop there. In great poetry the lines are interrelated and actually lead us to the point of epiphany. I'm hoping this ledge will help us move in that direction. We can't know for sure if it will. There's a chance. There we have it. Allowing for the possibility of success also allows for what is far more likely. That's failure. Life is a scam. A box of cracker jacks if you ask me. We never know what the actual prize is until we become it. Creativity is similar.

Might as well get used to cavities through masticating your own product into total inanity. The payback of the creative process is represented by entering the realm of the process itself. When we do that, we become eternal, escape time and become demigods. Do you believe that? Am I a fool if I do? Watch your footing!

We are our own prize through the act of forfeiting our egos and becoming the meditation itself. It doesn't matter how you get there. Chewing gum or fathoming the intrinsic merit of a hostess Twinkie might do it for some people. Its all about changing experiences into art. A timeless and most often harmless vocation. Of course you starve to death in the process. I like to see it as tweaking the Twinkie until you eat the end.

I can best clue you into my background by letting you know where I am right now. I'm reading a translation of Catullus and thinking about aliens. I'm thinking of the marathon run of remakes on the sci fi channel I was watching last night. Somehow it's comforting to know that both O'Hara and Bukowski were beat by over two- thousand years in terms of what they accomplished as evidenced by the work of Catullus. It's a sobering thought. By the way, I can't wait for the second part of the Reality Sucks series to come out on TV.

I'm going to be disappointed I know. I usually am by adaptations but they sucker me in anyway. To tell you the truth, what isn't an adaptation of something else? Isn't that what writers do? They take their experiences from whatever source and recombine them into distillations of meaning using words as the medium. Nothing is sacred. Nothing is profane. The artist's role is to give to open ended experiences a beginning, middle and end. We take from the flow to give credence to a unique period and time which is represented by our own consciousness. The art is in the truth of it.

Influences are like that. There is no such thing as a high culture or low culture anymore. As for an avant garde today, it's an impossibility. Of course, if you're not established you might

call yourself avant garde. Ezra Pound and Eliot compete in my mind with sex experts, toys on the Oxygen channel and M.T.V. Those get all mixed up with P.B.S. and my reading and thinking regarding cyber punk, punk rock and the Sex Pistols. Don't think for a moment that a person like Milton wasn't just as influenced by his surroundings.

There are no high roads. No necessary prerequisites toward attempting to reach the best in you but the blocks you put up yourself. The urge for notoriety or to make money or to seem more significant than you are gets in the way of creative effort. I got rid of my crosses because they were too heavy to carry. Actually, I tried to sell them at the flea market but everyone had their own so I sort of left them by the side of the table. Like any serious writer I never throw away anything. In a worse case scenario I can always create a living will donating my procreative literary organs to the Salvation Army.< p>

The point is that everything that comes into me is gist for the writing mill. I write every day and am usually quite dissatisfied. Occasionally something good emerges. I can't conceive of a time when I wasn't writing. I published my first poem at nine or ten.

The past is a graveyard. I don't view it as a necessary prerequisite to anything. Do what you need to do. It's dumb to selectively take from the past those things that you think others will be impressed by. There is so much posturing and hype. Writing is simply a craft. It's mental cooking with a dash of ego thrown into the mix. I try to make sure my ego is fresh but not rancid. I don't want to spoil the recipe.

In terms of poetry I've failed more literature classes than passed. I keep switching professions and living situations. Nothing satisfies me. I get bored easily which means I'm looking for something I can never find. That's why we're here on this ledge. At the nexus of creative exploration is where I find out about myself through using writing as an exploratory medium. It's just a tool for something else. My problem is all those something "else's" in me can get very complicated.

I've been fortunate in being ignored. I fool myself into thinking that the worst curse for a writer is to be captured in the academic orbit or to trip over success. The terrain along that route is littered with the graves of once promising people. Having said this, I wonder how much of that attitude is just fermenting, sour grapes. I both envy and resent those who have found financial security through their writing but can't quite get over the feeling that very rarely can what they do be called art.

So, my background as a writer might be described in terms of my being a voracious consumer of both popular and literary culture which means that I'm an expert on nothing but at the same time a synthesizer of both traditions and history. In general the more experiences the better for a writer. They have to be so many different people in so many different situations. It helps to be a scoundrel.

Prospero: Do you feel there are differences between crafting poetry and fiction? If so, what are they?

Caliban: What a numb question. You know there is. Did you come all the way up here to ask that? If, as some people insist it's true that only writers read things like this they'll know

the answer to that at once. I'm not going to fall into your trap. On the other hand, you might be truly brilliant and be attempting to go beyond the superficial boundaries of contemporary definitions. Actually, I've written prose pieces that turned into great poems and poems that made a great prose attempt. On this ledge is where I do my prose work. Notice that we have about two feet to work with. If you'll follow me around the corner you can see where I work on poetry.

The difference between the two is the size of the ledge. The mental leeway regarding poetry is measured in inches. With poetry you sort of teeter between presence of mind and total annihilation. It's all about the degree of compression. Prose work allows you more breathing room and time in which to right yourself when you lose balance. The truly interesting things being written today are those that combine or transcend definitions like "prose" or "poetry". Somewhere in the clutter of my mind I admit to being biased regarding poetry as the "apogee" of writing. Why is that? Actually it's the individual work you are conjuring with at the moment that is the most important thing whether it's prose or a poem. These days everything written is prose. What matters is a "will" to write and a commitment to it beyond everything else but the importance of what you are doing while you're doing it.

Exceptions tend to be the rule in creative work. There is little I can say about myself or what I do with any definitive conclusion because I'm still very much in the process of doing it. I'm milking my cow and if people aren't drinking the product or have an allergic reaction I don't care. Well... I don't care much.

The one thing I can with certainty say is that understanding what has come before as a writer is important. I've felt a need to both understand and respect the accomplishments of the past before trying to set my own fire. The experience has enriched me. I talk about setting fires because you have to pasteurize the milk and if you're a creative artist the act of destruction is implied in the creative act itself.

There was never a functioning human that didn't have to defecate or eat or burp or flatulate or even die. It makes me glum to think about it. The point is we have more in common with each other than we think. Swallow your gods whole and then be willing to let them pass gracefully through you. On the other hand, how can you attempt something new when you have no grounding in the accomplishments of the past or are enslaved by it? Now is a very special kind of wound. There are times it hurts to be alive both mentally and physically. We need to deal with the reality of that. In part, I deal with it by choosing to write what I want or need to write.

Prospero: What is your take on the current state of publishing in regards to poetry?

Caliban: The internet has served to empower the writer who lacks political savvy or is just not interested in sucking up to the establishment. I'm captivated by this phenomena. For years I've been writing and been rejected by every major contemporary publication I can think of. A good thing in looking back on it. I'm a very uneven writer. William Carlos Williams was that way but he was probably more talented. Writing takes time. Individual breakthroughs are slow. On the other hand, editors seem to have forgotten that a poem is greater than its individual elements. I'm amazed by all the unique and beautiful images the seem to lead nowhere.

I've learned not to evaluate an artist by their publication histories. It's an unreliable indicator of excellence. Let me give you an example. I know that many editors when they get a submission that interests them look the person up on the search engines to see what they can find. It's most usually "google". Your submitted piece now must contend with the information or lack of it that there is out there about you.

What happened to the work itself? Like traditional print it's the name that's ultimately the important thing. I wonder what would happen if a prestigious site decided to only accept anonymous submissions? I would have no qualms in being just one of the numerous anonymous Homers who contributed their little chapter to the big Homeric whole and then flamed out. I don't really care about reputation so much as writing a little something that might luck out to be lasting. Even a fragment would do. Wow! I like that. Having said that, there are days I doubt myself and seem to care a lot. I need to be interviewed by someone so editors will find it and think I'm interesting or significant enough that someone took the time to interview me.

Prospero: What are your influences from the fields of film, music, art, and writing? Or are you only influenced by written works?

Caliban: I take a structuralist view of information. Right now I'm also reading Quinn's little book on Hilda Doolittle. I mean I'm interested in the history of everything. It's the excellence of the result that inspires me. Rap, country, classical music, folk songs are examples when it comes to music. Film, art and writing are the same way. I'm influenced by all the classic directors. I get most excited when I uncover something good I didn't know was around.

I'm influenced by whatever touches me. Your willingness to come out on this ledge with me has aspects to it like a movie, music, art and writing. Think about it. Want to dance? We're all dancing the quick step through life. Some people are more coordinated than others is all. This interview is its own orchestration. If we knew where we were going with it, it might lose something in the spontaneity of its development.

I prefer the element of surprise where we're never quite sure where we'll end up. You've got to be more creative with your questions though. What is this some kind of formula thing? Fly, Prospero, fly. For my part I want to be mysterious and win the lottery. I want to flicker in your mind for a second and then fade out only to emerge sometime later with the memory of what I said like a raging bonfire consuming you alive. Pity though. Unlikely. Except that I do smell burning wood. I think it's me.< p>

For creative artists the end of the cliff is always the next step away. The question is do I prefer comedy or tragedy? I like both. We have all of history to romp around in. Welcome to Mr. Rodgers ledge! Care for some graham crackers and milk?

I would argue that the difference in artistic mediums is one of expressional technique rather than of kind. You would be surprised regarding the similarities in perception between good scientists and artists. I paint, sculpt and write. I treat my visual art like poetry and my written work as sculpture. I'm a trained and aberrantly functioning social scientist. Don't get trapped

in one approach or medium. Everything you do is interconnected so do it all. Don't get trapped in one style or approach. Continually experiment.

Prospero: Please describe some of your favorite creative techniques.

Caliban: Creativity is a form of deadly serious play. Use every trick you can think of. Get a scrabble set and throw the letters in a bag. See what comes out. Take a favorite poem and rewrite it starting from the end. Realize in the process why it was best to have written it as it originally was. Thumb through a dictionary finding one word you like on each page and string them together into a masterpiece. Let your mind expand with possibilities and then choke those possibilities into some new form and arrangement in terms of order.

It's in the seemingly contradictory synthesis of dissimilar elements the significance emerges. Who cares what someone else thinks about what you do if what you're doing is for yourself such that something in your life would be missing if you didn't do it. There comes a time in your development when you can feel inside yourself whether something is good or bad. Don't fool yourself but be aware of the importance of the communication coming from your gut.

I've been responsible for a lot of crap in my time. Most of it came out because I didn't spend enough time rewriting. I've tried every bizarre technique you can imagine. I love to play with art. At the end of it all I come back to the realization that being human and honest with yourself is the most important thing you can do. Lie to other people if you want but at least know when you're doing it. Appreciation for accomplishment rests on an understanding regarding the elements that make something special. That comes from wide reading, experience, feeling and continuous evaluation. Taste is something developed through comparisons.

Prospero: Do we have to kill our idols or worship them?

Caliban: I don't have any specific idols anymore because I worship them all at once now. God, my knees are raw from all my past genuflecting. The worst thing you can do is take yourself or all those idols seriously. At some point in time you need to free yourself from yourself and your insecurities. If you are truly yourself then what you have to say is important whether anyone else recognizes it or not. It's a case of individual experiences. Uniqueness can be shared. Celebrate it. Expand with it. Reach out to others not to impress but to share.

Prospero: What is your perception of electronic publishing?

Most of my work published to date is on line. It's developing into a rather extended electronic oeuvre. I like the idea that it floats about and then etherizes out. I'm in dialog with City Lights about a poetry book. Sounds good doesn't it? It sounds good until you realize all it really means is that I recently sent them a query letter and they were kind enough to answer back. That's all.

So many detours and roadblocks. I become paralyzed with the thought that to be better known I have to take time out from my work in order to hype myself. Do I really want to do

that? On the other hand I could pay to have a book done. I hate that idea as well. Hell, I write it! Why should I become involved in a situation that's just a few steps removed from a vanity press.

Electronic publishing on the other hand is a liberating force for the disenfranchised intellectual. It transcends the importance of the printing press. The arbiters of taste are pissed. The establishment in the sense of political structures and corporate industry are afraid. They are trying to make it conform to their expectations of what it should look like. They were able to do so with every other communication medium. They are rushing like hell to profit through extending their control. When you think about it, electronic publishing is a form of middle class titillation. That bothers me. At its worst it is abused and abusive. Any new medium goes historically through a period of over hype and unwarranted expectations. In the beginning it takes its cue from past mediums. We have yet to see what electronic publishing can really do. Artists are at the cutting edge of this technology.

Prospero: Is it best not to think about that which makes no sense?

Caliban: I don't know. I guess it depends on the "it" that's doing the making. If not making sense is what you do well then by all means go for it! Are you referring to the best that is "not to think" or the best that just might be hiding inside that which makes no sense? This is the reason I wanted to meet you on this ledge. Making no sense may actually make sense of this nonsensical universe. Some people argue that we can't help but make sense because of the nature of our mental physiology. Just try and not make sense out of nonsense. I don't think it can be done. Surrealism is something far more than trying to not make nonsense unless the point is to expose the nonsense for its own not making. Go figure?

Prospero: Where can readers find your work?

Caliban: Inside their own heads. Who cares! The best way is to not even try. Make it an accidental experience. Uncover it by not trying, by giving up and not caring about it and when you stumble over it on the internet, it's that much more serendipitous. They can find it in themselves just as I discovered it in myself. It's there. In all of us. Create your own stuff. If you want the easy way out, use the "google" search engine. I'm all over the place but in non taxing manageable bytes.

Prospero: Do you have any new projects in the works?

Caliban: Its interesting that you've asked me nothing about specific works of mine. What's the matter? Don't any stand out to you? Is that what it means to be "less" established? I think it's time I gave you a little shove. You've entered my consciousness and are now part of my background and history. I can do what I want with you. Want to join the crowd down below? Want to become part of a blog?

I've got a good system going. Each time a piece is rejected I mentally address the editor: "Damned you for your probably wise discernment!" and then I rewrite the submission in question. It improves. Editors get a lot of flak but they are in a unique position in being exposed to everything that comes their way. To tell you the truth I've been saved from embarrassment by them.

Most of the time if they think something isn't ready for publication it's because the piece in question needs more work. This is not true in a number of pseudo "prestigious" journals. Some of the editors out there are real scamps. I'm working on my third unfinished book, a series of unfinished plays, a gaggle of unfinished poetry and some unfinished absurdist genre things. All dribbles when it comes to my major work and that's me! Unfortunately, I don't like myself very well. It's the times I live in I guess.

Scott Malby Bio

Scott Malby lives along the Oregon coast and writes what he wants to when the mood strikes him. Some of his work has been published online and in such journals as *Bathtub Gin*. However, most of it lies in piles on his bathroom floor

