



THE
FICTION
INTERVIEW

Fiction Editor Joey Cruse with Chris Klassen

Hey Chris, welcome! First off, let me say it was a pleasure to read, “The Collection,” and it’s a pleasure to have you in Issue #14. Kind of like Mission Impossible, if you so choose to accept, I’d like to ask a few questions as a sort of informal interview. I type it up as a pseudo-conversation as best as I can and, hopefully, you feel as free as you’d like to dive deep into answers or not. Luckily, we ask questions to writers and they, in my experience, like to talk, so I’ll only warn that I am a basic bitch and like to ask four or five questions that pertain to your story/life and then one stupidly absurd question because it gives me simple pleasure and makes me laugh. I’ll get started, and I thank you ahead for the distention of belief in our conversation...

JC: *One of the things that stuck out to me most about your piece was the spread of information/disinformation. Whether true letters or not written by the mysterious antagonist, the internet rose up and showed its need for closure – they eat that shit up. Named Marjorie or no, people feel consoled reading confession, truth or lie. I suppose my question is then, in your story, do you think that the spread of these letters of confession through social media are beneficial or exploitative? And for whom?*

CK: As an admitted neo-Luddite, there's not much about social media that pleases me. I find it the 21st century version of Jerry Springer. In my story, I don't think the spread of the letters goes as deep as being beneficial or exploitative and I'm sure the teenagers who spread them thought about nothing other than they wanted to put them online because everything today goes online. I think it was just another superficial bit of tripe that might or might not have been true. Even though I wrote it, I'm still not sure if the letters were real or if the whole thing was just a hoax that gullible people believed for a little while until they got bored with it.

JC: *I think that there is a lot to unpack in your story, and I think that one of the more cool juxtapositions you made was using the medium of writing letters (epistolary) against the backdrop of social media. Was there a reason you had these small confessions travel like wildfire digitally, even though the intent may have been to never have been seen written on paper? How would you describe the overlap between the intimacy of a letter and a (probably poorly worded phrase) digital experiment in ego and shame and the need of feeling from another?*

CK: I think it reflects my continuing distaste and critique of what is constantly available online and how easy it is to harass and even destroy people. It makes me think about internet bullying and the fact that we are all so vulnerable to becoming victims. Letters are intimate and personal. Having intimacy posted online without consent is despicable but it's so easy to do and, like watching a car crash, people love to see it without ever considering the pain being inflicted. However, in the story, if the letters were actually written by the antagonist, I imagine his motive was nothing more than leaving a narcissistic legacy, which I guess means he would have been pleased for his few minutes of digital notoriety. He was a pretty selfish and uncaring dude, after all. On the other hand, if the whole event was a hoax, then the teenagers got their thrill by fooling the world for a little while and reading the sincere responses of those who were convinced they knew the perpetrator and his victims.

JC: *I have my own opinion, and of course there should be others, but do you think the writer of these collections is ultimately forgiven? Has he been forgiven enough in the court of public media to make up for, perhaps, never having had true forgiveness from who he wronged? I think that that concept leaves this story with a lovely philosophical treatise that fucks up your day for a while – in today's age is your apologetic value created by those you wronged (does, "I'm sorry," matter even if no one hears it, or you aren't forgiven, or you legit feel sorry), or does a general consensus from a mob give you the a-okay to feel forgiven?*

CK: I don't think he has been forgiven. On a grand scale, I don't think the majority of people who read his letters even considered whether he should be forgiven or not, despite his final question in the last letter. They read the letters, they might have thought about them briefly for a

little while, and then they moved on to the next shiny online object. His supposed victims, or the people who claimed to know the victims, would, in my mind, consider his efforts to gain forgiveness cowardly at best.

As a real fan of saying sorry, I hope apologies will always matter. Is asking "if you say sorry, and no one hears" the same as asking about the falling tree in the forest that no one hears? I think we can feel sincere about our apologies and forgive ourselves but only by knowing that those we've wronged forgive us too will we ever feel complete peace. Otherwise, it might just be a whole lot of "sound and fury signifying nothing". Someone much smarter than me wrote that.

JC: *I read this story and I think of a few writers. There's sort of a slow, cared-for, modernism burn, like Sherwood Anderson or maybe early Nabokov still writing in Russian, combined with a sort of contemporary edgery, Joe Meno, Raphael Bob-Waksberg, Donald Ray Pollack, John Jodzio, Shawn Vestal..., who are some of the writers that you're currently into/who are some of the writers that made you like writing?*

CK: My earliest interest was Edgar Allan Poe. I loved the darkness of his stories. "The Tell-Tale Heart" might be the reason that I enjoy writing about guilt and forgiveness and repentance. As a very old-school guy, I'm not familiar, to be totally honest, with much current literature. I mostly gravitate to the classics of the 20th century variety. The book that has hit me the hardest this year is Nausea by Jean-Paul Sartre (I first read it years ago but brought it out again earlier this year). He expresses the depth and confusion of existence in a way that can only be described as genius (assuming I understood it!) and it inspired me to write (or try, at least) about deeper issues. Others that I've read and re-read multiple times are A Moveable Feast by Hemingway, mostly for nostalgic purposes, The Gambler by Dostoevsky (who doesn't like to see rich people lose their money?), The Outsider by Albert Camus and Down and Out in Paris and London by George Orwell. To be refreshed when I feel like something a bit lighter, a quick dose of On the Road by Jack Kerouac usually does the trick. Or The Tao of Pooh by Benjamin Hoff.

JC: *What kind of cheese would you be and why? I'm sort of a Humboldt Fog guy myself...*

CK: My immediate thought is Laughing Cow. I come in a small and unassuming package but, once unwrapped, some people find me moderately enjoyable.

With much appreciation and great thanks for putting up with my wandering thought process, I'll say thank you again for creating such a rich and deep lake of a story to dredge. There's great enjoyment in sharing good work with others and you've done some good work, so I hope you feel proud. Joey