

# *S*nterview *S*ssue 11 (Fiction)

## *Senior Editor Charles Pinch with Zachary Hay*

*One of the big takeaways of having a literary publishing website is the thrill that jump starts your heart/mind cluster when you start reading a fiction submission from somebody you didn't know existed a few minutes ago only to find yourself inside a story of such superior quality and told in such breathtaking prose that you only wish you'd written it yourself—so much so that it almost hurts. This was our experience when Zachary (Zach) sent in The Boy Who Killed No One (Issue 3) and Back When Ford Made a Decent Car (Issue 9). It's hard to pin down just where his stories are in terms of genre or style. We settled on 'dirty realism' a la Hugh Selby Jr. and the man himself--Charles Bukowski but Zach's writing possesses an undercurrent of lyricism you don't find in either author. It's kind of 'noir-ish' but not enough to call it 'noir'. It bows to the noble tradition of 'realism' in literature but with a candescence that is new and fresh. In a word, it's all together his own thing, 100% pure—the highest compliment one could give it is...well, truly, madly, deeply you wish you'd written it yourself. Welcome Zachary Hay!*

*CP: What inspired you to become a writer? How old were you when you wrote your first story and do you remember what it was about?*

ZH: When I was twelve I got into Clive Barker. My parents believed that if I was old enough to understand a book, I was old enough to read it. So I got away with reading a lot of demented stuff as a kid. I believe my William Burroughs phase came a year after.

Reading felt like I was getting away with something so the appeal of writing came soon thereafter. I monkeyed with poetry and fiction. When I was 18 I wrote a short story called "Something about God, Something about a Toaster". At that time I was working the night shift at an aluminum factory and the story was about a young man who hated his job to the point of suicide. At the end the factory explodes and his suicide is averted through some cute twist of fate. I'm sure it was not very good and now it's gone forever, but I still remember the catharsis of writing that and I guess I'm still kind of chasing that feeling.

*CP: Where do you get your ideas and what triggers your creative imagination? Who were your literary influences along the way? What kind of writing especially fires your enthusiasm?*

ZH: My stories start with an intrusive thought that I can't get out of my head. I flesh it out until a story appears. The last story of mine you were kind enough to feature was called "Back When Ford Made a Decent Car" and that one started when I couldn't stop thinking about how terrible it must be to walk with a gangrenous toe.

My tastes in books followed a very typical pattern for someone of my ilk: Hemingway and Raymond Carver in early college followed by the postmodernists. My favorite writers now are JD Salinger, Philip Roth, Cormac McCarthy and William Faulkner. I still have to insist that the King James Bible is the greatest literary achievement in the history of the English language, which I guess is as good an indication of what kind of writing fires my enthusiast as any.

*CP: The stories of yours we've published are complex and layered and you seem to be drawn to the darker side of human experience. Does this reflect upon events in your life or life situations or is it purely an artistic decision or a bit of both? Also, and I'm saying this as a Canadian, your fiction has a 'very American' feel as opposed to say a non-regional or global one. Is this important to you and if so why? (This does not mean your writing is not universal in its appeal. It most certainly is.)*

ZH: First, thank you for your kind words.

Second, I'd like to emphasize here that I really am a very happy person. My childhood was a good one and I consider myself an optimist. I wouldn't say the bleak tone of my writing is an artistic choice as much as it is what comes easiest to me. As I mentioned, my stories start with small thoughts that I can't flush from my brain. Why my brain is filled with gangrenous toes and children with knives is Freud's business, not mine. Location does, however, play a role. I grew up in a trailer park outside of Detroit and the place had a big influence on me. Everyone was poor and all the children set fires, but everyone knew their neighbors. My mother was a cleaning woman, my father was a truck driver. So I suppose there's something very American in that upbringing. I don't know anything else.

*CP: You've heard us rag on FOTD about the duplicitous nature of MFA programs. Do you think good writing can be taught in the classroom? What's your personal feeling about Creative Writing courses and how do you feel they impact on emerging writers today?*

ZH: The foremost reason to enroll in an MFA program is to make connections, and I think that draws some very unimaginative people. There's a reason the fiction coming out of the MFA crowd all sounds like Jonathon Franzen. I don't have a problem with creative writing courses on their own. I've taken a couple and have met some very interesting people. But when you turn a business out of taking advantage of hopeful people, I have serious objections. I heard some great advice when I first got interested in publishing my work: if an agent wants money, they're a fraud. I think that same principle applies here.

CP: *What do find the most difficult when it comes to writing, and, on the flip side, what is easiest? Do you have a routine when you write? Do you know what you want to say before you begin or do new ideas and directions emerge during the process? Do you frequently revise?*

ZH: I write two pages a day. New stories start freehand. If they show potential I'll type a second draft. Then I read that second draft and make notes. Then I do a rewrite. Then I'll step away from it for a few weeks before I read it over again and write another draft. I keep the structure of the story in mind when I'm rewriting but the first draft is a drive through fog.

The easiest part of writing is the writing itself. I've never had writer's block. Not really. The hardest part, to be blunt, is finding a quiet space.

CP: *Finally, how do you see the future of literature, especially fiction?*

ZH: It will grow increasingly abstract. Books can't compete with television for our attention. Television is too ubiquitous. Last summer I saw a woman watching television at the beach. Figure that. So with the burden of entertainment off literature's shoulders, it is free to be first and foremost a form of artistic expression. Consider the ways painting changed with the advent of photography. Rembrandt and Cezanne were replaced by Pollock and Rothko. I think the same process is happening with fiction.

I don't think readers will ever die out, but we may become cultish.

CP: *Thanks, Zach. Really enjoyed our interaction. And now, as Caspar Gutman said to Sam Spade in Dashiell Hammett's immortal The Maltese Falcon... "Well sir, the shortest farewells are the best. Adieu."*

