

Where the Hummingbird Goes to Die

An Interview with Justin Hyde

By Aleathia Drehmer

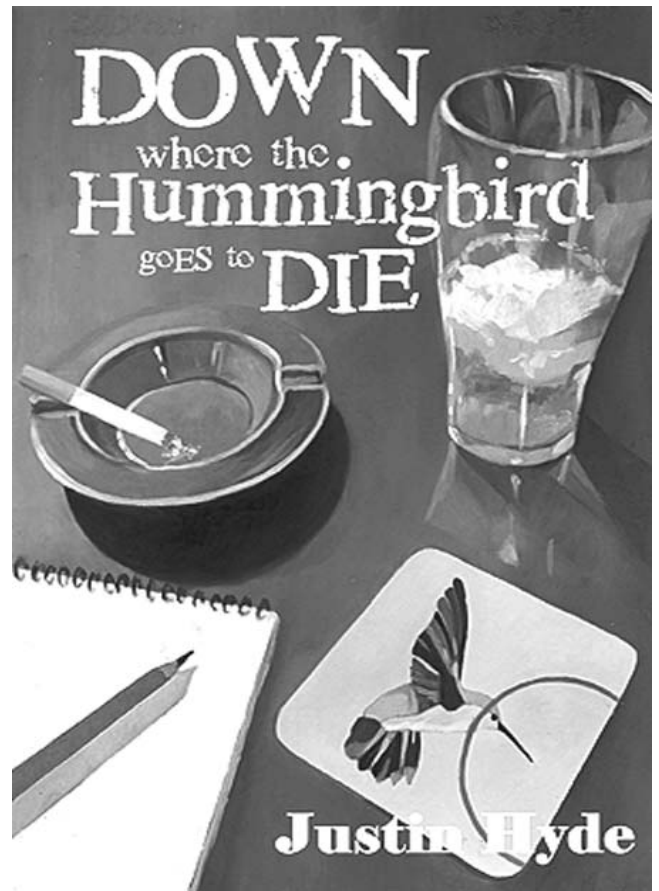
Justin Hyde is an unassuming writer from the heart of the Midwest that edged onto the small press scene in the last few years. I took a notice to his work very early on and have been a fan since he began writing at the age of 27. Last year, Outsider Writers had a poetry book contest and Justin came out on top delivering a clean and effective manuscript that speaks to the heart of the common man. Recently, Justin took the time to sit down and answer some questions about his life and having his book *Down Where the Hummingbird Goes to Die* published.

Drehmer: You started writing at age 27. Why so late in life and what was the one thing that spoke to you that day you started?

Hyde: Why so late in life? I don't know. Looking back, I suppose the mechanism was always there, but I'm a late bloomer in a-lot of areas and on top of that my parents were too busy with their own addictions and psychological bullshit to help foster anything. It's a wonder I'm alive today, let alone writing.

What was the one thing that spoke to you that day you started?

I'll be blunt here. I was parked in front of a bowling alley in Ames Iowa with a loaded pistol in my lap. I'd hit some sort of infinite bottom, I was living in my parents basement, had nothing to my name. I was going to kill myself. It sounds corny as hell and I almost want to make up some innocuous back-story, but it's the truth. I was sitting there flipping the safety switch on and off and then I started thinking about this old man who walked through my parents' neighborhood every morning. He looked ancient as hell, all twisted up like a curly-q, but he always had a smile on his face. I thought to myself how I'd trade places with him in a second if I could be that content, then for reasons I don't understand I grabbed an old sandwich bag from the passenger wheel-well, a pen out of the glove-box and wrote that down. It made me feel better, it still does. That being said, to say writing saved my life would be a disingenuous statement. If anything it's complicated my life: strained the weak family ties I



had to begin with and taken my marriage past the edge of disintegration.

Have you spent most of your life in Iowa? If so, do you consider yourself a regional writer?

I've lived all of my life in Iowa. I used to race bicycles competitively and have traveled all over to race, but Iowa has always been home.

Do I consider myself a regional writer? There is some ambiguity in that question. I consider myself a student of people. In

What is the Guild of Outsider Writers?

The Guild of Outsider Writers, founded February 2007, is an international collective of independent writers, editors and publishers. We started out with five original members and now have a core of around ten people and many more supporters. Our website, www.outsiderwriters.org is a hub for outsider writing and commentary. We've had small meetups in the past but our first official gathering will be August 23rd and 24th in Chicago. We have pages on the social networking sites Facebook and Myspace.

We're aesthetically diverse and we prefer innovative work. But I heard someone say recently that all good work is innovative in some way. More specifically, however, we champion independently published writing. We often like work from the counterculture. From the beginning, our motto has been "Unite the Write." We're interested in supporting and discussing a wide variety of literature in all its varying forms.

This newsletter represents a natural expansion of our print efforts. This first issue has essays and interviews by and about the kind of independent writers we like. I like the way it's turned out. I hope our readers like it too.

Contact Us
Pat King, Editor
www.outsiderwriters.org

so far as the people I have come into contact with are somehow fundamentally different for having lived in Iowa, then yes, I suppose I'm a regional writer, but honestly I don't believe that to be the case.

What is your obsession with the Russians?

I don't know that I have an obsession with the Russians. When I found out the government would pay for me to go to college (in the form of loans) that sounded a hell of a lot better than working for a living. I was issued a debit-card attached to the loan that I could use at the student union. I bought all my books for class there as well as food and one day I stumbled through the fiction section and grabbed *The Brothers Karamazov* by Dostoevsky. I was very impressed with the way he accurately and vividly nailed down the panoply of the human compound fracture onto the page. He is and was one of my favorite authors.

It seems in this day and age of poetry that most male writers are emulating either the Beats or Bukowski. Your work has been noted to lean towards the latter. Do you find this unsettling to be seen as someone who might not be writing with their own voice, but the voice of a dead man??

I look at it this way: I was who I was long before I ever read Bukowski. I started writing poetry before I read Bukowski, and after having read Bukowski, I didn't fundamentally alter my

style or mindset. That being said, I will readily admit that I am a fan of his work.

Do you feel you have any similarities?

If anything I would say a general narrative quality and desire for accessibility.

Within the last year, you have taken the position as a poetry editor at *Thieves Jargon*. Are you encouraged or disparaged by the state of poetry today?

I read so little poetry that we need to define it as the "state of poetry I read" as opposed to the "state of poetry today". I'll say this: some people are writing heartfelt moving poetry getting at universal truths through their own individual perceptions and they are doing it with style, this I like. On the flipside, some people are writing some deranged enjambment of broad concepts, perhaps because they've been proselytized into some cancerous notion of what poetry should be or because they are bored or because their parents read Dylan Thomas to them, I don't know, either way, I wouldn't say I'm disparaged by that latter category so much as I ignore it as the extraneous scat that has probably been promulgated throughout all of time.

At the end of last year, you won the first ever Jack Micheline Memorial Book Contest at Outsider Writers. How did it feel to beat out 105 other manuscripts for this prize?

Honestly I was ambivalent. On the one hand it felt great to be recognized, but on the other hand the whole ordinal rubric was anathema to the reason I started writing poetry in the first place.

When putting this manuscript together, what was your process for selecting the poems and how long did it take to build it? Was there a lot of thought behind the order of the poems?

This is going to sound flippant and/or arrogant, but truth is I saw the call on outsider writers, sat down with a case of bud-light and picked through some poems for about an hour and a half. I'm sure there was, but none of it was lucid conscious foresight, it was all yellow-brain reflex of the amoeba.

In your poem "klug" there is a mention of a hummingbird and I find it is the only time in the book. What is the meaning of the title of this book *Down Where the Hummingbird Goes to Die*?

I suppose it's an allegory or simile or metaphor, something like that, I don't know, I barely graduated from high-school and only made it through college because they wanted my money. The "hummingbird" is actually mentioned twice, the title came from that second poem. I knew I had to title the manuscript and was struggling to do so. I emailed Matt DiGangi (whose opinion I respect) and asked him if he had any ideas for naming the thing. He mentioned that I might find a line from one of the poems to use. "Down where the hummingbird goes to die" is a line from one of the poems. I suppose in a word it means "our existence" as unadorned with the pickle-foot bourgeois superfluous as possible.



Pat rests after a hard day of imagining the world's demise.

***Bad Attitude* by Leopold McGinnis**
Reviewed by Pat King

If you want the best example of contemporary outsider writing from the last couple of years, then you should read Leopold McGinnis's self-published book, *Bad Attitude*. The book is cynical, funny, and yet, deadly serious about its subject. And it's a polemic in the best sense. It takes the topic of consumerism, lays it on the operating table and examines its guts.

The subject of the book is the end of the world, the apocalypse, something I've been incredibly interested in recently.

The book recognizes the giant difference between capitalism, which is essential, to some extent, in any free society and the mindless consumerism which is turning otherwise healthy humans into mindless robots. Any sane person might look around them and conclude that that Western society is veering toward a sort of point of no return in terms of exchanging mind and spirit for a couple pieces of silver. In *Bad Attitude*, McGinnis's main character, Jesse Durnell, argues the West has already passed this point. He's simply waiting around to watch the thing collapse upon itself. In other words, the apocalypse that mankind has been waiting for has already happened. The virus is already there, all that's left is the death rattle.

And of course the best place to view this consumer apocalypse is by working directly in the heart of the thing: retail.

The narrator of the book, Jesse Durnell, is a salesman at Electronics Pit. Think Best Buy or Circuit City. Jesse has a college degree and worked for a while as a marketing assistant before becoming disillusioned and leaving the job. He's worked various retail jobs since then, quitting them when they start to seem like, well, jobs. He quits and moves on when the fun stops. And when we meet him at the beginning of *Bad Attitude*, the fun has almost stopped. We know that Jesse is about to move on. However, Jesse decides to stay until a certain item, the Futura, a \$10,000 "entertainment center" is sold. To Jesse, the item is the pinnacle of mindless consumption because of the sheer gaudiness of it coupled with the fact that it has every major gadget that consumers love (TV, DVD player, Internet connection, surround sound etc.) The gimmick is made up, of course, and absurd in its

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Come for the Apocalypse, Stay for the Widgets

extravagances. But in the world of *Bad Attitude*, which is one where humor and satire exist as everyday things (a world not quite our own but close) it makes sense. And it's possibly not as absurd as it sounds. Been to the electronics section of a Wal-Mart lately? Anyway, the Futura is a great plot device. There's only one in the entire store. Jesse and his co-worker/friend Mark know that the person who buys the device will symbolize something that they can't quite fully comprehend. The buyer will be the ultimate consumer, and therefore, the ultimate symbol of the apocalypse.

Bad Attitude feels more like a plot book than a character book. The characters seem to exist to move the plot instead of the reverse. It was the best decision for a book like this. You don't want to stray too far from the polemic, make it too much about any one individual character. Which might be a strange thing to say considering that the book is written in first person by Jesse himself. It's very personal and we are always aware that it's Jesse guiding us through this journey. Nevertheless, we never really learn much about Jesse outside of his work life. We know that he graduated college and that he doesn't own a car and doesn't care for the gadgets he sells. But not much else. Most of the book takes place inside the store. And this as it should be. The store is the stage where the actors perform (and make no mistake, everyone in this book is an actor of some sort). One can almost see the props and the lights. It's almost suffocating but that's exactly what's happening to Jesse and his co-workers and even the shoppers at Electronic's Pit.

Bad Attitude is possibly a great book, especially for its length. It's a dystopian novel that takes place not in the future but in the present. It's our own Western dystopia where happiness is fleeting and it can be bought piece by piece, gadget by gadget. In retrospect, it seems like my childhood in the middle class American 1980's was the beginning of the end. A point where we could have recognized where we were going and stopped it or at least slowed it down. And now, here in the 21st Century, in the face of the mighty Western apocalypse, what are reasonable people supposed to do? Jesse Durnell's solution is called "Zen Nihilism" and it means that we can remain in a curious state of peace even while living with ever-increasing meaninglessness all around us.

Stories of Tough Love, Bad Haircuts, and O.J.

An Interview with Matt Smith

By Pat King

Matt Smith's first book, *Jailed by my Father: Tales of Tough Love, Bad Haircuts and O.J.* is a hilarious collection of essays. It focuses on Smith's childhood in the 1970's and his relationship with his firm, funny and caring father. The book is the first release from Manual Publishing and can be purchased at www.manualpublishing.com.

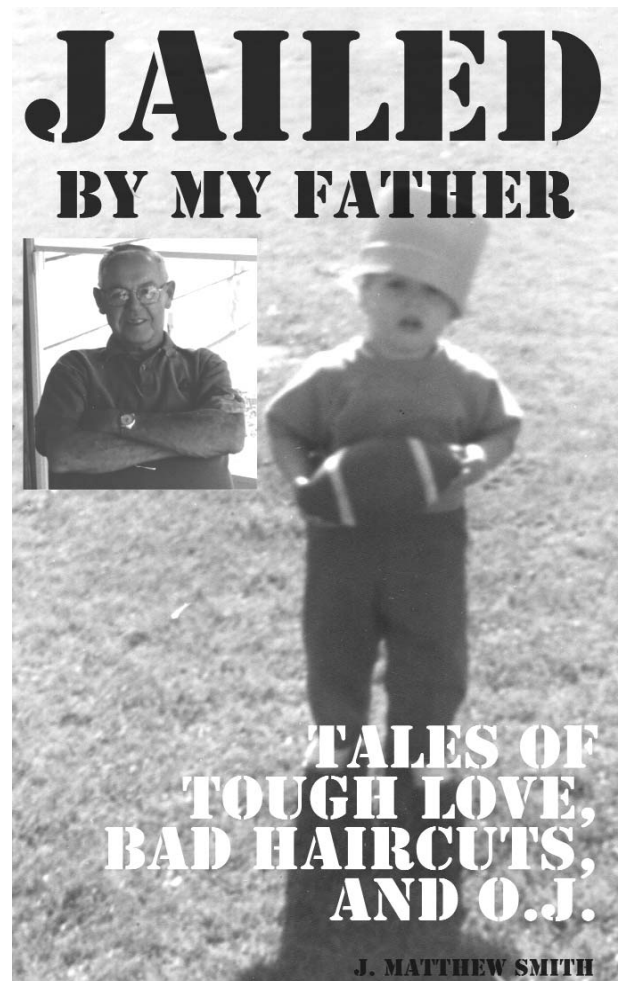
King: When I was reading your book, I found myself laughing out loud. I thought the book had a great balance of tenderness and humor. Was this a conscious choice or is this your natural storytelling method?

Smith: It was a conscious choice in that, first of all, my father—who despite being somewhat of a stubborn hard ass—was very much a funny guy with an affectionate side. He was definitely a tough-love practitioner, and without question, his methods inspired the book. But it wouldn't have been a true reflection of our relationship had the book not included the insanity, humor and even affection that surrounded our relationship. You know, nowadays, you can't really parent the way he did. If I used his blueprint, my kids would be taken away from me. (Trust me, sometimes I'm tempted.) But in some ways, that's how guys from his generation showed love, and he was a good dad and it's strange, but even back then, I think that—at least in the back of my mind—I always knew where he was coming from. I tried to make the book speak to the time in which I grew up, which was the last generation before the invention of political correctness. As I said in the book, often times, insanity reigned back then. Take "Table for Two," could you imagine a school now sending troublemakers to sit with special-ed kids as a form of punishment or in "Grappling for God" being kept after school to street fight a Catholic priest? Sure, it was totally insane, but thank God. Insanity breeds good stories. Also, having been a journalist for nearly 20 years, I've seen my share of writing that tries to pull at heart strings but only comes across as sappy. So, I think I was conscious of that and I used humor as a way to dilute any hokeyness that may have existed. Meanwhile, there was probably an element of subconsciousness working, too, since by nature I tend to be a self-deprecating but over-dramatic tool.

How long did it take to write the book? Did you write the stories in the order that they appeared in the book?

This is embarrassing, but the book took me just over five years to write. I started it Dec. 27, 1999 and finished it in early 2005. I worked off and on, so it wasn't constant. The essays were all written out of order, too. There were a few I tossed. There was a 27-page essay which was the original ending which I decided not to use for legal reasons. Manual doesn't have the pockets to fend off a lawsuit. I did several re-writes after early rejections from agents and publishers. And, of course, when my father died in 2006, the ending had to be rewritten. That's actually one of my regrets. My old man knew about this book and was looking forward to reading it. But, in the end, he never had the chance.

Do you have a favorite story? Was there a story that was hardest to write?



I think my favorite stories were "The Talk" and "Table for Two." As for the former, my old man's 'Birds and the Bees' moment was something I mocked him for literally up to almost his dying day. We just always laughed about that. It was so awkward and so brutal and, really, it just epitomized who he was. Plus, the episode later in that chapter, when I finally got the chance to actually use the 'wisdom' he imparted upon me, was so unforgettable. I mean, almost a quarter century later, I still can't watch *Willie Wonka and the Chocolate Factory* without that night coming back to me. It was like *Porky's* in hell.

"Table for Two," meanwhile, I'm just really fond of. It's bizarre and funny and maybe shocking by today's standards, but there's also a sweetness to it because 'Nick' was just a very sweet person and I've never forgotten her.

The hardest essay to write was "Working-Man's Blues." I re-wrote that piece so many times that I lost count. I knew what I wanted to say, but I'm still not convinced I actually said what I wanted to. I'm not convinced my thoughts transitioned to the page in the way I wanted them to. Although, that said, this is the essay that my wife laughed hardest at. Go figure. Of course, we are no strangers to disagreement.

I'd also have to say I had some difficulty with the first piece, "School of Hard Knocks." Though the essays weren't written in any type of order, I always intended this one to be the first in the book,

The Thousandth Monkey

mainly because I believed it had the best opening sentence, which I think is important for any book. Nonetheless, because I knew 'School' was going to be the first chapter, I was more particular about it than the others because I wanted to make sure people kept turning the pages. Obviously, if you lose them in the first chapter, it's not a good thing. I did several re-writes of this essay.

What was your writing process like? Did you finish a story and revise it or did you revise the stories as you wrote them? Did your background in journalism inform your writing process?

When it comes to process, I'm very undisciplined, unfortunately. I was all over the map. In some cases, I wrote two or three essays consecutively, before going back and editing any of them. Then, there were other instances where I'd work on one essay incessantly, editing, re-editing, etc before moving on. Usually, in those cases, it was because I just wasn't convinced a piece was working the way I intended it to. Finally in the end, when I had the essays I wanted to go with, that's when I made a final, from beginning-to-end edit and re-write. But again, during the process, I didn't follow any plan.

As for my background in journalism, for me, it was a mixed blessing. It helped in terms of self-editing, and it helped in terms of being aware of tone, emotion, etc. But, where it hurt, I think, was in the mechanics of my storytelling. A large part of my journalism career was spent writing for a tabloid and working for the Associated Press, both of which demand that you write tight, concise copy. You know: short, sweet, no fat on the bone. I should have used *Jailed* as an opportunity to break free from that format and let the stories develop more. I should have enjoyed the freedom. Instead, I allowed myself to remain captive to my journalism training. That's why the book is so short I think.

Well, I actually think the length of the book was great. I think a lot of books are too long nowadays and a lot of writers have a hard time getting to the point. These stories take place at least a couple decades in your past. Were there any details that you had to fictionalize because you couldn't remember exactly what happened? How much of the dialog did you actually remember and how much did you have to make up? I ask this partly because I once knew someone who was writing a memoir and wrote virtually no dialog since he couldn't remember exactly what people said. Also, were you ever tempted to write these stories as works of fiction instead of memoir?

This is an interesting question because the one thing I was very adamant about for this book was the Author's Preface, in which I state: "Many of the events written about in this book happened years ago. And although the stories are true, some of the dialog has been recreated from memory, and therefore, is not verbatim." I felt this was important to state right at the outset because way too many times, authors who write similar books end up having their stories called into question. It has happened with Augusten Burroughs and David Sedaris. I'm not comparing myself to these guys. I mean, they're giants and they are two of my favorite writers. But the point I'm making is, it just seems inevitable that these kinds of stories get disputed. So, I figured, 'Let's just say what this book is at the outset. It's meant to entertain and in some

places, for entertainment sake, creative license was taken in places.' What's the harm in saying so? As I've said, all the stories are true.

I didn't have any trouble with details. I remember them like they were yesterday. But I don't recall actual conversations word for word, so I recreated them from memory, trying to keep true to the spirit of the conversation. That said, some conversations - especially certain ones with my father - I do remember, like in 'The Talk.' That was like a recurring nightmare. I did contemplate at times writing these stories as a work of fiction, but never seriously. I do have other stories though that I think might work better in that style, such as my short stint as an insurance and

investments salesman. I think, after something like 88 days on the job, right before my 90-day probationary period, I was fired because I sucked so bad at it. It was one those gigs you fall into accidentally and if there is anyone who had no business in sales, especially insurance sales, it was me. I couldn't sell water to a man dying of thirst. By the way, I mention having other stories - it's for that very reason that the essays in this book focus primarily on my youth. If I'm fortunate enough to write another book, I want to have material. I didn't want to blow my wad all at once. I see that happen a lot with memoirs. I made a conscious effort not to play all my cards.

Do you have any advice for someone who's thinking of writing a memoir or personal non-fiction?

I don't really have any expert advice, per se. But I know from my years as a journalist that everyone has a story to tell. The trick is having the ability to tell it well and in a way that offers others something, whether it be inspiration, or knowledge or just simple entertainment. I say clearly in the preface that my stories have no point, of that I was certain. But, I was also confident that they were entertaining, not because they were about me, but because of the characters and situations. Some people have told me—and I'm grateful for this—that they laughed out loud at some of the essays in my book. That's awesome. That's all I was ever shooting for, really. And maybe having that desire goes back to my favorite book—*A Fan's Notes* by Frederick Exley. That book was the first, and maybe only, book that ever made me laugh out loud. Howl, in fact. It changed my life because it gave me direction. It made me want to write. So in terms of advice, maybe I'd just say, the book should never be about you but rather about your story.

What's next for you? Are you working on any new projects?

Thanks a lot for giving me the opportunity to talk with you. I enjoyed myself. As for future projects, I have a couple going. I've just completed a young adult fiction novel aimed at high school-aged kids, probably ages 15–18. The book is based in part on a creepy real-life event that happened in my hometown while growing up. It was a lot of fun to write. I had a very loose general idea for the book as far as basic plot, but I had no idea what was going to happen one chapter to the next. It was exciting for me to watch what happened to the characters as the book evolved. I'm also five chapters into a novel about a former auto worker in Buffalo who lost his job and his wife, and in between making half-assed attempts at suicide, works part-time as a children's birthday party clown. Seriously.



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Experiment
of All

xiii, by J.D. Nelson
Mad Verse Press
by David Blaine

Nelson's chapbook, *xiii*, contains thirteen poems that you can read through in about fifteen minutes, but you could ponder their meanings for limitless days. Note what it says on the book's last page. (Not the one that says, "Printed on Recycled Paper," the one before that, About the Author.)

"J.D. Nelson, (b. 1971) experiments with words and sound..."

In two instances Nelson's poems consist of, not including their titles, but four words.

That is indeed an experiment, to make an artistic statement in four words.

This is the first of those poems:

this isn't a ransom note

*it's just
a poem.*

If you exclude the title, and you exclude the concluding explanation, then the poem consists of this:

“ “

I like that because I'm left free to insert any thought I like.

This is an example of apophatic poetry, describing something only in terms of what it is not.

If we compared this style to a numbers puzzle, it might be like stating, "This number lies between three and six, and it is not five. You could deduce the number was four, not because I told you it was, but because I told you what it wasn't. But numbers by themselves don't strike me as poetic.

Looking back at Nelson's poem, he doesn't tell us what the poem is, only that it isn't a ransom note. I feel all good poetry has a dark space in the center, a place where you can read into the work. This one certainly leaves room to read in. Over time many people have attempted to write about what poetry is, but I've never read an attempt to say what it isn't.

Combining this apophatic style with what could be termed an experimental absence of examples, I'm free to interject:

*this isn't a ransom note
it's not a demand for reparations*

*there are no directions here
in case of my mysterious disappearance*

this is also not an apology, an explanation

or a suicide note

it's just a poem.

And since no two readers would likely come up with the same response, the prompt "*this isn't a ransom note*" could start each one down his own path of deciding what poetry is in terms of what it isn't.

In "World Weight: 80" Nelson seems to ponder along the same lines as William Carlos Williams might have, trying to decide just what depends on that famous red wheel barrow beside the white chickens.

World Weight: 80

*In my atlas
I thaw those
to say minus.*

*Numbers are
eating our clothes.*

*Tiny kittens
with bloody paws
hunt rats.*

*Wooden? This is
not a blank numbers slot.*

*Shooting sparks
sign their names
in my atlas.*

In his day Dr. Williams was also breaking experimental ground, with his theory of "No ideas but in things," and his claim to writing with what he called, "the variable foot."

As I read Nelson's poem, I see bloody paws, rats stiff with the death, and sparks shooting, golden, and blue upon the white pages of an atlas where the maps do not contain any geo-political boundaries.

I ponder the symbolism of each strophe. Who are these kittens? Who are the rats they are bloodying their paws on? How



are these numbers leaving us naked, and if there is no blank numbers slot, just what is there? But I have not been able to come to any satisfying conclusions.

As you ponder “World Weight: 80” I expect you’ll receive different impressions. That’s the idea, to form your own ideas in Nelson’s things. If you see different things, the experiment is a success. If you see the same things as I did, the experiment is a success. If you see nothing, try getting glazed with rain water.

The truth is, I still haven’t reached a satisfying conclusion as to just what depends on WCW’s wheel barrow. But no one seems to know exactly what his “variable foot” is either.

The most purely experimental poem in the collection is this one,

Star of the Salad Bar

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There are three similarly symbolized stanzas that follow, but I think you can grasp the nature of the experiment from this first one. In graphology, the study of written language, the smallest unit of meaning is the grapheme. In English graphemes are usually the twenty-six letters of the alphabet, punctuation marks, and some symbols such as the ampersand. Nelson’s experiment, writing with unconventional graphemes, is interesting because it pushes our minds to search for alternate meanings to the graphemes we are used to seeing in other contexts. For example the two backslashes on L2 are easily accepted in the stead of the double L normally found in the word “dollar” and the numeral 5 at the end is nearly as easy to accept in place of the letter S. But I can’t say I understand the extra spaces, stray marks, deliberate misspellings and repetitive letters inserted into words here. For me, this poem remains an ongoing experiment.

To my thinking, the most straightforward of the collection is this one,

Remember when salads were fun?

*inside every cherry tomato
lived a tiny tomato shark.*

*the kids would scream
for more!*

There is a world of experimental difference between *Star of the Salad Bar* and *Remember when salads were fun?* Nearly every reader can relate to the latter’s link between fun and the excitedly amused screams of young children, and it’s easy to appreciate the example of childhood imagination found in such a concoction as the tomato shark.

The remaining poems in Nelson’s collection will excite you, more or less, as the four I have chosen to present in this review. In a day when writing must provide instant gratification or risk losing its audience, this collection of poems demands that time be taken with it. That may be the grandest, and riskiest, experiment of all.

Me and The Fantasy Baseball



**Hey sportsfans, Melissa knows what you fantasize about—
BASEBALL! Virtual god-damned baseball.**

By Melissa Hansen

Ahh...fantasy...who doesn’t love it? Well, I’m sure there are a few of us Homo sapiens out there who would rather exist wholeheartedly and solely in that which is concrete; the real world, but not I. Fantasy has been said to alleviate stress and depression, enrich creation, help us to visualize our goals and the desired outcome of our futures. There is a downside to fantasy, I’m sure, but I’d rather not think about it. I’m too busy fantasizing.

My favorite board game as a child was “Fantasy Forest,” and other various games played outside with little or no props necessary. Just me, my friends, or siblings, and our imaginations, which were sometimes fueled by cartoons, movies, or commercial products. I preferred games like “War,” “Star Wars,” and later “He-Man” or “Master’s of The Universe,” and of course “Chase,” which involved the boy I liked chasing me, and me slowing down to just the right pace, but still out of breath, so that I might be tackled to the ground, hopefully sans grass stains. Sometimes I played “Barbies,” but this of course involved sexual fantasy, you know, Ken pulling down Barbie’s top, or Ken talking Barbie into lying down on the pink canopy bed. My Barbie was seemingly innocent, and yet an easily coerced slut, or something to that degree. I sometimes felt guilty, but she nonetheless always wound up on her back saying things like “What are you doing?” and “No, stop...” in an indecisive and passive whisper.

Now it seems to me that adults engage in fantasy just as much as children, but in different realms, which brings me to the Main Event: Fantasy Baseball. A few years ago when I first heard the term “Fantasy Baseball,” I was immediately intrigued, and confused. I was on my way to a concert and my husband’s friend

Brenden said something about it; my ears perked up, my eyes widened and I turned my head quickly towards him in the backseat of the car.

“Fantasy Baseball? You play Fantasy Baseball? What is it?” What first sprang to mind was that it was some sexual fetish I had yet to discover, encased in some arena, I had yet to visit, but no. This was not the case. He explained a little about it, emphasizing on the demands and slight stress it seemed to be causing him. Being the daydreamer that I am, I didn’t really learn too much about it in our short conversation, I just knew I liked the sound of it, and it put a smile on my face. I liked saying it. “Fantasy Baseball,” it sounded fun, and exciting, the possibilities were endless! I imagined fantasy swimming, tetherball, wrestling, flying, handball, cage fighting...I went all dreamy, and there was something endearing about hearing a grown man complaining and expressing heartfelt emotion concerning his Fantasy Baseball.

A couple of years later, or now, Fantasy Baseball began its resurgence in my life, and a slight obsession with the meat of it began to unfold. While working at 28 different libraries in the city of San Francisco, I occasionally began to notice open tabs on computer terminals titled “Fantasy Baseball,” which always involved a male colleague of mine moving hurriedly from the computer, not being assigned any tasks on the computer, a look of severe perplexity and intent or disappointment upon his face, while rushing off to his assigned duty.

And then I met Karl. Karl Koweski. Karl lives in Alabama, and I in California, so our relationship is based on corresponding through writing, our love of writing, reading of each other’s writing, and the editing. I’m fervently awaiting my autographed copy of “Cock Rock” written by Karl, which is soon set to come out in *Hustler Fantasies*. Karl is also a baseball fanatic. And to be more specific, being a “displaced Chicagoan,” a “Cubbies” fanatic. Apparently, this does not come without its anguish and emotional turmoil. I, knowing very little of baseball, except for the fact that some of the players have cute asses and it’s fun to hit balls and catch them, had no idea, previously to my relationship with Karl, of the passionate pain that being a “Cubbies” fan seems to provoke.

“I myself use Clonzipam and Xanax to get through the baseball season. Cause, after all, I am and always shall be a Cubs fan. Fukudome!!!” –Karl Koweski

“What does fuckudome mean?” I ask. Again, I’m intrigued.

“Hoping to ease the pain of being a Cubs fan, I joined a fantasy baseball league with a friend from work, hoping that the distraction of managing twenty odd players from different teams might diffuse my northside obsession. Sadly, this has not been the case...”- Karl Koweski.

Prior to this quote taken directly from one of Karl’s blog posts, I had jokingly asked Karl if he played “Fantasy Baseball,” as I was responding to a letter in which he seemed quite upset over something having to do with the “Cubbies” and a game. A short time after this exchange, I read this post my psychic abili-

ties were coming to a head; Karl Koweski indeed played The Fantasy Baseball.

And I became obsessed, or at least preoccupied with Fantasy Sports and all the possibilities they entailed within my furtive and overactive imaginings. I started doing a little research, learning of The Fantasy Sports Trade Association and the supposedly 15 million players, mostly and overwhelmingly men, participating in online Fantasy Sports. I went to ESPN.com. “Fantasy is hiring! Turn your passion for fantasy into a career opportunity!”

Wow...neat... I thought. I went to FSTA.com, learning that there are 13 (an ancient, mystical number mentioned numerously in the 6th and 7th books of Moses, as well as the number of moons in a year) steps in their guide *How to Play Fantasy Baseball*

“The beauty of fantasy baseball is that there really isn’t any set guideline you MUST follow. It’s your fantasy league, so fantasize any way you want. The main thing is to enjoy baseball and enjoy fantasy baseball. That’s it. OK, let’s take it step by step and get you started.” Again, Wow, sounds cool...sign me up?

I began asking men, who I knew liked sports, specifically baseball, if they played Fantasy Baseball. The reaction was always packed full of passion if the response was “Yes.” This “Yes,” was always paired or followed by a look of vacancy or disgust, pain, anguish, a down casting of the eyes, a shaking of the head, or the forehead falling into the hand, or “I don’t play Fantasy Baseball”...“I play Fantasy Football,” and he trots off to the computer to check his stats. This was one of the more “laid back” reactions I’ve observed.

One night while at my friend Rita’s, I began chatting away about The Fantasy Baseball, and how I didn’t understand why it fascinated me so, to think about it, to wonder, to imagine about its players and all the energy encircling its existence. She told me I was “obsessed” and that I should play for a season. “No thanks,” I said, “I just like to think about it.” It was then I discovered that I wasn’t actually obsessed with Fantasy Baseball, I was obsessed with fantasizing about Fantasy Baseball. I was interested in the psychological and sociological aspects, ramifications, and reasons behind the playing of Fantasy Baseball and Fantasy Sports in general.

One night, my husband goes out of town on a climbing trip, so I go to the bar I used to work at. I’m sitting at the bar having a drink with my friends Pete and CL, they don’t watch sports, they don’t play sports, and they’ve never heard of Fantasy Sports. So I start in again, my eyes are sparkling with curiosity, and glee! Here comes my friend Rob Giovanetti, he’s bartending, pouring the drinks that will lead to a night that turns into morning and a splitting headache, and he is a sports fan! I know he loves The Raiders and The A’s...he’s in front of me, it’s time... “Rob, have you ever played Fantasy Baseball?” An epic reaction occurred. Rob is an extremely verbal and expressive man, working with him, I often wondered if I would witness a cardiac arrest on his part due to any event that either irked or pleased him. His face is an open book. “I fucking hate Fantasy Baseball! It takes



away the whole point of baseball. It seems rigged...seems like the organizer is always the champion! I lost \$150! The whole point of baseball is lost to Fantasy Baseball! I hate Fantasy Baseball!"

Right after this short outburst, Rob got busy and had to get back to work, so we could no longer discuss The Fantasy Baseball, but later on I called him, and we talked about it, so that I might get a better understanding of his passionate hatred for the "sport."

"You grow up rooting for your team...you can only have one team! Fantasy Baseball takes the whole heart of baseball and chucks it to the side! It isolates the player from the team and if you don't follow the players religiously, or keep up, put a lot of time into it...I don't know, I still think I won..."

I told Rob about the questionnaire I had created for Karl, so that I might delve deeper into the mind of a Fantasy Baseball player. I told Rob that Karl was a devout "Cubbies" fanatic and read some of Karl's sermons depicting this state.

"Oh, he's a Cubs fan...The Cubs haven't won the World Series in 100 years...it really leaves The Cubs fan feeling like a loser, I mean, I might play Fantasy Baseball if I were a Cubs fan... I feel sorry for Cubs fans..." –Rob Giovanetti.

Rob's voice trailed off, becoming soft. I could feel his empathy; Rob's hatred for Fantasy Baseball had a hole in it, a soft spot...feeling sorry for the "Cubbies" and their despaired fans. And by the way, Rob HATES The Yankees.

I did a little research on The Cubs and did indeed learn that they haven't won a World Series since 1908, however, they also won the previous year, 1907. The Oakland A's had won four times in the past 36 years, 3 of these in a row, 1972–1974. Rob was thankful he had been raised in Oakland. Now this was getting intertwined with Geographics, and the excusing of stone written hatred for the playing of Fantasy Baseball as long as your team is a Cellar Dweller.

I discussed and sent the questionnaire to Karl. He agreed to cooperate with my hunger and thirst for the reasoning behind the fantasy by answering what I asked.

Let's Play Ball

What does "fuckudome" mean?

Kosuke Fukudome is the Cubbies latest "phenom" right fielder. The team's first Japanese born position player, Fukudome is especially notorious for his vicious ability to take a base on balls. Well worth his 48 million dollar contract.

Did you play actual baseball as a child, and if so, do you still play?

I did play baseball up through to high school until it was discovered that I'm mediocre at best. All that time I didn't realize I was playing middling. I just thought I was playing Cubs style baseball.

Did/do you play any other sports (physically)?

Physically, yes, though not professionally. A little softball with the fellas. And I play the football and soccer and tee ball and hockey and basketball with my kids. Thanks to my six-foot vertical leap I do dominate the volleyball tournaments at the sum-

mer cookouts. It's nothing for me to spike a volleyball into the startled face of a 50-year-old aunt.

When did you first become a baseball fan?

I was born a baseball fan. Specifically a Cubbies fan. People don't decide out of the blue to cheer for a team with absolutely no chance of ever winning a championship. You have to be born under that black flag, with the little embroidered L.

When did you start playing fantasy baseball?

I just started this year.

How much time a week do you engage in fantasy baseball?

Like Project Mayhem, you decide your level of involvement. It can be anywhere from five minutes a day to a couple hours, or, depending if you feel the need to keep virtual track of every baseball team playing, every player on your fantasy team and your opponent's fantasy team, on ESPN.com, four or five hours. I like to think I fall somewhere in the middle at a not quite pathetic two hours a day.

Do you play any other fantasy sports?

Absolutely not. I'm not a fantasy whore.

Do you enjoy watching any other sports besides baseball?

I like watching the new incarnation of American Gladiators. Crush is fucking hot. I would draft her first if there were an American Gladiator fantasy league.

Do you find that fantasy baseball raises your stress level, or does it help to alleviate stress, or both?

When my team is playing good baseball and I'm winning in the points standing, it is a fun, stress-free adventure. Since I'm almost in the cellar in the standings and the guys on my team act like they've never seen a baseball in their misbegotten lives, my stress level is usually ratcheted up to a three Clonzipam an hour pace.

Do you play for money? If so, how much money have you spent, and have you ever despaired over money lost?

No money is involved. Not even side bets. In any venture in life, I only involve money when victory is ensured.

Do you play online, or meet in person with players?

It's all online. I actually know only one of the players in the league.

Please redden any of the following words/phrases that describe the way fantasy baseball has made you feel, past or present, if you would like to elaborate in written sentences...go for it...

| | |
|--|---|
| fun | accomplishment |
| escape | sense of belonging and community |
| imagination | compulsion |
| depression | feeling 'out of control' |
| anxiety | loss of interest in previous enjoyments (sex, reading, writing) |
| restlessness | substance abuse (not use!) i.e., drinking too much, popping one too many Clonzipams |
| trouble concentrating | |
| preoccupation | |
| crestfallen | |
| happiness | |
| excitement | |
| secrecy | |
| daydreaming/fantasy/creation of imaginary visions and scenarios, plots | euphoria frustration insomnia |

Ok, all these should be a nice blood red.

Do the feelings evoked by fantasy baseball differ from the feelings evoked from watching actual baseball, whether live, or on television?

Well, I actually began playing fantasy baseball hoping to alleviate the unfounded elation and sudden agony of being a Cub's fan. I hoped that preoccupying myself with the statistics of so many disparate ballplayers and teams would dull the suffering of an entire summer watching the Cubs implode. Now I find that every day I get the one giant Cubs stab in the back followed by the small cuts of twenty other washed-up jackasses.

Could you stop playing fantasy baseball 'cold turkey', if you wanted to?

Yes, I can stop at any time if I wanted to.

Do you think you will play fantasy baseball for the rest of your life?

Goddam, I hope not.

Have you ever thought of your fantasy baseball while engaged in the act of intercourse?

I'll have to get back to you on that. I'm married, you see....

Has fantasy baseball ever provoked any sudden outbursts of rage or violence?

See, that's the strange thing about me. EVERYTHING provokes sudden outbursts of rage and violence.

Is there another team besides "The Cubbies" that you like?

No. There are only the Cubs. Every other team can fuck off.

When the Cubs lose, do you literally feel depressed? Have you ever cried over baseball, fantasy or physical?

Once again, I always feel depressed from April to October. I have cried over baseball. And that's when that cock-sucking sonofabitch Steve Bartman knocked the foul ball away from Moises

Alou, conspiring with Mark Prior to deny the Cubbies their rightful World Series bid back in '03. I cried in the backseat of my LTD with the portable TV sitting on my belly outside the factory I worked at.

Are any women in your fantasy league?

Ha ha ha ha ha. Oh, wait. You're serious?

What is your position in the league? Feel free to expand on your duties.

Cellar Dweller. I simply keep every one else from having to worry about being in last place.

Now these simple and straightforward questions only made me want to get dirty and dig around for more...I wondered if the "Cubbies" were not unlike a "gateway" drug, such as marijuana, leading to heroine, crack cocaine, Fantasy Baseball...I would have to do some serious research, but time was running out... I was preparing for a trip to New York, and the dishes were piling up, the laundry and packing undone, the dog wasn't going on too many walks, and I wasn't answering my calls... I began to wonder how Karl did it. Playing a mere "not quite pathetic two hours a day" seemed startling to me. Karl is a busy guy. He's married, has two children, works 12 hour days in a factory, edits fiction for two publications, is writing a novel, writes two ongoing columns, one, "Observations of a Dumb Polack" being my favorite, has published a number of Chapbooks, and writes articles and stories for porn publications. Not to mention, the "cookouts" and the dodging of periodic tornadoes while living "a top a mountain" in Alabama, and the depression and anxiety involving both aspects of baseball seemed to take up much time and energy. Was Karl a masochist? Was being born a "Cubbies" fan sorta like being born an alcoholic? You had no choice, and most often you didn't figure it out until you had gone through the depths of a wretched and most heinous of hells? It wasn't fair. It seemed that the angry war loving God which ruled our America was having a field day down here playing the ball and it got me wondering about those few friends I had in San Francisco who were Giants fans. From what I hear, they loose more than win, but don't quote me on that, I don't have the time right now for the research. Unfortunately, Fantasy Baseball was becoming a complex beast that needed more time than I had to give, and I really wanted to give. It made me think of my friend Pancho at the library. We've been friends for years, he's always wearing SF Giants shirts and I've seen open tabs on the computer on occasion glowing with The Fantasy Baseball. Once I asked him about it, and he evaded the detailed response that I so desired. He avoided eye contact, mumbled something I didn't quite catch, closed the tab, and ran off to "shelve."

During this short and manic stint of my obsessive one-track mind, I also discovered that the beloved Beat writer Jack Kerouac played his own version of "a labyrinthine fantasy baseball game," known as the "Summer League," from the time he was a kid until he died from chronic alcoholism in 1969. The New York Public Library is said to have some of the relics of his fantasy game, including his Fantasy Baseball cards. Well, I just happen to be heading to New York City, it seems the fantasy and the show have just begun. Now I just have to get to packing.

How To Be An Underground Lit Legend

by Tim Hall

So, you've decided to be an underground lit legend? Congratulations! Being an underground lit legend is an exciting career choice that can be rewarding and profitable, provided you take some simple precautions and plan carefully.

Being an underground lit legend means you can drink as much as you want, stay in bed until noon, and screw (or screw over) anybody you want, and basically act like an anti-social monster without regrets. Best of all, you can do all this without any negative consequences whatsoever! That's the best part of being an underground lit legend: the bigger of a shit you are, the more it feeds your legend! Can you say "win-win"? I thought you could...you're an underground lit legend, after all.

This handy guide will help you to achieve your goals faster and easier than ever before, while avoiding some of the pitfalls that derail so many promising young underground lit legends before they ever achieve lasting stardom.

1. Create your myth

This is the first step, and it is the most important, because it is the engine that will drive your career. It also provides the justification for every shitty, underhanded, sneaky, and stupid thing you will ever do from now on. Did you grow up a bored suburban kid with two bland, conventional, and stressed-out parents? No! You were a white-knuckled refugee in a hellish miasma of dysfunctional abuse and horror. Did you get a degree while living in a dorm room, masturbating and smoking weed and going home for the holidays? NO!!! You were a threadbare budding anarchist-socialist, writing screeds by the light of burning whale blubber in fingerless gloves to the strains of The Internationale. If that gay-ass rich fuck James Frey can turn a brief spell picking his nose in a country club rehab into being leader of the Attica riots and Mumia Abu-Jamal's death row lover, you can spice up your c.v. a little too. Come on, everybody's doing it!

2. Take no responsibility for yourself (while claiming that you do).

You are always misunderstood. Always. For everything. Remember, it is never, ever your fault for anything. It is always someone else's fault from now on. The way to pull this off goes something like this: "I never said I was Mumia Abu-Jamal's death row lover and leader of the Attica riots. You have obviously misunderstood my memoir, *My Life As Leader of the Attica Riots And Mumia Abu-Jamal's Lover: a 100% Totally True Story*. I'm deeply sorry you so completely misinterpreted the title and text of my memoir. I take full responsibility for mistakenly trusting you to be smart enough not to be such an idiot."

3. Cultivate the image of the "careless craftsman"

Write as much and as fast as you can, then deny it.

Remember, to build your brand identity as an underground lit legend, you've got to be prolific: real geniuses always are. That means dashing off as many squibs, aphorisms, and do-dads as you can. You've got to give the impression that your very best efforts are merely dashed off, with nary a look back. This leads to the inevitable backlash that you don't take your work seriously, so you must alternately claim that you labor over each comma for hours and days, weeks and months. If anybody were to add up the total hours you say you spend on your work it would actually equal 139 years, but nobody is ever going to bother doing that, and besides, you're a genius, so time is irrelevant.



3a. Flood the market

Send the 500 poems and short stories you write each week to every single print and online publication in the world, simultaneously. Remember, this is war. Nuke the fuckers.

4. Pretend to have a sense of humor.

This is important. In reality, you are the most severe, humorless motherfucker to come down the pike. And why shouldn't you be? When you've lived as hard as you have, man, you can't afford to have a fucking sense of humor, right? You have a rage within you of a thousand Hiroshimas, but you can't show that just yet. Pretending to have a sense of humor will be very important for your career and will come in handy. You must claim that your rage is not really rage, while at the same time claiming said rage is completely justified.

5. Attack anybody who doesn't further your career.

The highway of success is littered with roadkill. If somebody does not prove immediately useful to you, fuck 'em. If they are temporarily useful, you must cut them off the second they cease being of utility to you. The measure of friendship is a person's unquestioning reinforcement of your status as underground lit

legend. Everybody else is not only expendable, but should be crushed, humiliated, and defeated as quickly as possible. At the same time, you must always remind others that...

5a. You are the victim (and nobody's victim)

People will invariably ask you why you constantly attack others, so you must be prepared. Your attacks have always been caused by the other person, no matter what (See #2). In the world of the underground lit legend, you are always the victim—and if anybody calls you on it, deny it.

6. Deny everything, except your own sincerity

In order to be an underground lit legend you must be vigilant about controlling every aspect of your image. This often requires engaging in what short-sighted people will incorrectly dub “contradictory” or even “hypocritical” behavior: you are both a prolific, careless genius and careful craftsman; you are both a care-free soul and raging volcano of hatred for humanity; you are both victim of the people you attack and fearless truth-teller and self-defender; you don't mean anything you say, but only because you are the most sincere person in the world. Fuck it, this is too complicated. Bottom line: Don't get bogged down in the details.

6a. Engage in endless self-referentiality and meta-narcissism

These are your escape routes, always. Have you ever heard the joke about the boy who killed his parents, then begged the court to have mercy on him because he was an orphan? Well, if you're going to be an underground lit legend then you have to realize: THAT'S NOT FUNNY!!!! Make your hate a part of your oeuvre, and turn the joke into how the people you attack simply don't understand you, and mistakenly assume you know what you're doing (duh), and that since you already thought of it in advance and have written so candidly about it, then it inoculates you against further criticism so can't we just move along?

6b. Drop names to increase your legitimacy

Do some quick Google searches for “Wittgenstein,” “Foucault” and “Spinoza”. Familiarize yourself with their main arguments. If they don't work for you then keep poking around until you find some intellectuals and philosophers you like.

Remember, the purpose of philosophy is to justify your existence, no matter how much of a shit you are, with the added important benefit of making you sound much smarter than you are. Dropping names will give your self-mythology added bite, as gullible readers will think that you must be quite legendary indeed, as you have suffered so much while still becoming such an intellectual.

7. Remember that he who wins is always right.

Self-explanatory.

Conclusion

I hope you've found this handy guide to becoming an underground lit legend helpful. Next, I've put this advice together into a hypothetical situation that you can use as a template, in order to become an underground lit legend in record time:

Write a number of stories about what a bad-ass you are (#1) as fast as you can (#3), and email them simultaneously to every single publication you can (#3a). Don't bother reading the publications first, that will only slow you down. The race goes to the swift.

When the rejections begin to arrive, start a blog to attack those editors who don't understand your genius (#5). This will piss off those editors, but it will only prove what an underground lit legend you are, since you are so buck-wild you don't even care! (#1) Until you have fully cemented your mythology you are going to take some serious lumps; merely shake your head sadly (#5a) and say that others simply misunderstand you (#2), that you know what you're doing (#6a) and think it's funny (#4), and that you didn't really mean anything by it, but that the response only proves that you were correct in attacking them (even though you didn't) before the fact (#2, #6). Repeat your attacks against that person (#5) using some quotes from Wittgenstein (#6b) until he/she either a) finally exits the argument by claiming it's doing nothing but wasting his/her time, or b) links to your blog, at which point you can claim victory and relax (#7).

Remember, your main goal as an underground lit legend is to ensure your own immortality, and nobody ever achieved that without cracking a few heads. What are you waiting for? Get out there and get cracking!



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