

An Interview With Kurt Vonnegut; And, A Phone Call
From
Dr. Louis Manand, Of *The New Yorker* Fame

Strozier: Well, today, I find myself prepared to discuss art and literature with the famous humor writer, Kurt Vonnegut. We are in the author's parlor. It is winter. He is wearing a blue turtleneck sweater, rather happening corduroy pants, which appear to be a smidgen short, polished black shoes. He has his favorite cat, Winchester, curled up in his lap. We're in New York City. The author's manservant has placed a fine English sipping tea; and, cookies of some sort on the coffee table. I am taping this interview. I would like to begin by thanking you, sir, for the opportunity of interviewing you for our electronic ezine, *audience*, which appears on the Internet. On a personal note, it is an honor to meet you, sir; and, I remember your books from when I was in high school...

(Pause.)

Strozier: Hello? It's an honor to meet you, sir!

Vonnegut: What'd you say?

Strozier: Thank you for participating in this interview, for our ezine, *audience*.

Vonnegut: What's an ezine *audience*?

Strozier: An online, literary and artistic journal, on the Internet.

Vonnegut: Sounds boring. I hate the Internet. I threw my computer out my window in 1999. Never looked back. Best move I ever made. What's wrong with typewriters? I like the clanging of a typewriter (1).

Strozier: I see.

Vonnegut: Macaroon?

Strozier: No, thanks.

Vonnegut: They're my favorite.

Strozier: I try not to eat sweets, actually. I mean, not at all.

Vonnegut: There's hardly any sugar in macaroons. How's your tea?

Strozier: I'm good, thanks.

Vonnegut: It's Earl Gray

Strozier: I like Earl Gray a lot, as a tea.

Vonnegut: But no sugar in your tea.

Strozier: That's right, just a little milk, like the English.

Vonnegut: You're some interviewer. Is this for a high school newspaper, you said? How long is this going to last? I have to catch my nap. Winchester, here, has already fallen asleep in my lap.

Strozier: Just like a cat in a cradle. I did manage to suffer through that book. You know, sir, I remember reading your books in high school, like I just told you. My friend – Tom Beard – he really liked your books a lot. I thought they were weird. Actually, to be honest, I didn't read your books. I skimmed 2 or 3 of your books. Recently, I have gone back and re-skimmed your books. And, you know what? You are a lame writer. Whatever you're trying to write about, I have no idea; but I have come to realize that I don't care. In this age, we write about things that are real. Also, the pictures in your books are dumb. That's it; end of story. I don't care if you're some kind of politically influential liberal – always on National Public Radio – or whatever. I don't care about politics, at all. Any humor you have; or, maybe had long ago, is lost on someone my age. You are the quintessential postmodern writer: weak – basically, stupid – and academic, which is to say, boring. Your books are all written for someone who lived in the 1960s; yet, every book, essay, scrawling on toilet paper, which you've ever written, is lining row after row in Barnes and Noble. Scholars pour over your “works of art.” I'm tired of it all, frankly.

Vonnegut: Is that a question? You know, in the future, you might want to consult *The Paris Review* before you conduct any more “interviews” for your...whatever it is. They really do excellent interviews at *The Paris Review*. George Plimpton started all that.

Strozier: Plimpton is another mediocre writer, so typical of your generation, who is now dead. And, *The Paris Review*'s days are already over, too; it is one of my quests to squash that periodical out of print, forevermore. I will then dance; and, subsequently piss, on its grave. But you, sir, are not even a satirist. *Catch-22* is a satire. Your books are so farcical, they are not satires; they are just plain weird and stupid. You are more of a straight-up humor writer, like, say, Edgar Allen Poe. Your humor is disguised in a giant mound of bullshit, however, unlike Poe's. The humor of both you and he seem pretty stupid, today. Poe wrote many other things, too, unlike you. Last, you "art" – that is, your paintings – are amazingly bad; but you must know that.

Vonnegut: Did we get a question in there? You're a regular Walter Cronkite

Strozier: Who's he? Do you mean Dan Rather?

Vonnegut: Oh, common.

Strozier: Answer the damn question!

[Enter manservant.]

Vonnegut: Everything's fine. We're trying to conduct an interview for e-zine *audience* Internet. Can you bring lots more macaroons and a fresh pot of tea?

Strozier: Oh, *now* you remember...

[Exit manservant.]

Vonnegut: Well, what about Mark Twain? Certainly, he's still humorous, to this day. Some parts of his writing are obsolete, of course; but the things about language or relationships, that all stands the test of time. Anyway, why do you care? Why don't you just leave me alone? Just do your own thing on e-zine *audience* Internet and leave me the hell alone.

Strozier: That's not what I'm saying. Are you listening to me?

Vonnegut: Oh? What are you saying?

Strozier: I'm talking about Poe. I know what I said.

Vonnegut: But you said –

Strozier: Shut up!

[Phone rings.]

Vonnegut: Hello? Doctor? Yes? Doctor Louis Manand? The Doctor Louis Menand, the famous writer of The New Yorker fame? It is a great honor and a personal pleasure to hear your voice. Jesus, Louis, I'm getting tingly. Oh! Louis, is this a hot flash? Listen, Louis, I am a regular reader of your fascinating pieces about Nixon, Kennedy, everything that's the 1960s...We're in the middle of a war on terror; and, a real war in Iraq – thank God, someone out there is still “fighting the good fight” – taking about *our* issues – you know: Nixon, Watergate, Vietnam; and, all of that. I have your latest, brilliant article right here [*The New Yorker*, Nov., 2004]. It's an article about President Kennedy. I love your description of Vice-president Johnson – LBJ – sitting in a chair, listening to Kennedy's speech. Johnson picks up a piece of paper. He turns the paper over. He examines the other side of the paper. He puts the paper in his pocket. Yes, Louis! Phenomenal! Stupendous! A smorgasbord of intellectual prowess! Well, anyway. No, I'm in an interview with some young, disillusioned writer about technology – or something. I'm so bored, I can't see straight. No, don't give him a second thought; he's like an intern, really. What's that? You have a problem with your computer? Oh. I threw my computer out of the window in 1999. That was my answer to the 21st century. Ha! Can I put you on speakerphone? Sure. Let's see if our technology wiz can help you. Hold on, just a minute...Hello?

Menand: Hello?

Vonnegut: Doctor?

Menand: Yes?

Vonnegut: This is Kurt Vonnegut, sir.

Menand: Hello, this is Doctor Louis Manand.

Vonnegut: Doctor Menand – oh my – it is a great honor to meet you, through this speaker phone apparatus.

Menand: Yes, well. I am a professor of English at Harvard University. I also write for the periodical known as *The New Yorker*.

Vonnegut: Oh, yes, sir – oh – how I *do* know that.

Menand: I see, yes.

Vonnegut: I have our resident intern here with us, in the company of your highness. He claims to be a writer and –

Menand: – We’ll just have to see about that, now won’t we? I haven’t seen any of his work; he’s no writer. What university did he attend? Has he been published in *The New Yorker*? That is where the coolest writers are published.

Vonnegut: Ha ha ha! Oh, sir, you are *so* funny!

Menand: Yes, I am funny and nuanced, as well.

Vonnegut: Well, sir, if you would be so kind as to state the nature of your computer problem to our intern here, through my speakerphone, sound system apparatus, he says he can help you. Go ahead, professor, please.

Menand: [Editor’s note: What follows is a direct quote – to include *italics* – from *The New Yorker*, Oct. 6th, 2003; an article by Dr. Louis Manand called *The End Matter*.] To begin with, the designers of [Microsoft] Word apparently believe that the conventional method of endnote numbering is with lowercase Roman numerals – i, ii, iii, etc. When was the last time you read anything that adhered to this style? It would lead to sentences like:

In the Gramscian paradigm, the “intellectual” xxxvii is, by definition, always a liminal status. xxxviii

(Hmm. Not bad.) To make this into something recognizably human, you need to click your way into the relevant menu (View? Insert? Format?) and change the i, ii, iii, etc., to 1, 2, 3, etc. Even if you *wanted* to use lowercase Roman numerals somewhere, whenever you typed...

[Strozier presses “hold” button on the speakerphone.]

Strozier: Kurt Vonnegut, what’s the deal, man? This guy sounds like a serious asshole. I feel like kicking his ass, just hearing his voice. Is he

talking about Microsoft Word? What is so difficult about Microsoft Word?

Vonnegut: Put Doctor Menand back on the line, right now!

[Strozier does not move a muscle. Vonnegut presses the speakerphone button.]

Strozier: Hey, candy-ass Menandy! Click Insert, Reference, Footnote. Any other questions?

Manand: [Editor's note: More of *The End Matter*.] When, in the old days, you hit the wrong key on your typewriter, you got one wrong character. Strike the wrong key in Word and you are suddenly writing in Norwegian Bokmal...Finally, there is the moment when you realize that your notes are starting to appear in 12-pt. Courier New."

Strozier: Menand: let me tell you something: I am slashing your tires.

Vonnegut: Strozier! You *will* address the professor with respect, due his rank and status as a tenured, almost-Sterling English professor of immense prestige and noteworthiness, within all of literature and academic circles.

Menand: [Editor's note: More of *The End Matter*.] "In the end, you stop the random clicking and dragging and pulling-down and have recourse to the solution of every computer moron: with a sob of relief, you press Ctrl/Alt/Del. (What do Control and Alt *mean*, by the way? Does anyone still know?)..."

Strozier: Alt means *alternate*, you fucking, clueless moron! Press and hold Alternate; and, then press Tab: see what happens! That does it...

"Click!"

[Strozier picks the receiver up, slams it down, on the phone.]

Vonnegut: Oh! Sit down, Strozier! Is he gone? That was world-renown, Harvard English Professor, Doctor Louis Menand. Why are you so bent out of shape, sonny? There must be other ezines *audience* Internet out there, doing their own thing. What is it you want?

Strozier: This is revolution! And, one must be careful what one says during a revolution, lest a side you do not want to be on is chose for you. Doctor Menand and you and the hippy cartel, obsessed as they were in youth with being under 40, have become exactly what they preached against in their “counter-culture revolution” – how ironic! Well, I want the chance to achieve as much respect and recognition with our literary and artistic ezine, *audience*, as *The Paris Review*. I want my generation of artists to move forward; and, not be dragged down by the past – your past! I want to destroy all things print, as well as postmodernism. I am tired of the leftist political stranglehold on art in America. I want all artists to explore these newly discovered worlds, which are all there, right now.

Vonnegut: So do that and leave me the hell alone, punk!

Strozier: I will!

Vonnegut: Good!

Strozier: Fine! But I cannot fully realize that dream, until I first see your hippy cartel destroyed; and, marginalized, within the literary canon, both now; and, for all time.

Vonnegut: You’re insane!

Strozier: Here’s the simple truth: Right now, the hippy cartel controls all art in America. The hippy cartel has all the money, sets all the rules. We’re already doing our own things on the Internet; but I want to help destroy the print world and your hippy cartel, so more prestige, readership, along with more money, goes into the electronic medium. It’s all about business. You seem to be doing rather well, living off your writing, all tree-hugging aside. We are at a major turning point in literature right now. Once your generation is all dead and gone, I am going to marginalize it, within the literary canon. This is the price you pay. I am not here to discuss a thing. I am only informing you, this one time, out of respect.

Vonnegut: Out of macaroons!

[Enter manservant, setting down a platter of macaroons. Exit manservant. Vonnegut commences eating macaroons, crunching loudly. Crumbs fly from his mouth.]

Strozier: There was no artistic collaboration in your generation. The Beats, they collaborated. That was the last of it. The Beats invented flowery, girlish poetry, which your generation has embraced, in the free-verse medium. We are creating our own style – an entirely new style – by collaborating on the Web. The best you can say about the Web is, “It is a marketing medium, for advertisers.” This really demonstrates ignorance, on your part. Your generation does not understand technology, thank God; and, I have the Internet as one of my tools, free of your intervention. The other tool I’ve armed myself with is the theater – the Mafioso of Misfits – where I don’t have to be “published;” and, where your generation has zero influence. Why is that, I wonder? Ah, probably because at least on Broadway, one has to have *some* talent. The underground Off-Broadway – your creation – was an interesting idea, a political tool; but the art sucked – still does. The prestigious theaters like The Public Theater are paper tigers; they don’t produce anything of quality – I wonder if they ever did. I am only talking about the quality of art, as my subject and concern.

Vonnegut: That’s just not true – none of it. Broadway – all three of them – is wonderful. So are Modern Art and Free Verse Poetry and Billy Collins and Norman Mailer; and especially, Doctor Louis Menand, who is genius! You are not endorsed, a writer. You can’t even conduct an interview properly. You’re not validated in any academic circles. You are self-taught. Doctor Menand laughs at you. You are nothing to Doctor Menand; he is so much better than you are. You are a worm of a writer, squirming pathetically, underneath the heel of Doctor Louis Menand’s Harvard loafer, emblazoned on its side by its distinguished emblem: Academism, Intellectualism, Postmodernism...Liberalism!

[Pause.]

Strozier: May I please have some more tea – no sugar?

Vonnegut: No!

Strozier: Listen, old man: A writer must be educated; but one cannot teach writing in a school. Therefore, your generation has certainly been a misguided one. The process of learning to write is its own exploration. It is a difficult, taxing journey, with no equal. And, this process reveals powerful axioms, along the route, which is my favorite reward. The only light does not come from the end of a tunnel: you, the writer, are the light. A writer must have experience; or, there is nothing for the writer to write

about. He or she will eventually run out of experience, too; and, have to run out and get more. So, what is the opposite of your confused meaning of “self-taught”? I have come to understand your generation’s agenda is providing writers with limited method; and, sending those writers out to experience the world and write about leftist, political subjects, in a suitable manner. This is journalism, à la Hemingway, not writing. Besides, while clearly *not* the best writer of his generation, at least Hemingway learned how to write, via the experience, aforementioned. (How he did it doesn’t matter.) I will now properly define your term “self-taught” to you. Your generation has created a cartel, which has been systematically stifling all forms of writing. Readers and writers alike are forced to buy your books, listen to your mind-numbing rhetoric in universities. Thus, since one cannot teach true writing, your generation can only teach the masses how to adore your generation’s own form of writing, which exists in a time-loop of the 1960s; for example, your own expired, humorous books. Your cartel cannot allow true competition. All artists you promote – hippies themselves – must meet a strict regimen of “how to write like a hippy.” Hippy publishers (it is easy to name an unashamed, powerful set of twenty) only care that people will purchase leftist books at Barnes & Noble, generating money for your cartel, furthering their political goals. For the hippy publishers, quality and merit are secondary to propaganda and political correctness and political impact. And now, the highest selling genres are indeed political books and self-help books. In other words, literature is gone from the shelves! If one objects, by presenting an argument, as I just have, you ruthlessly dismiss it with your army of leftist academia, led by Doctor Louis Menand himself, columnist for *The New Yorker*. Or, as he, you ignore me outright, because I am not in print. You do not have any quality writers to fight me, however, because there are none, anymore. And I just keep rolling along, in my Internet tank, over your daisy fields, shouting, “I am not in print! I do not have any literary awards! Hear that sucker’s engine roar!” There goes a streaking hippy, running across daisy fields! I whip out my long-range sniper’s rifle; and, drop that hippy freak like the tree-hugging gazelle he is. Guess what? I am still a young writer; and, Orwell didn’t know if he was right, either, when he wrote *Animal Farm*, blasting communism. Your generation will be pushing up those daisies; I’ll still be writing about it. (Please note: All it takes is a single, pissed-off writer to bring any person, regime, system – any *thing* – to its knees, relegate it to the lost files of mistaken, worthless, human suffering. Only a fool doesn’t realize this. I keep saying hallucinogenic, psychedelic drugs ruined your generation.

Vonnegut: Oh, please; for Christ's sake: You're talking out your ass. But...all right. Let's pretend you have one or two valid points, somewhere, lost inside that insane diatribe. That is not how writing works. In order to talk in an educated manner about literature, one has to be an English professor, like Doctor Louis Menand; and, have published several books; or, at least a MFA in creative writing, from somewhere like Columbia University, where *all* the geniuses are. You have not created anything because you are just writing merrily along, undisciplined. Your greatest strength is your greatest weakness. And, I am a part of the Beat generation.

Strozier: You're old; that's what you are. And no, that is *not* how it works. I am a writer. I have completed 37 years. I am a member of my profession; perhaps, one of its leaders. Writing is an art; but it is also a craft and a profession. Therefore, I will help define my profession. Your generation rejected the concept of leadership, preferring a commune system; and, defined writing as serving other professions, such as academia; journalism via New Journalism; politics via propaganda; politics via imagery poetry; speechwriting via advertising; etceteras – everything; except, writing as an art form. The definition of writing you put in place is an incorrect model. It is a bit like when Andy Warhol created art for the masses, sacrificing the quality of the art form. The same can be said of Hemingway. Writing is an art, which owns all processes. Your generation's art has been rejected, a failure! Also, who says professors are right? My experience with professors – notably English professors – has always, always been that they have dubious talent, suspect motivations (if tenure provides for any motivation); and, no imagination, whatsoever. They plagiarize much more than we know. They are frequently bitter, cruel, angry – sometimes violent – persons (though they fight like girls). At best, they lead you on – as if teasing you – only to slam your face down in the pavement. “Publish or perish,” they tell each other; thus, their books' quality and purpose spirals downward, in a whirlpool of self-indulgence. They are all – of course – leftists; only recently, a demographic other than white male.

Vonnegut: You're a crazy man – crazy!

Strozier: I offer my experience – albeit, limited – of one writing form, which your generation ruined; but has never influenced, oddly enough: the *theater*.

Vonnegut: I wrote a play.

Strozier: I don't care what you did, bitch: Sit there with your cat and listen.

Vonnegut: You can't say the baby-boomer generation ruined Broadway. That's crazy; it's just not true. Did you just call me 'bitch'?

Strozier: It's a term of endearment, these days; a street term, like bling bling, which is now in the Oxford English Dictionary.

Vonnegut: Oh.

Strozier: Listen, bitch: Prior to the mid to late 60s – long after TV – Broadway was in its heyday, a national treasure. It has become, under your generation's watch (but not its tutelage), similar to all other art forms, which you've castrated: poetry, painting, books (though not tie-dyed T-shirts or woven baskets): a political statement. What did you do to turn Broadway (and, in turn, Hollywood) into the commercial, boring, tepid, non-confrontational, highly political, politically correct, formulaic, cookie-cutter art form that it is today? Let's look at one sliver of theater: workshops; and, we find our answer. For example, my play, *Guns, Shackles & Winter Coats*, first appeared at The Workshop Theater Company; 312 West 36th Street, New York, NY. My play is also in *audience* Vol. 1, No. 1. (My play will be performed at The Producer's Club on March 12th, 2005; a World Audience, Inc. production.) The idea of a workshop theater was invented in the 60s, by your generation; and, it fits perfectly into your philosophy of an all-inclusive, give-everyone-a-voice-type-of-bullshit, where writing is relegated into a pliable tool, a thing, to be molded to fit a political goal. But, let's not fool ourselves, you only aspire to money; in fact, at the aforementioned Workshop Theater Company, 312 West 36th Street, a rich gentleman donated many thousands of dollars to The Workshop Theater Company; and, lo, his play was given a full production this year – his piece-of-shit play; so poor in quality, that there were three suicides during rehearsals – the actors! On opening night, during intermission, there was a mass suicide of the audience in the bathroom, in protest from having to endure the horrendous play. As for politics, a playwright such as Tony Kushner – a card-carrying member of the hippy cartel – who writes two back-to-back, lengthy plays about gay rights – is forcing the medium to fulfill a political objective. Kushner is a fair playwright, elevated by his leftist politics, not by his merit. Gay rights will never make a play, however – ever; it can only be a statement. (It is the same thing when a mediocre writer, such as Tony Morrison, wins the

Nobel Prize for literature because she is a black female.) But, of course, all you hippies brainwash Morrison and Kushner, telling them how “wonderful” their work is. It costs a million dollars; or, many times that, to put up a play (not a musical) off-Broadway – Broadway being the same thing; and, you’re guaranteed an audience in New York City. So, Broadway has become a kind of rich-hippy, cartel town hall meeting. I say cartel; but only the leaders of the cartel can afford to see the play, because it’s so expensive! In a workshop, the playwright submits his play to the theocracy, which runs the workshops. The playwright must be humiliated; his work is torn to shreds. Everyone does the writer’s job, telling him how to write his play. Ultimately, the play is turned into a weak, politically-correct concoction, housing a leftist agenda. The workshop is a process whereby a play is written by a committee, following a formula, just a film is written in Hollywood. Those in charge of the committee make their ruling; the worker bees then carry out this ruling. This entire bureaucratic process is painfully slow. There is always a backlog of plays, waiting for the committee’s ruling. A director has ten times the power and influence as the playwright, over his own play. This process is also seen in other forms of writing; for example, when an editor (or creative writing teacher) is, actually, more powerful than a writer, in the assigning of writing projects. One example of this is the editor of the hippy writer Raymond Carver. An editor wrote that author’s stories for him. The theater, however, has traditions, which still exist; and, as I say, your generation’s influence has been minimal. It will only get more minimal now. I am not conforming to your Actors’ Equity Union, either!

Vonnegut: That’s all fascinating. I don’t agree with any of it; but what’s it got to do with me? Isn’t this an interview about me?

Strozier: I’ll tell you when to speak or answer questions. Otherwise, why don’t you just keep your pie hole shut, unless you have something intelligent to say?

Vonnegut: I’ll tell you what I think. There is no print bias or “print culture,” at all. There is no hippy cartel. There are a million different presses out there; and, if you can’t get published then the problem may be with you, not the presses. You should keep trying. I know it is hard to get published. Why don’t you just take a break for a while, listen to music; get a fresh perspective? My favorite band is U2. Bono is a creative genius.

Strozier: It’s Bono.

Vonnegut: I thought it was Boner.

Strozier: I'm not done yet. Art has become another form of politics in America; but not in the rest of the world. Siphoned into journalism and 'big media', art is powerless, dependent on bodies such as the National Endowment of the Arts; the leftist press and publishing houses; and rich philanthropists; curators, collectors, such as Lord Peter Palumbo; etceteras – all hardcore liberals. Large corporations; and, the tentacles of their advertiser, legal, Wall Street suction cups, have infected all forms of art, from museums to Broadway, like a cancer. This is all your generation's fault. For all the free-this-and-that, your generation is the most ruthless, unethical of businesspeople; hell, you couldn't even run a non-violence movement without incorporating violence. All of these things have ulterior motives, other than art, of a leftist leaning. Notice how popular Poet Laureates have become, as if poets were mayors, with political clout. Now, art's political voice is *recognized* as political, not as art. For example, when a Republican Congress cuts funding to the NEA because of confrontational, "Modern Art." In this case, the funding should get cut! It never used to be this way. In reality, art is not dependent on anything, not even food; but definitely not politics. In fact, everything is dependent on art; most of all, the artists. The art world, in America, has no independent voice anymore; and, that is all because of the hippy cartel, leftist academia, leftist publishing presses, philanthropists, museums, etceteras. Only the Internet can save us now. (And theater.) You know, the other day, I was wandering around the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), which just opened. I will be doing a lot of wandering in that building. And, for the first time, it all became crystal clear. You see, Modern Art belongs in the Modernist Movement, which begun at the turn of the last century, in Paris, right? After a while, out it petered; and, having nothing new, along came "postmodernism." Your generation – the hippies – desperately wanted the 60s be just like the 20s. So, you extended the Modernist movement by half a century, plus. That is what I see at the MoMA – not what you would like me to see: A "rolling-in" of everything subsequent to the Modern Era, into the Modernist Movement, which, itself, died by about the 40s or 50s. Even the MoMA itself left us 40 years ago, along with the Modernist Movement! What we have now is superb and highly educational, however. Modernism was excellent; postmodernism sucks. What we are doing now is not postmodernism. Postmodernism has zero permeation into the electronic age. The separation is demarked on 9/11/01. We're done being modern; here we

are. And, there is no post-modernism; you and the weak art of your generation were “postmodern.” Postmodern is defined as: highly political, experimental to the point of being stupid; and, inclusive in a way, which dilutes quality. Its era was the 60s to 9/11/01. Its participants were the hippies, *a-k-a* the baby-boomers; also, the Beats. We are not in the postmodern era right now – we are not in anything Modern, anymore. All art simply exists, in its own place, instantaneously; and, it is an interactive art. The past – the last century, books, Modernism, the Hippy cartel, academism – is gone, so there is no “Modern” or “post-modern.” In its place are: the electronic medium; new forms and styles of writing and art; a multi-polar, highly-interactive world; a permanently changed America, after 9/11, whose art is not controlled by the Hippy cartel. By the way, minimalism, the longest running school of art in history, is defined as: The illusion of aptitude in hippies to bring their imagery art to life; and, in its ineptitude, wallow in its death.

Vonnegut: I’m feeling tightness in my chest, just now. There’s light-headedness, a blurring.

Strozier: Try not to die until the interview is over. Do you need your manservant? Don’t eat any more macaroons.

Vonnegut: No, no. Okay. I’m okay. I’m all right now. I am making it through this interview. But, you’re just complaining. I understand; it’s okay. You’re a young writer, trying anything to get published. You want media attention. We’ve all been through the same thing, even Lee Stringer.

Strozier: Ah, now there is a high-quality, wise writer. That’s one place we agree. But, as for getting published: I am staking my territory in the electronic medium, in order put your hippy, print cartel out of business. Shut. You. Down; Steal. Your. Clientele. The slow vehicle of the book has a limited geographical and demographic reach. The Internet’s reach is the world, instantaneously. I can be translated, too, with the click of a mouse.

Vonnegut: Where do you get this stuff from? I’ve never heard of anyone like you. It’s crazy talk, that’s all; you’re a crazy man. Literary journals are where writers seek to be published, not the Internet. How many people can there be writing on the Internet? No many, I’m sure.

Strozier: Electronic journals are superior to print ones; in so many ways it's hard to list them all: from multi-media to interactively to better quality and more. But there's one more thing I forgot to mention, O great, clueless one: Books are dead. Kaput. Sayonara. Fineto. Sleep with the fishes. Wing-chi. No one reads books anymore. The news is handed out at subway stations now, free. Why on earth would I pay \$1 to read a journalist or columnist; a part-time, unimpressive writer, operating under a deadline? I never have time to finish the thing, anyway. Besides, newspapers plagiarize, routinely. (Like the cockroach, when you catch a plagiarizer, there're always a hundred more, unseen.) Magazines appear to be holding their ground; but diversifying into smaller, specialized niches. Book editing is woeful; it has been for some time, as we all know. Libraries now offer ebooks, online. The Oxford English dictionary, online, is an amazing asset for a writer. Books can be read on palm pilots or hand-held devices, etceteras. Artwork is also being digitized and put into electronic mediums. Digitized art looks better, actually. Furthermore, digitized artwork can be explained with precision, instead of wandering around a museum, with your thumb stuck up your ass. In the days of print, during the last century, there were a limited number of writers and artists to choose. Nowadays, in the 21st century, there are too many artists. Therefore, schools of art are developing on the Web. *audience* is, perhaps, the first of these schools. Books cannot keep up with these schools; it is simply not possible, logistically, as well as artistically (and other reasons - ly). There are myriad other examples of creeping doom for books. In truth, the fog is upon you, now. Books are dead: dead! Also, your generation, the hippy cartel, is known as "The Last Generation," of the last century; the last of everything: books, quality, art, the ability to conceptualize, leadership, etceteras. As for how many writers there are online: There are hundreds of thousands of Web writing sites, numerous of those with several hundred thousand members. In the words of my daughter, "There's a hundred gazillion thousand!"

Vonnegut: Jesus Christ!

Strozier: What's the matter with you?

Vonnegut: Son-of-a-bitch! This tea has more than ¼ of the Sweet and Low packet. I can taste the difference, for Christ sake! Ahh! Mother-fucker! God-damn, son-of-a-bitch! God-damn it! Mother-fuckers!

[Enter manservant, with a fresh cup of tea, which manservant places on the table. Vonnegut sips and waves away manservant. Exit manservant.]

Vonnegut: What about the role of the critic? You have to receive endorsement from critics, first, before you can do anything.

Strozier: The best critic is the artist; or, vice-versa. This is why the Internet is almost finished revolutionizing art. You do not understand the degree with which artists collaborate on the Internet – or the effect of this collaboration – because you do not understand the Internet. There is a vast reading audience out there, who are artists. The artists determine what is or is not art. The public is wise. In fact, they are infinitely wiser than all of academia. There's no middle-man/critic, authorized to give a seal of approval on art anymore. This is a fact that someone like Oscar Wilde could never have known, because in his day, art existed for only a small section of humankind. The Internet has made art available to all humankind. The days of a lone critic determining what's art and are already gone. To pay for his overreaching, the critic has been given a rubber stamp by the electronic age; his seal has been taken back. Art is not dependent on the independent critic, in the slightest. The public receives *some* guidance from the critic. The critic, like the artist, is dependent on art. The critic is also dependent on the artist. Academia, of course, has a love affair with the critic, because it is possible to fool the public into believing that the critic is an artist, when art sucks, as it does, at present. (Journalists are, therefore, kissing-cousins to critics, in this regard.) Thus, academia becomes a super-powered midwife to art. This is not unlike Freud's notion of penis envy.

Vonnegut: You're entertaining, that's the only reason I keep you around; but you're not right. I simply can't believe that the Internet is going to replace newspapers or books. The Internet is a marketing tool, just like Dr. Louis Menand says in *The New Yorker*. Books are irreplaceable. You are a liar!

Strozier: Well, it's all true. You're wrong. But, I'll entertain your ignorance long enough for one specific example: In the Nov. 2nd, 2004 presidential election, *The New York Times* reported that they had no clue who had won the election on Wednesday morning, Nov. 3rd, because they had gone to print at 12:30 a.m. Meanwhile, the world had moved on, far ahead of that paper, by 7 a.m. The media is driven by its medium. And, the medium is driven by the people. All three things live symbiotically. Thus, in the old days, the newspapers knew the whole story by about 9 p.m.,

regarding who had won the election, on Tuesday. Those days are gone. Now look: We can make the transition easy and peaceful; or, you can continue to piss me off; and, wind up paying a more severe price. What's it going to be, old man?

Vonnegut: Get out of my house, now! Get out of here, you little punk!

[Enter manservant.]

Vonnegut: I'm all right. I'm okay. We'll finish this fucking interview, now. [Coughing, wheezing.]

[Exit manservant.]

Vonnegut: [Lights a cigarette.] This all sounds personal. You have invented all this, in your mind. I don't know you from Adam. Do you hate me?

Strozier: I also don't know you for Adam, nor do I care about you. You've been compared to F. Scott Fitzgerald, as the 20s have been compared to the 60s. Please. If you're an artist; and, you can't take criticism, you need to seek another profession. You have a well-earned reputation, among your lame, over 40, leftist, academic, postmodern, baby-boomer generation. I have nothing against you, personally.

Vonnegut: What about copyright laws? They'll always be someone to steal your ideas. At least, in the print world, there are specific, intellectual property laws.

Strozier: Copyright laws do not apply to the Internet. There're no first or second serial rights; everything written is posted, instantaneously. Also, every country has different laws and artistic traditions. Technologies can be formed to enforce copyright laws; but other technologies can always usurp their forbearers. And, we can't sue across borders. So, writers on the Web will have to develop their own traditions and standards to substitute for what used to be copyright laws. There will have to be international copyright laws; but they will be created by artists, operating on the Web, not lawyers at the United Nations. Otherwise, they will be ignored. *audience* will be a player, in this arena, I predict.

Vonnegut: I am beginning to understand your point of view now. I am sorry for doubting you.

Strozier: I am glad you understand, because I'm through with arguing with you, old man. I am not even going to accept your pretenses, anymore. Books and newspapers are dead – as we speak; an online literary and artistic journal is light-years superior to a paper one – it is both a museum and a gallery in one – its breadth and depth and speed are incredible. There is a hippy, print cartel, which I will help destroy; modernism and postmodernism are already gone; your generation has – without precedent – ruined every form of art, from the theater to poetry; academia – like everything else, including the artist – is subservient to art; I am not going to fit into one of your cardboard boxes – I am squashing your box; and, you are not funny, at all. But, look how close you are to the East River! Let's go down there; you take your walker. It is winter. There aren't any plants living. But, there're still wonderful things to see and smell. Perhaps, we can get a warm muffin on the way; or, some New York cheesecake, at a pastry shop. Come, let's go; we have done enough talking. Actually, first, I want you to make a large donation – several hundred thousand dollars – to our corporation, World Audience, Inc., via Pay Pal, at: www.worldaudience.org. Or, you can pay at: www.mstefanstrozier.org.

Vonnegut: I will do that. Yes. Thank you, for the opportunity to make a donation to ezine *audience* Internet. [Extinguishes cigarette.]

Strozier: You're welcome. Your donation entitles you to nothing, of course.

Vonnegut: I realize that. It's an honor to be given the option. Let's make it a nice round \$500,000.00, shall we? I have lots of money. I'm a famous writer.

Strozier: Let's just say a million.

Vonnegut: I have that, too. I am so filthy rich from writing, it's disgusting.

Strozier: Do that right now. Step lively, old man.

Vonnegut: Yes.

(Footnote) 1 A typewriter is an arcane device, used in the 20th century, by writers. It makes a loud, obnoxious, “Clang, clang” sound, when used.

