

# Brian Evenson: an introduction

“I think the amazing, unsettling thing about life is that in most places in the world there exist types of human interaction that strike one as unreal or as appalling or as incomprehensible. There is a sort of murmur to the world that consists of the speech of the mad, the tortured, the irrational, the dead and dying, the subversive, the savage.

“From one perspective some of my stories are about this murmur, about trying to make it differentiated and significant, particularly in regard to death. Other of my stories are about a refusal to be moved by this murmur, an inability to react significantly in the face of something like death or like life.” — Brian Evenson.

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# 1. Biography

<http://fc2.org/evenson/evenson.htm>

<http://www.brown.edu/Departments/English/Writing/evenson.htm>

<http://web.archive.org/web/20030419024130/www.blessed1054.com/evenson/index.html>

Brian Evenson is the author of eight books of fiction, most recently *Contagion*, *Dark Property: An Affliction*, *The Brotherhood of Mutilation* and *The Wavering Knife: Stories*.

He has translated work by Rafael Cadenas, Jean Frémon and Jacques Jouet.

He received an O. Henry Award for his story *Two Brothers* and has twice received O. Henry honorable mentions.

In 1995 he received an NEA Fellowship; that same year he was told by Brigham Young University that if he continued to continue to write fiction in the same vein as his first book, he would be fired (discussed in the afterword to the reissued version of *Altmann's Tongue*). Instead, Evenson chose to leave of his own free will to teach at Oklahoma State University where he taught for four years. In 1999 he moved to University of Denver, where he was the Director of Creative Writing.

He now teaches in the creative writing program at Brown University.

“Brian Evenson, one of America's darkest and most pungent comic writers, prods with the tip of his verbal knife at all our assumptions regarding power, perversion and redemption.”

— Mary Caponegro.

“There is not a more intense, prolific, or apocalyptic writer of fiction in America than Brian Evenson.” — George Saunders.

# 2. Bibliography

**1994** – *Altmann's Tongue: Stories* (Knopf / University of Nebraska Press (new edition, 2002))

**1997** – *Din of Celestial Birds* (Wordcraft of Oregon)

**1997** – *Prophets and Brothers* (Rodent Press)

**1998** – *Father of Lies* (Four Walls Eight Windows)

**2000** – *Contagion and other stories* (Wordcraft of Oregon)

**2002** – *Dark Property: An Affliction* (Black Square Editions / Hammer Books)

**2003** – *Understanding Robert Coover* (University of South Carolina Press)

**2003** – *The Brotherhood of Mutilation* (Earthling Publications)

**2004** – *The Wavering Knife: Stories* (FC2)

**2005** – *Contagion: nouvelles* (Le Cherche-Midi)

**2005** – *Altmann's Tongue* CD (Ant-Zen)

### 3. An interview with Brian Evenson

[http://www.bookslut.com/features/2005\\_02\\_004303.php](http://www.bookslut.com/features/2005_02_004303.php)

Bookslut, February 2005.

In an interview with K. Matthew Yoss (part of which was published in Naropa University's Bombay Gin), Brian Evenson discussed the difficulty in offering explanations for his work by saying, "They're all really tentative. There are other things I could look at. I'm only giving parts of the story." To some degree, this helps ground discussion of his scholarly and daring work. Brian Evenson's work can be unpredictable, confronting the reader with what can be called "polished disturbances."

Samuel R. Delany said, "Like Poe's, Evenson's stories range from horror to humor; a similarly high critical intelligence is always in control. We read them with care, with our guard up, only to find they have already slipped inside and gotten to work, refining the feelings, the vision, the life." The New York Press took a different tack and called Evenson, "Like Garcia Marquez on really, really bad acid." However it's described, his voice, and the nature of his work, is distinct and recognizable.

Among other accolades, Evenson has received an O. Henry award for his story "Two Brothers" and an NEA Fellowship in 1995. His short story collections include Altmann's Tongue, The Din of Celestial Birds, Contagion, and, most recently, The Wavering Knife. Father of Lies was his first novel and Dark Property and The Brotherhood of Mutilation are novellas.

#### **Since the stories in *The Wavering Knife* what have you been working on?**

I've been working on a novel called *The Open Curtain*, which is something I began before all but one of the stories found in *The Wavering Knife*. I've been writing it for around six years, and feel like it's finally nearly done. It's about a disturbed boy who ends up becoming obsessed with a past murder and the way in which this obsession transforms and destroys both him and certain people around him. It has some very odd moments. I'm also continuing to write stories, and have a piece coming out in the next issue of McSweeney's and a piece in Omnidawn's *New Fabulist* anthology among other things. I'm very committed to the short story as a form.

#### **What else is out there? If one digs deep enough, at least several unpublished novels seem to exist -- such as *Pergolesi's Death* and *A Circular Desert*. Might these see the light of day?**

*Pergolesi's Death* and *A Circular Desert* and something called *The Mario Lanza Experience* are all novels that I have complete drafts of but which I've never been completely satisfied with. They're all in boxes. Each of them taught me something about writing, about putting a novel together, but each also taught me a great deal about what doesn't work when one is writing a novel.

I published a portion of *A Circular Desert* as a story called "Sortie" that appeared in a very small magazine six or seven years ago. There's something about that novel, which takes place in an imaginary Saharan country inspired perhaps a little too much by Roussel's *Africa*, that I still like. I've redrafted it, changing it each time very substantially, four times in the last eleven or twelve years. *The Mario Lanza Experience* is based on the father of a friend of mine whose obsession with the singer Mario Lanza ruined his life: he ended up spending thousands of dollars to make an informational video cassette that would show Hollywood producers how he was the right person to write, direct and star in a movie about Mario Lanza's life. He was incredibly self-deluded: he looked nothing like Lanza, was not handsome, had no skills as a writer or a singer. I tried to redraft it about three years ago, but wasn't any happier with where it was going; I do think it will eventually condense into a long story, but first I have to be willing to let it go as a novel. I do that sometimes; the "siege" sto-

ries in my first collection *Altmann's Tongue* are pieces of a short novel that didn't work as a novel but that worked as a series of semi-discontinuous stories. Pergolesi's *Death* was a sort of metaphysical mystery (like Leonardo Sciascia's work) which had a central flaw that I don't see any way to ever get around. I don't think it'll ever see the light of day, in any form.

I tend to throw away around half of what I write, and start a lot of stuff that doesn't work out. One has to know what not to publish, and be very strict with oneself.

**You've said your work contains a "violent edge." How hard has it been to face the consequences of your work? Did you ever think that writing fiction would affect your life as significantly as it has?**

There was a lot of local controversy surrounding my first collection, *Altmann's Tongue*, which cost me my job at Brigham Young University, a Mormon university I was working at the time. I talk about that in an afterword the paperback version of *Altmann's Tongue* -- it was very difficult, and ultimately precipitated the collapse of my marriage. But also, knowing that people might dramatically object to what I do made me think very carefully about what I was doing and made me very committed to it: knowing that my life could fall apart because of my fiction made me want to be certain of every word I put on the page. If it was going to destroy me, I wanted it to be worth it.

The objections to the book were framed in terms of the book's violence and immorality, but I think what people were really objected to was the ethical blankness of the book, the narrative's refusal to make any kind of judgment whatsoever on the actions therein, and the way this refusal is replicated in the non-reactions of the characters themselves both to the violence around them and to the acts they themselves are committing. And a number of the stories couple difficult content with a very lyrical style which, I think, makes a reader feel pulled between being repulsed by the text and attracted to it. I think with that book, I was trying to throw the reader into a world in which morality seemed absent so that any moral ground would have to come from the reader himself or herself. Some of my later work has continued to explore violence, but often in different ways, introducing affect and emotional content or exploring different sorts of combinations and the intensities to which they lead.

**With five short story collections, how much pressure is there toward writing novels? Is that the nature of the industry?**

There's always some pressure toward writing novels, though I think that I've been lucky in finding and continuing to find a number of presses and magazines interested in publishing my short stories. I'm happy with the novel I've published and the novel I've just finished, feel that the subject matter of both demanded the more expansive treatment of a novel, but I think the form I find the most satisfying is the novella, even more so than a story. It's almost impossible to write a long novel in which everything is tightly wound and which has the crispness and tightness to it that a novella can have -- even if you do, it's at least partly lost on a reader, reading a long novel over several sittings. The novella, at its best, has many of the strengths of short stories and novels. *The Open Curtain*, which is the longest thing I've ever written, I think of as a series of three novellas, so each section has that tightness and crispness, but then it has the larger scope and the sections have the larger interconnections of a novel. I don't think I could have written it without thinking of it that way, but it also meant that it took me four years to write the third section, which brings the other two sections together, in a way that worked. I wrote it four or five very different ways before finally understanding what needed to be done. And I couldn't have done it without having read Steve Erickson's work, which opened up new possibilities to me.

**In translating *Mountain R*, how much was Jacques Jouet's voice and how much was yours?**

I tried to stay very close to the feel of Jouet's original. It's a very strong book and as a writer I felt an affinity with it, which is why I wanted to translate it. There are, of course, some choices in terms of

arrangement and sentence patterning that are particular to me -- another translator might have handled them differently -- but I tried always to let my voice give way to his.

**Dark Property uses words that aren't in most dictionaries. Where'd the vocabulary come from?**

More than a decade ago, I did a degree in 18th century literature and read a lot of obscure 18th and 17th century texts. I started making lists of words that had fallen out of the language, and then began wondering about why the words had died. And then I started thinking, too, about how those words might mutate or adapt to other usages. A lot of those words probably appear in the Oxford English Dictionary, but some only exist in some rare text in some obscure library, and some are words that existed but were only used once or twice, but I've transformed them from verbs to modifiers or nouns to verbs. *Dark Property* has a lot of odd words but tries to put them into a very clean context, a context where one can quickly guess their meaning. For me, it was a way of trying to resurrect these dead, really intriguing words, and the story of the novella, which involves a resurrection cult and a very permeable line between life and death, sprang from that. It's an extreme book, but I'm very happy with it.

**You've studied madness as a literary technique that's tied to art. What have you learned?**

I've been interested in both writers who depict madness and writers and thinkers, like Antonin Artaud or Daniel Paul Schreber or Christopher Smart, who have spent substantial time in asylums, as well as in outsider artists of all kinds. I think the depictions of madness in writing are sometimes a little formulaic, but also think that very few of the insane are in any sort of position of lucidity. This for me all partly stems from an interest in Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* and their favoring of the schizophrenic over the neurotic.

**A strong argument can be made that your work is aware of philosophy, literary criticism and other "speculative intelligences," yet your stories have appeared in horror anthologies. Is this what's called "imposter fiction?" Is the blurring of the lines intentional?**

I'm fairly aware of philosophy and especially interested in questions of epistemology, particularly theories that suggest the impossibility of knowing. There's a philosophical thread in most of my work, and even some of the violence and cruelty is very much tied to, for instance, notions of transgression found in Bataille and others. But I have very little patience with fiction that seems to push a critical perspective, fiction that serves as a mouthpiece for a cultural critic or a post-structuralist's views. I'd rather just read the critical text than read the same thing watered down and simplified in fiction. I'd like to think my own stories are most interested in creating a narrative, creating too a certain mood or feeling, that whatever philosophy is there is integrated and sublimated.

I'd also like to think that my fiction can be read in a number of different ways. Most of it has been published in literary venues, but there does seem to be a lot of interest in it from other places as well -- a few stories have been gathered in genre anthologies of various kinds, and one of my favorite novellas, *The Brotherhood of Mutilation*, was published by a small press that mainly does horror. I am interested, as a reader, in people like Dashell Hammett who, at his best, is quite literary -- he's bashing around in noir before the genre was formalized and as a result does some very surprising things. Same, I think, is true of Jim Thompson, who does some things stylistically that I think are incredibly revolutionary. I feel an affinity with those writers but at the same time with Jean Genet, Samuel Beckett, Thomas Bernhard, Leonardo Sciascia, etc.

**Your humor, perhaps most fully in *The Wavering Knife*, is dark and hard. In your work, has the role of humor changed over time?**

I think that all my work has an element of humor to it, which is admittedly usually very much black humor. I do think there's often a tension and an exchange between humor and darkness, but in my past work the violence has generally been dominant. In some of the stories in *The Wavering Knife*

the humor comes out much more fully. I don't think it's changed so much over time as it's something that shifts a little bit with each story. For instance, a story I finished recently called "90 over 90," about an editor struggling in the publishing industry, has a humor that's largely satirical and parodic and contains only the darkness naturally found in the publishing industry. But I suspect that's a one story sideline for me.

**Your collections appear, especially in tone and theme, to have unique cohesive elements. What gives you that stylistic range? Do you make conscious decisions or does it happen more organically?**

I have certain rhythms and certain phrasings that I'm very drawn to, and I return to them, with variations, quite often. I have certain strategies involved with trying to slightly defamiliarize English. Some of these occur very consciously, others happen organically and then are perfected. I think I've managed to reprogram my thinking enough that now certain tonal things seem to happen organically. Thematically, I do seem to be drawn to certain kinds of stories, certain kinds of suffering. I do think, as I suggested above, that there's a subterranean philosophical investigation going on if you consider all my stories together, and this accounts for both the stylistic similarities and what you call the unique cohesive elements.

**Years ago, you said, "I'd like to think that the writing I'm doing has a signature of its own." Is that still a motivator?**

As a reader, I'm interested in style as much as in content, in the way a story is narrated as much as what's actually said. I think the best writers have a very distinctive signature that expresses itself in their style, in their way of putting sentences together. As a writer, I'd like to think that what I'm created has a certain authority and expresses a distinctive voice, that I'm offering something up to the reader that he or she isn't likely to encounter elsewhere, and that this something is not simply the content but a way of handle that content. Beckett has an extraordinary signature -- you can feel his presence in everything he writes despite the sparseness of his prose. Nabokov, whose prose is much more deliberately fussy, has a similar extraordinary signature. The reason we use modifiers like Beckettian and Nabokovian to describe the writing of others is that they use a particular style in such a way that it seems like it has come to belong only to them. Achieving such a style is, I think, is a worthy goal for any writer.

## 4. Life, Literature & Religion

[http://www.barcelonareview.com/arc/r2/eng/b\\_everbio.htm](http://www.barcelonareview.com/arc/r2/eng/b_everbio.htm)

The Times, July 15 1997.

### The high priest's story

Mormon Brian Evenson has been reviled by his Church for writing what they feel is sadistic and perverted fiction. Interview by Jason Cowley.

Brian Evenson is a writer of disconcerting power. His stories are full of atrocity and violence. There is no human exchange in his work that is not steeped in brutality. An affluent young couple hurl kittens out of the window of their speeding car, laughing as the cats screech like power saws when they hit the pavement. An aimless drifter travels across America randomly slaughtering young women on whose warm bodies he then carves commemorative stars. A farmer stumbles on the body of his dead daughter, but rather than tell his wife he inexplicably buries the girl in an isolated barn.

All this could easily be dismissed as the work of yet another neurotic literary outsider, were it not for the fact that Evenson, 30, writes so well and that he is a high priest in the Mormon Church, a happily married father of two young daughters and an unequivocal believer. To him, the Book of Mormon is a text of sacred revelation.

A religious conservative, he will this week celebrate the 150th anniversary of the arrival of Brigham Young and the first Mormons in Salt Lake City. And yet, as Knopf, his New York publishers, acknowledge on the dustjacket of his collection of stories, *Altmann's Tongue*, Evenson "appears, in every particular, to be the very destroyer of what he is instead the maker of". In short, he imaginatively and, numerous critics say, gratuitously, violates what in daily life is most sacred to him: family life, faith and morality.

Not surprisingly, controversy has hit Evenson like a truck. He is reviled and scourged inside the Mormon community, where he is accused of putting himself on the side of evil. "There are people who wonder how somebody could speak in an evil person's voice and not be affected by that voice," he says.

If he continues writing fiction of experimental modernism, Evenson knows he will be excommunicated from the Church he has served in numerous roles. The prospect fills him with terror. For a fundamental tenet of Mormonism, one to which he is devoutly committed, is that marriage binds a couple together for eternity (polygamy, once rife among Mormons, has been outlawed for more than a century).

The only way they can part is if one of them is excommunicated. So Evenson is trapped in a cruel dilemma: if he remains true to the impulses of his art, however dark these may be, he faces what he calls the agony of "eternal separation from his wife and children". But if he succumbs to authoritarianism and self-censorship he knows he will be miserable. "I feel good about my art," he says. "I feel like it is part of my identity. I don't want to have to make a choice between the Mormon Church and my work, but if I do I will be on the side of art, even though I still have my faith."

This is painful, too painful: already cracks are appearing in the once smooth surface of his family life. His wife, Connie, comes from a doctrinally more austere Mormon family than Evenson's, whose parents were the only Democrats in his neighborhood while he was growing up in Provo, Utah. He and Connie married "when we were in our early twenties because we were brought up thinking that is what you did". His eldest daughter Valerie is six, and his youngest, Sarah, is four.

In common with all Mormons, Connie believes that a "man's heart is revealed in his art". Evenson

says: "She can't understand why I write as I do. Though she has a French degree, she does not have the same kind of literary background as me. We are committed to each other, but what I am doing is causing her a lot of pain. We don't argue, but we talk about it, we debate about what this means to us as Mormons. But she feels that if I continue doing a certain kind of art then, in essence, I am betraying her."

Does he believe that? "I kind of do and I don't," he says, lowering his head. He is a big man, with huge hands and thick red hair worn in a ponytail. With his distressed jeans and wispy goatee beard he looks more like a farm laborer or perhaps a roadie for a rock band than the sophisticated literary intellectual that he is. At times, his voice scarcely rises above a whisper. It is hard to believe he is the author of work of such terrifying nihilism work described as "morally absent". But, of course, there is no such thing as moral absence: even amorality is a cannily ethical position.

Certainly that was the feeling among the hierarchy at Brigham Young, the Mormon university in Provo where Evenson taught literature and creative writing but from where he says he was "forced to leave" after a female student wrote an anonymous letter alerting the authorities to the extreme material in Altmann's *Tongue*.

"This man has an obsession with murder," she wrote. "There are descriptions of cannibalism, incest and serial murder . . . [reading the book] I feel like someone who has eaten something poisonous and is desperate to get rid of it. As Latter-Day Saints and disciples of Jesus Christ I believe we have a responsibility to use our gifts to bless the world with truth and hope not to revel in darkness and degradation."

In his defense, Evenson says he wishes not to glamorize, but to confront, violence. "When I was a boy growing up in Utah, I was disturbed that most of my peers felt that they could justify seeing an adult movie as long as it was 'only violent' rather than depicting sex. Violence, they thought, was somehow acceptable and entertaining but they had a real problem with sex. In Mormonism there is an emphasis on talking only about what is good in life. So you end up making a space where evil can occur unimpeded. I want to expose people to the darker side of life, to challenge them, to show that evil is part of this world."

After much anguish and vilification, Evenson took a job last year at Oklahoma State University because he felt "there was no place for me at Brigham Young; they wouldn't support me in my work". Appalled that fellow Mormons found his fiction unconscionable, he felt trapped and harassed in Provo. "I felt like an outcast in my own town. I would go into restaurants and people would look at me as if I was dangerous. It kind of got to me."

The clash between Evenson's literary sophistication and the uncompromising literalism of many Mormons has a compelling modernity. For Mormonism is one of the fastest growing religions in the world. There are almost ten million worldwide, half of whom are in the United States, clustering in Salt Lake City, Utah, where the Church has its headquarters.

The sect was founded, in 1830, by Joseph Smith as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints in Fayette, New York. Part of its appeal is its intense exoticism: Smith famously claimed that Moroni, an ancient American prophet, appeared to him revealing the existence of a hidden gospel engraved on golden plates and buried 1,000 years earlier on a hill near Palmyra. These were transcribed as the Book of Mormon, and together with the Christian Scriptures form the basis of the faith.

When Evenson was 19 he spent two years in France, Switzerland and Mexico doing the missionary work required of every young Mormon. "I remember knocking on doors wearing these dark suits. It made the religion seem terribly corporate. The thing about Mormonism is that the conversion process goes on even for the dead. It is very inclusive."

Evenson is working out a complex literary destiny in the desert landscape of Utah. Tied through a

quirk of birth to a religious community that grows ever more trenchantly confident with each new convert, he feels "lost and confused". His next book, *Father of Lies*, explores another Mormon taboo: child abuse. Structured as a psychoanalytic case study, it draws on actual, previously repressed cases of the abuse of young boys by Mormon lay clergy.

"Sometimes I wake up after a nightmare thinking I must be crazy to publish this book, because I know they will excommunicate me for doing so," he says.

He approaches this prospect with lucidity and gloom. "In my more rational moments I'm not sure the Mormon authorities can dictate what happens to me after my death. The Church is at a point where it can become even more repressive, or embrace a new openness. I've thought about what I'm doing, I've prayed for guidance. If I get excommunicated, my hope is that they might take me back in at a later date."

You know that he knows that this may be a forlorn hope indeed.

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<http://www.lds-mormon.com/aaupevre.shtml>

## Letter of Resignation from BYU

8/13/1996

Brian Evenson  
Department of English, 205 Morrill  
Oklahoma State University  
Stillwater, OK 74078

Open letter addressed to Jay Fox, Chair  
Department of English, 3146 JKHB  
Brigham Young University  
Provo, UT 84602

Dear Jay,

Though I respect many of the faculty and students at Brigham Young, I do not feel that BYU fosters the academic freedom and exploration which are necessary to a university environment. Indeed, I feel that many of BYU's administrators, as well certain members of the faculty and some of the students, are taking action and imposing restrictions which severely stifle academic freedom. BYU provides a climate in which academic inquiry is not allowed unless it is restricted within unacceptably narrow parameters. All indications suggest that these parameters will continue to narrow.

I have very specific objections to Brigham Young University's current policies. For instance:

--Though I do not object to temple worthiness, I object to the way in which temple worthiness is now being enforced. I feel the policy will lead on the one hand to hypocrisy and on the other to the lessening of the enjoyment many BYU faculty members will receive from attending the temple and from paying their tithing.

--I feel that BYU creates a hostile work environment for women: women who are scholars and women involved in cultural studies and gender studies in particular. I feel that BYU's harassment of the women's organization Voice-- as well as President Bateman's and the administration's attack of the nationwide clothesline project --show a lack of understanding of and sympathy toward abuse. I am not willing to participate, even passively, in the maintenance of such an environment.

--I feel that President Bateman's unwillingness to acknowledge the AAUP Academic Freedom Association is reflective of BYU's larger unwillingness to allow academic freedom in certain areas.

--I believe the continuing status review process as it currently stands is dishonest and manipulative. I feel this in particular in Gail Houston's case, in which documents were introduced after the departmental and college level reviews without Gail having a chance to respond to them. I feel that faulty conclusions were drawn --as far as I can tell purposefully. Data that showed Gail to be a dedicated teacher and scholar, as well as a strong spiritual support to students, was interpreted counterproductively. I feel that if I returned to Brigham Young I could not depend on a fair and honest continuing status review.

--I do not feel that I can depend upon your support as a chair. I feel that this is made clear by the way in which you handled Gail's case.

--I have been shocked at the willingness of both President Lee and President Bateman to make uninformed statements in both public and private about the inappropriate nature of my book, particularly when Lee claimed that BYU's process would leave judgment of the book to people trained in literature. Despite all claims made for a fair review process, the administration has already made up its mind. In the case of both presidents, their comments demonstrate that if they have read my book at

all, they have read it in only a cursory fashion.

--I feel that Brigham Young University has been dishonest in regard to the anonymous letter that was sent to a general authority criticizing my work. First I was asked to respond to the letter and then, several months after I did so, it was claimed that the anonymous letter was of no importance. Later, BYU disingenuously gave the press the impression that they had arranged for me to meet with the anonymous student and that I even had already done so. In fact, no meeting was ever arranged or planned, despite several requests on my part.

--I am also somewhat disappointed that though the English Department has strong proof that a particular professor has written letters to the General Authorities about myself and others, and has had repeated violations of standards, nothing has been done about him. I think it a profound weakness of the department and of BYU in general that, though you scold such people and warn them, you seem unwilling to fire them. Yet you show no such compunction about releasing scholars such as Gail Houston for reasons which are flimsy and insufficiently substantiated at best.

All this is further complicated by the fact that a General Authority is now the President of the University. Many Mormons teaching at BYU believe it wrong to question the decisions of a General Authority, and many will be unwilling to tell him when he is making poor decisions. I think that in his actions and decisions Merrill Bateman has demonstrated both a willingness to further compromise academic freedom and a lack of understanding of academics and what it takes to run a university effectively. His comments and speeches have made me feel that he is either uninformed or wrongly informed on current trends in academia. I feel that under his leadership BYU can only get worse.

I would not be proud to remain at Brigham Young University. I am not proud of the negative reputation that the BYU English Department is gaining in the profession at large. I am not pleased with the way BYU treats its faculty. I feel that its current policies and attitudes do great damage not only to faculty but to students. For this reason, I am tendering my resignation as an assistant professor of Brigham Young University, effective immediately.

Sincerely,

Brian Evenson.

<http://www.browndailyherald.com/main.cfm>

Post-, Friday, October 9, 2003 (Vol. 4, Issue 17)

## **Evenson's tongue**

By Elise Cheung

At first glance, Professor Brian Evenson of the Creative Writing department seems decidedly uncontroversial. But his easy, soft-spoken manner belies the fact that he is the author of literature that has sparked national debate.

A former Mormon, Professor Evenson originally hails from Brigham Young University (though he taught at Oklahoma State University and the University of Denver before coming to Brown last year). In 1994, after the publication of his short story collection “Altmann’s Tongue,” the BYU administration was alarmed to receive an anonymous letter complaining that Evenson’s work involved graphic accounts of interfamily murder, rape and mutilation—themes that went against the principles of Mormon belief.

Evenson was later told by the BYU administration that if he continued to publish such writing, he would be asked to leave. Citing this lack of academic freedom, Evenson resigned from BYU in 1996.

Evenson talked with Post- about his impressions of Brown so far, and his feelings about sacrificing his church for his writing.

### **Before you came here, what did you think of when someone mentioned Brown University?**

I actually came here and did a visiting writer program maybe seven years ago, and at that time I was made aware of what was going on in writing here. I was very impressed by Brown’s creative writing program. My first introduction to it was during Robert Coover’s conferences; I came for one of those conferences and it really felt like there were so many people at that time that were at the forefront of innovative fiction who were coming to do things at Brown. It seemed like a place I wanted to be. After that experience I’ve had the sense that Brown is operating at the top of schools that are interested in innovative fiction and poetry.

### **So far, would you say that Brown has been what you expected? Have we lived up to our reputation?**

Yeah, it’s been very, very good. I’ve been impressed by the students here, both the graduates students and undergraduates. The quality of students is very high; I think that I’ve been able, in talking about literature, to get to places with students very quickly that I haven’t been able to get to in other schools. So the responsiveness to literary texts is very intense and very thoughtful and very good. In terms of creative writing, I’ve only seen a few stories before, in my workshops with undergraduates and graduates, but I have been impressed by the quality of the stories before.

### **So how do you think Brown compares with the other three schools you taught at in the past: University of Denver, Oklahoma State, and BYU?**

I think it’s by far the best. I feel like my path has been from one school to a better school... each school’s been a little better. Coming to Brown, it seems to me like I’ve reached a point where I’m not sure where I would go beyond this. I feel like a lot is happening here, and in comparison to other schools that I know, it’s at the top.

### **Do you feel estranged from the Mormon community coming to Brown University?**

I’m actually no longer Mormon.

**Oh, really?**

Yes, I had been threatened with excommunication for a long time and I finally ended up initiating the process myself, to have my name removed from the Mormon Church. I felt like the pressure that I was getting from Mormonism was making it very difficult to write, and so I felt like a break needed to be made. I think because of that I really enjoy that Brown is very open in terms of what they allow... in terms of writing they allow anything. I can't say I miss that sense of restrictiveness.

**How did you feel after breaking with the Church?**

Well, it was a very odd thing... I grew up Mormon, and my family is sixth generation Mormon, so my family goes back to the beginning of the Mormon Church. My ex-wife's family also went back to the beginning of the Mormon Church. So to make the decision to leave the Mormon Church was a pretty major one. But it came down to feeling like I had to choose between writing and religion. At first I was terrified by that—it was really frightening to think that I would be moving away from something that I believed in and was strongly attached to. And I was not only just Mormon—I was actually a Mormon ecclesiastical leader, so I was one of three people who headed the congregation, and I was a member of the bishop ring. So I was very deeply involved in terms of the local hierarchy of the Mormon Church I was in. And I was frightened by the thought that I was going to leave it. It seemed to open up a whole realm of fear. But when I finally did it, I felt very much freed up by that. It did cause a lot of weird repercussions for me... my wife and I ended up divorcing, partly because of the fact that I left the Mormon Church. That was a big part of it. But as a writer, I've never felt better, and I feel like I was using it as a crutch in many ways.

**How do you think the Mormon community is taking all of this?**

Well, there have been really weird responses to my work along the way. There have been some very hostile responses; certainly the fact that I've come to Brown, that I've come to a big school gratifies what I'm doing in the eyes of some Mormons. I continue to get letters about the work that I've done. A lot of the work that I've done is related to Mormonism, sometimes very obliquely. And there's a good number of people who support my work in that community, and a number of people who really hate my work. I think that as long as I was Mormon there were enough ways that I could be threatened and pressured that they felt like there was some level of control over me. And now that I'm out there isn't that level of control, but at the same time since I no longer Mormon there isn't the same kind of authority that my fiction might have in that community if I were Mormon.

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## 5. When Religion Encourages Abuse: Writing Father of Lies

[http://www.vachss.com/media/righteous/evenson\\_1.html](http://www.vachss.com/media/righteous/evenson_1.html)

First published in *The Event*, October 8, 1998, p. 5.

By Brian Evenson.

Many things can serve as a motivation to write fiction— things read, conversations overheard, something momentarily glimpsed then lost, an unusual juxtaposition of objects on a desk. Most of the time my motivations for writing remain implicit, not quite taken in by the conscious mind. *Father of Lies*, though, is the exception: I know exactly what led me to write it.

I first had the idea to write *Father of Lies* while teaching at Brigham Young University. Coming back to Provo after living several years in Seattle, I was hyperconscious of the way in which a few Utah Mormons saw their involvement in the Church as an excuse not to think. "We don't need to think: our leaders think for us." I began to imagine a religious leader who would take advantage of this blind obedience, using his position to hide the worst sins. Guessing such a book might not fly at BYU, I pushed it out of my mind.

Before long, I was in the middle of a controversy concerning my first book, *Altmann's Tongue*. An anonymous student wrote a letter to a general authority, suggesting the book was immoral and that I must be evil. The general authority (still unidentified) passed the letter on to the university. I was asked to write a response to the student and did so without knowing who she was. I had a strong defense for my position, but as I met with administrators, including President Rex Lee and Provost (now General Authority) Bruce Hafen, it became clear that they weren't interested in hearing why I was writing; they were interested in getting me to stop writing. My department chair wrote a memo suggesting that further publications like *Altmann's Tongue* would bring repercussions. Hafen suggested that another book of fiction like *Altmann's Tongue* would only work against my staying at BYU. Even after I received an NEA Creative Writer's Fellowship, they didn't change their position.

I left BYU, taking a one-year job at Oklahoma State University, which quickly converted to a permanent position. I took a few months to relax and recuperate, thinking about what to write next. I spent some time working on *Father of Lies*, but eventually set it aside.

In early 1996, I began to reread Andrew Vachss' crime novels, which deal with child abuse with sensitivity and great knowledge without denying the need to reveal and destroy the darkness in conjunction with healing the abused. I read Linda Sillitoe's admirable novel, *Secrets Keep*, about a family on the Wasatch Front forced to face secrets they've ignored for years. I remembered a few people I thought I'd known well growing up. Later I found they'd been abused. Somehow I hadn't known— hadn't wanted to know.

Then came a fine article in *The Event* called "Keeping Mum on Mormon Sexual Abuse," that a friend in Utah forwarded to me. In the article, Marion Smith, founder of the Intermountain Specialized Abuse Treatment Center, chronicles abuse in the Mormon Church, shows the Church's hesitation to make changes, and makes a chillingly convincing case for the way in which silence allows abuse to breed unchecked. Not long after, I read the first volume of the *Case Reports of the Mormon Alliance*, which contained case studies of child abuse in the Mormon Church. Difficult reading, it helped reinforce the seriousness and the extent of the problem, made me begin to think again about *Father of Lies*.

I began to speak about abuse with other Mormons. Often they agreed there was a problem, but said it wasn't as bad in Mormonism as in other religions. A relatively small number of people were being

abused. It doesn't sound so bad if you think of it in terms of numbers, I suppose, but as soon as you start putting names and faces with the numbers, you realize that percentages don't matter: what matters is that there are children and adults who are being abused and who are being given harmful counsel from their religious leaders. What matters is that much of it could be easily prevented.

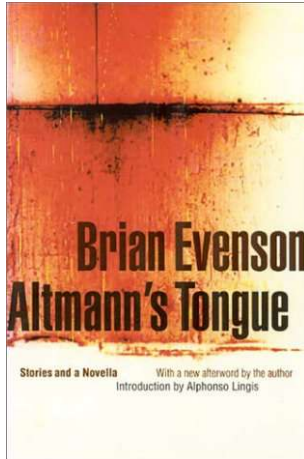
I began to write *Father of Lies* again. I began to speak to therapists and individuals who had suffered from abuse. I learned about ChildTrauma Academy, a child trauma program doing the finest cross-disciplinary work on child abuse that I know of. I read extensively in psychiatric literature. I was a priesthood holder, a former member of the high priest leadership and a former bishopric member: I had seen the Church system from the inside, could make some good guesses about how the system could be abused, felt the potential for abuse needed to be revealed.

Even though the final book adopted a broader sweep than just Mormonism (since abuse is a problem in many religions), Mormonism is still at the heart of the book for me: I'd like to see my own religion make much-needed changes. Some Mormons have told me I'm crazy to write a book of this kind, that I'm just asking for trouble from the Church. But I've reached a point where I don't want to collaborate any more by remaining silent. If the price of religious faith involves setting aside your convictions in favor of blind obedience, is it a price worth paying? For me, it isn't

© The Event 1998.

## 6. Books

<http://www.nebraskapress.unl.edu/bookinfo/4224.html>



### **Altmann's Tongue (1994, 2002)**

Knopf (1994) / University of Nebraska Press (2002).

251 pages, ISBN: 0803267444

"Showing off Evenson's myriad skills, the stories range from rural tales of death to a retelling of the biblical Job story, in which a skeletonized Job trades barbs and blows with a murderous lumberjack. . . . There is a detached brutality to the collection, similar to Beckett's novels, which, due to Evenson's precise control over language is both disturbing and compelling." — Review of Contemporary Fiction.

"The spirit of Edgar Allan Poe inhabits this collection of violent and mysterious stories that recall not only that master of the perverse but also the seamier side of the nightly news. . . . Many of these tales, particularly the short-shorts, remain enigmatic, resistant to any explication; yet even they are told in such a compelling fashion that one reads not to understand but merely to witness." — Publishers Weekly.

particularly the short-shorts, remain enigmatic, resistant to any explication; yet even they are told in such a compelling fashion that one reads not to understand but merely to witness." — Publishers Weekly.

"Evenson has created a fascinating, mysterious, and austere prose set in scenes that attain the precision of staged burlesque. Through the sparse economy of the plot and settings, Evenson's great moral sensibility is glimpsed behind the carnival mask of apparently frivolous murder." — Seattle Weekly.

"Altmann's Tongue strikes me as powerful, by reason of the mode of the language and the unusual style, by reason of the violence and force of the words... I admire this book." — Gilles Deleuze, author of A Thousand Plateaus.

"Like Garcia Marquez on really, really bad acid." — New York Press.

[http://www.locusmag.com/2002/Reviews/Lalumiere08\\_6Collections.html](http://www.locusmag.com/2002/Reviews/Lalumiere08_6Collections.html)

The release of the first edition of Altmann's Tongue set in motion a series of events that led to Brian Evenson being increasingly alienated from his Mormon community. That journey, which led to a parting of ways between Evenson and the religion of his birth, is described in candid detail in this new edition's afterword. Also new to this edition are an introduction by author and philosopher Alphonso Lingis and Evenson's "Two Brothers", a story that won the O. Henry Award.

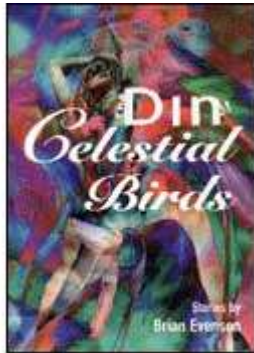
If I were to attempt to classify Evenson's fiction into a genre, I would have to say that most apt tag would be "moral horror".

Evenson's stories are peopled with characters — killers, mostly — whose morality is utterly alien. Not amoral, and certainly not immoral, but, perhaps, xenomoral. But there are no extraterrestrials or other non-human protagonists here. Evenson's characters are present-day people, aliens by virtue of being themselves.

Evenson does not try to justify his characters and their actions. He presents them in unequivocally unjudgmental fashion, with a cool and detached prose style, almost completely bereft of artifice. The effect is arresting, unsettling, and mesmerizing.

At their worst — because not all of these tales are successful — Evenson's stories approach impenetrability. At their best, they are stark tableaux of xenomoral cognitive estrangement, unapologetically transgressive, darkly beautiful, strange, odd, other.

<http://www.oregontrail.net/%7Ewordcraft/evenson.htm#birds>



## **Din of Celestial Birds (1997)**

Wordcraft of Oregon.

150 pages, ISBN: 1-877655-24-4

Contents: The Din of Celestial Birds, The Death of the Old Man, Among the Living, One Thick Black Cord, Amparo the Bastard, Water and Angels, Legacy, Manna, The Specimen, Altmann in Bolivia, The Dead Child, Bird, The Killer, The Revolution, The Jar, A Difference of Ideology, Down the River.

Seventeen surreal & magic realist stories set in South America.

« These stories represent the early work of Brian Evenson, a writer of astonishing power. He has been compared to Poe, to Kafka, to other great writers whose vision was bleak and dark, and whose characters act out of appalling despair. Evenson is worth such comparison, but his work is different from these. His worlds are without any emotion at all. Neither cruelty nor pity, happiness nor misery, compassion nor suffering, hope nor despair exist in his tales of inexorable and inhuman logic. They are written too in a faultlessly efficient prose, so that we see these strange worlds in the clearest and coldest of lights. And, paradoxically, we become aware of life without a purpose, of laws without sense, of victims who do not know they are victimized and aggressors who act without aim or malice. Evenson is a moralist, telling us that our very humanity is at risk, and that we must defend it. » — Leslie Norris, winner of the Katherine Mansfield Triennial International Award.



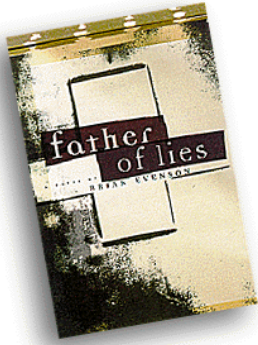
## **Prophets and Brothers (1997)**

Rodent Press.

Limited edition of 250 copies.

Contents: The Prophets; Blessing the Dog; Sanctified, in the Flesh; A Brother's Love.

<http://www.fourwallseightwindows.com/bookevenson1.html>



## Father of Lies (1998)

Four Walls Eight Windows.

232 pages, ISBN: 1-56858-116-5

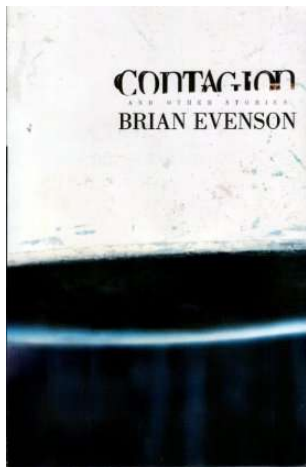
"Father of Lies is a remarkable book, with enormous potential to inflame — not antagonize, although that will be an organic consequence — to set the kind of fire without which no institutional injustice can ever be incinerated. I admire Evenson's writing and respect his courage. Father of Lies is quite amazing. As will be the response." — Andrew Vachss, author of Blossom, Born Bad, and Strega.

In this chilling psychological thriller, Brian Evenson delivers with cold precision the tale of a provost from the Corporation of the Blood of the Lamb and his affection — an unholy predilection — for children. The provost's sickness emerges deliberately, and the reader is drawn into the disturbing inner workings of a violent pedophile.

As accusations against the provost are made public, the church is forced to respond. In an effort to protect one of its own, and, in turn, to protect itself, the Committee for the Strengthening of the Church launches an all-out cover-up.

Evenson holds the reader to the page until the novel's fatal end. En route, he calls to question whether obedience to God justifies taking every liberty, right or wrong. And he brings to light how a divinely inspired institution can be as eager as its worldly counterpart to soil its hands in the furthering of the cause of supposed righteousness.

<http://www.oregontrail.net/~wordcraft/evenson.htm#contagion>



## Contagion and other stories (2000)

Wordcraft of Oregon.

151 pages, ISBN: 1-877655-34-1

Contents: The Polygamy of Language, Two Brothers, A Hanging, Internal, Prairie, Contagion, Watson's Boy, By Halves.

Stories — several with settings in the American West. Includes 1998 O'Henry Prize story, "Two Brothers" and O'Henry Prize runner-up, "The Polygamy of Language".

"Contagion remains one of the most strange and powerful books of the new millennium." — Bob Ehrenreich, *The Believer* #2, May 2003.

"The stories in *Contagion* are not comforting. They are, instead, challenging and intense. Evenson's vision is compelling; his prose, forceful. His characters are seekers who look with open eyes into the dark." — Andrew Geyer, *Iron Horse Literary Review*.

"Resplendently unsettling." — Rain Taxi.

"...fans of transgressive fiction will find *Contagion* thought-provoking, rich with metaphor and carefully crafted." — Ritah Parrish, *The Oregonian*.

"With [*Contagion*] Brian Evenson further stakes out his own disturbing, sometimes hilarious, and always bizarre narrative terrain." — Peter Donahue, *Review of Contemporary Fiction*.

"*Contagion* is a vicious and virtuous book that swoons in a panicked epiphany." — Melissa Maerz, *Rain Taxi*.

[http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/0971248524/qid=1075505032/sr=1-1/ref=sr\\_1\\_1/104-5328081-7629526?v=glance&s=books](http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/0971248524/qid=1075505032/sr=1-1/ref=sr_1_1/104-5328081-7629526?v=glance&s=books)



## Dark Property: An Affliction (2002)

Black Square Editions / Hammer Books

80 pages, ISBN: 0971248524

A woman carries a dying baby across a desert waste, moving toward a fortress harboring a mysterious resurrection cult. Menaced by scavengers, she nevertheless begins to suspect that the reality within the fortress may be even more unsettling than the blasted environment outside. As she slips unobtrusively towards the city of the dead, she is pursued by a bounty hunter who cuts a bloody swath after her.

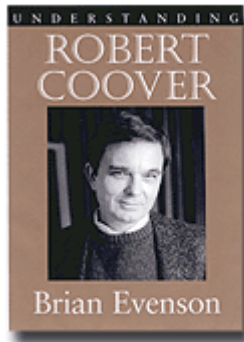
On one level, *Dark Property* is an exploration of religious fanaticism. Although Evenson's characters owe more to the Book of Mormon than the Koran, their frightening intensity will spark recognition in

both reviewers and readers. This brooding tale is reminiscent of Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* and J. G. Ballard's more disturbing works of fiction.

"I admire Evenson's writing and respect his courage." — Andrew Vachss.

"Evenson has earned his place in a long tradition of heterodox visionaries... Not many writers have the imagination or the audacity to transform what looks like salvation into an utterly original outpost of hell." — Bookforum.

<http://www.sc.edu/uscpres/2002/3482.html>



## Understanding Robert Coover (2003)

University of South Carolina Press.

192 pages, ISBN 1-57003-482-6

An insightful look at one of America's most important postmodern metafictional writers

In *Understanding Robert Coover*, Brian Evenson takes on the work of Robert Coover, a major figure of postmodern metafiction. In a careful analysis of Coover's short stories and novels, Evenson demonstrates how Coover writes in several different modes that cross over into one another. He explores Coover's concern with notions of community and

the ways communities hold together through a series of shared stories and myths—myths that often, once they lose their effectiveness, come to justify violence.

In this comprehensive study, Evenson discusses Coover's novels from his award-winning first book, *The Origin of the Brunists*, to his controversial *The Public Burning*—which has as its narrator the young vice president Richard Nixon. He studies the writer's reworkings of fairy tales in *Pricksongs and Descants*, *Pinocchio in Venice*, and *Briar Rose*, as well as the revisionary western *Ghost Town*. Evenson also looks at Coover's latest novel, *The Adventures of Lucky Pierre: Raw Footage*.

Evenson explicates Coover's rewriting of myths and explores his willingness to break the frame of his fiction so as to include both fantastic and realistic elements. Evenson also show that, for Coover, storymaking is essential to what makes us human, and for that reason his ideas remain at the heart of what makes literature dynamic and intriguing. *Understanding Robert Coover* addresses these issues and explicates Coover's often difficult and formally innovative fiction.

[http://www.earthlingpub.com/be\\_mutilation.htm](http://www.earthlingpub.com/be_mutilation.htm)



## The Brotherhood of Mutilation (2003)

Earthling Publications.

After losing a hand in a sting operation, Kline, a detective, finds himself unwillingly dragged into a secret amputation cult, recruited into a strange world in order to solve a crime whose details the self-mutilated members of the cult are strangely reluctant to discuss. As he struggles to unravel the nightmarish dynamics of the society and figure out the crime, he accidentally violates caste laws and begins to realize that he is profoundly threatened. Without question, this novella is one of the most original and disturbing takes on the detective story in recent years. Introduction by Paul Di Filippo, art by Chris Nurse.

Brian Evenson's work has been called "resplendently unsettling" (Rain Taxi) and "Garcia Marquez on really, really bad acid" (New York Press). Evenson is the recipient of the O. Henry Award and a NEA Creative Writing Fellowship, has published six books and over two dozen stories, and holds a double Ph.D. in literature and critical theory. Formerly a professor at Brigham Young University, he resigned after being threatened by the faculty to temper his fiction or face dismissal. Currently he directs the creative writing program at the University at Denver and is a senior editor at Conjunctions Magazine.

Available in two limited edition states:

- 300 numbered softcover chapbooks, signed by Brian Evenson.
- 15 lettered, traycased hardcovers, signed by Brian Evenson, Paul Di Filippo, and Chris Nurse.

"Brian Evenson has cooked up a hauntingly twisted midnight steak seared on the outside with black humor. When you slice into it be prepared for a rare taste of a society out of control. A bloody tribute to obsessions."— Del Howison, *Dark Delicacies*.

"Evenson's new masterpiece ... [an] astonishing work." — Paul Di Filippo, from the Introduction.

"Wickedly brilliant. A superb thriller that's a darker shade of noir. Brian's writing is scalpel sharp." — Simon Clark.

<http://fc2.org/evenson/knife/knife.htm>



## The Wavering Knife (2004)

FC2.

182 pages, ISBN 1-57366-113-9

Brian Evenson's fifth story collection constructs a human landscape as unearthly as it is mundane. Replete with the brutality, primordial waste, and savage blankness familiar to readers of his earlier works, Evenson's Kafkaesque allegories entice the mind while stubbornly disordering it.

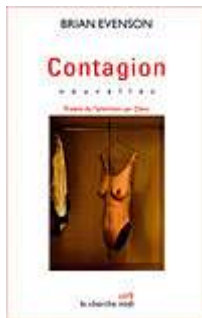
In the title story an obsessional consciousness folds back on itself, creating a vertiginous melange of Poe and Borges, both horrific and metaphysical.

Here, as in "Moran's Mexico," and "Greenhouse," the solitary nature of reading and writing leads characters beyond human limits, making the act of putting words to paper a monstrous violation opening onto madness. Evenson's enigmatic names—Thurm, Bein, Hatcher, Burl—unplaceable landscapes, and barren rooms all combine to create a semblance of conceptual abstraction, as though the material universe had come to exist inside someone's head.

Small wonder that Evenson's work has attracted so much attention among philosophers, literary critics, and other speculative intelligences, for it continuously projects a tantalizing absence, as though there were some key or code that, if only we knew it, would illuminate everything. However, the blade of discernment wavers, and we are left to our own groping interpretations. This is a collection to be read and reread.

"These tales by a modern Poe occur under an immense pressure of language, insight, and observation. Harrowing (Evenson makes us want to check the word's literal meaning) as they are, they take place just beyond the numbed moment where cruelty and craziness grow banal. Like Poe's, Evenson's stories range from horror to humor; a similarly high critical intelligence is always in control. It's moot, sometimes, which tale falls into which camp. But we read them with care, with our guard up, only to find they have already slipped inside and gotten to work, refining the feelings, the vision, the life." — Samuel R. Delany.

<http://www.cherche-midi.com/FR/catalogue/fichelivre.asp?id=984>



## Contagion: nouvelles (2005)

Traduit de l'américain par Claro

ISBN n° 2 74910 346 0

218 pages 14 x 22,

Chacune des huit nouvelles de Contagion se veut l'exploration crépusculaire d'un espace littéraire unique en son genre.

Chez Brian Evenson, la contagion est partout, que ce soit dans la gangrène, le fanatisme religieux, l'idée fixe, la pulsion de mort.

Ainsi, dans La polygamie du langage, un homme tente de percer le secret du Verbe au prix d'une froide et calculée descente aux enfers ; dans Deux frères, un pasteur qui s'est cassé la jambe refuse d'appeler une ambulance, convaincu de l'arrivée imminente de Dieu, et ce, sous le regard impuissant de ses deux fils. Avec Le fils Watson, l'auteur nous entraîne dans les labyrinthes infinis d'une maison-monde, où seul compte le ramassage de trousseaux de clés au croisement de corridors tous identiques.

Reclus plus ou moins volontaires, les personnages de ces nouvelles poursuivent tous des buts étranges, souvent cruels, au sein d'une réalité aussi distordue qu'aléatoire.

La prose impeccable de Brian Evenson, héritier de Beckett et de Borges, confronte le lecteur à des vies dérangées – et dérangeantes – qui n'en sont pas moins humaines que les nôtres.

« Une œuvre qui hante le lecteur bien après qu'il a fini d'en tourner les pages, comme un écrit ancien ou un crime récent. » — Rick Moody.

« Il n'existe pas en Amérique d'écrivain plus intense, plus prolifique ou plus apocalyptique que Brian Evenson. » — George Saunders.

[http://www.metarc.com/metarc/html/disc\\_at.htm](http://www.metarc.com/metarc/html/disc_at.htm)



## Altmann's Tongue CD (2005)

Ant-Zen.

Tracklisting: 1. Calling the Hour, 2. Prairie, 3. Altmann's Tongue, 4. A Slow Death: Prancing/The Underground Karst/On the Wall

Brian Evenson: text and voice.

Daniel De Los Santos: sounds, electronics, and processing.

John Sellekaers: sounds, electronics, processing, and mixing.

Upon the circulation of his first short story collection, *Altmann's Tongue* (Knopf, 1994), author and professor Brian Evenson found himself out of favor with his spiritual home ground, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints - the Mormon church. Since that time, Evenson's incisive, acerbic writing about the medieval brutality of contemporary humanity has gone on to garner significant praise, and not a few distinctions.

The creation of *Altmann's Tongue* - which features Brian Evenson reading selections from several books through a sonic fabric created by Xingu Hill and Tamarin - proved to be similarly cataclysmic, although of markedly different scale. On the surface, *Altmann's Tongue* appears to be a simple spoken word project backed by experimental sound design and post-industrial ambience of a distinctly harrowing nature. However, Brian Evenson's readings, recorded in an impromptu fashion in a sparse white apartment, begat an intensity of emotion that compelled Xingu Hill and Tamarin to work for over three years on musical reactions that could equal the sentiment of Evenson's recordings. Musical reactions, ranging from morose synth rhythms to enigmatic drones. Evenson's verbal recordings and the music feed upon themselves like the Ouroboros, like the snake which grows by eating itself.

Ant-Zen is proud to present *Altmann's Tongue* as a unique, compelling collaboration between a thought-provoking author and two exceptional sound experimentalists.

## 7. Stories & articles available online

<http://www.webdelsol.com/evenson/>

The Munich Window: A Persecution; Altmann's Tongue; After Omaha; Usurpation; Stung; My Possessions; The Father, Unblinking; The Evanescence of Marion le Goff; Job Eats Them Raw, with the Dogs: An Undoing.

[http://www.webdelsol.com/4Walls8Windows/Brian\\_Evenson/](http://www.webdelsol.com/4Walls8Windows/Brian_Evenson/)

Father of Lies (excerpt); A Brother's Love; Altmann's Tongue; The Munich Window; One Thick Black Cord; Down the River; After Omaha; Usurpation; Stung; My Possessions; The Revolution; The Father, Unblinking; The Evanescence of Marion le Goff; Job Eats Them Raw, with the Dogs.

<http://web.archive.org/web/20030720104652/www.blessed1054.com/evenson/stories.html>

The Father, Unblinking; Killing Cats; Altmann's Tongue; The Munich Window: A Persecution; My Possessions; The Evanescence of Marion le Goff; One Thick Black Cord; The Revolution; Down the River; A Brother's Love; A Hanging; Prairie.

<http://weberstudies.weber.edu/archive/archive%20B%20Vol.%2011-16.1/Vol.%2015.2/15.2Evenson.htm>

Legal.

<http://humanities.uchicago.edu/orgs/review/461/Evenson.html>

The Intricacies of Post-Shooting Etiquette.

<http://www.unl.edu/schooner/html/evenson.html>

Virtual.

<http://www.conjunctions.com/images/january.htm>

January (with Stacy Dacheux).

[http://www.postroadmag.com/Issue\\_3/Fiction3/FictionBEvenson.htm](http://www.postroadmag.com/Issue_3/Fiction3/FictionBEvenson.htm)

White Square

<http://www.unomas.com/fiction/brianevenson.html>

Son

<http://websearch.insidedenver.com/drmn/web/searchResults?site=DRMN&searchType=site&searchString=brian+evenson>

Rocky Mountains News: Books (reviews).

<http://www.thebrooklynrail.org/fiction/winter03/darkproperty.html>

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