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"STUPID SPOONS!" yells
Frank "waiting
for me to
PUSH them
around the table!
bathe them!
stick them
in my
mouth
again
later!
is no one else
SICK of this
paralysis of
gravity?
when I was a boy
I stepped into the sky
and I was a boy
not a surrealist!
part of the dream
is that you accept
your waking life as
part of the dream"
SCHOLAR OF THE MONTH:

C.A. CONRAD

My pal C.A. Conrad, who lives in and loves Philadelphia, is the most brilliant poet of the Twenty First Century. He is widely known for his unique and startling FRANK POEMS; THE COMPLETE FRANK is forthcoming from Jonathan William's Jargon Society Press. His AdvancedElvisCourse is also forthcoming from a publisher in Washington DC. He currently edits the E-Zine FINDINGTHEWORD. A review and excerpts form the latest issue follow. HAPPY VALENTINE'S DAY and ALL LOVE TO: C.A. Conrad!!!!

----- Sheila Holtz

BOOKS
EDITED BY E. LUDWIG
eludwig@philadelphiaweekly.com

Quoted, Printable

A local poet sends out a monthly compilation of witticisms and epitaphs.

BY MAURA JOHNSTON of The Philadelphia Weekly

Eavesdropping may be considered rude, but how about when it doubles as art? A Philadelphia poet has spent the past six months listening in on the conversations of others--with a little help from people around the Internet--and turning some of the best snippets of dialogue he's found into a monthly "e-zine of epigrams and epitaphs" called Findingtheword.

Findingtheword takes a different spin on the hit-and-run signature-quote idea that attaches itself to your everyday inbox. With snippets of dialogue offered by Findingtheword 's readership, CAConrad, the e-zine's editor, stitches together mini-narratives.

"There's a process where [the individual quotes] become a body," he says.

Call it a collective conversation in which many of the participants don't know the overall substance until the next issue lands in their inbox.

A typical issue veers from subject to subject, referring to everything from Willy Wonka to the sounds of toilets in Barcelona to the Pentagon contracts held by Dick Cheney's former company, Halliburton. Issue 6, which will hit inboxes around the world Feb. 1, will start off with a declaration that 2001 is the "year of the pussy," then head into discussion of vegetarianism and dreams.

"A lot of people like it because they get to use the voices they hear around them--on the street, the books they read," says CAConrad. He calls the project an "experimental place" with a finite shelf life; the magazine is slated to run for a year, and the post-e-zine life of the collected material is uncertain.

About 75 percent of Findingtheword 's subscriber base is content just to read CAConrad's layered dialogues. That leaves a number of people who submit quotes from all over--books they've read and dry cleaners they've talked to. "You get to find out about people like Eleanor Wilner and who they listen to," CAConrad says about the submissions he receives.
One of Findingtheword's longest--and most controversial--issues was a special edition that came out last November and inspired a good chunk of the subscriber base to send in politically inspired witticisms. "People were criticizing the issue because there weren't anti-Gore quotes," he says. "I had to tell them, 'I can only give you what I receive.'" CAConrad rarely rejects a quote; he tosses only those that are too long. (Submitted quotes are generally 75 words or fewer.)

The initial issue of Findingtheword went out to about 200 of CAConrad's friends, and then the subscriber base mushroomed, in true six-degrees-of-Internet-separation style. "It just took off," he says. It currently stands at about 1,200 members, with subscribers from as far away as India and Ireland. "I wanted to see how people would react to it," he said. "I didn't expect all the people I emailed to get it."

When he's not stitching together snippets of dialogue found on the Internet, CAConrad writes poetry. He recently released a chapbook called Evaporate Again (Mooncalf Press), and a collaboration with Frank Sherlock will be released soon.

Next up for CAConrad is a book about Elvis, whose quotes close out every issue of Findingtheword, called advancedELVISCourse (Buck Downs Books). "I went to Graceland and I was just overwhelmed by the people there. A lot of the book is dialogue; it's creative nonfiction, prose poetry."

One chapter is an exercise in listening entitled "The Philadelphia Elvis Experiment," and its premise is simple: CAConrad wheatpasted fliers around the city with a phone number and the directive "Call this number and talk to Elvis." The number, hooked up to an answering machine, was deluged with phone calls, and transcripts from the answering machine make up the bulk of the chapter.

Online, where the culture of Web journals and first-person retellings has turned everyone into a broadcaster, Findingtheword's emphasis on the words of others--and on careful listening and subtext-picking--is anomalous and refreshing.

Says CAConrad, "This is a magazine where people are listening and paying attention to others."

Email subscription requests to Findingtheword@aol.com.
"You can't be afraid to be a fool and if you're not willing to be a fool, get out of this business right now."

--Anne Sexton talking to a group of writing students. Quoted by Natalie Goldberg, THUNDER AND LIGHTNING, p. 48.
Submitted by Janet Mason, Philadelphia, USA

"If I'm decadent and reactionary--Communist jargon for being a free spirit--you can blame it on Philadelphia. A city that produced the mummers, Holy Joseph, Sun Ra and scrapple has taught me that every man has the right to achieve his own madness. Anything short of that is a failure of the imagination."

--Linh Dinh, from Philadelphia City Paper, Jan. 11-18, p. 34
Submitted by Frank Sherlock, Philadelphia, USA.
click here for info about <A HREF="http://hometown.aol.com/ixnaypress/page/index.htm">Frank Sherlock's CHAPBOOK!</A>

"I became insane, with long intervals of horrible sanity."

--Edgar Allan Poe
Submitted by Asha Sanu, Ahmadabad, India.

"I became a writer because I wanted to know if I could believe what my life had made me feel."

--Richard Wright
Submitted by Eleanor Wilner, Philadelphia, USA.

"To start off being a poet today you have to be young and full of illusions. To end up being a poet you have to have Another Job."

--Charles Henri Ford
Submitted by Edwin Hermance, Philadelphia, USA

"I prefer dead writers because you don't run into them at parties."

--Fran Lebowitz, from THE FRAN LEBOWITZ READER
Submitted by Dana "Kill The Child" McKenna, New York City

"Hear no evil-Speak no evil-and you'll never be invited to a party."

--Oscar Wilde
Submitted by Hillary Barrett, New Haven, Connecticut, USA.
SCHOLAR OF THE MONTH:

WOW! WOW! WOW!
fuckING WOWEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE!

i'm working on this new chapbook with my friend Frank Sherlock. section below.

it's called "(end-begin w/chants)"

all love,
Conrad

(end-begin w/chants)
dedicated to
the frequencies

this is a book of correspondence
between 2 poets

(performing w/ chants)

by C.A.Conrad
and
Frank Sherlock

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Song

is deep under

hair, reverb

in tooth-rattle

& the bottom.

-------------------

with chalk on philadelphia sidewalks
write:

a patch of daisies right here now!

write:

once a blackberry kingdom.

write:

cantaloupe ghost.

-------------------

Dream

future field-

training

the child

under shine

-------------------

mouthwash

a poet

cleans

not quiets

the alarm.

-------------------

how "I am not you"

started it.

these feet

in muck & the rubble.

-------------------

Boy kick

idea of being idea

man-

make rainbow

blacktop, motor oil.

(begin-end w/ chance)
Beat cracks of foundation
a pitch for blur
in perfect pinch -
homemade windows show on
walls spray voices -
blowdown order
fore - sightless sacrament
of blunt-root rage ,
spins p.m. dawn.

( end-begin w/ chants)
certain streets in philadelphia
smell of burnt toast early
in the morning.
hurry torn and mended light.
a man orders a plate of toast
to go. it is delicious in the bag
on the streets of philadelphia.
light mended and torn hurry.
elevators rising: crisp, delicious.

SCHOLAR OF THE MONTH:
C.A. CONRAD
"The things we took for granted do not take us so."

--Russell Edson
Submitted by Jeffrey Beam, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, USA.

"The days when you did what you liked are gone. 18 bureaucrats have been invented to see that you won't or can't."

--Jonathan Williams, poet, and publisher of Jargon Books.
Click here for <A HREF="http://www.jargonbooks.com">www.jargonbooks.com</A>
Submitted by Katherine Donithorne, Belfast, Maine, USA.

"Trudeau says, '... it's true, the election result is good for me. Bush is this stable hard target. It's as if Quayle had won. Plus you have the wonderful narrative of how he got where he now is. It took his brother, his father, his father's friends, the Florida Secretary of State and the Supreme Court. His entire life gives fresh meaning to the phrase 'assisted living'."

--In the Jan. 8, 2001, New Yorker, Gary Trudeau of Doonesbury fame is asked if George Bush will be good fodder for cartoonists and humorists.
Submitted by Alix Dobkin via Pam Ladds of Philadelphia, USA.

"June 10 probably came and went without your noting that it was Jesus Day in Texas. According to George W. Bush's Web site.... First off, who said Christians have cornered the market on "love and service"? And let's not forget that Jesus Day is brought to you by a man under whose watch 140 people have been executed."

--Ms. Magazine, fall 2000
Submitted by Annalisa Synnestvedt, Philadelphia, USA.

"All great murderers are- and must be- fanatically religious."

--Reinaldo Arenas, from THE COLOR OF SUMMER
Submitted by Frank Sherlock, Philadelphia, USA.

"I believe that the heaviest blow ever dealt at liberty's head will be dealt by this nation [the United States] in the ultimate failure of its example to the earth."

--Charles Dickens
Submitted by Tabitha Voss, Portland, Oregon, USA.

"If we do not change our direction, we are likely to end up where we are headed."

--Chinese Proverb
Submitted by Marsha Goldberg, Columbia, Missouri, USA.

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Until next issue, don't be nice unless you mean it,
THE SCHOLARS OF THE INSTITUTE
FOR ADVANCED THINKING
(dear)

My many thanks to all the great Scholars. When Andrew Porter crossed the border from New Brunswick into Maine in 1830 and founded the Institute for Advanced Thinking in Porter Settlement, Maine, no one knows exactly how many Scholars and Fellows he designated! At the time of Bern's biography by James Schevill, Where to Go, What to Do When You Are Bern Porter, Bern had designated forty four Scholars and affiliates. Since I and my cohort, the bolder, kinkier Natasha Bernstein, began producing Bern Porter International in 1997, more scholars have joined forces with us to further Advanced Thinking everywhere.

First let me thank Ketan Ben Caesar of Philadelphia, infamous performance poet and personality, for his early contributions.

Nick Herbert of Boulder Creek California is a physicist and poet. His recently published Physics on All Fours is inspiring and metaphysical. Nick is Fellow of the Institute and Scholar in the Unnatural Sciences. Quantum Tantra is his forte.

Mary Weaver of Belfast, Maine, is one of the original forty four scholars who remains active today a Scholar in Drama. Her PLAYHOUSE continues to produce great children's theatre, and we all look forward to the annual Church Street Festival, as well as The Feast of Venus, as great dressup and party opportunities. Her latest and most phenomenal production has been a collaborative 91st BIRTHDAY PARTY for Bern, today, February 14th, 2001. After a big nap, I have ALMOST recovered!

CA Conrad, of course, needs no introduction.

Katherine Donithorne, Nguyen ("Duke") Ducmanh, Daniel A. Russell, are all faithful correspondents and contributors. Critic Maureen Neville, of Trenton New Jersey, is a faithful friend and supporter. Amy Flaxman, peripatetic Scholar, has completed New Anatomies in 2000, and is working on three more literary critiques of Henry Miller as she tours Europe. And to anyone I may have omitted or overlooked, my eternal gratitude.

Special thanks, of course to Sister Scholastica Incognita, for her support in the founding of the Oblates of the Obscure and Obsolete Arts. She is a special friend.

Sincerely,
Sheila Holtz