



AN INTERVIEW WITH
AUTHOR OF



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Manhattan has been turned into the Perpetual Parking Plaza in an effort to thwart terrorism. The culprit is Kimball Lyon, New York's late governor. There are plenty of objections to his ruinous urban redevelopment. A hapless special investigator, B. Smith (who constantly reintroduces himself as *I. B. Smith*), trying to search out the rebels, ends up at a crumbling Civil War-era castle in the middle of the Hudson River where he finds Leo Post, a writer, son-in-law of the late governor. Post is an enigma with a connection to, among other things, the long-extinct passenger pigeon. Part mystery, part environmental elegy, Post combines meta-fiction and magical realism in a riotous futuristic fable. Hilary Masters' *Post*—instead of the misbegotten parking plaza—may just be “the best defense against terrorism” we've got.

by Sarah Eyer

What was the motivation behind Post, its genesis?

My motivation, as remembered, was the same as for all of my work: To entertain and to provide a reader with some moments of interest and pleasure. I can give no sense of its genesis. There is an island in the Hudson River with the remains of a castle-like structure and it is called Bannerman's Island, clearly seen from the NY Central railroad cars. I would pass it many times on trips into New York City when I lived in Columbia County. I wondered about its history and fantasized about the place as a site for some kind of fantasy. What about a misplaced “colony” of misfits? A kind of Robinson Crusoe place. Then I probably asked myself, “Why would they be living there?” A self-abandonment. And so on.

This book never shows its hand too quickly: it balances not giving the readers everything they need to know with giving them just enough information to keep up. Do you think that is a difficult thing to do in this age of predictable plots, to surprise the readers? What was your process for writing it that way?

The process you describe seems to sum up the basic idea for telling any story well. What Happens Next is the engine that propels the long narrative of a novel. The form of this novel is loosely based on the menippean satire used by Petronius in his *Satyricon*, a series of vocal entertainments that interact with each other, not realistic and usually accompanying food as in a banquet. The different characters were the enlarged figures from the roster of our social-literary-political worlds. They were in my mind from the beginning and were key figures to be satirized.

The introduction of the character Kimball Lyon seems satirically to criticize power held by an inept bureaucracy. Was that a clear goal in mind from the start or did you find it as the story unfolded?

The character of Kimball Lyon was inspired from the beginning by Nelson Rockefeller, the governor of New York and a wealthy

player of the Arts. A self-serving and ego-driven rich man. Any bureaucracy is available for satire and the effects of 9/11 heighten the process.

The narrative splices in several sexually charged plot points. What is the role of this sexuality? Would the plot only be half there if it wasn't included, the characters only half-drawn?

The sexual interludes make their contribution to the overall satire. Pornography is, I think, a form of satire and its enormous popularity in our culture indicates much about that culture. Moreover, the sexuality of a character is an important definition of that character.

The passenger pigeon, though long extinct before Kimball Lyon, nonetheless becomes his environmental antithesis and an important figurehead in the protest against him. Why choose the passenger pigeon? How did the fascination with this bird start?

I first came across the pigeon in a novel by Cooper that described a flight of them over a colonial colony. I can't remember the novel's title, but the imagery, almost journalistic, stuck in my mind. [See James Fenimore Cooper's *The Pioneers*—Ed.] Later, a casual talk with one of the people at our wonderful Aviary in Pittsburgh further increased my wonder at the phenomenon. Then I noticed a stray item about “clay pigeons” as targets because real pigeon targets had disappeared. Annie Oakley's history also contributed. So, bit by bit my dossier on the bird fattened with more formal research. The place and the characters of the novel seemed to be appropriate to the bird's history—they seemed to make a good fit that also supplied motivation and a goal.

What is your next project?

I am working on another novel—not so fanciful—plus short pieces: essays and fiction.