

Danielle Marie Georgiou  
The Literary Jester:  
An Interview with Christopher Moore

Author of nine novels, including the international bestseller, *Lamb*, Christopher Moore has carved his own place in the world of literature. A humanist with an eye for the surreal, Moore's everyman characters become instantly relatable, much like those of Melville and Shakespeare. And the same is true with *Pocket*, the main character in *Fool*, his new novel chronicling the adventures of King Lear's court jester.



Born in Toledo, Ohio and raised in suburban Mansfield, Chris is the son of a highway patrolman and a saleswoman. He briefly attended Ohio State University before fleeing the Midwest for sunny California to attend the Brooks Institute of Photography in Santa Barbara. He lived on the Central Coast until 2003 when he relocated to Hawaii. He currently resides in the City—San Francisco, that is.

Before hitting it big in 1992 with his first novel *Practical Demonkeeping*, a blood-filled trip through the sleepy town of Pine Cove, California, Chris worked as a roofer, grocery clerk, hotel night auditor, insurance broker, waiter, photographer, and rock 'n' roll DJ. Even after the acclaim following *Practical Demonkeeping*, he still worked as a waiter in Big Sur.

His sophomore book, *Coyote Blue*, chronicled the adventures of Sam Hunter (nè Samson Hunts Alone) as he traveled from Montana to Vegas alongside Coyote, the ancient Native American trickster-god, and began to unravel the interrelatedness in Chris's works. *Coyote Blue* introduced readers to Minty Fresh, death personified in *A Dirty Job*, and also made passing references to Augustus Brine from *Practical Demonkeeping* and Detective Sergeant Alphonso Rivera, who appears in *Practical Demonkeeping*, *A Dirty Job*, *Bloodsucking Fiends*, and *You Suck: A Love Story*.

*Coyote* also mentions Jesus Christ, the main character in *Lamb: The Gospel According to Biff, Christ's Childhood Pal*. And *Lamb* has been Moore's most inspired and far-reaching book. It takes all the best elements of his work—sublime tolerance, deeply compassionate characters, the marvelous wonder of the world, and big scary monsters—and combines them into a riotously funny tale bridging the gaps in Jesus' upbringing with spiritual illumination, the Kama Sutra, and Kung Fu.

With his newest book, *Fool*, Moore applies his unique sense of humor to Shakespeare's greatest work, *King Lear*. It's 1288, and the king's fool, Pocket, and his dimwit apprentice, Drool, set out to clean up the mess Lear has made of his kingdom, his family, and his fortune—only to discover the truth about their own heritage.

Chris took some time to talk to me about influence, originality, literature, and foolish behavior, in early December.

**Danielle Marie Georgiou:** What are you reading right now? And, who would you name as influences?

**Christopher Moore:** William Gibson's *Spook City*. I'd say Steinbeck and Vonnegut are my biggest influences.

**DMG:** Is there any one book that influenced your life?

**CM:** Steinbeck's *Cannery Row*. It taught me how not only to write about flawed characters with great affection, but to have a more forgiving attitude toward people's flaws.

**DMG:** The *Denver Post* once said that you were "rapidly becoming the cult author of today, filling a post last held by Kurt Vonnegut," and the *Denver Rocky Mountain News* added that you are the "greatest satirist since Jonathan Swift." How does it feel to be compared to these authors and what made you choose satire?

**CM:** It's great company to be put in. I'm honored to be compared with any of those writers. As for satire, I didn't really have a choice. I've always written funny stuff, and when I tried writing horror stories when I started out, people would laugh at the way I turned a

phrase. It may be the one natural talent I have. I just went with it.

**DMG:** As an author of works that make readers question life, their values, and the boundaries of reality, how has such success challenged your originality?

**CM:** Once you have a readership, there are expectations on you. People are very happy with a known quantity. They'll buy the same author over and over because they know exactly what to expect—much like how McDonald's hamburgers taste the same all over the country. They're not the best hamburgers, but you won't get an unpleasant surprise. So it's a struggle to try to cater to your readers, without repeating yourself. I try to do something different every time, usually something that I'm not sure I can do. With my vampire books [*Bloodsucking Fiends* and *You Suck*], of which I'm writing the third one now, this has been even more difficult, because the books have become a series, which requires a return to the same characters, setting, and tone. It's not insurmountable, but readers' expectations can certainly challenge one's ability to produce completely original material.

**DMG:** Your vampire series has put a new twist on the current vampire narratives, and there is something epic about all of your work. What are your thoughts on the epic as a genre, and would you consider your work a reinvention of that tradition?

**CM:** I've done epic stories, and I've done episodic stories. What I'm consistently doing is writing in the realm of religion and myth (and what is myth, but a religion which you don't believe?), so there tends to be an epic quality to the story-telling in some cases. After all, you're laying down the framework of a religion, even if it's a fictional religion. Big stuff has to happen. With the exception of my book *Lamb*, which is the retelling of the life of Christ, I haven't consciously sat down to reinvent the epic, but that doesn't mean that I haven't contributed, perhaps, to the craft.

**DMG:** What are your thoughts on "the hero?" Does our society need or want a new literary hero?

**CM:** I think we are desperate for heroes, literary *and* real. I think there's a cynicism in America that goes back to the Watergate era,

that seems to have hit a fever pitch in the last eight years, when the Bush administration used the qualities we consider heroic as part of a disingenuous sales pitch for their agenda. Courage, patriotism, and concern for our fellow man were commoditized, pitched like laundry soap. False heroes were thrown before us, only to fail to live up to the values thrust upon them as part of the political agenda. We desperately want to look to someone who is brave and true and truly decent. I have no answer, only that in the past, when people perceived themselves as oppressed or deprived, a hero often arose. From Achilles, to Moses, to Buddha, to Jesus, to Mohammed, to George Washington, to Abe Lincoln, to Gandhi, a hero has risen, flaws and all, to give people hope. Whether that can happen in the context of a mass media world is yet to be seen.

**DMG:** You attended the Brooks Institute of Photography in Santa Barbara and used to work as a photographer. How do the visual arts influence your writing?

**CM:** More than you might think, but usually in the context of creating metaphor. That is, I can write about light and color a little better than I could if I hadn't worked in the visual arts.

**DMG:** And your previous jobs—a roofer, a grocery clerk, a hotel night auditor, an insurance broker, a waiter, and a rock and roll DJ—have also influenced your characters. Which profession did you find the most stimulating?

**CM:** Stimulating? Well, writing is the most stimulating job I've had, but as far as "fun," I'd have to say being a DJ at an alternative rock station. It was great fun, and there was always something new to listen to, and new ways of putting sets together, even comedy to create. I liked it a lot. I miss the spontaneity of un-programmed radio. On any given day, I had no idea what might happen on the air, especially if we were taking calls. I was creating material on the fly and knowing right away whether it worked or not.

**DMG:** California and the City (San Francisco) seem to have been great influences upon you as well. Why do you think location can be so profound?



**CM:** I think setting is an important element to a story, but not as important as character. I moved to California when I was 19, and I got to see it with new eyes, so a lot of things became very vivid, and I was able to use that in my work. San Francisco is just a great multi-cultural stage on which to set stories.

**DMG:** If you had to pick, which of your characters is your favorite? Why?

**CM:** Currently my favorite is Pocket, the fool in my upcoming book, *Fool*. *Fool* is the story of King Lear from the point of view of the fool (who is a very minor character in William Shakespeare's original play), in which this diminutive and powerless little guy sort of pulls the strings of the royals of England. He's a horn dog and a rascal, but also very brave and very funny. So it's basically the story of a King of England who disowns his favorite daughter, then splits his kingdom between his remaining two daughters, who are less than virtuous. Hijinks ensue. He was also terribly hard to write, because he speaks in a British dialect, not something that came natural to me.

**DMG:** So what type of research went into bringing Pocket to life and illustrating life in Britain during this time?

**CM:** Pocket started with the Shakespeare character of the Fool. But I sort of expanded his history and personality, first by getting to know many of the plays, so I got a sense of the sort of banter Shakespeare wrote for his more rascally characters, and later by reading a lot of books on British slang, both contemporary and historical, to work the idiom into Pocket's speech. Language was a big part of his character. As for life in historical Britain, I took a couple of trips to England, and one to France, where I mainly looked at medieval sites: castles, walled cities, cathedrals, etc. There are still quite a few places where you can get a feel for how people must have lived back then.

**DMG:** What was it like recreating what many believe to be Shakespeare's best work? What type of obstacles did you encounter?

**CM:** Well, not to belabor the point, but the language was the hardest part. Shakespeare is hard for the modern American and English audience, and I didn't want the language to get in the way of the story. But on the other hand, the language and turn of phrase are what make Shakespeare so wonderful, so I had to set about creating speech patterns that would seem "British" to the American ear, but, in fact, were a mix of modern American English, modern British English, and a few archaic words and phrases thrown in for flavor.

**DMG:** Your book tour for *Fool* begins in February. Where can our readers find you?

**CM:** I will be in Austin February 22nd at Bookpeople (603 N. Lamar, Austin, TX 78704) at 3:00pm. What normally happens: I talk for 30-40 minutes, take questions for 20 minutes or so, then sign books until everyone gets their books signed. And I might be in Houston in April. My tentative tour schedule is on my blog, both on Myspace and at [www.chrismoore.com](http://www.chrismoore.com).