

ISSN 0976-8165

The Criterion



The Criterion

An International Journal in English

Bi - Monthly Refereed & Indexed Open Access eJournal

June 2014 Vol. 5, Issue-3

5th Year of Open Access

Editor-in-Chief

Dr. Vishwanath Bite

Managing Editor

Madhuri Bite

www.the-criterion.com

criterionejournal@gmail.com

About Us: <http://www.the-criterion.com/about/>

Archive: <http://www.the-criterion.com/archive/>

Contact Us: <http://www.the-criterion.com/contact/>

Editorial Board: <http://www.the-criterion.com/editorial-board/>

Submission: <http://www.the-criterion.com/submission/>

FAQ: <http://www.the-criterion.com/fa/>

An Interview with Donna Baier Stein

Aparna Mukhedkar

"Donna Baier Stein is a discovery," wrote C. Michael Curtis, Fiction Editor of The Atlantic about her recently released short story collection titled *Sympathetic People*. Elizabeth Berg, a bestselling author concurred, showering high praise for the book by declaring the book a "Powerful Accomplishment". She went on to offer this glittering review, "Ms. Baier Stein's stories are powerful in both language and character...through a sharp lens of wit and intelligence." The positive reviews and applause for the book continue to pour in, deservedly so, given the book's appeal to a wider audience in its content and subject matter.

Born and raised in the Midwest, Donna expertly juggles a successful, award-winning career as a copywriter, a savvy publisher/editor of a renowned journal *Tiferet: A Journal of Spiritual Literature* and a prolific writer of fiction, non-fiction and poetry. She has authored several books. Her noteworthy works include *Sometimes You Sense The Difference*, *Write on Target! A Copywriter's Guide to Direct Marketing*, and *The Tiferet Talk Interviews*, which she published and wrote an introduction for. *Sympathetic People* is her latest literary venture and is creating quite the buzz among the literati.

As a copywriter since the 1980's, Donna has written for many clients including The Nature Conservancy, Time, Smithsonian, World Wildlife Fund and many others. In 2004, Donna was named Direct Marketer of the Year by the New England Direct Marketing Association. She also conducted in person and online seminars for the Direct Marketing Association for 20 years. Her book *Write On Target* is used in University and College marketing programs as well as direct marketing practitioners.

She has received a fellowship at Johns Hopkins University, the PEN New England Discovery Award for Fiction for novel *Fortune*, a Scholarship from Bread Loaf Writers Conference among many others.

I am among those lucky enough to chat with her about her vast body of work as an author and a publisher. Despite her commitments, Donna was incredibly kind to grant me this interview.

1. Let's start with your background. How did you develop an interest in the field of writing and publishing?

I've wanted to be a writer since childhood. An early story I wrote was called "Melissa in Book World." The main character lived underwater in a world of books, so I think my fate was evidenced early on. Even now, when I am writing I feel like I am underwater. This is one reason I hate to answer the phone during work hours. Each time I do, it feels like I have to swim up to the surface of the pool. Then after the call, I have to dive back down and that takes time and energy away from the work.

2. When did the idea for *Tiferet* take shape? How did you go about building this very successful journal? How did you come up with the name *Tiferet*? And why?

We launched the journal in 2004. The meaning of the word *tiferet*, when I learned it, resonated deeply with me on many levels. The word means heart, compassion, and the reconciliation of opposites. Because I am the child of a Christian mother and Jewish father, I have always felt a need to reconcile opposites. The tagline of the original magazine was "A Journal of Spiritual

Literature.” We’ve since changed that to “Literature, Art, and the Creative Spirit” because I felt like the word “spiritual” constrained us. The magazine’s mission is now two-fold, first to publish high-quality literature and second to promote tolerance for paths other than our own. I do tend to believe that writing is a spiritual practice and that developing a sense of spirituality, or meaning, is important in each of us. It has certainly been a life-long search for me.

3. Tell us about Blog Talk radio? How was that conceived? What is your vision for its future?

I saw a notice about another BlogTalk radio show and thought this would be an excellent outlet to share conversations with authors. Since I’m more comfortable with the written rather than oral medium, I thought it would be a good idea to bring someone else on board to conduct the interviews. I had met Melissa Studdard when she submitted work to us. Her voice and manner are both lovely and she does a wonderful job of preparing for each conversation. We are fortunate to have her host our show.

4. You have an exciting book being released through Tiferet publishing, The Tiferet Talk Interviews, containing interviews conducted by Melissa Studdard. Can you give us a sneak peek into what it's about?

The TIFERET Talk Interviews includes transcriptions from the radio show. Authors interviewed include former Poet Laureate Robert Pinsky, Guggenheim President Ed Hirsch, Dr. Bernie Siegel, Julia Cameron, and other writers who have thoughts to share about creativity and yes, their own take on spirituality. I am incredibly proud of the content of the interviews Melissa conducted and of the design of the book, which was done by Diane Bonavist.

5. The role of social media, in particular Facebook, how do you believe it has changed the world of publishing? Do you think for the better?

I have mixed feelings about social media. With its first appearance, I, like many, was excited and jumped in with both feet. It reminds me of the excitement I felt when I heard that first “You’ve got mail” on AOL years ago. Like email, social media now requires a huge time commitment. While I love the idea that we share lots of free content on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, our website, monthly newsletters and elsewhere, I also worry that we may be giving away too much. While publishing TIFERET is a labor of love for me, I also need it to become more financially viable. The content we offer in our bimonthly issues is worth the very fair price of a subscription.

6. Do you think social media is an effective medium to sell books? Or is the traditional way still a better option? Do you think social media will usher in a slow demise of the traditional publishers similar to newspapers and magazines?

I’ve been in direct marketing for three decades as a copywriter. In direct mail, we know what kinds of response rates we get, both upfront and backend. With social media, testing is much more complex and response/conversion rates much lower than through traditional media. We’re all in a learning process about this.

7. Have you tried self publishing? If so what was your experience like?

I have not self-published any of my own work. My writing has only appeared, both in print and digital, through traditional publishers.

8. I have always been intrigued by various writers and their creative process. You have written a number of books on various topics. Advertising, non fiction, poetry etc. What is it

like to juggle so many different types of styles and keep it all together? How do you actually write? Long hand first or just type into a computer? Do you follow a ritual to keep your muse happy?

Quite frankly, I am pretty sure I have ADD tendencies! I always have a number of projects I am working on at once. Sometimes I wish I could be more focused and stick to just one at a time but that doesn't seem to be in my make-up. I do think that writing in different genres is fine, even helpful.

My handwriting is atrocious so I much prefer to write on the computer. I do, however, remember when I got my first IBM Selectric typewriter and how thrilled I was. Now I can't imagine going back to that, of course! I love the computer's ability to edit instantaneously. I'm both a fast thinker and a fast typist so I can't imagine working any other way. As to rituals, I sometimes light a candle when I am settling down to write but usually the most important ritual is sitting in the chair, opening a document, and dancing fingers across the keyboard! And thankfully, I love doing that. I need a lot of alone time and I simply find that when I write I feel like I am doing what I am supposed to be doing in this life.

9. Which do you prefer? Poetry or nonfiction? And why?

I prefer reading fiction and poetry to nonfiction. When it comes to writing, I like to do all three though fiction probably holds the most emotional power for me.

10. You had a chapbook of poems published last year titled *Sometimes You Sense the Difference*. Can you tell us about it?

This book was published by Finishing Line Press in 2012. All of the poems in the chapbook had been published in journals like *Poet Lore*, *The Literary Review*, *Beloit Poetry Review*, *Kansas Quarterly*, *Many Mountains Moving*, and elsewhere. I spent a lot of time publishing individual poems and stories and am now interested in seeing them in book form.

11. You have received rave reviews from several leading publications on your recently released book, *Sympathetic People*. Deservedly so, I believe. What is the book about that's creating all this positive buzz?

A much earlier version of this collection was a Finalist in the Iowa Fiction Awards, judged by Marilynne Robinson. Most of the stories deal with relationships, marriage, fidelity and its absence, loss and longing.

12. What other projects, books, nonfiction works can we expect in the coming months and years from you?

I have just submitted my novel to a potential new agent. I had an agent for that book but thought we came close, we did not find a publisher. I've spent the last two years doing a massive rewrite and am ready to send it out into the world again. It is based on the life of Colorado's Baby Doe Tabor, who lived in the late nineteenth/early twentieth century. Some people think she may have been a real American female mystic.

I also have five stories based on Thomas Hart Benton paintings, all of which have been published in literary journals. I plan to write a few more to make up a second collection. And I recently attended a wonderful workshop where I worked on organizing poems for a new book.

Tiferet is, of course, ongoing. We publish six issues a year now, five digital and one print. And we ran a wonderful month-long Poem-a-thon this April with poets from around the world.

As usual, several projects going on at once but somehow things seem to get done and there's never a reason to be bored!

Also, you had asked about my children. My son Jonathan is 28 and my daughter Sarah is 23. It is both surprising and wonderful that they are that old! I have been a freelance writer since 1980 so was very fortunate to work at home when they were little. Although I must say I don't miss the sometimes chaotic juggling that involved. Now, I get to spend my days on my own work and spend other time enjoying them as adults.