Andrea Actis / "But sometimes a sign's all you need": A Conversation with Susan Bee & Charles Bernstein

You spent approximately nine months in British Columbia in the early 1970s. Can I ask you to recreate the scene? Who or what brought you here? How did you travel? Where did you stay? Were you on holidays from some kind of work or idleness in the United States? Did you engage in some other kind of work or idleness during your time in BC or elsewhere in Canada?

Susan Bee: We arrived in British Columbia in the winter of 1973. I had just graduated with a B.A. in art history and art after three and a half years at Barnard College in New York, which was also my home town. Charles and I met in high school, when I was 16 and he was 17 years old. He went to Bronx Science and I went to Music and Art. We remained together as a couple when he went to Harvard, but meanwhile I stayed in New York to go to college. When he got a grant (the William Lyon MacKenzie King Fellowship) to spend a year studying in Canada, I decided to finish college early and join him. We looked at a map and decided to go as far away from the East Coast as possible and that's how we chose Vancouver as our destination.

Charles looked at schools to study at there. The University of British Columbia dean said he would have to sit for exams, so he looked for another college to study at and found Simon Fraser, where they said he could study what he wanted without requirements.

We took a plane to Madison, Wisconsin, and stayed at a farm for Christmas, then left by train for Vancouver, traveling on the TransCanadian railway. For us it was an adventure to leave home and the familiarity of the urban areas. The ride was spectacular through the Rockies with waterfalls and also through the flat frozen Midwestern plains.

From a professor at Simon Fraser, we got a rental, an unfinished house in the rainforest in rural Ruskin (between Haney and Mission). We bought a used red VW bug,

with 80,000 miles on it and rust, and in fact it was quite a lemon. It was also a stick shift, which neither of us knew how to drive, but we managed somehow.

Charles went to class with Robin Blaser, a seminar in the poetry of Emily Dickinson, while I stayed in the house and painted and drew and cooked and read books. For me, it was a welcome break from endless years of schooling. We had roommates in the house and cats to look after and we learned to bake bread and to chop wood to heat the house with. Neither of us had ever lived in the woods except in the summer and we learned to wield an axe and make a fire and Charles used the chainsaw. We went for long walks in the woods with the cats and Charles wrote poems. We also read Emily Dickinson's poetry out loud. It was quite an idyllic interlude, though not an easy transition for me. I wasn't used to the unstructured time, but I immersed myself in the immediacy of this new existence, though I was somewhat homesick for the urban fray of New York.

Are you able to recall the name of the SFU professor who rented out the property in Ruskin?

Charles Bernstein: Names are elusive. I do remember it was Dean Walter Gage of the University of British Columbia who said I'd have to formally enroll in classes to be affiliated with UBC. Simon Fraser was much more accommodating. I'd majored in philosophy at college so my initial contacts at SFU were with the Philosophy Department. I think it was David Finn from that department who said we could rent the ground floor of a house he had just built in Ruskin. He was renting the upper two floors to a few other students. Finn had originally planned to move into the house himself, with his family, but his plans went awry. The house itself was a modern wood house with almost no insulation, so we had to keep a wood fire going all the time to stay warm. I'd never chopped wood before, but now I was swinging an axe if not like a native then not like a killer on the loose either, though my forte was the chainsaw. I love the smell of chainsaw gasoline in the morning, the intoxicating buzz, the moment when blade makes contact with tree. (I've never used an axe or a chainsaw since.)

David Finn. I think that was the name, or something near. Not Quinn, as Susan at first thought—that's a character from Paul Auster's *New York Trilogy*. Finn, yes now I am almost sure that's the name, though I find almost no trace of him on the web except that on July 12, 1973 (midway in our stay in BC) one David Finn, Ph.D., signed off on an Education M.A. thesis by Wayne R. Pack (B.Sc., University of Illinois) entitled "The Measurement of Values: A Multivariate Analysis of Five Value Batteries and the Relation of Twelve Value Dimensions to Behavioral and Attitudinal Variables." I didn't get to know Finn, but, based on my interests, he recommended I take Robin Blaser's Emily Dickinson seminar. As a 22 year-old just out of college, I didn't know about Robin. I remember Finn said something like Blaser's stellar, which surprised me since Finn was more into the dry analytic philosophy I'd found so distasteful at Harvard (though now I see my irrational fear of positivist assault may have caused me to miss the chance to charge my value batteries or anyway learn to get the best price for my energy needs). I did, at first anyway, attend some philosophy department colloquia, but pondering over the stipulative definition of stipulative definition left me colder than the damp air in the Ruskin house (before we put the fire up). Pretty soon I started to come into SFU just one day a week, for Robin's seminar.

During your time at SFU, did you spend much time in the library's Contemporary Literature Collection?

CB: Yes. The library's new poetry collection was a treasure trove. I was in touch with Jerome Rothenberg and Ron Silliman at the time and following up on their suggestions/engagements, along with Robin's. I basically had my introduction to the New American Poetry through the collection.

During your stay in BC, did you ever meet any other local writers?

CB: I didn't meet those folks till the late '70s or early '80s, partly through *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* and *Open Letter* and Steve McCaffery. At the time, I pretty

much only met Robin. Otherwise, we kept much to ourselves in Ruskin, where I was reading and writing. Still, that time in Ruskin and at SFU did ultimately give me a deep connection to West Coast Canadian poetry; Vancouver became an active place in my geographic imagination. In fact, Susan and I applied for landed immigrant status while we were there. But we got turned down, probably because there were already too many educated young Americans who'd come to Canada to avoid the Vietnam War draft. We were quite surprised to be rejected. But after nine months in the Northwest, we were ready to find a sunnier place.

You mentioned in an email that you left Ruskin in late summer and traveled via Banff. Did you ever stop by the Banff Centre or otherwise have any affiliation with the programming there?

CB: We packed up our VW bug (Susan always says it was a lemon, but it lasted us a long time and I never felt it was so bad, let's call it a lime), with all our stuff stuffed in the back, and drove to the Rockies, then due south, then over to California, where we ended up in Santa Barbara for the last months of 1973 and most of 1974. Was the Banff Center even around at that time? I was just there, for the first time, this past March. We camped all the way from Vancouver to Santa Barbara. I didn't know how tent technology worked so we'd wake up every morning when the condensation from the sides of our pup tent started dripping on our faces. Like wielding an axe, it would be the last time I pitched a tent.

At one point in your collection My Way: Speeches and Poems *(1999), in a piece titled "Poetics of the Americas," you gesture to revise or replace Kamau Brathwaite's famous appeal to "nation language" with Robin Blaser's concept of "image nations"—a formulation that better accounts, in your view, for dialect as necessarily dispersed and centrifugal, and as fundamentally "imaginary, ideological; dialectical in that other sense." Can you speak a little to any influence Blaser had on you as a teacher or has had on you as a writer?*

CB: I have written several essays on Robin's work: a short piece in *Content's Dream: Essays 1975-1984*, "Robin on His Own" in *My Way*, and an afterword to the new edition of his collected poems, *The Holy Forest*. You are right to point to the importance of his "image nations" for me. Also his practice of a poetry of citations, the poem a tissue of quotations. Of the New American Poets, Robin was the most philosophically engaged, apart from Olson, but the full extent of that would only become apparent for most readers with Miriam Nichols's recent edition of his essays, since he published his essays and talks only sporadically. The big exception being "The Practice of Outside," his influential preface to Jack Spicer's *Collected Books*.

I met Robin at the perfect time: he was the first poet of his generation I got to know and for all our differences of generation and temperament, I found him a kindred soul. So I guess I got some deep sense of poetics, as opposed to philosophy, from him, and how it came out of an active, and at times contentious, exchange among poets. The seminar was "marvelous"—that was the kind of word Robin used for the things he valued. The reading was exclusively the three volume T. H. Johnson edition of Dickinson. Much was brought into the discussion, but our only text was these poems, which have remained foundational for me. I remember very much reading Dickinson as one of the great philosophical thinkers of the 19th century, thinking of her work in relation to writers who'd already made such a strong impact on me—Marx, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche in particular. But I'd be reading Thoreau and Emerson—this was close to the time I studied with Stanley Cavell in college—so Robin's Dickinson seemed necessary and reconnected to my reading of her work in high school. I loved the idea that a poem was a starting point for a discussion that could take you anywhere; and with Dickinson, the closer you stayed to her words, the farthest distance you'd be able to travel. Robin saw the poems as cosmologies, so I guess you could say I entered his galaxy that Winter in Burnaby, BC.

I can't help but think of Ruskin as an "image-nation" in its own right, particularly in light of the material you both produced around the time you lived there—and in your case, Susan, in your more recent retrospective painting, "Ruskin." Your description of it an "idyllic interlude" resonates deeply, too, with the town's original founding in the late 1800s as one of the few utopian-socialist "Ruskin colonies" ever set up in North America. "The eastern provinc-

es have been the slowest to move," one George Weston Wrigley wrote for the International Socialist Review *in 1901; "Ontario is rapidly learning the socialist lesson and western Canada is honeycombed with our doctrines." You mention wanting to go "as far away from the East Coast as possible"; did you have any notions of the West Coast as politically or socially more sympathetic to the kind of work and living you wanted to be doing? Were you privy while living there to Ruskin's history as a short-lived utopian-socialist commune? Was that history palpable? Because you certainly, if inadvertently, make it palpable in the work you created at the time. Everything from the intuitively rendered foliage and the bold, Edenic forms and colours of your paintings and drawings, Susan, which I see sharing formal (and by implication philosophical) affinities with the Arts and Crafts Movement Ruskin promoted in Britain, to your collaborative "Johnny June"—"no no not here not now not how not when oh yes and how, why when no doubt no doubt. A house"—to your lines, Charles, "why these questions of a quality or authenticity / & together & fun in itself that's enough / that really what is wanted—sure community / then from a collective fun—but is it / new heights. What is it then inspiration!"...I'll admit I can't help but encounter your work from this period in the former Ruskin colony as somehow spiritually—and either deliberately or fortuitously—consistent with Ruskin as an "image-nation" of collective ideals and practices. Any thoughts?*

CB: I still remember Susan pulling out a map at Lamont library, after I got the King Fellowship (it was a very small award of around $3000, but we figured we could make it last a year), and pointing to the furthest place from where we were. After all, what would seem further from the stifling confines of Harvard College than Vancouver? So yes of course we had West Coast fever—the desire for open spaces, both environmentally and intellectually, well both going together.

SB: Canada seemed more progressive to us because of the government's stance during the Vietnam war and its sheltering of war resisters. For me, this period was an escape from my formal education in painting and drawing. I was steeped in the tropes and issues of the New York artworld. This was a chance to engage with my imagination and the landscape, which was so different from the urban cityscape that I had previously addressed in my work. So the line drawings I did then were more like diary pages—personal, poetic, and dream-like. The paintings were of the forest and dealt

with the shapes and colors that I encountered there. It was an unusual period for me of introspection and enforced idleness, no jobs and no school and no city. I guess that is what made it idyllic. Charles and I were living together away from family for the first time and I had just turned 21. When I pulled out the old paintings and drawings and the papier mâché angels I made in Ruskin this year, I found oddly that they were very much like the paintings and drawings I'm still doing now. The trees still resonate and the angels still fly. In the new painting, I have long hair in braids that I wore then. Charles and I are back in Ruskin, innocents abroad, childless with our cat and snake in our Eden.

CB: But we had no notion of Ruskin's history till we found ourselves there, and no contact with its history apart from reading about it in books, which we did. We couldn't see or feel any whiff of utopian socialism in the air, maybe because it rained so much; at the time, I am sure we thought utopia would have blue skies. I always like to mention Ruskin, for the reasons you give; but as a practical matter it would be more accurate to say we lived in the Fraser valley between Haney and Mission. Each was about a 10-mile or 30-minute drive. There was nothing in Ruskin "itself" except the old lumber mill and a sign; or anyway nothing we ever found out about. But sometimes a sign's all you need.

As I recall, we usually went into Haney to shop. But I think we went to the movies in Mission, which was quite a small town at the time. I remember seeing Gordon Parks Jr.'s *Superfly* there and finding Mission such an incongruous place to see the film.

I read no Ruskin in Ruskin. But maybe you're right anyway. I am willing to think that the frame of Ruskin gives an adequate account of what was going through our minds and art in those years immediately following the huge political and social upheaval of the late '60s and early '70s. We did leave centers of all that—Cambridge and New York—to live in a rural area. Having lived all our lives in big cities, it was a huge change. And we rarely left the rainforest to go into Vancouver or SFU (Robin's seminar met once a week during part of our stay and Susan often stayed at home those days too). That was a transitional time for both of us; for me, a time of reading and thinking and writing in relative isolation. It was the time when I began to see the tangible possibility of a life of poetry and poetics and, just as much, to see it as a collective enterprise. The earliest poems I have previously published are from the fol-

lowing year, from after we moved to Santa Barbara. Yet that Ruskin writing was formative. One prose poem, in particular, remains in my mind, but I couldn't find a copy for you. It was called "Hermes Hermeneutic" and began: "Hermes Hermeneutic, the swashbuckle kid from Alacazam, swim, swam, swum past fireflies and mint juleps, pussies in the ally and lizzagator monsters." Image nation? Sure: we baked bread, chopped wood, read books aloud, painted, and wrote poetry. It set a pattern to which we both come back, in our imaginations anyway. It's not that different from what we are doing now, this July, in Rose Bay, on Nova Scotia's southeast shore.

There's more colour and sun dancing around in Susan's retrospective painting of Ruskin than there ever was in Ruskin, then? Would you say that Charles' raised arm is bidding hello or goodbye?

SB: My paintings from the period were also very colorful, like my current work. I think those early paintings were an attempt to inject color into the gray days there. Color has always been a major element in all my artworks. I based the painting of Ruskin on a 1950s postcard of the California redwood forest that a student sent me. In the painting, the man is gesturing up at the trees and showing the woman their great height. I wanted to convey the smallness of the people in relation to the tallness of the trees. In Ruskin, we felt very much surrounded by nature and it was quite foreign to us as city folks.

In that one essay on Blaser you mention, Charles, from My Way *("Robin on his Own"—written on the occasion of his 70th birthday), you note how "...Blaser's is a practice of leaps of association that bind us not into families or states or nationalities or groups but into image nations, those imaginary nations of speculation and desire, jelled not by coercion or by law but by Blake's tears, or is it tears?, of intellect..." But I'd actually like to ask Susan to respond to this. I know you've elsewhere cited an affinity with Blake, and that you've often spoken to existing, alongside your political and notably feminist commitments, as an outsider to art-market and/or institutional trends and movements. In early drawings like*

"BC Landscape," "Mobile and Scene," and "House with Window" (a couple of which bear endearing traces of being taped to the fridge or something—was this the case?), your sense of space and spill feels consistent with an aesthetic that refuses to be "jelled" by anything but intuition and broad environmental, even cosmological, acknowledgment. Can you say a little about how these early pieces relate us to your sensibilities in the present and maybe your current relationship to the art world?

SB: The drawings constitute a practice of free association and as such I agree with the idea of an imaginary, but one based on real life images. I don't like to be bound by the rules, whether of political correctness or art world correctness. I guess it is a rebellious streak in me. I continue to deal with imagery of angels and other fantasy elements, in addition to imagery drawn from film stills, popular culture, and fine art. I like the idea of including found imagery in my work, and several paintings from around that time in Ruskin, like the portrait of Charles, include collage elements from magazine ads and other sources.

The drawings from that period are purer stream of consciousness, not censored by my need to fit into a particular art context. The tape marks on the drawings are from when they were mounted for a show, I believe; unfortunately it was an acidic tape that ate through the paper. I never showed these works to anyone in the house at the time, except when my friend Toni Simon came to stay with us in the forest. They were created for me in a private way. Blake is important to me as an exemplar of the belief in the imagination and in the importance of poetry for artistic practice. I look to his watercolors and his illustrations as a guide to my own practice. This falls far outside the formal concerns of the New York school of painting and the minimal and conceptual art practices that have surrounded me in my education in New York. Later, I used fragments from these drawings to create word and image collages in my book, *Not*, published by Asylum's Press in 1980.

About cosmological and ecological interests, at the time, many of our friends were living in communes and going back to the land. It was the time for experimentation with other forms of existence, so in our own way, we were participating in that movement back to nature and away from our "natural" home, New York City, which is its

own ecosystem. In the drawings, I acknowledge being surrounded by trees, stars, and clouds, and mountains, which form the backdrop for this more interior journey. The drawings were all part of a black drawing notebook that I brought from New York. I had been drawing in this style since childhood, and especially in my college years, but it was my more private work, unlike the oil paintings that I did for class and brought in for critiques.

I continue to create fantasy landscapes, as in the "Philosophical Trees" and other more recent works. In the books that I worked on for Granary Books and other publishers, I use the same sensibility, which is informed by a Blakean sense of how to proceed through association, color, and imagination to create images that resonate with the poetry in the books.

I know collaboration has always been a crucial force and opening for your respective practices—that you've collaborated on books together and with other artists and writers and that the respective public universes you work within (Visual Art and, not vs., Poetry/Poetics) have inevitably informed and enriched the other's universe. My sense from all I've read and seen is that you both tend to privilege your collaborations with one another in enabling what you (and a select tradition of other collaborators) have referred to as a kind of third entity emerging from the encounter of text and image. That there isn't any predictable struggle for power/propriety between a poem written by Charles and an image rendered by Susan, as there might be between other text/image collaborators. Is this a fair observation? Can I ask for a brief account of the history of your collaborative impulses as precisely (as you write, Charles, of Blaser's image-nations) "dialectical in that other sense"—beginning with the Johnny June *piece or even earlier?*

SB: Of course, there is a struggle for dominance, and I have written about it elsewhere. Sometimes you start with the poem and go from there. With Charles, my collaborations have been closest. *Johnny June* was one of our first attempts to put Charles' words into the context of illustration. It was done—as best as I can recall, in the summer of 1971. I was thinking then of children's book illustrations and also playing with the nonsense aspect of the poem. It was a lighthearted work and it is surprising

that it lead to so many other collaborations. We've now done five books together for various publishers. My collaboration with Susan Howe, *Bed Hangings* (Granary, 2001) was very intense. Here I was working in a restricted black-and-white format and with more limited imagery based on the themes of the poem. In *A Girl's Life* (Granary, 2002) with Johanna Drucker there was more back and forth, with her writing and my pictures interacting to a greater degree and each one of us editing the other's work. In *The Burning Babe and Other Poems* by Jerome Rothenberg (Granary, 2005), I used images of mothers and children and religious imagery to complement the poems. Each image has a corollary in the poem. In my latest collaboration with the Brazilian poet Régis Bonvicino, *Entre* (Global Books, 2009), I was most free to do what I wanted. I was given the pages of the letterpress poems and just added my collages and watercolors. I then showed the publisher and Régis the books only when they were finished.

CB: My relation with Susan is a wedding of the verbal and visual, not a merging. Writing is so different from painting and drawing, that's the pleasure of the collaboration. While there surely is a verbal/conceptual level to visual art, it's not necessarily explicit; in contrast, printed writing necessarily includes a visual dimension. Susan is much more competent in the verbal arts than I am visually: she is a remarkable editor and an acute proofreader, and also a book designer (all of which she's done for a living). It's been important to me that Susan's paintings have conceptually framed so many of my books; the paintings become part of the book's meaning. My own obsession with the design of my books, certainly one effect of my engagement with Blake, has been greatly influenced by Susan's work in this area and her advice, beyond our named collaborations. I've always thought one of the attractions of *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* was Susan's design of the issues. But perhaps most important is that we have lived our lives with one foot in the poetry world and one foot in the art world (the other two feet planted in yet other worlds, as parents, teachers). So there has been for us a constant translation of aesthetic and conceptual issues back and forth across the visual/verbal divide. Contemporary visual art is as much an intimate part of my life as is poetry; and Susan has certainly been immersed in (not to say bombarded by) more poetry than almost any civie (non-poet) alive. So the two "worlds" have intersected and this is reflected not only in our work but our social life.

Do you, Susan (or Charles?), have any particular position in relation to what's been categorized (and of course marketed) as "outsider" or "naïve" art? Your incredible work in the collaborative book Little Orphan Anagram, *Susan, reminds me a lot of Henry Darger's at points—not that any formal consonances between your watercolours and his should necessarily tip me off to any deeper-running affinities, but I thought I'd ask anyway in light of how you've often described your sensibilities as more at home when you ignore what the world wants or thinks it wants. Is it even possible to talk about an "outsider aesthetic"? Is it a redundant or disingenuous term, serving only the curators and collectors and canon-makers? Most people I talk to these days don't even believe there's an outside to anything anymore or never was, but I'm not entirely convinced that there are no moments, at least, of being-outside. There's certainly yearnings and leanings, no?*

SB: Obviously I've been influenced by folk art, fairytales, children's book illustrations, and my own love of kitsch objects and paper dolls. Strangely, Darger and I share a lot of the same sources, paper dolls, and coloring books from the 1950s. The difference is that I was a child then and I am nostalgic for those times and those images, which were my playthings, whereas he was an adult using those images for extremely different ends. I greatly admire his work, but I was not influenced by it. In fact, an artist friend came to my studio and pointed out that my work looked like Darger's, before I had seen his watercolors. I do have yearnings to be outside, or to function with an outsider's perspective. I use a sort of naïve framing and flatness that I see in so-called "naïve painting," just as Matisse and Picasso looked at Henri Rousseau's paintings to gain another perspective on rendering human and plant forms. I am also influenced by Mexican folk art in the papier mâché angels. As a child, I took two trips to Mexico and the experience of the markets and the colors stayed with me. However, in the end, I am too well informed to be a genuine outsider. All I can be is on the fringe of various movements, which is more like being marginalized or apart from the mainstream of art history. I have always admired mavericks or those who stood apart from their times, like Florine Stettheimer and other eccentric figures. I'm not sure I qualify for that mantle, however.

You referred to your Ruskin writing as "formative," Charles, and I'm wondering if you might elaborate on that. Do you see these early poems as beginning to struggle with their status in relation to what you'd come to critique as "official verse culture"? Was it before or after or somehow during your time in the Fraser Valley between Haney and Mission that your writing began to invest in less "official" models (or to divest itself of investments altogether)? Were you theorizing the cultural politics of what you were doing at that point, five years before the first issue of L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E *came out, or mostly just practicing them? What verb(s) might you use to describe what your lyric "I" was getting up to in the Ruskin writing—"Bound and sounded to bind and be personified"?*

CB: I hadn't looked at those pieces in decades but was reminded of a few when I put together a PennSound page of early audio works <*http://writing.upenn.edu/pennsound/x/Bernstein-1975-76.html*>. On the "B" side of the 1975 cassette for "Class" I found some recordings of a few of the poems; hearing these made my connection to the works more visceral. These are not poems I'd ever wanted to include in my books; I consider them underdeveloped I guess. But they suggest what I wanted to do, and, to some extent, still want to do. I am publishing them here because of the very specific context you've set up and maybe out of a morbid curiosity about how these might read, in such deep retrospect. In my senior year at college, I'd written my philosophy thesis on Stein and Wittgenstein and was well aware of the politics of poetic form as they played out in the hothouse atmosphere of Harvard, where I got my first distaste for "official verse culture." Just now reading Yunte Huang's account (in his book about Charlie Chan) of the self-enclosed self-importance of the Signet Society just a few years back, I was forcefully reminded of my own sense of alienation or exclusion from such clubs or the main literary magazine, *The Advocate*. At college I was involved in alternative theatre and even published a small stapled xerox magazine called *Writing*, both of which were well outside conventional approaches to theatre and poetry. I remember I once did submit something to *The Advocate* and got word back from Lincoln Kaplan that the editors thought I would have to be an accepted formal innovator before they'd be able to publish what I sent, the sort of catch-22 that is one of the "race to the top" skills Harvard imbues in its successful students. I was a malcontent then just as now; the problem may be temperamental as much as ideological. My

problem when I arrived in Ruskin was that having read my philosophy and political critiques and participated in the anti-war movement, and also having absorbed, as best I could, Beckett, Stein, Woolf, Joyce, Barnes, Burroughs, the Living Theatre, plays by Brecht, Genet, Pinter, and Baraka, Ginsberg, Rothenberg's *Technicians of the Sacred*, and the like, I still hadn't read enough contemporary poetry. I wanted to write something—I didn't think of it as poetry, necessarily—that was opaque, self-sufficient, but still had personality—the I you ask about—and rhythm. But I didn't know how to do it. I didn't think I'd figured that out—well I still haven't figured it out!—till the following year, with *Disfrutes* (1974) <*http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/bernstein/books/disfrutes/index.html*>, and also the works collected in *Asylums* (1975) <*http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/bernstein/books/Asylums.html*>. In Ruskin, I was thinking, chainsaw in one hand, fountain pen in the other.