
~ 5 QUESTIONS ~

with

ADAM
OUSTON

of earth shattering importance

1. If you could take one book to a deserted island, what would it be?

Perhaps it might be better to ask what book I'd hope to *find* on a deserted island, because if I had room for one book and nothing else I'd probably take some sort of cutting implement or a sleeping bag or a large block of cheese in its place. There isn't really one book I can't live without. Literature is so diverse, and writers are doing and have done so many vastly different things, that I don't think I could boil it down to just one. Writers aren't gods, and no one book can hope to sum up everything. What you forego by not choosing one, you'll pick up something different with another. Unless it's Dan Brown. Never take Dan Brown to a desert island. If I *had* to choose one, I'd probably just take the one I was reading at the time – which at the moment is *Cat's Eye* by Margaret Atwood. An early one. Good, sinister, feminist. The one I'd hope to find would be *Hopscotch* by Julio Cortazar because it's long and there are an infinite number of ways you can read it. It's kind of a Choose Your

Own Adventure. Cortazar was a strange but seemingly sweet man. Looked like a salamander – but still handsome, if that's possible. He wrote a story called 'Axolotl' wherein a man becomes the axolotl he visits every day in the Jardin des Plants; or the axolotl becomes the man, you can't quite tell. Anyway, it's an incredible story, and could be autobiographical for all we know. I think Flanagan pinched it for the seahorse scene in *Gould's Book of Fish*, where the narrator suddenly becomes the seahorse in the fish tank he's gawking at. I'm sure he did, though it could be coincidence...

2. What is your writing space?

I have (or had) a study. I'm travelling now – well, not really travelling. My wife and I have come to Berlin. I'm trying to finish a book and needed a change of scenery. I can't write while travelling, which is largely why we're staying put for a few months. I need quiet and order. It is said that James Joyce could write in the middle of the kitchen with the whole family going about their business around him. You can tell that this is true just by reading his books. I get up early and shut myself away until about midday, when it's time to go to work or for a walk if I'm not selling my time to someone that day. Nor can I write in public. Writing – especially first drafts – is dirty laundry. I need to nest, then stay in that nest for as long as

physically possible.

3. If you are in a writing rut, how do you get yourself out of it?

I was in a rut earlier this year, actually. I came to the other side of the world and it helped a great deal. Change of scenery is good. I need to nest, but then I need to fly the coop. Also, don't forget that you're a human being, with desires and hardships and worries and your own special breed of neurosis. So what works for one is almost certainly not going to work for the other. You need to get to know your writing self, I think. This takes a long time. Years. All of a sudden you don't feel like writing anymore and you think, 'Christ, that's it! I'm done forever.' You should never underestimate the benefit of doing nothing. If you write all the time, you're going to get tired. You're going to get bored. But sooner or later—if writing is your thing, I mean a thing you need to do, and if it isn't that's fine too—sooner or later the pain of not writing will outweigh the pain of writing (or the *blahness* of the idea of writing) and you'll leap up and ruffle your hair (to borrow a phrase). That's what I find is best: try not to worry, and wait, do nothing. Or go to the other side of the world for a bit.

4. Pen, pencil, computer, typewriter, lipstick on a mirror - what is your preferred tool of trade?

Laptop, because my handwriting's a disaster and I edit, edit, edit each sentence before moving on and this method is impractical if writing longhand. Nabokov used little note cards to do the same thing. He also huffed and puffed through the wilderness with a butterfly net.

5. If the world was going to end in a week and you had to choose between a small remote island or a metropolis to live out your last days, which would you choose?

Remote islands are always far more interesting and you can get away with much more there than you can in the metropolis. Imagine what fun you'd have on an island with a few people, with only days to live, far away from everything, as opposed to the chaos and selfishness that would ensue in a city. Much more chance of returning to paganism on an island. Melbourne seems a long way from that. Though the beards are a start.

~ About the author ~

Adam Ouston has recently completed a PHD on the themes of death and identity in the travel writings of Robert Dessaix. His stories have appeared in *Island*, *Overland*, *Review of Australian Fiction*, *Islet* and *Voiceworks*. Ouston is also the front man of Tasmanian band All Fires.

You can read his story, *Sodom
Syndrome* in *Islands and Cities:
A Collection of Short Stories
from Tasmania and London*

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