

## Interview with Tim W. Brown

By Heather Covington

Disilgold Soul ([www.disilgoldsoul.com](http://www.disilgoldsoul.com))

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**Author:** Tim W. Brown, web site: [www.timwbrown.com](http://www.timwbrown.com), email: [audrelv@optonline.net](mailto:audrelv@optonline.net).

**Disilgold:** What can you tell the Disilgold community about yourself that will explain why Disilgold has sought you for a perSOULnalized interview?

**TIM:** It would be my support for community-based literary endeavors. For years, I've supported the efforts of emerging writers and poets outside the usual literary success channels of trade publishing and academia. I'm a writer myself, so I know the importance of all of us sticking together and helping each other out when there aren't traditional literary lifelines available. In Chicago, where I lived until 2003, there is a strong community-based ethos, which is different than New York and its more professionalized literary culture. Back in Chicago, I published a poetry zine for many years that featured the work of underground and performance poets, some of whom are well known now. And I headed up programming for writer outreach events at the annual Printers Row Book Fair. I'm continuing this mission in New York at the Small Press Center, where I serve on the Advisory Council and co-chair the annual New York Round Table Writers' Conference. The Harlem Book Fair, a fabulous event where you and I first met, is a perfect example of what I'm talking about: a bunch of people pitching in to give the community something valuable. Every neighborhood should have its own book fair.

**Disilgold:** What is your latest book about?

**TIM:** I've got a book coming out next year titled *Walking Man*. It's being published by a new independent publisher based in the Bronx called Bronx River Press. I understand that announcements will be sent out later this week. *Walking Man* is a mock biography of a fictional character who becomes the most famous zine publisher in America. It tells the story of this character's rise from working class origins to a celebrity status, and it satirizes mass culture while expressing affection for the bygone zine movement of the 80s and 90s.

**Disilgold:** How long did it take you to complete your book?

**TIM:** Writing took two years. Finding a publisher took three more. When my first book was published in 1997, after a similar lengthy search for a publisher, the *Chicago Reader* did a profile on me titled "Writing's the Easy Part." Compared to finding a publisher, writing IS the easy part of producing a book. You'd think it would get easier to find a publisher each time you write a book, but that's unfortunately not the case.

**Disilgold:** What were the happiest moments you have experienced while writing your latest book?

**TIM:** I like just sitting and writing and making stuff up in my head. I also like trying new stuff out on audiences at open mics by reading short passages and gauging the reaction.

**Disilgold:** Describe your writing style?

**TIM:** My style is deceptively straightforward. On one hand, it exhibits a dry, almost arid, sense of humor, and contains a lot of literary and historical allusions that my ideal reader, someone widely read in the humanities, would chuckle at. On the other hand, it includes more than its fair share of slapstick and farce to keep the plot moving forward and make the story accessible to a broad audience.

**Disilgold:** How did you develop your writing style?

**TIM:** I think a writer's style is an extension of his or her personality. I enjoy highbrow as well as lowbrow humor and my style reflects this. Once the general stylistic direction was established, I worked on making my prose as transparent as possible. I've always believed that it's hard enough to get people to read, so why make it even harder by writing with a dense, difficult style? I've always considered this to be my main challenge: communicate sophisticated concepts simply.

**Disilgold:** Do you have a favorite author of all time or someone who inspired you to achieve your goals as a writer?

**TIM:** I like classic satiric authors like Swift, Voltaire and Twain, and I consider them models. My favorite contemporary author is probably Thomas Pynchon -- his work is deeply intellectual and hugely funny at the same time. My poetry professor in college, Lucien Stryk, who's a Zen poet, taught me a lot about the close observation and discipline required to be a writer. In graduate school I had the opportunity to study with Nobel Prize winner Derek Walcott, the Caribbean poet, who deeply impressed me with his intellect and earthiness.

**Disilgold:** Where do you see yourself as a writer ten years from now?

**TIM:** I hope to be recognized for assisting the current generation of writers through the various book fairs and conferences I've been involved with.

**Disilgold:** What marketing tips can you provide to new authors?

**TIM:** Get involved with the writing/publishing scene; it's easier than you might think. Go to readings, lectures and workshops and introduce yourself to as many people as you can. The literary world is surprisingly small, and you will probably run into them again if you continue attending such events. Learn about how the publishing world works by reading industry magazines and attending classes and seminars. Identify the key individuals who shape tastes in your genre -- these could include book critics, professors, organization chairs, etc. -- and maintain their names in your address book so they're available when you have a new project in hand and a reason to contact them. I'm a firm believer in guerilla marketing -- do it yourself and damn the usual tired marketing methods.

**Disilgold:** What other projects are you working on?

**TIM:** I'm a member of the National Book Critics Circle, and I review a lot of books, usually fiction by small and independent presses, which desperately need someone to publicize and champion them. I publish these reviews in big national publications like *Rain Taxi* and *The Bloomsbury Review* and small but influential literary journals like *Another Chicago Magazine* and *Chelsea*.

**Disilgold:** What are your top ten favorite books right now?

**TIM:** In no particular order: *Mason & Dixon* by Thomas Pynchon, *Gulliver's Travels* by Jonathan Swift, *Naked Lunch* by William S. Burroughs, *Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison, *Always Running* by Luis Rodriguez, *Growing Up Absurd* by Paul Goodman, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel Garcia Marquez, *Tonguing the Zeitgeist* by Lance Olsen, *Erasure* by Percival Everett, *Reservation Blues* by Sherman Alexie.

**Disilgold:** When do you write and for how long?

**TIM:** I'm a technical writer, so you could say that I write for a living, meaning 8+ hours every day. But this is not creative writing. I try to work on my fiction and reviews every day for a couple of hours, which is about all I can spare with a full-time job and family.

**Disilgold:** Do you have a favorite location for writing?

**TIM:** I've written the better part of two books on public transportation -- buses and the L in Chicago and the subway and Metro North here in New York. I've learned to tune out the distractions.

**Disilgold:** What method did you use to write or organize your book?

**TIM:** My last few years in Chicago I led workshops in writing novels at such places as Columbia College, the Poetry Center of Chicago and Guild Complex. I suggested the following process: 1. Collect your ideas in notes and pre-writing exercises out of which the rough draft will grow; 2. In one sentence sum up what your novel is about to achieve focus; 3. Create a synopsis that outlines your novel's storyline, which should be expected to change as the writing progresses; 4. Write-write-write and Revise-revise--revise; 5. Read your writing aloud to ensure that it makes sense and sounds good.

**Disilgold:** What three words best describe your writing style?

**TIM:** Concise, idea-driven, comic.

**Disilgold:** What other hobbies do you pursue when you aren't writing?

**TIM:** I listen to a lot of music, both recorded and live. I've gone through several musical phases during my life -- in high school I listened mainly to classical and rock, in college punk and new wave, and in adulthood world music, mainly Cajun, zydeco and the myriad forms of Brazilian, including bossa nova, tropicalia and samba. Lately, I've been getting into "Nuyorican" forms of music like salsa and reggaeton.

**Disilgold:** Are there any hidden jewels or talents that you possess that many of your readers may not know?

**TIM:** Until my sophomore year of college I played bass tuba. I was named to the 1979 Illinois all-state band, I toured Europe with a concert band, and I majored in music my freshman year before quitting to be a lit major. I came out of retirement a couple of years ago when a musician friend lined up some gigs for his band that required a tuba, so I rented a horn and played them. He arranged an oom-pah polka version of the Beatles' "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds" that killed.

**Disilgold:** Where can folks buy your latest book?

**TIM:** Both of my books are more or less out of print, so you can't just go to a bookstore to buy them. However, they can be special ordered at most bookstores, plus they're available online in both new and used formats at amazon.com and elsewhere.

**Disilgold:** Where can folks meet you?

**TIM:** I don't have any readings lined up right now, but I will be volunteering at the annual Small Press Book Fair in New York City in early December.

**Disilgold:** What have been some of your toughest obstacles as a writer?

**TIM:** The temptation to give up. The secret to success is never giving in to this temptation. I believe that stubbornness is a writer's most valuable asset. It's even more important than talent.

**Disilgold:** The next section of our interview requires brief responses. What time do you awake normally every morning?

**TIM:** 7:00 a.m.

**Disilgold:** What is your writing fuel in the morning?

**TIM:** Decaf coffee

**Disilgold:** What early morning rituals have followed for many years?

**TIM:** Nothing outside the ordinary shaving, showering and dressing.

**Disilgold:** What are your favorite foods to snack on while writing?

**TIM:** I tend not to snack when I'm writing. If I'm focused I will sometimes forget to eat.

**Disilgold:** Do you watch television or listen to the radio when you're writing, and if so, what do you watch or listen to mostly?

**TIM:** I occasionally listen to music when writing. I don't watch much TV when I'm writing or any other time.

**Disilgold:** What is your favorite book of all time?

**TIM:** I don't have one single favorite, but many.

**Disilgold:** What is your favorite magazine of all time?

**TIM:** I don't have a single favorite magazine. I read many different magazines both related and unrelated to literature.

**Disilgold:** Do you have an exercise regimen to suggest for busy writers?

**TIM:** I suggest a lot of stretching while at the desk. I think walking goes well with being a writer, but it should be practiced in a very unbusy, contemplative manner.

**Disilgold:** What is your everyday outfit?

**TIM:** Oxford shirt and Docker slacks.

**Disilgold:** What is your pet peeve?

**TIM:** Stupid unsafe drivers.

**Disilgold:** If you could inspire a child, what would you say?

**TIM:** Follow your dream and don't let anyone talk you out of it.

**Disilgold:** What is your favorite motto?

**TIM:** "The world is a tragedy to those who feel, but a comedy to those who think." -- Horace Walpole.

**Disilgold:** What is your favorite time to put your writing pen down and rest?

**TIM:** After 10:00 p.m.

**Disilgold:** Have you traveled anywhere besides your hometown and if so, where?

**TIM:** I had visited or at least driven through 46 of the 50 states by the time I graduated from high school. I visited Hawaii in 1996, upping the list to 47. I've never been to Alaska, Texas or Utah. I toured nine European countries with a concert band made up of recent high school graduates in 1979. I honeymooned in St. Maarten in 1992. When I lived in Chicago I visited New Orleans a number of times, including multiple Mardi Gras celebrations -- it's one of my favorite cities and it breaks my heart that it was nearly destroyed by Hurricane Katrina last year. In 1997 and 2001 I took part in book-signing tours that sent me to 20 cities. Those trips were a blast.

**Disilgold:** Where is your dream vacation?

**TIM:** I'd love to vacation for a month on the beaches of Rio de Janeiro. I had reservations once but canceled them. The nonrefundable payment was due on September 12, 2001. At the time nobody could predict when there might be more terrorist attacks or even when airplanes would be allowed to fly again.

**Disilgold:** What do you particularly like about the literary world today?

**TIM:** It's open to more talented people than ever. Fifty or a hundred years ago the literary scene was dominated by a handful of white men (and a few white women) in New York and Boston that prevented other races, classes and religions from participating. Now, there are creative writing programs at many universities, publishers large and small in different parts of the country, spoken word scenes in places all over, and federal, state and city grant support available to writers, even in rural backwaters like Mississippi and Idaho.

**Disilgold:** If you could leave one word of advice to people in general, what would it be?

**TIM:** Persevere.

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