



Roma, 16 Luglio 2007

SD: Siamo qui a pochi giorni dall'uscita del suo primo romanzo, che si intitola Ha-ha, siamo qui con Dave King, l'autore. Hi Dave.

DK: Ciao Silvia.

SD: Dave, how come did you make your debut this late? What have you been doing for 50 years?

DK: Oh well, my undergraduate university degree was in painting and film, after I've finished school I became a painter and I was a pretty serious painter for about ten years, after that me and my partner started a small business in decorative painting, murals, *trompe-l'oeil*, and though I had not really found success as a painter we were very successful in our business, we worked at the White House, at the residence of Barbara Walters, Susan Sarandon, and various other people, and I liked the work but I realized that life was slipping by and I had drifted rather far from... from the desire that I had as a young man to be... to lead a creative life, so I took a writing course in the evening – I still had my business at that point – and then I took another and I received tremendous encouragement from the teachers I worked with, and after that I decided to leave my business, go back to school to Columbia University and began writing first fiction and then poetry for quite a long time and then fiction again and that was *The Ha-ha*.

SD: I see. You've been living here in Rome on Gianicolo for almost a year. What do you think about this city? And what about that wonderful place, the American Academy?

DK: Well, I have to say I love Rome, I lived in Toscana oh, when, in 1978 when I was at university, I lived there for six months, and I liked it very much but I was a little bored and so I used to escape every chance I got and come down to Rome, and ever since then I dreamed of living in Rome. I... actually I... when my film... when my book was optioned for a film I called the executive who optioned it that if they actually made the movie and I got a lot of money, I would use the money to come to Rome, for a year, and he said "Oh, you know, don't make it contingent on our making a movie, just decide you're going to Rome and go there" so I thought of myself in Rome for quite a long time and then I was very lucky because the phone rang one day and I have been awarded this fellowship to come here for a year, and the Academy is the place that I also had been thinking about for a long time, when I was a young painter I tried to get a fellowship as a painter and I never... I never got it, so there's a certain irony in my ending up there decades later as a writer, I've been really really happy at the Academy although I must say that if I were staying in Rome – unfortunately, my year is almost up and I have to go back to Brooklyn to teach and continue my work – but if I were staying in Rome I would move away from the Academy into some Roman neighbourhood, speak Italian as much as possible, and become as Roman as I could possibly become.

SD: The book is dedicated to Frank. Who's Frank?

DK: Frank is my partner, we've been together for 31 years.

SD: From the first time I met Ryan, as a reader, the kid, I saw him looking like Huey Freeman, one of the brothers of the comics *The Boondocks*. Do you know them?

DK: Yeah. Sure, sure, sure, I only see them in the newspaper.

SD: Yeah in «Washington Post» comics. A tiny boy with a huge afro hair and a tough look on his face. What do you think about it?

DK: I think that's about right, actually, I mean he's... in the book he is mixed race, he's part white and part black, but he appears more black and identifies as black, and so I think that's right, you know, one of the things that the book is about is Ryan trying to find a certain identity between the black world and the white world.

SD: Like Jazmine, in the Boondocks.

DK: Exactly, exactly.

SD: Sylvia, which is a great name, is a really irritating person, yet Howard loves her unconditionally. Why?

DK: I think the key with Sylvia is the fact that this is the only person who... the only person still living who remembers Howard as he was before his injury and so he feels that a certain portion of him, a certain portion of his potential and dreams and aspirations are inexplicably tied to Sylvia, she's also the person who loved him the way he was and he... Howard is probably so filled with self-loathing that he doesn't believe anyone could love him as he is now, and I think that's one of the things he begins to learn over the course of the book.

SD: The narrator, Howard, is adorable, you cannot help loving him. Which narrators in contemporary fiction have you been inspired by

DK: Wow, you know I... I think that there's a comparison that has been made often between my book and Jonathan Lethem *Motherless Brooklyn* [tradotto in Italia da Tropea con il titolo *Testadipazzo*] I think we're both doing the same thing which is that the reader is... the reader knows things about the... about the character which the other characters do not. I had begun my book several years before I read Jonathan's book, but I was very impressed by it and I liked it, I liked it very much. Not all of these characters are narrators but I really like Yossarian in *Catch 22* [tradotto in Italia da Bompiani come *Comma 22*], I admire some of the narrators or the protagonists of Joyce Carol Oates novels, you know the more literary of her works, and the kind of tough women narrators, I like those very much, I read a lot of nineteenth century American literature so I'm very interested in Henry James and Edith Wharton, people like that and they don't tend to use the first person narrator, but I think some of the ways that they get a character has influenced what I'm doing and maybe the most important influence on this book is E. M. Forster, the author of the *Passage to India* (*Passaggio in India*), *Howard's End* (*Casa Howard*), *A Room with a View* (*Camera con vista*).

SD: Lately people seem to be more interested in non-fiction and true stories than in fiction, both in America and Italy. What do you think about it?

DK: Well, you know, people are always asking me where the story came from, did I know someone, did I copied it from a newspaper or something and... I made the story up. There are certain things about the book that are important to me, one is an interest in disability, an interest in how people who are different live within our society, I'm very interested in Vietnam, and a lot of what the Americans refers to as the 'American Dream', but in terms of the characters in the story, those were invented, and my vision of fiction is that it is invented. I really celebrate the imagination, I love making things up, I love imagining, I think our capacity to imagine and to tell stories is one of the things that's really delightful as human beings, and I think that something very strange's going on in our culture if we can't trust the imagination, if we have... if we can only believe that something came from truth. To my mind, I don't know enough about Italian culture at present but I do feel that in the United States there's a kind of crisis of truth, citizens are losing the ability to tell the difference between truth and falsehood and it's making them kind of panicky, and I think this is one of the reason why people come to me and they so desire to be told that the book is actually non-fiction rather than fiction.

SD: Yeah in Italy is the same thing. Your novel is about what's left of family. What do you think about family today? Do you think is still possible and how?

DK: Well, one of the thing that occurs in the novel is that a kind of family... a kind of family comes together of people who are not related over the course of the book and increasingly those are the kinds of family that I'm seeing around me, you know, people who come together and decide to raise a child together, or friends who decide to share a household together or something like that, and I certainly, you know, I certainly think that family in his original definition will endure, but I also think that any kind of, any group of people that loves each other and decides to support each other also is, maybe not a family in terms of dictionary definition but a kind of a valuable unit that we're seeing more of, these days.

SD: I agree. Ok, thank you Dave!

DK: A pleasure.