

Conversations

Deborah Biancotti

Conversations 1: The Blind King

Stop, stop here a while. Lay down your burden. Now. Dig.

I said dig.

You know why. Because it needs to be buried.

Quit crying, girl. All this mewling over that ... monstrosity.

No! Tell me nothing of its life, I have no desire to carry that knowledge, too, to my grave.

No tombstones, nothing to remember them ... it... Gods, what is it, that it's born with two heads, four arms, but joined by one barrel chest, one set of legs? It is unholy, may the Gods forgive us. Make the sign of the cross, girl, in case the Christians are also right. There now, that's enough.

Oh Gods in Heaven will you stop, stop *crying*? Such ignoble behaviour suits no daughter of mine! And you wondered why I'd let none attend you for this task. This is ours and ours alone. No. *No!* I refuse to hear you out, girl, get off your knees and dig.

Had you the weight of an entire country on your shoulders, girl, like I do, you'd learn to be more resolute in your duties. What has my empire come to? My daughter dressed in rags, dirty, still, from birthing this unholy thing at her feet.

We will bury it with no Christian cross, no other marks either. I would throw it over the wall and pray for wolves to find it, but there must be no sign for our enemies to find.

Your brothers? You think they'd help you now? Well, that's by the by, girl. They're dead one and all.

Through their own weaknesses.

Because they were weak, I said!

If you must know, yes. Of course I killed them.

You should thank me. I'm protecting you. I'm protecting our name.

Stop.

No, stop *whining*. Keep digging.

Nicholas was the easiest. Your mother's favourite, but such a milksop of a boy, nothing useful about him whatsoever. No, the most difficult was Felix. Not because he was older or stronger – he wasn't so strong – but because he knew it, you see. Knew what I was doing. The way he looked at me as he took the chalice and swallowed the poison... I will never forget that look.

He was noble. He understood.

You could learn something from him.

How ... how *dare* you. How can you ask! Listen clearly girl. Beyond these walls, beyond you and me, there is no kingdom. Our line ends here. We are deserted. I do only what I must so that our name is remembered. Our lives are vanquished. This is my task, and yours. To bury the monstrosity, to put an end to our line *ourselves* before our enemies steal that from us, also. To–

Did you hear that?

Shhh, be quiet. Someone's breached the outer wall I think. Hurry girl, that's deep enough, cover them up!

Cover – What?

Not dead? Kill them, or not. Bury them alive. Or not. They're as good as dead anyhow. I would do it myself if they were mine.

What do you mean, they are?

Conversations 2: The Mute Child

They're too young to have voice, so I'll speak for them. As their mother, that's surely my right.

Had I birthed girls, I would have named one Avril, after my mother. Were these boys to live, I would call them after their uncles, Felix and Nicholas.

There were other uncles – Gwayne and and Ivan and Drake – but none grew even to adulthood.

This boy by my left hand – this little one who seems almost to face his brother, his tiny body turned and twisted so much he must wrap his arms around his sibling and lean almost to rest upon his cheek – this little one would be Nicholas. Felix is the larger one on the right, who stands front-on to the pair of legs they share. He looks as though he would protect his brother, wrapped around him. Yes, this is Felix. He has a strong chin. He would've been a good leader. Though I confess such traits do not come from his father, who let his kingdom rot rather than seek aid.

Still, there should be a chance, for these boys like any others. Else we'd stop having children. There should be... must have been, at some point, hope. When their souls were gently fashioned from air and promises, and made to fit inside these little bodies.

Don't worry, dear hearts, don't fret.

Soon enough we'll all be free, even if there is an afterlife, even if there is a God or gods or other holy functionaries. Surely those who made this world, the forest beyond our walls, the bright light of day and the cool of night – surely anyone who had a hand in our creation would save us in the afterlife.

Such knowing in their faces! They look at me with those blue-black eyes and they seem to promise ... such ... peace. As if they were *sent* to me. And for me. As if they are here to assure me that the time outside physical life – the time before birth, after death – is not to be feared.

My father always talked of a great kingdom, a vastness that he himself watched over. I never saw it. My mother said ... well ... she said very little. Silence was the best way, she told me, to let life in. And the tiniest moment of life was precious. I think she knew she'd never live to be old.

She never seemed to understand what the kingdom required of her. Or perhaps, perhaps she understood it too well. Perhaps her silence allowed her to keep the secret that the kingdom never required anything. It was a kingdom of nothing.

She told me when she died, she said "Adela, I have allowed as much life as I could."

My father called her crazy.

She would have loved you, dear boys. But grief has already killed her.

Grief at her many sons dead. Now my sons dying, too, I understand, I think, at last.

I was her only daughter. She said it's harder for a mother to look a daughter in the eye. Daughters, she told me, are the bearers of secrets. When they marry, they cast off their names and pretend to take on a new history. But they never forget their own and, knowing that, end up knowing, too, their futures.

I wanted a daughter. So I could look into her eyes and find a future. My sons have taught me instead: there is none.

Oh, see. Some tremor still shakes the body of young Felix. But he is so cold. His brother died first and Felix, sensing his distress, I think, set to work dying alongside him.

Doesn't that show a fine loyalty?

I find their kinship beautiful. Not monstrous. Not monsters, my sons.

God the father – all, *all* the gods – may they all forgive me for what I've done.

Conversations 3: The Deaf God

1. Every life, viewed from outside, whether from the top or side-on, is whole. Every life makes sense, every life is complete. Even loss, even yearning, even anger, all these are full emotions. When we lose someone, grief overwhelms us up. When we anger, rage blinds us. Happiness makes us deaf. All these make for one whole human life. But not me. I run, dribble to dribble, from one mind to another, searching for belief. When there was more of them believing in me, I was bigger.

I could still be complete.

2. Thou art goddess.

Shalom. Allah ich bahal.

God is the father, god is the son, the sun.

God the sum.

God is the sum of all things.

3. So you're saying we built god in our own image, yeah?

I'm saying we ARE god.

That's not a new idea either. It's pagan. God is in us, you are god & I am god, *boop boop be choo*.

No, I mean what if "god" – for want of a better word – what if god is nothing but what we are? God is the result of us, the sum of us.

So, right, so what you're saying is: God didn't make the tower of Babel. God IS the tower of Babel. Yeah, I like it.

4. God is the cacophony of noise that keeps us awake at night. God is in all things. God is in this rock and this tree and this life.

God is in brother wolf, sister moon. God is no more and no LESS than us. God is all around us, and us around god.

5. Listen to them. Listen to them groan and moan. How useless they are. How all-about-them, how *nonsense* it all is.

6. Viewed from outside, a human being is a collection of actions – a pattern of behaviours. No more and no less may be ascertained. What we call reason, emotion, even decision – even decision – is something we infer from observing behaviour. So it is through behaviour that you know someone. By his actions shall ye judge a man, as the saying goes.

7. What, then, is God?

8. Out with the old, in with the old. Everything old is the same again. What goes around comes around, and so it is with fashion. So it is with the fashion of belief. We see a turning away from modern belief systems to ancient ones, and back again. Each generation has to rebuild its beliefs anew. Some borrow the beliefs of their parents, some react *against* their parents. There is – and I stress this point – there is no progress. There is only repetition.

In this to-and-fro-ing, in this back-and-forth, where is the room for an actual, existent deity?

9. Where am I, where am I, *whereamI?* What am I?

10. I knew myself better when there were more worshippers. I knew myself better when I didn't have to scramble, dribble to dribble, from one mind to another. When I didn't have to scrimp and save for prayers. I knew myself better when there were more followers to ... to follow.

It is a time of plenty, and times of plenty are lean. Times of war, famine, pestilence, those are the times I'm needed, and then I'm needed more. And then I'm stronger. I understand myself better. I have something to recognise about myself. I have enough... enough. When those that believe in me, worship, follow, desire, claim me, when those are enough, then I am whole.

Now, in this time of plenty, when only a few survive and the rest worship other gods, other things, I am lean, crazed, unrecognisable, harsh, empty, hungry.

11. I am a harsh god.

12. You reach an age where none of it matters, when the car you drive, the place you live, the friends you make and lose and love, none, none of that matters. And then you reach past that age. And then it matters all over again, and worse, because you know it shouldn't.

13. Nietzsche said god is dead, we have killed him. There's an irony there. If we were built in the image of god, surely god, too, is mortal. God built us, it is reckoned. But we allowed God to live. When we killed him, some argue we were just paying back the favour.

14. Power corrupts. Omnipotence corrupts... well. Some say gods, any gods, must be mad, must be driven mad by the loneliness and responsibility of that power. Or else, what kind of god *is* that god? By which actions are we to judge god? Some say the nature of "god" is a troubled one from the start. God is crazy. We have made him mad.

15. Every life, viewed from outside, looks whole. Everyone, though, in each and every life, spends at least some of the time looking as though they're trying to escape.

Deborah Biancotti used to think she wouldn't live to see thirty. She has seen thirty now, and then some, and currently finds herself trying to look the other way. She likes rainy weather, positive outcomes, and justice. She describes herself as 'often disappointed'. You can find Deborah online at <http://deborahb.livejournal.com>, and <http://deborahbiancotti.net>.