



Brian Finney

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This week it is my pleasure to interview **Brian Finney**, author of *Money Matters*, a new novel. Would you please introduce yourself to my readers and share something about your life.

I am a recently retired Professor of English. I spent the first half of my life in England, mainly working for the Extra-Mural Department of the University of London, promoting courses in the arts for the adult public. In 1987 I emigrated to Southern California where I eventually became a tenured professor at California State University, Long Beach. I live in Venice Beach, a unique mixed artistic community in west Los Angeles.

When did you write your first book and how did it come about?

I wrote my first nonfiction book in 1972. It was called *Since How It Is: A Study of Samuel Beckett's Later Fiction*. I was invited to write this pioneering study of Beckett's short prose pieces after defending him in the Irish Press from an

indignant correspondent who claimed that one of these pieces (“Lessness”) was gibberish. One of the pieces (“The Lost Ones”) was still only published in French, which led me to write to Beckett and ask him for his own translation of the sentences I was quoting. That led to meeting him in his favourite Paris café when I was dumbstruck for the first time in my life during the first twenty minutes. The book became a feature of Beckett’s studies because it printed replies he sent me to questions about this later work.

Do you always write in the same genre or do you mix it up?

I have written seven nonfiction books, including a critical biography of Christopher Isherwood that won the James Tait Black Memorial Prize for nonfiction in 1979. Other nonfiction books I’ve published are a study of literary autobiography as a genre, a book on the life and works of Martin Amis, and a socio-political book, *Terrorized: How the War on Terror Affected American Culture and Society*. Since retiring from teaching full-time at California State University, Long Beach I turned to fiction for the first time and in August published *Money Matters: A Novel*. It is a Finalist in the 2019 American Fiction Awards, Best New Fiction category.

When you write, do you start with an idea and sit down and let it evolve, or do you make notes and collect ideas on paper beforehand?

Whether it’s fiction or nonfiction I always start with an idea of the book’s shape and progression. I then research the book and structure the results of that research in an outline. The outline is likely to change as I write, more so in the case of a novel where the characters take over and reject some of my outline’s intended actions.

Would you like to give us a short excerpt from one of your books?

This introduces the subplot of the novel:

Miguel feels even more tired than usual at the end of his shift at Cal Fowl. He takes off his work apron, washes his bloodstained hands and arms, and goes out to collect his bike. He feels lucky—this Friday he has been paid in full for last week’s work. Sometimes the pay is late or less than what he is owed. He has a few minutes to spare before biking to Citrus College for his afternoon class in Fundamentals of Automotive Technology.

He refuses to think about his job, but at night his dreams take him back to the processing plant, where he finds himself attaching not chickens but live dogs, cats, birds, even babies to the processing line. The line carries them inexorably down into the vat of electrified water from which they emerge with rigor mortis setting in. To get rid of the dream he will wake himself up and try to conjure up photos of his grandparents’ back yard in Oaxaca, where, he’s heard, chickens and a rooster spend all day pecking for seeds and insects in the rough grass. But he cannot recall anything of his life back in Oaxaca. All he can remember is what his mother has told him about it. That’s because his parents crossed the border when he was an infant. That must be at least twenty-three years ago.

He stops off on the way to the College to grab a pork taco from Taco Nazo, a stand on North Azusa Avenue. Since starting work at Cal Fowl he can’t face chicken. He counts out \$1.69 in coins and pays the guy. Turning around he bumps into Jesús, a fellow Mexican student from his morning class.

“Hey, hombre, how goes it?” he greets Jesús.

“It’s tough, man. You missed the panic here this morning.”

“What you talking about?”

“We thought la migra was raiding the stand. RCGT broadcast a warning about two ICE agents seen near the stand. It shut down just as I was about to get my breakfast burrito, and everyone (me included) vanished in seconds.”

“Glad you made it out, man.”

“It turned out to be a false alarm. Some joker sent out a fake tweet. Followed it up later ranting, ‘Kick those wetbacks the fuck out and the fat pigs that gave birth to them.’”

“Bienvenidos a los Estados Unidos de América.” They exchange forced grins.

“I’m starving,” Jesús exclaims, his mouth stuffed with food.

“That’s why you’re guzzling two tacos, is it?”

“You try going all day without breakfast.”

“What you doing Saturday?” Miguel asks.

“You mean afternoon?”

“Whatever.”

“Fishing in the East Fork of the San Gabriel River. And you?”

“A movie.”

“With Adela?”

“I’m texting her once I’m done at school.”

“She still holding out on you?”

“What can I say? Chicas are all the same.”

"No they're not. What's she got that keeps you going back for more?"

"Haven't you noticed? She's got really great breasts." Miguel doesn't think Jesús would appreciate her other non-sexual attractions.

"Keep with it. They all put out in the end."

"You an expert?"

"I just have lower standards."

"Each to his own poison."

"Poison? More like honey."

"Sweet tooth, ha?"

"Best candy I know."

Grinning, Jesús finishes off his second taco and swills it down with a Coke.

Miguel gets back on his bike. "Tonight my mom wants me to join the family after class at Almansor Park."

"El Día de los Muertos?"

"Right. They're making an altar for my aunt. She died in the Sonoran Desert two years ago trying to get back from Oaxaca. Someone slashed the water supply."

"Bad luck." Miguel isn't sure whether Jesús means him or his aunt.

"I miss her."

They both are silent for a moment.

"Got to go to class," Miguel calls back as he cycles off.

"Adiós, amigo."

Who is your favourite character and why?

Tricia is my favourite. She's opposed to everything Jenny, my narrator, believes in. She's right wing where Jenny is a liberal; she's financially successful where Jenny is barely getting by; she sees sex as a monetary bargaining asset, where Jenny wants love. She represents values Jenny (like me) opposes, but she defends them with vigor and conviction.

Which of your books gave you the most pleasure to write?

I most enjoyed writing Money Matters, my novel, because once I found the right tone for Jenny it kind of dictated itself. I liked the way it told me what I needed to write to give consistency and credibility to the characters and what they do.

What is the best marketing tip you have received?

For a self-published author it is imperative that you have a marketing consultant. I am so grateful that a friend recommended Coriolis Company to me. Nanda Dyssou and her team have had a big impact on the visibility of my novel.

How would you describe yourself?

Having spent much of my lifetime teaching university students how to read fiction, I am happy now to be able to write a work of fiction myself. I also do life drawing, attend LA Phil concerts and love the theater. I guess the arts come first with me.

What do you do when you are not writing or reading?

Gardening; travelling; walking my dog; watching streaming movies and videos; meeting friends.

If you could holiday anywhere in the world, where would you choose and why?

I would go to Mumbai. I have always been fascinated with India in general, having sampled its cuisine since I was a boy in England where it was the only good available cuisine at the time. There is so much to see there – temples, a gorgeous terminus, palaces including the Taj Mahal, museums, and fantastic restaurants.

If you have owned pets, do you have a funny story you would like to share with us?

One time I received \$3,000 in a class settlement. The same day my cat rolled over in her sleep and fell two stories down. It cost me \$3,000 to have her rib cage pinned back together. I ended up paying the tax on the original sum. So I didn't even break even. Still, animals are worth it.

What is the biggest factor for you when selecting a book to read?

Is it well written? Does the writer use language creatively? Will the book make me think a little differently after I've read it? Does the book in some way pertain to contemporary life?

Do you have your own website?

I have a highly developed website designed by Coriolis Company. It is a model writer's web site, in my opinion. Take a look at it: www.bhfinney.com

Are you working on a new book at the moment?

NO. I am still actively engaged in promoting Money Matters. I am not even sure what kind of book I will write next. One morning I'll wake up and say, that's what I want to write next.

Do you have any events or book promotions coming up that you would like to tell us about?

I still have interviews and blogs being posted about my novel. The novel keeps acquiring more customer reviews. See: <https://www.amazon.com/dp/B07W62XLY6/>

I also have a long review of Salman Rushdie's new novel Quichotte appearing in the Los Angeles Review of Books imminently

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