

## **The Monkey Who Loved the Monkey Who Typed Shakespeare**

by

**Mark Siegel & Eric Yetman**

### **A customer is waiting.**

Over the infinite clack of an infinite number of keys, the Angel Goedel announces that The Customer is waiting at the front counter of the Infinite Bookstore.

"I thought God was infinitely patient," Bonzo says to Grace, who is seated at the typewriter between us.

"God is not waiting for this set of the Complete Works of Bald Bill," I say, because I don't want him talking to Grace. She does not bother to answer him anyway. Always she is busy, slowly tapping at the keys. "It's His Wife."

Bonzo slaps at his keys. We need to finish a few of the Sonnets, but my love for Grace invades even any random success I might have:

Shall I compare thee to a summer's fruit?

Thou art sweeter, but not so cute—

None of the million ways I've thought of expressing my love are worthy, but this one's really unworthy.

Bonzo squeals with delight, having produced an actual word, rare for him, and does a somersault on the seat of his high-backed wooden chair. The gibbon and tamarin at the typewriters facing us clutch each other, fearing our notoriously unpredictable chimpanzee violence.

"Bitch'?" Goedel reads over his shoulder. The angel stifles his reaction: anger? mirth? I think—hope?—Bonzo is pretty far out on a weak branch of the palm-tree-of-infinite-patience. Goedel was the one who came up with this Infinite Bookstore idea in the first place. His baby, his purgatory—his Halo on the line. God set up this universe as a perfect system and didn't like it when Goedel proved that no system can be free of unprovable statements. "You like to prove things so much," the Big Guy said, "well prove this!" And so here we are.

Goedel looks over and, to avoid being sent to the howler monkey room, I crank out a few more characters on my 1946 Underwood Royal. Per usual, I come up with something that looks like "u kicw fe'xw." "If you want this to go faster," I suggest, "you could give us an infinite number of computers."

"That would only encourage cheating," he said. "There's no erasing allowed." But

I can see it gets him thinking. If this Print-on-Demand business is going to work, he's going to need a new business plan.

**Grace is hot.**

"You go, girl," Goedel whispers to her, as she types, eyes closed, possessed by something unknowable. Grace is Goedel's Ace in the Hole. She is cranking her way through Act IV Scene I of a perfect Hamlet, the last play Goedel needs to complete the set. Bonzo tries to distract her by licking his crotch, but my love does not miss a diphthong. Still I think I detect a slight upturning of her infinitely pouting, curled-back lips, on Bonzo's side at least.

Grace types,

There's matter in these sighs, these profound heaves,  
You must translate; tis fit we understand them

What's to understand? Is she trying to tell me something? And how should I respond? Maybe her words are not meant for me at all, or maybe they are meant to mock me. There are an infinite number of possibilities in these lines, an infinite number of possible responses.

"Hey, Griddle!" Bonzo chatters, spitting out a piece of the space bar he's been chewing. "Griddle!" It's as close as he comes to pronouncing the German name. "Aren't we due for a break?"

"You just had one," Angel Goedel says. "The customer is waiting."

"I thought we got an infinite number!" Bonzo screeches, rolling back his lips in a banana-crusted smile.

"You do not understand the nature of infinity," Goedel reminds us. According to him, no one does, except of course God, although Goedel himself is getting close to understanding it.

Last time we had a break, Grace was typing the scene of the play within the play, where one of the traveling players pretends to pour poison into the ear of the sleeping King, and Claudius freaks, because he's done the same to Hamlet's father. I spent the break wondering whether I am a player within such a play, meant only to be understood by others, or whether I'm supposed to know what's going on. I understand, at least, what is whispered may kill as surely as a knife.

Bonzo spent the break trying to stick something of his own in Grace's ear.

**Warning: canines are now locked in their fully armed position.**

Call me Furious George. Tamarin and gibbon busy themselves adjusting their typewriter ribbons, careful not to notice a thing. There is a sudden silence in this four-dimensional primate-packed madhouse. The monkeys below me, above me, in front and behind, in tangential lines transecting my space-time coordinates (barely visible if I turn my head quickly), infinite rows of monkeys appearing and disappearing, the high-pitched whoop-whoop-whoop of the gibbons, the barking of the baboons, the bird-like peeping of the tamarins—for a fraction of a second all are silent,

except for the single-minded *clack clack clack* of Grace's typewriter.

**Bonzo screams and shits his chair.**

By the time Angel Goedel locates the source of the disturbance, typing has resumed everywhere, including at my station. Bonzo is jumping up and down on his chair, waving the hand I have just punctured, but he is such a notorious troublemaker the Angel doesn't even ask him to explain, just gives him a three second blast of eternal hellfire. A tricky thing, I don't pretend to understand, but it shuts Bonzo up right away, faster than a trip to the howler room. I pretend to not even notice.

*u*

*kicw fe'xw.*

I had to type around the blood.

There are no letters on the keypads of our typewriters, and we couldn't touch type accurately anyway because the keys themselves are different from typewriter to typewriter, not an infinite variety of them, but close enough for me if not for Goedel. Every day Goedel makes us swap our typewriters in an apparently random exchange. He says it's not a random pattern of exchange, of course, only nonlinear.

And still Grace continues on her miraculous way, her sausage-thick forefingers jamming out a letter at a time. Her quick brown eyes are fixed on the page, or into it, as

if it were not flat white bond, but a world of players into which she can see.

### **Is it better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all? Really?**

Bananas for lunch again. "The Paradox," Angel Goedel says, peeling my banana, "is that, while the banana itself is a finite object in an infinite universe, it also may be considered a set containing an infinite number of possible subsets." He chomps off about a third of my banana in a single bite and chews thoughtfully. "So, on the one hand, given our infinite resources, we ought to be able to produce a copy of any work a customer might demand, but, on the other hand, the number of subsets or elements comprising any single work is also infinite, and so can never be completed..." He chomps off a third of what's left. "And, as the Angel Zeno showed, one can take an infinite number of bites of the banana without ever finishing the banana itself." Chomp.

As far as I can tell, my banana's pretty much gone, and Goedel is just fucking with me, but I am too distracted to pay attention. On the other side of Grace, Bonzo is making obscene use of his banana.

Why should Grace choose me over him anyway? Because once my work *almost* amounted to something?

Goedel had high hopes for me then. Once he paced behind me, as he now does Grace, stroking his great wings reflectively for what seemed like eternity (don't get me started on that!), while I produced a great long story about a purple whale, called *Huckleberry Fin*. A thousand pages, dull in parts, especially my thirty page bit on the

history of fruit, yet on the whole heroic and complex. But, in the end, the Angel Goedel shook his head, patted me on my hairy shoulder. "Too bad it's a matter of matching the product to the customer, not the other way around."

"You mean we don't have an infinite number of customers?" Bonzo asked.

Goedel sighed something about hope springing eternal and drifted away.

"Should have called it *Moby Grape*," Bonzo he-hawed. These two words occasioned infinite chittering among the infinite number of monkeys within earshot. Infinite humiliation.

Even Bonzo sold something once, a poem about a woman from Nantucket.

### **It snows in heaven.**

Everyone knows hell is hot, but few people know this, or that the snow does not melt here. The snow in heaven falls and falls, each flake an infinite variation on a six-pointed theme. These ubiquitous drifts are often painted as clouds by earth-bound artists. On my break, I knuckle-walk out through the front of the Infinite Bookstore, not an easy thing to do, because it is all transdimensional spatial angles and warps, mirrors made of air and pockets of slow and fast time, but Goedel has laid down a series of arrows like they do in airports to help get us monkeys through. I sneak a glance at His Wife, who is drumming about a hundred fingers on the counter. Then I'm outside, under the old fashioned, wooden sign creaking in the wind, an open book overlaid by an infinity symbol painted on it.

I pee her name in the snow, in my own infinitely practiced script: *Grace*. I

wonder if, over an infinite amount of time, an infinite number of me could pee the complete works of Shakespeare in the snow that never melts.

It is awful that only, at this moment, holding myself, do I actually have control over my life. I try again for a love poem, but can pee no better than

Banana hosanna

Fee fie fo fana

I love thee Grace

O fair of face

My love of the savannah

When I come back inside to resume my seat, I see Bonzo has spent his break sneaking through God's Wife's purse. He is chewing on a tampon. "Want some?" he asks Grace, offering to share.

**The end.**

Grace types "Go, bid the soldiers shoot."

*u kicw fe'xw u kicw fe'xw u kicw fe'xw.*

This cannot be the end. Isn't Goedel in this purgatory, instead of out playing in the snow with the other angels, precisely because he proved that there will always be at least one thing you can't prove or disprove? So how can we have reached the end of proving an infinite number of monkeys on an infinite number of typewriters can type



the complete works of Shakespeare?

Isn't "I love you" itself an unprovable statement? Perhaps Goedel will leave us in place on a new project, to try to exhaust the possibilities of love, to try to find the perfect love amidst the infinite choice, the infinite insecurities, the infinite uncertainties...

Grace types, "Cudgel thy brains no more," and gives me a look.

The angel spreads his enormous wings, and we are instructed to pick up our typewriters.

**We're all being replaced by computers.**

We are all being removed from the Print on Demand Infinite Bookstore. Goedel announces something about Brownian Event Simulators.

"Wait," I hoot, "I thought you said we had an infinite amount of time?"

"You said computers were not allowed!" Bonzo yells.

"I said you were not allowed to use them," Goedel says. "The theory is the same without you and your fleas and your banana-peel-on-the-floor jokes. You've typed all the words we need, just not in the right order. The computers can fix that. Infinity is infinity."

"What do computers know about infinity?" I say. "To them, everything is 0 or 1, 1 or not 1, being or not being." Between the shadow and the act... To be or not to be.

"That," says Goedel, "the space between the two, is where infinity truly lies." He's telling me? I have wasted all this time-- but no longer. I sidle up to Grace, bumping hips

as we amble awkwardly upright with our typewriters in our arms in the impossibly long line.

No more "u kicw fe'xw." I tell her this time, "I love Grace." Can it be for the first time? The first of an infinite number of times. I explain to her that, in a universe of infinite possibility, where there is a front door, there is certainly the possibility of a back door. She pulls her lips back over her teeth in an enormous grin and follows me. The tamarin and the gibbon shrug, then hug, and head out in their own random search, followed by an infinitude of others.

### **About the Authors**

Before researching this story, Mark Siegel was under the delusion that he might sometime exhaust all the possibilities of employment: butler, swimming instructor, English Professor, bag man, economic consultant, stay-at-home dad, writer, developer, and lawyer. He has two kids in college and lives in Phoenix with his wife Carole. Over the past four years, he's published over twenty stories and a novel, *Echo and Narcissus*, which was just released by Aardwolf Press to the best reviews since *Sadam Hussein's* play opened in Bagdad. There are no pictures of him on the Internet, because he doesn't like his face.

**Eric Yetman lives in Tucson and spent many years in theatre, where he performed in everything from Shakespeare festivals to wild west stunt shows. He now works in education, which gave him ideas and sympathies for primates trapped in vast, incomprehensible undertakings.**

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