

NIEKAS

Obsessions



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ROBERT H. KNOX

introduction by robert bloch

Obsessions

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Introduction by Robert Bloch	3
The Mannequin	4
Wounds	8
Bird Droppings on I-79	10
The Somnambular Supermarket	12
A Melville Home Is Damaged	16
For Jennifer: A Saturday Night Poem	20
Life in Harry Orth's Office	22
For Sam, Who Would Understand This	24
It's the Old Story	28
To Edgar Poe on Father's Day	30
Fernbach in Space	32
Obsession	34
Ode for a Dead Werewolf	38
Anthony S. Magistrale and Robert H. Knox	40

OBSSESSIONS

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NIEKAS #41a

Introduction

by Robert Bloch

What's an Introduction, anyway?

Words, just words.

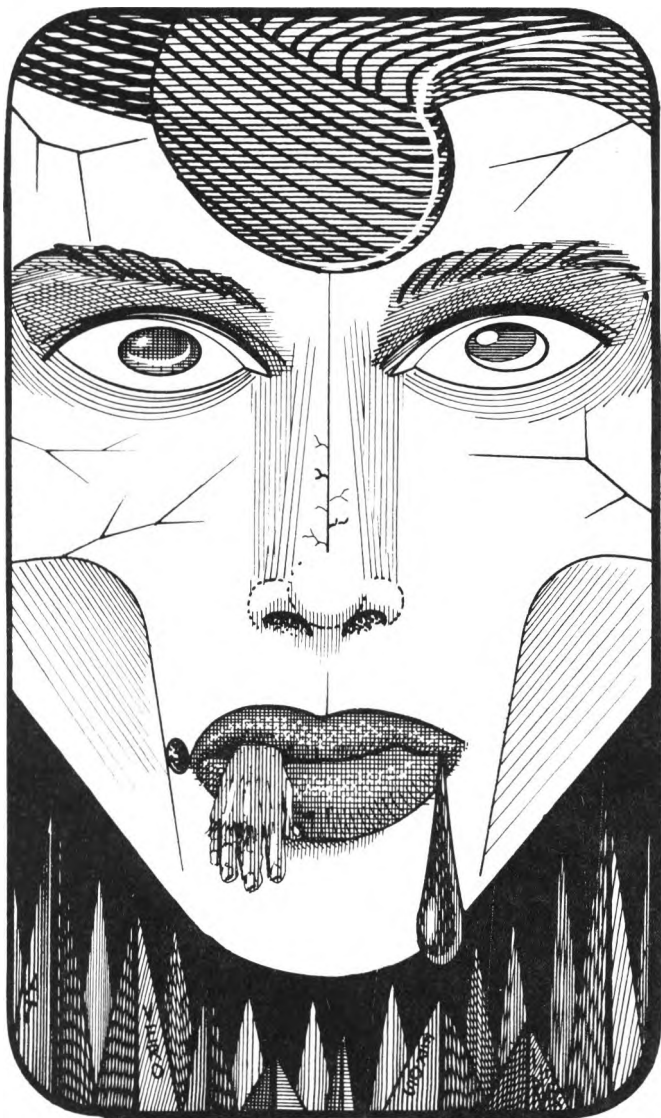
Words *about* words, to be exact. Words which tell you what to expect about other words to come—in a book or pamphlet, a work of fiction or nonfiction. Words that seek to explain, justify, or enlarge upon the words which follow within the pages proper.

But what you're about to discover here is that there's no need for explanation, justification or enlargement upon the content of *Obsessions*. Its words speak most adequately and eloquently for themselves, as do its graphics.

They introduce themselves to you, and I think you'll be most pleased to make their acquaintance.

All that needs to be said by way of introduction is, therefore, quite simple.

Reader—meet *Obsessions*. And may you enjoy each other's company!



The Mannequin for Greg Weller

Thine eyes I love, and they, as pitying me,
Knowing thy heart torments me with disdain,
Have put on black and loving mourners be,
Looking with pretty ruth upon my pain.

Shakespeare, Sonnet 132

He'd always thought his to be a normal,
If uneventful, life. There was much to be said
For the fine acquisitions that awaited
Alfred J. Swantz's touch, at home, in a quiet
Neighborhood, when he would return
In the pale pink gauze of late
Afternoon. And if he had been asked,
By some reporter seeking on-the-street
Opinions for Channel Nine, he would have
Replied:

"Yeah, I guess I'm happy. Sure,
Sometimes I'm not so happy,
But you can't get wound up over
Everything. I'm not really
Much different than anyone else,
I guess."

And although Alfred would have spoken the truth,
He kept searching for something vague
And sometimes in his confusion,
He would think it was almost religious.
But he lived most of his life
Waiting impatiently
For Friday afternoons
When he would get in the Chevy
And head on out to Sears.

Alfred was happy enough until
Two years ago last August —
When he fell in love
With a dark-haired woman,
Staring silently into space
In a department store window
That faced an intersection at the bottom
Of a one-way street.

It didn't really matter
That the woman in the window
Couldn't see Alfred and therefore
Could never return his affections.
She was still beautiful:
She possessed such delicate
Yet chiseled features in her orange flesh.
Her face, of course, never changed expression,
But she was otherwise very life-like,
Right to the nipples that pointed from beneath
Her expensive clothes.

And Alfred J. Swantz would stop each afternoon —
Even if it meant having to leave the office
Early — to spend precious moments
Gazing up at his Beatrice
From beneath her concrete pedestal.
Each day he would spend
Longer periods of time
Separated from her by only a strip of
Glass that still permitted him
To trace the seasons
In the mannequin's attire.

His love deepened into the first afternoon
Of winter. A December twilight
Where the snow came on
In stealthy and measured glides,
Like the moves of a chess-player.
The snow fell about the window
And as Alfred beheld her —
Standing in the same poise she'd held since June,
Dressed in tall, black leather boots
And a fur coat
That just touched the top of the boots —
He understood,
As the snow blew white circles around his feet,
That he could no longer be satisfied
With life as he had formerly known
It.

"I must have her."

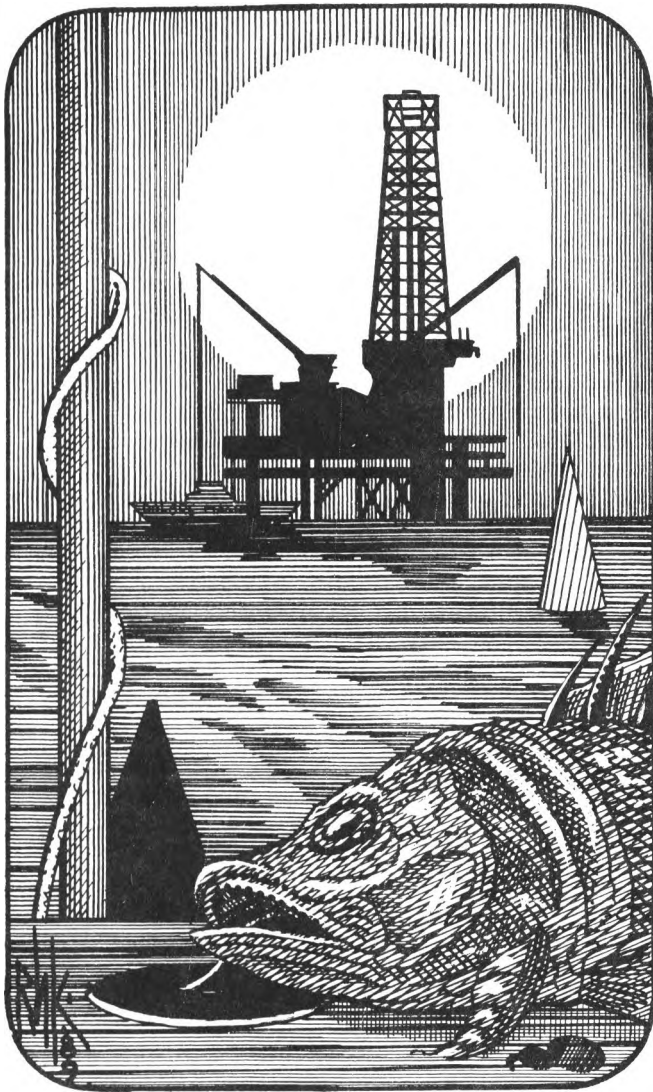
Shortly after hiring Swantz
As a nightwatchman, the department
Store officials noticed that
The display model in the front
Showcase had mysteriously disappeared.
Eventually, when Alfred failed to report
For work, the police traced the stolen
Merchandise to his apartment.

"Ok, Swantz, open up the door. Don't
Make us use force."

"You're gonna have to come in
And get me bastard coppers I've
Waited a long time for this
And I ain't givin' 'er up without a
Fight."

**POLICE REPORT ON CRIMINAL ACTIVITY
309-76-77;
December 24, 1976; Patrolman Grimm:
Suspect's home (1990 Walnut Avenue)
Was surrounded by four units of the
Tactical Weaponry Force. Suspect
Was ordered to surrender. At 9:32
PM, Swantz began firing at stationary
Police units 24 and 39. Shots were
Returned killing suspect. Stolen
Boots, fur coat, and black
Wig belonging to kidnapped mannequin
Were recovered. A thorough search of
Suspect's home, however, failed to
Produce any information as to the
Whereabouts of said mannequin.
Swantz's body was turned over to
Coroner's office.**

pittsburgh/8:77



Wounds

Confident men in three-hundred-dollar suits
speak quickly into telephones
smiling as petrodollars move across the world
with the same fluidity as the chocolate mud
sucked from the earth's teat
to feed the incessant whine
of a world machine demanding nourishment.

Sunsets now reflect through man-made carbons
sea-creatures float upside-
down with bloated insulation,
gulls flap against the sand,
wings glued to tarred feathers.

Perched on top of ocean waters
platforms of erector scaffolding challenge the horizon,
mile long steel straws bleed the sea-floor,
pumping oil and salt
into our wounds.

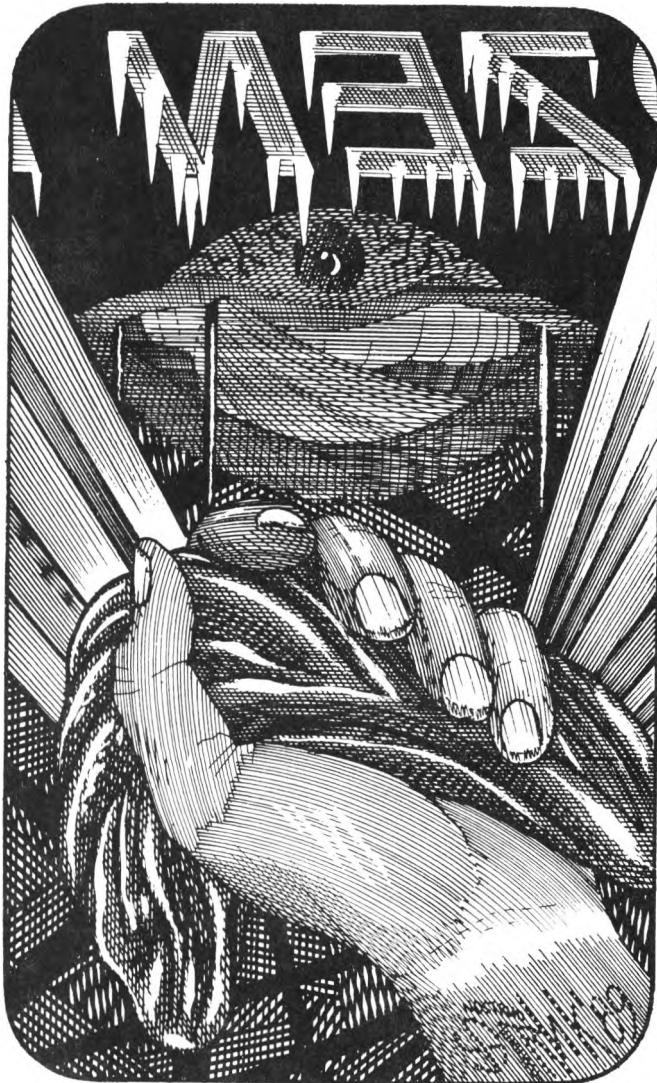


Bird Droppings on I-79

On an open stretch of state highway,
somewhere between Buffalo and Erie,
at a lonely point at the bottom of april,
between winter and spring, the radio says
Alfred Hitchcock is dead in L.A. at 80.
And with my one beer remaining
I roll down the car window
and scream into the wind
This one is for you, Hitch.
But before I am finished with the beer,
two crows flutter down and perch
on my car hood. And while I marvel
at their 60 mph feat,
two more emerge in the rear-view
mirror, standing on the trunk.
A sparrow claws at my windshield wiper
and suddenly birds are everywhere:
the car is transformed into an aviary,
a steel birdbath.

Sweating like a psychopath,
I pull off the road, reach into the glove
compartment, and slip on my Tippi Hendren mask
and wig. I get out of the car
and gently announce to the assembled creatures
Hitchcock is dead, they can relax,
go home to their nests. All of nature
is watching me as I slowly drive away.
In my mirror
lines of confused birds,
thousands perched on telephone wires and poles,
are crapping into the orange of a sunset.

buffalo/4:80



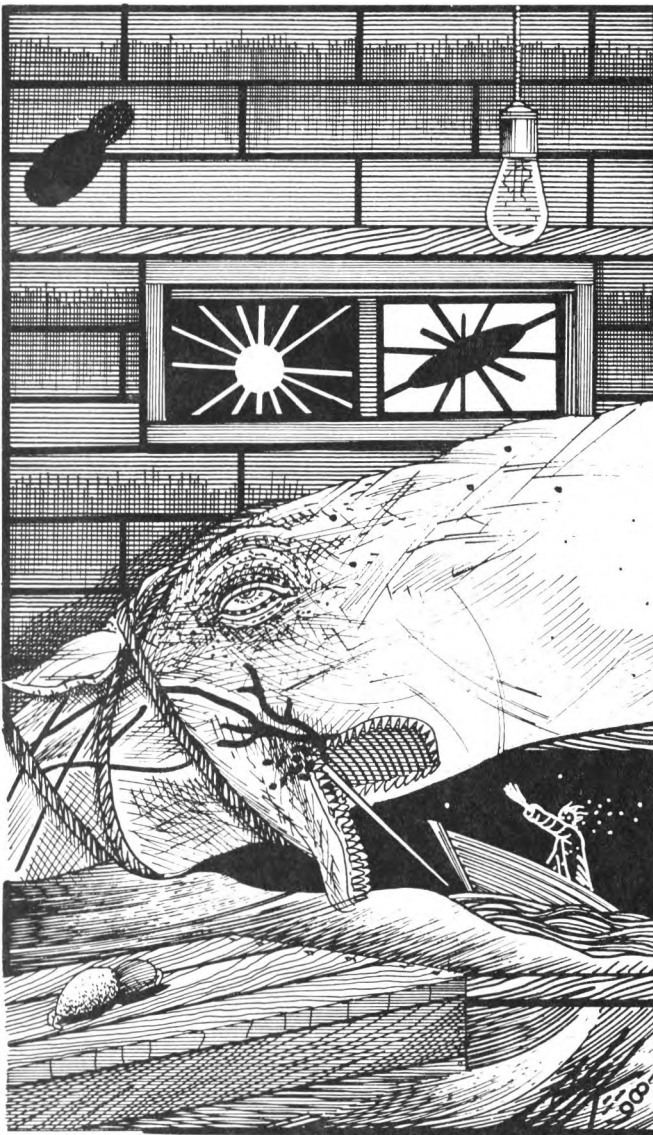
The Somnambular Supermarket

Oh what to do what to do what to
Wake in spring
It's something from Eden,
A piece of it in my
Front yard. I decided
To contact Mrs. Lynn,
Spiritual Advisor on
All problems from dreams
To health. You've seen her on
TV heard it all before on the
Radio.

"Why do I keep having these
Dreams? She's been out of my
Life for years. I burned the letters,
Forgot the voice. Why does she keep
Coming back, Mrs. Lynn? It's spring
And I'm smelling fall
Three years ago.
And then, I thought
I saw her in the supermarket
Yesterday. She was standing
Next to the rotting avocados.
But everytime I finally got close
Enough to really see,
She would push a shopping cart
At me and run away. Laughing.
With bruised shins, I chased her
Down the frozen foods,
Through the dairy. I was about
To close in, corner her by the
Hamburger, when this stockboy with a beard
Appeared from behind the meat
Counter and grabbed me.
The store was having a special
On liver, and although I never
Eat liver, he made me touch it
And we discussed how nice
Liver sales can be."

Mrs. Lynn took a long sip
From her coffee cup.
She shook her head
And told me I had real problems
Even her professional advice
Could not cure. I paid
Emerging into the brilliant spring
Afternoon.

I went back to the supermarket.



A Melville Home Is Damaged for Tom Philbrick

A 199-year-old house where Herman Melville wrote much of "Moby-Dick" has been damaged by water spurting from frozen, bursting pipes. Arrowhead, the author's home from 1850 to 1863 and now a National Landmark open to the public, was flooded Monday night when water cascaded from pipes on the first and second floors of the house.

The New York Times, February 25, 1979

No one believed crazy Erma Onsett
in 1854
when she tried to tell the authorities
about the contents
of Mr. Melville's basement:

I tell ye
'e's got a whale down thar
I peeked inta 'is winda one day
an' I seen a whale
jus' a thrashin' about
from a one end a da basement
ta da other. An' 'e was a thar too
a chasin' dis great white humpback
in a whaleboot
jus' a cussin' an' a hollerin'....

And when old Herman died
in 1891
everyone in Pittsfield
thought those strange midnight
deliveries of massive quantities of small fish
to the backdoor of Arrowhead House
would simply cease.
But then the Federal Government
went and made Arrowhead
a National Landmark.
Whole families
have been reported to have since disappeared
while exploring the cellar,
a biographer and two Melville scholars
are down there,
and now the pipes are shot.
The least someone could do
is warn the plumber.

pittsburgh/3:79



For Jennifer: A Saturday Night Poem

A swirl of light and
 she floats into the room
 with a flourish of satin and lace
 her hair bounces in the air
 and she smells of the spring
 available to 23 year-olds
 and those who have not forgotten
 what to remember. She is ascendant April:
 face colored from the sky,
 dipped-in eyes that jump forth
 fluttering heavily with the flush
 of a gull climbing the wind. Two and three
 blended colors emerge
 flash across the room with every blink
 the effect of flowers
 shimmering in Monet's magic garden.
 She moves closer to me;
 I am all mouth staring
 deep into the red of an apple
 a fire that burns
 under rigid control
 a line that glistens
 wet against the light.
 My appetite moves with her tongue
 to drift slowly downward
 beneath tight lines of clothing
 smooth legs and flanks
 the hard globes that emerge
 only to disappear
 out of the room
 into a swirl of light.

pittsburgh/3:79



Life in Harry Orth's Office

I schedule my hours after teaching
in the office of Professor R.H. Orth
who is away on sabbatical.
He has left behind his library
immaculate books and notes
arranged neatly, side-by-side precision—
an army of cavalry soldiers
carrying variegated banners,
dressed for battle.
Each afternoon in the quiet of my lunch
literary voices interrupt my baloney and cheese:
down from the racks Melville rants
too much has been written,
too many trees fallen for nothing more
to say. Hardy concurs.
Then there is Thoreau
from the other side of the room,
his voice rising above the crescendo,
he tells me stop eating
put aside these vulgar pursuits
devour what is unseen.
Whitman yelps from the bottom of a shelf
he says nothing wrong
in eating baloney and cheese—
just don't stop there.
Each afternoon I grope, confused
my appetite dulled; too many voices.
From the books near the door
Hemingway speaks in clear, tight
language: get out,
come back when you know
where you want to go.

vermont/9:81



For Sam, Who Would Understand This

My aunt reads the daily paper with an eye tuned for tragedy and death. She waits patiently for car wrecks with bodies fragmented in deathprint, the public nightmare to which she supplies one last rite of passage. She would gladly pay the extra dollars, I have heard her lament, if newspaper pictures were only printed in color.

My aunt collects human carnage—she doesn't yearn for it, merely records it, cutting print and photographs to be stored forever in a large black scrapbook with a crucifix on the cover. She tells me in reasoning sound, these people deserve someone to remember them, to restore a sense of order from life's cruel confusions.

I've watched that scrapbook grow since I was sixteen, containing early maladies neatly sealed, laminated with adhesive tape applied securely along the edges.

But lately her book has begun to swell, engorged with accidentally discarded parts, as reports of failed attempts at suicide, stories of lovers gone suddenly berserk with pistols, leak out from beneath book corners in unanchored newsprint.

I sometimes wonder,
as I watch her determined fingers
at work with scissors, her pregnant scrapbook
beside her, if the world has gone
too far out of control, even for her,
or if that collection is simply awaiting eagerly
one last entry.

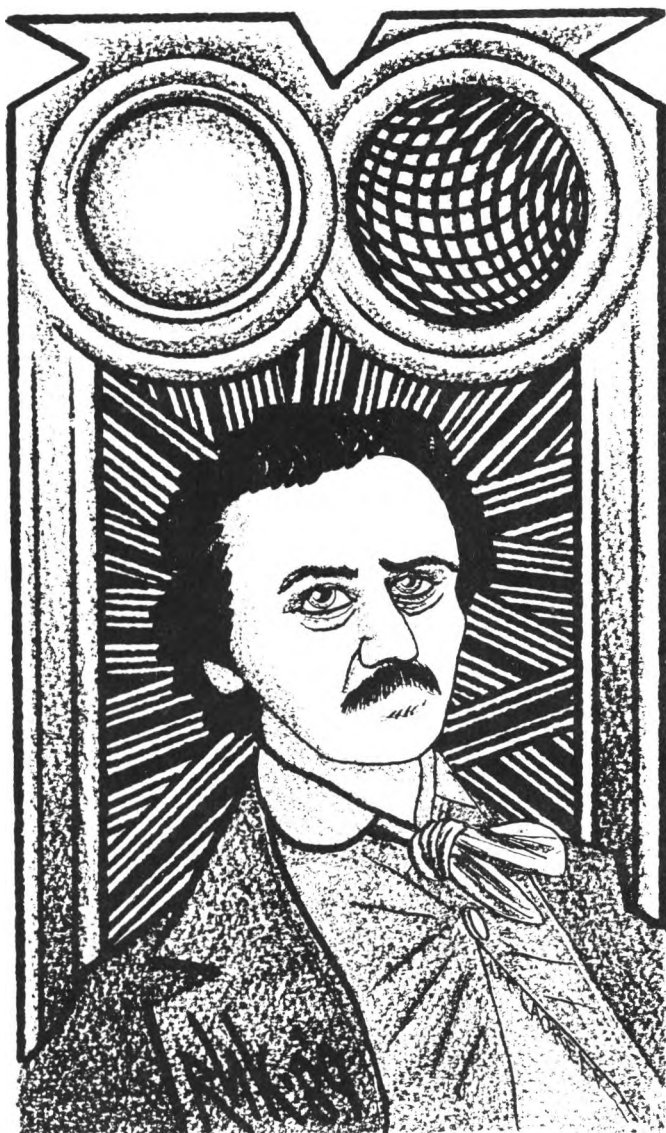
vermont/5:82



It's the Old Story

kong, the mightiest of the kingdom,
quietly collecting television residuals,
drowning his sorrows in banana juice and gin,
remembers a night when the air hung
in a dense fog
which a full moon barely cut
as love burst from the very
fingertips of his hairy hand.
"it will never work,"
she had tried to explain,
"i could never accommodate you."
and kong still sheds warm
nocturnal tears of loss
for his unrequited love,
jessica lange,
who has since become a professor's wife,
with children,
sporting curlers in shaker heights.

pittsburgh/9:78



To Edgar Poe on Father's Day

It is Father's Day, Edgar Poe,
and you have given birth to so many illegitimate
children—
they who wander the streets
convinced of the malevolency of God,
of the unsanctity of human blood,
that the Imp of the Perverse
runs loose in nature or society
instead of where you most found him:
the self. They don't understand you,
Edgar Poe, although they claim you as their father,
they think you were like them—
devoid of moral base, idealizing anger
and chaos, sanctioning atrocity and violence.
Your children, Edgar Poe,
are like your own narrators:
half formed in madness and illusion
the other half in terror and despair,
ignoring your fictional maxim:
an assault upon one's fellow
is the final break
with whatever is human.
You have excited a generation, Edgar Poe,
spawned them into justifying death and revolution;
so many of your offspring
into the night, every night, following perspiring shadows
in ragged coats with bloody knives.
You inspire them, but they don't really understand.
For if they did
on this Father's Day they would say
oaths of contrition
and you would surprise us all by replying sadly
there is no one left to forgive.

vermont/6:82



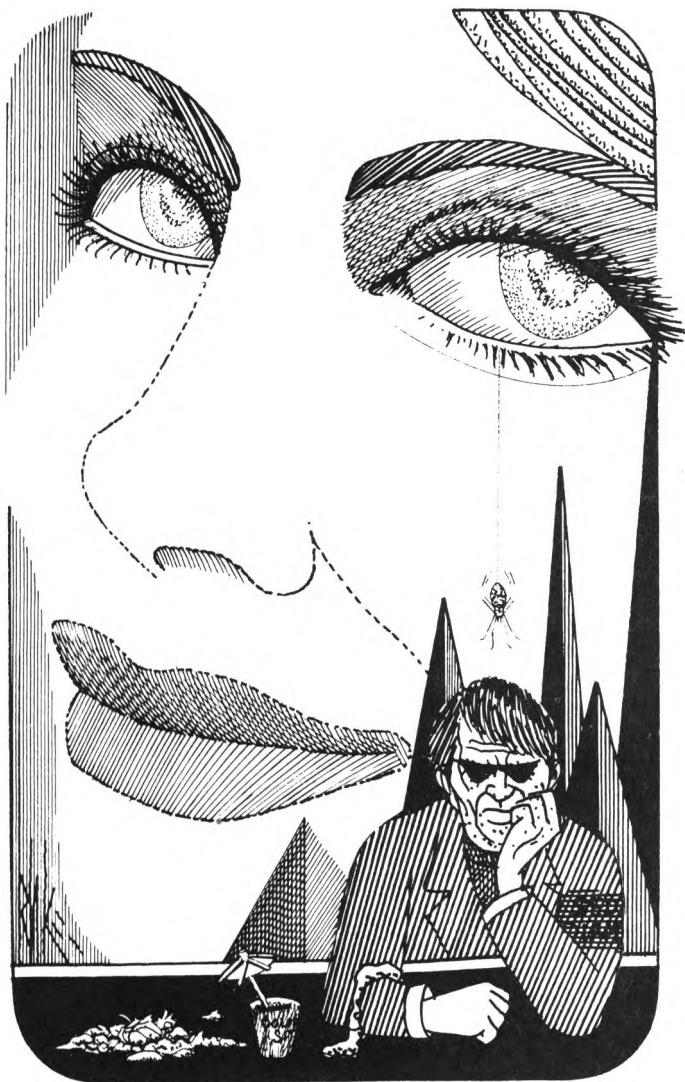
Fernbach in Space

Young Fernbach spent his quarters feeding the machine. He stole from his mother and worked overtime at the grocery store, cashing his paycheck into more quarters. His obsession cost him: he was losing weight, his acne grew worse, friends struggled with his limited conversation. But every night he would play the machine, each hour getting more proficient, building up more and more space stations until one night he won, zapping the last invader. The screen printed its unconditional message of surrender:

YOU HAVE DEFEATED THE SPACE INVADERS. THE GALAXY IS SPARED. WE HAVE NO MORE LEGIONS TO OFFER. BREAK THE SCREEN, YOUNG FERNBACH, AND STEP THROUGH. MR. ATARI AWAITS THIS MEETING.

When the police finally arrived, they found the mutilated body stuck with fragments of glass, unrecognizable. On the floor, next to the dying Fernbach, thousands of Atari space invaders were crawling back into the machine.

pittsburgh/5:81



Obsession

I put the glove on slowly,
examine the tight black
shining along the knuckles.
I smoke another bowl of hash
look at the clock
and remove Christine's picture
from the envelope. She is staring
at a storefront window.
She doesn't know I have taken
her photograph. She doesn't know
me.

Although I can not see
I stare at her windows:
curtains drawn tight
but I imagine her
in front of the morning mirror
experimenting with colors
reds browns and blues.
She sets and curls
perfumed hair
wiggles into skin-tight
black satin jeans
that licks at all the
right places
straps herself
into shoes that are all spike heel
and like a floating snake
slithers out the front door.

I am behind her
another office worker without a face.
She is all practiced motion:
heels, legs, buttocks, hair.
I think of five minutes
alone with her
just a touch here and
there. Oh I'm sure
she'd want to struggle
at first. I move closer
right behind her. Her perfume
heats me

it slips into my nostrils
inflames my heart to beat
through the walls of my chest
I am nearly out of breath.
Just five minutes
what I could do with just
five minutes.
I am the hawk
in rapid descent
closing on the unsuspecting
will
never
know
She turns the corner
and is safely up the stairs.
The lock tinkles into place.
I will be back later.

pittsburgh/3:79



Ode for a Dead Werewolf

the word is broadcast: thousands of men & women
avoiding walks in the woods the sheriff says fear not
we'll have 'im by monday and it's tuesday
and suddenly all hell breaks loose in a bar
somewhere in suburban l.a.
a woman recognizes him drinking beer
and staring at a full moon in a seascape over the bar
it's him it's him of course it is
who else can grow a year's hair in 15 min.?
he probably would have gotten away again
if he hadn't fallen in love with a woman's
feather boa hanging by the back door
love can kill a man
but that's another story
pittsburgh/2:78

Anthony S. Magistrale

Born in Buffalo, New York, now residing in Burlington, Vermont. Presently Director of the Freshman Writing Program, University of Vermont, Burlington, where he is also an Associate Professor of English. Fulbright Post-Doctoral Fellow, University of Milan, Italy. Mellon Pre-Doctoral Fellow, University of Pittsburgh.

Ph.D. University of Pittsburgh. Dissertation: "The Search for Identity in Modern Southern Fiction: Faulkner, Wright, O'Connor, Warren."

Authored *The Moral Voyages of Stephen King* and *Landscape of Fear: Stephen King's American Gothic*. Co-Author (with Lynne Bond) *Writer's Guide: Psychology*. Edited *Literature: Vermont as Setting*, forthcoming 1990 (in addition to editing the volume, also wrote the introductory essay, "Confessions of a Flatlander: A Landscape of Metaphors."); *The Shining Reader* (in addition to editing the volume, also wrote its introduction and an essay in the book entitled "Shakespeare in 58 Chapters: *The Shining* as Classical Tragedy.").

Robert H. Knox

Born within swimming distance of Innsmouth, Massachusetts and now residing in Laconia, New Hampshire. Former art editor for NIEKAS Science Fiction and Fantasy magazine.

Science fiction and horror film aficionado with a large collection of bad/vintage monster movies from the 50's and Japan.

Authored *H.P. Lovecraft: Illustrated in Ichor*. Continuing contributor to Necronomicon Press, MIDNIGHT MARQUEE, and Cryptic Publications.

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ob·ses·sion

(əb-sesh'-ən, ɔb-) n.

1. Compulsive preoccupation with a fixed idea or unwanted feeling. 2. An idea or emotion causing such preoccupation.

—ob-ses'sion-al *adj.* —ob-ses'sive *adj.*

—ob-ses'sive-ly *adv.*