

WHITE STENCIL

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PUTTING THE YEAR TO REST Once again I find myself cutting stencils on the final weekend of the year, with snow heaped on the window ledges and the debris of the old year heaped within the house. By the time these pages appear, I expect to be lolling on a Caribbean beach, amiably explaining to FAPA's most dapper executive type that no true gourmet can afford to sneer at oysters, even if they are served live. And he will tell me that I am not only a dangerous radical but also a barbarian, and then we will go for a swim.

At least, so we expect, though recent grim events have served as a reminder that no event is a certainty until it has happened. Right now, the beaches of Guadeloupe seem very remote indeed. There have been three or four snowfalls already this young winter, and there have been no thaws at all, so the snow is piled high. The squirrels, just coming into their mating season, dance around on the whitened lawn like big gray cockroaches. Strange tracks in the snow advertise the nightly roaming of the raccoons that live in the nearby wooded tract. Today, three days or so after Christmas, the mail is full of Christmas cards still. (I sent none, for the third year in a row. The volume has fallen off somewhat as a result. I suppose it's nice to be remembered, but the whole custom is one I'd prefer to do without. You, Bob Pavlat -- I thought of you now and then through the year, and no doubt you thought of me, so a card wasn't really needed to keep alive a pleasant friendship of a dozen years' standing. And you, Harry Warner -- your card was a lovely one, but I would have traded it for ten minutes of conversation with you at the convention. (Where were you? Where was I? I have the eerie feeling of hardly having been at the convention at all.)

ON NOT TALKING ABOUT THE ASSASSINATION That melancholy event casts a pall over the year that no mechanical celebrating can lift. Six weeks after the black Friday, I find that the murder still holds center stage in my mind, and that several times each day I have to stop and assure myself that it really did happen, that it wasn't just some fevered thought of just before dawn.

But how to exorcise it? How to stop talking and thinking about it?

The death of the President has become a dark touchstone of conversation. Not to talk of it is to attempt to ignore the overwhelming; but to talk of it is to renew the pain uselessly. I find each conversation compulsively making obeisance to the event, touching on it in a ritual way, then quickly scurrying on to some topic less charged with grief.

I was at work when it happened -- doing the final few pages of my day's stint. Barbara called, and said she had heard on the radio that someone had "shot at" the President. Shooting the President and shooting at him are very different things; my first image was of some fanatic rising out of a crowd, taking a few wild shots, being seized and dragged away while the President, unhurt, smiled in reassurance. But that image lasted only as long as I could turn on the radio. The early reports were coming in; no one knew what had happened yet, really, though one Secret Service man had already said the President had been killed. Almost at once came later news; he had been taken to the hospital for surgery. That first report was cancelled, obliterated; for some fifteen minutes, there was reason to hope. It was impossible to imagine anyone so dynamic, so purposeful as Kennedy letting himself get assassinated, and so it seemed certain that no tragic end was in sight.

But then the news got worse; priests left the operating room with the word that he was dead; finally the press officer made it official. Perhaps half an hour had passed since I had turned on the radio. Grotesquely, I had gone on working after hearing the first few announcements. I had remained by the typewriter, my fingers moving rhythmically while I listened to the somber reports. During that half hour, I wrote about a thousand words of copy, purely by reflex, the closest thing to automatic writing that I can imagine. Then came the news that he was dead. I turned the dials of the radio, trying to find some station that would give me different news. I went on turning dials all weekend, looking for the right station.

Later, I looked at those pages that I had written almost in a state of trance. What I had done was to stop a scene in its tracks and keep the characters milling round and round for a thousand words, saying and doing things that seemed to make sense, but which did not advance the plot a millimeter. I left the pages in the book. They don't represent very good narrative technique, but there's something about their purposelessness, their emptiness, that caught the quality of life as I was living it for half an hour on a terrible Friday afternoon.

KEEPING UP WITH SILVERBERG DEPARTMENT

The book I was writing
the day the President died

was the sort of book that could not be hurt by a few dead pages -- a paperback potboiler, nothing more. I've spent most of this year, though, on more ambitious projects.

The book on American Indians, Dan MacPhail, came out in November. (And if I had correction fluid handy, Dan, I'd get your name spelled the way you prefer.) New York Graphic Society published it as HOME OF THE RED MAN. It has illustrations by Judy Lawrence, who has won some prizes at the s-f convention art shows for her outre drawings. The age-group intended is 12-16. The book has had some nice reviews so far, and a pleasant letter from Secretary of the Interior Udall which I suppose will be quoted in advertising copy.

The archaeology entry, Chuck Hansen, came out in October -- EMPIRES IN THE DUST, from Chilton. Teenage on up, for this one. A catchall kind of book covering half a dozen vanished civilizations; my favorite section is the one on Mohenjo-Daro in India. Loren Eiseley gave this one a good review in The Saturday Review, and it was a choice of the Travel Book Club. Bantam Books will probably do a paperback edition in the summer of 1965. Next summer Bantam will be reprinting my 1963 underwater archaeology book, SUNKEN HISTORY. They've already republished LOST CITIES AND VANISHED CIVILIZATIONS. All these are in the Bantam Pathfinder series, for young adults.

The 1964 Silverberg season starts off around March, with a juvenile from Putnam called THE GREAT DOCTORS. April or May will have Chilton bring out my biography of Akhnaten as THE REBEL PHARAOH. June, I think, is the month that Macrae-Smith is publishing a juvenile on prehistoric men, which they're calling MAN BEFORE ADAM. In September, Dial will finally release an anthology I edited called GREAT ADVENTURES IN ARCHAEOLOGY.

Projects in the mill now include a book on the Great Wall of China and one on the Prester John myth. I also expect to be writing a juvenile novel with an archaeological background for Macmillan in 1964. I still do a little science fiction, too. During the year just ended, I wrote a novel which Pyramid will publish in April as REGAN'S PLANET, dealing with the World's Fair of 1992. Also, there was a teenage novel called TIME OF THE GREAT FREEZE, which Holt, Rinehart & Winston will do in the spring. It will be a selection of the Junior Literary Guild.

One project isn't ever going to get written, now. In the summer, I suggested an idea to A.J. Budrys of Regency Books, and he liked it -- but then he left Regency, and soon after, Regency went into suspension. My agent took the idea to several other publishers, and we were just about ready to come to terms with one of them on November 20. The name of the proposed book was THE PRESIDENT KILLERS. It was about the assassinations of Lincoln, McKinley, and Garfield. Two days after Scott Meredith talked to a publisher about doing the book, a fourth name was added to the list, and I nixed the whole project. My heart wasn't in it any more. The whole episode, the timing of it, even some of the phraseology of the outline I prepared, all strike me as unutterably grisly in the altered context of November 22.

ON WATCHING THE SNOW MELT

The snow seems an enemy to me this year. I don't know why. It looks lovely enough as it comes down, and it stays lovely here, in a quiet residential neighborhood where no fumes turn it black. But yet I find myself locked in mortal combat with it. Ten minutes after it stops falling, I'm outside with the shovel, pushing it away from the path. Then, each day, I go at it almost compulsively, piling it in big heaps, clearing it away from the house, shoving it around.

And I stand by the window and watch it melt, and each drop of new water on the sidewalk is a victory for me. This has been going on for three weeks, now, ever since the first snow fell. We had about four inches, that first time; and then a couple of days of clear, cold weather, and then two inches more, and then ten inches, and then another two, and two more after that. So there is a lot of snow on the ground. In some of the places where I've shovelled mounds of it together, the mounds are three and four feet high. The snow melts, a bit each day, but the overall accumulation keeps growing from one week to the next. Perhaps that's why I'm so involved with it; I'm obsessed by the thought that it's gaining on me, that no matter how strenuously I shovel it away, there's always more than when I began.

Ultimate victory is in sight. The snow has always melted in March, every year of my life, and I'm smug enough to think that it'll happen again this time. So all I need to do is sit and wait, and occasionally clear the path, and the white stuff will go away eventually. That seems reasonable enough -- but, as soon as I've typed this page, I'll go downstairs and start shovelling again, trying to clear the path to the back yard. Barbara doesn't understand the whole compulsion. Neither do I. But it's good exercise, at least -- a few minutes of judicious snow-heaving every day.

Last year we had almost no snow at all -- just bitter cold, with the temperature staying around five degrees for day after day. Without a protective blanket of insulating snow, a lot of the ivy around the house died, and some of the smaller evergreens suffered. I used to tune in the weather reports hopefully, last year, waiting for word that snow was on its way to shield the plants against the fierce blasts of wind. The snow didn't come.

This year I look out the window and take delight in each melting molecule. Some people just aren't born to be happy.

DEPARTMENT OF DIRTY BOOKS

Not long ago, I acquired three books which are interesting not only in themselves, but for the simple fact that they're openly available to the public. They're being sold in many bookstores of New York City, and, I guess, are also sold in other parts of the country where a demand exists for high-priced art books and where the local gestapo forces have not interfered. I'm referring to the three-volume set of erotic art of the ancient world, published in Switzerland by Nagel and distributed here by Lyle Stuart, a New York publishing house that seems to specialize in the erotic, the unconventional, and the unusual.

For the record, the books are these:

KAMA KALA (Erotic art of India), with a text by Mulk Raj Anand. (\$21)

ROMA AMOR (Erotic art of Rome and Etruria), with a text by Jean Marcade (\$35)

EROS KALOS (Erotic art of Greece) with a text by Jean Marcade (\$35)

KAMA KALA appeared first, in 1958. It is less elaborately bound than the later two (black cloth instead of colored buckram) and contains only black-and-white illustrations. Outwardly, the format is the same as that of the other two, but there are some internal differences; the text and plates are presented in separate sections, and the book is somewhat slimmer. ROMA AMOR, which was published in 1961, and EROS KALOS, published in 1962, are much more sumptuous packages, with dozens of excellent color plates, and more extensive textual matter.

In none of the books does the text matter much -- and here is their principal failure. Marcade contributes two lengthy, rambling essays on the sexual ideas of the classical world, and Anand a shorter but equally rambling piece on Indian sexual philosophy, quoting heavily from Kama Sutra. All three essays are civilized and agreeable to read, but they offer little by way of commentary on the actual plates. It is almost as though they were written without knowledge of just which plates were to be included in the book. It's too bad; the amiable generalities of the text leave the non-specialist reader eager to know more about the specific objects and paintings reproduced. Nor do the books provide any bibliographical reference. All too transparently, the printed matter in them exists simply as filler for the illustrations.

The illustrations themselves are remarkable. At long last they spike the irritating business of reading a book on Indian temple art, say, and coming across a line like, "The decorations at

Khajurao, while fascinating and artistically significant, are unfortunately impossible to reproduce in a book meant for Western readers" or "The art of the Etruscans was chiefly categorized by a powerful erotic content. Unhappily, we are unable to provide any illustrations of this art." At long last, the veils have been ripped away, the sniggering censors banished. Anyone with the price of admission is now free to see what any Indian peasant can look at at any time.

For the important thing to note in considering these three books is that they show religious art. The astonishingly graphic scenes of erotic delights were created in celebration of the functions of fertility and creation, which in any sane society are surely regarded as holy and blessed and worthy of veneration. If the sculptures of Khajurao or the wall murals of Pompeii happen to arouse prurient interests, well, all to the good, their makers would have said. For what can be nobler than awakening the impulse of creation? What greater good can there be than arousing the desire to bring forth new life?

The puritans are in favor of new life, too. The Roman Catholic Church, which ruthlessly tramps on any cultural manifestation that might tend to arouse prurient interests in anyone, is equally vigorous in encouraging its members to be fruitful and multiply. It seems to me that there are better ways of swelling the parish rolls than by conducting a vigorous anti-sex drive, but let that be. The Catholics are not alone in their puritanism nor in their simultaneous support of untrammelled reproduction. Churchmen of most creeds busily agitate against the open display of the generative function or the organs connected with it. It is a losing battle, as the presence of these three books in the bookstores indicates. But they continue it all the same, and I imagine the outcry would be fierce if the Metropolitan Museum of Art, say, were to run a special exhibit of Greek phallic vases, or of Hindu erotic temple art. (There are plenty of phallic vases, Etruscan phallic idols, and whatnot already on display in the Metropolitan Museum, by the way. But they are set out in the midst of such an unappetizing helter-skelter hodgepodge of artifacts that no one but a specialist is likely even to enter the room where they are shown.)

KAMA KAKA deals entirely with Hindu sculpture and statuary, but for a single full-color print -- no, there are two -- and a few black-and-whites of erotic miniature paintings. The bulk of the plates come from two magnificent Indian temples, Konarak and Khajurao, about which the text tells us maddeningly little. The temples are in the baroque, highly ornamented style of medieval India, and the character and flavor of their ornament has something of the mood of such gothic cathedrals as Chartres or Amiens -- that is, until you look closely and see that the elaborately carved scenes

represent, not episodes in the life of Christ or in the doings of the Biblical patriarchs, but lively and vigorous scenes of copulation, fellatio, cunnilingus, and other amusements. The participants are gods, hundreds of them, voluptuous women and strapping men, who go about their activities with a gusto that leaves the dazzled onlooker with the definite impression that sex must be fun.

The closeup photos leave no doubt. Here, a superb Khrishna fondles a full-breasted wench who would grace Playboy's pages with merit. The coupling couples intertwine in fanciful and free positions of splendid rhythm and flow. One busy god draws a goddess astride him while two abundant goddesses close in from either side. The men are unashamedly ithyphallic; the women are superbly female. Yard after yard of erotic frieze unfolds; it is the sort of stuff that Richard S. Shaver tried to depict as the decoration of the dero world, but this is real, solid as stone, the product of craftsmen toiling year after year under tropical suns. The head swims after half an hour of contemplating the friezes of Konarak and Khajurao.

To turn to EROS KALOS is to enter a cooler world. Here, in glowing color, are Greek vases, Greek bronzes, Greek statues. An enormous phallus rises from the top of a stone wall near Delos, a marble shaft against the blue sky; leering satyrs chase frenzied nymphs around red-and-black vases; tender couples, not always of opposite sexes, embrace on bronze plates. The style is the familiar Greek style, graceful and clean, with every limb muscular and sleek, every robe light and airy. What is new to us is the subject matter, those flaring foot-long penises that seek and find their goals so avidly. As our communities mount the Cross atop the church building or on the hillside, so, too, did the Greeks mount rows of erect organs, openly and casually, to bring the blessings of fertility upon their towns. Western museums abound with Greek nudes, but carefully selected ones; it seems permissible to display the male sex organs in a state of repose, but not otherwise. The otherwise is in EROS KALOS.

More hectic are the scenes of ROMA AMOR. There is some Greek influence in the Etruscan and Roman erotic scenes, but it is mixed with a strange frenzy, a wildness that even the satyr-and-nymph vases of the Greeks do not capture. Here are scenes from Etruscan tombs, from Roman villas, from temples and public buildings -- mosaics, paintings, bronzes, and much else.

A great deal of the book is devoted to the erotic art of Pompeii. Thousands of tourists whisk in and out of those celebrated ruins each year, without noticing enough even to realize that they ought to be shocked. All over Pompeii, for example, one finds a curious symbol embedded in walls and street pavements. It happens to be the phallus, and most of the phalli happen to

point, by no coincidence, toward the Lupanar -- the Pompeian brothel. What better road-sign to use? A stranger in town had only to follow the pointing penises and he would find his way to the Lupanar, just as the bemused out-of-towner wandering in the maze of Grand Central Station has only to follow the green lights if he wants to get to the West Side subway lines. And at the Lupanar itself, helpfully, the walls are decorated with elegant murals depicting various positions of intercourse, for the benefit of unimaginative clients in need of a hint or two. Those murals are reproduced in ROMA AMOR. When I visited Pompeii, I saw them -- briefly -- but Barbara was not allowed to. Women, even married ones, are simply not permitted to view such dreadful things. (Our guide would have let her in, except that a big bunch of tourists was coming up behind us, including a priest or two, and it would have caused problems for him. He did manage to give her a squint of some of the other celebrated erotic art works of the ruins, when no other tourists were around to snitch.)

Most of Pompeii's erotic art was spirited off in the nineteenth century to Naples, and it is still there, under lock and key in the Museo Nazionale. Museum officials will deny with a straight face that any such room exists in the building, but some fast talking (in Italian) and the rapid exchange of a few hundred lire got me into the forbidden room when we were in Naples in 1960. No objections to Barbara's entering, either, nor did the guard who accompanied us show any special embarrassment at admitting her to a room full of erotic statuettes and murals. A great deal of what we saw in that room is reproduced in ROMA AMOR, so the book is in a sense a souvenir of a part of Italy that not many American tourists get to see. For that reason, it's my favorite of the three, though I return in fascination and wonder to KAMA KALA from time to time.

The Customs boys tried to ban the three books from the country, but didn't succeed. Strangely, the Post Office Department has not yet got around to launching its customary futile attack, so far as I know; the books appear to travel openly through the mail, and in fact are offered by one nation-wide book club, the Mid-Century Book Society, without any restrictions. I doubt that you'll find them in your public library, though.

I recommend them most heartily. They'd make nice Christmas gifts for your local scout troop or veteran's hospital, too.