

showing ACE IN THE HOLE together with a similar film. On Thursday, April 21, at 7 PM the Leeperhouse Films will be:

THE MT VOID

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Media Events and the Public

ACE IN THE HOLE (1951) dir. by Billy Wilder

SMILE (1975) dir. by Michael Ritchie

I have never see this film show up anywhere but occasionally on TV under the title THE BIG CARNIVAL. It stars Kirk Douglas as a big-city reporter down on his luck and working on a tiny paper in Albuquerque. All he wants is a big break to get him back into the big Eastern papers. And then he gets it in the form of a lone man caught in a cave-in at an old Indian dwelling. It is this story that he hopes to build into national news and along the way he plays people like musical instruments to help him build the story. This is a very powerful and fascinating view of the newspaper business and humanity in general.

SMILE is a cult film that also is rarely seen. This is the behind-the-scenes story of a beauty pageant put on in a small town in California. It mixes realism, cynicism, and humor in about equal doses. This version was cut for TV, but is still very worth seeing.

2. Way back when I was in junior high school, I had a "friend" who I actually did not care much for. One of our disagreements was over a game he would play. When we were out walking he would see how many spiders and insects--especially caterpillars--he could kill. I was in the first or second year or so of my philosophy that the killing of any animal for any purpose but self-preservation was wrong, a philosophy that I still have. One day when my friend had a fresh kill under the tip of his shoe, I asked him what was the point of this little bit of cruelty and his response was, "Are you kidding? Do you know what it would do to you if it could?"

Well, that stopped me. After all, the world is a pretty cruel

place and if all these creatures were out to kill me, why was I trying so hard to save them? Cruelty to insects might in fact be a sort of self-preservation. I didn't start killing insects off, but it gave me something to think about. A little study answered my friend's question. What would these insects do to me? For most, not a thing! The spiders my friend was killing are mostly beneficial; the caterpillars would have been a real threat, but I did not happen to be a leaf.

The thing is that it is easy to justify injustice against a set of insects or even people if you can get people to believe that the hatred and threat really originate from the other side and your own is only a self-protective reaction. A standard way wars used to be justified to the soldiers was by telling them that the enemy really wants to sweep across our land looting and raping our womenfolk. And the soldiers on the other side were often told just the same sort of thing.

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Around 1901 a totally fictional document was published called "Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion." It purported to be a Jewish plan for world domination, though it later proved to be plagiarized from a newspaper satire about Napoleon III with the names changed (though c_e_r_t_a_i_n_l_y_n_o_t to protect the innocent). It was taken very seriously by many, stirred up a lot of hatreds, and certainly contributed in no small part to the events in Europe over the next forty years. And there are similar examples for what would happen if blacks got power. B_i_r_t_h_o_f_a_N_a_t_i_o_n actually claims some historical justification for its images of blacks turning halls of government into flophouses.

So where is this all leading? Perhaps nowhere. But think about it the next time you read a novel about a future in which men have enslaved women. Look around you and ask yourself if the men you see really want to enslave women. When you see a film that shows rape the national sport of Neanderthal males (with the subtext that men have always oppressed and always will if they can), ask yourself what archaeological evidence there could be to support that view of Neanderthal life.

Science fiction used to sell dreams and imagination and a sense of

wonder. When it starts selling hatred and misunderstanding, we should recognize what it is doing and perhaps do what we can to fight these trends.

3. Some more donations to the Holmdel branch of the Club Library, this time courtesy of Maxine McBrinn-Howard:

C.J. Cherryh - GATE OF IVREL
WELL OF SHIUAN
FIRES OF AZEROTH

Roger Zelazny - NINE PRINCES IN AMBER
THE GUNS OF AVALON
SIGN OF THE UNICORN
THE HAND OF OBERON
THE COURTS OF CHAOS

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BEETLEJUICE
A film review by Mark R. Leeper
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Capsule review: An incredibly forgettable film about ghosts trying to scare away new owners of their house. The very minimal plot is an excuse to load on piles of gratuitous special effects that do very little

for the story. Rating: -1.

Excuse me if this review is not very well constructed. I have to write it very, very quickly. I just saw B_e_e_t_l_e_j_u_i_c_e, an extremely forgettable fantasy film. So much so that even as I walked out of the theater, large pieces of the film were being forgotten forever. Why is B_e_e_t_l_e_j_u_i_c_e so forgettable? I guess because the producers had so much budget and so little story. It is not that it was a bad story. It was co-authored by Michael McDowell, one of the leading modern horror writers, but it was about four pages worth of story and the rest was just lathered-on special effects. Remembering the film entails remembering the list of special effects, mostly totally gratuitous, that were laid on at various points in the minimal story.

The story of B_e_e_t_l_e_j_u_i_c_e involves...(oh, rats. What was it about? oh, yes!) a young couple who live in a rustic little town and love their old house. They are in a car accident and are killed. Now is this where they see the ghost with the shrunken head and the smoker who was charred to a cinder? No, I think that's later in the plot. Oh, well, it doesn't really matter. Anyway, they go back to their house and can get in but can't get out again. Yeah, I'm pretty sure this is where they had the alien landscape special effect and the giant sandworm. That's what they face if they leave the house. Wait, that doesn't make sense--they were just outside the house. Well, I guess making sense doesn't matter. And then, yes, that's it, some not very nice people buy the house and start to remodel it. The ghosts don't like that, so try to scare the new owners. Now is this where they rip their faces off altogether or is this where they just stretch their faces into funny shapes? Doesn't matter, I guess. So where does Beetlejuice fit into this? Well, first off there is nobody named "Beetlejuice." There is someone named Betelgeuse, like the star, and that's pronounced "Beetle juice," but then why isn't the film called B_e_t_e_l_g_e_u_s_e? Darned if I know! Anyway, Betelgeuse fits in later in the plot. But don't worry about the plot. The filmmakers didn't.

The star of the film is Geena Davis who is attractive enough to occasionally upstage the special effects. She may be familiar from television work or from her role in the remake of T_h_e_F_l_y. Alec Baldwin is forgettable as her husband. Jeffrey Jones as the new owner is used to being upstaged by special effects as in H_o_w_a_r_d_t_h_e_D_u_c_k. And Michael Keaton was on hand as (uh, give me a second), oh yes, in the title role. No, wait, there was nobody in the title role. Well, anyway, give this tournee of mediocre special effects a -1 on the -4 to +4 scale.

CHRONICLES OF BUSTOS DOMECQ by Jorge Luis Borges and Adolfo Bioy-Casares
Translated by Norman Thomas Giovanni
Dutton, 1979, ISBN 0-525-47548-6, \$2.95.
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper
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A little while ago I reviewed two books of reviews of imaginary books by Stanislaw Lem. Wait a minute--that's not right. How about "two books by Stanislaw Lem of reviews of imaginary books"? That still sounds bad. Now, if English were two-dimensional instead of linear, I could say:

two books
[1] / \ [2]

by Stanislaw Lem of reviews of imaginary books
but it isn't, so I can't. Let's say "two books by Stanislaw Lem, these books being books of reviews of imaginary books." If you think of sentences as traversing trees, then the phrase "these books" is like a signal to go back up branch 1 in preparation for going down branch 2.

Anyway, this was supposed to be a book review, not a revisionist grammar lesson. The earlier of the two books referred to above, A P e r f e c t V a c u u m was written in 1971, though not published in this country until 1978. T h e C h r o n i c l e s o f B u s t o s D o m e c q was written in 1967, and appeared in this country in parts between then and 1979, when the entire volume was published. Since Lem wrote in Polish and Borges and Bioy-Casares in Spanish, it is unlikely that one influenced the other, so the fact that two literary giants produced such similar works at basically the same time must be attributed to the sort of situation best summed up by Robert Heinlein: "When it's time to railroad, you railroad." And when it's time to write essays satirizing reviews and art...well, you do.

This volume is, quite briefly put, a gem. The twenty essays are not designed to be gulped down one after the other, but savored separately, each for its own flavor. The "Homage to Cesar Paladion" reminds one of "Pierre Menard, Author of Don Quixote" in its sly examination with the topic of plagiarism. "An Evening with Ramon Bonavena" discusses a literary work which consists entirely of a precise and detailed description of one corner of a table. In another essay, Borges and Bioy-Casares examine one supposed author's works, each of which consists solely of a single word. "Gradus ad Parnassum" melds the idea of encoding ideas into words with the Humpty Dumptian concept of words meaning just we we intend them to mean, neither more nor less.

The other arts are not exempt from Borges and Bioy-Casares' attacks. In "An Abstract Art" they show what might happen if the sense of taste were used as an art form by the same sort of artists one finds painting or sculpting. "The Flowering of an Art" is an examination of what would happen to architecture. "The Selective Eye" and "On

Universal Theater" carries the modern concept of "art" perhaps to its ultimate conclusion, but to say more would spoil the fun. "What's Missing Hurts Not" tries to see if art by omission is any better (it isn't). After all of these, the reader is convinced that Bustos Domecq (the alleged author of all these essays) would be right at home writing art criticism for any one of a number of pretentious, artsy magazines.

"The Brotherhood Movement" reminded me of an idea I had many years ago--a convention for people whose license plates all started with "ABC" (or some other combination). Of course, I thought it was just a nifty idea, but Borges/Bioy-Casares turn it into a whole philosophy.

Just as many films have little jokes hidden among their credits, this book has little jokes tucked away in unlikely places--the reverse of the title page, the footnotes, even the index. Of course, the book itself, purportedly written by one "Bustos Domecq," could be said to fall into this category as well. This has been done before (for example, William Goldman's P_r_i_n_c_e_s_s B_r_i_d_e and S_i_l_e_n_t G_o_n_d_o_l_i_e_r_s were supposedly written by Morgenstern). This book does frankly admit on the outside who really wrote it, however, even if throughout the inside the charade is maintained.

This book will undoubtedly be hard to find--most of Borges' work is. I found this, along with several other of his books in a used book store, and that may be your best bet if you're not near a university book store. This and Lem's books go nicely with R_o_t_t_e_n R_e_v_i_e_w_s by Bill Henderson, a recently published collection of r_e_a_l reviews of r_e_a_l books that are just as off the mark as the reviews of imaginary works were. One superb example is Harry Thurston Peck's (say who?) 1901 evaluation of Mark Twain, "A hundred years from now it is very likely that 'The Jumping Frog' alone will be remembered." While there's still another 13 years to go, I'll go out on a limb and say I think he's wrong. But which is more laughable, the M_a_n_c_h_e_s_t_e_r G_u_a_r_d_i_a_n's estimation of T_h_e H_e_a_r_t_o_f D_a_r_k_n_e_s_s that "It would be useless to pretend that [it] can be very widely read" or Bustos Domecq's adulation of the novel M_o_o_n (consisting of the single word "moon") I leave as an exercise for the

reader.