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In the Beginning

The Fantasy Amateur: I doubt the legal worth of a statement intended to relieve FAPA officers from liability in a libel suit over something in a FAPAzine. If a disclaimer to the effect that opinions do not reflect those of the officers worked, similar statement would appear in every professional periodical and book published in the United States that only the writers and not the publishers are responsible for statements in the text. Another Fanzine Too Many: I learned some years back that trnaslating fiction is indeed a peculiar thing to do, as John-Henri states. I wrote the English versions of two or three German stories for a short-lived prozine that featured stories originally written in non-English languages. My heaviest cross to bear weighed me down every time I came across a word I couldn't find in a German-English dictionary and I needed to decide if it was slang or a bad word or if it was a made-up word by the author in keeping with alien races or future situations. I never received any complaints from the authors so maybe I guessed correctly most of the time. '' I believe All Flesh Is Grass is originally a Biblical statement which Eliot borrowed. '' Using movie titles in their original languages for showing in English-speaking lands is sometimes deceptive. Grand Illusion is a particularly bad case. In English, "grand" used to mean simply large but has gradually shifted in meaning to signify splendid or glorious in most usages. So the cynical title of that film should be Englished as Huge Illusion or Big Illusion. '' The Hallowe'en episode in Meet Me in St. Louis comes pretty close to catching the spirit of the holiday in the United States despite the number of years that have passed since the time period of the film. The Charlie Brown Hallowe'en animated cartoon is also realistic except for the Great Pumpkin which is an interpolation. '' I think the only way to do Heinlein fiction justice on the screen would be via what are called mini-series in the United States television industry: movie versions of fiction that occupy from four to eight hours on television, spread over several evenings. So much of Heinlein's quality reposes in the long dialog sections that movie versions that merely illustrate the things that happen would be hopelessly unrepresentative of his fiction. Fantasy Commentator: I can't believe I read the whole thing.''It's a sad commentary on American journalism and the media that Thomas Starzl isn't as famous as Curie or Salk and that I knew nothing about his achievements until I found them detailed in a FAPA mailing. The anti-science slant of today's writers has kept almost everyone ignorant of the individuals who are really important, like the man who has done so much for organ transplants. His achievements would have been considered wild imagination less than a century ago. Less than a century in the future, I wouldn't be surprised if some other genius has discovered the mechanism by which the human foetus grows the organs it needs and adapts this process to permit sick people to grow replacements themselves for whatever organs are failing. And he will probably be just as obscure in the public mind as the son of a science fiction writer is today. '' I believe copies of Rockets Through Space are almost unobtainable today in the original edition, for a good reason. I'm pretty sure it was this book about space travel that was the subject of a squib in one of the first fanzines I ever saw, which referred to it as one of the worst sellers of the year for the United States book industry. '' SaM probably meant to identify Amelia Reynolds Long as a well known writer of fantasy fiction before World War Two, not WW One as his article on book jackets states. And I might point out another reason for the scarcity of elaborate dust jackets on books published in the United States during the first couple decades of this century. Many books had bindings that included fancy decorations on the front cover, embossed lettering, sometimes color illustrations. I suspect that increasing publishing costs during the prosperous 1920s persuaded publishing firms to switch to plainer bindings and colorful paper jackets. '' H. R. Felgenhauer's article about Ray Bradbury is shockingly inferior to the usual high level of criticism and scholarship that Fantasy Commentator maintains. It is a childish-sounding series of gripes because some of Ray's opinions aren't the same as those of the writer. It also indicates that Felgenhauer is unable to distinguish between serious and frivolous

remarks. '' I continue to believe that somewhere lurking in long-ignored fanzine pages, there must be a paragraph in which Russell Chauvenet proposed and introduced fanzine as a substitute for the ugly-sounding abbreviations for fan magazine that were then current. His invented word was accepted and put into use so rapidly and widely that I doubt if he just dropped it into a letter or an article without explanation. Such instant popularity of the word seems to indicate there was a definite introduction to it in some widely read fanzine. VOM would be one fanzine worth searching because it was very widely read. Even a FAPAzine would have served the purpose, since most fanzine fans were FAPA members around 1940. '' I hope E. F. Bleiler has managed to see the first movie version of The Lost World during its several appearances on the American Movie Classics schedule. But I fear that the AMC version omits quite a few minutes of the original release. Several characters bob up in the television version without having their presence accounted for. '' Maybe T. G. Cockroft's index to letter sections of weird fiction prozines will inspire more attention by other researchers to what appeared in prozine loc departments during their prime. This is one specialized area of fandom that neither Sam nor I wrote about extensively in our books about fan history. There must be much of interest in the things that future famous pros and fans wrote when they first broke into print in letters to theprozines, some fans did little or nothing in other forms of fanac but were BNFs in the letter sections, and even the comments by editors on some letters would be worth summarizing. Incidentally, I felt complete disbelief when I found myself listed with seven published letters to Weird Tales, in the index to loc writers. I have absolutely no memory of having ever written to that prozine, much less having broken into print with prose there (I did sell a poem to Farnsworth Wright). '' The Blind Spot sticks in memory as one of the best evokers of the sense of wonder in all my years of reading science fiction. I no longer remember much about the novel, but it was just right for my science fiction instinctswhen I first read it in my teens. Alphabet Soup: I think the Retro Hugo concept is good but needs some sort of preliminary groups of suggestions of possible and eligible items and people for each category. Not many fans will take the trouble to hunt out prozine indexes or fan histories to determine what and who were good and active in a particular year a half-century ago. Memories could be jogged by committees agreeing on perhaps two dozen major possibilities in each category. '' The Eaton collection is helped to attain its staggering number of science fiction and fantasy books by its inclusion of many foreign language volumes. Horizons: Wrong again! A few weeks after typing those words about the censorship of Amos 'n' Andy, I stared in disbelief at a program listing in TV Guide: a Washington public television station whose offerings are aimed principally at blackswas showing Check and Double Check. This station isn't on the local cable, so I don't know if it was presented as an awful example or as good entertainment. I have the movie on videocassette and repeated playings have failed to inform me what is so terrible about it. Amos and Andy are referred to by both white and black characters as "you boys" at several moments in the film. But there must be dozens of the same appealations to Laurel and Hardy in their movies, a famous baseball book entitled The Boys of Summer had several blackplayers as subject matter, black youngsters join Boy Scout troops, and the black comedians don't behave any more ridiculously or stupidly than Lum and Abner, Abbott and Costello, and many other white comedy teams. Invasion of the Beer People: I don't worry much about infection from hot air dryers because I stay out of public toilets as much as possible. I remain unconvinced that there is absolutely no danger of contracting the AIDS virus in such places. Reason tells me it wouldn't matter much if I did become a victim in such a place because I would probably be dead from some other cause before the disease developed over the years. But I obey my instincts. '' Bing Crosby's use of corporal punishment on his sons didn't come out after his death. He personally revealed it in considerable detail in one of the autobiographical books published under his byline during his lifespan. Green Stuff: There might be two or three other FAPA members who were reminded like me of old days in fandom by the color of the ink Murray used in his FAPAzine. When I was new in fandom, during the late 1930s, a number of Los Angeles fanzines appeared in green ink, and unreliable memory seems to tell me that this was because green was a color symbolizing either Esperanto or Technocracy, two causes that many Los Angeles fans professed at that time. I believe Askerman had a green ribbon on his typewriter. '' I'm sad when I think of all the things I could have accomplished if I'd suffered reading blocks. But I'm yet to experience

one of the things. Ever since boyhood, I've read anything within my reach, except books with a colon in their titles, even FAPA mailings which seem to cause major reading blocks for many members of the organization. '' Pros might begin to suffer from convention fears, because of all the recent deaths of writers and editors at convention or scheduled to be guests of honor at conventions or just having completed that function. '' That dealer will probably ask three or four times the $30 he paid for that book. Secondhand dealers in printed matter seem to consider it humiliating to make less than that sort of profit margin on transactions. They've virtually stopped haunting the local Goodwill Industries store since its price on printed volumes rose to 59¢. They were sometimes two and three deep when more books were beingput out when the going price was 15¢. What they buy eventually appear in flea markets at prices ranging from $3.00 up, the source identifiable because Goodwill puts a red pencil line across the spine at various heights so clerks will know how long a book has remained unsold. Ben's Beat: I had a wild dizzy spell eight or ten years ago. It woke me from a sound sleep. The illuminated time on my bedside clock-radio was circling my bed, right to left, requiring about five seconds to make a 360° circuit. The faintly lighted windows were keeping pace with the clock. I'd never experienced anything like this. First I wondered why I'd never heard about anyone suffering such a spell while sleeping, then it occurred to me that maybe this was the last thing anindividual experienced before death which would account for the lack of documentation. I managed to get out of the rotating bed and as soon as I was on my feet, my orientation began to get back to normal. It never has happened again. '' I love old radio, too, but one aspect of the current interest in that field has me worried. The tapes and CDs of old radio broadcasts that are being peddled today are too heavily slanted toward violence: westerns, crime, and war. Such programming was in the minority during radio's golden age but it seems as if more than half of all the widely advertised stuff belongs in those categories. Younger people must be getting a wrong idea of what the networks offered before television. '' The man in Vienna who informed Ben that Mozart was five years old when he lived in Salzburg for the last time was obviously one of the script writers for Amadeus. In actuality, Mozart was 27 when he left the city for good, after an extended visit with his father. Mozart in Salzburg by Max Kenyon is an excellent if hard-to-find book about his life in Salzburg and the music he created there. '' A romance novel is involved in one of my all-time records involving books. There's a woman living a dozen miles south of Hagerstown who has published more than 100 of the paperback things, under the byline of Nora Roberts. Once I received in my capacity as a journalist a review copy of her latest, started to read it for review purposes, and halfway down page 3 I got irretrievably and permanently stuck. I simply couldn't force my eyes to continue their motions even to the end of that page. It still remains the book that I've bogged down on the earliest. '' I second Ben's praise for the full-length, big name recording of Show Boat. There are at least a dozen other Broadway musicals that need this kind of new recordings with first-rate singers, all the music even if some was cut before performance, and enough dialog to follow the course of events. '' It's amazing how many writers, good and bad ones both, have used high-powered electricity to achieve impossible results in their stories: causing a robot to attain powers not built into it, bringing back to life a dead person, giving supernatural powers to a living human, vastly increasing someone's mental powers, and so on. Just once, I'd like to read a novel in which the electrical jolt kills the human instantly or burns out all the circuits in the mechanical device. Realism, that's what literature needs today. Sweet Jane: I regret the total absence of reruns of the old Groucho Marx quiz show from television around here. It's surprising none of the cable channels has picked it up during this era of ever-increasing popularity of the Marx Brothers as a team. Conceivably, it could result from the bitter dispute over Groucho's estate. Helen's Fantasia: Nonstoparagraphing was Ackerman's contribution to fandom, not Laney's. Spirochete: Obviously most young people don't like classical music, and the media ignores it most of the time. But I wouldn't define it as dead. I was thinking the other day about the conditions I found when I first became interested in classical music, in the mid-1930s, and the situation today. The radio networks offered about 15 to 20 hours of classical music weekly when I was in my lower teens and sometimes New York's good music station, WQXR, was audible in Hagerstown after dark. Today, four public radio stations and one commercial station are receivable in this city,

providing somewhat more than 500 hours of classical music weekly. A 12-inch 78 rpm record containing less than ten minutesof music cost $2 during the Depression, although the price went down a few years later, and only two domestic manufacturers, Victor and Columbia, issued classical discs; imported records could be bought in big cities or by mail order at much higher prices. Only the largest libraries offered records to borrowers; today even small town libraries usually circulate classical recordings in various formats. Hagerstown had made several attempts to have its own sympony orchestra on an amateur basis, but they crashed and burned after a year or two i the 1930s; today it has supported for a dozen years the all-professional Maryland Symphony Orchestra with a world-class musician, Sir Barry Tuckwell, as its conductor. When I was growing up, there were no school orchestras, just bands. Today the larger high schools and some of the lower schools have orchestras playing classical and semi-classical music. On most weekends, there is classical music on a live basis in Hagerstown or within a fifteen-minute drive. Last Sunday, as I type, people could choose between a string quartet recital at the local museum or what was billed as "the world's biggest organ recital" at a church with four organists participating. Next Sunday, the Faure Requiem and Bernstein's Cichester Psalms will be given in a town just northwest of here; all these are free admission events. Although Redd imagines that Sunday band concerts in the park are "forgotten now", he is welcome to listen to one any summer evening in the park about 1,000 feet from my home where a thousand or more people usually turn out to listen, performed by the Hagerstown Municipal Band. The only matter I can think of which shows a decline in classical music interest is the scarcity of big name artists giving recitals in Hagerstown, and that's mostly the result of the change from trains to airplanes as the accepted way for famous musicians to travel. If a singer or a pianist had a recital in Philadelphia or New York City on one evening, and another in Baltimore or Washington two nights later, he often was willing to perform in Hagerstown on the intervening night at a reduced fee that local audiences could afford, to avoid the empty evening and to pick up some added cash. Today the big names command such huge fees and fly everywhere, and there's no way to avoid a huge deficit if someone books them into Hagerstown where the largest auditoriums own only 1,400 seats and the general public doesn't have enough money to spare for the break-even cost of tickets. Detours: There is so much variation in the way people pronounce the English language that I think there would be only one way to make possible a computer translation of speech to accurate transcription on paper. The computer would need to be programmed by the individual who intended to use it for this purpose reading aloud a list of perhaps 50,000 words so the electronics could match up his pronunciation of each word to its spelling. I have no idea if such preparation could permit the computer to keep up with his talking or if it would take hours to print out ten minutesof chatter. '' Bill Groveman, whom Russ might remember as an active fan during the early 1940s, wrote me recently, my first letter from him in perhaps a half-century. He was asking about possible resting places for his collection of amateur publications. I gather they include both fanzines and mundane ayjay publications. I referred him to Mike Horvat, among several other possible recipients. Lofgeornost: Today's definition of science fiction is so lax that it might be possible to argue that Franz Joseph Haydn produced the first science fiction for marionettes. During his long service with the Esterhazys, Haydn wrote quite a few operas, some of them for a puppet theater. Singers stood to one side while the action was portrayed by the wooden figures. One of these works was Philemon und Baucis. Unfortunately, part of the score is lost, but we know it involved a couple of Greek gods who go slumming on Earth, are given hospitality by a husband and wife, and are so pleased that they bring back to life the couple's deceased son. I have the old Vox recording of the surviving music, which is glorious. '' Maybe Roger Zelazny's reputation will improve as the years pass. Novels that don't fit the critics' ideals for significance or originality have the habit of gaining favor after a few decades from time to time. The Road Warrior: I think baseball's "decline" is sheer fiction invented by the media. Every time you read a story about how baseball has lost its audience, do the obvious thing and compare statistics today with those from whatever year the writer cites as its glory period: major league attendance, participation in youth leagues, minor league franchise values and attendance, radio-television income, books and music released with baseball themes, popularity of baseball in other nations and so on. Such data will show that baseball has never been as popular as it

is today. It's true that basketball has fans, but they're mostly people whose intellects have been disintegrated by drugs, drink and rock, making it impossible for them to keep in mind such baseball matters as the number on base, the ball-strike count, how many are out, and so on. Basketball consists of throwing the ball at the basket and it either goes in or doesn't go in, making it ideal for the typical youth today. Southern Fandom Confederation Bulletins: Both have been locced, I believe. The Devil's Work: Norm continues to ruin the punchline of an old joke about one of Rider Haggard's more obscure titles, by referring to him as Henry R. Haggard. Prang: As a member of SAPS, I've complained several times in mailing comments about Robert Briggs' bigotry. So have a number of other SAPS members. Once I considered resigning as a protest against the fact that I was inadvertently helping to fund the dissemination of his stuff, via the portion of my dues that goes to pay postage on the Briggs publications. Then I realized that this action would be meaningless, since someone from the waiting list would take my place and provide similar funds for spreading the poison and the newcomer could conceivably be influenced by reading the Briggs material, something that has never happened to me. However, I'm curious about why Andy complains in FAPA about this SAPS matter when he remained silent over the racist outburst by Howard Devore in FAPA several mailings ago. If Andy doesn't "have a lot of patience with people who see evil around and them (sic) and respond by hoping that it will go away if they ignore it", why doesn't he lose patience with himself? Of course, not just Andy but 63 FAPA members remained silent on the matter, leading me to assume that either they don't read the mailings or they agree with Howard. Synapse: I'm very unhappy over my reputation as a fan who writes locs to every fanzine he receives. Now Speer creates a new legend that "Only Harry mentions all the titles". I never have done so in mailing comments, although I used to write at least a sentence or two about the great majority of FAPAzines. For the past few years, I've cut sharply back on the proportion of commented-on items in FAPA mailings. '' As far as I know, nobody has ever caught me writing about the way someone learned me this or that. The nuns in the Catholic elementary school I attended teached us to avoid bad grammar. '' I'm not so completely irrational yet that I think I would be spending my children's inheritance by attending the Salzburg Festival. I don't spend large sums on things like that because I'm still gambling on the future. During the decades when I was working and putting aside money for the future almost every week, I was assailed by advice from this and that person to spend instead of saving because civilization would soon end in a nuclear war or a Republican President would destroy the nation's economy rendering money worthless or inflation would become so severe that a year's savings would buy only a loaf of bread and just possibly a jug of milk or (a heresy particularly rampant in FAPA) I would never carry out my intention to retire at the age of 60. I won that gamble. My new gamble involves the possibility that I might end up in a rest home or other institution during my final years, and the more I have in financial reserves, the better my chances of receiving decent care and treatment in a first-rate facility. There's also a very good chance that I'll drop dead while still in good health and mobility, in which case I lose the gamble, but one out of two isn't so bad. '' I would think it would be much more difficult to determine the probable reliability of information obtained by punching keys on a computer than by judging the value of the source when it appears in a periodical or book from a library. '' Newspapers still published fiction during World War Two. I remember trying to sell short-short stories to one syndicate during my first efforts to be a pro writer, in my first years in fandom.

Recent Reading

Robert Benchley was one of the funniest men who ever lived, both as a writer and as an actor in the movies. I'm surprised that his literary output is so seldom revived in new editions, and all those hilarious shorts he did for Hollywood are almost never visible on television and don't appear in catalogs of pre-recorded videotapes. I suppose the problem is that he didn't devote himself to trying to make smartass remarks about prominent politicians and other celebrated people seem funny. Fortunately, I came across a Benchley collection that was new to me recently at a library book sale at a preposter-

ously low price. It's Chips Off the Old Benchley, a 1949 posthumous collection of about 80 short Benchley masterpieces, most of them never previously published in book form but reprinted from various magazines and newspapers for the first time. My enjoyment of this book was slightly diluted by the sad fact that most of the periodicals whose files yielded up its contents are no longer in existence, or in the case of The New Yorker would be better off dead in their present condition.

Bob Benchley usually described the manner in which the universe or certain portions of it had gone more or less out of control, at least beyond his personal control. For instance, there's a piece which describes the ominous change in bathrooms. He had read in a Sunday newspaper that the days of all-white bathrooms had ended and this was the worst possible news. He describes a recent weekend visit to a house whose bathroom had lavender towels, pink and green curtains, and a tub that was "a brilliant yellow with mottlings of a rather horrid chocolate running through it". The poor man was afraid to read while in that indecent tub "for fear that a Chinese dragon would pop out from some of the decorations and get into my slippers". He ended his essay witha plea for a return to bathrooms "where we can use the towels without feeling that we are wiping our hands on a Michelangelo and look at the walls without going into a pirouette". Bayeux Christmas Presents Early involves the alleged discovery of a strip of Bayeux tapestry in Bayeux, New Jersey, depicting William the Conqueror crossing the English Channel. Benchley complains that the figurehead on one of the pictured ships "would indicate that it is going in the opposite direction from the rest of the fleet, or else that somebody made an awful blunder in assembling the ship." He's pretty sure that one of the men in the strip of tapestry is seasick, and this one might be William himself. Benchley decries the then current tendency to change the tunes of popular songs radically in performances (he's probably referring to jazz groups), the way Gilbert & Sullivan audiences laugh loudly at jokes that no longer are funny because they're so outdated, the pests who won't leave him alone while he is on ocean voyages, writers who go on at great length about nothing at all with particular credit to Robert Louis Stevenson, and people who are able to give the official Latin name for every wildflower in sight in the countryside. And yet I think a few fanzine pieces can compare favorably with these little masterpieces and wouldn't seem out of place if they had somehow slipped into this book under Benchley's name.

John McCabe's biography of George M. Cohan brought back very early musical memories. We had a good stack of sheet music of songs popular early in the century while I was growing up, saved by my father from the years when he was playing the piano and even heading a small dance orchestra. I picked out the vocal lines from these on the little toy piano on which I learned to read the treble clef of printed music, although I was slightly handicapped by the fact that the only black keys were dabs of paint on the diatonic scale's white keys. Then when my tenth birthday came and my big present was a real, live piano, I soon managed to play the Cohan songs with both hands. It's a vivid illustration of time dilation that in those early 1930s, this sheet music seemed immensely ancient to me, dating as it did from twenty and even twenty-five years earlier, and references on a couple of songs to World War One seemed as much a part of ancient history as if it were the Punic War. Today, something that happened a quarter-century ago seems like the day before yesterday. In any event, I loved the Cohan songs, both for their lively melodies and brisk rhythms and for their clear lyrics about the good qualities of the American Flag and the semantic advantages of Mary as a girl's name. I wondered about this long-ago composer, utterly unaware of the fact that he was still active on Broadway as producer and actor and wouldn't write his last drama until 1941.

Fortunately, McCabe doesn't spoil any of my illusions about Cohan. His book debunks some of the revisionists, such as the vile canard which had been circulating about George M.'s birth date. Someone had dug out Cohan's baptismal certificate which gave a date other thanthe Fourth of July. But McCabe found enough evidence in diaries and other sources to prove that the Yankee Doodle Dandy really was born on that holiday, just as the song bragged, and someone had goofed in filling in the certificate. The biographer doesn't try to hide the obsessive, abrasive elements in Cohan's character, but interprets them convincingly as necessary components of his perfectionist impulse to get things done right. But I was surprised while reading the book by some of the uncharacteristic aspects of Cohan's dramatics. He seems to have pioneered in piercing the invisible wall between production and audience by putting references to the play in progress into the mouths of its

players. The book even equates himwith Pirandello to some extent for experimental departures from conventional play writing.

I wish some record company or other would gather together a good cast, hire an oldtimer in show business who could advise about authenticity, and produce a Cohan show or two complete with all music and enough dialog to make the course of events understandable. There must be qualities in Seven Keys to Baldpate, Little Johnny Jones, and others that caused them to outlast Broadway productions that are being revived today. But I realize there are two problems with such a venture. Patriotism is equated by today's media with nuclear power plants and Bibles in schools as vile barbarisms and Cohan was intensely in love with his country. There also seems to be some lingering resentment after all these years against him because of his fight against unionism in show business and his lifelong refusal to join up. The state of live drama today seems to prove that he was right in thinking strong unions would sooner or later be self-destructive.

One of the most curious revivals of long-forgotten musicians is the one involving Archduke Rudolph Johann Joseph Rainer. For well over a century, he came into the awareness of the modern public only through the fact that Beethoven's Archduke Trio was nicknamed for him and mentions in Beethoven biographies of his doomed attempts to help straighten out the composer's chronic financial messes. But in recent years, some of Archduke Rudolph's compositions have been recorded and now comes an excellent book by Susan Kagan with the rather lengthy title of Archduke Rudolph, Beethoven's Patron, Pupil and Friend. It brings to life a man who certainly didn't fit the current stereotype of nobility but was a generally good guy in every respect.

His father became emperor of the Austrian Empire when Rudolph was only two years old. But Rudolph was the youngest of 16 children, leaving him with a slightly diminished chance of ever succeeding to the throne. He probably wouldn't have been happy if contagion had wiped out his 15 elder siblings and given him the job, anyway. He loved art, he was generous and eventually he embraced the church, becoming a cardinal archbishop. But he had one distinction that many aristocrats would have loved to possess: he was probably Beethoven's favorite pupil. The great composer was fond of the young man, gave him lessons in theory and harmony, and assisted his composing efforts. The archduke had a habit that we can be grateful for today, a mania for saving just about everything. So his creative music efforts exist and musicologists can figure out the places where Beethoven wrote corrections into them and the ways in which the teacher improved his pupil's compositions by altering harmony or melody or accompaniment. (So, if you wanted recordings of every note Beethoven wrote, you'd need to have many of the Archduke's compositions for the sake of those changes.)

This book is a very thorough retelling of the archduke's life, the involvement of Beethoven in his studies, and the compositions. I've heard none of the records that make them available to the public for the first time since the first half of the 19th century, but I judge from the extensive musical excerpts in this book that they're worth a hearing or two but not good enough to want to hear once a month for an entire lifetime. Above all, the book is a good supplement to the Beethoven notebooks for evidence of how the composer turned mediocre first thoughts into something outstanding in compositions.

Fanzine reviews had often told me about the Berserker series by Fred Saberhagen. Finally I've read some samples of this fiction in what I assume was the first of the books, entitled simply Berserker. I'm left wondering what all the excitement among readers was about and why the series was so successful that an endless series of additional stories on the same concept became successful.

The basic idea, automated devices created by vanished BEMs that fight humanity, strikes me as just another of the magic wand gimmicks that we usually associated with Star Trek and Star Wars. A writer of fairy tales uses the magic wand to accomplish anything with no necessity to explain how it works or why its very existence is logical. A berserker impresses me as just a larger than normal and lumpier magic wand. The more complicated the machine, the more danger there is of a breakdown, but inthis book at least Saberhagen doesn't explain how these killing machines have kept going for many eons without anyone

on hand to fix a failed component. The berserkers' ability to search out human life and evidence of human facilities strikes me as approximately as realistic as Star Trek's device that can translate with the very first words into English any unknown language. There apparently isn't even any self-destructive device in each berserker which the vanished builders would almost certainly have put there to prevent study of the devices when they become unable to function. The stories reek of violence as badly as the things you see whenyou runs through all the channels via your television remote. I find nothing in the writing superior to the Tom Swift tradition.

I thought about another aspect of modern television when I read We Will Always Live in Beverly Hills, by Ned Wynn, who is Ed's grandson and Keenan's son. It's hate, the same sort of hate that pours out of all the talk and call in shows, is promoted by ESPN and Fox for their sports programming, that newscasters betray when they mentionconservatives and office-holders, that forms the basis for almost all made-for-TV movies. Ned Wynn tried to make his book humorous but it's hard to remember that fact when he keeps to such a straight and steady course of hatred toward those two immediate parentalancestors, himself, everyone in Hollywood with any real authority or ability, and any sort of conduct that might have caused him to realize his own potential in life.

Fortunately, I liked some things in the book for reasons that Ned wouldn't approve. For instance, he includes quotes from several of Ed's Texaco Fire Chief radio programs of the 1930s to demonstrate how awful his grandfather's material was. But I've wished for a long, long time that I could find recordings of that particular series which I loved so much when I was growing up, and having parts of scripts from it is better than nothing. Some of the things he says about Keenan confirm what my old co-editor on Spaceways used to tell me when we corresponded, the summer when Keenan did stock productions in Skowhegan, Maine, where Jim Avery lived. There are lots of good photographs, too, which contain so many real-looking smiles that I doubt everyone Ned knew could have been as miserable all the time as he tries to convince his readers.

At the end of the book, which has a 1990 copyright, Ned is described as having found happiness and calmed down from his wild youth. I hope so, but I wonder why he or his ghost or the two of them were so intent in getting a reference to drinking or drugs on almost every page of the book, a barely greater frequency than the number of references to fornications. I get the impression that his mind wasn't focused on more constructive things in 1990, after all. Of course, the book is careful to describe nasty things almost exclusively on individuals who are dead and unable to contradict or hire an attorney, the usual patternfor the writers today who want to celebrate the useless people and useless things at the expense of those who have accomplished and behaved themselves.

Now there isn't enough room to say much about a recent surprise. It's a Thornton Wilder novel I hadn't ever heardof, Heaven's My Destination. Wilder was among the prolific, good novelists of mid-century like McKinley Kantor, Robert Nathan and James Hilton, who are remembered today mainly because Hollywood turned one or more of their works into first-rate movies or, in Wilder's case, a play like Our Town managed to retain its popularity for community theater and school drama club productions. Heaven's My Destination is a slightly short novelabout an odd young man who somehow winds up in jail repeatedly for eccentric behavior, speaks the truth even whenit would be better to keep his mouth shut, and seems to have been created by Wilder from a bit of doggerel which kids often scribbled in their school books in the old days. I think it's a funny book and a touching,one, too. And my failure to have encountered it previously is obviously my fault, because this copy contains the information that it's part of the 18th edition. I'll never know the life and experiences of this copy, a shame because the fly leaf is tantalizing. Its inscription says the book is from Frank Schuler, and there was a Hagerstown resident of that name in my youth, to Otis Rhodes with wishes for a pleasant journey, and at the bottom is written in a different penmanship Kobe, Japan, April 19, 1935. That was the year of publication. Did it travel across the Pacific and back? Where has it been for the past 60 years and how did it end up in the bargain bin at Hagerstown's largest secondhand book store, marked down from $4.00 to95¢? There's no jacket, but the binding and pages are in the best of condition so someone must have liked the book as much as I do and then died, more's the pity. And where will go next?