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60¢ per issue $2 per year.

RQ MISCELLANY

"What Happened at Clontarf?"

William Tiner's cover depicts St. Patrick's Day at Santa Monica Beach, with the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society (LASFS) and the Society for Creative Anachronisms restaging the Norse vs. Brian Boru title fight. The dinosaur and burning ship are purely fanciful (as is the relation between Patrick and King Brian), but the three Vikings can be identified as LASFS members, Paul Turner, Dave Hulan, and Bruce Pelz. Incidentally, Tiner's sketch on p.77 is derived from his new comic strip, "Harry Saurus, Private Detective."

"Oop, I never open momouth but I pack me food in it..."

Last issue I committed the unbelievable blunder of announcing March '71 as date for Eurocon I, the s-f convention at Trieste. Of course, this is one year too early--and so I've been informed, via deletion of my name from the first Progress Report, of my own non-existence. Nonetheless, dilettanti and cognoscenti are urged to register by sending $4 and $7, respectively (for supporting or attending memberships) to Eurocon I, c/o either Box 40 University Station, Regina, Canada or CCSF, casella postale 423--30100 Venezia, Italy. This should be done early so that I can spend that much less time confined in Limbo.

Blunder #2 was my misnumbering of Jim Harmon's address, which should have been: Nostalgia Illustrated, Box 38612, Hollywood, California 90038. (Pre-publication price is still $9 per year.) Fortunately, mail still arrived. As Mr. Harmon explained to me, "Apparently anything with a weird title on it, the clerks in that post office shove into my box."

"Achdung! Pozor! Attenshune!"

Those roused by Stephen Scobie's Einstein Intersection article should consult its Nova homologue, by Sandra Miesel, in the current Extrapolation (Box 3186 Wooster College, Wooster, OH 44691; $3/year). Tom Clareson's was consistently the best "heavy" in the U.S. Midwest; with its new "slick" format (and Mrs. Miesel as regular contributor) it becomes, as Ring Magazine would say, this year's Logical Contender.

Also recommended are these news magazines:

Check Point (Peter Roberts, The Hawthorns, Keele, Shafts., UK; 5 issues/ 20 new pence--or 8/$1 from U.S. agent, Arnie Katz, address listed below),

Focal Point (Arnie Katz, 59 Livingston, Apt 6B, Brooklyn, New York 11201; 6/$1),

Sanders N (Dave Nee, 208 Putnam Hall, 2650 Durant, Berkeley, California 94720; 5/$1).

Just as radiation from either focus of an ellipse converges at the other, so literary currents between old and new worlds necessarily emerge from either American or British focal (or check) points. Thus whoever sends Arnie Katz $2--and specifies both publications--can smell the wind from either direction. Berkeleians (or Newtonians) amongst us should also send a dollar to David Nee, who easily qualifies (to use baseball terminology) as Rookie of the Year.

(cont. on p.78)

CLICHÉS IN THE OLD SUPER-SCIENCE STORY

by

Leland Sapiro

#1 INTRODUCTION

At the start, the editor of Amazing Stories assigned to his magazine a simple didactic role: to arouse the scientific curiosity of its readers and so prompt them to become scientists themselves. In this way, said Hugo Gernsback, science-fiction "contributes something to progress that probably no other kind of literature does."[1]

Several years later, another publisher realized the greater sales value of such a magazine intended primarily to entertain, so in 1930 the Clayton Magazine Company issued[2] the first of its Astounding Stories of Super-Science. "This new periodical," wrote editor Harry Bates, "will anticipate the super-science achievements of To-morrow," yet its stories "will not only be accurate in their science but will be vividly, dramatically and thrillingly told."[3]

Vividness (but not the type anticipated) was indeed to be present; thrill and drama we can evaluate by classifying Bates's magazine in terms of Theme and Episode.

#2 ABOMINATIONS, HUMAN AND OTHERWISE

A recurring theme was the Invasion, designed to enslave or exterminate all terrestrial human beings. The invaders themselves, usually monstrosities of some kind, were described by suitable negative-connotive terms. Certain of these were supposed to produce instant dislike, e.g., "sinister," "fiendish," and--worst of all--"inhuman," while others were supposed to induce physical revulsion. In this category were such general words as "loathsome" and "disgusting" plus those that designated more specific traits, e.g., mode of locomotion--"slithering" or "crawling"--unpleasant odour--"fetid" or "nauseous"--or skin texture--"slimy" or "viscid."

In each instance, Man was assumed to be the standard of physical beauty, from which any deviation was reason for fear and detestation.

A representative invasion story was Harl Vincent's "Vagabonds of Space" (Nov. 1930), in which the inhabitants of Ganymede plan to subjugate the Solar System. The Ganymedeans possess both simian and canine characteristics.

> A group of squat, sullen Llotta awaited them...Close-set, beady eyes; unbelievable flat features of chalky whiteness; chunky bowed legs, bare and hairy; long arms with dangling paws--these were the outstanding characteristics of the Llotta. (260)

In particular, Rapaju, the Ganymedean naval commandant,"looked the incarnation of all that was evil and vile, a monster among monsters" (260).

However it was not mandatory that the invaders be extra-terrestrial. Thus Victor Rousseau's "The Beetle Horde" (Jan. 1930) described an army of giant insects released by a scientist at the South Pole, while his "The Wall of Death" (Nov. 1930) told of malevolent protoplasm, also from the Antarctic:

> The Argentine Government had sent a force of twenty thousand men against them, armed with cannon, machine-guns ...and the new death-ray. And in the night...it had been overwhelmed and eaten.
>
> But the Argentine expedition had done worse than it at first dreamed of. It had given the monsters a taste for human flesh. And then it had been discovered that by feeding these devils human flesh, they could be rendered torpid, and their advance stayed...
>
> At first criminals had been supplied them, then natives, then Chinese...a frenzy of fear had taken...the whole world. (153)

Here, then, is a well-ordered Hierarchy of Being, starting with protoplasm, ascending through criminals, then "natives," then Chinese, and culminating, presumably, in the white American. This classification was carried a step further by Nat Schachner and A.L. Zagat, who explain that in a future slave battalion,

> Every language of Earth was there save English. The Anglo-Saxons had chosen tortured death rather than submission to the commands of their conquerers.
>
> ("The Death Cloud," May 1931, p. 268)

But in such cases minority groups simply lacked qualities of their betters; in others, e.g., Harl Vincent's "Terrors Unseen" (March 1931) they demonstrated their inferiority in positive fashion.

> He had seen something at the window: a face pressed against the pane and contorted with unutterable malice. Then it was gone.
>
> "Who is he?" Eddie asked shortly...
>
> "Only Carlos--Carlos Savarino," said Shelton, carelessly. "A Chilean, I think. He worked for me for two months during the summer and I fired him for getting fresh with Lina. Good mechanic but dumb as an ox. Had to tell him every little detail when he was doing something in the shop..."
>
> The girl looked at Eddie squarely now. She was flushing hotly. "And I horsewhipped him," she added.
>
> "Yes," Shelton laughed; "it was rich. He sneaked away like a whipped puppy, and this is the first time we've seen him since." (366)

Such stories the editor justified in this way:

> After all, for story purposes it is more effective to make the villain a foreigner than an American. Every large non-English-speaking country furnishes its quota of objectionable characters...Somebody must be unsocial and obstructing. (January 1932, p. 139)

Of course,[4] these sentiments were present in other contemporary journals, though Astounding's reader, unlike that of various pulp magazines or the Saturday Evening Post, could inflate his self-esteem by viewing an entire universe of inferior creatures --a universe that included the abominations from other planets in addition to those on his very own.

But there still remains the evil physicist,[5] whose nationality usually was not specified.

Science-fiction writers of the late Twenties often were obsessed with the scientist's guilt[6] in acquiring knowledge not intended for men to possess. But in the early Thirties the Gernsback experimental-science story was partially displaced by the Clayton science-adventure story--and correspondingly, the "impious scientist" (to use Richard Witter's phrase) was replaced by the well-known "mad scientist."

> "Haven't you guessed the reasons for my interest in your engines of destruction? I came down the centuries....so that I might come back with power.... to wipe out the fools who have made a mock of me.....I will be what many men have tried to be ....master of the world! Absolute, unquestioned supreme master!"
>
> He paused, his eyes glaring into mine -- I knew from the light that shone behind those long, narrow slits that I was dealing with a madman.[7]

We ask: what was presupposed, first, by the scientist's accomplishments and, secondly, by his mental derangement?

In Bates's magazine it was assumed that coordinated programs of scientific research--and the manufacture of devices to embody the results--could be accomplished by an individual or a small group of individuals. Thus in Victor Rousseau's "The Invisible Death" (October 1930) the evil scientists are

> ...madmen who had escaped from somewhere, obtained possession of scientific secrets, and banded themselves together to overcome the world. (57)

Today, after the Manhattan Project--where hundreds of people sometimes were required to manufacture a minor subassemblage--the concept of solitary individuals making a fission bomb or any "secret weapon" appears ludicrous.

Arthur Cox, in a letter, summarized it this way:

> The existence of such men as Thomas Alva Edison and Albert Einstein gave some plausibility to notions of "Master Scientists" and "mad scientists"--that is, to the idea that a solitary inventor or thinker might be, because of his knowledge and intellectual ability, a person of considerable power, benign or sinister. Einstein obviously sat for such good scientists as Dr. Huer (who once had a large crop of hair, which later turned out to be a wig), Dr. Wonmug ("Ein Stein" being German for "one mug") and Dr. Herzog (in "The Triggered Dimension" by Harry Bates).
>
> The mad scientist was, of course, merely an adaptation of this potent figure to the needs of certain naive types of pulp fiction. He gradually disappeared from the mainstream of science fiction as it became more sophisticated and as the bureaucratized scientific projects of the war years, and after, crowded the individual genius out of our imaginations.

We note in passing that even if the scientist were not insane, his abnormally large head (for his supposedly big brain) naturally led to other bodily distortions by what was conceived as dramatic contrast: the power of scientific inventions versus the physical impotence of the inventor himself. For example, the scientist in L.A. Eshbach's "The Gray Plague" (Nov.1930) was a twisted monstrosity of a man" (215), while D.W. Hall's Professor Singe was

> ...a peculiar gnome-like figure...with hunched, twisted back and huge over-heavy head. From that ridiculous head had come the torpedoes arrayed before him.[8]

But concerning the mad scientist there is still the question: why was such insanity attributed only to the scientific maldoer?

I'd conjecture that in his normal state the scientist as then conceived lacked some of the criminal's main prerequisites. The habitual felon is concerned with sensual rather than intellectual pleasures. When Malcolm is trying to convince Macduff of his own wickedness, he says:

> ....there's no bottom, none,
> In my voluptuousness; your wives, your daughters,
> Your matrons, and your maids, could not fill up
> The cistern of my lust, and my desire
> All continent impediments would o'erbear,
> That did oppose my will...

Other examples of such behavior are seen elsewhere:

> Rapaju talked. He told of the armament of his vessels, painting vivid pictures of the destruction to be wrought in the cities of Terra, of Mars and Venus. His great hairy paws clutched at imaginary riches when he spoke glowingly of the plundering to follow. He spoke of the women of the inner planets and Carr half rose from his seat when he observed the lecherous glitter in his beady eyes. Ora! Great God, was she safe here? (Harl Vincent, op. cit., 261)

Obviously, the "cold, calculating young man of science"[9] would not be guilty of such conduct.

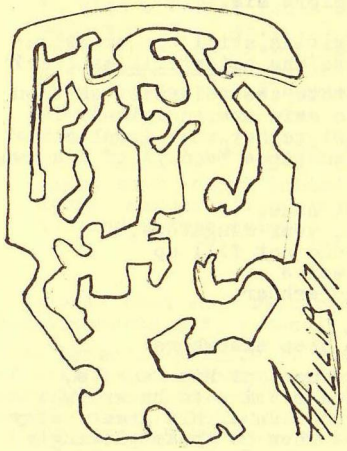
Even if the scientist did plan maliciously he would have been physically unable to carry out his designs, for he was reputed to be weak and sickly. This is why Commander John Hanson, after landing on Sewell Peaslee Wright's "Ghost World" (April 1931), expresses his gratitude at not being a "white-skinned, stoop-shouldered laboratory man" (126).

The scientist's continued indoor confinement furnishes an explanation for his debility. In the words of Commander (now Captain) Hanson,

> I have never seen a laboratory man who could stand the strain of prolonger physical exertion. Bending over test-tubes and meters is no life for a man. 10

Of course, these disadvantages would not stop the scientist from constructing death-dealing apparatus within the laboratory, but they do prevent nefarious activities of a more virile kind.

Hence the scientist was conceived as an object for ridicule: physically inept, emotionally unadapted, and intellectually disorientated, he made an unacceptable villain unless he first suffered a psychic derangement that altered his entire personality.



#3 THE EARTHMAN'S BURDEN

So far, the only theme has been Catastrophe, natural in the case of Victor Rousseau's man-eating protoplasm or artificial when caused by extra-terrestrial invaders or mad scientists from our own planet. A second theme is Exploration, from which we first note a minor sub-field, designated as Colonization and Law Enforcement. This type of story concerns either the problems encountered by the Earth Man (always synonymous with the White Man) in bringing the products of his civilization to other planets -- in opposition to recalcitrant natives who fail to understand these benefits -- or the activities of space-pirates, intent on preventing such commerce from ever getting started.

Thus R.F. Starzl's "The Earthman's Burden" (June 1931) described how trouble arose at the Mercurian Trading Concession. An agitator from Pluto has pointed out to the native Frog-men that by threatening to whthold their "translucene"--to them a worthless sap, but to the Terrestrials a priceless cancer cure --they can seize rulership of Earth. He offers to aid them in governing the planet:

> "My brothers will abide with ye as your guests--shall see that ye receive a fair reward for the white sap; and I will convey your commands to the Lords of the Green star." (382)

The Old Wise One, a Mercurian tribal leader, protests:

> "My people, I like this not! The Lords of the Green Star have dealt with us fairly...They have brought us the things we wanted" -- he touched his spear and a few gaudy ornaments on his otherwise naked body-- "in exchange for the worthless white sap of our trees..." (382)

In response to this entirely laudable speech the Lord of the Outer Orbit strangles the Old Wise One and later tries to eliminate the Green Star's trading representative in the same way. The Plutonian finally is apprehended, and shipped to Earth for trial and execution.

Another story by Mr. Starzl, "In the Orbit of Saturn" (Oct. 1931), concerns the "Solar Scourge," the buccanneer currently preying upon the space lanes, and the counter-efforts of the Interplanetary Flying Police, the organization that had "carried the law of white men to the outermost orbit of the solar system."

Take up the White Man's Burden--
Send forth the best ye breed--
Go bind your sons to exile
To serve your captives' need;
To wait in heavy harness
On fluttered folk and wild--
Your new-caught sullen peoples,
Half devil and half child

Take up the White Man's Burden--
In patience to abide
To veil the threat of terror
And check the show of pride;
By open speech and simple,
An hundred times made plain
To seek another's profit,
And work another's gain.

It was not realized by any of the Clayton writers that this White Man's Burden (in one reader's phrase, "usually loot") might contain benefits intended for himself.

(to be continued)

FOOTNOTES

1) Amazing Stories, Oct. 1926, p.579.

2) The first issue was dated January 1930 and the last, March 1933. In October 1933 publication was resumed by Street & Smith, whose magazine is discussed in "The Mystic Renaissance," RQ II, 75-88, 156-170, 270-283.

3) Astounding Stories, January 1930, p. 7. Unless specified otherwise, all quotations are from this magazine.

4) See Bernard Berelson and Patricia J. Salter, "Majority and Minority Americans: An Analysis of Magazine Fiction," The Public Opinion Quarterly, X (Summer 1946), 2, pp. 168-196.

5) An exception was Ivan Saranoff, the evil scientist in Capt. S.P. Meek's "When Caverns Yawned" (May 1931) and later stories in that series.

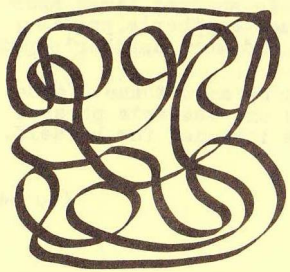
6) See "The Faustus Tradition in the Early Science-Fiction Story," RQ I, 3-18, 43-57, 118-125.

7) S.P. Wright, "The Man from 2071," June 1931, p. 303. Cf. Victor Rousseau, "The Atom Smasher," May 1930; Sophie W. Ellis, "Slaves of the Dust," Dec. 1930; Arthur J. Burks, "Manape the Mighty," May 1931; Jason Kirby, "The Floating Island of Madness," Jan. 1933.

8) "Werewolves of War," Feb. 1931. Cf. Jerome Siegel's letter in the Ausust 1931 issue (p.274):"A question Mr. Cummings: shades of Polter and Tugh!--why must you always have a deformed character in your stories? Do they appeal to your dramatic sense?"

9) Robert H. Leitfred, "Prisoners on the Electron," Oct. 1930, p. 81. In this instance the scientist was jolted from his normal behavior by the half-naked body of his fiance (just rescued from a gorilla), but such lapses generally required shocks of greater magnitude.

10) "The Man from 2071," p.305. By the same argument, bending over a typewriter is no life for a man; but S.P. Wright, a devotee of the Far North, could say he also enjoyed more virile activities--an excuse denied to Clayton's more sedentary writers.



COMPASS

Lost space curves
under a perimeter of numbers
etched in glass.
The dial clicks, a blur follows,
and feet forget their footprints in the snow.

Consequently, trees
tire of being trees,
become a wall,
and leaves decide to close the holes
where silence threw its fist in.

It is the time infinity wears a hat.
It is the hour always
shrinks to hardly ever;
it is the moment seconds fill a crystal cave
and there's only room for a needle
to lay balanced
on its back.

But the needle spins like a mad propeller
that keeps on turning
after the engine stops.
At a certain speed
it seems to be going
in the opposite direction.

Now it fans between closing walls:
The tired needle, fanning,
like a western pendulum
in an eastern clock.
Gravity shakes the head
within minutes of north,
the steel back shivers,
and feet freeze in the south.

-- R. W. Stedingh

DIFFERENT MAZES:

Mythology in Samuel R. Delaney's "The Einstein Intersection"

by

Stephen Scobie

(University of Alberta)

Samuel R. Delany's The Einstein Intersection is a very rich and complex novel, packing an incredible number of themes and ideas into its 138 pages.[1] Indeed, it might be claimed that there is too much here: that references and analogies are thrown off almost casually, for the fun of it, without the possibility of full development. This is true to some extent, though I find the book on the whole more satisfying and coherent than its successor, Nova. The purpose of this article is to show that there is a great degree of coherence in The Einstein Intersection's vast range of allusions and concepts, and that this coherence can best be seen by approaching the book in terms of Delany's own statement: "The central subject of the book is myth" (71).

"Myth," however, is not a simple or a unified concept. To start with, we may distinguish between (at least) three distinct levels of myth which are present. Firstly, there is what might be called "fictional myth," mainly Greek, the central references being to Orpheus, Theseus and the maze, and Pan. This is a mythology to which we do not give any literal belief, though we do admit that it carries a kind of "truth," in anthropological, social, or psychological terms. (It has been proposed, to give a fairly extreme example, that the scarlet thread of Ariadne--worn in the novel by Friza (8) --represents the umbilical cord by which the baby finds its way out of the labyrinth of the human intestines.) Whatever historical basis characters such as Orpheus may once have had is long lost; and the kind of "willing suspension of disbelief" which we grant them is most similar to that which we grant fully fictional characters.

Secondly, there is "religious myth." This is a mythology that is still alive as a religious faith: while few people today believe in Apollo, a great many do believe in Jesus Christ. Whereas historical existence has never been claimed for Apollo, it has been for Jesus; but there is no historical proof of such central tenets of the faith as the Resurrection. That is a matter of faith, not factual proof. Thus the references to Green-Eye as Christ--the Temptation (92-4); Palm Sunday (110); the Crucifixion (133-136); also the amusing side-reference to Nativia and Lo Angel (43)--are to a level of myth quite distinct from the Orpheus story. Occupying an ambivalent position between the two are the references, which we shall discuss later, to the Grail legend, the Waste Land and the Fisher King (87, 95, 136).

Thirdly, there is "historical myth," the main references being Billy the Kid, Jean Harlow, and Ringo Starr. In these cases, we have fairly reliable historical information on what these people actually were: but this has not prevented the formation, around each, of a mythical image quite distinct from so-called "reality." This image-making is apparent, among other ways, in the fact that none of the three is known to us by his or her "real" name. Kent Ladd Steckmesser, in The Western Hero in History and Legend (University of Oklahoma Press, 1965), gives a fascinating account of the changes that Billy the Kid's image has undergone through the years, starting with the melodramatic depiction of him as a very paragon of evil, then moving towards a view of him as a misunderstood, mixed-up kid, until at last he becomes a hero (as in one of the most delightfully absurd films I have ever seen, Billy the Kid vs. Dracula, where Billy is a clean-cut all-American boy, fighting vampires in the Old West). These "historical myths" are given a further twist by their literary developments, the most relevant of which is Michael McClure's linking of Billy the Kid and Jean Harlow in The Beard (Grove Press, 1967). Although, in The Einstein Intersection, Kid Death and the Dove never actually meet, the central refrain of McClure's play--"Before you can pry any secrets from me, you must first find the real me! Which one will you pursue?"--has a great deal of relevance to Lobey's search for Friza, and his inability to find the right maze.

Beyond these three levels of mythology, and such minor references to comic-book and movie serial mythology as "Spiderman" and the "cliffhanger" scene, there is one basic over-riding level. The characters of the book are not human; they are another race who have assumed the patterns of the human body and soul, and--as one of my students most concisely put it--they have made myths out of us. To them, the whole human race is mythological, we are gods; and this explains their desire to emulate us, to work their way through our old myths and mazes: a task for which, Phaedra says, "You're basically not equipped" (35). They are not in control of this attempt at emulation (far less succeeding); nor is it at all clear what success might in fact entail. The mythological belief is that "the humans had gone somewhere else, to no world in this continuum" (117). This may be a myth of the journey to Avalon or the Isles of the Blessed, representing a great leap in human evolution; or it may be a euphemistic mythical disguise of the fact that humanity obliterated itself in a nuclear war. The characters are striving to attain the myth of Paradise; but for all they know they could be heading straight for Armageddon.

At any rate, the basic characteristic of their society is change; its controlling myth is metamorphosis. Delany's major image for this is genetic mutation, but it is apparent also in the language and structure of the book. The language is replete with metaphor, especially synaesthetic metaphor, constantly changing one sense experience into another, describing sound in terms of sight, or touch, etc. (See, for instance, Lobey's account of the kinds of sound his blade produces, in the novel's very first paragraph.) In terms of structure, the changes become greater, and occur faster, as the book progresses from a fairly stable, slow-paced beginning, to a wild, hectically-paced ending. The culminating image of change and metamorphosis is the Dove's ability to transform herself into any desired sexual image--a kind of ironic reversal of the metamorphoses of the many Greek maidens who used it as a rather primitive and drastic form of contraception, by turning into trees, bushes, reeds, etc. The movement of the book as a whole also reflects Lobey's journey from the idyllic country to the corrupt city, which is itself a version of the age-old Pastoral myth.

In the midst of so much change, one naturally looks for an element of stability, something that does not change. Within the book, this thing that stays the same is, paradoxically, "difference." "Difference" and "different" are the key words of the book; they recur on almost every page. All the major characters are "different," and Spider ultimately declares that the world itself is "different." So much so, that the reader is tempted to ask: if everybody is "different," doesn't this mean that they're all the same?

In a sense they are. "Difference" has many and various manifestations: it involves telepathy and telekinesis as well as creativity and the ability to kill. But these things, we are specifically told (116), are only attributes of "difference," not the essence. The essence is mythology. The "different" characters are those who have a mythological dimension to them. They are not only themselves. Behind Lobey stand the figures of Orpheus, Ringo, Pan, Theseus; behind Kid Death stand Pluto, Satan, Billy the Kid; behind Spider stand Minos, Judas, Pat Garrett; behind the Dove stand Helen of Troy, Jean Harlow; behind Green-Eye stands Christ. What all these figures represent are recurring patterns in human experience, archetypes, basic configurations that repeat themselves in generation after generation. They stay the same. Perhaps the idea of recurring patterns in exemplary narrative form will serve, for the moment, as a working definition of "myth."

All the patterns of The Einstein Intersection bear upon a particular complex of ideas and themes, concerning the creative or spiritual experience in its relation to death. Delany's work shows a recurring obsession with the destructive potentiality of a sudden out-flaring of creative energy, for which his central symbol (curiously absent from The Einstein Intersection itself) is a nova. This is the experience of the genius, the child prodigy, burnt out and killed at an early age: "Chatterton, Greenburg, Radiguet" (107); the list could be extended: Fergusson, Keats, Alain-Fournier...Delany? Death for Delany is not an old man with a white beard and a scythe: he is a Kid with a sixgun. Billy the Kid, so the legend goes, lived 21 years and killed 21 men.

Death is involved in creativity, as it is in any extreme state of the human consciousness. Walter F. Otto, writing on the myth and cult of Dionysus, states:

> Love and death have welcomed and clung to one another passionately from the beginning. This eternal bond of existence is...[why] people [always] have been aware that the dead and the powers of the underworld are present at life's central moments and festivities--that is to say, at birth and puberty...They know more about life than we do. At its great moments of change they looked death in the eye--because it is really there. At every type of birth, life is shaken...not by sickness [or] some external menace but by its most important function. It is just in this circumstance that its association with death becomes clearest. The people who celebrate festivals like this are not just thinking of dangers. They firmly believe that the presence of the nether world is absolutely indispensable to the great miracle which takes place at birth. Is that an empty illusion? Does not each one of us have the face of one who has died? Does not each one live the death of those who came before him? Does he not reproduce their features, their movements, their thoughts and emotions?...This is...why the divinities of birth and fertility are so close to the divinities of death. Indeed, this is...why they often merge completely. (Dionysus: Myth and Cult, Indiana University Press, 1965; 137-138)

This is the experience of Orpheus: he plumbs the mysteries of death, he descends into hell, he recovers what is lost, he bears the face of one who has died. The Dove tells Lobey that he is "close to an old place called Hell...You can enter it through death or song. You may need some help to find your way out"(129). Other men also, in the world of myth, have descended into hell. Here the great heroes came: Odysseus, Aeneas; the poet, Dante; and here also the great religious figures, Christ who descended into hell, rising again on the third day, and all the mystics who went through their dark night of the soul. Poet, hero, prophet: all are inspired, all are "different."

And all share, to some extent, the dual nature of Dionysus, just as Lobey carries "a two edge knife that sings"(120). "Difference," like mythology, is morally neutral; it is continuously ambivalent, and in the last resort unknowable. Friza is the object of Lobey's quest, but he himself admits that "If I reach Friza, I don't know what I'll have, even if I get her" (122). Spider exists between two images: that of the guide and counsellor (Virgil to Lobey's Dante), and that of the traitor.(Pat Garrett, in the earliest accounts, was regarded as a great hero, maintainer of law and order, savior of civilisation, etc.) The Dove exists only in her ability to transform herself, literally, into the image of what each man desires; hermaphrodite, she/he is illusion made real, reality made illusion, continuous metamorphosis. Green-Eye is Christ with the face of a Cyclops; he may never come down from his cross.

(To digress for a paragraph: Green-Eye's monocularity may be associated with the Cyclops, who, like Lobey, was a herdsman; but it is also one of an admittedly tenuous series of connexions with Norse mythology. In speculating on the origins of the names Delany gives his characters, I noticed a resemblance between "Friza" and "Freyja," the Norse fertility goddess. Freyja's Greek counterpart would perhaps be Persephone, who, like Eurydice, is forcibly seized by the king of the underworld. From Freyja, I proceeded to an even more doubtful association of "Lobey" with "Loki." Loki is a highly ambivalent but ultimately evil trickster god; he is, however, responsible for the death of Balder, the Norse god most closely associated eith Christ. But it is not Balder whom Green-Eye most resembles; it is Odin, the god of war and death, who, like Green-Eye, has only one eye and who, like Green-Eye, was hanged from a tree and stabbed while hanging. Both these acts--the hanging and the loss of the eye-- were performed by Odin voluntarily, in order to gain wisdom and hidden knowledge, the type of secret mystery to which the Orphic religion was also dedicated.)

At the centre of all these configurations Lobey and Kid Death confront each other. But even here the contrast is not complete. The strange attractiveness of absolute evil that has transformed such characters as Milton's Satan clings also to Kid Death. Delany etches unforgettably on the reader's mind the flamboyant image of the naked boy (usually a figure of Cupid) with red hair, gills, and shark's teeth. The associations with the sea derive, at least in part, from Lautreamont's Maldoror (quoted on p.12), in which the hero acclaims the sea as "the cradle of thoughtless cruelty" and in one scene "watches shipwrecked sailors torn to pieces by sharks and then mates with the most dreadful shark of all."[2] (Death by water could also derive from T.S. Eliot's The Waste Land, which also provides a one-eyed man, and a Grail legend, to be discussed shortly.) The whole movement of the novel is towards the sea, and the Kid achieves one moment of pure and beautiful poetry when he says of Green-Eye's death, "I cried beneath the sea where you can't see tears"(138). But of course Kid Death is an artist too: his forms are the Western, cliff-hangers, and torture (89). He also has the artist's gift of vicarious experience: he can see through other people's eyes. But he lacks the attributes of creativity and order; like an irresponsible author he kills his characters, he closes their eyes.

Lobey is an artist, but it would be a mistake to regard him as an unambiguous figure. Le Dorik says of him that he is "too self-centred" (50), and this is shown in all sorts of ways--such as the very simple one that Lobey never asks people if they want to hear him play, he just assumes that they will listen to him. In part, this is the necessary egoism of any artist: but it blinds Lobey to certain essentials. Thus, he obsessively pursues his own quest, but always ends up in the wrong maze; meanwhile the true centre, Green-Eye, passes by him, ignored until too late. (See especially the exchange with Spider on p.109.) Although the basic mythological associations for Lobey are Orpheus and Theseus, the description of his wide, thick-skinned lower limbs, together with his music and his occupation as a goatherd, all combine to suggest also the figure of Pan, who, like Dionysus, touches on the frightening depths of human consciousness, inspiring that deep fear to which he gave his name, the primitive experience of chaos: panic. The ambivalence of Lobey's character and art centres on his machete, the weapon that creates music. It is first described as having a "hollow, holey cylinder"(5): the obvious extension is "holy," but the holes also fill with blood. And the blade's ultimate victim is not Kid Death, but Green-Eye. The ambivalence is continued in such phrases as "axe," slang for guitar, and repeated references to Spider's whip as "singing"; the motif is pursued even further in Nova.

The creative experience is always potentially destructive, involving the experience of death, the extinction of personality. Lobey meets a crisis in his own knowledge of himself and his art when he first discovers the extent to which his music is derived from other people through his ability to pick up tunes from other minds. The artist must value above all else the sense of his own personality as creatively unique: for this to be obliterated means death. Once Lobey has solved this problem, he is able to accept the fact of his "difference" and put it to good use, as in the "linear, arthropod music" he plays for the appreciative fly (86). He finds this solution by stating that the melody with which he mourned Friza was his (67): that is, he defines his own artistic identity by reference to his experience of loss, just as Orpheus is defined to all succeeding generations as the man who descended to death. But Lobey, like Orpheus, is a two-time loser: he learns to live in search of Friza more meaningfully than he perhaps could live having found her. With the (usual, necessary, sublime) egoism of the artist, he puts his art first, modifying even Green-Eye's formulation, "There is no death, only love" into "There is no death, only music" (80,86).

But there is death, and facing Green-Eye hanging on his tree, Lobey finds his music inadequate; instead, he uses his blade to kill. This blow is not simply that of the Roman soldier who thrust his lance into Christ's side, for Delany is careful to specify that Lobey "plunged the point in his thigh" (136, my italics), which is the normal euphemistic phrase for the castration of the Fisher King. We have already noted the possibility of Kid Death's "Death by Water" association with Eliot; certainly, there is what seems an obvious set of references to The Waste Land in the whole scene set in "the broken land" (87) at the climax of which thunder intervenes (95). The importance of these references is that they underline the whole theme of resurrection. The land ruled by the Fisher King becomes infertile (an image that fits right in with the whole idea of genetic mutation which obsesses this fictional society) until he is restored and healed by the Quester, who is, in some versions, also the deliverer of the original wound. That is, Lobey also has the power to return to life those whom he himself has slain. He has already, in effect, resurrected himself (95, 141); he now has the power to restore Green-Eye. And Green-Eye, in turn, has the power to restore Friza. It is, therefore, Lobey's deliberate choice not to do these things. Orpheus also chose to look back, but his choice was final. Lobey's isn't; he can wait.

This divergence is important. We have offered, as a rough definition of myth, recurring and unchanging patterns of basic human experience, realised in exemplary narrative form. This now has to be modified.

Lobey, confronted with Spider's demands to define mythology, comes to the conclusion that "It's fixed!...You're trying to tell me that these stories tell us just what is going to happen...This is all schematic for a reality I can't change." But Spider rejects this view: "Lobey, everything changes. The labyrinth today does not follow the same path it did at Knossos fifty thousand years ago. You may be Orpheus; you may be someone else, who dares death and succeeds. Green-Eye may go to the tree this evening, hang there, rot, and never come down. The world is not the same. That's what I've been trying to tell you. It's different" (119).

We must, however, be careful to recognise the limits of this modification: for it is a modification, not a negation. It insists that the individual experience is still individual; that, for instance, while Lobey-as-Theseus builds his own maze as he wanders through it (120), it is still a maze. Its pattern is not that of the Minoan Labyrinth at Knossos: but it is still the pattern of a maze, still the same bewilderment and ambiguity, the two-edged quality of Lobey's blade or of the double-headed axe, the Labrys, from which the Labyrinth takes its name. The myth of Theseus--or Orpheus, Christ, Billy the Kid--is still a valid way of articulating a continuing human response. "Myths," says Spider, "always lie in the most difficult places to ignore. They confound all family love and hate. You shy at them on entering or exiting any endeavour" (120). Spider goes on from this exposition of myth to talk to Lobey about his capacity for ordering things, which Kid Death lacks. Myth also has this capacity. Mark Schorer writes:

> Myths are the instruments by which we continually struggle to make our experience intelligible to ourselves. A myth is a large, controlling image that gives philosophical meaning to the facts of ordinary life; that is , has organizing value for experience. (William Blake: The Politics of Vision; New York: Random House, 1946; 25.)

Mythology is not produced by individuals, but by peoples. The artist's job is not to create his own mythology (possible exceptions are Blake and Tolkien), but to create his own individual response to the mythologies of his culture, in order to utilise their organising power. It is this which Lobey sets out to do at the end, taking his journey to the stars only because he is sure that, for him as for Spider, everything will be waiting when he gets back (142). It is this also which Delany sets out to do in the novel as a whole. His myths are the "large, controlling images" by which he organises his obsessions into a structure that has the dynamic energy and explosive power of a nova.

"Endings to be useful must be inconclusive" (125). The ending of The Einstein Intersection leaves everything still open to question. The individual response has still to be made: by Lobey, and by the reader. Mythology also is inconclusive: the pattern of the maze exists, but you must still create your own as you walk through it. Myths are images, not answers.

FOOTNOTES

1) All page references are to the Ace Books edition, New York, 1967.

2) W. Anderson, "Lautreamont," The Penguin Companion to Literature (London: Penguin Books, 1969), II, 463.

Postscript.

POEM FOR MUELS ARONLYDE

Poised, burning on starbrink --
a madness of wings, the sudden scald
of melting wax (from nowhere!) --

then, plunging, enters the star.
Turrets of light, astonished sentinels
burn out his brain; what remains

is language, power, twisted time;
Keats on his deathbed, as a new Hyperion
hurtles towards a sun gone nova.

And with some flute or weapon at your hip,
you start again; a universe splits
into whatever pattern you've arranged this time.

Psychological Symbolism in Three Early Tales of Invisibility

by

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In "Forbidden Planet" (1955), a science-fiction movie which, as Kingsley Amis indicates, drew on Shakespeare's The Tempest for its story idea, an invisible creature proves to be a manifestation of the subconscious of a computer-assisted Prospero. The post-Freudian tale suggests a new look at the three short stories that first conceived of such a creature during the last half of the nineteenth century. It is entirely possible that "What Was It? A Mystery" (1859), "The Damned Thing" (1893), and "The Horla" (1887) respectively by Fitz-James O'Brien, Ambrose Bierce, and Guy de Maupassant--all writers directly influenced by Edgar Allan Poe, the recognized progenitor of the psychological horror tale--may be read as disguised autobiographical accounts, specifically of the writers' artistic throes. To explore the possibilities of such an interpretation, it will be necessary to demonstrate each author's psychological association with his main character, analyze the symbolic role of the monster, and propose a subsequent meaning for the interplay between them.

If studied in the context of his few other pieces of short fiction, O'Brien does seem to project his own artistic consciousness into many of his characters. It is no great revelation to find that an author has drawn upon his own personal history for fictional details. But Francis Wolle in the only comprehensive study done on this writer explains the difficulty involved in recognizing these details. Referring specifically to O'Brien's use of a name from his own ancestry in "The Lost Room"(1858), Wolle says,

> Like the description of his own appearance in "From Hand to Mouth," like the details of his own pecuniary embarrassments in "The Man about Town," this is only another example of the use O'Brien makes of his personal background for literary material; and the difficulty for the investigator is to know how to separate such authentic details from the highly imaginative ones with which they are frequently mixed.[2]

The difficulty can be obviated, however, if those fantasies are seen as symbolic extensions of O'Brien's autobiographical realities. H. Bruce Franklin in his explication of "The Diamond Lens" (1858), the story on which O'Brien's fame almost solely rests, believes that at least in this case, "O'Brien is dealing as much with the world of the mind as with the world on the slide."[3]

The similar creative experiences of many of his characters seem to testify that the mind may actually be O'Brien's, and not simply in this story but in his others, including, in fact, "What Was It?". In "The Diamond Lens" the narrator, aided by the spirit of Leeuwenhoek, produces a perfect 240 carat lens for his instrument with which he discovers the fantastic beauty of a microscopic woman whom he calls Animula. The narrator in "The Lost Room" returns to his old room to find that some creative force has metamorphosed the common objects of his past--a piano, a dagger, a smoking cap, a lithograph, and snowshoes--into their more exotic counterparts--an organ, a yataghan, a casque, a real and animate scene, and Turkish slippers. William Blakelock in "The Golden Ingot" (1858) tries to achieve the alchemist's dream and create gold from the baser metals. Herr Hippe, the Wondersmith in the story of that name (1859), produces living wooden manikins in the Frankenstein tradition. And the narrator Harry Escott in "What Was It?" has not only written a story based on a ghost but also experiences the writer-like visions and fantasies under opium.

Some of these stories also reflect O'Brien's sensitive awareness of his own creative limitations (which are often glaringly considerable). As Wolle observes (op. cit.,44-5), O'Brien here illustrates what proved to be a characteristic habit of self-criticism as well as an inconsistency in style. Apparently recognizing that he never enjoyed fame or wealth from his writing, O'Brien in 1860 wrote "A Fallen Star," a poem in which Wolle says, "...he gracefully and sadly describes himself and much of his own fate" (ibid.,185). A representative verse echoes the self-degradation that marks the last half of the poem:

> He wildly flung his wit away
> In small retort, in verbal brawls,
> And played with words as jugglers play
> With hollow brazen balls.

This sense of failure appears most obviously in "The Diamond Lens." The narrator who loves Animula over and above the earthly beauty of someone like the famous dancer Signorina Caradolce must watch his microscopic fantasy shrivel and die with the evaporation of her water droplet. In "The Lost Room" the narrator, who no longer believes the transformed room now peopled with sensual and cannibalistic demons to be his, leaves the place and searches in vain to find it again. O'Brien here may be suggesting an irrevocable alienation from his past and even from his ultimately unreal creations based upon that past. The alchemist Blakelock dies upon discovering that his daughter Marian has deceived him to make him believe he had created gold. Herr Hippe is of course killed by his own demonic creations. This sense of failure in "What Was It?" seems to be bound up in the death of the invisible creature that profoundly affects the narrator, for afterwards he embarks on a long journey from which he says he may never return.

This allusion to a potentially disastrous escape assumes greater meaning when the invisible creature is understood to represent O'Brien's own failing muse. Escott says at one point that in discussing The Tempest, he and his friend Hammond prefer to linger over Arial and avoid Caliban. But the invisible creature embodies both. Much is made of the fact that the unseen being is real. Escott demonstrates to the sceptical onlookers that it makes an impression on his bed. It can obviously be felt and a plaster of Paris impression is even made of the chloroformed creature. The narrator speculates that it is a spirit, but spirits cannot die as this one does. This spirit-like reality, however, is only a deformed humanoid the weight and size of a fourteen-year-old boy.

An awkward allusion that the creature is anthropophagous--"It looked as if it was capable of feeding on human flesh" [4]--suggests that it, like the demons of "The Lost Room," needs to feed on reality to grow up. But it subsequently wastes away and dies prematurely as O'Brien apparently felt his own writing had. Perhaps O'Brien preferred an aerial ambrosia to the bittersweet reality in which his art was flawed and essentially ignored.

While the creature is clearly real, it remains a symbol of the fantastic in its invisibility. It is a kind of pure creation the way the Diamond Lens is. Hammond relates the possibility of a tangible but transparent being by means of an analogy to glass-making:

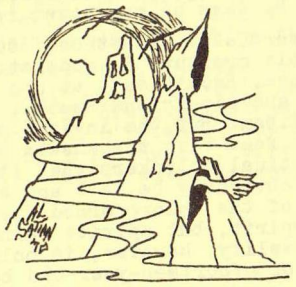
> "It is not theoretically impossible, mind you, to make a glass which shall not reflect a single ray of light,--a glass so pure and homogeneous in its atoms that the rays from the sun will pass through it as they do through the air, refracted but not reflected." (205)

Though "pure," however, it also proves to be demonic and deformed. The creature thus seems both fantastic perfection and corporeal imperfection, the paradox O'Brien failed to reconcile in his art.

The relationship between the narrator and the creature, then, makes this story a symbolic, though perhaps unconscious, confession of O'Brien's grappling with an ephemeral muse. First, the creature preys on the narrator with inexplicable preference and without apparent provocation. In the narrator's description of his struggle in which he admits an initial lack of perspective (the very kind a writer shares in the first heat of creation), he is harried by a significantly inappreciative and even derisive audience:

> Now, I can understand why the appearance of a man struggling violently, as it would seem, with an airy nothing, and calling for assistance against a vision, should have appeared ludicrous. Then, so great was my rage against the mocking crowd that had I the power I would have stricken them dead where they stood. (202)

Clearly sympathetic with the writer's sensitivity to criticism, O'Brien in a sketch called "The Fiddler" (1854) had depicted with obvious autobiographical references a poet's reaction to an unfavourable review in almost the same terms as Keats's fabled response. For a writer hampered by self-criticism as well, it seems appropriate that Escott's grip continually slips from the assailant because of its apparent nakedness. A writer of O'Brien's diffidence must have realized he could not keep hold of such naked inspiration for long. For although he eventually constrains the creature, it does inevitably die.



Ambrose Bierce makes a much better case in his fiction for suggesting that the "King of Terrors" Escott and Hammond discuss may be the unseen and unknowable aspects of one's own existence as well as his environment. Bierce persistently dramatizes the infinite terror his fictional observers suffer over a dead body or even a stuffed snake when they cannot know what the objects ultimately are. But in "The Damned Thing" where the terrifying object remains a tangible but unknown Nothing, Bierce may have been dramatizing no fictional plight. Many of Bierce's supernatural stories--"A Psychological Shipwreck" a more obvious example --evince a concern for psychological awareness. Paul Fatout has already recognized that Bierce's penchant for violence in his writings can be analyzed as a masked expression of his own insecurity and frustrated desire to be loved.[5] Because "The Damned Thing" derived directly out of a sensation Bierce himself imagined while hunting, this particular story may conceal a more conscious psychological revelation.

An autobiographical reading of the tale becomes even more credible when the two main characters are seen to be dissociated aspects of Bierce's own identity. Hugh Morgan leads an "odd, solitary way of life."[6] Bierce, too, plainly rejected his own society. Even literarily, as C. Harley Grattan explains, he was "a complete outsider.... He did not accept the novel, realism, local color, or slang."[7] The name "Hugh" means "mind" or "spirit" and the patronym recalls the name of King Arthur's fairy sister. In his own writing Bierce generally stressed intelligence over emotion and imagination. Perhaps, then, the figure of an ordinarily unexcited Morgan who seems to go mad at the approach of the invisible creature represents that imaginary aspect in his fiction or in Bierce himself. William Harker, who visits his friend Morgan and observes the encounter, is, like Bierce again, a short story writer as well as a journalist. Indeed, he accepts Morgan's invitation because he thinks Morgan would be a good model for a fictional character. His first name suggests "will" and his last suggests "harken." Perhaps Harker therefore signifies the side of Bierce that, listening to his self-imposed writing principles, could observe his existence more objectively.

To analyze the meaning of the creature that assails Morgan as Harker looks on, it is essential to note that the creature is real. Grattan in his interpretation has overemphasized Bierce's sardonic tone in the story. Bierce does in fact deride the coroner and his seven jurors. But to suggest, as Grattan does (op. cit.,167-8), that they fail to suspect the possibility that Harker murdered Morgan seems unwarranted, for no motivation or evidence is ever offered to support it. It is true that even the titles of the first three parts evince a tongue-in-cheek attitude. "One Does Not Always Eat What Is on the Table" refers to the mutilated body before the coroner and his jurors; "What May Happen in a Field of Wild Oats," recalling the cliche about such oats, refers to the "sighting" of the beast and Morgan's murder; and "A Man Though Naked May Be in Rags" refers to the ragged skin on Morgan's body. But it should be remembered that the fourth and last part, an extract from Morgan's diary, is serious in its effort to build a case for the scientific credibility of the Damned Thing's existence.

Furthermore, the story is never seriously passed off as the mere ravings of madmen in either Harker's or Morgan's case. The coroner thinks Harker is mad but Harker, recognizing himself the incredible nature of the story, has reported the incident to his newspaper as fiction. A madman would have believed more completely in the phenomenon he had perceived, no matter how incredible. Concerning Morgan's sanity, Harker says of his friend, "...he had a reputation for exceptional coolness, even in moments of sudden and imminent peril"(op. cit., III,285), thus discrediting the conclusion later reached by the coroner that Morgan merely had fits. The creature does indeed appear--if I may use that term--to be real.

As an invisible reality, then, the being comes to represent the cause of Bierce's failure to be recognized for his art. That failure has of course been traditionally cited as the source for Bierce's bitter cynicism. Chained to a journalistic career he did not respect, Bierce was never really recognized for his fiction or ever encouraged in his artistic pursuits. That neglect may have been particularly heavy on his mind when he wrote this story around 1893, for Bierce wrote very little fiction afterwards. Perhaps the creature depicts the cruelty of a larger kind of reality--Fate, Chance, God, or whatever generations have chosen to call it. Bierce's life outside his unfulfilled literary aspirations was marked by an unsuccessful marriage, the death of two sons by suicide and alcoholic dissolution, and a long-term bout with a severe case of asthma. But the juxtaposition of two similar incidents in this story suggest the Damned Thing is Bierce's paranoic depiction of "the damned human race"--As Mark Twain called it--that stifled his ambitions. In the second part the creature, after killing Morgan, inexplicably leaves Harker unharmed. In the third part, though the coroner and his jury believe Harker to have escaped from an insane asylum, they similarly let him go, concluding without evidence that Morgan was clawed to death by a mountain lion. The coroner seems linked with the creature, too, when he is described as having "a certain fellowship with the organisms of his environment"(281).

It is, of course, not Harker but Morgan who is harassed and mauled by the monster. Morgan in one capacity is defeated by a creature that would otherwise be nothing more than imaginative, perhaps reflecting Bierce's inner artistic struggles. But the Morgan who has been normally calm but is suddenly excited also becomes the Bierce whose artistic existence was utterly quashed by outside forces. In his diary Morgan recounts an instance when the monster blotted out the stars even in its invisibility. On another level the event may relate Bierce's failure to keep his admittedly high literary ideals in sight. When pursued by the beast, Morgan fires ineffectually at it, possibly a symbolic description of Bierce's cynical counterattacks on the humanity around him. But Morgan fails to prevent his unjustified death as Bierce failed in his lifetime to escape artistic oblivion.

It would seem difficult at first to interpret a story by Maupassant as a similar allegory of artistic consciousness since he was a pupil in the school of French naturalism that tried to make the author an objective reporter. Nonetheless, "The Horla" has generally been accepted as Maupassant's symbolic confession of "the mental twilight he knew he was approaching and which eventually did engulf him completely."[8] Although critics such as Rene Dumesnil have objected to such an interpretation, the story's own complexity renders facile the belief that Maupassant's sole inspiration here was Charcot's experiments with psychological disorders.[9]

A similarity between Maupassant and the narrator offers only one piece of evidence to that effect. Both suffer from a debilitating malady. It has already been recognized that the narrator is sick unto death--to use Kierkegaard's phrase--just as Maupassant felt himself to be, as a result of syphilis or an inherited neurotic disorder. Furthermore, at the conclusion of the story, the narrator, believing his effort to burn the Horla has been fruitless, decides the only way to escape the Horla's will is to commit suicide. Four years after this story was written, Maupassant twice attempted suicide to avoid the insane asylum. But the similarities do not end with this mental illness. As the narrator travels to Paris on account of his illness, so, too, did Maupassant travel on account of his. The narrator seeks seclusion in his estate just as Maupassant did in his villa at Etretat. And finally the narrator shares Maupassant's preoccupation with writing and perhaps significantly writes in the presence of the Horla later on in the story.

The link between the narrator and an invisible creature, more definite than in the other two stories, seems at times to make "The Horla" another in the tradition of the alter ego tales like Poe's "William Wilson" or Henry James's "The Jolly Corner."[10] The narrator believes "that an invisible being dwelt in my body."[11] Elsewhere he says of the Horla, "He has become my soul" (ibid., 1326). Then he fails to see himself in his mirror because the Horla stands in the way, yet one further suggestion that the beast is somehow intrinsic to the narrator's own identity. And it should not be overlooked that towards the story's end the Horla spends time writing as the narrator likes to do. It may be significant, then, to the meaning of the story when Saxe Commins speculates that the journeys of the narrator and Maupassant in and out of seclusion suggest Maupassant's flight from himself.[12]

But the creature becomes more than just an alter ego. If the Horla symbolizes "the mysteriousness of ...the reality that lies beyond the reach of our perception," as E.G. Atkin believes,[13] it may in effect represent that quintessential reality the artist searches for to define his own being. Maupassant quotes Flaubert's advice on creative individuality in terms of this kind of perception:

> "In everything there is a proportion of unknown, because we are accustomed to use our eyes only with the remembrance of what others before us have thought about what we are looking at. The minutest thing contains something yet unknown. Let us find it...In that way does a man become an original writer."[13]

The Horla does seem to represent art in its harmonious perfection and in its ascendant mortality. The Horla is the incarnate harmony not only of body and spirit but also of passion and will. The first time the narrator senses the creature is while it is plucking a red rose, the universal symbol of love or passion.

But it has a will strong enough to dominate the narrator and it never reacts with passionate hostility towards him as he does towards it. Juxtaposed to a narrator flawed with such a murderous passion, the Horla emerges finally as a symbol of perfection.

In its perfection it also demonstrates a god-like superiority that has evolved out of but beyond humanity. A long speech from Dr. Parent, who hypnotizes the narrator's cousin, suggests the Horla may be the sum total of supernatural figures from ghosts to gods. A kind of predetermining force to the narrator, it even controls emotional changes as the narrator intimates when he says,

> Whence come these mysterious influences that change our happiness to dejection and our self-confidence to discouragement? It is as if the air, the unseen air, were full of unknowable powers whose mysterious nearness we endure. (1313)

But the creature is not so much a god as it is an Übermensch, an example of the race that will supplant homo sapiens. As the narrator elucidates, "Why is he not seen of our eyes as are all the beings created before us? Because his form is nearer perfection, his body finer and completer than ours..." (1325-26). He later adds,

> Why should this transparent, unknowable body, this body of the spirit, fear sickness, wounds, infirmity, premature destruction?
>
> Premature destruction? The source of all human dread! After man, the Horla. After him who can die any day, any hour, any moment, by accidents of all kinds, comes he who can only die in his appointed day, hour and moment, when he has attained the limit of his existence. (1328)

From the narrator's attitude towards the Horla, then, the story becomes Maupassant's expression of failure to shake off both the bounds of mortal inferiority and the haunting esperance for a kind of artistic perfection. The narrator fights to destroy the Horla as if reluctant to know himself and his own imperfections through the creature. But when he fails to kill it and still feels the pressure of its will as Maupassant may have felt the relentless impulse to write, he is forced to admit his own inescapable identity with self-destruction. But the pessimistic disease-ridden Maupassant--like the similarly crippled Nietzsche--perceived an Übermensch that might somehow compensate for his own mortal inferiority. For the Horla that seemed the soul of the narrator to which he was forced to submit will live beyond the narrator as if to complete what his mortal existence could not. The story at least reflects Maupassant's unfulfilled mortal ambitions for mastery over the immortal. But the recognition of existential limitations and an aspiration for spiritual perfection may conceal the story of Maupassant's attitude towards his art: though he feared he would die before meeting his own standards of excellence as a writer, he hoped the distinction of past creative efforts would not die with him. The role writing plays in the story tends to promote that specific an interpretation. And we should remember as well he lived in an age that had itself begun to elevate art for its own sake.

It is thus possible to see each of these fantasies about invisible creatures as an allegory of the writer's artistic consciousness that describes in "What Was It?" the temporary mastery of a parasitic muse, in "The Damned Thing" the frustrations of literary ambitions, and in "The Horla" the vain aspiration for artistic immortality.

It seems H.G. Wells took an ineluctable step in 1897 when he wrote The Invisible Man in which Griffin, a man who reaches out for world dominion, actually becomes that invisible Unknown. Yet even he finds the achievement has not released him from his own mortality. The artistic consciousness that moved these writers is not peculiar to the artist alone; it is the very essence of man. But it remains both the meaning and the despair of his existence.

FOOTNOTES

1) Kingsley Amis, New Maps of Hell (New York, 1960), 30.

2) Francis Wolle, Fitz-James O'Brien: A Literary Bohemian of the Eighteen-Fifties (Boulder, Colorado, 1944), 165.

3) H. Bruce Franklin, Future Perfect: American Science Fiction of the Nineteenth Century (New York, 1966), 324.

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7) C. Hartley Gratten, Bitter Bierce: A Mystery of American Letters (New York, 1966), 101.

8) Sam Moskowitz, Explorers of the Infinite: Shapers of Science Fiction (Cleveland and New York, 1963), 67.

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11) Saxe Commins, "Introduction," The Best Short Stories of Guy de Maupassant (New York, 1945), xii.

12) E.G. Atkin, "The Supernaturalism of Maupassant," PMLA, XLII (1927), 206.

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International Beach Scene

Don't despise the Mediterranean's
oily manner: moving around
and hovering over
suntanning Aryans
(dimpled navels kissing
poly-lingually in bikinis
helio-centrically pot-bellied
around the poly-glot sea),
he needs to be fast
as greased lightning
to step on no toes,
win a counterfeit smile,
and find his place in the sun.

-- Frederick Candelaria

QUASIMODO

My child was engendered at Lyons
and I should like to live on the top of its cathedral,
a Lyons Quasimodo,
watching the mists over two streams
and over the maze of highways spreading like spiders,
wake on the monstrous roof among towers and turrets and spires
and bells tolling in the centre of an unknown town
where I would lie alone among the stone,
without an Esmeralda,
deafened by brass and bronze and crows and loneliness.

-- Henny Kleiner

Notes From an Institution

in the corner
between concrete.

The space
behind a slammed door
rings deaf.
You sit
stringing glass beads.

Old fingers --
the long blue rub of steel.

Inmates sing
down the corridor.
Voices bounce back
cold as bed springs.

In shifts of four,
attendants play checkers
below a light screen.

Finger on a switch.

As you fold the night
in your fists
behind your head

a calendar changes dates
into minutes of tap water.

One moves into the black square.

A hard stab into the stomach;
a window covered
with muslin.

Screams float
like hair under water
down the corridor,

in the space
behind the door
shut --

You sit stringing
glass beads.

-- Randy Tomlinson

OMNIPOTENT CANNIBALS:

Thoughts on Reading Robert Heinlein's "Stranger in a Strange Land"

by

Robert Plank

A person whose judgment I could not easily disregard extolled to me the importance of Stranger, calling it "probably the most widely read novel on American campuses today." That did not make me feel ashamed of never having read the book, but I felt a call of duty.

The clerk at the nearest book store knew at once on which shelf to reach for it: no doubt it is much in demand at that store--around the corner from a large high school; this, of course, may be coincidence. (My copy is a Berkeley Medallion Book, fifth printing, July 1969; page numbers refer to this edition.)

I read it with only rarely flagging interest. Since many people evidently got more absorbed by Stranger, I thought I might write down some thoughts that it caused me to pursue. To use a book as a starting point for an essay is much more pleasurable than to write a formal review. I can write as it pleases me, without having to be complete, informative, and fair. This will be read mostly by people who already know the book: I do not have to tell them what sort of novel it is or whether it is worth reading.

I have long contended that much of so-called science-fiction--and by all accounts, Stranger is so called--affects the reader not through what is characteristic of s-f by any rational definition --namely, that a scientific or technical innovation is at the core of the plot--but through an appeal to the reader's unconscious desires, and that the task of scientific study is to find out just what these unconscious factors are and how they operate. What aspects of the book provide direct emotional gratification? What is the role of the other aspects, those that do not play into the reader's fantasies? What in particular of the elements of real s-f in the midst of the so-called?

Now let us see what innovations are found in Stranger. They fall clearly into two groups: on the one side the rational innovations, s-f in the true sense of the word: manned travel to Mars, of course, improvements in comforts and communications, such as "bounce tubes," automatic air taxis under remote control, "stereovision tanks" (an improved type of TV, apparently), robot kitchens, the Lyle Drive (identified as indispensable for space travel, but not described at all).

None of this is startling. These gadgets, as far as Heinlein says what they are, have already been invented, though not all of them have been developed for general use. More important, none of these is essential to the story. Though they give it a certain flavour, the events could clearly unfold, with little inconvenience, if these inventions were never made. The same is true of the parallel social and political innovations, notably the close federation of the nations that now form the so-called Free World (11) and the emergence of the profession of Fair Witness (27).

The really important innovations are of a quite different sort. The book simply could not have been written without them. They are not extrapolations, they do not represent the fruition of ongoing research or effort. Nothing in the history of science or technology over the past several thousand years has prepared us to expect them.

Mike, the stranger of the title, was born on Mars. His parents die at his birth and no other human beings are left on Mars. He is raised by Martians--a breed of intelligent beings totally different from man--and trained in the exercise of certain faculties commonplace there but unknown on Earth, though it seems to turn out that more or less any human, with proper instruction, can acquire them. After 25 years he is discovered by the next Terran expedition and brought to Earth, the strange land of the book's title. The unfolding and use of Mike's powers is the content of the novel.

Mike can arbitrarily slow his heart rhythm and respiration to practically zero (14). Though psychologists judge him to be a moron (394),he reads three volumes of an encyclopedia in one day (106). His mind can leave his body (144 ff.). He moves objects by willing them to move (110 ff.) and is of course schooled in using the analogous method of teleportation to move himself by mere wishing, as is customary on Mars (denoted on p.62 as "apportation"). He practices levitation (260) and telepathy (265), etc. etc.

In short, Mike has those powers that in the border area between s-f and fantasy--as well as in the literature of the cults in this twilight zone--are called PSI powers, and that he possesses them more completely than elsewhere ascribed to anybody. They can be defined quite simply: they are the power of achieving any desired change in the real material world by merely wishing it to be so.

Is is amazing how often these clear and simple facts are misunderstood. Peter Marin, for instance, in a recent article "Tripping the Heavy Fantastic" in the New York Times Book Review (21 Feb. 1971) names the books that to him seem to be the favourites of "the young." The list includes five novels: Cat's Cradle, Stranger in a Strange Land, Steppenwolf, Dune, and The Lord of the Rings. He sums up this very mixed lot thus:

> ...those are all "heady" books: not exactly escapist but something close to it--verbal and fantastic trips through other worlds, other realities. Their heroes all possess marvelous or occult talents, the magical tantric and yogic powers of self-control and perception. All of them involve exaggerated but possible states of expanded human "being"--body and soul harmonized and given dominion over time and space. There is a dream-like quality to them all, a quality of wish-fulfillment; each is what Hesse called a "magic theater," and each, like the images in the Tarot deck, must somehow correspond in a rough way to what the young feel is actually happening in themselves.

Faith will move mountains, but it requires a peculiar faith to think of Mike's capabilities as of "exaggerated but possible states."

It is nice to know, though, that this is what "the young" feel is happening in them, especially when we think of the one among Mike's powers that by far exceeds all others: with a "tiny twist" (148), or even without such, just by wishing, he makes things disappear. The word "things" here includes men. At crucial times (e.g., 379) it amounts to mass murder--for to speak of "disappearing" is rather an understatement: what Mike wants to disappear ceases to exist. This seems so natural to him that he is quite puzzled when he is asked whether he can bring a certain box back. Of course he can't, because "the box is not" (109; the italics are Heinlein's). During much of the novel Mike and his friends are chased by police and government thugs, and here this power comes in most handy. When an enemy draws his gun at Mike's cornered friend, Mike simply reaches out--and presto, the gunman "is not."

It obviously would often be a great convenience to be able to overcome an obstacle by simply making it disappear; but Mike, strangely, uses his power very sparingly on inanimate objects--with one great exception: clothes. This is his delight; one might say, his favourite recreation. At the drop of a hat (if this simile be permitted in this context) he will make clothes disappear, be it his own or somebody else's. This compulsive desire to strip is, though not common, often enough associated with certain psychotic states to have acquired a technical name: Mike is denudative. I should add that he does not have to worry about replacing vanished clothes. He is a billionaire.

What is his purpose? To unveil the glorious beauty of the human body? Only at the very end (405). Communion with nature? To have water, air, sun, caress one's bare skin? Every swimmer knows of these delights, and so does Mike; but mostly--apart from an occasional prank, such as stripping law enforcement officers to expose them to ridicule--the purpose of his denudative acts is sexual.

Heinlein does not in this book follow the old tradition of s-f, to ignore sex. Overt sex is very much present, and indeed explicit. It is also markedly straightforward and systematized. Promiscuity would seem to be the model, but what makes promiscuity attractive is diversity and freedom of choice, and these are so far lacking that the sex life of Mike and his circle could be expressed in a simple mathematical formula: the maximum number of possible combinations are consummated. What an achievement! The only trouble is that the scheme leaves room neither for love nor for spontaneity. Heinlein has succeeded in devising a system that to Romeo and to the Marquis de Sade would be equally repulsive.*

Monotony could be somewhat relieved if homosexual acts were permitted, and this would also considerably increase the number of possible matings. But this is not within Heinlein's purview. The truth is that in spite of titillating hints, sexual performance does not rise to the level of anything that could be called an orgy--except once, and then with remarkable results.

We hear about it from Ben, who appears on Jubal's front lawn on p.306 and presently informs him that he needs to talk to him. He gets to his point on p.342, and the conversation ends on p.352, having taken up more than a ninth of the total length of a long and complex novel. What Ben needs so badly to confess and finds so hard to confess is this: he was sitting with a woman, in circumstances that might briefly be described as rather sexy. Mike joined them. After a brief conversation between the three of them, Mike was suddenly naked; whereupon Ben, seized by nausea, ran.

Now apart from the trick of stripping by will power, there is nothing unheard-of about such events. In clinical practice (I happen to be a psychiatric social worker) we occasionally learn of them. If a patient told me the story that Ben told Jubal, I would neither be very surprised nor would I have the slightest hesitation about interpreting it (to myself; whether I would tell the patient then and there is a different question): the man has suffered "homosexual panic." He has been invited to take part in a sexual performance to include both heterosexual and homosexual elements. Torn between his unconscious homosexual desires and his defense against letting them emerge into consciousness, he flees.

This is not, however, the diagnosis that Jubal and Ben arrive at. By skilful questioning and prompting ("dig deeper," 344) Jubal gets Ben to "admit" his motive: he was jealous. Jealous indeed! Jealousy has made men do many things--shoot their rivals, for instance--but that a man in the grip of jealousy grabs his clothes and runs, this is a new one (unless, of course, we "dig deeper" and view jealousy as a derivative of homosexuality--the implication for the question of denial of homosexuality would be the same). Does this mean that if I were asked for a professional opinion I would disapprove of Jubal's handling of the case? Not at all. In psychotherapy (and lord knows that men suffering from homosexual panic can use psychotherapy) it may be quite legitimate in certain situations to reinforce a rationalization that the patient has worked out for himself so as not to have to face a truth that would be too emotionally upsetting to him. Untruth will make you free...

Let us go on to another subject, one vaguely connected with nudity: the very unusual--well, let us say, funeral customs that Mike imports from Mars.

Martians don't die. They "discorporate." They do this voluntarily and with the same ease with which they annihilate other people and occasionally an entire planet (91). It doesn't hurt, and the soul lives on; assuming, in Heinlein's touching simile, an appearance somewhat like a TV picture. The body needs to be disposed of; and this is done by the friends of the departed reverently and festively eating it. Mike hints at this delightful practice in the very first chapter ("He knew he was food," 16). It is persistently mentioned again up to the final scene when he has sacrificed his earthly life and a broth is brewed from part of his remains and drunk by two disciples who do not fail to appreciate both the honour and the taste: "It was a calm happiness that didn't bring tears" (411).

I suppose this is meant to shock the reader, and it would have affected me, but for the fact that I happened to have been immunized by seeing that remarkable film, Fellini's Satyricon. For those who don't know the work, it ends with a rich man's dying and providing in his will that the various hangers-on should share his estate if they would cut pieces from his body and eat them; whereupon after a brief debate you see those well dressed citizens lift a leg of the corpse and unwrap it; the next shot shows them sitting there, glumly chewing.

This, as most of the film, is adapted from Petronius, a Roman writer presumably of the time of Nero. My Encyclopedia Britannica, 11th edition, whence my knowledge comes, found itself in a dilemma: facts must be given, but only as they are "fit to print." The editors cut the knot with such a masterly stroke that I can't forebear quoting:"...attaches a condition to the inheritance that even Encolpius might have shrunk from fulfilling...si corpus meum in partes conciderint et astante populo comederint." To those who know Latin, this says plainly, "If they will cut my body into pieces and publicly eat it." As to those who don't know Latin, they are by that very fact proved to be unready to receive such choice information. They did not go to the proper schools.

What Petronius was up to seems anybody's guess; it is a little easier to figure out what Heinlein intends. The Latin writer undoubtedly wanted to pillory the nouveaux riches of his time by showing them stooping to anything for money. Heinlein uses the motif in a totally different context: with him, it's the "good guys" who engage in cannibalism (or, more properly, in necrophagy). He may have intended to travesty the sacrament of communion--his choice of words tends to run to the blasphemous, and there are closer parallels, such as Mike appearing to Jubal after his death just as Christ appeared to the disciples at Emmaus. It is not likely that Petronius knew or cared enough about Christianity to have any such aim. He may have simply wanted to jolt his readers by imputing to Roman gentlemen customs of certain barbaric tribes of which they had read in Herodotus.

Such practices have survived well into the nineteenth century, if not indeed to our day, in many parts of the world. Since for us, however, cannibalism is remote, it is peculiar how ubiquitous it is in jokes. For instance, a rhyme for Timbuktu is found by alleging that this is where they boil the missionary, and hat and coat and hymnbook, too. Many are the pages of the New Yorker adorned with cartoons of clergymen sitting serenely in kettles. There is a short story of cannibalism by Bertrand Russell, and a very Petroniesque scene in the bar of the Nineveh Hotel in The Dog Beneath the Skin by Auden and Isherwood, etc. On the highest literary level we have Swift's Modest Proposal.

What makes this theme, so obviously not relevant to our problems on a practical level, so relevant to our souls? I can but confess that I do not know. It sometimes makes me wonder uneasily whether Jung may not have had something, after all, with his "collective unconscious," though generally I content myself with Freud's Totem and Taboo. I think I do know something, though, about the function assigned to necrophagy in the structure of Heinlein's book, as I think I do about this structure as a whole. To me the sense of it seems painfully clear. The conclusions are depressing but inescapable.

One way in which a literary work appeals to the reader is by embodying his daydreams and other fantasies (the same holds, of course, for other art forms, such as the film). The reader finds presented to him the experiences that he likes to dream up for himself as happening to persons with whom he can identify, so that he derives vicarious gratification of his desires.

This is, of course, not all there is to it--once we have reviewed Stranger from this angle, we shall consider what else literature does. But first, why would a person resort to vicarious gratification through literature instead of aiming at more direct gratification, in daydreams or deed?

Well, wish-fulfilment in fantasy may lag from failure of the imagination. Most of us are unable to conjure up images of women as beautiful and sexually stimulating as the images on the screen. The possibilities of wish-fulfilment through acting out are even more limited. Such attempts are apt to run head-on against the hard wall of reality. For instance, for a man to go around shooting people as liberally as he might want to is not practical (though some try); but it is practical to watch the Western where the "good guys" can do so with impunity, or on a more sophisticated level to read Steppenwolf where the hero is at least free to massacre in his fantasy those people whose attitudes he does not approve.

The desires that literature vicariously satisfies aim normally at sensual, chiefly sexual, pleasure, and at self-aggrandizement. Their specific form and content vary with the individual's emotional makeup and with the stage of his development. Therefore, different books appeal to different personality types and different ages.

Stranger addresses itself primarily to what is technically known as the fantasy of omnipotence. Child psychology has shown the belief that "wishing makes it so," that thoughts change the external world, that the will is as effective as the deed, to be a stage of normal development, an early infantile stage. The normal child discards the idea, albeit reluctantly, when he reaches the "age of reason," when experience teaches him. As fantasy the idea of omnipotence may persist. It retains its grip on those who are so discouraged by the conflicts of later childhood that they take refuge in their earlier beliefs (which they have learned are not valid) and "refuse to grow up."

Next in importance in Heinlein's novel is the fantasy of promiscuity, of indiscriminate, effortless, repetitive sexual intercourse with an unlimited number of agreeable, healthy, unindividualized members of the opposite sex. This is not quite as primitive a fantasy, but its emotional emptiness reveals its childishness. It is hard to imagine a man who has not been tempted by these fantasies. It is just as hard to bestow the name man on a person who has not overcome these temptations.

Some works of literature are content to embody the reader's fantasies. They are often called low-brow, and sometimes bad books. Then there are books that transcend the reader's fantasy. They embody it, but they lead farther, by presenting some experiences befalling the hero beyond those that embody the fantasy which cried for vicarious gratification in the first place. They show a way toward solving the problem of the unsatiability of the fantasy by an accomodation with other forces within the individual's character, and with the demands of reality. They are known as good books. Good books help the reader to grow. Heinlein's book embodies primitive fantasies. There is no evidence in it of any attempt to transcend them.

So much for the novel's main emotional thrust. How does it look from the angle of its thought content? A story that embodies nothing but primitive sexual fantasies may yet convey valuable information on the life style of the people it chooses to embody the fantasy. The teaching value of Stranger is limited, though you may want to turn to it if you wish to know what the proper table manners are when you consume the body of your departed friend.

This leads me back to the question, what is the role of necrophagy, anti-Christianity, s-f (in the narrower sense of the word)--what are all these elements of the book which do not form an organic part of its basic emotional content really doing there? The problem is not unimportant, because an answer would presumably apply not only to Stranger but to any work that is composed of a fundamental embodied fantasy and of seemingly extraneous material.

To come to such an answer, we must penetrate into a different layer of personality. Technically speaking, we must move from id psychology to ego psychology. We must assume that the force of the rather elemental drives which power the daydreams that seek vicarious fulfilment in literature is not unopposed, does not have free play; that the emotional life of the individual consists in interaction of a variety of forces, and that some of them hem in and counteract the basic driving force. As the individual matures, he acquires what is known as character--i.e., voices, as we might call them, within him which tell him that it is forbidden, detrimental, shameful to seek the unhampered fulfilment of his basic drives, be it directly or vicariously, especially if the basic drives are still in a childish state or tend to regress to it.

A burglar who wants to get by a watch-dog may throw him a piece of meat saturated with tranquillizers. A writer who wants to get a hearing for his embodiment of a primitive fantasy may lull the countervailing forces into inactivity by throwing them the meat of the loftier, more realistic, less primitive aspects of his work. He may say, in substance, to the distrustful ego: Look, I am not pandering to omnipotence or promiscuity. What I really want is to present a picture of the science of the future, to demonstrate the shortcomings of Christianity, and to discuss the question of necrophagy, which is interesting and so remote that it can't do harm! You do not really think that I could corrupt your pupil, seeing that he isn't going to become a cannibal whatever I say?--This would be the function of the extraneous material in the works that do not want truly to transcend the fantasies they embody.

Stranger presents the id with the sweet gratification of its desires, getting license to do so by bribing the ego with pretended interest in nobler things. As it is my almost professional belief that good books are good for people, I can hardly help also believing that bad books are bad for people. Is it inconsistent for me, then, to write about Stranger and thus to draw attention to it?

Perhaps. I am aware of some of my motives for nevertheless doing so. As usual in such cases, they are not altogether pure. However, I think I am writing largely for people who have already read the book, and I even flatter myself that conceivably some who intended to read it may change their minds after reading this.

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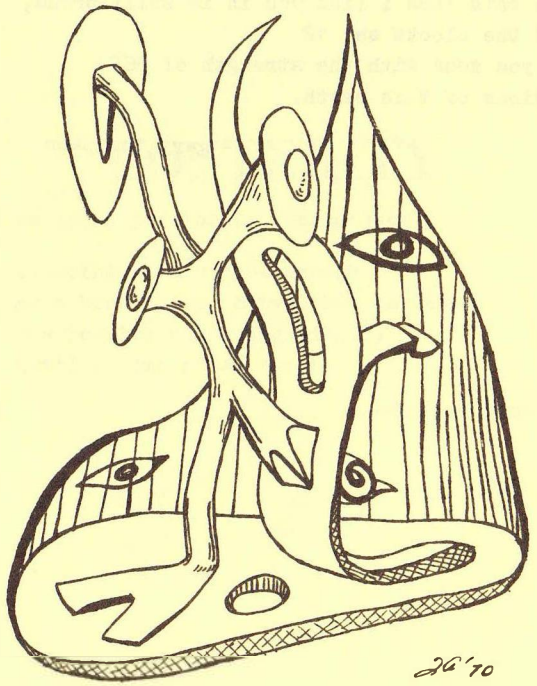
*Editor's Note: On p.32 Dr. Plank means not the activities usually associated with the Marquis de Sade but his program as specified in Aldous Huxley's preface to Brave New World (American edition): "Sade regarded himself as the apostle of the truly revolutionary revolution beyond mere politics and economics--the revolution in individual men, women and children, whose bodies were henceforward to become the common sexual property of all..."



NEW YEAR

outside an old man
bumps into himself on the terrible sidestreets
of alcohol.
in cheap rooms, young girls work delicately
on calendars, but still there are a few days
with names.
one little boy longs to break the last toys of christmas.

i close my eyes,
and ride on the crest of one good year.
i am young yet,
i will stop drinking and hold your head
above water.

we are above this dark city:
because this face i find you in is still proud,
and all the clocks say 12
i give you sons with the strength of 365
revolutions of this earth.

-- gary thompson

INFECTION

It is no good to be alone --
out of repair -- living
in an absurd country spaced
within my hands and head. On rainy
days, the rain inhabits me.
I watch flowers drowning, and drink
from rivers running dry, where no fish
spreads its gill or lifts its fin.
It's easy to be dead -- passing
into custom -- changed by the quiet
into something less deceptive.
When light moves through me,
I will no longer breed shadows.

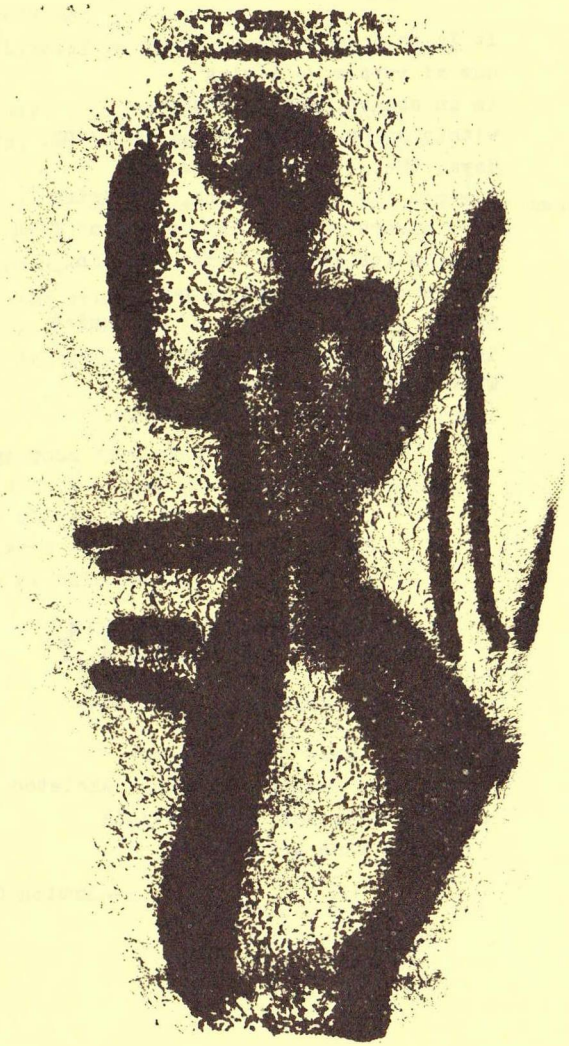
-- Ruth Daigon

POSTERITY

He had a passion for permanence

tattoing wasn't good enough
so a bone doctor carved his skeleton
the results not being visible
until a time after death

--Bruton Conners



Three Insinuations of Midnight Noon

by

John Shapski

I

The dark room is in use--but unattended. On a wall, projected by an enlarger, the image of a life-size self-portrait of the photographer.

The image-man moves, surprised: tentatively, he tries out this new-found freedom. A slight hesitation. Then he steps out of the projection, drawing out into another dimension as he pulls away from the wall. Full, rounded out, he stands back and waits.

A hollow space on the wall catches the photographer's eye as he re-enters the dark room. He leans to investigate. The image-man moves quickly, pushing the photographer into two-dimensional emptiness, and shutting off the enlarger. He pins the special large paper into place and starts the process of printing: exposure, developer, stopper, wash and fix. While the portrait rinses he systematically destroys all negatives in which the image of the photographer appears. Then he sits back and admires the drying more-than-portrait of the artist, marvelling at the haunting air of captivity and horror transfixed on the life-size face.

II

This world is like a giant dandelion--round, soft, covered in rich but light vegetation. No brambles, no thickets; all paths are clear, all points accessible. Nowhere on the globe does the depth of the cool sweet water exceed five feet. Fruit hang ripe on the low trees all times. There are no predators: in short, an ecology of love.

Lithe bronze-coloured people move about here, graceful and sure from birth: one might postulate perfection. They exist only to travel the land in small transient groups, marvelling at its beauty, singing, dancing, and making love.

In a strange garden, I stop alone to inspect a plant with which I am not familiar. It smells strangely of hemp, has an orange flower, and small berries. The air about it is saturated with the queer scent--the plant exudes thin whisps like smoke, I draw in deep breaths. Soon a bland smile spreads slowly across my face, and I sit down cross-legged before the plant.

A long time I sit and dream. Things I had never imagined before: large crowded areas where black, white, brown, red, and yellow people live in crazy boxes. I read speech from processed tablets. Prolix mad artifacts of transportation by land, water, and air. There is a managing system named "law" or "justice." It is all real: far too real. Twentieth century, I understand. Joy leaks slowly away.

My life, uneventful. Drugs are the rage.

I try smoking a different leaf and feel that I have returned to reality. After a while I notice the plant, before which I sit cross-legged. But the problem is more complex than I had thought. I have learned about a plant that lures one into an idyllic world of unreality, of useless being--only I find it increasingly difficult to remember exactly which plant it was.

III

A man is walking in the countryside--just that. A man perhaps a little more curious and contemplative than average, perhaps a trifle stubborn and also acquisitive. Something--a loose end, a piece of rope--catches his eye.

Compulsively, but disinterestedly, he stoops to pick it up. It resists his careless grasp. He grips it more firmly, and pulls: smoothly, it slides out of the earth. He continues to pull. It, whatever it is, continues to extrude, coming without either particular ease or difficulty. It seems to prefer a speed akin to that at which one hauls a sounding line from the water, and the man takes to piling it in a neat nautical manner. Hand over hand he hauls it out, grasping the coils in one hand and laying them down when the hand fills up. At times he changes hands.

Darkness finds this man pulling steadily, settled into the rhythm. Occasionally he ties the slack to a nearby tree, and rests. What concerns him most is that in an unguarded moment the line--or whatever it is--might rewind itself into the earth and leave him with a rather suspect memory. He must, he knows, find the other end, or be faced with the insecurity of self doubt. He adjusts to the dark.

The momentum of a gambler chasing lost money takes him--he has devoted time and belief. Others might be content to give up, but some hoard their realities, they cannot accept the equivocal, the dream, possible dream, and the surreal states of dream and reality inextricably superimposed. They must have their reality even if they are forced to create it. He continues pulling, hand over hand, and continues piling.

Different geometries develop, evolve from and into one another as do days and nights. Time loses its meaning, and significance. Eventually he feels the ground shake. Occasionally at first, then more frequently. It concerns him little. He plies on at his self-assigned task.

Then--success. A last shudder wracks the globe as it suddenly spits out its other end. The man stands in space, the unravelled world piled neatly beside him.

UNTITLED POEM

I ironed one shirt of yours this morning
and one leg of a pair of pants.
I cooked a piece of liver
then ate two strawberries
and left for class.

You were still asleep when I got back.
I try so hard,
Why don't you love me anymore?

I counted the number of your old girlfriends
then alphabetized them
according to their first name,
and last initial.

I found six
named Mary Kay S.
How could you tell them apart?

-- Carla Perry

I'm Afraid of Simple Things

I'm afraid of simple things,
spring,
the cuckoo,
blood and whipcracks.
Lesbia let me be your sparrow
save me seize me.
I'm afraid of terrible things.

-- Ruth Daigon

Science Fiction and the Revolution

by

Curtis Smith

(State University of New York at Albany)

In his "Science Fiction in the Age of Transition,"[1] Arthur Magline points out the potential usefulness to radicals of both utopian and dystopian science fiction. The utopia, though, is very often dull, however socialist; and while dystopias can at least portray the evils of neofascism or welfare state capitalism, they do not open up a radical vision of the future.

The best of science fiction, and that most useful to radicals, cuts through the utopia-dystopia antithesis and shows us an evolutionary future rather than one in brittle stasis. Arthur C. Clarke's Childhood's End (New York: Ballantine, 1953), for example, seems to be moving toward dystopia, when an unexpected revolution of sorts moves it in precisely the reverse way. The "Overlords," aliens who control Earth, impose upon men a welfare state technocracy that strongly resembles what radicals are now fighting against. Indifferent to political ideology and claiming to have only man's good in mind, these omnipotent administrators deprive man of self-determination and creativity. Art and all forms of life-affirmation dwindle. The message to radicals, though, is that the present great power of these technocrats is an illusion soon to be dissipated. No violent revolution will even be necessary. Men possess what the Overlords will forever lack: the ability to transform the world with the imagination. Clarke's future moves through and beyond both optimism and pessimism to a new start for man, a self-re-creation that can only be glimpsed. The Overlords are impressive. They are huge and literally capable of blocking the sun. But they are an evolutionary cul-de-sac. Man's future is his own. Daniel Bell please note.

What Clarke expresses allegorically, his mentor, W. Olaf Stapledon, expresses literally in his story, Old Man in New World.[2] In 1970, or thereabouts, the world-wide revolution has been achieved. It seems to have been more or less Old Left, as we would now say -- centralized to the point of disallowing any spontaneity, cultural life-affirmation, or mysticism.

It might seem that Stapledon has created a dystopia. Instead, he is merely moving one stage beyond a revolution with which he fundamentally sympathizes. The story is told from the point of view of the "old man" of the title, an old revolutionary who cannot understand that the revolution is a living and still growing thing. The young revolutionary who flies the old man to a celebration in London expresses a New Left position: he believes in decentralized self-discipline and the lifestyle revolution, and thinks that the revolution is now secure enough to be libertarian. The President of the World Revolutionary Government agrees, and at the ceremony he allows a clown to mock the revolution and to assert the puniness of man in the universe. The old man is shocked. "Where would it end? But tears were in his eyes." On a conscious level he cannot accept the individualism implied in the clown's genius, although his emotional self does accept it. Stapledon's calm assertion that the revolution will continue to take place is moving, and the tenderness with which he presents the old man's flawed vision is close to tragic. Stapledon may have succeeded in making tragedy not supportive of aristocratic values but of revolutionary ones.

Radicals, involved in taking man's next enormous step, need to look beyond that step; they need the calm, imaginative assurance of the best of science fiction that enormous change is around the next corner, and that through and beyond that change there will be further change. Although much science fiction is pessimistic, there is also science fiction which asserts cosmic optimism, tempered with a sense of continued mystery, that is consistent with radicalism.

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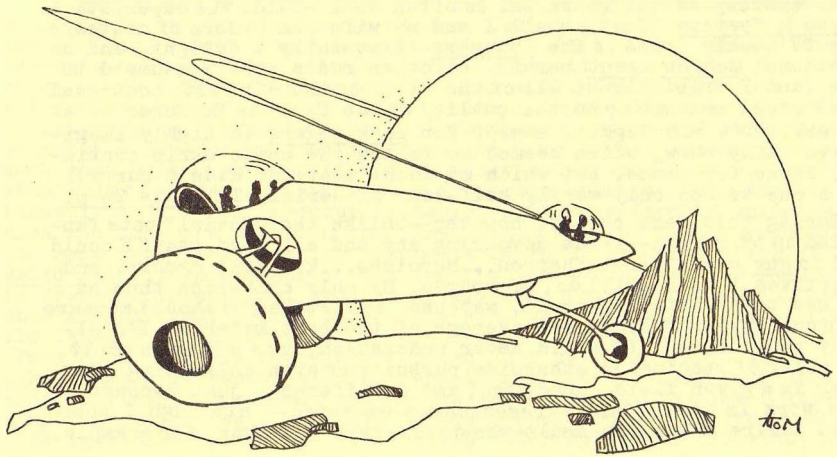
1) Radical America, 3 (July/August 1969), 4-11.

2) London: G. Allen, 1944; reprinted in Worlds of Wonder, Los Angeles: Fantasy Publishing Co., 1949.



FROM A CORNER TABLE AT ROUGH HOUSE'S BY BILL BLACKBEARD

Jim Harmon stacks the deck slightly in the introduction to his excellent study of "old-time" radio, The Great Radio Heroes, when he writes, "Each of us found his own escape, his own reassurance in radio. The world I found will not be identical to yours, but many compass points will be the same. There may have been musically inclined kids who liked little but The Hit Parade or The Voice of Firestone. Maybe a few other jovial tykes cared only for the comedy of stingy Jack Benny or the pompous Gildersleeve. As for myself, and most people I know, the vitally important part of radio was the afternoon serial heroes, the daytime serial heroines, and the nighttime killers, crooks, and detectives..."

This whimsical dealing from the bottom makes it sound as if a kid of the '30s and '40s who frankly preferred the better comedy shows (Gildersleeve was only infrequently good; Jack Benny usually better; Fred Allen best of a mediocre lot) to the vast majority of the blood-and-thunder serials and dramas of the period would have to be part of some curious "jovial" minority of juveniles, by which I suppose Jim to mean kids oddly limited by temperament to an interest in comedy alone, with action and adventure shows lying beyond the scope of the poor "tyke's" susceptibilities.

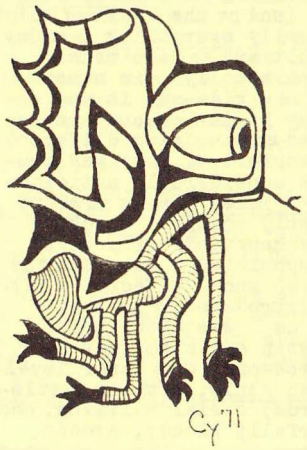
Such a casual put-down and pigeon-holing of a variant attitude toward radio just won't wash, of course. I was a kid like Jim during those peak radio years, and comedy shows were damn near all I could stomach of the output of the period. I listened to exactly one daily mystery-adventure serial as often as I could, the superlative I Love a Mystery (just as all I and my wife can endure of contemporary TV weekly drama is The Avengers--frequently a delight--and an occasional Secret Agent rerun). No other radio show I managed to hear (and I tried almost all of the stuff on the air, with continual hope) could measure up to the quality of the Carlton E. Morse tales of Jack, Doc, and Reggie, except for Buck Rogers (a highly imaginative daily show, which seemed to follow the comic strip continuity scene for scene, but which my local stations didn't carry), and a one-season-only weekly half-hour sf serial, Latitude Zero!

During this same period, however--unlike the "jovial" tots fantasied up by Harmon--I was devouring any and all good stuff I could find in any media about "heroes...heroines...killers, crooks, and detectives." As I still do, of course. My only criterion then as now was that whatever I read, watched, or listened to should measure up in quality to at least the average of the best material I'd already encountered. (I could never understand, as a kid or an adult, the point of reading or otherwise pursuing or even collecting anything in a given field, good, bad, and indifferent, just because it is a work in that field --researchers excepted-- although I sometimes admire the hardy souls who do: Forrest Ackerman, for example.)

My reaction to any work in any media was based on my assessment of its intrinsic quality as opposed to its extrinsic content, slant or gimmickry. (While I loved The Shadow's classic laugh at the beginning of each Shadow radio show, I found the drama that followed clap of the most abysmal trap.) To cut into my adolescence at random--when I was fourteen, say--I feel I could hardly be expected, after having discovered Page's Spider or Howard's Conan in the pulps, seen Gunga Din, King Solomon's Mines (1934 version), or Lost Patrol on the screen, looked daily or weekly at Terry, Buck Rogers, and Red Barry in the comics, and listened regularly to I Love a Mystery on the blatbox (as the less ardent among us kids called it in those days), to cock an eager and enthralled ear to a daily fifteen minutes of the kind of puling, written-down subliterate hackwork represented by such shows as Jack Armstrong, The Lone Ranger, Renfrew of the Mounted (bar-oooooo!) or Little Orphan Annie, any more than I could be expected to relish bilge like The Shadow or The Phantom Detective in pulps, most cuff-produced Saturday matinee movie serials, or Tim Tyler's Luck, Don Dixon and Superman in the comics. It seems to me, as far back as I can remember, that the thing my adolescent imaginative antennae seized upon in any work was the extent to which a writer, scripter, artist or director was genuinely and seriously involved in a self-fulfilling creative effort (I used to reflect sadly even as a teen-ager on how some of the adults responsible for the kid radio shows must gag over what they were spoonfeeding their young listeners, and wonder why more kids couldn't see how they were being patronized), while my final assessment was based on my evaluation of the worth of the creativity involved (I realized, of course, that some at least of the perpetrators of the worst pulp, comics, movies, and radio shows must find them, in their own stunted view, fresh and exciting and original). I learned the truth of Sturgeon's Law--that 90% of everything is crud--at an early age; my difficulty with radio adventure drama lay in my prompt discovery that 99.9% of it was awful. For relief, to do something with the radio set I was lucky enough to have in my room, I listened to the solitary "classic" music station and to some of the better evening comedy shows shile I read the hours away avidly, communing withthe richer, thicker gluten of imagination I found more often in literature than any other media.

My experience with the arts as a kid has benefited me in some ways as an adult and deprived me in others. Certainly I have never felt the emotion so many others know as nostalgia (and on the level of which Harmon's book operates so well), since virtually everything I enjoyed as a boy I have found enjoyable as an adult and so have made a point of not being separated from it either physically or in memory by an intervening "maturity." My good fortune as a kid--and it was apparently a rare bit of good furtune--lay in my having encountered so much good work in so many fields so early and so acquiring different standards of judgement than most of my contemporaries. This was continually at work; I remember listening with considerable anticipation and hope to a couple of the first Witch's Tales dramas at about the same time I was reading through a recently acquired stack of Weird Tales from the early '30s (racing inexhaustibly from Smith to Howard to Lovecraft), and how grimly disappointed I was with the show's contrived, second-hand plots and cheap shock effects. A little later I listened to the horror program introduced by Raymond (Your Host) and his creakingly opened door as I was discovering Unknown, and listened just long enough to retch and slam that door shut on my radio for good, and for the same reasons. On a lower level and at an earlier age, the radio Little Orphan Annie, withits little-kids-in-trouble plots and its routine Saturday serial villains, had to compete in my imagination with the wonderfully bloody, exotic, and inventive American dream-fable of the same name on the comic page of the 1930s--and just couldn't make the grade.

Nor is any of this comparative evaluation a subjective memory. Thanks to Harmon's extraordinary collection of old radio tapes (made from surviving records of hundreds of actual shows of radio's "golden age") I was able to listen once more to a number of typical and remembered shows from the past a year or so ago--and found my orginal judgements perfectly sound. I loathed Jack Armstrong and his gosh-wowing boy scout pals as much as ever, while I grooved at once with a splendidly grisly series of episodes from I Love a Mystery. The experience was particularly intriguing for me, since I've long been interested with the apparently unaltered continuity of virtually all my early value judgements in the arts into my adult life. Virtually nothing I enthused over, or simply enjoyed as a kid--whether Dickens, James, Conrad, Faulkner, Haggard, Lovecraft, C.L. Moore, Heinlein, Page, Humphrey Bogart, W.C. Fields, Laurel & Hardy, Segar's Thimble Theatre, Sterrett's Polly and Her Pals, Caniff's Terry or Tuthill's The Bungle Family--has failed to bring me renewed imaginative and/or aesthetic pleasure when viewed or read again in later years. This is not terribly unusual in itself, of course; many people have managed through self-confidence and personal good fortune to carry and nurture their childhood enthusiasms into adult life largely intact--again, Forry Ackerman comes to mind--but my own experience seems to me uncommon essentially in the way I explored and enjoyed the broad spectrum of arts from the academic "top"to the pop art "bottom," as a kid and managed almost unerringly, without instruction or coaching, to select as personal favourites from all fields the writers, cartoonists, films, actors, et al, who (even though at the time I was young may have been in a state of critical or popular eclipse: Faulkner, Fields, Tuttle, Howard, etc.) I have later seen lauded by critics or fellow creative artists as the best or tops in their various fields. (A simple example of this is found in the pulp dime novels: as a kid, I knew Doc Savage was the best work in the field, although practically all my (mostly older) contemporaries were sure The Shadow was. Today Doc Savage is being reprinted en masse by a major paperback house (62 titles so far) while The Shadow--which I found literally unreadable when it was appearing on its unique semi-monthly schedule and selling out issue after issue--is utterly nowhere and becoming rapidly more obscure and forgotten.)



/ Our columnist now addresses one paragraph (not reproduced here) directly to members of CAPA-alpha, an amateur press association for which his column originally was written; he explains why so far he hasn't discussed non-reprint comic books, an area toward which its members are "strongly biased." Blackbeard emphasizes that his preliminary remarks on Old Radio and newspaper comics were to show that he is not a kidscad maliciously buttending the bland young Isaacs of CAPA-alpha, but a critic whose responses in all media are based on early-acquired tastes he would not and could not try to repudiate. /

No matter how it may appear from what follows, then, I hope the fact remains clear: I am not biased toward original comic art in magazines as such, any more than I was opposed to mystery-adventure serials on radio per se. In the case of comic art, I've simply found the imaginative concept and maturity of execution I look for in all media more often in the newspaper strips, old and new, than in the comic books. Let me emphasize, however, that this present and long-standingly favourable reaction of mine to work in the newspaper strip area as opposed to comic books is more the result of prolonged research into the newspaper comics of the past than a reflection of my views of current work in that field. The contemporary newspaper strip is, in my opinion, currently at an excessively low ebb of inventiveness and graphic impact, with scarcely twenty daily strips across the whole syndicate range worth more than an instant's bored regard. The bulk of the contents in most newspaper's Sunday comic sections seem to me as empty and vapid as the average comic book, while it takes a very crowded daily comic page to serve up more than two or three strips of consequence, so thinly spread is quality work in the syndicated arena today.

The few good things are Pogo, Gordo, Peanuts (though only sporadically these days, alas); Russ Manning's excellent revitalization of the old Tarzan strip; Johnny Hart's frenetic B.C. and The Wizard of Id (though neither is always in top form); Mort Walker's trio of sometimes dulled gems, Beetle Bailey, Hi and Lois, and Boner's Ark; two well-wrought, consistently funny strips, Lolly and Archie; three good, workmanlike productions, Priscilla's Pop, Broom Hilda, and Andy Capp; the innocuous but witty Fred Basset; two old classics, Captain Easy and Our Boarding House, well continued by fresh hands; an uneven but sometimes engrossing comic-adventure strip, Rick O'Shay; and Reg Cochran's fine portion of Out Our Way, which recalls J.R. Williams' classic work extremely well. Nineteen titles in all, enough for a daily page or a Sunday section, although no paper anywhere carries more than a third of them. Dick Tracy, Steve Canyon, and Buz Sawyer, the first crippled by the persistent intrusion of Gernsback-level science fiction into an otherwise good story, the latter two by sophomoric blundering about in contemporary political and cultural trends. plus a recent lather of soap operatics, miss by distinct margins. Prince Valiant and Alley Oop (both now largely in new, uninspired hands) are pleasant to look at but intolerably dull to read. Blondie is intelligently handled, but ruined by its wrung-dry themes. Few others matter.

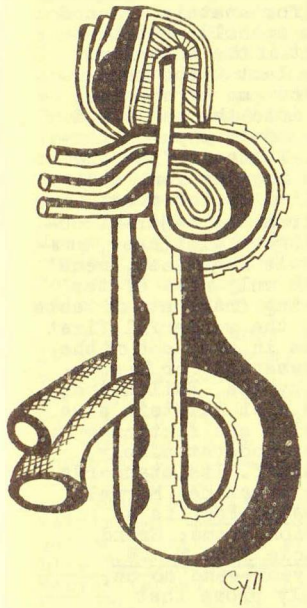
I'd have to admit that a rough balance of worthwhile material between the two major spheres of comic strip publishing had finally been attained if all the good work I've encountered in comic books over the years happened to still be appearing together today on the newsstands. These would include Walt Kelly's various contributions (strewn literally like diamonds in dung amidst the enormously un-funny animal strips with which many of them appeared), Sheldon Mayer's Scribbly and his "Red Tornado" (the only wholly palatable caped and masked "superhero" yet, precisely because so unsuper), Carl Barks's marvellously funny and imaginative Duck strips, the Dell Little Lulu (the one case I know if in comics where a staff of people--if Dell is to be believed--actually turned out a consistently amusing and inventive strip for years: an ability they unfortunately lost some time ago), C. C. Beck's Captain Marvel (the mark all original comic book superhero stuff would have to meet or surpass to even begin to interest me: none --except for recent Conan adaptions--ever has), Al Williamson's self-scripted stuff, Eisner's Spirit, and virtually the complete contents of Mad and Panic (until Kurtzman's exit), and of Trump and Humbug to boot. (Kurtzman's Help! was not a comic book at all, but a late entrant in the Life-Judge-Puck-Ballyhoo sweeps

of thirty years ago, as National Lampoon is now.) As for the other EC zines, even though many of these contained a great quantity of stunning technical work (Kreigstein's layouts in particular), most were so unoriginal in story content (vide the Bradbury imbroglio) or so deliberately morbid and grisly without redeeming wit or imagination to temper the effect that they seem more a miscalculation than an accomplishment of worth.

As it is, however, aside from the new Marvel Conan, I read no U.S. comic books regularly at all now, since the Spirit reprints, the Barks Duck strips, and the initially promising King efforts have all gone a-glimmering. (A recent exception, which looked promising, was Sheldon Mayer's imaginative development of his kid-oriented Sugar & Spike: here, for a wild, brief moment, the free-wheeling inventiveness and sheer fun of old-time comic strips blossomed again, and Mayer showed his real potential; sales, however, failed to support the experiment, and the magazine is now once more a juvenile pacifier.) Nevertheless, I still riffle forlornly through the comic racks every week, sampling new titles and wishing I hadn't, frowning at the latest New Gods or Forever People banalities, suppressing an onset of queasiness as I glance over the Popeye-Sad Sack huddle of horrors and the Archie stagnations, retching outright at the Disney garbage, finally hastening for a breath of fresh air to the paperback s-f racks. Why do I do it, especially since I expect so little of promise to emerge from this four-colour swamp for years to come, if ever? I do it, I suspect, because I'm a 44-year old American and I grew up with these damned things, and they are consequently, despite my hearty detestation of the bulk of them, a necessary part of the familiar arcana and curiosa of my life, needing to be irritably examined and assessed while around, like hangnails and morning stubble.

I'm not at all typical in this, I know. After all, I grew up with Jules Feiffer and those millions of others now in their late thirties and early forties who encountered the first superhero comic books as wide-eyed kids, and so I should by all the rules of camp and nostalgia look with spinning eyes and quickening heart on the early comic book supermen. Alas, I don't. I'm afraid that every last one of the ill-drawn, ill-written colour pages in Feiffer's Great Comic Book Heroes--as well as in such actual comic books of the period as pass through my hands from time to time--makes my gorge rise in revulsion precisely as it did in those otherwise wonderful childhood days when I first looked at the early Detective Comics and Action Comics, or even their odder, cruder predecessor, More Fun Comics. I didn't think they were worth a dime then (and needless to say, the present-day prices I see asked and paid for this drek almost pulls away my last leeching doubts about the idiocy of my fellow men); in fact, I didn't think they were worth anything. I still don't. Yet I continually took them down off those dawn-age comic racks with ever-fresh (but always shafted) interest and hope. Then as now, I didn't think there could be enough comics --just so long as they were good comics. Great comics, preferably, like Wash Tubbs, Mickey Mouse, Flash Gordon, Buck Rogers, or Thimble Theatre. Crud I could do without. And I did. As a kid, I never bought a single one of the non-newspaper comic character magazines.

Of course, I read plenty of them. I had no choice. Simply in order to co-exist with kids of my own age after the mid-'30s, I had to keep looking at non-reprint comic books. They were constantly being thrust at me as examplars of the wondrous from all sides. Often, during rainy-day visits to friends, the only way to conveniently pass the time amid plates of cookies and bedewed cokes was to read through this kid's or that kid's collection of comics.



But the discussion had to be an exchange of enthusiasms--you could prefer Superman to Batman, or Submariner to The Human Torch (a little like preferring Dillinger to Baby Face Nelson, that last), but you didn't dare deny the excitement and wonder of the magazine comic heroes as a whole. I subsided into seemingly agreeable silence to survive, having quickly learned that even what I felt to be telling criticism going beyond mere personal preference--such as my discovery circa 1940-41 that Siegal and Shuster were brazenly stealing plots and gimmicks from old issues of Lester Dent's Doc Savage (the most obvious instance of this I can recall now being a scene-for-scene imitation of the climactic events of Dent's "He Could Stop the World," a DS novel for July, 1937, in a 1940 Superman episode)--got me nowhere: the kids who gobbled up the new superhero comics as fast as they could be published were wholly obsessed and delighted with their ill-wrought opiates; if the guys who "did" Superman swiped plots, then so much the worse for the remote, impenetrable prose sources from which they were lifted. For, to those first comic book fanatics, most of the major pulps of the '30s and '40s were remote and impenetrable in the most literal sense: in their comic-widened eyes, even the most lurid-covered, blatant-titled pulp (unless wildly sexy) was by its very nature as a purveyor of prose a dull, plodding, wordy, old-fashioned nuisance, far outside their deliberately narrowed range of imaginative perception.

(That pulps and comic books were all part of the same manufactured fantasy world of popular entertainment--some well done, some not, with the comic books obviously the cheapest and sleaziest variation at the time--was not in the least apparent to the kids I knew. They had found stuff really on their level at last, and that was all that mattered. Where their older brothers and fathers of similar aptitude had doggedly plowed their way through the pulps for want of any other entertainment available in cheap volume, these kids and their sons to follow found themselves enabled to give up the anguish of following prose altogether, and readily relaxed into the picture-scanning which had always been the comfortable limit of their mental capacity. None of them viewed comic continuity as simply one among a number of good things in the narrative arts to be enjoyed when well done: any possibility of this vanished when the superhero concept ballooned some of the worst comic art in print into an all-absorbing source of vicarious pleasure, so that to many kids the western and adventure movies and radio shows with which they'd sometimes deign to interrupt their comic book reading and rereading were seen as barely palatable pap, no matter whether genuinely good or bad--merely because there was no superhero to jazz things up.)

There were, of course, a fair number of kids who never succumbed to the superhero virus to any excessive degree (finding Doc Savage, Richard Wentworth, or Kimball Kinnison, say, quite super enough for their tastes), and who kept on reading the pulps, enjoying the best newspaper comics as such, and turning to the original hero-comic books only in a dull or empty hour (fortunately, I found a few such individuals in my later years of high school), but these had become a shrinking minority with the advent of the superhero comics. These lucky few, like myself, were the last of the generations who, from the turn of the century, had grown up by a normal process from newspaper comics and kids' books into the pulps and boys' (or girls') series books and thence into adult popular fiction (Burroughs, Doyle, Wells, Hammett, etc.). It was a fine and constructive way to enter the world of narrative imagination, and the comic books--with the later aid of TV--killed it for ever. Kids now grow up through a morass that reaches from the major-circulation slicks like Life and Look through a deluge of gimmicked, sawdusty paperbacks to the charnel depths of the movie magazines, mens' sex-fear zines, and the comic books, from which only a few of the luckier kids ascend with the aid of some surviving fragments of taste and discernment within themselves coupled with the wonderful first Darien-peak discovery of something rich and fine in some one of the phantom s-f mags tucked in at the edges of a newsstand, or in some of the thin cream of fine fiction paperbacked by Ace, Ballantine, Gold Medal, Lancer, or one of the other houses that maintain some part of the old pulp attitude toward good fiction and fiction writers. The great bulk of kids, sadly and only too understandably, accept the overwhelming mass of crud as good stuff. Its standards become their standards: Mad is a great satiric magazine; Marvel comic heroes are wildly imaginative; The Fantastic Four is a gripping comic strip; 2001 is top science fiction drama; Grand Funk Railroad is where it's at in Rock; The Uncle From M.A.N. (or whatever) is the fun-and-games hit of the year--and so on, ad nauseum, from work to work which depressingly prove that the lower any opportunistic cretin can aim his sights in popular entertainment, the more resoundingly he can hit the target of mass approbation (given, of course, the luck to hit on a nerve of popular need at the right psychological moment).

The wasteland dreariness of contemporary entertainment in America is only too sadly underscored by the explosion of popular enthusiasm among young adults (mired for most of their childhood in the prevailing bilge) for the bonanza of Burroughs reprints a few years ago, the subsequent and continuing deluge of the Dent Doc Savage novels, the resurrection of Howard sword-and-sorcery fiction, the recurrent Hammett, Chandler, and Lovecraft reprints, et al. In films, nothing has excited young viewers so much as the gutsy, bedrock pulp fantasy of the Sergio Leone "Dollars" Westerns made in Italy, largely sneered at by voguishly anti-violence, Camp-following reviewers and critics, which stand out so starkly against the arty, gutless muddle of American attempts at adventure films and Westerns; forms in which the main body of new, pseudo-sophisticated writers and directors here no longer believe (although a few films, such as Darker Than Amber, Powderkeg, Point Blank, The Manchurian Candidate, Lonely Are the Brave, Fool's Parade, and the work of Sam Peckinpaugh, indicate some effective retention of basic pulp values in American films).

On TV, no American serious-show has half the dramatic kick and honest writing/acting/direction of the British Avengers and Secret Agent shows, and an old Fields or Laurel and Hardy movie will alone get many young people to the horror box now. Only in pop music have Americans come up with something really fresh, honest, and zestful, and--not surprisingly--it took young Americans, sick of the repellent guk that passes for mass music in a Porterless, Gershwinless, and (hmm) Hartless age, to make it, after the British Beatles showed part of the way: the San Francisco rock groups, such as The Greatful Dead and Country Joe and the Fish, and at least one inventive New York group, the Velvet Underground. In comics, there have been only the few stalwart standbys named earlier, spread across too many syndicates and papers for their work to make a concentrated impact in the way the comic pages before 1940 did; in comic books there have been just Barks (vale!); the abortive Harvey Spirit reprints; the botched King Features experiment in revivifying Flash Gordon and other classic newspaper strips with top artists such as Williamson and others; the Sugar & Spike trial balloon; and the present Conan series.

So much for what has followed the comic book revolution (for it was nothing less) in American publishing. To return to the '30s and to the oddball, offbeat kid comic book disdain had made me, I certainly had plentiful exposure to the books and their superhero population from their start. I was far from unwilling to be seduced into some kind of genuine enjoyment--in fact, feeling my fair share of that compulsive desire most kids have to adapt to the prevailing juvenile cultural ethos, I made repeated efforts to like and understand the appeal of the superheroes, even as I argued vainly against them. I tried to crowd good taste and good sense out of my mind, to stare at those bland, dull pages of Sheena, Blue Beetle, Blackhawk (wonderful art but an idiot plot), Captain Marvel (appealing in its low-key tempo and the disarming charm of the art, but often addlepated in its writing and narrative), Batman (exciting with its wild hard Kane drawings, but determinedly imbecile in character and plot), and many, many others--and repeatedly, tiredly, angrily failed.

Looking back now, I think that what disturbed me most in those first superhero strips was not just the obvious fact that most of them were of such low calibre artistically and textually--after all, I endured many similar abominations in the newspaper comics with only a grimace in turning the page--but the striking attitude that their low-calibre execution seemed to be bent on emphasizing. There was, in short, a fundamental difference in the basic atmosphere of creation between even the most wretched newspaper strip and any comic book strip involving the superhero concept. Virtually all the narrative and art--even much I admired technically--in the superhero comics seemed to me disquietly obnoxious as such, to be an intrusion from a previously unknown and unpleasant world. The slanting, the handling of the art and narrative appeared "wrong" and oddly unhealthy to me, a deliberately sick way of viewing things. The very faces of the (non-villainous) characters seemed deliberately and viciously distorted, uglified. (I find this same effect in a recent syndicated strip: Kubert/Celardo's Green Berets.)

What I didn't realize then was that through the garish pages of the superhero comics an angry, mocking, asocial and suppressed community of depression-racked, half-talented and no-talented jobless hacks of the bleak '30s had been laid open like a gangrened wound. These men had been told over and over again by art instructors, honest artist and writer friends, and syndicate heads and magazine editors, that their stuff was, in some cases, worthless; in others mediocre at best; in a few more, promising but lacking sensible integration.

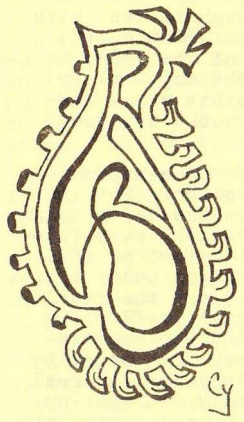
They, of course, didn't see it that way, and when a number of quick-buck magazine publishers and editors began buying up their stuff as fast as they could turn it out, obviously making good money out of it but callously paying them as little as possible, their accumulated venom and fury against prevailing standards of taste, against established comic narrative, against society as a whole, bubbled out in every panel they drew, every face they limned, every story they told.

(Had they had talent, this kind of ferocious ferment might have produced something stunningly effective--as it was doing in the work at that time of the equally bitter Al Capp and H.J. Tuthill in the newspaper comics--but since this tragic band of syndicate rejects and variously obsessed hacks (Joe Shuster used to draw hideous illustrations for sex-sadistic torture-pornography paperbacks; Mickey Spillane indulged his hatred of life in countless Sub-Mariner and Human Torch scripts) had only dross to spin, their end result was slush, without even the saving grace of honest, lowbrow schmaltz of the kind that vivified the second-rate cartoon art of Ballyhoo and Hooey in the late '30s.)

Of course, mind spoke to mind across the coloured pages of the superhero comics, and the mass audience swiftly recognized their own kind, their own hatreds and views of life, their own anguishes and needs and desires, in the work of these shabby cartoonists. Kids liked the raw, mindless dedication to violent solution of problems, to cheap ideals (crime is bad: dedicate yourself to smashing anything you think is criminal), to the avoidance of all frills (i.e., art) in the simple, direct drawing style; many of their parents liked precisely the same things. But all I knew, encountering this sudden mushrooming of magazines and characters on all sides, was that for the first time I had seen that comic strips could be ugly, and the knowledge hurt me deeply. I didn't want to admit this to myself at the time, but in the end the grisly nature of the florid work that stared back at me from that frenetic multitude of panelled pages could not be gainsaid.

What I want to emphasize here is what I was so long in understanding as a kid--that perhaps the greater part of the appeal of the superhero comics of that time lay not in their quality as art and story but in their efficacy as social anodynes. I never had the need Feiffer suggests he, and certainly many, many other adults and kids, had in those dismal depression years--to find imaginative recompense for personal inadequacies and suppressions (often aggravated by the economic chaos of the period) in the seeming total "freedom" from the laws of nature and man provided with such a lavish hand in the superhuman derring-do of the comic book heroes. Hell, I was a well-fed, middle-class kid in a happy home, and the comic art that spoke most sympathetically to me--when well done--was, of course, the relaxed, assured, eminently sane, sensible and adjusted work of the well-paid syndicate artists. These happy men indulged day-dreaming fantasies far from the hunger-churned, self-hating anxieties of the comic book men; their ideas of heroes were vulnerable, flesh-and-blood human beings who were either thrust against their wishes into peril (Flash Gordon, Brick Bradford, Buck Rogers), were paid by society to court danger (Dick Tracy, Sergeant Pat, Red Barry), or sought adventure in exotic places for an off-chance at fortune (Terry, Captain Easy, Johnny Hazard).

The more fanciful characters were often comic variations of these types: Mickey Mouse, Hairbreadth Harry, Boob McNutt, etc.; none were surnormal in powers except Mandrake and Popeye and possibly Alley Oop. None of the syndicate cartoonists bothered with obsessed monomaniacs who flaunted monstrous power in brilliant uniforms as the magazine superheroes did en masse, and if one had, his work would have seemed a lunatic intrusion into the newspaper comic page--exactly as Superman and Batman did later when the syndicates gave them trial runs.



Not that I didn't relish assaults on authority and society when I found them well done, as in Norvell Page's pulp novels about The Spider, or similar works--but the quintessence of sense and effective narrative in such fiction lay in its pitting a vulnerable human against the wrong-headed, misled stupidity of society or authority, and of saving one or both in spite of themselves from the menace of some criminal horror. The superhero comic concept was the sick reverse of this: the invulnerable hero became society, became authority, and as such beyond criticism and cavil, and wreaked havoc against all those who opposed him, or plotted to destroy him. That this is fundamentally a fascistic attitude hardly needs to be pointed out, or that the Germans, with their support of Hitler as a superhero smiting evil against a background of brightly uniformed pageantry, did in actuality what the superhero creators and readers could only do in vicarious fantasy.

For this is precisely what a close study of the older superhero comics makes so chillingly clear: the superheroes are fantasy projections of the infantile, frightened, repressed portions of society (i.e., the comic book cartoonists and their readers) inflicting total destruction on many of the authority-figures of society (thinly disguised as super-villains) which have plagued them: teachers, parents, employers, smarter, more prosperous friends, and the perennial scapegoats of the paranoid, certain minority racial and religous groups that hardly need be named here. The nature of the latter figures is laid bare in the fact that inevitably these super-villains, fiendishly intelligent and gifted, are shown as convulsed with malevolent hatred, not of society, but of the superhero-underdog himself. The bulk of this four-colour passion play was, of course, unconscious: the cartoonists and their public saw the superhero as just a more exciting extension of the detective or masked crime fighter of the pulps, and thought they were creating or enjoying him as such. (In the same way, the politically psychotic German public saw Hitler as just a more exciting extension of the established but increasingly futile political party leaders of the '30s.)

This catering of the comic books to the skulking hatred of their environment held by so many people had quick results in other areas of popular publishing: the old adventure and action pulps of the '30s and '40s gave way, sometimes within runs of the same title (Adventure, Argosy, Blue Book), to a new, hideous breed of "mens'" magazines devoted to the celebration (obviously taboo in the comic books) of the natural wickedness of women, the ways in which women destroy men, the dangers of sex itself, and the exquisite pleasures (carefully attributed to stock villains, i.e., Nazis) to be derived from torturing women.

In the area of popular fiction itself, the unparalled mass sales of the novels of Mickey Spillane, which dealt almost exclusively with the unmasking of female villainy and its brutal punishment by stabbing gut-shots, speak for themselves. Publishers have beaten the literary woods for more Spillanes (especially after their prize nut became a Jehovah's Witness for ten years and write nothing), but found that writers of literary competence seem unable or unwilling to mimic the mad ferocity of Spillane toward women (i.e., the challenge of sex). Like Spillane himself, this kind of vicious destructiveness comes out of sub-literary comic book concepts of reality, and it is comparatively rare in the kind of mind which can think abstractedly enough to deal with narrative through prose. (Louis-Ferdinand Celine of France, the frankly anti-Semetic and avowedly fascist author of the '30s, is perhaps the only gifted writer of this kind to make any mark on literature since the sad, grisly Marquis de Sade; his work, however, is stylistically and imaginatively far above the low-brow needs of his ideal audience.)

But things might be worse today. Most of the ugly once-predominant tone of the superhero comic books has vanished now; what remained as late as the mid-'50s (most notoriously in the majority of the EC magazines) was given the coup-de-disgrace by the overstated and largely inaccurate indictment of the ranting Dr. Wertham of Seduction of the Innocent (he could never grasp that popular arts do not create but only indulge popular abberation) and the resulting "Comic Code." A new, slick, exciting visual style reflecting the prosperous, contented, self-confident '60s (and the comparative prosperity of the cartoonists), has taken over in a majority of the present magazines, but the change in artistry and internal atmosphere of the comic books has done little, sadly, to make up for the rock-bottom quality of narrative, dialogue, and characterization that has typified the field from the start.

(In savage, bemused reaction against the entire official comic establishment in newspapers and magazines alike, a group of gifted young San Francisco cartoonists, in company with other artists who have gravitated to them over the past four years, have hurled a new, unfettered, highly experimental kind of comic book at young readers as fed up as themselves. One or two of these new cartoonists, who publish and distribute their own magazines to avoid commercial control, have already attained national prominence and publication: Robert Crumb and Gilbert Shelton. Others, in such magazines as Zap Comics, Snatch, Yellow Dog, Skull Comics, Hydrogen Bomb Funnies, Thrilling Murder Comics, All Pulp Comics, and others that cheerfully thumb their noses at all standard comic taboos, are doing exciting work of enormous value and promise in the field. So far, these publications have had no effect whatsoever on the moribund comic books from D.C., Marvel, and Charlton, nor are they likely to: no amount of dancing life can reanimate the dead in a graveyard.)

As showcases for a sizable body of striking artwork (apart from any contingent considerations of story and concept), the original-character comic books have a certain past and present interest; as purveyors of a form of narrative art brought to brilliant apogee time and again in the greatness of the best syndicated comics, they have failed abjectly -- in my long-considered and uncontent opinion.

OPERE CITATO

BY HARRY WARNER JR.

Everyone knows that there are more fanzines than ever. Almost everyone is familiar with the increased specialization of many fanzines nowadays. This one specializes in Sword & Sorcery, the one over there seeks to revive the old Weird Tales atmosphere, and several are devoted to the writings of a particular fantasy author, like Burroughs or Tolkien.

But the fanzine explosion has also produced some publications of a different sort. They have specific subject matter which has some sort of connexion with fantasy or science fiction, but also is connected with the mundane world. There has never been any shortage of fan publications devoted to mundane creators: Mark Twain, Gilbert & Sullivan, and Sherlock Holmes are just three of the many topics around which clubs and regular journals have sprung up. But I believe the current phenomenon is new to both fandom and the mundane world. With one possible exception, all the publications to be described in the following paragraphs were inspired in one way or another by science fiction fanzines. It looks as if science fiction fandom is moving out into the rest of the literary world. If the trend continues, I want to watch the consequences, which would presumably include more involvement by younger people and less polite controversy than the mundane literary fandoms now possess.

Mystery fandom is becoming large enough to have its own convention and a whole assortment of fanzines. But the semi-mystery fanzine that is closest linked with our fandom is The JDM Bibliophile, now in its 15th issue. It is devoted to the works and the readers of John D. MacDonald, generally considered the author of mystery, suspense and adventure stories, but also the creator of three novels and a batch of shorter stories that fall into the science fiction categories. Science fiction keeps bobbing up in this fanzine, the creation of two science fiction fans, Leonard J. and June M. Moffatt, even though recent issues have emphasized soul-searching by MacDonald fans over the merit of the McGee novels. Another fan, Dean Grennell, turns up in this 15th issue with a dissertation on firearms as they are represented in mystery fiction, and he includes a note about a future possibility: a noiseless handgun without the use of an illegal silencer. "I'd prefer to withhold explicit details on this, in the public interest," Dean says. There are at least four other fanzines currently devoted to other writers in the suspense and adventure field, incidentally, Frederick Faust, Frank Gruber, Ellery Queen, and Sax Rohmer.

There was a science fiction fan quite a while back named George Jennings. He gafiated and a year ago he suddenly bobbed up again with a new fanzine in a different field: Epilogue, devoted to oldtime radio. Old radio programs on tape seem to be growing into an essential part of some science fiction conventions and there is an increasing overlap between the two fandoms. Jennings is obviously interested in old radio qua old radio, not as a method of making money by peddling dubbings of old broadcasts, and Epilogue shows it. The third issue contains a splendid collection of anecdotes about horror shows that originated in Chicago during radio's golden age, where monsters' footsteps were simulated by putting crumpled newspaper and water into a tub and using plumbers' plungers in it. Here also are evidences of science fiction fandom's influence on another field: one reader claims the biggest collection of old radio shows in existence, more than 10,000, and there's a proposal to stage a convention of radio buffs.

A different attack on the broadcasting theme is wielded by the people who collect tapes without necessarily emphasizing old days in radio. One fanzine in this field is really a part of science fiction fandom: It's Replay, now in its 27th issue, published by Joanne Burger for the tape bureau of the NFFF. The NFFF has a bad reputation with many fans, for one reason or another, but it has some useful aspects, too, and its tape bureau is something unique: a source of information about taping stuff, a directory of fans who want to correspond on tape, and an imposing catalog of stuff that you can get dubbed for blank tape and a fee so small that hardly any celebrity would worry about piracy. There is also talk in the current Replay of getting into the field of taping science fiction and fantasy for persons in institutions for the blind. The complete catalog of tape bureau possessions runs to forty pages. If you have a sudden urge to hear L. Sprague de Camp recite in German Jabberwocky, or such fannish folk songs as "Universal Beanie" and "Where Have All the Fanzines Gone?", or Bloch, Tucker and Lee Hoffman arguing about who sawed Courtney's boat, or dramas ranging from old Dimension X or I Love a Mystery fantasies to new productions by the West Coast Players, they're all here. Plus enormous quantities of soundtracks from television, worldcon speeches, and even BBC productions.

Horror movie fandom isn't always a batch of 13-year-olds haggling over the value of the fourth issue of Famous Monsters of Filmland. Sometimes it's large, intensely interesting publications. Unfortunately, the 66-page first issue of Fantasia is probably the only issue, because of time shortage on the part of the editors. Maybe copies are still available of this first issue, which contains at least two things of major interest: an illustrated Bela Lugosi biography and an exceptionally detailed study of Freaks, the little-known horror film that was contemporary with Dracula and Frankenstein. If you're an older fan who can remember Forrest J. Ackerman before he got into monster fandom, you'll also enjoy reading a collection of tributes to him.

I'm not certain if The London Collector borrows anything from science fiction fanzines. Its first issue emphasizes Jack London's poetry, and the second issue, which I've not seen, is supposed to be devoted to his science fiction.

The poetry issue shows London as a writer of verse quite similar in style and quality to millions of poems that newspapers published on their editorial pages in his era. But a sonnet gives a hint that London liked Milton and might have achieved a pretty good imitation of his style if he'd tried a little harder. London is sorely neglected among science fiction fans, despite some of the pioneering speculative and fantasy fiction he wrote, and there's always the chance that a publication devoted to London will also perk up interest in the general literary world, where he's also given a shorter shrift than he should get.

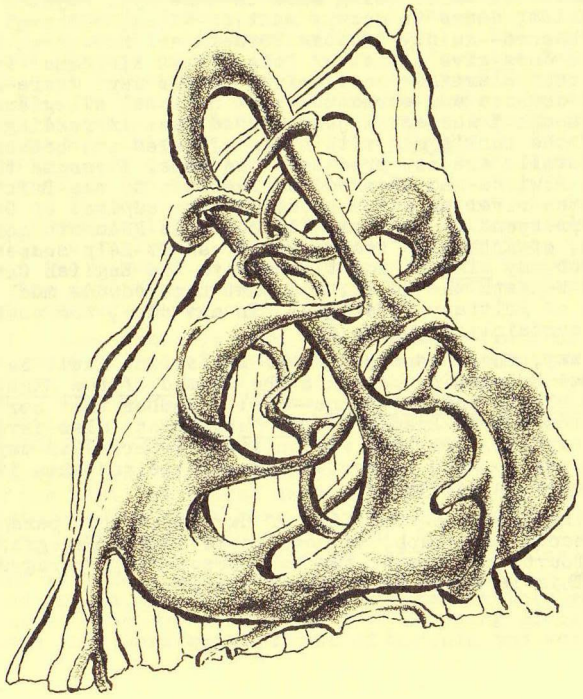
The JDM Bibliophile: from Leonard J. and June M. Moffatt, Box 4456, Downey, California 90241. 50¢ per copy; published semi-annually.

Epilogue: from George Jennings, 7605 Sandra Drive, Little Rock, Arkansas 72209. 25¢ per copy; "an attempted monthly schedule.

Replay: from Joanne Burger, 55 Bluebonnet Court, Lake Jackson, Texas 77566. Distributed to NFFF members who pay additional fee to join tape bureau.

Fantasia: from Bill Pugmire, Jr., 5115 S. Mead St., Seattle, Washington 98118. 60¢; better inquire first about availability.

The London Collector: from Richard Weiderman, Box 181, Cedar Springs, Michigan 49319. 50¢ per copy.



Saint Camber Protect Us!

by

Joe Christopher

(Tarleton College)

Katherine Kurtz, Deryni Rising, New York: Ballantine Books, 1970, 95¢

Recently I ended up on a panel discussing the current revival of Adult Fantasies. Perhaps the most interesting comments came from Katherine Kurtz at the opposite end of the table. She suggested her emphasis in Deryni Rising was on plot and characterization rather than magic. I asked her afterwards what use was fantasy if this was what should be done--wasn't a detective adventure just as good for plot plus character? She replied that her book was also a detective-adventure story, and that the fantasy was mainly used to give the novel a fresh and interesting background.

She was putting me on.

The fresh and interesting background used in this novel is that of a mediaeval Wales, fictionalized. Lin Carter, in his introduction, comments that Gwynedd, the principal country, is close in name (not identical?) to "an ancient Welsh Kingdom." I have compared the map at the front of the book to a map of modern Wales (maps of mediaeval Wales being hard to come by). Gwynedd, with its various duchies, seems to occupy most of Wales, although some details are obscure--mainly because borders are not given on the map. But the book does give a list of "the Eleven Kingdoms" in chapter two (p.34) that clarifies most points on the map. There are still a couple of duchies and earldoms whose national allegiance I haven't placed--although I suspect I just missed them in reading. Even comparisons of the book's map with a map of Wales are bothersome because the details are not precisely the same. I assume the sea inlet beneath Howicce and Llannedd corresponds to the Bristol Channel; if so the river on which Rheumuth (the capitol of Gwynned) lies may correspond to the Usk. (If so, does Rheumuth correspond to Caerleon, of Arthurian fame?) But I cannot help suspecting that the sea inlet may also be identified with the English Channel since Bremagne is beneath the inlet, and that name sounds much like the French name of Brittany (Bretagne). In any case, the various names on the map certainly sound Welsh.

(By the way, those readers of the Ballantine Adult Fantasies who have read Evangeline Walton's The Island of the Mighty--originally The Virgin and the Swine--will remember that her story, drawn from the Fourth Branch of The Mabinogion, also involved the Kingdom of Gwynedd, but that was in its pre-Christian days, when its capitol was in what is now Carnarvonshire and when its rule was matrilinear in descent.)

The opening describes the King of Gwynedd: first paragraph, one sentence; second paragraph, two sentences; third paragraph, two sentences; fourth paragraph, two sentences; fifth paragraph, one sentence. This is known as a snappy start.

It also counts on the reader to accept generalities: "When he spoke, whether with the crackle of authority or the lower tones of subtle persuasion, men listened and obeyed" (3.2). Perhaps it would have been better to open with the first flow of the deer hunt.

But the novel does not live up to this opening: it lives above it. For a mystery story, one of the problems is psychological. Why does Queen Jehana hate one of the King's most trusted Lords, Alaric Morgan, Duke of Corwyn, and a half-Deryni. (aha! an allegory about race prejudice--well, not exactly). Another puzzle is the proper interpretation of a riddling poem (given on p.90). Unlike T.S. Eliot's verse, the phrases do have a proper explanation, but otherwise it matches "A Cooking Egg," although in a more Alexandrine style.

I should pause over that word Deryni. The Deryni are a magical people in the book. I suppose the word to be a substitution for faery in the Welsh legends. These, of course, are the full-sized faeries of the original stories, not the diminutive, prettified fairies of Shakespeare and Drayton. (Spenser, in The Faerie Queene, seems to have used faery to refer to anyone of Welsh--or perhaps Celtic--blood, but he was not following the original traditions.) In Kurtz's novel the magic seems to be mainly of the ESP sort: telekinesis and teleportation, with the climactic duel between Charissa (a Deryni sorceress) and Prince Kelson, who is attempting to come to the throne after his father's death, taking the form of concretized mental images.

Other names besides the race are interesting, Charissa, for example. I suppose this is from the Greek Kharis for grace or favour. A Greek name seems odd in mediaeval Wales, but, then, Charissa is an odd evil sorceress: a blue-eyed blonde. (Alas, Morgan is a blond, and the one-time saint, Camber, was a blond, so perhaps it runs in Deryni lines.) It is also interesting that one of the chief male heroes is named Morgan--certainly a reversal from the Celtic use of morgan for an evil goddess, as in Morgan le Faye. (Morgan, by the way, is able to cure wounds, in a Charles Williams-like moment of exchange, when he feels another's power working through him.) Even if what I assume are invented words--like merasha (a drug) and Khadasa (an oath)--are neglected, there is still the oddity of Kelson being crowned in the Cathedral of St. George. For St. George is the patron of England: at Wales one would expect St. David or St. Beuno (or those earlier cult saints, Sts. Dyfrig, Illtud, and Cadog). Finally, a stylistic note: the use of interface (p.268) for the meeting of two adjacent areas of magical power is certainly precise, but the connotations are perhaps more scientific than ninth or tenth-century Wales easily permits.

Indeed, if I were asked to name the two major flaws of the book, the language would be one of them, although not because of interface. The main problem is that the language is too simple, not rich and resonant enough. The author does know her church terminology well, but other details while always acceptable are yet not much more. Take this description of an urban rain, for example:

> The courtyard was almost deserted, now, and the massive presence of the basilica loomed dark against the night sky. Far in the distance, they could hear the cathedral bells striking Compline, last of the canonical hours. And the last stragglers were filing from the lighter square of the basilica door across the way. Here and there, soldiers crossed the square in twos and threes, sometimes holding sputtering torches aloft in the fine drizzle, but more often just hurrying along, eager to get where they were going, in out of the cold and wet. (p.137)

Here is another passage, from a writer in his twenties when his book was published: a passage that is slightly overwritten, perhaps, but closer to what a fantasy in a primitive setting should sound like:

> A rising wind blew snow-heavy clouds ever thicker over the sky, so that the wan moon seemed to be fleeing great black dragons which swallowed it and smothered the dead world in darkness. The wind alone lived, it wailed in the trees, it roared through the sky, it snarled around her where she stood in a blind fury of bitter noise. Hoo, hoo, it sang, blowing a sudden sheet of snow before it, eldritch white in the moon, hoo, halloo, hunting you!
>
> (Poul Anderson, The Broken Sword, 1954, p.170)

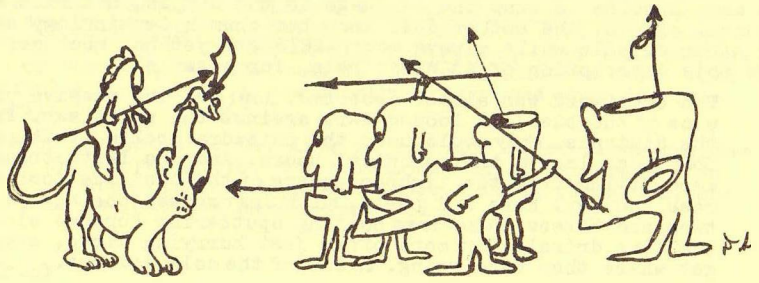
This simplicity in style, however, may well make Kurtz's book more popular among the younger fans than would be what I would consider a better book.

The second major flaw is a shift in point of view. After the first chapter, the majority (not all) of the book follows the thoughts and actions of Morgan, but at the end of the book, in the middle of the second-to-last chapter, as Kelson faces his trial, the point of view abruptly shifts to him and stays predominantly with him for the rest of the novel. Of course, one understands how the ultimate success in the magical struggle had to be his, and how his viewpoint was necessary to satisfactorily follow the struggle, but none-the-less the abrupt dropping of Morgan leaves a reader --left this reader anyway-- frustrated. It is not that easy to shift character-identifications.

The major virtue of the book, on the other hand, is that, after two chapters of exposition, the action is steady and various: a political fight in a council meeting, a visit to a grave, several assassinations, a coming-of-age (in magic) rite, and a coronation cum duel. If the characterization is not too complex (despite the author's comment to me) and if the reflections are not as deep as with a more leisurely book like Walton's The Island of the Mighty, this is only what one expects with a highly plotted novel: the action makes for fast, enjoyable reading.

. (I might add, not as a disparagement but simply for the record, that as a mystery writer, Miss Kurtz withholds one piece of evidence from the reader: that the seal of St. Camber is set (with other seals) in the floor of the cathedral.)

I have reserved one final point to direct to Ballantine Books: despite the nicely stylized drawing by Robert Pepper that is repeated on the back cover from the front, Katherine Kurtz's picture would be far more beautiful.



REVERSED THEOLOGY

by

Wayne Connelly

(York University)

Dimitri Gat, The Shepherd is My Lord, New York: Doubleday, 1970, $4.95

> "Who can tell what other cradle,
> High above the milky way,
> Still may rock the King of Ages
> On some other Christmas Day?"

Apologies to Flanders and Swann and to Mr. Gat, but with some muddying of the theology such appears to be the general theme of The Shepherd is My Lord. It is, of course, one of the oldest and most well-worn in science fiction. Unlike many of its fellows, though, it seems in little immediate danger of becoming outmoded.

The basics are familiar: man finally has succeeded at some remote time in the future in spreading himself over several galaxies, graciously offering his leadership in the process to various and sundry alien intelligencies. In this particular instance, human hegemony takes the form of a Planet Development Megacorporation, an industrial octopus with true inter-galactic proportions. However--as it inevitably must--a day arrives when someone/something is encountered that altogether upsets the perspective.

Landing upon what promises to be another commonplace virgin planet, Agar, an initial-contact agent for Enterprises, becomes the first human being to meet the Shepherds. Immeasurably more advanced than mankind, intent only upon the well being of others, they are in fact no longer evan a distinct species, having long since abandoned their individual selves for a quasi-mystical Oneness. In any event, Agar unconsciously and perhaps unintentionally becomes the Shepherds' prophet-teacher setting out upon a religious journey whose purpose is the revelation of the "Truth" to the Galactic Brotherhood or more precisely to Enterprises. And as it happens, the hierarchy of Enterprises proves most anxious to learn the truth from Agar--the whole truth--such as where the home planets of the Shepherds are concentrated, the state of their military preparedness, their possession of planet-busters...

Regrettably, though, even with the continuing fascination of this superior intelligence theme, The Shepherd is not in my view a success. The impression I can't escape is that the story is still in a formative stage, lacking at least one final extensive revision--a revision that would have made it a more completely fictionalized work and almost certainly would have eliminated several rather obvious and basic flaws.

Possibly the most unfortunate failing occurs in the structure. For while the method is appropriate it nevertheless fails to work. Undergoing an emotional disorientation, Agar proceeds throughout in a confused manner. The reality he has always understood has suddenly been shattered, and he is no longer genuinely certain of either his direction or purpose.

Accordingly, what Mr. Gat attempts is to reflect this puzzlement in the movement of his novel. His protagonist reacts to events without really knowing what is happening, the elaborate plot becoming apparent only in retrospect. Accordingly, the reader for the greater part of the book is presented with a series of disjointed and apparently pointless episodes, exercises in stock science fiction concepts--industrial giantism, scientifically programmed pleasure palaces, resort and retirement planets, even a crackpot father who tells fortunes with Tarot cards. It is only towards the novel's conclusion that all of these varying elements are drawn together and shown to actually form a significant pattern. For this kind of delayed disclosure to work, however--and it is here that Mr. Gat seems to have fallen down--the reader must be made at least in part to anticipate it. Some indication has to be provided, whether through hints, clues or whatever, that the coloured shards actually do fit together, that the odd-looking pieces of the jigsaw are indeed meaningful.

An even more basic fault is the excessive use of exposition; simply too much of the story is told through background accounts. The inevitable result is a plodding pace with about as much dramatic life at times as a lecture on "The Historical Parameters of Economic Imperialism." The most grim instance of this over-use of exposition occurs, moreover, in the very opening of the novel. Rather than getting on with his story and having Agar confronted with the Shepherds, Mr. Gat choses to linger over what seems to be endless pages of background. Consequently, the novel gets off to a start resembling that of a two-hundred pound lady sprinter.

What makes this opening even more irritating, though, is the fact that so much of the information provided is really unnecessary or could just as well have been added later. The concepts of first-contact and planet development are certainly familiar enough not to require an introduction.

Yet another unfortunate technical area is the author's handling of "plants." As already mentioned, much of the book has the appearance of being purely arbitrary. Why, for example, are we given an account of Guth-IV's collection of antique firearms? The answer, of course, is that these weapons are needed at a critical point later in the narrative, and so have to be mentioned earlier in order to make their later appearance credible and not completely fortuitous. Mr. Gat neglects, however, to provide some tenable reason for describing the guns in the first place. A far more damaging instance of this same thing is the single gift presented to Agar by the Shepherds--immunity to mind probes. Once again no immediate explanation is provided, and as a consequence Agar's immunity sticks out as an obvious "plant." The climax of Enterprises' series of attempts to learn the truth from Agar is effectively de-fused.

The best thing that can be said of The Shepherd is My Lord is that it contains the material to have been an interesting novel.

TIME AND FREE WILL

by

George Zebrowski

Keith Laumer, Dinosaur Beach, New York: Scribners, 1971,

I read this novel with a good deal of pleasure, all the while fondly remembering the same author's Worlds of the Imperium, which Damon Knight had hailed "a major new idea in time travel." Keith Laumer has a gift for time travel. The Timesweep technology in this novel is fascinating. All the terms and ideas are wonderfully self explanatory, or nearly so; and the events have an immediacy about them that makes for swift, compulsive reading. The prose throughout is muscular and lean, often leading the reader into some striking phrase or image.

Dinosaur Beach is a place of dead ends. It is the image and name which hold the entire theme of the novel, which is a dramatic and meaningful one. Ultimately, the book is set up as a criticism of the idea of determinism, fatalism, predestination--of any concept that can serve as the justification of controlled history, and of any actions that proceed from this view.

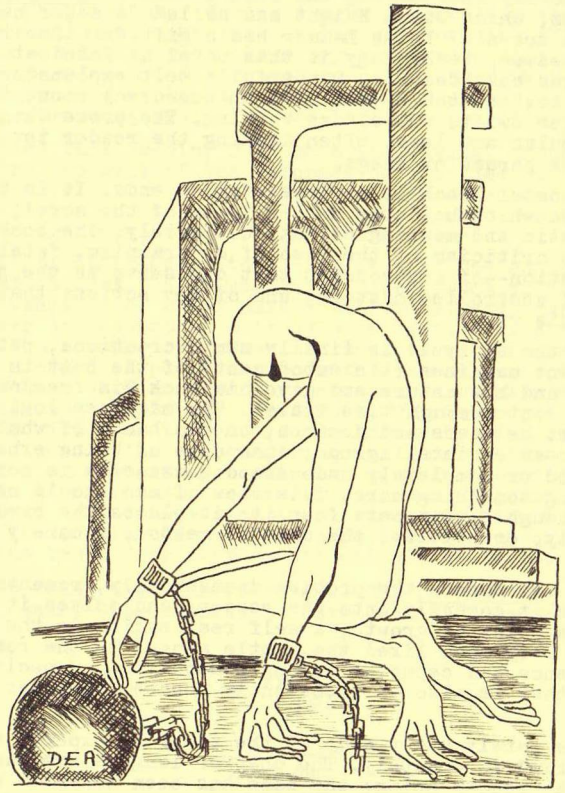
In the story it is finally man's creations, patient, intelligent machines (the embodiments of the best in man?), who understand his nature and give him back his freedom, which he has lost through time travel. The machines logically give man what he needs and desires, on the basis of what he is: an open-ended intelligence, incapable of being exhaustively analyzed or completely understood because he is constantly becoming something more. This view of man should not be feared, even though governments fear it; it places the burden of morality, creativity, the uses of reason, squarely on man himself.

Laumer treats the problem dramatically, romantically, and thrusts it cogently onto the reader; and solves it dramatically as a point of growth, a self realization in the hero's journey. I very much liked the subtle appeal to the reader's intelligence and capacity for philosophizing, especially in a novel that is also an excellently mounted thriller and action tale.

The purely story side of the novel is expert; the concepts are worked in smoothly. The chapter lengths are just right to keep the reader going; the pace has been measured with extraordinary accuracy.

The novel comes out of a tradition for this sort of thing in science fiction; and it is a criticism of that tradition. Leiber's The Big Time is almost mentioned by name at one point. I was reminded of Williamson's Legion of Time in a few places. Laumer's view of timesweep meddling as ultimately unviable, leading to an infinite regress of historical adjustments, and more meddling, is a knock of all the writers who have uncritically used such concepts.

Meddling -- putting patches on the patches, according to Laumer -- eventually eliminates itself. Freedom in historical time means giving the power of agency back to the principals -- men -- instead of doing everything for them. It means standing by and letting them make their own destinites, even if those destinies will not be tidy. Eventually governments, fathers and mothers, dictators and other oppressors, will have to learn this; or go the way of the great saurians, whose bones may be found, bleached and buried in the ground at Dinosaur Beach.



Selected Letters

316 E. Main St--Drawer P
Morehead, Kentucky 40351

RQ:

In his letter / RQ IV, 234 / Fredric Wertham referred to Konrad Lorenz, Robert Ardrey, Desmond Morris, and Anthony Storr as "reactionaries." I was so astonished I looked the word up in my new dictionary, thinking perhaps that it bears a new meaning in the jargon of Wertham's discipline, whatever it may be. It doesn't, apparently: I assume he refers to Webster III's definition 1-b: "tendency toward a former especially outmoded political or social order or policy."

Certainly it is Wertham who cites an outmoded order or policy in maintaining that human violence is "learned behavior...neither biological nor eternal." This would...place the reading of Wertham for information in the same category as reading Galen or Hippocrates for medical knowledge. I am far from alone in having studied ...and rejected that old and fallacious tenet of the excuse-makers. And you agree with the tenet! Honestly!

Apparently Wertham follows in the footsteps of Dollard-Miller-Doob-Mowrer-Sears, Ashley Montagu, and J.P. Scott. Both the latter display the most incredible ability to remain ignorant by ignoring all experiments and findings save those that agree with their own blinkers-wearing rejection of so "demeaning" a tenet as that you and I are (nearly?) as instinct-molded as my coonhound, Pompeius Magnus, and Mister Redd, the robin who "owns" my yard.

As early as 1913 Freud--who had no opportunity to read or talk with ethologists (in those days people still thought people could learn something about animal behavior by studying them in captivity)--rejected his own hypothesis that aggression stems from environment and upbringing, the F-A or frustration-into-aggression concept (Totem and Taboo, 1913).

"The bit of truth," Freud wrote,"...is that men are not gentle, friendly creatures wishing for love, who simply defend themselves if attacked, but that a powerful measure of desire for aggression has to be reckoned as part of their instinctual endowment." By 1920, in Beyond the Pleasure Principle, he was more firm: "In all that follows I take up the standpoint that the tendency to aggression is an innate, independent, instinctual disposition in man..."

It appears that Dollard et al used some of Freud's earlier hypotheses--before he outgrew them, for he found it ever difficult to ignore truth--as the basis for their thesis in Frustration and Aggression (Yale U. Press, 1939 and 1961). A book based on a premise discarded by its promulgator!

I have no idea what RQ's editor has read...I assume that Wertham has read Keith as well as Scott and Montagu, that he has read Freud and Ardrey's The Territorial Imperative, a book that could easily have been subtitled "Sunlight on corners purposely kept dark by those who feel that there is shame in man's instinctual nature." I assume that Wertham has read Scott, who...preferred to believe his own observations of a little group of white mice--while another man was showing, using the same species, that agression was... well, call it an automatic response. Montagu, also apparently embarrassed that man is an animal, actually stated that "The evidence indicates quite clearly that everything human beings do as human beings they have had to learn from other human beings," and went blithely on to say that innate aggression could be "thoroughly dismissed." Scott was just as unrelentingly positive, saying at the same time that "All that we know" shows that fighting's source is in "immediate external stimuli."

Now I am saying this, and the editor is absolved of any part in it: these statements are either (1) unintentionally false because the writers somehow missed all that was taking place around them, all that pointed to a totally contrary conclusion, or (2) deliberate lies. The evidence does not "indicate quite clearly" and for anyone to say that "all that we know" supports his preconception is...fantastic. It is the exact antithesis of the scientific method, which Baur characterized when he said that the scholar should be more or less indifferent to the outcome of his researches. Ignorance or chicanery such as that displayed by these anti-science gentlemen--who seem to have led Doctor Wertham astray (because of his preconceptions?)--bear out what Sir Arthur Keith wrote in the late '40's, that "our minds are enslaved to our prejudices to a far greater degree than is usually thought."

...The Montagu/Scott stand is becoming a lonely one. They should be delighted that someone else has joined their indefensible posture. Of John Dollard's co-workers, Miller saw almost at once that frustration could easily lead to consequences other than aggression, and Sears concluded that frustration of aggression leads to --aggression! Presumably both these men have dropped out of the F-A school "founded" by Freud...and out of which he dropped!

Had you not quoted Wertham as you did, I'd have said little of the foregoing; certainly I'd have been less militant about it. Much in my book The Castle Keeps, about the America and world of the immediate future, is based on the territorial principle, carrying with it automatic tendencies toward defense/aggression...because I think we need to realize this, and then to begin to search for means to circumvent it. Making chicken-egg excuses for man (son is aggressive because frustrated by daddy; why was daddy so damned frustrating?) has not helped and will not help. (An understanding of territory and the will of the proprietor to fight should, of itself and aside from "morality," have kept us out of Vietnam--and should stop people from bombing and burning universities. Neither activity frustrates the object, but they do slam straight into his territory-sense, and that thrusts him into aggressive behavior. Watch for "overkill" in the U.S. in matters of curbing dissent.)

Now. What Wertham says in his letter is that his observations indicate the possibility of the reduction and even abolition of human violence. I find nothing impossible about such an observation. I sincerely hope he is both right and loud. I am most interested in what forms of behavior he proposes as sublimation/redirection of our unfortunate refusal to learn from our own experience. (Instinct sometimes leads to apparently stupid and certainly irrational behavior, as lemmings and salmon indicate--along with warmaking man.) Certainly many other animals, some of which could be called more unswerving in their territoriality than man, have learned that violence doesn't get the job done...

I sincerely hope Wertham and others find a substitute. Could we have found it already, with Russia, in what we call the "space race"? Bear in mind that the last time war was hours away and we were scrambling down on the Florida coast, Khruschev wisely decided that it was better to sit down and scratch, as does a dog when his bluff is called at the territorial line, than allow himself and John Kennedy to be remembered as the men who started It.

My problem with Wertham, though, is this: I'd like to read the book he advertised in your pages, but really hate to bother with anything based on a false premise...

Come to think, mister editor, you are a Canadian whiskey reactionary--and that comes from a Kentuckian!

Positively,
Andrew Offutt

I'd prefer not to repeat my answer (on the tautological character of the inherent agression psychology) to Jeffrey May's similar argument last issue. Suffice it to note that Freud's unfamiliarity with social conditioning of behavior (cultural anthropology then being an infant science) makes his endorsement (or non-endorsement) totally irrelevant.

2111 Sunset Crest Dr.
Los Angeles, CA 90046

Dear Leland,

Last time I spoke of a strike--which was quashed immediately, I hasten to add--and this time I've a new excuse for brevity: viz., a recent bout of pneumonia from which I'm still recuperating. But one of the pleasures of convalescence is reading, and one of the pleasures of reading is RQ.

If Darrell Schweitzer would like to speculate further on where Frederic Arnold Kummer, Jr. may have gotten the device for his 1938 story, allow me to suggest the 1932 film based on the 1920's short story of Richard Connell, "The Most Dangerous Game," in which ships are drawn to an island and wrecked by means of false markings and buoys so that their crews can become the victims of the island's insane ruler.

I sympathesize with Bill Blackbeard anent the errata in the Krazy Kat book--the same thing happens constantly in cinema "histories" and "definitive reference works." It's easy to understand how history becomes distorted--but [it's] hard to accept!

All best,
Robert Bloch

So Disney's Mooncussers (cited by Mr. Schweitzer) is displaced by Most Dangerous Game as Kummer's likeliest source. But the Kummer story, in turn, is displaced by others of much lower grade, cited in the current Cliche serial.

---

948 Garrison Ave
Teaneck, NJ 07666

Dear Leland:

...For various reasons I am not renewing the subscription (RQ is just too academic for me; I can't understand four-fifths of it, I'm just a pulp writer) but will regret missing the newly-instituted Hall of Shame which strikes me as a good idea and one worth pursuing. (I suggested to an agent some years ago that I'd like to do a volume entitled Year's Worst S-F but for some reason no one wanted a project that would have been indistinguishable from anyone else's "best.") I would like to nominate for the Hall of Shame my own The Ascension (Fantastic, 4/69; anthologized in Final War & Other Fantasies, Ace, 1969) which in its sophomorism, cynicism, shallowness and horrifying derivation from Ballard will surely rank in any longterm thesis on the subject as one of the most truly abominable stories of its generation.

Best regards,
Barry N. Malzberg

As explained in our 6th issue, at least one annual "Best " anthology (Judith Merril's) would indeed be indistinguishable from anybody else's "Worst." Authors are hereby requested not to nominate their own works: as a Tennessee Williams character says, you don't call yourself names, but wait for others to do it.

Box 574 National City
CA 92050

Dear Mr. Sapiro:

Darrell Schweitzer's article on "The Pirates of Eros" finally prodded a letter of comment out of me. This type of article is always good for a chuckle or two (Yandro recently published an equally funny dissection of the old pulp "Flash Gordon Magazine"), but it also seems to me that the whole idea behind this article and others in the same category is both unfair and unkind. If we are old enough to have been reading Amazing Stories in 1938, I think that our reaction to "The Pirates..." and many similar stories at the time when they originally were published, is the only honorable test of their merit. After all, does it really matter what readers of Riverside Quarterly will think of this publication 25 years from now, when they unearth moldy copies? I believe that writers like Mr. Schweitzer are missing the point entirely, when they disturb the bones of ancient literary corpses. (Is the dialogue on the "late, late" TV movie really so corny, when we consider that the script writer was talented and highly original in his own era.)

Peace,
Irving L. Jacobs

I don't see why the antiquity of a story should furnish an excuse for its being bad. The reader's own aesthetic sensibilities may have been absent long ago, but not critical standards in general.

83-33 Austin Street
Kew Gardens, NY 11415

Dear Leland,

The worst s-f story of all time has to be The Five-Way Secret Agent by Mack Reynolds, in two issues of Analog which I have understandably forgotten. This production by that drivel-happy cloddy is merely a series of lectures strung together until even Reynolds' non-hero revolts with, "This seems to be my day for getting lectured."

Plot--Rex Baderis dispatched by his employers to make contact with their colleagues in the Sov-bloc. The momentous message he brings back is, "We agree with you."

Characterization--Nil. All the characters are animated lecturers, except Rex Bader, a cipher which exists only for them to talk at.

Callahan errs in stating that Elves are not native to Middle-earth. It would appear from Appendix F that the Eldar ("the Three Kindreds that sought the Undying Realm and came there at the beginning of Days") migrated from the East like the Edain and only then went to Valinor. The Sindar and the "silvan" Elves never crossed the Sea at all...

Sincerely,
Bill Linden

Mack Reynolds is not a bad writer, but (perhaps worse) one who sometimes chooses to write badly. I didn't see these fictional lectures, which in any case were outside Darrell Schweitzer's initial range, the short story and novelette.

---

208 Putnam Hall
2650 Durant Ave
Berkeley, CA 94720

Dear Leland,

Patrick Callahan's "Animism and Magic in The Lord of the Rings is a fine examination of the nature of Middle Earth magic. However, there is one note which should be made. He states,"...as a general rule, the mortal races command no magic of their own, the one exception is Aragorn...king of Gondor, descended from the heroic ancient race of Numerorians." While it is true that Aragorn is mortal, his ability to wield magic may not be due entirely to just his patrimonic right as heir to an ancient throne by his very ancestry. He is of the royal line of Numenor, right? Recall the genealogy in Appendix A: "There were three unions of the Eldar and the Edain: Lúthien and Beren; Idril and Tuor; Arwen and Aragorn." The first four lived in roughly the same period. Lúthien Tinúviel and Beren parented Elwing who would marry Earendil the Mariner, son of Idril and Tuor. And from the union of these two Half-Elven came the brothers, Elrond and Elros, who were given the choice of which kindred they would belong. Elrond, as we know, chose the Elven; Elros chose Man-kind and was granted a life-span greater than that of lesser men. It was Elros who founded the Throne of Numenor, becoming the first of the line, Tar-Minyatur. While he was mortal, Elros still retained his Elvish blood and passed it on to his heirs. One of whom was Aragorn.

What does this prove? Only that Aragorn's magic, passed down by his apparent right to the throne, might be derived from his relation--no matter how thinned, by my count around sixty generations worth--to those of Elvish blood. His being a mortal is accidental, due to a decision of a long past ancestor; his ability to wield magic, probably associated with the royal lineage more through common belief than his Elvish blood.

(Sixty generations, huh? That would make Arwen his great-great-great...grand aunt. Incestuous relationship, perhaps? But then, we've got to allow for royalty...)

And while I'm on the subject of royal use of magic, the same occurs in Katherine Kurtz' new fantasy, Deryni Rising. Here we have magic banned by the Church, and users of the Magic, members of the Deryni race, purged. Those with Deryni blood would deny its existence for the most part, thus the fact that someone was of the Deryni would be covered by nonacknowledgement in the past. The Royalty in Deryni Rising has this blood, but due to public opinion, it wouldn't be wise to reveal this odd nature and thus the institution of King's Powers...which situation forms basis for the novel (and presumably the sequel).

Yours,
Dave Nee

I think Aragorn's royal lineage was what the author primarily had in mind, as with his Royal Touch, attributed to British monarchs as late as Charles II (who admonished an ailing believer, "May God grant you health and better sense"). In any case I'm gratified by the diligence of our last two correspondents, who even know their appendices from A to F.

1016a McCausland
St Louis, MO 63117

Mr. Sapiro:

I have received the copy of the Riverside Quarterly addressed to the OSFA Secretary. The trade you requested has been relayed to the concerned parties and this letter is to acknowledge it.

Browsing through your publication I found numerous articles that were especially interesting. One, however, I would like to draw to your attention, "Animism and Magic in Tolkien's Lord of the Rings /in which/ several things stood out: virtually every quote in the article was not quoted correctly. I am not saying that Mr. Callahan was misquoting for the purpose of changing the interpretation, the /quoting/ was merely inaccurate. Words were left out of places that could have been edited easily, but at the same time he did not acknowledge the fact that he did so. Footnotes were inconsistent throughout the entire magazine, I noticed, and on at least one occasion in the article the author had his facts wrong. These errors were purely technical and certainly were avoidable. Other than that, the article was fascinating.

I am well aware of the fact that in all probability you will consider my statements in the last paragraph in the category of "Look who's talking." In at least one way you are right; OSFAN is far from the position where it can sit back and criticize any other publications in or out of fandom, but those were not the opinions of the staff of OSFAN (although I do write for it); they were my opinions as an individual. By sending me this zine you opened yourself to any/all comments I chose to give. Please take them as such.

Sincerely,
Rebecca S. Bierman
Secretary, OSFA

My only complaint is that OSFAN's staff criticizes not enough --a fault Miss Bierman's letter may help to rectify.// I couldn't find any inconsistency in footnotes or any factual mis-statements (except that pointed out to me by Mr. Linden), but of the eight errors I could find (from sixteen quotations) three consisted in the omission of single words--"Don't you go a meddling with old stones"--three in the addition of a single word (or comma)--"/The/ power to defy our Enemy is not in him"--and two in capitalizations written in lower case--"The eye was rimmed with fire." Singly or collectively, these didn't affect the integrity of the essay.

NEOEIL, c/o Charles Turnbull, The Van
Cudedens Farm, Chesham Road
Great Missenden, Bucks, England

Dear Leland,

Riverside Quarterly 4:4 makes me want to say only that Patrick Callahan's scholarly attitude to Tolkien is irrelevant, he being in my opinion an essentially simple (although, agreed, delightful) writer who does not repay this kind of study: suffice it to say that I /think/ the Tolkien industry is spurious and the Tolkien cult contemptible.

And that Stephen Saffer's "Room 402," although predictable, is readable and well-handled.

Yours,
Brian Williams

Perhaps the best answer here is the old Solvitur ambulando: instead of arguing that walking--or critical discussion of LotR --is possible, one simply goes ahead and does it. I don't understand the phrase "Tolkien industry," since there is none in the Walt Disney sense (the author refusing to exploit Middle Earth commercially) and relatively little in the literary sense.

---

237 S. Rose St.
Bensenville, IL 60106

Dear Mr. Sapiro,

I found very little to inspire comment in RQ 4:4, but as this was the second issue in a row in which this was the case, I thought that fact by itself might be worth noting. I am disappointed that you let an entire issue of a quarterly journal emerge without one substantial article on contemporary science fiction...Krazy Kat...however was sufficiently amusing that I am almost willing to overlook the fact that K.K. has no discernible link with s-f or related fantasy fields...

I applaud your decision to quit wasting space in the letter columns on an endless, pointless, and unfruitful debate on the war in Viet Nam. I only wish you had made your decision a year or two ago.

In reference to Gordon Matthews' letter, perhaps someone should point out that in 1984 no one, not even the Inner Party members, enjoys a high material standard of living. One of Orwell's points is that the drive for power makes such considerations beneath notice. Of course, Mr. Matthews could change his reference to Brave New World or We, so the error is not a substantial one. It is worth noting, however, that Orwell's anti-utopias are very solidly based on the Stalinist model, as opposed to what one might loosely term the "Leninism" of We. The influence of Stalin's fight with Trotsky is also the main reason for Immanuel Goldstein's Jewish name (Trotsky's real name was Bronstein). Of course, Orwell may have loaded on secondary connotations which might account for "Immanuel," following Mary Weinkauf's reasoning. I fail to see what significance she extracts from the fact that the teenagers in Clockwork Orange call God "Bog." "Bog" is a perfectly good Russian word for the deity, and it seems to me that one has to stretch things to evoke connotations similar to those which turn "khorosho" into "horrorshow." Surely, for instance, Manny in The Moon is a Harsh Mistress is exhibiting no special profundity when he resorts to the Russian word.

Sincerely,
Patrick McGuire

Last issue it was Tarzan as Bloomstoke and now it's Trotsky as Bronstein--apparently everybody starts out Jewish. As to the rest, one might just as well argue that Lewis Carroll had no visible link with s-f or related fantasy fields--for Herriman was just as skilful in his chosen medium as Carroll was in his.

Box 7019 Graduate Residence Halls
Brown University, Providence, RI 02912

Dear Leland,

In general I find your reviewers very competent indeed: I especially liked Stephen Scobie's extended review of Planet of the Apes: a lot of reviewers seem to have merely raged against this movie, of which Mr. Scobie has given a very reasoned appraisal indeed...

My sentimental favorite among all your articles /is/ Sam Moskowitz's piece about those Gernsback "non-magazines." Lovecraft bibliographers who have made a neatly numbered list of periodical appearances by HPL will definitely have to go back and renumber...

Frankly, I like your poetry and fiction less than your other features, but admit readily that others may find /them/ more satisfactory. I see the Viet Nam war continues to rage in your letter column, and would only comment that I feel your distinction between the views of writers of straight s-f and those of s&s writers is a little artificial. I doubt very seriously, for instance, that L. Sprague De Camp applies Conanesque logic to justify his stand on the war...

Sincerely yours,
Kenneth W. Faig, Jr.

That the Blood and Guts writers all justify the war and the Brain Trusters condemn it is a datum observed, not one (artificially) created. As noted earlier, any justification (including De Camp's) of the U.S.'s Viet Nam activities is Conanesque.

---

48 South Lawn Ave.
Elmsford, NY 10523

Dear Leland,

Steve Scobie's article just makes it because he doesn't get too bogged down in complications when comparing satires in different media: one by an individual writer of satirical genius, the other produced by a group of Hollywood fun-pokers. Partly because of this last, I don't think the superior use of audience manipulation Mr. Scobie rationalizes for the films is really intentional--and, at any rate, it doesn't work in practice; it is just an intellectual conceit. I admit to liking Planet of the Apes quite a lot, but Beneath the Planet of the Apes is simply detestable. (By now, perhaps you are aware that there is another sequel--Escape from Planet etc., wherein the devoted ape-couple --unbeknownst to the second film--have departed in the rescue ship on a return journey to Real Time Earth.) There is a consistency of viewpoint, but even the facile intelligence takes a quantum drop in the forms it assumes in the latter. Schaffner is a better cinema artist than Post, and he makes some of the most dynamic use of widescreen cinematography I've seen anywhere. But the sequel seems to be the very opposite of Planet--everything has gone stale and misshapen: the careful and shrewdly balanced plotting and pacing have been replaced by an inane marathon sprinkled with inept physical combats, and even the special effects are a laughable cheat. The result of the sequel is rather like a sloppy, stupid comic book; it makes heavy-handed use of the most time-worn s-f cliches--the "bomb-worship" and all attendant paraphernalia. (What is more, many are Hollywood s-f clichés.) At least Planet came upon us fresh with familiar elements set in a novel situation, besides having its independence as a creation. (As a side note, to be absolutely accurate, the screenplay of Planet is by Michael Wilson and Rod Serling. In Hollywood, that generally means that one writer has been called in to re-structure, patch-up, or otherwise disfigure the other writer's work. In this case, I'm fairly sure it was Wilson who edited Serling.)

John Foyster's letter brings up an interesting point of contention; I think I'd still rather stick with Fritz Leiber (and even J.G. Ballard), though. It is at best a moot observation whether cosmos-gawkers can't face realities very squarely. In even such a loosely-related area as horror film viewing, some people I've known who can accept this form on its own terms have a stronger and more practical realistic orientation than those who simply scoff at these movies (and who often do so for fear of being "taken in" by silliness). I've attended an art school and found that the latter--wherever an artistic bent is present--generally have a poor sense and feel for child-like fantasy, and are painfully pretentious and naive in most artistic endeavors.

...And--to throw a final monkey wrench into these ruminations --what of J.L. Borges, who finds fiction more real than the streets of his native city?

Bests,
Jeff Clark

In the opposite direction, recall Jim Harmon's earlier remark about Richard Nixon and Spiro Agnew--that they are fictional creations.// The inability to feel child-like emotions is, I think, necessarily correlated to unreality in art, since the perceptions of childhood are exactly what the artist tries to recapture.

WE ALSO HEARD FROM...

Harry Habblitz (3425 Prudence Dr., Sarasota, FL 33580), who characterizes Jim Harmon as a "reactionary radical" (while applauding the speech itself) and registers his enjoyment of the Ape and Dystopia articles plus his own tendency to appreciate the Krazy Kat book "just for being"--while admitting the justness of Bill Blackbeard's criticism.

Richard Kyle (Box 16168, Long Beach, CA 90806), with an appreciation for Blackbeard's new column, "Moskowitz's piece on the Gernsback trademark titles.../and/ the idea /of/ Darrell Schweitzer's article."

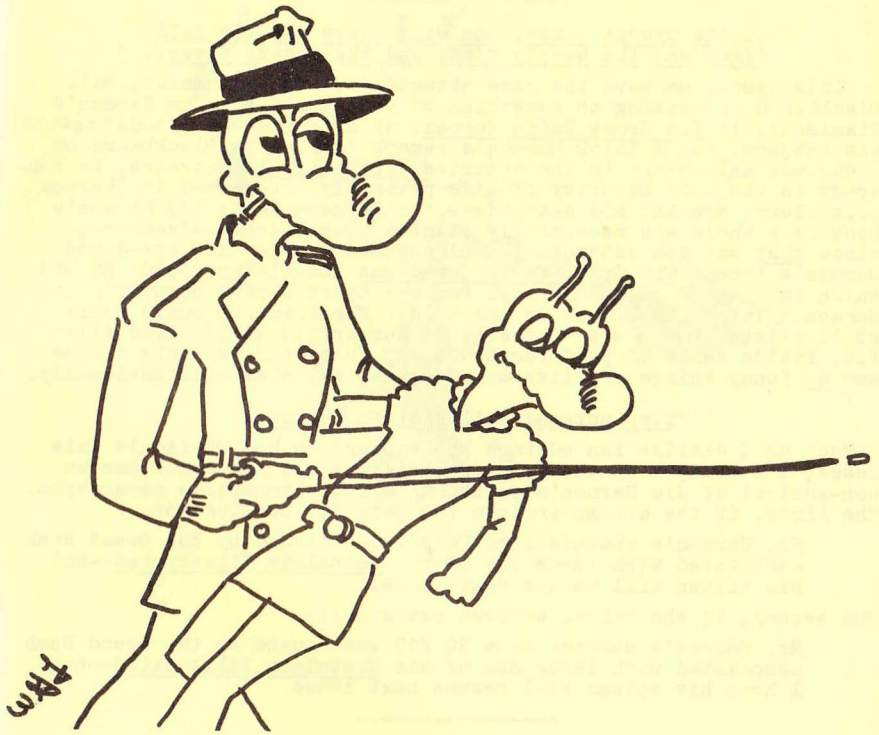
> My own favorite though, was discussed in a recent issue of one of Robert Lowndes's magazines--Kenny McDowd's "The Marble Virgin." Nothing could be more wonderfully awful in the short lengths. (I do recall Eando Binder's "book-length" novel "Vassals of the Master World" in a fairly early Planet Stories as being on a kind of par--however, Binder's yarn was extremely popular with the readers, something "The Marble Virgin" never managed.)

Peter Gill (18 Glen Manor Dr., Toronto 13, Ontario), noting that "Callahan's article was enjoyable in that it made me work a little /while/ Angus Taylor's and Phyllis Janik's poems made me feel a little, which is all I require or want poetry to do." Concerning Up the Line Mr. Gill claims, "Ted Pauls' article... is probably worth more than the book itself (that's supposed to be a nice way of saying the game wasn't worth the candle)..."

Sandra Miesel (8744 N. Pennsylvania St, Indianapolis, IN 46240), who pleads "a totally innocent neutrality on the matter of the Krazy Kat books..." but hastens to observe that Blackbeard's article "...reads like a classic example of a man outraged by the mistreatment of something he loves."

> Re Ted Pauls' review of Up the Line: according to Silverberg himself it was intended as a spoof (but what does the author know, eh?). It was also a spin-off from research on Byzantium. I agree that the historical aspects of the novel --both those played straight and those distorted deliberately--are excellent. Yet as Ted correctly points out, there is a distinct unpleasantness in its depiction of sex. Much as I personally like Mr. Silverberg-All-In-Black-Radiance-Shining, I find much of his fiction woefully anaphrodisiac.

Despite my original vow to stay out of this particular WAHF section, I must note that the author's own intentions--or at least his stated intentions--are not always reliable. As Oscar Wilde said, we should believe not the teller but the tale.



"I've a boodle full of maimeries in me buzzim..."

An appreciation is required here for the Easter Vancouver convention, sponsored by the UBC and Simon Fraser University s-f societies. Besides attending the customary gab-fests and parties, we listened to Guest of Honour Ursula Le Guin's speech,"The Crab Nebula, the Paramecium and Tolstoy" (to be printed in RQ #18), witnessed presentation of the S-F "Worst" awards--a gold-plated lemon being given, e.g., to "Beneath the Planet of the Apes" as Year's Worst Melodrama--and finished with a chopstick dinner at Wan L'ong Pan's (or whatever the name).

All this was followed by a July meeting at Calgary, which in addition to A.E. van Vogt's GoH speech--on everything from female behavior to NASA 20 years hence--featured exactly those fan activities (auctions and huckstering) missed at Vancouver. It would be "fitting" here to wish that everything can be put together for a Mind-Blaster in '73--but such sentiments would be inappropriate, since these last two confabs occurred in Canada cow country, while the Worldcon bid originates from the s-f Establishment in Toronto.*

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*Last summer's Toronto convention banquet, where I refused to pay several dollars for a dish of cold scrambled eggs, initiated a cover heading on the current Lowdown (Richard Labonte, ed., 52 Rosedale Ave, Ottawa, Ontario):"Will Leland Sapiro Pay For His Banquet Ticket?"

"...the bygone times, the wald times and the fald times and the hempty times and the dempty times..."

This issue, we have the rare situation of one columnist, Bill Blackbeard, objecting to something by another, i.e., Jim Harmon's dismissal, in The Great Radio Heroes, of a "variant attitude" toward his subject. But I think Harmon's remark (quoted by Blackbeard on p.46) was only meant to characterize hypothetical listeners, by contrast to the loud majority of kids primarily interested in "heroes ...killers, crooks, and detectives." Also note that: (1) Harmon's book as a whole was necessarily slanted toward drama-adventure, since that was its subject, (2) Blackbeard's objection pre-dated Harmon's recent The Great Radio Comedians (Doubleday, 1970; $6.95), which is slanted the other way. Perhaps there's more nostalgia in Harmon's latest book than in his first. For while (visual) drama still exists, there are virtually no humourists in the Fred Allen-W.C. Fields sense of performers who say funny things--only clowns who do funny things or (like Spiro Agnew) say them unintentionally.

"Temp untamed will hist for no man."

Much as I dislike fan editors who expound on How Difficult This Issue, I'm obliged by the July 3rd deadline and the simultaneous non-arrival of Jim Harmon's column to write alternative paragraphs. The first, if the column arrives too late for publication:

> Mr. Harmon's absence from RQ #17 was caused by the Grand Rush associated with issue one of his Nostalgia Illustrated--but his column will resume next issue.

The second, if the column arrives not at all:

> Mr. Harmon's absence from RQ #17 was caused by the Grand Rush associated with issue one of his Nostalgia Illustrated--but I hope his column will resume next issue.