RIVERSIDE QUARTERLY

Vol. 5, No. 2 60c

RIVERSIDE QUARTERLY

February 1972 Vol. 5, No. 2

Editors: Leland Sapiro, Jim Harmon, David Lunde
Bill Blackbeard, Redd Boggs, Jon White

Send poetry to David Lunde, 1179 Central Ave, Dunkirk, NY 14048
and other correspondence to Box 40 Univ. Station, Regina, Canada.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Front Cover: Kevin Mac Donnell Back Cover: Cy Chauvin

Tim Alton..... 85, 87
Adrienne Fein.....91, 94
REG 97, 135
Wayne Bourgeois..105, 107
Al Satian...111, 113, 118
Gary Phillips.....122, 124, 128
Seth Dogramajian..... 138, 139
Jim McLeod 143
Cy Chauvin 146, 149, 150
Rudy der Hagopian..... 162

Gretchen Schwenn....88, 151 Harry Habblitz....144

60¢ per issue $2 per year.

The Promise Of Space

transformations of a dream

by

Pamela Sargent

Norman Mailer, Of a Fire on the Moon, New York: Little, Brown and Company (paperback from Signet Books), 1971.

It has been a little over two years since Neil Armstrong set foot on the moon, and the ambivalence many of us felt toward this event has affected the reaction of various people to Mailer's book. The humanistic reaction was probably summed up by Roger Sale in The New York Review of Books: Professor Sale dismisses the book rather curtly, as it is about the flight of Apollo 11, about which no one cares any longer. Sale finds the event insignificant, and thus can ignore the book, except for some occasionally brilliant prose; he contends that Mailer admittedly wrote the book for money, and thus felt obligated to attribute more significance to Apollo 11 than it actually had. The reaction of technologically minded people was perhaps even more antagonistic to Mailer; Astronaut Gordon Cooper commented to Dick Cavett on how ridiculous he found the book (he was no doubt perturbed by such things as the reference to "evil moon rays") and Cooper wondered aloud why Life magazine had sent Mailer to cover the event rather than a science writer or someone familiar with technology, thus neatly ignoring the fact that Mailer was for four years an engineering student at Harvard.

This doesn't seem to leave a tremendously large market for Mailer's book; many people don't care about the moon flights or NASA (my father found Apollo 11 to be a moral outrage, refused to watch it, and felt the money would be better spent on social problems), and those who do care have probably ordered First On the Moon, written by the astronauts themselves with an epilogue by Arthur C. Clarke, I feel, however, that it is a mistake to ignore Of a Fire On the Moon. Clarke is a forward-looking man, at home in the world of those who wish to enlarge man's destiny by the exploration of space; Mailer views the event from a different perspective, that of the man who is not at home in such a venture, who, in fact, fears it and feels that somehow he and those in his world have been passed by.

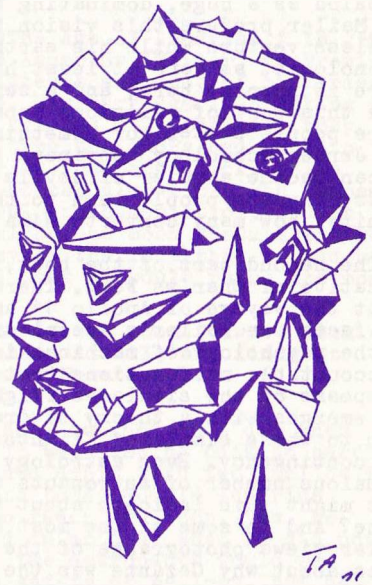
It is all too easy to dismiss those who are ambivalent about space exploration; one can call them atavistic, or ignorant, and ignore them, but this would be a grave error; the fact is that space exploration will not succeed if large numbers of people are suspicious or fearful of it, the fact is that NASA is having problems convincing people that their taxes are well spent. One is not going to convince anyone but scientifically-minded types that we should explore the moon and planets by appealing to rational argument about how much scientific knowledge we can accumulate by doing so. One may convcince a few by pointing to possible socially desirable effects of space programs. The only thing that can convince vast numbers of people is an appeal on the emotional level, an appeal made to man's religious sense and his irrational need to extend himself as far as possible. Mailer writes about the Vehicle Assembly Building:

> It was not that he suddenly decided to adopt the Space Program, or even approve it in part, it was just that he came to recognize that whatever was in store, a Leviathan was most certainly ready to ascend the heavens--whether for good or ill he might never know--but he was standing at least in the first cathedral of the age of technology, and he might as well recognize that the world would change, that the world had changed, even as he had thought to be pushing and shoving on it with his mighty ego. And it had changed in ways he did not recognize, had never anticipated, and could possibly not comprehend now. The change was mightier than he had counted on. The full brawn of the rocket came over him in this cavernous womb of an immensity, this giant cathedral of a machine which would voyage through space. Yes, this emergence of a ship to travel the ether was no event he could measure by any philosophy he had been able to put together in his brain.
>
> (57-8)

The attitude to be fostered, then, is that of a program in which all have a part to play; the mystical aspects of the venture are those to which NASA should appeal. The attitude to be overcome is that in which a person feels outside the age of space exploration; no matter if he lacks understanding, after all, how many attending a Mass have ever understood transubstantiation? One can worship as NASA's cathedrals without understanding them; it is this sort of appeal that NASA has failed to make, having turned a deeply metaphysical venture into a mundane technologists' television show, bland in taste and texture: a friend of mine, watching, walks away from the set, bored, others turn it off, some engage in morbid paranoid fantasies ("They've staged the whole thing in a television studio"). How many of us watched Armstrong and Aldrin cavorting on lunar soil because we felt we should, and yet were subconsciously or consciously bored? It is the mystical appeal that must be made, and NASA has failed to make it; Mailer, interestingly enough, succeeds.

The first section of the book, "Aquarius," begins with an appeal to the memory of Hemingway: this seems suitable, Mailer sees the death of Hemingway as the death of romanticism, the death of one who could live with dread: "Technology would fill the pause" (14). Yet it is precisely Hemingway's type of romanticism that could comprise the sort of attraction space travel could hold, and who can say whether or not Hemingway himself, born two or three decades later, might not have been one of those walking lunar soil (his personality, of course, suitably watered down by NASA's public relations). Neil Armstrong himself, asked why he was going, replied blandly about resources, about scientific knowledge, but then, pushed to the wall, proceeded to give a more philosophical answer:

> "I think we're going," he said, and paused, static burning in the yaws of his pause, "I think we're going to the moon because it's in the nature of the human being to face challenges." He looked a little defiant, as if probably they might not know, some critical number of them might never know what he was talking about, "It's by the nature of his deep inner soul." The last three words came out as if they had seared his throat by their extortion..."Yes," he nodded, as if noting what he had had to give up to writers, "we're required to do these things just as salmon swim upstream."
>
> (46-7)



Mailer is Aquarius, covering the flight of Apollo 11, ambivalent to the extent that he is uncertain whether or not this flight is man's greatest adventure, or his most insane one, recognizing that he is viewing the start of a new age, but uncertain about that age's character, holding to the belief that there are things which are forever beyond us, that the universe is fundamentally mysterious. We see him wandering through NASA-land, that land without odours, populated by those Mailer sees as men without egos, without, like the moon itself, atmospheres. Everyone is a component at NASA, the astronauts themselves only part of "the team." Yet Mailer senses, without explicitly stating it, that this attitude violates something inherently involved in going to the moon, a heroic defiance of the heavens (perhaps a mad defiance), a desire that, as Armstrong put it, is part of man's soul.

Mailer watches and speculates on the astronauts' psychology, trying to penetrate beneath the bland NASA surface; he speculates on those viewing the launch itself, and evokes the spirits of the Indians who once inhabited Cape Kennedy and Cocoa Beach, displaced by the very ancestors of those WASPs who now dominate the space program. Mailer attends a party, sees the bitterness of a Black man who feels passed by, outside NASA's world: no Black astronauts, no Jewish ones either: "They would not need to mention Mexicans or Puerto Ricans. Say, there might not even be any Italians" (29-30). Mailer speculates on history, seeing the possible inversion of all his values if the whole purpose of history is shown to be movement to the stars; the technologists, not the poets, would be heroes, the engineers, not painters and writers, the artists, God's purpose revealed as a huge, dominating technology with man as component. Yet Mailer prefers this vision to one of man engaging in a purposeless venture while his earthly problems go unsolved; the technologist as hero at least has a certain grandeur to it, there is purpose here, and a sense of the mystical. If NASA made this sort of religious appeal, who can say, in an age where people hanker for something spiritual, in an age where a New Jersey schoolboy convinces two friends to kill him so that he can become a ruler of devils in an afterlife, where thousands of young people turn to the most primitive forms of Christianity, how many converts NASA might create?

The second part of the book, "Apollo," is, oddly enough, evocative of Charles Fort. There are thousands of facts here, about the voyage of Apollo 11 and the equipment used; along with the facts are Mailer's speculations about them. He speculates on the psychology of machines in order to explain some of the unaccountable malfunctions that occurred during various flights. He speaks of the simulated flights of astronauts in training, and emerges with a theory of dreams; perhaps our dreams are akin to these simulated flights, the mind's preparation for any contingency. Even astrology gets its due: a statistically anomalous number of astronauts were born under water signs; what might this indicate about the minds of those who enter space? And in some of the most brilliant passages of the book, Mailer views photographs of the far side of the moon and speculates about why Cezanne was the father of modern art, draws a haunting vision of Cezanne and the modern age:

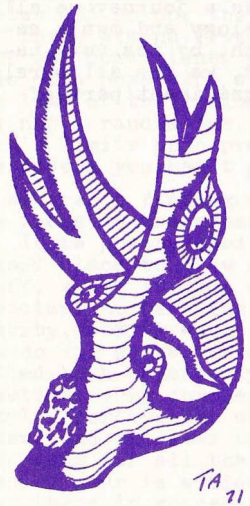
> Something in that vision spoke like the voice of the century to come, something in his work turned other painters out of their own directions and into a search for the logic of the abstract.
>
> (271)

Cezanne and modern art appear as the precursors of NASA photographs; they have anticipated the twentieth century. One reads "Apollo," and feels almost as if Fort is speaking through Mailer at several points, compiling strange facts and stranger speculations.

Mailer also attempts to break through the televised public relations surface of the astronauts themselves; he attempted this in the first part of the book by speculating about their conscious states and subconscious desires and fears. Here he uses facts about them (the Buddha in Armstrong's living room, Aldrin on a march to protest and mourn the death of Martin Luther King, Collins' tale of the prostitutes he kidded around with as a child) and manages to convey a picture of these men quite different from the televised one with which we are all familiar. We see them as individuals, rather than components in a system (how many, after all, can distinguish one astronaut from another through NASA's shield); we feel that the moon landing was, in fact, the accomplishment of individuals, rather than an overwhelming technological complex. I welcomed the feeling.

The third portion of the book,"The Age of Aquarius," is, in some ways, the most moving. We see Aquarius (Mailer) at Provincetown, on Cape Cod, viewing his existence and that of his friends in the light of the moon adventure. His marriage is breaking up, he sees his life and those of his friends as pointless: they drank, and smoked grass, all that time the WASPs had gone to the moon. Ted Kennedy had met disaster at Chappaquiddick, while three men moved toward the moon; one can almost see the Kennedy misfortune as the end of the liberal and humanistic trend in politics and society, and the simultaneous moon venture as the beginning of a new trend, the irony of the fact that it had been President Kennedy who had promised that we would reach the moon by the end of the decade.

Mailer wrestles with the dilemma of the moon flight, looking for a sign by which he might apprehend it all, and finds it while viewing a rock from the moon at Houston:



> He finished in fact on a day when Apollo 13 was limping back to earth in wounded orbit with two fuel cells gone, its Lunar Module Aquarius never to reach the moon, yes, he finished in an hour when he did not know if the astronauts would return in safety or be lost, but he had written the ending in his mind long before; it came on the day he stood in quiet before that object from the moon, that rock which gave him certitude enough to know he would write his book and in some part applaud the feat and honor the astronauts because the expedition to the moon was finally a venture which might help to disclose the nature of the Lord and the Lucifer who warred for us...yes, we might have to go out into space until the mystery of new discovery would force us to regard the world once again as poets, behold it as savages who knew that if the universe was a lock, its key was metaphor rather than measure.
>
> (415)

One recalls Arthur C. Clarke, another poet of space exploration:

> It is not merely an adventure of the body, but of the mind and spirit, and no one can say where it will end. We may discover that our place in the universe is humble indeed; we should not shrink from the knowledge, if it turns out that we are far nearer the apes than the angels.
>
> (op. cit., 494)

"Technology begins when men are ready to believe that the sins of the fathers are not visited on the sons," the Black professor had said to Mailer (131). Yet the sins, as well as the blessings, of our technological age are visited upon us as well as our children. We may doubt or disbelieve the technological faith now, but it still rules at NASA, as it must. Yet it is, of necessity, a Kierkegaardian faith. We cannot know whether voyages to the stars are a triumph or an evil; we cannot know what we will find. We can reason only so far, until we reach the abyss, where we must make the leap of faith. When one confronts the abyss of outer space, one cannot reason one's way across it; without faith, one must retreat to earth in terror. Why should one go beyond? We cannot prove that we should, we cannot be certain that what we might find will not destroy us. We are poised on the edge, violating the last taboo, uncertain of the results, in fear and trembling, yet we make the leap, in lunar modules and space stations, because we must. It is the spirit of Kierkegaard that walks the halls of NASA; it is Kierkegaardian faith that will take us to the stars.

Science fiction can serve as a testing of contingencies, allowing us to confront the possibilities before we actually encounter them; the possible outcome of space travel can only be viewed from the perspective of the future, and, ultimately, judged from that perspective. And what of Mailer? His book can serve us as a record of the journey of one twentieth century man, often tortured, often very confused, often brilliant, to the final apprehension of the grandeur of space travel. It is a journey we all have to make to a new faith, rooted in technology and man's nature; we do not know where it will lead (faith, by its very nature, cannot submit to proof) but, without it, we are all surely doomed to death on a small planet in an insignificant part of the galaxy.

The Crab Nebula, the Paramecium, and Tolstoy

Ursula K. Le Guin

(What follows is the Guest of Honour speech, given at the first Vancouver science-fiction convention, February 1971.)

Tolstoy wrote a book called, What Is Art? I like his question, but not his answer, so I shall give my own. Art is the rearrangement of experience in an orderly fashion, tending to produce aesthetic satisfaction.

Now that is a pretty cagey answer; it has a trick word in it, which is, of course, the word "orderly." Do we, in fact, find order outside art at all? Henry James would say no: that art imposes order on an incoherent, meaningless world. But if that is so, where do we get the aesthetic craving, which is a desire for order; where do we get even the idea of order? If Nature is a mess, then all civilisation, including art, is an unnatural and somewhat inexplicable activity.

As you are science-fiction people, perhaps you won't mind looking for a little while through the physical world for evidences of order or disorder. Let's start with the basics, with the constituents of matter. Now, if I understand it properly, the queer thing about matter at the sub-atomic level is that there is no disorder. Everything's neat as a pin. You don't find a proton running around over here for no reason and a neutron drifting off over there; on the contrary, the existence of the sub-atomic particles is in a sense a function of their relationship. As for the atoms themselves, they are of course quite reliable, arranging themselves nicely into tables and so on; they are all of certain kinds, is it 112 now? and there are no freaks, no crossbreeds or exceptions. And, whatever the conditions, even at the inside of a star, even at the inside of a nova, the atoms behave in an orderly fashion following the laws of their kind. The atom is an incredibly complex affair, but not a random one, and not an unpredictable one--within Heisenberg's limits upon prediction, which states that if you disturb the order, you can't predict any more.

We aren't finding much disorder among the atoms, so let's change the focus to the superatomic, molecular level--to matter as we know it. It is pretty clear that air and water and rock and so on is not a good place to show disorder in. It is all very highly organised stuff. Water is made of two kinds of atom in a special, regular association, behaving in a regular and predictable way--obeying gravity, making waves, freezing at 0° C., dissolving everything, and so on. Rocks are mostly crystalline; even dirt--soil--is stratified both physically and historically and its composition, though sometimes very complex, is the outcome of describable, even fairly simple, forces. The matter within our physical reach is, once we understand the laws of its organisation, quite orderly stuff. And this goes for all that's within reach of our eyes: for the stars, even. A star is a fierce thing, a great entropic furnace flaring away there in space--it seems beyond mere order--but, as you know, it's not. Its energy is equalled by its restraint. A star is a self-contained and law-abiding process, following its course from beginning through middle to end, physically and historically coherent.

But in between the stars...There we have something that looks pretty messy. Interstellar matter--"dust," they call it. Dust under the bed,dust between the stars, what's the difference. Disorganisation, mess. At last! Henry James is vindicated: the universe is not well swept.

Now, much of this dust is in the process of losing what organisation it once had: the Crab Nebula, for example, which as you know is stellar matter, the remains of a nova, and explosion, spreading out over the lightyears until it will finally lose its integrity as a cloud and will scatter quite at random. On the other hand, in other parts of the galaxy, around the Pleiades for example, the interstellar junk is doing something quite different.

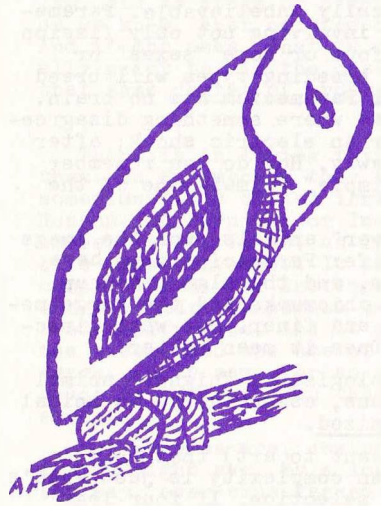
Long before there was any observational evidence, Immanuel Kant predicted what it would do. This dust and junk, you see, these cosmic dustpussies, tend to come together and to stick together in clumps and knots and lumps. Matter attracts matter. A certain rotary tendency is part of the clumping-together process. As the clumps rotate they tend to solidify, and also to sort one another out: that is, to enter into a relationship, a balance of forces, among themselves. The little ones get overbalanced, and are absorbed by the bigger ones. The biggest one of all becomes the centre of the rotating system. It becomes the centre, in fact, of a solar system. That's how the stars are born, these days: out of that drifting dust.

Therefore (though I am on philosophically very shaky ground here) I believe one is justified in seeing, even in this dispersed and disorderly cosmic dust, not only a potentiality of order, but a tendency towards it. Take one random speck of interstellar dust: perhaps only one law applies to it, the law of mutual attraction. It may be millions, thousands of millions of years before it comes near enough to another bit of matter for that law to act. But, when it does, it will obey that law. Obeying it, it is brought into relationship with other particles, and other laws begin to apply to it, and are obeyed; until--all very easily, very naturally--you arrive at the magnificent, complex harmony of a solar system.

These "laws" of attraction, aggregation, relationship, and so on, are simply descriptions of material behavior; because they express an orderliness in that behavior, we call them laws, the laws of physics. Law and order are aspects of the same thing. Even a law of increasing disorder, the Second Law of Thermodynamics, is an expression of the fact that chaos is achieved in a relentlessly orderly fashion, going from step A to step B...to step Z...

Let's re-focus once more, onto the galaxy itself. The night sky looks like a mess, a lovely disorder, a jeweller's shop after a bomb hit it. We know that it's not; and the interesting thing is, we have always known it. All peoples, in all times, have imposed an order on the visible cosmos. They make out constellations; they saw the Path across the sky, which you walk on after death, or the River that separates the divine lover from his beloved. They listened to the silence at night and they called it, with great accuracy and great beauty, the Music of the Spheres. Now, we know that the path or river is the Galaxy seen edge-on; we know that the stars look randomly scattered because the pattern, the great spiral, is too large to be apprehended from within. But all this is only evidence for what we have always known intuitively: and that is, that the universe is an orderly process.

But, one more focusing: the last. The Whole Thing, the Expanding Universe. All of a sudden our tendency to organise and group together seems to be lost, to go into reverse, indeed. The galaxy-clusters all go shooting away from one another like dustmotes on a balloon being blown up, bigger and bigger--Will it pop?



Well, we don't know. We don't know what it's up to. Fred Hoyle used to know, but he's stopped knowing lately, since some of his evidence turned against him. Ernst Opik and others say No, it won't pop. It'll just collapse gently again, when the centripetal force--gravity--overrides the centrifugal force, and in twenty five billion years or so down it will all come, galaxy-clusters, galaxies, star-clusters, stars, planets, moons, rocks, dust, all of it, into the Omega Point of the final Atom. Which is also the Alpha Point, the primal Atom, and the new genesis. And the Day of Brahma begins anew...Other cosmologists dislike this idea of the oscillating or accordionpleated universe. Most of them now agree only that it looks as if everything began about five billion years ago, and that a beginning may indicate a middle, and an end. But cosmology has not yet got any answers about the end, or the beginning. And I do not think it will ever have them; for cosmology, for all the terrifying vastness of its speculations and the immense poetry of its guesses, is a science. And science is anti-absolute; it perceives, discerns, describes, but it does not give out the Final Word, and it does not seek the Big Answer. This is perhaps because science is a living process; and life is not the answer. Life is the question.

Well, then, what about life? Let's come back down to Earth, to the world we inhabit when we're not literally or mentally stargazing. Is life a disorderly business?

I am sure you all know the current theory of the origin of life on Earth, the Irradiated Methane Soup Theory. I don't believe it's seriously questioned now, though of course it is unprovable--you can't prove that something happened four and a half billion years ago!--and it has some shaky steps in it. But in general it fits what facts we do have about the early Earth, and it doesn't introduce any hypotheses or external agents; it has been close-shaved by Occam's Razor, as have all really lovable scientific theories. So, then, life began when there were thunderstorms in the methane-ammonia atmosphere over a freshwater sea; and little chains of molecules got excited and began carrying on, rearranging themselves, reduplicating themselves, sealing off their inner order from all that was not a part of it: achieving integrity: becoming cells.

The cell is analogous to the star, sweeping up dust into the furnace of its entity. A cell is like a gentle little sun, burning borrowed fuel to be sure, but self-contained, an integral and orderly process, capable of ordered relationship with other processes, other entities. Capable, in fact, of cooperative relationship. There is the second wonder of the world. The stars, under the laws of physics, keep a balance, the Harmony of the Spheres. But living things cooperate and compete with one another in an infinitely more complex fashion. It is that complexity that makes anyone, not only Henry James, despair of ever making out any sense, any order in it--in this jungle, this superjungle of interwoven competing interdependent conflicting murderous maternal inexhaustible lives and deaths which scientists so coolly call the Biocosmos.

Take just one little living thing; one of the protozoa, Paramecium. If you are nearsighted, as I am, you can just see a rather large Paramecium without a magnifier. He is one cell. He is a "simple" animal. But the organisation of the molecular material inside that cell, into very elaborate organelles, and then the complexities of the cell's behavior, are practically unbelievable. Paramecium has a fantastic reproductive life, involving not only fission but sex--conjugation, that is, between four or more "sexes" or breeding-types--but only certain of the breeding-types will breed with certain others. . . . And, although Paramecium has no brain, he can learn. He can learn to avoid areas where something disagreeable occurs, a bad taste in the water or an electric shock; after a few tries he remembers, and he keeps away. How do you remember without a brain? And Paramecium is a "simple" animal--one of the "lower" animals . . .

One can't avoid that phrase, the "lower" animals, nor the image of the tree of evolution, the Tree of Life: Paramecium down here, you know, and here are the coelenterates, and the algae, and up here the arachnids, and way up here the chipmunks and the forgetmenots. Up it goes, branching out, higher and finer. But what direction is "up"? Is it a moral direction? Does it mean better?

Not to the biologist--or the anthropologist. A "higher" animal doesn't mean a more virtuous one. It means, essentially, an animal in which more complexity is better organized.

May I point out (a matter not irrelevant to art) that this doesn't say merely more complexity. Often complexity is just what's eliminated during the course of natural selection. If four legs serve as well as six or eight, simplify: use four: use two, even. If two eyes serve as well as three, then close the third one, turn it into the pineal gland. Superfluities are dropped. Simplicity is an aspect of harmony: Nature uses Occam's Razor too. But the rule remains, that on each level "up" there is more to be organised.

I should think that to describe all the properties of a crystal of table salt, pages of physical-chemical-mathematical notation would be needed. I know that to describe a Paramecium fully, a very large book is needed. And to describe a human being fully--what would that take? It would take all the history shelves and social-science shelves, all the fiction shelves, all the poetry shelves, of all the libraries in the world.

And at each step, more would be left out. Less is known; less is describable; relationships with beings outside the self become more and more complicated.

Now, I do not believe that Man is the measure of all things. I see no reason why he should be, why a star or a Paramecium should be expected to pay the least attention to Man. The statement is pre-Copernican. Yet in one sense it remains true, on this one planet at least: Man is the measure or standard of his fellow-creatures in that he has organised more complex material more effectively. He has developed (quite unintentionally to begin with, and somewhat fitfully since) his brain.

The human brain is the most complexly organised piece of matter that we know of. It is so different from its predecessors in degree that it also differs in kind. Like life itself, it has established a new dimension of Being. As life got underway in the ancient seas, it gave the original unitary cosmos two aspects: the non-living and the living--the inorganic and the organic--different in essence though not in material substance. And as conscious thought got underway in the human brain, again it established a new aspect or dimension of reality: the non-material. From then on the material universe was also the spiritual universe.

It may have been so all along, as Teilhard de Chardin points out. In any case, the new laws don't cancel the old ones. Life can't exist independently of non-life; the immaterial--thought, reason, emotion, selfhood--can't exist without the material. No law, and no stage of organisation of matter/energy, is, so far as we know, ever omitted or bypassed. But something is added. And if one asks, what is it that's added, then what can we actually point to, in the case of Life or in the case of Mind, but to that same degree of ordered complexity?

There is in living things a responsiveness to what is outside them. In Paramecium this is called irritability. In us, in Man, sometimes it's called irritability too . . . But also it's called Reason. Or Purpose; or Imagination; or Charity. It has a thousand names. It is, in us, an incredibly various, complex, and effective responsiveness. It produces behavior patterns of inordinate complication. For instance, it produces human societies, with cross-cousin, exogamous marriages, and business recessions, and credibility gaps. And it produces human cultures, with the use of the wheel, and the use of the superhighway, and the use of language. Let's say, for an example of the use of language, War and Peace by Tolstoy. You thought I'd never get back to Tolstoy, I expect.

But here we are, coming in the back door of the House of Art, as you might say, by a long and roundabout route. And have we, on the way, ever experienced disorder? I don't think so.

Now the Second Law of Thermodynamics seems to promise a final chaos, the reign of total disorder--if the universe is a closed thermodynamic system. We don't know that it is. And we don't and can't know the future. All we actually have is the past and the present; and in them, we seem to have progressed from a less to a greater degree of complexity, from dust to star to Paramecium to Tolstoy: but always, I think, within the realm of order. The laws of physics with which we began, still function on every higher level. New laws are added to them: those that govern the processes of life; those that govern the processes of Mind; and those that govern the processes of Art. In other words, the Laws of Creation.

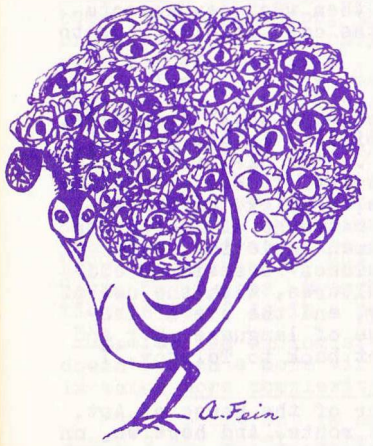
So at last we're back to where we started. I said, Art is the rearrangement of experience in a more orderly fashion. It tends to bring many things into a complexly ordered and harmoniously functioning whole. In other words, art does what life does. It does life's job. It does what the universe does. It does the universal job.

Is this great, vague, rather mystical definition of art really any use? I think it might be. For one thing, it answers the question, What is art for--what's the good of it?

Well, what is life for? You can't answer one question and beg the other. If you believe that life is given you for the purpose of serving the Church or the State, for example, then you have your answer readymade. Art should glorify the Church or the State. If you believe that life is given you so that you can satisfy all your desires on the physical plane, why then art exists to give the spectator physical pleasure, and to make the artist money. And art can do all these things, and generally does do them. But they are all secondary purposes, external to art itself.

Feeling that, artists often get up and say, in a sort of whinnying voice, Art for Art's Sake! And that seems on the face of it a rather silly statement.

But before you dismiss it, consider that all great scientists have said exactly the same thing: We learn for the sake of learning; we do for the sake of doing. Both art and science have no genuine end outside themselves. They serve nothing external. They obey their own laws.



Now this annoys people--always, everywhere. Art is so glaringly non-useful; its connexions with technology are very ancient and primitive, not modern and obvious like those of science. Why are you painting red zigzags on that cooking-pot? It'll cook just as well without red zigzags.--Why do you sit there playing on the nose-flute when the sweet potatoes aren't planted yet? --How can you sit there making up fantasy stories when the world is strangling in its own garbage and the New Left needs you and Nader's Raiders need you, and Zero Population Growth needs you and Women's Lib needs you? . . . .

The demands of society are so real and so intense that in fact you must give in; most artists do try to make their art serve the demands of their society, as they understand them. But the more particular and restrictive these demands are, the more they will cripple art. They cramp it; they pervert its nature. That's why journalism is writing, but is not art. Nor is most military music; nor is the Poet Laureate's poetry; nor is the Soviet novel as approved by the Soviet Government. Art has laws different from those of any State, or even of any society: laws of much vaster human relevance. The novels of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn obey those laws, and that is why his government detests and fears him, and that is why he is an artist, perhaps the greatest living writer.

But still, what good is art? Why paint red zigzags on the pot? We haven't answered that.

Along about 1840 or so, somebody asked Clerk Maxwell, the great pioneer in electrical theory, "But Mr. Maxwell, what is the use of this electricity stuff?" And he answered, "Sir, what is the use of a baby?"

You see, Maxwell's answer, and mine, is no answer. It is only a question. The technological applications of electricity are not a relevant answer: nor are the social applications of art.

Now many people claim to know what the use of a baby is. He is to grow up to be a Citizen, or a Soldier, or a Consumer, or whatever. I strongly advise you to distrust such people. And if anyone claims to know what art should be used for, distrust him. And if he says that art has no use? Distrust him, too. We do not know the answers.

A baby doesn't know any answers at all. But it does know its job. And it sets right to it. Its job is to breathe--to live, to grow--to be, and to continue being, in the form best suited to it, in the most extensive and harmonious manner it can manage . . . A work of art begins with precisely that same pure will-to-be. And if the environment is favourable, and the artist knows how to do his work, how to follow the laws of creation and no lesser or external coercions, then it will be a work of art. And then it is what it is. It is a T'ang Dynasty pot, let's say. Or a rock tune. Or War and Peace. There it is. Does it need an excuse for being, a reason, a use? Does the sun need a reason for being? What is the use of a galaxy? God may know. We don't.

I have been arguing that art is not an order imposed upon the basic disorder or incoherence of Nature, but is rather one manifestation--a terrifically complex and therefore fragile manifestation--of a basic natural tendency towards order. Art is not an unnatural act. It is a very highly specialized but perfectly natural way to behave. Its processes, like those of the atom and the Paramecium, obey the laws of Creation. And if these "laws" are simply the way in which mind perceives the world, as I think they are, that makes no difference. Mind is, after all, part of the world. The laws of physics, or of harmony in music, or of the growth of an embryo, or of the development of the novel, have no existence in themselves, on store tablets as it were, handed down to us from above, some supra-natural agency. They exist only as embodied in individual things, and as perceived and generalised by the human mind. No external, absolute assurance of their existence is possible, or necessary. We take the universe on faith; we take reason itself on faith. We have to.

It's just as well, I think, to remember that now and then, because we Westerners have a tendency to worship reason, and to think that if something cannot be rationally expressed, or even mathematically expressed, it doesn't "really" exist. Existence may be basically orderly, but the complexities of that order are still far beyond the grasp of our reason. When we in the West realise this, we're likely to have tantrums about it, and rush off to take psychedelic drugs. We kick Reason out and embrace Mysticism in a stranglehold. We are much too absolutist, too security-seeking. All the highfalutin' talk about the Wisdom of the East really comes down to this, that India and Japan and particularly China have never worshipped reason, but have equally respected reason and mystical perception, and common sense, and habit, intuition, dream, revery, imagination, emotion, and all the other operations of the human mind in its full complexity. We do not consist of the forebrain only, and it is deadly to pretend that we do. Order without complexity is not worth much to us; less, even, than complexity without order.

Now finally I want to speak for just a few minutes about science fiction. S.F. is not a great art form yet, and I rather think it never will be. It has certain inherent limitations which may keep it always on the fringe of the greatest potentialities of the novel. But there is something about it that I like tremendously and will defend in it against all comers. And this is its effort to include in art, in fiction, a whole new--truly new--field of vast complexity: that is, of course, the field of science, including modern technology. Science and technology as they affect human beings, of course. Here is a case where "life's job" as I call it is crying to be done; where the harmony of art, the ordering process, is very badly needed, where the complexity of our experience has become a terrible confusion. A whole great area of knowledge and experience, very intense and important experience, is omitted from literature, because most writers still shy away from science, as if it was going to bite them.

Of course it's true in reverse, as Lord Snow pointed out, but less so. Many scientists write splendidly: especially physicists, astronomers, biologists, and anthropologists. Indeed as a rule the great scientists are great writers. The one discipline furthers the other. But, going the other way, what modern poet has known enough of any science that his poems have grown naturally out of it? Almost none but Auden, and Auden is an old man now. As for the "mainstream" novel, it very rarely turns to catch a breath of new life from even the social sciences, except, occasionally, psychology.

It is all right for an art form to be slow to adopt new subjects. Abstract knowledge isn't enough, you have to feel things before you can write about them, feel them deeply. A mere gulping at novelty because it's new is no virtue at all. But we have been living in the age of science for generations now. It's nothing new. To the city dweller, Technology is Nature; yet he often understands it as little, and fears it as much, as any Stone Age man did his wilderness. We need understanding; we need our own myths...Well, I am proud of science fiction for undertaking this job, the job of mythmaking in a new world. And also I am proud of it for seeing the beauty, the delight that is waiting for artists in the discoveries of science: the pure aesthetic splendor of such concepts as the neutron star, or the DNA helix, or the dream-cycle of the night.

After all, there's more to human life than the relationships between human beings. The novel has centred too closely on those and those alone. The novel's been Confucian, one might say, and it's time that it went Taoist. A human being has relationships with things, things he handles and uses; with machines; with animals; with landscapes; with ideas; with the earth as a whole, and with the entirety of things. Man is not the measure of all things and the focus-point of all time; he is a part of things, an element in a great process. I think we're going through a mental revolution now, which will complete what the Copernican Revolution began. The earth ceased to be the centre of the universe, then. Now--a hundred years after Darwin--we are beginning to realise that man is not the centre of the universe. The revolution began with astrophysics; it ends in the human spirit.

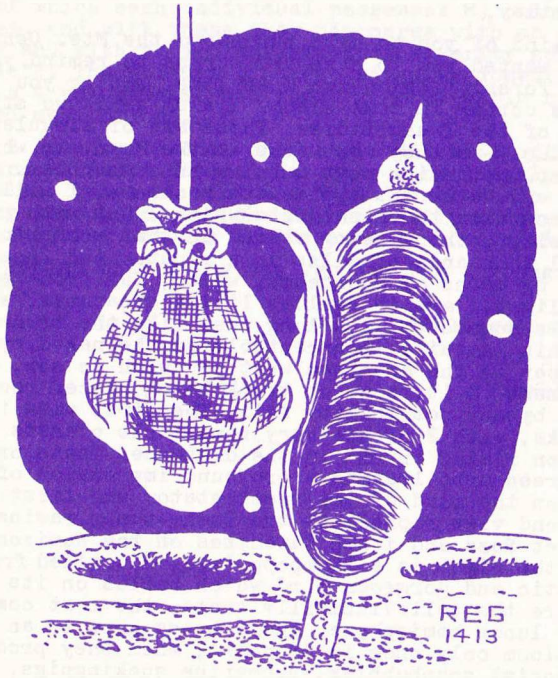
As astronomers had to figure out what Earth's real place in the fabric of things was, so now we have to figure out what man's real place is and ought to be. We will get help there from the East, again, because they never have said that nothing mattered except mankind. Science, even the ecological sciences, can't give us all we need; religion and philosophy and art must join in, as they did in the Renaissance, and work together. Again, this is why I admire serious science fiction: it is really involved in this attempt to make sense out of a more complex view of the world. It doesn't accept the easy old answers. It is working away at asking the questions we must ask: who are we, and how do we fit in? What are the patterns, the harmonies, of this new way of seeing? How shall we make ourselves at home in this much greater universe?

The complexity of things is very much greater than we used to suspect, much greater than science itself suspected; and therefore we have made an awful mess out of the world. But that there is an order in that complexity, we can take on faith. Indeed we must do so, for to lose that faith in the order of things is to go insane --to become, that is, either passive and catatonic, or desperate, aggressive, destructive. Sanity is the perception of underlying order. The description of that order is the job of science. The celebration of it is the job of art. They are both very good jobs to be doing.

Edward Lear's Visit to the Moon

by

Joe R. Christopher



In 1882 Mrs. Stuart Mortley visited Edward Lear's studio at San Ramo, and purchased one of his drawings. In a letter to her afterwards -- on February 26 -- Lear enclosed two small drawings for her and two for her daughters, the latter two being nonsense drawings (and early science fiction illustrations), such as the Victorians allowed themselves in dealing with children. I do not know if these drawings still exist, but the following portion of his letter is quoted in Vivien Noakes' Edward Lear: The Life of a Wanderer (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1969), pp. 293-5. Whether Lear was inspired in his nonsense for Mrs. Wortley's daughters by some early scientific (but not very scientific) concept or whether he simply knew the old tradition of using the moon as a place for satiric inventiveness (as in William Blake's "An Island in the Moon") is not certain, but the result is of at least historic interest.

J. R. Christopher

My dear Mrs Stuart Wortley,

...I thought it so kind of you to have purchased the Mte. Generoso drawing, that I wanted you to have two scraps to remind you of "Simla" & "Ravenna forest." Which two I enclose, hoping you may think them worth a corner in some Album. I also send two still smaller--one for each of the Young Ladies. These are of singular--I may say bingular value,--as they were done in the Moon, to which I lately went one night, returning next morning on a Moonbeam. As the Signorina Blanche and Katherine appreciate nonsense, I will add some few notes concerning the 2 subjects which I got with great rapidity during my visit, nothing being easier in that wonderful country than to travel thousands of miles in a minute. And these journeys are all done by means of Moonbeams, which, far from being mere portions of light, are in reality living creatures, endowed with considerable sogassity, & a long nose like the trunk of Nelliphant, tho' this is quite imperceptible to the naked eye. You have only to whisper to the Moonbeam what you wish to see, & you are there in a moment, & its nose or trunk being placed round your body, you cannot by any possibility fall. The first view is of the Jizzdoddle rocks, with 2 of the very remarkable planets which surround the moon rising or riz in the distance. These orange coloured & pea green orbs leaving a profound impression of sensational surprise on the mind of the speckletator who first beholds them. The second view represents the Rumby-tumby ravine, with the crimson planet Buzz and its 5 Satanites on the horizon. In the foreground on the right is a Blompopp tree, so called from the Blompopp, a gigantic and gorgeous bird which builds on its summit. On the left are the tall Vizzikilly trees, the most common vegetation of the lunar hemisphere. These trees grow to an immense height, and bloom only once in 15 years, when they produce a large crop of immemorial soapbubbles, submarine suckingpigs, songs of sunrise and silver sixpences--which last are ground into powder by the lunar population, and drunk in warm water without any sugar.

So little is known of the inhabitants of the moon, that a few descriptive but accurate notes relating to them may be interesting. They do not in the least resemble the people of our world,--as for instance they are all much broader than they are high; they have no hair on their heads,--but on the contrary a beautiful crest of yellow feathers which they can raise or depress at will, like that of an ordinary Cockatoo. And from the tip of their nose, depends an elegant and affecting bunch of hair, sometimes extending to as much as 20 miles in length, and as it is considered sacriligious to cut it, it is gradually wound round a silver-gilt post firmly placed in the ground, but removable at pleasure. The faces of the more educated classes have a positively perverse and placid expression--not unlike the countenance of an oyster, while frequently a delicately doubleminded semi visual obliquity adds a pathos to their pungent physiognomy.

These remarkable people, so unlike ourselves, pass 18 months of their year (which consists of 22) in the strictest seclusion, --suspended with their heads downwards, and tied carefully in crimson silk bags,--which are severely and suddenly shaken from time to time by select servants. Thus, exempt from the futile and fluctuating fatuity of fashion, these estimable creatures pass an indigenous life of indefinite duration surrounded by their admiring ancestors, and despised by their incipient posterity. The servants are not natives of the moon, but are brought at great expense from a negative although nutritious star at a remote distance, and are wholly of a different species from the Lunar population, having 8 arms and 8 legs each, but no head whatever,--only a chin in the middle of which are their eyes,--their mouths (of which each individual possesses 8) being one in each little toe, and with these they discourse with an overpowering volubility and with an indiscriminatory alacrity surprising to contemplate. The conduct of these singular domestics is usually virtuous & voluminous, and their general aspic highly mucilagenous and meritorious.

I have no time at present to dilate further on other particulars of Lunar Natural History;--the prevalence of two sorts of Gales, gales of wind and Nightingales;--the general inebriety of the Atmosphere, or the devotional functions of the inhabitants, consisting chiefly in the immense consumption of Ambleboff pies.

Hoping that I may see you and the 2 Young Ladies &c, Wednesday,

Believe me,

Yours sincerely,

Edward Lear

ON READING A LETTER FROM EDWARD LEAR

One summer evening while I read
the letters Edward Lear once wrote,
the sunset faded, colour fled,
and darkness brought a dream afloat
where Moonbeams twisted down so squishy squote.

Oh strange and rare their trunks they writhed
and lifted me, like Nelliphants strong,
to where the orange and peagreen rized
above the Mount Jizzdoddle long--
to where the Moon's own moons rose rare and wrong.

The Lunites with their yellow crests
drank silver liquid sugarless,
and toasted thus before their rests
the orange orb where Blompopps mess,
the peagreen planet treed with darkgreen fesse.

And then they sleeped eighteen months,
the Lunites in their crimson bags,
headdownward hanging, cocooned moths,
while their ancestors 'proved their tags
and their descendents feared they'd dress in rags.

But then before I ate the pie--
the Ambleboffan pie so rare--
the Moonbeams trunked me through the sky
from Vizzikilly landscapes fair
to moonlit study's flooded moonlit air.

Clichés In The Old Super-Science Story

by

Leland Sapiro

(Part Two)

#4 EXPLORATION

Our second category involves a trip to some unknown region, which might be another planet or "plane of existence" (or unexplored territory on Earth). Shortly after arriving, the exploration party is captured--a result not of the antagonists' greater skill but their numerical superiority.

> Swarming up, they overpowered the explorers by sheer numbers, and herded them with jabs of sharp, tiny knives toward a cavern mouth that opened presently amid these eery crags.[11]

A customary incident, which can occur either before or after the capture, is the surprise appearance of a terrestrial-type female.

> The door was opened and two of their ugly, towering enemies came in...behind came another figure; and at the sight of this one...the earthmen gasped with wonder.
>
> They saw a girl who might have come from earth...she was beautifully formed, and had wavy dark hair and clear light blue eyes...
>
> "Who are you?" he asked wonderingly.
>
> "I am Greca...of the fourth satellite."
>
> "Then you are not of these monsters of Jupiter?"
>
> "Oh, no! I am their captive, as are all my people. We are but slaves of the tall ones."
>
> (Paul Ernst, "The Red Hell of Jupiter," October 1931, pp. 80-81.)

Often the girl was partially undressed, a consequence of her primitive mentality, the summer climate, attacks by spider-monsters, etc.

> She was a beautiful barbarian, standing quivering before him...There was a savage brevity to her clothing, which consisted only of a short skirt of rough native grass and breast plates of beaten gold,[12] held in place by strings of colored seeds.

Although lascivious situations, as such, were not emphasized in Clayton's Astounding--perhaps owing to the immaturity of its readers--substitutes were provided by sadistic episodes that evoked identical gratifications.

> "Want to grab the old one?" the Chilean called.
>
> "Yes. Pick him up and squeeze him till his ribs crack. He'll talk."
>
> ...the iron monster approached the scientist and flung its tentacles around his madly struggling form...
>
> "Give him a squeeze, Carlos."
>
> Shelton's yell brought another low moan from the girl's set lips...
>
> The Chilean was working at the controls, increasing the tension of those terrible tentacles...
>
> "Another notch, you spiggoty!" [13]

For more direct sexual excitation the capture and escape could be replaced by a rescue, in turn motivated by a (proposed) sacrifice. Thus F.V.W. Mason's "Phalanxes of Atlans" (February-March 1931) concerned the polar kingdoms of Atlans, whose inhabitants claim Henry Hudson as ancestor, and Jarmuth, whose residents descend from Israel's Lost Tribes. In Jazreel, the Jarmuthian capitol, are conducted satanic rites that (in the words of an Atlantean noble) "stink as an offense to Saturn and the High Gods." Each year the Jarmuthians sacrifice and devour six maidens, delivered by the Atlanteans in order that their princess, held as hostage, does not receive the same treatment. In the story we watch the efforts of explorer Victor Nelson to stop this scandalous procedure.

> "Alatra! Alatra! a rising hurricane of impassioned... voices thundered the name.
>
> Through hot, strained eyes the American saw that... Alatra was beautiful beyond all possible comparison...On her curling golden hair had been set a circlet of ceremonial yellow roses, while her white, slender body was thinly covered with a scanty robe of yellow silk...
>
> Like a vast maelstrom...swelled the lustful cry...Then, all at once, one of the executioners roughly tripped the girl, sprawling her helpless on the bloody stones, and before Nelson could quite realize it, the slender...form lay helpless between Beelzebub's bloody claws.
>
> Like a voice from hell, that eery scream burst again from Beelzebub's throat as the priest stepped near, the knife raised. [14]

An exploration story also required a second fight to initiate the escape or rescue. In this scene the aliens could be painfully dismembered.

> A few smashing blows...with my fist served to bring screams of agony from the...creatures...about me...
>
> I swung the spike like a club and crushed two heads with a single blow at each. A downward blow served almost to hack a long, clutching arm from an Orconite's body. [15]

The protagonist's insane fury also may be described.

> He shouted and raved as this fourth Rogan crumbled. Torture him would they! Plan to capture Earth, would they! He'd kill off the whole damned population with this tube!
>
> (Paul Ernst, op. cit., 94)

Such action often is preceded by a cerebral breakage, to indicate that this maniacal exultation is not a sample of the hero's normal behavior.

> Something in his brain seemed to snap then, and he became a snarling, fighting animal...An arm snapped like a pipestem in his fingers and he heard the squeal of pain from somewhere in the tangled mass of savages around him.
>
> (Harl Vincent,"Creatures of Vibration," 24)

A typical Exploration, then, constitutes either a sacrifice followed by a rescue or an inquisition sandwiched between the capture and the escape--with the last fight accompanied by a brain-snapping and temporary loss of sanity.

But our Theme classification is oversimplified, since a writer is not restricted to just one. Thus Edmond Hamilton's "Monsters of Mars" (April 1931) describes an exploration, then the catastrophe that is to follow.

The trip from Earth is accomplished by a matter-transmitter, invented by three humans, Randall, Lanier, and Milton. But their hosts'a appearance is a surprise.

> These creatures were erect and roughly manlike in shape, but they were not human men. They were--the thought blasted to Randall's brain in that horror-filled moment--crocodile-men!
>
> ...the flat head set on the neckless body was most crocodilian of all, with great fanged, hinged jaws projecting forward, and with the dark unwinking eyes set back in bony sockets. (p.9)

Told that the reverse transmission is set to operate in twenty four hours, the king crocodile states that the return trip shall be made by his own subjects. They, in turn, will build still larger receivers to accommodate still more crocodile-men, who eventually will subjugate the human world.

Somewhat embarrassed by this announcement, the travellers initiate the first fight sequence:

> He struck, with all the power of his earthly muscles and felt crocodilian forms staggering and going down...He heard the roar of an automatic...as Milton remembered at last... the weapon he carried, but before either Randall or Lanier could reach their own weapons a new wave of crocodilian forms had poured onto them that by sheer pressing weight held them helpless, to be disarmed. (p. 13)

The escape occurs soon after, with two explorers, Randall and Lanier, seeking refuge in a Martian jungle. Hiding from their pursuers' "centipede machines," the fugitives lower themselves into a tunnel dug in the jungle floor--only to be seized and dragged downward by one of the tunnel's engineers.

> It was a huge worm creature! A thing like a giant angleworm, three feet or more in thickness and thrice that in length, its great body soft and cold and wormlike. (p. 18)

Borne into a cavern, the explorers witness a ceremony, following which Randall is stretched upon the altar, to be sacrificed to the worm god. Then

> Randall felt his limbs released...The strange rite broke off; the...worm-monsters crawled frantically this way and that...
>
> "The Martians!" Lanier cried. "They didn't find us above--they knew we must have been taken by these things--and they've come down after us!"
>
> ...And now that cavern had become a scene of horror unthinkable as the centipede-machines pouring down into it blasted the frantically crawling worm monsters with their rays. (p.21)

This scene (and the third explorer's name) brings to mind another "underground" monster rally and its crawling things. Satan has just told his assembled followers about his success in the Garden of Eden, but instead of "universal shout and high applause"

> ...he hears
> On all sides, from innumerable tongues
> A dismal universal hiss, the sound
> Of public scorn; he wondered, but not long
> Had leasure, wondering at himself now more;
> His Visage drawn he felt to sharp and spare
> His Armes clung to his Ribs, his Leggs entwining
> Each other, till supplanted down he fell
> A monstrous Serpent on his Belly prone,
> Reluctant, but in vaine, a greater power
> Now rul'd him, punisht in the shape he sinnd
> According to his doom; he would have spoke,
> But hiss for hiss returned with forked tongue
> To forked tongue, for now were all transformd
> Alike, to Serpents all as accessories
> To his bold Riot: dreadful was the din
> Of hissing through the Hall, thick swarming now
> With complicated monsters...

The catalogue is extended to include

> Scorpion and Asp, and Amphisbaena dire,
> Cerastes hornd, Hydrus and Ellops drear,

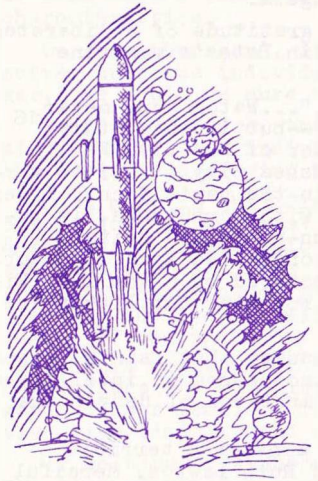
--and as applied to members of this "thick swarming" group the adjective "complicated" is further evidence of the poet's skill, for the word now induces a train of images--mandibles, antennae, and other insect bodily appendages. So whatever is not described the reader can readily imagine for himself.

It's unnecessary to expatiate on why the Satanic assembly is convincing--or to show why its Martian counterpart is not. Only because his cavern is not a scene of "horror unthinkable" does the author feel obliged to assure us that it is.

But it would be improper to continue without a return to Earth. Seizing a centipede machine and racing to the surface, Mr. Hamilton's explorers reach the laboratory just as the transmission is to begin--

> ...and behind the dias was a figure between two crocodilian guards at sight of whom Randall forgot all else.
>
> "Milton! They've brought him here to torture or kill him if they find he's lied about the moment they could flash to earth!"
>
> Milton! And at sight of him something snapped in Randall's brain... (p.24)

This brain-snapping is the signal for the second fight sequence, which enables the three human-men to enter the transmitter, rematerialize on Earth, and destroy the terrestrial receiving station--thus closing the Martians' interplanetary gateway.



#5 JUVENILE SET THEORY

Clayton's Astounding still must be discussed relative to its most conspicuous aspect, indicated by Arthur Cox's phrase, "undisciplined daydreaming." The creation of "fantasies"--in the dictionary sense of "mental images" or "whimsical speculation"--is a universal habit, and for an immature person these speculations assume a highly fanciful character. Many of us have enjoyed the cartoons of William Steig, who depicts the imaginary exploits of an eight year old boy: in one scene, "Rescue," he is lifting an unconscious girl out the window of a burning building; in another, "New World Champion," his glove is being raised after his knockout of the former boxing titlist; in a third, "National Hero," a wreath is being placed reverently at the foot of his monument (Dreams of Glory; New York, 1953).

Compare David Sparks's Ape-Men of Xlotli (January 1932), where Captain Fred Kirby finds an underground kingdom (populated exclusively by adoring and adorable females), discovers treasure, becomes king, and finally saves his sweetheart from being gobbled up by a giant serpent. Also see Francis Flagg's "Seed of the Toc-Toc Birds" (January 1932), in which the reader could share messianic visions of saving the United States. "It was hard to realize," says the author, "that the fate of America...hung on the efforts of two puny individuals"--but the adjective "puny" is rhetorical.

Juvenility also was manifested in other ways, as in D.W. Hall's account of an idealized air-force that includes a "clean-limbed" pilot and a "stern browed" colonel who fight a war in which all sordid aspects have been eliminated.

> "But"--and the colonel held up a straight forefinger--"those torpedoes must be guided from the place they raid... That...is Hay's job--and yours."
>
> Their eyes met; held. And then Lance's clean young face smiled.
>
> "Thank God, sir," he cried,"that I'm to help strike the blow that'll free our country."
>
> ("Werewolves of War," February 1931, p. 162)

The background to this scene is given by clichés of indefinite description: "The Slavs...wiped our boys out," says the colonel, "...it's hell, Lance...our back's against the wall. We're coming to death grips, man."

Similar vagueness was examplified by Victor Rousseau's "The Invisible Death" (October 1930). "Thank God," exclaims Captain Dick Rennel to scientist Luke Evans, "you've come back in time to save America." For Evans, previously thought insane, has devised a weapon to defeat the Invisible Emperor, who really is insane. But America actually is saved by Rennel himself, although his duties are never specified: we learn only that he is given "complete freedom of action," that he directs flights of planes "at strategic points," and that he "toils ceaselessly," his sleep continually interrupted "by...the arrival of messengers."

Even more desirable, however, than the gratitude of a liberated country was that of a rescued female, who in Bates's magazine existed for this purpose only.

"All right, Karl," exclaims Carruthers,"...Watch your meter gauges...while I switch to the atomic ray"--but in this story [16] it is more instructive to watch the behavior of Nanette, Karl's sister. As the experiment begins she expresses pity ("...it's torture to the poor thing") on a rat placed in the ray's focus. Later she accidentally steps into the beam and, with Carruthers, is reduced to atomic dimensions. On the electron-world she emits a "horrified scream" and faints upon being confronted by a dinosaur, and repeats this performance upon being captured by a gorilla. Finally, the frightened girl clings to her protector until they are re-enlarged back into the familiar world.

So the female was just a clockwork mechanism that faints, weeps, and screams at the appropriate times. She possessed no intelligence, merely a set of conditioned reflexes--and in times of danger she lost even these.

> ...clutched firmly...just under the monster's terrible fanged mouth was the slender body of Ruth Lawton. Merciful unconsciousness had overcome the girl now, for she lay supinely in the dread embrace, with eyes closed and lips silent. [17]

In critical situations, then, the female was just a body.

The leading male also was characterized in bodily terms, e.g., [18] his "craggy jutting jaw" or his "square set chin and resolute eyes." If he was a member of the Space Police or a similar organization, his introduction could motivate the action that followed.

> Commander Stone, grizzled chief of the Planetary Exploration Forces acknowledged Captain Brand Bowen's salute...
>
> "Captain Bowen...I want you to go to Jupiter...As you perhaps know, I detailed a ship to explore the red spot about a year ago. It never came back...Something ominous...is contained in that red spot...I want you to go there and find out."
>
> Brand's determined jaw jutted out, and his lips thinned to a purposeful line...
>
> "I'll be leaving tonight, sir."
>
> (Paul Ernst, "The Red Hell of Jupiter," 70-72)

It is easy to assert that stories like these have no characterization; but such a statement would not be strictly true, since each figure is defined to within a class of individuals.

We may divide mankind into classes (here, assumed mutually exclusive), each comprised by some particular kind of person; the members of one group, for example, might be resolute and square-jawed; a second, timid and myopic; another, shrill-voiced and vindictive, and so on. Now imagine that every such group is herded into a separate cage and that we are asked to locate Brand Bowen in order to deliver a message. We could easily find the right enclosure, but if we were furnished with only those details mentioned in the story, we could not tell which of its occupants is the man we seek--since everyone else in his group also possesses these characteristics.

On the other hand, if we should encounter another group of suave, unctuous individuals whose derisive sneers indicate "danger," we could be sure that our man is not in this collection.

Bodily structure, then, while defining a class, does not specify a particular individual, any more than we can specify a number uniquely by saying that it is odd and divisible by three.

Each male in this Clayton magazine was placed into at least one of four categories: bad man, old man, scientist, and he-man. Sometimes the male belonged in two categories at once, like the old-man scientist (the heroine's father, whose secret weapon stops an invasion) or the bad old man (the wicked priest who performs the sacrifice) [19] but there was still only a limited number of combinations.

In this respect, of course, the heroine was even less fortunate, since she was placed in the largest possible class, the genus "human female." That is, she exhibited only those qualities like timidity and compassion, supposedly common to all women.

If we take "sharpness of characterization" as referring to the size of class occupied by each individual, then it is clear what we mean by saying that the characters of Bates's magazine were not sharply defined. For a fictional person is characterized sharply only if his class contains no other members.

But sharpness of characterization is a basic literary criterion since each action, internal or external, must be performed by a definite somebody: in an adult story, the motivations belong to specific individuals, not to classes of persons. For this reason alone, the Clayton Astounding would have to be regarded as a collection of juvenile fantasies.

(to be continued)

FOOTNOTES

11) H. Thompson Rich, "The Diamond Thunderbolt," July 1931, pp. 51-2. Also see C.W. Diffin, "When the Mountain Came to Miramar," March 1931, p. 305; A.L. Zagat, "The Great Dome on Mercury," April 1932, p. 129; Harl Vincent, "Creatures of Vibration," January 1932, p. 20.

12) Sophie W. Ellis, "Slaves of the Dust," December 1930, p.297. Compare Jack Williamson, "The Lake of Light," April 1931, p.107 and Edwin K. Sloat, "Loot of the Void," September 1932, p. 13.

13) Harl Vincent, "Terror Unseen," March 1931, pp. 372-3. Cf. Paul Ernst, "The Red Hell of Jupiter," 88-91 and A.L. Zagat, op. cit., 127-8. Relevant here are the contributions of Ernst and Zagat to Horror Tales and other sex-torture magazines of the 1930s.

14) Cf. Victor Rousseau, "The Atom Smasher," May 1930, and Harl Vincent, "Creatures of Vibration," January 1932, p. 21. Also see H.B. Winter, "The Hands of Aten," July 1931: "They saw [the priest] clench his dagger tightly and with slow steps advance to the side of the helpless girl" (39).

15) David Sparks, "The Winged Men of Orcon," January 1932, pp. 72-3. Compare the last fight scenes in C.W. Diffin, "The Finding of Haldgren," April 1932 and David R. Sparks, "The Ape-Men of Xlotli," December 1930.

16) Robert H. Leitfred, "Prisoners on the Electron," October 1930. Compare Harl Vincent, "Terrors Unseen" (362): "She was obviously in a state of extreme nervous tension and, to him, seemed pathetically helpless and afraid."

17) Hal K. Wells, "When the Moon Turned Green," May 1931, p.244. Compare C.W. Diffin: "He swept one arm about the soft, yielding body beneath its wisp of garment, and he swung her behind him as he set himself to meet the attack" (op. cit., 305).

18) S.P. Meek, "When Caverns Yawned," May 1931, p. 202 and Paul Ernst, "Planetoid of Peril," November 1931, p. 154. Also noted were the protagonist's "clean-cut features" (H.K. Wells, op. cit., 242) or his "clean-cut lines and fresh features" (Edwin Sloat, "The Space Rover," February 1932, p. 230).

19) Another combination, the (good) he-man scientist was described by S.P. Meek, "The Cave of Horror," January 1930, pp.32-3, and (in similar terms) by Paul Ernst, "The Radiant Shell," January 1932, p. 121. But in Clayton's Astounding I recall no examples of the bad he-man scientist, a category that may have expired with E.E. Smith's Dr. Duquesne.

Mr. Smith Resolves A Crisis

by

Lance Lee

Mr. Smith looked extraordinary today. His hairless chest rose and sank with a barely perceptible movement under his delicately hued pink shirt with the white polka-dotted collar and cuffs. The black, gold, and raucous pink-striped tie that broadened to full five inches in its colourful descent flashed in the mirror.

"Mm, tiger, tiger, burning bright..."

His eyes glanced imperiously about and fell on his prize painting with overlapping red and yellow squares that formed a central one of dull green. This painting had a curious effect on him, for the green appeared to brighten beyond all credence when he focused on it directly as he did now ...It dilated, he thought, and reached out to his inmost self and absorbed him into its abstract space...You must understand that Mr. Smith had an aesthetic personality. Indeed he wrote a gentle sort of poetry, a kind of traumaturgy in which he volatilized his noxious emotions in the mild furnace of his art like the scorpion that improves its disposition through an innocous discharge of its poison...

But it was now almost time for Mr. Smith to take his morning walk. He tore his gaze from the painting, pulled down his trousers (or so it seemed in another mirror on the ceiling) with their tie-matching suspenders, and for the first time permitted himself to hear the noises from the city outside. Then he stealthily peeked through the curtain, but was unable to take the world by surprise: as usual the traffic charged in serried ranks down Fifth Avenue from light to light as if under the baton of a hidden bandleader. No less regular was the appearance of the pedestrians. First would come three secretaries, then two businessmen talking, a hippie, an old woman, an old man, and a group of school children of mixed age. There were occasional variations in this pattern, as when a beggar would replace the old man or a policeman come after the two businessman who together might be trailed by a large middle-aged woman laden with shopping bags. Hastily slipping on his black raw-silk jacket, he walked out the door of his apratment in his gold pants, hastening down the one flight of stairs to the landing from which, timing the next processi.n carefully, he slid unconcernedly behind the secretaries in his habitual position and began the short walk to the corner. There his procession broke down in the chaotic flow of human traffic, and like the solitary flickering images of his poems each individual flitted through Mr. Smith's consciousness shorn of his unity.

The street blazed with the red, near-burst buds which hovered on each tree in the indistinct atmosphere like a multitude of matchheads. A bus passed, trailing its white exhaust like a newly-wed's lace train. Mr. Smith drew a deep breath through his nostrils exulting in the aromatic fumes: from childhood he had associated these with a magical quality, and had once been heard to mutter "Shazam" when enveloped by a particularly extensive exhaust in his thirteenth year. He did the same now.

He had passed the Plaza absorbed in this and similar reveries, unconsciously crossing the streets as they presented themselves to him. At such times the traffic resembled two football teams lining up in different directions, though not opposite each other, between which Mr. Smith would parade like a bandmaster in search of a band.

On one such crossing Mr. Smith came to an unprogrammed halt, for on a normally unoccupied corner stood a news-stand: never had one been there before. This came as a joltingly unexpected irruption in his daily routine. He stood bemused on the edge of the pavement, blocking the other pedestrians who were trying to get out of the street before the massed lines of traffic descended on them from the lights. A heavy, burly woman laden with shopping bags gave him a shove, forcing him to hang onto the stand to avoid falling.

"Hey, watchit buddy, y'tryin' t'put me outa bisyniss?"

"Sorry."

"Paper?"

"Oh yes."

"That's a dime, buddy."

"Oh. I'm sorry."

He reached into his pocket and gave him a five dollar bill.

"Nithin' smallir? Bisyniss ain't s'hot t'dy."

He retrieved the bill and brought forth a crisp newly minted portrait of Washington, with its frown of moral superiority. He quickly handed it over. Vacantly he stared at the vendor's battered whiskered face as chewing and muttering under his breath he counted out ninety cents in change.

"Thir'y're."

He pocketed the money dumbly, and might have stood indefinitely staring at the man in his blue flannel shirt from which a shock of white hair protruded at the neck if another pedestrian had not bumped him and set him in motion again.

"Times."

But the vendor, watching Mr. Smith edge into the street, only muttered to himself, oblivious of his impatient customer,

"Well, I'm a monkey's ass."

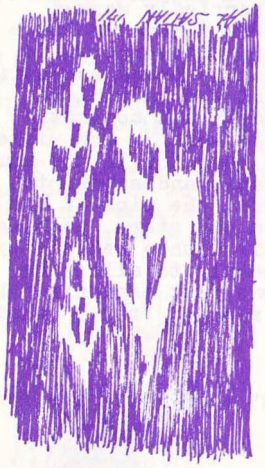
Dazedly Mr. Smith saw he had been given The World Journal. CASUALTIES LAST WEEK'S FIGHTING 1300 VC 289 ARVIN ... LILY WHITE DELEGATIONS TO BE DENIED ADMISSION TO NEXT CONVENTION...THE FAA SYSTEM IS CALLED NYCBAN (PRONOUNCED NICK-ban) FOR NEW YORK CITY BEACON ALPHA NUMBERS...GREAT GREAT GRANDDADDY LIFE COME SEE CHANEL START POLKA DOT LINE...NEW CURE FOR CANCER BY MAKING CANCER CELLS ALLERGIC RAGGEDY ANN SCORES LILY WHITE CASUALTIES FIGHTING GREAT GREAT GREAT GRANDDADDY LIFE...

Nauseated, he dropped the paper. He ran blindly across the street and leaned dizzily on a lamp-post. For a moment the traffic seemed to scatter in confusion. The pedestrians seemed to circle him as if the debris of a whirlpool on the verge of pouring down the funnel of Mr. Smith's mind.

With a superhuman effort Mr. Smith stood up. The traffic reformed in lines and began going down the avenue in groups pulsing like radio waves. The pedestrians drew back and resolved into their individual fleeting appearances. For a moment the ground seemed to billow under his feet and a sharp object to pierce the pavement under his left foot. He stepped down hard and felt the solidity of the concrete push back. The billowing ceased.

In looking down Mr. Smith recognized a certain crack in the pavement separating one square from another. With relief he began walking slowly but firmly, eyes to the ground. One, two, three... ...seventy-one-seventy-two...seventy five, seventy-six, seventy-six and-a-half...He made a ninety degree turn to his right and entered the Doubleday Bookstore, the goal of his walk. Every morning he walked the seven and-a-half blocks from his apartment to the Doubleday Bookstore, counting the lines of the pavement for the last half block. Every morning, after an hour, he would leave and retrace his steps home, only to repeat the same journey every day in the late afternoon. These activities constituted the important part of Mr. Smith's life.

He had not read a paper in sixteen years.



II

Once in the bookstore he swept the memory of the paper from his mind as Toscanini audience chatter from a concert. As usual Mr. Smith first turned to the left, patiently working his way around the table with the latest best-sellers. He would lift one of these, gaze at the cover, find the designing artist, read the inside dust-jacket blurb and author's biography, and lastly flip through the text, evaluating the stray passages he hit upon. If he were pleased his head would lean slightly to the right (to the left if he were on the other side of the aisle) and he would emit a quiet clucking sound. If he were displeased the book would be dropped casually back into its place. If the book had a particularly glossy cover he would rub it with the palm of his hand and then polish it on his coat sleeve if it became smudged.

He soon finished with the table and turned to the bookcase behind, his head craned back to read the titles of the topmost books. His displeasure was incurred whenever he found a book had been moved from its place or there had been placed an intruder among the worthier company (here his judgement was apt to be arbitrary, as he never read any of the books). This was most marked when he would find some trade book nestling with its exposés in close proximity to novels that had only recently receded from the number one position on the book lists. He could always tell the rating of a book from its overall position in the display.

He moved now across the aisle to the art-books. Since he knew their dust-jackets by heart, he passed by the Art of the Ancient Khmers and its mate, Angkor-Wat, in search of fresher game. He was turning away when he caught sight of a small book simply entitled Op-Art nestled between the Heritage Renaissance and an enormous book containing selections from the treasures of the Hermitage.

He drew it out from between its behometh neighbors, clucking with pleasure over its smooth red cover with a series of concentric black-line squares receding into the middle where, however, the last square was white. This tiny square had a hypnotic effect: at one moment it swelled out to the viewer, dominating the cover, while at the next it receded to an infinite distance hopelessly entangling one in its indefinable perspective. There is no telling how long Mr. Smith might have stood looking at this curious cover if a woman laden with bulging Macy's shopping bags had not abruptly pushed him against the Heritage Renaissance. He recovered himself and moved on, becoming aware of an uncomfortable hot feeling under his armpits and on his forehead. By this he knew he had been in the store for forty-five minutes, which meant, he calculated rapidly, that he had spent half-an-hour with the Op-Art cover.

He hastened through the music department, casting a glance at the paperbacks where the central aisle he was now crossing lost its here-to-fore straight character and meandered through the variously placed groupings of Philosophy, History, Signet Classics, Art, Poetry, and, in a final corner, after many others, dimly lit, the Mysteries. His goal now was the poetry rack. From these volumes he turned to the old best-sellers and hurriedly worked through them before the hour was up and he would have to leave because too hot to stay a moment longer. This haste upset him, and for once he was unable to take his customary pause surveying everyone in the store, noting the presence of the thin black-haired salesman whose hair glistened like satin and contrasted so strangely with the heavy english tweeds he wore in the winter or the rough Irish linen jackets he changed them for in the summer. Instead, the heat having become unbearable and spread to the small of his back where, unseen, it turned the pink of his shirt a near-red, he was forced to rush from the store, pausing directly outside to breathe in the cooler air with a satisfying sigh of relief. He raised his arms circumspectly to allow the air to circulate through his arm-pits. He was just beginning the count-down to the corner, and had actually reached "three" when behind him he heard a woman shout.

"Excuse me!"

He continued his way. He had reached "seven" when he felt a firm grip taken on his left elbow.

"Excuse me!"

He turned in surprise and looked into the small, recessed, sharp black eyes of a short woman. They were on a level with his own.

"Did you forget anything?"

He saw she was wearing a car-coat of brown corduroy surmounted by an imitation fox-fur collar, above which emerged her rotund little face in turn surmounted by a kinky expanse of graying brown hair. Her plump cheeks were barely separated by her tiny squat pyramidal nose. Self-consciously Mr. Smith fingered his own. Noting the look of surprise in his face, she patiently repeated her question.

"Did you forget anything?"

"Forget?"

The word tumbled from his trembling throat: two unexpected incidents in the same day!

"Yes, just a moment ago while you were in the store."

She nodded in the direction of the Doubleday Bookstore. He shook his head in near stupefaction as she removed a wallet from the brown plastic bag that hung from her shoulder on a long imitation bronze chain and opening it, showed him a picture of herself opposite a badge.

"I'm Patrolwoman Burns."

The glittering store windows made her badge sparkle like a kaleidoscope.

"You didn't forget anything?"

He shook his head in bewilderment.

"Are you okay, Mister?"

"Yes, perfectly."

Letting go of his arm, she reached across his stomach and tapped his right-hand pocket. He looked down. The top of a book projected above the coat-pocket flap: he pulled it out and stared at its Op-Art cover. The white square rose to his gaze, and then ineluctably sank back with his fascinated concentration. He might have completely disappeared into its concentric depths had not the patrolwoman removed it from his grasp.

"I think you'd better come down to the station with me."

At this moment Mr. Smith's world ceased. He accompanied her dumbly back into the store, down the centre aisle, in and out of the paper-back stacks, through a door behind the half-lit Mysteries, and into a bright, whitely lit corridor pocked with office doors into one of which she turned, motioning for him to sit. She made a brief call with a smooth black plastic phone that sat alone in the middle of an old, pockmocked mahoganny desk. Then she leaned back and stared at her rough nails while Mr. Smith, folded into his seat like a paper doll, stared at nothing.

III

He gradually regained an outward contact in the police car that had come for them, seeing first the driver's red neck bulging over his rough blue coat collar then the ends of his hair jutting out under the pressure of his cap. The woman was next to Mr. Smith, still staring at her dirty nails or out the window. He followed her glance and saw the confused flow that rushed chaotically through the yellow light, the cabbies cutting irregularly in and out all the while. The buildings reeled by him like racing pedestrians. He shut his eyes, revolted.

When the car stopped Patrolwoman Burns firmly led him through the foreboding precinct doors surmounted by the motto "Vengeance is Mine" which made him tremble in vague anticipation. Thence he was led into a plain office with a set of file cabinets, a desk behind which rested a large heavy man with the lobe missing from his left ear, and a chair.

Mr. Smith sat in the chair indicated while Patrolwoman Burns took her station behind him.

"Name?"

Mr. Smith's attention was fastened on the man's blue polka-dot tie that was partially undone to leave the top of his shirt open. The unexpectedly silky hair of his chest thrust out the opening.

"Aw com'n, fella, name?"

His heavy face darkened with irritation. His boar's hair beard bristled.

"Harold Smith. He's a little intimidated."

Patrolwoman Burns offered this in a tired voice.

"Har- old Smi- th...Offense?"

"Petty larceny, Doubleday Bookstore, an $8.95 art book."

"Not so fast! Pett- y Larceny Doubl- e ..."

When he finished he fixed Mr. Smith with his watery hazel eyes.

"Did you intend to take this book?"

"No."

He wrenched it out, trying to gain control over himself.

"Then it just sort of got into your pocket like by itself?"

Mr. Smith was no longer listening. He had begun casting his mind back over the morning's events. What had he done wrong to bring this on?"

"Are you gonna answer me, mister?"

He thought of each stage of the day: yes, he had brushed with the gold toothbrush; yes, he had put his striped tie on. He looked down hastily to make sure he had not deceived himself: yes, there it was.

"Tiger, tiger, burning bright..."

They stared at him astonished, but he felt he had done everything in perfect order, as usual. He stared back indignantly.

"Did you hear me, mister?"

The question renewed his doubt.

"I don't know what I could have done wrong: this isn't possible, you must understand: my existence is perfectly ordered!"

He leaned across to the table and hit it with his fist for emphasis.

"Well, I'll be damned."

But again Mr. Smith had turned inward while outwardly remaining in his leaning position, clenched fist resting on a sheet of carbon paper. Desperately he turned the day over in his mind again. Had he shaved? Yes, he felt his smooth face with his other hand. His pants! His eyes strained downward and caught the glint of gold slacks over his stomach's bulge. Had he dressed under the mirror? Had he entered the procession at the right moment? Yes! Yes, he could distinctly remember the secretary in front of him in her black patent-leather heels and rough gold flower-patterned stockings that disappeared under her dress of black crepe two inches above her knees. My God, what could be wrong, what did I do, reverberated in his mind. A thousand images rushed by like the stars on a peacock's tail, and finally resolved themselves into the carbon paper his now white hand rested on, from which he withdrew with a movement of horror, holding his fist helplessly in the air.

Patrolwoman Burns grabbed his arms and pinioned them to the side of the chair.

"Now let's not get rough."

The man's voice had become harsh and rasping.

"Just answer the question. How did the book get into your pocket?"

"I don't know."

"Aw com'n mister! Who d'ya think we are?"

"Oh what's wrong today!"

"You were caught shoplifting an amount over five dollars, that's what's wrong! Now lets have a few answers!"

"Be quiet, be quiet!"

He screamed in frustration. His mind twisted, and with a great effort he halted its descent into the maelstrom. The mirror, he thought, there's something about the mirror. He lifted his eyes upward to the tired astonishment of the others, murmuring aloud,

"The mirror, the mirror..."

All he saw at first was his down-raised head, then his gold trousers on the chair, then-- oh then he saw the bed!

"Oh I know, I know!"

He laughed with a joyful sense of power at his accession of knowledge.

"Oh I know!"

The man leaned back in his chair, rubbing his stubby fingers through his hair like a coarse rake.

"Suppose you tell us?"

Mr. Smith unheedingly babbled on as before.

"Stop this shitting around and give me a straight answer!"

He roared this as he rose from his chair, his lips peeled back over his teeth. Before that imminent charge, a little daunted, Mr. Smith returned to the situation.

"I forgot to make my bed."

"What?"

"I forgot to make my bed. I have to go now, officer, I'm sorry to have caused all this fuss."

The man showed a mixture of anger and bewilderment.

"I see you don't understand. All I have to do is go home and make my bed and then none of this could have-- none of this-- .."

Confusion came over him.

"Could have..."

The office was clothed in the heavy fumes of silence that hung on them like a wet newly-wed's lace train.

"Could have..."

They exchanged a long look: the other spoke in a gentle voice.

"Are you a nut or somethin' mister? Because if you're putting me on--..."

The phrase faded like smoke on a humid day.

"How did the book get in your pocket?"

"I forgot something, you see--"

"We all make mistakes-- "

"I forgot to make my bed. Maybe-- "

Fear sounded in his voice as the full depth of his predicament finally opened to him, as the phrase "could have" slid more deeply into his understanding.

"Maybe if you let me go it would still be all right as long as I made my bed, perfection ought to be retroactive-- "

"Hold on!"

Mr. Smith had already tried to make the door, dragging the indominable Burns with him. The man vaulted forward and slammed him back in his chair, out of which, however, Mr. Smith immediately bounced again heading towards the door. But now the man held him helplessly two feet off the ground as he tried to pull away with so evident, alas, lack of success.

"I must, absolutely must, go! You don't understand, my bed, it must be made, made, oh how horrible tomorrow will be if it's still unmade, everything will get geometrically worse! Please, please LET ME GO!"

Mr. Smith screamed ever louder. The man shouted into the corridor. Two patrolmen came running, relieving the man of his frantic burden. Patrolwoman Burns had sunk into the chair and begun inspecting her nails.

Mr. Smith was carried bodily down another series of corridors that echoed to his shrieking. In his horror he saw them begin to billow. At one moment they would close in on him, while at the next they would open into great vistas of empty space...But as they turned the last corner a great change occurred. He forgot his bed and tried to warn his companions of the danger, for now the billowing had been replaced by a hard shaking, a rigid mechanical jarring that threatened to shatter everything. The floor vibrated under him. His horrified eyes saw a hairline crack appear which grew steadily wider and revealed an abyss beneath. When they reached the last door which opened at their approach and revealed rows of identical cage-like cells on each side, the floor shattered completely and Mr. Smith, his little pursed mouth an "O" of dismay, felt himself slip from his bearers and plunge heels first into a great depth.

IV

This was not the end of Harold Smith. One day a small white point could have been discerned in the gloom he had slipped into, a white point that inexplicably expanded in a purely linear fashion until the darkness had been shut out by a flat white expanse whose limits could not be found. Equally inexplicably arrived the day when this same whiteness began contracting to its original dimension, this time, however, with an essential difference. As its size became perceivable a square black line against an indistinguishable background could be detected on the periphery. As the whiteness shrank one such concentric black square appeared after another until the white had become the smallest in their midst. If one focused on this anomalous square it seemed to come forward, engaging one's fascinated attention. Then it would sink back, drawing the gazer into its indecipherable depths...

On this particular day the background resolved itself into the red cover of a book entitled Op-Art, firmly held in Mr. Smith's hands. He had just been pushed against Angkor-Wat by a burly middle-aged woman who was making a dash to accost the slick-haired tweed-clothed sales clerk in the Doubleday Bookstore (who curiously enough was missing the lobe from his left ear): she was tilted alarmingly to her right by the weighted shopping bag she clutched with her stubbly fingers. With infinite care Mr. Smith replaced the book between the Art of the Ancient Khmers and its mate, Angkor-Wat. He felt something missing but, after a moment's concentration, felt the sudden outbreak of sweat on his forehead and under his armpits. He leaned on the shalf, gratified, content to finish his survey of the store ocularly. In a corner by the poetry volumes he saw a fat little woman in a brown corduroy car-coat idly examining her rough nails. A fake silver fox-fur collar was buttoned tightly around her neck. His eyes did not stray to the paperback section except for one sardonic glance at the dimly seen rack of Mysteries. Such a sense of pleasure filled him that he found himself almost laughing aloud.

His hour was now up. Magisterially he stepped into the centre aisle, through the revolving doors, and out onto the street. The traffic surged in neatly spaced rows from light to light. The pedestrians moved in ordered waves. Content with his world, Mr. Smith began the walk home, counting the cracks in the pavement until he reached the corner: exactly seventy-six and-a-half. The light turned red. The traffic lined up in opposite directions. Mr. Smith gaily made his way to the other side. There was a sound of music in the air.

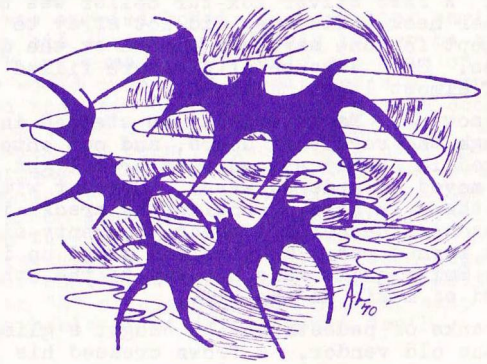
Through the ranks of pedestrians he caught a glimpse of the news-stand and the old vendor. A frown creased his forehead in parallel lines as he turned his head away. Almost at the corner he looked up again. The news-stand and the old vendor had disappeared: they never appeared again.

A few minutes sufficed to bring him to the corner of his own block. Waiting the right moment, he nonchalantly slipped into the procession that turned down the street towards his apartment. In front of him was a secretary in black patent-leather heels wearing rough gold-patterned stockings that disappeared under her black crepe dress a full four inches above her knees.

A third of the way down the block he turned right and entered his building. When he entered his apartment, the first thing Mr. Smith did was make his bed...

From this day on he always left his bed until after his walk. For some unaccountable reason he no longer wrote poetry. And curiously enough he insisted on wearing identical clothing every day. Rarely did anything untoward now occur. Sometimes on his walks everything would sway just the slightest bit as if a house of cards had been breathed on, though this was detectable only out of the corner of his eye: whenever he looked directly at any unsteady object it immediately resumed its former solidity. Less frequently Mr. Smith would feel a hard object trying to pierce the pavement from below, but the smooth leather sole of his left foot would always be coming down on the rough pavement at just that moment and so avert the menace. However distant his world from ours, he lost himself in it completely, absorbed in its perfection as are we when more briefly lost in a pleasant dream image...

And so we leave Mr. Smith on one of his innumerable walks as he passes store windows displaying goods he will never buy, traffic that will never be disordered, secretaries he will never kiss, and the red match-stick trees that no summer will ever strike green.



On The Question Of Foma:

A Study of The Novels by Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.

by

David Engel

(Wisconsin State University at Stevens Point)

INTRODUCTION

There are six novels by Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. on the market, all available in paperback. In the order they were first published, they are: Player Piano (1952), a fantasy of a mechanized world-of-the-future, based on Vonnegut's experience as an employee of General Electric; The Sirens of Titan (1959), a fantasy of human interspacial wanderings, manipulated by Tralfamadorians, machines on another planet; Mother Night (1961), a bitter fictional autobiography of Howard W. Campbell, former agent of America in World War II, while an anti-American radio broadcaster; Cat's Cradle (1963), a fantasy of the end of the world, set in the country of San Lorenzo and centred around ice-nine, a world-freezing compound developed by a mad scientist who also got the Nobel Prize for his part in developing the atom bomb; God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater or Pearls Before Swine (1965), a story of a loveable, gross, insane rich man, who helps people with money and kindness; and Slaughterhouse Five or The Children's Crusade (1969), the tale of Billy Pilgrim's erratic wandering through space and time, sometimes as a middle-aged American whose son is a Green Beret, sometimes as a gimpy war prisoner who survives the Allied fire-bombing of Dresden, sometimes as a captive in a geodesic "zoo" on the planet Tralfamadore.

Canary in a Cathouse is a seventh Vonnegut novel, unavailable as far as I know. The title suggests many possibilities.

I THAT MAGIC FEELING

Oh, that magic feeling.
Nowhere to go.[1]
Nowhere to go.

Kurt Vonnegut has that "magic feeling." It is a feeling of alienation and isolation. There is no place worth going to that one is permitted, by the realities of his existence, to go to. There is no time (past-present-future) that one may look to for solace. In the past, man has proven himself to be both cruel and stupid.

From Cat's Cradle:

> And I remembered The Fourteenth Book of Bokonon, which I had read in its entirety the night before. The Fourteenth Book is entitled, "What Can a Thoughtful Man Hope for Mankind on Earth, Given the Experience of the Past Million Years?"
>
> It doesn't take long to read The Fourteenth Book. It consists of one word and a period.
>
> This is it.
>
> "Nothing." (164)

Chaos, stupidity and cruelty, and alienation of the individual man from meaningful relationships with the world are all a part of the present. If Vonnegut were to add a Fifteenth Book, based on the present, it probably would be no longer. Given then, the past and present, what can one hope for the future? It doesn't take long to read The Fourteenth Book of Bokonon.

It is improbable that Henry Adams was thinking in terms of 1970 when he wrote "The Dynamo and the Virgin" in his Education. The military-industrial-technological complex that mushroomed over the land because of the World Wars would have been news to him. Nevertheless, there was a charge in the air, and Adams' nose pointed the right way. To Adams, the Virgin Mary was symbolic of religion as a powerful force in the lives of men, especially creative men. In modern times this force has been lost, as Adams realized. The attempt to combine the Virgin and the dynamo was bound to damage the sensibilities of many men unwilling to accept a lifeless machine as a primary source of inspiration and spiritual power.

Of course, the dynamos are still generating electricity, but not enough inspiration, or assurance. Our modern attempt at replacement of the symbolic Virgin is the fling at that mighty vacuum, Outer Space. In honour of that attempt men strain at semi-hysterical congratulations and contradictory and oratorical days of prayer and thanksgiving. Our Apollo symbolizes not art, but a continuing struggle to make science meaningful and inspiring. Vonnegut comments on space shots, in The Sirens of Titan.

> It /mankind/ flung them like stones.
>
> These unhappy agents found what had already been found in abundance on Earth--a nightmare of meaninglessness without end. (7-8)

The protagonist of Player Piano, Dr. Paul Proteus, is interrupted, during a speech to his colleagues at the Illium Works (a symbol of extreme mechanization) by his boss, Kroner. Ed Finnerty, Proteus' old friend, is obviously a spokesman for Humanity, though crusty and cynical.

> "The Atomic Age, that was the big thing to look forward to. Remember, Baer? And meanwhile the tubes increased like rabbits."
>
> "And dope addiction, alcoholism, and suicide went up proportionately," said Finnerty.
>
> "Ed!" said Anita. Proteus' disgusting wife.
>
> "That was after the war," said Kroner soberly. "It happens after every war."
>
> "And organized vice and divorce and juvenile delinquency, all parallel the growth and use of vacuum tubes," said Finnerty.
>
> "Oh come on, Ed," said Paul, "you can't prove a logical connection between those factors."
>
> "If there's the slightest connection, it's worth talking about," said Finnerty. (58)

Technological advances in machinery, meant to relieve men from meaningless drudgery, aiding their quest for a meaningful life, have usually had the opposite effect. Relieved of their job, in itself meaningful, if routine, most men feel useless to themselves and to others. They have no place in the world, no function.

Neither can they understand the world that has become so complex. Men often worship what they can't understand, even if it seems harmful to them. Science, however, is ultimately unsatisfactory as religion, because even in religion, man must have this meaning, this job. What is there for him to do?

Human-like beings were eliminated from the planet Tralfamadore. This is how it happened.

> And the machines did everything so expertly that they were finally given the job of finding out what the highest purpose of the creatures could be.
>
> The machines reported in all honesty that the creatures couldn't really be said to have any purpose at all.
>
> The creatures thereupon began slaying each other, because they hated purposeless things above all else.
>
> And they discovered that they weren't even very good at slaying. So they turned that job over to the machines, too. And the machines finished up the job in less time than it takes to say, "Tralfamadore."
>
> (Sirens, 275)

Paul Proteus defies the technocrats and "crosses the bridge" to Homestead, the home of "real people," where he becomes a sort of messiah leading, rather inactively, a revolution against the Works. The revolution is a pitiful failure, much like the attack from Mars in The Sirens of Titan.

From the last page of Player Piano:

> And that left Paul. "To a better world," he started to say, but he cut the toast short, thinking of the people of Ilium, already eager to recreate the same old nightmare. He shrugged. "To the record," he said, and smashed the emp- the empty bottle on a rock" (320).

II JUDAS OF OLD

Like Judas of old
You lie and deceive
A world war can be won
You want me to believe.[2]

In a very important way, Vonnegut is cut off from much of the past. At the beginning of Slaughterhouse Five, he writes:

> People aren't supposed to look back. I'm certainly not going to do it anymore.
>
> I've finished my war book now. The next one I write is going to be fun.
>
> This one is a failure, and had to be, since it was written by a pillar of salt. (19)

Vonnegut's literary vision backward is blocked by World War II, a personal tragedy for him as well as a universal one for Mankind. For Vonnegut, World War II was the Dresden massacre, the destruction of a strategically meaningless city in a contrived fire storm that Vonnegut survived under the earth, in a slaughterhouse numbered five.

The Vietnam war disgusts Vonnegut, but World War II remains the war in his writing. In an essay for Esquire, facing student essays by high school discontents, Vonnegut suggests some modern repercussions of that "old" war. "And much of what they object to in contemporary society came into being during World War II. That was when warlike thinking and Prussian attitudes toward unquestioning obedience became so popular. Too bad."[3]

Also from World War II came the scientific breakthrough that could make World War II the last world war, but most likely will make World War III the last great war. Man now has the power to destroy itself, but not the wisdom to stop from doing just that. Vonnegut shares this fear with millions.

In the same way World War II corrupted the victors, and endangered the future of all, it destroyed many tangible things--men, buildings, cities. Probably even more important, the meaning of many more things was lost, whether in patriotic perversion, or despair.

As Vonnegut asks us to understand in God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater:

> He had a book hidden in his office, and it was a mystery, even to Eliot as to why he should hide it, why he should feel guilty every time he got it out, why he should be afraid of being caught reading it. His feelings about the book were those of a weak-willed puritan with respect to pornography, yet no book could be more innocent of eroticism than the book he hid. It was called The Bombing of Germany. It was written by Hans Kumpf.
>
> And the passage Eliot would read over and over again, his features blank, his palms sweating, was this description of the fire-storms in Dresden. (174)

Vonnegut's vision is not only of the period after World War II. That is where it begins. It is the period before World War III. That is where it ends.

Each of the six novels has war for a backdrop. In Player Piano, Paul Proteus is muddled, trying to decide how much the war really did for him. "Objectively, Paul tried to tell himself, things really were better than ever. For once, after the great bloodbath of the war, the world really was cleared of unnatural terrors--mass starvation, mass imprisonment, mass torture, mass murder" (14).

Later, Proteus decides there is something rotten in Ilium. Life was better when the world was run for and by men, not machines spawned by the war. Proteus agreed with the sentiments expressed in his name in a letter from the "messiah" of the revolution, which was himself. "Man has survived Armagaddon in order to enter the Eden of eternal peace, only to discover that everything he had looked forward to enjoying there, pride, dignity, self-respect, work worth doing, has been condemned as unfit for human consumption" (284).

In The Sirens of Titan the setting is "...the Nightmare Ages, falling roughly, give or take a few years, between the Second World War and the Third Great Depression" (8).

Mother Night is nearly all about the guilt and depression caused by World War II. As an American double-agent, the "hero" broadcasts Nazi propaganda, coded to transmit messages for the Allies. The United States Government saves Howard W. Campbell's life after the war, but spiritually, he is as defunct as he is morally lost. " 'People should be changed by World Wars,' I said, 'else what are world wars for?' " (103). The change was for the worse. Campbell chooses to first give up freedom, then to give up life.

Eliot Rosewater, of God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater, was driven insane by the war.

> "Cease fire! Hold your fire, you guys. Jesus Christ these aren't soldiers. They're firemen!"
>
> It was true: Eliot had killed three unarmed firemen. They were ordinary villagers, engaged in the brave and...uncontroversial business of trying to keep a building from combining with oxygen.
>
> When the medics got the masks off the three Eliot had killed, they proved to be two old men and a boy. The boy was the one that Eliot had bayoneted. He didn't look more than fourteen.
>
> Eliot seemed reasonably well for about ten minutes after that. And then he calmly lay down in front of a moving truck. (64)

Eliot would never be completely sane, and he would never stop trying to make it up to firemen.

The business that begins the narrator's journey in Cat's Cradle was a book. The book turned out to be Cat's Cradle.

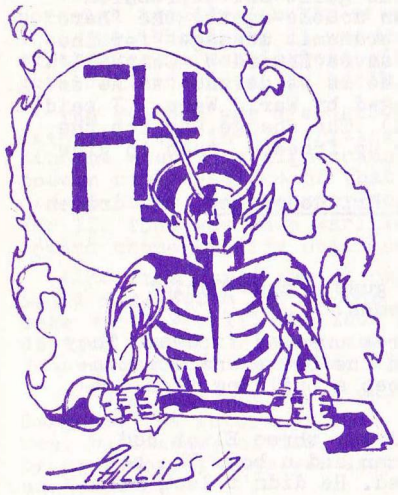
> When I was a much younger man, I began to collect material for a book to be called The Day the World Ended.
>
> The book was to be factual.
>
> The book was an account of what important Americans had done on the day when the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, Japan. (1)

This errand led to others and the task of describing the day the world ended.

Slaughterhouse Five, like Mother Night, is about the war itself. The part of the war most directly involved is the fire-bombing of Dresden, which Billy Pilgrim survives. He says (to Tralfamadorians): "As you know, I am from a planet that has been engaged in senseless slaughter since the beginning of time. I myself have seen the bodies of schoolgirls who were boiled alive in a water tower by my own countrymen, who were proud of fighting pure evil at the time"(100). And "so it goes," as Vonnegut is careful to remind us whenever someone dies in Slaughterhouse Five.

So it goes.

III QUID EST VERITAS: QUE ES FOMA?



> "No man," said the Preacher, "can find out the work of God".... The most satisfying and ecstatic faith is almost purely agnostic. It trusts absolutely without professing to know all.[4]

Mencken's premise, and one reiterated by Vonnegut, is that Truth cannot be known. Man is not to know the meaning of "God's" mysterious machinations. The failure to know Truth leads to many things. One is a disbelief in all assertions. As Chrono explains to his father in The Sirens of Titan, " 'Whatever you say--it's baloney,' said the eight-year old. 'What makes you think so?' said Unk. 'Everything anybody says is balony,' said Chrono" (145). Traditional answers, no matter how forcefully and confidently stated, are baloney. From sources such as Vonnegut, the answers are usually cryptic and ironic, if answers are given at all. The Riddle (What does it all mean?) remains unanswered." 'She was a fool and so am I, and so is anyone who thinks he sees what God is doing,' writes Bokonon" (Cat's Cradle, 13).

The wife of a rejected author laments in Player Piano:

> "And my husband says somebody's just got to be maladjusted; that somebody's got to be uncomfortable enough to wonder where people are, where they're going, and why they're going there. That was the trouble with his book. It raised all those questions, and was rejected. So he was ordered into public-relations duty." (233)

Such a questioner feels compelled to tell others the questions, but not the answers, and everyone is likely to become forlorn. As Winston Niles Rumfoord, seer of the future, invites us to consider in The Sirens of Titan: "It's a thankless job, telling people it's a hard, hard Universe they're in "(25). Man's nature seems to be to question and the nature of that Universe is not to answer. Eventually one may reach a state resembling wisdom, a state in which illusions are destroyed and everything seems meaningless.

> "No wonder kids grow up crazy. A cat's cradle is nothing but a bunch of X's between somebody's hands, and little kids look and look and look at all those X's..."
>
> "And?"
>
> "No damn cat, and no damn cradle." (114)

The cat's cradle disappears, with the illusion, and nothing takes its place but the mere fact of X's. Religion has, at times, for some people, given order to the X's and helped many people see the cat.

> Little Newt snorted. "Religion!"
>
> "Beg your pardon?" Castle said.
>
> "See the cat?" asked Newt. "See the cradle?" (24)

If religion fails to fill the spiritual gap, what is there?

What remains are lies, shameless lies, Foma, as in Cat's Cradle. Religions like Christianity are probably based on Foma, but it is no longer good, sweet satisfying Foma. Speaking of the lone Christian minister in Cat's Cradle, Vonnegut invites us to contemplate divinity.

> His doctorate, which he invited me to examine, was awarded by the Western Hemisphere University of the Bible of Little Rock, Arkansas.
>
> He made contact with the University through a classified ad in Popular Mechanics, he told me. He said that the motto of the University had become his own, and that it explained the chicken and the butcher knife. The motto of the University was this:
>
> MAKE RELIGION LIVE! (145)

Even in San Lorenzo, where religion was so badly needed and desired as well, Christianity was defunct. An even more damning criticism is given in Slaughterhouse Five.

> The visitor from outer space made a serious study of Christianity, to learn if he could, why Christians found it so easy to be cruel. He concluded that at least part of the trouble was slipshod story telling in the New Testament. He supposed that the intent of the Gospels was to teach people, among other things, to be merciful, even to the lowest of the low.
>
> But the Gospels actually taught this:
>
> Before you kill somebody, make absolutely sure he isn't well connected. So it goes. (94)

Each novel touches upon the subject of a new religion, offering hope or consolation to people, a service that has, for many Earthlings, petered out of Christianity. As Billy Pilgrim overheard Eliot Rosewater say to a psychiatrist: "I think you guys are going to have to come up with a lot of wonderful new lies, or people aren't going to want to go on living" (87-8)

An interesting explanation of God's seemingly callous attitude is revealed in The Sirens of Titan. Instead of apologizing for God's mishandling of man and Earth, the new religion congratulates what exists. It is "a new religion that can be received enthusiastically in every corner of every Earthling heart" (180).

> "The name of the new religion," said Rumfoord, "is The Church of God the Utterly Indifferent."
>
> "The flag of that church will be blood and gold," said Rumfoord.
>
> "These words will be written on that in gold letters on a blue field: Take Care of the People and God Almighty Will Take Care of Himself.
>
> "The two chief teachings of this religion are these," said Rumfoord: 'Puny man can do nothing at all to help or please God Almighty, and Luck is not the hand of God.' " (180)

Since the purpose of religion is to make people feel better about things, the dying Malachi Constant (Unk) is offered more shameless lies, more Foma, on the last page of The Sirens of Titan, contradicting The Church of God the Utterly Indifferent.

> He [Constant's best friend, murdered unconsciously by him] laughed. "Get in," he said.
>
> "And go where?" said Constant.
>
> "Paradise," said Stony.
>
> "What's Paradise like?" said Constant.
>
> "Everybody's happy there forever," said Stony, "or as long as the bloody universe holds together. Get in Unk. Beatrice is already there, waiting for you."
>
> "Beatrice?" said Unk, getting into the space ship. Stony closed the airlocks, pressed the on button.
>
> "We're--we're going to Paradise now?" said Constant. "I--I'm going to get into Paradise?"
>
> "Don't ask me why, old sport," said Stony, "but somebody up there likes you." (319)

There is little religion of any value in Mother Night, a black book. Nevertheless, the major character, Howard W. Campbell, cannot resist a taste of Foma.

> And so, with my Helga presumed dead, I became a death-worshipper, as content as any narrow-minded religious nut anywhere. Always alone, I drank toasts to her, and didn't give a damn for one thing else. (47)

A basic need for successful Foma is to accept or worship what is. With imagination, as above, consolation can even be gained by death.

In God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater, Rosewater has created pseudo-Foma based on his own kindness and on his ability to manipulate people with money--as in the following episode with a despondent man calling from a telephone booth.

> "Maybe you think it's funny to put up signs about people who want to commit suicide."
>
> "Are you about to?"
>
> "And what if I was?"
>
> "I wouldn't tell you the gorgeous reasons I have discovered for going on living."
>
> "What would you do?"
>
> "I'd ask you to name the rock-bottom price you'd charge to go on living for just one more week." (76)

Rosewater is just one man trying to make for less suffering. His honest attitude will not permit a well developed system of Foma.

> "I wasn't a religious person by any stretch of the imagination. I told her nothing I did would count in Heaven, but she insisted just the same."
>
> "What will you say? What will you do?"
>
> "Oh I don't know." Eliot's sorrow and exhaustion dropped away for a moment as he became enchanted by the problem. A birdy little smile played over his lips. "Go over to her shack, I guess. Sprinkle some water on the babies, say 'Hello, babies. Welcome to Earth. It's hot in the summer and cold in the winter. It's round and wet and crowded. At the outside, babies, you've got about a hundred years here. There's only one rule that I know of, babies--!
> 'God damn it, you've got to be kind.' (93)

A religious device keeps Billy Pilgrim, as well as his dental patients, going, although he is "unenthusiastic about living." This prayer hangs on his wall:

GOD GRANT ME
THE SERENITY TO ACCEPT
THE THINGS I CANNOT CHANGE,
COURAGE
TO CHANGE THE THINGS I CAN
AND WISDOM ALWAYS
TO TELL THE
DIFFERENCE

In context the prayer is ludicrous, since "among the things Billy Pilgrim could not change were the past, the present, and the future" (52). Again we see the advice, "Accept the things I cannot change." If you wish to be content, accept, or better yet, worship what is.

The Foma of utmost importance to this study is Bokononism as portrayed in Cat's Cradle, a put-on of Christianity with the fount of belief truth-through-lies, or perhaps the truth-of-the-lies. " 'All of the true things I am about to tell you are shameless lies.' My Bokononist warning is this: Anyone unable to understand how a useful religion can be founded on lies will not understand this book either. So be it.'" (14).

Why does a Bokononist lie?

"Well, when it became evident that no governmental or economic reform was going to make the people less miserable, the religion became the one real instrument of hope. Truth was the enemy of the people, because the truth was so terrible, so Bokonon made it his business to provide the people with better and better lies." (118)

Vonnegut invites us to join in this "Calypso."

I wanted all things
To seem to make some sense
So we all could be happy,yes,
Instead of tense.
And I made up lies
So that they all fit nice,
And I made this sad world
A par-a-dise. (90)

Contemplate the spiritual satisfaction that can be gained from a simple "Calypso" like this. "And I was some of the mud that got to sit up and look around...Lucky me, lucky mud...I, mud, sat up and saw what a nice job God had done...Nice Going, God!" (149).

Vonnegut writes of his daughter's infatuation with the Maharishi Yogi: "'Well,' I say at least, 'I'm glad you've got this thing going for you. Hell, I never gave you any religion at all and everybody's got to have some. Especially now.'" [5]

IV FOMA FOREVER

Good-bye. "As Bokonon tells us, 'It is never a mistake to say good-bye.'" (153). I leave with one last bit of innocent Foma that Billy Pilgrim (106) suggested for an epitaph. I think it is a good one, all Foma aside.

How's this for a good-bye.

EVERYTHING WAS BEAUTIFUL, AND NOTHING HURT.

FOOTNOTES

1) John Lennon, Paul McCartnay, "You Never Give Me Your Money," from Abbey Road, Apple Corps Records.

2) Bob Dylan, "Masters of War," Bob Dylan Song Book, 31.

3) "Times Change," Esquire (February, 1970), 60.

4) H.L. Mencken, "Quid Est Veritas," The Vinage Mencken (New York, 1955), 69.

5) "Yes We Have No Nirvanas," Esquire (June, 1968), 182.

Poem Written After Arriving Home October 24, 1970 and Finding No Letter from "the Lost Lady"

1
The few bright leaves still on their branches
are bright birds in January snow.
And the silence is a watch with no hands.

I have come home to this
after climbing a hill I thought was a mountain,
the way back.

2
In Springfield, you feed chickens, chop wood,
ask The Watchman to be yourself
or your self to fly, silent, bird-like,
over that mountain, the way back.
The way back to what?

Nancy, we both fear,
hide in our respective houses (mine the smaller),
drink beer or wine, make pictures of the sky inside
our skulls. That silent sky
we don't really want but think we should.

3
A week ago, in the alley, by my front door,
I found a pair of knitted red mittens,
put them, brightly, on the fance
for the little Nancy or Peter who lost them.

They are still there.

-- Peter Warren --

The Wasting of Elms

(For Mary Lee)

There is death greatly in the quiet feet that measure
step by stiff step the reluctant retreat;

They falter the sweet tide backward
into the drumming roots;

The trunk like a blindfolded soldier hangs
unable to break the habit of living!

The beetle, black and purposeful as a bullet,
conducts its momentum into the heart;

His jaws are chitin articulated,
the beetle bites with his bones;

The blank wind off the water
dismantles the small conceit of the elm tree;

Unarmed, the hands of the elm
accuse the white sky;

All this winter the urgent deer will grind
their teeth on the knotted bark;

This spring the molten snow will discover
our abandoned limbs, our torn, sweet flesh.

-- David Lunde --

The Day

Sun here this morning
strong and brown
coffee all day
light slanting yellow
through pine water
butterflies faltering
in cedar boughs
moth white wood
under shadow now
rocks heave up
from the sunken river
it's over. And over

-- David Lunde --

Hero

the kindest man you could choose to meet
but if you gave him a gift or helped him in any way
he never said
thank you
or anything like that
exceedingly humble and discreet
but if he made a slip or ever went astray
he never said
I'm sorry
or anything of that kind
never seemed proud or stood aloof
but if he had to go away suddenly to a meeting
he never said
excuse me
or anything like that
had no wish to offend his silence was proof
but if you met him there was never any greeting
he never said
good morning
or anything of that kind
the last time I saw him he seemed more than usually shy
I didn't know of course he was going away to die
he never said
goodbye
or anything

-- Gavin Bantock --

A Vision

Wheels within wheels.
Within people.
Within animals.
The wheels mesh.

extending from the bodies
of the men and the beasts
meet and lock.
Thus there is motor
action

and love-actions,
the one machine
continuous
in space & time.
Here there is oil

oozing from out
the spaces between the
rods of reason.
Thus smoothness
and precision

but in this machine
there is a secret
flexibility, a bending
into wonder
and the unpredictable.

-- Philip Dacey --

Not Anymore

I've put my huge hungry foot into your mouth
and you can't bite down
the joke's on you
The blood from my stab wounds
won't get into the scrambled eggs anymore
ever again.

My storm troopers are slinging yours up
against the wall
to gun them down
while they smoke my last joint.

A hundred and forty watch towermen
start fires beneath your head bed every night
I wouldn't want to catch a cold this winter.
Some cry on my shoulders when their shoes are too small.

I promise to wake you at dawn
on the day of your death
It will come as a surprise. Silently...silently.
Bring your tooth brush
your teeth are dirty
the transplanters are only taking clean teeth these days.

Take your shoes off as we pass their graves
their bodies are empty.

-- Carla Perry --

P x P

by

Wayne Connelly

(York University)

L.P. Davies, Genesis Two, New York: Doubleday, 1970

....., The Alien, New York: Doubleday, 1971.

L.P. Davies is also a writer of suspense and mystery stories. This background shows through to his advantage in these two science fiction novels, almost saving Genesis Two and making of The Alien an unusual and worthwhile entertainment.

Genesis Two is a member of that peculiarly British sub-genre, "the cataclysm tale." It's something of an oddity, though. The story concerns a handful of people plucked from a landslide in Northern England and transported into the future--into a remote time when the earth is once more pristine. Our descendents, it appears, at some point in the intermediate future have doomed not just their own civilization but all other life upon the planet as well. Consequently, they attempt to re-seed the future by reaching into the past, seizing a small group of people (a group that won't be missed, like landslide victims), and leap-frogging them forward into the post-holocaust period, into a second Garden of Eden, only this time with two Eves and several Adams.

Now "cataclysm tales" normally follow one of two patterns, exemplified best by John Wyndham and John Christopher. In the first, the main interest is centred in the catastrophe itself, the important thing being the setting, a world transformed or imperiled by disaster. The second views the end-of-the-world or whatever as merely a device; the main concern is to create a laboratory situation in which a controlled group under extraordinary stress can be studied. The distinction, then, is between the atmosphere and the character story.

For two-thirds of Genesis Two it looks as if Mr. Davies is attempting the second approach, unsuccessfully. Of course the situation itself tends to make of everyone a stereotype, but even so the characters in Genesis seem altogether too shallow for any kind of legitimate social study. They have the easy familiarity of a repertory company: the kindly, competent old couple; the overly-officious ex-army Major; the shy, could-be-pretty-if-she-tried girl; the full-blown, erstwhile exotic dancer; the D.H. Lawrence caricature, aptly named "Fox"; the wise-cracking young man....

But it's at this two-thirds point that the author presents us with his murder. A head-bashing appropriately. The subsequent chapters of wondering just who could have done it (and of course everyone seems a likely suspect) form one of the highlights of the book. If in fact the murder had been introduced a couple of chapters earlier, Genesis Two might well have come off as a mildly effective story--and also as something rather unique: a "cataclysm tale" in which the plot was the thing.

It has been said, and it's most likely true, that science fiction is involved less with new ideas than with new approaches to old ideas. Such is the case with The Alien. Its basic notion is as hoary as they come, namely, an alien invasion complete with flying saucer. Mr. Davies resurrects the idea, though, by adding to it an equally familiar element--amnesia.

An accident victim is brought into a hospital where it's found that his blood cannot be matched. In truth, it isn't blood. The Authorities are notified and it is soon discovered that not only does this "person" have several anatomical abnormalities, but that there are also a number of irregularities about his past. For one, no record of his existence can be found dating prior to a fairly well documented U.F.O. sighting. For another, not long after that sighting an important Government Research Centre was blown up; it was presumed at the time sabotaged by ordinary human spies. Now, however, the Authorities put two and two together.

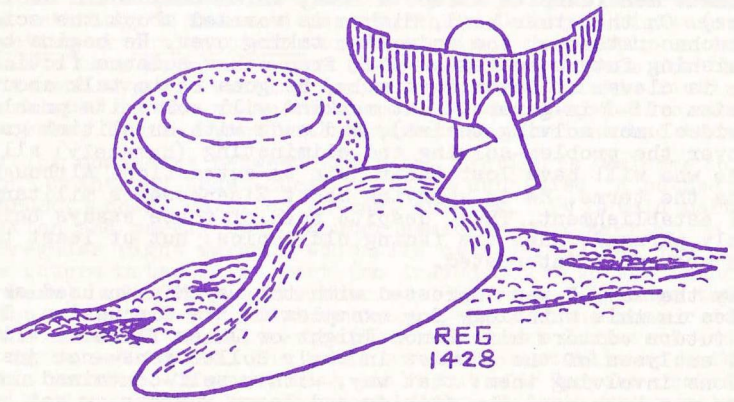
But they can't check their conclusion. They can't even uncover the rest of the extra-terrestrial saboteurs. For the Alien has lost his memory in the accident. As far as he is concerned, he is just a man who can't remember his identity.

So the story proper revolves around the Alien's efforts to learn who he is, or rather what he is, with the Authorities all the while hovering not too far in the background.

The result is an entertaining mystery yarn that, like the best of its type, requires a denouement to unravel all the involutions of plot. Accordingly, The Alien is a highly successful blending of mystery and science fiction forms, owing as it happens less to Robert Heinlein than to John Le Carre.

Finally, it's also possible to speak of a common theme in both Genesis Two and The Alien--and one not too far removed from Le Carre either--and that is "the manipulation of the powerless by the powerful." Or, as Alice so much more elegantly puts it:

> "I wouldn't mind being a pawn,
> if only I might join."



A Georgia Haymaker Aimed At The Future's Chin?

by

Joe R. Christopher (Tarleton College)

George Hay (editor), The Disappearing Future: A Symposium of Speculation, London, Panther Books, 1970. 5/ .

This anthology consists of thirteen stories-or-essays, along with a foreword by the editor and a list of brief comments about the authors, alphabetically listed. The editor announces: "The theme set herein is the future, as the writer saw it, as derived from present events and trends." Perhaps.

The essays are these:

I.F. Clarke: "The First Forecast of the Future."

Kit Pedler: "Deus ex Machina?" (reprint).

John W. Campbell: "Political Science: Mark II" (reprint).

Christopher Evans: "Sleep, Dreams, and Computers" (reprint).

Edward J. Mishan: "The Temple Scientists."

James Blish: "Future Recall."

Samuel R. Delany: "About Five Thousand One Hundred and Seventy Five Words" (reprint).

Of these, only Pedler and Mishan fit the announced theme. Pedler writes about androids (which he calls biomims, from biological mimics), and decides (1) they would replace man as the work force (he suggests ants and bees as analogous work forces); (2) they would surpass man by their controlled, Lamarckian evolution (vs. man's largely uncontrolled Darwinian evolution); and (3) they might exterminate man (despite Asimov's laws, which they could decide to ignore). On the other hand, Mishan is worried about the scientists and technocrats, not the androids, taking over. He begins by distinguishing future societies (F-S) from other science fiction(S-F), which is clever at least initially. He goes on to talk about the optimism of S-F-in-general that mankind will solve its problems (not individual men solving theirs), and ends with an elitist group taking over the problem-solving and eliminating (humanely) all the people who will have lost their jobs to automation. Although he avoids the terms, he is worrying about Eisenhower's military-industrial establishment. Thus, despite both of these essays being freshly phrased, they are facing old topics: but at least the authors are still interested.

(By the way, I was impressed with the way Mishan used several stories in this anthology for examples in his discussion. I suggest that future editors hire Damon Knight or James Blish to write critical analyses of the stories in their collections--not just discussions involving them: that way, with a self-contained unit, the reader can both read the stories and learn whether or not he should enjoy them. If he's in a hurry, he can just read the analyses. And future reviewers can review not only the stories but the Knight/Blish reviews. This should add to the in-group nature of S-F. Finally, when Advent collects the magazine reviews of these anthologies, then the magazines can publish reviews of reviews of reviews.)

To return: Clarke's and Blish's essays are more historical than futuristic; however, they are parallel to the anthology's theme. Both speak of how other writers have done in foretelling the future: Clarke, of the anonymous Reign of George VI, 1900-1925 (published in 1763), and Blish, of Heinlein and Cartmill, primarily. Clarke's author did poorly, and Blish's modern S-F writers did well in three stories. Blish undercuts this by suggesting several reasons for there to be less scientific extrapolation in the upcoming S-F.

Finally, Campbell, Evans, and Delany have nothing to do with the topic. Campbell attacks the National Academy of Science for not investigating racial intelligence; this may be worth saying on the part of a self-professed gadfly--although the connexion between intelligence and diet would make such a study difficult--but he does not connect it to the future. (Hay says in his foreword that Campbell's essay is very relative to the anthology's theme. In what way?) Dr. Evans contributes a study of the function of dreams (a non-Freudian view) which is interesting. He mildly suggests in his next-to-last paragraph that there will be further study of man's inner nature, which seems to be our anthologist's point. (A line of type is lost from Evans' essay on page 52; a number of lesser errors appear elsewhere in the book.) Hays admits that Delany was off-course (the anthology's course, that is). Quite so. Delany writes about the use of connotation in writing--one would think this was obvious, although from the various reactions to the piece, it doesn't seem to be.

Delany certainly has an urgency in his essay, but it doesn't seem to come from his basic topic. For example, I think it would be fair, in comparing Heinlein and Poul Anderson, to say that Heinlein has had the better S-F ideas and concepts and that Anderson has had more understanding of human psychology and has written a better style. Presumably a critic could compare two passages, trying to make them typical, and show a higher degree of sensuous detail in Anderson. According to Delany, this would prove Anderson the better writer, since style and content cannot be separated. But I doubt that Delany would be satisfied with this. His basic concern seems to be a defense of the New Wave in terms of this indivisible style/content, and, near the end of the essay, a celebration of S-F as the successor to Symbolist poetry. This is not connected to the anthology's theme. A parting shot: Delany's eighteen uses of subjunctive or subjunctivity are confusing: presumably an invented word in its noun form, it seems to be an inclusive term for the tone of different types of writing (reportage, naturalistic fiction, S-F), and unrelated to the grammatical mood of the subjunctive. For clarity's sake, I wish a word with clearer connotations had been used.

Fitting somewhere between essay and fiction is "Welcome to Wesbloc/Wesbloc" by Anthony Haden-Guest, which is subtitled "A potted preface to WESBLOC, a comic novel of several futures." It is told partly in exposition and partly by a computer named Merlin: Merlin. No doubt the irregular right margins add to its casual feeling. The picture of the future in the first part (no inadequacy as to the anthology's theme here) is followed by a number of 1967 news-clippings that suggest the basis for the previous future. Much of the humour derives from the names of "neural centre(s) of the Great Computer"--such as Lenny Bruce and Orwell. The basic situation established in the futuristic section is a great city built out of a "psycho-protein" called Nuplasm, which has gone mad. Haden-Guest's story/essay is worth reading for the jokes and echoes of other stories, but E.M. Forster did the basic plot much more satisfactorily in "The Machine Stops" over fifty years ago.

Finally, we come to the stories (none reprints):

David I. Masson: "The Show Must Go On."

Anne McCaffrey: "The Thorns of Barevi."

Christopher Priest: "Double Consummation."

Michael Moorcock: "The Sunset Perspective."

Perry A. Chapdelaine: "Some Day You'll be Rich!"

Of these, only one--that by McCaffrey--has nothing to do with the anthology's supposed theme. McCaffrey tells about an earthwoman who finds she enjoyed being swived by her galactic captor. I fail to see any present trend that this develops unless it is the astounding post-Victorian discovery (and pre-Victorian knowledge) of women's sexual desires. I gather that the editor doesn't see any relationship to his theme either, for he fudges in his foreword: "Anne McCaffrey...lays it on the line that Some Things Do Not Change" (his capitals; lays may be an intentional pun).

Let me consider next Chapdelaine's story: a fundamental objection is that the fiction has too many unrelated ideas and tones. It is partly a bildungsroman which is solved by a gimmick rather than maturity; it contains a satiric short-short, "The Monkey's Uncle"; and it has rather long sections of idea-discussion (which in Northrop Frye's critical terminology would be called "anatomies")--and the whole thing is told in the second person. Further, the number of words needs to be greater to present fuller character development (the protagonist's combination of "cyberneuronics," writing, painting, and conning needs a novel), or fewer with richer detail in just one or two areas (which is what a short story is normally limited to).

I also object to the basic plot device of feeding those letters into the computer and copyrighting all the combinations. Here the protagonist is taking the easy way out. What he should have done is feed an unabridged dictionary word-list + parts of speech into the computer (presumably by then dictionaries will be on tape, with selective options); then, using structural linguistics to establish sentence patterns, the computer could produce all possible stories made with English words and sentences within the word limits. (Already computers are approaching this in their poetry-writing programmes.)

Two thirds of the other stories are better than Chapdelaine's. The poor one is Priest's "Double Consummation" -- where the problem is not in the development (much better than Chapdelaine's) but in the basic concept. Priest assumes that England will have a dropping population (this is derived from a present trend?) while a number of other countries will have overpopulation; he suggests a re-establishement of marriage will solve the problem. A much more probable governmental solution would be immigration.

That leaves two tales. One of them is a Jerry Cornelius story by Michael Moorcock: "The Sunset Perspective: A Moral Tale." It is divided into ten sections, each headed by an unrelated epigraph, and each section has one or more sometimes-related titles in italics. The rather disjointed story is presumably a thesis story, based on a statement in Section VI: "Once history ceased to be seen in linear terms, it ceased to be made in linear terms." There is even a moral in the last section, put in italics: "The gestures of conflict keep the peace." What more could one want?

Moorcock's story, under its experimental technique, is a parodic James Bond adventure, with Jerry Cornelius saving the world from the moralism of Colonel Moon, who would have brought back the twentieth century (and earlier). Thus the story fits the theme of the anthology in a number of delightful ways, from the reference to a Lear Steamer car (the emphasis on trade or brand names throughout is part of the Fleming technique, but here it also keeps Moorcock from being as flat as Chapdelaine) to an episode (in a reverting New York) where faggots battle for their territory. Miss Brunner, who is a computer programmer for Cornelius, reverts to witchcraft. I suppose this is more a projection of a current literary trend (Fleming) than of social or scientific trends, but that's close enough.

The story that I have saved till the last is Masson's "The Show Must Go On." Mishan in his essay states that this

> ...sketch of insensate violence become commonplace...barely qualifies as S-F. But neither can it be regarded as F-S. No causes are assigned for the callousness and cruelty; possibly, it is but a magnification of current trends. What its significance is, and where it leads to, is anybody's guess.

As merely "a magnification of current trends," it fits the anthology's thesis (as George Hay comments in his foreword). It is hardly a story, however: readers of some of Leiber's plotless projections --"Coming Attractions"for example--will have a good idea of the type. But Mishan is quite wrong about its not having a meaning: it is a religious story. The epigraph is an altered version of a stanza from William Blake's "London," and in the last scene a soapbox speaker in Hyde Park harranges passersby with the view that nature has been created by Nobodaddy and that man has outgone nature. Anyone who knows Blake's mythology will understand perfectly; if I may paraphrase, "Nobodaddy's in his heaven, and all's wrong with the world."

What then may be said of this anthology? As a theme anthologist, Hay did not keep to his theme. But a number of the selections are interesting; a few are even valuable: I particularly liked Dr. Evans's theory of dreams because I particularly dislike Freud's limitations on the meanings of dreams (and, by implication, of most literature). Perhaps we will eventually reach a non-authoritarian point where an analyst will be ashamed to say that a dream means just one thing; instead he will say that a dream means Freudian sex and Evans's integration of experience and several other things, including (despite Evans's poohpoohing) a forecast of the future--and a story (despite Blish's poohpoohing and to Hay's delight) may also.

Moskowitz on Kuttner

by

James Blish

Sam Moskowitz's book Seekers of Tomorrow (New York: World, 1966) is subtitled "Masters of Modern Science Fiction," and as this subtitle suggests, all but one of the twenty two authors to which it gives major attention were alive in 1966. (Two more, E.E. Smith Ph. D. and John Wyndham, have since died.) The exception is Henry Kuttner, who died in 1958.

Moskowitz's chapter (number 18) on Kuttner contains a strikingly just and funny line: "Kuttner was the first in the science-fiction field to rise to glory incognito" (320). It also exhibits one of his major critical weaknesses, the overclaim, as when he characterizes (p.321) a 1936 Kuttner story as "undoubtedly one of the half-dozen truly horrifying short stories in the entire gamut of literature, all of literature"/his emphases/. In order to arrive at this judgement Moskowitz would have been obliged to read the entire literary output of the human race, in some six thousand languages. The chapter also contains various approximate titles and pure proofreading failures, including (p. 332) the invention of a play called "Visit from a Small Planet"/my emphasis/.

The chapter's account of Kuttner's career is radically incomplete, particularly of Kuttner's early years as a writer. Kuttner's output of non-science fiction and non-fantasy from 1936 to 1941 was enormous, and included detective, adventure, and Western stories, as well as horror stories. Moskowitz is primarily concerned with science fiction, of course, and is not obliged to mention these predecessors, though he does mention the part of this output which went to the mystery and horror magazines, citing three titles (324). But Moskowitz's picture of Kuttner as a lifelong imitator of other writers shows in a rather different light when one realizes that Kuttner was technically proficient and versatile almost from the start. Furthermore, the germs of Kuttner's literary preoccupations are buried in this mass of early work, which is all the more important because, as Moskowitz says (320), Kuttner rarely talked personally or in print about his formative years. Moskowitz has made no attempt to run down these titles, as is revealed in his statement, "It is likely that he used pen names for stories in Horror Tales /correct title, Horror Stories/ and Terror Tales" (324).

Kuttner did indeed use a plethora of pen names, particularly in these early years, but ferreting them out doesn't require much effort; the Day Index alone lists seventeen of them.[1] Among those unmentioned by Moskowitz are Edward J. Bellin, Noel Gardner, Hudson Hastings, Peter Horn, K.H. Maepen, Scott Morgan, Woodrow Wilson Smith, and Charles Stoddard,[2] two of them house names, signed to a total of eight science-fiction stories, plus stories of other kinds. Above all, he does not mention C.H. Liddell, which was a pen name Kuttner used for seven additional science-fiction stories, one of them a novel, in his last years (though most of the material published under this name had been written quite early).

These pen names are confusing--Jack Vance[3] was once suspected of being a Kuttner pseudonym, and so was I --and Moskowitz confuses the problem further. He says, for example, that Keith Hammond "originated as a device for running two stories in the same issues /sic/ of Strange Stories" at some time "as 1939 progressed" and that most of the stories under the Hammond name "may even have been rejects from Weird Tales" (327). But at least two Hammond stories,"The Hand of Ahriman" and "The Seventh Coffin," appeared before February 1939 and hence had to have been so signed in 1938 at the latest. The reject hypothesis is just that--pure speculation. Hammond, furthermore, was the pen name Kuttner used for four late science-fiction stories, including two novels; of these, Moskowitz mentions only a short story (333).

Some of this confusion is produced by the way Moskowitz writes; should he protest that he never said that the Hammond pen name really originated in 1939, I should have to grant him the point, for it is impossible to tell from the text just what he does mean to convey. Much of his text is like this. Dates fall like rain, but the instant one asks "Just when did the first story signed 'Keith Hammond'[4] appear?", there is no answer. As I have shown elsewhere, imprecisions and omissions like these are quite characteristic of Moskowitz's scholarship.

++++++++++++

When one passes from scholarship to criticism, one also passes from the inaccurate to the grotesque, and finally to the ugly. Moskowitz's assessment of Kuttner, like that of C.M. Kornbluth, contains elements of direct personal attack which even the most callous historian might hesitate to inflict upon a living figure.

Moskowitz's overall view of Kuttner's achievement, as noted above, is that of a writer who never attained to a voice of his own, but who instead spent his whole life imitating others. Moskowitz in fact views all of literature as a spectacle of successive imitations, which he calls "influences" and "derivations"; apparently the creative process is a mystery to him, insofar as one can judge from the very small amount of attention he devotes to originality in science fiction. His sole critical principle is one of infinite regress.

I adduce the following quotations, which are not exhaustive:

> Both of these tales were outright imitations of Lovecraft, and The Eater of Souls...imitated Lovecraft's imitation of Lord Dunsany! (322)
>
> ...while Kuttner wanted to change he seemed unable to bring to bear any qualities that were fundamentally his own... (323)
>
> Kuttner used Stanley G. Weinbaum's Lotus Eaters as a model... (325)
>
> Kuttner now tried his hand at it with a heroic character titled Elak, brawling and loving in the manner of Conan (and in the style of Robert E. Howard), but with supernatural settings from H.P. Lovecraft and stylistic hyperbole a la C.L. Moore. (326)
>
> The style, reading like something new to the science-fiction audience, was actually simulated John Collier. (331)
>
> ...plot derived and expanded from Clifford D. Simak's Rim of the Deep (332)
>
> A superbly proficient literary mimic, Kuttner usually wrote like whoever was in demand at the time. (332)
>
> Kuttner's A.E. van Vogt kick, most obviously apparent in his well-done "Baldies" series...are /sic/ variations on Slan... (333-4)
>
> The Lancelot Hogben series...were /sic/ ...blatantly drawn from a series which Murray Leinster wrote... (334)

Moskowitz backs these accusations--when he bothers--by simplifying and distorting the plots of the Kuttner story and its alleged influence until they sound almost exactly alike, a tiresome sophomore trick. He gets stylistic resemblances right only rarely and then by accident.

He concludes:

> Who was the real Henry Kuttner? We will never know. The man had discipline, technical brilliance, immense versatility, and ingenuity, and these betrayed him. Lured by opportunism, suffering from an acute sense of inadequacy, he refused to stand alone, but leaned on others for support: H.P. Lovecraft, Robert E. Howard, Stanley G. Weinbaum, A. Merritt, John Collier, A.E. van Vogt, and of course C.L. Moore. (334)

The remark about "an acute sense of inadequacy" is gratuitous mind-reading. As a friend of Kuttner's for the last ten years of his life, I can describe him as a sensitive, self-questioning, but basically confident man--but I could no more read his mind than Moskowitz can, nor does such parlor psychoanalysis in any way illuminate what he wrote for publication.

As for "opportunism," this is libel pure and simple: it accuses Kuttner in print of misconduct in his chosen profession, and holds him up to opprobrium to his peers. Taken together, these two slurs --and indeed the whole of Moskowitz's final paragraph--are not criticism at all, but defamation of the dead.

At this point, let me introduce Kuttner speaking for himself:

> ...for the writer to modify a clinical-necessity story for the market would be awfully bad for his innards. Which may be a yardstick. The stories one feels most strongly about are the ones that should be reworked only when the inward critic thoroughly approves. Stories with which I'm emotionally involved can be reworked effectively only after a considerable time has elapsed, whereas technical jobs can be tinkered with--and seen clearly--very quickly. For an even more practical yardstick, I suggest that the stories one has trouble changing at an editor's request are the ones to leave alone pro tem...100% of the stories written to please the writer first of all invariably sell. The more compromises on such stories, the worse the results. You've got to accept the validity of criticism and suggestions before you can use them well on a story.
>
> (Personal letter, March 21, 1950)

These are not, I submit, the opinions of an opportunist or of a man with any sense of inadequacy...nor of one whose achievement should be patronised, and his memory defamed, by a man who writes his own dust-jacket copy.

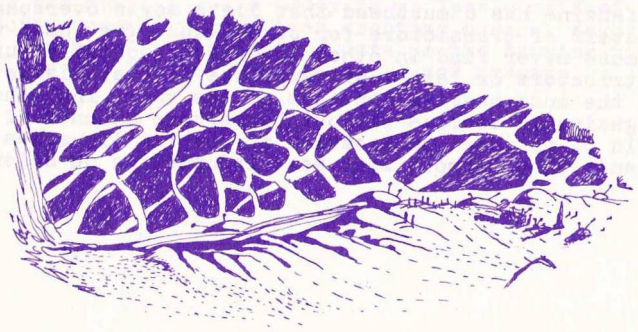
FOOTNOTES

1) Donald B. Day, Index to the Science Fiction Magazines 1926-1950 (Portland: Perri Press, 1952), p. 37.

2) A house name in the pulps was a pen name used by a single publisher, which might be signed to the work of a number of writers for that publisher as convenience dictated.

3) Vance was listed as a pen name of Kuttner's, for example, in Uberwundung von Raum und Zeit, Gotthard Gunther, trans. (Dusseldorf & Bad Salzig: Karl Rauch Verlag, 1952). I was taken for a pen name of Kuttner's, by a fan named Entrekin, in September 1948 --a very fortunate mistake, from which emerged my decade of correspondence with Kuttner.

4) James Blish, "The Future in Books," Amazing Stories, June 1968, p. 135; "The Great Historian," Australian Science Fiction Review, June 1968, p. 8; More Issues at Hand (Chicago: Advent, 1970), pp. 25-28, 36-39.



OPERE CITATO

BY HARRY WARNER JR.

I hate those tricky titles like "Opera Records for People Who Hate Opera." There's so much hate in the world that not even a desperation attempt to attract attention with pretend-hate should capitalize on a most undesirable emotion. So it should be understood from the outset that this time, I'm not going to call attention to fanzines that are ideal for people who hate fanzines.

But quite a few publications are appearing that are ideal for the person who is tired of the mixed bag of articles, columns and miscellany which fill up the pages of most fanzines today. Some of these are big, some are small, and all are different from the average fanzine in a way that should interest the person who doesn't want to read even good typical fanzines just now.

Tom Collins has not been a big name in fanzine publishing or in scholarly aspects of fandom. But all of a sudden he has produced a big, near-perfect and eminently readable tribute to August Derleth. It takes the form of an 84-page fourth issue of his fanzine, IS, devoted to material about the author, editor, anthologist and publisher who died on July 4. There's only one thing wrong with the issue: Derleth can't read it. He never received a great deal of attention in fanzines, and this collection of reminiscences, evaluations, and history would have made up for much of that neglect. From a few lines to several pages, Derleth and his activities are discussed by people like Bloch, Bradbury, Leiber, Lowndes, Price, and van Vogt. Sources range from the tape of a speech through a telephone conversation to original manuscripts and several illustrations borrowed from other fanzines. The typography is plain but eminently readable, and the appearance of such a thorough tribute less than five months after Derleth's death is miraculous.

I've never understood the neglect inflicted on The WSFA Journal when people fill out Hugo nomination forms. It covers regularly more aspects of science and fantasy fiction year after year than any non-news fanzine published in the United States. Its reviews, special articles on specific people or themes, and jewel-like filler-length items are not surpassed consistently anywhere. What other fanzine has a masthead that lists seven overseas agents and a staff of translators for seven languages? Good writers whom you almost never find in other fanzines frequently turn up here as contributors or letter-writers. The Disclave issue is usually one of the most massive fanzines of the year. The general tone of the magazine is serious without bothersome amounts of stodginess. It would be an ideal publication for public libraries to bind and keep handy when patrons want more information on science fiction.

But it's easy to understand why Stefantasy never gets a Hugo nomination. Bill Danner, its editor, claims he isn't a fan, and doesn't consider the publication a fanzine in the normal sense. There are veteran fans who have never seen a copy, even though it has been appearing regularly for the past 26 years. If some of the material in the latest issue isn't exactly fantasy oriented, I still insist that it's a fanzine. Doesn't it have complete permeation by the personality of the remarkable person who edits it, material by people like Lee Hoffman, a quote from Rick Sneary, and an astonishing set of reprints from 19th century issues of Scientific American that throw light on today and the future? Plus its special distinction, beautiful letterpress printing and handset type.

If Derleth didn't live to see the fanzine in his memory, he did survive to see the early stages of a Lovecraft renaissance which seems to be gaining international significance. HPL is particularly big in France just now, and that could be significant, because the French put Poe among the first rank of American writers at a time when he was considered a second- or third-rater in his own land. Harry O. Morris, Jr. has recently released the fifth issue of Nyctalops, a fanzine devoted almost entirely to Lovecraft and closely related topics. Even for a person who is interested in the general field of fantasy fiction rather than HPL specifically, this is almost indispensable. It has been running serially a listing of the appearances of each Lovecraft story in book and magazine forms, compiled by E.P. Berglund. In this issue, Kenneth W. Faig, Jr. provides a complete listing of the Lovecraft manuscripts in the special collection at Brown University Library. There's also a checklist of translations of HPL fiction; would you believe "Je Suis d'Ailleurs" as the title for a French version of "The Outsider"? Lovecraft fandom has come a long way from the goshwow total devotion that characterized it a generation ago, and Nyctalops embodies the more balanced attitude toward his person and fiction that prevails today.

A total change of pace in every way is Rotsler's Rocks. Bill Rotsler has been flooding fanzines with thousands of tiny sketches over the years, spartan of line and fraught with power to hit the viewer's superego, ego, or maybe even id. In the past year or two something has caused Rotsler to draw more large pictures, to put skeletonized landscapes into the drawings that once contained only conventionalized people and a half-dozen or so symbols of sex and life. This slim publication contains about a score of sketches in which an enigmatic rock is a leitmotif. There is the kind of humour in the drawings that impels people to whistle as they walk past graveyards in the dark of night. Some day the art world will be expounding and collecting and praising Rotsler just as the musical world today is at last convinced that Satie was doing something more than creating musical jokes. This publication may rate at that future date as the turning point between the old and the new Rotsler style and message.

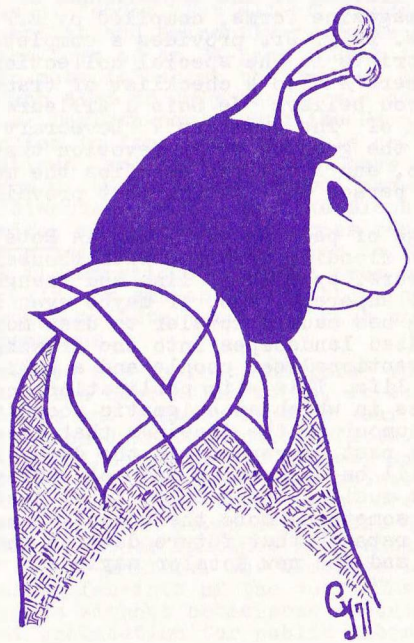
IS: Tom Collins, 43 Butler Street, Meriden, Connecticut 06450. This issue only, $3; the next four issues via subscription for $6.

The WSFA Journal: Don Miller, 12315 Judson Road, Wheaton, Maryland 20906. Four issues for $1.75, free for published contributions and pre-arranged trades. (A more frequent, smaller supplement contains somewhat similar material and sells at 12 issues for $1.50.)

Stefantasy: Bill Danner, R.D. 1, Kennerdell, Pennsylvania 16374. "Price up to a total 6 Colons except for your copy, which is free." Available for response, pre-arranged trades, "or any other reason that may occur to me."

Nyctalops: Harry Morris, Jr., 500 Wellesley S.E., Albuquerque, New Mexico 87106. 35¢ per copy, three for $1, free for contributions or trades.

Rotsler's Rocks: William Rotsler, 8420 Ridpath Drive, Los Angeles, California 90046. No price or availability information listed.



The Seasonal Fan:

by
Jim Harmon

Bill Blackbeard's ferocious opinions (RQ, vol 5, no. 1) on popular entertainment contrast markedly with Robert Plank's analytic judgements on Robert Heinlein's work. I prefer Plank's approach. Blackbeard never attempts to offer the slightest evidence, traditionally in literary pieces, quotations from the material discussed. For instance, he tosses this writer the bone of calling his book, The Great Radio Heroes, "excellent" but he certainly does not demonstrate any quality of excellence in the work. In fact, he expresses so many views downgrading the book that surely the average reader must consider the single complimentary set of syllables to be merely ironic.

In many ways Blackbeard resembles the clinical "fantasy of omnipotence" that Plank describes as a factor in the Heinlein novel, Stranger in a Strange Land. If Blackbeard says it, it has become true. No further discussion is required.

As a departure point in his parade of decrees, Blackbeard demolishes "old-time radio." I think two words are important in making judgements on this corner of the arts: intellectual and juvenile. Most of radio drama was not written for intellectuals; my book was neither written by nor for an intellectual. My book, and most radio drama, was aimed at the average or typical person, in many cases, the average or typical child. Much of it was deliberately juvenile. Juvenile is not an evil word (though I recall reading that "juvenile" was so often associated with "delinquent" that many people thought it had unpleasant connotations). The typical children of eight or ten could not in the thirties and forties (or probably today) appreciate such classics as Hamlet or Crime and Punishment; they could get something from Treasure Island or Alice in Wonderland. The radio networks may have underestimated most children's capacities. Yet the afternoon juvenile serials were actually written on just about the same level as the night-time TV drama of today. It is a case of the networks then possibly underestimating slightly the capacity of an eight year old and today totally underestimating the capacity of an adult. As for the true intellectual, he could not of course enjoy such simplistic entertainment as old radio serials or new TV serials, except perhaps on a very minor level. But mass media are not designed for Greek tragedy and symphonic music exclusively, but to communicate with the masses.

The old radio serials Jack Armstrong and The Lone Ranger are characterized by Blackbeard as "subliterate." Actually, they were written with a greater command of the English language than, for instance, 75% of current science fiction. Fran Striker, The Lone Ranger's chief writer, was an incisive dramatist. Armstrong was a constantly changing show, passing through many hands, but at times it was written by Talbot Mundy, whom Blackbeard regards as at least a passable adventure story writer, and created by Robert Hardy Andrews, who write If I Had a Million, one of the W.C. Fields films Blackbeard venerates. They may not have been at the top of their forms on Armstrong, but something of their abilities must have gleamed through.

This is not to say that the show could be enjoyed as dramatic entertainment by the average adult, and certainly not by a self-confessed or closet intellectual. They were enjoyed by me at the time, a person of at least functional human intelligence it has turned out. I can now enjoy them through nostalgia, a complaint which, like hemorrhoids, Blackbeard may never have personally experienced, but which does exist.

The chances of a Bill Blackbeard are one in a human race. Such chances represent a "variant" attitude that I do dismiss as statistically unimportant.

Blackbeard could have used my book, which presumably was at hand, to offer examples of the awfulness of Jack Armstrong and The Lone Ranger. I might offer the same to demonstrate at least some minor value.

> "He and the men with him are fighting 'change.' They are opposed to progress...Their own greedy, selfish interests are best served if the West remains unchanged. They know if this country develops and becomes more civilized, there will be more law and order...They want things to remain just as they are--with small communities isolated and easy prey for outlaw armies..." (The Lone Ranger, 1950)

> "Billy, when I think of this country...with everybody working and pulling together to have a nation where people can be free, and do big, fine things--why it makes me realize what a terribly important job we've got ahead...If we can get that uranium for our scientists...why we'll learn how to use all that energy in the atom. And we'll use it for the good of the whole world!" (Jack Armstrong, 1939)

To some, these may only be Establishment propaganda, but to me, they are only proof of how badly the Establishment has betrayed the ideals of the Lone Ranger, Jack Armstrong, and consequently, me. Moreover, these sentiments are at least as literately expressed as many current sex and drug indulgences by contemporary writers.

Radio was a field that offered ready employment to writers who could write dialogue skilfully. It was possible to submit scripts to a radio show much as one submits short stories to a magazine. In many cases, they would be read and if good enough, purchased. TV writing is a closed shop, open only to those with pull, influence, an "in"--relatives, bedmates, people already powerful in production or acting. There is a lot more money involved in TV writing.

Most pulp magazine writers who were good enough also wrote for radio, or moved to that medium completely. Dashiel Hammett quit Black Mask and the other pulps to write for radio, also movies. Walter Gibson, who wrote the Shadow novels as "Maxwell Grant,"also wrote such radio programs as Strange (stories of the occult) and Chick Carter (Nick's teen-age son). Lester Dent did no radio writing to my knowledge, because while he was a great "idea" man in plotting, he was a terrible stylist. Blackbeard in indulging his own supposedly irrefutable taste praises the work of Dent and condemns that of Gibson.

There are many reasons for the relative success of the Doc Savage paperback reprints. They began in the "camp" period characterized by the Batman TV show, were read by many college-age people simply because they regarded them as so bad they are laughably amusing. More than once in airline terminals I have seen twenty year olds reading Doc paperbacks and laughing their heads off. Then too the excellent Bama cover paintings featuring a handsome, rather vicious-looking Doc Savage naked from the waist up (save for a few tatters of torn shirt) obviously and admittedly appeal to many active and latent homosexuals as pin-up pictures. These novels were also the first of the pulp reprints, and to some extent have cornered the limited market.

The Shadow paperbacks have been very badly handled with almost universally terrible covers, from the small Belmont company at first and with original novels that did not capture the true spirit of The Shadow. When the reprint series began from Bantam, still more bad covers followed. Yet the series was not a failure and other novels will probably follow. Walter Gibson is a very graphic stylist, and certainly is not as poor as Blackbeard indicates.

In The Shadow Laughs (1931, reprinted 1969) Gibson deftly described the passing of the Shadow:

It was late in the evening. A misty drizzle was falling, and the lights above the street were dim in the gloom. The front of Mrs. Johnson's boarding house was black and shadowy.

Passing cars, sloshing through the muck, cast moving silhouettes upon the sidewalk and the wall of the house.

Black depths surrounded the steps of the building; and it was from this murky umbra that a shadow seemed to rise and blot iut the door of the house.

But in a moment the blackness was gone, and no sign of it remained. Inside the rooming house, however, a singular phenomenon occurred.

The landlady, coming along the hall beside the stairs, stopped for a moment, startled by a peculiar gloom that seemed to flit toward the steps that led to the second floor. Then she realized that her imagination must be tricking her.

Lester Dent, writing as Kenneth Robeson, described a scene equally as unlikely in the real world in Cold Death (1936, reprinted 1968):

Doc flipped a gas capsule and it fell at the feet of the foremost man. But the rush carried the men over the gas before it could become effective. The bronze man was holding his own breath. Then an automatic pistol slashed its blaze into the gloomy basement. And a sizzling stream of ammonia searched for Doc's eyes and nostrils.

With his eyes tightly closed, Doc charged directly into the members of Var's ring. Though he was not breathing, the ammonia was pungent in his nostrils. Two men crashed into opposite walls under fists so fast and so effective they had no chance to use their weapons against them.

While one might prefer the engaging outrageousness of the Doc Savage scene, Gibson clearly has a greater command of narrative technique. A similar superiority in use of dialogue could be demonstrated as well.

In short, everything that Bill Blackbeard says three times (or more) is not necessarily true, even when shouted between rapidly grinding teeth (a considerable accomplishment to be sure). Blackbeard is correct considerably more often than a stopped clock, but the force of reason works best with the accent on reason, rather than the simple violence with which a thing is said.

While I preferred the reasoned steps of Robert Plank's analysis of Heinlein's book, I found one line rather curious: "...indiscriminate, effortless, repetitive sexual intercourse with an unlimited number of agreeable, healthy, unindividualized members of the opposite sex...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." This statement has so many qualifying terms, it is a bit difficult to be sure just which elements Dr. Plank considers unmanning. While, alas, it is not an accurate description of my own activity, I know several men who have engaged in, at least, fairly discriminating sexual intercourse with rather individual members of the opposite sex with quite a degree of repetition, whom I would call not only "men" but "gentlemen."

Selected Letters

Kempton R#1
PA 19529

Dear Leland Sapiro:

May I comment on Andrew Offutt's letter about human violence (RQ #17). I appreciate his writing so fully, for it is always helpful to me to be acquainted with all the counter-arguments against my views.

What is involved is my theory that--contrary to current teaching and belief--human violence is not an inescapable biologically rooted part of man or of the human condition. By human violence I mean the injuring or killing of one human being by another. Offutt states that he will not bother even reading my book A Sign for Cain because it is "based on a false premise." But my idea that human violence can be not only reduced but in the long run abolished, is not a "premise." It is a conclusion arrived at after many years of studies concerned with people who have committed murder or other violent acts. Offutt thinks that my idea is an old one and that the theory that man has an inborn ineradicable instinct of aggression is new. But just the opposite is true. In innumerable books on psychiatry, criminology and sociology it has been taken for granted that a person who commits murder must be born that way, be a constitutionally psychopathic inferior or a "born criminal," etc. In all the many cases I have examined, I have never found a single "born murderer" once I studied their inner and outer life history. Konrad Lorenz and his followers present us with this old view bolstered by observations of animals.

Quite apart from the fact that it is extremely hazardous to draw conclusions about the causes of human behavior from animals, Lorenz is entirely wrong. What the argument amounts to in the last analysis is that man's violence is inherent and inborn and therefore impossible to avoid. At the same time it is accepted that human violence is inevitable and therefore must be inborn. Calling human violence an instinct includes the assumption that it is an inner need which has to be satisfied.

The widespread use of the euphemistic term aggression for human violence and physical cruelty is very ambiguous, since it is being used for both constructive and destructive acts. In this context "aggression"is not an explanation but a rationalization. As far as Freud (whom I knew personally) is concerned, his views on the sexual instinct, its vicissitudes, deviations and sublimations were based on years of concrete analytic clinical investigations. His generalizations about "aggression," on the other hand, were an interesting, entirely theoretical speculation. Offutt states that between Freud's writing in 1913 and 1920 his views on agression became "more firm." But what really happened was that between these two dates the First World War occurred, which was a profound shock to him and made him look for causes outside of his own scientific clinical experience. Such savagery, he felt, must be "innate" in the human race. It is noteworthy that Freud's daughter Anna Freud, a renowned scientist in her own right, at the recent international psychoanalytic congress in Vienna specifically disavowed Freud's idea of "aggression" (read violence) as being an instinct like sex.

"Reactionary" to me means the opposite of progressive. Neither Robert Ardrey's "territorial imperative" nor his "killing imperative" helps us to explain the Vietnam war, the turkey shoot in Kent State College or the muggings in Central Park in New York City. Offutt asks me to propose a "sublimation" of violence or a "substitute" for it. There is no answer to this question because the question is wrong. No such solution is possible. Human violence is not an instinct for which a "sublimation" or "substitute" can be found. It is not so simple. As I have discussed in my article, "Human Violence Can Be Abolished" (current Summer issue of The Johns Hopkins Magazine) we have to take up all the concrete factors which demonstrably can lead to violence. It is a tremendous but not a hopeless task.

In the same number of Riverside Quarterly and not unconnected theoretically with the foregoing, Bill Blackbeard takes me to task for not seeing that mass media violence is merely a reflection of society and nothing more. He himself describes it very well as "mindless dedication to violent solution of problems." My answer is that the sadism and brutality in the mass media are indeed a reflection of our society, but at the same time... /constitute/ a potent influence on it. As Robert Plank expresses it simply and succinctly in the same issue: "...good books are good for people...bad books are bad for people."

Sincerely,
Fredric Wertham,M.D.

As one reviewer puts it,"..a bare century after The Descent of Man, it has become popular to blame our animal ancestors for some of the distressing things we do to each other"(Dennis Chitty, Science, 2 July 1971, p.42). Or as John Boardman says (in a letter),"..The Lorenz -Ardery position is an attempt to find a biological justification for war." For details see Dr. Boardman's current issue of Graustark --available from 234 E. 19th St, Brooklyn, NY 11226.

2111 Sunset Crest Dr.
Los Angeles, CA 90046

Dear Leland:

I imagine most of the correspondence this issue generates will revolve around Dr. Plank's article on Stranger in a Strange Land; in fact, I can see the correspondents themselves revolving around Dr. Plank, brandishing broadswords and truncheons.

But the piece that really turned me on was Bill Blackbeard's dissertation on the comic book and pulp magazine and radio audience, past and present. I found myself nodding in appreciative agreement time and again. Blackbeard and I part company when it comes to an evaluation of films (to judge from the titles he cites) and also rock music--but anyone who evokes Harry Tuthill procures my esteem. Cf. my new yarn on comics in the Arkham House volume, Dark Things.

And you too are estimable for all you've provided this time around--including The Sasquatch Saskatchewanian, that typesetter's delight!

Many thanks and all best--
Robert Bloch

Mr. Bloch is right on target--not just about Stranger but Harry Tuthill, who (as explained in RQ Miscellany) originally was scheduled to be our columnist's subject for this issue.

Dear Mr. Sapiro: Box 595 San Marcos, TX 78666

I don't want to pick a fight in someone else's ology, but it seems to me that Robert Plank wanders onto dangerous grounds in his condemnation of Heinlein's use of promiscuity and omnipotence in Stranger. I am automatically distrustful of claims that such and such a work only pretends interest in great themes to allow the author to indulge in porn or other fantasies. That's the standard argument, after all, of /everybody/ that wants to tailor the city library to his own limited tastes. Stranger seems to attempt the discussion of several ideas--such as the nature of the ontological component of religious experience--that would pass for serious content. That's not to say that I like the book... The points about religion are made at least as well in Revolt in 2100, for instance, and perhaps better in Moon is a Harsh Mistress. However, it should not be forgotten that the question is one of technique. Plank seems to argue that Heinlein's means are destructive...But destructive or not, these are fundamental appeals. Without the prospects of power and a wonderful sex life (and the two are rather interlocked in western culture) advertising would soon collapse. If Heinlein has a point to make, he is tactically wise to chose these fantasies to add impetus to his argument. ..Plank...seems to believe that expression of these appeals in Stranger makes it a worse book. That sort of rationalist assumption about human behavior is hardly unchallengeable. After all, it is possible to argue that the expression of man as a passionate, feeling,irrational creature is more truly human than the view of him as a creature of a rationalistic dialectic. I'll not pursue that line of thought--Richard Weaver covered the ground much more thoroughly than I ever could.

Beyond the level of sophisticated psychometric prudery, I think Plank misses that a great deal of science fiction is based on forms of omnipotence fantasy. In particular, this is true of the older whiz-bang gadgetry stories as well as the whole fantasy and myth scene. Miracles are still miracles, even when technologically instead of theologically explained. Heinlein, among others, has been doing both for a long time...the gadgets in Waldo serve the same function as the hocus-pocus in Magic, Inc. Both allow men to do that which they normally could not do. All technology does that of course, but in some s-f the trick is having a machine that allows you to do anything (or at least the exact trick...you need to escape from the BEM's dank planet). All this is the modern magic ring or potion. S-F relies on magic whenever it provides miracles...Technology doesn't provide miracles; it provides limited applications for a price. But some s-f, in order to pursue other themes (let us be charitable), assumes that technology can provide anything the protagonist needs. That is clearly the function in Moon is a Harsh Mistress where Mike can do anything. Ditto for Door into Summer with its time-travel, and the assorted devices and operators of General Services in We Also Walk Dogs...In this type of fiction the hero is omnipotent, and the audience enjoys the vicarious shared power and authority. The whole range of psi stories by various hands is, I suspect, part of this same pattern--telling the reader that he has more power(s) than he dreamt...

Yours,
Richard Speer

Man's rationality is not the question here, since advertising and literature move the emotions in different ways. Sex-power tactics merely reduce literature to the status of advertising.

---

113 Deepdale Road
Strafford, PA 19087

Dear Lee,

...I ...wondered why you bothered to write on something as worthless as the Clayton Astounding. It's like complaining about the lack of/ philosophy_/ in Doc Savage...I suppose if you wanted to write an article on how bad the worst of the old s-f was, the Clayton Astounding would be the ideal place to go...although I still hold out for most of the Palmer Amazing as being fully as bad...By the way, Sol Cohen has been indiscriminately reprinting material from Palmer's issues, including some Kummer stuff, and maybe soon RQ readers will be able to find out if "Pirates of Eros" is as bad as I say it is.

...The biggest cliché, which contains most others, is the costume story. This overall category can contain virtually every stereotyped situation imaginable because it can incorporate the clichés of other fields into s-f. What I mean is, very simply, other kinds of pulp formulas translated into s-f by means of putting your cowboys in rockets.

Starzl's "Earthman's Burden" which you cite is an especially transparent case, as it is nothing more than White Bwana among the natives, as placed on another planet. Also it could very easily be a Western dealing with an attempt to make a deal with the Indians for the gold on their land...

The mad scientist tale is actually closer to s-f because it draws some of its clichés from s-f (i.e., the pseudo-scientific elements). However the actual plotting of such a story usually went something like this:

The Mad Scientist, in his attempt to take over and/or destroy the world, has kidnapped the hero's fiance and is holding her in his secret hideout wherein he plans to perform hellish experiments on her which will eventually turn her into a toad. The story will then deal with our hero's rescuing of the fair maiden and the terrible yet just end which the MS meets.

Now this is nothing more than a costume gangster story. Suppose Scarface McSlob, noted hoodlum, has stolen Detective Dan Dashing's fiance and is holding her for ransom in his secret hideaway, wherein he and his degenerate minions are torturing the poor lass and if the hero doesn't get there in time the poor thing might / be / ...given a dip in the river while wearing a cement life jacket. Of course the hero gets there in the nick of time and in the course of the struggle the villain gets an anchor tangled around his ankle and falls into the river and is never seen again.

The differences between the mad scientist yarn and a low grade detective are only superficial at best.

Of course such clichés are caused by / the author's / paucity of imagination...Unable to think up a new situation, he transfers a familiar one onto a supposedly alien world. This is the essence of all early clichés in s-f. "The Pirates of Eros" was nothing more than a sea story among the asteroids, and many more yarns of the era were romantic intrigues among the nobility of 19th century kingdoms set on Mars, and Westerns on Venus, etc.

.../there is/ another related cliché which called for humanoid life forms on all the planets and often the larger asteroids and moons. No, I shouldn't say humanoid, but human because the aliens were absolutely human in their behavior, and were indistinguishable from Earth people save for the fact they were green and had one eye. Needless to say, all scientific considerations were simply ignored.

But this too is just something which makes the costume story easier to do, and it widens the scope of clichés the incompetent hack has to work with.

I suspect that what Robert Plank objects to and calls the "fantasy of omnipotence" in Heinlein is the same thing that Franz Rottensteiner and so many other unfavourable RAH critics have complained about. It pervades almost all of Heinlein's work, in the form of a competent man triumphing over all the boobs simply because he is the competent man (and the author is on his side). The only two that don't have this are Orphans of the Sky and Farnham's Freehold. In the first Hugh Hoyland never displayed any more than a trace of intelligence here and there and he was mostly pushed along to his eventual success and at the very end a machine took over where he couldn't...Freehold deals with the failure of the competent man, and everyone in that novel is...hopeless to start with. I suspect this one was written by a despairing Heinlein who finally came to realise that the all powerful hero doesn't always triumph. You'll notice that in The Moon is a Harsh Mistress the competent "man" is a computer, and in I Will Fear No Evil he doesn't triumph but simply gets the hell out of his difficulties.

But in the vast majority of Heinlein's work there is this fantasy of omnipotence (to use Mr. Plank's convenient term) and in Methuselah's Children the Howard families simply want to escape the Earth so they steal a spaceship and do so, and it just happens that one of them has invented a new spacedrive in the process.

Actually, Heinlein isn't the worst for this at all. E.E. Smith managed to push it ad absurdum, and his heroes were so invulnerable that the story suffered because there was no conflict. One reader complained in ASF shortly after Galactic Patrol finished serialisation that the way Kinnison won out was simply / to / put on bullet-proof armour and blast the bad guys to oblivion. He could do it simply because the author said he was omnipotent.

I read Stranger In a Strange Land years ago and it failed to impress me...Essentially, at least in the earlier stories, the competent man might triumph but he had to work his ass off to do it rather than just wishing. I suspect that one reason why Stranger was so un-memorable was that Mike's omnipotence provided for very little conflict...

Yours,
Darrell Schweitzer

It's a matter of discussing not the worst s-f (although Bates's magazine certainly was that) but all pulp s-f, which includes the Clayton Astounding.//Granted that (in Richard Speer's words) if technology is used only "to provide whatever the protagonist needs," then "miracles are still miracles, even when technologically instead of theologically explained."

---

113 Kennerleigh Road
Rumney, Cardiff CF3-9BH
South Wales, UK

Dear Mr. Sapiro,

...your quotation from Macbeth to illustrate the sensual proclivities of non-scientist criminals...does almost suggest that you can't tell a hawk from a handsaw. The comparison, however, is by no means as odd as that between E.R. Burroughs and Homer (Tom Slate's "Edgar Rice Burroughs and the Heroic Epic," RQ 3:2)...

It appears that a new kind of fan has appeared who is far more literate than the writers he wants to discuss...Perhaps Orwell started it when he looked at various sub-cultures in his essays on "The Art of Donald McGill" and "Boys' Weeklies." But he was interested in the politics and sociology, not the sea-side post cards and Billy Bunter for their own sakes. (I suppose British boys were reading about Billy Bunter, the fat schoolboy of the comics, at a time when their transatlantic equivalents were reading about Flash Gordon and Buck Rogers.)

Personally I am looking forward to your next instalment about the Super-Science Story. You have already done two things for me: (1) proved that despite my previous incredulity at the accepted view, Heinlein must have raised the quality of s-f in the early 1940s, (2) destroyed my guilt-complex at not having read anything by Harl Vincent, Victor Rousseau, S.P. Wright, Capt. S.P. Meek and the others who wrote for the Clayton Astounding.

Best wishes,
Mark Adlard

The sharpest contrast is the very best vs. the very worst--so why not Macbeth vs. Vagabonds of Space--or Paradise Lost vs. Monsters of Mars?// Tom Slate compared not the quality of epics, but the qualities of epic heroes.// A more suitable representative of pre-1940 s-f was the Astounding of Orlin Tremaine (see RQ 2: 2-4).

---

820 Charlotte
Stephenville, TX 76401

Dear Lee--

I think I'm most impressed with Plank's "Omnipotent Cannibals" ...it's much clearer than his book, The Emotional Significance of Imaginary Beings...Which is not to say that it is necessarily correct. I can see the possibility of arguing that the grokking of water (or any other element) is the main point, not the two fantasies of omnipotence and promiscuity. But I think by and large I agree with Plank. It's like the Telzey stories in Analog so far as omnipotence goes: once the heroine (in Telzey's case) is admitted to have the best mind shield and the best technique for manipulating the minds of others so that they do her bidding, where's the suspense? where's the growth through overcoming hardships? The author simply sets up strawmen for her to overcome. One can hardly call it mature fiction, although I don't get as excited over its possible bad effects as Plank does--I suppose I read too much Edgar Rice Burroughs when in junior high school and high school (and know too many others who did also) to believe there's any direct connection between such fantasies and adjustment to life then or later...

Regards,
Joe Christopher

Without generalizing on long-term effects of different media, I quote Jim Harmon (RQ 3:3), who says of George Trendle, creator of The Long Ranger, that he "probably had as much influence on my life as my mother and father."

---

345 Belsize Dr., Toronto 298, Ontario

Dear Leland:

While I can appreciate Robert Plank's disappointment on reading Stranger in a Strange Land, I cannot really share his conclusion. Whether books, good or bad, can influence their readers, one way or the other, is a moot point. Whether Heinlein with a pretension to lofty concerns is guilty of leading his audience astray is equally open to question--though I for one have always held that seduction was a game played by two. No, my quarrel rather lies with the argument that the gratification of the id's desires or the fulfilling of one's daydreams (I happen not to be a psychiatric social worker) is, in any sense, an immoral or debauched purpose for fiction; even science fiction.

Quite oppositely, I'm inclined to agree with Aristotle and William Atheling Jr. (distinguished, if odd, companions) that the actualizing of childhood dreams is both purgative and necessary. The first point is surely familiar; the second perhaps requires amplification. I'll quote Blish's More Issues at Hand, page 48, where he has been discussing Childhood's End and its basis in adolescent fantasy:

> They [daydreams] speak for the gratifications which we really hope to find in life, no matter how crudely they may limit, simplify or otherwise falsify them. Certainly the race as a while cannot get away from them as a class, no matter how many individuals manage to outgrow this one or that one.

Blish goes on to suggest further that wish-fulfillment may indeed be s-f's ambiguous and illusive "sense of wonder."

But of course all this is really besides the point: if a man in growing up fails to retain the child he once was, he has become in his maturity a hollow being.

Sincerely,
Wayne Connelly

But the adolescent fantasies cited by Robert Plank are not among those proper to childhood (of the individual or the race) --and therefore seem not the type of gratification discussed by Jim Blish.

1227 Laurel Street
Santa Cruz, CA 95060

Dear Leland,

I am moved to (almost) immediate response by Robert Plank's "Omnipotent Cannibals"...Plank sets out to prove that Heinlein's purpose in Stranger in a Strange Land is to gratify the reader's unconscious desires. When he comes across aspects of Stranger that do not fulfill this purpose, he rationalizes (rather weakly, it seems) their existence by considering them crutches supporting the principal framework he has defined...

He states that "so-called" s-f appeals 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." Most any field of art appeals to the observer's unconscious desires to some extent or another, but I don't think most people's appreciation of art revolves solely or even principally about this aspect. Mine certainly doesn't. I read fiction in order to understand what the author is trying to say, and to gain insight into human relationships; I don't read because I believe the author is going to pander to my desires. Not when I read s-f, at any rate..

Psi powers, even Michael Smith's powers, do not give "the power of achieving any desired change in the real material world by merely wishing it to be so." Nowhere in Stranger is this ability stated or even implied. Mike's powers are broad, possibly even beyond conceivable human ability, but he is not omnipotent.

Plank misunderstands Peter Marin's statement about the effect on "the young" of such books as Stranger. I consider myself to be a member of that group, so perhaps I may qualify to say something about those effects. Marin says that "the young" identify with Stranger, LotR, Steppenwolf, et. al., because of the correspondences between the heroes in those books and their own selves. My interpretation of this is that these correspondences are metaphorical or allegorical, but not one-to-one, as Plank would have us believe Marin's meaning.

He would also have us believe that the stripping off of clothing is indicative of a psychotoc state. Come now, Mr. Plank. And of course such stripping is sexual--what else could it be? And as far as I'm concerned, unveiling "the glorious beauty of the human body" /and/ having "communion with nature" are also sexual activities.

...he's totally off the track...when he discusses "the promiscuity" in Stranger...By any dictionary definition /"promiscuity"/ connotes indiscriminate sexual activity. Not much room for "choice" when one is being indiscriminate. Mike's scheme does leave room for both love and spontaneity...

A great portion of Stranger is devoted to a debunking of conventional organized religion, but I strongly disagree that the eating of Mike's body is intended as a travesty of the sacrament of communion. If anything, it glorifies communion.

Plank is obsessed with the idea of art satisfying the desires of the observer. I'm not sure whether he disagrees with this per se, or merely with the quality or type of desire being gratified. At any rate, such art that has that as its sole object is stagnant. I try to satisfy my desires by real actions. One of these actions is to enjoy art--and it does give me great pleasure. However, to depend upon an abstract for all one's satisfaction (in this sense) seems rather empty and unsatisfying.

...It's almost impossible not to draw parallels between Stranger and the Christ legend...so I won't resist: If Plank is to be believed, one could also claim that the New Testament is a return to childish wish-fulfillment fantasy. If he really wants to accuse Heinlein of catering to the unconscious desires of his readers, let him consider I Will Fear No Evil...There he has a case.

If he actually considers "character" to be equivalent to voices saying "It is forbidden, detrimental, shameful to seek the unhampered fulfillment of /one's/ basic desires," I'd prefer to be without character or (presumably) decent moral fibre...

I also take special offense at any critic who considers himself righteous enough to believe he should keep people from reading those books he calls bad or harmful.

Yours,
Mark Mumper

While not omnipotence, Mike's powers--"beyond conceivable human ability"--are close enough to make differences inconsequential.// Stranger's cannibalism is at least a parody of holy communion--but parody seems incongruous with glorification.//Wish-fulfilment in Christianity has been noted before, e.g., Gilbert Murray's remarks on "failure of nerve." Likewise the equating of character with conscience or "superego" is nothing new, but what I'd understand as classical Freudian psychology.// To prevent people from reading bad books--by explaining why they're bad--is part of the critic's job.

8744 N. Pennsylvania St.
Indianapolis, IN 46240

Dear Leland:

Having studied Nova for two years (not of course continuously), I read Stephen Scobie's essay on The Einstein Intersection with more than usual interest. He's summarized a great deal of useful information in a concise and lucid way. I know I'll have occasion to refer to it when doing future papers of my own. However it does not begin to exhaust the subject. To whom it may interest: the original title ... was The Fabulous, Formless Darkness. This is a quote from W.B. Yeats's poem, Two Songs From a Play" which in turn links to Shelley's "Chorus" from "Helias" which reflects Virgil's "Golden Ecologue" and so on back into the mists of the Greco-Roman past. Checking these poems will illuminate the novel--Delany takes a position quite opposite to Shelley. (But, Gentle Readers, may I reserve for myself the title "Another Orpheus Sings Again"?)

I never cared to try such an analysis of TEI myself because the book had frightening personal connotations--I was involved in a serious automobile accident while reading it. (But if I hadn't been relaxed under the book's spell, the results might have been worse.) Too much study of Delany and one is caught in obsessive exegesis: is the planet Vorpis's name from the noun form of "vorpal" as in "vorpal sword" in "The Jabberwocky"? Does Oriental actress Che-Ong take her name from a Chinese garment, the cheongsam? And on and on into insomnia...

Cordially,
Sandra Miesel

The arbitrary title, which just as well could have been The Gödel Intersection, made me suspect it wasn't Delany's own.// On the quest for sources--by cyclic-time theory, if you go back far enough, you'll end right where you started. So on the next cycle, walk--do not ride.

---

6 Hillcrest Ave.
Faulconbridge NSW 2776
Australia

Dear Leland,

..."Science fiction and the Revolution" seemed very interesting...So often similar stories to those mentioned in the article point to the future as either the road to a utopia ("often very dull" indeed) or dystopia. Probably Stapledon was the only writer to view the future as something that continually changed, rather than something static. The millennium comes bringing with it a bigger brighter version of today: four /air/ cars in every garage...no-one has to work, play all day if you wish while the state looks after all, or the machines look after all. So many writers build up such a future, only to pull it down again--why? Life in the future, assuming there is one, will probably become even more complicated, too much to study, too much to learn... whatever path we take will it be a suitable path for people in general, or only for some?..It seems that when we ask ourselves the big questions...we turn away: the problem is too difficult, let someone else worry about it. This is escapism as much as the uncritical acceptance of the next space opera.

Regards, Eric B. Lindsay

Me worry? As Sweeney says, there's only "birth, and copulation, and death. That's all, that's all..."

St. David's University College
Lampeter, Caniganshire, Wales, UK

Dear Leland,

Thank you for RQ 5:1, which contained much of interest. My predilection for postcards makes it necessary that I write mostly about your comments on my letter.

The Tolkien industry is "possible": it exists, as witness pirate editions of Tolkien, Middle-Earth wall-maps, Gandalf posters, buttons and so forth. I said, not that critical discussion of "Lord of the Rings" was /impossible/ but that it was irrelevant, and the commercialisation of Tolkien's fairy-tales contemptible. And I fully realise that Tolkien does not approve: good for him. This clarification of my attitude to scholars' attitude to Tolkien is, however, merely a matter of opinion. Am I alone?

Yours,
Brian Williams

Anthony More (Ed Clinton) once put it thus:

> The shock of a piece of writing decently conceived and fully carried out has caused readers of fantasy and science fiction, a notably uncritical lot, to claim a children's art fairy tale as fantasy, their fantasy...And, having staked out such a false claim on what really isn't theirs, they've started clubs and published amateur magazines and used one of Tolkien's place-names for their homeland in a convention bid. Only recently, I was shown a thoroughly spurious and biologically unsound article trying to explain the physiology and biochemistry of one of Tolkien's races. In simple fact, these people do this because they cannot take the marvel-ous at face value. They must explain the gross because they are unwilling to probe the discreet.
>
> ("On Idle Worship," Rhodomagnetic Digest, October 1962, p. 62.)

But Clinton also says:"..talking about good books is a fine thing, and subjecting them to /criticism/ is..vital to literature." So his objection refers only to activity (like Middle Earth biological or geological treatises) that extends to nothing beyond itself--not to criticism like Sandra Miesel's or Patrick Callahan's.

8480 Caler St.
Vancouver-14, BC

Dear Leland,

...I enjoyed poems by Stedingh and Tomlinson, also Three Insinuations, although surely the author is Meisko Jan Skapski, not Shapski? Scobie's article is interesting, too, and I enjoyed yr. study of clichés in pulp s-f. Oddly enough, in my recent poems, I'm finding that certain of these myths--in particular the mad scientist/death-gnome--are surfacing all over the place. In general, I found it a stimulating issue, and would like to throw out a few possibilities which others might have the energy, time, and expertise to follow up:

1) Someone ought to look at the way William Burroughs uses pulp s-f as collage material in Nova Express.

2) Does any English RQ subscriber remember the Mekon? I'm referring to the evil green Venerean genius who played such a prominent role in the excellent Dan Dare full-colour comic strip featured for years...in a British boys' paper found in the early fifties called Eagle. Pitted against the Mekon were Dan Dare, clean cut but anonymous, Digby, Dare's North-Country batman, the aristocratic Sir Hubert, a Mountbatten of the galaxy, and a veritable regiment of eccentric but lovable stereotypes. All of which might have been laughable, if it hadn't been for the brilliant and subtle artwork (or so it seemed to the poet at seven...). Bill Blackbeard and company might groove on this one, if they don't have it already.

3) Those who enjoy experimental and speculative fiction might do worse than to submit/subscribe to The Canadian Fiction Magazine, edited by Janie Kennon, 181 West Windsor, North Vancouver, BC, $1.50 single, $6 four issues. That's hardly a commercial, by the very nature of av-garde micromags, more a public service announcement. It's a fat mag, nearly 100 pages of fascinating new work by Stedingh, Yates, McWhirter, Bullock, Porkolab, Green, and other luminous nonentities...

Best wishes,
Paul Green

RQ's staff not only remembers these particular comics, but (I modestly report) helped create them. See, e.g., issues 6 and 8, with drawings by Mike Higgs, a top cartoonist of the British boys' weeklies.

2635 Cranston Road
Philadelphia, PA 19131

Dear Leland,

I was somewhat shocked at the list of Blackbeard's choices in newspaper comic strips and the accompanying statement that "...it takes a very crowded daily comic page to serve up more than two or three strips..." and..."No paper anywhere carries more than a third /of the 19 titles listed/." Sorry Mr. Blackbeard, you had better check out the Philadelphia Bulletin which at last count carries nine (Pogo, Peanuts, B.C., The Wizard of Id, Beetle Bailey, Hi and Lois, Boner's Ark, Lolly, and Andy Capp) as well as at least four on the level of those strips (Ryan's Tumbleweeds, Lazerus' Miss Peach, and recent additions Wee Pals and Doonesbury) that you mentioned. I have for a long time felt that this was the best comics page I have ever seen and wish you hadn't overlooked it in your statements.

Peace,
Yale F. Edeiken

So it's clear why in Philadelphia "nearly everybody reads the Bulletin." Of course, in a city like Philadelphia there's little one can do except read the funny papers.

WE ALSO HEARD FROM...

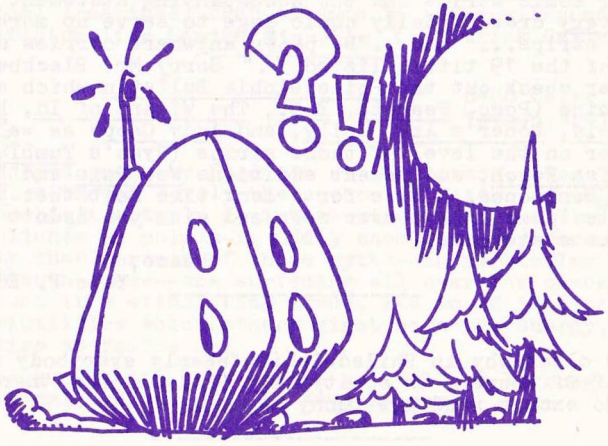
Garth Danielson (20-327 Edison Ave, Winnipeg, Manitoba), whose handwriting I often found unreadable. After concurring with Bill Blackbeard that "...superhero comics are pretty bad, if not terrible," our correspondent alludes to the current Superman, employed as roving TV reporter, and complains about the machine orientation of DC comics (an exception: Conan), which he attributes to Jack Kirby. Also discussed--I think--are Gold Key and several features they recently started--or maybe discontinued....

Bill Linden (82-33 Austin St, Kew Gardens, NY 11415), who for the Hall of Shame--short story and novella category--nominates "The Guerilla Trees," by H.H. Hollis.

> It is indicted on three counts: (a) false labelling--it is an anti Viet Nam polemic in worse-than-transparent disguise --(b) non-credibility--We are asked to suspend disbelief in intelligent bacteria, without the least bit of explanation-- (c) shoddy symbolism--These here bacteria (the "Communists") rule an interstellar empire by literally infecting subject races...

To make the obvious objection--I don't see how such polemic and symbolism can exist in the same story, since the Communist-infection metaphor ("Stop the spread of Communism") is used to justify the Viet Nam war, not to stop it.

Ulf Westbloom (Studenbacken 25C/103, S-115 40 Stockholm), who reports, "I have just come home from a meeting with some friends, and after a couple of beers I open my door to find RQ among the mail." Now, I've tried this experiment several times this month, but never with such a result. What I do find--or at least my impression at what I find--is best depicted by Ulf's neighbor, Rudy der Hagopian (of Gothenburg) immediately below.



RQ MISCELLANY

Jim Harmon's return this issue and Bill Blackbeard's absence (coupled with the reverse situation last time) does not mean a deliberate policy of "alternating" these two columnists. In the present instance, Blackbeard's article on H.J. Tuthill has been on hand for a month, but I felt it would be more effective if accompanied by a few of this artist's panels. A special delivery request failed to elicit an answer before the deadline, Monday Feb 2nd, so I spent the next three days juggling, pasting, and rearranging--only to receive the pictures Thursday, the day after alterations were completed. Not wishing to lose what remains of my own sanity, I decided to proceed with the "abbreviated" RQ and just say (to anticipate next issue) that you've not "seen everything" if you're unacquainted with Tuthill's version of marital domestic nightmare. To quote Blackbeard's title, "Hell is a place very much like home."

The second Vancouver s-f convention, Feb. 18-19, no longer can be listed in the future tense, so it must suffice to name the Guest of Honour, Phil Dick, and to note that on pp. 89-96 is Ursula Le Guin's GoH speech at the first Vancouver confab. In any case, RQ readers should inquire about the next two Brain Blasters in Los Angeles and Toronto, respectively:

L.A. Con, Sept. 1-4, 1972, c/o Fred Patten, Box 1, Santa Monica, CA 90406,

Torcon II, Sept. 1973, c/o John Millard, Box 4 Station K, Toronto-12, Ontario.

The newsmagazine Checkpoint should have been listed (in RQ 17) at Hawthorne Hall, Keele, Staffs. (Staffordshire), UK. Arnie Katz is no longer functioning as U.S. agent--so dollar bills should be sent directly to Peter Roberts at his British address.

Also, Roberts' Far Western counterpart, Sanders N, now can be obtained from David Nee, 977 Kains, Albany, CA 94706 at a cost of $1 (four issues) or $2 (nine issues).

Collectors of early radio programmes should send $3.50 to Jay Hickerson, 6 Koczak Ct., North Haven, CT 06473, for his newsletter, Hello Again. Featured are short articles and letters, biographies of collectors, lists of tapes being newly circulated (plus techniques for dubbing and maintaining these tapes)--and a monthly necrology to remind us of a time fast vanishing. If you want data on the Lone Ranger or on Uncle Don's famous, "I guess that will hold the little bastards a while," you'll find them here.


CY 71