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CREDITS AND DEBITS

The visual improvement in this issue, RQ #25, must be credited to art editor, Mary Emerson, who at the same time shares no blame for the shoddy appearance of its predecessor. That was entirely my own responsibility, and resulted from an attempt to economize by hiring an "amateur" printer. Jim Harmon's fans will notice that his Tom Mix fantasy is a reprint from number 24, since our columnist felt that the original dim reproduction was not a legitimate printing, but just a shadow of one.

"SELECTED LETTERS"

RQ fans also will notice the (temporary) absence of what so many of them read first, i.e., the letter column. But letters were received. Thus the indefatigable Bob Bloch writes,"R.A. Lafferty stands an equal chance of being canonized or caponized, depending on how well certain people can decipher initials," while James Bittner, glad to see RQ still functioning "after the unfortunate copyright hassle," found special interest in Lauri Anderson's survey: "...it's good to see people exploring rarely travelled areas and even some untravelled ones (for most of us) like Turkish s-f." Then there was a note from Roger Waddington, who "found the Laffiti (i.e., Lafferty graffiti...) a joy" and Jim Harmon's column "a pleasure to read, once through the foggy print."

Concerning Michel Butor's Crisis in S-F speech, discussed last time, Graham Stone remarks: "That ridiculous piece by Butor also appeared in a volume titled Inventories (Simon & Schuster, 1968) and in Tom Clareson's compilation, SF: The Other Side of Realism (Bowling Green, 1971). Once something really bad gets into print there's no end to it."

Finally, I received from one student a letter that is worth being reprinted in full:

Dear Sir:

Please send me information of science fiction in France, Japan, Italy, Spain, Romania, Germany and Soviet Union. And please send me information about the books of science fiction by these authors, Arthur Conan Doyle, Robert A. Heinlein and H.P. Lovecraft.

Thank you,

------ -------

I think that the most appropriate answer would be this:

Dear ------,

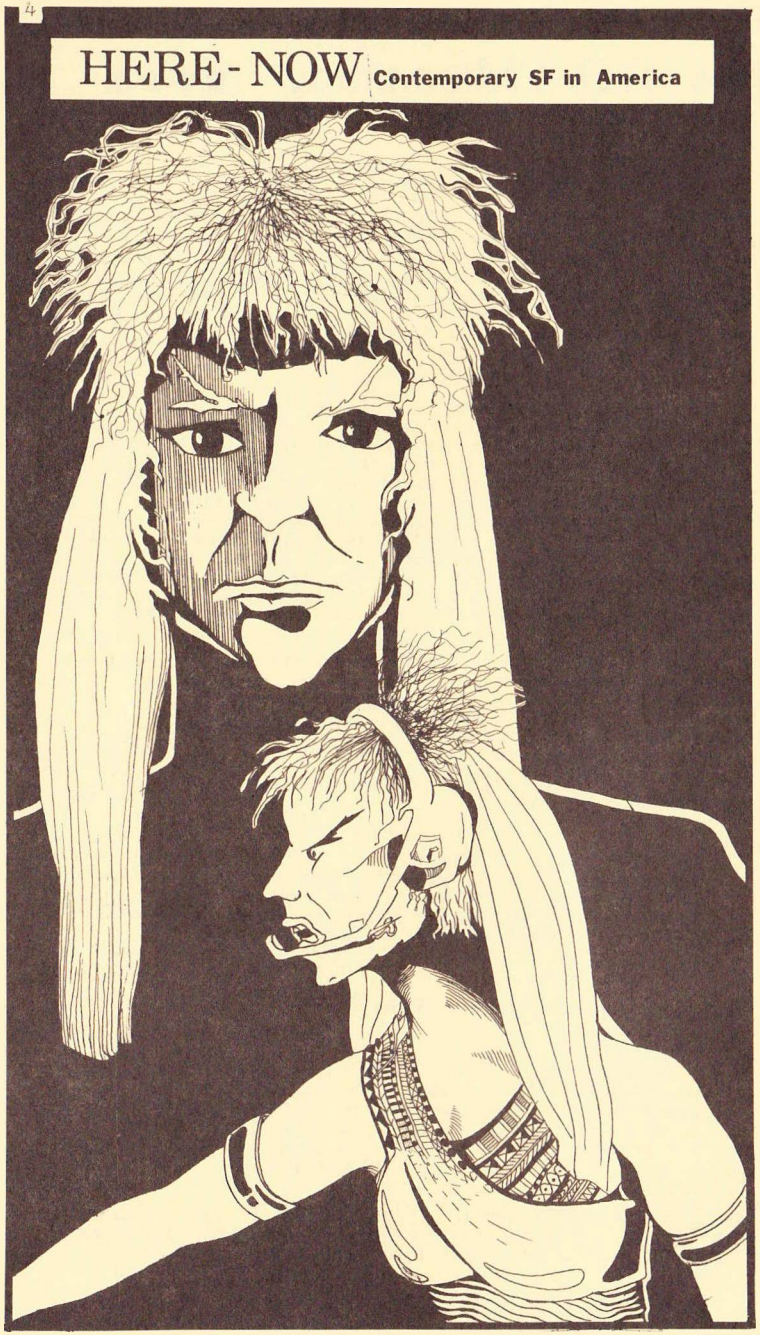
You mean they have s-f in far-away places like Spain and Romania? Wow! I always thought life in such countries was so strange they wouldn't need science-fiction. Why don't you write to Doyle and Heinlein and Lovecraft to find out?

Sincerely,

------ ------

However, my actual response--on the assumption that my correspondent was less than ten years old--was a bit more restrained (and perhaps more informative) than the above.

The number after your name on the mailing label indicates the issue (this being number 25) on which your subscription expires. Subscription rate: $4/four issues. Back issues are $1 each.

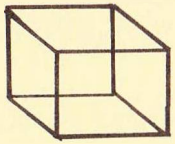


The world? The inhuman as human? That which thinks not,
Feels not, resembling thought, resembling feeling?

It habituates him to the invisible,
By its faculty of the exceptional,

The faculty of ellipses and deviations,
In which he exists but never as himself.

Wallace Stevens, "Things of August"



On Dhalgren and Triton

by

Karen L. Shuldner

to wound the autumnal city.
So howled out for the world to give him a name.
The in-dark answered with wind.

He had been living at the men's co-op (Serpent's House) six months now. This one had been working out well.

The opening sets of lines of, respectively, Dhalgren and Triton:[1] both consist of short sentences (and, in the first case, short fragments) introducing the central male character in a novel; each will lead into a much-subdivided, eight-line sentence.

"to wound the autumnal city." It would be a staunch reader who did not turn immediately to the last page of Dhalgren to find that the ultimate sentence indeed ends in the phrase "I have come to," without a period. And, as G. Jonas observed in the New York Times Book Review, the suspicion nearing a certainty that this will be a cyclical work, added to the thickness of the 879-page paperback in the hands, warns the reader of the level--though not the kind--of attention intended to be brought to the reading, and of the tradition in which the author means to write. However, Delany's intent is complicated by his own history. His seemingly cyclical novel Empire Star ended with a caution: "In this vast multiplex universe there are almost as many worlds called Rhys as there are places called Brooklyn Bridge. It's a beginning. It's an end. I leave to you the problem of ordering your perceptions and making the journey from one to the other." The reader literate in the science fictional tradition thus, in the first half-sentence, may be alerted to the possibility that the circle-shape may not apply, as well as to the kind of attention that will eventually be indispensable in understanding the subject of the book; for Dhalgren is "about" the science-fiction and the science-fiction writer: ideally, it is read with not only a literary consciousness but a science-fiction consciousness, with the attendant effortless grasp of the conventions, freedoms, and traditions of the genre. But near the mid-(literally turning) point of the novel a generous lifeline is thrown out for anyone still floundering over how to read the book or what it is "about."

Of the ruined city:

> Kid asked..."...what is this place?...How did it get like this?"
>
> ..."I suspect the whole thing is science fiction."
>
> "Huh? You mean a time-warp, or a parallel universe?"
>
> "No, just...well, science fiction. Only real...in Bellona you can have anything you want..."
>
> "It's funny, not that many people have that much."
>
> "A comment on the paucity of our imaginations--none at all on the wonders here for the taking."

Of its freedoms:

> "You're free...Do anything you want. Which does funny things to you. Very quickly, surprisingly quickly, you become... exactly who you are."

"to wound the autumnal city."

Dhalgren begins with the infinitive; with no subject, but with a purpose; specifically with the word "to," which is all direction, a pointer. "Wound" at once swoops to an emotional plateau from which the book is scarcely allowed to descend. The wound was long the symbol of both art and sexual love for Delany:

> ...the Singers of the Cities (who, last month, sang "Opal" from their divine injuries; and on Mars I'd heard the Word... and even there I pondered Singers and their wounds)[2]

and where the protagonist muses in his notebook margins, "Is art and sex replacing sex and death as the concerns of the serious mind? Life here would make me think so." it is made clear that this wound, manifesting especially as madness, is another subject (no work of art ever has just one) of Dhalgren.

"Autumnal" hauls in its load of associations: degeneration / fertility, aftermath, middle age, death with resurrection, smoke, cloud, mystery, even Halloween; to apply them to the word "city." This is the city, the object, for which the protagonist knows he is bound. It is the object of a sentence with no subject. The city is Bellona, whose streets shift like the lines of a manuscript in revision or the memories of the mad, whose eternal grey overcast parts only to reveal an impossible sky; where supplies are exhausted and replenished unpredictably and electronic communication with the outside world doesn't work; where time accordions and no one remembers the date any more.

It is the oldest given in science-fiction criticism: the real hero is the landscape. Background is foreground. But the simplicity of this observation on science-fiction in general doesn't transfer quite intact to Dhalgren, where the principal structural device is the literary equivalent of that paradox called the optical illusion (for example, the cube drawn in schematic, where back becomes front with a slight shift of vision), working in more dimensions than the (illusory) three of the drawing. The task becomes that of holding opposing ideas in the mind, if not simultaneously, at least in disturbingly rapid succession. The fact that a single block is seemingly described (pp. 17, 43, 58) three ways--

> 1) Across the street he could make out concrete steps, a loading porch under an awning, doors. A truck had overturned at the block's end. Nearer, three cars, windows rimmed with a smashed glass, squatted on skewed hubs, like frogs gone marvelously blind.
>
> 2) At the end of the block, a car had overturned in a splatter of glass. Nearer, two trucks sat on wheelless hubs--a Ford pickup and a GM cab--windshields and windows smashed. Across the street, above the loading porch, the butcher hooks swung gently on their awning tracks.

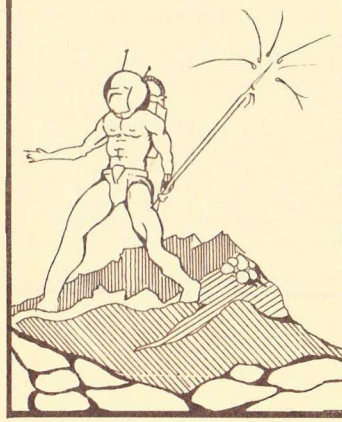
> 3) He looked down the block. There were no vehicles anywhere on the street...

can be gotten around logically: in the second description the approach may be from the other end of the block; in the third, the protagonist, standing at an intersection, may be looking down the cross street. Cryptically tangent to this, the protagonist asks Tak, who lives on the block, "Are we going in the way you came out...?" "Don't worry," Tak grinned. "You'll get used to it."

Almost none of Dhalgren's many such seeming contradictions can be shown to exist in fact; the possible shades into the impossible, people cast about for explanations of inexplicable events, flounder into perplexity, shrug, and go about their business. This image of the reversible cube, established in small by dozens of minute oppositions, many of which, spread over nearly 900 pages, go unnoticed by the first-time reader, becomes the central image of the novel when it is transposed onto the relationship of the protagonist to his environment. The manner in which this transposition is accomplished, of which more anon, itself undercuts the impossible in the novel.

"So howled out for the world to give him a name."

Still no subject. But the word "so" insists on history. Though we don't know what it is, we are told there is a reason for the action which is to follow, that something, if not the protagonist, has a past. The something--in the simplest reading, the protagonist--howled out. The second verb, if anything more emotionally loaded than the first, also follows from it in a fairly blunt statement of the identity of hero/landscape that will be explored: the city is to be wounded, the protagonist howls. A birth-cry (or the cry of awakening and all that implies: the book's last sentence ends "I have come to" and the first line is "to wound the autumnal city," giving "I have come to to wound the autumnal city," a rendering given support of the usual dubious kind by its repetition in the cut-up style marginalia of page 806), with a cause presumably traumatic, it is also immediately purposeful--"for the world to give him a name." Not "for a name" but "for the world to give him a name." It isn't a name he howls for so much as a relationship--which he finds in the name Kid, conferred on him by the first person he speaks to in the city. Variously kid, Kidd, and The Kid, the name abundantly accomplishes its purpose of establishing that relationship, which Kid then spends the rest of the book struggling to redefine. When he remembers his first and middle names near the end of the narrative, not only do they seem irrelevant to the character, not only has the discovery become superfluous to the thrust of the story, but we have become as wary as Kid of his perceptions, as when, a moment later, he thinks he has also discovered the true name of another character:



> I sat and panted and smiled...with contentment over the absolute fact of his revealed identity, till even that, as all absolutes must, began its dissolve ...I sat back again, marveling the dissolve's completion, both elated and numbed by the jarring claps that measured and metronomed each differential in the change--till I had no more certainty of Bill's last name than I had of my own. With only memory of knowledge, and bewilderment at whatever mechanic had, for minutes, made that knowledge as certain to me as my own existence, I sat, trying to sort that mechanic's failure, which had let it slip away.

This particular "absolute" knowledge is of course related to both the sensation of déjà vu and the "knowledge" of creation--that knowledge that a line or plot twist is right, perfect even: which a moment or a day or a year later may dissolve, may even be replaced by the realization that that was the one line or concept that did not belong. As such, the "discovery" of Bill's last name may be considered of a different order of knowledge from Kid's discovery of his own names; nonetheless, the parallel is there to discomfort, and less than five pages separate the two events. Furthermore, weight is added to the second discovery's import by hints that Bill's last name may be Dhalgren, or that Kid may believe it is.

"The in-dark answered with wind."

This is likely to be remembered, in the context of what follows (the scene, on a wooded night hillside, of Kid's coming into consciousness) as if it were "the darkness answered with wind," and, again in context, that isn't an unallowable reading: "(That which was in) darkness (the landscape) answered with wind." "In-dark," though, can also be read as "inward darkness" or "that which was 'in the dark' (the protagonist)," both implying ignorance, but the first, at least, depth and potentiality as well, taking darkness as the ultimate Source.

"Answered with wind" has, at this point, implications of mockery, of no answer at all. But on page one the word "wind" is used three times, the word "breath" twice, "breeze" once. Besides the implications of the new-born learning to breathe, besides the ways that the idea of breath connects with spirit and creation, the sound of wind and breath, both often described as a "roar," is the device most used to establish the identity of environment/protagonist. Several times Kid has the common experience of that switch in perception (back to the reversible cube!)when we discover that what we thought was far away and big is near and small;for example,realizing the distant roaring he had been vaguely aware of is his own breath. This is part of the process by which the "impossible" events begin to be devalued. The shrewdest cut is the moment at which Kid, who continues to lose significant pieces of his memory (and pages from his journal), having become a writer, having entered the text in the first person, suddenly rounds on the reader with one line of direct address: "After a year, how many days in it will you never think of again?" Still, the external events never do become simply internal ones. Both back and front of the cube remain, flicking irreconcilably in and out of prominence. It is this that allows the reader not to read but to experience the sensations of madness, trying to make things mesh, both on the simple narrative level and on the level of symbolic interpretation. The recurrence of lion statues, scars, beads, celestial portents, and the scratches on women's calves simply will not be forced into a coherent pattern, any more than the events they accompany can be ordered consecutively. Kid, describing madness, explains,

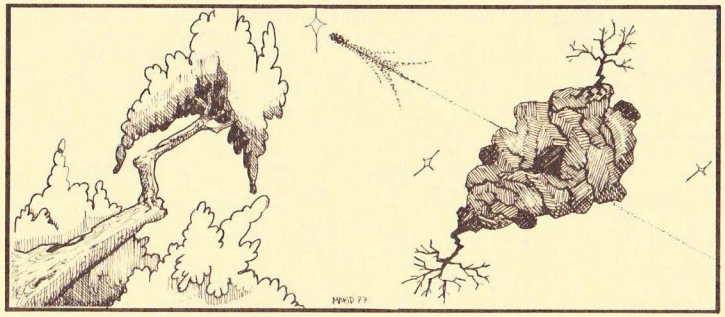
> "It's that all sorts of things you know don't relate suddenly have the air of things that do. Everything you look at seems just an inch away from its place in a perfectly clear pattern.. Only you never know which inch to move it..."

Still, to the extent that the unity of hero and landscape is established, "wind," the symbol of that unity, can be seen as a legitimate attempt to answer (not simply echo) the protagonist's howl. Perceived as a unity, these two may become the "moveless wind" which is at once identity and universe. Perceived as dichotomy, however, they may well be the obstacle to the protagonist's perception of the answer "in the wind"--a woman comes toward him on the hillside, speaking:

"Ahhhhh..." from her.

He forced out air: it was nearly a cough.

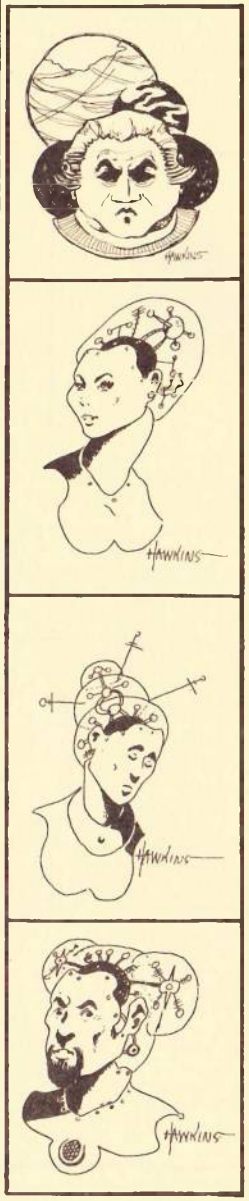
"...Hhhhhh..." from her again. And laughter; which had a dozen edges in it, a bright snarl under the moon. "...hhhHHhhhh...," which had more sound in it than that, perhaps was his name, even. But the wind, wind...



He had been living at the men's co-op (Serpent's House) six months now. This one had been working out well.

"He." The sentence starts with its subject and so does Triton. Enter Our Hero. The male.

"He had been living" is about as excited as you can get over Bron Helstrom's lifestyle--and even then you aren't sure but what you might be guilty of sensationalism. But the past perfect is Bron's tense, beyond doubt: his single great talent is for rearranging history to suit present needs. Then too, there is some indication that Bron's past has been somewhat more venturesome, since, as he is continually "letting slip," he was once a boy prostitute in his hometown of Bellona, on Mars. He emigrated, first to a moon of Saturn, then still further out from the sun, to Triton. And he once got involved with a religious group, but dropped out when he couldn't immediately master their most elementary chant. It isn't so much that Bron lacks insight into such experiences as that he chooses to retain only those insights which do not embarrass or hurt; life being what it is, this rapidly narrows the possibilities of self-knowledge. Bron's protective mechanisms multiply; the gap between perception and favourable interpretation closes--reinterpretation of reality is so swift that Bron himself is convinced that the versions of events he supplies to others are accurate. He becomes adept at twisting actual words and events so slightly--just enough to give a completely false impression--that it would be extremely difficult to point out to him that what he has said is untrue. Delany, in his New Wave essays on the indivisibility of style and content, repeatedly argues that you cannot say the same thing in two different ways; that accepting the not-quite-right word for the vision you want to put on paper will gradually skew the story-line itself till it is not at all true to that vision, since (a) the vision shifts, opens or closes subtly to the writer in response to each word used and (b) all the reader has is the writer's words, as access to the vision. Bron might be a walking illustration of the principle that one word is not as good as another.



"At the men's co-op"--this phrase gives a couple of impressions that on one level might be false but turn out to be on target. "At"--Bron definitely does live "at" the co-op, not participating in relationships there much or having any grasp of the lives of those surrounding him. The words "men's co-op," especially in science-fiction, associate to the monastic or military, the dreary dystopia where the sexes are segregated. Even the more utopian word "co-op," resonating as it does with the word "coop," and following that bland past perfect, registers not in its revolutionary sense of cooperative effort but rather as one of the many such revolutionary terms co-opted (another resonance) to veil oppressive institutions--a tendency enthusiastically adopted by science-fiction writers to signal "we have here totalitarianism." The slight increase in sexual awareness over the last decade has not made such a dent that we register the word "men's" as less an indication of celibacy than of homosexuality, despite any familiarity we may have with Delany's work or sexual orientation. And the impression so made is accurate, at least with reference to Bron. Bron, despite his expertise, hardly ever has sex, and his self-preoccupation, since we see through his eyes, manages to invest the co-op with a sterility it probably doesn't possess for all the other occupants. We can't even be sure what percentage of the residents do have some form of sexual difficulty, because Bron only seems to know five of them by name, only three of the five having any sexual history for him, only one of these histories perceived as more than a vague impression: that of Alfred, a teenager experiencing premature ejaculations. There is the pervasive suggestion, though, that the unspecified (as to sexual orientation), single-sex co-ops attract people who are avoiding intimacy on one or several levels. Gradually, with little thanks to Bron's observational acuity, we learn that the Outer Satellites constitute not a dystopia, not even the modest "ambiguous heterotopia" that Delany claims in a subtitle, but a utopia more absolute than any yet presented in fiction because we can believe in it. There are no jarring notes of sweetness and light. People live here, have real trouble with their jobs and their lovers, neglect their politics to the point of warfare, are lazy or foolish. But the freedoms! It may be simple-minded but it may also be unavoidable from our Twentieth Century perspective to decide Bron is making a hell in heaven's despite as he falls in love with a brilliant, creative woman to whom he grants not the slightest autonomy, gets himself into an untenable emotional position and sinks toward madness. There is nothing simple about the way Bron interacts with his world, and he complains that those very freedoms (social, sexual, political, and work-oriented) are somehow impeding him.

His lover, the Spike, says,

> "On one level...everything you say makes perfect sense. On another, very profound one, I do not understand a single word."

and again,

> "--I tend to distrust my own perception--not of the Universe, but of what in the Universe you're actually referring to."

This seems to happen because Bron's only steady reference is his own image. Since other characters' perceptions prove consistently more trustworthy than Bron's, their analyses tend to reassure us that Bron is not simply a product of his environment, that is, that Delany does not intend Triton society to represent merely the illusion of freedom. The Spike:

> "You seem to be using some sort of logical system where, when you get near any explanation, you say: 'By definition my problem is insoluble. Now that explanation over there would solve it. But since I've defined my problem as insoluble, by definition that solution doesn't apply.' "

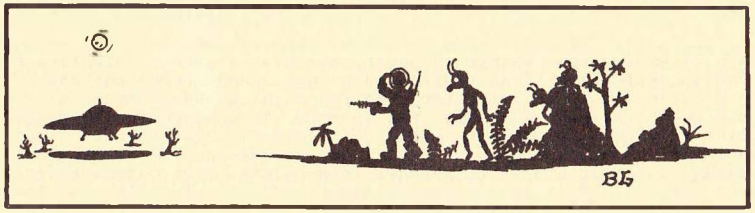
Lawrence, an aged homosexual living at the co-op, and Bron's closest friend:

> "Your problem, you see, is that essentially you are a logical pervert, looking for a woman with a mutually compatible logical perversion...someone who can enjoy a sort of logical masochism. If it were just sexual, you'd have no trouble finding a partner at all...But...the one thing she is not going to do is put up with your hurry-up-and-wait, your do-a-little-tap-dance-while-you-stand-on-your-head, your run-around-in-circles-while-you-walk-a-straight-line...But you are a logician. If you redefine the relation between P and Not-P beyond a certain point--well, then you just aren't talking about logic any more. All you've done, really, is change the subject."

Bron's reply may be his masterpiece:

> "I'm a metalogician. I define and redefine the relation between P and Not-P five hours a day, four days a week. Women don't understand. Faggots don't understand either."

Et voilà.



"(Serpent's House)." The parenthesis places the exoticism, the erotic connotations of the word "Serpent" outside the main flow of the sentence as they are outside the flow of Bron's awareness (except during drug-induced lowering of his inhibitions). "Serpent" resonates with the overtones of the word "Tiresias" from the Table of Contents which recur when Bron, in flight from himself, decides to change sex. Like Tiresias, Bron is blind--but he is emphatically not a seer. "(Serpent's House)," wholly parenthetical, corresponds to the cultural "underground" (mainly in the "unlicensed sector," like the subconscious of the city, where no laws apply) for which Bron professes indulgent contempt, and to all the chthonic wisdoms he rigidly resists.

"Six months now." Traditionally, half a cycle, though on Triton, of course, time isn't so simple: we meet Bron at four o'clock of the "thirty-seventh day of the fifteenth paramonth of the second year[N]... on Earth and Mars both they'd be calling it some day or other in Spring, 2112, as would a good number of official documents even out here, whatever the political nonsense said or read." But the Terran year does apply literarily; after the flurry of emotional involvement and her sex change, we encounter Bron in the same Plaza of Light:

> She had been living at the women's co-op (the Eagle) six months now. This one had been working out well.

"This one," in the opening lines, implies a change from past living arrangements. The male Bron (like the female, later) has trouble in co-ops where sexual or emotional relationships tend to develop among residents. "Had been working out"--Bron's tense again, with the same insipid "it's okay I guess" implications. Bron's rejection of responsibility for his life is first introduced in the structure that firmly places the "working out" entirely within the purview of "this one" i.e., the co-op. Bron would like to remain the passive bystander, not to be held accountable. "Well." A self-satisfied, businesslike sort of word. But the cumulative effect of this sentence on the re-reader is ironic--that is, it reverberates, without settling, between pathos and harshest sarcasm. It is a tremor of the terrifyingly ephemeral veil of well-being Bron weaves between himself and reality.

> to wound the autumnal city.
> So howled out for the world to give him a name.
> The in-dark answered with wind.
>
> He had been living at the men's co-op (Serpent's House) six months now. This one had been working out well.

Most immediately striking is the difference in the types of language being used in each book. The first set of opening lines is noticeably eccentric yet clearly composed with extreme care. The second has a formal feel, yet the language appears casual ("six months now," "working out"), even colloquial. The first is openly emotional; the second gives the appearance--which is always an illusion--of emotional neutrality. The differences persist throughout, with Dhalgren experimenting, parodying various styles, and testing every word, where Triton maintains the careless elegance--read absolute control--that comes to be called, in the fullness of time, classical.

"to," "He." Kid, starting with a purpose, though he later forgets what it was, discovers his subject: himself, i.e., his universe. Bron, starting with himself as subject, does not discover any purpose. This is because Kid is artistic (and "do you think a bad person can be a good poet?" he asks a critic, who answers, "From a perfectly practical point of view...it would be quite difficult.") while Bron is dishonest; but no one who has read Delany can be unaware that throughout the zigzag course of his fictional development one image metamorphoses to keep up: the artist as a criminal and friend of criminals. Geo the poet's mission is to steal the jewel that is the third eye of the brass god Hama. Vol Nonik (like Kid) is the leader of a delinquent gang--and a poet. H.C.E., master thief, is the beloved of Hawk the Singer. Joe Dicostanzo, who has created--or so he claims--his whole world, kills the one-eyed boy who comes to him offering a revelation. Jason Cage is an architect who uses his architectural knowledge to commit murder. Kid Death takes life and creates illusions while Lobey betrays the redeemer and makes music. Even Rydra Wong, the most loved poet of her age, discovers that through the hypnotic qualities of the language called Babel-17 she has been induced to steal from herself and sabotage her own ship; her lover is a murderer, saboteur and thief. Moving nearest to the two novels treated here, the Mouse actually steals the very instrument on which he plays his multisensory creations, and which he later uses as a weapon.[5]

Kid's crimes are more complicated. He does rob a man on the street to find out how it feels. He leads a gang that, if there were any law in the city, would be called delinquent. There is a hint that he takes part in a mass killing--if it occurred at all. But the "crime" that concerns him is "the falsification of this journal" (i.e., the text of Dhalgren), the rearrangement of facts through error or to "make a better story." Which happens to be precisely Bron's form of dishonesty. Kid's falsification also seems to pervade his life, which is, after all, contained in the novel (= his notebook); thus the lost and edited pages correspond to Kid's lost (edited?) memories.

That there is more than coincidental relationship, if not identity, between Kid and Bron is made explicit early in the text of Triton. In yet another reasonable attempt to account for the ductility of Bellona's geography, Kid remarks to a new acquaintance,

> "You meet a new person, you go with him...and suddenly you get a whole new city...You go down new streets, you see houses you never saw before, pass places you didn't know were there. Everything changes."

(To which the other innocently and implacably agrees that "Sometimes it changes even if you go the same way.")

On page 11 of Triton Bron encounters the Spike. On page 15 he says,

> "Have you noticed? To meet a new person here in Tethys is always like entering a new city...?" He'd said that before..."At least, it's always been that way with me. A new friend, and they invariably have an appointment or another friend on some street you've never been on before. It makes the city--come alive."
>
> Her new smile mocked slightly. "I would have thought to someone like you all places in the city looked alive."

Her comment clinches the correspondence, recalling Kid's half-conviction that the landscape of Bellona is alive and laying traps for him. (Which it is, in the sense that Delany controls that landscape, and in the sense that the landscape is the hero, that is, is Kid's own mind and body.)

After this blunt declaration of intent, it is hard to miss the more subtle stitches that tack the fabric of Dhalgren to the fabric of Triton. On page two, the Poor Children of the Avestal Light and Secret Changing Name shuffle through the scene, mumbling mantras and begging with tight-closed eyes. One discussion in Dhalgren revolves around how it would be possible to use an image like the blind leading the blind in a serious modern novel (and elegantly answers the question in the process). Bron comes from another city called Bellona, naturally enough on Mars. Reminiscent of Dhalgren's gangs of 'scorpions' are the Rampant Order of Dumb Beasts, unwashed, hairy, and wearing chains. Both Kid and Bron have been prostitutes. In the unlicensed (u-1) sector of Tethys, Bron is sure he is walking in the wrong direction but isn't--as often happens to Kid in Bellona. Loud roaring sounds accompany skirmishes in Triton's war with the Inner Worlds, and at one point the lights in the co-op "dropped to quarter-brightness" during a crisis; those in Kid's "nest" drop to quarter dimness while everyone is expecting catastrophe. Bron says, explaining metalogics,

> "We have a very useful P/not-P relation where we say that, for whatever the space, not-P is completely contained by P, is tangent to it at an infinite number of points, and cleaves it into an infinite number of pieces.... we say that not-P shatters P."

which could be taken as a description of how Triton relates to Dhalgren--though which is to be seen as P is debatable.

The greatest correspondence, of course, is the way that the city of Tethys mirrors Bron's mental state--sometimes almost to the point of a burlesque of the Kid/Bellona unity, as when Bron reads the Spike's firm good-bye letter and the city's artificial gravity immediately goes berserk, sabotaged by the Terrans. The artistic (and criminal) u-1 makes Bron as uneasy as would a tour through his own unconscious mind. The city is sprinkled with "ego-booster booths" where Bron can insert a credit token and view any three minutes of his past that may have been caught on a government security camera.

Allusions to Dhalgren help us to interpret--or dis-interpret--Bron's muddled perceptions. Triton casts doubt, in turn, on the entire premise that Dhalgren's protagonist is a reliable observer, given the correspondences between Bron, who lies, and Kid.

But the correspondence is never exact; Kid thinks of leaving Bellona half-way through the novel, changes his mind, and ends up fleeing the city through unnamed disaster in the last pages. For Bron, disaster strikes in the middle of the cycle; he too flees, but on Triton you can't leave the city--there is no friendly countryside to escape into. Instead, when the gravity cuts are scarcely back under control, Bron has a sex-change. It is not the protagonist of Triton (as it is in Dhalgren) who is involved in a sexual/artistic triad, but the Spike--which gives her, too, resonances with Kid. Bron wants to flee his wound; Kid wants to understand and exploit his. Kid, in line two of Dhalgren, wants relationship and name; Bron, further into page one of Triton, idly wonders how different he is from those around him, and this will be his anxious question always--though the answer he wants to hear will fluctuate. Bron is basically in flight; Kid is basically in search--or so it seems. Kid is a poet and Bron is a liar.

So between the two novels, quite consciously, is set up the same flicker of the irreconcilable twin illusions, the "front" and "back" of the reversible cube, that was established within the structure of Dhalgren.

Neither vision of what may (or may not) be the same personality can reasonably be seen as The Truth. Delany's unique fictional task has been meticulously carried out. The relationship between the two novels flashes with ambiguities like some weird multi-dimensional jewel.

FOOTNOTES

1) The editions cited in the text are Bantam Books: Dhalgren, 1975 (6th printing) and Triton, 1976 (1st printing).

2) New York Times Book Review, 16 Feb. 1975, p. 27.

3) "Time Considered as a Helix of Semi-Precious Stones," World's Best Science Fiction, 1969.

4) "About 5,750 Words," The Jewel-Hinged Jaw: Notes on the Language of Science Fiction (Dragon Press, 1977); "Thickening the Plot," Those Who Can: A Science Fiction Reader, R.S. Wilson, ed. (Mentor, 1973).

5) The respective stories are: The Jewels of Amptor, The Fall of the Towers, "Night and the Loves of Joe Dicostanzo," "Cage of Brass," (the last two from Driftglass), The Einstein Intersection, Babel-17, and Nova.

While the sandaled soles of taut Achilles
clapped his barren tent in blue-rhythmed sulk
knocking the king for ravishing warpride,
the deepest spear and his deadliest fear
was hurled by Ajax of the oxen hulk,
Ajax, the beef-witted thicker than hide.

When that steeped-to-the-heel-in-deity
was hamstrung and hung by Apollo's shaft
for his chest-drubbing drag of Hector's heels,
the strongest Greek had the loudest bellow,
spurning the gods as weak-woman witchcraft,
raising seven-hide-shield to thunder-peals;

crazy ox
beastly sins
and suicide.

But Ajax in sophoclean armour
meant more than sharp symbolic sin and shame,
retribution reeking from sand-propped swords.
Tenacious triumph of honoured honour
was the one completion worthy of fame
or theme for Athenian theatre lords.
Odysseus must lend wily words saying:
Others handle our historical name;
tomb-ravaged greatness is unkingly hate.

Ajax buried Hector's sword--hilt to heart.
The sad tragedy, sophoclean aim,
seems that greatness must be seen to be great.

Odysseus, fox
always wins
honour pride.

-- Thomas Kretz --

Ah! For the life of a romantic!
Brief the passions which, unfilfilled,
Turn time and again against themselves:
Rushing waters of sentiment,
Wearing beds of discontent,
Inscribe the barren continent
With minor stories. I have shelves
Filled with river landscapes.

But the paths the waters choose to go
Are of an interest but momentary and personal.
Observe, more important, the direction they flow,
The insistence with which they fall,
Toward the Destination whose name, I know,
Is seldom Love, if ever at all.

-- Daniel M. Frank --

The Novel of Transcendence: Silverberg's Downward to the Earth

by

M. G. Brashear

Robert Silverberg's Downward to the Earth (1969) is obviously a product of its time. It is a novel about consciousness transformation (with the assistance of drugs) that anyone who lived through the last decade can easily relate to The Beatles, Timothy Leary, Herbert Marcuse, and The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test. It is the special sixties form of the old science-fiction sub-genre of the superman tale, which includes Stapledon's Odd John, Clarke's Childhood's End, and Sturgeon's More than Human.

At a time that a certain Marxist critic[1] claims was devoted to doomsday visions in science-fiction (prophetic of failing American capitalism) Silverberg gave us a theme of transcendence, not doom. It is also noteworthy that in a decade when scientific rationalism was being applied to seemingly every area (from government, to war, to psychology), Downward to the Earth treated this rationalism as hardly worthy of notice, other than as a hindrance to the development of personality. It was a novel that bypassed traditional ideologies and attempted to deal with the process and structures of change in a man's consciousness.

II

As a private citizen, the protagonist Gundersen has come back to a place he once ruled as a colonial administrator for many years. Gundersen on board ship plays the role of a tired, cynical, ex-colonialist revisiting the scene of his former labours so that he may see how the natives are botching up the job of ruling themselves. Though he knows this is just a pose, Gundersen apparently enjoys shocking the sensibilities of the other passengers. This pose is "an exaggeration, a distortion, of his real attitude, but sometimes it pleased him to wear masks" (p.2).[2] The essential element in it is superiority, but the feeling of hubris exists in his real attitude as well. Gundersen really does have about him an aspect of the colonialist, the imperialist, and all the things these words imply: racism, exploitation, ethnocentrism, materialism. He is therefore, in spite of his pose (which he thinks he secretly denies), a spiritually and intellectually impoverished being. In contemporary terms, Gundersen represents the end product of our five hundred years of Western imperialism.

Nonetheless, he is coming back, although he has no rational reason for it: "Call it irresistable attraction; call it sentimentality; call it foolishness. Gundersen had never planned to revisit this place. Yet here he was..." (p. 1). Beneath the pose of the acerbic ex-colonialist administrator, beneath the reality of the colonialist values which the pose conceals from himself, is Gundersen's unconscious self which impels him to return to a place about which he admits that "the first thirty years of his life had been a pale prelude to that decade, and the last eight years of it had been a hollow epilogue" (p.12). Gundersen is one of those seemingly bureaucratic men that appear to others rationally aware of what they do--and who are actually guided in their major decisions by that portion of the self which is outside of the reasonable, conscious mind. Call it what one wills: the id, intuition, unconscious, spirit, or soul, this is guiding his return. This double aspect of Gundersen's personality is what makes him interesting at first and what finally makes him capable of further moral and intellectual development. The irrestible urge to return to the planet signifies the possibility of regeneration in Gundersen and also indicates the direction this regeneration must take. He must move away from racism, ethnocentrism, exploitation, and materialism (in both its senses). The movement of this Bildungsroman is one of transcendence of the older inadequate concepts and values.

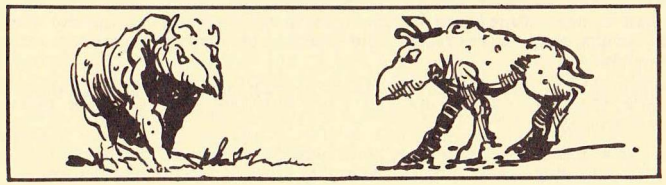
In the course of the novel, Gundersen is subjected to one learning experience after another. One example occurs soon after he lands on the planet. He tells an old associate (who had remained on the planet even after the colonialist government departed) that he intends to travel to the north to watch the secret rebirth ceremony of one of the two intelligent species on the planet. Having urged him back to this world, his guiding inner self has now fixed on the rebirth ritual as an object. As the novel finally shows, rebirth is what he himself badly needs and wants. But at this point he is not consciously aware of it.

Gunderson travels to a camp of nildorors (intelligent elephant-like animals) to ask permission of an elder to travel into the north. Of course, his imperialist past is still strongly with him: "He knew that he could not deceive the many-born one into thinking that an old Company hand like himself was suddenly eager to grovel before the former victims of Earth's expansionism" (p.39).[3] But he does muster up some sincerity, and when the old nildoror reminds him of the deeds of his past, he can say: "...but then understanding comes...and one feels remorse for the deeds of the past, and one hopes that one may be forgiven for his sins" (p.38).

As he leaves the nildoror, Gundersen is struck a glancing blow by the tail of a dying salamander-like animal that is being pulled from the water and killed for food by anthropoid members of the other intelligent race (sulidoror).[4] Stunned, Gundersen watches as the primitive animal is dispatched: "A final thrust of a stake severed the malidar's spinal column. The beast quivered and lay still" (p.40). Weak and nauseated, he watches a gorilla-like sulidoror approach:

> Gundersen stared up uneasily at the towering shaggy figure. The sulidoror held in its forepaws a gobbet of malidar meat the size of Gundersen's head.
>
> "For you," said the sulidor in the nildoror language. "You eat with us?"
>
> It did not wait for a reply. It tossed the slab of flesh to the ground next to Gundersen and rejoined its fellows. Gundersen's stomach writhed. He had no lust for raw meat just now.
>
> The beach was suddenly very silent.
>
> They were all watching him, sulidoror and nildoror both.
>
> (pp. 40-41)

I think one must see this death of the primeval beast from the waters as an external parallel to Gundersen's subjective change. Dying in him is a symbolic beast from the waters of the mind, the mindless animal representing his old colonial self (with its values and obstructing biases) which is being pulled out and destroyed. This is the process of Gundersen's spiritual and mental change correlated to events in the natural world around him. The offering of a piece of meat from the dead beast is in the nature of a ritual itself. His token eating, a form of communion, signifies conscious awareness of the dead, mindless past--of all the old ways of thought that stand in front of his quest for expanded understanding.



III

By this point in the novel, one can see its general form, or rather, forms, that have gone into the making of it. It is a novel of the growth of character and the expansion of mental horizons, and it is a quest-romance like Sir Orfeo or Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,[5] and, like them, a quest for another reality beyond the mundane one. In both of these mediaeval romances, the other reality has elements of magic associated with it--which means that the metaphysical predicates about reality have been changed. As the conclusion of Downward to the Earth shows, it is just this separate and metaphysically transcendent reality toward which Gundersen is guided, not by his critical, rational intelligence, but by his intuition.

The alteration of Gundersen's consciousness proceeds on several levels. On the most superficial level, he must dismiss cultural and racial biases, existing on the more accessible upper layers of his mind. Hence the episode with the beast from the water. A series of learning experiences, gradually increasing in profundity, prepare Gundersen for the final transformation of consciousness. Consequently, his next important act is learning to listen seriously to what the elephantine nildoror have to say. Among other things he learns that they separate living beings into those that have and those that have not "g'rakh," which is " 'the quality that separates the souled from the unsouled...Without g'rakh a creature is but a beast' " (p.44).

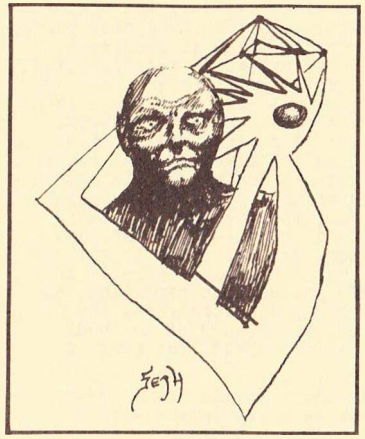
Of course the psychological process of change is not one of a smooth slide from one set of ideas and values into another: there must be a period of unsettling and disorientation, after which the personality can be reconstituted into a new pattern. This is what happens to Gundersen the evening after his interview with the old nildoror. He is staying in their camp for the night, listening to the rhythmic pattern of a ritual dance: "Gundersen was cut off from his own past, even from a sense of his own kinship to his species. Disjointed memories floated up...He found himself longing to join that black and incomprehensible frenzy at the lakeshore. Something monstrous was running free within him, liberated by the incessant repetition of that boom boom boom boom" (pp. 48-49). The breaking down of old patterns and formation of new ones also involves the liberation from his own self of repressed elements whose existence he had not before taken seriously. One of these is bodily pleasure and its demands, long repressed in the West--at least from the classical period (one thinks of the suppression of the body in Platonic psychology and of Plotinus' putative remark about being ashamed of having a body). Gundersen, in many ways an archetypal figure of modern Western man, must come to terms with the demands of the flesh, as he must come to terms with non-Western philosophy and religion. The two areas are fused in the ritual itself: "...the dance was preceded and surrounded by drama, a spoken episode akin to Earth's mediaeval mystery plays, a theatrical re-enactment of some supremely important nildoror myth, serving both as mode of entertainment and as ecstatic religious experience" (p.46). And we must remember that traditionally song and dance have had a dual function; that is to give expression of the demands of the body, and to recreate and participate in a sense of underlying order.

So Gundersen finds himself in the grip of some very powerful forces within himself, emerging like the water beast into the world of consciousness:

> He found an open patch of marshy soil and laid claim to it, moving forward, then backward, covering and recovering his one little tract in his fervor. No nildoror trespassed on him. His head tossed; his eyes rolled; his arms dangled; his body swayed and rocked; his feet carried him untiringly. Now he sucked in the thick air. Now he cried out in strange tongues. His skin was on fire; he stripped away his clothing, but it made no difference. Boom boom boom boom. Even now, a shred of his old detachment was left, enough so that he could marvel at the spectacle of himself dancing naked amid a herd of giant alien beasts. Would they, in their ultimate transports of passion, sweep in over his plot and crush him into the muck? Surely it was dangerous to stay here in the heart of the herd. But he stayed. Boom boom boom boom, again again, again, yet again. As he whirled he looked out over the lake, and by sparkling refracted moonslight he saw the malidaror placidly munching the weeds, heedless of the frenzy on land. They are without g'rakh, he thought. They are beasts, and when they die their leaden spirits go downward to the earth. Boom. Boom. BOOM. Boom.
>
> (p. 50)

This is an initiation into a new and wider reality; the beginning of his exploration of the new reality; the new, yet old, parts of his own personality, his own self. The movement of Gundersen towards the centre of his own being is symbolized in the stripping off of the clothing. The outer layers of the self (like those of an onion) are being peeled away. He is psychically more naked than he has ever been. In order to gain greater awareness of himself, he must throw off the artificial protective devices--colonialist prejudices, middle-class materialism, and the like. He must reach down into the centre of the "onion" past his social, to his essential self. The natural superficiality of the ego, with its orientation toward the reality principle, resists this sort of inward turning: it's not in the best interests of survival for the Gundersen-organism. His conventional rationality tells him to get out lest he be crushed, but his intuition makes him stay. Here is the incorporation into Gundersen of the new unconscious replacing the old inadequate one. The old was false and prejudicial, the new is a contact with long forgotten realities. The frenzy of the body is linked with philosophic insight as he whirls about, thinking of g'rakh.

In order to make the nature and direction of the change more apparent Silverberg next puts Gundersen back in contact with humans. On his journey toward the north he meets a group of earth tourists. Unwillingly joining them, he listens to their superficial comments about the planet and their ethnocentric doubts about the nildorors: " '...but are they people?' " (p.75). The contrast with the tourists emphasizes Gundersen's commitment to an intensive exploration of what is significant about life. The tourists are "empty, trivial human beings" (p. 69) and in facing them he suddenly experiences a release of buried psychic material: "Abruptly his patience shattered and he felt that his skull would explode if he did not instantly drop all barriers and admit the one great guilt that by stabbing his soul had spurred him into strange odysseys. It did not matter if these were not the right people from whom to seek absolution" (p. 76). This is the traditional pattern of all the popular religions: in Christianity, the penance leading to salvation; in Eastern thought, the purification leading to enlightenment. Gundersen's "one great guilt" was that he had treated rational autonomous creatures as though they were mere beasts, and when one does that, "What does that make you?" (p. 78). Such treatment signifies a lack of what Shelley ("A Defense of Poetry") terms the great secret of morals: "love, or a going out of our own nature." Gundersen's guilt stems from an inability to expand his own awareness, which is connected with and leads to a failure of morals. Shelley linked the two; so does Silverberg. The guilt, the sin, the impurity, must be treated in good psychoanalytic fashion by bringing it plainly into the conscious portion of mind by verbalization. Then one can see that "absolution" is necessary, and can be achieved by a purgatorial process that has in fact already been initiated by the intuition of Gundersen. The dance, the humbling of himself, the eating of the malidar meat--all these were purifying and liberating activities that need conscious recognition to be most useful in his quest for regeneration and enlightenment. And parallel to the psychic changes in him, the natural environment changes: "The quality of the land was undoubtedly changing. They were leaving the heart of the equatorial jungle behind, and starting to enter the highlands that led into the mist zone" (p. 81).



To this point the search for regeneration has been defined in terms of a number of different experiences for Gundersen, all of which have to do with establishing contact with essential nature (in the eighteenth century sense: both internal and external nature). But "getting back to nature" as a method of salvation has its drawbacks (as the Romantics discovered), chief among them being the danger that "nature" can become too exclusively an object of consciousness. Forms of primitivism in the past have usually made this error, thinking of resting secure in the heart of "nature," when "nature" was but the visible symbol of the quest-object, the Holy Grail; i.e., enlightenment or liberation.

Gundersen receives a rather gruesome lesson on this topic during his northward journey. Detouring by an abandoned "Company station," he finds an emaciated human couple lying within. He discovers that they are almost dead and have become the hosts of a parasite whose young are developing within their bodies:

> He knelt again. He forced himself to experience that inner quivering again. He touched the woman's stomach, her thighs, her bony haunches. Beneath the skin she was a mass of strangeness. Yet her mind still ticked, though she had forgotten her name and her native language. The man was luckier; though he was infested too, at least Dykstra did not have to lie here in the dark waiting for the death that could come only when the harbored larvae erupted from the enslaved human flesh. Was this what they had desired, when they refused repatriation from this world that they loved? An Earthman can become captured by Belzagor, the many-born nildor Vol'himyor had said. But this was too literal a capture.
>
> (pp. 87-88)

Indeed, one can be captured too literally by nature, by physical reality, and because of this miss the essential oneness (or identity) with what Gundersen calls the "Shaping Force" (p. 67). Becoming one with the natural world should be a more conscious than physical process--these poor people have only joined nature physically; the wrong way. In this study of the limits of primitivism, Gundersen must find the right way, an intellectual and spiritual way, which will move through, and beyond, our limited conception of nature. Thus he thinks in relation to these pitiful trapped people as he destroys their dead bodies, "I am the resurrection and the life" (p. 88), implying that he has freed them from a "oneness with nature" that was in reality a perversion of human goals. Though possibly uttered with some degree of irony at this point, the remark shows that the possibility of his ultimate goal (to become a holy man) exists in his mind even at this time. This helps in assessing the psychological distance he has already travelled.

Other forms of entrapment by nature are offered to Gundersen as his journey toward the rebirth ceremony continues. There is a long interlude in the centre of the book (chapters 9-11) when he stops at a still occupied human dwelling called "Shangri-la Station" which is described in such a way as to link it with the Garden of Eden). There he finds two people that he was emotionally bound to in the colonial days. Seena, whose lover he had been, and Kurtz, a character strikingly similar to Joseph Conrad's Kurtz in The Heart of Darkness.

Shangri-la Station is a paradise of nature, filled with formal gardens and "bedecked with plants (p. 91), and Seena is the fairest blossom in this garden of delight. Of this palace of material pleasures she is queen of sensuality, and she and Gundersen are soon copulating. Yet, "at the highest moment he was dimly aware of that strange grunting sound once more. He clasped her fiercely and let his eyes close" (p. 103). That "strange grunting sound" comes from the invalid Kurtz in another part of the building, who has gone through the rebirth ceremony himself and come back a gibbering monster, twisted in body and mind. Kurtz, who is an object of fear, and Seena, an object of desire, are linked together in this section as variations on the theme of enslavement by nature, which is part of the larger investigation of all the hindrances that must be overcome in the search for expanded awareness. Both Seena and Kurtz function as potential restrictions of Gundersen's consciousness to a limited, orthodox area:

> "I have to go," he said, less firmly than before.
>
> "He's living in hell," Seena said. "You'll be there too."
>
> She came to Gundersen and pressed herself against him. He felt the hot tips of her breasts grazing his skin; her hands clawed his back desperately; her thighs touched his. A great sadness came over him, for all that Seena once had meant to him, for all that she had been, for what she had become, for what her life must be like with this monster to care for. He was shaken by a vision of the lost and irrecoverable past, of the dark and uncertain present, of the bleak, frightening future. Again he wavered. Then he gently pushed her away from him. "I'm sorry," he said. "I'm going."
>
> (p. 119)

As the physical journey modulates into a journey of consciousness, so the physical obstacles transform to their psychological equivalents, acting against the further exploration of the mind. Seena and sexuality are only the specific examples of the larger trap: "When a man dwells in his mind on the objects of sense, attachment to them is produced. From attachment springs desire and from desire comes anger. From anger arises bewilderment, from bewilderment loss of memory; and from loss of memory, the destruction of intelligence and from the destruction of intelligence he perishes" (The Bhagavad-Gita, 11, 62-63). Likewise, fear of the dangers of the unknown can restrict a man to the orthodox level, the material plane. Kurtz is the object lesson in this case: see what can happen!

Kurtz appears to work in other ways as well. As remarked above, he appears to have been "lifted" out of Conrad's Heart of Darkness. Conrad's Kurtz was a remarkable man, who journeys into the heart of human reality and came back muttering (in Existentialist fashion) "The horror! The horror!" as he died. Silverberg's Kurtz is also seen as paradoxically saintlike, with a similar aura of unspeakable and fascinating evil, and Seena says, "Kurtz had a greater capacity for sin than the rest of us, because he was a greater man. Angels have farther to fall, once they fall" (p. 110). In Conrad, Kurtz's experiences are the last word; they form the existential description that lies at the heart of darkness. But Silverberg is less pessimistic, and more platonic: the quality of consciousness decides how far one gets into the heart of darkness, and if one goes far enough, one reaches the light (as in Plato's allegory of the cave). Gundersen has this possibility in Downward to the Earth, even if Kurtz is stuck in the darkness due to the imperfect nature of his own self.

Having resisted the arguments of ordinary "normal" reality at Shangri-la, Gundersen resumes the northward journey. So far he has moved far from his initial condition of intuited moral discomfort: he has learned to question his own nature and ideas; he has learned to recognize g'rakh in other beings; he has recognized his own moral failings through confession; he has recognized that he can never be satisfied with the restrictions of normal, ordinary, conventional human life. His departure from Shangri-la Station was finally a willed and conscious adoption of the stance of seeker, quester, outsider. He has at last responsibly taken control of his own life. However, the conscious recognition of one's departure from the security of conventional society can lead to bouts of despair and self-doubt. This is another obstacle to the pilgrim, and is symbolized by having the geographical surroundings change radically soon after Gundersen leaves the Station. Tropical jungle gives way to cold, barren, highlands shrouded in mist: "...at its clammy touch images of death stirred in his mind, skulls and tombs and coffins and veils..." (p. 126). And shortly thereafter he falls into a genuine dark night of the soul: he gets separated from his travelling companions, and becomes lost as darkness falls in the mist country:

> The night came, blackness in place of grayness. He sought moons overhead and found none. A terrible thirst consumed him, and he tried to creep back to the brook, but he could not even find that. His fingers were numb; his lips were cracking. But he discovered an island of calm within his discomfort and fear, and clung to it, telling himself that none of what was happening was truly perilous and that all of it was somehow necessary.
>
> (p. 128)

Self-doubt and the sense of lost direction are overcome by endurance--and two nildoror who find him and lead him to a village of sulidoror. This last barrier past, he finishes his pilgrimage alone, moving toward the place of rebirth, a huge mountain:

> He looked toward the rose-red mountain dominating the land far to the north, and as he did so the clouds that lay over the mist country parted, permitting the sun to strike the mountain's highest peak, a snowy dome of great expanse, and it seemed to him then that the face of Kurtz, transfigured, serene, looked down at him out of that smooth rounded peak.
>
> (p. 126)

The holy mountain, like Olympus, is a place where larger realities than normal can be experienced. The physical journey to the physical mountain is paralleled by the journey of slowly deepening consciousness to a critical point where transfiguration can take place. This is what Gundersen has consciously wanted (except during self-doubting) since he told Seena back in Shangri-la Station: "I've tried being human for quite a while. Maybe it's time to try something else" (p. 118). And so Gundersen undergoes the process of rebirth, a physical and mental process in which "he becomes aware of the harmony of all things g'rakh. He, who lies in rebirth, is in contact with them all, but also they are each in contact with one another, at any time, at every time, every soul on the planet joined in wordless communication" (p. 173).

This final alteration is in the nature of transcendence; the limitations of the body have been overcome, and Gundersen has become what every outsider moves toward, a prophet and a holy man. The broken structure of Hesse's Steppenwolf has been completed in Downward to the Earth.

IV

As a study of how man's consciousness can change and expand, the novel is a variation on the old mythic pattern of purification and rebirth, where purification is an heuristic process leading to transcendence. Plato provides a paradigmatic summary: "...he who has been earnest in the love of knowledge and of true wisdom, and has exercised his intellect more than any other part of him, must have thoughts immortal and divine"(Timaeus, 90). The pattern of transcendence through consciousness expansion works specifically in the areas of experience discussed above: (a) the limits of conventional values (coming out of the Freudian super-ego), (b) the limits of merely rational thinking (a function of the ego), (c) sympathetic relations (most influenced by the unconscious level, or id), (d) latent mental potentials (corresponding to the intuition or Jungian collective unconscious), and (e) the compatibility of man and nature, a complex problem dealing with both the conscious and unconscious.

Like every other successful pilgrim, Gundersen must deal with the unconscious and the conscious while making his approach to the real goal, the intuitive. Thus Seena, as a symbol of attraction to the material plane, must be gently denied before further progress is possible (one is reminded of Gawain's relation to the Green Knight's wife); thus Gundersen must explore himself in the nildoror dance before he can move on to more profound experiences. After each experience his area of awareness has increased; after the rebirth experience, Silverberg writes, "...his mind is open now, and he has been reborn" (p. 175). Where id was, there shall ego be.

Once the mind is opened, that which was formerly the unknown level of intuition becomes the consciously known. The Jungian collective unconscious is no longer unconscious when Gundersen has penetrated to that level: "...he is glistening, a transparent man through whom the light of the great sun at the core of the universe passes without resistance...He sees the souls of the other Earthmen now. They have g'rakh, but rationality is not enough; their souls are blind and silent" (p. 171). And having widened his awareness to include what was formerly intuitive, the collective unconscious, Gundersen emerges as an archetypal form himself:

> A vision of a mankind transformed blazed within him. I am the emissary, he thought. I am the bridge over which they shall cross. I am the resurrection and the life. I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life. A new commandant I give unto you, that ye love one another.
>
> (p. 179)

Thus Downward to the Earth fuses two themes: individual exploration of consciousness and racial evolution and transcendence. By showing Gundersen's transformation from a middle-class bureaucrat to a prophet, from a sensual materialist to an idealist, from a scientific rationalist to a mystic, Silverberg has created a model of the stages of ascent leading to a transformation of consciousness. And in so doing, the author prophesies human evolution [7] with the assertion of the power that Freud called "eternal eros." Judging from the events of the last fifteen years, I would say that Downward to the Earth exemplifies the direction of consciousness transformation in the United States during that period as well.

FOOTNOTES

1) Bruce Franklin, "Chic Bleak in Fantasy Fiction," Saturday Review, 15 July 1972, pp. 42-45.

2) All such page references are to Robert Silverberg, Downward to the Earth (New York: Doubleday, 1969).

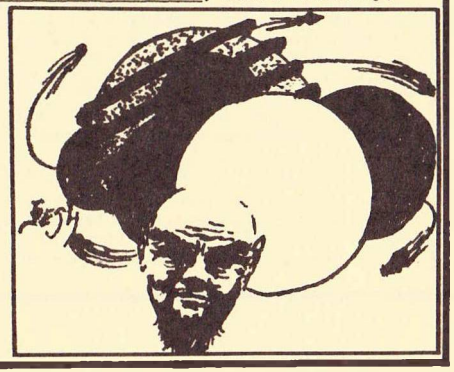
3) The attack on colonialism and imperialism is marked in the first part of the novel, mainly because colonial domination is shown to have been based on egregious factual and moral errors. The protagonist eventually recognizes this: "I sinned against the nildoror in the ordinary Earthman way, by collaborating in their enslavement, by patronizing them, by failing to credit their intelligence and their complexity" (p. 112). This political and moral aspect of the novel is very marked in the first half and is worth separate discussion.

4) This Jekyll and Hyde division of the two species (in appearance the sulidoror are morose and savage; the nildoror powerful but gentle and peaceful) is not as striking as at first appears since each is tempered by qualities of the other. Part of Gundersen's problem is symbolized in the relation between these two races; he must become aware of the polarities in his own self (which are partly repressed), and bring them into union in order to develop fully his potential as human being.

5) Of course I am not claiming that the mediaeval romance was science-fiction; only that many s-f novels repeat the essential structure of the romance, and that they are modern versions of the quest-romance. In this context, see a fine article by Lionel Stevenson, "The Artistic Problem: Science Fiction as Romance," Extrapolation, IV (May, 1963), 17-22.

6) On this aspect of the Quester, consult Colin Wilson, The Outsider (New York, 1956).

7) Sigmund Freud, Civilization and Its Discontents, James Strachey, trans. (New York, 1962), p. 92.



IVER'S SONNET

How things have changed for Iver.
He would hardly know his complexity now,
six kids and a wife, his father's farm
his, his father dead, and so much changed

since the time he broke through ice
and rose to a different world
through green of muskrat light.
His parents' calm admonitions

settling into the countryside like birds,.
and he taking up the ax to cut wood
saw for the first time the beauty

and slowness of his hands
rotating among the chips opened
thick out of the blue of the blade.

-- Rex Burwell --

THE VETERANS' HOSPITAL

Time whitens men and manly works
and dignifies long sitting still.
So, despite its livid panels
(robin eggshells bulldozed flat)
and steaming roof (fires go out),
the veterans' hospital in the trees
is not beyond hope as a monument.
A summer icicle, boxy stalagmite,
it will suffice as a cenotaph
for our tall, mechanical century
if ringed by twenty-third century drab
and year-bleached into an Attic daze.

-- William Green --

NEAR A HIGHWAY

Night begins
behind palmetto bushes
with the rustle
of dirt covered claws.
Stars
rub their black wings
underneath a hibiscus.
A thin white necked bird
flies above pines.
The fence post's dark object
stares at approaching car lights.
A possum peaks out
and trots
across the weeds
with poems
on its back.

-- Alan Britt --

Under Strabismic Western Eyes: A Translation of Romanian SF

by

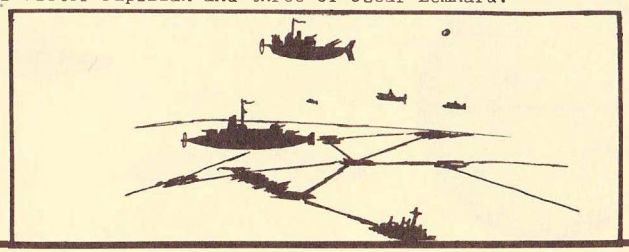
Camille La Bossière

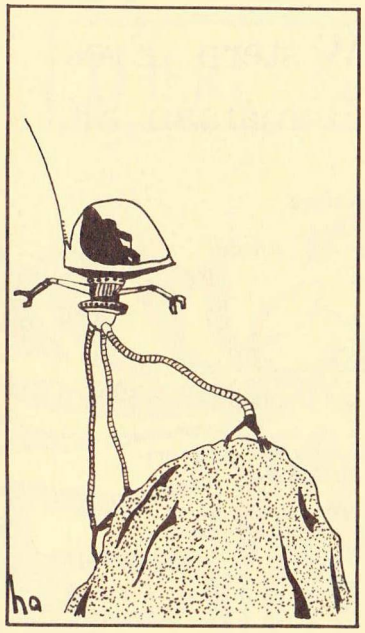
(Royal Roads Military College)

Les Meilleures histoires de science-fiction roumaine. Edited by Vladimir Colin; translated by Andrée Fleury; with an introduction by Ion Hobana. Verviers (Belgium): Bibliothèque Marabout, 1975.

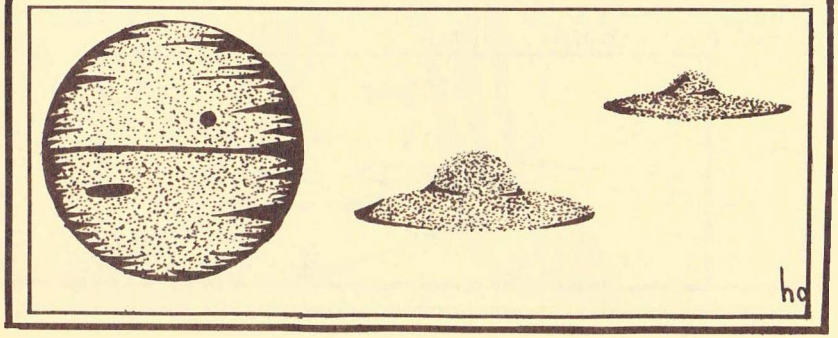
> "...the Western eye, so often concerned with mere surfaces." -- Joseph Conrad, Lord Jim.
>
> "J'ai analysé toutes les variantes logiques en rapport avec le problème programmé et voici le résultat."
>
> ("I analyzed all the logical variants in accordance with the programmed problem and here is the result.")
> -- Eduard Jurist, "L'Inspecteur Bott entre en action."

Nineteenth-century Romanian literature was marked by the wit of Ion Luca Caragiale, whose comedies reduced to absurdity the haste of so many of his contemporaries to modernize Romanian life; by the erudition of Moses Gaster, a hakham ("wiseman") of Sefardic (Spanish and Portuguese Jewish) communities and the author of the scholarly and influential Literatura populara Romana (The Folk Literature of Romania) (1883); and by the finely-crafted and often elegant symbolism of Ovid Denusianu, Iona Minulescu and Gheorghe Bacovia. The twentieth century has produced heirs worthy of such a patrimony of wit, erudition and craftsmanship: the archaeologist Vasile Parvan, the geographer S. Mehedinti, and, more recently, Tudor Arghezi and Miron Paraschivescu, who have expressed an informed imaginative vision in a literature manifesting shrewdness of conception, conviction of feeling, and polish of design. Romania's most widely-known writer, Arghezi, provides the first tale of Part I of Vladimir Colin's collection of Les meilleures histoires de science-fiction roumaine (The Best Tales of Romanian Science-Fiction), with its introduction by Ion Hobana. In addition to Arghezi's, Part I of the anthology, "Les précurseurs," offers one work of Victor Papilian and three of Oscar Lemnaru.





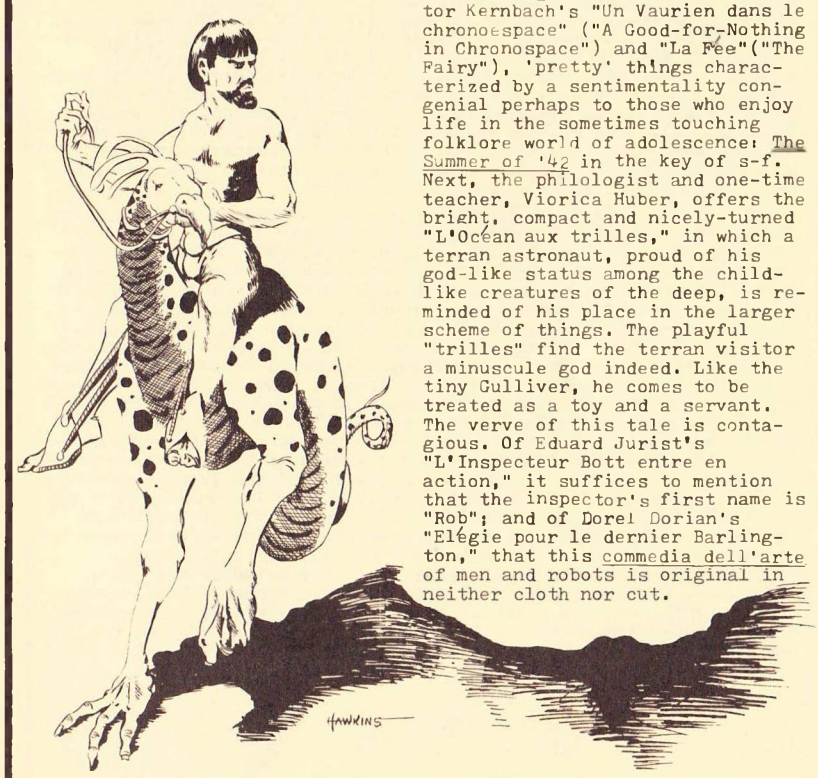
Arghezi, the author of such landmarks of Romanian literature as Flori de mucegai (Mold Flowers) (1931) and Versuri de seară (Evening Verses) (1935), is appropriately represented by a tongue-in-cheek portrait of the pretensions of academics and, in a manner which may recall Swift, the absurdity of their methods of analysis ("Dans la préhistoire"); and by "L'homme volant" ("The Flying Man"), a delicate sketch of earth-bound man's encounter with a celestial visitor, expressed in the imagery and action of myth. Papilian, a professor of anatomy, next offers "Terreur," an unfortunately spirit-less treatment of soul-less science. By way of the vascillating scepticism of the narrator, a positivist bound by "la pensée logique," the tale tries to argue imaginatively for the existence of the human soul. A brilliant colleague is resurrected from the dead by an injection of his own making, but returns a beast. The organism has been restored, but something has gone: therefore, the existence of the soul. The test appears as mechanical as the narrator's thought; the tale is not free of the crudeness of the positivist's analysis, which offers a mechanical solution to a problem in mechanics. Lemnaru's "L'illusion," which follows, an examination of the theme of the interchange of illusion and reality in a dream-world, seems unimaginative in expression and undistinguished in conception (curious in view of Lemnaru's considerable reading in philosophy). Lemnaru makes no contribution here to the already amply articulated vision of Hispanic illusionism. His interest in the philosophical extensions of optics is also reflected in "L'oeil du mort" ("The Eye of the Dead Man"): a murderer is unmasked by an image frozen in the mirror of the victim's eyes. This tale, comparing favourably with E.T.A. Hoffmann's tales of mirrors, terror and nightmares, seems a more convincing vehicle for Lemnaru's philosophical speculation, an ironic commentary in this instance on Berkeley's esse est percipi. The third of Lemnaru's tales in the collection, "L'horloge de la tour" ("The Tower Clock"), is a reworking of the perennial theme of the real or illusory marriage of man and mechanism: the clock stops, the man dies. The banality of the subject, however, is mitigated by the evocative matter-of-factness of the presentation, which does not speak beyond a muted close in the illustration of the idea.



For the first tales of Part II, "Les contemporains," Colin has selected two of his own works, "Giovanna et l'ange" ("Giovana and the Angel") and "Les Neiges de l'Ararat" ("The Snows of Ararat"). The first is a proleptic meditation on the immortality of art and the artist. Vittorio, analogically an angel by way of radiation, invites the poetess Giovanna to join him in the immortality of the artist transcending art. He promises: "Nous serons les nouveaux Prométhée qui apporteront l'étincelle d'immortalité sur la terre" ("We shall be the new Prometheans bringing the spark of immortality to the earth"). Colin, however, provides no 'reason' for us to accede to Vittorio's pledge; and the most apparent lacunae, historical, literary and philosophical--others before Colin have taken us considerably beyond these propaedeutics--are, I think, serious obstacles to the achieving of the tale's literary design. Also, on the subject of beauty of expression, the author seems to content himself here with the naming of "une beauté étrange, un peu irréelle" ("a strange beauty, somewhat unreal"). To say that something is beautiful is not quite the same as making a beautiful thing. Colin, in short, is neither convincing nor persuasive in this tale. "The Snows of Ararat," analogically an effort "de sonder l'inconnu" ("to sound the unknown")--a privative much favoured in this collection--shows Colin to much better advantage. The discovery by the protagonist of a six-thousand-year-old image of himself offers the reader an engrossing initial enigma. The 'explanation,' both complex and evocative, posits the visit in prehistory of extra-terrestrial beings with the power to read the future by sifting the genetic material of an antecedent. From this material, these visitors abstracted the image of the last member of the protagonist's genetic line. The conclusion of the tale, in which clouds above Ararat form a question mark, seems appropriately many-levelled and enigmatic. But the query may also suggest the limitations of a mind not sufficiently enlightened, though, for what reason, it is neither stated nor intimated. Perhaps the unknown will salvage both the reader and mankind. The plunge into the unfathomable might have been equally well expressed here otherwise than by this bafflingly mechanical expedient.

The critic Ovid S. Crohmălniceanu also is represented twice, by "Les Autres" ("The Others") and "Une recension scientifique" ("A Scientific Revision"). An epigraph provided by Mallarmé's Hérodiade beckons us to the first, which may be read as a promise unfulfilled. An ardent reader of Borges, Crohmălniceanu is no doubt familiar with the Baroque predecessors of Borges and with the intellectual subtleties and dark beauty of these; yet, he presents a banal treatment of the mirror-universe theme, expressed blandly and uneconomically. The student of Baroque drama, I suspect, will find this tale particularly thin. In the second, however, Crohmălniceanu offers a delightfully ironic treatment of the pretensions of rationalism among academics of the tenth millennium. Examining ancient terran life as "un monde se résumant aux bien pauvre relations d'une pensée binaire" ("a world summed up by the meagre relationships of a binary view"), the academics of the future speculate on the more complex relationships which a more imaginative mankind might have reflected on. Ironically, their Baroque arabesques on the logic of infinity, perceived as appropriate to such superior creatures as themselves, are in fact precise reflections of the history and works of ancient terra. The expression of the tale, unfortunately, seems not to go much beyond a series of lectures on subtleties beyond the reach of binary thought. Again, we are not made to see the author's point. Perhaps the tale's narrator has had more than a little of his way with his creator. (But this is as it should be, one might reply in counterpoint.)

Of the writers represented in this Collection, Adrian Rogoz is the best-known to the English-speaking world. His "L'autel des dieux stochastistes" ("The Altar of the Stochastic Gods") has also appeared in Views from Another Shore (Seabury Press). As a variation on the notion of gods-as-men, it is witty and compressed. The curiosity of the querulous gods in search of an explanation for the pattern of reason in the improbable shows itself in the sifting of a human--an ironic commentary on theological anthropomorphism (and the deification of reason), here reduced to its logical conclusion by inversion. (Rogoz's studies in philosophy do not appear to have done him much harm as a writer.) And in "Alambaï ou les arcanes de l'art," he spreads before the reader a comprehensive vision, mature in wit: "Toute idée irréfléchie est la cause d'une désastreuse reaction en chaine, et un piège qui mène à la perdition" ("Each undigested idea is the cause of a disastrous chain reaction and a snare leading to perdition"). This notion flows from the events of the tale, a tragedy for the genius exploring unwittingly the unknown, and there learning that ideas do not exist in a moral vacuum. The tale scores a basic assumption of modern prometheanism, the doctrine "what can be known must be known." The consequences of his invention are visited upon the explorer, who kills his pursuers (men transformed into insects) and himself as a solution to his intellectual myopia. The ironies of Frankenstein have not been wasted on Rogoz.



Following Rogoz's tales are Victor Kernbach's "Un Vaurien dans le chronoespace" ("A Good-for-Nothing in Chronospace") and "La Fée"("The Fairy"), 'pretty' things characterized by a sentimentality congenial perhaps to those who enjoy life in the sometimes touching folklore world of adolescence: The Summer of '42 in the key of s-f. Next, the philologist and one-time teacher, Viorica Huber, offers the bright, compact and nicely-turned "L'Océan aux trilles," in which a terran astronaut, proud of his god-like status among the child-like creatures of the deep, is reminded of his place in the larger scheme of things. The playful "trilles" find the terran visitor a minuscule god indeed. Like the tiny Gulliver, he comes to be treated as a toy and a servant. The verve of this tale is contagious. Of Eduard Jurist's "L'Inspecteur Bott entre en action," it suffices to mention that the inspector's first name is "Rob"; and of Dorel Dorian's "Elégie pour le dernier Barlington," that this commedia dell'arte of men and robots is original in neither cloth nor cut.

The collection closes strongly, however, with stories by Mihnea Moïsescu, Horia Aramă, Voicou Bugariu, Cheorghe Săsărman and Mircea Oprită. Moisescu's "La voix venant de la poudre dorée" ("The Voice Coming from the Golden Powder") is a tour de force of psychological writing. An explorer gradually comes to see the guilt that pursues him from the past; and the source of the guilt, once recognized--he has committed, in a sense, ontological murder--leads the protagonist to the resolution of suicide, an act of enlightenment and reconciliation at once. Arama's "Piano préparé," with its germane epigraph from Thomas Mann, unveils the catastrophe which overtakes a couple vacationing in a luna-park. Secure in their illusion of safety and self-possession, they come to surrender to an impulse sweeping them into the world of the explosive power of music. There, they, their audience, and the wizard of the piano experience the varied effects of the lust of power. The macabre tone of the story told so adroitly is worthy of Mann. And Aramă's "Reminiscence," a tale of an Eastern monarch's search for the heroic idylls of time-past shows the author a competent successor to the ancient Arabian raconteur. Bugariu's "A propos du méssage" immerses the reader in a mirror of relativity, in which persons and personae attempt to distinguish fact from fiction, time present from time past. As well, it is a satire on the vagaries of a deductive reason neither strictly deductive nor rational. Once again, the echoes of Hispanic illusionism are heard in Romanian s-f; and while the structure of frames within frames is clearly not raised in the hope of glorifying mystery in a novel way, the final effect, I think, is entertaining. The sense of déjà vu is not quite so strong here as elsewhere. Gheorghe Săsărman's "Kriegbourg," "Dava," "Le Motopie," and "Shah-Harah," each an elaboration on an architectural theme (the author is an architect), serve as brilliant and evocative single frames in isolation. And, finally, Oprită's "Figurines de cire" ("Wax Figurines") announces a writer gifted with subtlety of psychological insight and with skill and confidence of expression. In this tale, a future Prometheus comes to the revelation of his own inadequacy as a god; he comes to know that his power to duplicate the act of creation is married to self-deception and vanity. This fiction, which does in a few pages what others sometimes fail to do in an entire novel, bears the mark of a talent hostile to neither intelligence nor beauty.

In conclusion, I should like to comment on Ion Hobana's introduction, with the unpretentious title, "Quelques réflexions sur la science-fiction roumaine" ("Some Reflections on Romanian Science-Fiction"). Tracing the brief history of s-f in Romania, Hobana takes us quickly through the relevant work of Take Ionescu, Victor Anestin, and Henric Stahl (works, he admits, of little literary value). But when the historian-critic links Felix Aderca with Proust and Joyce, the reader may suspect special pleading. And Hobana's useful introduction is sometimes marred by foggy speculation unnecessary to the exposition, e.g., that Wells's Martians in The War of the Worlds symbolize man's aggressiveness. It is only briefly and at the conclusion of the introduction that Hobana addresses a core issue for the critical reader of s-f, from Romania as elsewhere. Romanian writers of s-f, he informs us, are often accused of "schématisme," of mechanically plotting out an idea in the guise of art. This charge, dismissed out of hand in the introduction, has some validity, it seems to me. Paradoxically, many of the authors (as represented in this anthology) show a recipe-like neatness of method in their illustration of the virtues of unknowing, of inscrutability. Such art, in the words of Conrad, is "bad," for its "moments" are created "for the illustration of the idea." Additionally, the reader may lose interest when, sailing an imaginary course in the unknown, he notices that he had made the same voyage many times before. Some of the tales in this collection suggest that their authors have copied earlier charts too superficially or too mechanically. Hobana's observation that no significant s-f appears in Romania before 1950 may go some way towards accounting for this. As Caragiale noted nearly a century ago, the blessings of Western imports are sometimes equivocal.

AT THE PIGEON POINT LIGHT
for Michael Nava

The sign is chipped, staked flat
where the wire fence corners to the north.
It says, "Keep Out," so I keep out
and mind the petty grievances
of gulls who've strayed beyond the fence.
Better the strands were barbed wire,
rusting on their posts, then so much
polished and politic aluminum.

I am looking through last year's
notebooks, to see how things
were going for me then, and am a little
surprised to find the ocean is not
mentioned, the ocean which occupies
so much of this horizon. The white boat
hardly moving into Half Moon Bay
is also unmentioned, and the pose
I strike beside this road to keep
an eye on tides and wet sand.

Now I am walking along the beach;
far past the round of sand
where the last pair of human tracks
turns back, the water takes on
a new complexion. Here the ocean,
rinsed at last of metaphor,
rakes genuine bits of shell and kelp
across the genuine beach; and at last
this mile or so of sea is merely water
---salty, cold and bearing small lives---
and running, out of cadence, on the sand.

-- David Owen --

On Soviet Readers and Fans of Science Fiction

by

Bernd Rullkötter

Science-fiction is nowadays one of the most popular literary genres in the Soviet Union.[1] Yet attempts at analyzing its reading public have been infrequent, all of these appearing in the 1960s.

The first short article devoted to the subject was written in 1965 by G. Patynskaya.[2] She examined the readers' letters which the publishing-house "Detskaya literatura" had received over an unspecified period. According to her, most of the children reading s-f were potential scientists who saw their own dreams realized in the genre. The author held that Western literature was often aimed at people who primarily wanted to kill time, and she emphasized the different calling of Soviet literature: "Soviet Science-Fiction is read by adolescents and youths who are future scholars, constructors, engineers, and workers. Our children's high level of knowledge requires that the writer of science-fiction create artistically relevant works which can be seen as part of the great literature of 'the atomic age' " (ibid., 119).

In the sixties Soviet supporters of s-f liked to point out its "seriousness" by stressing its influence on children's education. Patynskaya tried to give a factual basis to what might otherwise have been dismissed as wishful thinking. Today such apologetic assertions are less necessary, but they are still occasionally presented. Ye. Parnov repeated in 1974 the claim he had originally put in 1968 according to which 60 per cent of all Moscow physics students were stimulated by s-f to choose their specialty.[3] He did not quote the source of this information.

In 1965-66 the Polytechnic in Perm carried out sociological research into s-f's standing with the reader, with 664 students, 948 industrial workers, and an unknown number of kolkhoz farmers being interviewed. The results were published in 1967 by Z.I. Faynburg.[4]

70.6% of the students, 57.4% of the workers, and 27.6% of the farmers said they were interested in s-f. Some of its merits relevant to this discussion were given in the following order by those interested:

	provides social ideas about the future	entertains	stimulates people's imagination	popularizes science
% Students	48	6	22	3
% Workers	47	11	10	2
% Farmers	23	25	6	2

(ibid., 36)

These figures indicate that Patynskaya's approach, which viewed s-f as exclusively aimed at children, was mistaken. In fact, s-f seems to grow in people's esteem in direct proportion to their educational qualifications. At the same time it is noteworthy how little weight is attached to the popularizing effect of s-f.

The most thorough inquiry took place in 1966.[5] It was particularly interesting because, for the first time, Western authors were included.[6] This inquiry was initiated in Baku by the Writers' Union of Azerbaijan, which obtained answers to an extensive questionnaire from 600 respondents. Four years later the results were presented by G. Al'tov. Simultaneously, the "Science Fiction Fan Club of Moscow University" sent out the same questionnaires and received 700 answers, a survey of which was given in 1968 in the collection Fantastika 1967. The following figures represent the gist of the findings of both Al'tov and the Club.

About 17% of the respondents preferred s-f to all other genres, and more than 60% read it in addition to other kinds of literature. It is most popular with school and university students: of these, 23% declared it their favourite.

The readers of s-f above all looked for:

1) Paradoxes, unexpected views of familiar things (58%),

2) Thoughts on the social consequences of scientific development (54%),

3) Descriptions of the future and its social problems (43%),

4) Stories of man's behavior in unusual, fantastic circumstances (40%).

The favourite authors were S. Lem (56%), A. and B. Strugatsky (47%), Ray Bradbury(43%),[7] I. Yefremov (28%), Isaac Asimov (26%), Robert Sheckley (19%).

These statistics allow three main conclusions:

a) S-F is far more widely read in the Soviet Union than in Western countries,[8]

b) The readers are mainly concerned with its entertainment and social value rather than its scientific content. Therefore the validity of the assumption that s-f actually promotes scientific interest must remain doubtful,

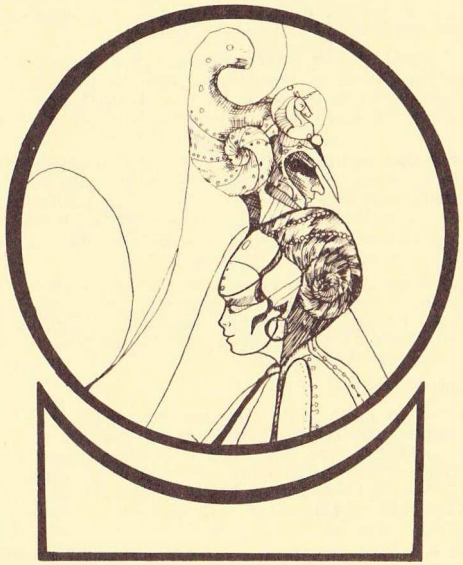
c) Western s-f appeals strongly to Soviet readers, which would appear to follow from their emphasis on entertainment.

Since 1966 no more prominent surveys of this kind have been conducted. However, it is safe to assume that more recent figures would show another upsurge in the popularity of s-f.

During a research period in Moscow in 1975 I hoped to contact some of the Soviet s-f fans. The above-mentioned "Science-Fiction Fan Club of Moscow University" had ceased to exist a few years before, but in the autumn of 1974 another fan club, which was attached to the publishing-house "Molodaya gvardiya," was founded. This was the only club of its kind in Moscow; its first meetings, which I was lucky enough to attend, took place in early 1975. The club's programme described its aims as follows:

> 1) Propaganda among readers, particularly among young people, for the communist ideals and standards, for a communist attitude towards work and social activity, as they are depicted in the best examples of Soviet science-fiction,
>
> 2) Educational work (especially through one's own example) among one's friends and comrades for the realization of the ideas and concepts of the future which are presented by the outstanding dreamers and writers of science-fiction,
>
> 3) A creative transformation of progressive ideas and results in the spheres of social thought, literature, art, science and production, aimed at a short-cut to the future; establishing a creative atmosphere and favourable conditions for the emergence of new writers and artists of science-fiction,
>
> 4) Setting up a social platform for professionals and fans of s-f through conferences, critical meetings, polls, competitions. Research into and formation of a public opinion on s-f works, creation of feed-back between readers, publishers and writers,
>
> 5) Bringing together readers, writers and artists through active work in the club, education towards co-operation, mutual help, responsibility before society and the future for one's actions and works. Links with other clubs in the Soviet Union and abroad in order to exchange experiences and set up high aesthetic and artistic criteria for s-f works,
>
> 6) Promotion of the man of the future: a harmoniously developed individual of high moral principles--a man for all times, an active fighter against the inferno (evil, injustice, crime, inhumanity, indifference, lack of principles, inertia, prejudice, racism, chauvinism) on the way to
>
> THE COMMUNIST FUTURE.[9]

It would be an understatement to call this programme ambitious. However, the actual meetings were rather more down-to-earth. The first two were devoted to "the problems of the city of the future." Out of eighty club members around fifty took part, only two of whom were women. The average age of the participants I estimated to be thirty. Most members had a university degree.



At the beginning of each session the chairman would introduce an official guest, such as a representative of the faculty of architecture in Moscow University, who would make a speech about his specialty and its links with s.f. Then the club members were given the floor. Their contributions would take up to five minutes and might deal with the cities of the future as depicted by Western writers, such as Clarke and Asimov. The problem of overpopulation as shown in Anglo-American s-f was usually put down to the "class character of capitalist architecture as opposed to the progressive character of socialist architecture." Several speakers concentrated on criticisms of their own city life which are surprisingly familiar to westerners, i.e., the consumer ideology that is increasingly taking hold of the citizens of Soviet conurbations or the danger of manipulation through advertising. Whenever such critical remarks accumulated the chairman would ask the club members "to be more optimistic and think positive." Altogether, it would be appropriate to talk of a series of speeches rather than a discussion. Most of these speeches were on a high rhetorical level and well-informed, some even learned, but there was hardly any interaction among them. The speakers waited for their turn, reeled off their contribution, and often did not take much interest in what was said before or afterwards. Contrary to schedule, the meetings ceased in March after the first three times, and the club adjourned its activities until the autumn. Whether they were actually resumed I do not know as I had left Moscow by then.

Soviet science-fiction fan clubs have a much shorter tradition than western "fandom." They started to develop only about fifteen years ago and never really flourished as did their western counterparts. Judging by what I have described, one might be led to think that this is not surprising because Soviet clubs seem preoccupied with ideological and policical objectives which do not rank among the foremost interests of Soviet readers, as the surveys have demonstrated. However, the main reason for the obvious lack of appeal of the clubs is a different one.

Fandom is a minority refuge. It gets its strength and distinctiveness from the fact that it unites and creates solidarity between people who are conscious and perhaps proud of being a minority. Popular literary forms do not usually have fan clubs, because they lack the attraction of exclusiveness. In the Soviet Union, science-fiction, being part of the citizens' "literary diet," has no need of them. Thus, in this case, the weakness of the fan clubs signals the strength of the genre that they represent.

FOOTNOTES

1) Even Pravda recently testified to this fact: Yu. Smelkov, "Mir fantastiki," 8 May 1976.

2) "O tekh, kto chitayet fantastiku," Narodnoye obrazovaniye, number 1, 1965, pp. 118-119.

3) Fantastika i vek NTR. "Znaniye," M., 1974, pp. 5-6.

4) "Sovremennoye obshchestvo i nauchnaya fantastika," Voprosy filosofii, number 6, 1967, pp. 32-43.

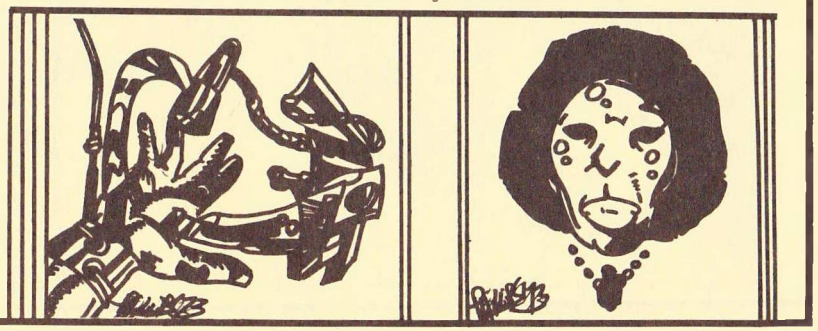
5) Cf. B. Rullkötter, Die Wissenschaftliche Phantastik der Sowjetunion, Herbert Lang Bern, Peter Lang Frankfurt/Main, 1974, pp.211-215.

6) The number of s-f translations into Russian was increased considerably in the sixties.

7) G. Al'tov, "Fantastika i chitateli," Problemy sociologii pechati, II vypusk, "Nauka," Novosibirsk, 1970, pp. 74-91; Klub lyubiteley fantastiki, "Ot Moskvy do Vitila," Fantastika 1967, "Molodaya gvardiya," M., 1968, pp. 409-414.

8) According to V. Graaf only 0.3% of North Americans are regular readers of s-f: Homo Futurus, Claassen Verlag, Hamburg und Düsseldorf, 1971, p. 37.

9) Quoted from the club's introductory hand-out.



PORTRAIT AFTER MONET

wistful wise and melancholy
sat a lady, turned in thought
on a stone beside a water
soundless under the sun.

into the pond and down she looked,
softly reading deeper currents,
through the sun-flaked easy mirror
sadly reading wiser thoughts.

willfully wise and melancholy
sits a lady, turned in thought,
upon a stone, beside a water,
alone in the quiet sun.

-- P. McCaffrey --

HERE-THEN American SF in the Thirties

On Being Scared out of One's Knickers: Carl Claudy's Kane-Dolliver Juveniles

by

James Wade

When I was seven years old, in 1937, the teen-age son of the "egg lady," Mrs. Arnold, who delivered farm produce to our door in a rattletrap flivver several times a week, gave me a stack of year-old magazines he was finished with, mostly pulps with garish covers. I was much impressed, browsing through these, and particularly recall a drawing of a rocket zooming into space captioned with a phrase apparently from the story it illustrated: "Up, up, up, in a geyser of golden light..."

However my father, representing the mores of the day that found pulp magazines decadent and unsuitable for children--as some of them indeed were--promptly took away my treasure trove and I never saw those copies again...

Ten years later, when I was methodically collecting the work of H.P. Lovecraft, the only way to obtain his novel, At the Mountains of Madness, besides ferreting out the fantastically-priced out of print Arkham House volume, Beyond the Wall of Sleep, was to buy the three 1936 issues of Astounding Stories that serialized the novel. I purchased them for about five dollars each, I recall, and was paging through one of them when, sure enough, there was the picture and "Up, up, up, in a geyser of golden light..."

But to get back to my father and 1937--the same year that he expropriated my pulp magazines, my father gave me a subscription to the supposedly staid and proper journal The American Boy combined with The Youth's Companion. Since he did not censor this apparently respectable material, little did he suspect that I skipped all the dull sports and detective stories and fastened upon a truly lurid science-fiction serial that began in the very first issue I received, that of December 1937. It was called "Doom Tocsin" and was written by one Carl H. Claudy in a judiciously adapted style and vocabulary that kept me reading in horrified fascination at a level far above my age.

In the five years that I continued to receive The American Boy, until its 1941 discontinuation during a war when American boys had more important things to do, I read very little else in it other than the stories of Carl H. Claudy. There were not too many of these...another long serial and three short stories, but I eagerly devoured them, even though my nascent habit of literary criticism assured me even then that "Doom Tocsin" was by far the best, a judgement verified by frequent rereading.

Later, in college days, I bought in a second-hand store four juveniles in book form by Claudy, which predated that epochal work, though all without exception had appeared in The American Boy, and all dealt with the continuing remarkable exploits of the brilliant scientist-adventurer Dr. Alan Kane and his muscle-bound sidekick Ted Dolliver.

Recently I regained access to all this material and reread it once more, coming to the conclusion that Claudy's work was worth at least this footnote to the history of popularization of science-fiction among the young. This, then, is my belated tribute to the first of the many fantasy writers who over the years have succeeded in scaring the pants off me; in this case so long ago that they were knickers.

Claudy's work, of course, was not the only juvenile science-fantasy published in this period, but it will be considered here in isolation, not in comparison with such better-known books as the Tom Swift series, the novels of Roy Rockwood, and the perennial Burroughs output, which was by this time beginning to be considered semi-juvenile in level.

All of Claudy's work that is known to me is part of what might be called the Kane-Dolliver Saga. In a sense the six book-length stories constitute an artistically rounded whole, since the loose ends of the plot of the first tale, The Mystery Men of Mars (book version, Grosset and Dunlap, 1933), are tied up in the last one, "Return to Mars" (magazine serial, American Boy, 1939), when the adventurers rescue a colleague abandoned under duress during their earlier interplanetary trip.

The books have an overall consistency in that events occurring in the course of one are often foreshadowed in earlier tales and referred to in later ones. There is no continuing villain, only a shifting series of mad scientists, oily espionage agents, industrial spies, and of course alien beings and monsters of one sort or another.

The stock characters are Dr. Alan Kane, professor of physics at an unnamed but obviously midwestern university, his athletic friend Ted Dolliver, erstwhile pro wrestler and explorer, and Oki, the faithful-shrewd-comical Japanese servant they inherit from Alan's uncle in an early story. The cast could be duplicated in any pulp magazine, comic book, or radio drama of the era.

The only inconsistency lies in the transfer of the heroic duo from student to faculty status between the third book, The Land of No Shadow, and the fourth, The Blue Grotto Terror, with disconcerting swiftness. Kane sprouts a doctorate, a full professorship, and crop of "prematurely grey hair" while a story line planted in the earlier volume develops without hiatus in the later one.

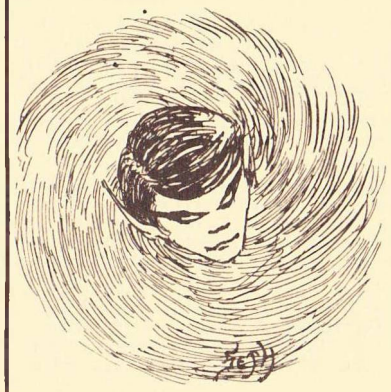
Dolliver similarly becomes an instructor in the athletic department, perhaps to obviate the embarrassing suspicion of being Dr. Kane's kept man, since they continue to share quarters, and an obsessive personal devotion, just as they did while student room mates.

There is of course no female or romantic interest in this genre, and it has often been remarked that fervent male friendships innocently take the place of this factor. The all-male worlds of sports, science, crime detection, and exploration recorded in The American Boy and its competitors would today be regarded as suspicious if not downright unhealthy.

The close companionship, amounting to cozy domesticity, between Alan and Ted might not be intrinsically suspect, given the ground rules for this sort of fiction, but Claudy does lay it on a bit thick sometimes. What, for instance, is one to make of the following passage, from The Blue Grotto Terror?--"/Alan Kane/ looked at a sight of which he never tired--Ted Dolliver's unusual body. At the red-headed figure standing on the springboard Alan gazed with ungrudging admiration, as he had a thousand times before." There follows a loving if not lascivious inventory of this big bruiser's musculature. (Luckily this type of passage becomes rarer and less rarified in the later and better stories.) One feels that today's American boy is better off psychologically skimming through Penthouse.

The Claudy stories are set down in a straightforward, generally undistinguished "muscular" style, and the dialogue is always at least faintly implausible. (The playful heroes kittenishly nickname each other Mastodon and Shrimp, alternating with the inevitable Brains and Brawn.) The authorial attitude here--unlike that in many hardcore pulps of the period--is one of respect and enthusiasm for science. The evil scientist and his dastardly devices are always treated as a correctable aberration.

All the shorter tales and several of the novels are developed in the manner of detective stories, to the extent that Alan Kane is often moved to murmur, "I'm a scientist, not a policeman"--but his civic spirit never permits him to turn down an intriguing bit of sleuth work.



Claudy's three short stories in the Saga are rather perfunctory, as if they were speeded-up scenarios for book-length tales. "Holes--Holes--Holes" (January 1939) deals with sound as a mind-destroying weapon; time of course has validated this thesis, without improving its fictional embodiment. "Tongue of Beasts" (May 1939) features a machine by means of which communications with a gorilla is established, with results similar to those in Poe's "Murders in the Rue Morgue." "Terror by Temperature" (October 1940), the last Claudy piece to appear in The American Boy, involves an attempt by a mad scientist to melt the polar icecap and drown the world's coastal areas. Neither the ideas nor the treatments are especially memorable.

One factor that gives some unexpected psychological resonance to the novels is that in evoking a sinister atmosphere for the outlandish places Alan and Ted visit, Claudy tends consistently to draw upon what must have been his own close observation or direct experience of neurotic anxiety or acute depression. Whether on Mars, inside a hollow earth, thrown back in time or sideways into another dimension, his characters suffer undefined malaise, worry, and a general funk that is rather endearing in contrast to their normal euphoric bravado. One example from "Doom Tocsin" will suffice:

> There was another heaviness that they soon came to accept as a part of life in Subterrestria, as Alan named the unknown land. It was a heaviness of spirit. Even the cheerful Ted found himself brooding over death and pain and misery.
>
> "Look here, Alan," he demanded, "are you sad for any reason?"
>
> "I think it's electrical," the scientist answered cryptically. "Yes, to answer your question--I'm depressed--but for no reason I can point out."

Plotwise, Claudy sometimes seems perfunctory and even anti-climactic. In the second Mars story. it is surely a letdown after the thrilling escape from robotic Martian brain-snatchers to conclude with a return to Earth and efforts once more to outwit mere Axis agents trying to steal the spaceflight formula.

Again, the problem of escaping from an alien dimension and its undefined menaces is dragged out for an uncomfortably long time in Land of No Shadow. (It may be noted that the magazine serials seem to move at a faster and more satisfying pace than the books, although the latter also originated in the pages of the same magazine; either because the editors judiciously trimmed the serials, or because the author injudiciously padded the books: it is impossible to tell without direct comparison.)

The themes of the novels, with a few exceptions, are not notably original either. The two Mars books depict a soulless underground society of "bugs" and their robots dedicated fanatically to some undefined "good of the whole," to the extent of thrusting themselves under rollers voluntarily so their juices may feed the vast tyrannical brains which pursue only esoteric mathematical knowledge.

Alan Kane calls this Martian society "socialism to the Nth degree," the only political comment I have found in Claudy's work. All this, as well as the anti-gravity metal of which their spaceship is made, obviously derives from H.G. Wells's First Men in the Moon.

It is amusing to note that on the second Mars trip our dynamic duo take along the popular radio adventure character Jack Armstrong, a high school boy, probably for some additional promotional value for the story, and because Alan and Ted are getting a little too mature to embody the juvenile identification factor.

The second book chronologically is A Thousand Years a Minute (book version, G&D 1933) a time-machine story again derived from Wells, but containing the conventional anachronistic juxtaposition of cavemen and dinosaurs.

Land of No Shadow (book version, G&D 1933) is a fourth-dimension story of the type then popular in the pulps, and Claudy comes up with the perhaps borrowed idea of beings as imperceptible and indeed unimaginable to three-dimensional creatures like his heroes as humans would be to inhabitants of Flatland. Unfortunately, however, the author is not able to dramatize this idea effectively, and the story drags woefully in the second half, despite some strong atmospheric touches.

The succeeding Blue Grotto Terror (book version, G&D 1934) is probably the weakest section of the Saga. Ted Dolliver is offstage for more than half the book, and rather surprisingly, the reader misses him. Interest is barely sustained by the fumbling efforts of a very conventional villain to steal Alan's formula for a universal solvent described as using "atomic energy." Eventually Dr. Kane burns a great hole in the earth with this solvent. He and Ted descend in an elevator and discover caverns inhabited by alien beings in the form of weird blue lights that feed vampirically on the hapless pursuing villains. The idea again is fairly fresh, but the story develops awkwardly and unconvincingly.

How the twenty-mile-deep hole of The Blue Grotto Terror squares scientifically with the hollow earth of "Doom Tocsin" (magazine serial, 1937-8) is anybody's guess, but possible inconsistencies do not prevent the latter from being Claudy's most effective treatment of his best original idea--though the tenacious hollow-earth theory had of course been popular from the time of Poe onward.

The story is this. World markets are flooded with cheap gold of a hitherto unknown molecular density, threatening the international economy with chaos. Meantime Dr. Kane is absorbed in pinpointing the location of an agonizing clanging noise picked up by his new sound detection equipment, which locates the sounds five hundred miles straight down beneath Hudson Bay.

The president calls upon Alan to find and stop the illegal flow of gold, and he agrees, if he is given a free hand, a large seaplane, and unlimited funds. After a brush with a ruthless financier-adventurer named Steenerson in New York, Alan and Ted fly to Greenland and, steering low over polar ice, enter a gigantic cavern mouth that leads to a hollow earth and a vast continent of tropical vegetation, lit by an electrical glow whose pale reflection forms the aurora borealis and whose seldom-glimpsed mist-shrouded skies show constellations in the form of outlines of unknown seas and continents on the opposite side of the inner globe.

Here lies the source of both the heavy gold and the agonizing clanging; as Alan foresaw, the sound comes from a cathedral-size dome of solid gold, the Doom Tocsin, rung by monkey-like natives as a religious ritual, its sound being fatal to those not raised on the bitter herb the natives chew.

But Alan is also forearmed: he has brought along two suits of scale-like metal armour and protective helmets which shield the pair from the sound at all but close range. However Steenerson, who is of course the gold-runner, has followed in another plane and kidnaps Alan, taking him inside the bell and preparing to leave, since without protection the villain must arrange to be far away at the daily ringing of the bell.

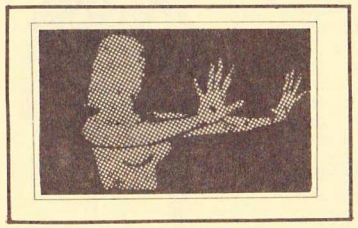
Ted attempts a rescue but is captured too, and Steenerson starts to leave them trussed up, helmets off, to face agonizing death when the clapper of the gigantic bell, dragged by a rope pulled by hundreds of natives, strikes. But Ted bursts loose, and in a fight with Steenerson, breaks the villain's thigh in a wrestling grip. There is barely time for Ted and Alan to put on their helmets and hope for the best before the huge clapper smashes into the side of the bell. In Claudy's words:

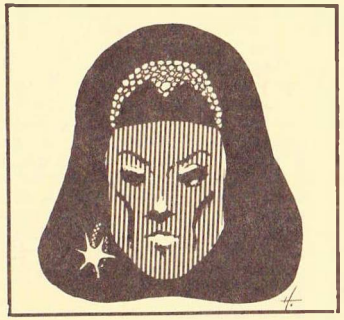
> The crash was devestating. Like the bellow of a thousand huge cannon, like the roar of titanic thunder--a crashing, smashing, destroying blare that laid Ted and Alan prostrate to endure racking pain...Alan saw the flame of the torch weave itself into strange patterns, responding to the blast of sound as the ocean had responded. It was crisscrossed with ridges of light, burning blue and red in strange designs. Then, as if tortured out of existence, it suddenly hissed into darkness...
>
> /Steenerson/ lay as he had fallen, but with his body twisted and bent as if by some great machine. There were flecks of foam on his lips and blood ran from his bitten tongue. Only his eyes implored, and these seemed filmed with the beginning of death...Ted could not hear it through his helmet but he read the words on the writhing lips: "Kill me! Kill me!" begged the gold-runner. "Spare me more torture---kill me!"

Steenerson dies with the second bell-stroke, shrivelled and blackened into a mummylike effigy, but Ted manages to dynamite the bell before the third and potentially fatal clang that not even their protective armour could withstand, and the pair escape from the strange inner world.

For all the dated contrivances and oversimplifications of these juvenile fantasies, "Doom Tocsin" shows that Carl H. Claudy once at least rose to the challenge of creating a gripping and original tale of science and terror.

Or do I still feel that way simply because I first read and reveled in the luridly fascinating delights of "Doom Tocsin" when I was only eight years old?





A BIBLIOGRAPHIC NOTE

The Library of Congress Card Catalog reveals that Carl Harry Claudy was born in 1879. His first books came out in 1912, and concerned baseball and popular science for young people, to judge by the titles. He also wrote books for beginners about photography and model aeroplanes. All of his fiction in book form, with one exception, seems to have been in the juvenile category.

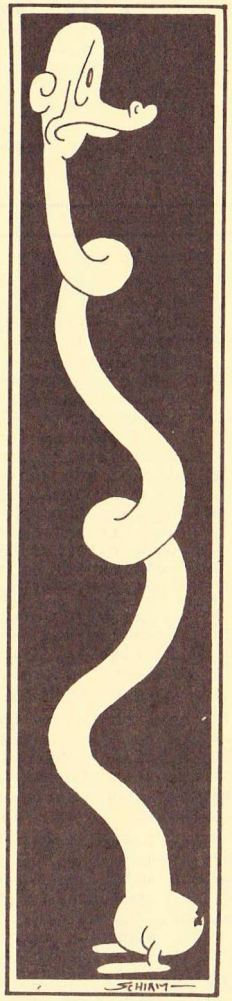
Besides the science-fiction novels examined here, he wrote one book for girls, The Girl Reporter (1930); a pirate story, Pirates by Force (1917); and several adventure books: Partners of the Forest Trail (1915), The Gold He Found (1928), Dangerous Waters (1929) and Treasure of Darkness (1933).

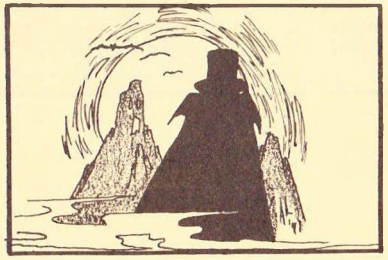
The later science-fiction serials "Doom Tocsin" and "Return to Mars" were apparently never published in book form.

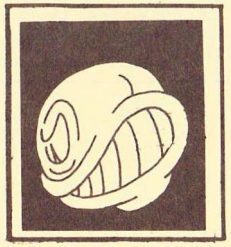
Of Claudy's 44 entries in the Catalogs 1912-1951, some of them reprints, 23 were devoted to Freemasonry, including several plays, some short stories, a poetry anthology he edited, and a pamphlet issued for the George Washington Bicentennial on Washington as a Mason. Freemasonry seems to have been a deep and abiding interest at least as early as 1922.

For the rest, there is one book of verses from newspapers, Busy Lines (1943), and his last known book, Journey to Yesterday (1951), which seems to be a history of the B.F. Adams Press in Washington, published by that company.

D.H. Tuck's Encyclopedia of Science Fiction and Fantasy gives the date of death as 1957, and states that Lester del Rey's anthology Year after Tomorrow (1954) included the novels Land of No Shadow and Mystery Men of Mars (under the title Master Minds of Mars) as well as the story "Tongue of Beasts," a remarkably full representation for a minor figure. (This reference errs in listing Land of No Shadow as "a Dr. Aronson story"; it too is Kane-Dolliver, with Aronson a subsidiary character.)







On Humour in Lovecraft

by

Rob Hollis Miller

Recently I read a statement by Colin Wilson:

> The problem of imagination presented itself to me in a new light one day. I happened to pick up a volume of ghost stories by a writer whom I had never read--H.P. Lovecraft--and browsed through it. The first story, "In the Vault," was about a lazy and inefficient undertaker who makes a coffin too short to house the body of a tall man, and who therefore chops off the feet of the corpse. This happens in an icy winter when the ground is too hard to bury anyone, so the coffins are stored in a shed on the edge of the graveyard. One day the undertaker accidentally locks himself in the shed. He piles coffins on top of one another in order to reach a high window. Uppermost is the coffin of the man without feet. As the undertaker is halfway through the window, he feels his ankles being grasped and bitten. He kicks out wildly and manages to escape. And Lovecraft has saved for the last line the disclosure about the cutting off of the corpse's feet, to give the reader a final thrill of horror.
>
> Clearly, Lovecraft hoped to give his readers nightmares. But he succeeded only in amusing me. It struck me that, treated in a slightly different way--by Petronius or Apuleius, for example--the story could be extremely funny. What was the difference between my state of mind and Lovecraft's?[1]

I have no desire to take Wilson to task for his argument concerning the imagination, but I think he mistook Lovecraft here and thus supplied a bad example to illustrate what he meant to say. Actually, there is humour at times in Lovecraft. This is something that has gone nearly unnoticed. Whether or not the story gives nightmares, it can aim to amuse and horrify simultaneously.

To illustrate the point, let me refer to another story, "Herbert West--Reanimator," and especially to its second part, "The Plague-Demon," which has been reprinted as a story in its own right. A medical student is attempting to perfect a method of reanimating dead bodies, although his experiments are not condoned by the medical school. When the dean, who had been most adamant in his opposition, dies in an epidemic the student performs the experiment on him. Consequently the dean goes on a rampage of murder. West's comment, as with his previous failures: "Damn it, it wasn't quite fresh enough!"[2]

In this case the ironic humour seems undeniable. West meets a poetically justifiable end (similar to the undertaker's in "The Vault").

I don't find it in the least surprising, given Lovecraft's mechanistic view of the universe, that an ironic humour would emerge at times in his writing. In a letter he said:

> I am.../a/ materialist, and regard the universe as wholly purposeless and essentially temporary, incident in the ceaseless and boundless rearrangements of electrons, atoms and molecules which constitute the blind but regular mechanic patterns of cosmic activity.[3]

In Lovecraft's mature stories the humour is changed. In "Pickman's Model" the submerged irony shows up in several places, one being the description of Pickman's pictures.[4]

One, entitled "Subway Accident," shows "a flock of vile things... lumbering up from some unknown catacomb through a crack in the floor of the Boylston Street subway and attacking a crowd of people on the platform."[5] Anyone who does much commuting can associate with that. Another picture contains:

> ...a scene in an unknown vault, where scores of the beasts crowded about one who held a well-known Boston guidebook and was evidently reading aloud. All were pointing to a certain passage, and every face seemed so distorted with epileptic and reverberant laughter that I almost thought I heard the fiendish echoes. The title of the picture was, "Holmes, Lowell and Longfellow Lie Buried in Mount Auburn."

This is satire on a minor segment of a civilization that is a mere blip of "cosmic activity." The transient nature of the universe certainly precludes taking anything very seriously. Another more subtle example of satire from the same story is the description of Reid, an art critic:

> Reid, you know, had just taken up comparative pathology, and was full of pompous "inside stuff" about the biological or evolutionary significance of this or that mental or physical symptom. He said Pickman repelled him more and more every day, and almost frightened him toward the last--that the fellow's features and expression were slowly developing in a way he didn't like; in a way that wasn't human. He had a lot of talk about diet, and said Pickman must be abnormal and eccentric to the last degree.

Here is a characteristic of the critic or scientist whose pet theory, supposedly based in scientific testing, quickly becomes incredible (the types still abound today) and who doesn't realize the limitations of his theory from the viewpoint of a materialistic philosophy. And the satire is indirect because Reid turns out to be nearly right about Pickman's physical changes, which the narrator doesn't realize until the end of the story.

In another story, "The Strange High House in the Mist," (written the same year as "Pickman's Model") humour plays a more obvious part. The house in question is perched high upon a cliff face above the coastal town of Kingsport. The only door faces out toward the ocean; entrance is seemingly impossible. The inhabitants of the town avoid even looking at the cottage, about which there are vague rumours as to age and origin. A professor of philosophy comes to Kingsport for a break in his routine and of course is immediately attracted to the mysterious house. By climbing down from the top of the cliff, he manages finally to reach the dwelling.

The story's baroque style conjures up a mythic, murky atmosphere, into which come philosopher Olney and his bland family. The contrast is total and effective:

> Then one summer there came a philosopher into Kingsport. His name was Thomas Olney, and he taught ponderous things in a college by Narrangansett Bay. With stout wife and romping children he came, and his eyes were weary with seeing the same things for many years and thinking the same well-disciplined thoughts.
>
> (Dagon, p. 261)

While Olney is in the home he witnesses the performance of cosmic demons while his family is absorbed in the mundane:

> All night in Kingsport they watched that lofty cliff when the storms and the mists gave them glimpses of it, and when toward the small hours the little dim windows went dark they whispered of dread and disaster. And Olney's children and stout wife prayed to the bland proper god of Baptists, and hoped that the traveller would borrow an umbrella and rubbers unless the rain stopped by morning.

Olney returns, altered by his experiences of the night in the High House:

> And ever since that hour, through dragging years of grayness and weariness, the philosopher has laboured and eaten and slept and done uncomplaining the suitable deeds of a citizen. Not any more does he long for the magic of further hills, or sigh for secrets that peer like green reefs from a bottomless sea. The sameness of his day no longer gives him sorrow, and well-disciplined thoughts have grown enough for his imagination.

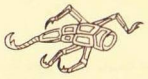
And what of his family? "His wife waxes stouter and his children rosier and more useful." And they never return to Kingsport--he, because he has lost his curiosity and imagination; they, because "they disliked funny old houses and complained that the drains were impossibly bad."

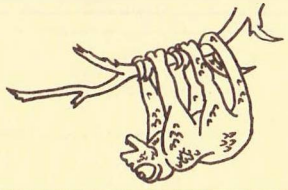
Lovecraft uses humour here as a means of juxtaposing the banal people who worry about umbrellas and rubbers and bad drains with the horror of a man losing his soul. Professor Olney is a character who will escape from the humdrum, well-ordered existence gladly, but cannot successfully, and finally he is even more pathetic than his family.

Lovecraft extends this theme further. The story is, after all, about the High House, and after Olney's brief visit to it a change takes place. "And folk tell of pleasing voices heard singing there, and of laughter that swells with joys beyond earth's joys." There is heard the "tinkle of laughter," "laughing chorus," "strange revels," and these grow louder with Olney's visit. Somehow the cosmic laughter increases as Olney's spirit decreases.

Lovecraft's humour here is stark and pessimistic, and expresses well the intent of his story.

It's a shame that Wilson missed all this. Probably it would not have greatly changed his opinion of Lovecraft, but it would have changed his perspective on Lovecraft's achievement.





FOOTNOTES

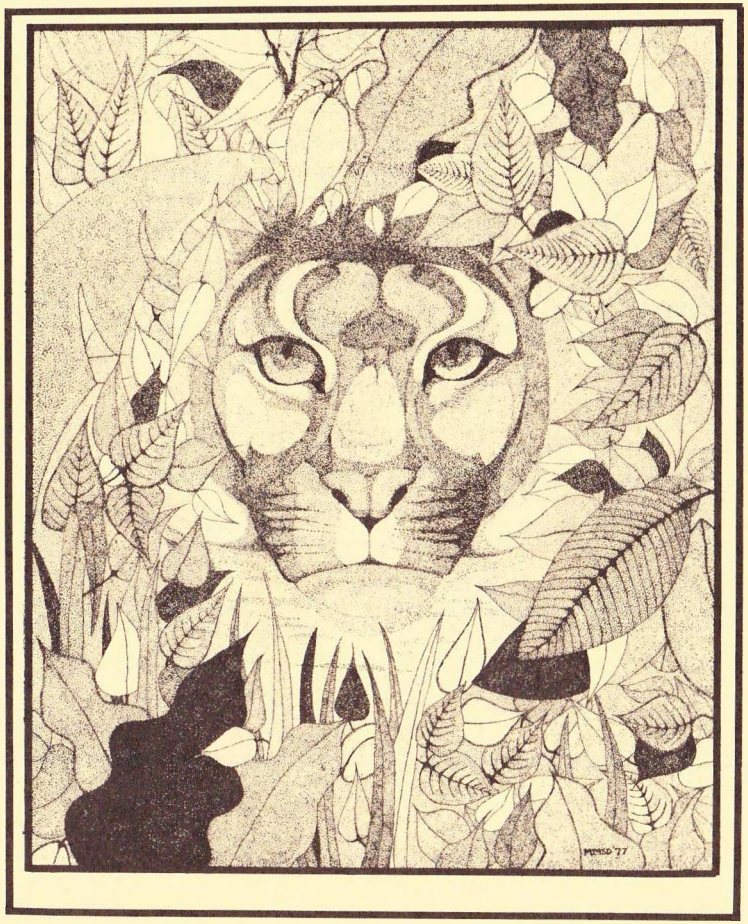
1) The Strength to Dream: Literature and the Imagination (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1975), pp. vi-vii.

2) Dagon and Other Macabre Tales (Sauk City: Arkham House, 1965), p. 132.

3) Selected Letters (Sauk City: Arkham House, 1968), II, 41.

4) H.P. Lovecraft: A Symposium (Gainesville: Riverside Quarterly, 1963), p. 8.

5) The Dunwich Horror and Others (Sauk City: Arkham House, 1963), p. 27.



There seems no need for scarecrows
in austere March
when the dark, driving wind
sweeps crows across fields
and herds low clouds
before a rising, swelling moon.

The crows smear across the moon,
calling above the scarecrows,
above the cold clap of March,
above the white fields
and beat through the wind,
shouldering the clouds,

scudding like clouds
through winter-residued March.
Alone in stubbled fields,
drowned in liquid light, scarecrows
dance on sticks. Flooded by the moon.
Driven by the wind.

Dangling and dancing in the wind.
The crows are bouyant like clouds,
rising above fallowed fields
and wind-swept, light-soaked scarecrows
addled in the fullness of the moon.
The rasp of the straw is loud in March;

the tattered coats flap in March
louder than the beating wings, the steady wind.
The crows cry to the scarecrows
fixed before the tide of the light of the moon,
fixed beneath the stampeding clouds,
fixed in the clay of the fields;

set and dumb in the hearts of the fields.
While circling before the moon
are the bumping, butting clouds.
And the sound of Spring carried on the wind
of dark, deadly March
is the crackling of the wooden bones of scarecrows.

Yet, scarecrows will remain past March
and past its blasting wind, beneath the evanescent clouds,
in fields naked and crow-plagued, outlasting even the steady moon.

-- Ronald Rae --

RHETORIC

The rhetorical sky
Reiterates, and reiterates.
The wind, the rain
The bastard hail
Pockmarks my face,
As I scurry along
Crowded streets,
Lifting my tongue
High above the crowd,
With snake eye
And taste the air.

Slipping out of my skin,
I slip into a brown tweed suit,
Horn-rimmed glasses and a briefcase,
Then tuck my body neatly
Between a trench coat
And walk
To urgent appointments.

Where the sand and gravel
Of rhetoric
Hardens in my appendages
Like concrete.
And I stand as a statue
In Central Park, with movement
On all sides,
But none in the middle.

-- Jan E. M. Haas --

In the night
without you
there is a sound
of leaves unfolding
without rain.

Without a sound the river
burns up the moonlight.
Without you there is
walking among stars
alone.

-- Russell Salamon --

BACKSTREET

Straight as the crow flies
To the yellow corn
Or the muskrat swims
To the sweet brown cattail,
So I sneak up to your back door.

Down the backalleys
And across the side streets
Over fences
And through a neighbor's backyard
Into your body

To find a refuge
From drugs and other women;
The job I just got fired from
And the rent I'm not going to pay.

I called home for help?

My mother wouldn't have me.
And my father bought me
For a lousy fifty bucks
That I gave away,
Crying
On 42nd Street and Broadway
At 4:00 in the morning.

-- Jan E. M. Haas --

HERE-THERE & EVERYWHEN

On Horror in Lovecraft

by

James Wade

Barton Levi St. Armand, The Roots of Horror in the Fiction of H.P. Lovecraft, Elizabethtown: Dragon Press, 1977, 102 pp.

Barton St. Armand (whose name sounds like that of a character in some lost early Baroque HPL story) has contributed a brief but lucid and perceptive account of Lovecraft's aims and achievements in the field of the horror story.

His contributions are mainly three: a distinction between terror and horror, based on definitions by Mrs. Radcliffe, the early Gothic novelist; a Jungian analysis of Lovecraft's symbols; and the use of Bernard Waldrop's concept of viscosity as a central theme in horror fiction to explain Lovecraft's obsession with a descent to undifferentiated slime.

While horror involves only an inward revulsion, says St. Armand, "terror expands the soul outward; it leads us to or engulfs us in the sublime, the immense, the cosmic." Thus it becomes apparent that whether Lovecraft was directly conscious of it or not, his later "cosmic" fiction evokes that terror that is the precursor of awe and reverence rather than mere horror. In this sense the atheist author might even be called a religious seeker.

The Jungian element enters St. Armand's discussion of "The Rats in the Walls," which he analyzes as not necessarily Lovecraft's best story but as the one where he most clearly delineated his basic subject-matter. Jung's dream of a house whose upper storeys represent the consciousness of rational and civilized man, but whose cellar vaults symbolize the preconscious subhuman heritage of the mind, is equated with Exham priory, whose tenant is drawn inexorably (by those "viscous" rats--the phrase is in the story) to explore the caves underneath and merge himself with the primal slime of his subhuman ancestors.

Citing writers as dissimilar as Henry Adams and Arthur Machen, the analyst discovers a pattern of horrified rejection of Darwinian evolution linking man to prehuman predators and ultimately to the undifferentiated primal jelly of life. The intensity of Lovecraft's projection of this nightmare vision, and his Herculean efforts to transcend it in some act of reverence to an awe-inspiring universe account for the power of his fiction, however flawed stylistically it may be. "Even while we laugh at the style, we shudder at the vision," Gerald Jonas is quoted as observing.

And the crowning example of the cosmic vision beyond terror in Lovecraft's work is found, surprisingly enough, by this commentator within the garish pulp-magazine outlines of Lovecraft's collaboration, "Through the Gates of the Silver Key," written on an outline by E. Hoffman Price, whose climactic episode St. Armand compares to Henry James for stylistic subtlety and complexity. His quotation bears him out, and makes us wish that Lovecraft had been able to embody this vision in a tale more worthy of it.

St. Armand's book is not consistently excellent. Some of its passages sound like a good Master's thesis and no more. There are some spelling and typographical errors that might have been easily eliminated. But all in all it is a worthy and original contribution to what promises to become an endless spate of critical works on this strange, elusive man and his work. As such it is worthy of close attention and assimilation.

COUNT DRACULA

REVIEWED BY

Thomas M. Egan

Produced in Great Britain in 1975, script by Jeremy Lloyd, directed by Clive Donner, rated PG (90 minutes); cast: David Niven (Count Dracula), Teresa Graves (Dracula's wife), Jennie Linden, Peter Bayliss, Nicky Henson, Carol Cleveland...

This truly unfortunate film is a blow to the whole tradition of Supernatural Horror. Presumably, Mel Brooks's success with a black and white production of Young Frankenstein (using the satirical tradition in films with great effect) inspired this imitative take-off on Dracula. The cast is competent-to-good (and all British too, except for one American, Teresa Graves), and David Niven tries to act in his tradition of the suave gentleman-of-leisure seeking to outfox the world, this time as the aristocratic vampire with a problem.

Niven and his co-star, the ever-beautiful Miss Graves (whose career was created by television's insipid Get Christie Love) try hard with the horrendous script but end in failure. Satire and "black humour" just don't come across with an unbelievable plot.

The cynical humour is supposed to come across with theories of racial transformation. Supposedly, an accidental transfusion of Negro blood into Dracula's wife in order to resuscitate her into resuming her existence as a contented vampire in Transylvania causes all the problems. The white Countess changes into a 1920's style "sassy jive-speaking" Black Flapper. Niven's horror turns into a determination as a gentleman to rectify this mistake by getting appropriate amounts of white female blood "transfusions." Now, there happens to be an ambitious English author and script director who has decided to do some publicity shots of the Vampire Legend in Transylvania and it happens that the local Playboy Club of London decides to back him financially and with a half-dozen buxom models or "Bunnies" to add flavour to this publicity film and it happens that they meet the "descendant" of Count Dracula, who is of course the Original, and are invited to his castle for hospitality's sake and then...Well, Niven is a polite vampire whether taking his victims (all beautiful girls of course) in Transylvania or in London. He pursues his quest with a grim determination and finally succeeds. Through a sad mischance at the last moment, Teresa Graves bites him before she can be turned back into a "Snow White" princess. And then, two black vampires fly back to the battle-scarred beauty of Transylvania. The Playboy Club and the unhappy author are left in London to try to clean up the mess.

Horror and humour through racial jokes are intermixed in such a way that the onlooker is left befuddled as to whether to cry or snicker from one moment to the next. The satire is not aided by the commercialism of the British Playboy Empire whose London Clubs collaborated and paid for the production of this film.

I suppose one can put the blame on Jeremy Lloyd for the ineptness of this film. Satire on the Supernatural Horror theme can be well-done (e.g., the 1969 Roman Polanski production, The Fearless Vampire Killers, where the plot was believable and the sardonic humour of the Polish-born director was expressed in an undertone of cynicism at human foibles), and David Niven has a good record in films of light satire. But this one has no real content and some of the killings just don't make for any kind of humour, even sardonic. So despite a decent cast, this film falls apart in a welter of sexual, racial, and blood-gushing jokes.

the Seasonal Fan
Jim Harmon

Tom Mix Rides Again

Tom Mix turned from his seat at the bar, pushed back his Stetson, and said, "Well, hello there, Jimmy!" Just as if he had known me all his life.

The above should be fantastic enough for a magazine dealing in science-fiction and fantasy. Considering that this happened in 1975 and that Tom Mix was killed in an automobile crash in 1940. Of course, I've managed to write more about Tom Mix in s-f fanzines than any other man alive, for perilously close to thirty years. About that long ago, I wrote about the Tom Mix radio show (along with more conventional fantasy programmes like Lights Out) in Langley Searles's Fantasy Commentator. (I was about twelve years old.) At least one movie made by movie actor Tom Mix (The Miracle Rider, a Mascot serial) is science-fiction, as well as some radio stories and the Ralston comic books based on the broadcast series. So there is a relation between Mix and fantasy. But enough of one for his ghost to appear before me?

Perhaps I should write "Tom Mix" with quotes, but this man greeting me had been Tom Mix to me (without quotes) all of my childhood and probably had been more important in framing my concept of Mix than the real motion picture actor. This man was Curley Bradley, who had played the part of Mix on the radio for many years. I could dimly remember an earlier actor in the role, but I had always preferred Curley. Now a middle-aged kid, I was meeting my hero for the first time.

As suits a man who played a character who was not only a cowboy but a great detective, a man of mystery, the whereabouts of Curley Bradley had been cloaked in shadows for decades. I had made a number of inquiries to AFTRA and other actors' guilds for years, asked his former co-workers, everything. There were legends -- that he was managing a tiny radio station somewhere in the Southwest, that he was in a veterans' hospital somewhere. None proved true.

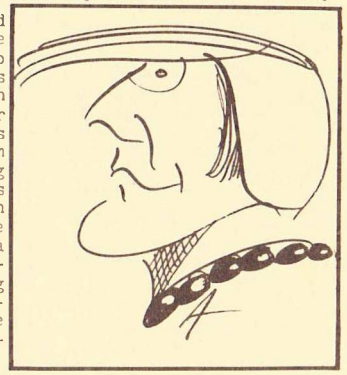
Years passed and I occupied myself with writing science-fiction, nostalgia books like The Great Radio Heroes and Great Television Heroes, editing Monsters of the Movies magazine.

One day in April last year, I received a visit from somebody who likes my books and who drops in on me about once a year--Bob Walters. A fan particularly of Western movies, Bob usually talks about the real, late Tom Mix and other stars with me. This visit I offered him a copy of a reprint edition I had done of a Tom Mix radio manual booklet. "I have the original of one of these," Bob said. "Curley Bradley gave me one a few months ago."

I felt something like an electric shock pass over me. This man had talked to Curley Bradley, literally and truly. To me, Curley had been as elusive as Howard Hughes and Amelia Earhart combined. My fellow writer and editor, Ron Haydock, was also there at the time, and although not as interested in radio greats as I, either sensed or shared my surprise, from his own reaction.

Bob Walters seemed to have regretted speaking so quickly. The thought crossed my mind that he might like to be the ultimate collector -- the only one who knew where Curley Bradley was. I got him to tell a little more of how he had met Curley -- some years ago through Curley's mother, a remarkable woman who had just died a few months before. He told me that Curley spent a lot of time at a veterans' organization in a neighbouring town. I thought this would give me enough information to find him, but I asked Bob if he would ask Curley if he would mind my visiting him.

Two days later, Bob called to tell me that Curley would be glad to see me, and gave me the phone number. I phoned almost immediately, and talked to Curley. The voice was older, deeper, but the voice of radio's Tom Mix. I was about eight years old again. This led to the meeting at the veterans' club where Ron Haydock and I met Curley.



Beneath the Stetson, the face had aged too, but the voice and personality were much the same. I listened mostly, to Curley tell of his work in the business world for many years. He had gotten that job to be near his invalid mother in her final years. (Several marriages before his recent one had only left him poorer and wiser.) He talked of working in radio, of leaving work in the movies for radio, which he loved. (He had been a stuntman with the real Tom Mix in the silents, but he prefers Buck Jones as a man and Western star.) In an early talkie he did the riding and the singing voice of John Gilbert. One reviewer noted: "If Gilbert could act the way he can ride and sing, his success in talkies would be assured."

As he talked, a plan began formulating in my mind. I had saved a few bucks from the monster magazine operation, and had been thinking of trying to do a syndicated radio series, probably some sort of science-fiction/mystery/horror series. But here was "Tom Mix" sitting next to me at the bar -- and now he was mentioning that he was going to be retiring from business in just a few days!

"Curley, how about doing the Mix show again?" I said. "We could get some of the old gang, and do it for syndication. I don't know about getting the rights to the 'Tom Mix' name. You could just use your own name, Curley Bradley. You did that in that Singing Marshal series you had for several years after the Mix show went off."

Ron Haydock, next stool over, just about fell off. Of course, he had gone up the mountain road to Carlton Morse's castle to get the last remaining transcriptions of I Love a Mystery with me, so he should know I'd dare anything where dramatic radio was concerned.

Curley did not have to be pressed to agree.

A few weeks later, we had assembled a cast featuring Richard Gulla, who had been a radio actor in Chicago near the end of dramatic radio; Kirk Alyn, primarily a movie actor (as the original Superman, as everybody must know) but who had done some radio work; George DeNormand, another movie actor and stuntman; Forrest Lewis, Curley's original sidekick on Tom Mix (although all too briefly with us -- because of advancing years, he doesn't care to work too much); Ron Haydock (who had done screen acting and narration) and, of course, me. I played Curley's second sidekick, a deputy named Dallas. (I had done some acting on educational FM stations with such people as TV vampire Barry Atwater, and have made dozens of radio and TV appearances, occasionally appearing in sketches with Steve Allen, etc.)

I won't say the acting styles were an immediate perfect blending. The final product does not have the polish of a programme made for radio in the Forties. I don't see how this is possible until there are dozens of actors and technicians working every day in radio drama again. But the new programme -- Curley Bradley's Trail of Mystery -- compares favourably with some of the few new shows being done for radio, in the opinion of my mother and other unbiased critics. Kris Neville, famous s-f writer, says he can't tell the difference between our show and one of the old shows done in 1948 -- but then, he is a better judge of wines.

I wish I could say that the new Curley Bradley show is a tremendous success. At this moment, a number of stations are considering it. I have a modest mail order business selling cassettes of the existing shows to collectors ($3.50 each for three cassettes of two different shows each from 19131 Victory #9, Reseda, CA 92335). At the moment, Curley has been called back to work as a "consultant" at more than he used to get at his old job. I've stopped writing Curley Bradley scripts -- yes, I wrote them, except for two by Haydock -- and am now working on a novel. We all have hopes that we can sell the original series of ten shows, and perhaps even do others.

The whole experience was to me like actually living a dream. I guess I'll never fly in a rocketship to Mongo with Flash Gordon, or ride the silver screen with Gene Autry. But by god, I did stand beside Curley Bradley at a microphone and play "Tom Mix's" deputy!

This sort of seemed a culmination of all the radio show tape collecting, the books about movies and radio, the articles on comic books and box-top giveaways. With meeting and working with Curley, I think I have at last made a peace with my childhood. I'll return there again -- and I would particularly like to return to do some more Curley Bradley shows -- but if I do, it will be my decision, not my compulsion.

Unfortunately, according to tradition, after writers make their peace with childhood, they formulate their philosophy of life and make their peace with death. It would be nice to experience a few years of maturity before having to deal with senility.

VALENTINES DAY, 1974

love, i always seem
to be sitting down to say

love: i don't know
how to say it
properly how to
act it

these poems
a vale in time
stopp'd by the repeated
assertions of
"love"

and the times i try
to live it
only
to discover
love
it's there in the act
when you aren't thinking
love at all:

where we arrive
occasionally

perhaps
if we're lucky

& perhaps we
sometimes are

-- Douglas Barbour --

CHIAROSCURO AND APOCALYPSE, THE DREAM

Chiaroscuro and apocalypse, the dream
in bold relief of oceans rolling blue and muted
sweet in depths of their own time. And there,
Somewhere within the waterfall that harbours your
delight
are sails filling with a devil-breasted wind
that grins a grin of centuries
and moans for your embrace.

The kiss reflected in a tepid pool will have a voice
but only you will know.
Her nakedness her shame, the banshee at your side
will roll her body into yours
for all of time and
Dream the second coming.
you will have pity on her and
you will smile on her
and you will utter lightning
on the waves.

-- Bruce Meyers --

Calligraphy of wild birds
in dark tapestries of sky
and swirling kaleidials
of fugitive leaves

Calliste of the surf board
A callipygian sea spun courtesan
in a polka dot bikini

Carnival calliope --
the mind's insidious power
of association
subtle modulations of sound --
lunar plains strewn with junk
and massacres

-- Peter Dillingham --

PERCEPTIONS OF SCIENCE FICTION

A special issue of Pacific Quarterly Moana devoted to science-fiction; guest-editor, Colin J. Lester.....

Contents of the July 1979 issue:

"The Future without a Future," an interview with Stanislaw Lem,

Darko Suvin, "Three World Paradigms for Science-Fiction,"

Patricia Warrick, "A Science Fiction Aesthetic,"

Bruce Ferguson, "Songs of the Southern Weyr,"

Norman Simms, "M.K. Joseph and Time-Travel,"

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