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FROM TENNESSEE TO TULSA

I had been all set to "update" Brad Linaweaver's interview, done in '76, by announcing that its subject, William Tenn, was leaving Academia to go Out West and resume full-time writing. But the rumour turns out false--so in addition to the U.S.'s most underrated football team (which deserved Number One rank after defeating USC's Trojans) Penn State also retains the country's most underrated s-f writer. In any case, the dialogue in these pages confirms a repeated thesis of my own: that a critic sometimes discerns things in a literary work that are unperceived by the author himself. Finally, it's editor's luck that the Tenn story I remember most vividly, "Brooklyn Project," has the same theme as "Thus We Frustrate Charlemagne," my (and perhaps Sheryl Smith's) favourite story by R.A. Lafferty, this issue's other Featured Author.

SHOCKS OF RECOGNITION

Alumnae and alumni both will recognize "Stanislaw Lem's The Investigation," by Stan Fogel, as another reprint from RQ's ill-fated 24th issue. Continuing our own investigation of Lem himself, number 27 will contain an evaluation, by Frank Bertrand, of his literary criticism. There'll also be a final reprint, Lauri Anderson's "Letter from Smyrna," on post-Byzantine s-f. Encores are not presently contemplated for 24's lead items, by R.A. Lafferty and Pat Hodgell, because those pages, I think, were legible even to the untrained eye.

MONSTERS, CINEMATIC AND OTHERWISE

In this issue starts a new column, Steve Dimeo's Film Clips, which RQ's future speeded-up schedule (semi-annual instead of bi-annual) will enable me to print while its subject-matter is still Contemporary Cinema rather than Films from Antiquity. Steve also edits Oregon Review (née Transition), a fantasy-oriented literary journal whose latest issue contains two Weird Tales, one scanning alternate personal time-lines and another, some monstrous aspects of magazine publishing. There's also some acidic verse by Erica Jong, an articulation of What Everybody Should Know about Sylvia Plath, and a finely-honed review of Carl Sagan's The Dragons of Eden. Not every article is of such quality, but whoever sends $3 (for two issues) to the editor (537 N. Lincoln, Hillsboro, OR 97234) is sure to receive full value.

The number after your name on the mailing label indicates the issue (this being number 26) on which your subscription expires. Subscription rate: $5/four issues. Back issues are $1.25 each.

Tracing the Subconcious

Lafferty's Short Stories: Some Mystagogic Goshwow

Sheryl Smith

Editor's Note: What follows had been originally requested "by this person with an ordinal for a last name" (Guy Lillian III) for a chapbook to be distributed at a Southeastcon, where R.A. Lafferty was to be guest of honour (which will explain the references to convention activities like parties and roof-top missle launching). Sheryl remarks that the initial composition of this paper was "ten weeks of nothing but list-scribbling," all of which left her with about 75 titles especially worth discussing plus a sense of trying to organize "an unorganizable topic." But not wanting to lose this chance of proselytizing an entire convention, she finally did the undoable. I ask the reader to pass over lightly this critic's depreciating comments on literary analysis in general and her own, in particular: one can say only that if everybody possessed Sheryl Smith's ability at textual discrimination, most critical writing would be unnecessary--but then so would journals like the RQ.

I can always start by putting Lafferty into one of Smith's Homespun Larger Literary Contexts--in fact, since I've never begun one of these things any other way, it's probably unavoidable. There are, for my purposes, two major schools of s-f (and indeed, of fiction in general if it should come to that). The socio-anthropological school, which is the majority, uses the genre primarily to construct environments, both natural (the Analog planet-builders, et al.) and social (the political extrapolators, the alien-culturists, the if-this-goes-on forecasters, the satirists, etc.), in order to express what is true of human beings in relation to exterior, usually group, situations. Fiction as an art form, with the extensibility, dense detail and precise thought that only prose can comfortably accommodate, evolved as the vehicle of these social views. Yet the very flexibility of prose leaves room for a second, minority use of it by the personal/mythological school. This approach is oriented toward the expression of internal human truths, which can be manifest both in intensive, strongly-emotional character studies (exemplified in s-f by Harlan Ellison), and in the use of strongly-evocative symbolic material, the common stock of all mythologies, whose roots lie deep within the human psyche. And this is where R.A. Lafferty comes in.

Since it is not only possible but fashionable to divine myth in the most specific social situation, and social convention behind the most primeval myth, I'll try and clue you about what this archetypal whoopjamboreehoo is, to go with the above designation of what it isn't. Which may be tenuous going from a critical standpoint, as it all boils down to whether an artwork has a mythic feel to it. When a piece of art has archetypal symbols that are alive, alive-o and functioning,* they seem to radiate more meaning than can be grasped, and stir more emotional echos than can be accounted for.

---

*Conveniently enough, the same myth (a modern dress version of a classic Indo-European hero) in its dead and living states may be seen by comparing the Superman comic book with Superman: The Movie.

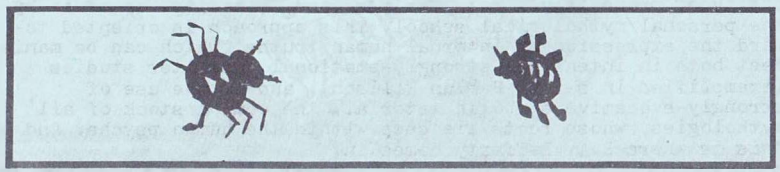
This is one of those statements that are bound to puzzle everyone but those who have experienced what I'm talking about, like--very like--those ubiquitous descriptions of mysticism. You'll just have to try some myth-art and see if you catch on.

Since science-fiction is required (by me) to have its fantastic elements grounded, at least implicitly, in an empirically-consistent, materialistic universe, myth needs delicate handling if it is to work in this form without turning it to fantasy. Conversely, if the matter-of-fact science fictional milieu is allowed to ride roughshod over a myth, so that its structures are distorted or its symbols are too constricted to resonate--which happens, by the way, in Poul Anderson's "Goat Song"--then the archetypal essence is lost. (Archetypes are tricky, though: sometimes they pop up and thrive in the weirdest places, viz. Blackie DuQuesne in Doc Smith's cosmic pinball arcade. However, mythological s-f is more than one archetype in a landscape of tinkertoys.) Two s-f writers besides Lafferty who have effectively combined myth and science-fiction are Roger Zelazny (in his pristine early period) and J.G. Ballard (in his Vermilion Sands stories). Both effected this by taking the basic patterns of specific myths and reworking them (with personal embellishments) to fit science-fictional contexts; and their best results using this method are excellent indeed.

But what Lafferty does is something else again, for he is not refashioning old myths so much as recasting the elements of both myth and science-fiction (archetypes and concepts respectively) into something all his own, to which the vigorous humour of the American tall tale and an inimitable verbal dexterity also contribute. Prime Lafferty is among the best myth and the best science-fiction I have experienced, and his finest work reflects the storyteller's art at its most luminous.

It is now down-to-specifics time, so those of you within the sound of my pen who'd rather be reading Lafferty than me--or are inalterably underwhelmed by him and only came for the parties--may leave quietly whenever you like by way of the margins.

Well, at least I seem to have blundered into a way to organize this thing: I shall (ahem!) discuss some of these stories in terms of myth, and others in terms of science fiction, ruthlessly jettisoning those of my 75 semifinalists that seem least pertinent to these two categories, and if there's anything indispensable left over I'll see what I can fake when the time comes.



One of the characteristic shapes of myth is the cycle, the vehicle of endlessness and often of regeneration. Lafferty's three great end-of-the-world novels--Past Master, Fourth Mansions, Arrive at Easterwine--are comedies of (implicit) rebirth; and cyclic themes and structures are also prevalent in his shorter work.

The cycle at its most positive--what Lafferty elsewhere calls the ascending spiral--can be seen in the richly marvellous "Boomer Flats." In this tale three scientists discover a group of living Neanderthals -- the Lafferteian version of "the link that is never really missing, the link between the clay and the blood" -- resulting in a death-and-rebirth experience in which the reader participates more literally than is usual. Behold:

> There is, however, a gap in the Magi set, due to the foolish dying of Arpad Arkabaranan...
>
> One more is needed so that this set of Magi may be formed again. The other two aspects being already covered, the third member could well be a regularized person. It could be an older person of ability, an eminent. It could be a younger person of ability, a pre-eminent.
>
> This person may be you. Put your hand to it if you have the surety about you, if you are not afraid of green snakes in the cup (they'll fang the face off you if you're afraid of them), or of clay-mud, or of comet dust, or of the rollicking world between.

Lafferty also employs a recurrent cycle which is one of repetition without renewal. A three-part repetition pervades the very structure of one of his most flawless (and funny) tales, "Slow Tuesday Night" -- an ironic title since it deals with a world speeded up beyond reason, e.g.:

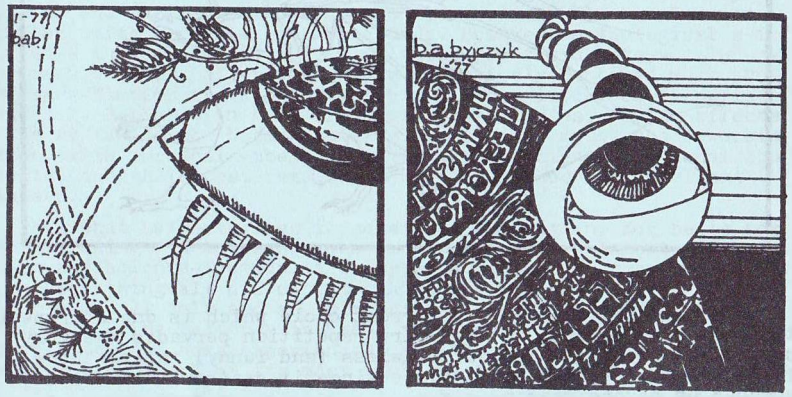
> The reviews of the first five minutes were cautious ones; then real enthusiasm was shown. This was truly one of the greatest works of philosophy to appear during the early and medium hours of the night. There were those who said it might be one of the enduring works, and even have a holdover appeal to the Dawners the next morning.
>
> Hundred-storied buildings had been erected, occupied, obsoleted, and demolished again to make room for more contemporary structures. Only the mediocre would use a building that had been left over from the Day Fliers or the Dawners, or even the Nyctalops of the night before. The city was rebuilt pretty completely at least three times during an eight-hour period.

But though this society is too shallow for rebirth, there is something life-affirming (and exceedingly delightful) in its breathless continuance. (And yes, there's social comment here too -- nothing is mutually exclusive.)

But in "Continued on Next Rock" the cycle takes on a bleaker poignance. It is a recurring personal drama of unrequited love and destruction, in which three progressively-more-recent records in stone build to a present-time climax but not, it seems, an end. The two primordial persons involved have little hope of achieving their mutually-exclusive aspirations except in death, adding to this mythic comedy a near-tragic countertheme which is beautifully supported by the writing.

> "You fear the earth, you fear rough ground and rocks, you fear moister earth and rotting flesh, you fear the flesh itself, all flesh is rotting flesh. If you love not rotting flesh, you love not at all. You believe the bridge hanging in the sky, the bridge hung by tendrils and woody vines that diminish as they go up and up till they are no thicker than hairs. There is no sky-bridge, you cannot go up on it. Did you believe that the roots of love grow upside down? They come out of deep earth that is old flesh and brains and hearts and entrails, that is old buffalo bowels and snakes' pizzles, that is black blood and rot and meaning underground. This is old and worn-out and bloody Time, and the roots of love grow out of its gore."

There is even a Lafferty story with a regressive rebirth cycle: "Incased in Ancient Rind," which is also the most inimitable rampant-pollution story ever penned. In its carbon-shrouded world men revert to Neanderthal-cum-Genesis giants with long life-spans -- but become slow and backward, without the aspirations and bright distinctions of evolved consciousness. But even this has a positive value in that death of one sort is also life of another.



One other primary mythological motif in Lafferty, this one more peculiarly his own, is that there are two simultaneous realities, the everyday and the archetypal, both equally valid. This duality is clearly delineated in a number of Lafferty's stories, with a whole spectrum of positive and negative effects arising from their inter-relationships.

"Days of Grass, Days of Straw" provides the plainest depiction of the two worlds. In precise parallel construction it sets a day of archetypal vitality against what is supposed to be the same day in the orderly outer world. However, fertile and upsetting traces of the archetypal day keep breaking through day two's tissue of predictability, so the ultimate effect is the enrichment of ordinary life.

That these separate realities are at core the two levels of a single personality appears in "The Man Underneath." In this larkish tale the outer (conscious) and archetypal (unconscious) usurp each other's functions, but when they switch places also the business is set right again.

Then there is that mythic gem of a story "The Cliff Climbers," in which is demonstrated that the archetypal world may enrich the everyday one even when it is let in the back door, by mistake. Thus Professor Potter, by whose archaeological misreadings legends are loosed, leaves a legacy so other scholars, in Lafferty's wry view, may do the same:

> We will not record what he carved, as he has already done so, and besides...it was too stilted and stylish...In a later time by another professor who might not have the key to the precise letters themselves, it would be more correctly translated as follows:
>
> "I have slain the nightmare and set down the terror. I have climbed beyond dizziness on the cliff that once hung down from the sky before there was a world below it. Even the eagles when they were new would not fly this high. And this above all, while others have ridden on the wind, I only have ridden on the daughter of the wind. This is a red-haired goddess, a strong slight amazon, a magic anemonead with hair like a red sea and shoulders soft and sweet as the night itself. She sways beneath me but will not break, and the early sun is on her and she is silver and flame. Her neck is of living ivory."
>
> And the rest of it would be very hard to translate even by the best paleocalligraphist. But he would know that this was the hand of an ancient poet who had climbed a dizzy cliff to write a hymn to the dawn.

Those are positive relationships between the everyday and archetypal realities; but there are negative aspects in Lafferty as well. In the ironic "Entire and Perfect Chrysolite" the two worlds are sundered from one another completely, for the bright, constricted "Ecumene" (Eurasia) denies the existence of Africa, its primitive counterpart. That the dark world is there nonetheless is proved when some irresponsible people invoke it, finding it a more dangerous place than they are able to realize.

Here's another. In his "four men who know everything" stories, Lafferty writes himself in as "myself, who does not." "Old Halloweens on the Guna Slopes" tells how Lafferty, the fictional character, lost this ability, and personified unconscious forces are shown to cause this loss of specialness. 'Tis a fine piece, and very moving in its haunting implications.

In "Configuration of the North Shore," one of Lafferty's best from the mythological standpoint, the conflict between the two realities takes on a multiplex aspect. Here a dream-quest for a much-desired land is shown as diverting energy from a character's exterior life. His psychiatrist, recognizing the destination as the "Ultimate Arrival Nexus" whose individual achievement (paradoxically enough) confers incalculable benefit on the whole race, forces his patient to resolve the conflict in favour of external reality, then pursues the inner quest himself using spurious dreams to take him there. But the land he reaches, as he is unprepared to deal with it from his own resources, shows the face not of desire, but of fear.

And finally, in "The Ugly Sea" (a lovely story), Lafferty demonstrates that contact with the unconscious, beneficial as it is when proportion is maintained and guidance followed, leads to death if one succumbs too completely.

Finis to that section. Not that I've begun to exhaust Lafferty's rich lode of myth merely by tracing two of its seams through ten stories. But there's still the s-f part to do before I can totter off into the chthonium.

Science-fiction has been widely labeled a "literature of ideas" -- too often in reference to authors who have nothing else to recommend them, but let that pass. Lafferty, perhaps because of his superiority in the more purely-human areas, is rarely mentioned in this connection, though to my mind he has come up with some dazzlers. Here are a few of my favourites.

"Rivers of Damascus" -- would you believe polarized history? This is the most unique and striking of Lafferty's frequent fantasies on the nature of history, of which there is another in this same story, viz: "Patina is the recording and remembering and transmitting surface of everything." And the story is eminently worthy of these mind-blowers. Several "soft" scientists make a movie of the Moslem conquest of Damascus as it is recorded in the patina of the landscape, but with data polarized by the prevalent Damascene view their record of the event looks impossible. But when a too-rigid scientific establishment brands them crackpots, they turn their own polarizing eyes against its hidebound authority; and, this being Lafferty, the upshot is not mere revenge, but renewal.

> Oh, but the great and gracious modification which now became the prime original. (Yes, the Noble Thing itself /science/ was bruised a bit when the modification tore through the old encrustations, but...now, for a while, it was no longer smothered and shriveled.)
>
> But the final, elegant, polarized presentation was like an old promise fulfilled, like a hidden river rediscovered. It was an unfolding, a full-flowing. It was finally to see all dimensions of time and space with the elegant eye.

Which seems to lead naturally to "Through Other Eyes": I don't know why, since its operative idea -- that everyone lives in a unique world of his own perceiving -- is so far from new as to be a philosophical commonplace. (It's really fudging to put this story here, but it's that or put it nowhere.) However, Lafferty illuminates this by realizing a few of these alternate worlds, and by making his character's perception of them, contrary to expectations, a source of disillusionment and divisiveness. Another poignant triumph.

The unaccountably-neglected "Bubbles When They Burst" starts with the common science-fictional question of whether the speed of light can be exceeded. But Lafferty's "yes" is one of those breathless conceptual connections that makes new thoughts of old. The story is basically about the borderlands of materialism; there is, for Lafferty, an unusual amount of science in it; and without leaving this base, he shows how a person at the point of death can be a relay for instantaneous transmission, an identification that brings science and myth very close indeed.

And now, a Lafferteian nosegay of cosmological beginnings. From "The All-At-Once Man," the Big Bang with a tilt:

> Just before the Beginning there was a perfect sphere and no other thing...
>
> Then an exterior speck appeared. This was the Beginning, not the sphere's lone existence...Now there was both contrast and relationship.
>
> Now there was size and mass and temperature, space, time and motion; for there was something to relate to. The sphere was indeed found to be in furious and powerful rotation, now that it could rotate in relation to something. It was in such rapid roation that it deformed itself with its own centrifugal force, it ruptured itself completely and everything thence is from its pieces.
>
> What happened to the speck? Was it consumed in the great explosion? Probably not. Likely it had never existed at all. It was a mere illusion to get things started...

From "Been a Long, Long Time," the Christian view as depicted by the world's only Catholic Laughing Buddha:

> It was a sundering Dawn -- Incandescence to which all later lights are less than candles -- Heat to which the heat of all later suns is but a burnt-out match -- the Polarities that set up the tension forever...
>
> The Creative Event was the Revolt rending the Void in two. The two sides formed, opposing Nations of Lightning split above the steep chasm. Two Champions had it out with a bitterness that has never passed -- Michael wrapped in white fire -- and Helel swollen with black and purple blaze...It has been put into allegory as Acceptance and Rejection, and as Good and Evil; but in the Beginning there was the Polarity by which the universes are sustained.

And from "Nine Hundred Grandmothers," about all we know for sure:

> "...Oh, it was so funny how it began. So joke! So fool, so clown, so grotesque thing! Nobody could guess, nobody could believe."

Set the last, and a test of some sort: what Lafferty does with a run of stock s-f subjects, the type nearly everyone in this ingenuity-laden field has tried to wring for a new twist, rarely (for lack of less specialized qualities like human interest) a viable one. When Lafferty takes up such topics he's not reshuffling spare parts, but refashioning the whole as a vehicle for his own particular vision. Hence his versions seem, not just fresher, but truer than others', and sometimes what he does with a motif seems the very thing it was destined for.

Lafferty's original outlook is already apparent in "The Weirdest World," one of his early stories. It is a first-person account of an amoeboid alien explorer who is marooned on Earth, encounters human society, is unable to cope with it despite his superior abilities, and finally dies. The opening and closing of this typical s-f tale might have been written by anyone; but between these stock borders, the working-out of it all is Lafferty in full flower. For after initial acceptance as a zoological attraction-cum-nightclub novelty act, the alien goes on to acquire great wealth. He loses this, however, when he is declared a non-person by the courts, from which social ostracism and doom naturally follow. You can see there is a quiet verisimilitude at work in this amusing little satire, that makes the more usual abstract motivations (brotherhood and/or xenophobia) ring false indeed.

In "All But The Words" Lafferty tackles the attempt to make radio contact with extraterrestrial intelligence. In one of those logical but loony approaches common to Lafferty characters, the director of this project decides, having failed to raise anyone with universal symbols, to have a compulsive lonely-hearts-club type broadcast some everyday chit-chat. This garners a response from ET's of the same type ("low and common"), but without the flesh-and-blood limitations that keep human blather within reasonable bounds.

"Interurban Queen" is essentially one of those stories that show how a single technological divergence could produce an entirely different society. Choosing a more plausible example than most, Lafferty depicts an America where electric interurban transport had won out over the automobile, which the group-centred interurbanites have outlawed. The picture he paints is of a friendly, idyllic land free of urban blight, agriculture and industry being blended in a lovely, evenly-populated "quasiurbia" unified by convenient public transport. But it is also a land where, competition having yielded completely to cooperation, the individualist and the loner are not tolerated; and those who persist in driving bootleg cars are considered incorrigible menaces to society, whom it is the duty of all right-thinking citizens to shoot on sight in approved vigilante manner. What makes "Interurban Queen" so remarkable, though, is the incredible tonal balance with which Lafferty handles the two sides of this question: I cannot tell, even with inside knowledge of Lafferty's personal politics, where his sympathies lie -- probably a historic first in s-f of this type.

The inventor as social misfit appears periodically in Lafferty stories, as does that peculiarly American trickster-figure, the lovable con man; but only in "Eurema's Dam," his Hugo winner, does the one turn into the other. This "last of the dolts" is described as inventing machines out of a well of absolute incompetence. Inferior to his fellow-men, intimidated by his grandest contraptions, he decided to end it all -- until a little machine he built to have hunches (hence his true mechanical counterpart) shows him that the apparently-superior world is really a warren of fair game, and promises plenty of fun in the plucking.

In "Hog-Belly Honey" Lafferty essays the invention that goes out of control. Told in the first person by this anthropoid-type itinerant genius, it's about how he and his scholarly milquetoast buddy build a nullifier that can selectively dispose of anything useless. They run into trouble, though, when the machine takes this to include useless people. The style here is delightfully suited to the character, full of sly malapropisms, and misconstructions in every sense of the term:

> "A garbage disposal!" he sing out. "The aeons labored to give birth to it through the finest mind -- mine -- of the millenium, and this brother of a giant ape says it is a garbage disposal! It is a new aspect of thought, the novo instauratio, the mind of tomorrow fruited today, and this obscene ogre says it is a Garbage Disposal!! The Constellations do homage to it, and Time has not waited in vain, and you, you splay-footed horse-herder, you call it a GARBAGE DISPOSAL!"
>
> Maurice was so carried away with the thought that he cried a little. It sure is nice when someone agrees with you as long and loud as Maurice did. When he was run out of words he got aholt of the brandy bottle and drunk it all off...
>
> He looked kind of sheepful when he finally woke up.
>
> "I feel better now, outside of feeling worse," he say. "You are right, Spade, it's a garbage disposal."

Ah, "Hole in the Corner"--now who but Lafferty would've seen the parallel earths theory as a vehicle for knockabout vaudeville? In this, Diogenes Pontifex, one of Lafferty's less orthodox scientists, sets up a gateway between the dimensions, and its musical characters as (almost) the same husband comes home three times.

And "Thus We Frustrate Charlemagne," an appropriate wind-up for this little donnybrook as it is the last word in time-travel paradoxes as well as one of Lafferty's very finest short stories. Borrowing the structure of a well-known fairy tale, it concerns the Institute for Impure Science's various attempts to change the past. They first effect a pre-Renaissance revival of classical culture by killing the traitor who sabotaged Charlemagne's treaty with the Moors; however, since the advance this brings about leaves the world, to them, the same as it always was, they then decide to investigate the effect of intellectual attitudes on culture by preventing decisive opposition to the ideas of mediaeval philosopher Ockham from arising. However -- and they are vaguely aware of this -- the previous cultural advance they had effected has turned the formulator of the Razor into the propounder of nihilism, and giving him free rein reduces the Institute and their computer to three savages and a voodoo mask. Their world is also as it always was, but their intimation of the previous situations is clearer still; and by unorthodox (but wonderfully prepared-for) means they manage to destroy the agent of the temporal changes, restoring everything to square one--almost:

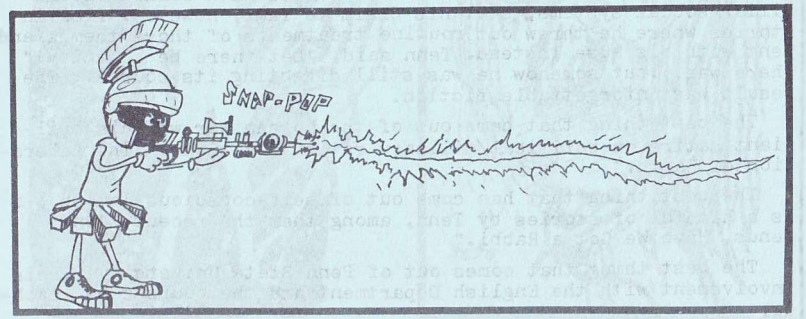
> "Did it work, Epikt? Is it done?" Charles Cogsworth asked in excitement. "It must have. I'm here. I wasn't in the last one."...
>
> "Push the button, Epikt!" Diogenes barked. "I think I missed part of it. Let's try again."
>
> "Oh, no, no!" Valery forbade. "Not again. That way is rump of skunk and madness."

In other words, paradoxical worlds both are and are not real -- and if their inhabitants should remember not being in a world where they never existed, it's no dizzier than anything else in the paradox game.

Well, that caps it. I cannot say this paper covers Lafferty's published works, with at least 50 stories of comparable quality on the cutting room floor, and the Three Great Novels (Space Chanty makes four), which are incomparable, wholly disregarded.

In any case, you're on your own from here on out. And once you start reading R.A. you'll realize you didn't need me in the first place. In fact, critics will be drones until they can broadcast their artistic responses via ESP on all wave-lengths, since only personally-experienced art can be of any use to you.

Anybody want to go up on the roof and make these old lists into paper aeroplanes?



An Interview with William Tenn

Brad Linaweaver

William Tenn (Phil Klass) was a New Wave writer before there was a New Wave. In many respects his work prefigured a cycle of s-f that studiously ignored his existence and made as though it had invented what had already been done. One of the differences between Tenn and many who followed in his footsteps was that he did material John Campbell wanted to buy, even when the stories had a sense of life entirely alien to the Campbellian philosophy. Tenn could get most anything said most nearly everywhere. He didn't need a special market that would allow a different point of view. He didn't need anyone writing introductions to provide a literary apology in advance. Like all good satirists, he got the job done in a way that would reach the largest possible audience instead of aiming at a small clique.

Satire is what the work of William Tenn is all about. His best s-f is part of a literary tradition dating back to Carroll and Swift and Juvenal and the first social critic who was burned at the stake for having a sense of humour, as well as a sense of wonder. What he and Fred Brown and C.M. Kornbluth and a few others contributed to s-f was old as the ages. What counts is that they were the first to regularly demonstrate the value of satire to the field. The mainstream had always noticed dystopian novels of the future. Tenn helped the s-f field to notice the same thing, and a hell of a lot more.

In the interview to follow Tenn speaks of literature that influenced him profoundly: Candide, Alice in Wonderland, Gulliver's Travels. Now here is a man who can write hard core s-f, with each nut and bolt in its proper place, and the plot behaving itself. Here is a man who has used all the popular devices: time machines and paradoxes, space ships in trouble, humans against BEMs, spies vs. aliens, alternate universes with remarkably familiar social systems, etc. His claim to fame, however, lies in stories where he threw out routine treatments of those themes and went with his Muse instead. Tenn said, "Let there be insanity!" There was...but somehow he was still directing its course. The result was unforgettable fiction.

The best thing that came out of the Korean War was his brilliant satire on political/military rationalizations, "The Liberation of Earth."

The best thing that has come out of self-conscious Jewish s-f is a handful of stories by Tenn, among them the recent, "On Venus, Have We Got a Rabbi."

The best thing that comes out of Penn State University is his involvement with the English Department and the courses he teaches.

The best thing that comes out of William Tenn is his dark comedy.

Tenn is not an easy man to interview. It took several tries. He talks fast and almost non-stop, much as Lester Del Rey. He has an intense personality. Only part of the interview will appear in RQ, but in my estimation it is the best part. Listening to an afternoon of William Tenn is like hearing a book be invented and told to you on the spot.

He is easy to describe--short and bearded and very academic looking. If you were casting him for a role in a movie, several clear types would come to mind: a mad wizard, a sane scientist, Rumpelstiltzkin, and best of all, a college professor.

* * * * *

Many fans wish he could write more. I agree. Please remember that those who ask for more are already acquainted with his work, and in that sense are lucky to begin with.

It is a pity that his work is so hard to find in the current market. His classic short stories should be available on every bookstall, instead of buried away in ths used paperback section. For someone attempting to form a reasonable Tenn collection (and not wealthy enough to go after the original magazines), used paperbacks at least promise a start.

Ballantine Books put out a series of six Tenn paperbacks in 1968, and these have been making the rounds ever since. Five are short story collections: The Wooden Star, The Seven Sexes, The Square Root of Man, The Human Angle, and Of all Possible Worlds. The sixth was his novel Of Men and Monsters, which went back into circulation from the same company in 1975, complete with a muscular Boris cover that seemed entirely out of place. A paperback more difficult to find is Time in Advance (Bantam, 1958) including his famous cover story from the February 1952 Astounding, "Firewater."

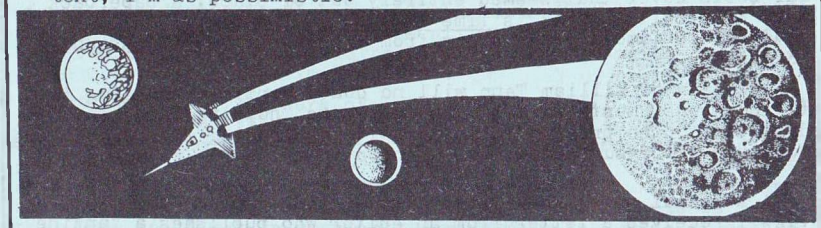
New fans of William Tenn will no doubt continue emerging from the wondrous, musty part of the bookstore, holding these introductions to the prose of a master. It is pleasing that Of Men and Monsters was resurrected. Let us hope that the future holds more of the same!

A personal note: When I first attempted to place this interview I received a letter from an editor who publishes a fanzine that is now available as a professional item. His objection to the interview was that William Tenn is not current enough. I suppose that for the same reason he would have turned down an unpublished interview with H.G. Wells or Edgar Allan Poe.

Q. In a Playboy panel in 1963 you said, "I can think of no potentially great advance in technology or human relations which man in all his ingenuity won't find a way to subvert into a historic step backward." Do you still hold this view?

A. I still think what I said then was absolutely true. The only difference is that at the moment I don't think it makes as much difference as I once did. Somehow or other, no matter what we do to ourselves in terms of repressive politics or perverted science, the human race goes on and human institutions in one way or another survive...

We are very, very close to our precivilized ancestors. We are really no more than paleolithic savages riding around in jets. As savages riding around in jets, we take the most complex developments in genetics, psychology, psychotherapy, sociology (understanding how man relates to his fellows), and turn them into some sort of weapon used by some sort of group. The big mistake many people make is that they keep expecting the group that uses the weapon to be some sort of conspiratorial government group as in Heinlein's "If This Goes On," or a Nixonish or fascist, communist conspiracy or something of that sort--but the groups that use these events for perverted and peculiar ends can be nothing more than a group of social workers who are trying to maintain their status...But essentially we are always looking for weapons to use against each other. Anything--no matter how complex, no matter how many overtones it has of philosophy and morality--any new development is something that we paleolithic savages pick up, fondle a bit and say, "My God, another good club. Let's split their heads open!" To that extent, I'm as pessimistic.



Q. One of your fellow panelists...Theodore Sturgeon, said we are not going to remain as stupid as we are. Nothing you've said now seems to agree with him.

A. No.

Q. So you haven't changed your mind on that?

A. Not at all. I've loved Ted for many, many years and I've admired him for some part of that time. My feeling about Ted in that statement and similar statements that he's made is that he's pissing into the rainbow. We are going to remain as stupid as we've been, without any question. When we stop being as stupid as we have been, we will have become something--as a species--on a higher ethical plane. We will no longer be man. We will be something else. We'll be a different order of creatures just as, for example, once we began using tools, any kind of tools, consciously and regularly...Once that was so, we could no longer be called animals, even though we had social organizations that related to the animal stage. We had become something more. The same thing is true, I believe, of these developments we've been talking about. When that happens, we will be nothing recognizable to ourselves: possibly not quite angels but, damn it , with a lot less kinship to the apes.

Q. In terms of optimism and pessimism, is the s-f field as a whole more in your corner or in Sturgeon's corner?

A. There's a question that I have to answer at some length...because there is a beautiful problem concealed there. It relates to your first question. At the time the interview occurred, in 1963, the s-f field as a whole was more in Sturgeon's corner than in mine. I would say as of now, the s-f field is much more in my corner, however little it may recognize that corner as having /my/ initials...on it.

Q. Does the New Wave have anything to do with it?

A. It's part of it, part of what turned away from a belief in the effectiveness of technology, an interest in technology and outer space, and turned to inner space--and in the course of it there was a greater degree of cynicism about the movers, the shakers. But "New Wave" is only part of it.

S-F today, from Ursula K. LeGuin on down...tends to be a little more pessimistic about man and about his unchanging qualities. It tends to believe that the issues we are facing are moral issues, not technological issues, and we are grappling with the same issues that we once were. Or to put it the way Bernard Shaw once did, around 1900: "The human race has not made a single ethical or moral advance since the fall of the Roman Empire." But it's made many other kinds of advances, was his suggested point. So by in large I'd say that most s-f today, as I read it, tends to be critical of society as I have been in my stories, tends to feel that satire of some sort, in some mutation, is the proper vehicle for looking at human society.

Take John Brunner's Stand on Zanzibar. There were fewer novels like Stand on Zanzibar in '63 than there are now, fewer novels like The Sheep Look Up. Not that I was as concerned in my work with the environment as Brunner in The Sheep Look Up, but I was concerned with the human world as a rather humorous toilet instead of...an observatory and springboard into the glorious future of the universe. To that extent, I'd say s-f is more in my corner. That is the first part of my answer to your question.

The second part of my answer is one of the reasons why I can now say I'm not as pessimistic with the future of mankind as I once was is because I have responded negatively to a number of people who seem to be crowding me in what I once thought was my lonely little area. There weren't very many people for most of the years I was writing who wrote the social satires, the criticisms of humanity. In '57 I did a story called "Eastward Ho" about what we had done to American Indians, a very bitter story. In 1950-51, I wrote "The Liberation of Earth," which was a story about Korea. It was later called my Vietnam story. It was a bitter story about what two great powers can do to a small nation when they fight over it in the name of liberty, democracy, and so forth. Well, there are many more people doing that now. And as I read many of these stories...instead of /being/ squeezed into the deeper recesses of this niche of satire and hopelessness, I've been squeezed out!

I wrote a jingle about 1957, about the time I was writing "Eastward Ho!" and "Winthrop Was Stubborn" (which is my most pessimistic story about the future). I wrote a jingle, one of four or five...I've written as an adult, which sums up what I believe about humanity:

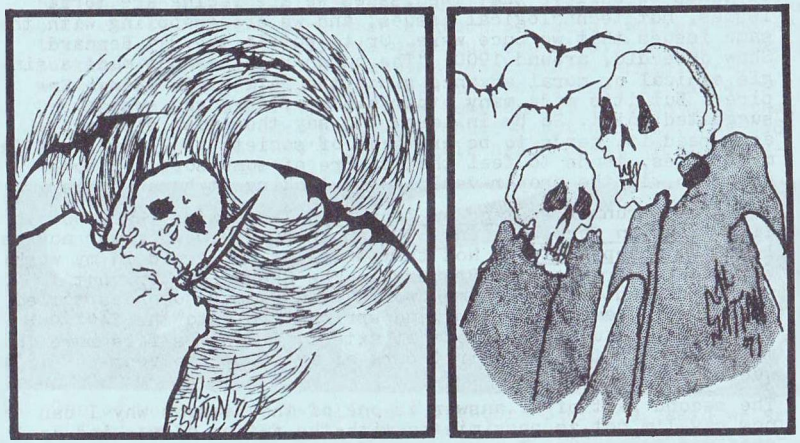
Not a superman who stumbles,
But an ape with makeshift manners
In whose nickleplated jungles
Roam mechanical bananas.

(continued)

A. I quote this ...with tremendous affection for this ape engrossed in his mechanical bananas. That's who we are and we are doing very well. I go around saying this a lot and this is something perhaps that a satirist whose stance should be bitterness shouldn't feel or say, but this is what I've come to believe.

I still think we're doing all the vicious things I used to write about and still write about. But what occurs to me often these days is that the terrifying problem of all systems of thought that apply to man is that, no matter how they say it, man is a fallen angel. He's not doing what he should. He's fallen from grace; he's fallen from Eden and so forth. But if you look at us properly, as something which has lifted its snout out of the slime and is for the first time probing the stars and looking into the upper air and trying to think of something beyond the slime, by god, we're doing remarkably well.

We have systems of justice which are corrupt but we do have systems of justice. We have aspirations which we frequently ignore completely and turn away from, but we do have aspirations. I still think man is as ugly as I ever did.



Q. Within the confines of magazine s-f you might be said to have been a precursor of the New Wave,but all the time you were really working in a much older field, the satiric tradition. So obviously you've been influenced by satirists such as Jonathan Swift. Were you also influenced by C.S. Lewis from the work he did that was ostensibly s-f but was actually satire and very critical of what is normally taken for granted in s-f?

A. My problem is that C.S. Lewis influenced me prodigiously but relatively late in life. I didn't encounter him until after I'd become a professional writer. This is true of certain other people I encountered relatively late in life. I didn't read Stapleton until after I had become a professional writer and he exerted a tremendous influence on me in terms of s-f. But there are others. The people I encountered early in my intellectual life have to be more important because at that point a slight shift means a much greater eventual arc of change.

Relative to s-f there are three books that influenced me more than anything else--three books that I read many times and brooded over. And I look upon all three as major satires. The third one is going to be very astonishing to some people when I refer to it as a satire, but even as a child I saw it as satire. All three influenced me in science-fictional terms.

A. continued)

Swift's Gulliver's Travels first of all, especially the voyage to the island of the Houyhnhnms. All of Gulliver and all of Swift. Also Swift's "A Modest Proposal." I think I encountered it when I was fifteen years old. At one point I set myself the task to memorize it--this very bitter suggestion of how to solve the problems of Ireland by making food out of the children. It was actually considered somewhat seriously by some people, rather horrifyingly.

Q. It seems that we've gotten to a point where the most outrageous ideas can be taken seriously. And I think it's becoming more dangerous to write something like "A Modest Proposal" because so many people will take you seriously.

A. It's dangerous to write satire in a period when people are willing to entertain strange ideas. I think that if in the Kaiser's Germany someone had suggested that the way to solve the economic problems is to turn all the Jews into soap and use their hair to stuff mattresses, it would have been known as satire and many people would have been a little disgusted with the idea, even with the satiric intention. Had the same idea been suggested in the last days of the Weimar republic I think there would have been a much greater outcry because it wouldn't have been taken as satire--it would be taken as a serious suggestion by far too many people, with a few very sophisticated intellectuals saying the thing is satire, after all. The intellectuals would have been a little disgusted and annoyed by the reaction. When the same idea is suggested in Hitler's Germany, it's no longer satire. It's a sensible, modern, industrial approach to what is regarded as a problem. When Swift came out with "A Modest Proposal," Ireland was a place of starvation and agony. And there were people who were annoyed with him because they thought he was being somewhat serious. Similarly today when we live in a time when it is conceivable that part of the world may be destroyed, when we recognize that we may be increasing radioactivity in the environment to our ultimate peril, when we live in a time when all sorts of ideas like the destruction of particular groups of people are considered seriously, then the outrageous ideas are somewhat trite...

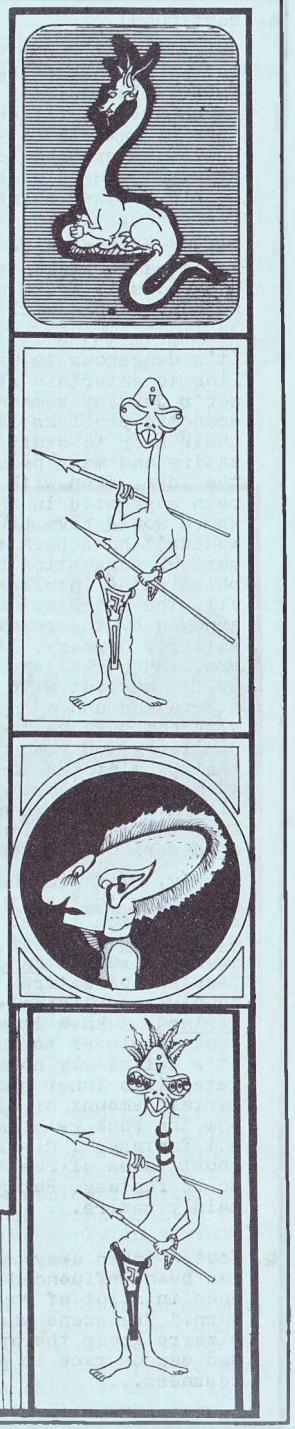
Anyway, Swift is the key influence. But Voltaire's Candide was something that by the time I was seventeen or eighteen, I had read a dozen times. Strangely enough I had not read Voltaire's Micromegas until after I became a pro by age of twenty-five or twenty-six. But Candide I knew well and I considered it a masterpiece of satire. The third piece that influenced me tremendously, and I've always considered it satire, is Alice in Wonderland. I knew it was a satire since age nine. I think that book is closer to the issues of the New Wave in s-f because it's definitely concerned with inner space--outer space translated into inner space--and when I teach s-f I have to spend a certain amount of time on Alice and I don't fully understand how the book relates. I read most of Alice the way I do s-f--not fantasy. I distinguish very strongly between Alice and the ghost tales of Poe and mythology which I loved but I considered to be fantasy. But Alice I saw as some form of s-f, but certainly satire.

Q. You've taken away my next question! I was going to ask if you had been influenced by Carroll. There seems to be that influence in a lot of your work, but especially "Winthrop Was Stubborn." The scene where the people release their tensions in the bizarre group therapy sessions--the shrieks--remind me of the mad caucus race in Alice. The way they run around, the senselessness...

A. Let me make a statement and you can put this in print if you want to. It's not given to very many people who interview me to open up an area which I had not suspected in my own mind. It doesn't often happen and very frequently when interviewers say that you have been very much influenced by this or when writing a story, did you have this in mind, you tend to giggle a little bit because who knows what you had in mind? I did not have any idea when I was writing "Winthrop Was Stubborn" of Alice so far as I know. I did not think of Alice at all. That's one answer to your question. But now that you mention it, I am aware of the fact that this was the only time in my life when I set myself unconsciously to recapitulate Alice. I had no idea that was what I was doing. But now that you've asked the question, I realize that "Winthrop Was Stubborn" was all a patchwork of pieces from Alice in all kinds of ways. That is, the four voyages in the future are all Alice in one way or another. They are different Alices. Winthrop is the only one who isn't Alice. I don't quite know what Winthrop's role is. The characters in "Winthrop Was Stubborn" are all, in one way or another, characters picked up from Alice. Now when you speak of the caucus race for example, I'm not sure of it, that's the one thing I'm not sure of--but it certainly has to do with the very mad moments in Alice in Wonderland.

Q. There's a quality of controlled madness that your work has in common with Lewis Carroll's--it seems deranged but there's also a discipline to it.

A. This moves into another area. The stories I'm most ashamed of, I call my sane stories. A sane story is one I've planned before I sit down to write. I know exactly what I'm going to do and therefore it is a story which I direct, carefully pulling on the bridle and pointing it in certain ways.



Q. Were your few attempts at space opera sane stories?

A. Except for one that almost became an insane story, "Down Among the Dead Men." An insane story is one where I lose control at a given point. I can also put it another way. My first published story was "Alexander the Bait," a carefully planned story. I'd broken it into scenes. It was an exercise in craftsmanship and I was terribly proud of it even before it was published. I said to myself, by god, that is how a story should be written. It was published in 1946 in Astounding. When I saw it in print, it disgusted me. Most of my stories in print disgust me. But that one I remember was a terrible shock because it wasn't nearly as good as many other stories in the issue and I couldn't figure out what was wrong. I wrote another story immediately after that. It was a space opera published shortly after that which I called "Gluttonous Mutiny." It was published as "Confusion Cargo" in Planet.

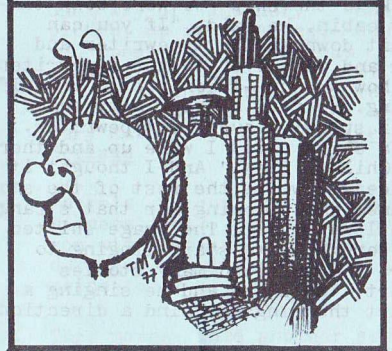
Q. Was that the one that copied Mutiny on the Bounty?

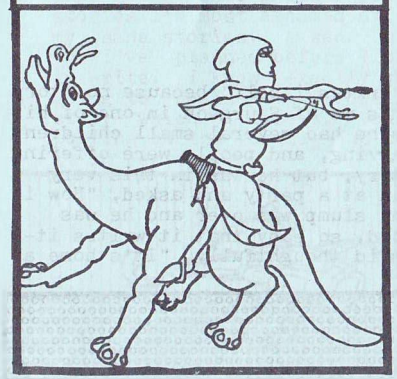
A. Yes, It was an attempt to do a Mutiny on the Bounty. I planned to do a trilogy of stories; I was going to have the equivalent of Men Against the Sea--that is, Captain Bligh's voyage--and Pitcairn's Island. But I gave that up. It was a sane story.

The third story I wrote, which was the second published, was "Child's Play." It was begun when I was drunk at sea. My brother had sent me my first published story. I was in the merchant marine and I was in Belgium and I showed it to some people on the ship. And the third mate went to shore with me drinking...He said anybody could show a story and claim /he/ had written it. Why wasn't my name on it? We argued about that and got drunk. When we got back to the ship--we were both tottering by then--and came to my cabin, he said, "If you can write stories like that, you sit down at the typewriter and write a story." I said I would and went over to the typewriter and typed madly. I don't know how or why--I don't even know if I was aware of what I was typing. He fell asleep in my bunk. I woke up the next day, sort of sprawled over my typewriter. I was a purser at the time on a cargo ship. I woke up and there were seven or eight pages of "Child's Play." And I thought it was a hell of an interesting idea. I wrote the rest of the story after I left the sea and came home, looking for that strange thing that happened to me when I was drunk. The image shifted again while I was waiting for something to start singing to me, for something to take over. I've written many stories waiting for the singing to start, the story and me singing a duet. But the story has to start the singing, find a direction of its own.

Q. It writes itself?

A. I hate to use the expression "writes itself" because no story ever writes itself. That reminds me of Sturgeon in one of his slumps. What he said to me was he had several small children and they and his wife were starving, and people were offering him bags of gold to write a story, but he was in this very bad slump. Later I ran into him at a party and asked, "How is it going, Ted?" and he said the slump was over and he was writing a story that was so good, so easy that it writes itself. He paused a moment and said thoughtfully, "It's home at the moment, writing itself."





A. (continued)

No story writes itself, though some are easier than others. When you write, you should make a discovery with each piece of writing, otherwise it doesn't count. You should find out something about yourself that you never knew. E.M. Forster put it much more beautifully in a BBC interview shortly before his death. He was asked how do you know when you've written something good? Forster said something like, "When I have lowered a bucket into the unconscious in the course of writing a story, and I bring it up and there is something in that bucket and I gasp and say how on earth did it get there and the answer is it didn't get there anywhere on earth, it's supernatural." He said this in the personal sense. Well, I look for that. That's what I mean when I say insane story.

Only one story of mine was sane that was any good as far as I'm concerned, and that was "Generations of Noah." That's the one about the atomic bomb. I planned it out to a fare-thee-well and sat down to write it, and it wrote exactly the way I planned it but as I came to the end, the story suddenly stood up and screamed, "This is the way I'll go," and instead of having the ending I'd planned, the characters in the story suddenly began speaking like a Greek Chorus (this is what my then agent Fred Pohl said--he didn't like that ending and neither did several editors who saw it). But I knew that was what the story had to have.

I write praying always for the lunacy to start, for something to happen when my craftsmanship is no longer an issue, where the control I exercise no longer exists. The craftsmanship will continue but it should not be overt. You should develop craftsmanship to the point where it will function unconsciously, where everything will work, where you're looking for a kind of craftsmanship that's much bigger than joining pieces together--where you're responding to the craftsmanship inherent in folktale, in myth, in the joke.

A. (continued)

This is what you want to touch and your story should touch upon it at some point. And when it does, you have a good story. If only you listen to it.

Q. This is what most people mean when they talk about stories writing themselves, isn't it?

A. ...When I say a story that writes itself, most of the time I'm referring to something that is relatively easy to write, that doesn't mean agony. An insane story is agony for me because nine times out of ten I stare at it in horror. I say that's not the kind of thing I believe in. When a story outrages me, when it says things about the world I don't like or makes fun of people I believe in, when it seems to adore people I hate, that is agony!

For example, "Firewater." It has too many elements of the sane story in it because I knew what I wanted to say in it. But--- I tried writing "Firewater" ten, fifteen times and it wouldn't work. I was very dissatisfied with it. I thought I had a saleable story but nothing I liked. What I wanted to write about in that story was what would happen if a bunch of superior aliens came to Earth and were as superior to us as we are to most animals--the aliens could do almost anything--and they were destroying our civilization because they were developing a tremendous feeling of inferiority in us. And I wanted to write from the viewpoint of one of the characters in the story who believes in a United Mankind and wants to find a solution to the problem. You could say it was a "get the ship out of the jam" story. In the course of the story I had a very comic character named Hebster who was only interested in making a buck out of it; I'd bring him on stage periodically and while our civilization is collapsing around us, he's only interested in finding out if he can make a dollar out of it. And he was a minor and funny character, a foil for Braganza, who was going to solve the problem, no matter what...

Well, the story wouldn't work. One day I sat down in total discouragement and began to poke at the typewriter as you poke at the piano, and I began telling it from Hebster's point of view. I wrote the story in a kind of agony and disgust because I was in Hebster's mind and the whole point of view of the story constantly was, "Why don't they leave me alone so I can make money out of this thing?" That's what I mean by an insane story. I didn't want to say that. I hated Hebster. I despise everyone like him. Braganza was my man. But Braganza, seen through Hebster's eyes, isn't that much of an idealist: he's a little bit of a crook, a little bit of a Nixon. He'll do anything for his ideas. You always learn something from a story that runs away from you and in this case it was that a large hunk of me is Hebster.

Q. This idea of a profit motivated businessman saving the day has been used several times in your stories--the businessman hero or the con artist hero it might be better to say.

A. More the con artist who doesn't believe in anything but the dollar he can make out of a situation. But as the hero, the viewpoint character, I've only used the businessman hero with Hebster.

Q. What about "Bernie the Faust?"

A. Bernie is not quite like Hebster. I don't like Bernie but I feel sorry for him all the way through. He doesn't save anything or solve anything. The whole point of the story is that he's taken by a Super-Bernie, a Bernie from beyond the stars. See, the difference is "Firewater" is a "get the ship out of the jam" story where the ship is gotten out of the jam by the most unlikely person on board. But in the course of writing "Firewater" (and I was a young Marxist up to that point) I came to believe that self interest is perhaps a more valid way of solving problems than social interest.

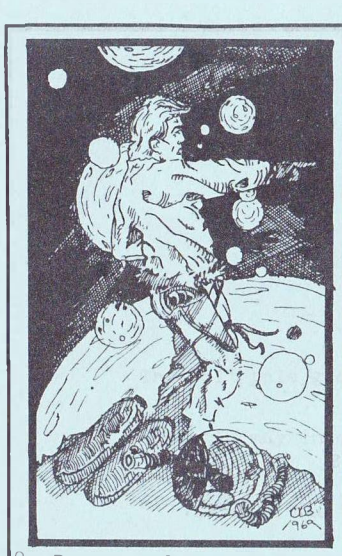
Q. It is a motif in many of your stories.

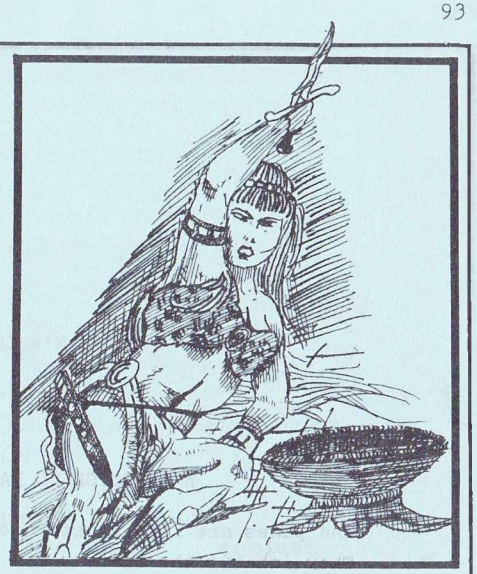
A. Yes, I've come to believe this very strongly. But "Bernie the Faust" is a different matter. It's also an insane story. It was a story in final draft of 6,500 words, but the first draft of Bernie was 33,000 words, second draft 18,500, third, 15,000, next was 12,000--that went off to Playboy but it was a bit too long so I cut it down to twelve and kept going. I wrote that story with the basic idea of someone in the depression going around offering a five dollar bill for a one dollar bill, and I didn't like it. After I kept writing long enough, a certain character appeared. Bernie was not a hero. Bernie is merely my examination of a poor schnook; he's part of my culture by the way, a very Jewish s-f story, one of many I wrote where I didn't use dialect. He's a lumpensch type, the kind of person who used to hang around in small towns in Poland in the market place, wearing derby hats--people without any skills of their own and when they'd hear a load of potatoes had left Minsk and was coming to Warsaw, say, they'd start bidding on options and the options would go up and down in value.

Let me tell you a basic joke about this type. It's the story of a man who has a watch and sells it for $15. And his friend sells it back to him the next day for $20 because the seller wonders why his friend bought it so fast and wants it back. So the friend, this other man, wonders why he wanted to buy it back so fast, so the watch goes up and up in price until it reaches $120. Well, one day they meet each other and one man says to the other, "That watch I sold to you the other day for $120, I'd like to offer you..." and the first man says, "I'm sorry but my cousin came along and offered me $150 for the watch, so I sold it to him." The second man grabs his hand and says, "You sold our watch, from that watch we were making a wonderful living?"

So that's Bernie. He appears in American Jewish culture as a peculiar character, the kind of guy who hangs around drugstores and phone booths in New York City in the Times Square area. You go in to use the telephone and they tap you on the shoulder and ask you not to be too long because they are waiting for an important call. That's their office. Con-men, operators, but pathetic as hell because they're always starving, they never make it big. But this is a different kind of person from Hebster.

The point about Hebster is he solves a problem out of pure self interest, not because he cares about man. He's only interested in himself and that's why he's able to solve the problem. I never believed that up until the time I wrote "Firewater." Up until then, I believed the only way we could solve social problems was by pulling together and getting a little away from our selfish interests.





Q. But you also have a businessman alien in the story, one on the alien side whose primary concern was with the mission being a financial success, making a profit if possible but at least breaking even.

A. Well, yes. That's true. But there we're not dealing with my unconscious. There we're dealing with John W. Campbell, Jr.'s consciousness and his private problems. The original version of that story did not have that specific alien in it. Campbell liked the story in its first version but he did not like the ending I had. My ending was man adjusting to a role in the universe as a tourist attraction for that alien and for other aliens who had intellectual capacities he could not hope to touch. Campbell did not like it. He was very distressed by the ending of the story. Something a lot of people don't know about Campbell, and I've lectured about this in various places, is he said to me he couldn't buy the story because the story suggested there might be a creature in the universe who was intellectually and forever superior to man. He said, "Phil, can you live with the idea that somebody has a better mind than you in every respect?" I said certainly. He said, "I can't." In 1951-2 John W. Campbell was this kind of person. I'd never known it from all the stories he'd published. Maybe he'd become that. And he demanded I find a solution he could accept. My original solution was the kind of story I love to write, man caught in kind of a ridiculous situation with his pants down for all the universe to see. Campbell said there's got to be some kind of correspondence between the aliens and man. I was very unhappy about this. At first I refused to do it. I have a long letter from Campbell in my files criticizing the story; I got a letter from Sturgeon, who was no longer my agent, but who knew Campbell well and wanted that story to be published. Fred Pohl wrote, who was my agent. They all urged me to reconsider. I didn't like it but they said Campbell wouldn't buy it any other way. I'd invested a tremendous amount of money and time in that story (money in terms of time) and I needed the money badly. Then it struck me! I could do what Campbell wanted and make another point about how ridiculous the universe was by having a businessman alien. I still remember that story and when I think of that ending, I giggle. The idea of having some sort of Super-Bookkeeper out there in space still strikes me as a very funny thing.

(to be continued)

WASHINGTON ON BAYS

The pines are like clusters of old insects.
They inhabit the air
like ocean swells

drifting a fine spray
of white blossoms
from the bay

trees fragrant as surf.
The honeysuckle goes
like smoke or snuff

right up your nose, but bays
are fragrant in the woods
as though you had never smelled

the taste of burning
and everything was green,
green as it first was, green beyond praise.

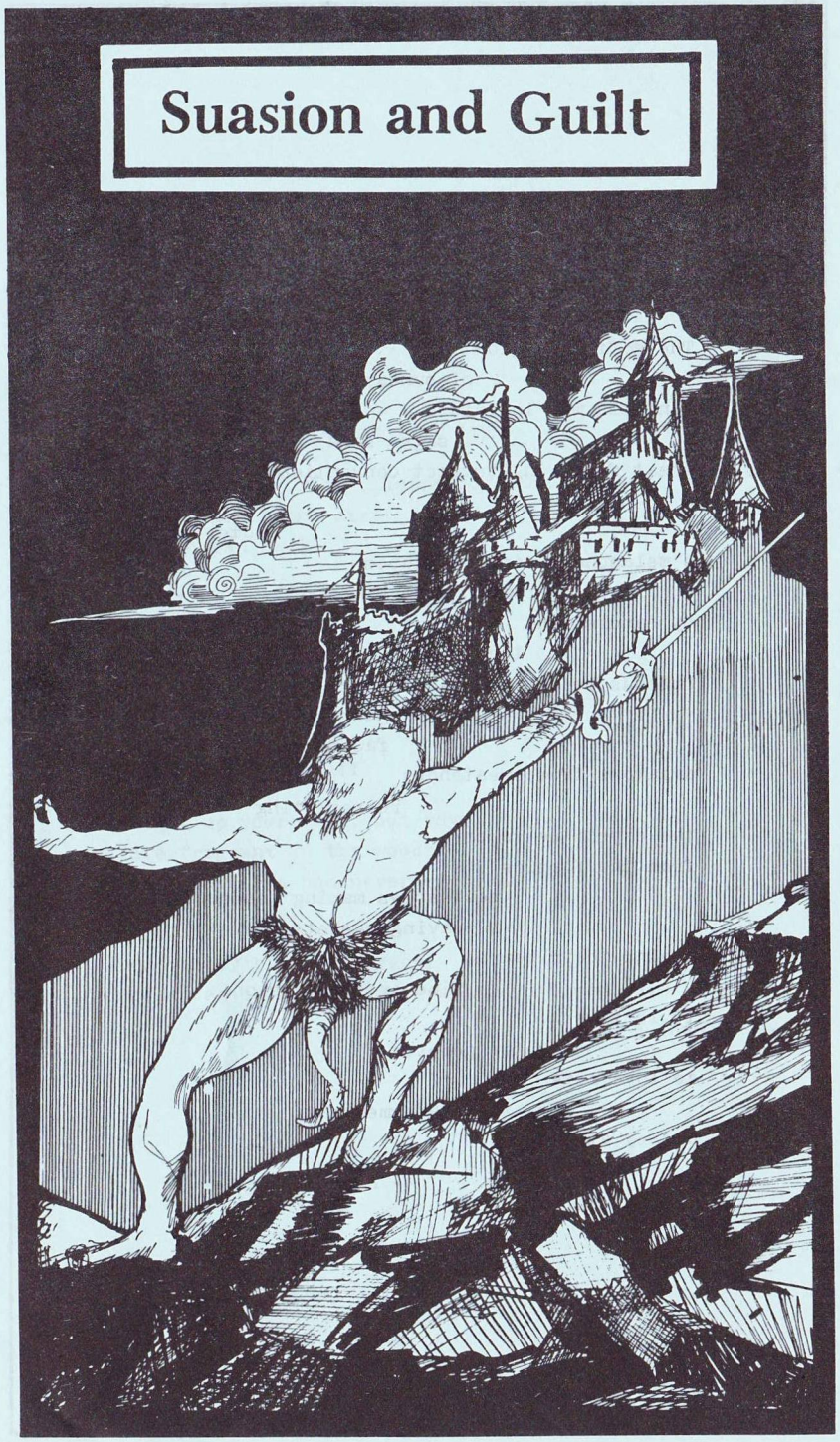
-- P. B. Newman --

TURNER'S LIGHT

The soft pale glow
of sunday morning advancing
confused may in ohio
saga saga
great folks in abstract conventions
desolate
hotel rooms
& melancholy single figures
reading the bible
by candlelight
lack of popular moments
hideous beauty of the sun
georgia swamps
fading into paintings
aviators from sweatshops
representing
the esprit de corps
from the forties
new masses making beads
& weaving baskets
behind their beards
fine-artist passion
it is time
for the people
to love life
so the statesmen say
& they always did.

-- Errol Miller --

Suasion and Guilt



"The Poison Belt" as a Morality Tale

Dana Martin Batory

#1 BACKGROUND

Right after his first Professor Challenger novel, The Lost World (1912), there followed Arthur Conan Doyle's second, The Poison Belt, serialized in the 1913 Strand Magazine. Here Challenger is given the lead in a basically serious story. The fifty-four year old Doyle poured much of himself into the novel, just as in his semi-autobiographical The Stark Munro Letters (The Idler Magazine, 1894-5), a study of the hopes, feelings, and religious doubts of a young doctor such as he had been at Southsea in 1885.

Challenger, his wife, and three friends, Edward Malone, Lord John Roxton, and Professor Summerlee shut themselves up in an air-tight sitting-room, for as Challenger falsely theorizes: "Our planet has swum into the poison belt of ether...That it will involve the whole world and that no life can possibly remain behind seems to me to be certain."[1]

"We drew four chairs up to the long, low windows..." writes Malone, as if "we were in four front seats of the stall at the last act of the drama of the world" (p. 256).

Doyle may have derived the plot from M.P. Sheil's The Purple Cloud (1901). Shiel's last surviving man, named Adam, sets out from the North Pole into a world full of corpses also embalmed by the gas that killed them. Sheil, in turn (or Doyle himself), may have read Mary Shelley's similar The Last Man (1826).

In his early student days at Edinburgh, Doyle occasionally visited George Budd, partial basis for the Challenger character,[2] whose quarters consisted of four little rooms above a grocer's shop. Budd, like Challenger, insisted upon gumming up every chink of one bedroom for fear of some imagined infection or an attempt at poisoning. No doubt Doyle had this in mind as well.

#2 A CHANGE OF MIND

What is felt by Challenger and his companions when the last dawn breaks and their last cylinder of oxygen is exhausted? Their feelings are Doyle's, and contrast sharply with his early beliefs. The subject of religion had been much in Doyle's mind all through the autumn of 1912. He jotted down in his commonplace book many speculations, and they are reflected in The Poison Belt, written before Christmas.

In his early twenties Doyle had felt obliged to admit there seemed no evidence for the survival of the mind after death. "When the candle burns out the light disappears. When the electric cell is shattered the current stops. When the body dissolves there is an end of matter."[3]

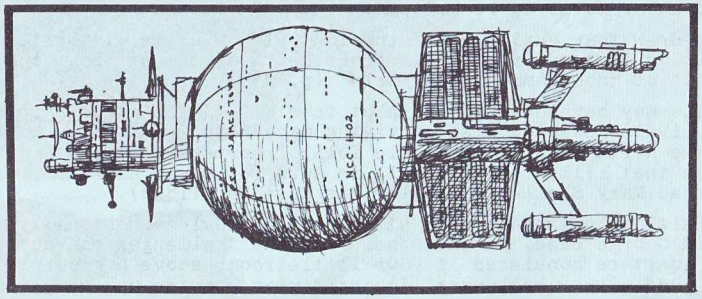
"It brings home to me," he had written in The Munro Letters, "what an unstable chemical compound man is. Here are the stage accessories as good as ever...hydrogen and oxygen and nitrogen and carbon, with traces of iron and silica and phosphorus. A tray full of chemicals and three buckets of water-and there is the raw material of my lady in the sedan chair!"[4]

The young Doyle didn't accept the usual concept of God, but did believe in an intelligent force in nature. "...surely," he continued, "the more we pry into the methods by which results are brought about, the more stupendous and wonderful becomes the great unseen power which lies behind, the power which drifts the solar system through space, and yet adjusts the length of the insect's proboscis to the depth of the honey-bearing flower. What is that central intelligence?" (ibid., 7)

By the time of The Poison Belt Doyle had totally accepted the existence of this intelligence. "Our Gardener is, in my opinion," remarks Challenger, "about to dip the solar system, and the human bacillus, the little mortal vibrio which twisted and wriggled upon the outer rind of the earth, will in an instant be sterilized out of existence" (p. 240).

Summerlee comments that "man may have been a mere accident, a by-product evolved in the process. It is as if the scum of the surface of the ocean imagined that the ocean was created in order to produce and sustain it..." (p.260). But Challenger rejects this view: "I, at least, am too great a thing to end in mere physical constituents, a packet of salts and three bucketfuls of water" (p. 248). "Nature may build a beautiful door and hang it with many a gauzy and shimmering curtain," speculates Challenger, "to make an entrance to the new life for our wandering souls" (p. 246).

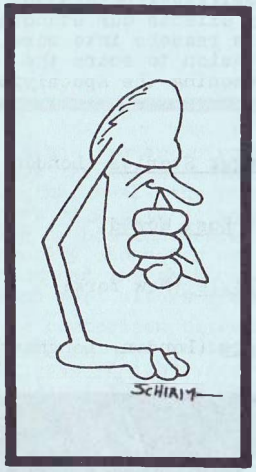
Why this change? We know only that after some point in the interval 1905-1913 Doyle believed himself to be recipient of a mystic communication, one that dispelled his early doubts about Spiritualism. Neither content nor mode of transmission was ever divulged--only that the intimacy of the message compelled belief that it was genuine.

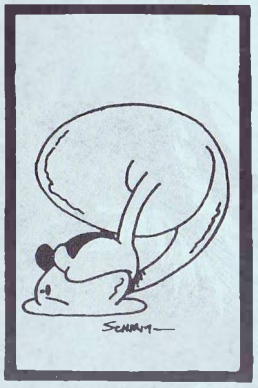


#3 CONVERGENCE

Back in 1898 Doyle, H.G. Wells, E.W. Hornung, and Brian Boru Dunne had met in Italy and spent nearly a month together, touring, discussing, and dining. Doyle had visited the ruins at Pompeii and seen in the museum there the hideous casts made of humans and animals who had been smothered by ash and preserved at the very instant of death during the holocaust of 79 A.D. These statues of death are the very images of what Doyle would later conjure up. As both the evil and good of Pompeii were indiscriminately swallowed up, so Malone thinks is the world's: "One instant of time had put aristocrat, waiter, tramp, and dog upon one common footing of inert and dissolving protoplasm" (pp. 283-4).

The arrival and dissipation of the seemingly poisonous gas and the revival of the population is portrayed as a visitation, a warning of what could happen unless humanity sees the error of its ways and repents. There is an obvious relationship between The Poison Belt and the multitude of works appearing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, warning a decadent England of the dangers of invasion if nothing was done to rejuvenate the country physically and morally.





In the same period as this novel Doyle himself was writing two prophetic articles, "Great Britain and the Next War" (Fortnightly Review, February 1913) and "Danger!" (The Strand Magazine, July 1914). It's doubtful that Doyle had visions of a world catastrophe like the supposedly dead cities and slain masses of The Poison Belt, but several other images and lines of thought were converging at this time.

Challenger compares their plight to being sent to sea in an open boat to some unknown destination--almost like the well-fed, well-dressed passengers aboard the Titanic, plunging toward death amid cushioned comfort. This famous disaster of April 1912, in which over fifteen hundred perished, was still vivid in Doyle's mind. W.T. Stead, Doyle's friendly enemy, had gone down with the ship. The same year, Doyle and George Bernard Shaw exchanged heated letters via the press over the behavior of crew and officers

A sense of restlessness troubled the world at the beginning of the new century. The years between 1900 and 1913 were filled with battles. In 1900 the Boxers laid seige to the legations at Peking, in 1904 the British invaded Tibet, in 1904-5 the Russians and Japenese were fighting, in 1911 Italy made war on Turkey, and in 1913 there was bloodshed at Londenderry caused by "Unionist" gun-running.

Throughout the nineteenth century, and particularly in the last quarter, there had been many expressions of nationalism. It was indoctrinated in schools and preached by editorial writers. Among the stronger nations a set of imperialistic ideals arose simultaneously. All the dying empires of Europe before 1914 were engaged in a policy of aggressive nationalism and imperialism; these two ideas ruled European thought, excluding any sane concept of common human welfare and eventually inspiring a nineteen-year-old schoolboy to assassinate the heir to the Austrian throne and initiate a world war.

It was against this backdrop of greed, self-interest, prejudice, and death that The Poison Belt was composed. These were all signals that a war, perhaps the war, was fast approaching. Inwardly, Doyle knew that this violence, caused by a "me first" attitude, was useless and self-generating. Maybe he couldn't stop the trouble brewing, but perhaps he could make people think before precipitating a drastic reaction or retaliation.

#4 CONCLUDING REMARKS

"It has been a well-known truism," concludes The Times in The Poison Belt after the world's population awakes from its short cataleptic sleep, "that our human race are a feeble fold before the latent forces which surround us. From the prophets of old and from the philosophers of our own time the message and warning have reached us. But what will not be forgotten...is this revelation of the possibilities of the universe, this destruction of our ignorant self-complacency, and the demonstration of how narrow is the path of our material existence, and what abysses may lie upon either side of it. Solemnity and humility are at the base of our emotions to-day. May they be the foundations upon which a more earnest and reverent race may build a more worthy temple" (pp. 298-9).

Could the earlier materialistic Doyle have written The Poison Belt? Clearly it wouldn't have been the novel we know. The early Doyle saw death as absolute. Professor Challenger would never have spoken so reverently of life after death, but would have reflected his creator's own scepticism. Summerlee is far more like the early Doyle than is Challenger.

Nor would the early Doyle have made such a boldface plea for humanity to put its affairs in order or even seen it capable of improvement. Convinced by thirty years of Spiritualistic study that our conduct in this life quite possibly affects our standing in the next, Doyle was trying to frighten his readers into moral reform--but instead of the usual foreign invasion to scare the English, Doyle warned all of humanity by summoning the Apocalypse

FOOTNOTES

1) Arthur Conan Doyle, The Professor Challenger Stories (London: John Murray, 1969), p. 238.

2) Dana Batory, "A Look Behind Conan Doyle's Lost World," Riverside Quarterly 6 (1977), p. 269.

3) Charles Higham, The Adventures of Conan Doyle (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1976), p. 61.

4) Arthur Conan Doyle, The Stark Munro Letters (London: Longmans, Green, 1894), p. 7.

There but not Back Again: The Road from Innocence to Maturity

Christine Barkley and Muriel B. Ingham

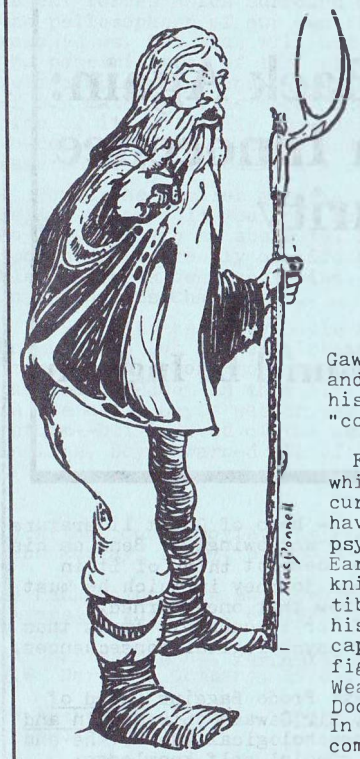
Since few or no road signs exist, the hero of Quest literature often travels down the road to maturity unknowingly. Bent on his original goal--the physical quest--he does not think of it in terms of a rite de passage, a dangerous journey in which he must give up his innocence. Nor does he know that once earned, maturity can never again be exchanged for innocence. It is thus often not the physical quest, but its psychological consequences, which most alters the Quest hero.

A comparison between Tolkien's naive Frodo Baggins (Lord of the Rings) and another innocent hero, Sir Gawain (Sir Gawain and the Green Knight), reveals that the psychological Quest, the end result of which is maturity, confers special self-knowledge: recognition of one's own capability for evil, acceptance of that knowledge, yet awareness that one can suppress the evil. This realistic, rather than idealistic, view of himself shows the Quest hero his place in a universe larger than himself; when mature, he knows that as he travels his own road, "pursuing it with weary /or eager/ feet.../he must/ join some larger way."[1] If the hero is not adequate for his larger responsibilities, he must learn to live with his own personal failure. How the character copes with his weaknesses determines the depth of his maturity.

At the end of his Quest, Frodo comes to a complete understanding of himself, after realizing his own capacity for evil and his need for humility, but it makes him sad:

> I have been too deeply hurt, Sam. I tried to save the Shire, and it has been saved, but not for me. It must often be so, Sam, when things are in danger: some one has to give them up, lose them, so that others may keep them.
>
> (RK, p. 309)

Frodo's deep physical hurts are the knife wound he suffered on Weathertop and the loss of his finger on Mount Doom, but here Frodo refers more to the psychological hurt he feels when he remembers the darkness, the evil, and his own weakness during the course of his Quest.



Similar sadness and shame Gawain suffers on his return to Arthur's court:

> The hurt was healed that he had in his neck, and the bright-hued belt he bore now about it obliquely like a baldric bound at his side, under his left arm with a knot that lace was fastened to betoken he had been detected in the taint of a fault; and so at last he came to the Court again safely.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> 'This is the grief and disgrace I have got for myself from the covetousness and cowardice that o'er came me there! This is the token of the troth-breach that I am detected in, and needs must I wear it while in the world I remain.'[2]

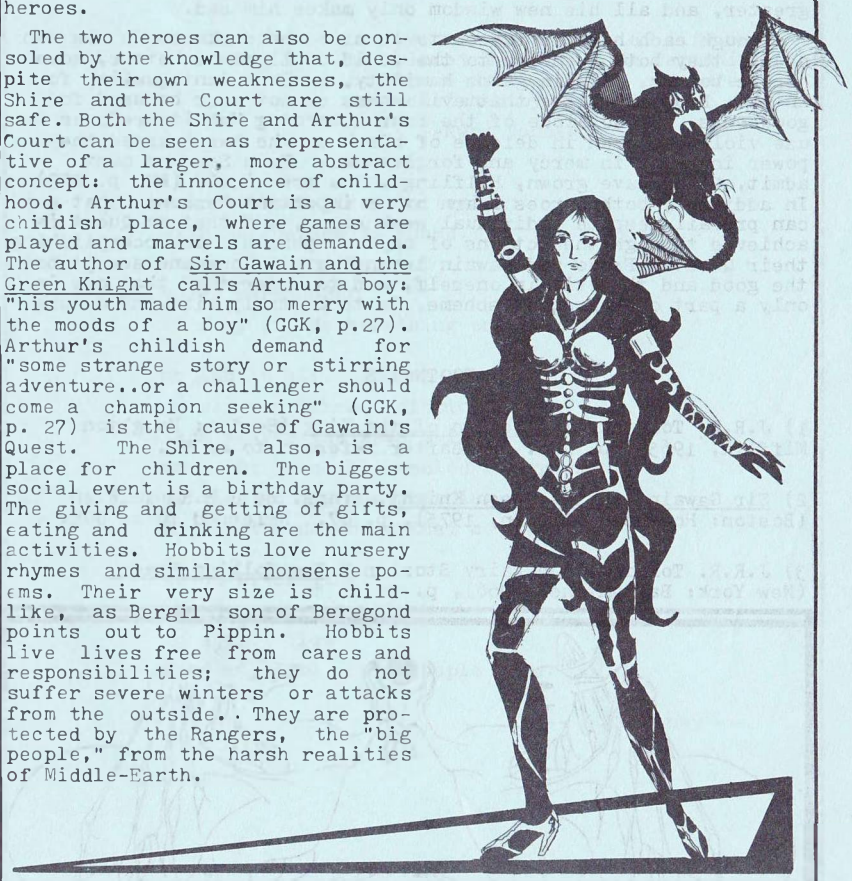
Gawain's hurt, also, is both physical and psychological: the ax wound in his neck and his disgrace over his "covetousness and cowardice."

Frodo and Gawain both have wounds which are the kind "that cannot be wholly cured" (RK, p. 268) because shame at having to admit their own weaknesses psychologically compounds the hurt. Early in the Quest, Frodo receives the knife wound as a result of his susceptibility to the evil power of the Ring; his susceptibility is exactly that capability for evil which he has to fight throughout the Quest As on Weathertop, when Frodo arrives at Mount Doom, he is tempted to use the Ring. In the end he betrays his Quest: "'I have come,' he said. 'But I do not choose now to do what I came to do'" (RK, p. 223).

Frodo's loss of a finger is a direct result of his failure to throw the Ring into the fire, for had he done so, Gollum would have had no reason to bite off that finger. Gawain makes a similar selfish choice: his Quest is to seek out the Green Knight in order to receive the reciprocal blow agreed upon at their initial meeting, but his courage and/or determination fail, and he tries to save himself by using the green girdle. At the critical moment, each hero puts himself or his own wishes above the general good. Therefore, each must face the knowledge that he has failed at his Quest. Frodo later admits, "'But for him /Gollum/, Sam, I could not have destroyed the Ring. The Quest would have been in vain, even at the bitter end'" (RK, p. 225). But the Quest itself does not fail in either case, for the Ring is destroyed and Gawain does stand for the return blow; the Quest is greater than its heroes and its success provides what Tolkien called a eucatastrophe, "a brief vision that the answer may be greater"[3] than the characters alone can provide. Because of their failures, Frodo and Gawain learn humility and that no one can be the ultimate hero for his society or his age.

While the physical scars Frodo and Gawain receive remind them of their humiliation and failure, each can be comforted by some token which he carries. Frodo has Arwen's jewel to help him forget the "memory of the fear and the darkness" (RK, p. 253) when the pain of his wounds bothers him. Gawain's neck wound has healed, but he uses the green girdle as a reminder to be humble, so that he will never again put himself above his honour. The tokens are symbols of the forgiveness Frodo and Gawain receive for their momentary lapses because they truly repent of their selfishness. When Gawain confesses his cowardice to the Green Knight, that Knight replies, "'I hold it healed beyond doubt, the harm that I had'" (GGK, p. 84). Then he suggests that Gawain keep the green belt as a reminder of the incident. Though Tolkien would have considered "repent" and "forgiveness" words too closely associated with religion to express his purpose, Frodo does regret his susceptibility to the Ring, and he does receive solace from the jewel when his wounds, both physical and psychological, bother him. The two tokens, the jewel and the girdle, comfort the heroes.

The two heroes can also be consoled by the knowledge that, despite their own weaknesses, the Shire and the Court are still safe. Both the Shire and Arthur's Court can be seen as representative of a larger, more abstract concept: the innocence of childhood. Arthur's Court is a very childish place, where games are played and marvels are demanded. The author of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight calls Arthur a boy: "his youth made him so merry with the moods of a boy" (GGK, p.27). Arthur's childish demand for "some strange story or stirring adventure..or a challenger should come a champion seeking" (GGK, p. 27) is the cause of Gawain's Quest. The Shire, also, is a place for children. The biggest social event is a birthday party. The giving and getting of gifts, eating and drinking are the main activities. Hobbits love nursery rhymes and similar nonsense poems. Their very size is childlike, as Bergil son of Beregond points out to Pippin. Hobbits live lives free from cares and responsibilities; they do not suffer severe winters or attacks from the outside.. They are protected by the Rangers, the "big people," from the harsh realities of Middle-Earth.



The innocence found in Arthur's Court as well as in the Shire is a desirable trait. But both Frodo and Gawain, during the course of their respective Quests, lose that innocence; they mature by discovering within themselves the capacity for evil, for selfishness, and they must learn to live with that knowledge. At the end of both Quests, the innocence of childhood still exists, in the Shire and at the Court, though the heroes can never recapture it themselves.

They cannot recapture lost innocence, even in the setting where it once was fostered. Frodo says, "there is no real going back. Though I may come to the Shire, it will not seem the same; for I shall not be the same" (RK, p. 268). Frodo finds he cannot stay with the Hobbits because he has matured and they have not. The other Hobbits, still relatively innocent, despite what they have learned about the nature of evil and their own physical weakness through their encounter with Saruman, do not understand Frodo. Even Sam, Merry, and Pippin are apart from Frodo, though Sam comes closest to understanding, for he, too, has borne the Ring and has been tempted by it. But Sam does not succumb to the temptation as does Frodo. Frodo, alone, has the knowledge of his own weakness.

Gawain, also, has changed while the rest of the Court has not. The others react by laughing when Gawain tries to tell them of his shame, to explain what he has learned. All alone with his self-knowledge, Gawain must simply bear his hurt. He remains in the Round Table fellowship, but Frodo leaves Middle-Earth with Bilbo, Gandalf, and the Elves because his hurt is much deeper, his loss greater, and all his new wisdom only makes him sad.

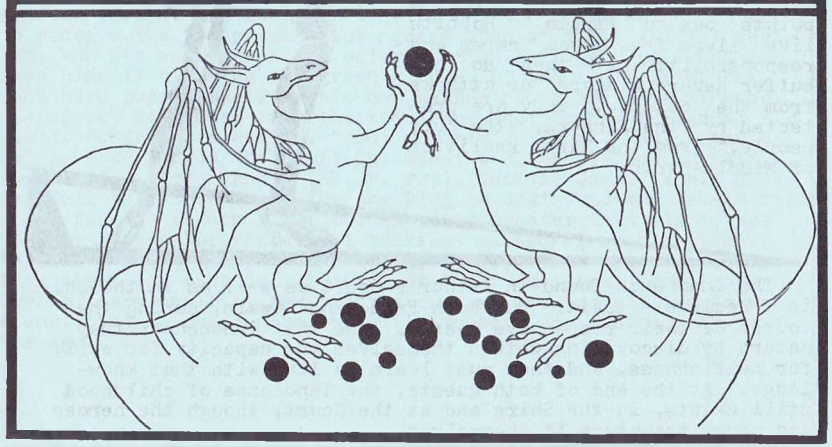
Though each hero is forced to examine the darkness in his own heart, they both reemerge to the world of light as better, more heroic beings. Gawain gains humility, an important quality for a knight; Frodo realizes that evil means cannot ever be used for good ends. Frodo alone of the four returning Hobbits refuses to use violence, even in defense of his home; he has learned the power invested in mercy and forgiveness. Even Saruman must admit, "'You have grown, Halfling...You are wise'" (RK, p. 299). In addition, both heroes learn other important lessons: that good can prevail despite individual weaknesses, and that no Quest is achieved through the actions of any one person. In accomplishing their Quests, Frodo and Gawain learn that to know and accept both the good and the evil in oneself, and to understand that one is only a part of a grander scheme, is to be truly wise and mature.

FOOTNOTES

1) J.R.R. Tolkien, The Return of the King (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), p. 266. Hereafter referred to as RK.

2) Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, trans. by J.R.R. Tolkien (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975), p. 87. Referred to as GGK.

3) J.R.R. Tolkien, "On Fairy Stories," The Tolkien Reader (New York: Ballantine, 1966), p. 71.



HARMONIUMS

...the only known form of life on the planet Mercury. The Harmonium is a cave-dweller...the creatures are nourished by vibrations.

--Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.

voices touch like hesitation
stir darknesses to sound.
where no light is,
voice surrounds;
we stay inside breathing counterpoint.

motion is all.
dancer and dance undistinguished,
Leda weaves the swan's intentions.
undreamt here the candled beginnings
of lighted day the ripening.
we eat the darkness that moves.

seeds of singing.
sound soothes to sleep
in shadow flow
face is chill where people grow.

-- K.E. Roney --

TREE OF THE MIND

Beneath are roots that filter nuclear light
Through gnarled branches of a primal tree.
Around it lies the barrier of night
To separate its twisted form from me.

A dragon bellows through the upper plain,
Invisible in caverns, woods, and nests.
But I see time's engraven stain
When I try my steel against the breasts

Of fertile shapes forever giving birth
To foil beaked predators with wings
Who hover, shaking soundlessly in mirth,
Over the glittering trauma planted deep for kings.

-- Alice Carol Gaar --

ARCADIA

(On April 10, 1524 Verrazzano, in his ship La Dauphine, discovered a place, now Kitty Hawk, N.C., which he named Arcadia "owing to the beauty of the trees")

I could have lived there then
In the newness of the earth,
The water shimmering in my depth,
When European sailors, hull-coloured, waded
Ashore and timid Indians gestured.

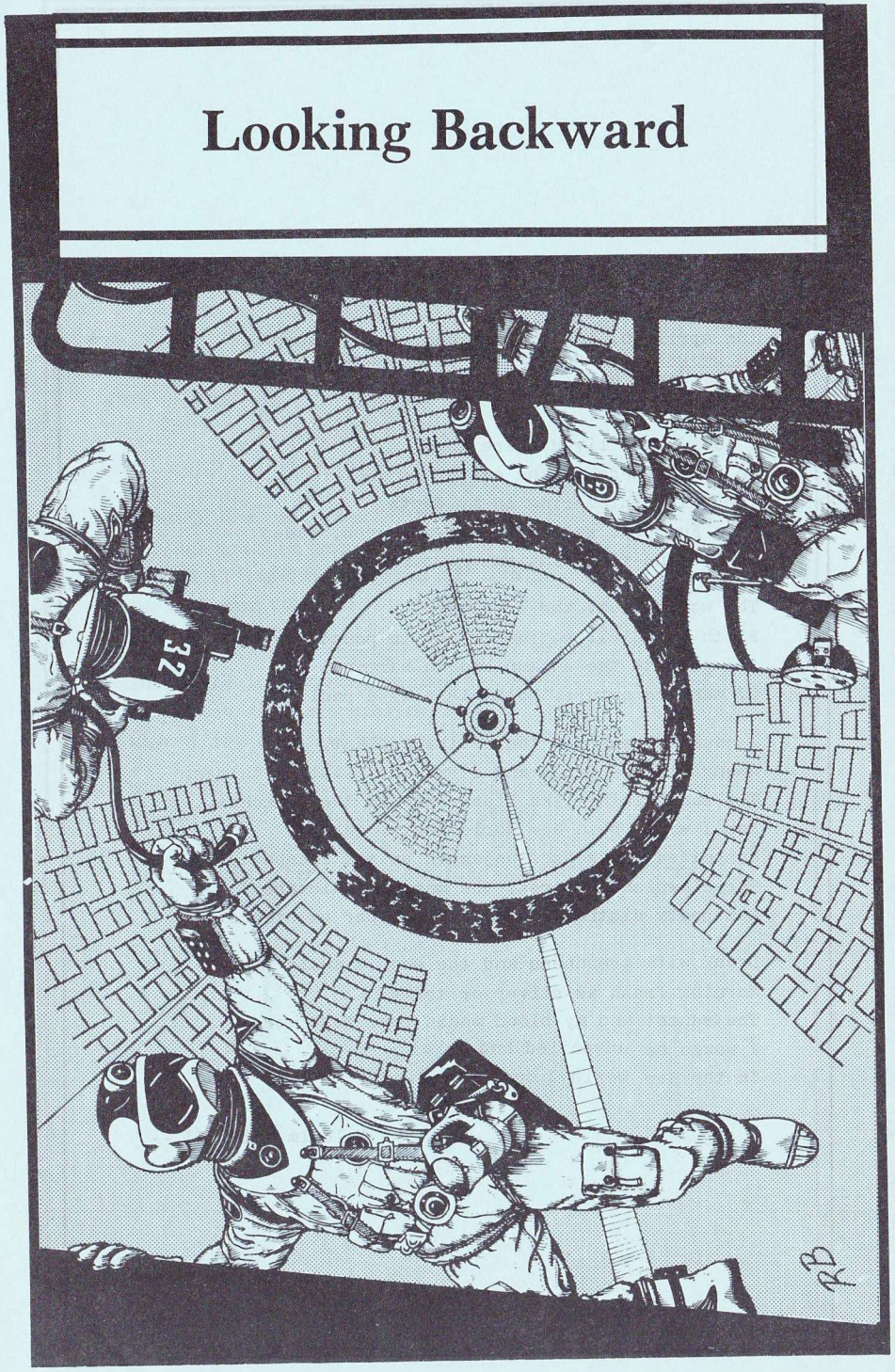
The worlds met, the encrusted
Filth of "civilisation" ready to pounce on
And pollute the salmon-smooth harmony
Of man and nature, bottomless as a soul.

I could have grown there like a plant,
Among blurred ferns and stems and flitting things,
The sun shining like blood through the branches...
For I would be a New World again, calm,
Unspoiled, my senses unjammed by the cacophony,
The clownish postures, the macadam snickers
And sooty distractions of skyscraper existence.

Drunk with greenness and the sun, I would feel
Morning fresh as silver or tears.
The sunset and my blood would roar together.
I would be unspoiled and pure
In the New World I once had.

-- Malcolm Muir III --

Looking Backward



The Frank Reade Library

reviewed by

Mary Weinkauf

The Frank Reade Library, introduction by E.F. Bleiler, New York and London: Garland, 1979-1980, 10 volumes, 4000+ pp.

Maybe it was the first s-f magazine; maybe not. It was, in any case, loved by those boys who dreamed of growing up to be Thomas Edison.

It was the Frank Reade Library, one hundred eighty-seven issues from 24 September, 1892 to 5 August, 1898. In them the teenaged inventor grows into adulthood, moving from the improvement of a steam man and a steam horse to the invention of submarines and electric airships, and travelling all over the world to face Comanches, Apaches, Thugees, Chinese, Cossacks, Mongols, pygmies, Eskimos, and various other enemies. Wondrous scientific inventions were tested by the dangers of unknown territories, with the courage of Frank Reade and friends being challenged by bears, wolves, sixty-foot pythons, and even a sea-serpent. The tales, usually 13 pages of hard-to-read 6-point type in 2 or 3 columns per page,were the stuff of a nineteenth century boy's daydreams.

Author of these stories was Luis Senarens, 1865-1939, who began the series at the age of sixteen, after two years of writing dime novels. Frank Reade, Jr.'s ancestors were Johnny Brainerd of Edward Ellis' Steam Man of the Prairie, 1868 (republished as The Huge Hunter, 1876) and Frank Reade, Sr., the hero of Harry Enton's Frank Reade and His Steam Man of the Plains, Frank Reade and His Steam Horse, etc. When Enton quit, publisher Frank Tousey recruited Senarens to continue the series under the signature of "Noname" and retired Frank Reade, Sr. to a farm in Readestown, Wisconsin. During his career Senarens issued some 1,500 stories under 27 pseudonyms, dashing them off without revising. Not surprisingly, the literary merit of these works is negligible. Paragraphs are one-sentence long; characters are stereotyped; and plots follow a formula, dependent upon coincidence. The series is, however, a monument to America's love of inventions and its ideal of leading the rest of the world into a brighter future.

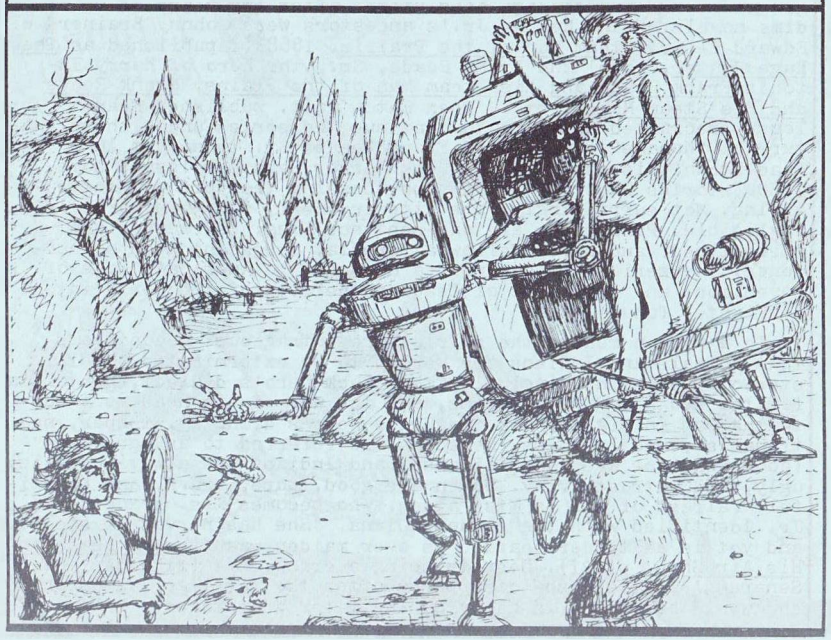
To a modern reader the stories are outrageous. Reade feels that animals and Indians are vermin to be exterminated. Racial stereotypes abound, including the black hero's dialect, nostalgia for the South and watermelons, and the use of his head as a battering ram in fights; and the Irish hero's drinking, temper, nationalism, and laziness. Mexicans are referred to as "greasers" (good Mexicans are "Castillians") and Indians are always hostile, ugly, and untrustworthy. Women are good, pure, brave, and beautiful. Fairest of all is Miss Alden, who becomes Mrs. Frank Reade, Jr. Identified with the goddess Diana, "She has nerves of steel, and yet is as tender-hearted as ever maiden was" (Frank Reade and His Air Ship, p. 21). Despite being a crack shot (like many of Senarens' ladies), she disappears after the marriage, although she would have come in handy during later adventures.

The heroes are marksmen, powerful swimmers and fighters, good-humoured, totally loyal and patriotic, and always ready to go, leaving their infrequently-mentioned families behind. Frank is brilliant but modest, a man's man who enjoys cigars, good liquor, and pretty ladies. His companions, Pomp and Barney, are capable of learning Frank's operations and provide humour. Dr. Vaneyke appears in issues 81, 82, 85, and 86 to represent theoretical science during the long airship voyages.

The typical plot begins with a request for help. Frank Reade turns down the offered fee, accepting because he loves adventure and needs to test a new machine. Off the heroes go to an exotic locale where the malevolent natives engage in gratuitous violence, usually because of their inferior race and political structure. Bears, wolves, and snakes attack only to be wiped out. The invention is pushed to its limit, often stolen by the bad guys (only while Pomp and Barney are skylarking), and sometimes completely destroyed. The heroes rescue each other and kindred good souls, clear the innocent, reunite lovers or fathers and children, and finally return to an appreciative society. Then Frank begins work on a new wonder.

Although these adventures seem amateurish today, the Frank Reade Library is still important because it was the earliest s-f series written deliberately for young people. It encouraged boys to learn about science, explore their world, and see the future as full of inventions to be embraced. It spawned the later Jack Wright, Roy Rockwood, and Tom Swift tales, and possibly influenced Heinlein's juveniles. In Explorers of the Infinite Sam Moskowitz relates that in 1881 Senarens received a letter from Jules Verne, congratulating him on his scientific logic and inventiveness. In fact, in Robur the Conqueror (1886) Verne's electric heliocopter and comic black servant are similar to elements of Reade's already published adventures in their details and actions.

"The American Jules Verne" deserves a place in s-f history and libraries because his Frank Reade Library described the world for boys of the nineteenth century, popularized science and adventures based on it, and made scientists heroic figures.



The Seasonal Fan or Harmony

Jim Harmon

For several years this column has been on the very outer edges of the science-fiction realm, as have been my own activities. This time, I thought I would strike nearer the centre of the field, because of the publication of two s-f volumes with which I am connected. (I also thought I would revert at least temporarily to the title "Harmony" which I have used on fanzine columns for thirty-four years. I note with personal interest that I am the oldest surviving fanzine columnist--except possibly for Harry Warner or someone with whom I am not familiar.)

The two books to which I refer are The Science Fiction Encyclopedia, edited by Peter Nicholls (Doubleday, $24.95; paperback $10.95) and Galaxy: Thirty Years of Innovative Science Fiction, edited by Frederik Pohl, Martin Greenberg, and Joseph Olander (Playboy Press, $10.95).

I believe Nicholls' Encyclopedia is the best of the several books with similar (or the same) titles and themes. My inclusion as both a contributor (for s-f on radio) and as an entry subject no doubt prejudices my opinion, but even without such bias the book would hold up. It is strong on text, not lurid colour illustrations of another, nostalgic period. There are hundreds of illustrations but these are representative examples to augment text, a better use of space in an encyclopedic work. The text itself is written by a number of authoritative contributors, and while it may not be totally free of error or disputable opinion, the work stands squarely on its own with a right-headed grasp of its subject.

Science-fiction has long been plagued by analysis from psychologists and "literary" figures from outside the genre. In the better of these cases, the works of such "outsiders" helped us see ourselves with a better perspective, a bit more mature sense of humour. In the worst of these cases, the works were just laughably in error--sappy misinterpretations that found acceptance through repetition.

In Nicholls' Encyclopedia experts were sought out in many different aspects of s-f. I was pleased that I was sought out to write on s-f in dramatic radio (as I have been doing since 1948). I think I did as good a job as possible in covering the entire field in one thousand words. I suggested to the editors it might be a good idea to include separate entries on at least a few of the more important individual s-f-fantasy programmes (Lights Out, The Shadow, I Love a Mystery, X Minus One) as well as the one general theme article I did contribute. I was told there wasn't room for these added articles, even though there were fifty entries on television programmes. While not in the ideal situation, I feel my thousand word, knowledgeable (if I may) entry is better than the one paragraph entries in some competitive volumes that only mention Orson Welles's "War of the Worlds" Mercury Theatre broadcast.

The biographical entry on me was brief, but I felt pleased to have been noted as at least playing a small part in the forming of the genre that has meant so much to me all through my life. (Future historians please note: Jim Harmon was born April 21, 1933 at Mount Carmel, Illinois. Several volumes have missed this statistic in recent years.) One of the facts about me worth noting (I noted) was that I was a contributor to Riverside Quarterly.

The Galaxy volume contains a number of good but familiar stories. I would suppose the chief purpose of books of this sort is to provide a saleable product to s-f readers who do not frequent old book stores with used paperbacks and back-issue magazines. Personally, I have never known an s-f fan who did not frequent such stores even if he had to travel a hundred miles or so to do so. Of course, in this age of wider circulation, I guess there are s-f readers who only buy shiny-covered new paperbacks off the news stand at $2.50 each. The Galaxy book is a better buy at $10.95 than an average quartet of new s-f paperbacks.

For the fan, the book's greatest value lies in the lengthy editorial comments by Pohl and by former Galaxy editor and founding father, H.L. Gold, and headnotes by each of the represented writers.

It would be hard to argue with the selection of such stories as "Coming Attraction" by Fritz Leiber, "To Serve Man" by Damon Knight, and "The Last Flight of Dr. Ain" by James Tiptree, Jr., all recognized landmarks. And it would be hard to argue with the inclusion of such writers as Robert Sheckley, Algis Budrys, Isaac Asimov, Robert Silverberg, Larry Niven, Theodore Sturgeon, Harlan Ellison, Frederik Pohl, and Cyril Kornbluth, significant authors all, if not always represented with the finest of their catalogues. I suppose it is understandable to use movie star Alan Arkin's sole contribution to Galaxy magazine, especially when it is balanced with the sole contribution of a less famous person, Allan Danzig--both selections being fine in their own right.

My story in the book is "The Place Where Chicago Was," the third time, I believe, this story has been anthologized. I'm glad Pohl or Greenberg or Olander remembered this story. I think it is a good story of mine, but not my best. Among my Galaxy stories I believe better than Chicago are "The Air of Castor Oil," "Blueblood" (misindexed as "Bluebook"), "Confidence Game" (none anthologized), and "Name Your Symptom" (anthologized a few times). I have a feeling the younger anthologists mainly consult previous anthologies, "best of the year" books, etc., and if your story only appeared in the magazine itself, it has a diminishingly small chance of ever escaping the pulp page. We need a new Groff Conklin to comb the pages of the prolific fifties and sixties for gems still left only in back-number issues. The judgment of Judith Merrill, Damon Knight, etc., who prepared contemporary anthologies in those years may not have been infallible. In fact, from proponents of the now largely discarded "New Wave" their judgments may be highly suspect.

In my "memoir" note I expressed a personal lack of affection for the "New Wave" and did not seem to indicate any knowledge that it has largely "blown over." I think I knew this at the time of writing, but it slipped my mind, or maybe the one-time emphasis on the "New Wave" left such a lasting impression I couldn't get my mind off the subject.

I don't read a great deal of current s-f. Although I am aware that a more "conventional" or "traditional" type of s-f story has come back into vogue, I don't find most of them as exciting as their models of some thirty years ago or more.

Years ago, critic Sam Moskowitz decried s-f's losing its "Sense of Wonder." More than one reviewer pointed out that it is the reader, not the written work, that loses a "Sense of Wonder."

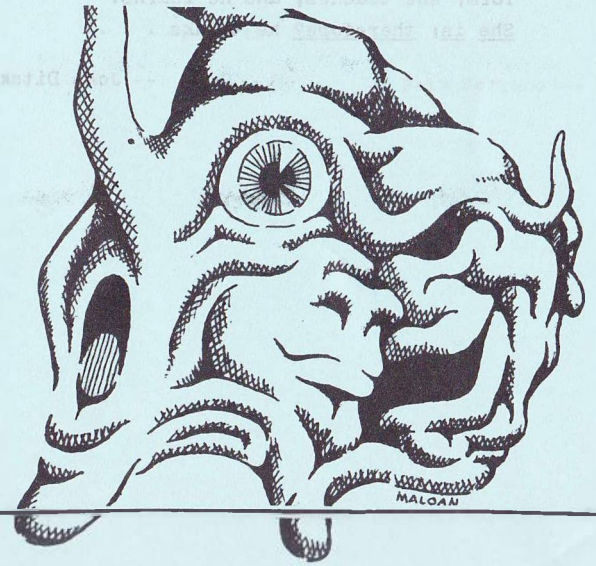
Still, there is an inherent "Sense of Wonder" in art forms in their formative stages. The exploration of limits, goals, and methods of a new form of expression will always have wonder. D.W. Griffith's silent classics, Birth of a Nation and Intolerance still have an excitement and power modern movies can't touch. Brilliant experiments in the use of sound-drama like Orson Welles's War of the Worlds and Carlton E. Morse's I Love a Mystery still have a fascination for listeners too young to have any nostalgic memory of them. Even old comic books, with the medium getting its act together in Seigel and Shuster's Superman or Seigel and Bailey's Specter, have a raw power unmatched by the more literate contemporary strivings of Roy Thomas.

The sheer excitement of s-f in its formative years is probably unmatchable and unreachable by today's more sophisticated and more blase writers and readers. But in our perhaps unwanted respectability, the s-f field will have to find the subtle differences of form and expression that the mystery fiction field has long explored.

I've found that many one-time s-f fans, who read s-f as a favourite form of reading matter, who did not necessarily look on it as a way of life or a salvation of sentient life in the universe, now prefer mystery stories to s-f. My wife of three years, Barbara, is also an s-f fan of twenty years. But most of her reading now is of mystery novels. While I am a life-long reader of s-f, and many who read these words may also be, we must face the fact that the mystery field has developed a wider range of appeal than s-f--so that while one person may read mysteries all his or her life, the average s-f reader reads it for only seven years, many publishers have decided through surveys.

To keep readers from getting sick of the stuff in seven years writers do not necessarily need new ideas: mystery fans have still not tired of the locked room, the gathered parlour-full of suspects, the relentless private eye. Writing need not be an indecipherable drug dream or a religious excursion into psi phenomena disconnected from all previous human experience. S-F writing need only deal with subtler expression of style, concept, and characterization. S-F writing doesn't need to be wilder; it needs to be better.

I may have said that before in the last thirty-four years.



PHILOSOPHY MAJOR

She has the morals of a grad school
nun; she challenges assumptions,
investigates his favourite premises.

Unfolding in his life like natural
law, she takes No for a question.
She risks his reason and his tenure

both. Her contradictions become
his principles; she posits tenets
that he wouldn't dare presume.

She gives a course in transcendental
form; she teaches, and he learns.
She is; therefore? he thinks . . .

-- John Ditsky --

WHISPERS AND DREAMS

Whispers and dreams
of a long night - - -
    fountains of broken rain
    whispering in dreams
    through the windows they have seen.

Whispers and dreams
filling our cups of wine,
lifting our eyes;

In the bright twisting wind
    there is nothing but a day
    that has been forgotten
        and disappeared
            into the rain.

-- Pete Vetrano --

PEACHTREE CREEK (SOUTH FORK)

Blood they knew, the temple's drum,
and almost magically conceived
of fleshy vats and tangled vines,
the salty undergrowth of life,
but Harvey saw a system and
a pump. Discoverer and spy,
the capillary net's Desoto, he
drew artery to vein and mapped
a vast hematic grid. So I
explore the city's body's blood,
the briery banks and rocky troughs
that bridges cross and streets evade.
Down Peachtree Creek (South Fork)
I scout a dark, residual green.

Here rusty hulks are heaped in vine,
concrete fragments lie with stones,
for here the dying craftsmen and
the deathless seed collaborate
and share the sun while, overhead,
the battle grows in high backyards,
in green deserts margined in bramble,
a scream of pistons and a hanging smoke.

-- William H. Green --

CIGARETTE SAILOR

Past birches, ferns,
Recalling green fields gliding
toward the sea,
A cigarette sailor,
wielding bluster like a shield,
breathing salty cigarette foam,
Struts, then startled,
Stops.

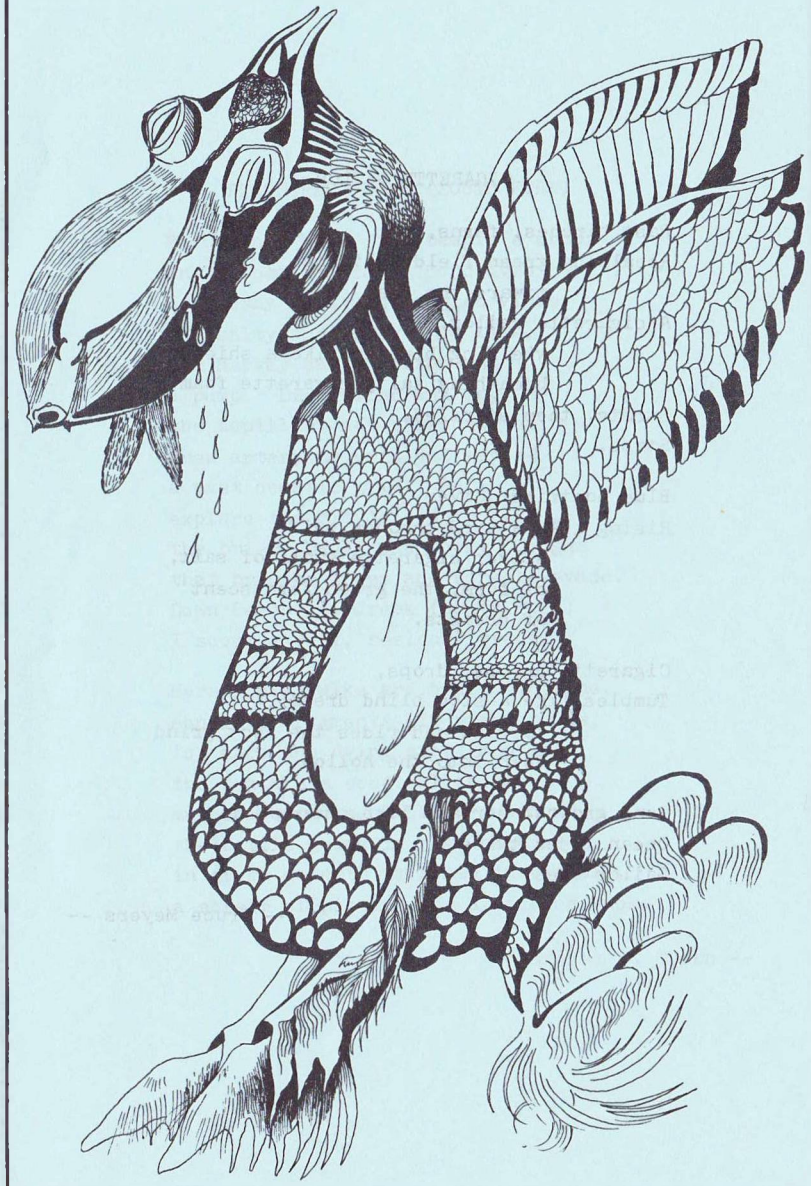
Blue nostrils quiver.
Rising like a bird through swift
silver cigarette smell of salt,
of form, the green fern scent
of breasts.

Cigarette droops, drops,
Tumbles like a slow blind dream
to sand and rides the foot grind
down into the hollow.

Sand groans, screams like spring ice.
Ocean rises twice.
Sailor sees.

-- Bruce Meyers --

On Failures of Nerve



The Eighty Year Shaft: The Grand Scam of Comic Book Reprints since the Turn of the Century

Bill Blackbeard

There is a marvellous William Steig drawing somewhere of a little armless man, walking frantically and fast, his eyes bugging out, with a gigantic screw ground through his middle. Steig's hopelessly shafted image is clearly meant to stand for anyone being systematically reamed by fate, but it does seem to have particular and prolonged application to the newspaper comic strip collector, reader, or researcher, so far as their treatment at the hands of American publishers is concerned. These poor, often devoted guys have been screwed up, down, backwards, and forwards since the turn of the century by virtually every book or magazine reprint collection made from a comic strip. The exceptions are very few, and sadly do not even include many of the reprint collections I have myself edited and entrusted to publishers. The damage wrought to the referential accessibility of a major creative field has been staggering, much of it certain to be irremedial for decades. There have been, of course, and are, grimly consistent reasons for this shafting, but before we explore these in any detail, let's examine what our well-screwed reader has had to put up with for so long, and take a selective look at the hundreds of reprint books and magazines based on newspaper comic strips published since 1897--a selective and appalled look.

We start in 1897, of course, because there was only one comic strip at all prior to that year (R.R. Outcault's Yellow Kid for 10/18/1896 provided the definitive format for the genre), and the first book or periodical reprint of a newspaper strip anywhere appeared the following year--in March, 1897, to be precise. The production was, in fact, a periodical outwardly disguised as a book: issue #24 of Dillingham's American Author's Library, issued monthly at $6.00 a year. The fifty-cent paperback's title was The Yellow Kid in McFadden's Flats, and it was bylined, "E.W. Townsend, author of Chimmie Fadden, and R.F. Outcault, creator of The Yellow Kid." The G.W. Dillingham Company, then in New York, generally printed popular fiction and humour in its monthly series (interestingly, the back cover of #24 announced, "The Most Popular Comic Books Ever Published," but the reference was to prose: the writings of Artemus Ward and Josh Billings), and seemingly took a flyer on this strip reprint only to cash in on the New York area notoriety of the Kid. The venture was apparently well repaid, since a copy of this book in the San Francisco Academy of Comic Art bears a "thirtieth thousand" imprimature under the Yellow Kid's toes on the cover.

The book itself was what we would today call a "quality paperback," with sewn, rag-paper signatures and stout paper covers; its fifty cent price was the 1897 equivalent (at a time when a quarter would buy a good meal of stew and coffee) of about $3.50 today. Thirty thousand copies sold at such a figure to the relatively smaller New York reading populace of the period was certainly an impressive sale. But the actual contents of the book the purchasers received were not very impressive, so far as Outcault's Kid strip was concerned. In fact, Dillingham's negligently casual treatment of his book's comic strip material set the pattern for virtually all of the strip reprint collections to follow.

In terms of prose, the book was probably considered good value by the purchaser. Edward W. Townsend's written commentary on the Yellow Kid's panelled antics, originally published in part with the Outcault drawings on the front page of William Randolph Hearst's weekly New York Journal comic section, and heavily amended to fit the Dillingham book concept, very likely pleased those who had read and enjoyed Townsend's then-famed Chimmie Fadden series. This book of short Fadden stories--like Outcault's Kid--dealt humorously with boyhood in the New York slums. The characteristic Townsend note in Chimmie Fadden was light, rarely reaching the slapstick norm of Outcault's work, but the author nevertheless managed to adapt his mild comic prose effectively enough to the hectic foibles of the Kid and his ragged gang. The point is, however, that to the perceptive Outcault Kid devotee of the time, anyone's words would have been wasted in the ferociously funny presence of Outcault's art. That Hearst realized this fairly soon is evidenced by his swift elimination of the Townsend text from the weekly Outcault continuity, after which the liberated Yellow Kid half-page moved happily toward that definitive comic strip episode of 10/18/1896 which prefigured a major narrative art form for the twentieth century.*

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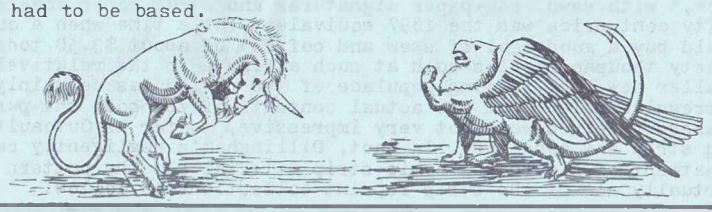
*This epochal episode will be printed in a later issue of RQ, in conjunction with a discussion of the special and unique features of the comic strip narrative form, and notes toward an effective definition.

Dillingham, however, was clearly afraid of reprinting the Outcault strip in a book by itself. People were not used to thinking of newspaper comic supplement material in the same way they thought of the cartoon art of Punch or even the rowdier American Puck. Books of cartoons by the highly regarded contributors in these august journals were perfectly in keeping with the divine order of things, but cartoon art in newspapers was felt to be an immeasurably meaner thing altogether. And surely a particularly nasty item like the horrid Yellow Kid (of which everyone had heard, but few would admit to having seen, since that would mean having purchased a copy of the detested lowbrow Hearst Journal) could have no conceivable pretense to art at all. Yet there was clearly money to be made from providing a presentable version of the Kid strip, one that could permissably satisfy the curiosity of the properly groomed public. To Dillingham, that meant hedging his bet with acceptable Townsend prose--in effect, to immerse the brightly-hued bomb of the Kid in a defusing bucket of Townsend narrative.

Somewhere along the line, Dillingham also decided that his Kid book needed a linking theme not present to his eye in the week-to-week gag payoffs of the newspaper strip. The Kid's yellow night-shirt balloon on the book's cover tipped the reader to what the interpolated theme was to be: "Dis Book," the nightshirt proclaimed, "is De Story of Me Sweet Young Life." This outsize approach meant considerable recasting of the Kid prose Townsend had written for the Journal Sunday page many months earlier, as well as a major reshaping of the implicit content of the Outcault strip episodes from which the book's art was to be selected and on which most of the direct narrative text of the book had to be based.



The result of all this jiggery-pokery was a book which, for the most part, gave the reader little idea of how an actual Yellow Kid strip looked (or even read) in the Sunday colour pages. The Outcault strip art used in the book was black and white, and largely redrawn by an inferior hand (presumably because of the disappearance of the original art in even that short span of time, the absence at so early a point of the very concept of strip proofs, and the extreme difficulty of deriving usable black-and-white art from printed colour pages), while the panels were much reduced from their Journal size, and rearranged in sequence to fit the new Townsend text and theme.

(For one magic stretch of a few pages, however, the book does come sharply alive for the contemporary strip fan. Between pages 177 and 187, five actual Outcault Sunday panels appear in complete strip sequence, dialogue balloons and all. (The fact of this strip episode reproduction, as well as the book's nominal periodicity as a publication, would seem to make The Yellow Kid in McFadden's Flats the first "comic book.") Apparently the original art proved to be available for this one strip, and Dillingham was astute enough to make use of it. Curiously, the contrast between these five superb originals and the crude tracery of the rest of the book's art does not seem to have struck him as noticable or embarrassing.)

The Dillingham book then, in its allover context, tamed the blatant vulgarity of the Hearst-Outcault Kid pages to such an extent that many people buying it must have wondered what all the excitement was about, and whether Hearst's much-denounced "yellow" Journal feature could be as "bad" for the "impressionaole public" as it was painted in more proper publications. To any reasonably objective viewer, of course, it was not "bad" in either an aesthetic or moral sense, but the point is that the Dillingham book so distorted the actual strip that no worthwhile judgment of its intrinsic nature could possibly be made after the book's structural and sequential demolition job. As a result, this book (the only book collection ever made of the Yellow Kid strip) was so useless for either serious study of the work or re-enjoyment of it that it might as well not have been published at all.

The fundamental misstep taken with the Dillingham Yellow Kid, as we can see in retrospect, was not to have had the Outcault art redrawn--that was a bad but understandable solution to a problem that was not to emerge again for decades--nor to have diluted the visual and textual integrity of the strip with prose narrative--that again was a one-time solution to a fancied problem with presentation which did not recur to any extent until the Whitman Big Little Book fiasco of the 1930s--nor even to have ripped the original strip episodes apart and spread the truncated, often borderless panels through the book, nefarious in effect as that was. What Dillingham did that was so deadly, even at this primitive stage of comic strip development, was to select a few weekly Kid episodes from a great many others, out of all creative and published sequence, with no notation at any point of their original order or date of publication, and reprint them willy-nilly in a form dictated solely by the publisher's fancy. In effect, a memorable and competent creative work of great strength and dignity in its own original form, from which a substantial section might have been hewn and effectively exhibited, was instead ruthlessly mined for a handful of tawdrily repainted nuggets, to be strung on a string and swung in the gaslight of Publishers' Row for a few brief hours.

The Yellow Kid in McFadden's Flats is now only a curious relic from the very beginnings of the comic strip, but its initial and basic mistreatment of the genre was to be tragically repeated in various forms and guises from that time on, through hundreds of reprint publications.

Après Dillingham, le deluge.

(to be continued)

"The Investigation" Stanislaw Lem's Pynchonesque Novel

Stanley Fogel (St. Jerome's College)

Ignoring the staples of science-fiction, which are the real or fancied products of science, Thomas Pynchon engages scientific concepts such as thermodynamics, entropy, and information theory;[1] moreover, he uses these concepts as structural principles as well as thematic motifs in his fiction. Although radical, Pynchon's work has analogues in the many experimental fictions that have recently been published. John Barth, John Fowles, Anthony Burgess, and Robert Coover, among others, all practise this kind of formalist art in which the methods and conventions of fiction-making are preeminent; as John Hawkes says, for these writers "the true enemies of the novel are plot, character, theme and setting." The concept of randomization, for example, has triggered Marc Saporta's novel, Composition #1, which is boxed rather than bound and allows the shuffling of pages. Another extreme example is Charles Aukema's "Frozen Voices"; Aukema writes of his own short story that it is "a formal exercise in structural fiction...a kind of Rube Goldberg machine that does nothing in a very elaborate way. For instance, each particle of the story is repeated twice, in staggered sequence."[2]

The works of Saporta and Aukema, it might be argued, operate on the periphery of serious novelistic experimentation. What is clear, however, is that no "sacred cows" remain for novelists. Their (to some, irreverant) play with the stuff of fiction--its theories and conventions--produces a conscious examination and alteration of traditional fictional models. In the realm of s-f, though, only Thomas Pynchon has been constructing his novels in this consciously playful way. In novels that involve sorting and ordering information, hewing meaning out of a disordered world, Pynchon structures his novels so that his readers must undertake the same fictionalizing processes his characters undertake, i.e., making sense out of tantalizing but elusive clues. Articulating that dilemma, Oedipa Maas wonders, in The Crying of Lot 49,

> whether, at the end of this (if it were supposed to end), she too might not be left with only compiled memories of clues, announcements, intimations, but never the central truth itself, which must somehow each time be too bright for her memory to hold; which must always blaze out, destroying its own message irreversibly, leaving an overexposed blank when the ordinary world came back.[3]

The directives to Pynchon's readers and characters are clear: there is no order inherent in the world except that which one arbitrarily places there. The quest (scientific or otherwise) for meaning is artificially resolved or is endlessly pursued.

Although a writer of s-f and an outspoken critic of the genre[4] for the past thirty years, Stanislaw Lem, with the recent translation from the Polish of Memoirs Found in a Bathtub and The Investigation, is just now becoming more accessible to American readers. Because of the Pynchonesque quality of his writing (if one may write this of a man who is Pynchon's senior), Lem is making a timely entrance onto the American literary scene. (The present dominance of formalist fiction, in fact, has caused Saul Bellow to lament that the Dickensian, socially concerned writer is being overlooked in current critical examinations and editorial decisions.) Like Pynchon, Lem is a formalist writer who employs scientific--specifically, in his case, statistical and mathematical--principles and motifs ultimately to undermine the scientific mode of perceiving and structuring the world in any but an artificial way.

The Investigation is a multi-layered parody of both s-f and detective stories. The narrative delineates the investigation of a series of puzzling corpse robberies and/or corpse movements. Gregory, a detective who prides himself on his deliberately random movements, and Sciss, a statistician who revels in his meticulously planned life, are the two principal antagonists who attempt to solve the riddle. It is a riddle studded with tantalizing clues: the names, for instance, are replete with double entendres--the bodies of James Trayle, Stewart Aloney, and Samuel Filthey disappear; the incidents occur in Engender and Spittoon; peripheral characters include Plays and the gothic-sounding Fenshawes. As with the panoply of Pynchon characters (Stanley Koteks, Ghengis Cohen, Bloody Chiclitz) and institutions (W.A.S.T.E., N.A.D.A.), however, the connexions they promise are never made. Again, as with Pynchon's fiction, endings and order are elusive not merely because the author wishes to indulge in some legerdemain, but because Lem's epistemological vision in The Investigation is that knowledge is a construct, tenuously wrought, which makes sense out of existence only by falsifying it.

Most elusive of any reductive significance in the novel are the corpse disappearances. Along with this "case" (which engages Chief Inspector Sheppard, Gregory, and Sciss) are other recurrent things and events, such as mannequins which are manipulated at various points and which provide a taunting reminder of the inexplicability of corpse movements, and the sexual innuendo of what might be called the Gregory-Sciss dialectic. The two men, offering in their actions and discourse two different modes of coping with inchoate reality, have dinner together and on leaving find that they must "skip around the edge of the dance floor, jostled by the dancing couples."[5] They dance together deservedly, neither one finding absolute meaning or even consolation in the highly deliberate way each (the scientist and the detective) attempts to solve the case and to cope with the world.

At the heart of the novel, though, is the search by Gregory and Sciss for an answer to the case of the aberrant corpses. Gregory, as mentioned previously, is a detective, one who needs a crime and a human perpetrator of that crime in order for his perception of the universe, full of logic and of cause and effect, to remain stable. As one of Sciss's acquaintances tells him:

> A culprit who isn't caught is a defeat for you--it means still another folder in the unsolved cases file. But a culprit who doesn't exist, who never existed, that's something completely different, worse than all your records burning up, worse even than confused language in your official reports, it's the end of the world! For you, the existence of the perpetrator of a crime has nothing to do with victory or defeat--it's a matter of the sense or absurdity of your profession and your daily activities. And because catching him means peace of mind, salvation, and relief you'll...get the bastard even if he doesn't exist!
> (p.160)

Yet not only the futility of his quest for that agent, but also other facets of his world undermine his perspective; there are, for instance, the unanswered questions about the noises which obsess him and which emanate from Mr. Fenshawe's room, the one beside his own.

There is also Gregory's habit of releasing himself in the random world around him by haphazardly traversing London and, more importantly, by playing a game unique to him since his school days; that game involves randomly getting on and off the subway trains at intervals chosen spontaneously (or, in other words, selected by chance). Gregory's preoccupation with chaos prepares the reader for his dogged pursuit of Sciss as the criminal and also for his compromise at the end of the novel after he discovers Sciss is not the human agent for whom he desperately wished.

At once falsely pursued and idiosyncratically pursuing, Sciss both lives his life and sees the case antithetically to Gregory. His life is organized around statistics, which supplies him with the hedge against random existence that Gregory finds in police work. Yet variables work against Sciss's neat constructs as well. His health, he reveals, and his sexual proclivities, it is intimated, conspire to thwart the statistically charted, fastidious life he wishes to live. Not to be denied, though, is his herculean attempt to live by the mathematical order he creates.

In terms of the corpses, Sciss epigrammatically states, "This isn't a criminal investigation, it's a scientific study"(pp 117-8). This scientific study, it is important to note, does not explain what causes the phenomena of the world; it merely orders them. This "merely," however, does not reduce statistics' claims. Sciss says:

> Nowadays rationalism is the fashion, not the method, and superficiality is always one of the characteristic features of fashion...At the end of the nineteenth century it was universally believed that we knew almost everything there was to know about the material world, that there was nothing left to do, except keep our eyes open and establish priorities... So-called common sense relies on programmed nonperception, concealment, or ridicule of everything that doesn't fit into the conventional nineteenth century vision of a world that can be explained down to the last detail. Meanwhile, in actuality you can't take a step without encountering some phenomenon that you cannot understand and will never understand without the use of statistics.
> (pp. 156-7)

Thus Sciss can analyze the events that perplex the criminal investigators and can at least provide a regulatory grid for their occurrence. Although he cannot provide definite answers as to why they occur, he can, as can medical researchers about cancer, predict under which conditions they are most likely.

After being defeated by the case and by Sciss, Gregory comes to appreciate Sciss's partial victory over disordered existence. In a lengthy passage which is the philosophical centre of the novel and which paves the way for his acceptance of the Chief Inspector's artificial and "neat" resolution of the case (achieved by Sheppard when he produces a recently deceased truck driver who could have been in the area of each corpse snatching), Gregory says:

> What if everything that exists is fragmentary, incomplete, aborted, events with ends but no beginnings, events that only have middles, things that have fronts or rears but not both, with us constantly making categories, seeking out, and reconstructing, until we think we can see total love, total betrayal and defeat although in reality we are all no more than haphazard fractions...The daily commonplace is automatically regulated by the world's vastness, its infinite variety; because of it, what we see as gaps and breaches, compliment each other; the mind for its own self-preservation, finds and integrates scattered fragments.
> (pp 204-5)

To save oneself from being overwhelmed by the surrounding chaos (Gregory's metaphor for the world is that it is like soup), he advocates the following: "The mathematical order of the universe is our answer to the pyramids of chaos" (p.205). Clearly, though, statistics is arbitrarily and selectively used, and provides nothing approximating an absolute order; it is merely an aid in coping with a variegated universe.

In The Investigation Lem is probing one of the basic paradoxes of human existence which Georg Simmel, a contemporary of Max Weber and another who was influenced enormously by Marx, has rendered as the dualism of "life" and "the forms of life." For Simmel, "Since life is the antithesis of form, and since only that which is somehow formed can be conceptually described, the concept of life cannot be freed from logical imprecision."[6] For Lem, only statistics, which maps the frequency with which various events occur, does not distort too grossly what Simmel has called the "restless rhythms" of existence. Nonetheless, the arbitrary nature of all answers is clearly manifested in Lem's fiction as it is in Pynchon's.

FOOTNOTES

1) For an insightful discussion of the role these elements play in a Pynchon novel, see Anne Mangel's "Maxwell's Demon, Entropy, Information: The Crying of Lot 49," Tri-Quarterly, number 20.

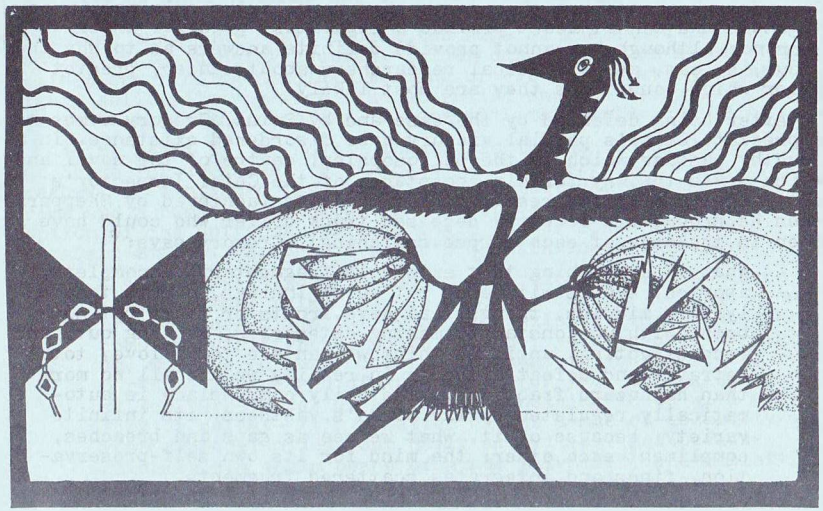
2) Cutting Edges: Young American Fiction for the 70's, J. Hicks,ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1973), p. 517.

3) The Crying of Lot 49 (New York: Bantam, 1966), p. 69.

4) See his "Robots and Science Fiction" in SF: The Other Side of Realism (ed., T. Clareson) for a discusssion of s-f as a game played with autonomous rules that can deviate from "reality."

5) The Investigation (New York: Seabury, 1974), p. 184. Subsequent quotations are followed by page numbers from this edition.

6) Georg Simmel, The Conflict in Modern Culture and Other Essays, K.P. Etzhort, ed. (New York: Teachers College Press, 1968), p. 26.



Film Clips

Steven Dimeo

** THE SHINING --Despite Newsweek critic Jack Kroll's lauding it as "the first epic horror film," The Shining, at an unbelievably long 146 minutes, shines only as director Stanley Kubrick's darkest hour. For all his artful if still self-indulgent staging of a few successful scenes, Kubrick respects neither Stephen King's novel nor the horror film genre itself. And while self-satire helped make two of his films his best to date--Dr. Strangelove (1964) and A Clockwork Orange (1971) /2001: A Space Odyssey(1969) was only his most influential /--it is here embarrassingly self-defeating. Because he never really balances the humour with the horror, preferring again obscure diffuseness of purpose, Kubrick has produced a film that breaks into a series of radically uneven episodes, epic only in its ability to bore us to death. He also goads us into howling for all the wrong reasons--at his own unintentional excesses and at misdirecting that forces us to sit through Jack Nicholson's worst performance ever.

Comparing his adaptation against King's original points up just how Kubrick overplays the wrong things at the worst possible times. His major error is in eschewing King's slow development of the main character's madness and making its nature too comically unnatural to be credible. In the book ex-teacher Jack Torrance, who brings his wife and son along when he accepts a job as caretaker of the Overlook Hotel in the Colorado Rockies during the winter when he hopes to finish writing a play, is tempted to madness by the hotel's lurid past for a number of internal reasons: guilt over his temper and alcoholism that once led him into wrenching his son's shoulder out of its socket, growing alienation from a simple but pretty wife, and a sense of failure as both a teacher and artist. In Kubrick's version Jack Nicholson as Torrance appears mad from the outset, his moronic grin prevailing even in the film's opening job interview with Stuart Ullman (too blandly played by Barry Nelson). We never have a chance to sympathize with Torrance as a normal human being who succumbs to the hotel's supernatural powers of suggestion. Which, after all, is more chilling: to see somebody act blatantly mad or seem normal when he actually is mad?

The self-satire implicit in this approach all too often undercuts the epic horror we expect from such a filmmaker. During the otherwise suspenseful ax-attack on Torrance's wife Wendy (toothily played by Shelley Duvall), for example, Nicholson sticks his head through the door to the bathroom where she is cornered and hollers, "Heeeere's Johnny!" Count the number of times the theatre audience laughs when Nicholson delivers such lines with that wide-eyed smile to know whether Kubrick succeeds in enhancing the sense of menace by overstating the insanity with crazy humour.

Even with his potentially charged camera angles, Kubrick alters King's story in ways that make Nicholson's madness even more senseless or that sacrifice numerous opportunities for a truly good scare. Three scenes freely adapted from the novel bring these weaknesses into focus.

To begin with, take Kurbrick's interpretation of the sequence in Room 217, which here--inexplicably--becomes Room 237. In the book Torrance's son Danny opens the door to discover a living corpse in the bathtub; the father later refuses to do any further exploring when he sees the doorknob turning from something on the inside that wants out. Apparently conscious of the eternally effective cliche of whisking back a shower curtain for shock value, Kubrick skips Danny's confrontation altogether, showing us instead the dazed effect of the experience on Danny Lloyd who plays the role, then concentrating on Nicholson's entering the room. There he finds slowly emerging from the bathtub a svelte nude (luscious Lia Beldam) who entices him into holding and kissing her--whereupon she corrupts into a hag. Clearly this shift identifies Nicholson's character as the film's protagonist, however characterless he seems. But what does this apparent eagerness for sexual promiscuity have to do with Torrance's giving in to the horrors of the hotel? Is the incident supposed to suggest that an illicit lovelife in the hotel doomed this girl to becoming a concupiscent corpse? If so, the morality is not only irrelevant but archaically absurd. For cinematic terror Kubrick substitutes sensationalism. His penchant for extraneous nudity at least endears him as a more sympathetic dirty 53-year-old male; a preference for obnoxiousness and obscurity makes him nothing more than a sloppy film director.

The climactic hedge maze sequence highlights just how effortlessly Kubrick wastes his talent for developing mood. He dreamed up the leafy labyrinth to avoid the difficulty of animating a topiary that comes to life and attacks Torrance in the book, but the snow-covered maze at least symbolically if not realistically reinforces the character's mental meanderings while maintaining, as a replacement for the boiler explosion that engulfs the Overlook at the end of King's novel (a trite touch anyway), the infernal implications of Torrance's transformation. But the ghostly white of those hedgerows and photographer John Alcott's camera that sends us headlong down those corridors to the heartbeat-like sound of Bela Bartok's score, lead, like the maze, nowhere. Pursued by a limping lunatic of a father, Danny too easily outsmarts Nicholson by backtracking in his own footprints, leaving Nicholson behind to freeze for another overstated still of his beetled expression of mindless madness. Kubrick never confirms the threat to Danny by having an ax-brandishing Nicholson leap out from the hedges and at least keep us awake.

In a third scene even more unique to the film, Kubrick more obviously forfeits entry into any movie hall of fame. From desk level, the camera looks up to frame Shelley Duvell's growing horror as she discovers that her husband's writing over the past few weeks has consisted solely of typing page after page of, "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy." We see only the balcony of the hotel lobby over her shoulders and, as she continues to riffle more rapidly through the pages, fully expect to see Nicholson's face suddenly loom up there. Instead, Kubrick utterly destroys the suspense by shifting the camera behind an unarmed Nicholson as he rounds the corner a safe distance away.

Even Kubrick's talent for setting up shots with a painter's attention to colour and composition--which made other trips into tedium like Barry Lyndon (1976) and 2001 at least visually exciting--here does no more than challenge his verbal excesses. And blame for the pointlessly talky script rests not with Stephen King but with Kubrick and his co-writer Diane Johnson. We may be initially forgiving when they make us sit through the vapid exchange of amenities between Nicholson and his employer-to-be Barry Nelson (reminiscent of that wasted exchange between characters on the space station in 2001), thinking perhaps they mean to contrast the dull Colorado world and the supernatural horrors to come. Wishful ~~thinking~~!

Most of the actors' words, some admittedly taken straight from King's text, sound unbelievable on the screen: when Ms. Duvall awkwardly explains to us and the doctor (Anne Jackson) about her husband's accidentally injuring their son, when Nicholson too easily accepts a ghostly bartender and a ballroom full of ghouls and begins to banter about the imminent intrusion by the cook, when Nicholson turns on Ms. Duvall with wild accusations in their bedroom and later in the lobby where she hits him with a baseball bat, and when Scatman Crothers as the cook rationalizes his incredible return from his Florida vacation to the hotel in a blizzard by explaining over the phone to a friend that the people who took over the place are "completely unreliable assholes."

Kubrick's additions to King's story seem cinematically sensitive but seldom work. He changes Torrance's croquet mallet to an ax, for instance, because it is keenly identifiable as a weapon. But the mallet seemed even more inimical precisely because its normal purpose was innocuous. Kubrick is more imaginative when he mounts the camera on the back of Danny's Big Wheel tricycle as the boy pedals through the empty hotel halls, which seem even larger and more menacing from that vantage point. But he uses that gimmick three times before Danny rounds a corner to see nothing more than images of twin girls standing at the end of the corridor alternating with images of their mutilated corpses. When Kubrick has the impact of visualization at his disposal, he does exactly that--disposes of it!

What he is unquestionably true to is the plot's diffuseness, adding even more obscurity, apparently hoping that dullness will be mistaken for depth. We never know in either the novel or film, for instance, the cause of the horror at the Overlook Hotel. Does it stem from the last caretaker's massacre of his family? For a while that's what we think when we learn that Lloyd, the bartender (Joe Turkel), is the ghost of that murderer. Kubrick's stroke comes at the very end with an ambiguous photo on the wall of the hotel taken during its heyday in the twenties with Nicholson at the forefront of the revelers. Are we to assume the bartender's ghost possessed him? Kubrick never even tries to brick over the greatest flaw: why should the hotel pick on Nicholson when it's Denny who demonstrates "the shining" or preternatural telepathic powers? And what purpose is that titular talent except--ridiculously--to call for help from the cook two thousand miles away?

Even without the aimless plot, there would still be the acting. Critics have mysteriously praised the performances here, but the actors only prove just how one-dimensionally unsubtle Kubrick's direction really is. As noted earlier, Nicholson makes madness more ludicrous than menacing. Ms. Duvall tries to save the picture with convincing blood and tears but bites off more than she can chew even with an overbite like hers. Aided by her campy Annie Hall fashions that make her clomp awkwardly through the posh hotel, she acts only like someone misdirected and miscast as a beauty who could have helped woo Nicholson towards beasthood. Nicholson and Duvall's performances only bear out King's own misgivings about the casting aired in an earlier interview (Cinefantastique, vol. 8, no.1). Danny Lloyd tries to chill us by lowering his voice as his psychic alter ego, especially when he keeps repeating "Redrum" (translate "dumb-dumb," for that's merely "murder" spelled backwards--and dead-ended contrivance spelled frontwards). But he conjures in us only a fonder remembrance of things more transcendent when Mercedes McCambridge's voice did a good deal more for Linda Blair in The Exorcist (still the champion of horror films). As a boy with a "shine" on in a way much different from his drunken father, he just can't approach the more natural brilliance of a child star like Justin Henry in Kramer vs. Kramer.

Frankly, it's as though Kubrick (like Coppola with Apocalypse Now) found himself steeped so far in this muddle that he had to finish the project whether he wanted to or not. He must have realized at some point just how ill-suited King's book was to his own film inclinations. Except for a few moments when there's still a spark of intelligence in his moody visualizations, The Shining flickers only as one more career eclipse. In Anthony Burgess' futuristic slang, some of which Kubrick retained in his underrated adaptation, A Clockwork Orange, the word "horrorshow" in that culture had come to mean "good." Kubrick's modern attempt at a horror show of his own is, sad to say, just not horrorshow enough.

**½ THE CHANGELING --An above-average hair-raiser whose biggest surprise is George Scott in the starring role as a man who, suffering from the loss of his wife and daughter in a freak car accident (shot in slow motion at the film's outset), rents a haunted mansion from a realtor, uncomfortably played by his real-life wife Trish van Devere. It eventually transpires that the spirit of a crippled boy murdered by his father is communicating with Scott in order to demand retribution for his murder. Director Peter Medak (The Ruling Class) piques our interest in this potentially stock ghost story by screenwriters William Gray and Diana Maddox by emphasizing the mystery of identifying the spirit and then trying to locate the corpse that will prove Scott is not imagining it all. The writers can't resist the inevitable cliche at the end, but the spirit's laughter over the sound of its favourite music box that has survived the climactic fire only confuses the purpose, suggesting its cry for justice from the grave may have been maliciously motivated. But for all the other standard horror film trappings from creaking doors to mansions burning to the ground, The Changeling both fascinates and terrifies because of its slick execution and pacing. David Ansen of Newsweek thought the film's seance was its best sequence but those trips into the attic where the boy was killed and the wheelchair's harrowing pursuit of van Devere down the staircase, with the camera right behind, will have viewers wheeling in their own seats.

***½ THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK -This second in a projected series of nine films in the Star Wars saga actually outdoes the original in sheer imaginativeness and depth. Mark Hamill is more mature and secure in his role as Luke Skywalker, who here plunges into a night journey of the soul when, attacked by a Wampa Ice Creature and Imperial forces on the ice planet of Hoth, he escapes to the swamp planet Dagobah. There he struggles in vain to learn the telekinetic ways of the Jedi Knights from another of producer George Lucas' many brainchilds, a little green man named Yoda, then, receiving a telepathic call for help from his friends, Princess Leia (Carrie Fisher) and Han Solo (Harrison Ford), races to their rescue to the heaven-like cloud city over Bespin only to fall into Darth Vader's trap and the darker side of the Force. The same brand of self-satirizing dialogue as in Star Wars marks this sequel which this time is seasoned with more sentimentality over friendship and by director Irvin Kershner's almost frenetic emphasis on more action and violence. There are inevitable loose ends about Han Solo's fate and the "savior" Yoda hopes for when Luke founders and also some corniness in the unconvincing love scenes between Han and Leia. But the sets and special effects again help realize an otherwise brilliantly conceived film fantasy.

** HUMANOIDS FROM THE DEEP --Girls and Gore Galore! might have been the best way to bill Humanoids from the Deep. But for all its "C" movie priorities this Roger Corman production is sometimes surprisingly diverting. With a low budget painfully obvious from the fuzzy soundtrack, director Barbara Peeters features standard suspense gimmicks that frequently work in this otherwise poorly paced rerun of s-f cinema's ecological disaster syndrome.

One major drawback is that the plot seems pieced together from all the colourless imitations of Jaws. A chunkier Doug McClure at first defends the town of Noyo against more human monsters representing a cannery and a delighted fisherman played by Vic Morrow, who wants the chance for more change in his pocket even if it means sacrificing Indian land, much to the inevitable chagrin of Anthony Penja (obvious shades of Prophecy there). Naturally--or unnaturally rather--the town sacrifices more than that, for CANCO sponsored scientists, in the interest of taking the lid off commercial possibilities, have produced a genetic strain called DNA5 intended to make salmon bigger. How big? Well, what we've got now are man-sized salmon walking on the beaches. Although photographer Daniel Lacambe is at least careful to show us the beasts a little at a time, screenwriter Frederick James, following a story conceived by Frank Arnold and Martin Cohen (so many to sire so little?), simply piles up episode upon episode without really building towards the climactic salmon festival that is never even mentioned until just before it takes place. There, of course, the monsters have a chance to do a little gate-crashing where they can jump more than just fish ladders in their own version of a spawn of the dead.

Probably with good reason, Peeters' team squanders most of the budget on the monster make-up. Creator Rob Bottin comes up with hybrids halfway between the creature from the black lagoon and Slithis that are at least sufficiently menacing as amphibian humanoids.

And along the way Peeters actually uses them to good effect, particularly in the assault on McClure's wife played by Ann Turkel. There the camera, assuming the unseen creatures' point of view, brushes through the bushes outside while Ms Turkel waits unknowingly inside, skillfully enhancing the suspense. Peeters likewise seems to be conscious of that thin line between lust and horror when she shows us a couple on their way to a beach outing, then comes in for a close-up of their footprints passing over a creature's. Stock stuff, of course, undercut by the quick cutting to other unrelated episodes, but it accomplishes what it's meant to. Unfortunately other moments lack that kind of subtlety when the monsters interrupt a couple of couples with another kind of coupling in mind, clawing off a skimpy bikini in one case and in the other leaping with understandable frenzy on another nude nubile nymph. Still, we have to admire Peeters distantly here for her gall letting her creatures have such an unadulterated ball right there on the screen--even if that brand of subtlety will probably set ERA back at least a decade. And if those scenes aren't enough to appeal to the perverse in us all, wait for that final shot of the ravaged survivor when an Alien-like larva does a bloodier Jack-in-the-box routine from her belly.

Those moments, however, keep at least our interest up. What ultimately commits Humanoids from the Deep to its own depthless depths is the sensational silliness that unwittingly eats away at the terror intended. It's hard, for instance, to take the attack of the sea beasts seriously when at one point we watch a gang banging with sticks and bones on the latex head of one fishy intruder, or at another when we stare in awe as a bestially bared Miss Salmon conks one of her scaly fans right in its gill while she's apparently swung about by her own endowments.

But for those of us who like their beauties and beasts skin deep once in a while, Humanoids should be adequate for a dip or two.

THE SCANDAL

A clotted interim in a serpent stretch
of sand protecting cliffs too high
to listen after personal erosion and
ebb tide philosophy.
Wriggling up to a light bulb not for every
skin, but I sport grains of rib to outline any
footprint. In love with a disaster.
Rational molting on the wave's crest.
Foam and slither play together
around a pitiful mew, the clam a vise
on its beak. Melba cannot say no.
"Better a milestone around his neck
and cast into the depths of the sea."
No space to fly, only patience to bow the head
and await the water's prying.
Imitating pain easy and I could leave when
enough is enough.
When a dock worker ran his new shoes behind the gull,
used his screwdriver, went back to work saying
"The fuckin' things are too greedy."
Now the stone around my neck turned to blood.

-- Thomas Kretz --

HARBOUR

As another sun flashes
Beyond the curve,
drop the too frayed hawser
and drift into the darkness.
Grope up each
regular swell and peer atop,
then with a slow slide
sink down. Suffer a night
of distended minutes
until

Eventually,
first remarked by its smoke,
thread gray in the dawn
and snaking up
in the play of the wind,
an indiscriminate dot,
steaming over-lifelike,
looms friendly.

Secure until sunset.

-- Ronald Rae --

ROADS NOT TAKEN

"This is a scene where he who treads the
boards
is artlessly rhetorical."
Elizabeth Bishop

"The Shortest Route from Oakley to Limon"
(according to this string of billboards)
is really twenty miles longer than the only
other road, but there are excellent reasons
for leaving the Interstate, for arriving
after dark and after hours. We all remember
what they are: the beauties of sparser traffic,
the need for solitude on long flights
from Metropolis---and last of all
simplicity, the virtue of narrow roads.

The shortest distance between two lines
is a point for the makers of maps
to embark from, on those infinitely famous
journeys, wherever it is they always go.

So relax. If you have a radio, turn it off.
If your wife is not dying in Colorado,
slow down. In the end we will all grow accustomed
to everything, to madness and to giving in,
plying the last roads of the last county
before the border, watching the sunset in flashes
through bullet holes in highway signs.

-- David Owen --