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Cover: Jeff Wilcox

RQ Miscellany

RIDERS OF THE PURPLE SAGE

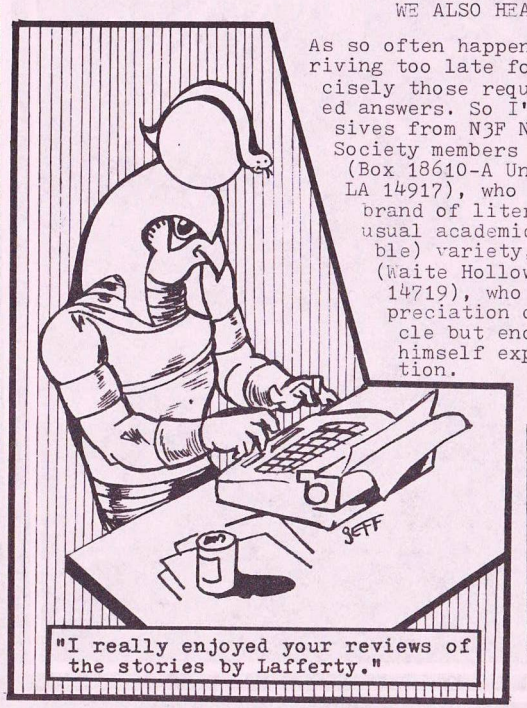
RQ cowboys will still remember Jim Harmon's search (recounted in issue #25) for Tom Mix surrogate, Curley Bradley. All three names are now combined in Ralston cereal's forthcoming series of Tom Mix radio shows that our columnist has been assigned to write and direct--and in which he also plays Tom Mix's sidekick, Pecos Bill. So Mr. Harmon, as he explained in a letter to your editor, has a chance not just to enter a favourite childhood fantasy but actually to create it. The tight schedule necessitated by these broadcasts prevented Jim from writing his column in time for this issue, but in the meantime Western fans will recognize the Ralston stampede as the clearest portent of things past (or remembrance of things future) since publication of Jim's own book on Old Radio heroes.

GOODBYE TO ALL THAT

Lauri Anderson's "Letter from Smyrna" describes the state of post-Byzantine s-f for those unable to decipher its foggy rendition in RQ #24--and it's intended as the last such reprint. So those readers wanting to evaluate R.A. Lafferty's sketch of s-f personalities or Pat Hodgell's account of fantasy night-journeys must look up the original items which (as noted earlier) are legible even to the "unarmed vision."

WE ALSO HEARD FROM (PART II)

As so often happens, those letters arriving too late for our column are precisely those requiring the most detailed answers. So I'll just cite two missives from N3F New Fanzine Appreciation Society members J.R."Mad Dog" Madden (Box 18610-A Univ. Sta., Baton Rouge, LA 14917), who distinguished RQ's own brand of literary criticism from the usual academic (often incomprehensible) variety, and Jeff Wilcox (Waite Hollow Road, Cattaraugus, NY 14719), who not only expressed appreciation of Sheryl Smith's article but enclosed a drawing of himself expressing such appreciation.



"I really enjoyed your reviews of the stories by Lafferty."

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LOVE AND DEATH

Philip Jose Farmer and the White Goddess

Casey Fredericks

Philip José Farmer's novel, Flesh, was inspired by the mythological system which Robert Graves formulated over his long career as poet, novelist, and critic, and which culminated in The White Goddess--purportedly a non-fictional statement of his mythological credo. Subtitled "A Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth," Graves's book[1] is a massive, grotesque compilation of pseudo-scholarship, brimming with random bits of folklore, imaginary natural history, arcane religious rituals, and esoteric mythological erudition, ranging from the Mediterranean to Northern European cultures, and from the Paleolithic through the Mediaeval periods. This is, in fact, the recording of a poet's private vision, on the order of Yeats's A Vision or Pound's Guide to Kultur, and central to it as an imaginative construct is Graves's self-announced "theme" of the Triune Goddess who is an archetype of woman in her three life-phases of Virgin, Matron, and Hag (or as bride, mother, and layer-out, respectively).[2] Her male counterpart, representing the poet himself, is a Dying God,[3] merely an adjunct to the Mistress who is both all-powerful Goddess and poetic Muse. All of this may be read as another of Graves's many sorties against modern culture, which are only half-serious and which often read like academic "put-ons."[4] The author vacillates between deliberate mystery and barely comprehensible irony in his tone, yet his overall intention is to advise us to restore vitality and interest to daily modern living by substituting a purposefully avowed primitivism, symbolized by female dominance and matriarchal codes, for the sterility and boredom of scientism and technocracy, thus making way for a rebirth of true poetry and free imaginative creativity. The reign of the Mother will also mean the victory of sexual expression, of the unconscious, and of instinct and intuition. To deny Her, by rejecting the mythic, primitive, and ritualistic, is to abandon our own animality, an intrinsic part of our make-up, hence, to profane and desensitize our human potential. To Graves's mind, there is just as much a human capacity for growth in emotional sensitivity as in scientific understanding.

Although Graves's conception of the White Goddess is the fictional hypothesis for Flesh, it really serves Farmer as a point of departure for a different kind of speculation. Farmer eschews the entire issue of poetry and the imagination so essential to Graves and, instead, is concerned to portray an entire futuristic world, alternative to our own, which worships the Goddess and preserves her fertility religion. The critical dimension in this book, as in so much of Farmer's other s-f, lies in its juxtaposition of another kind of sexual code and erotic sensibility with that native to our own time and place, leading to the reader's new understanding of the relativity of our own preconceptions about human love. Insofar as Farmer identifies the sex drive as the foundation of human culture, being latent in so many of our social rites and institutions, he is more explicitly Freudian than Graves is.

After eight centuries of exploring the stars, an American spaceship, the Terra, returns to Earth. The planet has, in the interval, suffered an ecological disaster so complete as to have ended our world altogether and ushered in a new era of agricultural primitivism. The dominant religion is that of the Great Mother Goddess under her three aspects of maiden (Virginia), matron (Columbia), and Hag (Alba). This system of archaic religious practices, taboos, and credos in many ways recalls the primeval world of Frazer's Golden Bough, but the world of the Goddess is a naturalistic one like our own, not a supernatural one: we never see the Mother, only her human representatives and the effect of her cult on the lives of humans.

Into this world of mother-right and female dominance the Terra brings Peter Stagg, starship captain, who is captured and biologically altered. Antlers are grafted onto his head, and he becomes the Great Stag, the Sunhero, the living embodiment of power and virility for the entire nation of Deecee. In reality, the strange antlers are specially adapted organs; though Stagg develops a tremendous appetite for food and drink, he is rewarded with a correspondingly tremendous satyriasis that makes him capable of inseminating the entire nation's women. His sexual career in Deecee also traces the path of a solar myth, as he moves north from Washington, D.C., in the direction of Albany, N.Y., beginning the winter solstice of December 21 in the South where he impregnates Virginia, and ending at the summer solstice of June 21 in the North where Alba, the toothless hag, will cut his throat and bury his remains to insure the fertility of soil and crops. And in the next year the seasonal pattern will recur all over again with a new Sunhero.

Stagg is really two people. His "normal" self, deriving from our world, dreads individual death when the end of the Dying God will mean real, permanent death for him, but an even greater source of horror is his loss of rationality, of control over his own actions, and even of the entire conscious mind when the antlers assert their overpowering needs for food, sex, and violence. Five of the eight occurrences of the word "flesh" do, in fact, refer to Sunhero's loss of individual ego in the blind, ecstatic, Dionysian frenzy generated by the rule of appetite and emotion.[5] Ultimately, Stagg can reassert control over his own body only by starving himself, thereby inhibiting his sex drive. Only by self-inhibition, too, can the masculine, control oriented "rational" values of our civilization reassert their dominance. Stagg is thus a representative of the kind of Western civilization that is depicted in the pages of Freud's Civilization and Its Discontents, Marcuse's Eros and Civilization, and Brown's Love's Body: in simplest outlines, this libidinal theory supposes that a progressive human culture is made possible only by a process of sublimation--what is sacrificed in individual sexual expression and free erotic activity is regained, in displaced form, in the permanent, stable institutions of society. In such a theory, civilization is regarded as the byproduct of inhibited eroticism. And for their part, Stagg, his crew, and the starship itself are the most perfect representatives of the male-dominated, assertive, power-oriented, and technology-based society that produced them. On the one hand, we are told explicitly that the mission of the starship was to locate "virgin planets" (p.21). On the other, there were no women on the Terra, and despite being helped through the eight hundred year ordeal by suspended animation, Stagg is fairly screaming his sexual repression when he returns to Earth: "Eight hundred years without seeing a single, solitary, lone forlorn woman!...I feel like Walt Whitman when he boasted he jetted the stuff of future republics. I've a dozen republics in me!" (p. 22). The restraints placed on the starmen in order to succeed in the highest enterprise of our masculine civilization to-date--space travel--correspond in their intensity, but in a reverse direction, to the demands for libidinal release required by the Goddess's world.

However, it is most accurate not to characterize New Earth as either utopia or dystopia, but as a fictional universe that stands in an ambivalent relationship to our own "real" one. Simultaneously it offers opportunities for greater creativity and more violent destruction. Correspondingly, the Mother herself is a Jungian "coincidence of opposites," being a figure both good and evil, sexual temptress and castrating ogress, at once benign and destructive. And so, too, Stagg's career is at once a sexual wish-fulfilment and the ultimate demonization and dehumanization of the total man, who is reduced to being a function only of his non-rational faculties. He is thus an ambivalent answer to the speculative question, "What if man did have unlimited sexual capacity?"[6] Farmer's own attitude, which modulates between the serious and the outright satiric throughout the novel, seems to re-enforce the ambiguity of New Earth's relationship to the present world. (We are not sure whether we are supposed to sympathize with the characters and identify with their problem, or to distance ourselves from them, particularly through satiric laughter.)

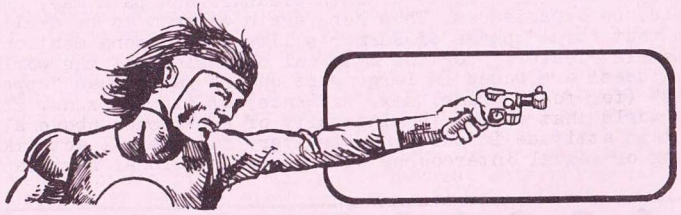
First, New Earth's advantages. The rites of the Mother promote human fertility and environmental improvement in a world devastated by ecological cataclysm, a world nearly sterilized, and still severely underpopulated. Perhaps this best explains why its only technology deals with biology and human sexuality, for it was our own civilization's continued assaults on nature in an attempt to exploit its resources to the full that brought about the collapse. Like Frankenstein on a macrocosmic scale, Western man experimented to tap new power sources in the very core of the Earth but exceeded the physical limits of the planet (pp. 27-8, cf. p. 67). Even from outer space the planet looks totally different from the one the starmen left(pp.19-20).

The world of the Mother is also superior psychologically insofar as its regular calendar of rituals and ceremonies allows for release of inhibitions as an accepted part of social life: periodic sexual orgies, wild drunkenness, blood sports, temple prostitution, and sadistic violence are the norm in this culture. It is a world controlled by feeling, rather than thought, a world where the heights of both pleasure and pain may, and should, be experienced. Thus here again we seem to be dealing with that "oral" phase of Farmer's literary persona mentioned by Leslie Fiedler,[7] for the mythical dimensions of the world of the Goddess are based in large part on the Gargantuan "appetites" (for food, drink, sex, violence) of its denizens. This is a world that values the intensity of experience above all, and this attitude in turn invests every fundamental act like eating or sexual intercourse with deeper emotional satisfaction.

Fiedler and Franz Rottensteiner have both said that all of his books are about sex, religion, and violence.[8] They are correct, yet the very fact that the three come clustered together in a trinity presupposes some larger principles at work. Rollo May suggests the term "daemonic" for this same triad and means by it to identify man's inner, unconscious drive to transcend his current limitations--whether imposed on him from within or without--and to achieve a new, larger "self."[9] The "daemonic" thus would not only characterize Stagg as a savage god, often rendered sub-human by his own abnormal powers, but it would go far to explain the violent character of all of Farmer's supermen (as in the World of Tiers series) and specifically of his Tarzan, who is his most perfect representative of daemonic passion and power. This same daemonic triad might also lead us to second Fiedler's view that Farmer's essential contribution to s-f is located in the field of depth psychology. Beneath the exciting and racy adventure yarns that owe so much to Burroughs there is an awareness, based on a thorough understanding of psychoanalytical literature, that man must always be searching for new, creative confrontations with the world. Hence sex, religion, and violence as man's three basic, elemental drives to help him achieve ever more intense, ever more creative experience. I would further speculate that the "crudity" in style and plot-construction that Fiedler, Rottensteiner, and Damon Knight have all recognized as typical throughout even the best of Farmer's works is isomorphic with the daemonic atmosphere: the direct, frenzied, Burroughsian pace of Farmer's adventures mirror the daemonic passions of his heroes.

From the satiric perspective, too, New Earth appears superior to our own, for our social rites and institutions seem to pale beside the undiluted myths and rituals in the realm of the Mother: thus, in Deecee, the Washington Monument has been re-erected explicitly as a giant phallic symbol, and the U.S. Capitol now sports two domes to symbolize the twin breasts of the Mother; the White House Honour Guards are bow-brandishing Amazons, while Georgetown University now houses the castrated musician-priests of the Goddess; social fraternities like Moose, Elk, and Lions are now full-fledged totem clans, the Speaker of the House in Congress goes by the name of John Barleycorn (the sacrificial "corn spirit" who by his name symbolized fermentation in Robert Burns's poem[10]), and baseball is a sadistic rite, played with a spiked ball that is hurled about in order to spill as much blood as possible.

Sometimes, in fact, this kind of satire is purely verbal, and Deecee and the other nations and institutions of New Earth often come down to being nothing more than a series of word-plays. There can be a fairly gratuitous travesty--like "Deecee" for Washington, D.C.--to more complex sequences of associations, like the nation "Caseyland," named after the K. of C. (Knights of Columbus), which gives away its Roman Catholic inspiration, and all of whose citizens are named "Casey"; most telling of all, its national sport is baseball, and the captains of its teams always have the name "Mighty Casey." In another briefer sequence like this, Alba, the woman-as-crone whose name means "White," is cleverly tied to the partly homonymous city of "Albany."



Sometimes, too, figurative statements from our world become literally true in the future: "Kill the ump" means just that in Farmer's version of the game,and George Washington's honourific title, "father of his country," becomes a mythical fable about the greatest procreator of them all. That the many word-plays form complete systems of reference is a striking feature of Flesh. This kind of wit is recurrent enough to call to mind that exuberant Joycean punster of "Riders of the Purple Wage."

Perhaps, though, Freud is as much an inspiration as Joyce. In particular, the name of still another nation of New Earth, the "Pants-Elfs," comes close to Freud's discussion in Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious. The first part of the name is a shortened homonym of "pansies"; the second is a synonym for "fairies." Thus "Pants-Elfs" is a barely disguised slur against a nation of fierce homosexual warriors. A second pun shares both a Freudian and Joycean dimension: "Horneycums" (pp. 119, 125). One of the Pants-Elfs, a would-be lover, calls Stagg this as a term of endearment in baby-talk, but "cums" is also a well-known obscene verb and "Horneycums" is a barely disguised reference to the Stagg's appetite for orgasms. Thus Farmer's puns contain a "latent" (that is, sexual) meaning in addition to the obvious "manifest" one.

Still other contrasts between old and New Earth show the latter to advantage. In particular, two other starmen represent sexual codes that many would already find arbitrary and archaic in 1982. Sarvant, the ship's chaplin, is a religious fundamentalist whose outmoded spiritual fervour is conducive to masochism, and he has much of both the would-be martyr and the sexual pervert in his make-up. Finding himself in a world of constant sexual overstimulation puts his archaic beliefs under too much pressure. Finally, he falls in love with a woman who happens to be barren, and when he discovers that she is a participant in promiscuous rites at a certain temple to cure her infertility he is overwhelmed by conflicting emotions and, finally, he rapes her. For profaning the worship of the Mother, Sarvant is hauled off and hung by a mob, though to his own narrow religious sensibility the woman was never anything more than a cheap whore. Churchill, the First Mate, fares better, falling in love with the daughter of a wealthy merchant sailor; the love is reciprocated and all is well, until it is revealed that the bride-to-be is pregnant by Sunhero. This is cause for rejoicing in the girl's family, but a rather severe blow to Churchill's ego--it had always been his male fantasy, primitive in its own way, to marry a virgin (p. 110).

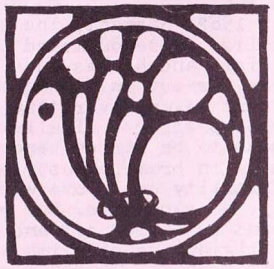
However, it is important to remember that the world of the Mother, as an alternative to our own, is limited and relative. For in addition to the nation of Deecee, which maintains the worship of the Goddess in its "orthodox" (that is, Gravesian) form, New Earth contains other viable cultures that stand in altering contrast to both Deecee and our Earth in regards to both sex and religion. In addition to the Pants-Elfs and Caseylanders, one should also mention the only nation resembling anything like a world-power, the Karelians, Finnish pirates whose Empire is scattered over three continents.

Even in the central issue of sexual mores, the religion of the Mother is not always superior. One evidence is still another love-relationship in the novel: between Stagg when he is in his right mind and a young captive virgin from Caseyland. Whereas Stagg acquired his first wife, Virginia, simply by taking her as Sunhero, he has to win Mary Casey under that nation's code of allowing her to remain a virgin, proving himself through his rational self's disciplined control over the Stagg appetites (even here we might suspect a half-serious parody of American boy-girl courtship behavior typical of the Fifties).

An even better clue to the non-absoluteness of the Goddess's world is evident in Stagg's fate. Ultimately, to be sure, the captain cannot escape his preordained mythical doom. Though Stagg escapes the Deecee for a time, Alba finally does recapture and sacrifice him; the entire myth of the Dying God is completed. However, the sophisticated technology of the Terra is able to resurrect Stagg, though the brain damage incurred while dead leaves him without any memory of his days as Sun-hero. Yet his death-rebirth pattern--with the rebirth deriving from the male-generated technology of our civilization--undercuts the power of the Mother-system as depicted by Graves, where the Mother herself is the final and sole repository of all capacity for death or rebirth. In fact, it is highly significant that the end of the novel dissociates into two distinct perspectives that leave open the question of the relative superiority of "male" and "female" cultures.

On the male side, Stagg and his crew steal women from Earth and again leave for the stars with the intention of re-establishing society as they had known it in another world. More than once this act of starting a new civilization is likened to rape, and the kidnapping of wives is compared to Livy's story of the Rape of the Sabine Women, a tale associated with the founding of Rome by Romulus and Remus:

> "Violence, abduction, rape," Churchill said. "What a way to start a brave new world!"
>
> "Is there any other way?" Wang said.
>
> "Don't forget the Sabine women," Steinborg said...
>
> Churchill frowned. There seemed no way to get away from violence. But then it had always been so through men's history.
>
> (p. 146)



Norman Brown was soon to express this same notion of the origin of higher (scientific, technological) culture in male violence, best symptomized by the violent power-oriented act of rape (and Brown also analyzes the Rape of the Sabines as a mythical statement of the origin of culture).[11] Yet even here there are ironies: Stagg has two wives, the Caseyland maid and his pregnant Virginia--surely to prove an explosive menage à trois--and Churchill is well aware that he has just begun a life-long challenge from his new wife to keep taming the shrew.

The very last word, in the Epilogue, is reserved for the Goddess and the feminine viewpoint after all. Three priestesses representing the three (Gravesian) phases of Woman meet to assess events and plan future strategy, for they have by no means been defeated by the starmen out of the masculine past. The Mother still rules Earth and may some day gain sway over all of mankind, even out among the stars; after all, the Dying God really did die and Virginia is still his bride.

The Epilogue is a deliberately vague and mysterious passage, unlike any other in the book, and makes one think of Todorov's term, "fantastic," referring to fictional worlds that are ambivalently structured in order to conceal the difference between the natural and supernatural laws.[12]

In particular, the enigmatic last three sentences of the Epilogue, being a reminiscence of the opening witches-scene of Shakespeare's Macbeth, heightens the mysterious atmosphere:

> The maiden says, When shall we three meet again?
>
> The matron replies, When man is born and dies and is born.
>
> The hag replies, When the battle is lost and won.

The matron's reply seems to refer to the Dying God, who is born and dies and is born (that is, "reborn") in the cyclical vegetative myth, but we should also remember that in the Goddess's religion the god is the mythical prototype for every man. Thus one other meaning for the riddling answer of the matron is that every time a man is born there shall be a woman present--his mother, of course.

The hag's reply, however, refers to the most famous and eternal battle of the sexes, and one specific interpretation of her riddling answer is that woman is the matrix out of which all change and human history must emerge; that wherever time and humanity intersect, there too must woman be (the alternations of time are suggested by the word "battle," by the rhythm of "lost and won," as well as by the matron's "born and dies and is born," the latter being reinterpreted anew in light of the hag's response).

Thus, this very last sentence of Flesh leaves the work open-ended in the sense that the conflict between male and female can never be resolved totally in favour of either sex so long as human history remains a creative interplay between conscious and unconscious, reason and instinct, the erotic and inhibitory, the emotional and the contemplative, science and religion, technology and ritual. Farmer leaves his fictional universe in a state of dynamic incertitude as to its future, with both male and female societies in full flower. Insofar as human history requires both male and female components, Farmer's vision of humanity is anything but sexist: it is, rather, androgynous.

FOOTNOTES

1) References are to the "Amended and Enlarged Edition," Noonday Press, 1966.

2) John Vickery, Robert Graves and the White Goddess is a readable survey of this theme throughout Graves's corpus. Not mentioned by Vickery is Graves's Watch the North Wind Rise (also published as Seven Days in New Crete), a novelistic treatment of the White Goddess that should be read closely with Robert Canary's analysis, "Utopian and Fantastic Dualities in Robert Graves's Watch the North Wind Rise," Science-Fiction Studies 1 (1973-4), 248-255. This view of triune woman was anticipated in Freud's essay, "The Theme of the Three Caskets" (1913), published in vol. 12 of James Strachey's edition of the Complete Works (London, 1958), 290-301.

3) In this and many other of his mythological ideas, Graves is indebted to Frazer's Golden Bough (for details, see Vickery, 1-25), where one repeated and essential image is that of a vegetative deity whose career of birth, waxing powers, waning potency, death, and rebirth is modelled on the annual cycle of seasons. Graves retains the Dying God as his own central masculine symbol but makes the male secondary to the female, the latter remaining the inexhaustible repository of power, fertility, and immortality. Graves's major treatment of the Dying God as such is in his novel, King Jesus (for which, see Vickery, 47-53). Two important general studies of Frazerian ideas and themes are Stanley Edgar Hyman, The Tangled Bank (New York, 1966), 187-291, and John B. Vickery, The Literary Impact of the Golden Bough (Princeton, 1973).

4) Northrop Frye, "Graves, Gods and Scholars," Hudson Review 9 (1956), 298-302, recognizes that much of what Graves has to say is sly, obscure satire against the modern world -- and his readers.

5) On p.18 Stagg is "surrounded by flesh" in the mob scene at his investiture as Dying God; on p.90 the god goes berserk and rides a giant stag into a crowd of priestesses--a "trap of lace and flesh"--dismembering and decapitating the women; on p. 96, Mary Casey refers to the Stagg body as a "cage of flesh"; on p.99 Stagg refers to his nightly orgies as "visions of screaming white flesh"; on p.119 his powerful hunger becomes a "fire raging within him, flesh devouring flesh." The other three references are no less significant and related to the title of the book: on p.38 the female biological surgeons of the Mother are described as "artists in flesh"; on p.122 the Pants-Elfs give as the rationale for repressive treatment of women in their society that "the flesh was weak," and on p.160 Mary Casey expresses the same sentiment from the Caseyland perspective, declaring that it is obvious that men and women who spend time alone "must succumb to the flesh."

These and all subsequent page references are to the expanded Doubleday version of 1968 (in paperback, reprinted by Signet Science Fiction in 1969); Beacon Press published a shorter version in 1960.

6) Stagg himself recognizes the ambiguity: "...last night I enjoyed what I was doing. I had no inhibitions. I was living the secret dream of every man--unlimited opportunity and inexhaustible ability. I was a god!" (p. 59, cf. p. 86).

7) "Thanks for the Feast," in The Book of Philip José Farmer (DAW Books, 1973), esp. 238-9.

8) Fiedler, ibid., 236-7; Rottensteiner,"Playing Around with Creation: Philip José Farmer," Science-Fiction Studies 1 (1973-4), 97. Unfortunately the latter article is almost solely the author's expression of his distaste for Farmer precisely in the three areas under discussion, and it is prescriptive criticism rather than analysis. For further criticism of Rottensteiner, see Damon Knight Science-Fiction Studies 1 (1973-4), 219-20 and 2 (1974-5), 89.

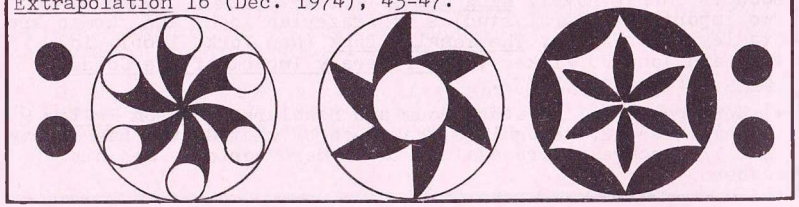
9) Love and Will (New York, 1969), esp. 163-4 and 170-72; cf. Power and Innocence: A Search for the Sources of Violence (New York, 1972), for the transforming power of violence.

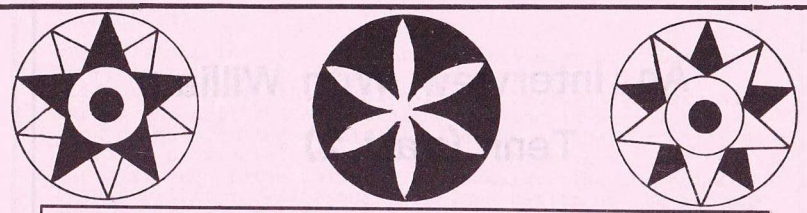
10) He turns up in Frazer's Golden Bough, and it is there that Farmer seems to have found him and not in Burns or Graves. See vol. 5 /vol. 1 of Adonis Attis Osiris / (3rd edition, London, 1914), 230-31. However, the figure of Tom Tobacco, who is clearly a doublet of Barleycorn, seems to be solely Farmer's conception and is a neat Frazerian imitation.

11) Love's Body (New York, 1966), 15 (the ancient reference is Livy 1.4-5).

I should at least mention Susan Brownmiller, Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape (Simon and Schuster, 1975), a new feminist work that regards rape as a sustained political mechanism by means of which men intimidate women and keep them in their place; she regards rape as the sine qua non of male-oriented Western civilization.

12) Tzvetan Todorov, The Fantastic, R. Howard, trans. (Ithaca: Cornell Paperbacks), 1975, with Forward by Robert Scholes. I have reviewed the theory in "A Structuralist View of Fantasy," Extrapolation 16 (Dec. 1974), 45-47.





THE RETURNED ASTRONAUT SEES THE QUARTER MOON AT MIDNIGHT

There's the map of my visitation.
I came yearning for the sight of a far country.
A woven band of sound kept me in the tourist bracket
And beside me and overhead was another of my kind.
I bounced over the rocky stretches
  in the most brilliant of contraptions.
I said it was all "beautiful," "fantastic,"
And I asked, "Do we get to stay?"

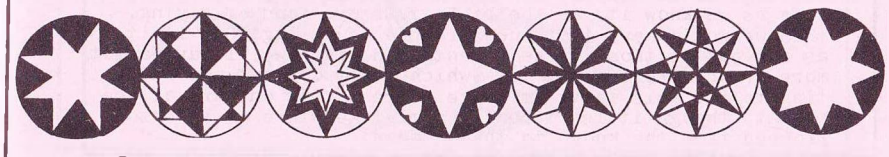
That shell of speech, like the shell of that garment
  that made it all possible,
Lies like a vapid, fraudulent castoff in a forgotten hanger.
For that familiar ring of gabbiness
Was like the illusion of this fallen westward quarter arc of a moon
So close to the midnight fields of earth it seems to nudge them.

It fishes in cold space.
It is aeoned in strangeness.
We its visitors walk earth
With a knowledge of no formula.
For it was not as we told it --
The rille, "the" rock, the expected dust --

"We are circling the dead orb of the moon,"
Said the first moon visitors.
"It is vast, lonely, forbidding.
It looks like clouds and clouds of pumice.
By day its skies are expanses of blackness with no stars.
O earth, return us to your green shores!"

Moon, return me silent to your rim..

-- Marjorie Grafflin --



An Interview With William Tenn (part 2)

Brad Linaweaver

Q. I'd like to ask you about the aliens in your stories in general. They are so incredibly alien. In "Firewater" they're dots in bottles. In other stories they are snails, bugs, blobs, or animated salads. They are always as bizarre as anybody's aliens have ever been. How do you originate them? Do they precede the story?

A. Let me give you the simple answer first: in any given story there is no method or procedure that necessarily relates to any other. I have begun stories with nothing more in mind than the picture of an incredible alien that I wanted to use in some way. I've begun stories with an idea that involved an alien without any idea of what kind of alien I could use and then suddenly an alien fits the necessities. So that's the simple answer--that there is no one answer to these things.

Now beyond it is a question that I think you're asking that I could answer in this way: the more alien the alien, the more unbelievable the alien, the happier I am as a rule with the story. The stories in which I have aliens who are snails, bugs, spiders--that is, creatures who follow a line of evolution that began with that and developed intelligence --are something I find moderately acceptable rather than, say, a story that deals with intelligent creatures whose line of evolution began with the elephant because that's a possible one. I'm interested in stories about the invertebrate line because I try to imagine the way these creatures might look at the world, the colour they might see, the music they might evolve. And I like to get as far away from the likely as possible. I don't feel very guilty for developing an alien who followed a line of evolution that originated in the snail.

Q. Then you come up with something like the suitcase monster in the "Flat-Eyed Monster."

Yes, the flefnobes. The dots-in-bottles of "Firewater." Then there is the alien in "The Deserter" who is practically a vast sea of liquid methane, I believe, and whose space suit is nothing more than a tank. These aliens I feel a little more comfortable with for a very important reason... I believe there is intelligence out there in the universe. I believe we will encounter it one way or another. I believe it may well be superior to our own, but certainly equal to our own. If it happens to have a human quality or relates to life as we know it, as the biologists are fond of saying, then we won't have that much trouble adjusting. But if it is as far out as those three I mentioned, then we'll have a lot more trouble recognizing it--which is important--and adjusting to it. This is the mistake we're making on Mars at the moment, though it isn't really a mistake since we have to proceed from the known to the unknown.

A. (continued)

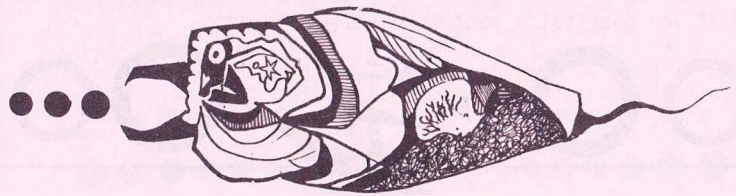
But it's all involved in my basic criticism of, "Does life as we know it exist on Mars; does it in the universe?" "Life as we know it" has always been a statement very similar to the British Colonel Blimp sitting in his club in London and speaking of civilization as we know it. It's a terribly provincial attitude. And I think as we look out at the vastness of the universe and consider the incredible possibilities for life out there, we better not be provincial.

Q. Are you saying it's more likely we'll bump into a bug-eyed monster than a humanoid, and isn't that a rather different view from most people in s-f, even though it's less comforting?

A. That's precisely my point. It isn't that it's more likely that we'll run into a bug-eyed monster, but it's two things: (1) If we run into a humanoid, we'll be dealing with something that's not so terribly alien. There's no problem there except that if we bump into a humanoid who's very much like us, heaven help us, because we're sons of bitches and we'll kill everything in sight. But conceptually there's no problem if we find a humanoid. If the camera on Viking Lander sees a biped walking across the landscape with two other limbs hanging down from what appears to be shoulders and a head stuck up in the middle, we are immediately in familiar territory; but if the Viking Lander notices, say, or through it we notice, that a rock has just moved slightly vis a vis the camera eye, the last thing in the world we'd want to think about is that maybe the rock has intelligence. I think we'd better get adjusted to the idea of something as alien as possible. (2) We are more likely to detect life if we stop thinking in terms of life as we know it.

I think the most important service the s-f writer can perform for the human race is preparing the human race for the future, in terms of society, emerging technology and discoveries on other worlds. S-F's primary function is a run-through before the big game, a kindergarten if you will, before we encounter the unendurable, the inconceivable and the impossible. And I don't do this consciously when I write--but I do sneer a little bit at the idea of meeting an alien who is humanoid. I may do this; I have. In "Bernie the Faust" I essentially did. I think the question that concerns us most of all is: how alien could an alien be in his thought processes, and along with that, how much could he still be like us and do the vicious and loving things we do?

Q. I'm reminded of "The Flat Eyed Monster" again, because just when you are lulled into how relatively harmless the suitcase creatures are--with their paper prisons, for instance--they up and kill you. You did the cliche about the hero getting the girl at the end, except in this case the suitcases get each other and the monster is the human being who is destroyed. It's one of my favourite stories.

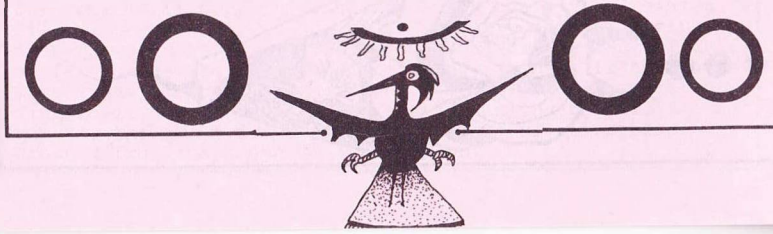


A. Well, yes--but there are three things about the story that should be told. That story was written in 1954 when I went to the hospital with a bleeding ulcer and I was told by the doctors that it looked very bad and they would have to remove part of my stomach. They didn't want to operate on me because of my physical condition at the time / which / did not look good. Since I was a freelance writer and didn't have hospitalization, to be admitted to the hospital took every penny I had in the bank. I was therefore flat broke and was facing the fact that I couldn't pay the rent on my apartment. Everything had been sucked out of my account. A lot of money was owed me at the time and my lawyer, Milton Engulf, went around to various publishers with the question --I found out later--do you want to pay the guy before or after he croaks?

At that point a girl with whom I'd been living for around six months--both of us had planned a marriage very shortly--and all my friends were there: Harry Harrison, Joan Harrison, friends came from all kinds of places...and I realized they were coming in to say goodbye. Joan Harrison, Harry's wife, brought me a great big lily to make light of the fact that it looked like a very dangerous thing was coming up. The next day they found that it wasn't that serious and they didn't have to operate, but that night the girl with whom I'd been living said to me after everyone else had left, "Phil, let's face it. You're flat on your back, physically, psychologically, economically. The time has come for me to leave. There's not very much here for me." I said you can't be serious and she said, "I have to be; look at it from my point of view." She tiptoed to the door and blew me a kiss.

After she left I got out of bed and asked an intern for a sedative. I said it was going to be a tough night and I'm not supposed to be upset. She left and I lay there in bed and I said to myself I must not think about this; I must not think about the operation; I must think about a story because I need to make money anyway and if I think about a story, it will take my mind off these things. I began to think about a story and called Horace Gold / who was then the editor of Galaxy / up early the next morning and told him I needed the money desperately. He said he would put through a check for me immediately, 4¢ a word, which was one of his top rates at the time, for a 12,000 word story, a novelette. It would be four-hundred and eighty bucks, he said he'd make it an even five-hundred. He said, "Phil, the check will be in your lawyer's hand by the afternoon, you just write the story." I told him it'd have to be long-hand. He said that was all right, do it long hand, his secretary would type it. He said, "All I want from you is the promise that you'll do it as fast as possible and it'll be funny."

Remember the situation I'm in at the time. It is in that situation when I start writing a story, saying to myself over and over again: it's gotta be funny, a gag on every page. I was hurting like mad, worried and upset. And my attitude toward a lot of people, including me, may have come through; but that was the context in which it was written, in the midst of incredible anxiety--and hatred (saying to myself how could I make such a terrible mistake about a woman I thought I loved--apparently I didn't know her). I was so mixed up about this, so upset, that when I got out of the hospital I went into psycho-therapy.



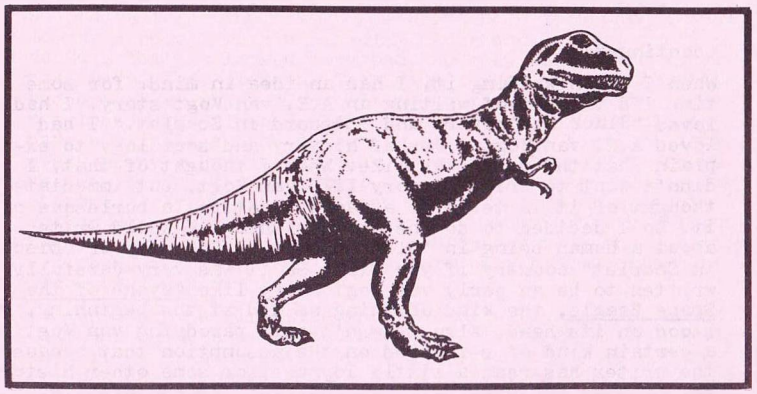
A. (continued)

When I began writing it, I had an idea in mind: for some time I'd thought of writing an A.E. van Vogt story. I had loved "Black Destroyer" and "Discord in Scarlet." I had loved A.E. van Vogt's use of history and sociology to explain what the water was like. When I thought of that, I didn't want to write a story like van Vogt, but immediately thought of it in terms of a parody, satire, a burlesque of it. So I decided to do the obvious thing. I would write about a human being in "Black Destroyer" country or "Discord in Scarlet" country if you will. So it was very carefully written to be an early van Vogt story like Voyage of the Space Beagle, the kind of thing he did at the beginning, but stood on its head. Also I wasn't only parodying van Vogt but a certain kind of s-f based on the assumption that because the writer has read a little Toynbee, or some other historian, or some sociologist, that therefore he can explain an alien or an alien culture clearly.

You said "The Flat Eyed Monster" is one of your favourite stories. It happens to be a story I am inordinately fond of myself and it's the one good story of mine which has never been anthologized. It baffles me. The stories that I consider inferior have been anthologized seven and fifteen times.

It is perhaps very important that the story was even more than a burlesque of van Vogt. It was an attempt to write what might be called a burlesque of certain s-f motifs. Of course the title suggests that immediately. Because that's not van Vogt. The title is "The Flat Eyed Monster" as opposed to the bug-eyed monster. It was an attempt to do something which I had never done as much as I would like. I wish I could have done more of this. That is to show a human being from an alien's point of view. And I want to do much more of this, that is: what do we smell like, feel like, and so forth from the alien point of view. It is part, it seems to me, of the process of trying to understand what we've got to understand--that there are many strangers in the universe. So this was an attempt to do that and it was done as humour, dealing with the cliches of s-f.

There was also something else on my mind at the time, I believe. When did I write that? '54? I think of the monster movie. What Damon Knight referred to as s-f having finally achieved the films regularly but only in the form of the monster movie. That was on my mind. I wanted to deal with the humorous possibilities of the monster and the role of the monster. The wonderful solutions. One of the stories that lies behind a lot of mine is a story I've never written. I've wanted to write a story about H.G. Wells's The War of the Worlds from the Martian point of view. That is--what the aliens thought they were doing, what they thought was going on on Earth and of course they didn't quite understand it, just as we didn't understand them, and those dreadful things that happened to them and so forth. Among other things, in their own peculiar way, they might have thought they were really trying to communicate with us in various ways and we made the one signal that meant war at the very beginning. How we made it I don't know, possibly by knocking on the cannister that arrived and then between us and you there would be nothing but war, hatred, etc. I thought of doing that and this is again part of the reason for the story.



Q. There is this macabre element in your humour. Two pretty light-hearted stories, "Lisbon Cubed" and "Child's Play," both ended with aliens dismembering the human hero because of a misunderstanding. Why did you do that?

A. "Child's Play" wasn't an alien, it was actually someone from our far future.

Q. My mistake. But that had an "oops" ending, right?

A. Yes.

Q. The humour of it is "oops" because he said he could tell the duplicate from the real one and at the end he starts dismantling the real one.

A. Well, "oops" if you will, but that's not the way I saw it. What I meant to suggest in there is that we are such imperfect, terribly imperfect creatures that almost anybody could do a better job and that even an ordinary neurotic human being with the proper equipment could make a better version of himself.

Q. I didn't get it.

A. Well, I know. Nobody ever has but that was my original idea and I didn't mean it as anything important enough for everyone to get, it was just in the back of my mind when I was writing it. And so that was part of it and also "Child's Play" was the first insane story I wrote. For example, when I wrote about the census keeper I had no idea what the census keeper was. But he appeared and I knew it was right when he did. When he appeared I had to stop and say to myself, I am Sam Webber; I have used this machine; a census keeper appears. What could happen? And the worst and immediate thought that occurred to me is: that's what could happen. It's because of that story, and stories like "Lisbon Cubed" which didn't appear in Astounding, and because of stories like "The Liberation of Earth," that John W. Campbell thought I had a bit too much Jewish view of the universe for his taste, by which he meant a view that at any moment a pogrom was about to break loose and we could all be wiped out. And so these things came up.

A. (continued)

Now in "Lisbon Cubed" it seemed to me again inevitable that could only go in one direction. I couldn't figure it out. I couldn't figure out any other ending to the story. Certainly I didn't want an ending like "Firewater." If an ordinary human being...God damn it, if you, Brad Linaweaver, were to find yourself through a peculiar group of events caught up in an interstellar spy ring where people who were various other creatures actually believe you are one of them but in disguise, what do you think is going to happen to you in the end? Do you think you are going to get out of it with a whole skin? For that matter, put it on a microcosmic basis. If you happen to walk out of here and, around the block, be mistaken by an Albanian for a brother spy from Communist China--I'm thinking of Benchley's Catch a Falling Spy--who was about to work with him to capture the local Russian spy, and he gets you involved with the situation and suddenly you're in something beyond your wildest dreams, what the hell is going to happen to you? Sooner or later, of course, you're going to be destroyed. If you do the sensible, warm, human thing, and that is go down to your neighborhood FBI man or CIA man or one thing or another, you're still going to be seriously damaged in another direction because you don't belong in that environment and it's very dangerous.

Q. It's bad luck. That's what it comes down to.

A. Exactly. So from the very moment that any normal human being, an ordinary Joe, gets involved in one of these things, he's dead. The only question is how soon it will happen and how ugly it will be.

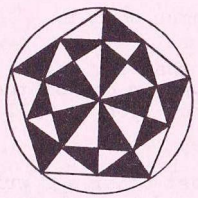
Q. You're definitely a pessimist. Most other s-f writers have figured out some way at the very end to yank the character out but you let the logic of the events always carry through.

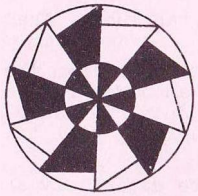
A. If I figured out a way, and I've done this in many stories, it's still that what you're talking about is basically a "get the ship out of a jam" story. I've done this in many stories and then what I write is the sane story. It's a plotted story. It's a solution to a puzzle story. But it's not what really happens to living creatures. The insane story is what happens to living creatures because we are insane. Life is insane.

Look, my view of it comes down to this. The trouble with most s-f for a long time is that it was plotted pulp story. It was constructed craftsman story. It violated the laws of life and the laws of life are insane laws. It operated as if we lived in a sane universe. As if we can solve the problems and the puzzles of this life and the truth of the matter is we cannot. We don't get out of this life alive no matter what we do. Love doesn't last. Beauty doesn't last. Life doesn't last. Society doesn't last. The best we can do is a moment or two of beauty, of life, of love, of science, a decent society, a moment or two of vision, and then that wave of shit which is rolling ceaselessly throughout the universe comes on top of us and covers us.

Q. The good moments in your stories are just that--moments.

A. Right. But you know in a very fundamental way I don't even see this as pessimism. In a very serious way I see this as recognizing the horror that we are in. We flies in a world of spider webs. We deer in a world full of panthers. We rabbits and mice in a world full of cats. We small cats in a world of large cats. The agony of a mouse caught in the talons of a cat. It's incredible. It wants to live. The cat is hungry. The cat sees an appetizing morsel there. They are both absolutely right. And the cat is going to become feeble. It's going to lose its ability to spring one day. It's going to lose the sharpness of its teeth and claws and it's going to die wondering why it is dying, why it can't move as fast. This is what life is. This is true and within this we have these few good moments. These glories. That is great. We have more conscious awareness of beauty than any other creature I know of. So to talk about these good moments is not pessimism. To talk about the horror which must eventually engulf all of us--we will die of cancer, we will die of dreadful accidents, we will have strokes and fall down and become vegetables, we will get some incredible disease--all these things, and either we will die with our loved ones around us, and so much beauty goes on that we are taken away from, or we will die after all our loved ones, lonely, foresaken, unable really to communicate. This is reality.



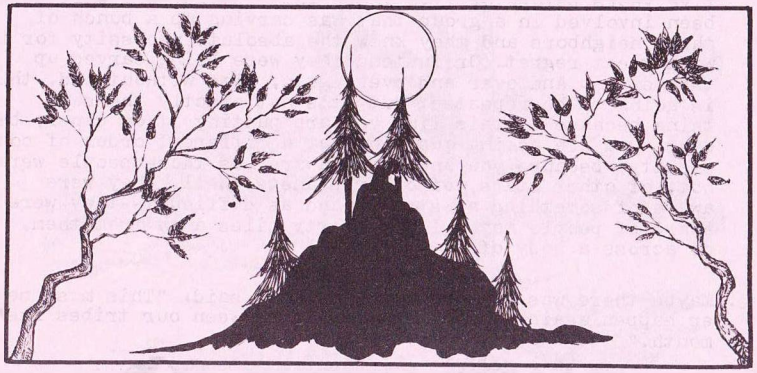


Q. You said s-f is to prepare us for the incredible. In a way you are saying all fiction, art in general, is to prepare us for death, or to live with it.

A. That's right. The essential story of all good fiction is the tragedy of life. And within the tragedy of life are the moments that make it bearable. The moments of beauty. Tolstoy's Anna Karenina is an incredible tragedy. His first book is almost a tragedy of enormous cheapness, /a/ Madame Bovary, to take a similar kind of novel. In both novels there are moments of beauty that the characters enjoy in their involvements and illegal affairs, their adulterous affairs. That's a lot. That's what it's all about. And that's what there is to the struggle. The mouse is going to be caught by the cat as it munches on a piece of cheese, for the moment saying it's good to be alive, it's delicious. The cat that's going to die inept and terribly unable to defend itself, terribly unable to get its own food because a carnivore needs agility much more than a herbivore, the cat munching on a mouse and enjoying the fact that it's been so fast that it can say life is good, that's all. These things ought to be pointed to. But that we've lived, that's the business of literature. Excuse me, it's not the only business of fiction but it's part of the business of fiction. The rest of fiction is to try to find a meaning to it all. I don't know if there is a meaning but in the most complex and fundamental sense, we search for meaning even if there is none.

Q. Your search for meaning reminds me of a story you once told me about World War II when you went through a town that had been destroyed twice, and there was still a sign that had survived.

A. We went through this town and I think it was something called Fontenelle, but I'm not sure whether that was the name of the town or another town similar to it. This was in the north of France. You are speaking of the town we arrived in during the second World War and my unit arrived on our way to get to the front, the combat area. When we arrived in it, this town had been recently evacuated by the Germans and it had been a tremendous battle point there between the Americans and the Germans. The town was completely wrecked and there was nothing but a few chimneys standing which had survived the bombardment and of course there were smashed houses everywhere. My sergeant and I wandered around because we were having a food break. We hiked around to look over this dreadfully desolate town and there was this little railing in the very centre of the town enclosing two chimneys and a little sign saying that this was all that was left of the town after World War I. These two chimneys that were all that was left after the bombardment. They had been set aside as a memorial of what war could do and what German barbarism was like and you looked at those two chimneys and they looked exactly the same as any other chimneys around them, outside of the fact of the memorial.



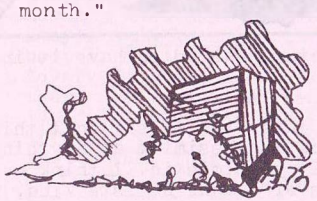
Q. Ever since you told me this story I wanted to have it in the interview.

A. As long as we've put it on the tape, let me say that this is about as clear a statement of my pessimism as anything else I've said, if I can call it pessimistic. I think we keep on repeating, in the words of Jeanne Batiste Vico, who is the first one who suggested that history repeats. But his words are a misconception in that we don't repeat exactly, not identically. We do repeat on another step of the pattern; we repeat on another step of the spiral. So this town was not gone. It was destroyed by a German army fighting in this case an American army rather than a French army. And it was a different kind of German army and somewhat different weapons were used, and it was a somewhat different war. France had fallen in this war and had not fallen in the first World War. But we keep repeating.

Q. The same mistakes.

A. Yes, but this can't be called pessimism. This is what I mean by paleolithic savages riding around in jets. This is what I do believe about human beings. You have a tape recorder...which is something relatively new in this century. You are talking to me about s-f which as something which is self-conscious, aware of itself, has only existed perhaps since H.G. Wells wrote. You're wearing clothes made from synthetics, as I am, and some from natural materials, and you live in a house of a certain sort. OK. All these things are novel. I don't know what the equivalent was--say, thirty or forty thousand years ago. Back then let's say there was the equivalent of a thee and the equivalent of a me. An older man and a younger man interested in something similar and there was the equivalent of an interview. It may have been that, in that context, my equivalent was some sort of a philosophical or religious guru who was respected to some small extent for his view in certain subjects. Perhaps I was particularly respected for my ability to write a certain kind of song which people liked to repeat. You wanted my judgment on it so you could speak to other people about it. Or I knew how to chip stone in an odd and interesting way and I had views on how stone should be chipped and what should be done with it and so on. But there was the equivalent of this thirty or forty-thousand years ago and there was somebody as intelligent as you speaking to somebody as intelligent as I and with roughly the same kind of relationship we people have, and there is not that much difference between those situations. Those two people perhaps five years before or five years later could very well have been involved in a group that was carving up a bunch of their neighbors and they knew the absolute necessity for it with great regret. Or instead they were being carved up themselves. And over and over again, time without end, this is going to be repeated. But it's not exactly the same thing because at this time you are putting it on paper, because you are asking questions at a different order of complexity, because you and I are aware, as those people were not, of other stars, of other planets. Well, they were aware of something as strange and as difficult--they were aware of people maybe living forty miles away from them, or across a body of water.

Q. Maybe there was a sign somewhere that said: "This must never happen again, this fight we had between our tribes last month."

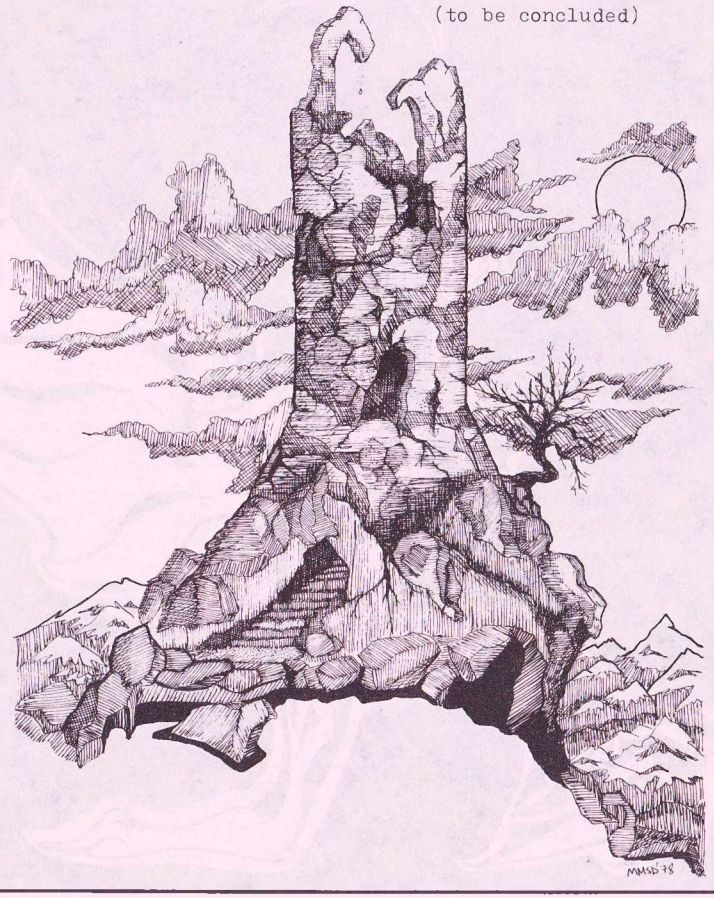


A. Yes, there must have been. When the six nations of the Iroquois met to bury the hatchet and create a better relationship, they had reached certain conclusions about the way people, Indians in this case, had to live together if anything was to make sense. They didn't reckon on the white man coming. We may develop a wonderful United Nations and a glorious, peaceful world where swords are beaten into plowshares, but we just won't reckon on the Flefnobes that are coming through and that are not at all interested in what we call the parliament of man. No, these things will happen. They may not happen to our exact equivalent, but they go on happening. This is my belief.

A. (continued)

All through the second World War, I was slogging through mud, doing ridiculous things that I had to do because superior officers suddenly said that such and such should be done. One thought kept going through my mind: how many times in how many different lands people exactly like me had gone through this. There was the Napoleonic soldier who did this. They carried different kinds of weapons and different kinds of food and so forth, but they would sit by themselves after they had dug a hole in the ground which never had been dug before, and they would say what idiocies I have to live with and I hope I don't get killed. I can enter that man's skin. I wouldn't know his techniques and he wouldn't know my techniques. But we keep doing this. And although we keep doing this, it is not a reflection on us. I must say this at the end--not any more than it is a reflection on me when I hold my wife in my arms and make love to her exactly the same as somebody held his wife in his arms a hundred years ago and made love to her. This is part of what we are capable of doing and the love and idiocies of war are both within our powers and what we seem to keep doing all the time. And for all I know they are as basic to us as anything. I'm not sure of that; I'm suggesting. I don't know that we can end war any more than we can end love.

(to be concluded)



THE COUNTERFEITERS

Stanislaw Lem, Science-Fiction, and Kitsch

Frank Bertrand

Rather than cite second-hand exegesis to explore and explicate the Stanislaw Lem phenomenon, in particular the theoretical basis for his acerbic critiques of American s-f, we can use instead Stanislaw Lem himself. To this end I have assembled nine critical articles by, as well as two interviews with, Mr. Lem. Of the nine articles three in particular are pertinent to interpreting the critical s-f theories of Lem: "Science Fiction: A Hopeless Case with Exceptions" in SF Commentary, #35-36-37 (July/August/September, 1973); "On the Structural Analysis of Science Fiction" in Science Fiction Studies (Spring 1973); and "Todorov's Fantastic Theory of Literature" in Science Fiction Studies (Fall 1974). Two relevant theories can be gleaned from these: (1) a theory of "literary games," to include s-f, and (2) a theory of Kitsch, with its applicability to s-f.

In "On the Structural Analysis of Science Fiction" (OTSA), Mr. Lem uses six of the first seven paragraphs to delineate his parameters of "literary games." He declares,

> A literary work considered as a game has to be played out to the finish under the same rules with which it was begun. A game can be empty or meaningful. An empty game has only inner semantics, for it derives entirely from the relationships that obtain between the objects with which it is played. (p. 26)
>
> In any literary game there are rules of two kinds: those that realize outer semantic functions as the game unfolds and those that make the unfolding possible. (p. 27)

These games, however, can become complex because "..the rules that realize outer semantic functions can be oriented in several directions," that is, "..literary works can have several semantic relationships at the same time" (p. 27).

Amidst all this verbiage one notion of import warrants stress, that of an "empty game." Mr. Lem contends that 'only with a language especially constructed to have no outward semantics, such as mathematics, is it possible to play empty games"(OTSA, p.27). No outward semantics is the key phrase, translatable as meanings having no orientation outward toward the world of real objects. "Empty games," therefore, have no concealed meaning; they depict and predict nothing, they have no affiliation at all to the real world. And with all semantic reference lacking, their value is autonomous; they are worthwhile or worthless only as games.

To clarify this concept further, Mr. Lem asks:

> What if not only the objects but also the problems have no chance of ever being realized, as when impossible time-travel machines are used to point out impossible time-travel paradoxes? In such cases SF is playing an empty game. (OTSA, p. 29, emphasis mine)

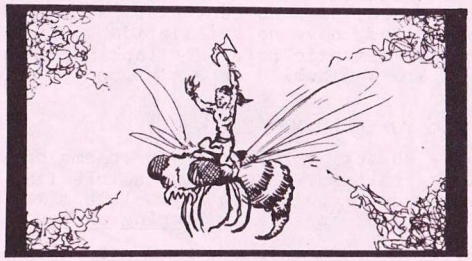
What does Mr. Lem mean here by s-f? "SF involves the art of putting hypothetical premises into the very complicated stream of sociopsychological occurrences" (OTSA, p. 32). It describes the future or the extraterrestrial. It tries to describe reality at other points on the space-time continuum. Its worlds, therefore, necessarily vary from the real world. And "the ways in which they deviate are the core and meaning of the SF creation" (OTSA, p. 31, emphasis mine). Consider, too, OTSA, pages 28-29: science-fiction via a family-tree flow-chart devolves down into "Real SF" and "Pseudo SF." Real s-f is that which portrays "meaningful, indeed rational, problems" (OTSA, p 29) with an inner coherence and a minimum of complexity. Pseudo s-f lacks semantic reference; it concentrates on the content of the message to be signaled, merely enabling one to transmit that message. It is, yes, an "empty game." Of the two, real s-f exemplifies "the premise of SF that anything shown shall in principle be interpretable empirically and rationally...there can be no inexplicable marvels, no transcendences, no devils--and the pattern of occurrences must be verisimilar" (OTSA, p.28). Or at least that is what it should be.

The actual nature of s-f, according to Mr. Lem, is indicated by:

> the abolition of differences that have a categorical character: the passing off of myths and fairy tales for quasi-scientific hypotheses or their consequences, and of the wishful dream or horror story as prediction; the postulation of the incommensurable as commensurable; the depiction of the accomplishment of possible tasks with means that have no empirical character; the pretense that insoluble problems (such as those of a logical typus) are soluble. (OTSA, p. 30)

This impropriety is stated in different but analogous terms by Mr. Lem in "Science Fiction: A Hopeless Case with Exceptions" (SFAH) and "Todorov's Fantastic Theory of Literature" (TFT). The term used is Kitsch. In the Random House Dictionary kitsch is defined as "art or literature judged to have little or no aesthetic value, esp. when produced to satisfy popular taste;" from German "verkitschen," to make cheap, and / or "kitschen," collecting rubbish from the street. Historically, kitsch is a fairly recent word that came into use during the 1860s and 1870s in Munich, where painters and art dealers used it to designate cheap artistic stuff. Mr. Lem broadens and refines it by stating that:

> Kitsch itself is the simplified, threadbare, prostituted but original, constellation of values central to a given culture. In our culture kitsch is what was once holy and/or coveted, awe-inspiring, or horrible, but now prepared for instant use. Kitsch is the former temple which has been so thoroughly defiled by infidels for so long that even the memory of its ancient untouchability has been lost. (SFAH, p. 17, emphasis mine)



Zeroing in on literature, Mr. Lem believes that kitsch results from all complexity, multi-sidedness, and ambiguity of the authentic product being eliminated from the final product. Then comes an important syllogistic like argument:

> Kitsch is composed exclusively of ersatz products: of heroism, of need, misfortune, love, etc.
>
> In science fiction, kitsch is made from ersatz science and literature.
>
> Knowing no discretion and no reverence for things inconceivable by the human mind, piling universes upon universes without batting an eyelash, mixing up physics, metaphysics, and trite trash from misinterpreted philosophical systems without end, science fiction is the true embodiment of kitsch. (SFAH, p. 17, emphasis mine)

At first glance this is an apparent categorical syllogism, with but three common terms: kitsch, ersatz (products), and s-f. And the connection Mr. Lem implies is that because kitsch is ersatz product(s) and one such product is ersatz science and literature, therefore s-f is kitsch.

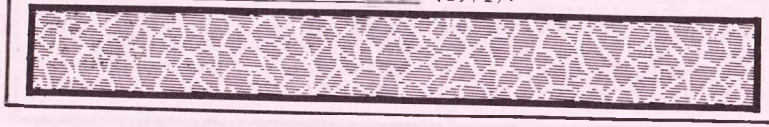
Acceptance of this, however, hinges on whether or not one agrees with Mr. Lem's definition of ersatz products and s-f being ersatz science and literature. The American Heritage Dictionary defines "ersatz" as "a substitute, esp. an inferior imitation." This is similar to the way Mr. Lem explains kitsch in TFT:

> Kitsch is a product counterfeited to pass for what it is not...kitsch takes up residence in regions inaccessible to the reader: in the palace, in the far future, among the stars, in history, in exotic lands. Every literary genre has its masterwork-ceiling, and kitsch, by a tactics of crude mimicry, pretends to have soared to such an altitude. (TFT, pp. 235-236)

A product counterfeited to pass for what it is not, crude mimicry, and an inferior imitation are at least first cousins of each other and suggest circularity in Mr. Lem's statements about empty games, kitsch, s-f, and ersatz, a circularity that is covertly supported by arbitrary definition. For, what he has really indicated in his "syllogism" is that kitsch is exemplified in concrete form by s-f. That this is the madness to Mr. Lem's method is further indicated in "The Time-Travel Story and Related Matters of SF Structuring," Science Fiction Studies (Spring 1974). Therein, Mr. Lem notes that:

> ...what is involved is an intellectual game, actually fantasy-making which alters in a logical or pseudo-logical manner current scientific hypotheses. This is "pure" science fiction, or science fantasy as it is sometimes called. (p. 151)

Perhaps "pure" s-f, here identified as an "intellectual game," is analogous to Mr. Lem's meaningful game, the antithesis of an empty one. Or, is the "game" one of real vs. pseudo s-f? Clarification, of sorts, is to be found in yet another Lem article, "Robots in Science Fiction," reprinted in SF: The Other Side of Realism (1971):



> The sum of all texts of science fiction consists of two kinds: (1) either science fiction talks about what possibly can occur in the real continuum (in the future) or what could have happened (in the past) and then tries to become a branch of realistic literature that follows through its hypotheses: or (2) it is a game, played with autonomous rules which can deviate at will from the rules to which our world is subject. (p. 311, emphasis mine)

Mr. Lem believes, then, that s-f is an empty game contrived from kitsch and ersatz. Real, or "pure" s-f, though it be meaningful and "intellectual," is a game also, requiring the reader to:

> distinguish between those works which are located in the universe of the "for all times impossible" and those works which belong to the set of things that can become fact. (Robots in SF, p. 312)

It is also evident that Mr. Lem's theories about s-f, kitsch, and ersatz are themselves kitsch. In the pursuit of critical nirvana he has managed to "kitschify" his very effort. Lem has become, in effect, a "kitsch-man," one who tends to experience as kitsch even non-kitsch works, or, more generally, situations. As Matei Calinescu notes in his article, "Kitsch as an Aesthetic Concept," CLIO (Fall 1976), "the kitsch-man wants to fill his spare time with maximum excitement in exchange for minimum effort." Lem has not adequately considered both the purpose and context of s-f, or of kitsch for that matter. In seeking to stereotype s-f as kitsch, he has failed to distinguish between that kitsch produced for propaganda purposes and that produced for entertainment. And if s-f is the latter (in Western society at least), it doesn't necessarily follow that s-f has established rules, a predictable audience, effects, and rewards. Nor does it follow that s-f is a kind of aesthetic escapism, in the sense of being a systematic attempt to fly from daily reality to an adventurous future by means of technological clichés.

For, while Mr. Lem alleges that s-f is the true embodiment of kitsch, he also states that kitsch, though simplified, threadbare, and prostituted, is, nonetheless, the "original constellation of values central to a given culture." It's too bad we can't say the same about Lem's criticism. As he himself writes in "Metafantasia: The Possibilities of Science Fiction" (Science-Fiction Studies, March 1981), "criticism must deal not only with the text's relation to the external world. It must evaluate not only the structure of the things described, but also the structure of the description itself." He has not meaningfully done this in the foregoing; his structure is cardboard and not concrete. At best he has woven a tangle of categorical confusions, his own "language-game" of theoretical principles, categories, and distinctions.

The Eighty Year Shaft

Part II: The Grab-Bag Packages

Bill Blackbeard

(In part I (RQ, 7 (1982), 119-122) we looked at the first book collection of a comic strip, the 1897 Yellow Kid in McFadden's Flats. Now we move on to the immediately succeeding comic strip reprint publications of the next few years.)

II THE GRAB-BAG PACKAGES

The idea of anthologizing comic strips as printed, rather than bowdlerized into narrative text illustrations, as was the case with most of The Yellow Kid in McFadden's Flats, occurred to Hearst himself in 1901. In the next two years, two editions of The Katzenjammer Kids and Happy Hooligan, sequentially dated 1902 and 1903, with some content changes in the 1903 editions, were issued under Hearst's New York American and Journal aegis, while the creator of the New York Herald's equally popular Foxy Grandpa, Carl "Bunny" Schultze, himself published (via the Hammersly Co.) two collections of Foxy Grandpa Sunday episodes in 1902 and 1903. It is difficult to assign priority to either Hearst or Schultze, owing to the relatively close publication dates of these strip collections, so perhaps it is best to credit both simultaneously. At any event, both committed the same offenses of omission and non-sequential organization that have plagued comic strip reprinting through the rest of the century, and driven interested students of the comic strip (who were limited for reference to these and similar volumes for many decades) diddily-bedammed daffy.

In physical appearance and layout, these early anthologies are delightful. A 1904 Schultze combination collection of his first two books (The Adventures and The Further Adventures of Foxy Grandpa), titled The Many Adventures of Foxy Grandpa, ran to 70 colour plates printed on one side of each sheet with the verso blank, on fine glossy paper in perfect colour register, and bound in heavy cardboard with a colour cover, for seventy-five cents. Identical in quality and layout, although running to only 39 plates each and selling for fifty cents, were the early Hearst titles (which were followed by a 1905 collection of James Swinnerton's Sunday Jimmy, the last Hearst-printed colour collection, same format and cost).

Lovely to look at, but...

Well, let's examine the Hearst Happy Hooligan (the "New Edition" of 1903, "with many additional new pictures") as a very typical example of these initial strip reprint books. Measuring -- like all these early titles -- fifteen by nine to eleven inches in size, the Hooligan volume consisted of 39 Sunday comic section half-page episodes reproduced the same size as originally printed in the New York Journal and American. (It should be parenthetically mentioned here that the Hearst Sunday comics were moved around their four weekly pages so that each of the six weekly strips would periodically appear in full-page size on the front and fourth pages, but more regularly run as one of the four half-page episodes on the inside two pages; it is these half-page episodes that were almost exclusively used in these early reprint volumes.) Unlike contemporary comics, these turn-of-the-century strips were published weekly without individual copyright designations or publication dates within their panels, the only date designations often being that on the first page of the Sunday section. Thus, in their direct duplication in the books, any indication of the original date of appearance was lost.

Now, even had these selected half-pages been reprinted in exact original weekly sequence, so that dates could be theoretically determined by count if the books' editors had at least given us the date of the opening episode, all progressive reference would have been thrown askew by the fact of the irregularly printed full-size Sunday pages which were completely omitted, since it would have been impossible from any internal referent to determine how many and at which points full-size Sunday pages were dropped from the sequence. But unfortunately, even the partial adherence to common sense that a sequential selection of episodes would have entailed was cavalierly avoided -- the episodes in Holligan, as in all the other titles of this time, were reprinted with total disregard to original sequence of publication, with 1901 episodes following 1903 episodes, succeeded by a few from 1902, hotly pursued by some more from 1901, and so on.

The effect of this lunatic scrambling of episodes in these books is most sadly exemplified by the inexplicable mixing of secondary characters into the books' pages out of all relation to their original sequential introduction into the week-to-week episodic continuity. Thus in the Katzenjammer Kids title, the Kids' father is involved in a prank pages after we have already encountered the Captain and his cronies; characters who in fact entered the strip only after the Kids' father had been dropped by its artist, Rudolph Dirks.* And in the Hooligan book, Hooligan's brother, Gloomy Gus, flits in and out of the pages as the variously dated episodes are intermixed, although he appeared regularly every Sunday for many months after his original introduction into the strip.

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*RQ readers are reminded that the Captain of the Katzenjammer Kids is not the kids' father.

It is curious that the early publishers of these reprint collections, so close in actual contact and time to the material, should have shown so apparent a contempt for the obvious interests of the reader in wanting to encounter characters in the same order in which they originally entered the strip. Yet the attitude, endemic in such publications to the present, emerged in all its idiot confusion at the very outset.

In fairness, however, it should be noted that the books' editors seemed to have based their slapdash arrangement of the strip episodes on book collections of cartoon humourists from Punch, Life, Judge, Puck, and other comic humour periodicals of the period, where any original sequence of publication was also ignored. The editors, apparently, simply failed to realize what would have seemed to be obvious -- that comic strips were generically different from magazine gag cartoons, and that their readers were following the graphic and behavioral development of repeated characters in serial instalment as their primary element of interest. Funny gags could be found anywhere, in dozens of periodicals at any given time; but funny gags with sets of dependably recurring and beloved characters could be found only in the Sunday newspaper comics. These initial strip collections were put together in total disregard of that elementary point.

Much worse, from the point of view of the concerned comic strip student and researcher, is the universal omission of any page or plate numbering in these books -- a signal crime that has also proliferated in strip reprint collections, most atrociously in recent years in the Nostalgia Press Secret Agent X-9 (which will be discussed in greater detail later). Any critical or historical reference to specific episodes or panels in these books is stymied at the start by the absence of page numbers (although admittedly, the prominent and individual episode titles present in these early volumes of Sunday pages makes them fairly accessible to such use; the absence of such titles in many subsequent collections is all the more of a referential disaster). This single point alone, coupled with the total inaccessibility for most people of the original newspaper pages, has done more to hamper serious critical and historical discussion of the comic strip in the eighty-plus years since its inception than any other factor or group of factors. If the writer can't refer his reader directly to a specific strip episode to check his point, he can hardly help but feel hamstrung at every impulse to move beyond the general in his writing; conversely, the concerned reader cannot check a given writer's data without access to such specific referents.

The growing spate of comic strip reprint collections was not limited to colour Sunday pages in these early years. What seems to be the first daily comic strip reprint collection appeared from the Saalfield Publishing Company in the form of the 1907 Outbursts of Everett True, by A.D. Condo and J.W. Raper.* This very amusing black and white collection (measuring an odd nine and a half by five inches in upright size) consists of some 76 episodes of the two-panel daily strip, sharply reprinted on heavy stock book paper with a standard book binding --but without apparent sequential arrangement related to original publication, individual episode dating, or page numbering. The contagion had spread.

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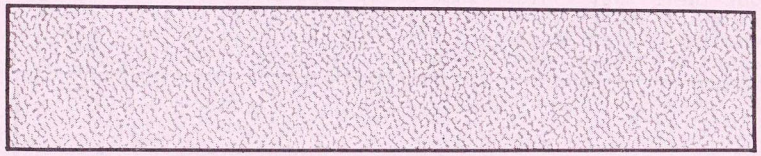
*Ongoing research at the San Francisco Academy of Comic Art may reveal this early NEA strip to have been in fact the first true daily strip, rather than the presently credited A. Mutt of Bud Fisher.



Two years prior to the Everett True book, in 1905, the Frederick A. Stokes Company of New York entered into the large-scale publishing of Sunday comics in book form, adding new and successive titles to the Hearst volumes of Katzenjammer Kids, Happy Hooligan, and Jimmy already printed (after which Hearst himself withdrew from this field); and introducing fresh comic strip titles to book collection, such as Little Sammy Sneeze and Little Nemo by Winsor McCay, Fred Opper's Maud the Mule, and Swinnerton's Sam and His Laugh. Schultze's Foxy Grandpa was also contracted for by Stokes in 1905, so that by the end of the decade Stokes had published some thirty titles, including five Foxy Grandpas, three Katzenjammer Kids, three Happy Hooligans, two Mauds, another Jimmy, and six volumes of R.F. Outcault's Buster Brown from the New York Herald. Stokes's reprint volumes were very similar to those of Hearst and Schultze, running to 30 or so colour platesper title and selling for sixty cents each. Unlike the earlier Sunday strip reprints, however, the Stokes books reprinted full-page episodes, simply breaking them in halves over two successive plates, so that the typical Stokes volume contained about 15 episodes. Here again, of course, there were no dated episodes and no sequential reprinting, so that the researcher today who turns to these works had no real way of determining the artists' original succession of ideas, temporal referents, character development and introduction, layout progression, or even seasonal concerns (since virtually all episodes dealing specifically with holidays were routinely omitted from these collections.)

After 1910, a few new publishers showed interest in reprinting comic strips, led by the Ball Publishing Company of Boston, which introduced an enormously successful series of Mutt and Jeff daily strip reprints with a curious, oblong fifty-cent volume measuring fifteen by six inches in hard covers, containing 60 episodes from the 365 Mutt and Jeff dailies printed in 1910 (at the time, the Bud Fisher strip ran seven days a week, appearing Sunday in the sports sections of the Hearst papers). Again, as in the case of the Sunday strips reprinted in the Hearst-Schultze-Stokes books, the Fisher dailies were republished the same size as printed in the newspapers of the time, the across-the-page length being accommodated by the odd oblong dimensions of the Ball volume. (In terms of dignity of representation, comic strips have never again fared as well in reprint as they did between 1900 and 1920.) The first Ball Mutt and Jeff volume was followed almost annually by four more; all five printed between 1910 and 1918 served primarily as Hearst newspaper circulation builders, being offered at the papers' central offices to anyone who came in with a coupon from a daily paper and a quarter. (Once at the offices, the hapless bargain-seekers were given a subscription pitch.) After the fifth Ball collection, the Mutt and Jeff reprints were taken over by Cupples and Leon of New York, who changed the oblong Ball format to a square, cardboard-covered volume of ten by ten inches with their initial Book No. 6 of 1919. (Cupples and Leon also released an unnumbered Mutt and Jeff title in 1920, made up of ten Sunday pages from 1919 and 1920 printed in twenty half-page plates in the full-size Stokes format. It proved to be virtually the last colour strip reprint to be published in this handsome manner.) A few other daily comic strips were published by Ball in the oblong format, notably Tad Dorgan's Silk Hat Harry's Divorce Suit in 1914, while the Hearst papers themselves took their last venture into strip reprinting with an oblong volume of George McMannus' Bringing Up Father in 1917, which contained 94 episodes from 1914-1916 and sold at fifty cents -- again at the Hearst circulation offices in various cities.

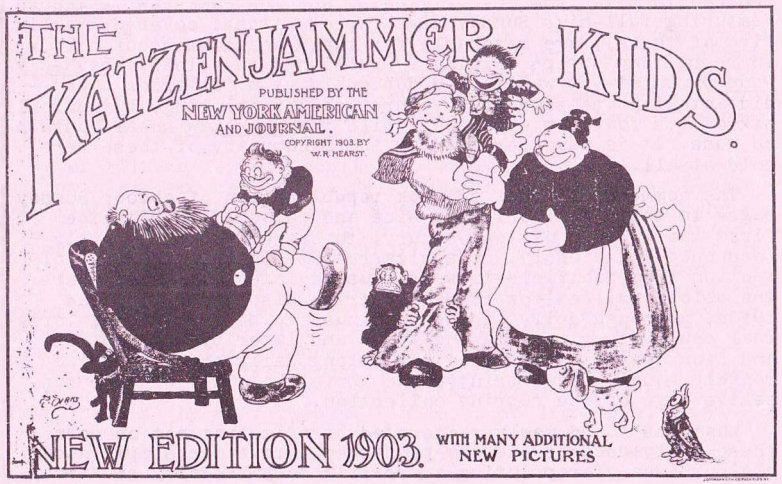
To touch on a few other relevant high points of strip reprinting in the 1900-1920 period, Reilly and Britton of Chicago took the innovative and unhappy step in 1912 of publishing the first Sunday comic strip collection in sharply reduced size. Curiously enough, this was also one of the rare Sunday strips of the time which ran only in black and white, an odd species confined to the Hearst chain of papers, and it surprisingly included (for its first fifteen years of existence) George Herriman's Krazy Kat. The Reilly and Britton book contained some 41 episodes of T.E. Powers' untinted Sunday entertainment section strip, Joys and Glooms, measured eight by eleven inches,and sold for seventy-five cents. Again, no dates, no sequential arrangement, no page numbers. And Saalfield returned with two Sunday page collections in 1917, among the last in the Stokes-size group--and certainly the skimpiest and drabbiest of the lot. These were George McManus' The Newlyweds and Their Baby (into which some unacknowledged pages by McManus' successor on the strip also crept), and Gus Mager's Hawkshaw the Detective. The two books, aside from their excessive thinness and cheap paper (The Newlyweds contained just fourteen Sunday pages, all reduced in size from the originals, and the Hawkshaw, although featuring full-size Sunday page reproductions, covered exactly five of these), are memorable for their abandonment of colour in reprinting strips originally published in colour. The Newlyweds pamphlet--it was touted dubiously as a "coloring book"--did actually use some grisly three-colour printing, but on only six of its fourteen episodes, while the Hawkshaw sheaf contained none. It is a wonder that at 50¢ a copy any of these were sold at all.

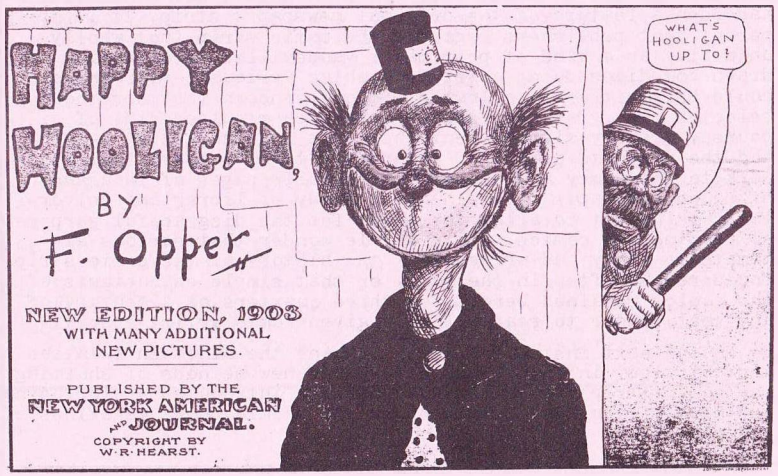
The commendable idea of book republication of colour Sunday pages in their full original size and colour died with the first two decades of the century, to be revived only rarely (and once quite oddly, in a bizarre 1934 Thimble Theatre collection from Saalfield to be discussed later) in later years. The oblong collections of daily strips also ended with the 1910s, although daily strips continued to be reprinted in original newspaper size into the 1920s and later by the Cupples and Leon device of dividing the oblong daily strip into two roughly equal halves printed one above the other on each succesive page of the reprint collection.

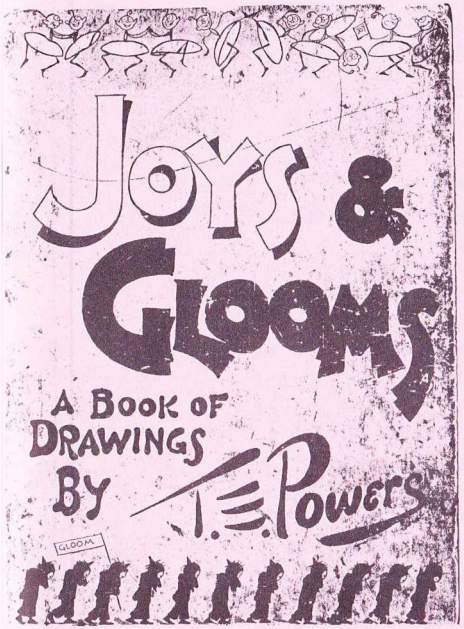
What has to be sadly reiterated here is that not once in these early decades did any publisher pursue the simple and obvious idea of reprinting a specific body of daily or Sunday strip material complete and/or in sequence, even when -- as in the case of the Mutt and Jeff books -- day-to-day continuity had been a feature of the original newspaper strip. It is apparent that publishers regarded the comic strip (not wholly unjustly) as a kind of poor man's vaudeville: a collection of drawn comedians doing acts, from which various performances could be arbitrarily selected without concern for those not selected. The grab-bag collections which resulted did, of course, grossly misrepresent the strip and the artist -- and had the ultimate effect of abandoning the uncut original strip work to the dusty and almost impenetrable pages of thousands of bound newspaper files in the custody of librarians universally reluctant to allow their use for the disgraceful purpose of reading old comics. It is little wonder that serious attempts to study and write about the history of the comic strip foundered so often in the past, or that simple enthusiasts of the comics remained bereft for three quarters of a century of any real chance to read all of a given comic artist's work.

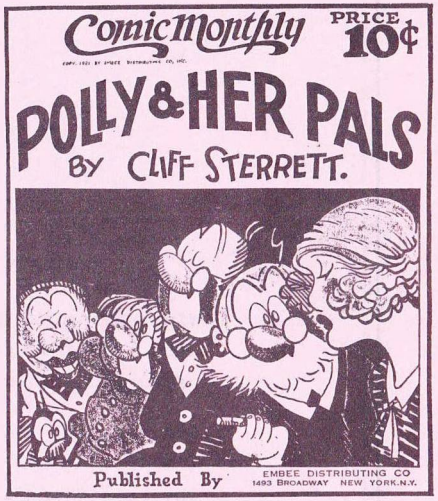
In the next instalment we'll examine the nineteen twenties and thirties, in which some altogether new methods of shafting the comic strip reader and student were introduced -- including the meretricious Big Little Books and "comic book" magazines of the period.

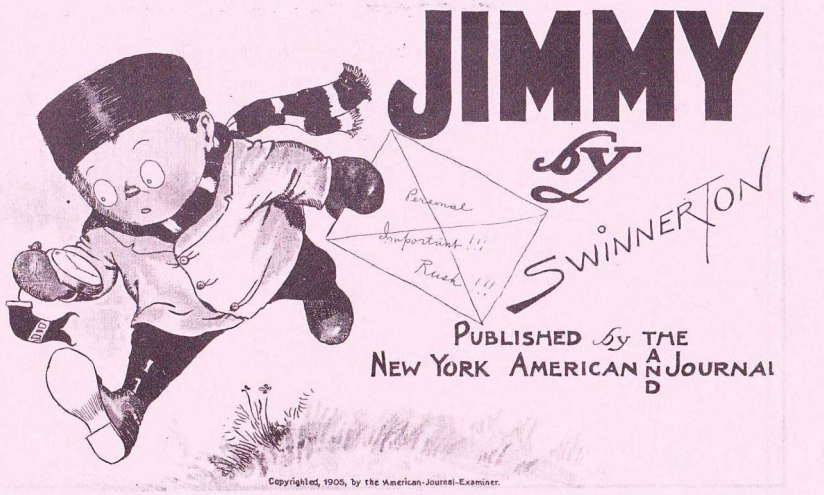

BRINGING UP FATHER
BY GEO. McMANUS.
BY GOLLY- THIS WILL PLEASE MAGGIE!


THE KATZENJAMMER KIDS
PUBLISHED BY THE NEW YORK AMERICAN AND JOURNAL.
COPYRIGHT 1903 BY W. R. HEARST
NEW EDITION 1903.
WITH MANY ADDITIONAL NEW PICTURES


HAPPY HOOLIGAN,
BY
F. Opper
NEW EDITION, 1903
WITH MANY ADDITIONAL
NEW PICTURES.
PUBLISHED BY THE
NEW YORK AMERICAN
AND JOURNAL.
COPYRIGHT BY
W. R. HEARST.
WHAT'S HOOLIGAN UP TO?


JOYS & GLOOMS
A BOOK OF DRAWINGS BY T. E. Powers
GLOOM


Comic Monthly
PRICE 10¢
POLLY & HER PALS
BY CLIFF STERRETT.
Published By
EMBEE DISTRIBUTING CO
1493 BROADWAY NEW YORK, N.Y.


JIMMY
by
SWINNERTON
Personal
Important!!!
Rush!!!
PUBLISHED by THE
NEW YORK AMERICAN AND JOURNAL
Copyrighted, 1905, by the American-Journal-Examiner.

KENTUCKY WINE

Wine stains the page I write
upon. No grosser is this blotch
of burgundy than all the chat

and veritas, the talky truth,
I'm turning out. Wrong stuff:
the real thing's the wild ride

that bolting bluegrass horses
give, provided sober drivers
come behind: Kentucky wine.

-- John Ditsky --

7:30 a.m., 10.1.74

full moon fat
in the black sky

im driving to work
in the dark
in the cold

white moon
shine / hidden
occasionally
as i move
crisscross the city
by huge vague banners
of smoke, of
exhaust .

the sky is so dark
the exhaust so
apparently solid

im sitting in my car
waiting for the light
to change breathing
sickness from the car
ahead .

-- Douglas Barbour --

TWO MYTHICAL KINGDOMS

The Father Christmas Letters

reviewed by

Tom Egan

J.R.R. Tolkien, The Father Christmas Letters, Baillie Tolkien, ed., Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1978, 48 pp., $4.95.

This is a posthumous collection of "letter-essays" by Professor Tolkien to his four young children--John, Michael, Christopher, and Priscilla--written over a twenty-year period from 1920 to 1940. These essays represent Tolkien's earliest attempts as a creator of a fairy-tale world where good and evil struggle for supremacy (albeit in a far softer manner than in Lord of the Rings).

They are indeed a strange but wonderful collection of "play-letters" wherein he, the narrator-author, appears as "Father Christmas" (the British equivalent of our American Santa Claus). Most of the letters are consistently dated year-by-year, with a few reproductions of the Professor's hand-written originals included.

Tolkien's ability as a literary craftsman will draw the fascination of adult readers. Here, again, we may see the growing lineaments of his artistry with words and images that would flower into his LotR and The Hobbit. Look hard and you may glimpse prototypes of Gandalf the Wise, the Hobbit-folk themselves, and the enchanting Elfin-folk with their magical powers and wondrous dignity. The "plot" is rather weak (these letters, remember, were not intended for publication) but Tolkien is always the master of word-magic, evoking images and concepts rooted in mediaeval Christian traditions and Nature myths of Germanic-Scandinavian ancestry.

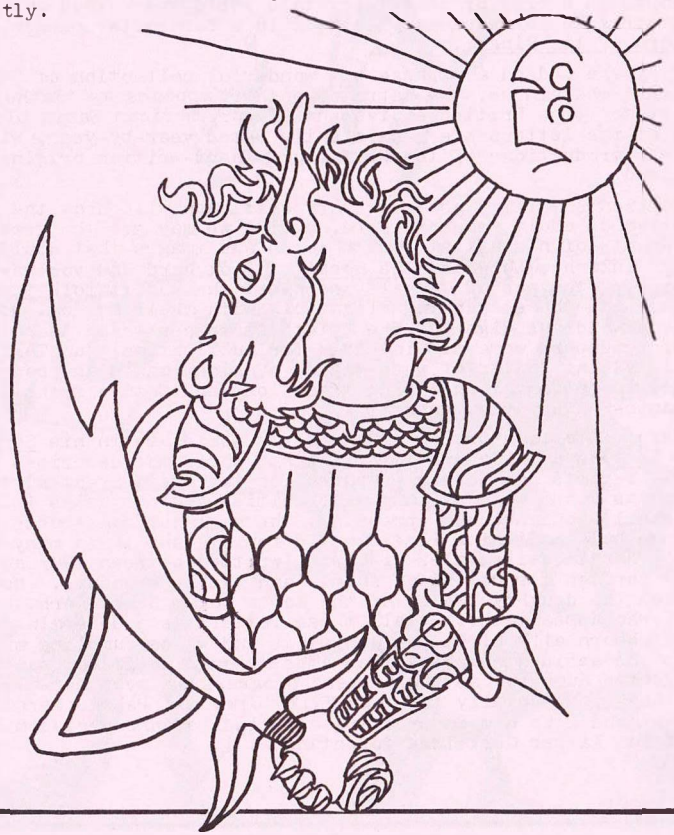
Here, in a literary form C.S. Lewis would use in his Screwtape Letters a few years later, Father Christmas describes in yearly reports how he has prepared for the Great Event of the Christmas Feast with various difficulties and obstacles (big and small) continuously appearing. The narrator constructs a strange but intriguing little world reminiscent in so many ways of the Narnia fairy tales of Lewis (written between 1947 and 1960) through its deliftful animal and mythic elements. Now we meet the doughty figure of the North Polar Bear, Karhu by name, who appears through all these letters as a determined and stubborn ally of Father Christmas and whose fumbling mistakes and accidents make him an amusing combination of pathos and gentle humour. As the letters progress we meet more lovable bears, especially the cubs Valkotukka and Paksu, Karhu's nephews and like him in creating all kinds of unexpected mischief for Father Christmas to untangle.

In contrast to the burlesque behavior of the bears is the dignified and awesome presence of the Elves whose warrior ability and maturity makes them a far cry from the tiny and mischievous pixy-beings of A Midsummer Night's Dream. Here, too, appear the valiant Red Gnomes (useful allies when one meets the ferocious and ugly Goblin-people). And then there are the Snow-men and the . . . Well, let's just say Tolkien's Arctic world is a very busy and populated one. Readers will especially enjoy the contrast between Father Christmas (born in and symbolizing the Christian era) and his "parent," Grandfather Yule (far more ancient in his origins in primitive peoples' celebrations of Nature's renewal and hospitality).

The threat of evil in this world is present in the menace of the Goblins (in LotR, the gargoyle-like Orcs) but the sense of real horror is absent here. A joyousness with life in its Christmas season is omnipresent.

The art in this work embodies this feeling of joy. The illustrations created by Tolkien here are everywhere. (Some forty of these nearly fifty pages have illustrations on them and most of these in full colour.) They range in size from full page colour plates to "mere" decorative fillers. The author's art illustrated his prose well. It may not be the greatest fantasy art ever done but it is good, especially in Tolkien's "scene-moods."

This work is just a small "taste of Wonder" but in a world too much like Mordor for my taste, this is not to be discarded lightly.



The Shielography, volumes II and III

reviewed by

James Wade

A.Reynolds Morse, ed., The Works of M.P.Shiel: 1979 Update, the Reynolds Morse Foundation in association with JDS Books, Box 67 MCS, Dayton, Ohio 45402, two volumes, 858 pages; ring-bound, $75.00; hard-bound, $90.00.

In 1947 the visionary novelist Matthew Phipps Shiel died in England at the age of 81, largely forgotten and nearly destitute. The following year his American admirer, Cleveland industrialist A. Reynolds Morse (who has since acquired the world's largest collection of Salvador Dali paintings, which he recently presented to Miami, Florida on the condition the city build a museum for it) published in an edition of a thousand copies a bibliography entitled The Works of M.P. Shiel.

Morse's bibliography took thirty years to sell out, for the anticipated Shiel revival did not materialize on any significant commercial scale. Now Morse has revised, updated, and expanded his original book and published another thousand copies. One hopes that he can dispose of the edition a little faster this time, and that the Shiel revival does get started this side of the Millennium. But the chances of either do not look particularly good.

The work, which its compiler informally calls The Shielography, is much more than a book list. Its two volumes are stamped II and III; Vol. I is a matching offset reproduction of two important Shiel novels, The Empress of Earth (1898), which became The Yellow Danger, and The Purple Cloud (1901), Shiel's most popular book, in their original magazine serializations, before expansion as hardback novels, along with a dozen or so short stories from periodicals, many of which were also revised for book publication years later. This compilation alone merits the gratitude of scholars, who can now compare the original serials with the book versions, and perhaps later with the cut versions Shiel prepared in the 1920s and 1930s of what he considered his half-dozen best novels, in an effort to streamline them for modern tastes--manuscripts that have never been published.

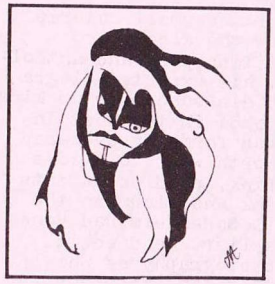
The promised fourth volume of the Shielography will contain essays by writers as diverse as Colin Wilson and Sam Moskowitz, and is due later this year, preceded by a landmark paperback edition of Shiel's last novel, The New King, which had never appeared in print before.

During the thirty years between the two editions of the Shielography much went on among members of the small coterie who kept loyal to Shiel. The key event was the alcoholic Götterdämmerung of John Gawsworth, the British poet and anthologist who had been Shiel's last disciple, his expected biographer, his heir and literary executor, and his successor as king of the mythical (or fabulous) Isle of Redonda in the West Indies (of which Shiel's eccentric father had formally declared him monarch at the age of fifteen). Gawsworth went to pieces rapidly, sold his Shiel collection for drink, peddled patents of nobility for Redonda, and became a freak and clown in the London literary community, much as Maxwell Bodenheim had done in Greenwich Village a quarter century earlier. He died in 1970, having never even begun his planned biography of Shiel; only the astuteness of Morse and a few other conscientious collectors prevented the Shiel literary estate from being scattered or even lost. (Most of it is now in the library of the University of Texas at Austin.)

Morse wryly documents this decline, and recounts the futile search for Shiel's last manuscript, a translation and commentary on the Biblical Book of Luke. The holograph final version of this work disappeared in the possession of an unnamed "reader" to whom Shiel gave it shortly before his death; but two earlier versions exist at Austin. Morse has examined these and is sceptical that any coherent provisional final version can be put together from them. He gives some fascinating extracts from the transcript of these notebooks, from which it appears that Shiel in translating Luke avoided all possessive pronouns, replacing them with awkward prepositional phrases, for some reason no doubt wholly Shielian; and that he believed the resurrected Lazarus to be the Saul of Tarsus who become St.Paul.

Morse, who was long ago created a Duke of the Kingdom of Redonda for services rendered the cause, was curious and wealthy enough to sponsor two Caribbean expeditions to that deserted rock, once used for phosphate mining; the first, in 1978, failed because of bad weather. In 1979 he returned with a larger group including Jon Wynne-Tyson, the British bookman and relative of Gawsworth to whom the inebriate bequeathed his own and Shiel's estates, along with the royal title of Redonda. The expedition climbed to the peak of the island where King Jon planted a flag improvised by his wife from the royal pajamas, and read a proclamation noting that the realm was a purely literary and visionary one with no political or economic claims on territory that had been in fact annexed by Great Britain as long ago as 1872.

These hi-jinks over, the group took some pictures reproduced in the book, giving a good idea of the topography of the rugged island, but nearly none of the physiognomy of the participants, since all the people shown are back lighted. (One would be curious to have a clearer view of the kind of persons who would go on such an outing.)



Morse also took advantage of the trip to examine old records on nearby Monserrat, the island where Shiel was born and brought up, confirming the fact that the novelist's mother was almost certainly a mulatto, which Shiel seems to have suspected, judging by guarded early correspondence with one of his sisters, and which some commentators allege is the basis of his Overman theory, as compensation for an inferiority complex, and of the extreme racism that pervades many of his novels. Morse's account of the Redonda trip and associational items occupy more than 150 pages of the Shielography.

From the above it may be seen that these books are not everybody's idea of a bibliography. In fact, Morse admits that in the absence of a biography and proper critical studies, he has purposely put together a Shiel scrapbook or sampler to preserve what may be perishable and to whet the appetites of future scholars. But it is a bibliography, too, and seems to cover all known editions of Shiel books as well as much of the unpublished material. The extent of the zeal and dedication involved is indicated by the hundred pages devoted to a detailed bibliography of Louis Tracy, a forgotten thriller writer, simply on the basis of Shiel's having written or revised a hundred or so pages in three of his novels and perhaps having helped on a few more.

So far so good. But Reynolds Morse--against the counsel of advisors, he admits--has used his essay interpolations to sound off on his own paranoid peeves at the world around him. Since he (like Shiel, or as Shiel sometimes seems) is a rabid white supremacist, and an advocate of laissez faire economic policies that haven't been the same since Teddy Roosevelt, his book is marred by these digressions.

Now, Shiel certainly shared some of Morse's concerns, beliefs, and cranky notions; but this does not give Morse the justification for preaching angry sermons in the middle of what purports to be literary criticism.

In pointing out that Shiel's turn-of-the-century socialism is not the same thing as the modern welfare state, Morse need not have used space to vilify bureaucracy, rage against constraints set by government on his running of his own business, and prophecy doom for the West because the Communists control American mass media.

Similarly, it is not edifying to read paragraphs alleging that the inferiority of Blacks is proved by their susceptibility to sickle-cell anaemia or their marginally inferior performance in learning tests. (Shiel himself was always ambivalent in his racism, creating Jewish heroes, noble Africans, and brilliant Orientals even while he inveighed against them; at one point he even suggests that the salvation of civilization can come only from racial mixture, known in some quarters as mongrelism.)

The point at issue is not the correctness of Morse's social and political views, but the appropriateness of airing them in a literary study of a writer to whom he by inference imputes similar views. This is not how the reputation of Shiel is going to be re-established, either on a popular or a scholarly basis. Of course, Mr. Morse has spent a lot of money on this project, and probably feels that he has a right to ride his hobby horse so long as he pays for the stable and fodder.

Mr. Morse's writing is peppered with bad grammar, poor syntax, and wrong spelling. His style is forthright, vigorous, often effective, and sometimes nimbly slangy (as when Gawsworth dying is described as having "popped his clogs") in the manner of the subject of his study. But a capable copy editor could have cleaned up and corrected Morse's writing without vitiating it.

The Shielography is thus a flawed if important compilation about an important if flawed author. It is unique, to some extent indescribable and, one hopes, not irreplaceable. It should be a stepping stone--if not, with all its bulk and detail, a steel-truss bridge--to the proper study of a fascinating writer's mind, life, and works. Meantime, as a literary curiosity, it would appear to cop the cup for this or any recent season.

NEW YORK

A drunk season overruns a wonderless child
for a windowless memory
New York passed yesterday.

Retrospect hearts
tracing the clichéd sun

Street clowns
poetically portraying the damned

Subway hearses
bearing Harlem warriors.

New York passed yesterday.

-- Pete Vetrano --

TO MARK THEIR PASSING

A time bomb is ticking in my head.
tick...tick...tick...Boom.
Skirting forests and the white of houses,
I see as never before.

Horizons turn inward upon themselves
Into an ocean of light.
Their throats open:
Blackbirds swirl into the sky.
Their surfaces explode:
I walk forth clothed in rags
And a sort of radiance.

I caress and hold my new body
As earth,
Wrapped in the holy blankets
Of a new born babe,
I stride over great cities.

Looking down,
I see the scurrying little dots,
Rushing around scrawny cities.
Who are so sure
They have fixed everything, just right.
Little stiff figures,
Like random snow
Or hail
For a minute huge
As basketballs,
Then gone...
Not even a blood stain
Marks their passing.

-- Jan E. M. Haas --

THE DISNEY-BYZANTINE CONNECTION

Film Clips

Steven Dimeo

**TRON

Like Ridley Scott in Blade Runner, writer-director Steven Lisberger makes the same mistake in thinking that atmosphere can substitute for identifiable characters and a believable storyline. The lines that Lisberger opts for here in this twenty million dollar effort to renew our faith in Disney studios, are those thrown off by computer-generated imagery. Fully 15 minutes of this 96 minute film are devoted to designs executed and visualized from every conceivable angle by computers. From the "power surge beam" to the butterfly ship and light cycles, they are imaginative. But movies, if I'm not mistaken, are supposed to be more than a series of pretty pictures.

Lisberger's mistaken focus is apparent from the very opening of the film: he begins inside the computer "wonderland" peopled with "programmed" counterparts to the "users" outside the machine. To appreciate that interplay--and to care--we have to get to know the "users" first--and we never really do. David Warner, apparently stuck in the same villainous role he had in Time Bandits, plays the head of a computer firm who has nabbed the video-game ideas conceived by computer-whiz Jeff Bridges, then banished the innocent to a video game arcade. Enlisting the aid of friends Cindy Morgan and Bruce Boxleitner, Bridges tries to breach the security programme that monitors Master Control and is summarily beamed (actually unbeamed) aboard the world inside the computer. There, of course, he continues the battle as his alter ego and, not surprisingly, wins. Except for an allusion to Bridges' broken relationship with Ms. Morgan, that's the extent of the characterization.

By so probing the depths of the computer, Lisberger tries to plumb allegorical depths of his own. There are obvious religious overtones to Bridges' seeking the aid of the self-abnegating Tower Guardian (played by Barnard Hughes). Before they have all gone into the world of light, Bridges means to be profound as well when he realizes, "Programs are like users!" Such observations, though, would have more meaning if the real people speaking the dialogue were more meaningful. Lisberger is only using them as pawns in his computer-generated program.

He takes one last shot at metaphor when the camera catches the city where Bridges has assumed his proper place in the firm: as day turns to night and the lights of the city appear, the scene dissolves in a way clearly meant to reflect the lines we have seen inside the computer world. His is an impressive light show, full of stereo sound and 70 millimeter frenzy. The only problem is that the computerized programme on the screen never has a heart.

***QUEST FOR FIRE

Director Jean-Jacques Annaud's film is a courageously ambitious backward glance at the good ol' days when men were apes and women were satisfied with showing mates how to light fires missionary-style. With gestures coached by zoologist Desmond (The Naked Ape) Morris, an invented language by A Clockwork Orange author Anthony Burgess, and impressive cinematography by Claude Agostini enhanced further by 70 mm clarity and Dolby stereo that help send us back 80,000 years ago, Quest for Fire becomes what every film aspires to be--pure cinema. The camera is all we need to know the story of the quest by tribal leader Naoh (Everett McGill) for the fire his people have lost after an attack by the brutal Neanderthals. When he saves a damsel in distress (svelte Rae Dawn Chong) and through her people learns the power of making fire on his own while he also falls in love with her, we realize that this film holds more than a candle against other prehistoric film forays. Our forefathers weren't exactly the brave Conans we like to think they might have been; McGill and his colleagues Ron Perlman and Nameer El Kadi clamber for the nearest tree when all else fails. But Annaud and screenwriter Gerard Brach tell the rest of the tale in full--with humour, both self-mocking and the kind that grows out of necessary cameraderie, and compassion. The musical score by Philippe Sarde is a bit too loud and intrusive sometimes, as if apologetic for a film with no recognizable soundtrack. But the lush photography and convincing acting offset such self-consciousness and help make this tale of one man's discovery of love and self-reliance our own--if only for a scant 97 minutes.

***WRONG IS RIGHT

Ironically, the fact that this film didn't do well at the boxoffice tends to substantiate its very point: the visual media do not cater to the more intellectually perceptive. Writer-director-producer Richard Brooks, who last directed the equally controversial Looking for Mr. Goodbar and has such classics to his credit as Elmer Gantry, makes a trenchant case here for our most self-evident truth: democracy mediocritizes. By giving the people more of the sensational silliness they desire, World Television Network newscaster Sean Connery, covering another CIA foul-up involving another nutty Arabian leader played by Henry Silva, brings the world to the very brink of nuclear war. In the tradition more of Dr. Strangelove than Network, Brooks takes potshots at pretense and politics as well as TV's pop-art. George Grizzard luxuriates in his role as President Lockwood who prefers being well athletically to the well-being of the citizenry. Leslie Nielsen, fresh from Airplane, delights in his satire of the senatorial pretender to the throne who will kindly turn anything to his advantage in an election year. And Robert Conrad has obvious fun, too, broadly playing General Wombat, an obvious parody of Patton. Along the way, Brooks drops a number of wry innuendoes that would be lost on most Dukes of Hazzard mentalities: Conrad apologizes to the black female Vice-President when he mentions the "black box" the President must use to start the war; the CIA dabbles with Haig-like euphemistic babble like "plausible deniability"; with the world near war, the President blathers blithely, "Fire away!" as Brooks cuts to enemy fire. He even manages to satirize New York newspaperese when, following the self-immolation of a demonstrator at a party celebrating the arrival of the Arabian leader, the camera features the headline, "Broad Bombs Broadway Boffola." A lot of these are hard to catch the first time through, but Wrong Is Right deserves a second viewing and--if the public isn't too dull to care--a second chance.

*½ SWAMP THING

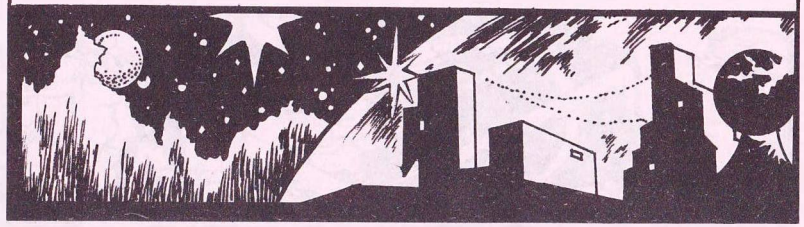
This is a sometimes sensitive (if even then melodramatic), mostly ludicrous movie about recombinant DNA researcher Dr. Holland (Ray Wise) who accidentally turns into Super Plant as a result of interference by adversary Arcane (Louis Jordan). The script by director Wes Craven (The Hills Have Eyes)is as encumbered with ill-timed cliches and poor pacing as Dick Durok is with that phony Swamp Thing suit. Batman-like slides between scenes are embarrassingly out of place since this picture pretends to be a serious treatment of the comic book character. Particularly hilarious is bored Jordan's transmogrification into the homonym of his attitude towards this film. Unintentionally, the climax plays about as convincingly as Godzilla vs. the Smog Monster. More proof, it seems, that this trend towards graphic depiction of gore and man-into-beast metamorphoses is really contrary to the basis of effective horror: the more left to the imagination, the scarier. Love interest Adrienne Barbeau is, as always, fetchingly chesty enough to frustrate any beast.

*½ FRIDAY THE 13TH--PART III

That half-star is for the 3-D which is never better than the credits that zoom out at the audience with impressive clarity. The rest is standard fare of the foulness that the youthful moviegoer likes to lap up with his popcorn. With plodding predictability, director Steve Miner dishes out gory murder after murder without any effort at suspenseful build-up towards the inevitable 15-minute chase sequence at the end. The spear from the spear gun hissing out at our eyes helps us temporarily forget that this killer's various costumes make as much sense as the storyline. His superhuman strength which he exercises on Dana Kimmell's boyfriend Richard Brooker in eye-popping splendour at least provides some comic relief. Unbelievably, Miner even seriously serves up that old shower curtain routine. The worst mistake of all is that no one but Ms. Kimmell ever really puts up any kind of struggle against this guy. Even gourmands of gore get tired of endless quick kills after a while. The film borrows a little from all the classics--Psycho, The Texas Chainsaw Massacre and Halloween--without a taste of the talent that lifted them above the genre's garbage. At least Alfred Hitchcock attempted to call on 3-D to add some real depth to a picture of some substance in Dial M for Murder. Maybe someday somebody else will try again. With audiences that gorge only off the gross and make boxoffice hits out of lamebrained sequels like this, the prospects don't look too good.

* MEGAFORCE

Ex-stuntman Hal Needham (Cannonball Run) proves again just how easy it is to waste $20 million. This is a ridiculously overblown half-hour TV tale told in 99 minutes about a mercenary force that gets itself in a bind, then easily gets itself out again. In the process, Introvision--a more sophisticated system of rear-projection involving mirrors--takes its second bow since Outland in a way that makes it look as authentic as those hokey special effects in Dino di Laurentiis' Flash Gordon. The only fascinating thing about this film is how Barry Bostwick, in that inordinately tight jump suit,can walk at all.

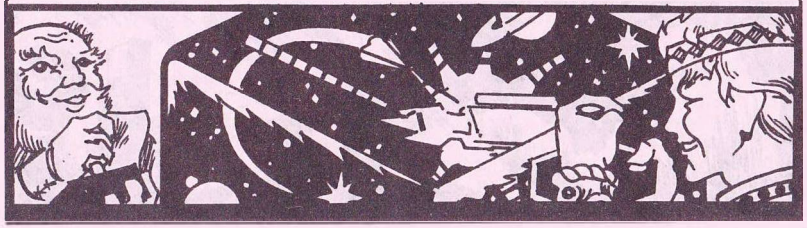


* FIREFOX

Firefox is that rare bird--a suspenseful tale of espionage that is totally void of suspense and real espionage. Probably Clint Eastwood's worst film to date (though there are many candidates by now), it's feathered with incredible plot twists, paper-aeroplane characterizations and darting shifts in point of view that have Eastwood as a mysteriously troubled Vietnam vet, just walk right into a top secret Russian lab and fly off with their most expensive, most sophisticated jet ever. The last half of the film is frittered away on Russian officials we don't even know and couldn't care less about--but this gimmick does help pad out the endless 137 minutes. John Dykstra, who helped on Star Wars, whould be ashamed of himself for special effects that have these jets perform unbelievable acrobatics at supersonic speeds that not only look phoney but would pulverize the real things. It's easier to believe a man can fly. The problem seems to be Eastwood must think he can--and make money at it even when he never gets off the ground. Sadly, he's right.

*** POLTERGEIST

If TV is the wave of the future in Wrong is Right that will finally swamp us, it proves to be the wavelength to the past in Poltergeist. Director Tobe (Texas Chainsaw Massacre, Salem's Lot) Hooper and producer/co-scriptwriter Steven Spielberg have teamed to create a horror movie of considerable dimension though not much depth. Alone in suburbia, JoBeth Williams is startled one morning to find the chairs to the kitchen table impishly stacked by someone other than her children played by Oliver Robins and Heather O'Rourke. This "poltergeist phenomenon" actually turns out to be a "haunting" by the script's own definition, the poetic license apparently taken for the sake of careful build-up towards a more spectacular climax. Staring transfixed at the living room TV (like most kids), Heather realizes through a telepathic link with the ghosts that they have entered the house through the set. When the ghosts abduct her, the frantic father played by Dreyfuss-look-alike Craig T. Nelson discovers that the greedy land developer he's worked for built this new subdivision on an Indian burial ground and the Indians are understandably miffed. With an eerie use of light, hauntingly effective use of Dolby stereo, and spectacular special effects by the ILM team again that make the ghosts materialize in a manner reminiscent of The Uninvited, Ms. Williams enters the other dimension to rescue her daughter in a sequence that is terrifying, gory, and unique. At the end, though, when Nelson, his family Holiday Inn refugees now, moves the portable TV out of the room, we find ourselves asking, "So What?" Necessarily episodic with some scenes inevitably more successful than others, Poltergeist lacks the impact of better horror films like The Changeling and especially The Exorcist where the haunting concentrated on a single force--in the first, a boy wrongfully murdered; in the latter (and still the classic horror film), possession by the devil within us all. By focusing on human victims that we do indeed care for rather than on the ghosts, Poltergeist becomes an effectve thriller. But if it had also chosen a single personality driven to haunt for a more original reason rather than a bunch of dead Redmen territorially wronged, the movie might have had a deeper purpose of its own.



**** E.T., THE EXTRATERRESTRIAL

E.T. is the film Close Encounters of the Third Kind should have been. While in Close Encounters the conflict between government interference and Richard Drayfuss' telepathic concern for the coming extraterrestrials seemed painfully contrived, especially considering the beneficence of the aliens, here the conflict is far more meaningfully focused: rather than pretending to be between government secrecy and well-meaning "little people," it's between adulthood and childhood themselves. With this seemingly simpler tale of friendship between a boy and an alien accidentally left behind by a scouting expedition, director Steven Spielberg has touched a much more universal chord than he did with those cute musical notes in Close Encounters.

Spielberg and scriptwriter Melissa Mathison never leave any doubt that this relationship of innocence and love is the movie's focal point. Even Carlo Rambaldi's convincing $1.5 million wide-eyed, gnome-like mechanical creation seems a perfect counterpart to the wide-eyed innocence Henry Thomas brings to the role of Elliott. The point of view is always from these more literal little people. Except for the mother Mary (played by Dee Wallace), adults remain faceless through the first half of the movie, whether they are E.T.'s pursuers, those suspicious government officials led by a man we only know by his clanking keys, or just Elliott's biology teacher. We see the faces of the adults only when the threat is realized and NASA officials corner the ailing E.T. and quarantine the house.

What strengthens this aspect of the film is that E.T. and Elliott, drawn together by a similar sense of alienation, identify so completely with each other. In a less literal sense, Elliott, too, feels abandoned--in his case, by his father who has separated from Dee Wallace's character before the movie even opens. Neither does Elliott seem to belong in the company of his brother Michael (Robert Macnaughton) and his friends who only grudgingly agree to include him in that Dungeons and Dragons game, then quickly make fun of him for discovering a "goblin" they never believe is real. When Elliott callously brings up their father again and sends his mother into tears, Michael underlines the separateness when he shouts, "Can't you think how other people feel for a change?" But after E.T. and Elliott come face to face in the field--each equally terrified of the other in one of the movie's many hilarious scenes--we discover that E.T. isn't merely imitating Elliott's gestures but that they are becoming what is known in s-f parlance as "empaths"--each sensing what the other senses telepathically. So when E.T. eagerly samples some Coors at home, Elliott in his biology class at school gets just as pie-eyed. And while E.T. watches John Wayne embrace Maureen O'Hara from a scene in The Quiet Man on TV, Elliott finds himself planting a kiss of his own on the prettiest girl in his class. This isn't done just for laughs. It's not without reason that Elliott's name for E.T. is what it is: the initials are the first and last letters of his own name. Their empathy in what Robert Heinlein called "grokking"--to understand someone so much that you become the other person, feel his joy, his fears, his suffering--becomes, in fact, a pretty good definition for the kind of love all of us seek.

This relationship, enhanced by the acting, offers a built-in sentimentality, then, that would be maudlin were it not for the film's irrepressible sense of wit and irony. Whether it's that realistic banter among the family in the opening scenes, the slapstick of E.T.'s falling-down-drunk scene, or even the dramatic irony in the same scene while the mother is unaware of E.T.'s presence--the humour keeps mawkishness in its place while it oddly makes the characters that much more endearing. The film's ironic cuteness seems epitomized when one of Elliot's friends asks about E.T., "Can't he just--beam up?" Elliott answers with obvious impatience: "This is reality, Greg!"

This is a reality that is highly indebted to other film realities, a fact not lost on Spielberg either. With good reason, E.T. listens attentively as Ms. Wallace reads her daughter Gertie (played by Drew Barrymore) the part involving Wendy's rescue from the story of Peter Pan. And on Halloween when the children conceal E.T. in a goblin costume and he makes R2D2-like gurgles at the horrors passing by, he is most entranced with a masquerade of his own counterpart--Yoda! Even after Elliott kisses the girl and the camera catches the teacher taking Elliott away from behind the patent-leather shoes of the girl who twists an ankle fetchingly, we're reminded somehow of Dorothy in the Land of Oz. Like Spielberg's meteor trails in Jaws just before the Great White's final attack, that rainbow-like trail of the spaceship at the end is not accidental; we have already glimpsed the other side of the rainbow right here on Earth in the character of E.T. himself.

As reverential as these references are to E.T.'s antecedents, it's ultimately the emphasis on terse dialogue and imposing visualizations that make this pure cinema in its own right. The most obvious example is the ending. Again reminding us of Dorothy's goodbye scene in The Wizard of Oz, E.T. says his goodbyes to Gertie, Michael, then finally the one he'll miss most of all, Elliott. At that point, he says simply, "Come." Elliott replies, "Stay." E.T. points to his transparent heart and says what Elliott said that one time before when he was cut by the teeth of a sawblade and E.T. reached up to heal the wound: "Ouch." Elliott reaches to his lips, trying to hold back the tears, then whispers himself, "Ouch." Wounds like this one even E.T. can't heal. Touching simplicity in a classic scene that universalizes all our own goodbyes when we've realized we were equally helpless to stop them.

Of course the movie does have minor forgivable lapses. For the sake of mood, for instance, Spielberg overlooks accuracy when Elliott goes out later the same night to look for E.T. in the back yard and the crescent moon is in the same place in the sky it was hours before. And we wonder momentarily about the fantasy's internal logistics when E.T. saves Elliott and himself a couple of times with his ability to make bicycles fly. Why didn't E.T. just fly back to the spaceship, then, to prevent himself from being left behind at the outset of the film? And with such powers, does he really need Elliott at all for any of this? Still, even these touches augment the magic. Those flights from danger, realized by George Lucas' ILM special effects team, are exhilarating!

E.T. is, finally, more than just another film. Whether we emphasize the Christ-like qualities of his healing abilities, his magical powers or the telepathic depth of his love, E.T. represents all our Puff the Magic Dragons, our Peter Pans that we've always wanted to last somehow beyond our own childhood. While E.T. languishes from a more absolute kind of homesickness, the NASA scientist admits to Elliott that E.T.'s visitation is a long-awaited dream: "I've been wishing for this since I was ten years old." So have we all. But in having his wish, Elliott grows, like Dorothy, to learn to live--and to be hurt by it. As E.T. lies dying beside him, Elliott says, "You must be dead. I can't feel anything any more." Pointing at Elliott's head, E.T. tries to console us all at the end by saying, "I'll always be here."

Well, at least the movie **E.T.** will always be with us. Its ability to have immortalized this kind of love with such cinematic skill should be enough to make it one of the few pictures that actually deserves not only to make as much money as it already has, but to be the first science-fiction/fantasy film in this century to win the Academy Award for best picture.

Letter from Smyrna

Laurie Anderson

I am writing from Izmir, the ancient Smyrna of history books. Izmir is Turkey's gateway to the Aegean, and its pillared Agora attests to its age: it is one of the oldest cities on earth. Over the centuries the city has gained and lost a multitude of peoples, and today the modern port city still contains a bewildering array of communities, several of them rather exotic even for the Orient.

The purpose of this letter is to let you know about the state of s-f in Turkey. Actually, that sentence is a bit grandiose since I know of only one original Turkish s-f writer, a startlingly beautiful almond-eyed girl of twenty-four. Her name is Yasemin Akbuz and her family is Levantine. This means that she is a mixture of Mediterranean bloods. Just yesterday, over a bottle of Thracian wine in one of the local seaside cafes, Yasemin explained to me her descent from various minority groups of the old Ottoman Empire.

Yasemin is one-eighth Armenian, one-eighth Circassian, one-eighth Greek, one-eighth Lebanese, one-fourth French, and one-fourth Spanish. Her family speaks six languages at home, including Cervantean Spanish, a hold-over from the sixteenth century when a Jewish ancestor fled the Inquisition for the relative security of the Ottomans.

Yasemin has taken it on herself to introduce s-f to modern Turkey. This is no small task. Turkey is a country that prides itself on its past and on conformity, and the government has never hesitated at branding those artists who advocate rapid change as political revolutionaries. Most of Turkey's contemporary writers spend their art in writing protests against the deplorable living conditions of the Turkish villagers and the ever-expanding gap between the rich city dwellers and their country brethren. This social literature is not necessarily Marxist in content, but all of it is construed that way by the government, and consequently many of the books are taken off bookstore shelves and many of the authors are harrassed.

It is under this type of censorship that Yasemin is forced to ply her trade and, following the tradition of much s-f, she has bravely carried certain unhappy aspects of her own present-day society to an even unhappier conclusion in the future Turkey.

To date Yasemin has written three novels. None of these has been printed by a reputable publisher. The press seems to fear that publication would cause a violent reaction from conservative elements in the country, and this could lead to real danger for the young author or the publisher. Consequently, the books circulate only in manuscript form, but all three have been read avidly by certain circles here in Izmir, in Ankara, and in Istanbul.

By far the finest of Yasemin's three books is Rumi's Antenna. This short novel of 140 pages begins straightforwardly enough. The opening chapters introduce a village idiot from Eastern Turkey who is humiliated constantly by the cruel peasants of his mountain home. The sufferings of the poor unresisting fool are piled one upon another; they culminate in his near-drowning in the village cesspool after a beating from a village tough. After this episode the boy is sent to stay with relatives in Konya, the religious capital of Turkey and its most conservative city. The relatives treat the boy harshly but realize that there is a religious tone to his innocent suffering. The relatives introduce the boy to the Koran and then to the whirling Dervishes of the Mevlana sect of Islam. The boy shows great enthusiasm for the Dervishes and is soon initiated into their dances.

At this point the novel breaks with its linear narration and begins to assume the circular pattern of the dance itself. As the boy raises his right hand palm upward to touch God and thrusts his left hand palm downward to touch the people, the ever present confusion of his mind is spun away. He begins to speak with clarity and wisdom, and the audience is astounded to hear him overflowing with blissful poetry. The poetic outpourings of the whirling Dervish are now the central narration of the book, and these outpourings interweave with each other and repeat as the narration moves slowly forward through the sedate ecstasy of the whirling boy. The discerning reader soon begins to realize that the prophetic songs of the idiot are actually not his words at all. They are the words of voyagers who are approaching Earth from another galaxy. The space visitors are able to communicate with distant worlds by casting their brain waves over vast reaches of space, but to be able truly to communicate, these visitors must find a receiver and sender of like brainwaves. The boy is such a receiver and has been one throughout the book, but this is not apparent to the reader until the boy dances. In the Dervish dance the boy concentrates his entire mind upon receiving God, and as he whirls, his own mind is no longer jamming the waves of the future visitors. We learn from the boy's song that the future space visitors have visited many planets throughout the galaxies, and they have often met with violent hostility; therefore, this system of sending words of great wisdom has been developed in order to prepare potentially hostile planets for the arrival of guests. We also discover that if we re-read the opening chapters we can now gain meaning from the previously incoherent garblings of the village idiot. With care we can unravel the boy's words from the interplanetary words, and suddenly it is obvious that the boy is not an idiot at all: he is only the hapless victim of a short-circuited nervous system that is being jammed from space.

Soon the boy is accepted by the people of Konya as a new voice of God, as a poet who speaks with the authority of a prophet. All of Konya is sent into a state of religious ecstasy verging on hysteria. Messages are sent throughout the Moslem world proclaiming the arrival of a new prophet. In the meantime the boy whirls on and on, and the words that are spun out from his dance are hastily recorded by scribes, who add new suras each day to the Holy Book of revelations.

In the end the conservative Imams of Konya plot against the new prophet and destroy him in a grotesque and macabre dance of death. Turkey's provincialism wins out, and the novel ends with a touch of doom lingering in the background.

Yasemin's second novel, Zap, seems to fulfil the fondest wishes of her country's politicians. The main character is a Turkish doctor of great ability who has spent years in the United States. There he has done a lot of research on brainwaves. The doctor has finally invented a machine that enables the controller to track and record all brainwaves within a given area. When the doctor returns to Turkey, he shows his device to a friend in the Turkish government. The friend recognizes the political importance of the discovery and the Turkish government sets aside a large portion of its meager wealth so that a greatly refined copy of the machine might be produced. In time the infernal machine is unveiled. In this new machine, with the aid of a built-in computer, the various emotional levels of brainwaves can be filtered out and recorded. Soon the government discovers that it can detect and identify certain brainwaves as potentially dangerous to the society. The next step is for the inventive doctor to devise a means of immobilizing (or short-circuiting) all potentially aggressive brainwaves so that no violence can be committed by any citizen.

The results are both tragic and humorous. Nearly all love-making comes to an abrupt end until the government learns to turn off the zap machine during certain night hours. In several cases the short-circuiting results in the deaths of some citizens, but these deaths are dismissed as inconsequential side-effects of the machine. The zapping machine's shortcomings are made apparent, however, when the students at the university in Ankara riot during the late afternoon rush hour. The government turns the zapping machine to its maximum force, and the students are zapped with such violence that they tumble in heaps onto the concrete in front of the parliament building where they have assembled. Unfortunately, the rush-hour drivers are also full of equally violent thoughts, and their zapping cascades them into horrendous accidents that involve hundreds of vehicles.

The climax to the story occurs when the President of the Republic discovers that his mind is zapped by the machine every time he tries sexual intercourse with his all-too-willing secretary. Finally the President himself orders the machine destroyed, and Turkey returns to the usual bumbling chaos of its political and social in-fighting.

Yasemin's third book is Perpetual Love. This brief novel was written during the two ecstatic weeks that Yasemin and I camped out on the balcony of a belly-dancing acquaintance's apartment. The book reflects the frantic activity of those two weeks: the wild bouts of love-making alternated with long periods of frenzied writing. In this book Yasemin's inventive doctor has devised a means of protracting orgasm for long periods of time. In government love parlours the fee-paying customer is hooked up to an individual machine that instantly sends the participant into constant orgasm for a time that is controlled by the amount paid for the admission ticket. In the case of a female the machine is relatively simple and causes continuous orgasm for a hundred or even a thousand times, until the body is utterly exhausted. Unfortunately, few of these machines are needed for women, since few Turkish wives and daughters are ever allowed to leave the protective sanctuary of their homes. The few female love machines are therefore available for prostitutes and foreigners. The machine for a man is necessarily more complicated. The testicles are connected to a great sack of artificial seminal fluid, and collecting tubes catch the constantly spurting fluid and recirculate the stuff until, once again, the body is utterly exhausted.

In time, physical love between couples is no longer expressed within Turkish society. In actuality, no man or woman is allowed to show affection in public in Turkey, but now in the book this affection is also lacking in their private lives. Soon the men are spending inordinately long hours away from home, either working to earn their next admission fee or sitting in coffee houses with their cronies and discussing their next trip to the love salon. The lives of the women are outwardly changed very little by these events; they still spend their days sitting on their balconies and watching the world go by. There is one big difference, however, and this is that the women are no longer constantly pregnant as in the past; in fact, the birth rate of the population drops nearly to zero. When the women of Turkey discover that they have lost their one purpose in life, the raising of their children, then they too devise means to escape into the pleasures of the love parlour. An enterprising Japanese firm comes up with a miniature love machine, and the women are able to hook themselves up in the solitude and safety of their own homes. Over a period of time the Turks are genetically adapted to their new way of life. The sexual organs grow more and more pronounced and the limbs atrophy.

Finally the day comes when all resistance has ceased and the love-obsessed country is ripe for invasion. Turkey is invaded by its traditional enemy, Russia. The Russians take over everything, including the lucrative love salons. The selfish Russians, in the best capitalist tradition, instantly raise the price of admission. Now the orgiastic Turks must work longer and harder to spend less time in the love parlour. After some time the Russians raise the price of admission again. Now many Turks rediscover their spouses. Finally, the Turks are once again spending most of their time working instead of climaxing. They now rebel and drive the Russians out of the country. The salons are destroyed and life is normalized.

Yasemin Akbuz is a fine writer in a little-known and rarely translated language. She has written controversial literature against terrific pressures from various camps of her conservative society. Her themes are protests against the stifling and authoritarian elements in Turkey, yet they apply anywhere. I look forward to many more thought-provoking books from her, and I hope this brief introduction has whetted your own appetite for her books, when and if they are ever translated into English.

DARTMOOR IN WINTER

(for Ann)

Fifty gulls each in its own green circle
Spill their whiteness,

And the wild horses
Who will gallop fitfully over the gorse in moonlight.

The cold rain
Fills me with the fifty-foot wells

That rise in stone across the sea,
Across all Ireland.

The wetness rests,
And the fox who outran the foppish hunters.

With them we listen at night
To the windstorm.

In candlelight, the pub sign
Turns over, over, over at its own sweet will.

And we feel
The horses fly unimpeded

Across the silver gorse.

-- Francis Blessington --

CASTEL SANT'ANGELO

Forced March.
Bernini called out the troops:
  Attention wings; smiles seduce.
The bridge clicked like a handful of cameras.
Heavy ahead, the stench of death a river
  stilled around a barge. Rejoice.
Stone boots trodding down sullen steps
  into a hold damp with history
  relieved of marble. We all wear models
  Of what we were when we began.

The ramp lifts an enormous weight, past
  Cellini's muffled pounding, pats the rump
  and safely sets believers adrift
  into a prison of change. Arms and art
  and angels. What better way to become
  buccaneers? A pile of dented popeheads
  salvaged from the Tiber decorates each cannon.
Treasure chests sleep lightly, hall for hall.

Justice, too, has room for whippings, sacks
  for crowns, and so to walk the thin passetto,
  to the point of humility. Rejoice.
Grotesques are not grotesque, not when bedrooms
  bin the wheat, theatres hide as oil wells,
  a door painted open. Peeking.
Oh holy trompe l'oeil. Eros and Psyche fidget
  uncomfortably on the wall, passengers
  have finished with needle-pointed beds.

Out on the bridge the scirocco leaves
  the gritty smell of Africa unanswered.
Down in the moat the thrashing only
  bruised soccer legs, and one old salt
  hammering up the hull with bricks.
Michael, Michael of the crow's nest,
  part the clouds with your great sword
  and let the sun sail out to sea.
Chase this plague of tourists to Tortuga
  so I may gobble the whole apple
  and know the afterthought of Hadrian.

-- Thomas Kretz --

THE LINE THAT IS THE LOCUS OF THE MOVING POINT

Pivot. In black water under red smoke
bruised love is drifting. But a song
simply swaying swings the pivot.

Lights travel by. The taffeta geraniums
have been bruised to amethyst brummagen.
Darkness lifts the bar in the thorn hedge.

A song is no kiss
the dark sinks. Breath has many doors
to dance on the body.
And language among painted wounds,
glass tears plays at suicide
like a history of falling
into deaf silence. But even the skin
somehow remembers
throne, bed, life, work the might-have-been gates.

Where light falls there amber is arrested.
This is the wall. We move here.

History hangs over the lake. It was the
But things fell down. Rocks pile up.
Time sits in a corner.

There is a big difference between our life,
but nearest the hand it is still electric.

In a very strong time there is big work to do.

Then was then. We were we.
Looked sweet. Talked nothings.
A like for a like. All cinnamon skin,
motherhands dripping. Being young,
growing older,
eating roads to ends
not of night: one wish
until dance sinks
to movement music to sound
and we wonder in explaining
we would not like to die
before we have explained. The real
and folded past grew foolish,
has binding possibilities, a wild
justice, an insistent note
whose stories skitter like rose smoke
and fish still splash in the rivers
while we walk in wet fields
working our legs like oars What emitters lingers.

Only the wall is flat. The table seems to tip
its wonder onto us into our laps.

-- Edward Mycue --

SELECTED LETTERS

428 Sagamore Ave
Teaneck, NJ 07666

Dear Leland,

I was quite pleasantly surprised when RQ appeared today.

It is many years since I read a juvenile version of Gawain. (I read any romantic legends I could find then, but my JRRT version is in the Middle English, which is slightly less accessible, although more impressive looking, than Finnegans Wake.) The article is interesting, although I somewhat regret its plebeian style, making such a matter of fact moment of the magnificent scene on Mt. Doom, certainly one of the greatest, most exciting and most psychologically revealing in fantasy literature. Christine, Muriel! Let it out! Go with the moment!

And a library of Frank Reade, 10 volumes, incredible! Forests died for such a project! If I seem unreasonable, it is simply that a sampler would have sufficed, or better yet, microfilm, to be xeroxed if necessary by early s-f scholars like Sam Moskowitz in his quest for unreadable material.

Jim Harmon and Bill Blackbeard remain knowledgeable, generous and delightful masters of their subjects...

Ben Indick

The Mt. Doom scene wasn't supposed to be recreated but "recollected in tranquillity," so that the critics could show the expanded self-awareness that followed.// That the Frank Reade Library (like Gernsback's Amazing Stories) is unreadable by today's standards wouldn't justify a hit-or-miss reproduction of it--the results of just this type of random-sample editing being described all too vividly by Bill Blackbeard in his current series.

2111 Sunset Crest Dr.
Los Angeles, CA 90046

Dear Leland:

It's good to know that RQ is continuing to uphold the sercon tradition so admirably, and I think the film reviews help lend diversification and thus broaden the scope a bit. Many thanks for sending this issue; please excuse my brevity, but I've got a deadline on a new novel which must be met.

Best, as ever
Robert Bloch

I am glad to hear from Mr. Bloch under any circumstances, but can't explain why without breaking ye olde hallowed tradition that a reply not be longer than the original communication.

Dear Editor:

812 Broughton Dr.
Sheboygan, WI 53081

William Tenn errs in two places. First, he claims we've made no basic improvement in ourselves since neolithic times. So I quote from Sigmund Freud:

> It is not true that the human mind has undergone no development since the earliest times and that, in contrast to the advances of science and technology, it is the same today as it was at the beginning of history. We can point out one of these mental advances at once. It is in keeping with the course of human development that external coercion gradually becomes internalized; for a special mental agency, man's superego takes it over and includes it among its commandments. Every child presents this process of transformation to us; only by that does it become a moral and social being.
>
> ("The Future of an Illusion," James Strachey, trans.)

It's also false that Campbell wouldn't buy a story in which some alien had "intellectual capacities he could not hope to touch." You, the editor, have certainly read Heinlein's "Goldfish Bowl," since you've cited it several times, but has William Tenn read it? At story's end a corpse is found floating in the ocean with the sentence scratched on its skin, "Creation took eight days." What the story puts over--extremely vividly--is that those creatures created on the 8th day are as superior to us as we are to the goldfish.

Sincerely,
Yogi Borel

Conceivably, humanity has improved--but following the age of Buchenwald and Auschwitz one must ask, improved how?// On Campbell's refusal to accept the possibility of innately superior minds, note carefully the wording of Tenn's sentence (p. 93): "In 1951-2 John W. Campbell was this kind of person." "Goldfish Bowl" was printed in the early forties, at which time JWC may not have been "this kind of person."

Rt 5 Fox Run apt 8
Laurinburg, NC 29352

Gentlebeings:

Concerning the 26th [issue] of RQ--

I have often been troubled by references to myths in Lafferty's work. Personal myths however--that makes sense. I must reread "Hinges of the World" and just maybe Fourth Mansion.

William Tenn I have read and some times understood for many years. Man the makeshift ape, the world eater, the ignoble. I have never seen Bernie the Faust as pitiful somehow. He makes all the money while his 'Contacts' have prestige and position. Perhaps I missed something. "Firewater" also needs rereading. I react to it as an endorsement of enlightened self-interest. Something like Farmer's DePop story.

The Poison Belt is a moral tale. Much too simple a moral tale to deserve such a detailed analysis.

Yours Truly,
William Wilson Goodson, Jr.

You're right about "Firewater." To quote the author (p.92), "Hebster is...only interested in himself and that's why he's able to solve the problem."// Maybe Batory did too well, making the moral aspect of PB obvious enough to persuade the reader it's self-evident. In any case, I'd rather be told that the story was too simple for the analysis than to hear that the analysis was too simple for the story.

Box 606 La Cañada-Flintridge
CA 91011

Dear Leland:

Received RQ 26. Quite a surprise--this is the first copy of this legendary fanzine that I have seen.

As for commenting on the articles themselves, I must admit to being quite uncomfortable in the presence of this sort of criticism. I have read the whole zine, and yet cannot honestly say I got any new insights into any of the works mentioned.

I am not down on all criticism. Dorothy Sayers wrote two fine books about Dante that are a model of clarity and information in criticism.

Just as an example...Nowhere in Sheryl Smith's article do I see a hint that Lafferty is playing games with the s-f story format. But look at this...Examine any of his short stories and see how often he uses the rule of three. Certain incidents or dialogues or meetings are repeated, with variations, three times. It helps organize the story, so that flights of imagination have a firm base.

Now that is an old pulp rule...repeat something three times to nail it down as truth. Here we have a pulp cliché elevated to humorous art.

Harry J.N. Andruschak

One can say that a writer is playing with a format only if it's regarded as something fixed and immovable. So in this particular case it might be more accurate to say that the s-f format must be enlarged to accommodate R.A. Lafferty.

30 N. 19th St
Lafayette, IN 47904

Dear Mr. Sapiro:

Well, I never expected to see the RQ again...I'll review it in IONISPHERE and I'm only too happy to write and say what I thought about it.

The format and paper seem quite a bit better than they were and there is more direct reference to s-f than there was. I found the contents more interesting than in past issues. I was particularly glad to see a column therein by Mr. Jim Harmon, correctly identifying himself as that old "Harmony" man. It's been a bit spooky to see him lurking on the fringes of your fanzine without exactly writing anything. His column was just as interesting as it used to be. It's "non-controversial," though, in the sense that I would not care to start controversies about any of his topics.

Your magazine is certainly distinguished. I don't know when anybody has ever done a better job of putting together something like this. That first illo is reminiscent of what GALAXY used to publish...The Tenn interview was interesting because Tenn hasn't been paid enough attention to in the past--it's relevant in the same way that it was relevant that FANTASTIC began publishing Fritz Leiber stories a few years after Howard Browne had said he was going to return to old-time s-f.

It would be nice if you had a letter column because there is a slight lack in the magazine communication-wise. You simply have to have that, s-f or not.

Sincerely,

John Thiel

I agree on lettercol, which mag's infrequency of publication made me suspend for two issues.// Credit art editor Mary Emerson for super-pro illos and layout.// On the non-controversial nature of Jim Harmon's column, see the communication that immediately follows.

Tarleton State University
Stephenville, TX 76402

Dear Leland--

I'm not sure I agree with Jim Harmon's comments about mystery fiction vs. s-f. I read both genres also, but I find more relaxation in the mystery field (I tend to read the old-fashioned puzzle stories). On the other hand, I tend to think of the better s-f as being more important fiction than the mysteries. I think I can make this clearer if I invert it and say something about s-f and detective fiction gone wrong. Heinlein years ago pointed out "The Little Tailor" plot as one of the three basic plots (I won't argue the number). I'm very tired of reading it with an upbeat ending in s-f, for I think of it as the hero-becoming-superman plot. The hero, who is unappreciated and downtrodden, turns out to have this secret power and ends up ruling the planet. This is dream stuff for melancholy adolescents. I read it when I was an adolescent in The Princess of Mars, but I no longer find that it has much of a kick.

But s-f has a very wide area of possibilities. The field can also include Out of the Silent Planet, Davy, A Canticle for Leibowitz, and The Left Hand of Darkness, to name some obvious titles. They have something to say about modern ideas or modern lives.

Detective fiction, on the other hand, seems to me to fall into two groups: the fun-and-games puzzles, playing variations on themes, which is typical of most popular fiction in its repetition of motifs, and realistic novels involving crime. (I may be oversimplifying here, for there are a number of conventional forms--the hardboiled private eye, the police procedural --which seem realistic in their gore but which are largely repetitious in their plots; they are not any more realistic in the meaningful sense than are the puzzles.) A good example of this contrast is the difference between two books by P.D. James. Her An Unsuitable Job for a Woman is a highly conventional whodunit, with a woman substituted for the usual male Private Eye. Many of its motifs reappear in her straight novel Innocent Blood (which, despite its being packaged as a novel, is actually a very good crime novel). The difference is that Innocent Blood has real people in it--or, at least, far more nearly real people than the earlier work. (It is hardly a perfect novel, but I would call it a good one--a crime novel with meaning.)

When mystery fiction goes bad, it tends to go not in terms of adolescent appetites (does anyone actually identify with Sherlock Holmes?), but in terms of sensationalism--more gore and sex than are needed for the story. "My realism is more sensational than your realism" sort of thing.

The difference is that s-f can deal with ideas, particularly ideas involving society and science, but other ideas as well, while detective fiction seems limited to realistic portrayals of people under stress. Can anyone think of a mystery which says as much about our society as Doris Lessing's The Golden Notebook...or as, in its inverted way, The Left Hand of Darkness? (Ellery Queen's The Glass Village, with its attack on McCarthyism, is hardly as typical of its field, as is Le Guin's novel.)

Out of time,

Joe Christopher

Of course, s-f can go awry in many ways besides world-beater paranoia, so (acknowledging my complete ignorance of the post-Holmesian detective story) I think that the logical argument might've been: more things can go right with s-f precisely because more things can go wrong with it.

423 Summit Ave
Hagerstown, Md 21740

Dear Leland:

If you should communicate any time soon with Jim Harmon, you could assure him that his status as oldest fanzine columnist isn't challenged by anyone in Hagerstown. I've scrupulously maintained during the past two or three years the policy I adopted when I resigned as an RQ columnist, that of writing no regular columns on any topic for any fanzine. I can't think of anyone else who threatens Jim's distinction, unless it would be Bill Danner who has been a sort of columnist in his fanzine, Stef, since just after the Spanish-American War broke out. But Bill insists that Stef isn't a fanzine and I don't believe he has stuck to one title for his self-published contributions.

Jim made me feel a bit better with his remarks on how s-f readers are being tempted away from the true faith by mystery novels. I'm among them. Most of my fiction reading for several years has consisted of plowing steadily through stacks of Detective Book Club volumes which I've scooped up for pennies at yard sales. I'm not sure why my personal literary heresy has occurred, unless it's linked with the urge to conservatism and to the familiar as one grows old, a reluctance to have the mind stretched amid alien landscapes and altered human natures, a desire to read about people and places similar to those I've known. But my mystery fiction tastes aren't as catholic as my s-f reading habits: I find myself uninterested in mystery fiction written before the 1930s or after the 1960s, for the most part. Just within the past week, I've brought home second-hand copies of Kornbluth and Cordwainer Smith anthologies and the hardbound collection of Blish's spacefaring cities fiction, so maybe I'm on the verge of fleeing back to the one true reading faith.

I don't own a copy of The Poison Belt. But several years ago a local friend who acquired an early edition lent it to me, and I read it with considerable interest, particularly for such an unexpected denouement. I remember discovering in it an unconscious Tom Swifty and quoting it to Donn Brazier, who was publishing Title at the time; he seemed unwilling to believe that a writer could have done it accidentally. The implications and influences that Dana Martin Batory found in the novel didn't occur to me at the time, but they seem logical as he proposes them.

Next, I suppose, Sheryl Smith will classify into a predictable ordering the subject matter covered by Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle. That project strikes me as a comparatively simple one, compared with the achievement of her sorting out some of the Lafferty fiction into categories. And I enjoyed reading the Tenn interview, even though I remain dissatisfied with the entire custom of presenting interviews in question and answer form. At best it reminds me of the transcript of a murder trial's testimony and at worst the areas covered by the interview are presented in choppy and mixed up manner instead of the logical progression that can be achieved when the interviewer writes up what he has obtained in the form of a feature article, summarizing when the interviewee rambled, shifting the answers around to bring the most important elements to the fore. But I suppose it's the influence of television interviewing that makes the straight question and answer transcript so popular in fanzines today.

Yrs., &c.,
Harry Warner, Jr.

In general I agree about literal transcripts of interviews, but as Brad Linaweaver says, "...an afternoon of William Tenn is like hearing a book...invented and told to you on the spot." So here it's a matter of preferring the original to an edited or condensed version à la Reader's Digest.

12790 Puesta del Sol
Redlands, CA 92373

Dear Leland,

Even though I object to the statement that "the best thing that comes out of Penn State" is William Tenn (we have produced great results ir many fields from political science to medicine to agriculture--etc.) I sincerely enjoyed the interview with William Tenn. Unfortunately when I was an undergraduate at PSU ('56-'60) my idea of good s-f was Ape and Essence...

The Frank Reade Library brought back memories of the 40s when I read some old copies of the original Tom Swift novels that had belonged to my uncle. Many of the comments on plot, and racial and ethnic stereotypes apply to those old books, also. It's amazing how much bigotry was accepted without a second thought.

Sometime, somewhere, I would like to see someone do an article on human sexuality in s-f. Female writers seem to handle it much more naturally than male. Most men still seem to think that a woman's sole purpose in s-f is to be a helpless victim to be rescued from some villain's clutches. I have yet to see any man attempt anything even remotely resembling MZB's treatment of emotional and sexual problems in Forbidden Tower.

Not only is your periodical good reading, but it also has the most professional format of any fan magazine that I've yet seen.

Sincerely,
Beth Ann Wempe

In justice to the Tom Swift and Frank Reade authors I must note that racial (i.e., Jewish) stereotypes were exhibited by Victorian writers of fantasy from H. Rider Haggard and G.K. Chesterton to Rudyard Kipling and Henry James.// Women's Lib has progressed since early pulp s-f, where females were viewed merely as sets of conditioned reflexes. Present awareness is manifested by feminist writers, like Joanna Russ, and feminist fanzines, like New Moon (Box 2056 Madison, WI 53701) --and lack of such awareness, by the choice of the non-ERA state of Illinois (in preference to Michigan) as the '82 world convention site.

2305 W. 6th Ave
Vancouver, BC V6K-1W1

Leland,

Thank you very much for sending me a copy of the March issue of RQ--it certainly had plenty of reading. Basically I found it to be very informative though a bit heavy reading at times. I tend to prefer zines of a lighter more humorous vein. I did not read the article by Christine Barkley and Muriel B. Ingham as I am not very interested in the writings of Tolkien. I did however enjoy the articles on Lafferty's short stories and the interview with William Tenn. These are two authors whose writing I enjoy. Film Clips was interesting but a bit dated. I saw Humanoids from the Deep and thought it to be a silly movie--I did not think it is worth seeing.

Best Wishes,
Michaela Duncan

I'm relieved that our correspondent thought that "Film Clips" was the only dated item--the tardiness here being not the critic's but the editor's--since, as noted last issue, one pro editor (Andy Porter) conceived the William Tenn interview as being "not current enough."

18 Frederick St.
Brantfort, ONT N3T-4N4

Leland:

Merci beaucoup for the copy of RQ number 26: I can honestly say that RQ is the best fanzine I've ever read (surpassing SF Review, Locus, SF Chronicle,and other high-profile (or low-profile, high-quality) zines. The material you've been pubbing is geared exactly to my interests in s-f and to some extent out of it. Perhaps a few comments on each feature, and then the construct of the zine itself...

Lafferty (by Smith)...an excellent overview, especially in terms of exploring Lafferty's relationship to science and myth. S. Smith has both perceptivity and a beautiful lucidness that make reading this article a pleasant experience even to one who has read little Lafferty. It especially made me want to read more, which is the true test, as she herself demonstrates in her closing comments on critics.

Tenn (by Linaweaver)...not only reveals much of Tenn, but much of the art of story-telling as well, particularly interesting statements re "sane stories" again proving my axiom that sanity and control are unhealthy and detrimental to the creative or intelligent mind. (Save the world thru science and insanity!)

Poison Belt (by Batory)...I was less interested in this than the previous two articles, but for a Doyle afficionado and as a historical perspective it was worthwhile. One thing I disliked was the breaking-down of the article into defined sections. This seems to me to be an amateurish and cumbersome device, revealing a lack of self-confidence. A good scholarly romp, though.

There but Not..(by Barkley and Ingham)...has the strengths of the previous article but not the weaknesses. Also, it is about books which I find more interest in than the Challenger stories. This piece demonstrates my thesis that one of the major aspects of LotR is free will, and how decision alters personality... Unfortunate that all of us, in travelling the roads, must lose some innocence, and thus stray from the wisdom of the child-like state.

Frank Reade (by Weinkauf)...History of s-f always intriguing, and I've always enjoyed reading about the old juve pubs of early days. A useful review, especially because it doesn't go on for too long about something which is of minor importance...

Seasonal Fan (Harmon)...an eyeful , good insights on anthologizing and sensa wundah. Though I take issue with his opposition to the new wave, I also agree with Harmon that the wild does not equal paradise. Disconnection from previous human expression is psychic importance, but it must be done with quality, or all is lost.

20-Year Shaft (by Blackbeard)...comics history is a passion to me...quant a Yellow Kid, it is a useful case in point for the argument Blackbeard builds as regards comics reprints.

The Investigation (by Fogel)...fascinating comparisons, if occasionally too academiesque. Pynchon(as well as Barth, Burroughs, others)/has/been ignored in sf-dom too long, despite /his/ use of genre material. Closer examination would lead to proud exclamation that we can claim these for our own. Lem intrigues, twisting spirals and variegated symbols...

Film Clips (by Dimco)...goes in accord with my personal prejudices, so how can I help but like it?

Poetry...not only were terror-beauty constructs to my ears rhythmic baroque, but introduced me to friends as yet unmet.

Art...pleasing to the eye and mind. May these artists continue to turn out work of equal flowing. /The/ placement of each piece was sensitive and appropriate.

As regards the organization of the magazine, I found that your thematic approach was both functional and helpful to the rising/falling moods of the reader. You picked unquestionable categories and I found also that the titles which intrigued me the most contained the articles that I liked best. All in all, congratulations on an excellent piece of work.

Until next time, love and peace,

Carl P. Wilson III

To take credit for the mag's thematic structure I also must take blame for the Doyle subheadings, inserted not by the critic but by myself, for greater cohesion.// Insanity--alas!--applies only to purely literary contexts and not to the external world, where mad politicians control atomic weapons.

1817 Lexington
Taylor, TX 76574

Dear Leland,

About the time I have relegated RQ to a place on my list of pleasant memories, the postman arrives with an unexpected gift.

I can count on my copy of Playboy arriving with punctual regularity each month but the dull sameness of its strained sophistication and even of its nudie cuties hardly causes me to look forward to the next issue. And I have come to believe that my Harper's and Atlantic are twin clones. Each seems to be earnestly committed to subjecting the reader to total boredom.

You can understand, then, my tingle of anticipation when I found my RQ in my box this morning. Nor was I disappointed. Without putting it down, I read it entirely, which says quite a bit, considering my impatience with most printed matter that comes my way. It is not my intention to overwhelm you with fulsome praise. Far from it. It is just that I feel you and your staff should receive recognition and plaudits for your obvious dedication to filling a void in the publishing world.

I remember a similar void that was filled by the long defunct publishers,Grosset & Dunlap, many years ago, when they made it possible for a pre-teen age worshipper of Edgar Rice Burroughs to save his allowance and buy into that enthralling world for seventy-five cents. Hard cover, too, with absolutely wondrous paintings by J. Allen St. John. This is the stuff that dreams are made of and fed upon.

Sincerely,

Hew Martin

I'm happy at the magazine's having provided a "remembrance of things past," and naturally RQ staff members are happy to get such praise--since they get no compensation (unless you count their portraits in issue #11) for their editorial work, which indeed just deters them from their renumerative activities.

WE ALSO HEARD FROM...

Adrienne Fein (26 Oakwood Ave, White Plains, NY 10605), with encouraging words on RQ #26, "an unusually good issue"; Thomas Egan (6936-43rd Ave, Woodside, NY 11377), who especially liked the LotR essay and Pat Munsen's drawing for it--"Eowyn captured in pen and ink!"--and Lola Andrew (1220 Walnut St, Webster City IA 50595), who appreciated "the really interesting filler art" and "liked the poetry best" of the written contributions. Also received were notes from Michael Bishop (Box 646 Pine Mountain, GA 31822), citing the interview with William Tenn, "who has long been one of my favourites ('Down Among the Dead Men,' 'The Liberation of Earth,' 'Lisbon Cubed,' etc., etc.)," and Dana Martin Batory (402 E. Bucyrus St, Crestline, OH 44827), who "enjoyed the last issue immensely" and reports that his annotated edition of "The Lost World" is to be published (in about a year) by Gaslight Publications.

IN PREPARATION

A BIBLIOGRAPHY

OF A PRIVATE PRESS

Complete citations of all publications from my press:
First editions by Ray Bradbury, Fritz Leiber, H. P. Lovecraft,
Clark Ashton Smith, and others-- a total of 38 titles.

The Bibliography will present much information elsewhere
unavailable (and will correct some published citations)
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