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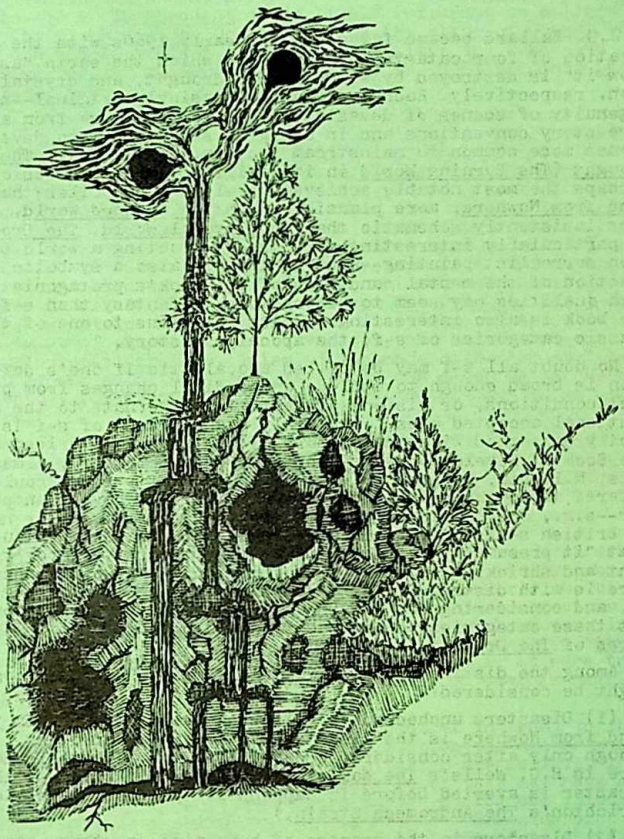
TWO NEURONIC ODYSSEYS



Dry Thoughts in a Dry Season

by

Joe Milicia

J.G. Ballard became famous in the early 1960s with the publication of four catastrophe novels in which the earth "as we know it" is destroyed by wind, flood, drought, and crystalization, respectively. Each book was increasingly original--not in ingenuity of scenes of devastation but in departure from adventure-story conventions and in using an s-f context to develop themes more common to mainstream fiction. Of the four, The Drought (The Burning World in its original American version) is perhaps the most notable achievement--less a potboiler than The Wind from Nowhere, more plausible than The Drowned World, and less insistently schematic than The Crystal World. The Drought is particularly interesting for its constructing a world based upon surrealist painting--a world that is also a symbolic reflection of the mental condition of the book's protagonist. Such qualities may seem to belong more to fantasy than s-f--but the book is also interesting for its relations to one of the classic categories of s-f, the apocalypse story.

No doubt all s-f may be called apocalyptic if one's definition is broad enough to include any radical changes from present conditions, or visions of realities alternate to the conventional accepted ones.[1] Certainly a great deal of s-f is directly concerned with one or more of the phases described in the Book of Revelation--Anti-Christs, Second Comings, Armageddons, Millenia, New Jerusalems. Any number of reasons could be offered as to why stories of world-destruction have been popular--e.g., one critic, noting the popularity of disaster novels in British s-f since the 1960s, suggests (perhaps facetiously) that "it presumably has to do with the progressive impoverishment and shrinking of a once great nation."[2] My own concern here is with distinguishing various categories of disaster novel, and considering how The Drought and Ballard's other novels fit these categories, before going on to note the unique features of The Drought.

Among the distinctions that might be made, the following might be considered:

(1) Disasters unchecked vs. disasters averted. Only in The Wind from Nowhere is the disaster checked in the process, though only after considerable damage is done. A classic model here is H.G. Wells's The War of the Worlds. (In some s-f the disaster is averted before it happens or spreads, as in Michael Chrichton's The Andromeda Strain.)

(2) Disasters in the process of happening vs. those having happened long ago. Both types, when the main interest is efforts to survive, can belong to the larger category of suspense and adventure fiction. Post-disaster novels can be further subdivided according to theme: Fall-of-Man, By-the-Waters-of-Babylon, survival-of-the-fittest, degeneration-of-the-species, etc. (Wells's The Time Machine may be the classic model here, while most dystopian novels are close cousins.)

The Drought begins with the disaster well underway, while the second part of the novel, portraying the primitive social institutions into which survivors organize upon the great salt dunes, is part of the same tradition of disaster-long-past fiction as Miller's A Canticle for Leibowitz, Aldiss' Greybeard or Roberts' Pavane.

(3) Success vs. failure in coping with disaster. Here a novel's main concern may be with how survivors either sustain or fail to sustain a reasonable level of civilized behavior; the paradigms(not strictly s-f in this case) are Robinson Crusoe or Swiss Family Robinson on one hand and Lord of the Flies on the other. The first class celebrates man's ability to survive or even prevail in extreme conditions--as in The Wind from Nowhere--while the second portrays mob rule or sinking to bestial levels--as in The Drought or (a likely influence on Ballard) John Christopher's The Death of Grass (No Blade of Grass). Perhaps one should include a third possibility: the impassive chronicle of the biological spectacle, as in Stapledon's Last and First Men.

(4) Various types of disaster. Every s-f reader could make lists of types, from war to mud; a considerable bibliography could be prepared for plagues alone, especially if one includes s-f borderline cases on the model of Defoe's Journal of the Plague Year. One could make a subdivision of disasters that change the face of the earth vs. those that do not. Ballard's novels all belong to the former, in contrast to stories of plagues, socio-political upheavals (which need not be sudden) and other factors that may lead to dystopias. A more significant subdivision may be made between natural and man-made disasters. In all Ballard's novels except The Drought, the catastrophe is outside man's control, as it is also in many (but not all) tales of plagues, alien invasions, and meteorological or geological disturbances. Tales of man-made disasters include those of war and its byproducts (including sleeping monsters awakened), pollution (The Drought), or tampering with nature in general.

Natural disasters can be further subdivided into important distinctions: between those in which man is truly innocent; those which are a sign of divine retribution (as in the Tower of Babel story); and those which appear to be materialized by some psychological condition, on the model of Dr. Frankenstein's neglect of his beautiful bride appearing to have some relationship to his monster's devastations. Alfred Hitchcock's film of The Birds illustrates the last category nicely (as Daphne du Maurier's simple tale of terror does not); the bird attacks appear to be unleashed by the heroine's unconscious aggression, related to her problems with other characters in the story; when a townsperson accuses her irrationally--"You caused this!"--the innocent heroine recoils as if it were true. The Drought very much belongs to this class of what is really symbolist fiction.

(5) Causes of disaster that are of central interest to the writer vs. those merely providing a situation the writer wants to develop. Most novels of man-made disaster are actively interested in the cause. On the simplest level they may have a social intention of warning against war or ecological idiocy; or they may more sophisticatedly explore the dark side of human nature. Some causes may be of interest in terms of scientific speculation ("Exactly what effects could sunspots have on the Van Allen Belt?"), while others carry symbolic value, as in Ballard's The Crystal World, in which the reason for world-crystalization is of organic importance to every aspect of the novel.

But many works simply use war or more esoteric causes as an excuse for the conditions they want to explore. The Drought may be an extreme case; Brian Aldiss notes how the single passage describing the causes of the drought is neatly "isolated so that an uninterested reader can skip that bit." Among the kinds of fiction in this category are adventure narratives and sociological "test-tube" situations; how will a band of survivors continue to live, and will they turn on each other? Obviously s-f shares this category with all non s-f disaster stories of land and sea, from The Poseidon Adventure to John Steinbeck's The Wayward Bus and other stranded-passenger stories. Often the adventure, the broad character types, and the tension from close confinement combine with scenic spectacle (ruined cities, the hallucinatory look of a ship's corridors upside down) and occasional sadism for a distinctive kind of popular entertainment.

Ballard's first novel, The Wind from Nowhere, 1962 (a shorter version appeared under the title "Storm-Wind" in New Worlds, 1961), is very much in this class of entertainment. A skillfully-written potboiler, full of brilliant descriptions of a London beset and eventually flattened by winds that begin at hurricane speeds, it is a fairly simple narrative of survival and spectacle. The climax adds the element of a James Bond thriller, featuring a mad billionaire with a private army who thinks to defy the wind; most conveniently, the wind dies down on the last page, having crushed the tycoon in his concrete pyramid but just sparing the good characters. The book is closest to Ballard's later works in its portrayal of a disintegrating marriage, with the wind at first seeming to be symbolically correspondent to the emotionally-distraught Donald Maitland; while Susan Maitland is the first of several solitary women in Ballard's fiction, hostile or indifferent to men, finally obsessed with living alone. The horror of her being blown away to her death over the roofs of London as Maitland watches is easily the most disturbingly memorable event in the novel. There is, however, a more conventional subplot with a budding romance to contrast the Maitlands; it is incidentally one of the very few happy sexual relationships in all of Ballard.

Like The Wind, The Drowned World (1962) seems to have little genuine interest in the cause of the disaster (intense heat causing floods when the polar caps melt)--if indeed the word "disaster" can apply to a case in which the protagonist rather likes the world in its changed condition. But Ballard's real concerns this time are far from those of traditional adventure fiction. Much closer to The Drought in spirit than to The Wind, The Drowned World represents a major advance in novelistic technique and ambition. In both the later works--which have only one central character each, by contrast to the multiple viewpoints of The Wind--the symbolic correspondences between the ruined world and the main characters are central and inescapable; it can almost be said that Ballard's heroes are comprehensible only in terms of their relationships with the landscapes. Ballard has denied any literary influence from Joseph Conrad, but his novels are very much within the symbolist tradition to which the author of Heart of Darkness belongs, along with others like Hawthorne, Melville, and Hardy.

In fact, both The Drowned World and The Drought go beyond much mainstream symbolist fiction in an apparent effort to approach the condition of painting--to convey meaning as much as possible through the look of the landscape. He may be compared in this respect to a film maker like Antonioni (particularly Red Desert).

Ballard has claimed the surrealist painters as an influence on his work, and indeed The Drowned World abounds in rich and strange sights: half-submerged London buildings with great tropical plants sprouting from the rooftops; the underwater observatory; the ghastly spectacle of drained Leicester Square. Such scenes recall in particular the fantastic architectural and animal structures, encrusted with jewels and vegetation, of Max Ernst's "Europe after the Rain" period in the 1940s. (The Drought too, as I will describe, attempts often to approximate the effects of surrealist painting.) But these scenes are never simply for pictorial effect--they tell us what we need to understand about his characters, or about his own consuming interests.

Both Robert Kerans of The Drowned World and Charles Ransom of The Drought are self-isolating individuals, much more at home with their landscapes than with other people. Both characters behave as if they were recovering from a nervous breakdown--if not about to relapse. Hence, they are ideal perceiving eyes for Ballard's phantasmagoric vistas: calmly objective with a possible hint of dementia. The important difference between them is that Ransom has something of a past and has psychologically complicated relations with other people; while Kerans is a more radical conception: his past is a blank to the reader, outside of his being a scientist from Greenland investigating a submerged European city; he has only tangential relations with anyone else in the novel; and preposterously, he is not even curious to know what city he is investigating--London, Paris, Berlin or whatever. Kerans' one drive, both instinctive and fully conscious, is to meditate upon the cityscape and eventually to journey southwards into the intense heat and rain of the equatorial jungles. A scientific explanation is given for Kerans' drive: the new climate has triggered primordial memories of the Paleozoic Age (or thereabouts), causing many humans with much exposure to the tropical heat and radiation even of London to seek the even greater heat and monstrous violence of the almost unimaginable South. While this change in human biology, a central emphasis in the novel, is acceptable enough as a rationale for Kerans' behavior, and perhaps of intrinsic interest as a s-f speculation, the novel can nevertheless be read quite differently, as a dream narrative. Although on the realistic level Kerans does not know pre-drowned London, his behavior and the very images of the city suggest that his journey to the far South--which is also the far past--is an effort to escape his immediate past. Submerged London then becomes a metaphor for "drowned" memories of it; the "real" London appears disguised behind a fantastic sea change. The journey south to personal oblivion is both mythic and neurotic.

The Drought (Jonathan Cape, 1965) reverses the situation of The Drowned World with Swiftian relish but is occupied by many of the same concerns. Before examining this novel more closely, I should comment on differences between it and The Burning World, the American version published by Berkley in 1964. A glance at the tables of contents would suggest that The Drought is a greatly expanded version--42 titled chapters to The Burning World's 15--but in fact Ballard simply divided his original chapters into shorter ones and assigned new titles.[6] Moreover, Don Tuck's statement that the British version is "completely rewritten" is simply untrue.[7] But a few passages have been altered in important ways, chiefly the four paragraphs of what is now the brief chapter 2. In the following passage, for example, Ransom's poete maudit look is changed (self-deceivingly on Ransom's part?) for a hardier romantic image:

> He had let his beard grow, but almost everyone had left Larchmont and there was little point in shaving it off. Although the rim of black hair gave his thin face a gaunt and Rimbaudesque look, he accepted this new persona as part of the altered perspectives of the river, and as a mark of his own isolation in the houseboat.
>
> (The Burning World)

> He had let his beard grow, and the rim of fair hair had been bleached almost white by the sunlight. This and his bare, sunburnt chest gave him the appearance of a seafaring Nordic anthropologist, standing with one hand on his mast, the other on his Malinowski. Although he gladly accepted this new persona Ransom realized that it was still only notional, and that his real Odyssey lay before him, in the journey by land to the coast. None the less, however much the role of single-handed yachtsman might be a pleasant masquerade, the houseboat seemed to have been his true home for longer than the few months he had owned it.
>
> (The Drought, p. 16)

But such changes are exceptional, and mostly limited to the first chapters. Most of the differences between the two versions are in the form of new sentences and occasionally paragraphs in the text of The Drought, scattered throughout but again mainly in the first chapters. In total, The Drought is only a few pages longer than The Burning World, and the narrative structure is unchanged. The additions seem mainly intended to clarify points, to expand upon the subject of how the landscape appears to alter time values (as I shall describe), and occasionally to make symbolism more explicit. Among the most important additions are a few details about Ransom's relations with women: the phrase "certain failures in his life" early in the novel is expanded to specify "...principally, Ransom's estrangement from his wife Judith" (p. 14); new sentences point out Ransom's curiosity about Catherine Austen; and he goes to bed briefly with Vanessa Johnstone in Chapter 29 (p. 177).

In a passage that introduces one of the major symbols of the novel, Ransom examines two photographs framed together (called a "dyptich" in The Burning World) on a desk in his houseboat:

> On the left was a snapshot of himself at the age of four, sitting on a lawn between his parents before their divorce. On the right, exorcising this memory, was a faded reproduction of a small painting he had clipped from a magazine, 'Jours de Lenteur' by Yves Tanguy. With its smooth, pebble-like objects, drained of all associations, suspended on a washed tidal floor, this painting had helped to free him from the tiresome repetitions of every day life. The rounded milky forms were isolated on their ocean bed like the houseboat on the exposed bank of the river.
>
> (p. 17)

The passage strongly suggests why the drought is attractive to Ransom: just as the surrealist painting blurs or hides memories or realities--"exorcises" them, Ransom imagines--so the world Ransom has known is covered over by sand, the outlines of houses and automobiles, and all they represent, softened and finally obliterated.

Ballard's (or at least his characters') taste in surrealist landscape in his early novels seems to be for the more abstract varieties--Tanguy's stony forms, Ernst's encrusted or overgrown shapes, de Chirico's deserted city streets with improbable geometric solids--rather than for works like Dali's with recognizable human parts and everyday objects weirdly combined and juxtaposed.[10] It could be argued that many viewers approach such landscapes from a direction opposite to Ransom's: that is, one may be first struck by the abstractness of the canvas, and then filled with the pleasantly or uncomfortably eerie sense that the unidentifiable hard-edged objects are not only real in three-dimensional space but somehow known, as if remembered from dreams, and alive in the sense of seeming to have some undisclosed meaning. But for Ransom, the appeal seems to be not in the disturbing hints of reality but in the way reality has been successfully hidden, abstracted, on the path toward incomprehensibility or foreignness, just as those familiar London buildings in The Drowned World are half-submerged and crowned with gigantic foliage. A typical passage in The Drought--one of many that seem intended to match the imagination of surrealist painters--demonstrates this process of disguise:

> The banks /of the river/ were now opposing cliffs, topped by the inverted tents suspended from the chimneys of the riverside houses. Originally designed as rain-traps--though no rain had ever fallen into them--the canvas envelopes had been transformed into a line of aerial garbage scoops, the bowls of dust and leaves raised like offerings to the sun. (p.13)

The strange beauty of these objects, in short, lies at least partly in the fact that their original functions have been removed, even forgotten, yet the dust-covered forms still hint at what they once were. It is a beauty much akin to that (for most people) of Roman or Gothic ruins, and also that of alien planetary landscapes in other s-f. The appeal is very different from that of most abstract painting, where the emphasis is usually upon design, not upon objects that seem haunted by having lost their purpose, or not yet metamorphosed into something purposeful. The term "surrealistic" is in fact commonly and loosely applied to objects absurdly lacking mundane functions (or in the case of alien planets, having functions not yet understood). There is often something liberating about such things without apparent purpose: for Ransom's friend Catherine, the drought ironically gives a freshness to whatever meets the eye: "'Don't you feel, doctor, that everything is being drained away, all the memories and stale sentiments?'" (p. 23)

A major part of the "exorcism" the drought performs for Ransom is its suppression of his ordinary perception of time (as well as of objects). On the drying lake, "time had seemed becalmed" to him; as the river dries up, destroying the communities of fishermen whose lives were regulated by its flow, every individual becomes "an island in an archipelago drained of time"; Ransom entertains hopes of "isolating himself among the wastes of the new desert, putting an end to time and its erosions." Statements about time and the sense of its "drying up" or "freezing" appear constantly throughout the novel (some of them so vague that one hopes they characterize only Ransom's thinking and not the author's: e.g., "Woman's role in time was always tenuous and uncertain" p.47). Among the many curious points about time is the notion that while the drought-world gives peace by "abolishing" time, the limbo world of the salt dunes is merely a "waiting ground":

> The beach was a zone without time, suspended in an endless interval as flaccid and enduring as the wet dunes themselves...But...time was not absent but immobilized, what was new in their lives and relationships they could form only from the residues of the past, from the failures and omissions that persisted into the present like the wreckage and scrap metal from which they built their cabins. (pp. 161-162)

The journey back up the riverbed is not, for Ransom, "returning to the past, to pick up the frayed ends of his previous life," but "moving forward into zones of time future where the unresolved residues of the past would appear smoothed and rounded"; "an expedition into his own future, into a world of volitional time where the images of the past were reflected free from the demands of memory and nostalgia."[11] If Ballard intends us to think Ransom is deluding himself, he gives no clue. In any case, the "future" Ransom finds in Hamilton looks suspiciously like the past, far from being "smoothed and rounded." The people he left behind are behaving in much the same way they did before, though (and this is important) in exaggerated--or quintessential--manner.

The draining away of time and memory, along with the draining of meaning from objects, may provide great peace and melancholy beauty, much sought after by Ballard's heroes, but it is a morbid beauty as well. If these characters are seeking a mystic "still point of the turning world," they also seem to be afraid of change of any kind (other than increasing stasis) and of unspecified traumatic memories, and hence seek an obscurity very akin to death. Considering how blissfully oblivious Ransom is at times to the deathly aspects of the drought--on the realistic level, not to mention the symbolic--one may wonder how conscious the author himself is. In The Drowned World Ballard seems to take pains to deny that Kerans' behavior is neurotic; but in The Drought he is clearly conscious of the morbid aspects of Ransom's interest in the drought. First, even Ransom is consistently appalled by the sterility of the salt dunes in Part II, however aesthetically pleasing he finds the sand dunes. Second, the novel taps the tradition of the symbolic desert or wilderness, signifying spiritual sterility, that one finds, e.g., in T.S. Eliot's The Waste Land. Any resemblance to Eliot in The Drought is not coincidental: one of the chapters is called "The Fire Sermon," and one can hardly miss the parallels between Ransom's sexual/emotional problems and the desiccated land. Both works end with the coming of rain, and both are highly ambiguous about whether the rain arrives too late for the parched spirits to feel it.[12]

But the most important way in which Ballard stresses the negative aspects of the drought-world is by dramatizing a conflict within Ransom: between his thirst for isolation and his involvement with other people. Ransom has as strong a desire to live apart from others as Kerans does in The Drowned World, but he is not so single-mindedly devoted to his detachment, nor does he have a convenient explanation for his behavior. We are not given enough data on his past for a full psychological analysis of his motivations, but we are at least shown his ambivalence about choosing the drought over people in general and a group of (rather strange) individuals in particular.

That Ransom is a physician (like several other Ballard protagonists, incidentally) stresses the ethical nature of his conflict. Others look to him for assistance as he longs for isolation; even more ironically, he is upset when others eventually reject him in professional and personal respects. Having lost many patients during the first beach years, he comes to be regarded superstitiously as a death-bringer. Living with Judith (as much a loner as he) on the salt dunes away from the settlement, he believes himself excluded because he "by his very sense of failure would remind each of them of everything they themselves had lost" (p. 197). In short, he becomes a pariah (p. 182). Early in the novel he attends Johnstone's sermon on Jonah, and while Ballard does not explicitly draw parallels, one may certainly connect Ransom with the outcast prophet who was not only cast overboard as a pariah but later smitten by drought as he sat brooding. One further irony is that most of the characters continue to call him "Doctor" throughout the rest of the novel.

Ransom's shifting relations with a selection of individuals (most of whom are outside the general communities) are dramatized from the first pages of the novel. His recent satisfaction in living alone for a week on his houseboat in the vanishing lake is contrasted with his brooding over his separation from Judith. Much attention is given to his having "hidden" himself behind a beard, but also to his foster-father relationship with Philip Jordan and his interest in Catherine Austen (though whether the interest is sexual or not is never specified). In the course of the novel he alternately works to protect others in need--notably during the journey to the sea and the later return--and feels a radical alienation from them: "The four people with him were becoming more and more shadowy, residues of themselves as notional as the empty river. He watched Catherine and Mrs. Quilter ...already seeing them only in terms of the sand and dust..." (p. 125). (Mrs. Quilter continued to lavish praise on his leadership abilities.) His strongest disaffiliation with his party comes when they are nearly back to Hamilton: "...he felt that all his obligations to them had been discharged" (p. 214). Not quite able to abandon Mrs. Quilter though impatient with her feebleness, he carries her on his back (a light burden, we are told, though he feels like a "lunatic Sinbad bearing the old woman of the desert sea" (p.216)); but he virtually forgets about Philip and Catherine, a fact difficult to interpret, since Ballard himself seems to lose interest in them, as they become shadowy background figures in the last chapters.

Ransom's ambivalent feelings about others are tested on several occasions when people ask him for water. He withholds it from people he particularly likes, Catherine (temporarily) and Philip, early in the story--for sensible reasons that all the same leave him with a sense of guilt--and then volunteers water to perfect strangers (albeit needy ones), the Gradys.

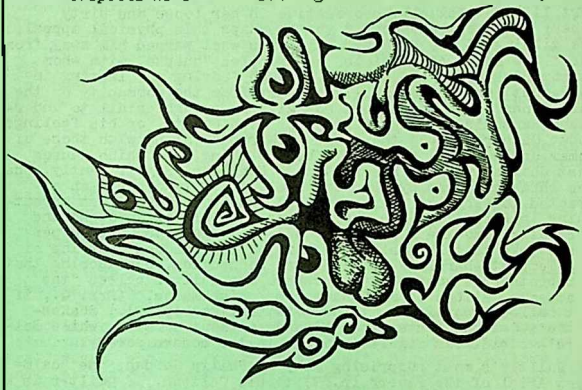
(Reverend Johnstone remarks upon this "easy" charity, p.38.) Later, with the force of more than coincidence, Ransom kills Grady--technically in self-defense, but clearly with a deliberateness of purpose. (While The Burning World simply states: "Holding the butt of the revolver in both hands, Ransom stood up and shot him through the chest" (p.91), The Drought adds: "Ransom waited. Then, holding the butt..."(p. 143).) Ten years later Ransom tells Judith, "'...the more I think about it the more I'm convinced it was simply a cold-blooded experiment to see how detached from everyone else I was'" (p. 164).

Ransom's friends are for the most part a very odd bunch, at times like nightmare images, or like curious allegorical figures drifting through the bare landscapes of a work like The Faerie Queen. Several of them--Philip, Quilter, Whitman, and Catherine--have powers over wild animals, and the spectacle of them patrolling with their lions or cheetahs conveys a sense of energy and control very different from the habitual state of the introspective Ransom. All of these characters are seen at a distance, from Ransom's perspective, and nearly all appear to have symbolic functions, suggested by the fact that Ransom is continually feeling mysterious links between himself and them, as if they were a part of his mind, or knew more about him than he himself knew.

Quilter is arguably the most important of these characters. In the first chapters Ransom imagines him as virtually a personification of the drought: his "presence...was an obscure omen, one of the many irrational signs that had revealed the real progress of the drought" (p. 11). Ironically, Ransom imagines him to be taking a "warped pleasure" in the drought--as if Ransom himself did not. Near the end of the novel, a "surrender" to Quilter brings (at least briefly) the peace Ransom had been seeking in his identification with the desert landscape: "His complete surrender to Quilter had left him with a feeling almost of euphoria. The timeless world in which Quilter lived now formed his own universe..." (p. 250).

But Quilter might better be understood not as a personification of the drought, but of a daemonic side of Ransom--a frighteningly irrational side, and hence (in dream terms) rejected as grotesque, even imbecilic. Although Quilter is called an "idiot son" in the first paragraph, Ransom must admit: "Despite his deformed skull and Caliban-like apperance, there was nothing stupid about Quilter" (p. 13). His most mysterious feature--or Ransom's most peculiar impression--is his "dreamy ironic smile, at times almost affectionate in its lingering glance, as if understanding Ransom's most intimate secrets" (p.13). He spends a good deal of the novel following Ransom at a distance; in the first pages of the story, he seems to know about the breakup of Ransom's marriage and how to goad him about it without words (p. 14). Alternately a friend and an enemy--threatening Ransom more than once but saving him from the demented fishermen in Part I, and brutalizing him but allowing him shelter in Part III--he continues to disturb Ransom like a figure from his own dreams. He achieves what Ransom would like to have done: to remain behind and survive in the inland desert. His bizarre costumes suggest primitive power and sexual potency, fearful but attractive; he wears totem animals, the peacock dangling between his legs and the black swan as a head-dress. Ransom's journey back to Hamilton in Part III may be understood as a search for the Quilter in himself.

While resisting Quilter for most of the novel, Ransom does keep a kind of link with him in his ministrations to Mrs. Quilter, a dotty but harmless version of Quilter himself. With her witchlike appearance and her making a living as a fortune teller on the salt dunes, she suggests an archetype of a Wise Old Woman. Whitman too is closely linked to Quilter: physically deformed as well, he becomes a second-in-command, taking orders from Quilter, carrying out violent acts, setting the fires behind Ransom's party. He may be taken as a purely destructive aspect of the daemonic that Ransom sees in Quilter; certainly Ransom feels disturbingly linked with Whitman, particularly when he sees the zookeeper's reflection in a glass, and for a while suspects himself of setting the fires unconsciously.



Lomax, who is Quilter's "protector" at first but is eventually displaced in power by him, may function similarly to Whitman as a negative image, an embodiment of what Ransom fears in himself. The death of Lomax is as much an exorcism for Quilter as it is for Ransom: "For the first time since Ransom had known him his face was completely calm" (p. 249). On the surface Lomax is totally unlike Ransom: vulgarly ostentatious, consistently irresponsible toward human life, flauntingly effeminate (or androgynous, as he is called). But he, like Quilter, has a disturbingly "knowing" interest in Ransom, and a mysterious confidence (shared by his sister) that Ransom will return to Hamilton: ""'Don't forget, Charles--we'll keep a place for you here!'" (p. 104) He does resemble Ransom in perverse ways: he too stays behind where Ransom had wanted to stay; he isolates himself from other people (ultimately even from his sister) to an extent that Ransom never allows himself; and while Ransom seems to have a repressed wish for death by drought, Lomax takes the mad step of destroying the water supply, having already pursued a career of pyromania in Part I. The clearest indication of the symbolic relation between Ransom and Lomax comes in Part I, when Ransom decides to leave Hamilton immediately after Lomax tries to persuade him to stay: "...after his visit to Lomax...he had realized that the role of the recluse and solitary, meditating on his past sins of omission like a hermit on the fringes of an abandoned city, would not be viable" (p. 69).

Miranda Lomax is if anything even more of a threat, or terror, to Ransom. In a single remarkably virulent passage, Ransom imagines her as the hideous "lamia" figure, Life-in-Death, or The Bine of the Ancient Mariner; as a "phantom" embodying "archaic memories" of "fear and pain" or "remorseless caprice... unrestrained by any moral considerations"; and as a "white-haired witch...her perverted cherub's face like an old crone's" (pp. 69-70). (Earlier she seems to him both "prematurely [illegible] and "like a wise, evil child.") Lounging around the Lomax swimming pool, she can easily be taken as an image of torpor and indifference, but this does not explain the intensity of Ransom's revulsion. Whether intentionally or not on the author's part, she appears to represent all that is sexually repellent about women to Ransom; she is matronly (monumentally stout in Part III) yet sexually provocative in her loose and dirty robes; "attractive enough," yet "Perhaps this physical appeal, the gilding of the diseased lily, was what warned him away from her." She has a parallel in the crippled Vanessa, with whom Ransom does go to bed briefly, though fearing any lasting involvement (one reason he lives apart from the community on the salt dunes). The novel does not give us enough detail to understand Ransom's particular problems with Judith, or his feelings about Catherine, but the image of Miranda (along with those of Lomax and Quilter) appears to be something with which Ransom must deal as part of his return to Hamilton. Significantly, she has three children by the daemonic Quilter (who has been attracted to her from the beginning), and seems much less threatening in Part III, once she assumes the role of an obese and virtually immobile fertility goddess. It is presumably a perverse joke that she bears the name of the innocent heroine of The Tempest--hardly a coincidental connection, considering that her brother is compared to Prospero and Quilter called "the grotesque Caliban of all /Ransom's/ nightmares." (Mrs. Q., if not called Sycorax, is at least "witchlike" (p.12).) Shakespeare's Caliban lusts after Miranda without success, while Ballard's libidinous figure triumphs in the modern parody.

Quilter's most surprising ally is Philip Jordan, the "calm-eyed Ariel of the river" (p.89) to his Caliban. If Quilter is a secretly attractive daemonic side of Ransom, Philip is more of an idealized self: a solitary of nature, but the old water-world rather than the drought-world; conspicuously compassionate, both to animals (the black swan) and people (notably old Mr. Jordan whom he takes as his father). The moment when Philip appears before Ransom with old Mr. Jordan in his arms--just after Ransom's shooting of Grady--is one of the most forcefully symbolic moments in the story.

Catherine Austen appears to be less of a symbolic figure than the others. On the realistic level she parallels Ransom in several ways: uttering sentiments close to his, attracted to the idea of staying in Hamilton, tending to be a loner but seemingly more at ease in her isolation than Ransom or the neurotic Judith. She may be taken as Ransom's anima, or ideal feminine self--though one with whom he fails to unite. Unfortunately, Ballard has made her mysterious without making her really vivid: she need not be comprehensible, but she should be as strong an image as the others, or have some discernable goal if not motivation. A mystery is set up as to why she returns with the others to Hamilton (pp. 194-5, 208), but no answer is ever suggested--we must assume her motives are identical to Ransom's. Possibly Ballard simply didn't know what to do with Catherine and Philip once they got back to Hamilton; or perhaps he means us to understand that Ransom does not need these images once he faces the grotesque figures from his past, or that they have become totally incompatible with the Lomax world. At least Philip and Catherine make an appropriate couple at the end, and form a fine tableau of strength (a slightly bizarre one considering Catherine's whip and leather boots) with their lions at their sides.[14]

One last figure of importance is Jonas, the fanatic fisherman and true father of Philip. Ballard makes a great deal of the fishermen in Part I: their threatening silence, their ominous black clothing, their kidnapping and arson. The mysterious fish symbol they leave as calling-cards is a traditional Christ symbol, but also (as Ballard would have known if only through his interest in The Waste Land) a fertility or life symbol.[5] Having been deprived of their way of life by the drought, they understandably have a very different attitude toward it than Ransom has; their brutality and their evangelical search for a "new river" follow the deprivation. Jonas is at once the epitome of the fishermen and a lonely figure set apart from them; less brutal than his second-in-command Saul; virtually crucified by Saul in the burning-church scene with the fish head and gaff; hunted by Quilter's party as the last remaining outsider in Part III; unknown to his son until the end, when they stand together at the helm of the landlocked ship. Jonas is clearly intended to have a strong symbolic function, particularly when Ransom rescues him from the burning church and later has a sudden dramatic realization of his resemblance to Philip. In his "natural" nobility, his aloneness and his relation to the lake-world--in addition of course to his blood relation--Jonas is a double for Philip (though older and a bit mad), and hence another ideal in Ransom's imagination. His role as an outcast makes him a probable identification figure for Ransom, and his unquenchable drive for the waters of life allies him with all that is opposed to the "waste-land" side of Ransom's psyche. At the end of the novel, Ransom is venturing to seek Jonas' and now Philip's "new river" when he heads off into the lakebed (fulfilling a certain symmetry, since he comes from the lake at the beginning).

I have suggested that the conclusion of The Drought is not a complete success. Having created a most satisfactory narrative structure--Ransom's journey to the sea, the desolation of the salt-years, and the return to deal with his past--Ballard has not (except for the killing of Lomax) provided a dramatic climax to bring together all the important symbolic strands. (Individual strands, like Quilter and Miranda in their new roles, are well developed.) One would like a more rational motivation for Ransom as he heads off into the desert at the end, in keeping with the s-f realism that is still the basic mode of narrative for the novel despite its symbolic elements; in the same vein one would like some sign of reaction from Quilter and his family at the loss of the reservoir. At least one does have a sense that Ransom has dealt with the nightmare images of his past (though in fact, in dream fashion, they have dealt with each other), so that the rain that falls at the end of the book may appear to him as a blessing, as in The Ancient Mariner and The Waste Land, signifying his having reached peace with himself. But the ambiguity of the last paragraphs, along with the title of this chapter, the name of the Tanguy painting into which Ransom has (despairingly, I would argue) wanted to enter all along, suggests that Ransom may never feel the rainfall. The oncoming darkness and his "failure" to notice the beginning of the rainfall may indicate its coming unawares to him but preceding a recognition; or it may indicate his death in the desert, ironically just before the rain. One can perhaps resolve the ambiguity by arguing that in any case the ending signifies an end to Ransom's way of life as a drought-worshipper: he dies or is reborn searching for a river.

FOOTNOTES

1) David Ketterer's New Worlds for Old (New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1974), defines literary apocalypse as "visionary reality, the sense of other worlds out of space and time" (p.43), and divides s-f into four "progressive" stages, the first three earthbound: "Dystopian fiction," "world-catastrophe fiction," "the postcatastrophe scene" and fiction whose interest is "the cosmic voyage and worlds beyond earth" (pp. 123-6; see also pp. 123-156 passim).

2) Peter Nicholls, "Jerry Cornelius at the Atrocity Exhibition," Foundation 9 (November 1975), 26.

3) Brian Aldiss, "The Wounded Land: J.G. Ballard," in Thomas D. Clareson, ed., SF: The Other Side of Realism (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green University Press, 1971), p. 127. The essay was first published in 1965.

4) J.G. Ballard, "J.G. Ballard," Books and Bookmen 15 (July 1970), 6.

5) Ibid. His taste is shared by his characters: Beatrice in The Drowned World has Max Ernst and Paul Delvaux paintings on her walls; the hero of The Drought has an Yves Tanguy reproduction. Several works of Ernst are mentioned in The Atrocity Exhibition, along with others by Dali, Duchamps and more contemporary artists like Keinholz, Paolozzi and Francis Bacon. Ballard has written on surrealist artists in an essay collected in The Overloaded Man (1967).

6) Or possibly Berkley reduced the number of chapters to save space. Ballard has not commented on the differences between the editions. That The Burning World is not simply a copy-edited version of The Drought is indicated by the nature of certain changes (e.g., no copy editor would change "seafaring Nordic" to "Rimbaudesque").

7) Donald H. Tuck, The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction and Fantasy, vol. 1 (Chicago: Advent, 1974), p. 28.

8) J.G. Ballard, The Burning World (New York: Berkley, 1964), p. 11. The British edition changes the town's name from Larchmont to Hamilton.

9) Some differences in this text from The Burning World are worth noting. In the earlier version, the trauma of the parents' divorce is more stressed, for the Tanguy exorcises "the terrors of this memory"; and the painting helps to "isolate" rather than "free" Ransom from tiresome repetitions. Most important, the sentence beginning "The rounded milky forms..." is new to The Drought, making the connection explicit between the painting and Ransom's world.

10) Ballard does seem to aim for Dali-esque fantasy when strange people step into his landscapes: the pirates in The Drowned World, the various grotesques in The Drought. The Vermillion Sands stories (1956-71) are definitely Dali-esque throughout with Southern California overtones.

11) The slowing down or abolition of time is an obsession in much of Ballard's work of the 1950s and 1960s. Kerans in his regression to primordial states of mind loses his sense of homo sapiens time. The dying protagonist of "The Voices of Time" (1960) discovers a way to "see" time through genetic mutation and is transported out of the present continuum, while another scientist discovers the entire universe is slowing down.

In "Chronopolis" (1961) white-collar revolutionaries destroy the clocks that had enslaved them; henceforth, possessing a watch is a crime. In the fanciful "The Garden of Time" (1962) a pair of aristocrats hold back the mob for as long as their time-suspending flowers hold out. "The Terminal Beach" (1964) is much concerned with its main character's perception of time. Ballard's fullest treatment of the subject is The Crystal World (1966), the last of his disaster novels, in which, as time drains away from the universe, matter "super-saturates" in the form of crystalization. Again there are symbolic connections between the landscape--crystallzing African jungles in this case--and the mind of the protagonist.

12) Another parallel to The Waste Land, though more incidental, is Ballard's habit of alluding to literary figures in order to underline the absurdity of the present. E.G., Miranda by the empty swimming pool reminds Ransom of "an imbecile Ophelia looking for her resting-stream" (p. 105).

13) He does hint at a connection on at least one occasion, when Ransom has been captured by the fishermen and kept in the hold of their ship: the captive feels as if he were "lying within the bowels of a beached leviathan" (p. 81).

14) A character named Catherine Austen appears as a psychiatrist in the title section of The Atrocity Exhibition, shifting to "Catherine Austin" and "Claire Austin" in later sections. There is no apparent connection with the Drought's character.

15) Their antagonist Johnstone, who really has much in common with them in his evangelism and hard-headedness, adopts the fish symbol in Part II: "...an immense swordfish, the proudest catch of the settlement and the Reverend Johnstone's choice of a militant symbol to signify its pride, was tied to the whale-bone mast and hung below the cross, its huge blade pointed heavenwards" (p. 168).

16) The appearance of Phllip with him is new to The Drought.

AFTERWORD

In his fiction since the mid-1960s Ballard has departed radically from the format of his first novels, but certain resemblances between his first and second "phases" can be found. The subject of contemporary alienation remains central to his work, though at times whipped up to a more desperate pitch than in The Drought and other first-phase works. He remains interested in capturing some of the "feel" of painting in fiction, though he emphasizes different art movements (reflected in a change of style as well); e.g., The Atrocity Exhibition (1969) is more Pop collage than surrealism. Its juxtapositions of mental wards, American war implements, automobile crashes, the assassination of John F. Kennedy, advertising images, Marilyn Monroe, Ralph Nader, and sado-masochistic eroticism recall similar juxtapositions (not all on the same canvas) in works by Rauschenburg and Rosenquist, and the nightmare violence alone may recall Roger Bacon. Symbolic wastelands are still to be found in Ballard's fiction, though usually more frenetic ones, like those in Crash and Concrete Island (both 1973), which are concerned with the pornography of car crashes--a subject incidentally touched upon in The Drought, in that one of the women in Ransom's life, Judith, has the strange air of having been in such a crash and struck on the temple (p. 47), while another woman, Catherine, is actually injured in the temple while Ransom is driving.

The Rime of the Polestar

by

Dana Martin Batory

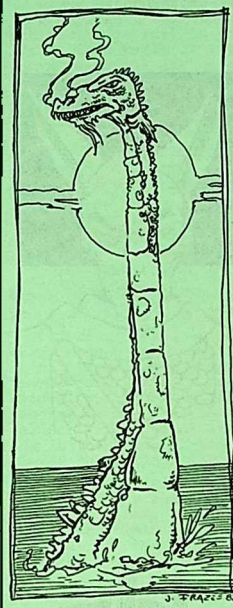
Most of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's early stories reach beyond our plane of existence into the nether land between life and death. "The best of them," observed Charles Higham in The Adventures of Conan Doyle (1976), "are poetic evocations of sexual obsession, stories about men who cannot accept the death of a loved one as final, who try to reach beyond the grave to enjoy sex in eternity." Nowhere is this truer than in "The Captain of the Polestar" published in Temple Bar Magazine in 1883. The incidents detailed follow one another in kaleidoscopic variety, like the disjointed parts of a delirium or nightmare, from which there is no escape.

One of its most chilling passages is worthy of Poe or Lovecraft. " I followed them /the tracks/ for a mile or maybe more," says second mate Manson, "and then running round a hummock I came right on to the top of it standing and waiting for me seemingly. I don't know what it was. It wasn't a bear anyway. It was tall, and white and straight, and if it wasn't a man nor a woman, I'll stake my davy it was something worse. I made for the ship as hard as I could run, and precious glad I was to find myself aboard. I signed articles to do my duty by the ship, and on the ship I'll stay, but you don't catch me on the ice again after sundown."

Doyle was always interested in the bizarre. Though he had attended seances as early as 1879, his first serious contact with the paranormal dates back to 1880 when he attended a lecture at Birmingham, "My only amusement lately," he wrote his mother January 30, 1880,"has been a couple of lectures. One was on Wale and Enracht--a soft affair. The other was capital: 'Does Death end all?'by Cooke, the Boston Monday lecturer. A very clever thing, indeed. Though not convincing to me..." In 1880 and through the next five years he observed psychic phenomena with sceptical curiosity, with no thought of making any investigations of his own. There is a reference in Doyle's story to Henry Slade, the famous medium who claimed to possess the gift of automatic writing:

"In discussing them /metempsychosis/ we touched upon modern spiritualism, and I made some joking allusion to the impostures of Slade, upon which, to my surprise, he /Captain Craigie/ warned me most impressively against confusing the innocent with the guilty." Clearly the Captain is to be seen as a Spiritualist. Doyle's readings in the field are evident as well. Pythagoras and the doctrine of metempsychosis, or the transmigration of the soul, where the soul passes into another living creature, man, animal, or even plant at death is touched upon.

The geographical details were gathered first hand from Doyle's experiences on a whaler. In March 1880, at the mere age of twenty, Doyle left Peterhead aboard the 600-ton steamer Hope as ship's surgeon. In "The Polestar" Doyle nostalgically recalls the voyage to the Arctic through the eyes of Dr. John M'Alister Ray, Jr., ship's surgeon, writing the Gothic fantasy as a variation of his own log of the seven month whaling and sealing expedition among the ice floes between Greenland and Spitsbergen.



The crew was made up of fifty Scots and fifty Shetlanders under the command of Captain John Gray. Doyle enjoyed the dazzle of the ice, the clear blue of the Arctic Ocean, and the danger. He also endured the months of acute loneliness allowing plenty of time for personal introspection. Doyle fondly remembered ship's steward Jack Lamb singing in his light tenor voice "Her Bright Smile Haunts Me Still" or "Wait for Me at Heaven's Gate, Sweet Belle Mahone," songs filling the crew, in Doyle's words, "with a vague, sweet discontent." The titles of these songs are significant when considered with the theme of the story. The hardships of his fictional crew and captain Doyle experienced for real. Even the personalities of the Scot crew members, who are recorded in Doyle's journals, come out in the story in veiled form.

The tale is written with a strong, almost poetic intensity stressing the unearthly, alien environment, yet never forgetting it's an environment of this earth. Such phrases as "nothing but the great motionless ice-fields around us, with their weird hummocks and fantastic pinnacles" and "a glorious sunset which made the great fields of ice look like a lake of blood" reveal a man who experienced Nature at its rawest form and knew how to use Nature to create a mood. Given the line, "...the stark, unfathomable stillness obtrudes itself upon you all in its gruesome reality," we expect that unnatural happenings are to be set in motion in this land of mystery.

Apparently Mary Shelley thought the same. The first and last chapters of Frankenstein are set in the frozen northern seas. Polar explorer Robert Walton, bent on tearing out the North Pole's hidden secrets, pushes his crew and ship ever farther into the arid world. Here, he rescues Victor Frankenstein, hears his uncanny narrative, and is a witness to the deaths of Victor and the Monster at the hands of the elements.

The link between the two stories is clear. "The ice cracked behind us, and was driven with force towards the north; a breeze sprung from the west, and on the 11th /of September/ the passage towards the south became perfectly free. When the sailors saw this, and that their return to their native country was apparently assured, a shout of tumultuous joy broke from them, loud and long-continued." On that same day Victor dies and the novel for all purposes ends.

Whereas Shelley's Frankenstein ased on the 11th of September, le's story begins with: "Septem- 11th -- Lat. 81° 41' N., 2° E. l lying-to amid enormous ice- is." One horror ends September another begins.

ne parallels don't stop here. on writes his sister that "I tioned in my last letter the ars I entertained of a mutiny. his morning...I was roused by half a dozen of the sailors who demanded admission into the cabin. They entered, and their leader addressed me. He told me that he and his companions had been chosen by the other sailors to come in deputation to me....We were immured in ice and should probably never escape; but they feared that if, as was possible, the ice should dissipate,and a free passage be opened, I should be rash enough to continue my voyages and lead them into fresh dangers after they might happily have surmounted this. They insisted, therefore, that I should engage with a solemn promise that if the vessel should be freed I would instantly direct my course southward."

Likewise Craigie's crew had been pushed almost to their limit."It is late in the season," writes Dr.Ray, "and the nights are beginning to reappear....There is considerable discontent among the crew, many of whom are anxious to get back home.. As yet their displeasure is only signified by sullen countenances and black looks, but I heard from the second mate this afternoon that they contemplated sending a deputation to the captain to explain their grievances....A captain takes a great responsibility upon himself when he risks his vessel under such circumstances. No whaler has ever remained in these latitudes till so advanced a period of the year."

Just as the last acts in Victor Frankenstein's life are played out in the pure white world of the Arctic ice packs so are those of Captain Craigie. "Sure it is," says Dr. Ray, "that Captain Nicholas Craigie has met with no painful end, for there was a bright smile upon his blue, pinched features,and his hands were still outstretched, as though groping at the strange visitor which had summoned him away into the dim world that lies beyond the grave."

Black supernatural forces surface in this world of months-long daylight. Both works show all too clearly that horrors don't have to lurk in gloom; that evil doesn't shun the daylight. In a world of near perpetual light the darkness of the grave yawns all the same. It's a white death that overtakes Victor and a white death that snuffs out Captain Nicholas.

Doyle's story also shares its poetic atmosphere with Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner."

> And now there came both mist and snow,
> And it grew wondrous cold;
> And ice, mast-high, came floating by
> As green as emerald.
>
> The ice was here, the ice was there,
> The ice was all around:
> It cracked and growled, and roared and howled,
> Like noises in a swound!

These verses could well describe Doyle's feelings towards the geography and atmosphere of the North Pole.

Coleridge based the poem on the old superstition that the ocean around the South Pole has a spirit watching over it. This spirit loves the albatross, thereby making it a sacred bird. Thus a sort of magic is introduced into the poem by the supernatural qualities of the albatross. Another element of magic appears in the unearthly quality of all the scenes. The Ancient Mariner kills the albatross, angering the Polar Spirit, resulting in the death of his crew and a curse upon himself. The crew blames the Mariner for their misfortunes.

Captain Craigie, described as being "fey," is also a man cursed by fate and crew. "...shortly after leaving Shetland," reports Dr. Ray, "the men at the wheel used to complain that they heard plaintive cries and screams in the wake of the ship, as if something were following it and were unable to overtake it."

The suffering of the Ancient Mariner is not merely physical, but spiritual--likewise Captain Craigie. "He has told me several times," writes Ray, "that the thought of death was a pleasant one to him..." The Captain sleeps badly, is given to occasional dark moods, courts death in every possible manner, and sometimes questions his own sanity.

A strange spirit pursues the Polestar. "Manson /the second mate/ swears the ship is haunted; and that he would not stay in her a day if he had any other place to go to." Compare this to:

> And some in dreams assured were
> Of the spirit that plagued us so;
> Nine fathom deep he had followed us
> From the land of mist and snow.

Suspense is built gradually. Manson reports sounds "like a bairn crying and sometimes like a wrench in pain." He confesses that "...we both saw a sort of white figure moving across the ice field in the same direction we had heard the cries."

The crew is understandably frightened. Besides facing the grim prospect of being marooned in the Artic ice packs they must endure the company of an evil apparition. The Captain's responses are queer. As Dr. Ray tells it: "He was staring out over the ice with an expression in which horror, surprise, and something approaching to joy were contending for the mastery. 'You see her--you must see her! There still! Flying from me, by God, flying from me--and gone! It was the glass that showed her to me, and then the eyes of love--the eyes of love.'"

The neurotic Captain breaks under the tremendous strain, impelled by a will stronger than his own. One night he sees "...what seemed to be a wreath of mist blown swiftly in line with the ship. It was a dim, nebulous body, devoid of shape, sometimes more, sometimes less apparent, as the light fell on it. 'Coming, lass, coming,' cried the skipper, in a voice of unfathomable tenderness and compassion, like one who soothes a beloved one by some favour long looked for, and as pleasant to bestow as to receive. He held out his hands as if to clasp it, and so ran into the darkness with outstretched arms and loving words." A female spirit as deadly as Doyle's also appears in Coleridge's poem:

> Her lips were red, her looks were free,
> Her locks were yellow as gold;
> Her skin was as white as leprosy;
> The Nightmare Life-in-Death was she,
> Who thicks man's blood with cold.

When the captain is finally located by the rescue expedition a shape is seen to rise from the frozen body: "...many of my companions averred that it started up in the shape of a woman, stooped over the corpse and kissed it, and then hurried away. across the floe."

It is significant when compared to "The Polestar" that in the foreground of the poem the Ancient Mariner is telling his tale to a wedding-guest, while in the background the wedding feast is going on. The motive for the haunting of Captain Craigie to his death is blamed on one important incident. "During his absence at sea," relates Dr. Ray, "his betrothed had died under circumstances of peculiar horror."

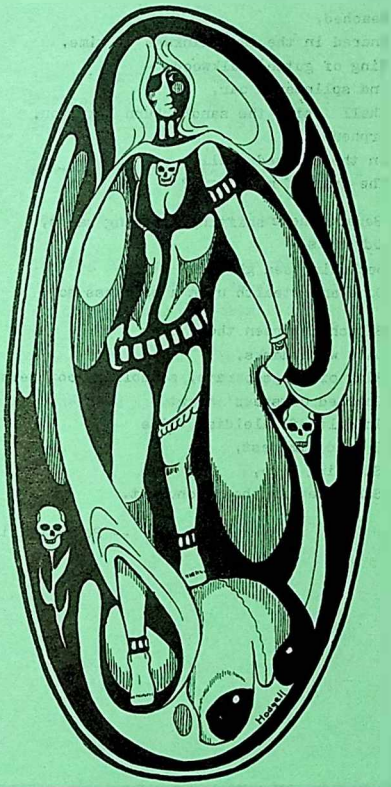
It's clearly implied that this "polar" spirit is the Captain's dead love that has been pleading to him in a manner unintelligible to the crew. When Dr. Ray enters the Captain's cabin to inventory the contents he notices that the young girl's portrait "had been cut out of its frame, as with a knife, and was gone." That the girl was capable of such actions had been indicated in the portrait. "That anyone in the short space of nineteen years of existence could develope such strength of will as was stamped upon her face seemed to me at the time to be well-nigh incredible." Death would never obstruct their sexual union! But is it his love beckoning to him or a deadly delusion created by a succubus or a banshee?

The former is an evil spirit that assumes the shape of a female for the purpose of having intercourse with a man. Most of the primitive saints were tempted by such devils. On sighting the nebulous shape on one occasion the Captain was heard to say: "But a little time, love--but a little time." And Dr. Ray observing his actions just before the Captain leaps from the deck described him as "a man keeping a tryst." We also must bear in mind that the Captain died with a smile on his face.

The latter spook is also a female spirit supposed to warn families of the approaching death of a member, generally by wailing under the window of the house (or ship?) occupied by the person who is to die a day or so later. The cry of the "bogie" haunting the Polestar is described by Ray. It "culminated in a long wail of agony, which might have been the last cry of a lost soul. Grief, unutterable grief, seemed to be expressed in it, and a great longing, and yet through it all there was an occasional wild note of exultation."

The banshee is also related to Old Nick, the harbinger of death and carrier of souls to the future world. Interestingly enough, the name is derived from Nikker, an old Teutonic term for a water sprite whose appearance was supposed by sailors to forebode death. This aspect also fits in well with Coleridge's Polar Spirit. As a Polestar crewman observes, "...something uncanny has been flitting round the ship all night."

From all of the above it's apparent that the ship's name has a double meaning. The Polestar, or North Star, has guided mariners through dangerous waters for hundreds of years. No matter where one may be in the northern hemisphere the direction north may be found by reference to the Polestar. But a Polestar for the soul doesn't exist--Captain Craigie knows his position geographically, but not spiritually. He must find his way through the darkness of his mind and soul, unguided, and pray for the best. It's up to the reader to decide if his fate was good or bad.



SHIPWRECKED

Beached,
Snared in the taut linkage of time,
King of gutted hulkwood
And splintered oar,
Shall I sing the sand's burn like you,
Orpheus,
On the creaked swell,
The char of my tongue?

Beware these shifting, hissing sands,
Odysseus,
Beckoning sea ghosts,
Dune and stealth upon a songless soul.

Bleached screen those eyes
Late with darks,
Ring of our separate, stumbling footsteps
Gnarled Odysseus' heart.
In silt of kaleidial voice
I laid him rest,
Sleeping hero,
Sand grave without monument.

-- Peter Dillingham

VIS INERTIAE

The ice cap retreated--
Perceptibly--in time. The falling
Wall revealed itself uneternal.

From a tall latitude, you watched
Pure savanna. You had to step back.
Then the animals multiplied.

The bog disgorged, and huge
Elk put on clothes. Merciless
Hunters pursued the crumbled light.

It had long begun. You
Came late. April, black flags,
Sleds were already on the move.

-- Francis Blessington --

An Interview with William Tenn (Part 3)

Brad Linaweaver

Q. You believe there is a human nature. Do you think it can be defined?

A. Umhumm. It is pretty broad and is capable of tremendous possibilities and modifications. God knows human culture has shown it. But also human culture has shown us something else. I used to believe that there is nothing that can't be done with a little intelligence. Give me one generation of human beings, I said, and I will produce a peaceful, decent human race. My feeling now is give me one generation of human beings, and you know what will happen? I'd be Adolph Hitler.

Q. Or B.F. Skinner?

A. Exactly. Or B.F. Skinner. Which is not too different. And that's what is important. What I'd be doing with them in the end.

Q. What is the meaning of the title of your story, "Lisbon Cubed?"

A. The original title of the story was "The Fourth Power of Lisbon." Horace Gold changed it. It has to do with the fact that during the second world war Portugal was neutral. And Lisbon had spies from all over Europe and was known as the spy metropolis of Europe all through the second world war. There were French spies and German spies, Russian spies, English spies and American spies. They rubbed shoulders and some people suggest they outnumbered the native population of Lisbon. So therefore I wrote the story about Earth as a kind of Lisbon during an interstellar war and I refer to it somewhere in the story as Lisbon carried to the fourth power. Horace Gold didn't like it and he made it "Lisbon Cubed."

Q. The plumbers' convention in that story is very amusing, especially the part where they are talking the trade in the washroom. They are so emotional, so caught up in discussing the different tools that they use, the way to be a good plumber and make money at it. I notice a lot of times in your stories when you deal with somebody in a job or trade, you show a strong rapport with them. Have you worked in a lot of different fields?

A. Yes.

Q. Were you a plumber once?

A. No, I wasn't a plumber but I have been a sheetmetal worker. My father was a sheetmetal mechanic and later became a sheetmetal contractor. My father came to this country as a sheetmetal mechanic who worked at a bench. After a while he built up a very substantial business of restaurant contracting. He rebuilt whole restaurants. He went bankrupt during the depression. He began again with a specialty sheetmetal shop where he made various devices for inventors--prototypes, and so forth. It was a very small shop with a few very good mechanics when he could afford them again and he forced me to work in the shop. I hated it. My father insisted upon it because he said I seemed to be an intellectual. I had no mechanical aptitude whatsoever and unless I learned to use tools, I would find the world a very difficult place. I hated it and I wanted to be alone, left alone to read. I'm very grateful to him that I learned to use tools because I can use them today. The hand/mind seperation which is a problem with most of my colleagues I could name doesn't exist for me. I have tremendous respect for good automobile mechanics as I see them solving problems and I know what intellect is involved in these things and it is an intellectual activity which most of my colleagues in the universities don't respect. They don't understand this sort of thing. They don't understand that there is something equivalent to or perhaps more complicated than what they are doing.

You were saying that you were intrigued by the plumbers in "Lisbon Cubed" and the fact we were talking about how they make things. I lost three weeks of my life at that point in the story. What you see now in "Lisbon Cubed" is a very small part of it.

Q. It's such a real scene.

A. Right, and it is such a real scene in that respect. What is interesting to me is that I never even thought of that as being important and therefore what's important to a writer is not necessarily what's important about a story. As you mention this,it occurs to me that I was doing this almost unconsciously. I know how these people would talk because I've heard them. But what was important to me about that story in that context was the fact that I began the piece in a specific way and then I had to have a meeting take place and I needed a place where they were all going to meet. So sitting at my typewriter, I paused with my fingers over the keys and I wanted an amusing place, an amusing context for them to meet in, a plumbers and steamfitters hall. I had no idea what was going to happen at that point and what was the name of the place where they were going to meet. I paused again with my fingers over the typewriter. Then I thought of Menshevik Hall. I'm an amateur of history, and that particular bit of history, the revolution that was destroyed, has always intrigued me. The story suddenly took a turn and I was involved in the idea of "The February Revolution is the Only Real Revolution Bar and Grill," and the characters who hung around it. The rest of it, of course, was pure comedy. But when I got to the plumbers I never even thought of what you said. It didn't seem important to me and yet it is the fact that most of the people I know in the University and most of the academic writers and unfortunately many s-f writers, not all of them, have a tremendous contempt for the people who do the work of the world.

A. (continued)

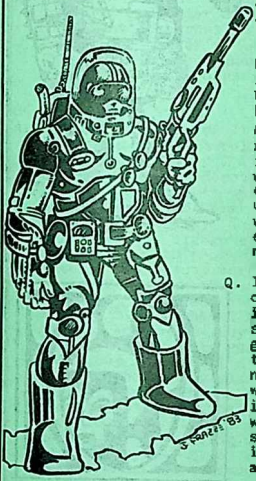
When I walk into a grocery story, for example, I know that there are things about how you unpack crates and put items on the shelves that I don't know about, that are involved in technique. They are specific and peculiar to anyone who runs a grocery store. It would take me a long time to learn. They may not seem important to many of my colleagues in the University or in writing, but they are important to me. They are everything I have ever seen; anything I have tried to do turned out to have skills of its own. I was a waiter for seven months back in 1950 when I went broke and I was not writing. I was astonished at how much you have to learn to be a waiter. At what you have to do to be a good waiter. I mean I was only a waiter for several months but to this day I go into a restaurant and I can immediately tell the new waiter or waitress by the fact that he or she makes too many trips instead of organizing and bringing everything in one or two trips. He or she will make five, six, eight trips, occasionally carrying nothing but a spoon or a napkin. And this is only part of being a waiter. I mean a large part of it is involved in various capitalist necessities such as how you make more money, how you get turnover, how you get more or bigger tips. It's not by being nice to the individual customers but by handling more customers. These techniques fascinate me and they are true in everything. I have never found a single area of life where techniques don't exist.

My father was an illegal alien who came to this country because he had a price on his head. He opposed the First World War. He was a socialist. He changed his name to Jack Smith, not very imaginative, and got himself a job as a stoker on a ship. He jumped ship when he got to America so for a long time he lived with the fear that he would be deported, until various things about this were right again but that is another story. He had been the president of a tinsmith's union and the organizer of a socialist group and he had had rabbinical training in his youth before he came to England. The man had been around and had seen a lot. He said he would never forget the day he walked onto that ship and was taken down below to the coal furnaces. He said there was the terrifying picture of the coal furnaces, these enormous ovens of flame which he had to feed with coal. Later on when I read Eugene O'Neill's The Hairy Ape where the people who feed the furnaces scream "Feed them, feed them, they are hungry!" I remembered what my father said. But the important thing my father told me was not just about the feeding of the furnaces; he said, "Who would ever think there was anything more to being a stoker than having muscle?" He said, "Well, that is an important part of it but there are ways of conserving your strength. There are ways of reaching for the coal. There are ways of getting it to the furnace. There is admittedly not as much technique in this as a watchmaker knows, but there is a technique and it must be learned."

Everywhere I go I am fascinated by this. At a party a little while ago I ran into somebody who was a stockbroker. I asked him in effect, not putting it quite in these words, "What is it to be a stockbroker, how do you live, what do you worry about, what is your daily life like, how do you relate to people in your business?"--and the man, thank God, was willing to talk to me. And he said nobody ever asked him these questions before. He said most people come up to him and they take for granted he is a stockbroker -- you are involved in stocks going up and then you make a lot of money. And he is in a very complex business. So these things fascinate me and they do relate to s-f because the techniques of our world are what we are.

Q. Are you familiar with Jacques Ellul? He is a French philosopher who says we have been dehumanized by our technology to the point that we are to our technology what fish are to water. The way he talks about it, he seems to feel that mechanics and people who work with their hands have become part of the machines, as well as everyone who uses or benefits from machines. He sees it almost as if the machines are making us do the movements associated with them. It is a very deterministic view (although mystical in impulse rather than materialistic a la Skinner) which runs counter to what you are saying.

. Well, there is something to be said for that because there is a point at which technology becomes so complex that the ordinary mechanic's role is changed. The hand which makes us human as much as our brain, that hand no longer functions properly because the machine is doing it all. There is that point and that is as dangerous and as frightening as the philosopher who doesn't want to understand how things work. But we are a product of our artifacts. Our books are artifacts and even our goddamned social systems are artifacts. I want to know how these things work, how they work on the ground. When I am reading about a new approach to social work and a new concept of that, I immediately start wanting to ask the question, "But what is it like for the social worker who goes around to the house? What is it like to climb the stairs? How is he or she received? What kind of notes does he or she have to make? What is it like on the ground? What is the fundamental technology of that?" In s-f, if we are to imagine how an alien works, we must understand not only his thought processes and philosophy, but we must understand what materials he works with and what it means when he touches objects which change his environment.



Q. I had an anthropology professor in college who said that whenever studying another culture, you should first study the tools and the weapons. He got in trouble with other people in that department who were kinship fanatics. There were some professors who would spend the entire term doing nothing but kinship charts. He would introduce his classes to the subject of other cultures by bringing in a homemade blow-gun and shooting a dart into the back wall.

A. I understand the man and I sympathize with him. Of course kinship patterns are another one of the artifacts. The bushmen have one of the most complex kinship patterns in the world. They have given up most of their technology. They are down to things like the digging stick. They were like that when the Europeans came. But they had to prove they were human; they have their complexities in their kinship patterns. And somebody who knew kinship patterns well among the bushmen could live a very good life and could thread his way through these things beautifully. That's an artifact.

I'm just saying that all these techniques are important. For example, a guy who is an account executive in our civilization has a very complex advanced technology, and he must be understood if you are to understand our culture; his equivalent among bushmen might be somebody who is particularly sensitive to kinship patterns and he must be understood too.

Q. Marrying the boss's daughter.

A. Right, and that's another approach to technology. However I make this exception because I don't want to narrow it: it is the hand that feeds the mind, not the mind that feeds the hand. The hand feeds the mind, then the mind takes over at a given point and can make great complexities out of it. The automobile mechanic who lies there under the car solving problems may then go off after years and begin to develop theory as to how these things should be put together. But first you begin with the way the car is made. There's no ideal car. There are a bunch of parts that fit together that's an early Ford or a late Buick or a prototypical spaceship or a time-machine.

Q. You always take your ideas from a different angle.

A. From the worm's-eye view.

Q. It is strange you would have had such rapport with John Campbell when he is the complete opposite in outlook.

A. Well, first of all, I didn't have rapport with him. He liked me and I admired him but we used to look at each other with complete bafflement. I never had a real conversation with John Campbell. And yet we kept on trying to reach each other. I look upon him as my intellectual father and he looked upon me as somebody who had some talent but he wanted it to turn into a good writer.

Q. He always looked for the big panoramic view but you look for the little pieces.

A. Let me give you a further example of what I mean. Julius Caesar crosses the Rubicon. He is now doing a major event in the history of the world. He is moving against the Senate of Rome. And he is taking a tremendous chance that will lead to the end of the Roman Republic and be the beginning of the Roman Empire through his nephew Octavian. Eventually. As Julius Caesar crosses the Rubicon what goes off in my mind is who rows the boat and how does he feel about it? Does he say to himself, "My god this may mean the end of the Roman Republic and the beginning of the Roman Empire"? Or is he saying to himself, "I wish that son of a bitch would sit still. It's hard enough to row as it is and I wonder if there is going to be any hot food for me at the end of this day. I haven't eaten. I wonder if anyone knows this." That is as much history as Caesar and that's what I'm concerned with.

Q. Of all the things for which William Tenn is famous, wit is uppermost. The funniest story I've read by you is "Party of the Two Parts"; I made the mistake of reading it in a library and I laughed out loud through several parts of it.

A. Thank you. I'm pleased.

Q. That's where the amoeba alien sells the pornographic amoeba pictures and later at the end when he divides himself and they want to arrest both of him, the two parts are saying, "Well, our father was guilty of these crimes but not us." Then there is the human being in the cell next to the amoeba who has a crash course in interplanetary law. How did that story go over?

A. How did it go over? It's one of the stories of mine which I think was not particularly noticed. It seemed to disappear. It's another story I like. I had a lot of fun writing it. It was purchased by Horace Gold. I imagine people must have liked it because it was one of the stories that when it was published caused Horace to say he wanted more of my stuff, he needed it badly. I don't think it went over particularly well. Here is a very bitter piece of knowledge. Stories that I consider much poorer but seem to be very serious in their intent draw a much more substantial response every time, and I get letters on them and people talk about them and so forth. It is unusual when somebody finally comes to recognize a Chaplin. Not that I consider myself in that league at all. But you know what they had to do for Chaplin to be taken seriously in the late 20s and early 30s? It was necessary to point out that Chaplin's comedies were stating a philosophy. And the philosophy was what people began talking about, the poor little tramp who rises above things, always dignified and so forth. But that comedy is something as such nobody can grapple with. At that time when Chaplin was being discussed seriously I was going up to forty second street in New York and I was sitting day after day, hour after hour, through Laurel and Hardy reruns.

A. (continued)

I was a kid and I was crazy about them. Nobody paid any attention to Laurel and Hardy in those days because it was cheap crappy stuff. Later on there was a Laurel and Hardy revival. Anyway, I loved comedy.

Q. The title of one of your books is The Human Angle, and if I were to think of a title that could cover what you expect when you buy William Tenn, it would be the humorous angle. When I see a story with the William Tenn byline, the thing I expect is the humorous angle. Isn't that a large part of your reputation, even when you write serious stories?

A. All right. The humorous angle is the human angle so far as I'm concerned. And when I say the human angle I am thinking not of man in the form of a statue standing on tiptoe pointing toward the stars but I am thinking of man in a smelly urinal scratching under his left armpit.

Q. Campbell's man is on his tiptoes reaching for the stars.

A. That's right exactly. The stories of mine that I despise and hate, that make me terribly uncomfortable, are those stories in which I have figures larger than life. For example, "Firewater." If I were to rewrite "Firewater" today, what I would do to that story! I would have Hebster convinced that since he was a millionaire he ought to have beautiful secretaries but somehow or another he gets secretaries that other people consider beautiful but they don't excite him particularly; he likes another kind of girl entirely. Or I would make him somehow or other a little unable to make it with this girl. I would have him with his deficiencies, with his uncertainties, which I didn't give him enough of. I would run him down in other words. I would show the hole in his pants even if he is a millionaire and so forth. And that's where I criticize these stories now. Again and again I have made the mistake of translating the human dimension in the wrong way. The human dimension is cliché. You should show Caesar falling down in an epileptic fit and having to wipe his lips afterwards.

Q. Some people would take /Caesar's/ falling down in an epileptic fit as artistically undercutting or destroying Caesar and although I don't think that would have to be the interpretation, there are some writers who would try to show that Caesar never really was Caesar when he had an epileptic fit. You see what I am saying?

A. Yes. He would be Caesar but the point is he would be Caesar with an epileptic fit who has an allergy to certain kinds of food and who doesn't like cold weather and so forth. But there are some people in s-f who I think are going too much in the other direction of what could be called "man smaller than life." You never really showed man's dark side without also showing, or hinting about, the brighter side. The roundness of man is the issue if you are going to depict man. I try to do it and I don't think I've done it well enough. That's what bothers me. Pieter Bruegel's statement about painting is that you don't worry about composition; you get up very close to the painting. Put your nose against it. Look at the individual brush strokes. That is where a painting really is. Well, that is where a human being really is. We are these things. We are not, if I can go back to my own little jingle, a superman who stumbles.

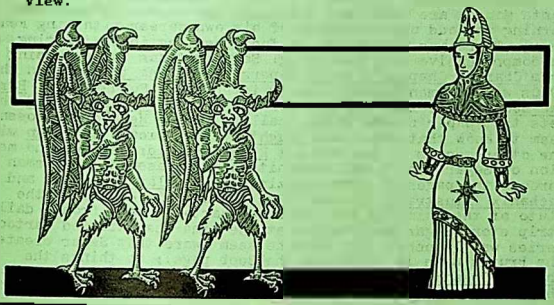
A. (continued)

We are/apes/ with makeshift manners, and the important part of that line is the makeshift manners. The desperate things we are trying to do with poses of all kinds.

Q. Whereas some writers in s-f are beginning to show man as an ape without makeshift manners.

A. Right. We are more than apes. Less than angels but more than ape. We do have incredible conceptions. God damn it, that is very important. It is so damn important. There was an Ozark mountaineer I knew in the army who was my buddy when I was overseas. He would dig foxholes with me and had very little education while I was all involved with concepts of the future, of space, of time...And I remember him pointing as we were sitting in France one very freezing day, pointing his hand up to the sky and saying, "You mean to say you look up there and see worlds with people living on them?" I said, "People that are not necessarily human beings," and he thought about this for a long time and he said, "You know, if I get nothing else out of this war, and I live through it, I'll take that back to Oklahoma with me." He gave me a tremendous number of things that I had never been able to properly digest as he probably couldn't digest that. He talked about what it is like to go through the woods with a rifle hunting, what it is like to site an animal, how you hunt. He did a lot of that. He hunted food among other things. He gave me that and I gave him this. Well, he is not just an Ozark mountaineer who is illiterate. He is capable of getting that concept of creatures on other worlds. I don't know quite what it meant to him. I haven't seen him since 1944-45. I don't know where he is at the moment. But damn it all, he walked away with that concept in his mind and he was capable of receiving it. And possibly going beyond anything I gave him. So that's what we are, too. He is capable, that Ozark mountaineer with practically no education at all, nothing I would call an education...he is capable of visualizing a better state of man, a better control of environment, of visualizing a more developed technology. He is capable of visualizing in terms of his religious background (which was very substantial) all these things. Yes, he has all those things, and he still farts, he still has athlete's foot, and he still does vicious things...

Q. Thank you for presenting your observations in this interview.



A Saga for Sagendorf's Sake

by

Bill Blackbeard

Bud Sagendorf, Popeye:The First Fifty Years, Workman Publishing Company/ King Features Syndicate, 1979, 144 pages, $8.95.

Browsers who spot this bright-covered paperback on sale are encouraged to pick it up for a prolonged once-over despite the cover art and Sagendorf byline: it contains some twelve Popeye/ Thimble Theatre colour Sundays by E.C. Segar in reasonably readable size, one colour Segar Sappo, and a number of panels and episodes from the Segar dailies of the 1920s and 30s. Unfortunately, the jarringly cruder Sagendorf work of recent years is elsewhere very much in evidence, occupying a disproportionate sixty-four pages of colour, and much of the black and white page space. If the potential purchaser is a Sagendorf freak, of course, he will be goshgeeddidilywhickered happy over the book; anyone else will have to determine for himself whether the small but precious Segar cargo is worth the fare for what is essentially a Sagendorf vanity job paid for by King Features.

An examination reveals that three of the colour Segar Sundays (89, 104, 116) are missing one panel apiece, although no textual notice is taken of this; two of the Sundays are already in print in my own Smithsonian Collection of Newspaper Strips (89, 104); and all of the Segar daily strip material(except for the 1921 episode on page 16, lifted from Becker's Comic Art in America) is also currently available in books or mail-order back issues from Nostalgia Press, Hyperion Press, and Street Enterprises (Menomenee Falls Guardian). In short, the book is a quick scissors-and-paste job so far as the Segar content is concerned, made up of easily accessible current stuff and some old Sunday pages in the possession of Sagendorf or a friend. (It is typical of this sort of amateur strip "history," of course, that no credit is given to any of the above-mentioned book sources for the daily episodes or other Segar cuts, or to the San Francisco Academy of Comic Art, from whose files they all originated.)

Sagendorf's text, written in the tone of arrested naivety typical of his Popeye strip, has some reference value for Segar buffs (King Features' crippling assaults on Segar's work in the 1930s are described in surprisingly frank detail), and a number of strip assistant Sagendorf's recollections of Segar's life in Santa Monica are novel and charming, but there are none concerning the odd ups-and-downs of his own career with King Features. There was no attempt at fact-checking in the writing, or in comprehensive data-gathering; Sagendorf has Segar jumping from Charlie Chaplin's Comic Capers to Looping the Loop in the 1910s without mentioning Segar's intervening Sunday page, Barry the Boob, done, like Capers, for the Chicago Record-Herald; he gets that paper's name wrong, calling it the Herald; he doesn't seem to know that Segar was bought by the Chicago American with the other assets of the defunct Record-Herald; he makes no mention of Segar's national recognition as a basement craftsman through the pages of such magazines as Popular Mechanics and Mechanix Illustrated in the 1930s; he doesn't know that the Bluto of the animated Max Fleischer cartoons came from a daily strip story Segar was drawing at the time the animated cartoon series was launched (nor does he seem aware that Segar created the Brutus name in his Barry the Boob page); he thinks the Thimble Theatre dramatis personae live in a village, despite the constant urban atmosphere of the original Segar strip, etc.

A couple of interesting colour pages of Popeye toys and artifacts plus an amusing Segar tribute to Harriman, done in a simulation of Herriman's style (which deserved a full page, but is reduced to playing-card dimensions so that one or another of Sagendorf's gargoyle Segar imitations can leer at us from an adjacent page in a much larger size), add to such appeal as the book may have for the Segar fan. The one remaining question is why Sagendorf subjected his work to such immediate ridicule by placing it in continual proximity to Segar's original material --it is a little as if Calvin Coolidge had published a collection of his presidential addresses in the same volume with a set of Abraham Lincoln's. Certainly the book's subtitle is misleading: there were ten glorious years of Segar's Popeye (1929-1938), then there were forty pointless years of Popeye puppets in other hands (1939-1979), but there is no way this side of madness that the two periods can be combined into a congruent fifty. Sagendorf's misguided attempt to do so is a pathetic disaster.

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AUTHOR'S NOTE:

Nothing in the above review is entended to suggest any lack of regard on my part for Sagendorf as a comic artist. There is certainly nothing wrong with naivety or childishness itself in comic strip art, as has been demonstrated over the decades by such classically delightful strips as Johnny Gruelle's Mr. Twee Deedle and Brutus, Bunny Schultze's early Foxy Grandpa, or Harrison Cady's Peter Rabbit. Sagendorf's own King Features' daily strip of some twenty years ago, Spur Line (still the only humorous strip to deal with railroading as a theme), was comically effective in its own terms, a minor work of real worth, in the same meritorious league as such equally little-known but highly enjoyable strips as George Swan's High-Pressure Pete, Elmer Woggon's Skylark, Marge Henderson's Steaming Youth, or Cecil Jensen's Elmo. The short-lived Spur Line, charmingly rendered in Sagendorf's Segar-derived style (itself often eye-catching and effective, so long as it is not used in a fruitless attempt to mimic Segar's powerful and inimitable line), was a gay, lightly suspenseful comic melodrama that brightened any comic page lucky enough to feature it. The characters were not individually memorable (as they rarely are in the work of strip naifs), but functioned adequately in terms of the comic demands put on them by the story line. It is a pity that Sagendorf was not encouraged by King Features to continue along this kind of independent line, rather than being assigned to conduct the spasmodically animated corpse of Segar's long-dead strip to its syndicated grave. The several thousand people who will see and read the Popeye book reviewed above are only a handful compared to the tens of thousands who would be reading any mildly successful daily comic strip -- and it is a sure bet that Spur Line in its first year of release had many more readers than Sagendorf's nationally-unseen Thimble Theatre strip has today. There is still time for Sagendorf to cut his losses and go his own way; one can only hope that he does.

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A DIVINE OF THE BLACK HOLE OFFERS MASS

Vague child, of meat and gas,
of speech and imagination,
receive my benediction,
a Mass of petrifaction
in the Latin of ancient stones.

May my words find cracks, descend and set
in Communions of ruby and spar.

May my prayer be drawn to the supersolid core,
throne of transcending density
where light swallows itself
and angels collapse inward.

Place the soft coin of your soul on my plate
if you would have it ring.

Your mind shall be a dull lustre.
Your heart shall pump lines of force.

Be blessed with the grace of infinite weight.

Take this wine: substance.

Break this loaf:
gravity.

-- Morgan Nyberg --

A CUP OF SINISTER

The world-as-experienced
is not the world
as possible. History
has a core of truth
saucered in sinister.
Times are bending.
Paths lead up, down.
All is traffic
in a necessary hour.
Be ready. Pardon your feet.
There is fever on ice.
There is a difficulty
created from derivations.
In the icy mirror
geneologists discount
the framework, but are
not daunted by ruins.
Ingenious running blood
is buried like grass
under the crust.
Sun colours flesh--
obscures the dumb, rare
authentic beginnings.
Lakes echo, remain handsome.
Full of the blood
we live daring the light.
The expected is known.
Wheels and machines are grass.

-- Edward Myoue --

PART OF A DREAM

it was big flying over our heads and
we could have touched it real look up there!
came back around could have touched it
could have reeled it in like a fish!
somebody's oyster! canary horizon became
all silver clouds it was real over our
heads look up there! and repeated previous
motion somebody's canary crazy horizon

living out of the car also in a tent
late for school and unable to recall whereabouts
brother and friend came to pick me up
I wasn't ready math class what a bore
beer in classroom Mr. Lucas is upset
I'm so sorry never happen again--what do you think?
endless daydreaming the geometrical assignment
somehow concerning Adam & Eve triangles I bet . . .

we could have touched it could have
reeled it in like somebody's oyster it
just came along came around did the same thing
did the same thing and moved back yeah it was
fast and it was long we could have reeled it in
we could have touched it

-- Neil S. Kvern --

THE MINOTAUR

I am the near-man assembled of apocrypha,
of magic and legerdemain--trands and projections--

of occult incantations and atomic theory,
passions recalled,

wonderings recanted,
innocence abandoned!

The God who designed me to walk upright
gave me prophecy to recite my Office,

but before the sun fires purged
desiccated hopes, senescent dreams, wasted prayers,

He anointed me with the certainty of disbelief
and the inaudible sound of doubt.

Then, He endowed me with flaming aspirations
and the volcanic yearnings entrusted to Heaven,

with the pain of distrust,
with the mourning garment of defeat

contained in the atoms of regret
and the physics of fear.

And I am compelled to wear the face of Ishmael,
the soiled bandage that covers wounds, scars, warts,
spectral shadows of merciless men, and pitiless electrons,
adrift outside time and space and passion and mercy.

-- Manuel Gomez --

IN A GLASS DARKLY

Horibile Dictu

by

J.N. Williamson

The re-emergence of horror in well-promoted novel form started roughly in the late 1960s with such strong offerings as Ira Levin's Rosemary's Baby and William Peter Blatty's The Exorcist. We need not be presently concerned with why the occult regained widespread public favour beyond noting that, in the copycat worlds of book publishing and movie-making, a single success sends out slowly-diminishing waves. Each is milked for its last infinitesimal drop of golden cream.

A standard reviewer would say--indeed, has said--that the fact that horror has not sold as readily since roughly the second quarter of 1982 indicates the force-fed character of this formerly white-hot genre. A short-sighted evaluation, I fear. There has been a reading audience for science-fiction, detective stories, adventure and romance prose since Year One, just as there was a ready-made audience for the occult which Levin and Blatty, master story-tellers, recognized as such. There will always remain such avid audiences for all the genres cited, even when wider, imitative fads have faded.

What happened to horror happened to millions of people in 1982. Money was in short supply, in case no one noticed. More than one paperback editor told me, not in the least confidentially, that publishers were looking for Sure Things, for can't-miss best-sellers. Thus does the forty-five minute business lunch rather than the all-afternoon session make cowards of us all. Such houses failed to perceive that their prophecy of a decline in horror sales was self-fulfilling when they cut the number of occult titles to a quarter of what the figure had been during the 1970s. Or less. If a reader wished, during 1983 and most of '84, to buy a new, well-crafted chiller with ideas central to the dark side of fantasy, it was almost impossible unless Stephen King had authored it. For the better part of two years, publishers concentrated upon romance, family saga, and a smattering of adventure/espionage books, particularly in paperback.

Presto! Horror didn't sell! But change, few individual novels of the other kinds became best sellers. They sold in acceptable numbers, during 1983; and to make up for the runaway hits the publishers had expected from the Robert McCammons, Bob Blochs or Charles L. Grants, editors were told to buy many family sagas or Thank-God-You're-Back-Dirk-The-Pillow's-Still-Indented-Where-Your-Handsome-Head-Lay.

But wouldn't it really have been simpler, as joblessness started to mount, for publishers to have been selective about the occult fiction available--to encourage the Earl Woods, Dennis Etchisons, Mort Castles, Lisa Tuttles, F. Paul Wilsons, Bernard Taylors and C. Terrel Miedaners to write more of their imaginative, perceptive, briskly-selling books? It's true, such writers mightn't continue accepting fifteen-hundred-dollar advances. Only the unartful beginners and one-shot part-timers tend to be forced to such acceptances, by and large.

I submit that the practice of hurling less-experienced unknowns into the marketplace that had become accustomed to Terry Cline, Sol Stein, Greg Bear or such masters as Rick McCammon and Richard Matheson--always with rising per-book prices--doomed horrific fiction from the outset.

Take these predictions to the nearest bank: Quite soon, the reading public will be sated with hearts-and-flowers fiction. It may be s-f which enjoys the next boom; or Westerns, espionage, or detective tales. Or--quite conceivably--horror. Because the audience is still there, it will be back, the minute one breakaway best-seller is achieved by an author less obviously apt to succeed than a Straub or King.

And then there'll be a deluge of phoney blood again, of severed heads and limbs, lust-possessed housewives and teenagers, imperiled as well as Satanic kiddies; of warmed-over monsters, subterranean societies and conflicts, and interplanetary/interdimensional/time-travelling apparitions, of giant insects and mutants of Monty Python silliness--all of a kind nobody can believe, not the author, his agent, or his editor.

Because success does not beget success; it begets imitation.

Yet from that cascade of fright-provoked coronaries and hillocks of dismembered limbs, if you hold your nose and rummage around, you'll find a competent wordsmith whose writing you can trust. A William F. Nolan, James Kisner, Mort Castle, David Shobin, Roland Cutler, Jeffrey Campbell, Joe Lansdale, Ardath Mayhar, David Silva or--dare I say it?--J.N. Williamson. He may or may not become so discouraged that he quits after one book; because it wasn't printed or promoted properly, or because royalties weren't promptly or reasonably paid.

And when you find such a writer, memorize his name or here. Buy his books instead of buying the grandiose claims you find on the cover, or quotes by well-meaning famous friends of the editor. He, or she, is quite special; far more fragile of spirit than you'd expect of an author with such a vivid imagination. You see, he--or she--is not a horror writer.

He, or she, is a writer who got started by writing horror.

Harmony

by

Jim Harmon

Most of the s-f books and movies and TV shows coming out today seem mere imitations of earlier original models. In fact, popular entertainment of all sorts seems to be merely a recycling of earlier classic prototypes.

What's worse, something is being lost in the translation from the earlier models. It's like an audio or a video tape that is being recopied time after time--each generation loses something.

The main loss in popular entertainment is the inspiration of the printed word. In mystery or detective novels, in historical and contemporary fiction, the younger writers are not calling upon personal experience or doing research into earlier books--they are drawing upon the movies they have seen (and to some lesser extent, TV shows).

Movies are certainly the most popular entertainment ever devised, moving our emotions and occasionally our thoughts more directly than the printed word. A lot of younger people I know are interested only in movies--they see them, talk about them, wish to write, produce, direct, or act in them or to supply special effects. Other creative jobs really don't interest them.

And they learn about movies primarily from movies, by studying them, dissecting them, emulating them. Such devotion may result in very technically skilled film makers--skilled even in manipulating the emotions of the audience. But those who learn about movies only from movies are like the tape that loses something each time copied.

Something can be learned of the hard-boiled detective from seeing John Huston's Maltese Falcon particularly, or from Murder My Sweet, or even Boston Blackie series entries. But how much more can be gained when you go to the soul of the matter, the written fiction of Dashiel Hammett, Raymond Chandler and others?

Science-fiction movies especially suffer from one copying another. Star Wars is great fun--the ultimate in the Planet Stories magazine school. But when Planet was a popular pulp, we also had John Campbell's Astounding offering Asimov, Heinlein, van Vogt. When will this end of the newsstand be represented on film? If someone ever manages to start out with such a film, perhaps others will follow.

I wasn't really thrilled with Arthur C. Clarke and Stanley Kubrick's 2001--I saw things wrong with it--but I did see that it represented an attempt to bring adult s-f to film, the first of many such attempts, I hoped. But then came Star Wars, and we were back to Planet Stories. Excellent, mind-boggling in technical expertise, but still Planet.

If adult s-f ever comes to the movie screen, it must come from the reader of adult s-f--there is too little adult s-f in film to emulate.

But what of the s-f books coming out today? It seems to me that the younger writers are imitating films and TV shows more and the old masters like Heinlein, Bradbury, and Asimov less.

Star Trek is an example of TV film adapting solid s-f ideas from the printed page--mainly, what might be called the ironies of logic as exemplified by the Astounding school. I certainly did not give it the attention and recognition it deserved when it was first broadcast.

Some writers for screen and print today are trying to draw on these concepts from Star Trek without going back to the printed word, thus putting a wall between themselves and the source.

But suppose a writer of today is "properly" inspired by the printed works that have my official seal of approval? Can he offer more than an inspired imitation?

I have seen precious few truly original s-f works lately. Since I don't read in the field extensively, I may have missed them. But they have not made themselves loudly heard.

Which brings us to the question of whether we have exhausted the limits of possibility.

Is it possible for a writer today to create a character with as wide an appeal as Sherlock Holmes, Tarzan, or Superman? Are these plus Sam Spade, the Lone Ranger, Buck Rogers the basic prototypes?

These characters in themselves were not born full grown in the consciousness of their creators. Sherlock Holmes owed something to Poe's Dupin. Tarzan had a bit in common with Kipling's Mowgli. Superman had a legion of precursors--Doc Savage, the Shadow, the Phantom.

I suppose nothing can be absolutely original. The creation must bear a resemblance to ourselves and humanity in general to interest us. But somewhere there is the possibility for the creation of a new universal character.

There is a source even beyond the printed page--the human imagination that created these prototypal characters in the first place.

We haven't yet imagined all that was, will, and can be. There are still new roads to travel.

A personal note:

I am not practising what I preach in the above.

Seldom has anyone so turned a childhood fantasy into reality as I am currently doing--or so slavishly imitated an earlier inspiration.

For years I've been writing about radio heroes in fanzines and books. As you may remember, one of my favourite radio heroes was Tom Mix--on radio, not only a cowboy but a figure involved with mystery and imagination as well.

Through the working of chance and perhaps destiny, and certainly through the efforts of an inspired young executive, Steven Kendall, I am now active in reviving Tom Mix as a symbol of the Ralston-Purina Company. This involves writing, producing, and directing radio dramas of Tom Mix, starring an original radio Mix, Curley Bradley (and myself, as the sidekick, young Pecos Williams), and editing new Tom Mix comic books, given away in packages of Hot Ralston.

The first of the radio shows is being aired on certain stations, and a set of shows can be obtained by mail--three 1940s episodes of a story called "The Vanishing Village" and a fourth new concluding episode produced by myself. (They are $8.95 for the two LP albums from Tom Mix Albums, P.O. Box 15528, Belleville, IL 62224.) Other new Tom Mix offers include a set of cereal bowls, a wrist-watch, membership cards, photos, etc.

All of this Tom Mix business may have nothing to do with s-f, but to me it is a fantasy come true.

Film Clips

by

Steven Dimeo

* FIRESTARTER

The strength of this film is the strength of the novel: the spark of a unique idea about a girl who can start fires with her mind. But neither bears out the promise. No matter how much Drew Barrymore screws up her face to carry the torch for this thinly conceived tale of an eight-year old pyrokinetic femme fatale, the film never warms above the staleness of microwaved leftovers. Void of developing characters or believability, this unimaginative special effects exercise only snuffs out the hope that Stephen King's best-selling material might somehow elevate the substance of horror films.

*½ INVITATION TO HELL (TV movie, ABC, first aired 5/24/84)

Invitation starts out as a welcome improvement on the ordinary TV fare--then dissipates in a nebulous puff of smoke at the end. Robert Uhrich plays an engineer seduced into joining Micro-Digitech on the strength of a space-suit designed for the first manned Venus landing three years hence. Unlike his wife Joanne Cassidy and children, though, he refuses to join Susan Lucci's mysterious "Streaming Springs" club to get ahead. The "non-human" element of the membership keeps us going as we hope in vain to discover what in Hell's really going on here. Wes Craven's first s-f venture can't stand a candle to his much under-rated Deadly Blessing (1981).

** THE NATURAL

There's more magic, myth, and the supernatural than the natural in The Natural--and that's three strikes against it right there. The only suspense in this ponderous parable of the Superman of the Sluggers bedeviled by women in black is how he'll finally put out the Bad Guys' lights. Surprisingly, it's more the supporting actors--Wilford Brimley as manager of the Knights baseball team, Richard Farnsworth as the assistant--who hit more homers here than people like Robert Duvall as another insensitive newspaperman, Glenn Close as the Lady in White, or either of the ladies in Black, Barbara Hershey (in a real bit part) and Kim Basinger. But Robert Redford's acting is clearly the best since The Candidate and some of the painfully predictable scenes (thanks to more excessive slow-motion) of Wonder Boy at bat, lightning literally at his heels, still have us rooting from the grandstands.

** STAR TREK III: THE SEARCH FOR SPOCK

Trekkies, who are easily satisfied anyway, won't be disappointed with this sequel to The Wrath of Khan that has Saavik (Robin Curtis) and Kirk's son David (Merritt Butrick) beam down to the planet Genesis to investigate a strange life form near Spock's coffin while the Klingon commander Kruge (Christopher Lloyd) tries to muscle in on the Genesis secret and Kirk (Shatner) endangers the Enterprise and his career to save the bedeviled McCoy (DeForest Kelley) and Spock's tenacious "soul." Offhanded humour and spectacular special effects (by Lucas' Industrial Light team) in vivid 70 mm and awesome Dolby stereo help make this an entertaining quest, particularly in the imaginative scenes on Genesis. But this film lacks the human drama of the second Star Trek movie; includes a lot of ho-hum hokum, especially in the tedious concluding sequence on Vulcan; and features unforgivably phoney corrugated Klingon foreheads, courtesy of the Burman Studio, that look like the plastic had a bad case of diarrhoea. Sensational visuals for this kind of "continuing adventure" begin to make us wonder if this isn't all a bit like gilding a rusty cap pistol.

we speak at odds
if we speak at all oddly
it can be understood

only that our odd speaking
follows
"like the hawk the mouse"
swiftly
upon the confused
noise, the motions of our
united chaos .

we are united
in nothing but
our desire to speak
oddly / at odds

with our own speech
crashing
imploding
to the centre of the room
unstill .

-- Douglas Barbour --

FOR THE AUNT, HER IMAGE

Red nemesis of leaves
poured down, browned on a brittle turning.
Autumn ground to dust
by plashy wheels. Idle roadbeds all with blurred
furnaces of trees.

The grail-lake this, downcast
sky-azure, grazed over certain places
with patchwork skeins of sun.
Trees blaze, stained below waves: boat mazes,
spreading fires, the past.

Trees above, trees below:
all umbers, rusts, golds, in life's waning stages--
Analogues of us...
Flung eyes above, saw thrust
one peacock-tailed green tree against crisping pages:
Dream-greened, I go.

-- Sheryl Smith --

Selected Letters

2111 Sunset Crest Drive
Los Angeles, CA 90046

Dear Leland:

RQ helps start the new year off in a rewarding way, the pieces on Farmer, Tenn, and the old comics being particularly praiseworthy, in my opinion. I think Casey Fredericks displays far more comprehension of Farmer's work than Leslie Fiedler, and Linaweaver asks the kind of provocative questions designed to get a meaningful response from Tenn. The Blackbeard piece, distinguished by his usual meticulous research, has me eagerly awaiting what he'll reveal about the 1920's and 1930's. I agree with Bertrand's assessment of Lem's opinions--though as usual I find it difficult to wade through the latter without hip-boots.

All the best!

Robert Bloch

From my limited viewpoint, Fiedler understands almost nothing about science-fiction--which he describes as "a new genre based on hints in Poe and committed to 'extrapolating' the future"--and still less about Philip Jose Farmer, whom he characterizes as "that master of Porno-S.F."

P.O. Box 1924
Spokane, WA 90201

Dear Leland:

Wonderful. Absolutely wonderful, the sample issue of RQ you sent me. I must admit that the fannish layout and unpretentious artwork kept me from reading it for several days after it arrived; many fanzines with similar form have struck me as increasingly boring within the past couple of years. Indulgent, and not on an admirably intellectual level, either.

But RQ was a mild-sercon delight. From Casey Fredericks' fascinating analysis on Farmer's Flesh and the connection to Graves (I'd love to see more articles by him...Fredericks, that is; a fan writer with a broad but interested intellectual perspective, and seemingly devoid of "sci-fi" genre jaundice) to the sometimes metanoid sometimes pragmatic interview with Tenn.

The highlight for this reader was Anderson's "Letter from Smyrna." An important piece of writing that told me a lot about a land and ideology I knew very little about previously. Please, demand more articles of this nature for RQ! Why not an interview with Yasemin Akbuz conducted by Lauri for next issue, with deeper personal insights on the (wild and witty) concepts in her fiction?

"Film Clips" by Steven Dimeo was in itself worth the price of admission. Unlike so many other solipsistic fan reviewers, Dimeo gave articulate overviews of movies that needed the wind taken out of them (Firefox, Megaforce) and others that needed urgent noting (Wrong is Right). I only found fault with his rave over E.T.--Spielberg's flicks strike me as being more manipulative than magical. (Besides, wasn't the girl, allusions to Wizard of Oz notwithstanding, squishing a frog beneath her patent-leather shoe? A scene a few seconds before she so "fetchingly" twists her ankle shows a nasty little tyke plopping the amphibian on the foot of the frightened female, who is taking refuge on a chair. I'm no great lover of little green slimy things, but cannot remain adiaphorous when presented with such a striking example of animal cruelty. Ahem.)

Of the poetry, Edward Mycue's work struck me as the most interesting. His images of paradox and pataphysics are both complex and accessible. But Thomas Kretz's "Castel Sant'Angelo" displayed a good degree of perspicacity.

Of all the artwork, the only thing I found of interest was Tad Markham's hilarious Disney-Byzantine absurdist fantasy.

Beth Ann Wempe annoys me greatly, with her letter to you on page 201. She's no doubt a very nice person, but anyone who prefers the deceptively exotic hackwork of MZB (sounds more a coffee than an author, deservedly) to the subtlety of (the extremely dated, I'll admit) Ape and Essence is someone of questionable aesthetic character in my book. And to dredge up the old "Women write better about sex (or men, or etc.)" cliché makes her worthy of frog-squashing. Ahem.

By all means keep me on your mailing list. Will send copy of my music/book review rant magazine when it is published later next month.

Out of the Labyrinth,

Chris Estey

After returning to the U.S., Lauri Anderson seems to have lost contact with his friends in Asia Minor--so the probability of such an interview becomes vanishingly small. But you can see more of Casey Fredericks in The Future of Eternity (Indiana University Press, 1982), his book-length essay on s-f and myth.// The "rant magazine" struck me as a riotous mixture of criticism and insanity, so I'd recommend that all record and cassette buffs write the editor c/o the address listed.

P.O. Box 646
Dear Leland Sapiro, Pine Mountain, GA 31822

I'm pleased to have the chance to read the continuation of Brad Linaweaver's interview with William Tenn (Phil Klass), whose trials and tribulations, not to say his writings and outlook, remind me a little of those of the late Philip K. Dick. I don't mean to imply that these two writers don't have their own unique approaches and styles, only that they both suffered a good deal of hardship to produce the distinctive kinds of work that they did.

All best,

Michael Bishop

No simple correlation works for William Tenn; as to Philip Dick, his personal experiences--which included a sequence of break-ins, searches, and other mindless harassments--appear to be reflected in his preoccupation with reality vs. dream and in the nightmare quality of so much of his fiction. To quote (Newsweek 10/24/83) the reaction of a 14-year old to a pre-dawn FBI raid on his bedroom, "Man, I thought I was dreaming."

4846 Derby Place
Dear Mr. Sapiro & Co: Klamath Falls, OR 97603

First, I would like to thank you for sending me a copy of this zine for comment. This is one of the benefits of membership in the NJF! I love getting non-mundane mail.

Miscellany: Where else would you get drawings of members appreciating your work? Though I think the person in question ought not to have listened to Steve Martin's King Tut quite as often as he obviously did.

The White Goddess & Philip José Farmer: I found this quite enjoyable and comprehensive. An additional pun of Farmer's apparent in Tales of the Vulgar Unicorn is the title of his story, "Spiders of the Purple Mage."What can you do with an author who parodies himself? I enjoyed Flesh and I enjoyed this critique.

The po-m by Marjorie Grafflin was excellent. I normally have a hard time critiquing poetry--however, the only addition I could make is that it might be interesting to see what she could do with this subject using metre, which can provide intensity equal to that of the feelings of the author.

An Interview with William Tenn was interesting. He's an author that I'm not familiar with, but I see I've been missing something.

Stanislaw Lem is full of it, and then some. Sturgeon's Law applies to him far more than he knows.

The Disney-Byzantine Connection: I adore that cartoon! ("Who's the leader of the cult that's made for you and me?" etc.) I know just who to send a copy to, too--anybody out there know Steve Souza? Film Clips is nice--haven't seen Tron, so I don't have much to say on it. Ditto for Wrong is Right. I always thought Swamp Thing was supposed to be a parody a la Saturday the 14th (though my husband will watch Adrienne Barboobs in anything for reasons having little to do with artistic excellence, etc.) I agree that Friday the 13th sucked. Megaforce I haven't seen, but from the blurbs would tend to agree with your opinion. Now I liked Firefox! I think you fail to recognize that the actual star of the movie, a la Blue Thunder, is the piece of machinery /which/ as such performs brilliantly. As a porno movie for TAC pilots, this movie is excellent. I did not like Poltergeist at all, and violently recommend that no child under the age of 12 see it. Also, I am more than a little tired of that brilliant light streaming so hard that you can't see anything else (that was a problem with ET also). Spielberg may consider it his directional signature, but I am really getting to hate it. I liked ET, but didn't think it as good as you do. The commercialism was somewhat overdone, and there were holes in the plot big enough to pilot the space shuttle through, and the parallel between ET and Peter Pan was forced.

Letter from Smyrna was excellent. Only one suggestion: if Lauri Anderson is so concerned about a translator why the devil doesn't /he/ take a crack at it? Let's get a translation out to an American publisher unconstrained by Turkish political considerations. I almost got sent to Izmir once when I was in the Air Force about 4-5 years ago--avoided it by a hair--but if I'd known there was a decent s-f group around, I might not have fought it so hard.

Has Edward Mycue ever read The Demolished Man? Bester's depiction of artistically weaving thought patterns reminds me of his poem, "Castel Sant'Angelo" is a nice poem, but is it s-f, or even fantasy? Or is it simply history?

Loved the letters. Nice to know people like Robert Bloch are out there paying attention to us fanfreaks. Note to Harry J.N. Andruschak--are you a Lord Peter Wimsey freak? Most people become introduced to Ms. Sayers' other writings from sheer thirst for her work, at least that was the case for me. Joe Christopher, since you love puzzle stories, surely you too are familiar with the leading light of English aristocracy, aren't you?

At this point I would like to insert a commercial for the Junior APA-5, an s-f/fantasy/ST/comics amateur press association, run by Eric L. Watts, Capitol Station Box 11603, Columbia, SC 29211. We still have a few openings. Write him today!

Sincerely,

Jean Lamb

One difficulty in publishing translations directly (that is, without a first edition in the original language) is noted by Roger Waddington later in this section.//

Avoiding Izmir was a wise choice, since it has no organized s-f clubs, just s-f readers secretly circulating manuscripts.// Not all poetry is science-fictional, but (in my view) all poetry has the same purpose as much of the better s-f, i.e. (to quote your letter), "the depiction of artistically woven thought patterns." // Here in Barbaric Yawpland, metre isn't considered essential to poetry. As to what is essential--that, as the textbooks say, is left as an exercise for the student.

---

18 Frederick St.
Brantford, Ontario N3T 4N4

Dear Leland:

Thanks muchly for your red, stapled folder of wonder. Voices from outside in these windswept days on my planet.

Poetry: "The Line That Is the Locus of the Moving Point," by Edward Mycue. The history, read aloud and in sequence, stands affecting, but most intriguingly (the form of the poem allowing one to read it so), it is a collection of phrases, half-phrases, snatches of conversation from the kitchen, strung together and apart to be read as friends or foes...the power of the word delivered bare-faced. Also "Castel Sant'Angelo," by Thomas Kretz. Its similarity to the spirit of my own verse was seductive but truly the tourist was dazzled by the noise and movements of the comedia as peeking through peepholes in bedroom doors.

Art: All interesting and decorative, though not quite as dazzling as last ish's...Hey, you can't come up with all A's every day of the week, right? Particular power in this case to PK page's shapes and visages, which swirled around the eye to liquid effect, and to the assemblage of the "Disney-Byzantine Connection"...Having been heard to hum the "Asmodeus club" theme song for days on end of late, I must admit to a weakness for quality absurdness...

Articles: Maintaining the ever-effervescent level of craftsmanship and artistry. The Philip José Farmer article by Casey Fredericks was of especial interest. I am always drawn by treatments of modern fiction as myth, for myth is the bones and blood of literature, as true now as to the Greeks. Re: "Film Clips," just a note that I thought it ironic that the "dead Redmen territorially wronged" asserted themselves through a television set in "Poltergeist," considering the fact that the animated blue portraits of TV have been a major tool for the rape of Amerindian culture by the white man. Admittedly, it was a weak device, but that twist rather appealed to my vigilante nose for justice. Of the most poetic sort, of course.

Until next time, best blizzards to you...

Carl P. Wilson, III

I don't know what PK is--but whatever the meaning, I'm happy it was done right.// For a discussion of American racism and greed as applied to Indians (and later to Filipinos and Vietnamese) see Richard Drinnon, Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian-Hating and Empire-Building (New York, 1980). To summarize: the "natives" are generally conceived as having no culture above the primitive level and therefore as being too stupid to govern themselves. In this particular context, even our sense of poetic justice is frustrated since it turns out that the burial ground wasn't Indian after all. For details, see the next letter.

Still, the product is very good. I am envious, but pleased that you shared an issue with me. My only regret is that I cannot add to anything, as I have not read Flesh, nor The White Goddess, nor anything by Stanislaw Lem. My own pursuit of comic book history does not extend as far back as that of Bill Blackbeard. In fact, my interest is much more in contemporary comic books; the alternative presses, the single issue books (such as When the Wind Blows, a post-holocaust comic book that predates The Day After by several years. The scene in which the husband, sitting in a make-shift bomb shelter with his wife, is singing, "Pack up Your Troubles" while accidently drooling blood on his shirt is perhaps all the more evocative for /his/ being just a comic-book character!). I would like to direct Mr. Blackbeard's attention to the editorial in All First Comics for March of 1984 in regard to the apparent demise of the continuity strip. It lists those few strips still in existence but notes that they all are of limited distribution, with the exception of Doonesbury, but Mr. Trudeau has taken a two-year hiatus.

Take Care,

John Anderson

Your comic-book editor is simply out of touch, since Blackbeard discussed that particular topic--the episodic nature of contemporary strips--more than 10 years ago in these very pages (see "The Doom that Whirred toward Minnie," RQ VI (46-59)). // It's false that all continued strips have "limited distribution," since Milton Caniff's Steve Canyon couldn't be so widely circulated here in Texas without also being distributed across the United States. ---

Route 3 Box 127
Birch Tree, MO 65438

Dear Leland,

Many thanks for sending me a copy of RQ. Yours is but the fourth zine I've received through NFAS /New Fanzine Appreciation Society/ in an entire year, and is probably the best.

I was especially impressed with the "look" of your zine--very professional, but still yet friendly, which is nice.

The article on Farmer and the White Goddess was exceptionally interesting and readable, but still scholarly in its presentation. I cannot say the same for Stanislaw Lem, Science Fiction, and Kitsch which, although well-researched, did not hold my attention nor interest me. That may, or may not, be an objective opinion because I've not once been able to sit and read anything Lem has written in its entirety. Letter from Smyrna also did not attract me, but I was interested in the topic; the writing seemed crude, though, and that always spoils it for me.

On the bright side, I was very impressed with The Eighty Year Shaft, which was interesting, well-written, and less scholarly in tone. For the same reason I liked the reviews, even if they were old; it is always nice to know what someone else thinks about these things...And, oh, is it ever so nice to read a review of Steve Spielberg's work in which he is praised a little instead of criticized a lot. Some say Spielberg is over-rated, which indeed may be true, but the truth is he does what he sets out to do. I'm glad someone else notices this, also.

One last thing; I don't know if anyone else caught it, but the pun in "The White Goddess" about the Washington Monument being re-erected as a phallic symbol was quite funny.

Jocular equanimity,

Jim M. Allen

Oh, say you can see from the foregoing why Blackbeard is the most perceptive writer on comics, as when he diagnosis a situation one decade before the hot-shot critics are aware that it exists.// The Smyrna author, who's currently chairman of the Language and Literature department at Suomi College, Michigan, will be interested in your remark about crudeness.

P.O. Box 213
Lakewood, CA 90712

Leland:

I was very impressed by the physical quality of the zine and the obvious devotion of the writers. I must admit, however, that I prefer my fanzines to be "fun" and have never been big on serious literary criticism, so I didn't get too much out of RQ as a whole; sorry.

A couple of things which did catch my eye, however. One was how many of the LOCers are people I know at least somewhat. Small world. Another was William Tenn's comment that no one had gotten the point of the ending of his story "Child's Play." Well, I did, the first time I read it (in Silverberg's anthology Beyond Control, which I wish I could find a copy of again someday).

Finally, the movie reviews: I agree for the most part, especially the mention of the under-rated Wrong Is Right. I would like to say that I think Tron has been too-poorly reviewed too often, though. Sure, as serious s-f it's a flop, but as pure fun adventure it's one of the cuter films down the pike in some time.

Well, I'll give you a mention in Directed Energy #3 if I ever get around to doing it (any month now, folks) and send you a copy...talk about a contrast in zine styles...sheesh.

Robert K. Rose

If you ferreted out the latent content of "Child's Play" then you already qualify as a literary critic--since this is precisely the critic's job: to discern relationships previously unseen by anybody else.

---

4 Commercial Street
Norton, Malton
North Yorkshire YO17 9ES
England

Dear Leland,

It's a wonder /speaking in my stamp-collecting capacity/ that Montserrat hasn't exploited the Shiel connection by issuing a set of stamps in his honour (as they have with everything else possible); that, at least, might lead to a revival of interest. Though he'll always stay in my memory, as a collector of odd titles, for one of the classics: How the Old Woman Got Home. (No, I haven't read it; takes away some of the interest, once you find out what it's really about!)

While tastes may go in eras (e.g., the Heinlein that's being vilified today might be revered tomorrow), there must surely be a point where the attitudes espoused by a writer fall out of favour altogether, where the world has moved on too far for those attitudes to be ever held again, and it becomes a matter of history rather than literature. Such, I would suggest, has already happened to Shiel. The Shielography might be a godsend to literary archaeologists, discovering the attitudes and memorabilia of the recent past; but to the casual reader?

An interesting Letter from Smyrna, and I for one would like to read Yasemin Akbuz's novels, once in translation; though it seems an unalterable law that no foreign novels get published until they've seen an original print; and in the accountant-ridden publishing world of today, no publisher seems to take any risk: it's entertainment, rather than expression. Though (harking back to some of those old, Cold War attitudes) it's strange that we can read all the Russian s-f that we want; whereas that of Turkey, a "conservative" government, and fellow member of NATO, is instantly censored.

Best wishes,

Roger Waddington

There's also a transition period, between Literature and History, when attitudes expressed by an author are despicable only when held by inhabitants of another country. Rudyard Kipling's White Man's Burden philosophy, as applied by the British in India, had been laughed at for many years in America (see e.g., Edmund Wilson's essay, "The Kipling Nobody Read")--but precisely this attitude was the basis for U.S. actions in Vietnam.

---

322 Limonite Circle
El Paso, TX 79932

Dear Leland:

I found some fascinating reading in this issue, even if I have nothing to say about many pieces (Casey Fredericks' piece on Farmer, for example; since I can't refute any of his scholarship, what is there to say, but that I enjoyed it?)

The Tenn interview is noteworthy; I think Tenn hasn't received the attention he deserves in the field because (1) he hasn't produced much work in the past couple of decades, and (2) much of his work is in a satirical, mordant vein, and thus tends to be ranked as "lighter" work. The bit on the circumstances surrounding "Flat Eyed Monster" are especially revealing; I think critical analyses that try to read an author's philosophy from his writings suffer when they don't take into account the transitory circumstances affecting the writer at the time. (The writer of romantic comedies tends to become cynical in later years if he's suffering from chronic back pain, etc.)

Recently finished reading the Lupoff/Thompson anthology, All in Color for a Dime (outdated, but fun reading), so I was in a receptive mood for Bill Blackbeard's column. I'm more fortunate than most, I guess, in having access to some original strips from the first part of this century; one of our local residents is Tom Moore, who wrote and drew the Archie comics in the '50s, and who also has an extensive collection of strips from old local papers. An old Boob McNutt hangs on our wall... Even so, not a lot of stuff is within our reach.

Lauri Anderson's "Letter from Smyrna" gives us news of a writer who, needless to say, is unlikely to be encountered on the bookshelves here. Rumi's Antenna seems like the kind of original, provocative work that we could use on these shores; would stir things up a little, maybe. Yasemin could use exposure to some American s-f, though; "wireheading" avoids all that cumbersome machinery described in Perpetual Love.

Enjoyed the film reviews, since I've managed to see all the films described, if only on cable, by now. Agree with most, although I found Wrong Is Right made its points with a sledgehammer, as is Brooks's wont.

Yrs,

Richard Brandt

To state the William Tenn problem as crudely as possible: satire works via humour, but how can a funny story be taken seriously?

Leland:

7331 Terri Robyn
St. Louis, MO 63129

First I guess I'll go over the general format and then cover the specific articles.

I notice that your /zine/ places artwork to fill gaps in the layout--whether the artwork fits the subject matter or not. Your zine looks a lot less "thrown together" than a lot of zines that do that, but still there's room for improvement. Why not tell your artists the subject matter of the articles they're illoing and give them measurements? That would look a little better.

Fan poetry is a waste of space, period. In my LISPAN /Lost in Space Fan/ publication guidelines I succinctly say that "All poetry (submitted) will be burned." Maybe I don't have the patience or introspection for such things; in any case, I tend to skip over poetry in fanzines.

Some positive stuff about your format: You don't use an electronic typewriter (hereafter to be called "E.T." after something else I hate). E.T.s and computer printers have absolutely ruined the appearance of fanzines. Yes, it's easier to use the E.T.; you get automatic justification and can easily correct spelling errors--but the advantages are far outweighed by the incredible reduction on quality of appearance.

I am unfamiliar with a lot of the literary allusions in the issue. I remember reading Lem a few years back--but I certainly didn't see all of that stuff presented in Frank Bertrand's article. Oh well...

Now the one thing I am familiar with (the movies reviewed) I have rather strong opinions on.

Steve Dimeo's article was typical of the sans-spine school of movie reviewing. Like all critics he ran in line to fall all over himself praising such films as E.T. I mean, come on now! Every critic in the world seems to have the same opinion--they hate "gratuitous" sex, violence, and nudity; they love "cutesy" animal stories, etc.

I have yet to see a good review of the truly popular films such as Pieces or Bloodsucking Freaks. Reading through Dimeo's column I see that he hates gore movies. Now what the the heck do critics have against gore movies? He mentions such "classics" as Psycho, The Texas Chainsaw Massacre, and Halloween-- any gorshound will tell you that those three movies are "classics" only in that they were marketed on a large scale and received critical attention. All three are boring (yes, I realize Hitchcock is "in" now, and any condemnation of him is heresy. Screw that; he's still a boring director).

Luckily enough, gore is coming into its own now, with the old classics such as Blood Feast by the master, Herschell Gordon Lewis, being re-released. In any case, people like Dimeo serve to make gorefilms unpopular and obscure--which, come to think of it, is what gorefans want. For every protest over Dawn of the Dead means that gorefans can see such obscure films as Ilsa: She-Wolf of the SS without any problems. As soon as gorefilms become popular, then the protest marches and town bannings, etc. will happen.

Blut und Ehre!

Flint Mitchell

Not being gorehound enough to comment on the films, I'll just note that poetry in fanzines isn't necessarily fan-poetry, of which we've printed none until the present issue. (The fan in question is RQ's poetry editor, Sheryl Smith.) // Bertrand was referring not to Lem's fiction but his literary criticism. The first has been called profound; the second, just plain silly--e.g., by Phil Farmer, who called one such effort the funniest thing he'd ever read.

34-45 201st Street
Bayside, NY 11361

Dear Editor:

Even though I like zines of a lighter nature, I still enjoyed this one. In particular, I liked the Letter from Smyrna. It is not very often you have the opportunity to read about Turkish s-f. I always find it very interesting to hear of foreign s-f and see how it reflects the culture and differs from American s-f. The William Tenn interview was also worth while. I was not familiar with this author before this article. Now I would like to try some of his work. The Film Clips section was also good. I usually read most reviews of anything to do with fantasy and s-f.

On the whole, I found this issue to be both informative and very well organized.

Sincerely,

Rosaire Orlowski

Although the first appearance of the Byzantine article (in RQ 24) was nearly ignored, its reprint was the most frequently praised item three issues later. Of course, we've picked up many new readers, like you, who didn't see it the first time; but possibly those who saw it then still couldn't read it because of the blurred printing.

3, The Pines, 100 Bain Ave
Toronto, Ontario M4K 1E8

Dear Mr. Sapiro:

Thank you for the copy of RQ. It is the only time in my experience that a publisher has voluntarily sent me a replacement copy of a magazine because one article was partially illegible. This alone would tempt me to continue dealing with one so honest. Unfortunately, I have less disposable income than I would like, and see no way of increasing it.

Most of my available book funds go to mythology and mythography, especially that having to do with The Goddess. (I also get supporting material, archaeological, historical, and technical.) Eventually, I hope to set up a training college for priestesses and priests of what I hope will be Mother Earth Church of Ontario.

You see, there are some of us who do take Robert Graves's White Goddess for real, malgré any of Mr. Graves's ironies, as noted by Messrs Fry or Fredericks. In fact, with respect to Mr. Graves's remarks about scholiasts (e.g., p. 224 of the Faber p.b. 1961 edition) perhaps the sarcasms bite the other way.

In North America, there are now over 500 registered neo-Pagan and Wiccan groups--and possibly three times as many unregistered. In Britain and France, about 200 groups each are registered. Australia and New Zealand also have numerous covens or congregations.

Besides personal salvation, these groups offer a hope of ecological sanity and of counteracting the patriarchal follies of authoritarianism, hierarchalism, and militarism. Violence and sexism are purposive political tools intended to oppress --primarily women.

It is from such a swamp of stinking error that we must rescue humankind, hopefully before the Big Ones are fired, and before overpopulation and ill-use ruin Gaia (the biosphere) even if no nukes fall--or save the remnants, if either or both occurs, and there are any.

May the Lady shed Her Light on you, and all of us,

Norman McKinney

I once traded fanzines with a Wiccan coven until they printed a letter that justified burning crosses on lawns by the amount of "psychic energy" so liberated. I agree about our sexist and authoritarian society--but whatever the cures, they're not in that direction.

---

c/o Gillian Eline
Mill Street
Dover Plains, NY 12522

Dear Leland,

I'll admit I came away from E.T. as dazzled and satisfied as anyone. If s-f could produce an author of genius similar to that of Spielberg, we'd all have a prayer. What the field lacks is a person who communicates real emotion, while appealing to all. And I so with to be able to come away from reading /an s-f book/ having been affected as by this movie. Such a pity. I ory for s-f, and still--when no one's looking--weep for E.T.

Glowingly,
David Thiry

Despite film's visual advantage, the poet can say (with Samuel Delany), "The metaphor of sensory impact is still mine" --and thereby outdo Spielberg many times over. So as to hurt nobody's feeling's I'll cite an early example: the chase episode in Moby Dick, where the cabin boy's sanity dissolves in the vastness of Ocean. In the movie you didn't see this, since translation into purely visual terms would've been impossible.

---

30 N. 19th Street
Lafayette, IN 47904

Dear Leland:

I must say that I disagree with Tenn's attitude that there is a tide of shit rolling through the universe that buries everyone alive. I would have to argue with him that he must be using "us" to mean "pessimists," since that tidal wave is a thing of the mind and comes onto only those who hold affinities to the vision of it. Mr. Tenn seems to me to be saying, "Apres nous, le deluge," to be working with material exploited in such books as The Andromeda Strain or what-have-you. Can it be denied that much modern s-f, and fantasy too, is pessimistic?

Sincerely,
John Thiel

Optimism or pessimism matters not: the same fate awaits us all. To quote a writer that I'm sure Tenn would approve, "Thought is only a flash of light between two eternities of darkness, but thought is all there is."

1292 Richardson Street
Victoria, B.C. V8V 3E1

Dear Fellowbeing:

I'd vaguely heard of RQ before, as a serious litcrit fanzine. The day your sample #27 came I also received a perzine, from not too far away, that I can best describe as obscene. Meanwhile I completed an utterly demented letter to another Texan correspondent. Indeed do many things come to pass.

Casey Fredericks' "Philip José Farmer and the White Goddess" put me in mind of a friend of mine; his literary criticism sounds rather like Fredericks'. I can't say much about the article, except that it established, in detail, what I figured out rather quickly about Flesh when I read it. As for The White Goddess...that single book probably did more to screw up my head than twelve years of grade school. It completely escaped me at the time, though, that (as Fredericks puts it) part or all of The White Goddess might have been ironic, or a put-on.

I think that's all I've got to say. Ask me about invisible zombie nudists sometime. Or the attack of the cannibal doughnuts. Or the Black Marxist Lesbians...

Yours frumiously, Garth Spencer

I've already explained the cannibal doughnuts somewhere, somehow.// If The White Goddess isn't meant seriously, then neither is any of Graves's other related works--and that I'd find hard to believe.// Your notion of "demented" may be only "local" in the sense that what's considered demented in Canada and the United States might not be so in Texas.

[redacted]
E. Rochester, NY 14445

Dear Leland,

I thoroughly enjoyed your well-written zine; I'm still not sure whether it's just s-f, or s-f/literary.

The reason I'm confused is the review of the Shielography. I only know that $75 or $90 is too rich for my blood, especially when this article makes one wonder whether it's worth the price at all. Perhaps, if one wanted a Shielography, it could be written without all the rage and vilification, and it would be cheaper too.

I'd love to comment at length on your Quarterly, but I have a zine of my own to get out; but I do like the poetry!

FIAWOL! De Ghysel

You now perceive that it's not s-f/literary but s-f/lunacy.

6936-43rd Avenue
Woodside, NY 11377

Dear Leland,

Your issue no.27 has some very beautiful pieces of art, including the red cover piece (an oriental myth motif westernized with comic book overtones?)--but very weird in the varied styles. That includes Robert Hoffman's disjointed but interesting creature-warrior for my Tolkien review.

The poetry is too abstract, fragmented, to piece together as enjoyable reading. Thomas Kretz's verse on Castel Sant'Angelo is one delightful exception. Full of real historical concrete imagery.

Turkish s-f leaves me cold from Lauri Anderson's strange little essay. I liked the article on Philip José Farmer though--interesting research even though I dislike Robert Graves and Farmer's fictional cosmos. Normal life seems to get so many knocks in s-f fantasy books.

The Stanislaw Lem and William Tenn essays were quite revealing, but a bit turgid in style.

Happy Easter.

As you saw, "normal" existence--with its sexual repression, abhorrence of bodily functions, etc.--is precisely what Farmer's story was about. The "truest" fantasy, then, is that (like Farmer's) which gives insight into the "psychopathology of everyday life."// Jeff Wilcox's cover character was the Steel General from Roger Zelazny's Creatures of Light and Darkness.

WE ALSO HEARD FROM--

Robert Briggs (730 Hazel St #3, Punta Gorda, FL 33950), who appreciated the article on Lem--"It's time someone cut him down to size"--but was undecided about the cover. "In any case your illos, layout, and printing are much improved."

Sharon Maust (RD #2 Box 459-AA, Uniontown, PA 15401): "Your zine is very nicely produced, but unfortunately I found very little within that was of interest to me. Except for the artwork, especially that of Jeff Wilcox. As for the movie reviews, I generally agree, although I think *½ for Swamp Thing is far too generous."

Capt. David Heath, Jr. (332 32nd St., San Pedro, CA 90731): "I knew I was in for a treat when I saw art by my friend Jeff Wilcox on the cover. His simplistic yet expressive style does well in the fannish zine, giving /it/ a clean pro look without a lot of hoopla. In the area of text my favourite was that treatment of Farmer's Flesh. Farmer has the ability to expand on the ideas of others and give them strange and interesting twists; witness what he has done with the Greystoke legend and Moby Dick."

Harry J.N. Andruschak (P.O. Box 606, La Canada, CA 91011), writing from SHARE (St. Luke's Hospital for Alcoholism Rehabilitation) that "RQ 27 has given me many hours of enjoyable reading."/// In turn, I've read with fascinated horror your own accounts, in Niekas, of the expiring U.S. space programme. So in other circumstances I'd say that if alcoholic stimulus were required, I would send a fifth of any preferred brand.

Robert A. Newsom (General Delivery, Tunica, LA 70782), who compares Arthur C. Clarke's Childhood's End with Rocky Horror Picture Show. "I've never /seen/ the movie, but have heard about those who go to throw rice in the air and shoot their water pistols along with other things, which they time to /individual/ scenes. Clarke's /book/ reads: 'First sound, then color, then stereoscopy, then Cinerama...Where was the end of the story? Surely the final stage would be reached when the audience forgot it was an audience, and became part of the action.'"/// It's only in viewer participation that the idea attributed to Clarke resembles the Rocky Horror show. For, in the first case the stimulus is provided by the movie and in the second, by the audience.

Janet Ellicott (43 Brooksbank House, Retreat Place, Morning Lane, Hackney, London E9-6RN, England): "Thanks for the copy of RQ. Having come to fandom through "Star Trek" and media fandom, I'm finding the rest of fandom quite fascinating. It's like being a neo-fan all over again, which isn't helped by being on the other side of the Atlantic, and not knowing any of the contributors to the zines I'm now receiving./ Not having read any William Tenn or Stanislaw Lem, I don't feel competent to comment on these articles. The same goes for "The Eighty Year Shaft." While comics are available here--and indeed prosper--they are not the multi-million pound industry that American comics are, and I do not intend to /analyse/ why that is. I found the article interesting though./ Steven Dimeo's review of Tron was a breath of fresh air. So many people have told me how good the effects are that I was beginning to wonder whether anyone else had ever noticed the lack of storyline and characterisation. I'm glad Steven did, and in print."

RQ Miscellany

HOW NOW / MOO COW

Astute readers will have noted allusions in the preceding section to sample copies of RQ--and so will have surmised that these letters weren't from subscribers. This other source was the New Fanzine Appreciation Society, in turn a subgroup of the NJF (National Fantasy Fan Federation). The NJF is, I think, the second oldest fan organization in the world, having been started during s-f's neolithic era (the early 40s), when most of our present correspondents were yet unborn. The most vivid reminder of the NJF is the Dallas radio commercial that begins: "In Texas you have the past (background noise: mooing and stampeding), the present (grunts plus bodies colliding after the 'hut, two, three' of a Cowboy quarterback), and the future ('...three, two, one, zero'--woosh!)."For NJF's present membership includes not only far-darters (in the Homeric sense) but far-seers as well--though without the beef associated with cattle or professional football players. For more information contact Don Franson, 6543 Babcock Ave, North Hollywood, CA 91606.

FROM A CORNER TABLE AT ROUGH-HOUSE'S

All mail and phone attempts to contact the San Francisco Academy of Comic Art have failed--hence there's no current instalment of Bill Blackbeard's comic-reprint history. I just hope that his review of the Segar-Sagendorf opus will be a substitute, if not a replacement, for the ""Eighty-Year Shaft" that readers were anticipating.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

I'm not sure if each of J.N. Williamson's two dozen published novels fits into the Weird Tales category, but all these ought to qualify our columnist as a top expert on Horror. It's perhaps redundant to mention his recent all-new terror-story anthology, Masques (contributors: Robert Bloch, Ray Bradbury, Mort Castle, etc.), since this must be already known to RQ readers, except for a few isolated souls in Hoboken and Peoria.

Dana Martin Batory started out as a geologist, but soon found gothic-style fantasy more intriguing than rock analysis. Besides writing for Megavore, The Dracula Journals, and The Baker Street Journal, he also helped edit the M.L. Cook reference work, Mystery, Detective, and Espionage Magazines (Greenwood Press, 1983).

Morgan Nyberg has two books forthcoming this year, a children's novel, Galahad Schwartz and the Cockroach Army, and a poetry collection, The Subtle Body Sings. His verse play, The Crazy Norse Suite, is being adapted for music theatre at the Banff Centre, Alberta.

Since the Nebula nomination for his Amazing novella, "Moon of Ice," Brad Linaweaver has sold fiction to Pandora, New Libertarian (its all science-fiction issue), and Magic in Ithkar, a theme anthology edited by Andre Norton and Robert Adams. With Adams, Linaweaver is collaborating on a novel, One Last Rebel; he's also co-editing an anthology with Amazing's former editor, Elinor Mavor.

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