

# SPRING

AWRIGHT QUACKO!  
ARE YOU NOW OR  
HAVE YOU EVER  
BEEN A MEMBER  
OF THE  
COMMUNIST  
PARTY?

B-BUT-  
ALL I  
WANT IS A  
MAILING  
PERMIT!

WHEN WAS  
THE LAST  
TIME YOU  
SAW FATTY  
HEARST?

WHERE WERE  
YOU ON  
NOVEMBER  
22<sup>nd</sup>, 1963?

THE FANZINE  
YOU ARE ABOUT  
TO READ IS  
**TRUE!**  
THE NAMES ARE  
THE SAME-SO  
DON'T BLAME US!

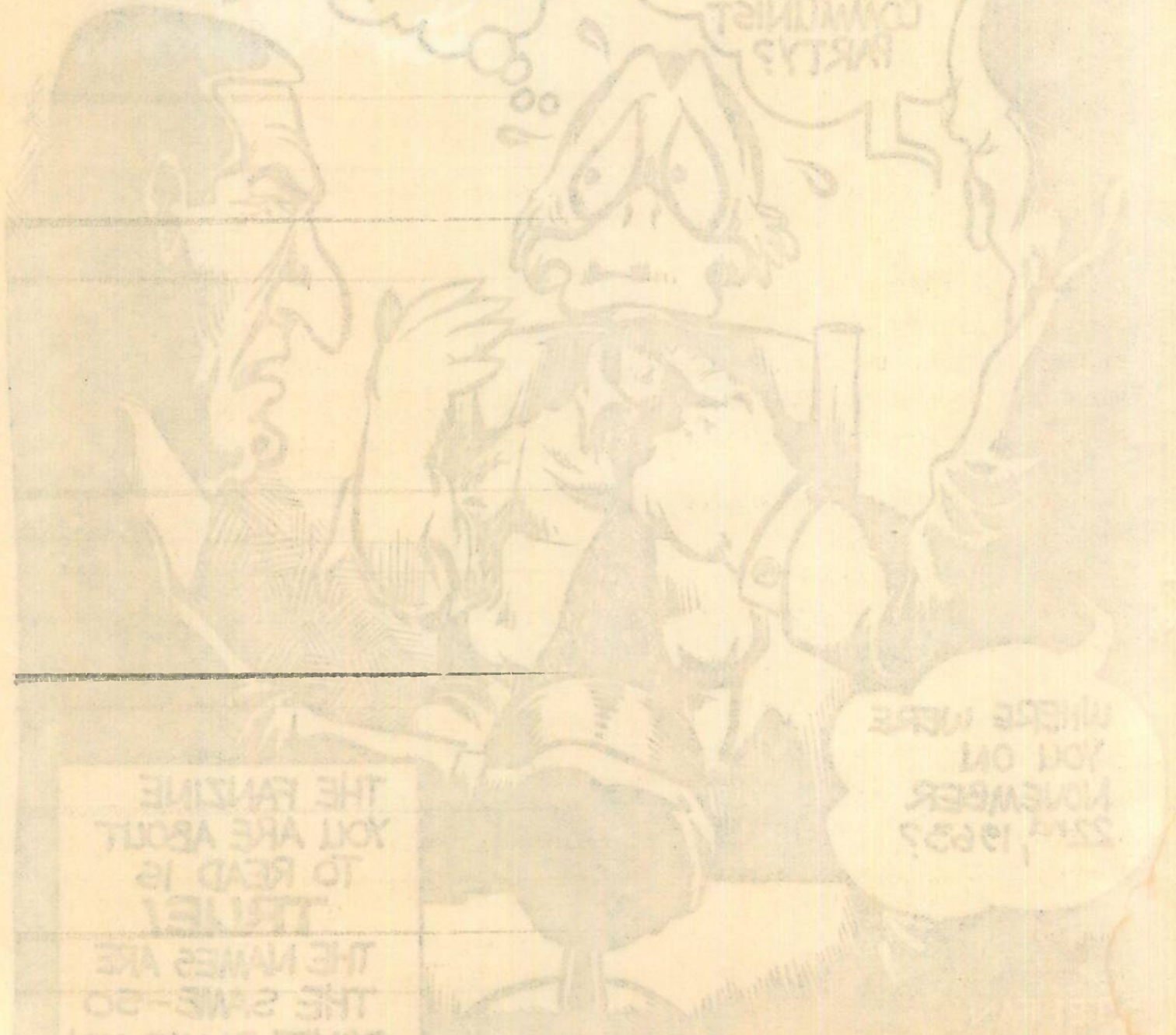
STEFFAN

# STUPID

WHEN WAS  
THE LAST  
TIME YOU  
SAID FOLLY  
HEARST?

B-BUT-  
ALL I  
WANT IS A  
MAILING  
LIST!!!

AMIRIGHT QUACKO!  
ARE YOU NOW OR  
HAVE YOU EVER  
BEEN A MEMBER  
OF THE  
COMMUNIST  
PARTY?



WHERE WERE  
YOU ON  
NOVEMBER  
22nd, 1963?

DON'T BLAME US!  
THE SAME-50  
THE NAMES ARE  
THE SAME-50  
TO READ IS  
YOU ARE ABOUT  
THE FANZINE

STARLING #35 was edited and published by Hank & Lesleigh Luttrell, 525 W. Main St., Madison, WI 53703 USA. Starling is available for fanzines or other publications in trade, with contributions of art, letters of comment, or anything else you can convince us is worth publishing. You can also get it for 50¢ a copy, subscriptions are 5 issues for \$2. Subscriptions are also available from our Australian agent, Leigh Edmonds PO Box 76, Carlton, Victoria 3035 AUSTRALIA at 3 issues/\$1 (Aus). Back issues: 16, 19, 21, 23, 24, 27, 28, 29, 31 are \$2 each; 30, 32, and 34 are \$1 each. You can trade in your back issues of Starling for an extension of your subscription and we will pay \$3 each for copies of #5 and 7, \$2 for #13 and \$1 for copies of issue 33.



The deadline for the next issue of Starling is February 28, 1977. This has been Weltanschauung Publication #203. December, 1976.

Cover -- Dan Steffan

Notebooklings (editorial) -- Hank Luttrell . . . . .	3
Sitting in Limbo: Underground Comix Eight Years Later -- Jay Kinney . . . . .	6
Words from Readers (letter column) . . . . .	12
Great American Comics, Part VIII: Who Are You Calling a Funny Animal!	
-- Lesleigh Luttrell . . . . .	19
Dance to the Music -- Juanita Coulson . . . . .	22
Notes Made While (Patiently) Waiting for the End -- Jim Turner . . . . .	26
Jawbone: The Real Diary -- Michael Carlson . . . . .	32
Bottoms Up! A Tribute to Thorne Smith -- Rick Dey . . . . .	35
Backcover -- Dan Steffan	

#### INTERIOR ARTWORK

Grant Canfield 18, 30	Barry Kent MacKay 15
Rudy der Hagopian 33	Marc Schirmeister 2
Ken Fletcher 4	Stu Shiffman 24
Jeanne Gomoll 17, 22, 32, 35, 38, 40, 41, 42	Dan Steffan 3, 7, 11, 12, 19, 21, 25, 26, 43
John Ingham 27	Jim Young 8
Jay Kinney 6, 9	Reed Waller 13



## NOTE

First, a Starling news flash for those of you who like to follow the success of fans in the real (?) world. We first started hearing rumors of this news at the Midwestcon in Cincinnati, where Brad

Balfour had stories about some member of the rock group Kiss who knew about fandom. If Brad had any other details we must have missed them, because it wasn't until we heard from Greg Shaw recently (and Greg is another success story, come to think of it), that we learned that Kiss leader Gene Simmons used to be known as Gene Klein. You might check your files of old St. Louis fanzines, including Starling, for Gene Klein artwork and letters; perhaps you could sell them for big bucks to your local Kiss fanatics, if you could get them to believe that Klein is now Simmons. For some supporting evidence, you can check Who Put The Bomb #16 -- a letter from Simmons in that issue makes it clear that he was involved in fandom, although it doesn't mention either his old name or that of his fanzine. Who Put The Bomb is \$1.50 from Greg Shaw, PO Box 7112, Burbank, Ca 91510.

Last issue I tried to bring you all up to date on the various publications which Lesleigh and I are acting as agents for, but I didn't really have complete information myself at that time, so here I go once again:

SF COMMENTARY edited and published by Bruce Gillespie, one of the leading serious science fiction fanzines. Subscriptions are 5 issues for \$6. I have a number of copies of SF COMMENTARY #47 on hand, which you can look at if you happen to get to a sf convention where I have a huckster's table. New subscriptions will start with that issue, which is the current one as of 12/76, whether the subscription is purchased by mail or at a convention.

THE BEST OF SF COMMENTARY #1 is PHILIP K. DICK: ELECTRIC SHEPHERD, published by Norstrillia Press. Copies are available from us for \$6. THE BEST OF. . . #2 is DELANY, reprints of reviews of Delany's work and letters from Delany (20 pages); THE BEST OF. . . #3 is DELANY: THE NOVA DEBATE, reprints of reviews and letters about Nova, of course (14 pages). Both of these are available from us at \$2.50 each.

We are also the US agents for Leigh Edmonds' excellent and frequent FANEWSLETTER, which is a must for keeping track of Australian fan and professional news. The price for this fanzine is 35¢ each, so \$3.50 or \$7 are good round figures. Leigh is also Starling's Australian agent, a fact that no one seems to have taken advantage of yet -- for details check our contents page.

Still on the international front, I want to urge all of our readers to vote in the TAFF race. Dig out one of those ballots which you probably have stuck away in your

# BOOKLINGS



desk in about four different places. . .if your desk is anything like mine. . .and vote now. As always, it is hard to decide who to vote for, but I think I tend toward Peter Roberts, mainly because I like his fanzines so much. Now, if you can't find one of those ballots, drop me a line because I know I have some extras. Or if Roy Tackett, 915 Green Valley Road NW, Albuquerque, N.M. 87107 lives closer, ask him for one. As American Administrator, I'm sure he has some extras, too. The subject of which British fan we'd like most to meet seems to lead logically to the Down Under Fan Fund, where we will be picking a US fan to send away to Australia. Unfortunately, news about the nominations won't be out until (as I type this) next week, so watch the pages of your favorite fan newsletter.

On the local front, the biggest news is that the Wiscon, the Wisconsin Science Fiction Convention, is scheduled for February 11, 12 and 13 at The Wisconsin Center and Lowell Hall here in Madison. I have to admit that long ago back when all of this was in the talking stage, I was dubious about putting on a regional convention in Madison -- it would be a lot of work, and there are certainly a lot of other regional conventions in the midwest already. One factor about which I always felt enthusiasm was the meeting/convention facilities offered by the Wisconsin Center/Lowell Hall, which I think are excellent, and a neat departure from the hotel/motel mold. I suspect that some experiments with sf conventions using academic facilities have been less than totally successful, and I would be extremely interested in learning details about these efforts so we can try to adjust our planning accordingly. One important factor is that Lowell Hall is not a dorm, but much more like a small hotel, and an inexpensive one at that. Our Guests of Honor will be Katherine MacLean, Nebula Award winner for "The Missing Man," and Amanda Bankier, editor/publisher of "Witch and the Chameleon." The convention program and features will include a feminist sf panel, an art show, a fantasy panel with Richard West and others, a huckster's room, an education & SF panel, a science program, multi-media productions, video tapes, indoor swimming, an original, live theatrical production, lots of movies including ROCKY HORROR PICTURE SHOW, and everything else that we can think of and that falls within the budget. Advance registration is \$4, after Jan. 31, \$6. You can request more information and/or send your registrations to WISCON, Box 1624, Madison, WI. 53701. Make checks payable to University Extension.

\*\*\*\*\*

Back in Starling #32, I devoted some of my editorial lines to several underground comix published in the country's second largest producer of underground comix -- Wisconsin. California, of course, is the largest producer, but good old Box 7, Princeton, WI 54968 makes Wisconsin second. Jay Kinney will entertain you this issue with his personal history of the comix field in general -- all I want to do is recall the time recently when Denis Kitchen of Kitchen Sink Enterprises, Krupp Comix Works,

etc., etc., visited Madison.

Cable television is relatively new to Madison. For the most part, the cable brings in the signals of some Chicago and Milwaukee stations, but also carries a little cable-only programming -- mostly old movies and City Council meetings. We also get a strange show called "Live on Six," which is a call-in talk show on Cable Channel 6. It is sponsored by local pizza entrepreneurs who run a couple of shops called "Rocky Rococo's." The show first came to our attention when we learned that our old friend Steve Grant occasionally appeared on it. Steve let us know in advance that he had arranged with the producers for an appearance of Wisconsin's underground comix king, Denis Kitchen, so I decided to drive out to the studio to provide a small but appreciative live audience. Also appearing with Denis and the host of the show was Bruce Ayers, owner of Madison's comic specialty shop, Capital City Comics. I think that the theory was that between the two of them, they should be able to provide a well-rounded viewpoint of the comics field, from well above to below ground level. Bruce brought all sorts of comics from his shop and his collection, most notably a group of European comics, as an example of a completely different sort of direction in publishing format from the mainstream of US comics, and some small press comics. Denis brought some of his publications, and some examples of the many diverse directions that Kitchen Sink Enterprises have taken, as befits the name -- projects such as some advertising art for some of that beer that they make in Milwaukee, and his Famous Cartoonists Buttons, and his remarkable series of Christmas cards by various cartoonists, including four great designs by Steve Stiles, and another which was a favorite of mine by Howard Cruse.

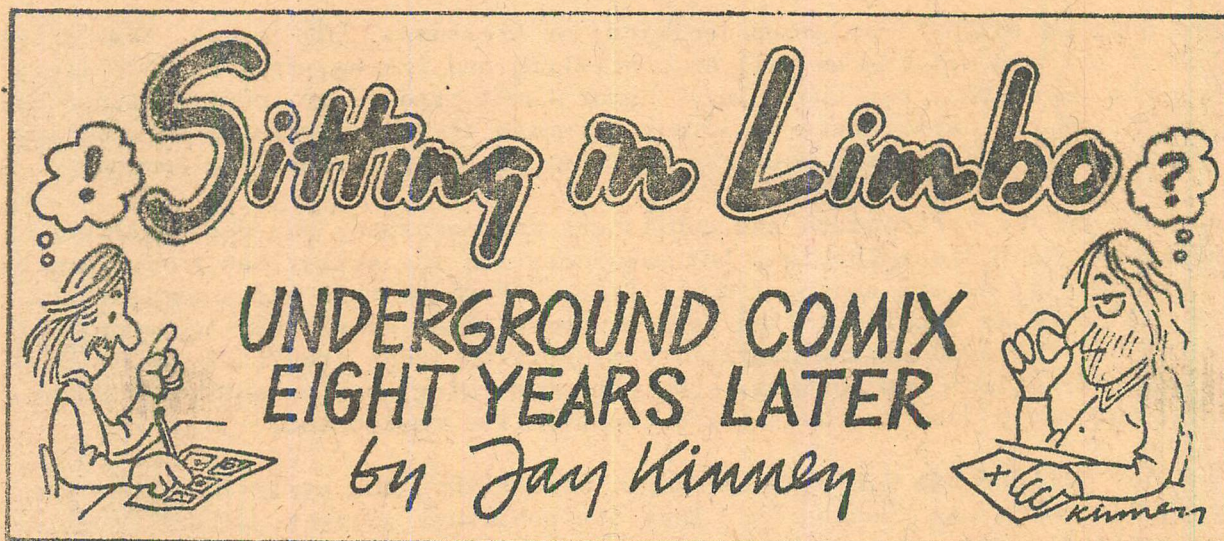
This was only my second visit to a real television studio, the first being when I was about 5 or 6 and put in a guest appearance in a peanut gallery for a St. Louis cartoon show that soon after went out of business. I always enjoy seeing lots of sophisticated electronics in action, and Bruce and Denis put on an interesting show, so it was an enjoyable evening. There were two still phone calls to get the show started -- the producer of the show called up and Steve Grant and I supplied him with some questions for Denis. After that, though, the phones blinked madly all the time. Most of the questions were pertinent and interesting, though we did have two which slowed things down -- an older friend or relative of the show's host asked why she hadn't seen him in church recently, and some old guy called up to ask what all this had to do with religion. He had seen some earlier show where the guest had been some evangelist and thought that all the shows were supposed to be religious. It must have been a disillusioning experience for him.

About the most interesting news that Denis had was that Krupp Comix Works is again going to have an active publishing schedule -- the publication of underground comix in general has been very slow lately, including Krupp. The more recent products of this more active schedule include Kurtzman Komix, introduced by R. Crumb. This book contains reprints of Harvey Kurtzman's old "Hay Look" and "Sheldon" and "Pot-Shot Pete" pages from obscure old comic books. Also Bizarre Sex #5, which certainly is, with stories by Steve Stiles, Joel Beck, Tim Boxell, R. Crumb, Howard Cruse, Sharon Rudahl and others.

\* \* \* \* \*

Last issue I devoted part of a page to some of the beginnings of our activities on radio station WORT-FM here in Madison. One reader jumped to the wrong conclusion and suggested that WORT must be a "PBS" station. But no, Back Porch Radio is that rarest of broadcasters, a non-commercial, community supported, community access station. Funds are provided primarily by donations and subscriptions to the program guide.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 43



C'mon. Sit down and make yourself comfortable. Think you can stand one more 'where are we now?' article, surveying the remnants of the 60's in the 70's? The remnants under examination this time are Underground Comix. Excuse me for a moment while I take off my green cartoonist's eye-shade and doff my objective historian's top hat. Okay, now we're set! Let's go...

Like many phenomena originating in the late 60's, Underground Comix started as a more-or-less spontaneous impulse. A small handful of cartoonists, most notably Robert Crumb, Gilbert Shelton and Jay Lynch started the ball rolling with a trio of self-published comix, ZAP, FEDS & HEADS, and BIJOU FUNNIES. Done as a lark with few notions of what would follow, the comix proved popular and inspirational, leading to a heady sense of a "growing movement" among young would-be cartoonists, opening up the possibility that not only could they draw whatever they wanted with no restrictions, but that they could see it printed as well.

Over the course of a few years' time, as publishers sprang up willing to make the comix their central concern, uniting with the budding headshop distribution network to spread the comix across the country, the cartoonists discovered that what was initially done for free or pennies, could, in time, become a semi-secure income if they were willing to restrain their tastes to a food-stamp level.

The comix came to be the comic relief of the "Revolution," expressing the implicit values of the Alternate culture in their jokes and humor. Just as underground papers were originally attempts to supply an alternative to the establishment media and news, so underground comix were fueled by a sense of providing an alternative to the generally limp comic art found in 'straight' comics and media.

But while self-consciously banding together in several cliques and circles all more-or-less under the holey umbrella of the United Cartoon Workers of America, there was nevertheless an essential difference between the underground cartoonists and their work and that of the other groupings of the self-named Counter-culture (be they newspapers, political organizations, demonstrations, or rock groups.) This was the cartoonists' unstated rule of "one man - one comic"...i.e., the realization that ultimately the creation of comics was achieved by one person sitting alone for long hours drawing, lettering and inking. More so than any other manifestation of the alternate culture, the underground cartoonists stood for the individuality of the artist, an individuality

which seemed only to suffer from group decisions or pressure. (Of course, some artists collaborated on art and writing as well as pencilling and inking, from time to time, but this was the exception, not the rule.) Humor isn't created by committees nor communal dictates, and the cartoonists jealously defended their right to be as scathing or quirky as possible against all would-be critics: be they Birchers or Feminists.

Cooperation between the cartoonists and publishers was necessary and desirable when it came to publication and dissemination, but when creating the artist had to try and be honest to his own visions and sense of humor first. Perhaps this helps explain the survival of the comix as vital entities several years after many other 'alternative' group ventures had faltered on the difficulty of getting large groups of people to agree on common directions and actions. "Do your own thing" was essential to Underground comix, but could lead to chaos for a co-operative restaurant.

From the days of selling his ZAP #1's on Haight Street thru the early 70's when the popularity of his books was keeping more than one publisher solvent, Robert Crumb was the rather unwilling nexus around which the comix scene revolved. Crumb's antagonism towards big business and big money, widely emulated among the cartoonists was to prove both the curse and saving grace of underground comix. It helped keep 'the comix biz' on a family level with an attendant purity of vision for many cartoonists, unclouded by temptations and opportunities to dilute their work. When such occasions did arise they were usually dealt with so straightforwardly (Moscoso doing uncompromising wrap-around bus ads for KSAN in San Francisco) or obliquely (Crumb's FRITZ THE CAT debacle which ultimately was blamed on everyone but him; likewise the wholesale unauthorized "Keep on Trucking" rip-offs which went on for years before he ever received a penny, and that only thru the zeal of his wife and lawyer), that the artists usually came up smelling like roses or at least dandelions. But such nonopportunism also meant that with few exceptions, the comix were never to rise out of their comfortable ghetto, printed on cheap newsprint and selling thru outlets identified with the "youth culture."

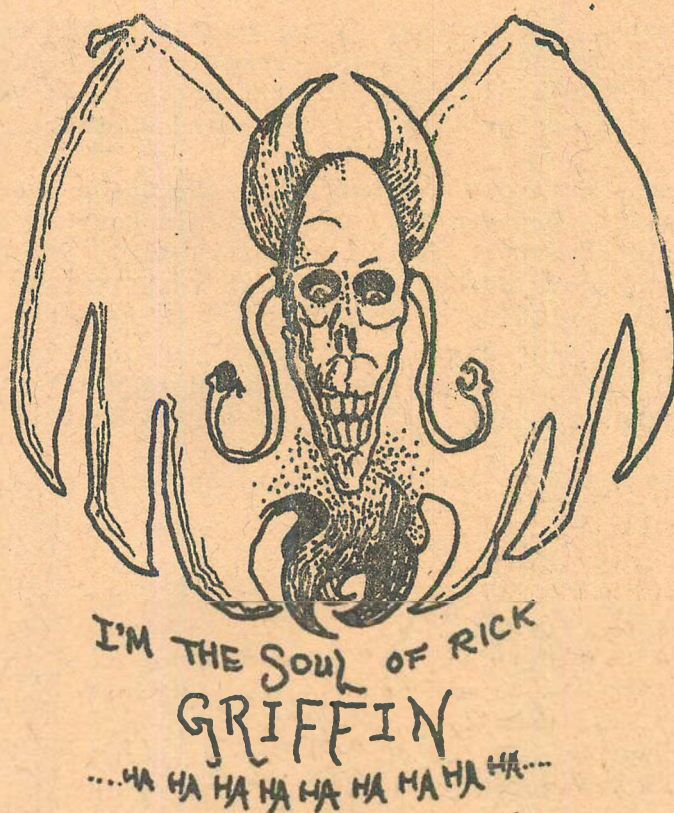


Underground comix, unhindered by regular publishing schedules, had shelf-lives unparalleled in the Establishment publishing industry. Comics done in 1968 stood in the racks next to comix done years later; ZAP 6 would be available along with ZAP 0 and all the numbers in between. After one edition of a comic would sell out, another printing was ordered, meaning more royalties for the artists and more profits for the publisher. Due to culture lag, comix which were old-hat to long time hippies by 1973 were still mind-blowingly outrageous to the ranks of new dopers and the would-be hip just coming up, and so money kept coming in enabling new original comix to be published, which in turn had long shelf-lives of their own.

However such an impressive edifice was not without its weak points. One was that, in time, the number of underground comix on the racks (where there were racks) ballooned into the hundreds, competing for the customer's eye as chaotically as any normal newstand pot-pourri. Secondly,

in later years most of the publishers had taken to printing second and third rate books either under the banner of 'giving new artists a break' or with the excuse of needing new books regularly to fulfill distributors' expectations. The result was bulging racks of uneven books, intimidating to the new-comers and disappointing to the old fans.

The summer of 1973 marked a turning point. In the wake of the Supreme Court decision leaving obscenity rulings up to local communities, head distributors across the country got nervous, sending cartons of books back unsold, fearful of costly busts. Sales dropped drastically, affecting all of the publishers and severely crippling some. Though the paranoia was to subside in the months ahead as few busts were forthcoming, many of the distributors, faced with failing businesses anyway, decided to drop comix from their catalogues. Other outlets reordered old best-sellers only, ignoring new titles.



Rolling papers and pipes were being sold at every drugstore in the land, making headshops superfluous. But those same drugstores were not going to blithely sell SNATCH or ZAP or YOUNG LUST right along with TIME and NEWSWEEK. The mafia-affiliated distributors that helped spread slick pubic hair nationally at \$1.25 a throw wanted nothing to do with underground comix.

Big-time publishing goes hand in hand with big-time money, an obvious enough observation. The underground publishers, used to nickle-and-diming it on a leisurely schedule, were basically unfit to go for the mass-market. And so the double-bind arose: unable to survive in the small-time and unable to compete in the big. The artists were still there. The readers, old and new, potential and proven, were still there. But the gap between the two was growing.

Here we come face to face with the essential realities of the recession we find ourselves in. Money and power get concentrated in the hands of fewer and fewer people as the distribution networks break down or become monopolized, grinding the small, independent businesses into the ground. This is the story behind the oil crisis, the situation with record companies, publishing conglomerates, food cartels, and, as victims, the underground comix field. As prices rise, the amount of capital needed for any venture increases accordingly...eventually leading to an impasse where only the already successful can start new businesses. It takes money to make money--another cliché, but one which the underground publishers had somehow gotten around until now.

There were several responses to this dilemma, each typifying a tendency inherent in the comix movement. A handful of artists, realizing that their own nearly completed comic books were not going to be easily printed by the publishers still in business due to the scarcity of capital, formed the Cartoonists Co-op Press. Bill Griffith along with Will Murphy, Jay Lynch in Chicago, Kim Deitch and a Fresno based new-comer, Jerry Lane, worked on the assumption that by raising the money to publish themselves and cutting out the middle-man, they could see their books in print and make more money for themselves

as well. The brother of cartoonist Justin Green, Keith Green, became the sales-distribution man for the Co-op, promoting the books through the extensive mailing list he had accumulated, combining the contacts of Last Gasp, Rip Off Press and Apex Novelties into one master list of stores and distributors.

Though seemingly a sound idea, the Co-op eventually faltered due to both personality conflicts between Bill Griffith and Keith Green (the two individuals who ended up shouldering most of the on-going work), and the realization that the Co-op was actually an amorphous ad-hoc entity with insufficient structure to sustain itself beyond the initial printing of four books. In time the Co-op came to exist largely in truncated form as Co-op Press, an altered personal label for Keith Green's own publishing efforts. Most recently Green has abandoned even the altered Co-op label for the more sarcastically appropriate name of Industrial Realities.

Denis Kitchen, creator of Kitchen Sink Enterprises, a.k.a. Krupp Comics Works, had been publishing comics (most notably Bijou Funnies) from a Midwest base in Milwaukee. Working mainly with regional and newer artists, most of the books he published were milder than their west-coast companions. Immersed in middle America, Kitchen championed books that toyed with, rather than exemplified the objectionable and subversive. When Krupp Comics hit the same hard times as the West-coast publishers, Denis entered into negotiations with Stan Lee at Marvel Comics in New York. The result, premiering in late 1974, was COMIX BOOK an 'aboveground underground', edited by Denis for Marvel. Like the Co-op this venture also floundered. Despite Marvel's connections, distribution was spotty and advertising was non-existent (the latter, purposely so.) The book seemed reasonably popular with an audience who had been having trouble finding underground comix in any form lately, but the magazine was killed by management after only three issues before its true potential could be judged. Kitchen went back to revive Krupp again, and after lengthy negotiations, arranged to publish COMIX BOOK's fourth and fifth issues (prepared for but never printed by Marvel) under his own aegis. Marvel, for its part, went its merry way, slowly running its once-popular comics for under-agers into the ground, exhibiting a chronic case of corporate lack of imagination and non-direction.



The next attempt at transforming underground comix into a new hybrid for the 70's was a slickly-designed 24 page full-color tabloid

out of New York. THE FUNNY PAPERS was the brain child of two comic-oriented lawyers, Albert Morse (S.F. based mouthpiece for Crumb and many local artists) and Sherman Sailer (N.Y. attorney for King Features Syndicate.) Aimed at a new collage generation given more to pinball playing than militance, the monthly tabloid had equal helpings of short comic strips by both undergrounders and old pros, 500-word columns on music, sports, medical advice and other middle-brow subjects, and a handful of reader-participation puzzles and games. Deriving much of its format from the popular OUI "Openers"

10

section, the tabloid seemed to assume an attention span of roughly 30 seconds on the part of its readers. The prospects for hefty advertising support were good, but the paper was unable to develop a sense of editorial purpose or depth within its three issue span and it too died, a victim of sporadic distribution and newstand discrimination.

Another abortive attempt at melding the comix with the mainstream was APPLE PIE. A blatant attempt at copying the NATIONAL LAMPOON, APPLE PIE had originally been titled HARPOON, until NatLampCo threatened court action and forced a name change. A generally mediocre publication, APPLE PIE did have a generous comic section featuring several Underground cartoonists. However this was not enough to save the magazine and after six issues, the format was changed to an even lamer satirical imitation of PEOPLE magazine, using photos and captions only.

The final attempt at something new came from the Print Mint, still the biggest underground comix publisher. In the wake of the demise of the Co-op, Bill Griffith brainstormed with close pal Art Spiegelman and presented the Print Mint with the idea of a quarterly magazine to be called ARCADE. Originating as a response to COMIX BOOK, the purpose of ARCADE was to establish a newstand distributed magazine that had the best artists of the Underground in undiluted form, no ifs, ands, buts, or Stan Lees. As I write this, the fifth issue has just come out, and the Print Mint is committed through the eighth issue. A modest eastcoast distributor has been lined up, and with luck and determination, ARCADE may become profitable enough to succeed where all the others have failed. If it does it will be by having consolidated a devoted audience rather than tapping a mass audience, for ARCADE is above all an embodiment of the idiosyncratic editorial policies of Griffith and Spiegelman.

However undeniably the one magazine which has grown and prospered wildly from the seeds planted by underground comix is the NATIONAL LAMPOON. A magazine which has taken big money, combined it with slick nihilism of a type never dreamed possible before 1968, and made all involved stealthy, wealthy, and rich. An outgrowth of the ivy-beleagured HARVARD LAMPOON, the NATLAMP has become the major humor magazine of the 70's, leaving all competitors twitching at the starting line.

The LAMPOON has succeeded where the undergrounds have failed precisely because it has been willing to play the 'big-time' game right. Appearing monthly, on deadline, totally professional, hiring those who know exactly what to do and firing those who don't, the LAMPOON strong-armed its way onto newstands everywhere and soon developed a large awe-struck audience. It looked like any normal, successful magazine on the surface, but hidden in those columns of innocuous type, in the corners of those glossy color spreads was a cynical no-holds-barred humor that owed much to pioneers as S. Clay Wilson and co., and yet had the added authority and power of New York, slick paper, and stereo ads behind it.

Going beyond a single magazine, the LAMPOON became an institution, spawning cabaret shows, paperbacks, records, and one-shot anthologies. There is even talk of a Lampoon sponsored all-comics magazine, featuring an international array of cartoonists. Will we soon witness the first multinational of humor? Quite possibly.

Meanwhile, back in San Francisco the native cartoonists are all rather distant from this, and for the most part 'one man - one comic' still reigns. The lunatic notion that adults are big kids and as deserving of good comic art as little kids is a hard notion to kick. The publishers struggle on, not quite sure if it was all a fad or a permanent popular art form. The cartoonists aren't sure either and many have taken up sign-painting, free-lance design or part-time jobs. Perhaps one day it will just be a handful of cartoonists selling their self-published comix on street-corners again,

and it will have come full circle. But it's always too early for the last train to Limbo. I've written an obituary for underground comix more than once before, and they ain't died yet.

**EPILOGUE:** Even as you read this, a modest but healthy Underground comix movement is growing in France, drawing upon the American comix as initial inspiration with French attention to aesthetics and robust European good humor. METAL HURLANT, a beautiful 8 1/2 x 11 SF-oriented comic magazine comes out quarterly, and in addition to featuring several top-notch French artists, reprints full-color work by Richard Corben. L'ECHO DES SAVANES is a lively monthly with a growing 70,000 circulation. L'ECHO also has a stable of regular French cartoonists but is devoting about a quarter of each issue to a variety of Americans. There have been reprints of Neal Adams and Ralph Reese from the NATIONAL LAMPOON, new work by Kurtzman and Wood, and underground work from Bob'by London and others.

Both Dan O'Neill and the late Vaughn Bodé have received awards from European cartoon circles for their work and it seems that Continental recognition of other American talents is not far behind. Several cartoonists, among them S. Clay Wilson, Bill Griffith, Kim Deitch, Dan O'Neill, Ted Richards, Justin Green and Pat Daley, have been doing unique weekly comic strips for the BERKELEY BARB. Paul Mavrides and myself have been producing a weekly one-panel cartoon dealing with political and social issues called "Cover-up Lowdown," which is currently running in 10-20 college and underground papers.

How much of this is a forerunner of the future and how much of it is interum busywork remains to be seen, of course. Perhaps when the time comes to do a follow-up article to this one (like in 1984?) things will have crystalized further. We shall see...

\* \* \* \*

ARCADE is available from The Print Mint, 830 Folger Ave., Berkeley, CA 94710. Back issues #1 thru 5 are \$1.50 each postpaid. A subscription for 4 issues is \$6.

Catalogues are available from most publishers at 25¢ each:

Rip Off Press, P.O. Box 14158, San Francisco, CA 94114.  
Last Gasp, 2180 Bryant, San Francisco, CA 94710 and  
Print Mint, at the above address.

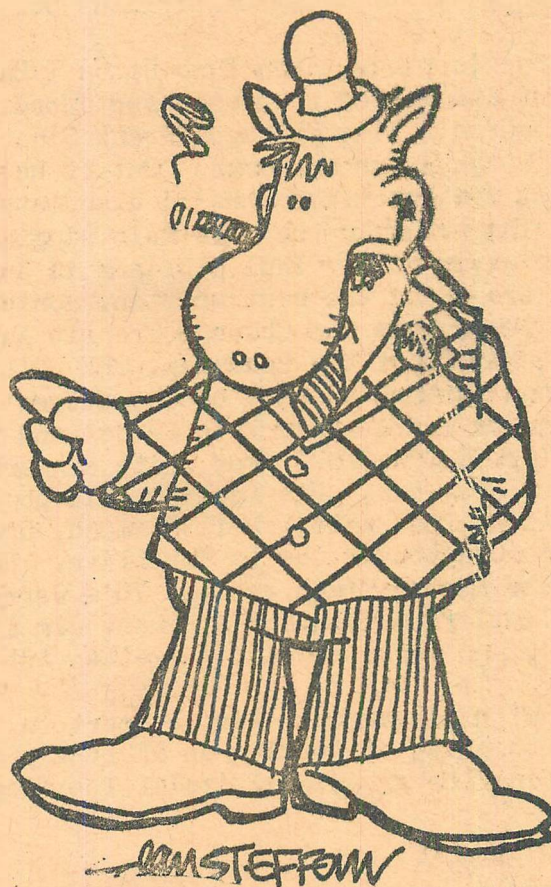
Krupp Mail Order, P.O. Box 9090, Boulder, CO 80301, handles all the Kitchen books and a myriad of other paraphenalia. Their catalogue is \$1.00, refundable on your first order. Include an age statement.



# Words from Readers

Howard Cruse,

I enjoyed the letter from Jay Kinney, since we share a stake in the fate of underground comix. If the genre does "evaporate into the same mist from whence it came," it remains to be seen what will happen to the unevaporated artists left behind. Hopefully new formats will surface which can comfortably incorporate the artistic freedom of the undergrounds, but a lot of resistance will have to be overcome from unfavorable economic forces, impenetrable distribution systems, and a political environment hostile to the testing of new perspectives. Meanwhile the UG cartoonists will have to scratch for bread as have the generations of cartoonists before them, and in the absence of a trendy (albeit vital and significant) supporting movement, we will discover whose perspectives have the breadth, depth, and staying power to become permanent landmarks in our culture.



Naturally, I'd like to see underground comix survive and grow in their unpretentious, broken-in format of today. But so far the battle to get the comix into the hands of a sufficiently large number of potentially interested readers is being lost, not won.

Lee Carson, 3412 Ruby St., Franklin Pk., IL 60131

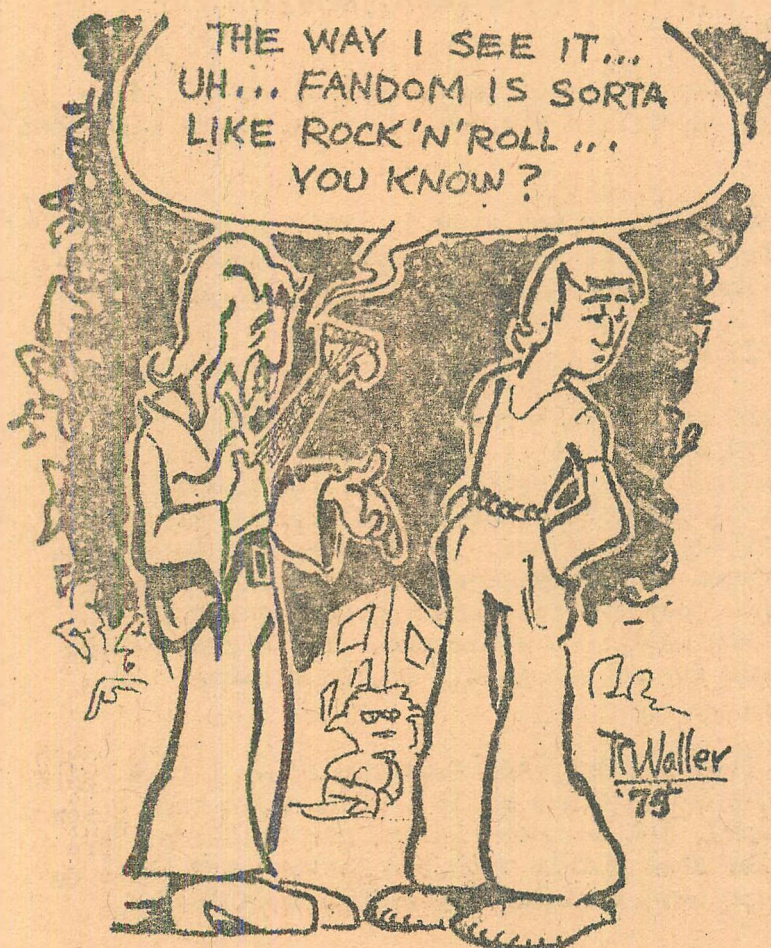
The most provocative item was of course the memo from Turner. While it might seem improbable, Mick Jagger could be considered a moralist (along the lines of William Burroughs). To express and reveal the "nature" of an "evil" to test the taboo, etc., does not serve to further the cause of "evil" (for doth not the malefactor flourish in secret shadow?). Know thy enemy is still good advice. It is romantic to suppose that the Stones "embody" the various outrages that they express. People have (with disillusioning intent) tried to tell me how much the businessman, materialist, chauvinist, etc. Mick Jagger really was, how nasty the music was. These kind people took it upon themselves to break my records for my own good. So, in a sense, the Stones bring out the worst in some people. . .

The Stones seem to thrive on the content they inspire (and frustrate!) -- I find their music "educational" (and it's got a beat, you can dance to it). Since Jim says he's an unreconstructed Dylan fan (common ground), let me quote Dylan, per TV Guide, Sept. 11, 1976 -- "I consider myself to be in the same spirit with the Beatles and the Rolling Stones." Overall, Jim's article was nevertheless refreshing, much in the fashion of the MidAmericon Ranquet.

13  
Lester Boutilier, 2726 Castiglione St., New Orleans, La., 70119

Jim Turner's piece, "Ten Dumb Bozos I Hate," must have been partly aimed at getting a lot of stimulated responses for "Words from Readers." Jim won't even explain why he doesn't like Chicago, Frank Sinatra, Paul Williams and the others who he considers beneath his contempt. But if he gets enough response criticizing him for his sweeping statement maybe he'll elaborate. Frank Sinatra is a superb romantic singer, possessing probably the best male singing voice of this century, with a repotoire(sic) that is never dull. Paul Williams is another gimmick singer, although the songs he writes are among the best written. Chicago started off well, back in 1968 when they called themselves The Chicago Transit Authority. But lately they've given themselves over to Middle of the Road pap. THE ROLLING STONES? One can deplore the amorality that runs through so many of The Stones' songs, but musically they're one of the best rock groups ever. Only Eric Burden and The Animals have outdone them at their specialty. ELTON JOHN? Few white singers have managed to capture the soul of soul as Elton John has. His feeling, his power, and his melodies are exquisite. I agree with Jim on The Eagles, Neil Diamond, Grand Funk Railroad and Bachman-Turner Overdrive. But Eric Clapton??? He is inventive. He is. Besides he's esgtatic to listen to. I despise Loretta Lynn and the 70's Jerry Lee Lewis. But then I despise virtually all hillbilly music. But at least Jim likes Bob Dylan(the great), Duke Ellington(the master), and Roger McGuinn(forgotten but not gone).

I note with pleasure Al Sirois' cartoon. Donn Brazier once mentioned in Title that Al was thinking of forming an SF rock group to play at worldcons, and I wrote to him suggesting the group call itself The Congo Helium, after the famous device in Cordwainer Smith's mythos.



The cartoon series Terry Hughes is trying to remember was Colonel Bleep, a product of the Sputnik era. The caveman was Scratch.

Jeff Smith, 1339 Weldon Ave.,  
Baltimore, Md. 21211

I feel the same way about Jim Turner's article as I did about the Hi-Fi Stereo Review piece he used as a model -- it's just a cranky prank, designed to do nothing but irritate people. Even when I agree with him over the lack of merits of someone or other, I just can't accept his criticisms -- and so find myself in the weird position of me defending Tony Orlando and Buffy St. Marie, me who could care less if they ever recorded again.

The major thing that astounded me was how narrow his tastes are, when he gets down to listing what he likes -- his range seems limited. No wonder he dislikes so much.

doug barbour, 10808 - 75th avenue, edmonton, alberta, canada t6e 1k2

i cant say too much about Jim Turner, cause he wavers from some fairly smart to some outright dumb points of view. poor guy -- he cant enjoy the greatest rocknroll band in the world. i actually agree with a lot of his hates, but how can i trust someone who doesnt like the stones? even if he does like Dylan. i go along with him about emerson, lake & palmer, for example, but ive just spent the last few days listening to a history of Yes, put together by Jeff Smith, a believer, & he has convinced me -- they are capable of fine music, alive in a way i really hadnt been willing to accept. like most of those to whom Jim addressed his article, i was ready & willing to disagree.

about Frank Denton's neat little piece, i havent heard of all the people of whom he speaks, but im willing to bet id enjoy them. given the particular aura/ambience of british folk/rock, i want to put in a mention of the people i consider the very best in that area right now, Richard & Linda Thompson. Richard Thompson was with fairport convention originally, but has been on his own for a few years now. what is really interesting about his work -- & a listen to the fantastic Pour Down Like Silver album on island will attest to this -- is that although all his songs, almost, are originals, they sound like theyve been around for centuries: theres a real feeling of timelessness about them, the feeling we associate with traditional music, yet it is electric, it is his own.

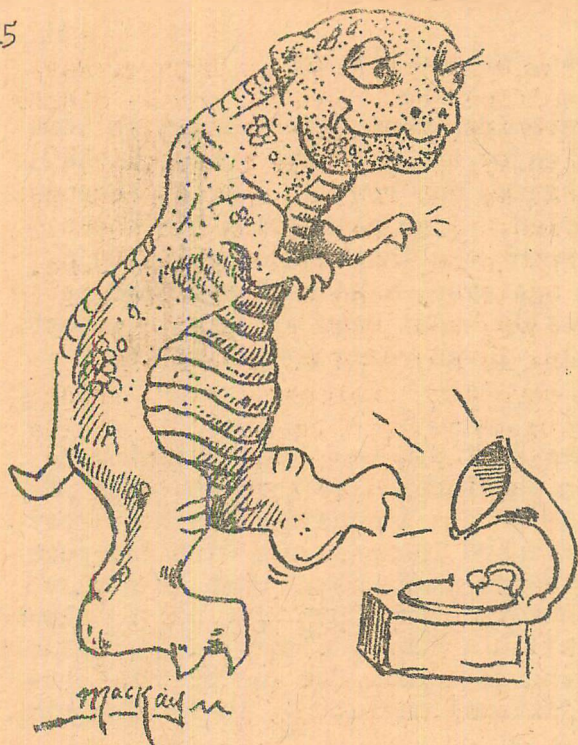
Michael Carlson, meanwhile, had me wishing id picked up a few of his lost top ten. The only one i have is The Jerry Hahn Brotherhood, & it is, indeed, a gem. i believe Michael is right to suggest the excitement has returned to jazz. especially the ECM label stuff: you can just about be assured that any album from ECM is worth a listen, & any of their solo piano recordings by Keith Jarrett are absolute must listens.

Steve Johnson, 207 S. Broom, #2, Madison, WI 53703

Turner displayed his usual fine form and one-liners in "Ten Dumb Bozos," in the Sammy Davis line especially. Any serious rejoinder seems uncalled for, except to note the popularity of the Stones as a dance music band.

About Hank's editorial. . . It was just yesterday that I was rereading Weinbaum in the Hyperion edition and glanced over Moskowitz's introduction -- and was struck by the references to Farley/Hoar as a Senator. If Hoar was a major politician, do his papers repose in The State Historical Society, I wondered, with Radioman drafts boxed up with miscellaneous campaign materials? Having thought about that for several minutes yesterday, I'm pleased today that Hank cleared the historical record regarding Hoar's activities in Wisconsin. Now I haven't the slightest reason to suspect that a trip to the archives would be fruitful, and being a former history student, as well as a former fan, that pleases me. My conscience, as well as my inherent laziness, is assuaged.

The Farley business leads me naturally to the archaically stfnal quality of the word "radio." This sense of the word remains strong with me, as strong as when I picked up on Farley many years ago and named an apazine "Radiophone," a title that evoked consternation and bewilderment among readers, if noted at all. In my own visualization of spacecraft, even today, the radio telephone, with its glowing vacuum tubes and vernier dials, constitutes an elemental and unchanging feature. I have accomodated solid state designs only reluctantly, and with reservations. Though the hi-fi tuner I built this summer is of solid state design, I still use a vacuum tube amp and pre amp. And I am happy to remind people of the advantages of tube-type tuners: they do not pick up the interference generated by solid state automobile ignition systems,



for example.

Leigh Edmond's column puzzled me a bit -- I'll accept "the exploration of organized sound" as a rationale for electronic music, but I can't imagine why anyone would want to listen to F-4's, Saturn rockets, or Concords. I've listened to, and enjoyed, the early electronic music which drew on tape recordings of factory and street sounds, but I've also spent a good deal of time on the street in cities and in noisy factories. After working hundreds of eight hour shifts at manual labor locked into the rhythm of machines and metal on metal at 90db, I find scant personal interest in the classification and analysis of such sounds as music, intellectually valid as such a system may be. I'm more interested in nice sounds, as defined by me: the sounds of the wilderness forest, mistaken by some city folks as silence; the sounds of central Wisconsin farming country, where individual milkers,

tractors, and animals can be heard at a distance of a half mile and more. (Loud sounds are on the farm in profusion, in the mechanized barn at milking/feeding times, and on the chopper pulling tractor which lacks (as most do) a sound proof cab. But I expose myself to these sounds close up only when necessary, and prefer not to romanticize them.)

Given Leigh's interests, he might be interested in trying out a pneumatic jack hammer, if he hasn't already done so. Sounds reach the operator's ears not only through the air but also through the legs, torso and arm. I would recommend that the novice operator start on asphalt, and gain practice before advancing to the more sensual vibrations of jack hammer on concrete.

The title of Leigh's column is, anyway, quite good, and I don't mean that in a cynical sense. Remember the Byrd's Lear Jet Song? The only objection I have to his argument is his strident assumption that the sole reason people don't get into electronic music is because they are ignorant and refuse to admit it. I cheerfully admit my formal musical ignorance. But the reasons I don't often listen to electronic music is that I prefer to listen to other things.

Harry Warner, Jr., 423 Summit Avenue, Hagerstown, Maryland 21740

I was quite surprised to find the revelation about Ralph Milne Farley. The inaccuracy of the old belief that he was a United States senator was a surprise, but the surprise was doubled by its location, since I don't normally think of Starling as the source of information about old-time prozine writers. His fiction conforms closely to the stereotype of old-fashioned pulp science fiction and it's surprising the way it keeps bobbing up.

Leigh Edmond's article about electronic music typifies the gap between its enthusiasts and me. The sound is the important thing about music to them. To me, the sound is just the frosting on the cake. It is just in recent decades that the sound has been considered a matter of real importance. Greater and lesser composers in the old days rarely felt any great concern about whether their music was played by a big orchestra

or by a little one. They wrote keyboard music which was played on every type of keyboard instruments. They transcribed their own compositions and compositions by others for every conceivable medium. Someone even published an arrangement of Handel's Messiah for two flutes. Today musicologists are struggling desperately to arrive at the exact way centuries-old music should be performed, in the face of all the evidence that it was performed in all sorts of ways. I just can't get excited about a new composition because it provides a quality of sound that nobody has made famous before. I think this is one reason why contemporary serious music has become so in-bred and unpopular: the sound just isn't important enough to carry the load. If music as we've known it for the past four or five centuries really has reached a dead end because all its melodic and harmonic potentialities have been explored, then I think it's time to start on third-tone or quarter-tone music. Compositions based on scales with smaller intervals than the half-tone chromatic scale we know so well might be produced for several centuries before composers use up all the possibilities for originality with the new potentialities.

I know Jim Turner wrote about the dumb bozos pour épater le bourgeois, to some extent. Still it's disturbing. The front page of newspapers contain nothing but efforts to blacken the character and accomplishments of important people, ranging from senators who patronize whores to agencies that send a spaceship to Mars. The first booklength biography of one of the most fabulous fantasy authors who ever lived devotes most of its space to complaints about ways in which he differed from the average man. A national music magazine uses "hate" as the key word in a survey of critics: not performers whom they consider untalented or whose music they don't like to listen to, but it's got to be a case of "hate." The attitude that used to be confined to the yellowest tabloids seems to be spreading epidemic-fashion through all forms of printed matter.

Robert E. Blenheim, 8 Catalpa Lane, Levittown, Pa. 19055

Leigh Edmonds seems to obfuscate the technical means in composing music with the artistic embodiment inherent in a finished work. The degree of relevance or excellence cannot be measured in its complexity or maturity of mechanical devices or technical elements; artistic merit is far less accessible to pinpoint.

Concert Music, unlike Pop or folk music, is grounded in the Universal, and changes in life-styles or technical improvements have minimum effect on its relevance. Advances in instrumentation or harmony, Schoenberg's 12-tone system, the introduction of the synthesizer, these have no more put Bach out of date than the invention of saccharine has put sugar out of date. There are now only more resources available to the composer, but this doesn't invalidate the old music systems or make music written under earlier conditions intrinsically inferior. As a matter of fact, today's electronic music is getting closer to the literal, using genuine noises in some instances, and this could be set up against the theory that the further one gets away from reality in art, the purer the work is, so a good argument CAN be made for Bach's Prelude and Fuges being "purer art" than Shostakovich's preludes, and -- as a matter of fact -- I, for one, DO have a relationship "more intense" with the former than the later, but it's not due to when Bach wrote his pieces, or the limitations of the resources available when they were composed. Bach is simply a greater artist than Shostakovich.

Jim Meadows III, 31 Apple Ct., Park Forest, IL 60466

Enjoyed Frank Denton's look at the British folk and rock groups, but was disappointed that the Incredible String Band wasn't mentioned. Doesn't anyone know who they were?

+For Starling's bit about The Incredible String Band, you'll have to see

+7/14 (May, 1970), where we published ~~pieces~~ by Lesleigh and Jake Schumacher-HL



It's always good to hear something from Jim Turner, the more offensive the better. Turner always sticks in my mind, since Jim is one of the few fanzine fans I have actually met. He came down to SIU at Carbondale last spring to see what he told me was one of the few public showings of Winsor McCay's "Sinking of the Lusitania." The typical college audience, seeing it was a cartoon, thought it was supposed to be funny and, dutifully, laughed. I have never seen anyone so outraged because of a movie audience before or since I saw Jim Turner throttling the guy in front of him who had been giggling uncontrollably. Jim and I left the auditorium just before the program ended,

and went downstairs to meet the SIU sf Society member who had introduced me to Jim. Jim told me a lot of wild stories about who really burned down SIU's Old Main building, and how the last four presidents of SIU. had been gay (excluding the current one, he said, who was possibly into leather). Jim also castigated me for drinking ginger ale. I left just as he was getting incoherent, but I must admit it was an experience.

Chris Couch's piece on Crumb was interesting. The Cheap Suit Serenaders seem to be derived from Crumb's interest in 78 rpm records of the 30's. Did anyone know that Crumb actually made a couple of 78's himself? It was about four years ago that Crumb and his Keep-On-Truckin' Band recorded the instrumental "Wisconsin Wiggles" and the tender ballad "River Blues." Crumb designed the record label himself: Ordinary Records, "a high standard of standardness." According to a press account I read, they had to search the country for a lathe that would cut 78 records. The distributor was Krupp Comic Works.

+As in Kitchen Sink Enterprises ;... discussed in my editorial. -- HL

David Griffin, 8 Woodville Road, Ealing, London W5 2SF, England

I've heard and like most of the groups and singers that Frank Denton mentioned. I was surprised to see the Chieftains omitted, though. I thought that they were reasonably well known overseas.

Still Life by Van Der Graaf Generator is the best lp I've ever heard. The title track is about the horrors of immortality, and there is even an interpretation of Clarke's Childhood's End.

Steve McDonald, c/o Alcan Jamaica Ltd., KirkVine Works P.O., Manchester, Jamaica, West Indies

I'm not going to run Turner down -- but I will say that he ought to watch out for toes when he's stomping around. My own tastes in music run helter-skelter through the Beatles to Van Der Graaf Generator and Peter Hammill, sucking in classical music, electronic music, African music and reggae along the way. At present I'm listening to Tales of Mozambique by Count Ossie and the Mystic Revelation of Rastafari -- a dumb band name, but a lovely album.

Music, for me, is anything I can listen to without cracking up in despair -- I can't stand Stockhausen or Cage, but I absolutely enjoy Robert Fripp and Brian Eno's No Pussyfooting, done mainly with guitar and tape. Most electronic music is a matter

of tape recorders, I think -- definitely it was in the fifties and early sixties, with everyone ~~from~~ Stockhausen to the BBC in on the act. Some of the BBC Radiophonic Workshop material is remarkable, having produced pleasant pieces from such things as rulers, bottles, rubber bands and cash registers.

Music, to define it, is actually what appeals to a person as music, and nothing else. That leaves things wide open for each person to define what he considers musical. Leigh's loose definition of music stands only with a corollary that should make it run: Music is any group of organized sounds that please the listener. Pleasure in this case can be defined in any sense, intellectual or sensual.

Aljo Svoboda, Johnson College, Redlands, CA 92373

Leigh Edmonds is great, and I think very right about the music that's coming out right now sharpening the ears to everything else that's happening aurally right now. I can already listen to avant-garde music of twenty-five years back and not be effected by it -- that is, listen to it as an escape rather than as the opposite. Our cultural ears are changing, or seem to be changing, so quickly. I go for Leigh's first definition of music: it's what makes personal time happen.

Michael Carlson, 35 Dunbar Rd., Milford, CT 06460

I liked Joe Sanders on Gores' Interface, which I loved, because one finds oneself caught up in the notion of a private detective totally going against the code of Hammett/Chandler and then, in the very last sentence of the book, one finds the morality was there all the time, was the motivating force, and it all fits together/makes sense. I don't think it's as simple as the hero being motivated by love -- because the love had died, but he's motivated by the sort of thing a Marlowe or Spade would feel he'd have to do.

Mike Glicksohn, 141 High Park Ave., Toronto, Ont., M6P 2S3 Canada

Lesleigh's delightful evocation of the musical presented at the 73 Minneapolis worldcon and something about the lyrics, the storyline and the illustrations struck a resonant chord. It remains a stimulation to my sense of wonder that a fan like Jim Williams could have written such a droll piece of fannishness, but then the minncon was a source of much amazement. Who could forget Tucker smoothing with orange juice while drying out, or Charlie Brown turn down a fanzine Hugo out of sympathy with the plight of the real fanzine? The GoH speech by Hugo was the most time-binding experience of all.

WAHF: Roy Tackett, K. Allen Biorke: "I believe the show Terry Hughes is talking about is (was) Space Ghost (160s)," Don D'Amassa, David Mruz, Alan & Bonnie Cohn, Bob Tucker, Sheryl Birkhead, Eric Lindsay, Ira M. Thornhill, and our mystery correspondent who's signature we can't read, and who didn't put his address on his letter.



# Great American Comics: part VIII



## Who Are You Calling a Funny Animal!

Every funnybook reader, child or adult, quickly comes to the realization that not all funny animals are alike. It's readily apparent that they come in all shapes, sizes and species, and that their humor ranges from the subtle to the broad, from the hysterically amusing to the completely unfunny. Who's to say which is which? Not me, but perhaps with a little thought I can make some generalizations, or at least provide you with some random thoughts on funny animals.

When I was younger, one thing I was sure to get every Christmas was a subscription to a Dell comic. I always chose LITTLE LULU, while my brother Chris picked UNCLE SCROOGE for his comic. But SCROOGE was a bimonthly, so to be fair and insure that we each got a comic in the mail every month, Chris got subscriptions to two comics. We always read each other's comic books, just as we read most of the books the other took out of the library, but I never liked Chris' second choice much. I just couldn't see the attraction that TOM AND JERRY held for him.

TOM AND JERRY -- a classic funny animal situation: cat and mouse; bigger, stronger creature constantly outwitted by smaller, brighter prey; small heroes avert violence to their own person while doing much physical and psychological damage to their nemesis. Character motivation is relatively simple and straightforward in these books--Jerry and Tuffy want to enjoy the food that belongs to Tom's owners, while he does his best to protect his owner's possessions (thereby earning his own food and avoiding a beating.) Behind this economic struggle for existence lies the primal theme of 'predator-hunts-prey', but Tom and Jerry are quite civilized in comparison with more primitive comic foes, such as Tweety and Sylvester (or, in the most frightening, unvarnished form of this theme, the desperate life-and-death struggle between Coyote and Roadrunner.) For Tom and Jerry, the element of predator and prey is one step removed, the food which both are mainly concerned with is safely dead, stored in cupboard and refrigerator, or spread temptingly on the kitchen table. The cat-eat-mouse motivation is still recognized by the characters, however. Tom has to be forcibly restrained from consuming the mice on at least one occasion, by the comic artist who reminds him that cat-and-mouse books are not funny with half the team missing. Jerry would be more than happy to see the tables turned and when, in an imaginary story, he and Tuffy are the bigger animals while tom cats are small and easy to push around, he remarks "You know Tuffy--We've had just about everything to eat, but a nice fresh chunk of cat! I think I'll try a bite!"

Most of the time, though, the struggle is not 'eat-or-be-eaten' but who can outsmart whom. Tom has the advantages of size, strength and, most of the time, legitimacy (he is supposed to be in the house, after all).but, as Jerry describes the edge the mice have, "He may be strong but he's a big dope, too!" TOM AND JERRY books are basically

ever more elaborate schemes of the mice to outwit Tom (who isn't really all that stupid) and achieve their objective of making him look foolish while they enjoy the forbidden fruit of human food. That's not funny. Oh, I know, I was supposed to identify with the 'underdogs', to glory in the successes of the mice, to vicariously enjoy the triumph of the small and weak (but smart) over the large and strong. I didn't. Perhaps because it was a cat-and-mouse game and my love of living felines made it impossible for me to laugh at the pain and humiliation inflicted on any specimen of Felis comicbookus, no matter how much they 'deserved' their punishment. (These books were written at a time, late 40s and 50s, when it was unfashionable to keep cats as pets, when cats were seen as a reminder of a too-recent rural past many newly-urbanized Americans were trying to live down. I suspect that most readers of TOM AND JERRY were not intimately acquainted with any real cats, nor did they have any awareness of the vital service performed by cats in an agricultural economy.) Not that the particular species involved makes a great deal of difference to the theme of the comics--any kind of 'natural enemies' team can and has been used in such situations.

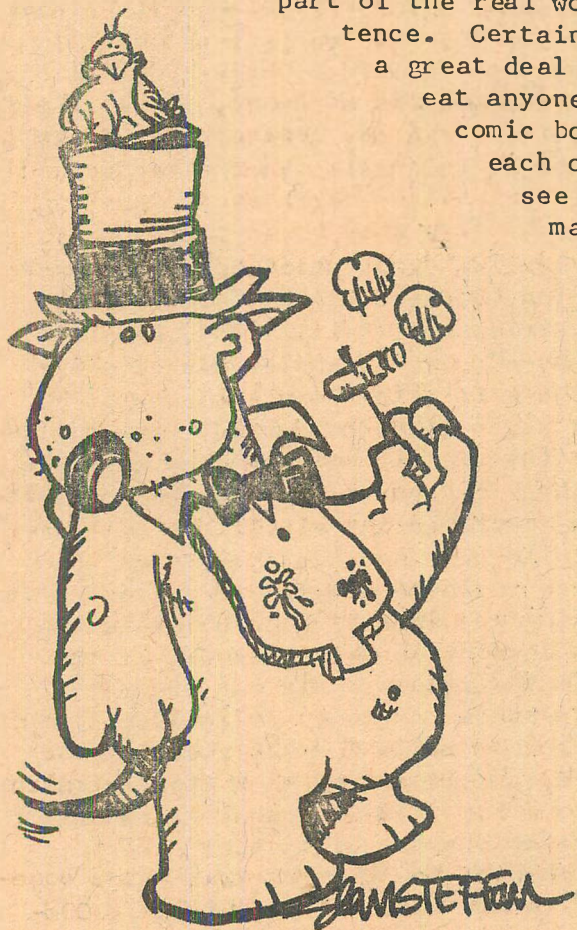
TWEETY AND SYLVESTER were a much less sophisticated pair, and I disliked their 'comic' appearances even more. Sylvester made no bones about his overwhelming desire to eat the little bird, and no one could blame Tweety for wanting to avoid this fate. Tweety has all the advantages, except size, being cute, bright, a household pet and completely without empathy. That little bastard--he was always more than happy to get Sylvester into trouble and then to enjoy the sight of his sufferings. Some people must have found this funny, though--the question is, what could they see in such a situation to make them laugh? Perhaps the humor comes from the fact that the characters and their motivations are so simple, their limitations so obvious that the cartoon/comic audience always knew what to expect, laughed at the expectation of humor rather than anything that was funny in itself. Or perhaps they appreciated the clever (?) way in which the writers/artists told the same story in numerous different forms. (Some people maintain that most of the humor of the Roadrunner cartoons is in the many variations Chuck Jones plays on the same basic plot, given only the simplest of situations. Barry Gillam once pointed out to me that Jones originally meant these cartoons as a parody of the simplistic, violent, cat-and-mouse chase cartoons, an objective I can appreciate. But if that's true, why are they still being made and even imitated by such pairs as the Aardvark and the Ant?)

Another book I found completely unfunny is THE FOX AND THE CROW, which Les Daniels describes in Comix: A History of Comic Books in America (Outerbridge and Dienstfrey, 1971) as "an endless variation on the themes of victimization, gullibility, disguise, and violence." There is only one plot in these books--C. Crow swindles his neighbor Fauntleroy Fox out of food and/or money. However there is a lot less violence in these books than in the others I've discussed. Fox never seems to consider the possibility of eating his annoying neighbor. He is only the victim, not the schemer. The natural roles are completely reversed (though not their fabled roles) and the gullible fox is at the mercy of the parasitic crow. Daniels describes the attraction of these books for children as the vision they provide of "guile proving itself superior to dumb force." But that's not true at all--Fox resorts to force only under extreme provocation, and generally tries to avoid the Crow, fearing the loss of face which is the invariable result of their encounters more than the loss of money. However, if the Crow always got the better of the Fox, I could claim the reason I did not enjoy the comic was mere boredom--kids aren't really as simple-minded as many adults like to think. Crow doesn't always win, though. For example, in #5 Crow sells Fox \$50 worth of "De-hydrated Education" pills made from ground-up books, and is amazed when they actually work, helping the Fox to win lots of money. "Dat Does It! I'm not gonna stand around an' let dat fox get all da money! I'm gonna make me some smart pills too!" Perhaps the crow is a marginal illiterate, for the book he chooses to 'borrow' from Fox's library for this purpose turns him into a baby. "What a nit wit! He made smart pills

out of my book of Nursery Rhymes!" (Or perhaps Crow has once again triumphed, choosing the very book most likely to provide him with the most ideas for future swindles.)

The reason I find these animals unfunny is not their species (Krazy is constantly being clobbered by Ignatz, and I love them both), nor the simplicity of their plots (like just about everything else, most comics can be reduced to 2 or 3 basic plots), but the feeling that something very important is missing from their pages. Even children realize that cartoon and comic book characters are anthropomorphized animals (or animalized humans) that their humor is not 'look at the strange antics of those non-human animals' but 'look at the human antics of those animal-like creatures.' The world of funny animals is a simplified reality (though that is sometimes hard to remember when immersed in the complex and fascinating world which Carl Barks created for his ducks) with two dimensional characters. Certainly some of our enjoyment of them comes from the fact that they reduce the world to terms which are easier for us to understand and deal with than the real world. They offer a way of taking one step back from reality which is important, for both children and adults, in maintaining our sanity. However it is possible to have a world too simplified, too predictable, lacking basic aspects of the 'real' world which make it understandable and thus potentially funny.

It would be easy to claim the reason I disliked comics such as TOM AND JERRY and THE FOX AND THE CROW is that they made me feel uncomfortable, that I didn't like having my natural violent urges stirred up in that way, that the swindles Crow perpetrated on Fox struck too close to some of the things I tried on my brothers. However, I believe the reason I always found those animal teams so lacking in humor is that never did I see in those books a spark of affection of one animal character for the other. For me, the best duck stories were those wherein Donald and/or Uncle Scrooge revealed their affection and concern for each other and for Huey, Louie and Dewey. Love is a part of the real world, and it shouldn't be simplified out of existence. Certainly I would never expect a real predator to have a great deal of affection for their prey (after all, you can't eat anyone you've been introduced to), but these unfunny comic book foes never even show a grudging admiration for each other. How could they? They are never allowed to see their 'partner' as anything but an enemy, or a mark.



Funny animals needn't reflect reality completely. Certainly the lack of sexuality in the funny animal universe never bothered me much (though now I can appreciate the efforts of Dan O'Neil and Bobby London to supply that missing dimension.) Making funny animals too complex, too human, defeats their purpose, that of giving us a different, supposedly more basic view of reality. As Howard the Duck proves again and again, a funny animals "trapped in a world he never made" loses a great deal of his potential for humor. However, it is ridiculous to waste full-color comics on characters who are only one-dimensional, black-and-white creatures. If it's true, that inside we are; all of us Homo sapiens, funny animals, it must also be true that genuinely funny animals must be human at their core as well.



+ Juanita Coulson +

Humor is as subjective as art -- possibly because, to some people, it is an art. Listen to people discussing a new film. Generally there will be agreement, at the beginning. "Thought it was the funniest movie I ever saw..." Fine; up to a point. Then someone will bring up a particular scene. Film fan two begins to back off and mutter and say things like, "well, I didn't think that was too hot, but remember the part where the accelerator sticks and he drives through the cream pie factory...?" The reminiscence may -- or may not -- break up the other reminiscences. There's almost no way to predict what item each fan of that film will think is funny, or how funny they will think it is.

I suppose I got a very early breaking-in on the subjectiveness of humor, and to the fact that my own sense of humor was not only somewhat out of the ordinary but downright weird. My mother tells me when I was a wee tot I, like all other tots, refused to leave the movie theatre until I'd seen the cartoons all the way through, preferably twice. She thought this was a bit strange on my part, even when I was young, because I almost never laughed at Mickey Mouse and Pluto and all the other late 30s and early 40s "funny" features.

What I did laugh at branded me in the kook category. I can recall sitting in one of the early Lon Chaney, Jr. Werewolf pictures and watching "Lawrence Talbot" pick up some schmoo of a Transylvanian peasant and pound the guy against a wall; all the while Chaney was battering the poor little nerd's brains out he was pleading pitifully, "Please, you don't understand, I'm a werewolf and you have to kill me." Sure he did. Just as soon as he got a ladder, a doctor to glue him back together, and General Patton's tank corps to help him out.

I nearly fell out of my theatre seat and spilled my peanuts-laced popcorn while laughing at that scene. People stared, and they weren't laughing. They thought I was screwy, and I thought they were hopelessly serious.

I laughed at Dracula, especially. I never understood how anybody could take Lugosi as a threat. It wasn't his accent. It was the hammy tongue-outs and eyeball wiggling and silent-film gesticulating.

Being a dedicated horror movie fan, I saw all of them, faithfully hoping for the bone-chilling effect I'd got when I was a little kid and saw a film called THE DEVIL COMMANDS (adapted from the William Sloane book, THE EDGE OF RUNNING WATER). That one scared me silly, and years later Robert Bloch and I could sit at a Midwestcon at the

old North Plaza and relive that film, admiring Boris Karloff and Anne Revere doing a dandy job of giving the audience the shivers. Somehow, watching Karloff as Frankenstein just didn't hack it. Frankenstein was always clunky, corny, pathetic. You knew he was going to get it, and he looked too much like a rag doll assembled by a committee and propped together with pipe cleaners. While the rest of the audience around me was shrieking with terror at the Monster or the Werewolf, I was mumbling to myself and saying, "Okay, now Ouspenskaya will say, 'You will never rid yourself of this curse, my son'," and that's what would happen on screen. (That was my first inkling that perhaps the people who wrote the stories behind films weren't all that original. If a kid could predict the lines, who couldn't?)

There was one authentically scary horror character for me -- The Mummy. He was more indestructible than Frankenstein (how do you kill something that's been dead four thousand years?), utterly without pity for anyone or anything, including whatever woman had recently been possessed by the spirit of Anankha, and at least once he won, carrying his re-possessed princess into the swamp while she turned into a hideous corpse right before your eyes. That was scary. But it was one of the few horror films that didn't amuse me.

I realize, in retrospect, that part of the reason I thought grim things were funny was because I was a rather grim kid. The problems behind that were personal and neither here nor there. Point is, I was reacting to drama or fiction on my own private wavelength.

Most people operate on general wavelengths, fortunately for comics and comedy writers. If there were no generalities about what audiences thought was funny, a lot of now-wealthy humorists would have starved.

But within those generalities, there are bulges and side avenues and individual tastes. I grew up in a period when nearly everybody listened to radio comics, and saw most of those same comics when they made movies. Everybody listened to and watched Hope, Benny, Red Skelton, Fred Allen, etc. But everybody had favorites and not-so-favorites.

Every family get-together would have knee-slapping exchanges about the latest radio jokes. Everybody knew the routines. Fibber McGee's closet and Digger O'Dell's schtick and Fred Allen's stroll down the alley, etc. But everyone also nestled close to the bosom one particular comedian they doted on, for whatever personal reasons. Mine was Red Skelton, though oddly, even though I was a kid at the time, I loathed his Mean Widdle Kid bit. (I also loathed Bob Hope, and still do. But that was my own problem and certainly never did him any damage.)

I rather liked the Marx Brothers on film, though Groucho's quick humor on radio then was a bit too fast and over my head. By the time A NIGHT AT THE OPERA was re-released in the late 40s (I believe it was) I was primed and ready to enjoy it to the hilt. That is one area wherein my taste in humor runs parallel to the rest of the world's and I'm glad.

But for the rest of the universe of humor, the subjectiveness got in the way. I'm aware it's a flaw in me, not in the humor. The world would no doubt be a funnier place for me if I didn't laugh at the wrong things, or would laugh at more of the right ones. But I treasure the special items that hit me just so. Like the first issue I ever picked up of ANIMAL COMICS. Understand, I was a wartime kid and a rabid comics fan, but I never liked funny animal comics. Never. Until I picked up that ANIMAL COMICS. I came in late, but Walt Kelly smacked me between the eyes and I smiled along with him ever after that. Like the first time I heard Tom Lehrer (this was much, much later, of course); and again I was on the same wavelength as everyone else.

Trouble is, under those conditions, you're never quite sure of yourself. When I think something is funny...is it? Or am I going through another of my laughing-at-the-were-wolf hangups? For example, one of the funniest movies I ever enjoyed was a film called UNFAITHFULLY YOURS, with Rex Harrison and beautiful Linda Darnell and numerous other good people. The film doesn't even get frequent runs on late-night tv, and I don't think I've ever seen it since it finally quit running at the theatre, years ago. But I treasure that memory. I sat through the film again and again, laughing till I cried, and the humor never lost its punch for me. Maybe it's because the film was so much involved with classical music, one of my tenderest spots, and maybe it's just because it was a unique idea well handled. I can't honestly recommend it to anyone else as a pinnacle of hilarity, though -- because I don't know if they'd think it was rib-splitting, or simply dull. Subjectivity, y'know.

Hank mentioned, when he said this was going to be a humor issue, that maybe I'd like to write about the Maria Montez films. Well, now, that's exactly what I mean about subjectivity. I realize those never-neverland Universal sand-and-sex epics are now regarded as high camp. I can look on such comments now and smile. But I saw the films when I was a kid, and they weren't campy to me then. I loved them. I didn't believe a single frame of film, but I loved them. You weren't supposed to believe them. On the contrary, you were supposed to do what you do with certain types of science fiction -- totally suspend your disbelief for the duration of the film. And I did, willingly. The color was too gorgeous, the people and the sets and even the animals were perfectly cast, the villains more evil than Satan, the dancing girls more sinuous than water snakes and even the date palms were tidier and taller than real life. You didn't laugh at them. You wallowed in them. The films came out in the 40s, during WWII, when history-in-the-making was pretty horrible, and they offered complete escape. They delivered on the promise: something for everyone. Handsome male leads for the women, a bra-less and utterly sexpot Montez for the men (she couldn't act her way out of a wet roll of Charmin, but who the hell cared in a day when she somehow thumbed her nipples at the censors), and heroism literally beyond belief for the kiddies. Never a dull, or ugly, moment.

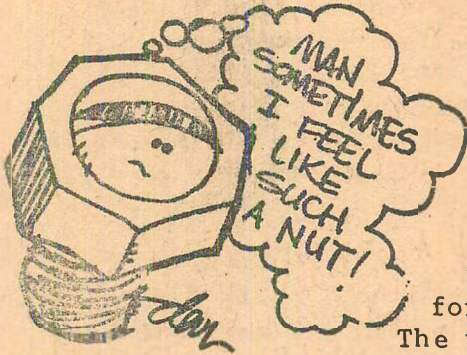
So I can't write about how funny they were. Somebody else can do that, somebody with a different sense of humor. Not a bad sense of humor, just a different one.

When I say I can't stand Don Rickles, that doesn't mean Rickles is a flop as a comic. If he were, he'd be broke. Somebody likes his material.

I get a little worried, sometimes, about the voraciousness of the media. It chews up material, including comic material, at a terrific rate, and there just isn't that much funny stuff anywhere. I hope they don't glut the audience -- all of the audience, and all the different taste buds for humor. That's been a worry of people since the days of radio, though, so it's not a new problem. Don't rush out and light a candle for the humorists just yet.



Don't put down a new -- and, to you, unfunny -- comic either. He might have something to offer somebody, and he's got a right to eat too.



Since I was a constant reader and film goer from an early age (even to going through every month's READER'S DIGEST the moment it arrived, for the jokes), I ended up by college days with a memory-full of routines and gags and schticks. It took quite a lot to jog my funny bone then. In one of my senior-level psych classes we had, of all things, a test in how to gauge your sense of humor. (Psych classes, in the 50s, were absolutely bonkers about giving and taking tests for everthing imaginable, and numerous things that weren't.)

The test, took about half an hour for most of the word-at-a-time education students in the room, amid a constant wave of snickers and snorts and teehees during the time. I can only recall chuckling twice. That's because there were only two jokes in the entire damned test that I had not encountered previously. One involved the very inane and yet totally logical sequence of the drunk in the telephone booth listening to an annoyed operator saying: "Num-bah, pliz" (this was back in the days of operators for every single time you used the phone, of course), and the drunk retorting furiously: "Number, hell. I want my peanuts." It was silly and ridiculous, and I hadn't run into it, so I laughed. The other concerned an elderly man scouring the scummier streets of London, searching for his notoriously rakish son, who'd gone off again with some lady of the night. The old boy was accosted by one of those same ladies who coyly asked him, "Hi, are you looking for a naughty little girl?" and was told "No, I'm looking for a naughty little boy." Her obvious punch line was, "Ooh, you dirty old man!" I gave those two jokes points simply because they were new, not because they were terrific. The curse of a jaded, omnivorous reader.

When we handed in our tests and had them rated, I came out with a double rating: my sense of humor was morbid and outré. I could see the last. Bhoy, could I see the last! Anybody who laughs at werewolves has got to be somewhat outré, right? But morbid? I ask you -- how can asking for your peanuts back be morbid?

I'll play psych student (which I once was) here. Okay: peanuts. What prior reference have I made to peanuts? Ah! Peanuts sprinkled atop my popcorn. They used to serve popcorn that way when you bought it at the movies in the 40s. They put free butter on it, too. And you got a great big box for your nickle. (I hear you cry, tearfully, what's a nickle?)

And what happened to the peanuts? I spilled them, laughing at a werewolf.

Therefore: I am yearning for my dead youth, when I laugh at a joke concerning peanuts.

That's the way psychology analyzes your sense of humor. If they get a chance, they'll do the same thing to every scrap of humor in the world -- yours, mine and Dick Van Dyke's.

Don't let them. Keep subjective.

And never laugh at werewolves. They bite, and then you'll spill your peanuts and years later somebody will tell you your sense of humor is morbid and outré and you'll be branded for life.

# Notes Made While (Patiently) Waiting for the End

26

+ Jim Turner +

"Petrification is of two sorts. There is petrification of the understanding; and also of the sense of shame. This happens when a man obstinately refuses to acknowledge plain truths, and persists in maintaining what is self-contradictory. Most of us dread mortification of the body, and would spare no pains to escape anything of that kind. But of mortification of the soul we are utterly heedless. With regard, indeed, to the soul, if a man is in such a state as to be incapable of following or understanding anything, I grant you we do think him in a bad way. But mortification of the sense of shame and modesty we go so far as to dub strength of mind." -- Epictetus

"Now let me tell you something about how I see the structure of a neurosis..." - Fritz Perls

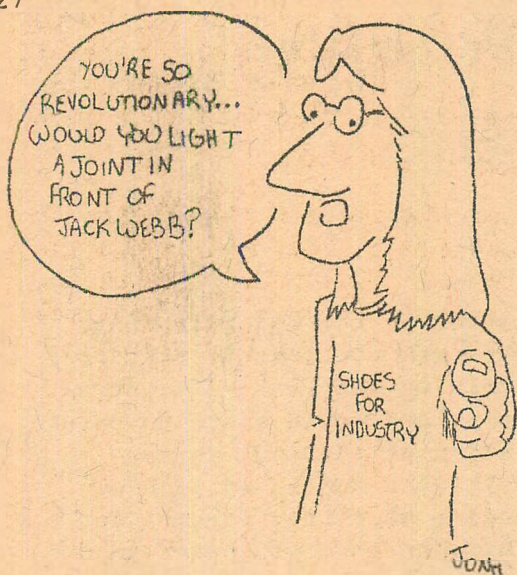
It is Sunday afternoon and I am drinking. Again. The doctors, my friends, everyone, tell me it will kill me. Promises, promises, said Dorothy Parker. Soon it will be time to sit around and drink Thanksgiving dinner all alone.

Last night I faked out a mugger for the second time in my life. As in the first occasion, I was well loaded or I would have had too much sense to try. I was walking across a wide parking lot near the University campus, well after dark, taking Doggie out before going to bed. A young black man in a big hat and long overcoat came out from behind a dumpster. The great master-slave, looter-pillager-victim gestalt came clearly together even before I saw the hunting knife in his hand. "Come here man," he said. "Come here, I want to talk about some money."

I realized in an instant what I had to do. I had, maybe, two bucks in change in my pocket, no watch, no ring. Anybody looking for victims on this cold a night must be desperate and capable of disappointment. My big black collie was off in the dark taking a crap (Lassie never did this to Jeff or Timmy or Ranger Cory if I recall a-right. From now on I will buy freeze dried doggie doo from the health food store. Twice a day I will add water and stir and won't need the dog anymore.)

The other time I faked out a mugger was coming out of a movie several years ago. I was hopped up on several things at the time. A couple of black kids (if I don't get mugged by a white man sometime I'm going to file a complaint with the Feds) came out of an alley and said they wanted to talk to me. All I





did was start walking toward them. Then I started giggling. (People who have heard me giggle usually start looking around for books like WHAT TO DO UNTIL THE EXORCIST COMES.) The kids split. Quickly.

Anyway, here I am turning into a statistic and wondering just where in hell Charles Bronson is when I need him? John Wayne would shoot the bastard between the eyes but I had left my .357 Mag at home. There's an apartment building across the street but I am not much good at running anyplace but to the toilet. Where are the Dorsai when you need them? I look at this bastard with the sharp knife who shouldn't even be alive in a world that has antibiotics, who's probably going to cut my nose off in childish pique and good fellowship.

I chuckled. (I swear to God I chuckled.) "Any money I have to talk about, man," I said, "belongs to my bosses. You better go down to Kansas City and talk to Giovanni Buccaccio and Vito Marcantonio and Jackie Rubin about money. Save yourself some tears."

So then he looked me over. Is it possible that this fat, bearded honky asshole in a cowboy hat and flowing cape knows some Italians? Does he know Chef Boy-ar-dee? Is he giving me or will six big animals drive down from K.C. and stomp me half to death just prior to shoving twelve pounds of garlic up my ass?

We watched each other. Off in the dark I could hear the dog in the brush of a vacant lot. Not only will I need stitches but I'll have to comb burrs out of my dog.

He started backing away. He still held his knife out but he raised his left hand as if to fend me off. "Everything's cool, man. No trouble. I don' wan' no trouble with nobody."

"That's two of us," I said. "No hard feelings."

He turned and ran and I treated myself to a good shiver. The dog came loping up with a stick in his mouth. I wish it had been that mother's shinbone.

-- 2 --

Do I sound bitter? Do I fail to perceive that that poor little mugger was probably the result of a broken home? That he was no doubt brutalized as a child and knows no other way to relate to people? Maybe so. I don't care. My home was none too happy and my family comes of a distinguished line of outlaws, tracing descent from both the Hatfields and the McCoys. A friend of mine, once one of central Missouri's main dope dealers, put it like this: "Like, I was dumb. I was a nice middleclass kid who never knew anybody who went to jail unless maybe some neighbor had a weird uncle who got behind on his alimony. Then I got into dealing and met real criminals for the first time in my stupid young life. They didn't look like Paul Newman or Robert Redford and most of them were crooks because they were too stupid to make it any other way. I discovered that Robin Hood was dead a long time ago." (Today that man is a lifer in the U. S. Army.)

In one of Ed McBain's 87th Precinct novels, it is opined that if most criminals put the same hard work and thought into legitimate enterprise, they would not only be safe

28

from the law, but they'd probably make more money. What they really want is the thrill of being out there on the street playing cops and robbers. (I suspect most cops are there for the same reason, God bless and keep them.) I read a book once by an old safecracker who said that he often had an actual orgasm when he made it into a particularly difficult safe or vault.

I was at a party on July 4 this year and remarked to some Jewish friends of mine that the week had had two delightful developments: the Israeli raid into Uganda and the reestablishment of the death penalty in Missouri. They were glad to agree with the first half of my remark but... "Come now," I said, "I'd hate to think that you folks were so racist as to think that it was all right for Arab terrorists to die but not American terrorists."

Well, gosh, that's different. Like hell it is. Once, Confucius was asked by one of his students if we ought to reward evil with good, hoping to draw the old man into a trap. Confucius said, "Anybody who rewards evil with good is a fool. Evil should be rewarded with severe justice. If you reward evil with good, what do you expect to reward good with?" Me, I'm getting a sword cane.

-- 3 --

You may recall that in the lastish of Starling I said that my next column might well be entitled "Pimpily Masturbating Assholes of Gor." As you see, it is not. Since then, I happened to pick up a copy of AGAINST OUR WILL by Susan Brownmiller, a history and general examination of rape and our attitudes toward it. I avoided the book for a long time because I suspected it was just another leftist diatribe. Ms. Brownmiller, I apologize. I was wrong.

I was looking through the pb when it came out and the book fell open on the passages wherein she excoriated Cleaver and LeRoi Jones and Mick Jagger and others of that ilk and I knew it was a book for me. I disagree with her on her exaltation of Hitchcock and Kubrick but that's another column. Please buy and read the book for no other reason than she is the first radical I've read who, when writing about the military and the history of military terrorism, bothered to get their facts straight.

As for as material pertaining to my proposed column about John Norman and his compulsion to put his illness into prose, I recommend her chapters on the myth of the heroic rapist and the myth of the beautiful victim.

"John Norman" is supposedly the pen name of a famous prof of sociology. I suspect the reason he uses a pen name and writes of what he does is that he is "chinless, bald and shaped like a shmoo," a scaley little twerp who writes under another name because, if his wife ever saw the stuff, she'd beat the holy living shit out of him and that would be that.

When I first saw that silly worthless movie BUTCH CASSIDY AND THE SUNDANCE KID, I was sitting in front of some fellows who would be naturals for Norman's books. Remember when Redford and the girl were going through their little skit where she pretended not to know him and he was forcing her to undress with a gun? Much heavy breathing on the back of my head. If you are that sort of person, go back to your Rolling Stones records. I certainly don't want to have anything to do with you. If you ever get tired I suggest suicide. Save us all a lot of trouble.

-- 4 --

I continue to be delighted, enthralled and astonished by the pb reprints of Seabury Quinn's Jules de Grandin stories. Quinn was a splendid hack (that is not intended as an insult) and one can learn much from his stories. Lowndes, Wellman and Peter Haining

label him as the most popular of the WEIRD TALES authors and I do not doubt it at all. Every story is trash and every one of them is a good read. There is nothing original: it is all a rehash of Conan Doyle and Algernon Blackwood and M.R. James. (Quinn's most famous tale, ROADS, is a steal from THE STAR ROVER by Jack London and, by God, it was a good thing for Quinn that London was dead when ROADS appeared.)

Nearly every story vanishes from memory when the last paragraph ends. Once in a while there is a flash of genuine horror: the scene in the story about the master of zombies where the female corpses dance in front of the villain in filmy robes. When they raise their arms, the watchers can see the stitches under their armpits where the undertaker shut them up. But the main point is the unveiling of a nude female body. That seems to be the main concern of occult villains: to get a woman naked. (Her nude body is never described with any exactitude. In those days, that was enough.) No telling how much seed was dropped on the ground from such influences in the 20's, 30's and 40's. I wonder: how much fantasy that we revere is concerned simply with the revelation of bare flesh, when we consider it in the end? Lovecraft comes to mind. Somebody ought to write it up. I could do it but would rather not.

Please buy and read these books. They are good, readable crap and a better time capsule you can't hope to find. Somebody ought to do a serious study of the pulps, rather than concentrating on nostalgia. They were the television of their day and the Kennedys, Johnsons, Nixons and Kissengers grew up reading them. Remember the message of Doc Savage: an American who's in the right doesn't have to bother with the law.

-- 5 --

I am most pleased by the outcome of the American Presidential Election. I am not convinced by Jimmy Carter. But...I have a friend who told me, upon reading the PLAYBOY interview, "I like Carter. I think he's an honest man. I just don't like his Southern Christian ethics."

I said, "My dear, it has been so long since we had a President who had any ethics at all, we ought to be glad for any ethical man we can get. In view of all the revelations we find, I doubt that Nixon did anything as President that Bobby Kennedy would not have done. Who had more fun bugging everybody than Bobby and who had more fun launching commando raids on Cuba? Who said, at the Cuban Missile Crisis, "if we're going to have an atomic war, let's have it now and get it over with?" Chew on that, my liberal friends and to hell with you. I used to know this dippy little girl and her friend who would get drunk at parties and would talk about how their dreams died with Robert Kennedy. Enough said.

-- 6 --

I work for the University of Missouri Student Health Service and it fell to us to take care of mass immunization against the swine flu. Nobody was quite sure of how many people to expect: we have over 20,000 students. Add to that faculty and staff, their families and whoever else walks in off the street.

It came off rather well. In two three-hour clinics on Monday and Tuesday nights we stuck as many people as the city and county together managed in an entire day: nearly 10,000. When it was over, we piled into cars and got drunk.

Columbia has a dreary (to my mind) bar scene: lots of noisy students on the make. A friend at work--an old alkie--said, "I can't stand those places. They don't take drinking seriously there." We went to a place called The Brass Bed in one of the shopping centers. We did not fit in very well, I think. None of us could be certified as being terribly young anymore. As near as I could tell we were the only ones who were really letting go and having any fun. There was only one other man in the crowd, one of the doctors, and he and I did the really serious drinking: straight whiskey and

beer chasers. The nurses tended toward Rusty Nails, Comfort Sours and--God help us--7-and-7. They were all drunk on the second drink which was about the time I started my W.C. Fields routine.

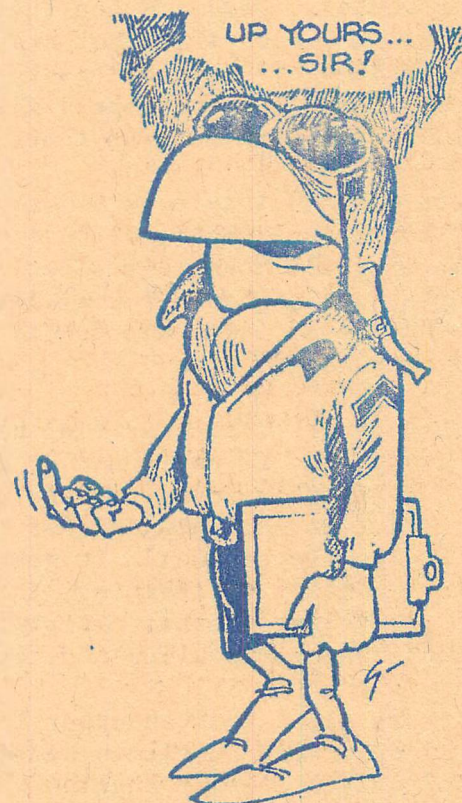
"Ah yes...it was a redheaded woman in Philadelphia who drove me to drink. Someday I'm going to look her up and thank her...Do you know, my little rounded melon, that drunkenness as we know it began during the Middle Ages? They were called the Middle Ages because, very frequently, a fellow couldn't make it home unless he was between two other fellows...A loose woman of my acquaintance once told me that I was going to drown in whiskey. Death, where is thy sting? Innkeeper! Innkeeper! Another round! ...Thank you, my dear, may your house be safe from tigers..."

The husband of one of the nurses showed up with three mink stoles that he was raffling off for charity. I do not recall just why he was carrying them around in bars but I put on one, one nurse put on another, and she and I adjourned to the dance floor. Occasionally I would introduce her to utter strangers as my mother (she can't be more than five years older than I am and certainly looks younger than me.) Finally, I grabbed some guy and began shaking his hand: "Howdy...ahm Billy Carter and the little lady and I jist now got up here from Jawgah and we want to thank all you good folks for the fine hep you gave Jimmeh!"

At this point I was gently taken away and, as Mark Twain said in connection with Tom Sawyer's Sunday School recitation fiasco, let us draw the curtain of charity over the remaining events.

-- 7 --

I am not a pubcrawler or partygoer by nature. I detest crowds and once left town for the weekend to avoid my own surprise birthday party. This was the first time I'd been in an actual bar, I think, since 1971. I am not likely to go back soon.



When I was in college I was quite different in this respect. I have a great deal to remember about such things. Unless senility is working hard on me, I seem to recall having rather a better time than those children out there were having. My friends from work and I got rather loud, somewhat bawdy, and we were quite alone in that. It was ironic that the oldest people there were the least inhibited in public.

I look around campus: hair is getting shorter on the boys (thank God...most men look silly with long hair), skirts are creeping down. Makeup is back in a big way. (Where ever did women get the idea that it was attractive to look like you had two black eyes?) For the first time in years, the Fraternities and Sororities had to turn people away. Are the fifties really coming back?

I suppose that the Sexual Revolution (God, I'm getting sick of that label) has something to do with it. I do the Purchasing at work and we can't keep enough birth control pills on the shelves. (Not to mention Kwell and penicillin. In the words of my old boss, "If you goin' to play, then you got to pay!" Just before vacation time, we stock up on supplies for the pregnancy tests.) Back in my day, there was just not that much screwing going on. It was not at all unheard of for a couple to go together three years and then break up over whether or not to continue saving it for marriage (and it was not always the girl who was holding out either.)

We went to bars and parties and acted out and made total asses of ourselves and didn't give a damn who might be turned off by it. Maybe it was because we expected less about how the evening might end. Maybe we were just too dumb to realize what was really going on. But I think there was less demand to maintain a cool image. And I think just maybe we had more real fun, at least in crowd situations.

(If anyone objects to my use of terms like "screwing" as being indicative of inhibition or of having a dirty mind, be warned not to get me started about what I think of people who have "relationships." "Relationship" in this context is part of the conspiracy to destroy the language and most other good things. Like "cinema noir", it is a good example of the sort of mentality that doesn't feel right about enjoying anything without giving it a bullshit ten dollar name. If you are going to make love, make love or fuck or screw or grouse in the goodie or something else specific. The chair I am sitting in is keeping my fat ass off the floor and, therefore, I feel safe in saying that that chair and I have some sort of relationship.)

-- 8 --

And now Saul Bellow has the Nobel Prize for Literature. I don't knock Bellow as a writer; I haven't been able to read enough of him to know whether or not he's any good. I read HENDERSON THE RAIN KING so many years ago that I can't remember anything about it. His novel MR. SAMMLER'S PLANET came out about the same time as 2001. I remember a review of the book said it was about the pressing problems of the urban intellectual. About the same time, Stanley Kubrick said that the main group that complained most about his movie were the little band of academically oriented critics that didn't think anything worthy of examination that didn't fit into their conglomeration of neuroses. The motives of a race that went around seeding the cosmos with black monoliths could no more be evaluated by human beings than the motives of a scientist could be considered by a microbe under a microscope. Which, I think, puts the pressing problems of the urban intellectual very much in their place.

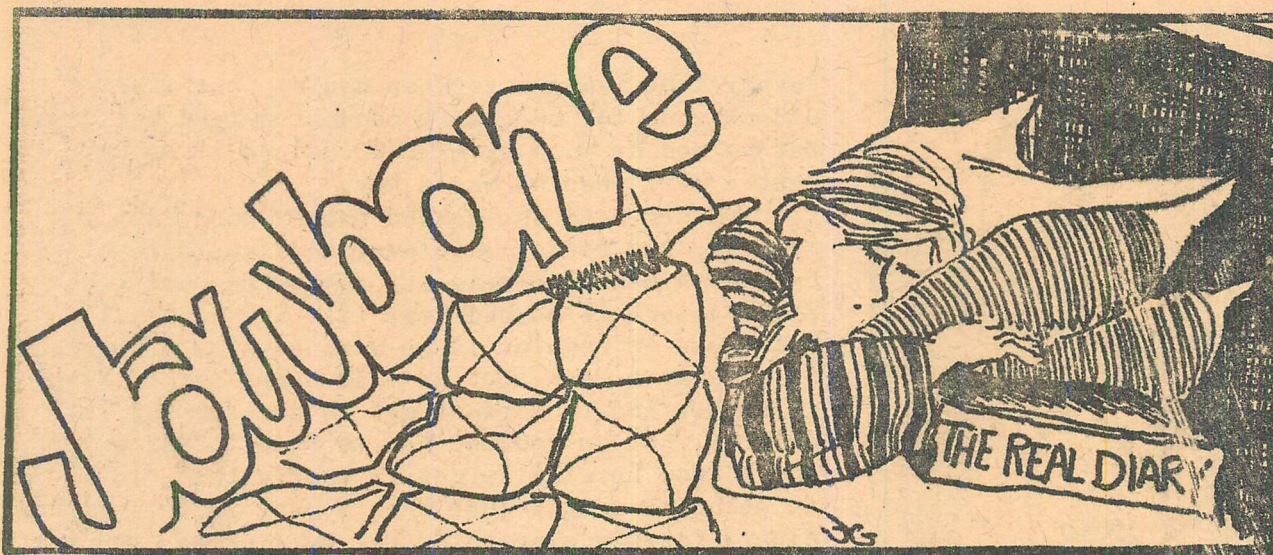
Robert Anson Heinlein is a most imperfect writer but I venture to say that he has delighted, amazed, outraged, disgusted and, in other ways, affected the sensibilities and lives of more people than this school of Despair Chic. And I suspect that he will be read, enjoyed, and pondered for a while after a great deal of what is now considered literature has passed away and become footnotes for Master's Theses on "The Concept of Neurosis as a Way of Life."

So much of mainstream writing has fallen into the R.D. Laing fallacy: society drives people crazy and, if you don't go crazy, you must be a pretty insensitive person, a real, living, breathing clod. It is Gore Vidal's assertion that what passes today for real literature is not intended for the public. It is intended for critics and the head of the English Department. It goes back too, to what Samuel Eliot Morrison called the Germanic tradition of learning, that true art and knowledge is sacred and to be protected from the vulgar masses. As style becomes more eccentric, prose more impenetrable, the audience becomes smaller and, supposedly, more exclusive and becomes truly elite.

Two years ago I took an upper level course in Chaucer. According to the professor, a true scholar and gentleman named George Pace (he even looked like Chaucer,) old Geoff is the only writer in English who has never undergone a reverse. He was considered an artist in his own lifetime and all generations following him have revered him as a great writer. (There was even a time when Shakespeare was thought to be rather outmoded.)

I was most impressed, getting into the course, by how Chaucer seemed determined, all the time, that his audience should know exactly what he was talking about, that they were there to be entertained, delighted and thrilled as well, or in spite of being there to look into a mirror on life.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 34



+ Michael Carlson +

THE REAL DIARY OF A REAL BOY, Henry A. Shute (Chicago: Reilly & Lee, 1902)

A good book, like a good man, cannot be kept down. Whatever that means. This book has surfaced repeatedly in my life, and it is a damn funny book, and that is why I am going to tell you about it here.

My first contact with THE REAL DIARY came when I was young, and reading voraciously, a habit I continued until I burned out at age 14 and soon afterwards turned to comics and sf. I wouldn't return to "serious" reading for a number of years. At that time, however, I was lugging home as many books from the library as I could carry on a regular Saturday morning trip, and I was also reading a large stock of books inherited from my parents and their siblings. Things like a 1920s Book of Knowledge, which I have since lost to an uncle. I read that entire encyclopedia, most fascinated by the Maginot Line, for some reason, and learned innumerable bits of trivia, like why people sneeze, which I have since forgotten. There were my father's copies of the original Tom Swift books (I still have those, I hope, tucked away in the closet.) And there was THE REAL DIARY.

I often consider myself as growing up in the 30s. Certainly our neighborhood hadn't yet undergone the changes which now render it just another modern American town. And I was raised along lines of discipline and recreation which were probably passé in California before my parents were born, so reading these books never seemed to me as much of an exercise in nostalgia as they probably would to a child now. Maybe the books themselves wouldn't impress most children today. But looking at children's humor today, assuming that such a thing exists, the difference between Saturday morning cartoons and THE REAL DIARY is that the latter possesses an adult sense of humor. Sure it is set in the 1860s, but the humor is seriously funny, it grows out of a real, human situations, and even (especially) children can feel whether or not a certain device is authentic. Maybe that's why CRUSADER RABBIT was so good, and why I can't watch cartoons anymore.

In the introduction, Shute describes rummaging through an old closet and finding a box in which were stored all his childhood valuables, including fishhooks (one with the mummified remains of a worm still attached), marbles (one blood alley, two chinees, etc.), a bean-blower ("for school use--a weapon of considerable range and great precision when used with judgement behind a Buyot's Common School Geography."), a frog's hind leg ("extra dry") and a bluejay's wing ("very ditto") and a copy book inscribed "Diry". He then reprints the "Diry" in its entirety.

The obvious device that sets up all the book's laughter is the illiteracy of the author. Spelling is consistently phonetic, slightly more accurate and real than an average bill bissett poem.



PETER  
PAN!

WHERE  
ARE YOU?

Zzz,

"Father thot i aught to keep a diry, but i sed i didnt want to, because i coodent wright well enuf, but he sed he wood give \$1000 dollars if he had kept a diry when he was a boy.

Mother said she gessed nobody wood dass to read it, but father said everybody would tumble over each other to read it, anyhow he wood give \$1000 dollars if he had kept it. i told him i wood keep on regular if he wood give me a quarter of a dolar a week, but he said i had got to keep it anyhow and i. woodent get no quarter for it neither, but he woodent ask to read it for a year, and i know he will forget it beofre that, so i am going to wright just what i want in it. Father always forgets everything but my lickins. he remembers them every time you bet."

So young Henry keeps his diry, and through it we see just what a child's life was like in Exeter, New Hampshire, 186-. The most important things recorded in the diry, besides the inevitable weather ("Brite and fair", "rany") are the fights at school and at play. Who can lick who is the most telling part of a boy's identity:

"Micky Gould said he cood lick me and i said he want man enuf and he said if i wood come out behind the school house after school he wood show me and i said i wood and all the fellers hollered and said that they wood be there. But after school i thought i aught to go home and split my kindlings and so i went home. a feller aught to do something for his family anyway. i cood have licked him if i had wanted to."

They torment the students (stewdcats) at the prep school in town, watch cock-fights, catch toads, and find ways of getting in trouble that transcend the prosaic. One

of the surest ways is to get caught smoking hayseed cigars, which I suppose has its modern analog.

But it's not for me to repeat the book, or to try to draw any further relationships between 185- and 197- or whatever. I came across the book again when I saw a copy lying on my thesis advisor's desk; he teaches a course in children's literature, and a friend of his had brought A REAL DIARY to his attention, and lent it to him. The next time I was down at my parents' house I crawled into the closet and searched through the crates until I had uncovered my father's BLUEJACKET'S MANUAL, a BASEBALL REGISTER (1954), a 1961 INFORMATION PLEASE Almanac, and finally, the worn red copy of the book for which I'd been searching.

I felt like Shute himself, brushing the dust out of my eyes, as I began to read and felt all the incidents come back to me. It was the attitude I missed; I wanted to share with those youngsters the worldview we'd shared, so many years apart, so few years ago. Shute has an appendix, where he lists all the characters and describes what became of them (shades of AMERICAN GRAFFITI). He muses on the spirit of rebellion that inspired himself and his friends, and marvels at the continued kindness so many of those adults he tormented showed him in the ensuing years.

I'd like to think it was because those people, in that small New England town, remembered, and understood their own childhood, and nothing would seem more natural to

34  
them than forbearance. I like to think it's an ability our generation hasn't quite lost, though sometimes I wonder if the "artificial" lives we are presented to fill so much of our time hasn't robbed us of a link to other people.

Children's books today would never be as wild as this one is. I doubt if they could be as much fun. I doubt if they really are "better" for children, or if they are anything but time-consumers, teaching consumers to be how to use, to buy, to do anything but do anything. Hell. I could tell you about Beany, Pewt, and Skinny Bruce; or tell you what became of them. I could tell you about more of the stunts or of the day to day life that seems so fascinating. But I want to keep this short. I don't want to fill you up with too much, what's been said so far is too important. I'll just leave you with this passage:

father goes to boston and works in the custum house...father says he works likes time, but i went to boston once and father didnt do anything but tell stories about what he and Gim Melcher usted to do when he was a boy. once or twice when a man came in they would all be wrighting fast, when the man came in again i sed why do you all wright so fast when he comes in and stop when he goes out and the man sort of laffed and went out laffing, and the men were mad and told father not to bring that dam little fool again.

Somehow that passage speaks more of growing up, speaks of more real humor, real life, than anything I've read in a long time.

Maybe I am lost in another time, I think, as I change the record on the stereo and finish my cup of instant coffee. There's a good movie on at midnight tonight. I should call my folks and tell them I'll be driving 410 miles to visit them.

What's changed? Not so much, I think, as I finish typing this article and hand the borrowed book to Theresa to read. I hope you get a chance to as well.

\*\*\*\*\*

#### Notes Made While Waiting... (Continued from page 31)

Ernest Hemingway wrote on the death of Joseph Conrad:

It is agreed by most of the people I know that Conrad is a bad writer, just as it is agreed that T.S. Eliot is a good writer. If I knew that by grinding Mr. Eliot into a fine dry powder and sprinkling that powder over Mr. Conrad's grave Mr. Conrad would appear, looking very annoyed at the forced return, and commence writing I would leave for London early tomorrow morning with a sausage grinder.

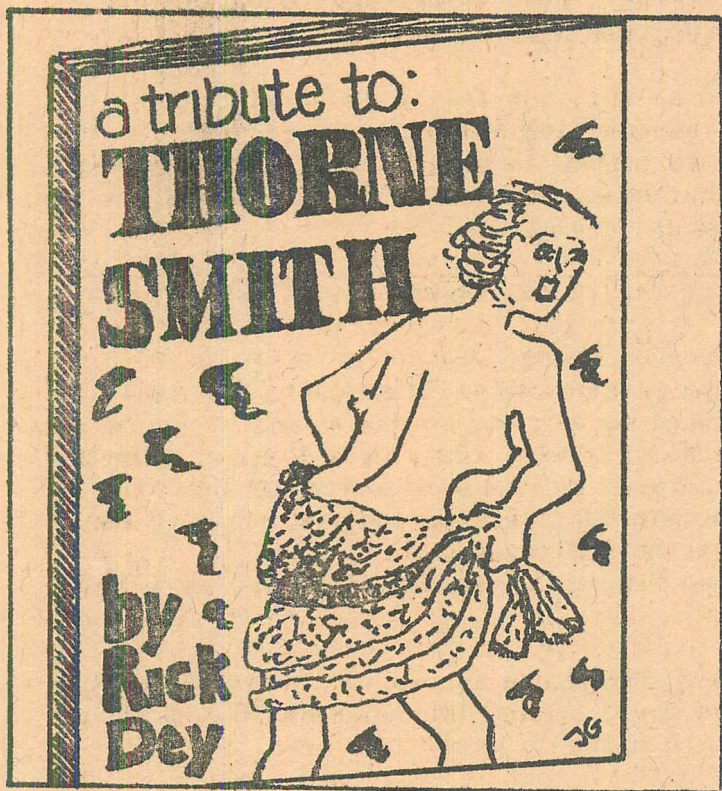
Well, Mr Chaucer has survived along with Mr. Shakespeare and Mr. Conrad and several others that the academics gave up on. I think Mr. Heinlein and several others from our microcosm will manage the same. We read Mark Twain while a technically better writer like William Dean Howells survives mainly on the Required Reading List. Gore Vidal is a most uneven writer but JULIAN and BURR and 1876 will go right on being bought and read for a long time to come. He knows better than the convential wisdom, too. He will survive.

-- 9 --

If you have found nothing here to offend you, it's not because I haven't tried. If you feel a need, let me know at 1501 Rosemary Lane, Columbia, Missouri 65201 and I'll find some way to irk you. Please enclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope. I reserve the right to issue rejection slips.

-- Turner

# BOTTOMS UP!



Fantasy fans, your attention, please! You say you crave red-blooded, two-fisted, he-man fantasy adventure? Gore-spattered goliaths in sweat-stained leather harness & jock straps? You say you hunger for great quests, heroic deeds, bloodied broadswords, eldritch dreads, horrors unnameable? Well, you may be missing half the fun.

How about a bumbling, middle-aged banker harrassed by two mischievous, horny, & alcoholic ghosts? A man who finds himself transformed into a succession of creatures ranging from a horse to a rooster-headed dinosaur lizard? Or a hard-drinking husband & wife who find themselves inside each other's bodies? A bishop & a gaggle of Staten Island ferry commuters marooned on a nudist colony? A group of oversexed Greek gods & goddesses who animate statues of themselves & go out on the town? Or a group of drunken socialites who regain their youth in an enchanted fountain & cap their drunken orgy by careening through Manhattan in the nude in a stolen fire engine? Or a man yanked through a doorway into a parallel world?

A man whose flesh vanishes at inappropriate moments? Or a dull, conservative millionaire who discovers he has married a witch? These are the kind of adult fantasies you won't find in the Lin Carter series. These are some of the novels of Thorne Smith, the F. Scott Fitzgerald of fantasy, and one of the most famous obscure figures in American fantasy fiction.

One of the great forbidden thrills of my boyhood days in the mid-1940s was sneaking up to my bedroom with certain magazines & books on the parental Condemned Reading list, among them WEIRD TALES (smuggled home from my grandfather's pulp magazine assortments), NIGHT & DAY magazine (very spicy pics), historical novels like FOREVER AMBER, Serious novels like STUDS LONIGAN and CHRIST IN CONCRETE, & of course, the Thorne Smith novels.

These blasphemous, X-rated tomes were mostly squirreled away by my parents on the top shelves of cabinets & bookcases, along with novels by Donald Henderson Clarke, Jack Woodford, Frank Yerby & the Heavy Stuff like PSYCHOPATHIA SEXUALIS & SANE SEX LIFE. One at a time these naughty volumes would be removed by me, the surrounding books & objects fluffed up to conceal the cavity, & then they would be smuggled up to my bedroom in the unfinished attic. I spent uncounted nights in this literary self-abuse, the blanket tented over my head, poring over those pulpy Armed Forces Edition pages illuminated by the saffron glow of a stolen flashlight.

Looking back on it now, the most memorable of those wonderfully wasted, sleepless nights were not the ones spent goggling at the childishly erotic & ghoulish artwork of Lee Brown Coye for the morbid, spectral tales he illustrated in WEIRD TALES (another time for that), but the ones spent reading Thorne Smith novels, laughing in smothered hysteria, thrashing of legs & drumming of heels & fists on the bedding, hanging half out of

my bed every other page, hardly able to breathe from the choked-off laughter (what if I wake up my folks?), hardly able to read from the tears of laughter streaming down my face. I was a Thorne Smith junkie.

---

"Without so much as turning a hair I freely admit that I am one of America's greatest realists. And I'm not at all sure that this calm statement of fact does not take in all other nations, including the Scandinavian."

---

Thorne Smith died in 1934, at age forty-two. During the last 16 years of his life he produced a volume of poetry, a children's book, & around 13½ novels. His most famous creation, TOPPER, as personified by Roland Young, appeared in 3 films in the late 1930s, and became a radio series. TOPPER was reborn in the early 1950s as a television series, this time played by Leo G. Carroll (of U.N.C.L.E. directorship fame). His notion of a contemporary man marrying a witch appeared as a film in 1942 (I MARRIED A WITCH), & doubtlessly inspired the hit television series BEWITCHED in the 1960s. During these decades, Thorne Smith's work found a large and enthusiastic audience, holding its own against one tide of propriety after another -- the fantasy novels were all sprightly, vivacious, & erotic in an amused, teasing sort of way. I know that my father considered them funny but naughty, & therefore Too Old for me, but after I read them anyway & began snooping around the libraries for more, I discovered that the Library Grundys had decided that they were too naughty for anybody. Along with that other defiler of minds & morals, L. Frank Baum, the man's work was banned from the libraries. Well, Edgar Rice Burroughs & a few other enormously popular authors were also victimized by this vicious snobbery, but I wasn't aware of it at the time.

A 1953 edition of THE GLORIOUS POOL boasted that 12,250,206 copies of Thorne Smith novels had been sold to date, in Pocket Book editions alone, almost all of them embellished by the artwork of Herbert Rouse, an illustrator whose work perfectly captured the arch, ribald flavor of Smith's novels. At any rate, his mass readership appeared to survive the Nightmare Decade, & then began to taper off in the 1960s & 70s to a more fannish readership of sentimental oldtimers and fantasy fans. I suspected that the puckish humor of the plots & characterizations, and the oddly baroque, convoluted style of his prose may have lost their impact in the more open atmosphere of the last decade or so. My suspicions were confirmed in 1974 when I contacted an old friend and chronicler of Thorne Smith -- H. Allen Smith, a puckish humorist in his write. He responded to my query about TS in part:

I appreciate your concern over the fact that recent generations ignore him & his splendid books. A couple of years back someone wrote me & said there was good evidence that the kids were taking him up & that a revival was in prospect. His agent (& mine) got out several of his books & reread them & reported back to me that they are pretty dated -- in content & in mood -- straight out of the 1920s & early 1930s.

Well, since the same could well be said of F. Scott Fitzgerald's work, I'm optimistic that Thorne Smith will also survive the tides of change. I know his work has survived the tides in my life -- I can read him right out in the open now, & still find him delightful. And as for period flavor, it's who climbs in & out of the step-ins that counts with me, not what they call them currently (and I don't think the current term, panties, is any improvement at all.)

---

"Like life itself my stories have no point and get absolutely nowhere. And like life they are a little mad and purposeless. They resemble those people who watch with placid concentration a steam shovel digging a large hole in the ground...They are like the man who dashes madly through traffic only to linger aimlessly on the opposite corner watching a fountain pen being demonstrated in a shop window."

---

Thorne Smith was born at the Annapolis Naval Academy in 1892. His father, James Thorne Smith, was a Commodore & supervisor of the Port of New York during World War I. After being graduated from Dartmouth, the younger Smith obtained employment with a New York advertising firm. When the United States finally involved itself in The Great War, Smith enlisted in the Navy as a common seaman, rose to chief bos'n's mate & edited the service paper BROADSIDE. On its back pages appeared Smith's first character, Biltmore Oswald, a more literate version of the dumbbell letter writers created by Ring Lardner & Edward Streeter (DERE MABLE). This material appeared in book form in 1918 as BILTMORE OSWALD, rapidly followed by a sequel, OUT O'LUCK. Oswald & his creator enjoyed a sales of 70,000 copies, & with the end of the war, both sank out of sight. Smith settled into what was then referred to as the bohemian life, renting space in Greenwich Village at a domicile known as Greenwich Village Inn, rubbing elbows with such fellow garret rats as Sinclair Lewis, John Reed, Jack Conroy & other Village luminaries of the era. The only work during this period that saw print were poems, appearing mostly in the magazines SMART SET & THE LIBERATOR. In 1919 they appeared in book form as HAUNTS & BY-PATHS.

Whether or not the Good Life was sustaining the spirit, it was not sustaining life & limb. Smith returned to the ad agency & moved to a small, tacky house in New Jersey in order to provide for himself & his new wife Celia. He rose to copy executive class with the ad agency (one of the major New York firms), but his book manuscripts were being rejected with depressing regularity. The appearance of his daughters Marion & June doubtless added to the pressure to produce a winner, and, I suppose, to the pressure to settle down & turn his back on his brief flurry of literary celebrity.

Sometime during the summer of 1925, as H. Allen Smith tells it, Smith was seated before his typewriter in the hopelessly neglected back yard of his shabby New Jersey home, attired in sneakers & shorts & trying to come up with The Great American Novel, or anything else anyone would buy to help get him out of debt. Suddenly he saw a dog rummaging about in the grass at the far end of the yard, all but its wagging tail obscured by the high, uncut grass. "He started thinking about a tail without a dog, & a dog without a tail. His imagination switched to human anatomy & he thought of legs without a body & a body without legs...The short story grew into a novel & the novel became the first of a series of fantastic tales that made Thorne Smith one of America's most popular humorists."

---

"Quite casually I wander into my plot, poke around with my characters for a while, then amble off, leaving no moral proved & no reader improved."

---

The first of these tales was TOPPER, published in 1926 by Doubleday, Doran & Co., Smith's prime publisher from this time on. TOPPER, like all of Thorne Smith's best novels, should not be spoiled by too much advance synopsis. Cosmo Topper, a stuffy, middle-aged banker, finds himself an unwilling participant in the drunken escapades of the deceased George & Marion Kerby, who materialized occasionally in whole or in parts, depending on how much ectoplasm they could round up at the moment. Their equally deceased friends The Colonel & his dog Oscar, who never got the hang of materializing more than one part of himself at a time--usually only the tail. The dog, like Smith's characters,

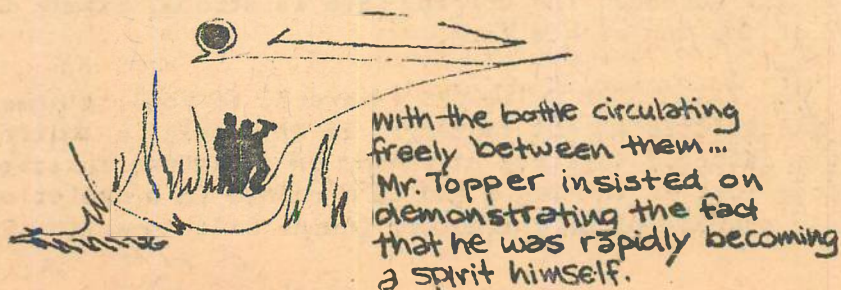
& Smith himself, was a heavy drinker. In the course of his progressive liberation <sup>38</sup>from conformity, Topper found himself constantly dealing with animated step-ins without legs, & animated legs without step-ins.

TOPPER was a smash hit. It was followed in 1927 by DREAM'S END, a smash flop. Smith either reached into his reject hopper for an old favorite or decided that now was the time to show his old Greenwich Village stuff. In any event, DREAM'S END sank without a trace. It was set in the wild salt marshes of a desolate seacoast & dealt with a poet torn between his passion for a musky sexpot & his exalted love for a delicate, spiritual type who was unfortunately married to a sadistic brute. The critics were not too kind: "It is sad to see so goodly a craftsman as the author of TOPPER here wasting his admirable prose in a wallow of fevered flapdoodle."

With his next novel, THE STRAY LAMB, Thorne Smith got back on the track & more or less stayed there for the rest of his career. T. Lawrence Lamb, a bored & stifled financier, confides to a strange little russet man that he'd like to see life from a different angle some day, & wakes up the next morning as a horse. In bed beside his peevish, promiscuous wife, Lamb finds himself straying from one body to another, none of them human, except for the brief interludes when he finds himself back in his own skin, attempting to handle Sandra, an extremely foxy lady who has eyes for him. During his other manifestations, which range from a seagull to a kangaroo,, Lamb learns more & more about his own real nature, & about humanity at large. At his inevitable divorce trial he becomes transformed into a monstrosity with a rooster head, lumbering, dinosaur body & long lizard tail, finding safety from a bloodthirsty mob in the hovel of the town simpleton who befriends him as a kindred spirit. This is easily the most thoughtful & intriguing of all his novels, & its quality did not escape the reviewers of 1929: "THE STRAY LAMB, with all its hilarity & fantasy, is a wise & tender tale beneath the glitter of its bizarre style. It has a hearty longing for the good things of the world & spirit."

Thorne Smith returned to a small, cluttered apartment in the Village, where he settled down to a steady regimen of writing, cashing royalty checks, & drinking. It was at this time that H. Allen Smith, then a neophyte journalist & rabid Thorne Smith fan, sought him out for an interview. He was working on a book at that time, watched carefully by his wife Celia & his agent Lucy Goldthwaite. They were all trying gamely to keep him away from booze until his ms. was finished. H. Allen was told that if T. Smith got his hands on even one drink, he would be off on a drunk for six months. The Smiths visited back & forth from that time on, & as H. Allen phrased it, Thorne was indeed a caution with a bottle.

The next Thorne Smith novel, DID SHE FALL? appeared in 1930 & was another unfortunate change of pace. DSF? was an attempt at a sprightly murder mystery, in which a sexy bitch is pushed off a cliff (to her death), & various suspects with likely motives are presented to the reader. The novel survived in reprints for over 20 years, doubtless based more on the fame of the writer than the quality of the work. Dashiell Hammett annihilated it: "At times the book approaches something akin to literature, but over-writing, rickety construction, triteness of invention & a flabby sort of whimsicality make it in the end only an indifferent detective story."



1931 was a good year for Thorne Smith. He produced two of his best novels & a children's book, LAZY BEAR LANE. The novels, NIGHT LIFE OF THE GODS, & TURNABOUT, marked a return to his best creative style -- screwball farce blended with white-collar fantasy. The novels produced during this final period of his career seem to reflect an acceptance of his special gift -- to amuse & entertain.

THE NIGHT LIFE OF THE GODS has all the familiar Thorne Smith plot elements & characterizations -- so much so, in fact, that they tend to overwhelm the sharp quality of reality that gives Smith's best novels their special balance of the concrete & the fanciful. His hero this time out is a routine-ridden scientist, Hunter Hawk, who discovers the secret of turning people to stone & stone to people. The celebration of this discovery inadvertantly turns into a drunken spree, during which the scientist meets Meg, a sexy, 900-year-old leprechan's daughter. She encourages him to animate eight statues of gods and goddesses on display at the Metropolitan Museum. The animated statues prove to be just as capricious & oversexed as the deities they represented, and, accompanied by a dog named Blotto, the entire group go careening up & down Broadway for the span of the novel. NIGHT LIFE was characterized by one reviewer as "completely committed to irresponsible nonsense--a nonsense which, delectable though it is, grows monotonous for want of a bit of matter-of-fact sense."

As if in response to this charge, Thorne Smith's next novel, TURNABOUT, was a brilliantly realistic fantasy -- urbane, witty, grounded firmly in the mundane reality of residential life, but best of all, funny as hell. As a result of a tiff staged in the presence of a still-potent stone god concerning how much better each could perform the other's role, Tim & Sally Willows wake up to find themselves inside each other's body. The situations Smith develops from this premise are too funny for words other than his own, & in my opinion if you try only one Thorne Smith novel on for size, this is the one. I have fallen out of bed, choking and paralyzed with laughter while reading & rereading this novel more times than I can remember. Among the many slapstick highlights of this raucous fantasy are Tim's drunken efforts to deliver a speech to a church group, his hands groping & digging at his wife's skirts for the pants pocket until, at the peak of an impassioned defense of the downtrodden streetwalkers of the world, the skirt bursts from its moorings; his crushing put-down of a lecherous neighbor; his horrified discovery that his wife's body is pregnant & that he will be the first man in the world to have a baby. One of the many enthused reviewers expressed my sentiments about this book perfectly: "Rarely indeed is a book genuinely funny on every page."

Thorne Smith was on his own by now, supported by the steady sales of his novels, sustained by family & friends, and off on long benders between manuscripts. In many respects, he lived the life he wrote about. When it was time to be dried out & prepped for another novel, he would be rounded up & transported to a country sanatorium. "They'd take me out & stand up against a brick wall, mother naked, & they'd turn a fire hose on me. That was a thing I resented, bitterly."

In 1932, Smith produced two successful novels. The first, TOPPER TAKES A TRIP, was the long-awaited sequel to his most popular novel, chronicling the further adventures of his bemused banker. The book is dedicated to Roland Young, the actor who would later portray Topper on the screen. The writing here is strong, lively & confident, the work of a writer at the top of his form.

The second novel was THE BISHOP'S JAEGER (drawers, to you), a novel rich in every Thorne Smith characteristic except fantasy. In this tale, a stuffy bishop & various Thorne Smith types gathered together at random on a routine crossing of the Staten Island ferry become lost in the fog & end up marooned in a nudist colony. This novel features a classic example of an obligatory Thorne Smith scene: the rounding up of a

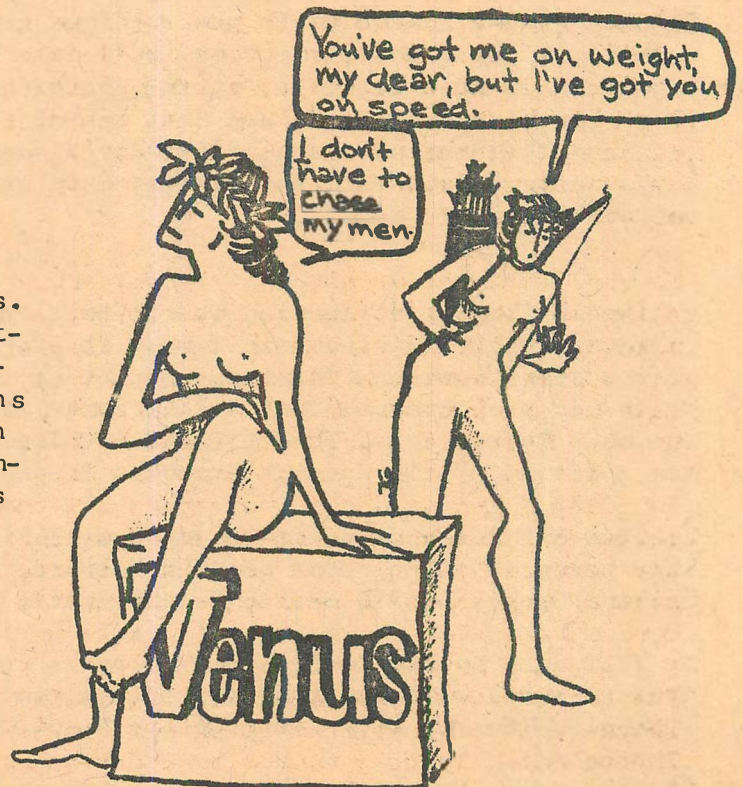
group of secretly naked & drunken revelers before a bemused night court judge. In this case, the nude heroine has a noisy & obstreperous duck stuffed under her MacIntosh.

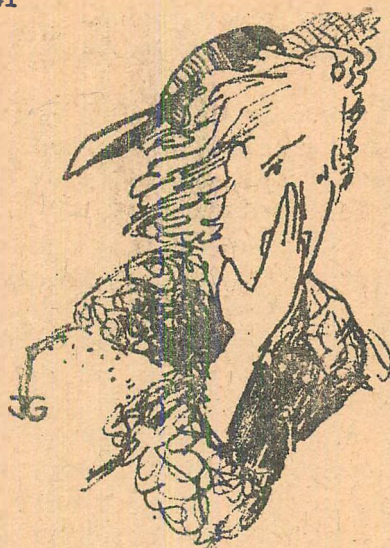
By 1933, Thorne Smith was riding the crest of his fame--vacations in France, a winter home in Sarasota, Florida, fame & fortune as a major American humorist, & employment in Hollywood as a screen writer. Thorne Smith the man, however, was not eclipsed by Thorne Smith, the literary figure. In his anthology DESERT ISLAND DECAMERON, H. Allen Smith recounted a typical example of Thorne Smith at large. After concluding some business with his New York publisher one morning, Smith, resplendent in loud sports jacket with cornflower in lapel & cane in hand, was observed to pause before an open manhole, surrounded by a pipe railing & the standard MEN WORKING sign. He blew a kiss to the Doubleday employee who yelled out a greeting to him, hung his jacket on the railing & disappeared down the manhole for the duration of the morning. At noon, a half-dozen or so grimy sewer workers emerged, followed by Smith. Each man sat down at the curb with his lunchbox, with Smith seated solemnly at the end of the line. There was little conversation. Smith received half a sandwich & a banana. He pulled a half filled bottle from his hip pocket & passed it up the line. Each workman solemnly took a swig from it. They all sat staring silently at the traffic for a while, until one of the workmen rose, stretched & returned down the manhole, followed by his fellow workers, with Smith bringing up the rear. No one knew when Smith finally emerged & went on his way, & when H. Allen Smith queried him about it later, he said he couldn't remember any of the details.

Smith settled in as a scenarist at MGM & drank heavily whenever he could get away with it. The two novels produced in this year (1933) display the old ribald humor, but generate an overall sense of a tired, overextended writer, a writer imitating himself. The first, RAIN IN THE DOORWAY, used a classic fantasy premise--a mundane, phlegmatic individual yanked into a parallel world in which all his smothered appetites & desires are stimulated & satisfied. One of RAIN's reviewers commented, "There are moments when the fun is spun out with too much talk but the narrative portions have a brisk & saucy ingenuity."

Smith wrapped up 1933 with SKIN & BONES, in which Quintus Bland, a lacklustre fashion photographer, succumbs to fumes from a fluoroscopic concoction & becomes a living skeleton at inappropriate moments. By now, Smith's critics & readers were getting restive about the overuse of a previously successful formula. "There are signs in (SKIN & BONES) that Mr. Smith has begun to reduce his humorous inventions to a convenient formula, & that in doing so he has lost something of the spontaneity & the irrepressible wit which made THE STRAY LAMB, for instance, so delightful."

Perhaps stung by such criticisms from reviewers & friends, Smith produced a fresh & vigorous fantasy in 1934. THE GLORIOUS POOL had all the expected elements of a Thorne Smith farce-fantasy, but displayed much more vitality & invention than the previous 2 novels. This time Smith explored





*A new light  
came into Mrs.  
Topper's eyes. It  
was the light of  
despair masking  
behind outraged  
modesty.*

the ancient dream of regaining lost youth. His hero Rex Pebble, another bored, middle-aged financier, moons about his estate, lamenting his empty affluence & dividing his time & loyalties among his wife Sue, his plump, long-time mistress Spray Summers, his Japanese servant Nockashima & his bloodhound Henry, (frustrated because he has lost his sense of smell.) A marble nymph nicknamed Baggage who graces the patio fountain comes to life & turns the waters of the pool into a fountain of youth. At the climax of a typical Thorne Smith cocktail party--full of drunken grappling, groping & clever remarks, Pebble & the rest of the entourage go skinny-dipping in the enchanted waters & emerge 25 years younger

& horny as hell. The gay escapades that flesh out the remainder of the novel involve the group's running amuck in a department store after hours, careening naked (under unbuttoned raincoats) through Manhattan on a stolen fire engine & the obligatory night court scene in which they drive the judge up the wall. In the course of the tale Rex & his friends discover that they have been suffering not so much from worn-out flesh as worn-out spirits.

Paul Allen, reviewing the novel in BOOKS acknowledged that Smith was now in a class by himself: "This book...is too quizzical to permit us to make the usual solemn critical appraisal. Instead, let us merely say that when most modern novels leered, Thorne Smith gave us a mocking guffaw."

By July, 1934, Thorne Smith was a famous fantasy humorist. He was also still drinking heavily, working for the movies, well into his next novel, & in general overextending himself. On June 21, 1934, at the age of 42, he died of a heart attack at his home in Sarasota, Florida. He had left behind 16 books (approximately one a year), 3 short stories (the best of which, "Birthday Present", appeared in REDBOOK in 1934), a devoted assortment of friends & associates, & an army of fanatical readers. However, there was still more to come.

\* \* \* \* \*

Hollywood finally discovered Thorne Smith's work in 1937. TOPPER appeared and achieved instant & enduring cinematic fame. It starred Smith's old friend Roland Young as Topper, & Cary Grant and Constance Bennett as the crooked ghosts. The film was also gifted by lively performances from Billie Burke, Allan Mowbray, Hedda Hopper & Eugene Pallette. A second Topper film, TOPPER TAKES A TRIP, appeared in 1939, minus Cary Grant but with the addition of the waspish Franklin Pangborn.

In 1940 Hal Roach directed a leaden & lacklustre version of TURNABOUT. The film had star power in the persons of John Hubbard, Carol Landis, Adolphe Menjou, Mary Astor, William Garga, Donald Meek & Majorie Main, but was a cinematic bomb.

By 1941 only Roland Young & Billie Burke remained for TOPPER RETURNS, a comedy-murder mystery based on the characters. This time the Kerbys were played by Joan Blondell & Dennis O'Keefe, ably supported by Carol Landis & Patsy Kelly.

In this year, Thorne Smith's unfinished novel THE PASSIONATE WITCH was completed by novelist Norman Matson, to the uncritical delight of Smithophiles everywhere. The

hero, Wallace Wooly, Jr., is cast from the basic Smith mold--a timid, vegetarian millionaire brought up on vitamins, ice-water & carrot juice, who finds himself precipitously married to a willful, oversexed bitch named Jennifer who quickly reveals herself to be a full-fledged witch as well. Mr. Wooly is drawn reluctantly into a series of fantastic situations until, at novel's end, Jennifer receives her just desserts, & Wooly discovers his animal spirits & regains his freedom. The reviewers damned the book with faint praise, but acknowledged that the posthumous collaboration had lived up to expectations. "No one would ever know that any but the shaky Smith hand had set up these fantastic creatures & more incredible situations."

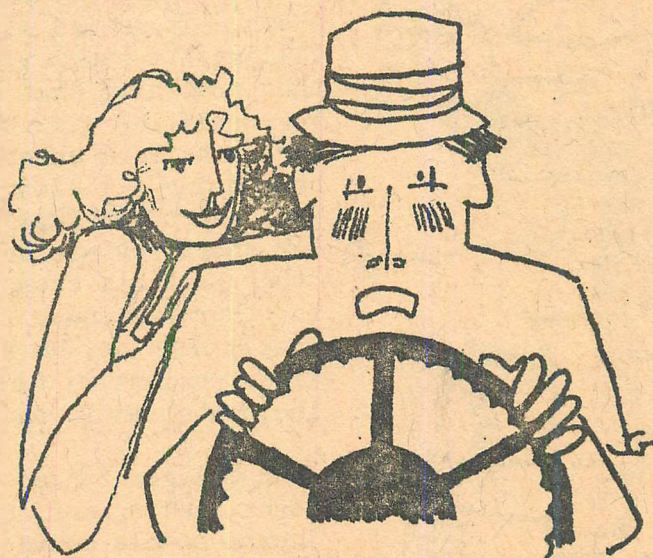
In 1942, a year after its initial publication, a film version of THE PASSIONATE WITCH was produced, retitled I MARRIED A WITCH. The plot was altered substantially, the character of Jennifer gentled down, but the special effects & cast were superb: Frederick March, Veronica Lake, Robert Benchley, Susan Hayward and Cecil Kellaway. The direction by Rene Clair was firm & lively.

To the best of my knowledge no other films were based on Thorne Smith plots or characters. A TOPPER series was heard on radio, again starring the superb Roland Young, & during the early 1950s television picked up on the idea with a sadly denatured & undersexed TOPPER series, carried mostly by a bumbling & sputtering Leo G. Carroll as Topper, & a martini-lapping St. Bernard. There appears to have been no further media usage of Smith material from the mid-1950s on, other than pocket book reprints of his novels, almost all of which remained in print until the early 1960s. In 1964 the hit television series BEWITCHED plundered the basic concept of THE PASSIONATE WITCH, casting jug-eared, pop-eyed Dick York as the husband, Elizabeth Montgomery as his witch wife & Agnes Moorehead as his bitchy mother-in-law.

---

"The more I think about it the more I am convinced that I'm a trifle cosmic. My books are as blindly unreasonable as nature. They have no more justification than a tiresomely high mountain or a garrulous & untidy volcano. Unlike the great idealists & romancers who insist on a beginning & a middle & an ending for their stories, mine possess none of these definite parts. You can open them at any page. You will be equally mystified if not revolted. I am myself."

---



(THE NEBULOUS LAP)

And out of the stillness a voice spoke to Mr Topper. "Topper," it said, "Topper, perhaps you do not realize you are sitting on my wife's lap -- or do you?"

Thorne Smith lives on, of course, on UHF syndicated reruns, lateshow movies, & best of all, in the used bookstores. The novels offer qualities & pleasure the other media could not: a playful, buoyant, zesty use of language & an arch celebration of ways sexuality makes fools of us all. Smith's innocent naughtiness was the despair of his publishers during his lifetime (he said that they cut out 20% of everything he wrote), but the remaining 80% nurtured the sense of wonder in millions of readers & viewers for generation after generation, and in my opinion helped substantially to loosen up national inhibitions & awake animal appetites. Carl Van Doren, one of the few literary critics ever to take Thorne Smith seriously summed up his work & sensibility succinctly in THE AMERICAN NOVEL:

The books have no problems & no penalties, since the plots are cheerfully irresponsible. They would be shocking if they were not so funny. Though the world Thorne Smith created is not in the least real, it is not remote in place or time. With an instinct for nonsense he took the smart life of his own day & let it run wild & free in his novels.

Mickey Spillane once said that he was a Writer, while Norman Mailer was an Author. Thorne Smith had the same conception of himself--as a writer, that is--and considered the enthusiasm generated by his work to be no more than a passing fad. He was a kindly, generous man, fond of dogs, cats, guppies, children & detective novels. His conversation, as H. Allen Smith recalled it, was full of the trenchant wit & urbane mentality displayed in his novels. He had the personal modesty & professional toughness of the true craftsman & artist. I think I'll pick up this yellowed edition of TOPPER, round up a flashlight, & go to bed.

\*\*\*\*\*

NOTEBOOKLINGS continued from page 5



the missionary position

Lesleigh and I have been active with WORT's Madison Review of Books, which produces short pre-recorded reviews which are broadcast between music programming, and also we've helped put together some of the weekly half hour shows. It seemed strange at first to be filling the ether with my own words -- wasn't that something that only Broadcast Media Personalities did? Only Stars? But it soon became to seem something like what we have been doing all along with Starling, and just what all other fanzine publishers are doing. Our short reviews are contributions to other people's shows, just like contributions to other fanzines. The half hour show is a weekly fanzine. We worry about covers and illustrations in fanzines, and theme and incidental music on the radio.

John Ohliger formed the Madison Review of Books last summer and since then has been an inexhaustable source of energy and inspiration. Publishers of all sorts, large and small, have shown their interest and support by sending many hundreds of books for reviews. And an ever increasing number of volunteers, somewhere around fifty people, are helping with the Review. So stay tuned.