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FALL 1979

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CULTURAL CORRESPONDENCE

SPECIAL DOUBLE ISSUE!

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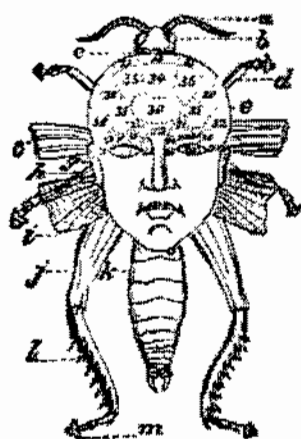
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CULTURAL CORRESPONDENCE

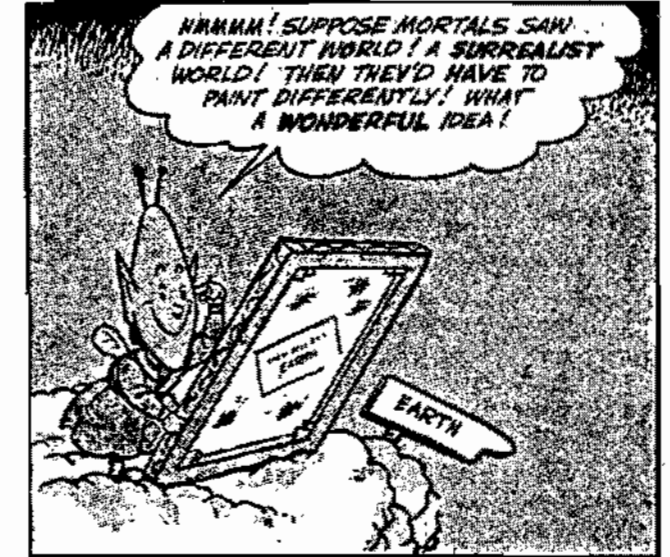
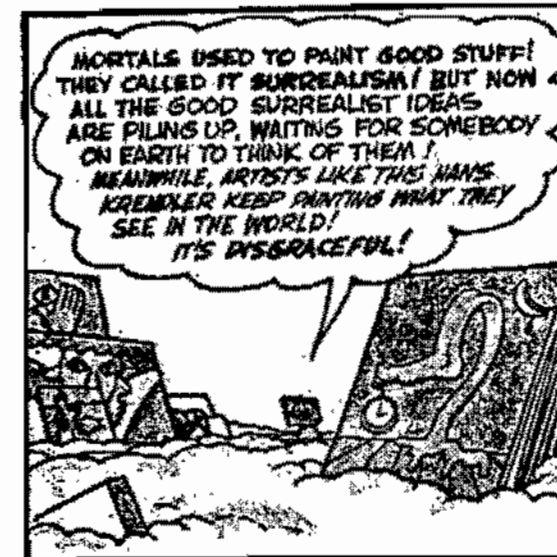


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Robert GREEN: ink drawing (1979)



From "Captain Marvel and the Surrealist Imp" (CAPTAIN MARVEL, May 1948)

SURREALISM and its POPULAR ACCOMPLICES

It probably started in poetry; almost everything does.
— Raymond Chandler

An appetite for the impossible, lust for adventure, readiness for the marvelous; an appeal to exaltation, acceptance of risk, scorn for pretense, hatred of sham; an expectation of the triumph of love, insistence on emotions experienced to the hilt, and a passion for life lived wondrously *on the brink*: These qualities of the best in popular culture are no less qualities of surrealism.

This issue of *Cultural Correspondence* assembles a number of writings by surrealists of the past and present, focusing on popular expression in literature, radio, comics, movies, television, music, dance and the plastic arts, with the immediate aim of exploring this common ground, and with the larger hope of advancing on it.

Surrealism's warm responsiveness to popular culture is one of the features that from the start have distinguished it from all other intellectual currents. If the bourgeoisie see in popular culture only the barbarous caterwauling of unlettered riffraff, too many would-be revolutionaries see in

it nothing but insidious capitalist ideology calculated to dupe the masses. As far from the laughable idealism of the former as from the miserable mechanistic materialism of the latter, surrealists approach this question (and all others) *dialectically*, and in the spirit of André Breton's cardinal principle that "criticism can exist only as a form of love."

The German romantic Franz von Baader, in his *Secret Teachings of Martinez Pasqualis*, wrote that "if modern philosophy knows nothing of many sciences and powers which seemed important to ancient philosophy, we may conclude with Hegel that this privation constitutes a proof of what the human mind has lost." Popular culture maintains, and surrealism confirms, that these powers can be recovered — that the world, and everything in it, can and will be transformed according to *desire*. "Poetry must be made by all!" said Lautréamont. And this too is certain: The road forward is illumined not only by Hegel, Marx, Lenin and Freud, but also by Memphis Minnie, Ernie Kovacs, The Shadow and Bugs Bunny.

Like popular culture, surrealism allows us all to have our cake as well as to eat it.

Why settle for less?

American Horror



A. K. E. JANABY: collage (1979)

The chief contribution of American literature is horror. From first to last it has illustrated what C. L. R. James calls the uncertainties of life and the ultimate doom of Western Civilization's claim to escape the universal human fate. This is a negative Romanticism, to be sure, for no more hope is given for the collective promise of the lower classes than for the pretentious optimism of the bourgeoisie. But it contains a revolutionary kernel, nevertheless. In a society infatuated by the illusion of Progress, horror speaks to a human essence beyond History. Poet and writer strive to regain their ancient role: the magic storyteller who gains coherence through use of universal symbols, offering a break with current existence and all its limitations.

The depth of horror in the American spirit is shown by the first national literary classic, Michael Wigglesworth's *Day of Doom*, which remained for a century after its 17th century publication second only to the Bible in New England sales:

No heart so bold, but now grows cold .
and almost dead with fear
No eye so dry, but can not cry
and pour out many a tear.
Earth's potentates and pow'ful States,
Captains and Men of Might
Are quite abash'd, their courage dash'd
at this most dreadful sight . . .
The mountains smook, the Hills are shook
the Earth is rent and torn
As if she shall be clean dissolv'd
or from the Center born
The Sea doth roar, forsakes the shore
and shrinks away for fear;
The wild Beasts flee into the Sea
as soon as He draws near . . .

This reflects, of course, the morbid metaphysics of the Puritans, whose abstract intellectualism and bourgeois expectations separated them from the ritual spontaneity of the European peasant life they willfully left behind. The sense of impending calamity outlasted their specific culture, however, because each succeeding American generation learned afresh that material advancement alone could not satisfy an inner longing for some fateful resolution to the New World quest.

If reason and happiness did not prevail in this most ideal of human experiments, what of Man's fate? So political (and revolutionary) a personality as Tom Paine wondered anxiously about Dream Life, Imagination's rampant run over mental judgment in its hours of weakness. America's first major novelist, Charles Brockden Brown, at the turn of the 19th century, put these intuitive fears into several fantastic works, unified by the notion that Americans had escaped the Old World class society only to confront their inner selves — revealing the disastrous quality of sheer human existence and of ideas which (in Brockden Brown's own words) "can be accounted for by no established laws." The American Revolution may have triumphed. But this achievement, too, would pass finally to dust, and in its crumbling reveal a fearful inner decadence. Brockden Brown's confidant, William Dunlop, whose production of the gothic *Monks of Monk's Hall* was among the first triumphs of the American stage, foresaw the arena where the macabre spectacle of decline would be played out: the frontier, what

Dunlop called "the asylum of European crimes."

Here, especially in the Old Southwest, horror becomes popular culture and establishes American literature on its own turf. Here, the modes are settled for the horror to follow in all fields. Horror is a blankfaced joke, the linking of the terrible to the hysteria of Unreason, the lack of control over human events linking the two together. Here the ghosts play on the ideals of untrammeled individualist democracy, revealing beneath its superficial freedom the alienated struggle of all against all.

Southwestern writings took the solid ground of the ordinary frontiersman, who described with a straight face the incredible exaggerations of social life and nature into the utmost grotesquerie, or unraveled a cruel practical joke with what Max Eastman later described as the "perfectly naked angle of meaning," cracked and not "talked around" in European intellectual fashion. If this were a barbarian culture, drunkenness and licentiousness along with random violence endemic, what made the pioneer unique was his self-consciousness of his reversion as the basis for humor. Not for nothing had Baron Munchausen gone through twenty-four American editions by 1835 and had Daniel Boone sat around the campfire with *Gulliver's Travels*. In the face of the fantastic, the true agony of asocial existence grew more dim, and what Marius Bewley called the "illicit marriage of disease and rippling muscle, or horror and hearty laughter" actually soothed the isolate with an acceptable self-vision.

The ghoul may occupy a special place in medieval popular literature about the violation of the Dead; but a random frontier boatsman swears he eats corpses when he's ill. Augustus Longstreet, frontier politician and chronicler, wrote astonishing tales about dinner-and-dissection mixups of the baby in the stew, "Gander Pullings" of man torturing animal, endless physical and psychological violence. Frontiersmen talked tall about pulling the stars down from the skies, drinking from the moon, riding lightning and provoking rain, passing consciousness animistically to bears and wolves and in return acting out the ritual barbarity interpreted from animal life. The frontier woman in particular — one-eyed, hair-lipped, wooden-legged — defied all the traditional sanctity of civilized character. Like Lottie Richards, who personally "carried twenty eyes in her work-bag that she had picked out of the heads of certain gals of her acquaintance," she was as bestial as her mate, infinitely more savage than the Amerindian "savages" she did her share to eradicate. Behind the violence and mockery of civilized ways, cultural historian Constance Rourke saw better than anyone, lay the same emptiness of feeling that drove the Puritan to apocalyptic religion and Captain Ahab to stark madness: "Anger, love, hatred, remorse were absent; fear alone was revealed, but only in a distant and fragmentary fashion, only to cast away with laughter. If it created unities, the resilience of the comic spirit seemed a destructive agent, so blank were the spaces where emotion might have appeared. . . ."

The great writers — Poe, Twain, Bierce, even Melville — might disavow the heartlessness of the frontier. But they could not escape the alienation of spirit, the essential loneliness, which animated its sentiments. Each found the means to confront that emptiness and search out a road of escape, of transcendence, or ultimate acceptance that nothing fundamental in the human condition could truly be altered.

The fantastic shaded briefly into optimism with the utopian novels, above all Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward*. The defeat of indigenous radicalism, the splintering of potential revolutionary forces into Black and white, immigrant and native, male and female — these returned horror to its natural abode at the center of creative literature.

In the last decades of the 19th century, "Local Color" writers spoke with new vividness about the American decadence. In the West, Ambrose Bierce sketched out a comic diabolism which deprived the Civil

War of its crusader's mission, the "Winning of the West" of its pseudo-heroic spirituality, the entire American Dream of its claim to virtues and happiness. The land the pioneers had left behind, New England, sported a weird sentiment in its emptiness, where the brilliant Mary Wilkins Freeman depicted her heroines as almost ghosts already, deprived of true human contact. As Lovecraft said, the landscape had become one where "mere grotesqueness is very common; sly, malignant madness sometimes lurks around the corner." At the highest level of social critique, Bierce summed up the apocalyptic view of the future. His short story, "Ashes of the Beacon," looked ahead to the future American revolution amidst the "noise of arms, the shrieks of women and the red glare of the burning cities." Capitalist political pretensions, always a fraud, were to be crushed and obliterated by History.

This is the final horror and the final drawing of the political implications that have been centuries in the making. The intended American escape from the Old World past to the frontier, the search for a timeless small-property Republic, proves not only illusory but a mad and self-destructive concept for those who believe. Pessimistic of alternatives, writers of the political catastrophes etched into American self-consciousness the portent of a true 20th century dilemma: Socialism or Barbarism.

Ricardian Socialist George Lippard's *Quaker City* (1845) set the guidelines for a political horror in America. The day would come when Independence Hall would be torn down for a palace of the wealthy, and the American flag replaced by a banner of crowns and chains. The heavens weep as the constant refrain is heard in the background, "Woe to Sodom." The graveyards stir, and the dead rise en masse to avenge the ruin of the Republic by the avarice and cupidity of individualistic striving. Dedicated to Charles Brockden Brown, and set in the Philadelphia where the first workers' General Strike had risen and failed to alter the course of economic events, *Quaker City* depicts only catastrophe ahead.

Ignatius Donnelly's *Caesar's Column*, Jack London's *The Iron Heel* and a dozen other less notable works carry the catastrophe closer to our own world of international class conflict. Socialist novelist George Allen England, in his *Darkness and Dawn* (serialized just before the First World War in *Munsey's Magazine*) conveyed the expectation of disaster to the center of contemporary popular literature. Just as socialists are on the verge of creating a new society, the entire society is blotted out

(England's commentary on the world conflict?), hero and heroine find themselves alone surviving a vast and mysterious destruction. Only after trials and agonies, stumbling through laughable architectural wreckage and inhuman mutation, do the couple help to found a new order where all is pure and socialistic. Thus the moral: first Armageddon where America pays for its sins; afterwards, with luck, the rebuilding on a new and universal basis. The blood-price must be paid for a ruined and ruinous civilization, above all for the hubris of American Exceptionalism.

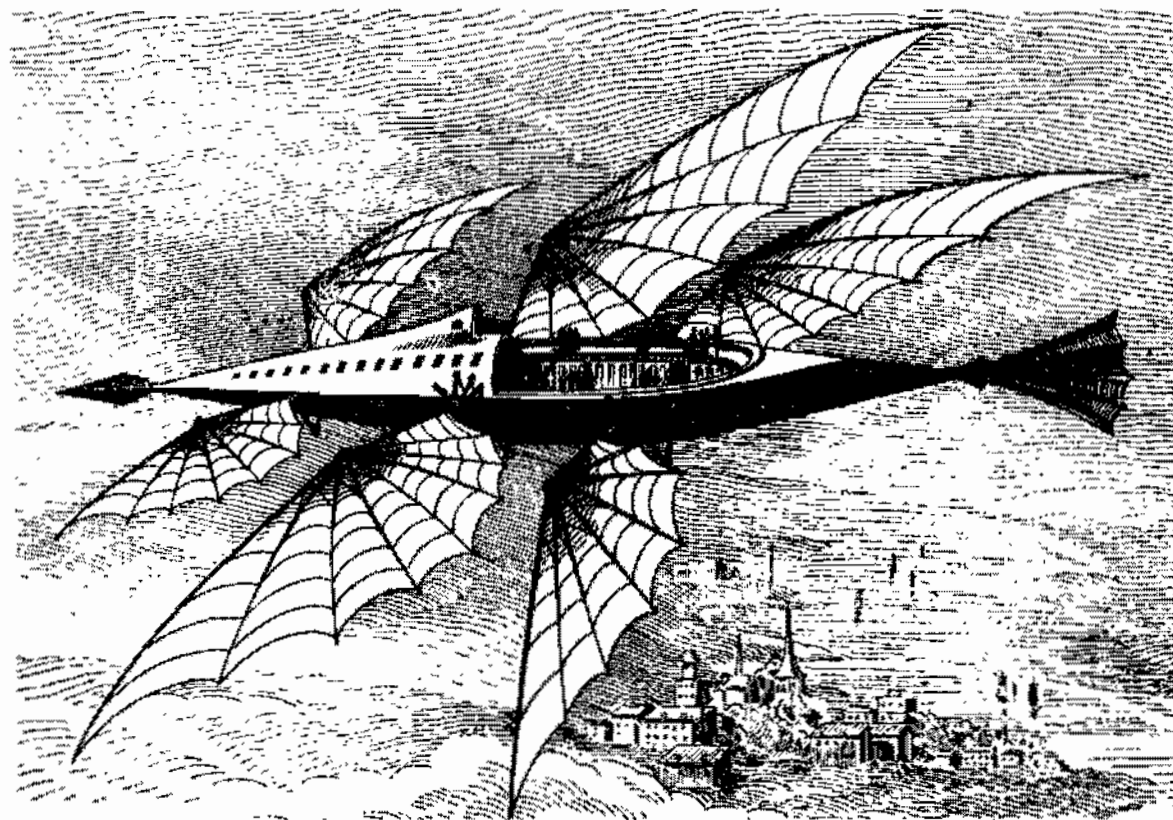
Mark Twain's late and superficially pessimistic document, *The Mysterious Stranger*, predicts better than any other literary source the proper successors to these political prophets. Not the Socialist Realism that the Communist Party school of literature claimed as the *only* revolutionary ground, but rather the pulp fantasy of science fiction — and to a lesser extent, detective stories — portrayed the horror whose other side is the sublime and ecstatic.* "Dream other Dreams, and better!" Twain's protagonist demanded, and H.P. Lovecraft, Frank Belknap Long, Clark Ashton Smith among others followed the precept. They did not wholly succeed in their pursuit of the Marvelous. The tenacity of capitalism permitted an escape only temporary and hag-ridden from the building tensions of war and multiplied human suffering. Yet somewhere in the 20th century, the uncomprehended fantasies of Wigglesworth, Poe, Bierce and London would realize themselves in a still-unwritten Epic of travail — and of the march into Paradise.

Mountains topping evermore
Into seas without a shore
Seas that restlessly aspire
Surging, unto skies of fire . . .

Are not these oneiric phrases of Poe's the echo of Wigglesworth, the passing glance of Brockden Brown and Twain and Bierce, and also prediction of the Hell that American Capitalism has prepared for its victims across the globe? But again, are they not too the phrases of volcanic eruption of spirit and body required once and for all to make an end to a hateful system? Away with the horrors of the old frontiers as we approach the final frontier, Space, with ecstatic desires of cosmic unity. Speak, mute prophets of mass self-awareness at this step — and you will have upon your lips the phrases of our weird literary champions!

Paul BUHLE

* Let us say here that the banalities of William Faulkner and James Dickey, whose apocalyptic sense is sheer fraud, have no place as the continuation of the horror tradition.



Artist's Conception of Future Aircraft, as Suggested by Thomas A. Edison (1880)

FREE PLAY & NO LIMIT

AN INTRODUCTION TO EDWARD BELLAMY'S UTOPIA

Looking Backward opens in 1887. A wealthy young Bostonian retires to his bedroom in a secret basement vault which he has had specially constructed to shut out street noise. A chronic insomniac, he is put to sleep by a hypnotist. He wakes up in the morning — 113 years later.

Like Rip Van Winkle, Julian West finds the world in which he awakens very different from the world in which he fell asleep. The intervening years have witnessed nothing less than a "complete transformation in the human condition," (1) the result of a thorough-going social revolution that has realized, for the first time, full human equality. In abolishing private ownership of the means of production, society also has done away with social classes, exploitation, poverty, hunger, war, sex slavery, race discrimination, slums, crime, jails, money, rent, banks, charity, corruption, taxes, advertising, housework, politicians, merchants, servants, lawyers, the army, the navy and the State Department.

Government itself scarcely exists, its functions having been reduced to the coordination of industrial production and distribution. There is very little disease, insanity or suicide, and virtually no legislation ("we might be said to live almost in a state of anarchy"). Churches have all

but disappeared. There are no locks or locksmiths, and no safes ("because we have no more thieves"). Coercion is a thing of the past, everything having become "entirely voluntary, the logical outcome of the operation of human nature under rational conditions." Working hours are short. Work itself has been greatly simplified and, as far as possible, rendered attractive. Vacations are ample; emigration is unrestricted. In the new society of the year 2000, "liberty is the first and last word."

All this has in turn fundamentally transformed the human personality. "The conditions of life have changed, and with them the motives of human action." In Bellamy's utopia there is no more selfishness, greed, malice, hypocrisy, apathy; no more "struggle for existence"; no more hunger for power; no more anxiety or fear as to basic human needs. "The highest possible physical, as well as mental, development for everyone" is the aim of the new education. Everyone is happier, healthier, brighter, friendlier; more active, more adventurous, more creative.

"Perhaps the most notable single aspect of the Revolution" was "the elevation and enlargement of woman's sphere in all directions. . . . Since the

Revolution there has been no difference in the education of the sexes nor in the independence of their economic and social position, in the exercise of responsibility or experience in the practical conduct of affairs. . . . In every pursuit of life [women] join with men on equal terms."

Moreover, "the sentiment of brotherhood, the feeling of solidarity, asserted itself not merely toward men and women, but likewise toward the humbler companions of our life on earth and sharers of its fortunes, the animals. . . . The new conception of our relation to the animals appealed to the heart and captivated the imagination of mankind."

The 113 years also have seen, thanks to the Revolution, an unprecedented flourishing of science, technology and the arts. Bellamy differs from many utopians in his confidence that modern technology can be conquered and put at the service of human desire. His forecast — in *Looking Backward* and its sequel, *Equality* — of such things as automobiles, radio, television, helicopters, air-conditioning and waterbeds, has assured him a permanent place in the history of science fiction. Interspersed through a charming love story and an unremitting attack on capital-

ism and its institutions, these inventions doubtless added to the appeal of his utopia.

Its appeal was, in fact, extraordinary. Indeed, it is generally acknowledged that *Looking Backward* was the most widely read and influential book of the late 19th century. It provoked vigorous debate in newspapers and magazines, in lecture rooms and living rooms, in union halls and saloons. It fascinated the "man in the street" as it did the "leading intellectual." Because of *Looking Backward*, said Vida D. Scudder, "the fading emotions of the old Abolitionist era flamed again." A broad movement sprang up, for the purpose of realizing the dream set forth in Bellamy's book. More than 150 Bellamy Clubs were formed around the country. Eugene V. Debs and Daniel DeLeon were among countless thousands who entered social radicalism through the door that Bellamy opened. J.A. Wayland, founder/editor of the *Appeal to Reason* — the largest-circulated socialist periodical in U.S. history — gave *Looking Backward* credit for having "popularized socialism, made it interesting, and started millions to thinking along lines entirely new to them."

A number of American utopian novels had appeared before Bellamy's, but except for Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Blithedale Romance* (1852), none had made a lasting impression. *Looking Backward* put utopia on the map of the U.S.A. It started a vogue for utopian romances that ran through the '90s and well into the new century. If it is still unclear to what degree it influenced Mark Twain's *Connecticut Yankee* or L. Frank Baum's *Wizard of Oz*, its impact on many other works — including William Dean Howells' *A Traveller from Aetna*; Caesar's *Column* by Ignatius Donnelly; Frederick Upham Adams' *President John Smith*; and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* — is firmly established.

Nor was Bellamy's influence limited to his native land. *Looking Backward* was wildly popular throughout the English-speaking world — in Canada, Australia and New Zealand as well as England. William Morris acknowledged that he wrote *News From Nowhere* as a "reply" to it. Tolstoy, finding it "exceedingly remarkable," arranged for its translation into Russian; Maxim Gorky once called the U.S. "the country of Henry George, Bellamy [and] Jack London." Jean Jaurès, the outstanding figure of pre-World War-I French socialism, saluted this "American masterpiece" which did "wonders toward dissipating hostility and ignorance against our ideas." The renowned Marxist theorist Clara Zetkin, leader of the German socialist workingwomen's movement, translated it into German and wrote an introduction to it. And, by way of exemplifying the exceptional range of its appeal, Helena P. Blavatsky — author of *Isis Unveiled* and *The Secret Doctrine* — declared Bellamy's work "magnificent" and in harmony with the perspectives of Theosophy. (2)

The history of the Bellamy movement in the U.S. remains to be written. (3) As a link of the older radical Abolitionists and Reconstructionists with the new generation that would form the Socialist Party in 1900 and the I.W.W. five years later, its study could teach us a great deal.

Few social movements, if any, have been so colorful or so heterogeneous. Under the banner of *Looking Backward* were Unitarians, Theoso-

phists, trade unionists, populists, feminists, Christian socialists, spiritualists, homeopaths, vegetarians, prohibitionists, members of the Farmers' Alliance, an appreciable number who thought of themselves as Marxists, and several Union Army generals — including Arthur Devereaux, "hero of Gettysburg," and Abner Doubleday, the apocryphal "father of baseball." Among Bellamy's adherents were Edward Everett Hale, William Dean Howells, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Lucy Stone, Hamlin Garland, Julia Ward Howe, Helen Campbell, Frances Willard, Jesse Cox, Lucian Sanial, Florence Kelley, Thomas Lake Harris, Solomon Schindler, Laurence Gronlund, Thomas Davidson, Burnette Haskell, Sylvester Baxter and Clarence Darrow.

Looking Backward was written fast and furiously in the dazzling light of one of the pivotal American labor battles: the bloody Haymarket Affair and its aftermath in Chicago, 1886, in which a group of innocent labor leaders were framed and hanged at the behest of Big Business.

The book appeared in a period of unprecedentedly rapid and convulsive change in American society. The Civil War and Reconstruction paved the way for extensive industrialization, which in turn exacerbated class stratification beyond anything even dreamed of earlier in the U.S. To meet the mounting threat posed by the great trusts, workers thronged into the Knights of Labor. 1887, when Bellamy was readying his book for publication, has been called "the year of 10,000 strikes."

Historians have debated the backgrounds of Bellamy's thought. From book reviews and editorials he wrote for the *Springfield Union* in the '70s, we know that he was familiar with the work of such utopians as Robert Owen, Frances Wright, Charles Fourier, Albert Brisbane, Etienne Cabet, John Humphrey Noyes, Josiah Warren and others. Greater than any of these, however, was the influence exerted on him by the Old Testament prophets and the millennial/heretical tradition in Christianity — the Anabaptists, for example.

Descended from a long line of Baptist ministers, Bellamy sometimes has been called a "Christian socialist," but the tag does not fit well. His early essay, "The Religion of Solidarity," is closer to Transcendentalism than to any Christian creed. Till the end, it is true, he hoped that the remnants of radical egalitarianism in the margins of Christendom would add their resources to the revolutionary ferment. Noting that the church's pro-slavery position had dealt "a blow to its prestige in America from which it had not yet recovered," he warned that "its failure to take the right side in this far vaster movement would not leave any church worth mentioning." Of course, this warning went unheeded; indeed, some of the most venomous diatribes against his utopia came from priests and preachers. His last book, *Equality*, includes a scathing indictment of "ecclesiastical capitalism." After his death, his works were a major influence on the short-lived "Social Gospel" movement; but the fact remains: he himself stood with the infidels.

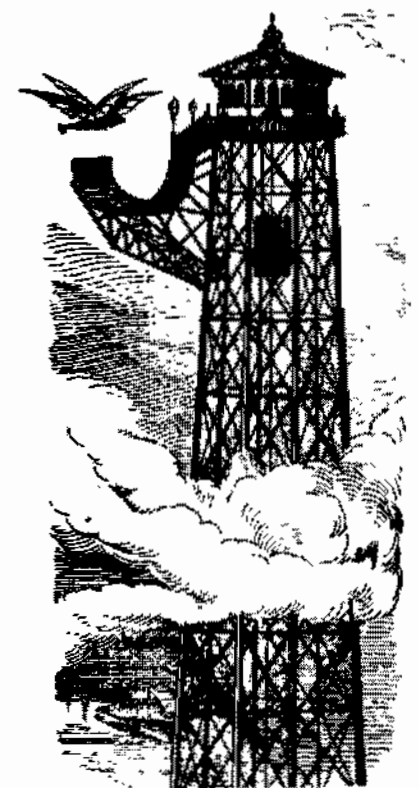
We may glean something of Bellamy's literary preferences from a passage in *Looking Backward* in which Julian West looks over the bookshelves in his 21st century home, and joyfully discovers the works of Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth,

Shelley, Tennyson, Defoe, Dickens, Thackeray, Hugo, Hawthorne and Irving. Dickens he admired above all: "He overtops all the writers of his age. . . . No man of his time did so much as he to turn men's minds to the wrong and wretchedness of the old order of things, and open their eyes to the necessity of the great change that was coming, although he himself did not clearly foresee it."

Living most of his life in the small milltown of Chicopee Falls, Mass., Bellamy's personal acquaintance with contemporary writers was limited. It is interesting to note that Mark Twain — who found *Looking Backward* "fascinating" — once arranged to meet with him. Twain's friend William Dean Howells became an active supporter of Bellamy's ideas, and corresponded with him for years.

To some extent he knew the work of Hegel, and even Marx; his acquaintance with the latter would increase appreciably after the publication of *Looking Backward* when, devoting himself unreservedly to agitational/propagandist work in the service of the Revolution, he came into contact with representatives of virtually every radical/revolutionary tendency. Bellamy's critique of capitalism, however, was derived less from books than from the things he saw with his penetrating eye and felt with his dreaming heart.

His critique is as unsparring, in its way, as Fourier's or Marx's. Bellamy denounced capitalism as "the source and sum of all villainies," "utterly unjust in all respects," "mutual throat-cutting," "a system which [makes] the interests of every individual antagonistic to those of every other." Zeroing in primarily from the moral angle, he recalls Lautréamont's maxim: "Place a goose-quill in the hands of a moralist who is also a first-rate writer. He will be superior to poets."



Launching Tower for Aircraft on Preceding Page

Bellamy's historical insight was formidable. He perceived elusive connections between seemingly disparate phenomena — the social reality beneath the ideological veneer. It was he who first pointed out that the millionaire and the tramp entered the American scene at the same time. He called the 19th century "the century that invented poker" — because of the bluff needed to sustain its political/economic machinations. He railed against the "utter hypocrisy underlying the entire relation of the sexes, the pretended chivalric deference to women on the one hand, coupled with their practical suppression on the other."

That Bellamy independently, and following a very different method, arrived at certain conclusions of Marx surely is not without interest. But what draws us to a writer, a thinker, an artist, is not so much what he shares with others as it is the unique charms of which he alone disposes. Bellamy's real importance lies precisely in those qualities that distinguish him from all others: his particular moral/revolutionary attitude and its underlying psychological and poetic dimensions. It was these qualities that made *Looking Backward* so vitally a part of its time. And it is these same qualities that render so much of his message as acute and vigorous today as the day it was written.

The esteem in which Bellamy is held even now in many countries of the world stands in marked contrast to the disfavor which has befallen his work in his homeland. Of the pre-World-War-I radical generation in the U.S., probably a substantial majority initially were drawn toward socialist solutions by *Looking Backward* and the furor it provoked; surely there were few who had not read it, or did not at least have a clear idea of its content. Of today's vastly smaller radical generation, the reverse is true: few have more than the vaguest notions of his work, the merest handful seem to have read *Looking Backward*, and scarcely anyone outside the universities knows his other works.

American Marxists, disregarding the appreciations of Debs and DeLeon, have long treated Bellamy with condescension, as noted by Heywood Brown in his preface to *Looking Backward* in 1931. Notwithstanding Kropotkin's early enthusiasm for Bellamy's work, anarchists have been just as indifferent.

Not that Bellamy has vanished from American bookshelves: On the contrary, *Looking Backward* has steadily remained in print (seven editions are currently available), and widely accessible even in small town libraries. The anomaly is that Bellamy now lives almost wholly outside the currents that style themselves radical in this country. He is read primarily as a precursor of science fiction, or as a curious contributor to the "American Experience," or as a minor survivor of Romanticism in the dawn of American literary realism.

The reasons for Bellamy's eclipse from the spectrum of American revolutionary thought are not difficult to discern. World War I was a watershed for radicals everywhere. As the best-known figures of international socialism (and anarchism) endorsed the expansionist aims of "their" respective national capitalist rulers, the Second International ignominiously collapsed. Then the October Revolution in Russia, 1917, brought enormous prestige to an unfamiliar and rigorous interpretation of Marxism. Draped in the glory of the first conquest of state power by the working class,

"Bolshevism" quickly upstaged all other currents of socialist thought. The new movement, priding itself on its "hard line," looked askance at the seemingly naive visionaries who had exerted such influence a few years earlier. Anything tainted with "utopianism" now was automatically suspect. And so, having been the best known name in American radicalism, Bellamy became taboo.

Adding insult to injury, the rejection of Bellamy was carried out in the name of Marxism, overlooking Marx's and Engels' deep appreciation of Fourier, Saint-Simon and Owen; and in the name of Leninism, ignoring Lenin's and Trotsky's enthusiasm for Chernyshevsky, Dobrolyubov, Pisarev and Tolstoy, who surely were Russian counterparts of such men as Wendell Phillips, Theodore Parker, John Swinton — and Edward Bellamy.

While those who have monopolized the title of revolutionary in this country have been notably zealous in advertising their ignorance of Bellamy, the apologists for modern liberalism have been no less assiduous in their neglect. Bellamy's indictment of capitalist civilization, like Fourier's, was too merciless and too all-encompassing for it to have proved serviceable, in the long run, to the essentially "civilized" — i.e., repressive — ideology of bourgeois reformism. If welfare-statists and social-democrats now and then lay claim to his legacy, it is precisely as they claim Marx: by doing violence to the integrity of his views. Contrary to widespread belief, Bellamy was in fact strongly anti-reformist. Rejecting the notion that reforms were a "sufficient method of overthrowing capitalism," he stressed that "they did not even tend toward such a result, but were quite as likely to help capitalism to obtain a longer lease of life by making it a little less abhorrent." He went on to express his "considerable apprehension" lest the revolutionary movement "be diverted from its real aim, and its force wasted in this programme of piecemeal reforms."

Shortly after Bellamy's death, John Clark Ridpath said: "He who believes in the Existing Order can have no part or lot with Edward Bellamy. He who does not believe in the Existing Order, but fears to disturb it, has no part or lot with him either."

One other reason for the eclipse of Bellamy lies in the name he gave to his system: *nationalism*. He meant by this that the whole population of the country would take over the means of production from the capitalists; the word thus had not a trace of its later connotations of jingoistic patriotism and chauvinism. Bellamy at first expressly rejected the names socialism and communism, which in the America of the 1880s still signified isolated and exotic communitarian experiments, often led by eccentric religious sects, or small political sects, equally isolated and exotic, such as the German immigrant socialists in New York who were sharply criticized by Marx and Engels for their supercilious irrelevance to the American workers' movement. Seeking a new name for a new idea — one that would not be limited to the needs of any sect but would express the aspirations and interests of all producers, among whom he included workers, farmers and petit-bourgeois tradesmen — Bellamy selected "nationalism." His reputation has suffered immeasurably be-

cause of the totally different definitions that this term later acquired.

Bellamy's system retained the interclassist character common to most utopias, reflecting a specifically petit-bourgeois longing for harmony, free not only of the oppression of monopoly capital, but also of the potential uprising of the proletariat and subproletariat — an uprising feared as a vengeful cataclysm certain to be ruinous for all. It was Bellamy's belief that capitalism could be abolished in the U.S. without the violence of class war.

The notorious instability of utopian movements is a direct consequence of the instability of the petit-bourgeoisie as a class. And just as this intermediate class, at different periods, necessarily leans either toward the proletariat or toward the bourgeoisie, so too the various utopian currents sooner or later ally themselves with one or the other of the two great classes. Most of these currents eventually dissolve into the parties of capital; this has been the case, for example, with the many movements advocating currency reform panaceas, and nearly all campaigns of monomaniacal reformism. But other currents, just as utopian, have found their way to the revolutionary workers' movement: the followers of Proudhon and Blanqui, for example, joined the First International.

Bellamy clearly belongs to this latter category. His solidarity with the oppressed peoples of the earth, and his concomitant hatred for the capitalist system responsible for their oppression, outweighed his fond faith in interclassist cooperation. Significantly, through the '90s he and the Nationalist movement moved closer to organized labor, and developed ties with revolutionary workers' groups. *The New Nation*, edited by Bellamy, regularly ran advertisements for the Socialist Labor Party's paper, *The People*, and for other periodicals issued by socialist, anarchist, populist, communitarian, Knights of Labor and independent Left currents. *Equality* featured a stirring homage to "The Strikers" as the pioneers of the Revolution. Nationalists took an active part in the celebrations of May Day, which Bellamy called "the most significant and important anniversary of the year." When Illinois governor John P. Altgeld pardoned the three surviving Haymarket anarchists, Bellamy applauded the deed in his weekly paper.

Too many historians have been content merely to note the Nationalist movement's predominantly middle-class leadership, and have utterly ignored the extent and variety of its interaction with the militant proletariat. It is thus rarely acknowledged that in the decisive labor struggles of the period, such as the 1892 Homestead Strike, the Nationalists stood with the workers. The protracted drive for shorter hours, the central issue of the class struggle in those years, received Bellamy's support from the start. The fact that *Looking Backward* — the best-selling book of its day — took for granted a much shorter workday surely was an important boost for the Eight Hour movement, just as Bellamy's acknowledgment of full equality for women doubtless contributed to the cause of equal suffrage.

His enthusiastic support for the women's movement contrasts sharply with the masculine arrogance (pathetic disguise of a deep-seated fear) so characteristic of other Left currents, then as now. Most of those who enjoyed the mantle of orthodox Marxism in the U.S. retreated in holy horror from this bold, new current — of women

speaking and acting for themselves — and many went so far as to contrive abjectly specious arguments to "keep women in their place." Bellamy, to the contrary, saw the women's movement not as a competitor or threat, but as a natural and indispensable ally.

His writings on the "woman question" retain all their freshness. "While some men oppress other men," he wrote in *The New Nation*, "all men oppress women." Looking back from the year 2000 it was perfectly clear that "the key to the fetters the women wore were the same that locked the shackles of the workers. It was the economic key."

Bellamy was neither sectarian nor fetishistic about labels. By 1894, the year of the great Pullman Strike, he declared that he and his co-thinkers were, in fact, socialists. "Holding all that socialists agree on," he added that he and his comrades "go further, and hold also that the distribution of the cooperative product among the members of the community must be not merely equitable, whatever that term may mean, but must be always and absolutely equal."

His ambivalence regarding class struggle, his inclination toward nonviolence, his naive appeals to men and women of "good will," would seem to situate Bellamy at the antipodes of Marxism. But on several essential points his position was far closer to Marx and Lenin than to populism or social-democracy or Laborism. These latter currents, let it be noted, advocate "nationalization" to preserve the capitalist system, whereas Bellamy sought to destroy it.

Bellamy was, as we have seen, an inexorable dialectician. He recognized the need for a specifically revolutionary party, fundamentally different from and opposed to all other parties. He foresaw that, as the Revolution developed, a situation of dual power would arise, in which this party would be called on to intervene, decisively. He perceived that, during this crucial phase, the old bourgeois state apparatus would become increasingly unusable and therefore would have to be dispensed with. And finally, since the goal was a society without classes, he saw that the new state would hardly qualify as a "state" at all, on account of the "prodigious simplification in the task of government. . . . Almost the sole function of the administration now [i.e. in the year 2000] is that of directing the industries. . . . Most of the purposes for which governments formerly existed no longer remain to be subserved."

There can be no doubt, in any case, of the socialist/communist tendency of Bellamy's utopia. The principal slogans of communism — abolition of the wage system and production for use, not for profit — he made his own. "Unless humanity be destined to pass under some at present inconceivable form of despotism," he said, "there is but one issue possible. The world, and every thing that is in it, will ere long be recognized as the common property of all, and undertaken and administered for the equal benefit of all."

It should be clear from all this that, in the ordinary sense of the word utopian — meaning something unrealizably fanciful — Bellamy's views are not utopian at all. Acutely sensitive to the dialectic of "ultimate ideal" and "first steps" (in his words), he elaborated a practical transitional program leading from present conditions to the abolition of wage-slavery. If we consider the distinctions made by Engels in his *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, it becomes plain that Bellamy's is, in Marxist terms, the most scientific

of utopias. "A dream, yes," as Ida Tarbell said of it, "but a dream built upon materials in our hands."

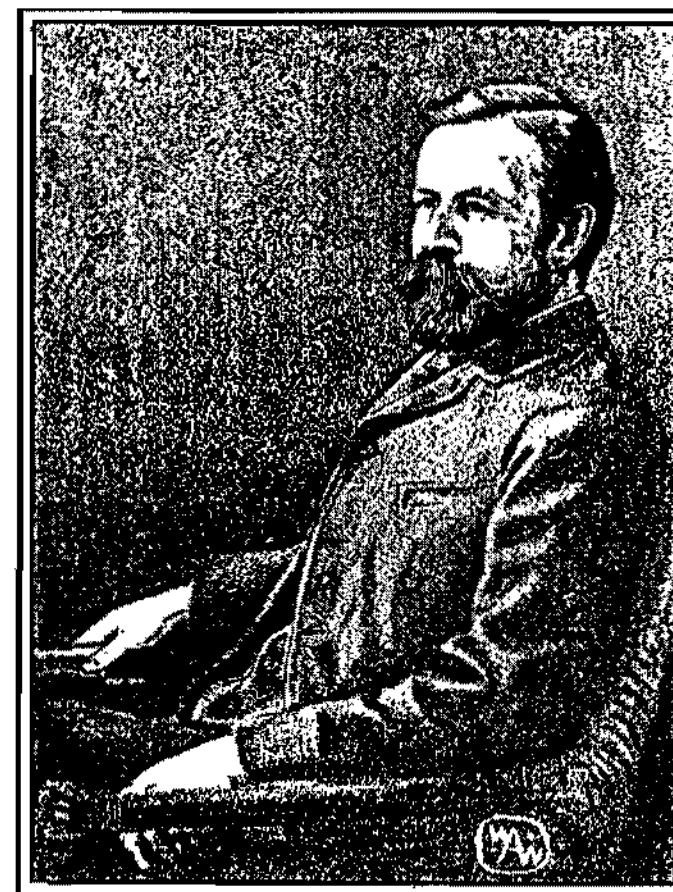
Repeatedly Bellamy stressed that it was his aim "to extend popular government, the rule of the people, to industry and commerce." By Nationalism he meant "the translation into industrial and economic terms of the equal rights idea, hitherto expressed in terms of politics only." He argued that without equality in industry, political democracy "must forever fail to secure to a people the equalities and liberties which it promises."

This conception of industrial democracy was taken up a few years later by the Industrial Workers of the World; indeed, it was the cornerstone of the IWW program. Bellamy deserves greater recognition as a forerunner of the Wobbly theory. In an 1890 article he wrote that "in the progress toward National cooperation, there shall be a question of an organization inclusive of different trades, and ultimately of one including all trades," thereby prefiguring the central IWW idea of One Big Union of all workers. It is noteworthy that long after Bellamy had become unfashionable among communists and socialists, his ideas were still seriously discussed in the IWW press. (4)

Close in spirit to the IWW, too, is Bellamy's "industrial army." His "military" metaphor has caused considerable consternation among critics, and has been woefully misconstrued by many.

The "industrial army" is perhaps not the most appealing feature of Bellamy's system, but one should at least try to see it as it was meant to be, rather than vilify it solely on the basis of a posteriori projections. Bellamy's "industrial army" is not military at all, of course, since in his utopia there are no wars — no possibility of wars — no weapons with which to fight them. His marching bands of ununiformed working men and women, with their great festivals and musical pageants through garlanded streets and pleasure gardens, have nothing in common with the brutally disciplined troops of any bureaucratic/hierarchical military regime. To find something comparable in military history, we would have to point to the joyous libertarian throngs who fought at John Ziska's side in the Hussite wars, or to the glorious Durutti Column in the bright early days of the Spanish Revolution.

Not surprisingly, the ideologists of "things as they are" greeted *Looking Backward* with derision. Bellamy was probably the most denounced man of his time. In church and classroom, in "respectable" assemblies and in the bourgeois press, he was pictured as the devil in disguise. Volume after volume appeared in opposition to his work — if not to "refute" his program, then at least to ridicule and revile it.



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It is piquant, today, to look back on that plethora of uniformly idiotic literature. Of what "crimes" was Bellamy convicted by bourgeois "public opinion" in his own day? Here are a few: He wanted to give mankind "too much freedom." He was essentially an anarchist. He thought that ordinary working people were capable of running industry. He wanted to "change the nature of woman." He questioned the integrity of the clergy. And he dared to suggest that happiness was attainable on Earth.

Such overtly capitalist "criticisms" are but the veriest balderdash, of course, and need not detain us. More pertinent to our inquiry are other criticisms made, rightly or wrongly, by Bellamy's political opponents on the Left, and by the historians of utopia. Unlike the outspokenly pro-capitalist criticisms, which long ago vanished into the mire whence they came, these latter have helped shape the attitude toward Bellamy that prevails today.

One of the earliest of the Left critics was the English painter/poet William Morris, who reviewed *Looking Backward* in the socialist journal *Commonweal* in January 1889. (5) It is not easy to understand how Morris could have so completely misinterpreted the book — how he could so abysmally have failed even to recognize the passion and integrity of Bellamy's motives. We know that he was disturbed by the book's popularity; perhaps Upton Sinclair was correct in contending that Morris was prejudiced against it for the simple reason that it was written by an American. (6)

In any case, Morris's refusal to see in *Looking Backward* anything more than a "cockney paradise" does not show the author of *Art and Socialism* at his best. Indeed, when we read another of his remarks on Bellamy — "If they brigaded me into a regiment of workers, I'd just lie on my back and kick" — we see rather the "rich artist-enthusiast" and "sentimental socialist" described by old Engels. Morris's most ardent defender in our time, E.P. Thompson, has had to admit that the great Preraphaelite's "opposition to *Looking Backward* led him to willful exaggeration, more than once." (7)

Changed conditions and the passage of time have blunted the edges of Morris' ill-considered polemic against Bellamy, just as they have blunted the edges of Engels' hasty gibes at Morris. Today, as we struggle to find our way out of a vastly more horrible maze than any of them could have conceived, we find that all of them help to light our way. That they had their faults is the merest truism, and is hardly the point for us who have faults of our own. What matters is that the going is easier, thanks to them, than if we were trying to go it alone.

Morris's peculiar blindness to Bellamy — alas! — has worked its mischief over the years. Those who have followed him in this blindness, needless to say, have rarely shared his redeeming genius.

Bellamy himself observed that his opponents generally criticized his program "for what it is not"; their criticisms tended to be based on misunderstandings and aimed at straw men. All the old misunderstandings, Morris's and others, besides an astonishing dose of new ones, somehow found their way into Lewis Mumford's influential *Story of Utopia* (1922). The most dyspeptic and pusillanimous pages of this overrated book are devoted to *Looking Backward*.

If vanity and smugness could make a thinker, Mumford would have few peers. His critique of Bellamy is a shameless exercise in superficiality, carelessness and falsification. (8) In this grand imaginary millennium he pretended to see nothing but paternalism, monotony, an immense bureaucratic state apparatus, a "high-powered engine of repression," "rigorous discipline," and even militarization ("the organization of this utopia is an organization for war"). His hideous, gloomy caricature calls to mind a passage from "The Book of the Blind," the closing chapter of *Equality*: "It seems almost incredible that the obvious and necessary effect of economic equality could be apprehended in a sense so absolutely opposed to the truth."

Among many other preposterous allegations, Mumford stoops to this: "As for criticism of the administration, that would be treason; admiration for the practices of another country would be disloyalty; and advocacy of a change in the method of industry would be sedition." I wonder: How many of the numerous critics and scholars who have heaped the highest praise on Mumford's book are aware that, in all of Bellamy's writings, there is nothing — absolutely nothing — to justify such absurd defamations?

One would prefer to laugh away such misinformed inanity, recalling that in the same book Mumford referred to the magisterial Fourier as a "pathetic little man" who "it is hard to take . . . seriously." Unfortunately, however, Mumford's utterly false evaluation of Bellamy has been widely accepted and is currently almost "standard." The same poisonous portrait turns up again and again, even in the work of authors from whom one might have hoped for something better. With only minor variations we find it in *The English Utopia* by A.L. Morton (1952) and in Erich Fromm's Foreword (1960) to what is currently the most available paperback edition of *Looking Backward* (New American Library). It does seem that each of Mumford's echoes likes to add a flourish or two of his own. Thus Fromm, a neo-Freudian social-democrat, laments that life in Bellamy's year 2000 is in some way "similar to the Khrushchevian form of communism"; while Morton — who even with Stalin on the throne regarded things in the USSR as just fine and dandy — alleges that *Looking Backward* is an "exposition of the now familiar doctrine of super-imperialism."

It is downright disheartening, however, to find Mumford's fundamentally and despicably bourgeois thesis recapitulated in Marie-Louise Berneri's otherwise estimable *Journey Through Utopia* (1950). An anarchist, Berneri does at least concede that what she (misleadingly) calls Bellamy's "state socialism" allows "a greater degree of personal freedom than most other utopias based on the same principles." But then she goes on to argue that "his rigid regimentation of men's lives takes little note of the differences in the psychological makeup of individuals."

Detailed refutation of each and all of the foregoing criticisms may be found in Bellamy's works. By way of a brief reply — in passing, as it were — here is just a sampling "from the horse's mouth":

"[We do] not propose a paternal government, but its logical and practical antithesis, a cooperative administration for the benefit of equal partners."

"Our system is elastic enough to give free play to every instinct of human nature which does not

aim at dominating others or living on the fruit of others' labor."

"Equality creates an atmosphere which kills imitation, and is pregnant with originality, for everyone acts out himself, having nothing to gain by imitating any one else."

"While we insist on equality, we detest uniformity, and seek to provide free play to the greatest possible variety of tastes."

"Instead of the mind-paralyzing worship of the past and the bondage of the present to that which is written, the conviction [of men and women in the year 2000 is that there is] no limit to what they might know concerning their nature and destiny and no limit to that destiny."

Free play and no limit: There is the heart and soul of Bellamy's utopia.

If I have attempted to rescue Bellamy's work from some of the worst distortions and falsifications to which it has been subjected, it is not because I regard his utopia as unassailable — far from it. But I do think it is high time for a fresh look at his revolutionary message, with all its eccentricities, faults and contradictions; and such an attempt at reassessment is not even conceivable without first dissipating the critical fog that shrouds all that he wrote, all that he was.

I want to emphasize, above all, how much more there is in Bellamy's work than even his best-intentioned critics have dreamed.

Let us make no mistake: Much of his "system" is naive; many solutions he proposed surely are not the best possible; his picture of the year 2000 unquestionably leaves something to be desired. But can't we get beyond the puerile notion that utopias are drawn up as finished blueprints requiring only our simple yea or nay? Are they not, rather, contributions to a discussion — a discussion that should and must continue, because it touches everything that matters? And is it not prerequisite to such discussion that any specific contribution to it be understood as fully as possible, in all its dimensions, and viewed initially on its own terms? That is precisely the problem confronting the study of Bellamy today: his contributions have been slighted — even slandered — to such an extent that they are scarcely known at all.

Indeed, crucial areas of his thought remain wholly unexamined. It is difficult, for example, to reconcile the prevalent view that the world of *Looking Backward* is "grim," "static" and "mechanical," with William Dean Howells' assertion that "in Edward Bellamy we were rich in a romantic imagination surpassed only by that of Hawthorne." (9)

Howells' opinion deserves the fullest respect, for it is based — as few estimates of Bellamy have been — on a long-standing and intimate knowledge of all of Bellamy's writings: not only *Looking Backward* and its sequel, but also the five earlier novels, the more than thirty short stories, and numerous articles, speeches and short sketches published in *Nationalist* and other papers.

Bellamy's earlier writings, especially his tales — and it is worth noting that he regarded himself above all as a *romancer* — shed an invaluable light on his utopia. Much that might seem ambiguous in *Looking Backward* finds its clear explanation in his "non-utopian" fiction; any number of "gaps" are filled in, and our image of the new moral world that Bellamy envisioned

becomes infinitely more precise, more alive.

That Bellamy's early tales are inseparable from his utopia is further suggested by the fact that *Looking Backward* in no sense represents a "break" with these tales but is rather their continuation and culmination. *Looking Backward* was begun as "a fairy tale of social felicity" with "no idea of attempting a serious contribution to the movement of social reform." And yet looking over a text he had written when barely out of his teens made him wonder, some years later, "not why I wrote *Looking Backward*, but why I did not write it, or try to, twenty years ago."

His novels and tales show Bellamy's early, deep and enduring interest in psychopathology, psychical research, hallucinations, obsessions, dreams, spiritualism, erotic passion, interplanetary travel, exalted moods, extreme situations. "The Blindman's World," which carries us to Mars, poses the question: "When will man learn to interrogate the dream soul of the marvels it sees in its wanderings? Then he will no longer need to improve his telescopes to find out the secrets of the universe." Another story, "A Summer Evening's Dream," takes place in *reverie* — that "magic medium" in which "the distinction between imagination and reality fast dissolved," allowing us to follow its characters as they go "wandering in some . . . mysterious between-worlds."

"To Whom This May Come" chronicles a sojourn in the "islands of the mind-readers" in a corner of the Indian Ocean, where descendants of ancient Persian magicians have abandoned speech and writing for "direct mind-to-mind vision." Telepathy, particularly in its relation to hysteria and love, is also the topic of "At Pinney's Ranch," set in the mountains of Colorado.

"Two Days' Solitary Imprisonment," centered around a murder, powerfully conveys the deceptiveness of appearances. All pieces of "circumstantial evidence," all the facts, add up to a wholly mistaken conclusion: a theme taken up decades later by such writers as Dashileil Hammett and Raymond Chandler. One cannot but be impressed by the range covered by Bellamy's tales. His spoof on positivism, "A Positive Romance," looks forward to O. Henry and Ring Lardner. "The Cold Snap," with its "nameless forebodings and . . . great, unformed fear," prefigures H.P. Lovecraft.

Several recurring themes are discernible in Bellamy's earlier work, and show up again vividly in *Looking Backward* and *Equality*. Together they constitute what I have referred to as the psychological and poetic dimensions of his moral/revolutionary outlook.

SUPERSESSION OF MEMORY

First let us consider Bellamy's unrelenting hostility toward memory, and his corresponding, passionately preference for the future over the past.

A citizen of Mars calls planet Earth "The Blindman's World" (in the story of that title) because Earth's inhabitants almost all are afflicted with what he calls "the disease of memory." On Mars, to the contrary — so the Martian assures us — the faculty of precognition is highly developed, while

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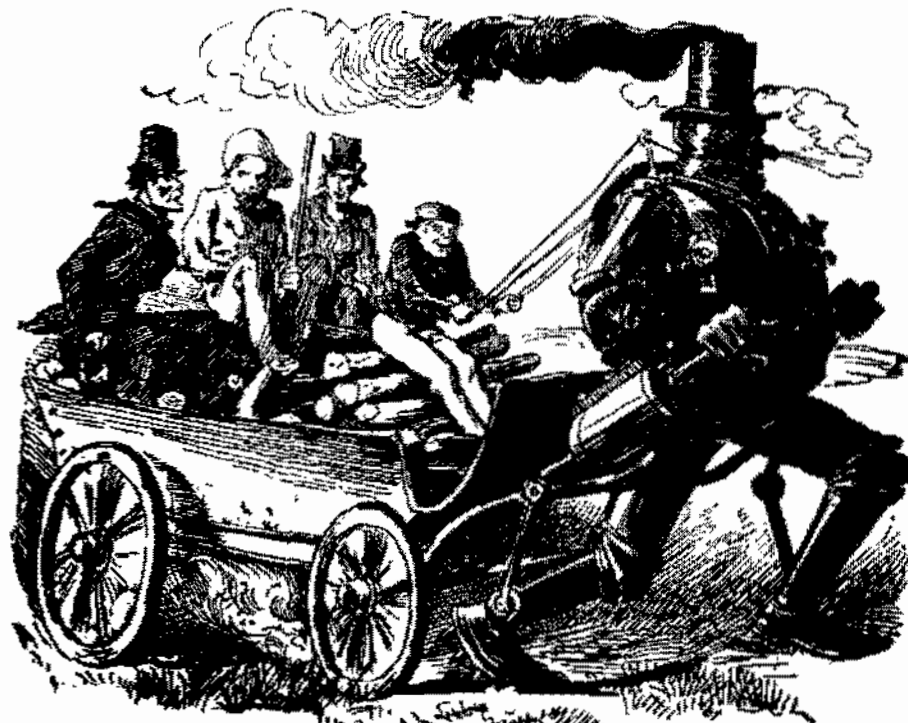
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A Dime Novel Cover from the 1880s

memory scarcely exists. "We live wholly in the future and the present." The result, we are told, is a life lived to the fullest, free of the burdens of yesteryear, and always ready for the morrow. On Mars, our Martian tells us, "we write of the past when it is still the future, and of course in the future tense."

In "The Old Folks' Party" we meet a group of young people who, as a diversion, hold a party which — with the help of costume, makeup and mannerisms — they attend as if they had already reached advanced age. Pursuant to this curious sport, one of them remarks: "Ghosts of the future are the only sort worth heeding. Apparitions of things past are a very impractical sort of demonology, in my opinion, compared with apparitions of things to come."

The overcoming of memory is the theme of an entire Bellamy novel, *Dr. Heidenhoff's Process* (1880), in which we find this bold affirmation: "Macbeth's question, 'Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased; pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow; raze out the written troubles of the brain?' was a puzzler to the sixteenth century doctor, but he of the twentieth, yes, perhaps of the nineteenth, will be able to answer it affirmatively." Bellamy in this book sums up his attitude: "Memory is the principle of moral degeneration. Remembered sin is the most utterly diabolical influence in the universe."

Interestingly enough, at the very moment he was writing *Dr. Heidenhoff's Process* — which, as he wrote it, was being serialized in *The Springfield Union* — he also was at work on a historical romance, *The Duke of Stockbridge*, serialized in the *Berkshire Courier*.

The Duke of Stockbridge, "A Romance of Shays' Rebellion," portrayed the 1786 Massachusetts revolt of debtor-farmers and poor mechanics, led by a Revolutionary War veteran. Based on extensive original research — including searches through old family records and small-town archives, with his ears always open for revelatory popular local traditions — this was more than a historically faithful work of fiction: it was a major contribution to American historiography. Before Bellamy, historians had followed the lead of George Richards Minot's vituperative *History of the Insurrection in Massachusetts* (1788) in presenting the most unflattering view of Capt. Daniel Shays and his comrades, seeing them only as malevolent malcontents. Bellamy dug deeper. Uncovering the social and economic causes of the great revolt, he gave us a picture of the Shaysites painted with understanding and sympathy. Later historians have come to agree with Samuel Eliot Morison that *The Duke of Stockbridge* gives "a more accurate account of the causes and events of Shays' Rebellion than any of the formal historians do."

That Bellamy was writing a sustained attack on memory, against the fixation with the past, and simultaneously was poring over musty records of the previous century, preparing a purely historical work, may seem paradoxical: but it is not. His antipathy to memory was no mere intellectual idiosyncrasy but rather the critical lever of a far-reaching dialectic.

It was not an abstract memory or past that he opposed, but the concrete ways in which they are used to allow the dead to dominate the living —

above all, the way memory is used as an obstacle to the transformation of the present and the creation of a desirable future. This orientation is not far from that of Marx, who wrote that "the tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living," and stressed that the proletarian revolution "cannot draw its poetry from the past, but only from the future." It is comparable also to Freud's theory that repression can be overcome only by restoring unconscious conflicts to consciousness and then advancing beyond them.

Because he focused on the elusive links between social and psychical factors, Bellamy may be regarded as a precursor of Freud-Markism. But his work has yet another dimension — essentially poetic — that points, however sketchily, beyond the territory delimited by Marx and Freud. In the dialectical supersession of memory, he not only saw (as they did) the negation of the negation, but saw also, to use Feuerbach's expression, the "self-supporting positive" — in this case, the poetic imagination.

If we recall that memory is chiefly the vehicle of guilt — and thus a fixture of the Reality Principle — Bellamy's orientation appears all the more clearly in its true subversive light. In view of his own Christian background, he would have agreed wholeheartedly with Baudelaire that "true civilization does not lie in gas, or in steam, or in turntables. It lies in the reduction of the traces of original sin." The supersession of memory by the poetic imagination — "the free play of every instinct" — is necessarily accompanied by the release of eros in all directions. In Bellamy's utopia, the age-old conflict between Pleasure Principle and Reality Principle is decisively altered — in favor of the former. (10)

His antagonism to memory thus brings Bellamy to the very threshold of surrealism. Let us recall that André Breton, in his "Letter to Seers" (1925), evoked the surrealists' "hatred of memory"; shortly thereafter he hailed the apparition of what he called "souvenirs of the future." In his better days, when he was still a surrealist, Nicolas Calas advanced the challenge that "history is a conception of the future," an aggressive thesis delightfully exemplified by the chronicler of the year 2000. How else could one describe the historiographical approach of an author whose masterwork permits us to gaze into the distant morrow by "looking backward"?

REINTEGRATION OF THE PERSONALITY

In several works Bellamy evidences his interest in the problem of divisions in the personality, and the possibility of its reintegration.

"The three persons of grammar are not really enough," we read in "The Old Folks' Party." "A fourth is needed to distinguish the ego of the past and future from the present ego, which is the only true one." In *Miss Ludington's Sister* (1884), a novel centered on spiritualism, this notion is developed at greater length: "When the world comes to recognize the composite character of the individual, that it is composed of not one but many persons, a new department will be added to ethics, relating to the duties of the successive selves of an individual to one another."

This remarkable insight, prefiguring Freud's model of the mental processes, should be regarded not as a mere piece of clinical data but as a hypothesis to account for the contradictori-

ness of human behavior and also (as developed in his later work) for the extensive transformation of the personality which cannot fail to occur when the social basis of this contradictoriness is overthrown. In "To Whom This May Come" our attention is called to "a shifting of the sense of identity." In its implications this view seems to correspond to Rimbaud's "I is someone else" (*je est un autre*), an observation that helped pave the way to the systematization of what later became known as surrealist automatism, the expression of the "real functioning of thought," outside of all controls exercised by the apparatus of repression.

Bellamy recognized that social revolution implies a mental/affective revolution — that the contradictions of the "divided self" in capitalist society will be resolved, and that a new and vastly higher consciousness will emerge as the repressive obstacles to such consciousness are discarded. The "intellectual splendor" which he signaled as one of the Revolution's most notable consequences is only one of many indications of this qualitative leap.

Here too, of course, the liberation of eros is central. In the year 2000, "the vacuum left in the minds of men and women by the absence of care for one's livelihood has been entirely taken up by tender passion."

That Bellamy's approach to this question can best be seen in the light of surrealist automatism is suggested by numerous passages in his work. In a notebook from the early 1870s he opposed the "old literature," with its "one-sided revelation of the mind in its attitude toward some single object or direction," to an entirely new idea: "a transcript of the mind itself undominated by single motives and marked with the almost infinite variety of the mind's own operations." (11) "Is not the succession of ideas that in an hour passes the focus of our mental vision . . . a more heterogeneous, and fantastic, procession than ever graced a day of carnival?" Noting, furthermore, that "books are dull" because they "present thoughts in unnatural distorted arrangement" which "gives little idea of the mind," he declared his intention "to follow the law of the mind in making a book," to try to write his "thoughts as they throng in the mind."

To what extent Bellamy carried out this experiment in automatic writing is not known. Most of his papers were sold after his death, and have not been accessible to researchers. The remarks quoted above, however — especially in view of his critical interest in spiritualism and psychical research — would seem to indicate that he had indeed heard and heeded what André Breton would call the *automatic message*. That this was for him much more than a "literary" aid is made clear in this unequivocal testimony from "The Religion of Solidarity": "It is especially in moments of the deepest anguish or of the maddest gaiety . . . that we become, not by force of argument, but by spontaneous experience, strictly subjective to ourselves, that is, the individuality becomes objective to the universal soul, that eternal subjective. We call such an experience abnormal; it should be normal."

TRANSCENDENCE OF TIME

Throughout his life Bellamy dreamed of the conquest of time by passion.

In *Miss Ludington's Sister* we meet a character for whom "the veil between time and eternity

was melted by the hot breath of . . . passion, and the confines of the natural and the supernatural were confounded." More audaciously, in one of his most extraordinary tales, "With the Eyes Shut," the clock is seen almost as the symbol of all ideological conflicts rooted in the Reality Principle. We are ushered into a display room of clocks that are equipped with phonographic devices, so that on the hour, on the half-hour, etc., they recite excerpts from the works of celebrated writers. These timepieces also feature "effigies of the authors whose sentiments they repeated." "There were religious and sectarian clocks, moral clocks, philosophical clocks, free-thinking and infidel clocks, literary and poetical clocks, educational clocks, frivolous and bacchanalian clocks. . . . Modern wisdom was represented by a row of clocks surmounted by the heads of famous maxim-makers, from Rochefoucauld to Josh Billings." Standing near the religious and skeptical clocks at the hour of ten, he says, "the war of opinions that followed was calculated to unsettle the firmest convictions."

As early as "The Religion of Solidarity" (1874), when he protested "the barrier of time" and affirmed our hunger "not for more life, but for all the life there is," Bellamy took his stand for the poets' eternity. "Each moment of fullness," he would have agreed with André Breton, "bears in itself the negation of centuries of limping and broken history." Can anyone doubt that the "free play of every instinct" requires the abolition of time? Against the miserabilists' mechanical measurement of misery, Bellamy called for Blake's "Eternal Delight." The passions — especially the passions of solidarity and love — demand the primal timelessness that alone allows us to live, as Bellamy urged, with "calm abandon, a serene and generous recklessness."

The three themes — supersession of memory, overcoming of divisions in the personality, transcendence of time — reoccur in *Looking*

Backward with full force in the subplot telling of the narrator's love life.

In the year 2000 Julian West falls in love with a young woman who, as it turns out, is the great-granddaughter of the woman who had been his fiancée in 1887. Unknown to him, however, this girl — Edith Leete — had known since childhood of her great-grandmother's love for him, and had long felt herself to be, in some strange way, the living spirit of her ancestor, "come back to the world to fulfill some work that lay near [her great-grandmother's] heart."

In a dramatic climax, we find Julian West brooding over his weird isolation in this new world, feeling that "there was no place for [him] anywhere," and that he was "neither dead nor properly alive." It is at this moment, as he is on the verge of suicide, that Edith Leete affirms her reciprocal love and thereby retrieves him from the depths of despair.

Erotic passion thus triumphs — symbolically at least — over time and even death. A further implication is that love will flourish at its wildest heat after capitalism has been overthrown. "That evening the garden was bathed in moonlight, and till midnight Edith and I wandered to and fro there, trying to grow accustomed to our happiness."

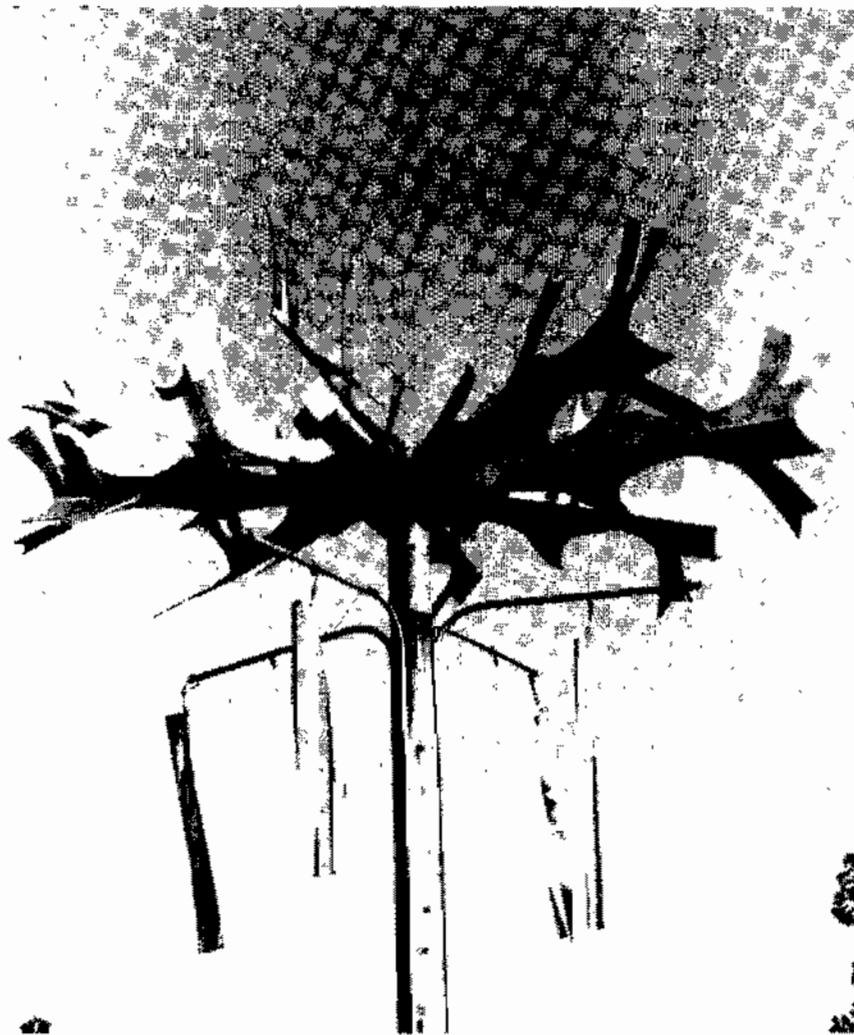
THE NEED FOR WILDERNESS

A fourth theme is Bellamy's sensitiveness to the call of the wild which, in turn, emphasizes the "open-endedness" of his thought.

In his unfinished autobiographical novel, *Eliot Carson*, he wrote rapturously of the remotest wilderness: "to chance all awed and silent upon those secret places of the woods, those room-like nooks whose air is warm with the sense of something living there . . . to lie beneath the pines and listen to the song of eternity in their branches till he forgot what manner of life his was." (12) A character in his early story, "Deserted," says



Edward HICKS (1780-1849): *The Peaceable Kingdom*



Gerome KAMROWSKI: *Marvelous Freedom of the Winds*

point-blank: "I wouldn't give much for a country where there are no wildernesses left." This is essentially the view set forth by Thoreau in *Walden*, where it is urged on us that "we need the tonic of wildness, to wade sometimes in marshes where the bittern and the meadow-hen lurk. . . . We need to witness our own limits transgressed, and some life pasturing freely where we never wander."

Contrary to the misperception of nearsighted critics who persist in mistaking Bellamy for an advocate of some sort of technocratic urbanism, this same attitude characterizes his utopia. It is implicit in the vast reforestation that begins immediately after the Revolution; in the ensuing transformation of relations between man and animals; in his vision of "the works of man blending with the face of nature in perfect harmony."

Extending even beyond the apparent barriers of "external nature," Bellamy's solidarity embraces also the wildernesses of human society, the wildernesses of the mind. Throughout his life he admired the sturdy independence of the American villager, whose unique way of life was vanishing before his very eyes under the blows of bourgeois industrialization. Where others saw only quirks and foibles in these plain and simple folk, Bellamy saw real grandeur, which he

reflected in many tales. His utopia could be viewed, in part, as an outgrowth of his desire to protect these unpretentious people — and with them, the last remnants of their sturdy independence, their quirks and foibles, their grandeur — from the onslaught of the capitalist juggernaut.

A deep sympathy for "outsiders" runs through Bellamy's work. No one could fail to note his affection for the spiritualists, for example, in *Miss Ludington's Sister*. His stories show him to have been drawn toward eccentrics, dreamers, people in some way "touched in the head." The world of *Looking Backward* leaves room — as too few utopias have done — for such "exceptions," such marginal beings who live "outside the system." In *Equality* it is emphasized that "the new order [has] no need or use for unwilling recruits. . . . If anyone did not wish to enter public service and could live outside of it without stealing or begging, he was quite welcome to."

Of course, Bellamy believed that the attractions of the new society would be so many and so irresistible that eventually everyone would come into "the new social house." But he insisted that "no sort of constraint [would be] brought to bear upon . . . anybody." He preferred to rely on such things as "the undreamed of possibilities of human friendship."

It is worth calling attention to the fact that *Looking Backward* was not intended as a

"finished" system; it was deliberately expansive. Recognizing, as he did, that "human nature in its essential qualities is good, not bad," Bellamy was convinced that once capitalism is abolished, and replaced by a rational social system, men and women will know well enough what to do with their lives. To paraphrase his own watchwords, there is no limit to the splendor that the "free play of every instinct" can create. "The way stretches before us," he wrote of the year 2000, "but the end is lost in light. . . . With a tear for the dark past, turn we then to the dazzling future and, veiling our eyes, press forward. The long and weary winter of the race is ended. Its summer has begun. Humanity has burst the chrysalis. The heavens are before it."

Relating *Looking Backward* to his earlier tales emphasizes that his utopia is above all a work of the imagination. He himself regarded his stories as "the working out of problems, that is to say, attempts to trace the logical consequences of certain assumed conditions." (13) Acknowledging that it was "in this form" that the plan of *Looking Backward* presented itself to his mind, he added that from that moment "the writing of the book was the simplest thing in the world."

The facility with which Bellamy recorded his utopia is a measure of its truly inspired character, and helps explain why it has proved so inspiring to so many others. William Dean Howells touched on this point when he wrote, regarding the method of Bellamy's tales, that "he does not so much transmute our everyday reality to the substance of romance, as make the airy stuff of dreams one in quality with veritable experience." (14)

In *Looking Backward*, Bellamy's moral/revolutionary enthusiasm was suffused with just the right touch of scientific anticipation, the poetic marvelous and erotic promise for it to become contagious for a generation that dreamed at night of Darwinian evolution, baseball, bicycles, boxing, the eight-hour day, Barnum's circus, aeronautics, anarchists, Whistler's Mother, world's fairs, the cancan, steam locomotives, the Ferris Wheel, the Statue of Liberty, Lily Langtry, Loie Fuller, Tennyson, Edison, Jack the Ripper and *Alice in Wonderland*. As the vivid expression of a dream already lurking in the backs of the minds of millions, the book "caught on" and "sold like hotcakes."

If the same cannot be said for the much longer and heavily didactic *Equality*, it has its own brighter moments nonetheless. Who could be indifferent to the account of the "great bonfire" where, in the midst of the Revolution, masses of people dance around an immense conflagration — fueled by a mountain of stocks, bonds, money, deeds and other examples of capitalism's mystical paperwork — on the site of the New York Stock Exchange?

The chief interest of *Equality* lies precisely in the details it supplies to our usage of *Looking Backward*. As a tale it is the meagerest shell, but as an extension of the earlier book it is invaluable.

Among its many suggestive and appealing details, we learn in *Equality* that this utopia is symbolized by the windmill, replicas of which adorn the roofs of public buildings: "The mill stands for the machinery of administration, the wind that drives it symbolizes the public will, and

the rudder that always keeps the vane of the mill before the wind, however suddenly or completely the wind may change, stands for the method by which the administration is kept at all times responsive and obedient to every mandate of the people, though it be but a breath."

That he would select such a symbol, at once so simple and so strange, tells us much of the man who wrote *Looking Backward*. From the weird effigies surmounting his oratorical clocks, to his indignant Martian critic of Earthian psychology; from the haunted and obsessive wanderers through the anticipatory nostalgia of *Miss Ludington's Sister* to the beautiful and free-spirited girl of the year 2000, walking arm in arm with her lover: 143 years old but still young! — Bellamy's imaginary world runs far and deep. He has been called "the Jules Verne of socialism." But he deserves better. Could it not be — especially in view of the appreciable role of glory in his utopia — that he is rather socialism's Raymond Roussel?

The foregoing presentation of Bellamy, as essentially eros-affirmative, libertarian and richly imbued with the poetic spirit — one whose approach to key questions is analogous to that of the greatest, most revolutionary poets — is admittedly at variance with, even wholly antithetical to, the prevailing view. In attempting to see his work as a whole, relating his early stories and essays to the later utopian works, I have tried to rectify the false and narrow conclusions of critics whose "critiques" too often have been based on nothing more than a hurried and prejudiced skimming of *Looking Backward* alone.

The internal evidence of Bellamy's writings, as I have tried to outline it here, seems to me more than enough to warrant a new hearing, so to speak, for him and his work. It will also prove illuminating to call on an interesting if little-known supporting witness. Our effort to see Bellamy and his achievements in the light of Blake, Baudelaire, Rimbaud — above all in the light of surrealism — is enhanced and substantiated by his association (unnoted by his biographers or commentators) with a remarkable poet: a poet of whom André Breton said that he was one of the few of his generation who "commands the high waves," (15) and who also was among the first to translate Baudelaire and Rimbaud into English. I refer to Stuart Merrill (1863-1915). A major figure of the Symbolist movement in France, he happens also to have organized the first Nationalist Club in New York, 1889. (16)

Born on Long Island, Merrill spent most of his childhood and adolescence in France, where his father, an abolitionist who had fought in the Union Army, was employed as legal advisor to the American legation. By the time his family returned to the U.S. for a few years in the '80s, young Merrill was already a poet as well as a revolutionary.

Prior to taking up Bellamy, he had helped on Henry George's mayoral campaign, defended the Haymarket anarchists and sold socialist publications in the streets of New York. His whole life was an impassioned crusade for the transformation of the world. He fought for the freedom of the American blacks, the Chinese, the whole working class; he supported every struggle against injustice. When British hypocrisy im-

prisoned Oscar Wilde, Merrill spoke out in his defense.

On the walls of his New York apartment were paintings by Gauguin and Rops; on his bookshelves, works of the greatest living poets in French and English. Merrill knew, down to the very marrow of his bones, that the revolutionary spirit of the new painting and the new poetry was fundamentally inseparable from the revolution in the streets.

The second issue of *The Nationalist* (June 1889) featured his strident "Ballad of the Outcasts":

Beware, O Kings whom Mammon sways,
Lest morrows nearer than ye ken
With our red flags of battle blaze!
For we are hated of all men.

In an article in the same magazine, Merrill defined the Bellamy movement as the "expression of the evolution of society from competition to co-operation," and summarized its perspectives: "Upon the ruins of the competitive state will arise the Co-operative Commonwealth, with its system of equilibrated production and consumption. Then private interest will no more be hostile to public interest, but they will become identified, and as in a huge partnership, the purest altruism will prove the truest egoism."

As a leader of the Nationalist movement he organized meetings, wrote "articles of combat," and — with his friend Clarence McIlvaine — ran a "correspondence society" to promote the diffusion of radical literature.

As militant in poetry as in politics, he was in more ways than one a follower of Blake, Shelley and Swinburne. "Modern society," he wrote, "is a badly written poem which one must be active in correcting. A poet, in the etymological sense, remains a poet everywhere, and it is his duty to restore some loveliness on the earth."

Merrill's poetry, nearly all of it written in French, has a touch of the Preraphaelites' sunlit melancholy but is always shot through with a sweetly seductive undercurrent of revolt. It is this quality that distinguished him from most of the Symbolists and made him a notable precursor of surrealism.

His close friends included Stéphane Mallarmé and René Ghil. He was well acquainted with all

the leading and most of the lesser figures of French and Belgian Symbolism. During his stay in the U.S. in the '80s he wrote on French poetry — on Gérard de Nerval and others — for the *New York Times* and the *Evening Post*. It was during his active participation in the Bellamy movement that he prepared a volume of translations from the French titled *Pastels in Prose*, prefaced by his friend William Dean Howells and published by Harpers in 1890. This book introduced American readers to the work of Aloysius Bertrand, Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam and many others. A second volume, to have been called *Poems of the Symbolists*, was readied for publication but unfortunately never reached print. Merrill also translated works by William Morris, Oscar Wilde, James Thomson, Ernest Dowson, Arthur Symonds and William Butler Yeats into French.

Like many of Bellamy's followers, Stuart Merrill evolved into a revolutionary socialist. But we cannot help being struck by the depth and passion of his youthful commitment to the world of *Looking Backward*. If he later advanced beyond its limits, this was a matter of growth, not renunciation; his underlying motives, his basic orientation, remained unchanged. At the same time, the adherence of such an outstanding poet to Bellamy's movement helps us to see that movement in a new light.

"Regret, remorse, love of the past," Merrill wrote, in an admonition that Bellamy could have written, "are forerunners of mental decay and death. . . . We have eternity before us." Like Bellamy, Merrill dreamed of a new society founded on freedom, equality, solidarity, love, imagination and poetry. Like Bellamy, he devoted his life to the realization of such a society. Like Bellamy, he kept his inner eye focused on the revolutionary future.

In spite of the myriad defeats, disappointments, failures, defections, betrayals, collapses, false starts and other unending calamities that have afflicted the revolutionary cause in our time, some of us remain determined, no matter what, to hold out for everything that revolution — and revolution alone — can bring. However dim the prospects, however rare the signs of resurgence, we concede nothing in principle: modern society is slavery and misery. Nothing can stop us from dreaming of freedom and the marvelous — dreaming, above all, of the great day when those dreams will find their way, irreversibly, into action.

If there is one crucial lesson of revolution in the 20th century, it is this: without the dream of freedom, the act of liberation too easily becomes a trap. Therein lies the permanent value of the great utopias. They give us an irrevocable sense of what revolution meant when the dream and the act were seen and felt as one.

How many are there, today, with the courage to admit that we shall never get anywhere till this sense has been fully renewed?

I know of no American whose works could contribute to such renewal more than Edward Bellamy. He is one of those great dreamers who dared to imagine means of escape from a suffocating social order. With Winstanley, Blake, Shelley, Owen, Fourier, Flora Tristan, he dreamed of a life made livable at last.



STUART MERRILL
(woodcut by Felix Vallotton)

Much of his strategy may be questionable; his economics may be superseded; this or that feature of his program may be rendered obsolete by technological developments foreseen by no one. But capitalism — wage-slavery — remains, with all its insidious institutions. And just as Bellamy's indictment of the whole system still stands vividly true, so too his portrayal of the nonrepressive 21st century remains at once a brilliant promise and a burning challenge.

To leave Bellamy to the technocrats would be as foolishly wrong as to leave Marx to the Stalinists or Freud to the American Psychoanalytic Association. Long, bitter struggles await us; we need

all the help we can get. We can ill afford to wave away those who have so much to offer. If we agree with Amadeo Bordiga that "a revolutionary is one for whom the revolution is as



certain as a deed that has already happened," then Bellamy is one of the greatest revolutionaries that the U.S. has known. He did, moreover, what very few ever have done: For millions of people, he made revolution attractive and desirable.

Looking Backward, he wrote, "was written in the belief that the Golden Age lies before us and not behind us, and is not far away." To read Bellamy today is still to look ahead: It is a moment's breath of fresh air from a future worth dreaming about.

Franklin ROSEMONT

NOTES

- (1) All quotations from Bellamy, unless otherwise specified, are from *Looking Backward* (Boston, 1888), *Equality* (New York, 1897) and *Edward Bellamy Speaks Again!* (Kansas City, 1937). "The Religion of Solidarity" is included in *Edward Bellamy, Selected Writings on Religion and Society*, ed. by Joseph Schiffman (New York, Liberal Arts, 1955).
- (2) Sylvia E. Bowman's *Edward Bellamy Abroad* (New York, Twayne, 1962) traces Bellamy's influence in twenty-eight countries. The bibliography lists eighty translations of *Looking Backward*, into twenty-three languages.
- (3) The best sources remain Arthur E. Morgan, *Edward Bellamy* (New York, Columbia, 1944), and Howard H. Quint, *The Forging of American Socialism* (Indianapolis, Bobbs-Merrill, 1964).
- (4) See, for example, the long review of *Looking Backward* in *Industrial Solidarity*, Nov. 17, 1926.
- (5) A long excerpt from Morris' review is included in A.L. Morton, *The English Utopia* (London, 1952). In *The New Nation* (Feb. 14, 1891), Bellamy reviewed *News From Nowhere*, a book "exceedingly well worth reading" by

"one of the greatest of living poets"; he is mildly critical only because "as to the industrial system . . . Mr. Morris is provokingly silent." (6) Upton Sinclair, *Mammonart: An Essay in Economic Interpretation* (Pasadena, 1925), p. 238.

(7) E.P. Thompson, *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary* (London, Merlin, 1977), p. 693. (8) Mumford never even manages to get Julian West's name right: he makes it Julius. His plot summary says that it is "needless to observe that [West] reawakens to the world of 1887 as soon as the institutions of 2000 have been described" — needless indeed, for it is not true. One begins to wonder, did he read the book at all?

In his preface to the 1962 Viking reprint (in which, by the way, all his errors are left uncorrected), Mumford acknowledges the "superficiality" of his work and offers his explanation: "I conceived this book in February 1922, did the necessary reading for it by the end of March, and turned the final drafts over to the publisher in June, in time to read the proofs before I sailed to Europe toward the end of July."

When it is recalled that his study concerns some forty utopias, to each of which he could not have devoted more than a day or two of research,

it becomes clear that Mumford's "explanation" is truly a confession of his boundless pretension and dishonesty — of his pompous eagerness to pronounce himself dogmatically, and with an appearance of scholarship, on problems for the solutions of which he had not even the rudiments of knowledge.

(9) W.D. Howells, preface to E. Bellamy, *The Blindman's Tale and Other Stories* (Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1898), p. xiii.

(10) Regarding the erotic implications of *Looking Backward*, see also David Bleich, "Eros and Bellamy," in *American Quarterly* (Fall 1964), pp. 445-459.

(11) Quoted in Morgan, *op. cit.*, p. 179.

(12) *Ibid.*, p. 155.

(13) "How I Wrote *Looking Backward*," in *Edward Bellamy Speaks Again*, *op. cit.*, p. 221.

(14) W.D. Howells, *op. cit.*, p. vi.

(15) André Breton, "Le Merveilleux contre le mystère," in *La Cle des champs* (Paris, 1953).

(16) Marjorie Louise Henry, *Stuart Merrill: La Contribution d'un Américain au symbolisme français* (Paris, 1927). See also Vincent O'Sullivan's article on Merrill in the *Dictionary of American Biography*.

H.P.L. & The Black Moon

Lovecraft's grandeur resides in nothing less than the creation of a personal mythology which ridicules "modern history." Scattered through the pages of popular magazines until his death, this mythology reflects an authentic occult knowledge, treated with entire freedom. From unknown planets there descended to earth, long before man, the founders of religions of which something still surrounds us. It is striking that this point of departure sheds light on scientific works certainly unknown to Lovecraft, such as the glaciary cosmology of Horbiger and certain developments in South American archaeology (cf. Denis Saurat, "Atlantis and the Reign of Giants," *Nouvelle Revue Française*, August 1953).

Presuming and analyzing a whole ante-diluvian literature, under their own direction, this impeccable writer and his group have given themselves the luxury of verifying their mythology. Rarely has such rigor served the evocation of the unfathomable depths.

Gérard LEGRAND

Two Articles From
MEDIUM/COMMUNICATION SURREALISTE
No. 1, November 1953



Silhouette of
H.P. Lovecraft
by Perry (1925)

Reaching back beyond Arthur Machen and Algernon Blackwood, in the gigantic shadow of A. Gordon Pym and Waldemar, stands Howard Phillips Lovecraft (1890-1937). This recluse of Providence, Rhode Island, was not content to distill the very pulp of nightmares — that terror of time and space signaled by DeQuincey and evoked by Benjamin Paul Blood in *Pluriverse*. Engulfed by the shores of Mu, Lovecraft — in his displaced prose, forged in the furnaces of the alchemy that he venerated — announced the occult return of the Ancient Ones.

It is in the essence of such vertigoes to be propagated, as if by vibration, at the very heart of subsequent works. And this has been amply demonstrated by the Snuk City group — represented among others by August Derleth, Robert Bloch, Hazel Heald and Robert E. Howard — who have perpetuated the black legend of Cthulhu.

Robert BENAYOUN

LOVECRAFT, SURREALISM & REVOLUTION

The Second World War, and the Nazi occupation of France, forced André Breton and other surrealists to seek refuge in the U.S. Regrouping in New York, they began a fruitful search for "surrealist evidence" in the New World. Among their greatest discoveries was Howard Phillips Lovecraft and the "Lovecraft circle," including Clark Ashton Smith, August Derleth, Donald Wandrei and Frank Belknap Long.

In the works of these authors the surrealists found confirmations and extensions of their own quest. Appearing in *Weird Tales* and other "pulp" magazines, these works seemed to them more truly poetic than the stuff in *Poetry* or other official organs of High Culture. Lovecraft and his friends reached beyond mere "literature" into the volatile shadows of a new mythology.

In a pioneering study of Lovecraft, in the American surrealist journal VVV, Robert Allerton Parker saluted his "primordial creatures of Manichean evil surviving from prehistory." (1) Lovecraft boldly confronted the problem of evil, with no concessions to religion (he was a militant atheist). A Lovecraftian sense of evil permeates several of the surrealist painter Matta's late '40s canvases, such as *Atyarth Insolent* and *Rghuin Monstrous Triumphs*.

In 1953 the first French translations of Lovecraft were hailed by Robert Benayoun and Gérard Legrand in the surrealist journal *Medium*. I recall vividly how Claude Tarnaud, during our meeting in New York, 1963, invoked the urgency of Lovecraft's "cosmic malevolence." This urgency owes nothing to esthetic/literary convention: It touches the world, life, all that we do. It is not accidental that Edouard Jaguer has suggested Lovecraft as an aid to sculptors (2), for his tales give us glimpses of the "Great Invisibles" assuming visibility in the defiant vitality of matter. Writing from the Oregon Caves in 1974, Philip Lamantia signaled there, in "the dialectics of calcination," a "pure Lovecraftian view of the 'old ones' growing their mineral thorns and bangs." (3)

For surrealists today, the works of the Lovecraft Circle remain a central source. (4)

One cannot help wondering to what extent, if any, the surrealists' interest in Lovecraft was reciprocated. To an inquiry on this subject, August Derleth replied: "I doubt very much that Lovecraft was ever much aware of the surrealist movement . . . Neither Lovecraft nor [Clark Ashton] Smith would have considered himself surrealist." (5) Frank Belknap Long, who probably knew Lovecraft better than anyone, adds: "I'm sure that HPL never read a word of surrealist writing in his life. And I doubt very much that CAS did in the early years. He may well have done so in later years, but as to that I possess no knowledge. Neither HPL nor Smith, in letters to me, ever mentioned Breton or Lautréamont." (6)

Lautréamont and Breton were not, in fact, well known names in 1920s/'30s America. Surrealism was almost as unknown in this country then as it was in Hitler's Germany and Stalin's USSR. None of Breton's manifestoes, none of the movement's pivotal works, had appeared in English. It is not surprising, then, for Long to acknowledge that "surrealism was not discussed to any great extent

among the writers of fantasy and horror I corresponded with forty years ago: George Sterling, Smith, Henry S. Whitehead, Donald and Howard Wandrei, Derleth, etc." (7)

In his volume of reminiscences of HPL, Long resumed this discussion: "Lovecraft's knowledge of surrealism . . . was of an exceedingly restricted nature. He was familiar with it only in the domain of painting, and although he had, of course, found many parallels between the work of the early Flemish artists and that of Dali and others, I am quite certain that even twentieth century surrealist painting influenced him very little." (8)

LOVECRAFT'S LAST LETTER

(excerpts)

During the past few months so many of my correspondents in the pest zone have been writing me about that display of fantastic and surrealist painting at the Museum of Modern Art that I'm hoping its travelling residue will include ancient Providence on its route. The group of elder sources — pictorial fantasists as far back as El Greco and Hell-Fire Bosch — would have especially fascinated me . . . but I fear it won't be included in the migratory aftermath. In general, though, I am not a surrealist enthusiast, for I think the practitioners of the school give their subconscious impressions too much automatic leeway. Not that the impressions are not potentially valuable, but that they tend to become trivial and meaningless except when more or less guided by some coherent imaginative concept. A thing like Señor Dali's humorously-dubbed "Wet Watches" tends to become a reductio ad absurdum of the fantastic principle, and to exemplify the aesthetic decadence so manifest in many phases of our moribund and socially transitional era. However, I surely concede that this form of expression should be adequately recognised; since many of its products undoubtedly do possess a powerful imaginative reach and freshness, whilst the whole movement cannot but make important and revivifying contributions to the mainstream of art. There is no drawing a line betwixt what is to be called extreme fantasy of a traditional type and what is to be called surrealism; and I have no doubt but that the nightmare landscapes of some of the surrealists correspond, as well as any actual creations could, to the iconographic horrors attributed by sundry fictioneers to mad or daemon-haunted artists. If there were a real Richard Upton Pickman or Felix Ebbsenly, (*) I am sure he would have been represented in the recent exhibition by several blasphemous and abhorrent canvases!

H.P. LOVECRAFT

(March 1937)

(*) Fictional artists in tales by HPL (ed.)

From HPL: *Selected Letters*, Vol. IV (Saug City, Wis., Arkham House, 1979)

Beyond the always uncertain ground of "influences," however, there is the broader field of objective parallels and above all of *elective affinities*, where we find ourselves on surer footing. "Neither HPL himself," Long tells us, "nor the members of the Lovecraft circle, were as influenced by surrealism as they were by Poe, Bierce, Dunsany, Blackwood, Machen, etc. But," he adds significantly, "they could hardly have been the kind of writers they were if the outstanding surrealists of the period had not made some impression on them." (9)

Long has avowed his own lively interest in surrealism, especially in its current American manifestations, in which he says he perceives "a rare, mountain-peak kind of free-associational splendor." (10) Unaware of VVV in the '40s, he now recognizes R.A. Parker's essay on HPL as one of the finest early appreciations. Citing Parker's tribute to HPL's "uncensored testimony of his inner adventures," Long comments: "It is an 'uncensored testimony' of that nature which forms the foundation upon which present day surrealism has built much of its structural cohesiveness, and though many of its tenets would doubtlessly have been rejected by HPL, this aspect of surrealism is certainly in accord with what he most wanted to achieve." (11)

It so happens that Lovecraft himself left a veritable "testament" on this subject. The very last letter that he wrote, found unmailed at the time of his death in 1937, contains a long passage (reprinted here in its entirety) on surrealism. His estimate, though not uncritical, is favorable overall — amazingly so for an American of that time. Elsewhere in the same letter he affirms his commitment to anti-fascism and the labor movement. He had long before outgrown the provincial racism and conservatism that disfigured some of his early 1920s letters. But in this last unfinished text we see how far the author of "The Call of Cthulhu" had advanced on the road of revolutionary clarity.

It is an extraordinary fact, well worth thinking about: In his last words, H.P. Lovecraft was deeply preoccupied by the decisive question of our century: revolution, socialist and surrealist.

F.R.

NOTES

- (1) "Such Pulp As Dreams Are Made On" in VVV No 2-3, 1943. This article was reprinted in the surrealist issue of *Radical America* (1970).
- (2) *Poétique de la Sculpture* (Paris, Musée de Poche, 1960), p. 66.
- (3) Postcard, 16 September 1974.
- (4) Recent studies of Lovecraft in the light of surrealism include Paul Buhle: "Dystopia as Utopia: HPL and the Unknown Content of American Horror Literature" in *The Minnesota Review* (Spring 1976), and Franklin Rosemont: "Notes on the Legacy of Cthulhu" in *Arsenal* No. 3 (Spring 1976).
- (5) Letter of 4 June 1967.
- (6) Letter of 3 July 1974.
- (7) Letter of 3 February 1974.
- (8) Howard Phillips Lovecraft: *Dreamer on the Nightside* (Saug City, Arkham House, 1975), p. 9.
- (9) Letter of 3 February 1974.
- (10) Letter of 3 July 1974.
- (11) HPL: *Dreamer on the Nightside*, p. 10.



Explorers of the Pluriverse



The "realist" polishes his lenses to capture the fleeting aspects of the external world. He prides himself upon the soundness and the sanity of his vision. The totality of that objective world he never doubts. But there are others: they cultivate the inner vision, abandon the paved highway of standardized points of view, brave the quicksands of non-conformity, and seek their own path through the jungle of subjectivity. For artists of this type, no less than seers and poets, the external world provides no more than the symbols and alphabet of communication, and the "field" into which they may project their visions.

Such adventurers are by no means alien newcomers to this continent. America has produced pioneers of the inward realm no less than of distant horizons. Old Cotton Mather himself published a book entitled *The Wonders of the Invisible World* which contains passages reminiscent of the diabolic visions of Hieronymus Bosch. Jonathan Edwards, in the middle of the eighteenth century, preached his famous sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," which literally had his listeners writhing in the aisles. His power was generated by the inner compulsion of Jonathan's obsession, a compulsion that exploded like a bomb into fiery, devastating eloquence, which spread terror among the credulous. Some such obsessive power has been exercised by prophets and messiahs of all the egregious sects and cults which have proliferated upon this continent. The folk-lore and folk-art of such cults, from Mother Ann Lee and Joseph Smith to Father Divine, invites examination and preservation.

I have neither time nor space to touch more than superficially upon the endless procession of native eccentrics who have, in various media and arts, sought to project their obsessive vision of the invisible. Edgar Allen Poe springs most directly to mind — though without doubt the psychoanalysts and psychiatrists have picked this case to the bone. Poe is a superb example of "marginal" consciousness — the external rebel, Lucifer the fallen, diabolically possessed, driven to express his inner vision of a demonic universe. In Poe, everything is calculated and cryptographic; all motives are malefic. A sort of mephitic ether numbs the reader with this poet's specially concocted poison, in which state he senses the erotic obscenity, half-masked, in such lines as these —

"Well I know this dim lake of Auber,
This misty mid region of Weir,
Well I know this dank tarn of Auber,
This ghoul-haunted region of Weir."

Herman Melville is another giant who utilized the space-time symbols of the outward world to project the somber vision of his somber universe. In "Benito Cereno" he presents a vivid allegory of appearance and reality, puncturing the safe and sane assumptions of the "normal" vision. In the words of the victim, Don Benito, he points his moral:

"... you were with me all day, stood with me, sat with me, talked with me, looked at me, ate with me; and yet your last act was to clutch for a villain

not only an innocent man, but the most pitiable of all men. To such degree may malign machinations and deceptions impose. So far may even the best man err, in judging the conduct of one with the recesses of whose condition he is not acquainted."

William James rescued from oblivion the obscure genius of Benjamin Paul Blood (1832-1919). Blood was a village philosopher of Amsterdam, New York, most of whose literary output consisted of letters addressed to the editors of Utica newspapers. He also published visionary poems at his own expense. Blood discovered the "anaesthetic revelation," and believed that the deepest insight into reality came just as the individual consciousness takes flight under the influence of ether or some such anaesthetic. The illuminating moments so experienced led him to the formulation of a philosophy of the "Pluriverse," as opposed to our commonly accepted "Universe." "Certainty is the root of despair," Blood asserted. "The Inevitable stales, while doubt and hope are sisters. Not unfortunately the Universe is wild — game-flavored as a hawk's wing. Nature is miracle all. She knows no laws: the same returns not, save to bring the different. . . ." Blood's *Pluriverse* was published in 1920, the year after his death; but his work and vision still await exhaustive examination.

If, too often, Blood wrote in the pedestrian measures of his own period, he succeeded at times in liberating himself from the network of current verbiage that hindered his flight into super-consciousness. Nor, as his "poetical Alphabet" demonstrates, was he without humor. Thus, independently of Rimbaud, he diagnosed the

vowels, and wrote of the "Absurd genius of U flat":

"U, guttural, or flat, is a humorous savage, best described in his own words: a huge, lubberly, blundering dunderhead, a blubbering numskull and a dunce, ugly, sullen, dull, clumsy, rugged, gullible, glum, dumpish, lugubrious — a stumbler, mumbler, bungler, grumbler, jumbler — a grunter, thumper, tumbler, stunner — a drudge, a trudge; he lugs, tugs, sucks, juggles, and is up to all manner of bulls — a musty, fussy, crusty, disgusting brute. . . ."

These homegrown eccentrics of ours are specimens all of the marginal consciousness, doughty defenders of the subjective from the regimented invasion and standardized error of the external world. It is fortunate for us that the spirit of Charles Hoy Fort lives on in his published work.

This Socrates of the Bronx died in 1932. He was primarily a collector of newspaper clippings; out of these clippings, by a craft of literary collage and montage, Fort managed to project his picture of a paradoxical and highly unpredictable universe. He was a connoisseur of the incredible — a snatcher up of unconsidered, yet disconcerting, trifles — the alogical, the illogical, the analogical, the neological.

"We shall have a procession of data that Science has excluded," Charles Fort challenged. And so he marshals his army of incredible details — of snowflakes the size of saucers, of black rains, the fall of a thousand tons of butter, of jet-black snow, pink snow, blue hailstones, of hailstones with the flavor of oranges. In response to a query Charles Fort confessed his faith in "the oneness of allness." Furthermore:

"... we and all other appearances or phantasms in a superdream are expressions of one cosmic flow or graduation between them, one called disorder, unreality, megalibrium, ugliness, discord, inconsistency; the other called order, reality, equilibrium, beauty, harmony, justice, truth. . . ."

In the visual arts, the eccentric or subjective craftsman has been ridiculed and rejected by his contemporaries. One recalls immediately the case of Albert Ryder and the tardy acclamation of his genius; and more recently, that of Louis Eilshemius, who despite belated appreciation, passed so many years of his lonely life, as a figure of ridicule. In the arts, as in other realms we have, on the whole, placed too high a value upon "standard equipment" and have too long remained inhospitable, to borrow the words of the poet, to "all things counter, original, spare, strange."

It is fortunate that a new spirit is emerging at last. Despite the exigencies of our hot, sputtering immediacy, this spirit recognizes the sanctity of expression in all forms, and values authenticity rather than empty professionalism. This spirit is no longer frightened by the expression of ob-

session and delusion. For without such compulsions, bereft of fire and vitality, expression dies.

We have but to use our own eyes, cultivate our own emerging powers of observation, to make our own discoveries of significant eccentrics. Some may be re-discoveries from a more or less forgotten past; others may be hidden in strange out-of-the-way places or pages. I myself have long wondered why some enterprising editor or publisher has never "discovered" the talent of Clark Ashton Smith. I came by chance upon his black bitter humor in the pages of a pulp-paper magazine devoted to quasi-scientific fiction. Clark Ashton Smith writes of interplanetary ex-

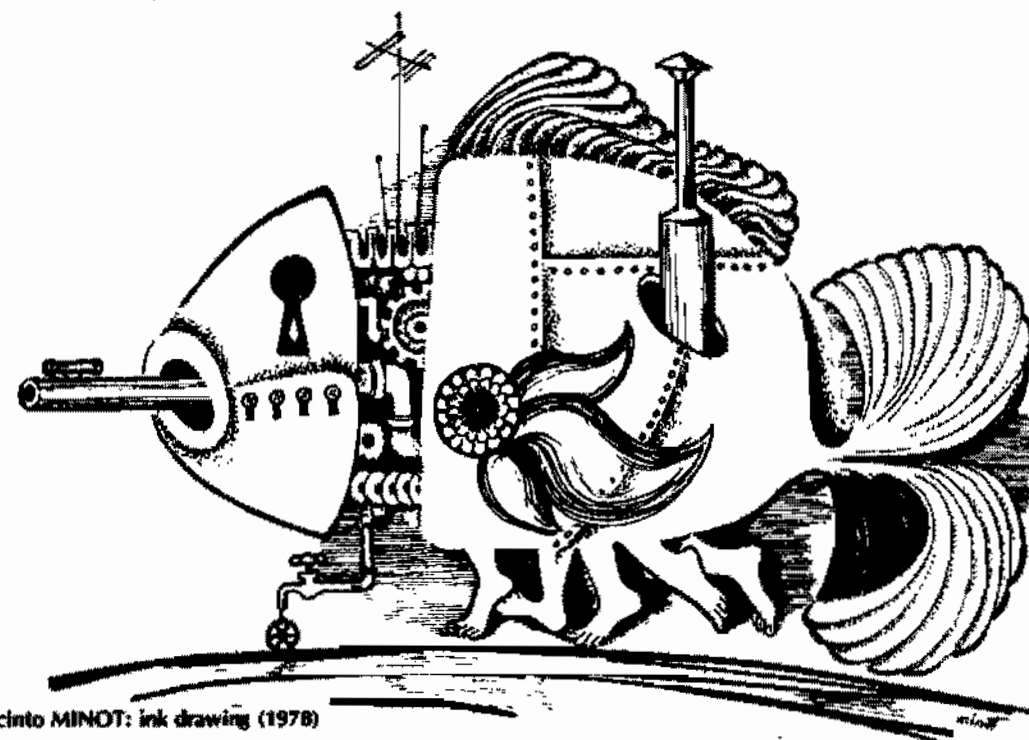
ploration — the common matter of such publications — but he possesses a power to transmute this base material into an imaginative and humorous allegory of human aspirations. Three explorers of the outer universe rocket through space so swiftly that they seem not to be moving at all. Overcome by the monotony of the speedless speed which seemed to be motionless, two of these adventurers murder their companion, cast the body from the rocket-plane. There it floats and follows them with accusing immobility — since the plane itself is the only body exerting any gravitational pull in that vast emptiness!

Maybe here is a fable for the rest of us. In our frenzied rocketing through time and space, we

too, may have cast out the misunderstood visionary from our midst. But he too belongs to our common humanity. However evident his eccentricity may appear to our eyes, let us not forget that self-propitiation does not in itself insure immunity from self-deception.

Robert Allerton PARKER

from *First Papers of Surrealism*,
catalog of the
International Surrealist Exhibition,
New York, 1942



Jacinto MINOT: ink drawing (1978)

O. HENRY (1862-1910)

O. Henry, who visited Niagara in a top-hat, claimed to be able to distinguish the register of the falls on the musical scale as he listened to them. "The note was about two feet below the lowest G on the piano," he said. This great popular humorist trails a lyrical past throughout his work, evoking the bright eyes of the first years of American movies, the blazing stanzas of Apollinaire's "Emigrant of Landor Road" and Jacques Vaché's loud appeals to the unique vocation of a whole generation: "I would also be a trapper, or a robber, or a prospector, or a hunter, or a miner, or a driller, Arizona Bar . . ."

In this same way O. Henry, a pure product of the state of Texas where he did his early work, bordering on Mexico and on Indian Territory, was in turn cowboy, gold prospector, drugstore clerk and

draughtsman with a real-estate agent. Imprisoned for an alleged fraud, later found innocent and released, eventually he became editor of a satirical magazine.

O. Henry's humor ("gebrochenor" humor), like that of the early Chaplin, is affectionate and does not seek to modify the structure of the world. "All of us," he wrote, "have to be prevaricators, hypocrites and liars every day of our lives; otherwise the social structure would fall into pieces the first day. We must act in one another's presence just as we must wear clothes. It is for the best."

His good will, his heartfelt sympathy, like Thomas DeQuincey's, extend no less electively toward the "rascallions," the outlaws. The grand poetic trails which he covers so alluringly in tales like "The Voice of the City" are those that can be followed

only by an admirable cavalier. "A man lost in the snow wanders, in spite of himself, in perfect circles."

Moreover, O. Henry is kept from any bitterness by his sense of wonder-struck love, as well as by his knack of leaning at pleasure over the well of childhood illusion. He wrote to his young daughter from the country: "Here it is summertime, and the bees are blooming and the flowers are singing and the birds making honey. . . . And I haven't heard a thing about Easter, and about the rabbit's eggs — but I suppose you have learned by this time that eggs grow on eggplants and are not laid by rabbits."

André BRETON

from *Anthology of Black Humor*
(Paris, 1939)

Translated by Peter Wood



BENJAMIN PAUL BLOOD IN 1860



Maurice KISH: The Tunnel of Love (oil on canvas)

Surrealism and Yiddish Poetry

Self-conscious surrealism has been rare in Yiddish poetry. (I have explored this subject in an essay to appear in the forthcoming issue of *Arsenal*.) But whether or not they ever heard of surrealism, many Yiddish poets — within as well as outside the boundaries of the political Left — approached the world of dreams, the irrational and the marvelous in a spirit which can be called surrealist in essence.

Some of the most remarkable poets in Yiddish are among the least known, precisely because their work departs so sharply from the mainstream of realism. Three such poets are represented here.

Ephraim Auerbach, born in Bessarabia in 1892, was an agricultural worker who came to

the U.S. via Palestine and Britain. He is among the most curious authors in Yiddish; his *Red Thread* (1927) is a unique revolutionary defense of the vegetarianism then common in Yiddish radical circles.

Leonid Feinberg, born in 1897 in Podolia, Russia, was an outstanding young poet in Russian as well as in Yiddish. An officer in the Red Army during the Revolution, he was captured by Deniken, escaped in 1920, and emigrated to the U.S. Long known as a leader of proletarian poets, he bitterly attacked the rising Soviet bureaucracy, the lack of party democracy, and the general Stalinization of the communist movement. His later writings, epitomized in

Yiddish (1950), were marked by a brutal pessimism.

Selwyn (Shloime) Schwartz, perhaps the most surrealist-oriented of Yiddish-American poets, was born in 1912 in the district of Lomea, Poland; he emigrated as a child. Associated with the *In Sich* group of introspectivists, he made a transition to English-language poetry as few of his elders could do. He has been close to many painters — Marc Chagall and Rufino Tamayo among others — and came into contact with the French surrealist exiles' milieu in New York in the 1940s. Author of several books of poems, in Yiddish and in English, he lives today in Chicago.

P.B.

NEW YORK

*Kaleidoscopic, grotesque and more varied
Than theater, museum or morgue,
Towers the miracle of the century.
The apocalyptic city, New York.*

*A sorcerer in purple togas
Wrapped in loud outcries
On a sparkling chariot of fire
Along Broadway's brilliant lights.*

*When the evening — a lusty drunkard —
Drives the sober day from the skies,
Lights stream like colorful liquor
From the lamps on every corner.*

*In the city of steel rhombuses
Where one rhombus rests on another,
Red electric lamps set aflame
Dazzling unrest in the blood of hermits.*

L. FEINBERG



PRE-SURREALIST

*last night on the verandah
she and i drank the stars
from a blue saucer.
the night was intelligent and sad.
my wristwatch in song aloud
in fractured space the smoke of her Chesterfield.*

*a young love gossiped of spring and wombs.
the minister would gladly die beside her,
her hot wind tongued the black fish to fry
the river like Sunday passed slowly on.*

*but her music rich in profane swings;
each step a cradle
down
the stairway spines.
my young one powdered the back of the moon
while the night sang psalms of rape, of nightmare.*

*she & i have hoisted so many hours over last night
to keep my wristwatch off the last minute.
in vain the dawn, its coiffure done up
while the sun wrote a sonnet on naked feet.*

Selwyn S. SCHWARTZ



NEWS

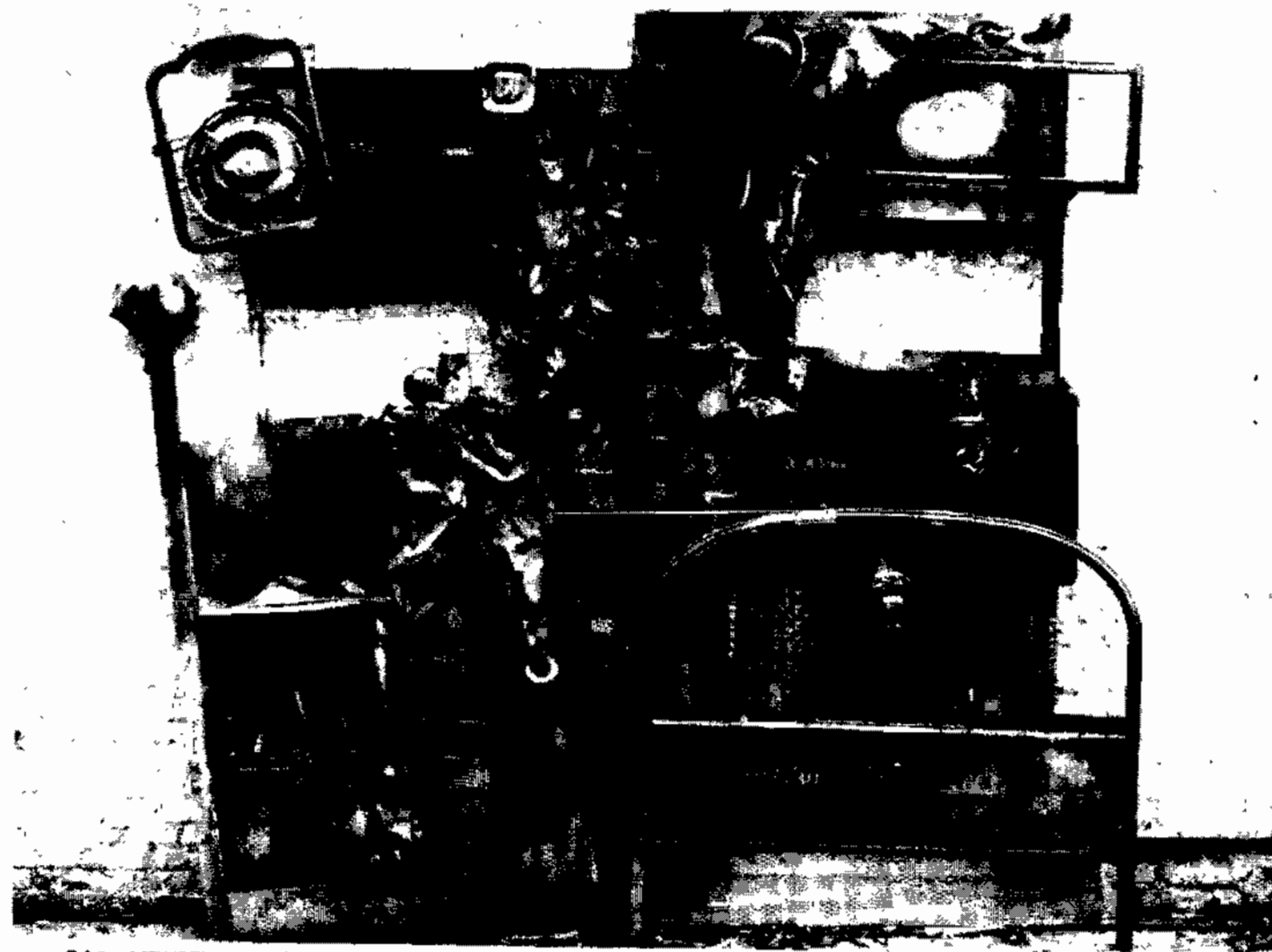
*In my feverish fingers the world writhes.
I am a net of wire,
A pulse of a thousand pulses,
A seismograph of world-quakes.
In the East there rises in me the sun,
In the West there sets in me the sun,
Morocco storms my fortresses,
A hurricane devastates my harvest fields,
In Broome Street I perish in flames,
The black Hudson drags me to its bottom,
I kindle the world in the fire of decline:
With naked heaving breasts, with hungry eyes,
Raging fists upon sated worlds I advance —
In my feverish fingers the world convulses,
And I within it — a sullen sadness.*

*Dusty papers and sooty faces,
Machines — palpitating hearts,
Frustrated thoughts on questioning shoulders,
Imps in weary eyes,
And fingers jerk as if on wires.
The leaden Destroyer above
Swallows the letters in his burning belly
And regurgitates them in lines, lines.
The Moloch of emotions is unappeased.
He will gulp me down, too,
And spit out in leaden lines
The world in my fingers
And I in the seething belly of the press-machine.*

*Suddenly the world paused
And my fingers remain at rest
On the keys of the typewriter,
Scattered, stiffened.
The head sinks like lead on the desk,
The wire-net becomes like stinging flies
That spread themselves on me with blind repose
With tiny freezing pins —
And Moloch above rips his belly within him,
His fury exhales gray fumes,
The hunger cramps his entrails,
Red worms crawl from his eyes —
And my fingers
On the keys of the typewriter,
Spread out and stiffened.*

Ephraim AUERBACH





Tristan MEINECKE: *Amerika* (assemblage). At the 1976 World Surrealist Exhibition this work became "The Domain of T-Bone Slim"

T-BONE SLIM AND THE PHONETIC CABALA

The greatest writer of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) — and one of the most curious figures in American literature — was the man known as T-Bone Slim. Little is known of his life. Of Finnish descent, he was born Matt Valentine Huhta around the turn of the century, probably in or near Ashtabula, Ohio. He died in New York, where he had been employed as a barge captain, in 1942.

The IWW's most persistent columnist, T-Bone Slim wrote regularly for One Big Union papers and magazines for some twenty years. Three of his songs — "Mysteries of a Hobo's Life," "I'm Too Old to Be a Scab" and "The Popular Wobbly" — remain among the best-loved lyrics in the famous *Little Red Song Book*. In 1922 his only extended work, a 38-page pamphlet titled *Starving Amidst Too Much*, was published by the IWW's Foodstuff Workers Industrial Union No. 460. An impassioned critique of the food industry, it also is a classic of black humor.

Humor as black as midnight is, in fact, the hallmark of all of T-Bone's writing, and it was heightened by a remarkably acute sensitivity to the *hidden ways of words*. It is this that gives his

work a special *flavor* that is unlike anything else in our literature. He veered constantly toward the extreme limits of language, to the disquieting no-man's-land of puns, palindromes, malapropisms and slang. For T-Bone, the words "stiff without a brother" equal "ship without a rudder." "Betterments," he tells us, "should be better meats." His work is strewn with sparkling neologisms — Brisbanality (after the top columnist on the Hearst papers, Arthur Brisbane), Saphroncisco, civilinsanity, inexhorrible, sarcasthma — and incomparable maxims: "Half a loaf is better than no loafing at all." "Wherever you find injustice, the proper form of politeness is attack." "Juice is stranger than friction."

Slang and word-play always have been characteristics of popular literature, as well as principal vehicles by which the expressiveness of language is continually enriched. The best-read authors have drawn heavily on puns and the "language of the streets," often with marvelous results. When we read, for example, in *Boxiana*, by Pierce Egan (1772-1849), an oft-reprinted work by one of the most widely-read authors of his day, such lines as "the numerous GILLS he has punished . . . the

LUSTY COVES he has milled . . . the SAUCY SWELLS he has pinked" — all of which translate into "the fighters he has vanquished" — we may appreciate the remark by a writer in *Blackwood's Magazine* (1820) that "the man who has not read *Boxiana* is ignorant of the power of the English language."

In T-Bone's case, however, word-play assumes a significance that is deeper and darker. This revolutionary hobo — a conscious member of that class "with nothing to lose but its chains" — realized, perhaps more than any of his American contemporaries, that language is not ours to facilitate esthetic, literary or moralistic pursuits, but rather to be unfettered so that it can help extend the universal unfettering known as Revolution.

In Jack London's tale, "Local Color," a curious digression tells us that the words *hobo* and *oboe* derive from the French *haut bois* (high wood): "In a way one understands [the word hobo] being born of the contempt for wandering players and musical fellows." This is especially suggestive in view of the alchemical scholar Fulcanelli's contention (in *The Mystery of the Cathedrals*, 1925)

that the expression "gothic art" has nothing to do with the Goths, as so many have believed; rather, "gothic art" (*art gothique*) is simply a corruption of the word *argotique* (slang) which sounds exactly the same. This is in conformity with the phonetic law, which governs the traditional cabala in every language and does not pay any attention to spelling." Moreover, Fulcanelli continues, "dictionaries define argot as 'a language peculiar to all individuals who wish to communicate their thoughts without being understood by outsiders.' Thus it is certainly a *spoken cabala*." And he goes on to point out that "in our day, argot is spoken by . . . the poor, the despised, the rebels calling for liberty and independence, the outlaws, the tramps and the wanderers . . . [It] is the cursed dialect, banned by high society, by the nobility (who are really so little noble), by the well-fed and self-satisfied middle class, luxuriating in the ermine of their ignorance and fatuity. It remains the language of a minority of individuals living outside accepted laws, conventions, customs and etiquette."

For Fulcanelli, finally, argot is nothing less than "one of the forms derived from the *Language of the Birds* . . . the language which teaches the mystery of things and unveils the most hidden truths . . . the key to the *double science*, sacred and profane."

It is worth emphasizing how perfectly Fulcanelli's perspective coincides with the discovery by philologist/philosopher/poet Fabre d'Olivet (1768-1825) that the word *poetry* does not derive, as is still commonly believed, from the Greek word meaning *maker*, but rather from the Phoenician word signifying the *highest principle of language*.

That the quest for this highest principle of language should be pursued by those held to be of the "lowest" class is one of those exhilarating priorities of dialectic that help clear a "humid path" through the ice of ideology, and thus help to make us masters rather than victims of the bottomless bag of tricks that Hegel called "the cunning of history."

T-Bone's theory and practice — "humor," he wrote, "is the carefree manhandling of extremes" — situates him at the juncture of traditional phonetic cabala and the surrealist image. The sureness of his poetic *direction* is exemplified in a brief sketch, teeming with alchemical implications, wherein he announced "T-Bone Slim's Golden Discovery," a "motion mirror": "You throw a dead cat in front of it and it shows the cat tearing up a live buzzard."

When he remarked, moreover, that he wrote "using a cross between a Chinese and a Hebrew grammar," this may not be a plain "fact" but it is

surely more than a "joke." Does it not suggest T-Bone's consciousness that "Something Else" circulated "between the lines" of his penciled notations — that his "grammar" exceeded the accepted boundaries of discourse and carried on a kind of "double monologue," or rather a monologue to the third power?

We may thus reinterpret Shakespeare's celebrated remark about puns being the lowest form of wit: In the light of Fulcanelli and T-Bone Slim, it would seem that "lowest" here means *deepest* — that is, that word-play penetrates to the *physical* foundations of language. The embarrassment provoked by puns in "polite" society suggests that they do indeed touch something vital and hidden, as has been amply shown, of course, by psychoanalysis.

T-Bone takes us to the very heart of this elusive domain — to the erotic spaces *between words*. He shows us the wild dances of suffixes and prefixes, the explosive matter and anti-matter of homonyms, the gambols of etymological roots, the magnetic attraction of syllables.

"Words make love," said Andre Breton. Who better than T-Bone Slim has shown us the infinite variety of *verbal foreplay*? Without even trying, he left us the prolegomena to a veritable *Kama Sutra* of language on the loose.

F.R.



GOD IS A SCAB

for T-Bone Slim

*Heads float in incense
hands float in blood
the last pope's last will and testament
floats in the grease shed by world-weary
worms*

*It is out of their golden yawn
that the crippled skeletons emerge to break
wind
and to count the banknotes that the heavenly
courriers gnawed with their leprosy
gums*

*No rest in this century for the Universal
Scab!
the hogs stand in line with the gods
at his perfume counter to be born again*

Joseph JABLONSKI



A NOTE ON SLANG

Even today in the most advanced industrial societies, it would be easy to witness the development of a poetic language, not among the "upper classes," but among the pariahs and outlaws. I refer to slang.

On the part of the popular masses who create it and use it, slang reveals, first, an unconscious need for poetry that is no longer satisfied by the language of the other classes, and second, an elementary and latent hostility toward those classes. It reveals also the tendency of the workers (who, in France, all have a trade jargon) to develop into a distinct social group having its own language, manners, customs and morality.

From the slang of these disinherited classes, new words constantly arise. Perhaps slang

recapitulates, on a higher level, the whole process of the development of language once it has satisfied the most primary human needs. The entirety of linguistic evolution can be retraced in slang, from onomatopoeia all the way to the most evolved poetic imagery, to such an extent that Victor Hugo was able to see in it "immediate words, created all of a piece, no one knows where or by whom; words lacking etymology, analogy and derivatives; solitary, barbarous, sometimes hideous words which have a singular expressive power. Some of these words are like claws; others like dull and bloodshot eyes."

Benjamin PERET

From *La Parole est à Peret*
(New York, 1943)

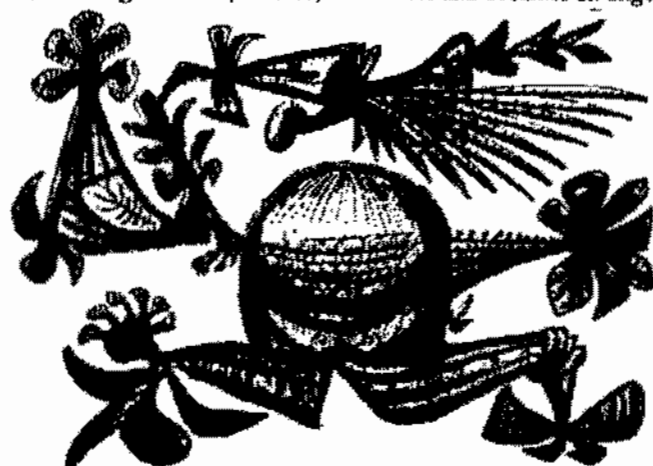
Introduction to Afro-American Poetry

It is in the cry that we recognize a human being: in the cry, eldest son of life, or rather life itself which, without diminution, without renunciation, in a free and unforeseeable movement, incarnates itself in the immediacy of a voice . . .

The dominant sentiment of the black poet is discontent, or better yet, intolerance: intolerance of the real because it is sordid; of the world because it is caged; of life because it is robbed of sunlight:

I speak in the name of the black millions.

On the muggy ground of anguishes, recurring indignations, despairs long since disposed of, there rises and breathes an anger



E.F. GRANELL: Ink drawing from ISLA COFRE MITICO

— and America, on the disordered bed of its conformisms, grows anxious wondering of what atrocious hatred this cry is the deliverance:

I speak in the name of the black millions.

The black court of miracles is stirring: all that there is of suffering humanity in the slums of Harlem, the cornfields of Maryland, the cotton plantations of the Carolinas. And they march past — men, women and children, pell-mell, ankle-deep in the obstinate dust of poverty and hunger. There are some from the chain gang, some embittered, some optimistic, some who are sharp-witted, some who are drunk. They are from Mississippi, from New Orleans, from Atlanta. There are musicians with their syncopated rhythms; there are shoeless pickininnies, prostitutes with chocolate complexions, players of epileptic trombones, jazz players tossing their drumsticks to the moon. A vast horde passes, cries, sings, gestures and dies.

The poet, amidst this lamentable humanity, is not content to present it picturesquely—from “outside,” so to speak—which would be to reduce the whole human being to a state of organic tinsel.

On the contrary, he wishes to be not at all a painter or evoker of images; rather he is engaged in the same adventure as his least commendable heroes. He lives their life, in its grandeur as well as its squalor . . . He is not above them but *among* them. He is not their judge but their comrade. And it is this camaraderie which explains these poets’ astonishing faculty of *renewal*, as signaled by Browning: this ease of putting oneself in another’s place. It ex-

plains, too, these poets’ virtuosity in discerning the fundamental and primary energies which move their people

...

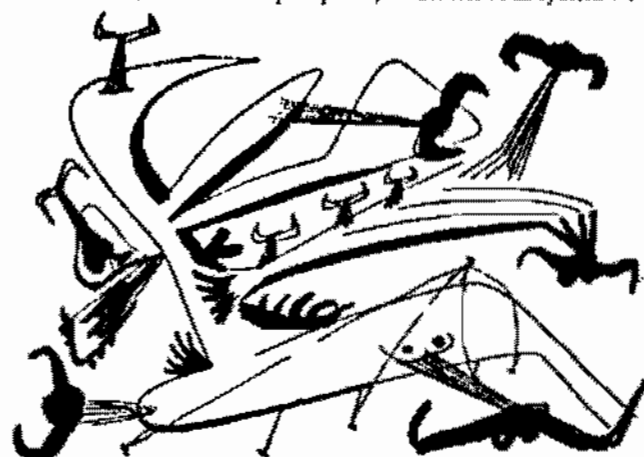
Ah, Black Paradise! How strongly we feel that it is the poetic escape of a brutalized people stuck for centuries in material misery and spiritual gehenna, under the constant guard of vigilant butchers!

In heaven there is fine grape jelly to eat, and delicious golden biscuits. Heaven is where the best stories are told, and where we can hear good music, from David’s guitar and Gabriel’s trumpet . . . Not for a moment do we feel out of place, for we recognize all our old friends who haven’t changed a bit since leaving Earth . . . Here is old Peter Johnson, puffing away on his corn-cob pipe, looking a little like the No. 9 train highballing west. And here comes Mammie, with her wrinkled face and brown eyes, so strangely sweet; she’s tired and stretches out in the best armchair in the place.

Ah, when the saints go marching in!

...

Here is a poetry which does not offer ear or eye an unexpected and undiscussable body of vibrations nor the explosion of color nor magic of sound. All the more is it imbued with rhythm, but it is primitive rhythm, of jazz and tomtom: that is to say, pushing human resistance to its deepest point, in the nervous system . . .



E.F. GRANELL: Ink drawing from ISLA COFRE MITICO

This poetry, written only to the rhythm of a naive spontaneity, and at the precise intersection of the ego and the world, forms a drop of blood. A drop. But of blood.

...

Let’s not fool ourselves. The value of this poetry lies in the fact that it opens on the *entire human personality* . . .

Is it such a little thing to create a world?

Aimé CESAIRE

Tropiques, No. 2
(Martinique, 1941)

RADIO VOICES

A Child’s Bed of Sirens



Activity is the faculty of receiving.

— Novalis

Whatever its limitations, it was generally acknowledged that American radio between 1920 and 1950 had the virtue of providing a stimulating vehicle, albeit technical, for exercising a listener’s imagination. Determined by radio’s intrinsic structure, the listener was “forced” to “see” by responsive imaginative activity the invisible content of what is, by contrast, given and visualized in movies and television. With adults such imaginary collaboration may have been, more often than not, confined to what was directly suggested by the broadcasters, but for children up to the age to puberty certain radio dramas sparked realms of terror, desire and reverie which infinitely improved and heightened the content far beyond the limits set rationally and consciously by the original producers. In some adventure and mystery programs of radio’s so-called “golden age” (I was listening, intensively, as a child between 1934 and 1942) radioland was peopled by figures, images and mythic concepts which served as formidable initiators of poetry and enchantment. I can trace a profound awakening of the poetic sense of life and language directly to the exemplary magical myth of *The Shadow* and to those disquieting transgressions — veritable sagas of symbolic patricide and matricide — revealed by *The Whistler*.

Among the programs aimed primarily at children, along with the science-fiction genre represented by *Buck Rogers* and *Superman*, were the realistic adventure serials: *Jack Armstrong the All-American Boy*, *Dick Tracy*, *Jungle Jim* and *Terry and the Pirates*. Though not devoid of some spirit of risk, adventure and exoticism, the whole group was a varied expression of diurnal mentality, characteristically broadcast in the afternoon hours that followed school. Most of these daylight dramas did more or less reinforce old fashioned ideals and morals of capitalist culture and the

cliches of “law and order.” But beginning in the early evening the purer mystery fantasies were featured: *Fu Manchu*, *Chandu the Magician*, *Mandrake the Magician* and *The Shadow*. Deeper into the night, fantasy fiction came on: *Lights Out* and *The Witch’s Tale*, aimed presumably at adults and adolescents, but certainly heard by the more precocious or less disciplined children, by those of us who possessed secret handmade crystal sets or managed to acquire personal bedside radios, dropping off to sleep at least once or twice a week by means of a kind of audial *Weird Tales*, the Lovecraftian pulp magazine many of us would not discover until the brink of adolescence, but for which we were being adequately prepared by radio late at night. For those who lived in the Western and Mountain areas, around nine or ten in the evening, radio on Sundays transmitted the long running series of individual dramas linked by a basic structure fictionalizing “heinous crimes” of capitalist greed: *The Whistler*. *The Whistler* and *The Shadow* were conceived no doubt under the rubric of escapist adult fare, along with the detective adventure group which was also aired usually at prime time, such as the very sympathetic *Alias Jimmy Valentine* (based on O. Henry’s genial safecracker) and *Boston Blackie*, both prototypes of the “good-bad guys,” as well as *Bulldog Drummond*, an exotic lone-wolf from England. But what was intended by the radio producers and what occurred in a child’s imaginary reception and associational development of the thematic materials from these audial sources were often contradictory — and humorously so considering the rigorously-adhered-to serious intentions of the producers and writers behind the formulas.

For children the excitement and crystallizing imagery generated through audial reception of violence, mayhem, murder and terror far outdistanced and superseded in imaginary grandeur any possible parallels of thought and feeling an adult might have experienced. For sophisticated

adults most of the radio dramas were received as variants, often banal, of the formula-fictions of the pulps; the great mass of listeners, often too tired after a hard and anxious day of work or the fatiguing anxiety of looking for work in the Depression, may not have been hearing too distinctly at all. Gilbert Seldes insisted in *The Great Audience* (1950) that radio was not, in the strict sense, a mass-media cultural form; hence, the dramas were mostly the creation of connoisseurs of certain genre-literatures who, representing a minority of the reading public, projected their special interests onto everybody, at least onto whoever was listening through the evening hours. Seldes also noted that the broadcasters were well aware of the positive effect on and high responsiveness of children to the more violent programming, so "that fifteen hundred murders take place each week on the air. This does not include murders mediated or suspected in daytime serials, but it does take in manslaughter specially arranged for children's programs."

Such shows of violence were generally salutary for children and carried for them necessary degrees of representational non-repressive sublimation, as parallel expressions in comic books and movie serials (and, long ago, fairy tales) had adequately conveyed. All the more the interventions of marvelous figures, or even merely fantastic ones, such as *The Shadow*, *Fu Manchu*, *Chandu* or *Mandrake the Magician*, some attaining mythic dimensions, themselves transforming agents of violence and terror, transmitted audially to children, continued in new forms the unbroken line of fabulous oral literature, legend



and myth, of earlier times where the magician such as Merlin, that counselor of vengeful battles, and the multitudinous transformations of "The Shadow" have served as permanent cultural motifs. If for adults *The Shadow* or *Mandrake* may be said to connote signs of regression and narcissism, for children these beings can represent truly effective symbols of triumph, power and necessary ego-building — interacting with the child's psychical needs during the successive stages of the latency period. On the poetic plane, *The Shadow* and *Mandrake* are paragons of hermetic knowledge: modern forms, respectively, of the fairy tale wonder-worker and sorcerer. The opening theme of *The Shadow* is among the most memorable for those whose childhood games were often sparked and charged with imaginary adaptations of this potent figure. His literal visual image was known to us from two sources: graphic conceptions from the covers of the widely circulated pulp magazine devoted to him and at one juncture we were nourished by the Saturday matinee movie serial in which he was adequately portrayed by Victor Jory, who resembled, as well, some of the magazine portraits.

Psychoanalysis long ago located correspondences between practical magic and ritual in primitive societies and certain phases of our childhood psychical development. The child's psychical reality is structured in early infancy by a high sense of omnipotence continuing dynamically and transformationally through the "magical" power of words and gestures, "calling," in Geza Roheim's theory, "on all the child's sources of pleasure within its own body." Roheim wrote:

"Magic in general is the counterphobic attitude, the transition from passivity to activity . . . It is probably the basic element in thought and the initial phase of activity . . . We grow up through magic and in magic, and we can never outgrow the illusion of magic. Our first response to the frustrations of reality is magic; and without this belief in ourselves, in our own specific ability or magic, we cannot hold our own against the environment and against the super-ego. The infant does not know the limits of its power. It learns in time to recognize the parents as those who determine its fate, but in magic it denies this dependency. In magic, mankind is fighting for freedom . . ."

Simultaneously with the daytime heroines and heroes of the earliest mythology came the beings of the Night. For example, to Spaniards *La Sombra* (The Shadow) is to this day a familiar figure, often the name of a restaurant, cafe or other popular haunt; and charmingly depicted graphically with cape and sombrero, silhouetted in black on the label of a popular wine. In folkloric investigations, Alexander Krappe found superstitious variants of the identification of "the double" or "soul" with the Shadow. By 1925 Otto Rank completed his milestone psychoanalytical study of *The Double* in which he interprets innumerable appearances and transformations of this subject from anthropological and literary sources. Maxwell Grant's pulp magazine version of 1931 — perhaps inspired by Dickens and Poe — united the sense of the Shadow's earlier superstitious traditions to those of a near-omnipotent and mysterious personage with an Avenger motif; adapted for radio, *The Shadow* was altered to possess, as well, perhaps the most appealing of magical powers. The opening theme of

the program clearly delineated both "the double" and the extraordinary power:

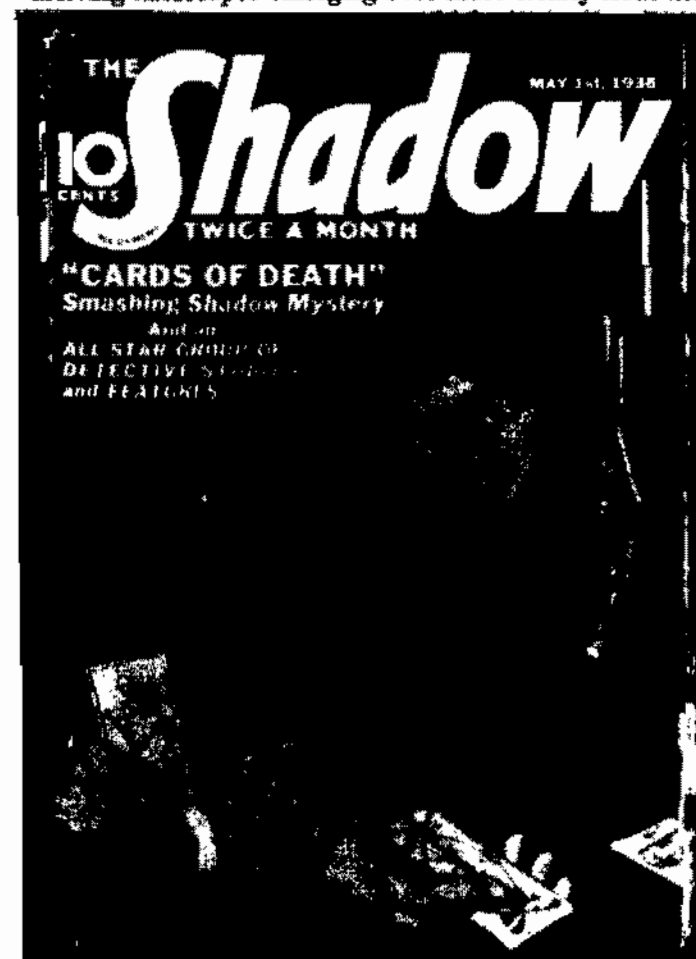
"The Shadow is in reality Lamont Cranston. . . . Several years ago in the Orient, Cranston learned a strange and mysterious secret . . . the hypnotic power to cloud men's minds so they cannot see him. . . ."

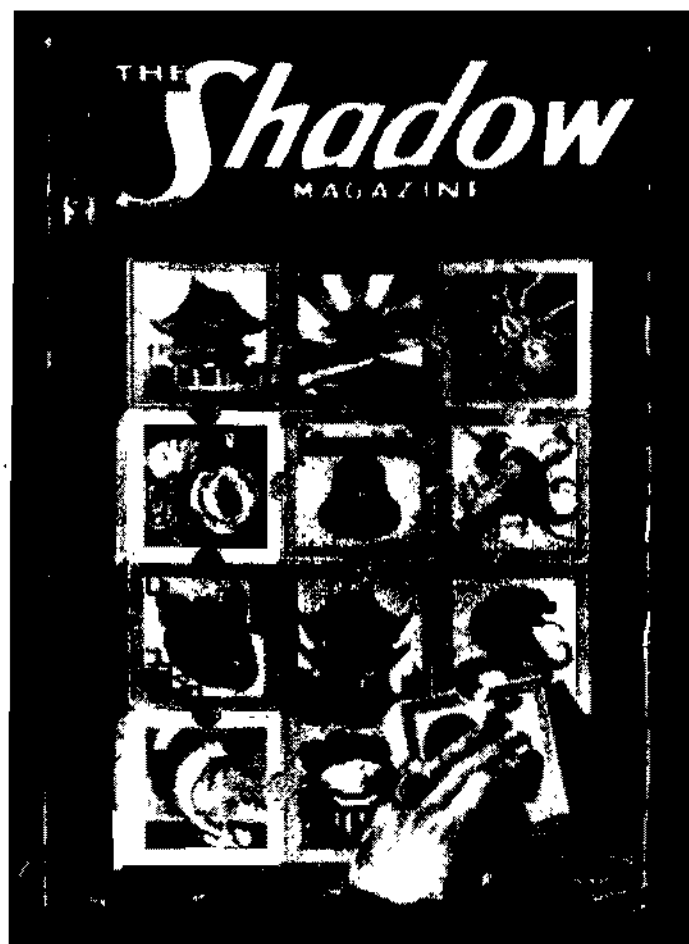
Since, during radio's golden age, children were generally trained rigorously to respect the given institutional authorities, any representation of the police as weak and ineffective as portrayed in *The Shadow* may be interpreted as an effective communication of a subversive sign, all the more enhanced by its weekly repetition. Since the depiction of police impotence was conducted within the context of comparison to an "improbable" power, the broadcasters probably rationalized the subversive quality as having been rendered diluted in a manifestly unreal form. But for children who would grow up to question or reject institutions which uphold the generalized criminality at the base of capitalist society, the subversive dimension of *The Shadow* may have been more germinal than any rationalist adult could suspect.

It is the imaginary intervention of magical power, as possessed by *The Shadow* and the radio magicians, among the urban landscapes of daily life which suggested the precariousness of normal social relations and hence the possibility of extraordinary transformations (here suggestions of the marvelous, but always generally intuited by humanity as rationally possible). For children who were defending themselves against the repressive demands of the parents and were capable later of questioning societal norms, great magical beings furnished the sign of a "conscience" deeper and nobler than that enforced by capitalist morality. As another mythic figure of the night, *The Vampire*, can be seen as a symbol of the latent power of the proletariat rising "from the dead" of social existence, so *The Shadow* becomes the Avenger of the victims of the "hidden" criminality of capitalism which has been internalized in psychical reality: "Who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men? The Shadow knows." Though the radio producers counterbalanced the exceptional qualities of *The Shadow* by the use of a conventional device, i.e., enlisting him as an "aid" to "the forces of law & order," this manifest sign of accommodation was itself rendered "improbable" by the logic of the magical context in which it operated and the magical response of children nullified the device entirely. Any hypothetical rationalist or positivist "sociological" argument to the effect that *The Shadow* and other fantastic and mythical night-beings are reducible to mere "defenders" of capitalist law and order by the fact of adult rationalizations via mass-media ideological reinforcement, misses the point here and errs by not taking into account the determining significance of psychical life materially interacting with socio-economic structures. Nor with such rationalist reductionism, totally inept at understanding cultural exchanges, could there ever emerge the rich layers of latent meaning or the uncovering of inferences which signify the specific logic of the poetic marvelous. Any effective interventions of the marvelous impose their own logic on events, including even those fictionalized moments in crime stories which otherwise progress "realistically" but are capable of transmutation by the determinations of a magico-marvelous symbol such

as *The Shadow*, *The Vampire*, *Mandrake* or even *Chandu*! Though it has been understood in the historiography of Hollywood movies that certain filmic representations of "private-eyes" — foremost, the prototype of the "bad good-guy" or "good bad-guy" in Sam Spade of *The Maltese Falcon* — are "ambiguous" vis-a-vis established law & order, all the more the magico-mythic hero intervening in ordinary human affairs is able to turn the conventional context of cops and robbers inside out and by his superimposition of improbable means and ends implies a profound subversion of societal norms.

For an imagination highly anticipatory, such as a child's, not yet corrupted and overwhelmed by associations of routine reality, the narrations of many of radio's "opening themes," repeated ritually week after week for years, formed some of the most lasting germinal impressions emanating from popular culture. It was these thematic crystallizations that resonated with a poetic insistence and inspired irresistible moments of fervent exaltation throughout my childhood. Spells they were, auditory enchantment; talismanic voices cabalistically conveying us in vehicles structured by breathtaking excitement, irresistible affective surges of our eyes on fire beating on winged corridors of sound; waves and rivers of pulsating phonemes that swept us immediately from the first phrases into deliriums of anticipation . . . And as we continued to "grow up" in the remaining few years, with the underlying sense of having conquered lost ground in the passionate embrace of newly arriving landscapes emerging ever more clearly from the





steamy vermillion mists, we continued almost semi-consciously to hear the radio voices of anticipation and insatiable desires for the unknown — in a great headlong rush into whatever was to be: "invitation to the voyage," "on the road to Xanadu," "coming on like gangbusters."

The following few examples, dense as I have become, still flicker from having once been bathed in the first lights of glowing words: The quoted narrations and sound-effects directions are from the opening themes of, respectively, *Lights Out*, *Fu Manchu*, *Bulldog Drummond*, *The Witch's Tale* and *Boston Blackie*:

(Announcer's voice:)

"It . . . is . . . later . . . than . . . you . . . think!
Lights out . . . e-v-e-r-y-b-o-d-y!"

"London at midnight
a great city wrapped in a heavy shroud
of dense yellow fog
... street lights weird as elfin lamps
grow mistily as something fashioned
in a dream . . ."

The murmur of creeping traffic. Behind an ancient wall, a vast gloomy mansion crouches like an evil beast of prey.
... The prince of evil . . .
a superman of incredible genius possessing a brain like Shakespeare and a face like Satan . . .
... the shadow of
Fu Manchu . . ."

(Sound-effects:
Foghorn blasts, slow footsteps, gunshot, police whistle.)

"Out of the fog
out of the night
and into his American adventures
comes . . .
BULLDOG DRUMMOND."

(Sound-effects:
Tower clock tolling, eerie music, howling wind.)

"The fascination for the eerie . . . weird, blood-chilling tales
told by Old Nancy, the Witch of Salem, and Satan, the wise
black cat . . ."

"Boston Blackie
Enemy to those who make him an enemy
Friend to those who have no friends!"

If in realms of a child's wish fulfillment *The Shadow* represented the sign-symbol of an ultimate defense mechanism, i.e., the power to appear invisible to others ("the cloak of invisibility" is a concomitant of legendary shamans, magicians and yogis), *Mandrake*, who stepped into radioland from the pages of a nationally syndicated daily comic strip, was a twentieth century interpretation of the traditional *Magus* displaying "all the powers" that have been universally ascribed to this archetype immemorially in history and myth. He was also characteristically "American." Though I imagine one could by exhaustive research find any number of "reasons why," the fact remains that the United States has *not* had in its history a mythic figure corresponding to Merlin in Britain, Faust in Germany, the historically authentic Cagliostro in eighteenth-century Revolutionary France. Cagliostro — who fascinated half of Europe, from kings and courtiers avid for his "secrets" to great masses of people who eagerly sought him out for thaumaturgic cures — was perhaps the last truly popular of the modern Great Magicians; he is doubly interesting for his anti-monarchical and subversive influence in the Freemasonic secret societies of his time, "the friend of liberty" who died in a dungeon in Italy as a victim of the Papal Inquisition.

Most fictional accounts of the modern *Magus*, from Bulwer-Lytton's *Zanoni*, a seminal popular novel of the Victorian age, to *Doctor Strange* in the recent comic book extravaganza, have their sources directly and indirectly in Cagliostro and his more esoteric, royalist counterpart, the Count of Saint-Germain, who also distinguished himself in the resurgence of magical belief which curiously paralleled the rationalist enlightenment and the birth of capitalism. In this latter connection, the sociologist Marcel Mauss, writing in France at the turn of the century, stated in his *Theory of Magic*, "Magical beliefs which are active in certain corners of our society and which were quite general a century ago, are the most alive, the most real indications of a state of social unrest and social consciousness . . ."

Though by powers and accomplishments *Mandrake* was easily the equal of his European counterparts, his comic-strip inventors during the Depression years chose to depict him, interestingly enough, in the guise and attire of what

from the standpoint of "high magic" signifies a mere caricature of the *Mage*. *Mandrake* was drawn to look exactly like a conventional stage magician, hypnotist or mentalist. Could it be we were confronted with another appearance of "the double," or (also implied ironically) that hard times in Depression America had forced the truly great magician *Mandrake* into "selling himself" in the more credible and lucrative disguise of a theatrical performer of legerdemain? But as they say here, "it worked, man," and presto — behold! — the heir of Merlin, Faust, Cagliostro and "the great Unknown Magus" arrived in full morning or afternoon daylight replete with evening clothes, black tie, tails, short cape, top hat and pencil-thin mustache, as if he had just finished his act from a vaudeville stage of 1920s America. Among his superior attributes he also possessed "the power to cloud men's minds," the ability to go through solid steel walls, levitate himself and others, paralyze enemies and oversee events at a distance, divert lethal objects from attaining their mark, and to cloud men's minds to the pitch of producing prodigious hallucinations to their disadvantage, etc. He even sent his seductively beautiful companion and accomplice, Princess Narda, unscathed and intact, *through a full-length mirror*.

This combinational adaptation by his inventors turned *Mandrake the Magician* into a veritable theatrical dandy of the occult whose stage of operations was basically the whole world of *certain interiors* of an urban landscape. He was most often depicted inside luxurious Manhattanlike apartments, fashionable restaurants and cocktail lounges of the 1930s. And it was into *interiors* of all kinds that he invariably was drawn, as if fulfilling the old hermetic-magical invitation, in order to acquire knowledge and power, to go "into the insides of the earth." So, lo, to the extreme delight and wonder of children, *Mandrake* took off one day for what was to be perhaps his longest adventure; he descended into another universe, to another inhabited planet which existed in the sub-atomic spaces within the interior of an ordinary American coin! Among childhood friends and acquaintances this series of comic-strip adventures "inside the coin" was the source of endless reveries at every chance turn in the long chain of phantasmagoric events.

I though we had ample visual prefiguration of *Mandrake* from the comicstrip, the opening theme in 1940 of the radio series had the surprising quality of an extraordinary, anticipatory annunciation. We listened to a truly oracular summons, the Latin words intoned slowly as if swept by a whirling wind and coming from a deep cave, to float over the world:

"INVOCO LEGEM MAGICORUM!"

Whether or not we understood literally the English equivalent, "I Invoke the Law of Magic!," these Latin sounds communicated the "cabalistic" meaning perfectly as the emblematic motto which joined to the provocative words, *Mandrake the Magician*, was instantly received as a doubly crystallized sign, an efficacious *password* to gain entry to the deepest realms of the marvelous, perfectly serving our real needs as children for the pleasures and excitement of an authentic magico-poetic experience: poetry invoked and provoked.

Gilbert Seldes also informed us that radio producers in their "golden age" deliberately aired what they considered the most violent dramas when children were apt to be listening. *Gangbusters* and the more realistic cowboys & indians, cops & robbers and the crime adventures were what the producers had in mind mainly, but *The Shadow*, *The Green Hornet*, *Inner Sanctum* and a few others had their share of homicide. Many of us were listening long after "the lights" of the normal household had "gone out" and the violence, including the murders, became stranger, more gothic, and (even in adult eyes) fantastically "poetical." With the contempt reserved for children in this society, it was agreed by the cultural arbiters that the "kiddies" could be "safely" left to their own devices with the kind of irrational violence *The Witch's Tale* might offer.

Then, as recently, all kinds of fools parading as moralists insisted on unqualified repression of representational violence, projecting their own fears and conflicts onto children's psychical capacities. This normal reaction to sublimated and symbolical representations of violence is proportional to the rejection of the findings and insights of



MANDRAKE THE MAGICIAN



From "Mandrake in Hollywood" (1938)

Drawing by Phil Davis

Freud and the psychoanalysts concerning all aspects of psychological development in infants and children. What is enraging, though, is the fact that often the moralizers who are dead set against any representational violence in the arts—specifically those of the mass media—are the staunch upholders of repressive police and military violence institutionalized in this society to reinforce its cracking structures and to repress all revolutionary action deemed a threat to capitalist power, and it is this capitalist state violence, threatening our very existence as a species, which of course must be suppressed. This stupid state of affairs, cultural and political, could not continue a moment if it were up to some of us who have reached the far points of black humor, who interrogate the night to transform the day, who see the vital necessity to reveal what goes on "in the shadows" of reality.

For the true poet, lover and free spirit, certain cultural necessities are as primary as breathing, unless one would come to be, in any degree, at the mercy of all the diurnal "healthy-minded" worshipers of *Thanatos*, the death god,

whose "trick" (similar to what Baudelaire said of the devil in the last century) might consist in hiding himself behind the very events he determines, by keeping everyone focused exclusively on the manifest content of reality, in the glare of high noon (obviously blinding)—a delusion buttressed by the general obsession with "good health" which obscures any profound sight of the festering, hidden causes of the obvious social maladies, certainly curable, of a world whose shadow and substance are held fast by the deadly and death-dealing institutions, not the least being the habitations of cultural death.

Since language is basically an audial system, for those in process of extending their recently acquired capacities for language-acquisition, poetic crystallizations of verbal signs received directly by the ear were complementary to the poetic and mythical expressions on the visual plane offered in some comic books and films, e.g., the Saturday matinee serials: *Fu Manchu*, *The Shadow*, *Black Dragons* and *Dr.*

Satan, the latter a primitive masterpiece of the marvelous featuring one of the greatest of Hollywood actors, Eduardo Ciannelli. For me, three fertilizing rivers of popular culture—certain radio dramas, comic books and movies—often interchanging subjects or content, were the authentic sources of poetic and life-transforming expression a child of the Depression and war years was offered, in contrast to the poverty of institutional culture, in the schools and elsewhere, whose results we would confront soon enough in the general miserabilism mercilessly enforced in adolescence and young adulthood. As in other fields, the high quantitative content of dross was immediately dissolved by certain exalting words, purified images and sounds, all the more so with radio materials which the producers deliberately structured, they believed, to last but a day and be forgotten. But as I have tried to indicate, rich thematic matter was ritually repeated and latent messages were received and often recreations of exceedingly subversive and mytho-poetic information was heard as if for the first time. I find little trace of poetry coming to me in childhood from any external cultural sources other than the three popular ones I have indicated. And no wonder, since elementary school rooms represented poetry, derived solely from so-called "high culture," as a hideous reduction to memorization exercises, confined to the most insipid examples of nineteenth century versifiers, the bowdlerized versions of

European balladry and fairy tales. In short, poetry in elementary schools of the United States was presented as reified and deadly by its channelization into a totally inappropriate form of mental gymnastics (memory and recitation drills). This set of cultural crimes perpetrated by the schools from childhood on contributes in no small measure, I feel, to internalizing almost insurmountable barriers to the various forms through which poetry seeks its end, specifically in writing but also extending to the poetic organization on the graphic and plastic planes of expression. One cannot help being reminded that we are dealing here with pedagogical practices initiating that special "hatred of the marvelous" Breton noted in the *First Surrealist Manifesto*. But every day significantly after school, imaginary crimes of violence were celebrated on radio with the sublime obsessive intensity of dream images, and Mandrake's opening theme—"I Invoke the Law of Magic,"—served also as a motto for all that was most passionately responsive in the inner ears of children aspiring in identity with the mythical heroes and heroines, fulfilling absolute needs to recapture "the lost unities" and a sense of omnipotence; to respark impatience, curiosity and unlimited capacity for imaginary life; to open the windows to the unknown, to desire more life—the key sources of all authentic poetry.

Philip LAMANTIA



The Shadow as drawn by Earl Mayan

It is not by his image alone that everyone knows Bugs Bunny; it is also by his voice. That tough, nasal, Brooklyn/Bronx twang is as distinctive as any of the rabbit's other features. His voice — as well as the voices of Daffy Duck, Sylvester Q. Pussycat, Porky Pig, Woody Woodpecker, Screwy Squirrel, Pepe Le Pew, Elmer Fudd, Tweety Pie, Yosemite Sam and countless others — are all the work of one man, "The Man of a Thousand Voices": Mel Blanc.

Even as a child Mel Blanc invented voices and performed at grammar school assemblies. "The teachers would laugh," he recalls, "then give me lousy marks."

When an intended musical career didn't seem to be getting anywhere, he applied at Leon Schlesinger's animated cartoon studio. "I kept coming in looking for a job, and this fellow kept saying, 'Sorry, we have all the voices we need.' Eventually he died, so I tried again." That was 1937; forty-two years later Blanc still remembers the first voice he did for a cartoon. "They said, 'Can you do a drunken bull?' and I said, 'Sure,' and did it."

Leon Schlesinger Productions eventually became the Warner Brothers cartoon studio. Over the years Blanc did voices for virtually the entire cast of some 3000 cartoons by Tex Avery, Chuck Jones, Robert MacKimpson, Friz Freleng and others.

In his Introduction to *The Looney Tunes Poster Book* (New York, Harmony Books, 1979), Blanc describes his *modus operandi*: "In creating all my character voices I followed the same pattern. First I would be shown a storyboard and would be given a brief summary of the situation and moods in which the character would be placed. . . . All of the Looney Tunes were done in full animation. The process followed for every cartoon was always the same. After I recorded all the voice lines, the animators would then draw the characters to fit these voice tracks. Precise mouth movements were thus created to match each word being said by the character."

During much of his long stay at Warner Brothers, Blanc was also on radio. For a while there was even "The Mel Blanc Show" (also known as "The Fix-It Shop" and "Mel Blanc's Fix-It Shop"). For years he was a regular on the Jack Benny show (on radio and later on TV); at first he did only the growling of Carmichael, the polar bear who stood guard over Benny's subterranean vault, but later he did the voices of the train announcer, the sarcastic parrot Cheapskate, and others. One day, when a radio technician neglected to plug in the recording of Benny's sputtering Maxwell, Blanc

MEL BLANC: Wizard of Audio



managed to provide the "voice" of a struggling antique automobile.

Voices by Mel Blanc were also heard on the Abbott and Costello Program, the Burns and Allen show, "The Cisco Kid," and the "Major Hoople" comedy show (based on Gene Ahern's daily newspaper comic panel, "Our Boarding House").

It is a long way from Daffy Duck's raucous "woo-woo" to the gravelly snarl of Yosemite Sam; and when we recall that he has made a romantically inclined skunk sound exactly like Charles Boyer, and that he can make a horse whinny with an English accent, we are inclined to agree with those who insist that there is no sound that Mel Blanc cannot make. He says he once started to count the number of voice characterizations that he had devised, but fell asleep after 400.

Warner Brothers shut down its cartoon studio in the late '50s, but Blanc has not been idle. Among his many activities in recent years, he taped all the voices for a two-hour revue, "The Bugs Bunny Follies," performed by live actors and dancers; and he did Bugs Bunny's voice on a CBS-TV special, "A Connecticut Rabbit in King Arthur's Court." He also does radio and TV commercials, speaks at college campuses, and dreamed up the Bugs Bunny Birthday Call Kit: for only five dollars and a postcard, you can arrange for a birthday telephone greeting from Bugs Bunny himself.

Some of Blanc's best work has long been available on record. *Bugs Bunny and the Tortoises*, *Bugs Bunny and His Friends* and *Bugs Bunny in Storyland* recently have been reissued by Capitol.

Now in his seventies, Blanc refuses to slow down. "My wife talks to me a lot about retiring. I say to her, 'What the hell for?' I never want to stop."

Something of the poetic power and the secret glory of Mel Blanc's voices is suggested by a poignant anecdote. In 1961 he was injured in an automobile accident, so severely that it seems he was actually listed in the obituary columns of some papers. For three weeks he lay in a coma in his hospital bed. "They say that while I was unconscious, the doctor would come into my room and ask me how I was, and — nothing: I wouldn't answer him. So one day he comes into my room, he gets an idea and he says, 'Hey, Bugs Bunny! How are you?' And they say I answered back in Bugs's voice, 'Ehh, just fine, Doc, how are you?' Then he said, 'And Porky Pig! How you feeling?' and I said, 'J-j-j-just fine, th-th-th-thanks.' So you see, I actually live these characters."

And if these characters in turn continue to live and to contribute their magic to our lives, it is only fair that a good share of the credit should go to the grand audial wizard behind the scenes. It is touching to read that Mel Blanc considers Bugs Bunny one of his "closest friends." We can add, for our part, that any friend of Bugs Bunny is a friend of ours.

F.R.

Introduction to the Hearing of LORD BUCKLEY

On the way to Eldorado you will meet, if you travel far enough, the wandering shade described in Edgar Allen Poe's haunting poem of that name; then you may even chance to meet the utopian legions of American Fourierism, lost but still searching; and then, farther along than these or any other aspirants of the impossible, you will certainly espy the frontier's hip Paracelsus himself — none other than Alvar Nunez Cabeza de Vaca (The Gasser), who once upon a time was reincarnated as Lord Buckley.

No doubt can exist about this: if the spirit of the '60s was in vibrant life anywhere prior to December 31, 1959, all of it (if not more) was concentrated in Lord Buckley's aggressive, optimistic humor. And optimism is a colorless word indeed with which to describe the brilliant dialectical gold whose rays the one and only Lord of Swing could direct to blind the apostles of 1950s-style miserabilism. No American entertainer or humorist had ever done what Buckley did in the sense of bringing a great reality and immediacy to the notions of genius and inspiration (freedom, really), and at the same time demystifying the "greats" themselves. Lenny Bruce, who is said to have been influenced by Buckley, could hit very hard; but he lacked Buckley's extravagant generosity and his instinct to transcend malice with moral miracles.

Richard Buckley, who later became Lord Buckley by his own decree, was born in California around the turn of the century to a part Indian family. His career as a stand-up comedian and humorist began in the 1920s in the speakeasies of Chicago, where for a period of time he enjoyed the direct protection of the Capone gang. At the time of his death, in the early sixties, he was the most noted of the "hip" or "bop" comedians who performed their routines in jive slang. At one juncture or another he had been obscure, ignored, imitated, and applauded.

If Buckley's fame has slipped a little during the "slipped-disc '70s," that of his imitators has vanished. They were the drunken pallbearers who quickly fell on their faces in the mud, while the royal coffin floated away to the strains of the Hallelujah

Chorus. But apart from the imitators, the image of "pallbearers" seems to arise here specifically to remind us of Ishmael Reed, who has captured some of the spirit of Lord Buckleyism in his books, such as *The Free-lance Pallbearers*.

In any case, Buckley's legend has a built-in resistance to facile adulation. The moment anyone begins to revere or eulogize him, one hears in response the creaking of an insidious laughter. It appears to emanate from the pores of a creature half sphinx and half pomegranate. Suddenly, in a flash, Sun Ra approaches in a chariot from the direction of his ancestral star, and Apache warriors in terrible garb line the horizon. Inflammatory spectacles of Urmor attend the thought or mention of Lord Buckley. Posthumous fame of the conventional order is completely irrelevant.



No. 0021. Wondas Kat.
Buck.
When lit, throws out a large
assortment of Favors, Gifts,
etc.

Fourier, because of his extravagant good will which wreaked havoc on the acknowledged principles of rationality, has a special place in Andre Breton's *Anthology of Black Humor* alongside Lautreamont, Peret, Roussel and the other exemplars of mad laughter. Perhaps there is no fitter comparison by which to gauge the extremes of Lord Buckleyism than Fourier himself. An appalling and ruinous generosity pervades both men, begetting a kind of *whore* humor serving the same subversive function as the black. The key to Lord Buckley's alchemy was undoubtedly his umorous technique of inflation that allowed him to both valorize and satirize Great Men like Gandhi (The

Hip Ghan), Jesus (The Naz) and Cabeza de Vaca (The Gasser), while contriving somehow to diffuse their mythical, miraculous gifts within a spirit of bop egalitarianism and universal aristocracy of the free.

Like many of his routines, Lord Buckley's own life was a hectic and chaotic parody of grandiosity. He held court constantly and he had willing courtiers because he was, for many admirers, the Living Presence of Swing. According to Charles Tacot's liner notes to the album *The Best of Lord Buckley*, he once marched a troupe of sixteen nude people through the lobby of the Royal Hawaiian Hotel. He inaugurated his own "religion" — the Church of the Living Swing — which featured, besides his uproarious monologues, two belly dancers. The "church" was raided by the vice squad. Ironical as it may seem to some, Lord Buckley in his humor took up the sword of the many lay prophets throughout history who fought to free man's inner gifts from the repressive and authoritarian deformation of them contained in religious ideology. His boisterous hedonism, challenging bourgeois morality at every turn, fits the same context. It is the pleasure principle allied to poetry, which fights against the reality principle, allied to the religious "truth": "There's someone bigger than you on the block, boy, so kneel." Lord Buckley gave proof of an immense awareness of the grandeur that existed outside of him, but he did not think it would represent any tribute to that grandeur if he groveled in front of an altar. "People should worship people," was his reply.

Lord Buckley was capable of doing many things to get an audience to listen, to dig. The most astounding thing of all was what he said when he got their attention. An example is the "Gasser" routine. At the conclusion, Cabeza de Vaca, the lost explorer-soldier who became a famous healer among the native Americans, writes a letter to the king of Spain to explain his unaccounted years in the New World. Buckley addresses the words of this letter to his audience, and the way he pronounces them evokes a most eloquent affirmation: "There is a great power within, that when used in beauty and

immaculate purity, can cure, and heal, and cause miracles; and when you use it, it spreads like a magic garden, and when you do not use it, it recedes."

Lord Buckley's entire career was a continuing tribute to an exalted gift which, if it is not the same thing as the poetic marvelous sought by surrealism, is certainly a close cousin to it.

A final point about Lord Buckley concerns the question of sources. The humorist's affinity with Afro-America (which he himself acknowledged) is enormous. It is one that he developed on the entertainment and jazz circuits, as well as in his private experiences through association with blacks and exposure to their influence. It is palpable not only in his rhythmic-oral style and

street lingo; it is deeper than that, in the spirit of his work which shares the enthusiasm and aggressively impossibilist orientation of Afro-American art, culture and mythology.

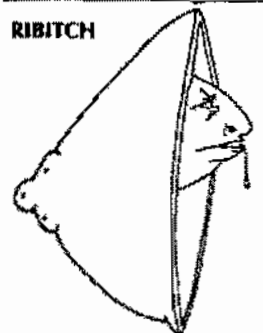
It was this most ebullient vein of black existence that Lord Buckley mined for moral gold, so that his magic was directly inspired by the poetic values of that tradition. On this plane the question of a ripoff does not arise; for Buckley himself not only would acknowledge his debt but would actually proclaim it. To see his work side by side with its primary sources is to enjoy the signal illumination produced by the symbiosis.

Joseph JABLONSKI

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The texts of some of Lord Buckley's most popular monologues were included in the book *Hiparama of the Classics*, published by City Lights Books, San Francisco, in 1960. Recordings of his performances have been issued periodically since the '50s: *Euphoria* (Vaya Records); *Way Out Humor* (World Pacific Records); *Gettysburg Address & James Dean* (Hip Records); *Hipsters, Hipsters & Finger Poppin' Daddies* (Victor). More recent releases include: *The Best of Lord Buckley* (Electra EKS-74047); *Lord Buckley, Blowing His Mind (And Yours Too)* (World Pacific WP 1849); *Lord Buckley in Concert* (World Pacific WP-1815); and *Bad-Rapping of the Marquis de Sade* (World Pacific WP-21889).

RIBITCH



HEIRS OF THE DREAM — PLEASE STAND UP!

A Note on Children's Art



Though more than seventy years have elapsed since Freud first took his analytic mallet to the ludicrous icon of "childhood innocence" (*Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, 1905) we find ourselves still pestered by those utilitarian doctrines which maintain, flagrantly choosing to ignore all the evidence to the contrary, that sexuality is an adult prerogative.

It is little wonder, then, that the persistence of such myopic suppositions has only left "adult" sexuality so hopelessly "in the red" when we come to settling the accounts between desire on the one hand, and the demands of reality on the other.

For it is of critical importance to a civilization deplete of genuine sensual gratification, and rotten through with neurosis, that every magnificent span supporting the psychic bridge between the lusts of our childhood and our mature, responsible lives of impoverishment, be mercilessly ripped down and sunk out of sight forever.

Fortunately for us, though, the efficiency of this demolishing process can never be total for, like every other movement, the traumatic passage from child to adult bows to the laws of dialectic and contains within itself its own negation. Thus, the most rampant symptoms of our diseased-beyond-repair christian/capitalist society — crippling anxiety, madness, sexual violence — bear internally the luminous seeds of a period of complete and instantaneous sexual gratification experienced by every individual during infancy. Such a resplendent specter in the historical development of one's subjectivity never departs entirely but remains on the threshold of consciousness, always haunting the present and becoming collectively represented in the abundant myths of "The Golden Age," in the psychotic regressions through which religion comes to espouse an "afterlife," and in the indomitable spirit with which Marxism turns science to the task of materially gratifying our nostalgia for the future.

(Let me point out here that I by no means ignore the fact that apart from the sensations of wonderment and a vertigo of omnipotence, the other most characteristic traits of children in our society are grief and utterly desolate boredom. Indeed, this is only a further indication of how quickly the law of the father saddles every human being with its abominable deprivations.)

With scientific weapons that were soon to be proved beyond doubt Freud had intrepidly called out from far within the seismic faults in the

stale crust of conscious thought, announcing the discovery of an underworld of "polymorphous perversity," — that is, a world in which a whole multitude of bodily zones were employed in attaining erotic satisfaction, a world wonderfully oblivious to the distinction between male-ness and female-ness, and a world in which the painful distinction between the subject and the object of his/her desire asymptotically ceased to exist the further one traced back along the veins of sensual ore.

Meanwhile, the observers dabbling on the surface, those employed in the mystification of misery and profit, blandly recite from their various behavioral catechisms that there is an irreconcilable distinction between the sexes (and so women especially must bear the lacerating consequences); that there is a total incompatibility of non-object sexuality with social needs (and so neurosis must continue to take its toll); that the patriarchal family is "innate" and "natural" (and so guilt must pervade every sexual relationship); that our sexual lives suddenly begin at puberty (and so children must be continually told to keep their hands out of their pants).

Against all this dross we have in the arsenal of sexual emancipation (and not without certain devastating effects in the economic sphere) the magnificent revolt presented by images concretized by children from within the very eye of the storm — above all, an eye which does not observe itself and proceeds, outside any concern for esthetic or moral veils, to illuminate the shadows of the erotic nucleus of existence, energetically bent on the no longer obscured object of desire and prepared to attain it "by any means necessary."

The unmistakably subversive implications of such works, unceremoniously throwing off the fetters of an oppressive rationality, always pointing to an horizon where no fruit is forbidden and, meanwhile, not hesitating to bare their teeth with striking cruelty at any who stand in the way, no doubt sends the timid, be they art critics, bourgeois psychologists or school-teachers, running back to their "Virgin Mothers."

Supremely tempting and threatening to the forces of repression, children's art will have nothing to do with equilibrium.

Those intent on preserving their stupor best stay clear.

Anthony REDMOND

ERNIE KOVACS

and the Surrealist Promise of Television

Television has shown its contradictions boldly in the 1970s with Black and women stars as never before, sympathetic and intelligent blue-collar characters, detective shows with a social conscience, even occasional Superhero depictions (such as *The Hulk*) scripted toward an anti-authoritarian content. Only rarely, and at the margins, has television exceeded this modest liberal humanism for more striking, subversive, and wildly hilarious entertainment. Beyond the power of the sponsors lies the sheer cowardly inability of corporate executives and their lackeys to offer the public something grittier than mush to chew on, and more innovative than last year's stylized *Friendly Cops* and *Zany Sitcom Characters*. That a little worthwhile material slips through is a tribute to concessions exacted by the discontent of millions, and the courageous (or plainly intelligent) activities by a minority of producers, writers and technicians.

Ernie Kovacs stands out in the history of television like a looming shadow on the landscape. David Whalley, in *The Kovacs Phile* (New York: Bolder Press, 1975. 244pp., \$5.95) suggests that Kovacs combined a naturally uproarious personality with a sense for television's capacities in its early, plastic days — and that he got in on the ground-floor, forcing his bizarre shows on otherwise unwilling execs and sponsors.

Born of first-generation Hungarian parents in 1919, Kovacs came out of the bowels of Popular Culture in Trenton, New Jersey, harassed as a fat kid, active in theatre, and making his big break through the local radio station and newspaper. Here he invented crazy bits, insulted celebrities, and became a famous local character. By 1950, he joined television in Philadelphia, where he could enlarge his opportunities for the bizarre: Polish versions of *Mona Lisa*, Yiddish versions of *The*

Call of the Wild Goose, intermixing of cartoons with live action, wild bits like conducting the *1812 Overture* first with a chair, then a stuffed dummy, and finally a pillar. He and his resident cast took the cameras into the streets, where they conducted live impromptu satirical drama. Kovacs could also convey the incredible: He would shoot an arrow and "follow" it until it came to rest in an apple on his own head; or he would appear as both organ-grinder and monkey, "peeling" bananas with zippered skins — and so forth. Now and then he threw eggs and custard pies at the studio audience to keep them on their toes. All this and more he had to accomplish on a negligible budget.

As he shuffled through morning and afternoon shows on local TV, Kovacs picked up the calling-card characters and skits that would stay with him the rest of his career: Uncle Gruesome, a scary reader of children's stories; Percy Dovetonsils, the effete poet; Cromwell Cranston, private eye; Wolfgang von Sauerbraten, German disk jockey; J.

Walter Puppybreath, song-peddler; savage satires on current TV shows, personalities and commercials. His "Question Man," framed after the *Shell Answer Man*, ran for instance: ANNOUNCER: L.U.B. from Lower Lip, South Africa, writes: I am writing you from the bottom of a twelve-foot pit which we dug early this week to trap a hippopotamus. Unfortunately, two of my companions and I fell into the pit early this morning and discovered to our alarm that during the night an eighteen-foot python has killed both my companions by crushing them to death. As I am writing this letter, it is completely wrapped around my body. Several of my ribs have cracked under the pressure and I have a blood blister on my big toe. Please advise.

KOVACS: I sure hope you will be amused to learn that you have committed a faux pas. It is not the python who kills his victims by crushing, it is the boa constrictor. I hope that you and your dead companions do not think me



ERNIE KOVACS

too overbearing when I say that I may suggest you read up on your reptiles before making any further trips into foreign countries.

Kovacs went on from show to show, in the evening hours by the mid-50s, never quite completely successful but always in contention for new possibilities. Toward the end of the decade he advanced to Hollywood, where he played in a number of films that he could not control, and in which he could not fully utilize his comic talents. Throughout this high phase of his career, his great enemies were himself and the TV powers-that-be. Kovacs loved to play the personality, to drink and play cards all day and night, take three hours sleep and keep up with a schedule that would have ruined a perfectly healthy actor-producer. The strain was obvious in the uneven quality of his shows, from the weird and explosive to the merely offbeat, the missed shot, the exploitation of all-too-familiar symbols like busty women. The commitment he had expressed to the labor and civil rights movements during the 1940s in New Jersey also seemed to fall by the way in the course of his drive for acceptance as the world's most serious clown.

The very nature of commercial television, one can suggest, did much to drive Kovacs into a stupor. While the other comics were doing old vaudeville bits, he boldly seized the potential of video experimentation. Harriet Van Horne described him as the "first surrealist in television," and she could

have added that he was the last for some time. He himself would say that "The television audience of today is a sophisticated, alert, discriminating audience," denied the pleasure and the challenge they deserved. If he described his Trenton, NJ. newspaper column as the "lowest rung in literature," he surely meant that all-crucial rung on which the entire edifice of evolving society rested — the culture of the masses.

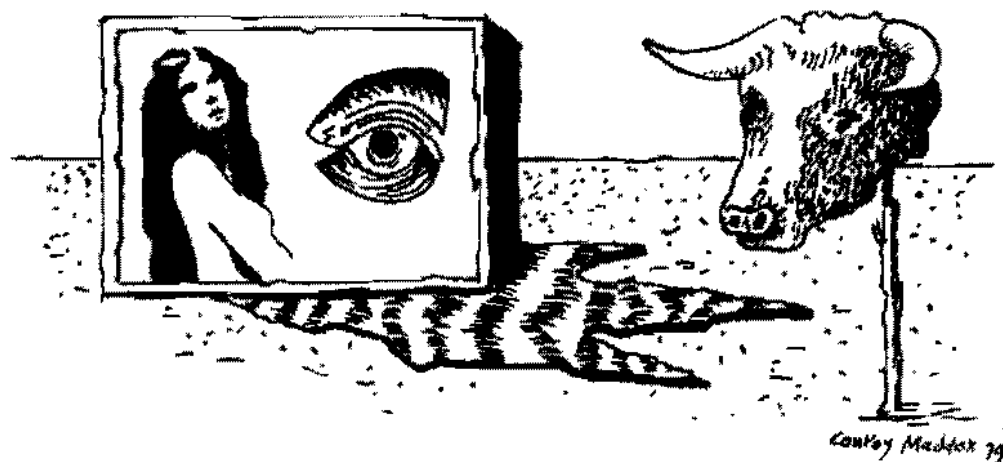
The strong side of Ernie Kovacs, to his very end, remained the black humor attack on the crass commercialization and phony estheticization of Culture. The early *Mad* in the days of Harvey Kurtzman's glory, Spike Jones and his brutal assault on classical music — these found their echoes for the largest possible audience in Kovacs' invention of imaginary sponsors and satire of real ones, his mocking poetaster Dove-tonils, and above all his gorilla-suited Nairobi Trio doing *Swan Lake*. One can only imagine how he would have passed through the '60s where Anarchy became (however briefly and ludicrously) a mass sentiment, and the '70s where dark humor in diluted forms took stage center among the late night TV audience. Kovacs knew, better than anyone else, the elements of a truly revolutionary critique delivered in absurd caricatures and insurrectionary imagery:

A figure of a girl in a cowgirl outfit...and a figure of a man in

cowboy outfit enter. They do not have heads. The girl opens a small box and takes out a folded guitar which she snaps out larger than the box — conceivable in happy cartoon land. Then male figure going rapidly through his pockets, pulls out small balloon-type thing which he blows up and becomes a bass. He stamps his foot, one and two and one and two, then with gesture prevents guitar player from beginning, exits and returns with two boxes marked his and hers. They open the boxes and each puts on a head... He puts Kovacs head on girl's body and Edie's on his...

This scenario from 1959, characteristically Kovacs in form and direction, suggests — as well as words can — the logic which incited his activities from his first days until his fatal car crash in 1962. The British import Monty Python, closest to his work and evidently derivative from it, lacked the sheer pathos of Kovacs at his best. *Saturday Night Live*, in turn drawing from Monty Python but bolder sexually and politically than TV in Kovacs' time was allowed to be, still cannot reach his level of manic madness. With a few props and a small budget, Kovacs went to the verge of truly Revolutionary Television. We are still waiting for the rest of comedy to catch up.

Paul BUHLE



Conroy MADDOX: Ink Drawing (1979)



TV: RESIDUAL GLORY — THE THREE STOOGES

Only a decade ago, any child could spend the afternoon in the wicked delight of utter destructiveness. Marx Brothers on the Cheap, the Three Stooges rambled through literally hundreds of two-reel shorts destroying the houses of wealthy matrons, breaking up football games, smashing illusions of bourgeois reality as they smashed each other in the longest-running Theatre of Proletarian Cruelty in screen history. The witchhunt against "violence in the media," Repressive Intolerance of the Liberals, and the aversion of local stations to black-and-white programming has deprived millions of that opportunity. In New York, Chicago, and the Buffalo of American culture, you can still see them — on the verge of an avant-garde revival (the Stooges achieved a special film festival in New York last year) but sturdily resistant to Aesthetic treatment, awaiting the kind of order which will appreciate their self-punishing antics.

Moe Howard's autobiography (*Moe Howard and the Three Stooges*: Secaucus, Citadel Press, 208 pp., \$14) reveals less than one would hope about the "boys," their real lives and their ideas. The characteristic Jewish slum life stands behind the stage routines that featured the slap and poke alongside the recreation of improbable events. Howard notes his vitriolic hatred for racism in all its forms. He should have recalled a famous photo (I saw it in the West Coast Communist newspaper, *People's World*) of the Stooges signing a petition for the Seaman's Rights Bill in 1945, a favorite measure of the Left to extend the New Deal into some more socialistic reality. My notion is that, consciously or unconsciously, the Stooges were at the Leftward fringes of a popular-culture interpretation of the Depression and its causes. Reel after reel bears out that notion.

The blue-collar life is at the center of the Stooges' 1930s experience. "Where do you live?" the cabbie asks them. "Down by the old winegar works," in the roustabout neighborhoods of the big cities, where the unemployed

(like the figures commonly played by the boys) practiced a thousand wiles to find some living, each more ludicrous than the last and all suggesting the ludicrousness of a system that made life so. They had no liberal solutions, but like the Happy Hooligans of the turn-of-the-century comic strips, they "accidentally" vented their rage against the rich: pouring alum into the lemonade of a teaparty, bringing polite conversation and card-playing to an hilarious end; appearing spuriously as fumigators, or gardeners, or in the guise of some other menial occupation, to utterly destroy the treasured estates; insane waiters at a fancy club; sham doctors with ruinous advice for the wealthy. They turned respectable only for the Anti-Fascist effort, and bizarre hits like *I'll Never Heil Again* overwhelmed Chaplin's paler caricatures of Hitler's battle for world control.

At their peak in the satire of phony humanitarianism, they provided in *Men in Black* (a parody of *Men in White*, vehicle for Lew Ayer's saintly demeanor) an unforgettable romp. "For Duty and Humanity," they swear repeatedly, to heal the sick and nurse the wounded. They ride up and down the hospital aisles on motorcycles, operate with mechanic's tools, and finish off the short by shooting the pseudo-God "Voice of Authority" — the hospital loudspeaker. "Why are we whispering?" Moe asks the nurse before an operation. "I lost my voice asking for a raise." Humor will have its revenge.

Moe, Larry, Curly and Shep — how could they be forgotten? Millions on millions of us grew up with their unrepressed violence inside, ready to ask the Higher Authority "how many" fingers, and answer with "two" — smack into the eyes, lift the nose up a few inches and then drop it suddenly, come around with a fist smack on the skull. To hell with gentility! Let's give the enemies of human freedom a real thumping.

Paul BUHLE

AN IDEAL TELEVISION

I would like to make a few notes on the problem of the social function of television, because the decisive questions are not in television itself, or in the analysis of the structure of television programs, but in the historical scene in which television and its audience appear. Much has been said of the relation between television and cinema, and almost nothing of the consumers of these programs; namely, the audience . . .

Television, by disseminating ideologies in a more or less concealed form, is an instrument of power institutions. Ideology creates false notions about reality; it creates myths which conform to the given power structure. This is the real function of television. However, television should take a critical stand toward reality. Let me imagine an ideal television, which does not exist . . .

and is a wishful dream. It would bring us a critique of our everyday life, help us to overcome illusion. I imagine television programs which could criticize mass illusions, destroy ideological camouflage, reveal the trump cards of power institutions, and demystify consciousness. Television should be able to critically understand our everyday life. It should be able to struggle against fetishes and masks of reality, which the establishment offers to modern man through the mass media. It does not matter whether the power institutions are churches, political parties or other power conglomerates . . .

The duty of a reporter, whether in newspapers or on the TV screen, is to tell the truth. The key problem is not the artistic presentation of various programs; the key problem is the truth. This is postulate number one. If this postulate were to be realized, what kind of topics would appear on the screen? Those which are today pushed back into the dark corners of the television studios.

Television should show programs which would de-ideologize consciousness—that is, do away with lies and falsifications. Television programs should express critical thoughts against dangerous tendencies, especially against totalitarian tendencies. This would establish a critical counterbalance to the "ideas" which misuse television in favor of partial interests. Television arrives at a point at which it transcends a merely descriptive stage. It has the potential to go deeper into reality and offer more than mere facts.

Ivan SVITAK

BEWITCHED THE IMPROBABLE IN TELEVISION

Did you ever want to stop time to rearrange an event, disappear and reappear at will, turn an adversary into a frog or "zipper" shut the mouth of an in-law? *Bewitched*, a '60s show still going strong in daytime residuals, makes the fantasy come true. Despite its sexual traditionalism and sheer corniness, the show rises above the banal to a species of Wonder.

The sitcom "unreal" is situated best, not in a fantasy world or outer space (where, for the purposes of action dramas, the human narrative must be similar to earth-life to maintain some semblance of believability) but in the most mundane and expectable circumstances. Television script-writing is so formulaistic that even the bizarre element readily becomes a tedious device. And yet moments of the ludicrous maintain, in flashes, an autonomy from their hackneyed origins. One thinks of the floating hats and shoes or the drunken St. Bernard's hiccups in *Topper*, the loquacious wisecracks of *Mister Ed*, the robotic black humor of *Grope in Get Smart*, as well as certain sketches on the old Steve Allen and Jackie Gleason shows. Short of the avowed assault on staid consciousness implemented by Ernie Kovacs, such humble offerings at least tip the scales away from stock replication of so-called Reality (in its reactionary or liberal interpretation)

tations) to an almost poetic pursuit of wild joy and sudden, jarring terror.

The central plot of *Bewitched* deals with the efforts of a young couple, Samantha and Darin Stevens, to live a normal life in the face of family interference. This would be pretty ordinary stuff except for the fact that Samantha is a witch and her relatives' intrusions have more punch than anything a run-of-the-mill family could come up with. Possessing the power to transcend time and space, and to transform human bodies into all manner of animate or inanimate objects, the witches and warlocks amuse themselves at the expense of Darin and other mortals who happen to cross their paths. That they fail to break up the marriage speaks to their limitations—they are quirky pagan entities and not saints on the take with Jesus—but they possess enough supernatural energy to keep the domestic world topsy-turvy. It turns out all right in the end, of course, but the intervening chaos furnishes our real pleasure.

The show's continuing success is attributable to the scope it provides for imaginative possibilities, underlined by a combination of technical virtuosity and generally good acting. The principals include Elizabeth Montgomery, Dick York (later Dick Sargent), Agnes Moorhead and David

White, joined from time to time by some of the finest character-actors in the business including Marian Lorne, Paul Lynn and Maurice Evans. When such luminaries are exiled into the chilly realm of the mirror, or pursued by fantastic creatures, we are inevitably reminded of W.C. Fields as Humpty-Dumpty in the best film version of *Alice in Wonderland*, or Laurel and Hardy in their *Babes in Toyland* fantasy-epic. Then again, the domestic/female bent of television can show itself with astonishing verve, as in the episode where Samantha entering the hospital for childbirth suddenly has her mind exchanged with Darin's. Humor pulpwriter Thorne Smith, whose '30s novel *Turnabout* unraveled a similar notion (and was recently made into a mediocre and unsuccessful show), could not have orchestrated a better shock to the mortal male.

If the fantastic implications for human consciousness tend to be suppressed rather than offered up whole by such shows, and if specifically social issues are clearer in the more realistic universe of *M*A*S*H* or the destroyed world of *Mary Hartman*, nevertheless *Bewitched* and its kin supply an important glimpse of television—and life—that will be.

Ron WEISBERGER

BACKYARD BOMBS AND INVISIBLE RAYS

Horror Movies on Television

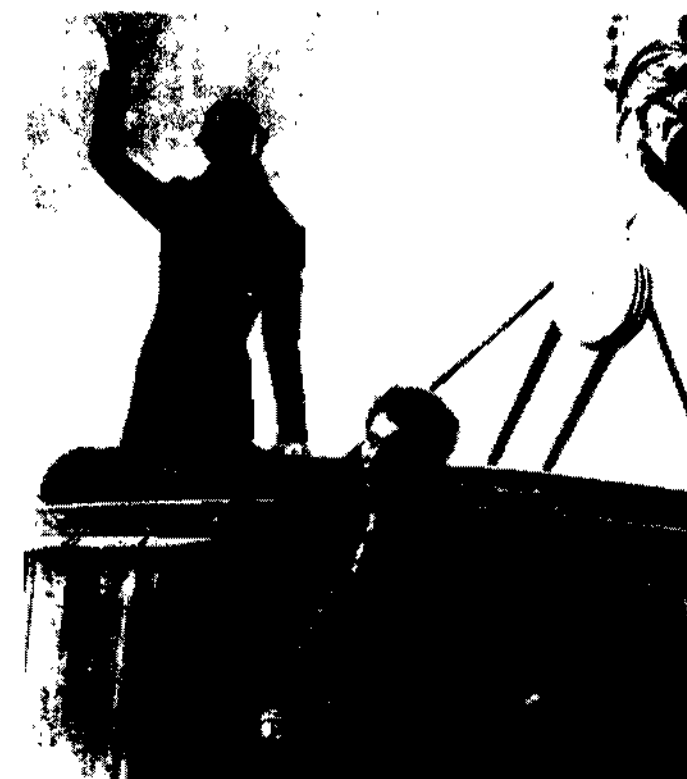
After the legitimization comedies and the frauds passed off as "news" have left the air, that is, late at night and in the dark, we are likely to find roving our television screens ubiquitous and disquieting figures—vampires, werewolves, mummies, zombies, abortive creations of diabolical doctors, and other masked and mutant beings. Monsters and magical practitioners have always been inseparable from the human imagination, a fact confirmed in ancient civilizations, rites and myths of tribal peoples, folktales of peasant societies, the fantasies of childhood and the dreams of "civilized" adults. Only the means of expression changes.

At the end of the *ancien regime* on the eve of explosive industrialization, as D.A.F. Sade was working out his brilliant theories in prison isolation, the modern horror tale grew in European literature and blossomed in the dark gardens of gothic romance. Matthew Lewis' *The Monk* and Anne Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1795) coincided with others of the type which set the scene with images of the castle, the night, the dungeon, the storm, mysterious ruins haunted by spectres. In the early 19th century four poet friends wrote stories which were to give form to characters still seen on the late show: Percy Shelley's *St. Irvyne*, Lord Byron's *The Giaour*, John Polidori's *The Vampyre* and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus* (1813). Through them and their heirs the gothic tradition with its marvels and terrors, its amalgam of cruelty and love, the quest for supernormal power, and acts of violent transformation carries into the late 20th century in essentially the same outlines.

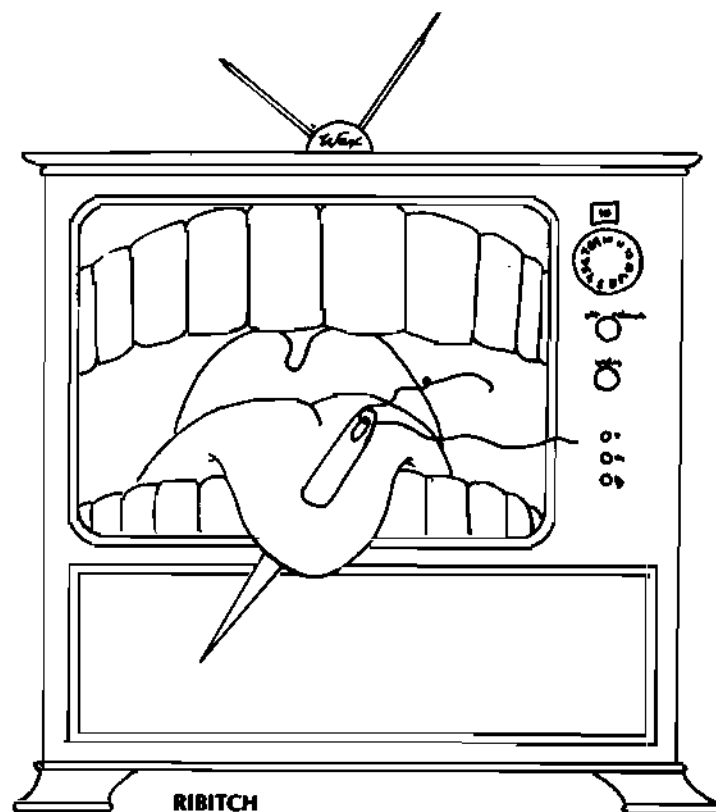
Tales of terror and the supernatural were among the first to be translated into film. Melies made *Le Manoir du Diable* (vampire) in 1896, and *Cleopatre* (mummy) in 1899; Edison's *Frankenstein* was filmed in 1910. Many others were to be made before the 1920s when the first surrealists in Paris recognized in *Nosferatu*, *eine Symphonie des Grauens* the revelation of the poetic marvelous, heralded by the words, "on the other side of the bridge, the phantoms came to meet him." Mass audiences in the '30s and '40s sitting in rococo movie palaces thrilled to the oneiric delights of scores of films: *Dracula* (Bela Lugosi), vampire par excellence, evoking another, more seductive world for his "children of the night"; *Dracula's Daughter* (Gloria Holden) unable to awaken from her nightmare of perverse sexuality; or *Night of the Zombie's* two women in

their nightdresses almost sleepwalking through the shadowy cane fields suddenly encountering the spectral Carre Four on their way to voodoo rites.

Generally, it is possible to follow in these pictures a fusion of themes and imagery with historic moments, in the present era with the cataclysms of capitalism. Certainly the direction of horror films after Auschwitz, Hiroshima and '60s Vietnam was more overtly violent and sadistic—from the bloody Hammer productions to Franju's elegant and hallucinatory *The Eyes Without a Face*; and it tended toward mutants—from the Japanese *Godzilla* saga in which Tokyo is compulsively and repeatedly destroyed to films like *The Split* in which a horrific double emerges little by little from the suffering hero's shoulder. Recent audiences have responded strongly to *Night of the Living Dead* in which all the dead of the world rise to avenge themselves in an orgy of cannibalism, leading to an ironic



Scene from F.W. Murnau's "Nosferatu"



climax where imbecile politicians and murdering cops reveal their own zombie nature.

The second film in George Romero's zombie trilogy, *Dawn of the Dead*, released this year, extends a view of the eclipse of human values in a mechano-SWAT-bureaucracy out of control. The 70s — decade of mass carnage, cult suicides, nuclear menace, urban disintegration, monetary terrorism, technological catastrophe — has been the decade of the horror genre with a new focus on impotence, anger and revolt: science fiction apocalypses (*Star Wars*, *Close Encounters*, *The Alien*), cannibals (*The Hills Have Eyes*), demonic possession (*The Omen*, *The Exorcist*), and telekinetic adolescents (*Carrie*, *The Fury*).

Television has altered the social context of the ritual aspects of horror film as the landscape of the transfigured collective dream moved from the communal warmth of depression movie houses into the isolated living room. Yet the sheer frequency with which these films are available for viewing on television gives them a peculiarly obsessive quality. *King Kong's* immense head and eye at the window of Faye Wray's hotel window; yet another metropolis devastated by a gigantic insect; Dr. Pretorius displaying his enchanting homunculi dancing in their little jars; or Henry Hull (*The Werewolf of London*) in the mists of a Tibetan plateau, bitten by a mysterious animal, searching for the *marifasa lupina lumina* that blooms only in moonlight: one sees these images over and over again until they are granted a kind of mythic privilege.

As for plodding realists and cynical purveyors of "camp," they can have their impoverished and reactionary horrors: the "horror" of Watergate, the spectre of so-called "terrorism," airline disasters and condominium fires. Beware the enemies of poetry who try to foist on the public

the idea that the horror film is beneath contempt, fare fit only for children — revealing an awesome denigration of childhood, that stage of life in which imagination has not yet been wholly exterminated by this society. In spite of constant subjection to ridicule and scorn, more horror films are being made now than ever before and they seem destined to remain an immensely popular cultural form. Undaunted, filmmakers proceed with rock-bottom budgets, so it is no surprise that "masterpieces" are rare. Technical achievements are often crude, scripts sometimes banal, actors inept. Yet, even when great strains are placed on the "willing suspension of disbelief," the poetic marvelous may emerge astonishingly even in those films termed "bombs," those apparently made in an ordinary backyard with homemade materials. Potentially explosive, any object can be an object for transformation. A flying saucer fashioned from an automobile hubcap, a monster composed of three people inside gunnysacks stitched together, a rubber and seaweed humanoid lurking in an ocean cave: these images I have recently seen on late night television summon a sweeping nostalgia for childhood, the delirious transports at the Saturday matinee where the incomparable Eduardo Ciannelli as *Dr. Satan* ruled the world from a control panel made out of a cardboard box while his adversary The Mysterious Copperhead could become unrecognizable by his family and friends simply by donning a stocking mask pulled from a vest pocket. This was an inspired game anyone could play.

The horror genre can be considered today to be in an embryonic stage; it had an auspicious beginning in the magical images of Melies; it has far to go, and there is an infinite road ahead. Because it forces the imagination to operate in a surrealist manner, this kind of tale issues a profound challenge to the filmmaker (and the viewer), an invitation to transform reality, a prospect with dizzying potential. Realistic conventions can be dispensed with: the logic of time and space and proportion does not apply here. Barriers between external and internal, dream and waking, the monstrous and the beautiful, desire and fulfillment, the categories of mineral, vegetable, animal, human can dissolve in a second through the magic eye of the camera. The intrusion of the poetic image might occur at any moment in the most unusual places: I think of *The Night of the Lepus*, a pedestrian effort with a far-fetched theme if there ever was one, featuring, as it did, mutated hares. Yet what a delicious and strange charm was exerted by the moonlit apparitions, giant rabbits floating over an ordinary American farmyard with an air of totally unexpected menace.

poetry, content, especially latent content, is always sovereign over form. Sometimes the maker of a film is quite unaware of the resonances of the marvelous it emanates. Dream figures of animals appear as regularly as they once did in legends told around fires on starry nights in the past, and their sense of enchantment is not limited to the dialogues concerning radioactive mutation. Transformation into cat, wolf, ape, spider, cobra, alligator, plant, owl, bat, vulture, wasp: an uncannily familiar scenario expressing universal impulses to live outside social regulations prescribed by human law and to recognize deeply felt bonds with earth's other creatures. Here is a potential meeting ground, in film, with the wisdom of non-Western cultures, a hint of a future myth for all

humanity which might break the chains of habitual conventions.

"So on his nightmare, through the evening fog, flits the squat fiend o'er fen and bog, seeks some love-wilder'd maid with sleep oppressed..." begins botanist Erasmus Darwin's poem on the incubus vampire. The capacity for transformation, particularly of humans into animal forms, has an erotic basis. Psychoanalyst Ernest Jones in his classic *On the Nightmare* traces how the masochistic and sadistic components of the sexual instinct come to expression in the figures of the vampire, werewolf, witch and demon; how these creatures of popular belief and folklore derive from nightmares and anxiety dreams; and how these dreams, in turn, arise out of tabooed sexual impulses. Unconscious desires and repressed sexuality become visible on the screen in fangs, fur, teeth and claws, materializing before our eyes in the forms of beasts. The modern viewer, no longer believing in the old superstitions, nevertheless is not immune from dreaming, nor from the fascination of encounters with transformational symbols in movies or on television.

The horror film is the terrain where heroes and heroines dream their sexuality, where the unrepressed image is allowed.

It is not difficult to discern parallels to primitive ceremonies which mediate untempered infantile wishes, the Oedipal passage, motifs of cruelty, guilt, revenge, the perversions. The power of eros appears with the force of inevitability: "Even a man who is pure at heart and says his prayers by night may become a wolf when the wolfbane blooms and the moon is full and bright," says the old gypsy to poor Larry Talbot (Lon Chaney, Jr.) who succumbs to his sadistic wishes in the excesses of lycanthropy. What heroine in her passive, virginal beauty could resist the spell

of Dracula with his promise of the eternal ecstasies of the night? Recent Draculas, I note, experience a diminishing reluctance on the part of their "victims." And who can forget the haunting image of triumphant desire as Imhotep (Karloff), despite 4000 years of death in mummy wraps, hypnotically draws his lover, the reincarnated Princess Anck-es-en-amon, to him across the deserted streets of London?

I have always wanted to make a film based upon Empedocles' *Fragments*, which display an amazing array of animal and human forms whirling in a cosmic kaleidoscope. Moreover the sense of loss, of profound isolation and pain of existence, the terror of mutability, and the intimation of cosmic error in this poetry shares a kind of gnostic vision common to the horror genre. "The might of the air pursues him into the sea, the sea spews him forth on the dry land, the earth casts him into the rays of the burning sun, and the sun into the eddies of air. Of these I too am now one, a fugitive from the gods and a wanderer, who put my trust in raving strife. I wept and I wailed when I saw the unfamiliar land. From what horror, from what height of bliss have I fallen to go about among mortals here on earth... come under this roofed-in cave."

The hero's destiny under such circumstances pits him against savage nature, nature as Sade saw it, immeasurably cruel and implacable. The hero's goal is to win victory over death, to liberate love, to discover the "great ray that first brought life into the world," to replace gods with self, to establish Man on earth. The hero's weapon is Knowledge. Usually he is defeated in the rituals seen on the screen, but not because he tampers with sacred things in the sense of prerogatives of established religion, or because he is existentially fated to lose. Rather he does not understand the dangers of unadulterated rationalism, and he fails be-

VAMPIRIC FILM

Your Joan Crawford eyes
I made them larger, even larger
With what cruel scalpels I widened
your eyelids.
And your eyes were opening and opening

immense,
in a white crescendo
in such a form
that they became two large eggs
desolate and frightful.

(And you, absent, untouched.
Without a presentiment even though
the hideous crime was committed
just a few feet away.)

Emeterio GUTIERREZ ALBELO

translated by P.L. and N.J.P.



cause he denies the demands of eros, stupidly ignores his dreams and intuitions. The methods of the mad scientist are the methods of positivist science. Sometimes we glimpse in the shadows an outline of a mediating figure, a high priest burning the tanna leaves, a Van Helsing who *believes* in the vampire, a guardian of ancient knowledge, a wise old woman. It is this figure, the poet-scientist, the forerunner of a possible surrealist hero/heroine uniting the opposites, resolving the dualist dilemma, who holds the promise of things to come.

Under the surface, horror films deal with *essentials*: the exaltation of desire, wishes for the excessive possibility, the truth inhering in the non-rational, and the absolute necessity for transmuting and surpassing present reality.

The protagonists are on a quest as authentic as that of a medieval knight or a historic revolutionary. The dreamers are not satisfied. And although the passages of transformation are dangerous, dreamers will change the world. Some have seen in zombies and monsters the sleeping people, the workers of the world, coming awake and rising to seize power from their exploiters. Deprived of love, living a living death, disoriented among the electric rays of the 19th century's magneto apparatus and 20th century weaponry, the monster destroys an alienating world. Portraying in fantasy the images of defiance, negation and revolt, the horror film grants a powerful assent to freedom.

Nancy Joyce PETERS



Scene from James Whale's "Bride of Frankenstein"

NATIONAL EDUCATIONAL TELEVISION PUBLIC BROADCASTING SERVICE

See Ambrose Bierce, *Devil's Dictionary* (1906)

"Independent" public broadcasting supported by government:

Politics, n. A strife of interests masquerading as a contest of principles. The conduct of public affairs for private advantage.

"Educational" television's policy directors and program managers:

Philistine, n. One whose mind is the creature of its environment, following the fashion in thought, feeling and sentiment. He is sometimes learned, frequently prosperous, commonly clean and always solemn.

"Non-commercial" television sponsored by Exxon, Ford, Standard Oil, General Motors, Gulf, et al:

Hypocrite, n. One who, professing virtues that he does not respect, secures the advantage of seeming to be what he despises.

N.J.P.



J. Karl BOGARTTE: The Obsessive Image (photomorph)

MANIFESTO FOR A VIOLENT CINEMA

Reprinted from the catalog of the 1976 World Surrealist Exhibition

Whenever the lights were extinguished the enlightened ones believed that the heroic epoch of mysteries had returned with an uninterrupted program of orgies and revels, continuing from week to week, transporting the unknown silhouettes in the theater pit beyond the Marvelous. The adventurer who took the risk of an incursion into the darkened hall asked only that the ray of light dazzle the vision of everyday life with the wonders of a new reality. The provocation felt by each viewer challenged him to let poetry burst into his whole being.

But the animated images have been bought in order to be sold. The light is transformed into commercial cinema, locus solus, within which lost beings masturbate with a maximum economy of colloidal material. The masses have been led by prudent onanistic planning to demand the purified air and laxative preparations which bring them a sleep without dreams as a remedy for clogged bladders.... The dragon of light and shadow has had its tongue put in an insulated thermos.

The cinema is domesticated. Or rather, the pieces it produces eject only disinfected artifacts, while the mechanism itself retains

its original faculties for lifting the humiliated heads in a magnificent and unanimous erection—forerunner of delirious commotions capable of violating the citadels of the cowardly for allowing a single temple to remain standing....

Make violent films! Show violent films! Show *Simon of the Desert* to the lions swept away by mystical ecstasies—and then we shall see if a wave of destruction is not provoked by spirits carried to erectile eruption; then we shall see if priests and young girls do not join together with the gods and devils to have done with all the old vestiges of classes whose time has passed.

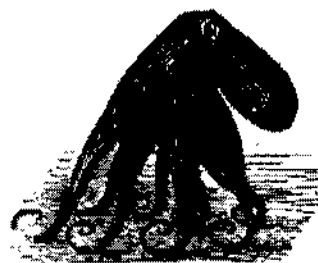
The cinema will be violent or it will not be at all.

(written in a few minutes after several years)

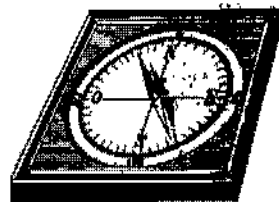
Paulo de PARANAGUA

Rio de Janeiro, 1966

(translated by Michael Lowy and Dale Tomich)



AGAINST COMMERCIAL MOVIES



No medium of expression has engendered so much hope as the movies. Through them everything becomes possible; the fantastic itself is placed within reach. Yet never have we observed so much disproportion between the immensity of possibilities and the paucity of results.

Acting directly on the viewer, movies are capable of overwhelming, agitating, transporting him as nothing else can. But they can deaden as well as awaken; this has been only too easy to confirm, alas! as motion pictures have been transformed from an unprecedented cultural instrument into an industry, subdued by the laws of a sordid commerce which is incapable of distinguishing works of the mind from a sack of flour. For the film producer, nothing counts any more beyond the profit he can derive from the millions he has tied up in the legs of one or another idiotic female, or in the voice of some cretin.

The obvious result of such an orientation can only be an interminable series of films devoid of the slightest interest — that is, when they are not frankly odious or stupid — intended, with skill and efficiency, to anesthetize the public. If three or four films out of a hundred are exceptions to this rule, revealing themselves as works of value, it matters little: It is the general tendency that counts, and exceptions remain precisely what they are — exceptions, powerless to transform the rule.

Film production today is fundamentally corrupted by money — that is, by capital — the ends of which are foreign, nay, *contrary* to any disinterested enterprise. Now in any domain at all, nothing truly valuable can result unless it is free of all commercial preoccupations. Artists who have chosen to express themselves in movies (I refer especially to screenwriters and directors, rather than actors whose importance remains secondary) necessarily confront capital, which demands of them before all else: "How much will my money bring me?"

As long as this situation remains unchanged, movies will be condemned to senselessness, additionally aggravated by an anachronistic censorship based on musty and odorous Christian prejudices.

Nonetheless, the hope that the young have placed in movies, from their earliest beginnings, is a sure sign that their intrinsic possibilities remain, boundless and unexplored, despite all the endless frustrations. Already it appears that young men and women have attempted to escape, individually at least, from the sterilizing influence of capital. Their results, however isolated and fragmentary they may still be, are nonetheless highly promising and permit conjecture as to the next stage in a rebirth of motion pictures, when it will be generally recog-



MOVIES: FRENETIC OR ACADEMIC?

... The modern voyager seeks the marvelous. He thinks that, gropingly, he has found his way. As absurd shadows tremble in the brush, the modern voyager thinks he recognizes the promised land of his nocturnal dreams. It is night-fall now, full of mystery and promises. A great magic searchlight is following fabulous creatures. Here is Nosferatu the Vampire. Here is the asylum where Cesar and Dr. Caligari will have such memorable adventures. Here, rising from poetic caverns, are Jack the Ripper, Ivan the Terrible and their old friend from the Wax Museum.

The modern voyager, ravished at last by the powers of this tragic poetry, is at the very heart of the miraculous regions of human emotion.

At this moment there appears a grotesque personage who at first sight might not seem out of place here. We recognize — by the dandruff in his hair, by the inkstains on his fingers, by the dirt under his fingernails, by his nearsightedness — a redoubtable specimen of that species known as "Men of Letters." He announces that poetry is a matter of literature; that cinema is an art; that art consists of copying nature, naturally (*sic*); that the duty of the artist is to represent people in their foulest and most trivial occupations. Once this personage gets his dirty hands on the white apparitions, on the sympathetic phantoms of the night, on the pure faces of exceptional creatures, everything disappears.

The modern voyager finds himself seated in a room. He is told that he is at a motion picture theater, and that he is going to see a film that has cost millions of dollars to produce.

A title appears on the screen. Great actors and good-looking women begin to stir. They act out a

nized that creativity and money are eternal enemies.

Then the young will associate freely to produce the movies we have awaited since our own youth — the movies whose first manifestations, oases in a desert of asphyxiating dust, are *Nosferatu*, the early Chaplin films, *Peter Ibbetson*, *L'Age d'or*, etc.

Benjamin PERET

L'Age du cinéma, No. 1
(Paris, March 1951)

Translated by Cheryl Seaman

scenario that is banal to the point of nausea, dragged along through cheap but clever technical stunts — enough to keep the average spectator happy till the vulgar ending.

The modern voyager yawns. He goes to the street, where luminous signs rival the stars of paradise, and admirable women pass by. ... The modern voyager returns to the road leading to the mysterious forest of nocturnal marvels. He remembers the miracles of Charlie Chaplin. He remembers Pearl White and the *Mysteries of New York*.

In motion pictures, as everywhere, we are taking part in the great struggle which opposes intelligence to sensibility, poetry to literature, life to art, love and hatred to skepticism, revolution to counter-revolution. Man's fate is played in detail and in general in these struggles whose beginnings go back to the closing years of the eighteenth century.

When we speak of movies, it is necessary to insist firmly that it is not a question of corporative or technical interests, but of their very *spirit* and their links to the solemnity of our restlessness.

... It is important to realize that it is not technique and the material future of the screen which are at stake. On the contrary, under the guise of perfecting the former and assuring the latter, an attempt is being made — and already has been successful in several countries — to dry up the magnificent sources of inspiration.

Robert DESNOS
(1927)

from *Cinéma* (Paris, Gallimard, 1966)



THE MARVELOUS IS POPULAR

I abhor aristocrats and aristocracies, of class or otherwise. Let them have their Bressons and their Cocteau. The cinematic marvelous, the modern marvelous, is *popular*; and the best and most exciting films, since the time of Melies and *Fantomas*, are those shown in low-class dives — films that seem to have no place in the history of motion pictures.

No longer is anyone "privileged" in the marvelous, no cliques monopolize the imagination. Movies today tear open caches of weapons — Armin's double-edged swords — and distribute them to all. Film offers the example of Houdini, the man who will not be kept in chains.

The great visionaries always addressed an extremely large public, but the diffusion of their works remains limited, appropriated by society.

Today movie theaters cover the globe, and if ever cinematic expression were ungagged the world could live in a climate from which the impossible was banished: ideal climate for surrealist consciousness.

But let's not delude ourselves. The films that enjoy the greatest success are not the ones consisting of psychological blabbering or obtuse realism; on the contrary, they are films disdained by "esthetes" and reproved by the church. Popular films: *serials* with their extraordinary heroes, rejected by the "best" theaters; the great *Tarzan* films and old *Westerns*, in which the lead actor was not some stupid sheriff but an eagle-headed man or a man with a body of tin; Douglas Fairbanks' films, with their tree-men and giant spiders (*The Thief of Baghdad*, etc.); the films of

the superb Houdini (*Terror Island*, *The Mystery Master*), those films forgotten by historians in which, for ten episodes, a gang carries away the bride just at the moment she is about to pronounce the fateful words, "I do" — in which the hero, to get past a locked door, flattens himself like a sheet of paper, slides beneath the door and reassembles himself on the other side; in which a hand, a single hand, tears out the hearts of traitors, who die like flies; in which all the avengers shout to the world of their joy at being free. Those despised masterpieces, such as *The Raven* (directed by Louis Friedlander, alias Lew Landers, with Karloff), *The Black Cat*, *The Mysteries of Dr. Fu Manchu*, and the admirable films drawn from the most cinematic of modern authors, Gaston Leroux: *Baloo*, *The New Baron*, *The Phantom of the Opera* (the first version, by Rupert Julian, made in 1925 with Lon Chaney), *The Perfume of the Lady in Black*, *Mister Flow*, etc. ...

In these "popular" productions, films that are not addressed to pretentious pseudo-intellectuals, a real freedom of thought is often present. Impossible voyages (I think of certain films freely drawn from novels by Jules Verne and Arthur Conan Doyle); exotic adventures (recall the delirious *Adventures of Hajji Baba* by Don Weiss); certain "peplum" movies deliberately and sublimely idiotic, such as Richard Thorpe's *Prodigal*, more demented than biblical, are often the involuntary equivalents of surrealist collages. Mere "anecdote" disappears, and all that remains are some unexpected images, at times as dazzling as the prose of Benjamin Péret or the paintings of Clovis Trouille. All these films are accepted by a public ever ready to devote itself to mental exercises of liberating complexity. But here the complexity disappears, since with everything possible everything is fundamentally simple.

Jacques BRUNIUS

from "Monsieur Verdoux,"
Horizon (London), March 1948

TOWARD CINEMA

If cinema were only what some people would want us to believe, perhaps it would be necessary to despair. Everywhere it is overshadowed by the props, the writer, the painter, the public, and the actor. And it is true that in the beginning these elements had to be discovered. But among so many riches, so many new riches — now that they are already being squandered — it finally seems that we should be able to use them with some modesty, with a greater efficacy.

We think that the best procedure, if one hopes for cinema to serve in more delicate and subtle ways, less uncertain than

those to which we are accustomed, would be to show only a very few films, the strangest that have appeared, and nothing but those.

This confrontation, for which undoubtedly none of them is prepared, would present the problem from a rather unexpected angle. At this point, we believe, it would not take much more to elucidate the crux of the matter as definitively as possible.

Paul NOUGE

(February 1925)
From *Histoire de ne pas rire* (1956)

Translated by Keith Holloman

is it not characteristic that *science fiction* perfects alchemical systems, permitting voyages in time, where we can meet crystal men and birds of fire, in strange worlds where the word "surprise" loses its meaning? Science thus finds the place it truly merits. It becomes the auxiliary of the marvelous; it exceeds the simple anticipation of Jules Verne and attains the freest marvelous. I am thinking of some admirable films from around 1930-39 that I have had the good luck to see: Frederick Stephans's *Flash Gordon*, *The Phantom Empire* by Otto Brower (Houdini's son), Sam Nelson's *Mandrake the Magician*, etc. Science fiction is undeniably a great intellectual stimulant, and certain of its themes — mutants, parallel worlds, great invisibles, alchemy of time, new dimensions — take up surrealist themes.

Frankenstein and *Fantomas* are favorite films of entire peoples. Such admirable complements to *Peter Ibbetson* and *The Battleship Potemkin* will inevitably support the springboard from which long-awaited new myths will extend their way.

Ado KYROU

Le Surréalisme au cinéma
(Paris, Le Terrain vague, 1963)

MACK SENNETT

Mack Sennett was the great promoter of destructive cinematographic humor. Chase scenes and gratuitous transformations were no longer enough. He created the comic style, introducing certain gags which are infallible even today, and letting his imagination run wild throughout the shooting of his almost wholly improvised shorts.

He gathered around himself a band of extraordinary actors and actresses — Mabel Normand, Ford Sterling, Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle, cross-eyed Ben Turpin, Mack Swain, Al Saint-Jones (Pieratt), Chester Conklin, as well as great stars of the future such as Wallace Beery, Buster Keaton, Harold Lloyd, Harry Langdon, W.C. Fields and Charlie Chaplin. All these comedians, surrounded by the unforgettable "Bathing Beauty Brigade," run along electrical wires, throw pies at each other, ride elephants through the streets of New York, leap onto their horses from the tops of six-story buildings, chase hearses whose drivers are furious, fight phantoms with their bare fists, and dynamite entire cities. The improbable reigns supreme.

With the aid of a bottle of seltzer water, Mack Sennett irremediably ridiculed a world that did not even know what ridicule was.

CHARLIE CHAPLIN

One thing must be made clear from the start: Chaplin's spirit is surrealist. He never raised a barrier between his works and his life. Movies were not his "employment." . . . The publicity at the time of his second divorce revealed the thorough honesty and sincerity of Chaplin's revolt, a veritable beacon of our conduct.

On October 1st, 1927, in *La Révolution Surréaliste*, there appeared a collective text titled "Hands Off Love!" (signed by Aragon, Arp, Breton, Desnos, Duhamel, Eluard, Ernst, Leiris, Masson, Naville, Péret, Prévert, Queneau, Man Ray, Sadoul, Tanguy et al) — surely the most beautiful homage ever rendered by free men to one of their brothers. In Chaplin's defense, and in the accusations against him by Lita Grey, the surrealists clearly recognized a unique and exemplary personage who — like Rimbaud, Lautréamont and Jarry — will always light the signals of human sensibility. . . . Here are the closing words:

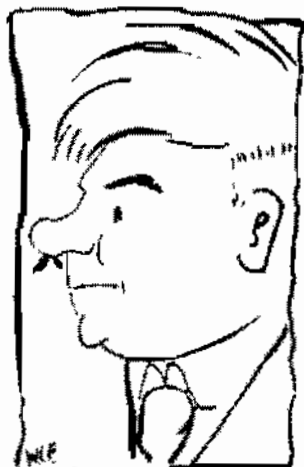
"We understand now exactly what place genius has in the world. Genius seizes on a man and makes him an intelligible symbol and the prey of sinister creatures. Genius serves to point out to the world the moral truth which universal stupidity obscures and endeavors to destroy. Our thanks, then, to the man who, over there on the immense Western screen, beyond the horizon where the suns decline one by one, projects your shadow. O great realities of mankind, perhaps the sole realities, moral truths whose worth is greater than that of the whole universe. The earth sinks beneath your feet. Our thanks to you above and beyond the victim. We offer you our thanks, we are your humble servants."

W.C. FIELDS

A bomb destined to revolutionize our ways of thinking was dropped on the world in the absurd and wonderful form of William Claude Dukensfield, known as W.C. Fields. He has not the slightest use for natural laws, and it is precisely this indifference which gives him his explosive force . . .

His films and his personality form a single whole: Entirely alone, and paralyzed toward the end of his life, he stubbornly resisted this society which inevitably rejected his total revolt. Immense and marvelous, he hated all the fossils who did not know how to be happy. He spat in the face of logic; systematically he devastated sports, old folks, bothersome brats, "cinema," inventors, money — substituting for all of them a real joy in living.

After this terrible earthquake, a new world will be put together. W.C. Fields is surrealist in everything.



W.C. FIELDS: Self-portrait

BUSTER KEATON

Keaton's genius, equal to Harry Langdon's, is overwhelmingly demonstrated in *Sherlock Junior*, which contains one of the most beautiful dreams in the history of film.

Employed as a film projectionist, he falls asleep while showing a film. Dreaming, his double watches the film and recognizes in its actors the persons who play a role in his own life. Intrigued, he goes down the theater aisle and effortlessly enters the movie screen. There he is subjected to terrifying changes of scenery: If he leans on a tree, the scene changes and he finds himself swimming in the ocean; again the scene changes and he continues swimming in the middle of a heavily trafficked street, etc.

Here the supersession of the concepts film, reality, dream etc. is total. A new mode of thought, completely free of habits and prohibitions, comes to light. Here surrealism flows directly from nonsense.

HARRY LANGDON

If Chaplin has crossed all frontiers and touched, with the tip of his cane, the most diverse publics, the surrealist Harry Langdon still remains ignominiously unknown. "The Man Who Didn't Want to Wake Up" was ahead of his time, and I believe that only a public that appreciates the spirit of surrealism could enter into the sleep of the poet Harry Langdon.

Limits, prohibitions, logical distinctions glide over him; he is glazed with sleep and dream. There resides his absolute revolt: he definitively denies the manifest world and its laws; he sees around it by means of the dream. . . . The dream is his invincible force. . . . In the end the dream will vanquish everyday reality.

Just as he refuses all love that does not conform to his marvelous dream, so he tramples on every sordid aspect of life. In war he amuses himself by shooting at boxes of candy, and if he is obliged to pursue an "enemy" he does so by hurling onions at him with a slingshot. The world of men, where everyone is killing everyone else, horrifies him; he returns to his dream, but not without first recruiting a few rare beings who will blindly follow him throughout his voyages.

If the word "adult" signifies one who accepts logical laws and denies all poetry, it is a word that has never applied to the surrealist Harry Langdon.

PHANTOM FILMS (Popular Eroticism)

Let us have the courage to declare openly that some of the semi-pornographic short films that could be viewed in slot-machines before the Second World War (the more recent ones are clearly inferior) were masterpieces. What could be more mysterious and more unusual than those ladies in fur coats getting out of their bourgeois cars to plunge with a dancer's steps into the forest, where they revealed themselves to us ostentatiously in some strange rite?

Much more than simple and base excitants for old men, these short films constituted the sincerest and purest expression of cinematographic magic. Automatism, objective chance, revolt and love are provided the most poetic rendezvous in an immense commercial machine which they are able to transform from top to bottom. Obviously these flashes of the spirit are drowned (and have been for a long time) in mercantilism and reactionary propaganda. But I see them, I see only them. From the screen to me, they form sensitive ties of the greatest importance — flames that only a very few poems have been able to ignite till now.

I urge you: Learn to see the "worst" films — they are sometimes sublime.

Ado KYROU

Le Surréalisme au cinéma
(Paris, Le Terrain vague, 1963)

BUSTER KEATON

Joseph Francis Keaton (1895-1966) got his nickname from his godfather, Harry Houdini, when, as an infant, he fell downstairs without getting "busted." Raised in the whirl of vaudeville, he had more arduous adventures before he reached the age of two than most people know in a lifetime. Once he was picked up by a cyclone and sent flying for hundreds of feet through town.

Almost from birth he was performing regularly in his parents' comedy routines. His father would hold him by his ankles and sweep the floor with Buster's hair (he was billed as "The Human Mop"), then hurl the lad across the stage or into the audience. Almost before he could walk, Buster Keaton knew how to fall without getting hurt.

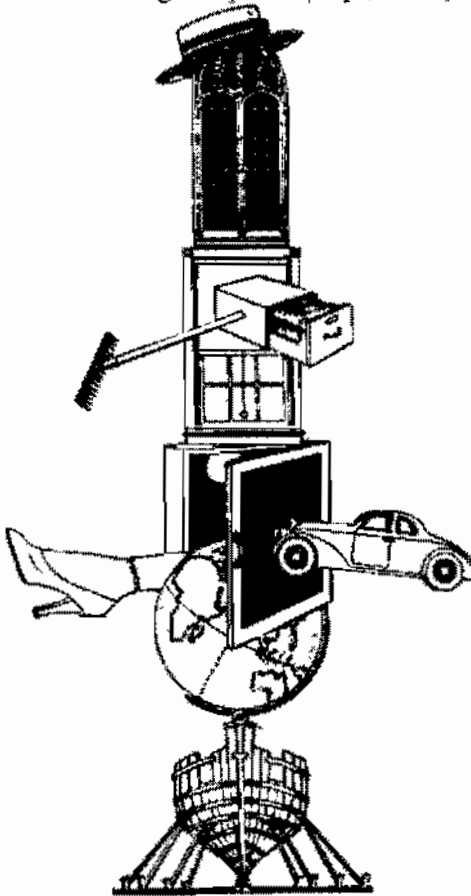
He was, indeed, something of a specialist in falling (throughout life, he almost never used stunt men). This is by no means as easy as it might appear. The art of falling requires not only an incredible coordination and equilibrium, but also a certain way of looking at things — a certain "attitude" akin to the experience of *satori* in Zen, or to the "pure psychic automatism" of surrealism. "Because I find it easy to scratch my left ear with my toe," Keaton once said, "you may think me incapable of having opinions on poetry or music. But after all, learning how to scratch your ear with a toe requires strong muscular discipline, and every discipline implies another, cerebral discipline."

Keaton's marvelous resiliency, in any case, underscores his perfect tranquility. His "Great Stone Face" surely is the most expressive blank stare of all time. Magic lamps burn in each of his eyes, signaling the intense passion that seethes beneath this mask of Spinoza's imperturbable calm. There is nothing superfluous in Keaton's movements. His indomitable grace owes much to the subversive directness of his gestures. Entering a workplace, he notices a sign that says "Punch Clock"; with the merest glance at this instrument of degradation, he puts his fist through it (*The Playhouse*, 1921).

In all his films Keaton is a man with things to do. He has tasks to accomplish, obstacles to overcome, aims to fulfill. With his unique kinesthetic/poetic energy, he supercedes the mossgrown distinctions between acrobatics, athletics, dance, and gives us a

profound sense of the truly inspired human body exceeding all known limits.

His comic method consists in creating situations, to use an expression of Marx, from which all turning back is impossible. A past master in the art of keeping cool in a crisis, he accepts all challenges, and always in his own way: with the greatest of ease. He lights his cigarette with a bomb thrown by an anarchist, and then blithely tosses the bomb into a throng of police (*Cops*, 1922).



F.R.: Buster Keaton (collage)

It is significant that, unlike Chaplin, who consistently mistrusts machines, Keaton finds that machines can be sources of pleasure and play. Ample evidence of this exists in nearly all his films, but it is shown with particular force in two of his greatest: *Sherlock Junior* (1924) and *The Cameraman* (1928), both of which are movies about movies. Camera and projector are seen here not as intrusive impersonal devices in opposition to human activity, threatening the individual's autonomy as alien forces, but

rather as vehicles of an exalted subjectivity: elements, like everything else, of a dream within a dream within a dream.

These two films best exemplify Keaton's revolutionary/poetic world-view. When he passes through the looking-glass, he is not content merely to see what is on the other side: he braves his way through a whole succession of looking-glasses, each behind the other, and each reflecting only the meagerest hint of what we call "the real." And what motive could possibly underlie such feverish wanderings back and forth through the interpenetrating spheres of the pluriverse? The answer is crystal clear: Keaton's audacity is in the service of sublime love. His agility is always radiant with a lover's grim determination. There is no risk that he will not take for the woman he loves. Only Buster Keaton, moreover, can sustain a single kiss for two years (*The Paleface*, 1921).

We do not know to what extent Keaton was aware of the magnitude of his achievements. Always modest, devoid of pretense, he spoke little of his intentions or deeds. We have his autobiography, *My Wonderful World of Slapstick* (1967), and a number of interviews — all warm, informative, helpful, yet somehow strangely reticent. There is no doubt that he knew much more than he ever cared to express in words. It is interesting to note, in this regard, that when he made the remark about scratching his ear with his toe, in 1929, he was reading a volume of selected writings by Karl Marx.

It was in his silent films that Buster Keaton said everything he wished to say, and he said it with such brilliance and verve as to preclude all misunderstanding. Nothing could be plainer than the fact that every one of his films is implacably against war, alienated labor, law 'n' order, sentimentality — against all the rotten values and institutions of bourgeois/christian civilization.

In dozens of marvelous films, Buster Keaton lives as the embodiment of a quality all too rare: an exemplary total freedom. An intrepid foe of the inhuman, he is never a mere superman and always much more than a "humanist." Overreaching himself at every turn, he urges us to try to overreach ourselves. For many of us, he is one of the few who have made life worth living in the twentieth century.

F.R.



THE MARX BROTHERS



The first film of the Marx Brothers that we have seen here, *Animal Crackers*, appeared to me and to everyone as an extraordinary thing: the liberation through the medium of the screen of a particular magic which the customary relation of words and images does not ordinarily reveal, and if there is a definite characteristic, a distinct poetic state of mind that can be called *surrealism*, then *Animal Crackers* participated in that state altogether.

It is difficult to say of what this kind of magic consists. It is probably not specifically cinematic, nor theatrical; perhaps only certain successful surrealist poems, if there were any, could give an idea of it. The poetic quality of a film like *Animal Crackers* would fit the definition of humor if this word had not long since lost its sense of essential liberation, of destruction of all reality in the mind.

In order to understand the powerful, total, definitive, absolute originality (I am not exaggerating, I am trying simply to define, and so much the worse if my enthusiasm carries me away) of films like *Animal Crackers* and, at times (at any rate in the whole last part), *Monkey Business*, you would have to add to humor the notion of something disquieting and tragic, a fatality (neither happy nor unhappy, difficult to formulate) which would hover over it like the cast of an appalling melody upon an exquisitely beautiful profile.

In *Monkey Business* the Marx Brothers, each with his own style, are confident and ready, one feels, to wrestle with circumstances. Whereas in *Animal Crackers* each character was losing face from the very beginning, here

for three-quarters of the picture one is watching the antics of clowns who are amusing themselves and making jokes, some very successful, and it is only at the end that things grow complicated, that objects, animals, sounds, master and servants, host and guests, everything goes mad, runs wild, and revolts amid the simultaneously ecstatic and lucid comments of one of the Marx Brothers, inspired by the spirit he has finally been able to unleash and whose stupefied, momentary commentator he seems to be. There is nothing at once so hallucinatory and so terrible as this type of man-hunt, this battle of rivals, this chase in the shadows of a cow barn, a stable draped in cob-webs, while men, women and animals break their bounds and land in the middle of a heap of crazy objects, each of whose movement or noise functions in its turn.

In *Animal Crackers* a woman may suddenly fall, legs in the air, on a divan and expose, for an instant, all we could wish to see — a man may throw himself abruptly upon a woman in a salon, dance a few steps with her and then whack her on the behind in time to the music — these events comprise a kind of exercise of intellectual freedom in which the unconscious of each of the characters, repressed by conventions and habits, avenges itself and us at the same time. But in *Monkey Business* when a hunted man throws himself upon a beautiful woman and dances with her, poetically, in a sort of study in charm and grace of attitude, the spiritual claim seems double and shows everything that is poetic and revolutionary in the Marx Brothers' jokes.

But the fact that the music to which the couple dances — the hunted man and the beautiful woman — may be a music of nostalgia and escape, a music of deliverance, sufficiently indicates the dangerous aspect of all these funny jokes; and when the poetic spirit is exercised, it always leads toward a kind of boiling anarchy, an essential disintegration of the real by poetry.

If Americans, to whose spirit (*esprit*) this genre of films belongs, wish to take these films in a merely humorous sense, confining the material of humor to the easy comic margins of the meaning of the word, so much the worse for them; but that will not prevent us from considering the conclusion of *Monkey Business* as a hymn to anarchy and wholehearted revolt, this ending that puts the bawling of a calf on the same intellectual level and gives it the same quality of meaningful suffering as the scream of a frightened woman, this ending that shows, in the shadows of a dirty barn, two lecherous servants freely pawing the naked shoulders of their master's daughter, the equals at last of their hysterical master, all amidst the intoxication — which is intellectual as well — of the Marx Brothers' pirouettes. And the triumph of all this is in the kind of exaltation, simultaneously visual and sonorous, to which these events attain among the shadows, in their intensity of vibration, and in the powerful anxiety which their total effect ultimately projects into the mind.

Antonin ARTAUD

Translated by Mary Caroline Richards
From *The Theater and Its Double* (1938)



KEY LARGO

for Lauren Bacall

*The stairs' wings were floating
among the hawks
The floor's feet were sinking
between the lizards
The ceiling's head was rising
toward the people*

*A narrow cascade
of butterflies
fills the cavern
in my hand*

Penelope ROSEMONT



ROOM SERVICE

The Marx Brothers exhibit the only admissible form of optimism, an optimism based on aggressivity, an optimism justified by authentic consciousness, outside all heroism. They exemplify men who have overcome the bluish of their original inferiority through humor, and who have resolved their guilt complexes.

There is every reason to think that rather grave economic difficulties at this time deprive them of some of their resources. Their latest film, *Room Service*, a "poor" film, does not escape suffering from this indigence.

The derision which they hurl against the bourgeois world, Harpo's erotic violence, Groucho's lovable scurrility, could not but arouse, more or less covertly, the powers of reaction and puritanism in the U.S.

Though disappointing in relation to their earlier films, one ought to go see *Room*

Service, if only to support one of the rare free endeavors still being made today. The offensive Legion of Decency must not black out the only elements through which cinema survives.

Among present film production, such a film is moreover one of those which do not permit a wasted evening. As usual, it displays toward concepts at the base of our civilization (for example, respect for the dead) an irony that spreads uneasiness through the theaters of the Champs Elysees — a delightful chill for lovers of black humor.

Jacques BRUNIUS

translated by N.J.P.

From *Cle*, No. 1 (1939)
Bulletin of the International Federation
of Independent Revolutionary Art (FIARI).

A Note on Peter Ibbetson



George du MAURIER: illustration for "Peter Ibbetson"

One of the most inexplicably neglected American films is *Peter Ibbetson* (1935), a love story of astounding dimensions. Never really popular in the U.S. or Europe, it nonetheless has had a history of admirers, among them the surrealists. As Alain and Odette Virmaux report in *Les Surrealistes et le cinema* (Paris, Seghers, 1976), adherents of the surrealist group in France referred to it often, and always with enthusiasm; it had a place in a kind of oral tradition. André Breton called it "a stupendous film, a triumph of surrealist thought," and cited it in *Mad Love* (*L'Amour fou*, 1937) as one of two examples in cinema (with Buñuel's *L'Age d'or*) of the exaltation of total love, the perfect union of the sexual and the spiritual. At the World Surrealist Exhibition in Chicago, 1976, *Peter Ibbetson* provided the theme for one of the "Eleven Domains of Surrealist Vigilance."

Published in 1891 by Harpers, the novel *Peter Ibbetson* was written by George du Maurier, a Frenchman living in England, a painter and at one time a cartoonist for *Punch*. He told the story of Peter Ibbetson to Henry James, who encouraged him to write the book. It was subsequently adapted as a play by John Nathan Raphael; this became the basis of the film version by Henry Hathaway, a director whose other work in no way shares the distinction of this powerful cinematic achievement. The film, in fact, surpasses the novel, concentrating its imaginal beams on the metaphysics of the dream and the transformational power of love. "It is difficult to discuss this film," said Georges Sadoul, "without tending to invent certain details twenty-five years after

being burnt by its flame, its profound understanding of love and death."

The film opens on the deep emotional attachment of a little girl and boy. When the boy's mother dies, he is taken away to England. The children are heartbroken by

their separation. Years later their paths again converge by chance: Peter Ibbetson, as an architect hired to design new stables for a duke, meets Mary, now Lady of Towers, wife of the duke. Their mutual attraction cannot be stifled; in a memorable storm scene, their desire seems to reverberate in correspondence with the forces of nature. The duke is jealous. Peter shoots him accidentally and is sentenced to life imprisonment. Mary visits him and asks him to remain alive so they can continue to meet in dreams. Of these extraordinary dream meetings Benjamin Péret wrote, in his *Anthology of Sublime Love* (1956), that one is "taken from the outset to the fluctuating point where dream and reality interpenetrate; but the dream here does not hesitate to dominate reality and order it according to the most imperious desire. Amorous passion, which was forbidden in the waking state except in timid flights, suddenly finds in the dream the opportunity to spread its wings. Peter Ibbetson moves with such ease in oneiric life that it becomes his sole existence; in spite of his situation of imprisonment, he is able to know all the joys of shared love."

At the film's conclusion, Mary dies, after years of oneiric meetings, and a final dream vision leads Peter to death so that the lovers can be together. As Ado Kyröu observed, "the dream attains its true grandeur; as it materializes it unites the two bodies. Human constraints, even death itself, are as nothing to a love more powerful than all notions of overt life."

N.J.P.

PETER IBBETSON

*The glades with their beautiful sable
profile*

*set free by nimble fingers
are oddly connected
to memory's tenacious reefs*

*for the very first time
the wind regrets its swiftness
and never wants to close
the reciprocal eyes of lovers*

*crowded forests
interpose themselves vainly
between the blood and its fairy wound*

*they infallibly meet again
on the keyboard of certainties
undemonstrable and innate*

Georges HENEIN

(translated by P.L. & N.J.P.)



"ENOUGH, OR STILL MORE"

Painting and color, beauty and convulsion, cinema and surrealism — certain relationships are so self-evident that we end up, as in *The Purloined Letter*, no longer perceiving them. They become part of us and our landscape.

Dislocation of time and space; amalgam of dreams and what is called reality; incantation of faces where a close-up unveils *the eye in the savage state* and the hint of a quiver at the corner of the mouth. All adventures (from Latin *adventurus*: what ought to happen) — made possible and, like a unique hand-rail, the ambiguity of a nearly smooth fragment of cloth, a fragile two-dimensional frontier between the voyeurs of the third dimension and the seers of the fourth.

To those who know that the imaginable — even the unimaginable — is only

the antechamber of the real, cinema is thus made flesh and blood by our looking, so that the latter ends up in some ways conditioning the former. I often order the arabesque of a dream — or is it the dream which orders me? — in the manner of a cinematic decoupage. On my wakening, each *scene* appears with such clarity of focused image that nothing remains but to film it. I have remarked elsewhere (and I owe the fixity of my attention on this to the reading of John W. Dunne's *Experiment with Time*) that dreams often have a premonitory aspect, which a kind of snare of the memory prevents us from verifying further.

Thus a dream is also an adventure (from Latin *adventurus*: what must happen). To film our maddest dreams would be equivalent — would it not? —

to throwing the dice which will abolish chance, surrendering it to the triumph of all revolts, of love without constraints, of this *truth in a soul and a body*, road of the absolute.

"The composition of images is a spirit in a body," wrote Picatrix. "As to what images are, sages call them *Theigam* or *Tetzavi*, which is interpreted as a transgressor, because everything that makes an image makes it through violence."

The adventure of cinema (from Latin *adventurus*: what must happen) will be convulsive: surrealism. Or it will not be at all.

Nelly KAPLAN

Translated by N.J.P.
Etudes cinématographiques
(No. 40-42, Paris, 1965)

NELLY KAPLAN'S *NEA*: WOMAN & EROTICISM IN FILM

"Smile, but not for long, Ladies and Gentlemen of the Patriarchy."
— Nelly Kaplan

Although widely admired for its wit and elegance, a delightful eroticism, and the beauty of its lush color photography, Nelly Kaplan's film *Nea* has met with some oddly paradoxical responses: "controversial," "reactionary," "progressive," "a satire of interest to feminists only," "ultimately anti-feminist," "not for the squeamish." This is surely because *Nea* zeroes in on an explosive problematic: how female power — sexual and intellectual — is perceived, imagined, experienced, or might potentially be realized. Moreover, Kaplan takes the scandalous position of insisting on love. The film's use of image, symbol and discourse violates (at the same time that it gratifies) conventional expectations with a finesse and comic irony which in no way negate its moral rigor.

Sybil (Ann Zacharias), a rebellious sixteen-year-old virgin, escapes from the claustrophobic atmosphere of her bourgeois family by reading the world's erotic masterpieces and trying her hand at writing her own in an eccentrically decorated hideaway she shares with her cat, Villiers d'Ile de Cumes. She chafes under the stupid, repressive rules imposed by her father, a philistine Geneva industrialist; she is contemptuous of her fatuous sister and fascinated with her mother's lesbian liaison with her aunt. On her way home from school, she is caught shoplifting pornographic books in the bookstore of a handsome young publisher,

Axel (Sammy Frey). She boasts to him that she could write a great erotic novel which he promises to publish if she does. Back in her lair she writes in a furious automatic trance, but realizing she needs more than imagined sexual experience, she chooses the attractive Axel to provide "material" for her book. He reluctantly complies; they become lovers and both know great sensual happiness. He publishes the book which becomes an astounding best-seller, but to "protect" her anonymity he makes her agree not to see him until the snow melts from the chapel roof. Denied love, Sybil suffers and waits while Axel protects himself in promiscuous encounters with others, including her conventional seductive sister. When she discovers his betrayal she sets up a phony rape scene, a gem of black humor in which the bleeding Sybil, whom everybody imagines has been violated, falls down in the snow in the midst of a bourgeois wedding party coming out of the chapel. Axel eventually returns to get even, but in a surprising denouement, she confronts him with psychic and carnal truths too powerful to be denied, and the lovers are re-united, setting out together in their boat across the dark lake to Axel's castle.

Kaplan wrote in 1964, "If in this domain (eroticism) the cinema has already performed miracles, one facet is absent nevertheless. Is there anything so exciting as a beautiful woman knowingly caressed by the caprice of the lens? Yes, the sight of a beautiful young man captured by a heterosexual camera." There is more to this statement than

meets the eye, for it goes beyond the reversal of convenient roles — Sybil as active protagonist, a sexual subject as well as sexual object — in a Romantic narrative. It also and more crucially opens up the revolutionary possibility of challenging the Patriarchal order because it dissects and subverts the way in which we signify and order reality. In this it courageously sets out on quite new terrain.

How woman's sexuality is contained and assimilated into Patriarchy during a period of desublimation has been a central issue in popular culture commentary for the last decade. Woman's image in the movies has always been abundantly analyzed and everybody knows that a woman in control of her erotic and intellectual destiny almost invariably gets married off, jailed, exiled, defeated or killed. Parker Tyler, an early commentator of the sad decline of the movie heroine's integrity, noted that after the 1930s the representation of a woman who was sexually assertive, intelligent, and endowed with strong personality and moral energy, virtually disappeared from the screen. Ado Kyrrou (*Amour, Erotisme et Cinéma*) concurred, finding at this same historical moment that with rare exceptions American film began moving in the direction of mechanical sex, Coca Cola eroticism, gratuitous sadism and a despicable hatred of women.

On the most accessible level, films reflect subjective experiences and social realities so that many feminists tend to evaluate only whether or not what happens to the women characters is positive or negative, under the unfortunate assumption that ideology is conferred from above by some mysterious office of sexism. Such an approach to cinematic analysis, looking for role models and realistic depictions of liberated women, imposes severe limitations in the long run. Perceptual reality is illusory enough in real life; in film it is profoundly more so since cinema is located in a nexus of fluctuating ego identifications, libidinal wanderings, desire dreaming itself. Kaplan's brilliant use of types, symbolic images and mythic elements has the effect of dislocating a frozen reality. By overloading the circuits of conceptual thematics — blowing the realist fuse, so to speak — she is able to achieve allegorical resonances of great complexity in a fluid elaboration of external and internal, real and symbolic at once. In one respect *Nea* takes the guise of a perverse fairy tale: Instead of the wicked stepmother and the good father, we have a repressive patriarch and a mother emanating a benign bisexual voluptuousness. Sybil does not wait to be "exchanged" by her father; she refuses his world leaving him with the sister who is adjusted to her "inferior" woman's place. Sybil is her own fairy godmother, effecting transformations through her desire and will, rescuing the handsome prince from his sleep, i.e., a neurotic attachment to the memory of his dead mother and an inability to love.

From another angle, *Nea* simultaneously explores the myth and fact of woman's sexual nature, revealing how she is imagined by both man and woman. The skillful disorientations of categories, highly self-reflected, provoke a consciousness of woman as fetish and as woman might be beyond fetish. Sybil the witch, accompanied by her charming feline familiar, works a magic, very real yet beyond the confines of the rational. For instance, the subversive power of her sexuality is wonderfully realized in a "chance happening": Unwilling to wait for the snow to melt, the

chapel bursts into flames under her gaze as her desire overpowers the regular procession of the seasons. This conflagration of female sexuality has, of course, been represented by the figure of the witch both mythically and in history. The significance of witch is illuminated, yet Sybil is never reduced to the vulgar witch, and she is decidedly no *femme fatale*. Her naturalness and directness allow her to carry the image of a normal, insurgent adolescent girl, and to me she is reminiscent of Stendhal's devastatingly honest *Lamie* in her purity and innocent inevitability.

Molly Haskell (*From Reverence to Rape: the Treatment of Women in the Movies*) traces in depth the escalating hostility to love expressed in American films, pointing out how themes of love have been contemptuously relegated to a despised genre, the "woman's movie." She underscores this finding by singling out in particular the neglect of that masterpiece of mad love *Peter Ibbetson* in which the lovers, separated by prison walls, are "transfixed at the sublime moment of their love (denying yet improving on reality) by the power of the imagination, by the screen, by their permanence in our memories." Even these films, good ones at any rate, were rare, and in the present period of crisis, threats to deeply entrenched sexism being launched on all sides, love between men and women, she notes, has been dispensed with altogether. Narcissistic affective relations occur between men, a tendency Ado Kyrrou remarked in *The Outlaw* where Jane Russell, reduced to breast fetish, is continuously debased and never allowed to interfere with the erotic flows circulating between man and man (or between man and horse); today



André BRETON: Tragic — In the Manner of the "Comics" (collage, 1943)

the touch of hyperbolic self-parody in this film has disappeared in the process of expropriating the mode.

It is true that films are evidence of actual experience and the workings of ideology and so it comes as no surprise that many women regard love as impossible; they see only one choice — either emancipation or love. This is a grave situation and one for which there is no facile solution, given the phallogocentric nature of the world, yet to relinquish love is clearly insanity; even if it appears utopian I think we must demand a future in which love triumphs and triumphs absolutely. Beverle Houston's perceptive review in *Film Quarterly* (Spring 1979) situates *Nea* as an essential recognition that "romantic love is valuable, honorable, thrilling, and not to be debased." Kaplan's powerful fable, she thinks, works with unexpected epistemological and moral sophistication in the way it demonstrates that love is not inevitable in the human condition, but a project of Sybil's. Like the "fiction" of her erotic novel, she and Axel elect to exalt imaginative activity, to create and liberate love. Reality (which includes love) is what we bring into being, at least in part, and derives from desiring, risking and acting. Kaplan's cinematic expression of this concept is a far cry from the customary wedding bells and incarceration in the nuclear family suggested when "The End" appears on the screen in the stereotype romance.

Surrealists have frequently observed that film is an intrinsically surrealist medium. It shares a close affinity with dreams in its delirious imagery, mechanisms of displacement, and dispersal of desire through a prismatic lens. Cinema is in a unique position to throw light on the fact that reality is a mass hallucination. For the viewer it offers an invitation to unravel how meaning and value are determined

within that mass hallucination; on the movie screen is the display of not only what happens but the key to the operation of social and individual events. Like the inspired activity of automatism, latent content surfaces to scrutiny, making screen images available to decipherment and making "reality" available to demystification.

For the filmmaker, the irresistible opportunity presents itself to project images which transcend the present and imagine a future which escapes the bondage of petrified structures. Above all, the cinema spreads before us the spectacle of how the erotization of the world takes place. To caress the male with a woman's camera violates, in the psychoanalytic sense, the place in the unconscious of woman as the sign of castration. In that we live the way the difference of the sexes is experienced in the unconscious, Kaplan effects this shift of focus with subtlety, necessarily, insofar as the objectification of the male is a threat to psychic need. Kaplan gives us, through Sybil the seer, the first shadowing outlines of a new world-view, one originating in woman's look. Though she remains the object of desire, Sybil goes beyond being the object of desire, the passive catalyst of men's action and discourse which convey the film's meanings. A revolutionary in the realm of desire, Sybil is the transcendent prefiguration of *Nea*, the new woman, conferring the promise of a happier existence, as she speaks not only her own reality (now oppressed under Patriarchy), but a higher reality, too. Hers is a pioneer voice announcing a possible destiny, the realization of love, humanity as it would be.

Nancy Joyce PETERS



Robert GREEN: ink drawing (1979)



HOMAGE TO TEX AVERY



Tex Avery is not merely the greatest of all animated cartoonists; he is one the freest spirits of our age, or any age. He has given the imaginary a force of propulsion which for generations will carry passionate dreamers on voyages beyond their most extravagant hopes.

Tex is a direct descendent, on his mother's side, of Judge Roy Bean, a genuine old wild west hero of folkloric dimensions. Avery shares his illustrious forebear's taste for free-wheeling violence and a rollicking good time, but there is a sharp distinction between them: Judge Bean introduced "law 'n' order west of the Pecos," whereas Tex has fomented lawlessness and disorder on both sides, as well as all points north, south, up, down and inside-out.

It has often been remarked that film animation provides freedom unparalleled in other media. It makes the impossible easy, and places the inconceivable within reach. Such freedom exists, of course, precisely so that surrealist use can be made of it. And indeed, from the early days of Winsor McCay and Emile Cohl, through Pat Sullivan's Felix the Cat and Max Fleischer's Koko the Clown, no medium has brought forth such an abundance of surrealist moments as the animated cartoon. And no animationist has been so consistently and relentlessly surrealist as Tex Avery.

In *Slaphappy Lion* a kangaroo vanishes into its own pocket. In *Billy Boy* a goat is rocketed to the moon, eats it, and then proceeds to eat the movie screen as well. In *Dragalong Droopy* gunfighters firing at each other from behind boulders "just happen" to shoot away bits of rock so as to form perfect replicas of the Venus de Milo and Rodin's Thinker. In all of Avery's work, the marvelous "just happens." The adage "wonders never cease" loses its lame irony and assumes a breathtaking actuality. The unexpected occurs with such rapidity and force that it becomes as natural as breathing — and as intoxicating as breathing nitrous oxide.

If he had done no more than create Bugs Bunny (*A Wild Hare*, 1940), Avery's immortality would be assured. But if bringing into being the world's greatest rabbit can be regarded as his crowning achievement, it must not diminish our appreciation of Avery's other achievements, which are both numerous and impressive. He has given us, among others, Daffy Duck, Porky Pig, Chilly Willy Penguin, Droopy Dog and Screwy Squirrel.

This last, although he starred in five cartoons (1943-46) remains too little known. It is he, perhaps more than any other of Avery's characters, who best exemplifies the vast

gulf separating Avery from Disney. Screwy is a ferocious, psychotic "wise guy" opposed *absolutely* to everything that Disney stood for. He is Avery's exterminating angel out on a mission to mop up every trace of the sickeningly sweet sentimental cute little fuzzy-wuzzy claptrap. Screwy Squirrel is so hopelessly unendearing that he finally becomes admirable. The cartoons in which he is featured are generally regarded, even by many Avery enthusiasts, as a bit *excessive*. But shouldn't we be grateful that Avery always has had the courage to go *too far*? The disarming nonchalance with which he annihilates common sense, elementary decency and good taste is the surest proof that his poetic reflexes are attuned to the infinite.

In addition to his creation of "characters" — many of whom, of course, have gone on to enjoy long and fruitful careers under other directors — Avery has made several one-shot features of such rare poetic quality that to call them nothing more than masterpieces would be to demean them.

Who Killed Who? (1943) is an uproarious distillation of all whodunits and ghost stories, set in a huge old mansion. An elderly gentleman is seated in an armchair nervously reading a book titled *Who Killed Who?* — *From the Cartoon of the Same Name*. His chair is furnished with a sign telling us that he is "The Victim." A skeleton in the cuckoo clock announces that "at the sound of the gun, the time will be exactly twelve o'clock." The gunshot is followed by an incredible whirl of gangsters, malevolent butlers and ambulatory corpses pursued by a dopey, heavy-set, cigar-chewing detective. There are numerous mad chases up and down long winding marble staircases and along ominous and gloomy corridors. Searching for clues, the detective comes to a closet labeled "Do not open until Christmas." Opening the door, he finds himself face-to-face with an indignant Santa Claus who immediately reshuts the door — and is not heard from again. In the end it is the chief lawman — arguably J. Edgar Hoover — who turns out to be the culprit.

In *King-Size Canary* (1947) we meet a hungry cat who wants a canary for lunch, except that the canary is pitifully small. Discovering a bottle of *Jumbo-Gro* plant food, the cat tries it out on the canary, who grows indeed: In seconds he is larger than the cat. So the cat too drinks some *Jumbo-Gro*, and is soon even larger than the giant canary. But before the cat can get his hands on him, the bird takes another drink. And so it goes. A mouse and a bulldog also get into the act. Soon we see them on the boulevards,

looming larger than the skyscrapers. Each of the four keeps taking drinks to get larger than the others until, in the end, only two immense and forlorn figures are left standing atop a seemingly very small planet Earth, holding each other for dear life as a close-up shows the now-empty bottle of Jumbo-Gro.

Bad Luck Blackie (1949) shows us a defenseless kitten tormented by a vicious bulldog. Along comes Blackie, a black cat whose calling card announces that he specializes in bringing bad luck wherever it is needed. Immediately he goes about afflicting the bulldog with a spate of misfortunes such as no one has ever seen. Each of Blackie's avenging intrusions is accompanied by a few bars of "Comin' Through the Rye." It is our privilege to see, falling from the sky onto the bulldog — as if out of one of the cantos of *Maldoror* — a flowerpot, and then another, a trunk, a piano, a cash register, a locomotive, a horse, a fire engine, a brick and then a whole brick wall, an anvil, a tree, a kitchen sink, a bathtub, a steamroller, a passenger plane, a Greyhound bus and a battleship.

Because they are unpretentiously and extremely funny — and also because everyone presumes (wrongly) that they are intended only for children — Avery's cartoons have rarely been "taken seriously," as the expression goes. Hard as it may be to believe, some full-length studies of animation have relegated them to a disparaging paragraph or two, or even a footnote. However plain it is that hokum

is never *only* hokum, and that Avery's is always — or almost always — sublime, those who manipulate Critical Opinion in this country have largely succeeded in excluding his cartoons (and cartoons generally, for that matter, except Disney's) from the field of Serious Consideration.

A number of critics, without actually deigning to discuss Avery's work, have been nonetheless eager to go on record against his "violence." A veritable hue and cry has been raised over the wonderfully insatiable mayhem in cartoons of the Avery "school." A special study should be made sometime of the particularly disgusting variety of hypocrite who, having no objection to nuclear weapons or to imperialist oppression, reserves his self-righteous wrath for cartoonists and others whose imaginary violence never hurt anyone but is supposed to be such a "bad influence" on children. Doesn't this show all the signs of being a rather shabby *defense mechanism*? Do not these protestations against cartoon violence conceal a deep-seated fear of primary process thinking, a contempt for the child's modes of apprehension, a horror of unrestrained sexuality? Themselves repressed, these custodians of bourgeois Virtue seek to repress others. They are against violence only when it is liberating, revolutionary, amorous, poetic. They hate Avery's work not because it is violent, but because its violence is in the service of freedom and the marvelous.



CONTRIBUTIONS TO TEXAVERIAN STUDIES



Juggling with dimensions, and following a rigorously logical progression, Avery makes us evolve from the infinitely small to the infinitely large. Erecting the absurd into a totem, in his subject matter as well as in his development of action, he breaks one after the other every law of the three-dimensional world. Next to this Swiftian Mad Hatter, Disney truly appears as an insignificant figure.

Abner LEPETIT

"Bilan du dessin animé"
L'Age du cinéma No. 1, 1951

Tex Avery is simultaneously the Man in the Iron Mask, Fulcanelli, the Invisible Man, B. Traven, and the Missing Link. . . . Blaise Pascal, flanked by his couple of infinities, gets the cold shoulder before this cosmic jugglery that emphasizes the obsession of *changing size*. From the dust under foot to the clouds in the sky, Tex Avery scoffs at all notions of landmarks, metric systems, scales of comparison.

Robert BENAYOUN

"Tex Avery, ou le cosmos en perdition"
in *Le Dessin animé après Walt Disney*
(Paris, J.-J. Pauvert, 1961)

There is one kind of humor, in our opinion specifically modern, which . . . is based on the rational structures of the mind so as to disarticulate the mechanism of these structures by means of the absurd. . . . To characterize this *critical humor* by means of an image, let us say that is . . . nowhere to be found in the Disney cartoons, but is omnipresent in those of Tex Avery.

François VALORBE

"L'humour critique"
Medium: Communication Surrealiste
No. 1, 1953

Impelling the absurd to the point of delirium, nonsense to the point of the surrealist Marvelous, and the gag to the point of nightmare; superbly rejecting every rational pretext, assaulting screen and spectator as with so many luminous blows of a thousand brilliant inventions; elevating the cream-pie fight to a cosmic level; discovering a powerful libido in the gentlest animals; and finally, returning the corrosive power of the gag against itself: Tex Avery's work makes the work of others appear fatally conformist or, at best, as simple preludes to these magnificent orgies.

Petr KRAL

"Tex Avery ou le delire lucide"
Positif, 1976



The veritable poet of the explosive animated cartoon is Tex Avery. In an inspired hurricane he has neatly overturned all established notions. With the aid of sound gags, color gags, and off-screen gags . . . he has stripped bare an extraordinary universe in which we are no longer discrete initiates but rather actors playing leading roles. . . . The great disquiet that overcomes us after the showing of each Tex Avery film is a purifying bath which obliges us to reconsider all our beliefs.

Ado KYROU

Le Surrealisme au cinema
(Paris, Le Terrain vague, 1963)

In its essence, Avery's violence — comprising the qualities of exaggeration, distortion, spontaneity and aggression that are the principal characteristics of his work — is the violence of Jonathan Swift and of Isidore Ducasse, Comte de Lautréamont. And it is precisely in such company that Avery's work must be situated, not merely on account of formal or stylistic similarities but because of all-pervasive affinities of *content*.

In his "Thoughts on Various Subjects" (1726), the author of *Gulliver's Travels* wrote that "Elephants are always drawn smaller than life, but a flea always larger." In *Les Chants de Maldoror* (1870) we read that "An elephant permits caresses. But not a louse." With these twin observations — by the "veritable initiator" of black humor, as André Breton designated Swift in the famous anthology that gave this humor its name, and by the poet of whom Breton said, in the same work, that "for centuries to come, everything thought and explored most audaciously will find here, formulated in advance, its magic law" — we are transported to the very heart of the Averian dialectic. Wherever he goes, in whatever he does, Avery manifests his obsession with *changing size*: from the portentous shambling of his King-Kong-size canaries in the streets of New York, to his tantalizing quest for the world's smallest pygmy in central Africa ("Ha!" says an almost imperceptible figure on the screen, under a magnifying glass. "You think I'm small! Wait till you see my Uncle Willie!").

Equally conversant with the infinite and the infinitesimal, Avery is supremely equipped to take on all comers.

F.R.

Bugs Bunny

(Reprinted from the catalog of the 1976 World Surrealist Exhibition)

It is no accident that all that is revolutionary and scandalous in the work of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel came to be symbolized, in a uniquely *umorous* way on the eve of the second world imperialist slaughter, by a little gray rabbit whose very name embodies a dialectical resolution of contradictions: Bugs (nickname of a notorious gangster), Bunny (almost a synonym for gentleness).

A more or less urbanized descendant of Br'er Rabbit, Bugs Bunny (whose ancestors include also Lewis Carroll's eccentric White Rabbit and the psychotic March Hare) is categorically opposed to wage slavery in all its forms. Content with a modest subsistence on the edge of the forest, his residence is marked only by a mailbox bearing the name Bugs Bunny, Esq. Aside from wondrous adventures that only rigorously applied laziness can lead to, his major "vocation" is pilfering carrots from the garden of a certain Elmer

Fudd, and, more generally, heckling this same Fudd in ever new ways.

It is impossible to appreciate the genius of the world's greatest rabbit without understanding Fudd: this bald-headed, slow-witted, hot-tempered, timid, petty-bourgeois dwarf with a speech defect, whose principal activity is the defense of his private property. Fudd is the perfect characterization of a specifically modern type: the petty bureaucrat, the authoritarian mediocrity, nephew or grandson of Pa Ubu. If the Ubus (Mussolini, Hitler, Stalin) dominated the period between the two wars, for the last thirty years it has been the Fudds who have directed our misery: Fudds and more Fudds in the White House; Fudds on the Central Committees of the so-called Communist parties; all the popes have been Fudds; the best-selling novelists are all Fudds; Louis Aragon and Salvador Dali, beginning as anti-Fudds, degenerated into two of the worst of all possible Fudds. Almost alone against them all, Bugs

Bunny stands as a veritable symbol of irreducible recalcitrance.

If the Bunny/Fudd choreography reflects a particular historic moment in the class struggle—a period of class "asymmetry" in which the workers here and there win a few of their demands, only to be chased back into their holes in the ground—nonetheless the mythic content of this drama exceeds its original formal limitations. The very appearance on the stage of history of a character such as Bugs Bunny is proof that some day the Fudds will be vanquished—that some day all the carrots in the world will be ours.

Until then, one can scarcely imagine a better model to offer our children than this bold creature who, with his four rabbit's feet, is the good luck charm of total revolt. Confronted by any and all apologists for the status quo, Bugs Bunny always has the last word: "Don't think it hasn't been lovely, because it hasn't."

F.R.

SURREALISM & ANIMATED CARTOONS

Is there a separate genre known as "animated cartoons" or "cinema of animation"? I think not. As a film can be either silent or with sound, either black-and-white or color, so it can be either photographed directly or drawn. The painted or drawn being as real as the objects which we regard as inanimate but which are set in motion by film. And living persons, by means of camera tricks, can go through the same deformations as actors born of pen and ink. It is a quirk of film producers to want to build walls between the various possibilities of film.

Max Fleischer's delicious Koko the Clown rebels against his immobility as a drawing and, without asking permission, animates himself so that he can mingle in the life of beings of flesh and blood. The totality of life can be expressed in movies — so why try to impose limits on film and compartmentalize its possibilities?

But the fact is that the animated cartoon almost always has been relegated to the margins of film production, forcing it to follow its own course and to form its own line of conduct and its own myths.

Pat Sullivan's Felix the Cat removes his tail and hurls it into the air where it assumes the form of a large question-mark. Does this indicate his disturbance about the future of the animated cartoon? The fantasy of the first cartoons too soon vanished under the accumulation of "cuteness," anthropo-

morphism, and "tricks" — either on us or on them. Disney and his studios, after their promising beginnings, quickly foundered, became facile, and remained mined in bourgeois sentiments. Disney has been called the "La Fontaine of the cinema," and surely he deserves this ignominious title.

For a while it seemed that animated cartoons were about to lose their surreal aptitudes, and that — in imitation of the rest of motion pictures — they were about to sink to the level of mere transcrip-



Max FLEISCHER: Koko the Clown

tions of ordinary life. Censorship kept Popeye from being too cruel; kept Betty Boop from being too "sexy."

We had to wait till the end of the Second World War to see cartoons divest themselves of logical dress and the reactionary precepts of the "wisdom of nations." Then cartoons returned at last to the example of Emile Cohl in depicting the latent content of this life that animation is so capable of undermining, destroying and perfecting... Woody Woodpecker, Heckle and Jeckle, Bugs Bunny, Tom and Jerry, Beep-Beep the Roadrunner and Tweety Pie arrived to overturn all our habits and break all taboos...

The animated cartoon has discovered its own world and explored its complexity. It has revealed, meanwhile, a part of our own life that we did not know existed. Our senses have been enriched.

Were this new vision, these new sounds, to make their triumphant entrance into the non-drawn cinema, I am convinced that the supersession of the manifest content of life, and the penetration of its latent content, would be greatly facilitated.

Ado KYROU

Le Surréalisme au cinéma
(Paris, Le Terrain vague, 1963)

The Phoenix of Animation

Over the years, film critics have refused to take notice of what they consider a puerile sop on the weekly theater programs, and some animators have declared that, far from being a link between the cinema and the older plastic arts, animation is an autonomous eighth art. They refuse to be called film-makers, and they refuse to be called artists; they prefer an undefinable niche in an occult fraternity, jealously guarded, whose rites are celebrated at certain places along the Loire river...

And in truth the animator today defies definition. He may be an able sketcher or may never have held a pencil in his life; he may have a degree in engineering, hold patents on inventions, or manifest a colossal lack of culture together with a perfect instinct for the laws of movement. He may be a meticulous lab-man within the experimental branch of some official organization, or a free-wheeling publicist, devoting his energy and talent to an ever-renewed praise of consumer goods. The diversity of form which is the result of all this can be surprising, detestable, even fatal, but nonetheless is what we must work from in defining animated film today.

All these films illustrate, channel, or release an irresistible craze for speed, a realization symptomatic of one of the central compulsions most typical of our era — for it is superposed, in different forms, on disciplines as static in their basic laws as painting or sculpture.

Animation, in principle, has no other plastic imperative than movement. Stills from the most beautiful animated films are as deceptive, as little representative of the original, as are stills from a

film by Resnais. When certain critics write, therefore, that the animated film is not cinema, they commit the same error as so many neophytes who imagine, once they have used an animation stand to shoot a number of free forms in the act of moving, that they have made a film. They treat the genre as if it were a kind of annex to the beaux-arts, an after-dinner amusement. But if an animated film is made to be projected in a hall, its images registering at 24 per second on the retina, it surely constitutes a film. An animated film made without traveling shots, without pans, without cuts or other cinematic grammar, without dramatic progression, would not only be a ludicrous anachronism but would also be as silly as those dance films which record a beautiful ballet with deadly stolidity — and in so doing betray the spirit of dance as well as that of film.

However, these curious notions which circulate about the "autonomy" of animation help explain the regrettable isolation which seems to have become the lot of so many animators, who keep themselves away from everything else happening on the screens, and work increasingly in ivory towers. They are animating exclusively for other animators.

During the more than fifteen years that I have been an enthusiastic follower of animation, I have observed all the fluctuations, all the swift-passing fads and formulas of the genre. These disturbances are incidental. Sometimes, they bring with them technical discoveries of importance; sometimes an abrupt break (always late) with entrenched styles. Modern art, though it has continually influenced, modified, or given impetus to

the course of animation, has seldom been influenced in return. The great contemporary artists have never been tempted by animation. Those who have integrated a form of movement into their work — Calder, Frank Malina, Vasarely, Agam, Tinguely, Takis, Munari, Davide Turconi — have centered their efforts on an exploration of kinetic laws, but left to themselves they have not gone on to an analysis and decomposition of movement, or to its creative manipulation as did Alexeieff.

Animation, by contrast, its fashion and ephemeral revolutions aside, has produced a certain number of authentic artists, who merit in their individual sphere the same admiration, the same critical exegeses, and the same respect as Miro, Tanguy, Arp, or Magritte. Unfortunately the lack of publicity and distribution of their works condemns them to a narrow audience of cinephiles and to the film museums, isolating them from the rest of the public. A vicious circle thus arises: the problem of distribution itself drives the animators to cultivate a regrettable esoteric spirit, which leads some of them toward a sterile self-pigeonholing among the arts, as if they were the keepers of some lost secret.

The great artists of animation seem to be distinguished very clearly from the experimenters. Art in animation begins at that moment when the "experimental" phase ends, and freedom ensues.

Robert BENAYOUN

(excerpts)

Film Quarterly (Spring 1964)

Surrealism in the Comics

Many who admire drawing and enjoy reading strangely balk when the two are combined, as in comics. The widespread condescension toward comics reflects the bourgeois prejudice against all truly popular expression, aggravated by the age-old "civilized" scorn for children. For comics still are regarded as pre-eminently a juvenile medium. The first comics were indeed intended for children. But editors soon saw that adults by the millions were reading over the kids' shoulders. The anomaly continues: "officially" a children's genre, well over half its readers are adults.

In their infancy, comics evidenced an overriding infantilism. But from the first

they were self-consciously insatiable, as if they knew they were growing and therefore hungered for everything in sight, boastfully asserting their mastery over every obstacle. "People are usually good," said Richard Outcault's Buster Brown, "when there isn't anything else to do."

Often the early comic characters didn't seem to know what they were doing; they got into trouble unwittingly, in spite of themselves. And so it was with comics as a medium: Under the pretexts of "entertainment" and even "boosting circulation," poetry found an unexpected refuge.

Tending beyond literature, beyond "art," comics point to a new kind of "hieroglyphic"

poetry. Significantly, in this regard, several surrealists have explored the comics medium, especially in recent years. Among others have been Thomas Arnel, Karol Baron, Paul Colinet, Marcin Dib, Robert Green, Maurice Henry, Matta, Jacinto Minot, Hal Rammel, Ribitch, Rikki, Pierre Sanders and Martin Stejskal. Some of their work is reproduced in this issue of CC. A special study should be made of surrealism's contributions to comics.

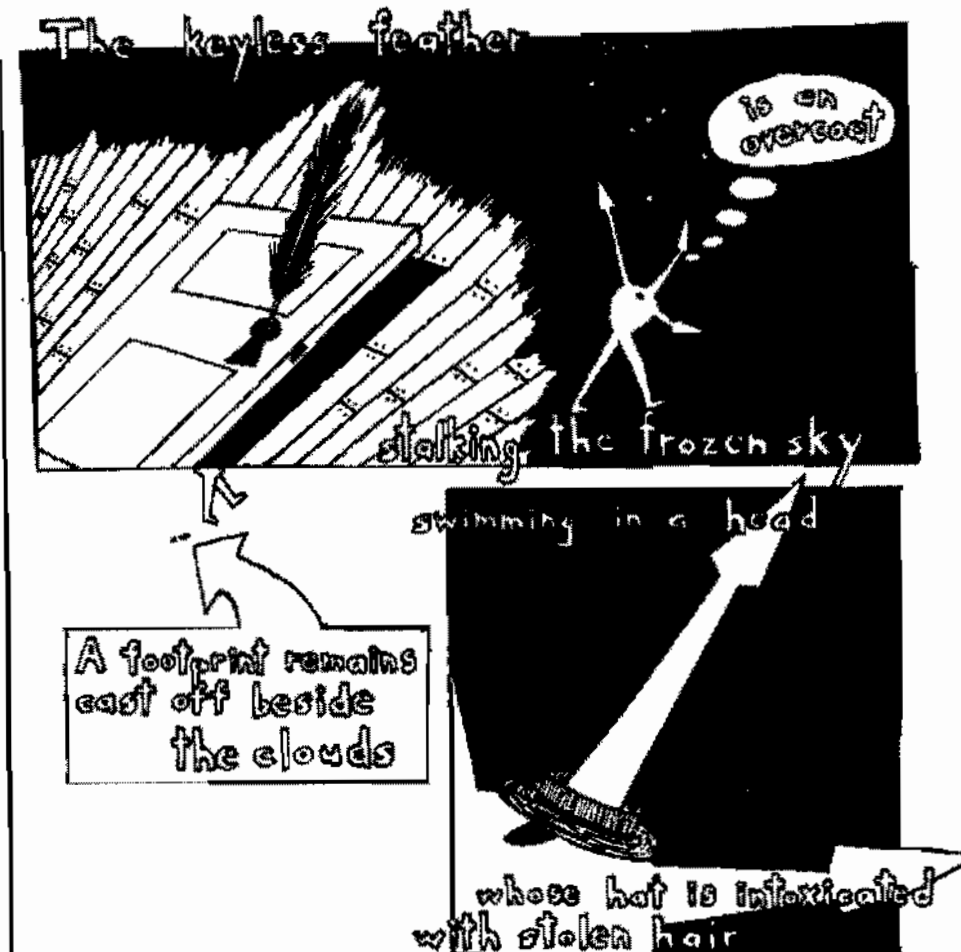
In these pages, meanwhile, we have started at the beginning, with the aim of specifying some of the comics' contributions to surrealism.

THE COMICS

Cussing
the men are going home to work
on sleeping horses
and automobiles come alive
and return to the factories
wearing lingerie ad makeup
Steering wheels chrome fenders and
gears
leer at the computers
in the outer offices
and the engines — oh those seductive
engines —
get into black boots and thrash the
clouds
rushing through gargantuan windows
the pistons are eating
with anthropoid teeth

Philip LAMANTIA

From *Blood of the Air*
(San Francisco, 1970)



Hal RAMMEL:
Comic Strip based on a poem by Penelope Rosemont (1979)



GEORGE HERRIMAN (KRAZY KAT)

Next to "What is Truth?" the question "Who is Krazy Kat?" is the most perplexing in the annals of philosophy.

Rather than even attempt a definition, let us begin on more modest terrain with a simple description of George Herriman's magnificent creature and the drama that unfolds around it.

Nominally a cat (or at least a kat) — albeit with few typically feline characteristics — and of indeterminate gender, Krazy is a gentle, wistful, poetic, eccentric, innocent, impractical, exuberant, inspired, idealistic and amorously passionate dreamer wildly in love with a mouse named Ignatz. If Krazy is not like other cats, Ignatz is not at all like other mice. Inordinately strong, Ignatz is not easily frightened. He regards himself as coldly logical, realistic, rational, materialistic, practical, and unsentimental; he is also hot-tempered, short-sighted and malicious. He is by no means scrupulously honest; he is sometimes hypocritical and is always thoroughly cynical and pugnacious. In contrast to Krazy's unabashedly lowbrow tastes, Ignatz prefers Mozart, Beethoven, the classics. Perhaps the mouse's most endearing quality is his wholehearted disrespect for the law; indeed, we can forgive him much (and even grow fond of the little demon) because he is such an incorrigible sinner.

Far from returning the kat's affection, the mouse insists that he despises his crazy admirer and, to demonstrate his scorn, hits the kat again and again — many thousands of times over the years — with a brick. Krazy, however, does not interpret Ignatz's overt aggression as hostile. For the kat, the brick is the proof, a veritable symbol, of the mouse's deep devotion. Time and again Krazy is anxiety-stricken that no brick has

hit his head that day; time and again, following such moments of despair, the kat is duly clobbered in the end and sings, "Now I'm a heppy, heppy ket."

At this stage in the drama we meet the third and last of its central figures: a sort of bulldog, Coconino County's official representative of "law 'n' order," who happens to be in love with Krazy, and who is ever vigilant in protecting his love from the violence of the mouse. As often as Ignatz tosses a brick, Officer Pupp tosses Ignatz into jail.

Officer Pupp, also known as Kop, may be more or less doglike, but he is hardly cop-like. Aside from his touching fondness for the kat, his incessant philosophical soliloquies — delivered with old-time oratorical grandiloquence and accompanied by exaggerated theatrical mannerisms — makes him, as a law enforcer, odd indeed. And if he does, several times a week as a rule, apprehend Ignatz and lock him in a cell, nonetheless the mouse — repeated offender though he is — always is back on the street next day: rather a poor showing, by police standards.

There are many other characters in the story: among the regulars are Mrs. Kwakk-Wak, the gossip duck; Kolin Kelly the brickmaker; Y. Zowl, an owl with an M.D.; and Joe Stork (sometimes referred to by his Spanish name, Jose Cigueno), "purveyor of progeny to prince and proletarian." But the aforementioned trio — kat, mouse and kop — hold an indisputable centrality in the strip: They are the driving forces in Herriman's irreducible dialectic.

It is necessary to emphasize the peculiar *symbiosis* of these three characters. They are engaged in a complex contest in which there is no question of our "taking sides." They are all in it together. In one strip Officer

Pupp has lost his memory ("lost about a quart of memory where but a pint existed before"). Leaving the doctor's, he runs into Ignatz but fails to recognize him. Upon questioning, he admits that he does not know the name Krazy Kat. Gleeful at this turn of events, Ignatz rushes off, brick in hand: "At last I'm free to toss this 'brick' at that 'kat' without that kop's interference." But by the time he finds the kat he has forgot what he intended to do; indeed, he has forgot who he is and, face to face with Krazy, recognizes him not. Whereupon an alarmed kat runs off shouting "Oh-h doctor!" But when Krazy finds the doctor, he too has a memory failure — can't remember what he wished to say. The final panel shows all three — mouse, kat, kop — together in the amnesia ward of Dr. Ambrose Phleeze's sanitarium, each ignorant of the identity of the others.

In *Krazy Kat* the old cat-and-mouse game is remorselessly inverted, subdivided, stirred up, hopelessly confounded and, ultimately, *superseded* in a unique "eternal triangle" adjusted to non-Euclidean specifications. The action takes place as far as possible from Reason (probably in that very domain where, once upon a time and long, long ago, Reason was invented — as a plaything). Everyone and everything appears here with a staggering freshness. All stereotypes have been forced through the sieve of schizophrenic derealization. The world is not only topsy-turvy, but shifted into unexpected and ever-changing dimensions. Here is a universe governed exclusively by its own laws, which essentially are the laws of free association, passionate attraction, Jacques Vaché's immortal humor, spontaneous play, and the physics of poetry.

Through it all, year in and year out, we are treated to a laugh a minute — or oftener.

Fortunately for us, we know now that laughter — like everything truly desirable — must lead *somewhere*.

Herriman's magisterial strip has elicited numerous paeans of praise, a few detailed commentaries, several widely conflicting interpretations and, most plentifully, polite confessions of despair to the effect that, tantalizing as the strip is, it doesn't have a bit of meaning. Although it is "universally acclaimed as the greatest comic strip of all time," as Bill Blackbeard says in *The World Encyclopedia of Comics*, surprisingly little light has been shed on Herriman's motives, methods or achievements.

Traditional critical approaches will always shrivel to nothing before this unpretentious yet sublime work. The arduous search for "sources," with which philologists like to commence their exegeses, has turned up little more than the faintest clues. It is unquestionable, for example, that Herriman was influenced by Cervantes. This is plain from any number of internal details (there is even a character in *Krazy Kat* named Don Kiyote), as well as from abundant affinities of atmosphere and theme. Krazy is very much like Don Quixote: a romantic knight-errant who faces impossible odds in a madcap effort to revive the Golden Age. And the perils that Krazy confronts, like those of Don Quixote, are all the greater, all the more hilarious, in that the kat does not see them the way we do. All that Krazy Kat does, moreover, surely qualifies as *quixotic*. Society, for Herriman as for Cervantes, is a welter of meretricious schemes and devious designs, all working at cross-purposes — over which a solitary dreamer may somehow, almost "accidentally," triumph, doubtless thanks to his perseverance in his solitude and to the integrity of his dreams.

If Krazy Kat is a passable Don Quixote, Ignatz is rather a poor Sancho Panza. And Officer Pupp is wholly unsatisfactory as Rocinante. Some critics have attempted to compensate for these shortcomings by compounding the confusion. It has been suggested, for example, that Krazy is not only Don Quixote but also Parsifal; and Gilbert Seldes proposed, no doubt jocularly, that Ignatz is not only Sancho Panza but also Lucifer. We could add that Krazy is both Romeo and Juliet, and probably also Hamlet and Ariel; the kat has much in common with Immalee in Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer*, and embodies the principal qualities of Queequeg, Tashtego

and Daggoo in *Moby Dick*. This sort of thing, of course, can go on forever — but does it help us understand anything?

If the Don Quixote analogy collapses in a heap after a few faltering steps, e. e. cummings' effort (1) to see in the strip an allegory about Democracy versus all extremism — in which Krazy represents Democracy struggling against the Individual (Ignatz) and Society (Officer Pupp) — never even gets to its feet: Herriman's mighty epic just does not conform to such

shallow and lukewarm prejudices. Just as little are we aided by a more recent attempt to read the strip through the double lens of Kierkegaard and Sartre. (2) Hard as it may be for the partisans of simple solutions to accept, *Krazy Kat* simply is not reducible to any simple formula: literary, philosophical, political, psychological, esthetic or otherwise.

There are indeed very real difficulties posed by Herriman's many-sided message. The strip developed, day in and day out, for



more than thirty years; and if its thousands of incidents retain an unmistakable coherence — and form what can be regarded as a “unified whole” — still there were countless digressions, sidelong glances and a multiplicity of subtle ramifications. The very magnitude of the work, and its incontestable complexity — together with the mediocre attempts made thus far at critical interpretation — have led some critics to conclude that it is not in fact interpretable at all; that it is “meaningless.” The most assertive proponent of this view, Robert Warshow, bluntly stated: “We do best, I think, to leave *Krazy Kat* alone.” (3) For Warshow, and for others who have followed his lead, Herriman’s strip is without significance except perhaps as a symptom of the “extremity of . . . alienation” in “Lumpen culture.” Behind this abstentionism we cannot miss the ill-concealed sneer of the snob. He recognized the power of the strip, and even begrudged it “a certain purity and freshness,” but only by way of condemning it all the more for being outside the purview of High Culture. Warshow typifies the unhappy bourgeois intellectual who would choose at all costs to remain unhappy rather than cease to be bourgeois. He perceived that once it was admitted that the “mass image” deserved the same consideration as any other “work of art,” then traditional esthetic values (and beyond those, traditional social values) would stand exposed as laurel wreaths whose leaves have long since withered to dust.

As if to illustrate the extreme backwardness of American critics as far as the “popular arts” are concerned, Warshow’s bitter polemic has sometimes been mistaken for an “appreciation” of Herriman. That there is more than a little hypocrisy in the voluble acclaim of *Krazy Kat* is further indicated by the fact that seventy years after the kat’s initial appearance, and thirty-five years after Herriman’s death, only a minute portion of his complete works ever has been printed in book form. Surely the prerequisite for serious evaluation of any artist’s or writer’s contributions is that the work under consideration be accessible. To read Herriman, however, one has to pore over musty and crumbling newspapers or scan mile after mile of microfilm.

The many and disparate attempts at analysis to which *Krazy Kat* has been subjected have at least the virtue of demonstrating the extraordinary and lasting power of fascination that this comic strip has exerted on minds very different from each other. If one recalls, first, that it was a highly popular strip, perhaps less widely read than *Blondie*

or the later *Peanuts* but nonetheless appearing daily for decades in dozens of papers, and second, that although its publisher was William Randolph Hearst (the most demagogic and reactionary figure in the U.S. news media of his day) it aroused the sympathetic interest and even devotion of many who were generally antipathetic to everything Hearst stood for, then it becomes clear that with *Krazy Kat* we are in the presence of an extraordinary phenomenon. Such coincidence of taste between “advanced intellectuals” and “the masses” testifies to Herriman’s rare prescience, which reveals



in turn a deeper truth: that *Krazy Kat* expressed, in a uniquely captivating way, the latent content of the historical drama that convulsed the first half of the American twentieth century.

The following notes are offered as jottings from a “log,” so to speak, of repeated journeys through the kat’s enchanted domain. I never have been able to view Herriman’s work as primarily a “problem” to be “solved.” It is rather a gift to be enjoyed. It seems to me to be neither a chess game, nor

an allegory, nor a riddle, but rather a series of radiant glimpses into a unique world of the imaginary: a window — a kaleidoscope of windows — opening on the Marvelous, through which it is our privilege and our pleasure to look and see. And how could one expect to see anything there if one does not seek, first and above all, for *emotion*? Confronted with such splendor, our affective responses, provided that we allow them the fullest freedom to roam far and wide, could hardly fail to throw light not only on the work under consideration, but on our whole destiny — our destiny as individuals as well as the collective destiny of humankind.

To avoid misunderstandings, it is necessary to begin with some first principles — a trayful of kategorical aperitifs:

1) *Krazy Kat* is not only a work of “fantasy” — it is, much more importantly, a work of *nonsense*: indeed, one of the masterpieces of nonsense. This does not mean, of course, that it therefore lacks “significance”; on the contrary, there is more significance and worth in the best nonsense than there is in the great bulk of what passes for “sense.” It so happens that the significance of nonsense lies outside of formal logic, but this in no way diminishes its interest, for logic itself is almost negligible as a factor in human affairs.

The strip’s dialogues often have the flavor of Zen koans, or the surrealist “one-in-the-other” game, or — at times — the excruciating ambiguity of certain mystical paradoxes, such as St. Teresa’s “I die because I cannot die.” A riot of rhyme and “reasons beyond Reason,” and therefore situated outside of any traditional discipline, *Krazy Kat* drinks from sources deeper and more far-ranging than philosophy or religion. “The world as it is, my dear K,” Ignatz explains, “is not like it was, when it used to be.” To which Krazy responds: “An’ wen it gets to be wot it is, will it?”

2) *Krazy Kat* is before all else a *poetic* work, and George Herriman is one of the greatest American poets. If he kept his distance from the abject literary cabals that writhed and bribed their way through the English language of his day, it is all the more to his credit. *Krazy Kat* is definitive proof of our oft-reiterated contention that American poetry in this century has lived primarily *outside the poem*.

It is astonishing that no one has yet taken the trouble to approach Herriman’s work from the linguistic angle. Such an exploration could not help yielding important discoveries. Herriman’s language was drawn more or less equally from lush Victorian prose and the Yiddishized street lingo of

New York’s Lower East Side: something like a synthesis of Emily Brontë and Groucho Marx. This gives his dialogues a very special rhythm, a *baroque pulsation*, found nowhere else.

Herriman’s word-play is invariably loose and lively. The kat would never say “Of course I wouldn’t,” but rather “If coarse I wooden.” Richard Wagner becomes “Rigid Vogna”; “solar eclipse” is “solo eeklip.” In strip after strip we find enticing queries (“Do the moom always come ova the mountin? Dunt the mountin evva come ova the moom?”) and grand assertions: “You turn off the light and turn on the dark. You turn off the dark and turn on the light. Positively marvilliss!” and “I like my kit fits in riddim — I do.”

3) *Krazy Kat* was not “conceived,” not “born” — it “jes grew.” (4) Herriman was as surprised as his readers by the doings of his kat, whose “marvelous secrets,” moreover, were as elusive to him as to us.

Consider these words by Herriman himself, which I think may be taken as a kind of testament: “You have written truth, you friends of the ‘shadows,’ yet be not harsh with ‘Krazy’ — he is but a shadow himself, caught in the web of this mortal skein. We call him ‘cat,’ we call him ‘crazy’: Yet he is neither. At some time he will ride away to you, People of the Twilight. His password will be the echoes of a vesper bell; his coach, a zephyr from the west. Forgive him, for you will understand him no better than we who linger on this side of the pale.” (5)

Wonderfully nonsensical, defiantly poetic, and proceeding unconsciously — or rather *surconsciously*, *as if by magic* — *Krazy Kat* is one of the triumphs of pure psychic automatism. It is its essentially *surrealist* character — recognized by nearly all commentators — that not only makes it resistant to every variety of “specialized” criticism but also renders it endlessly appealing.

With this in mind, let us look more closely — a telescope to one eye, a microscope to the other — at just what’s happening in Coconino County.



The origins of the strip — how it “jes grew” — are revelatory. Born in New Orleans in 1880, Herriman sold cartoons and other drawings to leading magazines while still in his teens. It is striking that his early work included illustrations for short stories by Charles Fort, that important precursor of surrealism, whose later works — starting with *The Book of the Damned* (1919) — elaborated a world-view as unpredictably and humorously *surrational* as Herriman’s.

After several more or less short-lived strips — most notably the deliciously zany *Major Ozone’s Fresh Air Crusade*, which gave more than a hint of the grandeur to come — Herriman in June 1910 started *The Dingbat Family*, soon retitled *The Family Upstairs*. This remarkable strip featured the constant struggle of E. Pluribus Dingbat and his wife, Minnie, to drive away the noisy and otherwise extremely irksome family that lived in the flat above. The Dingbats never see their tormentors; do not even know their name. They try everything — a raging bull, a cannon, sneeze powder, a quartet of boxers (Jack Johnson, Sam Langford, Young Peter Jackson and Joe Walcott), a bomb, a jujitsu champion, wild bees, a ventriloquist, a cobra, the Pied Piper and three man-eating rats, an elephant, a hypnotist, bagpipe players, a trio of suffragettes, Desperate Desmond (a villain borrowed from another comic strip) a scorpion, a tarantula, a gila monster. They even try patience, kindness, generosity — to no avail. All their efforts fail; the Dingbats always get the worst of it. The more the Dingbats suffer, the more *The Family Upstairs* flourishes.

In view of Herriman’s zeal for suggestive ambiguities, puns and innuendoes, it seems reasonable to see in this strip a critique not only of apartment living and obnoxious neighbors, but of all “higher authority” — including the highest: The Holy Family Which Art Upstairs in Heaven, credited by believers with being almost as omnipotent as the Dingbats’ persecutors, and surely just as unseen. Significantly, in this regard, Herriman’s *Family Upstairs* are intimately allied with the whole gamut of power; their

visitors and friends include Teddy Roosevelt, William Howard Taft, Buffalo Bill, the Czar, the Ku Klux Klan, Ty Cobb and many, many more.

The Dingbats’ travail ends — as the struggle against religion and all oppression must end — with the toppling of the entire structure. The last strip of *The Family Upstairs* shows a wrecking crew demolishing the whole apartment building — to the great joy, let it be said, of Mr. and Mrs. Dingbat.

Meanwhile, momentous developments had taken place literally “between the lines.” In the Dingbats’ apartment, almost wholly independent of the story, we meet a cat, soon to be called Kat; and we meet also a mouse who, very early in the series, hits the cat with a brick. These unobtrusive and appealing cat-and-mouse adventures are soon set off in a small strip directly below the Dingbats’ story. From these modest subterranean beginnings emerged, a few years later — in October 1913 — the separate strip known as *Krazy Kat*.

“Come, let us dedicate the Great American Desert to Terpsichore!” This curious exhortation from one of Edward Bellamy’s early stories is realized in Herriman’s saga. The choreography of *Krazy Kat* is set precisely in the wide open spaces of Arizona, a brick’s throw from the Grand Canyon and the Petrified Forest.

Choreography is the word. I am convinced that the strip’s special appeal owes much to its graphic interpretation of the primordial urge to *dance*: the sense of standing on pins and needles, jumping for joy, falling head over heels in love; the sense of dizziness, swooning, of being swept off one’s feet. It is no accident that so many commentators on *Krazy Kat* should call it a *ballet*. (5) An attentiveness to dance-imagery permeates its every panel. (It is worth noting that the period when the strip began was the most dance-conscious in U.S. history).

Even in the earliest strips, when it still supplemented *The Family Upstairs*, we meet Krazy in the guises of “Katlova, the Russian



dancer" and "Little Egypt"; once Ignatz mistakes the kat for the popular nightclub singer/dancer Eva Tanguay. Moreover, from ballet to ballroom, from vaudeville to voodoo, from jig to jitterbug, Krazy Kat is always dancing up a storm.

Indeed, *Krazy Kat* offers us a unique example of a "danced drama" within the limits of a printed page. Everything contributes to this effect: the bold play of chiaroscuro; the constantly changing background; the exceedingly resilient line. Few artists have a line so sinuous and yet so strong as Herriman's. René Crevel wrote of Paul Klee that "he takes a walk with a line"; for his part, Herriman takes a line out for a mad fandango. In portraying his characters he was deeply aware of centers of gravity, of nuances in poise and differences in gait; each movement, each gesture, each glance, conveys depths of meaning. With the slightest agitation of a pen, he brought to life an imagery vibrant with rhythms unknown before him.

When we read a text or look at a picture — or do both at once, as in a comic strip — we too easily forget that it is our *whole bodies* that read. Beyond the eye that exists in its "savage state," invoked by Breton, the *kinesthetic sense* is ready to avenge itself on the immobile. Krazy Kat, too restless to stay confined in the world of two dimensions, leaps out into a third, a fourth and a fifth, thereby appealing powerfully to this too-little-understood "sixth sense."

In his classic *Code of Terpsichore* (1828) Carlo Blasis wrote that love — "of all passions the finest and most powerful" — was "the principal spring of action in a ballet." It is the spring of action, too, in *Krazy Kat*: "Love," as the kat says, "will fine away."

In *Krazy Kat* dance does not appear as an alienated spectacle, but as the simultaneous emancipation of body and mind which are, moreover, no longer perceived as contradictory. Krazy's dances are the untrammelled expression of a free and imaginatively exalted life.

Without dance, how could we account for the most overwhelming quality of the whole strip: its *supreme grace*?

Krazy Kat is not only the "danciest" comic strip but also the most *musical*. Herriman's knowledge of music was considerable. He was even something of a musician himself: in the '90s he wooed his girlfriend with songs, accompanying himself on mandolin. The mandolin is also Krazy's favorite instrument, but the kat, "imbillivibly" versatile, also plays piano, bass viol, several kinds of horn, harp, drums. And he bursts into song at every opportunity — even when it isn't opportune at all.

I do not know what music accompanied, or was meant to accompany, the *Krazy Kat* animated cartoons made (under Herriman's supervision) by Vitaphone in 1916-17. But



ORGANIZING THE INSECTS
For a Revolt Against Mankind
(from ARCHY'S LIFE OF MEHITABEL, 1933)

I know what music fits the strip to a T — the music that shares the same free-wheeling insouciant magic: it is the music of the early, crazier black swing bands. When I read *Krazy Kat* I can hardly help hearing Jimmie Lunceford's "I'm Nuts About Screw Music" or Cab Calloway's "Kickin' the Gong Around."

Is it purely by accident that the first recorded blues vocal (by Mamie Smith, 1920) was called *Crazy Blues*? When jazz musicians, some years later, began talking about "crazy cats" — meaning *inspired men* — were they not heralding the proliferation, rather, of Krazy Kats: that is, a new generation of footloose dreamers, rebellious and innovative outsiders, whose sensibilities had been shaped to an appreciable degree by events in Coconino County? Weren't the "hep cats," who later evolved into hipsters, following in the footsteps of a certain "heppy, heppy ket"?

Let it be borne in mind that jazz and the comic strip — universally acknowledged as this country's most important contributions to the arts — were equally subject to derision by the guardians of bourgeois High Culture. These two *despised media* were thus well situated to express the deep and secret longings of the most despised sectors of the population: the most exploited of the proletariat, immigrants, blacks, slum-dwellers, hoboes, drug victims, prostitutes, lunatics and jazz musicians. (7)

It is evident in all his work that Herriman had more than a vague "sympathy for the underdog" — that he shared an active spirit of solidarity and revolt and was very much on the side of the outcasts. In addition to *Krazy Kat* and his other strips, see his review of Charlie Chaplin's film, *The Gold Rush*, and his illustrations in the volumes of satirical verse by Don Marquis, featuring Archy the anarchist cockroach.

A more particularly subversive aspect of his work is also discernible. Krazy is not

only a cat but a *black* cat. Long a fixture of folklore, the black cat as a symbol of *bad luck* is second to none. At the time Krazy began to appear, however, the black cat was enjoying an unprecedented notoriety as an even more specific symbol: the symbol of workers' *sabotage*, or "striking on the job," bringing bad luck to the bourgeoisie.

Throughout the American labor movement in that era — most especially in the IWW, the Socialist Party and the anarchist movement — sabotage was a major topic of discussion and debate. Numerous pamphlets and articles hailed it as an important form of class struggle. Its praises were put in rhyme and set to music by leading Wobbly songwriters such as Joe Hill and Ralph Chaplin. Black cats abounded in IWW cartoons, and "silent agitator" stickers emblazoned with ferocious or funny black felines turned up on walls and windows across the country.

It is noteworthy that this literature and art favoring workers' sabotage was characterized — like *Krazy Kat* — by a genuine lyricism and an all-pervasive humor. A Wobbly known as Shorty wrote a poignant ditty called "The Kitten in the Wheat" which includes these stanzas:

A sab-cat and a Wobbly band,
A rebel song or two;
And then we'll shoo the Parasites
Just what the cat can do.

The sab-cat purred and twitched her tail,
As happy as could be;
They'd better not throw "wooks" in jail
And leave the kitten free.

And Ralph Chaplin's "Sab-O-Tabby Kitten" adds:

On every wheel that turns I'm riding,
No one knows, though, where I'm hiding.
The fight is tough and you can't see through it?
Shut your traps and a cat will do it.

It hardly need be added that the worshippers of private property, the philistine champions of capitalist class rule, considered IWW saboteurs hopelessly *crazy* — as crazy as Ignatz considered Herriman's invincible wonder-working kat.

Is all this mere coincidence? I think not. Herriman was, after all, born and raised in a poor immigrant family; he reached maturity with unassailably proletarian credentials. Moreover, he traveled the length and breadth of the country. He could hardly have avoided encountering somewhere,

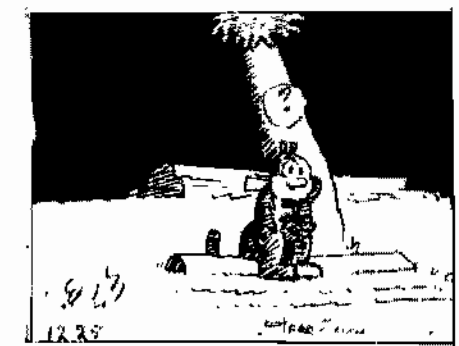


ARCHY'S LIFE OF MEHITABEL, 1933

sooner or later, the IWW and the black cat of sabotage. According to *The World Encyclopedia of Comics*, Herriman "rode the rails" from California to New York at the turn of the century. If this means he "rode the rods" or hopped freights, he surely would have met some of the migratory workers who, a few years later, became the backbone of the One Big Union.

In any case, even if he never met a single revolutionary worker or Wobbly or advocate of sabotage — even if he never read an IWW or left-wing socialist or anarchist pamphlet or periodical — still he would have had plenty of occasion to "read all about it," for in those years the IWW, impending revolution and sabotage were "big news" and prominently featured throughout the capitalist press.

Still more important, however, is the fact that Herriman himself, in the finest IWW spirit, is known to have practiced sabotage. As a teenager he was unhappy with his parents and hated his job in the family bakery. Once, to get even, he poured salt on



several hundred doughnuts. Another time, when he buried a dead mouse in a loaf of bread, he was kicked out of the house, never to return.

It was under the sign of sabotage, then, that the man who would create *Krazy Kat* gained his freedom. From then on, George Herriman was on his own.

Krazy Kat's profound appeal to aspirations which are fundamental but brutally repressed in this society — aspirations covered by the words poetry, dance, freedom and love — and its subtle but very real links with such "outcast" currents as the revolutionary workers' movement and the Afro-American jazz scene, help explain how and why Herriman's strip originally became and has since remained such a dynamic force in modern mythology.

Herriman's deep affection for "the wretched of the earth" also underscores the overriding *utopian* quality of his work: utopian in the best sense, signifying the imaginative critique of existing values and institutions, and the presentation of imaginary alternative societies organized on lines completely different from our own. It is not often remarked that the first comics appeared in the heyday of American utopian fiction. To a greater extent than has been acknowledged, comics (the best of them, in any case, such as Herriman's and Winsor McKay's) are an extension — we could even say the *flower* — of this important critical/utopian current.

Of all utopias, moreover, *Krazy Kat*'s is the simplest and the grandest, because it leaves it up to each and every one to do as he or she pleases. "In my Kosmos," says the Kat, "there will be no feeva of discord." In one strip a fortuneteller predicts a future without jails or bricks or kops: a future, in other words, without repression. I know of few writers or artists, anywhere or anytime, who devoted themselves so tirelessly, or for so long, to the exaltation of the Pleasure Principle, as did George Herriman in his *Krazy Kat*.

Ethereal and earthy at the same time, incorruptible in his infinite tenderness, Krazy reaches out confidently for values that do not yet exist. Here we have a "kounter-kulture" resonant with everything the heart desires. Against odds that seem impossible to everyone else, the Kat holds out for nothing less than dancing in the streets, poetry made by all, total love, permanent festivals of what Edward Young, in his *Night-Thoughts*, called "unprecarious bliss."

The world of a comic strip might seem small, but *Krazy Kat*'s world looms larger than "life as we know it." Emphatically inconclusive, neither Herriman nor his Kat pretended to have "the" answers. Rather they proceeded — and we proceed with them — by means of a continual questioning. "Nobodda but me," the Kat once said, "would care to go where I'm going, an' ivvin I dunt know where I'm goin' until I get there." And so it is that each reader must make his own way, by his own means, over this magical terrain: There are no shortcuts.

But one thing is certain: The spectre of *Krazy Kat* will long continue to haunt the world.

GEORGE HERRIMAN in print

Krazy Kat (Grosset & Dunlap, 168 pp., \$7.95)

The Family Upstairs, Introducing Krazy Kat (Hyperion, 212 pp., \$8.95)

Baron Bean (Hyperion, 101 pp., \$5.95)

Illustrations for Don Marquis, *Archy and Mehitabel* (Doubleday, \$1.45)

GUSTAVE VERBEEK (THE UPSIDE-DOWNS)

"The Incredible Upside-Downs" strip featured the unending perils of Little Lady Lovekins and Old Man Muffaroo. Starting on October 11, 1903, its sixty-four weekly episodes are unlike anything else in the world.

Drawn in six panels with captions, it was designed to be read first in the conventional way, and then continued upside-down, with new captions. That is: first you read it like any other strip, then turn it over and read it again. Every element in the strip thus had to make sense both rightside-up and upside-down. Moreover, since each strip told a story, each panel had to be meticulously coordinated as part of a coherent but amazingly complex whole.

Few artists in any medium have challenged themselves to such an extent as Verbeek. With unfailing rigor, he pursued his unlikely quest week after week for over a year, turning loose an astonishing horde of convertible images. An elegant lady becomes a duck. A farmer tugging at his beard becomes a hand reaching for a squirrel. A tousle-eared dog eating from a plate becomes a moustachioed fortune-teller in a wide-brimmed hat. Two men sleeping under a haystack become a flying owl in tears. In a unique hermaphroditic *pas-de-deux*, the Little Lady and the Old Man also turn into each other, upside-down.

The strip strikingly recalls the literary method of one of surrealism's major precursors. Starting with two different sentences sounding exactly the same (the second being

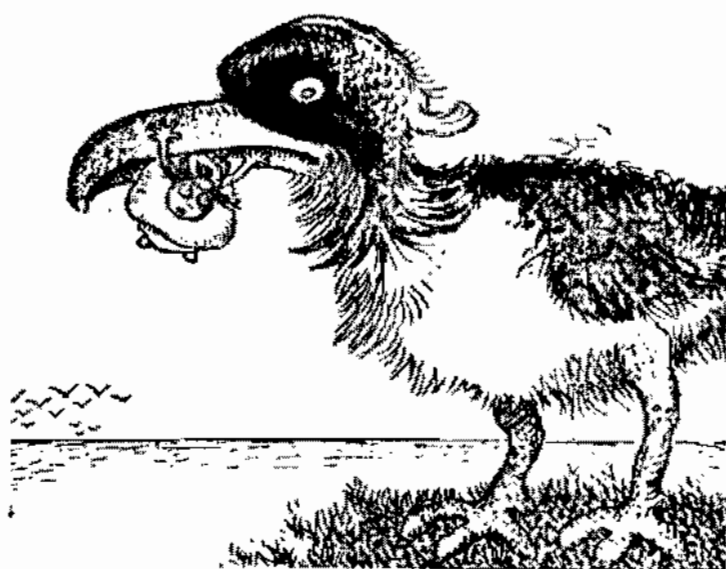
an elaborate pun on the first), Raymond Roussel would begin a story with one of these sentences and end it with the other, supplying the continuity between these two "poles." Verbeek's affinity with Roussel is further indicated by another of his strips, "Terrors of the Tiny Tads," the saga of four tiny people venturing over a dark and formidable landscape where they encounter the most fantastic creatures: creatures invented by combining words, — i.e., hippopotamosquito, trolley-caribou, eleganteater, wildcaterpillar, falconductor, etc.

More than any other comic artist, Verbeek approached the preoccupations of

- (1) e. e. cummings, "Introduction" to *Krazy Kat* (New York, Grosset & Dunlap, 1969).
- (2) Arthur Asa Berger, *The Comic-Stripped American* (Baltimore, Penguin, 1973).
- (3) Robert Warshaw, *The Immediate Experience* (New York, Doubleday, 1962).
- (4) On the notion of "Jes Grew," see Ishmael Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo* (New York, Doubleday, 1972), which is, by the way, dedicated to George Herriman.
- (5) Quoted in the *Krazy Kat* book, op. cit., p. 168.
- (6) A ballet version of *Krazy Kat*, with music by John Alden Carpenter, was choreographed and staged by Adolf Bolm for the Chicago Grand Opera Ballet in 1920, and by Walter Camryn in 1948.
- (7) Rumors of Herriman's Afro-American ancestry persist; if true, this would appreciably substantiate these speculations.

hermeticists and other seekers of "occult" correspondences. With him the comic strip assumes an almost divinatory quality. Cannot the "Upside-Downs" be seen as a kind of Tarot?

It is impossible to read Verbeek without sooner or later being struck with the notion that his work might, after all, *point* to something, somewhere, somehow. Its absurdity is so wonderfully total, and yet so perfectly coherent — so resonant with oneiric truth and poetic justice — that a whole new way of life, or at least a new morality, could easily be derived from it.

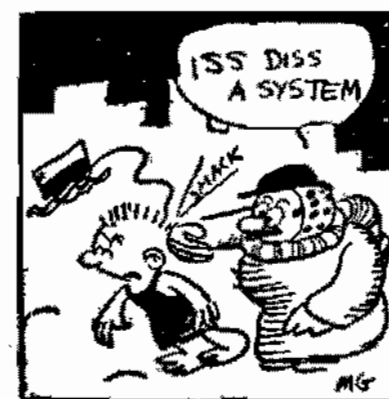


Gustave VERBEEK: The Upside Downs

MILT GROSS (COUNT SCREWLOOSE)

Milt Gross presided serenely over a universe in which unruliness was the golden rule. Whether he was depicting the simplest incidents of everyday life in New York's Lower East Side, or retelling the classics in his own inimitable way, or rewriting esoteric chapters of ancient history, hilariously calamitous intrusions could always be counted on to disrupt the proceedings.

His profusely illustrated narrative, *Nize Baby* (1926), with its colorful Yiddishized English ("Like for a nexample: is de law from gratification wot it proofs if it sets onder a tree a man — so it'll fall him on de had a hepple!"), demonstrated his mastery of comic dialogue. *He Done Her Wrong* ("the Great American Novel and not a word in it — no music, too!"), published in 1930, revealed his flair for mad and melodramatic situations; it also showed his drawing at its vigorous, nervous, jolting, knockabout, exaggerated best. These qualities are amply



MILT GROSS: Nize Baby

evident in all his strips, from the early *Phool Phan Phables* (1915) through *That's My Pop!* which began in 1935 and was still turning up in comic books more than a decade later.

Gross's most powerful work, however, was a Sunday strip, *Count Screwloose of Too-*

loose, which ran for several years, starting in 1929. Like *Little Nemo* and *Krazy Kat*, it consists of endless and never tiring variations on an elementary theme: The Count, an inmate of the Nuttycrest lunatic asylum, makes his escape at the beginning of each strip, only to return eagerly at the end, after seeing that those "outside" are even crazier than his fellow patients. "Iggy, keep an eye on me!" he says each time to his faithful accomplice, who happens to be a dog, and who happens to think he's Napoleon.

A lunatic's critique of the "normal," which is shown to be only another (and far more malignant) form of lunacy, *Count Screwloose* is a truly magnificent series. Its hard-hitting and unremitting satire often overflows into the most glorious poetic nonsense. When this strip is collected and published as a book — it is high time! — it should be required reading for all psychiatrists.

ELZIE C. SEGAR (POPEYE)

In his celebrated anthology in which the term *black humor* first saw the light of day, André Breton called attention to the curious fact that two early partisans of this specifically modern humor (Jonathan Swift and Petrus Borel) shared the same motto: *I am what I am*. This also happens, of course, to be the motto of Popeye the Sailor, in a variant of his own: *I yam what I yam*. And so the great two-fisted, pipe-smoking sea-dog stands third in this grand epoch-spanning triumverate.

Breton's anthology is dated Paris, 1939. The year before, Elzie Crisler Segar, creator of Popeye, died in California. Under Segar's infallible direction, Poopdeck Pappy's trouble-shooting son mumbled and brawled his way from one wonderful adventure to the next, meanwhile eating enough spinach to cover every inch of Earth as well as the two moons of Mars. Popeye is always triumphant, yet always ingenuous — an American proletarian Ulysses (or Lemuel Gulliver) whose odyssey started with the Great Depression of '29.

Here is a figure of truly mythical proportions, known to hundreds of millions of people. Segar's strip featured a host of memorable beings, including J. Wellington Wimpy, rotund hamburger-addict, reputed genius (with a 326 IQ), and full-time loafer

and moocher ("I'll gladly pay you Tuesday for a hamburger today"); weird Alice the Goon; and the endearing Eugene the Jeep, that "mysterious animal" with a "fourth-dimensional brain," who lives on a diet of orchids and predicts the future. (*Goon* and *jeep*, by the way, are words that Segar introduced into the language.)

The illustrious forebears of Popeye's motto help us situate his epic historically. Swift was among the first to ridicule the ideological pretensions of the rising bourgeoisie; *Gulliver's Travels* was a burning indictment of every dominant social value. Nearly a century later Borel, as part of the extremist wing of French romanticism, threw in his lot with the most revolutionary current of his time, and stood with Auguste Blanqui in the 1830 Revolution. "I need an enormous amount of freedom," said Borel.

After yet another century, Popeye needs even more freedom. All the freedom he has,

he has had to fight for, and he is prepared to defend it tooth and nail. Popeye can be taken almost as a *symbol* of the power, the historic *weight*, that the working class had attained at the time of the stock market crash. He is proud of his achievements, but still self-critical; sure of himself but rarely boastful, and never complacent. He manifests a strong sense of loyalty and solidarity, and is always ready for anything. I like to think that all these years he has had a red card in his pocket, signifying his membership in the IWW's Marine Transport Workers U 510. (Interestingly enough, Popeye is blind in one eye, as were two of the best-known Wobbly organizers: Frank Little and Big Bill Haywood.)

Those who know *Popeye* only in its later incarnations as a gag strip for small children may be unaware of the far-soaring splendor of its originator's intrepid imagination. The *Thimble Theatre* strip — which Popeye entered as a guest, but soon took over — featured dramas born of dark and melancholy brooding, defiantly aglow with disquieting surprises. Drawn by E.C. Segar's inspired hand, the first decade of Popeye's adventures constitutes one of the comics' greatest glories.

ELZIE C. SEGAR in print

Thimble Theatre, 1928-1930: Introducing Popeye (Hyperion, 173 pp., \$8.95)

Bud Sagendorf, *Popeye: The First Fifty Years* (Workman, 144 pp., \$8.95). Includes several strips by Segar.

BILL HOLMAN (SMOKEY STOVER)



In 1928, in *La Revolution Surrealiste* No. 11, Louis Aragon and André Breton published a manifesto hailing "The Fiftieth Anniversary of Hysteria." (1) Deeply inspired by some photographs of hysterical women patients — taken a half-century earlier but just discovered in the archives of the Salpêtrière Hospital where Charcot pursued his research into this most elusive of "mental ailments" — the surrealists affirmed that, for them, hysteria was "the greatest poetic discovery of the end of the 19th century," and a "supreme means of expression." Their manifesto not only indicates the gulf separating surrealism from traditional esthetic categories but also suggests to what extent the surrealist practice of poetry had superseded all merely "clinical" frameworks in understanding the "real functioning of thought."

Elsewhere I have had occasion to remark that "independently of the surrealist movement, but wholly in the surrealist spirit, qualified defenders of the poetic spirit staged, right in the midst of American popular culture, nothing less than their own celebration of hysteria." (2) In the forefront of this celebration was Bill Holman, who was already actively cartooning in 1928 but whose *magnum opus* was not to begin for seven years. March 10, 1935 — a red-letter day for black humor — *Smokey Stover* was unloosed on the world.

All that the word *hysteria* implies gushes from this fast-paced strip in unheard-of quantities, every which way and all at once.

The setting is a firehouse where Smokey Stover and the Chief, with an unending supporting cast, pursue their nonstop rapid-fire

misadventures. These frantic fire-fighting clowns — who, incidentally, start more fires than they put out — seem to live by a single principle: extravagant disorder at all times and at all costs.

In his own way Holman does exactly what the surrealist painter does: concretize the irrational. Throughout *Smokey Stover* we see the craziest furniture (an easy chair, for example, rests not on legs but on the letters E and Z); incomprehensible household gadgets ("windshield viper," "scrambled ax"); and vast ultra-elaborate contraptions that prove Holman a worthy disciple of Rube Goldberg. Ever-changing portraits adorn the walls. The figures in these portraits lead adventures of their own, often wholly unrelated to the rest of the story. These portraits smoke real cigars, wear hats,



or beards that protrude beyond their frames; leap entirely outside these frames; recline in hammocks slung between one frame and another; or shoot peas through a pea-shooter at figures in other pictures, or even at the main characters.

And everywhere — on the walls, doors, windows, floors, furniture, and even on the characters themselves — are words. The world's zaniest graffiti grow wild, simply wild, all over *Smokey Stover*. Words and images freely collide in a frenzied Brownian movement, to the tune of Universal Analogy. In Holman's hysterical hieroglyphic, a never-ending array of labels, tags and captions indicate the never-ending possibilities of relationships between signs and things signified.

As a master of punch lines, Holman has few peers. But no one in comics comes even close to his prowess as a wizard of wordplay; unquestionably, per square inch, he packs in more puns — visual as well as verbal — than any artist before or since. He shows us green P's, blue J's, brown I's. The picture of a little boy with the seat of his pants on fire is labeled "Flaming Youth." A government official's writing implement is a "state pen." A small globe in which two hatchets are imbedded becomes "The Earth and Its Axes." Puttering around in the kitchen, Smokey holds a whip in his hands — a "prune whip." A man standing amidst a cluster of taxicabs sings "Deep in the Heart of Taxies." And so it goes, pun after pun after pun — sometimes over a dozen in a single strip. "Of chorus," as Smokey says, "it could be verse."

All this mad "handwriting on the wall," all these goofy pictures within pictures, all these irrational objects whose sole function is symbolic — all these elements of a background in constant metamorphosis — form a kind of oneiric counterpoint that serves above all to emphasize the pervasive, total, definitive delirium that characterizes the whole strip. Nothing is stable or static in Holman's world. His images refuse to stay put; his words are out looking for trouble;

his objects are eager to make known their objections.

Smokey Stover could be regarded as the last holdout of vaudeville burlesque slapstick. But it is something more. For in order to enable his slapstick to survive at all, Holman had to raise it to the third — or fourth, or fifth — power. Quantity inevitably passed into quality, and lo! a new and unhopd-for marvel was added to our lives.

When every one of these strips is collected

CHESTER GOULD (DICK TRACY)



DICK TRACY

It is the same with comics as with movies or paintings or poems: out of a hundred, one or two may hit the mark. The dominant ideas of an epoch, as the ABC of Marxism demonstrated so irrefutably so long ago, are the ideas of the ruling class; and when the ruling class is the bourgeoisie — intrinsically hostile to art and poetry, as Marx observed — the things expressed in the great bulk of what passes for art, including popular art, inevitably are saturated with bourgeois values.

And thus for every Krazy Kat or Little Nemo or Smokey Stover — sparkling with all the colors of freedom and love — there are dozens, scores, hundreds of Steve Canyons, Mary Worths, Brenda Starrs, Rex Morgans, Captain Americas, Little Orphan Annes and Star Wars: four-color props for a dying social order, fundamentally prosaic and hopelessly subservient to the ideological needs of the whole repressive apparatus, from the State Department all the way down the chain of churches, Boy Scouts and Ku Klux Klan to the stoolpigeons for the CIA.

In the comics, as everywhere else, the struggle between the marvelous and the miserable is waged unrelentingly. We want comics that dream and inspire dreams;



FLATTOP

comics that challenge musty traditions and overturn mental habits; comics that give a chance to the "impossible" (the mask behind which the *desirable* is so frequently forced to hide). Is it necessary to add that virtually nothing which matters to us — nothing inspiring, subversive, emancipatory, poetic — will be found in the plethora of comics devoted to family life, soap operas, spies, military exploits, sports, pets or the shenanigans of "bobby soxers"? That there are, here and there, a few rare exceptions, serves only as usual to prove the rule.

Still less should we expect to find subversive/poetic qualities in those comics that consciously aim at the glorification of detectives and cops. And yet, though the great majority of these comics are irredeemably dreary, the exceptions are both sufficiently numerous and of such indisputably high quality that we are confronted with what might seem to be an anomalous circumstance. The problem, however, is easily solved: The extreme intensity of conflict in these comics, their fevered acceptance of the omnipresence of crime and malevolence, their dark obsessiveness and constantly recurring violence are such that the artists often are carried away by their creations. On such emotionally charged terrain, conscious intentions

and published in book form, it will be one of a very few books of which we can say that it is *surrealist from cover to cover*.

I have said it before and I'll say it again: Everlasting glory to Smokey Stover!

(1) A translation of this document is included in André Breton, *What Is Surrealism?* (New York, Monad Press, 1978), pp. 320-1.
(2) "The 100th Anniversary of Hysteria," catalog of the *Surrealism in 1978* exhibition at the Ozaukee Art Center, Milwaukee.

count for little: it is the *latent* content that commands our notice. What do these comics show us? A mercilessly steady stream of snapshots: brutally altered primal scenes, traumatic memories, Oedipal rages, savage impulses, fits of ferocity, lust and vengeance. The seven deadly sins multiplied a thousandfold cavort and grovel in these stark panoramas of unconscious mental processes. In Will Eisner's compelling *Spirit*, in *The Shadow* (drawn by several hands), in Jack Cole's admirable *Plastic Man* we are presented with shattering, nightmarish dramas — as gory and disfigured, perhaps, as Grunewald's *Crucifixion* or Goya's *Disasters of War*, but also just as authentic in their passionate portrayal of the *return of the repressed*.

Pride of place among the comics' detectives belongs to Chester Gould's pioneering Dick Tracy. Starting on the 4th of October, 1931, this laconic, angular, trench-coated knight has ventured boldly through the streets of Chicago to do battle with an astonishing cast of villains. In the very nerve-center of America's criminal underworld, Depression/Prohibition Chicago — the Chicago of Al Capone and Bugs Moran, whose rival gangs of bootleggers were machine-gunning each other all over town



SHAKY

— Tracy was the first in comics to begin, in Chester Gould's words, "fighting it out face to face with crooks via the hot lead route."

Gould has expressly denied being influenced by Dashiell Hammett or other "hard-boiled" mystery writers. But there is no doubt that the work of such writers, which enjoyed such wide popularity from the mid-1920s through the '40s, helped prepare an audience for Tracy. And Tracy, in turn, has influenced the crime/mystery genre, not only in comics but in literature, radio, movies. Ellery Queen has credited him with being "the world's first procedural detective of fiction." (1)

The real interest of *Dick Tracy*, however, lies elsewhere. Tracy himself is of decidedly minor interest, always peripheral to the strip that bears his name. The central figures of the strip, its prime attractions and the reasons for its success, invariably have been the "bad guys." The real theme of *Dick Tracy* is: the fascination of Evil.

Look at its unparalleled roster of grotesque rogues: Littleface, B-B Eyes, Mole, Flattop, Pruneface, Mrs. Pruneface, Mumbles, The Brow, The Blank, Shaky and a host of others. It is these incarnations of Satan — these insatiably cruel, deformed, horrible abominations — who hold the spotlight as they move from outrage to outrage, gun or dagger in hand, through an immemorial darkness spattered with moonlight and blood. We are in the old Gothic wilderness; it has been industrialized and urbanized, of course, and the moldering castles replaced by skyscrapers, but the atmosphere remains essentially the same. A cold metallic solitude rings through the Tracy epic in its

early years. Wet streets glisten with greed and fear as we follow crazed killers in their gloomy sedans, roaring through the shadows to an inexorable doom.

It is beyond question that Gould consciously — with all his heart — is on the side of the cops. He is an inveterate champion of law 'n' order, a hater of crooks who likes to spend his free time visiting police stations to see how the boys are doing in their war on crime. But at night, when he shuts his eyes, he can't help dreaming; and sometimes

CHESTER GOULD in print

Dick Tracy, The Thirties: Tommy Guns and Hard Times (Chelsea House, 320 pp., \$15)

dreams enjoy the sweetest revenge. "I don't outline the whole story when I start," Gould has admitted. "I feel if I don't know how it is going to come out, then the reader can't, and if you keep enough punch and enough interest, the intervening ground seems to be covered automatically."

Even such a casual concession to automatism has serious consequences. In spite of Gould's precautions, poetry wreaks its own havoc and achieves its own infallible justice. To cite but one example: When one of the *Dick Tracy* villains, the psychopathic killer Flattop, died

"... Gould received half a dozen telegrams from people who offered to claim the body. ... The day of the funeral, several floral of-

ferings and a stack of sympathy cards arrived at the office of the syndicate which distributes the strip. That night a crowd of bereaved citizens gathered ... and held a wake, complete with a coffin and candles, for Flattop. Many people have since written Gould touching letters, expressing their deep sense of personal loss. ... A woman living on the West Coast asked the ageless question, 'Why did he have to die?' and added sadly, 'All America loved Flattop.' " (2)

We read *Dick Tracy* the way we read Cotton Mather's *Wonders of the Invisible World*. Both are works of apocalyptic puritanism, bursting at the seams with an uncontrollable and "righteous" fury. But we are as little interested in Gould's respect for the law as we are in the fine points of the old witch-hunter's theology. What interests us is the insuperable violence of the dramatic collisions and the dazzling profusion of obsessive detail.

Let us conclude by paraphrasing Blake: The reason Chester Gould writes in fetters when he portrays Law-Abiding Citizens and Cops, and at liberty when he portrays Evil-doers and Criminals, is that he is — unconsciously at least, and in spite of himself — "a true Poet and of the Devil's party without knowing it."

NOTES

(1) Introduction to *The Celebrated Cases of Dick Tracy, 1931-1951* (New York, Chelsea House, 1970), p. xxv.

(2) Lancelot Hogben, *From Cave Painting to Comic Strip* (New York, Chanticleer Press, 1949), p. 216.

JACK KENT (KING AROO)

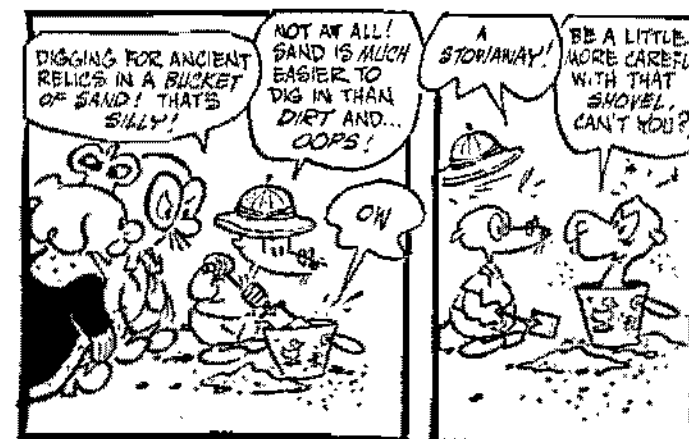
King Aroo belongs to that comic fraternity of half-pint monarchs whose entire demeanor qualifies them, however paradoxically, as anti-Oedipal father figures. The child-sized King of Myopia, however, has neither the tight-lipped arrogance of O. Soglow's *Little King*, nor the sheer paranoid cantankerousness of the royal midget in *The Wizard of Id*. Aroo is rather a mild-mannered, unassuming, even jovial fellow, though very much inclined to nostalgia and reverie. He dreams of living happily ever after with a beautiful princess who lives in the Kingdom Next Door. Fundamentally indifferent to his kingly duties, he frolics with his friends, brightens up his castle by doodling on the walls, and now and then

runs away from home, seeking to join the Gypsies.

Whoever sets foot in Myopia must expect the unexpected. In this tiny kingdom where enchantment is the natural order of things, each of Aroo's many boon companions disposes of unique and compelling charms. The bald and moustachioed Yupyop is the king's official yes-man — a one-man royal retinue who holds every position from chancellor to pastry cook. Mr. Pennipost is a kangaroo who delivers the mail and plays the saxophone. Drexel, the fire-breathing dragon, declares himself to be a pacifist. The irresistible little Wanda Witch orders magic potions through a mail-order catalogue, and pushes a handcart peddling

"Spells and Curses — 5¢." We also meet an elephant who is plagued with forgetfulness ("I'm one of those animals that 'never forgets' — I know that much — but I've forgotten what animal that is!"); a mountain goat afflicted with acrophobia; and a bird that has built its nest of violin-strings ("I've got the only nest in Myopia that has to be periodically tuned!").

It should go without saying that these uncompromisingly onerotic creatures engage only in the most improbable adventures. The humor of *King Aroo* exudes much the same spirit as the silent film comedies of Harry Langdon: the wide eyed innocence of a lovesick somnambulist playing solitaire chess in a rowboat about to go over Niagara



Jack KENT: King Aroo

Falls. And so the story proceeds: one delightful catastrophe after another, viewed through the lens of gentle wonderment.

At every turn we confront situations that could happen nowhere else but in this defiantly dreamlike dominion. A flea bites Yupyop and gets ptomaine poisoning, whereupon he — the flea, that is — is regarded as a ward of the state and gets the royal treatment; his plush wheelchair is

pushed by the king himself. Once Aroo stumbles on some ants who are having a picnic; he tries to help himself to the potato chips, but an ant angrily protests: "I wish we 'ants' could have a picnic just once without 'people' pestering us!" Then there is the photographer's "little birdie" who, in his efforts to rivet the attention of those who sit before the camera, does a juggling act as well as a song-and-dance routine; alas! he proves to be only too successful, for the photogra-

pher is so engrossed by the bird's performances that he forgets to snap the picture.

Jack Kent's Myopia can be pinpointed on the map. It is at the exact geographical center between the Land of the Houyhnhnms, the original Wonderland, Coconino County and the Okfenokee Swamp. It is close to all of these, but nonetheless far enough away to have a climate and a way of life that are wholly its own.

GEORGE CARLSON (JINGLE JANGLE TALES)

Comic books aimed at the tiniest tots are nearly always insufferable. As is the case with most literature imposed on children, they are utterly devoid of imagination. In its place we get a stereotyped silliness, the same stupid stories over and over, and an all-pervasive "cuteness" so repulsive that it would give heartburn to a snowman. These comics are not only dull — they are *deadly* dull: a hideously typical product of a civilization engaged in a permanent war against children.

The most notable exception-proving-the-rule is *Jingle Jangle Comics*, which ran for forty-two issues from February 1942 to December '49. Never really a big hit in its day, it seems all but forgotten now except by collectors. What made it exceptional then, and still worth recalling today, are the stories (in nearly every issue) written and drawn by one of the most eccentric artists in or out of comics: George Carlson.

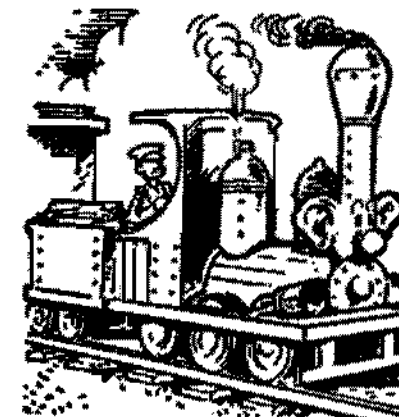
Defying the timeworn formulas of fables and fairy tales, Carlson's work is outlandishly original — to such an extent that it sometimes gives the impression of having emanated from another planet. His plots are

so far beyond the field of credibility that one quickly despairs of ever making sense of them. Bristling with an extravagance of irrational detail, dramatized by an overwhelming nervous fluidity, his work is the most militantly baroque in comic art.

Only Carlson could have given us a tale such as "The Extra-Style Ostrich and the Sugar-Lined Necktie," with its cigar-smoking sun and its self-winding watchdog, in which the characters, much like Dr.

Faustroll, row through the streets in a boat, using a broom and a banjo for oars — or in emergencies take a *taxicab* (in homage to Gustave Verbeek). Carlson's apocalyptic daffiness is as unique as the Taj Mahal, but a thousand times more formidable. All of his "Jingle Jangle Tales," and the adventures of "The Pie-Face Prince of Pretzleburg," are closer in spirit to Lautréamont, Benjamin Péret and Joseph Jablonski than to *Little Lotta*, *Atomic Mouse* or *Casper the Friendly Ghost*.

The 1940s were years of counter-revolution, and consequently of reactionary "realism": object surrender to the "accomplished facts" of Hiroshima and the House Un-American Activities Committee. "Intellectuals" were taking up existentialism, "coolness" and other accommodative fads — knocking each other down as they quit the Left for higher-paying jobs on the Right. Meanwhile, unpretentious artists such as George Carlson — and the workingclass parents who read his stories to their three-year-olds at bedtime — were helping to prepare the way for the revolutionary imagination's inevitable revenge.



George CARLSON: 1001 Riddles



Penelope ROSEMONT: *The Duckburg General Strike* (oil on canvas, 1979)

BASIL WOLVERTON (POWERHOUSE PEPPER)

The post World War-II war on comics — which led to the infamous "Comics Code" — was not, as is commonly believed, an exclusively Right-wing campaign. Of course it was McCarthyist in essence, and championed by fascists and churchmen. But it also was supported by liberals, free-thinkers, Communists and Leftists of all kinds. That is just the sort of thing that happens in counter revolutionary periods.

Leaf through some comic books of those days and you will see just what it was that the guardians of the "American Way of Life" were so eager to suppress. Horror comics with foaming-at-the-mouth ghouls, half-rotted corpses, ax-murderers and necrophiles on the rampage; crime comics showing honest citizens getting their heads blown off by joy-riding, machine-gunning gangsters and their heroin-using teenage girlfriends; adventure comics featuring voluptuous, scantily clad, high-heeled heroines in the clutches of an endless series of sadists. Middle-class parents simply didn't want to look at such things — above all didn't want their children to look. For these comics contained a stark, brutal, unmistakable message: The war for "Democracy" may have been won, but barbarism flourished everywhere.

The anti-comics crusade was not aimed primarily at the publishers, who easily adjusted themselves to the changed conditions and put out a new "safe" line. The war on comics was aimed at — and hit — the most vulnerable sector of the proletariat: school

kids. Some artists, of course, and countless kids, fought back with all they had. Harvey Kurtzman's *Mad* served as a rallying point for a whole generation of recalcitrant American youth. Eventually it too was domesticated, but not before unleashing some of the most vigorous satire of the 1950s. And at least one of the *Mad* stars never gave up: the heroic Basil Wolverton, a one man guerrilla



BASIL WOLVERTON
in print

Spacehawk (Archival Press, 64 pp., \$3.95)

Foopgoop Frolics Frantic Funnies Foho
(Glenn Bray, 52 pp., \$10)

"GJDRKZLXCWQ" Comics (Glenn Bray,
32 pp., 65¢)

war against everything the Comics Code stands for.

Wolverton is a truly *scandalous* artist: insolent, uncompromising, ruthless. His work ranges from the white-hot to the unbelievably cold. He has created an immense number of comic characters, and has worked in nearly every genre, including humor, westerns, horror and science fiction. His haunting *Spacehawk*, featuring the "lone wolf of the void," is superior in all respects to better-known outer-space strips, such as *Flash Gordon*. *Powerhouse Pepper*, probably Wolverton's best work, is a hard proletarian sock at the corny bourgeois Joe Palooka, drenched in the blackest humor. In "Disk-Eyes the Detective" a cast of cold-blooded, hard-boiled maniacs play a goofy cops-and-robbers. "Flap Flipflop, the Flying Flash" featured a tiny pilot of a tiny plane, unable to concentrate on flying, he prefers to read or sleep. In his first appearance he crashes through an army depot control tower, but is too engrossed by Einstein's *Theory of Relativity* to notice: "This book I brought hasn't got such a hot plot for a tot," he remarks, "but it's not a lot of rot."

In all his work, Wolverton defies the law and spits in the face of authority. Incessantly excessive, he always has refused to "know when to stop." Yet even at his most outrageous, he is always *princely*: elegance runs through his uproariousness. Much of his work might be in the worst possible taste, but still: It's the highest quality bad taste in the world.

CARL BARKS (UNCLE SCROOGE)

If the Comics Code made few waves in the world of Walt Disney, it was because "Citizen Walt, the Last Tycoon" had long before enforced a repressive, parochial code of his own on his employees. Disney's ambition seems to have been to impose bourgeois respectability on the raucous nihilism of the early comics and animated cartoons — to tame these savage genres: for a fee, of course. His success is only too well known.

It so happens, however, by one of those "twists of fate" that make life always more interesting than philosophy, that the Disney studios harbored for decades an artist who can be regarded as truly and wonderfully *subversive*, in the best sense of the word.

Carl Barks never explicitly quarreled with the Disney Code. Quietly taking the formulas as handed to him, he nonchalantly transformed them from top to bottom. Out of readymade material he elaborated a universe precisely as he wanted it, gradually adding to it until soon there was far more in it of his own than of Disney's. He is the creator of *Uncle Scrooge* and author of most of *Walt Disney's Comics & Stories*. His comics were so immensely popular that his departures from orthodox Disneyism were allowed to pass; Barks enjoyed an autonomy that no other Disney artist ever approached. And it is our good fortune that he consistently made the most of it.

The greatest of all comic *storytellers*, Barks is at his best in the narration of marvelous *quests*. He takes us to the Seven Cities of Cibola, King Solomon's Lost Mines, ghost towns of the Old West, the Everglades, Atlantis, the Yukon, and even to the center of the Earth which, we learn, is inhabited by tribes of rolling ball-like people known as Terries and Fermies (their favorite sport is making earthquakes). With Barks, the oldest myths spring to life and lead to heroic adventures. We follow his dauntless ducks eagerly as they search for the Golden Fleece, the lost crown of Genghis Khan, the Flying Dutchman, the Fountain of Youth, the Philosopher's Stone.

What I have called Barks' subversive quality is manifest particularly in the delightful irony that permeates his work. Be-

Donald Duck (Abeville Press, 195 pp., \$15) 10 stones in full color; foreword by Barks

neath a naive and taciturn exterior, he is clearly a man of great passion and deep integrity. Subtly and serenely, he kicks the ground out from under numerous retrograde cultural assumptions. He has the highest regard for primordial innocence, and distrusts the economies of that innocence. The story of Scrooge's sojourn in the faraway valley of Tula is a devastating attack on money. In the ~~re~~ of the "Seven Cities," the hidden splendor is destroyed through greed. "The Law of the Pygmy Indians" (featuring a lost tribe who speak in iambic pentameter, like *Hawatha*) is a poignant denunciation of capitalist rapacity. Steeped in history and myth, and scorning empty didacticism, *Paris* inspires a thirst for knowledge in keeping with Hegel's prin-

This much is sure: Without comics, surrealism would be very different from what it is in the U.S. today. Those who wish to know the *specifically American sources* of surrealism here and now could hardly do better than to study the comics — especially of the '40s and '50s — and above all the works of the tireless chronicler of the doings in Duckburg.

George CARLSON: 1001 Riddle

We are told that Lichtenstein has raised the comic strip to the level of the worst painting: that of the stereotype, imitation, blundering and rote repetition. . . . [In Lichtenstein's work] we see only the weakest examples of what are the most insipid and retrograde: because these are the ones he prefers. If one were to reduce his paintings to

Le Ballon dans le bande dessinée
Paris, André Balland, 1968



McCay combines the most mundane details of daily life with the most far reaching possibilities of the mind. His characters and scenes do not merely help us momentarily to escape a humdrum existence — a service they no doubt performed for the chief audience of the early comic pages, the blue-collar urban mass; as McCay himself might have guessed, they also *foretell the future*. When our revolutionary reverie becomes the human pattern, we will all *live* in a McCay world.

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We encounter outstanding adversaries, most notably the "terrible Beagle Boys," a gang of cutthroats who wear their masks all the time, even when locked up, and wear their prison numbers even when outside. In or out of jail, they spend most of their time contriving schemes to plunder Scrooge McDuck's untold fantasticalities. There is also the "spitfire sorceress" Magica de Spell, who lives on the slope of Vesuvius, and who, seeking to devise a powerful talisman, will stop at nothing to get Scrooge's first dime.

The heroes of most of Barks' tales are not the world's richest duck or his scatterbrained nephew Donald, but Donald's trio of nephews: Huey, Dewey and Louie, members of the Junior Woodchucks of the World. Armed with their *Junior Woodchucks' Guidebook*, that incomparable fount of universal wisdom, the brilliant duckling brothers find answers to questions that leave their elders paralyzed and helpless. It is Huey, Dewey and Louie who, for example, in ancient Colchis, literally pull the wool over the eyes of the sleepless dragon.

What I have called Barks' subversive quality is manifest particularly in the delightful irony that permeates his work. Be-

CARL BARKS in print

Uncle Scrooge (Abbeville Press, 213 pp., \$15) 18 stories in full color; foreword by Barks

Donald Duck (Abbeville Press, 195 pp., \$15) 10 stories in full color; foreword by Barks

neath a naive and taciturn exterior, he is clearly a man of great passion and deep integrity. Subtly and serenely, he kicks the ground out from under numerous retrograde cultural assumptions. He has the highest regard for primordial innocence, and distrusts the enemies of that innocence. The story of Scrooge's sojourn in the faraway valley of Tra-la-la is a devastating attack on money. In the tale of the "Seven Cities," the hidden splendor is destroyed through greed. "The Land of the Pygmy Indians" (featuring a lost tribe who speak in iambic pentameter, like Hiawatha) is a poignant denunciation of capitalist rapacity. Steeped in history and mythic lore, and scorning empty didacticism, Barks inspires a thirst for knowledge in keeping with Hegel's prin-

ciple: "the hand that inflicts the wound is also the hand that heals it."

Because of his obsession with voyages of *seekers*, his preference for symbolic discourse, and his ambiguous irony, Barks could be regarded as the Herman Melville of comics. Unquestionably, as the art of graphic storytelling develops, he will be recognized as one of those who did most to advance it. He has given the comic strip power to express things considered inexpressible before him. Perhaps the time is not far off when people will speak of Melville as the Carl Barks of literature.

For those of us who grew up in the 1950s, Barks' work was a life-saving oasis. It was his work that first made us aware of the extent to which comics could express our deepest aspirations.

This much is sure: Without comics, surrealism would be very different from what it is in the U.S. today. Those who wish to know the *specifically American* sources of surrealism here and now could hardly do better than to study the comics — especially of the '40s and '50s — and above all the works of the tireless chronicler of the doings in Duckburg.

Franklin ROSEMONT



George CARLSON: 1001 Riddles

COMICS vs. "POP ART"

One must never have read a single comic strip, in one's whole existence, to find the slightest interest in a painting by Roy Lichtenstein which reproduces a gigantically enlarged frame from a sentimental comic such as *The Heart of Juliet Jones*, or from the militarist sort such as *Ranger Comics*. Nonetheless, the snob collectors who spend millions so that their Chiricos and their Pollocks can face these "denatured" images (they consider them "denatured" because they have been enlarged) will continue to look down on the comic strips; they are happy to find, in the

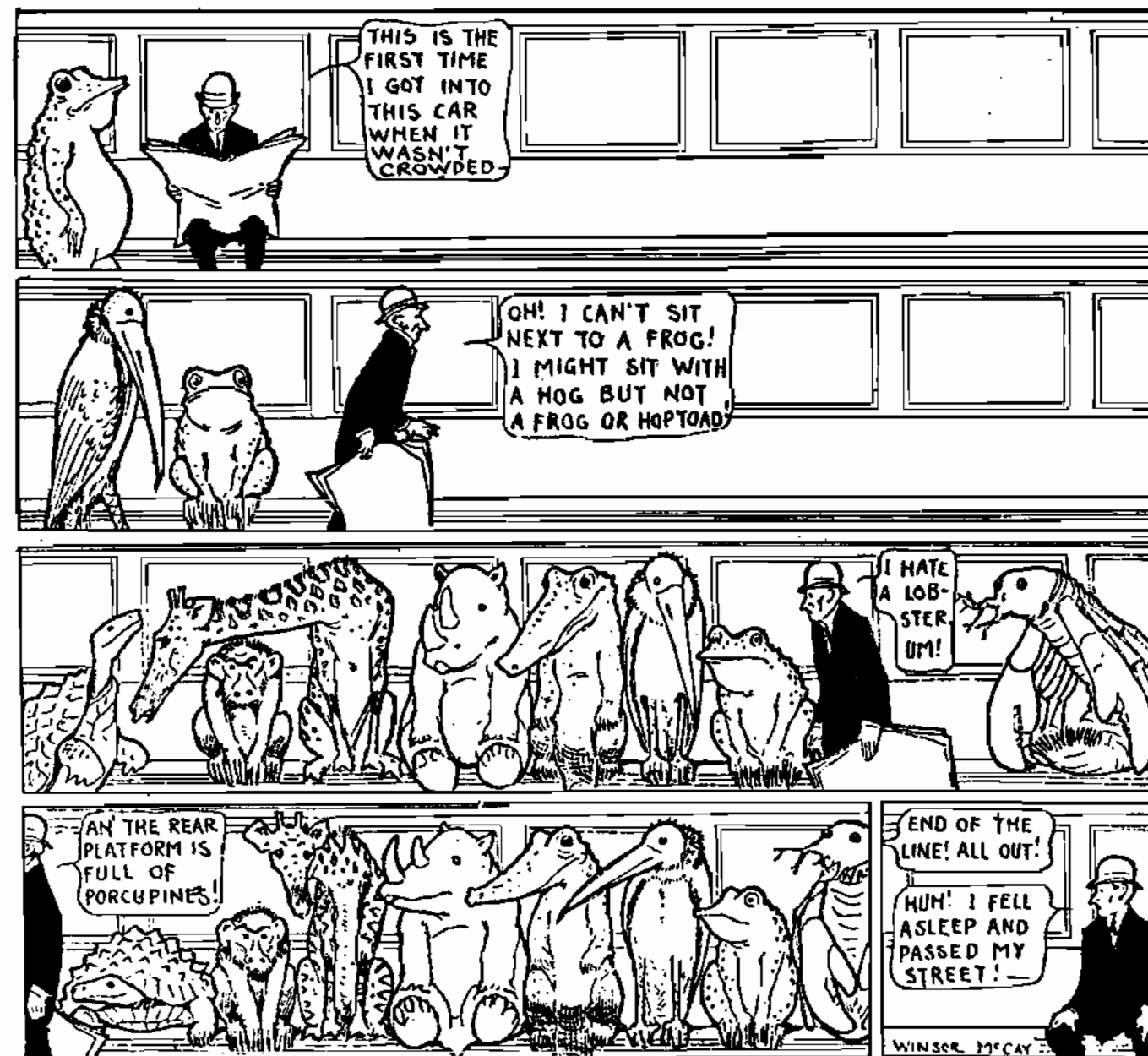
work of this latest scoundrel, whom they exalt, some insignificant detail from the most stupid of all strips, with which to cover their immaculate walls.

We are told that Lichtenstein "has raised the comic strip to the level of painting." But I would reply — only to the level of the worst painting: that of the stereotype, imitation, blundering and sterile repetition. . . . [In Lichtenstein's work] we see only the weakest examples of comics, the most insipid and retrograde: because those are the ones he prefers. If one were to reduce his paintings to

the size of the frames of the comics he copies, one would see that his work never equals the latter, either in force or in efficacy. Confront his paintings with any frame by George Herriman, Hal Foster, Alex Raymond or Lee Falk: you will see that the ugliness of his work in comparison, far from incriminating the comics as a genre, condemns only the choice Lichtenstein has made of them, in his baseness and esthetic totalitarianism.

Robert BENAYOUN

Le Ballon dans le bande dessinée
Paris, André Balland, 1968



Winsor McCAY: Dream Days

WINSOR McCAY: ONEIRIC PHILOSOPHER

It staggers the mind to realize that thousands, many thousands, of Winsor McCay's sublime dream drawings lie in the moldering files of old newspapers, while the most ludicrous and pretentious "Art" dominates the walls of American museums. How tragic, and how stupid, that American Culture pays off its dreariest esthetes and buries the true architects of the mass culture *soul*.

But there is a logic to this. McCay has been largely ignored because his mode of drawing and his message are universally translatable, insensible in any non-popular context. Born in the late 1880s, he began drawing for a Cincinnati newspaper in 1903

and was quickly recruited to New York City where he spent a frenetic career till his death in 1934. Painstaking craftsman, delirious artist and film animator, he has remained perhaps the greatest cartoon artist of them all.

To date, the most impressive effort at reprinting McCay — and the only one with color plates — is the Nostalgia Press Edition of *Little Nemo*, priced well beyond the means of the ordinary reader. *Dreams of a Rarebit Fiend* (Dover, 1973) offers a delightful selection from another McCay series. Most recently, *Dream Days* (Hyperion, 1978) puts together a fascinating sampler of oneiric creations spanning the

decade 1904-14, ably introduced by Bill Blackbeard and Woody Gilman.

McCay combines the most mundane details of daily life with the most far reaching possibilities of the mind. His characters and scenes do not merely help us momentarily to escape a humdrum existence — a service they no doubt performed for the chief audience of the early comic pages, the blue-collar urban mass; as McCay himself might have guessed, they also *foretell the future*. When our revolutionary reverie becomes the human pattern, we will all *live* in a McCay world.

Paul BUHLE



POETRY IN THE COMICS:

WALT KELLY'S CHURCHY LA FEMME SONGS

Some of the best American poetry of recent years is the work of a turtle who lives in the Okefenokee Swamp.

The lyrics of Churchy La Femme — Churchy to his friends — have never appeared in elitist "magazines of verse." Blithely unconcerned with Literature, our troubadour turtle sang his songs for years in the daily newspapers, as an integral part of Walt Kelly's justly renowned comic strip, *Pogo*.

Each character in *Pogo*, as in every comic strip (and in real life, too, for that matter), has its own very special, personal qualities: Dr. Howland Owl, the mad scientist; Porky the cynical but sentimental porcupine; Beauregard the nostalgic dog; Albert the Alligator, lovable braggart and would-be playboy who is always hungry and will eat anything; and Pogo Possum himself, the calm, quiet Voice of Reason, always willing to lend a hand, and always taken advantage of by all and sundry.

Churchy is the Okefenokee's poet. Unlike most turtles, he is neither slow-moving nor dull-witted. On the contrary, he is fleet and graceful as a dancer, with an intelligence that always sparkles even if it does, often, go far afield. Everything about him helps characterize him as an *inspired dreamer*. He is a pirate, but very gentle. He is one of the most gifted clowns in comics. Sometimes he pretends to be a beautiful young girl. He is obsessively afraid of Friday the 13th, especially when it falls on Monday. He is an ardent partisan of calendar reform, seeking to prolong the month of October to a full year, so that New Year's, for example, would fall on October the 96th.

Often we see him playing a musical instrument. And at any moment he is likely to break into song.

His songs are based on well-known songs, but are not exactly parodies. They are

extravagant plays on words, following a kind of phonetic equivalent of the "paranoiac-critical" method, by which any given image can be indefinitely multiplied. "Carry Me Back to Old Virginny" thus becomes "Caramel Bag Twofold

McGinty." Churchy's version of "My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean" goes like this:

*Ma Bunny lice soda devotion!
May booney life-saver D.C.!
McBoniface River Commotum,
Oh, brickbat Mahoney Toomey!*

His "Home on the Range" has this chorus:

*Whom, how many rage,
Weary beer in the cantaloupe age?*

Here is another old favorite, thoroughly revised:

*Oh, pick a pack of peach pits,
Packets full of pie,
Foreign twenty blackboards
Raked until they cry.*

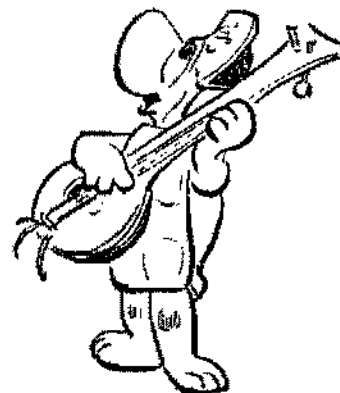
*Winnipeg was open,
The burst again to sing,
Oh, worse than that a Danish ditch
Was two-by-four the king!*

The utterest nonsense? Of course! Nonsense has long been one of poetry's chief hideouts, relatively safe from academic meddling. And the comics, so derided by those afflicted with the *esprit de sérieux*, remains one of the chief outposts for nonsense.

As Gelett Burgess mourned, there is far too little "sheer, premeditated absurdity" in our world. Nonsense allows the mind to wander in delight. It helps us recover equilibrium in an insanely over-rationalized society.

Walt Kelly's *Pogo* is one of the great works of nonsense. In Churchy La Femme's songs we have an imagination running amok to the point of magnificence. What more could we ask for?

Penelope ROSEMONT



NO RHYME FOR REASON!

In the Okefenokee Swamp an absurd poetry contest is staged between an earthworm and an alligator; a self-taught crow does not know how to moo; a dog takes himself for a cuckoo. Genus and species yield wholly to a carousel of errors and defiance, formally contradicting Buffon at every turn.

Such is the climate of *Pogo*, written and drawn by Walt Kelly, one of the rare comic strips to win the recognition of being published in book form. Edward Lear, whose spirit pervades the series from beginning to end (preoccupied as he was, long before Magritte, by the relation of word and image), would certainly have appreciated such manifestations as these, further enhanced by a graphic sense worthy of the best nonsensical doodlers.

Robert BENAYOUN

Médium/Informations Surrealistes
No. 8, June 1953

The Eye's Shadow

SURREALISM & BLACK MUSIC

Like a Thief in the Night — By Way of an Introduction

"Every notion of black is too feeble to express the long waiting of black as it glows brilliantly."

— Cesar Moro

When the sun sinks its teeth into the red horizon, the black flag of night unhurries its shimmering colors over a landscape whose shadows are the molten lovebeds of a thousand chimeras, all attired in suits made of liana keyholes, exuding a scent which invites temptation, like the echo of a deathcry, bitten on the wing, and which pierces the honeydew serenity of the African jungle's "fore day chorus." This night landscape, open like a map of flaming tongues, now discloses itself to be the arena *par excellence* of magnetic embraces, the embraces within embraces of those who, with no exceptions, dare to risk their lives in the hope of perceiving, if only for a fleeting blue moment, "the light that will cease to fail." And at the heart of this landscape, with his feet firmly on the ground and his eyes anchored in the orbit of the heavens, is the shadow through the looking glass — like a thief in the night, *The Black Man*.

It is also this night, this hotbed of seething possibilities — this permanent rendezvous of repressed desires, where the wildest vicissitudes of our everyday life are acted out — where surrealism, from the start, set its sights, and where it recorded its first resounding victories on the seismograph of poetic vengeance. With its experiments in hypnotic and trance states, the recording of dreams, the practice of automatic writing, the exploration of objective chance — that is, with a sensibility acutely attuned to the farthest reaches of human destiny — it could not be long before surrealism, armed with such a marvelous arsenal, should make contact, in accordance with Fourier's theory of passionate attraction, with the life (and its mythopoetic expression) of the African peoples and their descendants, whose lives are characterized by a keen receptivity to, and fear of, the unknown, and whose mythology develops under the aegis of imaginative modes of apprehension, in contrast to the restrictions of logical modes plaguing the Western world.

References to black music by the early surrealists, as noted in derogatory tones by bourgeois hack critics, were indeed few, mainly surfacing in poetic texts and the like. But even these preliminary reverberations were extremely provocative — articulating, in the boldest terms, a *correspondence* still in the process of becoming, and even tacitly suggesting a disquieting influence of black music on surrealism from the very beginning. The hue and cry raised by critics over the early surrealists' attitude toward music was no doubt mainly due to the surrealists' refusal to reduce their interrogation of music (or of anything, for that matter!) to a mere voicing of esthetic affection.

"Not interested in music," said Giorgio de Chirico.

"The most confusing of all forms," wrote Breton on musical expression in *Surrealism and Painting*.

But most important, for surrealists, what is at stake (and this applied as much then as it does now) is not merely the elaboration of an esthetic attitude peculiar to music but also the elaboration of a revolutionary poetic conception of life. Asserting the primacy of imaginative modes of apprehension over the fixed forms of logic, and the primacy of inspiration over memory, this conception of life, in the eyes of surrealists, has been audaciously confirmed by the whole spectrum of black sensibility — from the body tattoos of the Nuba to the paintings of Wifredo Lam, from Yoruba trickster tales to the poetry of Aimé Césaire, from the "underground railroad" to the Moroccan War, from Haitian voodoo chants to the music of Thelonious Sphere Monk.

As expressed in the liner notes to the album *Fanfare for the Warriors* by the Art Ensemble of Chicago, "TRUTH SAYS: No culture or community of people has provided as much latitude for creativity and uplifted as many other cultures as the African experience and input into the field of so-called Art. Those contributions were not only original, rich and innovative but have continued through the ages to serve as a spiritual barometer of things to come! An indisputable fact of here, there and after..." The object of the following discussion is to synthesize the evidence, rational and otherwise, of this intervention of the black sensibility in the evolution of poetic

thought, and also to suggest certain reciprocal communications.

Music Is Dangerous

Paul Nougé, the leading theorist of the surrealist movement in Belgium, delivered in 1929 a lecture which was published in English under the title *Music Is Dangerous*. Beginning his essay with an elaboration of the different reasons advanced for a person's affection for music, he continued by discussing the relative roles of auditor and performer at musical performances, insisting that we suffer under a gross illusion if we believe that "in the presence of music, we retain our full independence while in the role of witness or spectator," and further that "we are not long in realizing that actually we are not judging something, but *taking part in something*." The jazz musician Leo Smith affirmed this position, stating that "a piece of improvisation is done, and after it's done there's nothing to be said about it because it affects your life whether you like it or not."

Whether you like it or not! And how many people recoil at the black musician's bold articulation of the drama of freedom, merely — or should I say especially? — because their ears have been reduced to nothing, pierced as they are each morning by the shrill cry of the alarm clock, signaling the end to the freedom of dreams, in which their very wishes are fulfilled; summoned to a daily grave where even the vestige of a memory of this momentary gratification of their desires is denied them? The black drummer Milford Graves, perhaps the most outspoken commentator on the relationship of music to the public, once said, "There's a different rhythm of the self that a lot of people are not aware of," and it is this rhythm, a rhythm conceived as a violent antithesis to the miserable noise of our existence, which assures us that each of our encounters with music is, despite appearances, a serious adventure" (Nougé).

Another surrealist, Franklin Rosemont, has suggested that "the entire evolution of jazz from the 1920s to the present reads like a line-by-line response to the challenge advanced by... Nougé," stressing Nougé's argument that the prosperity of music and musicians depends on "a deliberate will to act upon the world." Certainly one of the most outstanding characteristics of jazz, especially since bebop, has been its elaboration of protest, its impassioned resistance to all forms of repression. As Max Roach put it, "the artist must reflect the tempo of his times, he must try and bring about changes where possible." And this is only the beginning!

"We cannot escape music"

Nougé also proposed that "the feelings provoked by music" could produce "the most surprising effects — sometimes utterly unexpected by those responsible for them." In December of 1929 the fantastic writer H.P. Lovecraft said in a letter to J.F. Morton: "You cannot tell me that an



Victor BRAUNER:
Portrait of Thelonious Monk
(1948)

Aeolian harp plays anything but jazzy blues. . . . This line, surprisingly similar in content to Breton's phrase, "the mysterious wind of jazz," invoked in his *Introduction to the Discourse on the Paucity of Reality* (1924) as well as the phrase by Nadja, "the blue and the wind; the blue wind," would seem to have come, as they say, out of the blue, if it were not for certain suggestive, albeit farfetched, evidence.

During the summer of 1926 Duke Ellington and his band, with the addition of Sydney Bechet, were playing regularly in New England. In his memoirs, *Music Is My Mistress*, Ellington recalls the peculiar quality of the music played at the time. "Call was very important in that kind of music. Today, the music has grown up and become quite scholastic, but this was *au naturel*, close to the primitive, where people send messages in what they play, calling somebody. . . ." This elucidation of the dynamics of the mental processes conditioning the music played then veritably seethes with hidden implications when one considers that it was also "around New England" in 1926 that Lovecraft wrote *The Call of Cthulhu*. Frank Belknap Long, a friend of Lovecraft and a writer in his circle, wrote a story set in the distant future, featuring a character who takes great pride in his collection of antique Duke Ellington records.

The Blue and the Wind

"I can tell the wind is rising,
leaves trembling on the trees."

— Robert Johnson

Already when H.P. Lovecraft had invoked their presence in 1929, these "jazzy blues," carried on the wind, were reaching storm dimensions among the black working class in the rural regions in the South and later in the urban ghettos of the North. Unknowingly fulfilling the challenge posed by Nougé for a form of musical expression established "according to the measure furnished by the feelings, desires and intentions of those who depend on musical means to act on the world," the blues, as the poetic voice of a people particularly victimized by the whole gamut of the repressive forces of bourgeois/christian civilization, set its sights, at its very beginning, on that point in the mind "at which life and death, the real and the imagined, past and future, the communicable and the incommunicable, high and low, cease to be perceived as contradictions" (Breton).

Relying on a mode of apprehension relatively free from repressive restrictions that act like a brake on the free play of the imagination, the blues singers passionately harvest the arena where these crippling contradictions define the extreme precariousness of man's individual and social existence, revealing to the light of day mental products usually relegated to the shadowy depths of the night, and doing so without hesitation or plagued by pangs of guilt. "Whoever worships the accomplished fact is incapable of preparing the future," wrote Leon Trotsky. And it is precisely because of its remarkable candor when it comes to communicating the incommunicable, to focusing on the terrifying vistas of the unknown, that the blues, in revealing something of man's original grandeur by exposing from the very heart of the night the limitless capacities of the mind, becomes an impassioned critique of miserabilism (the latest

historical stage reached in this epoch of the decline of capitalism) in all its forms, and thus the preparation for a future vastly more livable. As an oft-sung lyric states: "The sun's gonna shine in my back door some day; the wind's gonna rise, blow my blues away."

References to blues by the early surrealists in Paris are virtually nonexistent (because of their indifference to music, and also because jazz is sung in the English language). But just as jazz is "the continuation of blues by other means" (F. Rosemont), so the blues weaves an elegant web of erotic glances and disquieting encounters through a veritable orgy of poetic corners.

There is the possible — highly probable — blues influence on the works of Marcel Duchamp at the time of his momentous and key work, the large glass, *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*. This is poignantly suggested by one of the constituent elements of this piece, *The Chocolate Grinder* (descendant of the "Coffee Mill" of 1911). Duchamp wrote in his notes to the glass, "The Bachelor grinds his chocolate himself" — i.e. *grinding something black*, an expression which in French (*broie du noir*) signifies *having the blues*. Particularly in view of the erotic implications of this key work by Duchamp, the analogy retains a certain desperate pertinence when one recalls all the coffee grinding and broken-down mills in pre-war blues.

"I can't get no grinding,
tell me what's the matter with the mill."
— Memphis Minnie ("Can't Get No Grinding")

There are also suggestions that we could possibly see much more in Pablo Picasso's *blue period* than we first suspected. Aside from the fact that a painting from this period, "The Guitar Player," was used (by chance?) as the cover illustration to the anthology album, *The Blues in Modern Jazz* (which, for the record, included works such as Thelonius Monk's "Blue Monk" and Charlie Mingus's "Haitian Fight Song"), we also have it noted that Picasso considered blues to be the most brilliant discovery, along with Polish vodka, in the 20th century — this from the man who was among the first to introduce African artistic expression to the European art world, and which he himself acknowledged as an ongoing influence in his own artistic evolution.

The Devil's Son-in-Law

"Thank you, thank you, honey!
I got three shaves tonight; we gonna have
some fun until five o'clock and heck if the po-
lice are gonna stop us. 'Cause I don't care."
— Hound Dog Taylor

Understandably, it was only with the formation of an indigenous surrealist movement in the United States in 1966 that the full implications of the blues as an autonomous poetic current would be realized. As Franklin Rosemont wrote in *Surrealist Insurrection*, in 1968, "Surrealism will demonstrate why the blues singers Robert Johnson and Peetie Wheatstraw are greater poets than T.S. Eliot or Robert Frost or Karl Shapiro or Allen Ginsberg. . . ." One can add, without any trace of false modesty, that surrealism has proved this point beyond question. Paul Garon, who is the most meticulous chronicler and defender of blues as poetry of revolt, and whose adherence to the surrealist movement was large-

ly influenced by his profound awareness of all that blues comprehends and implies, has devoted a detailed study to the subject of *Blues and the Poetic Spirit*. Combining psychoanalytic methodology with a surrealist critique, the book surveys the whole gamut of creative activity as it appears in the blues. His discussion is organized around the themes: Eros, Aggression, Humor, Travel, Alcohol and Drugs, Male Supremacy, Liberation of Women, Night, Animals, Work, the Police and the Church, Crime, Magic.

The author, himself, of violently humorous, humorously violent and violently erotic automatic texts, Garon has been able to appreciate the poetic qualities of the blues *from the inside*, as it were, permitting his critique to be substantiated by an understanding of his own internal evidence. Since the book is readily available (1), there is no need to discuss it at length here, within the limited capacities of this article, and so I shall content myself with quoting its concluding paragraph: "The blues, like the dream, continues to retain its rights — even if its future is uncertain. We can see in it an appeal to close the shutters on a withered concept of virtue and a harsh and oppressive civilization; we see in it a demand for non-repression, elaborated by the images of a capacity for fantasy that has not been crushed. We see in it one of the few modern American poetic voices through which humanity has fiercely fought for, and managed to regain, a semblance of its true dignity."

At the Rendezvous of Friends

The surrealists in Chicago also edited a supplement to the magazine *Living Blues* (Jan/Feb 1976) in which the blues is presented in its true revolutionary colors — the kaleidoscopic colors of an electric storm inside a lighthouse. The subject is approached from many different angles: as a revolutionary poetic tradition ("The outstanding characteristics of blues lyrics — materialism, eroticism, humor, atheism, a passion for freedom, a sense of adventure, an alertness to the Marvelous — are the outstanding characteristics of the works of the great Elizabethan poets, of the great Romantics, of all poets worth their salt"); its relation to jazz ("Jazz always has been the continuation of blues by other means"); its attitude toward eros, particularly its tendency to sexualize the role of machines ("For blues-singers and surrealists, machinery, like everything else, exists to be used poetically for the realization of desire"); as a music of despair ("A music of despair, but not of self-pity; a music of sadness, but not of masochism; a music of night, but not of day"); in the light of millenarianism ("the black blues tradition vibrates to the same liberating currents as the Brethren of the Free Spirit"), etc.

In a statement introducing the supplement, the surrealists' attitude toward blues is expressed definitively: "In regard to the blues . . . we cannot accept its restriction to the category of 'entertainment,' or even music. We find blues to be, rather, a magnificent dream implying the total transformation of reality — an ardent appeal for a new life from the other side of all travestied hopes."

The Mysterious Wind of Jazz, or The Blood of the Air

"A new myth?"

— André Breton

Early in the 1940s August Derleth, friend and collaborator of H.P. Lovecraft, wrote "Beyond

the Threshold," a rigorously suggestive tale, written as a contribution to the "Cthulhu Mythos." This open-ended mythology is based on the belief "that this world was inhabited at one time by another race who, in practicing black magic, lost their foothold and were expelled, yet live on outside, ever ready to take possession of this earth again" (Lovecraft). Derleth's tale chronicles an episode with the terrifying Ithaqua, the Wind-Walker. The coming of this Ancient One was heralded by the sound of the wind roaring and thundering, but without any movement, or physical disturbance, in the air whatsoever. "The wind's sound was now a terrible, demonic howling, and it was accompanied by notes of music, which must have been audible for some time but were so perfectly blended with the wind's voice that I was not at first aware of them. The music was similar to that which had gone before, as of pipes and occasionally strangled instruments, but was now much wilder, sounding with a terrifying abandon, with a character of unmentionable evil about it."

In the eye of this *fantasy*, one is faced with a holocaust of associations farfetched but wildly humorous. What dark shadows in the wall mirrors of unsung abysses, where the external weeds the temporal, where the latent weeds the manifest, could have influenced, so decisively, the hand of Derleth as he recorded the terrifying spectacle, borne on the wind, which was being acted out in his mind's eye? One may well ask, for early in the 1940s — 1941 to be exact — the Jay McShann Orchestra entered the Decca recording studios in Dallas, Texas, where six sides were recorded, introducing a black alto saxophonist, whose playing was characterized by a wild exuberance, a "terrifying abandon" ("If you come in loose, you'll get ideas and play good notes. If you act just a little foolish, good ideas will come to you") and an aggressively destructive approach (implicitly and explicitly *evil*) to the restrictions imposed on sound by traditional European modes of composition, and whose adopted nickname is suggestive enough to situate him perfectly as the gleaming receptacle of a poetic sensibility — extremely far-reaching — which was very much "in

the air" at the time. Like a rainbow with wings of mica: Charlie "Bird" Parker. (2)

Franklin Rosemont, who has done more than any other surrealist to turn back the tide of critical miscomprehension under which black music has suffered since it first let loose its fiery message on the ears of the world, succinctly discussed the implications of Parker's intervention in his essay "Black Music and the Surrealist Revolution" (1976): "Impossible to re-enter, as it were, the 'process' by which the original revelations of Charlie Parker and his collaborators were set loose on the world. But one thing at least is beyond dispute: the boppers effected a remarkably explosive, lyrical crystallization of revolutionary sentiments shared to a great degree by the black proletariat as a whole. . . . Charlie Parker's achievements in music are on the same plane as Rimbaud's in poetry, or Picasso's in painting, with this difference: Bird, unlike Rimbaud and Picasso, did not allow the last years of his life to detract from his earlier grandeur. . . . The substance of Parker's courage and lucidity permits us to define the quest of bop as a heroic and victorious effort to expand the field of improvisation — that is, to expand the prerogatives of imagination over memory's fixed forms."

Things, as they say, have never been the same since.

Silence is Golden

Soon to follow the audacious example of Charlie Parker were such black geniuses as Thelonius Monk, Dizzy Gillespie, Bud Powell, Charles Mingus and others, consolidating the advances made by Parker in the area of improvisation and creating a volatile atmosphere of collective experimentation, producing a majestic river of fertile discoveries. At the same time that these new developments were creating a storm in the musical atmosphere, Breton, in exile in the U.S. owing to the Second World War, wrote an article, originally published in the American magazine *Modern Music*, entitled "Silence is Golden," in which, for the first time, he tackled in detail the problem posed by "that most confusing of all forms" — musical expression. This essay

has been of pivotal importance to the whole future generation of surrealists, greatly influencing the evolution of the movement, particularly its intrusion into the domain of black music.

Acknowledging his own indifference to music, Breton recalled the selfsame prevailing attitude among most of the poets, worthy of the name, of the 19th century. He continued: "In spite of my diametrically opposed attitudes toward poetry and music, due to my individual make-up, I have not renounced all objective judgement concerning them. Should I hold to the hierarchy proposed by Hegel, music, by virtue of its ability to express ideas and emotions, would come immediately after poetry and would precede the plastic arts. But above all I am convinced that the antagonism that exists between poetry and music (apparently affecting poets much more than it does musicians), and which for some ears seems to have now reached its height, should not be fruitlessly deplored but, on the contrary, should be interpreted as an indication of the necessity for a recasting of certain principles of the two arts."

Returning to one of his "favorite themes" Breton again expressed the need, on the plastic plane, to overcome the antinomy between physical representation and mental representation, further projecting these feelings onto the auditive plane. "The painter will fail in his human mission if he continues to widen the gulf separating representation and perception instead of working toward their reconciliation, their synthesis. In the same way, on the auditive plane, I believe that music and poetry have everything to lose by not recognizing a common origin and a common end in song: . . . Poet and musician will degenerate if they persist in acting as though these two forces were never to be brought together again." Further, Breton insists that "now only the most radical methods could hope for success," affirming "that we must determine to unify, reunify hearing to the same degree that we must determine to unify, reunify sight." Suggesting that the synthesis of music and poetry "could only be accomplished at a very high emotional temperature," Breton states that "it is in the ex-



IT'S NOTHING

It's nothing
this tragedy in our arms
we can invent new bones
new flesh
new flowers against madness
another red dress
another apple jack
another mug from
the neck bend of our conflict
yes
we can tolerate a still heart
against our ears and
relax with the trusted
confessions of a blood cake
it's nothing

Jayne CORTEZ

(from Scarifications, 1973)

pression of the passion of love that both music and poetry are most likely to reach this supreme point of incandescence."

The Blue Wind

After the publication of this essay and the return to Paris of many of the surrealists from their wartime exile in the United States, the number of references to black music, direct and indirect, increases markedly. This was coupled with an increased predilection for the culture and lives of so-called primitive peoples, greatly influenced by the firsthand contact many of the exiled surrealists experienced with them; for example, Breton's visit to Haiti and Martinique. Breton also made a point of attending jazz performances while in New York. The surrealist painter, Roberto Matta, introduced the younger adherents of the surrealist movement to the bop recordings of Parker, Monk, Powell, Gillespie and others, all of which were received with the utmost enthusiasm. The veteran surrealist painter Victor Brauner did an exalted symbolic portrait of Thelonius Monk. Several poetic works by surrealists, notably Claude Tarnaud and Gérard Legrand, were inspired by and/or dedicated to jazz musicians. Legrand also wrote a book entitled *Powers of Jazz (Puissances du Jazz, 1953)*.

Despite this evident affection and admiration for the accomplishments of the black warriors of the new sensibility, these two currents — surrealism and black music — remained pretty much mutually exclusive, in keeping with the stage of development reached by both parties. This would remain so until vital new discoveries in both fields reached the light of day. I am speaking here of the birth of the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians in Chicago in 1965, followed a year later, with the publication of the tract *The Forecast Is Hot!*, by the formation of the original nucleus of the surrealist movement in the U.S., likewise centered in Chicago — the Windy City.

Judging from the preoccupation with atmospheric disturbances in the preceding discussion, the title of the U.S. surrealist's first tract and the nickname of Chicago certainly appear in a new light — a light which exudes from the uncanny solitude in the eye of a crystal ball, endlessly and indefatigably exploring the possibilities of a desirable future of desire supreme — a veritable weather forecast of the Pleasure Principle. This portent of what was to come, this wholesale trust in the future, was admirably expressed by trumpeter Leo Smith: "I only play when there is an opportunity for you to really explore yourself, when each occasion would bring to those people and myself a complete challenge. And when I say 'challenge,' I don't mean some reference in the back past, but like challenge right now, where we're at right now — because it is the future."

The surrealists in the U.S. have from the very beginning stressed the vitality and importance of the black musical evidence, and its growing influence on the evolution of the movement is reaffirmed at every turn of its thought. Penelope Rosemont, in an article published in *Arsenal/Surrealist Subversion* No. 2, in 1973, in which she explores the "absolutely modern" implications of totemism — a discussion situated in the revelations set loose by the majestic destiny of objective chance — wrote of her fortunate discovery of "the enchanting music, dance and myths around which Sun Ra has created his own cosmology, combining ancient Egypt and outer space." And it was also while plumbing the

depths of the labyrinth of broken mirrors through which the unforeseen draws a revolver, point-blank, between our eyes, that jazz was first assigned its proper and exalted place among the major poetic advances of our century. Franklin Rosemont, in his treatise *The New Argonautica* (3), by breaking with a whole tradition of white commentators of jazz, whose critical meanderings only served to betray their own impotence when faced by the somnambulist's onslaught of the waking dreamers of jazz, was the first to situate black music under the triple cause of love, poetry and freedom: "Jazz may be regarded, in fact, as an independent manifestation and reinforcement of that specific all-pervasive climate of readiness for the actualization of the marvelous that defines the revolutionary poetic spirit today . . . The poetic cause today would be defeated at the very onset if it failed to recognize in jazz a fraternal movement, a powerful ally, above all a complementary adventure. One must admit at the very least that jazz has covered inestimable ground entirely on its own and that its most ardent adepts show every sign of their willingness to go all the way." And further, "Let us proclaim . . . that the quest to remove the obstacles to the free development of the imagination . . . is advanced inexorably not only by a long



Robert GREEN: Hammer & Rhino (1978)

and continuing revolutionary current of poetry and painting . . . but also by the long and continuing revolutionary current of jazz . . . The torches with which we proceed into the abyss of the unknown may vary, but they are lighted from a single flame."

This will seem capricious only to those suffering from an incurable myopia, those who cannot see the forest for the trees. The fact is the question of the hierarchy of artistic expression formulated by Hegel — where music comes after poetry, "the universal art," but before the plastic arts — is still to be settled. What is beyond doubt is that the most audacious solutions to this problem will come from those who have made of music their means to act on the world. In this regard we look forward to the publication, hopefully in the near future, of a book which promises to discuss methodological concepts of black music: *Mysteries* by Cecil Taylor — a black pianist whose playing evokes the penetrating scream of a midnight chorus of panther eyes, and a writer of poems of an exalting hermetic resonance. As Franklin Rosemont has written elsewhere: "The decisive lessons of Taylor's work seem to me as follows: that the emancipation of what has been known as jazz could be achieved only by rigorously following through the profoundest essence of this music; that salvation

could not be found in any compromise or eclecticism; that the victory of the 'jazz revolution' required absolute fidelity to its own means — namely, the definitive triumph of improvisation, pursued (as it could only be pursued) in conditions of moral asepsis."

An excerpt from Taylor's book which appeared as the liner notes to his album *Air Above Mountains (Buildings Within)* (Inner City 3021) is written in poem form and contains this lucid definition of improvisation from the inside:

"Improvisation is a tool of refinement
an attempt to capture 'dark' instinct
cultivation of the acculturated
to learn one's nature in response to
group (society) first hearing 'beat'
as it exists in each living organism"

This alone would be enough to affirm that not only are surrealists and black musicians speaking the same language, albeit in two distinct forms, but that on the foreseeable horizon Imagination is readying itself for a complete vindication of its rights.

"To Play what one hears
is our objective
Downward and inward
are the forces bent
to live as recognition
of the invisible: spirit"

— Cecil Taylor

Out of the air into the wind, and in 1976 with the publication of *Arsenal/Surrealist Subversion* No. 3 and the presentation of the World Surrealist Exhibition in Chicago, the collaboration of black musicians and surrealists became definitive and beyond question. Not only did *Arsenal* contain the most complete synthesis of the surrealist evidence in support of black music, *Black Music and the Surrealist Revolution* by Franklin Rosemont and an essay on Joseph Jarman by the same author ("All of Jarman's recordings, and above all his live performances, are nothing less than a majestic and fertile revenge of the wisdom of Africa on the unhappy conscience of Europe: which is to say, as well, the triumph of poetic truth over prosaic lies . . .") — this issue of *Arsenal* also included "The Musician," a poem by Cecil Taylor, and the myth-poem "Odawalla" by Jarman. That this collaboration of poets and musicians was actually a portent of the things to come, rather than an isolated instance based on misplaced enthusiasm, is admirably shown by the fact that on an increasing number of recently released jazz albums, poetry by the musicians themselves and by others replaces the usual liner notes — notes usually written by paid white lackeys, which seldom add anything except maybe a gray haze, to the appreciation of what exudes from the shimmering black disc inside the sleeve.

Furthermore, the World Surrealist Exhibition gave the affinities between surrealism and black music an even more burning actuality. In cooperation with *Living Blues* magazine, a special World Surrealist Exhibition Blues Show was organized on June 5, featuring Eddie Shaw and the Wolf Gang as well as Honeyboy Edwards. And on the nights of June 19 and 20, in conjunction with the AACM, the surrealist international presented two performances by the "Sun Song" Ensemble (Gloria Brooks, vocalist; Hank Drake, percussion; Douglas Ewart, reeds; James

Johnson, bassoon; Rrata Christine Jones, dancer; George Lewis, trombone; and Reggie Willis, bass). From the surrealist point of view, this admirably unholy collusion of forces was in a sense a confirmation, reinforcement and extension of many of our wildest hopes, a sure sign that in spite of unceasing efforts on the part of all repressive agencies to "keep the lid on," the revolutionary tempest was gathering momentum and finding its indispensable poetic accomplices

Lighthouse of the Future

Rastafari — ever living, ever faithful, ever sure,
Selassie — I, the First
Yeah, yeah
Rastafari, ever living . . .
RASTAMAN VIBRATION, positive . . .
— Bob Marley

In 1976, in his article "Blues, Dream and the Millennial Vision," Joseph Jablonski wrote: "Characteristically, the great wish that animates a vast body of blues, jazz, as well as the older spirit-involving black music, is the transformation of the world — the Millennium." And it is precisely at this fork in the road of the crisis of human consciousness where the reggae musician "digs in," waging a protracted war against all forms of oppression and alienation — a veritable tropical resort of carnivorous mirrors, ready for anything and everything. "The impossible has a habit of happening," sings the band, Steel Pulse. Reggae, as the poetic voice of the black proletariat of Jamaica, and of the Jamaican working-class migrants in England, can best be viewed from the historical perspective as being the "absolutely modern" defender of the millennial vision.

In the introduction to his book, *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, Norman Cohn summarizes the basic premises of millenarian movements, which are equally applicable as an outline of the reggae musicians' program of action. "Millenarian sects or movements," says Cohn, "always picture salvation as

(a) collective, in the sense that it is to be enjoyed by the faithful as a collectivity;

(b) terrestrial, in the sense that it is to be realized on this earth and not in some other-worldly heaven.

"But if you know what life is worth,
You will look for yours on earth"
— Bob Marley, Peter Tosh

(c) imminent, in the sense that it is to come both soon and suddenly;

"Redemption stands within the scheme of things"
— Bunny Wailer

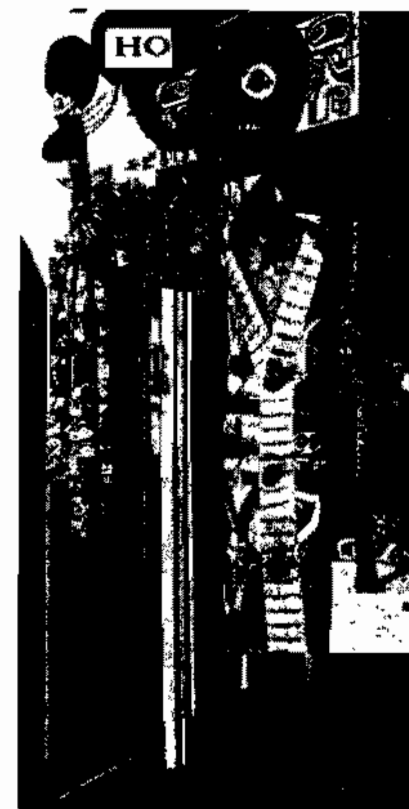
(d) total, in the sense that it is utterly to transform life on earth, so that the new dispensation will be no more improvement on the present but will be perfection itself;

"So long we've been as slaves and no more
will we roam.
So I will hope and pray that the day will come
When we will see the rising sun.
When no more crying, no victimizing,
No more starvation, no more,
No more killing."
— The Mighty Diamonds

(e) *Miraculous*, in the sense that it is to be accomplished by, or with the help of, supernatural agencies.

"Guide us, Jah"

— Matumbi



Georges GRONIER: Waiting For Bird — Homage to Charlie Parker (collage)

Consider the names of the adepts of reggae, and it will become quite clear that the revolution which they are helping to prepare will not be only a reshuffling of property relations; what is in store is a complete vindication of man's innermost desires, a desirable dictatorship of the Pleasure Principle. They call themselves Burning Spear, Tapper Zukie, The Mighty Diamonds, Jah Lloyd — the Black Lion, King Tubby, Prince Hammer, the Abyssinians, Max Romeo and the Upsetters, Bob Marley and the Wailers, Big Youth, and Peter Tosh — self-proclaimed "Minister of Herb!"

The fundamental means adopted by these black alchemists from the "Isle of Springs" to act on the world differ very little from those of their black brothers in the United States — the key similarity being the primacy of automatic modes of apprehension and representation. Says Tapper Zukie: "Bunny Lee . . . give me eight rhythms, six of them was on 'MPLA' album. And he give me one hour in the studio and I use that hour and voice eight rhythms then . . . We line them up on the tape and as one finish I start on the next, and that finish I start on the other one."

The unity of aspirations of the jazz musician and the reggae musician, suffused with the tropical snow of a zebra's dream, has long been affirmed by individuals from both sides. Big Youth considers John Coltrane a master musician and

wrote a song about him titled "Jim Squashy" — "John Coltrane died in vain of a Love Supreme." Oliver Lake, on his album *Life Dance of Is*, includes Big Youth in his list of "inspiration/dedication to's," and the album includes a song, "Change One," where the reggae influence is marked, to say the least; throughout the song the guitarist Michael Gregory Jackson continually shouts, "Reggae!" "Reggae power!" Dudu Pukwana, South African jazz saxophonist, played as a session musician on a song by Toots and the Maytals. This will surprise none but pigs and downright cretins. The fact is that what appears as two vastly disparate movements are but two tongues of the same flame, two eyes of the same iceberg. As Paul Nougé has written, "Nevertheless the certitude persists that spirit lives only through an illimitable adventure with movements and perspectives that must be unflaggingly renewed (emphasis added: M.V.); in which the dangers that we discover and, at every moment, threaten to cut short its progress, are also — if we but refuse to bow before them — the surest guarantee of the only victories that can still tempt us. Hence . . . whether we deal with music or some other human event, spirit is at our mercy and we are, in reality, accountable for it."

With the desperation of "hot" merchandise on a flotilla of swordfish, *Black Music* — from the ancient to the future — shuttles its invaluable cargo into the artery of hermetic solutions: the alchemical process by which the base metal of quotidian misery is transformed into the pure gold of eternal freedom.

Philip Lamantia has written: "I continue to lure the wind's eye I am one with the wind. There are no other friends. The avalanche begins."

Today, the mysterious wind of jazz opens its legs onto tomorrow's liberty.

Michael VANDELAAR

NOTES

(1) Originally published in cloth edition only by Eddison Press in London, 1976, *Blues and the Poetic Spirit* has recently appeared in the U.S. as a DaCapo Press paperback.

(2) Perhaps someone in the future will devote a detailed study to the history of the wind as a vehicle for revelation and its ramifications on the poetic consciousness as suggested by a poem by Nancy Joyce Peters, "Seeing and not Seeing," which appears in her monograph, *It's in the Wind* —

So it will begin again, and
eloquent as the lips of a jackknife
the winds will continue divulging
riches of a mad prescience

— implying, as it does, the presence of a continuing tradition concerning the intervention of the wind in the poetic atmosphere.

(3) See the special section devoted to, and edited by, the Surrealist Movement in the United States in the *City Lights Anthology* (City Lights Books, San Francisco, 1974). Reproduced on the cover of this anthology is Victor Brauner's portrait of Thelonius Monk.



Magic & Voodoo in the Blues



According to Geza Roheim (*Animism, Magic and the Divine King*, 1930), "it is by magic that man takes the offensive against the world at large." And in the blues we encounter an insistence on the power of magic in the form of various spells, charms, rituals, etc.

She had a red flannel rag, talking about hoodoo in poor me. (x2)
Well, I believe I'll go to Froggy Bottom so she will let me be.
(Alex Moore, *Goin' Back to Froggy Bottom*)

It must be emphasized that despite a probably common origin magic and religion are fundamentally dissimilar — the differences are especially evident when the religion in question is Catholicism or another form of Christianity. The surrealist Benjamin Péret (*"Magic: The Flesh and Blood of Poetry,"* 1943), in discussing the evolution of myth as well as the evolution of religion from magic, has said, "Innumerable generations have added the diamonds they discovered as well as the dull metal they mistook for gold." For Péret, Christ is the dull metal. He continues: "While it is true that poetry grows in the rich earth of magic, the pestilential miasmas of religion rise from the same ground and poison poetry. . . ." Péret then relates the myths of "great poetic exuberance" of certain tribes to their lack of moral precepts. "On the other hand, more evolved people see their myths lose their poetic brilliance while multiplying their moral restrictions." Alienation and religious morality are the enemies of poetry and desire! Through magic, the rational and the irrational, the subjective and objective become whole again, poetically prefiguring the dialectical resolution of all the dualisms rooted in class society. Poetry is created by the destruction of the barrier that separates the wish from its fulfillment, the dream from waking life. The blues songs of magic and superstition compel our attention through their links with poetic activity. "In the language of magic, different grammatical forms are used because . . . the magic of language was evolved on the basis of the magic of love" (Roheim).

My pistol may snap,
My mojo is frail,
Ah, but I rub my root,
My luck will never fail.
When I rub my root, my John the Conqueror root.
Aww, you know, there ain't nothing she can do, Lord,
I rub my John the Conqueror root.

I was accused of murder,
In the first degree.
The judge's wife cried,
'Let the man go free.'
I was rubbing my root, etc.

Oh, I can get in a game,
Don't have a dime.
All I have to do is rub my root,

I win every time.
When I rub my root, etc.

(Muddy Waters, *My John the Conqueror Root*)

The revelation of the often unconscious meaning of such "lucky objects" (John the Conqueror Root = penis) is but the revelation of desire. Often magic is called on when frustration threatens desire.

I'm going to Louisiana, get me a mojo hand. (x2)
I'm gonna fix my woman so she can't have no other man.
(Lightnin' Hopkins, *Mojo Hand*)

They say it's bad luck when you see a black cat cross the street. (x2)
Ah, the black cat must have slept in my bed, oooh, Lord, the black snake must have crawled across my feet.
(Big Bill Broonzy, *Bad Luck Man*)

Many blues singers were (and in some cases still are) attracted to certain aspects of voodoo and its attendant rituals. This is not the place to attempt a detailed discussion of the complex subject of voodoo. But it is worth noting that it is still widely practiced today: not only in Haiti and throughout the Caribbean but also in the U.S., and not only in New Orleans but even in the black ghettos of the North. Of course it has undergone extensive modification over the years, but even today in Chicago one can still find shops displaying for sale numerous magic powders, potions, talismans — "Attraction Powder," "Uncrossing Powder," "Black Cat Oil," "Hex-Removing Floor-Wash," John the Conqueror Root, etc. — as well as in impressive array of popular dream-books (the *Napoleon Mascot*, the *Three Witches*, etc.) more or less voodoo in origin.

Several scholarly studies of voodoo can be recommended; Paul Oliver (*The Meaning of the Blues*, 1960) has briefly surveyed voodoo traces in the blues. The most stimulating suggestions toward a fundamentally new interpretation of voodoo, however, have come not from traditional anthropologists or scholars but rather from poets and painters, above all the surrealists. André Breton was able to witness voodoo rites in Haiti (a rare privilege for whites); his deep appreciation of their significance was clearly derived from his poetic affinity with the mental processes involved. ** Surrealism, in permitting us to see voodoo in a new light, also enhances our appreciation of yet another aspect of the blues — for, to a far greater extent than anyone has conceded, the blues may be viewed as a vehicle for the expression of voodoo. More specifically, the voodoo trance state, in which the subject is seized by powers "from below," approaches the "pure psychic automatism" of surrealism; and the blues, too, in its improvisatory intensity in the heat of inspiration, also draws on these same powers "from below." In this regard it is inter-

esting to see Michel Leiris (*Manhood*, 1946) remark, in a discussion of jazz in the surrealist milieu in the 1920s — and the same could certainly be said of the blues — that "it functioned magically, and its means of influence can be compared to a kind of possession." Once again we are able to observe the intimate connection — here the link is *entrancement* — between ancient primitive magical traditions, the blues, and the most audacious and revolutionary current of modern poetry and thought.

The evidence of voodoo in the blues is not limited to a certain identity of spiritual values. On the contrary, the lyrics of blues songs reveal a profound and enduring preoccupation with voodoo themes and imagery. Blues singers refer constantly to voodoo, "hoodoo," mojos and all sorts of magical apparatus. It would be futile here to attempt to distinguish between specifically voodoo elements and magical elements derived from other sources; Curtis Jones clears up this confusion:

I call it black magic, some call it plain hoodoo.
(Black Magic Blues)

Black cats, black snakes, black cat bones, all appear frequently in the blues. Yet often our interest is heightened by references which seem more obscure. In the darkest corners of the mind, the shadowy vestiges of totemism flourish. Frogs, for example, are occasionally mentioned in the blues, usually in a most enigmatic fashion.

If I had wings like the bullfrog on the pond.
(Yank Rachel, *T-Bone Steak Blues*)

But the use of the frog in magic is less obscure, and may throw some light on references to frogs in the blues.

* * *



Robert GREEN: ink drawing (1979)

Superstitions may be restrictive of human freedom just as are the dogmas of Christianity. Yet the differences as elucidated by Peret remain inescapable. Superstitions reveal less alienated mental processes and a closer contact with the unconscious. This quality of magic thinking is clarified by an example provided by Freud (*The Psychology of Everyday Life*, 1901). "The Roman who gave up an important undertaking if he saw an ill-omened flight of birds was . . . in a relative sense justified; his behavior was consistent with his premises. But if he withdrew from the undertaking because he had stumbled on the threshold of his door . . . he was also in an absolute sense superior to us unbelievers; he was a better psychologist than we are striving to be. For his stumbling must have revealed to him the existence of a doubt, a counter-current at work within him, whose force might at the moment of execution subtract from the force of his intentions. For we are only sure of complete success if all our mental forces are united in striving toward the desired goal." Of course, the close relationship between magical thinking and the more primary processes succeeds in unearthing the source of powerful and fantastic imagery, which by its nature reintroduces the concept of poetry.

In magic, there is poetry — religion poisons poetry. The surrealists have long argued that one exceedingly crucial task of modern poetic activity is the dechristianization of the world. There is no poetry of religion. There is only poetry of revolt — revolt against the degradation of language; against the repressive forces of the church, the police, the family and the ruling class; against the inhibition of sexuality and aggression; against the general repugnance of everyday life. As we have said, the songs do not always depict liberation, but even when they do not, they invoke an insistence on the instinctual and unconscious, an insistence which is at once revelatory of the poetic process and destructive of the techniques of academic depreciation and dissection. The blues songs reveal indelible traces of humanity's original grandeur, and by comparison, they indict the ludicrous spectacle of modern civilization.

Paul GARON

* Milo Rigaud, *Secrets of Voodoo* (New York, Pocket Books, 1971); Maya Deren, *Divine Horsemen: Voodoo Gods of Haiti* (New York, Dell, 1972); Robert Tallant, *Voodoo in New Orleans* (New York, Macmillan, 1946); and Alfred Metraux, *Voodoo in Haiti* (New York, Schocken, 1972).

** For an introduction to the surrealists' perspective on voodoo, see particularly Breton's essay on the Haitian voodoo painter Hector Hyppolite (in *Surrealism and Painting*); Pierre Mabille's *Le Miror du merveilleux*; the poetry of the Haitian Clément Magloire-Saint-Aude and the Martiniquan Aimé Césaire; as well as the works of the Cuban surrealist painter Wifredo Lam. See also Michel Leiris' essay "On the Use of Catholic Religious Prints by Practitioners of Voodoo in Haiti" (in *Evergreen Review*, No. 13, 1960). For a brilliant discussion of voodoo from the angle of poetic creation see the essay "The Writer and Society" by the Guyanese Wilson Harris, in his *Tradition, the Writer and Society* (London and Port of Spain, New Beacon Publications, 1967).

"Magic & Voodoo in the Blues" is excerpted from
BLUES & THE POETIC SPIRIT
by Paul Garon
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SWING AS SURREALIST MUSIC

Horace Meyer Kallen (1882-1974) was the greatest of William James' followers, the one who most fulfilled the late leftward leanings of his teacher. At James' prompting, he began in the 1910s a correspondence with presurrealist poet/theorist Benjamin Paul Blood, protagonist of the "anesthetic revelation." Blood's last book, *Pluriverse* (1920) had a long introduction by Kallen.

In his two-volume study, *Art and Freedom* (1942), Kallen approached surrealism far more insightfully than did most U.S. Left intellectuals of the time. As the following excerpt makes clear, he perceived surrealism's integral relation to the global crisis of "culture" throughout the modern epoch, and thus was able to recognize the movement's universal implications.

—editors

The musical equivalent of surrealism in painting and literature is not obviously connected with either its theory or practice. It develops as a practice entirely innocent of theory, as a unwitting expression of alogical spontaneity, of irresponsible, personal invention unchanneled by form, unchecked by musical knowledge or learned tradition; develops thus with all the differentiae which the connoisseurs ascribe to surrealist creations. The name for it is *Swing*. Its native habitat is the United States of America, and it is indigenous to the southern portion, especially to the Mississippi riverfront at New Orleans. Unlike its literary and pictorial parallels, which sustain a local life already below the level of subsistence among selected groups of *intelligentsia*, *Swing* has attained a world-wide diffusion among all classes and occupations. The event is natural enough. Verbal form and graphic symbols require interpretation; sheer sonorous rhythm does not. *Swing* is caused in a medium which issues from and speaks to Dr. Freud's Unconscious direct, without disguise, without distortion.

And its emergence parallels the emergence of visual and verbal surrealism. That arrived in a progression from post-impressionism to cubism, from cubism through dada, to surrealism. Throughout the transition there was an urge toward "the primitive," toward the primitive Tahitian, toward the African primitive, toward their works and their ways. In post-impressionism this primitive was external and real, a flag of rebellion and a shape of flight. Cubism, by geometrizing, internalized it, assimilated it to figures of the imagination, to the patterns which feeling designs on space. Surrealism reabsorbed geometry in emotion and reconcentrated emotion into the dark impulses of the Freudian Unconscious. Surrealism gathered the primitive without into the savage within, made them one and endeavored to utter them as one. Concurrently, *Swing* arrived as the latest phase of a progression from Rag-time through Jazz. The trick of heightening emotional tension by opposing one rhythm to another became conspicuous as a practice about the same time that post-impressionism made its start. The matrix of *Swing* is said to have been opposed and mixed body-rhythms of the pasmala as danced in New Orleans bawdy-houses and honky-tonks. The manner of mixing and opposition was carried over from dancing bodies to

sounding musical instruments. Popular songs so treated were said to be "ragged," and the treatment came to be called Rag-time. The singers and dancers and players who devised Rag-time were American Negroes with remnants of an eroding African culture in their body-rhythms, in their social habits and in their personal outlook. They were primitives indigenous to industrial civilization, with its timeclocks, its rigid divisions of the hours of the working day, its patterns of machine-logic and rationality. Negro Rag-time was the beginning of a break from that. In less than a generation the Negro's social heartbreak was absorbed into Ragtime's terpsichorean breakdown and Ragtime transmuted to Jazz. The vehicles of the American Negro's heartbreak is the Spiritual and Jazz, which is said to derive from *jaser*, an Acadian word meaning to gabble, to chatter, is the compenetration of the rag and the spiritual. Body, voice, wind and percussion instruments are its vehicles.

Jazz began to spread through the great industrial cities of the North American continent about the same year that the First International Exhibition of Modern Art began its epoch-making trek across the States. This exhibition, which for the first time brought before the unaccustomed eyes of Americans the works of all the schools and cults that Europe had bred in two generations, had been arranged under the auspices of the Association of American Painters and Sculptors. Ragtime, which might be said to correspond to the cubist phase of the pictorial and verbiform arts, spread to Europe while modernist painting and poetry were acquiring a vogue in America. The four years of the First World War were a plowing of a cultural soil wherein Jazz could take deep roots, and when the War ended it flowered indeed. . . .

The metronomic noises of the railroads and factories, the monotonous roar of the cities demanded their rhythmic compensation. Even

formal music brought them forth. Percussion and wind instruments — brasses, saxophones, trombones, xylophones, bells — became more noticeable in orchestras. To atonality or to polytonality, which dropped modulation, which set key against key and scale against scale, was joined a continuous shift of rhythm or a contrapuntal opposition of many rhythms. In 1893, Dahomey Negroes, beating tom-toms for the entertainment of gaping Americans at Chicago's World Fair, had, by using feet and heads as well as hands, produced a triple cross-rhythm which constituted an unconscious counter-point of rhythms. . . .

Formal professional music, however modern, somehow failed to release the emotions which the industrial workday blockaded and starved. Night, that so long had been the time, not for living, but for sleeping away the fatigues of the living day, became conspicuously the time for living. The existence of the folk of the industrial cities is now a cultural schizophrenia of day-life and night-life. Day is the time when they earn their livings; night is the time when they live their lives. During the day most people are producers, disciplined to the machine, their bodies held to its rhythm, their minds constrained to its motions. By night, they are consumers, their body-rhythm seeks to recover its native physiological patterns, their movements search to resume the human form appropriate to autonomous human function.

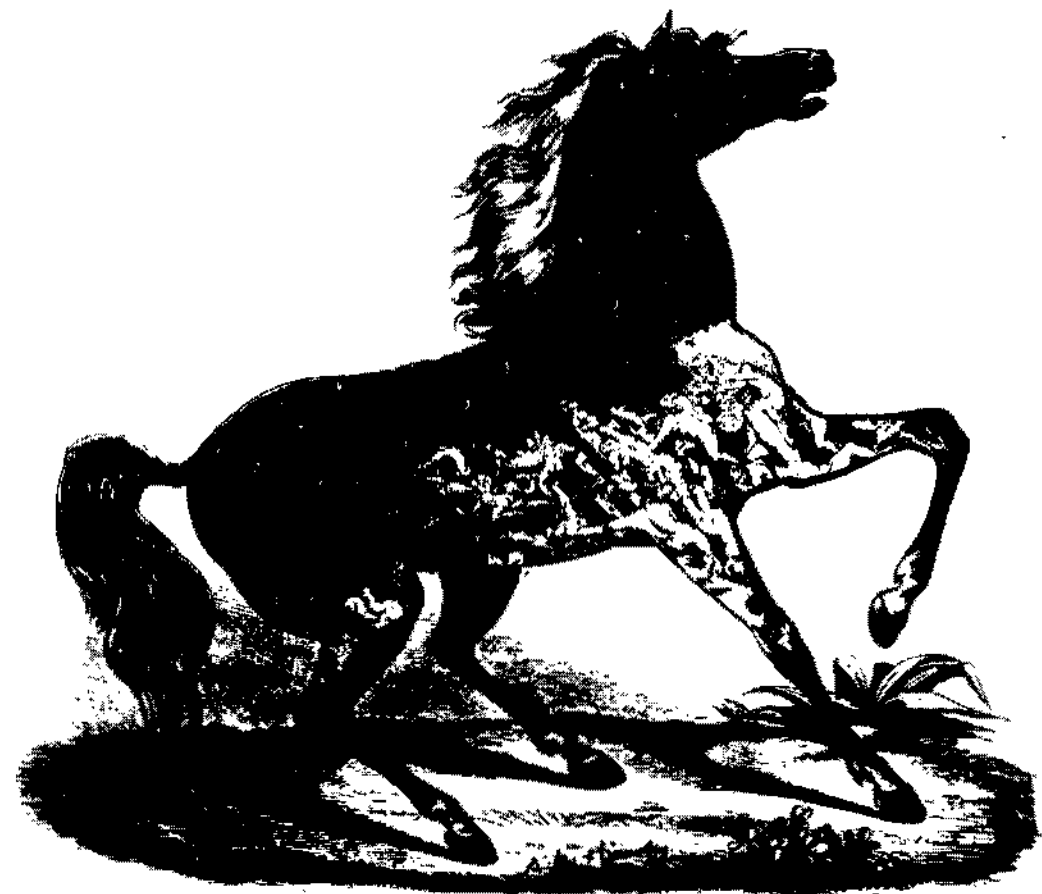
The extraordinary spread and influence of *Swing* testifies that in it the seeking and searching come to a haven; that it owns the power of gratifying the needs which launch them. Also its well-spring is the Negro of the urban jungle in New Orleans; also its centers of power are the great industrial areas — Chicago, New York, London, Berlin, Moscow, Shanghai, Tokyo. Atonal, poly-rhythmic, *Swing* cuts itself loose from every rule and canon that tradition has brought down or craftsmanship confirmed. It asks of the performer two things, a maximum of virtuosity on his instrument, a maximum of spontaneity in his performance. That must needs be sheer, unrestricted improvisation, the free, the anarchic expression of his Unconscious, undisguised and unashamed. Nor is the expression soniform only. His whole body collaborates: as he plays, he dances, he acts, he sings, he leaps and twists and weaves like an acrobat, and the different behaviors pass seamlessly into and out of one another. He becomes the leader, not only of his band, but of his audiences: they step from their seats into the aisles and dance with him in an ecstasy — orgiastic or mystical or both according to the observer's lights — of release and self-recovery. It is the liberation of Dionysos from Apollo, of the living organism from the automatic machine, an resurgence of the depths into a conscious experience without connection and without analogue, though perhaps revivalist religious gatherings do enfold likenesses wherein convert and jitterbug are one under the skin. *Swing* might with good reason be called surrealism *in excelsis*.

Horace Meyer KALLEN

From *Art and Freedom*
(N.Y., Duell, Sloan & Pearce, 1942)



RIBITCH



A.K. El JANABY: collage

POETRY, JAZZ & FREEDOM

More than any critical reflection, it is the phenomenon of *jazz* — quite considerable for us — that has enabled us to realize the historic character of style and content in a work and even, at its limits, to grant them only (so to speak) "instantaneous" value.

The essence of jazz is improvisation.

An esthetic derived from jazz would be a technique to create beauty as one goes along. For jazz results from an approach consisting of the very somersaults of life, and its style is simply an immediate informing through music or in any other way — I realize that such an esthetic can apply to poetry in general — of feelings and images, progressively as they appear in the mind. Any crystallization, any lazy imitation of self, any petrification of life, threatens the validity of the fragile elaboration.

No detailed rhythm set beforehand.

No content concretely preconceived.

No rhythm, no content, other than in the form of a *hunger for life* — a life marked, let us say, by a passion demanding to be satisfied, substitutively, by the sublimation of "song." The "player" does not know, *must* not know, his next note, his next phrase, his next adventure. Yet he goes forward, like an

acrobat on the tightrope of circumstance.

A beautiful work is a work of circumstance.

But who will agree with Goethe that the only lasting works are the works of circumstance?

The time we live in is poisoned with eternity. Jazz has been one of the best means of purging us, and for re-creating in us the sense of the instant and the sense of transition. For our part, we shall not hesitate to see in *actuality*, however defined, the place to resolve all human problems that can be posed, in this or any other domain. . . . In actuality we find all the instants prior to a particular act of becoming — because, in any life, "that which has been superseded is at the same time something preserved which, in losing its merely immediate existence, is not thereby destroyed" (Hegel).

The actuality of a being is its present, but this present is that very being marked by the extreme temporal indication of its duration. Thus, for a living being, there is no irreconcilable contradiction between its present and its past except in the heads of the abstractors of its quintessence. Similarly, in a social setting, there is no antinomy between

modern and ancient works, between new works (not yet consecrated) and culture. The latest work, although it may not be "qualified" — in other words, regarded as valuable at present — implies all the steps taken by the society under consideration.

A poet, therefore, is not modern because he is ignorant of the past or has abandoned it, but rather because of a dialectical supersession of the stages of that past — that is to say, a simultaneous living negation and living conservation of old cultural forms. This modernness, moreover, will be fuller and more valuable because it is totally informed of the past.

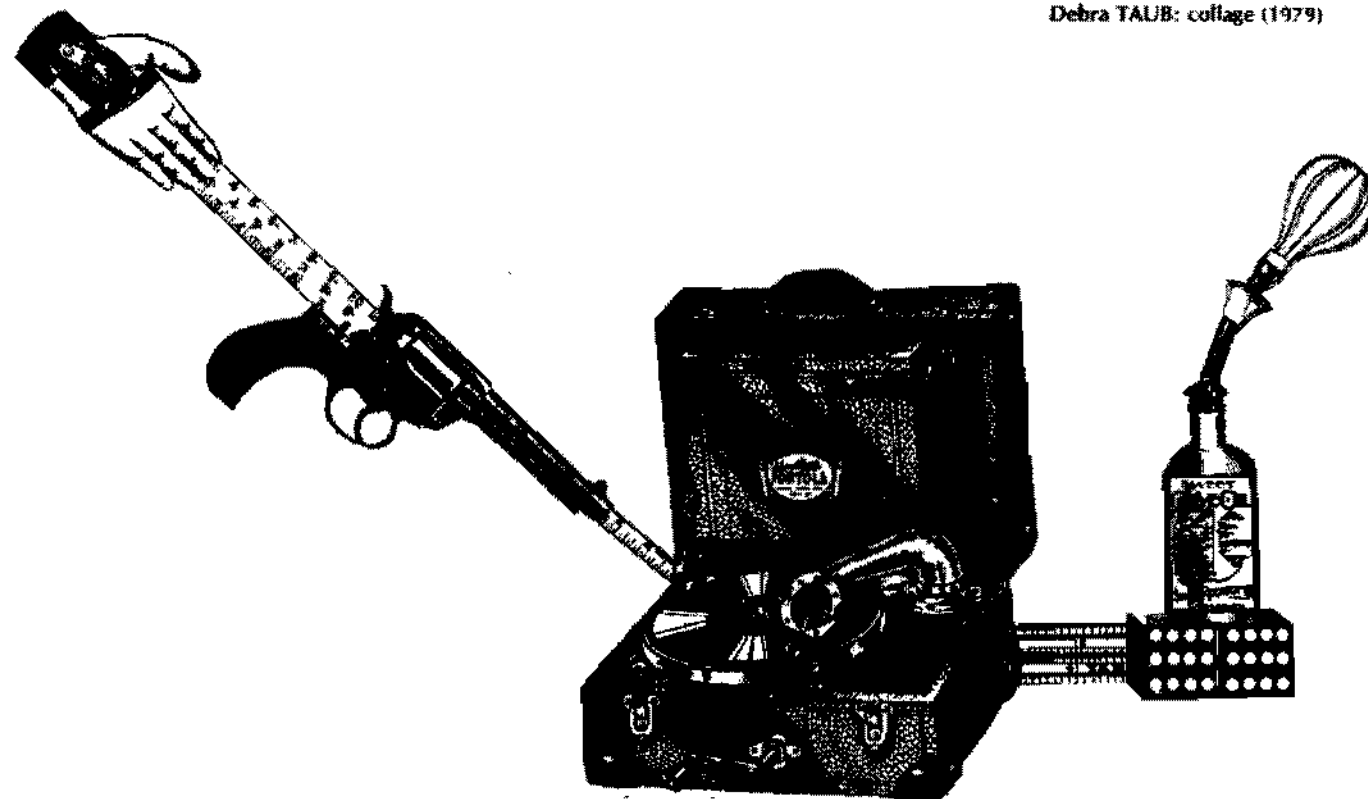
If cultural tradition is embodied in the poet, it cannot serve as a model — there is no model for what is yet unborn. But it will serve as a support of the past to situate the poet inflexibly in time, to make him a modern man in a specific period.

Such is poetic necessity: all of the past in oneself.

Such is poetic freedom: before oneself, the faceless future.

Tropiques, No. 11
(Martinique, 1944)
translated by Keith Holloman

René MENIL



HARRY PARTCH AN "UNHEARD OF" MUSIC

"None of his harmonies had any relation to any music I had heard before. . . . Sounds which filled me with an indefinable dread . . . unimagined space alive with motion and music, and having no semblance of anything on earth. . . . I shouted in his ear that we must both flee from the unknown things of the night. But he neither answered me nor abated the frenzy of his unutterable music."

— H.P. Lovecraft
"The Music of Erich Zann"

See them dance, watch them move: a full moon rising suddenly over the north woods, or the snow falling with a bang — it is the apocalyptic joker, Harry Partch, the Human Fly of musical consciousness, climbing the highest structures and beyond!

Hegel said that nothing great was ever accomplished without passion. It is passion, above all, that is exemplified in Harry Partch's music. He was a vertiginous one-eyed jack, an inspired rebel — no, a *revolutionary*: Having overthrown all conventions, he revealed endless sunrises and sunsets of tonal quality and modular vibrations, mysteriously soft at times, then cut in half like a wave by a maniacal speedboat, and invariably more delicious than a psychopathic diamond sleepwalking through a shattered mirror.

Exemplary partisan of an extreme Romanticism, Partch was forced to pursue his auditory dreams in that peculiar domain of solitude set aside for "artists," courtesy of man's

inhumanity to man. He was an "outsider," a solitary seeker, but never a snob. If an insane/insipid/inhuman social setup made his preoccupations seem remote from the day-to-day concerns of the great majority of humankind, keeping all but a small minority from knowing his music, he nonetheless consistently affirmed and helped fulfill the best aspirations of his species-being — for liberty, equality and fraternity, beyond all preposterous dualisms and other pitiable constraints. And notwithstanding the fact that he is still regarded by the lame police dogs of "musical appreciation" as impossibly far out, he always drew — deeply and powerfully — on authentically popular sources. He was warmly responsive to the music of tribal societies and to medieval choral chants, and no less attentive to sounds very much "in the air" of our own time. His long-standing obsession with hoboos, whose presence looms so large in some of his works, unmistakably indicates his social direction, passionately on the side of those who have nothing to lose.

Partch's specific lifelong aim was the *expansion of music*, which naturally entails the expansion of consciousness and therefore the expansion of the possibilities of life. Recognizing that the potentialities of music immeasurably exceeded the capacities of existing musical instruments, he calmly set about inventing his own. Utilizing dozens of these weird and captivating instruments, he devoted himself untiringly, year after year, to unleashing furious,

restless, defiant, untamable collages of sound against a world that uses its portable radios primarily to prevent people from hearing the voices of their own dreams. His vibrant, Beowulf-like sounds bring forth emotions long considered extinct, and simultaneously inspire the apparition of other emotions that are wholly new and unheard of. His music is *initiatory*, appealing to all the senses, wondrous and wet, a passion-fruit lamp that reveals the light of the unknown.

While so many other "modern composers" have only kidded themselves into a dull, empty corner by following "avant-garde" recipes — often little more than forlorn rainchecks on *satori* experiences read about in books written by misinformed tourists — Partch quietly (musically) followed his own ferociously anti-academic path, refusing the star-studded plaudits of mere virtuosity and perfection for the thankless but irresistible pleasures of reckless temptation and carefree discovery.

Envy of the criminal, which borders on a secret American nostalgia, lies — very logically — in the fact that crime is one area where individuality is taken for granted.

Others will come to write his biography, to compile memoranda and anecdotes, to analyze, annotate, criticize, discourse, dissect, discourage and disgust. It is hardly good news that his instruments are to wind up on display in the Smithsonian Institution, under the uncomprehending eye of the capitalist State. Is Partch to become another King Tut — his works enshrined by card-carrying members of that class of fools who, after extracting every trace of a person's living magic, can only bury his instruments behind theft-proof security glass?

I care even more for the divination of an ancient spirit of which I know nothing. To encom-

pass — at least intuitively — thousands of years of man's sensitivity to his world is to rise above the merely encyclopedic.

Let us listen to Harry Partch before the critics and scholars submerge him irretrievably under the "merely encyclopedic." His annihilation of musical dogma, and all repressive frameworks, is the proof that his was first and last a *quest for freedom*. Screaming for life, his music helps realize the future.

Let us add that his music is vastly more than what we have been accustomed to regard as music. It could more accurately be called *ritual drama*. His players are also actors and dancers — intermingling, trading places, undulating through a shifting hysteria of musical/magical progression. Human ritual generally has been accompanied by an activity called music: Christian choirs, Buddhist bells, Hindu and Moslem chants, African and Native American drums, Australian Aboriginal bones — All are born of the primordial mud of the rhythmic swellings and pulsations of the earth, and wakened by the very cry of life. Equally at home amidst the most ancient hieroglyphs and tomorrow's news, Harry Partch helped restore to music something of the incendiary promise that once permitted it to shake walls, disturb gods, and make the universe jump for joy.

Originality cannot be a goal. It is simply inevitable.

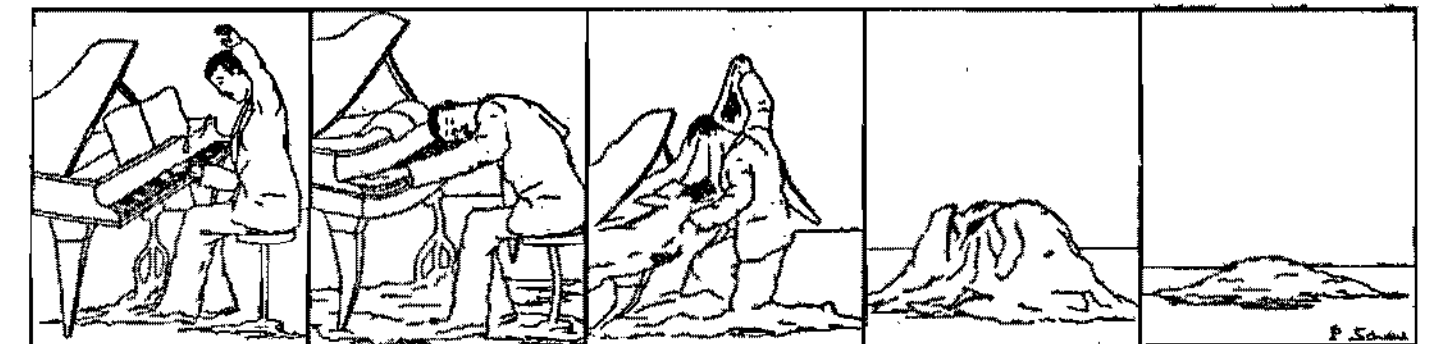
Walk through the darkened room, feeling your way with your hands, and turn on the Harry Partch switch. It will help you see where you have been, where you are, and where you are going.

Norman KAESEBERG

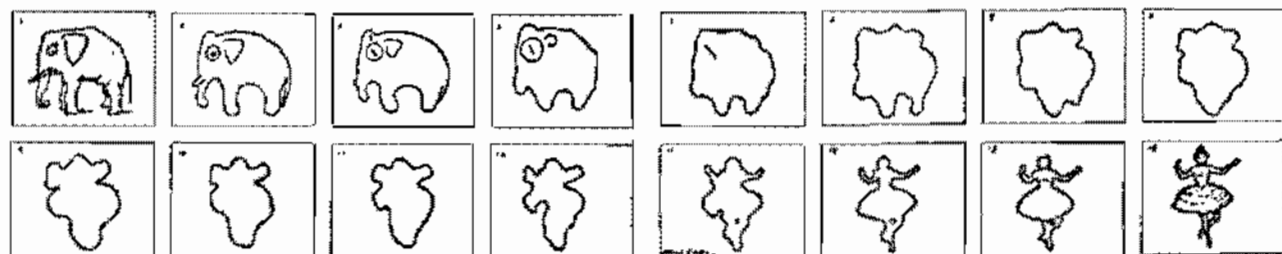
DISCOGRAPHY

<i>Delusions of the Fury: A Ritual of Dream and Delusion</i> (Columbia Records M2 30576)	Several other works (including <i>Six Poems by Li Po</i> , <i>U.S. Highball</i> and <i>The Wayward</i> are available on Gate 5 Recordings.
<i>The World of Harry Partch</i> (Columbia Masterworks Ms 7207)	<i>The Bewitched — A Dance Satire</i> (Composers Recordings)
<i>And on the Seventh Day Petals Fell in Pataluma</i> (Composers Recordings, 170 W. 74th St., New York, N.Y. 10023)	<i>Ulysses Departs from the Edge of the World</i> (Orion)

See also Harry Partch's important book, *Genesis of a Music* (New York, DaCapo, 1974), from which the above quotations have been taken.



Pierre SANDERS: Comic Strip from LE BLEU CIEL, Belgian surrealist newspaper (1945)



Emile COHL: Animated Cartoon Gag (1908)

BARNUM

It is an odd prejudice that makes a periodical devote so many pages, or even all of them, to recording, criticizing or glorifying the manifestations of the human mind — taking into account the activity of a single organ, the brain, excluding the rest. No reason is assigned for failing to make such a thorough study of the stomach, say, or the pancreas, or whatever member. We need hardly point out that sports news is buried on the back of the daily papers, and that ninety-nine of a hundred novels — but no more! — are exclusively devoted to exploiting man's concern for his reproductive apparatus.

Under the title "Gestes" (*gestes*) will be found henceforth in this journal (*La Revue Blanche*), through our personal attention, commentaries on all kinds of plastic performances. These are so varied that it would take a long time to compile a full list. A good number already have been enumerated, better than we should know how, in this very magazine, by Mr. Thadée Natanson concerning Toulouse-Lautrec: "Perfection of the muscles, nerves, training, skill, craftsmanship, technique... elbow wrestling, horse racing, cycle-tracks, roller skating, automobile driving, beauty care, the operation undertaken by a great surgeon... a tavern, a dance hall... a drunken authority on drinks... an explorer who has eaten human flesh... the young of a cat or a squirrel... a sailboat taking you off on the wind... a brawl among drinkers... the burial of a pope..."

All these movements (*gestes*), indeed all movements, are esthetic to an equal degree, and we attach equal importance to them. The closing

night at the Nouveau Cirque realizes as much beauty as a premiere at the Comedie Francaise. One or another mundane marriage should not distract our attention from the true wedding ceremony of a certain stallion on a stud farm, any more than an auto race should distract us from the more modest but more edifying performance of a procession. What is a procession, in short, if not footwork? (Excellent footwork at that.) And now that such public displays are banned, have not the Middle Ages bequeathed us that marvelous processional, Notre Dame? Footwork yet again: horseback riding! For, of the two elements of this sport, horse and rider, which is indispensable and characteristic if not the horse? And, whether mounted or not, does he not travel on foot? Gladiatorial combats, whose tradition has been preserved in all its purity since Antiquity, offer us three categories of movements according to the number of adversaries on either side: (a) one against one — dueling, boxing, wrestling; (b) one against several — nocturnal assaults and acts of self-sacrifice; (c) several against one — legal execution and military exploits.

As for the latter-day fairgrounds shows, always cherished by the public, an exceptional concurrence exempts us from celebrating them today: Barnum is within our walls — we wish to say that, if it pleased him, he would fill these walls to the point of bursting them, as easily as he has submerged them with his advertising posters.

It is just a big circus, people have said. True — but imagine an arena in which you drop three others of re-

spectable dimensions. Once they have been positioned, you notice that they take up just as much room as three plates on a tablecloth. Into each of these rings you unleash a few herds of elephants, and then you begin to get a glimpse of what it really means to be enormous, unless you would rather tell yourself that "an elephant isn't so big!" Entangled in the air is a virgin forest of rigging necessary for several dozen tightrope walkers and trapeze artists, who fly among themselves with never a mishap. Down below swarm a colony of clowns, a herd of horses. A historical cortege sets out: Nothing less would be presentable to us than Balkis, Queen of Sheba — musicians, singers, dancers, fan-wavers, idol-bearers, charioteers: a more multitudinous dazzling than novel or legend dare suggest is lavished by Barnum in his circus, beginning simply with a masterpiece passed off as an episode.

What superiority over actors do these acrobats display, finding it natural to give themselves up to their perilous job, in and among twenty other acts, without even knowing if they themselves are being watched!

In the freaks' gallery, let us bring your attention to Colonel Shelby, who, for the audience's pleasure, has himself electrocuted every night in the appropriate electric chair, as willingly as any other colonel would take his seat at a bar.

Alfred JARRY

Le Revue Blanche (1 Jan. 1902)
Reprinted in *La Chandelle verte* (1969)

Translated by Peter Wood



Debra TAUB: collage (1979)

DANCE and the Transformation of the World

Everyday life of the Pygmies in the African rain forest includes the custom of allowing anyone, at any moment, on any occasion, to break spontaneously into dance. Whenever a member of this marvelous community feels like it, he or she may simply begin to dance, and others may join as they please.

Does this not reveal the true meaning of dance? Yet it is all too plain what would happen if one was to express oneself in this fashion on a streetcorner in any city in the world — it would mean certain incarceration.

Dance demands this freedom: this same freedom that Isadora Duncan demanded when she danced her joy on the hillsides of Greece; the freedom she demanded, for herself and for everyone, when — grief-stricken over the multitudes of dead carried away from the Winter Palace in Czarist Russia after Bloody Sunday, 1905 — she danced her sorrow and her rage on theater stages throughout the world.

Dance traditionally has been a form of invocation, a primary instrument in the construction of a magical precipice: from the ancient Bacchanals through medieval pagan festivals to the innumerable frenzied "trance dances" known to all societies. This "occult" power of dance on the human psyche was compellingly demonstrated by the German dancer Mary Wigman, in her "Witch Dance" (available on film). Exchanging her personal identity for a universal identity with the use of a magnificent mask, she takes us through ancient rhythms and Druidic footsteps, always rooted to the ground and emerging organically from a timeless space in which dance is free to articulate every issue in the most radiant hues.

In her "Incense Dance" (also on film) Ruth St. Denis, a woman with unbelievably fluid movements, no less liquid than water, makes an offering in such a way that the gods cannot refuse her. Fluidity, although of a very different

kind, was also the hallmark of the luminous serpentine dances of Loie Fuller, who exerted so profound an influence on the French Symbolist poets and the sculptors and painters of *art nouveau*.

These four women — Isadora Duncan (unquestionably first and foremost), Loie Fuller, Ruth St. Denis and Mary Wigman (all of them American except the last) — were the outstanding pioneers who emancipated dance from the stupefying and crippling dogma of centuries. It is they, more than anyone else, who — in the opening years of our own century — restored to bodily movement its possibilities as a medium of human expression. Their individual invocations remain a permanent source of inspiration, especially to those of us who are trying, today, to emancipate dance from the shackles of minimalist/conceptual abstraction and merely decorative acrobatics.

Repressed as it is in our repressive civilization, the impulse to dance nonetheless continually resurfaces, often where we might least expect to find it. It is interesting to note the way people move in the simplest kinds of social situations. People engaged in conversation, for example, no matter how mundane the topic, go through an actual "dance" (particularly if they are standing), which is often complete with a specific beginning, some complicated steps (changing places, crossing legs to sidestep, clapping hands and other manual gestures, stomping feet and turning), and even a formal ending. The erotic essence of this unconscious dance is much more pronounced when the participants are of the opposite sex, especially in couples. The movements then assume a more sensuous quality in a dance that is probably in many cases far more communicative than the accompanying verbal dialogue.

François Delsarte (1811-1871) was deeply interested in this "language of movement," and the extensive social current that took up his ideas in the U.S. contributed appreci-



ciably to freeing Victorian women of the ridiculous garments of their time, which bound them to the point of strangulation, thereby preventing the possibility of any free movement. Just as a beautiful horse galloping majestically in an open field shrinks to half its size when saddled and bridled, so it is with people strapped into the monotony of stifling clothes exemplifying a meaningless existence.

The late 19th/early 20th century revolution in women's clothes underlines the extent to which modern dance originated as a movement of protest and emancipation. The dance pioneers all were outspoken partisans of women's rights; in the case of Isadora Duncan, her critical spirit grew into a consciously revolutionary attitude, leading to her espousal of the Bolshevik Revolution and the cause of communism.

It is noteworthy that the same period in which modern dance came into being also witnessed an unprecedented flurry of developments in popular or "social" dancing. In the early years of movies and jazz, and helped undoubtedly by the rapid diffusion of radios and phonograph records, dozens of new dances — lively, exuberant, expressive — took the country by storm. Unfortunately, this development long ago ran its course, and little trace of its original impulse remains. The vast difference between what is known as "folk dance" and what passes today for "popular" dancing is only too painfully evident.

In many parts of rural America it is still possible to attend a local fe-do-do, or a square dance, or a barn dance — communal events that are socially valuable, unpretentious and above all fun. Their contemporary urban equivalents, however, tend to have undergone a rigid stylization, almost a sterilization, which is the very opposite of what dance is all about. Unquestionably the worst and most reactionary tendency in this regard is the recent fad for "disco," which is wholly consumer-oriented and bourgeoisified in every way, and ultimately nothing more than a hideously

servile acceptance of what Herbert Marcuse has called "repressive desublimation."

Once the disco-victim purchases the proper attire, pays for the necessary dance lessons and buys his practice records, he or she can enter one of the invariably expensive disco lounges, only to be awed by competitors still more expensively attired, and harassed by waiters or waitresses for the two-drink minimum. Disco is a game of exchanging commodities in which dance is only a flimsy pretext. The actual dancing, in fact, is decidedly secondary, and contrary to the situation of the rural dances mentioned earlier, the possibilities disco provides for meaningful social contact are negligible. It is symptomatic of the crisis of civilization that this fraudulent pseudo-dance is the only type of public dance which is truly acceptable in advanced capitalist society.

The situation is hardly better, however, in today's "performance dance." If Dance (with the capital D) has never enjoyed such widespread interest — not to mention such financial support from giant corporations and government agencies — it cannot be said that the results, so far, have been more than mediocre. Those who pretend that we are in the midst of a "dance renaissance" only advertise their stupidity, or blindness, or both.

In the West, the two principal categories of dance as a performance art are ballet and modern dance. There is not much to say about classical ballet, except that it requires years of strict training and considerable skill only to bore us into oblivion. The dazzling virtuosity of a few exceptional ballet dancers, such as Pavlova and Nijinsky, has made too many people overlook the utter barrenness of this intrinsically aristocratic and irremediably lifeless genre. Whatever semblance of vitality it has been able to muster has almost always been plundered from sources which its snobbish apologists are loath to admit, but which are scarcely deniable: folk dances, peasant dances, carefree frolics of village and farm.

Isadora Duncan, in her splendid autobiography and the articles compiled in her *Art of the Dance*, definitively tore ballet to shreds, refuting it all along the line. Today ballet is no more than a quaint museum-piece feebly posing as a living art. The best that can be said for this peculiar and obsolete form of gymnastics-with-fancy-costumes is that some wonderful music has been written for it. A notable example is Erik Satie's scores for *Parade* and *Relache*, loosely called ballets, although they were the scandals of their time and remain unsurpassed in daring by any subsequent ballet.

Modern dance, with very few exceptions, has not lived up to the promise of its vibrant beginnings. It is true that the leading figures of its second and third generations maintained much of the audacity and zeal of the great dance pioneers, and it is worth emphasizing (especially since dance historians usually ignore it) that modern dance as a movement in the 1920s and '30s was intimately linked to the radical political Left. There were well-known dance groups affiliated with the Communist Party, the Socialist Party and other Left parties and trade unions; they choreographed and performed dances dedicated to Sacco and Vanzetti, to the Scottsboro defendants, to the anti-Franco forces in Spain. Significant, too, is the degree to which they derived their inspiration from essentially popular sources:

Martha Graham from pagan myths and the American circus; Doris Humphrey from the Shakers; Katherine Dunham from African, Caribbean and Afro-American folklore; Sybil Shearer from dreams and fairy tales.

But as the revolutionary workers' movement was virtually obliterated in the course of the second imperialist world war, this radical dance movement (and the radical cultural movement as a whole) was scattered to the winds. Its dwindling forces were increasingly unable to withstand the encroachments of academism, commercialism, existentialism. With Merce Cunningham it adjusted itself to the political climate of the Cold War. And it's been downhill ever since.

Today, more than a century after the birth of Isadora Duncan, the exalted potentiality of the *free dance* seems practically to have perished in the hands of such incredibly reactionary idiots as Meredith Monk, Twyla Tharp and Laura Dean — all of them wildly acclaimed as "innovators," of course, by bourgeois dance critics from coast to coast.

This trio, constituting the best-known culprits in the degeneration of dance today, has conspired to remove all content from dance — above all erotic and poetic content, thus removing the very heart of dance.

And what is left after sending dance to the dry-cleaners? Well, here we have Laura Dean, specialist in "twirling and stomping," wandering aimlessly about the stage muttering "My name is Laura Dean," and even "ma-ma." Oh, yawn! Her "Circle Dance" consists of people shuffling endlessly in a circle; later, by some miracle, they change direction and shuffle the other way. What more could we want! Jesus songs? "The Star-Spangled Banner"? Yes, she gives us that, too. As *piece de resistance*, she pours Ivory Snow on the stage, repeating the remarkably witty line: "snow."

Then there is Meredith Monk sitting motionlessly in a cardboard box in the theater lobby. The box has a hole in it so that we may peek in and observe her feigned catalepsy. Meanwhile, on stage, a film shows the performer, still motionless. Those who have forked over their ten dollars for tickets are doubtless expected to express their humblest gratitude for this rare opportunity.

Twyla Tharp, in her routine blankness, is interested in such labored microproblems as "that which is minimally or maximally visible." To be more precise: How far away can a dancer be without becoming invisible to the naked eye, and how close before we can no longer detect movement, but only a wart on the cheek? Such miserabilist preoccupations deserve the *Who Cares?* award of the decade.

Besides all this bombastic dreariness, the latest dead-end currents of modern dance have cheated us out of

1) *all hand movements* (which can hardly be ignored, for hands are among our most powerfully expressive instruments);

2) *costumes* (almost exclusively limited now to the basic Danskin), as well as *masks*; and

3) *stage sets* (which have all but disappeared except for an occasional black backdrop).

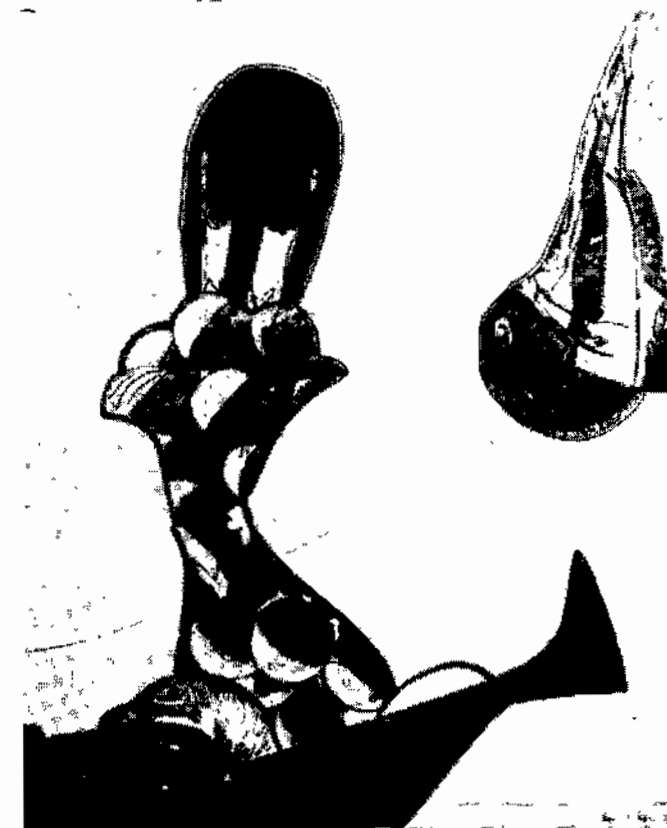
Thus, those who have appointed themselves the "leaders" of what they pompously call "post-modern dance" have done nothing but confess to their incompetence and worthlessness. They are so utterly terrified of the truly popular roots of modern dance — in street-dancing,

folk dance, vaudeville, the circus, silent movies and jazz — and so neurotically obsessed with justifying their cowardice under the pretense of Art, that they are no longer capable of expressing anything except their own emptiness, death and decay, and even that in an insipid and half-hearted manner.

But in spite of all this treacherous inanity, we are entitled to retain some hope. Now as ever, the possibilities of dance remain *limitless*. We have everything to expect from a dance that will defy conventions, leap boldly into the unknown, and never hesitate to start from scratch: that is, a *surrealist dance*.

For what is dance if not the physical expression of poetic vitality and exaltation, the moving magic of marvelous freedom? That is what Antonin Artaud sensed in the dancers of Bali, and in the peyote dance of the Tarahumara Indians in Mexico; what Michel Leiris discerned in the funeral rituals of the Dagon in Africa; what André Breton found in the midst of voodoo ceremonies in Haiti; what Benjamin Péret discovered in the dance-games of descendants of slaves in Brazil; what Philip Lamantia recognized in the Katchina dances of the Hopi in Arizona. These are all fundamental points of reference for surrealism in dance.

Surrealism began in poetry but soon took over painting and gradually extended its sway over the whole field of human expression. In the last few years the surrealist revolution has brought dance under its fiery imperatives. The surrealist dream of "poetry made by all" (Lautréamont) will be realized only when everyone is free to dance whenever and wherever he or she pleases. It is time to heed the lessons of the Pygmies!



Anne ETHUIN: Isadora — That Is, Iris (coated collage, 1976)

The point is that anything and everything can be ours with the flick of an imagination. Why should we settle for nothing — or less than nothing — when we could thrill ourselves and everyone else with new, constantly changing and wondrously illumined landscapes, not only on stage but *everywhere*? To be inspiring, we have only to allow ourselves to be inspired. We have only to follow through the dignity of thought and the power of dreams.

Dance is the inscrutable sorcery by which we are transported by every gesture to the terrain of the imaginary, where all things become possible along the magnetic fields of the body's waking dream, where the charmed humming-birds of our most extravagant reveries soar through a lunar eclipse to the break of a new dawn.

And it's all ours!

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Penelope ROSEMONT: Sun Dance of the Kite-Birds (ink, 1978)

MOVIES, SPORTS & DANCE

If movies owe nothing to the theater, they nonetheless owe a great deal to sports, athletics, acrobatics. Is it necessary to enlarge on something so obvious? Films, which are as much a collective effort as football, rarely recruit their actors or actresses from the tragedians of the stage—especially not American films. French cinema is relatively closer to theater. . . . But in the overwhelming majority of cases, the movies have found their most remarkable interpreters among sportsmen, athletes, acrobats and circus clowns. The celebrated boxing champion Carpentier — a friend of Charlie Chaplin's — is now playing in films. Only the sports world, with its high degree of perfection, has been able to furnish the movies with sufficiently "smart" automobilists, cavaliers, cowboys and cowgirls such as Rawlinson, Fairbanks, Marie Walcamp, Helen Holmes, Pearl White, Maciste, Harry Carey, W. Hart, Ruth Roland, et al.

Movies, as an art, are a development of modern spiritual culture. But they are at the same time the glorification of modern physical culture. They find their equilibrium between the two, and therein lies their considerable moral significance.

A Poetry of the Corporeal and Spatial Senses

Sense of direction, sense of speed, chrono-spatial sense of motion; sports and its various disciplines — auto racing, aviation, travel, gymnastics, acrobatics; the thirst for records, the competitive sense of the athlete, the passion for victory all resound at a football game along with the collective joy of play and the sentiments of harmony, precision and coordination.

The poem of sport, looking beyond the merely educational and orthopedic tendencies of physical culture, develops all the senses. It lavishes itself on the pure sensations of muscular activity, the pleasure of bare flesh in the wind, marvelous physical exaltation, the drunkenness of the body.

The free dance: autonomous, corporeal, dynamic poetry — independent of music, literature and the plastic arts — opens the way to sensuality, to the art of the inspired body. The most physical and nonetheless the most abstract art, its medium is a palpable body of flesh and blood: this body which composes through its movements the dynamic and abstract forms of the danced poem.

Karel TEIGE

(early 1920s)

ISADORA AND THE MAGICIANS

Because of her undisputed centrality in the development of the new art of modern dance, Isadora Duncan (1877-1927) has been the subject of a vast literature — most of it, alas! merely sensational and anecdotal. In the last few years, however, some attempt has been made not only to disentangle truth from legend in her life, but also to get beyond the tiresomely reiterated generalizations regarding her epochal ideas and achievements.

Part of this new research has focused on the "influences" discernible in her choreography and her writings. Much has been made of her study of dance-figures on ancient Greek vases; she herself insisted on the influence exerted on her by the Prerafaelites, the poetry of Walt Whitman and the philosophy of Nietzsche. Recent research has brought to light some important details. But the picture is still far from complete.

"At different periods of her life," according to one of her friends, "Isadora was troubled with hallucinations and she was strangely influenced by evil omens and curses." (1) These incursions beyond the mind's wildest frontiers have been noted by many others and, indeed, were by no means concealed by Isadora herself. Her writings teem with allusions to altered states of consciousness and to "secret sciences." She acknowledged her interest in "the recent discoveries of mental telepathy," reported several precognitive dreams, consulted fortunetellers, and readily admitted that her dance was conceived "as if in a trance." (2) One of her most compelling essays is titled "The Philosophers' Stone of Dancing." Though hardly an adept of astrology, she nonetheless boldly declared that "it is certain that our psychical life is under the influence of the planets." She often identified herself with the ancient Egyptian goddess Isis who, for the hermetists, represented the Elixir of Life. She held, moreover, that the dance she had discovered had curative powers and was capable of greatly prolonging life. On her pilgrimage to Greece she "became greatly impressed upon reading of the Mysteries of Eleusis." With her mother and siblings she "actually danced every step of the way" from Athens to Eleusis — a distance of thirteen and a half miles — and remained there two days, "studying the Mysteries."

Customarily dismissed by her biographers as a frivolous diversion or a "quirk," Isadora's interest in this shadowy domain has not received the attention it deserves. It is worth emphasizing that these preoccupations were not at all peripheral to her other



Abraham WALKOWITZ: Isadora Duncan

"Very little is known in our day of the magic which resides in movement, and the potency of certain gestures. The number of physical movements that most people make through life is extremely limited. Having stifled and disciplined their movements in the first states of childhood, they resort to a set of habits seldom varied. So, too, their mental activities respond to set formulas, often repeated. With this repetition of physical and mental movements, they limit their expression until they become like actors who each night play the same role. With these few stereotyped gestures, their whole lives are passed without once suspecting the world of the dance which they are missing."

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interests: they recur too often, too consistently and over too long a period. It would be no exaggeration, indeed, to say that her meanderings into the "Mysteries" form an integral part of the Isadorian world-view.

Paris, where she lived off and on for extended periods, beginning in 1900, was still the center of a widespread revival of occultism which deeply affected the cultural life of the time. Secret societies, magical cults and circles of initiates that had flourished in the 1880s and '90s still lingered. Spells and counterspells, possessions and exorcisms, hexes and hoaxes were "in the air." It was also a time of major work in the area of psychical research, as witness the many publications of Theodore Flournoy. An artist as adventurous and heterodox as Isadora could hardly fail to come into contact with this milieu. Several of the authors she frequently cited, most notably Maurice Maeterlinck, were immersed in this occult atmosphere. Also significantly, the printed program for one of her 1920 performances included, as a kind of preface, a lengthy excerpt on Orpheus from *The Great Initiates* by Edouard Schuré — that is, from the major work by a central proponent of the Theosophical movement in France.

Far more suggestive, however, is Isadora's association with the curious and striking personage who proclaimed himself the Sar Merodack Péladan. At least one of Isadora's celebrated performances at the Trocadero in 1913, when the famed tragedian Mounet-Sully sang the choruses, was preceded by a long lecture by Péladan on Isadora's art.

Along with Stanislas de Guaita and Gerard Encausse (better known as Papus), Josephin Péladan ("Sar" means king in Assyrian; "Merodack" refers to Merodach Baladan, son of a Babylonian king, mentioned in Isaiah xxxix), was a major figure in the French occult revival of 1880-1920. A prolific playwright, poet, novelist, essayist, author of numerous volumes on the "black arts," he was the founder and leader of a Rosicrucian sect, the Aesthetic Rose Cross. His work is a feverish blend of magic, eroticism, a virulently decadent Catholicism, ancient mythology, Satanism, blasphemy and homeopathic medicine. Today he seems all but forgotten, recalled only as a "muddled exhibitionist" (3) and as "a charlatan who used to walk the Paris boulevards in a silver waistcoat and

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black burnous, his hands devoutly folded upon his breast." (4) In his own day, however, he was recognized as "one of the most fascinating personages . . . and as a front-ranking esthetician." (5)

That Péladan was no ordinary spiritualist/mystic hack is further indicated by the diversity and caliber of many of his friends and collaborators. These included writers such as Villiers de l'Isle-Adam (author of *Axel* and the *Cruel Tales*) and Barbey d'Aurevilly, last of the great Dandies (author of *Diaboliques*), as well as the artist Felicien Rops, so admired by Huysmans. It is significant, too, that he was held in high esteem by no less a discerning critic than Alfred Jarry, the illustrious founder of 'pataphysics, who rendered Péladan the honor of including one of his works (*Babylon*) among the twenty-seven "equivalent books" of Doctor Faustroll, along with Homer's *Odyssey* and works by Coleridge, Lautréamont, Mallarmé and Rimbaud. (6)

Péladan also has been called the "chief" of the "Wagner cult" in France; one of the aims of his Rosicrucian order was to "regulate the arts according to what was alleged to be the Wagnerian esthetic." (7) The order's official composer, however, was the far-from-Wagnerian modernist Erik Satie.

Also associated with Péladan — and, at least for a time, an adherent of the Aesthetic Rose Cross — was the great Symbolist poet Saint-Pol-Roux, author of many outstanding works, including *From the Crow to the Nightingale by way of the Peacock*. Saint-Pol-Roux, whose work is one of the grandest prefigurations of surrealism, is of special interest in this connection because in his "Choreologie," a poetic exploration of dance, he saluted the "luminous passage of . . . Isadora Duncan." (8)

Except for a reference by her adopted daughter Irma (9), the name of Péladan is not to be found in any of the books on Isadora in English. Fortunately, however, excerpts from his conference on Isadora were published in French, under the title "Isadora Duncan and Greek Tragedy." (10)

That it was printed even in an abridged form leads us to deduce that it may not have been a lecture from notes but rather a completed written text; one likes to think that the original manuscript may yet be discovered in some archive. The published excerpts indicate that it was an ambitious study, savoring of an "old-fashioned" grandeur. The excerpts alone constitute a well-argued, sustained appreciation in which the author of *How One Becomes a Mage* situated Isadora's dances at the very heart of his wildly wayward esthetic.

Defining tragedy as "the masterpiece of the human spirit," and deploring the fact that in the modern epoch it has remained a *Sleeping Beauty*, Péladan credits Isadora (and Mounet-Sully) with its reawakening. "Isadora Duncan is Dionysiac," he says, adding that "this epithet alone expresses the freedom of her inspiration and the radiant charm of her art." He notes that the ancients based their dance on poetry, and applauds Isadora for restoring her art on the same basis. Finally, observing that *rhythm* eludes all efforts to define it but that everyone automatically recognizes it, he provides his own definition: "the agreement of a voice or a gesture with the harmony of the spheres" — a declaration that could easily have been made by Pythagoras, or Giordano Bruno, or Isadora herself.

That Isadora should have been involved with a character such as Péladan is not so surprising; the concurrence of their views, however — at least on the subjects outlined in Péladan's conference — is truly remarkable. One cannot help wondering, on the strength of this, whether she delved more deeply into the society of practicing occultists. It would be interesting to know if she ever read, for example, Fabre d'Olivet's little treatise on music, or if anyone ever placed in her hands the works of Nicolas Flamel, or Hoene Wronski, or Eliphas Levi. One wonders, too, to what extent she was aware of esoteric traditions relating to dance.

* * *

If we take the trouble to consider, carefully, Isadora's association with Péladan — and, more generally, her incursions into psychical research and the occult — it will serve to deepen our appreciation of her radical nonconformist spirit.

In her dance, she knew she had discovered something new that was yet, in another sense, ancient. "I did not invent my dance," she stressed. "It existed before me, but it lay dormant. I merely discovered and awakened it." (11) Attempting to develop the implications of her discovery, she found little guidance in the dominant systems of thought. Indeed, more often than not these ideologies repelled her, having revealed their utter impotence to solve any of the fundamental problems of human existence, as proved by the persistence of such evils as poverty and war. Thus she ventured far from the beaten track, into curious heterodoxies and doctrines of revolt. Over the years she allied herself, to one degree or another, with many and widely varied currents. But great as the differences between

these currents might have been, outstanding characteristics united them:

- 1) all were opposed to the bourgeois/christian mainstream of Western civilization; and
- 2) all shared a confidence in the ability of human beings to retrieve "lost powers," and to *change the world*.

Isadora's essentially Promethean impulse drew her to Péladan as, later, it would draw her (and more powerfully) to Lenin. And so it happens that magicians and mediums had a place alongside painters and poets as well as anarchists and communists in the Isadorian perspective for social transformation. Her enthusiasm for everything contributory to the new myth was nourished by her sensitivity to all that was vital in the myths of old.

Opposed to everything repressive, Isadora Duncan exemplified a glorious restlessness that reached into the future, a restlessness that could not settle for anything less than the restoration and limitless expansion of the Garden of Eden: "Everything rustling, promising New Life. That is what my dance means."

F.R.



NOTES

- (1) Mary Desti, *The Untold Story: The Life of Isadora Duncan, 1921-1927* (New York, Liveright, 1929), p. 49.
- (2) Quotations by Isadora are from *My Life* (1927) and *The Art of the Dance* (1928).
- (3) Richard Griffiths, *The Reactionary Revolution: The Catholic Revival in French Literature, 1870-1914* (New York, Ungar, 1965), p. 123.
- (4) Robert Baldick, "Introduction" to Joris-Karl Huysmans, *Down There (La-Bas)* (New York, University Books, 1958), p. xvi.
- (5) Théophile Briant, *Saint-Pol-Roux* (Paris, Seghers, 1951), p. 18.
- (6) See also Jarry's appreciations of Péladan in *La Chandelle verte* (Paris, Livre de Poche, 1969).
- (7) Rollo H. Myers, *Erik Satie* (New York, Dover, 1968), p. 23.
- (8) Saint-Pol-Roux, *Les Plus belles pages* (Paris, Mercure de France, 1966), p. 191.
- (9) Irma Duncan and Allan Ross Macdougall, *Isadora Duncan's Russian Days* (New York, Covici-Friede, 1929), p. 358.
- (10) Unidentified clipping in the Dance Collection of the New York Public Library.
- (11) Quoted in Irma Duncan, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

FRED ASTAIRE

for Jacques Baron

Fred Astaire dressed in black with a tophat, Fred Astaire hatless, wearing a tuxedo, Fred Astaire in checks and a boater, Fred Astaire with a bowler and umbrella, Fred Astaire in a trilbee, without gloves, Fred Astaire in a double-breasted jacket, with gloves, Fred Astaire in shirt-sleeves, Fred Astaire in a cardigan, Fred Astaire in an overcoat carrying a suitcase, Fred Astaire knotting his tie, Fred Astaire tweaking his braces, entering a restaurant, waiting in the rain, playing with his lighter, strolling in the countryside, courting a woman: There is a whole gallery of Fred Astaires, viewed by night and by day, in winter or spring, in comfortable apartments or on the street, contorted or humming a tune, jerking or stretched out, with a consumptive look but a laughing eye, a beatific grin on the taut features of an alcoholic — not to forget the feather-brained, innocent look, and that supreme distinction which is the prerogative of certain royally dressed hoods. "It was about time for that cursory air of ours," said Vache. "Cemetery of uniforms and liveries," said Marcel Duchamp. And Rimbaud, too, who spoke of "the cruel swagger of rags," though concerned with something very different, would hardly have guessed that one day we

would see the severe jacket which suddenly runs riot, the quality leather shoes which enter abruptly into trance and rap the floorboards as if to defy or enrage them; the fine silk handkerchiefs draped over a heart which suddenly begins to bleed — for this window-mannequin, this automaton, this sylph, is also a man, and all his finery, his panoply of costly trifles, his little manias, cannot always exonerate him from love or boredom.

Fred Astaire is the incarnation of one of the most acute features of the modern disorder: a prestigious dancer and a rather macabre albeit well-dressed clown (the cut just shabby enough to make him seem a bit disreputable, just ample enough to make him appear skinny and underfed, and to rend our hearts as the song takes off). It is this man who, when I saw him dancing in London about a year and a half ago in *The Gay Divorcee*, reminded me irresistibly of the drawings a schoolfriend and I used to scrawl on our notebooks during the war, all of which depicted skeletons of perfect elegance — some of them civilians, others soldiers: the expression of a quite special kind of frivolity.

La Bête Noir, No. 1
(1935)

Michel LEIRIS

Translated by Lorna Scott-Fox

GENE KELLY: Singin' in the Rain

Since the long-gone epoch of the first musicals, dance films unfortunately have been overrun by syrupy songsters. Only the genial Fred Astaire has remained to recall for us that once, in the very beginning of "talking pictures," things were different.

Then along came Vicente Minelli. Shamelessly he ushered his dancers into the world of dreams and arrayed them in dazzling colors. In such films as *A Cabin in the Sky*, *Ziegfeld Follies*, *The Pirate*, *Yolanda and the Thief*, *An American in Paris*, he demonstrated how viable the marriage of film and dance could be.

His favorite actor, Gene Kelly, not content to be the best cinematographic dancer (after Fred Astaire) as well as his own choreographer, has now become his own director. He collaborates with Stanley Donen, who is black, which for a European would be of no significance, but is otherwise for an American.

Gene Kelly, moreover, is an intelligent man: He truly loves motion pictures which he does not dissociate from dance. His first film, *On the Town*, was delicious; his second, *Singin' in the Rain*, is a real masterpiece of its genre.

Gene Kelly has not made a film in which song and dance numbers are interspersed through an idiotic and insipid story (as is the case in 99% of today's musicals). He integrates his dances into a story which is interesting, charming and amusing; the final sequence, with its atrocious albeit justified cruelty, would not be out of place in a film by Stroheim or Clouzot . . .

The musical numbers are not simply a recreation of an old style: Gene Kelly, the man who dances with his double as well as with animated cartoon characters, has brought to them all his tenderness and transformed them into poems. The declaration of love in the huge studio, empty but yet overflowing — thanks to his moonbeams, soft lights, mist and wind: all the requisite features of the romantic landscape — constitutes a highly poetic sequence. And Gene Kelly's dance which gives the film its title is an admirable affirmation of the joy of living and of amorous exaltation.

Ada KYROU

Bizarre (Paris), No. 2, 1953

DANCE and INSTINCT

Dance is above all a reflex, a spontaneous expression of vividly experienced emotions. In dance mankind has found a means of satisfying its desire for tangency with the universe.

★

We must reject as a profound error the static idea of a dance that is always the same. Academic dance, still with us at this late date, offers the viewer an exclusively visual pleasure by means of an exceptional virtuosity of the limbs, opposed to the rest of the body. It tends to derive solely from the law of gravity.

Confined by such obsolete methods, the dancer becomes a mechanical instrument executing meaningless movements. Choreography repeats, in a language withered and weak, what has already been said. Thus we get "pure dance," "art for art's sake": expressions of decadence, crystallization and death.

And thus dance loses its human character, which consists in translating the intensity of life in all its sentiments and aspirations, individual as well as social. Reduced to acts that are contrary to life, dance loses its poetic place in reality, and drags mankind downward. Academism is a vicious circle.

★

In dance today we see a return to the magic of movement, to natural and subtle human forces. Dance today aspires to exalt, to charm, to hypnotise — to wholly engage the sensibility.

It is a matter of restoring to our movements the expressive surplus enclosed in the human body, this marvelous instrument. In line with current needs, we must rediscover the truths already known to the ancients, to primitive peoples, and to Oriental civilization, as concretized in the dances of the African fetishist, the whirling dervish and the Tibetan rope-dancer . . . Dance attains its reason for being when it knows how to enchant the onlooker and to revive him by means of the organism . . . For that to happen, we must be unafraid to go as far as necessary in exploring our whole person . . .

★

Today we are striving to reconstruct the world. Our life-saver in this task is instinct. Part of our effort now consists in uncovering our instincts, which have been imprisoned for so long.

Happily, there are vital needs, irresistible forces. There is hope and, besides, there is science which, however, must not be isolated but rather must preside, as in olden times, over our adoration and our magic. Everything must be organized for liberation, for the rediscovery of vertigo and love.

Françoise SULLIVAN

Excerpts from a lecture,
"La Danse et l'esprit,"
Montreal, 16 February 1948

SYBIL SHEARER

First and last, Sybil Shearer is an ardent free spirit who has persistently gone her own way. She has run all risks, challenged sacrosanct assumptions, leaped over obstacles regarded as insurmountable. Everything about her serves to remind us that dance, if it is to exist at all, must be a passionately pursued *adventure*.

She was a leading member of the Doris Humphrey/Charles Weidman company in its best days (mid-1930s), and in 1942 she received John Martin's prestigious Dance Award for "the most promising debut performance of a solo choreographer." Then suddenly, the following year, to the amazement of the "dance world," she fled New York and its maddening maze of jealous coteries, and has worked ever since in relative isolation in the northern suburbs of Chicago.

This deliberate self-occultation, revealing her utter indifference to an ordinary "successful career" — and her scorn for the hardly disinterested pretensions of critics — doubtless helps explain the reticence with which dance historians have approached her appreciable contributions. Thus, whereas many lesser dancers have been made the subject of full-length biographies and numerous monographs, Sybil Shearer — indisputably one of the greatest dancers of all time — has been awarded primarily silence and more silence, especially in recent years.

Her fierce independence was unmistakable from the start. A critic in *Dance Observer* (June/July 1949) remarked that Shearer "took all the devices and developments of modern dance and threw them to the winds, returning . . . to the period of Isadora." This was meant to be sharply critical, but succeeded only in missing the point. By the 1940s modern dance had been largely reduced to reified formulae. Everything had become tiresomely predictable — exercises with no surprises. In revolt against this deadly uniformity and repetition, Shearer returned not so much to Isadora as to the *essentials* of dance — to its "prime matter," in the hermetists' sense — which she discovered for herself as Isadora had discovered before her.

Moreover, while so many dancers succumbed so easily to a stifling "realism" — as later they would give in to existentialism and other deplorable fashions — she never accepted any limits to the possibilities of

dance. The unfettered imagination always has been her surest guide. This is as evident in the simplest improvisations of what she calls "liquid acting" (a kind of pantomime feverishly carried to the point of pure psychic automatism) as it is in her most complex choreography. The inspired oniricism of her every muscle and nerve allows her with seeming effortlessness to transgress the bounds of the possible. Her sheer bodily poetry is enhanced by striking costumes which she designs and makes herself, as well as by her often austere but invariably evocative use of props. Everything is additionally underscored by the exceptional lighting provided by her longtime collaborator Helen Morrison.

Alone on stage, Sybil Shearer makes us see a veritable horde of somnambulists on the rampage. Abruptly everything changes: now we see a solitary dragonfly, at daybreak, hovering over a grassy knoll after the rain. She takes us through the dark delirium of fertility rites, the riotous frenzy of "dancing in the streets," ambiguous tragedies in the moonlit wilderness, the bitterest melodramas, the most sinister comedies. Out of the seething cauldron of gestures, she has brought forth endless images of magical

transparence, golden with our wildest dreams.

It should not be too surprising, in the light of all this, to learn that she has many times avowed her profound affinities for surrealism. What makes this especially worthy of remark is that surrealism did not exist in this country as an organized movement during her most active years. In her own activity as a dancer she followed a closely parallel path, and her choreography brims over with authentic surrealist moments. She always has been "absolutely modern," in the sense intended by Rimbaud. "Modern," she says, "is the desire and the attempt to reach eternity now."

It is our good fortune that much of her work is currently available on film. Certainly her admirable *example* will long serve as a blazing torch to all for whom the art of dance is inseparable from the triple cause of poetry, love and freedom.

Through her marvelous kinesthetic alchemy, Sybil Shearer has brought a whole world into being — a world of irreducible radiance, warm with the glow of ancient suns, caressed by winds from a wholly desirable future. F.R.

P.R.: drawings



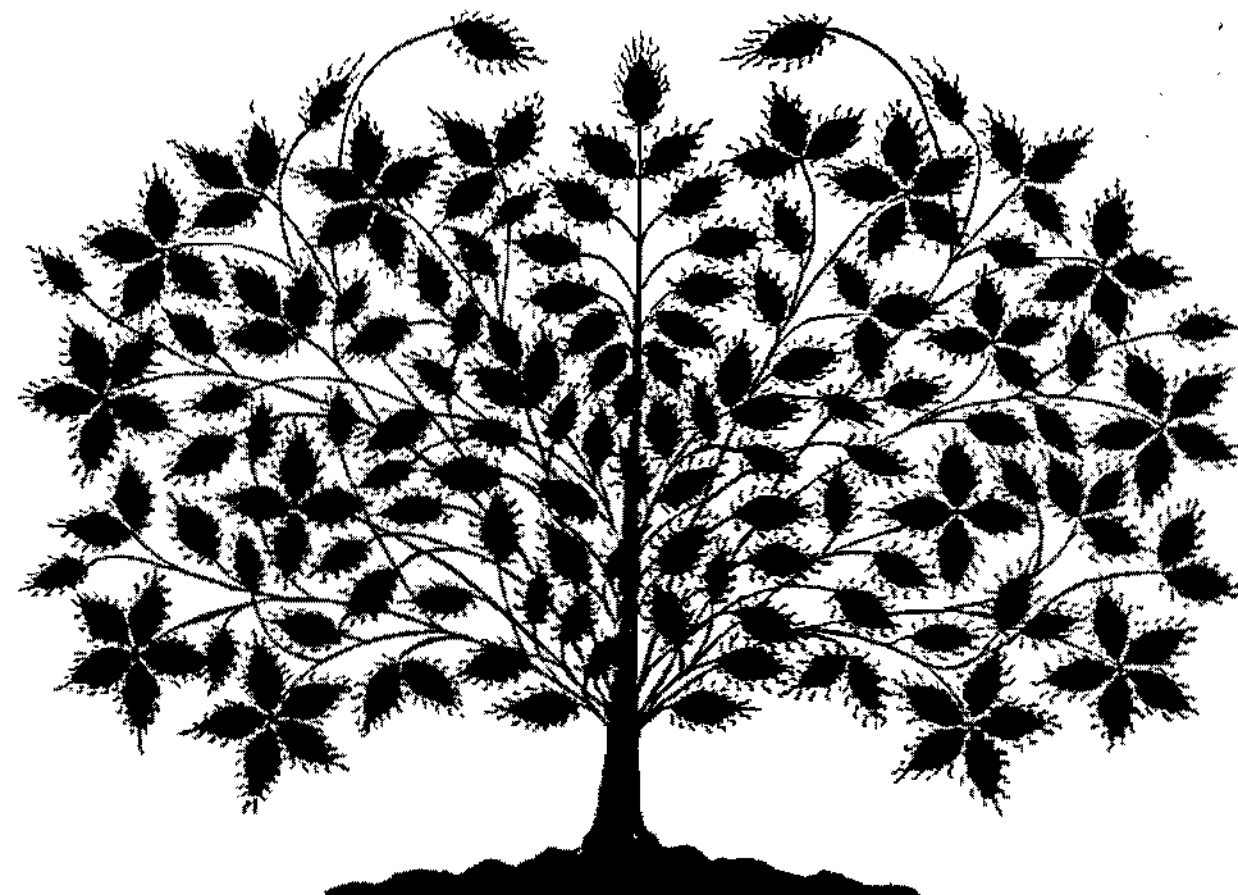
DANCE OF A FURY: ANNABELLE GAMSON

The solo dance, which has seemingly all but vanished from both the theater and dance studio, lives on (and gloriously), with Annabelle Gamson.

Her brilliant re-creations of Isadora Duncan's and Mary Wigman's work are equalled by her own superbly arresting choreography.

In her dynamic performance Gamson illustrates the commanding presence of a single dancer who has much to say and a furious desire to say it.

Debra TAUB



Hannah COHOON: The Tree of Light or Blazing Tree (1845)

HANNAH COHOON THE MIRROR OF EQUALITY

"And we would urge all children, who are thus growing in this tree, friendly to ponder that each branch and twig helps to shelter the other from the storm, and we commend ourselves unto their love and growth."

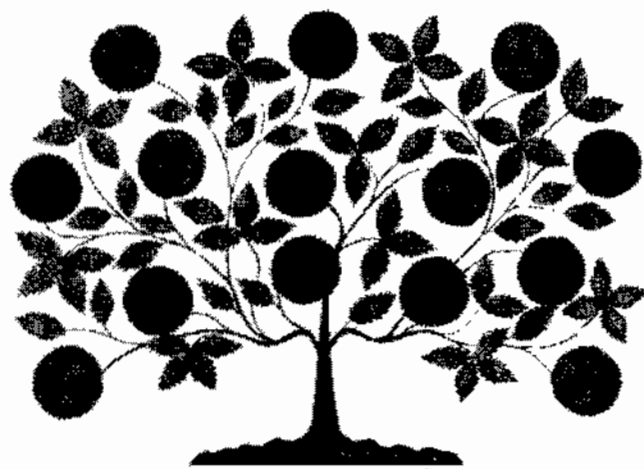
—Jacob Boehme

André Breton's essay "The Automatic Message" (1933) treated in some detail the question of mediumistic/automatic drawings. Many drawings of the type he mentioned were executed in the nineteenth century under the influence of spiritualistic ideas which gave a certain sanction to automatism viewed as the result of a benign form of spirit possession. The then obscure existence of the Shaker "spirit drawings," dated from the early and middle nineteenth century in America, was probably unknown to Breton. Certainly their formal tendency is generally different from the kind of drawing usually identified as automatic in surrealist writings on art. They are typically more naive and child-like in their imagery and structure, sometimes reminding us of crewel embroidery and folk art figurations. Still, it is noteworthy that Breton himself quoted Herschel on "the involuntary production of visual images whose principle characteristic was their regularity." This trait is well exemplified in Shaker visual-

izations, as is the auditory tendency that Breton personally favored, for many of the Shaker creations were described to the artist by a voice rather than being executed by a hand directly manipulated by a spirit.

Different though they may be in some ways, the Shaker drawings would in any case necessarily obey an automatic exigency. For like all Shaker expression, they were precipitated psychologically in response to a human situation characterized by rigid sexual abstinence and the prohibition of artistic images as such. Under these conditions, such pictorial sublimations as would inevitably tend to arise would have to assume a rather primitive and immediate quality. Also inevitable would be the need for an acceptable ideology to justify the maverick indulgence in visual imagery, which violated the Shaker reading the first commandment of Moses.

The necessary rationale was provided by the spiritualist inspirationism that served to justify most, if not all, Shaker art forms which carried the burden of expressive needs in a community wherein "Fine Art" was unknown. Their "spiritualism," which brought the Shakers of the 1830s and '40s into communication with their own deceased saints and even with secular greats such as George Washington, preceded even the first stirrings of that more widely known



Hannah COHOON: The Tree of Life (1854)

Spiritualist movement that sprang from the mysterious rapping sounds audited by the Fox sisters. If a derivation for Shaker spiritualism is to be found, we must search for it in the ecstasies of the prophets who fueled the Camisard revolt in France in the 1700s, and who exerted an influence on the extremist Quaker circles from which the Shakers emerged.

One of the most remarkable series of Shaker drawings was that executed by Hannah Cohoon of Hancock Village in Massachusetts, which community was renamed the "City of Peace" during the burst of inspirationist fervor that swept over the Shaker movement in the 1830s and '40s. In contrast to the dispersed imagery of most Shaker drawings, which feature collections of miniaturized symbolic gifts matched and balanced in a dominant rectangular pattern, Hannah Cohoon's drawings contain only one major symbol — a tree, in various permutations. This tree is so striking in its evocation of the unity or totality of life that even someone who is only casually acquainted with the writings of Jacob Boehme will receive a shock of recognition have they but read his "Author's Preface to the Reader" from *Six Theosophical Points*.

The series of watercolor drawings referred to are only four in number. They are usually on display in a preserved building at Hancock Shaker Village with a representative selection of other Shaker works. They are also discussed and reproduced in the volume *Visions of the Heavenly Spheres* by Edward Deming Andrews and Faith Andrews, which deals with the Shaker drawings and is a valuable source of information on the inspirationist/spiritualist wave in Shaker history.

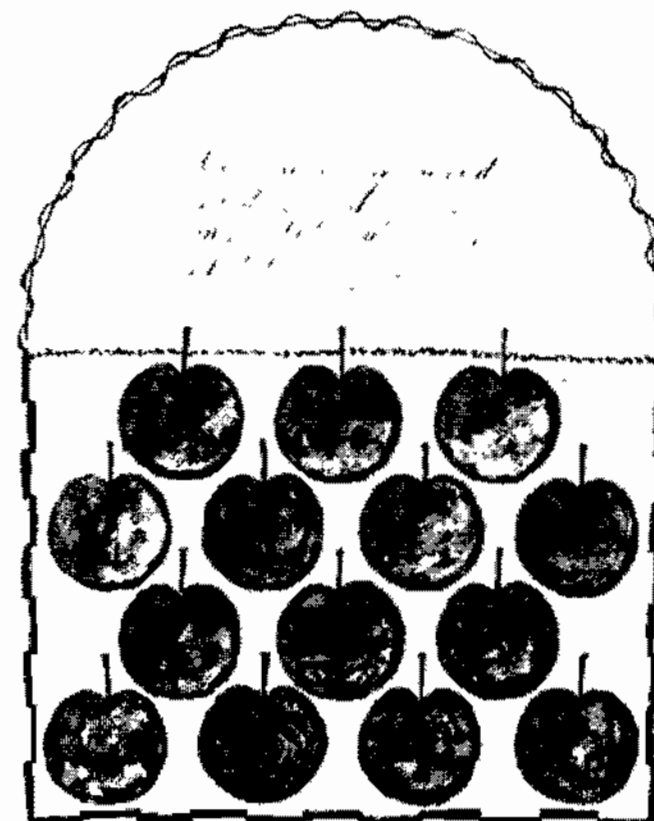
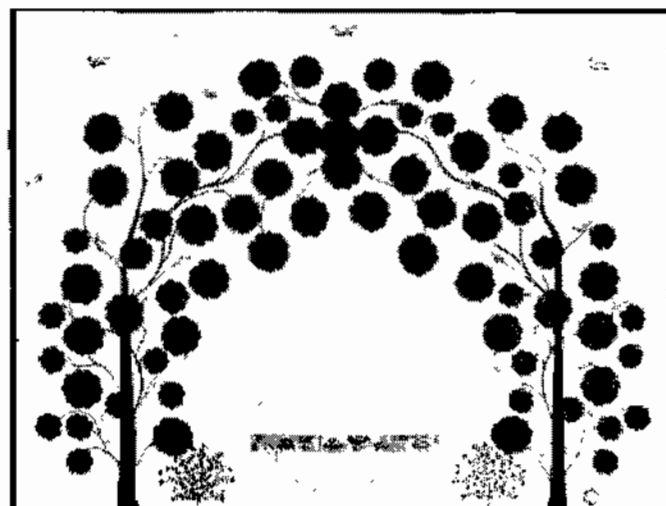
Of the four drawings, the first three were directly inspired by communication with the spirit of Ann Lee, founder of the United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Coming (known as the Shakers). The precipitating visions are described by Hannah Cohoon in a short text on each sheet. We are shown roots, trunk, branches and leaves rendered with an ease of line and a delightful feeling of life and motion in the context of an overall harmony. The uniformity that threatens the movement of the lines and the various shapes is a trait that risks monotony; however, here it is not productive of rigidity or monotony. The lines

and shapes remain free. In these drawings we can see that the elimination of overbearing masses is a principle in Shaker art that points to a kind of joy. Perhaps the supreme moral tendency of these works lies in a symbolic assertion of complete balance between the male and female principles.

The drawing entitled "The Tree of Light, or Blazing Tree," from 1845, memorializes the visionary tree that the early Shaker James Whittaker saw while he was still in England with Ann Lee's original entourage, and which he spoke of as a "vision of America." The vision is probably intended to portray a Shakerized America. The symbol is an ideal representation of a united human community, each leaf equal in the quantitative dimension, each glowing by itself with a light that is inspiration.

The "Tree of Life" from 1854 is a sensuous variation. Roots, trunk and branches are little different from the drawing done nine years earlier. However, this drawing is dominated by oversized red and green fruits covered with tiny seedlings. The fruit dances in the branches, and the leaves arranged between them are marked with a crisscross pattern to suggest veins. Here again we have a uniform sizing of all the elements: the fruit, differentiated only in color; the seedlings that cover the outer surface of the fruit; the uniform leaves; the crisscrossing of the veins. Nature and life in its ripeness, all things grown to be equal. "I entreated Mother Ann to tell me the name of this tree; which she did Oct. 1st, 4th hour P.M. by moving the hand of a medium to write twice over Your Tree is the Tree of Life."

From the same year of 1854 we have a stately vision of "A Bower of Mulberry Trees." The trees compose an archway with large-sized leaves whose shapes are somewhat hallucinatory in a strictly optical sense, reminiscent for me of certain shapes in the paintings of the early twentieth century abstractionist Arthur Dove. A smaller arch within the arch is composed of the dream-like text in which Hannah Cohoon describes the vision. Under the word-arch is a golden table, set for a feast. "Sept. 13th 1854. Blessed Mother Ann came into meeting we had a very powerful meeting... Afterwards I saw many brethren sitting upon benches in the bower."



Hannah COHOON: Basket of Apples (1856)

A watercolor drawing called "The Basket of Apples" dates from 1856 when Hannah Cohoon was sixty-eight years old. It is a tree drawing only in the sense that the apples are from a tree, but we can guess what tree it is. Straightforward and triumphantly beautiful, these are the

"golden apples of the sun." A corrugated rectangle represents the basket; a twisted line represents the handle. This is the plainest of the Cohoon pieces, but apparently the spirit made it a point to compensate the few plain lines with a rich golden color on the perfectly matched apples, fourteen in number. "Seen and Painted in the City of Peace by Hannah Cohoon."

An ideal organicism radiates from these works, indicating perhaps the sublimation together of latent sexual themes and preconscious social perceptions within a compatible symbolic content. The degree of genuineness of the automatism involved and the question of Shaker sexual doctrines and mores can be argued elsewhere. The watercolor drawings we have surveyed speak for themselves; that is, they speak for themselves provided one sees in them more than just a vague "love of nature," a sentimental tangent not entirely consistent with the Manichean element in the sect's outlook, even though it is sometimes averred to explain Shaker symbolism.

Hannah Cohoon captured the essence of Shakerism in these inspired works. In her terms, Holy Mother Wisdom, the female principle of divinity, told her what to draw and paint. What came out of that rapport was a symbolic affirmation of equality, unity and balance in the community of the sexes and of humanity altogether. The symbols employed, or the symbolic elements unconsciously projected, are simple indeed and would be almost invisibly elusive if we did not have the context of Shaker culture to which to relate them. But as they are, with their fine coherence and harmony, and with their inspirationist aura and origin, they are moving expressions of a mature communist instinct, or of what Wilhelm Reich called a "longing for socialism," subliminally fulfilled. They are indeed the mirror of equality.

Joseph JABLONSKI

A Pleasure Dome in Los Angeles

Simon Rodia's Watts Towers

*In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure dome decree...
So twice five miles of fertile ground
With walls and towers were girdled round...*

— Samuel Taylor Coleridge

In Watts, a singularly ugly and monotonous suburb of Los Angeles, a poor uneducated Italian immigrant acquired in 1920 an unwanted plot of ground, about 150 feet in length. There, during the next thirty-five years, he erected with his own hands an architectural fantasy which is unique in the world.

Its conception, execution, use of color, and wild but visionary precision of detail, are unlike anything attempted elsewhere. And it was created by a man whose poverty, lack of education, and humble

form of livelihood rendered him, in a sense, a social outcast.

The man was Simon Rodia, born and christened Sabatino Rodia in the village of Serena, in the province of Avellino in Italy, in 1878. He came as an immigrant to America when about ten or twelve years old. Later he worked in logging and mining camps as a cook, and apparently arrived in the Los Angeles area in the early 1910s. He had no education by academic standards. He never at any time attended any sort of art or architectural school, and until his death his English remained imperfect. He came to be known by his friends and neighbors in the poor Mexican and Negro sector of Los Angeles where he settled as

Sam Rodilla, or more often simply as "Sam".

In Los Angeles, Rodia became a tile-setter, evolving into a master of his craft, which was later to serve him in good stead. Wiry and undersized, but endowed with extraordinary energy, he managed to earn enough money to buy the plot of ground, triangular in shape, in Watts. Near the base of this plot he built his own house, a fantastic house, later burned by vandals.

Then something that had been growing within him, from the very depths of his subconscious being, took over. In his spare time mysterious and beautiful structures took shape. Composed of short lengths of scrap steel, overlaid with a

special cement mix in which were embedded tens of thousands of pieces of broken bottles, dinner plates, vari-colored tiles and multiformed sea shells, these structures consisted of three main steel towers, a "Pleasure Dome," a "Jewel Tower" (these are my names for them, not their creator's), a fountain, a fish pond, and several structures which Sam himself called "ships". His artisan's skill made these structures stick together. His hands, guided entirely by intuition, created the designs and colors of a visionary world.

Without any engineering training at all, and without welding equipment, or even bolts or rivets, he found a new way to put steel together. And he put it together so well that the Towers survived an earthquake. Later, when the city of Los Angeles building inspectors had the Towers condemned as "unsafe," after Rodia had given the Towers away to a Mexican friend and disappeared, they were able to withstand, undamaged, a 10,000-pound horizontal pull, in a test devised by a professional engineer. The city of Los Angeles was then forced to reverse its condemnation of the Towers, and they are now considered to incorporate the longest unweilded columns in the world.

This is an astonishing achievement for a rather undersized man, working without human or mechanical assistance, whilst also working eight hours a day to make a living as a tile-setter. No wonder it took him thirty-five years and he did not complete it until he was seventy-five years of age.

The highest tower is 104 feet in height. The method of construction used by Rodia resulted in a system of wheels within wheels, so to speak, and with radiating members interconnecting all the parts. There are semicircular members attached to the periphery of the tower, carrying balloon-type horizontal members which expand rhythmically as they ascend upwards along the axis of the structure.

This tower was begun in 1921, and the date, with Rodia's initials, is inscribed at its base. Below, in deference to his Mexican neighbors, he announced his

"New City" in imperfect Spanish. Comparisons are not easy to find, but this and the other vertical features have an affinity with Buddhist temples of Bangkok.

What I have called the "Pleasure Dome" because it seems to have been designed as a central place to sit and meditate on the beauties around, is visually an ideal form, with its mushrooming structure, to set beside the tall towers, with their piercing verticality. It is significant that every unit used in the construction of this dome is different from the rest in length, thickness, texture and color. There is constant modification everywhere. Nothing was ready-made; nothing was pre-shaped or the result of intellectual calculation. It is an empiric work of the hands and eye. Rodia's dome is the complete antithesis to the famous geodesic domes of Buckminster Fuller, which so well express the scientific and mechanical cast of our society, the domination of intelligence and the ordered world of geometries. Rodia's dome is intuitive in conception and execution.

It is, however, interesting that when Buckminster Fuller himself visited the Watts Towers in 1960 he said: "Rodia was a master of his material — cement. Rarely have I seen a construction standing as long as the Watts Towers showing so few and so insignificant cracks."

What I call the "Jewel Tower" is less high than the three central towers, and reminds the viewer inevitably of a jewelled crown. The fountain has all the charm and gaiety of a huge Italian wedding cake. This is a remarkable example of Rodia's instinctive gift for decoration. The circular walls are mosaics of broken tiles of every shape, pattern and color. Water was intended to flow down the descending levels of this structure, but, because of some municipal regulation, the City of Los Angeles never permitted Rodia to turn the water on.

Close to this fountain is one of the strange "ship" formations which Rodia built up, with a mast-like spire, and several stalagmite-like concrete growths rising from the 'deck' and sprinkled with broken multi-colored glass. The oriental

inspiration of so much of the whole fantasy is indicated by the fact that another "ship" was called by its creator "the Ship of Marco Polo."

The ship imagery is echoed in the whole triangle enclosing the towers, which has something of the shape of a ship, with masts rising from it. Does this express a baffled sense of adventure, a voyage of discovery to some fabled Xanadu? Or should one change the imagery and regard the whole enclosure as a magical garden, a garden where the shrubs and trees are of steel and cement, and the flowers of glass and tile — a garden representing to his own design and in the only materials which were available to him the lost gardens of Italy which Rodia would never see?

James Johnson Sweeney has described Rodia as "an intuitive genius of construction." Viewing his extraordinary fantasy in architectural terms one comes to three conclusions. First, it is a pioneer work in a new kind of non-utilitarian architecture. One of the very few valid comparisons is with the work of Antonio Gaudi, architect of the Familia Sagrada in Barcelona.

Secondly, it is an example of a truly contemporary kind of beauty — just as "contemporary" as the works of any of the "modern" school, since its materials come very largely from scrap heaps, the discarded excreta of our city civilization.

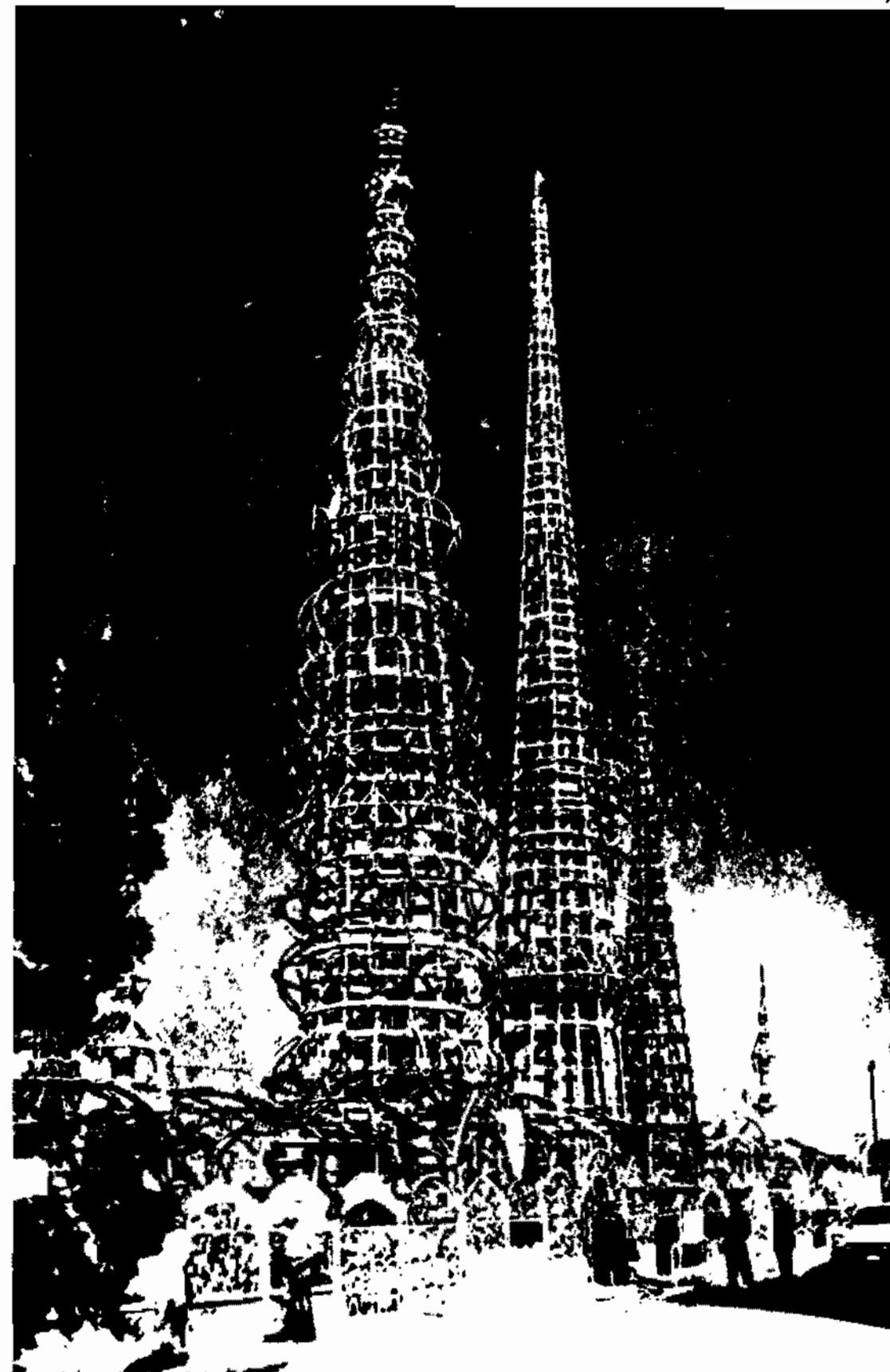
Thirdly, it is a superb demonstration of what is so often lacking in modern building — the use and function of color.

Rodia died in Martinez, California, on July 16, 1965. In his last years he lived in a rooming-house in straightened circumstances. Today the extraordinary nature of his achievement is at last being recognized. A Committee has been formed to preserve the Watts Towers as a cultural center and as a unique example of the triumph of the creative and intuitive mind over the technical outlook which dominates our age.

Clarence John LAUGHLIN



José ARGEMÍ:
Surrealist Postage Stamps



Clarence John LAUGHLIN: The Watts Towers (photograph)

SPONTANEOUS SCULPTURE & the Law of Entropy

Sculpture is an activity rarely engaged in by those who do not think of themselves as artists; rarely, in fact, by anyone who has not had at least some "esthetic" schooling. But occasionally, as if possessed by a mysterious force, sculpture erupts out of the *matter at hand*.

In spare moments, in the secrecy of their homes and workshops, plumbers, pipefitters, welders, woodworkers and electricians construe the irrational and the marvelous out of the very materials they manipulate so rationally and mundanely at work day after day. Something beneficial must be derived from this natural impulse, or else it would not occur to the extent that it does. And much more often than one might think, it results in sculptures a thousand times more vital and more expressive than the miserabilist monuments imposed on us by the officially acclaimed Great Sculptors of today.

Most often this impulse toward spontaneous sculpture manifests itself in moments of leisure, as a contrast to work that is routinely performed. A striking example is the proliferation of snow creatures after great blizzards, when the material literally is dumped on the imagination abandoned to leisure. The transient character of snow conforms well to the play of spontaneity and humor. Moreover, as with waves lapping against castles of sand on the beach, no great principles are lost to anyone's approval or disapproval.

The probability of spontaneous sculpture developing in any given society could be calculated only if we were able to consider all the factors that aid or inhibit its production. The question poses itself: Would it flourish if it were free to do so?

A fundamental relationship exists between the entropy of a system left to its own, and the logarithm of the probability of formation of its structures ($S = E \log P$). The availability of time and material, the two major factors in the production of sculpture, is not sufficient to assure its proliferation. Yet it would seem to follow that the greater the abundance of these prime factors, the greater will be the development of sculpture.

In this respect, the differences between the older societies (in which sculpture flourished) and the modern industrialized society (in which sculpture languishes) would seem to indicate a deficiency, in the latter, of some vital component.

Significantly, what is almost universally regarded as the greatest sculpture is the product of precapitalist societies: ancient Egypt, Greece, India, China, Tibet, and — of still greater interest from the surrealist viewpoint — the tribal societies of Oceania, Africa and the Americas. Just as significant is the fact that under capitalism the greatest sculpture nearly always is the work of marginal, disenfranchised loners who stubbornly refuse to run in the rat race: S.P. Dinsmoor, creator of the Garden of Eden in Lucas, Kas.; the French mailman Ferdinand Cheval, who built his extraordinary "Ideal Palace" with pebbles collected on his daily rounds; Simon Rodia, who built his Watts Towers with

broken pieces of Seven-Up bottles and seashells; Grandma Prisbrey, maker of countless wonders out of old bottles; and our friend Stanley Papio, proprietor of Stanley's Iron Works in Key Largo, Fla., who has unleashed a whole menagerie of inspired junk-metal creatures.

These sculptors, whose work is so dissimilar (probably not one of them ever heard of any of the others), nonetheless have a lot in common: All have been self-taught and wholly oblivious to the machinations of the "art market." They have sculpted primarily for their own pleasure and incidentally for the pleasure of all humankind: they are not in it for the money.

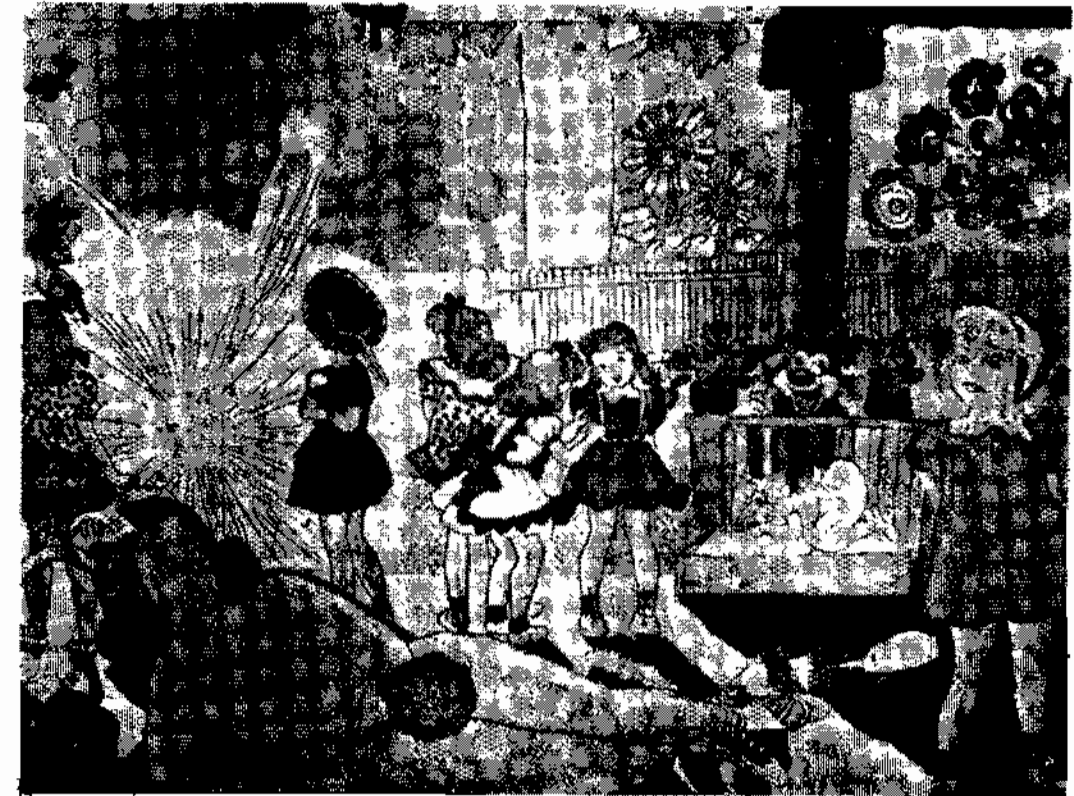
The inescapable conclusion is that, in societies where sculpture exists as a commodity, the number of sculptors is much reduced proportionately.

Sculpture, too long regarded as one of the "secondary" arts, is emphatically *social* in its very essence. A renaissance of sculpture requires a complete transformation of society. There is perhaps no better way to begin than by demanding not freedom (much less government support) for Art, but rather freedom *from* Art.

Robert GREEN



S.P. DINSMOOR: Sculpture from "The Garden of Eden"



Henry J. DARGER: collage/painting from "Realms of the Unreal"

HENRY J. DARGER: THE HOMER OF THE MAD

Henry J. Darger was a self-taught artist in the realm of epic fantasy. According to his own account, he was born on April 12, 1892, in Brazil. But he lived his life in rural Illinois and in Chicago where he died in 1972 as an invalid in the dubious care of the "Little Sisters of the Poor." Having no formal education, he worked for decades in menial jobs, usually in hospitals. Perhaps the most impactful experience of his life was witnessing the Easter Sunday twister which destroyed the entire town of Countybrown, Illinois, in 1913.

Darger's magnum opus is composed of many large collage-drawings, often shockingly gory, along with a dozen or more volumes of prose narrative. It is titled "The Story of the Vivian Girls in What is Known as the Realms of the Unreal or the Glandorian War Storm or the Glandico-Abbiennian Wars, as Caused by the Child Slave Rebellion." His works were first shown to the public at the "Surrealism in 1977" exhibition organized by the Surrealist Movement in the U.S. in Gary,

Ind. A major Darger exhibition was held at the Hyde Park Art Center in Chicago later in the same year.

Because of his use of strictly popular vehicles — comics, coloring books, advertising art, war news, popular religious lore, etc. — as a basis for his epic, Darger could be considered as an unknown and unheralded predecessor of "pop art." There is a crucial distinction, however, in the fact that he was one with the people to a vastly greater extent and truly expressed the naive exaltation of popular heroism, whereas the so-called pop artists were specialized denizens of the "art world" and could only provide more or less alienated stylistic glosses on the subject of the mass image.

But just who was this grand unknown?

* * *

There are a few residents of Chicago who knew Henry Darger, or at least about him, most notably Nathan Lerner, from

whom the aging fantasist rented a room for many years. Sooner or later Darger's life story will be told in some detail.

To me it is obvious that Darger was in that class of men whose extreme poverty and lowly social station at birth lead them almost inevitably into the path of infantile and pre-adolescent trauma: orphanhood, lifelong scars of humiliation, and inferiority neurosis that precludes the possibility of any work or "career" beyond the most elementary servitude. Unfit for military service, unfit for marriage, unfit for the game of life; but all the time burning in secret, with secrets known only to themselves.

Darger, however, was somehow different from the great majority of those who get the worst of it in the school of hard knocks. Different in that he possessed, along with his desire, a fully activated imagination capable of focusing this desire with images to which he attached an obsessive fealty. He was able to create living myth. He was a self-sufficient

poetic being. Though his destiny may have conspired to render him rude or awkward, or even stunted, it did not succeed. For by the evidence of his work he was completely and nobly human; great struggle and passion and love were known to him, beckoning through the most unusual and sentimental disguises.

Yet Darger was more than a sentimentalist. He was a naive surrealist, in that the power of the desires dictating his imagery forced asunder the conventional swathings of his vision and his story and reached the point of convulsive gratification. His epic reveals to us one of the most important things that surrealism is: a sublimation that reveals all the psychic dimensions at once.

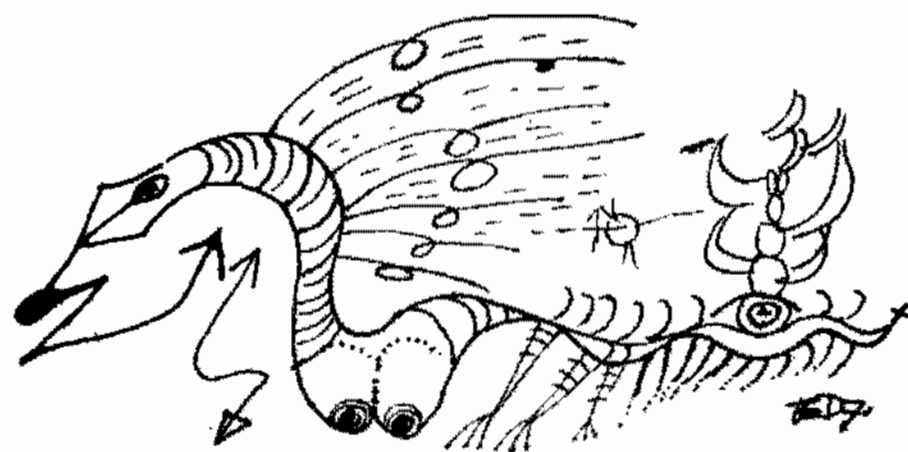
Surely, in the course of creating a personal mythos to contain and sublimate his enormous internal conflicts, Darger was hypnotized, outmaneuvered and overpowered by the aggressive eroticism latent in his fantasies. The scenes of battle and carnage, the tortured organs, the naked waifs with magnificent rams' horns, the monumental death statistics, the blood-chilling omnipresence of throttling and irresistible storms — he integrated these things into an allegory, a military fairy tale balanced innocently on the opposition of the most naive and simplistic fantasies of good and evil. Still, whatever elements of a morality his work contains, we recognize the truth that beneath the sublimations his mind thirsted for some kind of abyss. He adored and worshiped the innocence of his models precisely because this innocence presented the opportunity for an infinite violation. "Throw out the battle line," he sings. He revels in this erotic liad; his joy in the supreme tension can only be represented in the imaginative marshaling of millions of angels and demons, whose formations are capable of a strife that can in its turn only be comparable to storms of galactic dimensions: "The Glandelinian War Storm" in the "Realms of the Unreal."

Darger's decades-long involvement in the creation of this epic must have been intensely sustaining as well as gratifying to him, and thus we must assume that in the process of creating it he lived vicariously many of the experiences he depicts. This eternal sojourn of his in the "Realms of the Unreal" was for Darger his real life. Commonplace events in his room, at his menial jobs, at Roma's Restaurant in his neighborhood where he often took his meals, in his memories of his own childhood and youth, at mass, and in his contacts with alien beings from the realms of the real — these fragments of daily life were relentlessly transformed and incorporated into his personal mythology, which was more vivifying to him than any daily bread. How can one fail to

be amazed by his corny posed photographs of "cute" children from the daily newspapers and advertisements? These pictures created such a storm within him that they activated a compelling dialectic of aggressive desire and immediate sublimation. He took these pictures home, to his room, and transferred them by means of his technique of tracing and collage into the frontal images of a sentimental delirium and horrific martyrdom.

It took an entire self-contained world to provide an enveloping matter dense enough to contain the explosive forces latent within his fantasies. So much is self-evident. This man could not function as an occasional naive, producing now and then some fossil evidence of a vanished passion or impulse. His need to create and sublimate within a dynamic process of mythic-poetic expression was constant; it was his being.

The need extended even to his artifacts, those trivia that surrounded him in his densely cluttered room. We need consider only what remain of his pos-



Schlechter DUVALL: ink drawing

INSCRIPTIONS

Behind signs, signs are hidden. ☆ The real is imagined, and the imaginary is realized. ☆ Everything is always new. ☆ I am neither my master nor my slave. ☆ I AM AGAINST. (Groucho Marx) ☆ The theater is the imagination for those who have no imagination. ☆ Novels are too long. ☆ Science and poker: games for adults. ☆ I don't write: I box. ☆ Imagination is action. ☆ The day will come when people will hunt for texts in popular entertainment magazines the way they hunt now for old Gothic novels, for works by literary lunatics and for works by the most outrageous minor romantics — looking for their absurdity, their sense of the marvelous, their freedom. ☆ To organize an expedition to explore the banal.

sessions, consisting of strange letters, pictures of children and babies that he treasured, bibly pictures, etc. He was dangerously extended. He went so far as to write letters to agencies charged with the care of orphaned children in an attempt to adopt a young girl. Darger applied to society in pursuit of his muse. Of course he was refused.

Henry Darger died in 1972, eighty years old, a charge of Catholic charity. We shall consult an almanac to see what the weather was like that day, and we shall compare it with the predictions of the weather bureau.

The "Glandelinian War Storm" is over, but we are endeavoring to discover its historical causes and effects.

One cause: Desire.

One effect: There is not a Catholic church standing, in the entire world, whose rigid stone walls have not been transformed into the muscle-flesh of the human heart and been burst open.

Joseph JABLONSKI

Louis SCUTENAIRE

Mes Inscriptions
(Gallimard, 1945)

HERESIES

Let us not lose sight of the fact that we are at grips with "the noble white man" that made agony both ingenious and scientific, and relegated life's possibilities to the select few and life's "garbage" to the many.

* * *

Once again speech is free — but you must not mention anything.

* * *

I've been rather skeptical about my own intelligence. Without any apparent reason I'd find myself in the most compromising positions — jobs.

* * *

At times I have a craving to run for office, like I did this spring. I fully intended to run for mayor of Chicago, but was held up on the eve of nomination by slow freights.

* * *

Only one bad flaw about radio: worker is on wrong end — the receiving end.

* * *

Edison backwards spells *no side*.

* * *

Tear Gas: The most effective agent used by employers to persuade their employees that the interests of capital and labor are identical.

* * *

*They floundered 'round in Flanders Field
In mud up to their ears*

All for "dear old plutocracy" and possible *pie a la mode* (pronounce: pile-o-mud).

Chimerical, what?

Christian civilization (exploitation of man by man).

Western civilization (exploitation of man by man).

European civilization (exploitation of man by man).

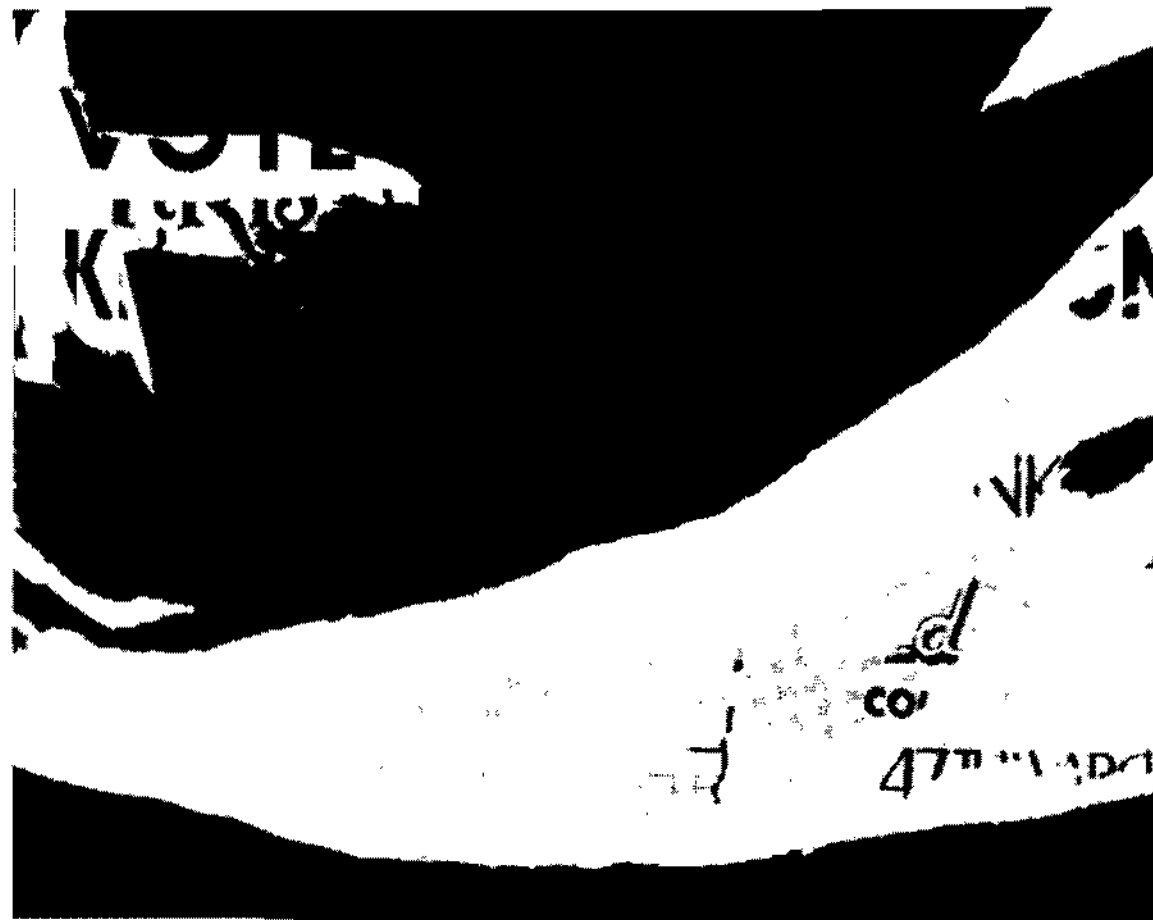
ETC., far into the night . . .

T-BONE SLIM

(1920s-'30s)



Hal Rammel:
Comic Strip based on a poem by Franklin Rosemont (1979)



Lacerated Poster (Chicago, 1979)

REVOLUTIONARY ASPECTS OF EVERYDAY LIFE

An Introduction to Lacerated Posters

Surrealists always have had a predilection for the streets where, amidst the seeming confusion of the banal and ordinary, startling evidence of a deeper and truer sense of reality continually pierces the consciousness of those who know how to look for it. Wandering at all hours, and *determined* — like arrows en route to their targets, or rather, magically en route to other, more revelatory kinds of targets — we may find ourselves waiting at some particular place for which we feel a certain fondness, or even a certain anxiety; where, with a fierce resolution — a will to find that which sparkles, that which tears the veil from the normal — we become wholly engaged in a search that is not just an isolated adventure, but rather part of a unique way of life.

In the world of objective chance, premonitions are rampant, and coincidences are everywhere a crisscrossing network of static and interference. The slip of the tongue is as revelatory for the one who speaks as for the one who hears.

By making ourselves *available*, for anything, an exciting atmosphere of anticipation surrounds us. The air itself becomes magnetically charged with desire; it would not be far from the truth to describe existence as *haunted*. In the chance phenomena of everyday life are intricate relationships which are fundamentally recognizable as erotic comminglings of internal and external reality. Propelled by desire, we find ourselves constantly alert, in our waking dream, to occurrences of "another nature." Indeed, we could ask, as did Breton on the first page of *Nadja*, whom or what do we haunt?

Thus the aleatory not only *attracts* our attention but *commands* it, for we take part in and are part of "that which shall be" to a greater extent than we generally suppose. What we say or do, for one reason or another, often without our even being aware of it, has *implications* — not only for us, but for others who may not have the faintest notion that they are looking for something of which our

action or verbalization provides the substance. Several years ago I received as a gift an Indian bearclaw ring that triggered a whole series of events which held sway over my waking moments for more than a month, provoking around me an almost other-worldly atmosphere of anticipation and mystery. While walking home late one evening a few days after I received this ring, I was suddenly — as if out of nowhere — confronted by a large bear rug staring at me from a store window. To say the least, it registered as a shock. An acquaintance subsequently spoke of his intentions to go bear-hunting. During the weeks that followed came one link after another in the chain of events, ending with my discovery — late one night, while waiting for a bus — of a woman's black glove, on the ground near my feet. Though not having anything to do with bears, the glove — I felt certain of this — was the culminating link in the series (there is, of course, an obvious parallel between the bearclaw and the glove which once covered a hand). And thus a long series of curiously related incidents, to which slight attention would have been paid had someone not provoked me into it by his gift, carried me along *who knows where* on an adventure that may yet reveal its secret.

A comparable instance was related to me by Joseph Jablonski. He had just purchased a book of André Breton's poems published by Jonathan Cape, and had it on the front seat of his car as he was driving home. Waiting for a light to change, he noticed a sticker on the car in front of him that read, "Cape Breton." He told me that he should have dropped everything and driven straightway to Cape Breton. Who knows what might then have transpired?

Whether they know it or not, everyone — at every moment — is involved in such quests. Breton wrote in *The Communicating Vessels* that it is significant "to observe how the demands of desire searching for the object of its realization make strange use of external things, tending to take from them only what will serve its purpose. The vain bustle of the street has become hardly more disturbing than the wrinkling of the sheets. Desire is there, cutting straight into the fabric which is not changing fast enough, then letting its sure and fragile thread run back and forth between the pieces."

Such temptations cannot be ignored. Psychoanalysis has taught us to study the seemingly most insignificant details of everyday behavior. But surrealism has carried the psychoanalytic effort further, permitting us to recognize in these generally "unnoticed" details signs and symptoms of an impending revolutionary social transformation. The smallest actions can have the greatest consequences.

The program of the "Systematic Cycle of Conferences on the Most Recent Positions of Surrealism" in Paris, 1935, featured a discussion by Leo Malet on "The Surrealist Physiognomy of a Street," accompanied by a "presentation of lacerated posters." Thus emerged the concept of *decollage* (unsticking), defined in the 1938 *Abridged Surrealist Dictionary* as "the generalization of the process of peeling pieces off a poster so as to reveal fragments of the poster or posters beneath it," in turn provoking "speculation on the disruptive or disordering quality of the results obtained."

Lacerated posters surely must be among the most genuinely popular and widespread of all media: They are on view aplenty in the streets of every city in the world.

Starting out as dreary manifestations of a commercial social order, these advertisements end up — thanks to "ordinary" people who are *just waiting* — as emblems of "something else." Such images, liberated from the grip of commodity fetishism, reveal aspects of the latent content of the ceaselessly unfolding mythology of our epoch.

"The urge to destroy," as Bakunin noted, "is also a creative urge." In a society that sanctifies private property, vandalism is one of the principal means by which people who do not think of themselves in any sense as poets nonetheless can contribute appreciably to the poetic cause.

These posters, mutilated and therefore transformed, are fomentors of numerous disquieting revelations. Collective, anonymous, continually changing, they are infinitely better attuned to the pulse of the times than ninety-nine per cent of the Works of Art enshrined in today's galleries, museums, police stations and banks. Unmistakably authentic products of pure psychic automatism, and created *against the law*, they are vehicles of radical demystification as well as incitements to change life.

The lacerated posters are an important example of popular revolutionary poetic activity — modest and unassuming, indeed, but capable of affording us, if only for odd moments here and there, ineradicable glimpses of the marvelous.

J. Karl BOGARTTE



Lacerated Poster (Chicago, 1979)



SAUCER EYES SORCERIZED



They're here! Or are They? And if They aren't, what are They waiting for?

We're someplace in the middle of a sixth or seventh wave of sightings that began in the US in 1896-97, disappeared until the post-Hiroshima gloom of 1947, recurred in the Cold War 1952 and 1957, again in the wild years of the mid-sixties, and have gone on more or less unabated from 1973 to the present. The earliest observers reported strange lights and sounds, metallic vehicles, sometimes friendly but also frightening interchanges with aliens. The basics have remained ever since pretty much elaborations on a theme. But the scale of observations, and the excitement aroused by them, grew wonderfully in the years that followed World War II. Despite government efforts to suppress speculation as groundless, the saucers inevitably escaped from a classified military subject to a popular culture icon. If the saucer enthusiasts could not be corralled into amphitheatres for organized observations spacepeople turned into cosmic jocks for public enjoyment. UFOlogy has nevertheless climbed into the arena with Roller Derby and SciFi paperbacks — somewhere between the ludicrous and the sublime.*

Five blue-collar workers from southern California paved the way for cult followings in the mid-fifties by spectacular reports of alien contact popularized in books like *The Flying Saucers Have Landed*, *Secrets of the Saucers* and *From Outer Space to You*. Recounting bizarre experiences from bus terminal conversations to earthling-alien romances, these workaday messengers told of Utopian societies on other planets and of an Earth mission both to prevent atomic holocaust and to protect the galaxy from homo sapiens' crazed aggressions. Extraterrestrial intervention had a strong appeal, filmically best captured in *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951) with the aliens a combination of intergalactic UN and God. And the boom spread. Saucer enthusiasts organized clubs, published magazines, held conventions, even developed a modest political base through which a Californian received over a hundred thousand votes in a Peace and Space bid for the Senate in 1962. Steve Allen's original "Tonight" show, New York radio's Long John Nebel and other talk shows offered spectacular forums for earthling contactees to further publicize their experiences. Cottage industries formed here and there; one contactee sold packets of hair from a 385-pound Venusian St. Bernard dog. By the time bus driver Ralph Cranden (Jackie Gleason) came to a costume party in his own self-made Spaceman suit (Norton/Art Carney won first prize as Alien when he showed up in his sewerage worker fatigues and gas mask), American culture reached the saturation point.

Inevitably, public interest faded away. The long-awaited tete-a-tete between world leaders and the supercivilization never (as far as we know) took place, and as nineteenth century Americans had turned their attentions from Spiritualism to electricity, their descendants dropped Saucers for the real-life Moonshot. Actually, government-sponsored investigations, Congressional hearings, and "official" reports

concurrently accomplished what the Air Force had never managed alone: discrediting of the UFOs and their observers. In spite of numerous sightings, the idea of extraterrestrial contact harmlessly invoked the image of 1950s culture, along with the hula hoop, Buddy Holly records and the Edsel.

The last few years have seen another turnaround. The sheer number of eerie incidents is again on the increase. Tabloid headlines scream, "UFO FLEETS BLITZ EARTH — 'It Could Mean That Alien Beings Are Finally Getting Ready to Talk to Us' " (*National Enquirer*, Jan. 30, 1979). South African children are reportedly accosted by gleaming humanoids; the population of an entire Brazilian city flees from a strange yellow light; residents of Petrozavodsk, in Russia, grow so accustomed to regular visits by "their" UFO that they count on it as a tourist attraction. 1978 was supposed to be the "Year of Alien Contact," hyped by the *Enquirer*, random psychics, and *Close Encounters of a Third Kind*. But the new enthusiasm is not to be dampened by a temporary setback.

The growing respectability of the Aliens is perhaps the most important change. Once in the guts of popular culture, Saucers could be laughed off as the product of atmospheric peculiarities, mind-games and outright hoax. But the Air Force abandonment of investigations in 1969 opened up the field for more independent inquiry. Prominent scientific figures, such as Carl Sagan, also eased the way for positive investigation by popularizing the hypothesis of intelligent life on other planets. Erich von Daniken and a host of other cranky speculators threaten that respectability through pathetic pseudo-explanations of early human history, translating biblical quotations and anthropological guesswork into ancient space visitations. Hoaxers with their falsified sightings remain at large. But a level of public acceptance seems finally to have been attained, from Jack Webb's television "UFO Reports" and its ambiguous acceptance of the "unexplainable" to the development of such academic citadels as the Center for UFO Studies in Evanston, Illinois. The saucer watchers have dug in for the duration. As J. Allen Hynek of Northwestern University's Astronomy Department says, "There will indeed be a twenty-first century science, and a thirtieth century science, to which the UFO phenomenon may be as natural as television, atomic energy, and DNA are to twentieth century science..."

Scientific credibility alone cannot, however, fully explain why the world is more ready to look and listen. The simple or "naive" vision of extraterrestrials as guardians of space come to pronounce mandatory changes in a failed human civilization has deep popular culture roots, after all, from the Millenarian uprisings of medieval European peasants to the Melanesian Cargo Cult, to the Messianic strains of Socialism, to religious or other cult rebellions of all kinds. The threat of atomic annihilation first stirred these energies. But the old faiths, religious and secular, kept the results within bounds. Saucer advocates in those days had to guarantee their anti-Communism to get a hearing. Don Siegel's *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* and a horde of lesser films refuted the

Kindly Alien image with a threat that sounded suspiciously like Cosmic Stalinism. Christian theology and Western logic frowned on the possibility of forces more "occult," and potentially more powerful, than their own.

A quarter-century later, the basis of the old beliefs has been shaken. Only a highly selective paranoia still places Evil entirely outside American society, and the old promise of technological cornucopia seems less real than ecological disaster and thermonuclear Doomsday. A new stage has been reached with what might be called Saucer Theology. Domenico Grasso of Gregorian University, formerly an adviser to the present Pope, has vouchsafed to the *Enquirer* (Feb. 13) that meditation has given him insight to the existence of Aliens who lack Sin! Naturally, they are more technologically advanced than mere humans, and they may (not surprisingly) be willing to help their Fallen counterparts. If the doctrine of Original Sin stops at the stratosphere, most religious authorities haven't yet got the news. But in this depressed and dragged-out era, many people in all walks of life have apparently come to the conclusion that the human race, helpless to find its own way out of impending disaster, may get a helping hand from the Stars.

The implications of this mass sentiment are still undetermined. The fervent desire for a Savior, even couched in a disaffection with the existing order, seems to suggest Jonestown more than any positive social movement. But the thirst for intergalactic contact, for a human destiny bounded neither by earthly reality nor by the NASA-cowboy-style "conquest" of Space, raises other possibilities as well. Science Fiction has long been an important vehicle for social criticism, and the generalized wish to place human life in a new relation with the cosmos, to see the common destiny of all Earth's children transformed in a gleaming moment of peaceful understanding, is no mean craving. The believers may be foretelling humankind's doom amidst its own resources, or then again they may be voicing an expectation of social change larger than any that humanity has known heretofore.

There's a jocular argument going around the heterodox Left these days: Would a socialist civilization conquer space because the beings possessed collective, unalienated scientific power? Or would technological supershots be abandoned for the simple joy of living? The impossibility of answering, and the need to make these jokes at all, are revelations of our time. Observing, wondering, no more able than anybody else to act on the mysterious UFOs, some of us can't help watching the watchers prepare themselves for what they hope will be the greatest spectator sport of all time

Paul BUHLE



* Much of the historical narrative, as well as the quotation from J. Allen Hynek, is derived from the admirable scholarly study, David M. Jacob's *The UFO Controversy* (Signet Paperback).



SCIENCE & THE MARVELOUS



Mechanization has had an inherently paradoxical relation to popular culture in the United States: seen at once as the friendly magician, the demon, the impersonal device and the personified character of the civilization writ large. Not in any society, notes Siegfried Gideon in his authoritative *Mechanization Takes Command*, has the proportion of inventors exceeded that in the United States of the mid-nineteenth century. Just at the cutting edge of industrialization, machines seemed to suggest a dreamlike visage of rendering the marvelous possible — like the Spiritualists who believed the invention of the telegraph key would perfect communication with inhabitants of the "Other Side," beyond Death's veil. The same Spiritualists feared correctly that the bourgeois rationalizers would seize Science for purely exploitative purposes, and deny the in-

sight of analogy beyond or above empiricist verification.

Yet the glimmer of wonder persists, from every backyard Gyro Gearloose working on an unknown solar principle to the child's dreams of self-powered flight. We know also that the popular critique of mechanization is deep and penetrating. When Colin Clive as Dr. Frankenstein in *The Bride of Frankenstein* (1935) reveals a mysterious source of power that "Man was not meant to know," the foreshadowing of nuclear technology is transparent. But will the jagged, jerry-built monster-children of the Nuclear Age only destroy the laboratory while the old society weeps and riots outside? Or will the machine regain through them its old promise of the magical device (rendered in Frankenstein by the monster's recognition of erotic possibility in

For me, as for the realists of the Middle Ages, there exists no fundamental difference between the elements of thought and the phenomena of the world, between the visible and the comprehensible, the perceptible and the imaginable.

Consequently, the marvelous is everywhere. Comprehended in things, it appears as soon as one manages to penetrate any object. The humblest alone raises all problems. Its form, testimony of its personal structure, results from transformations which have been taking place since the beginning of the world; it contains in germ the countless possibilities that the future will undertake to realize.

The marvelous is also between things, beings, in that space in which our senses perceive nothing directly but which is filled by energies, waves, forces in unceasing movement, where ephemeral equilibriums are evolved, where every transformation is prepared. Far from being independent, isolated units, objects participate in compositions, vast fragile assemblages or solid constructions, realities whose fragments only are perceived by our eyes, but whose entirety is conceived by the mind.

To know the structure of the external world, to reveal the interplay of forces, to follow the movements of energy: This is the program of the exact sciences. It would seem, then, that these should be the true keys to the marvelous. If they are not such keys to a greater extent, it is because they do not affect the whole human being; their severe disciplines exclude emotional perception. They reject the individual factors of knowledge in

favor of an impersonal and mechanical investigation.

By a curious paradox, the more humanity extends its knowledge and its mastery of the world, the more estranged it feels from the life of the universe, and the more it separates human needs from the data of the mind. A definite antimony seems to exist at present between the way of the marvelous and the way of the sciences.

Emotion subsists for the scientist at the moment of discovery; he perceives the obstacle overcome, the door opening onto an unexplored domain. Emotion is felt again by the uninstructed who, without understanding anything, falls into ecstasies before the theatrical character of modern technology.

The others, pupils and professors, do not feel themselves involved in a mechanism in which memory and pure intelligence are at work. Learning is a suitcase they carry. No internal transformation seems necessary to them in order to understand a theory or follow a curve in space. Successively, they



the spectacular being of Elsa Lanchester) and help turn the desultory scuffle against Capitalist Science into revolutionary conquest?

The results remain to be seen. We console ourselves historically with the experience of Boris Karloff who, enraged by the insecurity and terrible working conditions of putting on and removing his Monster disguise long before and after the paid shooting hours, became a pioneer of the Hollywood unionism that helped inspire the CIO. It is not the monsters we fear, at last, but their Masters in this order.

The following excerpt from Pierre Mahille's *Mirror of the Marvelous* (*Le Miroir du merveilleux*; Paris, Les Editions de Minuit, 1962) sheds a valuable light on these preoccupations.

P.B.

learn limited sciences in particular techniques, in a special vocabulary. Their languages, increasingly precise and abstract, shun concrete and poetic images — words which, having a general value, engender emotion.

The biologist would think himself dishonored if he described the evolution of the blood corpuscle by means of the story of the phoenix, or described the function of the spleen by the myth of Saturn begetting children only to devour them afterward.

Such parceling out, such will to analyze, are destined to cease. Soon, thanks to a vast synthesis, humankind will establish its authority on the knowledge it has gained. Science will be a key to the world when it is capable of expressing the mechanisms of the universe in a language accessible to communal emotion. This language will constitute the new lyric and collective poetry — a poetry freed at last from shudders, illusive tricks, obsolete images.

Consciousness then will cease to enclose the impulses of life in an iron corset; it will be in the service of desire. Reason, going beyond the sordid plane of common sense and logic where it crawls today, will join, at the stage of transcendences, the immense possibilities of imagination and dream.

If I admit the external reality of the marvelous, and if I hope that science will permit its exploration, it is with the certainty that soon the internal life of the individual will no longer be separated from the knowledge and development of the external world. For it is only too evident that the mystery is as much in us as in things — that the land of the

marvelous is, before all else, in our own sensitive being.

Adventure travels at once over the ways of the world and on the avenues leading to the hidden center of the ego. In the first case, courage, patience, the habit of observation, well-conducted reasoning are indispensable. In the second, other necessities arise for gaining access to the sources of emotion.

He who wishes to attain the profoundly marvelous must free images from their conventional associations, associations always dominated by utilitarian judgments; he must learn to see the human being behind the social function, break the scale of so-called moral values, replacing it by that of sensitive values; he must surmount taboos, the weight of ancestral prohibitions, and cease to connect the object with the profit one can get out of it, with the price it has in society, with the action it commands. This liberation begins when by some means the voluntary censorship of bad conscience is lifted, when the mechanisms of dreaming are no longer impeded. A new world then appears where the blue-eyed passerby becomes a king, where red coral is more precious than diamond, where the toucan is more indispensable than the cart-horse. The fork has left its enemy the knife on the restaurant table; it is now between Aristotle's categories and the piano keyboard. The sewing machine, yielding to an irresistible attraction, has gone off into the fields to plant beetroot. Holiday world, subject to pleasure, its absolute rule; everything in it seems gratuitous and yet every-

thing is soon replaced according to a truer order, deeper reasons, a rigorous hierarchy.

In this mysterious domain which opens before us, when the intellect — social in its origin and in its destination — has been abandoned, the traveler experiences an uncomfortable disorientation. The first moments of amusement or alarm having passed, he must explore the expanse of the unconscious, boundless as the ocean, and likewise animated by contrary movements. He quickly notices that this unconscious is not homogeneous, planes stratify as in the material universe, each with their value, their manner of sequence and their rhythm.

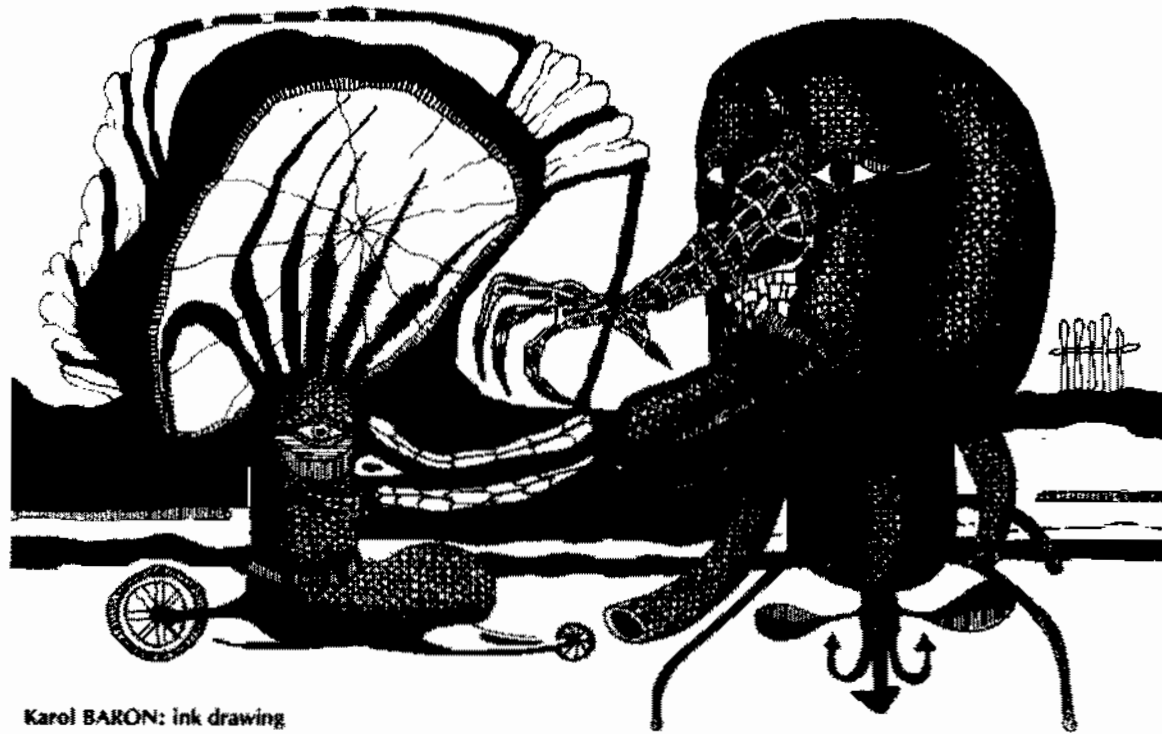
Paraphrasing Hermes' assertion that "that which is above is like that which is below, to perpetrate the miracles of One thing," it is permissible to say that everything is in us just as that which is outside us, so as to constitute a single reality. In us the diffuse phantoms, distorted reflections of actuality, repressed expressions of unsatisfied desires, mingle with common and general symbols. From the confused to the simple, from the glitter of personal emotions to the indefinite perception of the cosmic drama, the dreamer's imagination effects its voyage; unceasingly it dives to return to the surface, bringing from the depths to the threshold of consciousness, the great blind fish. Nevertheless, the pearlfisher comes to find his way amid the dangers and the currents. He manages to discover his bearings amid the fugitive landscape bathed in a half-light where alone a few brilliant points scintillate. Little

by little he acquires mastery of the dark waters.

To gain this internal lucidity in a more extensive sensibility is not less necessary to mankind than to possess scientific disciplines and techniques of action. Magic ceremonies, psychic exercises leading to concentration and ecstasy, the liberation of mental automatism, and simulation of morbid attitudes are so many means capable, through the tension they induce, of refining our vision and enlarging our normal faculties: They are ways of approach to the realm of the marvelous.

But the mind is not content to enjoy the contemplation of the magnificent images it sees while dreaming. It wishes to translate, visions, to express the new world which it has penetrated, to enable others to share it, and to realize the inventions that have been suggested to it. The dream is materialized in writing, in the plastic arts, in the erection of monuments, in the construction of machines. Nevertheless, the completed works, the acquired knowledge, leave untouched — if not keener — the inquietude of man, ever drawn to the quest of individual and collective finality, to the obsession of breaking down the solitude which is ours, to the hope of influencing directly the mind of others so as to modify their sentiments and guide their actions, and, last and above all, to the desire to realize total love.

Pierre MABILLE



Karol BARON: ink drawing



The Wild Tchoupitoulas: from Les Blank's ALWAYS FOR PLEASURE (photo Michael P. Smith)

"LONG LIVE THE LIVING!"

"There's nothing I crave more than to percolate down the boulevard, followed by my entire residue," said John Metoyer, late president of the Zulu Social Aid and Pleasure Club. This marvelous lyric statement perfectly describes the elan of a rare tradition, the pleasure clubs and neighborhood parades of New Orleans. In that city, around 175 parade permits are issued a year, and most of these celebratory occasions with their single bands and handful of "second liners" dancing behind them through the streets bear no resemblance to the official, commercial parades which are the miserable lot of most cities. For an increasingly administered, banal, Disneyland culture, so rare is spontaneous communal joy, a sense of festival that it comes almost as a shock to view such pockets of resistance to dehumanization that still exist in the U.S.

Les Blank's *Always for Pleasure* films this tradition of revelry, the camera moving through the back streets of industrial and ghetto neighborhoods catching intoxicated Irish marchers; cooks preparing munificent feasts of crawfish or Louisiana red beans; parades and pageants; musicians Professor Longhair, Irma Thomas, Blue Lou Barker, Allen Toussaint, The Wild Tchoupitoulas. These images convey a sense of another time, almost another dimension, recalling the great rituals of tribal peoples or old pagan festivals with their periodic abandonment of social constraints, public drinking and feasting, ecstasies and masks. Above all they convey an imperative of life over death, a recognition that *pleasure is a human necessity*. As a young man says returning from the "Ready or Not

Cemetery" in a jazz funeral parade, "This is how I want to go out, with a little band behind me and my friends havin' a nice time cuttin' up on the way back. But I'm living now and I'm not gonna wait, till I'm in the ground, be laid out, to have some fun in the streets."

Or as Luis Buñuel said, "Long live the living!" Blank's most extraordinary footage chronicles activities of the black "Indian" tribes whose annual rites have a remarkable heritage. Slaves were allowed to gather in New Orleans' Congo Square on Sunday afternoons to engage in dancing and drumming competitions which had their origins in West African tribal associations. In the early 1800s insurgency and rebellion by slaves led to the banning of these activities which were forced underground, only allowed on Mardi Gras day. Escaped slaves were harbored by Louisiana Indian tribes, and the Indian was adopted as a carnival motif by working class blacks whose "tribes" pay homage to the dignity, courage and strength of native Americans and express solidarity with them against racist oppression. Mixed with French, Spanish, Trinidadian and Haitian elements, the nearly century-old tradition evolved into its present form in which twenty to thirty tribes meet in uptown bars during the year to construct the splendid Indian regalia which they will wear on Mardi Gras and to practice songs accompanied by the polyrhythms of drums and tambourines. Song lyrics recount rivalries between tribes, momentous events of past Mardi Gras, describe life in ghetto or prison, and treat other themes of community interest.

Tribesmen hold sewing sessions throughout the year to make the astonishingly opulent robes, headdresses and moccasins from ostrich plumes, feathers, beads, flowers, ribbons, rhinestones, sequins, beads and other ornaments. The thousands of stitches represent hours of labor; like Malangan of New Ireland or Kwakiutl potlatch, this tradition insists on the *living moment of poetry* — the Indians take each garment apart after the annual event and remake entirely new ones each year. Although a few tribes have cut a record or performed at the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival, there is a strong tendency to resist commercialization and tourist exploitation. Every tribe finds strength in black solidarity, a sense of continuity in friendship, mutual aid and close social ties.

The ritual itself commences when the tribes go out on festival morning — spyboys on the lookout for rival tribes, flagboys in charge of signals, wildmen who keep spectators from crushing feathers, trail chiefs, higher ranking chiefs, Big Chief and Little Chief, queens, princesses and followers. Until twenty years ago, ritual encounters

between rival tribes led to combat, sometimes to death, but today competitive displays are sublimated into complex dances, comparisons of the fabulous feathered robes, verbal rituals involving threats, boasting, exaggeration, humor and improvised dialogue: "it just comes to you," says one Indian, "there's no script to follow, you just say what you feel." Blank's film captures a singular dynamic of a participatory theatre that carries the charge of a magnificent fusion of work and play, aggression and sexuality, risk and joy.

Other documentaries by Blank focus on similar stands against alienation taken under inauspicious circumstances in rural and marginal city populations; unfortunately the traditions are steadily eroded while the poverty which surrounds them prevails. These films escape sentimentality or attitudes of "hip" adulation due to Blank's obvious respect and admiration for his subjects who are allowed to speak for themselves and who invariably reveal a gift for ardent enjoyment and an unaccustomed wisdom.

Nancy Joyce PETERS

Other Films:

Dry Wood — black Cajun fiddle and accordion; "Bois Sec" Ardoin, his sons and Canray Fontenot; a rural Mardi Gras

Hot Pepper — Clifton Chenier, "Zydeco" king, performing in the bayous and in country dancehalls

Spend It All — French-speaking white cajun folk; accordion making, a hog *boucherie*

Chulas Fronteras — Nortena musicians; migrant laborers in Southwest U.S.

A Well Spent Life — Texas sharecropper, philosopher, lover, songster Mance Lipscomb

The Blues Accordin' to Lightnin' Hopkins — the great bluesman at home in Texas, songs and thoughts

For information: Les Blank, c/o Arhoolie Records, 10341 San Pablo Avenue, El Cerrito, California 94530



Olympia Jazz Band Returning from a Jazz Funeral
("The end of a perfect death" — Jelly Roll Morton)

TIME-TRAVELERS' POTLATCH

In the game of Time-Travelers' Potlatch, each participant indicates the gift that he or she would give to various historic figures on the occasion of their meeting. The first examples of this new surrealist game appeared in *Arsenal/Surrealist Subversion* No. 3 (1976).

Introducing the *object* into an imaginary relationship that otherwise runs the risk of being defined too superficially by an arbitrary and abstract subjectivity, this game effects the concretization of the irrational "secret," the inner-

most kernel of desire, underlying the more or less conscious reverie. The object — the gift — functions symbolically between the giver (who lives in the present) and the receiver (who dwells in the past). Altering the relationship between the two, it constitutes the third term — a catalyst of the future in the form of a crystallization of desire — in a humorously dialectical and materialist exchange which, presupposing the annihilation of conventional chronology in favor of the imagination's vertical eternity of the magic moment, seems to open an entirely new approach, from an

unanticipated angle, to all the old and unresolved problems of projection, idealization, fixation, obsession, identification, etc.

For this issue of CC, we invited some surrealist comrades from the U.S. and other countries, to play a few rounds of this game focusing on figures of American popular culture. Complementing the critical explorations elsewhere in these pages, the gifts enumerated below help define surrealism's relationship to its popular accomplices from the angle of poetry and play.

J. KARL BOGARTTE

For Clark Ashton Smith: A copy of *Les Chants de Maldoror* printed on veils of black lace and orchestrated by Sun Ra with musical ink ¶ *For H.P. Lovecraft:* The satin-gloved hands of a disordered sponge clapping in the burning living-room of a haunted castle, where a flutter of a thousand vaginal butterflies is like a chandelier assaulted by a dream ¶ *For Gypsy Rose Lee:* A three-week Engagement at the Vatican ¶ *For G.W.G. Ferris:* The Eiffel Tower, with wings enabling it to fly wherever it wants, and webbed feet for great landings ¶ *For Samuel Greenberg:* A jellyfish for a telephone, having direct communication with astrological beings ¶ *For Lightnin' Hopkins:* His own private zoo filled with every beast and bird now considered extinct ¶ *For Harold Lloyd:* A longhaired timepiece that announces the phases of the moon with a tiny phoenix that appears out of a tiny flame on the dial, then lifts slowly into the air, growing in size as it flies away ¶ *For Jack London:* An African mask that bestows on the wearer the power to create constellations of anything imaginable; once put on, it cannot be removed, and thus exists as a fetish of extraordinary temptation.

HILARY BOOTH

For Simon Rodia: The task of redecorating the Grand Canyon or the Panama Canal ¶ *For Herman Melville:* A white submarine in the shape of a snake ¶ *For Ambrose Bierce:* The phone number of Ambrose Small's mother ¶ *For Charles Fort:* An "inexplicable" rain of heated revolutionists from all corners of the world — to fall in the back-streets of Chicago ¶ *For Bugs Bunny:* A hot-dog stand in Alaska, a camel to ride along Miami Beach.

MARIO CESARINY

For Bugs Bunny: A cross-country race on the ground floor of the Chicago Art Institute ¶ *For Fred Astaire:* A dozen very fresh lizards ¶ *For Marilyn Monroe:* A war vessel ironing her first gala dress ¶ *For Bessie Smith:* Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* equipped with an electric system, two arms and two legs, allowing it to walk all over the house, including up the stairs ¶ *For Harpo Marx:* Iago's role in *Othello*

¶ *For Krazy Kat:* A Japanese tree which, as soon as it is given a cigar, shows a telephone; on the line a Yugoslavian priest continuously gives information of the Utrecht Frankenstein experience ¶ *For T-Bone Slim:* A "Lincoln" squirrel ¶ *For Jerry Lewis:* The Chicago Water Tower, but a little higher and sliced longitudinally in 11-inch slices ¶ *For Buster Keaton:* An airplane piloted by a giraffe; on weekends, giraffe only.

GUY DUCORNET

For Charlie Parker:

LA MERVEILLEUSE ORGUINETTE AMÉRICAINNE.



Le plus merveilleux Instrument de
Musique du Monde.

SCHLECHTER DUVALL

For Jack London: The water of the Thames pumped into the belly of Santa Claus and then thrown into Trafalgar Square, by daylight ¶ *For T-Bone Slim:* Something the length of the Eiffel Tower, divided by the width of the Leaning Tower of Pisa, and multiplied by the little finger of my third hand ¶ *For Fred Astaire:* Another shadow of this magnificent veiled world put into his left dance shoe, while the other shoe makes love to the piano of motion ¶ *For Felix the Cat:* The Holy Trinity in a fishbowl ¶ *For O. Henry:* A volume of texts by the infamous Anatole France, wrapped around the navel of the cathedral of New York.

PAUL GARON

For Peetie Wheatstraw: \$1000 and a walk down the "Magnificent Mile" of Michigan Blvd. in

Chicago (see Peetie Wheatstraw's "Mr. Livingood") ¶ *For Elmore James:* A pack of playing cards containing only court cards and aces ¶ *For Gypsy Rose Lee:* An underwater microscope which would work only by correctly and deftly manipulating a G-String ¶ *For Daffy Duck:* Stacks of unread comic book mss. from editors' desks; Mr. Duck would have the ultimate decision-making power regarding these ¶ *For Ernie Kovacs:* The complete works of Alfred Lawson, inscribed to Mr. Kovacs in disappearing ink ¶ *For Rube Goldberg:* His biography, written by Lightnin' Hopkins (or vice versa) ¶ *For Memphis Minnie:* A Cadillac car as in her songs, with Henry Ford as chauffeur.

ROBERT GREEN

For Ernie Kovacs: A wincing goose with a tic ¶ *For Lucille Ball:* Horseshoes equipped with tail-lights ¶ *For Loie Fuller:* A vast gown of white smoke.

PAUL HAMMOND

For O. Henry: A hand grenade charged with soot, buttons and umpteen different samples of barbed wire ¶ *For Lole Fuller:* Fifteen thumbsticks bound in bundles of 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively; each bundle is tied with switches of hair of different colors, all infected with lice ¶ *For Krazy Kat:* A watermill worked not by H₂O but by the shifting sands.

JOSEPH JABLONSKI

For Ernie Kovacs: An invisible TV set plugged into Bakunin's grave ¶ *For Mother Jones:* An exquisite corpse etched with a diamond stylus on a chunk of anthracite coal by Marie Laveau, Mountain Mary and Hannah Cohoon ¶ *For Samuel Greenberg:* A piece of black sail streaked with blood ¶ *For Arthur Cravan:* An admission pass so that he can get in to cause a disturbance during the Nobel Peace Prize award ceremony in 1985 ¶ *For Buster Keaton:* Paracelsus' lost lucky piece ¶ *For Bud Powell:* A tool kit for repairing flying saucers ¶ *For Jack Johnson:* A hand-shaking machine that breaks apart playing The Star Spangled Banner when you shake hands with it ¶ *For H.P. Lovecraft:* A biplane that flies of its own power and guidance to the South



RIKKI: For Little Lulu —
The Fountain of Youth and the Singing Clitoris Sisters

"The right eye's duty is to dive inside the telescope
while the left eye interrogates the microscope."
— Leonora Carrington

pole whenever anyone boards it ¶ For *Thelonus Monk*: Several vials filled with tears of joy shed by Cabalists ¶ For *Alfred Lawson*: A mechanical flying horse to be ridden in hailstorms ¶ For *Mary Lou Williams*: The Altar of St. Peter's Basilica converted into a piano, with relief carvings depicting the life of Duke Ellington ¶ For *Rube Goldberg*: An anatomy book illustrated by Salvator Rosa and the Portuguese Nun, with the text by de Sade ¶ For *John Reed*: A set of implements used in early Egyptian burial practices.

PETER KRAL

For *Groucho Marx*: A whole ham enveloped in a bouquet of flowers ¶ For *Harpo Marx*: A small potted tree with a possum permanently suspended from one branch ¶ For *Buster Keaton*: A raft with a landscape-painter's easel ¶ For *Larry Semon*: An anthill ¶ For *Fred Astaire*: A silk dressing-gown, with an ostrich egg in one pocket ¶ For *Lauren Bacall*: A tie cut from the flag of England ¶ For *Cab Calloway*: A bulldog with golden fangs ¶ For *Thelonus Monk*: A complete edition, in Turkish, of Brehm's *World of Animals* ¶ For *Bessie Smith*: A canopied bed (red).

PHILIP LAMANTIA

For *Simon Rodia*: The sudden appearance, at once, of a million Americans in Watts, in order to be in close proximity to his Towers ¶ For *Charlie Parker*: The materialization of his old green jacket re-forming the flag of the future republic of desire and dreams ¶ For *Edgar Allan Poe*: Upon awakening, an original copy of the *Manifeste du Surréalisme* ¶ For *Charlie Chaplin*: His wrench of *Modern Times* reconstituted as Merlin's magic wand ¶ For *Bela Lugosi*: A chance meeting with *Morgan Le Fay* at the observation-roof of the Empire State Building ¶ For *Magloire Saint-Aude*: The cinematic projection from a hummingbird's eye of Charlie Parker's spontaneous musical session at "Bop City," San Francisco, in 1954, fixed in an order of black, white and red crystallizations, volatilizing the human brain on the brink of an evolutionary mutation through a circle of blazing rum.

CONROY MADDOX

For *Fatty Arbuckle*: An ice bucket filled with field crickets ¶ For *W.C. Fields*: A sawed-off shotgun made of glass and filled with goldfish ¶ For *Hedy Lamarr*: A small statue of the juggler of Nazareth and a pair of bloodstained bicycle clips ¶ For *Marilyn Monroe*: A Warhol-shaped inflatable in the process of putrefaction ¶ For *John Reed*: An oak tree, each branch shaped like a finger ¶ For *Jack London*: A skull in a sound box.

LEON MARVELL

For *Little Walter*: A monolithic image in ball-shot of Daffy Duck struck with black graffiti, an atomic pince-nez, ¶ For *Daffy Duck*: All the weapons of the world, gold-plated and loaded with poison ruby needles ¶ For *T-Bone Slim*:

A NOTE ON TIME-TRAVELERS' POTLATCH

In a letter to James Morton (1932), H.P. Lovecraft wrote, on the subject of games, both physical and intellectual; "They reveal no actual secrets of the universe, and help not at all in intensifying or preserving the tantalizing moods and elusive dream-vistas of the aesthetic imagination." And in a letter to Robert E. Howard, same year; "There is a basic difference between the tense drama of meeting and overcoming an inevitable problem or obstacle in real life, and the secondary or symbolic drama of meeting or overcoming a problem or obstacle which has merely been artificially set up."

One could say further that the games legitimated by this society tend to be merely an extension of the repression necessary during the workday; an extension into the few hours of "leisure" before we sleep; a stopgap to prevent real desires and fears from catching us "offguard." It is as well that miserabilism finds it impossible to harness the dream in any such fashion!

The surrealist use of games can only be of an absolutely opposing nature to those of which HPL speaks. With the seriousness of black humor, we continually invent them for the purpose of exploring the dark realms of the unconscious, of chance, of the mysterious correspondences of thought that arise between us (due to both the universality of the language of the unconscious, and also, perhaps, thought-transference), of the consequences of love as a gorgeous vehicle of freedom, with sparks of light that are extremely pleasurable in themselves. Many of them, such as the exquisite corpse and the collective relation of automatic stories, have been practiced by children for many years, before the logical modes of thought extinguish such delights so brutally.

To the ludicrous domino-toppling buffoons, to the meanderings of absent-minded chess whizzes, to the pointless physical prowess of Olympic nationalist idiots and to the boredom of the daily cryptic crossword, we say: "The joke's on you!" Childish pleasures will reign supreme. When the imagination is set loose, all of Hell is too. And that, no doubt, is precisely where these gifts will have to be delivered, via the Underground Railroad, perhaps in the midst of an infernal jazz concert featuring Duke Ellington, Charlie Parker, John Coltrane and Fats Navarro — with Lautréamont on machine-gun . . .

"The things which interest me," as Lovecraft said, "are . . . broad vistas of dramatic pageantry in which cosmic laws and the linkage of cause and effect are displayed on a large scale."

Hilary BOOTH

An instrument that sounds like the noise mice make on midnight revels ¶ For *Marilyn Monroe*: A boat that travels along the rivers of hell and that ports only in Elysium where I would clothe her in robes made of moth's wings (sleeves fastened with Death's Head moths) and we would count sheep. She would tell me what she saw in Hell.

NANCY JOYCE PETERS

For *Michael Wigglesworth*: A Pisco Punch from the Eureka Saloon of Phantom Moll, Girl Footpad, and a recording of her singing " 'Tis a jolly life we outlawed sinners lead" ¶ For *Isadora Duncan*: A glittering amphitheatre designed and constructed by a hundred birds of paradise who will accompany her in whatever ways they see fit ¶ For *King Kong*: An executive desk at RKO studios, Carl Denham's skull for a paperweight, and a stack of scripts by Little Nemo ¶ For *Clark Ashton Smith*: A rain forest suspended over the American River by a spider's thread ¶ For *Jack London*: A pillowcase on which is embroidered in scarlet letters the secrets of Zuni ¶ For *Ma Rainey*: A cloud chamber filled with elephant-tusk arrowheads in a configuration suggesting the permanent seizure of Harpers Ferry ¶ For *Buster Keaton*: The wishbone from a giant bird risen from the waters of Lake Stymphalus ¶ For *Samuel Greenberg*: The Sierra Nevada.

ANTHONY REDMOND

For *H.P. Lovecraft*: The complete works of Sun Ra with album designs by Ian Jones ¶ For *Bessie Smith*: A bottle of October 1917 bourbon ¶ For *Hound Dog Taylor*: A night out with Juliette — dinner at Cheval's Ideal Palace, music and dancing on Easter Island, then his place or hers ¶ For *Duffy Duck*: An airline ticket to Florida, every winter ¶ For *Bugs Bunny*: A blue burrow between Billie Holiday's breasts ¶ For *Duke Ellington*: A red satin piano on the slopes of Mount Kilimanjaro.

MICHAEL RICHARDSON

For *Mariene Dietrich*: A beautiful necklace exquisitely carved from Josef von Sternberg's teeth ¶ For *W.C. Fields*: A child's rattle loud enough to permanently deafen the President ¶ For *O. Henry*: Combinations to all the bank safes in the U.S. ¶ For *Billie Holiday*: One of Joseph Cornell's boxes ¶ For *Thelonus Monk*: Two tickets for a performance of *Ubu Roi* ¶ For *Clark Ashton Smith*: The key to the Snow Queen's ice palace.

FRANKLIN ROSEMONT

For *Lauren Bacall*: An immense amphibious Ferris Wheel, powered by hurricanes, at its highest point one may see throngs of "Abominable Snow-women" in the Himalayas, avidly studying the just-arrived reports of the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention; at its lowest point it passes through the exact center of the Earth, pausing at intervals for those who wish to stroll through Little Nemo's Ice Palace ¶ For *Clark Ashton Smith*: The old Chicago Riverview amusement park,

lully restored on the floor of the Atlantic, and directed by Ludwig von Beethoven and Pretty Boy Floyd. ¶ *For Charlie Parker*: The whole state of New York, transformed into a tropical garden full of Carolina parakeets and Patagonian giant sloths. ¶ *For Thomas Skidmore*: A recording of the sixth canto of *Maldoror*, in Cherokee, played at full volume in the cab of a locomotive highballing across the country during the coming General Strike. ¶ *For Moshe Nadir*: An unabridged Martian-Yiddish/Yiddish-Martian dictionary, prefaced by William Blake, annotated by Samuel Greenberg, and profusely illustrated by Maurice Kish. ¶ *For Joe Hill*: The Monmon Tabernacle, converted into a drive-in theater featuring Marlene Dietrich's early films, and serving the finest Chinese food in the world. ¶ *For Black Hawk*: A huge forest covering what is now Washington, D.C.; at its center, where the White House now stands, a towering house-pole surmounted by an enlarged replica of the Maltese Falcon.

PENELOPE ROSEMONT

For George Francis Train: The Great Transcendental & Northwest Utopian Railway Co., using only 1870s steam locomotives; he would be chief engineer, following a schedule calculated by *Passional Analogy*. ¶ *For Timothy Dexter*: The international monetary exchange (all currency having been converted into smoked sardines) and a larger-than-life statue of Isadora Duncan. ¶ *For Victoria Woodhull*: The U.S. Senate and House of Representatives in a bottle, including every senator and congressman, with whom she could do as she pleased. ¶ *For Albert Einstein*: A pueblo in Oraibi, next door to

Don Talayesva's. ¶ *For Woody Woodpecker*: A chance to direct the reforestation of the Chicago Loop, accompanied by a chorus of all the birds within 2000 miles. ¶ *For Annie Oakley*: A gold-plated, double-barreled shotgun, on which is engraved the whole of Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. ¶ *For Harriet Tubman*: A flock of white-crested laughingthrushes (*garrulax leucolophus*) who would help her in whatever she does. ¶ *For Frank Hamilton Cushing*: A special edition of Carl Barks' tale of "The Seven Cities of Cibola" (*Uncle Scrooge* No. 7, 1954), with fold-out maps pinpointing the exact locations.

CHEIKH TIDIANE SYLLA

For Bessie Smith: A second birthday after midnight, with the sporadic sound of a buzzing giraffe, and a silver candle smoking upside-down. ¶ *For Mae West*: A sculptured smile with green lipstick on the mountains of the Sierra Madres. ¶ *For Lightnin' Hopkins*: The blue light of a thousand ribs exhuming hopefully the cloudy voices of last night.

DEBRA TAUB

For Harpo Marx: A porcupine-quill coat that sings him to sleep. ¶ *For Ernie Kovacs*: The tallest building in the world, turned upside-down. ¶ *For Mae West*: A tropical forest on the back of a beetle. ¶ *For Buster Keaton*: The last languorous dream of a frozen night. ¶ *For Lightnin' Hopkins*: An island that can be moved anywhere. ¶ *For Daffy Duck*: An airplane with an apple in its mouth.

MICHAEL VANDELAAR

For Clark Ashton Smith: A magic carpet with in-built stereo. ¶ *For H.P. Lovecraft*: A copy of Freud's "Interpretation of Dreams" annotated by Elmore James, illustrated by Winsor McCay. ¶ *For Montezuma*: A head-band made of panther's eyes and the pleasure of seeing Disneyland reduced to dust. ¶ *For Edgar Allan Poe*: The august humor of the raven saxophone: the complete recordings of Charlie Parker. ¶ *For Lady Usher*: A bouquet of flickknives with which to slash the orbit of the moon. ¶ *For American Prairie Dogs*: A night in Tunisia.

RONALD VANDELAAR

For Herman Melville: A tattoo on the right shoulder with the letters S.A.D.E. ¶ *For John Brown*: A totem pole of ravenous bears and a bicycle pedaled by the wind. ¶ *For Marcus Garvey*: An axe, a mojito cocktail and a portrait of Patrice Lumumba. ¶ *For H.P. Lovecraft*: A side-street that looks upon the residence of 42 Rue Fontaine. ¶ *For Art Tatum*: The fuse that will ignite the explosives to the police headquarters of New York, the explosion from which will illuminate the grave of Joe Hill.

JOHN WELSON

For Charlie Parker: A night full to the brim with the eggshell of yachts. ¶ *For Lester Young*: Habitual flames of snow-filled laughter. ¶ *For Bud Powell*: The frozen bowtie which has lost its temper at sea, and breaks into the screams of a vanishing point. ¶ *For Baby Gonzalez*: The largest bunch of flowers, holding out its hand to enable it to map the path of hidden handshakes.

CANAL

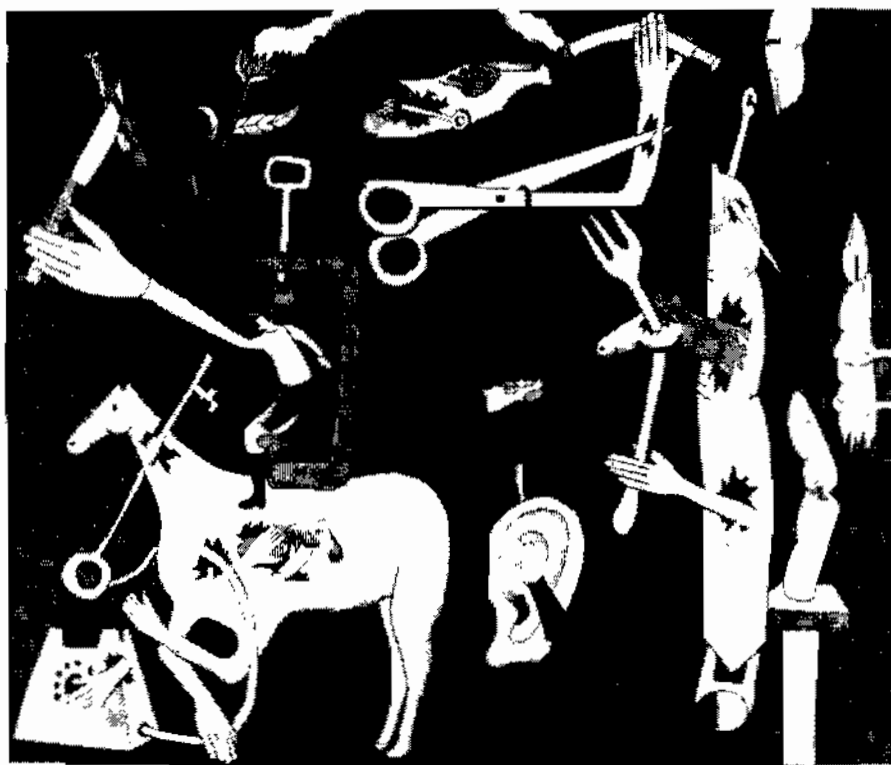
There it seemed ablaze
The quiet Heed uncertain
The strain was Sapphire glaze
With paint, mirth and no curtain

The Twilight question dim
Were ceasing shade a light
That fell to mortal's eye
The gift of simple sight

The Bird of love sank faint
A musical symphonic strained
While here I must chant
The goblin's joy acquaint

Samuel GREENBERG

(circa 1915-16)



John W. WELSON: *The Bush-Fire of Slumber* — Homage to Kurt Seligmann (oil on canvas, 1977)

REVIEWS



REVOLUTION & THE PROPHETS

The Prophets by Shmuel Eisenstadt. Trans. from the Yiddish by Max Rosenfeld. Yiddisher Kultur Farband (YKUF), 80 Fifth Ave., New York, N.Y. 10011.

This is an essential book for those who are endeavoring to create a methodology for the study of social revolution within religion-saturated periods of history. More than that, it is a book that can be read easily and profitably by workers, farmers, students, even by Sunday-school pupils who desperately need to learn exactly what they are not being taught about the prophetic movement in ancient Israel. According to Shmuel Eisenstadt, the ancient Hebrew prophets represented a tradition of popular, militant revolt against the class society of their time. He introduces us to the heart of their social ideas, their revolutionary strategy and tactics, and the meaning of their agitational language, relying largely on the biblical documents that so often are used for purposes of confusion by proponents of religion or Zionist ideology.

This book has an interesting history of its own. Written originally in Yiddish in the still-revolutionary U.S.S.R. of the 1920s, it comes to us today in an English translation by Max Rosenfeld through the publishing auspices of the Yiddisher Kultur Farband (YKUF) in New York, with the last author's foreword dated October 1970 in Tel Aviv. It must be said that Eisenstadt persevered in a most worthy aim, for his work joins hands with that of such nineteenth century socialist writers such as Engels and Kautsky, who addressed the subject of popular prophetic revolt in medieval Europe.

J.J.

PAZ ON DUCHAMP

Marcel Duchamp by Octavio Paz. Viking Press, N.Y. 1978.

This volume by Octavio Paz combines a republication of *The Castle of Purity* with a new essay on the artist's final work, "Given . . ." an assemblage that was created in secrecy by Duchamp and exhibited at the Philadelphia Museum of Art only after his death in 1969.

This book is the latest, but surely not the last, in the swelling body of Duchamp exegesis. It probably could be argued superficially that this torrent of commentary has compromised whatever is left of the idea of lucidity, austere rigor, the artist as exemplar, the work as gesture, etc. But it is not so. In fact it is fitting that Duchamp's work should attract enormously more attention and comment than all his imitators combined, those pathetic starvelings of the "nothing" esthetic.

It is fitting also that Octavio Paz has continued to write about Duchamp. A great poet himself, and one who has written about poetry and art with a searching passion that seems omnivorous, Paz is able to suggest to us the presence of an acute crisis and drama of the mind that become

these "works" of his spiritual hero. With this book one meets two giants of the poetic intelligence of the twentieth century. If one does not accept everything that they have said on this or that subject, nevertheless their projects and conclusions have to be reckoned with as fundamental in the areas they have demarcated.

J.J.

SELF-ABUSE IN PRINT

English and American Surrealist Poetry, ed. by Edward B. Gormain. Penguin Books, 1978.

This is the most ridiculous anthology ever produced by anyone, anywhere, on any subject. It is so saturated with stupidity and falsification that its sole purpose seems to have been to serve as a platform on which editor Gormain could castrate himself in print, and then — with his introduction — kill himself.

Such a ludicrous spectacle gave us a good laugh. But it is still necessary to alert American readers, notoriously misinformed about the aims and principles of surrealism, that this book has no redeeming feature. Quite simply, it has nothing to do with surrealism. How could the editors at Penguin have been taken in by such a swindle?

It is worth noting that Gormain begged representatives of the Surrealist Movement in the U.S. for contributions to his anthology, and that the surrealists flatly refused when his complete incompetence and imbecility became obvious. With shameless dishonesty, Gormain asserts that Philip Lamantia "assisted" in preparing the book; however, as Gormain and his publisher know very well, Lamantia explicitly refused to have anything to do with the project.

The book is a hodgepodge of puny exercises by false poets who would themselves, in almost every case, admit that they are openly hostile to surrealism and its revolutionary aims. Old-line reactionaries such as John Crowe Ransom are featured with up-to-the-minute opportunist scum such as Ted Berrigan. The best-represented "poet" in the book is the prize-winning idiot Robert Bly — with his own insipid mullings and some translations of the Stalinist thug Neruda. The closest Bly ever has got to surrealism, as is well known, is when the surrealists in Chicago threw a pie in his face in autumn 1977.

The book, in short, is a disgusting fraud. If I ever ran into the sniveling intellectual pimp who calls himself Edward B. Gormain, it will give me great pleasure to kick his face.

J.K.B.

ON PHOTOGRAPHY?

On Photography by Susan Sontag. Farrar, Straus & Giroux, N.Y., 1977.

Susan Sontag belongs to that part of the U.S. literary establishment that wants nothing more intensely than to reduce the word surrealism to a

pejorative. A useless sort of vendetta, it is hardly unfamiliar. In Sontag's case the dishonesty involved is so blatant and the hatred so thickly reinforced by wilful ignorance that it strikes one as rather bizarre. After all, she is supposed to be rather clever, an esthetic moralist from the renowned pages of the *New York Review of Books* — someone from whom her peers would expect a modicum of knowledge and competence.

But in this most recent book, the famous critic combines her love-hate relationship with photography and her pure hate relationship with surrealism, and as a result no one on planet Earth is any the wiser about either. Employing no criteria based on surrealist theory or practice, or on the history of the movement, or on genuine examples of surrealist works past or present, she creates her own arbitrary definitions with the sole purpose of applying the attribution "surrealist" to various aspects of current photography that she dislikes. In this way she proves that there has been a "surrealist takeover" of photography. She goes even further to insist that all photographers — without exception — are surrealist, as is anything else in the world the least bit "strange." And yes, Sontag considers the whole situation perverse and frightful.

Now, it is one thing for a writer to attack a particular kind of sham surrealist sensibility affected by so many dilettantes within the commercialized cultural orbits of America. It is another thing to try and foist all this on surrealism.

Plainly, Sontag cannot generalize as she does without committing gross deceptions, indulging in outright critical doggerel, falsifying everything.

For what it's worth, Susan Sontag is very "ing" right now. She is perhaps the only figure currently filling the once-popular esthetic-moralistic niche in the devotions of the mass media. In *On Photography* she gives no positive suggestions toward a kind of photography that might be good for us. She just advances the slogan "ecology of images." This is a "trendy" sort of phrase, of course, but it is not a new thing with Sontag. Her career was begun in step with a particular phase in recent "avant-garde" complications that saw the inauguration of an "esthetic of silence," a "criticism without interpretation," a "novel without content," a "poor theater," a "minimal art," and numerous other varieties of masochistic mysticism that pretended to inherit the entire field of human expression.

Any attempt to list and refute all the follies in this book would be useless, for they are almost as numerous as its many judgments. The reader will notice for himself that these follies hide their intent behind some justified, if unoriginal, objections to the widespread abuse of photography and various other fads of the bourgeois "pop" sensibility. Thus, using the bait of a readily shared disdain, Sontag fishes on one level for the reader's sympathies in order to clear a path, on another level, for her meaningless generalizations and false formulations regarding surrealism and regarding the allegedly embarrassed condition of photography as an "art."

On Photography is nothing more than the involuntary self-criticism of Susan Sontag. Every snapshot she looks at, every newphoto of Jimmy Carter or the pope in the *N.Y. Times*, becomes for her "surreal." Such "surrealism" and Susan Sontag deserve each other, courtesy of Roland Barthes.

J.J.

PAGAN EVIDENCE

Gargoyles and Grotesques, Paganism in the Medieval Church by Ronald Sheridan and Anne Ross. New York Graphic Society, Boston, 1975.

This book was put together by the photographer Ronald Sheridan and the scholar Anne Ross, a specialist in Celtic antiquities. The volume is a fortunate compilation of photographs and explanatory notes presenting sculptural evidence of the survival of pre-Christian mythic-poetic iconography in the Christian churches of medieval Europe. It contains remarkable examples of practically every kind of early metamorphic sculpture known to the continent: strange giants, The Green Man, Centauros, Glaring Creatures, Biters, Solar and Lunar Heads, foliate heads, horned and beaked heads, bicorporates, mermaids and mermen, fertility figures, sphinxes, serpentine horrors, obscenities and appalling nightmares.

The authors confront forthrightly the question of whether or not this imagery is assimilable to orthodox Christian "heliology" and aver that it is not. Their view, which corresponds to ours, is that the pagan myths were in retention of their integrity during these periods; they were neither displaced by Christian doctrines, nor incorporated by them. Sheridan and Ross hold that these carvings were powerful magical efficacies in the minds and lives of the people. In effect, then, what we have to deal with here are so many instances of concrete poetic hallucination that plastically formulate nothing less than the latent content of the Christian cathedrals of old Europe.

As much as has been made of the great cave paintings of the pre-historic era, there is yet as much to be made of the shocking apparition of these grotesques which arose in a society closer to our own, a class society. What were the political and psychological motivations of those who carved and placed these stones? What were their ties to the traditional cults, to magic, to alchemy, to agencies of malediction implied in some of the carvings? Are the carvings hints of primordial ancient themes? Do they bring forward into medieval Europe the wild visages of a previous era — an era of masks?

The authors are never more encouraging regarding these matters than in the statement: "One thing we hope has been established in the course of this book: the medieval artists were not engaged in haphazard decoration merely for decoration's sake; everything they did had a purpose and it is not their fault that we do not really know much about it." It was the church's fault, of course. And? Rationalism.

So we are not willing to leave the final interrogation of these figures to scholars either. It is the poetic interpretation of these carvings by inspired artists that will lead us to their profoundest understanding, by leading them back into life.

J.J.

THE MYSTIC PATTERN IN AMERICAN CULTURE

In Search of White Crows by R. Laurence Moore. Oxford University Press, N.Y., 1977.

If he had done nothing else, R. Laurence Moore could be remembered as the discoverer of a key to 19th century Spiritualism in the real character of the Medium: the lower-class woman, driven by lack of status and low pay to weave Spiritualism into the Popular Culture, draw from and reciprocate the impulses of mass society for the strange, the unbelievable, the forces Beyond. Moore's unappreciated *In Search of White Crows* offers a powerful analysis of the American Irrational from the inside, rank-and-file practitioners as well as major thinkers who captured public attention just as capitalism began to proclaim the utter rationality of its Machine Age.

From a Pantheistic impulse, legitimated by references to Swedenborg, masses of mid-nineteenth century Americans began to outgrow their narrow mainline Protestantism for something more exciting and more humane. The connection with political radicalism was apparent from the beginning. William Lloyd Garrison, hero of the antislavery struggle, defended Spiritualism from its attackers by disclaiming as "puerile" and "preposterous" the so-called scientific refutations. The movement's great theorist, Andrew Jackson Davis, served as a political comrade to an outstanding American Communist and free-lover, Victoria Woodhull; fellow Spiritualist Stephen Pearl Andrews edited Woodhull & Claflin's, the first English-language newspaper to translate and print (serially) the *Communist Manifesto*.

Moore is right in assaying that Spiritualism failed because it could not offer "miracles" as great as the electric light or automobile. He follows with great care the modern experiments from William James to Joseph Rhine and their signal attempts to recapture popular interest. As he says, the very effort to demonstrate the unprovable by scientific means was philosophically misconceived. If the future of Spiritualism lay anywhere, it was in the manifestation of the unconscious joined to the revolutionary intentions of its early visionaries.

P.B.



TINY FEATS

Tiny Footprints and Other Drawings by B. Kliban. Workman Publishing, N.Y. 1978.

Whenever Benny Kliban comes out with a book, we wonder, "What more can this black &

white maniac think up?" After *Never Eat Anything Bigger Than Your Head* (1976) and *Whack Your Porcupine* (1977), what more is left? There's no end to it; Kliban always delivers. Yet his books are neither better nor worse than earlier ones; the humor is so other-dimensional that it never quite matters where he's going or what gear he's in. He is so slaphappy and silly he defies relativity. He is not "like" anyone. He recognizes the humor of the past, he even follows its laws. Everything must have a point, a hook, however minuscule or elusive of our grasp. Says Breton of Swift: "He makes you laugh without sharing your laughter. It is precisely at this price that humor, in the sense that we must understand it [italics mine], can exteriorize the sublime element which... is inherent in it and transcends the forms of the comic." Kliban's cartoons make sense on a high/black humor level. He may juxtapose two unlikely elements (see illustration), find humor in contrast, then go further, turning orthodox religion into a parade. The leap from the subliminal to the obvious never was more fun.

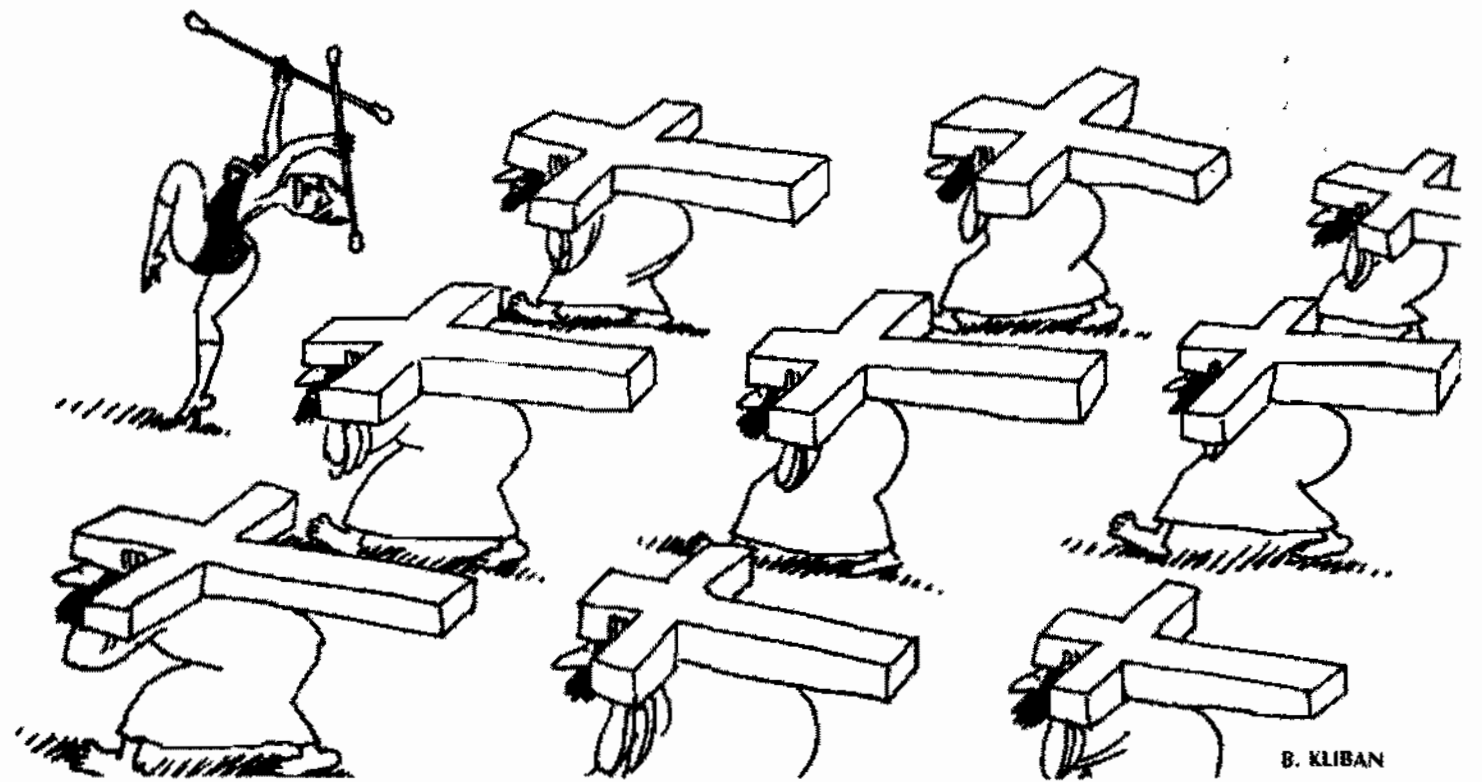
There are almost no captions or balloons in *Tiny Footprints*. In that respect it is like his first book, *Cat* (1976). It's a move toward the mass market, where visual cartoons can be reproduced almost anywhere. (Captions are distrusted — they smell Thomas Nast.) Many of the cartoons — and they are cartoons, not "drawings" — could make it into the *New Yorker*. A priest hooks his earphones up to a crucifix (defanged Goya!). An artist paints the lightbulb above him (cutesy Steinberg!). These are the glib cartoons, the more controlled. They have a short half-life; there's not much room to lurch around in them. They are from a familiar mold: the "zany-punchol" effect. Like Picasso's Greek Period, they are Kliban's simple homage to the past.

But there are those others! A frequent complaint about popular satire is that it is all too tame, too too polite. (*Nasty Habits* is the best available film "spoof" about Watergate, *Delta House* TV's sorry answer to frats.) Satire draws anemic blood. Kliban is the only American mass culture product who is both unprincipled enough and vicious enough to resuscitate the pseudo-dead art of satire: when a gawker's brain falls into a woman's cleavage, our scruples get scraped. No friction, no stimulation; sorry. A man stamping "Happy Day" smiles on bombs is a sly nightmare; we know it, we can't look away from it. Tension is most felt when it crushes.

Kliban's visual puns are blunt but poetic. The leap to recognition is mostly exhilarating, no man's-lands of possibility gape wide open. The hunter, shooting a plumber's helper at a toilet deer — what does he do with the trophy? Kliban provides the tales, we footnote them. The absurdity is compounded.

"What sort of profession is it for a grown man to sit around drawing pictures?" But then I thought, "What does an actor do but stand around and make faces at a camera?" and I came out of it" ("Interview with B. Kliban," *Rolling Stone*, Sept. 21, 1978.) Kliban doesn't seem to understand the effects he produces; he sees cartooning as just another job in the vast American entertainment network. Perhaps it's just as well — he may become self-conscious, and that would immobilize if not demoralize him.

It's well known that satire is a moral victory lacking a material one. Kliban complicates this polarity. His satire flubs and flutters around the



B. KLIBAN

material world and posits a warped one where people can detach hair from their bodies and, like inverted merkin-sports trophies, mount it on display plaques. It's disturbing and painful. It's funny. It keeps on coming; his pen is mean and accurate. He shoots it from a crossbow and it leaves a tiny hole. The question: What do we perceive through that paper lens other than the next cartoon or neutral whitespace? The answer: Wait a while.

Peter BATES and B. KULIK

PHASES OF A SECRET MOON

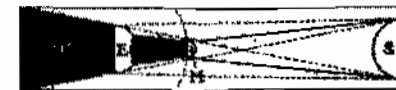
Perahim by Edouard Jaguer. (Editions Non-Lieu, 224 des Pyrenees, Paris 20, France). Text in French.

A surrealist poet since World War II (see his collection, *The Night Is Made to Open Doors*, published by Oasis Editions in Toronto), Edouard Jaguer is best known as a writer on art. He approaches the multifarious questions of painting and sculpture, the whole field of graphic and plastic expression, with an admirable clairvoyance, an encyclopedic knowledge, and a passionate revolutionary/poetic critical consciousness. His many essays are still uncollected. They may be found in the journals and exhibition catalogs of the international Phases movement — a movement which, together with Jean-Pierre Duprey, Georges Henein, Wilfredo Lam, Gherasim Luca, Claude Tarnaud and others, Jaguer founded in Paris, 1953, to coordinate a diversity of plastic researches.

A tireless organizer, Jaguer has arranged scores of exhibitions in dozens of countries. He was co-organizer, with André Breton, of the "Surrealist Intrusion in the Enchanters' Domain" in New York (1960-61), and played a key role in organizing the massive 1976 World Surrealist Exhibition in Chicago.

His most recent monograph discusses the life and work of a great but too-little-known Romanian/Jewish painter who, though never formally associated with surrealism, for fifty years has participated in it objectively, through his work. This is the first book anywhere on Jules Perahim. Lavishly illustrated, with numerous color plates, it affords us an intimate view of "Pythagoras' Happy Childhood," ablaze with "Possible Birds," in a magic garden where King Ubu — en route to Africa — dances madly in the midst of frantic fauna, looming large at the intersection of desire and the laws of chance.

F.R.



AFFIRMATION & COMBAT

Textos de Afirmacao e de Combate do Movimento Surrealista Mundial, ed. by Mario Cesariny. (Editora P & R, Rua Ruben A. Leitao, 4-2 Esq., Lisboa 2, Portugal). Text in Portuguese.

Mano Cesariny is widely regarded as the foremost Portuguese poet of our time. Less often it is acknowledged that he has been a major figure of world surrealism since the 1940s.

In his stupendous compilation of documents (*Texts of Affirmation and Combat of the World Surrealist Movement*) the accent is on surrealism today, in its most active centers: Sao Paulo, Chicago, Prague, the Arab countries. One of the largest sections of the book (36 pages) is devoted to the Surrealist Movement in the U.S. Important "dossiers" also trace the surrealist presence in Mexico, Cuba, England, France, Holland, Romania, etc. A second volume will cover the Iberian peninsula.

Superbly heterodox, the book conveys the vitality and force of the various tendencies that

together make up the re-emerging Surrealist International. The appearance of such a volume in English would be especially useful.

F.R.

THE Gnostics' RETURN

Gnostic Review No. 1. Giordanisti Press (3230 N. Clark St., Chicago 60613). \$2.95

Conceived as a "Religio-Magic and Astrological Exposition of Books, Ideas, and Art," the *Gnostic Review* has just been launched in Chicago by Russell Thorne and Jennifer Pondur. It will be available twice yearly.

Judging by the first issue, the title "Gnostic" is not a mere label. The editors and their associates have been inspired to prepare this publication by Jacques LaCarriere's work *The Gnostics* (Dutton, 1977); they aim to revive the worldview and mode of critical thought associated with the second-century thinkers and sects usually designated by that name: Valentinus, Simon Magus, Carpocrates; the Peratae, the Sethians, the Barbelognostics, etc.

Proof of the active seriousness of this project is found in the contents of the current issue, which does not consist of retrogressive ruminations but emphasizes modern intimations of gnostic processes found in such diverse manifestations as Dada, the music of John Cage and Scriabin, Frances Yates' researches, as well as more typically "occult" themes such as Magic, Tarot and Astrology.

In approaching this review — and approach it one should — it is best to be prepared beforehand by reading LaCarriere's book and other studies of ancient gnosticism. Gnosticism is no hodgepodge; it is a profound method founded in an incredible insight embedded in a brilliant and compelling creation myth. What is rarer in this day and age?

J.J.

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