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Page 3 Poetry	Maureen Picard
Page 4 Poetry	Janice Weisman
Page 5 <i>An Interview with Harlan Ellison</i>	Page 11
Poetry	Dave Waxman and Mark Simpson
Page 12 Poetry	Maureen Picard and Jennifer Corse
Page 13 Poetry	John Sparagana
Page 14 <i>Carnival Games</i>	Robert W. Bly
Page 16 Poetry	Donald G. Brice and Joseph Bocchiaro III

Photos: Kurt Z. Itil-cover, pages 5,7; R. Coopersmith-page 15

Manny's Men, page 16, by Laurel Jefferson

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EDITORIAL

They entered Hardee's pit as one enters a church or temple or a \$2.50 admission historical landmark. As they stood, swaying together by the side entrance, I noticed they had two tape recorders, a camera, three note pads and no food. One of them, a guy with black, overbearing eyebrows, surveyed the pit and gave commands and the other three, two guys and a girl, objected together, in unison, like a chant or litany. He pointed to my table, where I sat unwrapping a roast beef sandwich. The other three shook their heads no. They finally picked a table with five chairs and set up the tape recorders with the microphone facing an empty chair. I expected at least a god incarnate. Were they trying to prevent another dubious testament? They sat on the edge of their chairs, fondling their recorders and the camera like holy relics. The litany continued throughout this performance, although the girl, obviously a heathen, yawned often and tapped her foot impatiently.

In a few minutes they stood up, gathered their articles of worship and moved to the table next to mine. By now I had almost finished my roast beef sandwich. They repeated the same ritual, with what might have been a different chant. I overheard part of it:

Leader: Did you see Him?

All: We saw Him.

Leader: He is magnificent.

All: He is glorious and wise.

Leader: He spoke to me today.

All: He spoke to you, and we speak to you.

Leader: He is coming to us now.

All: He is coming.

Leader: He is coming indeed. Give Him a few minutes. He's probably waiting for a cheeseburger.

Then they relaxed and talked among themselves. I decided the service was over. No one had appeared. I was disappointed—it had been such a good show. The recorders were still set up, but they were no longer interesting to watch, and I had finished my sandwich. I crumpled the wrapper and picked up my tray to leave.

"Have you seen about four literary types looking for an interview? I left them by the door when I went to get this cheeseburger and coffee..." He leaned against my table and looked at me for an answer.

"No, I haven't seen them. Are you somebody famous?"

"Well, I hope they get here soon, I hope they're not a bunch of stupid students. You know, I encounter nothing but stupid students everywhere I go. You know why they're like that? I'd be glad to tell you."

"I suppose you do, whoever you are...why?"

"Because they're bored, they're lazy, and they don't believe in anything."

"Oh...who are you? Am I supposed to know you?"

"No, of course not."

"Then who..."

"Oh, there, I think I've found them. Tell you a secret. I'm actually...Oh, excuse me."

With that, he sat down with the worshippers at the table next to mine.

Spiritual enlightenment in Hardee's pit? Something to believe in? It could happen. After all, the seemingly impossible controversy over "A Boy and His Dog" did originate in the basement of the Commons. Who says we're bored? Anyway, we're trying, we're really trying.

I'm actually Captain Midnight in disguise...

An Interview With Harlan Ellison

On April twelfth of this year noted writer Harlan Ellison came to the University of Rochester to debate UR students over the controversy about the film *A Boy and His Dog* (based on one of Ellison's stories). LOGOS editors interviewed him that afternoon in Wilson Commons.

Robert Bly (RB): Recently, we've been reading in *Galaxy* and other magazines that you're pulling a "Robert Silverberg" in that you're retiring from science fiction...

Harlan Ellison (HE): Okay, okay, okay...since you're a literary magazine, the time has probably come to open your eyes and alert you to the way the world is really run. I'm happy to be able to do that for you. Humble and sweet fellow that I am I'm going to tell you the way it all happens. Now, first of all, pulling a Silverberg is a pejorative. That's like pulling an Xaviera Hollander, alright? Or pulling an Idi Amin Dada. What Robert Silverberg did, was, after twenty-five years of devoting his life to a literary art form that he conceived of as a literary art form, discovered that his audience was basically composed of assholes, yup-yups, yutzes, and slope-brows who would much rather buy Perry Rhodan books and Star Trek books than read something that depressed them. "Well, Silverberg is so sad. Silverberg writes such depressing books." Yes, he deals with the human condition, and it is not always Albert Payson Terhune or Doris Day time. So after 25 years of writing some of the finest literature this genre has ever produced--Bob Silverberg had forty books that were out of print, and it wasn't money, because Bob, if he never works another day in his life, he won't have to. He has a great deal of money, which he has gotten from writing. What he was concerned about was that his work was being ignored. He would go to conventions, and people would ask for his autograph, and he would go to academic discussions, and people would tell him how wonderful he was, and no one was buying his books. For a writer, being read is what counts. And he finally came to the point where he got hip and he said "Hey, wait a minute, where is this golden horde for which I was writing? These are a bunch of imbeciles." And he said "That's it--pass!" And he grew up. And he molted. He stopped writing. He doesn't have to write anymore. He now does what he wants to do. He travels

around the country, he's an expert in succulents and cacti, he has an amazing botanical layout in his backyard up in San Francisco, and he doesn't do anything. Barry Malzberg also left the field. He came to the same conclusions. He could no longer deal with idiots who wanted him to write the same thing time and time again. He's not Isaac Asimov. Isaac has found a way of writing the same thing over and over again indeed. He's allowed his audience to dictate what he's go-



ing to write. Malzberg couldn't handle it, Silverberg couldn't handle it, George Alec Efinger couldn't handle it, there are more and more writers drifting away from being called science fiction writers. My "pulling a Silverberg" is a very different thing. I'm not a science fiction writer. I have never been a science fiction writer. Time and time again the reviews come out and they say "Well, gee this is really good stuff, but it's not science fiction." You know, I no longer choose to be tarred with a brush that doesn't fit me, which is a mixed metaphor, that, that doesn't serve, okay? I write fantasy if you have to have a

label. My work has always been closer to Borges and Kafka and Poe than Asimov, Heinlein and Clarke. We are simply indifferent categories. The phrase "science fiction" is a marketing term that was devised for news dealers so that they could put all the books with green, icky monsters and ladies with their breasts falling out of their brassieres over there. They can put all the screaming nurse novels over here. They can put Westerns over there, and all the gothics way over there. It is a marketing term for the ease of news dealers. And there are some of us, who, rightly or wrongly in our own benighted arrogance, think that our work transcends labels and should be judged solely on its own merits. I don't want to be judged against Asimov, I don't want to be judged against...I mean, if I'm going to be judged against anyone, for Christ Sakes, give me a shot at being judged against Kafka, not Isaac Asimov. As good as he may be, my aspirations are somewhat higher. And so, I refuse to let them put "science fiction" on my books. I'm not writing anything different than I've ever written. I've got two new books coming out, *Strange Wine* and *Stalking the Nightmare*, and they're filled with these kinds of stories. The difference is, they didn't appear in *Galaxy* and *F & SF*. They appeared in *Viva*, they appeared in *Penthouse*, they appeared in *The New Yorker*. And that's where I want my work to be.

RB: Would you say that the label "Science Fiction" carries such connotations with it that it could prevent some writer like Zelazny and others from getting full appreciation from the public just because they only see the garish covers on the paperbacks?

HE: Absolutely, there are chapter and verse that can prove that. Theodore Sturgeon has spent his life in poverty. He's one of the finest writers this country's ever produced. Because he's been labelled a science fiction writer, he can't sell his stuff. You know, I can tell you stories...I won't name their names, because I don't want to belittle them, but a man who has won almost as many Hugos as I have, he is a classic writer in the genre, there isn't a fantasy writer working in the country today from Stephen King and Michael Crichton on down all the way to Lin Carter who has not been influenced by him. This is a man who has maybe forty books published. A genius--you'd know who I meant immediately. He lives in a one room flat in San Francisco, and hasn't got the money to move anywhere else. He sits on the end of his bed and types with this typewriter on a chair, on a

kitchen chair. His Hugos he has up on a shelf because there's no room for them down in the room. Another young writer, one of the best of the new young writers, has five or six books and has been nominated for all kinds of awards, he's had three cancer operations in the last two years. He's going in for his fourth, and he hasn't got the money to pay for it. He's being done for eleven thousand dollars in medical bills. You think that science fiction writers live great Olympian lives. Most of them are fucking poverty cases. Most of them live lives of incredible meanness. Judith Merrill, the great anthologist, used to leave the conventions where people would laud and applaud her and say what a great maven she was, and go back to be a waitress in the diner in Milford, Pennsylvania. There is an enormous gap between the kind of adulation that writers get at conventions and this kind of set-

"I'm not a science fiction writer. I have never been a science fiction writer."

ting, and what their lives are really like. I'm an exception to that. I got hip to it very, very young. I looked around me and I saw people like Phillip Jose Farmer working in a milk bottle cleaning plant so he could support his wife, who has petit mal and his daughter. I said "Jesus Christ, this man's a giant and he can't make a living at this." I make a very good living, I live very high indeed, and that's the way I intend to continue living. And one of the ways of maintaining my life the way I want to and my freedom is not to be called a science fiction writer. It's also truthful, I'm not.

RB: Recently you edited two volumes of speculative fiction that I consider important to the field, *Dangerous Visions* and *Again, Dangerous Visions*. Is there going to be a *Last Dangerous Visions*?

HE: Yes, he said, chewing on his shitty Hardee's hamburger...

RB: I warned you...

HE: Hey, it's better than a poke in the eye with a hot stick. But not by much. Yes, the book will be out this fall. *The Last Dangerous Visions* is a three volume boxed set, each volume as big as *Again, Dangerous Visions*. It is a million and a quarter words, five times the length of *Gone With the Wind*, over a hundred stories, two complete novels, a hundred illustrations. It will be about thirty dollars--save you money.

RB: Recently I was reading your collection *Love Ain't Nothing But Sex Misspelled* and it seems in a lot of the stories that the protagonist, whom I took to reflect your feelings in some way, would somehow revenge a moral injustice through physical violence. I think you know the stories I'm referring to, when Roger Gore is brutally beaten by the protagonist...

HE: I *did* that. There was a guy who knocked up a friend of a lady I was living with, and he wouldn't pay for her abortion, and I went and beat the shit out of him, and he paid for the abortion.

RB: Do you, okay, in the other stories similar things happened. Do you really feel that it's justified just because something...

HE: The question that you are asking me is: Do you justify physical violence? No--I do not justify it, I do not like it, I abhor it, I abominate it, and spend a lot of time talking against it, and I am a very violent person. I'm sorry, that's the reality. It's very dichotomous, but a foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds. What can I tell you? Tell me that you are an anti-violent person who, when he was cut off on the free-way, never said "You mother-fucker!" and wanted to run into him. Tell me that and I will have you sainted immediately.

RB: In your novel *Web of the City* you ran with a streetgang to gather material for the novel. Could you tell us a little bit about that experience.

HE: It's told in great detail in a book called *Memos from Purgatory* which is an autobiography about the ten weeks I ran with the gang and the time I spent in jail subsequently. (Looks at Robert Bly's note pad). You print funny, kid.

RB: You often refer to Ellison Wonderland. What is that?

HE: It's my house.

RB: Your house? You titled a book with that name...

HE: Well, I had the book before I had the house...It's a bad pun. I like bad puns. (Bites Hardee's cheeseburger) It's not all that bad. It's not terrific, it's not filet mignon, but it's not that bad...

RB: When did you first decide to write?

HE: I think I came out of the womb writing. The first thing I ever sold was when I was ten years old, a five part serial to the *Cleveland News* young people's column, and before that I was doing my own little newspaper in the neighborhood. I've always written. I never decided to be a writer, I was just...there's a scene out of a film called *The Red Shoes*, really a film, where Moira Shearer, who was a brilliant ballerina, is talking to the ballet entrepreneur. Kind of a Sol Yurok kind of figure, actually he's a Balanchine kind of figure. ...And he says to her, "Why must you dance?" She wants to join his company, and she thinks about it a moment and then she says to him,

"My work has always been closer to Borges and Kafka and Poe than Asimov, Heinlein, and Clarke."

"Why must you breathe?" And he says, "I must!" And she smiles and walks away. I didn't choose to be a writer, that's what I am--I'm a writer.

RB: You do teach a lot of workshops on creative writing. Do you think it's something that can be taught?

HE: No. The only workshop that I teach is Clarion. I have spoken and taught at a number of other workshops and very quickly came to believe what I had always believed about writ-

ing courses in colleges. They're bullshit. You can't teach writing. All you can teach is the plumbing. You can teach how to set up a story, you can teach the punctuation, you can teach syntax, and the moment you begin getting into theory, you're playing what Bogart called a Mugs Game. It just can't be done. At Clarion, it's a very different situation. All of the people who were admitted to Clarion--each of the 25 each year--were people who had submitted work, and they obviously and clearly had talent. All they needed was to be shown the ways to do it. I don't think you will ever learn anything taking a college course with somebody who has never sold a novel or never written for the commercial media. They will fill you full of a lot of esoteric bullshit which bears no relation to the reality of writing.

RB: So you're saying if I don't have it now, I'll never get it.

HE: No, you can teach monkeys to do almost any damn thing, man. Look at Harold Robbins, he's not a writer, he's a creative typist. Jacqueline Susanne, who couldn't write for sour apple spit had four or five novels published.

RB: You talked about the fact that Erich Segal is talentless, yet very rich and famous in your intro to *Dangerous Visions*. Why do you feel that such people who have no talent become the most widely read authors?

HE: Very simple. The recent illiteracy figures in this country released, and I don't have them specifically, but it's something like this--something like 26% illiterate, and another 16% functionally illiterate--almost half the population in this country either illiterate or functionally illiterate. The book-buying public in America is 8%--8% of the population, what--230,000,000 people? Of that 8%, only 2% buy more than one book a year. That means 6% of the population are reading a book a year. What are they going to read? *Remembrance of Things Past*, *Moby Dick*, *War and Peace*? They are going to read *Jaws*, or *Oliver's Story*, or *Valley of the Dolls*, or the latest Harold Robbins abomination. The reason for that is that those novels appeal to the lowest possible common denominator. They're like television, they're eyewash, they don't require any intelligence, and they further the mythology of stereotypes of women, stereotypes of big businessmen, stereotypes of the hero, stereotypes of what a *macho* man is, all kinds of crazed stereotypes, like these multimillionaires running around in Lear jets with telephones and banging beautiful actresses constantly. The fact of the matter is that most of the big businessmen I know are exhausted by nine o'clock at night and go to bed and can't get it up. But that wouldn't be interesting.

Rick Link (RL): You were talking about stereotypes earlier, what type of effect do you think something like the Doris Day movies have on people where she is portrayed as the pristine virgin until she is married?

HE: I don't want you to think for a moment that I disagree with that view of Doris Day movies because in one way that's exactly what they are, on the other hand, I'm sure that there would be other people who would

disagree with that view. I think perhaps that was a slanted question—I would never say that was a slanted question but, I think in general—and in specific in most cases—stereotypes are always bad. Because they reduce individuals to templates, to *Doppelgänger*, and that denies their humanity. And anything that denies humanity, that denies freedom, is bad, *per se*. Excuse me, that's why being called a science

"A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds."

fiction writer is bad, because it's a term that spans a length and breadth of writers that goes all the way from Edgar Rice Burroughs and H.P. Lovecraft to J.R.R. Tolkien at one end, to Kurt Vonnegut and Jorge Luis Borges at the other. It doesn't mean anything, it is bible. It's just input noise, so dealing with stereotypes means that you're dealing with imprecisions. There are general overall categories that you can use as a basis, but from that you have to work to the individual. I mean, I could see you all as stupid students, I encounter nothing but stupid students everywhere I go—brain damaged assholes who want to stay loaded or drunk or high, and the most important thing to them is getting the grade, which transcends getting laid (motioning with his fingers) by only about that much, and I suspect that if they thought that they could get laid regularly they would pass on the grades.

RB: Getting laid is making the grade...

HE: Well, it's the same thing—proving your *macho* with a grade. And now I could see you guys as that, but I choose not to. I choose to deal with him (Bly) as a particular person who writes funny and you (Link) as a guy who already has your view formed. That's why you slant the question at me the way you do. But that's okay. I think Doris Day movies are a lot less detrimental than a movie like *Lipstick*, which I conceive of as a really purely evil film—bad, bad film—fills people with a lot of bad ideas. Movies like *Deathwish*. I think they are bad movies in that way no, no matter how well they're made, and...

Girl (from a balcony): *A Boy and His Dog* sucks!

RB: And you're a jerk!

HE: What did she say?

RB: "*A Boy and His Dog* sucks." (To Ellison) I wasn't defending you, I just happened to like the movie.

RL: There goes the rating of the student's at the UR down ten points.

RB: She'll probably debate you tonight, too.

HE: Public outcry is a good thing. She at least said it—that's cool. She shouldn't have run away, she should have stayed there, but there's a little cowardice in all of us, I suppose.

RL: Do you feel that the media is having too much effect on us today? Or do you hold the view of Marshall McLuhan?

HE: I hold a very different view from Marshall McLuhan. I used to think that television could be potentially the most powerful medium for the dissemination of knowledge that the world has ever known, it could be a very rich and rewarding thing if handled properly and that problem was in the execution. I've now come, after ten years, five years of which was as a television critic, of taking a very extreme viewpoint. I think television *itself* is bad. The idea of television, the act of watching television kills the imagination. It's not like radio, with radio you had to listen, had to make things, you had to build things in your mind. Movies do that. Television is something else again. Television lays it all out there in a very prescribed way and the bare minimum of imagination on the part of the viewer is needed and I really fear for all of us. I think that in a very few years we're going to have nothing but Jukes and Kallikaks in this country. And, I said this last night at the pizza place and nobody knew what I meant when I said Jukes and Kallikaks, I think a time is coming very, very soon for me personally when I am

life to be a courageous person. I mean every Goddamned day they put you in a position where you have to be a coward, where you have to compromise, where you have to put up with shit, where you have to dehumanize yourself, where you have to let them chip away at you a little bit, where you have to be quiet, I mean, desks, when you have to put your hands quietly on the desk, hands that want to do things and they have to be there silently. And after a while, you can't do anything else, because they've broken your back, and you wind up like your Mommy and Daddy. And if you do one really dangerous thing, you find that doing the second one is easy, and the third one is easier, and easier and easier and after a while it becomes a way of life...I came here because a lot of people were saying crazy things which if left unattended they could then use as a wedge later, and go to a film council and say, "Look, remember all this trouble we had with this other guy, well here's another example and you don't want that to happen again, do you?"



no longer going to be able to morally or ethically work in television. I won't be able to do it...I mean, I've been getting to that place. I kind of build in self-destructs now. I'll be going along with a project, and I'll know that if I bend a little bit it will go on and I'll make my fifty thousand dollars and everything will be cool. I can't do it. I fucking can't do it, I invariably get rigid about it and won't bastardize the story or won't bow to what their stupid demand is and they cut me off...and it doesn't matter to me. I always breathe a great sigh of relief. It's as though an enormous Sisyphus rock had been lifted from my back and I know that I shouldn't have been doing that to begin with. It is harder and harder in this life—and if you use this, what I'm about to say, you're going to have to rewrite it because it's mostly in the way it's said: It is harder and harder in this

RL: And you got scared, more or less?

HE: Yeah, I got scared about it, I said, "God damn it, somebody's got to come and open it up. And I figured, okay, I got a reputation, and I pull a lot of bread when I go to speak, so it will be a big debate. And even if they make me look like an asshole, man, I don't care, because I know I'm an asshole to begin with so they ain't going to hurt me that way. But the talking about it, the yelling tonight, people who might have sat quietly and let it go down later can't now, they won't be able to. And that's what it's all about—just the act of comin' and doing it. Putting your body on the line, is what it's all about.

Kurt Hill (KI): So you came just to keep the issue alive?

HE: Yeah, well, whether or not the film is sexist is such bullshit. I mean all we're talking about is a movie, I mean, Jesus...I mean it may be sexist, it may be anti-female, it may be everything they say it is...I dunno, I don't see it that way. I didn't write it that way, I don't hate females—at least I don't think I...the only female I can think of that I hate right offhand is my sister, who's a bigot. But then, I hate a lot of bigots. This one just happens to be my sister. If it is a sexist film, if it is a bad film in that respect, that ought to be said, too. And I don't think guys should keep defending masculine roles just out of rote. There are things that men do that they should keep on doing because they are good, and they're productive. There are other things that we do that are stupid and we've been doing them for 10,000 years and we ought to stop doing them. That's why I like the feminist movement, because it frees men, it is enlightened self-interest.

RL: You are saying a lot about the media, now. I'm thinking to myself, "He's saying a lot about what the media is *not* doing." Like, it doesn't allow for any input from the viewer it does it all for him. He just sits there, turns on, tunes in, turns off. What *positive* goals do you have for it?

HE: For television? My positive goal is me getting out of it. Look, the human race will do what it wants to do. I mean, there was the dancing madness of the middle ages—everybody got out in the streets and danced until they dropped dead. Everybody is entitled to come home at night after working at the foundry all day and turn on reruns of *Gilligan's Island* and suck on a Coors, dynamite—they're entitled to do it. My objections are that there is nothing on TV that I want to see, there is nothing that interests me as an intelligent human being. Which is not to say they're not intelligent, maybe—well, fuck it. Fuck it. I'm not going to be hypocritical about it. I'm an elitist, God damn it. I know fucking well that I am better than ninety percent of the people I meet in a given day. True, just simple, flat out true. I mean, I know it. There are people in this life who are smarter, faster, quicker, stronger—that's what the species is all about. The race goes to the swift. Will and Ariel Durant wrote in *The Lessons of History* words to effect that freedom and equality are sworn and mutual enemies: when one survives, the other perishes. And there's no way to get around it. When you give people *de facto* freedom, I mean real freedom, I mean not lip-service freedom, but *real* freedom, the

to be drones. They go for the safe road, they go for the two cars in the garage and the radar range. Dynamite—you can have it. But don't complain when somebody else wants heaven. My secret dream is to own San Simeon, the Hearst mansion, man, I want that mountain, I want the whole thing. That's my dream. If I can get it, I should get it. Somebody else, all they want is a rose-covered cottage and a husband or wife who will love them, and a job that won't break their spine. That's fine. But change in society, the betterment of life for people, is made by exceptional people always. Always. It's effected by ordinary people, but if left to their own devices ordinary people would keep polluting the atmosphere just so they could

"I'm an elitist, god damn it. I know...that I am better than ninety per cent of the people I meet in a given day."

have aerosol spray cans for hair spray. Does that answer what you were asking? I hate to sound so cynical. I'm not cynical. Really, I'm not—I like to think of the human race as capable of incredible nobility, godlike when they're at their very best, and they settle for such shit most of the time. And I would be dissembling, I would be disingenuous if I were to pretend to a oneness with that common herd. I'm above it, and I think everyone should be above it. This does not make me any great friends, I want you to know that. Cause most of the people who are like that, they look at you and they say "Fuck you."

Robert Bly (RB): Sometimes it's hard to tell where it crosses the line between fiction and fact. Why do you find that you sometimes have to express yourself in fiction rather than in straight forward talk or essay?

Harlan Ellison (HE): Well I do. People say "I've read a lot of your stuff." Probably you've read one 1/20 of what I've written. I do maybe a million words a year. I got 900 magazine pieces alone. Did you read my articles in *New Times*?

RB: No.

HE: Did you read my articles in the *New York Times Magazine*?

RB: No (begins to sink lower in seat).

HE: Did you read my essay that was in *Writer's Digest* on writing-no. I do a lot of stuff. What you are actually saying is that you have encountered a certain section of my things and you've drawn conclusions from it. I do as much non-fiction in a given year as I do fiction. I've been working on a very long piece about the death of Sal Mineo for almost three years now—Sal died a year ago, but I've been working on a piece on Sal for a lot longer than that. Sal was a very good friend of mine and his death was profoundly disturbing to me, and it's a big piece for *Playboy* and I've been having a lot of trouble writing it, but it's gonna be at least ten-twenty thousand words. That's a big, big article. It's a major piece of writing. So, sometimes an idea will need to be expressed as fiction, other times it will need to

be expressed as non-fiction. Sometimes it will need to be expressed as a western, others as a detective story, sometimes as a love story, sometimes as a fantasy. The modes that I use are the modes that the story itself demands, which is one of the secrets of writing. The form follows function...That was terrific...that was sensational....

RB: You never say "I'll do a science fiction story about this idea in *Scientific American*, do you?"

HE: No, my ideas never grow out of that kind of thing. Occasionally I'll use science as an implement in my stories, but I use it the same way I would use cultural patterns or historical patterns, as I did in *A Boy and His Dog*. That's a historical pattern that I'm using. And I was using historical science which the lady who yelled that *A Boy and His Dog* sucks does not understand, but that's because she's an asshole, and there's no way of curing that. My stories always grow out of an abstract idea or out of a person, out of a kind of person I want to write about, or an abstract idea, like I'll say to myself, "What if a guy was in a restaurant, and his date was late, and he went to the telephone to dial her, and because he was thinking about something else instead of dialing the number where she was supposed to be he dialed his own apartment number which we all do because it's the number most familiar to us. And *he* answered!" And that's how that idea started....

HE: ...and that's "Shatterday." What happened out of that story was a very different kind of thing than I intended because it was a gimmick. It was an idea, just a funny idea, "Gee, what would happen if..." But then the story is—that's not a story, that's an idea, and there's a very big difference between an idea and a story. The story was: who is this person, why has this happened to *him* instead of to anybody else in the world, and what becomes of him as a result of this? And that's what the story is. Stories are always about people, they are never about things.

"Two hundred years after I'm dead they'll still be reading what I wrote...that's the delusion that sustains me."

RB: I would have to disagree. That may apply to you, but stories are written about things.

HE: About THINGS? Name one.

RB: Okay, let's consider detective stories, or maybe the pulps. They are not about what happens to Doc Savage, they are about Doc Savage's scientific gimmicks, Doc Savage's super strength. They don't care about Doc Savage the man. They are just interested in something exciting....

HE: Not so, not so. Have you read Doc Savage?

RB: I have read one of the Doc Savage novels.

HE: Okay, the Doc Savage novels are of a

"It is harder and harder in this life to be a courageous person."

strong will always rise whether they're black, white, young, old, male, female. They'll rise, and it is those people who should be treasured. In a generation there is only one Einstein, in a generation there is only one Picasso, in a generation there is only one Beverly Sills, in a generation there's only one Joe Namath, one Margot Fontaine. These are people who are clearly better, and God damn it their way in life should be made easier. People, it seems to me, in many cases choose

very peculiar genre. You see, when we are dealing with a general kind of thing, where I say stories are always about people, never about things, there are gradations of that. There are good stories and bad stories but they're always about people. The people whom read the Doc Savage novels-and I read them, I read them religiously. I love them. They're elegant trash-they don't presume to be anything other than what they are. They're very straightforward. I mean they're not shit like Lin Carter which pretends to be some kind of dumb literature and it isn't. You came to care for Doc, because you knew who he was and you knew that he was the upholder of truth

"If what I have written is of any consequence it is because I have found my own voice."

and right, and you came to understand the character flaws of his helpers, and on a very low, literary level, they are people stories. And all of the things that are going on, all the adventure, and all the gimmicks and gadgets, that's just part of...I mean it's like trying to write a story about a motocross racer without talking about cars. You take a book like Oakley Hall's *The Downhill Racers*. It's a book basically about ski bums, or Romain Gary's *The Ski Bum*. They are about ski bums and people who follow the whole thing. But it's about people, and yet there's a lot of talking about skiing. *Moby Dick* is a story about people, but there is an enormous amount about ships and whaling. So Doc Savage has scientific gimmicks in it but basically it's those dumb characters that you follow.

RB: I'm going to try to catch you on this point now. Have you read "Neutron Star" by Larry Niven?

HE: Yeah.

RB: I contend that all it's about is taking popular science dealing with that phenomenon and presenting it to the public in a fictional format.

HE: Well, it's a bad story!

RB: ...and I don't think that it is about people at all. You don't care about this guy...

HE: It's an example of bad writing, that's all it is. And if you find one or two, the very fact that we have to sit here and you have to cast about....I can only think of one, *Earth Abides*, George Stewart's book in which there are no human beings, where the Earth itself is the character. But that's merely an anthropomorphism, so the Earth becomes the character we care about. The very fact that we have to sit here and dredge our minds to find things that may be, proves the point...there may be exceptions, but I think that they will invariably be bad stories. I don't think you can find me a good story which isn't about people. Well, I'm glad we came to that, I thought we were going to come to blows.

RB: Well, I've heard about your exploits, so I won't tangle with you.

HE: I'm a very gentle soul, I never lift my hand to anybody. Laura, do you want to ask anything?

RB: Come on, Laura.

HE: Leave her alone, leave her alone man...

RB: But we're married, damn it!

HE: I don't give a shit if you're married...

LS: When you write, do you write sometimes to get rid of something?

HE: Yeah, Yeah. Writing is catharsis for me, and occasionally it is therapy. I have come to understand a number of things in my life through writing, and oddly enough they were never things that I sat down to discover for myself. Like I was in this story "Shatterday" that I was just talking about, where the guy calls himself. I came to realize in the writing of the story that I really wanted my Mother to die. My mother had been sick for many, many, many years and hanging on, and hanging on, and hanging on, with a lot of heart attacks and a lot of bad shit, and she kept wanting me to come down and see her in Florida. And I would go down occasionally and I couldn't take it...you know, it would make me nuts, I'd leave after two days, I couldn't take it. And finally, in a story I copped to it, I just copped to it, I said, "Yeah, I want her dead." Not out of hate, or dislike, because she's a sweet woman, just fucking free me, let me out of this. That's very heavy. Very heavy...that's a stupid phrase...No, I mean that specifically, I mean that exactly-very heavy. It is a very heavy weight to be able to accept. And I did. I just wrote a story called "Alive and Well and on a Friendless Voyage" which will be one of three stories which I wrote for the *Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*. They're doing a Harlan Ellison issue, and I wrote three stories. I said to the editor, "Gee, now that I have a memorial issue, what do I have to do, drop dead?" He said, "No, you can continue living." I said, "Fine." So I did a long introduction, a very surly introduction, and I did these three stories. And in this one I was able to come to terms with the fact that I just got divorced in November. I was married to a lady from June to November, and I really love her. I loved her a lot. I think with the exception of my dog Abu who died I don't think I've ever loved anyone else in this life. And she was fucking another guy... I think it's very important in this life to have no secrets. No secrets, man, because that's the only way you can be absolutely free of anyone ever making you do something you don't want, you've got to have no secrets.

I mean if you're ashamed because you're in college, because your parents are taking care of you, you know, and they're paying your way and you really want to be off doing something else, they got a hold on you. If you've got some sexual hangup that you think is dirty, and that you think other people think is dirty, and you keep it in the closet, then they got something on you. You can never really speak your mind, you can never go all the way because there's the fear you're going to be found out. I got no secrets, there is absolutely no question that you could ask me-nothing-that I would not tell you the absolute solid truth on even if it was the most damaging thing in the world to me.

RB: Before you said writing is basically a catharsis and therapy...

HE: Well, no, no, no, that isn't what I said at all, man, listen carefully. What I said was: sometimes it is catharsis for me and sometimes it is even therapy. Mostly, I conceive of writing as a holy chore. It's something to be done with what Balzac called clean hands and composure. I go at it the same way that I'm sure a priest goes at the sacraments. That's the God's truth. When I'm done writing a story, when I finish, fucking bolts of lightning come out of my fingertips, Jack, I'm a hundred and eighty feet tall, I walk this far off the ground. There has never been a high-dope? What the fuck do I need with dope, man. Liquor? Screw it. I mean, good sex is great but it's another kind of high. But there's nothing, nothing like creating something that no one else could have written. No one else. Two hundred years after I'm dead they'll still be reading what I wrote. That's, that's the delusion that sustains me. All right?

RB: What writers were your biggest influences?

HE: My big influences were the Shadow Radio programs.

RB: Disguised as Lamont Cranston...

HE: He wasn't really Lamont Cranston. You see, in the original books, Lamont Cranston was just another one of his guys who worked for him. He wasn't Lamont Cranston, Lamont Cranston was just another one of his flunkies. He was actually Kent Allard, a pilot who was downed in the Brazilian jungles. That's who the shadow was. In the radio program they got it wrong. My influences were varied and many, but mostly they were old time radio, movies, comic books, and pulp magazine. That isn't what I tell *Time* magazine when they

"I write for an audience of one. I write for myself."

interview me. I tell them it was Conrad, DeMaupassant, Dickens, and Mark Twain, all of whom were, I suppose. There are no influences, really. I look around now and I see the influences in my work and I think they were probably Clark-Ashton Smith, they were probably Ernest Hemingway, they were probably Dickens, Mark Twain thematically speaking. But the reason that you're sitting and talking to me here indicates, well this guy has done something that's worthy of our paying some small attention to, right? I mean I'm not Marcel Proust, but if what I have written is of any value and any consequence it is because I have found my own voice. And that means that whatever influences there have been on me have been minimalized, to the point where whatever it is I have is in the ascendant.

RB: Do you have any planned line of attack for tonight's debate?

HE: Well, I thought I'd move in on the left, get them in a pincer movement...No, I think the

whole thing is crazed as a bedbug, I really do, even the people who are defending. I think they're as nuts as the ones who are opposing, 'cause they all defend on the wrong grounds! My contention is that censorship is the issue—it's their contention that this moron movie...I didn't come three thousand fucking miles to talk about this imbecile movie. Now about censorship, I would say, having gotten two thousand people into this arena... (to Laura Sechrist) You're not really married to him (BLY), are you?

LS: No.

HE: I mean, you don't even fool around with him, do you?

LS: No.

RB: Why did you think it was such an impossibility?

HE: Because you are not that far removed from virginity, if at all. (All the editors moan). Tell me I'm wrong.

RB: I would say "if at all" is wrong.

HE: But not far?

RL: Not yet.

RB: I'm going to make you do a true confession! Okay, you ready? I read in a book that you said you had five hundred women. Is that true?

HE: More.

RB: More? Could I have a list?

HE: What would you do with it, dummy, you wouldn't know what to do with it. Listen, I don't run up a flag everytime I go to bed with a woman. It just happens...see, I never kissed a girl until I was 19, I never got laid till I was 20, and I was married at 21. And I was a very, very ugly kid. I mean, I'm not George Segal now, but I was even more unattractive than you are (to Bly). (Editors of Logos all shriek with delight). Okay. I mean, I really was, I really was, I was a bad looking, ugly kid...

RB: By the way, I'm not a nice person either.

HE: Oh, you had me fooled, pushy. Why do you think I'm talking to you this way; you don't see me talking to them (other editors) this way, do you?

RB: They are nastier than I am, they just don't show it.

HE: They're smarter than you are, too.

RB: Most people are.

HE: Because they don't show it. Anyhow, so when I started getting decent looking which happened almost simultaneously with my selling my first story. It's the truth, it's the God's truth, when you start feeling good about yourself, man, you start looking great. I mean, I can convince whole rooms full of people that I'm really a great looking guy. And I'm not. So I guess I went through a period of proving that I was attractive to women. And I

was sleeping with as many as four women a day. And it was crazy, because it went on and I wrote a lot during that period. There's that flaw in some men which if they are smart they grow out of or lucky to grow out of, and I guess I did, because I don't do it anymore. But just the sheer mechanics of four women a day, getting them in, getting them out, talk, I mean, it was a night and day job, and I was writing a lot during that period. But if you sleep with four women a day for three months, you're coming pretty far along toward the five hundred number. I suspect that it's well over five hundred, it's just that I don't run tallies; I think that's very silly and very unhuman. And I wrote about it in that introduction because I was talking about love (introduction to *Love Ain't Nothing But Sex Misspelled*, and about what little I knew about it and here it all is, and it was an actual conversation I had with my then-to-be-wife, which has nothing to do with the fact that you're not that lately removed from virginity. And why should you be ashamed of that? Now, you see, there you are playing a male stereotype.

Studs Bly: Not true.

HE: You notice he didn't have that (the tape recorder) on while we were talking about his virginity. Did you have it on?

RB: Yes, and I guarantee I'll put that right in the article.

"I live each day as it comes, and my life is filled with action, danger, and adventure..."

LS: When you write, do you write with a specific audience in mind?

HE: Yeah, I write for an audience. I write for an audience that I think is the most intelligent, witty, bright and informed audience in the world. I write for an audience of one. I write for myself. I never write for a market or for an audience, I don't give a shit what anybody thinks about my stories. If tomorrow, I was declared unconstitutional and nobody could like my stuff and the critics all said it was shit and terrible, I would still continue writing exactly the way I do now. I try to be as free of outside influences as I can be. I think anybody who writes for an audience is damaging himself...or herself.

RB: Do you care if you are published or not?

HE: Of course I care. Anybody who writes and says "Well, I just write to write," they're playing with themselves. The reason to write is to communicate. It indicates an incredible arrogance and egomania on the part of the writer because what it implies is "What I think is important enough for someone else to read." Everytime you sit down to write, that's what you're saying: I am *that* good, I am that important, my thoughts are that important. Most people don't do that. Most people can't write that way. I just write to please me. I mean, how horrible it would be to write to please somebody else and miss on that and also not please myself and no one would have won. At least if I please me, I know I'm halfway there.

RL: How do you feel about this pornography debate—no matter what channel you turn to, you see Larry Flynt saying "You can't define pornography, and what's pornography to you is not pornography to me"...

HE: He's absolutely right. I mean I personally despise Larry Flynt. He offered me \$2,000 a story to write for him with a guaranteed kill fee of \$1,000 which means that even if they reject the story I'd get a thousand dollars. I could have written *Moby Dick* knowing they wouldn't use it and they would have rejected it and I'd have made a thousand dollars. I couldn't do it. Ethically I couldn't do it. I despise the magazine, I think it's a loathsome piece of shit. It's debasing not only to women but to men, and it's really a vile piece of crap. And I have very few scruples about where I write because I figure my work stands on its own. The story is self-contained, I don't give a shit if you turn the page and there's a...cunt the size of Ausable Chasm. I don't care. It has nothing to do with me—my work is in and of itself pure. But that magazine is so loathsome to me, such bad, gross, despicable taste that I couldn't do it, and I wrote him back a letter to the editor who had asked me to write for him and said, "I just can't do it man, I just can't do it."...And I said if Larry Flynt came to visit I'd have the doorknobs cauterized. He wrote me back a letter, he fired the editor for even writing to me...and wrote me back a letter saying, "Fuck you, fuck you, who needs you, fuck you." I got it framed. I got that letter framed...Where were we?

RB: We were talking about my problems.

RL: The life and times of Bob Bly...

HE: Well, no, you see it's not Bob Bly, what it is is the basis of writing! Faulkner said the only thing worth the blood and the sweat and pain of writing in the human heart in conflict with itself. So you have to get to understand people. You have to understand why Laura's shy, and why when I said she gives good vibes and I'm attracted to her she blushes. By the way, it starts at the wings of your nose and goes out, it's terrific...

LS: I know (bright red)...

RL: Do you have any new directions you plan on taking in the future?

HE: Yes, I'm getting on a plane tomorrow to go back to...that's a new direction. I never know from day to day what I'm going to do. I like surprises. Usually when I write a story I never know how it's going to come out. I don't know the ending at all. When I started writing *A Boy and His Dog*, I had no idea it was going to end that way. It just went there, that's where it went, logically. I live each day as it comes, and my life is filled with action, danger, and adventure...I'm actually Captain Midnight in disguise.

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