



At The Sleepy Sailor

A Tribute to R. A. Lafferty

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One Fan's Odyssey with R. A. Lafferty

Late, late one night (or maybe it was early, early one morning) at the 1977 World Science Fiction Convention, the lovely and remarkable Linda Karrh and a group of her comrades encountered Raphael Aloysius Lafferty (unlovely and remarkable) in the lobby of the convention hotel. Lafferty inquired of the New Orieanian as to the purpose of the group's late-night (or early-morning) peregrinations.

"We wanted to frolic on the shore and watch the sun rise over the ocean." came the reply, for the 1977 Worldcon was held in Miami Beach. "But we are told that we would have to wait two hours for the dawn and we do not know if we can last that long."

"Hamm ...," mused Lafferty. "Well, how about 45 minutes? Do you think you could last 45 minutes?"

"We could."

"Go to the beach in 45 minutes."

They went to the beach in 45 minutes. At which moment the sun rose as promised.

What of this Lafferty? Is he a shaman with powers that control the elements? or is he merely one who has seen so many sunrises that he feels their proximity even in hotel lobbies? No absolute answers appear in this book. I have the double boon of both reading and knowing Ray for ten years. I'm not about to say that he doesn't have the power to command sunrises and move mountains. As far as I'm concerned, there's simply no question.

R. A. Lafferty *can* do anything.

P. Schuyler Miller, book reviewer for *Analogs*, first brought Ray's work before my eyes. His 1968 article reviewing Ray's first three novels puls'd with contagious enthusiasm. Furthermore, it waxed as it moved from *Space Chantey* to *The Reefs of Earth* to *Past Master*. The first was wonderful. The second was more wonderful yet. And the third was among the best of the year, original (as were all three books) and passionate and glorious. How could I pass them up? Did any s.f. reader with sense pass them up? I bought and gobbled them down in a daze of enchantment and revelation. "Wonderful" was an adjective pale and puny for what I thought of the works of this new and astonishing s. f. author.

CREDITS AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS:

The illustration on page 5 was done by Vaughn Bode; that on page 35 by Ron Juge and Chris Juge did the picture on page 43. The photograph shown on page 7 is from Mr. Lafferty. G. H. Lillian took the photo on page 18. Dany Frolich drew our cover. Our thanks to all.

Now I must describe myself as I was then, a hairy quasi-revolutionary choking on the tear gas at the great University in Berkeley, hot with zeal and rebellion. Lafferty — although I did not know it then — was a hairless quasi-conservative choking in the dust storms of Tulsa, but hot or not, his work sang with zeal and rebellion. What a treasure I had found: a voice shouting in the wilderness, whose message I could clasp close, its perspective so near to my own. In *Past Master* sang a raw belief in actual good, in absolute evil. That was *my* kind of revolution! Let my Berkeley brethren have their Timothy Leary's and Jerry Rubins ... I had my guru, and Lafferty was his name.

One night, during my Berkeley years, a freshman girl who lived in my co-op dorm came up to me. Her face contorted and out pulsed a wash of tears. A new roommate had moved in and immediately erected a screen around her side of the room. This was an unbearable slight to this vulnerable and sensitive little lady, and she cried and cried, stung by the cruelty of the world. I had no idea of what to do for her.

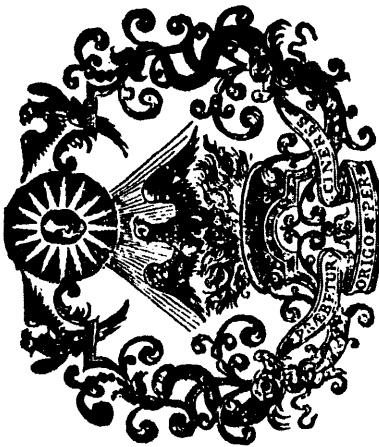
But a life touched by Lafferty is not without resource. Inspiration came. I sat her down, fetched *Past Master*, and handed her a photograph of Ray. "That man wrote this," I said, and read to her the spectacular closing pages of Lafferty's finest work. There the conceit of the "programmed world" is dashed, and its arrogance and cruelty blasted by courage and compassion. Pottscamp the mechanical man sneers at martyr Thomas More as More goes to his death, and More's reply sends him into a mad fit of remorse and regret. There is victory, there is justice, there is hope itself, in that scene, and as I read it to her the striking grandeur of his prose and vision swept the tears from her eyes. When I finished, she said nothing ... just looked at the snapshot in her hand, and smiled.

Yeah, he's a remarkable cat, this Lafferty. He's proof that glory and madness live on in the world. As editor of *At the Sleepy Sailor* — named for the tavern frequented by Roadstrum and his crew in *Space Chantey* (minus ecstasy chips, of course) — I've claimed these pages to tell my own story vis-a-vis the Cosmic Ray. In the pages that follow, others have their say. Damn it, we love the man, and just as his song says, he'll never know just how much. Here, though, we try to let him know.

GUY H. LILLIAN III



No, no, I didn't sketch this masterpiece, and forge the name of the late and much, much missed Vaughn Bode. At the '69 Worldcon Art Show Bode was drawing his various characters for ten dollars a throw. Flush with the bravura of youth I approached the great artist, two dollars in hand, and asked him if he would draw a Hugo for Ray. May the gods smile upon his spirit, for he said yes, and — as you see — added on his own a sketch of Captain Roadstrum, whom he had earlier portrayed in *Space Chantey*. Together we worked out the wording on the plaque: TO A FANTASTIC MAN, R. A. LAFFERTY. And when the last line was drawn, Vaughn refused pay. "Can you buy him a drink?" he asked. "Then do."



By ROBERT J. WHITAKER

Much of what follows was originally published by Bob Whitaker in his superb genzine, *The Hunting of the Snark*. The rest, with one or two impertinent entries and asides from myself, comes from his correspondence with Lafferty, which Whitaker has graciously allowed us to see. OVERIEAF: three wild lads from the 229th Anti-Aircraft Battalion, ca. 1942, snapped in a photo gallery in Palacios, Texas. We leave it to you to find Mr. Lafferty in this fearsome group.

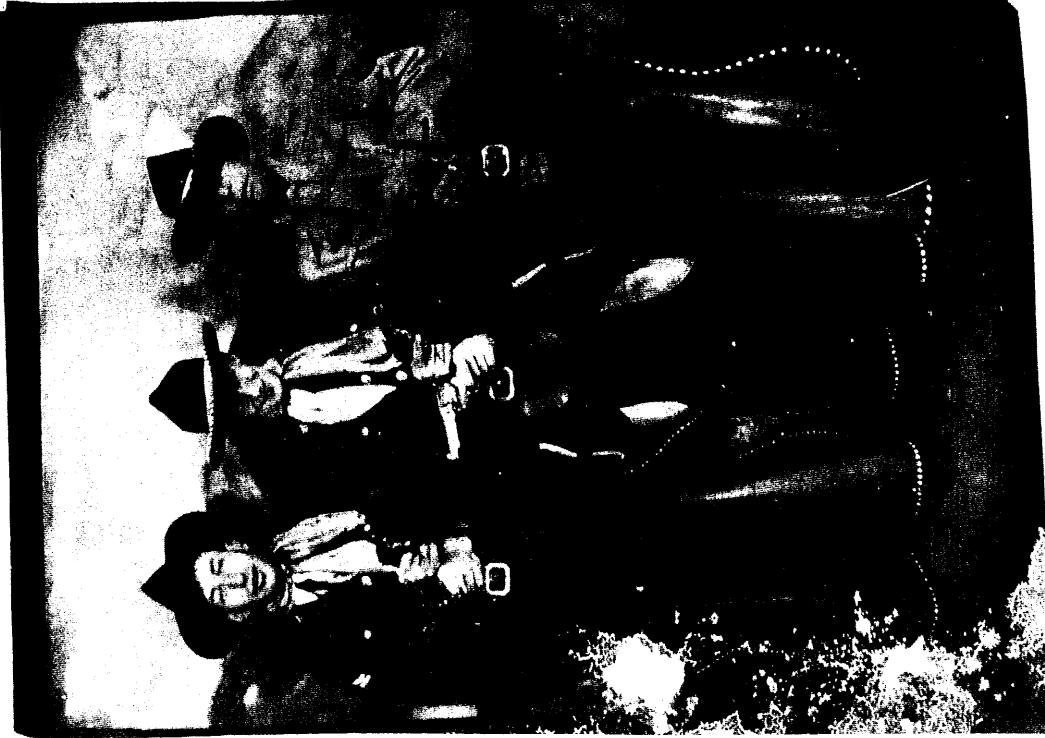
— GHLIII

Whitaker: Could you give a little biography and why you started writing and when?

Lafferty: I was born November 7, 1914 in Neola, Iowa. Both my parents were born in Iowa, and both had lived in Oklahoma City for quite a few years. I was born on their second move back to Iowa. And when I was four years old we moved to Oklahoma again, to Ferry, Oklahoma. With summertime visits back north again and with many relatives in both states, I enjoyed what have been called the two most educational experiences, to be a small northern boy in a small southern town and to be a small southern boy in a small northern town.

Then we moved to Tulsa, Oklahoma which qualifies as a city. Having traveled in forty-five of the fifty states and in a few foreign countries, I still find Tulsa to be the favorite city of the world.

No particular events in life, though. I went through school, and then only a few college courses taken at night. I worked one year on a civil service job in Washington, D.C., then to Tulsa again. Worked most of my life in the electrical wholesale business. Took an ICS Electrical Engineering course and a few other technical courses. In the spring of 1942 I went into the army. I was twenty-seven years old, about ten years older than a man should first go to sea, go to war, go to the enchanted islands, have his adventures. I did have quite a few modified adventures in Australia, New Guinea, Morotai (then in the Dutch East Indies, now in Indonesia) and the Philippines, and a few smaller islands. Some of the islands really were enchanted; some of the people we lived with really were still in the stone age; both of these conditions have been partially corrected since then. Our combat encounters were pretty sporadic and not very important. Or so I thought. But at a group reunion of the old outfit in Fort Worth, Texas last year, I found that these things loomed much larger in retrospect than they had at the time of their happening. Hell, we were a bunch of heroes. Anyhow, I had seen a lot of the world.



After five years of it, I was out of the army and back home and working for electrical firms again, and there were no particular events. In 1959 I began to write. I had tried it a little bit twenty-five years before, evening writing slipped in between evening correspondence courses, but nothing had come of it that first time. In '59 I took it up again to try to find a hobby that would make a little money instead of costing a lot, and also to fill a gap caused by cutting down on my drinking and fooling around. I sold my first stories later in that year, and sold my first novels in 1967. Then in 1971, after developing a wobbly heart and a disinclination to work anymore, I retired from regular work to try to get by on my writing. OKLA HANNALL, coming a little bit after this, helped. It didn't put me on easy street but it put me on easy alley, which is probably better for a person of my predilections.

At the world convention in Toronto in 1973 I won a Hugo (the highest award that the world can give, according to SF people). So that is the end of the biography. I've always believed that people should have the grace to die quietly after touching the top. I've put it off for one reason or another, but I know that's a shoddy thing to do. There are even some who repeat the award, but that is in very bad taste. Things going pretty well at the moment, though. What I don't have I don't need. If I were fictionizing this biography, I would put some events in it; but there really weren't any.

What writers did you read, when younger, who influenced your work?

R.L. Stevenson, Twain, Bret Harte, Melville, Lafcadio Hearn, Hilaire Belloc, G.K. Chesterton, Dickens, Balzac, J.B. Cabell — that all seems pretty old. Then there was Miles Murdoch, the first I even knew, a mystery writer of the 1920s now forgotten, who was also our Bishop Kelly that I served 6:30 mass for every morning one winter; this was when I was about ten. He was from French Canada and was much more French than Irish. Then there was Donn Byrne and Graham Greene and Maugham. But none of the SF writers. Not that I don't like them, but I didn't come to them early enough. I believe that literary influence on a person's style is set by the time he is come of age, even if he hasn't written anything by then. The twig has already received its bent.

Sylistically and in content, some of your stories bring to mind the American Tall Tale. I would say that folklore studies are in your background. Yea or nay?

Sure, there's a lot of the American Tall Tale in my background. And I have a theory that the American Tall Tale had its shaggiest growth right here in Oklahoma, for the reason that this was a mixing bowl in the decade that the Tall Tale was the most flourishing. From the first land opening here, the "Run" in 1899, for ten years through the other openings, this was the last block of free land left anywhere and people came from all the other states and territories to file on it. And this brought on a cross-fertilization of all the regional tall tales from all the frontiers as well as from all the settled regions. The three best tall story tellers I ever knew, Hugh Lafferty, my father, Ed Burke, the brother of my mother-to-be, and Frank Burke, her cousin, homesteaded near Snyder, Oklahoma in the 1890s, along with an Irishman named McGuire. They built a shack in the middle of a section of land, so that it covered the corners of each of their 160-acre claims, and lived there to prove up on them. There was nothing to do except try to scrape out a living and tell tall stories. This McGuire started the first store around there and it was tall tale headquarters. Everybody, even the Texans and the Indians.

added to the mixture. From the uncle, Ed Burke, I picked up quite a bit of Indian lore. Much later — as he had gone to work, as a stenographer (he was the only one for a long ways around) at the Wichita Indian Agency at Anadarko, Oklahoma, nearby. But the tall tale element was from verbal rather than from written sources with me.

When did you discover science fiction? How did you react to it? What do you prefer to read in it? Who do you like reading?

I don't know when I discovered science fiction. I had read most of the wonder stories and wonder novels of H.G. Wells without knowing that they were s.f. And I had read the Healy and McComes anthology *Adventures in Time and Space* when it came out (in 1946), and it did bear the alternate title *Famous Science Fiction Stories*; my reaction to that was that it was wonderful. My reaction when I began to look for other good science fiction stories was that there weren't any other good ones; and there weren't. I then discovered the cycle in s.f.: periods when almost all the stories were rotten but there are a few good ones to be found; and periods when all the stories are rotten and there were not any good ones to be found. We are presently in a type 2 period. Maybe there will be a couple of good stories to appear in the next several years and then we will know that there we are in a type 1 period again.

Oh, Niven, Poul Anderson, Brunner, Arthur Clarke, Pournell, Malzberg do pretty well now and then. Sturgeon and Van Vogt could probably still do it if they wanted to. Joe Haldeman and Panshin and Harrison and Harrison and Silverberg could do it if they would get off those shaggy horses they're riding. Of the younger ones, Michael Bishop and Steven Utley and Jack Dann might start writing good ones any time now.

Several science fiction writers of note [Ellison, Silverberg and Malzberg] have time and again denounced science fiction and have gone so far as to say that they are not going to bother with the field again. So, do you think that the "SF" label on your books hinders your acknowledgement as a serious writer to a larger audience, or is the audience that welcomes you good enough for you?

Ellison, Silverberg, Malzberg threaten to break out of the SF ghetto. Now the fact is that Ellison, Silverberg and Malzberg are all the same person who happens to maintain bodies in Sherman Oaks, California; Oakland, California, and Teaneck, New Jersey. This is not a criticism. Lots of persons maintain several bodies in several different places. But this person has just a touch of posturing in his threats to leave, since the door isn't locked, and he already comes and goes forth and to several different writing worlds. (Ellison's essays into the underground new journalism, Silverberg's writings on archaeological subjects, etc.). But farewell announcements are fun.

No, a label of SF on some books shouldn't be an impediment to acceptance by a larger audience, for the reason that the larger audience has never heard of SF or any SF writers. But the labels should be kept to keep from gulling people.

Even with my own limited experience in several limited fields, I get protests that "It isn't SF" from persons who bought *The Fall of Rome* or *Okla Hammali*, or "It isn't a historical!" from persons who bought one of my SF books by mistake.

The only thing wrong with the SF audience is that it isn't larger, but how is it to be criticized for that? I can't tell a Tom Collins or a Robert Whitaker "How come there's only one of you? Clone, dammit! Be a hundred of you, and all buy books!" All the roads are open and all the maps pretty good, and painting out the name of the town called SF isn't going to improve the geography.

I've been informed that you wrote yourself into *Fourth Mansions*. Which character are you?

Yes, I've been accused of writing myself into *Fourth Mansions*, and I always say it's a lie. I've been accused of being Bertigrew Bagley, the Patrick of Tulsa. Well, maybe I looked like him about then, but I've since taken off fifty pound to a skinny two hundred. I've got a good-looking set of artificial teeth. I've sweetened up my disposition. And we're just not as much alike as we used to be. And we were never really the same person.

(Editor's note: Bagley is described thusly in *Fourth Mansions*: "fat and ungainly, grown old ungracefully, balded and shaggy at the same time, rheumy of eyes and with his mouth full of rotten teeth, discredited, violent and vulgar; an earthen pot, and a cracked one at that." Who could ever think such things of Lafferty?)

Why do you write, other than for money?

Money isn't very important in it, since there's not any big money involved. I suppose I'm like the kid with the Crayolas: I want to make my mark on the world. The impulse would never admit that it is vanity, and yet it's the impulse to leave some kind of memento on the way through this vale of tears — and snuffles and smickers. And then it turns out to be enjoyable on its own.

What would you do if you could not write?

What would I do if I could not write? I would learn to write. Or I would try something else somewhat expressive. I tried some years to play the violin when I was young, and was no good at it. I have tried several times to draw and paint, and I sure cannot make any mark with pencil or brush. Maybe I would try to pluck chickens if everything else failed. I would attempt to be the most imaginative and innovative chicken-plucker in the world. Some expressiveness, for hobby at least, seems to be necessary.

What do you look for in books?

I read books to hear what people are up to. This is the only approved and organized form of eavesdropping. I listen for whatever interests me. If I don't find it, I put the book away and go to another book. Eavesdropping is about as close as we can get to the quin-

tessence of people. They fumble it when you encounter them directly, but they reveal a lot when you can overhear them in this or any other way. People, that is what I read for; to get the marrow out of their bones and enjoy it.

Is there any one book which you enjoy to the point that you would not hesitate to recommend it?

How about Plutarch's *Lives* for the one book? No, it isn't affectation to reach that far back. It is my belief that Plutarch invented the novel as well as the biography in this. There were really fifty short- or medium-length novels here (the degree of fiction can't be determined now), and they are good. He really invented narration as distinguished from rhetoric and a few other things. He was the world's best novelist (Balzac comes in second) and nineteen hundred years haven't done him any harm at all. Part of him may be slipping away; he invented the concept of the great man, the hero, and that erodes a little bit now. But nothing takes its place so far except a vacancy.

Did you ever know any children like those who were in *Reefs of Earth*?

Sure, I've probably known a dozen bunches of children like those in *Reefs of Earth*. Some of them I lose track of later (I think they go back to where they came from), and some of them merge in with the mass of humans (they are a gang of black-hearted fakers when they do this), but none of them seem to grow up as visibly as Puca. There's a lot about the Puca phenomenon that I don't understand.

Were you a Puca-ish type child toward your parents, or did you attempt, when younger, to conquer the world?

Nah, I wasn't a Puca-ish child. I never plotted to kill my parents or wanted them dead. And I never plotted to conquer the world, except figuratively. Those mean kids are fun to watch, but tricky to be.

When you first started writing back in 1959 (for the second time), how long did it take for you to get your first story published? And what was your reaction to the acceptance of publication?

They weren't the same story. The first story accepted was "The Wagons," by the New Mexico Quarterly. This was after I had been sending stories around for four or five months. I was pleased but not overwhelmed, because this was a college-affiliated magazine (even though it paid \$25.00, I believe) and seemed only semi-erotic. But the story wasn't published until the spring of 1960. The first published story was "Day of the Glacier" in the December, 1959 *Science Fiction Stories*, and my reaction was anger since I hadn't been paid for it and hadn't been informed of its acceptance, and they hadn't answered any of my letters asking about it. This was by the old Columbia Publications, that was just going out of business then. I did get paid a year or so later, but it took a lot of pursuit. But the real reaction was delight that the stories should appear anywhere under any circumstances, and that delight hasn't lessened a bit for any of a hundred and fifty subsequent sales.

How do you compose a story?

The only honest answer is that I prowl back through a bunch of busted or unfinished stories and salvage pieces out of several of them and put them together for a story that might go. It seems that “time in discard” is necessary for most of them, and the tension and juxtaposition that a story has to have can often be made by such a combination of old things. I usually make an outline of the new story then, though often only in my head and not written down. I usually do about two-thirds of the first draft writing. Then I start what I hope will be the final version and go right through without slowing down at the old stopping place. About half the time, this proves not to be the final version, and I rewrite completely after letting it set a month or so. In other cases, I will rewrite only two or three pages of it — likewise after letting it set for a while.

In the writing you did 25 years prior to 1959, was there any difference in subject matter? Is this the area where you salvage “busted and unfinished” frames from which you write and create new stories?

Of the writings of the 25 years prior to 1959 there is nothing surviving except some verse. I plunder some of the verses now and then and adapt them for chapter headings, but there is nothing else to rework. I believe that the early stories were partly imitations of sea stories by Stevenson and Conrad and Melville, but I had never been to sea then and I didn't know anything about it. The busted and unfinished material that I salvage is all 1959 or later.

What are your religious beliefs? Do you feel that your stories echo your beliefs soundly? Or do you try to avoid your beliefs' entering your stories?

I am a Roman Catholic, of what is considered an old-fashioned sort, as there are a number of modernities flickering over the church now, none of them very deep. I do not attempt specifically to put my beliefs into my stories, nor to keep them out, either. An exception is *PAST MASTER*, because religion was the subject of that novel. But the belief is part of the person who writes the stories, and it will be there naturally.

There is a double standard in this area, though. There is considerable preaching against preaching, and an amazing amount of decrying religion by the people of the most intolerant religions. Belief is religion. The most rampantly righteous religions in the world now are the religions of secularism, humanism, liberalism, nihilism, scientism, diabolism. We have those with hatred as the central commodity, those with perversion as the central, those with disorder as central, those with worthlessness as central. We have cheap-shotting as a crusading religion. And it is out of these that the militant preachers come. Certainly three-quarters of SF is given over to the relentless preaching of those of the anti-religious religions. They are the ones who carry on the feuds and the covert as well as open attacks and who recommend the boycotts. The longest work by a SF practitioner in recent years is a preachment for worthlessness for the sake of worthlessness, and it will not accept anything except total worthlessness for everyone. Ah, well; if I can't preach about preaching, what can I preach about?

From *PAST MASTER*, I have gathered a feeling that you dislike large cities, and consider them a mass of decay.

Wrong, wrong, wrong! I don't dislike cities. Some of my favorite places are cities: Tulsa here, Dallas, Denver, Santa Fe, Oklahoma City, San Antonio, Galveston, New Orleans, St. Louis, Omaha, Sioux City, San Francisco, Washington, New York, Sydney, Manila, Laredo, Toronto, Boston, Orlando, Chicago, Baltimore. There aren't many cities I don't like, but there's a lot of them I don't know very well. I've walked thousands of miles exploring cities on foot just because I like them. No, it was the distopic materialism and not the cities I disliked in *PAST MASTER*.

What do you consider distopic materialism?

Can't I hate stuff without being able to define it? I do not regard Utopias and Distopias as opposites; they are the same thing, and they are always disastrous. And they are always completely materialistic. They are highly-organized error. “They want so thoroughly to organize freedom that they turn it into slavery,” the Hungarian Thomas Molner says in his *UTOPIA, THE PERNILLAL HERESY*. And he also says “Pessimism about the individual, optimism about the collectivity, and enforced enthusiasms — these are not the only contradictions in the utopian mind.” In *PAST MASTER*, I tried to show materialism at its best as being inadequate. The trouble is that most people will choose materialism again and again, and then wonder why they hurt. One point to note: utopias are never establishments. They are always that much more tyrannical thing, the anti-establishment.

Why do you consider *PAST MASTER* a failure?

PAST MASTER was a failure because hardly anyone got what I was talking about: that Golden Astrobe was a rotten place. Most readers thought that it was a fine and desirable place. There is the same difficulty about the *UTOPIA* that its hero wrote. Most people who read it (and I don't believe that there are too many who really read it) believe that it is a sort of ideal or heavenly vision; but it is really a hellish vision, and intended to be. Golden Astrobe, which is present-day Earth, has a lot of things wrong with it; but they are vested and defended, and it is only the things that are right with it that are howled down and persecuted.

Maybe I'll write something someday to say the things I didn't know how to say in *PAST MASTER*. There is still a very big gap in it. Somebody could fall into that thing and get killed.

What do you think of the tendency of writers to allow evil to win out in a story?

A story with evil winning out can be powerful and effective through the depressing irony of it, I suppose. One isn't supposed to like such a story, but only to be impelled to take some action against the evil. I've never done a piece like that, though. The stories that I do dislike are those that assume that the evil way is the only way and that nothing

else can be considered even as a possibility; that are built on an evil premise and worked out on it and show no more than a dismal choice between two evils as conflict. Almost all SF stories of the last decade are of this sort, but I don't like them. SF has always been the most narrow-minded of writings, but it becomes more and more so. A breath of fresh air should be welcome in it, but would be hated instead; even a breath of stale air would be welcome, but there isn't much breath of anything. There, there's another mini-lecture.

Evita, in PAST MASTER, says at one point, "Imagine a grown man too ignorant to believe in the Devil." Do you consider the Devil/Satan to be a real person or presence?

Sure, I consider the Devil/Satan as a real person or presence or species. I don't know to what extent individuality is a quality of that species. Leaving aside all testimony of religion or revelation, I believe that a competent interdisciplinary biologist, working without prejudices, would come onto substantial evidence for the existence of unbodied beings or mentalities, from the effect they have on human persons — just as a competent interdisciplinary physicist-astronomer would arrive at the necessity of there being a moon of such a size and gravity and location and distance, even though, for some reason, the moon lacked the quality of visibility. And the physicist-astronomer would realize this necessity for such a moon from its influence on the earth. The biologist-psychologist should arrive at the necessity of the Devil/Satan, of such a power and location and activation-pattern, because of his influence on human persons.

Well, there is something rampant in the collective unconscious, and if we ask "What is it?" we're naming one of its names. As God several times in Scripture gives Himself the name of "I Am" or "I Am Who Am," so the Devil/Satan species is given the name in many languages or something like the "What is it?" or "Who is it?" An African tale begins "The Who-Is-It came and killed a man and cut him open." This particular who-is-it seemed to kill and cut open a man every morning to read him as if reading a morning newspaper. As to whether the diabolical species has individuality, that's a problem. Before being cast into the Gadarene Swine, one devil or multiplicity of devils told Christ either "my name is legion" or "our name is legion," seeming to mean a multiplicity of guises for an individual, or a multiplicity of individuals in the species.

Well, this diabolical species-person cannot read human minds and cannot invade the human individual, except in a few doubtful cases. But he can invade the human species, which he does by invading the group unconscious. There is the devil in the cellar of the mind. He/they/it does have influence on persons, on all persons.

There are likely other unbodied beings or mentalities, some of them more good than bad — if the qualities "good" and "bad" pertain to them — and some of them neutral spirits in a direct sense.

What is your definition of the meaning of life?

Using your "meaning" in its only legitimate sense as "purpose" or "aim," the meaning or purpose of life is happiness. This was once clear to everybody in the world, and I don't know why so plain a thing should escape people now. Happiness often coincides with pleasure or enjoyment, but it isn't the same thing. There are many paradoxes

about it, so there probably can't be any such thing as selfish happiness. The secular scriptures are full of correct understanding on this. "Oh happiness! Our being's end and aim," Alexander Pope writes. "It is the business of a wise man to be happy," old Doctor Johnson wrote. "There is no duty so much underrated as the duty of being happy," R.L. Stevenson said, and he was sounder than was T. Jefferson in the Declaration of Independence when he wrote of it being a right rather than a duty. But being happy is a duty we owe to the world and every companion of ours in it, and that is the meaning and purpose of life.

Thomas Aquinas wrote that sin was an offense against happiness. Aurelia the space girl also taught that sin was an offense against happiness. People who don't believe in God, or the natural order, or form, or due process, who confuse pleasure with happiness, and who aren't at all sure of being, do not accept that there are such things as sins. They are presently in the majority in the world.

Do you use slang in your stories to give them a here-and-now approach?

No, I use colloquialisms in my stories, but not slang. The difference, I suppose, is that a colloquialism is also a localism of one region for a long time, and slang is widespread for a short time. But I don't want the here-and-now approach. I always want a perennial effect, whether I can get it or not.

Just how accurate is the historical background to OKLA HANNALI?

I maintain that the historical background of OKLA HANNALI is absolutely accurate. Hannali himself and his family are fictitious, but they are composites of real types. And most of the characters in the book are historical persons and I know the descendants of many of them. There were more than thirty years of observation and reading on the general subject before I began to write. I had Indian classmates in every class I was ever in, and Indian co-workers on every job I have ever held, and there is more evidence to be gathered here in Tulsa than anywhere. Of course, there are different versions of some of the events, but in selecting the most convincing ones I have tried to be as accurate as possible. The different versions still reflect the different sides of Indian civil wars of more than a hundred years ago, and they are not going to be reconciled. Historical opinion is always partly subjective, however, and all historical evidence can be interpreted in several ways.

Your narrator seems to be always the superior of the characters you write about, but takes a humorous viewpoint toward them objectively. This seems to be your pose as a narrator. Do you feel that way toward the world in general?

Nah, that's not a description of my pose as a narrator. And it's not the way I feel toward the world in general. If a narrator seems superior to his characters then he's busting on his characterizations. The w.i.g. [world in general] is a cantankerous animal and pretty smelly, but it leads most of its opponents about seven rounds to two going in to the tenth, and feeling superior to it is just not an answer to such a situation.

What sort of dreams do you experience?

They just don't make them like they used to. Maybe one good one a month. There's one peculiarity about them that I notice in late years: after I've made use of one sort, they don't come around anymore. I don't have so many metaphoric dreams since I wrote "Continued On Next Rock." I don't have so many alien-sublimation dreams since I wrote "Ride A Tin Can." But I can't identify them well till I have got them down and made them stop hollering. So I suppose that a dream cycle is a clamoring for expression in some medium or other. I don't have as many smothering dreams since I tamed them with "Incased In Ancient Rind." There seems to be less frustration and more sense of free motion in my dreams now. Maybe that means I'm about to go over the edge. And the only way I can save myself will be with a "Don't Go Over The Falls! Turn The River Off" story.

How many stories that you've written are the direct result of dreams?

No more than four or five of my stories are direct results of my dreams but all of them or almost all of them are indirect results of dreams. The unconscious, working through dreams as well as other ways, is a soil out of which all actions and ideas grow. They grow out of the sunlight and air of the daytime also, but they always have these underground or undermind roots.

What is your background in language? How many do you know?

Background in language? I haven't any. But I like to fool around with them and always have. Latin and Spanish were all that I took in high school, and German in a college course. I've bought a lot of record courses, I can count them for thirteen languages without getting out of my chair, and there should be more in the back room. But all that is languages as a pleasant game, and I have never gone deeply into any of them. Six of them I can read fluently enough for most purposes, and a dozen more I can make out slowly and tortuously. But I haven't fooled with them much for the last ten years.

Has your work been translated? Do they seem to be all right?

Quite a few of my books have been translated, into French, Dutch, German, Italian, Spanish. French and Dutch are tied now with four books each (mostly not the same ones), but Dutch will move ahead with OKLA HANNALI. (It's fun to be in Dutch.) And there is a Swedish OKLA HANNALI coming out. Short stories, but not complete books yet, have been translated into Polish, Russian and Japanese. Most of the translations seem to be all right, except for the verse translations. Demut, who does some of my books into French, has sent me several lists of inquiries on just what I meant. I remember he wanted me to explain the mythological implications of a phrase I used: "Natty as a peach orchard boar" and I couldn't do it; I had to tell him it was just an old country phrase.

I don't know what element of poetry it is that sends a shudder through this old horse sometimes — not the music, not the words; it must be a whiff of something.

Some people have been displeased with Plato for not allowing the citizens of his Republic to read poetry, but such people weren't paying attention. Young people are not to be citizens of the Republic at all. Till they are twenty, they are not citizens and they are not prohibited from reading poetry. And if they haven't read their poetry by the time they're twenty, why haven't they? And if there's some good poetry that wasn't written by the time I was twenty, why wasn't it? It's more for recollecting than for reading in the later years. And all the great experiences of poetry can be enjoyed completely only once anyhow.

There's a technical difficulty that prevents me doing more with poetry. I only compose poetry or verse when I'm walking, and I only write things down when I'm sitting down. Well, I walk a lot and I sit down a lot, but I hardly ever do both of them at the same time. I never learned to whistle (what's the matter with a grown man who doesn't know how to whistle?) and people strolling along cut a sad figure when they're not whistling; unless, that is, they are manufacturing interior verse. I get about a mile to a poem. On the walk I just took before sitting down to answer letters, there was this:

The lorries jostle cheek to jowl / With crashing sound and horning
And rolling hunks of metal roll / How beautiful the morning!

The people rush to rendezvous / Anent their daily earning
At selling soap or making glue / How beautiful the morning!

The birds are barking up a storm / The beaming sun is boining.
It's even getting kind of warm / How beautiful the moining!

Well, there were really five stanzas to that, but two of them are lost already. It's a shaggy venture where you lose forty percent of your product before you ever get it packaged, and probably the best forty percent. I suppose I never did anything with the versifying because I was always told there was no money in it. I hear now that a very few of the modern poets make big money, as much as New York City garbage collectors; but it's too late for me to take it seriously. I do know a couple of early-morning whistlers, though, whose product should be packaged and sold. Do you know anybody who publishes whistling?

Do you believe in the perfectability of man, or is he a constant fool at odds with the universe to be forever rebuffed at his attempt to rise above the madness which surrounds him?

I believe in the perfectability of people — some people, possibly most people. I do not believe in the perfectability of society, or of the world, or of "man" in the abstract. Maybe it is a madness that surrounds and buffers abstract man. But such a person can select his own ambience, because it is subjective to a large degree. The madness is optional, both for oneself and for the surroundings. You can send it back to be cooked right. You don't have to accept the raw madness. Sure, the individual is perfectable (though there's probably a less pompous word for it somewhere). Perfection — the real meaning of the word is "completion," not "faultlessness" — is always there for the never spent much time on it?

taking. A person will come to it finally unless he refuses it. You're making me sound pompous the way you put those questions — "constant food at odds with the universe . . ." — that's not a real phrase; that's one of the consensus impositions that somebody stuck in your pocket when you weren't looking. Throw it away!

What do you think of the works of R.A. Lafferty?

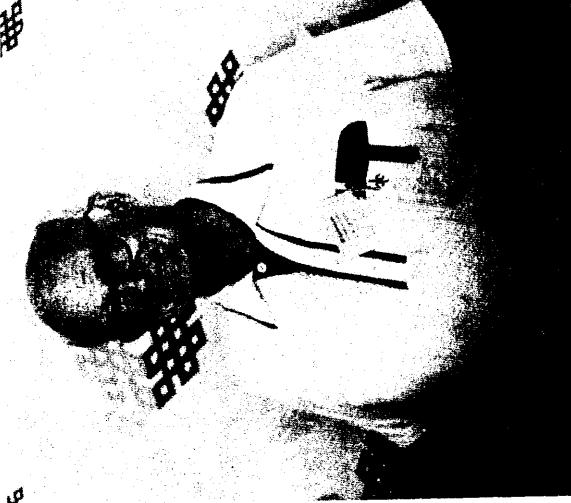
I like the old Lafferty works, with five or more years on them, or the newer works, last year or so. But there is a place between where I am embarrassed to read them at all. The old ones are as if written by somebody else and I can enjoy them sometimes as a reader. But it's those in the process of slipping away and turning into someone else's that make me uneasy.

I suppose the favorite short stories are "Continued On Next Rock," "One At A Time," "Ride A Tin Can," "Slow Tuesday Night," "Snuffles." The favorite novels are PAST MASTER, SPACE CHANTEY, OKLA HANNALL.

Is there a difference between the you-who-writes-the-stories and the you-who-lives-in-the-real-world?

No, not much difference between the me-who-writes-the-stories and the me-who-lives-in-the-real-world. One of us is on the top of the rock and the other one on the underside of the same rock, but I'm not sure which is which.

You seem to posit a real world, but that is doubtful. There isn't any reality except the various consensus realities. And no two persons belong to quite the same consensus. So the world that a person lives in is largely a world that he has fictionalized, whether he is a fictioner by trade or not. Whatever frustrations we find in the cantankerous combo-world is partly from our own inability to shape things just the way we want to. Pax, paz, peace, irini, saaam, schollim, heiwa, amani, perdamaian, sulh, rusha, pokoj, fred, vrede, frieden, siocchain, murno.



HOW I WROTE "CONTINUED ON NEXT ROCK"

by R. A. Lafferty

To ask how any story or tune or statue comes about is to ask "How is it done?"; "What does it take?" Have you heard of the Dutch boy in this country who was going to butcher school, whose schoolmates tried to mix him up? The heart, they told him, that is named the liver; the bladder is called the stomach; the tongue is the coccyx; the loin is known as the chuck; the brisket is the flank; the lungs are named the trotters; and so on. This Dutch kid was very smart however; he figured out that they were having him, and he figured out the right names for everything, or for almost everything. And he passed his final examination with top grades both in meat-cutting and nomenclature. "How were you able to do it?" the instructor asked, "With so many things going against you?" "I've got it up there," the Dutch kid said, and he tapped his head, "Kidneys."

It isn't exactly that one should use kidneys for brains, but the sense of grotesque juxtaposition does come in handy. You can't be sure you are looking at something from the right angle till you have looked at it from every angle. How did I write "Continued on Next Rock" then? Upside down and backwards, of course. I started with a simple, but I believe novel, idea that had to do with time. Then I involuted the idea of time (making all things contemporary or at least repeating), and I turned the system of values backwards, trying to make the repulsive things appear poetic ("the nobility of badgers, the serenity of toads") and trying to set anti-love up as comparable to love (the flattest thing you can imagine has to have at least two sides; it can have many more). I let the characters that had been generated by this action work out their own way then. After this, I subtracted the original simple but novel idea from the story), and finished things up. (The original idea was a catalyst which could be recovered practically unchanged at the end of the reaction.)

The beginning idea, which I give to anyone who wants it, was simply to have archeologists digging *upwards* through certain strata, for rather vague topographic reasons, come to deposits of the fairly recent past, or the very recent past, of the near future (a discarded license plate from fifteen years in the future, for instance), then the more distant future, then to realize that the strata still remaining above them had to contain the remnants of at least a hundred thousand years of unfaked future.

So much for the genesis of one particular short story. Each one is different but each one is anomalous; and there is a reason for that. No normal or reasonable or balanced or well-adjusted person is going to attempt the making of a story or a

tune or a statue or a poem; he'll have no need for any such abnormal activity. A person has to be somehow deficient or lacking in person or personality or he will not attempt these things. He must be very deficient or lacking if he will succeed at all in them. Every expression in art or pseudo-art is a crutch that a crippled person makes and donates to the healthy world for its use (the healthy world having only the vaguest idea that it even needs such crutches).

There are, I know, many apparent glaring exceptions to the rule that only persons who are deficient or lacking in person or personality will contribute any creative content. Believe me, these exceptions are only apparent. There is something badly unbalanced in every one of them.

Carry it one step further, though. One of the legends, unwritten from the beginning and maybe unwritten forever, is about a Quest for the Perfect Thing. But it is really the quest for the normal thing. Can you find, anywhere in the world, behind or before or present, even one person who is really normal and reasonable and balanced and well-adjusted? This is the Perfect Thing, if it or he or she is ever found, and if ever found there will be no further need of any art or attempted art, good or bad.

Enough of such stuff, end of article, if this is an article. I am both facetious and serious in every word written here.

Raphael A. Lafferty



A truth does not become less true by being remarked upon so often that at last people stop hearing and dismiss it with the easy word "cliche". Therefore I have no hesitation about joining just about everybody else and saying that R. A. Lafferty is absolutely unique.

If you stop to think about it, anyway, that is a considerable statement. A certain editor, himself with a degree in literature and an unusual sensitivity to it, once observed to me over a couple of beers that, with very few exceptions, critics fall flat on their faces when they attempt to deal with modern science fiction and fantasy -- because if ever a field was loaded with stylists, this is it; and nearly all critics are style-deaf. Yet even here, Lafferty's use of language is incomparable.

At the same time, there is something quite appropriate about repeating these things that everybody knows. Basically, this is what the man himself does. Or at any rate, he repeats what everybody used to know. One does not have to agree with his particular religious views in order to appreciate the motifs of reverence, honor, and ultimate human dignity which are a solid framework for the dazzling inventiveness and pyrotechnic style. In fact, taken all in all, he is comparable -- to G. K. Chesterton, another top favorite of mine.

He didn't start writing for publication till he was well along in life. Doubtless that helps explain why he understands so much more than most of his colleagues do. Long may he continue challenging us!

SPECIAL BOOK REVIEW FOR GUY H. LILLIAN, EDITOR

by Samuel Edward Konkin III

APOCALYPSSES

by R. A. Lafferty

(Pinnacle Books, Los Angeles, 1977 \$1.95)

Like C. S. Lewis and Cordwainer Smith, Raphael Aloysius Lafferty has binocular vision. These three are undoubtedly the best known Christian writers of Science Fiction for the simple reason that they wrote Christian SF. Their Christianity was not compartmentalized off from the scientific "materialist" view of the universe. Still, all of them had a problem: communication to a world of fans who have monocular vision. How many readers of SF are even aware of what Lewis calls *The Discarded Image*, the non-materialist Platonic-Aristotelian view of the universe still held by old-line, die-hard conservative Christians, especially Roman Catholics and Anglicans?

Smith hewed the modern line most and no one quibbles as to whether his material is SF or Fantasy. Yet Smith had a crucifixion in "The Dead Lady of Clown Town." Fortunately for his scientific readers' sensibilities, he avoided outright resurrection.

Lewis' Inklings buddies J.R.R. Tolkien and Charles Williams never attempted SF and are relegated to the Fantasy ghetto. Lewis was "one of us," a fan, and played the game in his Ransom trilogy. Though he was opposed to the Wellsian materialist "scientific" view (see the treatment of "Jules," i.e. Wells, in *That Hideous Strength*) he describe angels, unfallen worlds, and satanic conspiracies as alien beings and planets -- with the characters suggesting another interpretation. The reader could take it or leave it.

Williams wrote in the mystery genre, but he presented the theistic and occult occurrences straight. To most modern readers, his stories are bizarre to the point of comparison with psychedelic hallucination. Yet anyone delving into William's metaphysical interests will find the fiction perfectly reasonable -- with that philosophy.

Lafferty is closest to Williams in presenting his High Church view straight, world-view -- only he gives them both equal footing. Lafferty's characters also find themselves flickering back and forth between spiritual and materialistic understandings of the events around them.

Furthermore, Lafferty sets you up and loads his deck. Read his story your way and it's confusing, mind-bending, dream-like. Accept the Olt Thought approach -- and it makes sense. Now and then he deals a card from the bottom with an unorthodox idea or two of his own.

- Poul Anderson

Williams wrote books on anti-christs, the Tetragrammaton, ghosts and possession. More than once he threatens Armageddon, the ending of Time. So does Lafferty.

Apocalypses are two novellas: the first threatens the End, the second delivers it. Or seems to do so. Interestingly enough, neither "end" is of the Whole of Creation.

"Where Have You Been, Sandaliotis?" focuses on the "greatest detective in the world," Constantine Quiche. That is, maybe he's the greatest *maybe* he's a detective, *maybe* he's Constantine Quiche. *Perhaps* he's in the world.

He's investigating the appearance of an entire country between Monaco and Italy, covering Corsica and Sardinia. But then again, maybe it's always been there. It seems to be populated by Platonic "beautiful people." Maybe it's not there at all but an elaborate green-foam fake. Somebody's hustling real estate. Characters Quiche meets are a couple who are his best friends -- but he doesn't remember meeting them before; three agents, one of whom may be dead but he's not sure; the greatest forger in the world; a director who kills actors because he's entitled to do so by the law of averages; a dolphin who seduces him; and various Sandaliotics who may or may not have cooked-up memories.

Interpol is worried about the 300-pound bomb (anti-matter?) a thousand miles above Sandaliots -- an isle which they don't see. Anti-matter seems to be the material of Hell. *Something* is going to end at midnight -- at the very least, Sandaliotis. The roast boar picnic made me hungry.

"The Three Armageddons of Enniscorthy Sweeney" could be about an anti-christ -- or maybe an unfortunate fellow who seems able to control all events around him. Talk about Primacy of Consciousness over Primacy of Existence (as Ayn Rand does)! Lafferty seems firmly subjectivist.

The story is unchronic (altermate timelines) splitting from our history with the election of a Black President of the United States of America in 1900. It has, however, an annoying tendency to return to our track. Why did Roosevelt get elected U.S. President if there was no depression? How did Eisenhower (and MacArthur) get into the Presidency without World Wars I and II?

Oh, there were operatic presentations of the wars, called *Armageddon I* and *Armageddon II*, and a musical comedy called *The Great Depression*. And these operas have cults around them who take them seriously, believe themselves to be veterans of these World-Wide Wars with wounds to show it. But they're only part of the population.

Lafferty love conspiracies. There are two contending groups in "Enniscorthy Sweeney," a trio of pure mathematicians meeting in a bar (The Rotating Vector) who have solved Devonian's Equation for the solution of Sweeney and find he's instrumental to the End. And there are three unhuman types who want Sweeney to end the world with his *Armageddon III* opera, dated for debut in 1984. Oh, and one of the mathematicians dies but continues his assault on Sweeney unabated. Sweeney learns to live with the murderous ghost -- literally! They cohabit.

Sweeney hires private detectives to protect him from both the Good Enemies and his Evil Friends (who torment him if he flags in his work) and they all end up playing cards together. Occasionally with Sweeney and his wife, the latter being a Chicago Irish lass who was the most beautiful woman in the world -- because

Sweeney willed it.

"The Three Armageddons of Enniscorthy Sweeney" is also afflicted with binocularity. All events are subject to a bizarre (spiritual, occult) interpretation which makes more sense than the everyday way of looking at it. On one level, the entire novella can be seen as a world which went through our history but refused to accept it. World Wars I and II were followed by World War III, thermonuclear extermination, and nobody took it seriously or cared.

It's no accident that I chose the metaphor of binocularity for Lafferty's two visions, two world-views, held simultaneously and in obvious tension. Just as viewing the world with two eyes yields a third dimension neither eye perceived alone, so Lafferty's double image of reality has produced more than the sum of the parts.

Lafferty's third dimension -- Imagination -- is so full and rich that he tosses away ideas in a paragraph others would eagerly fill an entire story from. Still, he has many obsessive themes repeating themselves in ever-new variations.

Is he a delirious madman who retained his ability to write -- dazzlingly and coherently no matter how twisted his ideas? Is he a Christian preacher and prophet, calling us back to the Old Faith in a new way to get past (what Lewis calls) the "Watchful Dragons" of skepticism and pride? Is he a Science Fiction writer who can treat Apocalypse (in the plural yet) as one would handle a "First Contact" or a "New Invention man was not meant to discover"? Is he laughing at my descriptions and your reading of it to him at some Con bheer party, agreeing with it all with an unmistakable twinkle in his eye?

Probably.



A POEM ON HIMSELF
A minstrel with a busted harp,
He's sharp,
But not so vary.
Aw take him back to Tulsa
Cause he's too young to marry.

becoming something I would like to see: a criticism of More's ideas in modern sf terms.... And if someone wished to object that it is Lafferty's purpose to write stories and not criticism, I would reply that criticism is, or should be, the main purpose of novels. When it is not those books become a species of Saturday morning TV.

The utopian Astrobe is a sister Earth, tied to its faraway older sibling by a kind of interstellar dream-subway. It is wealthy, civilized, largely peaceful, and seems to offer almost unbounded scope to individual freedoms. Nor is it entirely urban; this world offers Feral Strips of dense forests and towering mountains complete with exotic and furious predators, all for the harder and more primitive pleasures of men. Yet this Arcadia is coming apart at the seams. Great numbers of the populace are deserting to Cathead. Cathead is Funk City with a vengeance; its best enticements are like those found in the grubbiest pages of Zola. The professions there available are ill-paid, filthy, dangerous to mind and body; and the recreations are no less noisome and scary. But Cathead attracts, the people are drawn to it, and More is deployed to understand the situation and to reform it.

Putting it in the plainest terms: Sir Thomas More is recalled from the past that he may cure what is perceived as a basic disorder of the human spirit. Once we see the bare bones of the problem, we recognize it as insoluble; and in the novel it is not solved. Or if it is indeed solved -- the ending is mystically ambiguous -- it is not solved without recourse to the Absolute.

As a consistent literary construction *Past Master* fails completely. Lafferty poses, by positing our *nostalgie de la bête* as an inherent impulse, a tough ethical problem, which he then surrounds with impenetrable political intrigue, sociological speculation, exciting odysseys and nightmare biologies -- all of which are irrelevant to the problem. His resolution, which suddenly becomes an abstruse speculation on the nature of time, does not leave his narrative hanging, but neither does it truly resolve it.

But again, I'm not sure that consistent construction is importantly at stake here. When I think of *Past Master* from a kind of mind's-eye distance, I do not think of it in terms of cleanly-made sf novel like *Starship Troopers* or even in terms of a mystical sf novel like *Childhood's End*. To me it seems to lie almost within the tradition of the perfervid illogical Romantic poems like Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* or Laon and Cythna or in the tradition of the early Gothic novel like Vathek. Which is to say that its narrative progression is not likely to be controlled by internal logic, but by the writer's obsessions, fancies, dreams, and impulses. The writer feels that he has something important to say, and he dresses it out in splendid and exotic images; or conversely, he is haunted by burning but ill-defined shapes in his imagination, and he must give them voice, whatever they mean, and maybe even if they have no definable meaning.

In this book, Lafferty has a Vision, and *Past Master* fails as a novel the more it tries to become a novel, the more it tries to keep that Vision curbed. That word, novel, predicates a kind of discipline to which Lafferty's Vision is radically opposed. It is for this reason that I believe *Past Master* should be much longer than it is, that it should explain less (for finally it explains nothing at all), and exhibit more. That it should move more, be even freer in time and space and is perhaps a legitimate interpretation -- other writers have held it -- but it avoids

Lafferty's First Best Novel or, Past Master PASSES MUSTER

Fred Chappell

It would be hard for a critic -- and I'm no critic -- to decide whether R. A. Lafferty's *Past Master* is a Good novel or a Bad one. There is a way in which this common, all-too-common, judgment has little relevance. It is not hard to find faults with the book: the pace is uneven, stopping dead still at times and at other times whooshing down like a tumbling chimney; the characters are rarely fully drawn; motivation is often murky; and the storyline never quite makes sense. Etc. etc. etc. These faults would be enough to sink most novels, and, Lord knows, they have indeed sunk many a well-intentioned sf novel.

But with all these faults, and others, *Past Master* never goes under. It succeeds in the way that it succeeds because it is daring. Let's face it: with all the hype about "adventurous ideas" and "bold new concepts" and so forth, most sf novels are essentially timid. Most sf novels are built upon notions, and not ideas, and at those points where notions may actually develop into ideas, the writer is likely to pull back and give us mindless action instead of following his thought. I observe this habit even in Bester and Heinlein. When he does present his notions more thoroughly, the sf writer is wont to present them rather joylessly, eschewing the advantages of prose style, metaphor, perspective, and humor.

Past Master is not nervous, whatever it is. Neither is it really a novel of ideas. It is a headlong melee of fancies, loosely tied to a couple of central notions. There is a streak of bizarre humor in it, an intermittent word-play, and a current of crazy poetry that never gets securely directed. In many books these qualities might be faults; in Lafferty's they are strengths.

The central idea is one of the best there is, as it is one of the oldest. We remember that Odysseus and Aeneas, needing advice in their present predicaments, raise up and speak to the ghosts of dead sages. Arthur Leo Zagat's *Seven Out of Time* is an early sf example. In *Past Master* the golden world Astrobe, facing its own dissolution and perhaps the entire dissolution of Time, calles by means of time travel the person of Sir Thomas More to rescue it. Lafferty's fine irony is that Astrobe is not merely a utopia; it is the Utopia of More's own devising, the one his famous book depicts.

Now that's a fair thought, and I can't help wishing that Lafferty had gone on to treat it more directly, with a kind of Dialogue of the Dead between More's two selves.

The novelist takes another tack, though, having More describe his *Utopia* as an elaborate joke, a satire, rather than as a possible blueprint for the future. This is perhaps a legitimate interpretation -- other writers have held it -- but it avoids

language...My shot-in-the-dark guess is that once upon a time it did these things, either in outline or in Lafferty's head, and I suspect the presence of the paperback editor's leaden hand: "Whoa up here now. We gotta make sense!"

The hell with sense. Sometimes it is no more than a fatter.

His central figure, More himself, Lafferty draws rather curiously. He is not much a man of his own time, of the sixteenth century, because he has visited the future on other occasions; yet neither is he at all comfortable in the year 2535. He regards the civilization of Astrobe with a mixture of admiration, contempt, and fatigue. Often he is acerbic, more a pissed mister than a past master. Even so, he undertakes the task that is set before him, finding himself both well - and ill-equipped for it. He fails; he is of course betrayed by one of his own men. (This character, Fabian Foreman -- Lafferty's name for English socialism? -- we are never properly introduced to.)

More's ultimate fate on Astrobe, though unclearly rendered, has the right feeling about it; this is the kind of fate which will always dog a figure with More's determined intent. And it has just enough similarity to his historical fate to convince us. But it is disappointing too, because it comes so quickly. Nine days is the whole amount of time in which More is allowed to set things right. The time is short partly because Lafferty has boxed himself in by giving the political leaders of Astrobe accurate insights into the future, but also partly because -- and this is a nifty point -- if More were given time enough to fully understand the situation, he would be powerless to change it.

I have concentrated too thoroughly on the main strands of Lafferty's book, and have not allowed myself space to celebrate its ornamentation. It is filled with puns, proverbs, jokes, anecdotes, fables, witty retorts, and neat formulations; maybe none of them is smoothly introduced, but they are there to startle and delight. He loves to invent animals too: ansels, lazarus-lions, hydras, porche-s-panthers, brainsnakes; one longish passage in the book is a Weinbaumian odyssey. And he is very good with dreams and with distorted memories. *Past Master* is finally a big shiny delirious clutter of impulse. Anywhere you poke into it you will find something bright and interesting. If you try to put it all together, you will lose more than you are able to keep. It's a glorious mess, and I for one am willing to put up with the mess for the sake of the glory.

ASK LAFFERTY

© 1978

by Grant Carrington

Have you ever had someone come up to you and called you by another name?
Insisting he was right?
And you knew somehow he was?
Not once
but hundreds of times.
And always by the same name.

Is there someone walking around with your nose?
Have they confiscated your eyes?

Stolen your lips?

Counterfeited your ears?

Hijacked your hair?

Or are you someone else?

There is a legend about a double race
who lead two lives
never knowing that they have two names.
Ask Lafferty.

He knows about them.
He'll tell you.

So in the night

I hear a whistle over the back-alley fence
and I slide down the sheets
to a rendezvous with other immortals
who rule the world
secretly

or with a five-foot basketball team
before returning to bed
remembering it all as a dream

Driving down a country road
wondering
How did I get here?
Whose care is this?
Where am I going?
Then I find myself in a farmhouse
under a bombed-out dam



with puddles of water
footsteps leading to the mud
and a glow in the stars

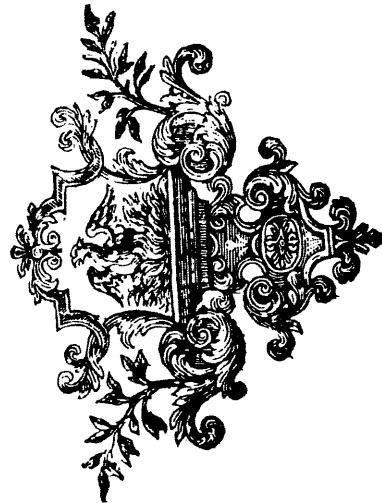
Policemen obsequious
Lawyers sycophants
Mayors bowing
Presidents kowtowing

Suddenly they look up
as if seeing me for the first time
and chase me
charge me with

trespassing
vagrancy
loitering
public nuisance
and resisting arrest

I look in the mirror:
eyes that have seen the Great Wall building
hair ruffled in an African breeze
nose that has smelled Cleopatra's perfume
lips that have kissed Marie Antoinette's
ears that have heard Beethoven make mistakes
hands that have handled Pyramid stone.

There is a double race
a twin people.



RAINY DAY IN HALICARNASSUS

by
R. A. Lafferty

'It is said that the Christ accounts cannot be true because there are earlier versions of similar stories. It is said in particular that the death-of-Christ account cannot be true because there are earlier death-of-the-sage legends. But I believe that the Christ account is the most convincing of all of them. And likely the death-of-Socrates account is the least convincing of such tales.'

'Using arguments like those that are used against the Christ account, Socrates could not have died his fabled death because that particular death account was already well-worn and centuries old. He could not have died by taking poisonous hemlock because many sages in India did die by taking poisonous hemlock in earlier centuries. The plant known mistakenly as hemlock (*koneion*) is Greece in the time of Socrates was not poisonous in any form. But the plant known correctly as hemlock in India was poisonous.'

'The only account of the hemlock-death of Socrates was written by Plato. Plato was almost certainly kidding Socrates (who was present when Plato first read that tour de force to their circle) by comparing him to one of the old deified sages who had died this traditional death-of-the-sage in old India. The date of this death-account or death is always given as b.c. 399.'

'Xenophon and other biographers of Socrates do not mention any such hemlock death, or any death at all for him. But they do mention Socrates as living in Halicarnassus in Asia Minor at least ten years after this purported death. And Socrates was present, sitting on a sort of dunce's stool that was provided for him, on 'opening afternoon' when Aristophanes first satirized him in his comedy 'The Clouds'. There was some banter between the playwright and the butt of his play. It seems pretty clear that this was Socrates himself and not an actor playing him. This was in b.c. 395, four years after the ascribed death of Socrates.'

'It may be that the legend of the false or hemlock death of Socrates has persisted because we have no account of his true death. Instead of that we have - more legend.'

'More than one hundred years after his false or hemlock death, Socrates is mentioned as being one of a circle of sages in Halicarnassus who had whipped the dying business; but this has the smell of legend again. And Villehardouin records it that Crusaders spoke with Socrates in the year 1191 in Halicarnassus: but this has the smell of deep legend. And three different Englishmen in the nineteenth century mention meeting Socrates in Bodrum (the modern name of Halicarnassus). To me, this does NOT have the smell of legend; for personal reasons (one of the Englishmen was my own grandfather), I believe it is truth.'

The Back Door of History. Arpad Arutinov.

Art Slick and Jim Boomer had been heading for the Island of Cos when they were driven onto the Turkish mainland by a sudden squall. They put in, and hour before sunrise, at the little harbor of Bodrum whose ancient name had been Halicarnassus. They had come in the twenty-two foot motor launch the 'T-Town Tornado' which was too dumb to know that it shouldn't have come half way around the world on the open seas: and Art Slick and Jim Boomer were likewise too dumb to know that their craft was too small for such voyaging.

When they had tied up in a little slip, the wind fell by one half and was not as dangerous as it had been. But the rain came down in torrents and it would not stop that day, and maybe not the next day.

Remember that girl in Istanbul three days ago, remember how she sang 'Rainy Day in Halicarnassus, Gloom, Gloom!'. And later when she came to the table with Art Slick and Jim Boomer she said "Do you know that there are three hundred and nineteen different words for 'gloom' in Turkish? I like to tell these little informations to gentlemen who come into our place."

"I'd sure never learn three hundred and nineteen different Turkish words for 'gloom,'" Art Slick said.

"You would if you ever had to spend a rainy day in Halicarnassus," the girl told him. "You'd learn them all and you'd use them all. That isn't half enough words for the kind of gloom it is there when it rains."

Well, it looked as though they would spend just such a rainy day in that town now. It was torrential, it was blustery, and it was gloomy, except for one stocky Greek man who had an aura of sunshine about him.

"The Dictionary of Idiosyncrasies' gives it that the equivalent of a 'Rainy Day in Halicarnassus' is a 'Sunday in Philadelphia,' this broken-nosed and grinnly Greek seaman said. Well maybe he was a broken-nosed Greek boxer and not a

Greek seaman. "There is a Greek cinema, a Turkish cinema, and a Syrian cinema. And then there is a Greek night club, a Turkish night club, and a Syrian night club. These presently open at six in the morning and close at six in the evening because of the curfew which is imposed because of the political turmoil. And then there is the 'Ancient Museum of Living Effigies' that you might want to see. There isn't anything else in town, and the rain isn't going to stop today."

"Thanks, Rocky, we may just try them all," Jim Boomer told old broken-nose.

"Why do you call him Rocky when his name is Socky?" a lady asked Jim.

Art and Jim and Rocky-Socky had a breakfast at the Greek cafe. Then they had one at the Turkish cafe, and then one at the Syrian. Well, the broken-nosed Greek was a good solid belly-man, and Art and Jim could stay with anything for at least once around the circuit. And what else is there to do on a rainy day in a place like that?

"How come you talk such good English, Rocky?" Art Slick asked. "Have you been in the States?"

"Oh, I've been in the area where they are now, but the States hadn't arrived there yet. Back when I was young and wise, I'd learn a new language every five years," said this strong, stocky fellow who was smoking a Greek pipe. "Well, I was pretty sharp-witted then and I learned things easily. And later I slowed down and learned a new tongue about every twenty years. And more recently I learn oneabout every fifty years. I've been learning English just about fifty years now and I'm getting pretty good at it. And now I may spend about fifty years on Indonesian."

"Going back as far as you do, you're probably a Pagan, Rocky," Jim Boomer said.

"Nah, I switched a long, long time ago. Now I usher every Sunday at St. Petes in town here."

It was still raining when they came out of the Syrian Cafe. They went under leaking wooden awnings to the Greek cinema and saw an American 'Western', 'Rustlers of Rim-Rock Canyon'.

"Are you a movie fan, Rocky?" Jim Boomer asked.

"Yeah, from a way back, and I mean from a way back. I loved them when we had them the first time. A lot of people don't remember that, but there was a first time. We even had 'Westerns' that first time around, though they were 'Easterns' from my viewpoint, in desert setting, and both the Gobi and the Arabian deserts were east of me. About the only difference in those and the present 'Westerns' was the pounding of dromedary hoofs in the old ones and the pounding of horse hoofs in the new ones. And we had SF movies, sort of. Fantastic stuff they were. A critic wrote recently that the old 'Arabian Nights Stories' sounded a little bit like primitive movie scripts. He was guessing, but that's where they did come from. They were based on old movies."

"Ah, they made some good movies at those old studios in Ctesiphon, at the Biograph Studio, at Palmy Days Productions, at the Lion and the Unicorn Associated Artists. But after Baghdad became the big city in the area, most of the studios moved there. After that, the decline in movie-making set in: I never really knew why."

They went to the Turkish cinema and saw the American 'Western', 'Guns of the Palo Duro'. Then they went to the Syrian Cinema and saw the American 'Western', 'Robbers' Roost on the Rio Rojo'.

"Well, that about does the town, huh, Rocky?" Art Slick asked when they came out of the Syrian Cinema.

"We can always see them over again. That's what I do on rainy days here, see them over again four or five times."

"Why do you call him Rocky when his name is Socky?" a young boy asked Art.

"You told us about the three night clubs that are only open in the day time on account of the curfew," Jim Boomer said, "and what was the other thing, Rocky?"

"The 'Ancient Museum of Living Effigies'. I'm really the best one in it, but overall we haven't a very good show. I wouldn't recommend it ordinarily, but on a rainy day here, yeah guys, it's the last diversion."

They went to the Greek night club where there was an American Jewish comedian, an Italian songstress, a Black trumpet player, and a troupe of Arabian tumblers.

"Is this about par for it, Rocky?" Art Slick asked.

"It's about the same as we used to have back in Greece when I was a young man, yes. When we had 'radio' the first time we had shows just about like this."

The 'Arcadian Honey Hour' and the 'Petrides Olive Hour' was a good show. So was the 'Hippodromion Wine Hour'. I used to wrangle passes to go to the studios to see the shows live. Most of the acts were better live. Except for the Arabian Tumblers; they were better on the radio. I guess the radio shows faded away after the Romans came. The Romans thought they were silly, so we kind of dropped them until modern times."

"I guess there's nothing new under the sun, Rocky," Jim Boomer said.

"Hey, that's new! Let me write it down. Nothing new under the sun!"

That's good. Into the old notebook it goes."

"Did you always carry a notebook, Rocky?"

"Always. It is part of my self-education program. But it was more cumbersome in the old days, carrying those slabs of clay around in your pockets and wetting them whenever you wanted to make a note with your stylus. Who could afford paper and parchment then? Poor scholars like myself couldn't even afford wax to write on."

"Is this whipping-of-death jag that you fellows are on much of a trick, Rocky?"

"And what's the secret of it?" Boomer asked.

"Oh, we don't have it whipped, just delayed for a while. And if I told the secret of it, it wouldn't be a secret any longer."

"What was that stroke like invisible lightning coming right through the walls?" Art Slick asked.

"Probably a temperature inversion discharging," Jim Boomer said.

"No. It was a time-inversion shock-wave," the genial Greek offered just as if he knew what he was talking about. "We have them here pretty often. It means we're going to have visitors."

"What's that, Rocky, a folk superstition?" Art asked.

"Sort of, boys, sort of. When we had time travel the first time we knew how to muffle the shock-waves."

They were drinking Martinis.

"The Martini is really what saved the olive from extinction," the broken-nosed Greek said. "A wonderful invention, wonderful."

The Italian songstress was singing 'Rainy Day in Halicarnassus'. No, that had been in the Turkish night club. No, that had been in all three of them. Each of them had an Italian songstress singing it. They were three sisters named Mon-tanari.

"Well, that about does the town, Rocky," Art Slick said when they came out of the Syrian night club. It wasn't noon yet. 'So we're down to the 'Ancient Museum of Living Effigies' of which you're the star. It's that, or see the movies again.'

"Let's see the movies again," the genial rocky-faced Greek said. It was still raining. They saw the three movies again. They went to the three night clubs again after that. And it was not yet two o'clock. Time goes slow on rainy days there.

"When does the show start at the Museum, Rocky?"

"Whenever we can get as many as three customers. Come along. There's you two and maybe there will be another one."

As a matter of fact there were seven other customers waiting, a local girl, and six people from a time-probe. You could tell the time-probe people by their closure-ears. Things must have been noisy where they came from.

"Werent' you six folks around here about ten years ago?" rocky-face asked them, "and weren't you around here about ten years before that?"
"Kyrie Socrates, we've spent the whole afternoon trying to get a serious interview with you, and it costs more than you'd think," one of the time-trip persons said. "And we've seen your silly show twelve times. We've been coming back here at ten year intervals to try to catch you in the mood to give us a real interview, but we're about out of patience with you. We're convinced that you really are Socrates. We can't reach back far enough to get you in what I might call your credible life, and you drop out of the scene again not very much after now, so we have a narrow place to try to catch you. Your rediscovery can well be the historical event of the ages, but you won't let it be. Why won't you give us a real interview, now, today?"

"Ah, there's so many other things to do that are more fun!"

"What are they? On a day like this, what are they?"

"Oh, on a rainy day like this I guess there aren't really any," old pudgy admitted. The local girl there was shining up to Art Slick and Jim Boomer.

"I know you were trying to get to the Island of Cos when you had to put in here to Bodrum," she said. "I want to go theret tonight. My sister who lives there is expecting me to come and help her with the geese. Tomorrow is the first day of Goose-Plucking Week, you know. And tonight is Goose-down Eve Festival. We really throw a banger over there on Goose-Down Eve. We'll take Socky too if he's decent to these visitors."

The 'Ancient Museum of Living Effigies' Show wasn't a very good one by ordinary standards, but on a rainy day in Halicarnassus it was at least tolerable. And it did have a good cast: Pythagoras, Pico della Mirandola, Lama Hamagama, Avicenna, Prester John, Tycho Brahe, Leibnitz, but Socrates was the oldest of them.

"I was the youngest member once, but gradually we drop out," he said. The

Living Effigies, the Old Sages gave little lectures on mathematics and philosophy and history and civic duty. They played ancient and Medieval musical instruments, and Socrates also played several tunes on a modern harmonica. They answered catch questions thrown at them to test whether they really were who they said that they were. And all of them seemed genuine.

"Why are there no saints among you?" one of the time-prober persons asked.

"Some of the saints were true sages."

"They're not declared saints till they've gone to their glory," Pico della Mirandola said, "and we haven't gone there yet."

"We really throw bangers over there on Goose-down Eve," the local girl was telling Art and Jim. "And the wind has swung around now. It's still a gale, but it's a strong gale off the land now, and it'll put us into Cos in two hours if that skiff of yours has any kick at all. And the party will just be starting good when we get there. Everybody else would be too chicken to put out in this weather, but I know that you guys aren't chicken."

The sages slipped away one by one as they finished their specialties, and the last of them, Socrates, was still spieling: - "Back when we had aviation the first time, I was barnstorming one autumn in a little tri-winger plane when -"

"Oh stop giggling when you tell them, Socky," the local girl said. "Your stories aren't that funny."

"Kyrie Socrates," said one of the time-trippers, "you are telling lies again. You never had aviation the first time. You're telling tall stories. And yet you are your genuine self and you could give us genuine and sensational information. Work with us and we'll create the greatest archeological-historical coup ever. We have about a hundred key questions here, and if you will just use them for take-off points -"

"Go ahead, Rocky," Art Slick said. "You'll have time. We won't be putting out to sea for at least a half hour."

"And you haven't anything better to do," another of the time-probers put in. "After all, this is a rainy day in Halicarnassus."

"It doesn't hurt to be nice to people who have made such a whennish long trip to see you," the local girl said. "Be nice to them, or we won't take you to Cos for the Goose-down Eve Festival."

"All right, folks, I open my heart and my head to you," the Old Master said. "But I wouldn't be opening them if it weren't such a dismal rainy day, and I wouldn't be opening them to you if only they had changed the bill at even one of the movie houses."

Then the time-probe people fell upon him joyously for the epoch-making interview.

"We'll gas up at Turkoman's Marina, Rocky," Art Slick called. "We'll see you there, but take your time and give them what they want."

"Why do you call him Rocky when his name is Socky?" the local girl asked as she went out with Art and Jim.

And the interview was a great success. The old master used the hundred or so questions as take-off points for really masterful illuminations. It really was the archeological-historical coup of the century.

Of which century? Of this one, or of that one?

Of that one, of the century - well it was either the twenty-ninth or the thirty-

ninth century, whichever century the time-probers said they came from. And their write-ups of the masterful meeting introduced to their world two new and powerful archetypes: the *Rainy Day in Halicarnassus* Psychosis; and the 'Goose-down Eve Festival of Cos' Eschatological Motif.

E N D



A FEW WORDS FROM ELLISON ON THE SUBJECT OF LAFFERTY

Ray Lafferty contends I'm in the paid employ of the Antichrist. Nothing I can say will convince him otherwise. I'm resigned. Since I've never seen the face of my employer anyway (the payoffs come in Swiss francs, smelling faintly of saffron and scoria, delivered by this incredibly tiny guy who always wears a bulky overcoat and a ski cap, summer or winter, as though he's concealing appendages one doesn't normally see on a human ... and he always rings my doorbell at dead midnight ... or when I'm in the shower), since I don't precisely know who my employer is, Ray may be correct.

Nonetheless, I wildly admire Lafferty's work.

I don't think I'm even exaggerating when I say I was one of the first to pick up on him. If you can lay your hands on a copy of the original edition of *PAST MASTER*, his first novel, in the Ace Specials edition, published in 1968, you'll find my blurb extolling his wonderfulness. But even before that, as far back as September of 1966, when "Narrow Valley" appeared in *F&SF*, I was a slave to the talent of R. A. Lafferty. And somewhere in Ed Ferman's letter-file there's testament to that claim. Because when I read "Narrow Valley" I wrote Ed telling him -- in case he didn't know -- that he had stumbled on a rare, first-rank imagination. This Lafferty, I said, is one in a million; and you cannot possibly publish too much of his work.

So I think that puts me in the win column as far as foresight goes when we're discussing who has a right to praise that most peculiar gentleman.

So you Nawlins-come-lately enthusiasts can honor him all you wish (and his Guest of Honorship is long overdue), but when it comes to admiring the quirky, indefatigable, blessedly original writing of Lafferty ... get thee behind me.

.. Harlan Ellison

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ABOUT RAY LAFFERTY

For me, Ray Lafferty represents genius. That's a strong word, I know ... but no other is adequate to describe his work.

Ray is that rarest of commodities, an original talent. Original, in the full meaning of the term. In both style and content, Ray Lafferty clears his own path through the forest of literature. And he walks it alone.

From the strange, compelling love story in "Continued on Next Rock" to the cutting irony of "About a Secret Crocodile" to the theological fantasy of *The Devil is Dead*, each Ray Lafferty work is a unique, highly individual creation. I think his proper metier is the short story, of which he has written probably a hundred or more. His novels too often impress me as being essentially just long short stories. (Jerry Page and I have argued over this; he thinks Ray Lafferty is a better novelist than short story writer. I think the opposite.) But while Ray does have peers in the short story department, he has no equals -- because his work is so different and off-beat it can't be compared to that of other writers.

What is most strange to me is that Ray Lafferty is not more popular. He has published at least a dozen stories of Hugo quality. Although I kept the customary stiff upper lip, it almost broke my heart, when serving as MC at the 1970 Nebula Awards banquet in New Orleans, to have to announce that Sturgeon's excellent "Slow Sculpture" had beaten out the equally good "Continued on Next Rock." Ray was in the audience, and Sturgeon was not. But I also had the pleasure of being in Toronto in 1974 when Ray won a Hugo for "Eurema's Dam" -- and at last achieved a small measure of the recognition he deserves.

We could talk about Ray Lafferty's work at endless length, and till not convey its essence to the reader. Like sex and laughter, it must be experienced to be understood. Go, you who have not read a Lafferty, and buy his novels; read his short stories. But I warn you: like good wine, like complex and fascinating games, he is strongly addictive. You may become hooked, want more, much more ... and sadly, Ray is not writing much these days.

Come back, Ray. We miss you.

Joseph Green

