

IMPLOSION

Implosion #14 is the local monthly fanzine of Arnie Katz (330 S. Decatur, Suite 152, Las Vegas, NV 89107). Everything is exactly as it was, except that You Are There. It is produced for the 14th Distribution of Apa V, the Las Vegas apa, which has as this month's theme "Art." Today is December 3, 1994.

Implosion: The Fanzine that proves anyone can publish a fanzine.
Member, fwa.

The Art of Burbee

If Ernest Hemingway had had a sense of humor, he would have been Charles Burbee. No other fanwriter communicates trenchant insights in such an economical prose style.

It is interesting to speculate how *The Sun Also Rises* might've turned out if Burbee had written it. And perhaps it is yet in his plans to attempt *The (Dirty) Old Fan and the LoC* (pronounced ell-oh-see by civilized fans everywhere).

No speculation is required to read the huge body of work that Burbee has bestowed on fandom during over a half-century of activity. Although the two *Incomplete Burbee* anthologies still leave many gems buried in moldering old fanzines, they present ample evidence that Burbee truly is the Hemingway of Fandom.

This is no disparagement of Walt Willis, whose fannish efforts have inspired me for so long. He is equally a master, but he weaves his tapestry in a different frame of reference. The quintessential Willis article is a cunning latticework of crystalline words, ingeniously fitted together to maximize their sound, meaning and laugh-provoking potential. To praise Burbee no more dims the Willis lustre than praising Hemingway denigrates William Faulkner. (Is Walt William Faulkner with an Irish accent and puns? Watch for another article, coming soon...)

The seeming simplicity of Burbee's magic makes it even more remarkable. He

writes the kind of natural prose which comes only with repeated revision. Without esoteric vocabulary and highly detailed descriptions, his artist's eye paints whole scenes, entire universes, with a few brilliant strokes.

He's a literary impressionist-realist. (That's a term I intend to copyright, like that guy did with "threepat." That way, every time you turn to each other in herbally induced stupor and burble, "You're an impressionist-realist!" and laugh uncontrollably, I'll have the consolation of knowing you owe me another 2.3 cents. And I intend to collect that 0.3 cents, too.)

What I mean by "impressionist-realist" (© A. Katz, 1994) is the Burbee's laconic lyricism is nearly transparent to readers. He crafts images that transcend words. Though every line is painstakingly molded, and many will be repeated until we've all fanned our last ac, it's the total effect that stays with the reader.

I hope this treatise will be forgiven a few extensive Burbee quotes. There's no better way to get the flavor of his writing. This description of a 1944 fan visit, from "Their Sensitive Fannish Faces" showcases Burbee's descriptive power.

I went down and could see through the door window a couple of sensitive fannish faces. How did I know what sensitive fannish faces looked like? I had never seen any. Neither had Isabelle, but she had seen a funny wild look there. I opened the door and the boldest of the trio introduced the bunch, none of whom I had seen before. I saw those faces often after that, but this was the first time. I gazed with awe on these genuine fan faces on genuine fan heads. I invited them in, opened the door wide, and up the stairs trooped, in shambling unison, James Kepner, Andy Anderson, and F. Towner Laney.

James Kepner, later known as Dirty Old Kepner.

Andy Anderson, described in a later article in **Shangri-L'Affaires** (the Defunct Fanzine) as "horse-faced," F. Towner Laney, known also as Francis T. Laney, whose letterhead proclaimed him a connoisseur of "unusual books, hot jazz." They all trooped up my stairs, gay smiles on their sensitive fannish faces.

We spent a reasonable time getting acquainted, sealing the bonds of our friendship by the use, eventually, of the four-letter word made famous wherever our troops were stationed. I loaded them with beer, whiskey and milk. They got high on all three.

They went through my fanzines, spoke in gentlemanly uncomfortable tones. In general they were nice and polite and considerate, not the least like fans. Now and again, various expressions came and went on their sensitive fannish faces.

Burbee is never more incisive than when he is describing other people. This selection from "Stibbard the Gay," hints at how Burbee creates his evocative character portraits. Note how he deftly plays the ostensive meaning of the description against the real, opposite meaning, all in a disarmingly conversational tone. This is artistry, indeed!

"Make me dashing, romantic and gay," said Stanley Stibbard

I said that this was beyond the power of a mortal such as I, and I am mortal even if I am a fan.

"I cannot work miracles," I said.

"But if you're going to write an article on me I insist that you make me dashing, handsome, and gay," said Stibbard.

Stibbard is a colleague of Rotsler, as you may know. They go to art school together. He is not a fan. He is crazy about Albert and Pogo, though, so I will talk to him even if he isn't a fan. Rotsler can sometimes induce Stibbard to draw fantastic pictures, and these Willie latches onto quickly, for Stibbard, being a true artistic soul, is wont to destroy his marvelous sketches as rapidly as he draws them. It is impossible to say how many sketches, each featuring his characteristic economy of line, he has channelled onto paper, only to liquidate a moment later.

But I must make him dashing and gay and romantic. I can't really do that, of course, but maybe I can cause you to carry away with you the impression that Stibbard is all these things. If merely saying it here on paper will do it, I will say it here on paper. Stibbard is a dashing lad, romantic, handsome, and gay. As a matter of fact, he looks a hell of a lot like Steve Canyon. Especially when he wears that leather flying jacket. With his crew haircut and downward slanting eyes -- yup! -- he does cut a swashbuckling figure at that. One expect to see

either the flash of a rapier or the ugly snout of a Colt .45 somewhere about him. He smells impressively of doublemint chewing gum and Cuban tobacco and damp wool (this last from the flier's jacket which he wears everywhere except to bed and breakfast).

By now I hope you have a firm grip on the illusion of Stibbard that I have striven so manfully to build up

Burbee builds his word-picture of the young art student with vocabulary intelligible to a seventh grader, according to the Flesch Index, a measure of prose density. That's another reason you'll find nuggets of Burbee buried in the compost of Katz. His precision atones for my occasional prolixity, my least favorite Sins of the Flesch. He reaches for the *right* word, not the flashy one.

Burbee is a master of the ordinary language of every day people. In his hands, the every day becomes something special. Check this brief snippet from a **Shangri-L'Affaires** editorial:

We are striking off a medal for Frank Robinson, who publishes that gem of fanewscards, which, strangely enough, is titled **Fanewscard**. We feel that suitable awards should be made to fans who have contributed something to the art and science of fandom, or who have performed some doughty deed. Fwankie has done a very courageous thing, and to be more explicit, an unheard-of thing. It seems that some weeks ago we asked him for an article for this very issue. He promised one. He may have been coerced, but he promised. Eventually he rushed back to the comparative safety of Chicago 29, being only a visitor here in the first place. After a few notes telling of no progress, he finally admitted that he was unable to write anything longer than a **Fanewscard**. Said if he wrote a hundred words, 75 of them would be padding.

We were bowled over, of course. He's the first fan we've ever heard of who's actually come right out and flatly stated an inability to do anything. So -- for him we are striking off a medal. The design has not yet been decided upon, but it will be something bizarre and shocking. Due to scarcity of noble metals, the thing will have to be made from something like yttrium. It will not be forthcoming in the near future, but it is being thought about seriously. Even if we don't strike it off this month, or this year, Fwankie can always turn toward L.A. with the warm, comfortable feeling that he's got a Medal coming from here sometime. (June 1944, #15)

Burbee's ear for dialog is second to none. The lines have the authentic terseness of offhand conversation, but the cumulative effect is devastating. This excerpt from *FAPA*

Forever, dialogue with minimal connecting narrative, could almost be a two-character play. Despite the fact that he doesn't tell us anything about either Betty or himself in straight exposition, both come through vibrantly, memorably.

She asked then if I liked poetry. I said no. So she said she would read me a poem I would like. I declined with thanks. So she said, "Oh, but you'd like this one."

"No," I said, "I don't like poetry. Especially fan poetry, which practically always stinks."

"You'll like this one," she said.

"No, I'd rather not hear it. I don't like poetry."

"I'll read it to you."

She had a copy of one of Dale Hart's mags. When I saw that it was inevitable, I had to give in and enjoy it. I said I would read the poem myself, and took the mag and read this sonnet by Sidney Johnson. I said I didn't like it too well.

"What kind of fellow is Sidney Johnson?" she asked.

"I don't know," I said. "I've never heard of him before."

"How old is he?" she asked.

"I don't know. I don't even know the man. Never heard of him in my life."

"Do you think he has a fine mind?"

"Well, that's hard to say, from reading one sonnet and that not a very good one."

"What kind of fellow is he?"

"Who?"

"Sidney Johnson."

"Oh," I said, "you mean *Sidney Johnson!*"

"Yes," she said. "What kind of fellow is he?"

"Oh," I said, "**he's** not a bad fellow -- now, I guess."

"How old is he?"

"Thirty-eight."

"How do you know?" asked Betty

"His brother told me."

"Who's his brother?"

"Why, Johan P. Johnson. Teaches English at LACC. Used to be a great friend of mine."

"Are you sure he's 38?"

"Well, that's just a guess. He might be 42."

"Oh, no! He's not more than 40!"

"**Well,**" I said, casting a sidelong glance at my host, busily cutting stencils, a yard or so away. "I don't see why it matters."

"It matters a great deal," declared his bride. "I may want to marry him some day."

"Oh. Well, I guess he's around 42."

"You said 39."

"So I did."

"Come on, Burbee, give a girl a break.

He's 38, isn't he?"

"Wellllllll, come to think of it he is.

"That isn't too old, is it?"

"I guess not."

"Tell me about him -- what is his philosophy?"

"He had a strange philosophy. I guess he was a black sheep. Of course all my information is seven years old, so he might have changed and be entirely different now."

"What did he do?"

"Oh, the family educated him. Brought him up to be a dentist. Paid some \$2000 to teach him the dental profession; After graduation he went into the business, and after three years of work, he'd paid them back and saved up quite a sum of money. So he thought he would take a little vacation. He went all over the world."

"Where did he go?"

"He wound up in India, where he ran out of money, and he got a job of some sort. Maybe it was in Tibet -- I never listened very well when Johan told me about it.

"Johan," murmured Betty, "who is that?"

"That's his brother who teaches English at LACC."

"Oh, and how did he know all this?"

"Well, after all, even black sheep write letters home now and then."

"He wasn't completely estranged, you know."

"And how long did he stay away?"

"Eight years."

"But how old is he now.?"

"I'm not positive. Let me see, I will figure it out. He got out of college at the age of 22, was a dentist for three years, was gone for eight years and that was seven years ago --- that makes him 40."

"Oh no!"

"Well," I said, "I happen to know he is 38, so my figures are wrong. They were only approximate, anyhow. Ah, yes," I added reflectively, "he thought he would take a little vacation and so he went to Paris." I drank a little beer.

"And how long was he gone?"

"Eight years."

Betty laughed. He sounds like quite a guy. What does he look like?"

"Well, I never saw him."

"Yes, but was he tall, dark, blond, or what?"

"I don't know."

"He's tall, isn't he?"

"Well, yes, now that you mention it. I'd say he was about 73 inches tall, weighed about 170 pounds of lean, hard sinew."

"I thought so," said Betty.

"Had a lot of strange experiences in India. Once, while climbing up a rickety rope ladder while ascending Mount Kashima in southern India -- right near Tibet, you know -- he made the mistake of looking down. The lines of perspective pulled him down to the valley floor, three thousand feet straight down. He lost his head. He clung weakly to the rope and messed himself. Yes, he clung there, weaker than beer with ice in it and messed himself. Said he almost died there."

"Why," said Betty, "none of that shows in his poetry."

"Yes, that I must admire him for," I said.

"A man like that, who knows at least fifteen native dialects, refrains from putting one word in a poem. That shows great restraint, which is the basis of artistry. Of course, there is a bit of Urdu philosophy in lines 8 and 9, but it is all to the good."

"I didn't notice that," said Betty, "I haven't read as much as you have."

"Burbee," said Betty, "how many children have you got?"

"He has five children," said my host.

"Is that right, Burbee?"

"Well," I said. "I guess that's right. Let's see, one each by two girls I should have married, and three by Isabelle."

"You're married to her, aren't you?"

"In the sight of God, yes."

"But what about those other girls? Why did you get them pregnant?"

"Oh, I don't know. I thought it would be a good joke, I guess."

"I can't understand a man who will do that."

"Well," I said, "women are pretty hard to understand, too. For example, when I brought home a girl I had got pregnant, Isabelle refused to take her in. I merely wanted to take care of the girl while she was that way, but Isabelle wouldn't hear of it. That seems like a very strange attitude for a woman to take against a member of her own sex."

"But why did you get bet that way?"

"Oh, I was thinking of something else at the time. You know how it is. But hell, Sidney Johnson had 15 children, so I'm a piker beside him."

"I thought you said he was single."

"Well, he was. He had five or six native wives. But

you can't expect a native marriage to hold in the courts of this country."

"No," said Betty, "I suppose not."

Insurgents generally have two methods for making their criticisms known: satire and polemic. *Ah, Sweet Idiocy!* is the ultimate insurgent diatribe unflinching and reportorial. Burbee's satire is more oblique, but no less devastating, than one of FTL's frontal assaults. Try this acid-etched, yet still affectionate, send-up of Laney's well-known penchant for proclaiming his lack of involvement with fandom and science fiction.

Next day at work I said to Francis T Laney, as I held out my hand, "Where is that article?"

"I haven't written anything," said Laney. "I'll write you that article one of these days, but I haven't any time now."

"But I'm going to press!" I shouted, and the fellow on the lathe in front of me tuned his eye upon me. "I'm going to press!" I shouted again.

"Hell with it," said Laney, grinning, and walked away.

I'd hollered the wrong thing. Those words would not bring the fanatic gleam I've so often seen in his eyes. I should have said: "Mint commemoratives! Plate blocks!" Then for sure his eyes would have lit up. Oh well. He is going to do me an article one of these days. I will publish it here, in this seldom type mag.

There is a fellow in the shop who reads *Astounding* religiously. He rightly regards Laney as an intelligent person. But he also thinks that Laney ought to read science-fiction.

"Oh, I've read a little of the stuff," said Laney.

"Along with my general reading. It's OK to spice a general reading diet with a bit of science-fiction; some of it is quite interesting. But though I find it pleasant to read at times, I can't say I care a great deal for it. And I certainly can't see anyone going strongly for the stuff."

Thus spake F T Laney, science-fiction fandom's living legend.

Burbee loved Laney (not in the biblical sense, if their articles may be believed). This acid-etched character study is Burbee on the warpath.

"I can handle them," said Al Ashley. "I can take care of that situation." He was referring to the threat made by the Executive Committee of the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society and Dancing Academy (Walter J. Daugherty Pres.) that they would eject him bodily from the club if he ever dared show up again at a meeting. It seems they removed him from membership some time ago, and since then, he has shown up for meetings more

regularly than before.

Hints that he was not welcome bounced off him. When Russell T. Hodgkins, who prides himself on his dignity, so lost his dignity one night that he called Al in open meeting "You damned welsher." Al merely sat there and stared at Russ with the identical expression he uses for staring off into space. Every so often, too, EEEvans, that most patient of men (he says) loses his patience and addresses some sharp, impatient remark to Al, who doesn't seem to mind at all.

But the other night the executive committee decided that the next time their unwelcome visitor should up they would, by main force, throw him bodily and with malice aforethought, right out the clubroom door. Ashley, when informed of this decision, made the statement as recorded in the first line of this factual account. He said that if Gus Willmorth (who weighs 220 on the hoof and virtually the same sitting down) were omitted from the Ejection Committee (one wonders why there is no Welcoming Committee) he could handle Cox, Evans, Hodgkins, and Ackerman.

"Yes, Al," said a friend. "Perhaps there would be a mighty struggle with you swinging Evans around like a blunt instrument (which is no doubt the mental picture you carry of him), but don't you think that eventually you would end up in the street?"

"No," said Al calmly. He calmly picked up his coffee cup, placed it calmly to his lips and calmly drank the contents.

Trouble was, the cup was empty before he picked it up.

Burbee's ability to evoke characters and situations often gives his fanwriting universality, and therefore accessibility. He's funny even to readers largely unfamiliar with the fans who populate his stories. "Big Name Fan" and "A Coinage for Fandom" are definitely funnier if you get all the fannish references, but you don't need to know Al Ashley to get a laugh out of this sliver from "You Bastard, Said Al Ashley."

You bastard, said Al Ashley. These words of his, so much at variance with his general genial attitude, ring in my head like a mad doorbell. At odd hours during the day I seem to hear his soft voice saying: You bastard. He says it with a smile, because he has a sense of humor (in spite of what people may say) and often knows what is going on even if it sometimes seems that his brain is four measures behind. He is forced by the propriety of self-esteem to vocalize himself in this dreadful epithet.

He always has a distinct and excellent reason for expressing himself thus. It is not to be thought that Al Ashley greets people at his door with this

expression, or that he can be depended upon to repeat it at odd intervals in a normal conversation. I have merely stripped the phrase of its context. As such it cannot stand alone and have anything but an esoteric meaning. So in the following pages I will outline a few of the many situations and remarks that have caused Al Ashley to give rise to this epithet.

For a time it was a humorous thing from Al Ashley's point of view to bring out "falsies: and wear them around the house outside of his shirt while visitors were present. The falsies and Al's elfish smile would naturally, as he expected, rouse comment from the onlookers. My god, Al, someone would be sure to say, what the hell are those? And Al would answer, smiling, say, can't you see? And someone would say: Yeah, but whose are they? And Al would eagerly say, oh, they belong to E-----. This was his punch line, because E-----'s homosexual tendencies as are well-known in the inner circle.

One evenings as Al Ashley was sporting these things around in view of a half dozen or more people, I said, Al, why are you wearing those crazy things -- are they yours? Hell no, he said, they belong to E-----. I said, I'm inclined to doubt that. You say they belong to him, but I've never seen him wearing them. On the other hand I've seen you with them on a dozen times. You wear them so much, Al, I think they're yours.

You bastard, said Al Ashley.

Al Ashley's researches into the sex lives of the various fans he knows is something amounting to a passion. Al has a long list (in his head) of all the homos in local fandom, and suspects at least 90% of the rest. With very little encouragement he can be brought out on the subject, declaiming this person and that person and declaring others under a cloud of suspicion. His theme is that nearly everybody is queer, and he's pretty disgusted with them all.

At one of these declamatory sessions somebody remarked that Al seemed pretty sure of his facts. They asked him how he could be so sure that nearly everybody was queer. I have definite proof, said Al. And then the redoubtable F. Towner Laney said, I think you say people are queer just out of spite. You're trying to get even with them, because you can't get into their pants.

You bastard, said Al Ashley.

Who cares whether or not Al Ashley really said, "You bastard"? Even fannish historians would barely recall that '40s fan today, if not for the many Burbee pieces in which he starred. Not knowing that he existed at all is no barrier to relishing the moment when the pompous windbag gets his come-uppence.

And speaking of pompous windbags, it is time to let go of this appreciation of the art of Charles Burbee. Like every supposed

humorist, I would give my propeller beanie to be proclaimed the Burbee of the '90s, but if my shaky scholarship continues much longer, this article's honoree may recast me as the decade's reincarnation of Al Ashley

Raven swept into the living room. Around me, Las Vegrants celebrated Eric Lindsay's visit. The Australian fan had flown from Los Angeles, between convention weekends, and the fanzine fans had assembled to meet him.

I rose to meet her, and she opened her arms in greeting.

"Happ Chanukah," she said. We hugged.

"Where's my present."

"It's me."

"Let's go in the other room, so i can unwrap it."

"You know, I owe you two," she said. That was true. This was the third day of the Jewish festival of lights. Raven referred to the custom of giving children a present for each night. I could see this was a good custom.

"When I was younger, I could handle presents like that."

So I went over to the buffet and had a roll. It was a hot roll, but not the hottest I had ever had.

I wanted to do complete mailing comments, I really did. Planned out the whole thing. Had it covered.

Then I started to write the article about Burb. By the time I finished, I was ready to be fabulous and Burbee-like (or at minimum, tolerable and Katz-like) about the mailing.

Alas, time has evalopated. The Vegrants will be here in no time at all, and **Implosion #14**, the Fanzine That Proves Anyone Can Do a Fanzine, must be rubnoff by then.

I only have room for one comment. You canbet it won't be one to Rosds Chamberlain, who seemingly commented to every person in FAPA except me in the latest mailing. No sirreee, no comments for Ross.

On the other hand, I did want to respond to Tom Springer's queries concerning nightmares.

I very seldom have nightmares, andwhenIdo, I almost enever recall the details once I 'm fully awake.

I had an unusual experience one night last week. I was in the throes of one of those classic frustration dreams. I don't remember the details, perhaps unfortunate for this narritive, but the ambience was unmistakable.

Except for one thing. This time I solved the whole problem, wrapped up the lose ends, and went back to pleasant phantasies best left undescribed.

I told Joyce about this the next morning. "I guess things are going pretty good for you these days," she said.

I guess they are.