

# The Vinegar Worm



"Foolthy Fanzines?"



And now, kiddies, it is time once again to gather round Uncle Bob's rocking chair for your quarterly period of enlightenment in epistemology, prosody and politics. Which is to say, here is .

### THE VINEGAR WORM

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The Worm is in chronic need of material, and so a while back I sent to a number of well-known professional and fan writers a request for some high-grade stuff to fill these pages. As an editor with a nice sense of balance and proportion, I had sought for some unifying theme for the issue, and I found it in a little pensive written by an old friend, a Mrs. Geuse, whom some of the older fans will remember. The verse I chose as a theme runs as follows:

Little Miss Muffet  
Sat on a tuffet  
Eating her curds and whey.  
There came a great spider  
Which sat down beside her  
And frightened Miss Muffet away.

The writers were requested to take this small gem as a text and to produce something stirring and inspirational. They no doubt would have, too, but for various reasons--other work, genre publishing, death, etc.--they were unable to make our deadline. This put me in something of a spot, since I had already advertised a special, all-star issue, and I could hardly disappoint the public. Fortunately I discovered a solution: I could just print what they would have written had they been able to do so. This matter follows:

After Thomas Wolfe:

A stone, a leaf, a tuffet; a stone, a leaf, a lonely tuffet. This

is where the spider came hungering in his youth, his wild heart aflame for food: for West Virginia ham well-seared in a cast-iron skillet, for buttery lima beans, for a fifteen-cent cone of chocolate ripple ice cream. He hungered for women: for Helen, for Juliet, for Pompadour, for Garbo. He hungered to read every word ever written by anybody: by (here refer to The Encyclopaedia

was on the tuffet? A frowsy, frumpy, pasty, pimples, bag-nosed, bunny-nosed, slime-lipped, big-eared, imperishably ugly female with an incondite figure and swartky skin (O lost and by the wind grieved Helen of our youth ) who was ravenously and repulsively slobbering her way through a bowl of curds and whey.

After Buck Coulson:

SPIDER WORLD #6: This issue is devoted mainly to the Spider-Muffet feud. I think they're both idiots, and I wish they'd stop sending me their damn fanzines. I don't really care how this fight comes out, and there's already too much of a backlog of reading round here to cope with. RATING: 1.

After Philip K. Dick:

The Spider's wife was going to leave him, and he trembled continuously as he rushed his aircar toward his favorite tuffet. The fellows at the Paranoics' club all agreed that she was doing him a grave injustice, particularly now, when he hoped to develop something new in the Tinkertoy line, and perhaps improve his status to that of Schizophrenic. If only he could be at the tuffet now, and regain his equilibrium!

• And then, when he reached the tuffet, his world collapsed. There was already someone there--someone he recognized! Miss Muffet! And she was carrying the status symbol of the Latent Psychotic class, a bowl of curds and whey. A burst of rage overcame him, and. . .

After Walter Breen:

"Speedair et petite Mlle. Muffet" is not Faulbetzer's best opera, but any competent musicologist will tell you that the polyphonic-sharp transitions in the aria "Les curds et le whey" are analogous--where in a minor key--to the flatted fifths in the Piccighieri sonata.

After Buz Busby:

Almost deadline, but it's nice and cool here in the back yard, and this batch of home brew is good. I'll finish off at least this stencil today.

Yes.

I'm irked by the knuckleheads who have come out in favor of the spider. The rules say pretty plainly that you don't get curds and whey unless you postmail a premailing and file your petition

at least seventy-six hours prior to (or after) a pre- (or post-) mailing, and then only if the postmailing is not premailed, or the premailing postmailed. The spider had no right to the curds and whey; they were Miss Muffet's, and all the nit-picking in the world isn't going to change that.

After Swinburne:

Merry, melodious, modest Miss Muffet,  
Splendidly sleek on a soft summer day,  
Sought for a silky and sumptuous tuffet,  
Carrying carefully cool curds and whey.  
Suddenly springing, there came a great spider,  
Vicious and vile as a viper or ray;  
Haggard with hunger, it sat down beside her,  
Frightening fearful Miss Muffet away.

After John Boardman:

Those who blame the spiders for their recent uprising, which was so bravely led by their humanitarian reformist nonviolent contingent of tarantulas and black widows, fail to grasp the fact that the Muffet woman was not actually injured, and that the spiders have for too long been forced to live in tremulous webs, rather than in proper brick houses. The spider only wanted the curds and whey. He was entitled to this. His alleged threatening gestures to gain the curds and whey weigh little against the tons of flit that have been sprayed on the spiders over the years.

After Ayn Rand:

The spider would not relinquish its principles: "I am a spider," he said, his hair nobly on end, "and what I have achieved is my own. Muffet has no right to this bowl of curds and whey, because I frightened her away, and it is mine by right of achievement. I am a frightener, and what I frighten people away from is mine. If you will look at the matter rationally you will see that Muffet was, in effect, battenning off me. It is time for spiders to stant firm for rapacity."

After Bob Leman:

Assuefaction--by repute--meliorates arachniphobia. My own late experience with an intrusive spider, however, (an incident that eventuated wholly without advertance on my part) leads me to submit to you a conclusion to which I have devoted a not inconsiderable amount of lucubration: the validity of the aphorism remains open to question. I was scared away from my curds and whey.

After AMBA:

Of all the stories of The Spider, the best is perhaps "Curds and Whey". This is an account in Faulbetzer's middle--and best--style, of The Spider's dangerous encounter with an enormous beast

which possessed food at a time when The Spider was seriously in need of nourishment. There is very real excitement in The Spider's stealthy approach to the monster, and in the creature's eventual flight. The Spider was, of course, able to continue on his perilous journey after capturing the food. The capture was accomplished through the use of rapiers, cutlasses, epees, sabers, broadswords, longswords, daggers, dirks and paring knives, all of which the Spider handled with superlative skill.

After William Faulkner:

And Quentin "because he (the spider) knew while he was saying 'I heard you tell her "I want the curds and whey" ' felt (somehow apprehending the ancient evil of the fecund female principle ((there in the dusty breathless gloom)) that stigmatizes the gallant proud unvanquished bravebannered galloping marauders of the confederacy) that she (Miss Muffet) might well have replied 'I am frightened, I will run away.' "

After Jack Spier:

WHEREAS the language of this indenture is vague and indefinite; and

WHEREAS the evidence adduced fails to establish either fright on the part of Miss Muffet or intent to harm on the part of the spider; and

WHEREAS i counted seventeen typographical errors and six grammatical errors;

NOW THEREFORE this court is prayed to return a judgment in the spider's favor in the amount of \$76,978.98.

After Allen Ginsburg:

I saw the worst poet of my generation, Spider, hairy and homely, queer as Dick's hatband,

Reduced to hanging around tuffets and finding more often than not a nasty woman sitting there eating food.

Wild with despair at the screeching times he could only frighten her away and smoke a stick of pot.

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Not long ago I received a catalogue from a vanity press. It was evidently produced in fulfillment of a contract with the authors which provided that the publishers would advertise the book as well as print it, in consideration of their fee. This catalogue was a strange and wonderful document, and I seized the opportunity to comment upon it at some length in these pages. I did not, on the whole, treat it kindly.

But as time wore on, I found that the thing had stuck in my mind. I thought about it like this: almost everybody believes he could write a good book if only he were to get down to it, and more people than you'd think actually write their books. Most of them are, of course, abominably bad, and regular publishers show an understandable reluctance to publish them. But the truly amateur writers (many of whom are zealots of some dotty discipline, such as pacifism or belief in flying saucers) are unable to accept the fact that the world is not eager for their masterpieces. And, after all the commercial publishers have declined the book, the boob makes a deal with a vanity press, to print the book at his own expense. These publishers seem to make a good deal of money, if one may judge by their number.

I kept this in mind, and when I recently became unemployed I decided that a convenient route to financial security was the foundation of a vanity press. I accordingly undertook the enterprise, and I am now able to bring to the public the fruits of the labor of my clients. I am happy to offer below a selection from the forthcoming catalogue of the Ecclesiastes Press. All mail orders are sent postpaid, and you will be remembered in our prayers if you make a purchase. You will understand that I am new in the business, and so have been obliged to model my copy upon that of other vanity press catalogues.

MOBY DICK, by Herman Melville  
Cloth-bound. 654 pages. \$3.50

Zany adventures aboard the tugboat "Imogene Krause" as it plies the Kaskaskia river. Led by jolly old captain Moby Dick, who hated to shave and was everready for a bottle of Drewry's beer, the crew included Clay Fortescue the stalwart mate and the captain's pretty daughter, Alice Girl. Also aboard was the captain's wife, who had a sharp tongue but a heart of gold. How the captain and a group of "river rats" foiled Mr. Darkhouse, the President of The Farmers and Merchants Bank of Barkersville is the interesting plot of the book. A wholesome and thrilling love story is interweaved. Real family entertainment.

THE LORD OF THE RINGS, by J.R.R. Tolkien  
Cloth-bound. 117 pages. \$27.50

Mr. Tolkien was ringmaster for the famous Fenstermacher-Burns three-ring circus for more than twenty-two years, and richly deserves his title as "Lord of the Rings". Another good title for this book would be Twenty-Two Years under the "Big Top". All the thrills and adventures of "show biz" are thrillingly and dramatically portrayed in this account of twenty-two years with the circus. Many formerly unrevealed facts, some of them

pretty spicy, are revealed about such famous performers as Lucas Kurtz, Ghiorgi Ramescu, Ilona Tivlis and Fred Curry. Many savage animals are mentioned, and Mr. Tolkien has much to say about his four wives and other friends. Everyone who enjoys the circus will like this one.

~~VANITY FAIR~~, by William Makepeace Thackeray  
Cloth-bound. 471 pages. \$5.00

What is more fun than a county fair? And when was there a better fair than that in Vanity County, Missouri, in 1926? Mr. Thackeray has a good remembrance of the fair, and he tells all about it in this exhaustive memoir. What fun to awaken early and load the hogs after slopping them! What thrills as the model T truck breaks down! And guess who won the prize! The adventures of a boy and his father and the brood sow "Nellie" at the Vanity Fair make fascinating reading for young and old alike. A full recapitulation of the prizewinners in every classification is included, together with the dates of death of the animals involved and a number of pedigrees.

THE FOOD OF THE GODS, by H.G. Wells  
Cloth-bound. 360 pages. \$3.50

Different dishes as prepared and served in the Cajun country is the topic of this book. It is a well-known fact that the people of this area live extremely long lives and retain to the end their teeth and eyesight. (Mr. Wells recounts a hilarious anecdote of asking a native for directions to the optometrist's. "What's a optometrist?" replied the native.) Also the people retain their amorous vigor all their lives. This is due to their diet, Mr. Wells contends, and it seems like he proves his point, entitling this food to be called, "The Food of the Gods". Many recipes are given, with step-by-step directions on how to catch your leeches, gophers etc. and a section on herbs. A must for the gourmet.

CRITIQUE OF PURE REASON, by Immanuel Kant  
Cloth-bound. 461 pages. \$5.00

Some people know there are more things in earth and heaven than is dreamed of in our philosophy. In this interesting book Mrs. Kant has assembled unusual true events which will open your eyes to say the least. Most of them took place in Mrs. Kant's home county in Vermont, but some are farther away. You will thrill to the story of Annie Strawjeck who saw a manifestation



of her grandmother while eating codfish balls, and heard six weeks later that she had died in the old country. What could be stranger than Oscar Gasseweiler's dog Prince, a part-collie, who found his way home in four months from south of Boston even though he had gone there by train? And there is a whole chapter on the famous Tuttle house, where many manifestations have been heard and felt. No student of the occult can afford to miss this book.

ROGET'S THESAURUS

Cloth-bound. 187 pages. \$9.50

The well-known sculptor Roget labored for more than thirteen years on his well-known statue of Thesaurus, the well-known Grecian hero who killed the Minotaur in a battle to the death. In this book several experts have painstakingly investigated every phase of the creation of this famous sculpture, and they have spared no pains in recounting every step of the way. It was not known before that Roget liked mutton for instance. The authors lived in Paris for some time while writing this book, and actually saw many of the cafés etc. which they describe as well as the Louvre and the Eiffel Tower. A must for the art-lover.

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This issue was planned as something other than it is. A questionable eight pages a year is not cheating under the letter of the law, but it's not what I appreciate in other people, and I dislike being a transgressor of that kind myself. But certain personal difficulties made it seem, for a time that this issue would not be published at all. If you're reading this, then I've saved my membership, and have put my eight pages into the mailing, but it's not the zine I'd hoped for, and not, it seems to me, the zine you had a right to expect.

Some apologies are due. Several months ago, on an extra-dull evening in a motel while I was on the road, the Miss Muffet idea occurred to me and I wrote the stuff up there. It mouldered in my briefcase for some time, and then one day when I thought of it again, it served as the ski-lift for what I thought was an actually promising idea: what about asking a number of professional writers to take the Muffet theme and parody themselves? What results might have come of this is hard to say, because the beam in your own eye is just about the world's most invisible object. The results should have been of great interest to the serious student of literature, however.

I accordingly embarked upon this serious constructive scheme. As a trial balloon, I asked Avram to take a shot at self-parody, and he responded with what seems to me to be a remarkably objective look at his own style. I planned at that point to throw out my own samples, and publish a substantial and satisfying set of parodies by eminent authors.

At just about that time I had to go to Milwaukee, and it is of course as immutable as the law of the Medes and the Persians that one who goes to Milwaukee ventures up to Germantown. There, over a scotch of two or Löwenbrau (or was it Heinekin's?) I shyly revealed my project to ol' Dean Grennell, who not only popped up with a leverly bit, but also talked Lionel Johnson out of one. It seemed that things were going swimmingly.

~~so. I~~ disaster--the nature of which I will not go into-- I had neither the time nor the inclination to pursue my nifty little anthology. I think it is safe to assume, at this point, that it will not appear. And so, to Messrs. Davidson, Grennell and Johnson, my most sincere apologies.

I have just read The Hobbit for the first time. I'm a little bit sorry. I had been led to expect something that belongs on the same shelf as Alice and Mr. Toad, and this is emphatically not the case. The Hobbit is a kiddie book, written down in an obvious and repellent way, and has been vastly overrated. I read The Lord of The Rings back in 1957, and again recently when Ace brought out their paperbacks. (And sometime I'd like to enlarge upon my opinions of Ace's ethics in doing this bit of publishing. The Lord isn't one of the world's masterpieces, but eventhe worst artisan deserves payment for his work, and Tolkien is being defrauded--morally if not legally--here.) The latter book has much to recommend it; it is easily possible to suspend your disbelief after reading a few hundred pages of Tolkien's touching revelations of his dream-world, and while it's a long way from Peake's Gormenghast, it makes interesting reading. Tolkien, it would seem, decided to give up his pretence that he was writing for children, and to do the best he could to give reality to his secret cosmos. He does it very well, and the three volumes will well repay your time in reading them.

But not The Hobbit. Tolkien remembers too often that his daydream is supposed to be for children (bright, well-bred children, to be sure) and he doesn't quite know how to write for children. I have too vivid a recollection of my own reactions, when I was quite small, to being apostrophized by an author who was clearly a grown-up, but who tried, from time to time, to talk to me kid-to-kid. I didn't like it then, and I don't like it now. My own children, who liked the Alice books and The Wind in the Willows, are a little too old now to be tested on The Hobbit; they are--being in their teens--at exactly the wrong age; I remember that at that age I ranked Alice with The Little Lame Prince.

There are, I know, a great many Tolkien admirers among the people who will be reading this. It would please me to hear how many of you disagree with this evaluation of The Hobbit. And what I am curious about--in particular--is whether any of you know any small children who have been exposed to it. Did they like it? If they did, did they like it as well as the Alice books, or the Bobbsey Twins, or Dr. Seuss?