

those paperbacks that have been collecting dust; those hardcovers you can bear to part with, even records (after all, you probably can't get a new turntable when your old one dies anyway), posters, or commemorative buttons. There will be ongoing discussions about books, movies, and so forth, to your intellect, as well as your

THE MT VOID

Page 2

wallet, can be stimulated! (The book swap will be in the usual meeting room on April 1--no joke!) [-ecl]

2. I talked a while back about "American" cheese and how far it was from really being cheese. I notice that as things you buy to eat get further and further from actually being food, the name has to get longer and longer because the FDA insist that this junk not get the same name as real food. I kid you not, the Kraft company has sent a coupon to my house for--are you ready for this?--"KRAFT LIGHT American Flavored Singles Pasteurized Process Cheese Product." What a mouthful! But I think I would rather have a mouthful of their words than of KRAFT LIGHT American Flavored Singles Pasteurized Process Cheese Product. Is "Singles" a noun or an adjective? I am not sure I would know how to diagram the sentence: "I like KRAFT LIGHT American Flavored Singles Pasteurized Process Cheese Product." And I think I would rather diagram it than say it.

Now let's look a little closer at that name. This isn't even the American Cheese I talked about. They have taken something else (In a moment I will get to what!) and flavored it American. I assume they don't mean that it tastes like an American. ("Yes we have big chunks of genuine American in our cheese.") I guess that it really means that means they have flavored it to taste like the terrible abomination we call American Cheese. It is kind of like saying you can now get imitation hemorrhoids. And what is it that comes American Flavored? Pasteurized Process Cheese Product. I guess I have no particular objection to it being Pasteurized, but aren't all dairy products you buy in the grocery store Pasteurized? "Hey, we thought someone else would sell you LIGHT American Flavored Singles Process Cheese Product that hadn't been Pasteurized, and we just wanted you to be sure that you would not get botulinus from our product." Pasteurization is a big selling point, I think. Let me give you a clue. You see the word "process" in the name. By

the time they process it, any self-respecting botulinus bacillum would gag rather than live in that stuff.

Now we get to the meat of the matter. It is Cheese Product. Whoever puts on their shopping list, "cheese product?" That's real specifying, isn't it? "Hey, Mom, we're all out of cheese product. Oh, and can we get some food wrapped in cellophane?" It's like the cans of generic food in REPO MAN.

3. Reminder: Hugo nominations forms must be postmarked by next Tuesday, March 31, to count.

4. And speaking of Hugos, it's still early in the year but I've already got one dramatic presentation that I want to nominate next year: "Fool's Fire" on American Playhouse (described briefly in last week's MT VOID). For those of you who missed it on WNET, WNYC will be running it Thursday, April, at 9 PM. [-ecl]

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THE FACE OF THE WATERS by Robert Silverberg
Bantam Spectra, 1991, ISBN 0-553-07592-6, \$20.
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper
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T_h_e_F_a_c_e_o_f_t_h_e_W_a_t_e_r_s seems to be an attempt to combine an introspective character study with an adventure story focusing on the weird biology of a strange planet. Even with Silverberg's not inconsiderable talent, it's not entirely successful.

The planet is Hydros, a world that is almost entirely water. The small human population lives (by sufferance) on the floating islands built by the native intelligent species, the "Gillies." But the Gillies allow no spaceport to be built, so traveling to Hydros is a one-way trip in a drop-capsule. (One wonders how humans found out that Hyros was livable, or how they negotiated with the Gillies for permission to settle humans there, since the implication is that no spaceport means that n_o ship can ever take off if it lands, plus of course there's no place to land anyway.) The original humans were criminals sent into permanent exile; now the new arrivals are

mostly misfits who choose this particular permanent exile. (The social structure in which descendants of the original convict settlers becomes the elite, proud of their ancestry, is reminiscent of Australia, reinforced here by the image of islands, though Australia is a m_u_c_h bigger island than any of these.) One community of 78 humans lives on Sorve Island, but when one of the members offends the Gillies, they are all evicted. (This week I've also seen M_i_s_s_i_s_i_p_p_i_M_a_s_a_l_a and C_o_m_e_S_e_e_t_h_e_P_a_r_a_d_i_s_e, so stories of people getting evicted from their homes are getting repetitious--I wonder if the 500th anniversary of the expulsion of the Moors and Jews from Spain is one reason for this seeming trend.)

Anyway, Valben Lawler, the community's doctor and descendent of one of the original settlers, wants to keep the group together instead of scattering it to several of the other islands. This leads to difficulties and eventually an epic voyage to Hydros's one land mass, called the Face of the Waters.

When I say "epic voyage," I have this on good authority--one of the characters is writing an epic about it even as it is going on, and another keeps quoting Coleridge's "Ancient Mariner." Yet all their adventures have a certain sameness to them: they encounter a weird life-form which either 1) they know to be dangerous, or 2) looks harmless, but in either case i_s dangerous. They fight it, possibly suffering some losses, and then go on to the next. With all this adventure, the character study of Lawler gets somewhat lost in the shuffle, reserved mostly for scenes between Lawler and Sundira Thane, a woman who intrigues Lawler because she has traveled widely on Hydros, as contrasted with his having lived only on Sorve

(his entire experience off Sorve was a single day spent on another island as it drifted close by).

At the end, however, the book switches to a more philosophical tone, not effectively (in my opinion). The switch is too abrupt and the message--of casting aside the past and embracing the future--is not so much demonstrated as announced. In both this book and R_a_f_t (by Stephen Baxter), artifacts are used as powerful symbols of the past, but here Silverberg doesn't carry through with the metaphor.

T_h_e_F_a_c_e_o_f_t_h_e_W_a_t_e_r_s isn't a bad book, but it is a dissatisfying one. I can see the necessity of conveying the impersonal hostility of the world, but by using the "weird alien biology" motif, Silverberg undercuts the mood the reader needs for the philosophy. And to be honest, the fact that I was not comfortable with what Silverberg seems to be saying in his ending no doubt affected my opinion--but that you would have to decide for yourself if you read the book.

SHADOWS AND FOG
A film review by Mark R. Leeper
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Capsule review: Beautifully filmed and intriguing tribute to German Expressionism and in general the Central European sensibility between the World Wars. The story and the director's intentions are never better than vague. Rating: high 0 (-4 to +4).

Out in the fog a killer--a tall bald man in a long frock coat reminiscent of Orlok in N_o_s_f_e_r_a_t_u--is strangling people. A deputation of vigilantes drags Kleinman (played by Woody Allen) from his bed. He must fulfill an important role in their plot to catch the killer, but there is no time to explain to Kleinman what his role is to be. To prove his support he must go out into the fog and perform an unexplained but dangerous function to catch the killer. There he meets a beautiful sword swallower (played by Mia Farrow) who is married to a thoroughly unpleasant clown (played by John Malkovich).

With the dissonances of Kurt Weill's music under the credits, Woody Allen opens S_h_a_d_o_w_s_a_n_d_F_o_g, his tribute to Central European culture and mindset between the two World Wars. The unwary viewer might expect this film to do to German and Czech culture what Allen's L_o_v_e_a_n_d_D_e_a_t_h did to Russian culture. To a large extent, that is what Allen is doing, playing his poor schnook character in the middle of a cultural milieu and making it look silly. We have the allusions to film and to literature. Here there is a scene inspired by N_o_s_f_e_r_a_t_u or M. There there is Kafka-esque situation or some characters out of Brecht. As a character drops into a saloon, the soundtrack plays Weill's "Show Me the Way to the Next Whiskey Bar." But in L_o_v_e_a_n_d_D_e_a_t_h the point of it all was good-natured and fun. There is fun in S_h_a_d_o_w_s_a_n_d_F_o_g, a carrot to the lovers of Allen's earlier films, but the point of this bleaker film is introspection and abstract philosophy. It also can be read as an elliptical allegory about anti-Semitism. Its main character, a little Jew named Kleinman, wanders in the fog caught up in circumstances darker and more complex than he can understand. And where he goes there are allusions to medieval accusations against Jews as well-poisoners. And there are allusions to the Holocaust to come as he is betrayed and sold by the Church, or told be a one-time fiancée to "Get out there and die." All this to music by a Jewish Kurt Weill in situations originally created by the Jews Fritz Lang and Franz Kafka. S_h_a_d_o_w_s_a_n_d_F_o_g is certainly a black followup to L_o_v_e_a_n_d_D_e_a_t_h.

It has been suggested that S_h_a_d_o_w_s_a_n_d_F_o_g is purely an exercise in using the photographic conventions of German Expressionist and horror films. Certainly the photography is the film's strongest suit. Scene after scene is visually striking, even if the action of the scene is not so striking. The film is top-heavy with major actors, many of whom have only cameos. In the search for faces you will find Madonna, Donald Pleasence, Lily Tomlin, Jodie Foster, Kathy Bates, John Cusack, Kate Nelligan, Fred Gwynne, Julie Kavner, Kenneth Mars, David Ogden Stiers, and Wallace Shawn. The film is short and there really is not enough time for seventeen major actors. Clearly there are lots of actors willing to settle for tiny roles in a Woody Allen film and Allen is willing to create a role for any recognizable name. In this case this cast has only gotten itself roles in a rather vague and elliptical allegory. I rate S_h_a_d_o_w_s_a_n_d_F_o_g a high 0 on the -4 to +4 scale.

THE MAMBO KINGS
A film review by Mark R. Leeper
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Capsule review: T h e M a m b o K i n g s shows us a period of entertainment history rarely if ever dramatized on film. But the people we see are just of tepid interest and the story, while nicely textured, does not engage the viewer. Rating: low +1 (-4 to +4).

There are by now a l o t of films about popular music in the 1950s. They are nearly all about rock and roll, and treat the coming of rock with a reverence usually accorded only to major world events. The impression you get is that music before rock and roll was all pretty dull stuff like opera and "How Much Is That Doggie in the Window?" though there are begrudging nods to jazz. It is true that Latin music was also very popular in the Fifties and I do not remember seeing a post-1960 film that has ever acknowledged that popularity. T h e M a m b o K i n g s breaks the mold and tells the story of a middlingly popular Latin band, their ups and downs. Unfortunately, there is somebody in your family whose life was every bit as interesting as the life of Cesar Castillo (as played by Armand Asante). The story has some action, but it is almost all in the first ten minutes. The rest of the film is just a bland story.

The year is 1952 and Cesar and Nestor Castillo (the latter played by Antonio Banderas) are playing good music in a Havana nightclub. Unfortunately, the boss has eyes for Nestor's girl, Maria. Maria decides to go with the boss after some arm-twisting. The boss is ready to kill Nestor to be rid of him, and gives this message to Cesar. Not wanting to see his brother's throat cut, Cesar convinces Nestor to come with him to New York. Cesar succeeds in impressing Tito Puente (playing himself forty years younger), but fate steps in to screw up the Castillos joining Puente's band. Instead, we see the Castillos forming their own band. The film follows their career, their loves, and their disagreements. The story is at best lackluster and occasionally descends into soap opera. This sort of laid-back story-telling may appeal to fans of

_ T_ h_ e_ F_ a_ b_ u_ l_ o_ u_ s_ B_ a_ k_ e_ r_ B_ o_ y_ s.

I personally have only limited interest in Latin music so quite surprised myself by enjoying some of the numbers. But the story is just too little about too many things. It tells of the Castillos' love lives and their family lives. It shows them doing a little creating of their music. It shows them deciding if they should give control to a promoter who could give them big-time bookings, but who will insist on being a boss. And we see them at their day jobs in a meat-packing plant. Meanwhile, Nestor pines for his Havana

Mambo Kings

March 22, 1992

Page 2

girlfriend, forever rewriting a song dedicated to her. Armand Asante goes a long way to make this film watchable. He is a fine actor, certainly, though I would more recommend that the viewer find his _ B_ e_ l_ i_ z_ a_ i_ r_ e_ t_ h_ e_ C_ a_ j_ u_ n, which was a much better film that
this
condensation of a Pulitzer-Prize-winning novel. Also notable in the cast are Celia Cruz as a popular entertainer and Roscoe Lee Browne as the semi-sinister promoter.

_ T_ h_ e_ M_ a_ m_ b_ o_ K_ i_ n_ g_ s starts well, but never really says much of interest. I would give it a low +1 on the -4 to +4 scale.

