



Ellen Kushner, and the topic is "Fantasy in a Modern Vein." There are a small group of authors today working in the fantasy field who are not writing Tolkien rip-offs, but who have gone back to the classic fairy tales and legends and are re-telling them in a modern setting, or at least with modern sensibilities. Robin McKinley

THE MT VOID

Page 2

started in this direction this several years ago with B\_e\_a\_u\_t\_y, and Sheri Tepper did something along these lines recently with her B\_e\_a\_u\_t\_y as well. (The former is "Beauty and the Beast"; the latter is "Sleeping Beauty.") The best-known works of this sort, though, are in the "Fairy Tale" series. Jane Yolen's B\_r\_i\_a\_r\_R\_o\_s\_e, for example, takes the story of Sleeping Beauty and sets it in the Holocaust, Pamela Dean's T\_a\_m\_L\_i\_m is set on a college campus, and so on. This use of an old and mostly abandoned genre in new and unusual ways will form the basis of our discussion.

Nick Sauer adds the following: "I have not read T\_h\_o\_m\_a\_s\_t\_h\_e\_R\_h\_y\_m\_e\_r, which Evelyn tells me is the latest in the Fairy Tale series [it isn't; Evelyn was confused -ecl]. However, since the topic for the next meeting is fantasy in a modern vein, I will talk about one of the other books in the same series which covers this same topic. J\_a\_c\_k\_t\_h\_e\_G\_i\_a\_n\_t\_K\_i\_l\_l\_e\_r by Charles DeLint is an excellent modern fantasy story set in Ottawa. The lead character is Jackie who, after being dumped by her boyfriend in the first chapter, rather accidentally stumbles into the world of the fairy folk in modern day Canada. I tend to like stories that show a world that is all around us and, yet, invisible to most people. The idea is certainly not a new one (T\_h\_e\_y\_L\_i\_v\_e/E\_i\_g\_h\_t\_O'\_C\_l\_o\_c\_k\_i\_n\_t\_h\_e\_M\_o\_r\_n\_i\_n\_g being a more common example of the same idea) but, Charles DeLint does a spectacular job making the fairy world's presence in our own world believable. At the same time he keeps the giants and other fey folk characters very close to the way they were presented in the fairy tales that I was told/read as a child. In addition, he weaves all of this into a story that picks up from the first chapter and doesn't stop moving until the last one. Jack the Giant Killer is a very hard book to put down once you get started and, I highly recommend it as an example of how a modern fairy tale story should work. Now, if only I could find a copy of the sequel D\_r\_i\_n\_k\_D\_o\_w\_n\_t\_h\_e\_M\_o\_o\_n... [-ns]

2. Okay, I admit it. There isn't a whole lot of theme in common connecting the next two films at the Leeperhouse film fest. They are both about putting on shows, I guess. Both are good films (one I have been trying to work into a film fest for years). On Thursday, May 13, at 7 PM we will show:

THE GIG (1985) dir. by Frank D. Gilroy  
HEAR MY SONG (1992) dir. by Peter Chelsom

In T\_h\_e\_G\_i\_g, five New York City businessmen who get together once a week to play Dixieland jazz harbor a dream of going professional. Then they get a shot. A Catskills resort agrees to hire them. As the story begins, the five men are faced with actually achieving their dream and each reacts differently. When one drops out and a Black stranger is brought into the group, new tensions arise. T\_h\_e\_G\_i\_g is a very funny, perceptive, and entertaining film, very different from what would come from the Hollywood mill. Wayne

THE MT VOID

Page 3

Rogers and Cleavon Little star.

H\_e\_a\_r\_M\_y\_S\_o\_n\_g is the story of a music promoter about to be put out of business who thinks he can save the day if he can locate a famed Irish tenor who is a tax exile from England. Josef Locke fled England in 1958. (That part of the story is true, by the way--Josef Locke is real.) Adrian Dunbar stars as the irrepressible promoter. The story is up-beat, fast-paced, and for the most part unpredictable. A full review is included elsewhere in this issue. I do recommend both these films, neither of which got wide releases.

3. Lance Larsen reports that Marcia Chomitz just donated T\_w\_e\_n\_t\_i\_e\_t\_h\_C\_e\_n\_t\_u\_r\_y\_S\_c\_i\_e\_n\_c\_e-F\_i\_c\_t\_i\_o\_n\_W\_r\_i\_t\_e\_r\_s, 2nd ed. (edited by Curtis C. Smith, St. James Press, Chicago and London, 1986) to the SF Club Library. This is in the Lincroft branch; people at other locations should contact him via e-mail to borrow it. [-ecl]

4. Hugo Factoid of the Week: Robert Silverberg has been nominated 23 times (and won 3), Harlan Ellison has been nominated 17 (and won 7), and Poul Anderson has been nominated 16 times (and won 7). Next week: who has been nominated the most times in the fiction

categories \_w\_i\_t\_h\_o\_u\_t\_w\_i\_n\_n\_i\_n\_g? [-ecl]

Mark Leeper  
MT 3D-441 908-957-5619  
...mtgzfs3!leeper

### John W. Campbell Award Nominee Bibliographies

- Barbara Delaplace

- "No Other Choice" (Alternate Presidents)
- "Freedom" (Alternate Kennedys)
- "Wings" (Horse Fantastic)
- "Hidden Dragon" (Dragon Fantastic)

- "The Last Sphinx" (A\_C\_h\_r\_i\_s\_t\_m\_a\_s\_B\_e\_s\_t\_i\_a\_r\_y)
- "Black Ice" (A\_l\_a\_d\_d\_i\_n: M\_a\_s\_t\_e\_r\_o\_f\_t\_h\_e\_L\_a\_m\_p)
- "Lost Lamb" (W\_h\_a\_t\_d\_u\_n\_n\_i\_t\_s)

- Nicholas DiChario

- "The Power of Love" (F&\_S\_F Sep 1991)
- "Red Poppy" (S\_t\_a\_r\_s\_h\_o\_r\_e)
- "Forty at the Kiosk" (U\_n\_i\_v\_e\_r\_s\_e\_2)
- "The Winterberry" (A\_l\_t\_e\_r\_n\_a\_t\_e\_K\_e\_n\_n\_e\_d\_y\_s)
- "Fizz" (A\_l\_a\_d\_d\_i\_n: M\_a\_s\_t\_e\_r\_o\_f\_t\_h\_e\_L\_a\_m\_p)

- Holly Lisle

- F\_i\_r\_e\_i\_n\_t\_h\_e\_M\_i\_s\_t
- B\_o\_n\_e\_s\_o\_f\_t\_h\_e\_P\_a\_s\_t
- W\_h\_e\_n\_t\_h\_e\_B\_o\_u\_g\_h\_B\_r\_e\_a\_k\_s (with Mercedes Lackey)
- a novelette in the last collection of new Harold Shea stories

- Laura Resnick

- "We Are Not Amused" (A\_l\_t\_e\_r\_n\_a\_t\_e\_P\_r\_e\_s\_i\_d\_e\_n\_t\_s)
- "A Fleeting Wisp of Glory" (A\_l\_t\_e\_r\_n\_a\_t\_e\_K\_e\_n\_n\_e\_d\_y\_s)
- "No Room for the Unicorn" (H\_o\_r\_s\_e\_F\_a\_n\_t\_a\_s\_t\_i\_c)
- "Fluff, the Tragic Dragon" (D\_r\_a\_g\_o\_n\_F\_a\_n\_t\_a\_s\_t\_i\_c)
- (title unknown) (A\_C\_h\_r\_i\_s\_t\_m\_a\_s\_B\_e\_s\_t\_i\_a\_r\_y)
- "Yasmine" (A\_l\_a\_d\_d\_i\_n: M\_a\_s\_t\_e\_r\_o\_f\_t\_h\_e\_L\_a\_m\_p)
- (title unknown) (W\_h\_a\_t\_d\_u\_n\_n\_i\_t\_s)

- Carrie Richerson

- "A Dying Breed" (F&\_S\_F Oct/Nov 1992)

- Michelle Sagara

- I\_n\_t\_o\_t\_h\_e\_D\_a\_r\_k\_L\_a\_n\_d\_s
- C\_h\_i\_l\_d\_r\_e\_n\_o\_f\_t\_h\_e\_B\_l\_o\_o\_d
- "Birthknight" (A\_C\_h\_r\_i\_s\_t\_m\_a\_s\_B\_e\_s\_t\_i\_a\_r\_y)
- "Gifted" (A\_l\_a\_d\_d\_i\_n: M\_a\_s\_t\_e\_r\_o\_f\_t\_h\_e\_L\_a\_m\_p)
- (title unknown) (W\_h\_a\_t\_d\_u\_n\_n\_i\_t\_s)

SARAH CANARY by Karen Joy Fowler  
Zebra, ISBN 0-8217-4088-1, 1993, \$5.99.  
A book review by Mark R. Leeper  
Copyright 1993 Mark R. Leeper

There is a bookstore in Amherst, Massachusetts, which is, I am sure, not unlike bookstores in a lot of college towns. The store stocks books that as nearly as the managers can arrange apparently represent one consistent political viewpoint. In the store's repertoire you can learn just about all you want to know about that one viewpoint. But if you want to compare it with other ideas of people who do not ascribe to that viewpoint, you have to go elsewhere. It is not that I disagree with that viewpoint--politically it is close to my own--but as far as diversity of opinion, I find I do better at the average airport newsstand. Ironically, the store calls itself "Food for Thought." But it is sort of the literary equivalent of the "House of Toast." "Food for Thought" is a good name for a bookstore, but if I ran a bookstore with that name it would have D\_a\_s\_K\_a\_p\_i\_t\_a\_l and M\_e\_i\_n\_K\_a\_m\_p\_f, not because I agree with either, but because I don't. It would have Spinoza and Plato and Mishima. A store with that name should have Hawking and Velikovsky. It would have Jeremy Rifkin and Frank Lloyd Wright and Ludwig Wittgenstein and Marshall McLuhan. As food for thought, this place is pretty slim pickings particularly if you are not interested in their one social viewpoint, but they are smart enough to know that there is a ready market for books written in this narrow band of political thought. I guess people feel secure with reading matter that agrees with their own way of thinking. Authors writing from that viewpoint will have as ready a market as they would if they were writing in the "Star Trek" universe. I thought of "Food for Thought" many times when I was reading S\_a\_r\_a\_h\_C\_a\_n\_a\_r\_y. It was written for their market.

A nameless woman mysteriously shows up in a Chinese railroad labor camp in the Washington Territory in mid-winter 1873. The woman is dressed in black and speaks no intelligible tongue. If abandoned to the cold, she will surely die. Chin Ah Kim, a surprisingly erudite laborer, decides to adopt the woman in black, at least until he can get her to a place of safety. In grand adventure style, the simple trip to take Sarah Canary, as the woman comes to be called, to safety becomes a far greater adventure than Chin Ah Kim could have expected.

Superficially at least, S\_a\_r\_a\_h\_C\_a\_n\_a\_r\_y resembles H\_u\_c\_k\_l\_e\_b\_e\_r\_r\_y\_F\_i\_n\_n. We have a set of fugitives running across a stretch of America and while the travelers themselves are of some interest, really it is the backdrop, the portrait of the world of 1872 and 1873 in the Pacific Northwest, that is the focus of Fowler's attention. Most of what Fowler sees in this period is injustice and

ignorance. Undoubtedly that is not too far from the truth, but what our characters see is mostly a very 1990s view of the injustice. We see white male injustice against Chinese, Indians, blacks, and especially women, but Fowler never has a white woman being cruel to an Indian. Fowler is describing a world in which there are the oppressors and the oppressed. The oppressed all basically have sympathy for each other. And the choice of the oppressed seems to have come from a 1990s checklist: women, Chinese, blacks. Now, I cannot imagine that this not being a time of a tremendous reliance on animals and certainly there would have been no small amount of animal abuse that the characters would have seen on their journey. That is not where Fowler's sympathies lie, apparently, so no descriptions of animal abuse are mentioned. Fowler, on the other hand, has a good deal of interest in feminism and so, as a result, do all the 19th Century women in the book.

Not having a time machine or being able to read minds, it is for me impossible to tell you what was on most people's minds in the Washington Territory of the 1870s, but I certainly felt while I was reading this book that Fowler misrepresents the situation. She takes the attitudes of a very small number of women--the pioneers of the women's movement--and spreads them liberally over the minds of the women in this novel. My suspicion is that more women were concerned with the issue "Will there be food enough for my family this winter?" than "Don't I have the right to as much sexual pleasure as a man gets?" Does this sound more like an 1870s or a 1990s woman? Just worrying about sexual pleasure implies a much more affluent society, one like our own, than one like was present in Fowler's setting. While there may have been a few men who sat around like Fowler's men do and spat and complained about uppity women, far more were worried about issues like "Will there be food enough for my family this winter?" When you are scratching your existence out of the ground as much of the population of the Pacific Northwest were, trying to get enough food to eat, food and shelter are the major issues on both men's and women's minds. Sexual politics is a long way down on the list. At least that is my impression. And it is considerably different from Fowler's impression apparently. Fowler writes as if she knows the history of the women's movement and believes that is all that is necessary to understand the period. If the history we learned in schools is

indeed just white men's history, Fowler's history is certainly no broader or more inclusive. When she has a character say, "Someday we will learn that when one woman is wronged, we all are wronged," she is not writing in the 1870s I picture. That was probably a very rare sentiment in the 1870s. You would find far more women believing "Blood is thicker than water." (Actually I might question that even as a principle for the 1990s. Do I feel, for example, that when one New Jerseyite is wronged, we all are, or when one science fiction fan is wronged, we all are? Unless I was going to spread the sentiment to everybody, I am not sure it is an idea I would buy.)

Sarah Canary

May 1, 1993

Page 3

Time and again, Fowler's characters turn out to be warped just a bit out of the reality of the setting. Just about everybody in the novel seems to have an unrealistically broad knowledge of the world. Chin is a Chinese railroad worker laborer who knows not just about the folklore of China, but also of India. He speaks fluent English and German. It is eventually explained that he was, in fact, more high-born than the other laborers. But his views are as far from those of a high-born Cantonese of the time as they are from those of a Cantonese laborer.

Another character considers the possibility than Sarah Canary is a vampire, having read some LeFanu. Yes, it is possible that someone might have read about vampires, but it is very unlikely and such a person would know other creatures of folklore that they would be equally likely to choose. It is only since Bram Stoker wrote D\_r\_a\_c\_u\_l\_e that vampires have become so central in popular folklore. Perhaps a little more realistic is a self-styled scientist who is a font of amusing misinformation; some of it includes a sexist belief that women are more primitive than men. Fowler smugly pokes fun at all the strange and unscientific beliefs the man holds. Of course, Fowler comes from a time when reliable scientific knowledge is readily and cheaply available. It is easy for her to laugh at the misimpressions of people who have not had her opportunities.

However, my impressions of S\_a\_r\_a\_h\_C\_a\_n\_a\_r\_y are certainly not all negative. Fowler's prose style is actually what attracted me to this book in the first place, and it is what I liked best about the book. She has a short, clean writing style. She never lets the

writing get in the way of the story-telling. She tells a story that involves the reader quickly and has a plot that moves well. She has sprinkled in a good deal of historical detail, though not all of which I would rely on. For example, there was indeed historically a mechanical device that supposedly played chess (and which really was operated by a midget chess player inside), but she associated the device with P. T. Barnum. That is just not true.

Fowler does have one stylistic quirk. She mixes story chapters with chapters of historical background, usually with a didactic bent. But the story chapter headings are spelled out (like "Chapter Two"), while the historical essays are numbered separately with Roman numerals. Why? It is never clear.

\_ S \_ a \_ r \_ a \_ h \_ C \_ a \_ n \_ a \_ r \_ y is an enjoyable book to read, with interesting nuggets of history, but occasionally you want to ask Fowler her if she seriously believes this very weird and eccentric view of the period.

## HEAR MY SONG

A film review by Mark R. Leeper

Copyright 1991 Mark R. Leeper

Capsule review: A bunch of newcomers to feature filmmaking make a highly impressive debut in this very original and funny comedy about a young impresario and a legendary Irish singer. You may have to go some distance to find \_ H \_ e \_ a \_ r \_ M \_ y \_ S \_ o \_ n \_ g, but it is well worth seeking out. Rating: low +2 (-4 to +4).

\_ H \_ e \_ a \_ r \_ M \_ y \_ S \_ o \_ n \_ g is the first film directed by Peter Chelsom. It is based on a screenplay Chelsom co-authored with Adrian Dunbar, the

actor who plays the film's main character. It is a spectacular start for two major talents. British Chelsom is starting out with more talent than 90% of American directors and with a skill that it took Bill Forsyth two or three films to attain. I choose Forsyth because Chelsom and Forsyth are both British and each has a loving feel for the personalities of minor characters and local color.

H\_ e\_ a\_ r\_ M\_ y\_ S\_ o\_ n\_ g is constantly doing the unexpected. Only in the last ten minutes does the film get a bit sugary.

Mickey O'Neill (played by Dunbar) is a thirty-year-old concert promoter in an Irish neighborhood in England. He wants little more from life than to put on successful concerts and to woo his girlfriend Nancy. Tara Fitzgerald, who plays Nancy, has the sort of pristine beauty that Grace Kelly had. There is absolutely no need for the film to explain why Mickey is anxious to win Nancy. Mickey, however, is having problems, both with Nancy and with his promotions. He finds himself promoting sleazier and sleazier singers to ever-shrinking audiences. Then he manages to book a legendary Irish singer who has been a tax exile from England since 1958. That sparks unexpected events and a quest in Ireland.

Chelsom's style of story-telling is brisk and usually intelligent. Plot details are not overly explained. Some concentration is required and there is the feeling that the plot could take a right-angle turn at any moment. Unusual camera angles abound. Chelsom and Dunbar pack the film with comic situations and dialogue. Some mention should be made of the films only two recognizable stars. Top billing goes to Ned Beatty as a reclusive Irishman who could be the key to Mickey's success. His singing is one of the few negative touches as his singing voice--dubbed by Vernon Midgley--just does not seem to go with his speaking voice. David McCallum is largely wasted as a police inspector and as a heavy.

This is a genuinely funny comedy and well worth looking for. I rate this a low +2 on the -4 to +4 scale.