

Bibliomen part 1

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 28 Aug 2014

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Marc Aramini — 28 Aug 2014, 15:02

Bibliomen is a light-hearted collection of twenty-two character sketches of people associated with books in one way or another. Seaman (based on Neil Gaiman) and Captain Roy C. Mirk, Ba, Ma., PhD. were added in 1995. Many of the sketches begin in the past and go forward beyond their original publication date of 1984. Many of the names also form puns and allusions (which I may or may not catch — Gertrude S. “Spinning Jenny” Deplatta is based on Gertrude Stein, Peter O. Henry more obviously the rather shocking life of O. Henry). The commentary is here mixed with the individual summaries and entries.

In his forward, Wolfe quotes Emily Dickinson’s infamous, “There is no frigate like a book, to take us lands away.” He then says Emily met few of her fellow sailors over the course of her cloistered life, readers and bibliophiles Wolfe believes to be universally interesting, though some have been detestable. He ends his forward with an injunction to get on with things quickly from *The Tempest*: “Now belay all this. Heave on the plot line and hoist our paper sail. In the immortal words of William Shakespeare, ?Fall to?t, yarely, or we run ourselves aground — bestir, bestir!”

The sea and sailing recurs as a motif throughout; no doubt this is because of the opening simile, that of the book as a ship.

KIRK PATTERSON ARTHURS, Ph.D. (April 1 1960 -)

Born on April Fool’s day, Arthurs fakes through his academic career by composing academic books about an obscure British writer, John Glaskin. (*Mask and Coin: Grub Street in the 30s, Maze of Gray: John Glaskin Revisited, and Sweet Sword, High Heart: Love and War in the Fiction of John Glaskin*). When he gets a large inheritance in 1993, he retires from teaching and then later publishes *Fiction in Fancy Dress: John Glaskin et al Exposed* in which he reveals John Glaskin was entirely fictional. After a brief outcry, his last book is forgotten. He claims his primary motivation in faking Glaskin was to see if anyone would notice. He now lives in the South of France, “reported to be at work on a book on deep-sea fishing,” returning to the dominant maritime simile of *Bibliomen*. (The South of France will appear in Xavier McRidy’s entry and also possibly as the birth place of “Adam Poor” in the Island of Sark.)

The text says that Glaskin was a contemporary of Alroy Kear, which unscrambled reads Royal Rake (Edward VII’s nickname). Later, we get Glaskin’s fake autobiography, and, indeed, he was born in 1899 and went to London in 1911 — King Edward ruled from 1901-1910. (An autobiography emphasizing his moral character was published on King Edward VII called *Edward the Rake* by John Pearson in 1975, though whether this is at all related to the character of John Glaskin is nebulous. The sensationalism in revising or reevaluating history and character for academic trends might be under attack, such as the dramatic hyper-sexualized slant on Edward VII’s character presented by Pearson in real life.)

The name Kirk means “Church”, Patterson can mean “son of Patrick”, which implies patrician or noble. I suspect Arthurs is simply a pun on authors, but it could imply “king” or “man?” and “bear?”. (St. Patrick’s Church?). There are several Irish Catholic allusions throughout *Bibliomen* as well.

The obvious criticism of academia involves the artificiality of their entire careers. Whether the things they write about are “real” or not is conceptually irrelevant, and Dr. Arthurs ironically exposes himself as a fraud.

HOPKINS DALHOUSIE

This entry reads as science fiction — the confession of Hopkins Dalhousie’s killer, 00028956: his car. It begins, “Yes, I killed my owner — because I loved him, because I could not bear to give him up. If you conclude that I should be destroyed for that act, I cannot prevent you; but I ask you whether many of you have not done worse, though you are free.” It chronicles the success and failure of the writer Dalhousie and the gradual loss of all his possessions. Dalhousie works fourteen to sixteen hours a day, fruitlessly, and loses his wife and his house, pawning Proust for car oil, gas, a meal, and some paper. Dalhousie speaks to his car of all the things he has not yet done, and the car shows him all the roads it hasn’t yet been on. Eventually they go into the hills overlooking the city to see the lights, though the car has insufficient fuel to return. Dalhousie gets out and walks near the drop; the car claims he heard his master’s voice say, “You know what I want.” He runs Dalhousie off the cliff and lands on top of him, knowing that he could continue to drive and get help, but instead the car says “That I remained where I was for over an hour, until he no longer cried out. That I have never backed away from my duty, and that I did not do so then.”

There is of course the subtext that Dalhousie had mortgaged his car and wound up suffering and crying under his tire for an hour — perhaps the car couldn’t stand to be sold, creating a motive.

Hopkins implies “son or Hob” or renowned fame, but Dalhousie is primarily a place name. Both are names of prominent Universities.

This story criticizes the welfare system: “There was Government help enough a million idlers; but not for Hopkins Dalhousie, who worked night and day and had once paid a fortune in taxes.” Lurking in the background must be a metaphor that possessions can come to own us, too, though Wolfe is never that uninteresting and banal in his creation of these situations.

GERTRUDE S. “SPINNING JENNY” DEPLATTA (Aug 20, 1961 -)

This entry tells the story of Gertrude Susan Smith, who accepts a position as a typist in 1981 at WHRL radio station and is asked to fill in for a newscaster. In August of 1982, she subs for a DJ with a strained back. “Despite the proverb, it is not greatness, but rather the opportunity for it, that is thrust upon unprepared and indeed unconscious subjects.” She was told to speak over the beginning and end of the songs to prevent illegal taping, and advised that the back of albums might provide fruitful material. Gertrude reads a mishmash of album material, pronouncing her commentary “in a strained monotone and mingling it with non sequiturs concerning ozone alerts, temperature inversions, the health of her cat (named Jenny) and what would seem to have been album notes in a never-identified foreign language she pronounced as though it were English.”

The door was jammed by a fumbled record and it took 18 minutes for her to be removed,

consequently replaced by an organ recital taped at Wolf Trap (a national park dedicated to the performing arts in Virginia). By the next day, she has her own show and she becomes a national sensation, though people think her name is Jenny. She starts calling her cat Trudy. Her marriage to a pizza chef in November lasts only two days. A fan publishes a book of her tapes. When a musical band makes a song of it and Spinning Jenny attempts to speak over it in her usual style, it is "conjectured that she suffered a form of verbal overload, but this cannot be confirmed; she has refused psychiatric help."

She is stricken mute and uses a daisy wheel typewriter to work on her book, which she refuses to let anyone see, but insists will be done soon.

While her name is not truly Gertrude Stein, the nonsensical, kitchen sink approach to art that garners attention is a unique and bizarre trademark of Stein's composition style, and its sing song quality also lends it to the metaphor of a spinning record topped with random nonsense. Stein's voice is completely unique in literature. Deplatta assuming the name of her cat seems to be the inversion of personality and voice Stein used in writing **The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas**.

Clearly, the story makes fun of Stein's style to some degree and combines it with a rags to riches story in the musical world: random and meteoric rise to success, a fast lifestyle with a rapidly dissolved marriage, and a regression to practical insanity. In many ways Gertrude Deplatta comes to resemble the narrator of Wolfe's "My Book" by the end, with her random and meaningless technique for composition that actually drives her insane. Deplatta can mean "made of silver" (even though there is only one T and the husband Anthony is assuredly of Italian rather than Spanish descent — perhaps "of the plate" would be a more appropriate translation in light of her random fame as a disc jockey).

BERNARD A. FRENCH (September 9, 1933- August 19, 1985)

French is a publisher who wants to produce the largest coffee table book ever. He gives another character, photographer Kopman Goldfleas, his final assignment. When the giant books are delivered to French's office, his secretary Barbara Ward hears a loud sound "but assumed he had struck an author and did not investigate". No trace of him was found until 1986 when a bored janitor leafed through the book and found French pressed "between the Afterword and the Index. He is reputed to have discolored the paper." The boxed book become his coffin, and his epitaph reads "A Page at the Court of God".

The pun on "Page" will appear again in the story, and this is perhaps an original story of a man killed by his oversize book - it is difficult to determine if French is based on anyone in real life, though his aggressive publishing strategies might resonate with Bernard Geis, who brought sensationalism to the publishing world in recruiting celebrities to write and in promoting unknowns like Jacqueline Susan. There seems to be no relationship to Anatole France as far as I can tell. Indeed, Bernard French, entombed in a book in the most memorable image from **Bibliomen**, might be an entirely original creation, as are all the plot lines concerning his giant book and his publishing company, Cobb, Neil, and Sons.

Bernard means "brave as a bear", which gives it a vague etymological relationship to the name Arthurs.

MARY BEATRICE SMOOT FRIARLY, SPV (April 12, 1925-)

Beatrice Smoot Friarly is born Easter Sunday by the effort of her mother Martha to hold in the baby, but she was expecting a boy. Her mother raises her "like nothing on earth." At the age of

15 she appears weeping to Father John O'Murphy begging to be accepted as a postulant to a religious order. "Muttering that it would at least get her out of her mother's house, Father O'Murphy promised to see what he could do." A year later she joins the Sisters of Perpetual Vigilance, "an order of nuns intent upon saving their oil for the coming of the bridegroom."

Taking the name Mary, she teaches Fourth Grade at Saint Apollos the Persuasive (A real Catholic saint - despite the pagan name, mentioned in 1 Corinthians 3:16 as Paul's assistant). A mother gives her an eighty year old cookbook and her collection begins. One night she hears a knocking at her door, and she knows that the knocking will not wake her roommates, Sisters Bruno and Evangellica. A short dark man says "Shalom" at the door, and she replies in kind, at which point he steps across the threshold. He says he has come in part as an answer to her prayers, to be visited by "the least of Your messengers, Lord." He asks if he can smoke and begins to do so from his entire body, saying he has come because she has the greatest cookbook collection in the world, and that he needs help. [She also notes that he is Jewish from his circumcised state]. Sister Mary boasts that thanks to her collection she knows how manna was baked, and which broth simmered in the Cauldron of Cerridwen.

He whisks her to hell, where she finds herself looking eighteen and nude. She comments that she didn't know hell was so crowded, to which the Devil responds, "For people who don't like crowds, it's crowded. For people that do, lonely." They come across an expressionless man with red skin, who does not respond to any of the Devil's punishments.

When the devil asks if he should try Sulfuric Acid on the red man, "As if on cue, a dickens appeared. 'From Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the Chairman says so where is he?' the dickens announced. 'It's line seven. I should tell him out to lunch?'" [God is calling Lucifer here on phone line 7, and his assistant is asking if he should say he is out to lunch — in this "Jewish" stereotyped reality, God operates as a corporation or large partnership firm].

The devil says he has to go (to take God's call) and leaves in a puff of smoke, and Sister Mary tells the expressionless man, "He knows what I'm going to do, you know. He knows exactly what I'm going to do. I find that encouraging, exciting, and disturbing. The universe is not as we thought. — Or perhaps this is not the universe at all — Just a corner of a bad dream." She grabs his hand despite his concern that it will burn her, and crosses herself.

When she awakens, a tall and swarthy man appears in New Canaan "whom the people have decided is a Micmac Indian." He does neither work nor harm, and whistles when he sees Sister Mary. On summer nights "when lightning flashes in the west and black clouds gather over the Hoosac Hills, she joins Man-on-Fire, the Micman Indian — and talks with him in tones too low to be overheard." She says she is preparing a volume of Indian recipes.

This one blends the classic horror idea of temptation of the devout with cook books. Martha and Mary, the mother and daughter in this story, of course echo the biblical story of the sisters found in the Gospel of Luke in which Martha prepared food and Mary sat and listened to Jesus. Here, Mary is preparing the recipes and collecting cook books without doing any cooking. The devil here quotes Jesus from Luke 10 and calls him a "loose liver" - someone who lives a rather dissolute life - when he says "I watched Satan fall from the sky like lightning." When the dickens (another word for devil) appears in the most confusing part of the story, the scripture referenced is either Exodus 3:6 or Acts 3:13. If it is the later reference, this is where Jesus asserts that Jehovah is a God of the dead, which would make sense in light of Man-on-Fire's presence in hell.

While there is a Hoosac Hill in New Hampshire, there is a rather famous reputedly haunted tunnel in the Hoosac Mountain Range in Massachusetts (Sister Mary is born in New Canaan

Massachusetts) called “The Bloody Pit” in which 193 workers were killed and at least one foreman strangled to death. Many of the deaths involved the use of nitroglycerin and other explosives in its construction.

Since her name is Sister Mary and her mother is Martha, of the Magdalene family, I feel perhaps there is a faint reference to Sister Magdalena of the Cross, who ascribed most of her powers to the intercession of demons rather than angelic forces before repenting. This story is more innocuous — but it does show how the demons work with God, almost under his supervision.

Mary can mean “bitter”, “rebellion”, or even a “wished for child.” Beatrice means “voyager”, Smoot is a name for someone who could afford rich foods or sold fat or lard. It seems that her last name implies “like a Friar”. These seem to relate to the story.

Who is Man-on-Fire? Is he related to the historical explosive deaths in the Hoosac Tunnel? While the Sisters of Perpetual Adoration are a real order, the Sisters of Perpetual Vigilance seem to be fictional.

SIR GABRIEL (503 -February 2, 1987)

Born at Carcassonne,, Sir Gabriel grows up to serve King Arthur and lived a heroic life before Arthur's defeat and death at Camlan. He wandered aimlessly until he picked up a book in a ruined castle near Glastonbury, and became so absorbed that he forgot all about his life and entered a “necrotic” state until a sour faced woman touched him on the shoulder. She tells him he is her husband, Harry Appledorf. His golden aura disappears and he finds himself living in a small apartment in St. Louis. He knows that he was once Sir Gabriel, “and now and again he returns to the book he found himself holding at the time his wife tapped his shoulder. It was this one.” He dies as Harry Appledorf.

Certainly here is an inversion of *Don Quixote* — a knight picks up a book in Glastonberry and becomes Harry Appledorf. While this plays with the ability of a book to serve as a kind of wish fulfillment, it has been inverted — in the midst of despair Sir Gabriel escapes to an ordinary life far removed from the world of King Arthur. Which is real doesn't truly matter, as the artificiality and metatextual nature of *Bibliomaniacs* is directly invoked.

Harry means “ruler” and Appledorf probably means “cottage or village of apples” or something close to it. Gabriel means “strong man of God.”

Usually, the character of low mimesis dreams of having some power and grasping towards a reality where mythic or high mimesis is possible — here, the character of mythic proportions in his depression transforms into an ordinary, hen-pecked man.

JOHN GLASKIN (1899-)

Here we receive the fictional biography of the writer John Glaskin. He was born at Saltburn-by-the-Sea in the North Riding in 1899. He moved to London and published in *The Boys Own Weekly, The Yellow Book* (which would have been out of print after 1897) and *New Witness* (which was edited by GK Chesterton).

He is friends with Virginia and Leonard Woolf until a year after her suicide, “when Leonard offered to 'dig up a girl for him, too.’” [Virginia Woolf was cremated, as was Leonard, and their ashes buried under an elm tree — shades of *Peace*?]

Shaw hated him as a “regular Don Juan” [referencing the third act of *Man and Superman*,

often called "Don Juan in Hell", where the Devil and Don Juan have a philosophical debate]. The story states Gissing treasured him for counseling him not to marry, but it is unclear if this refers to George Gissing (who died in 1903 and had turbulent relationships with women) or his son (who did not seem to have marital problems? though both were writers.) In the chronology of *Bibliomaniacs* it must be the son, but there are several indications that dates are being tampered with in *Bibliomaniacs* as jokes by Gold (such as *The Yellow Book* being out of print by the time Glaskin went to London). The textual jokes that Glaskin was always trying to match H.G. Wells up with girls is of course unnecessary: in real life Wells seemed to have many affairs with his wife's consent in a fairly non-traditional lifestyle.

Hemingway likes Glaskin, "believing he had thrown their fight." In Africa, Glaskin lurks in a leopard skin on Mt. Kilimanjaro and Hemingway fires on him. His best known books are *Sixpence for Buns*, *Brideshead*, and *You Can't Go Home at All*.

"Having gained literary immortality, Glaskin can never die. He presently lives in Kent under the name of Saunders, where he keeps bees and vice versa." [Edward Saunders, an English entomologist, wrote, among other books, *Wild Bees, Wasps and Ants and Other Stinging Insects*, though he died in 1910.]

The magazines Glaskin supposedly published in were ridiculously diverse — a boy's magazine, a conservative religious one, and an avant-garde one reputed to be fairly amoral. His biography is sensationally eclectic and obviously fabricated, and this entry pokes fun at the sensationalist biography of the famous.

Why is Glaskin equated with Saunders?

KOPMAN GOLDFLEAS (May 1, 1940 — January 7, 1987)

Kopman Goldfleas works as a retail clerk in a camera store before becoming a self-trained photographer. After 1967, he supported himself with free-lance photography. In 1980, Bernard A. French commissioned him to photograph Michelangelo's *Aphrodite Preparing to Seduce Paris* in San Benito, Italy. He finds that the village priest had painted over it in white because it was obscene.

Goldfleas says he needs to take a photo as proof, but takes three days to shoot. When he returns, he locks himself in his darkroom to develop the photographs because "he believed Michelangelo's painting could be 'brought up' by optical methods, much as palimpsestic writing is made to appear on the parchment from which it has been removed. Eventually he stops eating the vitamins and Necco wafers his family shoves under the door, and his son finds him dead. His son Claude believes he fell for the image of Aphrodite and would not leave her or surrender the image to his publisher. Claude destroyed the negatives, feeling that Aphrodite was "overdeveloped."

Besides dealing with photography as an obsessive art, we see the subjectivity of taste: obscene and worthy of suppression to one, ideal and worthy of obsession to a second, and too voluptuous to the final observer? three different reactions to one image. The painting is fictional, though it harkens back to some of Gold's talk of the Venus de Milo in *Peace*, and just as he posits an apple in hand, Aphrodite is here seducing Paris for the gift of an apple of discord.

Kopman is a name for a clever person, "head man". Claude means "lame".

PETER O. HENRY (January 22, 1965 — November 2, 1987)

His mother tells stories of how at four years old Peter was entertaining crowds of older children. Some of his crayon efforts "are at least good enough to earn the condemnation of most college writing workshops."

He left school at fourteen and worked for a time at an automobile dealership, writing "Two Cigarettes" and "A Black Goy". He was arrested for burglary in 1981 and maintained his innocence, jailed for three years. He moved to New Jersey where he composed his stories on the word processor at the public library. Working in textiles, he lost all four fingers of his right hand in 1986 and drew workman's compensation. His only published work was "Dustywings" in *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* before being admitted to a hospital for pneumonia, of which he died. One of his stories supposedly served as the basis for Lothar Schmidt's opera "The Short Nosed Doll." (Lothar Schmid was a famous chess player in real life who was reputed to own the largest collection of books on chess in the world — he was the arbiter between Bobby Fischer and Boris Spassky in 1972).

This entry ties together some of the biographical facts from the life of O. Henry, though some sound like the stories of Jesus as a child amazing the wise men at the temple and his peers. The author O. Henry was at one point accused of embezzlement by a bank at which he worked and was eventually arrested. He fled to New Orleans and then Honduras by changing trains right before his trial. He served only three years (just as Peter O. Henry did).

While Peter O. Henry has to type at the library, I am unsure which author this references — Bradbury famously wrote many of his most enduring works on just such a public typewriter.

Here we have the exploration of the artist only recognized long after his death. Of course the name Peter means "rock or stone".