

Short Story 132*: The Monday Man

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Marc Aramini — 29 Apr 2015, 05:15

#THE MONDAY MAN

"The Monday Man" first appeared in the *Readercon 3 Anthology* in 1990 and has been collected in *Innocents Aboard*.

#Summary

Once again, a narrator named Gene tells us of a strange event in reality otherwise much like our own contemporary one. The story starts, "I knew John Genaro more than forty years, I suppose, if you want to go all the way back to the beginning." They played softball together when "the old Harry S Truman School split the tracks." Gene went off to law school and forgot about John, but ran into him again when he returned to work in a very small law office where he handles petty cases and writes wills for poor families. His father had lost his money and Gene says, "It killed him, and that killed Mom; but nothing had killed me yet."

Gene says he took all the criminal cases he could, and tried to shake down John, who was a police officer, but found out he couldn't: "I recall thinking it might be because he wasn't married." They renew their friendship and go hunting, mostly rabbits and pheasants, but Gene can never get John to go fishing with him: "I never even got him to get a line wet; before he died he told me why. Now that I'm close to going myself, I think I ought to pass his story along. You won't believe it, but perhaps you'll remember it just the same. If only when it's too late."

When Gene was still in law school, John was a rookie, and he claims, "it hit me harder than anything has since, though I've had a partner shot down beside me, and I was the one that opened the box they'd put the Rothman girl in. Know what a Monday man is, Gene?"

Before the laundromats and driers were widespread, people would steal clothes off the line, and Monday was when most of the washing was hung out. "Sometimes they were the kind that steals women's underwear to keep - there's something wrong with those - but mostly they'd take anything that wasn't too worn, and wear it themselves or sell it."

One day on patrol, A woman yelled that her husband's overalls had been stolen, and John chased the small man (saying that in those days, before cops patrolled in cars, they were supposed to know everyone on their beat, but he did not recognize the Monday man.) He lost him, but managed to find out where he went through a child who had been in trouble for vandalism (and who, as John told this to Gene, later worked in the Assembly).

"Anyway the kid pointed out the place. These days it'd be full of addicts, but back then you didn't see so much of that." He goes up to the fourth floor and hears the man moving around upstairs, on the fifth and top floor. John kicked down a door to find the man just looking at him with the overalls still in his hand. He approached him and grabbed him by the sleeve of his jacket, commenting to Gene, "That was what saved me, even though I didn't know it then."

John snapped handcuffs over both of their wrists and pulled the Monday Man a few steps down, before being pulled right off his feet and being dragged back up the landing. John then rapped him on the head, ordering him to stop, pulled back down the stairs, surprised that a man as small as this one could resist him. He finally punched the man hard right on the jaw.

His fist stuck to the man's jaw: "You ever touch a piece of bare metal that's been in the freezer? It was just like that, except he didn't feel cold." He compares it to Krazy Glue, which wasn't around then [it would have been marketed by the late 50s as Super Glue]. At this point, with his hand stuck to the face, he noticed that there were only little black depressions in the man's face rather than real nostrils, and that his eyes also lacked depth. John claims, "it was ... like he was a dummy, like they have in department stores. Only I've never seen one half as good as he was."

Pulling away with one hand stuck and the other cuffed to the Monday man, John managed to get him down the stairs and out the front door. He screamed for help but no one was willing to aid a cop: "I could hear windows banging shut and people hustling to get off the street. Then he dragged me back inside the building."

He kicked at the man's feet before realizing his legs weren't really holding him up: "He was like one of those bass lures you're always bragging about - they wiggle a lot when they go through the water, but it isn't the wiggle that makes 'em go." John managed to get the handcuff key with his teeth from his watch pocket, and released the handcuff.

"This time the door that I'd thought probably belonged to a closet was standing wide open, but there wasn't a closet in back of it - it was as black as an alderman's heart." At this point in his story, John sees that

Gene doesn't believe him, and says he was done drinking anyway.

After Gene says that the story has a lot that needs to be considered, John states he has been thinking about it for twenty-eight years, and that he believes there was someone inside the closet, "on the other side of the dark. ... I couldn't make him out, but I could feel him just like you can feel death at the scene of a murder. I call him the Fisherman."

He explains why: when a fisherman wants to catch something, he uses something like small chunks of wood formed to resemble a bug, frog, or fish with a hidden hook so the prey cannot let go once it has taken the bait.

John says that he was being reeled in, and he managed to make a cavalry draw with his left hand since he wore a cross draw then (grabbing the handle on his left side with his palm facing away from his hip and into the handle of the gun). He shot the Monday man three times and also fired into the closet, then finally managed to tear his hand free from the thing's face - the Fisherman did not realize the handcuffs were not a secure attachment to his prey.

"I've been thinking about that Fisherman, on and off, ever since it happened. That's why I won't fish, and why I always look real carefully at everybody I run into, which is what got me my captain's bars. I'm not too worried about meeting another lure like the Monday man - I'd know one of those the minute I laid eyes on it.

"But I keep wondering whether the Fisherman ever uses live bait."

##Commentary

Of this story, Wolfe says, "'The Monday Man' refers, of course, to those sad and frightening men

who steal women's underwear. When I was growing up no one had clothes dryers, and Monday men were a perennial problem for my poor mother." This rather domestic problem is here given a kind of primordial treatment filled with dread - an inexplicable and strange lure which might lead to consumption, extinction, or even damnation. Perhaps "The Monday Man" can be viewed in purely Freudian symbols, in its personification of a clothing thief's semblance as something which also tries to snatch away humanity. However, there does not seem to be much subtext, save for the indication that this reality is ever so slightly different than ours - it seems financial stability is extremely hard to come by, and that this Gene has become a poor, small time lawyer rather than a writer. However, judging from the set up of the later story, "The Card", in which a writer is told of a crossing over between probable realities, also by a policeman, the pattern of the story is one which we can see refracted and diffused several times through Wolfe's more mimetic fiction. One question we might ask is how far after the Great Depression are these events occurring? Certainly the late 1950s seems a possibility, though it could certainly be earlier.

Perhaps with the sense that there is not much subtext to "The Monday Man", I wanted to try something slightly different for this entry. "The Monday Man" seems to have been composed at a crucial time in Wolfe's career, when he had retired from editing and working with engineering concepts all the time, and began instead to write more fantasy and horror, producing far less SF than during the 1960s and 1970s. Certainly "The Monday Men" appears to be an overt horror story of the eldritch, exploring something which wants humanity for some unknowable purpose - representing a trap from which there is no return. the final line is paranoia inducing - would this live bait actually be something like a servant of the darkness, or simply someone pinned like a worm on a hook, wriggling to escape the torture?

It occurred to me as I looked over this story that Wolfe's short stories up until the late 1980s where by and large either science fiction or a kind of urban fantasy similar to fairly realistic *Twilight Zone* episodes where just one or two things seem "off" from normal reality. His obvious fantasy horror stories, influenced by Lovecraft and Clark Ashton Smith, had been written fairly early in his career: "The Grave Secret" and "The Dead Man" really stand out in this regard. Then, for much of his career in the 1970s and 1980s, if he wasn't writing science fiction, his stories seemed *almost but not quite* completely realistic, like "The Island of Doctor Death and Other Stories", "Against the Lafayette Escadrille", or even "Sweet Forest Maid", "Tarzan of the Grapes", and "Beech Hill" - all composed in such a way that they were only in the most subjective manner classifiable as "fantasy" - a remnant of the unexplainable and the bizarre lingered in their ontogeny, often in the form of subjective or distorted perceptions somehow entering reality, but there is never a glimpse at the kind of terrible fantastic evil that would be a matter of course in a Lovecraft story - the type of horror that we begin to see starting to proliferate throughout Wolfe's writing in the late 1980s. Thus, "The Monday Man" represents a turning to something intrinsically and innately unknowable, the very different but equally important influence of the horror genre in general and of Kafka specifically in Wolfe, allowing paranoia and neurosis to walk hand in hand with fantasy and even contemporary realism (one of Wolfe's most haunting, bizarre stories hides under the rather innocuous, realistic title "Houston, 1943".)

"The Monday Man" marks a departure into this urban horror, in a way that seems to congeal naturally with many of Wolfe's other stories of a reality right next door to ours. He employs the identical double narrative strategy that we will also see in "The Card" and "A Fish Story": a stand in for our author is told a story by another, who has experienced something which cannot be easily explained away. However, it seems that at this point in Wolfe's career that his interest in genuine horror exploded. "The Friendship Light", "The Game in the Pope's Head", "The Haunted Boardinghouse", "Queen of the Night", and "Black Shoes" are all disturbing and horrific stories quite unlike the type of writing Wolfe had done earlier in his career, where the terror and

the unravelling of the actual representational nature of Wolfe's work becomes increasingly exposed to view, and "The Monday Man" seems a key link between his religious supernatural works set in contemporary times (for example, "How the Bishop Sailed to Inniskeen", "The Arimasian Legacy", or "Procreation") as his writing transitions to all of these true horror stories. Our narrator here is a subtly altered version of Gene, something which may or may not be the case in his more religious "self-narrated" stories. The interesting thing about "The Monday Man" is how closely it resembles the sentiment of the modern religious stories Wolfe had composed (or would come to compose). This story is a mirror to the later "The Card", even down to Gene relating the story of a policeman acquaintance who tells his story second hand.

Why does Wolfe like to employ the second hand first person narrative in stories in which a writer or a man named Gene is the first person storyteller? What effect does this have on our interpretive task besides producing a kind of distance from its bizarre nature or the fear it would produce?

Since there does not seem to be much interpretive work to do on this particular story, I thought it would be interesting to place some of Wolfe's famous stories in their primary "types" - while some can flit between one or the other category, many of them are definitely of the same type - for example, the paranoid transformation and infection of "Lief in the Wind" has much the same feel as "Prize Crew", "Alien Stones", and "The Other Dead Man", just as the eschatological feel of "King Rat" makes it a spiritual successor to "The Hero as Werewolf". While there are probably other suitable names for these categories, and perhaps even several others, I think these are fairly descriptive catch alls:

Urban Fairy Stories

"The Changeling"

"A Cabin on the Coast"

"The Nebraskan and the Nereid"

"The Giant"

Realism or Near Future SF

"Paul's Treehouse"

"The Peace Spy"

"Viewpoint"

"Eyebem"

"Of Relays and Roses"

"Hour of Trust"

"Cherry Jubilee"

"How the Whip Came Back"

Alternate Histories

"Donovan Sent Us"

"How I Lost the Second World War and Helped Turn Back the German Invasion"

Personal or Religious Experiences

"The Card"

"A Fish Story"

"How the Bishop Sailed to Inniskeen"

"Procreation"

"The Arimasian Legacy" (though the spiritual world is getting a little horrific, there)

Portraits of Psychological Abnormalities, Possibly Supernatural "Redbeard" "Monster"

"Innocent" "Why I Was Hanged" "Melting"

Parasitic, Transformative, or Insane SF Stories, (often involving ships) "Thou Spark of Blood"

"Silhouette"

Fifth Head of Cerberus

"Lief in the Wind"

"Civis Laputus Sum"

"When I Was Ming the Merciless"

"Prize Crew"

"Alien Stones"

"Many Mansions"

"Talk of Mandrakes"

Apocalyptic Stories

Book of the New Sun

"King Rat"

"The Hero as Werwolf"

"Beautyland"

"One Two Three For Me"

"Mute"

Allegories

"Redwood Coast Roamer/Mathoms from the Time Closet"

"The God and His Man"

"To the Dark Tower Came"

"A Criminal Proceeding"

"Love, Among the Corridors"

Horror

"The Monday Man"

"Kevin Malone"

"Queen of the Night"

"A Traveler in Desert Lands"

"Lukora"

"Black Shoes"

A special subset here might be called *Perspectives of the Dead*, which could possibly include

Peace, "Checking Out", "The Dead Man", and others.

Dog Stories

"Rattler"

"Calamity Warps"

"Dog of the Drops"

"Unrequited Love"

Pastiche and Humor

"Our Neighbor by David Copperfield"

"Slaves of Silver"

"Planetarium in Orbit"

"How I Got Three Zip Codes"

"A Walking Tour of the Shambles"

Solstice or Christmas Stories

"At The Point of Capricorn"

"The Boy Who Hooked the Sun"
"Christmas Inn"
"La Befana"
"No Planets Strike"
"War Beneath the Tree"

Fantasy
Wizard Knight
Soldier of the Mist
"The Green Rabbit from S'Rian"
"Under Hill"

Of course there are many other ways to categorize his stories (such as *Island*, *Dickens*, or *Light in the Sky* stories) but Wolfe's tendencies to repeat certain thematic patterns in stories of a similar type really jump out.

##Literary allusions

I have already mentioned the feeling of eldritch dread that Lovecraft and other early horror and supernatural writers produced, from Poe on down. The Fisherman in some small way does remind me of the demon-like being awakened and seeking to consume from behind a portal in one of Vance's *Dying Earth* tales, though the Fisherman is quite generic enough to represent any kind of supernatural temptation or damnation.

##Names

-*John Genaro*- (although in this reality John Genaro is a policeman, in ours, it was also the name of a prominent member of the Dallas crime family who died in 1954). The name Genaro is derived from the Roman Januarius, meaning "January" in Latin. The name of the month may derive from the Roman god Janus. Saint Januarius, the patron saint of Naples, was a 4th century bishop who was beheaded during Christian persecutions, but Janus is the two faced god of gates, doors, and endings who looks both to the future and the past- what would happen if John Genaro was cast through that door into the clutches of the Fisherman? Would he serve as live bait or simply face consumption?