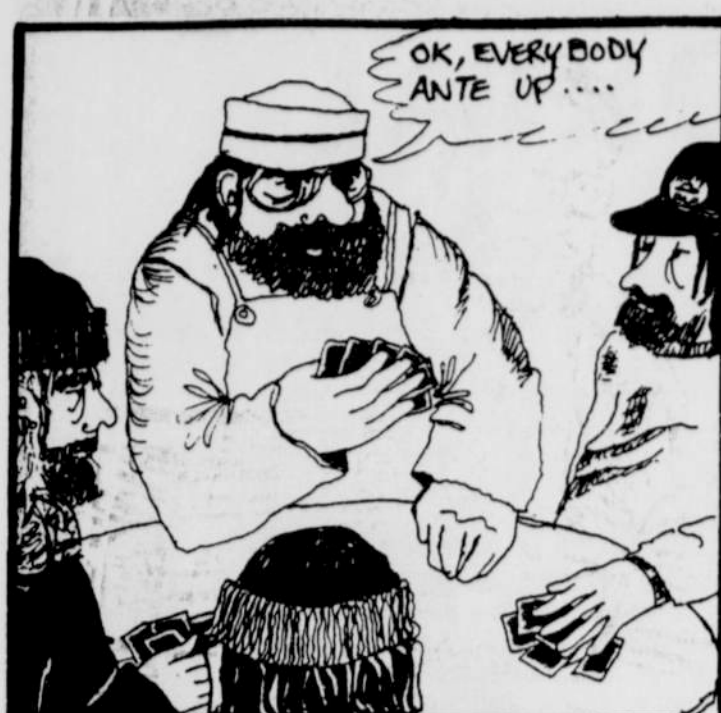




SHE SAID

It is not the time to talk of politics and Picasso, your next novel or the weather in old Mexico, but of what are we going to eat today and how we're going to pay the rent next Monday.

'MICHAEL MARSH AT LEISURE' BY D. BREWER (GILMORE GAZETTE, 1981)

PAPERBACK DOSTOEVSKY

When Jim Thompson died in 1977, not one of his 29 novels was in print in this country. He began writing when he was 14 but it was not until 1941 at the age of 35 (and had been married for 10 years with 3 children to support) that he made a decision that should have changed his life.

As the story goes, Thompson went to New York and talked a publisher into giving him a subsidy and a typewriter with the promise of a forthcoming book. Two months later, *Now & On Earth*, his first novel, was delivered. Two more books followed. All three were published in hardcover. None of them sold. They were the last Thompson hardcovers published during his life.

What followed was *Cropper's Cabin* in 1952, the first in a long line of original paperbacks. At this time original paperbacks, with the exception of a few, were crime stories: crime stories with the standard slash & trash cover art that promised sex and violence and delivered no sex and usually 2nd-rate violence. Paperbacks were the low-rent district of the book business, the side street where the property was merely maintained and no improvements were expected. Cover prices were 25 to 35 cents, depending on the number of pages. The only advertising was by word of mouth. Critics and reviewers ignored them.

The format for crime stories quickly became a standardized format. The protagonist was a generally a hero type of unusual stature, who would somehow get mixed up in a crime, preferably a murder. Over a period of pages, our hero would solve the crime and probably become romantically involved, if not sexually, with the woman in the case. In the end, no matter how much muck our hero has had to wade through, he somehow transcends it all because justice, as blind as she is, has been served.

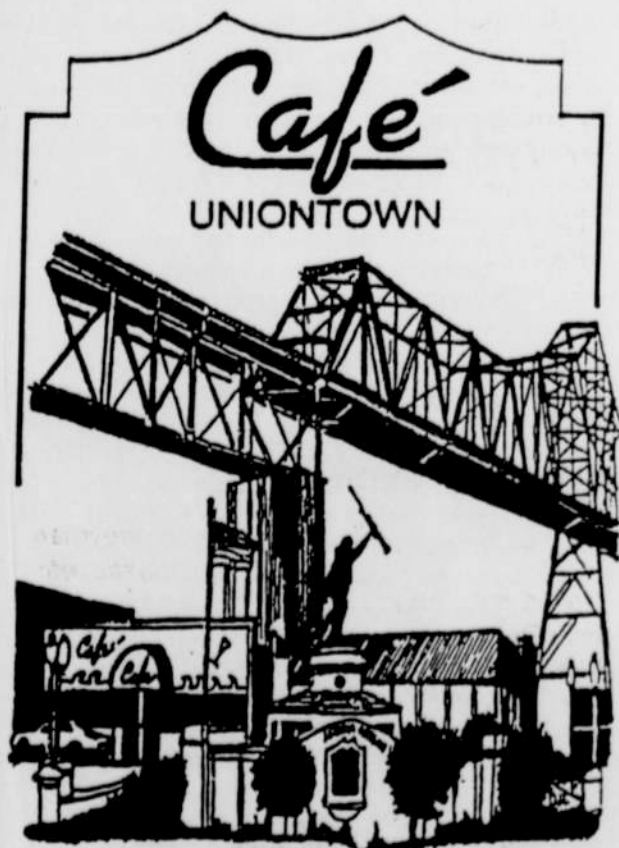
Thompson did not follow the format.

For openers, there are no heroes in Thompson's stories. The protagonists are usually losers; the door-to-door salesman, the 3rd-rate con-man who has never made a decent score, or the hotel night clerk who is about to lose his job.

There are always hotels in Thompson's stories. They are either transient or resident hotels; they are "the kind of place that if they don't let you spit on the floor at home, you could go there and do it." The hotels are focal points, places where the homeless and the hopeless drift to and then try to escape from, yet there is no real escape. Thompson's world is like one gigantic cheap hotel.

Geoffrey O'Brien called Jim Thompson the dimestore Dostoevsky. This is a fairly apt title. In Thompson, there is all the darkness of Dostoevsky blended in a heavy mix of the wonderful world of mid-America and served in a dirty cola glass across a cracked countertop at the corner drugstore. This is the America of the postwar '40s and '50s, a time of growth when Ronald Reagan worked for GE and touted the "progress was/is our most important product" on black&white TV every Sunday evening. Superficially it was a bright world of sunshine and happy days; high gloss and veneer were popular. Thompson knew how thin the veneer was, how quickly the gloss would dull and that the brighter the sunshine, the harsher the shadows. It somehow seems fitting that his books would be mass marketed at a quarter apiece with pornographic covers and sold in truck stops.

~GILMORE GAZETTE, Issue 22 (1987)



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THE DARK MAN

after K.E. Rantala*

Who is the dark man.
Where did he come from.
Why do his hands tremble
when slicing bread.
Is gray his better color,
dead meat his favorite dish.

And why when
looking in the mirror,
he turns off the lights,
and closes his eyes.

(*K.E. Rantala is collecting a
retrospective of Marsh's work.)

FOR K.E.R.

There is a woman
in the north
carving totems
in small wood.
Her knife moves
making cuts
years before this time.
Pieces of dry wood
Indian and Finnish
in nature with
an influence
of drunken Irish
scarring their surface.
She moves her scalpel
like a pen putting
words on paper,
pieces of small paper
she sends me
every now and then.
Words that help
keep us alive.

X-MASS

In the 2nd week
of December
of any year
and armed
with the
knowledge
that everything
changes and
that nothing
is ever quite
the way
it used
to be

The seasonal
music comes
across as
a traditional
attempt
to relive
the past.

But it
only makes
suicide seem
a viable
alternative.

NOTES ON KRAPP

Dec. 2, 1982, Newport, Oregon

The Whale's Tale is crowded, almost too crowded for comfort, and at times like this I wish J. wouldn't carry her .357 magnum in her purse. It's too much of a piece and too bulky for any kind of inside work. Have to give the cops credit for adopting the .38 snubnose way back when.

There's a raised area in one corner with furniture/props, and now Michael McCusker.

McCusker begins messing around, fiddling as if he was undecided when to begin. Eating a banana and throwing the peel on the floor, picking it up, fumbling with a desk, and on. He picks up a stenographer's notepad and fumbles with it as only a journalist without a pen will do.

McCusker as Krapp (or as McCusker) begins something of a disgruntled monologue, somewhat short: he fumbles again (fumbling with a reel-to-reel tape recorder, c 1950s) and he and the audience begin to listen to a tape.

"Mother at rest at last," says McCusker's recorded voice. Beckett by way of Camus. "The black ball...." the tape continues and Beckett as unreasoning as he is, takes the set, except McCusker can't help ad-libbing ("Should have got a cassette"), not uncommon for writers masquerading as actors.

Krapp's name (pronounced with a short a) is obviously intentional and Beckett "live" performed is enough to make one regret a diseased liver. I don't believe anyone has bothered to accuse Beckett of being entertaining.

McCusker's role as an actor is more interesting than the character he plays, although he seems quite comfortable in the role of Krapp.

Krapp finishes and exits while I'm scribbling notes. I've missed the end of *Krapp's Last Tape*. Having read Beckett I don't feel as if I've been denied much.

A short break and rearrangement of scenery while I write in my notes such things as "Working on nothing important now," and "Just deal with the time creeping along like cigar smoke across a tabletop," and I know I'm in trouble. *Railroad Women* (by Helen Ratcliffe, featuring Helen Patti, Issa Hessel and Ann Tracy) is excellent and I wonder why women hate their daughters, is it so simple that they see themselves as 20 years younger? Incredibly funny lines (about a man with warts, salt & pepper shakers, etc.) are spoken with uncommon ease.

J. tells me later that she was entertained, had not expected to be, and that the players were surprisingly good. She tells me, say something good about those girls — *Girls!* J. shows her age at the oddest times.

~NCTE, Dec. 10, 1982

THE EGYPTIAN MERCENARY ARMY

BY JOHN PAUL BARRETT

There are people we meet in this life whose personalities stand out so profoundly as to render them unforgettable long after their physical bodies are gone. We tell stories about them, invent myths...and sometimes when we're alone, we recall parts of conversations we've had with them. Michael Marsh was one of those persons; not necessarily because he was "larger than life," but perhaps because he was simply larger than his own life, which ended May 22, 1991.

One afternoon Michael Marsh and a half-dozen other Reuben's 5 regulars were sitting at a table, drinking, telling tales and laughing. One of the group was Marsh's close friend the writer and poet Arthur Honeyman, who has (along with a brilliant mind) cerebral palsy, which causes his body to spasm and makes his speech practical only after editing and only after some exposure and patience on the part of the listener.

All at the table knew one another well; except one, a somewhat drunken fellow who had apparently sat uninvited at the table and was a bit obnoxious, though apparently tolerable in a tavern context — to a point.

Art Honeyman was attempting to get a few words out, when the undesirable visitor interrupted Art by turning to Marsh and saying, "What's wrong with him?"

At this point in my mind's eye I can clearly picture Marsh's thick eyebrows narrowing. The man's rudeness and downright stupidity in not directing his question to Art himself was clearly unforgivable.

I see Marsh leaning back in his chair, taking a major slug of red (death) wine, adjusting his large dark beard, and then beginning the epic tale of how the soldier of fortune Arthur Honeyman had sustained and miraculously survived an endless litany of grave wounds and injuries while serving as a combat operative, mostly with the Egyptian Mercenary Army.

Marsh told about Art's Special Forces training with the Rangers; how he had been a Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol LURP, a Green Beret, and a member of the Underwater Demolition Team (Frogman, SEAL, etc.). He related in great detail the saga of how Art had been blown apart by a grenade and run over by a tank in the desert during a brief stint with the

French Foreign Legion, as well as how Art the Assassin had also been shot, tortured and tossed from an airplane, all in the mercenary service of the Egyptians, mostly...and on and on and on and on Marsh spun the tale, like Rumpelstiltskin spinning gold — for all but one, the Rube, now stunned and reeling, overwhelmed.

The others were dying as they choked to hold back laughter while Marsh unreeled the never-ending story, straight faced, possessed with the intensity of a fanatic, a warrior in the heat of battle.

And further yet the epic narrative juggernaut rumbled. I imagine Marsh's diabolically grinning face red with bloodlust and his eyes wide.

Art was spasticating more than ever from the laughter. The Rube must have thought he was having some sort of fit — which he was, as uncontrollable tears of laughter and saliva rolled down his ecstatic face.

I've often imagined how it must have felt to have been Art under those circumstances, how I might have felt about Michael Marsh as I listened to him telling some fool a preposterous and hilarious story of how I came to be the way I am.

The story ended when the boneheaded interloper got up and wandered mumbling out the door, numbed into senseless submission by Marsh's flamethrower onslaught of sheer spontaneous storytelling ability to create a story which survives him.

So he died a few years ago, leaving some of us (and we are legion) infected like vampires; moon-bitten fools, from which the world will never be safe.

John Paul Barrett is the author of *Sea Stories I & II* (Of Dolphins & Dead Sailors: *Sungods & Sundogs*) and *I'll Be Home in Half An Hour*. He is publisher of Gaff Press in Astoria.

Arthur Honeyman, the Egyptian Mercenary, also publishes his own books through Wheel Press in Portland. He is author of *Sam & His Cart* (which was made into an award winning movie), *The Claws & The Horns*, *Portrait in Poetry*, *The Follies of Sexism in the Civilized World*, and many others.

Bill Bertin is a poet and ex-mariner who lives in Astoria.