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Abstract
Deplores the dearth of serious critical attention to the writings of Leiber and speculates about the reasons for this. Gives an overview of his career that suggests avenues for future critical analysis.

Additional Keywords
Leiber, Fritz—Biography; Leiber, Fritz—Criticism and interpretation

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A Literary Newton

A Suggestion for a Critical Appraisal of Fritz Leiber

Bruce Byfield

Introduction

There are stable perching places aplenty in the modern world, extending into the foreseeable future, too, for scientists, engineers, widely skilled mechanics, advertisers, salesmen, and entrepreneurs. At the opposite extreme, there are fewer and fewer places for poets, lovers and women.

— Fritz Leiber, "Utopia for Poets and Witches" (194).

Although Fritz Reuter Leiber is no longer "critically, virtually ignored," as Judith Merril complained in 1969 (46), study of his fiction is still in its early stages. Thoughtful criticism of Leiber usually focuses on a single work, while surveys of his career tend to dilute insight with admiration and plot summary. Almost always, categories not found there are imposed on his work. Some critical problems have been pointed to, and Justin Leiber, his son, has suggested approaches, but otherwise his career has been neither assessed nor made accessible to readers unfamiliar with his fiction. In these respects, study of Leiber lags far behind that of Ursula K. Le Guin, or, lately, of Philip K. Dick. The state of Leiber criticism seems inconsistent with his reputation. For over half of his five decade career, Leiber has been a major figure in modern American fantasy. Harlan Ellison, writing in "A Few Too Few Words" that "I have no hesitation in ranking him with Poe and Kafka and Borges," speaks for many fantasists with an interest in style when he insists that "none of us working in the genre of the fantastic today are free of the lessons taught by Leiber" (122). "Writer's writer" is how many science fiction writers describe Leiber, and they praise him even when they find fault. When Ursula K. Le Guin, for instance, deplores shifts from archaic to colloquial dialogue in the comic scenes of the Fahrd and Gray Mouser stories, one of her reasons is that the shift is unnecessary, because Leiber "could maintain any tone with eloquence and grace" (81-82).

By any standard, Leiber is prominent in science fiction. That his awards include six Hugos, voted on by members of Worldcon, the annual World Science Fiction convention, suggests that he is a popular writer. That they include four Nebulas, voted on members of the Science Fiction Writers of America, suggests that he is a skilled one. Whether it is true that Leiber has won more awards than any other science fiction writer must be decided by someone with the patience to count, but the claim is plausible enough that it is often repeated. Because he is personally admired in science fiction circles, some of the praise given his work should be discounted, yet, even so, he has earned such a high position that definitive criticism of his work is overdue.

The problem is that his accomplishments are difficult to handle critically. Dividing the history of science fiction into the Golden Age, whose standards were set by John W. Campbell, Jr., the editor of Astounding and Unknown; the early literary age of the 1950s, fostered by Anthony Boucher at Fantasy and Science Fiction and Horace L. Gold at Galaxy; the Sixties' New Wave and the present publishing boom, Norman Spinrad writes in an afterward to Destiny Times Three that "although perhaps never generally considered the single most important science fiction writer in any of these periods, Leiber has been regarded as one of the most significant writers in all of them" (150-51). His style has evolved throughout each period, often ahead of everyone else's. He is credited, among other things, with transforming the supernatural tale from a reworking of the Gothic into a reflection of cultural anxieties (Hartwell 629), and, in his 1958 novel The Big Time, with anticipating the tone and stylistic experiments of the New Wave (Aldiss 311). Writing in every subdivision of fantasy, Leiber has experimented continually with lengths, moods and styles. As late as 1979, Malcolm J. Edwards could characterize him in The Science Fiction Encyclopedia as "the only sf and fantasy writer of his generation still developing and producing his best work" (349), and Leiber's latest collection, The Knight and Knave of Swords, shows that the description is still accurate. Published shortly before Leiber's seventy-ninth birthday, the collection shows Leiber evolving a new terseness and simplicity as his failing eyesight forces him to write only a few lines per page and to dictate revisions.

Leiber's refusal to stand still is the main reason for critical difficulties with him. Some science fiction writers, such as Robert Heinlein, take pride in a commercial approach to writing. Their interest in style is limited mainly to clarity, and, although their careers have been as long as Leiber's, they have not developed so much as indulged idiosyncrasies. Others, like Avram Davidson, are noted for the nurture of a single style. Still others are identified with certain themes, such as Ray Bradbury, who is known for his mythologizing of childhood and American traditions. In contrast to all these types of writers, Leiber is identified with no single era, style, or subject. In general, he is more at home with horror than science fiction, more with short stories than novels, and more with moods and psychological studies than action, yet there are few traditions, lengths or styles that he has not used.
effectively. Leiber is not as easily classified as most science fiction writers, and it is hard to see any continuity that allows his work to be discussed as a whole.

In "Fritz Leiber and Eyes," the best effort to define an approach so far, Justin Leiber takes this diversity for granted. "Fritz simply likes to write a lot of different kinds of things," he explains, "and if half of them are ahead of their time or behind their time or so far out in left field that the people who have the right background to read it can be counted on your fingers—well, tough" (12). For all its flippancy, the comment singles out the underlying assumption in all of Fritz Leiber's work. Leiber serves notice many times that he expects alert readers to be aware, not just of science fiction or of orthodox literature, but of both. His ironic choice of epigraphs for The Wanderer, for instance, is a melodramatic excerpt from E. E. "Doc" Smith's space opera Second Stage Lensman, followed by lines from William Blake's "Tyger." Admiring Robert Heinlein, yet impatient with his conservatism, Leiber pays homage to his juvenile fiction in "Our Saucer Vacation," while satirizing his insistence that humans are "the most lawless animal in the whole universe" (161) by having an alien single tradition, Leiber tells Charles Platt, "I've got more

The Wanderer, for instance, is a melodramatic excerpt from E. E. "Doc" Smith's space opera Second Stage Lensman, followed by lines from William Blake's "Tyger." Admiring Robert Heinlein, yet impatient with his conservatism, Leiber pays homage to his juvenile fiction in "Our Saucer Vacation," while satirizing his insistence that humans are "the most lawless animal in the whole universe" (161) by having an alien

"The Button Molder" is meant to alert readers to the fact that the story shares the concerns of the last act of Henrik Ibsen's Peer Gynt. Rather than working from a single tradition, Leiber tells Charles Platt, "I've got more satisfaction, really, out of mixing categories" (134). Even writing in the often despised sword and sorcery genre, best known today from Conan movies and Heavy Metal videos, Leiber shows the discipline and diverse influences that characterize the rest of his work. His Fafhrd and Gray Mouser stories are inevitably pointed to as exceptions to the generally low quality of sword and sorcery, and, since he has written them since the mid-1930s and often uses Fafhrd as a heroic version of himself, they are actually one of the best guides to his development. In them, as in all his work, the usual distinctions between commercial genres, or between popular and literary fiction, simply do not exist. At most, a lacquer of humor and drama covers their intent, and readers who enjoy his work as light entertainment when they are teenagers often find new pleasures in it as adults. Essentially, Leiber expects readers who share his diverse reading tastes. Such a demand does not seem unreasonable in orthodox literature. To study Sufism in order to understand the novels of Doris Lessing is part of a critic's routine. However, few critics expect such a demand in work packaged as science fiction. Yet, unless critics meet the demand, they will miss half of Leiber's allusions and experiments, finding little more than casual enjoyment. At worst, they will find his most distinctive stories oblique to the point of being boring. Leiber's relation with his fiction is a direct one, and it sometimes limits the number of qualified readers or critics.

Justin Leiber is not the first to mention the personal quality of his father's work. It is one of the few truisms of Leiber criticism. In the first substantial article on Leiber, Judith Merril observes that his fiction resembles his conversation and his letters, concluding that "the man and his work are not separable" (45), and the insight has been repeated many times. Leiber himself, who uses his nonfiction to clarify his thoughts on subjects that obsess him, has written autobiographical fragments for almost thirty years. His reviews for Fantastic became increasingly personal through the Seventies, and his "On Fantasy" column for Fantasy Review and his "Moon, Stars and Stuff" column for Locus in the last decade have mixed reviews with opinion and anecdote. Three times, he has written autobiographies: anecdotally in "Fafhrd and Me" (slightly revised for the Gregg edition of Swords and Deviltry as "Introduction to Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser"), and more seriously in "Not Much Disorder and Not So Early Sex" (the title is both a tribute to Thomas Mann and a self-mockery), and "My Life and Writings," an eight part article for Fantasy Review. Each autobiography focuses on his career, since, as he explains to Darrell Schweitzer, Leiber believes that "it's part of my whole adjustment to life, to be a writer and look at experience from the point of view of hunting story material" (38).

These autobiographies share shortcomings: Leiber is reticent about the people nearest him, and his self-analysis rarely goes beyond hints. Because Justin Leiber is close to his father, he is partly able to compensate for these flaws. For those interested in the relation between artists and their fiction, his cataloging of the fictional analogues of his family members is particularly noteworthy. Yet Justin Leiber's main contribution is his suggestion that the personal elements in his father's work point the way to a critical approach. His father's career, he maintains, can be summarized as an ongoing effort to deal with personal beliefs and problems by giving them fictional shape.

Justin Leiber does not imply that his father is a confessional writer. Outlining heavily and considering himself lucky to write five hundred words per day (Garrett, "An Hour With Fritz Leiber"), Fritz Leiber shows neither the compulsiveness nor the lack of control that the term suggests. His description of how he wrote "Four Ghosts in Hamlet" explains how he usually mixes fiction and reality. Based upon his experiences in his parents' Shakespearean theater company, the story is nonetheless far from straight autobiography:

I changed the names, of course, and shaped and fitted the incidents together differently, drawing on the events of several seasons and inventing a couple out of whole cloth, and then finally setting the whole thing in England. But under all this costuming, there were real people and things. ("Not Much Disorder," 284)
The use of "costuming" here is consistent with Leiber's other descriptions of fiction writing. In "The Stage in My Stories," he implies that he approaches writing much as a director might approach a stage production, while in the August 1981 Locus, he describes writing as "dressing and undressing and endlessly manipulating the ghost dolls that are a tale's dramatis personae"(11). Such theatrical metaphors reflect the fact that Leiber's concern is not simply to express personal material, but to dramatize it in his fiction, with all the distortions, exaggerations and simplifications that drama implies.

Partly, Leiber's concern with presentation is due to his start in the pulps. His son believes that, as a young man, Leiber was "crippingly shy," with a determination to impose neither himself nor his beliefs on anyone ("Fritz Leiber and Eyes," 18). To such a young man, the newsstand magazines offered the ideal market, because they mostly aimed at the basic level of entertainment, where the story matters more than the writer. At the start of his career, there was no room for personal revelation, and what started as necessity likely continued out of habit. More importantly, his concern with presentation is a sign that his goal is psychological rather than journalistic accuracy. In the search for suitable forms and styles, Leiber finds the means to clarify ideas and problems, much as Robert Graves did in his laborious revisions and his invention of a private mythology. He can create wish fulfillments, as he does in "The Ghost Light," in which a widower partially modelled on Leiber centers his grief upon the fear that he strangled his wife while drunk, or confirm a new direction in his life by writing about it, as he does when he fictionalizes the end of his mourning for his wife in Our Lady of Darkness. In each case, the search for a dramatic presentation distances Leiber from the issues involved so that he can think about them, and makes the act of writing a means of therapy and self-discovery. This is the relation between artists and their work that Leiber assumes in "Not Much Disorder" when he speculates that Marilyn Monroe might have found the will to live had she ever played a strong minded actress like Jean Harlow (302) — for Leiber, the strategies of therapy are the devices of art. His approach does link his life and work, and, the more personal his work is, the more stylistically complex it is apt to be. Regardless, only the literal minded can expect a perfect literal-minded-Leiber and his fiction. His son's suggestion is that he has evolved by learning how to manipulate personal experience into fiction. Manipulation is at the core of the relation between Leiber and his fiction even in his work of the last fifteen years, in which the distinction between Leiber and his protagonists often disappears.

Justin Leiber does not go into detail, but I suggest that his father's main development has been in the ability to manipulate symbols. Anyone who reads more than half a dozen of Leiber's stories soon notices his fondness for symbologies. Leiber acknowledges this interest indirectly in the introduction to The Ghost Light when he observes that many fantasies center on an object, citing (among others) Jacob's "The Monkey's Paw," Poe's "The Cask of Amontillado" and Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings. In the June 1981 "On Fantasy" column, he summarizes his favorite symbol systems:

- Jung's archetypes, the tarots of the Major Arcana (and those Knights between the Knave and Queen), the signs of the zodiac and planets-they all stir the imagination and drop down into the unconscious, and with the passing years I've grown fonder of all of them, and more inclined to listen to their suggestions and play with them. (5)

Eight months later, in the same column, he adds chess pieces to the list.

What is not mentioned in this list is Leiber's chief symbol: his embodiments of his values and fears in women. In "Not Much Disorder," he calls these embodiments "my notorious Anima" (267), and searches for their origin in his childhood. Born on December 24, 1910, Leiber spent his infancy on tour with his parents in Robert Mantell's Shakespearean Repertory Company, where "the importance, perhaps even the necessity, of fantasy in living and thinking is not denied" (281). By the time he was four, he had memorized Macbeth and the role of Hamlet, and Shakespeare's inventive diction and dramatic structure would later influence his fiction. He was equally impressed by the easy-going liberalism in Bohemian theatrical circles, but, when he started school, he was submerged in conventional life while being raised by relatives. Eager to please, he concentrated on winning good grades, and toyed with becoming a scientist. Only while attending the University of Chicago did he reaffirm the values of his infancy, drifting from the physical sciences into psychology and finally graduating as a philosophy major, while reading Sigmund Freud, Bertrand Russell and Oswald Spengler on his own. Declaring himself a pacifist and a believer in free love, he became what he describes in "Fafhrd and Me" as an "introverted" radical — a philosophical rather than a political one (93). At university, too, he met for the first time people who shared his temperament and tastes. One of these was Harry Otto Fischer. Reading the way that others chain-smoke, Fischer wanted to write, and in the complex literary games that emerged from their correspondence, Fischer transmitted the ambition to Leiber. During this correspondence, Fischer invented Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser. Heroic versions of the correspondents (Justin Leiber notes that his family called his father "Fafhrd," while Fischer's obituary in the March 1986 Locus lists a grandson named Greyson), the characters quickly became Leiber's, as he surpassed his earliest teacher and began to sell stories in 1938.

Leiber's autobiographies hint that his early emotional life centered upon women. Fritz Leiber, Sr., is described in "Not Much Disorder" as a "tireless competitor" (280), who took up chess and writing when his son did, and whose all-round competency made the father feel inadequate. There is even a rivalry, if a friendly one, implicit in his correspondence with Fischer. In "My Life and Writings,
Leiber writes that he tried to "vie" with Fischer in imaginative and literary invention, and, in the December 1980 "On Fantasy" column, he briefly speculates that Fischer served as "a bit of a father-figure" (5). By contrast, Leiber regarded his mother as both a protector and a stiffer of his individuality. In "Not Much Disorder," Virginia Bronson Leiber is described as almost frightening in her devotion. She is a mother who jealously over sees her only child's diet and health, and who once broke a train window to get him air. Later, she urged him to play tennis in the hopes that he would meet girls, although when he married Jonquil Stephens in 1936, she had his new wife investigated by a detective. This impression in his autobiographies is that Leiber desired his mother's attention while dreading its intensity. This impression is confirmed by Justin Leiber's "Artisan roique," which sees caricatures of her in "The Snow Women" in Paffrd's witch mother Mor and his lover Mara. Both characters epitomize the matriarchal woman, whom, in Carl Jung's Symbols of Transformation and Erich Neuman's The Origin and History of Consciousness, must be overthrown if men are to mature or civilization to develop.

Attending school, Leiber saw less of his mother, and transferred his fascination with her towards the female sex in general. Two aunts and an uncle raised him while he went to school in Chicago, yet he mentions his uncle chiefly in passing, and writes several times that he was raised by his aunts. One aunt, Dora Essenpreiss, seemed to him a source of obscure and practical information, and he talked to her for hours while she did housework. Marie Leiber, his other aunt, he recalls as someone to attend movies with, whose gossip about actors and the rich helped him to understand how fantasy could compensate for a conventional life. Both created a home where he was cossedet and allowed to be passive, so that for a time in preadolescence, he was overweight, worrying on at least one occasion that he might be developing breasts. He rarely mixed with girls of his age, but he remembers watching them "playing jacks and hopscotch and being much impressed with their abstruse knowledge and recondite skills. They could jump and dance about, while I moved more sluggishly" ("Not Much Disorder," 267). This awe of females as remote figures was heightened by his romantic worship of film actresses.

Leiber's rediscovery of the values of his infancy coincided with his discovery of sex and his decision to write. Reading such advocates of free love as H. G. Wells, Leiber did not have to develop his outlook very far before he associated women with liberal values, especially since his attempts to follow sexual conventions, as described in "Not Much Disorder and Not So Early Sex," were a series of embarrassing misadventures. It was easier for Leiber as an adolescent and young man to worship women at a distance rather than risk getting to know them. Such romanticism was all the easier as he started to write. Aside from Fischer's letters, Leiber's main incentive to write was to write love poetry to show women — "or at least 'entran cement poetry,'" he qualifies in the first part of "My Life and Writings" (10). A frequent recipient of these poems was Helen Dueck, whose first name is sometimes given to Anima figures in Leiber's fiction. Leiber did not, apparently, write poetry to Jonquil Stephens, perhaps because they married after just a few months of dating, but it seems an indication of his ongoing fixation that his wife shared his literary ambitions and much of his mother's single minded devotion and pragmatism. She was the one who proposed, and who, in their early married life, created a home and social life while he concentrated on writing. She also did her best to find jobs for him and to put him in touch with other writers, including H. P. Lovecraft and Thomas Mann. By the time that Leiber started to publish, he had connected sex, writing, the liberalism of his infancy and his domestic and social life with women. Often, he puts these matters under the general category of "mystery," but, considering how he associates them with magic and darkness, a better name might be "the irrational" or "the unconscious."

A few months before H. P. Lovecraft died in March 1937, Leiber corresponded with him. Lovecraft advised Leiber on work habits, and gave him a rationale for considering fantasy as serious literature. Leiber analyzed Lovecraft's fiction, and, when he became a regular in the pulps in the early 1940s, modelled his stories upon Lovecraft's. His analysis of Lovecraft's style was summarized in 1944 in the seminal essay "A Literary Copernicus." Among the points he makes is that Lovecraft's malign aliens symbolize his existential despair.

As Leiber searched for his own symbolism, this insight led him to an awareness of his own attitude to women. In the same year that "A Literary Copernicus" appears, Leiber removed the female characters from the outline of Destiny Times Three, and triggered a crisis in his life and work. Able to do little original work, over the next five years he revised "Adept's Gambit" and Conjure Wife, the major works from his career's first decade. Going over "Adept's Gambit," he noticed that his major female character represented the values that her ultrarational brother repressed. Seeing the same attitude towards women in the original version of Conjure Wife, he was partially able to convert the novel from a standard pulp adventure to a psychological study of his male protagonist. As he revised, he also prepared a new novel, The Sinful Ones, in which he expanded his insight by having each of his protagonist's choices represented by a woman. His symbolism is handy for self expression, yet Leiber also realized that the equating of women and the irrational is a stereotype that represses the liberal values that he upholds. His ambivalence about his new artistic strategy produced "The Girl With the Hungry Eyes," his last major work in the pulp tradition. Because Leiber sees his efforts to understand and expand his craft as derived from Lovecraft's example and encouragement, this stage (1936-1949), can be labelled Leiber's Lovecraftian period.

Throughout the Fifties, Leiber's misgivings about stereotypes dominates his work. In 1949, he noticed that
Robert Graves connected women and the irrational in *Seven Days In New Crete*, Grave's only venture into science fiction and a novelistic treatment of the mythology codified in *The White Goddess*. Immediately, the book became one of Leiber's favorites. Confirmed in his technique, he perfected it in "Coming Attraction" and the much later, "America the Beautiful." At the same time, in such stories as "The Ship Sails At Midnight" and "The Moon Is Green" he expressed his discomfort about stereotypes by inverting Graves' mythology and showing its masculine bias. These inversions are accompanied by direct critiques of the female stereotype in works like *The Green Millennium* and "The Mechanical Bride," and satires of the male self-image that produces it in "Poor Superman" and "The Night He Cried." After a three year hiatus due to alcoholism, in 1958 Leiber concluded his critique in *The Big Time* with a confrontation of male and female social roles; male values win, but Leiber expresses his preference for female ones, and hopes for a future synthesis of the sex roles. The same year, in "A Deskful of Girls," he made the more feminist conclusion that women must reject their predefined roles. After 1958, Graves' influence is seen mainly in allusions and themes, but the period in which Leiber attacks stereotypes (1949-1958) can accurately be called his Gravesian period. Leiber emerged from it with a terser, more literary style, and a preoccupation with technique.

Middle-aged, alcoholic and partially estranged from his wife, Leiber shifted to more personal topics in the late 1950s. Convinced by the psychoanalytic essays of Carl Gustav Jung of the validity of recording subjective experience, Leiber started to make his protagonists self-portraits, and to view other characters through his protagonists' projections. When his protagonists' projections are inaccurate, as in *The Silver Eggheads, A Specter Is Haunting Texas* and "Gold, Black and Silver," they are assumed to be polluted by stereotypes. With this assumption, Leiber resolved his ambivalence and starts to explore his symbolism, borrowing Jung's term for the male concept of women and referring openly to the Anima. Yet he depicts the Anima in its full complexity only once in this period: in the capricious feline alien Tigerishkain The Wanderer. Because of his problem ridden life, he generally limits his picture of the Anima by identifying it with the Shadow, or repressed personality, associating it with his fears and regrets in "When the Change Winds Blow," "Midnight in the Mirror World," "Richmond, Late September, 1849" and the later "Horrible Imaginings." At the same time, he traces the origins of his symbolism in his mother and wife in "Gonna Roll the Bones" and the Fafhrd and Mouser stories collected in *Swords and Deviltry*. After his wife died in 1969, the Anima Shadow fused with her memory, as Leiber expressed his guilt over her death in "Waif," "The Ghost Light," and "Black Has Its Charms." Its origin traced to his mother and its form to his wife, the Anima Shadow appears in Leiber's work as late as the mid 1980s. However, the period in which it develops and dominates his work is roughly between 1958 and 1974. These years can be called Leiber's early Jungian period.

By the mid-Seventies, Jungian thought is so much a part of Leiber's work that it even intrudes when he uses other symbologies. As he recovers from his wife's death, he enters what might be called his late Jungian period. The stories of this period are structured on Jungian thought, discuss Jungian theory in detail, and often allude to works whose symbolism resembles Jung's. Borrowing Joseph Campbell's concept of the mythic Hero as a metaphor for the developing individual, in many stories he separates the Anima and the Shadow. The Shadow is evoked to resolve lifelong worries, mingling with his father and Lovecraft's Cthulhu in "The Terror From the Depths" and with the apathy and self-absorption of both America and himself in "Belsen Express," "Catch That Zeppelin!" and "Black Glass." The Anima also conforms to Campbell's ideas, becoming a guide to the Self, or ideal personality, in "A Rite of Spring" and the Fafhrd and Mouser stories in *Swords and Ice Magic* and *The Knigh and Knave of Swords*. When Leiber alludes to Thomas De Quincey's *Suspiria de Profundis in Our Lady of Darkness*, the Anima and the Shadow merge once again, but are joined by the Self, so that the encounter with the Shadow becomes a necessary stage in development; in a fictionalization of his own recovery from grief, his protagonist is driven from the reclusive, scholarly life into which he had lapsed after his wife's death and commits himself to the lover who saves him from the Anima Shadow's manifestation. Similarly, in "The Button Molder," derived from Henrik Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*, an encounter with a female ghost not only cures the Leiber-like narrator's writing block, but also gives him the courage to defy old age. With these developments, Leiber reaches the height of his craft and critical acclaim.

These four periods do overlap. Rather than distinct stages, they are best thought of as a series of waves, in which each new wave overtakes and gains height from the previous one; each period is an amplification of the earlier ones, rather a replacement of them. Still, within their limits, these periods suggest how the symbolism of the Female has shaped Fritz Leiber's career. I do not claim that the influences of Lovecraft, Graves or Jung explain all of Leiber's three hundred pieces of fiction. As many as one sixth — mostly uncollected — are formulaic, dated, or slight. These I will hardly deal with at all. The influences of these writers matter, not because they are all encompassing, but because they show the continuity in Leiber's career. Taken together, they shape perhaps two thirds of all Leiber's work, three quarters of his most acclaimed work, and virtually all his fiction since 1975. Leiber himself considers these influences important enough to write about at length. He discusses Lovecraft in several essays, most notably in "A Literary Copernicus" and "Terror, Mystery, Wonder," Graves in "Utopia for Poets and Witches," and Jung in "The Anima Archetype in Science Fantasy" and, indirectly, in "Monsters and Monster Lovers." In each of these essays, Leiber seems to write in order to clarify his understanding of his craft as much as to discuss the writers who are his topics; the essays are almost the whole of Leiber's criticism. Added to the hints
in his autobiographies and the timing of his developments, these essays have helped me to put together the first detailed analysis of Leiber's career. Because the analysis is based upon Leiber's own comments, it should also give some idea of how Leiber himself views his career.

Notes

1. The two major surveys are Jeff Fran's Fritz Leiber: A Reader's Guide and Tom Staicar's Fritz Leiber. Fran fulfills the modest purpose stated in the title, giving an idea of Leiber's diversity and themes, but little analysis. Staicar is more ambitious, but his book is flawed by minor factual errors and his preoccupation with the outdated idea that the value of science fiction rests with its ability to predict the future. Both books have good primary and secondary bibliographies.

2. Leiber's awards are: the Bram Stoker Award (1988); The British Fantasy Award (1988); The Mrs. Ann Radcliffe Award (1978), (1975); the Hugo Award for The Big Time (Best Novel or Novella, 1958); The Wanderer (Best Novel, 1965), "Gonna Roll the Bones" (Best Novelette, 1968). "Ship of Best Conversation," (Best Novella, 1970, "Ill Met in Lankhmar" ("Best Novella, 1971), and "Catch That Zeppelin!" (Best Short Story, 1976), as well as six other nominations; the Mrs. Ann Radcliffe Award for Conjure Wife (1954); the Nebula Award for "Gonna Roll the Bones" (Best Novelette, 1968), "Ill Met in Lankhmar" ("Best Novella, 1975), "Catch That Zeppelin!" (Best Short Story, 1976) and Lifetime Achievement (1981), as well as six other nominations; and the World Fantasy Association Award for "Belsen Express" (Best Short Fiction, 1976), Lifetime Achievement (1976) and Our Lady of Darkness (Best Novel, 1978). Leiber has also been Guest of Honor at Worldcon in 1951 and 1979, and had issues of four magazines devoted to him: Fantastic (November 1959), Fantasy and Science Fiction (July 1969), Whispers (October 1978), and Tales of the Unanticipated (Fall/Winter 1989/1990). Two issues of the Belgian French language magazine Phénix also honored Leiber in 1987.

3. Whether the statement that Leiber has won more awards than any other science fiction writer applies to numbers or types is unknown.

4. While Leiber wrote for Fantasy Review, it changed its name from Fantasy Newsletter to Science Fiction and Fantasy Review, then settled on its present name. Since the issue numbers are consecutive, I refer to the magazine by its present title throughout.

5. Leiber's debt to Shakespeare is suggested by the fact that his first collection, Night's Black Agents, takes its title from Act III, Scene 2 of Macbeth: "Good things of day begin to droop and drowse/ And night's black agents to their praise do gaze." Possibly, the many descriptions of nightfall in Macbeth help to explain Leiber's fondness for "black," "dark" and "night" in titles.

Another sign of Shakespeare's influence is that when Leiber decided in the late Fifties that his style had been weakened after he had written too many nonfiction articles, he corrected matters by reading Shakespeare or the King James Bible every morning, returning to the Renaissance poetry and metrical prose that was his earliest influence.

6. Although little known today, Fritz Leiber, Sr., was one of the pioneers of modern Shakespearean drama in the United States, helping to develop the natural delivery and minimal stage sets that are standard today. When Jonquil Leiber contacted Lovecraft in 1936, he remembered Fritz Leiber, Sr. from performances over two decades earlier: I saw him many times on the Robert Rietz's company in parts like Horatio, Iago, Mercurito, Bassiano, Edmund and Paul Conbridge and delighted in his happy blending of classical traditionalism with the more refined and modified technique of the present. (Selected Letters, v. 5, 340)

He also played Caesar to Theda Bara's Cleopatra and Solomon to Betty Blythe's The Queen of Sheba, using his money from these silent films to organize the Fritz Leiber Repertory Company (founded in Chicago Civic). He used his company's last tour in 1935 to ease a move to Los Angeles, where he became a character actor in films. By his death in 1949, he had appeared in over fifty movies, including A Tale of Two Cities and Monsieur Verdoux. Leiber portrays his father under his family nickname of "Guv" in "Four Ghosts in Hamlet." The fact that Fafhrd's father Naflon is dead in "The Snow Women" may suggest Leiber's remoteness from his own father.

Works Cited

Primary Sources

Most of Leiber's articles and stories are available in several collections. For alternate sources, see Chris Morgan's bibliography, which is complete up until 1979.

The First Date in each citation is the year of original publication. When any source, other than the original is cited, the year of its publication is given after the name of the publisher.

The Big Time, for example, originally appeared in 1958, but the text cited is the 1961 edition. Each story is cross-referenced with the collection cited, with original publication dates for the story and the collection listed separately. Thus, "America the Beautiful" is listed as originally appearing in 1970, while the collection cited, The Best of Fritz Leiber, has a publication date of 1974. Magazine publications for novels are listed separately from book publications only when both are cited.


"Belsen Express." 1975. Heroes and Horrors. 91-104.


"Midnight in the Mirror World." 1964. Heroes and Horrors. 139-158.


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