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The Imposition of Structure: Archetypes in the Fafhrd and Mouser Series

Abstract

Analyzes the development of stories in Leiber's Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser series, under the influence of Jung's and Campbell's theories of archetypes, anima, and monomyth. Notes a maturation of the characters and more significant women characters.

Additional Keywords

Anima in Fritz Leiber; Jungian analysis of Fritz Leiber; Leiber, Fritz. The Fafhrd and Gray Mouser series—Characters—Women; Leiber, Fritz. The Fafhrd and Gray Mouser series—Psychological aspects; Leiber, Fritz. The Fafhrd and Gray Mouser series—Sources; Monomyth in the Fafhrd and Gray Mouser series

The Imposition of Structure

Archetypes in the Fafhrd and Mouser Series

Bruce Byfield

The Fafhrd and Gray Mouser stories have been important to Fritz Leiber from the start of his career. Invented by Harry Otto Fischer in a letter to Leiber in September 1934, the characters are heroic versions of the two correspondents; Fischer is survived by a grandchild named Grayson, while, in the Forties, Leiber's family called him "Fafhrd." Both men used the characters in their attempts to publish, but, since only Leiber had the determination to become a professional writer, the series is almost entirely his. In the entire seven book series, only a few thousand words of "The Lords of Quarmall" are Fischer's, and they are mostly descriptive. Initially, the stories were episodic, and Leiber tended to write from the Mouser's viewpoint, probably, as his son suggests in "Fritz Leiber and Eyes," because writing from Fafhrd's would have been too personal for comfort. It is not until the late Sixties, when Leiber arranged the series for paperback release, that the personal element began to dominate the series. Deciding on the stories' order, and adding stories to fill in gaps in the chronology, Leiber was disturbed by the realization that women played only minor roles in the stories. To explain the fact, he turned to Jungian theory, arresting his character's maturation in late adolescence in new stories about their early lives. The process took several years, but Leiber not only managed to rationalize the episodic and womanless quality of the earlier stories, but also to give the series a new direction as he chronicled his heroes' long delayed maturation in the stories written after 1970, using Joseph Campbell's extensions of Jungian ideas as his guide.

When Donald Wollheim commissioned the Fafhrd and Mouser series for Ace in 1966, Leiber had recently become a confirmed Jungian. A three year struggle with alcoholism in the mid-Fifties had left him with a habit of introspection and, when he returned to writing, eager to make up for lost time, with an extreme consciousness of style. As these traits were making their marks on Leiber's fiction, R. F. C. Hull was gradually publishing the English translation of Carl Jung's *The Collected Works*. Jung's account of the Anima, the female part of a man's mind, and the Shadow, the unacknowledged self, confirmed Leiber in the symbolism that he had always tended towards. By the early Sixties, Leiber's work started to contain frequent references to Jungian theory. At the same time, he started dealing directly with his personal problems: with his relation with his father in "237 Talking Statues, Etc.," with his alcoholism in "Damnation Morning," and with his increasingly troubled marriage in "The Secret Songs." Increasingly, he wrote in the first person, often using protagonists who are thinly disguised versions of himself.

A few stories, like "The Lotus Eaters," are even straight biography with a fantasy element tacked on, although these stories are not nearly as polished as similar works Leiber would do in the Sixties, such as "The Button Molder."

As Leiber starts to rely on Jungian thought, he uses it to trace the origins of his own symbolism of the Female. An example of this tendency is the framing device of "Gonna Roll the Bones," in which the protagonist's Wife and Mother are identified only by their relations to him, and are versions of Leiber's wife Jonquil and his mother Virginia. Most of this self analysis, however, takes place in the Fafhrd and Gray Mouser series.

At first, Leiber approaches the origins of his symbolism indirectly through the Gray Mouser. In the 1962 story "The Unholy Grail," Leiber tells the earliest story of the Mouser, an apprentice magician whose teacher is persecuted by the local baron. Both the baron and the master magician seem dominated by the memory of the baron's savage wife. Even in death, she intimidates the baron, and a brief affair with her appalled the magician so much that he became a hermit and renounced violence. Believing his daughter Ivrian to be the magician's, the baron murders him. In response, the Mouser forsakes his tutor's teachings and kills the baron with black magic, using Ivrian's resemblance to her mother as a conduit for the spell. In doing so, he becomes as Anima-dominated as the baron and the magician. He flees to the city with Ivrian, who becomes the symbol of his lost innocence. In later stories, his longing for his innocent past is suggested by his interest in slim, boyish women who resemble the adolescent Ivrian.

Leiber takes longer to approach the Anima through Fafhrd. In 1960, the idea that Fafhrd has some unresolved feelings is intimated when he pairs off with the Mother aspect of the Triple Goddess in "When the Sea King's Away." Similarly, in the 1965 story "Stardock," in which the heroes climb the peak on which Fafhrd's father died in the hopes of treasure and supernatural lovers, there is a passing suggestion of an Oedipal conflict. Halfway in the climb, Fafhrd explains that he wants to continue to "beat out my father," and refers to the peak as feminine, adding that he could not stop climbing "any more than you could stop after touching half of a woman" (56). Nothing more is said about this motive, but the comment suggests that Fafhrd wishes to out-do his father by conquering the female figure that his father could not.

It is another four years before Fafhrd's Anima is detailed in "The Snow Women" and "Ill Met in Lankmar," stories written to complement "The Unholy

Grail" as Leiber arranged the series for paperback publication. "The Snow Women" is the earliest story of Fafhrd, "Ill Met in Lankhmar" the story of how the heroes met. Justin Leiber writes that Virginia Leiber appears as Fafhrd's mother Mor and his first lover Mara, and Jonquil Leiber as Vlana. The women's names summarize the outlook: "Mor" is a Danish diminutive for "Mother," and "Mara" is "nightmare" in several Germanic languages.

"The Snow Women" is set at a trading fair at Cold Corner, where the nomadic Snow Clan gathers to trade with southerners. The Snow Clan appears to be passing from absolute matriarchy under the influence of the more civilized south, and the women resent the men's accumulation of power. Their resentment takes the form of a distrust of their men's fascination with the south and a hatred of the burlesque show that accompanies the traders. When the showgirl Vlana ventures out alone, the women snowball her into unconsciousness. The men are mobbed and hexed with even greater fierceness, the women relenting only when a man is injured and, requiring nursing, returns to his usual dependency upon his wife or mother. The scenario seems based upon Jung's and Neumann's belief that progress starts with the transference from the Mother, in the shape of a matriarchal culture, to the city. Certainly, this is the transference that Fafhrd undergoes as he asserts his independence.

The Oedipal conflict hinted at in "Stardock" becomes overt in "The Snow Women." Fafhrd suspects that his mother magically destroyed his father because he escaped her control and climbed a taboo peak, and he wishes to succeed where his father failed and escape all domination by matriarches. When he rescues Vlana from a mob of Snow Women, he tells her that he pitches his voice high because he is trained as a skald, and that he wears white, rather than the colored furs of the other men, because he honors his father by honoring the clan's old customs. Yet, whatever his reasons, in the context of the Snow Clan the result is an effeminate appearance, suggesting his domination by women. He keeps his integrity only by detached obedience to custom, telling his lover Mara what she wants to hear, and coldly obeying the letter of his mother's commands. Increasingly, he understands that he must soon leave the Snow Clan or conform in spirit as well as action. The need to decide his future becomes urgent when Mara announces that she is pregnant and assumes that he will marry her. When Fafhrd suggests that Mor would treat her like a slave, Mara diagnoses his problem as Mor's "unnatural influence" (37), and promises to remove it by poisoning her until she is too weak to dominate anyone. As for civilization, Mara will soon teach him to forget that. In Mara's estimation, "civilization was nasty, Vlana should be whipped out of Cold Corner, and Fafhrd needed a woman in his life" (49). She is only too eager to replace Mor as that woman.

Dismayed by Mor's and Mara's efforts to control him, Fafhrd is driven into a relation with Vlana. She promises to flee with him if he will aid in her vendetta against Lankhmar's Thieves' Guild, which killed her friends.

Despite this warning that civilization is as corrupt as the Snow Clan, he agrees. Awaiting their departure, he has his decision confirmed by a dream in which he cannot hear his dead father Nalgron giving advice; awakening, he realizes that he can no longer live by asking what Nalgron would do, but must strike out on his own. As a result, when Vellix, a rival for Vlana who has paternal feelings for Fafhrd, urges that he try to become clan chieftain, then meet civilization on his own terms, Fafhrd rejects the idea. In a complex climax, he renounces Mor and Mara, breaks a taboo as he leaves, and sees all his older male rivals dead, including Vellix. Having broken a taboo and lived (as his father did not), and having killed a father figure, Fafhrd seems to have resolved his Oedipal conflict. Babbling excitedly and hugging Vlana as they sleigh south, he also seems to have freed his Anima from its domination by the Mother. Yet, amidst his success, he wonders why, as Mor promised, "his heart was still so cold" (119).

The answer lies in the fact that, although the Snow Women dismiss show girls like Vlana as chattels, Vlana is as dominating as Mor or Mara. When Fafhrd meets the Mouser in "Ill Met in Lankhmar," they feel an immediate kinship. A major reason for this kinship, it emerges when they introduce each other to their lovers, is that both are dominated by the Anima. Insisting on keeping Ivrian in luxury and pampering her, the Mouser projects the image of his lost innocence on her, "keeping doll like and making more so the potentially brave and realistic girl" (184). For his part, Fafhrd wearies of Vlana's single minded feud with the Thieves' Guild, and repents his promise to aid her. When Ivrian takes Vlana's part, Fafhrd feels that she is "speaking in the same guilt showering tones and using the same unfair yet heart cleaving arguments as Mor his mother might have, or Mara" (200). Goaded by their lovers, Fafhrd and Mouser resolve to scout Thieves' House that evening. They do so, but the thieves they mugged earlier in the night retrieve their loot through sorcery, killing Vlana and Ivrian, who have stored it away. Although the men avenge their lovers, their guilt goads them for years afterwards. For a time, they cannot bear to live in Lankhmar, and, for a much longer period, they are unable to have more than a brief sexual relation with a woman. They remain mentally the adolescents that they are in "Ill Met in Lankhmar," their obsession with the Anima manifesting in their fascination with mysterious, often sinister women.

Occurring at the end of *Swords and Deviltry*, the first book in the new chronology, the deaths of their lovers changes the nature of previous stories. The stories from the Forties and early Fifties are now gathered in *Swords Against Death*, the second book, with connecting stories such as "The Circle Curse" and "The Price of Pain Ease," which explain that the heroes are wandering in an attempt to evade their grief. By the books' end, they have accepted their lover's deaths, but at the cost of putting themselves under the control of the sorcerers Sheelba and Ningauble in "The Price of Pain Ease." In the context of the emerging chronology, Ningauble's addressing of Fafhrd as "'Gentle

Son" in the 1963 story "The Bazaar of the Bizarre" assumes a meaning that it did not originally have (232). The sorcerers do become parental figures, imperfectly in control of the perpetually adolescent Fafhrd and Gray Mouser. Through *Swords in the Mist*, *Swords Against Wizardry* and *The Swords of Lankhmar*, the heroes continue to live a footloose life, loyal only to each other, and, when forced to be, to their sorcerous mentors. Many of their adventures are conceived as duels with death, a motif that begins in the early 1940s with "The Bleak Shore," but which, in the new chronology, can be reinterpreted as proof of their ongoing domination by the Shadows of their lost lovers.

Having imposed order on the series, Leiber had the problem of how to continue it. The answer came from Joseph Campbell's *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, which Leiber read sometime in the mid-1970s. Recently made popular by a public television series on Campbell's work, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces* identifies the archetypes with the figures of ritual and heroic myth. This view is an expansion of ideas Jung outlines in such works as *Symbols of Transformation* and "The Phenomenology of the Spirit in Fairy Tales." Comparing mythologies, Campbell categorizes the episodes in the heroic quest to produce its essential structure. He calls this structure the "monomyth," a term he borrows from James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*, although his categorizations are really little different from those that folklorists had been doing for decades. Campbell divides the monomyth into three categories. The quest starts with the Call to adventure, in which the Hero (Campbell barely considers Heroines) leaves his community and enters a previously unknown realm of adventure. The Hero's leave-taking, Campbell explains, is analogous to a child's separation from the Mother, while the journey into the unknown represents individuation. On his journey, the Hero meets figures who are "the projections of unconscious intent" (78). Helpful projections, often animals or wise men and women, are guides to enlightenment; hindering or menacing ones of ten manifestations of the Father, the first beings encountered after separation from the Mother are manifestations of what Jung would call the Shadow. Generally, the benign and malign projections are distinct, and the same figure is ordinarily not both. Because the meetings with the various projections season the Hero for the fulfillment of the quest, Campbell refers to them collectively as the Initiation stage of the quest. Initiation culminates in the obtainment of the Hero's goal. In his success, the Hero may openly achieve self knowledge, but, often, this goal is symbolized by the rise to godhead or power, or by the winning of a female figure. Newly empowered, the Hero begins the Return, bringing the lessons he learnt back to the ordinary world to save or to renew his community.

It is the Return, as Norman Spinrad emphasizes in "The Emperor of Everything," that distinguishes the heroic quest from the power fantasy that it otherwise resembles. As Spinrad observes, the reward of the heroic quest is

insight, the reward of the power fantasy revenger, wealth, status, and sexual power. Although a true Hero may reach the same goals as a character in a power fantasy, they are either incidental or symbolic of his actual goals. If the hero wins a woman's love, for instance, the relation is emblematic of self knowledge rather than being a sexual fantasy; "women, in the picture language of mythology," Campbell writes, "represent the totality of what can be known. The hero is the one who comes to know" (116). It is the hero's fitness to rule, rather than his strength to rule that counts, and he achieves power on behalf of his nation or culture. Thus, when Aragorn is crowned at the end of *The Lord of the Rings*, his coronation represents the renewal of his race and adopted nation rather than a mere personal achievement.

Leiber uses Campbell's structure in the new Fafhrd and Mouser stories to show his heroes gradually maturing. Until 1977, this influence may have been largely unconscious. Aging and newly recovered from alcoholism, Leiber's first impulse in the mid-1970s is to repeat the motif of a duel with Death. As shown in the later stories, Death is by no means malicious. He rather admires Fafhrd's and the Mouser's cleverness, and, when they evade him, he sportingly grants them a brief reprieve from his attentions. Throughout the early Seventies, Death pursues them in "The Sadness of the Executioner," "Beauty and the Beasts," "Trapped in Shadowland" and "The Bait," the first stories in *Swords and Ice Magic*. The similarity of these stories, as well as their brevity (together, the four fill just thirty-two pages), gives the impression that Leiber is unsure how to proceed and is marking time. Taken together, however, they suggest that the heroes are aging. While still as cool in a fight as ever, they take death more personally and show less bravado than they did, for instance, when they faced down a mob of creditors at the start of *The Swords of Lankhmar*. By the end of "The Bait," both recognize that they are pursued by Death. Metaphorically, this realization seems to mark the transition from their adolescent belief in their own deathlessness to an adult awareness of their mortality. In admitting their relation to Death, the heroes are starting to mature.

The heroes' maturation begins with "Under the Thumbs of the Gods." Cursed to encounter most of their exlovers, the heroes realize their Anima fixation and their failure to develop. The next story in *Swords and Ice Magic*, "Trapped in the Sea of Stars," in which a sprite advises them to "'seek Death to 'scape from him'" (68), reveals to the heroes their need to face their Shadows directly, and neither to deny nor to succumb to them. With these insights, the heroes are ready to progress, and Leiber finds new directions in a narrative based upon Joseph Campbell's *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, an extrapolation of Jung's *Symbols of Transformation*. Although a continual story, the narrative begins in *Swords and Ice Magic* with "The Frost Monstreme" and "Rime Isle," and continues throughout *The Knight and Knave of Swords*.

Adapting Campbell's outline of the heroic quest, Leiber symbolizes the progress of individuation in the heroes'

courting of two women. The women are Cif and Afreyt, citizens of Rime Isle. Their democratic, agnostic, austere, and pragmatic community is modelled on Iceland, whose social structure is the nearest equivalent in the Dark Ages to a community founded on Leiber's values. The women themselves, as Leiber explains in his interview with Jim Purvance in 1978, are "obviously feminists. They'd become the Secretary and Treasurer of Rime Isle: the way to power for a woman" (23). In fact, Afreyt and Cif are female versions of Fafhrd and the Mouser. Tall Afreyt physically resembles Fafhrd, and, in "The Curse of the Smalls and the Stars," defeats him in an archery contest, while the small, agile Cif matches the Mouser and defeats him in a knife throwing competition. The woman's comradeship is as close as the men's, and, just as the men believe that they are incarnations of the same hero, so the women believe themselves incarnations of their forebear, Skeldir the Witch Queen.

Although there is some evidence that the women mature through their relation with the men, the emphasis is on Fafhrd's and the Mouser's development. To the men, the women represent all that they lack. As "The Frost Monstreme" opens, the heroes are reflecting on the glimmerings of self knowledge they gained in "Under the Thumb of the Gods" and "Trapped in the Sea of Stars." Abruptly, they understand that they are no longer young. "We are exchanging the luxuriant musculature of young manhood," Fafhrd drunkenly declaims, "for a suppler, hardier, more enduring structure suited to great midlife trials and venturings" (76). He does not mean that they are on the verge of another aimless adventure, but rather overdue for responsibilities. "We've never really lived," Fafhrd complains, "we've not held land. We've not led men. . . . We've neither homes nor wives" (76-77). Since Viana died, he now believes, he has been "but half a man" (77). As usual, the Mouser is inclined to argue, cynically suggesting that responsibilities and adventures are incompatible.

By contrast, Cif and Afreyt see no contradiction between responsibility and adventure. Afreyt's description of their lives in "Rime Isle" makes clear that, compared to the men's, their development has been much more even, just as Tansy's was more even than Norman's in *Conjure Wife*. The death of their first loves hours after Fafhrd and the Mouser met makes them associate women with quieter pleasures; Fafhrd thinks of "little girls as gathering flowers and wearing garlands whilst imaging themselves wives and mothers" ("Rime Isle," 140). Yet these activities were only part of the women's childhood. Both women, Afreyt explains, are

only daughters inheriting house, farms and council memberships from fathers after (in Cif's case) sons died. We played together as children in these hills, she and I, reviving Rime Isle's greatness in our games. Or sometimes we'd be pirate queens and rape the Isle. But chiefly, we'd imagine ourselves seizing power on the council, forcibly putting down the other members. . . . Oh, we gathered flowers, too, sometimes." (139-140)

Eager for the responsibilities that the men have avoided,

both women are much closer than they are to being adults.

Given their relative maturity, the women are suitable Animas to direct the men towards their long delayed maturity. When the women commission the men to save Rime Isle from sea nomads and supernatural forces, the Mouser and Fafhrd respond to this call to adventure by outfitting ships and training crews. How closely these actions are connected to the men's development is indicated by the fact that their crews are duplicates of themselves, the Mouser hiring small, streetwise thieves, and Fafhrd tall, melancholy berserkers. Thieves and berserkers alike need to learn discipline, and in training their crews the Mouser and Fafhrd start to initiate themselves. Steering through a magical fog and darkness, they manage to avoid blundering into a fight with each other despite their enemies' best efforts, and land on Rime Isle. There, in "Rime Isle," they defend their new community, wondering all the while at the changes in themselves and in their men. The Mouser, wondering why he teaches his crew a discipline that they will have no use for on the streets, suddenly realizes that his attraction to Cif places him "in bondage. . . to all his men, and to his ambitions and self esteem" (201). Similarly, Fafhrd worries that Afreyt has "set him on the wholly unsuitable course of being a responsible captain of men — he who had been all his days a lone wolf" (198). Mirroring these changes, one of Fafhrd's men admits sheepishly that he is no longer a berserker, having been trained by Fafhrd to think before he acts.

In *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, Campbell suggests that many monsters encountered by the mythic Hero are versions of the father. In organizing the Fafhrd and Mouser stories, Leiber had given them father figures in the form of Ningauble and Sheelba. In "The Frost Monstreme," they do not oppose their sorcerous mentors, but they do face near equivalents in the invisible Oomforafor and the power magician Khakhht. "Rime Isle" gives them even more powerful versions of the Father to oppose in Odin and Loki, who, strayed from our world into Nehwon, bear a strong physical resemblance to the heroes; Odin is even said to resemble an older version of Fafhrd. All these figures, especially the two gods, seem to represent the heroes' past and their destructive impulses. Under Loki's influence, the Mouser leads a fleet against the sea nomads, learning at the last moment that Loki plans to destroy the fleet in order to lure the nomads to destruction. Similarly, under Odin's influence, Fafhrd's berserkers, marching to the relief of a small town, are tempted to revert to their nature and die taking their enemies with them.

The heroes can achieve victory only by resisting the gods' plans. At the last moment, the Mouser revises Loki's spell and limit its destructive power. Fafhrd, having deserted his responsibilities to rescue an adolescent girl from Oomforafor, is less lucky. He attempts the rescue, not because he is responsible for the girl, so much as because she is named Mara, like his first lover, whom he has felt guilty about ever since he abandoned her. Fafhrd rescues the girl, severing Oomforafor's hand, but his ally and exlover, Oomforafor's sister Hirriwi, tells him that she

would have rescued the girl and prophesies that he will suffer “for deserting your men to chase this girl chit” (210). Rejoining his forces, Fafhrd recovers his sense of duty, refusing to let his forces wear the noose that is the sign of subjection to Odin. Vague apprehensions make him collect the nooses on the pretense that he needs them to brace his wrist for archery. His apprehensions prove well founded when the Mouser’s revised spell banishes Odin and Loki, who take the nooses and his hand with them. Having needlessly mutilated Mara’s abductor, Fafhrd suffers the same mutilation himself. Leiber passes quickly over this development in his interview with Jim Purviance, explaining only that he realized that his heroes had never been hurt, and that Fafhrd’s adjustment to his handicap would give fresh story material. These motivations are valid, yet it is also true that Fafhrd’s loss fits well with the idea expressed in *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* that suffering represents maturation achieved at a cost. In rejecting Odin in his morbid and destructive aspect, Fafhrd comes to resemble the god’s aspect absent from “Rime Isle”: Odin as the quester for wisdom, whom, as Campbell mentions, sacrificed an eye and crucified himself in pursuit of his goal (191). In metaphorical terms, Fafhrd overcomes his monstrous image of the Father and reaches maturation by imitating the Father. The Mouser’s thwarting of Loki emulates Loki’s own subversions, and, by defeating his Father image, he also matures, although at a lower cost.

Since the heroes are about to settle down at the end of “Rime Isle,” the story might satisfactorily conclude the series. However, Leiber explains in the March 1989 *Locus* that from his reading of Campbell he felt that his heroes should first adjust to adulthood and face the consequences of their previous irresponsibility. Accordingly, *The Knight and Knave of Swords* shows the heroes slowly settling down. A shapeshifting temptress lures Fafhrd back to his old life in “Sea Magic,” then awakens the Mouser’s latent sadism in “The Mer-She,” almost causing his first merchant voyage to end in disaster. Fafhrd can resist the temptress because the hook that replaces his hand — his reminder of his maturity’s cost — is immune to her magic, while a combination of luck and Cif’s sympathetic magic preserves the Mouser. By “The Curse of the Smalls and the Stars,” each accepts that he now has three comrades instead of one, and is starting to consider Rime Isle home. When Sheelba and Ningauble, their parental figures, try to lure them back to Lankhmar, and mortal enemies dispatch assassins, the men survive both threats to their new lives through the support of the Rime Isle community. In the process, they learn that they share an Anima in Skeldir — they, not the women, are apparently her reincarnations.

Their development concludes with self revelation in the 1988 short novel, “The Mouser Goes Below.” The novel reflects Leiber’s growing interest in neopaganism, as Rime Isle abruptly gains a witch cult and Skeldir becomes a cult hero who, like Ishtar, descends into the underworld to find aid. The story begins when Loki awakes for the first time since “Rime Isle.” To avenge himself on the Mouser, Loki

has him sink bodily into the ground. Essentially, this descent is the Mouser’s journey into his own unconscious. After taking delight so often in abusing others, the Mouser finds himself pursued by the incarnation of Pain, Death’s sister, whom at one point he mistakes for Ississi, the symbol of his past in “The Mer-She.” Moving through the earth at supernatural speeds (or having out of body experiences), the Gray Mouser returns inadvertently to the scenes of earlier adventures. His first stop is the underground chambers of the half rat Hisvet, whom his sexual obsessions focused on in *The Swords of Lankhmar*. Watching her torment her serving women, the Mouser recalls Freg, a lover whose memory he repressed because he had seduced her away from Fafhrd then treated her badly. He is aroused by Hisvet’s antics, but, while he watches, Pain catches up with him. Masturbating him with agonizing slowness until he faints, she punishes him for his attitudes and past actions. Reawakening, at first with no sense of identity, he finds himself witnessing a scene in the underground kingdom of Quarfall. Finding himself an observer again, he reflects:

How characteristic of most of his life. . . to be on the outside in drenching rain or blasting snow or (like now) worse and looking in at a cozy abode of culture, comfort, companionship and couth — what man wouldn’t turn to thieving and burglary when faced at every turn with such a fate. (265)

Yet on Rime Isle, he is not an outsider. He is roused from self-pity upon hearing of a sorcerous plot against Fafhrd. For Fafhrd’s sake, he does what he cannot do for himself, and returns to the surface to prevent the plot. After this unselfish act, Loki’s curse loses power, and the Mouser returns to the surface for good, restored to life by Cif’s artificial respiration.

The Mouser is strengthened for his underground descent by the intervention of the sporting Death, who loans him some of Fafhrd’s substance. While the other Rime Islers tunnel for the Mouser, Fafhrd finds himself drawn in the opposite direction, his head in the clouds, romanticism given literal form as he floats into the sky. There he encounters Frix, Hisvet’s maid from *The Swords of Lankhmar* now queen of the supernatural realm of Arilia and voyaging in her flying galleon. Like Hisvet, Frix is transformed into an Anima figure, as the encounter evokes Fafhrd’s memories of his dalliance with Frix and her attendants, as well as his past loves. He decides that he has been attracted to two types of women, comrade mistresses and beloved girls:

Oddly, the beloved girls were more apt to have been actual comrades, sharing day to day haps, mishaps and boredoms, than the others. What made the others seem more like comrades, then? When he asked himself that, which he did seldom, he was apt to decide that it was because they were more realistic and logical, thought more like men, or at least like himself. Which was a desirable thing, except when they carried their realism and logic to the point where it became unpleasantly painful to him. Which accounted for their cruel streak, to be sure. (243)

Fafhrd realizes that, although equals are apt to deflate his romanticism, he prefers them as companions. Afreyt is one of these comrades, but their epitome is Frix, because she is a supernatural being. Hoping for another dalliance, Fafhrd meets, he admits, "total defeat in a war of pleasure" (298). In a mock funeral reminiscent of the old joke about the sleeping Scotchman and the old ladies, Frix and her attendants return the sleeping Fafhrd to earth, tying ribbons around his penis for remembrance.¹ Just as the Mouser's adventures underground lead him to accept his community, so Fafhrd's impotence with Frix leaves him with the realization that sex is no longer the primary way that he relates to women. He need no longer dream of an ideal female, and he settles down with Afreyt.

With these revelations, the two men reach final acceptance of their new lives. Campbell describes the Hero's journey as a form of rebirth, and this is exactly the description that the Mouser uses to describe his experiences underground. Fafhrd's reawakening after the mock funeral could also be described as a rebirth. As a sign of their adulthood, both men learn that they have mature children: the Mouser's lieutenant Pshwari is his son by Freg, while a moon priestess and ship's prostitute named Fingers is revealed as Fafhrd's daughter.

With "The Mouser Goes Below," Leiber has completed the cycle of development that he wrenched the series towards in the late Sixties. At the story's end, both men are reconciled to staying at home with their lovers, and, with adult children, neither can pretend to be an adolescent still. This conclusion is artistically satisfying, and, perhaps, ensures that Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser will not become literary vampires like Robert E. Howard's Conan, and be endlessly resurrected in banal sequels after their author dies. However, contrary to the advertising, *The Knight and Knave of Swords* is not necessarily the end of the series. The Mouser's comment that Arilia's galleons "should make it possible to run things from a home base while still managing an interesting field assignment from time to time" (303) leaves the option of further adventures, and Leiber has said that he hopes to write them. Whether he will or not, given his age and failing eyesight, is uncertain. How these further adventures will be structured is even less certain. Probably, however, they will not return to the earliest episodic structure of the series; having worked for twenty years to impose a structure, Leiber is unlikely to abandon the structure now that it is complete. Perhaps he will complete the Campbellian structure by exposing his heroes to the problems of old age and showing the departure of the heroes. Leiber has already dealt with old age in other stories, so it would be strange if he did not deal with the subject in the portion of his writing that has always meant the most to him.

But this is speculation. For now, all that can be said is that Leiber has not only performed the difficult job of adding a foundation after the house was built, but has also given the house an addition that, if not completely in keeping with the original structure, certainly enhances it. ♦

Note

1. The ribbons echo the ancient joke about the Scotsman sleeping off a drunk and the two old ladies who lift his kilt and tie a blue ribbon around his genitals. When a friend wakes him and asks about the ribbon, the Scotsman replies that he can't recall where it came from but, whatever he was doing, he must have won first prize. Like the Scotsman, Fafhrd has done nothing.

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(A Note on the Listing of Primary Sources: for convenience, the publication of each story is given after the title. When both separate stories and collections as a whole are mentioned, the complete citation for the collections is given only under its title. Stories are not listed here if they are mentioned in a context in which their collection is not immediately obvious).

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