

Keeler News

Bulletin of the Harry Stephen Keeler Society
No. 48..... July, 2004



Webwork Now

Keeler News

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It is this artificial relationship, this purely fictional web-work plot, this bit of life twisted into a pattern mathematically and geometrically true, that fills the gaps in one's spirit which rebels at the looseness of life as it apparently is.

No. 48, July 2004

Cover illustration by

Daniel Clowes, Harry Stephen Keeler,
William Gillespie, and Richard Polt

Editor's Notes.....	2
How to Write a Web Work	3
Hobo Story	5
Webwork for the 21st Century	6
Charles Williams on Keeler.....	9
<i>Like a Velvet Glove Cast in Iron</i> ...	10
Sex sells.....	12
Letters	14
Sing Sing Nights Cocktail	15
A Sentence from the Master	16
Books for Sale	16

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Editor's Notes

During a brief visit to Chicago in May, I swung by Harry and Hazel's house at 3530 N. Fremont St. It wasn't there. In keeping with Chicago's longstanding tradition of squandering its architectural history, the Keeler house, along with most of the rest of the block, has been replaced by condos.

I later discovered that the house was actually mentioned last year in a *Chicago Tribune* series about reckless demolition in the city's neighborhoods. Read it and weep (and consider how appropriate the Eastlake style was to Harry's writing).

"3530 N. Fremont St. (Lake View): this single-family home borrowed elements of the Eastlake style, named for the English designer Charles Locke Eastlake. Using mechanical lathes and jigsaws, the Eastlake approach decorated houses with elaborate scrollwork, beaded spindles, turned balusters and porch posts. The porch of this house had an elliptical arched opening, spiraled spindles, turned posts and cast-iron railings. Built: 1880s. Demolition authorized: 2001. Today: A four-story condominium building."

Is there any HSKS member who had the foresight to take a picture of the house?



From an e-correspondent: "I have a complete (though not the Portuguese ones) collection of mostly first-edition Keelers handed down to me by my father, who never threw away anything but especially prized Keeler books and *actually read them to me as bedtime stories*. I'm glad I couldn't tell what was going on in the story half the time. But I had many dreams involving skulls."



Fender Tucker reports that the most common Keeler books at abebooks.com are *The Green Jade Hand* and *Thieves' Nights*. Meanwhile, the best-selling Ramble House edition so far is *The White Circle*, with 66 copies printed.



My latest great discovery: the Dutton archives, which are housed at Syracuse University. They have been sending me photocopies of the *hundreds* of pages of correspondence between Dutton and HSK. Stay tuned for details.

William Gillespie is the brains behind Spineless Books and the author of a number of works of experimental fiction. He is currently studying at Brown University. William recently passed through Cincinnati and promised over lunch to write something for *Keeler News* sharing some of his insights into the potential in Keeler's webwork theories. He has been as good as his word.

On Keeler's plotting in general, William writes on his web site (spinelessbooks.com), "Keeler's idea of a beautiful novel resided in the complexity of its plot, and he followed highly specific rules to make his plots complex and yet, to his mind, structurally sound. Keeler believed in an infinity of possible stories and scoffs at those who say there are only a few basic plots. Keeler finds coincidence an acceptable, even indispensable, element of the novel. The plots are complex machines that render their characters cogs, turning deterministically to conserve and transmit energy. Keeler's plots are not flat maps. They are dynamic, in motion, a diagram of a row of dominos falling, playing pool and knocking in all the balls, eight ball last, on the break, skull in the corner pocket. He has made the puzzle plot unsolvable."

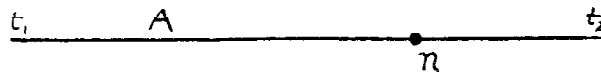
Before we get farther into William's own reflections, here is his brilliantly straightforward distillation of Keeler's plot theory, which HSK presented with exquisite convolutions in *The Mechanics (And Kinematics) of Web-Work Plot Construction* (1928). (This topic was first discussed in **KN** #10, and this may be an appropriate moment to remind the gentle reader that back issues can be downloaded from our website—visit keelersociety.mondoplex.com and follow the "back issues" link—or can be had on a CD-ROM for \$5, inclusive of postage.)

How to Write a Web Work

by William Gillespie, following Harry Stephen Keeler

Method

A plot can be represented by a score or diagram.



Character A moves through event n between times t1 and t2

A line or thread represents a character or inanimate object.

Characters are considered active, objects passive. *All characters are continuously motivated to act.*

Numbered intersections are significant interactions between threads.

Story time moves from left to right.

The vertical axis is used to separate the threads and show their tension with respect to their intersections. The intersections exert **deviational** force on the momentum of the threads.

Every line must intersect another line at least twice.

Each intersection must result from the previous intersection along all intersecting threads.

Principles

A single viewpoint should be maintained.

To build a web work plot, at the beginning, the main character's thread must intersect many threads in quick succession, in order to bring enough threads into the story.

Weaving may take place forward and backward.

Intersections may be revealed through narration as well as reminiscence.

The number of threads decreases over the course of the story.

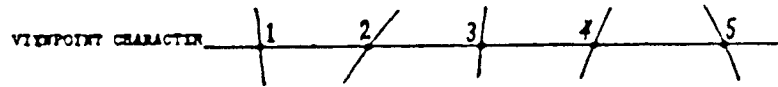
Drop the least important thread first.

Keep important characters separated until the end.

Some Jargon & Schematics

(diagrams from the 1917 "Web-Work Plot Structure")

In a **Row of Bricks plot**, incidents develop along a thread, and depend one upon the other, although the threads have no further use in the story or relationship with each other.

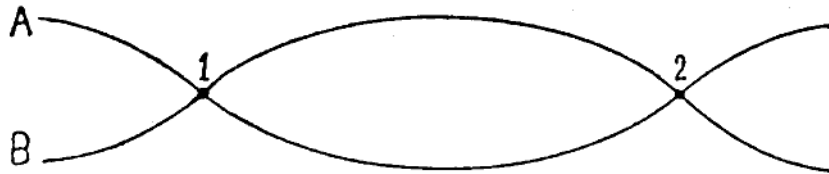


Weaving: encounters between threads cause further encounters.

Deviation: The intersection causes the threads to deviate from their path.

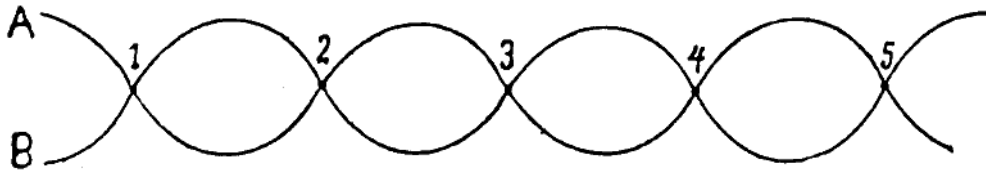
Plot Loop: a circuit in which an incident between two threads causes a second incident between two threads. With web-work, it is less instructive to think of your stories as having "plot" than it is to think of them as having "plot loops."

A **Simple Plot Loop**, as in a **Quadrangular Plot**, has two intersections.

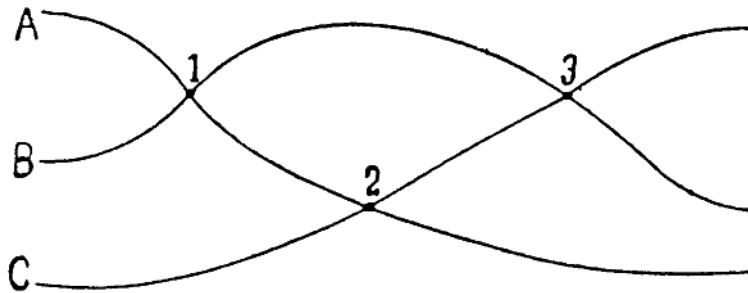


One of the simplest models of plot: characters A and B have encounter 1, which motivates both of them, such that they have encounter 2. 2 must be caused by 1.

A **Compound Plot Loop** is a plot loop with more than two encounters.



In this weaving, three threads deviate each other:



Motiving: Providing the characters with traits that will cause them to act.

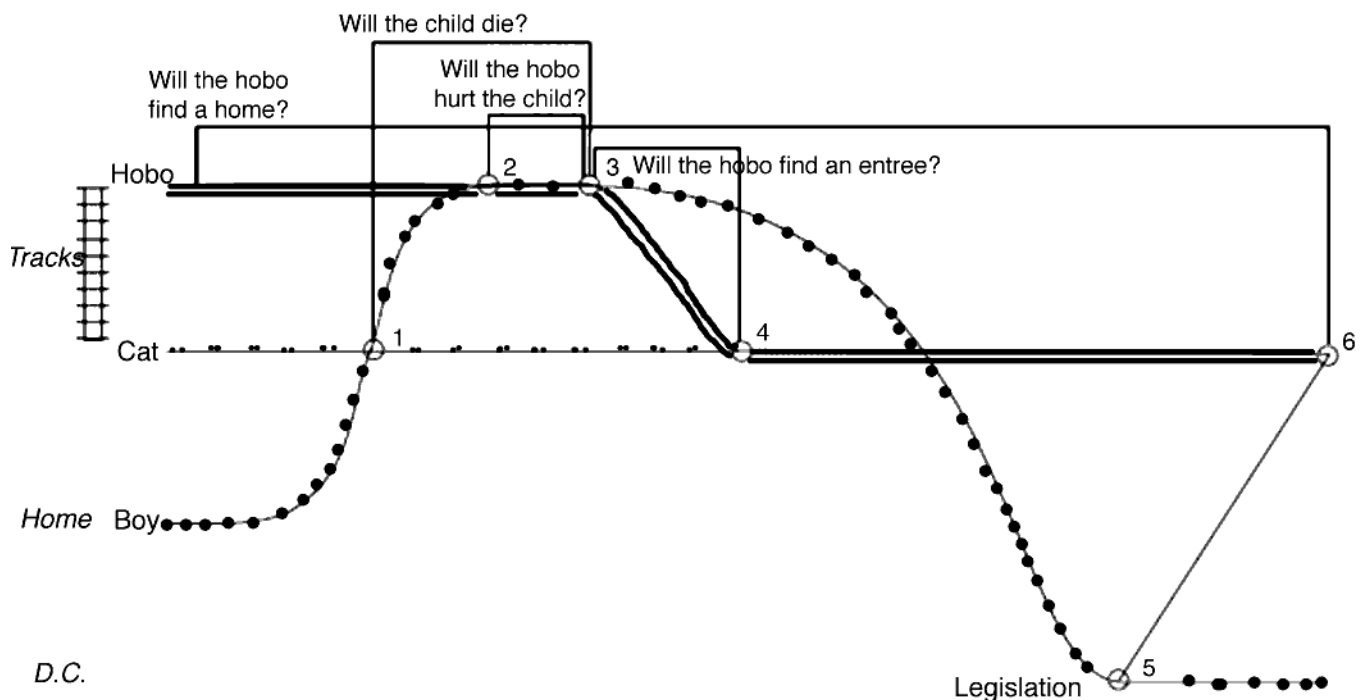
Motivating: Providing the characters with circumstances that will cause them to act. ☹

Hobo Story

by William Gillespie

This is a small demo of the Keeler technique. The map of the story includes "enigmas," which is an idea I get from Barthes and not Keeler, and which is explained briefly in the following essay. Though Keeler's thinking was clearly guided by enigmas, they aren't notated in his diagrams.

1. Once upon a time a child was wandering along the railroad tracks and encountered a stray cat. The child tried to pet the cat and the cat bit the child and ran off, frightened. The cat was infected with a mutant strain of rabies that would kill the child in ten minutes if the child did not receive medical attention.
2. The child, crying, stumbled down the track where it noticed that a pile of rags was actually a man. The crying child looked at the terrifying man. The hobo asked the child why he was crying. The child said that a cat bit him.
3. The kindly hobo sucked the venom from the child's wound, spitting it in the dirt. The hobo bandaged the wound in a greasy kerchief. The grateful child gave the hobo an apple and a candybar. The hobo, pleased, walked off down the tracks to find an entree to go with the salad and dessert.
4. The hobo found the cat and tried to pet it. When the cat hissed, the hobo grabbed it and strangled it and cooked and ate it, afterward savoring the apple and the candy bar.
- 5/6. The child went home to grow up and become president and pass radical legislation stipulating that hobos were entitled to ownership rights of plots of land along railroad tracks. ♪



Webwork For the 21st Century

Keeler and Narratology

by William Gillespie

Well, this is the last place in the world I should confess this, but the only place I can. I don't like reading Keeler's fiction. Yet. It's got problems. To me. The arrhythmia. The relentlessly questionable style choices. The race stuff, the race stuff, the race stuff.

Despite this, I may be one of the most devoted students of *The Mechanics and Kinematics of Web-Work Plot Construction*. M&K then, do not interest me as a method of writing like Keeler: I think they stand as a structural analysis of plot that can be applied to all fiction. I think any story or novel can be represented in a webwork schematic, even if it just looks like a line. In many cases this will involve guesswork. In the case of a complex time travel story or metafiction, you may have to do some serious head-scratching and invent new notation. And in the case of a large and complicated novel, a webwork diagram might reveal the author's mistakes as well as their intentions. Either way, I believe such an exercise would be instructive and would reveal aspects of the novel's structure otherwise difficult to pick up on. Especially if one were to diagram a number of different well-read books such that their structures could be compared at a glance.

A conventional detective novel, indeed all narrative by many definitions, is bound by sequence. The story is a sequence of events in story time, and the story telling is a sequence in which these events are revealed to the reader. These two sequences do not have to correspond, as the author has recourse to flashforward or foreshadowing, flashbacks, and any number of tricks. Narrative is a double helix of two interlocking sequences.

Keeler's diagrams—encompassing chronology, causality, character, and motivation—provide a model to analyze one half of the double helix, that of the story independent of its telling. When you look down on one of those schematics, though the events it represents are

bound by a sequence, you can study them as an object.

For example, in the *The Voice of the Seven Sparrows*, thanks to the surviving webwork diagram, we can see the story (the diagram) independently of its telling (the novel), and speculate how the storytelling could have been accomplished in any number of ways. Keeler chose to remain fixed on a particular character as he moved through a portion of the story (going forward in time), and the story was revealed through his encounters with other characters who had access to parts of the diagram neither the main character nor the reader otherwise had access to. But what if the story were told in a different way? From multiple points of view? Or in reverse chronology? Entirely in unattributed dialog? Without the letter E or entirely in interrogative sentences? Through visual descriptions with no narration? Or from the perspective of one of the other characters? Well, since this is Keeler, we can guess that the story would be written in excruciating racial gibberish if it were written from the perspective of one of its characters, or in unattributed dialog. Let me put it this way: what if the story were written by a different author? (Or, ha, what if Keeler wrote *The Great Gatsby*?)

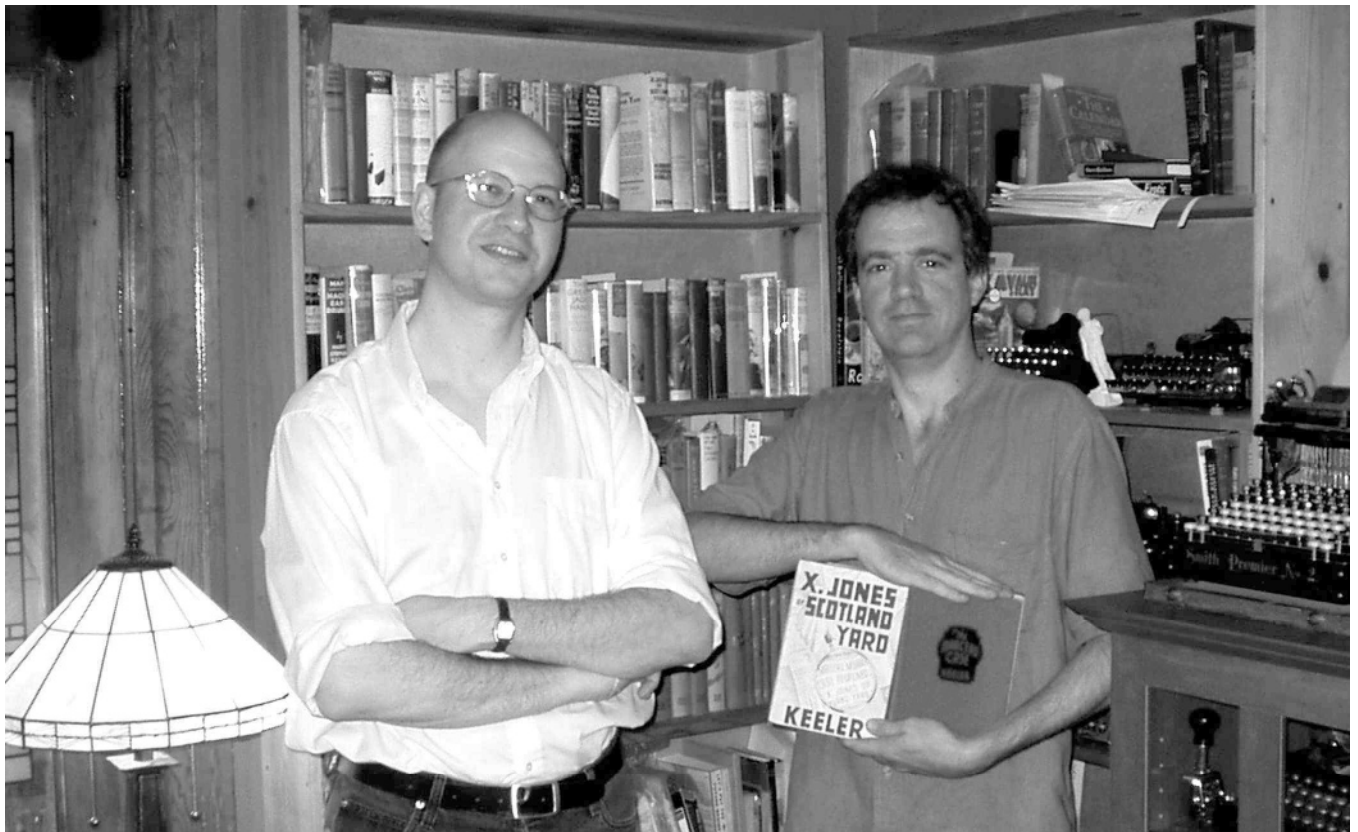
To some extent, in the *Voice*, as in conventional detective fiction, the reader is drawn into enigmas—questions the story poses that readers desire answered (closure), such that they feel compelled to continue reading (in case they fail to surrender to the pure beauty of the prose). But my sense is that Keeler's enigmas, through their sheer density, are hard to keep track of. Many surprising details are revealed, some of the weirdest at the end—for example that four of the characters are two of the characters each in disguise—but these peculiar gestures toward clearing up confusion by resolving enigmas lack the satisfying clarity of “the butler did it.” In a conventional mystery story (which I

assume was the starting point for Keeler's webwork genre), the reader is engaged because the enigma is simple enough to second-guess, and the author's art sustains this guesswork while keeping the enigma suspended. But the satisfaction of guessing what happens is utterly denied to Keeler's readers. Instead of an "ah!" you get a "huh?" or a "ha" or a groan or a "&^%\$()*^#%!"

One aspect of the "ah!" I call retroactive correction. When you discover the butler did it, you immediately want to reread the book because certain details that did not make sense or were forgettable are now significant and you want to reexamine them in the light of the new interpretation your knowledge of the ending can bring to them. It is easiest to point to examples from recent cinema: "12 Monkeys," "Fight Club," "The Sixth Sense," "Memento," "21 Grams" are all films that invoke retroactive correction, such that I felt I needed to see them a second time to reinterpret missed or misinterpreted details in their first halves. These films have surprising closure. In many of them, the sequence in which the story sequence is revealed

is most crafty. But for the shift in the reader's interpretation to be significant, the story itself has to be fixed and have a single correct explanation.

A Keeler schematic makes it possible to construct a story independent of its telling, in the manner a composer might compose a musical score that is fixed independently of its performances. The *Voice* is Keeler's performance of his webwork diagram score. We could give that same score to Paul Auster and ask him to perform the novel. We might even allow the reader to be a part of the performance. In multisequential fiction (such as hypertext fiction), the reader has a hand in choosing the storytelling sequence. What happens to the "ah!" of the surprise ending if the reader reads it first? To my knowledge, nobody has properly interrogated this question. The discourse surrounding "hypertext fiction" has been too bound in computer science, sweeping utopian rhetoric, and university politics to provide, to my knowledge, any solid criticism on multisequential fiction independent of considerations of media. And hypertext fiction itself as an institution has



Richard Polt and William Gillespie at HSKS global headquarters, June 2004

already been declared dead by the new media poets (transparently enough), and has no visible, convincing, talented practitioners, as its most credible proponent, Robert Coover, has shifted his interest to VR literature. Most of these early electronic works (published on floppy by Eastgate) may never be ported to the web, are dependent on vanishing technology, and won't get the widespread attention they deserve. Outstanding works of writing are, simply, infrequent, and it is my opinion that there will be wonderful examples of what in the 1990s would have been called "hypertext fiction" published in print or electronic form within my lifetime, regardless of how the academic lines are drawn.

Because Keeler gives us the criteria for composing a novel in the form of a score, in which every scene is essential to the structure of the whole, his "web-work" schematics (which resemble hypertext node-link flowcharts) provide insight into the possibility of writing a multisequential fiction in which every scene, no matter which order it is read in, provides unexpected information that might trigger a retroactive correction of scenes read previously, regardless of what order they happen in the original story.

I'll let you know. ☺

Visit

spinelessbooks.com/keeler

to read

- An online version of HSK's "Mechanics and Kinematics"
- "Mechanics, Kinematics, Constraint": more of William's thoughts on webwork and hypertext
- The results of a "Web-Work Collaborative Novella-writing Exercise" guided by William at Cincinnati's School for Creative and Performing Arts

Your comments are welcome:
e-mail

william@spinelessbooks.com

New Member

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Returning Member

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Updated Information

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Warren, Barry G., 1110 Harbour Point Dr.,
New Bern, NC 28560, *abncp22@aol.com*

In the next

Keeler News

Bulletin of the Harry Stephen Keeler Society

Letters to Derleth

A Magazine for Iconoclasts

see you after the summer—October 2004

Can you solve this?

WIN a Building LOT **NOCLNIL**
What great president do the above letters spell when properly arranged? RUSH correct answer and win a choice lot (20 x 100 ft.) free and clear of all incumbrances, located between New York and Atlantic City. Mail answer to Evergreen Heights Development Corp., World Bldg, 63 Park Row, N.Y.C. Dept. 47

DARING PARISIAN GIRL PICTURES
—Artistic, Unusual and Distinctive.
"Veri-Chic" sample and list of art cards,
10c; 15 for \$1.00 (sealed). Girard Novelty Co., 10S, Pawtucket, R. I.

Charles Williams (1886-1945), a contemporary and friend of C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien, wrote plays, fantasy novels, poetry, theology, biography, and criticism. There is, of course, a Charles Williams Society (www.geocities.com/charles_wms_soc). Williams's reviews include some thoughts on Keeler, which were kindly brought to our attention by Geoff Bradley. We reprint them with enough context to explain the references to fish. Source: *The Detective Fiction Reviews of Charles Williams 1930-1935*, ed. Jared Lobdell (McFarland, 2003).

Charles Williams

on Keeler

Murder and Mystery (January 23, 1935)

As They Rise, by E. Laurie Long. Ward, Lock.
7s 6d

Ten Hours, by Harry Stephen Keeler. Ward,
Lock. 7s 6d

The Diamond Ransom Murders, by Nellie Child.
Collins. 7s 6d

The Five Suspects, by R. A. J. Walling. Hodder
and Stoughton. 7s 6d

"You can buy fish as they rise, which means, 'You're in the Good Lord's hands and must take what he sends you.'" So Mr. Long explains his title; his noble unsophisticated hero of a tugmaster tries, very sensibly, to take things "as they rise." These four novels are of very different kinds. Mr. Long's own is of the simple herring type, caught in our own seas, suitable for a breakfast cooked by a young bride for a clean-stomached husband. It tastes more of the sea and tugs and harbour-life than of crime, though it has a murder and a "sinister plot" and an illegitimate child. The child grows up into the tugmaster, helps to avenge the murder, thwarts his unknown and not wholly agreeable father, and also thwarts the rather vague international plot, by which it is intended that France shall declare war on us when she finds rifles stamped "Fabrique en Angleterre" used against her in Alsace. Even a French Government might think twice over such evidence; it is clear our breakfast herring has an awkward bone.

For lunch, perhaps, Mr. Keeler would be best as a filleted plaice. *Ten Hours* has something of the unendingness of plaice; it is filling,

but unsurprising. This is not from lack of the intention to surprise. An American town is threatened with destruction from aeroplanes by a mad Mexican. Three tramps are arrested as spies, and court-martialled. The trial takes all night, for each tells a fantastic tale to account for his presence, which is in turn disproved. The detail is lengthy, and the language even lengthier. When one reads that the three tramps gazed at each other, "wordlessly, speechlessly," one realises how much more than is necessary one is reading in order to find out what happened.

To compare Miss Child's book with sardines sounds "low." But never was sardine-tin fuller of meat than *Diamond Ransom Murders* of facts, complications and murders. Her first book, *Murder Comes Home*, was all but a miracle. This all but overbalances into a maze. Her people are, I think, less interesting here, and her plot less near perfection. It begins with kidnappings, and then it becomes like a diagram composed of printed words. Every now and then Miss Child stops to pop a bit of human nature (or what she means for human nature) on our plates, like the bread and butter with the sardines. I do not believe in her sardines for a moment but her name on any label means that there are the goods.

And then Mr. Walling's *Five Suspects* for our grilled sole at dinner on the verandah over the river. It is in a river that the corpse of his country lawyer is found, and in a country town that the clear intelligent action goes on. The suspicion is admirably distributed, and the murderer neatly hidden; I had almost forgotten all about him. Mr. Walling serves his fish with the exact distinction of an English parlour-maid. The book is agreeable, we read carefully, and end contentedly. ☺

Book Review

by Richard Polt

Like a Velvet Glove Cast in Iron

by Daniel Clowes

Seattle: Fantagraphics, 1993

I've raved about this graphic novel before in the pages of this bulletin, without ever fully justifying its relevance to the Harry Stephen Keeler Society. Well, here goes.

The sensibility of Dan Clowes, who presented *Velvet Glove* as a serial story in his comic book *Eightball* in the late eighties and early nineties, is uncannily Keeleresque. (If there is anyone he's closer to than Keeler, it may be David Lynch, but I can't think of anyone else.) This book is teeming with conspiracies, underground currents in popular culture (à la Pynchon), and unexpected connections. Above all, it is woven together with a plot that is so convoluted yet coheres so tightly that it generates delicious paranoia.

Clowes draws in a flat yet strangely powerful style reminiscent of early-sixties commercial art. His urban landscape, like the commercial architecture of that period, is soulless, shabby, inauthentic, but full of eerie character nonetheless—the kind of place where you eat at Grimm's Diner, receive medical care (or not) at Ol' Dutch's Hospital, and are embalmed at the Paul Bunyan Funeral Home. There is a matter-of-fact alienness to his places. Once you've seen them, you are sensitized to locales that you have to call "Clowesian." (In Cincinnati, one finds small, dirty, ominous buildings with names such as Clown Alley Industries and Marpro Marshmallow Products

Corporation.) Such places would be perfectly at home in a Keeler novel, where characters inhabit sites such as Harker's Crib (in *The Mysterious Card*):

The hanging clock ticking away on one wall of the odd one-room residence showed the time to be 8 in the evening. ... [Tarlo Yuce] strode out the door to the narrow hallway whose sliverlike window looked out on the front of the huge, unbuilt-on block that this single strange house stood in the center of. Far off down a long plank walk was the

distant ribbon of sidewalk ... "I'm an architect—designed this affair, thinking 'twas something that could be merchandised—and a building firm, swayed by my silvery tongue, took my fool idea; and built the single one out here on what's called Harker's Heights, as a sample bungalow. ... I got a year's free occupancy in exchange for my design—and I'm living it out here in Harker's Crib, as this bungalow is called in the trade."

As for the people in Clowes, his heroes tend to be mild-mannered, somewhat bewildered young white men, such as *Glove's* Clay Loudermilk (shades of Clay Calthorpe in Keeler's *Riddle of the Traveling Skull*?). Clay is beset by a series of nightmarish yet

funny encounters with people whose perversions don't have names, mutants of various species (such as a dog with no orifices), and irrationally furious characters (such as a villain who injects himself with testosterone). The events here are more bizarre than in any Keeler novel; you may enjoy this, or you may prefer Keeler's teetering on the verge of plausibility, where you're not sure that the author intends the events to be strange.



But is this a *webwork* novel? Consider two fundamental principles of webwork, as expounded by William Gillespie in this very issue:

(a) To build a webwork plot, at the beginning, the main character's thread must intersect many threads in quick succession, in order to bring enough threads into the story.

(b) Each intersection must result from the previous intersection along all intersecting threads.

In the first few pages of *Velvet Glove*, Clowes weaves just such a web:

1. Clay Loudermilk happens to watch an exceedingly weird film, titled "Like a Velvet Glove Cast in Iron," in which his ex-girlfriend appears, much to his surprise.

2. Asking in the theater for information about the film, he is directed to a swami who sits in the men's room and answers all questions. The swami tells him the film was made by "Interesting Productions" in Gooseneck Hollow.

3. To get to Gooseneck Hollow, Clay borrows a car from Paul, who doesn't currently need his car because his eye sockets are being cleaned out by "rare Asiatic sea crustaceans."

4. On the way to Gooseneck Hollow, Clay is pulled over by two sadistic cops who beat him up and mark his foot with a cartoon face.

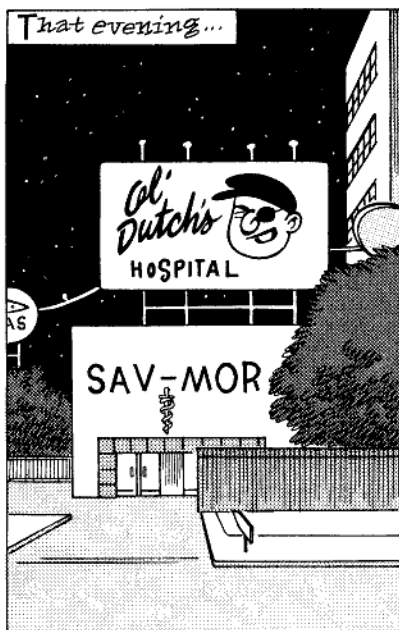
5. Clay is rescued and nursed back to health by an Esperanto-speaking cult.

This all happens with Keeleresque "logic," and the plot threads are kept ominously open, so that we feel that we will once again en-

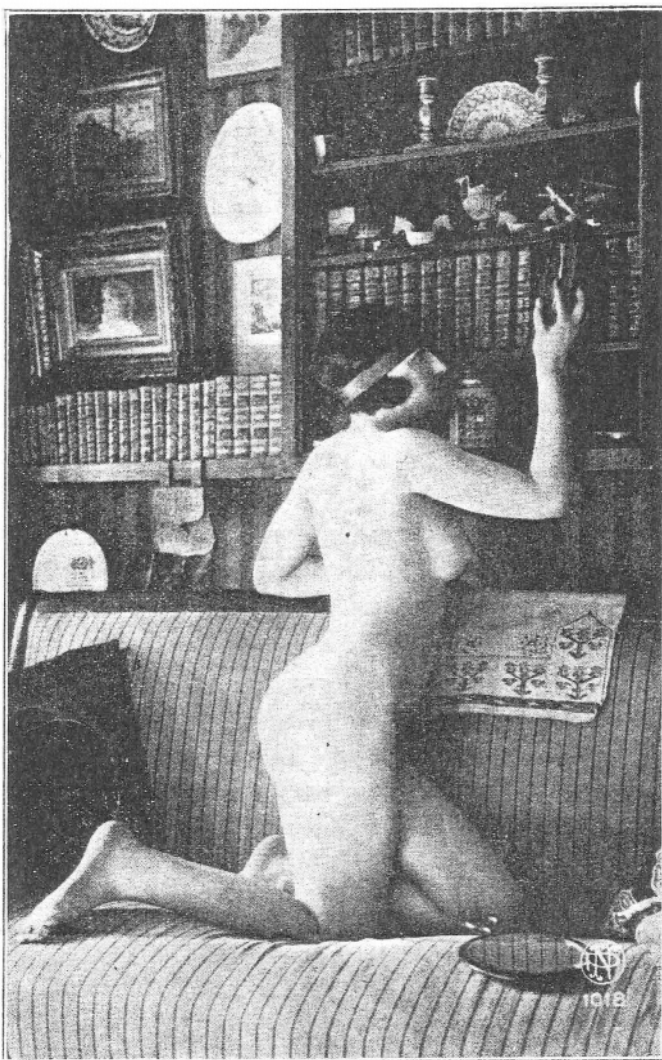
counter those cops and that cartoon face (it's known as "Mr. Jones").

The opening is a perfect match for a key event in Keeler's *The Defrauded Yeggman* and *When Thief Meets Thief*, where the main character happens to watch an exceedingly weird film called "The Franklin Square Enigma": "all its innards had been recorded in reverse direction, the end had evidently been made the beginning so that it could be told—well—infraretrospectively ... immense chunks of the story were missing here and there, being substituted with dead-black stretches where words came to the audience out of the pure ether Its plot appeared singularly like something I'd read once." The film turns out to have been based on a novel by Tillary Steevens, who stole the idea from the hero's grandfather—and thus the plot takes off.

Clowes, who is a native of London-of-the-West and whom I briefly met in my pre-Keeler days, is not a reader of HSK, but he is part of our extended web: his friend and fellow cartoonist Richard Sala is a Keeler fan, as is Johan Kugelberg, who served as the model for Clay Loudermilk. Since creating *Velvet Glove* Clowes has focused on somewhat more realistic and less plot-driven stories, the most famous of which is *Ghost World*. Today he lives in Berkeley, California, and continues to produce *Eightball*, which I heartily recommend while hoping he will turn his talents to webwork again someday. ☺



Sex sells—or so thought Harry Stephen Keeler, as evidenced by these pages from *10 Story Book* (July 1929 and July 1930) provided to us by Chris Mikul.



She Was in a Hurry to Get Her Spectacles !

No, not her glasses, but her copy of "The Spectacles of Mr. Cagliostro," the leading mystery novel which is causing so much talk today over the United States. And so the moment Mabel Landon jumped out of her little crib, she rushed into the library to find out how Jerome Middleton got out of the insane asylum without getting his throat cut by Vianello, the asylum barber.

B. Molreng. 73 Avenue de la Republique,
Montrouge, Seine, France.

Chris comments: "Do you think the art editor was really named 'Libb Sol Pav'?" By the way, internal Dutton records show that Harry's publishers took a dim view of his self-promotion efforts and of his embarrassing magazine. More on this in some future issue.



***She Says the Editor's New Novel, THE FOURTH KING,
is just too Exciting and Mysterious for Anything!***

She being Mazie Carella, and the novel being the latest mystery novel put out by the gent which concocts, like an omelet, this red-jacketed magazine each month, Mr. Harry Stephen Keeler, who, when he sees this blurb in the first copy of 10-Story off the press, will probably fire ye honorable art editor who hath inscribed it! However, THE FOURTH KING, says we, is as good as any of this gent's other successful novels such as "Sing Sing Nights," "The Spectacles of Mr. Cagliostro," "Thieves' Nights," "The Voice of the Seven Sparrows," "Find the Clock, and "The Amazing Web." All booksellers at \$2.00, or at your library.

Photo posed for "The Fourth King"
by CI Photos. Caption by
Libb Sol Pav, art editor 10-
Story Book

Letters

The latest issue of KN is great—the Ken Keeler and Neil Gaiman interviews from *Bizarre* are very interesting, and I thoroughly enjoyed Chris Mikul's account of his strange Keeler volume. I was also intrigued by your piece on *America's Humor*. I wonder why it's such a hard magazine to locate? Surely it had a large readership.

Gavin L. O'Keefe
Bendigo, Victoria, Australia

As Keeler Koinkydink would have it, just a day or so before receiving the latest KN with your question on the naming contest for *America's Humor*, I had transcribed for my *Wit & Wisdom of Harry* book his recollection of the incident. "Bill Ziff had 8 bushel baskets of unopened entries in his prize-contest for the name of his new mag, *America's Humor*. He'd settled in advance for his title; the circulation manager told Thelma Eaton, secretary, 'Pluck out 9 envelopes from those 8 bushel baskets, and award runner-up prizes No. 2 to No. 10 to those nine'."

Mike Nevins
St. Louis

I wonder if there was really a Morris Jones of Providence, then, the supposed inventor of the (not terribly original) name America's Humor. 25 runners-up are listed, all of whom win a year's subscription. Number 18 is—you guessed it—Harry's dear aunt, Laura B. Jones, with her suggestion, "—And the World Laughs With You!"

If Thelma was there in 1926, then the incident with the taxi accident, when Harry took Thelma to the hospital and then asked Hazel for a divorce, would have happened in December 1926. According to your interview with Thelma, she "never went back to that job" after that. But the little credit to "Thelma Rinaldo" appears in the issue of America's Humor that went on the newsstands in June, 1927. Hmmm...

KN a delight—particularly fond of the Mikul! Quality of light at 5:30?

Just finished *Thieves' Nights* this a.m.—wow!

Ed Park
New York City

I got KN #47 today and it's a marvel of interesting Keeleriana. It's so much fun deconstructing Harry.

Here's a passage from *The Crimson Cube* that provoked a "publisher's footnote":

"Does it?" he echoed. "Well let me tell you this: I've encountered every kind of woman there is now—British and American—wild and tame!—but the only one I want happens to be you. And as for playing roulette—well, what would you say if I told you I sat last evening in a poker game in Archdeacon's Gambling Rooms uptown and dropped—well—\$210?"

"Oh-oh!" she said, but not in the least chidingly. "You do need a wife, English," she added, maternally. "And quick. Someone to—to dole it out to you—dollar by dollar. Why say, did you think, as you were shoving out those hardearned bills to the center of that green baize table, you were the richest man in the world?"

"Well I thought," he countered, "that 4 kings was one heck of a high hand. Only—a full house, with only deuces and treys, is, it seems, higher."

"I—said," she insisted firmly, "did—you think—even with 4 kings that can be beaten by all the full houses in creation[1]—oh yes, I can play poker myself!—did you think you were maybe the richest man in the world?"

"I am," he declared.

[1] Apparently, poker was not one of HSK's games. — Publisher

I kept waiting for him to bring that back as a plot point later in the book—"Hey, wait a minute!" he exclaimed. "Four kings does beat a full house!" But he never mentions poker again.

Did Harry play poker? Ever read anything about it in the Keyholes? Should I take out the footnote and just let the reader think what he wants? It's not the kind of error Harry usually makes, is it?

Fender Tucker
Shreveport, La.

Way back at the time of the Keeler centennial (1890-1990), I made a semi-facetious effort to convince the Post Office to issue a Keeler commemorative postage stamp. No dice, but I got a lot of amusingly noncommittal letters from elected officials.

Ever since then, I've been looking for a way to get Keeler official U.S. government recognition. I saw my chance when NASA ran a promotion where people could submit their names via a website, and NASA would encode the names on a CD that would be carried to Mars on the Mars Rover missions. In view of Keeler's secondary career in skience-friction, I thought he should be on Mars. I submitted his name. Even better, I thought, it would be great if Keeler's fictional science-fiction writer, Scientifico Greenlimb, made it to the Red Planet. (He's the guy who skipped town in *The White Circle* and was last reported to be consulting on a Hollywood "rocket movie.") I submitted that name, too.

The Mars Rovers landed safely in January. You can now verify from an official NASA website (<http://spacekids.hq.nasa.gov/2003/>) that bits encoding "HARRY STEPHEN KEELER" and "SCIENTIFICO GREENLIMB" are rolling around on Mars, courtesy of the American taxpayer!

Bill Poundstone
Los Angeles

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Here's another priceless discovery by Chris Mikul, who writes: "I found the enclosed in *So Red the Nose, or Breath in the Afternoon*, ed. Sterling North and Carl Kroch (Farrar & Rinehart, 1935)—a collection of favorite cocktail recipes of various literary luminaries, including Hemingway, Edgar Rice Burroughs, and S.S. Van Dine. I was relieved to see that our man only has 'one eccentricity'."

Sing Sing Nights Cocktail

We can almost see the warden, the captain of the guards, and a couple of gentlemen in striped coveralls singing "Sweet Adeline" and imbibing the *Sing Sing Nights Cocktail* devised by Harry Stephen Keeler.

Mr. Keeler says that he wrote the prescription with people in mind who like himself have allergy toward the complicated esters and ethers which exist in all old, rich-bodied, aged-in-the-wood, bonded Whiskies. For such unlucky individuals the following recipe is guaranteed not to puff up the lining of the nose like an upholstered hatbox nor bring on the 99 other kinds of allergic reactions which may develop.

1 PONY OF PURE GRAIN ALCOHOL
1-1/2 TEASPOONS SUGAR SYRUP
1-1/2 TEASPOONS PURE ORANGE JUICE
(Must not be bottled juice, as this contains Sodium Benzoate, one of the most prolific sources of allergic disturbance!)

Shake with 3 Ice Cubes till at least Half of the bulk of the Cubes has dissolved

Mr. Keeler's one eccentricity is his belief that owning a Siamese cat brings him luck. The trouble is that cats eventually die, and what with worrying about esters and ethers, fulfilling his writing contracts, and hunting for new Siamese cats, Mr. Keeler has very little time left for serious drinking. ☹



RH

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A Sentence from the Master

So long as one *could* unlock himself out of that iron door lying up at the further end of Old Cell Block, well under the overhanging second-tier balcony, it would be "dung pie," at any time when the lousy night screw up there went to the "nicky"—and he always went by way of the connecting corridor, visible from Rudy's cell—it would be dung pie to slip out of Cell 76, pad quietly down the cell-walk—the cons would all be snoring, heads toward the gateside wall, as was necessary because of the way those unprison-like ancient bunks had been constructed—and thence to that riveted door.

The Case of the Transposed Legs

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THE CASE OF THE IVORY ARROW. Phoenix, 1945, good, \$99. Quilldrivers, 218 1/2 W. Florence, Oglesby, IL 61348, quillhill@pipeline.com.

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