



Edgewise
Publications

A Book About A Blog About A Book

by *Steven Fernand*

Edgewise Publications

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Jean-Claude Flornoy restoration of the Jean Dodal Tarot

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Jean Dodal Tarot de Marseilles, circa 1701, Lyon, France.

Restored by Jean-Claude Flornoy.

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~ Introduction ~

I once wrote a novel, (initially titled *Appalachian Carnival*); and to promote it, I started a blog at the beginning of 2012. My intent was to write about my quest to publish the book, and about how aspects of the novel had arisen from my unorthodox notions.

I gave the blog a bi-monthly deadline, the first and fifteenth, and I met that schedule for a year and a quarter. The subjects of several postings were the day of the year itself—the day’s historical and mythological background—April Fools’ Day, May Day, Mardi Gras. Other times, I wrote about the struggle to get the novel published, or I related aspects of the book to the archetypal symbols of the Tarot and the psychology of Carl Jung. Also, I dispatched my opinions—intrinsic to a blog—on politics, religion, people, and places, indulging my satisfaction, amid each spellbound hour, wrapped up in research and composition, mustering my sentences into formation.

Halfway through 2012, I chose to self-publish the novel through Amazon’s CreateSpace, a print-on-demand service; whereupon the blog became a journal of my publishing endeavors. Now and then, I returned to my heretical spiels, varying them with reports on various book promotions.

Each fortnight, I came up with subjects that piqued my interest, and hopefully the interest of my readers as well. Nevertheless, when I found myself, in the spring of 2013, struggling to not repeat what I’d written the year before, I began to wonder if the 35,000 words I’d accumulated thus far had said enough already. Moreover, the blog’s bi-monthly fix to my literary cravings seemed to be stalling the start-up of my next novel. I figured I’d best blog less—even though my website’s numbers for unique-visitors and pages-viewed had been trending upwards.

As the deadline for my mid-April blog approached, a light bulb lit up in my thought balloon—why not collect these blogs sequentially into an e-book? To upload it to Kindle costs nothing but the time to format it. Opting into Amazon’s KDP Select program, I can give it away on five days of every ninety, and the rest of the time charge as little as 99 cents for it (the lowest price allowed by Kindle). Thus, my blog’s role in promoting *Appalachian Carnival* might be preserved and extended beyond its initial format. Other than being made more The Fool, what would be my risk?

Born from my penchant for wordplay, a title came to me—*A Book About A Blog About A Book*—for which I did a google search, and which nobody had. After a few days of putting the existing blogs in sequence and cleaning up their HTML files, I clicked together a Kindle cover. Then, on May Day, 2013, I announced in my blog this book about it, and e-published the e-book.

Within a year or so, I encountered problems with Amazon and the way it does business, so I decided to end our contract—thus deleting my titles from publication. I then revised the novel, retitled it *A Fool Rides the Wheel of Fortune*, commissioned new art for the cover, and signed up with another print-on-demand service, IngramSpark, to produce three new editions: a hardcover, a paperback, and an EPUB, all published on July 1, 2015. Ingram is the biggest book distributor in the world, dealing with bookstores, libraries, and multiple e-readers—markets diametric to Amazon’s avaricious empire.

For those who may have read my blog during the previous years, I sincerely thank you for your worthy attention. For those who may have come across my digital journal for the first time, I hope you might find interesting this pdf-collection of virtual pages about my barefaced adventure into self-publication and self-promotion—which, like mirrors facing each other on opposite walls, repeatedly reflect the persona of my own self-image.

S.M.F.

First Post!

01/04/2012

To whom it may connect:

Greetings from yours truly, Steven Michel Fernand. It's a sunny, but cool, fourth day of the new year, here in St. Petersburg, Florida, as I put together the beginnings of this website. I'm no webmaster, yet I am a do-it-yourself type of fellow, so I've joined forces with weebly.com, a "freemium" type of website-building program, and I'm good to give it the old college-drop-out try.

This here is the E-Z blog function. Although I've written a novel, I have never in my life kept a journal. A private guy, I'm used to holding most of my thoughts close to heart. However, my literary agent tells me that I need to create an online presence. Humility is a virtue, but shameless authorial self-promotion is one way books get sold, get read. And I wrote my novel for it to be read—like a painter wants his canvas seen and a singer, his song heard.

So, pardon me for writing of myself in the third person, and allow me to allow myself to engage in what it might take to push this book out into the www. What to do, and how to do it, is presently a mystery to me; but, like the figuring out of how to write a novel, figuring out how to do this will be a learning experience that I expect shall keep my fingertips busy for a spell.

S.M.F.

First Draft of the Website

01/05/2012

Dear Reader....

After several hours yesterday, and several more today, I guess I've put together a site for sore eyes. There are still some "search engine optimization" business I need to take care of, and likely endless tweaking. Nevertheless, what I've done so far has been surprisingly easy to set up—thanks to the digital engineers at Weebly.

I've heard tales of web-construction pickle barrels that drain money and patience. After two days work and \$50 a year for my own domain name, this has been like shooting fish in that metaphoric barrel. Easy to make and easy to take. That was my motto when I put together my shoe business. And when I set up a website for it in the mid-nineties, I used a primitive program called AOL-Press, simply devoid of bells and whistles, which I also set up in a day or two of point-and-click work, and which served me well for ten years.

Next comes the task of getting this thing out into the worldwide barrel of monkeys. Please feel free to comment, give advice, condemn or praise, and link smfernand.com to whatever you deem appropriate.

Thanks.... S.M.F.

Good to go

01/13/2012

Kind Reader....

So now that this website has been set up, search-engine optimized, and brought forth into the world-wide web of ballyhoo, then what's my spiel? I suppose I might write about the excellent weather here in Florida, or what I did or will do, yesterday, today, or tomorrow—but that would bore me as well as you. What does interest me, and hopefully you, is what exists between the lines, behind the pages, within the structure, of *Appalachian Carnival*.

One writes a novel because one must. Some also do so for money, some for fame, or career. I don't have a lot of money, but I have enough for a while. And during my career as a self-made shoemaker, when people would tell me that I was famous, I knew my narrow fame to be good for business; nevertheless, it was never a goal for my wider soul.

What has broadened my consciousness has been my curiosity for whatever awakens awareness. You name it, and I've perused it—from bibles to heresies, philosophies to psychologies, psychics to physics. Some guys are interested in sports, but my interest is in why they are interested in sports.

Why? is one of the first questions we ask when we begin to speak. We are often told: "Because," and most leave it at that. Many accept the answers for life's questions from whatever society they were born into. One main function of society is to provide its people with beliefs—myths that ease the confusions of lost souls, and stamp their passports to contemporaneous purgatories.

Appalachian Carnival juxtaposes two societies, carny and townie, each with their own credos. Folks in each believe that their world is better than the other. But Annabelle, our heroine, is one of us who is betwixt the worlds. She doesn't fit into her hometown's way of life, and she is unlikely to adopt carny mores, nor any others. As an outsider, she must seek her answers inside herself.

Societies tyrannize, more or less, each person's individuality. Individuation and socialization are two sides of the ever-flipping coin of our lives. Heads, I win; tails, you lose—either way, it's a toss-up for getting one's way. Perhaps only when the coin spins balanced on its edge does one's soul both escape and belong to one's world.

Metaphors stretching beyond their limits make me wonder even more so.

Wishing all the best on this Friday the 13th.....

S.M.F

Rah Rah Ra

01/24/2012

On another sunny Florida day...

As the two sides of the coinage of these un-United States flips before my face, Mitt Romney spins his "pre-buttal" spiel prior to Obama's state of the dis-union address tonight, while Newt, campaigning here today in St. Pete, grins with his growing power—a likely time to pay heed to The Emperor archetype of the Tarot.

There seems to be three sorts of leaders: one imposes his will by physical force or the power of his charisma; a second senses what a crowd feels, and ballyhoos it loudly; a third type dons appointed or inherited trappings—judge, ambassador, king—and with authority thus bestowed, we-the-people become personified. Human groups create their own leaders, projecting into them the echoes of their collective fears and desires.

In chapter four of *Appalachian Carnival*, Eli McCain, the carnival's owner, appears in only one quick scene. Nevertheless, it is solely his sovereignty, vested in good-old American money and cunning, which has begotten his realm—the electric mechanical whirligigs gyrating week to week from one town to the next, the townsfolk milling around McCain's Magic Midway encircled by tents full of outlandish bamboozlement.

Wielding sly capitalist chutzpah, Old Eli has brought forth and commands a state of affairs known as a carnival—a way of life rooted in country fairs, a life form cultivated by gypsies and their ilk.

Each carny, in turn, is in charge of his or her own game, ride, sideshow, or popcorn stand. Whether an independent concessionaire, agent, or salaried ride jockey, each is granted frontage on the midway upon privilege paid to the show boss—transacting the age-old deal of: "This is my territory, and I'll protect you, for a cut of the action."

Also in chapter four, on my fictional day entitled *The Emperor*, May 4, 1970, the real Kent State massacre occurs. Whether or not President Nixon has anything to do with it does not matter, because he shall be blamed regardless. Imperial arrogance, a trait of most politicians, is what they all adopt in order to win elections. A candidate for office must exaggerate his own consequence in order to beat the other mountebanks on the slate. In doing so, he risks being seen with no clothes, and thus he claims the responsibility of causing many things, whether actually capable, and culpable, or not.

So, during this week of Republican primary, Mitt and Newt, Rick and Ron, shall travel Florida, boasting of what they'll do to save conservative souls from the liberal boogiemer. Romney exalts his destined coronation. Gingrich tunes up the choir of angry white folks. Santorum, a devout Christian, touts another war with the Infidels. And Ron Paul attempts to reason with the irrational mores of politics as usual.

I reckon all I can do about it is go to happy hour, and before the sun sets over the Gulf of Mexico, raise my beer to the absolute power of its blazing light.

S.M.F.

Jung and Tarot

02/02/2012



Jean-Claude Flornoy restoration of the Jean Dodal Tarot
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A question often asked me about my novel is: what's with the Tarot cards? Well, it began with a connection I made with my two main characters and the images of the first two cards of the Major Arcana—The Fool and The Juggler—depicted above in reproductions of the Marseilles deck.

Carl Jung, and many others, have attributed archetypal and mythic qualities to icons like the Tarot. From stone-age cave paintings on up to post-modern-abstract-expressionism, artistic images are not just representations of the visible world; they're also reflections of the unseen, of the unconscious, echoes of dreams and myths.

The Fool portrays a traveler afoot, staff and bindle in hand. Lunging at The Fool's half-naked backside is a cat or dog, or a cat-dog. The Fool has a beard, yet his gay array, his gentle gaze, the bells at his waist, the sweep of his headdress, the swag of his ample buttock, all hint at a feminine aspect. His left hand is larger than his right, and it's his right buttock that the animal attacks. And why does the bindle's staff seem to sever his head from his body? Throughout the ages, the right hand has been said

to be masculine, the left, feminine. In the last century, Jung wrote that both men and women have a masculine side and a feminine one—which he named the animus (male) and the anima (female).

My heroine, Annabelle Cory, is at a time in her young life when she must leave her mother's apartment in their coal-town home. I set Annabelle forth, in the prelude, sneaking into the back of a carnival, where a Gypsy's dog champs onto her bellbottoms—clearly evoking The Fool. Although Annabelle is an immature woman with much to learn, there are also masculine traits and strengths that Annabelle must fetch from within herself on the journey toward individuation.

In chapter one, the image of The Juggler, which looks a lot like a flimflammer at a fair, represents my anti-hero, Walt Ryder. (The old French word *bateleur* means mountebank.) And when boy meets girl, we have the start of a story. Nevertheless, to carry this conceit forward, I required a plot.

Thus, in my carnival tale, why not have a tattooed bearded lady represent the next card, The High Priestess? Why not explore various aspects of the symbolism of the next card, The Empress, in the next chapter, on the next day? What do the rest of the cards mean to me, and to the tradition of their interpretation? And how do I incorporate it all into my story?

When I came upon a book by Sallie Nichols, *Jung and Tarot*, it echoed my notion that the progression of the symbolism of the Major Arcana, cards zero through twenty-one of the Tarot deck, stacks up with Jung's idea of individuation—a person's eventual progression toward whom he or she essentially is.

So this is how I came to build each day of Annabelle's ten days with Walt and the carnival around the images of the Tarot. *Appalachian Carnival* ends with The Wheel of Fortune, card X, which leaves me with two more novels to write in my trilogy, carrying this conceit forward, from card XI through XXI, in *Walter Ryder's Medicine Show* and *The Astral Circus*.

Any way you cut the cards, I have my work cut out for me.

S.M.F.

The Chariot

02/15/2012

Another thing I've been asked about is—what's the deal with the acid trip in Chapter Seven? LSD has been demonized, outlawed, debunked, cursed, damned, vilified, and anathematized. Why would I not only write about it, but also, how could I color my heroine's psychotropic experience with beneficial tones?

The uses of entheogenic substances are as old as the world—their abuse, their evil twin. An entheogen, a word coined in 1979, is “a psychoactive substance used in a religious, shamanic, or spiritual context... mostly derived from plant sources and... used in a variety of traditional religious contexts.” Derived from the archaic Greek, the word has been defined as: “that which causes God to be within an individual”; or “creating the divine within”; or “God inside us”; or “a substance that causes one to become inspired or to experience feelings of inspiration, often in a religious or ‘spiritual’ manner.” (all quotes from Wikipedia).

With Native Americans, we've seen such use with peyote cactus and magic mushrooms. The Olympians had their ambrosia; the Rig Veda, its soma; the Rastafarians have their cannabis; the Christians, the body and blood of Jesus himself. In the Eleusinian Mysteries, the *kykeon* was imbibed by the initiates just before the culminating rites in the Temple of Demeter. (The myth of Persephone, the daughter of Demeter, tells how Hades abducted her into the underworld, and I suspect that Annabelle's story, in some aspects, reflects Persephone's tale.)

Be that as it may, *Appalachian Carnival* is a narrative of a time in America when psychedelics were widely available and daringly used for various purposes—mostly thrill-seeking, but also for experiments in psychiatry, and explorations of spirituality. In vogue during the mid-nineteen-sixties and into the early-seventies, was the idea that psychedelics were the way to “turn on” to peace and love. Peace and love are the aim of most religions, what the gods aim to instill in us. The safest and most reputable way to seek such bliss are the time-honored disciplines of meditation, scripture, gurus, rites, initiations—the whole panoply of spiritual quests.

It is not advised that one storms either heaven or hell, unprepared for the divine, nor the diabolic. We cling to our fragile egos, the lifeline to our realities, so that the persona we've become will survive. Mysticism has much to do with the vanquishment of oneself—to get to know a Self greater than one's own individual being. When our egos are overpowered by substances like LSD, our arrogance is brought to its knees; we taste the dust of our ephemeral conceptions. This may be a sacrament to the virtue of humility, but among those whose lives are built upon pride, or among those weak in heart, or muddled in mind, LSD could be very dangerous to their sanity. That is why it was outlawed. Whatever its entheogenic benefits, its damage to fragile psyches cannot be denied, nor tolerated.

But like the mores of carnies and hillbillies, my fiction seeks to document the behavior of people, once upon a time, both good and bad. The reality of *Appalachian Carnival* is that such things happened. And the fact remains that during this time of war and assassination in America, many people discovered peace and love in a wafer of acid.

The aim of my plot, the metamorphosis of Annabelle's character within one week in May, 1970, required a literary device, a *deus ex machina*, to do just that in only a day or so. Thus, the alchemical entheogen, lysergic acid diethylamide— along with some mystic fundamentals from Isis, the bearded

lady—spark in Annabelle some basic epiphanies, which, in the reflective calm following her internal firestorm, begin to transfigure her spirit.

I do not condone the recreational use of LSD, nor similar drugs. Tripping for kicks may well lead to a regrettable kick in the head. I also do not agree with the outright ban of LSD. It has been put to good uses by good people—psychiatrists, gurus, counsels to the dying—experienced guides through the internal world. Also, in the age-old shamanic tradition, some adventurers have benefited their own souls, and those of their tribe, because of their courageous journeys through the doors of perception. Yet, alas, many have also lost their minds in the hells that they possess within.

The Chariot of the Tarot portrays a rider high and mighty beneath a four-square canopy. Its number, seven, is the number of transformation and creation. The chariot's crossbar divides the upper world from the lower, and the ego's will from subconscious forces. An unbridled pair of horses pulls the wheels in contrary directions, while the driver, without reins, steers their eyes to the right with his own. Balanced on his shoulders are two faces: his mask and his true self.



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S.M.F.

Lover's Leap Day

02/29/2012



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The sixth card of the Tarot's Major Arcana, The Lovers, perhaps would have been timelier to blog about on St. Valentine's Day a few weeks ago, rather than on this extra day in the calendar that comes but once every four years. Yet, not unlike love itself, this 366th day realigns us with how the world turns. As the song goes: love makes the world go around. And the vortex of centrifugal and centripetal forces—attraction and repulsion and the pull of gravity—are powers well known to lovers.

The image of The Lovers shows a young man between a young woman and an old one. Above them hovers Cupid, a.k.a. Eros, his arrow aimed at the two youths. The old woman, on the one hand, seems to be pushing the youths together; but the other upon his shoulder appears to caution him. The young man's eyes question hers. His feet step in opposite directions. The young woman—her left hand reaching for his heart, and her right holding the cloak over her womb—stares off beyond my own left shoulder, far into the mystery of what might be. [ed.—the card referred to here is from another Marseilles deck, which Edgewise Publications does not have permission to reproduce]

In Chapter Six of *Appalachian Carnival*, Annabelle and Walt lustily start their day off with a bang; but, Annabelle puzzles over whether she has fallen in love. Knowing little love within her childhood home, her affections suffer from a lack of education, as well as from a lack of experience. Because of what she has read in novels and seen in movies, and when she finds herself not transfigured with the

bliss of what these tales tout as love, Annabelle doubts she is in love. Her twentieth-century conception of love is so confused, she tightens her grip on her hesitant heart. Later that day, when secretly attracted to another man sitting beside her and Walt at a lunch counter, she worries that her licentious yen is a dawning wantonness awakened by the eagerness yawning amid her thighs. When Walt's jealousy rages afterward, she finds refuge in a library, and seeking a clue to her dilemma, she reads *The Art of Love*, by Erich Fromm.

Fromm instructs us on what various types of love can be. Denis de Rougemont, in *Love in the Western World*, tells us that the romantic myth, inscribed into the European heart since the days of Provençal troubadours, is but the fancy born of a mystical conceit of poets. The Greek and Roman myths, save that of Psyche's, relate the genealogies of lust—the Olympians ravishing one another like cavemen with clubs. Kama, the Hindu deva, and his consort, Rati, are lords of: “desire or longing, especially as in sensual or sexual love.” (Wikipedia)

A paternal trade in virginal brides once brought forth most tribes and nations. The eons-old sex-glue between a man and a woman, plus the cement of family, engendering marriages with deep roots and plentiful fruit, was once what love was. One did not fall in love; one grew with it. Although the twitter-patter of hearts young and old, that urge to merge, no doubt sparked countless Greek and Hindu trysts—they didn't make a myth out of it. They did not deify it.

The medieval romance of Tristan and Iseult, tells of a treasonous tragedy, which was nevertheless revolutionary in rousing to ecstatic heights a new form of worship, as close as living skin—the exaltation of one's beloved. But like Dante's Beatrice, or the courtly troubadour's maiden, this mystic ideal, one's soul mate, is unattainable—an imagined projection of one's own psyche.

Psyche, a mortal maiden, falls into Eros' land of enchantment, but the god lies with her only in the darkness of night. After her jealous sisters goad her into a monstrous plan, she brings a lamp and a knife to bed, to behold the husband she has never seen, and slay him. But as Psyche gazes upon Eros, only then does love take hold of her. Eros flees. She has broken her marriage vow. Heartsick, she searches far and wide for her husband. And only after completing Aphrodite's tasks, does she drink ambrosia with Eros and the immortal Olympians.

Today, we call what's between our ears—psyche. I too grew up in the Western World, watching love stories at the movies, reading them in books, and hearing about them from gossip. Like the finches on Galapagos, we modern human beings have evolved amid our surroundings and background—whatever gods our psyches have illuminated. And the flickering sequential images projected onto the inside our skulls, the stuff of last Sunday's Oscars, breed in us ideas born from the myths that exalt our lives. The soap operas of the Olympians and those of daytime TV are one and the same. Only the gods have changed. Today we worship the stars of Hollywood, and believe we must act out the constellations they portray.

Impressionable youths, until they learn better, believe that the paradise of being in love is the most marvelous thing under the heavens. And when the path of their real-time love affair wends awry from their dream-time version, these lovers, both young and old, become downcast by their own devils.

Perhaps if we had not fallen under the spell of troubadours and their latter-day ilk, love might bring less disappointment and more fulfillment. Nevertheless, imagine what would be, were we not to have that lusty spark which we call “falling in love.” The Great Mother gives us such pleasures to multiply creation. Yes, love at first sight does occur. But better yet, it can turn us toward the long view, high upon the mountain where love ascends.

S.M.F.

Anima Enema

03/15/2012

Resolved upon blogging at the beginning and middle of each month, I find the ides of March upon me. My subject this time is why I put the first-person narration of *Appalachian Carnival* into the voice of a nineteen-year-old West Virginian girl. After all, I'm a sixty-something-year-old male Yankee.

The tale I wanted to tell is one of self discovery, a personal experience. Were I to write it in my own voice, I thought that this point of view, being one step removed from the main character, would not work as well as might were I to have the protagonist telling the story.

Huck Finn came to mind—told by Twain through a boy. Huck's unique voice resounds powerfully in his characterization. To drift on a raft downriver appears more alive. The time and place of Huck's language announces the era of the Mississippi in the mid-1800's—resurrecting it from the long forgotten.

Now, I'm no Mark Twain. In fact, when I set myself to writing my novel six years ago, I was nothing but a novice novelist, dangling participles and all, prone to playful alliteration. Writing a novel is difficult. One has to learn how. It soon seemed to me that the easiest voice to write in was the first-person—narration with a fixed point of view and a particular personality. The task was to make the voice believable: my most disciplined concern.

When I passed around to several friends, male and female, a suede-bound print-out of the second draft of *Appalachian Carnival*, the first thing I asked each was, "Do you believe Annabelle's voice?" Their revues came back with sufficient suspension of belief, but they complained about too much Appalachian argot and carny cant. One reader wrote that it seemed like I'd peppered the pages with words from a hillbilly dictionary—which is just what I did. (Kudos to *Mountain Range* by Robert Hendrickson) Though I had heard West Virginian dialects amid swirling midways and within their steep towns, I'm a born-and-bred Frenchy Yankee, heir to mid-Massachusetts terms and idioms. Carny lingo, I know well enough. I spoke it in my profligate youth. Nevertheless, I heeded my readers' critiques about too much arcane lingo, and in subsequent drafts edited it to seek a balance.

So, my having given Annabelle a voice, now who might she be? She is foremost the reader's eyes into a carnival world within an Appalachian time. Her fears and desires are the pulse of this story. Her flight away from socialization, and into individuation, drives the plot. Bold enough to take her chances, but cautious enough to take care, we wonder what she'll do next. She is on a path to herself, the pilgrimage we must all make.

C.G. Jung tells us that a person is both feminine and masculine. Most men exert their animus and repress their anima—that is: upon their world's stage, they act out their masculine aspects (animus); and their feminine qualities (anima) are cut out of the script of their lives. Jung prescribes becoming conscious of one's own lesser half, and proposes growing in awareness of it, so that one might become more whole. We are men and we are women, but more importantly, we are all human beings, cast from the same stuff, yet too often playing one-sided roles. A woman flaunts her femininity (anima) for her advantage, but often cedes her masculine powers (animus) to her man. Every person must actualize their whole being to become who they are. My heroine's challenge, amid the contests of a carnival midway, is to strengthen her animus.

Annabelle, is no doubt a projection of my own anima—a figment from the feminine side of my soul, taking my personal tale of once upon a time among carnies in West Virginia, and casting it upon a

dramatic screen. In so many words, a joker's subtitle to my novel might well be, *An Anima Enema*. I figure it'll be up to each reader to reckon whether my book is bull doo-doo.

S.M.F.

Know Foolin'

04/01/2012

In 1582, New Year's Day moved from April 1 to January 1, decreed by Pope Gregory XIII on his new calendar. Some say that April Fools' Day began when the folks still celebrating the new year on the old day were called fools and had jests played upon them—but days of pranks and foolishness on the week after the vernal equinox go back to the ancient world.

The Romans took from the Greeks such a rite, renamed it the *Hilaria*, and celebrated it on March 25. Modern Iranians, 13 days after the equinox (our April 1), celebrate the ancient Persian feast of *Sizdah Bedar* (translated as "getting rid of the thirteenth"). They go on picnics in the countryside where they sing, dance, and play games—and play tricks on each other. Young girls knot blades of grass together for good fortune. Green vegetables from picnic baskets are left behind, offerings upon the meadows. During India's vernal festival, *Holi*, people cast colored and scented powders upon one another, and frolic without caste around bonfires.

No one really knows where April Fools' Day comes from. Like most of the doings of humans, it's been around a long time, much longer than written history. In 1983, Professor Boskin of Boston University told an Associated Press reporter that the tradition started when Emperor Constantine let one of his court jesters be king for a day on April 1st. This story, printed nationally, was an April Fools' trick, a tongue-in-cheek hoax, a *poisson d'avril* swallowed hook, line, and sinker by the media.

Festivals after the equinox are all about the newborn vegetation of spring. After months of folks' eking through winter, abundance was again on its way. Exorcizing the past winter's troubles with springtime mirth—what better way to celebrate than with laughter?

Like all archetypes, The Fool has many masks in his bag of tricks. The Jester, at medieval European courts, wore motley garb and a hat with bells while he joked and juggled. A licensed fool—differing from a natural fool: that is, one born moronic or mad; providing entertainment, as well; and once widely considered to be divinely inspired—was royally permitted to say things no one else would dare to say. Like the comedian of today, nothing was out of bounds for his wit—the ridiculous ridiculed; the unspeakable spoken; sometimes advising the king with unwelcome barbs that swayed decisions. A jester's buffoonery in the halls of government not only created laughter, his mischief was an antidote to the self-righteous dominion of the status quo. By deriding the way things were, he turned the soil for new ideas to take root.

The Trickster is another mask of The Fool. The Norse shape-shifter, Loki, breaks the rules of Viking gods and men alike. West African stories of Anansi, a spider, tell of deceptions of theft and lust, which often backfire on the anthropomorphic and metamorphic arachnid. Lakota Sioux know a spider-trickster, too: Iktomi is both good and bad; switching his personas to alter the fates of tribes. Coyote, of North-American mythology, and his European cousin, Reynard the Fox, are wily thieves. They, along with Loki, Prometheus, and Māui, stole fire from the gods and gave it to men.

Carnies are tricksters, too. They roll into town, spinning their devious spiel, signifyin' the rubes, and playing the fools. A carnival midway on a vacant lot becomes an evocation of mirth and danger, whereupon kith and kin wander afar from their daily circles. The fire-eater's ballyhoo, the freak's sideshow, the shyster's game, the mechanical roundabout turning plain folk into dizzily laughing fools—an Appalachian carnival is a 20th-century caravan of revelry and deceit.

A god's-honest story I often tell is of the day I ran a carnival game for the very last time. In 1975, under October gold-and-red Massachusetts maples at the Belchertown Fair (which was bizarrely also the very first fair I ever played games at when I was a boy). I quit and huffed out to the road to hitchhike

back to Northampton—and there in the gutter lay a dead fox! I stared drop-jawed, stone-dumbfounded, knowing it was an omen. Then, a VW bug with hippies in it pulled over to give me a ride— even though I did not have my thumb up. I got in, commenting on the dead fox. They asked: what dead fox? As we rode away, I overruled my urge to turn and see if it was really there. After that, I never worked a midway game again.

Psychedelic drugs were The Trickster’s potions in the sixties. The Merry Pranksters knew their role: befuddle, bamboozle, and mystify—blow minds by buffoonery. Many stale egos tripping bewildered within Alice’s wonderland discovered new outlooks and insights amid psychoactive states of mind. The hocus-pocus of a Zen *kōan* is but a verbal trick to transmute a monk’s meditation into greater self-awareness. Discombobulate a person’s, or a culture’s, self-absorbed thought forms—frozen within and without—then renewals are free to flow.

Trapped within her coal-town society, *Appalachian Carnival*’s heroine, Annabelle, escapes with a troupe of tricksters. She corresponds to the Tarot’s Fool. *Le Mat*, the card’s Italian name in a Marseilles deck, translates as “the madman.” I quote Wikipedia: “The Fool is the spirit in search of experience. He represents the mystical cleverness bereft of reason within us, the childlike ability to tune into the inner workings of the world. The sun shining behind him represents the divine nature of the Fool’s wisdom and exuberance, holy madness or ‘crazy wisdom’.”



Jean-Claude Flornoy restoration of the Jean Dodal Tarot
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Each year upon the sun’s return, a hilarious spirit of spring again arises from a withered winter world.

S.M.F.

North/South Shift

April 15, 2012

Today is Friday the 13th, and on Sunday morning, April 15th, Susan and I head north to Michigan for the summer. We are busily cleaning and packing up our apartment here in Gulfport, Florida, an artsy waterfront village at the south end of St. Petersburg, where we've whiled away the wonderful weather this winter.

It's tax time—the day our numbers must add up. Though two and two are definitely four, twenty-two is a number I've often wondered about. There are twenty-two cards in the Tarot's Major Trumps, eleven of which I employ as chapter themes in *Appalachian Carnival*. Yet my curiosity about eleven and twenty-two also turns in other circles—those of the sun and the earth—our cycles of time.

I'm no historian; nevertheless, I'm fairly familiar with the story of the 20th Century. The pendulum of history swings us back and forth, right and left, and it seems to me that its arc, from one side to the other and back, is nigh on to twenty-two years.

In 2011, people of the Arab Spring arose spontaneously to end the reigns of several right-wing dictatorships. The last time such a thing happened was in 1989, twenty-two years before, when citizens of Eastern Europe brought down the Communist tyranny. Before that it was in 1967, when protests in America precipitated the Vietnam War's downfall; and in '68, students barricaded the streets of Paris. Go back twenty-two years from there, and the Allies defeated the Axis in 1945. In 1923— a quieter year— Hitler's "Beer Hall Putsch" failed, and he was imprisoned; also that year, Marxism's ideals birthed the U.S.S.R. experiment. Twenty-two years earlier, around 1901, Queen Victoria and William McKinley died, and the progressive Republican, Teddy Roosevelt, rode rough against the robber barons.

Flip the coin the other way, and I observe the rise of the forces of war, repression, and conquest: pre-WWI tensions in 1913; Hitler's election in 1933; the Cold War of the mid-1950s; the rise of the Ayatollah in late-1970s, along with Brezhnev's invasion of Afghanistan; and at the turn of the 21st Century, the spread of Al Qaeda and Islamic militarism, resulting in our 9/11 cause for war.

Not only do the trends seem to swing politically from left to right, but also there appears to be corresponding oscillations in the worlds of art and invention, in the ups and downs of economics, and in the cycles of fashion.

A surge of creativity during the first decade of the 20th Century brought us the works of Picasso, Scott Joplin, Henry Ford, Marconi, Einstein, and the Wright Brothers. The 1920s roared with jazz, movies, literature, industry, and the Harlem Renaissance. Geared up for war in '44, WWII spawned rockets, jets, radar, the atom bomb, TV, bebop, and abstract expressionism. We reached for the moon with high-tech gizmos in '66, and during its Summer of Love we explored inner space, setting off a big bang of musical genesis with the genius of Hendrix, Clapton, and The Beatles. The late '80s saw another burst of creativity, this time with computers. And nowadays, we are witnessing a kaleidoscope of graphic art on our televisions, smart phones, and computer-generated cinema.

The other halves of these 22 year cycles, 1911, '33, '55, '77, and '99, had much to do with economic and artistic stagnations. Boom years occurred around 1900, in the early 1920's, the late '40s, the '60s, the late 80's; and were it not for the sub-prime mess, and the deficits of two long and unnecessary wars, perhaps would have been booming lately as well.

And fashion?—Teddy Roosevelt saw the bustle disappear and skirts rise above the ankle. The '20s brought higher skirts and shorter hair. During the depression years, and 22 years later in the mid-50s, hems dropped to the shins. The '60s gave us the mini-skirt. The 70's, disco duds. Dressing for success in the early 80's became as conservative as Nancy Reagan and Margaret Thatcher. The '90s brought retro-hippie grunge and hip-hop sloppiness. And today, were I to sit at a sidewalk table in downtown St. Petersburg and watch the parade of young people march by, my eyes would be seeing a lot of skin.

Now, I'm not claiming that this historical pendulum swings like clockwork, swaying the whole world

from progressivism to conservatism, from boom to bust, from creativity to mimicry, all on time and in totality. I'm trying to show the trend that appears to occur approximately every eleven years— a zenith of positive forces followed eleven years later by a nadir of negative forces. I find it very curious.

And what's even more curious... I quote from nasa.gov: "The Sun's magnetic poles will remain as they are now, with the north magnetic pole pointing through the Sun's southern hemisphere, until the year 2012 when they will reverse again. This transition happens, as far as we know, at the peak of every 11-year sunspot cycle—like clockwork."

Hmm.... The polarity of the Sun flips every eleven years? Its positive pole switches with its negative pole every eleven years?

Are we not simply manifestations of the Sun's essential energy?

S.M.F.

May I?

05/01/2012

I vividly remember a May Day in 1982, on St. Thomas in the Virgin Islands, where onstage at a small festival a bare-chested young man, wearing tights and a horned wreath, fingered recorders in each hand, blowing them in wild harmony—one flute in each nostril! He seemed to me an echo of Pan, the Greek god, half goat and half human; and, as I gazed at his performance, I felt that the role he was playing was as old as the world.

One of the eight spokes within the pagan wheel of the year (each holiday either on or halfway between the solstices and equinoxes), May Day is a festival of fertility—a time to dance around maypoles, leap over bonfires, swap a basket of posies for a kiss. One of the calendar's cross-quarter days (along with the first days of November, February, and August), the holiday harkens back long before history, when each eighth of the year brought forth its own needs for survival and celebration amid the turnings of the seasons.

The fields having been sown with new seed, the workers got May Day off, to eat, drink, and make merry. The May Queen is adorned with flowers—as once was Flora, the Roman fertility goddess. The ancient Celts, calling the day Beltane, built bonfires to beget the warmth and light of summer, and they coupled in the flickering shadows upon the dewy grass, enacting the union of the Horned One and the Goddess—like the Stag King in Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Mists of Avalon*.

On the eve of May Day in Germanic countries, Walpurgis Night is when witches and sorcerers are said to cavort atop the Brocken in the Hartz Mountains, where the dark forces of winter have their last fling before the dawn of summer. I quote Goethe's *Faust*: "*Now to the Brocken the witches ride; the stubble is gold and the corn is green; There is the carnival crew to be seen, And Squire Urianus will come to preside. So over the valleys our company floats, with witches a-farting on stinking old goats.*"

The Czechs, on Walpurgis, burn straw effigies of witches. Estonians masquerade as witches and warlocks. Around bonfires ablaze with what is dead and decaying, Swedes sing to banish evil spirits from their midst. On May Day morning, burghers enact mock battles led by their May-King, to drive away winter's deathly tyranny and fly the ribboned pennants of a reborn reign of fecundity. Whereas on Halloween (a half-year before and afterward), folks around the Northern Hemisphere observe nature's transition from life to death, Walpurgis hallows its transition from death to life.

Amid our collective unconscious—a stew pot of pagan and Christian traditions—there lies a conundrum betwixt carnality and evil. Our heathen sexuality has been damned by the sacred cows of popes. The lusty rites of spring are those of a horned god, a.k.a., The Devil. The hot blood of Beltane

surges through our hearts; however, our puritanical history represses this erogenous birthright, inherited from Mother Nature herself.

As I was clicking around Google for May-Day lore, I came across this in Wikipedia: *“Sherry Salman considers the image of the Horned God in Jungian terms, as an archetypal protector and mediator of the outside world to the objective psyche. In her theory, the male psyche’s ‘Horned God’ frequently compensates for inadequate fathering. When first encountered, the figure is a dangerous, ‘hairy chthonic wildman’ possessed of kindness and intelligence. If repressed, later in life The Horned God appears as the lord of the Otherworld, or Hades. If split off entirely, he leads to violence, substance abuse and sexual perversion. When integrated he gives the male an ego ‘in possession of its own destructiveness’ and for the female psyche gives an effective animus relating to both the physical body and the psyche.”*

“In considering the Horned God as a symbol recurring in women’s literature, Richard Sugg suggests the Horned God represents the ‘natural Eros’, a masculine lover subjugating the social-conformist nature of the female shadow, thus encompassing a combination of the shadow and animus. One such example is Heathcliff from Emily Bronte’s Wuthering Heights. Sugg goes on to note that female characters who are paired with this character usually end up socially ostracized, or worse—in an inverted ending to the male hero-story”

Although this analysis is news to me (I’ve never before heard of Salman nor Sugg), it appears to reflect aspects of my novel, *Appalachian Carnival*. Walt, akin to most any horny wildman, is Annabelle’s protector and mediator. She, as did Persephone, gets spirited off to an otherworld—a roadshow’s midway, rife with violence, drugs, and sex. Annabelle struggles to seek her animus and unveil her shadow—nevertheless, she cannot conform, and ends up left out.

When a carny refers to someone as a “First of May,” it means the person is new in the business. A carnival’s season often begins on May Day, bedazzling and amusing the local celebrants of summer’s arrival, with dizzying thrills, dangerous chances, freakish curiosities, and con men bedeviling young and old.

On May 1st, 1970, Annabelle meets Walt. He and his ersatz gypsy troupe carry off this child of coal-town West Virginia. Townsfolk swirl amid the leaping colored lights of monstrous mechanical whirligigs. Hootchy-kootchy banners and ballyhoo blare into their upturned eyes and ears as lascivious May-Queens bump and grind on the carnival midway—luring men behind the curtain of their own primal lust for life.

Maybe I’m too eager to find symbolic parallels among my own written imaginings. Yet perhaps, notwithstanding, one oughtn’t underrate the archetypal gestations of one’s own collective unconscious.

S.M.F.

Archetypal Idols

05/15/2012

In Man and His Symbols, C.G.Jung wrote: “My thesis then, is as follows: in addition to our immediate consciousness, which is of a thoroughly personal nature and which we believe to be the only empirical psyche (even if we tack on the personal unconscious as an appendix), there exists a

second psychic system of a collective, universal, and impersonal nature which is identical in all individuals. This collective unconscious does not develop individually but is inherited. It consists of pre-existent forms, the archetypes, which can only become conscious secondarily and which give definite form to certain psychic contents.”

The unveiling of the mystery of the fundamental power of the collective unconscious is one of Jung's greatest gifts to the knowledge of what makes us tick. Within us all are basic symbolic constructs, as inherent and functional as our other internal organic systems—all of which allow us to wend our way through this world.

Were it not for the evolutionary adaptivity of life, we might well still be amoebae in mud puddles. Yet, even a one-cell amoeba must deal with its environment. It projects pseudopodia to move towards food that it engulfs, digests, and excretes. Somehow, it knows what food is, and goes in quest of it.

Darwin's studies of Galapagos finches tells us that each species on Earth adapts to occupy a niche within its surroundings. We human beings have pretty-much taken over the whole wide world, mostly because of the adaptability of our hands and heads. The complex manipulations of our fingers and the creative imaginings of our minds—from stone arrowheads to the atomic bomb, from hieroglyphics to iPads—have projected us through the millennia to the top of the food chain.

But man lives not on bread alone. Our quest for nourishment entails other aspects of both the natural and man-made worlds. We seek sex on Saturday night and religion on Sunday morning. Procreation, and its attendant pleasures, drive us to the carnal dance; but what is it that propels the majority of mankind to churches, temples, and mosques?

The word “religion” is said to derive from “to reconnect”—*re-* (again) and *ligare* (to bind or tie). But reconnect to what? The easy answer is God. But then I have to ask: what is God?

Gods have been plentiful throughout the traditions of all cultures. Many nations have had but one god, and some, many gods. Christians have a triune one—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. Muslims swear there is no God but Allah. The ancient Greeks and Romans believed in a pantheon of deities, each embodying various aspects of humanity. Hindus have a supreme trinity, too: Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva, functioning as creator, protector, and destroyer—and they also have thirty other deities, each with its own aspects and powers; plus, ten avatars, ten incarnations of gods. The Indians of America sing of one Great Spirit.

The validity of one system of belief over another is moot. What I want to get at here is what motivates mankind to create such constructs, and give them the importance to rule the lives of civilizations.

One thing is common among them all: symbolism. Religions use symbols like a chef uses ingredients to feed the hungry customers— each dishing it out according to acquired tastes. Early Christianity rehashed the pagan and Jewish beliefs of the ancient Mediterranean world. The Koran reheats parts of The Bible. Out of a Hindu mash, Buddha distilled a new spirit.

Joseph Campbell revealed the masks of god and told us of the hero with thousand faces. James Frazer compared varieties of spiritual fruit hanging from the golden bough. Edward Whitmont writes that life is a symbolic quest.

What I gather from all this is that within people is the urge to reunite with the force that causes the world to be—unsolvable mysteries, unseen and unknowable. We know it to be, because we are a piece of it all; however, how can we, existentially a part, possibly know the whole? In our individuality, we feel ourselves to be orphaned from that force, so people through time immemorial have sought reunion with Mother Earth and Father Sky, and sought communion with their attendant spirits.

We have mostly done so by projecting aspects of our own psyches into self-seeking realms of heavens and hells. We view the world as in a mirror, a reflection of ourselves and our experiences, both

individually and collectively. In order to bring the gods down to earth, we personify them—we anthropomorphize what we presume to be their powers. We create rites, myths, and heroes that glorify our relationship with them. We employ shamans, priests, and preachers to be our intermediaries with them. From statues of stone to bibles of paper, we deify idols that depict ourselves to ourselves.

Apart from mystics who succeed, more or less, in connecting with the essence of the godhead, humanity spawns symbols to bring the divine near. The demiurge behind this begets the archetypes that Jung says populate the collective unconscious of every human—symbolic conceptions, born and bred through millennia of human interaction with the world.

Like the beaks of Galapagos finches, our minds have adapted methods and abilities to deal with the challenges of our environment, which for us greatly includes the contents of our psyches. Archetypes as plentiful as the cast of characters upon Olympus seek roles upon the stages of our lives. They all need to be actualized. We must allow them to play their parts, for us to live a full life.

In the introduction to *Women's Mysteries*, Jung states: *“The term (archetype) is not meant to denote an inherited idea, but rather an inherited mode of psychic functioning, corresponding to the inborn way in which the chick emerges from the egg, the bird builds its nest, a certain kind of wasp stings the motor ganglion of the caterpillar, and eels find their way to the Bermudas. In other words, it is a “pattern of behavior.” This aspect of the archetype is the biological one..... But the picture changes at once when looked at from the inside that is from within the realm of the subjective psyche. Here the archetype presents itself as numinous that is, it appears as an experience of fundamental importance. Whenever it clothes itself in the appropriate symbols, which is not always the case, it puts the individual into a state of possessedness, the consequences of which may be incalculable.”*

The adjective “numinous” means: mysteriously associated with deity; having a mysterious power that suggests the presence of a spirit or god; filled with inextricable associations with God; holy. Whatever archetypal forms a society exalts upon its altars—animal, vegetable, or mineral; humanoid or geometric—they have a mysterious power that evokes awareness of the divine. From the golden calf to the black stone within the Kaaba; from petroglyph spirals to Christian crosses; from the Green Man to Zarathustra—they all address our desire to be again in the presence of the essence of our being.

We are thrust from the womb and into this world as individuals, separate from all others. We strive to be who we must become, unique and independent. Yet we inevitably return to the source. This is the myth of the hero's journey. There are many variations on this archetypal theme. One of which I attempt to relate in *Appalachian Carnival*.

Our myths, rites, and icons differ in specifics from people to people, but their function in life is the same—reconnect our solitary souls with our ineffable source. Folks do so in myriad ways, each likely as valid as the next. I prefer a pantheistic approach. If we assume that God is everything, why not call it All That Is? When we turn archetypes into idols, do we not have false gods in our temples?

Cautioning the reader that my novel's theme is concerned with the detrimental effects of society upon the individual—and humbly asking myself, “What the heck could I ever really know—I attach below, from *Appalachian Carnival*, a segment from the mimeographed booklet written by my bearded-lady character, Isis, and given to my heroine, Annabelle:

If you think that you know, then you do not. Whoever knows knowledge to be unknowable—who knows that truth is simply too much for our minds to grasp, and is thus always misunderstood—knows the truth that sets one free.

Symbols are how we know what we believe we know. And what we believe we know creates our world. The first symbols were real objects, real events, their meanings evident in the animal lives of

ancient men. Then, symbolic objects, replacements for what they represented, were fashioned into statues, fetishes, totems, used in ceremonies mimicking the older realities.

The first handmade symbols were small fat figurines of women, of the Great Mother Goddess—and over time, many other goddesses came to be worshiped. When some people saw the power these objects had over others, they exalted these idols for their own selfish gain. Whoever controlled these objects, controlled their power, controlled what people believe, controlled their world.

Idols other than the Great Goddess also became powerful, but nothing is so revered by people as is their mother—so she reigned supreme in the temples of old. All was from her womb. She not only represented our human mothers, she was Gaia, the earth goddess, from whence we receive all that the world gives. Her priests gained dominance, and her temples the most treasure—while the priests of other temples, other goddesses, vied for power.

Then, not long before history began, the civilizations of the ancient world were overrun by men from the north. Their spears and chariots, and their male gods and priests, vanquished the goddesses from their temples, and overthrew the beliefs of the people. And on the blood-washed pedestals, these men exalted their own gods of war, and lust, and power.

But the people would also have their goddesses. So, in realms like those on Olympus, tales of marriage and rape brought forth pantheons of newborn deities—their myths ruling people's lives for eons.

When the Christians converted this world, they smashed the old stone idols and stole the old stories. And they bred new creeds with words on paper—now exalting the idolatry of a book. Declaring it to be the Word of God, their priests, like those of old, knew the power of symbols—whether written, chanted, painted, or etched in stone at a cathedral.

Though the Christians did not include the goddess in their trinity, the people worshipped Mary, nonetheless. Nevertheless, all gods and goddesses are false gods—made by men and women to glorify aspects of their own selves. And to ascribe powers to these gods conceals the world's truth from us—our own truth.

All That Is cannot be known. Yet one may know that It cannot be known, and thus not be misled by those who believe that they speak the truth.

S.M.F.

Empress Juno

06/01/2012

The month of June is named after the Roman goddess Juno—queen of the gods; sister and husband to Jupiter. Her complex role in the Capitoline pantheon has entitled her with many epithets, aspects of which have been variously expressed in millennia of exegeses. For an easy explanation of her theology, I quote from www.britannica.com:

“Juno was connected with all aspects of the life of women, most particularly married life.... As Juno Lucina, goddess of childbirth, she had a temple on the Esquiline from the 4th century bc. In her role as

female comforter she assumed various descriptive names. Individualized, she became a female guardian angel; as every man had his genius, so every woman had her juno. Thus, she represented, in a sense, the female principle of life....As her cult expanded she assumed wider functions and became, like Hera, the principal female divinity of the state. For example, as Sospita, portrayed as an armed deity, she was invoked all over Latium and particularly at Lanuvium, originally as a saviour of women but eventually as saviour of the state. As Juno Moneta ("the Warner"), she had a temple on the Arx (the northern summit of the Capitoline Hill) from 344 bc; it later housed the Roman mint, and the words "mint" and "money" derive from the name....Juno is represented in various guises. Most frequently, however, she is portrayed as a standing matron of statuesque proportions and severe beauty, occasionally exhibiting military characteristics."

Pick a card from the Tarot deck that resembles Juno, and I'd wager it'll be The Empress. Number three of the Major Arcana, her image upon a throne depicts the three primary aspects of Juno: fertility, sovereignty, and protection. In the Marseilles deck, The Empress cradles in her right arm a shield emblazoned with a martial eagle. With her left, she holds the orbed scepter to her womb. There is wisdom within her gaze.



Jean-Claude Flornoy restoration of the Jean Dodal Tarot
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In chapter three of *Appalachian Carnival*, The Empress reigns on Annabelle's first day after running off with Walt and joining the carnival. In the back seat of a car, she awakes Sunday morning amid a jumble of carny rigs scattered about a pasture between the hills. Walt, who has carried her off from her dreaded coal-town prospects, is nowhere to be seen. She squats in the bushes, douches in a creek, and crosses over to a small waterfall pouring off the ridge. She gathers mayflowers, sits atop a boulder, and weaves them into a circlet, until a snake scares her away.

The Empress of the Rider-Waite Tarot depicts a woman in a flowery gown sitting upon cushions atop a stone bench. Before her is a field of wheat; behind her is a forest, a stream, and a waterfall; and aside

her is propped her symbol. She wears a crown of stars, and her right hand holds an orbed scepter. For what it's worth, I echo this image in my chapter's beginning scene, as if to say Annabelle is also empress of her own Eden.

While searching the carnival lot for Walt, she meets Lula, fat lady in the sideshow. Sprawled in the sun beside a two-ton truck, Lula fills up a loveseat set in the pasture—again resembling The Empress upon her throne. With the confidence and warmth of a stout woman, Lula eases Annabelle's worries and welcomes her into the bosom of the show. Lula, like Juno—like The Great Mother—bestows protection and understanding.

Annabelle searching further for Walt, is tempted by Danny to dance for dollars in his hootchy-kootchy show, to sell the sight of her body to the lusty eyes of men. His offer sparks a heat in her blood that chills her to the bone with shame, and she refuses to swap off her allure, her gift of beauty, her feminine power.

Walt shows up and drives her to a motel room in town, where she feels for the first time in her young life that she is the woman of her own domain. She tidies the room, moves things around to her liking, and turns on the lovemaking.

And later, back out at the lot, Julia—the wife of Eli McCain, the carnival's owner—rides to and fro in her golf cart, telling the independent concessionaires where to set up their joints on the midway. She is surely the empress of the show. She gathers together the rides and tents and trailers into an oval—an egg that hatches into a carnival. Julia stops and grills Annabelle for her story, and tells Annabelle how it's to be on McCain's Magic Midway; but she also offers Annabelle protection.

Brenda, wife of Nickel Nick (Walt's boss, who owns and books three games on McCain's show), sets Annabelle up in their hoop-toss. Afterward Annabelle has a chat with Isis, the tattooed and bearded lady, who gives her a bizarre booklet that she wrote.

When Walt and Annabelle go out for dinner later at Mama Maria's Italian restaurant, they are joined by Trudy and Janet, strippers in Danny's kootch show. Trudy, embodying the shadow of a woman's power, raises a ruckus with some locals, which is shortly quelled by a burly, frying-pan-wielding, black woman from the kitchen.

And back at the motel, at a carny party in the room next door, Annabelle befriends Madeline, a girl near her age, who talks show business, and informs her about certain characters in the hierarchy of carny society.

Thus, at the same time as I bring Annabelle's story forward, we explore several aspects of The Empress. Being that the tale of a girl running off with a carny must be my main concern, I worry that the allegory doesn't materialize as well as this first-time novelist might hope. Nevertheless, it was my conceit in each chapter, in each a day of my heroine's week with the show, to broadly paint Tarot archetypes behind the scenes.

Say the name "Juno" nowadays, and most folks will think of the movie *Juno* that came out in 2007, wherein a teenage girl gets pregnant and tells everybody what she's going to do about it—a story about a woman's power embodied in a quirky teenybopper. Juno protects her fertility with near militant sovereignty. She shall run her own life no matter who tells her what. She is empress of her destiny.

Juno—Roman goddess of the moon; goddess of marriage, pregnancy, and childbirth; sister and wife to Jupiter; mother of Mars and Vulcan; queen of the gods; protector of finances; defender of the state. Her strengths are leadership, loyalty, her benevolent authority protecting others. Her weaknesses include jealousy, vindictiveness, arrogance, her will becoming controlling and aggressive.

Juno, and also the Tarot's Empress, live large in the soul of every woman (and as well in the souls of all men, albeit lessened). All are projections of the unconscious representations of our own innate selves

painted upon the facades of tradition. Yet, the powers they embody are those that sustain the lives of tribes and nations.

S.M.F.

I, a D.I.Y. guy....

06/15/2012

This Monday, I was told by my literary agent that 160,000 words from a first-time novelist was too much for a publisher to sensibly print, and unless I cut out a third or so, she would no longer be submitting the manuscript.

I knew already that my having more than 100,000 words added up to too many pages to gamble on the likes of me. Ninety-nine New York agents had previously rejected *Appalachian Carnival*, ostensibly confirming what I'd read about publishers' word-count limits.

Late last year, upon my penultimate flurry of queries before opting to self-publish, one agent signed me up—a wonderful woman, gung-ho about the book, and new in the business. I hoped she might transport my manuscript through doors closed to the un-agented—which she did do, only to see just the way it is nowadays with big-time publishers and first-time non-genre-specific novels that are half-again beyond the prescribed word-count.

Because I won't be slashing a third from my story to comply, we've agreed to cancel our contract, and now I'm free to publish the book myself.

Amazon's CreateSpace and its ilk, with print-on-demand and e-books, have made small-time book publishing much easier—and less costly—by employing online book-design tools, by reproducing digitally on paper and online, and by providing how-to info, all at one's fingertips. Now, typesetting need not be set with lead, nor offset. No pallets of boxes of books need to be stacked in warehouses. Paperback novels can be printed one at a time with lasered fonts, or ordered up on electronic screens. Software programs have become bottled geni translating the age-old know-how of book design into the can-do of desktop publishing.

I've always been a do-it-yourself guy. My footwear business was totally D.I.Y., cobbled together from necessity, the mother of invention. I paint my house myself. I mow my own lawn. Most of what ideas I hold to are the result of self-education. If I can design and manufacture a line of shoes, and sell enough of them to stay plenty busy for a quarter-century, I'll eagerly wager a few thousand dollars to produce and promote a novel that I wrote myself.

This new challenge has sparked up my aging and idling pistons. Switching on the key to this literal vehicle, I'm eager to put the pedal to my mettle. The drive has begun to roll out a first edition before August.

ISBN's and CIP's, gutters and running heads, widows and orphans—a whole new game to play by the rules! And it's never whether one wins or loses; it's always how one plays. Yes, it's being in the game itself, whatever one's wherefores or thereafter.

I didn't write a book to have it not read. It is certainly not the greatest one ever written, nor not likely the worst. I've mostly seen approval in the eyes of what few readers I have had. Plus, I've made enough unconventional shoes in my life to know that an unconventional novel about unconventional things is just as subject to the individual subjectivity of one person as it is to any other. You can't please all of the

people all of the time, but you'll likely please some.

If you've read this thus far, perhaps you might please sign up below to receive notification when *Appalachian Carnival* becomes available through Amazon. Or just stay tuned to this website for further developments.

S.M.F.

Words in Edgewise

07/01/2012

Keeping with my discipline to post a blog at the first and middle of each month, I'll write here an update on my endeavors during the past two weeks to self-publish *Appalachian Carnival*—aiming to get it ready for submission by mid-July, and have copies in the trunk of my car on my trip to Massachusetts in mid-August.

The 18th of June, I went to the local courthouse and registered a sole proprietor's DBA—Doing Business As—Edgewise Publications. Coming up with a name for an enterprise is often difficult. After scanning a thesaurus and listing various options, I googled one after another, eliminating any that were already used or were too close for comfort. I searched “Edgewise Publications” and there wasn't one single instance of those two words combined together in the whole world wide web. “Edgewise” being associated with “getting one's words in edgewise,” I reckoned it apt for publishing today. Until the recent dawn of print-on-demand and electronic books, New York sold what books saw the light of day. Now, writers have other options to reach readers through deals offered by the likes of Amazon's CreateSpace, Lulu, and Smashwords—perhaps getting one's words in edgewise? The two halves of “edgewise” have overtones themselves. “Edge” feels of something on the fringe, something edgy. “Wise” is what we should be.

From the courthouse, I went to the bank, opened a checking account in the business name, and put in a thousand-dollar capitalization. They all say that it takes money to make money. My business experience as a shoemaker, launched on a shoestring in '82, has taught me to separate one's financial pocketbooks, both for one's own accounting, and for the IRS as well.

The next day, I awakened from a drawer an unused credit card, for use only for publishing expenses, and (recording the miles driven in a new mileage log) drove up to Traverse City to buy a new laptop at Staples. My old one had done me well for a half-dozen years—the digital womb for *Appalachian Carnival*'s first draft and multiple rewrites. But the Dell has descended toward hell, slowing slower and slower, making me bless it out with much impatient cussing. I also bought new Microsoft Word software and the new Microsoft Publisher. I've used Publisher since 1996, and this upgrade is like going from Moped to Harley.

With new tools and a suitable imprint, I registered on CreateSpace, and began clicking on and learning about my options. I dumped the novel's file into a 6”x9” Word format, and printed it out on my desktop one more time, as if it were galley proofs. Susan, my loving lady and reigning grammar queen, agreed to go through it as if she were a proofreader, espousing typos and pointing out repairs. Susan has a BA in English and a MA in French literature, and she's a bi-lingual stickler for proper usage— notwithstanding my heroine's narration in an Appalachian voice. I pencil-edit pages after she's done with them, and then reload changes into the laptop. Most edits so far have been small: too many

commas, a clumsy sentence here and there. As I re-enter it into my new Word software, I'll also heed its spelling and grammar functions.

Next, I had to come up with a cover. A year ago, I came across an image on a stock-photo site, Dreamstime, and contacted the photographer that had posted it, Robert L. Fox. At that time, I was still hunting for an agent or publisher, but I kept the image in mind, for the likelihood I'd end up self-publishing. So, after relearning the interfaces of my upgraded software, I sat down and put together a mock-up of a book cover, to CreateSpace's specifications, and pasted the Fox photo into Microsoft Publisher.

The first-day's result I showed to a few folks, notably my *amie*, Amy Johnquest, a.k.a. The Banner Queen, whose forte is carnival and circus art. I'd hoped she might design my cover, but both her time and mine seemed limited to do so forthwith. She liked her first look at the cover on her phone, and after studying it on a bigger screen, offered suggestions that I'll endeavor to heed.

I contacted Bob Fox, to deal direct with him, but he was on the road, and it seemed easier to just buy the reproduction rights from Dreamstime, which I did—a one-time fee of \$25 for a “royalty-free” license, allowing use as a book cover, up to 500,000 copies. A bargain. I'll paste the mock-up below. Comments will be most welcome.

Then I had to secure reproduction rights for images of the Tarot's Major Trumps, which are depicted at the beginning of each chapter in the novel. There are many, many, Tarot decks. I chose the Marseilles deck, one of the oldest. There are Marseilles Tarots in museums, published centuries ago, which are likely now in the public domain; however, the quality of their images has been eroded by time and use. In the last hundred years or so, several artists have restored the traditional images with their own take on what the cards should be. And each, or their publisher, now holds copyrights to these updates. I sent multiple queries to several, with the result that most just ignored me. Then the gracious and generous Roxanne Flornoy, *et ta famille*, granted permission to reproduce her deceased husband Jean-Claude's restoration of the Dodal Tarot. I'm wholly grateful for allowing me to present such distinguished work.

These legal necessities of publishing accomplished, I set myself to another. An ISBN number (International Standard Book Number) is a must. It identifies each edition of each book in print. Booksellers rely on it. CreateSpace will give you one for free, with certain caveats, or they will sell you ISBNs with various options; nevertheless, Edgewise Publications bought its own—which allows using the same ISBN with printers other than CreateSpace, were it ever to be advantageous to do so. Bowker Identifier Services, the sole clearing house for ISBNs, sells one for \$125, ten for \$250. Since each edition of a novel must have a separate ISBN—in my case, paperback and e-book (and also one ISBN for each edition in e-book format: Kindle, Nook, i-book, PDF, et al), I figured \$25 apiece is the way to go. Acquiring ISBNs was as easy as making a peanut-butter sandwich. Just go to Bowker's website, click on this and that, type in some slots, enter a credit card, and voila.

There's more business to take care of on the verso of the title page—Library of Congress cataloging and numbering. Yesterday, I looked into it and gathered that the CIP block, as it is termed, is unnecessary. It makes one's book appear more professional with it included, but it has little practical effect with the Library of Congress and most local libraries. The L of C does not issue CIP blocks to self-publishers. I could get a “Publisher's” CIP block, for \$60 or so, through an online service, which would act and look like a L of C block. However, I see advised in various blogs that unless you have a non-fiction title on specific subject, cataloging would likely never be used by any local library. They shelve fiction alphabetically by author. And unless a book has a good chance for wide circulation (published and distributed by an established publisher) then when the likes of me submits a copy for numbering and inclusion in the Library of Congress' collection, it likely will be tossed out with the tens of

thousands of other self-published books. So what's the point in printing any CIP, other than to try to impress someone perusing the backside of my title page?

As you can see, I'm learning. I have a couple of how-to books en-route about e-publishing, which is another bowl of beans altogether. Yet I figure I've got my spoon stirring the paperback edition with the heat up high and a recipe in hand. The chores now are to slog through proofing one last time, fine tune a cover, and then deal with submission to CreateSpace. Maybe I'm a bit optimistic all that'll get done in a month or so, but I'll be giving it the old college-dropout try. Stay tuned.

S.M.F.

My Deadline Lives

07/15/2012

I like a deadline. For instance, were it not for my self-prescribed behest to compose this bi-monthly blog, I'd likely be wondering what to do with myself every fortnight. Somehow, I've always been one of those guys who can deliver the goods on time. As a custom shoemaker, I would tell my customers when they'd be receiving their Fernand Footwear, and they would get them then, 99% of the time. As for my paying of bills, I am never late. If I have an appointment with somebody, I'm usually there a few minutes early.

Two weeks back I assigned myself the task of readying *Appalachian Carnival* for submission to Amazon's CreateSpace so that I might have copies to carry east to New England in mid-August. After an intense couple of weeks of going through my manuscript one more time, as if it were galley proofs and Susan and I were proofreaders, I've assiduously purged it of typos, smoothed out dozens of phrases, and deleted many an "And" that began a sentence.

"And" at the beginning of a sentence is known to be a grammatical faux pas—"but" too—but what with the informal voice of my narrator, and my penchant for the conjunctive relating of sentences to each other, then my use of "if," "and," or "but," hopefully without overuse, might be considered either overly sinful, or merely characteristic syntax.

Commas are another stylistic bugaboo for me. I subscribe to putting a comma before the "and" that precedes the last item of a list or a series of phrases. Modern usage tends to delete as many commas as possible. I guess if one assumes that commas in a list are actually elisions of the word "and," then using a comma and an "and" is redundant. As much sense as that makes logically, the omission of the last comma seems to me to tie the last two items in the list together more than they ought to be. The rest of the list has commas—were all things to be otherwise equal in the list, why then more closely link the last two items by not separating them with a comma? By using only an "and," which is a conjunction—a word that joins words together—does that not conjoin the last two things in a series rather than separate them? I've read that including this comma, or not, is generally considered to be an option. I opt to include it, mainly because I don't like the way it feels without one.

Other commas that pepper my pages, and are often considered by style manuals to be unneeded, are those segregating phrases or clauses that arguably could be pronounced to be dependent. However, if one were to say the sentence aloud, a pause would not only make what is being said easier to understand, it also would perhaps put some emphasis on a nuance of its meaning. Running phrases and

clauses all in a row without commas to give pause as people do when speaking seems to me to be limiting oneself of a tool that aids in comprehension and aesthetic effect. But, that's just me talking.

Then there's the comma in front of "and said," before a piece of dialog. I go both ways on this one. If the compound sentence is short, or the passage's action is hurried, then I say no comma. Otherwise, a comma before "and said" works better in my book.

These last minute fixes may not add up to much in the wider scope of things. Nevertheless, I'd prefer the first novel that Edgewise Publications produces to have scarce typos and consistent usage. Being that the narrator is a nineteen-year-old hillbilly girl, whose use of Appalachian idioms jerks the readers eyes from the flow of the story plenty enough already, having typos or inconsistent usage or too many unneeded conjunctions on the page will steal one's mind further from the narrative, as well as make the publication appear unprofessional. Publishers hire copyeditors to cure manuscripts of the little errors that catch the eye. I hope I've executed that function adequately. I must add that I had big help from MS Word's spelling and grammar check, which found errors that neither Susan nor I picked up.

Now that this task is done, what now remains before submitting my book to the print service provider are: the title page and the legalities on its verso; some pages for acknowledgement, credit, and dedication; and finally my graphics. The Tarot images at the beginning of each chapter need to be switched over to the Dodal deck, and their accompanying text boxes need to be tweaked to the new images. This should only take a day or two. Plus, the novel's cover has to be fine-tuned—also another day or two.

Therefore, it looks like I could have it all ready to go to the printer within a week. After uploading the PDFs to CreateSpace, they will then examine it, and if it passes muster they'll print out one proof copy and mail it to me for my okay. Whether my formatting of the book will be copesetic to them, remains to be seen. How long this will take is beyond my control, but I suspect that it won't be but a few weeks.

If all that goes well, *Appalachian Carnival*, in 6"x 9" paperback, will then be for sale on Amazon.com, and from the trunk of my car, before mid-August.

S.M.F.

The Proof Is In Hand

08/01/2012

After half a life of carrying the idea of it around in my head, after half a decade of pecking it out into my laptop half the time, and after a half-assed year-and-a-half of submissions to agents and publishers, I now, after a month-and-a-half of do-it-yourself can-do, have a 6"x 9" paperback proof copy of *Appalachian Carnival* in my hand.

You might think that I'd be ecstatic about finally seeing it ready to be unleashed into the world. Yet, after all the time and effort that I've put into it, now having the dang thing done seems eerily anticlimactic— perhaps not unlike a postpartum mama. You tote this burden around that grows inside of you, and you labor through its birth, then there it is, just another child, just another novel, there with its life, its potential, now outside of you. Now done with it, it is now done with you.

Yes, finishing such a project does leave me with a tinge of pride in my spectral aura. But what mostly colors my self-respect is my stick-to-it-iveness. Always one to get the job done, I no doubt thrive when

there is a goal to attain. My chutzpah is in the doing, not in what's done. The audacity to make a shoe that is different, or a novel that is novel, or even live a life that is unconventional—there lies the amperage that powers my motor.

One wonders why one is driven to write a novel, paint pictures, sculpt statues, and I can only guess that I did so for the challenge. Why does a mountain climber climb mountains? Because it's there? Putting together *Appalachian Carnival*—from the first glimmer of a concept back thirty years ago, throughout all the mental wrestling of the past six years, till now after my crash course in self-publication—I reckon I did all that because of the doing of it itself, and because my not doing so somehow would have left my life unfinished.

As I write this, I await a digital proof from my print service, CreateSpace, for me to approve the final repair to a glitch in the novel's cover, the last step in a long journey. When that gets fixed, I shall then click the okay button, and *Appalachian Carnival* will shortly be available nearly worldwide.

After that, I'll then undertake a new challenge for myself—selling the book. I've sold many things through the years, from games of chance to handmade shoes. Whatever number of copies eventually gets sold is not really important to me. Results are just the result of how things are done, of the doing itself. My self-education as a publisher is what now cranks my pepper mill, spices my day. The job of pushing this book out into the world replaces my labor of pushing the book out of my soul.

By the time of my next bi-monthly blog on the ides of August, I'll likely be on the way back east to Massachusetts to my 45th high-school reunion, and I hope to have a trunkful of novels to peddle to bookstores along the way and throughout New England.

Hmm... it just occurred to me that the returning to one's roots with what one has learned from a journey is the essence of many age-old myths. But ain't that what myth is for? To show us what we must do in life?

And alakazam! I just received the e-mailed proof of the repaired PDF file of *Appalachian Carnival's* cover. It being good to go, I clicked the approve button. The first edition, now published, will be available on Amazon.com in about a week. Or, you can purchase it now on my CreateSpace e-store, at <https://www.createspace.com/3910001>

S.M.F.

Win/Win Jobbing

08/15/2012

The ides-of-August blog is due as I awake late in a motel room in Hornell, NY. I'm on my way to Massachusetts for my forty-fifth high-school reunion and a visit to my eighty-three-year-old mother and my three-and-a-half-years-younger brother, whose heart just had its first triple bypass.

I left Michigan Monday morning carrying a half-gross of my novels in the trunk of my car, and so far I've stopped into a dozen bookstores along the way, in Grand Rapids, Lansing, Ann Arbor, and Cleveland. The folks at the bookstores, owners and employees alike, have been very gracious and welcoming when I walk in, put my novel in front of them, and say, "I made this book." Eight stores have either taken a few copies on consignment, or have accepted a complimentary copy to inspect. I see these copies as seeds sown in the garden of possibility.

Today, I'll stop in four more bookstores in towns along my way, and then in the next few weeks, I'll have the whole of central New England to solicit. When I return to Michigan after Labor Day, I'll steer a different path back and cultivate a few more rows to hoe.

What with the challenge of writing the book, editing the book, and publishing the book now done and gone, this new challenge of getting the book out to readers is presently churning my chutzpah. I believe I have a pretty good product—certainly not the great American novel, yet no doubt not nearly the worst—as my assessment of the work has been confirmed by the reaction from several readers, and now a few booksellers. The success of any product in America has a lot to do with not only its qualities, but also with the time and energy invested in its promotion, which in my self-imposed role as publisher is now up to me.

Thirty years ago, when I set up a dozen wholesale customers and launched Fernand Footwear (also with the m.o. of stopping at likely stores along my travels from here to there) what I much enjoyed was the hunt for outlets—the prospecting in the Yellow Pages (now the internet), the searching out of locations (now by GPS), and the going in cold and walking out warm. The making of a connection for the distribution of whatever you do is like panning for gold. You start with dirt, rinse away the detrius, and what remains is of great value: a person who values your abilities, who will mutually profit from them, and who has a location where whatever it is that you have will be appreciated and purchased by untold numbers of unknown people. When one sets up a win/win/win situation, everyone has won. Notwithstanding the business aspects of the face-to-face transaction, more often than not what also has been established is a new friend in the world of one's interest.

Well, I've got a half-hour to round up my things and check out of this motel room, and I have miles to go before I sleep. So I shall cut this short.

S.M.F.

Shelf Publishing

09/01/2012

So by now I've placed the novel in the hands of two dozen booksellers in a half-dozen states (click the **BOOKSTORES** button above [ed.—on the blog page]), either on consignment or as a complimentary copy, and I've handed out a dozen free copies to my friends. Out of a hundred copies received on August 8th, I have eight left. I've ordered fifty-eight more, which will be delivered after I return to Michigan. And on Amazon, six have sold.

Keeping track of all that is a bit of an accounting challenge—never mind collecting future payments for copies sold on consignment and soliciting re-orders. Nevertheless, I must say once again that I see this effort as planting seeds in a garden. Some will sprout, others won't. To not sow copies among a local literati would likely result in the book never being seen by any of them.

There are so many books out there, millions on Amazon, thousands in a bookstore. When I see my novel squeezed between titles on a shelf, often only its spine in view, I see the fat chance that someone will pull it out, look it over, and actually buy it to read. But if it wasn't on that shelf, then there would be pretty much no chance whatsoever that anyone in Oneonta NY or Chester VT or elsewhere might cast a curious eye upon it.

At independent bookstores in small- to medium-size towns (and not so much in bigger towns), I've encountered many kind and helpful booksellers who realize that the book-business paradigm is in flux, that the way it was is not the way it is now, nor will be. These independent folks are flexible enough to bend into the new wave of independent publishers. They are intelligent people who love books, and have made it through the cumulative King-Kong onslaught of big-box stores and online discounters—they are survivors.

Because each bookstore on each street holds its own micro-economic piece of a local pie, I want *Appalachian Carnival* to be included in that recipe. Yet another 800-pound gorilla in the kitchen is the chef of centralized distribution, Ingram and its like. Their business is to make it easy for the book retailer to acquire stock from one source, pay one invoice, and return in one carton remainders for credit. What if each bookstore had to deal with each publisher one at a time for each book? That's one huge OMG! A book distributor makes a bookseller's day much easier.

When I signed up with Amazon's print-on-demand service, CreateSpace, I paid \$25 extra for their "Extended Distribution" option. This would put my novel into Ingram's catalog. But come to find out, copies ordered by booksellers would then not be returnable to Ingram, which is a major hindrance to a bookseller taking a risk on a book. It appears that the entire inventory in most bookstores has the option to be returned to the publishers. A bookstore's stock is essentially on consignment—a way of doing business which is unique to the book business. So to have my novel be unreturnable to the distributor would no doubt hinder distribution.

Yet if I were to print my book through Ingram's print-on-demand service, Lightning Source, then remainders could be returned if I should so choose to provide that option. Hmm. But if I were to move the printing to Lightning Source, then I'm told that the availability of the book on Amazon often drops from "in-stock" to "ships in two or three weeks," which will no doubt hinder sales through Amazon. Hmm. It seems as though these gorillas are thrashing it out for territorial dominance in the burgeoning jungle of independent publishing.

My present solution to this dilemma, whether to go with CreateSpace or Lightning Source, is to wait and see which sales channel sells more books. I like having a copy on a bookstore shelf. It is browseable; it is one among only thousands, rather than virtually one among millions; it is palpable rather than virtual; it is hands-on rather than click-on. I also like having my book available to readers worldwide with the biggest bookseller on Earth. That sort of distribution never before existed. Perhaps instead of either/or, I may be able to utilize the best of both services.

I'll return to Michigan next week, check what has sold locally in the first month, and place the book in several more Michigan bookstores. The "local author" connection is definitely an easier sell than for somebody who walks in from out of state. Then on the 15th of September, 1:00 PM to 3:00, I have my first book-signing gig at Horizon Books in Traverse City.

I've watched authors before in bookstores sit alone at a table with a stack of books and nobody asking to sign any, which has cast a shadow of dread in me under the necessity of this widely played marketing game. Perhaps because I have written a carnival story, I might do well to employ the old line: "Step right up!"

In my mid-September blog, I'll let you know how that works.

S.M.F

A Signature Smile

09/15/2012

At one PM on this sunny Saturday, I'm sitting at my first book signing at Horizon Books in Traverse City, Michigan, and I don't know what to expect. They put me at a table facing the entrance, right out in front of the cashier's counter, where everybody comes and goes. I've done enough retail at county fairs and art & craft fairs to know how to catch someone's eye and throw them my pitch. So, that's my plan today: eye contact, smile, and give 'em my spiel.

After a quarter hour, and only a dozen or so people coming through the door, very few eyes have yet to glance my way. It appears that most book browsers keep their eyes cast downward, scanning the piles of books spread out before them on the tables and shelves, or they focus on reading the back cover or random pages of a book they are considering. Whatever each person is searching for—information, entertainment, enlightenment—it's a good bet that neither he nor she came into the store looking for a carnival tale set in 1970 West Virginia.

And now, a half an hour into my advertised two-hour time slot, I have signed and sold a copy; but it's to a fellow I've known for years who happened to be out in front of the bookstore holding a sign for the "Occupy Traverse City" protest, his sign saying, "What Has Your Banker Done To You Today?" Several years ago this fellow and I went to a Dylan concert together, and I filled him in on what my novel was about. He had no clue that I'd be here today signing copies, and he would have eventually probably gotten his hands on a copy, one way or another. It is said that a self-published book usually sells less than a hundred copies, mostly to friends and family. The big trick is for a book to break out into a wider market, which doesn't appear to be happening too quickly yet today.

Forty-five minutes in, and there are very few folks coming through the door. Retail is a haphazard business. One minute a storekeeper can be as busy as a goose with nine rectums, and ten minutes later he's standing alone with his thumb up his own. There's no telling when it will be busy—when it's supposed to be, maybe it won't be, and when it's not, perhaps it will. In my ex-shoe-shop, I'd not see one sole soul for days on end, and then all of a sudden there'd be three or four different pairs of feet all at once buying shoes. These folks would think that I was making money hand over fist, that I was as busy as that all the time. So my long-learned retail lesson is that you never know when a sale will occur. You just got to hang in there until it does, or doesn't.

At an hour in, a young couple walk by and eye the books on my table (the first lengthy glance that I've gotten as of yet), and I stop them flatfooted with a good old, "Hurry, hurry. Step right up. Get your carnival story here." They politely ask what it is about, and I give them the 30-second synopsis. Then they smile, turn, and go off to what they'd come into the store for.

An hour and a quarter in, a heavy older woman with saggy jowls, walks through the front door with a bit of a limping list to her left side, and she says to me, "Hi, young man. Smile some."

Now I'm not that young, and I know that I've never been the most smiley face in the crowd. Through the years, strangers have even asked me now and then, "Is something wrong?" or, "Why are you so sad?"—when I hadn't been feeling sad at all.

I raise the corners of my mouth to her thankfully, as she struggles forward to whatever book she's after, and I beam a smile around to the latest bevy of browsers wandering into the store. As I attempt to catch an eye or two, a few folks flash me back their faux smile—a one- or two-second rise to their cheeks

and the corners of their eyes and mouth, which quickly drops back to normal as their eyes seek safety looking elsewhere, signaling that this is all the attention they'll pay me, whoever the heck I am—their smile dismissive rather than welcoming.

And now with less than a half-hour remaining in my two-hour slot, I've pretty-much given up the ghost on this gig. There's been not much more than a hundred people through the door so far, with a slowly diminishing frequency as the afternoon wears on. I didn't expect this book-signing thing to be a gangbuster. I'd seen other authors at bookstores sitting alone with their pen and their pile of books, a disappointed boredom in their weary eyes. The idea of doing book signings hasn't been my idea of the most desirable of a writer's duties. Still, I must play this game again to see what happens. I have another one scheduled for October 6, and another one possibly the week after. It's likely I'll get better at it, and smile more.

An hour and three-quarters in, an ambiguously sexed young person (male I think, but maybe not) with a geometric tattoo on his or her forearm, becomes the first to stand in front of my table and ask me about the book. I give her or him the quickie synopsis, and she or he picks up a copy, studies the cover blurb, and turns to a few pages. Gracious and curious, he or she asks a few more questions, and becomes the first to ask for one of my one-sheet flyers that I have out on the table—and then he or she walks out of the store studying it closely.

Possibly, I've gained another reader.

S.M.F.

Tome of the Unknown Author

10/01/2012

After only one singular signature at a Traverse City book signing, I realized it was likely that both novel and author were too unknown. It was simply too soon in the game. The ump had scarcely yelled play ball, and there I was—who at the plate? People come to a book signing and buy books because they've heard of, or read of, or have read or know the writer or the book. Joe Blow sitting in a bookstore with a pen and a pile of his books, scarcely yet read, hardly draws a glance from the public eye. Being read, or being read about, or heard about, is what brings folks out to a book signing.

I have two more signings lined up in the next couple of weeks. The first is a mile down the hill in Beulah, Michigan, at Crystal Crate & Cargo, I've know the owner, Sally, for decades. She's a woman who can sell things. Her store is mostly upscale kitchen stuff, but she stocks other items, including some books. Six weeks ago, I gave her a comp to read after she wrote me a check for six copies to sell. Then she signed me up for a book signing during Beulah's Fall Fest, and asked her publicist to do some press releases. I'm hopeful it might be good for both of us, Saturday, 11 to 2, October 6.

The following Saturday, 3 to 5, October 13, I have another book signing at the Frankfort Bookstore, seven miles west from here—Frankfort, a touristy town on Lake Michigan is sequentially having their Fall Fest. Dwight, the owner of the bookstore, I used to make sandals for. My friend Mary, the new owner of the old hotel catty-corner across Main Street from the bookstore, also wants to host a signing—so afterwards from 5 to 7, I'm there in the lobby of the Sleeping Bear Inn, in some yet-to-be-determined afterglowish literary event. Then, from 7 to 10 or so, I'll be playing guitar and harmonicas

and singing "Songs from the Last Century" with Bob on bass.

There's a serendipitous story about Bob that goes like this.... On my search for the book's cover a year ago, I came across on a stock-photo site the image I eventually used. I like to try to deal direct, so I hunted up Bob's e-mail and we exchanged several messages. Eventually, I bought the Dreamstime reproduction license—found on the world wide web, mind you—then come to find out, Bob has a cousin in Beulah: my friend Nels the grocer, who had recently been at Susan's Bastille Day party. And furthermore, Bob was up in Traverse City for the summer and he plays a dog-house bass fiddle. So Bob and I have been performing unrehearsed sets in the lounge at the Sleeping Bear Inn, Wednesday nights in August, and now a Saturday or two this fall. And Bob's writing a book, too!

Around here in Benzie County (one of the smallest counties in Michigan, population 17,500) up in the northwest corner of the lower peninsula of Michigan (think of Michigan as a right hand held up, and it's on a knuckle of the pinky) locals and summer people alike know me as "the shoe guy." Dozens of times through the years, I'd be introduced to someone and he or she would say, "Oh, you're the famous shoe guy." Demurely, I'd question, "Famous?" Then I might try to explain that because my shoes were different, they attracted attention and folks talked about them, and folks told stories about me, the shoemaker, that took on a folk-tale life of its own. The Little Golden Book tale "The Shoemaker and the Elves" had been part of many an American child's enculturation, and possibly the archetypal need was being transferred onto me?—only a craftsman trying to make ends meet. Notwithstanding, this elven mini-myth conflation was very good for business.

So folks know of me around these parts. Will they show up the next two Saturdays to buy novels that I'll gladly sign for them, smile and all? Well I guess we'll see. But I suspect that maybe it's just still too early in the game.

Out of a hundred copies scattered out there, only maybe twenty to thirty have been read. Other copies are being read right now, or are on someone's to-read shelf. What will attract, or scare off, new readers is what readers tell others about the book. And that's not going to happen for a while yet, and little by little, if it ever does at all.

What attracted attention to my line of footwear was that they looked different; they were unlike what was then known as a normal shoe; they still are. Unusual is a good thing for some customers, and bad for others. *Appalachian Carnival* is unusual. It's about a bizarre caravan in a countercultural time. Endeavoring to be real, it's got sex, drugs, and carnies amid a turbulent week in 1970. Trying to give it meaning, I imbue it with my self-made heresies. My mother told me as she read it, "Christians aren't going to like it." I told her, "I didn't figure they would."

Last night, at the annual Democrat Honoree Dinner, a fellow that I'd admired and respected for a long time, yet do not know well, told me that he had read my novel and that he had enjoyed it and was quite impressed. I asked him where he'd gotten a copy, and he told me his wife had bought one at the Frankfort Bookstore (one of the two copies sold there so far). If readers like him around town maybe tell their kith and kin about it, then perhaps after the long northern winter's reading season is over, then the buzz on the book might be loud enough to actually draw some folks to a local book signing next summer. Readers, the right readers, are the creators of more readers. Word of mouth is the abracadabra.

Sales so far have been slow: a half a dozen on Amazon; a dozen for cash; one or two copies sold in a store here and there; thirty comped to friends, booksellers, and libraries; and fifty more still consigned on the shelves of two dozen bookstores. I'm just going to let the whole caboodle set for a month or so and then see what happen—let some more copies be read, and maybe talked about. Traffic to this website, to this blog, rises month to month. If you've read this far, I appreciate your doing so and I

thank you for your time and attention.

For the last week, I've been scouring with steel wool and waxing a wood floor in my house, which I have been trying to sell for a year now. Susan and I have signed a six-month lease for an apartment on the south side of St. Pete, in Gulfport FL, from mid-November to mid-May, so I'll tidy up my house for the realtor, drain the pipes, and head south before the snow piles up.

In St.Pete, I'm very unknown. Maybe there I'll have more of a chance to become what I'm attempting to be, instead of remaining what I once was.

S.M.F.

Anonymity City

10/15/2012

Well, I had a fairly good couple of weekends signing and selling novels locally here in Benzie County, Michigan—twenty-six copies, mostly to people that I've known for years. If any of them are reading this blog, I heartily thank you for your support and good wishes.

It seems that some folks are more excited about my getting the novel out there than I am. There's a cachet that people attach to publishing a book, a glorification beyond what it likely is. I used to experience a similar thing in my shoemaker's life. Folks maybe aggrandized the shoemaking even more so. Plenty of people write books. Try to find a shoemaker nowadays. Folks, in both words and eyes, would go absolutely agog that I actually made shoes. My crude and rude remark to quell their exaltation was to tell them that shoemaking was not rocket science. I am well aware, and sorry for it, that I do not handle praise well.

Novel making is certainly more complex than shoemaking; nevertheless, this author/publisher deal, a new business for me, is a lot like my old business—endeavor to make a quality product in the best way one knows how, and then sell it. After designing a thing, one gathers one's wits, acquires tools and material, experiments with the process, executes a prototype, makes copy after copy, and eventually refines the thing through time. Then, with a decent product, one enters the marketplace. And once one sells some, then one, too, must keep accounts.

Weighing upon most any role, America's collective consciousness projects, onto whomever acts it out, what the traditional portrayals have been for the part. A good actor, or a good businessman, plays the part well and gains success. I had the shoe-guy thing down pat. Amid the economic demands of fatherhood, I birthed my business model from the mother of invention, necessity—during the recession of the early 1980's. My timely luck was that as a homespun craftsman of handmade and foot-shaped footwear, I had little competition in a marketplace of international manufacturers selling tight and pointy-toed shoes.

So now I'm playing a new game: Hurry! Hurry! Step right up and see the Author! Alive and in person! Buy his book and he'll sign it for you.... Okay, if that's what is expected of me to be authorial, I'll do so with a smile, and try to jot down something nice. But as my family, friends, and readers may know by now, I get embarrassed when I'm fawned over. Especially when I try to figure what is such a big deal about book writing?

Perhaps it's because, books are sold to us by publishers whose job has been to glorify the authors that they have under contract. Or maybe it's because everyone went to English class in high school—where authors are put upon a pedestal as we study their high and mighty literature. It all smells a mite like a

personality cult to me. The great writers, with prolific careers, certainly deserve such beatification. However, when folks gush with ennoblement for my own self-published carnival-adventure venture, I humbly cringe from their prestigious projection of what they believe an author to be.

Me? I'm more or less what I've been all along. Housepainter, carnie, shoemaker, musician, author, publisher—just getting a job done the best I can. Clothed within each costume is the real me, where my anima lives with my motivations, desires, and expectations, and where my animus deals with my strengths and weaknesses.

In the first chapter of *Appalachian Carnival*, I have my antihero, Walt, telling Annabelle: "*When people have no clue who you are, you can be anythin' you want. You pull into a town, and till they find out you're a carny, you might be anyone at all. I've told people that I was things—from a priest fired for hanky-panky, to the son of John Wayne—just for shits. For somethin' other to say when they ask me where I'm from and what I do. If I tell 'em I'm a carny, they jump to the usual kinds of conclusions about who the hell I am.... So why not play games with it?*"

Now, as October wanes, the northwest winds begin to blow lake-effect clouds off Lake Michigan, turning autumn's red and gold to grey, then soon to winter white. Susan and I have booked an apartment, November through May, in Gulfport, Florida, on the south side of St. Pete. There, my reputation does not precede me. Tampa Bay does not know who the hell I am. There I may be, once again, what I can become, not what I have been. There I have never been a shoemaker. There, like last year, I'll be a singer with a guitar and harmonica. And there, this winter, I'll also be a guy hawking his carnival novel in the anonymity of a city. We'll see how that goes.

Here in Benzie County, I've sold a few dozen books to folks I know, to folks who know me, folks who likely would have not bought my book otherwise. I humbly appreciate their interest in what I've done, their praise, and their participation in the process.

Yet what I seek is neither recognition, money, nor glory. I've had my meager fill of those things. I just want readers. Isn't that why writers write?

S.M.F.

Day of The Dead

11/01/2012

So enough already with the last few months of blogs about the business of self-publication. Without a hefty marketing budget, *Appalachian Carnival* will just have to catch on, or not, from the word of mouth of one reader at a time. What I'd rather blog about are the subjects I approached earlier this year: the symbols and rituals that lurk in our collective consciousness and influence who we are and what we do.



Jean-Claude Flornoy restoration of the Jean Dodal Tarot
© Succession Flornoy. <http://www.tarot-history.com/>

The first of November, halfway between a solstice and an equinox, is another of the cross-quarter days on the pagan wheel of the year: Candlemas or Bridgid's Day on February 2nd; Beltane or Walpergis on May Day; Lammass or Lughnasadh on August 1st; and Samhain, Winternacht, Allantide, the Feast of the Dead, All Hallows' Eve, our Halloween, on the night before All Saint's Day.

In the Northern Hemisphere, when the sun lowers in the sky, the days shorten, the leaves drop off the trees, and a killing frost prowls in the winds, it is as if the grim reaper has come for his harvest. In the spring and summer, folks celebrate the burgeoning of life with fertility festivals, and with the waning of sunlight, they beat their drums in a seasonal chorus to death.

Among ancient Celts on November 1st, their new-year's day, Samhain was believed to be when the gates of the otherworld were unlocked, allowing the souls of the dead to revisit the world of the living. Not only were the dead set loose, but also other Gaelic spirits, fairies, and demons harrowed the land. In 835 AD, in concert with the Vatican's strategy to conflate Catholic holy days with those of the pagans whose souls they endeavored to save, All Saints Day, a day exalting canonized Christian heroes, also known as All Hallows Day, was decreed to occur on November 1. The intent was to expel the pagan spirits and deities celebrated on Samhain, and replace these evils with the blessings of saints; nevertheless, the night before All Hallows retained its demonic dance with the ghosts of the pagan collective consciousness. Brought to America by Scottish and Irish immigrants in the 1800's, it morphed into our Halloween.

One of its customs we've adopted is "mumming" or "guising," the tradition of dressing up in costumes. During Samhain, while ghosts and demons wander our world, they might take vengeance upon those who have done them wrong. To protect oneself from this malice, a disguise was worn so the spirits wouldn't recognize you. Offerings of food and drink were also set out to appease the spirits. The people masquerading as ghosts, witches, and demons demanded from each house these offerings as well, or the habitants suffered the consequences—Trick or Treat!

When the Spanish conquered Mexico, they found the Aztecs celebrating a millennium-old rite with human skulls. Meso-American civilizations kept skulls as trophies, honoring them in rituals, and using them to symbolize death as a continuation of life. The Spanish missionaries, failing to eradicate this custom, incorporated it into the Catholic calendar on November 2nd, All Soul's Day, or the Feast of All Souls (another holy day added by the Vatican in the Thirteenth Century, officially titled, "The Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed") about which I quote from Wikipedia: *"The Roman Catholic celebration is associated with the doctrine that the souls of the faithful who at death have not been cleansed from the temporal punishment due to venial sins and from attachment to mortal sins cannot immediately attain the beatific vision in heaven, and that they may be helped to do so by prayer and by the sacrifice of the Mass. In other words, when they died, they had not yet attained full sanctification and moral perfection, a requirement for entrance into Heaven. This sanctification is carried out posthumously in Purgatory."*

Today, Mexicans on *Día de los Muertos* go to cemeteries and tend the graves of their ancestors. They bring them food and drink, and talk to them to encourage them to revisit the world of the living. Sugar skulls are gifts for both the living and the dead. *Pan de Muerto* is fashioned into skulls and bones. *Catrin*s, images of female skeletons wearing upper-class clothes, echo the Aztec goddess *Mictecacihuatl*, the Lady of the Dead.

Today in the USA, Halloween has become a carnival mocking death, a Mardi Gras of the macabre, a costume ball with a theme of horror, a dance with the archetypes of Hell. It is the second-most money-spent holiday on our calendar after Christmas. The rest of the year, death is mostly unspoken about or whispered about. Halloween shouts death aloud and then laughs at it. We have our Day of the Dead, too.

Death and the world of the dead remain a mystery to us. Most tribes and civilizations embrace the notion that when a person dies there is an afterworld to which the spirit of the individual goes. There are many, many versions of a similar tale—in most of them, the souls of the dead reap what they've sown. Whether through a happy hunting ground, tortuous hells, karma, or by Thoth weighing your heart with Ma'at's feather, we all appear likely to get our due.

But, isn't that also evident with the living? Hermes Trismegistus said, "As above, so below." Me, I figure we create our own otherworld, often in concert amongst kith and kin. In our individual time and place, we inherit traditions, learn survival, and cherish beliefs that guide our souls toward whoever we are, both here and hereafter. This world and the next are created by our minds. We would not know of neither were they not, simply because knowing is a function of one's mind.

Whatever occurs between one's ears animates one's daily doings and lifetime achievements. Ways of thinking run the gamut from Papuans to Los Angelinos. The brain matter is all *Homo sapiens*, but the contents of each brain differs—which mainly depends on where and when you were born (though some folks do convert to other systems of thought).

In a grainy black-and-white documentary that I saw on TV when I was a kid, European explorers encounter a remote tribe in Africa whose members pride themselves with the beauty of flies glistening in their hair, piled high and pomaded with dung. The British narrator then retorts that the blacks think that the white's soapy scent stinks. An epiphany no doubt pierced my 1950's-factory-town consciousness, because I still remember the moment even now—or perhaps it might have been a dream. Notwithstanding, I forever understood: different strokes for different folks.

So if folks in their belief systems can beautify with either dung or soap, what other human concepts are subject to interpretation? Other than the basic principles of animal life, maybe pretty much everything we do.

We build our house the way we believe it should be. Some people eat pigs, some eat horses. Clothing, furniture, transport, or art, we can tell its specific time and place in the history of the world by the style it is, the ideas in it. In ancient Greece, the mental constructs of a Spartan soldier and an Athenian sculptor, though living only a few days' march away, were worlds apart; as they often are nowadays in individuals of military and artistic bent.

And if, in the physical world, man can build architectures of stone and steel by constructing manifestations of ideas about what and how things are to be, how artless might it be to do so in the hereafter where it is said the dead exist amid the planes of desire and mind—the souls of the dead haunting this aether, night and day, shackled to desires, thoughts, and ideas borne through their lives.

I am presently reading *The History of Hell*, by Alice K. Turner. What I've gathered from it so far is that our European collective consciousness has created Christianity's Hell through the past two millennia mostly from the devilish pursuit of punishing those who fail to submit to the blessings of church dogma, both Catholic and Protestant. The idea of the afterlife as a place where a reckoning occurs was bred in Mesopotamia and Egypt, grew up among the Greeks and Romans, and matured amid the edicts of medieval bishops. Dante damned his enemies to his Inferno.

My guess is that we make up our own personal heavens and hells. A latter-day Lazarus who returns from a near-death experience and tells us that he met spirits who knew his thoughts, and he knew theirs, gives us a clue about how things are known there. One's thoughts are unconcealed, one's desires are evident, just as one's body is in plain sight on the physical plane. You can't hide what you think and feel behind the mask of your face and the play of your words. One's soul is reborn naked to be seen. And, as they do below, like birds of a feather, the ghosts of like minds tend to flock together.

Guided by the Psychopomp known as *Tarot*, the next novel in my trilogy will attempt to explore this astral world and tell the tale of Walter Ryder's journey into death. Walt, my anti-hero in *Appalachian Carnival*, has much to heal in his medicine show, and much to witness at the astral circus. I shall adopt the literary conceit that when someone dies, one survives in another form in another world. Yeah, okay... so then what happens?

I'm heading south to St. Petersburg within a week or two. There, in Susan's and my six-month rental, I'll try to figure it out.

S.M.F.

The Sacrificial Turkey

11/15/2012

So now, I'm in our winter rental in Gulfport, Florida, which is an arty, century-old village on the southern tip of the Pinellas Peninsula, nestled between Boca Ciega Bay and the beautiful city of Saint Petersburg. To the west, a few miles across the bay, lies Saint Pete Beach, a barrier island on the Gulf of Mexico. To the northeast, on the other side of broad Tampa Bay, stand the towers of downtown Tampa, amid way too much traffic. To the north spreads the low-lying grid of Pinellas County, one of the most densely populated counties in the U.S.A. To the south spans the four-mile-long Sunshine Skyway Bridge, high over the entrance to Tampa Bay.

The 1400 miles down here from Michigan was a three-day ride, hard for my bony buttocks, but now

I'm thankfully back in short-sleeves. Susan will stay up north until after Thanksgiving Day. I prefer to avoid the annual feast. I commented to her a few weeks back that I am not one to participate in the rites of our society, whereas she must do so—from carving pumpkins to coloring Easter eggs, she has to observe the ritual of the season. She wholeheartedly agreed with my assessment of one of the many differences between us. All the women in my life have complained about my lack of enthusiasm for holidays. At Christmas, I've been called a Grinch and a Scrooge, and I can only reply, "Bah. Humbug." I've learned to try to go along with whatever might be expected of me on such-and-such a day, but I'm not inclined to lead the festivities. And on Thanksgiving, when invited to sit down with friends or family and offer up a turkey to God's grace, I'll pass the carrots, but I don't partake of the ceremonial bird.

At the age of 27, I became a vegetarian, and have remained so for the past 36 years. When I was a kid and our turkey was in the oven on Thanksgiving morning, I would get nauseous every year, sometimes to the point of puking. Across the land, millions of other immolated turkeys were being simultaneously roasted, rendering their offering of ethereal gases high to the heavens. Me, I never liked the smell or taste of cooked meat.

To continue with my blah-blah blogging about the archetypal forms within our collective consciousness, allow me to try to figure what the deal is with America's Thanksgiving Day. We all know the story of the Pilgrims' feast in 1621 Plymouth. But from what did that derive? Why do we slaughter animals for ritual purposes?

Gadhimai is one of the Hindu goddesses of power. Every five years during the month of November, at the temple of Baliyarpur in southern Nepal, millions of Hindus gather for what is reputed to be world's largest animal sacrifice—the festival of *Saptabali*. In 2009, on November 24th, NepalNews.com reported that 20,000 water buffaloes were decapitated in one day; and the guardian.co.uk reported the ritual sacrifice of a quarter million animals during the month-long festival—rats, pigeons, roosters, ducks, swine, and male water buffaloes.

Yet it might rather be said that the world's largest animal sacrifice is our Thanksgiving. PETA estimates that 45 million turkeys are offered up on American tables to give thanks to The Lord. That's just on one day! Yearly, 270 million turkeys are slaughtered and eaten.

To kill an animal for food is one thing, but killing animals for a religious rite is a whole other butterball. Before chowing down every fourth Thursday of November, Americans fold their hands and say grace, giving thanks to God for the bounty they have received. Many folks do this at every meal, but on Thanksgiving Day, it is *de rigueur* for everyone at the table to bow their heads and say amen.

Animal sacrifice has replaced human sacrifice. Both were observed throughout the world eons before the onset of history, and the sacrifice of maidens still occurred into the 19th century among the Pawnee. Atop the pyramids of Mexico, just five centuries ago, Aztecs priests cut out the hearts of thousands and thousands, year after year, and offered up the bloody mess to their gods.

In Genesis 22 of The Bible, God says to Abraham: "*Take now thy son, thine only son, whom thou lovest, even Isaac, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt-offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.*" Atop the mountain, Abraham complies—the pyre prepared and the knife in hand—but then an angel of God comes to Abraham and tells him: "*Lay not thy hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him; for now I know that thou art a God-fearing man, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from Me.*" And after which: "*Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in the thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt-offering in the stead of his son.* Then the angel says: "*By Myself have I sworn, saith the LORD, because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, that in blessing I will bless thee, and in*

multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the seashore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast hearkened to My voice."

This Bible story, likely a myth that gives a reason for the abolishment of human sacrifice, echoes upon our Thanksgiving tables. We hearken to the sacrifice, and our seed is blessed. And by God, the murder of Christ on the cross, a proxy for human sacrifice, purports to magically propitiate our sins. If we believe in its divine grace, we are forgiven.

I quote Lorraine Day, M.D.: *The word "Grace" according to Bible scholars and theologians means "unmerited favor"—the concept that none of us in the human race deserve to be saved because we are all wretched sinners. But God through His "graciousness" sent His Son (apparently instead of God coming to earth Himself) to die for all sinners, so those who "make the right choice" and accept Jesus Christ as their Savior will not have to die eternally. Instead, God apparently will overlook the fact that we are all sinners (because as they say, no one IS perfect—or even CAN be perfect) so Jesus' blood on Calvary somehow "covers us up" so God apparently cannot see that we are sinners. Or at least God apparently looks the other way and lets us into heaven anyway because "Jesus died in our place."*

(http://www.goodnewsaboutgod.com/studies/spiritual/home_study/saved_grace.htm)

In my heretical opinion, this derives from the prehistoric, barbaric, and hallowed custom of human sacrifice—an archetypal abracadabra tattooed upon the human soul. In my novel, *Appalachian Carnival*, Annabelle asks the bearded lady, Isis, how is it that the bloody murder of Jesus can save our souls. Isis replies in part: *"Now it's said among those who know magic, that when you want to summon a spirit, for whatever purpose, the spilling of fresh blood attracts it, allowing the ghost to partially materialize within the bloody vapors. The life force in the blood, evaporating into death, somehow connects the two worlds. These primitive shamans made blood sacrifices to summon their familiar spirits, a skill they'd discovered either by their own talents, or from other shamans. And when the shaman's tribe asked big favors of a ghost that craved power—it eventually assumed the role of a god. This god may or may not be able to deliver any favors. But it doesn't matter. Because by at least trying to do something about their problems, the tribe then felt better. They'd seek advice or forgiveness. They'd pray for rain. They'd ask what the future will bring. Whatever they felt powerless about, they were led to believe that the god could do something about it. The god then grows in influence, as does his priests, who end up with plenty of sacrificial meat on his table, as well as treasuries to build the god or goddess a temple with."* And Isis sums it up with: *"So, my dear Annabelle, after Jesus was crucified and deified, then the early Christians, who were primitive people as well, figured that the only way any sense could be made of Jesus' bloody murder was that God sacrificed His Son for us—or that Jesus offered Himself up to His Father—so that all our sins would be forgiven. And if you believe that, then I suppose they would be."*

In the Old Testament, Jewish priests officiated at their tribes' obligatory burnt offerings. Below, in blood red, to evince for the reader the enormous extent of Biblical prescriptions for the rituals of animal sacrifice that existed among the ancient Hebrews, I quote at length from www.jewishencyclopedia.com:

The Offerings: Mode of Sacrifice. These were wholly animal, and the victims were wholly consumed. They might be from the herd or the flock, or in cases of poverty birds might be substituted. The offerings acceptable were: (a) young bullocks; (b) rams or goats of the first year; (c) turtle-doves or young pigeons. These animals were to be free from all disease or blemish. They were to be brought to the door of the tabernacle, and the offerer was to kill them on the north side of the altar (if a burnt offering), except in the public sacrifices, when the priest put the victims to death, being assisted on occasion by the Levites (II Chron. xxix. 34). The blood was then sprinkled around the altar. The victim,

if a large animal, was flayed and divided; the pieces being placed above the wood on the altar, the skin only being left to the priest. If the offering was a bird a similar operation was performed, except that the victim was not entirely divided. The fire which consumed the offerings was never allowed to go out, since they were slowly consumed; and the several kinds of sacrifice furnished constant material for the flames. Every morning the ashes were conveyed by the priest to a clean place outside the camp (Ex. xxix. 38-42; Lev. i., vi. 8-13, ix. 12-14; Num. xv.).

Kinds and Occasions of Burnt Offering: Stated and Occasional Offerings. (a) Stated Offerings were: **(1) The Daily Burnt Offering**, presented at the time of the morning and the evening prayer (the third and ninth hours). The victim was a lamb or kid a year old. This was always accompanied by a vegetable offering ("minḥah") and a libation of wine (Ex. xxix. 38-42; Num. xxviii. 3-8). **(2) The Sabbath Burnt Offering**, which included double the amount of all the elements of the ordinary daily sacrifice (Num. xxviii. 9, 10). **(3) The Festal Burnt Offerings**, celebrated at the new moon, the Passover, Pentecost, the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Tabernacles. On these occasions, especially on the last-named, the number of victims was increased (Num. xxviii. 11-xxix. 39). (b) Occasional Offerings: (1) When a priest was consecrated (Ex. xxix. 15; Lev. viii. 18, ix. 12); (2) at the purification of women (Lev. xii. 6-8); (3) at the cleansing of lepers (Lev. xiv. 19, 20); (4) at the purgation of ceremonial defilement (Lev. xv. 15, 30); (5) in connection with the vow of a Nazarite (Num. vi. 11, 16). Voluntary Offerings. These sacrifices were prescriptive and obligatory; but voluntary burnt offerings might also be made. Some of them are recorded which involved the immolation of a large number of victims (Num. vii.; I Kings viii. 64).

Regulations of the Levitical ritual. All of the sacrifices were to be made under priestly auspices; and even when a private offerer killed the victim the main parts of the ceremony were performed by the priests. Yet both before and after the time of Moses the 'olah was offered by laymen without distinction of persons and without restriction as to mode or measure—*e.g.*, Gen. viii. 20, xxii. 2 *et seq.* (compare xv. 17); I Sam. vi. 14; Amos v. 22; Isa. i. 11; Hosea vi. 6; Job i. 5, xlii. 8—not to speak of the more or less heathenish offering of human victims (Judges xi. 31; II Kings iii. 27; Jer. xix. 5).

In Rabbinical Literature: The name for burnt offering is explained in various ways. Some scholars take it to be an offering of atonement for the evil thoughts that steal over one, ("ascend in his mind," Tan., Lek Leka, ed. Buber, i. 71; Lev. R. vii. 3); others derive the name from ("to the Highest"), because it is entirely intended for God, the Most High, men taking no part therein (Tan., ed. Buber, iii. 13).

Aspects of Sacrifice. There seem to be three stages or phases in the development of sacrifice as representing the relations between the worshipers and the Deity. In the first, communion is prominent; in the second, homage or devotion; in the third, expiation. The most primitive notion was that of communion with the object of worship, held to be akin to his votaries, who partook of his life. The Deity, however, was also a benefactor. It was from Him that the various kinds of offerings, animal and vegetable, as the produce of the land, came to the offerers. Hence, on the one hand, a sacrifice was a part of a social feast—a family meal in a wider and deeper sense. On the other hand, it was the giving back to the beneficent Deity of a part of what He had bestowed: it was in fact the most tangible and obvious mode of rendering homage to one's God.

Origin of Burnt Sacrifices. Only a part of the whole was at first offered; otherwise there would have been no sacrificial feast, no communion with the Divinity. But what should be chosen as the offering? and how should it be rendered? The Deity, being invisible, would be most suitably entertained by a more ethereal form of nourishment than solid food. Hence arose the custom of burning certain portions of the animal offerings or materials of the feast. The most appropriate of all were the fatty parts of the animal, which in general among ancient peoples, as among the Hebrews, were consumed by fire, while

the remainder of the flesh was eaten by the human participants. This was the "zebah," the fundamental animal offering.

We European-Americans belong to a Judeo-Christian culture. The Bible, both the Old Testament and the New, is ingrained within the fabric of our collective consciousness and woven upon the loom of humanity's primitive depths. Awash with the ruthless flow of blood vital to a people's survival, we atone for our savagery by implicating our gods. We project upon them our own needs, and thank them for their cooperation. We include them at the table of our slaughterous feasts. In the everlasting struggle between good and evil, the father sacrifices his son or daughter so that his own life shall endure.

Those Native Americans at that first Thanksgiving, in 1621, when they would kill an animal for meat, they'd sing a prayer of gratitude into the ear of the dying animal. They did not transfer their guilt for taking this life, nor their gratitude for receiving this food, to an anthropomorphic lord of the hereafter, who granted forgiveness and sustenance to those that paid tribute. They thanked the spirit that lived in the animal for its sacrifice, the same spirit, The Great Spirit, that also lived within themselves.

Their prayer went something like this: *I have killed the deer. I have crushed the grasshopper and the plants he feeds upon. I have taken fish from the water and birds from the sky. In my life, I have needed death, so that my life can be. When I die, I must give life to what has nourished me. The earth receives my body, and gives it to the plants and to the caterpillars, to the birds and to the coyotes. Each in its own turn, so that the circle of life is never broken.* (www.blackhawkproductions.com)

The mass slaughter of water buffaloes or turkeys contains little of this Spirit. We'd best be most grateful to simply celebrate Thanksgiving within the circle of the people we love. And perhaps we might do better to offer up our prayers of thanks to the turkey itself.

S.M.F.

It's All That Is

12/01/2012

After reading some of my previous bi-monthly blogs, one likely might condemn me as an iconoclast. After writing mid-November's, I wondered whether I was sawing off the limb I was putting myself out on. Decapitating sacred cows was one thing, but calling it a turkey?

An iconoclast is defined as: *a destroyer of sacred images; one who attacks and seeks to overthrow traditional or popular ideas or institutions, practices, or attitudes.* (American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language) This excellent dictionary also lists in its back pages the classical and Indo-European roots of the word "icon." Our word comes from the Greek, *eikon*, which meant likeness or image. The Indo-European root word is "weik," which sprouted five branches of Western words having the meanings: 1) clan, social unit above the household; 2) words connected with magic and religious notions; 3) to be like; 4) to bend, wind; and 5) to conquer. I am no lexicographer, nor a linguistic archeologist; I simply find it curious that from one root word, one eon-old grunt, humans have engendered the multicultural denotations of clan, magic, image, bending, and conquering. A Sophist might even conflate this information into the notion that magical images bend and conquer a clan's notions.

Throughout what millennia that we have any clue about on our myths, legends, and histories—the collective consciousness inherited by us—folks have had a tendency to exalt one thing or another, erect idols on pedestals, worship golden calves. In the book of *Exodus*, Moses, an iconoclastic character in anybody's book, comes down from the mountain with the Ten Commandments carved into a tablet of stone. The first two are: 1) *I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me;* and 2) *Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.* In other words: no worshipping of gods other than YHWH— or else!

To me, this story tells how Moses strives to destroy the graven idols of other clans, these symbolic statues of golden calves and their ilk, and to replace them with symbols engraved upon stone tablets, words of Holy Scripture—that ironically become idolized in turn.

In the Hindu pantheon, the panoply of carvings adorning temple walls appears much akin to the friezes of the Greeks and Romans. Much of what has survived from Ancient Egypt was engraved in stone. From totem poles to tattoos, tribes throughout time have fashioned their fetishes—expressing what they held as important—in the human endeavor that we now call "art," the creating of symbolic images.

Many modern artists have built their reputations by willfully deconstructing and reconstructing the icons upon our pedestals. The realistic Classicism of the *Academie des Beaux-Art* was toppled by Impressionism, which was in turn toppled by Cubism, and so on and so on with each avant-garde. Each movement's adherents had an urge to reach beyond whatever came before them, to transform stale ideas into their own notions of what was worth saying, to give birth to other forms of thought.

It is said that the most powerful thing in the world is an idea. A new idea can, and often does, change the world. Aside from our animal nature, we exist amid a myriad of thought-forms. They hold such a presence within our lives that they are like the nano-moments that become what we call time. They are the atomic particles in the molecular structure of our cultures. They are the wherewithal from which we birth our personalities. They are so inherent that they are difficult to distinguish from the conceptions they breed. We live and die in a land of notions, a fanciful island made of ideational grains of sand, piled high amid an ocean of chaos, and destined to be swept away with the next tide.

Sacred cows, of the ancients and moderns alike, have yielded up their bountiful milk for the nourishment of civilizations. When Moses destroyed the Golden Calf, he thrust upon the Jews the concept of not putting false gods before their own Lord God. In the eras prior to the written word, people expressed their notions of the divine by creating and exalting symbolic graven images—statues, bas-reliefs, paintings on cave walls. But the god of Moses wrote his words down, symbols commanding a code of ideas, which later morphed into Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Ancient Jews revered the Tetragrammaton, YHWH, the name of their god, a word that may be written but not spoken. Christians, especially Catholics and Eastern Orthodox, employ a plethora of icons and statues. Islam bans images from its mosques. Yet, all three idolize words of scripture in either the *Talmud*, *Bible*, or *Koran*—symbols.

It appears that most folks need to have a set of symbols intermediating between themselves and the divine. Paul, in *1 Corinthians 3*, says: *And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto*

ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?

Paul knew that the physical and the spiritual are worlds apart. The milk he fed the Corinthians were the symbols that they knew, embodied in a new idea of what is divine. It was mainly Paul who made Jesus into the god he became—Christ the intermediary, the connection between God and Man. In the first three *Gospels*, Jesus refers to himself as the Son of Man, but in the *Gospel of John* and the *Epistles of Paul*, he is made into the Son of God. And later bishops deify him further within The Trinity—one god with three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. YHWH once again had other gods before him.

In Exodus 3:13-14, Moses upon the mountain asks the voice in the burning bush: *Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is his name? what shall I say unto them? And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.*

As a part-time pantheist, I prefer to see the divine in a spirit I call All That Is. Like the name I AM, All That Is has all to do with being. I am. You are. Everything is. We are all the children of that Great Spirit of existence. And rather than segregate into various gods and pantheons the various aspects of being, why not simply see divinity in what is all around us?

Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee used to sing this song:

God and man played hide-and-go-seek.
God told man, "Now man, don't you peek."
Man counted to ten, and then looked around,
But God was nowhere, nowhere to be found.

Man looked on the mountain. He looked across the sea.
He looked in the stars, in the skies, in the trees.
He looked in the wind, in the sun, on the ground,
But God was nowhere, nowhere to be found.

So man made an image and he gave it a name,
But this man-made god brought nothing but pain.
Man started shouting "God! Where can you be?"
"I'm right here man, inside of thee."

Oh, man was so shocked, he was really surprised.
'Cuz he looked everywhere, but right there inside.
Now when man found God, man found love,
And man found out what we all are made of.

God is in you and God is in me.
To love all of God is to love humanity.
God is in you and God is in me.
To love all of God is to love humanity."

I have to disagree with the last line in the second stanza of Sonny and Terry's song. God is also in all the things of the world. It's All That Is.

S.M.F.

What Would Zarathustra Say?

12/15/2012

Any reader of mine likely knows of my heretical view of Christianity. The advent of Christmas upon us, this final intercalary blog of 2012 may as well continue my chronicle of Early-Christian exploitations of mankind's age-old symbols, rites, and festivals.

Listed alphabetically at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Winter_solstice, are 34 multi-cultural winter-solstice celebrations, worldwide and throughout history, of which Christmas is only just one. A few days after the southern equinox, in the northern half of the world, the sun begins again its ascent in the sky to rekindle its life-giving light and warmth. In Third-Century Rome, Wikipedia tells us: "*Sol Invictus* ("the undefeated Sun") or, more fully, *Deus Sol Invictus* ("the undefeated sun god") was a religious title that allowed several solar deities, including Elah-Gabal, a Syrian sun god; Sol, the god of Emperor Aurelian; and Mithras, a soldiers' god of Persian origin, to be worshipped collectively. Emperor Elagabalus introduced the *festival of the birth of the Unconquered Sun* (or *Dies Natalis Solis Invicti*) to be celebrated on December 25, and it reached the height of its popularity under Aurelian, who promoted it as an empire-wide holiday. With the growing popularity of the Christianity, Jesus of Nazareth came to be given much of the recognition previously given to a sun god, thereby including Christ in the tradition."

The oldest date we know of that has Christmas on December 25th is from A.D. 354, in the calendar of a wealthy Roman Christian. But rather than do a post-mortem on all that and Saturnalia to boot, allow me to instead exhume an ancient religion that figures into the Nativity scenario—the faith of the magi. Today, we call it Zoroastrianism, after its founder and prophet, Zoroaster, which is a name derived from 5th-century B.C. Greek texts. I prefer his Avestan name, Zarathustra.

Not much is known historically about Zarathustra. He is said to be the composer of the *Gathas*, hymns to Ahura Mazda, the creator-god, chanted in Avestan, an Indo-Iranian language spoken in the early 2nd-millennium B.C. His birth is speculated to be in Iran somewhere between the 18th and 6th centuries B.C. Linguistic and cultural clues in the *Gathas* deduce the likely time he lived as at least a thousand years before Christ, in a polytheistic Bronze-Age culture, prone to animal sacrifice and to ritual intoxication with a hallucinogen called *Haoma*.

The *Gathas* are the most sacred texts of Zarathustrianism. Written down in a script developed for it in the 3rd and 4th centuries A.D., the language had already been dead for a millennium, save for the recitation of Zarathustrian liturgies memorized by magi, its priests, passed orally from generation to generation, and collected into the *Avesta*, much of which has been lost or destroyed. The seventeen hymns of the *Gathas*, in 238 verses, tell of Zarathustra's mission to convert his people to a monotheistic dualism. Some verses are spoken directly to the creator-god, Ahura Mazda; some are spoken to the people he attempts to convert; and some tell of events of Zarathustra's life.

The core of what he taught boils down to this: Ahura Mazda (the name means "light" and "wisdom") is the lord of everything good; yet he also created Angra Mainyu (*angra* means destructive, *mainyu* means mind or spirit), a.k.a., Ahriman; and the two are ever at battle in the world. Truth and order, *asha*, is antithetical to *druj*, falsehood and disorder. People are responsible for their choices. Through *humata*, *hukhta*, *hvarshta*—good thoughts, good words, good deeds—*asha* is upheld, and *druj* kept at bay. When a man dies, he must cross into the otherworld at the Chinvat Bridge, whereupon he is led to the House of Song or the House of Lies, depending on the *asha* of the life he has led. Good and Evil will eventually fight a final war, whereupon a savior born to a virgin will raise the dead for a final judgment.

Sound familiar? Back in Zarathustra's day, it was new and revolutionary. Moreover, it held sway in the Persian East for a thousand years before Christ. The Achaemenid kings in the 5th Century B.C., lords of the Persian Empire, were ostensibly Zarathustrian, as was the religion of their vast empire, which stretched from India to Egypt to the shores of the Black Sea. Christianity, in the syncretistic tradition of the Middle East, likely absorbed much of Zarathustra's revelation.

In the *Gospel of Matthew*, chapter 2, verses 1-12, we read the story of wise men from the East (it doesn't say three wise men, just *magi*, the Latin plural of *magus*, a Persian priest) who have traveled to the birth of Jesus. The manger scene comes from the *Gospel of Luke*, which does not mention any magi; nor does *Matthew* mention any manger. The other two Gospels have no mention of the Nativity at all.

Young's Literal Translation tells this tale in *Matthew 2*: "And Jesus having been born in Beth-Lehem of Judea, in the days of Herod the king, lo, magi from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, `Where is he who was born king of the Jews? for we saw his star in the east, and we came to bow to him.' And Herod the king having heard, was stirred, and all Jerusalem with him, and having gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he was inquiring from them where the Christ is born. And they said to him, `In Beth-Lehem of Judea, for thus it hath been written through the prophet, And thou, Beth-Lehem, the land of Judah, thou art by no means the least among the leaders of Judah, for out of thee shall come one leading, who shall feed My people Israel.' Then Herod, privately having called the magi, did inquire exactly from them the time of the appearing star, and having sent them to Beth-Lehem, he said, `Having gone—inquire ye exactly for the child, and whenever ye may have found, bring me back word, that I also having come may bow to him.' And they, having heard the king, departed, and lo, the star, that they did see in the east, did go before them, till, having come, it stood over where the child was. And having seen the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy, and having come to the house, they found the child with Mary his mother, and having fallen down they bowed to him, and having opened their treasures, they presented to him gifts, gold, and frankincense, and myrrh, and having been divinely warned in a dream not to turn back unto Herod, through another way they withdrew to their own region."

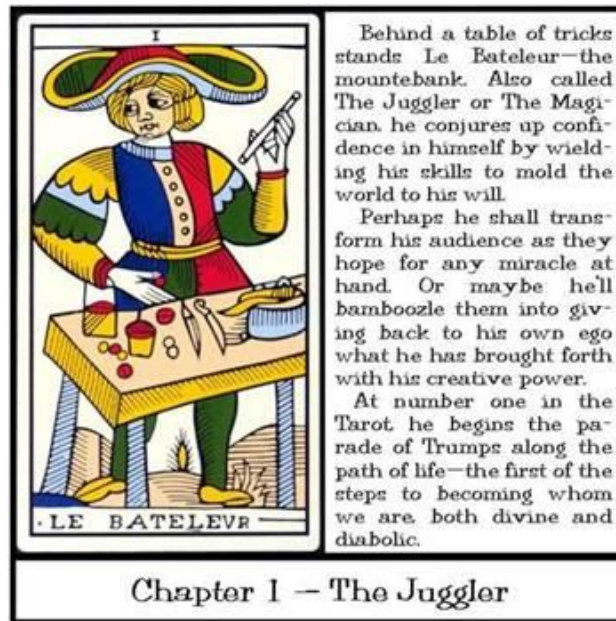
Herod, the proxy of Rome, wants to kill this potential messiah, but Joseph, warned by an angel in a dream, is told to flee to Egypt before Herod orders the slaughter of all the infants in and around Bethlehem.

Notwithstanding the villainous plot twists of this tale, the pilgrimage of the magi to the Nativity can be viewed symbolically as the priests of the older religion, Zarathustrianism, kowtowing to the new god, to whom they offer gifts of gold and incense from their temples. The writer of Matthew was likely aware of the power of the magi in the Persian kingdoms. Cyrus the Great, who freed the Jews from captivity in Babylon, no doubt had magi in his court. Mythically in this New Testament chapter, we have the worldly Roman Emperor, from the west, failing to destroy the messiah, and from the east, the spiritual magi granting him their powerful talismans. Historically, Christianity will eventually supplant both.

Zarathustrians today number around 200,000 adherents. After the Islamic invasions of Persia in the 7th Century, many who would not convert to Islam fled to the Iranian mountains and later to India, from where many then scattered throughout the world. Today, after India, the USA has the second largest population of Zarathustrians. They are generally an industrious and educated people, respected by those who know them. They are often maligned as fire-worshippers, because of their ritual use of fire. Both fire and water are viewed by them as agents of purity, and are ancient aspects of their temple observances. Insight and wisdom are gained through fire, and water is the source of that wisdom. They are no more fire-worshippers than are Christians cannibals, eating and drinking the transubstantiated body and blood of Jesus.

The Greeks of the Hellenistic world thought the magi to be magicians adept in the esoteric arts of astrology and alchemy. Pliny the Elder in his *Natural History* names Zoroaster as the inventor of magic. These ideas, like others throughout time immemorial, are most likely untrue, but have congealed into quasi-truths believed by so many—for all one knows, much akin to our Christmas story, or to Christianity's Zarathustrian roots.

Take a look at Trump number one in Jean Dodal's Marseilles Tarot, restored by Jean-Claude Flornoy, reproduced with permission of his estate, and underscribed with text from my novel, *Appalachian Carnival*. It depicts a weary medieval magician, wand in hand, as *Le Bateleur*—a mountebank at his table of tricks.



S.M.F.

Kindling to Stoke up Interest

01/01/2013

Whew... after wassailing the New Year last night with multiple bottles of Warsteiner Dunkel, chased with some bootleg absinthe from the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, I'm a mite groggy this first morning of 2013. Nevertheless and notwithstanding, my bi-monthly blog, with its self-imposed deadlines on the first and the fifteenth, is due, so let's see what I can do.

I set up this website and began this blog at the beginning of 2012, on the advice of my literary agent, as a promotional tool to crank up interest in my novel. I suppose that it has done so somewhat; yet, writing for publication on schedule has also jimmied open windows of opportunity for my motive, motivation, and motif. Choosing something to write about, then researching the subject and rendering it into words that I likely won't regret, has mostly been a welcome task, challenging my character, my beliefs, and my literal skills.

Yet, seeing that I ought to get going on the next novel in my envisioned trilogy, I wondered at year's end whether I should continue this blog, which consumes a days' worth of composed word-count each fortnight. But, I reckon for now I'll play the cards at hand and ante up for what bets might raise the stakes.

And please allow me, after my first full year in the blogosphere business, to thank the readers who have followed my attempts at having something to publish here twice a month. My unique-visitor and page-view numbers have been rising slowly and steadily, despite my outlandish opinions—or perhaps because of them. What can I say? I have to write what I think might be true—at least true for me.

As a matter of fact, I need to set the news afloat that *Appalachian Carnival* has now raised its sails, and hopefully also its sales, as a Kindle e-book. These last days of the last year, I've been immersed in the sea of do-it-yourself know-how needed for Edgewise Publications to format a respectable product—for which I gratefully thank M.A. Demers and her book, *The Global Indie Author*, and its astute details on getting what I've written shipshape for an e-reader.

As captain of Edgewise, I've opted for this new tack because paperback sales were sinking. Being marooned at 3.2-millionth in Amazon's sales rankings, tells me, among other things, that there are a lot of books out there. Even with mine being just another spine squeezed between novels on the shelves of bookstores that I've consigned copies into—what chance is there that it might be chosen by a reader?

As an enrollee in KDP Select, for a ninety-day exclusive, I've made Annabelle's tale available to the Kindle Owners' Lending Library, which allows Amazon Prime members to check out my book at no cost other than their prepaid \$79 yearly fee, which entitles them to other benefits, too. There's some sort of formula with a pool of money that Amazon calls the KDP Select Global Fund, of which, depending on how many times my book is "loaned" in the "library," versus how many other books were "borrowed," then Edgewise earns a proportional cut of the fund. Money, I've presently got enough; it's readers I want more of.

Another bump in buzz is likely to occur soon. The publisher of the regional art-newspaper in my neck of the woods up in Northwest Lower Michigan—*Northern Express*, with offices in Traverse City and an average readership of 75,000—interviewed me for a book review soon to be in print. I sent him the novel before I went south, and he tells me he loves it.

Also, I bought into *ForeWord Reviews'* deal, which for not much money will put my title in front of national and international eyes that I'd otherwise have little sight of. I pray whomever they have reviewing *Appalachian Carnival* will like it as well.

After these reviews get published, I'll try to gain traction with them, instead of spinning my wheels amid this blizzard of self-publications that blankets the literary landscape. Now that the busyness of the holidays is over for the bookstores that I've consigned copies into, I need to settle accounts with them—write them to see what they've sold, if any; request payment, if any; and with these reviews, pique their interest, if any, in further consignments, or maybe even in buying copies outright.

I remember reading in somebody else's blog that when a writer becomes his own publisher then he lessens the time that he has for writing, what with all the tasks at hand in the selling of books. Luckily, I don't need to make my living doing neither. I got lucky making my living as a shoemaker, and now my success as an author/publisher isn't a financial do-or-die issue.

Kindle costs nothing to publish on (if you do it yourself). And this here blogging page is included with the minimal price of a Weebly website—practically free for freely writing with the freedom of words I enjoy. The novel's paperback edition, after an initial few-hundred bucks for this and that, affords print-on-demand at a fixed cost. My greatest cost so far has been my giving of copies to kith and kin—I'm uncomfortable about charging money for my clan's heartfelt interest and curiosity in reading what I've

written.

A hundred years ago, who'd 've thunk it—why even just ten or twenty years ago—that now, in the year 2013, one's words can be read worldwide on electronic gizmos!

S.M.F.

Appreciated Appreciation Appreciates

01/15/2013

In the past couple of weeks, two reviews of *Appalachian Carnival* have been published—one from the indie-book promotional service, *ForeWord Reviews*, and the other in Northwest Lower Michigan's weekly art-newspaper, *Northern Express*, written by its editor and co-publisher, Robert Downes. Getting a good review by a publisher of a regional periodical—with an estimated 75,000 readers—who has two decades of a straight-forward reputation to uphold, is as good as it gets in any neck of the woods. Mr. Downes writes:

"Appalachian Carnival," the first novel of Benzie County writer Steven Fernand, is a joy to read, not just for its picaresque plot of a 19-year-old adventuress who hooks up with a hillbilly carnival on May Day, 1970, but even more so for the flavor of its language.

Corn-pone humor fried black & crispy underlies a book filled with vivid scenes of the carny life and its clientele of deadenders, layabouts and lowlifes. The book has a 'voice' that captures the rural life and its crusty outlook as thoroughly as rolling in a burr patch. Like diamonds studding the walls of a coal mine of black humor, the book offers jewels of folk wisdom and dead-reckoned dialogue.

Add to that mix the ancient wisdom of the 22 Major Arcana of the Tarot card deck. Annabelle Cory of Clandel, "West-by-God-Virginia" is shaken to learn that the cards have uncanny things to say about her after a reading by a three-armed man at the carnival. A flirtation with a carny named Walt Ryder leads to dinner and a night in bed, after which Annabelle decides to ditch her coal-town life for an adventure on the road with McCain's Magic Midway.

What seems astonishing as the pages turn, immersing you deeper in the coal slag of Appalachian life with its mountain dialect and carny jargon, is that author Fernand is able to so completely take you there.

(Reproduced by permission from the January 7, 2013, issue of *Northern Express*;
<http://www.northernexpress.com/michigan/...> read the full-page article at --->
<http://npaper-wehaa.com/northernexpress#2013/01/07/?article=1778265>)

I've been reading Bob Downes' weekly column, "Random Thoughts," for as long as he's been writing it—yes, since 1991—and his wit, good sense, and style have always been an informative pleasure. When I sent the *Northern Express* a review copy before I went south for the winter, I thought it likely that a staff writer might get around to writing about it in an issue—after all, that's what this paper does, promote local arts. And when Bob e-mailed me, saying he "loved the book," and asked for an interview, just that was already complimentary enough. However, when his review came out, and with a laudatory pat on my back he hits the same nail on the head that I have endeavored to pound into my keyboard, his endorsement got the new year of '13 off to a fortunate start.

Amid the congratulatory hoopla of last week, a friend asked me how I gauge success, and I replied

that success to me is not about money and sales—I see success to be with one person at a time, someone reading the novel and enjoying it. Before I knew about print-on-demand and self-publishing, I figured that, at the very least, I would print a few copies of the novel using my desktop printer and bind them in leather (which I did for a couple of my preliminary drafts), and then I'd give the books to some local libraries, wherefrom people may read it and either like it or not. And if, as I told my friend, even just one person experienced the wondrous state of suspended disbelief while reading my tale, then to me the novel will be successful.

Nevertheless, as publisher of *Appalachian Carnival*, the reins of its chariot are in my hands. Good reviews are the brass ring of the publishing merry-go-round—reach for one to grab, and you may win another turn on this wheel of fortune. Yesterday, I mailed two more review copies, with the recent reviews enclosed, off to the periodicals in Ann Arbor. Presently, another copy is likely in the slush pile of the book critic at the *St. Petersburg Times*. An eight-dollar expense—cost of the copy plus postage—seems to me a wise investment for Edgewise Publications. What the hey... why not send a copy to the *New York Times*?

Another review, this one costing \$129, from the indie-book-review service, *ForeWord Reviews*, has been published on their website. Their deal is one of three: 1) if submitted before the publication date of one's book, and they, with "strict editorial standards," choose to review it, the review will run in their quarterly magazine, *ForeWord Reviews*, at no cost to the publisher; 2) if submitted after the publication date, and also with their strict editorial standards they choose to review it, a \$129 fee gets it farmed out to one of ForeWord's independent book reviewers, and the result, with a kill option, will henceforth be published on their website, <https://www.forewordreviews.com/services/book-reviews/>; 3) if the book does not measure up to their editorial standards, \$335 will procure a book review from the same pool of reviewers, but published online under ForeWord's *Clarion Review*.

So, for as much cost as a decent ad in a local paper, Edgewise slips into the wide world of indie-books, with this from *ForeWord Reviews*:

Most people are afraid to take a chance with their lives," muses Walt Ryder, a carnival operator of unusual magnetism, in the early pages of S.M. Fernand's debut novel. That sympathetic recognition is part of what draws teenaged Annabelle Cory to him; in larger part, she's compelled by his believable-enough insistence that she's the girl of his dreams. Annabelle's narration is enlivened by a mixture of colorful, unabashed colloquialisms and phrases she's gleaned from books. The novel follows her as she abandons the West Virginia coal town of her youth, where, despite her curiosity and beauty, she's at grave risk of becoming just another sad tale. When Walt offers her a chance to light out with the carnival, she eagerly accepts.

This break with convention is the first of many for Annabelle, who finds herself ravenous for new experiences—any and all which might help her understand who she is, and what life holds for her. The Midway is happy to respond to her hunger. Annabelle finds her soul's kin amongst the carnies, folks whom the outside world thoughtlessly dismisses as "freaks," but who in actuality prove to be an enlightened bunch.

Isis, the bearded lady, is there to help with questions of spirituality; Lula, the fat lady, is a willing coach when it comes to love; and Madeline, the daughter of a game operator, has access to drugs. Beyond all of these teachers stands Walt, his presence igniting unfamiliar lust in Annabelle, though the ordinariness of his daily routines confuses her between their salacious encounters.

The glitz and bustle of the Midway contends with the common world surrounding it for Annabelle's senses, and in the span of one eye-opening week, she comes to see how truly intertwined both arenas are. Or, more accurately, how little each feels like home to her. A bit of genuine monetary luck coupled

with real danger is the impetus for one final brave decision from Annabelle in the closing chapters of this fast-moving thrill of a book.

Fernand's heroine is a character perpetually ready for what's next in life, and the reader will be dazzled by the chances that she takes. The author's own experiences behind the scenes of carnival life may be the magic ingredient in these beguiling pages; though the setting will be foreign to most readers, authenticity is never an issue. Sexy, provocative, and entertaining, this dense novel of self-discovery is well worth the price of admission.

Michelle Schingler January 2, 2013

<https://www.forewordreviews.com/reviews/appalachian-carnival/>

Edgewise Publications now owns this review, to do whatever with whatsoever. Its last paragraph might look good on the dust-cover of a hardcover edition. Ms Schingler's analysis is professional, telling, and terse. I suspect, though, that she may have had difficulties with the novel's heretical content—she is a graduate of Harvard Divinity School, and a "field education intern" and blogger at the Massachusetts Bible Society. I pray that her reading a fictionalization of my blasphemous notions did not disturb her Christianity, and I praise her for her lucid restraint, and thank her for the kind words.



Before this review came out, Edgewise anteed up *Appalachian Carnival's* \$99 entry fee, for ForeWord's Book of the Year Award. As carnies say on the midway, "You can't win if you don't play." A hundred-dollar bet on my dark horse won't break the bank. No risk, no reward.

Advertising and marketing are known to be a repetitive and redundant enterprise. Three is the charm—tell them what you'll say, then tell them, and then tell them what you've said. Last week I did my utmost to get the word out on the novel's reviews, through e-mails to bookstores that have consigned copies, and to almost everybody in my yahoo! address book, and also to Facebook friends, while clicking on add-a-friend for a hundred more familiar faces.

Sales are trickling again, with both the Kindle edition and the Amazon paperback, and no doubt also in a few Northwest Michigan bookstores. Nevertheless, the few dollars that Edgewise Publications

might never make in 2013 is of little concern to me.

My profit lies in the minds and hearts of readers that enjoy the novel I've written.

S.M.F.

Carnival—The Uplifting of Flesh

02/01/2013

Mardi Gras! The days of Carnival are upon us in the Western World. Christendom shall exalt its flesh prior to the penitential fasting of Lent. Sins are freed upon the land—gluttony, drunkenness, immodesty, vanity, lust! The ancient gods, Dionysus and Bacchus, arise again to transfigure us into someone other than who we are every other day, yet whom we have always been in our marrow.

The origin of the word *carnival* is debated. My *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* states that the Italian word we get it from, *carnevale*, derives from the Old Italian, *carnelevare*. Break that word in two, and we have *carne* and *levare*, which Google translates from the Italian respectively as *flesh* and *remove*.

My dictionary also links *levare* to the infinitive *to raise*—seemingly apparent to me, what with *lever*, *elevate*, *levitate*, *leaven*, *levity*; moreover, the dictionary's Indo-European lexicon ties *lever* squarely to the root-word *legwh*: "*Light, having little weight.*" Notably, the Indo-European reference does not define *legwh* as *remove*. When I plug in *levare* as a Latin word, Google Translate renders it as *lift*. Thus it seems to me that *carnival* has to do with "elevating flesh," since Latin predates Italian.

Maybe the Italian derivative's meaning, *remove*, came into being from the Early Church's decree to abstain from eating meat and dairy during Lent. Wikipedia quotes Thomas Aquinas: "*they afford greater pleasure as food [than fish], and greater nourishment to the human body, so that from their consumption there results a greater surplus available for seminal matter, which when abundant becomes a great incentive to lust.*" Medieval man's flesh was condemned from pulpits to be the haunt of Satan. For one's spiritual upliftment, in preparation for the resurrection of Christ from the dead, the life of the flesh, its enjoyments and temptations, were removed as a Catholic option during Lent in the Middle Ages.

There is also a reference in Wikipedia that the word *carnival* derives from the Roman festival, *carrus navalis*—whereupon the goddess Isis was paraded through the streets in a boat (float) amid masked revelers. I dare to guess the word's derivation is likely not either/or; it is both. One tradition joins another within the melting-pot of time.

A hundred countries and a thousand cities each have their own version of carnival. It is traditionally celebrated on the day before the Lenten Fast begins, forty days before Easter (minus Sundays with Catholics), in emulation of Jesus' forty-day fast—also perhaps of Elijah's and Moses' forty days upon a mountain and Noah's forty days and forty nights of rain, what with forty being a Biblical holy-number.

The American version of the festival, Mardi Gras, which translates from the French as "Fat Tuesday," occurs on the day before Ash Wednesday, most notably in New Orleans, Mobile, and in the Cajun country around Lafayette, Louisiana. I've been to all three. Mobile's Mardi Gras is the oldest in the country; New Orleans's is the biggest.

The Cajun Mardi Gras is unique—during their *Courir de Mardi Gras* (Mardi Gras Run), hundreds of

masked Cajuns, on horseback and on foot, go through Acadian towns from neighbor to neighbor begging ingredients for gumbo, of which all may partake. They wear homemade costumes and pointed hats fringed with purple, green, and gold. Their daylong parade also has homemade floats, most upon everyday trailers towed with pickup trucks, many with just family and friends sitting on hay bales, drinking and hooting it up (most floats carrying an on-board porta-potty). As the parade winds past, some homeowners set a chicken loose, which teenage boys competitively scramble to catch. Cajun cuisine is everywhere, as is Cajun music.

In my quartet, The Cajunauts, which I book here in the Florida winter around St. Pete, I sing "La Danse de Mardi Gras"—*Les Mardi Gras ca vient de tout par tout / tout alentour, le tour du moyeu / ca pas une foi par an / demander la charite. / Quand meme si c'est une poule maigre / et trois ou quatre coton mais.* (The people of the Mardi Gras they come from all around, all around the hub; they pass one time each year asking for charity, even if it's a skinny chicken and three or four corn cobs.)

The Cajunauts play the St. Petersburg Yacht Club on the night of Lundi Gras (the Fat Monday before Fat Tuesday); and the Saturday afterward we play a Mardi Gras party in St. Pete Beach. The Yacht Club is a private party, but the Saturday gig, February 16, at The Daiquiri Shak, is a public event for charity. Are The Cajunauts real Cajuns?—not! Notwithstanding, being that my mother's side is Acadian from New Brunswick, and I feel the music in my blood, I'm not shy about how the Cajunauts rock it into another space. For a listen to the Cajunauts, click---->

<http://fernand4music.weebly.com/cajunauts-song-demos.html>

Another carnival I've been at is the version celebrated in Cádiz, Spain, where *chirigotas* and *coros*—singing groups sometimes accompanied by a guitar or two and a bass drum with a cymbal atop it—perform in the streets till dawn their witty compositions lampooning whatever they wish. One night in February 2007, I witnessed amid a crowd of thousands the burning of a straw man effigy embodying carnival itself. Below is a photo of a *romancero* I encountered on the steps of a cathedral, satirizing God; and also attached is a video of a *coros*, shot with my primitive digital Kodak.



(ed.—the video file of the *coros* can be viewed at:

<http://www.smfernand.com/1/archives/01-2013/1.html>)

The carnival on St. Thomas in the Virgin Islands, I've been to twice—and Susan and I have booked our flight and hotel for this year's 61st annual carnival at the end of April. The Caribbean version of carnival stems from a two-century old Trinidadian tradition. Carnival on Trinidad, like on most islands, is on the days before Ash Wednesday, but on St. Thomas it occurs two or three weeks after Easter, this year the big day being Saturday, April 27th

When I lived there in the late 1970s, I was told that many of the smaller islands staggered their dates for carnival because a big part of the tradition was the crowning of the Calypso King, and having different dates allowed the calypsonians to sing at multiple carnivals. Performers like the Mighty Sparrow would put out a song on a 45-rpm record, which would then get local radio play, and islanders would argue whose song was the best. Steel bands, mounted on pipe-framed trailers took up their favorite tunes and rolled until dawn through the streets on *Jouvert*, surrounded by a dancing "tramp," a "jump-up" of young and old. At the calypso tent, singers offered their tunes to a sit-down crowd; and at the center of Carnival Village, a parking lot ringed with homemade booths selling food and drink, sat a stage with brass bands blaring out soca versions of their favorites.

Then on Saturday, the final day, a parade went all day long through the middle of Charlotte Amalie—moko jumbies on stilts, troupes of costumed dancers, steel bands rolling by on two-story pipe-rail trailers, brass bands upon trucks and floats—one big bumpsie jump-up!

The last time I was there, twenty years ago, the calypso tent was no longer part of the festivities. The old calypsonians were dying off and reggae and soca had the ear of the youth. What will happen at this year's scene remains for me to be seen.



Mardi Gras in New Orleans is well known enough to not describe it here. In 1971, I sold popcorn, peanuts, cotton candy, and candy apples from a pushcart to the crowds alongside ten days of its parades. Susan and I were there one night a few years back, but the parade we were going to see got rained out.

The next day, we went to the Mobile Mardi Gras, which has been celebrated since 1703, and has a month-long carnival season of balls, mystic societies, and revelry; and we watched a parade of ornate floats, marching bands, and masked riders. The Mobile parades are not as fabulous as New Orleans, yet are certainly worth seeing.



Regarding my novel, *Appalachian Carnival*, we see this sort of carnival defined as a traveling amusement show with mechanical rides, food concessions, sideshows, and games of skill and chance.

Wikipedia dates its beginning to 1893: "At the Chicago World's Fair was an avenue at the edge of the grounds called the Midway Plaisance. This avenue of the fair had games of chance, freak shows, wild west shows (including Buffalo Bill whose show was set up near the fairground) and burlesque shows. It also featured the first Ferris wheel constructed by George Washington Gale Ferris, Jr. Following the Chicago World's Fair, the term "midway" was adopted from the Midway Plaisance to denote the area at county and state fairs where sideshow entertainment was located."

After the World's Fair, an impresario named Otto Schmidt put this new entertainment combination on the road, and by the 1930's there were around 300 traveling carnivals setting up from coast to coast in America on fairgrounds, parking lots, and vacant fields. How they came to be called carnivals appears unsaid within my cursory research. Although such a carnival customarily sets up during what in many towns are the few festival days of the year, I suspect that the tricksters operating these roadshows likely purloined the name.



Jean-Claude Flornoy restoration of the Jean Dodal Tarot
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Whatever carnival one goes to, there is in the air a magical spirit of transformation from the mundane to the otherworldly, and from one's daily morality to an age-old licentiousness.

S.M.F.

To Love Is To Give Is To Live

02/15/2013



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As is my blog's bi-monthly wont, and with yesterday being Saint Valentine's Day, I shall endeavor to uncover some clues of where and when this day celebrating love came into our world of annual traditions.

Valentinus was a popular Roman name in the early Christian era. Like our word *valiant*, it meant worthy, strong, powerful. Whoever Saint Valentine really was has been lost through time and legend. It is known that a Christian named Valentinus was martyred on a road north of Rome in the third century on February 14; however, there so many other tales of lives of beatific Valentinae that when Pope Galasius I, in 496, deemed February 14 to be Saint Valentine's feast day, the pope: *included Valentine among all those "...whose names are justly revered among men, but whose acts are known only to God."* As *Gelasius implies, nothing was yet known to him about his life.* (Wikipedia)

Eleven other saints named Valentinus are listed in the Roman Catholic list of martyrs, four of them dying on February 14. One story has Valentinus healing a blind girl. Another has him martyred because he refuses to denounce Christ. The most common legend is that Valentinus was a priest that married Christian couples when it was a crime to help the Christians, mercilessly persecuted under Claudius II; and around A.D. 270, Valentinus was beaten, stoned, and beheaded. A skull said to be Saint Valentine's, crowned with flowers, can be seen today in a basilica in Rome.

Early antiquarians thought that Valentine's Day was the Vatican's substitution for the Roman fertility festival of *Lupercalia*, celebrated in mid-February. But, because any mention of the day's celebration of romance did not appear until the 14th Century among the literary circle around Chaucer, the connection to *Lupercalia* has been discredited. Yet I suspect that with the inevitable melding of traditions throughout time, *Lupercalia*, which superceded the Sabine festival of *Februa* (from which we get the month's name, February) has more than a coincidental correlation with Valentine's Day in our

collective unconscious.

It is most likely that the custom of sending Valentines to one's love, whether the love be unrequited or fulfilled, was born during the age of courtly romance. Towards the end of the 12th Century, Provençal troubadours sang poems glorifying a new idea of love that inspired a new relationship between the sexes—not only was there a physical desire, but also a spiritual need to connect with the soul of the beloved. Often, the physical connection never came to pass; nevertheless, the poetry extolled the beauty and joy of a mystical bond, whether one-sided or mutual, that falling in love bestowed. This ecstasy became a fashion in the courts of Europe, and spread through the wider population of the Middle Ages through the writings of Dante, Chrétien de Troyes, and Sir Thomas Mallory, within whose tale of King Arthur we find the romance of Lancelot and Guinevere.

By the year 1600, Ophelia in Shakespeare's Hamlet says: *"To-morrow is Saint Valentine's day,/All in the morning betime,/And I a maid at your window,/To be your Valentine./Then up he rose, and donn'd his clothes,/And dupp'd the chamber-door;/Let in the maid, that out a maid/Never departed more."*

By the end of the 1700s, the tradition of lovers composing verses to each other on Valentine's Day was so well established that commercial printers began to publish lacy cards with ready-made sentiments, and an industry was born that today ranks third in the USA, behind Christmas and Halloween, in holiday money spent on it. Moreover, Valentines are nowadays not only given to one's love—but also everybody one knows often gets something with a heart shape upon it.

The symbol of a heart (♥) I suspect represents bodily organs other than our blood pump. Upside down, it looks a lot like buttocks, a pair of breasts, a spread-opened vulva, a scrotum, and/or the glans of a penis.

As for the human experience of love itself, in my blog of 2/29/2012, archived here in the column on the right side of this page, I wrote:

In Chapter Six of Appalachian Carnival, Annabelle and Walt lustily start their day off with a bang; but, Annabelle puzzles over whether she has fallen in love. Knowing little love within her childhood home, her affections suffer from a lack of education, as well as from a lack of experience. Because of what she has read in novels and seen in movies, and when she finds herself not transfigured with the bliss of what these tales tout as love, Annabelle doubts she is in love. Her twentieth-century conception of love is so confused, she tightens her grip on her hesitant heart. Later that day, when secretly attracted to another man sitting beside her and Walt at a lunch counter, she worries that her licentious yen is a dawning wantonness awakened by the eagerness yawning amid her thighs. When Walt's jealousy rages afterward, she finds refuge in a library, and seeking a clue to her dilemma, she reads The Art of Love, by Erich Fromm.

Fromm instructs us on what various types of love can be. Denis de Rougemont, in Love in the Western World, tells us that the romantic myth, inscribed into the European heart since the days of Provençal troubadours, is but the fancy born of a mystical conceit of poets. The Greek and Roman myths, save that of Psyche's, relate the genealogies of lust—the Olympians ravishing one another like cavemen with clubs. Kama, the Hindu deva, and his consort, Rati, are lords of: "desire or longing, especially as in sensual or sexual love." (Wikipedia)

A paternal trade in virginal brides once brought forth most tribes and nations. The eons-old sex-glue between a man and a woman, plus the cement of family, engendering marriages with deep roots and plentiful fruit, was once what love was. One did not fall in love; one grew with it. Although the twitter-patter of hearts young and old, that urge to merge, no doubt sparked countless Greek and Hindu trysts—they didn't make a myth out of it. They did not deify it.

The medieval romance of Tristan and Iseult, tells of a treasonous tragedy, which was nevertheless revolutionary in rousing to ecstatic heights a new form of worship, as close as living skin—the exaltation of one's beloved. But like Dante's Beatrice, or the courtly troubadour's maiden, this mystic ideal, one's soul mate, is unattainable—an imagined projection of one's own psyche.

Psyche, a mortal maiden, falls into Eros' land of enchantment, but the god lies with her only in the darkness of night. After her jealous sisters goad her into a monstrous plan, she brings a lamp and a

knife to bed, to behold the husband she has never seen, and slay him. But as Psyche gazes upon Eros, only then does love take hold of her. Eros flees. She has broken her marriage vow. Heartsick, she searches far and wide for her husband. And only after completing Aphrodite's tasks, does she drink ambrosia with Eros and the immortal Olympians.

Today, we call what's between our ears—psyche. I too grew up in the Western World, watching love stories at the movies, reading them in books, and hearing about them from gossip. Like the finches on Galapagos, we modern human beings have evolved amid our surroundings and background—whatever gods our psyches have illuminated. And the flickering sequential images projected onto the inside our skulls, the stuff of last Sunday's Oscars, breed in us ideas born from the myths that exalt our lives. The soap operas of the Olympians and those of daytime TV are one and the same. Only the gods have changed. Today we worship the stars of Hollywood, and believe we must act out the constellations they portray.

Impressionable youths, until they learn better, believe that the paradise of being in love is the most marvelous thing under the heavens. And when the path of their real-time love affair wends awry from their dream-time version, these lovers, both young and old, become downcast by their own devils.

Perhaps if we had not fallen under the spell of troubadours and their latter-day ilk, love might bring less disappointment and more fulfillment. Nevertheless, imagine what would be, were we not to have that lusty spark which we call "falling in love." The Great Mother gives us such pleasures to multiply creation. Yes, love at first sight does occur. But better yet, it can turn us toward the long view, high upon the mountain where love ascends.

Romance is only one of love's many forms. The word *love* has so many meanings and permutations, and is so widely overused in our world today, that we hardly know what we are talking about.

Nevertheless, we know what we feel. We know who or what we like so much that we must call it love.

I love the lady that I've lived alongside for eleven years. I gave Susan a bracelet for a Valentine. I also love my children, my parents, and my friends, even my exes, each in their own way. I love to write and I love to live. To live is to love is to give is to love is to live is to give is to love....

February 14 is our celebration of giving living loving.

S.M.F.

Self-Sequestration

03/01/2013

What with all the blather and bother in Washington about sequestration, I wondered what the word *sequestration* meant before the politicians got hold of it. My trusty *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, which I bought in 1976, says that the verb *sequester* means: "1. To remove or set apart; segregate. 2. *Law*. To take temporary possession of (property) as security against legal claims. 3. *International Law*. To requisition and confiscate (enemy property). 4. To withdraw into seclusion...."

The term *budget sequestration* was coined in 1985 amid the language of the Gramm-Rudman-Hollings Deficit Reduction Act, which capped spending in specified categories of the federal budget. This was replaced in 1990 with a pay-as-you-go budget, which mandated that any increases in spending be matched with increases in revenue (taxes). By the end of the '90s, federal finances were operating with a surplus for the first time in decades. The law expired in 2002, and federal debt exploded under President Bush. President Obama reinstated pay-as-you-go in 2010.

In August of 2011, in a deal to raise the debt ceiling and not default on the debts of the U.S. Treasury, Congress bet that a "super-committee" would come up with a workable budget, and when that didn't happen, a provision got triggered, called sequestration, which mandated across-the-board cuts in federal spending. And today, March 1st, is the day the doo-doo, or the don't do, hits the fan.

We sequester a jury; that is, we segregate it from everything but the trial. We sequester property in both peace and war. We sequester ourselves into self-imposed isolation. Chemical sequestration entails

the "inhibition or prevention of normal ion behavior by combination with added materials, especially the prevention of metallic ion precipitation from solution by formation of a coordination complex with a phosphate." These are the only definitions of sequestration in my 1976 dictionary.

Now, Americans evidently have a new meaning to an old Latin word—which in federal budget parlance now refers to a mandate that if the Congress and President cannot come up with a budget deal, then: *an amount of money equal to the difference between the cap set in the Budget Resolution and the amount actually appropriated is "sequestered" by the Treasury and not handed over to the agencies to which it was originally appropriated by Congress.* (*A Glossary of Political Economy Terms*, Paul M. Johnson).

Whatever deal the federal government might come up with at the last minute, or sooner or later, to avert risking the disapproval of their constituents, most Americans, clueless of the technical meaning and mechanization of budget sequestration, will likely for a long time henceforth regard the word *sequestration* as a symbol of the bane of our political era—the eternal squabble between Republicans and Democrats. In our collective ear, the word will resound for months, maybe years, as a bad thing.

The endemic sequestration in American politics nowadays seems to me to be the separation of the difference between the subjective importance of either we or me. Democrats fight for the rights of all, for the public good; Republicans fight for the rights of the individual, for one's personal good. Government for the people vs. government for me and mine. This bi-polar schizophrenia has made this country mentally unstable.

I just started reading a book by Edward Edinger, *Ego and Archetype*, in which its first chapter elucidates C. G. Jung's theory of Self and its relation to one's ego. Self is not just one's self, it is also all that we come from and live amid—our collective world of Mother Nature and Western Civilization. To Jung, Self gives birth to our being—an organism pre-stocked with primal archetypes and behavioral patterns inherited from a collective unconscious formed through the eons of Life's experience on Earth. Each ego grows into a person through individuation, a life-long process, by separating itself, sequestering itself, from the Self. An individual's destiny is to become itself; but when he or she separates from the Self, from All That Is, then, paradoxically, alienation sets in.

Edinger writes further about ego inflation, whereupon the seven deadly sins of pride, envy, anger, gluttony, lust, avarice, and sloth take hold in one's life. These sins are all about me, and are contrary to we. The ego inflates the importance of itself—which also includes one's family, property, lifestyle, and tribe—and sets itself apart from others. Jingoism and Exceptionalism are just two political manifestations of this malady.

Are we our brother's keeper? Democrats tend to act as if we are; Republicans, as if we are not. Washington's annual battles over taxing and spending come down to these bi-polar motivations. One side says, "Don't tax me and waste it on other people. The only thing government should do is protect me from enemies foreign and domestic." While the other party says, "Government needs to take care of the poor, the sick, the elderly. It needs to build roads and bridges, educate our young, promote the arts, do scientific research, protect our environment, as well as protect us from enemies."

Today, within the psyche of the U.S., the enemy is us. Democrats inflate the importance of the public good, while Republicans inflate the importance of the individual. It is an individual right to have a gun—yet we see mass murders. We should care for our brother and sister—yet too many are ne'er-do-wells, eschewing their individual responsibilities. Is it the government's business to be concerned with profit, or is it to be a benevolent regime? America has been debating this for more than a century, and likely shall for more of this 21st century.

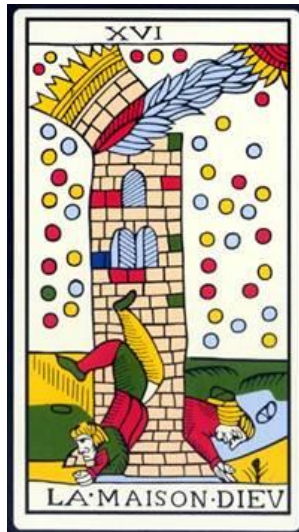
The Jungian remedy for ego inflation and alienation is to consciously reconnect the ego with the Self, the individual with the collective, so that neither one nor the other unconsciously tyrannizes the person. Perhaps this can also help cure our national dysfunction.

T. S. Eliot's *The Wasteland* laments: *What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow / Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man, / You cannot say, or guess, for you know only / A heap of broken images, where the sun beats, / And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief.**

Edinger writes of it: *The "heap of broken images" surely refers to the traditional religious symbols*

*which for many people have lost their meaning.** He further explains that without these icons, nowadays debunked by science, then modern man dangerously projects his innate idolatry into secular or political dogma. And: *When the value of the Self is projected by opposing groups onto conflicting political ideologies, it is as though the original wholeness of the Self were split into antithetical fragments which war on each other.** Does that sound familiar?

In the life of a dysfunctional person, it is often a crisis that leads to a rehab of one's psyche. One's own Tower of Babel—....*let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth.(Genesis 11:4 ESV)*—built by one's inflated and alienated ego, is struck with the lightning bolt of deity.



Jean-Claude Flornoy restoration of the Jean Dodal Tarot
© Succession Flornoy. <http://www.tarot-history.com/>

Of the Biblical city of Babel, The LORD says to his heavenly pantheon—*“Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another's speech.”* So the LORD dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city.(Genesis 11:6-8 ESV)

One wonders what the hell the good LORD did that for. Perhaps, as Jung said, what one needs to become more oneself is the Self expelling the individual into alienation, into the wasteland.

Edinger defines Self as: *the ordering and unifying center of the total psyche (conscious and unconscious) just as the ego is the center of the conscious personality. Or, put in other words, the ego is the seat of subjective identity while the Self is the seat of objective identity.** Edinger writes further: *It is generally accepted among analytical psychologists that the task of the first half of life involves ego development with progressive separation between ego and Self; whereas the second half of life requires a surrender or at least a relativization of the ego as it experiences and relates to the Self.(Edinger, Edward F., Ego and Archetype)*

Our politicians must grow up! This babel in the playgrounds of our capitols is childish. Inflated egos on both sides of this tug of war cling to their half of the rope and just stand their ground. A confusion of tongues taunts and dares and blames and prattles, while nobody wants to listen. Were they to have one language, then LORD knows, *nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible to them.*

Our politicians—who are merely transferred projections of ourselves—must mend this split in our national psyche. It's the needs of both the individual and the collective that they must set in balance for the well-being of our future.

S.M.F.

Free Carnival Reads!

03/15/2013

I am giving away e-copies of *Appalachian Carnival* this weekend, March 14 to 18, for Amazon.com's Kindle. Why?—because writers write to be read; and having more eyes reading the novel is much better than having less. Readers and their reviews quicken the lifeblood of a book's vitality.

I'm also doing a giveaway this month on Goodreads.com. I discovered Goodreads a few weeks ago, and although I am a mite social-media shy, I'll likely get up enough gumption to befriend the bookish on this facebook-like site. On it, I've signed up to give away 3 paperback copies of my novel, and so far 121 goodreaders have requested to be entered in the giveaway, and another 47 have marked it as a "want to read." At the end of the month, a Goodreads algorithm figures out who wins the three copies, and I mail them off, hopefully evoking a review or two. My cost of this loss-leader promotion: around \$25.

Free downloads from Kindle cost me nothing but the fat chance that somebody might have paid for a copy otherwise. After only one day of the giveaway, 177 Kindle-copies are now loaded for action and reaction. This Amazonian marketing-strategy is to gain readers and reviews with the giveaway, thus raising the book's "Best Sellers Rank," and thus garnering more eyeballs and word of mouth. In one day, *Appalachian Carnival* has gone from an e-book ranking of way over a millionth to just over a thousandth.

The Amazon ranking algorithm also extrapolates the quantity and ratings of reviews. Good reviews are the Holy Grail of publishing—bad reviews: aspects of the quest; reversals of one's card on the table. When I first set the primitive prototypes of my shoes out in the Wellfleet flea market on Cape Cod in 1982, they were so different that everybody turned their head and formed their opinion; people either loved them or hated them, and I knew I had a winner there and then. Opinions on the internet, more often than not, can be critical—somebody with a gripe often has more passion, more reason to write. As the saying goes: everybody's a critic. Nevertheless, no risk, no reward.

So allow me to ask those of you who have read *Appalachian Carnival*—or might now download the freebie, or may someday give it a read someday—if you'd please take a few minutes, or an hour or so if your pleasure is to write, and click your mouse onto: [Appalachian Carnival: S. M. Fernand: 9780985807078: Amazon.com: Books](http://AppalachianCarnival.com); scroll down the page to the "Write a customer review" button; poke into your keyboard some words echoing what you thought about my novel; and click any star, one to five. You don't have to be an Amazon customer to do so. And if you are on Goodreads, which I recommend for anyone with an interest in books, I kindly ask the same.

For readers up around the little finger of Lower Michigan, I've donated copies of the novel to several local libraries; not only in a spirit of payback, having borrowed my copious share of books throughout my literal life, but also for the same self-promotional reasons as these other giveaways—the only way a book gets any attention among the millions and millions of books out there is to be read and talked about.

Another helpful website for book marketing and selling tips for authors and indie-publishers is: <http://www.authormarketingclub.com>, which has links to twenty other sites that will list one's Kindle giveaway. It also offers other promotional tools and marketing resources.

And a book that I just downloaded from Kindle, *Goodreads For Authors: How To Use Goodreads To Promote Your Books* [Kindle Edition] by Michelle Campbell-Scott, has been the best \$3.47 I've spent in a while. This how-to is not only for writers, but also for readers who would like a guide to navigating the

Goodreads' site.

One truism said by writers, come true for me, is that the business of digital-age book promotion becomes a job in itself, which employs hours of keyboard-poking, and which slows the business of writing one's next book. Even this bi-weekly blog, with its research, composition, and rewrites, takes up a few days a month. And now, were I to get friendly on Goodreads, even more time would fly in a different direction.

So, that said, I'll cut short my usual on-and-on about my latest whatever-it-is, and take some further stabs at this weekend's thrust to increase the readership of Edgewise Publications.

S.M.F.

The Tarot Fool

04/01/2013

For last year's April Fools' blog, *Know Foolin'*, a mini-history about fools, click here: (www.smfernand.com/1/post/2012/04/know-foolin.html)

This year, this fool blogs about the Tarot Fool in his novel. We all know a fool when we see one, but maybe some readers don't know about the Tarot, nor about my novel, so kindly allow me some exposition.

At the beginning of each chapter of *Appalachian Carnival*, I've placed a card from the first eleven Trumps of the Tarot's Major Arcana. A Tarot deck has seventy-eight cards—the Minor Arcana, four suits of pips numbered one through ten, with four additional face cards—plus the Major Arcana, twenty-two Trumps numbered one through twenty-one, with the Fool numbered zero, or with no number at all.

The suits of the Minor Arcana—Cups, Coins, Batons, Swords—correspond to our modern deck of playing cards—Hearts, Diamonds, Clubs, Spades—respectively. Each suit's face cards, the court cards, depict a King, Queen, and Page (a.k.a. Jack, or Knave) and also a fourth card, the Knight. The twenty-two Trumps have no suits.

There are many speculations about the origins of the Tarot, yet its historical genesis remains a mystery. The first known deck is from Northern Italy in the mid-1400s. Early decks, hand painted by various artists for wealthy patrons, are in museums today, most missing some cards. With the advent of the printing press, other versions of decks by other artists were mass-produced in France, the most popular being the *Tarot de Marseilles*. Today, there are many decks, by many artists, some with esoteric and occult symbolism, most notably the Rider-Waite deck and Aleister Crowley's *Thoth Tarot*.

The version my novel uses, the Jean Dodal *Tarot de Marseilles*, was published around 1701 in Lyon, France—and has recently been beautifully restored by Jean-Claude Flornoy, from Sainte-Suzanne, France, whose estate has graciously granted me permission to reproduce it.

In the novel's acknowledgments, I've inserted these paragraphs from Flornoy's book, *The Journey of the Soul*, that tell us:

The 22 Major Arcana of the Tarot are a coded description of the journey through life, from incarnation to liberation, of an individual soul. It is a geographical map which describes the inner itinerary of a being.

Each arcanum represents a stage along the way, a level of achievement. By examining them in order, one after the other, each of us can feel the particular energy which emanates from these

images. One may "play at remembering", and find oneself saying, "I, too, have experienced this...." In the end, perhaps he will realize that the Tarot is telling the story of his own life.

(© <http://www.tarot-history.com/Symbolism/index.html>)

In the early 1980's, long before I ever knew of Flornoy's work, I got a similar insight—an idea for a trilogy, with its outline being the Major Arcana. I'd had a hankering to write a carnival novel, and I had played fortuneteller with a few Tarot decks. One day, while looking at the *Bateleur* of the Marseilles' deck, it appeared to be a carny at his bally.

What's inside oneself, is that what one sees in these cards? Are these numbered pictograms about the story of life?

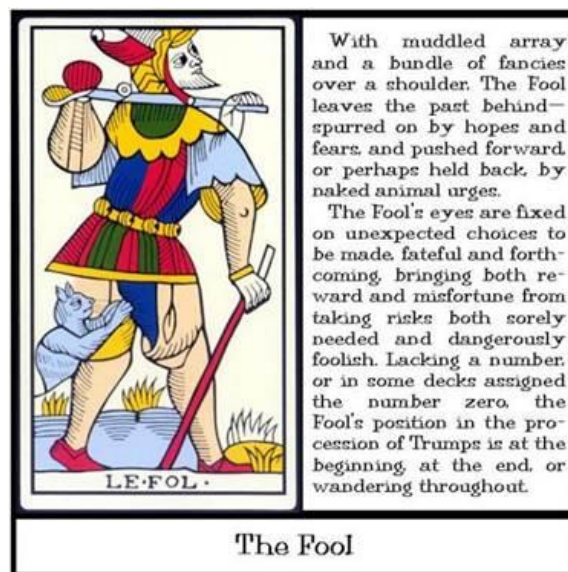
Recently, I've come across a website, *The Aeclectic Tarot*, run by Solandia, a woman from Brisbane, Australia. She's written an article entitled *The Fool's Journey*, which begins: *It is said that the Tarot is a book, the book of The Fool and his journey through life. If you read his story, it will help you immensely. It characterizes the cards so you know the energy and personality of their archetype.* (<http://78nightsoftarot.tumblr.com/post/13379877530/the-fools-journey>)

Several years ago, I found a book, *Jung and Tarot: An Archetypal Journey*, by Sallie Nichols, which echoes the same notion. The Tarot Trumps are "a map outlining the journey towards self-realization"—what Jung called: individuation.

The Fool (each-and-every one of us) sets out on a journey through life, in a place once upon a time. My novel is set in a place in time—a West Virginia carnival in 1970—whereupon a Fool meets a *Bateleur* (a girl meets a carny); and then she encounters a Priestess (the second Tarot Trump), portrayed by Isis, a tattooed bearded lady. Then... and then....

Our time and place in life occurs within a society, a culture. The varieties of societies are as myriad as there are times and places. For one fictional week, the outlandish sub-culture of McCain's Magic Midway whirls amid the coeval mores of a West Virginia town.

In my conceit, I introduce my Appalachian heroine—an allegoric Fool—Annabelle, into another way of life. At the start of her story, I put this Trump alongside my gloss in a text box:



Jean-Claude Flornoy restoration of the Jean Dodal Tarot
© Succession Flornoy. <http://www.tarot-history.com/>

Due to Annabelle's narrative becoming the real story, I fear my allegory shortly suffers. Nevertheless, within each chapter—each a day of her ten days in May with the carnies—I endeavor to reflect some shadows from the archetypes of the first ten Trumps.

I've asked several readers what they've thought about the correspondence I make between my tale and the procession of Trumps. Some didn't seem to know what I was talking about; others got it, somewhat.

Each of us views the symbolism of the Tarot, like any iconography, with our own mind's eye. Each person envisions each mythic image in accord with one's temperament, culture, and education. To one person, a penciled circle on paper is only just that, a line made round; while to another, the symbol of a circle represents the eternal universe.

And often when a reader tells me of their take from what I've written, I'm surprised at what they have to say about the book—stuff I never thought my story to be about. No doubt, they see Annabelle's tale through the focus of their own experience, much as when they are shown a painting in a museum, or a movie on a screen, or an icon on a card.

S.M.F.

A Book About A Blog About A Book

05/01/2013

It's not enigmatic that I write this blog to promote my novel. I began blogging at the start of 2012, advised by my literary agent to do so. My postings have been a challenge and a pleasure—I like a worthwhile quest, and to put together words that mean something to me is ever a healthy dose of self-gratifying individuation. I've imagined my readers to be interested in what I have to say, and I've striven to pique their curiosity, not only with some arcane content, but also with a smidgen of quirky composition.

I gave the blog a bi-monthly deadline, the first and fifteenth, and I met that schedule for a year and a quarter. The subject of several postings was the day of the year itself—the day's historical and mythological background—April Fools' Day, May Day, Mardi Gras. Other times, I wrote about my self-publishing venture, or I related aspects of the novel to the archetypal symbols of the Tarot and the psychology of Carl Jung. Also, I dispatched my opinions—intrinsic to a blog—on politics, religion, people, and places, indulging my satisfaction, amid each spellbound hour, wrapped up in research and composition, mustering my sentences into formation.

Nonetheless, this spring, when I found myself struggling to not repeat what I'd written the year before, I wondered whether the 35,000 words I'd accumulated thus far had said enough already. Moreover, the blog's bi-monthly fix to my literary jones seemed to be stalling the start-up of my next novel. Therefore, I figured I'd best blog less—even though my website's numbers for unique-visitors and pages-viewed have been trending upwards.

And as my deadline for this mid-April's blog approached, a light bulb lit up in my thought balloon—why not collect these blogs sequentially into an e-book?

It would cost nothing but the time to format it and upload it to Kindle. Opting into Amazon's KDP Select program, I can give it away on five days of every ninety, and the rest of the time charge as little as

99 cents for it (the lowest price allowed by Kindle). Thus, my blog's role in promoting *Appalachian Carnival* might be preserved and extended beyond its initial format. Other than being made more The Fool, what would be my risk?

Born from my penchant for wordplay, a title came to me—*A Book About A Blog About A Book*—for which I did an Amazon search, and which nobody already had. Rather than compose my mid-April posting, I put the existing blogs in sequence, cleaned up their HTML files, clicked together a Kindle cover, wrote an introduction, and prepared the e-book for today's release, May Day, 2013. Then Susan and I flew off on April 21st for a week in the Virgin Islands, to visit an old friend on St. Croix and enjoy a Caribbean carnival on St. Thomas.

How's *Appalachian Carnival* doing? The short report, so far, is that it's a singular success (i.e.: now and then, here and there, a single reader and single-digit sales). Notwithstanding, the significant singularity among readers' responses is that they enjoyed the novel—and I feel that every single reader's enjoyment to be a success, well enough alone.

In March, I entered the novel in a couple of giveaways, reckoning that the more eyes that see it, the better. Free Kindle copies were snatched up by 522 e-readers. At www.goodreads.com, 551 people signed up to win the three paperback copies offered through its giveaway, which also led to 247 people clicking the Goodreads' want-to-read button for the novel. The promotional rationale behind this so-called "loss-leader" deal is much akin to that of a supermarket giving away cranberry sauce so people come into the store to buy their other Thanksgiving fixings.

Sales have since bumped up a bit; yet it still may be early for many readers to finish the book and opt to review it. To date, seven reviews have been posted on Amazon, four 5-star and three 4-star, all with welcome words of kindly commendation.

I receive sales reports from the novel's print-on-demand service, CreateSpace, and also from a feature of Amazon's "Author Central" which provides data from Nielsen BookScan. Disconcertingly, the two reports do not jibe—BookScan tallies twice as many sales than has CreateSpace, the novel's sole licensed printer. Hmmm.... I suspect that BookScan logs most of the paperback sales through orders to the wholesale distributors, Ingram and its ilk, whose fulfillment process is said to take up to eight weeks—an unfortunate lag-time requiring patience for both the customer and the indie-publisher.

As for some personal news, I'll be heading north by mid-May, returning to Benzonia, Michigan, for the summer. My house there is for sale and needs upkeep, and the shop where my shoe business was for twenty years, right across the alley from my house, has recently been vacated by Fernand Footwear's current owner, who has moved the operation to his house. So my commercial building needs a major rehab—cleaning, repairs, paint—for whatever may come next for the property.

Later this summer, I'll likely visit friends and family in Massachusetts. In September, Susan's daughter gets married in North Carolina. And in October, Susan and I plan to travel France and Italy for a month or two. Then we'll return to St. Pete, Florida, for the winter. Yes, life is what you make it to be.

Amid these coming months, I aim to find the time and gumption to write some further chapters of my proposed trilogy—a continuation of my Tarot allegory, interpreting the archetypes of the next eleven Trumps.

So, kind reader, I shall abandon my bi-monthly blogs for a spell, and instead schedule a Kindle giveaway of *A Book About A Blog About A Book* on each first and fifteenth of the upcoming summer months. For those who may have read this blog in the previous fifteen months, I sincerely thank you for your worthy attention. For those who may have come across my digital journal for the first time, I hope you might find interesting these virtual pages and pages about my barefaced adventure into self-

publication and self-promotion—which, like mirrors facing each other on opposite walls, repeatedly reflect the persona of my own self-image.

S.M.F.

A Fool Rides The Wheel of Fortune

April 1, 2014

April Fools.... Those of you who may have read my previous blogs perhaps have wondered what happened to that Fernand guy and his fool novel. It's been near a year since my last post. April 1st seems an appropriate date for catching up.

Again this winter, Susan and I are residents of Gulfport, an artsy little city on the south side of St. Petersburg, Florida. The cold and snow have been record-breaking bad up north in Benzonia, Michigan, where my house sits unsold, and where we'll return by mid-May, if the ice is gone by then.

Last summer there, I'd made plans to promote Appalachian Carnival—book signings, a radio interview, plus I was going to try peddling copies at some local art fairs—but in early July, my mother went into the hospital and I drove out to Massachusetts. A month later, she died, and I spent most of August there, settling the estate. So I cancelled all the book promos.

In September, I had the rehab of my former shoe shop to complete, and the marriage of Susan's daughter in North Carolina to attend. Then, for five weeks in October and November, we flew over to Europe, a trip we'd planned months before. Our do-it-yourself itinerary included more than a dozen cities: Amsterdam, Bruges, Paris, Troyes, Venice, Mantua, Siena, Lucca, Nice, Sete, Collioure, Foix, Carcassonne, Toulouse.

Soon after our return in mid-November, we drove to Florida for the winter. In December and January, I reworked my musical repertoire, adding bass and drums from Band-in-a-Box software, and booked some gigs. Some recent live recordings are posted at: <http://fernand4music.weebly.com>

Meanwhile, during all that ado and to-do, the sales of Appalachian Carnival have tanked, due to my neglect of its promotion, and also because of some scathing customer reviews last June on the novel's Amazon page by a couple of West Virginians. "Shame on you," says one; "Really? Appalachian carnival," asks another—their complaints being that I had denigrated their home state by depicting hillbilly stereotypes, and I'd misrepresented their dialect with my heroine's voice.

I would not argue with this. The only defense I might plead is that the book is fiction. The stereotypical hillbillies in this novel are secondary characters, undeveloped and cardboard. Save for Annabelle, my Appalachian heroine, the characterization is mostly concerned with carnies—people also often stereotyped, and people I once knew well.

Many of the words that I put into Annabelle's narration, I gleaned from *Mountain Range: A Dictionary Of Expressions From Appalachia To The Ozarks*, by Robert Hendrickson. I've read cautions in several books on writing fiction that a novelist should not try to write dialect. Now I know why. And not only have I hazarded hillbilly lingo, but also carny cant.

Regardless of any offensiveness, I now see that my fool's error has been that the dialect has hindered readers—Yankees and West Virginians, both—from getting into the story. Those two irate reviewers could not get past the first few pages. And a comment I've often heard from readers, both northern and southern, is that the weird words in Annabelle's narration are hard to take at first—although, most say, that once they do get into the story then the voice becomes enjoyable. Overall, the novel has received

many good reviews from those who have actually read the whole thing.

Therefore, since this fictional Appalachian dialect appears an impediment to getting into the tale, I am now greatly diminishing it during the editing of a second edition, along with repairing an awkward phrase here and there. Also, I shall change the title, change the cover art, and change the printer and distributor.

A title casts a spotlight onto what the book is about. Some readers have asked me what the deal is with the Tarot cards that I depict at the beginning of each chapter, that are also the names of each chapter. What does the Tarot have to do with an Appalachian carnival? The setting of the novel, notwithstanding, is a carnival in Appalachia; nevertheless, within the theme and plot I've endeavored to allegorize the archetypal symbolism of the first half of the Tarot's Major Arcana—a numerical progression of iconic images on cards numbered zero through ten: The Fool to The Wheel of Fortune.

My literary conceit presents Annabelle's undertaking of The Fool's arcane journey and it correlates The Wheel of Fortune to the whirligigs of a carnival, to the midway's wheels of chance, to the turnings of ones world within a world within a world. Thus, I now conceive a better title to be: *A Fool Rides The Wheel of Fortune*. Less regional and more evocative, it will hopefully render a clue why the novel features the Tarot.

When I first published it in August of 2012, I was in a hurry to get it out. I'd wanted my friend, Amy, to do the cover art, but she was busy with other things, so I used an image that I found on a stock-photo site. Amy, a.k.a. "The Banner Queen." paints canvases in the style of sideshow banners on the midways of carnivals and circuses. (<http://www.bannerqueen.com/>) With my heartfelt appreciation, she has graciously agreed to do the cover art for the new edition.

Also when I first published the novel, I juggled whether to go with Amazon's print-on-demand (POD) service, CreateSpace, or with Ingram's POD, LightningSource. CreateSpace appeared easier and cheaper, and had a direct link to Amazon, so I signed up with it. CreateSpace, though, had limitations that Ingram's POD did not—it printed paperbacks only; plus most bookstores won't stock a CreateSpace book, because it isn't returnable (nearly every book in a bookstore can be returned to the publisher for a refund if it does not sell, a unique convention in the book business). Plus, many book dealers consider CreateSpace to be yet another monstrous tentacle of Amazon.com, their Great Satan.

Often, when I would mention CreateSpace to other indie authors, I'd be warned that it may misreport sales. I didn't believe it, or maybe I chose not to believe it, but now I've lost all trust in CreateSpace. Nielsen's BookScan—an independent company that claims to report 75% of book sales in the USA, with data collected from 10,000 bookstores, data which Amazon itself provides on its Author Central page—tells me that the number of copies of *Appalachian Carnival* sold nationwide is more than five times what CreateSpace reports that they have printed, and paid me for. When I inquired about this discrepancy, I was stonewalled by CreateSpace with a boilerplate e-mail that made no sense in the circumstances. When I inquired whether Nielsen's BookScan's data was correct, I was told by the people at Amazon Author Central that it was correct. Hmm... something fishy stinks. There are also other blogs that wonder what the devil is doing here. One of them being:

<http://jeanettevaughan.wordpress.com/2012/09/28/do-amazon-and-createspace-rip-off-indie-publishers-with-failure-to-correctly-report-sales>.

Another complaint I have about doing business with Amazon, is that on my novel's Amazon page, upon which I try to sell copies at a viable price, there also exists a list of other booksellers that are discounting the book, both new and used copies, at prices that undercut mine. When the book's Amazon page was first posted, just a day or two after the novel's publication date, I immediately saw used copies for sale there, and I wondered WTF. Asking how can there be used copies to sell already, I was told that

most of these book re-sellers, as well as the ones advertising new copies, order a copy from the POD only after they make a sale. So, how many readers are buying copies from them? And where are these copies being printed?

By changing the title, changing the cover art, and changing the POD, the look of this new edition will have a totally different online presence. I'll cancel my contract with CreateSpace, and discontinue the publication of *Appalachian Carnival*, both in paperback and Kindle e-reader editions. With new ISBNs, Edgewise Publications will contract with Ingram's newly launched POD service, Ingram Spark, to produce a hardcover edition, a paperback edition, and an e-book edition. Then I'll find out how accurately Ingram counts the copies they print. And if I find sellers on Amazon still offering new copies of the out-of-print edition—well, we'll see about that.

For those of you who may have followed this blog, or read its e-book spin-off, *A Book About A Blog About A Book* (to be also soon deleted from Kindle publication), I thank you for witnessing my adventure in publication. Please pardon me for being so amiss in getting back to you in a timely manner. Kindly look for *A Fool Rides the Wheel of Fortune* in the summer of 2014. And, for what it's worth, perhaps purchase your copy of the original edition before its intentional disappearance.

S.M.F.

Revise, Rename, Recover, Reprint

December 1, 2014

It's been eight months since my April Fools' Day blog about my next move in the labyrinth of self-publishing. The cool summer in the Michigan mitten's pinky, once again found me re-habbing my ex-shoe shop—busy daily with clean-up, drywall, wood trim, and paint. On the walls of the shop's retail room, I hung my collection of found objets d'art, and sold some pieces. Then, finally done with the rehab, I listed for sale, with Real Estate One, both my shop and my house, two properties across from each other at the top of the hill in the Village of Benzonia. Also this summer, I sang twice a week in a local eatery. And now, Susan and I are back in Gulfport, Florida, till the end of May.

As for my novel, I'd early this year abandoned any effort to sell *Appalachian Carnival*, in anticipation of my producing a hardcover revised edition with a new title and new cover art (the story why, is in my April Fools', 2014, blog). I'd hoped to get the new edition up and running during the summer, but that didn't happen. Though the new cover art was commissioned in May, it wasn't delivered until early November—notwithstanding that, I'd already decided to delay the release of the new edition until the spring of 2015 (April Fool's Day seems appropriate).

I put out the first edition in a rush—two or three weeks in July of 2012, from the decision to go to print through Amazon's CreateSpace, to a publication date of August 1st. Since then, I've learned some things about the book business. One being that pre-publication reviews and promos are important. A publication date is an event to be planned.

So now it's time to take my time and do it justice. I've signed up with IngramSpark, and I'm taking a turn on a new learning curve. Yes, CreateSpace is easier to do—upload a PDF from any software, and overnight it's worldwide on Amazon. IngramSpark requires Adobe's InDesign for all submissions. Reformatting the text in new software might be troublesome. The pros and cons of print-on-demand publishing through either CreateSpace or IngramSpark can be easily found through a google search.

Another thing I've learned is that one must diligently peddle one's book upwards on the sales graph. An author is expected to be an authority on something, something interesting, and talk about it at bookstores, book clubs, book fairs, libraries. When I started my footwear business, I did every craft fair that I could get into within a day's drive. I put my face in front of thousands of people and told them my shoemaker's story. However, whenever and wherever I have endeavored to promote my novel, I've found myself not all that interested in discussing neither Appalachia nor carnivals. What I want to talk about is symbolism—such as the archetypal images of the Tarot—upon which I outlined the tale.

More writer than talker, I'm much more comfortable composing a script than speaking extemporaneously. When I was a carnival barker, I had a nightly spiel. When I sold shoes and sandals, my pitch developed over time—a repertoire of shoe ballyhoo and foot-service info that either closed the deal or chilled it, depending on the customer. I knew what to say, and what they wanted to hear from me. The how-to gurus of self-publishing prescribe that one must seek an audience likely to be interested in what one has to say—one's platform—and then start a conversation about it.

Symbols fascinate me with their enigmatic meanings—multi-layered images amid the twilight of each psyche's outlook and each culture's archetypal inheritance. We live in a world of symbols, a world of ideas created by symbols. Witness the electronic letters in this blog's words. The symbolic ideation of our daily lives is so inherent, so innate, that we can't see the trees for the forest. The houses we live in are built from blueprints of two-dimensional lines, words of instruction, and numbers of measurement. The designs of their facades reflect the face we want to show the world. A home is so iconic, so archetypal, that among the first pictures a child draws are squarish houses with rectangular doors and windows, a triangle for a roof, a squiggle of smoke from a chimney, and a stick-figure mom, dad, and kid. Another culture's people might live in round homes, or conical—which nevertheless occupy the same dwelling in their psyches.

Names are powerful symbols, too. Many ancient people kept their names secret. Fraser's *The Golden Bough* states: "...primitive man regards his name as a vital portion of himself and takes care of it accordingly. Thus, for example, the North American Indian regards his name, not as a mere label, but as a distinct part of his personality, just as much as are his eyes or his teeth, and believes that injury will result as surely from the malicious handling of his name as from a wound inflicted on any part of his physical organism."

The names of many gods were unutterably sacred. In my novel, I named my bearded-lady character after the Ancient Egyptian goddess, Isis, who used to be "worshiped as the ideal mother and wife as well as the patroness of nature and magic. She was the friend of slaves, sinners, artisans and the downtrodden, but she also listened to the prayers of the wealthy, maidens, aristocrats and rulers." (Wikipedia) But nowadays, dubbed so by American-English CNN, ISIS is an acronym for the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. (Or is it ISIL? Or is it IS? It's WTF, is what it is!) So now the name ISIS, a translation misnomer, has been damned to symbolic hell, by whomever first called it that, and much of the Western World thereafter. For most readers of English, it now means mean meanies, enemy terrorists, Islamic evildoers.

So I must rename my bearded lady, who represents the High Priestess card in the Tarot. Should I keep the name secret till April 1st, 2015? Nah. She's hereby henceforth: Iris. Hmm, I change one letter, "s", to the symbol that precedes it in alphabetical order, "r", and alakazam! I evoke a different goddess. In Greek mythology, "Iris links the gods to humanity." (Wikipedia) Hey, this is maybe even better yet.

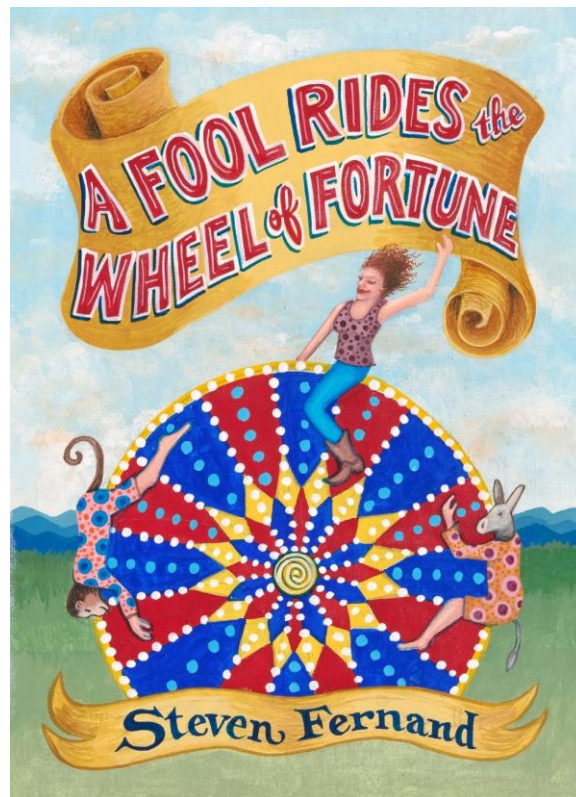
Eighty-sixing the "S.M." pen name off the menu seems better yet, too. Hi, my first name is Steven. My middle, Michel. Be that as it may, were one to google "Steven Fernand," there'd be pages of others to scroll through; but "S.M.Fernand" pops right up on top. Yet, for all that, www.smfernand.com just got

paid up for another year--so it's a keeper, a while yet.

Some visitors to this website have wondered what the heck is that painting behind me in the photo on the homepage. I found it hanging on the side of an Econoline van at the Wagon Wheel Flea Market, up in Pinellas Park some years back, and bought it for five dollars. Titled Felicidad, it's acrylic paint on a reed mat, done by a Cuban woman. I see Felicidad as a Caribbean Madonna, an icon on a prayer mat, a portrait of the Great Mother, savage and protective. Like Isis, the Egyptian-goddess Isis, and like the Virgin Mary, she's pictured with her offspring, who are us. Whatever else one might view Felicidad to be, the photo represents to me the significance of symbols mystically behind much of what we do.

Some symbols are functional and finite: one and one making two is very useful. Some bestow meanings seemingly infinite (more likely beyond our ken). Many mysteries of art dwell in the symbols summoned up by the artist. Archetypal imagery echoes deep within us all. It's part of our DNA. C.G. Jung excavated the mummy of our primitive soul, brought it out of the darkness, attempted to unwrap it, and christened it: the collective unconscious. Not only do our dreams, our myths, our art, emerge from it, but also much of our day-to-day doings. This native language of dreams, myths, and art, has a profound voice one can evoke in everyday life—casting its spell upon everyday objects. Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily, life is but a dream.

Thus my new cover for the new edition with a new title, *A Fool Rides the Wheel of Fortune*, is this, painted by Amy "BannerQueen" Johnquest:



Yee-hah!.... As for the now out-of-print Appalachian Carnival, the title has been retired (CreateSpace's verb, not mine), as of today, December 1, 2014

S.M.F.

Old Fool ~ New Tricks

April 1, 2015

This old April Fool's bought a house in Florida. Let out of our lease early, yesterday we emptied and cleaned the apartment that Susan and I have been snow-birding in for the past four years, and moved her cat into new territory—a 1200 sq.ft. block house on a small lot under large live oaks; two bedrooms and two baths (each on opposite ends of the house); an open floor plan in between, tile floors; plus a patio and palms. The house was built in 1950, but majorly updated in 2002, so I now own 1950's pink-and-green bathroom tiles, along with Home Depot kitchen cabinets. On the Monday before Christmas, my short-sale offer was accepted, but I had to close the deal by the Monday after Christmas, or the property was going into foreclosure. I hectically did the deed, and now, switching residency to Florida, I have a new homestead. The house has "good bones," but needed a healthy dose of cleaning and painting. Now if only I can sell my properties in Northern Michigan....

Notwithstanding my new domicile, this post was supposed to be about the new edition of my novel—nee: Appalachian Carnival; now: A Fool Rides the Wheel of Fortune. What with the rehab of this house, and the work I did last summer on my Michigan real estate, I haven't done much lately with the writing business. However, on my calendar deadlines must live—and April Fools' Day seemed an appropriate publication date—so I took a week in February to reformat the novel to IngramSpark's specifications. For readers of this blog that have perhaps followed my foray into independent publishing, I offer here a short narrative of my experience thus far with Ingram's print-on-demand (POD) service—an alternative to my former POD, Amazon's CreateSpace.

Ingram is the biggest wholesale book distributor in the world. What they offer, that Amazon does not, is the POD production of hardcover books, plus the option of remainder returns from booksellers. Though twice the cost, a hardcover book seems to me a much better package, a longer-lasting package, for a story, than a paperback will ever be. I've seen copies of my novel with covers so curled they open up by themselves. But it's the remainder-return option that is the big difference from Amazon's POD.

Standard operating procedure in the book business is that it's okay to order a whole stack of a title (after all, the more one has of an item, the more items one sells), and then if and when there are books unsold, the retailer, within a certain period of time, can return them to the wholesaler or publisher for full credit of the wholesale price. Amazon's POD does not offer returns of remainders, so most bookstores will not stock a book printed by them. Ingram distributes books the way the industry does business. Although an independent title has little chance of being stocked by most bookstores, a title has no chance if printed by Amazon's CreateSpace.

Then there's the whole issue of wholesale discount—who gets what percentage of the price, and what that means for business. This is a complicated issue with many factors, which I find explained very well in this link to Dog Ear Publishing: <http://dogearpublishing.net/ak-wholesale-discounts.php>. The discount I chose, and why, I'll leave for a future blog, after some months of let's-see-what-happens. Today, I just want to relate how it was to set up a book with IngramSpark.

First, they only accept PDF submissions from Adobe InDesign software. Absolutely no Word.doc files saved as PDFs. My novel was written and formatted in Microsoft Word, which CreateSpace does accept. InDesign is a program for professionals. It used to cost a lot of money to license it. Now, instead of a

lump-sum acquisition of the software, Adobe offers their "Creative Cloud"-- I can download a free month's trial, and then, if I choose to, pay by the month: \$29.99 on a month-by-month basis; or \$19.99 a month with a year's contract. So with my free month's trial in February, I took some time to learn the software and re-format the novel.

Learning a new software interface is a challenge. Tasks one has done in Word now have new names in different menus. A more professional program is less easy to manipulate, but more able to manipulate the work. After of a few days of clicking and cussing, I got the knack. Adobe does provide a 710-page free PDF manual to download: and Ingram has a much shorter File Creation Guide, also a free PDF. So the how-to answers are there for the finding. I thought this all would be more of a chore, yet in just a solid week's work, I had reformatted the novel.

I went back to painting and cleaning for my move-in deadline (also April 1st) and in mid-March I bought a month of InDesign to finish the job on the text, and set up the cover file. After a few night's work, the new edition was set to go. What with the moving out of and into the apartment and house, I didn't get around to submitting the files to Ingram until Sunday, March 29th. I requested an April 1st release date, which I doubt can happen so quickly. As always, a snag happened on the upload, so I called Ingram on Monday morning, was on hold for ten minutes or so, and then reached a pleasant and helpful person who pointed out that I'd misinterpreted an instruction, and she cheerfully fixed it for me. I ran the files through again, and alakazam!

The next step happens when people at Ingram review the files I've uploaded, make sure they pass muster with Ingram's production values, then they okay it or not, and either send me instructions on what to change or send me an e-proof to approve. After that... well, we'll see.

But so far, the switch to Ingram has been no more difficult than my initiatory experience with Amazon's CreateSpace. I had to learn something new, and did.

S.M.F.

Grok, Click, and Make

June 1, 2015

Now two months later, after all our semi-tropical day-to-day doings, and weeks of my side-yard fence rehab, I've wrapped up the InDesign/IngramSpark process for three new editions of my retitled novel-- *A Fool Rides the Wheel of Fortune*—in hardcover, in paperback, and in EPUB.

April became a month of our settling into the new house here in Gulfport FL. Then came my reconstructive repurposing of the slantwise and rotting stockade fence and lattice around my property, with me sweating well into May. Plus, in between, I drove up to Massachusetts to visit a sick friend, a ten-day trip. Nonetheless, since April Fool's Day, the total time spent on this revision, mostly on formatting, has been maybe half a week. So getting a title through Adobe InDesign and into IngramSpark has not been overly onerous for this reasonably laptop-literate user to grok, click, and make work.

When there's much to do, I binge at it. The novel was written in several binges, and binge-edited. When I bend my mind to a task, it gets done—usually with the exclusion of most everything else. I hammered away at fence-fixing like the cobbler I once was, buckling down my damndest to polish it off. On my hands and knees to boot, as if assembling an ad-lib jigsaw puzzle, I cobblestoned a dirt-covered

corner of my lot with a patchwork of sundry stones and paver pieces gathered from here and there around the yard. In the meantime, the new edition of the novel sat on a shelf at the back of my mind.

So a few days back, to get it done before I drove north at the end of this week for the Michigan summer, I took to task my plan to ready for a July 1st publication date, a hardcover edition through Ingram (see my April 2014 blog for an explanation of that, and also the two postings that follow). While working out a few more things more to do on it, after laying it aside two months back, I decided as well to issue another paperback edition, plus an EPUB edition. The internet service up north in rural Benzie County isn't like it is here in urban Pinellas County, and I had neglectfully continued my thirty-dollar-a-month subscription to Adobe's InDesign Creative Cloud, so why not, before I leave, get some bang for my buck.

My previous blog left off with the hardcover files uploaded to IngramSpark, and me awaiting Ingram to okay what I'd submitted, which they did within a day or two. Then I rush-ordered a proof copy, which got to me within a week. Meanwhile, I'd changed the publication date to July 1st. The proof copy looked fine, though I thought I might tweak the dust-jacket art a bit more. And then, there it sat for eight weeks.

Producing a new paperback edition was easy enough—use the same format, use a new ISBN, and reconfigure the cover art and blurbs. The dust jacket of a hardcover book wraps around the boards, so there are flaps inside the cover for blurbs or a bio. A paperback cover has only the front, back, and spine to print on. With Ingram providing another cover template to the same page count and trim size, it was just a matter of cropping off the dust-jacket flaps, and rearranging the blurbs. Then: change the ISBN, barcode, and price; export the cover file and the content file from InDesign to PDF; upload to Ingram; and alakazam—> good to go.

InDesign can also export the book to an EPUB file—but an e-book is a whole other deck of cards to deal with. I'd previously published a Kindle edition through Amazon, so I'd slogged through it once before, though a Kindle e-book uses MOBI files instead, and will work with Windows Word. An EPUB works in most all other e-readers, like Apple's iBook and Barnes & Noble's Nook—pretty much everything else but the Kindle. Not only that, in Amazon's customary monopolistic avariciousness, if one does publish through Kindle, Amazon's contract terms state that one cannot also put out an EPUB while the Kindle is in publication.

An InDesign book for print on paper is created as a bundle of documents—in my case, each chapter, plus the front pages. When I tried to export this book of files to a flowable EPUB, the result was a mish-mash of disordered formatting. After a crash course from YouTube tutorials, and google searches on problems I encountered, I decided to make the whole book, title page to the end, into just one document, one file, and export that. Still, much of the formatting was out of whack—images of the Tarot cards here-and-there higgledy-piggledy, no indents on paragraphs, no centering, no page-breaks at the end of chapters, and numerous other glitches in my rookie configuration.

I eventually found the key to most of these in the "Export Options" and "Object Export Options" dialog boxes, and also among the functions within "Paragraph Styles" and "Character Styles." One by one—re-exporting after re-exporting, and seeing what came of it—I corrected the issues, and formatted a passable EPUB.

Yet still, in Adobe's e-reader, Adobe Digital Editions (a free version with InDesign), there are four places amid the text where it cuts off to a blank page before continuing the narrative. I googled that bug, and I'm not alone with it, but I could not find any reason why it was there— not in several pages of chat and Q&A, nor in the "Export Options," nor in the HTML itself. When I uploaded a few other free e-readers, Radium and IceCream, these presented the book in two somewhat dissimilar interfaces,

minus some of the formatting displayed in DigitalEditions, and lacking the unwanted page breaks. What I gather from that, and other hearsay, is that each e-reader manifests each EPUB in its own way.

The devices I'd like to set my sights on--iBooks on iPad, Nook, and most any other tablet or smart phone--I own none of them. Perhaps a few kindly readers of this blog might like to upload a complimentary review copy of the EPUB file, and maybe let me know how the thing flows on their gadgets. If so, for a limited time only, please e-mail your request straightaway for a free copy, to edgewisepublications at gmail.com.

At the beginning of business today--Monday, the first of June--after yesterday uploading the three editions to IngramSpark, the hardcover's good to go, the paperback's in "Premedia" (Ingram's people are looking it over), and as for the EPUB: "Title has been Rejected." Argghh!

So, I telephoned IngramSpark in the late afternoon (calling in the morning usually means a long wait on hold), and as I sat here writing this line, I got within a few minutes a very friendly member of the Ingram Support Team, Jenna, who cheerily told me that I have to unembed fonts in the file, and she quickly sent me a ten-page PDF, titled "Common CMS EPUB Errors: How to fix them."

And now this evening after dinner, and after consulting with my computer-savvy friends, Kelly and Zack, I've subsequently resubmitted the file. The PDF sent by Jenna told me to unpack the EPUB, delete an excryption.xml file, and repack the EPUB. That seemed to be a bit much of an unzip-idy-ado for me. My friends had never heard of such a procedure. Zack suggested I use the "Create Outlines" function in the Type menu—that is, make the fonts into shapes. When I did so, and exported it, the EPUB displayed even worse yet. Nope. So I simply googled "unembed fonts" and saw that I could uncheck the "Include Embedded Fonts" box, under CSS in InDesign's "Reflowable Layout Export Options" menu. I did just that, re-exported it, resubmitted it to Ingram, and Bingo!—within ten minutes it was accepted as good to go. Whew.

So now that this EPUB binge is over (as well as this 1425-word blog binge), and the three editions are ready for release on July 1, 2015 (pending premedia analysis by Ingram of the paperback file)—my next undertaking in the next few days is to pack up, load up, and drive twenty-four hours to the up-north summer, whereupon I'll take care of business there, and my lady Susan.

If some readers of this blog, indie-publishers and the like, are considering doing business with IngramSpark, thus far I'd highly recommend doing so. Stay tuned to see how it turns out for me.

S.M.F.

Riding Another Wheel

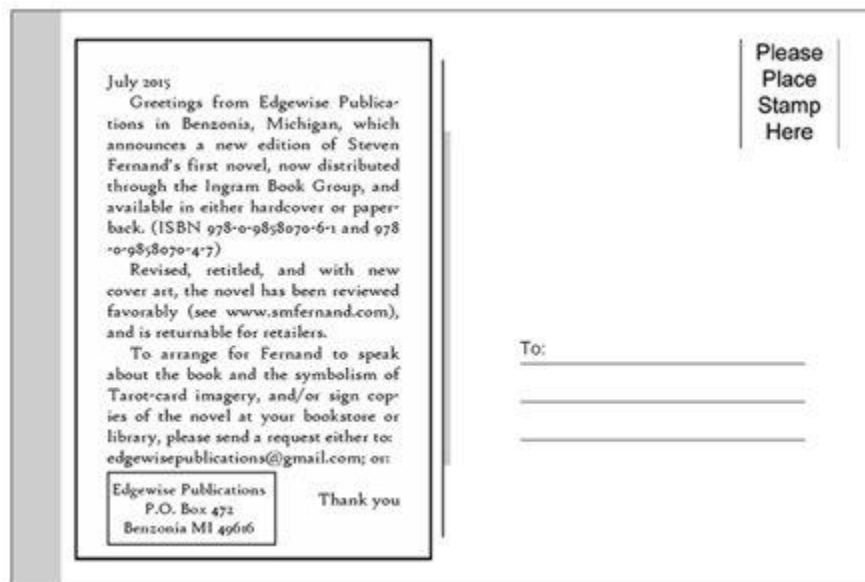
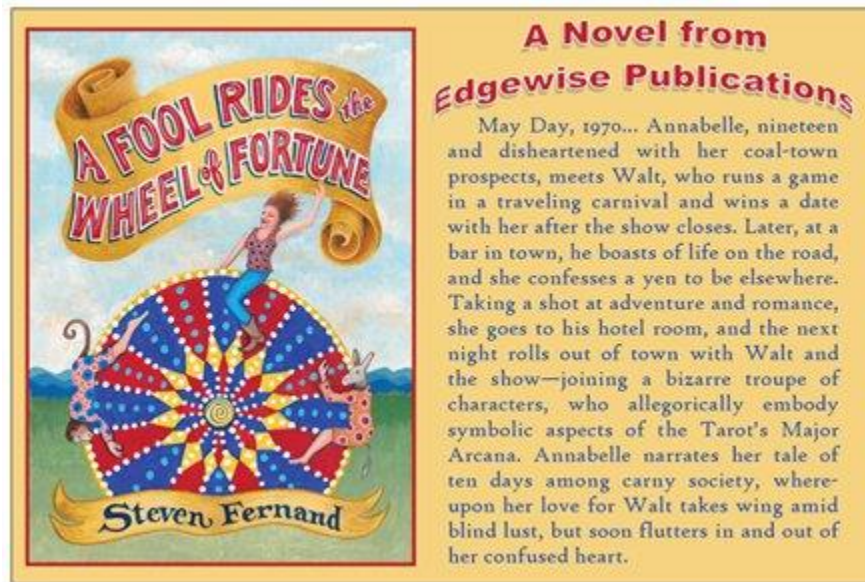
July 1, 2017

In this July 1st, 2015, chapter of a blog about a book, Edgewise Publications announces the publication of *A Fool Rides the Wheel of Fortune*, through IngramSpark—two new editions: both with black & white interior, 6.14" by 9.21"; one in paperback, \$16.99 retail, perfect bound with crème paper and matte-laminate color cover; and one in hardcover, \$28.99 retail, in blue cloth with crème paper and matte-laminate color dust-jacket. These are now available for order by bookstores and libraries, although it might take another couple of days to process through Ingram's system. Amazon.com will

also retail them, but likely with an annoying delivery-time lag of a few weeks or so. Nevertheless, any curious reader can soon order a copy from their favorite bookseller.

Also today, an EPUB of the novel has been published, priced at \$1.99. Ingram will distribute it to six-dozen e-retailers, Apple's iBook and Amazon's Kindle among them. An EPUB is new territory for me, so I guess we'll see how it goes.

To promote the release of the novel to bookstores and libraries, I did up a postcard through VistaPrint:



I sent this out today to 84 indie-bookstores, mostly in Michigan, Chicago, and Wisconsin; and also sent it to 16 public libraries in Michigan. Yes, a library may only buy one copy, but that one copy has the potential to reach many readers. And isn't being read the reason one writes books?

Well, yes, and to sell them, too. And as a retired businessman with likely enough financial means for

whatever time I have yet to go, I feel sorry for all the younger writers trying to eke out a living in the book business nowadays—which is amid a transition towards digitization in a marketplace glutted with independently-published books.

Doing business is like playing a game. There are rules to follow, and there's a chance to win. So far, as an indie-publisher, I find IngramSpark to be better game to play than dealing with Amazon's CreateSpace rules. In my blogs of August and September, 2012, I wrote how the only way to get my CreateSpace-printed novel into bookstores was to show up at each store, and ask if I might leave some copies with them on consignment, which I did with a few dozen stores during a drive to Massachusetts. Some books were eventually sold, and some were not. Then came the task of reconnecting with each bookstore for payment for what had sold, and for return of what had not, which turned out to be more trouble than it was worth, for both the bookstore and me.

Also, I'd signed up for CreateSpace's "extended distribution," which channels through Ingram. However, since CreateSpace does not accept returns of remainders, and since most every other book in a bookstore can be returned to the publisher if it doesn't sell within a specified time, why would a bookseller take a chance on a CreateSpace book? (Most bookstores also don't want anything to do with anything from Amazon, anyway.) And notwithstanding that, I've already complained enough within these blogs about the discrepancies between the number of copies CreateSpace said they had printed and the number of copies that Nielsen's BookScan reported had sold nationwide.

The only rule in Ingram's playbook that worries me is that if some big bookseller orders hundreds of copies that do not sell, and are returned, then I have to pay the printing costs of each copy; and if I choose the option to have these books returned to me, then I owe \$2.00 a copy more.

This is somewhat consistent with what traditional publishers have to deal with; they pay to print a quantity of copies in a press run, and also get stuck with what doesn't sell. However, their cost per copy goes down as the quantity of the print run goes up. (Thus, in explanation of this unique arrangement between supply and demand, consider the publisher's incentive to put more copies in a store than a bookseller might want to buy on speculation, since the printing cost of a dozen books per store, is not much more than the cost to print one or two copies for each store. And a tried-and-true rule in the retail game is: the more you have, the more you sell.)

However, a print-on-demand book, like mine, is the same price per copy whether it's one copy or seven-hundred-and-seventy-seven. And at my books' price-points, each returned remainder will cancel out what I earn on nearly three hardcovers, or two paperbacks, that have already been sold and paid for. To slow down any over-ordering, I've opted for a wholesale discount that will allow me to earn enough to maybe not lose a lot: 45%. (Most books are distributed at a 55% wholesale discount, some at 50%, and even less at the minimum discount Ingram allows, 40%.) Big retailers will likely not want to mess with a indie-book at 45%. Yet, that discount still allows an indie-bookstore to make some bucks on my book. And if it happens that I am buying back more remainders than selling books, then Ingram's supply chain can be shut down by a mouse click.

Furthermore, I won't order copies up front to sell by myself. I'll wait until I receive any remainders, and employ those as my retail inventory. Presently, I'm in Northern Michigan for the summer—where, three years ago, I personally peddled a few-hundred copies of the first edition to the folks around here. They don't need another edition. When I get back to Florida, there are plenty of street fairs to sell books at.

So there you have it, the new strategy for this new game—this old fool's spin on Ingram's Wheel of Fortune. For those of you that have followed my ups and downs thus far, I thank you warm-heartedly for your interest. Today's posting might well be the penultimate in this blog about a book. All that's left

is to see what happens next—which I'll let you know when I find out.

SF

The End

July 1, 2017

It's been two years since my previous post here, within which I claimed it to be "the penultimate in this blog about a book." You who may have read some of these pages, and may have wondered what happened to this old fool's novel, please pardon me for my disregard, and kindly allow me now to finally wrap up this chronicle.

The blog left off describing the release of the revised and re-titled edition of my novel, *A Fool Rides the Wheel of Fortune*—a title apropos to the book's content, and to my own journey into the publishing business. Self-publishing, that is. After eighty-sixing Amazon's print-on-demand service, CreateSpace, for various reasons expressed in my previous blogs, I had reissued the novel through IngramSpark. This was a bit of a challenging task, reformatting the manuscript from Microsoft Word to Adobe InDesign; but nevertheless, it became quite rewarding regarding the physical aspects of the books themselves—the bindings, covers, and paper. What with its new cover art, I felt the novel to be in a quality package.

The discrepancy that I'd experienced between CreateSpace's creative accounting of copies printed and sold through its "extended distribution" retail outlets, versus the five-times-more reported by Nielsen's BookScan (see blog of April 1, 2014), has not been an issue with IngramSpark, whose respective numbers match up with Nielsen's. Furthermore, what the heck is the deal with seven copies of my out-of-print title, *Appalachian Carnival*, being reported by Nielsen sold in the last week of August, 2015, nine months after I terminated my contract with CreateSpace to print the novel, and for which I also never have been paid? I don't know, it beats me.

The book business nowadays is a bizarre ball of wax. What with the consolidation of publishing houses into corporate giants that chiefly print only bankable authors; and what with the tsunami of self- and indie-published novels, many ineptly done; and what with the decline of book sellers and book readers—what have we got? An unfortunate ball-buster.

Notwithstanding that, as the publisher of my novel, I have done a poor job—and as its author, I've done even worse—being reluctant to invest the needed effort to realize even meager sales. I did send out 800 postcards announcing the publication to book stores and libraries around the country—with the result of nothing coming from it at all. I did sell a few dozen copies at a weekly street market in Gulfport for a few months. Big deal.

As with any career, even after acquiring its specific skill-set, one must devote years of role-playing on a public stage to become what one strives to be. Me, I've been there and done that with my shoemaker's persona, which has left me with enough wherewithal to likely ride out the rest of my life. Money not being an issue, nor fame, my only motivation remaining is to create a decent work of art. This, I believe, I've done. And my opinion appears bolstered by most of those who have read the novel.

My book is not for everybody. Its genre is ambiguous; its composition forgoes the formulaic. Intended as an allegory of the first half of the Tarot's Major Arcana, portrayed in the alternative world of a 1970 traveling carnival in the hills of West Virginia, the novel depicts this well enough. Nevertheless, very few people are aware of the Tarot as an iconography of life's path. Many fear these cards as the tools of fortune-telling charlatans—the devil's damned picture-book. Carnivals and carnies evoke unsavory

memories for many people, as well. My novel is no bedtime story. Its tale of lust, drugs, and greed; its characterizations of freaks, geeks, and con men; its themes of subversion, perversion, and heresy: all feed the distaste of readers who seek more conventional fare.

That being said, this is the book I had to write, whatever its future. I've learned much about how to write a novel, and about the business of publishing. I stand proud of what I've written, and I uphold its qualities, regardless of its commercial fizzle. Although it shall be in print through Ingram as long as I am alive, I now bequeath the book to the dusty shelves of posterity, perhaps to be read by someone decades hence.

So here you have it—the last of this tale of my journey into the world of self-publishing. I hope it has been, or shall be, of some help to other writers. The second half of the Tarot's Major Arcana awaits my allegory of an even more forbidden subject: the world of the dead.

Steven Fernand
Lake Township, Michigan
July 1 2017