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The Hewlett Influence: An Afterthought

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On the whole, I stand by the claims that a less time-worn version of myself made in the article "After the Style of Maurice Hewlett," in KALKI 12 (1969). Yet there is one sentence I am now anxious to retract.

The article, I still feel, substantiated the assertion that in all likelihood Cabell derived from Hewlett the habit of labeling his novels Comedies, of ending his books with "Explicit," of commencing some with introductions garnished with pseudo-scholarship, and of utilizing certain rhetorical devices. But when, in conceding the existence of differences between the two writers, I stated "Hewlett does not venture into fantasy or allegory," I tripped over a gap in my research.

For at that time I had not yet read Hewlett's *Brazenhead the Great* (1911). True, I had encountered Captain Salomon Brazenhead in the story "The Captain of Kent," one of Hewlett's *New Canterbury Tales*; but I had not yet experienced the pleasures of the volume in which he is the sole protagonist. More especially, I had not read its final tale, "The Last Adventure." When I belatedly did, I found it to be a fantasy, and an allegory of a suspiciously Cabellian kind.

Captain Brazenhead is one of that line of braggart soldiers which extends at least as far back as the *Miles Gloriosus* of Plautus and at least as far forward as Sir John Falstaff (whom Brazenhead claims as a friend). Brazenhead is, in truth, the author of deeds that could easily be considered heroic if only they were not so absurd; but when set forth by his eloquence those accomplishments swell into prodigies, and they multiply with all the fecundity of the Captain's exuberant fancy. In "The Last Adventure," however, he meets his match, in both deed and brag.

The tale commences with a wryness that was to be echoed in many works of Cabell. Time has demoted Brazenhead from a military hero (of sorts) to the gray, paunchy, and timorous steward of Lord Say, whom, in "The Captain of Kent," he assisted in the winning of Lady Say. The couple — romantic young lovers in the earlier adventure — have become middle-aged and indifferent to each other. In her husband's absence, Lady Say, "plumper now and fuller in the eye," has even indulged in, at the least, a flirtation. To extricate her from complications caused by this affair, Brazenhead takes ship to France in search of a lost and compromising ring. Meg Mallow, a wench with whom he has dallied, accompanies him.

So do some curious portents. The ship is the same *Bonne Esperance* that brought him to France in an earlier exploit. The man who holds the vital ring is the brother-in-law of the same Count of Picpus whom the Captain has once impersonated. The Bordeaux tavern to which he stumbles in a daze is the same Stag he visited in that previous adventure. There he encounters a sinister tall, masked man, curiously suggestive of Brazenhead himself, who lures from him his fair companion, and departs.

Brazenhead pursues them to a lonely valley. There the stranger disports himself not only with Meg Mallow but with women whom Brazenhead has wooed many years before and who are still young and lovely. The unknown has removed his mask, and Brazenhead confronts his own face — as it was in his prime. The ladies all claim the stranger as their true love. Brazenhead, in a frenzy, attacks him; the two batter each other with their swords, until finally each stabs the other to death.

"Thus," says Hewlett, "fell in the year 1477 Salomon Brazenhead the Great . . . Never beaten in the field, but now in this last struggle; never refused of woman but in favor of himself as he had now been, none but his own youth, it appears, could have slain him, nor any slain his own youth but himself."

The Cabellian echoes are many. One thinks of Cabell's use of "I have slain a young man to my hurt" in *THE MUSIC FROM BEHIND THE MOON*. There is his interview with his younger self in *STRAWS AND PRAYER-BOOKS*, and again in *LET ME LIE*. Smire has a conversation with himself as a boy. Middle-aged Jurgen meets the girls he loved as a young man, and *SOMETHING ABOUT EVE* shows us a young Gerald Musgrave confronting his elderly self.

Indeed, "The Last Adventure," taken as a whole, seems a plausible foreshadowing of Cabell's description of the decline and death of that blustering old hero Coth, in *THE SILVER STALLION*. In that case Cabell did not make use of fantasy, but in a parallel episode of the same book he did: the aging of Guivric and his journey to meet Glaum-Without-Bones, who has the shape of Guivric himself.

It could be objected that these similarities are mere coincidence. Yet in view of Cabell's enthusiasm for Hewlett, and considering his use of all those other devices "after the style of Maurice Hewlett," a direct influence seems far more likely.

In any case, that 1969 sentence is hereby repudiated.

Source Note

Maya and Mrs. Yoop

The Oz books of L. Frank Baum frequently speak "over the heads" of the children for whom they were written, offering verbal, psychological, and sociological subtleties for the benefit of any adult readers. An episode in *The Tin Woodman of Oz* (1918) suggests that, just possibly, such readers may have included the author of *SOMETHING ABOUT EVE*.

Early in Baum's book, the Scarecrow, the Tin Woodman, and a boy known as Woot the Wanderer come upon a castle in which lives a giantess, Mrs. Yoop. (Mr. Yoop has been taken captive and put into a cage because of his unruly behavior.) Mrs. Yoop is described as an attractive (if oversize) woman of agreeable disposition. She is, however, a witch — or, more precisely, a "yookoohoo," an "Artist in Transformations." She has no friends, "because friends get too familiar and always forget to mind their own business." When she has visitors, she uses the power of her magic apron to change them into animals. Indeed, these particular visitors wind up in the shape of a bear, an owl, and a monkey.

John R. Neill's illustrations depict Mrs. Yoop as a handsome woman dressed like an American lady of 1918. Perhaps he saw a parallel between the giantess and ladies of his acquaintance.

Similarly we may see a parallel between Baum's Mrs. Yoop and Cabell's Maya. Maya is a handsome woman who turns the visitors to her cottage into domestic animals. Verbally, at least, she is unpleasant to Gerald Musgrave, but he finds living with her so agreeable that he is not able to leave. He becomes, in fact, a domestic animal, in a sense more important than the merely physical. ("Why should you wish to escape?" asks Mrs. Yoop of the travelers. "I shall give you new forms that are much better than the ones you now have. Be contented in your fate, for discontent leads to unhappiness, and unhappiness, in any form, is the greatest evil that can befall you.")