

Robert Bloch (1917-1994)

Robert Bloch, one of the best loved authors in the field of fantasy and suspense, died Friday, September 23, of cancer of the esophagus and kidneys. He was 77 years old. His career spanned an amazing 60 years in seven decades.

Services were held at the Pierce Brothers Mortuary in Westwood CA. Many of the hundred friends and fellow writers in attendance made short remarks, and Richard Matheson read tributes from Peter Straub, Stephen King, William Peter Blatty, and Ray Bradbury (who could not be present), among others. Sally Francy, Bloch's daughter, read a poem about a daughter's love for her father.

Bloch had been diagnosed early in June when he sought treatment for difficulty in swallowing. His doctors, as he confided to friends later, "told me I could play with fireworks, but I shouldn't plan on trick or treating." Shortly after diagnosis, he wrote a final piece for *Omni* (October 1994) about death and dying and his fear of it.

The article was an eerie echo of an early interview with Bloch that ran in the *Milwaukee Journal Green Sheet* for April 6, 1935, when Bloch was 18. The *Journal* mentioned the horror stories he had recently written for *Weird Tales*, then concluded: "And still — this same young man confesses to an inexplicable and profound fear of death." Quoting Bloch: "I can write horror tales very impersonally but I can't view death impersonally. The more I read of it, the more I fear it."

The *Journal*, discussing Bloch and his future career, mentioned that writing terror tales was only to help him achieve his real ambition — to be a comedian. Apparently, scarcely a day went by that Bloch didn't write four or five gags that he stored away for future use. When he was older, according to the paper, the young Bloch hoped to act in sketches that he wrote. Luckily for us, Bloch didn't move completely on-stage.

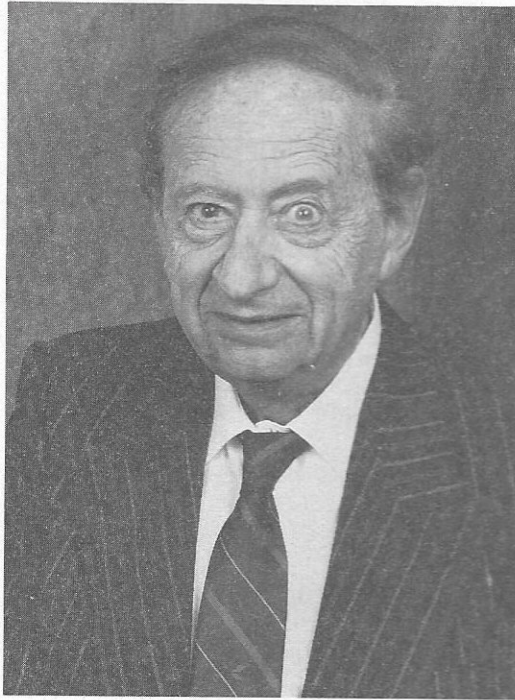
Though he started as a writer of weird and horror stories, and later varied the mix with forays into humor, fantasy, science fiction, and even westerns, he was to achieve his real fame and importance pioneering the psychological horror story. During the war years, his interest in writing supernatural stories of the type popularized by H.P. Lovecraft had begun to pall. He was becoming more interested in the monsters within than the monsters without.

"By the mid-1940s I had pretty well mined the vein of ordinary supernatural themes. I realized as a result of what went on during World War Two and from reading ... psychology that the real horror is not in the shadows but in the twisted world inside our own skulls."

Bloch's first effort in exploring that "twisted world" was *The Scarf* (The Dial Press 1947), a short novel told from the viewpoint of a psychopathic strangler. It was followed by *The Kidnapper* (Lion 1954) — Bloch's personal favorite of his novels and another first-person narrative of a psychopath —, *Spiderweb* (Ace 1954), and in 1959, the novel that was to make him famous: *Psycho* (Simon & Schuster).

Unlike most of his short fiction, his psychological horror novels were terse and clinical, with little of the humor that usually marked a Bloch story. His earliest tales were pastiches of Lovecraft, but even they had humorous undertones. He couldn't resist killing off a thinly-disguised Lovecraft — to whom he dedicated the story — in "The Shambler From the Stars" (*Weird Tales*, 9/35). Lovecraft retaliated by writing a story in which he killed one "Robert Blake" of Milwaukee ("The Haunter of the Dark", *Weird Tales* 12/36). He dedicated the story to Bloch, for which Bloch was forever grateful.

But it was psychological horror that made Bloch's literary reputa-



tion. In many respects, his novels were ahead of their time, but they paved the way for many of the later books by Stephen King, Thomas Harris, and others. Norman Bates and Hannibal Lechter might differ in degrees of sophistication and depravity, but most readers would have little difficulty in identifying them as inmates of the same asylum.

Robert Bloch was born in Chicago in 1917, the son of Raphael and Stella Loeb Bloch. His father was a cashier in a bank, his mother a former school teacher and social worker who had once turned down a career in light opera. They were Jewish but not particularly religious, and for the most part Bloch was raised as a Methodist. A chance meeting with magician Howard Thurston sparked an early interest in show business. Family members were already enthusiasts of vaudeville, and Bloch also attended movies regularly, especially comedies. His childhood idols were Buster Keaton (whom he was to meet much later in life) and Harold Lloyd.

But the defining moment in his experience of the performing arts came when, as a small boy, he attended a nighttime production of *The Phantom of the Opera* starring Lon

Chaney. The scene where the Phantom removes his mask to reveal his skull-face was to stay with him the rest of his life. In one interview he said he'd peed in his pants, ran home from the theater, and slept with the light on for the next two years. (In his autobiography, he denied it all — though he admitted he became a Chaney fan as well as a fan of other horror pictures of the period.)

An interest in Egyptology, picked up from his numerous visits to the Art Institute and Chicago's Field Museum, led him to buy his first copy of *Weird Tales*. He'd been browsing through the newsstand at Chicago's huge Northwestern Railroad Station and spotted the issue featuring Otis Adelbert Kline's "The Bride of Osiris" on the cover (August 1927). An indulgent aunt bought the issue for him and changed his life forever. He was nine years old.

Bloch's father lost his bank job in the early '20s at about the same time his mother was offered a position by the Abraham Lincoln House in Milwaukee, where she'd been employed as a social worker prior to her marriage. The family relocated to Milwaukee. While in junior high school, Bloch discovered science fiction in *Amazing Stories* and became a fan of H.P. Lovecraft through his stories in *Weird Tales*.

In 1933, Bloch started a long correspondence with Lovecraft, which continued until the latter's death. Lovecraft introduced the young fan to other writers for *Weird Tales* such as Clark Ashton Smith, E. Hoffmann Price, and August Derleth. Lovecraft also encouraged the young Bloch to try his hand at writing stories and offered to read and criticize the results. His first efforts were published by William L. Crawford, who printed Bloch's story "Lillies" in *Marvel Tales* and "The Black Lotus" in *Unusual Stories*.

The only drawback was that Crawford paid no money to contributors. By this time, Bloch was serious about writing. It was the middle of the Depression, there were few jobs available for high school graduates, and writing for a living was worth a gamble. He bought a second-hand typewriter, a used card table, paper and carbon from the local Woolworths, and set up shop in his bedroom.

A month after graduating from high school, Bloch sold his first story to *Weird Tales*, "The Secret of the Tomb". But the first published story was the second one he sold, "The Feast in the Abbey" (*Weird Tales*, 1/35). Others quickly followed, and Bloch soon became a familiar and popular name in the magazine. But he had yet to find his own voice.

One of the side effects of his early writing career was his introduction to the Milwaukee Fictioneers, an organization whose members included Stanley G. Weinbaum, Raymond A. Palmer, Roger Sherman Hoar ("Ralph Milne Farley"), and others. Bloch was making friends through the mails as well, among them Henry Kuttner, with whom he later collaborated on a story ("The Black Kiss", *Weird Tales* 6/37). He took a trip to Chicago to meet Farnsworth Wright, the editor of *Weird Tales*.

Bloch didn't restrict his creative efforts to writing horror stories. He had written gags in high school, acted in skits for the drama club, and appeared in a minstrel show and the senior play. Later, with high school friend Harold Gauer, he wrote a mock radio broadcast and collaborated on an unpublished – and unpublishable – novel, "In the Land of the Sky-Blue Ointment".

Through it all, he was turning into a journeyman writer with experience in a number of different forms, all of which would stand him in good stead. He was analytical about his writing, realizing that his penchant for horror sprang from his own fear of death. "I was terribly susceptible to fear of death.... I decided I'm not going to let them scare me, I'm going to scare them. And that's exactly what I did. I put on a fright mask myself and it worked.... Familiarity didn't breed contempt, but it made it ... much easier ... to see how you manipulate the props to make the audience scream."

He was an avid reader of fantasy, and read extensively in the fields of Freudian and Jungian psychology. Later in life, when asked to analyze the connection between comedy and horror, he wrote: "To me, horror and comedy are two sides of the same coin. Both of them involve a common denominator. Both of them involve the grotesque, the unexpected. In most cases, humor relies upon the twist, just as the shock in horror relies upon some kind of twist...."

When Lovecraft died, Bloch was devastated by the loss of his mentor. When Henry Kuttner invited him to spend a month in Los Angeles, he jumped at the chance. Hollywood was the home of many of his childhood heroes. In addition, he finally met Kuttner, Fritz Leiber, Jr., Catherine Moore, and the members of the Los Angeles Fantasy Society.

It was a trip he never forgot.

Back in Milwaukee, he discovered that Ziff-Davis had purchased *Amazing Stories* and Ray Palmer, his friend from the Fictioneers, was the editor. Ray needed new stories in a hurry, and Bloch hastened to oblige. The resulting increase in income enabled him to rent an office in downtown Milwaukee and hire a secretary. Trips to New Orleans and Sauk City WI (where he met August Derleth for the first time) followed. He now expanded his writing base still further, selling gags to

Stoopnagle and Budd, a radio team, and one of his own monologs to comic Roy Atwell, who had appeared on the Fred Allen radio show. He also took on a side job as a stand-up comic, MC and mimic in various taverns and nightclubs.

None of these efforts produced much money, and when, in 1939, an offer came for him and Harold Gauer to mastermind a political campaign, he accepted. Their candidate was an assistant city attorney named Carl Zeidler – tall and blond, with a firm handshake and a good singing voice and few other obvious qualifications. Their opponent was the "dean of American mayors," Daniel Webster Hoan, the Socialist mayor of Milwaukee for 23 years.

With little in the way of money, though much in the way of promises, Bloch and Gauer trusted to wit and innovation. They slanted the campaign to women (Zeidler was a bachelor and handsome) and youth (Zeidler was young), with a heavy reliance on photographs. They wrote Zeidler's platform as well as his speeches, held rallies at which pretty girls passed out campaign booklets, showcased their candidate standing in front of a huge American flag, and at the end of his speech yanked on strings backstage that flooded the auditorium with balloons.

Early in the campaign, Bloch and Gauer had decided that politics was just another form of show business, and designed the campaign along those lines. None of what they did is unusual today, but it was in 1939. They got extensive press coverage, generated intense political excitement, and when it was all over, their no-talent candidate was in the runoff for Mayor.

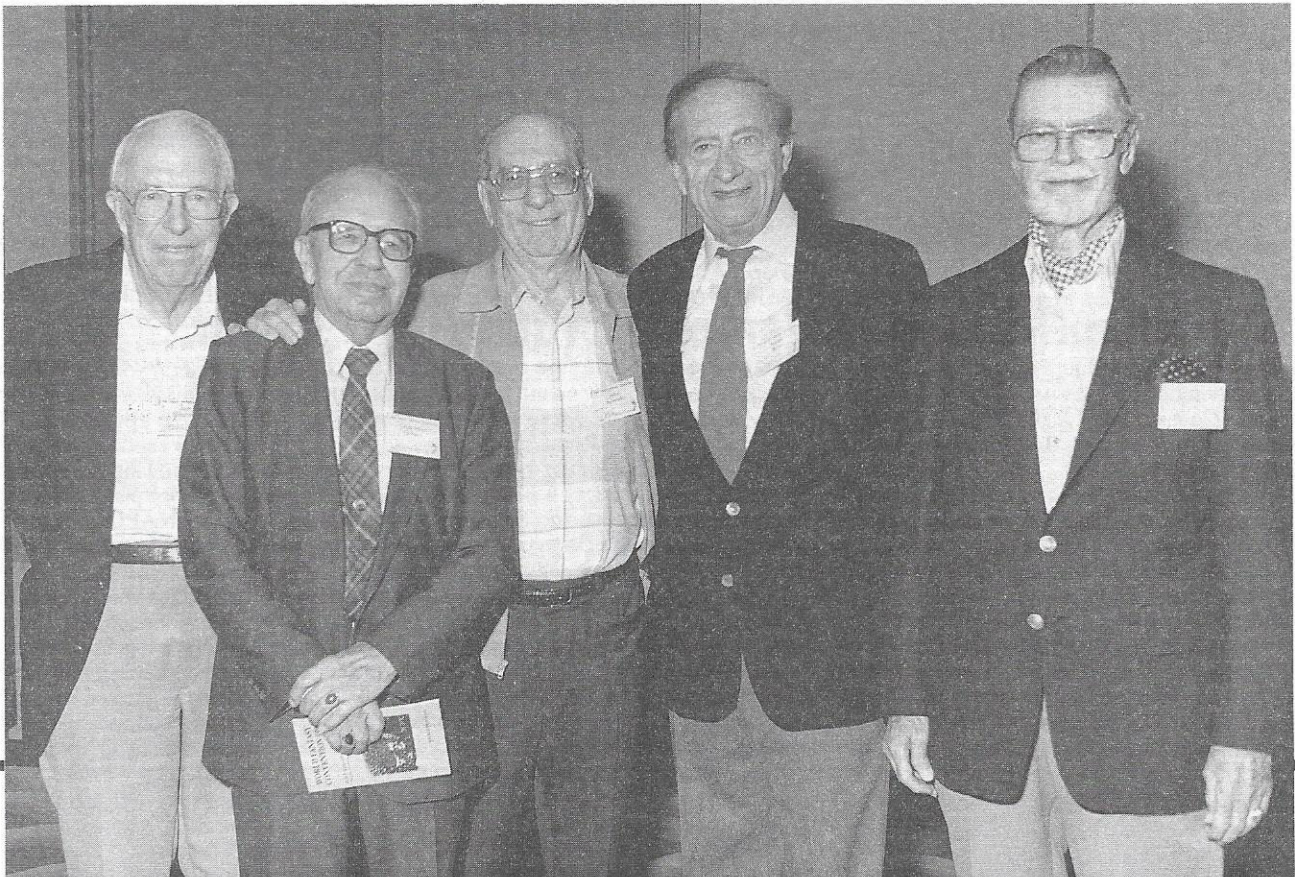
In the general election that followed, Zeidler won by 12,000 votes. He also stiffed Bloch and Gauer for their fees, doubtlessly contributing to Bloch's sardonic take on politics in particular and life in general.

Bloch married Marion Ruth Holcombe in October 1940, tried his hand at another political campaign with little financial reward, and was faced with making a living for two. Returning to writing short stories, he lifted a character from the unpublished "In the Land of the Sky-Blue Ointment". The character was Lefty Feep, a petty gambler with overtones of Damon Runyon. Feep, along with other characters from the original Bloch/Gauer novel, was to star in 23 short stories and novellettes.

Bloch now paid frequent visits to Chicago to visit editors, meet other writers, and play poker at Ray Palmer's house in Evanston, where he met William P. McGivern, Howard Browne, and William Hamling. He was an average poker player, but invariably managed to fleece this naive Ziff-Davis office boy invited to the poker parties for just that

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Jack Williamson, Lloyd Eshbach, Julius Schwartz, Robert Bloch, L. Sprague de Camp



The Data File

tion winners.

In memory of the late writer Anne Spencer Lindbergh (whose last book is reviewed in Carolyn Cushman's column this month), her family is establishing an annual prize for the best fantasy novel for children. They will gratefully accept donations to help set up the award, which should go to Anne Spencer Lindbergh Prize Fund, c/o the Charles A. Lindbergh Fund, 708 S. 3rd St., Suite 110, Minneapolis MN 55415.

Final Frontier magazine and associated group the Space Explorers Network are holding a contest to name the Moon. *Final Frontiers* editor Leonard David declares, "Jupiter has Io, Europa and Callisto among its entourage, Saturn has Titan, Neptune is orbited by Triton.... But what is the popular name of the Earth's moon? Moon ... how boring." Send suggestions to *Final Frontier*, Dept. Name the Moon, P.O. Box 15451, Washington DC 20003-0451. *New Scientist*, in its report on the contest, added "And while we're at it, why can't the Earth have a name as well? Calling the planet we live on 'Earth' is like calling it Dirt or Mud - not a proper, dignified name at all. Whatever names are finally chosen for the two, we think they should indicate the intimate, mutually dependent bond between them.... [Our] suggestion, therefore, is that the Earth should be called Kevin and the Moon should be called Tracy."

Rights & Options • British rights to *Witches*

Brew and the next five Terry Brooks novels went to John Jarrold at Legend, "so Legend will publish Terry into the 21st century!" Legend also bought rights to the next two books by Tim Powers, via Danny Baror of Scovil Chichak Galen.

US rights to *Dead Girls, Dead Boys, and Dead Things* by Richard Calder sold to Gordon Van Gelder at St. Martin's.

Paperback rights to *This Side of Judgment* by J.R. Dunn sold to Roc.

Movie rights to Robert Silverberg's short story "Amanda and the Alien" (*Omni* 5/83) sold to IRS Productions (!), which will produce it as a feature-length film to be shown on HBO in 1995; HBO could also issue it as a theatrical release. The sale, made by Silverberg's Hollywood agent, Joel Gotler, in association with Ralph Vicinanza, is not an option; payment was up-front.

Film rights to John Christopher's "Tripods" trilogy and its prequel went to producer Jerome Hellman (*Midnight Cowboy*), via agent Russell Galen, for an option price of "\$25,000 per year, increasing to \$50,000 per year after the project has been set up at a studio, against a purchase price of 2.5% of the budget," with a variable ceiling (\$550,000 for picture one, \$600,000 for picture two), depending on the number of films. The series first appeared as young-adult hardcovers from Macmillan UK in the mid-'60s, and it has never been out of print since then.

Ed Gorman's forthcoming novelette "The End of

It All" (from *Dark Love*, edited by Collins, Kramer, & Greenberg), has been optioned for filming by director Nathaniel Gutman; Gorman and Gutman will co-script. Gutman and producer Niki Marvin are currently working on a theatrical film of Gorman's *Moonchasers*.

The Philip K. Dick story "Imposter" has been optioned by Miramax Films, as one of a three-part anthology film based on classic SF stories; the others have not yet been named. Russell Galen conducted the deal.

Intersection Update • Progress Report 4 has appeared from Intersection, the 1995 Worldcon to be held August 24-28, 1995 in Glasgow, Scotland. It includes a programming questionnaire plus the latest membership rates good from October 1, 1994: £80/\$125/C\$160/Dfl 240/DM 215 attending; £15/\$25/C\$30/Dfl 45/DM 40 supporting. Cheques, checks, or any other spelling, can be made out to Intersection. Credit cards can now be accepted in both the US and UK. Addresses: Intersection, Admail 336, Glasgow G2 1BR, Scotland; phone/fax +44 81 522 1995. US agent: Intersection, P.O. Box 15430, Washington DC 20003-0430; phone/fax (301) 345-5186. Email: intersection@smof.demon.co.uk. Art show: c/o S. Starshine, Flat 7, 23 Stanhope Road, Highgate, London N6 5AW, England. For dealer information, write or phone c/o the convention.

Robert Bloch

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reason.

Despite his success with Lefty Feep and other fiction, money was still tight. Marion was not in good health, and medical bills began to eat up their income. Bloch's solution was to go to work for the Gustav Marx advertising agency, consisting at the time of Marx and a secretary. Marx had been a member of the Milwaukee Fictioneers, had heard of Bloch's straitened circumstances, and offered him a job - at no salary. After six months experience, Marx claimed, Bloch could find a decent job with any agency in town.

Bloch had written copy for the several political campaigns he had masterminded, and writing copy for the ad agency was not so different - or difficult. At the end of the six months, Marx asked him to stay on at a generous salary and with the option of writing his own fiction when he wasn't involved with agency work.

Bloch stayed for 11 years.

But writing fiction and ad copy weren't his only sources of income. He was soon offered a freelance job writing scripts for a radio show titled *Stay Tuned for Terror*. Bloch agreed to write 39 15-minute shows and deliver them within three months. It amounted to doing three scripts a week while holding down his full-time job at the agency.

It was a stretch. Bloch adapted many of his stories from *Weird Tales*, though the 12 minutes of air time (15 minutes minus commercials) made condensing them a problem. So did commuting to Chicago, where the shows were frequently recorded back to back.

Probably Bloch's most famous story of the '40s, one he considered an average story but which turned out to be a legend, was "Yours Truly, Jack the Ripper" (*Weird Tales* 7/43). Julius Schwartz, his then-agent, sold the story to a hardcover anthology. Subsequently, it was dramatized on the CBS radio show *The Kate Smith Hour*, and starred Laird Cregar, soon to be seen in the film *The Lodger* playing ... Jack the Ripper. The story has since been anthologized and presented on radio and television more than 50 times (by Bloch's own estimate - he may have missed a few).

In 1944, Bloch's first book was published. August Derleth asked him to review his 100 or more published stories and pick out enough for a collection. (This was the same August Derleth who had once

told a younger Robert Bloch that he would never be a writer.) *The Opener of the Way* garnered good reviews but didn't produce much in the way of royalties - some \$600, most of it paid out over the years.

Bloch was now invited to join in still another political campaign, this time on behalf of Senator Robert M. LaFollette, Jr. Bloch urged the Senator to spend more time in the state shaking the hands of his constituents, especially the younger voters to whom he was a legend but not much more. The Senator listened quietly, thanked him, then made a few cursory stops around the state and spent most of his campaign sitting it out in Washington. He lost by a very narrow margin.

The new Senator from Wisconsin was Joe McCarthy.

In 1946, Bloch wrote a short novel about a serial killer, a psychopathic strangler, titled *The Scarf* (Dial Press 1947). It was to be the first of a number of novels dealing with serial killers and psychiatric themes. The style was not typical Bloch. It was terse, gritty, and avoided the humor that he frequently used in short stories. It received good reviews, including one by Dr. Frederic Wertham in a psychiatric journal and another in *The New Yorker*. The book went through several hardcover printings and promptly sold to paperback. Bloch should have been on his way to fame and fortune, except Dial bounced his next proposal, his editor quit to get married, and the literary agency (A. & S. Lyons) that had handled the sale of the novel suddenly went out of business.

A film company in Hollywood subsequently produced a film titled *The Scarf* with a storyline remarkably similar to Bloch's, but he had neither agent nor publisher to help him contest the similarity.

It was six years before Bloch published another novel, though a condensed version of an initially unsuccessful attempt ran in the August '52 *Bluebook* under the title "Once a Sucker". (The original version, possibly rewritten, appeared in 1954 as *Spiderweb*, half of an Ace Double.)

Of the shorts that now followed, perhaps the best known was "The Man Who Collected Poe" (*Famous Fantastic Mysteries* 10/51), in which he directly inserted lines from Poe's own "The Fall of the House of Usher". Professor Thomas Olive Mabbott of Hunter College was impressed by it and invited Bloch to finish Poe's last, never-completed, story, "The Lighthouse". Bloch did so (it was published in *Fantastic* 1/53), and was very proud that few people could tell where Poe left off and he began.

Marion's physical condition continued to worsen,

and in 1953, the Blochs moved to Weyauwega WI, Marion's hometown. Marion was now among family and friends, but Bloch was something of a fish out of water. He had gotten used to cities, and a rural community with a population of 1,200 became a social prison. He was cut off from normal contact with his friends and other writers.

Something of a relief was offered by an invitation to appear as a panelist on a cartoon quiz show out of Milwaukee titled *It's a Draw*. The money from the show, and the social contact it offered, was a godsend. It was also during this period that his correspondence with other writers and with fandom increased greatly. He contributed hundreds of articles and letters to fanzines and even edited several one-shots of his own (primarily for FAPA), and co-edited six issues of a professional fanzine published by Gnome Press, *The Science Fiction World*, with Wilson Tucker. He became a frequent toastmaster at Worldcons and was honored at a number of them.

In 1959, at the Worldcon in Detroit, he and Isaac Asimov were co-toastmasters and handed out the Hugo Awards. Asimov would introduce the categories and Bloch would open the sealed envelopes and read the names of the winners. He was in shock when he read out his own name as the author of the Best Short Story, "The Hell-Bound Train" (*F&SF* 9/58).

Bloch was breaking into magazines outside the genre now, including appearances in *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine*, *Ellery Queen*, *Mike Shayne's Mystery Magazine*, *The Saint Mystery Magazine*, and *Playboy*. The pulps may have died, but the digests and the men's magazines were picking up the slack.

In 1959, the world changed enormously for Bloch. Several years before, in the little town of Plainfield, 40 miles from Weyauwega, the local sheriff had walked into a barn owned by a farmer named Ed Gein and discovered a woman's torso hanging on hooks, much as if it had been the carcass of a deer. The seemingly innocuous Gein had prowled the lonely hearts columns, and a steady stream of widows and lonely middle-aged women had disappeared into his barn.

The Gein case was an overnight sensation, and Bloch was convinced there was material in it for a novel. But while the big cities covered the story in detail, the papers in Weyauwega and surrounding towns had only limited coverage. *Psycho* was based upon the murders but not upon Gein himself, about whom Bloch knew little. The character of Norman Bates sprang full-blown from Bloch's own imagination; the very name Norman was a pun, the mur-

derer being "neither woman nor man." (Years later, when he did an article about the murders for editor Anthony Boucher — *The Quality of Murder*, Dutton 1962 — he was astonished how close he'd come to the real character of Gein.)

Psycho was published by Simon & Schuster in 1959 to good reviews. Shortly afterward, Bloch's agent — Harry Altschuler — received a "blind" offer of \$5,000 for the film rights. The purchaser was unknown. Bloch refused to sell, and the offer was raised to \$9,500, which he accepted. Of the total price, Altschuler received his 10%, Simon & Schuster their 15%, and after taxes Bloch received about \$6,250. Not an unusual offer for the time, but a miserable one in light of what the film was to make. Unfortunately, few authors who sold movie rights during the '50s were offered a piece of the action.

The real wonder, perhaps, is that the film was made at all. The story was replete with transvestism, hints of incest, and the definitely un-American suggestion (as Bloch put it) that a boy's best friend might not be his mother. Paramount hated everything about it, starting with the title. But the purchaser was Alfred Hitchcock's production company, and Hitchcock badly wanted to make the film. Paramount cut his budget and told Hitchcock no sound stages would be available during his projected shooting schedule. Hitchcock, in retaliation, put up some of his own money and filmed the movie in black & white on the Universal lot (though Paramount still released the film), using the cinematographer from his television show.

At a screening of the rough cut, Hitchcock asked Bloch what he thought of the film and Bloch said, "I think it's either going to be your biggest hit or your biggest disaster."

The critics were initially unkind, but *Psycho* soon became the largest-grossing black & white film ever made. Only *The Birth of a Nation* had grossed more (and today, of course, *Schindler's List*).

Oddly, *Psycho* did not bring Bloch out to Hollywood — he was already there. He had been invited to Hollywood to write a segment of *Lock Up*, and by the time *Psycho* was released, he had already written six or seven teleplays and had five or six more assignments.

He now became famous as the author of *Psycho*, but somehow the fame didn't translate into money. The big bucks for another book never materialized until years later when he wrote *Psycho II* (1982), a volume that had nothing at all to do with the sequel to the movie released at about the same time.

Bloch continued to write the occasional novel and short story, but more and more, his work was for films and television. During the '60s, he wrote extensively for *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*, *Thriller*, and *The Alfred Hitchcock Hour*, as well as doing three segments of the original *Star Trek* ("Wolf in the Fold" was a Jack the Ripper story set hundreds of years in the future). He also did work for *I Spy*, *Whispering Smith*, *Night Gallery*, and others. In addition, other writers adapted some of his stories for these and other shows.

Like Ray Bradbury, Charles Beaumont, Harlan Ellison, and a few others, Bloch had discovered Hollywood and Hollywood had discovered him. The stars whom he had idolized while watching them on theater screens in Chicago and Milwaukee were now personal friends. Buster Keaton, Boris Karloff, Joan Crawford, Dick Foran.... He moved the family out to California and settled down to relative peace and prosperity. He hadn't made a fortune on *Psycho*, but soon *Psycho* and "Robert Bloch" were synonymous, and that didn't hurt.

But as the years went by, the situation at home became increasingly untenable. Marion's physical condition worsened, and while Bloch enjoyed the atmosphere of Hollywood and socializing with his movie star friends, Marion did not. Bloch had warned her that life in Hollywood would be far different from the life they'd led in Weyauwega. But Marion couldn't adjust, and in October 1963 Bloch received an interlocutory degree of divorce and moved into

his own apartment. Marion eventually sold the house he bought her and moved to Desert Hot Springs, where she became active in the life of the small community.

Bloch had resolved never to marry again, a resolve that crumbled almost immediately after meeting Eleanor Alexander at a party. Her writer-husband had died of a heart attack three months before, and this was the first party she'd attended since. In his autobiography, Bloch states that he proposed marriage to her after 22 minutes of talking to her. She wasn't quite as ready as he was, but five days after he received his final divorce decree in October of 1964, they were married.

The story had a happy ending after all.

Ellie's life and Bloch's meshed without difficulty, and Bloch's friends quickly became Ellie's as well. His circle of friends and acquaintances among writers and actors and in fandom expanded still further, if such a thing was possible.

He wasn't quite as prolific now, but he had reached that stage of life marked by honors and awards. He had been the first Guest of Honor at a convention outside the United States, the Sixth World Science Fiction Convention in Toronto (1948). Once again he was GoH at Torcon II in 1973. In 1975, he was GoH at Bouchercon I, the San Diego Comicon, and the World Fantasy Convention. He had received the Hugo for Best Short Story in 1958 and the World Fantasy Life Award in 1975, and twice won the Ann Radcliffe Award, once for Television in 1966, and once for Literature in 1969. He won a World Science Fiction Convention Special Lifetime Career Award in 1984, the Bram Stoker Award in 1990, and the World Horror Convention Grand Master Award in 1991. He served as President of the Mystery Writers of America for 1970-71.

He would never have denied that he had a somewhat sardonic view of life, encouraged by his experiences in politics, where shallow candidates and the ease of manipulating the public had largely turned him off. His views became more intense in later years, when the story lines in horror films, the genre he loved, were replaced by special effects and copious amounts of gore. "You might just as well go to a slaughterhouse and pick out a few animals and carve them up screaming and squealing on camera." He was sickened by the audiences that laughed at the blood and sadism in the "splatter" films.

He regretted that despite *Psycho* he had never received the critical acclaim nor the fortune bestowed on other writers in the genre (hardly an unusual complaint). But he never forgot that he'd elected to become a public entertainer early in life, and took great pride in the fact that probably no other writer in the genre had had so many stories published, reprinted, and shown on television or presented as theatrical films. He attributed his television and theatrical film popularity to the fact that his stories could be easily translated to the visual medium, not that they were necessarily better than those of other authors.

He was a journeyman writer and entertainer, and had more experience in various writing forms — from political speeches to advertising to short stories, novels, articles, teleplays, and film scripts — than probably any other genre writer.

But all of his stories, all of his movies, and all of his teleplays didn't account for the feelings of affection that both fans and writers felt for him. When he was a struggling young writer, H.P. Lovecraft had helped him with his craft. Bloch never forgot that, nor did he hesitate to "pass it on" when he became the experienced professional and beginning writers approached him for aid and advice.

In one sense, he was a contradiction in terms. He was one of the most beloved figures in the field, but never tried to disguise his disappointment in humanity as a whole. "When you really get to know people, you don't need to invent monsters.... I believe a majority of mankind is violent.... Modern horror fiction ... has provided virtually everyone with a 'Devil' theory. As Flip Wilson says, 'The Devil made me do it'.... No one is individually responsible."

When it came to fandom, he was the most accessible of all the professional writers. He was a fan himself and had joined the ranks for the same reasons that most fans do — he was lonely and sought social contact. He wrote extensively for fanzines, he published his own, he was the most sought-after toastmaster and emcee in fandom. His presence at a convention was enough to turn it into a family party. Once, when asked what he considered the highlights of his writing career, he replied: "My first sales — of a short story, of a novel ... the sale of *Psycho* to films and its subsequent success. But the most satisfying and memorable moments have come with the conventions where I was invited to appear as guest of honor, the winning of various awards ... the continuing interest of fans...."

During the last few months of his life, Bloch received hundreds of calls and notes of appreciation. For as long as he could, he took all the calls and read all the notes and letters. When he could no longer do so, they were read to him.

It was typical of Bloch that he wrote the notes for his own obituary for distribution to various media. At the end of them, he typed: "Always interested in giving readers a 'surprise ending,' Bloch wrote these obituary notes himself." His personal memorabilia were donated to the American Heritage Center at the University of Wyoming. His ashes will also be at the Center in a book-shaped urn. According to several reports, the legend on the urn will read: "Here lie the collected works of Robert Bloch."

And sometime next year, Tor will publish a collection of Bloch's stories selected as their favorites by various writers, who will preface each story with a personal tribute.

[Here is my own]: Despite his sardonic view of the world, Robert Bloch was a man without malice. Almost everybody who met him sensed that, and almost everybody who met him loved him for it. It was impossible not to.

Bob is survived by his wife Ellie and his daughter Sally.

And by a multitude of friends who never realized how much they were going to miss him until the day he died.

— Frank M. Robinson

ROBERT BLOCH: AN APPRECIATION by Stephen King

The part of my imagination which would become, in the course of time, my "writer's mind" inclined toward horror fiction from the very beginning. It was fired first by the vulgar horror of the E.C. comic books, then by the classical horror of H.P. Lovecraft — he of the cyclopean horrors and great, galumphing sentences — and then by the short stories of Robert Bloch, stories which provided a perfect bridge between the two. Although influenced by HPL, Bob was too puckish and too lively to become one of the "Lovecraft Circle elders," like Frank Belknap Long or Zelia Bishop or Clark Ashton Smith. Yet horror tales, supernatural tales, and the literature of the imagination were clearly much more than play to Bloch; he loved to explore the darker depths of the human soul — he was, like so many writers in this genre, a scuba diver armed with a pen instead of a speargun — and took his gift for the fantastic seriously.

As a poor kid growing up in a single-parent family in the '50s and '60s, I could never have afforded the Arkham House collections of his work (although I lusted after them), but I was able to afford the Belmont paperback editions containing those stories. Even when *Yours Truly*, *Jack the Ripper* and *Horror 7* upped the ante from 35¢ to a ball-busting 50¢ (60¢, by the time the paperback version of *Psycho* with Janet Leigh screaming her head off on the cover appeared), I found a way to afford them. I had to afford them. I had become a horror junkie by the time I was 15 or so, and in the quiet years before I went off to college, Robert Bloch was the pusher with the best stuff. He didn't teach me everything I know, but he taught me at least one invaluable lesson: to enjoy it. To have fun with it.

Robert Bloch

He was a fine writer and an even finer human being. I remember how pleased I was — aw, tell the truth, how *star-struck* I was — when I first met him in California, and how quickly he set me at ease, telling stories about movie stars (we were in L.A. at the time), and cracking me up by referring to Forest Lawn Cemetery as “the Disneyland of the Dead.” Some years later, at the World Fantasy Convention in Maryland, Bob showed up beside me at a raucous room-party and said, “Kirby McCauley says I’m supposed to tell you some stories about how it was in the old days. Do you want to hear?”

I told him I did, and Bob led me over to one corner of the room, where we sat on the floor, cross-legged like kids. For the next two hours, Bob told me stories about how it was in the old days, when the Elder Gods — not Cthulhu and Nyarlathotep and Yogsothoth, but Robert Howard and Seabury Quinn and, yes, Robert Bloch — walked the earth. He told me stories about the movies and movie-stars, too — people like Alfred Hitchcock and Joan Crawford, with whom he worked on *Straightjacket* — but it was

the *writing* stories I was most hungry to hear, stories about how it was to see your byline on the cover of *Weird Tales* or to eat lunch at the automat with John Campbell, and these were the stories Bob told the best.

He was a man of wit and gentleness and great, great talent. He was also a man who knew how to be kind to younger writers. He seemed to understand that most of us — the “young Turks” of the late ’70s and early ’80s who are now the middle-aged



Robert Bloch, 1935

scribblers of the ’90s — really idolized him, and how much we envied him the people he had known and talked to in his life. He knew those things ... but he never took advantage of them.

“I actually have the heart of a young boy,” Bob liked to say. “I keep it in a jar on my desk.” It was a line I used often, always attributing it to Bob (who also owns the greatest story title of the 20th century, in my opinion — a Lefty Feep opus titled “Time Wounds All Heels”), because it had a sly sort of charm. When some well-meaning idiot asks, “Where do you get your ideas?” or “Why do you write such horrible things?” Bob’s answer turns the responsibility for the question back to where it belongs ... upon the questioner. There’s a comic subtlety in the line that Bob could almost have trademarked. But he *didn’t* have the heart of a small boy; he had the heart of a kind, imaginative man whose vision was keenly attuned to the shadows that nest in the dark places. He’ll be missed in the fantasy community, and he’ll be missed by yours truly, Steve the Ripper, in a much more personal sense. Even now, I can’t believe that his spooky, sarcastic voice has been silenced. There is no voice on the contemporary scene which can replace it, and that is a great loss. —Stephen King

REMEMBERING BOB BLOCH

by Ray Bradbury

There is a double sadness, the fact of Bob being gone and the fact of my being 30 miles away today and not able to speak these words myself. And as we all feel, Bob should be delivering these words himself. His relationship to Death was, like my own, constant and amusing. In the vast candy-shop that Life is to all of us, Bob found Death to be a jawbreaker, which he constantly tested, with us as witnesses, again and again, not losing any teeth until now. We were all hoping his fight with the Adversary would be won again, but you can’t win forever, and he left a record of more than 400 encounters and dark victories for us to savor the rest of our lives.

You’ve heard it all before from me, but let me repeat it again: In the summer of 1946 when I hardly

knew my own name and hardly anyone else ever said it aloud, Bob Bloch came into a science fiction convention hall in Los Angeles and called out so everyone could hear it, “Where’s this guy named Bradbury? I want to meet him!” With tears in my eyes, I went to shake his hand. He invited me to Milwaukee a few weeks later, to stay overnight and drink more strange drinks than I had ever had before and never had again. Knowing him then, I had secret hopes for his future life. They were fulfilled when he met and married Ellie. I celebrated for him when I finally met her, and knew that his future would be secure.

Now, to the rough part. In a story of mine many years ago, I wrote about my closest friend John Huff leaving town forever, which was 50 miles away, but it might as well have been a thousand. When he ran off in the sunset I ran after him, yelling: “Okay for you, John. Go on, go off. Leave me, John, and don’t come back. I hate you, you hear? I hate you for leaving me.” And then I broke down and wept and said, “Oh, no, John, don’t listen to me. I didn’t mean it. I just hated you going away. Forgive me, John. I take it back. Forgive me, oh please, forgive. I just didn’t want you to leave, you hear? Don’t leave. Stay here with me.” To which I add today, oh Robert, oh Bob, why did you have to go? We’ll miss you, Bob. We’ll miss you forever, Bob. I know, I know. You simply had to go. There was no way to stay. Lord, Bob, I hope we’ll see you again some day. We pray for that. God Bless you, Bob. God rest your dear soul. Goodbye, Bob. Goodbye. —Ray Bradbury

AN APPRECIATION

by Peter Straub

How can *Bob Bloch* be dead? It is almost unimaginable. Though I met Bob only a handful of times, he was an important part of the landscape, both landscapes, the literary and the personal, and tremendously dear to me. I sort of *cherished* him, and I have come to understand that many others did the same.

Part of Bob’s impact on me, by no means the largest, is the product of my having seen him on local television very frequently in Milwaukee during the



Weird Tales office, 1940: Bill Sprenger, Farnsworth Wright, Henry Kuttner, Robert Bloch

Midwescon, 1953: Robert Bloch, Harlan Ellison, Evelyn Paige Gold, Arthur C. Clarke



Milwaukee Fictioneers, 1934: Al P. Nelson, Stanley G. Weinbaum, Harold Brunner, Lawrence A. Keating, Ernest Eisenberg, Ralph Milne Farley, Robert Bloch, Arthur Tofte, Leo Schmidt

1980s: Robert Bloch, Jerry Pournelle, Harlan Ellison, Arthur C. Clarke



late forties, when he must have been in his late twenties and I was in the low-to-middle single digits. This was so early in the history of television that it predated Milton Berle. Bob appeared on a weekly program called *It's a Draw*, and since my family did not have a television set, I took in the spectacle of Bob Bloch being very funny in public at my friend Marvin's house (Marvin really had to have a set, unlike every other kid on 44th Street, because, along with stuff like washing machines and toasters, his father sold them), where we peered at the nine-inch screen, inhaled the milk and cookies provided by Marvin's mother, and cracked up whenever Bloch opened his mouth. It was one of our favorite programs, right up there with *Kukis*, *Fran and Ollie*, but much funnier.

It was difficult to reconcile this wisecracking character with Robert Bloch, the author of the stories I began to read when I was a teenager, though I think I was always certain that they were the same man. For the most part decidedly unfunny, the stories were lean, frightening, and brilliant in their concision. Sometimes these qualities had been so sharpened the story took on an elegant, well, nastiness — in fact, an absolutely delightful nastiness. Bloch brought the Southern California Gothic style to perfection, and what continues to amaze and impress me is the imaginative fertility he brought to this task. Characters and situations unfold in a continuously inventive stream, the details always freshly minted. Apart from P.G. Wodehouse, I don't know of any other writer whose work stayed so consistent, at a consistently high level, for so long a time.

And he was, famously, a kind, generous, witty man. The first blurb I ever received was a kind, generous, witty verbal bouquet tossed at *Julia*, my first horror novel, by Bob Bloch. I'm absurdly proud of that, but it says a great deal more about him than it does me. I met Bob for the first time at a World Fantasy Convention in Chicago, and was struck by the combination of absolute unpretentiousness, real sophistication, friendliness, wryness, charm, unsentimentality, and playfulness in the man. These qualities, rare in themselves, are almost never united in a single human being. We had two or three conversations during that weekend, and Bob Bloch became more valuable and endearing with every word he said. I loved him. Every time I saw Bob after that, I immediately felt better — when Bob came into the room, the world suddenly improved in a fashion peculiar to Bob. The fools instantly became more foolish, the pompous became ridiculous, the dimwits turned into dolts, and all the while the Blochian eye glittered, the Blochian smile tilted ever upward. It's unusual to find a true sense of the absurd linked to Bob's kind of good-heartedness, but the first quality let you in on a certain clarity you might otherwise have missed, and the second instructed you in sympathy. For me, being around Bob in a crowded social scene was always an object lesson in how to enjoy yourself while remaining a decent human being. Bob is the only person I can think of who could make *dignity* light-hearted.

When Ricia Mainhardt telephoned me with the news that Bob was very ill and probably did not have long to live, I couldn't say any more than "Oh, my God" for a lengthy period. I felt a tremendous, and tremendously painful, sense of loss. When I was more in command of myself, I called his house. Ellie, whom I have never met, was very kind and let me speak to Bob, then having a relatively "good" day. Bob was more his usual self than I would have believed possible. While speaking frankly about his own death and cheering *me* up, he managed to make a couple

of jokes. In the middle of things, I told him that I loved him, and he said he loved me, too. So in the midst of the pain, there is this vivid bit of gratitude. I envy those friends who lived nearer to Bob than I do and had so much more of his time and company. God bless that delightful man. —Peter Straub

AN APPRECIATION by Harlan Ellison

It's chillier here, now. The light to read by, it's too dim.

We talked many times between the day he learned he was going to die, and the night of 23 September, when he left. Face to face, and over the phone. I knew him since I was 16 years old; we became friends early in May of 1951, at Beatley's On-The-Lake Hotel just outside of Bellefontaine, Ohio; we stayed friends for 43 years. Not once in a while friends, or I'll call you when I get to town friends, or We really must get together for dinner one night soon friends, but close and regular chums. He was the exemplar of what my father told me a man should always strive to be: a *mensch*. There is no higher accolade. He was a *mensch*. His photo in the dictionary under the definition of a class act.

I sat on the stairs and spoke his name, and I cried for myself because I had lost another friend.

Three nights before he left, I called to check in, and Ellie said he wanted to talk to me. I hadn't expected that. The day before, he had been in bad shape, couldn't speak, sat propped up on pillows on the bed, terribly thin and pale, his head down, eyes closed. I hadn't expected him to be able to talk to me. But he got on, and it was 20 years ago! No huskiness, no hesitation, no rambling sentences, it was Bob, back again. And we talked for 20 minutes. We talked about his typewriters, the Olympia office standard machines he hadn't been able to get repaired because the world was intent on converting everyone to electronic junkware. We often talked about how annoying it was that commercial interests brainwashed everyone into believing they



1961: Robert Bloch, Bob Tucker



1978: Ray Bradbury, Robert Bloch, Gahan Wilson

1970s: Robert Bloch, Lydia & A.E. van Vogt



1980s: Ramsey Campbell, Hugh B. Cave, Robert Bloch

1990s: Robert Bloch, Andre Norton



Robert Bloch with World Fantasy Award, 1990s

Robert Bloch at his 75th birthday party, April 1992



Robert Bloch

had to have this or that new toot'n'whistle, when the technology we already used was perfect for us ... and the concomitant need for those who chose not to go along with the game. And I told Bob I had a guy who did great repairs, and I'd come over and pick up the three Olympias, and I'd take them along with one of my own big, when I went to see Jesus Silva this week. He said that would be grand.

Never to see his face again, that grin. It's hard, it's really tough.

There is a picture of us together, on that street in Ohio in 1951. He is three times my height, and a thousand times my presence. I am a kid, and he has his arm around my shoulders. And we are friends. It is tough, boy, you just don't know.

—Harlan Ellison

ROBERT BLOCH by Edward Bryant

I was a small-town high school sophomore when *Psycho* hit the screen in our one local theater. Like everyone else in my generation, I was instantly imprinted with shower-phobia. Nothing on the screen had affected me that much since the nocturnal shrilling of the giant ants in *Them!* Nothing would again until *Repulsion* instilled a distaste for leaving skinned bunnies in the vegetable crispier.

While it was one of my most traumatic influences from popular art, *Psycho* was not my introduction to Robert Bloch's work. For a long time, I'd been reading both his reprinted and his new prose fiction. I very much responded to his work in the supernatural macabre. Later on, I'd discover and be riveted by such classics of psychopathology as *The Scarf* and *Firebug*. And eventually I'd meet the author in person.

Ten or 15 years ago, I was toastmaster at a St. Louis convention which had selected Bob as their guest of honor. The irony was not lost on me when I checked into the hotel and found that my shower curtain had apparently been slashed down the middle by a previous guest. I always enjoy synchronicity.

I'd met Bob long before that and discovered what a warm, intelligent, funny man he was. Were we close friends? Nope. Did I admire him immensely? You bet.

But I'll tell you — some of my greatest appreciation for Robert Bloch generated only a few months ago, when I read in close proximity his collection *The Early Fears* and his autobiography *Once Around the Bloch*. The fiction dated back as far as 60 years ago. I was amazed to be reminded that most of it just *didn't* date. Sure, a bit of the jargon was no longer current; but the really important stuff, the material about how human beings tick, how their frustrations and terrors and relationships function, was as fresh now as it obviously had been back then. To be timeless is an accomplishment achieved by only the best writers.

So Bob was one of the best.

The autobiography told me things about his life I'd never heard hinted of when I'd spoken to him or attended his convention appearances. Bob certainly *had* had a life. *Once Around the Bloch* would be worth reading alone for the section about Bob, as a young man, working with a buddy as the equivalent of a spin doctor for a Milwaukee reform mayoral candidate.

And I've got a much better idea now about Where He Got His Ideas.

Now Bob is gone, and the reality is just sinking in. His legacy? All those printed words. The memories shared by those who remain. It's not a good trade, but it'll have to be enough.

My deepest condolences to Ellie and all the others who were close.

—Edward Bryant

RE: ROBERT BLOCH by Richard Matheson

My first short story was published in *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction* in 1950. I was, as

far as being a professional writer, a raw novice. Imagine my astonishment — and utter delight — when I received, in the mail, a magazine (I wish I could recall its name) in which an article was printed: "The Art of Richard Matheson". By Robert Bloch!

I could scarcely believe my eyes. I had had no notion whatsoever that Robert Bloch knew who I was and knew what little I had published at that time. That he not only knew about me and had read my scant output — but had actually taken the time to *analyze* the stories and write a laudatory article about them... well, it was, to say the least, a staggering surprise. *Robert Bloch?* A towering master of the very genre I was attempting to enter? Incredible. But there it was.

Which is a roundabout way of saying that Bob Bloch was one of the kindest, most considerate men (in the field or out of it) that I have ever known — for, happily, in years to come, I did get to know him and count him as a close friend.

This anecdote could be — in essence — repeated by dozens of others (perhaps hundreds) — writers, editors, publishers, amateurs, fans, *et al.* Bob Bloch *cared*. In that, he was unique. While producing his own brand of creative genius for 60 years (60 years!), he was never too busy to lend a helping hand, more often than not, praising hand to those who asked for or needed it.

God bless the man. His lifetime was a treasure in a multitude of different ways, creatively and personally.

—Richard Matheson

AN APPRECIATION by Ramsey Campbell

I remember Bob. I remember him receiving the first World Fantasy Award for Life Achievement in 1975. "I don't know what to say," he said with a very large catch in his voice. Bob Bloch lost for words! An occasion unique in my experience. At Deep-SouthCon in Huntsville more than a decade later, I abused my position as toastmaster by introducing Bob with a handful of puns which tried to be worthy of him. "Some Africans have a tradition where the tribe chooses a scapegoat and takes him into the bush to sacrifice him," he responded. "Here they call that tradition ... Ramsey Campbell." Only a wicked twinkle in his eye showed he wasn't absolutely serious, except that anyone who knew him at all knew how innately genial and courteous he was. Many, though not enough, were the hours we spent at conventions, reminiscing about *Weird Tales* and August Derleth or politely disagreeing about the avant-garde, something he notoriously never cared for.

In some ways, he should have. Who, having read of them, can forget the hungry house, or Mr. Steinway, or the theaters, or — the story which for me sums up the Bob I knew — that hellbound train?



June 1994: Robert Bloch, Lisa Feerick, Julius Schwartz

He certainly advanced and modernized the horror story, and composed an enviable number of its unforgettable lines. "And her head." "What they really are is *fingerprints!*" "Just call me ... Jack." Why, he began his career with "It was the head of my brother"! I once wrote a sentence with a voice coming from an unlikely mouth, and thought at the time of writing that it was a tribute to one of his best lines in *Psycho*. I never quite got around to telling him so, maybe because I knew he would be too polite to suggest that another word for tribute was ripoff.

At least I told him what counted. Not many weeks ago, I spoke to him for the last time. He was a little slow with medication, but very much the Bob I knew. We reminisced for getting on for half an hour, and he told me that while nothing was likely to convert an old cynic like him into a believer, it did mean a lot to him to look back over his life and see a pattern which he hadn't seen before. I was able to tell him he was loved and admired. He is, and will be.

—Ramsey Campbell

AN APPRECIATION by Philip José Farmer

What I miss most about Bob Bloch is Bob Bloch, the human being of splendid virtues and minor weaknesses, the true friend. He left a legacy of hundreds of fictional works, some of which are classics in his field — the awful side of human nature. Whether or not they'll be read 50 years from now is up to Time itself. He had no illusions about the permanency of his works. "What goes up must come down." Maybe.

Bette, my wife, and I have loved the man since we first met him in 1952 at the World Science Fiction Convention in Chicago. Bette and Bob were born on April 5 and always sent birthday greetings to each other or phoned on that day. We got to know him inside and out during the five years we lived in L.A. and during the many conventions we attended and annual trips to L.A. We always looked forward to seeing him, even during the last years of his life when he became depressed because so many friends and old movie stars who'd become friends were dying.

He never kicked against the pricks, but he certainly commented on them. Like Mark Twain, his ability to make people laugh hid a deep pessimism.

His wit was Voltairean, not Rabelaisian. He wasn't overly prudish or self-righteously uptight. It just wasn't in his inborn nature, and he didn't share my love for Henry Miller and Charles Bukowski. But he was exceedingly witty, and, talking to close friends, very biting with his exposés of movie/TV producers *et al.*, certain literary agents and publishers, and the egos and antics of certain SF writers.

He had a lot of nostalgia for the world existing before the sixties, though he did not spare its vices, intolerance, and misery. I wish he'd had a Boswell to follow him around since he was a child. It'd make a record of very funny remarks and deeply analytical lectures on individuals and society, a record not many could match.

He was timid about taking public stands on issues — the Vietnam War, for instance. But he gave good reasons for this refusal.

He was a very generous friend. He'd advanced money to young and broke writers who'd come to Hollywood to be script writers. Though he really couldn't afford the money, he gave whole-heartedly. And he was repaid by all except one notoriously tightwad cheapskate. That pleased him and made him feel better about his judgement of humans in general and the loanees in particular. He hadn't expected the tightwad to repay him, anyway.

During his last days, he talked to Bette on the phone. His voice weak, he said, "What's it all about?"

That's a question all thinking persons ask now and then. But his works and his personal conversation show that he knew the answer to that. There is no answer. All we can do is shine brightly for a while — if we're lucky — and then die out. Ultimate questions will be answered in the next world.

Maybe.

—Philip José Farmer