



Hey, Harlan,
thanks from
Cleveland, Ohio!
September 21, 2007

Cover image courtesy of Moonstone Books

HARLAN ELLISON

as seen by Stu Levin

If anyone in Cleveland is old enough and/or has lived in Cleveland long enough, you may remember me as being the movie critic on WEWS -TV and on WCLV for many years. If you're even older, I was, before that, an actor and director at the Cleveland Play House.

Though I would love to say more about ME, this is about my friend Harlan Ellison who, just as I, is prone to ranting on and on about himself.

I could best describe Harlan in one word, but it is not a word I use in polite society, so I'll try to find another.

I'm told by many, including Harlan, that he's a genius. Perhaps he is. No matter. I love him in spite of his precocity.

We met some sixty years ago when we were kids and appeared together in a play at the Cleveland Play House. Harlan played a penguin on roller skates. He was, and still is, a self-centered, egomaniacal, funny, talented and exceptionally bright brat.

I don't know why I liked Harlan, many others did not, but we became friends. Maybe it was because he and I were both "outsiders." Maybe it was because we both loved fantasy. I really didn't know why until many, many years later when I realized that beneath the surface of that angry, often vicious, arrogant, narcissistic boy, there was the seed of an angry, often vicious, arrogant, narcissistic man who cares about the future of the world, who cares about the condition of his fellow man, who loves his wife more deeply than anyone else I know loves theirs and who is extraordinarily kind, giving and loving to his friends.

After sixty years, we live near one another. We dine together upon occasion. We speak often. We share much. We laugh a lot.

Although I fully expect him to decry the content, spelling and sentence structure of this note, Harlan is my friend, my buddy, my confidant.

Do I have to describe him in a word? Well, all-righty then. Harlan is HARLAN. And THAT is saying volumes. (No pun intended.)

In my golden youth, I attended St. Leon's College, (split major in Persiflage and Paradiddle), and my home was in Chicago. Thus on semester breaks, at the end of terms, and following expulsions, I would ride in a car with other students to and fro--our route took us through Cleveland, where we always arrived in the middle of the night. It was traditional to stop at the White Castle, to load up on the beloved Sliders, or Belly-Bombers, and also to take in the spectacle of the homeless, the toothless, raving loonies, Roosevelt Democrats, and Confused Persons who congregated there. We looked, in particular, for an intense, diminutive fellow, who wore a coffee-dribbled overcoat fastened by a very large safety-pin, winter and summer. He was always there, was always gracious to us, accepting the cheeseburgers we bought him, and warning us about Jesuits, Rotarians, and flash women who would lift our pokes and then laugh at us. Of course this was Harlan, hardly more than a stripling himself in those days, but we did not know. On one of these passages, after pocketing a few coins I'd given him, he gripped my lapels tightly, pulled my head down to his level, and whispered, "Become a writer kid. It's hardly any work, and the squares will heap honors on your head." In later years, I learned to love and venerate the little varmint--or vagrant--whatever he was. And of course I followed his advice, as we all should do. May he continue to annoy us for a hundred years.

Daniel Pinkwater

I am one of the many writers and artists to whom Harlan has given a hand up over the years. My heart was in my throat the first time heard him praise Concrete on Hour 25, the radio show he hosted. His comments in Playboy helped me get my first movie option, I'm convinced. I of course was a fan and familiar, too, with his personal legend. To be called out for praise was like having an arm reach down from Mount Olympus and touch my forehead in blessing.

Years passed and we became friends. I know Harlan well enough now that I've heard some of his anecdotes twice, (and can compare the differences in the telling). I know his crochets. I've seen that infamous Ellison belly peeking out from the bathrobe more times than I care to remember.

But I still find myself in awe. At his bottomless enthusiasm for literature, even for particular words, which he savors like chocolates. For his eternal inner youth, even as his body infuriates him as it insists on aging. For his political adventures. For the fights he's picked with the powerful. For his refusal to be walked on, ever. For the way he can recount an afternoon lunch or medical appointment and imbue it with suspense, with plot twists, with hilarity. For his insights into people -- God, he knows so many people -- and history, and the writer's craft, and the best pastrami on either coast.

I'm in the midst of a collaboration with him, now, and so have cause to closely consider his written words, hammered out on a noble, old, mechanical typewriter. It's a privilege and an inspiration (I'm drawing a comics series he's writing). Those just-right words, the diamond-edged metaphors, the stinging awareness of the cruelty and beauty that make up life...it's all there.

It's been an honor to have been in your life, Harlan, not because you're famous and celebrated, but because you're you.

Paul Chadwick

"I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream" was my introduction to Harlan Ellison. The world has never been the same. Reading him is like running downhill in front of an avalanche. I'd often thought that the mark of good literature is that, when it rains in the book, the reader gets wet. But Harlan has what one might call a tidal wave effect.

I've always had a passion for his work. I didn't love it, the way I did Bradbury's. Of course, it isn't meant to be loved. You don't love something that pushes you over the edge. That runs you down and leaves scars. One does not stroll lightly away from "The Beast That Shouted Love at the Heart of the World." No, indeed. Harlequins repent, the Deathbird flies by night, and the wise reader hides under the bed. Harlan gives us rollercoaster rides. Get in and hang on.

I first met Harlan at the Sycamore Hill workshop, probably fifteen years ago. I was surprised to find him to be warm, gentle, compassionate, and self-effacing. Not at all what I'd expected from his work. Or his reputation.

Over the years since, I've watched him take on various causes. I've never seen him retreat. And if I needed someone to watch my back, he'd be my first choice.

Jack McDevitt

"Few writers merit being called a legend, but my friend Harlan Ellison is certainly one of them. Teleplays, film scripts, novels, novellas, short stories, essays, on and on. I can't think of a type of writing that he doesn't do brilliantly. Except maybe sonnets. But he's probably got a drawer of them that he just never bothered to share with anyone. Over a long career, his work has been consistently exciting, intelligent, well-crafted, and mind-bending. He is a fearsome advocate for writers and, to put it as elegantly as possible, doesn't take shit from anybody who wants to abuse his rights or those of the rest of us. If that weren't enough, he's also one of the finest public speakers around. To see and hear him is to be mesmerized. I envy all of you for the chance to pay him tribute in person. In a world of so many fakes, this guy is authentic."

David Morrell

Harlan Ellison has inspired me, entertained me, fed me, employed me, convinced others to employ me, berated me, advised me, trusted me with things precious to him, motivated me, expanded my horizons, bedazzled me, laughed at me when my wife left me (calling to Susan, "It's tragic, of course, but wait'll you hear why!"), told me many stories (some in person, many more in print), impressed me with his kindness, invited me in, invited me to leave (I believe *Cheers* was coming on), given me things, looked at me askance, turned me on to things I didn't know existed, lent his name to my publications, and just generally treated me the way you wish all human beings would treat all other human beings, with decency, courtesy, honesty, forthrightness, and chili. (Mustn't forget the chili.) Thank you, Harlan, for all of the above and for all the things I'll remember after I've already sent off this note. From the bottom of my heart.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Jan Strnad

Robert A. Heinlein opened my eyes to the wonders of SF, but it was Harlan Ellison who showed me -- and an entire generation of writers -- that SF could live beyond the confines of a young adult library shelf, that it could shake up the real worlds of politics, television, and the universities.... that it could be passionate, loud, insistent, and important.

Thanks,
Michael Cassutt

Harlan Ellison is easily the most unforgettable person I have ever met. Others are dull shadows in comparison. Hmm, that sounds like the basis for a Harlan short story. I'm sure he could write the whole damn thing brilliantly in the time it will take me to write this e-mail. I have dozens of Harlan stories. Every time I'm with him a new one arises immediately. He is eccentric, acerbic, kind, generous, funny, magnificently creative and exhausting. It is a wonder and an honor to know him. Many people are casually called 'unique'. Harlan is the only one I know who is truly so.

May his typewriter continue to clack and his energy never wane.

Stuart Kaminsky

Harlan Ellison An Appreciation?

Let's get this out of the way first. Harlan is a gigantic pain in the butt. You call him, you pray to God his wonderful wife Susan answers so you can talk to a human being. If he picks up he doesn't ask who it is. He screams, "What!?" You are already on the defensive and you haven't even said "hi" yet. You just wind up muttering defensively, "Umm. Nothing. Just life and death. Sorry to bother you." CLICK!

At conventions, if you ask him a question that is ever-so-slightly questionable, he proceeds to rip you apart so expertly you'd think he was either a butcher or Moyle in some previous life. And if you stupidly say something nasty about some friend of his, he instantly channels Jack The Ripper... and once again tears you apart, only without the polite letters afterward. Most of us at times can talk tough but we're really kitten mittens. Harlan, when provoked, is saber tooth fangs and claws. On steroids.

Conversely, I've seen people attack him because they've heard all the stories, many of them true, a few not so, and they think it would be fun to show off to their friends and match wits with The Man. Oh, God in heaven you have no conceivable idea how big a mistake that is. Pieces of audience members are still being discovered... from the 1984 World Science Fiction Convention.

So why do I actually like this walking nuclear reactor?

Although this is a library and it is honoring his written work, which is more often than not brilliant, witty and provoking I want to say his writing has virtually nothing to do with why I like him. His work, which I devoured when I first came across it, gave me entrance to Harlan the man, and it's the man I enjoy, even if 90% of the time I want to strangle him, or tell him to stop acting like a baby and to calm down, or to quit interrupting me while I'm trying to make a point he's already rejected. Harlan usually

talks to me like I'm the "special" brother of the village idiot. But since I only listen to him with bemused tolerance, that's okay.

So why do I like him? Why am I taking precious time to write this? I've seen Harlan put up indigent friends for stays so long they could claim squatters rights on his incredible house. I've known him to help out almost anyone who needs it. He's marched for people's rights when it was dangerous to do so. He's stood up to morons and tore them a new one. And for the right reasons. When I was involved with a legal hassle some years back, he quietly checked in on me, and when he heard I was falling apart, he called and talked me through it. No one else did. Things like that can't be forgotten. Shouldn't be forgotten.

I like Harlan because there's no pretense. What you see is what you get. The good. The bad. And the ugly. He is a sum of his passions, and they range from sublime jazz and fine art to plastic super-hero action figures and comic books which he displays next to each other giving them equal weight and importance in his sprawling Winchester House of eclectic oddities. Harlan is both annoyingly irrational and supremely rational - at the same time. He is extremely intelligent and extremely childlike. I like that he's never grown up while being more of a man than most of the people I know.

I like Harlan because despite his reputation for ripping people apart, he doesn't prejudge. He lets you prove you're not worthy before the sundering begins. If Harlan's temper is legendary, his beneficence should be. As loud as he is about his passions, he's as humble about his charities.

He gets on my nerves. He entertains me. He drives me crazy. He makes me laugh. He makes me want to scream. And he makes me want to write this. And after he reads this, he'll call and complain that I should have proofread it better.

Oh, and his writing doesn't suck too much.

-Marv Wolfman

Harlan Ellison has a big art collection: it's his house, a Dada Readymade. He came to our town to do a three-hour thing on Judaism, we took him for breakfast (about three in the afternoon). He went to our house, admired my second favoritest painting and bought it off the wall. This is how collecting is – or ought to be – done. I visit it from time to time when we are, as now, on the Coast. And the one he got he hung and about two months later called me with a commission from one of his legion of visitors. Congratulations to Harlan and to Cleveland for thinking of it.

Joe Reed

A DOUBLE DACTYL FOR HARLAN

by
Kit Reed

Polymath omnivore
Harlan Jay Ellison
Ate what they brought him
and drank what he could.

Terribly horribly
Incontrovertibly,
Often most charming
—and misunderstood.

xxxx
k

"Harlan Ellison is probably the best short-story writer of the second half of the 20th century -- but it will be a long time before that fact eclipses the qualities of the man himself -- his generosity, his humor, and the strength of his loyalties. We don't get a lot of people like him in any century!"

Cheers,
Tim Powers

I have known Harlan for something over forty years. He has stayed at my house in London and I have stayed with him in Los Angeles. We have spent time in many of the world's great cities and as little time as possible in some of the world's small backwaters. We have travelled together. We have got on each other's nerves together. We've been together in sickness, strangeness and some exceedingly good times. He has been a generous friend and an inspiring friend. Together we fought a lot of the same battles and some of them we even won. I feel all the complex emotions towards him one has for a favourite brother. He will tell you that I stole his personal assistant after availing myself of his hospitality. Linda will tell you that she was leaving anyway. I prefer to keep out of any argument between them. Be that as it may, thanks to him, I have been married to one of the world's great women for some twenty seven years. He has given himself credit for many achievements and in most cases that credit has been due, but he has forgotten to give himself credit for many other achievements. Among them was the general raising of standards in the imaginative story as well as the raising of the rewards given to so many of his fellow writers, some of which he paid out of his own pocket. He has forgotten many of his own virtues and denied one of his worst vices (that appalling tobacco he smokes in his pipe which has been giving me migraines for well over half my lifetime). He can be a quarrelsome fiend, but usually in the interests of others, as well as his own, and Linda and I just can't stop loving him. Together, Harlan and I mapped out the terms for what came to be called The New Wave. I was proud to publish his great Nebula-winning story "A Boy and His Dog" and have almost forgiven him for never publishing a story by me in that revolution-defining anthology *Dangerous Visions*. He's one of the great American writers and it's been an honour and pleasure to be his friend.

Yours sincerely,
Michael Moorcock

I first met Harlan in June 1967 when I was a twenty-year-old school-teacher and my car broke down near Blacktown, outside of Sydney, New South Wales. While waiting at the side of the road for the repair service to arrive, I began reading the stories in a paperback I had with me at the time.

On the cover was a man sitting on a giant mushroom surrounded by the most weird and wonderful creatures. The book was *Ellison Wonderland*, of course, and I knew from my first step into "The Silver Corridor" and among the other wonders within that here was something rather special, really quite nifty. It had what I now know to call the Voice of Truth, that vitally important quality the very best storytellers have. It's when you as reader know that you're in good hands, that this time you've lucked out; this is the real deal.

Sixteen years later I met Harlan in person in June 1983 when he came down to Sydney as Guest of Honor at that year's national science fiction convention. We travelled the Outback together and quickly became friends. In those years between that first roadside – literary – meeting and our second, I'd read much more of his work and relished the flair, the strut, the knack of delivering powerful observation with now hard-hitting, now heart-wrenching, now funny, always intimate delivery.

I sensed, rightly as it turns out, that here was a true natural, a true maverick, a true rogue scholar. That's rogue scholar, a very appropriate term. For Harlan is one of those smart, switched-on, immensely gifted writers and artists and mixers who look at the world and see it for what it truly is, then render it for the rest of us as a reminder, a provocation, a wake-up call.

Like others of his ilk – and I'm sure everyone of us tonight could easily put a list together – he reminds of how the world works for good or ill, right or wrong. His message is pay attention, don't you dare forget to notice, to feel, to stay switched on. Don't you get sidelined, blindsided, distracted. Don't you dare. Not you. Not me.

This precious, invaluable storyteller, this rogue scholar mixes it, pushes and shoves, tears your heart out one moment, then soothes and caresses it the next; demands, takes and always puts back. And simply has fun. Oh yes. That has to be part of it too. But he's there, always on his game, always paying attention, standing up and being counted. For what it's worth. The real deal. It's what rogue scholars do. I'm proud and blessed to be his friend.

Dr Terry Dowling
Editor / The Essential Ellison
Sydney, Australia

I have been a fan of Harlan Ellison dating back to *Dangerous Visions*, a book that changed the way I thought about Science Fiction. Aside from the amazing stories he and his typewriter have created over the years, his reflections on our culture and the creative process have had a continuing impact on me. I've also had the good fortune to be Harlan's friend for most of the last two decades. I love to tell the story of the first time I met him in person. I was attending Wonder Con in the Bay area. Harlan was signing books and posters and such. I handed him an object to autograph and, without looking up, he asked what I wanted him to write. I said "You're Harlan Ellison, write something brilliant." He said, "No problem," and promptly signed his name. True enough.

Thanks,

Mike Richardson
Dark Horse Comics

Harlan Ellison is a thinker, a creator of unique and fantastic worlds, a logophile, a pop-culture maven, a curmudgeon, a spieler, a provocateur, and much, much more... but most of all, he is an original. There are many other good writers and fantasists, but there is only one Harlan. His contribution to American literature speaks for itself, and it, too, is unique.

Leonard Maltin

I'm glad for this opportunity to thank Harlan and express my appreciation for many things—for the introduction he wrote for my very first graphic novel, for the chance to keep trying to nail a good likeness in his Dream Corridor comic book series, for publication rights to an Oz essay, for phone calls and advice, for kind words about my work, for his own written words that have opened doors in my mind and in the minds of many others. Most of all I'd like to say thanks, Harlan, for being yourself—emphatically, entirely yourself—in the face of whatever—good or bad—has come your way.

Eric Shanower

HARLAN ELLISON

By Stephen Jones

I can still remember my first meeting with Harlan (although I doubt that he does).

It was at the The Fourth World Fantasy Convention in Fort Worth, Texas, in 1978. When I arrived at the hotel, down a long dusty road, I entered the lobby only to be confronted by Harlan, gleefully reading out extracts from some poor fool's sword & sorcery story to a laughing audience of bemused fans. In fairness, I should perhaps add here that all Harlan had to do to entertain the crowd was simply select those passages he read aloud.

Anyway, I ignored this spectacle (the words "Christians" and "lions" immediately sprang to mind) as I made my way to the hotel's registration desk, where I joined the line to check-in. As it turned out, Harlan joined the same line a few paces behind me. So when it came my turn to speak to the person at reception, I suddenly found my — at that time uncommon — English accent being mimicked from behind me.

Now, what Harlan didn't know was that I had just spent three days and nights travelling on a Greyhound bus across America to get from Chicago to the convention in Fort Worth. And this was after a twelve-hour flight from London. I was tired. I was dirty. And most of all, I was cranky. And the last thing I needed right at that moment was some silly American writer who thought it would be funny if he did a bad impression of my accent in public.

So I told him so. Right there in the lobby. In no uncertain terms.

He immediately stopped. And then began talking to me as if were an equal which, at the age of twenty-five and just starting out in the genre, I certainly was not. And whenever we encountered each other at the convention during that weekend, he went out of his way to talk to me.

Now, I'm sure that Harlan has no memory of that encounter, and why should he? It was almost thirty years ago and he has met a lot more important people and done a great many more interesting things during those intervening years. However, I've never forgotten it, and I tell this story for one simple reason: to illustrate to you that Harlan does not suffer fools gladly.

When I went on to carve a small career for myself as an editor of anthologies, mostly of the horror variety, it was only natural that our paths would cross again. And I can say without a shadow of a doubt that Harlan is one of the most professional and dedicated authors it has been my pleasure to work with. In fact, I would describe him as the Consummate Professional when it comes to the business of writing.

I have heard editors complain over the years that Harlan is “difficult” to work with. No he is not. Just so long as you don’t mess him around or try to rip him off. As I said earlier, he does not suffer fools gladly, and if you try to put one over on him — or even someone he might know, be it a fellow author or a neophyte fan who he feels has been wronged — then he will come after you like rabid Rottweiler and tear your throat out with his bare teeth before he sees an injustice done. And I admire him for that passion. That dedication.

A well-known New York publisher once complained to me because Harlan has a clause in his contract that states that, as an editor, you must pay him a monetary fine if you fail to supply him with a copy of each and every edition of your book — no matter from where in the world — that contains his work. “How unfair!” this particular publisher whined. “How dare he do such a thing?” And my reply was, “Good for him!” I wish that every author included such a clause in their contract — then perhaps publishers would be more careful about honouring their commitments and being honest and open about their deals. That’s all Harlan is asking for. The difference is that he’s putting the responsibility on the publisher or editor, instead of the author, to track down reprintings and foreign editions of his work. And as an author, he has every right to expect to be treated in such a manner. If you are fair with him, then he will be fair with you. In fact, more than fair.

I probably have gone on too long here already, so I’ll close by saying that it is always a delight for me to work with Harlan. Beyond that, we have attended many of the same conventions over the years; we have signed together in bookstores; I have been a guest on a number occasions in his marvellous home, which he shares with his English-born wife and absolute champion Susan; and we have dined out together numerous times (invariably on meat dishes ranging from the Argentinian to the Mongolian). I consider him a friend and one of the most talented and creative writers — as well as writer’s advocates — we have in our genre of fantastic fiction.

I’m am delighted that he is being honoured here today. Listen to every word he says to you. Oh, he’ll no doubt be outrageous, and controversial, and funny, and terrifying. But that’s just Harlan. Take note of every word that comes out of his mouth because they are like nuggets of gold. The pure truth. The real thing.

And if you’re lucky enough to get to talk to him afterwards, don’t behave like an idiot. Don’t mess with him, or thrust your latest manuscript at him; don’t argue with him, or try to show off. Just treat him with the respect he deserves. And I can assure you that he will treat you in the same manner in return.

As he has always done with me, from the very first time I ever met him.

— Stephen Jones
London, England

Harlan Ellison: An Appreciation

Kristine Kathryn Rusch

When I think of Harlan Ellison—capital H, capital E—I think of the writer whose work I discovered when I was a teenager. My best friend Mindy Wallgren brought me a copy of the Hugo Winners, and showed me Harlan's story in the volume. I was hooked.

From that moment on, I read everything I could find. One winter afternoon in Plainview, Texas, I walked into a gift shop with a small book section in the back. All along one rack were copies of all of Harlan's short story collections. I devoured those books on that trip, and tried reading a few aloud to my much older sister. She was offended by the occasional swear word—and couldn't hear the wonder of the stories.

At that moment—twenty-five years into my existence—I realized just how different from the rest of my family I was.

It turns out I have this difference in common with Harlan. We're both from Midwestern families, and we both found the atmosphere of our childhood extremely stifling.

Harlan rebelled in ways I could only dream of. I read about his exploits with great admiration—and I continued to buy everything with his name on it.

Often when I read the work of another writer, I wish I could write as well as he does. But I have never had that wish when I've read Harlan's work.

I knew, from that first short story onward, that no one else in the world can write like Harlan Ellison. Not now, not ever.

Then my husband Dean Wesley Smith and I started Pulphouse Publishing. We did a practice book—a blank book that we called Issue Zero—so that we could learn how to bind a book. I sent copies of Issue Zero to all my favorite writers and asked them to write for me.

Many did. Some just submitted stories. Others gave me letters of intent.

Harlan called me.

At six in the morning.

And then, when I blearily said hello, he apologized. "I thought you were in New York," he said. "I only now realized you're on the West Coast."

I used to be a reporter. I've interviewed everyone from United States Senators to world leaders, so I rarely get what my husband calls "The Gosh Wows." But I've gotten them in the past with writers who've influenced me greatly, like Harlan had.

But since I was half asleep, I wasn't processing information quickly. It took a good ten minutes before the Gosh Wows caught up with me, and by then the conversation was over.

Harlan agreed to write for us. And he gave us one of his best stories for our very first issue, enabling us to launch Pulphouse with great fanfare.

Months later, I met him at a science fiction convention. Which convention is lost to the sands of time. What I remember is Harlan, standing in a crowd of people, eyeing me sideways. He turned to Ellen Datlow, then editing *Omni*, and quietly (but obviously) asked who I was. She told him, and he waved me over.

"Kris!" he shouted like we were old friends. "Kris, get over here. There are some people I want you to meet."

It was—and remains—the smoothest introduction I've ever had to a person I admired. Hell, it's the smoothest introduction I've ever had to anyone, famous or not.

From that moment on, Harlan was a friend. Not Harlan Ellison—capital H, capital E—but Harlan, the raconteur with the great smile, the man who knows how to put everyone at ease. Unless, of course, he wants to make them nervous.

Which he does. Also with great ease.

He and his lovely wife Susan, who is one of the most amazing people I've ever met, live too far away, so the time we spend together is precious. We have marvelous conversations, great meals, and some nice quiet moments. (Yes, Harlan and I can both be quiet. I know most people don't believe that—at least of me.)

When I think of Harlan, my friend, I think of the most generous man I've ever met. A man who does a multitude of small, almost unnoticeable favors for the people he loves. He also performs grand gestures, but fans of Harlan Ellison—capital H, capital E—expect the grand gesture.

His public persona is all about grand gesture. But the private man is a homebody who understands the value of a good laugh.

It's the small things I appreciate the most. Like the way he waved me over to smooth our introduction. Or the way he puts his hand on his wife's back, protecting her as they go through a crowd. It's the phone call he didn't have to make, but did. Or the hug when we first see each other after too long, followed by the continuation of the conversation we'd been having at that last visit, as if time hadn't passed at all.

So often when I meet the subject of a Gosh Wow, he doesn't live up to the person his writing created in my imagination.

Harlan Ellison—capital H, capital E—is a great writer. One of the best. I'm a huge fan of his work.

My friend Harlan is a great man, who has surpassed the Harlan Ellison of my imagination.

Harlan's one of the best.

I'm proud to call him my friend.

Congratulations on this tribute, Harlan. It's greatly deserved.



Dear Harlan,

Thank you for your work, and thank you for your friendship,
and thank you for your kindness when I was a no-name pup
all these years ago.

With affection,

Vonda McIntyre

“Who can forget the first time they read a story by Harlan Ellison?
Surreal, sharp as razors, filled with anger and a bizarre sense of
humor—always searching for, and seldom finding, justice—
Harlan’s stories pierce both head and heart. He has become our
new Ambrose Bierce. Part Mark Twain, part Rod Serling, wholly
obstinate and outrageous. Hurray for Harlan Ellison!”

Best wishes—

Greg Bear

We love you Har. Without you in our lives it would have
been much less interesting. Your talent, wild imagination,
and fighting spirit are an inspiration. Looking forward to
many more years of friendship.

As always,
Leo and Diane Dillon

A Tribute to
Harlan Ellison

So, I just get home from a gruelling three-week book-signing tour, looking forward to sleeping in my own bed again. The foyer is filled with boxes that were delivered while I was gone, the stack of unopened mail rivals the heights of some of the mountains I climb in Colorado. And in that stack sits a letter from Susan, sent weeks earlier, asking if I'd write some words of appreciation for a special surprise for Harlan—and the deadline happens to be the following day.

There aren't many people for whom I'd drop everything else, no matter how tired or busy I might be. Harlan is one of them.

HARLAN ELLISON. Some (including Harlan himself, probably) would claim that nothing else needs to be said. For so many years, Harlan carefully cultivated a Goliath personality to make fans tremble in their tennis shoes. The science fiction world is rife with stories about "Harlan encounters," after which poor bloodied fans would shamble away in defeat. The truth is, Harlan has no patience for fools and no sympathy for anyone who would waste his time with stupid arguments. (And science fiction, just like the real world, has plenty of fools and time-wasters. Repent, Fanboy, Said the Ellison-Man.)

But Harlan has a secret. He has a huge heart and will do just about anything for you if you really need it. He's helped me in many ways in my career, offered advice and commiseration, as well as friendship, and I dedicated my novel *THE MARTIAN WAR* to him. He worked extraordinarily hard to help Lydia van Vogt after the death of Van. He has championed many causes because (no doubt as an avid comic fan) he pictures himself as a superhero fighting for what's Right. And he tackles the Big Boys in causes that are genuinely important to all of us, not trivial things for his own personal glory. (Unfortunately, we all pay the price for that, too, because the time Harlan spends beating the bad guys is time that he does not spend writing.)

It's an old adage that authors are supposed to pay forward, to help up-and-coming writers keep the creative momentum rolling because it's not possible to reward the people who helped us. I disagree. Harlan, for what it's worth, this brief tribute is my attempt to pay back. Thanks for setting the bar so high for the rest of us.

Kevin J. Anderson

**A Few Words on Harlan Ellison's Lesser Known
Contributions to Writing**

By M. Christine Valada, Esq.

"Ms. Valada?" questioned the voice on the other end of the phone. "This is Harlan Ellison." The call came through just a few days after I had moved to Cleveland to start classes at Case Western Reserve University's School of Law. I had left my career as a professional photographer in Washington, D.C. to become a copyright lawyer. Six weeks before the call, I flew to Los Angeles to photograph a number of science fiction writers for an exhibit and Harlan Ellison had been my primary goal.

My formal introduction to Harlan got off to a rocky start (and that's a whole story I won't tell here) but illustrator Leo Dillon stopped Harlan from walking away from the sitting. Despite that prickly meeting, I knew I had captured something special about Harlan on film and that he would have to love the print I mailed him. He did. His tone on the phone was far friendlier than it had been in July. He wanted to use the photograph on a book jacket. Obviously, I was a "real photographer" and not just somebody with an expensive camera. I realized he must have called within minutes of opening the envelope.

Harlan recognizes, encourages, and respects talent. Many writers got a break because of Harlan Ellison. So have artists. Harlan is, and long has been, a tireless advocate for creators' rights, but he doesn't just talk the talk. He understands the business of writing. I don't know anyone who can find more ways to make money off the same words than Harlan can. Most importantly, he's ready, able, and willing to take on anyone who infringes on

his rights as a writer. From the standpoint of preparation, he's the perfect client for a copyright lawyer and a shining example to anyone who ever had delusions of making a living from their creative output.

In April of 2000, I got another call from Harlan. By then, I was living in Los Angeles, had practiced copyright and entertainment law for about seven years, was the outside general counsel for the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America, and was married to one of Harlan's best friends (*despite* what was said back on that day we were first introduced), so a call from Harlan was a relatively common occurrence. This time, however, Harlan was hopping mad because his work was showing up in news groups on-line and he wanted to go to war.

Unlike almost all of the other authors whose short stories were being "shared" on-line—and there were many--Harlan's copyrights were all registered and properly renewed with the U.S. Copyright Office. Under any other circumstances, we could have filed an action that very day going after all direct and contributory infringers, demanding statutory damages and attorneys fees, and we most likely could have prevailed at the level of a preliminary hearing. Not so when the infringers were using the Internet, where the law had recently been changed to shield the deep pockets (in this case America On Line and a company called Critical Path), and where there was not one reported ruling construing the new law.

Harlan wasn't too happy to find out that what is known as the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) required us to send notification to both AOL and Critical Path and that they had the right to be dropped from any lawsuit if they responded

“expeditiously” and took down his stories. He would be limited to going after the individuals who had scanned and uploaded his stories, and those who continued to post and re-post them. Identifying the perpetrators in this or any similar case would prove to be almost impossible or financially ruinous, leaving a copyright holder with little in the way of restitution for infringement on the Internet.

Amazingly, neither AOL nor Critical Path responded to the notice-and-take-down demands we sent. They did notice the filing of the lawsuit, though, and thus began four years of facially conflicting defenses, motions, discovery, motions, rulings, settlement (with the one direct infringer we could identify and with Critical Path), and appeal before the Ninth Circuit recognized that the DMCA placed obligations on service providers before they would be able to claim that precious limitation on liability and AOL finally sat down to negotiate a settlement.

Through it all, Harlan never wavered in his belief that he would prevail. While many of Harlan’s colleagues and fans gave financial support (all repaid) for him to carry on this fight, a huge vocal contingent of the “information wants to be free crowd” jeered his efforts and dismissed his likelihood of success. Now, there’s a reported Ninth Circuit ruling with his name on it, which, unlike a large percentage of published rulings, has already been cited by other courts working their way through the legal mire of copyright in the digital age.

There are many people who want to be like Harlan Ellison the writer, with good reason. More of them should try to be like Harlan Ellison the businessman.



A Fire in the Eye

In the Fifth Century B.C., the Greeks believed that the goddess Aphrodite lit a fire within the human eye— a fire shining out into the world, creating the phenomenon we call “sight.”

While later philosophers and scientists attributed sight to light reflected or absorbed from external sources, it is tempting to believe that some fortunate few actually are possessed of an internal luminescence that flows out to the world, not only informing their own dreams, but changing the world around them.

Forty years ago, Steve first encountered the world of a man named Harlan Ellison, in the form of scintillating, sometimes disturbing, often amusing, but always vastly entertaining short fantasy, science fiction, and crime stories. There was another man named “Harlan Ellison” who wrote essays in the L.A. Free Press, who spoke of social issues, media whoredom, and personal responsibility. And there was yet another Harlan still, who he heard on the radio speaking with abrasive wit and startling candor on a mind-boggling variety of topics ranging from marriage to politics.

When he realized that these were all the same man he sought Harlan out: he was, it seemed, one of the rare men or women with the courage to see the world through his own eyes, rather than merely borrowing impressions from others. For forty years he’s loved Harlan’s work, and for at least thirty of them, he has loved the man himself. Tananarive met Harlan in 1995 when she gave him a copy of her first novel at a horror convention. In his great generosity of spirit, he called her to point out grammatical and copyediting mistakes—and to give her frank advice she has never forgotten.

Harlan is so intensely human, with all the strengths and weaknesses the term implies, concentrated and purified by a spirit more loath of cowardly compromise than perhaps any we have ever encountered.

Like all men or women who have decided to rage against the machine, he has both allies and enemies, proponents and detractors.

We are firmly in the camp of those who admire Harlan's intelligence, creativity, and wit. He's a man with a death's-grip on his own vision of a human being's responsibility to strive for excellence, at any cost, against any opposition. Harlan is a singularity who is also somehow a universal, in the midst of a life lived both as artist and performance art. He is both child of and parent to his own genius. One of the handful of human beings we feel most fortunate to have befriended in this life, he is one of the blessed and cursed among us—those born with a fire in the eye.

Steven Barnes
Tananarive Due

There's a line at the end of one of Harlan's stories, something like: That night it rained, everywhere in the known universe. Harlan's that rain: there is not a writer alive who hasn't in some way been touched by him -- by his work, by his editing, by his teaching, by his screenwriting, by his role as spokesman for creative rights. You want avant-garde? Here it is, friends, wrapped in some damned fine hard-edged storytelling. Years ago, as editor of *New Worlds*, I was privileged to first publish "A Boy and His Dog." I am immensely more privileged to have him, for many years now, as a friend.

Jim Sallis

Cheers! -Ken Steacy

Exactly twenty years ago this month (is that possible?) Harlan and I created what is now commonly known as a graphic novel, titled *Night and the Enemy*. It's a collection of adaptations of his short stories, set against the backdrop of the vast Earth versus Kyba war, that I had illustrated in sequential narrative format.

But let's be honest - a graphic novel is really just a comic book that left home and got a college degree, just to make its parents kvell with pride ("such a nice hardcover it's got, with a dustjacket, even!"). In spite of this, comic books still don't get much respect - but neither one of us would ever apologise for our deep love for those wonderful amalgams of words and pictures. And in spite of now being produced the world over, they are, as Harlan is quick to point out, as American an art form as jazz, musical comedy, the detective story, and the banjo.

As I noted at the time, I've never had much difficulty visualizing the printed word, but few authors activate my mind's eye as readily or with such acuity as Harlan. That was true when I first read his work as an unruly kid forty years ago (is THAT possible?) and it's equally as true today, re-reading him as an unruly adult.

Besides that, he's one of the dearest men I've been privileged to have as a friend. Thanx for everything, Harlan, now suck in that gut - no, wait! Please don't, not in front of all these nice people!

Love, Kenny

"One otherwise quiet night in the early sixties *The Outer Limits* was shooting at the famed piece of transitional architecture, the Bradbury Bldg. in downtown LA. I was in my chair between scenes outside on the sidewalk when a well-dressed very young man approached, and told me in a cheerful voice, loud enough for the entire neighborhood to make note of it, as I recall, that he had written this superb episode we were filming, and in fact had written it for me to play the character I was playing. He told me his name, and waited, smiling expectantly in case I might feel the need to genuflect. Instead, I went back inside to work, after thanking him quietly for his kindness. His name was Ellison, Harlan Ellison, as in Bond, James Bond, who later became quite popular. Harlan was from Cleveland, Ohio. A recent arrival. Harlan has been waiting patiently ever since for me to genuflect. Well, this is it. I do indeed genuflect to you, my old friend, one of few still above ground. I kowtow. Here, take my que.

If you care to ask, Harlan will show you an award he took home some years ago which informs the world that *The Outer Limits* episode he wrote for me, and which I was filming the night we met, see above (DEMON WITH A GLASS HAND), made more money as a stand alone series episode than any other in the history of television, anywhere. Pretty cool for a kid from Cleveland in the sixties.

Everyone thinks of Harlan as one of the preeminent stylists and craftsmen working with words in English, one who has built a sturdy new vault of mirrors and prisms, virtually an annex to Webster's New World tome for those who care about the English language as well as Harlan's tireless, remorseless punching out of that envelope which is most especially his unique turf -- Fantasy Fiction.

Ah, but that's not all of Harlan. Let me point out that the young Harlan was often impelled to couch his fanciful discoveries and resultant notions regarding the human condition in some of the sparest, leanest, diamond-clean-and-clear prose I've ever read. As a sample of his work on that harsh, bright-lit side of the hill where chafing discipline and strict limits make the climb difficult, may I offer a work of Harlan's from long ago, a quick group of short stories which he calls, when offered together, an essay: THE THREE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS IN LIFE. It's in the Cleveland Public Library under Ellison, Harlan Ellison. Good Luck, Harlan. Your old friend, Robert Culp."

Harlan Ellison saved my life.

By Gil Lamont

This is not hyperbole. At my very lowest point, Harlan rescued me by taking me into his home. For nine and half months I slept in that deadly secret room called the Grotto, slowly rebuilding my self worth.

This appreciation by necessity breaks a couple of confidences. For the first time anywhere, I now reveal the secret of how to access the Grotto, which is carpeted in deep blue all over its padded floor and partly up its razor-rock walls. (I was forever slicing myself on the latter.)

Getting into the Grotto is easy. First, find the life-sized statue of the Venus de Milo. Twist her head counterclockwise, then climb up the helicular staircase visible through her chest. (It's a tight squeeze, but it can be done.) Take 3 rights, 2 lefts. (Careful: 2 lefts and 3 rights will put you out on Ventura Boulevard.) Rap shave-and-a-haircut knock on the ebony panel, say the password ("Swordfish" of course), and the door will swing open. Or you can enter through the back of Del Floria's Tailor Shop. Once in the Grotto you can put your hand on the wall to steady yourself and pull it back bloody.

Harlan quickly dubbed me Bunky. He was Sparky. Come early morning through the peculiar properties of the Grotto's ventilating system I'd hear the CRACK of the cue ball breaking the rack, my own cue to arise and play him the first of a dozen or so games that day. Over the months I got pretty good at pool. (One time I showed up with my own custom cue and he launched into the theme from THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE UGLY.)

I regained my skills at proofreading and editing, enough that before long I was helping assemble books such as THE ESSENTIAL ELLISON ("ichthyimp" in the interstitial material is mine) and MEDEA: HARLAN'S WORLD (I retranscribed the seminar that was MEDEA's germ and gave Harlan the unfinished furniture metaphor). And even after I moved out Harlan would fly me back from out of town to work on a book whose deadline was fast approaching (or sometimes fast departing).

Oh, the wild times Sparky and Bunky had! Defoliating the hill behind the house of that awful ivy. Checking out the fantastic hole-in-the-wall restaurants Harlan had a nose for finding. Debating the sometimes

dubious merits of the films screened for the "Harlan Ellison's Watching" column. Mastering the art of "the fave," which only I could extract correctly from Dupar's. Tagteaming the exegesis of LABYRINTH as a metaphor for sexual awakening to a sweet young thing come a-calling who stayed for lunch. Soliciting a date for me from the audience at a convention (success: zero).

Another confidence betrayed: Harlan is a generous man. When the tv news featured a story about a poor woman whose upstairs neighbors had jacked into her electrical supply, sticking her with a \$500 bill that the electric company refused to forgive, even though he couldn't afford it Harlan paid that bill anonymously.

Over the years, Harlan has paid a lot of other people's bills, and more than his share of dues. He's given until he thinks there's nothing left to give. But somehow he picks himself up and climbs back into the ring for another round.

I can't and won't discuss his body of work. Other writers can do that better than I ever will. (I think its unflinching examination of every aspect of the human condition will ensure that it lives long beyond its creator.) But I can attest that Harlan Ellison is a great friend, a brilliant raconteur, a quick wit, a fearless fighter for the oppressed and abused, a mensch, someone who grabs life by the throat and doesn't let go.

I am proud and privileged to call Harlan my friend. And I want him to know that I love him and cherish his friendship. And I promise him that I'll never again play Steve Reich's "Music for 18 Musicians" in his hearing (so long as he lays off the Culture Club). Finally, I leave him with an apology and a question, and I hope he understands both:

It was my last dollar.

What was the third tree?



Dear Harlan: All these years of being extraordinarily attractive, sexy, and talented! All those marvelous books and scripts! All the fights for good causes! These make me admire you, Harlan, but I LOVE you because when you're a good friend, you're the best! Congratulations---Janet Asimov

From *Comics Buyer's Guide* Senior Editor Maggie Thompson —

Sending "some words of appreciation" about Harlan Ellison is daunting, not because so few words come to mind, but because there are so many ways to appreciate Harlan.

There's his wit — and you haven't really experienced it until you've had him telephone you out of the blue to regale you with a joke he has polished to perfection.

There's his generosity — and you haven't really experienced it unless you happen to be someone to whom he has spontaneously presented a gift, whether it's his time, his talent, or his home.

There's his courage — and you haven't really experienced it unless you're aware of the extent to which he will risk everything to take a stand for what he believes.

There's his forgiveness — and you haven't really experienced it unless you've hurt him and then apologized, when his forgiveness is complete.

Those are far from the only ways that his friends appreciate him, but maybe it would be better simply to pay tribute to his genius — because we've all had a chance to experience that. It has, after all, been on display to the world for more than half a century.

One more aspect of the Grand Master that is Harlan is, I think, some sort of feeling of obligation — the necessity to share yet another story, yet another essay, yet another joke to inform and entertain and affect the rest of us. I have a sneaking feeling that he may have stashed a typewriter somewhere today so as to continue to produce even more stories and essays and jokes for the rest of us. Please, Harlan, just this once: Relax and let others entertain you!

With the understanding that I am among impressive, highly verbal, eminently accomplished company in my wish to share words regarding Harlan Ellison, I will keep this billet-doux brief. Besides, any stories that I might like to share of my friendship with Harlan that are *truly* worth telling—tales that might characterize this beloved father figure of mine (he prefers BIG BROTHER figure) as anything more than a simple Jew from Ohio—would certainly constitute a breach of our friendship. And there is no excuse for that.

I cannot count how many times Harlan has stood up for me, helped me professionally and personally, and one must bare this in mind as he terrorizes a waiter at my favorite restaurant—the only decent kosher steak house in *all* of Manhattan (forcing me to either wear a disguise when I visit NY City, or eat *milchiks*). I am forever grateful to Harlan for convincing my father-in-law to allow me to marry his daughter and must affix this in the back of my brain as I'm being berated over the phone by Harlan (at least once each week) for being an illiterate or a nincompoop or astonishingly ill-informed.

There is no Hugo awarded for Friendship. There are no Nebulas bestowed for fraternity above and beyond the pale. But this, to me, is Harlan's greatest achievement. There is nothing I admire more than his *genuine* commitment to the mere mortals he keeps company with, and I number among *my* greatest achievements the pact of our friendship.

If he had only been the greatest writer of the last half-century, *dayanu*—it would have been enough.

Clifford Meth

I knew Harlan Ellison before he knew me. And not just through his written works. I walked behind him once on a WGA picket line in the eighties and was regaled by his non-stop patter and firebrand rants.

At a rally during another WGA strike (or maybe the same one...they all blur), he gave another of his firebrand rants that made you proud to be a writer and just share the same space with him.

At a membership meeting during yet another WGA strike (or maybe still the same one), the internecine squabbling among guild members had reached such bloodthirsty vehemence that someone, pleading for peace in the ranks, mentioned that "Harlan Ellison received a death threat." From somewhere in the sea of bodies, a disembodied voice spewed out, "Not enough!" That's the thing about being a firebrand...you don't care about being liked by everybody.

I was finally formally introduced to Harlan in the mid-nineties at an Edgar Rice Burroughs Bibliophiles Dum-Dum ("dum-dum" being ape-speak in the Tarzan books for gathering). He was the guest of honour. He noticed in the programme that I had been one of the organizers. He had me summoned to the speakers' dais because he wanted to tell me how much he had admired a recent movie of mine. Instead of just graciously accepting his compliments, I immediately went off on the cretinous director, the craven producer, grouching about all the various flaws in the finished film that had diminished my brilliant screenplay. Harlan was quite amused by this. "You sound just like me," he said.

Later that evening, I was quite amused by him when he gave another of his famous firebrand speeches...which was also very funny. Alas, my wife Julieanne (who wouldn't be caught dead at a Dum-Dum unless it was to meet Harlan Ellison, her literary demi-god) and I were among the only few laughing. The greying, pot-bellied, rather Republican crowd that made up most of Burroughs fandom was not getting the jokes.

At the end of the evening Ellison said to Julieanne and me, "I'll have you up to the house; we'll become friends. He did; we did.

And what a rare privilege and honour that friendship is. It enfolds you, enriches you, and enlightens you with fierce loyalty, warm generosity, brazen laughter, and blindingly bright conversation of intelligence and wit. And you discover the firebrand is also a pussycat.

And if all that weren't enough, sometimes he'll read you a work-in-progress or a new story that no other ears have ever heard before. Wow! How lucky can you get!

Charles Edward Pogue
(Screenwriter of THE FLY, DRAGONHEART, DOA)

Harlan Ellison is our Old Testament prophet crossed with a jester who throws wondrous and beautiful jelly beans on us all. We're blessed to have him among us. A few anecdotes:

Years ago, when one of my friends learned that I'd met Harlan, she said, "Harlan Ellison, who wrote that column for the Freep? That column kept me alive and sane." Years later another friend said the same thing, in almost the same words. When I was teaching at Cornell, Harlan called, asking if I might line up a gig for him somewhere in the area, to help with travel expenses. I called the Cornell English Department and their Creative Writing Program, both of whom reacted as if I were trying to sell them dirty French post cards or something even more dubious. So I called nearby Ithaca College and proposed the same to them. This time I barely got Harlan's name out before a gorgeously excited voice erupted from the phone: "HARLAN ELLISON HERE? WONDERFUL!" Yes, Harlan and his work are wonderful, were wonderful and will be wonderful. He's not (thank the cosmos) respectable in Cornell University terms (ugh!) but in a wiser world some TV network would give him a channel of his own, saying "Here, it's yours. Do what you want with it."

Hasn't anybody collected his TV plays? They're absolutely superb. I hadn't listened to "Grammar" for three sentences before I knew that the play—which was a tour de force almost monologue by a quite young boy—was going to be dramatically superb. And it was.

Hey, I can't do Harlan justice in a few lines. Who could?

Joanna Russ

I first met the kid in 1952. (I call him that because I'm ten years older than he is.) I had just married and was on my honeymoon (a more or less nightmarish drive across the country to visit my mother and family; I have been, I hope, compensating for that eldritch drive for 55 years and I believe that my wife has more or less forgiven me for it.)

Anyway, part of our itinerary (to describe it in a polite way) was Chicago to stop by the (I guess) World Science Fiction Convention. I was searching the hotel lobby for my bride; I could not find her. I was not besieged by autograph seekers since I had only one story published—and that short short. So there I was in the crowded lobby, searching, when this young chap appeared before me, wearing, I seem to recall, a dark suit and—the memory of this is vivid—a tiny pipe jutting from the side of his lips which, I observed during my brief stay at the convention, remained as fixed in place as that of Popeye.

At any rate...

The young gentleman eyed me with assurance glinting in his eyes and spoke these immortal words; at least immortal to me if not to the U.N.

"Hi, Dick. Ruth's in the crapper."

Little did he (or me) know what he'd be up to in the next 55 years—hey, that's as long as I've been married!

Harlan does not remember this scene—I'd forget it too except that I didn't. But this note—which is becoming so extensive that Barry Hoffman might publish it—is designed (not by me obviously) as "some words of appreciation." Which I will attempt to append (good phrase).

I do appreciate Harlan. For a number of reasons. One: He has always been a good friend, very kind and generous to me as a person (whatever that is) and a writer—which I have now disproved by the length and garbled presentation of my "few words."

But I do appreciate him. He has accomplished in his fiery lifetime what almost all writers (at the head of the list, *moi*) have failed to do: that is, become a viable part of REAL LIFE.

-Richard Matheson

A QUICK ODE

David Twohy

I can divide my time on Earth into two categories – days spent with Harlan Ellison, and days spent without him. The former are certainly more stimulating, the latter surely more sane.

Fifteen impressionable years old was I when Harlan first made landfall in my life. It was at some comic book convention, and “HE” was speaking from a dais so lofty it seemed to treble his true stature. Harlan was waving around a gold watch for all the assembled to see, claiming it had cost five thousand dollars, and further claiming that he had paid for it by – get this – moving words around on paper.

And oh, how he moved those words around!

I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream, The Glass Teat, The Other Glass Teat, Deathbird Stories, even the *Dangerous Visions* series “HE” merely edited. I drank them all in a binge. The tales were always provocative, typically shocking, sometimes downright assaultive. “You can write like this?” I asked in punch-drunk wonder. “You can actually put two fucking colons in the same sentence?” The unspoken answer seemed to be “You can do whatever you want. It’s your story. It’s your writing.” More and more, hundreds upon hundreds of pages I must’ve consumed, all this in a fever-dream of reading and learning that probably, more than anything else, shaped the manner in which I write professionally to this day -- some 35 years after that ostentatious watch-wagging show of his.

To be fair, I think the point of the watch was to express that writing is a workaday trade and, that like other trades, one should expect proper recompense for it. Don’t treat writing as a hobby, don’t treat it as an art: Just put the fucking words on paper, don’t be dull about it, then get that check to the bank and make sure it clears.

Words to live by.

So thank you, Harlan Ellison. I owe you much, and if you didn’t know that before, I trust you do now.

How maddening it must be to awake each morning as Harlan Ellison does (and has, for the past fifty years and more now) and to know – actually and totally *know*, down to the core of his soul and to the seat of his meat – that if he'd only had the luck of accident to have been born in South America or Central America (perhaps even in smog- and corruption-filled Mexico, who knows?), that he – Harlan Ellison – would have long since been shortlisted and most probably selected for the Nobel Prize for Literature, his work having been glowingly reviewed and praised and anthologized and celebrated and translated for decades as “magical realism” rather than ghettoized and shunted aside by the North-American Powers-That-Be as “sci-fi” (pronounced, as Harlan has taught us correctly to pronounce it, “skiffy.”)

This is not hyperbole. This is, as Harlan would alliteratively and accurately phrase it, a simple fucking fact, folks.

But God, in Her infinite perversity, did not allow Harlan to be born in Caracas, nor in Córdoba, nor in Cali or Cúcuta, nor in Concepción, Careas, Chuquicamata, Chitré, Cúcuta, Chacabuco, Campos, nor any other place where the mantle of magical realism inevitably would have been bestowed upon the *oeuvre* of a Harlan Ellison (by any other name), to be followed, equally as inevitably, by all the literary honors our small and not-very-literate planet can bestow.

No, as we all assembled here know, God decided, in her infinitely small-minded and maliciously ironic way, to allow Harlan to be born in Cleveland, Ohio, United States of America, just after the end of the first third of that seething, soul-sucking nightmare known as the Twentieth Century.

And Harlan's misfortune of birth has been our great good fortune of proximity and access.

Presumably the works of Ellison already have been translated into sixty-three quintillion languages (and shall continue to be translated into new languages up to and beyond that day when thump-drive interstellar starships haul word-encoded reading stones, each heavily copyright-protected, carrying “*Repent Harlequin!*” *Said the Ticktockman* and “*Mefisto in Onyx*” and “*I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream*” and “*Jeffy is Five*” and “*The Deathbird*” and a thousand other Ellison tales outward bound to the Gulpher Reach and beyond) . . . but aren't we glad we got to read these tales in their original and undiluted English? (I am sure that “bugfuck” translates into French, Russian, and Swahili, but I am equally sure that some of its ineffable beauty and power must be lost in translation.)

And aren't we glad that we got to read these Ellisonian screams of outrage hurled into the maw of an unjust and insensate universe in the same centuries in which those very crimes against humanity and justice which Harlan decries lay red-raw on our common skins, like shared whiplashes?

#

There are three aspects to Harlan Ellison that have to be discussed and understood. The first is his personality. As with certain other alpha-personalities – Ernest Hemingway, say, or Golda Meier or George Patton or Arthur Flegenheimer – Harlan rearranged the orbits of every human planet in every room he entered. The sparks from Harlan's personality have lighted campfires of conversation among readers and fans for decades and will continue to do so for decades more, but at times the perilous pleasures of encountering that personality have occluded the more important aspects of the man and his work.

The second and perhaps lesser-known aspect of Harlan Ellison lies in his lifelong service as high-priest to good writing.

If quality writing – the Word -- were a golden chalice or sacred 1,000-karat diamond, it would be kept safe in a sealed temple accessible only after a long and exhausting pilgrimage through thick jungle, blizzard-lashed mountains, and endless, burning sands. Around that temple there would be a moat filled with raging saurians. The only access would be across a narrow drawbridge riddled with trapdoors and under an arch boasting a hair-triggered portcullis. The only door would be guarded by the usual three-headed Cerberus and this hell-hound would have been bred specifically to sniff out and dismember imposters, poseurs, dilettantes, and slackers. Inside – as one approached the high, gleaming altar of good writing – there would be a final High Priest set there by the gods to interrogate – mercilessly – any pilgrims or would-be practitioners of the Word who had made it that far. Those who failed the High Priest's quizzings would be banished into the outer darkness, never to be allowed near the temple or its golden chalice and sacred gem again.

Harlan is that High Priest, of course. But he is also the jungle, the mountains, the desert, the raging saurians, the drawbridge, the portcullis, and – most certainly – the slacker-sniffing Cerberus. In a real sense, he is the temple itself in which the Word has been kept sacred and safe for almost three-quarters of a century now.

"Writing," explained Kafka, "is a form of prayer."

I met Harlan Ellison a little more than a quarter of that century ago and the circumstances of that encounter – at a writers' workshop in the remote mountain reaches of Colorado – have become something of their own legend in the skiffy circles both he and I sometimes travel.

At that workshop, a bevy of hopeful adults – some of them sane and solid men and women in their sixties and older who had held out the dream of becoming writers for fifty years and more, and a few young upstarts such as myself – several whose manuscripts were read and critiqued by Harlan were also told by Harlan that the human language was not their native tongue. After so many years of encouragement by their elementary teachers, high-school teachers, college professors, husbands, wives, friends, children, grandchildren – all people who loved these would-be writers but who didn't really give a shit whether the writing *in-and-of-itself* was good or not – all of these hopefuls and wannabes were shot down without apparent mercy by this five-foot-four-inch Jew with no credentials in his quiver other than several thousand stories sold and a Los Angeles home creaking under the weight of awards.

As Harlan himself described that day in an introduction he wrote more than seventeen years ago for my first short story collection, Ellison was finishing his quiet dismemberment of one such bad writer – a dignified elderly man, tall, thin, determined, polite, but tone deaf to his own inability to write –

“As I spoke, the room grew tenebrous. Some of the attendees slumped far down in their chairs, as if trying to vanish from my sight. Others turned away, using one hand as a blinder. On the faces of some of them I saw a look that must parallel that worn by soldiers in combat when they see, with guilt and human relief, that the bullet has struck the next man in the trench.”

Ellisonian hyperbole? Not in the least. I know. I was one of those slumping, quivering, shell-shocked writers in attendance. But my story had been chosen to be critiqued next by Harlan Ellison. I *was* the next man in the trench . . . the next bullet, or salvo of bullets, was meant for *me*. I was thirty-four years old, my wife was pregnant with our first child, I hadn't been sure about attending this damned workshop in the first place, and now I had only minutes to live.

People busy avoiding Harlan's gaze now also avoided looking at me. He had pushed his glasses up on the top of his head and was reading my manuscript with a scowl of concentration, making occasional slashes at the page with his pen in a way that we'd all come to dread in the preceding two hours. I seriously considered tiptoeing out into the hallway, leaving the building, finding my car in the lot, and driving the five hours east towards home and safety.

But I did not. When the survivors and spectators were assembled again, Harlan critiqued my short story. He found every weakness – rooted out each specific incidence of posturing or lazy word choice or tapdancing where I had not truly solved the problem of the paragraph. But he also liked the piece. He praised it with the same specificity with which he had torn apart the earlier pieces.

Again in Harlan's voice here from his introduction –

"The section was stunned. Fifteen minutes earlier they had seen a poor guy eviscerated, and now they were seeing some other guy raised as a symbol of everything they hungered to possess. (Had I planned the encounter as a demonstration of the two edges of a sword, I could not have put it together more perfectly. In real life, one does not encounter these neat, symbolic scenes of contrast. In real life it's messy, and rarely plotted for the epiphany. But here I had stumbled into just such a set-piece.)"

"Then I said, 'Now, having said that to you, I will change your life forever."

" 'Mr. Simmons, you are a writer."

" 'You will always be a writer, even if you never set down another word. There may be another writer among this crowd, but I think it unlikely that anyone else here is as totally and correctly and impressively a writer as are you. But now that I've told you that, I must tell you this: you will never, not ever be allowed to turn away from that."

" 'Now that you have the knowledge, you are doomed to spend the rest of your life working at this lonely and holy profession. Your relationships will suffer; your wife and family – if you have them – will inevitably hate you; any woman you come to love will despise that part of you for whom the writing is irreconcilable mistress; movies you will miss because you have a deadline; nights you will go without peace or sleep because the story doesn't work; financial woes forever, because writers don't usually make enough to pay the rent, allow the spouse to quit a second job, buy a kid a toy."

" 'And the most awful part of this, is that most of you think I dumped on that man . . . ' and I pointed to the kindly old gentleman I'd savaged, ' . . . but I've crowned with laurels this man. But the truth of it, is that I was trying to save his life, and I've just sentenced Simmons to a life of unending labor, probably very little recognition, and a curse that will be lifted, even after death!"

“ ‘You are a writer, Mr. Simmons. And you know how you can make book on that? You know you’re a writer, when a writer says you’re a writer.’”

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Well, obviously no real-life event can be as perfectly scripted or as dramatically well-timed as this scene just depicted.

But it was.

I was there.

And I’ve learned since that one doesn’t know that he or she is a writer when a mere *writer* says that he or she is a writer . . . no, it takes a writer with the blue-flame ferocious honesty of a Harlan Ellison to bestow such a gift; a writer to whom the written Word is sacred; a writer who has made of himself not merely a judge of would-be writers, but himself a *crucible* – a searing crucible of flame that burns away all dross, in his own work and in others, knowing that the rest of any real writer’s life will be an endless succession of similar crucibles: not just unpleasant heat from readers and editors and reviewers and critics and academics, but also and always the searing flames of self-doubt.

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So we come to the third and final part of Harlan Ellison – his writing. His work.

When all else fades – when the wild tales of his extraordinary life are lost to memory, when the hatred of his enemies and the gratitude and love of those who have benefitted from his life and teachings are less than the muted echo of a half-heard sound – his work will remain.

Among the excellence of Harlan Ellison’s work there are some pages, some passages, some complete stories, some entire batches of stories, that go beyond mere workaday writerly excellence and which will earn the man something we can only call – with our mortals’ embarrassment at even using the phrase – literary immortality.

As a stylist, Harlan Ellison emerged from an early unfocused explosion of sheer energy into a tempered maturity and from that maturity moved to a new definition of his own excellence, and from that high, strong point then moved . . . beyond. Into a stylistic realm of his own creation and one that only he could inhabit. This has always been true of our greatest stylists, both within the sweet circle of imaginative literature and throughout the greater sphere of literature, and such style cannot be neither taught nor learned. It can only be achieved. It can only be created. And, as John Keats once explained to us, "That which is creative must create itself."

Harlan has created not only the myth and legend of himself but also the absolute quality of his work. The latter will survive.

When John Keats was a very young man – to be specific it was in August of 1818 while 22-year-old Keats was attending the deathbed of his brother Tom even while beginning his epic poem *Hyperion* – he wrote to his other brother George, "I think I shall be among the English Poets after my death."

Great writers – damn their eyes! – know they're great. My guess is that Harlan Ellison was younger than twenty-two when he knew for a certainty that he would be among the great American writers.

All the rest of us can do is scramble to catch up to the artists' own self-knowledge in our appreciation of the work and talent of such men. I'm glad that the Cleveland Library and the city of Cleveland caught up. I'm also glad that the too-often myopic and too-frequently solipsistic Great Eye of literary awareness in our country is finally opening, turning, and focusing on the fact that the fire of Harlan Ellison still burns strong and clear and hot on the darkening American ridgeline.

I am privileged to add my barbaric yawp to this bag of barbaric yawps set out to honor the man.

- Dan Simmons

A Tribute to
Harlan Ellison

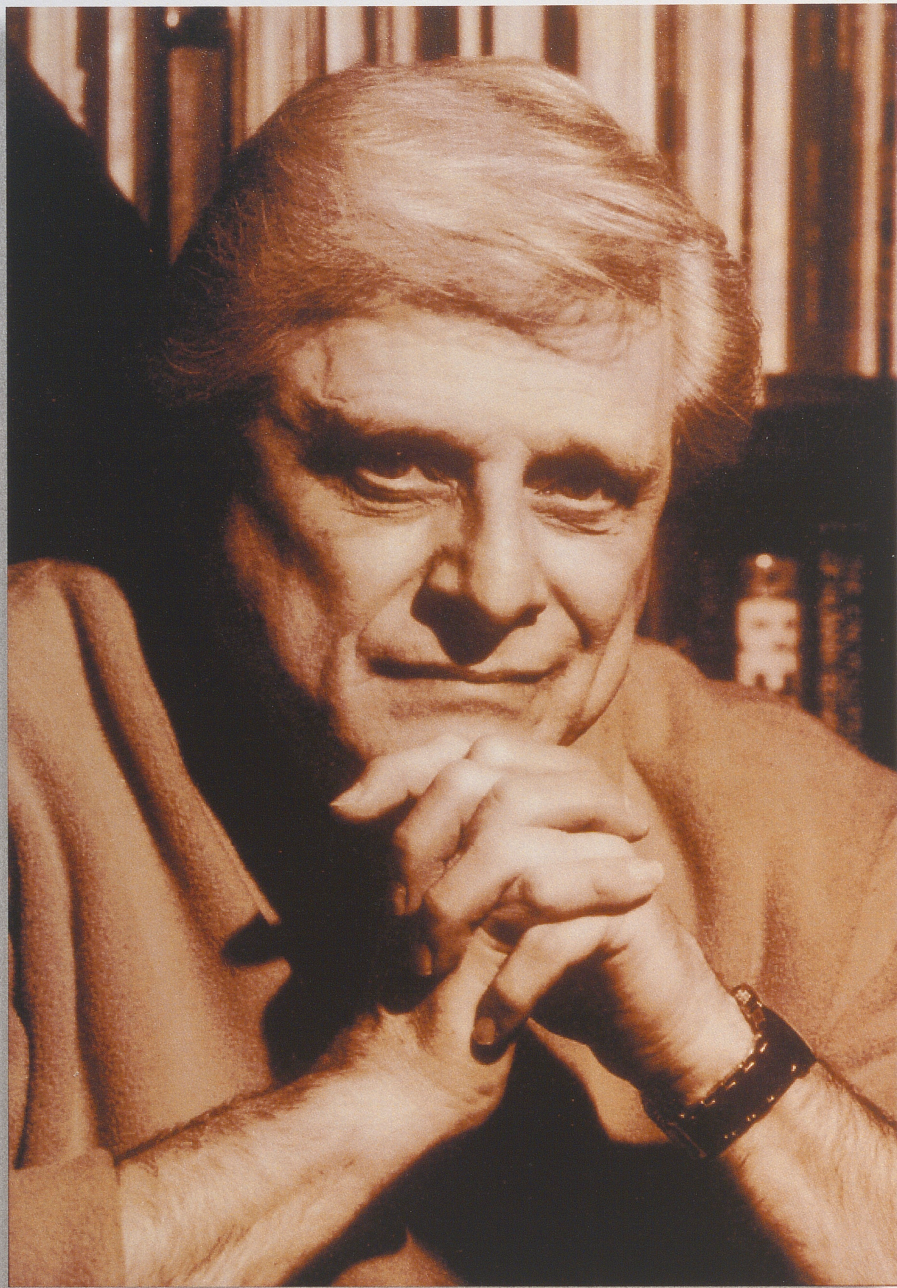


Photo by Thomas De Soto

