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Ballast Quarterly Review, v06n3, Spring 1991

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B A L L A S T

Q U A R T E R L Y

R E V I E W



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Ballast Quarterly Review, Volume 6, Number 3, Spring 1991. Founder, editor, contents arbitrator, usage sleuth, entertainment engineer, layout monkey with a t-square for a brain, keyboard cop, spelling cad and address man: Roy R. Behrens. Copyright © 1991 by Roy R. Behrens.

Note: Many of the entries in this issue were suggested by Gordon Mennenga, a reader as well as a writer from Iowa City, who wrote the monolog for *The Prairie Home Companion* (the old show) about Buddy Holly, who perished when his airplane crashed in an Iowa cornfield on 3 February 1959.

Cover illustration by Jonathan Carlson, a reader from Baltimore, Maryland.

BALLAST is an acronym for Books Art Language Logic Ambiguity Science and Teaching, as well as a distant allusion to **BLAST**, the short-lived publication founded during World War I by P[ercy] Wyndham Lewis, the Vorticist artist and writer. **BALLAST** was established in Hotchkiss, Colorado, in 1985, moved to Pea Ridge, Arkansas, then Disputanta, Virginia, then westward (ho) to Prophetstown, Illinois – and now Iowa. Initially it was a protest against desquamation, equiponderance, fried onions and leptoprosopy. Its editor having stepped into the gum of advanced middle age, it is now chiefly a flexible strand of more or less chewable excerpts from books, magazines, and other publications. Put differently, it is a journal devoted to wit, the contents of which are intended to be insightful, amusing or thought-provoking.

The purposes of **BALLAST** are educational, apolitical and noncommercial. It does not carry paid advertisements, nor is it supposed to be purchased or sold. It is published every three months, more or less, beginning in October and ending in June. There is no charge for subscriptions as such, and (to the extent that finances allow) the journal will gladly be mailed to persons who send in a mailing address and two first class U.S. postage stamps for each issue. In other words, to receive **BALLAST** for one year (four issues), we ask that each reader contribute a total of eight genuine unused U.S. postage stamps, interesting or not. Do not send postage meter slips. When subscribing, good-looking or unusual stamps are preferred. We do not accept phone orders.

T.A. (Tad) Dorgan [American cartoonist quoted in M. Thomas Inge, *Comics as Culture*): Half the world are squirrels and the other half are nuts.



Gary Kelley

“Look, a cantaloupe is a hard thing to buy -- maybe the hardest thing there is to buy, when you stop to think about it. A cantaloupe isn't an apple, you know, where you can tell from the outside what's going on inside. I'd rather buy a car than a cantaloupe -- I'd rather buy a *house* than a cantaloupe. If one time in ten, I come away from the store with a decent cantaloupe, I consider myself lucky. I smell it, sniff it, press both ends with my thumb...I'll tell you about making a mistake with a cantaloupe: *we all do it*. We weren't made to buy cantaloupe. Do me a favor, Herm, get off the woman's [back], because it isn't just Lil's weakness buying a [lousy] cantaloupe: *it's a human weakness*.”

Philip Roth, *Patrimony: A True Story* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990).

Gerald Burrill: The difference between a rut and a grave is the depth.

One little girl never brought anything to sharing time. Other children might bring an authentic Indian head-dress acquired on a vacation in Arizona, or a Civil War sword handed down from Great Granddad, but whenever the teacher asked: "Dori, do you have anything to share with us today?" she only stared at the top of her desk, shaking her head firmly from side to side.

Then one day, long after her turn had mercifully passed, Dori abruptly left her seat and walked to the front of the class. With everyone's startled attention she began: "Today on the way to school I found something that I want to share." She held her arm stiffly out in front of her and began slowly dropping tiny pieces of shredded Kleenex. "See?" she said. "Snow."

Vernon Fisher. *Navigating the Stars* (Chicago and Kansas City: Landfall Press & Karl Oskar Group, 1989), p. 24. Suggested by Anna Martin, a reader from Cedar Falls, Iowa.

Highly Recommended: D.J.R. Bruckner, *Frederic Goudy* (New York: Abrams, 1990). While ironically set in a typeface (Bodoni) which Goudy disliked and did not design, few books are as pleasant or easily read as this more or less flawless pictorial view of an extraordinary and prolific type designer. This volume is the second in the *Masters of American Design* series, a must for all collections of 20th century design history.

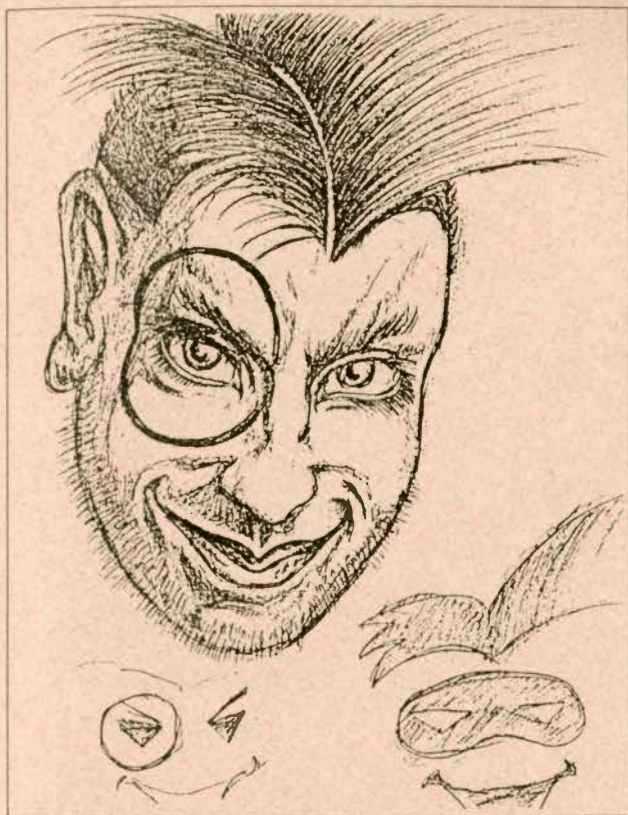
Gary Kelley



Q: What do you consider the most important tool of the genius today?

A: Rubber cement.

Donald Barthelme. "The Genius" in *Sadness* (New York: Bantam Books, 1974), p. 26.



Literature was born not the day when a boy crying wolf, wolf came running out of the Neanderthal valley with a big gray wolf at his heels: literature was born on the day when a boy came crying wolf, wolf and there was no wolf behind him. That the poor little fellow because he lied too often was finally eaten up by a real beast is quite incidental. But here is what is important. Between the wolf in the tall grass and the wolf in the tall story there is a shimmering go-between. That go-between, that prism, is the art of literature.

Vladimir Nabokov, "Good Readers and Good Writers" in *Lectures on Literature* (New York: Harvest/HBJ Book, 1980), p. 1.

Recommended: Philip B. Meggs, *Type and Image: The Language of Graphic Design* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1989). An important if largely imperfect attempt to provide an overview of the process of designing by a prominent design scholar, author of *A History of Graphic Design*. What should be an extraordinary banquet comes off as a more or less interesting lunch.

The imagination is a cynic. By that I mean that it can accomodate the most disparate elements with no regard for relative values. And it does this by assuming all things have equal value, which is a way of saying nothing has any value, which is cynicism.

Richard Hugo, "The Triggering Town" in *The Triggering Town* (New York: Norton, 1982), p. 15.

Highly Recommended: John Pile, *Dictionary of 20th Century Design* (New York: Facts on File, 1990). Few works are as thorough or sparingly phrased as this illustrated guide to styles, individuals, objects and technical terms in modern design. Its disappointment resides in its failure to be designed (and illustrated) with the same exactness.



When the *New York Post* and *New York Sun* were feuding early in this century, an editor on the *Post* called the *Sun* "a yellow dog." Answered a *Post* editor, most aloofly, "The *Post* calls the *Sun* 'a yellow dog.' The attitude of the *Sun*, however, will continue to be that of any dog toward any post."

Robert Hendrickson, *American Literary Anecdotes* (New York: Facts on File, 1990), p. 11.

Ray Bradbury: [My short stories] run up and bite me on the leg -- I respond by writing down everything that goes on during the bite. When I finish, the idea lets go and runs off.

In colonial Mexico an old woman one day complained to two priests of their abuse of her. When in astonishment they protested, she reminded them that the day before they had chased a bat from their house. "I was that bat," the old woman said, "and now I am exhausted."

John Haines, "Shadows" in S. Walker, ed., *The Gray Wolf Annual Three: Essays Memoirs and Reflections* (Graywolf Press, 1986), p. 150.

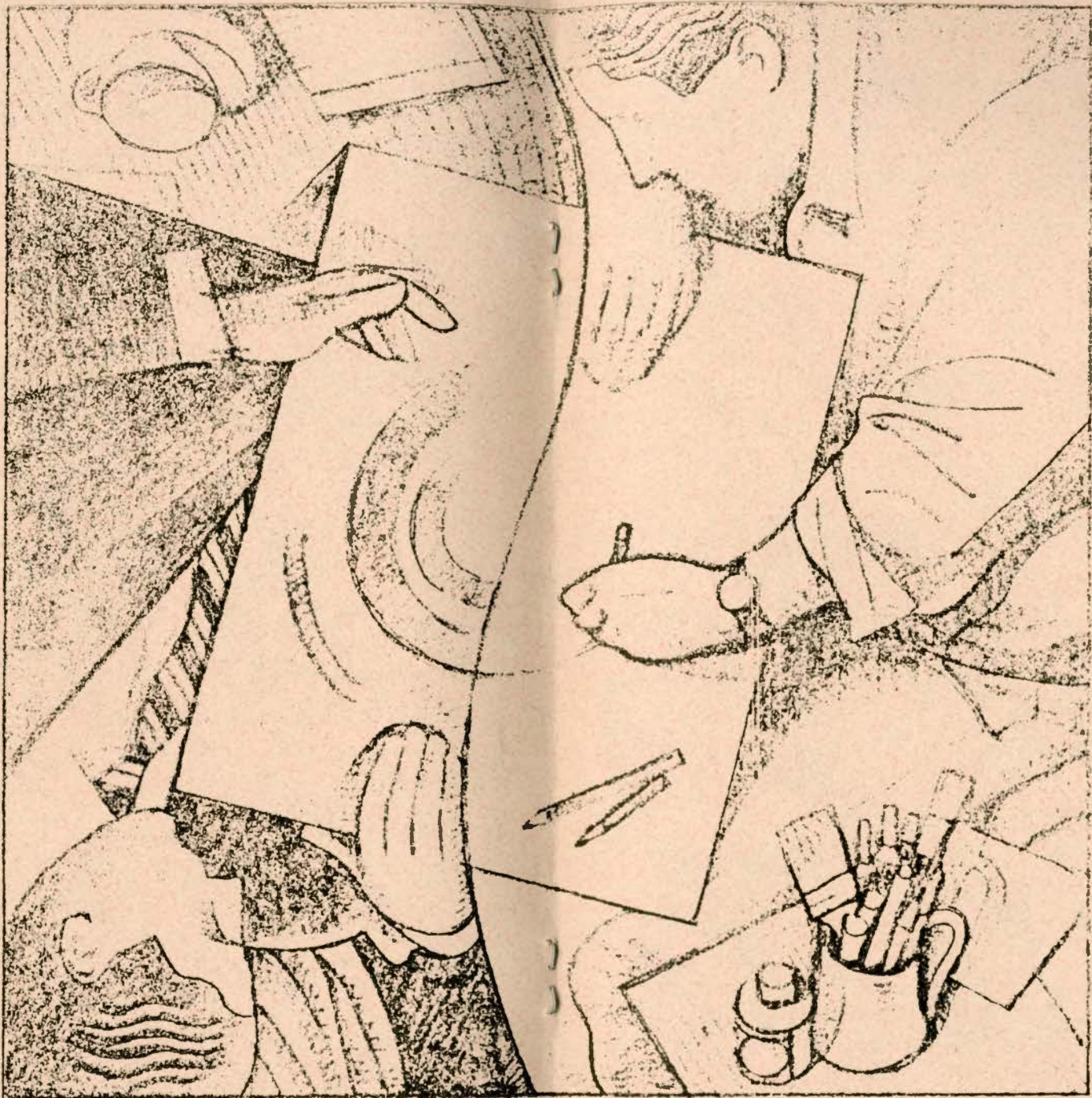
Jonathan Carlson



I had a thrilling discovery while browsing among the books of local history in the Worcester Public Library. There I learned that the Indians who once lived on the shores of Lake Webster had a word of their own for it: Chauggogagogmanchauggagogchabunagungamaugg. To think that this was reputed to be the longest lake-name in the world! To know, moreover, that this fantastic porridge of syllables made sense, and what delicious sense, signifying: "I-fish-on-my-side, you-fish-on-your-side, nobody-fishes-in-the-middle!"

Stanley Kunitz in "Swimming the Lake Chauggogagogmanchauggagogchabunagungamaugg" from O. Bertagnolli and J. Rackham, eds., *Creativity and the Writing Process* (New York: John Wiley, 1982), p. 171.

Highly Recommended: Robin Williams, *The Little Mac Book* (Berkeley: Peachpit Press, 1990). We love this book, mostly because it's a wonderful way to introduce students to Macintosh computers. This is a new edition of *Macintosh Basics: An Informal Guide to Using the Mac*, now published by Peachpit Press (1085 Keith Avenue, Berkeley, CA 94708), which offers a number of valuable books on computer-aided design, including Robin Williams, *The Mac Is Not A Typewriter*; Daniel Will-Harris, *TypeStyle: How to Choose and Use Type on a Personal Computer*; and guides to layout software like QuarkXpress and PageMaker. Write for info.



Gary Kelley

Lawrence Crumb: If you want to see the sisters in their wimples with the pimples on their dimples, making laces for the faces of the acolytes in surplices, with purples for the trimmings of the cassocks of the canons of the bishop of the diocese of Fond du Lac -- you're too late! They just passed by.

Harry Chapman: Having served on various committees, I have drawn up a list of rules: Never arrive on time; this stamps you as a beginner. Don't say anything until the meeting is half over; this stamps you as being wise. Be as vague as possible; this avoids irritating the others. When in doubt, suggest that a subcommittee be appointed. Be the first to move for adjournment; this will make you popular; it's what everyone is waiting for.

Desserts grew more and more elaborate and pies grew larger and larger until the minister of justice suffocated trying to eat a seven-foot "Jumbo Pie." *Jumbo* pie soon became *jumble* pie and "to eat a jumble pie" referred to any kind of humiliating act. When the Spanish seamen heard the word *jumble*, they pronounced it "humble," although many preferred to say nothing and simply grin.

Woody Allen, "Slang Origins" from *Without Feathers* (New York: Warner Books, 1976), p. 219.



Gary Kelley

Legend has it that, the bigger the breasts, the dumber the woman. Actually, the bigger the breasts, the dumber the man.

Anita Wise, quoted in *Mid-Atlantic Country* (September 1990). Suggested by Judith Dollenmayer, a reader from Washington, D.C.

To the Editor:

In his review of "Jurassic Park" by Michael Crichton (Nov. 11), Gary Jennings refers to me as a writer of techno-thrillers full of "arcane military hardware." As I have never written such a thriller, I assume he was thinking of Stephen Coonts, author of "Flight of the Intruder" and "Under Siege."

Please tell Mr. Jennings that I think he does a very nice job as anchorman on the ABC evening news.

Dean R. Koontz
Orange, Calif.

Dean R. Koontz from *The New York Times Book Review*, 16 December 1990, p. 34.

Recommended:
Herbert Spencer,
*Pioneers of
Modern Typogra-
phy* (Cambridge,
MA: MIT Press,
1983). Revised
edition. Initially
published in 1969,
there is still a
visual bite in this
venerable
collection of
avant-garde
posters and page
layouts from 70
years ago.

**Highly Recom-
mended:**
Sebastian Carter,
*Twentieth
Century Type
Designers* (New
York: Taplinger,
1987). An
attractive,
precisely-made
survey of the lives
and accomplish-
ments of major
type designers,
including Stanley
Morrison, Eric Gill,
Bruce Rogers,
W.A. Dwiggins,
Jan Tschichold,
and a dozen
others.

John Berry: The bird of paradise alights only upon
the hand that does not grasp.

Worms do not possess any sense of hearing. They took not the least notice of the shrill notes from a metal whistle, which was repeatedly sounded near them; nor did they of the deepest and loudest tones of a bassoon. They were indifferent to shouts, if care was taken that the breath did not strike them. When placed on a table close to the keys of a piano, which was played as loudly as possible, they remained perfectly quiet.

Charles Darwin, *The Formation of Vegetable Mould
Through the Action of Worms* (1881). Suggested by Mark
McBride, a reader from Silver Spring, Maryland.

No semicolons. Semicolons indicate relationships that only idiots need defined by punctuation. Besides, they are ugly.

Richard Hugo, "Nuts and Bolts" in *The Triggering Town* (New York: Norton, 1982), p. 40.



Lanette Hamsen

I.B. Singer: When I was a little boy, they called me a liar, but now that I am a grown up, they call me a writer.

My mother receives letters from a childhood friend who has since gone blind. When mother gets these letters, she finds that occasionally her friend has gotten off the home keys. Instead of making sense, the sentences read: drj pvvsdopmxyb gomgd yj sy jqt, etc. My mother has tried placing her hands in different positions on the keyboard and repeating the sequence to determine what was being said, but so far she hasn't been able to break the code.

Vernon Fisher, *Navigating by the Stars* (Chicago and Kansas City: Landfall Press and Karl Oskar Group, 1989), p. 17. Suggested by Anna Martin, a reader from Cedar Falls, Iowa.

How wrong Emily Dickinson was! Hope is not "the thing with feathers." The thing with feathers has turned out to be my nephew. I must take him to a specialist in Zurich.

Woody Allen, "Selections from the Allen Notebooks" in *Without Feathers* (New York: Warner Books, 1976), p. 9.

Commonsense is fundamentally immoral, for the natural morals of mankind are as irrational as the magic rites that they evolved since the immemorial dimness of time. Commonsense at its worst is sense made common, and so everything is comfortably cheapened by its touch. Commonsense is square whereas all the most essential visions and values of life are beautifully round, as round as the universe or the eyes of a child at its first circus show.

Vladimir Nabokov, "The Art of Literature and Commonsense" in *Lectures on Literature* (New York: Harvest/HBJ Books, 1980), p. 372.

"Mom died in the middle of making me a sandwich. If I had known it was going to kill her, I would never have asked."

David Ordan in "Any Minute Mom Should Come Blasting Through the Door" in *TriQuarterly* (Winter 1985).

The last words, the blessing of the young, the washing of the body, the coins on the eyelids, the deathbed confession, the deathbed reconciliation and the deathbed farewell have been succeeded or crowded by the IV, the respirator, the feeding tubes in the nostrils, the living will, the hospital roommate, the nurses.

Robert Pinsky, in his review of Philip Roth, *Patrimony: A True Story* in *The New York Times Book Review*, 6 January 1991, p. 30.

Ways to say *goodbye*: Abyssinia! Be good, but if you can't be good be careful! Don't fall out of any windows! Don't let a hearse run over you! I'll see you in the slot machines! Happy landing! I'll be suing you! I'm cutting off! S.Y.L.! Plant ya now and dig ya later! Oh reservoir! Oh river! Oh revolver! Olive oil! The current is pushing me! Bone sour!

L.V. Berrey and M. Van Den Bark, eds., *The American Thesaurus of Slang* (New York: Thomas Crowell, 1956), p. 319.



Gary Kelley

Federico Fellini:
All art is autobiographical; the pearl is the oyster's autobiography.

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BALLAST is published in a limited edition and back issues are not available. However, the magazine may be xeroxed to provide others with copies, but the copies must never be altered or sold. Our readers are encouraged to suggest offbeat examples of verbal and visual insight of the sort that the journal might publish. Original material must be explicitly labeled as such. Material which is not original must clearly make note of its author and source. All contributions are unpaid, and unsolicited material will not be returned unless accompanied by a self-addressed stamped envelope.

BALLAST doesn't have a budget really. For almost six years, it has operated at a loss. Even if we received stamps from everyone to whom we send the magazine, we would still lose money just on printing costs, without beginning to account for research, typesetting, paste-up, correspondence and so on. The losses are currently offset by donations from enlightened subscribers and generous deductions from the Subscription Valet's paycheck. If anyone is foolishly philanthropic (foolish because such contributions are surely not tax deductible), we will sometimes accept a check (made payable to Roy R. Behrens), a book on the hazards of buying a farm, one large scoop shovel, and plans for constructing a moderate pond and a Purple Martin apartment complex.

We are grateful for all of the wonderful mail we received since last issue.

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First Class Mail