

In Praise of Jewish Parody

Ansche Chesed 6 March 2007

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Ruling on Rap Song, High Court Frees Parody From Copyright Law

By LINDA GREENHOUSE

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, March 7. — The Supreme Court, carving out a safety zone for parody within the constraints of Federal copyright law, today unanimously overturned a lower court's judgment that the rap group 2 Live Crew had infringed the copyright on the rock classic "Oh, Pretty Woman" by recording its own rap version of the Roy Orbison original.

The Justices ruled that 2 Live Crew was entitled to a trial to show that its bawdy recasting of the 1964 song was a "fair use" of the original, exempt from a copyright infringement claim.

A Federal appeals court ruled in 1992 that 2 Live Crew's "blatantly commercial purpose" in recording its version, which the group described as a parody of the original, deprived it of all protection under the copyright law.

What Constitutes 'Fair Use'?

That broad ruling alarmed many who make a living through parody and made the case an important test of the doctrine of fair use, which is the one exception in Federal copyright law to copyright owners' exclusive right to control their works. Under the doctrine, a portion of a copyrighted work may be used without permission "for purposes such as criticism, comment, news reporting, teaching, scholarship or research."

There is no explicit mention of parody in the law, however. The Supreme Court had never addressed the issue, although lower courts have considered numerous song parodies in the context of fair use. One appeals court gave fair use protection to a parody of "When Sunny Gets Blue" called "When Sonny Sniffs Glue." Another court deemed a Mad Magazine parody of Irving Berlin's "A Pretty Girl Is Like a Melody,"

titled "Louella Schwartz Describes Her Malady," to be fair use.

Writing for the Court today, Justice David H. Souter said that "like less ostensibly humorous forms of criticism," parody "can provide social benefit by shedding light on an earlier work, and, in the process, creating a new one." As such, he said, parody was entitled to consideration as fair use on the same terms as other commentary.

While noting that "we might not assign a high rank" to the element of parody in the 2 Live Crew song, Justice Souter accepted the group's assertion that its song, "Pretty Woman," includ-

ed on a 1989 album, "As Clean as They Wanna Be," was intended as parody.

The original version, written by Roy Orbison and William Dees and copyrighted by Acuff-Rose Music Inc., was an upbeat tale of a man who sees, longs for and eventually captures the attention of a woman as she walks down the street. In the 2 Live Crew version, the pretty woman of the first verse becomes "big hairy woman," "bald headed woman" and "two timin' woman." The Court's opinion printed both versions, with Justice Souter commenting on the rap group's: "The later words can be taken as a comment on the naïveté of the original of an earlier day, as a rejection of its sentiment that ignores the ugliness of street life and the debasement that it signifies."

The humor of parody, Justice Souter said, "necessarily springs from recognizable allusion to its object through distorted imitation." He said that because parody's "art lies in the tension between a known original and its parodic twin," a parody has to be able to use enough of the original to be recognizable to the audience.

He said that works like parody, which take the original and effect a creative transformation, "lie at the heart of the fair use doctrine's guarantee of breathing space within the confines of copyright."

Justice Souter stressed that courts must make a case-by-case determination of whether a parody, or any other form of borrowing copyrighted material, qualifies as fair use.

Group Asked Permission

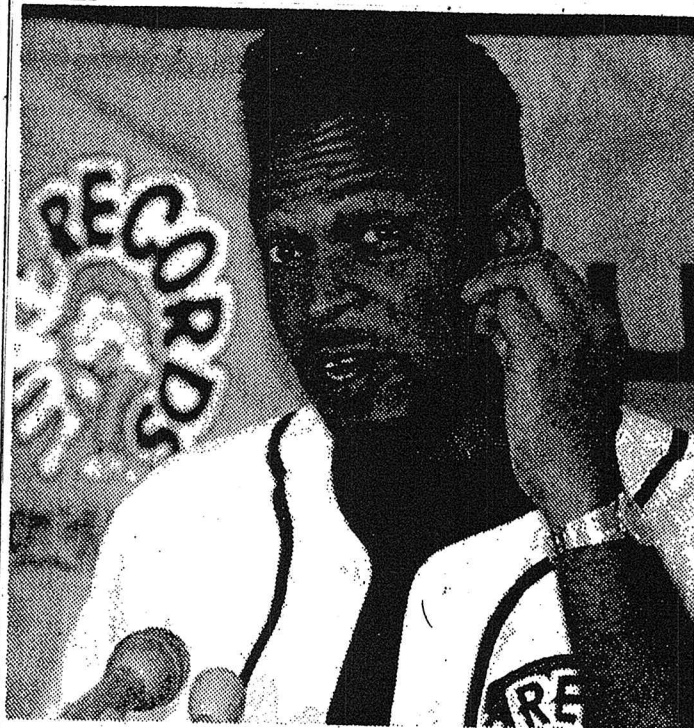
While the copyright law lists "commercial purpose" as one element in the fair use determination, the appeals court in this case mistakenly treated 2 Live Crew's profit motive as the only element, Justice Souter said. Noting that the concept of fair use comes from English common law and dates back centuries, he quoted Samuel Johnson's admonition that "no man but a blockhead ever wrote, except for money" as evidence that commercial writing should not be stripped automatically of fair use protection.

2 Live Crew had requested permission to record its version of the song, which Acuff-Rose denied. On its album, the group gave credit for "Pretty Woman" to Roy Orbison, William Dees and Acuff-Rose. After Acuff-Rose sued for copyright infringement, the Federal District Court in Nashville ruled for 2 Live Crew, a ruling that was overturned by the United States Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit, in Cincinnati.

The opinion today, *Campbell v. Acuff-Rose*, No. 92-1292, was not a final victory for 2 Live Crew. Justice Souter said the group had to persuade the lower courts of two elements essential to the fair use defense: that it had not taken any more of the original than necessary to make the point of the parody, and that the parody had not harmed the market for the original song or the potential market for new versions that Acuff-Rose may license.

While joining the opinion, Justice Anthony M. Kennedy wrote a separate, concurring opinion in which he expressed doubt that 2 Live Crew's song was a "legitimate parody" as opposed to a "commercial take-off."

The Court received "friend of the court" briefs on 2 Live Crew's behalf from Mad Magazine, the Harvard Lampoon and the political satirist Mark Russell. The Capitol Steps, a musical group here that performs topical political parodies, sent the Justices a cassette tape on which the group performs a musical history of parody in America dating to the Revolution. Acuff-Rose was supported by many briefs, including those from the Songwriters' Guild, the entertainer Michael Jackson, who owns the rights to many of the Beatles' songs, and the estates of a number of renowned composers, including Leonard Bernstein and George and Ira Gershwin.



Luther Campbell, of the rap group 2 Live Crew, speaking at a conference in Miami yesterday after the United States Supreme Court overturned a copyright infringement ruling against the group.

NYT March 8, 1994

National News

הקפות לפורים
 מדה צדק השפיעה נא. נאר ונבל הנמיאה נא. סך וספל
 השקנו ביום קראנו :
 עסיס וענב השפיעה נא. פרט פרים הנמיאה נא. צנצנת
 וצלוחית השקנו ביום קראנו :
 קצין ושר השפיעה נא. רסיסי יין הנמיאה נא. שומר תחביות
 השקנו ביום קראנו :
 תומך שבורים השפיעה נא. תירוש ודבש הנמיאה נא. תמים
 במעמו השקנו ביום קראנו :

קידוש לפורים

יום הפורים ויכולו המים מתארץ וכל צבאם: ויכל לוש ביום הפורים
 פרו אשר שטה: וישטה ביום הפורים מכל פרוי אשר שטה: ויברך
 את יום הפורים ויקדש אותו: כי בו שטה מכל משקיו אשר בחר
 לשטות :

סברי סוררים ומורים ושבורים
 ברוך אתה מוכר פרי הגפן

ברוך אתה אשר מבר לנו מכל יין. והשקנו מכל דבש
 והשפירנו בכוסותיו: ותתן לנו באהבה משקים לשמחה יין
 ודבש לששון. את יום חג הפורים הזה זמן שברותנו בארבעה עשר
 לחודש אסור לשתיית מים. כי לנו מכרת ואותנו תרוית מפרי
 פרמים ומשקי ברוך בשמחה ובששון השפירנו. ברוך אתה
 מוכר משקים ומענינים :

ברוך אתה שהשקנו והשפירנו והגמיאנו לזמן הזה :

כל

כל בו לפורים

כולל

שאלות ותשובות שכורים

מערבית לפורים. אתה הראתה. הקפות. קידוש.
 יוצרות. הושענות. זמירות. תפילת נעילה להג.
 הפורים. ושיר המעלות ליוולדת בשורים

גם אקדמות לפורים

סם סרוס כמלות

מסכת פורים

מן

תלמוד שכורים

עם פירש"ה ותוספות מרובה ומהרש"ע

גם

הגדה לליל שכורים

וגם

סליחות לפורים

The Philosopher

This humorous song (originally titled *Dos gute Kepl*) by Velvl Zbarzher (1826(?)–1883) is a satire upon the alleged miracles performed by the Hassidic rabbis. The song was first heard during the Haskalah period in Eastern Europe, when satirizing fanatic beliefs was in vogue. Many singers today erroneously interpret this song literally, as one that expresses the wonders of the rabbis. The song was later parodied during the 1905 revolutionary period to “go to the working man and learn wisdom from him.”

Kum aher, du filosof,
Mit dayn ketsishn moykhl,
Oy, kum aher tsum rebns tish
Un lern zikh do seykhl.

REFRAIN:

Bim-ba-bam. . .

A damfshif hostu oysgetrakht
Un nemst dermit zikh iber;
Der rebe shpreyt zayn tikhl oys
Un shpant dem yam ariber.

An ayznban hostu oysgeklert,
Un meynst du bist a khorets;
Der rebe shpet, der rebe lakht,
Er darf dos oyf kapores.

Tsi veystu den, vos der rebe tut
Beys er zitst bekhides? —
In eyn minut in himl flit
Un pravet dort shalesh sudes.

קום אהער, דו פֿילאָסאָף,
מיט דיין קעצישן מויכל,
קום אהער צום רבינס טיש
און לערן זיך דאָ שכל.

רעפֿריין : ביס-כא-באם . . .

א דאָמפֿשיף האָסטו אויסגעטראַכט
און נעמסט דערמיט זיך איבער;
דער רבי שפּרייט זײַן טיכל אויס
און שפּאַנט דעם ים אַריבער.

אַן אַײַזנבאַן האָסטו אויסגעקלערט,
און מײַנסט דו ביסט אַ חרוץ;
דער רבי שפּעט, דער רבי לאַכט,
ער דאַרף דאָס אויף קאַפּורעס.

צײַ ווײַסטו דען, וואָס דער רבי טוט
בעת ער זיצט ביחידות? —
אין אײַן מינוט אין הימל פֿליט,
און פּראַוועט דאָרט שלוש סעודות.

Come here, my philosopher, with your cat's brains; come to the rabbis' table and learn real wisdom. You invented a steamboat and take pride in that; but the rabbi spreads his kerchief and crosses the water. You dreamed up a dirigible and think you're so clever? but the rabbi laughs and sneers at you, for he has no need of it. In one minute he can fly up to heaven and eat his Sabbath meal there.

BONTSHE SHVAYG

Here on earth the death of Bontshe Shvayg made no impression. Try asking who Bontshe was, how he lived, what he died of (Did his heart give out? Did he drop from exhaustion? Did he break his back beneath too heavy a load?), and no one can give you an answer. For all you know, he might have starved to death.

The death of a tram horse would have caused more excitement. It would have been written up in the papers; hundreds of people would have flocked to see the carcass, or even the place where it lay. But that's only because horses are scarcer than people. Billions of people!

Bontshe lived and died in silence. Like a shadow he passed through this world.

No wine was drunk at Bontshe's circumcision, no glasses clinked in a toast; no speech to show off his knowledge was given at his bar mitzva. He lived like a grain of gray sand at the edge of the sea, beside millions of other grains. No one noticed when the wind whirled him off and carried him to the far shore.

While Bontshe lived, his feet left no tracks in the mud; when he died, the wind blew away the wooden sign marking his grave. The gravedigger's wife found it some distance away and used it to boil potatoes. Do you think that three days after Bontshe was dead anyone knew where he lay? There was not even a gravestone for a future antiquarian to unearth and mouth the name of Bontshe Shvayg one last time.

A shadow! No mind, no heart, preserved his image. Nothing remained of him at all. Not a trace. Alone he lived and alone he died.

Were not humanity so noisy, someone might have heard Bontshe's bones as they cracked beneath their burden. Were the world in less of a hurry, someone might have noticed that Bontshe, a fellow member of the human race, had in his lifetime two lifeless eyes, a pair of sinkholes for cheeks, and, even when no weight bent his back, a head bowed to the ground as if searching for his own grave.

Were men as rare as horses, someone would surely have wondered where he disappeared to.

When Bontshe was brought to the hospital, the corner of the cellar he had called his home did not remain vacant, because ten men bid for it at once; when he was taken from the hospital ward to the morgue, twenty sick paupers were candidates for his bed; when he was carried out of the morgue, forty men killed in the fall of a building were carried in. Think of how many others are waiting to share his plot of earth with him and well may you wonder how long he will rest there in peace.

He was born in silence. He lived in silence. He died in silence. And he was buried in a silence greater yet.

But that's not how it was in the other world. There Bontshe's death was an occasion.

A blast of the Messiah's horn sounded in all seven heavens: "Bontshe Shvayg has passed away! Bontshe has been summoned to his Maker!" the most exalted angels with the brightest wings informed each other in midflight. A joyous din broke out in paradise: "Bontshe Shvayg—it doesn't happen every day!"

Young, silver-booted cherubs with diamond-bright eyes and gold-filigreed wings ran gaily to greet Bontshe when he came. The flapping of their wings, the patter of their boots, and the merry ripple of laughter from their fresh, rosy mouths echoed through the heavens as far as the mercy seat, where God Himself soon knew that Bontshe Shvayg was on his way.

At the gates of heaven stood Father Abraham, his right hand outstretched in cordial welcome and the most radiant of smiles on his old face.

But what was that sound?

It was two angels wheeling a golden chair into paradise for Bontshe to sit on.

And what was that flash?

It was a gold crown set with gleaming jewels. All for Bontshe!

"What, before the Heavenly Tribunal has even handed down its verdict?" marveled the saints, not without envy.

"Ah!" answered the angels. "Everyone knows that's only a formality. The prosecution doesn't have a leg to stand on. The whole business will be over in five minutes. You're not dealing with just anyone, you know!"

מ ס כ ת

ע מ י ר י ק א

מ

תלמוד ינקאי

עם פרוש קצר ומספיק.

מחבר ומסדר מאת

גרשון ראזענצווייג

ניו יארק.

1909.



הוצאת בית מסחר הספרים ש.
ש. דרוקערמאן, 50 מאנעל סטריט, ניו יארק.

מסכת אין בין פרק ראשון עמיריקא א

מתני' אין בין עמיריקא. למעליה. שלשה חלקי יסוד: והיה לנוס שמה. קמיירי: אלא שעבוד מלכות. שהחלק הרביעי לא נכרא אלא לאחר

דנית זעמיריקא:
וחכמים אומרין.
לשעבוד מלכות
זעמיריקא נמי
איכא, דכל
שעבודא דזרעטי
ואוטרס לחכמי
שעבוד מלכות
הוה:



פרק ראשון

מוקלט: עמא
ריקה. על שם
רקיס וכחזים
אשאר ארנות
שצאו זה: עלו
זראשונה. לאחוקי
העולין עכשן
ללאו כלן יוחסין:
עוברי חרס
היינו חרס דרזנו
גרשון: שהיא
ממרק' עונותיהן.
על ידי שנעשו
עשירים
וממילא עונותיהן

מתני' אין בין עמיריקא לשאר
ארצות אלא שעבוד

מלכות בלבד דברי רבי ירמיה
וחכמים אומרין עמיריקא כשאר
ארצות לכל דבר:

גמ' תניא לא נבראה עמיריקא
אלא לארץ מקלט, שבשעה

גמי שלשת חלקי
הוה 3.
דקודס שנלתה
עמיריקא לא היו
נעולם אלא

שגלה קלומבוס את עמיריקא באו שלשה חלקי הישוב לפני הקדוש
ברוך הוא ואמרו לפניו רבונו של עולם כתבת בתורתך (דברים י"ט)
ושלשת את גבול ארצך, אמר להם הקדוש ברוך הוא והיה לנוס
שמה כל הוצת. אמר רב ספרא צפה קלומבוס באצטגנינות
שלו שעתידה עמיריקא שתיעשה ארץ מקלט לרקין ופוחזין
של כל העולם כלו ובקש רחמים שלא תקרא על שמו,
קראוה עמא ריקה. איני והא תנן כל הארצות עיסה
לעמיריקא שעמיריקא בחזקת יוחסין עומדת. אמר רב מבינא
מאי יוחסין פאולין של שאר ארצות כדתנן עשרה יוחסין עלו עם
עזרא מבל וקחשיב ממזרים ונתינים וכו' תניא נמי הכי עשרה
יוחסין עלו בראשונה לעמיריקא. ואלו הן רוצחים, גנבים, מוסרים,
מדליקי בתים, מזייפי שמרות, מוכרי נפשות, עדים זוממין, פושטי
הגל, עוברי חרס, ובנים סוררים ומורים, ויש אומרים אף נעדרות
שנתפתתו, ולמה נקראין יוחסין לפי שכל הפסולין של שאר
ארצות כיון שבאין לעמיריקא נעשין בה יוחסין. במתניתא תנא
מפני מה היא נקראת עמיריקא, משום שהיא ממרקת עונותיהן של

אין קול ענות נמלטים מתוך הטרפה ואין קול ענות הנסים מפני לטטים מזוינים — קול ענות יהודים, הצובאים על בית נתיבות הברזל בכסלון, נשמע ברמה אחינו בני ישראל שם רצים דחופים ומבוהלים, צרורות קטנים וגדולים בידיהם ועל שכבם, וביניהם נשים מתבוססות בכרים וכסתות, גם עוללים ויונקי-שדים בוכים, וכלם דוחקים זה את זה והרופים בצד ובכתף ומטפסים ועולים במסירת-נפש על ידיהם ועל רגליהם כסאלמה של העגלה קמדרגה שלישית, בשביל לכבוש שם מקומות לישיבתם ביד חזקה חרוץ נטויה, ואני, מגדלי מוכר ספרים, מכובל במטלטלין וכלים מכלים שונים, הגני אחר כגבר חלצי ומטפס, כרע וקורס בצבור כאחד מהם, ובאותה שעה, שאנחנו היהודים זרזים ונחפזים לעלות ברגזה ובדאגה, סמא יקדמנו אחר, חס ושלום, ומביטים בפני הממונים על העגלות כבקשה ובתחנונים, כאלו נסיעתנו שם היא חסד חנם ומדת הרחמים כצדם, — כאר הנוסעים מאמות-העולם מטיילים בעזרה לפני בית-הנתיבות וממתינים עד שיצלצל הפעמון בסנית או, בשלישית ויכנסו לתוך העגלות במתינות וכל איש על מקומו יבוא בשלום. אחרי המהומה והמבוסה המבוכה בשעת העליה מבחוץ גברה הטרדה מבפנים בכבוש המקומות. יש קנו מקומם לאלתר ברגע אחד, ויש שלא באו עוד אל המנוחה כהפצם והמתודדים כה וכה. יהודיה כרסנית, הטמנית ודברנית נדהפת ובהה הכבודה לפניו, וכאשר באה כרעה נפלה על צרורותיה, ופניה וכל תנועותיה כברבור זה, שנקנה בשוק קודם הפסח, משהובא הביתה והותרה הרצועה מעל רגליו הוא משתטח על הרצפה, זנבו וכנפיו פרושות וצופה ומביט בשמות ושואף לכל רוח, ואהריה עוד אשה אחת באה בכתה, מתרפקת על מצעותיה וסמרטוטה וקוראת לילדיה: גוש, עוש, חושו! בהמת רוח ובקול רעש גדול, היא האשה, אשר הוכיח ה' לי לשבת אחת במתיצתה בדוחק גדול עם בעלה ורוב בניה, וחבילות-חבילות מטלטליה וכסתותיה לי הומה מימיני ומשמאלי.

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Shem and Japheth on the Train

SHOLEM YANKEV ABRAMOVITSH

I

Exod. 32:18: the Golden calf.

Jer. 31:15: Rachel weeping for her children.

Ezek. 34:21.

Deut. 4:34.

It is not the voice of them that flee from a fire, neither is it the voice of them that run from armed bandits—it is the noise of Jews^o who congregate upon the train station of Ksalon [Foolstown] that is heard on high.^o There, in haste and confusion, our brethren press on, with bundles of every size and shape in their hands and on their shoulders; women, too, encumbered with pillows and bolsters and wailing infants; all jostling one another with side and with shoulder^o as they perilously hoist themselves up the ladder to the third-class compartments, where a fresh battle will be fought with a mighty and outstretched arm^o for places in the congested train. And I, Mendele the Bookseller, burdened with my goods and chattels, join manfully in the fray: I climb, stoop, and jostle my way through as one of the crowd. Yet, while we Jews hustle and work ourselves into a state of frenzied irritability, lest, Heaven forbid, someone should get ahead of us in the crush, and while we gaze beseechingly upon the railway employees, as if the fact that we are traveling at all indicates an unrequited act of grace on their part—all this while, the gentle passengers are strolling up and down the hallway in front of the station with their luggage and waiting until the bell rings for a second or even a third time, when they will mount the train at leisure, and each proceed to his appointed place.

After the hubbub outside, there is a renewed scramble for seats. Some lucky ones find places straightaway; others trail up and down in a fruitless quest. A stout, loquacious female is thrust forward, pushing baskets and bags ahead of her. She trips over them and falls headlong. Lying there, she looks for all the world like a goose bought in the market before Passover, after it has been taken home and the strap untied from its legs. It collapses on the floor with its tail and wings outspread, gazing up in terror, and gasping for air. Now, another woman appears in the doorway, clutching her bedding and bits of old clothes, shrilly urging her children to bustle along behind. This is the woman it has pleased the Lord to designate^o as my traveling companion, together with her husband and her numerous offspring: it is in their compartment that I shall sit, wedged in with the maximum of discomfort between bundles of household goods and bedding that mount up on my right and on my left.^o

Gen. 24:43.

Exod. 14:22.

[מקשה העגל]

הצובאים על הר-ציון

רחל סבכה על בניה

[יציאה מצרים]

בדמ"ך חי

העשירים הנוגשים

אח העם

[יציאה מצרים]

[אללי הבעל]

[יתרו אל משה]

קונה עולמו בשעה

אחת

הרי ישראל השוממים

[רבקה לפני אליעזר]

[קריעה ים-סוף]

Books of The Times

By Michiko Kakutani

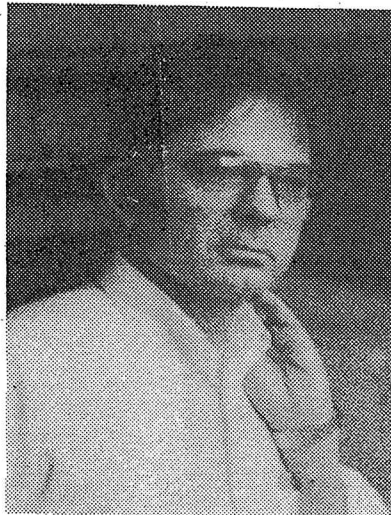
A NIGHT AT THE MOVIES. Or, *You Must Remember This.* By Robert Coover. 187 pages. Linden Press/Simon & Schuster. \$16.95.

Of all the post-modernist writers, Robert Coover is probably the funniest and most malicious, mixing up broad social and political satire with vaudeville turns, lewd pratfalls and clever word plays that make us re-think both the mechanics of the world and our relationship to it. The targets of his manic imagination are large — including religion (“The Origin of the Brunists”), baseball (“The Universal Baseball Association, J. Henry Waugh, Prop.”), the Presidency and anti-Communist fervor (“The Public Burning”) — and the methods he employs are often equally subversive of literary and philosophical conventions. In “Pricksongs and Descants,” he rewrote the stories of Joseph and Mary, Little Red Riding Hood, and Hänsel and Gretel. In “Gerald’s Party,” he refashioned the old-fashioned mystery story, turning its orderly narrative process into a mirror of mayhem and fear.

Now, in “A Night at the Movies,” Mr. Coover does a similar number on old-time Hollywood films — a perfect subject, when you think about it, for his malevolent magic. Not only do such movies rely upon conventional (and easily parodied) forms, but in

doing so, they also tend to reinforce traditional values — a faith that good will triumph over evil, order over chaos, as well as a more basic belief in cause and effect, sense and sensibility. Thus, by inverting such conventions, Mr. Coover is able to make us question our most fundamental social and cultural preconceptions. As he once wrote: “The novelist uses familiar mythic or historical forms to combat the content of those forms and to conduct the reader . . . to the real, away from mystification to clarification, away from magic to maturity, away from mystery to revelation. And it is above all to the need for new modes of perception and fictional forms able to encompass them that I, barber’s basin on my head, address these stories.”

Certainly the three full-length “features” in this volume (billed ironically enough as “Adventure!” “Comedy!” and “Romance!”) do a thorough job of destroying all our fondest expectations, while serving, at the same time, as wittily observant exercises in mimicry. In “Shootout at Gentry’s Junction,” the Sheriff — “a tough honest man with clear speech and powerful hands, fast hands, fair hands and sure” — sets out to rid his town of the notorious Mexican bandit Don Pedro. Though the Sheriff’s a tidy — and often very funny — compilation of every good guy-western cliché (“there was no sun in his eyes, here in his office, but still he squinted as he



Jack Spratt

Robert Coover

stared toward the old screen door”), he fails miserably in his showdown with Don Pedro, who winds up killing all the good guys and making off with their women.

In “Charlie in the House of Rue,” the rules of comedy are similarly subverted. In this case, Chaplin’s Little Tramp — meticulously described in terms of gestures and idiosyncratic mannerisms — is placed in a booby-trapped house of horrors. Things begin normally enough — Charlie looks about, does a lot of busi-

ness with his hat and cane — but they quickly escalate into chaos; not only do objects defy him (as they do in the original movies), but people also begin to act very strangely. By the end of Mr. Coover’s little drama, a woman has hanged herself, another woman has sexually assaulted Charlie and Charlie himself is left stranded in this surreal world, in which the reassuring conventions of slapstick humor no longer apply.

“Charlie, dabbing still at the old man’s eyes as though unable to stop himself, knocks one of the eyeballs loose,” writes Mr. Coover. “Slowly it oozes out of its socket, squirts free, and slides down his withered cheek, hanging there by a slippery thread. Desperately, Charlie tries to push the eyeball back in place, but it is difficult even to hang on to it: it keeps popping and slithering out of his grasp.”

In the final story, “You Must Remember This,” violence and sex are again used to shatter whatever sentimental notions of innocence and idealism the reader might still possess. In this rewriting of “Casablanca,” Mr. Coover turns the reunion scene between Rick and Ilsa (the one in which she threatens to shoot him, and they end up embracing) into a dirty adulterous tumble in which every shred of romance, nostalgia and honor is lost in the sulphurous atmosphere of sex.

Although each of these segments of “A Night at the Movies” is unnecessarily repetitious, although each is somewhat predictable in its willful perversity, they all manage to engage the reader’s attention, thanks largely

to Mr. Coover’s wonderful ear for language and his eye for cinematic detail. His impersonations of famous screen personalities are initially so convincing that we’re lulled into believing the characters we’re reading about are the same ones we’ve come to know and love on the screen. Consequently, we’re shocked and dismayed when they fail, in Mr. Coover’s hands, to continue to fulfill their designated roles.

The technique of setting up a familiar scenario and then destroying it is also used in other portions of this vol-

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