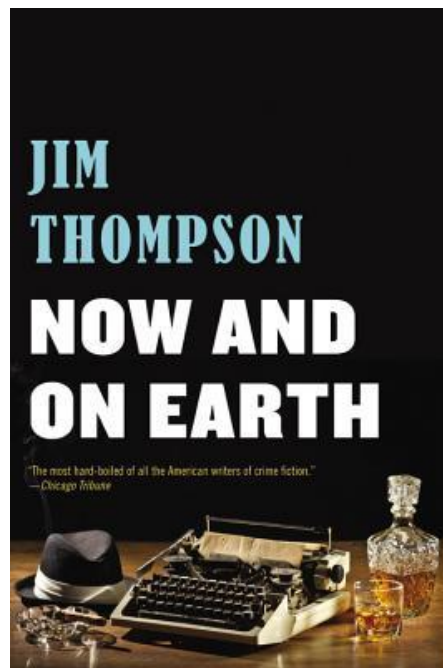




Now and on Earth

Jim Thompson

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Now and on Earth Jim Thompson

San Diego in the years before World War II. James Dillon is barely scraping by working a menial job in manufacturing, trying to raise a family and support his elderly mother and sister Frankie at the same time. He drinks too hard--just like his father and nearly everyone in his extended family. With so many people crammed into one home, sometimes there's so much fighting he can barely stand it. But if James can survive the chaos of everyday life long enough, maybe--just maybe--there's a chance it'll all get better.

NOW AND ON EARTH, Jim Thompson's first novel, draws on personal experience to depict a hardscrabble life in the sun-soaked streets of mid-20th century California. Chronicling the birth of a writer and the plight of the working man, it prefigures the American classics that followed, in a deeply-felt, autobiographical tale that shows a writer just coming into his own.

Now and on Earth Details

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Author : Jim Thompson

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From Reader Review Now and on Earth for online ebook

Blake says

I'll review the entire Red Riding Quartet, since the books really compose one large narrative.

David Peace takes us into one of the bleakest worlds I've encountered even in the most hard-boiled detective literature -- northern England from 1974-1983 (with some flashes back into an equally dismal late 60s) in which a child abductor and killer is running rampant, the Yorkshire Ripper is terrorizing the region, and the police force is hopelessly corrupt and in bed with some very bad businessmen. Squalid flats, cups of strong, cheap tea, abandoned warehouses, racist graffiti, and the encroachment of Thatcherism all add up to an atmosphere of inescapable despair. Throw in references to the Moors Murders, graphic, yet lyrical, depictions of mutilated bodies, last moments of terror, and horrific memories, and you have quite a depressing soup.

Rebecca McNutt says

Now and on Earth is a very unique book and I loved reading it. It follows the life of a man living through the horror of WWII and it captures the emotion and atmosphere of the era very well.

Patrick Bair says

A different kind of novel from a different kind of writer. I love Jim Thompson.

Guy Salvidge says

This was Thompson's first novel but it reads more like a thinly-veiled memoir and a far better one than *Bad Boy*, which was written a decade later. I think it probably helps to read the bulk of Thompson's work before this first, as I did, because this certainly isn't representative of his style as a whole. What we have here is a slice-of-life narrative without much of a plot or shape that nevertheless provides fascinating detail about working in a production plant during wartime San Diego. As a novel this is hardly a great success, but it is certainly of interest to Thompson's fans and/or those looking for period detail.

Ned says

Told purely from the harried and psychologically damaged mind of Jimmy Dillon, who struggles mightily to establish himself a writer in newly entered California. But he has a large, demanding wife and family and his own sisters and mother to keep. He struggles to keep up his writing craft, with pressure from those around him with their own misanthropic issues and mental instabilities, including an institutionalized father back home carrying the shame of professional failures. This was Thompson's first novel, apparently

autobiographical, which chronicles his flight from a troubled childhood in Oklahoma to the WWII era manufacturing in southern California. This story is told from inside his tortured mind, as he frets over uncontrollable Rechildren and a demanding and sexually frustrated wife. Ultimately he is accused of communist leanings, must explain connections to the mob and his childhood as an underaged bellhop delivering prohibition era illegal liquor.

Three stars may not be enough, as had some fine writing, but I found the narrators voice unsettling. It reminded me of Fred Exley where the incomprehensible thoughts of the protagonist are ultimately revealed to be from the damaged and fevered mind of the mentally ill. And this character has serious issues, which I realized as the story progressed. His account of reality is seriously in question, but insights into the motivations of others is colored by his mental state, such as (p. 40) when he "...knew he was laughing, and it embarrassed me. It always embarrasses me to see meanness in others, even when it is directed at me. I wince for them." The writers dilemma is told brilliantly, however, as Jimmie reaches his ultimate frustration with his resident mother and sisters who expect him to churn out great writing on demand. Near the breaking point, feeling the weight of his limitations and no sympathy for his radio writing for hire, he finally lashes out in a drunken rant saying "Do you know what that means- 36 hours? Did you eve sit down and write 36 hours of conversation? Conversation that had to sparkle, had to make people laugh or cry; had to keep them from tuning to another station....what did it get me? It got me a ragged ass and beans 3 times a week. It got me haircuts in barber colleges. It got me piles that you could stack washers on. It got me a lung that isn't even bad enough to kill me. It got me in a dump with six strangers. It got me in jail for 38 hours a week and a lunatic asylum on Sunday. It got me whisky, yes, and cigarettes, yes, and a woman to sleep with, yes. It got me 25,000 reminders 10 million times a day that nothing I'd done meant anything. It got me this, this extraordinarily valuable, this priceless piece of information that I'm not....I opened my eyes and said, 'Jack London'".

I will read Thompson again, and I will expect more. The narrators voice is unique and random, and the reader must stand back and watch. Reminded me a bit of Bukowski in his ruminations about the futility of work for its own sake and the insidious hollowing out of the artist trying to keep the physical and psychological world together against the forces bearing down.

Trixie Fontaine says

Lately all roads have been trying to lead me to Jim Thompson, so I was pretty excited when I found this book at the bottom of a stack; I forgot I bought/had it and had no expectations for it. The description on the back cover had me picturing something much darker than what wound up being sweeter and funnier than that. Not that it's a sweet and funny story, just sweetER and funnIER than I anticipated.

It was incredibly mundane and domestic - poetically so. The detailed workday descriptions reminded me of Catch-22 a wee bit and Out which apparently bored some people because of the lengthy descriptions of assembly-line work. I, however, am not bored by such things although the aircraft plant stuff was over my head in this one. It felt kind of like reading a blog/diary full of the author's frustrations.

There were tons of things I could relate to in this book, making it perfect reading for right now when I, too, am feeling a little like I just can't get a break, the world is trying to sabotage me, and the kind of work I want to do and the way I need to do it is just out of reach and nobody really fucking gets it. Plus I love how he mentioned his hemorrhoids quite a few times. It all struck me as very true. My favorite chapter was the one with the "but I'm NOT Jack London!" scene.

I personally loved this book five stars worth, but it was kind of scatty with patches of brilliance (not surprised to read this was his first novel) so I'm going to read more of him and no doubt give that stuff five stars. He nailed the anxiety-riddled personality-type, though. The kind of person/people who overthink things and get self-conscious to the point where they can't even stand or walk in a natural way and always feel (and ARE) conspicuous.

12/3/12 Changed rating to five stars after reading The Grifters.

Chrissieskleinewelt says

Rezi: <http://chrissies-kleine-welt.de/?p=1499>

James Dillon ist ein armer Schlucker. Er kann sich und seine Familie in den 40er Jahren des vergangenen Jahrhunderts gerade so mit seinem ungeliebten Job in einer Flugzeugherstellungsfabrik über Wasser halten, kämpft mit seiner Alkoholsucht und deren Folgen und hat als Schreiberling mit einer absoluten Schreibblockade und einem Haus voller Irrer genug zu tun. Ein Teufelskreislauf, aus dem es scheinbar kein Entrinnen gibt.

In autobiographischer Weise geschrieben, denn der Autor hat diese Zeiten selbst durchlebt, erzählt Jim Thompson von einem Mann und seinem Leben, das alles andere als normal verläuft. Dilly, wie der Protagonist meist genannt wird, muss aufgrund seiner Schreibblockade in einer Flugzeugfabrik arbeiten, die wegen des zweiten Weltkrieges genug Aufträge bekommt. Dort wird er schikaniert, kann sich aufgrund seiner Alkoholsucht teilweise nur schwer aufraffen und macht diesen Job eigentlich nur, weil irgendwie Geld in die Familienkasse fließen muss, damit die Miete und das Essen gezahlt werden können. Trotzdem hat man das Gefühl, dass er sich dort wohler fühlt als bei seiner Familie zu Hause, wo das Chaos regiert. Er lebt zusammen mit seiner Frau, seiner Schwester, der Mutter und den Kindern und nicht einer scheint "normal" zu sein. Dilly schwebt zwischen der Liebe zu seiner Familie und dem Wunsch, das alles hinter sich zu lassen.

"Jetzt und auf Erden" erzählt die Geschichte eines Mannes, der seinen Platz sucht und nicht findet. Armut, Unzufriedenheit und heillooses Durcheinander regieren den Alltag. Leider erging es mir so auch beim Lesen. So interessant und gut Thompson schreibt, so wirt erschien mir alles und bis heute bin ich mir nicht sicher, ob ich dieses Buch verstanden habe. Als Leser wechselt man zwischen den Welten in der Flugzeugfabrik und der zu Hause, erfährt einiges aus der Vergangenheit von Dilly und bekommt so immer wieder Happen vorgesetzt, die zwar teilweise einen heftigen Hintergrund haben, mich aber auch oft etwas ratlos zurückgelassen haben. Was möchte mir dieses Buch sagen? Möchte es mir überhaupt etwas sagen? Ich weiß es nicht und entweder erging es dem Autor ähnlich oder gerade dies war die Absicht hinter allem. Zeige ein heillos durcheinandergewürfeltes Leben in Armut auf und versetze den Leser in eine ebensolche Situation. Das hat Thompson definitiv geschafft.

Emilio says

James Dillon, poor soul, who struggles incessantly everyday just to get by. He feels trapped by his family, his job and his circumstances. He lives in a cramped home and is constantly bickering with his family (his mother and sister live with him and there is another sister who will also be moving in). He is also haunted by demons from his turbulent youth (his father, once a successful lawyer and politician, ends up in an

institution). James Dillon alienates himself from his dysfunctional family, coworkers who are jerks and just society in general. Written in 1942 but it reads like it is happening in the present because the conflict the protagonist faces are still very much real in the lives of many men across America.

Roviragrao says

Me gusta mucho la capacidad del autor de usar muchas palabras para contar pocas cosas y que pese a ello te enganche y te embajone tanto.

Más allá del estilo, la historia no me ha aportado nada especial, quizá por ese tono autobiográfico y ese rollo de escritor escribiendo sobre problemas de escritores que me cansa un poco.

Seguro que otras de sus novelas me gustarán más.

Mariano Hortal says

Publicado en <http://lecturaylocura.com/una-recopil...>

Una recopilación de novelas de Jim Thompson. La escisión de la identidad

Aprovechando que acabo de terminar la biografía del escritor norteamericano, una joya de la que tendréis noticias en este blog en no mucho tiempo; se me ocurrió la posibilidad de hacer un pequeño monográfico con las obras que me quedaban por leer del escritor; ha valido mucho la pena, sobre todo porque gracias al análisis de la biografía, es indudable que ayudan a disfrutarlas mucho más.

La primera de ellas ha sido la última que ha sacado RBA en su serie negra, “Libertad Condicional”, obra encuadrada históricamente tras el que fue su primer gran éxito, esa obra maestra que es “El asesino dentro de mí”, esta influencia y la atracción del cine serán decisivas en el resultado final.

Partiendo de una buena idea, se nos presenta un presidio, Sandstone, donde el convicto Pat Cosgrove malvive, pero que, sin embargo, verá la posibilidad de salir gracias a la ayuda aparentemente desinteresada de Doc Luther, obteniendo la libertad condicional para trabajar con él, librándolo de un verdadero infierno: “Luther creía estar acostumbrado a las aberraciones. Pero con Sandstone era imposible no escandalizarse. Sandstone no era una cárcel. Era una casa de locos en la que quien estaba loco era el director, y no los inquilinos. En Sandstone tan sólo había una forma de sobrevivir: llegar a ser más duro y más retorcido que el propio director. Si lo hacías -si conseguías caerle en gracia al hombre con los ojos extraordinariamente brillantes y la risa impredecible-, no sólo sobrevivías, sino que lo hacías con relativa comodidad. “

Es evidente, para nosotros, los lectores, que salir en estas condiciones tiene que tener un precio, pero el plan de Doc Luther no es evidente; es la espera, esa potencial amenaza, la que sostiene la narración. Según avanza, la desconfianza de Cosgrove será cada vez mayor:

“-¿Y no conocía nada a esa persona que le consiguió su libertad condicional... Que la compró por así decirlo?

-Exacto.

-Pues tiene usted razón, señor Cosgrove. Tiene motivos más que sobrados para desconfiar. A esa persona le hubiera resultado igual de barato y fácil conseguir que le concedieran el indulto. Con el indulto, usted podría haberse ido donde quisiera... Lejos de la periferia de su benefactor. Esa persona no tiene nada de benefactor. Esa persona no tiene nada de filántropa.”

No faltarán mujeres fatales, dobles juegos, traiciones... que llevarán a desentrañar la trama final desde el punto de vista de Cosgrove, verdadero narrador (excepto en el capítulo inicial que narra Luther) y afectado por los acontecimientos. Thompson no era un dechado de virtudes a la hora de plantear las tramas, la resolución resulta farragosa; el final feliz, desacostumbrado en el caso de Thompson, estuvo muy influenciado por la querencia del autor por conseguir un contrato con Hollywood para alguna de sus novelas. Aprovechar el éxito de su anterior novela parecía una buena oportunidad. La pena es que la novela se resiente mucho por esta circunstancia.

aquí_y_ahora_300x459“Aquí y ahora” fue la ópera prima del autor; publicada en 1942, recoge muchos elementos autobiográficos aunque no se atreviera a poner exactamente los nombres de las personas de su entorno; sin embargo, eran perfectamente distinguibles entre las historias que nos relata el autor como cuando se refiere a sus hermanas y a la situación de pobreza en la que subsistían, alentada por el abandono de su padre:

“Margaret –mi hermana mayor- y yo sobrevivíamos gracias a la caridad de los vecinos, mientras que mamá apenas probaba bocado. Así que la única que necesitaba verdaderos cuidados era Frankie. Por desgracia, la pequeña no podía alimentarse de las sobras ajenas y mamá tampoco podía amamantarla. A todo esto, solo nos quedaban cincuenta centavos.”

No es la infancia de Thompson una de esas “misery memoirs” ficcionales donde el protagonista es maltratado, violado, etc., pero sí es bien cierto que la influencia de su padre fue muy negativa para el desarrollo de su personalidad y de su propia vida y lo podemos comprobar en el texto:

“¿Y qué? –me dije-. ¿Es que en algún momento fuiste feliz? ¿Es que alguna vez te sentiste en paz contigo mismo? Pues claro que no –me respondí-. Está clarísimo que no, nunca dejaste de sentirte habitante del infierno. La única diferencia es que ahora has caído un poco más bajo. Y vas a seguir deslizándote por la pendiente, porque eres igualito a tu padre. Eres tu propio padre, aunque careces de su determinación y su fuerza de voluntad. De aquí a un año o dos acabarán encerrándote igual que a él.”

También su obsesión por la escritura y las consecuencias de su mercantilización aparecerán en varias ocasiones a lo largo de la novela para mostrar las inseguridades de un escritor que tuvo que luchar mucho consigo mismo a la hora de crear:

“A mí me daba igual vender los derechos de la narración o no. De hecho, prefería que nadie la adquiriera. Sabía que si la vendía, me perseguirían para que escribiera un nuevo cuento por el estilo, cuento que sería todavía peor. Y la constante certeza de que me estaba dejando llevar por lo facilón bastaría para aniquilar en mí incluso ese último y débil afán de expresarme mediante la escritura.”

“-No sé cómo explicarlo –dije-. Lo más seguro es que nunca sea capaz de explicarme, ni aunque escriba un libro.”

Quizá el mayor logro sea ese diálogo hipotético que realiza con el padre fallecido durante todo un capítulo, hay aquí un presagio de esta lucha interior psicológica que le servirá para configurar a los Lou Ford y Nick Corey futuros; que ya tiene reminiscencias del desarrollo futuro de uno de sus temas más importantes: la escisión de la personalidad que tan bien analiza Polito en su biografía sobre el autor norteamericano:

“No estoy loco. No estoy ni asqueado ni furioso, quiero decir.

Solo estoy...

¿Cómo? ¿No puedes hablar un poco más alto, papá? Ya sé que siempre ha sido la costumbre... Pero aquí no hace falta que me hables en murmullos. Háblame con voz tonante, la misma que tanto efecto causaba en las salas del tribunal. Alza tu vozarrón como el estruendo que se eleva sobre el trueno de la perforadora de petróleo. Grita y ruge y golpea la mesa como si no pudieras porque le haremos una cara nueva a golpes, hasta dejarlo por muerto. Maldita sea su estampa.”

Como la mayoría de las primeras novelas, Thompson experimentó, buscaba su estilo y los temas que seguiría más adelante, se apoyó en los temas que vivía en primera persona para darle la estabilidad que necesitaba y conseguir una buena novela pero que todavía estaría lejos de sus grandes creaciones. Eso, sí es indudablemente interesante, a la luz de su biografía, para entender parte de vida del autor, imprescindible para entender el devenir de su literatura.

Los textos de estas dos obras provienen de la traducción del inglés de Antonio Padilla de “Libertad condicional” y “Aquí y ahora” de Jim Thompson para RBA.

Asesino-Burlon-Jim-Thompson Para acabar, una obra, “Asesino Burlón” de la que solo tenemos una edición en España, la de Libro Amigo Policiaca de ediciones B del año 1988; una obra que no ha sido reeditada y es prácticamente inencontrable y donde encontramos una de sus cimas, sin lugar a dudas; encuadrada en su “época dorada” de creación y que entraría en la categoría de sus psicópatas a nivel de los ya mencionados de “Asesino dentro de mí” o “1280 almas”, la novela no solo se queda en esta caracterización psicológica que, ya de por sí, supone un logro; en las primeras páginas el propio Jim Thompson nos da pistas sobre lo “especial” que puede llegar a ser:

“-Bueno... sí –asentí-. Sí, es algo mío. Una especie de melodrama que estoy escribiendo en torno a los crímenes del Asesino Burlón. Supongo que confundirá por completo al lector de novelas policíacas, pero tal vez lo que necesita es precisamente que lo confundan. Quizá su sed de diversión lo lleve al terrible trabajo de pensar.”

Clinton Brown, el periodista del Clarion, es el epítome de psicópata que tan bien desarrolló Thompson, “la enfermedad” de Lou Ford en esta ocasión es un “doble sentido”, el juego de dicotomías refleja a la perfección este doble sentido, esta división de la personalidad que altera a nuestro protagonista; de fondo, como en otras obras, la guerra y más concretamente, la castración, con unas connotaciones ciertamente esclarecedoras:

“En ese momento estaba comenzando a sentir ese peculiar doble sentido que se me había manifestado con creciente intensidad y frecuencia en los últimos meses. Era una mezcla de calma y ansiedad, de resignación y rechazo furioso. Simultáneamente, yo deseaba emprenderla a golpes contra todo y no hacer absolutamente nada.”

El caso es que el propio Clinton (Brownie para los conocidos) ve en Lem Stukeley, el jefe de detectives su “doppelganger”, ese contrario que es la extensión inconsciente de su personalidad escindida, “un hijo de puta” en sus propias palabras:

“Tal vez esté equivocado –me he equivocado con tantas cosas-, pero no recuerdo haber oído hablar jamás o conocido a un hijo de puta que no se las arreglara perfectamente bien. Estoy hablando, entiéndase bien, de verdaderos hijos de puta. De la variedad A, de doble destilación y calentada al vapor. Coges a un hombre así, un hijo de puta que no lucha contra ello –que sabe lo que es y se entrega de cuerpo y alma- y realmente tienes algo. Mejor dicho, él tiene algo. Él tiene todas las cosas que tú no puedes tener, como recompensa por no ser un hijo de puta. Por no ser como Lem Stukeley, el jefe de Detectives del Departamento de Policía de Pacific City.”

Como comentaba anteriormente, esa castración, ocasionada por las consecuencias de la guerra le llevará a elegir entre sus víctimas a tres mujeres; a la hora de matar a su exesposa seguimos comprobando, en una escena cargada de violencia, la caracterización de la personalidad de Clinton, esta vez unida al mayor vicio de Thompson, el alcohol:

“-No –dije-. No puedes y no lo harás.

Y estrellé la botella contra su cabeza.

Me quedé mirándola, mientras mi cabeza navegaba y yo me tambaleaba lentamente sobre mis pies. La humedad y el esfuerzo y la larga conversación me estaban desembriagando, y cuando estoy sereno me emborracho. Más borracho de lo que podría ponerme cualquier cantidad de whisky.”

Según va cometiendo asesinatos, va perdiendo el sentimiento de culpa ante las consecuencias de sus actos; la desesperación de sus actos perturbados le llevará a justificar sus actos de la manera más infame; su desequilibrio le lleva a crear un mundo de acuerdo a sus ideas, un mundo inconscientemente influido por el trauma de su castración:

“El problema me perturbaba solo de una manera muy lejana: bueno-debería-sentirme-avergonzado. En realidad, no sentía ninguna culpa. Con Ellen sí. Lo lamentaba sinceramente en el caso de Ellen. Y, ciertamente, lo sentía mucho más en el caso de Deborah. Pero no me asaltaba ningún remordimiento en el caso de Constance. Ella no hubiese continuado viviendo como ellas lo hubieran hecho, de no mediar mi

intervención. En Constance no había vida, solo flema y avaricia, ¿y cómo se puede quitar la vida cuando no existe?"

En este mundo nada es lo que parece, el sorprendente final, del que no hablaré, nos revela la subversión de la propuesta, lo enrevesado de la situación, ese maestro que es el gran Jim Thompson en una de sus propuestas más arriesgadas y posiblemente peor entendidas.

Los textos provienen de la traducción del inglés de Gerardo Di Masso para "Asesino Burlón" de Jim Thompson.

Neil says

contains an introduction by stephen king with a great quote about jim thompson:

"the literature of a healthy society needs proctologists as much as brain surgeons"

this wasn't thompson's usual noir, but rather a semi-autobiographical novel about old school family, i.e. extended, all living in the same house, often drinking, sometimes fighting (oddly enough, usually when NOT drinking), any barely getting by on one salary from a horrible job, but with a deep sense of responsibility despite many setbacks. i.e. "heartwarming" in parts. but ultimately there wasn't much of a story here, just a slice of life in a different time.

Dominick says

I liked this book, probably more than it deserves to be liked, given its odd shapelessness--though that, of course, is part of its point: life is plotless, just one damn thing after another as one is slowly and inevitably ground down. Jim Thompson's first novel is, basically, a literary novel written as if it were a pulp novel, sort of a "what if Faulkner wrote clear concise sentences?" kind of thing (at one point the book actually cites a story by Robert Heinlein as one of the best pieces of writing, technically speaking, the narrator has ever seen, a remarkable thing to find in a 1940s novel with literary pretensions). It verges on naturalism, with its depiction of people as effectively no more than victims of economic forces and their own biological and familial origins, and it's grim stuff--crushing poverty, alcoholism, unwanted pregnancy and so on--without any of the catharsis you'd get in a pulp novel exploring the same themes: no elaborate scam plot, no spectacular violence (though a few much more realistic ones), no pat resolution, etc. Its autobiographical elements make it even more interesting to anyone who knows a bit about Thompson. The narrator, Jim Dillon, is pretty clearly a Thompson stand-in--a struggling alcoholic writer desperate to produce fine work and not fall into grinding out pulp fodder. Had Thompson succeeded in this, of course, we would lack some of the finest pulp novels ever written, but it is rather sad to see him so clearly present that outcome as a squandering of a writer's gift. Grim, as I said above, unrelenting, and extremely pessimistic in its possibly over-stressed assertion that people can never escape from their own limits and predilections, but remarkably well-written--innovative and experimental without being precious or opaque.

Sean says

Back around 1996, I picked up *Savage Art: A Biography of Jim Thompson* by Robert Polito, shortly after it won a couple of awards for best biographical work. I started reading that book which I found engrossing

but decided to put it aside until I read ALL of Thompson's published works so I wouldn't "spoil" the experience by having all the plots revealed in the critical biography. Distracted by life and other manifestations of obsessive compulsion, I quickly put that "project" aside, until almost two decades later, when a couple weeks ago I suddenly revived this project by ordering all of the remaining works of Thompson I did not own previously, and intending to read all of Thompson's works in published order and capping it all off by reading *Savage Art* to completion. However, after reading each book I will review the portions of *Savage Art* in which Polito discusses the plot and critiques the book.

I begin with *Now and on Earth* which was published in 1942. I believe I read this first in the late 90s and was disappointed, probably because it is not crime fiction and no one ends up murdered. Older now, I was surprised to find this is an excellent novel. I would first warn off those readers who do not like to read about characters they do not find likeable, unless they enjoy seriously flawed characters, you know the ones populating the real world. This is the real world and a natural subject for an artist like Thompson, look elsewhere for happy-days escapist crap.

As previously stated, this is not crime fiction but the writing style is noir or hard-boiled told in the first person. Polito describes the book as having "three complementary narratives. Equal parts of a classic blue-collar novel, a plaintive confession, and a searing portrait of an incipient psychopath..." First off, I disagree that James Dillon, the narrator is an incipient psychopath. Dillon is a deeply scarred individual from a dysfunctional family who marries for lust and finds his writing career stifled by his own wife and children, alcoholism, obsessing over his new job, not to mention his sisters and mother who also all end up living with and dependent upon him although none of them, with the possible exception of his 9 year daughter Jo, understand him and his desire to create art. They would prefer he be a hack churning out stories for money. However, he does express some feeling for his family, including remorse at how he has treated them, while at the same time plotting his escape from them. There is some extreme love/hate feelings which most of us would not admit to but which are part and parcel in many human relationships.

The novel depicts with extreme realism the job Dillon feels forced to take at an aircraft manufacturer in San Diego during World War II. Although hating his job and co-workers, Dillon excels at it eventually even devising a new accounting method for the inventory of parts he must track. There is a great deal of realistic detail of time and place that is apparently based on a real job held by Thompson. In fact, this book is viewed by family members to be a veiled memoir of those times. Although at novel's end, Dillon questions "Probably I'll never be able to explain to anyone. Not even if I wrote a book..." After reading that book, I think Thompson has succeeded in showing the dark side of domestic life in 1940s wartime America and the desperation it generated in a flawed, but artistic personality. (As a side note, I recently finished Vasily Grossman's *Life and Fate* which in part depicts the dark side of domestic life in 1940s wartime Soviet Union by depicting a Soviet scientist at home and work. Clearly these books are not mirror images, *Life and Fate* being over 800 pages long and much more ambitious and reaching in scope and much different stylistically, but anyone with an interest in the era would be rewarded by reading both books).

The book apparently received critical praise upon publication, but was not successful. In the Black Lizard paperback edition, there is an introductory essay by Stephen King which is not specific to the novel along with a short "New York Times" quote of generic praise of Thompson as "best suspense writer going" on the back cover. One wonders why they dropped blurbs which per Polito originally appeared on the novel, such as Richard Wright's "Here is a document as true as a birth or death certificate" and 1927 Pulitzer Prize winner Louis Bromfield's "It is a remarkable transcription of a world which seldom finds its way into fiction." Probably because neither are household names today, certainly not Bromfield.

Don Smith says

A gritty old noir story that will chill and mesmerize. I love Raymond Chandler, Dashiell Hammet and all, but this guy can hang with the best.

Ryan says

Have read a few other novels by Thompson and this one is different from them all. This is not a crime novel at all. More of Thompson channeling Grapes of Wrath. All of the characters are a bit pathetic, just like real people. It's well written except for the laggy parts where our protagonist goes into detail about his mind-numbing job. I know this is all practically autobiographic; makes you wonder what actually happened or where the reality and the story diverge. Makes me look forward more to reading more of the crime novels.
