

## Bowles's Up Above the World as Beatnik Murder Mystery

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**Abstract:** In his article "Bowles's *Up Above the World* as Beatnik Murder Mystery" Greg Bevan discusses Paul Bowles's fourth and final novel, which at the time of its publication was met with mixed reactions from reviewers and its creator alike, and has seen relatively scanty critical attention in the years since. Gena Dagele Caponi perceives in the novel a reflection of Bowles's struggle for control, during the time of its writing, in the face of his wife Jane's terminal illness. Building on this insight, the current essay notes the same tension in the writings of the Beats—a movement with which Bowles has been loosely associated, and one that both attracted and repelled him—and argues for *Up Above the World* as not only a personal meditation on struggle, but also a broader statement of Bowles's ambivalence toward the Beat Generation.

**Greg BEVAN**

### **Bowles's *Up Above the World* as Beatnik Murder Mystery**

When Jane Bowles suffered a stroke in 1957 it was the start of a long physical and mental decline, and in the writings of her husband began to appear an elegiac sense of good things slipping away. In a 1958 essay for *Holiday*, Paul Bowles mourned the loss of the Tangier that had first bewitched him nearly thirty years before: "The population has augmented at least threefold, and I'm afraid the city would never strike a casual visitor as either quiet or attractive" (*Travels* 224). An alarmed letter to his parents three years later gave that population boom the frightening face of a Beatnik invasion: "Every day one sees more beards and filthy blue jeans, and the girls look like escapees from lunatic asylums, with white lipstick and black smeared around their eyes, and matted hair hanging around their shoulders. The leaders of the 'movement' have moved their headquarters here and direct their activities from here. Allen Ginsberg, Gregory Corso, and Burroughs are all established in Tangier now, sending out their publications from here" (Sawyer-Lauçanno 356). "You kids get off my lawn," the letter seems to be shouting: at fifty-one Bowles was a generation older than all the Beat writers except William S. Burroughs. And while it may perhaps be true that "Paul Bowles opened up the world of Hip," as Norman Mailer wrote (468), he was cut from a different cloth than the hipsters. Jay McInerney writes that "Bowles is frequently lumped in with the Beats in surveys of American literature, but his relation to the movement is a little like that of Manet to the Impressionists; Bowles stood between the European modernists and the Beats, an elder patron with an affinity for Beat ideals" (191). Gena Dagal Caponi similarly asserts that "in temperament and literary style Bowles was closer to Gide and his successors, the French existentialists, than to any of the American Beat generation who followed" (*Romantic* 196).

The most obvious contrast between Bowles and the Beats can be found in his apparent lack of interest in American social commentary: almost none of his fiction is even set in America. Yet the more closely one examines the membrane between Bowles and the Beat movement, the more permeable it appears. In spite of their settings in Africa and various far-flung tropics, Bowles's stories have struck many critics as an indictment of his native civilization; Hans Bertens writes in this vein that Bowles "very clearly sees Western culture as the cause of the nihilism he has made his major fictional concern" (8). Moreover, one cannot distinguish Bowles from the Beats by his affinities to a modernist like Gide without addressing the proclamation of Burroughs' own fealty to Gide in the prologue to his 1953 novel *Junky*. This is to say nothing of Burroughs' regard for Bowles's own work: it was Bowles's second novel, set in Tangier's International Zone, that had drawn him to Morocco in the first place—"Why Tangier? I came solely because of a book by Bowles: *Let It Come Down*" (Harris 180)—and when the other Beat writers followed to help him assemble the manuscript that would become *Naked Lunch* (1959), they adopted Bowles as a kind of elder statesman. Burroughs remarked that "among the lesser beats, or miscellaneous beats, the general impression was that [Bowles] was kind of uptight and old maidish" (Sawyer-Lauçanno 356-57), but he and Ginsberg in particular struck up lasting friendships with the urbane and aloof Bowles.

This is not so surprising when we note that *Let It Come Down* (1952) culminates in a hashish-fueled murder which, however dubious its existential justification, shows the same focus on drugs and the unconscious (and, it might be added, the same willingness to shock) that characterizes much Beat literature. For his part, after denying he was an existentialist in an interview with Lawrence Stewart, Bowles then backtracked, reframing the question in a way that shows a striking kinship to Beat thinking: "But what is an existentialist character, really? It's one who plays it by ear and every moment afresh from the given situation. He's infinitely adaptable, I would say. He thinks of everything in terms of the immediate situation—not according to credos and tradition" (Stewart 152). This comment and his alarmed letter to his parents, taken together, evince a mixture of identification and disdain that can also be found in a remark worth focusing on, which an elderly Bowles made in an interview in 1985: "I was never part of a group, but I felt sympathy for the Beats. I approved of their existence as a group. It seemed a new thing. I thought it was careless, though. There's a certain amount of carelessness in the writing of all those people" (Caponi, *Conversations* 191).

It has always been a commonplace to associate the Beats with undisciplined spontaneity, generally citing the scattered sheets of yellow paper that became *Naked Lunch* or the 120-foot taped-together roll on which Jack Kerouac dashed off *On the Road* (1957). But there is a discernible moral censure in Bowles's use of the word "careless," one that brings to mind this anecdote from Burroughs biographer Ted Morgan: "Burroughs had once borrowed from Paul a copy of [Tennessee Williams'] first collection of stories. Being on junk at the time, he dripped blood all over it while injecting himself, and Paul was

annoyed" (539).

Yet it would be too easy to call Bowles's objection to the Beats "uptight and old maidish," for in fact he shared with the movement a longstanding interest in the uninhibited, one that had driven him to explore surrealism early in his career and drug-powered "automatic writing" throughout it. In the Stewart interview he goes on to say, "The destruction of the ego has always seemed an important thing" (Stewart 152), an explicit affirmation of the surrealist idea—hugely influential on the Beats as well—that the individual consciousness and its received notions must be bypassed for true art to result. Moreover, Bowles was aware of the extent to which the freak-show quality of the Beats was a creation of the popular media, and in a 1959 essay he wrote of Burroughs: "When I got to know him I realized the legend existed despite of him and not because of him: he didn't give a damn about it" ("Burroughs" 15). Bowles therefore had an additional source of sympathy in his own sense of being unfairly pigeonholed as a purveyor of shock and gore. As he said in an interview, "Let's say there are sixty stories, and two of them have unprecedented violence. Therefore I write only about violence. That's really ridiculous" (Caponi, *Paul Bowles* 67). One finally senses that the Beats writ large—their work, as well as the aura of spontaneity, drug abuse, and exhibitionism that surrounded them—struck both a nerve and a chord in Bowles.

I think this ambivalence is the key to understanding the one novel Bowles had not yet written when the Beats and their hangers-on invaded Tangier. Published in 1966, *Up Above the World* is the oddball of Bowles's oeuvre for a number of reasons. Of his four novels it has suffered the most critical neglect, generally being written off as a piece of escapism or a psychedelic Sixties curio. It offers Bowles's perspective on the cultural change he was witnessing in 1960s Tangier and yet is the only one of his novels not set in North Africa. In his own recorded views on the book he disparages it—"I didn't consider it a serious book like the others. It was like what Graham Greene calls an 'entertainment.' Actually I wanted to do it under another name, but the publisher wouldn't agree" (Caponi, *Conversations* 52—and deems it "the best written of the four novels" he produced (*In Touch* 513). But most interesting of all is a comment in a letter to his mother in advance of its publication: "It's a murder mystery about beatniks, decidedly light, and probably will get awful notices. However, I was tired of writing about North Africa" (*In Touch* 376).

A murder mystery it plainly is: set in an unnamed country in the tropical Americas, the story portrays the entrapment of a traveling American couple, Taylor and Day Slade, by a wealthy young psychopath who has had his mother murdered and fears they have witnessed the deed. But who are the beatniks in question? In his 1957 essay "The White Negro," Mailer fixes the aim of the Beat (or Hip) movement as "the divorce of man from his values, the liberation of self from the Super-Ego of society. The only Hip morality ... is to do what one feels whenever and wherever it is possible" (354). In Bowles's novel, Day Slade objects in similar terms to being called a tourist—"We just move around where we please, when we please. It's the only way to do it. Group travel's a degradation. The whole point is to be free" (101)—but she is merely putting on airs; she and her physician husband are as bourgeois as they come. We recognize Mailer's figuration as well in the young antihero Grover Soto, whose name later morphs to Vero Grove: "What he had had in mind when he had fitted together the various possibilities that would form and maintain his present life was an eternally empty schedule in which he would enjoy the maximum liberty to make sudden decisions" (82). When we take into account his avid interest in marijuana and jazz, Grove, along with his seedy henchman Thorny, becomes the only plausible Beat in the novel.

Indeed, the idea of "liberation of self from the Super-Ego of society" helps illuminate one scene that otherwise seems an odd bit of Sixties techno-fantasy. Upon learning that his mother's murder has been carried out, Grove lies in bed in his luxury penthouse in the capital and has a dream: enclosed face-down in a tiny cell of glass, he is peering into a huge auditorium through a high-tech viewer that gives him the sensation of being in the hall itself. Onscreen a famous actress playing "the pathetic role of a distraught matron" (87) suddenly morphs into Grove's own mother: "Underneath the jovial flesh was the supremely calculating consciousness, the dark destroying presence. No matter what part she was playing (for her role depended on her audience), to him the basic expression was always the same, cunning and omniscient" (88). Fleeing the auditorium in terror, he thinks, "She knows about the glass room upstairs. She's the one who had me committed" (89).

It is unclear from this dream evidence whether Grove has ever actually been institutionalized, although the book makes clear enough his psychopathy, metastasized by his divorced parents' materialistic tug-of-war for his affections. What the dream does show is that the omniscient, smothering mother is also society itself: just before awakening he senses that "by rising from his seat in the audience he had in some way interfered with institutional processes. He would be caught and punished" (89). Again one thinks of the Mailer essay: "The unstated essence of Hip, its psychopathic

brilliance, quivers with the knowledge that new kinds of victories increase one's power for new kinds of perception; and defeats, the wrong kind of defeats, attack the body and imprison one's energy until one is jailed in the prison air of other people's habits, other people's defeats, boredom, quiet desperation, and muted icy self-destroying rage" (339). It is to escape the prison of his mother's presence—and by extension mainstream, "Square" society—that Grove has come to live in his father's native country; his mother, whom we meet as Mrs. Rainmantle, is on her way to visit him when she meets the Slades on their cruise ship. In a port they all check in to a decrepit hotel where Mrs. Rainmantle finds that the lock on her room door is broken—one of Thorny's preparations for her murder, we later realize—and ends up rooming with Day Slade and her put-upon husband. Leaving with him for the capital early the next morning, Day sees Mrs. Rainmantle lying motionless with her eyes open but does not realize she has been given a fatal injection of curare. Still, even after Thorny burns the hotel down to cover his tracks, Grove fears the Slades may know too much. In the capital he befriends the unsuspecting Americans, drugs them, convinces them they are sick and need to convalesce in his mountain villa, and there subjects them to a hellscape of hallucinations and tape-recorded sound effects in order to scramble their memories of the trip.

There are Beat connections both in the autobiographical kernel of the story and in its execution. Bowles read Kerouac's *On the Road*, whose final section was inspired by a bout of dysentery that plunged Kerouac into delirium in Mexico, and based his own novel on an illness he, Bowles, had long before contracted from the drinking water in Colombia. His recollection in his autobiography *Without Stopping* of the coffee plantation where was advised to recuperate is hallucinatory: "I never had seen trees even half as high as the giants around me, or such waterfalls, or such fantastic vegetation" (181). Years later he composed *Up Above the World* while walking around Tangier's Monte Viejo high on *kif*—in fact, he said it "was the first book where I really used *kif* for the purpose of writing" (Caponi, *Conversations* 105)—and enlisted Burroughs as a consultant on synthetic drugs: "I went to him for some of the technical information about drugs—the effects of various doses, that sort of thing" (Caponi, *Conversations* 53). Burroughs assured him that the final product felt much like an acid trip.

Yet none of this suffices to allow Bowles's description of the novel as a Beatnik murder mystery to pass without question. In point of fact there is much about Vero Grove that seems the antithesis of Beat, the most obvious of which is his ostentatious wealth. It is hard to reconcile the anti-materialism of the movement with Grove's posh but soulless penthouse, which seems to Dr. Slade "more like an overpoweringly elegant hotel than a home" (99-100), to say nothing of his vast mountain estate. It could be argued that Grove was meant as a reflection of the rich hippies—a later era would have dubbed them trustafarians—who had eclipsed the more authentic Beats of *On the Road*'s cultural moment; taking into account Bowles's professed sympathies with the Beats, this could be seen as another reference to good things gone bad.

But I think Grove—who shares his name with the publisher that made the Beats famous—can be read as a comment on the movement itself, one rooted in the trying circumstances that surrounded the novel's composition. In exploring this idea, I am building on the biographical analysis of Caponi, who finds in the novel an expression of Bowles's futile struggle for control in the face of Jane's illness (*Paul Bowles* 88). Such inner turmoil would have helped make him seem "uptight and old maidish" to the younger Beats as Burroughs remarked, and notwithstanding the role that drugs played in the production of the novel, could also have prompted a rethinking of his earlier fascination with the "destruction of the ego." It would moreover be remiss, in a biographical approach to this novel, to overlook the contrast between Bowles's ministrations to Jane and Burroughs' recklessly accidental killing of his own wife Joan Vollmer in 1951. I mean to suggest, in other words, that in Bowles's remark about the "carelessness" of Beat writing we can find the perspective of a caregiver.

It must of course be acknowledged that the Beats were themselves preoccupied with control, both as an institutional force to be resisted and a quality elusive to the self. Of Burroughs John Tytell writes that "Rarely has any novelist managed so explosive a struggle between the demands of total control and the nihilistic impulse to defeat those in control" (309), and in the superficially sunnier work of Kerouac we find the same undercurrent, such as the madness of Dean Moriarty prompting Sal Paradise's repeated feeling that "everything was falling apart" (*On the Road* 70). Indeed, in a certain light Grove strikes us as an avatar of the compulsive Lee in Burroughs' early novel *Queer*; he is both the oppressed, as we have seen, and the oppressor.

During the Slades' convalescence in the mountains, Day has a hunch that Grove "had the answers to all possible questions written out and hidden away for safekeeping, and that under no circumstances would she ever get from him more than a small part of the truth" (130). This is more than a literal foreshadowing of the Slades' fate: it also hints at an aspect of Grove's psyche that completely inverts a Beat precept outlined by Ginsberg the year *Up Above the World* was published.

Positing Beat literature as a corrective to the artificiality of what had come before, Ginsberg asked the *Paris Review*: "what happens if you make a distinction between what you tell your friends and what you tell your Muse? The problem is to break down that distinction: When you approach the Muse to talk as frankly as you would talk with yourself or with your friends ... And that was Kerouac's great discovery in *On the Road*. The kinds of things he and Neal Cassidy were talking about, he finally discovered were the subject matter for what he wanted to write down. That meant, at that minute, a complete revision of what literature was supposed to be" ("The Art" <<http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/4389/the-art-of-poetry-no-8-allen-ginsberg>>). Literature, in other words, should be as frank as our conversations—a maxim for which there could be no poorer exemplar than Grove. In spite of his previously noted profession of desire for "the maximum liberty to make sudden decisions," Grove is in fact so terrified of the spontaneous that he uses a tape recorder to plan his discussions with his girlfriend: "Often he improvised these one-sided conversations, recorded them, and then wrote out notes on the more convincing passages. Using these, he plotted the course of a verbal procedure from which he allowed himself almost no deviation when the moment came for actual speaking" (94). A desperate drive for complete control is at the center of Grove's disturbed psyche; one suspects he is involved with the seventeen-year-old Luchita because her youth makes her malleable. His father once tried to bring him to Catholicism by saying that "the only way to be free in life was to adhere so strictly to an orthodoxy that everything save the spirit became a matter of reflex," which Grove thought "a viable technique, providing you found a valid orthodoxy" (91).

But what Grove is missing is not orthodoxy—approximated by his habits of compulsive planning and manipulation—but spirit. In "The White Negro" Mailer, having championed liberation from the superego, finds in Hip a safeguard against selfishness: "In widening the area of the possible, one widens it reciprocally for others as well, so that the nihilistic fulfillment of each man's desire contains its antithesis of human cooperation" (354). Yet having rejected one tyrannical system, Grove puts another in its place, and one is led to ponder the implications of the novel's putative Beat becoming something like the soulless and crushing system the Beats decried. "But what is the world?" the drugged Dr. Slade thinks as he staggers through Grove's estate. "How many more rooms are there in it?" (122). Bereft of their memories of the murder scene, the Slades begin to resemble the brainwashed masses of Ginsberg's "Independence Day Manifesto," in which he proclaimed that "America is having a nervous breakdown" ("Poetry" 3). We recall the oppression and the sinister tape recorders of Burroughs's *Nova Trilogy* in the Slades' private hell, where tape decks deliver the thought-control messages and sound effects.

But such parallels need to be drawn without obscuring a crucial difference in the way common elements are deployed in the Beats—in Burroughs in particular—and Bowles. Analyzing *Naked Lunch* formally, critics have fixated on the way the horrors depicted in Burroughs' novel are embodied in its assaultive language: Oliver Harris observes that "Control and its terrors are *present* rather than represented in this writing, *produced by* as much as reproduced in it" (37, italics in original) and Fiona Paton concurs that "the novel's constant refusal to observe linguistic and discursive boundaries is a crucial component of its monstrosity" (61). To quote one of many examples: "Let the dawn blue as a flame cross the city ... The backyards are clean of fruit, and the ash pits give up their hooded dead ... 'Could you show me the way to Tipperary, lady?' Over the hills and far away to Blue Grass ... Across the bone meal of lawn to the frozen pond where suspended goldfish wait for the spring Squaw Man. The screaming skulls roll up the back stairs to bite off the cock of erring husband taking our advantage of his wife's earache to do that which is inconvenient. The young landlubber dons a southwester, beats his wife to death in the shower" (109-10). The syntax is relatively straightforward, but the reader scans in vain for a stable vantage point, recognizing only shards of folk songs and filmmaker Cecil B. DeMille, whose film *The Squaw Man* the Burroughs excerpt references. Harris describes the novel's text as "a labyrinthine network of verbal repetitions and variations that can be collected and collated and arranged into lists but that, finally, yield eerie surface effects of uncanny *recognition*, of disturbed memory, not deeper levels of meaning" (221; emphasis in the original).

Even champions of *Naked Lunch* have been driven by its disorienting language to describe it as a work one profits from having endured. Testifying at the book's notorious 1965 obscenity trial, Mailer said that America was "stronger as a nation for possessing an artist who can come back from Hell with a portrait of its dimensions" ("Boston") and Harris writes that "Acceptance or rejection are the defining alternatives, and *Naked Lunch*, as itself symptomatic of the diseases it would cure, is not acceptable" (231). By comparison with *Naked Lunch*, here is Dr. Slade's psychological collapse: "In front of him, not three feet away, there was a face—a muzzle, rather, for it surely belonged to an animal—looking at him with terrible intensity. It was unmoving, fashioned from a nameless, constantly dripping substance. Unmoving, yet it must have moved, for now the mouth was much farther open; long

twisted tendons had appeared in each cheek. He watched, frozen and unbelieving, while the whole jaw swiftly melted and fell away, leaving the top part of the muzzle intact. The eyes glared more savagely than before; they were telling him that sooner or later he would have to pay for having witnessed that moment of its suffering" (106). The imagery is hallucinatory, but the narrative coherence and point-of-view clarity hold us at arm's length from the doctor's madness. Asked in an interview about his comparatively straightforward prose style—"What advantage does this voice have for you that such techniques as Burroughs' 'cut-up' method or other attacks on the linear lack?"—Bowles replied, "Since the only way of expressing an idea is through language, it follows that language should be used in the most concise and lucid manner possible; the idea is entirely at the mercy of the words used to describe it" (Caponi, *Conversations* 140).

Caponi suggests that despite Bowles's longtime flirtation with unconscious writing, he had a temperamental aversion to its guiding principle: "To the fastidious, compulsive Bowles, the unconscious was messy, gushy and uncontrollable" (*Romantic* 211). While the cut-up method is not a variety of unconscious writing, its reliance on chaotic chance may have seemed similarly threatening to an author tending to an ailing wife. In other words, we can perceive the struggle in the writing of *Up Above the World* as Caponi recounts it—"With his wife's health and sanity in a precarious state and his domestic situation in turmoil, Bowles must have felt more keenly than ever his lack of control" (*Paul Bowles* 88)—reflected not only in the content of the novel but also its form.

Yet while the Slades' breakdown may represent a repudiation of Burroughs' approach to narrative, it is important not to err on the negative side in assessing Bowles's view of the Beats. Just as it behooves us to remember that he was writing to his elderly parents when he described his novel as a "murder mystery about Beatniks," using the pejorative term for the movement, it pays to note in the Slades' collapse the glint of sympathy for the Beats, and their feeling of entrapment in a repressive age. For the stifling maternal nightmare of the novel's Beat figure Vero Grove, which we examined earlier, is recapitulated in the drugged visions of the Slades. Dr. Slade thinks, "Soon there would be only the obscene reality of himself, trapped in the solitary chambers of existence" (107), which recalls Grove's dream with its claustrophobic glass cell—as does the terrifying end of the drugged doctor's escape attempt, when orderlies guide him back to his bed: "He has always known the world is like this. There is no way of escaping. They come and get you and quietly lead you away" (124).

For the Slades, unlike Grove, there is no coming back. Grove gives his handwritten notes for their brainwashing sessions to Thorny and tells him to burn the evidence, but later discovers that Day has found them incompletely incinerated. As with her glimpse of the dead Mrs. Rainmantle, she is uncomprehending, but the fate of the couple is nonetheless sealed. The paranoid Grove has Thorny kill Dr. Slade, and at the nightmarish festival that gothically concludes the novel he pulls a gun on Day, whose death seems no less certain for being outside the book.

US-Americans find madness and death in an exotic land: the novel recalls Bowles's more famous debut *The Sheltering Sky* (1949), to which Bertens compares it unfavorably, writing that, "halfway through the novel [the Slades] become mere fictional puppets manipulated in order to shock. Besides, they become the victim of a madman whose insanity lacks significance; Bowles makes no effort to make Soto's mental condition representative of something larger than itself" (174). *Up Above the World* is indeed a flawed novel, especially in terms of character development (though it did not receive the "awful notices" he feared). But Bertens doubly misrepresents Grove's mental condition: as mentioned earlier he is not insane but psychopathic (a more insidious and hence more frightening abnormality), and if we view the work as Bowles did through a Beat lens it is clear that the presentation of Grove's psyche—indeed the novel as a whole—does strive toward a statement of larger significance.

A half-century on, there is no reason to confine the implications of *Up Above the World* to the Beats and their historical moment, and indeed some critics have rehabilitated the novel by finding it prescient of contemporary issues. Anabela Duarte writes, "Along with noise and violence, we find in *Up Above the World* a unique literary work amazingly tuned to today's concerns with the use of music as a weapon and as torture in the context of the new realities of the War on Terror" (239). But if Bowles's last novel represents a renunciation of his—and a repudiation of the Beats'—longtime fascination with unfettered mental states, it is perhaps most fruitful to ponder the connection of this shift to the years immediately following the book's 1966 publication.

The late 1960s brought upheavals for which the writings of the Beats were unprepared. Allan Johnston observes that, "Beat culture by its very nature lacked the theoretical and social underpinnings to develop the clarified economic or political oppositional stances that appeared in the 1960s counterculture" (104). Notwithstanding the reflected commentary on the West that Bertens and others have found in his work, Bowles professed less interest than the Beats did in sweeping social

critique, and with the publication of *Up Above the World* and the story collection *The Time of Friendship* the following year he began to seem outmoded to many; one reviewer found in the latter book "a basic disharmony with the prevailing *geist*" (Sawyer-Lauçanno 393). It hardly amounts to a defense of the timeliness of *Up Above the World*—whose title comes from the lullaby "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star"—to quote Bowles explaining that "what I had in mind were the words that come after: so high, which was a Sixties thing" (Patteson 135n7).

To focus on Vero Grove's transformation from hipster rebel to suffocating System is to begin to situate Bowles's most underappreciated novel as an intriguing link across American eras. Both fetishizing and fearing spontaneity, Grove hearkens back to the heyday of Burroughs and the Beats, while the destruction of the ego which the book documents was apparent at the time of its writing in the breakdown of people around Bowles, whether it be Jane or a drug casualty like Alfred Chester. In a few years this collapse would be a hallmark of the era, with the unchaining of pure id witnessed in the Manson murders and the violence that took place during the Altamont Speedway Free Festival. Bowles's evocation of a soul-crushing System—itsself a trope inherited from the Beats—would become part of a continuing current when novelists like Joseph Heller and Kurt Vonnegut sharpened their focus on the dehumanizing aspects of American bureaucratic and institutional life in the 1970s.

All of which is to suggest that the relative obscurity of *Up Above the World* may in part be due to the shortsightedness of some of its contemporary reviewers, too temporally close to the novel to perceive its broader historical connections. Even if Bowles, hinting at these in the comment on which we have focused—"It's a murder mystery about beatniks, decidedly light"—showed the same dismissiveness, it is a testament to the redemptive power of hindsight. One thinks of his sober reflection in *Without Stopping* a quarter-century after Jane's stroke, the event that would bring his final novel into being: "I did not know it, but the good years were over"(336).

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