Bet You Missed It—What do the Monkees and Superman have in common?

Bruce Strauch
The Citadel, strauhb@citadel.edu

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BET YOU MISSED IT

Press Clippings — In the News — Carefully Selected by Your Crack Staff of News Sleuths

Column Editor: Bruce Strauch (The Citadel)

Editor’s Note: Hey, are you all reading this? If you know of an article that should be called to Against the Grain’s attention ... send an email to <kstrauch@comcast.net>. We’re listening! — KS

BILLBOARD POP KING
by Bruce Strauch (The Citadel)

Okay, aging Boomers, trivia quiz. Author (not singer) of “Be My Baby,” “Baby, I Love You,” “Chapel of Love,” “Leader of the Pack,” “River Deep, Mountain High?” Of course you give up. Jeff Barry (née Barry Adelberg) had 17 hits on Billboard’s pop chart in 1964 alone.

A college drop-out (aren’t all the Great Ones?), he pitched “Tell Laura I Love Her” to RCA. Originally about a guy gored by a bull, Barry changed it to a car wreck. It became a top 10 hit of 1960. He teamed with Leiber and Stoller and churned out hits for the great girl groups: the Crystals, the Ronettes, the Shangri-Las. In 1964, his “Chapel of Love” knocked the Beatles’ “Love Me Do” out of the top spot.

He couldn’t read music and never wrote down lyrics. But he did not stop, going on to write singles for the Monkees and Neil Diamond and TV themes for “One Day at a Time,” “The Jeffersons,” and “Family Ties.”


JOYCE IN CHINA
by Bruce Strauch (The Citadel)

James Joyce’s wife Nora called Finnegan’s Wake chop suey and told him to write something people could read. But he persevered with ten different words for thunder 100 letters long and all the mish-mash of puns, layered meanings and multiple languages.

And speaking of languages, it’s now been translated into Chinese by the beyond-belief industrious Dai Congrong. And it’s a big hit where some give up after 30 pages and others consider it an IQ test.

To translate the first sentence, Ms. Dai provides two definitions, five footnotes and seven small-print asides explaining the arcane allusions.


90-LB. WEAKLINGS BIRTH THE MAN OF STEEL
by Bruce Strauch (The Citadel)

Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster were two high school nebbishes who longed to make big bucks as syndicated cartoonists. They wore eyeglasses, were bullied, terrified of girls. Siegel had a high-pitched voice, wrote love poems to a girl named Lois who snubbed him.

After graduation, they worked demeaning jobs and drew and drew for five long years. Eventually they put together a combo of Samson and Doc Savage, Man of Bronze. Superman was born. In 1938, they got a nibble from Detective Comics — later National Comics and later DC. Ten dollars a page for the two to split. And they signed away all rights to the character.

During the war, Superman was so popular that the Navy included the comics in ration kits. But the corporate louts were always critical, always reminding them how easily they could be replaced. And replaced they were as soon as the war ended.

It was all downhill for the dynamic duo then. Siegel worked as a mail clerk, Shuster drew for pornographic comics, named Lois Lanes flogging bound Clark Kents and Jimmy Olsen.

In 1975, when the first Superman movie went into production, Siegel sent a mass mailing to news outlets cursing the enterprise. RCA paid the pair a small pension to end the bad publicity.

See — Deborah Friedell, “Kryptonomics,” The New Yorker, June 24, 2013, p.80 (a review of Brad Ricca’s Superboys, St. Martin’s).

LET’S READ ABOUT FILM DIRECTORS
by Bruce Strauch (The Citadel)

William Friedkin is a good one to pick these. He’s an academy award-winning director. And he’s got his own book out: The Friedkin Connection.

So here goes. (1) Elia Kazan, Elia Kazan: A Life (1988) (I had no idea he did A Tree Grows in Brooklyn and hated it. Called it “poverty cleaned up.”); (2) François Truffaut, Hitchcock (1967) (Conversations between the two. Hitchcock’s Jesuit education had given him a fear of “being involved in anything evil.”); (3) Orson Wells and Peter Bogdanovich, This is Orson Welles (1992); (4) Sidney Lumet, Making Movies (1996); (5) Joseph McBride, Searching for John Ford (2001).


LET’S READ ABOUT UNSOLVED MURDERS
by Bruce Strauch (The Citadel)


LET’S READ ABOUT UNUSUAL JOURNEYS
by Bruce Strauch (The Citadel)

(1) Amitav Ghosh, In an Antique Land (1992) (Indian travels in Egypt); (2) Franz Kafka, Amerika (1927) (revel Kafka as he gets caught in a maze of clerks and corridors in NY); (3) Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, The Little Prince (1943); (4) Ruth Harris, Lourdes (1999); (5) Theodor Fontane, Walks Through the Mark Brandenburg (1862-89).


Future Dates for Charleston Conferences

Preconferences and Vendor Showcase Main Conference

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Conference</th>
<th>Preconference Date</th>
<th>Vendor Showcase Date</th>
<th>Main Conference Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Conference</td>
<td>5 November</td>
<td>6-8 November</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Conference</td>
<td>4 November</td>
<td>5-7 November</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>Conference</td>
<td>2 November</td>
<td>3-5 November</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>Conference</td>
<td>8 November</td>
<td>9-11 November</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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