

scratch pad no. 42 avram davidson special



# scratch pad

No. 42, April 2001

Based on \*brg\* No. 30, a fanzine for ANZAPA, 200th Mailing,  
and The Great Cosmic Donut of Life No. 28, a fanzine for Acnestis,  
by Bruce Gillespie,  
59 Keele Street, Collingwood, Victoria 3066, Australia.  
Phone & fax: 61-3-9419-4797. Email: gandc@mira.net.

Cover graphic:

Richard Dadd: *The Fairy Feller's Master-stroke* (Tate Gallery).

---

# ROUNDING UP THE SHAGGY DOGS:

## THE SHORT STORIES OF AVRAM DAVIDSON

by Bruce Gillespie

---

**First given as a talk to the Nova Mob, 7 March 2001, at the home of Lucy Sussex and Julian Warner, Brunswick, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia.**

'Avram Davidson? Who's he?' That's been the reaction of several people when recently I mentioned I would be talking about his work. The answer is in the anthology, *The Avram Davidson Treasury*, edited by Robert Silverberg and Grania Davis. Reading it set me reading every Avram Davidson anthology I could find. Thanks, Alan Stewart, for lending me some that I did not have. And thanks, Grania Davis, for the energy you have invested in recent years into revealing the range of Avram Davidson's work.

Avram Davidson was born in 1923 in Yonkers, New York, and died in 1993 in Bellingham, Washington, in poverty. He was in the US Navy during World War II, and on his way home visited China and, later, Israel during 1949, the year of its birth. He had returned to America by 1950. Beginning in his late teens, he became a strict Orthodox observer of the Jewish faith, and his early stories appeared in magazines, such as *Jewish Life* and *Commentary*, primarily directed at Jewish audiences. In 1954 he sold his first genre fantasy or science fiction story, 'My Boy Friend's Name Is Jello', to *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*, and in 1958 made his name with a story called 'The Golem', also in *F&SF*. This tells of an elderly couple, sitting outside their suburban home, who are approached by a golem. They do what anybody would do: wrote on the golem's forehead and set him to work mowing the lawns. Davidson's other enduring successes from that period include 'Help! I Am Dr Morris Goldpepper' (1957), which tells of a dentist captured by aliens who force him to fit them with upper plates so they can move to America and claim welfare, and 'Or All the Seas with Oysters' (1958), which is based on the wonderful notion that safety pins are the pupae and coat hangers the larvae of bicycles. In his introduction to the story in *The Avram Davidson Treasury*, Guy Davenport tells of students in his writing classes who have handed him garbled versions of the same idea, not knowing where it has come from. Not many SF stories become urban legends.

Davidson led a restless life, constantly trying to find a house cheap enough to fit his income, or other sources of income to finance his writing career. From 1962 and 1964 he worked as by far the most interesting editor that *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction* has ever had. While he was editor, his introductions would sometimes grow longer than the stories they were meant to introduce. As editor of *F&SF*, his most memorable achievement was publishing Roger Zelazny's first hit story, 'A Rose for Ecclesiastes', accompanied by the finest SF magazine cover ever, by Hannes Bok. During this period he was living in a village in Mexico. All the paperwork involved in editing *F&SF* was at the mercy of the Mexican and US post offices. Later, Davidson lived for a while in British Honduras, now called Belize, before moving in and out of rooming houses all over the west

coast of America. During this period he published many short stories and sixteen novels, but never made any money.

That short biography contains the essence of the Avram Davidson legend: that he was an eccentric man who never made a cent because he wrote quirky stories that make people chuckle. Discountable; not regarded as one of the giants of SF. If such a legend grows up around an author, people stop reading that author, which is what happened to Davidson during the seventies and eighties. I also stopped reading him. Therefore, like most other SF readers, I missed out on the fact that year by year Davidson's work kept improving. Some of his very best stories were written just before he died.

It was not until I read the *Avram Davidson Treasury* that I gained any idea of the complex reality of Davidson's life and the true worth of his work. *The Treasury* is a particularly valuable resource, because of the care taken in its selection of stories and the range of writers chosen to comment on individual pieces. In his Foreword, here is co-editor Robert Silverberg's recollection:

Even though Avram had seemed to materialize among us like a stranger from another world, there in the mid-1950s, it turned out that he was in fact a New Yorker like the rest of us . . . Indeed he had been active in New York science-fiction fandom in his teens — co-founder, no less, of the Yonkers Science Fiction League. (I find the concept of a teenage Avram Davidson as difficult to comprehend as the concept of the Yonkers Science Fiction League, but so be it.) . . .

Born in 1923 — that means he was only thirty-five or so when I first met him at that unspecified party at an indeterminable time in the late 1950s. Which is hard to believe now, because I think of thirty-five-year-olds these days as barely postgraduate, and Avram, circa 1958, bearded and rotund and professorial, seemed to be at least sixty years old . . .

So we clustered around this curious little man at our parties and got to know him, and when his stories appeared we bought the magazines that contained them and read them; and our appreciation, and even love, for his work and for him knew no bounds. He was courtly and droll. He was witty. He was lovable. He could be, to be sure, a little odd and cranky at times (though not nearly as much as he would come to be, decades later, in his eccentric and cantankerous old age), but we understood that geniuses were entitled to be odd and cranky.

Here Silverberg gives me the clue to all of Davidson's work — that he was born old and wise, except in aspects of his personal life. But that's not quite the impression he gave when his stories first became well known among SF fans. Because of the success of such stories as 'The Golem' and 'Dr Morris Goldpepper', he was regarded as an oddball

genius, rather than a real genius. His oddest stories are his earliest, and their eccentricity often made it difficult for readers to see their brilliance. In the late fifties and early sixties, he really hoped to sell enough fiction to become a success in the field, so he wrote too many stories of the wrong sort. Many of his published pieces of that era were six-page sting-in-the-tail stories, clever but unmemorable.

If we want to judge the true ability of Avram Davidson, we can start at the beginning of his career. Take his first fantasy story, 'My Boy Friend's Name Is Jello', published in *F&SF*. Its first paragraph is Joycean stream-of-consciousness writing, not at all the sort of thing one finds in SF magazines of the early fifties. A man is suffering from a disease, which he calls Virus Y. We have no idea who he is, where he is living, how he caught whatever he caught. 'Oh dear, how my mind runs on. I must be feverish. An ague, no doubt.'

The second paragraph begins: 'Well, rather an ague than a pox. A pox is something one wishes on editors . . . strange breed, editors.' The story has switched direction entirely. Will the story be about sickness or editors?

The third paragraph begins:

'In front of the house two little girls are playing one of those clap-handie games. Right hand, left hand, cross hands on bosom, left hand, right hand . . . it makes one dizzy to watch. And singing the while:

*My boy friend's name is Jello,  
He comes from Cincinello,  
With a pimple on his nose  
And three fat toes;  
And that's the way my story goes!*

There is a pleasing surrealist quality to this which intrigues me. In general I find little girls enchanting. What a shame they grow up to be *big* girls and make our lives as miserable as we allow them, and oft-times more.

The narrator then speculates about people who criticise Charles Lutwidge Dodgson for his attitude to little girls. Is *this* the direction the story is taking?

Only in paragraph four do we return to the theme of paragraph one: illness. If this story were music, this procedure might not be puzzling. It's quite common to introduce three different phrases at the beginning of a piece of music, with the knowledge that the listener will allow the composer, at leisure, to stitch them all together. When a writer of fiction does this, we readers often don't see how the themes are stitched together. We say that he or she is writing a 'shaggy dog story', which the *Macquarie Dictionary* defines as a 'generally long and involved funny story whose humour lies in the pointlessness or irrelevance of its conclusion'.

Davidson's narrator begins to talk to the little girls, who are playing outside his window. In turn, this leads to speculations about the other people in the hospital, or whatever, in which he is staying. He mentions a Miss Thurl, who brings in supplies. Rain falls, gradually washing away the chalk marks of the girls' game. Miss Thurl brings him tea.

A new theme emerges on page three of the story:

I thank whatever gods may be that Mr Ahyellow came in just then. The other boarder (upstairs), [hah! at last we discover that the narrator is living in the front room of the bottom floor of a boarding house] a greengrocer, decent fellow, a bit short-tempered. He wished me soon

well. He complained he had his own troubles, foot troubles . . . I scarcely listened, just chattered . . . Toes . . . something about his toes. Swollen, three of them, quite painful. A bell tinkled in my brain. I asked him how he spelt his name. A-j-e-l-l-o. Curious, I never thought of that. Now, I wonder what he could have done to offend the little girls? Chased them from in front of his store, perhaps. There is a distinct reddish spot on his nose. By tomorrow he will have an American Beauty of a pimple.

All those shaggy dogs, the themes, are starting to be mustered. As this happens, they are becoming part of one theme. The narrator lying in bed works out that the girls outside are junior sorceresses. One of their other calling games blesses a boy friend named Tony, 'who eats macaroni, has a great big knife and a pretty little wife, and will always lead a happy life . . . that must be the butcher opposite; he's always kind to the children.'

The narrator is a sensible chap. He takes out two dimes and flings them out the window. He thinks:

Too bad about Ajello, but every man for himself. Listen to them singing away, bless their little hearts! I love little girls. Such sweet, innocent voices.

*My boy friend will soon be healthy.  
He shall be very wealthy.  
No woman shall harry  
Or seek to many;  
Two and two is four, and one to carry!*

It will be pleasant to be wealthy, I hope. I must ask Ajello where Cincinello is.

Three and a half pages, yet here is the heart of Davidson's genius: his shaggy dog stories metamorphose into lean wolf stories. In musical terms, it's a merry mini-sonata that Mozart might have written. Like much of the rest of Davidson's fiction, it also proved to be autobiographical. Davidson's relationships with women seem to have been uncomfortable throughout his life, except for his short marriage to Grania Kaiman who, even after many years of remarriage to Steve Davis, calls herself Grania Davidson Davis. He never became wealthy. I get the impression that he was sick a lot. He lived in lots of boarding houses and rented houses. He often gave dimes and dollars to unlikely people, especially when he was himself down and out.

'The Spook-box of Theobald Delafont De Brooks', the last story he wrote, appeared just after his death in 1993. It is sixteen pages long, rather than three and a half pages. When you finish it, you feel as if you've read a novel. Yet it is also, in essence, the same story as 'My Boy Friend's Name Is Jello'.

For an Avram Davidson story, 'The Spook-box' has a fairly straightforward beginning. The main character earns his living by collecting rents on old properties owned by old Miss Whittier. For this privilege he is allowed free rent, which for him is the difference between survival and poverty.

The narrator is a con artist. He is quite proud of way he can fool Miss Whittier into giving him privileges that enable him to make a bit of money on the side. He has one advantage over other people who might have tried to take advantage of Miss Whittier's vagueness: his name, Theobald Delafont De Brooks. In the world of this story, which is slightly off to one side from ours, Theobald De Brooks and Grosvenor Delafont De Brooks had been presidents of the

United States of America. When people meet the narrator of the story, they assume that he has some close relationship with these presidents or their descendants. The main character assumes the same thing. There is one catch: nobody from the Delafonts or the De Brooks will admit that he is part of the family. He keeps sending letters to his putative relatives.

No invitation to come boating or swimming at Muskrat Sump. No invitation to go golfing or riding at Parkkill Ridge. Oh well. Take what you can get. Hope for the Big Chance. Keep your powder dry. And — say — don't knock it. On the strength of the Story Number One, Theobald De Brooks . . . floated into a job offered by an uncle . . . not much of a job, but it kept them in groceries and off Relief. *See?*

Where are the shaggy dogs in this story? We keep bumping up against famous names, or at least, names that the main character believes are famous. Theobald has spent his life surrounded in a cloud of family history, but the cloud never quite turns into rain. As people keep telling him, 'If your name is De Brooks, why ain't you rich?' Early in his life, he asked his father, 'How come all we've got are the names?' Nobody has an answer to that. His father remembers one possible connection, Phoebe Fisher De Brooks of Fishkill, New York. A letter for a reference that would enable Theo to obtain a scholarship 'for the benefit of native-born American boys being of Holland Dutch descent' brings only a letter to the effect that 'Miss De Brooks was absolutely unable to be of assistance even in regard to distant family ties, and that she hoped that Theobald would meet with all the success to which his merits might entitle him'.

Theo becomes a jack of all trades, distributing cards that claim he is in Real Estate and Business and Financial Management. His name, his heritage, forever hangs around his neck, promising a chance that never comes. Theo's story meanders. He tells the story, gleaned from a newspaper, of the 'Missing Treasure of the Patriot Patroon', a member of the De Brooks family who sought to rescue a treasure from advancing British troops during the Revolution. A month later, he turned up, 'tired, hungry, muddy, bloody, and exceedingly confused'. It was not clear whether or not he still had the treasure. All that connects the main character with the old treasure is a scrappy old letter he owns — his only actual connection with the De Brooks.

As Theo's hopes continue, his life winds down. He is offered a chance to join a club of people who feel they have distant relationships with old America, but turns it down:

TDD, after a lifetime of ungratified hopes and increasingly entrenched disappointments, was no longer really sure of what he really wanted. But he was sure that it was not to become a part of a would-be cabal of unpensioned former railroad telegraphers, retired secretaries of down at heel institutions, bankrupted salesmen of the bonds of obscure municipalities: seeking to revive the ghost of the Know Nothings and secure for themselves a share of the openings for US vice-consulates and inspectorates of intestate properties, to which their descents from militia officers of the War of 1812 obviously entitled them . . . — Was that how he seemed to others? he wondered — and the wondering of it give him a very sharp pain whenever he thought about it: and, after that, he thought about it often.

Here is the heart of the story, written in prose as chewy and delicious as any to be found in American short fiction. It tells how one man gradually comes to have a clear idea of himself, after living a life of illusion. What is of most value? To read a lot of Avram Davidson is to find that old objects and ideas are valuable, but they can also trap someone, as Theo De Brooks is trapped. At the time Davidson wrote this story, he was old and sick and poor, and must have known he would soon be dead. His life must have seemed to him one of 'ungratified hopes and increasingly entrenched disappointments'. For other writers, writers much less gifted than him, the main chance usually arrived at least once in life — a movie sale here, a bestseller there, a story that keeps on selling. But for a writer, there are no guarantees. Therefore this story is the tale of coming to terms with a life lived in hope but without guarantees.

The story ends as the main character is finally offered his main chance. The old patroon's treasure chest (or 'spook box'), never opened, is traced to Theo, as the only surviving relative. He is the only person who knows what it might contain. When he opens it, he finds that the old ancestor had, during that lost month in his life, sold the jewels and gold rumoured to be in the spook-box, in return for a box full of Continental money. Totally worthless paper. Theo asks himself:

Had he not wasted his life on a dead claim to a dead name? Was there not, waiting in the chest, one message of great worth? *Lay thy burden down*, it seemed to say. It had to say *something*, didn't it?

This is a very moving story, all the more because it is not clear what the shape of the story actually is until the last page or so. Also, it's very funny. It's not sour humour. It is rueful humour, a comedy about one man's self-delusion. But it's not a gloomy story, because Theo invests so much energy into his life of delusion, which had given meaning to his life. In the end, he can laugh out loud at himself.

As I said at the beginning, Avram Davidson seemed old to his contemporaries. In 'My Boy Friend's Name Is Jello', the ritual of the girls' pavement game is centuries old. It's a piece of traditional magic that happens to touch upon the main character. In 'The Spook-box of Theobald Delafont De Brooks', the main character is afflicted by an ancient association of names, which he takes to be fortunate, but which proves to be curse of his life. Avram Davidson wrote an entire book of articles about old things. Called *Adventures in Unhistory*, it displays his immense wealth of knowledge about all things ancient, demonstrating how most such knowledge is based on mistaken observations. The legend of the mermaid may or may not be based on sailors' observations of the manatee; the legend of the werewolf may or may not be based on ancient experiences of rabid wolves; and so on. Davidson kept vast notebooks of his discoveries about every possible subject.

Given that immense learning about the past can often lead a writer to commit unreadable pedantry, why do Davidson's stories seem fresh? Why does Davidson the writer never lose control of his shaggy dogs?

A quick answer would be: because every page of a Davidson story raises a chuckle. The whole is funny because all the minute parts of the story are funny. What, then, delights Davidson? I asked Elaine this. She said, 'He loves the people he is writing about.' Why are Davidson's observations about people more interesting than those of many other writers?

Because Davidson values people who are usually forgotten or despised by other people, and often by other writers.

Most of Davidson's characters are middle-aged or old. Some of his best stories are about feisty old women. In 'Where Do You Live, Queen Esther?' (1961), an old servant, mistreated by the people she has served for many years, takes a wonderfully ingenious revenge, using a nice little bit of traditional magic. In 'The Woman Who Thought She Could Read' (1959), an entire neighbourhood gangs up on an old woman who can foretell the future. The upright citizens do not listen to what she has to say; they think she's a witch; and the narrator becomes her betrayer.

That's a sombre story, as is the beginning of 'Crazy Old Lady' (1976). In introducing the story in *The Avram Davidson Treasury*, Ethan Davidson, the author's son, recalls when he was fourteen and living with his father in a house shared with a blind man:

Avram liked to move every few months, and I became accustomed to living with all sorts of people. Most of these people had something unusual about them . . . One was even a crazy old lady. Even when he lived alone, he sometimes brought in homeless derelicts or confused young people. Avram was sometimes irritable. But he often also displayed quite a bit of compassion.

Eighteen years have passed. The number of people who are poor, elderly, and live in bad neighborhoods has increased tremendously.

The story itself is just an elaboration of that proposition, until it reaches its end, and we discover the delightful way in which the Crazy Old Lady solves her problem of keeping a roof over her head while avoiding the criminals who have moved into her neighbourhood. In writing this story, Davidson has dramatised one of his major themes, the deterioration of American thought and culture during the last thirty or forty years. Much of this deterioration has happened because of America's insistence on forgetting what was important in its past. To Davidson, the past is usually more complex and humane than the modern, and allows more possibilities for living the good life. This is the opposite of the prevailing weight of opinion in SF over the last sixty or seventy years: that the past is better than the present or future because there life is simpler and less complicated than it is today.

In the Dr Eszterhazy stories, Davidson writes about his true home of the spirit, the Triune Monarchy of Scythia-Pannonia-Transbalkania, a mythical empire he says existed somewhere in middle Europe before the First World War. Its rickety political system unites not only the Scythians, Pannonians and Transbalkanians, but an endless variety of other peoples and tribes, who have little time for each other but pay allegiance to the eccentric King-Emperor Ignats Louis, friend and patron of Doctor Engelbert Eszterhazy, who has five doctorates, immense wealth, and can leave no puzzle unsolved or piece of magic uninvestigated. In these stories, Davidson has done what we often like to do when writing or reading fantasy: relate the adventures of the person we would like to be. Doctor Eszterhazy is a loosely disguised Avram Davidson, but a Davidson with the money to follow his interests without needing to kowtow to editors, the connections to enable him to travel widely and meet all types of people, and the wisdom to solve problems while staying modestly in the background. Scythia-Pannonia-

Transbalkania is a wonderfully crazy place, full of people who survive through complex compromises and gimcrack arrangements. Davidson writes about Scythia-Pannonia-Transbalkania with such affection and detailed knowledge that he seems to have felt it to be the country that America should have been. I won't single out any stories, except to recommend them all, and hope you can find a copy of the Owlswick Press anthology, *The Adventures of Doctor Eszterhazy* (1990). Savour the geniality of Davidson's world view: his belief that all people are intrinsically interesting, and everything is forgivable but self importance.

However, 'Polly Charms, the Sleeping Woman', the Eszterhazy story that's in the *Treasury*, is one of the most puzzling stories I've read, and solving it is not helped by Gene Wolfe's introduction, which is as gnomic and puzzling as you would expect from Wolfe. Anybody who offers me a sensible account of the meaning of the ending of this story, with or without Gene Wolfe's help, will earn my undying gratitude.

If it's still available, *The Avram Davidson Treasury* is a carefully edited and valuable introduction to this writer. Few of the people who introduce the individual stories tell us much that we can't work out for ourselves, but some, like John Clute, in his introduction to the story 'Dagon', are really useful. *The Adventures of Doctor Eszterhazy* would be my next recommendation.

A recent anthology, *Everybody Has Somebody in Heaven: Essential Jewish Tales of the Spirit*, edited by Jack Dann and Grania Davis, has all of Davidson's early sketches and learner stories, which appeared in *Jewish Life* and *Commentary* in the late forties and early fifties. Even the slightest of these sketches, which are usually about Israel and the Adriatic countries in the late 1940s, are vivid and perceptive. Did Davidson ever write an uninteresting sentence? I doubt it. He was always brilliant, funny, and perceptive; in short, a great American writer whose stories are still to be discovered.

— Bruce Gillespie, 6 March 2001

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Essential anthologies:

Avram Davidson, *The Adventures of Doctor Eszterhazy*, Owlswick Press, Philadelphia, 1990, 366 pp. (The original set of Eszterhazy stories, plus the 'young Eszterhazy' stories written a decade later.)

Avram Davidson, ed. Jack Dann and Grania Davis, *Everybody Has Somebody in Heaven: Essential Jewish Tales of the Spirit*, Devora Publishing, 2000, 285 pp. 10 contributors.

Avram Davidson, ed. Robert Silverberg and Grania Davis, *The Avram Davidson Treasury*, Tor, New York, 1998, 447 pp. 41 contributors.

### Read these if you can find them:

Avram Davidson, *Adventures in Unhistory*, Owlswick Press, Philadelphia, 1993, 307 pp.

Avram Davidson, *Strange Seas and Shores*, Doubleday, New York, 1971, 219 pp.

Avram Davidson, *What Strange Stars and Skies*, Ace Books, New York, 1965, 188 pp.

Avram Davidson, ed. Grania Davis and Richard A. Lupoff, *The Investigations of Avram Davidson*, St Martin's Press, New York, 1999, 246 pp.

Avram Davidson, ed. John Silbersack, *Collected Fantasies*, Berkley Books, New York, 1982, 224 pp.

---

# Whenever Crocodiles Appear

More on Avram Davidson

---

Usually I avoid anything that resembles show biz, but once a year I write and deliver a paper on something or other for Melbourne's Nova Mob, which just keeps on going and going, 31 years after it was founded by John Foyster. I don't like giving papers, but I like the stimulus of being forced to write at least one essay per year. I wish I could avoid giving the paper, as people have to look at me instead of me looking at them. March's Nova Mob was worse. I couldn't see *them*.

At the March meeting, enough people turned up, and the weather was sufficiently warm, that we took our seats into the back yard of the Brunswick residence of Lucy Sussex and Julian Warner. There was a catch. Although the hot weather hadn't broken, the days were getting shorter. I began reading my talk. About half way down the first page, I realised that shortly I would have to cut it short or start making it up. I could hardly see the pieces of paper. I kept going. Suddenly the reliable frame of Julian Warner loomed at my side. He was carrying a portable lamp. When he switched it on, I could see my pieces of paper again, but I couldn't see anybody *out there*.

When I had finished, and I could see the Nova Mobbers again, I realised that not only had many turned up who late last year were presumed lost, stolen or strayed, but we had even gained a new person (Ros Gross, who reviews for my magazines from time to time).

That was my little shot at show biz for the year. I wish I could remember all the post-talk discussion. I do remember that Ian Mond, who observes Orthodox practice as strictly as did Avram Davidson, asked what was specifically Jewish about Davidson's fiction. How would I know? I enjoy the American Jewish humour found in American popular culture, such as Woody Allen's scripts, or the work of certain Jewish fiction writers, such as Stanley Elkin, whose stories remind me greatly of Davidson's. But it's not my culture, and some of the fascination of reading Davidson is seeing America from an alien viewpoint.

The only clue I have can be found in Peter Beagle's tribute to Davidson ('Avram and G-d'), in the anthology *Everybody Has Somebody in Heaven*:

He used to tell me long, ridiculously involved shaggy-dog stories in Yiddish, always assuming (or pretending to assume; who knew with that man?) that my command of the language was vastly more fluent than the handful of words and phrases that it is. But for all the twinkles and nuances that I missed as the jokes tumbled by me, one line, appended by Avram to a particular fable, is with me still, clear and cold and amused as the first time I heard it. *'Don't ever believe that we Jews were chosen by God to be his people. We volunteered.'* (p. 145)

I get the feeling, to answer Ian Mond's question, that the most Jewish aspect of Davidson's fiction is their form — the shaggy-dog story.

*Everybody Has Somebody in Heaven* is in many ways as stimulat-

ing a collection as *The Avram Davidson Treasury*. It doesn't have all the A. D. classics, as the *Treasury* has, but it is a small encyclopedia of unexpected insights — about Jewish life in general; about the startling multicultural experiment that Davidson found in the fledgling Israeli republic; and about Davidson's own fiction. For instance, here's his account of the genesis of the Doctor Eszterhazy stories:

Gradually it came to me that there had been an empire in Eastern Europe which had been so completely destroyed that we no longer even remembered it . . . that being an empire, it had an emperor; that the emperor had a wizard; the wizard drove about the streets of Bella (BELgrade/ViennA) in a steam runabout; . . . that the emperor's name was Ignats Louis; and that the wizard's name was . . . was . . . was Engelbert Eszterhazy . . . I sat down at the typewriter, and in six weeks wrote all eight stories of the first series. No rewrites were ever even suggested . . . Everything came so clear to me, the bulging eyes and bifurcated beard of Ignats Louis the fatherly King-Emperor, the teeming streets of the South Ward of Bella . . . and all the rest of it — came so clear to me — that now I recognize that I did not at all 'make them up', that Scythia-Pannonia-Transbalkania *did* exist!' (p. 209)

After I had written the talk for the Nova Mob, I realised that Scythia-Pannonia-Transbalkania was not only a picture of America as Avram Davidson would have liked it to have turned out (further evidence: 'Take Wooden Indians', one of Davidson's most complex and deeply felt stories, as well as stories he's written about pre-Civil War New York) but it resembles greatly the picture he gives in *Everybody Has Somebody in Heaven* of Israel in 1949: a vast throng of disparate peoples, hating each other most of the time, but willing to put up with each other in order to found a new commonwealth.

Avram Davidson was an idealist — a pestilentially prickly one, if I can believe all the stories told about him — but many of his ideals are also mine. My favourite piece of Davidson's writing can be found in Carol Carr's remembrance of Avram Davidson in *Everybody Has Somebody in Heaven*:

In 1983 my mother died. Avram:

*For your pain and sorrow, I am painfully sorry. There is, however, I have noticed, usually, a certain measure of relief. And for whatever relief you feel, feel therein neither pain nor sorrow. Flow with it. Resume the voyage, float, float; and whenever crocodiles appear, whack them on the snout with the paddle.* (p. 153)

In memory of Avram Davidson, keep whacking those crocodiles.

— Bruce Gillespie, 11 March 2001

---