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# Colin Wilson: From the Outside Looking In

33-42 minutes

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*In remembrance of Colin Wilson's life and works, we have resurrected our exclusive interview from the print archive and proudly present it here for internet posterity with a few minor updates.*

**Colin Wilson, one of Britain's greatest Modern thinkers, talks with Remy Dean about the death of the author, creative immortality, the magic of our minds, morbid curiosity and romantic criminality...**



Colin Wilson transcended the material world a year ago... On

this first anniversary of his death, I recall my meeting with him back in 2002. I had been to a London venue to see him address the Society for Psychical Research and had arranged to meet him after the event to ask a few questions. This was going well when he called a halt to the interview. I was flattered when he explained that my questions deserved more time to consider and invited me to join him over breakfast the following morning.

So, early the next day, I was sat across the kitchen table of the his London lodgings, being generously plied with tea, toast and marmalade by Joy, his wife. In this relaxed situation, Colin was extremely generous with both time and intellect - we chatted for a good part of the morning. I was talking with the man who wrote *The Occult* - one of the books that had the greatest influence on my mind as a youth!

The interview I ended up with was far too long for the intended publication, and it was all too interesting to cut any out... An extract saw print in *Outlook Magazine*, but I held the bulk back for *The Scrawl* pilot issue. Now, here it is again, preserved on the internet for posterity, too entertaining and important to be left in the paper archive...

## ANGRY YOUNG MAN

Colin Wilson was first recognised as one of this century's most notable thinkers and literary figures back in 1956, when his first book, *The Outsider*, was published to, initially, unanimous acclaim. Since then, he has repeatedly fallen in and out of favour with the literary community but always remains the agent provocateur - outspoken about his ideas and opinions, however controversial they may be.

He has written fact, fiction and theory. His story, *SpaceVampires*, was adapted into the SF movie, *Lifeforce*, which he has called, “The worst film ever made,” and many of his novels and short stories have been optioned for cinematic development.

Colin Wilson was born 26 June 1931, in Leicester, and grew up against a working class backdrop. He has been a voracious reader and absorber of ideas ever since he was an eight-year-old. He spent his time either reading, exploring the local countryside on his bicycle, or experimenting with his chemistry set. Depressed by his environment, he had built a refuge for himself with the words of the Romantic poets and overcame suicidal urges with the pursuit of meditation.

He left school at 16 and at the age of 18, after a short stint as a civil servant, he had to enroll for his National Service. Military authoritarianism was an anathema to the young Wilson, and after being assigned to various departments he was eventually discharged.

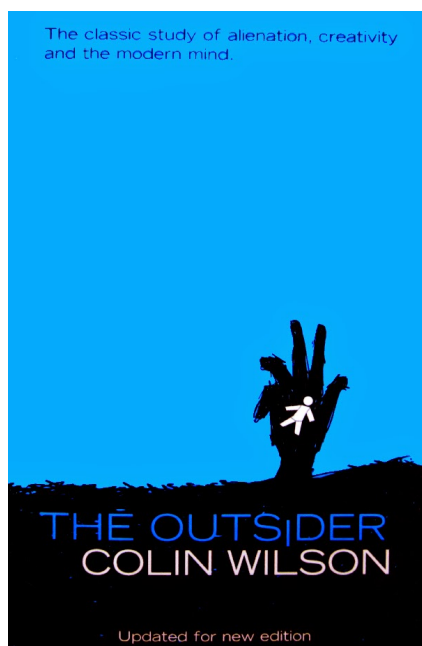
He put all his free time back into reading, thinking and writing. He devoured all kinds of books with a voracious appetite, later writing a book of his own - *The Books In My Life* - as a homage to those texts that have influenced and shaped both his interior and exterior lives. When he had enough money, he travelled in Europe. He married and divorced in the space of two years. He moved from job to job, barely covering the rent.

In 1953 with an act of will, he set out to escape this repeating cycle, stopped paying the rent, bought a weatherproof sleeping bag and took up al fresco residence on Hampstead Heath,

spending his days in the Reading Room of the British Museum to further research and write two books simultaneously.

With the encouragement of novelist Angus Wilson, the Reading Room superintendent at the time, he submitted the first part of a manuscript titled *The Outsider* to a publisher. The book was accepted on the strength of the unfinished manuscript and an advance paid to facilitate its completion.

*The Outsider*, was published in 1956, by Victor Gollancz. Never has a debut by an unknown met with such a fervent reception. Wilson was 24 when he found himself the darling of the London *literati* and hailed as a major writer. The book was a best seller in America and Europe, translated into a dozen languages within a year.



The instant success enabled Colin to afford a comfortable place to live with his second wife, Joy, and they moved into a house formerly occupied by Dylan Thomas, but Wilson was soon reacting against this fame and stardom. He became irritated by

vacuous interviewers were only interested in telling the sensational success story of 'young working class lad makes good'.

The press coined the phrase, 'Angry Young Man' and used it to label a perceived trend embodied by the likes of Wilson and John Osborne. With such a high profile and an increasingly indignant attitude, it was not long before opinion began to turn against him. Serious critics began denouncing him, many changed their views through 180 degrees. Deification turned quickly to vilification.

By 1957, his image had been assassinated to such a degree that his wife's parents forced entry to a friend's home, where they were dining, and threatened Colin, accusing him of being a bisexual who had been unfaithful with a string of lovers. They had seen some notes for his novel, *Ritual In The Dark*, and mistaken them to be his diary! It is probably apocryphal, but I have heard told that the father-in-law busted down the door, bull-whip in hand, cornered Colin and proclaimed, "The games up, Wilson, we've found your diaries!"

The police were called, by the owner of the house, and the newspapers were hot on their heels. Fed up with the media attention, Colin and Joy left London and let the rumour and gossip feed off itself. More than one critic predicted that Wilson would never have another book published and that he had been a charlatan all along

Colin Wilson is the author of more than 100 published books including science fiction novels, psychology, biography, commentary and critiques, countless essays and articles, plus

many short stories. He appeared regularly on television as an authority on serial killers, the paranormal, Atlantis and the occult. He is one of David Bowie's favourite writers.

*Scrawl* is honoured to present an extended interview with Colin Wilson conducted by Remy Dean:

## COLIN REACHES HIS PEAK

You hail the Romantic poets as a major formative influence on your life - what was it about them that affected you so deeply?

"The Romantics had these moods of intense ecstasy, but the question was how to duplicate them. Pushkin compares the poet's heart to a coal, which is blown into a glow by the wind of inspiration, and then the wind goes away and suddenly it's just a black lump. What he's saying is that you have to wait for the wind of inspiration. There's nothing you can do.

"Well, I disbelieve that, I wanted to learn the mechanics, so to speak. It seems to me that when you get into certain moods, peak experiences, it's exactly like having arrived in a particularly beautiful place in a city, but a city for which you have no map. And if you want to get back there again, the first thing you've got to do is get a map. If there are no maps on sale, you have to make your own. All my life's been about making maps..."

Like shamans charting the otherworld of the subconscious?

"Not really... a lot more practical than that. What interested me so much about the Romantic poets, was they felt that they had discovered a way of living that was far more purposeful and real than ordinary, everyday life. It struck me that they were making

an artificial distinction. What we're talking about is not ordinary, everyday life, but the state of mind that ordinary, everyday people share. If for example, you went into a room of stupid people, concerned only with gossip about the royalty or something, after you'd been in there a few hours, your state of mind would be pretty low. It would be extremely difficult to get yourself into any higher state, or to think about anything more serious. The same goes for human beings in general - we're stuck among them.

“Apparently, there are ‘feral’ children, found among animals in forests, who have actually been brought up among animals. The problem is with these ‘feral’ children, is that there’s no way of ‘humanising’ them. Even if they had been among wolves or apes for only six or eight months, they behave like apes or wolves - they remain basically ‘animal’ for the rest of their lives, even if you can teach them to speak.

“Since human beings, for the most part are pretty stupid - regarding the love affairs of the royalty as the most interesting thing in the world, for example - you can see why, being brought up among all these ‘apes’ and ‘wolves’, that most human beings are unable to rise to anything better than apes or wolves.

“I had the same problem when I was a child. I was working class, my father was a boot and shoe worker in Leicester. I was always bright, but I had this feeling that I was stuck among some extremely thick, average working class people and that I was never going to escape that. The result was, that I did what a lot of kids do - I went to extremes. I found a copy of Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture Of Dorian Gray*, when I was about twelve, I

remember devouring this from beginning to end, becoming a disciple of Oscar Wilde immediately. Simply as a way of escape.

“That’s the big question - ‘How do you get out from amongst the apes and the wolves?’ In the same way, when my mother bought me a chemistry set, when I was about ten, I just became fascinated by science, chemistry, astronomy. By the age of twelve, Einstein was my great intellectual hero and I was reading his book on the theory of relativity. Not just because I was interested in science. Because it was an escape! Like poetry, like music, like going up to a mountain top.

“This is what is interesting about human beings. The intelligent ones have this extremely powerful desire to get to the mountain tops, up from the valleys where the apes and the wolves live.”

So have you found an effective method to achieve this?

“It’s not an easy thing to do! People like myself are trying to create an artificial environment that people can escape to. The Romantics also did that, but the trouble was, if you escaped to their mountain tops, you couldn’t live there, because the air was too thin, and when people came down from those mountain tops, they found the real world so appalling that they shuddered and committed suicide! Now, there’s obviously something wrong with that! It ought to be possible to create this environment, in the mind, for people to escape to from the valleys, which is just as good and healthy an environment. This could be said to be my aim and my purpose.

“This is one of the reasons why I’m interested in crime and psychology... I never felt that you have to escape into some rarefied environment where there is nothing but beauty. What



we need is any kind of intellectual interest. As soon as you get intellectually excited, it can be about the theory of relativity, or about murder, it's equally valid because the excitement carries you straight out of the valley, like a balloon taking you straight into the air.

"The result is that people like me spend all their time, particularly when young, looking for the more interesting people. Very often they're dead, but fortunately they have left their ideas behind in books, music and paintings.

"In a sense, my books are themselves a complete intellectual environment. If you're interested in philosophy and mysticism, then you can read certain books of mine, if your interested in crime and so on - the darker depths of human psychology - then you read others."

What is your motivation for writing if not fame?

"Everybody's motive is the same: to alter one's self. In the process of pulling yourself up, you also happen to be pulling other people up, with a bit of luck. The whole question of fame is a very interesting one, nobody honestly says 'No, I don't want fame'...

"...Yet, what I was saying in *The Outsider*, is that it's extremely important to be able to subsist without fame. All the great outsiders from, Shiele and Hoffman, down to VanGogh and Mogdigliani, have subsisted without fame, died more or less unknown, or even jeered at. The main problem with these outsiders was that they didn't realise that it was possible to stand alone. If you drove yourself up to a far higher level of intensity, then you could in fact subsist as an outsider.



Colin Wilson - when being outside was the in thing...

“One of the main problems is, of course, if you publish a book like *The Outsider*, which makes you famous, suddenly you are potentially an in-sider. I was saved from that by a terrific backlash of all the critics. Within three months of *The Outsider* coming out, everybody was saying the book was a fake, a fraud, it’s just an anthology of quotations from other people... The result was that I was suddenly right back where I started, except that I now had the possibility of making a living as a writer. In a country like England, that made me a total outsider!”

Do you think you have to be on the outside to write?

“In a sense, yes. I wrote *The Outsider* because I was so fascinated by the people who don’t fit in, who have this strong evolutionary urge to rise to a higher level, because they are totally dissatisfied with the people around them. Then having achieved this, having got *The Outsider* published, to suddenly be denounced as a fake when I’m probably the most serious writer that Britain has ever produced! The feeling was ‘Oh, well - F\*\*k it! I said that it should be possible - to exist as an outsider!’”

“In Shaw’s *Back to Methuselah*, a sculptor produces sculptures of the ancients instead of the usual beautiful young people. So

all these young people go to see them and are revolted, 'ancients, how awful!' Then, a much older sculptor tells him that when he was younger, he also had this desire to stop sculpting just beautiful young bodies which bored him and also did busts of ancients. So the first sculptor says, 'well bring them out, I'd love to see them, I've done it and these f\*\*king c\*\*ts haven't done me any harm!'

"And the other chap says, 'well, I destroyed them'.

"I feel very much the same – I did it and these f\*\*king c\*\*ts haven't done me any harm! I've succeeded in remaining an outsider and *the f\*\*king c\*\*ts haven't done me any harm!* I hope I'm a kind of symbolic figure in that way..."

## PLAYING CHESS WITH MR. DEATH

Talking of age, you have said that the peak experience can make people feel indestructible and able to go on for ever... are you a proponent of longevity, and immortality, being good and desirable things?

"Well... Shaw believed that human beings should be capable of living to be 300, but in *Back To Methuselah*, when the question is raised of what do you have to do to achieve this, his answer is you don't need to do anything – it will just happen, Now, he had not really understood the basic problem, which is that you need such a high level of intellectual drive and self-renewal in order to keep going indefinitely. Shaw did not have that. You only have to read those later books about him like, *Days With Bernard Shaw* and *Shaw's Corner*, by people who wrote down Shaw's conversations in later years, to see that Shaw's mind had reached a full stop. It was just dreadfully repetitive... What he

should have been doing at that age is studying the up-and-coming people like Heidegger and Jean Paul Sartre, he should have been learning new things instead of living in the past.

“I spent a couple of years trying to understand Heidegger and Foucault, and when I finally got the hang of them, I realised that all the effort had not really been worth it – they said nothing new at all. Then again, in a sense, there never is anything new! There are only two positions in philosophy. A negative, materialist position, or a positive, idealist position. No matter how much you try to disguise it, your philosophy ends up as one of the two. Like a billiard table with only two pockets, eventually, you drop into one pocket or the other.”

Eternal life has had a lot of bad press over the ages, from the Wandering Jew to Dorian Grey. By far the best-known ambassador for immortality must be Count Dracula, cursed to live forever, the Prince of Darkness. All our legends and folklore seem to be designed to make us certain of death. The possibility of physical immortality has been portrayed as evil, something no-body should want...

Why do you think there is such an in-grained resistance to longevity in our culture? Why are those thinkers and scientists who are outspoken proponents of longevity, such as Timothy Leary, so vilified by the UK press?

“Remember, Aldous Huxley wrote a book called *After Many A Summer* as a deliberate counterblast to Shaw’s *Back To Methuselah*, and in it the old count – or whatever he is – has discovered how to extend his life by eating the raw liver of fish... something like that. When they find him at the end, he has

turned into a kind of ape. This, of course, was Huxley's typically pessimistic comment on all this. He was a terribly negative man in many ways.

"You see, most people don't want to be faced with the immense effort that would be entailed in actually teaching themselves how to live for a long time. Or, in deed, having to evolve in any way!

"This is a reason for my unpopularity among the English intellectuals – they're a lazy lot of f\*\*kers! Every single one of the bastards is f\*\*king lazy! The English are the laziest people in the world, intellectually speaking. They're living in a kind of cultural desert. They always admire anybody who has no talent and is modest about it! We don't have a really intellectual tradition, no Satres, Heideggers or Goethes.

"We have Shakespeare, and Jane Austin – who describe everyday life and are very good at it, but nothing much outside that. Aldus Huxley is really a male Jane Austin, still stuck in that little ambiance of tea on the vicarage lawn and all the rest of it! This tends to summarise the English temperament.

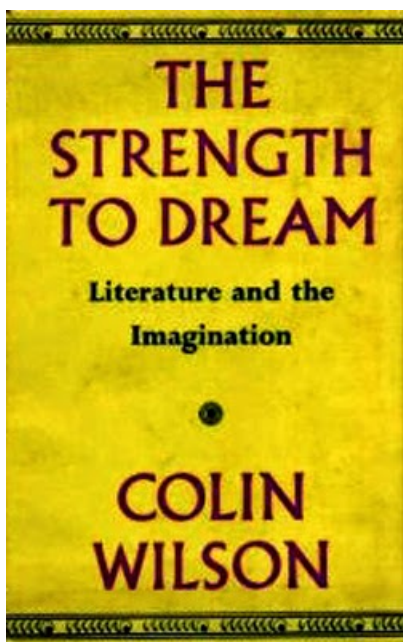
"England has many very good things about it. One of them is that there is a great deal of freedom and you can, more or less, say what you like. We've never had a dictatorship. It's quite a good environment for someone like me – I'm allowed to get on and do what I want to do, provided that I can make a living. There are no real barriers, as there would be if I had lived in Russia or Nazi Germany!

"The fact remains that I do get pretty bored, now and then, by the sheer stupidity of the English. There seems no way of making the English think. The buggers just will not think! That's

why they love John Osbourne who says in *The Entertainer*, ‘I don’t want to make people think, I want to make them feel.’ Well f\*\*k it, we feel too much! Osbourne certainly does. I want to make them *think*. Unfortunately that’s almost impossible to do!”

Moving from the sublime to the reviled... Your interest is not solely absorbed by those members of the human species that attain exceptional levels of intellectual and creative powers, you are also an ‘expert’ on criminals and murders – serial killers in particular...

“Ted Bundy was a highly intelligent man, one of my outsider types, who had this rather harsh background with a grandfather he greatly admired, but who was a total bully. Bundy’s mother moved away to Seattle, Tacoma, in order to get away from this family background, and what Bundy as a child wanted, was what I wanted... and what Bernard Shaw confessed to wanting: dreams about being a prince in disguise, about someone turning up and saying, ‘I’m your real father and I’m the Raja of so-and-so...’ Of course, he wanted to be adopted by an uncle who was a music professor, so all these daydreams...



“But! What you need is what I called *The Strength To Dream* – taking the title of my book from Bernard Shaw, who thought that every dream could be willed into reality by those who were sufficiently serious about it and whose will is strong enough. This is what I wanted to do.

“Ted Bundy did not have the strength to do that. Or rather, he was so completely shunted onto another track, by his sexual desire, that took him the wrong way. The judge who said, ‘You took the wrong road pardner,’ had absolutely got straight to the point.

“In the beginning of *Ritual in the Dark*, where the character goes down into the London underground and the advertising pictures of girls in their underwear he feels like a match thrown against a petrol soaked rag. The trouble with our civilization is that the level of sexual stimulation is far too high.”

It seems often that our society is very repressive, sexually, evident from the degree of censorship in films, books and comics. Yet, as you say, our advertising seems to rely heavily upon images of overt sexuality. Perhaps this is something (semi)conscious: if sexuality is routinely suppressed, then these quite blatant images in advertising become so much more potent...

“No – you see what you are suggesting by that argument is that perhaps we ought to have a far more open and sexually liberated society. Like the old jokes about Sweden, ‘Oh, that was wonderful... what’s your name?’ And that also leads to too much emphasis on sex and we’re back to Ted Bundy. The simple fact

is that when you are really deeply interested in ideas, you become absorbed and transcend sex. It becomes an enjoyable diversion, but you're not so deeply obsessed by it.

"I realise more and more, that this is a problem with our society. Robert Ardrey said in *African Genesis*, 'in the jungle, sex is just a side show.' As soon as you put animals in a zoo, they do nothing but screw, but in the wild, this just isn't so. They are interested in more serious things, like eating and surviving... Reproducing is a part of it all, but not the dominant, all-important part.

"The problem with this civilization is that we're all living in a zoo and as a result, sex has been raised to this intense level where we get serial killers who are obsessed by it. Who, like Ted Bundy or Ian Brady, wreck themselves and destroy their lives, and the lives of others, just because at a certain point they decide that it is worth exploring this sexual thing as far as they can possible go."

Serial killers seem to have become the entertainment archaetype. Hannibal, and before that Freddie Kruger, are almost heroes. Do you think this indicative of a culture that is teetering on this sexual frustration? Or is it morbid fascination, or just that the serial killer has become the new ogre, the new mythic foe... It seems to be serial killers or alien abductors... or terrorists.

"I was surprised when I went into a shop, in Melbourne, that sold nothing but crime books, and they told me that most of their customers were teenage girls! To me, the reason for this seems clear. Teenage girls are in the most danger of being the next



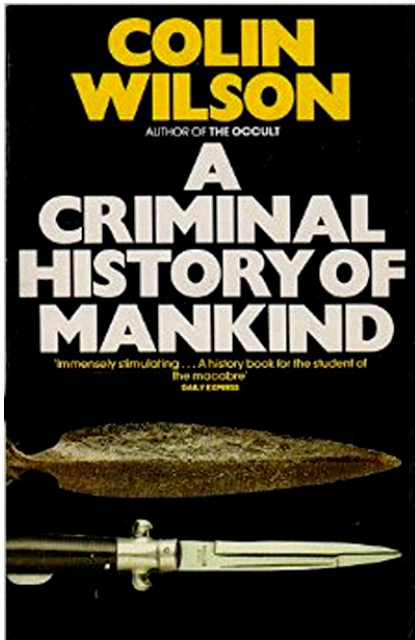
victim, and you always want to know about things that frighten you. When I was young I read books on sharks, octopus and snakes, because they struck me as creepy creatures. Like serial killers, you are not very likely to actually ever become a victim of these things, but they worry you. But what you learn almost immediately is that, in general, the usual stories you hear about them are rubbish! Conan Doyle wrote a story about some mysterious thing that kills people – their bodies are found horribly crushed. It turns out in the end to be a python. It is completely inaccurate about the behaviour of pythons!

“What we want to do is to learn about the things that frighten us by knowing about the real thing. In a sense, serial killers are less frightening than they appear to be. Someone like Henry Lee Lucas turns out to be a very mixed-up man with a strong desire for ‘salvation’, and an extremely bad habit formed when he was young, of fucking dead things. And as soon as you know that clearly, Henry Lee Lucas ceases to be this powerful, sinister serial killer.

“Dennis Neilson said of serial killers, when he was talking about *The Silence Of The Lambs*, that Harris had turned Hannibal Lector into a tremendously potent sinister figure and this was rubbish. He said, ‘I never felt potent in my life and that’s the reason I killed’. That’s a real insight – you see that Harris has completely distorted the serial killer.

“I think that *Silence Of The Lambs* is quite a good book, on the level of a fairy tale. It’s rather like Jack and the bean stalk, ‘Fee Fi Fo Fum...’ – totally unrealistic.”

Do think that these criminals, murders and serial killers might be trying to get away from their circumstances, some form of escape from the apes and the wolves – setting themselves aside from the rest of human society by committing ‘inhuman’ acts?



“You’re talking about the criminal romantic...”

“To me someone like Nielson is totally uninteresting. Just as he says himself. Not a Criminal Romantic at all, just an inadequate victim of his necrophilia.”

I wonder if any of them can be seen as ‘Romantic’?

“Ian Brady, I think, was a Criminal Romantic. Ted Bundy was a Criminal Romantic. But the others, for example Richard Speck – who killed the eight nurses in Chicago – though he had the makings, so to speak, of a Criminal Romantic, he was basically

just another inadequate personality like so many of these mass killers. Just a few have the idea, at the beginning, that if you do whatever you wanted to do – this is the De Sade fallacy – that, somehow, you would evolve beyond it. You would put it behind you... and stand triumphantly above these desires that no longer hold power over you.

“This doesn’t happen. What happens – and this is a very interesting and weird thing – is they get tangled, it’s like they can’t get their feet free of the net and they keep repeating the killing. The Yorkshire Ripper is a very good example of this. Now, I think there is a very good case for arguing that these people are literally possessed. Again and again these people say they are possessed by the devil. I wouldn’t be the least bit surprised!”

## INSIDE, OUTSIDE and THE OTHERSIDE

How firmly do you believe in spirits? You have given talks at the Society for Psychical Research...

“The answer is that I do, and it doesn’t strike me as the least bit important. The evidence seems strongly in favour of life after death. But, it’s as if you handed me some interesting piece of machinery and I asked you, ‘What’s this?’ and you tell me that it’s part of a car or a radio... I’d say, ‘Well that’s of no use to me whatever’. If I had a car that needed that part, I’d be delighted, but I haven’t. In the same way, handing me a piece of information like there is life after death, I’d think, ‘Well what can I do with this? Of what practical use is it to me?’ The answer is that it’s not.

“Although Dostoevsky said that the problem of whether we live after death is the most important question of all, to me this seems a fallacy. It would be nice to be absolutely certain that we live after death, but the real question is this confusion of the world we live in. The basic point is to try and understand it. That’s why I was so excited by chemistry when I was ten years old, it offered me a key with which to begin to understand it. I like to know things, it gives me pleasure. I feel that in a sense, I’m merely an instrument of a force that wants everyone to know things. One of my jobs, as a writer, is to digest information and process it in such a way that it becomes available to a larger number of people.”

I think a friend of yours, Robert Anton Wilson is also very good at doing that...

“Oh, Bob is an old friend of mine, and Bob has said some very interesting things! There’s one piece that comes to mind, in his book *The Illuminati Papers*, in which he describes when he began to smoke pot, while his wife was out at a feminist meeting once, and how he suddenly realised that with pot you could do the most amazing things. You could make yourself shrink, or expand until you filled the whole room. He goes on to say that later he realised that you can do this without pot. This made him terribly aware that we don’t understand anything about the powers of the mind. He talks about Freudian repressions and says that you suddenly realise that our minds are so full of these repressions, but you never notice because when you look at the external world, we edit it so quickly that we are not aware of the editing process. We are not aware that we are processing all the information. What’s more, processing it through things that we take absolutely for granted, we just accept these things as real.

He says that when you do become aware of this editing process and the terrific speed at which it occurs, then you also realise that you can start re-editing things, and learn how to this more and more. It seems to me that when Bob wrote that three-page piece, he said one of most important things that any human being in the twentieth century has ever said. He put his finger right on it!

“He’s great fun, one of these rebel characters, very funny – a kind of Mark Twain. A lot of American rebels, like Vonnegut, for example, are very good at being anarchic and jibing about things, but they’re not terribly good when it comes to being creative and analytical. That’s where, I think, Robert Anton Wilson goes one phase better. He’s a very good example of what I mean by an outsider. He doesn’t make a tremendous fortune, he has to work as a journalist all the time... His books sell to a cult audience and make him a living, and he lectures around, but he is still working hard and he’s two or three years older than I am! The result, I hope, is that him and me both will make 90!” [ *Editor's note: Sadly, Robert Anton Wilson has also passed away since this interview was conducted, he died on 11 January 2007, aged 75. He was outlived by Colin, who died on 5 December 2013, aged 82. ]*

How do you compare your fiction and non-fiction?

“In a sense, my fiction is the ‘serious stuff’. To begin with, I thought of myself as a novelist. *Ritual In The Dark* took years and years to write and was the basis for *The Outsider*. I was writing *Ritual* longer before *Outsider*. In *Ritual*, I was writing about the three types of person: the hero, who is the typical intellectual outsider, feeling bewildered but pretending to be very

analytical. There is the painter called Oliver Glass, who was based on Van Gogh, who is what you might call the emotional outsider. Then there is the murderer, Austin Munn, who is really based on somebody like Nijinski, who is the physical outsider. Each of them has a different way of disciplining themselves: the mind, the emotions, the body. It was when I was talking to my friend, Bill Hopkins, about this, that I began to express this idea about the three types of outsider, that I suddenly saw that I could write a book about this. So, the central chapter in *The Outsider* is the chapter in which I deal with T E Lawrence as the typical intellectual outsider, Van Gogh and Nijinski. These three types of outsider became the basis of the book and having taken this stuff out of *Ritual* and put it into another book, I lightened the load of *Ritual* and it became much easier to write! I had been trying to digest too much information into it.

“Ever since then, all my novels have been lightweight. I mean they’re not ‘just stories’, they are an attempt to digest extremely important information. For example, I wrote a book called *Introduction To The New Existentialism*, in which I talked about an idea that human beings are the victims of a kind of mind parasite that is deliberately sucking away our energies. At the same time I wrote *The Mind Parasites*. There’s always tended to be a novel running parallel with the ideas that interest me at a moment.

“I’m fascinated by virtual reality. I went to a conference in Japan about virtual reality – Timothy Leary was there talking about it. I think the interesting thing about the notion of virtual reality – being able to create a whole world inside your own head – really, the first creators of virtual reality were the Romantics. When Samuel Richardson invented the modern novel, in 1840,

with Pamela – what he had done is invent virtual reality more than two centuries ago!”

## SHAKESPEARE NEVER DID THIS!

Shamans and many ritual practices, such as visiting the other world, or astral travelling... are an ancient version of virtual reality. It seems that it is a fundamental human need to enter into, or create, these separate and virtual realities...

“The problem with ordinary reality that surrounds us is that it is filled with things that interest us and things that don’t, but mostly with things that don’t. The result is that very rarely do we perceive external reality as something that really interests us. This is why we want to visit strange places. If you are walking down a street in Hong Kong then ordinary everyday reality has taken on a higher level of interest for a short time while you are absorbing new things. The thing about a book is that writer has deliberately taken a lot of things of interest and put them between two covers. Compressed the interest, so to speak. And this was what the Romantics were doing, pushing all the interesting bits between two covers – all the bits that interested them, of course. Which involved beautiful girls, mountain landscapes, ruined castles and so on.

“This is the reason when as a child, the mere sight of a book was enough to send me into a kind of ecstasy. If I went into a room, in the house of some relatives, and I saw a book laying on a table, I headed straight for it. I wanted to know what was in it, what it was. More often than not it was some boring thing that I then didn’t want to look at. Nevertheless, this idea that you can compress meaning into books, so you create a far higher and

concentrated level of meaning between the two covers has always struck me as tremendously significant – this is one of the greatest advances the human race has ever made! And when you start compressing your daydreams into books, you’ve gone higher still.

“Shakespeare never really did what [H P Lovecraft](#) did. There are horrors in Shakespeare, but he didn’t feel that there were certain things that he wanted to get out of his system and therefore he put them into *Macbeth*. Whereas Lovecraft, who was stuck in an extremely boring environment in Providence, quite deliberately created a hothouse environment in the mind and put it into stories. In a certain sense, Lovecraft did progress. He started off writing these weird, horrible stories... the early ones really are quite morbid. Then he got more and more imaginative as he progressed and developed. Towards the end of his life, the horror all but disappears and you get very good science fiction stories like *The Shadow Out Of Time*. They are not horrible any more, they’re fascinating. Lovecraft then stopped writing! He had written himself out of the horror and thought, ‘Oh, my god. I’ve nothing more to write about!’ At which point he died.

“Kierkegaard fell dead on the pavement the day after he went to the bank and withdrew the last of his money. Almost as if the unconscious mind told them to die. As if Lovecraft’s unconscious mind said, ‘Oh dear, I’ve got rid of all my morbidity that turned me into writer, so it’s time to die’. Now if he had the courage he would have said, ‘Right, I’ve put all that behind me, now let’s get on with the next stage!’”

- Colin Wilson was talking with Remy Dean



