

TEDDY THE FISH

In combined homage to two of my favorite saints, I offer this rap. It is my interpretation of what Lord Buckley might have said about Theodore Sturgeon . . .

M'lords and miladies of the Royal Court . .

Here ah is again, here's me, and there's you. Now I heard all you cats talkin' 'bout who the greatest cat in the *world* was, talkin' 'bout Dr. A and Quarrelin' Harlan, and High Gee Wells, and Admiral Bob, and Ten-Foot Pohl, and Herb Varley on his Verb Harley, and the Lawd knows there ain't a cat alive that can blow the way of Virile Cyril Kornbluth used to do—but ah'mo' put a cat on you ... dat was the sweetest ... gonest ... *wailin'est* ... *grooviest* cat that ever stomped upon dis swingin' sphere! And they call dis-yar cat—Teddy the Fish!

That's what they called him, Teddy the Fish, cuz he *swung* skiffy, he *wailed* skiffy, he *gassed* skiffy, he *grooved* skiffy and ah'mo' tell you why: you see, skiffy was bugged wit the *critic*. Ev'y time skiffy people wanna pass the jug to the neighbor, go up to a mundane, say, "Dig a taste of this, brother," WHAM, here come the critic, start puttin' it down: *Dat stuff is bad jazz, go further, it ain't no real jazz at all, fact, what it is is Top Forty*. And PFFFFT! TWEET! the mundane split the scene and there stand the skiffy cat stoneless: bugged 'em to death.

That was before Teddy the Fish blew in on the scene, you see—and the day the Fish *blew* in on the scene seemed to be that critic's big swingin' day, cuz he was into that highbrow bag up to his *shoulders*, wailin' up an *insane breeze*. Sayin': *them skiffy people is tone deaf, and they got no heart, and they got no soul, got no cre-dentials, don't know no chords, they ain't no serious cats, and furthermore, wlwver heard of 'em?* Then he look up

-and here come the Fish

-lookin' like the merriest goat you ever see, makin' the scene wid his bad buddy, Admiral Bob (but that's a whole other lick, tell ya 'bout Bad Bob 'nother time), and the Fish look at the critic, and he smile like a faun diggin' a nymph, an' the critic start to look away

So the Fish back off about thirty-forty feet, and he put out his arms, co-o-o-o-l-wise, and he take a runnin' broad jump and WHACKED on that critic's tail so *hard*, he got the cat's *attention*

-and that gassed skiffy. *Gassed* 'em! People standin' round wid de *eyes* buggin' out, sayin', "Look what the Fish put on that boy!"

And the Fish say, TONE DEAF, IS WE? and he blew a lick God went home hummin' that night.

Fish say, NO CHOPS, HUH? an' he blew a sixteen-chorus solo in iambic *pentameter*, with two fingers of his lef' ban'.

Fish say, NO HEART? an' he blew a chorus made the critic cry like a widowed woman.

Say, WE AIN'T NO SERIOUS CATS? an' blew a lick made the critic laugh like a chile.

Say, DON'T KNOW NO CHORDS? an' blew a chord with seventeen notes scared the critic wigless, had to send out for the wig-tappers to put it back on.

Fish say, NO CREDENTIALS? an' he sat in wid the *New York Times*, hippin the mundanes to skiffy till they all got straight.

Fish say, GOT NO SOUL, IS WE? an' he blew a stanza made the critic dance like a drunken monkey, sayin', "Lord, I see Yo' plan at last, an' it ain't such a bad deal after all."

And when the critic come down, he say, "O great, sweet, swingin', groovey, non-stop, high double-clutchin' pinetop *go* of all double-swings and beauty ... " An' the Fish say, "WELL IF I AIN'T, I'M A GREAT BIG GROOVEY POLE ON A ROUGH HILL ON THE WAY THERE."

Critic say, "Tell me somethin'," (See, he was a very hip cat, the Fish was) said, "Tell me somethin', Yo' Sweet Hipness. Straighten me ... cause I'm ready. Tell me: what in the world is you *smokin'*?"

An' the Fish look at him, an' the love-look come on his face, an' he say, "LOVE AND CURIOSITY, BABY. HEH HEH. DASS ALL, IT'S JUST LOVE, AND CURIOSITY."

Critic say, "Always *did* like that skiffy, and furthermo' I dig it *in front*, man, the first one hip." An' Admiral Bob outs wid a laser cannon an' shoot 'im through the wishbone, an' the skiffy people start to party down at last .. .

Pretty soon the fame o' the Fish is jumpin', an' the grapevine is shootin' off sparks forty feet long, talkin' bout how he laid it down for the critic, cat dug it: *didn't dig it—put* it down again, dug it: *didn't dig it—put* it down a third time, WHAM, critic dug it to death, next thing you know you got skiffy people playin' Carnegie *Hall!* And that *gassed* skiffy! Anybody blowin' skiffy for a livin' today got the Fish to thank that he ain't sellin' shoes on the side to keep some juice on the table. Anybody diggin' skiffy, they got the Fish to thank if the bag ain't no drag. Anybody *ain't* diggin' skiffy, it's their own damn fault, cause the Fish laid it down, and WHAM .. . it *stayed* there.

Now the Fish went down a couple o' verses back, joined the Hallelujah Chorus in the sky. His frame is cold, his tale is told, an' he can't come to the phone. But he left his eyes behind. See, Fish had them pretty eyes. He wanted ev'body to see out his eyes, so they could seehow pretty it wuz ... when you look with love, and curiosity ... Well, dig what I tell you now: FISH LIVES!

The Fish can touch *you* any time you ready to get straight. All his best licks got recorded, baby, an' you can put 'em on any time you like and hear 'em again. Just put on his eyes, an' you can dig the world like he did, wid love, and curiosity.

The Sturgeon may be swimmin' somewhere else—but we still got the caviar .. .

—Halifax, 10 March 1986

LORD BUCKLEY facts:

—Born Stockton, CA, 1907.

—Died NYC, 1960.

—Beginning in 1925, he would get up on stage, fire up a big bowl of reefer, and start to rap, in free-associated jazzman's idiom, the ver-nacular of the hip.

—Sported a waxed mustache, evening dress, a monocle, and a pith helmet ("so necessary in a nightclub, dear boy").

—Owned a nightclub in Chicago in the thir-ties called Suzi Q, in which was held The Church of the Living Swing, substituting belly dancers for altar boys; this eventually got him run out of town by the Vice Squad.

—Once allegedly led an audience naked through the streets to crash a Frank Sinatra concert at the Waikiki Hilton.

—One friend characterizes him as " ... a stone crazy, six and a half foot tall, half Chero-kee ex-lumberjack who pretended to be an English aristocrat ... by common consent an uncouth unreliability, forever on the con ... who drank like he had a thirst you could photograph, guzzled pills like candy, and fucked anything with a handbag."