



ROBERT ANTON WILSON

BY JOSE 1.5

Robert Anton Wilson is a living example of the old tao theory of opposing forces living in harmony. The enigmatic author of more than twelve books and two plays seems to be a very up front person when you speak with him. He's undergone some very nasty shit (poverty, a childhood bout with polio, the murder of his daughter) yet he remains optimistic. Raised as a Catholic and then proceeding to join the majority of the European occult groups, Mr. Wilson remaining an agnostic.

His writing doesn't necessarily stem from his lifestyle (except for the recently reprinted and highly recommended Cosmic Trigger) but always involving and informative.

Wilson's credentials are impeccable; he holds a Ph.D in psychology from Hawthorne, directs the Prometheus society; is an active member of the L-5 society. He's been a consultant for Israel Regardi and Tim Leary among others, he's released LP's of comedy and punk, and was an editor at PLAYBOY for six years.

After PLAYBOY Wilson co-authored Illuminatus! his first and best know novel with Bob Shea. An adventure involving JFK, Dillinger, Paganism, Nazis suspended animation, Rock n' Roll, the great seal of the U.S., talking dolphins, LSD, and tantric yoga, it's a witty informative novel in which chronological format is given only a cursory nod. Highly recommended.

Illuminatus! was subsequently turned into a play and more recently, a comic book (Rip off press S.F.). Robert Anton Wilson followed this up with the novel Schrodinger's Cat and Masks of the Illuminati. Schrodinger's Cat deals with the deals with the implications of quantum physics. Masks is a detective story starring Al Einstein, J. Joyce and A. Crowley. Wilson has also written a book of essays entitled The Illuminati Papers and a series of Historical Illuminatus stories set in the fifteenth century.

Other books such as Prometheus Rising, Ishtar Rising, The New Inquisition, and Cosmic Trigger are much more straight forward. Here Wilson doesn't couch his theories into stories, but sets them out in all their mind-blowing glory. Prometheus Rising has given rise to several small New Age covens and I doubt one could read it without severely questioning the nature of "reality".

With parallels to Burroghs, Colin Wilson, Crowley, and Joyce its no wonder that Wilson has cult status as opposed to the popular respect he deserves. The majority of people can't absorb his information-dense writing style. But people continue to evolve, all of Wilson's books are back in print, articles such as this and in Mondo 2000 help spread the word.

STARTING OUT

TFP - How did you start writing?

RAW - I always wanted to be a writer as far back as I can remember. I wrote a novel the summer I graduated from grammar school. Naturally, no one wanted to publish it. Then I wrote a few short stories - all of which got rejected. And so I wrote less and less during my teens and early 20's and finally, when I was 26 I sold two articles, on the same day - which happened to be my 26th birthday. It seemed like a great birthday present! And that encouraged me to go on writing.

TFP - Do you remember what they were?

RAW - Of course, Hell, they were my first two articles. I sold one to The Realist, which you may have heard of, it was called "The Semantics of God". And the other article I sold that day was to The James Joyce Review. It was called "Joyce and Taoism".

TFP - You always seem to have a real fascination with Joyce. Why is that?

RAW - Well, Joyce's use of language is more continually interesting and exciting than just about any other writer I can think of, including Shakespeare.

CHILDHOOD

TFP - Do you still feel connected with your adolescence at all?

RAW - I always have been, but lately I've been more

connected with my childhood and pre-adolescent memories- more insight as to how I got to be where I am.

TFP - Is there anything that stands out as a turning point?

RAW - One of the main events of my childhood was having polio. It made a basic imprint in the sense that the universe

was a mean-son-of-a-bitch. I don't recall how long I had it, but before I recovered fully it must have been over a year. I had to learn to walk twice and I had a limp for awhile. Some other children made fun of me for that. Children are wonderful beings because their cruelty is so honest and up front.

TFP - How was school for you? Did you like it or hate it?

RAW - Well, both. I enjoyed school because I got high marks all through grammar school. I disliked it because it was a Catholic school and the nuns scared the hell out of me. I was convinced I was gonna go to Hell, which sounded like a most unpleasant place by the time they were through describing it. But it seemed there was no way to avoid it, because everything I thought or felt was a sin according to the Church. I didn't have much chance to commit sins at that age - who

can? But I think I recovered. Most ex-Catholics become Atheists - I did for awhile.

TFP - So what's your religion now?**RAW -** Keeping an open mind. That's my religion.

TFP - What was high school like for you?

RAW - High school wasn't as pleasant as grammar school. In high school I got pretty miserable and uh, psychologically discombobulated. My marks dropped straight down so that instead of being at the top of the class, I was near the bottom of my class. I got back together again by the time I got to college. I just felt alienated, I guess, from the whole world - it didn't make sense, most of the kids I knew didn't make sense and it took me a while to decide that that's the way the world is, it doesn't have to make sense and I just had to deal with it whether it makes sense or not.

CRITICISM

TFP - How about you and critics?

RAW - I prefer professional prize fighters - at least the people they hit, hit back; it's an even contest. Any writer who responds to a critic ends up looking like a fool or an egotist - it's best to ignore them. I always thought all critics should have a pimp for an older brother so they have someone to look up to.

TFP - What are some of the more extreme negative reactions to your writing?

RAW - Well it happens to all writers - I get a certain percentage of hate mail, about 1% of my mail. Some of it's pretty psychotic - I'm glad they don't have my address. If some of these people had my address, I'd move. I think the most extreme thing wasn't a letter, it was on a radio show in Hollywood. Someone uh - put a curse on me - called out all the Abrimelon demons to afflict me and make my life miserable - I wasn't too worried. It just goes to show what too much cocaine will do!

TFP - The story you wrote for 3 Fisted Tales Of Bob(in which King Kong's penis size figured prominently). I recall reading another story by you that dealt with the same subject.

RAW - Yeah, King Kong's dong has gotten into several things that I've written in the past few years. I've decided I've got to stop that, it's getting monotonous.

TFP - Was the article Coincidence in Semiotexte USA a shortened form of the book?

RAW - No it was almost entirely different - some of the same material, but it contained some that wasn't in the book and vice versa. They were sort of independent productions with an overlapping theme.

(The inspiration for the non-smoking piece in Mondo 200) came from so many things going on in the country today. I often get the feeling I should go back to Europe. I'm getting tired of being hassled about smoking, I'm getting tired of the fact that if anything's wrong with my health in this country, it's a major disaster, whereas in most parts of Europe I'd get health care at a reasonable cost - it wouldn't bankrupt me. There's an awful lot about this country that really annoy me when I know how different things are in Europe.

TFP - It seems like this country's really hitting the skids fast.

RAW - Yeah, It's amazing how much R. Reagan accomplished in only eight years.

ON IRAQ, KUWAIT, AND OIL

RAW - I regard the Arab nations as pretty equally detestable. I don't care who loses.

TFP - It seems like a good way to justify military spending as well as a good excuse to raise the price of oil.

RAW - I think the sooner we run out of oil the better. Oil creates most of the pollution. Once it's gone the multinationals will have no choice, but to convert to solar power. They keep dragging their feet on that, claiming it will take 40 years to develop it and it's all crap. I know people who've built solar powered houses on their own, it can be done right now. There's a whole solar powered suburb of Dallas, Texas. The multinationals would just prefer to stick to oil as long as the price stays high enough. So I think we'll all be better off when all the oil is gone and there's no more wars over oil. We'll be forced into using solar power which will give us all the energy we need without polluting the air.

TFP - There seems to be a heightened awareness of ecology, but it also seems like a media fad.

RAW - I think something very interesting is happening. I see

a lot of good things like the Eastern European situation, the liberalization of Russia, South Africa is negotiating with the ANC and the ANC has given up the use of violent behavior. I think a lot of cranky behavior is a healthy sign to..... The more people who complain that they don't like the way they're being treated the more the world will have to become sensitive. I'm expecting there to be a lot of changes because things seem to run in a 30 year cycle and we're due for an upsurge of liberalization and radicalism. There's a lot to provoke it too especially if the Supreme court outlaws abortion, which looks likely to me. Brennan resigned and Marshall fell and hurt himself. The court is about 7 to 2 conservative now, it may end up 9 to 0 conservative. My latest crusade is the fully informed juror amendment. It's something that's been written into law since the Magna Carta, but it's never been compulsory for a judge to tell a jury juries have the right to nullify laws if they find you guilty of something and they think the law itself is stupid, they can acquit you. They don't have to obey the judge's instructions. That's been upheld for 600, 700 years, but there's never been a law that judges have to tell juries about that right. The F.I.J.A. would change that. I think it's the only hope we've got, the way this country's going.

TFP - There seem to be a lot of control freaks lately...
RAW - Well as knowledge increases, information increases, then technology and society change - and as society changes more people get freaked out and try to put down controls on everything so it won't change too fast...that's why there's such an upsurge in conservatives.
TFP - Speaking of technology, you mentioned demonstrating Virtual Reality, are you involved in VR research?
RAW - No, I'm strictly on the outside. I think in addition to

education and entertainment, VR might help cut down on pollution. There would be more meetings in VR, so businessmen won't have to drive and fly so much. They'll all be at terminals at home meeting in a VR cafe in Paris. In addition to all that, I think VR will create what I try to create in my books, an attitude of general agnosticism and uncertainty. It'll be harder and harder to know what's real, which is all for the good I think. The less people know what's real, the more open minded they'll be.

ILLUMINATUS

TFP - How did Illuminatus! start?

RAW - Bob Shea and I were working for Playboy, editing the Playboy Forum which was the section dealing with civil liberties issues and a lot of the mail came in was from people complaining about government conspiracies to suppress the counter-culture in the 60's - some of which later turned out to be true. The F.B.I. did infiltrate a lot of pacifist and civil rights groups - which were infiltrated to make them paranoid about each other; that's been documented. But we also got a lot of mail from people hedge betting conspiracies that were totally unbelievable. So Shea and I got the idea, "Why not write a novel in which every conspiracy theory turns out to be true, but none of them is complete because the conspiracy is so thick that no one can understand it?" The book is a mixture of fact and fiction and it's left up to the reader to figure out which is which. People ask me to tell them which is which, I tell them. "That's your side. I just wrote the book, it's up to you to figure it out."

TFP - You seem to be really good at taking all these divergent elements - some of which are mutually exclusive - and bringing it all together into a cognizant whole...

RAW - That's because I don't believe in anything totally - I don't disbelieve in anything totally either.

TFP - Do you know if there's any chance of the play of Illuminatus! being staged again?

RAW - Well that's not up to me. If it was up to me it'd be a movie now, but somebody with money has got to decide to do it. The play has been staged for several different places in Europe at different times - Liverpool, London, Frankfurt, Amsterdam, Jerusalem, Cambridge, but in America it was only played in Seattle. My play Wilhelm Reich In Hell is doing better in this country, playing several places - Long Beach, Santa Cruz, New York a few other places. There are more productions in the talking stage.

TFP - How would a movie of Illuminatus! be done though? It'd have to be awfully long...

RAW - It'd probably have to be a 10 part TV mini-series. It'd have to be on cable of course!

TFP - I'd say. So how deeply are you involved with Falcon Press?

RAW - (Laughs) The owner of Falcon Press has a sense of humor.

TFP - Did you incorporate Principia Disoordia into Illuminatus or was it an offshoot of your book?

RAW - Principia Disoordia was written over a period of years, chiefly by Gregory Hill with a lot of input from Keri Hondley, some from me and Bob Shea, a few other friends, including a psychiatrist.

TFP - So what's the significance, if any, of the Egyptian Mouth Breeders?

RAW - The E.M.B. have no significance - just one detail to add to the realism. Some things get into a novel because they add to the verisimilitude. Like, whenever possible I mention real bars and real restaurants, real streets and so on...I use a lot of real people in my books. My fictitious characters are created out of my imagination, I don't know where they come from. But there's a lot of real people in my books - Mozart, John Dillinger, Roosevelt, and Beethoven, James Joyce, Marilyn Monroe -

TFP - Why do you think people are still interested in Dillinger?

RAW - Dillinger did what everybody wanted to do during the Depression. During the Depression almost everyone was broke; people were getting evicted from their houses because they couldn't pay the rent, people couldn't get food except by going to charitable organizations - standing in line to get fed - things were hard. Dillinger did what everybody dreamed of doing - he just walked into banks with a gun and took the money. On one level everybody identified with him.

TFP - What about the Kennedy assassination?

RAW - Well that lingers on and on because the Warren Commission was very unconvincing to anybody with more than a half-inch of forehead. My best guess at this point is that the Mafia did it. (For what reason?) Because the Kennedy administration was really cracking down on the Mafia and because they helped him win the election. They, uh, don't like it when politicians double cross them. One of Kennedy's mistress' was coincidentally the mistress of Sam Giancono, head of the Chicago Mafia.

HISTORICAL ILLUMINATI

TFP - Your books are still in print?

RAW - Everything is still in print except for two (The publisher went bankrupt. (Lynx Pub.)) but they're coming out in NAL next year

TFP - What two were those?

RAW - The Earth Will Shake and The Widow's Son.

TFP - The HI is great. What's going on with Nature's God - third in series)?

RAW - NAL went bankrupt as that was coming out. It will be published along with the other two in three separate volumes

TFP - In Widow's Son it seemed to be two separate books - a gothic adventure in text with the footnotes being a treatise on deselby. What was the reason for that?

RAW - The deselby theme was part of a bigger theme that emerged from the footnotes, which was Gothic Euro-conspiracies. I was just making a parallel between the 18th century and the 20th century.

TFP - Speaking of Euro-conspiracies, have you heard anything new on P2?

RAW - Yeah, the Italian government is now investigating charges that P2 was paid by the CIA to perform terrorist bombings.



A note on the historical Illuminatis - The Illuminati used to hang their victims from trees. A dagger had been planted previously in the trunk of the tree-gibbet. The sect of the Illuminati was founded in 1776 by Weishaupt, professor of canonical law at Ingolstadt, and often earned fame through its acts of violence

PROMETHEUS RISING

TFP - For being written by a self proclaimed agnostic, Prometheus Rising seems suspiciously like a blue print for a modern western religion. At UCSC a few groups have sprung up that use your book as a frame work for

their beliefs. Is this what you had in mind?

RAW - No, I regard it as an operating manual which has been useful to me and I hear it has helped quite a few people. It's supposed to be improved and revised as better methods are found. The next thing they'll excommunicate me for heresy.

WILHELM REICH IN HELL

TFP - Is your play Wilhelm Reich In Hell going to be playing again soon?

RAW - There's a couple productions in Santa Cruz and one in New York that are supposed to be happening. There's been a tremendous amount of interest in that play. I think it'll be performed at colleges until it gains mass popularity. It's already been done on national radio...

TFP - Are you working on any plays?

RAW - No, not right now. I'm writing two books and then I'll be writing a play on the trial of William Penn who was the first

rich man converted to Quakerism and he made so much trouble in England where Quakerism was illegal, that the King finally gave him a charter to establish a colony over here which became the state of Pennsylvania. But in England he was put on trial for preaching on the streets a religion contrary to the tenets of the established Anglican Church. And he was guilty and the jury refused to convict him on the bases of the jury nullification I was talking about before. And so it went to the Tower of London for three months after which public opinion was so outraged that the judge reversed himself and admitted the jury had the right to nullify a law that they didn't like. That was the beginning of the end for religious persecution in England.

MUSIC

TFP - When did Chocolate Biscuit Conspiracy come out?

RAW - Four or five years ago - I don't remember exactly. It was punk rock with a Dublin group (The Golden Horde) with me reciting poetry in between their songs - I also wrote the lyrics for a couple of their songs. They've done several singles; I think that's the only album they've done. There's also tapes of my lectures available.

TFP - How did your records do financially?

RAW - The company that made them went bankrupt. (Laughs) I never got a penny out of it. I suppose it was aggravating in a minor sort of way. They were both experiments to see what I could do in those fields and I make my living out of my books more than taking flyers into odd fields like that.

TFP - Have you noticed any resurgence in your books lately?

RAW - Oh yeah, they're all selling better than ever.

TFP - What are your musical interests?

RAW - My musical tastes are very conservative. I like the classics - Beethoven, Mozart, Vivaldi,.... Helgar. He's not on most peoples list of favorite composers, but I like him.

TFP - What do you think of bands using elements of your stories (PTV promoting the smile concept, Adamski recording under LDD, DK. taking their name from Illuminatus!)?

RAW - I seem to be very popular with rock musicians in the younger generation. I keep hearing about references to my works on records. I wish Madonna would start plugging me!.. That would help publicity. I see a lot of references to 23 and the pyramid on MTV, also Max Headroom had the pyramid and channel 23. That got in because Colin Wilson worked on the script and he's a fan of my books.

TFP - That ties in with the futurist or "Industrial" music theories in which semi-automated or electronic

instruments are used in such a way as to create music from what sounds like semi-automated or electronic instruments destroying themselves. Also, it's very information dense. How much more info do you think people can ingest before they overload?

RAW - Well, I think there's definitely a limit. I studied the Shannon theory of Mathematical communication which says that when there's too much information you only perceive noise because it's too much to handle. Of course everything new and original looks like that at first. So every great original artist will seem to be producing chaos until we can assimilate what they have to say. I think that beyond a certain level that uncertainty is so high that your brain gives up trying to understand.

TFP - I don't know about that. It seems that with a lot of "cyberpunk" media people are striving to get more information in less time. William Gibson for example is very infodense.

RAW - Take Burroughs for example. He doesn't publish all of his cut ups, just the ones that seem to him to work. The phrase that ran through my books when I used cut ups was "American Life Bomb went Authoritarian."

TFP - How much are you influenced by the "cut-up" method and William S. Burroughs?

RAW - In Illuminatus! I did use the "cut-up" method in places, in Masks OTI - I only used it in small sections, in S. Cat I didn't use it at all. (The 23 thing) was Burrough's influence on me, that was the first time I was told about 23s and over the next three days I kept running into 23s. So I got to be pretty fascinated. I haven't been able to make up my mind as to whether you notice them or it just happens. I think that there's a great deal of selective perception, but every now and then I'll have a couple years where I'm not sure it's all selective perception. For example, when I give a lecture and I start joking about 23s and then immediately afterward a 23 occurs, I begin to wonder.

SUB-GENIUS

RAW - I didn't contribute anything directly to The Book Of The Sub-Genius. Ivan Stang says I was a major influence, but

we didn't collaborate - I didn't know him at the time he was doing it. I only came into The Sub-Genius system directly when he persuaded me to write a story for Three Fisted Tales Of Bob. I've also been on their radio show three or four times (The Hour of Slack).

FINAL THOUGHTS

TFP - Has your message changed since you started writing?

RAW - I don't know. I hope my books are denser and richer and wiser.

TFP - Do you feel lucky that you've been able to influence people while having an outlet for your thoughts?

RAW - Yeah, sometimes I do. Sometimes I'm impatient because I haven't reached a bigger audience. I think every writer in the back of their minds has a desire to change the world. I would like it if my books were all best seller's and I could appear on TV shows as often as Gore Vidal. I mean that's the truth, why should I hide it? I want to have an influence on the world. The world's had a tremendous influence on me.