

APPRECIATION:

Earl Hamner

As a struggling young writer in 1949, I submitted a script to *The Dr. Christian Show*, which was billed as “The only show on radio where the audience writes the scripts.” This was literally true as the *Dr. Christian* producers invited script submissions from listeners and chose a number of them to be dramatized and broadcast over the CBS radio network airwaves. I was one of the second-place prizewinners and was invited on an expenses-paid trip to New York to participate in the awards ceremony and accept a five hundred dollar check. It was there that I first met Rod Serling, one of the other second-place winners that year, and his lovely wife Carol.

Rod and I were both students at the time, although we would soon graduate and our paths would again cross. I had been working as a radio writer at WLW in Cincinnati—“The Nation’s Station,” as it was called—and decided to resign from the job in order to devote full time to writing my novel SPENCER’S MOUNTAIN. Fresh out of school, Rod accepted the job I had vacated and years later when he introduced me to friends in Hollywood, he would say, “I want you to meet the man who gave me my first job.”

It was not until I moved to Hollywood in 1961 that we would see each other again. I came over from New York with high hopes that I would immediately find writing assignments. After all, I had written live television shows and for *The Today Show*, countless radio productions, and had published two books with a third on the way. To my dismay I found that I was not qualified to work in Hollywood—I had never written film.

EARL HAMNER

After many expensive and fruitless months, I decided to approach Rod about submitting ideas for *The Twilight Zone*. I had never written fantasy or science fiction, but I was a fan of the show and I reasoned that as a professional writer I would be able to write with reasonable skill in any venue. I sent two story outlines to Rod in his offices at MGM. He replied that a committee chose the show's stories and that he would submit them for consideration. I thought he was being polite and letting me down easy, but to my delight I received a call from Buck Houghton just a few days later. Thus began an association that enabled me to write eight *Twilight Zone* scripts.

Twilight Zone is a classic because it embraced good stories that have a universal message and were written with style and a certain literary sensibility. Much of my writing for the show had a folkish flavor; I've always been grateful to Buck and Rod and thought it courageous of them to accept my offbeat kind of storytelling. And I've always been very proud of my contributions to the series.

In a 1962 *Los Angeles Times* interview, Rod said, "We've developed some fine writers who understand our kind of story—writers like Dick Matheson and Chuck Beaumont and a young writer you'll hear from someday, Earl Hamner Jr." It was fine praise indeed from a man who helped to launch my long and productive career.

Rod Serling was a wonderfully warm person and a talented, driven writer who contributed greatly to the lost art of storytelling. His vision and social consciousness shed light in dark places, and his work enriched the image of all writers. It was a privilege to know and work with the man.

APPRECIATION:

George Clayton Johnson

Rod Serling's contribution to television literature has long been acknowledged by viewers of *The Twilight Zone* series. Now, with the publication of these marvelous scripts—the hard-won pages that generated everything, the words on paper that were used to evoke what appeared upon the television screen—his reputation as a writer of stature is confirmed.

Verify for yourself that they serve not only as blueprints but are also highly-readable literary documents of great artistic power. Discover that, like fairy tales, these scripts tell universal truths. They are archetypal accounts of how the personality meets and overcomes its own dangers. They speak in the language of symbols directly to the soul.

Notice that the stories appear to be timeless—to take place under the aspect of Eternity composed as the stories are of both the seen (matter) and the unseen (spirit). They ask you to accept both the undeniable and the unbelievable at the same time.

As Buck Houghton, the gifted producer of *The Twilight Zone* once said, “The story must be impossible in the real world. A request at some point to suspend disbelief is a hallmark of the series.”

The stories are more metaphysical than religious. They are more spiritual than supernatural. They are more fantasy than science fiction, for, as Ray Bradbury said, “Science fiction takes you up to the edge of the cliff—fantasy kicks you over.” In answering the age-old question “What if?” Rod's stories exemplify the power of the dream and the magic of the wish.

GEORGE CLAYTON JOHNSON

They are, in a word, surreal. As an art form surrealism tries to banish the distinction between the real and the unreal to provide for an infinite expansion of reality. When Rod Serling created *The Twilight Zone* television series he took a job working on the frontiers of the limitless, searching for a foolproof unity of opposites.

To the mind of the surrealist both the real and the imaginary can be equally “real” if, when reflected into each other, both realities make sense and mutually support each other to reveal a greater truth. When you believe both realities simultaneously your awareness of the paradoxical nature of the cosmos is intensified. You can come away from this glimpse of infinity changed, and with Rod Serling’s highly-developed moral compass pointing the way, usually changed for the better.

Yes! Surreal stories expand consciousness. They are “wisdom fiction.”

I believe that the design for *The Twilight Zone* program itself is a major achievement and the decision to use Rod Serling, the creator and chief architect of the project, as the host/narrator was inspired.

The decision to pan down from the sky into the opening shot of each story—to begin with a strong teaser that would introduce the “touch of strange” that would intrigue the audience and at the conclusion of the teaser to whip-pan to Rod Serling within the scene itself, ready to comment upon what you have seen in his grim, tight-lipped way—that was itself a promise to the viewer of wonders to come.

All this was masterful, but it was the quality of the scripts themselves that would establish Rod Serling’s *The Twilight Zone* as television literature. As you read Rod Serling’s pages consider this: Although they are compelling works of art in their own right these scripts are merely the scaffolding used to build the television programs. To serve their purpose the scripts had to be translated into a different language of images and sounds to become those wonderful episodes you saw on TV.

Remember, Rod was writing for the eyes of the producer and the director, for the actors, for the cameraman and the set designer. He was also writing for technicians involved in lighting, sound and wardrobe, and for the editor who would have to refer back to the script to discover how best to fit together the footage supplied by the director.

AS TIMELESS AS INFINITY

He was speaking to them in a stylized language he knew they understood. With words on paper Rod had to reach out and seize hold his reader's imagination to awaken and arouse that reader's potential for creativity.

Seeing the shows reminds us how wildly successful he proved to be. Isn't it significant, as you read these scripts, how much the words on the page evoke the clear memory of what you saw on the screen?

In translating all of these scripts into films, producer Buck Houghton must not be overlooked. He shared a common vision with Rod Serling that kept the two men in total sync. We writers worked for Buck. It was often Buck who needed to be pleased with our work before Rod would even see it, but if Buck said that he liked a verbal story proposal, I found I could depend upon Rod to buy the story if I could work the kinks out of it.

Like Buck Houghton, Rod Serling had a concern for matters of character. He was interested in human morality. He strove to live up to an ideal standard he had set for himself that had very much to do with personal honor, honesty, sincerity, morality, and dignity. A word you don't hear much these days is "integrity." It can be detected in certain men who are much more interested in the great within, and the state of their spirit, than they are in the world out there.

I cannot speak with any authority about Rod Serling. I barely knew the man. But I did encounter him a number of times and had an opportunity to take his measure. I knew him as a man who said what he meant and meant what he said—a man I could admire.

He was a trim little colossus who got the attention of the press by standing off the philistines. He was sometimes truculent but very civilized. He was a well-spoken gentleman in a neat black suit ever ready to publicly lift his strong, clear voice against censorship, bigotry, injustice, dishonesty, false pride and low motives in high places. I loved the guy from afar and even fancied that I knew what made him tick.

Fortunately for myself and others, Rod could not write all of the required *Twilight Zone* scripts himself. Fortunately for Rod, before he came to town there were two journeyman writers floating around writing movies and episodic television as well as novels and *Twilight Zone*-type short stories. They were Charles Beaumont and Richard Matheson.

Rod accomplished his purpose by first buying several published short stories

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from Richard Matheson to adapt and then later hiring both Matheson and Charles Beaumont to adapt their own stories into television scripts. Both writers proved to be astonishingly prolific.

Still, from time to time Rod would run out of original story material for himself and would buy published stories from others to adapt, including: Manly Wade Wellman, OCee Ritch, Marvin Petal, Lucille Fletcher, Lynn Venable, Paul Fairman, Madelon Champion, Lewis Padgett (Henry Kuttner and C.L. Moore), Jerome Bixby, Sam Rolfe, Damon Knight and myself.

Like Beaumont and Matheson I was eventually allowed to adapt my own stories and thus able to join Earl Hamner, Jerry Sohl, Ray Bradbury, Reginald Rose, E. Jack Newman, Montgomery Pittman, John Tomerlin, Bill Idelson and John Furia Jr. in writing scripts for the show. Rod Serling and Buck Houghton gave me a hand in the game for which I will be eternally grateful.

I remember my last conversation with Rod. He asked me about *The Liar's Club*, a kind of quiz show with Rod as host moderating between celebrity guests competing with each other with outlandish explanations of the use of unusual tools or apparatus. The lies were often ingenious and sometimes the show got laughs but was usually quite dismal.

Rod asked me, "What do you think of *me* doing that show?" My first impulse was to remind him that he was too important to be wasted on such a trivial endeavor as, doubtless, other voices of sanity had told him. I wanted to say, "What is the current president of The National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences doing on a lowbrow show like *The Liar's Club*?" But I saw something in his face of a boy trying to decide if he should run off with the circus or stay safely at home.

I told him I believed that if he wanted to do the show he should. He had years ahead of him in which to be serious. Little did I know how soon he'd leave us—although to this day I expect to find him leaning against a building ready to tell me something damn interesting and thought-provoking in a tight-lipped, menacing way that will remind me that it's all a game and that existence is endless and the universe but a bubble on the foam of time with the human spirit always triumphant and love conquering all. The guy really had an influence on his times and, with these scripts, will continue to mold minds and expand consciousness for some time to come.