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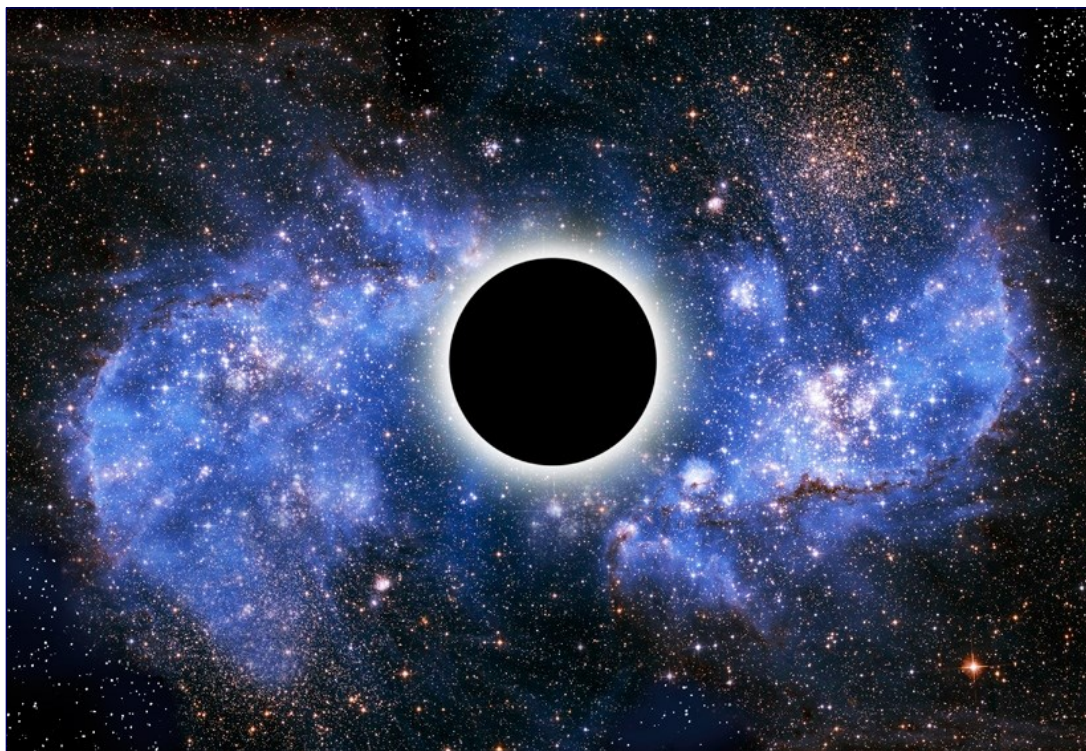
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Illustration: Black hole with event horizon, Victor de Schwanberg, Science Photo Library.

Newsletter of the Austin Peay State University Retirees Association



The upside of Future Shock

Jim Clemmer

Rolling through the lush rainforests of Costa Rica last week, listening to a Scriabin etude on my iPod, I happened to notice my seat-mate, a retired professor of French linguistics, thumbing through the January issue of *Scientific American*. I removed my headphones and asked, a bit flippantly, "Looking for some light reading?" She replied, without a hint of irony, "I am learning about Complexity Theory. I thought I might find an article on that here this month."

I wanted to say "Huh?" But reluctant to reveal my ignorance of a subject she seemed to consider common knowledge, I said, "How did you come to be interested in Complexity Theory?" "I belong to an interest group about it." "Interest group?" "Our association has forty interest groups on all kinds of things." "Forty?" "Yes. I also go to meetings on macroeconomics and contemporary literary criticism." "What kind of organization is this?" "It is the Association of Senior Professionals at Eckerd College, ASPEC, based in St. Petersburg." "So it is a retirees association?" "We don't call it that. We are a learning community, with most of our interest groups led by our 300 members. Most of us no longer work at regular jobs, but some do." "How long has ASPEC existed?" "Thirty years."

I was beginning to get the picture. This was apparently an organization that for thirty years had known and practiced what some other retiree-focused academic groups are just now beginning to learn: that the act of retiring does not necessarily and automatically convert one into a zombie. ASPEC had known all along that retirees can continue to thrive as real people living real lives, engage in real learning, and use new knowledge and experience to make big contributions to their communities and the larger society. [See the ASPEC pages at www.eckerd.edu/aspec, especially the almost unbelievable schedule of sessions laid out in the Weekly Newsletter.]

Many retirees from academia over the centuries have, of course, continued to live very real and productive lives, often with the help of groups of one kind or another, but there have been far

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Representatives of retiree associations from ETSU, APSU, UTK and UM in THERA meeting at Fall Creek Falls, Nov. 8, 2015.

too few campus retiree organizations equipped to encourage and support their nobler ambitions. Too many retirees from academia, like retirees from other areas, have in effect been encouraged to view the act of retiring merely as the first fateful step toward decay and death. Addie Bundren, the dominant character in Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*, says "The reason for living is to get ready to stay dead a long time." The folks at ASPEC, and Faulkner himself, would say otherwise.

This "new" concept of active and vibrant retirement is now the primary focus of many groups including AROHE, the Association of Retiree Organizations in Higher Education, which has titled their upcoming national conference "Transforming Retirement: Re-Writing the Next Chapter." The president of AROHE, Patrick Cullinane, says the "next chapter" will be devoted to "changing the role of later life to one that fulfills retirees, enhances universities and makes a difference on and beyond the campus."

One of the preconditions for full pursuance of this concept of lively retirement has to be a willingness to force oneself and one's group to reopen in a systematic way the portals of vulnerability to what Alvin Toffler called Future Shock. We were open to Future Shock while we were employed, because we had to be. A constant influx of new co-workers, bosses, students, policies, lab techniques, algorithms, and especially new hardware and software, regularly bombarded us with big unknowns to which we had to rise.

Part of the fun of retirement for me, and maybe for you, has come from being able to say "I don't want to learn that" about thousands of challenging new developments we see around us, from string theory to microcephaly. Ignorance is indeed sometimes bliss, and I think we often deliberately cultivate this cocoon of oblivious calm to avoid shocks to our newly liberated brains.

But sometimes we just have to know things, often about topics that unfortunately might indeed shock

us. We might develop cancer, and have to fly to the doctor for the latest treatment options; or a neighbor fell on our lawn, and we are off to confer with our lawyer about liability; or sometimes an off-hand challenge from a seat-mate about Complexity Theory will send us fleeing to all-purpose Google and Wikipedia for instant help.

But becoming a real, thoroughly alive learner of the ASPEC kind obviously involves more than the occasional sporadic acquisition of desperately needed information. It requires once again the kind of systematic concentration on knowledge for its intrinsic rather than extrinsic worth that we presumably learned long ago in our liberal arts courses. The world of knowledge is not a world of apps, valuable only for ways they can benefit us here and now, but a world of mythic discoveries that deserve to be pursued on their own terms.

Maybe we should ask not what information can do for us, but what we can do to understand and appreciate, and build upon, the innate value of knowledge.

Since the challenge from my seat-mate, I have visited Google and at least caught a glimpse



of a vast body of literature about "complex adaptive systems theory," or "Complexity Theory," and I think I now understand why my linguist might be fascinated by that school of thought. She had spent much of her professional life trying to make a kind of genuine sense out of the chaos of the French language, an ultimately impossible job.

A linguist, like a physicist or a physician, lives constantly on the edge of chaos, at the event horizon of a gigantic black hole, where infinite ironies reside. Here there indeed be monsters. This is why the *Hodges Harbrace Handbook* is now in its 18th edition, with no end ever to be in sight. My seat-mate was discovering a new way to visualize the inexplicable realities of her profession, a difficult endeavor aided and abetted by the support of a dedicated community of fellow inquisitors. We should all be so lucky.

Coming events for late winter and spring

Based on members' responses to our request for feedback on event proposals for late winter and early spring, your APSURA directors in our meeting of Feb. 3 made a tentative list of events and excursions we hope to pursue. We have not yet settled on exact days and times for most of these, but we will get back to you soon in a NewsNotes with this information.

Two events for which we do have dates are a series of workshops on C. S. Lewis, and the Alumni Association tour "Wines of Germany and France." Former Language and Literature colleagues Eloise Weatherspoon and Allene Phy-Olsen will present a series of talks on the life and works of C. S. Lewis, entitled "Inklings of C. S. Lewis," on Sunday afternoons in April and May, beginning April 3, from 3-4 p.m. in the chapel at First Presbyterian Church. Questions and discussion are encouraged. The Alumni tour, to be led by Dewey Browder, will be discussed in detail at an information session on Tuesday, Feb. 23, at 6 p.m. in the Pace Alumni Center. The tour takes place July 6-17 and costs \$3,999. See a complete description in the APSURA Newsletter of August 2015 at www.apsu.edu/retirees-association.



Magnificent Ambersons, The Taming of the Shrew, American Idiot and Smokey Joe's Café. If you especially like one or two of these suggestions, let Meredith know at gildrie@att.net.

In addition to these events, the directors have appointed a committee to study new forward-looking trends among retiree associations and to consider possible new directions APSURA might pursue. This committee will begin meeting within the next month, and interested members are invited to join this look toward the future. Please contact Aleeta Christian (christiana@apsu.edu), who will head the committee.

Looking farther ahead, the national convention of the Association of Higher Education Organizations (AROE) will be held at the University of Washington in Seattle,

Other events to be scheduled are a presidential forum led by David Kanervo, a visit to a culinary arts center, a workshop on building for aging in place, a spring-foliage train excursion to Cookeville or a winery, a garden tour, and lunch coupled with a matinee at the Roxy.

Meredith Gildrie will be organizing our Roxy visit. You can see the full schedule and description of plays on the Roxy site, www.roxyregionaltheatre.org. Meredith suggests we might consider the following productions for our group trip: *Thrill Me, The Leopold and Loeb story* (mature audiences only); *The Temperamentals* (mature audiences only); *The*



Aleeta and Floyd Christian representing APSURA at THE-RA, Nov. 8, 2015

John and LuAnnette Butler with other panelists at Straight Talk about Retirement, Nov. 18, 2015



Aug. 14-16, and APSURA might be sending a delegation to this meeting. This will be followed in early November by the yearly meeting of the Tennessee Higher Education Retirees Association at Fall Creek Falls, which many members of our board usually attend.

Our signature yearly event "Straight Talk about Retirement" for current employees planning for retirement will again be presented in November. We will probably expand this popular program to two or more sessions covering specific topics in more detail than possible with a single session. Please plan ahead to join us in this important contribution to the wellbeing of the entire APSU faculty and staff.

Attendees of Straight Talk about Retirement, Nov. 18, 2015

A dream cruise-tour of Western Europe

Jim Thompson

Our trip to Europe this winter was truly the trip of a lifetime for Linda and me, and the second longest of our marriage, Dec. 12 to Jan. 2. Because of continuing mobility issues, I used my new travel cane for the first time to minimize my chances of falling, and I continued the wheel chair and transport services in airports.

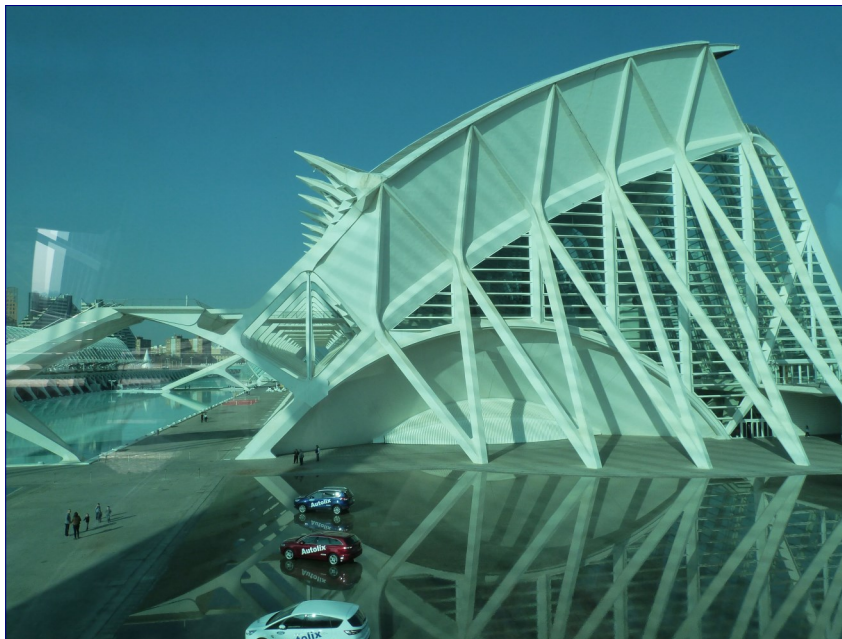
We flew to Rome, staying two nights and seeing the Colosseum and the Palatine Hill, palace of Caesar Augustus, from a hop-on hop-off bus tour of the city. Then we boarded the Viking Star cruise ship (930 passengers, 602 crewmembers) in Rome. We cruised the western Mediterranean with perfect sunny weather for six days, with a land tour each day. While in Rome and on the cruise we made friends with four other couples, who added to the pleasure of our cruise.

We cruised first to Naples where we saw the Roman ruins of Herculaneum, then to Messina, Sicily. I took the city bus tour, while Linda stayed in her room sick with a GI virus which affected many of the passengers on the cruise—including me, though my illness was milder. Then on to Trapani, Sicily, where we swapped our booked walking tour of the medieval hilltop town of Erice for the easier Marsala wine-tasting bus tour.

We continued on to bus tours of Cagliari in Sardinia, Palma and the mountain village of Valldemossa on Mallorca, and Valencia, Spain. We disembarked in Barcelona to transfer to the Le Méridien Hotel in the heart of the old city near the Plaça de Catalunya. While in Barcelona we saw five structures designed by architect Antonio Gaudi, our primary reason for staying in Barcelona. In addition to

touring the well-known Sagrada Familia cathedral, we saw a planned community, Park Güell, and three historic residences: Casa Batlló, La Pedrera and Palau Güell.

We took several guided walking tours emphasizing Catalan history, enjoying the stone streets of the Gothic area, decorated for the holidays. The Gothic area is the oldest part of the city, dating from before Roman times. We ate wonderful meals and saw cathedrals, palaces, government buildings, shops and galleries,



*Jim and Linda
at Cathedral
Sagrada Fa-
milia, Barce-
lona*

*Photos by Jim
and Linda
Thompson*

*City of Arts
and Science,
Valencia,
Spain*

a highlight being the Picasso Museum. We saw places connected to George Orwell's time in the city during the Spanish civil war, and joined a cooking class to experience the preparation of authentic Catalan/ Barcelonan cuisine.

Outside Barcelona we visited the Salvador Dali Museum in Figueres and Dali's personal residence in Cadaques, a tiny isolated fishing village on the Costa Brava, reached by a winding mountain road through



the Natural Park of Cap de Creus. We also toured the mountain top monastery complex at Montserrat with its world class art museum, Museu de Montserrat, followed by a visit to the Codorníu vineyards, founded in Catalonia in 1551. The Codorníu is the world's oldest producer of bottle-fermented sparkling wine, "cava." One night we attended a concert featuring operatic singing and flamenco dancing.

Along the way in Spain we made friends with two from among a great set of tour guides, Alex Sandra Ferrar and David Garcia, both of Barcelo-

na. We found a few cat icons, books and other mementos to bring home from the trip, along with three bottles of wine and a few local foods including cheese, fig bread and chocolates.

A final treat was being flown part of the way home in British Air's business class—a first for us. We are still unsure why we were awarded these "Club World" seats that convert into fully-flat six-foot beds. On the trans-Atlantic flight, the business class cabin included as passengers Hollywood star Emily Blunt and her family, whom Jim was able to wish "Happy New Year."



The ruins of Herculaneum, outside Naples

A windmill near Trapani, Sicily, and The Elephant Tower, Cagliari, Sicily

From the bookshelf

Review: Paul Theroux, *Deep South* (New York, 2015)

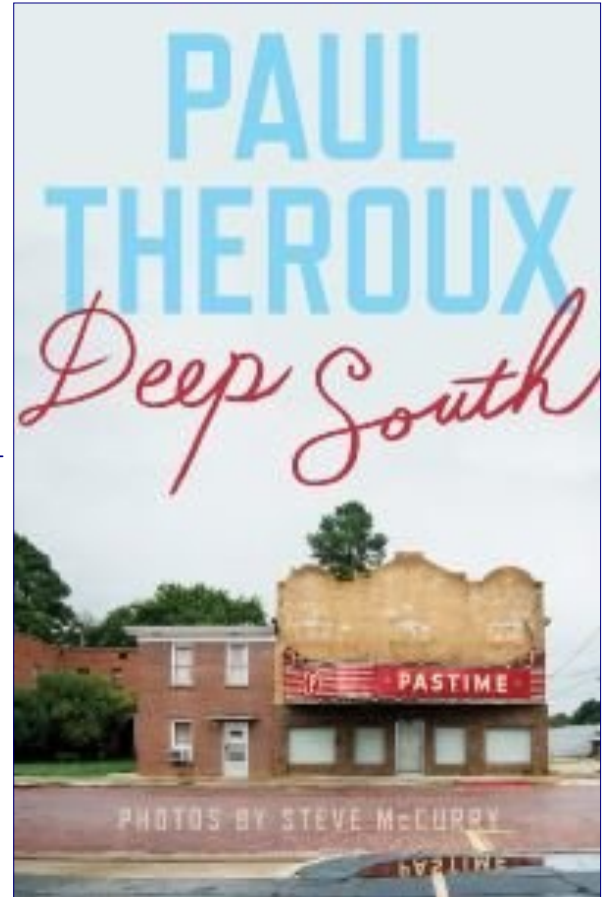
Richard P. Gildrie

In preparation for our fiftieth college reunion, my former room-mate assigned the new book by Paul Theroux, *Deep South* (2015), to Meredith and me along with a few other old cronies. The idea is for us to discuss it, probably over seafood and beer, as we did in school. It was an inspired choice, not just for us former Floridians but for anyone interested in social and cultural conditions in the American South.

Paul Theroux is a novelist and travel writer who explores the lives of people in rural, exotic, and virtually inaccessible places. He has written engaging books on Oceania, Africa, China and South America. He has a talent for description and a gift for relaxed but probing conversation, made easier by his obvious respect for others and his companionable eagerness to “go native” on food and lodging. He is not the sort of traveler who seeks out a Starbucks in Istanbul.

This book grew out of his sardonic recognition that, in all of his wayfaring, he had never ventured into the more rural and impoverished portions of his own nation; hence, the Deep South. I suspect, given his proclivities, that the High Plains and Appalachia are future projects. His approach was not to make a single journey from point A to point B, his usual method. Rather he made four seasonal elliptical, geographically overlapping trips through the South, allowing him to revisit some of the same people and places while adding others. That led to fuller, more nuanced portraits and descriptions. He took to heart that old Southern saying, “Y’all come back now!”

At the start, Theroux makes some interesting observations on travel in America. Unlike other rural areas he has visited, the Deep South has fine roads, along with such amenities as gas stations, diners and motels. They are often hardly luxurious, but adequate to his purpose and revealing in their way. He frequently notes his pleasure at escaping interstates for leisurely drives along such venerable highways as US 301 and US 278. This comparative ease and comfort of travel allows his four longish tours around which he organizes the book. In between accounts of each tour, there are “Interludes,” essays on aspects of Southern literature.



Paul Theroux

Photo by Steve
McCurry

Such convenient and pleasurable driving and visiting leads him to a stimulating critique of the conventions of travel writing, including his own. He notes that most travel accounts are adventure stories, patterned roughly after the *Odyssey*, which feature a traveler overcoming dangers and obstacles to reach a specific place. For Theroux there were no dangers, no obstacles, and no clear destinations. There were only leisurely jaunts. The author is not a hero, engrossed in his struggles, but rather a journalist or anthropologist who respects the people he encounters and wishes them well.

These people—their aspirations, problems and attitudes—are the core of the work. He recounts conversations with small farmers, black and white. He met with mayors of decaying towns, struggling with the loss of “outsourced” jobs and by-passed by interstates, while staying at motels owned by Indian immigrants, almost invariably named Patel. He attended African American church services and shared tea with pastors and church women. He toured a quarry with the proud, entrepreneurial owner, also an Indian immigrant. He listened carefully to social workers in their offices and workmen in diners. An aged widow determined to maintain her home and gentility by running a bed and breakfast commanded close attention. He also went to as many gun shows as he could.

In his wanderings, he saw poverty as profound as any in the world and asked himself and others why American philanthropies and the US government were not as engaged in the South as in, say, West Africa. He noted the often stark but convoluted effects of ethnic and class divisions. Looming over all was a sense of stagnation. He often heard the refrain, “The South never changes,” spoken in pride or desperation. Nonetheless he concluded “that the vitality of the South lies in the self-awareness of its deeply rooted people.” In that truth there is hope as well as danger.

Finally, in his “Interlude” essays he faults Southern literature in general, and Faulkner in particular, for obscuring that vitality through obscurantist prose and emphasis on the bizarre. In effect, Theroux is calling for a renewal of Southern writing, as well as Southern society. This book is a good stimulus to those ends.

Richard P. Gildrie

Publication Information

The APSURA Newsletter is published quarterly by the Austin Peay State University Retirees Association. A supplement to the Newsletter, the APSURA NewsNotes, is published occasionally to update APSURA members on time-sensitive coming activities and events, both those in which APSURA is participating officially and others recommended by APSURA members. Both the Newsletter and NewsNotes are available at apsu.edu/retirees-association.

We invite APSU retirees to send us specific information about coming activities and events you believe will be of interest to APSU retirees. Please send to Barbara Wilbur at 8wi18ur@charter.net, to Jim Clemmer at clemmerj@apsu.edu or to APSURA at the physical address below, and include exact dates, times, locations, deadlines, costs, etc. We also welcome the submission of original articles for possible publication in the newsletter, especially descriptions of your accomplishments, travels, discoveries and other experiences as APSU retirees.

Submissions are limited to 500 words and a maximum of three high-resolution photographs. Send texts as regular email (no tabs) or Word attachments to Jim Clemmer at clemmerj@apsu.edu with photographs sent individually as separate .jpg files. Or you may submit typed manuscripts and good-quality photo prints to APSU Retirees Association, Box 4426, Clarksville, TN 37044.

Please let us know of retirees who for some reason are not receiving the Newsletter, and of errors or needed changes in your own name and address. If you would prefer not to receive the printed copy of the Newsletter, please notify Membership Director Nancy Smithfield (smithfieldn@apsu.edu). If you are not a member of APSURA but would like to receive the Newsletter via email, please notify Nancy Smithfield and provide her your preferred email address.

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apsu.edu/retirees-association

See our website for current and past issues of our Newsletter and NewsNotes, a retirement checklist, and information on retiree benefits.

APSURA Members Registration Form

☐ New member ☐ Renewing member ☐ Retired faculty or staff ☐ Associate member

Check both of the above-right boxes if your spouse or partner is joining or renewing as an associate member.

Dr.____ Mr.____ Ms____ Mrs.____ Date_____

Name of member: _____
Last First Middle

Name of spouse/partner: _____
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Number and Street (Apartment Number)

City State Zip Code

Telephones: _____ E-mail addresses: _____

Former department: _____ Years of service _____ Year you retired _____

Activities in which you would like the APSURA to be involved (check all that apply): ☐ Group travel; ☐ Athletic events; ☐ Cultural events; ☐ Social events; ☐ Scholarship activities; ☐ Seminars; ☐ Community work; ☐ Other _____

Annual Dues for Austin Peay State University Retirees Association are:

Regular (APSU Retiree) Membership ☐ \$25.00 Please send to APSURA, Box 4426, Clarksville, TN 37044
Associate Membership ☐ \$25.00 ☐ 5 years for \$100
Additional donation for Scholarship Fund _____ ☐ Lifetime Membership \$500