**Gus Weill turns to horror**

By SARAH SUE GOLDSMITH
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Who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men? The Shadow knows." So does Gus Weill. His new novel is a tale of horror and evil so complete that the reader is revolted while being fascinated — and thoroughly entertained.

The book is Flesh (St. Martin's Press, $15.95).

"This is the first book or play I've written in which I know none of the characters," Weill explains. "I thought I was creating a family and the disease. I asked Charles East to read a draft of the book. He asked if I knew there was a family in 14th-century Scotland who had the same disease. I thought I had created a family, and they really had existed. The disease which I thought I had created is very real. I told LeAnne I feel dangerous creating these things. I'll never write a book about a monster."

Yet the people in his book are monsters. They have no morals. Pleasure is the only thing that matters to the Caesers. And they have weird ways of being titillated.

"Midway through writing this book there came upon me the need to write something very serious, just entertaining, which I hoped this book is."

So he wrote two books at the same time, alternating the mood of the stories. One book is about a priest, very serious with a religious theme, which he finished about a month after Flesh.

Weill is a playwright, poet and novelist. He's also a political consultant and public relations man. How do all these hats merge on one man? His answer is provocative and dangerous.

"I never knew any of the characters in Flesh," Weill repeats. "I have an imagination or creative talent, that imagination was certainly called into play with these people."

Meat time in the Caesers' palatial abode is an experience in animal lust. After eating to satiation, the family dozes off at the table, in a coma of 10 minutes or so. Marlion can't believe it. No one ever offers Marlion a share of the entrees dripping with juices and sauces. Not that he wants any; he is repelled by the spectacle of the family's adoration of the food. He eats clams and lobster and other seafood delights. And watches the peculiar Caeser family.

What inspired Weill to write such a story of grotesquerie?

**Gus Weill**

"I really don't know. I had written a play, (Roseinfeld's War), very structured, with a lot of research, and I wanted to write with freedom of places I'd never been and people I'd never met. I did do some research on Maine, but I've never been there. I read guidebooks and an article in the New York Times about islands off the coast of Maine."

"The people in Flesh are wealthy beyond wealth. I've never known any people like that. I have met people that wealthy. I went to a national governors' convention with John McKethen once. One of J. Paul Getty's sons was there. He received word that his horse had won the derby in England. That son later drowned himself. So much for great wealth."

"I had to do research on how wealthy people lived. I went to the Goodwood Library and found a book on homes of the wealthy. That is a splendid library, by the way."

"LeAnne (Weill's wife) helped with the fashions worn by the women in the story. I hope her research was limited!" The fashions described in the book sound like the most costly garments found anywhere in the world.

**Te Caesers rely on townspeople from the small village on the mainland for their servants. It's obvious from the moment of Marion's arrival that something is dreadfully wrong in that town. Someone warns the young man to go home, get away from the island. That person disappears. Marion, like most people, is curious and, while feeling a certain amount of dread, wants to check things out for himself to see what's going on.

"The book is about a certain type of disease," Weill explains. "It's called "Flesh." It's not exactly the hero type. He's just an ordinary person cast in an extraordinary situation and determined to come through the experience alive. There's plenty of foreshadowing. Some readers might even say it's too predictable. But the ending is hilarious, and the reading experience worthwhile.

"I guess it's my way of saying we live in an age of excess. Anything is fine if we can get away with it. Sex, alcohol, drugs, sexual diseases — ferocious excess. Man is on a tightrope. Man is a delicately balanced creature. If he goes too far in any direction, even religious fanaticism, they may topple over the edge."

"In writing, the steering wheel is in our hands, and there must be a great subconscience in it. It's always a tiny way to endure. One hundred years from now, someone may stumble across one of my books at the LSU Library. Thus, after I'm gone, in that small way I endure."

"I just loved myself going and creating this family of very different people. When I write poetry and plays. I'm terribly afraid that I'm like a rabbit — very prolific but not particularly distinguished."

"Sometimes I question why I write. It's such a lonely, tough business. It's not of our times. You don't need any equipment. You don't need to be dressed a certain way. It's just you, a pencil, paper, maybe a typewriter. None of the accoutrements of Playboys."

"I feel a compulsion to write. A need. I'm no more capable of stopping writing than I am of stopping breathing. Some days I question why I'm sitting there at 3 a.m. writing. It's an opportunity for me to have a handle on my existence. Life buffets us so, knocks us from pillar to post."

"In writing, the steering wheel is in our hands, and there must be a great subconscious comfort in it. Finally, it's a tiny way to endure. One hundred years from now, someone may stumble across one of my books at the LSU Library. Thus, after I'm gone, in that small way I endure."

"Flesh is a gothic tale. Suspense and foreboding hang from the pages as Marion stumbles along a path of terror, learning what the secret of the Caesers is and trying desperately to avoid becoming the next victim."

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