





MYTHOLOGIES

#3

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"Let us compare mythologies;
I have learned my elaborate lie."

--- Leonard Cohen

MYTHOLOGIES is a personally oriented fanzine dedicated to the proposition that nothing is real.

MYTHOLOGIES will appear as often as I can spare the time and money. Next issue will probably be February. Print run this issue will be 110.

MYTHOLOGIES may be had by editorial whim or for 10c. Do not send money.

All contents are the fault of the editor unless otherwise specified.

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Cover this issue is by:

DAVID MACAULAY

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Since last issue, I note that Macaulay's second children's book, CITIES, is now on sale.

MYTH

Shortly before the November elections, I had the dubious honor of conducting a hand-shaking tour of Sheridan Silver for Margaret Heckler, Representative from this area to Congress. Margaret Heckler is immensely popular locally (she was re-elected) and has attracted some national attention. She generally exhibits an air of quiet, businesslike sincerity. I don't live in Massachusetts, so I was neither particularly well informed nor particularly interested in her attributes as opposed to those of her opponent, but I had mentally tagged her as one of the more interesting members of Congress. But during our tour, I witnessed a campaign tactic that indicates something about her that is not readily apparent. On each and every occasion where she shook hands with a male, she mentioned her good voting record, her concern for her constituents, and her active participation in Congressional affairs. But whenever she approached a woman, her words were: "Remember to vote for me this year. There are only sixteen of us women in Congress."

Now, I'm not so politically naive as to believe that politicians are any more altruistic than the rest of us. I doubt that there is any successful politician who has not resorted to questionable methods from time to time. That's a built in drawback of our political system, and there is no point in criticizing people for accepting the inevitable, or even turning it to their advantage. So I don't condemn Heckler for making a bid for votes along chauvinistic lines. After all, Blacks have gained political power in the same manner. I am a bit put off, however, that Heckler seems to indicate by her own statements a

measure of contempt for women, that the only reason they would have for voting for her is her sex, that they are incapable of evaluating her voting record. The brief glimpse I had of her political techniques is hardly sufficient to base a broad criticism upon, but this incident did spur me to considerable thought about sex roles and the Feminist movement. I've dipped into the literature in the past, Germaine Greer, Kate Millett, Betty Friedan, and a scattering of bits and pieces from MS magazine and elsewhere, but all of this was rather long ago. So acting upon the advice of a review by Joanna Russ, I dug up a copy of Shulamith Firestone's THE DIALECTIC OF SEX.

The very choice of such a title implies there to be conflict between the sexes, an assertion which raises few objections in general: the controversy centering on the degree of conflict. Firestone presents us with an extremely perceptive examination of various aspects of our society from a Feminist viewpoint, then postulates a future society in which sex roles have been eliminated rather than just equalized, a view so radical that it distresses even the majority of Feminists, as Firestone herself remarks. She believes that, just as we consider that in racial matters "separate but equal" is a contradiction in terms, so is it also in sexual relations. Although occasionally marred by hyperbole and polemics, Firestone is for the most part uncomfortably perceptive. Her analysis of Freudian psychology, particularly the Oedipus and Electra complexes, strikes me as a far more consistent and logical explanation than the traditional view. This chapter alone would justify the price of the book. But there is a great deal more of interest.

Firestone points out, for example, that childhood (at least as we know it) is a relatively modern development. In the middle ages, children were viewed simply as small adults. No one familiar with that period's art could fail to be aware that the physical differences between adults and children were generally ignored. There were no systematic arrangements to exclude children from feasts, from drinking parties, from rough language, or physical toil. It is only in the last century or so that "children no longer played the same games as adults, nor did they share in their festivities (children today do not normally attend formal dinner parties) but were given special games and artifacts (toys); storytelling, once a community art, was relegated to children, leading to in our time a special child literature." Firestone interprets this train of events as part of a vast plot to make children more dependent on adults, chiefly their mothers, so that women would be forced to devote more of their time to trivial matters such as child rearing and home management.

There is also a telling critical section dealing with our modern educational system. Modern schooling "retards development rather than escalating it", a view not confined to Feminist groups. She attacks the policy of splitting students into grades because it deprives them of the wisdom of older children. Many educators have drawn similar conclusions about the controversial policy of "tracking" students by ability, now apparently an ingrained part of high school programs. Many of Firestone's other criticisms are also to be found among an increasing number of scholars, particularly the regimentation and formalization of schooling, with its stifling effect on creativity and self-reliance. Again, Firestone attributes this to an ulterior motive, a plan to prolong childhood, thereby extending the amount of her life when a woman is tied down by her children.

It should be obvious from the two above examples that Firestone is a firm believer in the conspiracy theory of history, that she believes that men are somehow plotting--at one point she says consciously--to prevent women from attaining equality. While this is undoubtedly true in many cases (e.g. trade unions, professional organizations), Firestone even cites the popularity of Freudian psychology as a plot to divert female self-awareness into socially safe but personally unsatisfying channels. This conception probably derives from her political views rather than her Feminist ones, for Firestone is also a Marxist. Where James Tiptree portrayed men as being unaware of the chasm between the sexes (in "The Women Men Don't See"), Firestone believes that men consciously view women as inferior beings and manipulate society to prevent them from becoming aware of their inferior position.

In her chapter on love, Firestone draws on this view to prove that "men can't love", that what they actually do is become enamoured of an image which they themselves project. Their eventual, inevitable disillusionment with marriage results when the woman fails to demonstrate all the attributes of this image. Men cannot love women because it is impossible to love an inferior being, and men consider women inferior. "To express tenderness to a woman," says Firestone, "is to acknowledge her equality."

The idea that man is consciously plotting the subservience of women is true, but only in a limited sense. Certainly many men feel personally threatened by the intrusion of women into areas where men were formerly unrivalled. David Keller, to take an example from SF, who viewed life as a ceaseless battle between the sexes, portrayed the professional woman as a heartless, unnatural creature in such stories as "The Psychophonic Nurse". But the extent of cooperation which would be necessary to implement such a program on the scale Firestone implies is such as to defy belief.

The largest misapprehension I detect in THE DIALECTIC OF SEX is the apparent assumption that men find the present system beneficial. While it is certainly true that women have the shorter end of the stick, neither end is particularly long. Man's role is just as firmly predetermined and rigidly confined, and men are increasingly becoming aware of it. Men, particularly when they are in their teens and twenties, are expected to be interested primarily in sex, sports, cars, and having a good time. For a high school boy to spend a substantial amount of time reading, studying, listening to classical music, or writing poetry--or for that matter, learning to cook or sew--is tantamount to admitting one's sissyness, homosexuality or squareness. As a male who read an average of 15 books per week from ninth grade on, I can attest personally to this. Even within the tight circle of my close friends, I was looked upon as something of an oddball. After all, the books I was reading weren't even about sports, war, sex, or anything else of a presumably masculine character.

Which all brings me to Gerry, a former classmate of mine, who was transfixed between his own inclinations and what he thought other people wanted him to be. Gerry was a quiet boy, fragile in both physical and personal makeup. I first met him as a high school freshman, at lunch, because he was sitting alone and the cafeteria was full. We struck up a conversation and he mentioned that he was a member of the US Olympic Equestrian Team. I was suitably impressed.

and he went on to describe in great detail his horse, the training procedures, competitions he'd been in, his last tour of Europe, and so on. The conversation made a big impression and I mentioned it in turn to some friends. It was only a matter of a day or two before I ran into someone else who knew him, and who assured me Gerry came from a rather poor family, didn't own or even ride a horse, had never been out of the country, and most certainly wasn't a member of any Olympic team. It was unsurprising that he had fooled me, because I learned that he had gone from one fantasy career to another over the years, always carefully researching his new role far in advance and in minute detail.

I was furious. No one likes to be taken for a ride, no matter how pleasant the scenery. At the first opportunity, I told Gerry off. He shrugged noncommittally and left me feeling frustrated and angry. I don't believe I spoke to him again for almost a year. While I was a sophomore, a group of boys from my class were taken on a field trip to a technical school to see a demonstration of various engineering principles. As we were getting off the bus, I happened to notice that a large art museum stood across the street. Glibly, I talked the monitor into letting me spend the afternoon there, instead of the scheduled demonstration. Machinery has never been one of my hobbies; in fact, I detest machinery, a feeling which I am sure is fully reciprocated. To my surprise, and great displeasure, Gerry followed me to the museum. For the next two hours, the two of us walked through that museum, with Gerry providing a running monologue. He described Degas' fascination with ballerinas, Van Gogh and his ear, told me that El Greco simply meant "The Greek", an expatriate artist living in Spain, and on and on. Gerry knew his subject well; much of his life may have been fakery, but his knowledge was very real. I was completely entranced. From that day on, I found my attitude toward Gerry was markedly ambivalent. On the one hand, I found him to be gentle, friendly, extremely knowledgeable and interesting; on the other hand, he lived in a fantasy world, was shunned by most of my friends, and worst of all, he was effeminate, although we used more pointed terms to describe it.

Gerry was not popular. He couldn't walk through the corridors without being insulted at every turn. He ignored it all with dignity, but I continued to feel embarrassed for him and because of my friendship for him. On several occasions, one or another of the local tough guys found it necessary to prove his masculinity by bullying Gerry. The height (or perhaps nadir) of the taunting came when Gerry was voted Prom Queen for our class by our intelligent, charitable student body.

One day Gerry told me a long story about his father's career as an expressionist painter. I knew damned well that none of this was true and was about to tell him off when I suddenly realized that Gerry needed to project an image of himself. It didn't matter to him that no one believed him; he believed it while he was telling us, and that was all that mattered. So I sat back and listened and, though I didn't believe a word of it, I enjoyed it. I became quite unabashedly curious about Gerry, and even visited his home once. I never did so a second time. His father was a violent man, probably alcoholic, who beat his wife and son with unfortunate regularity. Most of the house was unfinished or badly in need of repair; it was

dirty, dark, and cluttered throughout. Gerry never once spoke a critical word about his parents in my presence; in fact, he went to extraordinary lengths to praise his father. I was to hear an awful lot of fantasy from Gerry in those last two years of high school. In each of them, Gerry portrayed himself in masculine terms; he had learned to drive a bulldozer, was taking karate lessons, had driven in an auto race, had gone skiing, or hunting, or flying in a private plane. Gerry and I lost touch completely after graduation, but I learned later that he had joined the army, had been discharged as unsuitable, had somehow then enlisted in the air force, where he died of a brain tumor. No doubt his attempt at a military career was yet another attempt to fill a masculine role. As they say in one of the more detestable recent commercials, a boy "wants to know he's a man".

Although Gerry is an extreme case, all men are placed in a position of being expected by society to fill certain slots, to have certain tastes, ambitions, and qualities. Firestone's casting of man in the role of exploiter and woman as the exploited just doesn't hold up. Certainly marriage laws are drawn to favor the man overwhelmingly; but so too are the divorce laws designed to benefit the woman disproportionately. So too are the draft laws. On a trivial, but still pertinent level, I have seen men barred from a theatre because they wore sandals without socks, while women wearing the same footwear were admitted without a second thought. The assumption, presumably, is that women's feet are more sanitary than are men's.

Implicit in her criticism is the charge that men are allowed to do the meaningful work, while women are confined to boring, menial, meaningless lives as housekeepers and babysitters. Leaving aside the obvious reply that being a wife and mother are no less meaningful than being a husband and, say, a ditch digger, there is also the unfortunate fact that most men are unhappy with their place in life, that most work does seem meaningless to the people performing it. To take my own case, for example, I see absolutely no way that one can find personal fulfillment through being responsible for deciding whether we should give priority to silverplating water pitchers or gravy boats on any given day. I'd far rather be home talking to Sheila, playing with Davy, reading GRAVITY'S RAINBOW, writing an article for GRANFALLOON, a short story for ANALOG, or even watching a football game or mowing the lawn.

The truth is that, just as in racial segregation we have found that the dominant race is also adversely affected by the caste system, so it is also with sexual domination; the male is restricted by the structure of society just as much as the woman. And let's not forget that many women are perfectly happy in their present situation, and don't want Firestone's type of liberation. Women, no less than men, are afraid of personal freedom, because it means they will be responsible for their own lives, and will have no one to blame for their own failures. Women can be just as chauvinistic as men. Firestone herself demonstrates this. She insists that the emotional equilibrium of most women is basically healthy, "unlike most men's". Hardly the words one expects to hear from an objective viewpoint. She goes on to say that "men walk about in a state of constant sexual excitement." Funny, I never realized that I was having that much fun.

Firestone then elaborates her own Utopian vision of the future. The nuclear family, a relatively modern invention, is the mainstay of our repressive society in her view. "The biological family is an inherently unequal power distribution." She represents the family in true Marxist terms: "the husband was the owner, the wife the means of reproduction, the children the labor; and...reproduction of the human species was an important economic system." Her critical description of the family is well substantiated; few of us would question that society invests the male with far more of the responsibility and authority within the family. But Firestone insists that "the psychology of power, whose source is the biological family, will disappear." It does not take a great deal of insight to recognize that inequalities in society did not originate with the advent of the nuclear family, and will not cease with its passing.

Wary of charges that she has criticisms without alternatives, Firestone suggests a communal arrangement similar to the Israeli kibbutz. Again, she provides a great deal of cogent, incontrovertible, and valuable criticism of the present system. Many--possibly most--parents are incompetent in that role, there are many parents who mistreat their children. With the prevalence of mothers supplementing the father's income by working, and with most children absent at school for most of the day in any case, there is little chance for the close family relationships we see represented on THE DONNA REED SHOW, LEAVE IT TO BEAVER, or THE WALTONS.

Perhaps some form of extended family or communal responsibility for children would provide a workable, desirable alternative to the nuclear family. But Firestone makes this assumption without test; since it is logical, it must be so. She thus ignores the evidence that children raised in kibbutzes do display some radical character features, including a difficulty with expressing emotion, with maintaining a one-to-one personal relationship, and with working in a cooperative effort, under some circumstances. The children raised in a kibbutz may yet prove to be more happy, responsible, and free than those of the nuclear family, but to advocate wholesale alteration of our system without evaluating the consequences would be the height of stupidity.

"Pregnancy is barbaric", says Ms Firestone, and even worse, "ugly". In her future society, all conception and maturation of fetuses would be extra-uterine, and men would be equally responsible for all aspects of childbirth. Natural childbirth would disappear, although it is not clear whether Firestone would prohibit it, or just assume that in her sane society no sane human being would want to undergo such a barbaric inconvenience. She believes, you see, that there is no instinct for child birth, only instincts for sex, and for child rearing.

Citizens of her society would be transsexual. They would be free to choose partners of either sex in their personal relations. "All other things being equal, people might still prefer those of the opposite sex simply because it is physically more convenient." This is perhaps the one aspect of her society that Firestone defends extremely well. She feels that sex and beauty should not be invariably linked in our minds, and that sex itself should not be confined to any single modality. Firestone is not anti-beauty; in fact,

she specifically warns that "Feminists need not get so pious in their efforts that they feel they must flatly deny the beauty of the face on the cover of VOGUE." Sex should be but one element of a personal encounter, and gender should not be the determining factor in sex.

Up until the concluding chapter, the author has for the most part presented us with a perceptive analysis of our culture and a definite program for the future. Some of her assumptions may be questionable, many of her goals unrealistic. Firestone says at one point that those who consider her views radical, chauvinistic, incorrect, or Utopian simply prove how right she is, a chain of reasoning I find too circuitous to follow. Most if not all of her suggestions do however deserve serious consideration. I don't expect transsexuality to become the norm, as she suggests, but it does strike me as desirable for there to be some socially acceptable manner by which men could display affection for one another. It should be remembered that completely heterosexual European men see nothing embarrassing about embracing one another. It also seems quite likely that extra-uterine birth will become possible, even common, though I doubt that it will entirely or even substantially supplant natural childbirth in the foreseeable future. I would also like to see the nuclear family evolve into a larger social unit, though not necessarily modeled on the kibbutz.

But even though many of her criticisms and suggestions make sense, Firestone reveals one major flaw in her perceived future, though this seems to derive more from her Marxism than her Feminism. She believes that a true human society should be rigidly ordered. For example, conservation is dismissed utterly; it would be better for man to redesign the entire ecological system, to eliminate species and elements which do not contribute to man's general welfare, to complete "human mastery of matter". One doesn't have to be a conservative to consider such a program as profoundly anthropocentric. Firestone forgets that humanity is a part of nature, that we are all animals, subject to instinct, environment, and our own bodies. When man is entirely ruled by reason and logic, he will no longer be the race we know.

With this vision of Marxist order, Firestone reinterprets objective fact to fit her theory. Pregnancy is ugly, she insists, and that is why women cry during the eighth month of pregnancy, casually ignoring our glandular system. She finds one exceptional child in an Israeli kibbutz, and this becomes evidence that communal systems produce better children, despite the fact that she then spends several pages explaining the shortcomings of this very same kibbutz. The hubris displayed in the final chapter comes very near overshadowing the constructive comments that preceded it.

None of this should be taken as implying that Firestone does not have a valid case. The inaccurate portrayal of women in SF has been alluded to far too often for me to raise it as an issue here, but I do want to quote from Roger Zelazny's blurb on Panshin's RITE OF PASSAGE. "Alexei Panshin has done a rare thing for a young man: he has captured the feelings of a young girl, at the point in her life where all young girls are most beautiful and pathetic." To which Sheila instantly reacted: "How does Roger Zelazny know what the feelings of a young girl are?"

DR NO UPDATED, OR,

THEY DON'T MAKE CLIMAXES LIKE THEY USED TO

--- Paul DiFilippo

((The President of the United States is sitting alone in his office. He is obviously very busy with some distasteful paper work, and only wishes to get it finished as soon as possible. He has left orders not to be disturbed. Oblivious to these instructions, the Secretary of State bursts in the door.))

Secretary: Mr President, I bring news of dire importance. A madman and his forces have established a base in the Caribbean, and from it are ruining every Cape Canaveral launch we attempt.

President: Well now, Jesus, Henry, you know the public doesn't give a shit about rockets any more. What they do care about is the economy, and if I don't get busy and ram some of these programs through Congress, you and I and the rest of the GOP are going to look pretty foolish standing in the welfare lines in '77. Why don't we just close down the Cape?

S: I'm afraid that would establish a dangerous precedent, sir, allowing a foreigner to dictate our domestic policy.

P: Alright, I suppose we'll have to do something about it. What do you suggest?

S: Let me call in London to help, sir.

((The President looks at the Secretary as if he suspected the man of indulging in the use of some hideous narcotic that left the user permanently brain-damaged, and incapable of rational thought.))

P: London! Christ, Henry, they're worse off than we are. In two more years, they're going to be another Atlantis. No, I'll tell you what we'll do.

S: Use the CIA, sir?

P: Hell, no. I don't want another fucking Bay of Pigs. This time, we'll use sufficient force. ((He picks up a phone.)) Hello, get me the Pentagon. Hello, General? Listen, I want a threat to national security destroyed. Uh, wait a minute. ((Turns away from phone.)) Where is this place, Henry?

S: Crab Key, sir.

P: ((Turns back to phone.)) It's a place called Crab Key, in the Caribbean. I don't care if you never heard of it. Trust me, will you? How the hell do I know? That's your department. Plutonium, hydrogen, however many negatons it takes to do the job. Alright, I'll be expecting a report. ((Hangs up.)) I guess that's that. What do you say, Henry?

S: I don't know, sir, but I get the feeling that we just missed one hell of a story.

PARABLE: INSIDE DYING INSIDE

Robert Silverberg's novel, *DYING INSIDE*, is a radical departure from the normal subject matter found in SF novels. There have been many stories dealing with telepathy in the past -- Blish's *ESPER*, Shiras' *CHILDREN OF THE ATOM*, Brunner's *THE WHOLE MAN*, Bester's *THE DEMOLISHED MAN*, just to name a few -- but each has concerned either the uses to which these powers are put by individuals or societies, or the manner in which society or an individual adjusts or fails to adjust to their presence. In *DYING INSIDE*, the central character must adjust to the loss of his telepathic powers, and society never becomes aware of their existence at all.

This turnabout in plot is not the sole unique element in the novel. The plot itself is a relatively insignificant element. The scraps of story line serve only to underscore or illustrate the points which Silverberg makes about his character, David Selig. The novel's lack of chronological arrangement reflects this deconcentration on plot in favor of character.

David Selig is a forty-odd year old telepathic mindreader who must look on helplessly as his powers slowly fade. He has never been able to project thoughts, only to receive them, and now even this ability is waning. Selig is culturally Jewish, but religiously uncommitted. His parents are dead, his adopted sister Judith is a divorcee with a young son. There is a long standing hostility between Selig and his sister, now fading, but apparently being replaced by avid dislike on the part of his nephew. Selig briefly holds a series of jobs, eventually supports himself by ghost writing papers for undergraduates at Columbia. He has a series of mistresses, two of whom, Toni and Kitty, he professes to love. At one point he encounters another secret telepath, Tom Nyquist, but he never likes the man and their acquaintance is soon abrogated.

Selig is a study in self-contradiction, a mixture of strengths and weaknesses, ego and humility, shame and pride. When speaking of his childhood, he tells us that "everyone agreed that he was a brilliant child". Despite this brilliance, he supports himself as a parasite and takes perverse pride in his ghost written works, calling them "glib, earnest, profound in a convincingly sophomoric way". His service to the undergrads is, naturally, "the quickest and most reliable".

As his powers decline, Selig is forced to rely increasingly on normal sources of information about the people with whom he must deal. On more than one occasion he expresses dissatisfaction that he is being reduced to the level of ordinary mortals. He spends hours composing lengthy letters to great thinkers in various fields, indulging his fantasy of intellectual superiority.

While making love to one of his mistresses, Selig explores her mind, saying afterward: "I feel a little guilty about the casual way I slammed into her head, no regard for her privacy at all. But I have my needs." He can casually brush aside the rights of others when they conflict with his own desires. As a child, he had wished his infant sister dead even before the enmity was reciprocated, even to the point of trying to use his power to kill her. In his adult life,

he attempts to remake Kitty to his own specifications, imagining himself as Pygmalion. Her interests have always been in the sciences and his in the arts, so he considers her "as not having read anything at all".

Selig is also an intellectually pretentious man. He quotes frequently from Eliot, Shakespeare, Whitman, Browning, Marlowe, Wiener, Thoreau, Tennyson, Huxley, Beckett, Kafka, and others. During the course of the book, he refers casually to his familiarity with the works of over 75 other writers, composers, poets, artists, philosophers, and social thinkers. Contrarily, Selig often expresses contempt for himself as a voyeur, a freak, odd, a dumb schmuck, a schmendrick, a neurotic, and a failure. He admits to self-loathing and self-pity on many occasions; in fact, "Selig" itself is German for "pitiful". "I find my own company wearisome," says Selig, "when I descend into self pity." But: "I've got a lot to pity myself for." At one point, Tom Nyquist recognizes this and asks: "Why don't you like yourself Selig?" While under the influence of LSD, Selig sees himself as "a crouching, huddled bloodsucker", but withdraws from recognition of this and insists that the image originates in the mind of his current mistress, Toni.

Kitty appears to be immune to mindreading when they first meet, giving rise to speculation by Nyquist that she may be a latent telepath with the ability to block. Selig reacts strongly to this possibility, insisting that "she's a sane, healthy, well-balanced, absolutely normal girl. Therefore she's no mind reader." By obvious implication it follows that Selig is insane, or at least unsane, unhealthy, unbalanced, and abnormal, since he is a mind reader.

Selig's feelings with regard to interpersonal communication are also ambiguous. On the one hand, he longs for the ability to develop meaningful, lasting relationships with others, particularly Toni and Kitty, yet he never attempts to recognize their points of view, or those of his sister and parents. He tells us that "his growing bitterness, his sour sense of isolation, damped his capacity for joy." He recognizes that this alienation may well be the major problem in his personality: "The problem is that I feel isolated from other human beings." At the same time, he feels not entirely responsible for the gap in communication, describing his attempts as "unilateral efforts at making contact with a deaf world".

Nyquist points out to Selig that he is not being altogether honest with himself, that the lack of interpersonal success is partly of his own making: "What scares you is contact, any sort of contact". Selig minimizes this, while still admitting to hating his infant sister "instantly", to having driven Kitty away by his attempts to dominate her life, to despising and fearing Nyquist from the beginning. But Selig's isolation is not entirely a result of either his power or his fear of personal interdependence; it is at least partly intellectual.

Like members of any generation, Selig has been affected by things which occurred in his environment which were independent of his influence. As a college student, he became embittered because he saw the United States as "dumping napalm on everything in sight for

the sake of promoting peace and democracy" in Vietnam. But Selig was equally disillusioned by the excesses of protest. "It was then that I knew there could be no hope for mankind, when even the best of us were capable of going berserk in the cause of love and peace and human equality."

Selig blames his telepathic ability for preventing him from functioning gregariously. He describes it as "a useless gift", compares it to an addictive drug, and insists that "It never did me any good anyway." Judith, who knows of his power, argues that "without it you might have been someone quite ordinary". To this he replies that "with it I turned out to be someone quite ordinary. A nobody, a zero. Without it I might have been a happy nobody instead of a dismal one." It has become obvious that Selig is using his telepathy as a scapegoat, blaming all of his personal failures on an ability that he never asked for, rather than accept that he may himself be responsible for his failures and unhappiness.

There is more than a little justification in Selig's comparison of his power to a drug, because the "power brought ecstasy", and Selig uses it compulsively. To a great extent, telepathy is the one unique aspect of his life, and this is a point that, when he is being honest with himself, Selig admits: "On the other hand, without the power, what are you?" Now that his power is fading, he feels guilty, as though he had squandered the gift. Despite over thirty years of telepathic eavesdropping, Selig has never been able to use it to improve his own life or that of the people he has known. Nyquist, contrarily, has developed methods through which his power supports him comfortably. There is no reason to believe that Selig could not have done the same, had he really wanted to.

If Selig was correct in ascribing his alienation to his telepathy, cessation of one would mean cessation of the other. This is not the case. Selig recognizes that "silence is coming over me. I will speak to no one after it's gone. And no one will speak to me." He fails to draw the inescapable conclusion that his exclusion from normal human intercourse was not the result of his abilities, but of his inabilities.

The theme of guilt pervades the entire book. His feelings don't prevent him from eavesdropping in the minds of casual acquaintances, but he avoids reading those of the people to whom he is attached, however remotely. He believes that his power "darkens the soul". Commenting on the frequency with which Selig washes his hands, he asks himself, "What is it, do you think, that he's trying to wash away?"

There is clear evidence that Selig recognizes the dichotomy in his personality. He quotes Walt Whitman: "Do I contradict myself? Very well, then I contradict myself. I am large. I contain multitudes." He refers to himself as being "of two minds" about losing his power. In fact, he often refers to the power as a separate entity living parasitically within him, which spurs Nyquist to say "That's schizoid, man, setting up a duality like that."

The idea that Selig's suffering is unique is simply another manifestation of his overwhelming egocentricity: "I must suffer because I am different, but by way of compensation the entire universe will revolve around me."

There is further evidence that Selig may be suffering from paranoid schizophrenia. He identifies with the central character in Kafka's THE TRIAL, who discovers that there is absolutely no possibility of his acquittal. He also identifies himself and Judith with Orestes and Electra, and assumes their guilt.

As a young boy, Selig felt that "spies were everywhere, probing for young Selig's secret, fishing for the awful truth about him." He discovers that Toni has a "predatory mouth". Under LSD, his paranoia takes solid form and he sees himself as a skulking vampire, hated by mankind. He decides that if people were ever to discover his secret, "I'd probably be lynched." At one point he says that God himself has singled David Selig out for persecution. Near the end of the book, he insists that for all of his life, the power has "separated himself from himself".

The fact is that it is Selig, not his power, which drives people away from him. He hated his sister and despised his parents for no reason discernible. He projected his own paranoia onto Toni and destroyed their relationship. His dislike of Nyquist was easily detectible by the other. Kitty was driven away by Selig's failure to recognize that she too had needs. It even appears that the dislike he detected in his nephew was largely, if not entirely, a product of his own imagination.

Selig carries about with him an aura of gloom and pessimism. When Judith asks if he is in pain, he answers, "Who isn't in pain?" He sums up his view of human destiny quite succinctly by stating that "things have a way of getting worse and worse all the time, until in the end they get so bad that we lack even the means of knowing how bad they really are."

Ultimately Selig accepts the loss of his power: "Whatever comes to you, accept." But it is a grudging acceptance and it only serves to increase his bitterness. "On some ultimate level I just don't give a damn at all. This is what I am...what I now shall be. If you don't like it, tough crap." At the same time, it appears that he is finally beginning to realize that it is he and not his power which has prevented personal happiness. "Maybe I'd have had the problems I have even if I hadn't been born with the gift...God knows there are plenty of neurotics around who have never read a mind in their lives."

Silverberg is sympathetic to Selig, even while carefully delineating his shortcomings. It is difficult to conceive of any writer devoting so much effort to the creation of a single character without realizing a certain degree of kinship. He mentions, for example, that Judith had been a far more proficient hater than David. David was obviously insecure, spending much of his early life as the class clown, seeking attention while simultaneously fearing discovery. It could not have been a very happy childhood.

Less obvious is the thread of evidence showing Selig's identification with Christ, a paradoxical situation since he was raised as a Jew, but then, Christ was a Jew. He specifically isolates himself from mortals and mortal pleasures. "Without the power he was nothing...with it he was a god." He refers to his telepathic power as "my wound". At the same time he denies the existence of a God. "Prayer? To whom? To what?" "Jews don't pray for favors, because they know nobody will answer." But it is Nyquist who accurately tags him: "You're a deeply religious man who doesn't happen to believe in God."

DYING INSIDE is likely to be criticized for its anti-hero character, its downbeat ending, and its slow pace. Selig is obviously not the stuff from which John Carters are made. But it is only in this type of character that we can see aspects of ourselves from an outside perspective. If Selig is an anti-hero, then we are all anti-heroes to greater or lesser extent. DYING INSIDE is indeed slow paced, with little physical action. It is the gradual revelation of the many facets of Selig's character which occupies our attention.

The conclusion of the novel is only outwardly downbeat. Selig has lost his power, as expected, but he has gained in return. He has used his telepathy as an excuse for his misanthropy throughout his life; with the loss of this excuse, reconciliation with humanity is finally possible. There are clear indications that his relationship with Judith and her son Pauly are improving. Selig's insistence that people accept him as he is indicates the first stirring of his own self-acceptance. The shroud of paranoia with which he covered himself has not been removed, but its fabric has been rent. He has traded a power which gave the illusion of human contact for the ability to recognize and attain real contact.

DYING INSIDE did not win the Hugo, and Silverberg may go on to write a dozen better novels in the future. Nevertheless, David Selig--despise him, pity him, or sympathize with him--is probably the most fully realized single character yet to appear in the genre, and it is my bet that this novel will one day be retroactively credited as the first example of a new movement in SF. Expansion of the horizons of SF in any direction is to be welcomed; in the direction of fuller humanity, it is long overdue.

"Once in a while somebody comes out and starts talking nonsense. Don D'Amassa, much as I respect him as a fan critic, has done just that."

--- Warren J. Johnson, SON OF THE WSFA JOURNAL 133

"...does D'Amassa make a specialty of either missing the point or shrugging it off?"

--- Virginia Kidd, SON OF THE WSFA JOURNAL 137

BYPASSING TIME AND SPACE

WITH ISABELLA FIGHELLER

--- Paul DiMillo

At one point in time, Isabella Figheller visited Immanuel Kant, the famous philosopher, with the hope of witnessing him at work. Upon her arrival in his study, she did indeed find him busy--but not with the expected. Instead of composing one of his great tracts, he was laboring at a Utopian fantasy.

Kant's fantasy told of a world where men wandered the earth in naked, Arcadian bliss, living off manna from the sky. They were assured of immortality by the ingestion of a certain medicinal plant that accompanied the manna, for one bite of the plant would cure all mortal ills. The story as a whole was singularly pointless.

Isabella, furious at the waste of such a great mind, interrupted Kant at his work. "Immanuel, you must quit this vaporous writing and get busy with your destined task. This fantasy is worthless, and, moreover, has been done before."

"Worthless it may be," Kant replied, "although I do not accept your judgment, but I defy you to tell me when it has been done before. All this is original with me."

"Quite to the contrary," Isabella replied, "for Chaucer did it much better than you. Who has not heard of his Kant herb airy Tales?"

ERRANT NUISANCE

--- Mike Blake

Boston inventor Jonathan Hawthorne has patented a new household device authorities claim will usher in "a new Golden Age, without food, water, or power shortages, and without worry, for the people of America". The device is a compact matter converter that can turn waste either directly into energy or into matter of a more useful sort, such as food or water. The inventor, who claims descent from the famous American author Nathaniel Hawthorne, says that while the original research project at MIT cost millions of dollars, when mass production of the device begins by early 1976 consumers will be able to install one in the basement of their home for under a thousand dollars. The converter is about the size of an ordinary water heater, delivering utilities and carrying away waste through a series of cables connected to the bathroom, kitchen, etc. There are four cables for delivering consumer needs--one each for electricity, heat, food, and drink--and three for inputting different types of waste--one for garbage, one for all non-edible refuse, the third for liquid waste. Hawthorne hopes to have a book out this spring explaining in layman's terms how each of the utility lines works, and how they are installed. He is naming the book in honor of his famous ancestor, calling it, of course, THE HOWS OF THE SEVEN CABLES.

BYPASSING TIME AND SPACE

WITH ISABELLA FIGROLLER

--- Don D'Amassa

The art of cloning was first perfected on the planet Zamool, by a team of scientists working under threat of death by that planet's potentate, Queen Zemmi. Zemmi suffered from a profound fear of death and disproportionate lust for power, and she was determined that her rule of Zamool would never end. When the cloning process had been perfected, she decreed that at her death, clones would be prepared from her body cells, and the most successful clone would assume her identity and throne. She then chose three of her closest friends to share her power and immortality. The Lady Jessica was given the post of Moriel, trained to extract cells from Zemmi's body and use them to grow each batch of clones. The Lady Angela was proclaimed Zindel, and would assume the throne during each period where the clones had yet to reach maturity. The Lady Lydia was chosen to be HardeI, and it was her duty to administer tests to the various clones and to make the final determination as to which was the most fit replacement.

When Isabella learned of the imminent selection of her successor, she realized this provided an opportunity for her to learn the secret of the cloning process, and simultaneously end Zemmi's tyrannical rule of Zamool. Since Isabella was unexcelled in all the galaxy for mental and physical prowess, all she had to do was substitute herself for one of the dormant clones, and assume the throne following her inevitable selection as the fittest.

Isabella dropped out of sight for several months and her superior, General Zak (formerly employed as a fat gypsy in a circus) was seriously worried that she had been discovered. But only a few days later she appeared in his office, dropped off a complete manual for the cloning process, and announced that as ruler of Zamool, she had abdicated and announced free elections.

"I don't understand," complained the General. "How did you accomplish all of this."

"It's simple," she replied. "I'm considered as the apex of Zemmi's freshest clones by Zamool's HardeI Lady."

.....
"I was telling Don D'Amassa yesterday that I don't feel as if I'm doing my part as a SOTWJ reader, since everybody else seems to be attacking and/or disagreeing with him."

--- George Flynn, SOTWJ 143

"...D'Amassa continues to amaze."

--- Virginia Kidd, SOTWJ 143

FABLE: SAVING MY SOUL

Every once in a while, we all find that someone has reacted to one of our acts in ways we consider grossly inappropriate, sometimes embarrassingly so. Back in 1967, I decided to attempt publishing a fanzine. I was a junior in college at the time, living among a variety of fans like George Fergus, Sue Anderson, Dave Heal, Lee Carson, Tracie Brown, Jim Landau, Terry & Ann McCutchen, Seth McEvoy, and Mike Wood. MSU fandom had absorbed the local Tolkien society, more or less, so the circle also included a number of other people who had little if any contact with fandom as a whole.

One of these latter was a freshman named Paula, a quiet, wildly attractive girl whom both Mike Wood and I dated. In my case, at least, once was enough. Paula was painfully conventional, almost neurotically so in fact. On the one occasion on which I took her to dinner at a Howard-Johnson's, we were unsuccessful despite repeated attempts to convince the waitresses to bring Paula the milk she had ordered with her meal. But when I announced my intention of withholding a tip, Paula insisted that she would leave the tip herself rather than embarrass the waitress. I gave in, but at the cash register, I refused to pay for the milk, while Paula stood by looking uncomfortable, and whispering to me not to make a scene.

We went to a movie. The only one showing that Paula didn't overrule as indecent was an insipid animal story, THE INCREDIBLE JOURNEY I think. Afterwards, we stopped at an ice cream shop for sundaes. The waitress here wrote out two checks, totalled and added tax to each, thereby charging me one cent extra tax. I refused to pay this also, and Paula was scandalized that I would make a scene over such an insignificant thing. It was with great relief that I finally dropped her off at the dormitory, swearing to myself that I would never date her again.

But Paula had expressed an interest in seeing the first issue of my fanzine, GASLARK, when it appeared. In due course it was ready, the premier issue featuring a Dave Heal nude female on the front cover. I suppose I should have known better, but I naively left one copy in Paula's dormitory mail box.

I wasn't present when Paula emptied her mailbox, but a mutual friend was, and she described the ensuing scene in loving detail that evening. When Paula had focused on the subject matter of the cover, she immediately dropped GASLARK as if it were molten lead. Then, in the middle of a crowded lobby, she dropped to her knees, praying loudly and at great length that God would forgive me for my licentious act, and teach me the error of my ways. It was weeks before I dared show my face in that dormitory again, and Paula and I were never to exchange more than a nod ever after.

I'd like to think that my fanzines make a lasting impression on the people who read them, but I am overjoyed to say that -- to my knowledge anyway -- they have never evoked quite that reaction again.

ELABORATE LIES



MATURITY:

/MIKE BLAKE/

I find myself feeling rather ambivalent toward your search for a definition of "maturity". I wonder if it was worth the effort, since I would tend to think such an inexact word has little real application in the world we live in, inhabited as it is by human beings. Even the definition you cite of maturity as a state of sanity at the peak of development bears me out, as no human being is truly sane. And that isn't just all those Phil Dick novels I've been reading lately speaking there. The human norm (or perhaps I should say the normal human) is a myth, a golden mean averaged out from variances in people on both sides of the scale. One person is too tall, another too short. One person lives his life on a schedule as regular as clockwork, another has a mania about never doing the same thing the same way twice. Which is sane? Neither. The situation is the same as regards maturity. A person can be rational in one area, emotional in the next. Perhaps maturity is when the rational attitudes outnumber the emotional ones. But still there are subjects he is immature about, whether it is race, sex, religion, or what. So, in the final analysis, perhaps the best definition of "mature" might be "something mankind isn't".

((The point I thought I had made in the article was that people are not mature, only acts are, or aren't. And I'm not about to get emoroiiled in a discussion of what constitutes sanity. That would be insane.)))

✓ PAUL DIFILIPPO ✓

I simply can't agree with your definition of maturity. Or rather, I think it is only half a definition. You erred seriously when you discounted the importance of "sanity" and "emotional balance". Here are some cases where your structure falls apart, for lack of these two factors.

1) A mass murderer turns himself over to the authorities and requests that he be put in prison to pay for his crimes. Is this man mature? Apparently, by your definition, he is. After all, he is willing to suffer the consequences of his actions. Or would you say that the murders were immature acts and his surrender a single mature gesture? That still doesn't answer my question of whether, taken as a whole, he shows maturity. Does the mature act outweigh the immature ones in determining character, or vice versa?

2) What of the suicide? He accepts the ultimate responsibility: the fact that his actions will cause his own death. You might say that he is attempting to evade lesser responsibilities, but surely that is balanced by the fact that he is accepting such a large one in exchange. Is he mature?

3) How would you classify the stereotyped character so often found in literature, who willingly, blandly, accepts anything? Fate deals out to him? He, it might be said, is not even taking any actions of his own. He is being tossed about by the actions of others. Your definition cannot even begin to deal with him, since he does not act, except in a minimal way.

I am trying to say that acknowledgment of responsibility by itself is not enough to count as maturity. If we also applied the (admittedly nebulous) standards of "sanity" and "emotional balance" to the people I have singled out, I think we would be able to make a decision as to their maturity, whereas with your proposal, we would not.

((Like Mike Blake, you assumed I was assigning maturity to people, rather than acts. In the cases you list, #1 is simple. The murder was probably an immature act (although that is hard to say without knowing the circumstances), and the surrender probably mature. In case 2, we need to know more about the individual's reasons for suicide. If he is killing himself because he cannot face his responsibilities, that is proof on the face of it that he is evading a greater responsibility and acting immaturity. If he is in pain and incurable and chooses death, this is probably a mature response. Case #3 is based on a non-existent being. The very act of not acting is thereby an immature act. One cannot avoid acting unless one is a vegetable, in which case the question of evaluation doesn't arise.)))

✓ GEORGE FLYNN ✓

I don't know if I have any general comments, but let's take your specific case of the draft resisters. This is a dubious test case to begin with, since any decision made under the threat of the draft was essentially under duress, and thus not a fully responsible act. But then, what is, right? More to the point is that most of these

involved were not mature in any meaningful sense when they made their decision; as you say, the system's designed that way. But to what extent should one who is (relatively) mature be bound by his (relatively) immature decisions? To the point, though: You argue that the exiles who want amnesty are behaving immaturely. I disagree. It is one thing to accept responsibility for one's own actions. But when the responsibility for an action is shared, one should not carry this so far as to relieve the other party of responsibility. In a democracy, it is especially important that the government be held fully to account for its actions. And the "rightness or wrongness" is indeed material: if you know that your actions will cause you to suffer injustice, does this disqualify you to protest that injustice? I'm rambling all around the issue, but I think I finally see the crux of the matter. The "consequences of their actions were" not "clear from the beginning", since there were always two possible consequences: either they would stay in exile, or the government would repudiate its position. And in spite of all the noises about mercy and reconciliation, that is really what the whole argument is about.

((As you may have guessed, I chose the draft evader issue precisely because it was a sticky question. If a definition does not fit in a difficult situation, there is no point to having that definition. I should probably clear up two points, one an assumption you and most readers seem to have made, a second one that resulted from imprecise language on my part. First, "immature" is not a pejorative term as far as my definitions are concerned, any more than "mature" is a compliment. Second, I should have differentiated between an evader who believes the government to have been wrong and who wants amnesty from the evader who demands full amnesty. Although I find the concept of involuntary servitude (be it military or alternate service) repugnant, the fact is that such service was (until recently) an obligation held by citizens under our system of law, just as an individual's property rights can be abrogated under eminent domain. So an evader who does not expect to have to face alternate service but still demands that he be accepted back into society is acting in an immature manner. Does that meet your various objections?)))

[GEORGE FERGUS]

Your discussion of maturity has not yet caused any new insights to germinate in my brain, but it has provoked a complaint. I don't like your statement that war resisters who want a full amnesty are behaving immaturely. Accepting the consequences of one's actions when one has to choose the lesser of various evils should not preclude attempting to change those consequences at a later opportunity. Do you figure that the draft dodgers recently released from jail as part of Ford's amnesty plan should have refused to leave because they hadn't yet finished suffering the full consequences they had expected of their actions? It does occur to me, though, that if each of us tends to reach his level of incompetence, then it is not surprising that we are unwilling to accept the responsibility for our actions.

((My comments above to George Flynn should meet most of your objections. As to the fellow being released from jail, since the consequences of his actions changed, he is still faced with them. It doesn't surprise me that people are unwilling to take responsibility for their own lives; it just discourages me.)))

/SHERYL BIRKHEAD/

Although the bigotry discussion interested me, I was even more interested in the idea of maturity. Rather obviously you're going to ignore the purely physical "maturation" definition -- I seem to recall one on a cellular level from college bio, but that doesn't have anything to do with what you're aiming for. Did you ever read ODD JOHN? What or how does intellectual maturity do (ignoring not defining it) to or with a lack of physical maturity? Can one be considered exclusive of the other? There obviously is a physical definition of maturation in an organism -- how that interacts with "mental" maturity I'm not sure. Perhaps part of maturity is the ability to accept defeat, or perhaps merely accept?

((The only connection I see between physical and mental (or perhaps a better term would be emotional) maturity is that the more physically mature an organism is, the more likely its reactions are to be mature. Up to the point of senility, anyway.)))

/ROGER SHEEN/

I used to worry a lot about what maturity meant when I was a teenager because I was always being told, "Act your age." I realized slowly that for my parents my maturity was a matter of acting in conformity with some kind of standard set by society. They weren't absolutist about this, but it was their idea that there was some kind of good example "out there" that I should follow. As for myself, I came to define maturity as the ability to direct one's life in regard to its best interest. The view is akin to your idea of responsibility, I think, but with the emphasis on correct valuation as a basis for making decisions. I don't think that I can agree with you, however, that "a large majority of people remain immature". Admittedly maturity is complex and relative from person to person, but most people achieve a modicum of responsibility. Our civilization rests on this achievement.

((Frankly, I would have said that our civilization totters on this lack of achievement. By my definition, maturity as responsibility, the overwhelming majority of people refuse the responsibility for their own lives. For example, unquestioning obedience to any church or philosophical school automatically makes one immature. This would include the vast majority of all Catholics, Protestants (particularly fundamentalists), and probably Orthodox Jews, to say nothing of Mohammedans and Buddhists and Taoists. Almost anyone who favors censorship is acting immaturity. Mind you, I insist that the term "immature" is not necessarily pejorative, but within my definition of the term, most of mankind is, in balance, woefully immature.

/BEN INDICK/

I cannot quite agree with your view about the deserters, etc., who seek complete amnesty now. This is a generation which was taught that the judgments offered at Nuremberg insisted that men must follow their consciences (it assumed correctly or otherwise that an individual could determine for himself what was Good or True). Since they did, and offered their own conscience-felt verdict on governmental edicts they considered illegal or unjust, they should not, therefore, be penalized. They were not, after all, being "good Germans". I realize that this is an implied injustice to the many men who fought and died, but it is something we must face. There are, after all, many of those

same veterans who do not believe the men who fled the war should now be forced to undergo some form of expiation. This is irrespective of the fate of Mr. Nixon, and whatever motives Mr. Ford may have had; in the greater (more mature) purview, his pardon is "one of those things" whereas the decision not to fight was of a great significance to a world which has too often chosen blindly, stupidly, or selfishly to fight.

((You seem to assume that alternate service would be penalization, Ben, which is where our positions differ. Long before Vietnam, there was a great debate as to whether or not all people should be required to spend a period of time in the ~~service~~ service, but expand the service to include non-military programs. Although I am opposed to all forms of conscription, this struck me as the most fair. Individuals would be able to choose (at least to some extent) what form their service to society would take. Granted this premise, all that the Vietnam evaders are being asked to do is retroactively accept a plan that many of them were agitating for in the first place. The stumbling block is the type of discharge they are in many cases being forced to accept, but otherwise, I don't think they have a good case to reject Ford's plan.)))

/ALYSON ABRAMOWITZ/

According to my two dictionaries the definition of "mature" is: completed, perfected; having reached the limit of its time. Maturity is defined as: 1) state of being mature 2) full development; perfected condition. From that my own opinion is that maturity -- like normalcy -- is judged according to society's and/or one's own personal standards as to what one has been taught is the "perfect state". According to that definition something like draft dodgers can be judged more realistically. If you believe that it is wrong for draft dodgers to want to come back to the U.S.A. without any punishment/duty, then the people are acting immaturely. If you think it's right, then the dodgers are acting maturely. This definition tends to work better than yours when it's applied to situations like a child. We often call children mature or immature. By that, the "willingness of the individual to be responsible for his own actions" (your definition of maturity) isn't meant. What is meant is how the child acts/thinks according to society and/or one's own standard of that child's age or grade.

((I think that my definition works extremely well in the case of a young child. The tendency to say "Johnny did it" or "It wasn't me" is a perfect example of immaturity, and its common to every child I've ever known. What I'm implying is that if you have a six year old boy who accepts the responsibility for his own bad conduct, this boy is extremely mature. As I said above, there is a tendency to find more emotional or intellectual maturity as the organism develops, but I don't think it's a one-to-one correspondence.

/DON THOMPSON/

Your discourse on Maturity in #2 struck some responsive chords in me, particularly your comments on the schools. Metro has been making some innovations aimed at dispelling students' fear of failure;

several years ago the grade of F was abolished and NC (meaning no credit) was substituted. A grade of NC does not affect the grade point average at all and a student can take the class over as many times as necessary to get at least a C (most instructors don't give D's either, since that drags the grade point down). There seems to be a certain loss of prestige, however, in getting NC and more and more students are showing the same fear of that grade as used to be displayed for F. Last year, the administration came up with Adaptive Self-Paced Learning, and this year Freshman Composition is employing it for the first time. Under this system, the work that is to be done during the quarter is all laid out and explained at the very beginning -- seven essays using a variety of rhetorical means of development -- comparison-contrast, analogy, example, etc. -- and then the student proceeds at his own pace. If he finishes all seven of the essays (plus a two hour final examination) and gets a grade of C or better in everything (and if he's satisfied with the grade, according to the syllabus the student has the right to do each assignment over as many times as necessary to get whatever grade he's aiming at) then a letter grade is turned in for him at the end of the quarter and he is finished with that course. Students who do not finish all the work before the end of the quarter receive a grade notation of SP (self-paced) and they register for the same class the following quarter and continue working where they left off. And if they want to take four years to finish one quarter's work, why that's their option.

(Already, students who are receiving the SP are expressing bitter resentment.)

I've tried to moderate my criticism of the SPL thing, reasoning that anything new deserves a chance to be tried fairly before it's condemned. Maybe it will work out all right as the bugs get worked out of it and as both students and faculty become more used to it. But I do have serious misgivings. It does seem to me too much like another method of encouraging the students to delay maturity, in the sense that you were speaking of -- accepting responsibility for their actions. (It also encourages faculty members to shirk their responsibilities. I get some extremely stupid students occasionally, those who are wasting their time, money, and energies by even being in college, and in some cases are actively interfering with the education of others. Previously I could feel that it was an act of charity to flunk them out, but at the same time I always felt bad about giving an F because so often there is real pain involved for the recipient and I don't enjoy inflicting pain. Now there's no problem. The moral issue never arises, and the instructor is not burdened with the task of negative judgments. The dumb student is not flunked out -- he's simply passed along from quarter to quarter).

The impression I get from freshman English students is that the high schools (and probably the elementary schools too) have totally abdicated their responsibility to try to teach kids anything about writing. My students come from two different kinds of schools in the Denver area -- the structured and the unstructured, or the permissive and the regulated. Students from the permissive schools have not been required to write much of anything or else they've been encouraged to write anything they wanted to and have been

lavishly praised but seldom criticized. Their feeling are easily hurt by red ink. Students from the more structured schools have been taught to write empty banalities, platitudes, foggy generalizations. They write essays that have a certain form (they haven't learned any more about spelling, punctuation, or grammar than their counterparts in the unstructured schools), but virtually no content. I try to encourage them to write about their own experiences -- what they themselves have seen or done. Their answer is: "But we were always taught to keep ourselves out of our writing. Nobody's interested in what we do or think!" It takes me the whole quarter, in most cases, just to convince them that their experiences are the one thing they can tell me that no one else can and that they are therefore the very thing I'm most interested in.

As you say, the whole educational system is crumbling rapidly.

((As long as our society as a whole is so concerned with the emphasis on competitiveness and achievement, I don't think isolated alterations in curricula are going to cure students from the fear of bad grades, no matter how it is candy coated. Fear of failure is a powerful human force, even if we call "failure" by some less loaded term. The self paced course you mention appears to offer a great deal to the student who is already mature, but very little to the student who requires strict programming in order to acquire education. I think you and I would differ in our solutions, though.

Rather than eliminate slippery courses like self-paced composition, I'd increase them, but I would add rigidly enforced entrance and exit exams from college. This would force the student to acquire the necessary tools for courses which required personal initiative before he even entered college. The colleges have contributed to this problem themselves. Many professors have admitted to me that they were now passing people with good grades who formerly would have been flunked, through the tyrannies of public relations and the bell-shaped curve.

When I first started teaching, I dreaded the possibility that I might have to flunk anyone. In my senior English Literature class, I had a student whose ability to comprehend the latest nurse novel was in doubt, let alone Chaucer. I asked her if she would like extra help. She declined. I made a point of asking her questions in class, hoping that she would realize she had almost no grasp of the subject. She still refused extra help. She failed every exam I gave her. Finally I offered to let her do some outside work to raise her grade to a D, and gave her a list of topics. She chose to read two additional tales by Chaucer. The paper she handed in I can almost quote from memory: "For extra credit, I read the Miller's Tale and the Knight's Tale from Chaucer's THE CANTERBURY TALES. The Knight's Tale was pretty good, but the other had too much sex." End paper. I flunked her.

I did try one thing that worked out pretty well. In both of my composition classes, I required that each student keep a Journal (carefully never referred to as a diary) which they handed in to me on Fridays. They were to write in it each week, on whatever

subject they liked. There were no grades, and everything was confidential. I red inked it, correcting gross spelling and punctuation, then wrote responses to the ideas and the organization of what they wrote. Some times my responses went on for page after page and we had lengthy, fascinating conversations there. I began to know the students better on paper than in person, and several told me that it was possible for them to talk to me in ways on paper that they wouldn't dare face to face. I found it to be a very successful experiment, and if I ever go back to teaching, the journal would be an integral part of any class in composition I had charge of. Frankly, the only way to learn to write is to write and write and write, although it doesn't hurt if you read a lot too. I, for example, never studied grammar at all. I simply read voraciously since the time I was five, and I know when a sentence looks right. I probably couldn't tell you exactly why it's wrong or right, but at least I'd know.)))

MATURITY AND BIGOTRY

[MIKE BLAKE]

To link Philip K. Dick, maturity, and the South Boston busing situation (which is brought up by Mike Glycer and Rebecca Lesses), I think the parents in Boston need a good spraying with Ubik, because they've gotten to the point where they have lost what maturity they had and are devolving toward the tribalistic reactions of our cave-dwelling ancestors: protect the helpless offspring from the evil, dark strangers. Their use of stones and clubs as weapons seems to prove this retrogression. Hopefully we can rush a case of Ubik for the police to use on protestors before they start using black school children for ritual sacrifices to the Great Ones in the sky.

[GEORGE FERGUS]

Going back to your previous discussion of bigotry among otherwise fair-minded people, I wonder if it could be considered part of a more general tendency to jump to conclusions. That is, there are plenty of people who will form an opinion on any subject regardless of the fact that they often lack sufficient knowledge for it to be valid. Who prattle on blithely about the cause of inflation in America or of fighting in Ireland or Cyprus. Who are seldom heard to say "I don't know". Are these the same people who tend to stereotype all members of a minority group on the basis of a few encounters and a lot of hearsay?

To tie it all up, are these people who jump to conclusions without sufficient consideration of all the facts the same people who jump to actions without sufficient consideration of the consequences? Perhaps you have just been poking into various facets of the same basic flaw in human nature. The question that remains is whether it is due to fear (of nonconformity), stupidity, or plain laziness.

((I don't know. Probably. The ultimate cause is undoubtedly a combination of all three.)))

[FRED LERNER]

I haven't anything useful to say about bigotry. For one thing, I just finished reading Mark Twain's LETTERS FROM THE EARTH, and

consequently I've little reason to like anybody. Also I'm not sure where to draw the line between "bigotry" and "learning from experience". If it's a valid lesson that fires tend to burn, and thus a valid course of action to keep one's hands out of fires, is it not a valid response to an almost uniformly negative experience with Mauretanians (for example) to avoid them and their works in the future? Is it bigotry to avoid contact with urban poor blacks but not with suburban affluent blacks -- if one has reason to fear being mugged by the former and not by the latter? The main reason I'm concerned with all this is that, as I see it, one of the main factors retarding the conquest of bigotry is the failure of would-be liberal egalitarians to distinguish between "bias" (a negative attitude shaped by unfavorable experience) and "prejudice" (a negative attitude irrelevant to experience).

Unlike some of your readers, I find encouraging the revival of ethnic consciousness in America. The reason is simple: in an increasingly homogeneous society, every tendency toward heterogeneity tends to increase the choices available to an individual. If there's only one acceptable mode of dress, worship, behavior, or whatever, then anyone who differs from it is "wrong". If there are fifty, who's to know the difference if I choose a fifty-first? As a confirmed libertarian I view the ethnic consciousness movement as one of the few positive tendencies of recent years.

((See, Fred, you did have something useful to say. The lack of distinction among liberals which you cite has also led them into the embarrassing situation of quotas. There are certain limited applications of the quota system which may well be valid under certain conditions, but the system as established by the Democrats in the primaries last time actually thwarted majority rule in many cases.

The ethnic consciousness bit is, like everything else, a mixed bag of good and bad points. While I also favor heterogeneity in society, I'm suspicious of situations where the Italian-American minority can force a major motion picture producer to pretend the MAFIA isn't dominated by Italians.)))

FLEAS

/MIKE BLAKE/

You should have let yourself get bitten by one of those radioactive fleas. You might have gained all the powers and abilities of a giant flea. Then you could dress in a fancy costume and go jumping from building to building, upon encountering a villain leap on his back, and let him scratch himself into submission.

/DON THOMPSON/

Fable is a horror story that reminds me of the time we adopted a kitten and my daughter (who was only 3 or 4 at the time) got head lice from it -- NO, by golly, it was some kind of fungus or mange. We had to keep her head shaved for more than a year until medical science came up with a new pill that cleared it up.

MISCELLANEOUS

/GEORGE FLYNN/

To Ben Indick: Ireland is indeed tragic, but there's no point in talking about "brother cannot live with brother", since the groups in question have been separate in every sense but the geographical for over three centuries.

To Jim Goldfrank: There is nothing wrong in "having the virtues of a good Christian". Many people do; some of them are even Christians. Another reason for the greater fear of similar groups is the difference between the poor, benighted outsiders who don't know any better and the dirty heretics who have been exposed to The Truth and have no excuse for their obstinacy in not accepting it. (All of which reminds me, Don: You're also prejudiced against religion.)

((Not prejudiced, George, biased. And only against organized religions. I am very religious, in my own peculiar fashion.)))

/GEORGE FERGUS/

Perhaps you should indicate that some of the pieces appearing in MYTHOLOGIES (such as those by Lee Carson and myself) are almost a decade old. I wouldn't want Paul Di Filippo (better ease him out, Don. You wouldn't want it to get around that MYTHOLOGIES is a wopzine...) to think that I am still in the state of fevered, manic obsession that prevailed during those macabre school years with you, as compared to the steady, sober rut through which I stride today. Nevertheless it is very gratifying to receive such praise for my takeoff on the Hamlet soliloquy, especially the honest admission that its appeal is surpassed only by a work overlaid with gratuitous sex. My next opus, "Street Walker's Soliloquy", will hopefully remedy this lack.

Re: Juggling Time Apace with Isabella Hogcaller, I am not sure how many of these feghoots I will be able to stand. Lest you choose this moment to resurrect one of my old ones, let me state for the record my feeling that they belong to that large class of things more fun to do than observe. See Don publish feghoots in MYTHOLOGIES. See him laugh. See all his readers send their awful feghoots to Don. Hear Don groan. See Don buried under mountains of feghoots. Hear Don's groans growing fainter and fainter...

/DAVID SINGER/

Just last week, I saw an interesting item in Zodiac News (an alternative news service that the radio station (WRPI) gets). Basically, it said that college textbook publishers were having to come out with new editions of the texts because many students were unable to read at the college level. I was shocked when I saw that item; I hadn't come into contact with many of that kind of student. While I do see some of them, mostly when I'm consulting at the computer lab, I found that they were generally foreign students or black. In both cases, they had been subject to relative cultural deprivation (that is, the foreign students simply hadn't grown up with English as their native language, and the blacks had gone to inferior schools...My god, I came to college to learn, and to be challenged...NOT to be forced to sit around while those who obviously can't or won't do the work would be spoonfed the material.

/PAUL DI FILIPPO/

Why is Sheila conspicuous by her absence in MYTHOLOG she not represented by even a humble loc? From the CONDESSES I have seen, her writing talents are not (Christe-the-things-a-person-will-say-for-delicious she could help) alter the 10-3, male-female, odds in column.

((Actually, distribution of MYTHOLOGIES #2 was 78 male which I suppose reflects the proportions in fandom as a about 10-4. Since I don't believe in quotas (see comment Lerner above) I'm not about to artificially alter the balance. Sheila is in two apas, among other things, which might account some of her free time.)))

/BEN INDICK/

I have no complaint at all this time about Paul Di Filippo's piece. It is wise, witty, and wicked. I only hope MYTHOLOGIES does not re out decisionmakers, or, my goodness, it may come true. If they offer the women of this generation an entire generation of Paul Newmans or Robert Redfords, or, who knows, Don D'Amassas, for dallying, with greater safety than any oral or physical contraceptives, where will that leave all of us?

/MIKE SHOEMAKER/

I detect negative implications in your mention of the strikes in West Virginia. Frankly, my sympathies are entirely with the parents. And what they are doing is not an attempt at censorship, but an attempt to regain the right to a voice in their children's education. Actually, they are fighting against a sort of negative form of censorship, that is, against the bastards on the school board cramming the stuff down the students' throat as required reading. Required reading is censorship in reverse, and one's no better than the other. The lack of choice is the factor that relates the two.

((You make several misassumptions that destroy your argument. First, the reading was not required, therefore it was censorship, since the parents wanted other students prevented from reading the material. Second, even if it was required, a majority of the parents supported the school's action or were indifferent. Third, children are not property, as your support and their actions imply, and parents do not and should not have exclusive control over their education. Fourth, when one is ill, one goes to a doctor; when one wants one's children educated, one presumably goes to an educator. I don't want to be put in the position of defending the American public school system, which I find frightfully ill-conceived and executed, but I find the mindless violence of the strikers extremely disturbing. They are perfectly free to withdraw their children from the public school system and place them in private schools. No one required them to enroll in public education. But in public education, the majority presumably should rule. Since I support total non-mandatory school attendance, the situation would not arise perhaps, but the fact that the striking parents don't want other children to be exposed to "pornography" either is a clear indication that they are not trying to defend their own rights, they are trying to repress those of others.)))

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Gorman, Mike Gorra, Gil Gaier, Chris Sherman, Jeff Smith,
Michael Coney (whose letter will appear next issue) and
Paula Lieberman, who asked and therefore provided me with
an excuse to list my tentative Hugo choices.

Best Novel: THE GODMALE by T.J. Bass, Ballantine Books
Best Short Story: "The Cathadonian Odyssey" by Michael Bishop
Best Fanzine: STARLING edited by Hank & Lesleigh Luttrell,
Best Editor: Damon Knight
Best Fan writer: Paul Walker
All other categories as yet undecided.

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