

DEROGATORY REFERENCE

ONE HUNDRED



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Derogatory Reference 100

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This is the 100th DR. I'm tempted to make it the last. I learned from reading Alfred Bester that I am a pi person: Part of my assignment this time around is to make patterns, some but not all of which I am aware of. So when I come to a nice round number I'm tempted to stop and begin something new. What I'm not at all tempted to do is to stop publishing altogether. I've also reached a number of other round numbers this year, including 25 years in fanzine fandom, 20 years living with Bernadette, 10 years living with Kevin, 10 years off drugs, and for that matter 60 years of being alive, and I intend to continue with all of those.

So I will do a next zine, but I'm thinking of giving it initials other than DR, and making it issue #1. One title that comes to mind is *Equal-Opportunity Crone*. The titles for older males are too flattering—Old Wise Man, and even Curmudgeon, are not things one wishes to call oneself. I'm over 60, I'm getting crankier, I've reached the age where even the grown-up oppressor music of my adolescence sounds better than the noise these kids listen to, and I like to talk about the Good Old Days. Besides, I'm in the post-fertile stage (though I accomplished that surgically years ago). I want to be a crone, and only a sexist pig (or sow) would deny that to me.

Opinions on the title question are solicited.



A major function of the mass media is to deflect envy away from those with power to those with ability. The way most people use the word *elitist* shows how well it's working.



Why the Music Died in 1968

In mid-1968 it seemed that our entire culture was faced with the possibility of a change that might mean either going mad or transcending to a higher plane, and I felt that I was, too. The culture chickened out, and so did I, leaving San Francisco and returning to New York, not daring to face the challenge of the Chicago convention, taking a job as a public school teacher. I believed that the culture was punished by winding up with Richard Nixon, and I may have undergone a similar fate.

The alternatives to Nixon included two groups that I think of as the punks and the dreamers, the heirs of William Burroughs and Allen Ginsberg, respectively—and each had its own music.

In the late 60s, the dreamers briefly flourished in Haight-Ashbury, while the punks centered around Andy Warhol in New York. Warhol represented scrap irony—the cheapest kind of negativism. (Asked if he were going to write a reply to Edward Gibbon's attacks on Christianity, a man of the cloth said, "I do not know how to refute a sneer." That may be unfair to Gibbon, but it's a good point in general.) I find the Warhol version so trashy in its negativity that I would actually prefer to be life-affirming, if that were the only alternative.

Musically, the punks were represented by the Velvet Underground, with its heroin commercials. Greil Marcus reminds us that San Francisco underground DJ Tom Donahue, who usually presented the likes of Janis Joplin and the Grateful Dead, introduced the group to his audience by saying, "That was the Velvet Underground. A very New York sound. Let's hope they stay there." On the other hand, Paul Williams, in *The Twentieth Century's Greatest Hits*, lists a Velvet Underground song, "Sister Ray," as #2 in his Top 40 works of twentieth-century art. I imagine this is something of a provocation. If I were doing a Top 40, I might well do what I think he is doing and give the second spot to

a song I genuinely love, and yet one that I know would rouse protests, even loathing: "MacArthur Park," as recorded by Waylon Jennings and the Kimberleys. I am willing to stipulate that Williams is being no less sincere than I would be, but I'm with Tom Donohue. Rather than listing the Velvet Underground with stories by the likes of Sturgeon, Vonnegut, and Borges, as Williams does, I would include it with paraquat, Kent State, and Nixon: This is what happened to the Sixties.

It is generally known that the group got its name from a book. I actually read *The Velvet Underground* when it first appeared. It was the nearest thing to erotica that could be openly published in 1964, which is to say it was a book of prurient (morbid and shameful, according to the Supreme Court; literally, itching) allegedly factual mention of sex with a heavy veneer of moral condemnation under the general rubric of "Isn't it awful how they...." It is the sort of work that nowadays is harder to sell unless one is a Special Prosecutor, although the television show *Temptation Island* has certain similarities.

The book was modeled after Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis*. It may be that Krafft-Ebing never said in so many words, "This can lead to rape, murder, even masturbation," but that was his approach to anything "deviant," and *The Velvet Underground* took the same tack. Homosexuality was, to author "James Leigh," so nasty that mere fact could not suffice to condemn it enough. So he imagined the "Society for Transcendental Philovita," a Homintern plot to find a way to reproduce without all that nasty heing-and-sheing so that they could kill off all the hets. This was of course a fairly primitive form of the blood libel, one that has since been refined to the idea that all gays wish to make child snuff porn.

That is what I mean by scrap irony: One could suggest a certain self-hatred in a sexually revolutionary group picking this particular book for its name, but only at the risk of being irrefutably sneered at as irony-deaf.

Jedediah Purdy hit the news a few years ago with *For Common Things*, a book that was in large measure an attack on irony. One is tempted to be ironic, perhaps downright cynical, about him. His name is Jedediah Purdy. He has a remarkably fresh-faced look,

and when I heard him on the radio, I was taken by the almost unbearable sincerity of his voice: If Jedediah Purdy told me to go screw myself, I would feel quite confident that he wanted me to do so. It is cheap and easy to suggest that the author is playing the hand that was dealt him.

But he has some good ideas on the subject, including one point that had been made earlier by David Foster Wallace: Irony is a surprisingly cheap commodity, one that can be added to commercial products with little expense or effort. Irony, like torture, is a powerful instrument that can be successfully operated with very little ability.

I sometimes speculate that 1968 was a branching point of alternate histories, and I picked the boring one. In a book of photos of sf writers, the late Karl Edward Wagner chose as the caption for his, "Shortly after 1970 our world ended and with it any hope for intelligent life on Earth. Let there always be some refuge from time where it is eternally the autumn of the 1960s." (I hope he has found it.) Perhaps that is the world I missed out on. That world would still have cheap sex and cheap paperbacks, perhaps even evolving to that ultimate combination: 50s music, 60s sexndope, 90s computers. I express this thought by saying that I live in the fallen universe: the one where Janis Joplin, rather than Lou Reed, OD'd.

Here's another take on the question: In the mid-Sixties, rock & roll was loaded down with political and artistic significance far beyond what it could take. The artistic inputs may have taken hold more virulently, because the music had insufficient natural resistance to such infections as perverse modernism (the art that hates art: Warhol) and romantic self-glorification (Jim Morrison, who managed to make whipping it out onstage boring). Rock & roll attained critical mass in 1968, and it imploded; its half-life was four years. Bits of it are of course still alive.

And another: Tim Leary was right, at least about my tastes. The music I like is what I imprinted on when the juices of adolescence started flowing, and anything that doesn't sound like that is no good. Besides, in 1968 the Music area of my inner storage was getting full, and I didn't want to expand it or delete valuable content such as "Yip yip yip yip boom shananana" and "Transfusion, transfusion. Nurse, pardon me for this crazy

intrusion. I'm never never never gonna speed again. Shoot the fluid to me, Louie!"



Science works in its own terms. *Social Text* made a collective fool of itself by trying to criticize science without dealing with it in those terms. It's like a dog humping a person's leg: The dog may be having sex, but the person isn't.

On the other hand, Congress's effort to determine the medical efficacy of marijuana by legislation is an equal stupidity, plus the power of enforcement.



Harry, You're a Beast

I have always felt that "masculine" and "feminine" are no better to describe types of behavior than "Caucasian" or "Negroid." This runs counter to good old Evolutionary Psychology: All other mammal species have fairly strong differences between males and females, so why shouldn't humans?

It is certainly true that human beings are animals, and as animals have the animal traits, including sexual dimorphism: The bucks want to spread their seed as widely as possible, while keeping other bucks out of their territory, and the does want to have lots of cubs and find a big, strong buck to protect them. But surely we have other characteristics, mental and social. I suppose it isn't possible or desirable to completely transcend our animal heritage, but I am in favor of making it less important.

If nothing else, it seems counterproductive to go to heroic efforts to change a successful person who has the "wrong" good qualities for his/her genitalia. C.P. Snow, hardly a figure of progressive enlightenment, pointed out half a century ago, "It is one of our follies that, whatever we say, we don't in reality regard women as suitable for scientific careers. We thus neatly divide our pool of potential talent by two."

Besides, there are other consequences to the evolutionary approach. Eric S. Raymond, among others, has mentioned that if the buck is going to spend a lot of time out fighting other bucks, then the doe might wish to optimize her reproductive strategy by second-sourcing the needed sperm, especially if she can do so without the Alpha catching her.

DNA evidence shows that more of this than we might think goes on in other species.

Another note on reproduction and evolutionary psychology: Martha Hrdy has written a book pointing out that the animal model of mothering does not lead to desperate efforts to preserve each and every offspring one has had or is about to, a fact that should be obvious to anyone who has seen a mother cat eating her imperfect kittens. In particular, this means that a woman might have an abortion as part of a successful reproductive strategy. (Ursula K. Le Guin has written a fascinating memoir of doing so.)



One feature of cocaine (or perhaps it's a bug) is that it enables the user to be drunker than drunk—that is, to keep sopping up the booze longer without unconsciousness intervening. (I believe this secret is known in the highest circles of government.) An analogous function is performed by the luxury industry, so that an individual who has already made enough money to satisfy ordinary avarice, gluttony, and lust can turn further ill-gotten gains into expensive status symbols such as \$6000 shower curtains, thus becoming richer than rich.



I think this whole "Silence Is Consent" meme is a bad one. There are times one is trapped in a situation where that is true, but that's the pathological case. Silence Is Consent goes with a lot of bad ideas, from blaming everyone in a country for the evils that go on there to feeling obligated to tell strangers on the street that they are too fat or don't really need their canes.



Embrace the Power of Nor

Clifford Geertz is a genius. He created **thick description** as a role for anthropology where it's something other than a way of trying to dress up like a Real Science, and that's only one of his contributions. For instance, there's the essay "Common Sense as a Cultural System" (the title itself offers information many people need), which discusses the folly of trying to maintain sex as a fixed and absolute natural distinction even though a

small percentage of new babies are not obviously one or the other.

His latest book, *Available Light* (Princeton tpb), includes a marvelous essay about "Anti-Anti Relativism," which he compares to anti-anti communism and anti-anti abortion. Cultural relativism may lead us to refrain from criticizing differently civilized tribes that mutilate little girls' genitals to protect them from ever enjoying sex, but antirelativism tends to sweep a lot of valuable information under the rug in the name of one's own Big Story (sociobiology, Marxism, whatever).

This sort of plague-on-both-your-houses approach has many uses. People are always trying to make us say Yes or No or choose between two supposedly exclusive and exhaustive alternatives. This has long been a specialty of Richard Viguerie's fund-raising questionnaires, going back to "Do you want an increased defense budget, or do you want the Russians to come over here and violate our women and children?" Or there's Erich Fromm's division of the world into biophiles, who love Life Itself, and necrophiles, who wallow in blood, violence, and disease. I am neither, and I know people who are both.

Some wish to tell us that two-valuedness is logic. It isn't. Logic is a tool that does precisely one thing: It guarantees that your conclusions are no worse than your premises. If your premises do not divide the world properly, neither will your conclusions; "Garbage In, Garbage Out" did not begin with computers.

Jon Elster offers the useful concept of External Negation. You can believe that something is false (I believe not-X); that's internal negation. Or you can believe that the question is ill formed, or that we don't know enough to believe one way or the other. In that case you can say, "I don't believe X." (Common speech is careless about this. Perhaps we should distinguish between "I don't believe..." and "I disbelieve...") I would suggest that we do more not-believing, in that sense.

We are all fallible, and we keep getting more ignorant all the time (in the sense that the sum of knowledge grows much faster than an individual's can), so it behooves us to recognize that all our knowledge is provisional. Bernadette tells me that's the main message of Seventeenth-Century Skepticism. Time has not aged it, nor custom staled.



We're beginning to hear that low-fat is not as wonderful as we were formerly told. I'm old enough to remember an earlier form of nutritional correctness, a two-variable system in which meat was benign and exciting, vegetables were benign and boring, sugar was harmful and exciting, and starch was harmful and boring. Fat didn't really count in this one.

When the new approach came in, I figured it was another fashion (or shall we say, episteme), rather than progress. I am not surprised by the new findings. I would guess it will turn out that there are different nutritional profiles, and people who eat in keeping with theirs remain healthy. Until we've found those, nutrition will be like the study of blood before we learned there were different types.



In 1966, I dreamed I had dropped acid (which I had not yet done in waking reality). Someone said, "It will start working NOW!" whereupon I awoke. I think I'm still on that one.



It's been said that a good slogan can stop thought for years, and Gilbert Ryle may have done so for more than fifty of them with "the ghost in the machine." Because it's hard to think in more than three dimensions, that particular spook seems like the only alternative to materialistic reductionism. If I hadn't studied complex variables and multidimensional geometry, I might have thought that way.



1960 is not "historical" for me if that means "what I learned as history." I was there! And you wouldn't believe it! You couldn't use public water fountains if you were the wrong color! You could go to jail for pictures of people with actual pubic hair! And you'll never believe what they had the cops doing in men's rooms!



A newspaper report on a recent protest march included the supposedly damning fact that some female participants hadn't shaved their legs. And we have learned that if you're in the FBI, you don't have to listen to information you desperately need to know if it comes from a woman outside the proper range of sexual desirability. If the little blue guys from space really are watching us, it comes from the same sort of unedifying interest that made eighteenth-century madhouses into tourist attractions.



Some autoantonyms (words with two opposite meanings): "oversight," "discriminate," and "design," the last of these meaning both "clear thinking made visible" (Edward Tufte) and "prettiness with as little concession to the needs of users as possible." Our household recently stayed in a Residence Inn where the drawers and cabinets were cunningly designed to give no clues to how one opened them.



I am not making this up: Harvard professor William Moulton Marston invented the polygraph in 1916. Some years later he dreamed up Wonder Woman comics. I am making this up: He rubbed his hands together like Lex Luthor or Dr. Sivana and chortled, "If they believed the lie-detecting machine, I should have no trouble selling them on the bullet-catching bracelets."



Every year I watch the NFL Player Draft, which I find more fun than many actual games. I love to watch the maneuvering, but it's like the curse that comes with the Klopman Diamond: I also have to watch—and listen to—Mel Kiper. Mel Kiper is Iron Geek Draft. He looks like a rooster, complete with a rigid pompadour, held in place by at least a full can of industrial-strength hair spray, and as one nineteenth-century British intellectual said of another, "Would that I could be so certain of anything as he is of everything." I used to read him online, which spared me his voice, though the tone came through. This year, however, he was an extra-cost special, so I passed him up. If they ever start a

Draftniks Anonymous, one of the questions will be, "Did you ever pay to read Mel Kiper?"



There are a lot of people to whom the word *marriage* is a magic thing, which is defiled if same-sex couples use it. I have heard this sort of thing referred to as "associational thinking": Connotations of words are everything; logical consequences are nothing. The depressing thought is that each of the people who think this way gets to vote as many times as you or I do. I suggest we let them have their word, and set up some new concept under which "couples" of nonstandard number and/or gender distribution can have precisely the same rights as those who get to use the Holy Word for their unions. I personally wouldn't mind if the alternative term were *concubinage* or *whoredom*.



I've been writing parodies for over forty years now—mostly songs, but an occasional prose effort. For instance, in the early Sixties, when James Bond first became famous, my friends and I all read the books, so I wrote a Bondlike parody, an obscene libel of most of those who would be reading it, and gave it the sophomoric title "Goldmember." I ~~think I'll sue the movie people and present as evidence word-processed files from 1963.~~ That was all too typical. Most of my works took acceptable songs and added smut. I never thought I'd go the other way, but I recently felt inspired to rewrite the sewer-mouthed blues classic "Stavin' Chain" as:

Richard Cheney had what it took.
If he couldn't make a profit, he'd cook the books.
Cook the books, make 'em come out right,
Hire Arthur Andersen for oversight.
Nobody gonna do like Cheney do.

Good Things

The recent wedding of my niece, Alison Cimmel, to David Hoffman. My sister, Eve, married Joe Cimmel 33 years ago, and they have been living happily ever after. They have three children: Brian, Stephanie, and Alison. I don't see them anywhere near as often as a socially unchallenged person would, but the wedding was in New York, their whole family

was there, our whole family went, and we all enjoyed it.

The New York Times described Lydia Davis as "a stand-up comedian who works to an audience of philosophers." Naturally, I was interested. *Almost No Memory* and *Samuel Johnson Is Indignant* (both Picador tpb) are made up of stories and nonstory constructs, some of which work very well for me, such as:

Spring Spleen

I am happy the leaves are growing large so quickly. Soon they will hide the neighbor and her screaming child.

Speaking of *The New York Times*, they have one op-ed guy who always makes sense: Paul Krugman. I would like to point out that he read Isaac Asimov in his formative years and said that he got into economics because it was the closest thing to psychohistory.

<www.efanzines.com> offers online versions of the work of such excellent zinners as Geri Sullivan, Ted White, and Earl Kemp. Bill Burns is doing yeoman service in running this site. My previous issue appeared there, and I trust this one will too.

Nasty, Brutish, and Short

Attorneys at Law

Ann Coulter, *Slander* (Crown hc): An expose of how the [singular] media pursues its radical leftist goals by accusing conservatives of being dumb enough to say things like "Kill their leaders and convert them to Christianity."

A specter is haunting Wall Street; it is the specter of honest accounting.

Michel Foucault wanted to reduce all intellectual disputes to a battle over power and domination. By a remarkable coincidence, that was also his idea of a good time sexually.

Depending on the kindness of strangers may not be as bad as depending on the competence of strangers.

Pale Fire: nested Klein bottles.

Maybe there's an atheist Hell that's like the traditional one, only nobody's in charge. It just happened.

The anti-downloading thing reminds me of that good old sexual warning, "If he gets free milk, he'll never buy the cow." Makes as much sense here.

Materialism is a good, but by no means perfect, crap filter. In Mark Twain's image, it keeps a cat from sitting on a lot of hot stoves and a few cold ones.

Did you hear about the terrible fate of the homeopathist? He drank a glass of distilled water and died of an overdose of everything.

All those people who said dictionaries should report the way real people use words instead of some elitist rules, Google is your dictionary. Excuse me, your dicktionary.

Literary criticism: When the only tool you have is character analysis, everything looks like Jane Austen.

A civilized society would have an obscene word for one who *doesn't* give oral sex.

Curiosity killed Schrödinger's cat, or not, as the case may be.

One function of crazy people is raising the questions sane people don't like and insisting on discussing them. Ayn Rand, for instance: Why is it more admirable to love the undeserving?

I imagine there are people who think *Jurassic Park* is real and the moon landing was faked.

On the grave of a baby beaten to death by its parents: I WAS A CHILD, NOT A CHOICE

The whole point of society is to be less unforgiving than nature.

I sometimes think Judge Judy tried to make it as a dominatrix, but was too disagreeable.

A curse for someone you REALLY don't like: May you have many learning experiences and not learn from them.

