

CONSOLATION PRIZE

"(My) letter leaves me extremely dissatisfied. When I first got your letter I was full of responses but lots of overtime and work pressures later I can just barely skim the surface..."

-- Beryl Hauser

c/o AMERIKANSKE BILLEDER, KØBMAGERGADE 43, 1150 COPENHAGEN K, DENMARK

Having rec'd several fascinating variants of the above address through the miraculous Danish post (which arrives at 9 a.m. here) I thought it might be wise to include the real true final approved version in a prominent spot. Having also rec'd some bewildered if not reproachful responses to my former mass mailing I must hasten to apologize, and try to excuse myself by explaining that Science Fiction People Do These Things. It's true. For decades science fiction fans, overwhelmed by the press of events and the masses of unanswered mail avalanching off every tabletop or other flat surface, have resorted to things called "letter substitutes" (lettersub for short, which conjures visions of Captain Nemo in USPO drag). These they send out to all their correspondents, traditionally with ritual profuse apologies. Lettersubs are generally considered ALMOST as good as a Real Letter (the kind that start Dear Uncle Floyd and spend a lot of time reacting to your last letter) and at least suitably mollifying to the (by now) irate neglected penpal. WARNING: Science fiction also has other traditions, such as quoting anything that doesn't say Do Not Quote, seizing on typos as a source of endlessly rich linguistic growth, and taking things out of context. I do, however, try to avoid quoting anything too personal unless I know the person is "out" about it.

Receiving a lettersub when you are NOT part of this tradition could be quite disconcerting, I now realize. I felt I should start my last one with an explanation, but as it was being mailed from here via "printed matter" mail, I wasn't too sure if references to it as a "letter" were wise, at least on p. one, even though it didn't actually achieve "letter" status until remailed by Terry Garey from Minneapolis (all this to save overseas postage) in actual individual envelopes.

In venturing upon yet another lettersub to you all, I refer you to the quote from Beryl Hauser's letter, above, since it's exactly how I feel. I have before me 12 -- count them, 12 -- very interesting and very unanswered letters, with more arriving at a rate that would have given Malthus grim satisfaction. "Daunting" is hardly the word for the prospect of 12 separate accounts of my recent life & plans. "Daunting" in fact is the word for even one such account, given the fact that *at this very moment* I should be working on the last manuscript pages of The Foreword -- as we call it in haunted tones here -- to The Book. The Foreword, now almost wrestled and hogtied into submission with vast looping red magic marker slashes and scarce-decipherable knots of outraged pencilled critique, "insert A", "sleeping bag here", "go to Z previous page" and the like, has Jacob reading the shiny new typescript over and over in fascinated awe. "Mog," he says, "now I think you are a genius." But only one or two lines did I actually write, and for my part I can't even remember what's IN the thing; I have only a vague memory of a titanic struggle with monsters of length, politics, and syntax. Reading over bits here n there I know that these monsters still lurk, only their beady eyes showing, just below the surface of that draft. I'm not turning my back on it.

This phenomenon of not remembering anything I've read (or even written) moments afterward -- I sometimes wonder if it's a necessary aspect of writing for some people -- or creation -- the forgetting of whatever is non-essential at that very moment. Other times I think it's just prema-

ture senility. Whatever it is, it is MARKED. I'm always amazed how when Jacob wants to refer to a part of the book he can turn right to it in the manuscript or the Danish book, or remember a specific picture from the show and what part of the script it goes with. True, there are those six years of dealing with the whole thing. But when I realize I don't know a single one of the poems I used to write by heart...and that I find it hard to remember what I did yesterday, or this morning...I feel uneasy.

Anyway, so much for What I Did On My Summer Vacation. It's occurred to me I owe you all a lengthy description of what American Pictures is and why I am here. It's occurred to me I'm just going to keep on owing it. In March 1984 you can all buy the book or force your libraries to buy it, and then All Will Be Made Clear in a Single Blinding Flash. Though actually I wish you could all see the show before reading the book.

All my loyal friends instantly grasped from my last letter the basic principle that Jacob Holdt is a Beast and a Cad. This was naturally quite gratifying except insofar as it provokes forth the tedious necessity of presenting the Other Side of The Picture. There is nothing quite so unsatisfactory as having to go back and say that someone you wrote of as Mr. Hyde also has his Dr. Jekyll points. Therefore I will do it hastily and just mention that Jacob can be extremely sweet and has many fine qualities not found in the average man, including gentleness, generosity, a slightly skewed but serviceable loyalty to friends, openness to new people, sexual diffidence and great willingness to work. He has immense personal charm (cave, Anne Laurie) and fabulous shoulders. (I don't know if I've mentioned my shoulder fetish...?) His politics may drive me bananas, but I can also recognize in them the chameleon quality I tend to have myself sometimes. If he can't be said to have what Jane Austen would have called "correct principles", he at least has a vague idea of which side he should be on when push comes to shove, and he has certainly done more "real" things in the way of furthering worthy radical causes than most of us can boast of, both before and after "American Pictures" was created. Also, he wears his clothes (both of them) to rags and doesn't fuss about his food.

There. Now I can say anything I want about him.

How the hell (asks one correspondent) do you spell your last name?

DECARNIN

Beryl, why are you trying to read RINGWORLD? Just curious.

Betsy sent me a hand painted invitation to her wedding. I just missed my brother's (and consequently can't really believe it happened) and will almost certainly also miss yours, Betsy. I'm glad you had such a great time in France. I'm also glad Susan shared the letter with you -- sending them to people who were supposed to share was an economy measure (also I wasn't sure you were home) which I may employ again, so all of you ask around & see if close friends/lovers/relatives got this.

Susan sent many interesting observations on relationships but is shy about being quoted so I won't. But I hope your writing has picked up again -- don't let work get you down.

Louis wrote from the hospital (where David later tells me he (Louis) had his gall bladder removed) with pancreatitis caused by the prison food. The reason you didn't get the Journal seems to be that they won't let it into the prison anymore! I guess David must have explained that by now. As you can see I'm feeling a lot better, though we now have one case of

bronchitis and one case of mumps (a 3-year-old) in the collective, and are hoping none of the men who've been here get mumps, as it can cause them to become sterile as well as seriously ill.

Thanks to Chip for sending the Village Voice (July 26 issue) review of COMING TO POWER. Lisa Orlando, the reviewer, is always thought-provoking although this time, if I had time, I would send her a spirited debate on some of her remarks & assumptions.

Cheryl wrote a letter starting "Mog, you're in Denmark!!" She follows this with something I don't understand about raising snails...she either is or isn't. Somehow, Cheryl, I suspect you would be more eager to pass on to me the rivetting news that you are NOT raising snails, so I'll assume that's the state of affairs. From your mention of "last Saturday" I assume the Lounge Lizards are still an entity. (For those of you who tuned in late, the L.L. are San Francisco science fiction fans who congregate every other Saturday at a bar that could best be described as "low tech".) I haven't rec'd your zine BLUE MOON yet but wow am I looking forward to it! If you sent it surface mail, I'll be able to look forward to it for about another 2 months...

I should mention here that Louis is not allowed to receive stamps for his friend; only members of the stamp club can receive them (my conjecture is that this is to prevent articles of trade coming into the prison, but who knows why they do things...), so no one should send Louis stamps because they will be returned probably. Alas.

Loren: How long does it take me to transcribe a tape? Well, if I have a rush order I usually do it over a weekend. a Real Rush I could do in a day (a 90 minute tape). But bear in mind I make no attempt to deliver clean copy, since Our Editor doesn't need it. It's full of typos and strikeouts and xxx'ed out words. Also bear in mind I didn't have a full time job. And P.S., yes, O.E. often stood me up too. Yes, I like seeing the articles you clip for me. Thanks. "I'd procrastinate more, but I keep putting it off." Right, Loren...

Paul Williams? Who is Paul Williams? (The ? on this Danish type is on the top row over the "4", and in the normal ? place is an underline mark. So now you know.) Loren adds: "You should see the appalling conglomeration of Star Wars related junk. Star Wars notebooks, cookie jars -- cookies, for god's sake (the villains are chocolate, the heroes vanilla; the lone black in the cast, a hero, isn't in either.)" Figures. He also passes on lots of juicy s-f publishing gossip. If you want to know, ask him.

I pause here for a moment to urge everyone to read Alice Miller's book FOR YOUR OWN GOOD. This is one of the most important books ever written, in my opinion, as it directly relates child abuse to global survival. Particularly those with children or with any special interest in children need to experience this book. She gets a few things wrong, but her basic attitude and means of expressing it both exhibit unusual clarity of intellect. Most refreshing of all is that she takes her own profession (psychiatry) to task for so far failing to deal with their own childhoods which prevents them from believing and dealing with the brutality their patients experienced, as well as from basing any theories on these experiences. She's written other things which I may be able to get hold of (did: PRISONERS OF CHILDHOOD which is fairly good but nowhere near the later book for brilliance and originality). The amazing things she points out about the typical Nazi childhood seem so obvious once you stop and think about them.

Re AMERICAN PICTURES: There is a strange fact about storytelling. I don't know which end to grasp it at. But: you CANNOT move or even interest people with a day-to-day prosaic account of the truth (well -- you can't even tell it. It takes too long.) -- at least, the more minute and accurate you make a story, the fewer will bother to listen. On the other hand, taking a fundamental experience, leaving 98% of it out, swiping an idea here and there from the introduction or page 3 of a book you never actually read, and informing the whole with passionate indignation -- may not only get attention but may actually ignite some sort of sluggish change, eventually. Add 6 years of standing patiently introducing your work and answering questions as if this were not the 1700th (literally) time you'd been asked them...and people who become close to you find you AND your story very complex experiences indeed. Throw in three or four major revisions over the years, a couple of dozen close collaborators in the final product, a roller coaster of alternating wild success and debilitating failure, and enough fame that you can go to a party with 30 total strangers in a distant town and have a fine time -- only to learn by the end of the evening that every single person there not only knew who you were the minute you walked in but had seen your show -- and the usual zillion personal factors, and you have some basis for supposing that Jacob Holdt, creator of the whole shebang, has a lot of mental and emotional business to handle in relation to his "story". The last-mentioned event took place last month when Jacob and I were in a summerhouse in South Zealand "finishing the book". We mailed off the "preliminary final" manuscript yesterday. Er, that is, "mailed".

Living with someone you sort-of love who only loves you in that discouraging comradely sense isn't something I recommend. The other day walking on the street paying more attention than usual to my poor, destroyed, painful feet, suddenly, +flash+: The Little Mermaid, I thought, for Chrisake. I can't even talk here, really. I have, true, started Danish lessons. At a very very good school, which I can already see will be a great help to me if I stay here long enough to make use of it. I think I am going to write to my subletter\* that he can keep my apt. through October ...after all, if I'm going to learn Danish...and I have permission to be here through January...and whatnot...(I hear some of you screaming).

Diane wrote from Charing Cross Road, "Speaking of regions, Valentine is sporting a new t-shirt that says Minnesota, land of 10,000 lakes and a few weirdos." ((Hi, Terry and Denny! --ed.)) And: "Oh, did you know that someone told Ronald Reagan taht there are hungry people in the U.S.? They did, and he is "perplexed" about it and has order a "no-holds-barred" study to see if a hungry person can be found among the truly needy and if so, why. Aren't you relieved to know that everything is being taken care of? I wonder who told him!" Yeah, so do I. I'll try to get an absentee ballot for the city elections, but the last time I was in Europe I tried that (for national elections)and they never sent one. Of course I may be home by then anyway.

Thank you to all who wrote -- I am doing much better, with only intermittent awfulnesses, and expect things will get better still. You can't always get what you want (I'm sure Alice Miller would have a sage word to say about why Mick Jagger ends up sounding exactly like everyone's mother) but you might get some consolation prizes.

Love & xxx'es,

Mog

\* An entirely different thing from a lettersub.