

blurb is unable to, and it falls to me. I haven't even read the book, but luckily Neil Barron (in A_n_a_t_o_m_y_o_f_W_o_n_d_e_r) comes to my rescue: "A satire on contemporary society, on professional futurists, and on 'on the sleeper wakes' utopias. Tichy goes to a convention held in the 100-story Costa Rica Hilton. Pointless

THE MT VOID

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terrorism abounds, and Tichy is caught up in a local rebellion and the counter-measures that unloose a flood of mind-altering drugs."
[-ecl]

2. Our next film festival will feature two stories of the dirty underbelly of American society. We are going to take a closer look at the world of racketeering: the killers, the victims, the guns.... Hot damn! On Sunday, March 15, at 1 PM at the Leeperhouse, we will be showing:

Gangster Comedies

SOME LIKE IT HOT (1959) dir. by Billy Wilder

OSCAR (1991) dir. by John Landis

SOME LIKE IT HOT is one of the most popular comedies of all time. Jack Lemmon and Tony Curtis are two musicians who find themselves in just the wrong garage in Chicago in the wrong St. Valentine's Day. Now they want to get out of town fast, but the only way they can get away is to disguise themselves as women and join an all-girl band. Then things get really weird. Also starring are Marilyn Monroe, Joe. E. Brown, and George Raft. The last line of the film, written only hours before it was shot, has become a classic.

As a rule I detest Sylvester Stallone films. I even hated the first R_o_c_k_y film, the one that won the Academy Award (Oscar!) for best picture. So when Stallone decided to break out from action into comedy, I had just about zero interest in the result. Then OSCAR got some good reviews, so I went to see it at the local cheap theater. It starts slow, then it turns into one of the funniest comedies I have seen in years. I mean that. This is the sort of screwball comedy Frank Capra made in the 1930s. Oddly enough, Stallone is just fine and the rest of the cast is great. This is actually the remake of a French farce and with all the weird

characters it is very funny. (A full review appears elsewhere in this notice.)

3. The Lincroft chairperson, Rob Mitchell, has moved to Holmdel, but by vote of the Lincroft members (or at least the attendees at the last Lincroft meeting), will remain as chairperson for Lincroft. This is either a vote of confidence, or an indication that no one else wants the job. [-ecl]

Mark Leeper
MT 3D-441 908-957-5619
...mtgzy!leeper

Try to keep the rebel artist alive in you, no matter
how attractive or exhausting the temptation.
-- Norman Mailer

TIME'S ARROW by Martin Amis
Harmony Books, 1991, ISBN 0-517-58515-4, \$18.
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper
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Tod T. Friendly, John Young, Hamilton de Souza, Odilo Unverdorben. Or should it be Odilo Unverdorben, Hamilton de Souza, John Young, Tod T. Friendly? Because in T_i_m_e'_s_A_r_r_o_w, the one person is inhabited by a soul living backwards in time.

This idea is not new in science fiction (or is it fantasy? Stephen Hawking discussed the scientific basis for time reversal in A_S_h_o_r_t_H_i_s_t_o_r_y_o_f_T_i_m_e, so I'll call it science fiction). Philip K. Dick did it years ago with C_o_u_n_t_e_r-C_l_o_c_k_W_o_r_l_d. But Dick's premise was not as tightly thought through--though people start conversations with "Goodbye" and end with "Hello," in between the conversation seems to go from what we would consider start to finish, and so on. Amis is much more precise: though he does in general spell each speaker's lines in the normal English fashion, the lines are given in what we would call last first (e.g., answer,

then question) order.

All this sounds somewhat frivolous. But Amis is not being frivolous. Unverdorben turns out to be (have been?) a doctor in Auschwitz and part--but only part--of what Amis is doing is showing how much of life and our existence makes more sense when lived backward. Ecologically, for example, turning cars into iron ore and replacing it in the earth has a certain appeal that going in the other direction lacks. And clearly the Holocaust makes more sense run backwards than forwards. Many authors and philosophers have tried to make sense of the Holocaust and, while it's not clear that Amis's approach provides any practical answers, it does highlight how the Holocaust may be the archetypal example of humanity's tendency to do precisely the reverse of what makes sense. Conversely, of course, the normal function of a doctor (Tod T. Friendly's profession) makes more sense forward than backward. So in both our timeline and the reverse Tod T. Friendly (a name chosen with great care by Amis) moves from sin/evil to redemption--in a sense, anyway, though the actual situation is far more complex.

None of this description, of course, conveys the richness of ideas or the poetry of words in T_i_m_e'_s_A_r_r_o_w. It is far and away the best science fiction novel of 1991 I have read and at the top of my Hugo nominees list.

HEAR MY SONG

A film review by Mark R. Leeper

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Capsule review: A bunch of newcomers to feature filmmaking make a highly impressive debut in this very original and funny comedy about a young impresario and a legendary Irish singer. You may

have to go some distance to find H_e_a_r_M_y_S_o_n_g, but it is well worth seeking out. Rating: low +2 (-4 to +4).

H_e_a_r_M_y_S_o_n_g is the first film directed by Peter Chelsom. It is based on a screenplay Chelsom co-authored with Adrian Dunbar, the actor who plays the film's main character. It is a spectacular start for two major talents. British Chelsom is starting out with more talent than 90% of American directors and with a skill that it took Bill Forsyth two or three films to attain. I choose Forsyth because Chelsom and Forsyth are both British and each has a loving feel for the personalities of minor characters and local color. H_e_a_r_M_y_S_o_n_g is constantly doing the unexpected. Only in the last ten minutes does the film get a bit sugary.

Mickey O'Neill (played by Dunbar) is a thirty-year-old concert promoter in an Irish neighborhood in England. He wants little more from life than to put on successful concerts and to woo his girlfriend Nancy. Tara Fitzgerald, who plays Nancy, has the sort of pristine beauty that Grace Kelly had. There is absolutely no need for the film to explain why Mickey is anxious to win Nancy. Mickey, however, is having problems, both with Nancy and with his promotions. He finds himself promoting sleazier and sleazier singers to ever-shrinking audiences. Then he manages to book a legendary Irish singer who has been a tax exile from England since 1958. That sparks unexpected events and a quest in Ireland.

Chelsom's style of story-telling is brisk and usually intelligent. Plot details are not overly explained. Some concentration is required and there is the feeling that the plot could take a right-angle turn at any moment. Unusual camera angles abound. Chelsom and Dunbar pack the film with comic situations and dialogue. Some mention should be made of the films only two recognizable stars. Top billing goes to Ned Beatty as a reclusive Irishman who could be the key to Mickey's success. His singing is one of the few negative touches as his singing voice--dubbed by Vernon Midgley--just does not seem to go with his speaking voice. David McCallum is largely wasted as a police inspector and as a heavy.

This is a genuinely funny comedy and well worth looking for. I rate this a low +2 on the -4 to +4 scale.

OSCAR

A film review by Mark R. Leeper
Copyright 1991 Mark R. Leeper

Capsule review: A delightful surprise. O_s_c_a_r is a throwback to manic screwball comedies of the 1930s that takes chances and has them off. Undemanding as a star vehicle for Sly Stallone, O_s_c_a_r is packed with eccentric weirdos, funny hoods, and lots of nutty dialogue. It has been a good long time since I laughed so much at a comedy. Rating: +2 (-4 to +4).

Fifteen years ago Sylvester Stallone became a major star with a single film, R_o_c_k_y. Since then he has made nothing but macho action films. But surely now he realizes that he cannot keep playing low-personality action figures on the screen. Even John Wayne discovered he had to put some acting and character into his roles. And Wayne was considered more charismatic on the screen than Stallone. So the time has come for Stallone to cross over into comedy. His choice of comedy shows unexpectedly good taste. It is not only a very funny comedy, but it is a comedy unlike comedies that have been made for many years. Although originally written in French in 1958, it is very much in the style of some of Frank Capra's screwier comedies, such as A_r_s_e_n_i_c_a_n_d O_l_d_L_a_c_e and Y_o_u_C_a_n't_T_a_k_e_I_t_w_i_t_h_Y_o_u. It also takes some chances in that it has the claustrophobic feel of a filmed stage play: 95% of it takes place in one house and much of that is just in the course of one morning. But it is such a gem of a stage play that it may just do the trick for Stallone.

The plot defies describing in any detail, since a big part of the fun is just making the plot more and more convoluted, until the characters themselves are totally bewildered about what is going on. The film opens with a surprisingly unfunny scene between mobster "Snaps" Provolone (Stallone) and his dying father (played by Kirk Douglas). Almost undoubtedly this scene was written just for the film, since it is poorly written and it does not take place in the Provolone house, as most of the rest of the film does. Poppa makes Snaps promise to go straight. Flash to a charming credit sequence featuring what looks like a Puppethon opera singer singing the "Largo al factotum" from Rossini's B_a_r_b_e_r_o_f_S_e_v_i_l_l_e. Flash to a month later and Snaps's morning starts with an unexpected meeting with his accountant, who admits that he has been embezzling from Snaps but explains it is all okay because he will soon be one of the family since he wants to marry Snaps's daughter. Except it turns out to be a daughter that Snaps does not happen to have. Well, sort of. If that sounds a little strange, you ain't heard nothing yet. That is just how it starts. Give the film another five minutes and stranger will happen still.

The heart of this film is an incredible array of minor characters, some very funny, far too many to mention. The film is well chosen to let the bit parts do the most to pull the film along and place small demands on the leading man, who appears to be up to the small demands that are placed on him, and even if he were not, the pacing, the script, and the minor characters would still make this film worth seeing. O_s_c_a_r makes it as one of the funniest comedies in a long time. I give it a +2 on the -4 to +4 scale.

Boskone 29
(Part 1 of 2)
Con report by Evelyn C. Leeper
Copyright 1992 Evelyn C. Leeper

Traffic was very light most of the way (it got bad only between Hartford and Bradley Airport) and we managed to make the trip to Springfield in just over four and a half hours. Next year, if course, it will take longer to get to Boskone, since it's moving to Framingham. But more on that later.

Last year panelists registered in the regular registration area and were given their panelist information there. This year we had to go to the Green Room to get our panelist information. Since one was in the Sheraton and one in the Marriott, this was a trifle inconvenient, but at least we ended up in the hotel with the dealers room.

Hotels

This year the weather was warmer than usual, making the outdoor run across the street between the Sheraton and the Marriott not too bad, except for Saturday night, when it was raining. The connecting overpass was kept open (it usually closes when all the stores in Baystate West do), but it does add quite a ways onto the distance. This whole two-hotel situation is one reason the convention is moving next year. As far as space goes, there was never a problem with crowding. Boskone 29 was about the same size as Boskone 28 (900 or so members), and though I

heard some of the parties got very crowded, none of the function space was a problem.

Dealers Rooms

Boskone stayed with the idea of a single dealers room (after having had one in each hotel for a couple of years). The number of dealers seemed to hold steady, though it appeared to me (and others) as though the number of _ b _ o _ o _ k dealers was down. Non-book items included art, jewelry, Japanese videos, folk and folk cassettes, and knick-knacks. The woman running the table (well, corner) for Tales from the White Hart said that sales were a little better than last year, but still not high enough to make her happy about the cost, since Boskone charges the same for a table at their current conventions (of about 900 members) as they used to for the ones with a couple of thousand members. If attendance (and sales) don't go up next year, more dealers may drop out--Mary Southworth was at the convention, but didn't have a table in the dealers room for the first time in many years. I found several books, both for me and for a friend, but it was a somewhat disappointing selection, with only one table with a large supply of used books. I didn't get to either Treasure Island (a comic store in the mall) or Johnson's Bookstore across the street, due in part to lack of time.

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Shortly after we arrived, we met Dave who said that Kate, Cynthia, and Barbara (all friends of ours) had had several drinks in the bar when they arrived, and were somewhat "snookered." Where was Kate now, we asked. "Oh, she's in the Dealers Room." "You let Kate go drunk into the Dealers Room?!?"

Art Show

It seems to consist mostly of 1) well-executed pieces in which I have no interest in the subject matter of, and 2) poorly-executed pieces in which I have no interest in the subject matter. There is far too much fantasy, "cat art," and media art (e.g., pencil sketches of _ S _ t _ a _ r _ T _ r _ e _ k actors) to suit me. There were some good etchings (a form one doesn't see often in art shows) and a few good pieces. The print shop had a good selection reasonably priced, but again, much of it didn't do anything for me.

Film Program

The film program consisted of A_e_l_i_t_a: Q_u_e_e_n_o_f_M_a_r_s. There was a video program, which was mostly Japanese animation, with Fritz Lang's S_p_i_e_s and S_p_i_d_e_r_s, and the silent versions of N_o_s_f_e_r_a_t_u, V_a_m_p_y_r, and 2_0_0_0_L_e_a_g_u_e_s_U_n_d_e_r_t_h_e_S_e_a. The video program was on a seventeen-inch screen; it would seem as though getting a twenty-five-inch screen might be a good idea. A_e_l_i_t_a was shown with live accompaniment by the Shirim Klezmer Orchestra. This had its pros and cons. The accompaniment was good, but the fact that the film started twenty-five minutes late, and that there was a twenty-minute intermission between reels (for the band to rest) was not.

Programming

Last year I said I wanted the science track back. Well, there were some science panels this year: "Robotics," "What's New in Science?," "Worldbuilding 104: Destroying Planets," "Chaos and Ecology," and "Cosmology." Unfortunately, the panels I was interested in were opposite panels I was on. So it goes.

I also went to fewer panels this year (seven versus last year's eleven). I don't know if this means the panels are becoming repetitive, or if I'm less likely to rush from panel to panel. It is true that if I'm on a panel, I won't go to a panel during the immediately preceding hour, and tend not to rush off to one immediately following either. But it may be that there were fewer panels altogether. Certainly there were fewer panels in the evenings (after the dinner break), and that means fewer time slots I can go to panels in.

The First Night

The "Meet the VIPs" party was held in the Boscave (the con suite). This was probably because last year the Con Suite went virtually unused

during the party. Free soda was provided, but drinks and munchies were

on a cash basis. Entertainment was provided by the before-mentioned Shirim Klezmer Orchestra, and while the music was perhaps too loud to allow conversation (okay, not perhaps--it _ w_ a_ s too loud), I enjoyed it a lot. A couple of dozen of us danced a line to one of the songs earlier on, but then were too out of breath to try it again later. Dave Langford came over and introduced himself to me (claiming I was his competition, to which I replied I wasn't much competition), and gave me a copy of his latest fanzine. Given that he is normally hard of hearing, conversing with him in a room filled with loud music was almost impossible.

There were some panels Friday night, but I didn't get to any of them.

Guest of Honor Speech
Saturday, 11 AM
Jane Yolen

(Before the speech started, I asked Yolen to autograph a copy of _ T_ h_ e_ D_ e_ v_ i_ l_ 's_ A_ r_ i_ t_ h_ m_ e_ t_ i_ c and she mentioned she had just finished another novel set in the Holocaust, _ B_ r_ i_ a_ r_ R_ o_ s_ e, which would appear in Terri Windling's "Fairy Tale" series.)

Yolen spoke about censorship, which I assume overlapped with her panel on censorship (which I didn't get to). She began with some introductory comments, including saying that somebody had said that the reason women are put on pedestals is because that way you can look up their skirts. Her response to this was to tell us, "That's why I'm not wearing a skirt--so you can put me on a pedestal."

She began by defining what she saw as the main problem, or rather, twin problems: PC ("politically correct") language, and the "Satan hunters" (which she labeled, in the way of fantasy novelists, as "Authorsbane"). She then read newspaper reports of many examples of both, some of which were _ s_ o ludicrous that one had to laugh. For example, one person objected to a book because the number 33 appeared in it, and "two times thirty-three is sixty-six, which is just one digit away from the number of the beast." (I asked if this person also checked all the arithmetic books.) Another person objected to rainbows as "Satanic," in spite of their mention in the Bible as a sign from God. She related that a book she wrote in 1971 referred to a garden full of "gay flowers and beautiful plants"; the publisher insisted she change this to "gaily-colored." She tried quoting Lewis Carroll to him ("The question is who [between the words and the writer] is to be master, that is all"), but it didn't help. The Northampton Chief of Police once made a list of words he wanted to see banned, including the word "chitlins." Now as Yolen points out, she considers chitlins (which are hog intestines prepared as food) as certainly not kosher, not something she would ever want to serve or be served, and possibly obscene, but she would not want to see either the food or the word banned. It is

believed, however, that the Chief of Police had not the slightest clue what chitlins were, and decided it _ s _ o _ u _ n _ d _ e _ d dirty. (By the way, he is no longer the Chief of Police.)

One school removed a book titled _ M _ a _ k _ i _ n _ g _ I _ t _ w _ i _ t _ h _ M _ a _ d _ e _ m _ o _ i _ s _ e _ l _ l _ e from its library, only to reinstate it when it was pointed out that it was a pattern book. (Long-time science fiction fans or "Twilight Zone" watchers may first themselves thinking "It's a cookbook!" here. :-)) Another cancelled a Christmas play because one parent objected to the word "pregnant" although Yolen pointed out that no one has ever suggested that Jesus was delivered by the stork or found under a cabbage leaf. Another protest was against "Snow White" because it "encouraged mirror-gazing." As Yolen pointed out, the Wicked Witch who gazes into the mirror ends up being forced to dance in red-hot iron shoes, which doesn't sound like much encouragement to her (or anyone in the audience, for that matter). This reminded me of the school in Michigan that had a stress-management course that came under fire because it included deep breathing, which apparently "leads to out-of-body experiences, promotes mysticism, and undermines Christianity." My first observation was that anyone taking a deep breath of Michigan air would _ w _ a _ n _ t an out-of-body experience, preferably into another state. A more serious observation is that any religion undermined by someone taking a few deep breaths has more serious problems than deep breathing. Yolen mentioned Texe Marrs's book _ R _ a _ v _ a _ g _ e _ d _ b _ y _ t _ h _ e _ N _ e _ w _ A _ g _ e : _ S _ a _ t _ a _ n ' _ s _ P _ l _ a _ n _ t _ o _ D _ e _ s _ t _ r _ o _ y _ O _ u _ r _ K _ i _ d _ s, which has a whole chapter attacking fantasy. (I'm not recommending you buy this, mind you, because that only encourages them; check your library for it.) Perhaps one of the most ridiculous attacks was the one against C. S. Lewis and Madeleine L'Engle on the grounds they were "anti-Christian."

Yolen recently edited an anthology for young adults titled _ 2 _ 0 _ 4 _ 1, which contains a Connie Willis story about censorship: "Much Ado About Censorship." The premise is that in the future so many special interest groups attack Shakespeare that only two lines are left in _ H _ a _ m _ l _ e _ t. A side-effect of this is that students spend a lot of time and effort to get the unexpurgated Shakespeare and read it. "It's an ill wind that blows no one good," as someone once said. (Ha! Fooled you! It was _ n _ o _ t Shakespeare--go check.)

You can see that there have been some pretty flimsy reasons for the

attacks. But as Cardinal Richelieu said, "Give me six lines written by the most honorable of men and I will find an excuse to hang him." In other words, it's not hard. As Yolen said, "Metaphor is right over the heads of these people." The result is that they are unable to see that the only good adult in H_u_c_k_l_e_b_e_r_r_y_F_i_n_n is black, and decry the book as racist instead, because it uses the word "nigger." Nor is banning books new, Yolen pointed out. At one point, all of Dickens except O_l_i_v_e_r_T_w_i_s_t was banned, as were many others, including (from a list I had-- Yolen listed only some of these):

Angelou, Maya I_K_n_o_w_W_h_y_t_h_e_C_a_g_e_d
B_i_r_d_S_i_n_g_s
 Anonymous G_o_A_s_k_A_l_i_c_e

Bannerman, Helen L_i_t_t_l_e_B_l_a_c_k_S_a_m_b_o
 Blatty, William Peter T_h_e_E_x_o_r_c_i_s_t
 Blume, Judy F_o_r_e_v_e_r...
 Brown, Claude M_a_n_c_h_i_l_d_i_n_t_h_e
P_r_o_m_i_s_e_d_L_a_n_d
 Buck, Pearl T_h_e_G_o_o_d_E_a_r_t_h
 Childress, Alice A_H_e_r_o_A_i_n't_N_o_t_h_i_n'
b_u_t_a_S_a_n_d_w_i_c_h
 Dickey, James D_e_l_i_v_e_r_a_n_c_e
 Frank, Anne T_h_e_D_i_a_r_y_o_f_a_Y_o_u_n_g
G_i_r_l
 Golding, William L_o_r_d_o_f_t_h_e_F_l_i_e_s
 Griffin, John Howard B_l_a_c_k_L_i_k_e_M_e
 Hawthorne, Nathaniel T_h_e_S_c_a_r_l_e_t_L_e_t_t_e_r
 Hemingway, Ernest A_F_a_r_e_w_e_l_l_t_o_A_r_m_s
 Huxley, Aldous B_r_a_v_e_N_e_w_W_o_r_l_d
 Jackson, Shirley t_h_e_L_o_t_t_e_r_y
 Kesey, Ken O_n_e_F_l_e_w_O_v_e_r_t_h_e
C_u_c_k_o_o's_N_e_s_t
 Klein, Norma I't's_O_K_i_f_Y_o_u_D_o_n't
L_o_v_e_M_e
 Knowles, John A_S_e_p_a_r_a_t_e_P_e_a_c_e
 Lee, Harper T_o_K_i_l_l_a_M_o_c_k_i_n_g_b_i_r_d
 Orwell, George 1_9_8_4
 Parks, Gordon T_h_e_L_e_a_r_n_i_n_g_T_r_e_e
 Salinger, J. D. T_h_e_C_a_t_c_h_e_r_i_n_t_h_e_R_y_e

Shakespeare, William M_a_c_b_e_t_h
 Solzhenitsyn, Alexander O_n_e_D_a_y_i_n_t_h_e_L_i_f_e_o_f
 I_v_a_n_D_e_n_i_s_o_v_i_c_h
 Steinbeck, John O_f_M_i_c_e_a_n_d_M_e_n
 Steinbeck, John T_h_e_G_r_a_p_e_s_o_f_W_r_a_t_h
 Swift, Jonathan A_M_o_d_e_s_t_P_r_o_p_o_s_a_l
 The Boston Women's Health Collective O_u_r_B_o_d_i_e_s,
 O_u_r_s_e_l_v_e_s
 Trumbo, Dalton J_o_h_n_n_y_G_o_t_H_i_s_G_u_n
 Twain, Mark T_h_e_A_d_v_e_n_t_u_r_e_s_o_f
 H_u_c_k_l_e_b_e_r_r_y_F_i_n_n
 Vonnegut, Kurt Jr. C_a_t's_C_r_a_d_l_e
 Vonnegut, Kurt Jr. S_l_a_u_g_h_t_e_r_h_o_u_s_e_F_i_v_e
 Vonnegut, Kurt Jr. W_e_l_c_o_m_e_t_o_t_h_e
 M_o_n_k_e_y_H_o_u_s_e
 Zindel, Paul M_y_D_a_r_l_i_n_g,_M_y
 H_a_m_b_u_r_g_e_r

Why do many of these (and other) books get attacked? Because, Yolen said, they carry the very dangerous message that we should "value our differences and speak out against authority when authority is wrong." Yolen also said that stories are what define us, because "only the human animal tells stories." Other animals may use tools, have language, or exhibit other behaviors frequently labeled human (though her claim that dogs and hyenas laugh is flawed, I think, in that the sound like laughter that they make is not to indicate that they find something funny). And also, she said, "Quite simply, stories change lives." To support this, she gave several examples of letters she had received from people whose lives or the lives of those they knew had been changed by her stories. Well, in this I'm sure the censors would agree with her, because if they believed that stories _d_i_d_n'_t change lives, they wouldn't be trying to ban them.

Yolen closed by saying that she had been called in a sermon "a tool of Satan." After thinking about that she decided that wasn't specific enough--which tool was she? So she declared, "I am a ball-peen hammer." And she produced "Satan's Toolchest" T-shirts, listing a variety of writers who opposed the censors:

Bruce Coville--crowbar
 Steven Brust--sickle
 Gene Wolfe--pencil-sharpener
 Patricia Wrede--astral plane

Kara Dakley--Phillips screwdriver
Suzy McKee Charnas--C clamp
Steven Gould--tape measure
Judith Reeves-Stephens (?)--torque wrench
Delia Sherman--awl
Tappan King--power drill
Beth Meacham--hex wrench
Theresa Nielsen-Hayden--spirit level
Patrick Nielsen-Hayden--thin edge of the end of the wedge

Someone from the audience then pointed out that the Bible has more sex and violence than all the books people were objecting to. Yolen again pointed out that these people were not operating under logic. (She also said that the statement was true, and "Dorothy Parker had a parrot she named Onan because he always spilled his seed.")

People asked what they could do. The ACLU, the American Library Association's Freedom to Read Foundation, and People for the American Way were mentioned, but Yolen felt that what was really needed was more grass-roots action: people should get more involved with their school boards and libraries and raise as much of a fuss when books were attacked as the attackers were raising. Otherwise, it's too easy for the school board to say, "Well, why don't we just drop this? It will be easier all around." If parents come in and give them hell when they drop books, and threaten to sue them for malfeasance, just as the attackers threaten to sue them for h_a_v_i_n_g the books, then the board will have to make their decisions on the merits of the books and the arguments, rather than just taking the easy way out.

(All this talk of school censorship struck a chord. My first-ever book review was of T_h_e_P_a_s_s_o_v_e_r_P_l_o_t. I wrote it in 1967, when I was seventeen, for the high school paper. The town was over 75% Catholic, the principal always checked over the newspaper's content, and my review didn't get printed.)

1991: The Year in SF on Film and TV

Saturday, 1 PM

Chuck Rothman (mod), Mark R. Leeper, Laurie Mann

The panel began, predictably enough, with each panel listing their favorite films from the preceding year. Leeper listed P_r_o_s_p_e_r_o'_s_B_o_o_k_s, T_h_e_S_i_l_e_n_c_e_o_f_t_h_e_L_a_m_b_s, T_h_e_R_o_c_k_e_t_e_e_r, and B_e_a_u_t_y_a_n_d_t_h_e_B_e_a_s_t as being not only his favorite science fiction, horror, or fantasy films, but also in his "Top Ten" list for a_l_l films in 1991. Rothman said that he didn't get to the movies as often as he would have liked (he has a seven-year-old and trips to the movies get expensive), but he liked

A_l_i_c_e, L. A. S_t_o_r_y, and D_e_f_e_n_d_i_n_g
 Y_o_u_r_L_i_f_e. Mann said the year was
 good, but derivative, and gave T_h_e_A_d_d_a_m_s_F_a_m_i_l_y,
 S_t_a_r_T_r_e_k_V_I, and
 T_e_r_m_i_n_a_t_o_r_2 as prime examples. She described S_t_a_r
 T_r_e_k_V_I as the "Jack
 Chalker of the S_t_a_r_T_r_e_k series" in that it threw out a lot of ideas,
 only some of which worked. (She has a ten-year-old, so she had some of
 the same problems as Rothman.)

B_e_a_u_t_y_a_n_d_t_h_e_B_e_a_s_tand_S_t_a_r
 T_r_e_k_V_I were given special attention.
 Leeper observed that the animated B_e_a_u_t_y_a_n_d_t_h_e_B_e_a_s_t drew
 a lot on the
 Cocteau version. For example, the Cocteau version showed a scene down a
 long hallway lit by candles held in candle-holders shaped liked arms and
 hands, which on closer examination turn out to be live arms and hands.
 This was elaborated on in the recent version, so that the candlestick
 was a "live" candlestick--it talked, sang, danced, etc. As far as S_t_a_r
 T_r_e_k went, Leeper pointed out that it was the first self-correcting
 television show, in that because of the enormous amount of discussion
 about it on electronic networks (such as Usenet), if the producers are
 doing something the fans/viewers don't like, they will find out about it
 very quickly and in great detail. (Fan posting: "Yet a_n_o_t_h_e_r Wesley-
 saves-the-universe story." Producer: "Okay, no more Wesley-saves-the-
 universe stories for a while.") Even so, S_t_a_r_T_r_e_k: T_h_e_N_e_x_t
 G_e_n_e_r_a_t_i_o_n
 was described as "infuriatingly uneven." One audience member claimed
 that every old S_t_a_r_T_r_e_k episode was better than any N_e_x_t
 G_e_n_e_r_a_t_i_o_n
 episode, but he was clearly a minority of one in that opinion.

Little-noticed films or shows that panelists recommended were
 T_r_u_l_y, M_a_d_l_y, D_e_e_p_l_y (originally titled C_e_l_l_o in
 Britain) (Mann), the
 made-for-cable C_a_s_t_a_D_e_a_d_l_y_S_p_e_l_l (Leeper), and the television
 show
 D_i_n_o_s_a_u_r_s (Rothman). Leeper also mentioned D_e_a_d
 A_g_a_i_n, which he said
 was similar to a 1985 film titled D_e_j_a_V_u. He also suggested I_c_i_c_l_e
 T_h_i_e_f as a fantasy film not likely to be thought of (though it was
 actually a 1989 film), W_a_r_l_o_c_k, and the various animation festivals.

Audience member Walter Kahn suggested that a lot of science

fiction, fantasy, and horror was being done on the USA Network; unfortunately, no one gets good enough listings for it to figure out what's on when (one of the problems with the proliferation of channels that comes with cable). Q u a n t u m L e a p was recommended as well for television.

In our equivalent of "Screened by Teens," I asked what the panelists' children liked. The seven-year-old liked H o o k; the ten-year-old liked T e r m i n a t o r 2.

Other dramatic presentations mentioned included the new (to New York, anyway, though not eligible for a Hugo because it had already run in London--or is a play in a different country with a different cast a different production?) musical R e t u r n t o t h e F o r b i d d e n P l a n e t, the radio show W B U R S c i - F i T h e a t e r.

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Meeting of the Society for the Aesthetic Rearrangement of History
Saturday, 3 PM

Mark Olson (mod), Steven Brust, Steven Gould, Judith Tarr,

The subtitle of this panel, given at the beginning of the panel rather than in any advance schedules, was "How History Ought to Have Been," and it was claimed that the title of the panel came from Ferdinand Feghoot. Well, it's been too long since I read a Ferdinand Feghoot, so I can't "confirm or deny" this, but I'm sure s o m e o n e can.

Olson started this off by saying that he often thought it was a pity that the Roman Empire fell. Tarr countered this by saying that it never really did: it's now the Cosa Nostra. Gould offered the scenario of Isabella and Ferdinand (n o t Feghoot, but the Spanish king) having never been born, not because of any effect on Columbus, mind you, but because without them there probably wouldn't have been any expulsion of the Jews and Moors from Spain. Brust wanted the Huns to meet the Vikings (in a tag-team match? :-)). Tarr's scenario involved Charles Martel losing at Tours in 732 against the Muslims. (I wrote down "Poitiers" rather than "Tours," but I'm sure she meant Tours and I may

have misheard it, as she has a slight speech impediment.)

There was some further discussion of Gould's scenario. Gould suggested that if the Moors and Jews hadn't been expelled, the Moorish civilization in Spain would have continued, but others disputed this, saying that Muslim fundamentalists destroyed Baghdad in the 7th and 8th Centuries, and could have as easily destroyed Spain. Checking later, I discovered my encyclopedia says that Baghdad was f o u n d e d in 762 and remained a center of Muslim culture until 1258, when it was sacked by the Mongols, so there seems to be some contradiction here. (It makes one wish one had an encyclopedia right at the panel, doesn't it?)

Brust suggested somewhat frivolously that if Christianity hadn't gotten to Britain, we wouldn't have a lot of air-headed pagans today; presumably he meant we would have the real ones instead.

Someone in some context quoted Saki as having said that the Balkans produce more history than can be consumed locally. This led to a discussion of the Alexandria library and scenarios in which it wasn't burnt. One panelist (I can't remember which) observed that literary critics would now say that everything in it was by "dead white males." One person suggested a scenario in which the library was a circulating library and all the best works were checked out when it was burnt down.

Brust said (apropos of not much) that he would specifically not change anything about Richard Nixon: "My God, that was fun!"

Someone asked about looking at the topic from a different perspective: what if some fictional description of the world were true to it? As an example, what if John Norman's descriptions of people's motivations were accurate? Unfortunately, this didn't catch on (too

complicated, I suspect), and the panel rapidly drifted back to such questions as "what would have happened if the United States had lost the Revolution?" (One answer was that we would be speaking English.)

Olson, returning to the Roman Empire scenario, observed that the Jewish population of the Roman Empire in the 1st Century was about 10%, and in addition was rising (because Jewish men were considered good husbands, so non-Jewish women would convert to marry them--but did this

mean that non-Jewish men converted to marry Jewish women or what?). Without Christianity, would we have had a Jewish Roman Empire? An audience member (either named Michael Wood, or quoting someone named Michael Wood--my notes are unclear) claimed that the Western world chose Christianity as its religion because it embodied the Western values of personal freedom, etc. This led to much heated debate on two counts. First, many people claimed that Christianity did n o t embody these values. And second, many thought that claiming these were Western values without defining Western was careless. In particular, I asked where the Native Americans fit into this East/West dichotomy. Two books mentioned as pertinent to this discussion in some fashion were the fiction book T o o l m a k e r K o a n by John McLoughlin and the non-fiction

book

L e s s T h a n W o r d s C a n S a y by Richard Mitchell.

Somehow the panel got off onto a discussion of why Hungary had turned out so many great mathematicians. Brust (who in case you hadn't figured out, is of Hungarian ancestry) said that it might be because math does require a lot of expensive lab equipment. I suggested that it may also be that math does not require any particular language skills. With Hungarian being so different from any other language in Europe (with the exception of Finnish and Estonian, I think), the ability to work internationally in other fields might be limited, but you could read mathematics papers from anywhere without knowing the language, and become a world-class mathematician without having to write in a different language. (As a further example of the lack of need for any special equipment, Ramanujan was mentioned.)

The U t n e R e a d e r had an article about a year ago on "the World Championships" which talked about how long some empires had lasted, empires about which most people probably know very little these days. I said that my husband often pointed out that we were living in the short period following the fall of the Egyptian empire. Along these lines of "what everyone knows that isn't so," people also mentioned Stephen Robb's "A Letter from a Higher Critic," in which a historian from four hundred years hence analyzes World War II and proves it was as much myth and legend as the King Arthur stories that everyone used to accept as history. Given what we've learned about the sorts of "facts" that are thrown around during wartime (handless Belgian children and incubators come to mind), this story has a hard edge to it. It's sobering to think that it may be the lesson we learned about propaganda during wartime from World War I (the most common circulating atrocity story was that "the Huns" were cutting off the hands of Belgian children--large sums of

money were collected to help them, but after the war, no one could manage to find any of the handless children that the stories had described) that made most people disbelieve the stories of the Nazi concentration camps until the first pictures started coming back as the camps were liberated. I have no way to explain the people who _ s _ t _ i _ l _ l claim the Holocaust never happened, however. But all these stories prove is that it is very difficult to decide what's fact and what's fiction until years later. Unfortunately, decisions have to be made at the time, not years later, and it is worth remembering that they can end up being made on "what everyone knows that isn't so."

Other examples of pointing out that what people know isn't so (and its flip side, what people don't know is) include Tony Rothman's essay "Genius and Biographers: The Fictionalization of Evariste Galois"

(_ A _ m _ e _ r _ i _ c _ a _ n _ M _ a _ t _ h _ e _ m _ a _ t _ i _ c _ a _ l _ M _ o _ n _ t _ h _ l _ y, Vol. 89 No. 2) in which he disproves all the commonly held beliefs about Galois's work--for example, it turns out that most of what Galois wrote on his last night was not fresh work, but just rewriting some older papers); the fact that Dumas was black (pe `re or fils was not clear); and the real meaning of Caesar's death (it was not a betrayal and murder by a friend, but the assassination sanctioned by law of a tyrant). As you can tell, we strayed off the topic a lot.

Of course, for most, if not all, of these scenarios, there are alternate history stories dealing with those ideas. The "non-fall" of the Roman Empire shows up in dozens of stories, including Robert Silverberg's "To the Promised Land," "An Outpost of the Empire," and "Tales from the Venia Woods"; Gregory Benford's "Manassas, Again"; S. P. Somtow's "Aquilad" series; Edmund Cooper's "Jupiter Laughs"; Kirk Mitchell's "Procurator" series; Frederik Pohl's "Waiting for the Olympians"; Clifford Simak's _ W _ h _ e _ r _ e _ t _ h _ e _ E _ v _ i _ l _ D _ w _ e _ l _ l _ s; and others.

Ferdinand and Isabella? Well, a couple in which they were born, but not victorious, include Philip Guedalla's "If the Moors in Spain had Won" and Esther M. Friesner's "Such a Deal." Martel losing at Tours? Gordon Eklund's "The Rising of the Sun," Harry Harrison's _ A _ T _ r _ a _ n _ s _ a _ t _ l _ a _ n _ t _ i _ c _ _ T _ u _ n _ n _ e _ l, _ H _ u _ r _ r _ a _ h!, and J. B. Ryan's "The Mosaic." (Tarr herself wrote a story in which upon hearing of Roland's death and Ganelon's treachery at Roncesvalles, Charlemagne converts to Islam. The story is called, not surprisingly, "Roncesvalles.") I know of none in which the Vikings meet the Huns, but I'll bet there are some.

The best story in which Christianity doesn't get to Britain is probably Esther M. Friesner's _ D _ r _ u _ i _ d' _ s _ B _ l _ o _ o _ d, a Sherlock Holmes pastiche, but there is also Michael Moorcock's _ G _ l _ o _ r _ i _ a _ n _ a; _ o _ r, _ t _ h _ e _ _ U _ n _ f _ u _ l _ f _ i _ l _ l' _ d _ _ Q _ u _ e _ e _ n, and Cooper's "Jupiter Laughs" (mentioned above) has an epilogue in Britain. The Friesner is closest to what Brust was hoping for, I think. Even Olson's unlikely-sounding Jewish Roman Empire shows up in

Kim Newman and Eugene Byrne's "The Wandering Christian."

I won't even bother listing the "what if the United States lost the Revolution" stories--there are too many.

(End of Part 1)