



P L E N U M

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For the Fantasy Amateur Press Association.

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24 March 1946

Dear people:

I saved this page for last, intending to put hereon a table of contents, but then decided that a table of contents for this mag would be silly. So I proceed to compose on the stencil, giving a dash of the first person singular to keep the rag from becoming completely stuffy. This will probably make more sense if you read the rest of the magazine first.

Since arriving home, March 6, I have been reading here and there among the last year of Astoundings. It's quite an experience to miss a year and then read them all at once. ... I wish to go on record as being very impressed with The World of A. It is a highly significant piece of writing as far as the ideas contained within it are concerned. Oh, it has many flaws as a piece of fiction. The loose threads left hanging break all the rules of novel writing. So what? It doesn't have intense human interest and character development. That makes it not quite as good a story as Slan. But it's still fine. The Fairy Chessmen, by Lewis Padgett, is also fine. It is terrifying to think of the future as being one continuous war, and yet that is the situation as projected from the current trend of events. The last pages of the story, in which interplanetary travel is the hope for peace, is obviously intended as a lesson for today's situation. I bought The Best in Science Fiction anthology yesterday, and it looks drooly. Can't wait for the Random House anthology to appear. You see that story in there by Lee Gregor? Gosh wow boyoboy.

Election stuff: Hereby announcing my intent to run for President of the FAPA. Platform is: Keep the chicken out. Meaning that I will do whatever is necessary to keep the FAPA running smoothly with a minimum of red tape and friction. You guys know me from way back. The FAPA is like a baby of mine. I'll treat it good.

Milty

 CADENZA

A war does not end merely when the last shot is fired. In its various facets it dies out exponentially until equilibrium is reached. To the soldier the last lap is the exchanging of overseas stripes for pin stripes.

This war is more than an interruption in history. It is change, abrupt and complete. The pre-war world has blown itself into the Atomic Age with the necessity of choosing between a United World and retrogression to the stone age.

In the same manner, to the soldier as an individual, the war is more than an interruption in his life. The three years in the army, and particularly the year spent overseas are a bridge separating an old life from a new life.

The necessity for a complete break from the old and a transition into a new regime (for better or for worse) is symbolized here by the dissolution of the adolescent "Milty's Mag" and the birth of "Plenum."

With the new title is associated an effort to eliminate the overemphasis on the first person singular that characterized Milty's Mag. Beyond that, no promises will be made. The style will work itself out and will be, as usual, influenced by the immediate mood and environment of the person who writes this.

It was difficult to choose a new title. The French word "ambiance" is admirable. It has a rich sound (pronounce it correctly with the long "a" and nasal "n"), and it has a set of meanings that has no equivalent in English. It means the surroundings, the environment, the atmosphere (as in the atmosphere of a night club), mood. The popular song "In the Mood" is called "Dans L'Ambiance."

It would have made a fine title, but there is already a French magazine by that name, and altho none of you dear people would have known any better, the conscience would have hurt. We must be original at all costs.

The use of a Greek or Latin word came to mind, but that sounds too highbrow (and think of what Koenig would have said), and typewriters do not have Greek characters customarily.

A word was required -- short, euphonic, all-embracing. Cosmos has already been used. (There is a French magazine by that title, incidentally.) Plenum swam up from the subconscious.

(This occurred, incidentally, in Paris, before I had read The World of A, where the word is used several times.)

The small dictionaries did not contain the word Plenum. A trip had to be made to the American Library in Paris, and an enormous six-volume dictionary was consulted. There it was, with several meanings. The first one was the desired one: All of space containing matter. Then according to theory in which space without matter does not exist, the Plenum is the all.

To formulate an excuse for applying so grandiose a title to so small a magazine, we may say that the Plenum represents the extent of the subject matter which may at some time be included herein.

(Offstage, left, the chorus softly chants: hubba hubba.)

To continue with definitions: Cadenza in music is a section in a concerto where the solo instrument takes over and jams it. It is a free improvisation or developement on whatever themes happen to be around. That's this department.

There may be regular departments in Plenum. It's time there was a regular place for Astronautics discussions in the FAPA. Atomic energy and semantics would make good departments.

If any letters are received that say anything worth repeating, correspondents are hereby warned that such letters may be published. In fact, breaking completely from tradition, Plenum will be open to contributions from anybody on any subject. Only conditions are that the items be interesting and good. The editor has the privilege of publishing any crud that he himself writes, but he has a psychosis concerning typing material written by other people. This mental state derives from working as a typist for many long, boring months, and is not to be denied. Therefore contributors are warned that their material must be worth the mental anguish undergone by the editor in dummyping and stencilling the stuff. Items leading to controversy will be given preference.



The character of an individual may be judged by his opinion
of Paris, as he will find in Paris those qualities which
exist in his own mind.

FANTASY AND EDUCATION

In examining the effect of interest in fantasy and science fiction upon the education of young people, two important points stand out. There is not one single effect, but various separate effects upon various facets of the character; secondly a great deal depends upon the individual under question -- his basic abilities and the manner in which the remainder of his environment affects his activities.

There are two adverse effects to be discussed. The first is a subtle psychological one; the danger that the young reader will build up a dream-world and try to live in it. This is something that could happen to anybody, fantasy reader or not. We might guess, tentatively, that the people who have a tendency to build dream-worlds also have a tendency to become fantasy fans. Whereupon the reading of fantasy intensifies the imaginative character of the mind and creates a vicious circle.

One specific dream-world which has been noted in the past under the title, "The Gernsback Delusion," is a state of mind which resulted from the early character of science fiction. In the Gernsback days, the hero of a science fiction story was generally a scientist. Furthermore, interest in science fiction was supposed to run parallel with an interest in science. Therefore young readers, identifying themselves with the heroes, imagined that they could become great scientists when they grew up. Some people thusly got off on the wrong track before they woke up. Others found the right path.

With lack of experimental evidence, no specific conclusions can be drawn from this line of speculation, beyond stating that the young reader should be watched for evidences of unworldliness, withdrawal from reality, and imaginative ambitions that are beyond his capacity.

The second adverse effect is a more immediate one. When a young person in high school first becomes absorbed in fantasy and fandom, his activity takes up time and attention that should be spent on other things. He is liable to spend his time reading magazines when he should be reading the required school literature and studying history.

This, in itself, may be harmless in the long run, for later on, when our student's interests broaden naturally (if they ever do at all) he will catch up with literature and history thru general reading. However, it is often very important that attention be paid to the proper studies in high school, for a lifetime career may depend on the winning of a scholarship for which good grades in history, languages, and literature are usually required.

In general, a person will do well in subjects which interest him, whether or not he has science fiction on his mind: ~~his~~sf hobby is dangerous when it removes attention from those subjects in which the student is less interested, and to which he should therefore pay more attention in order to keep his grades uniform.

The exceptional person may study what he likes and damn the subjects in which he has no interest, but the average high school student must follow the established curriculum if he wishes to reap the economic advantages of a scholarship, and, in fact, if he wishes to get through college at all. For the universities, recognizing the tendency towards dilletantism fostered by the elective system, are eliminating the electives in favor of required curricula even for the liberal arts courses.

Failure to realize all of this in high school may cost a student many years of work which might have been avoided if he had paid more attention to what was required in scholarship examinations. It is not our purpose here to discuss the content and fuction of a liberal education. The fact remains that educators believe certain things are required in the education of a well-rounded person, and the individual who thinks he can get away with ignoring any parts of this education is doing so at his own risk.

Our conclusion, then: the student who becomes engrossed in fantasy fiction as a hobby is in danger of neglecting those studies in which his interest is least and which therefore require more attention for the benefit of his education.

The opposite effect may be seen in certain cases where interest in fantasy produces an interest in particular subjects. Here we will choose a particular person called Joe as an example. Other examples can no doubt be cited.

In the first place we will not say that science fiction produces an interest in science. There is probably more of a reciprocal relationship. A basic liking for science leads to an interest in science fiction, which in turn intensifies the scientific interest.

The particular effect to be noticed, however, is that a certain problem which arises in science fiction will stimulate the study of particular subjects in an effort to solve that problem.

Example one: "The Irrelevant," that famous John W. Campbell story which brought out an apparent paradox in the physics of rocket flight, was Joe's initiation into the mathematics of physics. He had thought that he knew a lot, and he found that he knew nothing. The next year he took high school physics and he studied it most intently trying to find the answer to the paradox. He continued to do that during college physics and calculus. Eventually

the Irrelevant problem was drained of its mysteries, but there remained the entire structure of rocket ballistics to be studied, which enhanced his interest in the differential equations course.

Example two: The Superman discussion, set off by stories such as Slan, took place just as Joe was taking psychology, and he squeezed that course dry because everything in it was related to the superman question and was thereby doubly interesting.

Example three: It is almost superfluous to point out how fan writing and the ambition to do professional writing often produce sensational results in English composition.

Our next conclusion, then, is that interest in science fiction has a good effect in cases where it stimulates attention towards particular problems which give an increased motivation towards study.

The average intelligent person reads a good many books over the course of years, and much of his education is acquired in this informal manner. If a person reads nothing but fantasy and sf, then he is neglecting this important part of his education. Fortunately, most fantasy fans, as they reach the age of 20, cease to monopolize their time with fantasy, and branch out into general reading. Therefore it is safe to say that any delay in the acquisition of general reading experience is not serious, and has this additional feature: Thru the better fantasy stories and discussions among fans, the fantasy fan acquires quite a broad knowledge of philosophical concepts which, however, are unorganized and spotty. When this person comes to do reading in the history of philosophy, he will find that he is already familiar with many of the ideas introduced, and that this formal reading has the main effect of correlating and giving rigor to his general fund of information.

I am speaking here of the Astounding SF class of reader. For those who subsist on Captain Future, I am afraid that their knowledge of philosophy is limited to the less abstruse aspects of comic-strip ethics.

But the reader of the better fantasy has long been familiar with the Aristotelian and Platonian concepts of government by an aristocracy of the most capable citizens. (cf. World of A.) The person who has read Stanley G. Weinbaum's works is familiar with Bishop Berkeley's ideas of subjectivism, and the entire philosophy of science fiction tends towards Spinoza's belief in "God" as the natural law and order of the universe.

Latter day Heinlein and Sprague de Camp give a smattering of semantics and symbolic logic, while in "None But Lucifer" the fantasy fan became acquainted with Schopenhauer's pessimism.

Lawrence Manning's "The Man Who Awoke," Stapleton's "Last and First Men," and many others, apply Herbert Spencer's concept of society as an organism.

In Weinbaum's "The Circle of Zero" is an exact description of Nietzsche's Eternal Recurrence, while the Lieutenant in "Final Blackout" is the personification of the Darwin-Nietzsche concept of "good" being that which survives. And, of course, the superman concept in science fiction (ranging from Richard Seaton thru Kimball Kinnison to Odd John and Slan) is Nietzsche saying that the goal of human effort should be the development of finer and stronger individuals. Science fiction morality in general is strongly Nietzschean.

The fantasy reader knows these ideas, but not the names associated with them, and it is not until he begins his formal reading of philosophy that he learns what men originated these ideas, and in what manner one idea led into another in the course of philosophical evolution.

Our conclusion on this point: altho general reading may be delayed by absorption with fantasy, fantasy reading together with fan discussions provide a fund of information plus a free-minded attitude which makes easier subsequent reading in philosophical subjects. Furthermore, the fantasy fan becomes accustomed to considering philosophy as a familiar topic of thought instead of as a high-falutin' affectation, which it is in the popular mind.

In conclusion, we indulge in a bit of wishful thinking to formulate the final rule: Once the danger to formal education is overcome, interest in fantasy can be an advantage to the intellectual development of the person.

Who can give me a good philosophical justification for hanging on to thirty shelf-feet of science fiction magazines for the rest of my life?

ADVERTISEMENT:

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CRITIQUE

NIGHT UNTO NIGHT by Philip Wylie

Murray Hill Books and
Editions for the Armed Service.

In the words of Philip Wylie's preface, "Here is a novel about death -- a novel, that is, about the living and their thoughts of death."

The plot is a skeleton upon which to hang the meat and guts of a philosophical discussion which is stimulating to those who can take it and maddening to the others. The story mostly concerns Ann and John with support by Shawn and Gail, all of whom have psychological problems to be settled in the book.

Ann lives in a Victorian house outside of Miami, Florida, and loses her husband, Bill, in the early days of the war. Bill was a naval officer, a German submarine came along the Florida coast, and Ann swam out to pull in a raft full of machine-gunned bodies several days old.

That night Ann hears Bill trying to communicate with her.

John is a brilliant biochemist who comes down from Chicago to rest while waiting for his body to decide whether or not he is going insane. He rents Ann's house and immediately becomes involved with the ghosts there.

Altho Shawn has little to do with the formal plot, he is important in the dialogues, taking the part of the artist against science. He is a commercial artist who in his spare time paints masterpieces of subtle horror.

Gail is Ann's sister, a high class whore who finally finds out why she is trying to escape from herself.

This is not a ghost story, nor is it a horror story. There is no mystery or atmosphere. It is unadulterated philosophy, and covers a wide range of subjects. The basic problem is that of personal existence: ethics, consciousness, death, life after death, and most important, the conflict between materialism and animism, or religion.

Shaw, the artist, argues with John, the scientist, about the need for science to go beyond the test-tubes, the mathematics, the measurements of surface phenomena, and the psychological reflexes. It is necessary, he says, for man to turn within himself

and examine his consciousness -- his subjectiveness. John protests at first, but is convinced when various unexplainable events occur.

In the preface, Wylie claims that he, himself, observed these Fortean phenomena, which is an important point, for the entire body of the argument rests upon it. It is left to the reader to decide whether he should take Wylie's word for it, or wait until he (the reader) sees the evidence himself.

The ghosts are discussed rationally in the light of modern psychology, with a heavy dash of Freudianism.

Much of the book is concerned with making mighty analytical slams at contemporary society in the manner which Thomas Wolfe used so well.

Wylie speaks of the juvenility of modern forms of entertainment -- the radio, movies, etc. He raps the complacency and narrowness of individuals concerning the progress of the war, and at the same time grows rather rapturous and sentimental about the marching boys who are going off to battle. His description of a men's club meeting approaches the level of Thomas Wolfe in bitterness, and his recording of the conversations that go on in this meeting brightly illuminates the native fascism running throughout the minds of middle-class business men who join clubs of this booster, rotary, chamber-of-commerce type.

The attack on organized religion is savage, altho the arguments against materialism and atheism are just as determined. Wylie wants a church which recognizes science and change, and which works with science to reveal the basic secrets of life.

The general tone of the book is this: The world is composed of confused, ignorant, small-minded people with the exception of certain individuals who are more rational, perceptive, and wise than the others, and who therefore live lives to a greater fullness than the others. The state of the world, including the war and all the wars to come, is a result of "Materialism -- man's defiant attempt to overshadow destiny with the panoply of cities, the hurtling activity of his body, the absorption of his five senses through ceaseless compulsion -- with toys and furnishings, games, stone jewelry, and fine processions -- with listening and looking and smelling and touching and tasting -- with all and everything that serves to stave off introspection for a minute, an hour, a lifetime -- The peace of the world will come only when the people who compose it have found the way to inner peace."

This book is another piece of ammunition added to one side of the argument which has been going on for many years, and which has been wavering from one side to the other. When psychology was new, introspection actually was the only method of observing the operation of the mind. Later on more objective methods were devised

until finally behaviorism was the only psychology admitted by the academic textbooks (or so it would seem according to my prof.), altho psychoanalysis still hovered in the background.

Now comes a reaction. Behaviorism cannot explain consciousness, the rebels say. It cannot explain free will. Rhine goes ahead to investigate ESP. And Wylie demands that science go into investigation of subjects usually considered philosophical. (As did Heinlein in Beyond This Horizon.)

There is somewhat of a parallel in the field of biological evolution. In pre-Darwin days, evolution, if admitted at all, was simply a result of God's direction. Darwin made it strictly mechanical, a logical result of natural selection. After Darwin, a reaction took place in which those who could not swallow the idea of complex animal mechanisms being built up by selection alone held on to some guiding force. And Lamarck carried on with inheritance of acquired characteristics. Only in recent years has Julian Huxley (in his book, "Evolution, The Modern Synthesis") been able to come to the defense of Darwinism with the aid of the newer weapons of genetics, mutation, and statistical methods.

This gives an indication of what will happen in the battle on psychology into which Wylie wades. The crux of the situation is the "Evidence." The supernatural phenomena which are the deciding factors in the novel being discussed. Admitting that such peculiar phenomena exist, how are we to arrive at an explanation consistent with the laws of nature? A thousand introspective thinkers may bring forth a thousand answers from their a priori knowledge. How do we know which one of these thousand is correct?

In the long run it will be the behaviorist psychologists who will give the answer by means of their tedious tracing of mental reactions. The philosophers, in their speculations, may point the way, but scientists, in their skeptical manner, will nail the truth to the drawing board. The philosophers and novel writers, in their impatience, overlook the fact that the psychologists have just barely begun working.

What do they want -- egg in their beer?

ANNOUNCING THE BIRTH OF A BABY:

At last, after all these long and weary years of sponging on other people, a Speedoprint of my own, my very own, has come to me. It is brand new, has automatic paper feed, and a darling little counting device.

It's name will be announced.

ABOUT TRANSITION

The science fiction fan mag has as a not-so-distant relation the small literary magazine. One of the most noted of the literary magazines (and not a very small one at that) was the publication "Transition," copies of which can still be found in Paris.

When you read an issue of Transition, you get a feeling as though you had seen something like it before. And so you have, for the more arty efforts of the Futurians are derived directly from the literary movement in which Transition played a large part.

Transition was first published in April, 1927, in Paris; later by the Servire Press, The Hague, Holland. The issues I have seen date about 1932 and 33.

Transition dubbed itself "An international workshop for Orphic Creation." Its value was that of an organ for the works of such writers as James Joyce, Hans Arp, Gertrude Stein, Kay Boyle, and scores of others of the group of modern writers who were developing at that time. Works in French and German, as well as in English, were frequent.

The keynote of the magazine was experimentation. In its own words: "Transition has been the only modern review of any country which systematically attacked the problem of language revision and which opened its pages to the chief linguistic experimenters of France, Germany, Ireland, England, and the US. It has created a new style in literature."

This was accomplished thru several channels. First, in the reproduction of new-type literature. Second, by publishing "James Joyce: Work in Progress," which was a serialized version of "Finnegan's Wake" as Joyce was in the process of writing it, demonstrating how it evolved. Third, by a department entitled "Laboratory of the Word."

The last is the part that would be most familiar to the fans, who have been raised on a diet of Ackermanese, Esperanto, Widner's experiments, Futurian and Liebscherian poetry, and many others.

Here we have articles on subjects relating to semantics, illustrations of new ways of expression in print, and in general an effort to increase the expressiveness of language.

For instance, we see an article utilising a great many styles and sizes of type in an effort to intensify the expression

of each word. We find a Revolution-of-the-word Dictionary, which continues what Humpty-Dumpty started and lists items from various authors such as James Joyce, Eugene Jolas (the editor of Transition), and Marius Lyle. For example:

- Pencylmania (Joyce)Love for writing; exclusive literary preoccupation.
- symperise (Joyce).....Sympathize with exaggerated show of emotion.
- vertigral (Jolas).....of or pertaining to the tendency of seeking a mystic synthesis in primal language. (Whatever that means.)
- konfiguration (Hans Arp)...Schöpfung, welche die Bilder und Läufe des Unbewussten ohne die Mittel des Rationellen zusammenfügt.
- ygsil (Lyle).....person with second sight; weatherwise.
- constunnaked (Sydney Hunt).consternation of sudden flash of nakedness of steel of flash.
- interlewd (Hunt).....period of sensual desire.

(To digress, this points out a fundamental lesson. In pictorial art, the average person has no comprehension of what the modern artist is trying to do, and therefore has quite a feeling of scorn for modern art. Yet many of the techniques created by the cubists and the surrealists have penetrated into commercial art, until now cubism and surrealism are common, everyday forms. Likewise, the nonsense-word building begun in fun by Lewis Carroll and continued more seriously by James Joyce and the others has spread out to all levels of writing, until now Walter Winchell, Walter Liebscher, and other columnists wouldn't be seen without their own original creations in words. That is what they call Cultural Lag.)

So revolutionary is Transition that it brings forth notices such as the following: "Transition herewith announces that in future the following words will be abolished from its pages: Novel, poetry, verse, poem, ballad, sonnet, short story, essay, anthology."

The evolutionary line from which came to us Fred Pohl's and Doc Lowndes' Vombic literature is clearly shown in the following "Manticism" entitled "The Bilgewonk," by Ivan Black:

In stravanada we'll bewon
 With esplanada seneshon
 The griffagon the draggofinx
 That leap from Stonahenjabinx
 Of Matterhorn to Marawhelf
 Like every single body's self.

The following item, entitled "Smyrshum," by William Van Wyck, might possibly be Dutch doubletalk.

Shtag voin glami voin doofelogam,
 Boidee um vital dua stel obam.

Rash voin glami per kupi baertel ko,
 Stirpelstra dibbel ko zumaertelpe.

Vrool voin glami, voin bindi stropad,
 Vital astam enappi drunksk ko prad.

These were published in February, 1933.

In the same issue is a small item concerning an unauthorized Japanese translation of James Joyce's "Ulysses." (Sort of imagination-staggering, isn't it -- a Japanese translation of stuff like: "And he did a get and slink his hook away. For he could chew upon a skarp snakk of pure undefallen engelsk as raskly and as baskly as your cow cudd spanich.") The item ends: "A protest has now been adressed to Tokio through diplomatic channels."

VERTIGRAL: The Search for the Symbol behind the Symbol.

This winds up the material written in France before coming back to the States. A more gala issue had been planned, but I have been very busy getting organized and do not wish to give any more time to this issue. Furthermore, the trial-and-error business of getting used to a new mimeo has made this issue more work than is ordinarily required. However, now that the wrinkles have been ironed out, I'm quite satisfied with the job that the machine is putting out. In fact, I'm a bit elated.

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Getting organized, as mentioned above, meant building shelves, putting magazines, books, and fanzines into order, and in general getting my den in a condition fit for living and entertaining. Now that that is completed, I extend an invitation to you gentle-people: I'll be tickled to hear from you (in fact I'm mad at some of you for not writing to me for ages), and if any of youse are in the vicinity of Philadelphia my phone number is FREmont 5126. I'm home most of the time.
