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PARTY POLITICAL ANNOUNCEMENT We here at the Silver Dagger Publications offices wish to make it clear that we were as shocked as the rest of you at the appearance of a quote from Ronald Reagan in the last issue of CRANK. We realize that some confusion exists in the minds of some readers because the SDP (no relation) offices share a building in common with those of CRANK UK/EPSILON, and we hope no one inferred approval of the Reagan quote from these quarters.

It is, in fact, our feeling that Ronald Reagan should plan extensive tours of the Middle East in the near future, and that he should take Sylvester Stallone with him. Perhaps Ray Bradbury could also attend.

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READER'S LETTUCE A Mr Patrick Nielsen Hayden of New York, commenting on my remarks last time regarding 'experimentalism', warns that while he appreciates my intent, I may have forgotten momentarily the incredible power of the written word - and anyway, I was imprecise.

"I liked the diatribe against experimentalism-for-its-own-sake, but found myself wishing you'd qualified yourself more, or at least put words like "experimentalism" into quotes. Because as your own anecdote about the double-spacing faned shows, what we're discussing here isn't genuine experimentalism, but rather incompetence disguised as such. Probably neither that faned nor most of the writers in that anthology had enough notion of, or command over, the tools and elements of their art to achieve the effects they wanted; instead of truly experimenting, which implies a certain measure of control, what they're really doing is lurching about doing the best they can, which is not much. That they may call it "experimentalism" after the fact doesn't mean we're obliged to accept the label, condemning real artistic experiment as a result. But that's what you edge toward doing. The way you phrase it, it

almost seems as if you feel the only thing that can validly dictate "experimentation" is some sort of unusual content which might require special presentation. I don't agree. Real and successful experiment justifies itself by creating new language, new ways of seeing and expressing. Unfortunately, real and successful experiment, as if it didn't have an uphill battle before it in the first place, must also bear the burden of the twentieth-century scam of calling any old piece of incoherent junk "experimental." The thing is, too much of this can kill an art form. Like, who listens to modern "serious" music anymore?

Thing is, people make false analogies from ethics to art. The "shoulds" and "shouldn'ts" of art and its criticism (read: study) aren't the "shoulds" and "shouldn'ts" of politics and law; rather, they're attempts to discover what works and what doesn't, and how. The one is prescriptive; the other isn't. That many critics have an authoritarian attitude or tone is irrelevant; so do many plumbers, but no one cringes from plumbers as if they held the power of life and death. Try engaging in discourse with an aim towards discovering how, say, fanzines work, and you'll see: people act as if you're trying to impose Standards, as if anyone could. This confusion reached a sort of peak a couple of years ago with the publication of a faannish short story about a future in which fanac was passed or rejected by an Orwellian ruling body empowered to gun down standards-violators in the hotel corridors. In exaggerated form, this appeared to reflect a real fear. What the root of it was is another question, though. Coming from prickly neofans with chips on their shoulder, or John Thiel or someone like that, such rhetoric is easily explained. Coming from established and competent practitioners of the arts in question, though, it makes me wonder: just what is so threatening about trying to evolve a critical vocabulary? Could it be that there are simply some people for whom inarticulacy, subjectivity, and the general confused muddle of "Uh, I dunno much about art, man, I just know what I like" are states of affairs to be defended at all costs? Beats me. Well, actually, it seems perfectly clear, and you know exactly what I mean.

Oh, well. Experimentalism, subjectivity, common language, dat ol' debbil Standards... what I like about fandom is the way it provides such a concise microcosm of the outside world, complete with ancient hoary aesthetic arguments. Other days, what I loathe about fandom is that it provides such a concise microcosm of... you get the idea. Who said fans were slans? They have James Michener; we have Eric Mayer. The arguments between those who want to expand the language we use to discuss art, and those who would prefer the whole matter stay mystified and imprecise, has been going on a lot longer than fandom. The argument's peculiarity in modern times is that both sides now strive to portray the other as the real censors: "you're trying to stifle my True Inner Voice" versus "you simply want to avoid talking about how this stuff works." From the way I sum each position up you can probably tell which one I favor. In any case, that even the Know-Nothings now feel compelled to pay lip service to such advanced values is probably progress of a sort, even if it is the result of mixing metaphorical levels. (I.e., the only sense in which "freedom" is a substantial value in art is political; no one should be arrested for doing the wrong sort of art. As far as the art itself goes, too much "freedom" and not enough form means no result at all: no spark, no fun. But I could go on like this for a long time.) The point is that by condemning "experimentalism" simply because a lot of dross tries to pass under that name, you muddy the waters considerably and lay yourself open to anguished cries of Censorship, accusations

of secret reactionary tendencies (remember Randall Jarrell, who wrote in 1940 that rhymed verse was Fascist), and endless confused battles across semantically poisoned terrain. But you knew that already, right?"

Point taken, Mr. Nielsen Hayden. It's too late to explain that I meant it in quotes. Because, of course, virtually every project you undertake is going to be an experiment of sorts. Going to a party is an experiment in trying to have some fun or some sort of social success on this particular night, in this particular location, in this particular outfit, with these particular people. Every time you write a new article or story, every time you produce another issue of your fanzine, it will presumably differ in some ways from the last one - or else it wouldn't be worth doing - and that makes it all a big experiment. But it helps first to have some idea of why existing conventions are there to begin with before you start breaking the rules. Maybe no one ever thought of doing it your new experimental way before, but don't be too sure about that. Take, for example, the matter of double-spacing. Most people who read and write for a living have read, or produced, plenty of double-spaced text before. We double-space our manuscripts because it's easier to make corrections between the lines that way. But the very fact that double-spacing is used for manuscripts means that it will always tend to convey a sense of the unfinished, which is all by itself a good reason not to publish something that still looks like a MS. This doesn't mean you can never find a use for double-spacing in a fanzine - it's possible you could someday come across an idea that you'd like to do that would benefit by ds, or you might even devise some way to use ds for its own sake that makes it work. But let's face it, generally it's going to look ugly and incomplete and waste a lot of paper and postage.

The trouble with the Standards discussion is that, in the end, you still can't give a name to the Thing that people say is missing, or should be there, or whatever. Steve Higgins recently said there were "no first-class fanzines" being published these days. When I asked him what a first-class fanzine was, he said something about knowing the author was trying to do her best. The author is capable of better, therefore it is not a first-class fanzine. I wondered how Higgins could be so sure what a faned's "best" was, and how a first-class fanzine could be defined in such easily limited terms. That could make the last HOLIER THAN THOU a first-class fanzine simply because we know Marty isn't capable of doing better, and yet leave the last CLOUD CHAMBER out of the first-class category just because we know Langford has done better. I judge a fanzine by how much I got out of reading it, not by some nebulous comparison with the potential body of the editor's work.

But that doesn't mean you shouldn't try to give a name to the workings of a good fanzine, or figure out just how it does work. It's just very difficult to crystallize, and harder still to convey to an audience that these ideas aren't just prisons you're trying to build around their creative reality. Of course, some people don't do much to demonstrate that they intend to do more than build those prisons and maybe make a few people feel bad. For example...

There are more good fanzines around than people seem to think there are, but you'd never know it to read the kind of fanzine reviews and fanalysis that are going around these days. Real reviews and criticism of individual fanzines appear sporadically at best, and when they do they seem to emphasise so much of the negative that one gets the impression there wasn't anything worthwhile

coming through the mail slot all winter. Last February numerous excellent fanzines appeared at Mexicon II, but how many reviews have you seen of them, and how good did the ones you have seen make you feel about the current crop?

I don't think fandom is helped too much by this state of affairs. It's one thing to approach reviewing with a critical eye - it's another thing to think you have no obligation to acknowledge the good that is done. It's really not that hard to look at a fanzine and figure out that the layout leaves something to be desired, the articles fall flat, the artwork was messy; and all it takes to write about it is forgetting your morning coffee. It's actually easier to write a piece that finds all of the holes in a zine or article than it is to describe what's good in it. Someone we know has a terrific piece of lit crit sitting on her desk that's about eight times longer than the fanarticle she decided to take the axe to. Good reading, too. But try tearing up a bad piece while still demonstrating respect for the author and understanding of what was attempted, even if it wasn't successful or "correct", and you may never get past the first paragraph. But it's worth a try, or else you come across like you're telling people they have no business sitting in front of a typewriter.

It's also important to remember that when there aren't many other people doing reviews and criticism, every critical word you write takes on disproportionate importance. If five people are writing columns talking about how great the fanzines they picked up at the last con were, and one guy says, well, I didn't get anything good at the con, it doesn't matter much. But if the only review you see says there isn't much going on in fanzines right now, you really want to kill the guy. When no one is giving credit where it's due, even the most honest criticisms become pretty devastating, and a minor quibble feels like wholesale condemnation.

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DEAT TRAP, SUICIDE RAP, & HOMERUN I think it's nice that fans have hobbies. I got a fanzine a few days ago from **Steve Bieler**, a one-shot he did for a convention in which he wrote about one of his hobbies, baseball. And even if you don't know anything about baseball, Bieler makes it fun to read. One of Bieler's other hobbies is Bruce Springsteen. People in Britain can't appreciate Springsteen as well because (1) he was overhyped the first time he came over here, and for someone like Springsteen that can have a deadly effect, and (2) they don't spend much time tearing down interstates in their cars, and therefore miss that buzz that good driving music provides when "Rosalita" comes on and suddenly there can't be a speed limit.

I'll get back to Steve and Bruce in a minute, but first there is **Terry Hughes**, who has this sometimes hobby called fandom...

"It is strange what a person finds him/herself missing the most while in a foreign land. For you it seems to be baseball (at least that was what you mentioned first) which is something I never miss when traveling. The thing about the US I missed the most during my month in Britain was the soft drink vending machines which are as common as fire hydrants on the streets over here while being virtually non-existent outside of buildings over there. Both of our kinky desires, however, pale in comparison to a woman I know who recently moved to Thailand and who has her aunt send her videotape cassettes of Guiding

Light so that she can keep up on her soap opera while living in Bankok. (Oops, I was wrong: the first thing you mentioned being absent was Keeblers. Keeblers? Oh, Avedon. The other side of this sheet will give you something else to miss. Yes, Paul Krassner has revived the Realist. And there you are with the Sun.)

The best line in the entire issue was the interlineation you attributed to Rob on page 7 but your page one quote from Jackie Lichtenberg was a close second. It does make me wonder about the effects of culture shock on your mental abilities though if you are now reduced to reading novels like FarFetch. That's not the sort of thing one talks about in public. I gather Jackie didn't have a contribution in "The Women's Press Anthology". No, I didn't think so."

Good Ghu, Terry, what makes you think one has to read a J Lichtenberg novel to find quotes like that? Rob opened the book at random and pointed at the page, and I just typed the sentence he came up with. Just our little way of showing what a goldmine these JL galleys that were donated to TAFF are. You never have to be without an interlineation when you need one, as long as you have a copy of one of her books around. Get your bid in today!

Actually, baseball isn't the thing I miss most about America, nor are Keeblers, although they have a certain amount of symbolic use as category headers. It would help cut down on some confusion if I could rely on some of the brandnames I'm used to (can't find my favorite soup crackers, saltines, anywhere), and there are just all of these things I've always known as part of my environment which are gone - baseball is the example, but try substituting "Official Secrets Act" for "Freedom of Information Act," as another one. At the moment, I think the things I miss most are laws against job discrimination by age (although that xerox of the Realist cover did cause genuine pain). I look at the want ads and see jobs I'd ordinarily go for that specify a person between 18 and 21 (altho, as should surprise no one, many of these jobs run for a long time without being filled - hard to find experienced workers that young, especially when one of the other requirements stated in the ad is, "Five years or more experience"). At the moment I'm temping in a job that they won't give me because I'm too old and westernized (it's a Japanese bank), but their head-hunting isn't getting very far since no one who knows anything is young and wimpy enough to be able to answer the ad.

Which is one reason I decided it was time to do a fanzine and try to make myself feel a little more active. And anyway, **Mitch Hellman** has written to me twice by MCI mail, which I find amusing anyway.

"Nice to hear that you are finally doing what I have been doing for many years: enjoying Bruce Springsteen. He's another person who puts his money where his mouth is. I just wish he could have been a little more picky about who he married. His wife looks like they haven't removed the cellophane yet."

Now, Mitch is a man who really loves Bruce Springsteen. I'll never forget the Thanksgiving day when he discovered he was the only person he knew who had made no arrangements for the holiday. With nothing to do, he got in his trusty roach-mobile and drove all the way up to Asbury Park in the hope of meeting his hero. When Mitch told me this, I was feeling terribly sorry for him - poor guy,

all alone on a big family holiday, driving up to Asbury Park, of all places, in the vain hope of meeting his favorite rock star. The thing is that Mitch's optimism paid off and that's why I got to see Springsteen for free the next time he played Baltimore at what may be the smallest hall anyone outside of New Jersey has been able to see the man play at in many years.

Which doesn't exactly bring us back to Steve Bieler, but I've never let that sort of thing stop me before. Steve was one of a number of people who wrote back to echo Alan Bostick's last letter and was then reminded of a Bostick story:

"Alan spent a number of his formative years in the Bay State, so it was natural that he and I would strike up some sort of relationship when I first moved here. Soon we began discussing the Red Sox. Alan is not a baseball fan but, having lived in New England, could not escape certain influences; I suspect he still wakes in the middle of the night worrying about George Scott's weight, but he won't admit it.

Anyway. One evening, while discoursing upon this favored subject (who do you talk baseball with over there? Does the American Consulate provide a phone-in baseball line? Are the Orioles really moving to East Ham?), Alan overheard me mention the seventh-inning stretch. There's no such thing, he commented. Of course there is, I said. But Alan, knowing my penchant for exaggeration and recognizing a whopper when he hears one, refused to believe me. When I enlisted other baseball-wise fans, like Donald Keller and Tom Weber, to back my claim, Alan accused me of conspiring to con.

This went on for months! Finally, exasperated, I threw up my hands at still another party and confessed. You're right, Alan, I said. I made it up. There's no such thing as a "seventh-inning stretch."

Alan looked at me.

I don't believe you, he said."

Steve, I hope you appreciate the restraint it took me to let you get get through that story uninterrupted (we don't believe in the Marty Cantor style of "editing" around here, by god!) before correcting your appalling delusion that I am a (yuch!) Orioles fan. I am a New York fan. The only team I have ever seen live were the New York Yankees. To me, the best season ever played was by the Miracle Mets. There are, of course, certain players I enjoy watching wherever they go (Reggie Jackson could have been playing those seasons for the Brewers and I still would have watched him. Hell, he could have been playing for the Rams and I think I would have watched him!), especially guys like Pete Rose and several people named Smith. But as far as teams are concerned, my ideal season is a Subway series, so I can't lose.

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THIS SURE AIN'T KANSAS, AUNTIE BEEB Having seen the handful of British TV programs that the occasional US network has had the wisdom to buy and air, many Americans have figured out that there must be a lot of good stuff on the BBC & "the other side" that Americans never get to see. They are right in that, but there is an attendant illusion that

this means many more hours of airtime put to good use, and that assumption is incorrect. The unfortunate fact is that in order to make those programs so good, they generally must consume a great deal less of the script-writing energy of the little geniuses who create these things.

British Television has no "season" as such. The average show may be produced in a series of perhaps six individual episodes, and then if you liked it you can only hope they'll decide to make a few more. I think that was the hardest thing for me to get used to - as soon as I was really into a show, it was gone. A good British show is usually off the air faster than a rank failure is removed from the network line-up in the US. I remember during the Vietnam war, ABC TV was having so many failures that there was a joke going around that went, "If they really want to end the war, they should put it on ABC and it'll be cancelled in 13 weeks."

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EGOBOO AS ART I usually cut out all of the bits raving about how wonderful my fanzine was and all that because they generally aren't the most interesting parts of the letters and to be honest you can only read so much of that in some other person's fanzine before you go blind (and you wonder if there is hair growing on the palms of the editor who for some reason expects everyone else to want to read about how wonderful he is). God knows a fanzine can hardly survive unless the editor gets some positive feedback from readers, and we all appreciate all that friendly reinforcement. But if you print it all you make your fanzine a bit boring and your admirers start to seem pretty gloopy too.

Nevertheless, she said, in tones that assure you that she is just about to do what she says she prefers to avoid and you shouldn't do it either, one's tolerance is shot, one weakens, one reads the 107th issue of yet another mediocre fanzine which has been made worse still by 30 pages of locs which are composed (or composted) of little more than "Thanks for your zine it was really wonderful wow you're so great," and one is overcome - overcome, I say - with the urge to print one's own egoboo. And anyway, it is from Arthur Thomson, who is related to the Royal family and if only a couple-few thousand people die, he will be king.

"Just wanted to put into print how much I enjoyed VERGE, and BLATANT 14. I know I'm just a weepy-eyed sentimental old fart and a pushover for a bit of (I can't find the right word to type but what I want is something to describe 'from the heart' writing)...which is how whole heaps of V and B come over...really, you seem to be able to do this type of evocative writing so well...you'll remember I mentioned about that piece you did about your Christmas visit to New York, and which I thought pretty bloody terrific and in this style of writing which not only tells what your mind is saying, but your heart as well...there, I told you I was just an old softy, but (here comes my 'Bogey' impression) it gets me here, kiddo... picture of Atom tapping his chest just below his left nipple.

I liked your piece on fnz layout style, you're quite right about the double spacing being ugly in print, but too, there's an awful lot of fans who haven't grasped that the concept of layout isn't just masses of space with all sorts of 'arty' lettering, illos, and styling. I like to see a zine 'presented' with or without lettering or illos, but at least put together with thought,

and not just crammed onto page after page...which so many faneds do and use the excuse that they don't like 'layout' for the fact that they find it easier to ignore than attempt.

Yeah, I remember that Harry is a Julie Andrews fan, too."

Oh, poor Harry, if only he'd been here to see THE SOUND OF MUSIC on the tube, and Julie herself on Wogan...

"No one could have lived through that except the Spectre - and he's dead."

HOT METAL Tom Perry has written with a COA (PO Box E, Sugar Loaf, NY 10981) and a few encouraging words about moving to certain foreign countries, among other things:

"I'm happy for you and Rob, of course, and in complete awe of what you have taken on. I love England but realized what a hopeless American I am after spending two years there and being DESPERATE to return home. The third year that the company wanted us to stay for would have been in London, instead of Hampshire, and that might have made the difference, but after much discussion we decided not to find out. Taking on that culture shock on a permanent basis is an act of courage. I admire you.

The International Herald Tribune I believe to be the best edited English-language paper in the world, though I confess it seemed a little thin sometimes. Getting it by mail at 7 a.m. so you can read it over breakfast, even in a country village near Southampton, is one of the marvels of English civilisation. The phone system and the mail ought to be two prime measures of how civilized a country is; the US seems to be faltering in both. This last Christmas, the Postal Service dropped the two-delivery-a-day practice around Xmas which has been part of our heritage as long as I can remember.

Do you really get CAGNEY & LACEY over there? Reruns, or the new shows? Add a third measure to that civilized yardstick."

Well, Tom, you'd admire me a lot less if you could see how well I'm handling it all. And the morning delivery at Greenleaf Road doesn't arrive before I leave for work, anyway. I can't pick up the Irrational Herald Trib in my neighborhood, either. But to tell the truth, I find the reportage on the Financial Times more to my liking - straightforward, little editorializing, and more in the style to which I had become accustomed in 33 years of having The Washington Post dropped on my doorstep at 5:30 every morning. I still miss the opinion pieces from people like Mary McGrory (where are you, Brown?), but Ken Josenhans has been supplying me with clips from the NY Times and the Detriot Free Press which have been a godsend. Meanwhile, we still get two mail deliveries a day, but must suffer with the worst phone system in the industrialized world.

"An actor is president?" -- Flint

US NEWS AND WORLD REPORT A Mr. Alexis Gilliland of Arlington, Virginia (which is pretty close to Ground Zero, by the way) has written with an update of the latest gossip he's heard from around the Heart of the Beast:

"Reagan and the Supremes still pique your interest? Brennan, whose wife died in '81 and who was subsequently ill and profoundly depressed, leading to speculation that he might step down, has married his secretary of 30 years, and is reportedly in good spirits. He was, you will remember, an Eisenhower moderate who stayed pretty much in place as the court drifted right.

The most interesting, if muted, controversy in Washington is Ed Meese's presuming to lecture the Supreme Court on the way the Constitution ought to be interpreted. This was taken in sufficiently poor grace that at least two of the justices went public with their rebuttals. "Awright, Ed...take yer two ears in yer two hands and pull yer head outa yer ass!" is not a direct quote, but a summary of more lawyerly language. Substantively, Meese seems to think that the 14th Amendment was a perversion of the Founder's original intent.

Bumper sticker for Ed Meese: DEREGULATE BUSINESS, NOT WOMEN! BAN ABORTION!

At present none of the justices seem to have any intention of retiring, and the Movement Conservatives may yet wind up cursing the 'nine old men' who seem intent on breaking the longevity record set by the FDR court. Which they will do next spring if they hang in there. Could they outlast Ronnie? Only three more years to go."

Yeah. I heard Thurgood Marshall was planning to retire when Carter was re-elected, but when he lost instead, we heard no more of that.

I enjoyed Edwin Meese claiming that it would be constitutional for individual states to declare their own State Religions. It might be worth it to move back to Maryland and invent a good state religion of the kind that would make some skin crawl in the Reagan administration. My bumpersticker would say something like: "Take the Christ out of Xmas!" After all, Solstice comes but twice a year...

By the way, folks, I just thought before you all cancel your vacation plans, you should know that it's still safer in Britain than it is in most cities in the US, although you should stay away from the police - they aren't used to having guns and don't know how to carry them without discharging them into innocent bystanders. (How come terrorism was OK when it was the IRA terrorizing the English, but it's not OK when it's funny-colored Mediterranean-type people? That's what I want to know. Maybe because the "evil empire" that's been giving aid and comfort and money to the IRA is the US of A?)

HOF FOR DUFF? No, I have no idea who will be standing for DUFF from the US next time around, but just think - hasn't it been restful with Marty administrating and holding to his belief that fan fund administrators should not engage in controversy? Marty, you will recall, expressed the belief before winning DUFF that FF administrators should not express opinions about potential fan fund candidates. Since that includes almost everyone, Marty has had to keep pretty quiet. If Hold Over Funds wins the next DUFF race, Marty will have to remain administrator and maintain his silence. Personally, I don't

know where Mr Cantor got the idea that a truly active and involved fan would even bother to stand for a fan fund knowing it meant virtually opting out of crifanac for at least two years, but as long as he thinks so, we might as well take advantage of it. And if a really good candidate comes along, we can always invent another fund to go with it. TOFF, we can call it - "The Other Fan Fund." Either that or pass a resolution making Marty the vote-counter in perpetuity.

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WE ALSO HEARD FROM Amy Thomson (COA: 4014 Latona Ave, NE, Seattle, WA 98105), Roger Waddington, Ethel Lindsay, Martyn Taylor, Bernadette Bosky, Debbie Notkin, Denys Howard, Linda Blanchard, Lee Hoffman, and Marc Ortlieb, and I'm sure I've mislaid a few letters as usual. And oh, yes - Daniel Farr sent issues 1 & 2 of his fanzine a month apart, but they both arrived on the same day a couple of weeks ago.

The staff of Silver Dagger Publications would like once again to thank Arthur Thomson for the logo (this is getting to be a habit) and Vincent Clarke and Rob Hansen for help at the physical plant.

BLATANT

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