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LINES OF Occurrence 5

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WEDNESDAY

LINES OF OCCURRENCE 5 is a science fiction fanzine written, edited, and published by Arthur D. Hlavaty, 819 W. Markham Ave., Durham, NC 27701, 919-NUTS'-LAB. It is available for \$1 (\$2 outside the US), trade, letter of comment, art, ~~dangerous~~ friendly drugs, or anything else the editor feels like trading it for. Copyright ©1982 by Arthur D. Hlavaty. All rights returned to contributors. Atlanta in '86. This is W.A.S.T.E. Paper #327.

CONFERENCE VENTION FRONTATION FLUENCE

This con report is gratefully dedicated to Judy Bemis and Tony Parker, whose hospitality made our attendance at the con possible, and whose company made it much more enjoyable.

You could call it a dangerous vision--certainly a bold and different concept. For the past few years, Florida Atlantic University, in Boca Raton, Florida, has been holding an Academic Conference on the Fantastic. Rat's Mouth Fandom, Boca's fan group, decided to combine with that a fannish convention.

There has been some question about the ability of fans and academics to coexist. One imagined a sort of worst-case scenario in which open war broke out between the two factions. The fans, wearing a strange sort of helmet with a propellor on the top, charging forth armed with zap guns, crying "FIA-WOL" and "Let's get sf back in the gutter where it belongs!" And then the counter-attack, as the academics ponderously rally round to the cry of "Cognitive estrangement!" and attempt to bury the fans under a mass of theses.

But surely there are other possibilities. In the place the phone company has chosen to label the Nuts' Lab, there live, in harmony, Bernadette Bosky, graduate student in English Literature, and notorious fan Arthur Hlavaty.

It could be said that we are not typical, that Bernadette has been dabbling in the forbidden joys of fandom (Lovecraftian as well as sf) through much of her academic career, and that I have been urging fans to try *fnord* mainstream lit since my first fannish efforts. But then perhaps many people are not typical, going back to such pioneers of the sf/academic interface as James Gunn and Jack Williamson.

I am a Discordian pope, and the pope's original title was *pontifex*, the bridge builder. I was here to see bridges being built.

Upon registering for the con, one received a program, indicating that the daytime would be divided into four 1½-hour sessions for papers (only one on Wednesday, as they were starting in the afternoon), with the evenings featuring a star per day.

I perused the program with somewhat mixed emotions. Writers like Samuel R. Delany, Bria Aldiss, and Fritz Leiber would be there, and their works would be discussed, as would such people as CS Lewis, Kurt Vonnegut, and Robert A. Heinlein.

And yet there was so much that seemed to me to have little to do with sf/fantasy. This was not even my usual complaint that the academics devote great amounts of time to works with "historical importance" when they obviously have no other kind. Nor was it the apparent belief in some academic circles that it is unfair to discriminate against some country in the study of sf just because nobody there writes it very well.

These factors were present, but there was also the fact that the term "the fantastic" could cover a great deal of material that would not be classified as sf/fantasy. I found it interesting that one panel could encompass THE FAERIE QUEENE and FEAR AND LOATHING IN LAS VEGAS, but neither is what I would consider sf/fantasy.

This conflict came up in the very first panel I attended, on "Contemporary Critical Approaches to the Fantastic." There, a panelist spoke on how "the holistic, centripetal, and temporal properties of the realistic transmute to the atomistic, centrifugal, and predominantly spatial properties of the fantastic," with examples drawn from the writings of Kafka and Beckett. In the question period afterwards, one member of the audience asked how this distinction applied to works of "the fantastic" by Tolkien, Morris, Lewis, et al. Total lack of communication. The speaker had not read any of those. The asker had apparently not read Kafka or Beckett. [It might be pointed out that the person asking the question was not a "mere fan," but a professor, who was giving a paper at another panel.]



But as I look back, I can see that confrontation as an occurrence, not an omen. If I do not choose to see Kafka, Beckett, Sartre, Hawthorne, and that lot as the stepping stones between sf/f and the "mainstream," I do find that there are other good ones, and some of these were discussed. A pontifex should not be peeved that others build bridges.

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That evening, we were treated to
 !!!THE!!HARLAN!ELLISON!!SHOW!!!
 Harlan was magnificent. He told stories and anecdotes. He denounced current trends in sf/f that he finds loathesome, notably the books which cross the thin line between s & s and s & m. (DAW has discovered a female John Norman. Aren't we lucky?) He read from some of his latest works, both funny and moving. It was great.

THURSDAY

The first session we attended was on Magic in Literature. The three papers offered a bit of a contrast. The first attempted to cover just about all of the metaphysics and ethics of magic, and needless to say, half an hour was nowhere near enough to cover it. If the first was too big, the second was too small--a through discussion of the use of voodoo in Taylor Caldwell's TIME NO LONGER, a book which probably did not deserve even that much attention. The third was ~~THE~~ *Baby* ~~Beat~~ just right--a discussion of the "magic portrait," in which I learned that THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY is just the best-known surviving example of a whole group of stories in which "magic portraits" appeared for horrifying or didactic purpose. I can see not finding that sort of thing terribly interesting, but I kind of enjoyed it. (Of course, technology has killed the magic portrait as a literary device. I thought of Ellison's "All the Lies That Are My Life," in which the central presence is a "magic portrait," or perhaps "ghost," which is neither fantasy nor science fiction.) In any event, it was interesting, but next year, Bernadette is going to present the definitive paper on magic in literature.

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The second panel we attended was on CS Lewis. One paper discussed Lewis's view of the relationship between the enthusiastic way of reading literature and the scholarly way.

This brought up some interesting points. I've mentioned before that I've always objected to the common view that reason and intuition are such opposed approaches that one must be one or the other, but not both.

Thus I was very pleased to discover CG Jung's four-function model of the mind, in which thinking and intuition are not opposed to each other, and one can have one of them as a primary function and the other as a secondary one. One image of this approach is the description of Saul Goodman's thought patterns in ILLUMINATUS! where the intuition function takes a great leap, and then the thinking function slowly but surely follows to make sure that it is valid. It may well be that it is impossible for these two functions to work at the same time, but here is a model for their working in tandem.

Though Jung's model suggests compatibility between thinking and intuition, it tends to assume an opposition between thinking and feeling. When I mentioned this, favorably, in an apa, Rita Prince Winston asked what about the passion for knowledge.

Good point. And Lewis presented a model that includes that possibility. He suggested that the study of literature begins with reading a work with the naive & uncritical enthusiasm of the child. That is what should give one the feeling that the work is worth studying. Then, and only then, one applies the cool & rational reasoning processes of formal criticism to the work. Now the enthusiasm would be out of place, just as the critical calm was out of place at first. But after this is done, one can return to the work, read it enthusiastically once again, but have one's pleasure increased by the knowledge one had gained in serious study.

This could be a somewhat oversimplified model for the relationship between the fan and the academic. The fan is the enthusiast, reading sf/f for the joy, the excitement, the sense of wonder. But the fan who never passes that stage winds up perpetually trying to repeat the enthusiasm of adolescence. The academic, who never was a "fan" (of any kind of literature) can mechanically study the work at hand, but is also forever condemned to be missing something.

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Another topic that came up at the Lewis panel was the idea of Myth as a way of knowing. Lewis realized that Myth was not, as the term is vulgarly misused today, simply a form of primitive nonsense or prescientific mistake, but rather a valid nonlinear form of presenting truths that do not easily lend themselves to the form of propositions in logic.

Today Americans are not presented with many of the great old myths, and thus have to find myths for themselves in the elements of our culture, as perhaps the speaker on "The Romantic Myth and Transcendence: A Feminist Interpretation of the Kirk/Spock Bond" was doing.



IF YOU CAN'T HANDLE
THE TRUTH,
THEN
DON'T READ THIS!

DELLFAMMS

As I listened to the discussion of Myth, I began thinking of one of the central myths of my own life--one that I had not previously formulated in words.

It is the image of the Fellowship and the Quest--the group of people ("fellowship" being the least sexist term I can think of for it) joining as allies for a goal. There are obvious examples of it in the world's literature; LORD OF THE RINGS leaps to mind. Less obviously, perhaps, I find it something that John Brunner does very well, in books like THE SHOCK-WAVE RIDER and THE STONE THAT NEVER CAME DOWN, and that is one reason I find so many of Brunner's books so fascinating.

I'm not sure why this particular myth is so important. I know that it offers an image for what I think is a highly valid third possibility between the individualistic war of all against all so often preached as the American Way and the anthill equality the Left offers as the only alternative.

The importance of the myth to me, I now realized, was in its combination of the two elements. Fellowship without Quest is very nice and friendly, but it can become idle and pointless. Quest without Fellowship is at best solitary effort, at worst competition even unto the point of war.

And I could see those two elements here. Fandom centers on the element of Fellowship; it is a place to hang out with good companions. Efforts to give it a quest, whether Ellison's effort to mobilize a Worldcon for ERA, or the continuing thought that fandom should somehow be much more organized than it is, tend to be viewed with suspicion.

And Academe is the Quest without (disclaimer!) the Fellowship. Cooperative effort is rare; indeed, Bernadette points out that at ordinary literary/academic conferences, there tends to be a wariness about sharing one's ideas with others unless those ideas have already been published, and that this is not mere selfishness or paranoia, because in fact academic advancement does largely depend on what one has published and ideas can be stolen at meetings like these.

Here again, the meeting of the two subcultures offered hope. Those from the fannish world were, by their presence, taking part in something more than just hanging out, in the exchange of knowledge which fandom at its best promotes. And Bernadette said that, as the conference progressed, she got the feeling that many of her fellow academics were opening up and becoming more comfortable about sharing their ideas.

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The first afternoon panel we attended was on the works of Samuel R. Delany, and there in the back row was Samuel R. Delany. I suppose there's a tendency for one to be a bit wary in a situation like that. When I took Charles Platt's New School course in Science Fiction, I found myself talking at great length about each work, until we came to CAMP CONCENTRATION, and Thomas Disch attended the class. My silence was less awe (I was able to keep my feelings down to a civilized level of respect) than the realization that all semester long I had been saying, "The author is obviously...", and here was the author himself ready to point out, if he chose, that the author was obviously doing no such thing.

Delany was sensitive to the problems his role caused, and asked to be referred to as the "writer," rather than the "author," because "author" sounded like "authority." He did make some interesting remarks as writer, saying he found one interpretation "oddly moving" and gently pointing out that the White author of another paper had not quite precisely summarized Black feelings about the civil rights movement.

I like the idea that the writer is not a privileged Author[ity] on the One True Meaning of the work, largely because I don't believe in the One True Meaning. I've tried to peddle this idea before, but have had trouble convincing many readers, particularly those who fear that the only alternative is an anarchy wherein there is no reason whatsoever for preferring one version to another.

Before embarking on this trip, I had finally gotten around to reading THE DANCING WU LI MASTERS (Bantam pb), Gary Zukav's excellent summary of the apparently mystical and occult aspects of contemporary physics. Zukav mentions the problems in subatomic physics that began with the Uncertainty Principle, Werner Heisenberg's discovery that it is literally impossible to know both the position and the velocity of a particle at a given time. This and other anomalies led to the Copenhagen Interpretation of Quantum Physics, the idea that, at the quantum level, the state of affairs (known as the "state vector") is not a set of facts, knowable if we are clever enough to discover & interpret the relevant data, but a mass of probabilities & possibilities, having only a potential existence until one of the potentialities is actualized by the act of measurement itself.

At the Delany Panel, I considered the possibility of a Copenhagen Interpretation of Literature. A literary work is, perhaps, a state vector, a set of probability waves. The reader actualizes one possibility in the act of reading. The critic actualizes a more specific interpretation. Perhaps there is a sort of Literary Uncertainty Principle whereby one cannot simultaneously determine the aesthetic merit of a work and its value in the class struggle, but each interpretation presents a true version of the work. (Or can do so. Quantum physics is not simply a matter of opinion, a pure subjectivity where anyone's view is as good as anyone else's. There are erroneous interpretations in both quantum physics and literary criticism. But the fact that two interpretations disagree does not mean that one of them is simply Wrong.)



And so I applied my Copenhagen Interpretation to the discussions of NOVA and BABEL-17, and decided that they all worked.

*

The next panel--on Hesse--was the only one I attended that featured a speaker with neither academic nor sf credentials. A woman described only as "an alumna of Florida Atlantic University" used "Hesse and the Search for the Beloved" as a stepping stone to a discussion of the Aquarian/New Episteme/New Age consciousness. She spoke of the reconciliation of right and left hemispheres, of planetary awareness, of transcendence of the old rigid forms for power and knowledge, and in fact of the same things Zukav discussed in his book. I found her message familiar, as my readers may have guessed, but others may well have profited from it, unless of course their minds snapped shut with some "explanatory" phrase like "hippie," "anarchist," or "Marin County," or refused to open at the beginning, having been warned by her lack of Official Credentials.

*

Delany returned in the evening with a Keynote Speech on the teaching of sf. He began by pointing to the horrors wrought upon poetry by the American school system in its efforts to teach poetry as if it were prose with short lines. He suggested that an effort to fit sf into the mold of mainstream literature could lead to the same sort of problem.

He pointed out that the reading of sf does in fact require a sort of altered state of consciousness in which given facts & limitations of the world of consensus reality have been transcended. Many otherwise intelligent people fail to appreciate sf when they attempt to read it not because of any literary limitations that the work might have (he made the point that style could not be an absolute limitation because in fact English-speaking readers have been able to appreciate the genius of works rendered in the inept prose of Constance Garnett, H. Lowe-Porter, C. Scott Moncrieff, and other translators), but because they, as readers, were incapable of putting themselves into a situation where it is possible to travel from one planet to another.

Delany was attempting to navigate between Scylla & Charybdis. On the one hand, sf has traditionally had a theory, with the grandiosity that comes only from defensiveness and fear, that it is a kind of slannish literature, a mutant so superior to its ancestors that it cannot be judged by their merely human standards. On the other hand, he was correct in pointing out that one can judge sf by the same standards as, let us say, Saul Bellow; and of course sf loses, but one can't help feeling that something has been left out.

The debate can get to be fairly anthropomorphic, with one side saying that sf "deserves" to be treated better, while the other maintains it should not be "privileged."

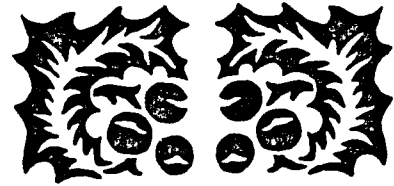
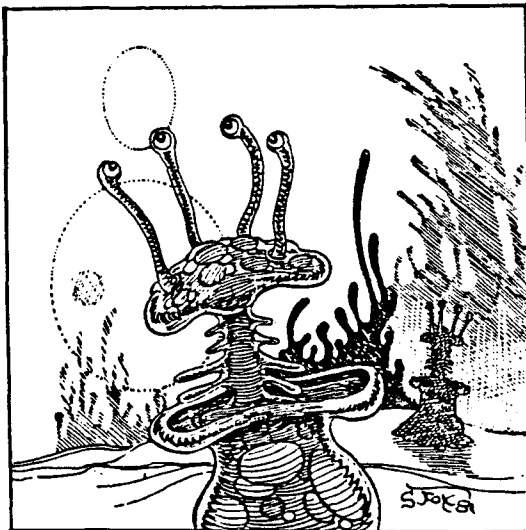
Here I thought again of the Copenhagen interpretation. One way of looking at some sf book will tell us that it contains brilliant speculative thinking, consistently applied, with the conclusions of a particular paradigm shift imaginatively, yet rigorously derived. Another approach is that it is far inferior in prose, characterization, and imagery to any number of mimetic works. Assume that both these viewpoints are consistent and can be supported by reference to the text. The latter has said, at least, that this is a book that is not of interest to him. OK. The former has said that by applying his approach we can find a work that is interesting, one that rewards reading and study. Why should we not do so? The argument for Delany's approach, then, is not that the work "is" better, or "deserves" a different reading, but that such an approach offers the promise of enjoyable literary experiences.

FRIDAY

The first session seemed unpromising, so I yielded to the temptation to sleep a bit late. The second session included a panel on time-travel paradoxes, chaired by Justin Leiber, a philosopher as well as the author of *BEYOND REJECTION*. This was the least "literary" panel that I attended. It dealt almost entirely with philosophical and logical problems. At one point, the chair suggested that one panelist's presentation would have been better & more complete had its author read and understood *THE BIG TIME*. This was by no means mere nepotism.

*

In the afternoon came the panel I was most looking forward to: Stanley Fogel's "Fantastic Contemporaries: Front Pagers in Modern Fiction." I mentioned earlier that I like the idea of something like "the fantastic"



to cover works which are obviously in some sense "mainstream" and yet seem in some ways that I cannot precisely define to give me the same kind of pleasure that I get from the sf I like best.

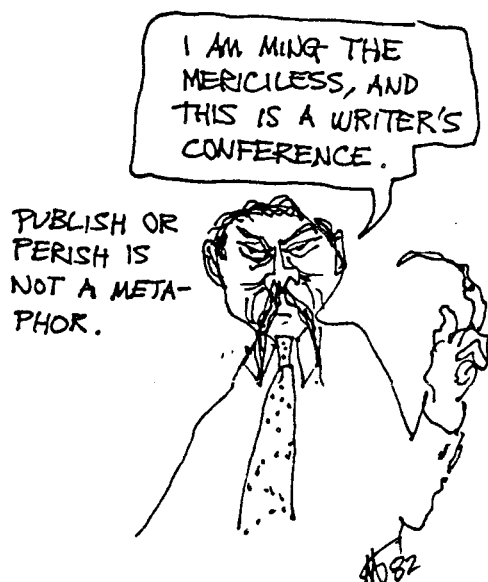
One group of books that seems to fall into, or at least intersect, that set, is the group under discussion here, books in which actual and undisguised historical personages appear for fantastic purposes. This group includes Robert Coover's *THE PUBLIC BURNING*, a somewhat nonmimetic treatment of the Rosenberg trial, narrated by one Richard Nixon. (I would insist that Coover did a better job of making his protagonist human & credible than the Lord did.) There is also E.L. Doctorow's *RAGTIME* (now a movie) and his version of the Rosenberg case, *THE BOOK OF DANIEL*. (I was highly disappointed that a paper comparing the Coover & Doctorow books, which was scheduled for the conference, was not delivered.) Not to mention Wilson's *MASKS OF THE ILLUMINATI*, Ishmael Reed's *FLIGHT TO CANADA*, etc.

The panel did not deal with those, except in a few introductory remarks. There was a rather sober, but well done, consideration of Donald Barthelme's "Robert Kennedy Saved from Drowning"; a discussion of how Truman Capote appears in his own fiction, and the way he presents a version of himself that is less pleasant than the real thing (I'm sure that can't be easy); and most surprisingly, a discussion by a scholar of Italian literature and history of the presentation of Mussolini in Niven & Pournelle's *INFERNO* (she found great verisimilitude in it). Afterwards, Bernadette & I went out for a drink with a panelist and discovered that one main source of his enthusiasm for this conference was the temperature differential between Boca & Canada, where he teaches.

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The evening brought a lecture by Academic Guest of Honor Richard Ellman, biographer of Yeats, Joyce, and Wilde. Ellman delivered a lecture on the history of the concept of decadence, particularly in the writings of the three men whose lives he has chronicled. It was learned, impeccably researched, filled with useful detail, and it had absolutely nothing to do with our conference. Well, no, I shouldn't say that. At one point, Dr. Ellman did use the term "fantastic," and he smiled as he said it, although I could not tell you whether his smile signified, "You see, I am trying to tell you something in your specialty" or "Well, here's a bone for you low-rent sci-fi types."

6



SATURDAY

And now the Conference and the Convention met. The convention officially began, and I found myself more drawn to their programing. What I went to was not faanish stuff about who Roscoe was or anything like that, but professional writers discussing their work and reactions to it.

The first panel was on sf series and included Robert Sheckley (who has never done any series), Fritz Leiber (who did Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser), and Jean Lorrah (who has published nothing but series books and says that editors are loath to look at one-book suggestions from her).

There is much talk in sf circles today about the Series Menace. Ellison devoted some time and effort to denouncing it in his Wednesday night speech. I think it goes back to about a decade ago when Philip Jose Farmer and Michael Moorcock and their publishers discovered that it's a better deal for everyone (except maybe the readers) to have three short books than one long one. Thus each idea by each of these writers became at least a trilogy. Other writers, like Piers Anthony, began to follow. And so on.

The urgency of the threat was underscored by one bit of news that reached me at the con in the form of galleys from LOCUS which were on display at Rusty Hevelin's huckster table. Robert Silverberg had said, in his AMAZING column a few months earlier,

I would be very much surprised to find myself writing a true sequel to LORD VALENTINE'S CASTLE--the idea dismays and depresses me....I'm fairly confident that it won't happen.

And now the announcement that Silverberg had signed to write--you guessed it!--VALENTINE PONTIFEX, a sequel to LVC. (And an additional announcement that the pious hope of many readers that GOD-EMPEROR OF DUNE had finished off that series for once and for all was premature, and Herbert has just signed a \$1.5-million contract to do yet another sequel.)

And it may be that history is on their side. At one point, moderator Joseph Green asked the audience how many of them read series because they like the idea of series. More than half raised their hands.

As I thought about that question, I realized that I have an actively negative approach to many series. For instance, I particularly enjoyed Jack Chalker's MIDNIGHT OF THE WELL OF SOULS and Jacqueline Lichtenberg's HOUSE OF ZEOR, but found that later books set in the same reality no longer held my interest. Perhaps it was a feeling that I did not really want to remember the special conditions of these series from book to book. The one series that I do enjoy book after book in is Marion Zimmer Bradley's Darkover series, and MZB has repeatedly stated that she sees it not as a series, but as a Human Comedy in the manner of Balzac, set in a common reality which, except for the reality of psi, is not that different from a possible Terran historical one.

[Actually, what bothered me most on that panel was not anything about series, but a throw-away line. Jean Lorrah is a college professor as well as a writer. She mentioned that she had long since given up hope that her undergraduates would recognize any manner of literary reference, even to best sellers, and had been for years picking her examples from television. Now, she informs us, the kids don't even watch TV. They seem to have no discernible inputs.]

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The second panel was on writers & critics, featuring Gene Wolfe and Samuel R. Delany as the former; Eric S. Rabkin as the latter; and James Gunn as both. Moderator William Wu introduced the group. Delany & Gunn spoke pretty much as expected. Rabkin delivered a particularly witty & thoughtful discussion of the role of criticism, treating it as something which, like literature, is written for an audience. And then Wolfe surprised me.

Wolfe quite deliberately writes his books in a prose of extreme difficulty & compression. One suspects that someday there will be a Wolfe Industry in the universities studying his works, though it will probably never reach the extent of the Pound or Joyce industry. Nonetheless, Wolfe began by saying that the academics had killed poetry, and turned it into a veritable fossil, that they had divided the novel into the Serious Novel ("you know, the one about the fifty-year-old college professor whose marriage is breaking up, which we've all read and loved so many times") and the Pop Novel, for which no standards apply, and that given half a chance they would perform the same service for sf. Rabkin replied, pointing out that poetry was in fact done in by a variety of external circumstances, and that academe is in fact the only reason why any of it survives. And a most interesting dialog ensued. Gunn provided what may have been the perfect synthesis when he said that the ideal critic for sf is someone with all the knowledge & skills of literary criticism that the academy can provide, who has also read and loved sf since the age of seven. Perhaps the best thing about the conference was the feeling I got that there were an awful lot of people in this group.

[And perhaps the apparent anomalies in the discussion can be explained by one exchange late in the hour. Rabkin, with a hurt look on his face, turned to Wolfe and said, "But you agreed with me last time we were on a panel together," and Wolfe replied, "Yes, and do you remember how boring it was?"]

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In the evening, we saw a truncated version of Tom Stoppard's absolutely delightful play, *TRAVESTIES*, and heard a most enjoyable lecture by Stoppard himself. That, too, may not be recognizably sf/f, but it's fantastic in some sense, and I enjoy it.



SUNDAY

One last contrast between conference & convention became apparent. At the conference there were formal presentations. Essentially the hour and a half was divided into three half-hour segments, and at least 20 minutes of each half hour was taken up by the reading of a paper. Sunday morning, we attended a panel on Tarot in sf/f. Moderator Jacqueline Lichtenberg began by saying that this was obviously such a big topic that she'd like the audience to tell her what part of the topic they'd like to hear about, and she and fellow-panelists Fritz Leiber and Somtow Sucharitkul would improvise from there.

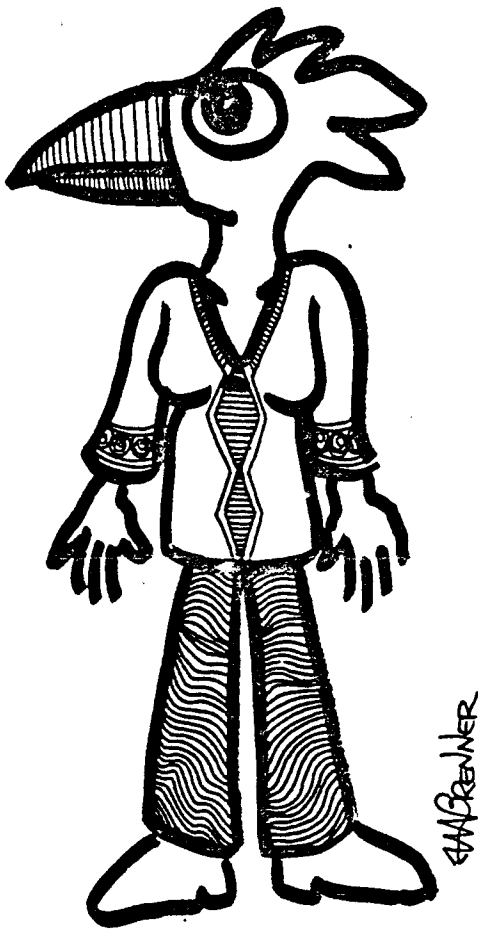
Obviously, there are advantages to both of these approaches. The conference approach has little or no spontaneity; should the audience be inspired to further discussion of what has been presented to them, there is little or no chance within the framework of the program for such discussion to take place (though as I mentioned, sometimes audience & panel can continue the discussion at the bar or elsewhere). The convention approach allows for that. On the other hand, if the audience cannot think of anything interesting to discuss, the casual convention approach can lead to an utter ordeal, or at least the possibility of one, unless one has the (obviously minimal) courage to walk out on one's own panel, as I did last year at Empiricon when no one including me could think of anything terribly interesting to say on the subject of "Fandom: What's It All About?"

SUMMARY

And so academe and fandom have met, with no bloodshed, or at least none that I've heard about. What conclusions may we draw from all this?

The world is full of undeclared wars, like the one between the overachievers and the underachievers. I suspect that another major one is between those with positive and negative imprints on the word *serious*. I suspect that, as a rule, academics tend to belong to the former group, and fans to the latter.

To some, and I am one of these, the connotations of the word "serious" are negative. "Serious" is the medical term for a condition not quite as bad as "critical." [That use of the word in this context leads to a train of thought which will not be pursued at this time.] "Serious" is a situation where bad things are liable to happen to you; "serious" is what your teacher or the government makes you do; "serious" is the antonym of "fun."



8

Fandom is not serious. No one is in it for the money. No one has to publish or perish. If it isn't fun, you don't have to do it, and many people behave accordingly.

But all too often, fandom is not serious in the good sense of the word "serious." Fandom can be as trivial as cars & hairstyles.

Worse yet, all too often fandom is serious about not being serious, and that may be the worst trap of all. Some of the reaction to academe has always seemed to me to be based on a fear that anything resembling serious study will simply kill sf and fandom, that somehow merely by applying their critical approach to sf, academics could somehow magically transform it into something as boring as [insert favorite Horrible Example from the last English class They made you take].

Fandom can be serious about not being serious in the sense of forbidding conversation on topics deemed too serious (including, ironically enough, sf itself). There is an approach now which seems to me to get the whole thing precisely backward. It is an approach that talks at great length about setting STANDARDS for fannish writing, and "standards" is a word that I associate with seriousness as the antonym of "fun." At the same time, these serious critics are every bit as serious about restricting conversational topics to the most trivial. I mentioned earlier the image of the Fellowship and the Quest. I will suggest that the two somehow attract each other--that those embarked on a Quest that they truly care about will seek comrades & allies along the way, and conversely that there is something about Fellowship that makes those involved in it seek out a Quest, and that if none is to be found, they will make a Quest of Fellowship itself. This would perhaps explain one fannish phenomenon I find most curious--the way fandom, especially the kind I've been talking about just now, tends to be exclusively about itself.

But for others, "serious" is a positive word, opposed to "silly," "trivial," "frivolous," and "pointless." Perhaps if you've been exposed to a social set where cars or hairstyles are the approved topic, and everything with more content is condemned as "serious," you'd want to be serious.

Academic criticism is serious. Often (see EXTRAPOLATION and SCIENCE-FICTION STUDIES, *passim*) it is serious in the worst sense of the word--obviously done to avoid bad consequences like unemployment; obviously done by someone who has to, rather than someone who wants to; obviously the opposite of "fun," "casual," "humorous," and other such positive terms.

But it can also be serious in the best sense of the word--serious in that it's done by someone to whom it's important; serious as opposed to trivial and silly; serious because it means something to its author, and thus will mean something to a reader who is likewise serious enough to care about what is being discussed.

One does not expect fans and academics to form a total alliance. Indeed, there are and always will be differences of approach. But I would suggest that we recall what Korzybski has always told us about signal reactions--that when we allow our positive or negative imprints on words to influence our behavior, we are depriving ourselves of the freedom to react to what is really going on. Even though these people are/are not serious, they're doing some interesting stuff. Check it out for yourself.

Hail Eris,

Arthur

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