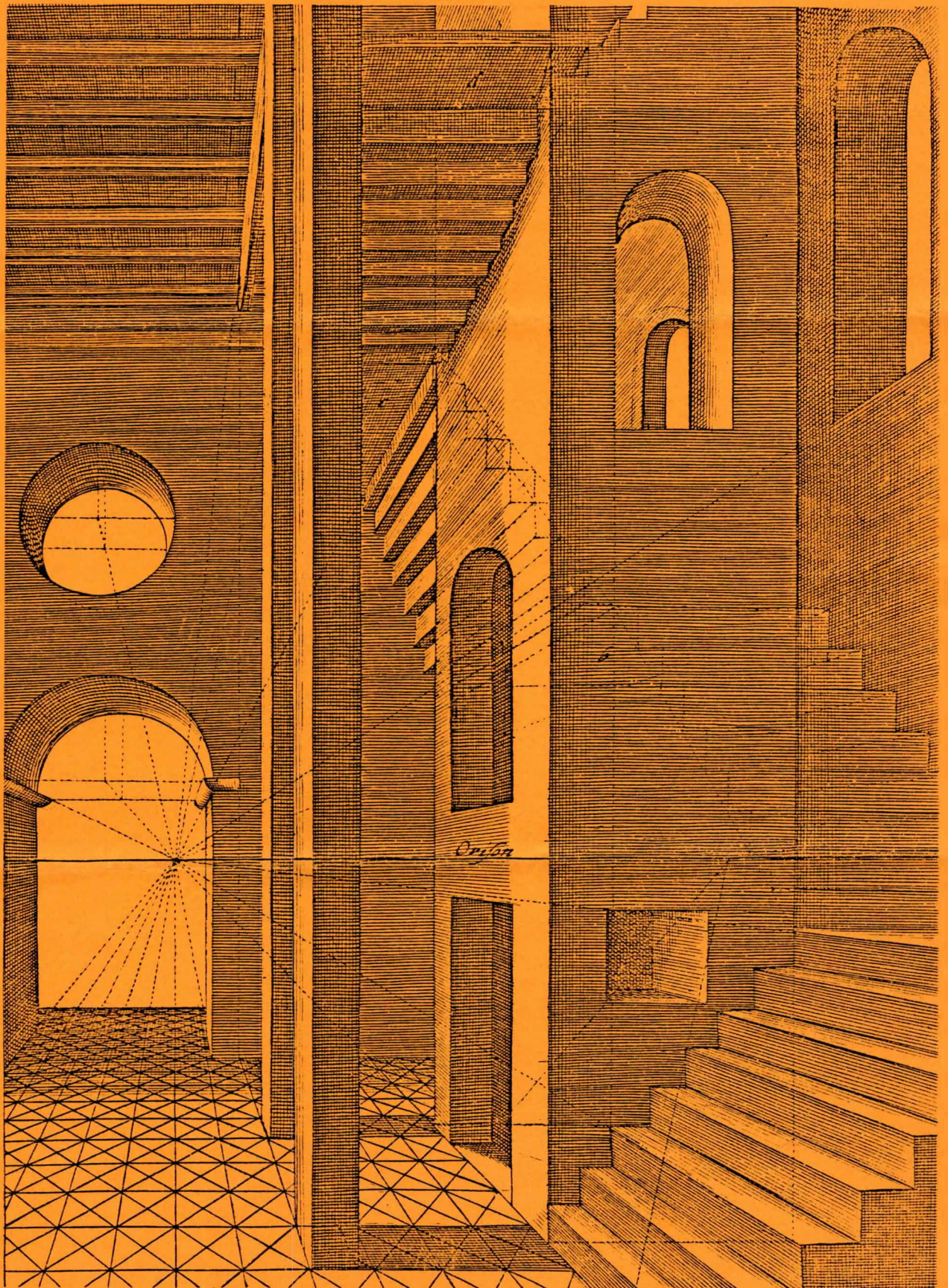


LINES OF OCCURRENCE 7



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, and anything else the editor feels like accepting. It is copyright © 1983 by Arthur D. Hlavaty. All rights returned to contributors. This is W.A.S.T.E. Paper #453.

History may not be eager to record that the Fourth International Conference on the Fantastic, held 24-27 March, 1983, in Boca Raton, FL, was the first time Bernadette Bosky ever presented a scholarly paper at a public gathering. It should be, but it may not be.

In any event, that was my motivation for attending. Bernadette & I had attended the previous one, and I enjoyed it more than not (see *Lines of Occurrence* 5), but the expense & difficulty of travel, and the fact that I was scheduled for two other major excursions on the preceding & following weeks, argued against it. I'd received a flyer for the conference which I did not care for. It seemed to be seeking respectability--saying that what they wanted was papers on Real Literary People like Emily Dickinson and Charles Dickens, and not a lot of that sigh-fie stuff.

But Bernadette wrote to the Conference, offering to present a paper she had written, and a few weeks before it was scheduled to start, she heard from Professor Gary K. Wolfe, who said that her paper would fit into a session he was running.

Of course, I wanted to see & hear my beloved make her literary debut, and so we planned to attend. Further encouragement came from our friends Tony Parker & Judy Bemis, who had put us up/put up with us the previous year, and now were offering to do so again. We accepted.



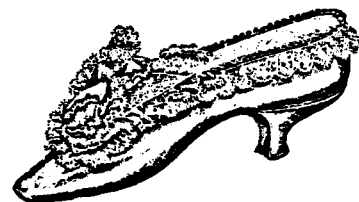
And so on Wednesday evening, we entrusted ourselves to Piedmont Airlines, which delivered us to Miami airport, where Tony & Judy picked us up. The next morning, we were over at the Boca Raton Sheraton (the previous year's site) registering for the Conference.

A look at the program book indicated that the respectability trend had not gotten hopelessly out of hand. As last year, there were papers (and a few entire sections) on mainstream with at best a tenuous connection to f/sf and on obscure and bizarre areas (one entire section on fantastic tombstone art),

but there too was the kind of thing I enjoy--discussion of good contemporary f/sf writers, and interdisciplinary discussion invoking areas like philosophy and religion as well as the purely literary.

[RANT BREAK: "Interdisciplinary studies" are a necessity. The university may be divided into departments, but the universe isn't. As the borderlines of a discipline are defined, then fortified, insularity can creep in. The field can become closed, self-referential, stultifying, missing all the good stuff going on outside. It has been argued, for instance, that science fiction itself, by remaining open to influences outside of the strictly literary, has thus been able to escape some of the less fortunate trends in serious lit. from fashionable pessimism to the belief that story telling is no longer possible. On the other hand, it can be argued that a successful interdisciplinary project eventually builds new walls, and becomes as insular in its own way, devoted to doing the same old stuff in the same old ways. See Del Rey books, *passim*. END RANT BREAK.]

The first session included a panel that offered evidence that good contemporary sf could still be discussed here; it was devoted to Roger Zelazny. It also offered evidence of the remarkable organizing skills of the conference: Of the three people scheduled to present papers at that session, two were simultaneously scheduled to be at other parts of the program. (The third wasn't at the conference at all.) The papers were all enjoyable. Gregory Shreve discussed the vision of future man/machine union as shown in *Coils*; Joseph Sanders pointed out the evolution of Zelazny's moral vision in the *Dilvish* stories (which he's been writing for 20 years); and Joseph Francavilla pointed out that Zelazny's view of immortality has always transcended the standard negative approaches, of which Swift's *struldbrugs* are typical.



And then it was Bernadette's turn in the second session. Her paper covered two 19th-century horror stories--FitzJames O'Brien's "What Was It?" and Ambrose Bierce's "The Damned Thing." Both deal with invisible things. Bernadette applied Todorov's theory of the fantastic as a literature which hesitates between the "uncanny" (which offers rational explanation) and the "marvelous" (which does not). On several levels, O'Brien treats his invisible thing as nasty, but explicable, while Bierce's tale leaves all in doubt.

I have a problem in reporting the session. It was entitled "The Fantastic and the Fairy

Tale in the 19th Century." Having gone to a boys' prep school, I find it difficult to utter the phrase "fairy tale" without snickering. (The fact that one paper was on Oscar Wilde does not help.) In any event, it was a strange session in one regard. Apparently Wolfe and the other two panelists were used to doing these things together. They'd added Bernadette because the third panelist had cancelled. She was not snubbed, or anything like that; it's just that they were old friends, and she was not.

First Bernadette presented her paper, and I thought she did quite well. The Wilde paper was moderately interesting. The third paper, by Jules Zanger, was much more so. It compared the classic folk tale of the traveler who falls among the Wee Folk for what he thinks is merely an overnight visit, only to discover that he's been gone for years, with the supposedly true 18th- and 19th-century tales of Indian captivity. Zanger demonstrated the parallels clearly, indicating that there were of course major differences as well. It was the sort of paper I really enjoy. Afterwards Bernadette & the others fielded a few questions.

In the evening, we were treated to a delightful session of reminiscences by Elders Fritz Leiber & Frederik Pohl.

Friday's schedule began at 9 AM, and Bernadette & I attended the session on "Religion and Twentieth Century Fantasy." It was supposed to be chaired by Melissa Barth, whom we'd had the pleasure of meeting last year, but she was replaced by one David Miller, a white-bearded man whose face showed that he'd been overindulging in the Florida sunshine. He read his own paper on the gods in Herbert's *Dune* series. Peter Macky, another speaker we remembered from last year, then discussed *Till We Have Faces*. It seems that he always speaks on C. S. Lewis, in a manner rather reminiscent of his subject--intelligent, direct, controversial insofar as his religious beliefs are, but not argumentative for the sake of argument. He will not dazzle you with brilliance, but neither will he baffle you with bullshit. Then Judith Kollman spoke on the use of the Tarot in Charles Williams's *The Greater Trumps*. I must confess that I would have been more impressed had she not consistently pronounced the final T in "Tarot."

For the second morning session, we decided to forego the fantastic tombstones, and even a paper on "The Phallic French Moon Voyage," and attend the session on "Parallel Universes." There Robert Ewald summarized some of Simak's creations. David Miller once again impersonated Melissa Barth (most unconvincingly, by his own admission), reading an interesting and innovative paper of hers on the structure of fantasy worlds, as shown in a C. L. Moore story. Finally, William Schuyler, another familiar face from last year, presented a more strictly philosophical paper, on how philosophers consider the problem of alternate worlds, with asides like a summary of E. E. Smith's approach to scientific plausibility as "if you shovel it fast enough, nobody'll know what you're shoveling."

What we considered perhaps the best sessions of the whole conference took place that afternoon. They were a pair of sessions on "Motifs and Structures of Higher States of Consciousness," chaired by an Englishman named Ralph Yarow. The first paper, given by one Carmine Sarracino, aroused my suspicions because of the repeated references in the abstract to the wisdom of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. The Maharishi has something of a cult image, and one is tempted to expect, as with Sun Moon or the late L. Ron Hubbard, from his followers a blank look, dogmatic certainty, and the tone of a recorded announcement.

All wrong. Sarracino sounded intelligent, and his religion was no more intrusive or overbearing than Macky's.

Then Peter Malekin, of the University of Durham (England, not here) spoke on the model of the mind used by Plotinus and other mystics, and how writers like Shakespeare and Blake have reflected the same model. Finally C. W. Spinks, a man who obviously knows Stuff, related the philosophy of C. S. Peirce to "semiotic means of expanding consciousness," including Zen koans. What I followed in all of that I liked a whole lot.

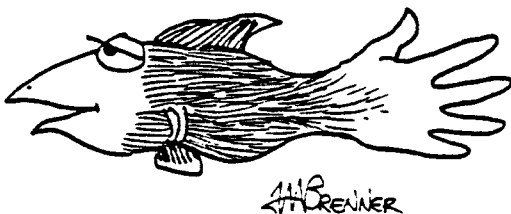


At this point, Bernadette & I went separate ways. She attended the second part of the consciousness session, while I went to one on "Imaginary Societies as Social Criticism." There I heard a discussion of *Cat's Cradle* which seemed simplistic in treating Bokanovism as nothing but an opiate of the masses, rather than recognizing the extent to which it, like my own Discordian faith, is simultaneously a religion and a parody of religion, and in some ways valid as both. Then Peter Macky talked on *Out of the Silent Planet*. I enjoyed the book in spite of those aspects Macky emphasized, the preaching of sex as strictly reproductive and the idea that man should keep his fallen filthiness away from cleaner and more godly planets. Finally there was a discussion of *The Man in the High Castle* which gave no indication that anyone before Dick or since had ever written an alternate history. (As I write this, I find myself wondering if I might not have subconsciously chosen a panel where I could feel superior, rather than one like the previous one, where the panelists quite obviously seemed to know much more than I did.)

In any event, Bernadette reported that at the second consciousness panel, the discussions of Lem and Lessing were quite good, and Malekin's paper on "The Tempest" and some Ellison stories as consciousness-altering devices was just about awesome. (Harlan Ellison, who unbeknownst to Malekin was in the audience, thought very highly of it, and said so to Malekin afterwards. I arrived as Ellison was presenting Malekin with an autographed first edition of *Deathbird Stories* in token of his appreciation.)



In the evening there was a panel featuring some of the writers at the conference--Harlan Ellison, Kate Wilhelm, Gene Wolfe, Julian May, and Brian Aldiss. The main topic was the current market for sf, including the best-seller status of a few writers, and whether or not it was a good thing. To Ellison & Wilhelm, it threatened the current fate of mainstream fiction, where a book is a best seller, or it is nothing; there is no "mid-list." To May, whose books are moving towards best-seller status, it is a time of opportunity. As ever, nothing was resolved.



Saturday's panels were interesting, if not as inspiring as the one on consciousness. The first we attended was on the works of Brian Aldiss. Aldiss himself, as I have mentioned, was at the conference, but did not attend this panel, because of modesty, or unwillingness to make the panelists self-conscious, or perhaps just because he'd been reveling late the night before. There were only two papers: Philip E. Smith presented a careful and ingenious look at some of the many patterns in Aldiss's *Last Orders*, a book which obviously contains more than meets the eye (or at least my eye). Willis McNelly's paper discussed entropy and stasis in Aldiss's fiction, with particular attention to *Report on Probability A*, which contains much of the latter.

In the second session, we heard about "Narrative Strategies in Fantasy and Science Fiction." Tom Dunn gave an excellent comparison of how two books--*The Dispossessed* and *Gateway*--use an alternating-chapter structure. The other paper, on humor in the fiction of Jack Vance, suffered by comparison, being mostly on the plot-summary level, but I enjoyed it, as the books discussed--*Space Opera* and *The Many Worlds of Magnus Ridolph*--apparently are funny, and the humor came through in the descriptions.

After lunch we attended the session on "Philosophy, Science, and Science Fiction." There the lugubrious voice of Justin Leiber compared and contrasted Plato's *Republic* and Heinlein's *Space Cadet*. Plato won. Richard Wolters suggested that philosophy itself was beginning to resemble science fiction, in that more and more philosophers were using thought experiments, a trend he viewed with at least some alarm. Finally, Frederick Bruce Olsen, one of the few participants in the whole conference with no Official Affiliation, presented parts of a massive classification scheme he has devised which, among other things, is supposed to enable us to tell for sure whether a book is science fiction.

For the last session of the day, we attended a panel on "the Locus of Fantasy," a title which was apparently not intended to be a pun. It was a sort of grab bag of three papers that didn't fit into other categories, and on top of that, the scheduled chairman wasn't there. Still, it turned out quite well. Roger Schlobin, who took over the chair, showed how to do it, making the panelists feel that they were a part of things and drawing connections between the papers. He himself talked on the *locus amoenus* or "pleasant place"--that land which the Quest hero often encounters, where peace, comfort, and contentment attempt to lure him from his Quest. The pleasant place is always a trap. A paper by an unpublished fiction writer on how she went about writing her unfinished novel sounds unpromising, to say the very least, but Nancy James made it work. She is working on a juvenile fantasy novel. She described her studies of how other fantasy writers (Lewis, Donaldson, and Baum, among others)

have gotten their characters into the fantasy world: how she synthesized their approaches; and how, having done all that, she then decided to do it her own way. Most enjoyable. The session concluded with a paper on "the Garden of Eden motif in James Baldwin," which likewise was better than one might have guessed.

And then it was time for the banquet, to be followed by Harlan Ellison's GoH speech. Last year, there had been a formal sit-down banquet, but this time they had scheduled a buffet. This did not seem like an entirely inspired idea. For one thing, it led to a long food line and complications in determining who had paid for the banquet. (Those who'd paid in advance had blue dots on their badges; those--like me--who had paid at the time of registration were supposed to have gotten dots, but didn't. Fortunately, I had a receipt.) For another thing, the banquet was outdoors, and the sky looked very threatening.

Bernadette & I finally got our food, much of which was quite good. We did not feel particularly sociable, and so, rather than seeking people out, we took an empty table.

In Robert Sheckley's delightful *Mindswap*, Juan Valdez explains the Theory of Searches: You can go out and look everywhere for whoever or whatever you seek, or you can stay in one spot and wait for everything to come to you. The latter method works more often than one might suspect. As we sat there, Julian May took a seat at the table, and when I went back for seconds, I returned to find that Harlan Ellison had taken my seat.

Well, not exactly. His lovely & intelligent companion Jenny (last name unknown to me) was sitting about where I'd been, and Bernadette was getting another chair. What followed was most enjoyable. Ellison was very much in his public persona, talking fast and doing bits, and he does that quite well. While he was somewhat onstage, he was not monopolizing the conversation, and the talk was pleasant. Brian Aldiss came over and Ellison said, "Brian, you're supposed to be drunk and offensive when you introduce me." Aldiss graciously assured him that he would.

I noticed one contrast about the writers. Julian May has written three novels which have achieved some popular success and award nominations. She is proud of her work, and makes no secret of such feelings. Ellison is of course legendary for his literary self-confidence. I am somewhat conditioned to believe that admitting to a high opinion of one's own work is a Bad Thing. And yet I wonder. The critics who treat such self-praise as universally bad all strike me as somewhat prissy. Of course, when there is a huge gap between the writer's opinion of his own work and the work's merit, the result is laughable. This does not seem to be the case with May. I have not read her books, but I get the impression that she is at least a competent popular novelist. (I mean, it's not

as if her popularity came from unconscious kinky sex in her books, or something like that.) Nevertheless, I felt somewhat uncomfortable about her self-evaluation.

Perhaps it was something Bernadette had mentioned before the conference in a different context. Self-praise sounds better when it is mixed with praise for others. Ellison does this. While speaking publicly or privately, he deferred to elders like Leiber and Aldiss, and when Bernadette mentioned knowing Dave Drake, he said, "Good writer." ("But a bit violent," added the author of "The Whimper of Whipped Dogs.")

Then it was time for the GoH speech. Aldiss introduced the speech with some charming reminiscences, including one gathering where, he told us, Ellison kept insisting that they all watch something called "Demon with a Glass Dong."

The speech was, like last year's performance, delightful. Ellison told jokes and stories, embellishing the legend of his own public weirdness and berserker rages. He also made serious points about the imprisonment of the sf writer in a fixed category, as in the *Publishers Weekly* review of Robert Silverberg's new mimetic historical novel, *Lord of Darkness*, which assumed that the book was supposed to be fantasy and thus complained that the fantasy elements were minimal. The Harlan Ellison Show was, as ever, well worth the price of admission.



The following morning, the show ended, with a panel on scholarly approaches to sf. It began with James Gunn, the first Grand Amphibium to combine recognized achievement as sf writer and literary scholar, talking about his work. Then Brian Aldiss spoke, and it was quite enjoyable, though he did not have all that much to say specifically about scholarship and research.

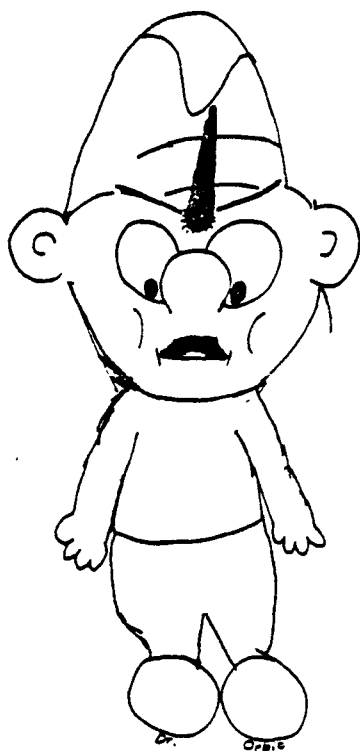
Roger Schlobin spoke about microcomputers as useful tools for the scholar, discussing word-processing and data-base programs and handing out a list of recommended products. He obviously knows a good deal about the field, but one thing he did not convey was an awareness that computer hardware and software can be at least as controversial a subject as literature. I myself could probably do a page or two here on my specific disagreements with him, but that would bore all but the nee-neeps in the audience, so I will merely give as one example that his was the first list of

recommended dot-matrix printers I've ever seen that did not mention Epson.

Then there was another panelist who wished to complain about the trouble publishers give when you try to get their permission to quote from copyrighted works that are being criticized and analyzed. Questions from the floor made it fairly clear that he had brought much of the problem on himself by asking for a whole bunch of permissions for a critical anthology at once instead of having individual writers ask for permissions. Finally Chair Marshall Tymn discussed and listed bibliographic source materials.

And that was the end. The program listed a brunch, but that turned out to be just a hotel function that conference participants could attend if they felt like it. (This was a prime example of the communications breakdown between the conference staff and the hotel.)

It was, despite my prior misgivings and the organizing skills of the conference leaders, a pleasurable and informative gathering. Next year Bernadette will probably give an even better paper and hopes to chair a panel on literary aspects of Peter Straub. I plan to be there.



"What do you mean
'Unicorns are the
Smurfs of fandom.'?"



Go West, Young Man

I do not approve of brutal fanzine reviews, but sometimes I see such a good example of the slash-&-burn school of reviewing that my pleasure overcomes my moral feelings.

The latest *Tappen* ("mysteriously available" from Malcolm Edwards, 28 Duckett Road, London N4 1BN, ENGLAND) contains such an article. There D. West, in the course of a rambling con report, does a wondrously vicious, but not unjustified, putdown of British fanzines.

His first telling point is their context-dependent (or, less politely, in-groupy) nature. As he says, a British zine cannot be understood without knowing a "whole web of personal allusions and knowledge." In other words, one who does not personally associate with British fandom will get nothing out of a Britzine, rather like most one-shots and a few American zines like the misnamed *Nothing Left to the Imagination*, where, as the saying goes, "You had to be there."

He then pinpoints another notorious Britzine trait: squeamishness, which he further parodies by using their own euphemism, "reticence." He demonstrates the panicky British tendency to treat Americans who speak openly of things like sex, self-actualization, or their own thoughts and feelings, even cheerful ones and notorious pontificators, as if they were beating their chests in a self-pitying proclamation of neuroses.

He also shows the psychological acuity to recognize the macho tendency (British zine fandom is much more predominantly male than American fandom) to deny that they are being squeamish, and to overcompensate with deliberate rudeness, rather like American jocks hitting each other on the shoulder and calling each other "y'old sunuvabitch" because the nature of their real feelings for each other will not bear examination.

All in all, it's a delightful performance, and mostly on target. But for all my appreciation and basic agreement, I cannot resist fairness. Not all British fandom is as bad as West proclaims. *Tappen* itself often rises above this level, as do Dave Langford's zines. *The Zine That Has No Name*, the zine which is not to be named, some of Rob Hansen's work, and others. Still, this article is a well-done and long-needed hatchet job.

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