

Lincroft-Holmdel Science Fiction Club
Club Notice - 4/10/87 -- Vol. 5, No. 39

MEETINGS UPCOMING:

Unless otherwise stated, all meetings are on Wednesdays at noon.

LZ meetings are in LZ 3A-206; MT meetings are in MT 4A-235.

_ D _ A _ T _ E _ T _ O _ P _ I _ C

04/22 LZ: MURMURS OF EARTH by Carl Sagan SF-related Non-Fiction

05/06 MT: THE HANDMAID'S TALE by Mainstream SF

Margaret Atwood

05/13 LZ: TO YOUR SCATTERED BODIES GO by Reincarnation

Phillip Jose Farmer

HO Chair: John Jetzt HO 1E-525 834-1563

LZ Chair: Rob Mitchell LZ 1B-306 576-6106

MT Chair: Mark Leeper MT 3E-433 957-5619

HO Librarian: Tim Schroeder HO 3M-420 949-5866

LZ Librarian: Lance Larsen LZ 3L-312 576-2068

MT Librarian: Bruce Szablak MT 4C-418 957-5868

Jill-of-all-trades: Evelyn Leeper MT 1F-329 957-2070

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1. I have been doing a series recently on the rising tide of square dancing in this area and, I am told (and this should scare you), at places like MIT. The vast majority of square dancers take their orders (which they term "calls") from a caller. The caller is sort of a local lieutenant in the conspiracy, but there appears to be no single leader of this conspiracy, no Reverend Moon of the Square Dancers. The callers go off to secret classes where they "learn to call." These have not been infiltrated by outsiders as far as I can tell, but there are hints about who might be pulling the strings in square dancing itself.

Think about what you have seen about square dancing. It is a very mathematical, very symmetrical form of dance. But who really sees the symmetry. The caller stands above the floor and can see the symmetry, but even there only from an angle. The perfect place to appreciate square dancing is directly overhead. So what does that imply? Lots of forms of dance can only be fully appreciated from directly overhead. But the June Taylor dancers who used to appear on the Jackie Gleason show and who specialize in this sort of geometric display, came along only after there were overhead

cameras to show the effects to an audience. When square dancing was invented, there were no such overhead cameras, at least none that the history books record. These were designs that could be appreciated only from the air directly overhead at a time when that was an impossible position for a human to get to... just like the

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mysterious figures on the plains of Nazca.

Clearly there is a possibility that square dancing was invented for the benefit of (and perhaps by) visitors from another world. It may have started when these alien visitors first "came to call." They now have a serious foothold in technical institutions in places like MIT and AT&T. Beware.

Mark Leeper
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...mtgzz!leeper

THE HANDMAID'S TALE by Margaret Atwood
Fawcett Crest, 1986 (1985c), \$4.95.
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper
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They say that politics make strange bedfellows, and they point to the feminists and the fundamentalists marching side-by-side to "take back the night" and punish all those horrible, evil pornographers. Well, Margaret Atwood has brought new meaning to that cliché of bedfellows. In a world where the fertility rate has been drastically reduced because of pollution and who knows what other evils, the Gileadean solution is that of Rachel and her handmaid Bilhah. And this is made palatable by couching it as the solution that both the anti-pornography ("AP") fundamentalists and the AP feminists have been promoting for years. The AP fundamentalists get the strict morality, the elimination of divorce, the return of woman to her role as keeper of the home. The AP feminists get the banning of pornography, the death penalty for rape, and the elimination of violence against women. So why do I have the feeling that none of those promoting these goals today would actually want the reality Atwood gives us?

Actually one of the characters makes the point best. There are two kinds of freedom, she says, freedom to and freedom from. Both the AP feminists and the AP fundamentalists have been emphasizing the freedom from: freedom from fear, freedom from violence, freedom from anything that offends, etc. (Sounds a bit like Franklin Roosevelt, doesn't it? But I digress.) They have forgotten that freedom from and freedom to have to balance out: an increase in one is only achieved by a decrease in the other. Or, as Henry Drummond says in I_n_h_e_r_i_t_t_h_e_W_i_n_d, "Yes, you can learn to fly. But the birds will lose their wonder, and the clouds will smell of gasoline." In the case of T_h_e_H_a_n_d_m_a_i_d's_T_a_l_e, the freedom from fear et al has been achieved by giving up the freedom to live as one chooses, to work in a profession, to have financial independence, to have an identity of one's own. The handmaids are "Ofglen" or "Offred"--which Atwood mislabels as patronymics--having given up their own names when they were recruited. The AP fundamentalists and the AP feminists have been so busy joining forces on what they want everyone to have freedom from that they have overlooked the fact that they disagree on what people should have freedom to. If they achieve their goals they may discover that the world they have made is not to their liking after all.

The other interesting point about the society that Atwood portrays is that it is very similar to another science fictional society--that of John Norman's "Gor" series. Bizarre though this sounds, let's examine the two. Atwood describes women's roles as being one of five types: Marthas, Handmaidens, Wives, Aunts, or Colonists. The Marthas do the cooking and cleaning; they are the equivalent of Norman's state slaves. Both dress in drab colors and do the menial work. The Handmaidens

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provide procreation (and sex); they are the equivalent of Norman's pleasure slaves. Both dress in red. The Wives are the equivalent of Norman's free companions--honored and respected, living their lives on a pedestal. The Aunts are the equivalent of the slaves who train the pleasure slaves (I don't recall if there is a specific term for them). The Colonists have no direct parallel, though a disobedient slave on Gor does end up doing some sort of unpleasant/dangerous work. While it's true that these roles are not unpredictable, the parallels between Gilead and Gor are thought-provoking, to say the least. Add to this

that Atwood, as part of the main character's description of her indoctrination, includes graphic descriptions of violent sex, and one wonders if those who would ban Norman's books would do the same to T h e H a n d m a i d' s T a l e. Consider the following excerpt from a proposed anti-pornography ordinance: "Pornography is the sexually explicit subordination of women, graphically depicted, whether in pictures or in words, that also includes one or more of the following: ... women are presented dehumanized as sexual objects, things or commodities...."

(Note that the portrayal does not have to be favorable.) My reading of this is that T h e H a n d m a i d' s T a l e would be considered pornographic by this definition. All this indicates, of course, is that this definition is crap.

I haven't said much about the book itself. That's because the plot itself is not that original, or enthralling, or amazing. It's what the book makes you think about that counts. Atwood makes you think about what can lead to this society and, conversely, what the actions and attitudes of today can lead to. It doesn't bear multiple readings the way a novel like L a s t a n d F i r s t M e n does. It's not a masterpiece of literary style. But the thoughts it generates will stay with you long after the details of the book itself have been forgotten.

BLIND DATE

A film review by Mark R. Leeper

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Capsule review: Slapdash comedy really shows up the deterioration of Blake Edwards's style. Two funny scenes and for the rest Edwards just seems to tread water.

Blake Edwards has been making comedies for a long time. He may be best known for the Inspector Clouseau films that starred Peter Sellers. Edwards has turned out a comedy every year or so since the mid Fifties, and since the early Seventies he has made little but comedies. Many of his comedies have been uproariously funny like T_h_e_P_a_r_t_y, but in my opinion he is having some trouble keeping up the level of his humor and his comedies work nowhere nearly as well as they once did. Edwards seems to be running out of ideas and his films seem to have less and less care lavished on each.

B_l_i_n_d_D_a_t_e has the feel of an hour-long script padded, mostly at the end, to be a full-length film. Like I_n_t_o_t_h_e_N_i_g_h_t and A_f_t_e_r_H_o_u_r_s, B_l_i_n_d_D_a_t_e is the story of how much can go wrong with someone's life in the course of a single night. After the story of that night, B_l_i_n_d_D_a_t_e finds itself with no story to tell and no place to go. The rest is just sort of tacked on.

Walter Davis (played by Bruce Willis) is a financial executive who needs to find a date to take to a business dinner. Against his better judgement, he allows his brother to fix him up with a woman he has never met. To his surprise she doesn't look like the underside of a rock. In fact, Nadia (played by Kim Basinger) is a knock-out. Then he makes his big mistake. Against the advice of his brother and Nadia's own reluctance, he gives her a drink of champagne. From that point on, Pandora's Box has been opened and Walter's life would never be the same again.

There are perhaps two scenes that actually work in this film; the rest of the film just frames those scenes, and not particularly imaginatively. Through much of the film people act in totally unexplainable ways on the weak script excuse that they are drunk, so not themselves. Often the script doesn't even make that much sense. One character spends a good part of the film driving through store fronts. The police never stop him and his car sustains only minor damages.

These days some very good comedies are coming out, with the current T_i_n_M_e_n, R_a_i_s_i_n_g_A_r_i_z_o_n, and perhaps O_u_t_r_a_g_e_o_u_s_F_o_r_t_u_n as prime examples. If Edwards is going to trade off of his name and do as

slipshod a job as this, he will soon have to hang it up. For the sake of a couple of scenes that do work, rate this one a 0 on the -4 to +4 scale.

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