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FROM THE SECRETARY:

Although Institute proceedings are primarily devoted to matters directly related to the betterment of the economic status of the profession, it has been suggested that on occasion some space might be devoted to discussion and demonstration of certain of the critical methods for content analysis that have been developed by some of our colleagues during the past few years. For purposes of explication, a previously unpublished but gripping vignette of contemporary life by Algis Budrys has been selected.

A man was sitting in a restaurant, and, having ordered, was supplied with a glass of water and a pat of butter. The waiter bent forward solicitously and asked:

"Would you like rye bread or white, sir?"

"Neither, thanks," replied the man in the restaurant, drawing two French rolls from a paper bag which he had brought with him. "I'll just butter 'ese."

Matters of space prevent a full exploration of the rich underlying symbolism, but even the most cursory examination of the man's reply will reveal what a skillful job Budrys has done of skillfully interweaving two themes that are basic to most good science fiction: voluntary castration and cannibalism. Gunderson's recent article in PMLA (Herbert W. Gunderson, "Excursus on Certain Archetypal Minoan Ritual Forms Preserved in Silverberg's 'Love Slaves of the Passion Planet'") touches on these matters but does not give adequate attention to the use of traditional linguistic techniques. When these are used as additional resources for critical analysis, the literal meaning of Budrys' last paragraph is immediately revealed:

"Neither, thanks," replied the lean and hungry man to the madam as he cut off his testicles, "I'll have a cheesemutburger."

The knightian implications of the taking of the two rolls from the bag are too obvious to require further discussion. What is interesting, however, is Budrys' rather subtle play on the word butter.

butter < ME butare < AS butter < L butyrum < Gr boutyron < Gr bous (ox) + tyros (cheese)

At this point Budrys makes use of the usual lexical resources. The denotation of ox of a castrated male and of tyro, a beginner, a novice, combine to further enforce the 'French rolls' metaphor. Tyros as 'cheese' of course supplies is with the other ingredient of the mutburger. "Lean and hungry" is the end product of an associative chain that starts with Caesar's description of Cassius' facial expression. We reach this through tracing 'butter' back to tyros again and then making a fresh start.

Gr tyros (cheese) E cheese < ME chese < AS cyra < L caseus > Cassius

"Madam" can automatically be derived when "restaurant" and "waiter" are placed in juxtaposition.

restaurant < OF restorer < L restaurare < Or stauros, an upright stick.

This reference, while demonstrating Budrys' relish for the Elizabethan pun, is too transparent to offer any real challenge to a reader with the most elementary grounding in knightian criticism, since a place of upright sticks is an obvious euphemism for 'bawdy house'.

waiter < OF, quaito, one who watches

And who stands around a bawdy house watching but the madam herself?

Later in this communication Poul (sic) Anderson, a West Coast writer who early established a solid critical reputation through his contributions to a now defunct little magazine under the pseudonym A. A. Craig (N.B. "Virgins of the Void", Planet Stories XLV (1951), 8-94), assigns much of the blame for the depressed state of the profession to the writers. Perhaps the fact that such a promising young artist as Budrys is devoting, no matter how skillfully, most of his creative energy to the production of such off-color fabliaux is rather strong support for Anderson's contention.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

Pertinent excerpts from member responses to the Bretnor proposal here follow.

Davidson Says:

. . . delayed adolescence. . . extra-early senescence. . . pre-climactic climacterick
. . . or constipation?

Anderson Says:

Reg Bretnor's letter puts a burr under the saddle of one of my current hobby horses. You are hereby warned that whatever follows will be serious and constructive. I think. I'm not going behind his back, either; our arguments on this subject have been long, heated, and of great value to the California wine industry.

You see, I don't blame the public particularly for not doing its share in creating a science fiction boom. (I almost said "new" boom, but thought back and asked myself: "What boom?") Science fiction itself has not been doing its share either.

To dismiss one negative shibboleth at the outset, I don't think lack of critical attention has had any part in the fizzle. The "literary" world is divided into several small mutual admiration societies, such as the academic, the semi-commercial (Atlantic, Harper's, NY Times, etc.), the latest beatnik version of Togetherness, and so on, with comparatively little overlap. Let's face it, not enough people read literary criticism with enough attention to make a financial difference to the writer. A reviewer within a specialized field such as science fiction or the mystery may have some influence -- he's talking to people with his own general bent. Then again, he may not. I don't know about that. I do know that even outright critical attack has no demonstrable effect on sales. Last year, for example, Jacques Barzun cut loose with a number of attacks on the mystery novel in a number of periodicals. I suppose only specialists realized how irresponsible his blasts were, apparently dredging all the "facts" cited out of thin air; presumably most of his readers took him seriously. Net result? The biggest boom in the mystery novel for a generation. The whole thing is analogous to science fiction fandom. John Campbell, I believe, remarked once that all fandom in the usual sense of the word

could drop dead one morning, and he'd never know it from his circulation figures. The statistical fluctuation is so much bigger.

Therefore, while a critical quarterly, with or without Big Name Critics, would be interesting to read, I don't see where it would do science fiction any external good, i.e., induce more people to buy science fiction. It might do some internal good, i.e. promote or stimulate more good science fiction, but even this seems doubtful, for several reasons. First, there already is a certain amount of criticism around in the form of fandom, professional reviews, What Your Best Friends Gleeefully Tell You, etc. Simply making it more pretentious isn't going to make it more useful. Second, the value of any extensive criticism is debatable. A writer learning his trade can benefit from a small amount of guidance (it normally takes about five years to recover from a college writing major and actually start work); and of course any writer at any stage of development can benefit from occasional suggestions, informed praise, or purposeful dressing down. However, if he's anything more than a fiction factory, he's essentially an inner-directed man and has to make his own way, writing neither for a trained small clique nor for an editor nor for a public, but for himself. Finally, a minor point, these creative manifestos and critical dissections take up time and energy which might better be directed into actual writing. Or, better yet, into sitting and thinking about one specific piece of writing to be done.

So the reason the public is not adequately supporting science fiction is that science fiction doesn't offer the public anything. We double-dyed fanatics will plow through issue after issue after issue in the hope of an occasional memorable story. (Offhand, I couldn't tell you what was in the last number of the two magazines I still read with any regularity.) If the average reader isn't that interested, it doesn't mean he's an oaf. It means, more likely, that he'd rather spend his time in fields where the pay dirt isn't quite so thin. If a "Mission of Gravity," or "Demolished Man," or "Flowers For Algernon," occurred often enough, we'd soon be in a healthy state. Even if our level of mediocrity were higher, we'd be doing all right. By mediocrity I mean, quite unpejoratively, the ordinary competent story meant only to entertain, e.g. the recent "Wherever You Are" in Astounding. It's the necessary soil for the growth of the works of genius --- and the geniuses themselves produce their share of it, between masterpieces.

But what have we actually got? Alien (or Russian) enemies foiled by one clever human (or American) trick. Aliens land at one spot on Earth, or pick up one Earthman, and base all their conclusions on said sample. Alien invaders, quite able to mount an interplanetary war, fail to allow for terrestrial conditions, even to recognize what snow is. Future world controlled by insurance companies. Future world controlled by garbage collectors. Future world starving to death. Future world smothering in its own production. Psionic army corps. Psionic nuclear fission. Psionic contraception. Complex computer gains conscious mind. Complex computer answers, "Duh." Expedition lands on planet just like Earth, except for having neither geography nor history, and finds natives just like Earth primitives except for acting like one of Ruth Benedict's fantasies. Moon colony discovers to its great astonishment, after many years, that it can use its own chemical synthesizing apparatus to synthesize its own food.

Ech.

Well, so what's to blame? Not necessarily, or even probably, the relapse of our culture into barbarism. For much as the creative energy of the dying Roman Empire went into religion, where it produced forms never seen before and a living religious literature: so our own creative energy is all going into science, and it would seem that science fiction is a, if not the, natural literature to give artistic expression to these developments. Science fiction is also well adapted to discussing politics, another obsession of our own era, if you can dignify the baboons now running

most countries with the name of politician. Science fiction could even strike a small blow for goodness, truth, beauty, and man himself --- perhaps more effective than the similar advocacies of the "mainstream," which seems to be almost entirely archaistic and/or irrelevant to present reality.

Economics may be at fault, but I think far less than Reg supposes. The reading public is still large enough to support good books and magazines, the latter still able to attract lucrative advertising. Scientific American is a handy case in point. We'll never get rich off science fiction, but the potentiality for a modest income is there.

A strong union can do much to correct what economic injustices exist --- if they are injustices. If, that is, a certain group is actually being paid less than it is worth. Science fiction writers could, I suppose, get a little more under present conditions; but if they want very much more, they'll have to earn it by offering a better product. Otherwise they'll merely price themselves right out of the market.

By the way, there's no reason to dash off and form a special science fiction writers' association. It's been tried several times; petty feuding has killed each attempt; but it's no longer necessary. The Mystery Writers of America, one of the few such outfits which actually has done something to help its membership and actually is still getting tough, extends a cordial invitation to any writer who's sold at least one story of mystery, crime, or suspense. I can't think of any science fiction author who wouldn't qualify under such a rule.

So the blame for the poor state of science fiction falls squarely on science fiction itself.

First, on idiot publishers, who flood the market with inferior material at inferior prices to the writer. The field will not support more than two or three good magazines, nor is this situation likely to improve in the foreseeable future. Another class of idiot publisher, often overlapping the first group, is the character who puts out one or two issues and then quits. A third category meddles with editorial content, and that brings us to another group who must be blamed, namely

Idiot editors. To some extent, they can't be blamed for running crud. The average level of submissions is so low that they take what they can get. However, a lot of the crud is simply inexcusable. Or it's unbalanced as to content (I think the idea of superstition). Or, perhaps worst of all, the editor rewrites without so much as asking the author's permission. I have never once seen an instance, in my own case, where the result was an improvement, and generally it was much for the worse. A good editor will normally have the writer do his own revising --- or at least check with the writer first. The editors who habitually make the most wanton changes are those who habitually put out the dreariest magazines.

Finally, and probably most to the point, the blame falls on the writers. If more of us would refuse to write anything we knew was bad (because God knows, we turn out enough bad stuff that we don't recognize for what it is) --- ideally, if we discarded everything we did not know was good; if we got away from what Ted Sturgeon described as the cardinal sins of incest and cannibalism, and oriented ourselves toward reality rather than toward Publisher's Row; if, one and all, we would change our individual hobby horses at least occasionally and try a new motif; if we'd take up and develop, or invert, or extend, or what-have-you, each other's ideas sometimes (as the phony-religion motif was once brilliantly exploited by several writers) --- and not merely imitate each other imitating something that was a success one time; if we'd do something

as simple as spending a few days per story jotting down ideas for background, personalities and biographies we'd try to say something --- Well, if we still stayed poor and were still ignored, at least we would know it was not our fault.

Critical reviews, conferences, and what not can be fun, and may be mildly helpful to some. But the real job is up to us, individually. You and me and Heinlein and Knight and Sturgeon and Budrys and Dickson and Simak and Bretnor and so on down the line, including the upcoming unknowns.

I thank you.

Where the hell is the beer?

Asimov Says:

Thanks for chance to read Reginald Bretnor's enormously interesting letters. Appalled at objections by scientists & engineers to ads in s. f. magazines.

Also, can't quite believe it. The American Chemical Society is meeting in Boston right now. I gave two papers yesterday, one to the section on Chemical Education, the other to the section on Chemical Literature. On both occasions I was introduced in terms which boiled down to "Isaac Asimov, the famous science-fiction writer." In both cases, I had the infernal gall to deliver my address anyway. And in both cases, I was snowed afterwards by people who identified themselves as "fans" and wanted to know when the next Life Baley story would be out or something else equally inappropriate to the occasion.

I say, we mustn't give up hope. I say, we've got to stand up and fight for our beliefs. For my part, I write angry and denunciatory letters to any publication that sneers at s. f. I wrote in such fashion to the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists and it was published in the May, 1957 issue. I wrote an angry letter to the Christian Science Monitor and ended my subscription. I have written to (and for) the Chemical and Engineering News on the subject.

Go everyone and do likewise. It hasn't hurt me professionally that I can see, and I don't see why it should hurt anyone to fight for the right to speculate in science. Even if it did, it couldn't hurt as much as acquiescence in a wrong through inertia or cowardice must hurt.

This, I take it, is Reg Bretnor's view, too. So I say, amen.

Bloch Says:

Well, maybe I've never read BRAVE NEW WORLD, but I did read the excerpts from Reg Bretnor's letter.

And, of course, I agree with his presentation of the problems confronting writers in our field; we find the markets in a deplorable collapse, word-rates are execrable and in some instances pegged at the 1935 pulp level, we have no status in "mainstream literature", etc. I doubt if any science fiction writer will quarrel with the validity of these conclusions, nor will most fans. This is all common knowledge, though admirably and forcefully summated.

In fact, Bretnor did such a good job that I found myself eagerly awaiting his promised "reasonably radical -- and, I hope, radically reasonable -- ways to solve all these."

What, I wondered, would be Bretnor's means of attaining a BRAVE NEW WORLD for writers of science fiction?

And I read...

"We ought to get one of the Foundations to finance a critical review of science fiction....."

"The question of a science fiction writers organization is something else again, and I must confess that I don't know just how one could be made to work."

"The problem, of course, ties in directly with the greater problem of a general writers' organization."

Hooray! In other words, "Let's all get together and fight cancer."

I'm not being sarcastic, believe me; if anything, I'm wistful. Whenever a woman's club meets and passes a resolution or endorses a speaker who, in effect, espouses such sentiments, I feel a certain sad empathy for them. They know cancer is "bad" and may become a personal menace; they are as much "against" it as Calvin Coolidge's minister was "against" sin; they would dearly love to do something about the situation. The trouble is, they don't know how.

Now I'm not comparing Reginald Bretnor to a clubwoman. If we continue the cancer parallel, he is at least worthy of a position comparable to that of a research expert in a medical laboratory. Unfortunately, the research expert, to date, has not been able to come up with any sure-fire cancer cure. And Bretnor, despite his considerable stature in the science fiction field, as writer, essayist and general commentator, hasn't come up with anything resembling a practical methodology for a solution to our problems.

"We" ought to "get one of the Foundations" to finance a critical review of science fiction...

What "we"? The same "we" who ought to get together to fight cancer? An editorial "we"? Can or will Bretnor do this -- or Ted Cogswell, or Isaac Asimov, or James Gunn or any of the other writers who have some academic status and (presumably, therefore) a slightly better entree to "one of the Foundations" than an illiterate lout like myself who is suspected of not having even read BRAVE NEW WORLD?

The answer to this long and involved sentence is, thus far, a flat and uncompromising "No!" It's a lovely dream, but before I buy it, I'd like to hear a plain statement of ways and means. Not to be confused, by the way, with ENDS AND MEANS -- another Huxley book I probably didn't read. Anyhow, until somebody furnishes a working hypothesis, let alone a working blueprint, for attaining such an objective, I'm inclined to dismiss it as impractical. The very bias which Bretnor feels such a critical review might help overcome stands in the way of obtaining financing for such a review.

The question of a science fiction writers organization is, in his own words, "something else again", and I suspect that this "something else" is mere rhetoric. For Bretnor himself "confesses" he doesn't know just how one could be made to work. Any more than he can solve the "greater problem" of a general writers' organization.

Well, I've got news for him. I "confess" that I can't solve these problems either, and I doubt like hell if anyone can, including Aldous Huxley.

He believes that the aims and goals of a science fiction writers organization would have to be "very clearly defined at the outset...in such a way that our very different attitudes and opinions could be brought into some sort of general alignment, and so that extremes of opinion would be powerless to change direction or impede progress." Well, so do I. And I also believe that if he, or anyone else, can find a man or a group of men capable of doing this, it would be a pitiful thing to waste such ability on organizing mere science fiction writers. Such talent, properly employed, would solve our segregation problem and resolve the crisis between the United States and the Soviet Union. All you got to do is bring these here very different attitudes and opinions into "alignment", and in such a way that "extremes of opinion" would be "powerless to change direction or impede progress", see? Real simple, like. I admit I'm somewhat surprised at Bretnor if he actually believes this is possible, even in our little field; he knows the "extremes of opinion" prevailing and the irreconcilable attitudes of many writers and editors; shucks, he's even served on a Convention Committee and seen at first hand how hard it is to come to even minor working agreement here.

Now, as for the "greater problem" of a general writers' organization with -- as he says -- "a full set of teeth", I again wonder just who he thinks can take the impressions and do the plate-work.

I agree we live in an age of "pressure groups", and it would be ever so peachy-keen if we writers had one of our very own. I would dearly love to be a member of the American Writers' Union, Local 473 (AFL) with a 35-hour week, two weeks paid vacation, seniority rights over young punks like Isaac Asimov, paid-up insurance, unemployment benefits, a lobby in Washington to keep out those damned English and French authors and ban DE. ZHIVAGO, a goon squad to take care of scab writers who sneak one-line fillers from encyclopaedias into newspaper columns, and a picket line to parade in front of Street & Smith whenever we disapprove of one of John's editorials.

But, as Bretnor so realistically remarks, such a group must be "armed"; must have a "gun" which can be "used ruthlessly".

Having gone that far, I was hoping he'd go a little further and come up with a weapon for us. Unfortunately, he didn't even produce a spitball.

There are effective writers' organizations (Newspaper Guild, Screenwriter's Guild) but they are industry ingroups, capable of exercising a partial control over a self-contained area of operations with the assistance of other unions in their field, just as Bretnor points out. But without such assistance, the general or free-lance writer is completely defenseless. If he doesn't like the setup, or the rates, or the contract offered, he has only one recourse -- he can refuse to sell. Whereupon he stops being a published writer. There are plenty of competitors, eager amateurs, and part-time professionals who do not depend on writing as their main source of income, who will eagerly peddle their wares in his place at the established prices. Editors, editorial assistants, and readers are also victims of the same system; they too are usually underpaid and underprivileged. And they have not as yet been able to form an effective or even partially-united front against the publishers who, in the end, profit from the present confusion.

Nup, I'm not "attacking" Reg Bretnor; he has pointed up a problem, and most effectively. But I very much doubt if anyone can do much more than view with alarm. Unless, of course, Huxley has a solution in BRAVE NEW WORLD.

Leiber Says

It was as pleasant, in a sort of disturbing way, to have your ITFCS ss 127 turn up at LASFS headquarters (and then in my mailbox) as it was to have your comment on a crash psionics program turn up in the midst of the interesting and ego-building long quote from Bretnor.

If we picked our defense secretaries from the ranks of science-fiction writers, I imagine someone would start discovering that most at least of our "science fiction writers of any stature" are writers of fantasy or at most science-fantasy. But perhaps that's just because I shrink from taking over the job myself.

A writers' guild with teeth in it...makes me think of a horror writers' guild of wolfmen and vampires. My first thought about a guild is that there ought to be masters, journeymen, and apprentices. Not a bad idea that a writer should feel bound to ~~EXTRICATE~~ teach writing to another or others. In any case, "How do you get in?" is apt to be a big question with any guild, though it may turn out to be a pretty theoretical question. Mention the word "guild" and I always get a little jab of fear: "Maybe they'd keep me out. Maybe they wouldn't have let me in."

This wanders. Get back to the simple modern idea. Guild as pressure group. Especially as a pressure group able effectively to fight for higher rates. Very appealing.

Here's a problem (typical, I imagine) I hear about out here relating to the TV Writers' Section of whatever the actual guild is called. Guild rule: A writer is supposed to get about \$200 for any single "treatment" (2 - 5 page outline) he supplies as a possibility for a series program. He's supposed to get this whether his idea is used or not. The programs don't want to put out this kind of money on spec, so many guild members and practically all beginning writers violate the rule, sometimes by such silly stratagems as talking out an outline which is taken down by a studio secretary and later perhaps bought as an "assigned" treatment. This makes a little more vivid for me the problems in a toothy writers' union.

Probably the more money involved overall in a project, the easier it is for any section of that project to organize. I mean, screenwriters and TV writers are better organized than magazine writers because there's more money in a film or a program than in an issue of a magazine. (Now that I've written that, I'm not sure of it.) At any rate, a screen- or TV-writer is a member of a team producing a show. Is a magazine writer a member of a team producing an issue? Would he want to be?

The more I think about it, though, the more I think that such feelings as I have against unionization of writers are emotional and unrealistic. On the whole the "free enterprise" situation enforces on a writer (established or beginning) the same general sort of control as a guild would enforce. Ah sweet individuality, where art thou? What art thou, really?

UNCLASSIFIED ADS:

Paul Anderson, 1906 Grove St., Berkeley 4, California, announces that he is now collecting material for a sequel to Salacious Science Limericks to be entitled The Magazine of Fancy Science Limericks. Anything vaguely scientific or science fictional, clean or otherwise, is welcome, provided only that it be a limerick and funny.

Mack Reynolds address is 18 Loma de San Fernando, Torremolinos (Málaga), Spain.

The Science Fiction Novel, a collection of essays by several of our eminent colleagues, is now available. Write Advent: Publishers, P.O. Box 9228, Chicago 90, Ill.

YOU TOO CAN WRITE SCIENCE FICTION! EARN BIG MONEY IN YOUR SPARE TIME! H.E. of New York made \$1800.00 his first week. Write Robert Mills, Mercury Publications, 527 Madison Avenue, New York, N.Y. for full details.

MEMBERSHIP NOTES:

All individuals professionally associated with the science fiction and fantasy field are automatic members of The Institute of Twenty-First Century Studies. It has been suggested, however, that some provision be made for automatic members who do not wish to be automatic members. Therefore the Institute has made a limited number of non-memberships available. The schedule is as follows:

Trial non-membership, three months for only \$3.29.

Regular non-membership, \$12.00 per annum.

Sustaining non-membership, \$25.00 per annum.

Contributing non-membership, \$50.00 per annum.

The Board of Directors is currently considering a proposal for an annual award by the Institute of an Honorary Life Non-Membership to the writer, editor, or agent whose efforts during the previous twelve months have made him most deserving of such recognition.

Although no charge is made for Institute publications, practical considerations suggest that certain limitations be placed on general circulation. Our present mailing list was compiled from various sources and is admittedly incomplete. All omissions, with certain obvious exceptions, are inadvertent. If you qualify for membership in the Institute and are not receiving its publications, please contact us so that the error can be rectified. If you are presently receiving Institute publications and would like to continue to receive them, please let us know so that your name can be placed on the permanent mailing list. If you are presently receiving Institute publications but would prefer not to receive them in the future, non-notification of such preference will be considered as notification of such preference and appropriate action will be taken to remove your name from the temporary mailing list. If you are not now receiving Institute publications and do not wish to receive them in the future please write the Secretary of the Committee on Publications and ask for IOTFCS form 127-A3 (REVISED).

Members are requested to check their drawers for material suitable for Institute publication. The only editorial requirements are that submissions be of high enough caliber to have been previously unpublishable.

Although PITFCS publications are never proofread, blank errata sheets will be supplied on request to those wishing to compile their own lists of typographical errors.

EXERPTS:

From TH, No.5, Jean and Annie Linard, 24 rue Petit, Vesoul, Hte. Saone, France.

"Even if we hadn't been profoundly deep below the rocks after that expensive strip and stay while vacationing or holidaying, cording up for dignity, we'd still be in this dark economical situation of the unproudest, and impossibly remediable

for the moment, about which all I don't see the point now to recount it in details here, though. Summing up, we are that deep in debts (And it being reminded that living in (or on) debts in France isn't exactly the same, the peaceable same as it seems it is in America & other countries more advanced. French debts are always guilty-like, and uneasy to live by; you only have to wait for things to go better and settle little by little, do nothing else, till getting rid of them and not starting with other ones next after, this for quite a while. Least, so does it bounce in Vesoul tween us and Creditors) up to 18 months above heads, now. Parallelly, we want to express our apologies therefore, to all the many of you who will see their Season Greetings & Wishes Material (elaborated cards and other personalized Greeting Sheets) to be unrewardedly awarded with the only thing we can do in that field this sorry year-end: an eager yet pitiful or pitiful yet eager DUPPED card (or sheet). However, Heaven knows how much we hate this latter cold system of Greetings, when addressed to those who will have sent humanized (i.e., BOUGHT) and personal-intended mailed cards to us before, at the same time, or even after; even overrated as such hatreds can be, we still are not for it. Alas, it is absolutely all we can possibly turn to this year, even after having worried a lot about it like we did."

(Comment: These be gentle people who out of their goodness, and knowing me not, went to all sorts of trouble to find and send me copies of French magazines with my stories in them. They have a madness for Reed's Cinnamon and Life-Saver's Wint-O-Green and have trouble obtaining adequate supplies locally. It is suggested that Institute members take appropriate action.)

From The Vinegar Worm, Vol.I, No.4, Bob Leman, 2701 So. Vine St., Denver 10, Colorado.

"I missed something when I was a boy, and It's too late now to do anything about it. There are certain experiences which you must have when you're young or not at all. Such an experience is enjoying Talbot Mundy.

It's a puzzle to me how I managed to miss reading Mundy. Ever since I learned to read, the bulk of my leisure time has been spent with books, and there was a time when I'd have been the wildest kind of Mundy enthusiast. That would have been during my Burroughs-Haggard period, when I appointed myself gadfly to the public library, in the interest of getting all the works of H. Rider Haggard and Edgar Rice Burroughs on its shelves. I had a fair degree of success, too, although, looking back, I'm sure Miss Seibert must have dreaded to see me advancing upon her desk with list in hand. I would launch into an impassioned plea in favor of, say, Maiwa's Revenge, holding up to scorn and ridicule any library so benighted as to lack that pearl among books. Miss Seibert would--somewhat wearily, but with exemplary patience--embark for the hundredth time upon her explanation that the library did not exist solely to serve as a fund for buying books for young Mr. Leman. I would depart disconsolately. But in all probability, a couple of weeks later Miss Seibert would call me over to her desk and pull forth--as a magician does a rabbit--Maiwa's Revenge. We had a very pleasant relationship, Miss Seibert and I, and I'm sure I could have worked the same dodge with Mundy's books. Somehow I just failed to hear of him.

My enthusiasm for Burroughs and Haggard died after a while, and I took up Sabatini, and then Jeffrey Farnol and then William J. Locke. I discovered mysteries and science fiction. And about that time I learned that a good many of the books my elders enjoyed were good reading. It was too late for Talbot Mundy.

I say that advisedly. I have lately looked into his writings, at the behest of a friend who is a Mundy fanatic, and I regret to say that I find him unreadable. I can still sometimes find moderate enjoyment in Burroughs and Haggard, but somehow

Mundy does not get across to me. It's not that he was a poorer writer than Burroughs (nobody was), or that his narratige has less movement and intrinsic interest than Haggard. I am perfectly sure that if I were to read Tarzan of the Apes for the first time today, I would be unable to get past the first chapter. But the point is precisely that I am not reading Burroughs for the first time; and when I reread Tarzan, something of the wonder that filled a rapt and goggle-eyed ten-year-old on a long-ago day is revived. Reading Burroughs and Haggard today is an exercise in nostalgia, rather than reading-for-fun. There is nothing nostalgic in Mundy for me, and hence I find his celebrated romances simply dull. If this be treason, make the most of it!" (Comment: Herewith follows an open letter which started out as a closed letter but got all involved in itself and since it has to be retyped anyway why not here?)

Dear Bob:

And why should a gentleman be casting his pearls before fans? I mean, there are certain things that just aren't done -- and anyway, they're happier with their own kind; and playing to the pit will get you no place. All of which means that the Vinegar Worm just came in and I found it a joy and a delight until I got to the two chunks of farmish fiction at the end. What the hell are you trying to do, recapture your lost youth? You write good, man. Why waste your time on side splitters for the beanie set? And this be not hand biting but honest concern because you spent pages writing what you shouldn't be writing instead of what you should be writing. Look -- the reason you write IT is because you've got something to say, something that you want to communicate (what IT is doesn't matter -- it may be aprofound tragic insight or simply a bit of something you found amusing at the moment and wanted to pass along). And unless you are on the make and trying to Get People to Do Things, your concern is with communicating with your peers. The best thing of course is to sell it -- that way you get paid for doing what you would have done anyway. But if you can't sell it, you give it away. You write a letter, or you publish it yourself so you can talk to more people at once. But these people are never faceless -- they are the people you'd be spending you evenings with if they lived in your town instead of some other. As a rule one doesn't voluntarily spend his free time drinking beer with adolescents (no matter how bright) or dullards (no matter how old) unless he himself is one and/or the other. . . or has a more than usually strong neurotic need for recognition.

Now the need for recognition and its accompanying ego inflation is part of the natural state of writerdom. This is why so many science fiction writers leave their own honorless countries periodically and go on pilgrimages to the annual feasts of fandom. Who among us can deny the momentary warmth that comes from the stranger's mumbled words of praise for past words written? Ah, I in my day have seen the uncomfortable loitering of the great in lobbies. And the lesser great. And even such as I. But the price . . . ah, the price. After the momentary orgasm, what then? How does one dispose of the gold toothed shop girl picked up in a moment of drunken need? Here speaks the dreary voice of duty. She did not sell, she gave -- and by such has certain claims that must be met. If one is not an expert at the delicate art of disengagement the decent interval stretches endlessly. Talk is all that can fill the void, but whatever is there to talk about? And when one tries, then what? Especially when she insists on steering the conversation into literary channels by asking you what you think of Vincent Peale's latest book.

And what does one say to the undersized fan when he tries to bridge the stiff and silent gap by confiding that classics just ain't like they used to be back when Shaver and Roy Phillips was writing them.

All of which is a long way from The Vinegar Worm, but not really. To begin with, most fans are slob (as am I, since by definition a slob is somebody who bores the hell out of you without supplying you with Scotch while he's doing it, and the world is full of people that I bore the hell out of). One reason most fans are slob is that they insist on talking their kind of shop instead of mine. I have no objection to gossip providing it's about people I know, but theirs never is. And when I try to enter in like a good fellow and toss out something really fresh and interesting like the news that Jow Glutz just sold his old AGF serial to ACE, they just look at me blankly and then go back to talking about people I've never heard of. This isn't all, however. If there were an occasional oasis in the great arid desert of fannish talk, if, after the long and animated interchange of memories of that hilarious moment when Rodney Gugwurst threw a roll of toilet paper out of the hotel window at the EASTWESCON, somebody would start kicking an idea around just for the fun of it, I might look at general fandom with a less lackluster eye.

All of which leads us through the back door of the point of the point. It takes just as much energy to write fannish humor as it does a bit of intelligent nonsense. So why waste time on them when you could be wasting time on us? T.R.C.)

TOO LATE TO CLASSIFY:

Nourse Says:

Re: Brethor's letter, excerpted herein: All of us, I suppose, have toyed from time to time with the idea of a really active and powerful...and useful...organization of practicing writers, and/or of science fiction writers. And have seen a few abortive attempts at such, including the late unlamented FORUM. But in trying to work out some such thing, one fundamental concept of the Value of Organization seems to have been overlooked, and still is overlooked. This is simply that an organization...of any kind...will survive and thrive only insofar as it fulfills a need of its members, and not a bit farther. Nobody can make an organization go, no matter how hard he works at it, if it doesn't do that one basic thing; while given a need which is unfulfilled, the flimsiest of leadership can get an organization off the ground and it will really roll as long as the need for it is fulfilled.

I would suggest that so far science fiction writers, or just plain writers haven't really felt a need for an effective organization that could stand up and speak for them with any kind of conviction. When the time comes that they do, the organization won't have any shortage of members, or funds, or people to serve in its offices.

EDITORIAL CLARIFICATION:

All mail should be addressed to The Editor, Theodore R. Cogswell, Department of English, Ball State Teachers College, Muncie, Indiana. The return address of 500 Wayne is given for postal purposes only since the future of the Institute might be adversely affected if returned mail got into college administrative channels.