

# ALACERO







STET . . . . . editorial column by Barry Smotroff, p.2  
 SINUOUS CONVOLUTIONS editorial column by Moshe Feder, p.10  
 SMOKED SALMON the loccol. will appear at the back of next ish.

PLACEBO IV is the two-headed personalzine issue of the genzine of Moshe Feder and Barry Smotroff, the Tweedledee and Tweedledum of fandom. It is published with the cooperation of the SFFSAQC and is available for contributions of written material or artwork, letter of comment, all for all trade (a copy to each editor), old fanzines or 35¢ (3 for \$1.00). This is the issue for the quarter beginning July 1972. Letters on this and last issue will appear in #5. Please address your correspondence to:

Moshe Feder, 142-34 Booth Memorial Ave., Flushing, N.Y. 11355  
 or Barry Smotroff, 147-53 71st Road, Flushing, N.Y. 11367

ART CREDITS: Front Cover by Stu Shiffman

Sheryl Birkhead — pp.2,7  
 Grant Canfield — p.8  
 Paul Jordan — pp.1,10, 11  
 Bill Kunkel — pp.3,4,5,6,16,17,back cover  
 Stu Shiffman — pp.1,12,13,15

STAFF: M.Feder and B.Smotroff coeditors, P.Jordan art editor  
 Collated by members of the B.O.A.C. (Brotherhood of American Collators).local 4614.



# STET

Well, here we go again. This is about the eleventyseventh attempt I've made at writing this installment of STET and Ghod only knows how it'll turn out. The original three pages that I wrote were thrown out because they were just plain terrible. I have to let my writings sit for a day or so and then reread it for me to see just how bad(or good)it is. I can't reread my stuff right after doing it and still be a halfway decent judge of it. It's annoying at times, but I'd rather be a bit annoyed than have in print some of the stuff I've written on first draft. This summer in particular seems to be pretty bad in that I've found it difficult to write just about anything. I've written practically no locs, and the few I've managed to do have required a great deal of effort to get out. Some correspondence has been about the only thing I've been able to do without laboring over the typewriter. What the cause is I haven't been able to figure out. I'm working full time this summer, but since I was last summer also and it wasn't like this then, I don't think that's it. Perhaps it's the weather. We've had those terrible floods here on the East Coast and while NYC wasn't particularly hard hit, the month of June nevertheless only had 4 days when it didn't rain. After the rains, it refused to get warm at all, and it was cold(well, very cool) in July, a month where it usually stays above 75 or 80 degrees F(for Fred). Then it did get warm; it went into the 90's and refused to get out. Now we seem to be going back to the cold. For the last few days, the temperature when I leave for work (7:15AM)has been 59 degrees Fred(did you know that Fred means peace in some language?) Thank Ghod the summer is almost over.

I guess one of the bigger things that's happened to Moshe and I this summer has been our joining Brooklyn Fandom. I had come home from work one evening and my mother told me that someone named Arnie Katz had called and that he'd call back. I couldn't figure out why he would call me. Perhaps we shouldn't have let Hank Davis write "Pepsi is a Sercon drink" on Arnie's envelope, I thought.(In the interest of accurate reporting, I wish to state that Arnie Katz no longer drinks Pepsi. Instead, he has fallen into the depths of depravity and now drinks Diet Dr. Pepper. But he is not yet beyond hope. He hasn't started drinking Fanta. Yet.)



I think one of the best ways to describe my feelings when I went to the Katz's for the first time has already been said by Bill Kunkel when he described going there for the first time himself. His words were that he and Charlene "...plowed through the Vestal Virgins prone in the position of adoration in the hall...". I knew that they were just people, but damnit, I was nervous. As it turned out, I had nothing to worry about. The first time I went there for dinner, Joyce said that for a neo I had a very good appetite.



The first two times we went to the Katz's, it was just for the after dinner meetings which start at about 8:30 or so. The way this worked out, by the time I could get home from work, it would practically be time for me to start on the trip to the Katz's. Therefore, I decided to eat dinner in a Chinese restaurant and then wander around downtown until it was time to take the train over into Brooklyn. The first time I did this, it was raining when I was through eating. Since it looked like it was clearing to the South, I decided to take a chance and try to get out of the shower area. The only problem was that it wasn't clearing; I hadn't gotten twenty feet from the restaurant when it started to really rain. To escape the downpour, I ducked into what I thought was the door of a store of some kind. Only it wasn't a store, but a penny arcade. Something about it struck me as familiar, and I stood there wondering what it was. Then I realized that this was the same place my day camp used to take us whenever it rained and they had nowhere else to go. To make sure I went to the back of the place, and sure enough, there it was, "The Dragon's Lair." The lair is this White Elephant (capitals intended) of a thing in which there supposedly dwells a dragon. Insert a quarter and one of the windows will rise and there's the dragon. In all the times we went there, I don't recall anyone ever paying a quarter to see it.

Anyway, I wandered around for a little while until I couldn't resist it any longer and got some change to play the machines. The main thing that struck me as being different from my younger days was the lack of dime machines. Just about everything was a quarter for two or three plays, or a quarter just for one. When I was in camp, it was a dime for one play, three for a quarter on most machines. (About the only thing whose price didn't change was SkeeBall and Pokerino, the former still a dime, the latter a nickel.) But I couldn't resist any of it, price be damned. I tried a couple of rifle shooting games and a few other things and then discovered something which had not been there when I was smaller. I found a pinball machine. To understand my surprise you have to realize that such machines are illegal in NYC.

I remember when my family would vacation in the Catskills. The kids would always be grouped around the pinball machines, spending enough money to make up for the other  $11\frac{1}{2}$  months when we wouldn't have access to them. One summer, we went to a resort called Tamarack. Outside of their excellent food, the most





memorable thing was their pinball machine. A whole room with 6 or so pinball machines, all of them in constant use. Perhaps this was because the pinball room was located right outside the dining room. This way, they'd hook you right after you finished dinner, away from parents who couldn't see you spending so much money on mere pinball. One machine was like a card game(hearts, no doubt), one was supposed to be like a beauty contest(hit the bunker and give your choice points), there was the ubiquitous carnival/circus machine, and one or two others. One of these others was a machine involving a complicated scheme which dealt with the cardinal and semicardinal points of the com-

pass. To win a free game, you had to light up all the points, a more difficult task than it sounds. Lights would flash, specials would light up, things would revolve, oh it was something else. On a scale of ten, it was about seven in terms of hardness, but nevertheless, it was the most popular machine. And it was on this popular machine that Tamarack history was made. You see, it so happened that someone put in a dime, played a game, and proceeded to win 72 free games. 72. That's a hell of a lot of free games. Ah, those were the days, baseball in the morning, swimming in the afternoon, and pinball in the evening. The pinball usually was only terminated by our generally illfated attempts to get in and see the "adult" show that would go on every night.

I spent about a dollar at this illegal machine in Chinatown (and yes, you could win free games, I did)before I tore myself away. It was something like Ellison's "Pretty Maggie Moneyeyes", only with a pinball machine, not a slot machine. To prevent myself from spending half my salary, I went back to the rifle games. When I was at one of them, a little kid stood there and started to tell me what targets to shoot at. I was just about to ask him to be quiet when instead I asked him his age. When he answered I realized that he was the same age I was when I was in camp and that he was doing the same thing that I used to do. The impact of this struck me and I just stood there for a moment, feeling old at 18½ and realizing that I had come full circle. No longer did I have to hunt up a wooden box to stand on to reach the rifle, as I used to do, and as this kid was doing now.

Looking around later, I saw the Skee Ball machines. This too awakened old memories, this time of when my grandparents were alive and they had a summer apartment at Rockaway(a NYC beach and summer resort area). When my family would go to visit them, we would often go for a walk along the boardwalk and go into penny arcades similar to this one in Chinatown. One of the biggest differences between the two places was that on the boardwalk the arcade was dominated by Skee Ball machines. For the uninitiated, Skee Ball involves rolling a ball along a lane with an upward tilted ramp at the end. Beyond the ramp were a group of concentric circles,



each circle worth a certain amount of points. The idea was to roll the ball up the ramp and into the circles, thus amassing points which were worth a certain amount of tickets. These tickets were redeemable for prizes, like a TV set for 2100 tickets, with five being the maximum you could win on one game(10¢). I played a few games, reliving old memories and amassing enough points to get some tickets. I knew right away what I was going to get. It was going to be the exact same thing I used to get every summer, a disappearing coin trick and a disappearing ball trick. When I was at the Katz's, I took out my prizes and displayed them as booty. Someone, Bill I think, had never seen them before, so Arnie demonstrated the disappearing coin trick for him. You have a slim hollow box with a slab that fits inside. There's an indentation in the slab for a coin(a quarter in this case). You put the coin in the slab and the slab in the box. When you take the slab out, bingo, no coin. Only something was out of alignment and the slab wouldn't go all the way in. So Arnie took the slab and tried to get his quarter out.

"Hey, it's stuck!", said Arnie.

"That's the trick", said someone(possibly Greedy Me).

Never did get that quarter out till I was on the train going home.

I recently had my hair mutilated. Not on purpose, mind you, but because of some idiot's stupidity. My mother had been insisting (to put it mildly)that something be done with my hair(which wasn't too long to begin with). Since it's sometimes easier to give in to her than to have her constantly berating me, I agreed to have it shaped. You know, the International Barbers Conspiracy's word for haircut. Well, in I go and say "Shape it. My mother likes it short and I like it long so cut it to a length midway between.". "Fine", he says. Damn fool cut off a bit more than he was supposed to and now it's short enough that my mother likes it. Bleah! I couldn't see what he was doing since my glasses were off and without them, forget it! I think that in the future I'll cut my own hair. Meanwhile, I look terrible, look completely different, and I feel rotten. ~~Damn~~ and blast!

ONLY  
RAIN  
LASTS  
FOREVER



I'm not much of a moviegoer these days, although I used to devour the things on weekends. I still haven't seen "A Clockwork Orange" and a couple of other movies which sound interesting. But in my own way, I'm still sort of a movie aficionado. You see, I follow advertising campaigns for movies. Really. They're often more fun than the movies themselves. For instance, a while back some ads started appearing in local newspapers. They consisted of a white rectangle in which were the words "The Green Slime Are Coming". These ads would appear in the comics section, in the sports section, and occasionally in the movie section. This went on for two or three weeks until a movie of the same name opened without any other publicity. I think the ad campaign lasted longer than the movie did. But more recently we have another goody. The movie is called "Frogs" and perhaps you've seen the posters for it? They show a frog with a human hand sticking out of its mouth, rampant on a field of nausea green, with the motto: Today the Pond. Tomorrow the World!". Honest. And according to Norman Hochberg who has seen the film, it lives up to its posters. For instance, one person is killed when lizards knock over cans of deadly insecticide spray. Another person is killed when she is forced into a swamp by snakes and bled dry by leeches. Still a third person is killed by "a collaboration of the trees and moss", Honest. The co-feature by the way, is "Godzilla vs. the Smog Monster".

Pluck your magic twanger Froggie.

There seems to be some confusion dealing with the name of this fanzine. First of all, it's spelled P-L-A-C-E-B-O. We've received some interesting variations on it, including "Place 130". But it got here and that's what counts.



That, however, is minor in comparison to the fact that everybody, including my co-editor, is mispronouncing the name of this fanzine. All I hear is "plə/see/bōw". Any right thinking person knows that the word is pronounced "plə/suh/bōw".

And fout on you if you mispronounce it.

I've just discovered that, according to the dictionary, the primary meaning of placebo (before the sugar pill meaning) is: "(in the Catholic Church) the vespers for the office of the dead, from the beginning of the opening antiphon with the word placebo". PLACEBO, the fanzine of the dead.

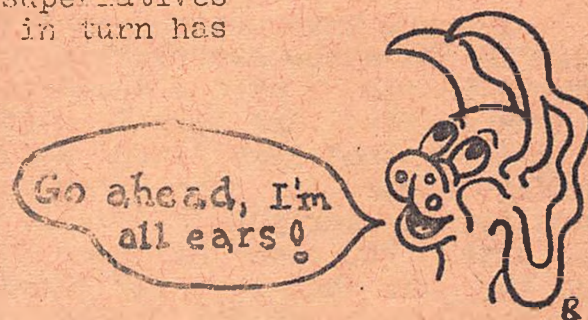
I don't think this editorial would be complete without the story of How We Get Paid For Attending Cons. Basically, it boils down to the fact that we make great use of the college facilities, like getting the college to pay postage on Placebo and getting



electrostencils for 50¢ each. For conventions, we use an organization called Inter-Club Council. ICC is sort of a blanket organization whose purpose is to help clubs with whatever they want. Their primary way of doing this is to dispense money for various purposes. Neither Moshe or I had thought of asking for money for cons, but one day when I was getting ready to take two finals, I mentioned to the head of ICC that I was going to Disclave right after my last test. Since Ronnie (the ICC President) has gotten to know us (we run off PLACEBO on the ICC mimeo) he suggested I fill out a budget application. And I did. Then, one night, Moshe walked in to the meeting at the Katz's and handed me \$50. Which is nice, you must admit. Our funds aren't unlimited of course. The club is allowed \$100 a term for cons. Last year Disclave, this year Pghlange! (The preceding paragraph is dedicated to Joyce Katz.)

In his editorial last issue, my co-editor said some things that I'd like to take particular exception to.

According to Moshe, overuse of superlatives has resulted in generalization which in turn has resulted in a situation where words have lost their semantic impact. Well, granted that this is in some cases true, but I think Moshe misses some other points.



One very important reason that words go through generalization is that the original meanings no longer apply. To use some of Moshe's own examples; spellbound and enchanted have been generalized because their original meanings are no longer applicable as a general rule. When you say that "Mary held John spellbound by her beauty", you're not saying that she cast a spell on him, you're saying the situation is something like the idea. Words present analogies that conjure up something in the mind of the reader or hearer. True, there are words that give a direct meaning, but a word like "big" isn't big in itself. Instead, it brings to mind the idea of big. It creates an analogous situation between the word's orthographical/phonemic structure and its morphological structure.

It's a good thing that languages do have such things as generalization and specialization associated with them. Imagine a language that never changed, a stagnant mass of words.

Another point is that the exact meaning of the word is not in itself necessarily important. More important is that the word get across the meaning of the writer or speaker. Granted, it may be the exact meaning of the word that is supposed to be gotten across, but that is not always the case. If I say that a book is effervescent, I don't mean that it bubbles naturally, I mean something else. I may not communicate my exact degree of meaning, but since that is subjective exactness is impossible. Remember, words are stimulus portions of analogies and people's reactions to stimuli vary from person to person.



If you still don't like the old superlatives, then make up some new ones. There are always new ones, e.g.: cool, neat, and heavy. Granted, some become passe or campy, but not all of them do. And the new ones have to come from somewhere.

Moshe suggests that you look at the original connotations and denotations of the words he gives. By all means do, it can be quite fascinating to do so. But remember, these meanings no longer generally apply. Why should we go back to the old meanings? There are other new words which sometimes get the idea across better. The English that Chaucer's "Canterbury Tales" was written in may be great for poetry, but why should we go back to the definitions of Chaucer's time? No Moshe, one of the beauties of language is that it changes with the times, it comes up with new meanings and new connotations and denotations. These new meanings express the need that that is there now, not the need that was there then.

#### VRAM

You may have noticed that the preceding paragraph says "VRAM". VRAM is not a new superlative. It did, however, appear on tee-shirts in the NY area a decade ago. VRAM, you see, is "Marv" spelled backwards. And Marv is half of Marvelous Marv, which in turn is part of that Magnificent Met, Marvelous Marv Throneberry. Marvelous Marv (as John Berry can no doubt tell you) played first base for the early Mets. Hell, Marvelous Marv was first base for the Mets. You remember those Mets in their first season. 1962 was the year they lost 120 games, had two 20 game losers, and had two pitchers named Bob Miller. And they also had Marvelous Marv, a player who had to be seen to be believed. And even then . . . Like the time he hit a triple and forgot to touch first base and was called out. If I remember correctly, he missed it by two feet. And when a player would get caught in a rundown between Marvelous Marv and the second baseman . . . I shudder to think about it. But we loved him anyway.

How much did we love him? Our cry was "Cranberry, strawberry, we want Throneberry."

Writing the above has surprised me. Originally, I was going to write about the summer vacations my family used to take, but I couldn't get anything coherent. But reminiscing caused me to remember baseball and how I used to be such a great fan. I'm not a baseball fan anymore; it tends to bore me too much. But it wasn't always like that. I used to be a rabid Mets fan and baseball nut in general. (Even though I was a terrible player. Maybe that's why I liked Marvelous Marv. Hero identification) Being a baseball fan of course, meant that great American pastime, collecting baseball cards. Spending most, if not all of, my allowance on baseball cards I collected them as if they were gold bars, or Vol. 1, No. 1 of "Unknown." There were a few cards, however, that I hated. For instance, I hated the series checklist cards. I was rarely able to ever collect a complete series and those checklist cards used to remind me constantly that I was missing something. Being a completist, this really drove me up the wall.

I also hated Rocky Colovito. I no longer remember what team he played for or what position. I do remember that I hated Rocky



Colovito and why. At one time, I needed one card to complete a series and I spent my last nickel on a pack of baseball cards. At this time I had about three "doubles" of Colovito since he was one of those players whose card they made a lot of. I gave my nickel to the guy behind the counter and opened my pack. I threw away the gum and looked at the cards. The top card was Rocky Colovito.

So was the second.

And the third.

And the fourth.

And the fifth.

If there had been a sixth card, I'm sure it would have been Rocky Colovito.

I also used to write baseball stories. Once I was at my grandmother's; I composed my magnum opus. Whenever I mentioned the name of one of the teams or the names of its players, I wrote it in orange. Whenever I mentioned the opposing team, I wrote it in nausea green. I must have been about 8 at the time, but when I finished even I knew how bad it was. And that is why the only fiction I've written since has been what I've been forced to write by school. You may thank baseball that I don't write fiction.



Remember, "Watch between meal treats and brush often with an effective decay preventive dentifrice in a conscientiously applied program of oral hygiene and regular professional care.

-Barry Smotroff

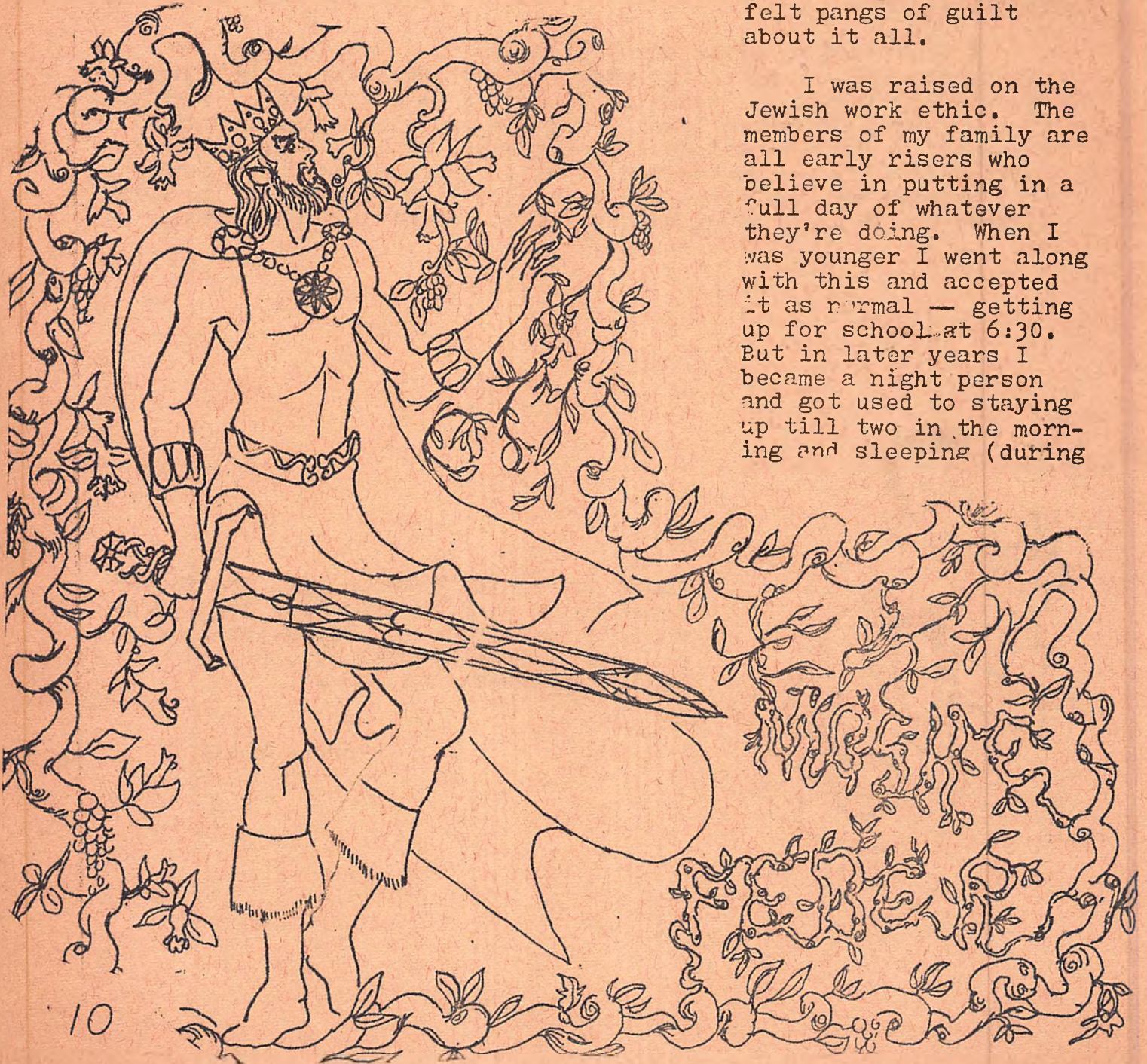


This issue of PLACEBO may be slightly unusual in its small size but it follows precedent as far as timing. By now it seems quite normal to be typing for the July issue in late August. Just as it does to begin my editorial with a reference to the issue's lateness. This is the last time I will ever do that.

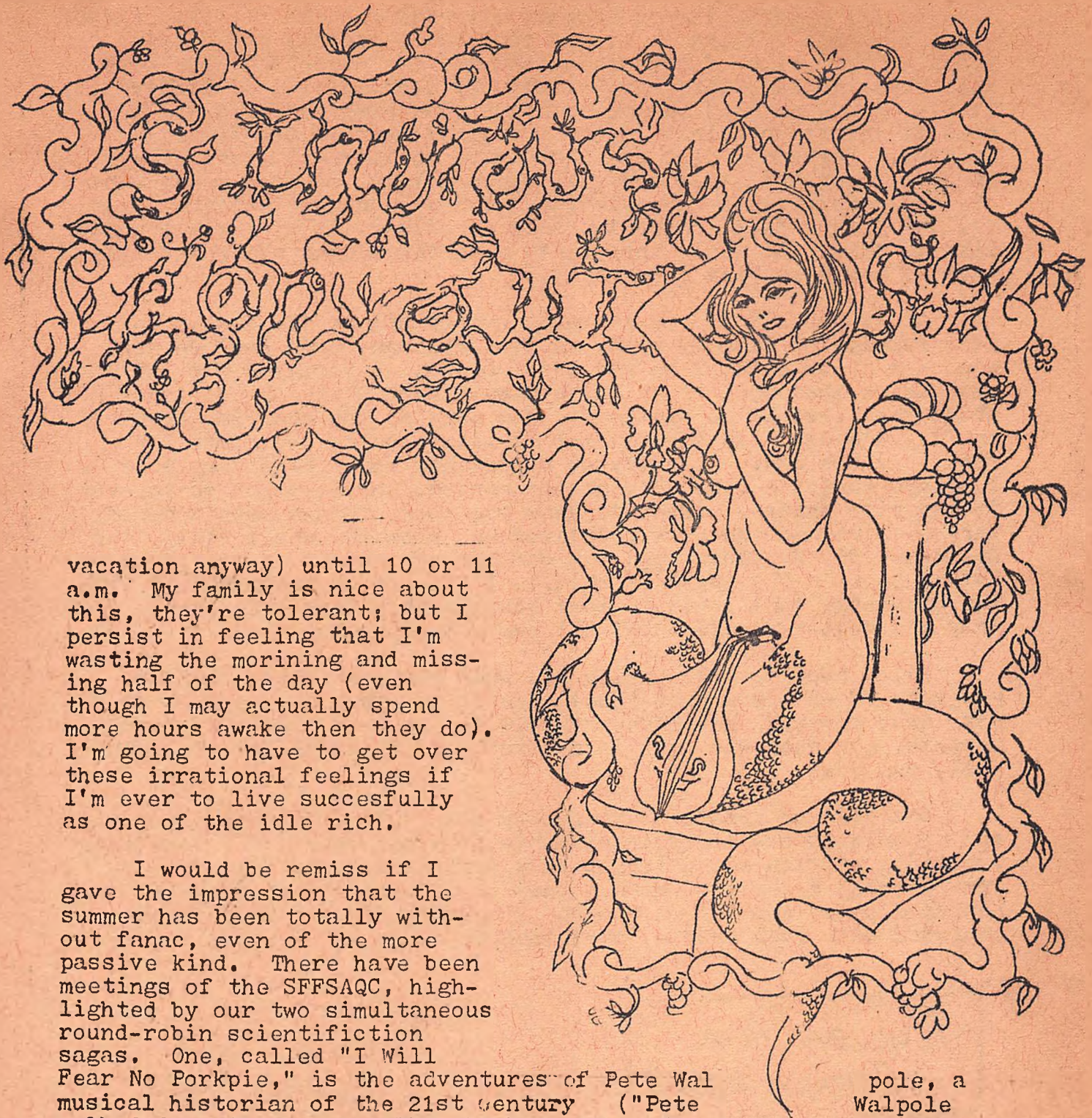
It's been a slow summer all around for me. There have been too many moments of depression and frustration to really enjoy the season. The combination of my natural laziness and what I can only call a writer's block have prevented me from writing or doing very much of anything, including fanac. What little I did do was only an excuse not to do something else. Even the term paper for my summer-session English course (the English Novel I; Fielding, Smollet, Godwin, Defoe, Radcliffe etc. — not as bad as I expected.)

which I well knew I had to do, was an agony to get through. Worse, I felt pangs of guilt about it all.

I was raised on the Jewish work ethic. The members of my family are all early risers who believe in putting in a full day of whatever they're doing. When I was younger I went along with this and accepted it as normal — getting up for school at 6:30. But in later years I became a night person and got used to staying up till two in the morning and sleeping (during







vacation anyway) until 10 or 11 a.m. My family is nice about this, they're tolerant; but I persist in feeling that I'm wasting the morning and missing half of the day (even though I may actually spend more hours awake than they do). I'm going to have to get over these irrational feelings if I'm ever to live successfully as one of the idle rich.

I would be remiss if I gave the impression that the summer has been totally without fanac, even of the more passive kind. There have been meetings of the SFFSAQC, highlighted by our two simultaneous round-robin scientifiction sagas. One, called "I Will Fear No Porkpie," is the adventures of Pete Walpole, a musical historian of the 21st century ("Pete walked down the hexagonally-blocked path. Sharp treuse slacks, pink shirt, and white bowler he whistled some of his favorite antique motown . . .") and his guardian (owner?) Shmerkle the immortal super-flea. The other is the story of the enigmatic Farmer, bane of Otis elevators. (" . . . he sucked its greasy, metal soul deep within and belched with satisfaction.") We are now trying to combine these two tales by using that super-star of the inter-para-universal airwaves, Huggin Squamash, as glue. ("He nudged the other and said, 'Huggin Squamash!!'")

Another important part of my summer has been my visits with Arnie and Joyce Katz and their fannish friends. It's been a most



interesting opportunity to compare expectations and reality. (Reading a person's writing or seeing cartoons depicting him always leads to some kind of preconceptions and one doesn't always have the chance to have them authoritatively contradicted or confirmed.) It was also a welcome chance to learn something about fandom and some of the finer points of the practical work of producing a fanzine. Barry has also had the chance to learn to stuff himself in true Insurgent style and gave Joyce a large stuffed panda (which she named Burbee) in appreciation. I have done neither (remember me, the Kosher Kid? "Hiho two sets of silver, away!") but I would like to thank the whole Insurgents gang for making alternate Fridays so worth looking forward to.

Of course, SF is rarely topic number one at the Katzs, but it's rarely far from my mind. A few days ago, when Paul Jordan was over to draw the logo for this column, we repeated part of a discussion that some of us had had with Mike Glicksohn at Lunacon about the first SF we had read. How many of you can remember? I can't, although I do know that I've been reading the genre for some 13 years now. Actually my memory has never been very good — I always forget a face, I'm absent minded, and it takes me forever to memorize things. (Just to show you these things aren't hereditary — I've had and have relatives who know the whole Bible, the Prophets, the Writings, and the complete Talmud by heart. Even my father knows a few pages of that.) I can only console myself with the knowledge that psychological studies show that most people wish they had better memories and all our memories have flaws.

Think back to your childhood, when you were three or four. How much of what you know about yourself at that age is part of your true memory? How much was told to you years later by your parents, how much was seen in a scrapbook of snapshots? You can't tell, can you?

Not all our memories are really ours. Some are happily accepted transplants now indistinguishable from the original. Sometimes a vividly written scene from a book or a strikingly filmed image from a movie becomes so much a part of memory that it seems to have happened to us and it's a common experience for dreams to become confused with real events, occasionally even a wildly weird one





a vividly written scene from a book or a strikingly filmed part of a movie makes such a strong impression that it seems, in retrospect, to have actually happened to us. It is also common for a dream to be remembered as a real waking experience. Sometimes, the feeling that the events of a dream actually occurred persists even after a logical analysis shows them to have been impossible. Childhood memories can be especially strange. Isolated images, fragments of conversations, the oddest trivia survive; even when many supposedly important occasions do not. (I can remember vowing at the age of ten that I would never forget a certain fact. I have forgotten it, but I still remember determining never to forget it.) And you can't always be sure that you really remember something yourself. Did I really tell the Catholic girl from next door that she should convert because Chanukah is longer than Christmas, that day out in my Roy Rogers tent? So they tell me. But all I remember, all that I'm sure of, is the way the light inside was a yellow orange and Roy's silhouette was backwards on the tent wall.

I think it must prove something that one of my earliest clear memories (of an experience rather than an image) is of my first time at the movies.

It was my parents anniversary. They left my sister, then an infant, with my aunt, but they thought I was old enough (3) to come along. So they took me with them to Radio City Music Hall where we sat in the balcony. I was sleepy and bored and not very interested in the adult doings on the screen. I kept busy by sending my father out a couple of times to get me water and candy. Finally, I turned to my mother and said, "Mommy, tell the man to change the channel."

Although my parents have retold this story as an anecdote a number of times, I am positive that I remembered it independently. Recently, I realized that this is more than a simple cute kid story that parents bore their friends with. It's an example of how profoundly two media, television and cinema, have shaped the perceptions and the lives of my generation.





Watching an old film on television is like living part of your life over. "That's how it was," you say, "I was there." You say it even if you weren't; and if you don't say it there is nevertheless a part of you that believes it. This is so even though film gains an extra degree of unreality on television. The television viewer has learned to recognize the hallmarks of live (or videotaped) TV. He detects it automatically, by the lighting and texture of the image. These he associates with the live and the real. Film simply looks different, and the look of film on television has come to mean "fiction" and "artifice." The visual hallmarks of film and their concomitant associations with fiction are apparent even when the content is factual (the filmed news report). When the content is fictional (the Hollywood movie) the effect is even stronger and the associations are reinforced. Because movies fill so many of the broadcast hours, because a two-hour fictional narrative with a plot line and development holds our attention and captures our imagination more decisively than a half-hour sitcom or news program or even a one hour drama we have assimilated certain habits of seeing from movies, rather than from TV. These affect the way we see everything, including TV.

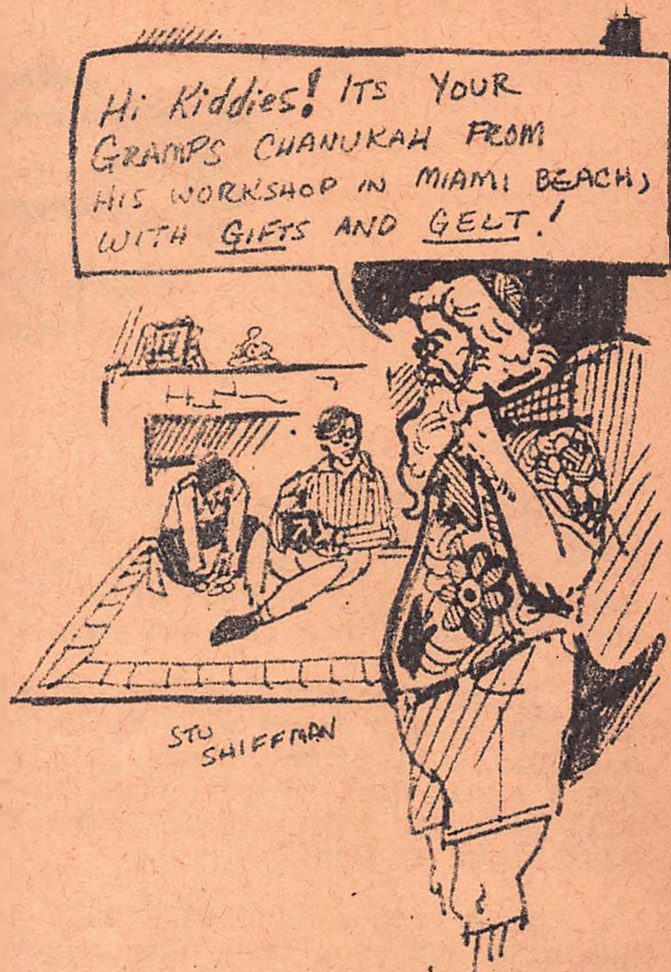
Once, they were rivals for our attention. Now, the networks depend on movies, showing them during prime time almost every night. The mixture of the two media produced some interesting results. Like two wave trains producing patterns of cancellation and reinforcement. Each affects the way we perceive the other. That's why, for instance, I had trouble accepting the reality of the Vietnam war.

I couldn't believe in it, not for a long time. My knowledge of it was nothing more than intellectual faith, there was no gut acceptance of it. I remember wondering where it had suddenly come from -- as if it sprang full blown from the electron-gun of my picture-tube. Fools sometimes theorize that we all could have been created a moment ago with a full set of memories. Here was the same thing in reverse. A fact without the memories to back it. Of course, eventually I caught up with current events and I did believe it. They kept showing us two-minute snatches of it on the news, you couldn't ignore it. Still, there was something subtly wrong. I watched them drop out of low-hovering helicopters, heard the cap-pistol like shots, saw the orange marmalade on burnt toast of the napalm, but I couldn't make it part of my worldview. "It's a fraud," I wanted to say, "or a joke." There was no war because there was no enemy. There was no enemy because we never saw their faces. Never saw them running or shooting, attacking or falling. The Nazis, the Japs, they were real. We watched them plotting and preparing, killing and dying. We saw them, we knew them face to face. We watched it and it was real. It still is real. The Second World War continues on television (where it has always been for me) where it is realer than Vietnam. For on the news they can't cut back and forth from the enemy lines to our own. From the grinning face of the enemy pilot, to his guns firing, to his handsome young American adversary, to the Zero or Messerschmidt spiraling down in flames. The death on a Hollywood battlefield of someone culled from the files of Central Casting registers more strongly than the week's toll from South East Asia. The conventions of film have become the conventions of life. And when the present is not cinematic, we don't believe it.



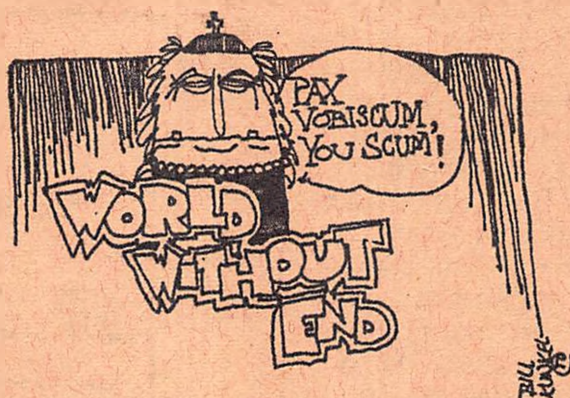
For every great event in history the media (from history book, to newspaper, to movie) create a parallel pseudo-event, a fantasy, that matches the real event in general outline but differs in the details. As human memory of the real event dies with its bearers the fantasy becomes ascendant. As the true reality of the Persian Wars was replaced by the pseudo-events of Herodotus so the events of the first half of the 20th century will be characterized for the future by the pseudo-events of films.

We have another way of preserving the memory of the past, the commemorative holiday. These are real events in our lives that at the same time are pseudo-events relative to the things they commemorate. I have already mentioned I have already mentioned two of them, Chanukah and Christmas. The latter you are familiar with. The former is a post-biblical, commemorative type holiday of the second rank that had the misfortune of occurring around Christmas time. Faced with the tremendous promotion of Christmas and the effect this has on their children, Jewish parents have responded by elevating the status of Chanukah and expanding on every likely tradition in order to compensate for the lack of a dazzlingly decorated evergreen in the livingroom. There have always been Chanukah "carols" and candles to be lit. But that isn't enough for some people. Some parents have taken a hint from "The Twelve Days of Christmas" and give their children gifts on each of Chanukah's eight nights. (This is what I was referring to when I talked about Chanukah to the girl in that tent.) Others erect "Chanukah bushes" in a pitiful attempt to mimic their gentile neighbors. Still others go even further and actually celebrate both holidays, claiming that Christmas is an American festival rather than a religious one. And you know, they have a point. I'm at a loss to understand why the existence of a national Christmas-tree is not unconstitutional, and the same goes for Christmas stamps, and Christmas preparations (arts and crafts) and celebrations in public schools etc., etc. I don't want to spoil anybody's fun, but looking at it objectively and strictly you've got to admit there's something wrong here. Anyway, my parents were traditional. We were taught to respect Christian traditions and enjoy our own. They never gave me a present on each of the eight nights but I made up for this at the annual Chanukah and Purim (a March commemorative holiday of similar stature) get-togethers at my grandparents' house. In December I multiplied my





take of Chanukah-gelt by playing expertly at Dreydl (a dreydl is a four sided top that can be used for a gambling game) and on Purim — Well, my cousin Yakov and I were real operators. One year we doubled our take of Purim-gelt by claiming we intended to use the money to build a rocketship in my backyard. The adults were so charmed by this cute ploy that they gave us more. We told our cousins "we don't think we'll make the moon, but it'll fly" and impressed by our honesty and sincerity they chipped in too. So you see, if your parents give you moral support when you're too young to understand you do alright when you're older. You know, when I was younger I used to feel funny about falling into the spirit of the Christmas season — after all, it was occasioned by their holiday. But now I don't mind; I relax and enjoy it. After all, if all of you want to spend so much time, money and effort on celebrating a Jewish boy's birthday, who am I to object?



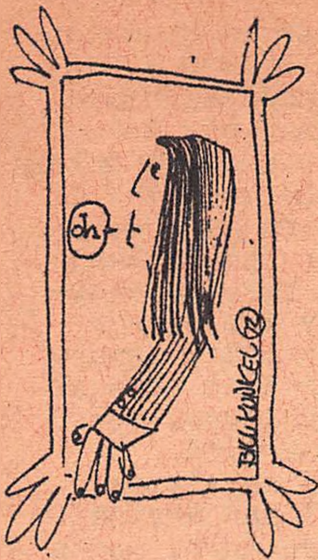
Once upon a time we planned a "theology issue" which would have included, among other things, a tuckerized fannish "parody" of the Bible (we just have a penchant for blasphemy around here, sorry if it offends you) which never got written. But I did write some thoughts on a related subject:

In my "Essential Mind" column last issue I remarked in passing that Satan and Jesus were two of my favorite characters when used as such in fiction. There is also a third personage that I believe has a great deal of potential as a character in fiction who has up till now been neglected. Although he goes by many names, he is best known as God.

Some authorities will tell you that God is so different from humanity and even from such supernatural beings as the Devil and Jesus that his use as a character is impossible. But we all know that "with God, all is possible." I maintain that these writers are lacking in imagination and are looking at the problem from the wrong angle. In many ways God is the perfect character. The powerful and the power-hungry can identify with him, the weak and humble can admire and worship him, the intelligent and skeptical can enjoy themselves analyzing him, and so on. In short, he offers something for everyone. Still, I do admit there are problems. The most basic, of course, being how one should depict him.

Up till now God has invariably been treated in one of two ways. One makes him incomprehensible, unapproachable, awesome, and consequently, useless, except as a sort of natural force (like fate, or luck, or the weather) or as something for angels to fly around and talk to (a telephone pole would serve as well).





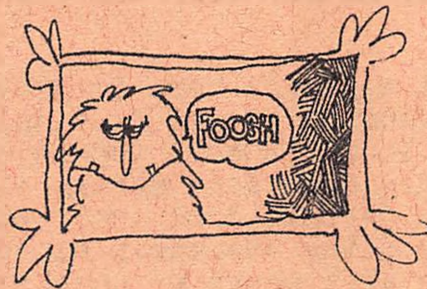
The other stereotypes him as "Jehovah," a grandfatherly old man in a white beard. As such he is, at worst, something of a cross between Santa Claus and Father Time and not very god-like at all; and at best, not more than merely super-human.

The challenge then is to use God as an active character in a fictional narrative while retaining as much as possible of his true deity, his ineffable unfathomability if you will.

In making this attempt we must remember that even the Bible finds it necessary to use anthropomorphic language about God to enable us to get an inkling of what he's like and what he does. The idea is to transform him, stepping down the theonic voltage to a safe level (at full power God must radiate across the whole electromagnetic spectrum). But the Bible never makes the mistake (at least in the Old Testament) of going so far as to personify God in human form. Rather, it uses anthropomorphism in language only. The Bible tries to strike a balance between treatments I and II, and, for the most part, succeeds. This is the compromise we should seek to emulate.

We may theorize that this is because God is the ultimate positive. Since likes repel and opposites attract he repels the positive and attracts the negative adjectives. We note that even the few positive things we can say about him are in part defined by what they aren't. For the writer of fiction, who has no other tools but words, this aspect of the special nature of God presents problems of craftsmanship that can not be lightly dismissed. The constant repetitious use of negative adjectives is limiting, worse, all such restrictions inevitably lead to reader boredom. Unfortunately, we must live with this dilemma until new words are coined. In the interim, the deft author will divert his readers' attention with other matters and, in his spare moments, pray.

Another problem, one often pointed out by those plodding, unimaginative delineators of the extent of literary possibility, is that of action. Yes, they agree, God is in his way the ultimate super-hero, and that's just it, he can



Once over this hurdle, we face another, that of the actual description. God, you see, has this problem with adjectives — he repels the positive ones and attracts the negative ones, i.e. we find it much easier to say what God isn't than what God is.





do anything. Where's your tension, your suspense when we know how the story must come out? So what!, I say. Don't we know how the story will come out in most simple problem/development/resolution type stories anyway. Doesn't the reader of comics know his hero will certainly be the ultimate victor; that no matter how bad things look on page 15 he will have triumphed by page 30? Doesn't the TV viewer know that the "good guys" will survive to return next week "same time, same channel"? It doesn't seem to bother them. What counts is the way it's done! The method used by the hero to overcome his problems and his enemies, the method used by the author to tell the story. Even if this were not so, these critics ignore a number of other possibilities. Prime among them is that of self-imposed limitation. As is apparent from our everyday lives, God acts as if he had made a non-interference pact with mankind. So when he does step in it must be discreetly and as indirectly as possible. Why do you think God has so many "go-fers" and errand boys, all those winged messengers (the Hebrew word for angel means messenger), why did he use Moses or Jesus? God has a Standard Operating procedure, a unique personal style all his own and the author of fiction can take advantage of this. Or, if he prefers, he can take other tracks. What about fictional autobiography, the bildungs-roman, the picaresque novel and novel of pure character development, all these and more are available to provide a way of removing this particular monkey-wrench from the works so we can extract the deus ex machina.

The last problem we shall consider here is that of "love interest." A sex scene or two is de rigeur in modern fiction, and if we can't provide those there should at least be some aspect of more chaste romance. God's love for all his creations hardly qualifies and any obvious use of the Virgin Mary defeats some other part of our previously stated purpose, besides being obscenely blasphemous. We must conclude that this is one area where we have to settle for something less than perfection. We are at cross purposes here and the best we can do is to assign romantic roles to some of the ancillary characters. We may console ourselves with the thought that a story with God as a character is of necessity classed with SF and Fantasy, two genres which are notoriously innocent of the erotic. At least our tales of the further adventures of divinity will not be alone in this fault. . . .

This issue should reach you some time close to Rosh HaShanah (Jewish New Year — Birthday of the World) which is on Saturday and Sunday, September 9 and 10. I ask you all to forgive me for anything I have done to offend you, just as I forgive you. May the coming year be one of health, happiness and fruitful fanaticism for you and your loved ones. May your name be inscribed and sealed for life!

Shalom,

— Moshe Feder



