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Alas, All Thinking!

COGITO ERGO SUM

by

David Goldknopf

"Reality," Plante had remarked that morning to his wife, and in a sense to his children, since it was said at the breakfast table, "reality is what we find at the interface with the unknown. We are all looking for a frontier." He was about to leave for the airport, on his way to what was probably to be the most important interview of his life, and he was clearly keyed up by the excitement of the moment.

Until now he had bounced along comfortably enough from scholarships to fellowships, from fellowships to foundation grants, always assuming that his ability would bring him at last to a renowned research institute. Yet, at the age of thirty-four, he was a non-medical assistant professor in a second-rate medical school, at loggerheads with the chairman and half of the department.

Fortunately, as more and more people were refitted from the dead or by machine shops, his credentials were in rising demand. Instrumenting such cases was his specialty, and there also was where the brain-bank excelled. It was natural, therefore, that he should have thought first of that institution when he decided to make still another move. Nor was it altogether surprising, though it was a happy coincidence, that the brain-bank should have let it be known, at about the same time, that they might be interested in someone with his background.

The brain-bank -- the vernacularly inevitable term could not be put down -- was housed in discreetly modernistic buildings on conservatively landscaped grounds: an island of its own off the South Carolina coast. Its lights could be made out, glimmering across tidal flats and unseen waters, at the mainland motel where Plante had spent a restless night. He was discouraged, somehow, by the remoteness of the place. It seemed to radiate a sense of exclusion through the darkness. Yet, the next morning, a very ordinary, not terribly spruce launch chuffed evenly across the quiet waters of the bay, and the greeting at the reception desk was cordial. He soon felt, if not fully at ease, fit to create a strong impression. And indeed he very much wanted to, for everything he saw in the first few hours confirmed his opinion that the frontier was here. In addition, the facilities for family living were excellent.

Things seemed to be going well. (But then -- he reflected in a moment of moodiness -- hadn't they always gone well at the beginning of his interviews?) How familiar he was by now with the carefully cultivated informality, the somewhat heavy-handed jocosities, the elaborate indirection. At last he was with the Nobel laureate, Joseph Harking, who would, he knew, be the deciding voice, and who was now sketching the history of the project for his visitor.

"...All those spectres of zombies, split-personalities, and so forth," Harking was saying, "and the lawyers in a tizzie over the testamentary question...I think we're all terribly happy the entire transplant business is out the window, as far as our work is concerned."

"I can well imagine." Plante replied sympathetically.

Harking peered at him with a benign, somewhat pixyish expression. He was a slight, rather dapper middle-aged man with a brush mustache and a vaguely British manner: momento, no doubt, of his Rhodes scholarship and two years at the Cavendish laboratory. Since he was considerably shorter than Plante, the younger man felt ill at ease until they both sat down.

"But do you know the real reason why we dropped the transplant effort?" Harking asked. Plante considered the question, or rather the best way of handling it. But before he could reply, Harking continued, saying more or less what Plante had had in mind. "Because we found it much easier to restructure our thinking than the public's."

"Isn't that usually the case?" Plante smiled, and he and Harking nodded good-naturedly.

"Most people," Harking pointed out, "think in order to live. But in almost every culture there is the true aristocracy which lives in order to think. What we are involved in here -- this, of course, is a very long-term project -- is taking over physiological housekeeping for literally disembodied brains, leaving them entirely free for their supreme function: thought. In that pregnant dictum of Descartes which launched the modern age, 'I think, therefore I am.' Cogito ergo sum. We expand that concept to its ultimate limit. Whereupon we discover that the brain doesn't need the body. It needs only what the body can do for it, which is to keep it alive. And that we are now able to do through our new support techniques."

Plante nodded energetically -- nothing new so far. He wanted, however, to point the conversation toward his own special interest, so he inquired diffidently, "Doesn't the brain also need external data?"

"Data and feedback," Harking replied. "Very well, then, it feeds to the computer, it requests additonal data, it may even reprogramme the computer. That is to say, it acts upon its environment. What more," Harking laughed, "could even the most demanding brain ask for?"

Plante laughed too, though he resented rhetorical questions; he always wanted to answer them.

"The point is," Harking continued, "the brain is confirming its existence and defining its nature. It is engaged with the computer, for an indefinite term, in an intercourse which we have the right to call thought. Shall we have a look around now? I'll show you some of our specimens."

They got up, and once again, Plante, a full head taller than his host, felt the unhappiness of his height.

Dining with Harking that evening, in the institute's dining room, Plante was still pondering what he'd seen that afternoon. He realized that the institute had by no means published all its achievements, and had reason to suspect that some had not been discussed with him either. It would have been impolitic to mention the second point, but he did mention the first, and Harking quickly agreed.

"A good deal of publication is nothing more than horn-blowing," he observed. "Career-advancement. Fund-raising. Well, we've always been amply funded here. No problem at all. What we do have to worry about is the public's frame-of-mind. Because, you see, our work is so easy to misinterpret. To romanticize, exaggerate, and even view in a sinister light. For we are moving toward the mystical roots of the world's great religions, and, as we do, we kick up some very profound fears. The strange thing is that even after centuries of religious indoctrination man feels that it's his body that makes him human, not his mind. His body, his face, his flesh, that's what he's going to miss in death. Far from being delighted at the prospect of liberating his brain from his body, he's terrified and even disgusted. I must confess we have a bit of a crank problem here, and we can't ever be sure it will go no further than phone calls and abusive letters. So we have rather stringent, though I hope unobtrusive, security measures. Like it or not, it's an element of the job."

It was something to weigh against the wonderful facilities for family living, Plante mused. On the other hand, it added a trace of physical challenge to the position, which in a sense rounded out its attractions. "I wonder," he remarked, "whether we aren't developing a new barrier between scientists and the general community. The scientific search for reality against the layman's search for identity. 'What are we?' against 'Who am I?'"

He was getting over his awe of Harking -- this wasn't the first Nobel laureate he had met -- and he wanted to make it clear that, unlike many specialists, he brought a certain breadth of vision to his work.

"We are all looking for a frontier," Harking remarked.

It brought Plante up short -- he'd been on the verge of saying just that. "Very well put, sir," he observed humbly, at which Harking suggested that they have their coffee on the terrace.

It was just past sunset. Several sailboats were idling on the quiet waters of the bay. In the nearer boats Plante could see families, out perhaps for a basket-dinner on the water. Over the land, a rosy sky promised fair weather for his trip home the next day. The terrace itself was on a pier against which the sea lapped in wavelets of long period. Sitting at one of the small tables along the railing, they looked out to sea in a rather formal silence. Elsewhere, pipes were being puffed and here and there a cigar. And there were of course the inevitable chess games. The dinner had been much better than what was generally offered by institutional dining halls. Plante felt very comfortable. The mellow mood settled on him until he realized, with a catch of anxiety, that he'd been on the point of dozing and that Harking was talking to him. Fortunately, it was only an amusing anecdote.

It was in fact about the dining hall. "Heart, lung stew, liver naturally, broiled kidneys, sweetbreads, tripe...the healthiest parts of the animal of course. So we insist on having them on the menu. But there's one dish where we draw the line." He paused for effect. "Brains!"

Plante laughed heartily. "Too close to your work, eh?"

Harking giggled. "Seriously, though, we have a splendid group here. Not a single prima donna, believe me. None of that back-biting and infighting you just can't seem to escape on the campuses. Honest differences of opinion of course, but anyone who grasps the implications of what we're about isn't likely to get fired up by petty egotism. And anyone who doesn't isn't going to be very comfortable here."

"It's got to be a team effort these days." Plante agreed, thinking, however, "You have your Nobel prize."

It was getting dark. The evening light seemed to have passed very rapidly, and the last of the sailboats were coming in. A busboy cleared the table. "I hope we're not keeping the dining hall open," Plante remarked.

"Not at all. It's open all night."

"All night," Plante repeated with a note of awe.

"Oh yes. Some of the work goes on round the clock -- it's like life itself, you know. We have three fully independent power systems."

"It is sort of a world of its own," Plante remarked, watching the lights on the mainland, where commercial neon signs, reds, oranges, purples, could be made out amid the incandescent twinkling. "When I checked out at the motel, the man said, 'Going out to the island? Good fishing out there.'"

"As a matter of fact, there is."

"I wondered what he meant by 'fishing.'"

"The motel keepers?" Harking laughed. "Oh we're aces high with them! Fine source of income. And we attract a 'good element' to the area. But that doesn't mean the mood couldn't change overnight. So we've got to stay on our toes. That's one reason we send our youngsters to school on the mainland. Primarily, of course, it's to give them a normal school experience. But we're also interested in the feedback from the general public. And we in turn brief our young people on how to answer questions about our work, to emphasize its positive aspects, for example, 'possibilities in space-exploration,' and so forth." Harking laughed shortly. "Though heaven knows we have trouble enough keeping the blasted things alive and in good spirits even on Earth!"

"Good spirits?" Plante asked in surprise.

"Oh I imagine there are changes in the sense of well-being. I'm almost sure of it. But why should that surprise us? Don't we say, 'The thought saddened us.'?"

"You really believe it's the thought?" Plante asked closely."Some people in the field would say the opposite, The saddening -- a change in body chemistry -- came first, and that produced the thought."

"No doubt," Harking replied, off-hand, apparently unconcerned with such subtleties. This annoyed Plante.

Behind him, on the island, the lights suddenly flickered. By a rather common illusion, Plante felt a momentary sinking, as though his heart had skipped a beat. Harking glanced at his watch. "Cutting over to a new power supply," he explained.

He began to stuff his pipe, working deftly and methodically, as though he were setting up the apparatus for an experiment. There was something a trifle overplayed in the air of self-assurance with which he carried out even a trivial activity. Plante could not help wondering, "Is he altogether immune to doubt?"

"Do you suppose," he began as diffidently as he could, "those brains ever suspect?" He could not altogether quench the sly tone in his voice. "Maybe that's what depresses them."

"It's...possible," Harking conceded. "We have tried to anticipate the contingency by incorporating as many salient facts of individual history as practical in our programme. Our aim, in other words, is to establish -- in what is still, I grant you, a rudimentary style -- a continuous biography for each of our specimens."

"Yet you exclude from that biography the single most important datum that exists: the fact that they are brains. In short," he concluded with a suppressed tingle of triumph, "are you playing fair with them?"

"Oh I don't see 'fairness' as a consideration," Harking answered impatiently. "Does nature sign a contract with us? We learn its rules behaviorally, and those rules become, by definition, normality. I don't doubt the specimens have a sense of dislocation, reduction, loss. At the same time we work constantly to enrich their programmes. Tbis is, after all, only the dawn of a heroic enterprise. No more than the universe unlocks all its secrets for us need we do so for them."

Plante looked down at his hands, crossed thoughtfully on the table and vaguely luminous in the darkness. One hand felt the coolness and tremble of the other in the night air. The sea was still gentle but the period of its waves had quickened. Plante wondered why they did not go inside. He felt, quite uncharacteristically, like a drink, or at least something warming inside him.

Despite the elaborate care with which Harking had loaded his pipe, it had to be relit. Waiting for the moment when the flare of the match would play on Harking's face, Plante observed, "In other words, if I were one of your brains, it's very unlikely that I would even suspect it."

Harking's eyes, cast down at the pipe bowl, looked up briefly with a strange expression; cold, almost, as if to quench his surprise. His eyes dropped again and he continued his measured puffing. "We rather hope that would be the case," he said, putting the matches back into his pocket.

His fingernails clicked the plastic surface of the table. "But this sort of speculation is really old hat, isn't it?" he remarked, trying to put a bantering tolerance into his voice. "Doesn't it all go back to the Bishop Berkeley business? How can we be sure our clothes are still hanging in the closet, after we've shut the door on them? The good bishop's answer, of course, was that God guaranteed the continuity of his trousers. God, the banker of reality. But Hume knocked that into a cocked hat, didn't he? We can't be sure. All we've got is the input data from our sense-organs and our memories of them. Very well, I have my sense-data and the brains have theirs. I don't see how matters have changed very much."

"That is what has changed," Plante replied, tossing his head toward the floodlit laboratory building. "Hume knew there was a real world, a world of tables and chairs, wives and children. He just pretended that we couldn't be sure, so we'd have to ask ourselves what 'knowing' really meant. It was a game. And Wittgenstein didn't think philosophy should play games. That's why Wittgenstein--"

"Yes, yes--" Harking nodded shortly, as if to say that he knew all about Wittgenstein, or perhaps that he didn't see why he had to know anything about Wittgenstein.

Plante shifted his weight impatiently, suppressing his resentment. "The point is--it isn't a game anymore. There are now two worlds. The world we live in, and the world we are creating for them," he pointed his chin at the laboratory. "And it's rather important, I should think, for each of us to know which world he belongs to."

"Yes," Harking agreed suavely. "That is rather important."

They got up together, the chairs scraping on the slate floor. Plante was glad to remove himself from the sea-spray, which had covered his cheeks like cold sweat. He walked stiff-legged toward the dining hall, blinking as he came into the light. Harking must have caught his speculative glance at the bar for he suggested a drink. There was no trace of the asperity that had crept into his voice only a short time ago.

"Thank you," Plante said. "I'm afraid the chill has gotten into me." His tone was slightly accusatory.

"The sea-breeze does freshen up in the evening," Harking conceded.

The bar was deserted except for a young couple, who seemed a trifle flustered to find themselves in Harking's social company. Though the Nobel laureate's greeting was cordial enough, he did not introduce Plante, who surmised that Harking had forgotten the names of the young people.

"Or maybe," he reflected, "he's forgotten mine."

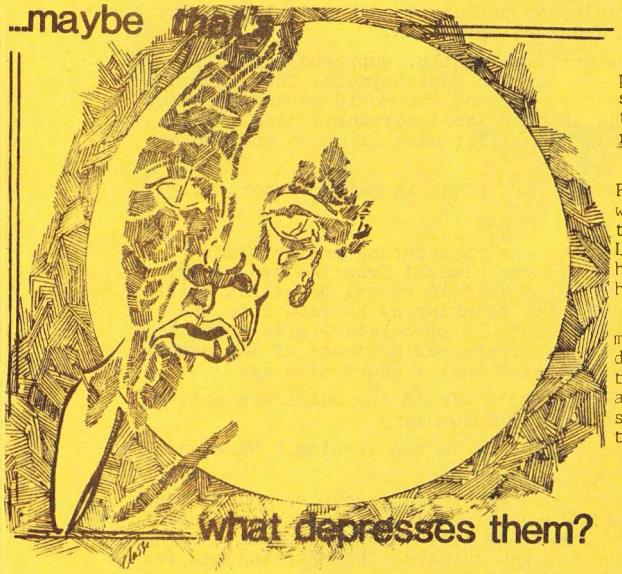
They ordered brandies, and very generous the drinks were, in snifters handsomely engraved with the Institute's monogram. Plante, who knew nothing at all about liquor, nodded at the first sip, like a connoisseur.

"I say, this is a sort of holiday for me," Harking observed. "Reminds me of the bull sessions in my old Oxford Days."

Plante turned the glass, staring at the glints in the liquor; his own graduate training had been entirely in midwestern institutions. "Of course," he remarked nonchalantly, "if I am a brain, then you must be an illusion."

"Indeed?" Harking slid the brandy glass onto the bar, and then turned half-polititely, half-challengingly. The bartender glanced at the snifter, before staring off into the sea distance again.

"Well, let's say, a configuration of pseudo-sensory inputs," Plante amended with a conciliatory yet complacent air.



"For you," Harking answered pointedly. "Yet those pseudo-sensory inputs, as you call them, may be derived from the real Harking."

"The real Harking," thought Plante. "Meaning no doubt the winner of the Nobel Prize, together with John Kramly and Lee Fong, neither of whom he's mentioned since I met him."

He felt a seething excitement, a sense of triumphantly defying privilege, connection, renown. "There is still another possibility," he observed casually. "Namely, that you too are a brain."

"Oh I see." Harking swung in short arcs on the bar stool, which gave out a sad, nautical creeeek at each swing. His expression, in the mirror behind the bar, had become, if anything, more composed and bland. "In other words, if I reach out"--Plante saw him, in the mirror, reaching out--"and touch you"--he felt the fingertips on his hand, which he realized to his chagrin, was trembling even more strongly than before--"then the computer supplies each of us with appropriate sensory signals. In short, it substantializes me in your mind, you in mine, by acting as a sort of sensory switchboard between us. Very good."

His warm fingers continued to rest lightly on Plante's. "Perhaps you have caught a chill--your hand is cold. I'd hate to have you leave the island with a bug. Why not stop by the infirmary tonight? They may be able to nip this, whatever it is."

"I'll--see how I feel tomorrow," Plante drew his hand away, to his drink.

"Probably the excitement of the vistas we've opened this evening," Harking laughed drolly.

This time Plante did not laugh. He had thrown out the bait --good fishing--but who was the fish? Once again, he had made himself blind to his future.

"And why, may I ask, do you stop where you do?" Harking asked. "That young couple--?" But the couple at the end of the bar had slipped away. "Well then--" Harking nodded at the bartender, who was still gazing vacantly seaward, his arms folded on his stomach in the classic pose of his trade. Harking said nothing more, as though even a Nobel laureate hesitated to question the reality of a bartender. But then, warming to the idea, he encompassed the whole island with a quick gesture of his arm. "We may all be brains!"

"Exactly what I was about to add," Plante replied through thinly drawn lips. He shook his head slightly, as if to clear it. Harking was right: he was indisposed. The day-long intoxication of the sea-air, the drama of the occasion. His big opportunity! But he remembered how other such opportunities had slipped away. A turn in the conversation, a locking of horns, the insipid letter of regret...Always this melancholy compulsion to declare himself apart. Suddenly he felt sallow, drained, frightened even, at the prospect of illness in strange surroundings. Damn it, it was thoughtless of Harking to keep him, especially after noticing how peaked he looked.

"Perhaps you'd like to call it a day," Harking said solicitously. "You look tired."

"Un--not really..." Plante stretched and sighed. He took his glasses off to wipe them, for the sea-mist seemed to enter even the dining-hall. Then he heard footsteps and dimly saw two men in white frocks advancing toward him.

"Hello!" Harking called out cheerfully. Plante recognized the faces after he'd put his glasses on. Furthermore, Fong and Kramly seemed to know why he was there, for at the mention of his name a glint of recognition, even of appropriation, came into their eyes. "Looking for porters too, for their glamorous safaris," he reflected, and wondered whether the meeting was really accidental.

As if to remove his suspicion, the two men explained that they had just come down from the lab for a hamburger and some tea; Kramly, in fact, still had a spot of ketchup alongside his nose.

"Hamburger?" Harking scoffed. "You eat hamburger while my friend here has all but convinced me that I'm a brain. And you too! And you!"

"The question," Plante said hoarsely, "was whether there was any way for an autonomous brain to discover it was a brain. And if there wasn't, then it could be hypothesized, as...as a recreational speculation"--the long words seemed to tire him--"that we are...indeed...brains."

"My wife isn't going to like that," Fong exclaimed. "Do you know what she will say? 'Lee, why didn't you tell me this before we were married?'"

"There is another possibility," Harking told them consolingly. "You may simply be an illusion of my brain."

"A configuration of pseudo-sensory inputs!" Plante protested.

"The important thing," Kramly observed, "is, whatever you do, do it right. If we're illusions, then"--he struck the bar with his fist--"let's be the best damn illusions that ever existed."

Plante glanced blearily from one to the other. "Comedians," he thought.

"Say, there's a problem," Harking pondered. "Who's taking care of the shop?"

At that they all turned to Plante, who had propped his elbow on the bar, his hand over one eye. "Why?" he asked dully. "Why must anyone be, as you put it, taking care of the shop?"

The Nobel laureates looked thunderstruck, yet also strangely pleased. "You mean?" Fong asked in a theatrical whisper.

Kramly nodded solemnly. "We are all living in a brain-world."

"No!" Fong raised his hands in awe.

"Yes," replied Kramly. "Programmed and automated. It just goes on and on, while we brains imagine we're still in the old, old world, doing those marvellous, nasty, human things we used to do."

"Wonderful! Wonderful!" Fong snapped his fingers at the bemused bartender. "Heard the news? We're all brains!"

"Not me," the bartender replied with a dreamy smile.

"Of course you are," Fong insisted. "What's a brain-world without a good bartender?"

The bartender gravely nodded thanks. Plante stared at them with a glazed expression, highlighted by bleak resentment. But for the moment he was being almost pointedly ignored.

"I swear, I never suspected," Harking whispered to Fong. "Did you?"

"Just once. The day you beat me at tennis. How did you get that into the computer? An Harkeeng, you are the sly one!"

Fong punched Harking's shoulder affectionately. Then, linking arms with both his friends, he urged them into a little dance. Back and forth the Nobel laureates weaved like an old-time chorus line, while the bartender hugged himself, his stomach rising and falling in the rhythm of his mirth.

Plante lurched off the bar stool. "Copernicus was laughed at, Darwin was laughed at," he cried indignantly. "We see the Sun revolves around the Earth. We know man was divinely created."

Arms still linked, in frozen attitudes, they half-surrounded him. In an instant they had become monstrously plain, eerily ordinary. He spoke to them from a distance.

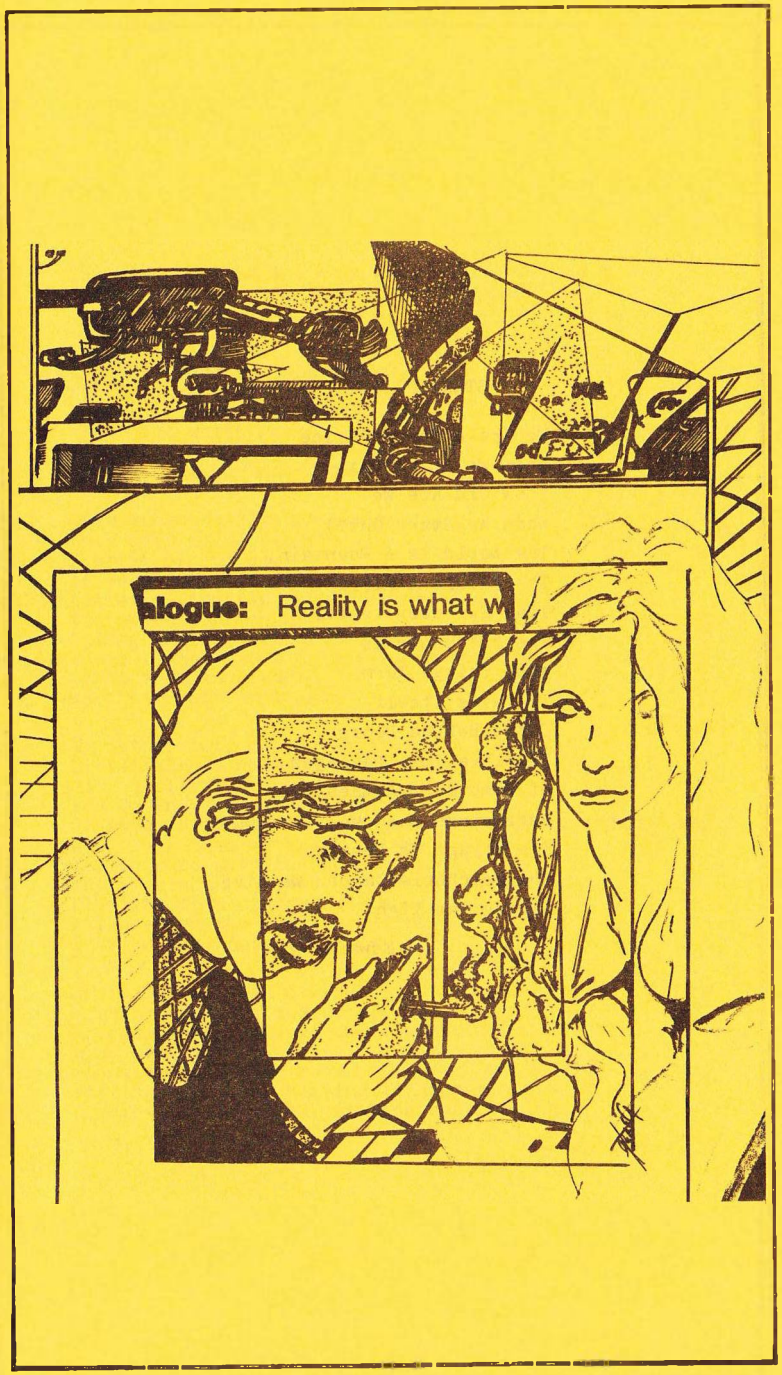
"Of course you may say, if you wish--if you wish, gentlemen --that my theory is self-defeating. If I am a brain like the rest of you, how did I find out?"

He let the silence hang, not to be hurried by their embarrassment. But his thoughts began to weaken, loosening their hold on words.

"At the interface with the unknown...Unstable equilibrium... knowledge dissolves into mystery, mystery into knowledge..." The silence began to harden around him, so that the words seemed to break upon it. "Shock, drugs, unspeakable indignities... a mind more valiant than the rest...the vagrant memory. A sunset, a breakfast." He tried to hurry. He became alarmed. His thoughts were vaporizing. "Honour this spirit, gentlemen. Honour it! Cogito...cogito...cogito..."

It echoed endlessly in the vault of his mind, and he heard (or did he?), "Good heavens, the chap is really unwell." And he felt (or did he?) hands like ropes around his arms. "Now then, we'll have you to the infirmary in a jiffy..."

His head fell forward, acknowledging the oncoming darkness with a groan. Eyeless, he gazed into the well of his despair. "Oh my god...the frontier..."



STARTING OUT

We Are A Fever On Ice
When We Start Out
(How Old Are We
When We Start Out?)
The World Is A Mountain,
The Future A Mirror
That Extends Itself,
The "I" Vanishes
When Things Turn
To Thing Itself
Doors Behind Doors
Dissolve Into Passages
Of Dumb Rare Authentic
Beginnings When We Start Out
The Voyage Is Destiny
The Reachable Garden We Live
Daring The light.

--Edward Mycue--

AT L-5

Surprise here is the work of science:
plants suddenly stirring in greenhouses,
limbs twisting towards sun,
thickening cattle twitching in stalls,
swatting at injection sites.
I once wished for stampedes,
for incurable disease.
I made friends with plants,
their fat white roots
squirming secretly under benches.
They seemed to understand.

Cows pregnant with no bulls,
bags over dying flowers . . . .
I dream of aphids,
of worms haunting muscle,
bacterial traffic in the veins of a calf,
the embrace of an amoeba.
Things move according to plan.
Music is the right music; books contain
considered knowledge;
machines make us laugh.

My father told me once of Earth.
Of building a house between oaks,
near a cliff. Putting blocks together
end to end, with mortar between,
wearing cotton gloves. White, he told me, and the sky
was bluer than asters. It was November,
leaves were skidding across gravel.
While drinking coffee, my father looked up.
Floating from a great distance,
balanced on the wind, wings raised
like an angel's: a vulture.

My father watched it, felt
a shadow bending and stretching
across gravel, block, and boulder.
Wind sank in the valley,
along cliff's edge rose
lifting the bird, heaving it higher,
cradled in that wind, rocking and rocking.

--Jon Davis--

ACTION AND REACTION

The drizzle and the river mingle
far below the window where she stands alone:
undaunted, self-assured and single,
she camouflages emptiness by telephone.

Love's inchoate mystery along the wire,
the stealing shadow that conceals the sun.
She seeks its image in the mirror where
her dreams like crystal pinwheels spun.

She knows: the sunburst of an April afternoon,
the leaning ledge and wary suicidal jump;
the discrete meanings of the three and nine
when slyly covered by a handy trump.

And then: the jointless fingers come together,
weathered knots along a core of twisted wood,
in mute fidelity to one another;
beneath the leathered skin, attenuated blood.

The faint horizon's bridge is like a spider's web
suspended from a cynic quarter moon;
she shrinks still deeper into her silken robe,
decides that, some day soon, she'll turn another stone...

--Dan Pettee--

Theatre of the Fantastic

Salad Dressing

by

Peter Bernhardt

Little Shop of Horrors premiered in New York City in 1982 as an off-Broadway production. At the time I write this column this musical comedy continues to run, and it has been so successful that local television stations regularly run a rather uninspired commercial (positive interviews with patrons leaving the theatre lobby) to attract a continuous audience. Critical response to Little Shop of Horrors, back in '82, was entirely favourable. How could anyone dislike the sentimental story of a man-eating plant that conspires to take over the world? The Village Voice titled its review "The Play of the Triffid."

Followers of film cults undoubtedly recognize the title of this musical. Little Shop of Horrors is among the most famous of the "Roger Corman Quickies," and the original movie was released in 1960. Corman is reputed to have shot the film in two days. Trivia gourmets are quick to note that the film offers one of the earliest performances of Jack Nicholson on celluloid. He played a masochist with a strong affection for the dentist's drill.

Production rights to the musical seem to have been released within the last two years. In fact, my introduction to Little Shop came last January through an effort of the Repertory Theatre of St. Louis. Considering the popularity of the play, I suspect that it won't be long before many other readers of this publication have the chance to sample a performance by one of their local theatre groups.

Within the past quarter of a century musical comedy, in America, has undergone continuous hybridization in its search for popular subjects. Adaptations of stage dramas seem to have given way to the taming of rock music and film. This makes Little Shop one of the more typical but appealing chimeras. Imagine, if you will, the stylistic parodies of Grease and The Rocky Horror Show grafted onto the plot of a B-movie.

Briefly, Mr. Mushkin runs a flower shop on Skid Row. He is a loser who employs two other losers, Seymour and Audrey. Seymour loves Audrey but he only seems to get on well with plants and he has little to offer a woman, as his place of residence is a makeshift bed under his employer's counter. Audrey is obviously fond of Seymour but she worries about her past. She is currently dating a brutal biker-cum-dentist who forces her to address him as "Doctor."

When Mr. Mushkin receives no customers towards the end of a long day he threatens to close the place. Audrey and Seymour convince him he needs something interesting in the window to attract the attention of strollers. Seymour brings out a bizarre little plant he found in the garden of a Chinaman following a freak eclipse of the sun. No sooner has the plant been placed in the window than a suspicious looking zombie marches in and promptly buys a hundred dollars worth of roses.

The shop is saved but there is a problem. Seymour's plant, now named Audrey II, refuses to flourish. Seymour coddles the plant with fertilizer and one of the most absurd love songs I've heard in a musical comedy, "Grow for Me," which contains memorable lines like "Oh, how I mist you." However, the secret of the plant's vigour is not revealed until he cuts his thumb on a rose thorn. Expounding the plot further isn't necessary. However, I don't think I'd be giving too much away if I mention that the final number is called "Don't Feed the Plants" and that most of the cast members have been transformed into flowers on the plant's limbs. Thorny tendrils sprout from the orchestra pit and vines descending from the wings billow out towards the audience.

The lyrics and music are by Howard Ashman and Alan Menken, respectively. They have produced a show consisting exclusively of novelty songs. These songs are so tightly wound into the plot that I find it unlikely that any could survive outside the rarified milieu presented in the play. Then again, I may be wrong. "Let's Do the Timewarp Again" has enjoyed a lusty life in discos divorced from The Rocky Horror Show.

Little Shop absolutely wallows in the late-fifties scenario it parodies. Three runaway girls make up the entire chorus, and they are named Chiffon, Crystal, and Ronnette. My favourite song is a ballad performed by Audrey in her most wistful mood. In "Somewhere that's Green" Audrey yearns for a better life in suburbia where she can cook like Betty Crocker and look like Donna Reed. Pine-Sol scents the air of her dream house and thaere's an "enormous 12-inch screen" television to watch after the frozen dinner is consumed.

The running gag in this show is the plant, which increases in girth and menace following each meal. The monster resembles a hybrid between an artichoke and a toothy watermelon. In fact, Audrey II is a series of puppets cleverly manipulated by hand and rods. The show's most popular gimmick is the illusion that the plant expands every time it consumes another warm, moist meal. The voice of the plant quickly changes from whining tempter to threatening Svengali. In the production I saw they gave Audrey II the accent and inflections of a ghetto-educated black male who could alternately croon and thunder like Marvin Gaye. Perhaps the director of the St. Louis production was trying to make the point that the bland security of the fifties would soon be "engulfed" in decades of racial turmoil. Of course, this is not the sort of show that survives on topicality or even serious introspection.

Specifically, Little Shop survives only if the director and cast invest all their resources into comic timing and careful blocking. The production I saw offered such exquisite pacing and underplayed performances that the bouncy pace was superior to good cabaret. Mood is everything to a show like this. Lose it and members of the audience quickly realize that they are sitting through just one more musical comedy showing how Americans rejoiced in their naivete while Ike was president.

Little Shop, then, delights in its own brainless amusement, and it's certainly the best of its kind that I've seen in years. Those who prefer serious s-f theatre or even the tradition of hummable musical comedy will not be pleased. I suspect, though, that Little Shop represents a continuous trend, not the end-product of a fad. As musical theatre becomes prohibitively expensive, backers will favour productions with a small cast (Little Shop requires just ten performers) that will offer a plot attracting a wide, young, monied audience. It's small wonder that a show about an aggressive flytrap will survive and proliferate during an age of artistic Darwinism.

WARNING

You are getting so big
all of a sudden, Dragon!

You have lost your baby fat
and know where
your head and tail are at

You are too big to be innocent

Now when you melt a city
we will not respond playfully

There will be no more allowances
for your homelessness
and lack of friends

Now we will read your acts
As Dragon acts to Dragon ends

--Kay Ryan--

THE RETURNING

All my life-time I'd been afraid of shadows,
sensing them, like ghost-birds behind my eyelids
sensing them, like prophets from distant countries
watching and waiting.

When we walked together we made one shadow.
Then you went away to that distant country,
then you went away and your shadow vanished
past my horizon.

Now, from nowhere comes a familiar presence
like faint incense wreathing around my shoulders,
like faint sunlight slanting through ice or water.
Shadow, I know you.

--Caryl Porter--

SEA OF TRANQUILITY

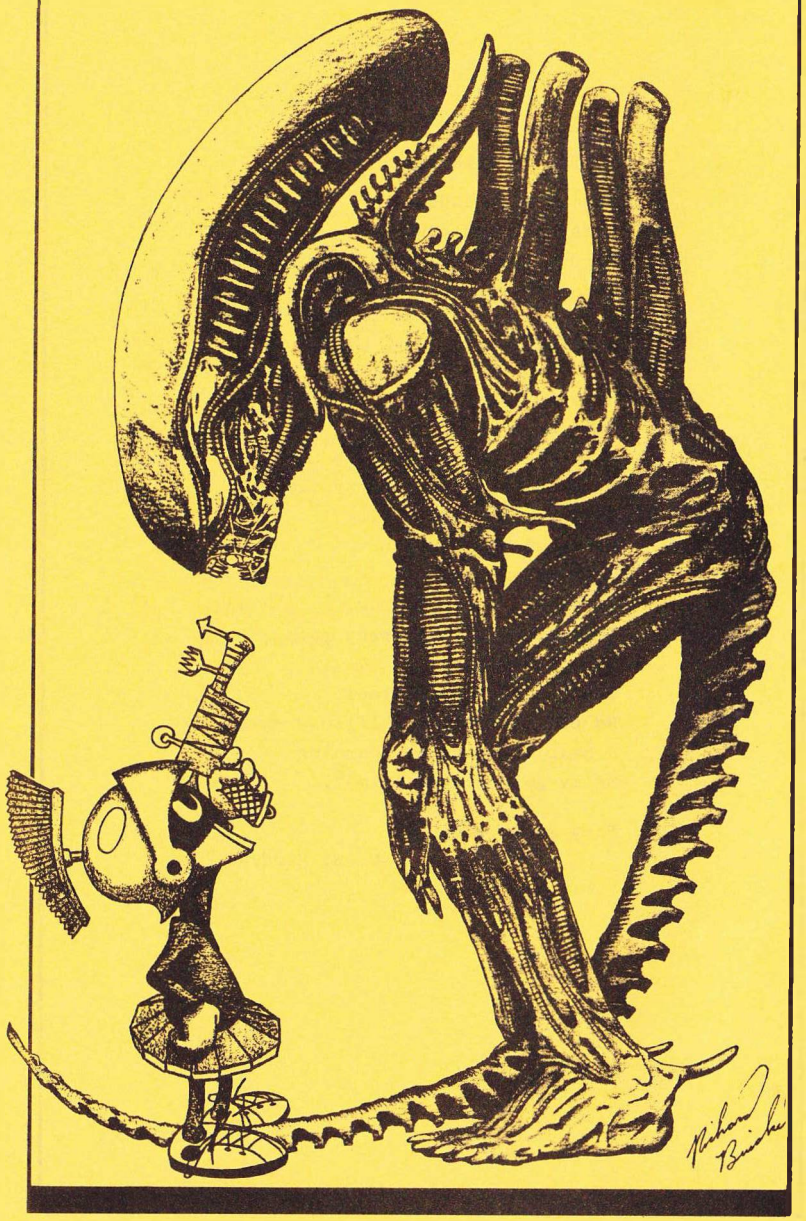
Memory of clouds,
Breeze chased grass,
Bird arias and insect reprise,
Young lovers consumating
Their anxious hopes in the wild,
And the scent of the wind.

Name me liar,
Name me poet,
Here floating on sterile sea
With soil like dead gray flour,
Watching the earth rise
Heavy on the horizon
I think of home.
I, exiled for metaphor,
Prometheus on the great rock,
Creativity my sin.
The irony of this place,
No peace on these shiftless waves.
I heap the dust of mourning
On my gold glazed helmet.

Bury me at sea.

--K. S. Hardy--

Speeches and Screams



Future Talk

or

What Do You Say When You Get off the Time Machine?

by

Mary Weinkauf

So long as there are living beings using it, language changes. For a long time science-fiction ignored this fact, using translating machines or telepathy with cheerful indifference to linguistics. A few writers invented special terms for wondrous inventions and strange new ways. Sir Thomas More invented syphograunte or philarche to name the head of a utopian (itself an invention) thirty-family unit, and Swift coined ynholmhnmrohlnw-Yahoo to say an ill-constructed house. C.S. Lewis took a philologist through his space adventures in the Perelandra trilogy. Although s-f writers don't always pay attention to the changing language, it is interesting to consider inventive language that shows change.[1] Since full study of the subject would grow to galactic proportions, I'll just give some examples specifically dealing with usage changes, names indicating new inventions, etc., then swear words and other unmentionables.

I. USAGE CHANGES

Back 900,000 years ago, according to René Barjaval's The Ice People, there were separate languages for male and female, differing in vocabulary and syntax. But in our sexist world one recurring problem--grammatically and sociologically --is the use of his to represent either his or hers. In Marge Piercy's Woman on the Edge of Time, Connie Ramos is capable of breaking through time into the world a hundred years from now. The group with whom she spends most of her time has leveled sexual differences and accepted people as people. Consequently, person is used:

> "Does she want me to leave?" Connie whispered.
>
> "No, no," Luciente said in her normal loud voice, "Person only wants not to be made to remember who you are."[2]

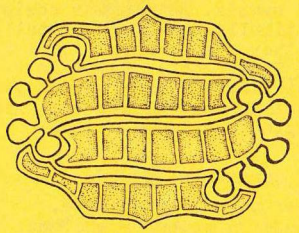
Person is shortened to per: "And Diana goes mad every couple of years. Has visions. Per earth quakes" (p.54). Piercy also forsees logical back-formations, abbreviations like proj, crit, and plex for project, criticism, and explanation. A useful blend occurs in easercises (exercises used to relax persons) and recks ("a recks but we wish it was a requisition" (p. 265). "A process of change over the years creates for granite: "You have to pretend to take it for granite" (p. 286). Although an Edwin Newman might wear out his typewriter protesting usage changes, ultimately a new society makes a language to fit its ways. When Connie reaches New York City, which has developed along a dehumanizing technological pattern unlike the countrysides life, she is befuddled by conversations starting out with "How'd you get in here anyhow? Nobody but contract girls and middle flacks stack in this complex. It's strictly SG'd" (p. 279).

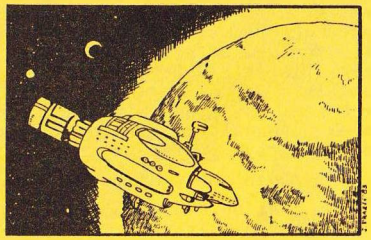
Another bewildered time-traveller is John Brent in Anthony Boucher's Barrier, which begins:

> The first difficulty was with language.
>
> That is only to be expected when you jump five hundred years, but it is nonetheless perplexing to have your first query of "What city is this?" answered by the sentence: "Strappers will get you. Or be you Slanduch?"[3]

Irregular verbs are dangerous--and so are plurals and pronouns. In the twenty-fourth century, everything had settled into dull perfection and the English language had been "regularized." The article had been found unnecessary and misleading. As one thinker, Farthing, had written in his definitive This Bees Speech, "Article...bees prime corruptor of human thinking" (p. 226). The Barrier was set up to avoid imperfections from the past and future. John's adventure brings it down.

During all the intrigue John learns about language change. The typewriter has the forty-odd characters of the Farthing phonetic alphabet. A few new words have come about. When John is accused of being drunk, it's in these words: "And how long have you beed on a bonder?" He considers this. "A bonder ...would be a bond bender." Proper grammar in these days is I be, you bees, it beed, they does, "'What be the large wheels maked of?' he telled," "How doed he know?" and five mans. Does is pronounced dooze and all r's are trilled. Of course, John catches on because linguistic adaptability was a qualification for his mission. This adventure of a man who has to learn "improper English" is a clever extrapolation of the ultimate police-state. "Stappers," the first word John hears, is the final development of Gestapo; Boucher's warning is against totalitarianism, not power-maddened English teachers. When people's language has been controlled, as in the obvious cases of Barrier and Nineteen Eighty-Four, freedom has been destroyed.





II. NAMES INDICATING NEW INVENTIONS, ETC.

Language control as thought control may be disputed by linguists, but it is, nevertheless, a basic premise of Nineteen Eighty-Four. Normally, some words are invented by the people and some proper nouns become common nouns, like webster in Clifford Simak's City and gallup in Robert Silverberg's The Stochastic Man. But in Nineteen Eighty-Four words are created by the government and not devised by the people to say important things. Government-made words often whitewash unpleasant realities. This managed language is Newspeak. Most s-f readers are aware of the inventions of Nineteen Eighty Four--telescreen, minitrue, pornoses, and doublethink, for example. Orwell adds an appendix, "The Principles of Newspeak," to reinforce his linguistic message. One of the novel's sources, Cyril Connolly's "Year Nine," provided inspiration for Orwell with words like Youngleaderboy, Sleep thinking, Groupbegettingday, and Leadersequence.

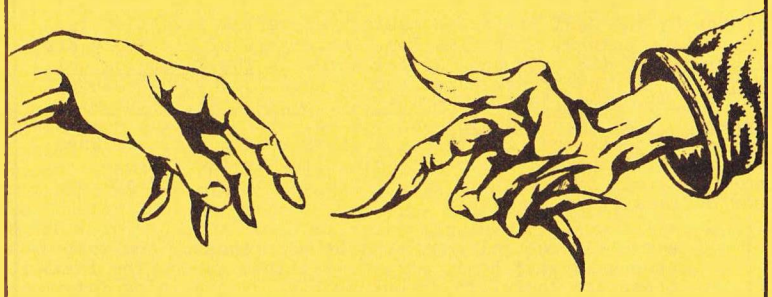
Brave New World with its strange new ways also has special names: centrifugal bumbepuppy, galloping senility, and zippcaminknicks. Bokenovskification is one of those new processes mentioned in s-f, similar to A Clockwork Orange's invention of Ludoviko's Technique, the cure for criminals through conditioning, and Stand on Zanzibar's eptification, a process that turns a man into a spying and fighting machine. Since Anthony Burgess, influenced by James Joyce, provides a glossary, it is enough to refer readers to the slang dictionary in A Clockwork Orange for such Nadsat words as cal, appy polly leggy, drencrom, flip, maslo, devotchka, polyclef, and prestoopnik. Many of these are of Russian origin; others are clever word games. Similar to the Nadsat words and ways--except in reduced viciousness--are the Jang terms of Tanith Lee's Don't Bite the Sun and Drinking Sapphire Wine. Attlevey is hello, droad is bored, zaradan means insane, and ooms means honey. Lee does not use slang dialogue extensively but invents more words than Burgess, whose teenagers are extrapolations into the near future and a world little different from our own.

One of the most respected masters of verbal invention is the Polish author, Stanislaw Lem. Though all of his books are imaginative, the best one for new words is The Futurological Congress. A riot of new words occurs when Ijon Tichy enters the future: fictification, piositive, suggesties, psychem, encephalostat, equaniminine--on and on, new words for new sciences and drugs that obliterate a disagreeable present. Then too a friend shows up to regale him with his few field--morphological forecasting, projective etymology. The professor defines it at length:

> A man can control only what he comprehends, and comprehend only what he is able to put into words. The inexpressible therefore is unknowable. By examining future stages in the evolution of language we come to learn what discoveries, changes and social revolutions the language will be capable, some day, of reflecting.[4]

Not all word changes are startingly original, or even intended as more than a touch of local colour. To indicate that words are not English, writers have always combined letters in irregular ways. For example, Ilodium is the power source in the parallel world of Hall and Flint's The Blind Spot. The word sounds Welch--just a little unlike common English. Vocabulary in place of specific description is used in Keith Laumer's Retief adventures. Super-hero Retief converses fluently in every-creature's dialect throughout the universe, be they Strukes, Vorch, Tsuggs, Doobs, Poons, Zilk, Rhoon, Quopp, and of course, Groacci, Laumer's version of the Klingons of Star Trek. Attempts to convey native conversations lean heavily on pigeon-galactic, spoonerisms like "Thur sing, Moss-ban," and inverted sentence structure like "Used to be they garbage-pickers."

H. Beam Piper has used vocabulary, discovery, and linguistic analysis as a major part of his plots in Little Fuzzies, Fuzzy Sapiens, and "Omnilingual." The people of Little Fuzzies and its sequel establish their humanity once Terrans learn that they speak in a pitch higher than human being can detect. Though Piper transcribes some original Fuzzy--"Ahi-gazza-heeta-so"--they usually speak in baby-talk--"Keffu, Unka Gus! Sha'ap; kuttsu!"[5] Agreeable little souls, they learn to communicate with a Fuzzyphone or to lower their pitch to the range audible to human beings. In "Omnilingual" Piper presents one of s-f's best extrapolations of anthropological linguistics at work. A research team uses all the clues it can find on Mars to unlock the dead race's secrets. What allows Martha Cane to read Martian is the periodic table: chemistry and physics are omnilingual. In this case old words interpret new ones and open the door to understanding the scientific accomplishments of a long-dead race.



III. SWEAR WORDS AND OTHER UNMENTIONABLES

People will, we assume, go on getting angry. Life always offers unpleasant things to generate colourful cursing. John Brunner presents some of s-f's most effective social satire in The Jagged Orbit and Stand on Zanzibar, detailing worlds to swear about. In fact, one major character is the author of a work referred to regularly--The Hipcrime Vocab by Chad Mulligan. In Brunner's books people call each other softasses, dreck, bleeders (based on British slang and the greater incidence of hemophilia), and muckers (based on the frequency of people who run amuck and perpetrate senseless murders). A short-term girlfriend is a shiggy. Children are prodgies, with no fondness intended in an overcrowded world. Reason has become a dirty word.

The words of Stand on Zanzibar reflect society's changed mores. The dominant communication mode is the chatter of the television newscaster: a.m. is anti-matter; p.m., poppa-mamma. With no religion and, in fact, with prejudice against the once prolific Catholics, the old theological curses are meaningless. So it's howinole, holovalot, whoinole, whatinole, whinole, sheeting hole, or just the hole! Or it's[6] "Why in the cosmos not?" Whaledreck also substitutes for hell. Bastard is only a word that has become descriptive rather than pejorative. People do not marry; they simply breed and may not know or care who their fathers are. The military enforces some language. Chinese, the scapegoats, are to be referred to as chinks, slit eyes, yellowbellies, and weevils instead of "softass civilian terms" like "little red brothers" (p.84).

In several novels, in fact, our contemporary good words have gone bad. "Mother" in Brave New World elicits gasps, while "father" is less shocking--just a smutty joke. As Huxley explains,

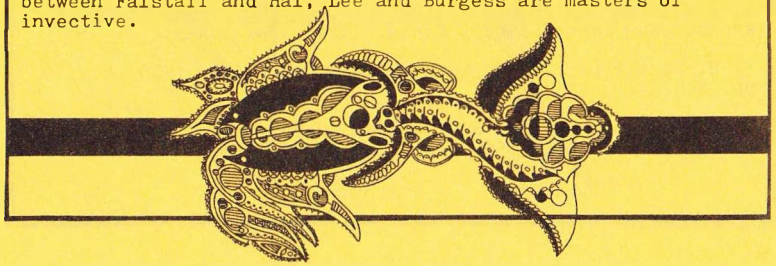
> ..."father" was not so much obscene as--with its connotations of something at one remove from the loathsomeness and moral obliquity of child-bearing--merely gross, a scatological rather than a pornographic impropriety.[7]

"Hate" has become the ultimate obscenity in the ostensibly loving society of Ira Levin's This Perfect Day. A low-life type might, for example,[8] say "Where the hate had they got it!" or just "Hate!" And in Heinlein's The Moon is a Harsh Mistress you'd better smile when you call a Moon colonist a "loonie."

Swearing will have to change as gods come and go. The most famous example appears in Brave New World, a society that worships the memory of the efficient Henry T. Ford. "Our Ford, Ford!" and even "Fordy!" the folks exclaim. They also sing hymns to Ford. Levin's citizens swear by Christ, Marx, Wood, and Wei or shout "We Li Chun!" In Barrier, where unapproved grammar is punishable by death, typical expressions are "Cosmos knows!" or "Cosmic Eons!"

Not all deities' names are taken in vain, though. In Nova people still say "hell" and "God damn," but Ashton Clark is deified as the worker's prophet. A twenty-third century psychologist/philosopher, he had pointed out the lack of control and responsibility in the old ways of working in a technological society and had influenced the scientist, Souqet, so that he developed neural plugs, allowing people literally to plug themselves into the machines with which they worked. Thus workers say "Ashton Clark go with you,"[9] "Bless Ashton Clark," or "Ashton Clark will send me something." Silverberg's Tower of Glass has another such god. Simeon Krug has developed a process of creating androids who go about saying, as might be expected, "Krug preserve me," "Praised be Krug," and giving a "Krug-be-praised" sign[10] ("Left hand to crotch, breast, forehead, one two three.") Obviously, new gods require both new curses and new blessings.

When a philologist sets about studying current slang, he or she will discover numerous words for currently popular drugs and perpetually popular sexual activities. In the teenaged societies of Anthony Burgess' A Clockwork Orange and Tanith Lee's Don't Bite the Sun and Drinking Sapphire Wine there are lots of both. Drugs are synthemesc, vellocet, and drencrom in Nadsat. Pol, in-out in-out, sod, and panhandle refer to sex. To start a fight Alex taunts, "Come and get one in the yarbles, if you have any yarbles, you eunuch jelly, thou."[11] It does not take much to understand a Nadsat insult. In Jang slang, farathoom! is an eloquent expression for "bloody, fucking hell." A thoroughly nasty lady can be called either a floop or a thalldrap. At one point the heroine, occasionally seen as a nasty lady, is greeted by: "You lying, double-crossing, maladjusted, thalldrap! You regurgigated tosky, maker-making promok!"[12] Though few writers can reach the scurrilous heights of Shakespeare's name-calling matches between Falstaff and Hal, Lee and Burgess are masters of invective.



SUFFIX

In this short essay I cannot mention every book that deals with language in the future. Many authors are sensitive to language change. Robert Heinlein, among them, has fun with Michael Valentine Smith's process of adjusting to American idioms in Stranger in a Strange Land. A master of language himself, Samuel R. Delany works extensively with the relations of language to thought in Babel-17. Here the whole plot is based on poet-superwoman Rydra Wong's mission to unravel the mystery of Babel-17, a language that dominates communication networks before, during, and after sabotage of Alliance defence operations and deaths of officials. To everyone else it's gobbledy-gook, but for Rydra it has grammar, logic, and thought-processes. She is impressed by its ability to convey more in a word than most languages can in paragraphs. While she works on the puzzle, she reviews the complexity of language, especially the most profound mystery -- the noun. How, she muses, can you think about something without a word for it? When she realizes that I does not exist in Babel-17, she understands that it is the language of a programmed secret agent, and the war between the Alliance and the Invaders is on its way to an end. Delany's novel tells much about human communications, even portraying a key character who cannot say "Captain," the author explains, because "The mouth, distended through cosmetisurgically implanted fangs, [13] could not deal with a plosive labial unless it was voiced." Incidentally, people still call an enemy ship a big mother and yell "All right already!" like twentieth-century New Yorkers.

Just as she is given her assignment, Rydra tells a close friend that "most textbooks say language is a mechanism for expressing thought, Mocky. But language is thought. Thought is information given form. The form is language. The form of this language is...amazing" (p.22). Since our thoughts are still those of today, creating future talk is only a game.

FOOTNOTES

1) In his essay, "Language for Time Travelers," first printed in 1938 and available in Martin Greenberg, ed., Coming Attractions (New York: Gnome Press, 1957), L. Sprague de Camp uses scenarios of a time-traveler who finds the language of 2438 incomprehensible. Assuming that English will become the international language, de Camp speculates on changes in pronunciation, vocabulary, and syntax. Compare Charles F. Hockett, "How to Learn Martian," also in Coming Attractions, and Beverly Friend, "Science Fiction and Linguistics: Strange Bedfellows," English Journal, LXII (October, 1973), pp. 998-1003.

2) Marge Piercy, Woman on the Edge of Time (New York: Knopf, 1976), p. 147.

3) Anthony Boucher, "Barrier," 6 Great Novels of Science Fiction (New York: Dell, 1054), p. 217.

4) Stanislaw Lem The Futurological Congress, trans. Michael kandel (New York: Seabury Press, 1974), pp. 108-9.

5) H. Beam Piper, Fuzzy Sapiens (New York: Ace, 1976), pp. 186,33.

6) John Brunner, Stand on Zanzibar (Garden City: Doubleday, 1968), pp. 547, 527, 509, 316, 20, 17, 206, 26.

FOOTNOTES (cont.)

7) Aldous Huxley, Brave New World and Brave New World Revisited (New York: Harper, 1965), p. 116.

8) Ira Levin, This Perfect Day (New York: Random House, 1970), pp. 66, 263.

9) Samuel R. Delany, Nova (New York: Bantam, 1971), pp. 4, 136, 178, 136.

10) Robert Silverberg, Tower of Glass (New York: Bantam, 1971), pp. 5, 146.

11) Anthony Burgess, A Clockwork Orange (New York: Norton, 1963), p. 15.

12) Tanith Lee, Drinking Sapphire Wine (New York: DAW, 1977), p. 27.

13) Samuel R. Delany, Babel-17 (New York: Ace, 1966), p.34.

Harmony

(Since 1950-- The Oldest Continuously Published Column in Fandom)

Jim Harmon

The new slogan, "Since 1950--the Oldest Continuously Published Column in Fandom," has been added after careful consideration. In an earlier instalment, I suggested this singular honour might go to Harry Warner, but Harry declined it. If I am in error it isn't by much, and I stand ready to be corrected. But in any case, I have been around s-f fandom for a long time, not always at the heart of the action, but somehow always in touch.

On two different occasions I have been invited into First Fandom. I wish I could accept that honour, but I don't quite make it--unless reading and collecting Buck Rogers and Flash Gordon Big Little Books when I was in my single digits counts. But since 1942, when I was nine, I have been reading and collecting s-f prozines and books. The first one I bought was technically fantasy, Weird Tales, featuring "Black Barter" by Robert Bloch.

Weird Tales keeps coming back, making a phantom, unlikely appearance, akin to one of the ghosts out of its pages. As for Bloch, he has never been away. Like many fans, I corresponded with him, met him any number of times; and I was pleased to run into him again at an affair at the home of another omnipresent fan, Forrest J. Ackerman, within the last few months. Both Bloch and Ackerman seemed remarkably lightly touched by time.

Yet a lot of years have passed since I first started doing this column for Charles Lee Riddle's Peon. Many of the fans I knew have become parents (I am stepfather to Dawn, 16) and possibly some of my precocious contemporaries have even become grandparents. And of course, death has taken its toll among the ranks of 1950s fandom. Just today, I heard of the death of Tom Scortia at 59, of leukemia, at Pomona, in the first week of May, 1986.

At one time, I suppose, Tom was my best friend. Although six years older, much better educated, and much more affluent, he took interest in a young fan and beginning professional writer who lived in Mount Carmel, Illinois, not all that far from his home near St. Louis. Tom was himself a published s-f writer and a scientist working on rocket fuels. I visited his ultra-modern home a number of times, and he visited the far more modest house I shared with my mother and aunt in Mount Carmel. But the problem I have so often encountered in my life came up again. It is just impossible to be close friends with somebody making vastly more money than you. Tom found a better-matched friendship with Frank Robinson, and together they wrote some s-f-related best sellers, including The Glass Inferno, partial basis for the film, Towering Inferno. Tom was also married for a time to the former Irene Baron. Any other vital statistics are outside my knowledge. But for a time around 1960, Tom and I were a perhaps unlikely pair at many conventions, often circulating with the youthful and rather frolicsome Isaac Asimov and others.

One of the more noticable fans of that era was Harlan Ellison, and I guess no one has stopped noticing him since. When we were both barely of voting age, he and I were involved in a run-in at a convention. I damaged his door and he ripped my shirt, but one drew nary a drop of blood from the other.*

---

*Editor's note: A fuller account of this incident is given by Philip Jose Farmer's letter in RQ vol.4 (pp. 59-60), from which I quote: "I remember ...the Midwestcon...when Harlan dropped a sack of water on Jim's head from Jim's hotel-window. Jim charged, like Roosevelt up San Juan Hill, up the steps, found the door locked...I remember Jim knocking the door down with his fists a la Doc Savage's buddy Renny. I also remember the cops carrying Jim off, and the hat being passed around to pay for a new door and to keep Jim out of the hoosegow...Those were the days! Wooden doors and iron men then."

For a few years after that, I fancied it would be amusing if we had a sort of Jack Benny-Fred Allen feud in the fan press, but I dropped this in the early Sixties when it became obvious we were mismatched and it would just seem I was trying to chip away at a "rich and famous" author. Although years pass between contacts between Harlan and me, I find he is always friendly and courteous in such encounters.

The other writer of the same generation as Harlan and myself who has gone on to great success is Robert Silverberg. I knew Bob in the slightest way through very occasional letters and meetings at conventions, and I have not had even the most casual contact with him for over twenty years. Silverberg has always impressed me and the people I know who knew him as a formidable intellect, and one who always seemed to have his emotions under control. I don't think anyone who knew him when he was doing fanzines is really surprised by his success.

For those who came in late, at one time in the late Fifties and early Sixties I was a quite successful s-f magazine writer, primarily for Galaxy, but also for F&SF, Amazing, others. I appeared as often as Ellison, Chad Oliver, Philip K. Dick, others of the era. My material was reasonably well-received, and continues to be regularly anthologized. But I could not make a decent living from it. In those days, it took a really established name to sell an s-f novel, and the big money--such as it was in those days--was in writing books. I tried to sell an s-f novel, but could not make it.

In 1960 I moved to Los Angeles and tried writing anything to make money: short stories and articles for imitation Playboy magazines; sex novels (very mild on sex, long on mystery and adventure)--and writing and editing movie-monster magazines like Fantastic Monsters and much later, in the Seventies, Monsters of the Movies, for Marvel Comics. In 1967 my hobby interest in old time radio drama resulted in my book, The Great Radio Heroes, which was termed a "modest best-seller." An association with nostalgia, including but not limited to s-f, continues to the present. Some day, I hope to return to s-f--if I live long enough for my head to rotate back to that point.

That's what I've been doing for the last few decades--besides marrying the former Barbara Gratz, whom I first met at a meeting of the Los Angeles Science Fiction and Fantasy Society in 1960.

But what about the other fans of an era when the leading fanzines were Spacewarp, Quandry, Peon?

Today, I talked by phone with my friend of many years, Redd Boggs, who lives in the Oakland area up north (I'm in Burbank, near Hollywood). In the early Fifties, Redd published a fanzine called Skyhook and James Blish wrote book review for him under a pseudonym (William Atheling). Today, Redd still does fanzines for FAPA (Fantasy Amateur Press Association). He is a man of great literary potential who is yet to find his right outlet, in my opinion.

Boggs confirmed what I suspected from the last reports I heard, that one of the leading fanzines of the Fifties--Spacewarp--is still being published, as a part of the mailing of SAPS (Speculative Amateur Press Society). The last time I saw a copy--ten years ago--it was more informal and chatty than the old Spacewarp, but still reflected the personality of Art Rapp. For years Art was a sergeant in the army, a career man. His ideas and philosophy seemed to reflect none of those of the stereotyped career army man, but I suppose it was a steady job. Some years ago, he married another fan, Nancy Share. Nancy and her sister, Marie Louise, published an excellent letterzine for years. Or so it seemed. Then it came out that "Marie Louise" was a harmless hoax and there was only Nancy. She seemed to have enough wit and fanac for two girls anyway. Today, Nancy and Art run a truck-farm near Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania, and are still active fans. Art's Spacewarp was the first fanzine I saw that I really liked (when I was 12) in all its multi-coloured, hectographed glory. I still have those copies, obtained through Sergeant Saturn's fan column in Startling. I wrote letters, articles, and fiction for slightly later numbers of Spacewarp.

Quandry was a highly regarded fanzine in its time of the late 50s-early 60s. It was considered "sophisticated," and appealed to more mature fans like Bob Tucker, a very early fan, who broke into print by writing mystery novels such as Chinese Doll, whose characters had the same names as fans very often. Later, of course, Tucker wrote some very good s-f novels when the market opened up for them. His main money-earning job was that of a theatre movie projectionist in Bloomington, Illinois, and in recent years he has returned to Bloomington, if not to that job. He is still a sought-after guest for conventions.

Tucker was a contributor to Quandry, but its editor was Lee Hoffman, a teen-age girl. Such a charming and intelligent girl was a hit at s-f cons--I remember meeting her at Chicago in 1982--although she was too popular for me to claim much of her time. She married s-f editor, Larry Shaw, although like so many things, the marriage didn't last. She became very interested in motor-cart racing for a time, and also wrote a number of successful Western novels, though no s-f to my knowledge. Today, I understand she lives in Port Charlotte with her ailing mother. Perhaps she crested too soon; she was born for Women's Lib in my view, and could have been a leader in that movement.

In the Los Angeles area, Bjo Wells Trimble was another liberated woman. She was the de facto leader of L.A. fandom for many years, and went on to become one of the leaders of Star Trek fandom and to write one of the better selling books in that category. Today, she spends a lot of her time raising funds for some rather rare disease that afflicts one of her children. I did not enjoy being under her leadership quite as much as some, but I have a fond memory of her at some fan costume party where she was dressed as a female Robin Hood and seemed to define the word "cute" for all time.

A lot of time has gone by since Lee Riddle asked me to make my regular letters into a column for Peon. After Peon folded, I wrote the column per request for a number of short-lived fanzines--as most are--some of which I would have to consult my files to name accurately. For an even longer time, I have been doing the column for Lee Sapiro's Riverside Quarterly. For a few years, I tried the less egocentric name, "Seasonal Fan." But a few years ago, I decided to revert to "Harmony." Like most writers, I am egocentric, and I like the traditional. I always preferred Astounding to Analog. So here we are, back with "Harmony," going into our thirty-seventh year.

I think "Harmony" will be here as long as I am. A few years ago, I thought of dropping it, wondering if the musings of a middle-aged fan were all that interesting to the mostly young ones among the readership. But I decided I was still interested in saying something, and I hoped I might make it interesting enough to appeal to younger constituents. So until you kick me out or until something kicks me off, "Harmony" will sing a song of sweet reason and temperate pronouncements such as are well known to all those who know me well.

If I do get out of line and try to distort history, there are enough of my contemporaries out there to set the record straight. They will, I'm sure, inform me if this is only one of the two oldest columns in fandom. Or three...

Le Guin's The Left Hand of Darkness

The Weaving Together of Dualities

by

Gary Willis

(University of Calgary)

For Ursula Le Guin, truth inheres not in purely logical utterance but in metaphor, which, she implies, is a fusion of the rational and the intuitive, the Apollonian and the Dionysian. Her novel is intended, she says, not as a prediction of any real future, but as a distillation, through metaphor, of life as it is now.

The person in the novel who first seems most to share Le Guin's perspective is Genly Ai, whose first words [1] assure us that "Truth is a matter of the imagination" (p. 1). But Genly Ai is naive, inexperienced, and bewildered by "culture shock" on the sexually and socially alien planet of Gethen; as a result, his reason and intuition, like his "magnetic and directional subsenses," go "all wrong" (p. 168). As Estraven later angrily tells him, Genly has first trusted everyone but the only man he should have trusted (pp. 198-9); and were it not for Estraven, his mistake would surely have led to his death and thus to the failure of his mission. After saving Genly Ai's life, through a simulation of Genly's death, Estraven elicits in Genly an imaginative rebirth [2] into unity of being and accurate perception. Estraven is the one thing that Genly Ai did not expect to find on Gethen, a person more imaginatively whole than himself. Indeed, Estraven, who claims that his one gift is that of intuition (p. 189), is a sort of Gethenian Odysseus, supremely competent in all aspects of living, including logical reasoning, intuitive apprehension, political manipulation, and the physical skills needed to combat an extreme environment. What Estraven has from the beginning of the book Genly Ai gains by the middle and the attentive reader, by the book's end: "the intuitive perception of a moral entirety."

The planet Gethen, for obvious reasons, is called "Winter" by the first investigators from the Ekumen. Genly Ai comments repeatedly on the uncomfortable cold. As we come to know Gethen better, it becomes clear that the planet is metaphorically as well as physically cold: that is, its societies, or at least the two that we see, are based on distrust and fear rather than on love and communion. Argaven XV, King of Karhide, tells Genly Ai that he should "trust no one" (p. 33) and that "only fear rules men" (p. 40); and the governments of Karhide and Orgoreyn, both characterized by deadly factional intrigue, seem to bear out Argaven's point. But the two governments are dissimilar in other respects. Karhide, headed by a line of fickle kings, is a feudal monarchy in which the autonomy of each person is attested by his "shifgrethor" or degree of prestige. Orgoreyn, headed by thirty-three Commensals, is a modern totalitarian dictatorship in which the central government has absolute power, so that the average person has no "shifgrethor."

The more we see of the two societies, the more sharply do we perceive the contrast between them. The three Karhidish tales inserted into the novel are all "hearth-tales," describing the loves, hatreds, and sufferings of ordinary humans and excluding any mention of a god or gods. In sharp contrast stand the two Orgota tales, one of them a pre-historical cosmogonic myth describing the actions of human and natural demigods, the other a discursive meditation on the omniscience of the human and yet divine Meshe. In short, the Karhidish tales are familial and personal, the Orgota tales cosmic and abstract. Similarly, the Karhidish people tend to react personally to other people, while the Orgota tend to react abstractly. As a general rule, the Karhidish are suspicious of neighbors and friendly to strangers; in contrast, the ordinary Orgota is listlessly incurious toward everyone, while Orgotan officials are bureaucratically skeptical of everyone. The faith favoured by Karhide, the Handdara Cult, contrasts with the faith sponsored by Orgoreyn, the Yomesh Cult. The Handdara, a religion without institution, hierarchy, or creed, praises darkness, passivity, ignorance, and intuition; the Yomeshta, a monotheistic religion with some resemblances to Christianity, praises light, activity, knowledge, and reason. Refusing to ask whether God exists, the Handdara values the perpetual uncertainty of life; certain that Meshe is God, the Yomeshta values submission to a single law. In the course of the novel, Genly Ai comes to think that the turbulent disunity of Karhide is to a large extent the product of its ancient faith, while the docile centralization of Orgoreyn is largely the product of its relatively young faith.

When Genly Ai first arrives in Orgoreyn, he prefers it to the Karhide he has known for two years; pleased by the quietness and orderliness of Orgoreyn, he "felt as if [he] had come out of a dark age" (p. 115). When the exiled Estraven turns up at an official Orgota dinner, Genly sees him as "dark" and "shadowy," "the specter at the feast" (p. 122); trusting his genial and considerate hosts, the Envoy distrusts Estraven more than ever. But he is uneasy: the capital city, Mishnory, seems "fluid, insubstantial"; his hosts seem "a little bit unreal," "not quite solid" (p. 147). Estraven, we recall, has always struck Genly Ai as inscrutable, but "solid" and "substantial." Of course, the enlightenment of Orgoreyn is specious. After being arrested by the secret police, Genly Ai realizes he was wrong to look "for the substance of Orgoreyn above ground, in daylight" (pp. 167-8); the substance is in the black cold of the prison van. When at this point he experiences "a profound bewilderment, a feeling that everything, literally, has come loose," what is "coming loose" is his illusions about Orgoreyn. He later realizes that Karhide is the more hospitable country of the two; but he knows by then not to expect much of either. Karhide and Orgoreyn represent opposed aberrations, the first trapped in the darkness of feudal disorder and clan jealousies, the second in the searchlight of totalitarian order and rationalized repression. A fully civilized country, the book implies, would lie somewhere between these two extremes: perhaps, like the Ekumen, it would function "through coordination, not by rule" (p. 137).

Although neither of these Gethenian countries approaches the ideal, two Gethenian individuals do: Estraven, who is Prime Minister of Karhide as the book opens, and Faxe, who seems a likely choice for Prime Minister as the book closes. Both are Handdarata, devotees of the Dark Cult; and their courage, poise, and wisdom seem to spring from their assimilation of the Handdara discipline. No devotees of the Yomesh Cult are shown as truly admirable: Obsle, the best of them, favours Genly Ai's mission, but is willing to sacrifice the Envoy to buy his own safety. Thus the Yomesh Cult, by association with the Commensals, seems fraudulent, while the Handdara Cult, by association with the two wisest persons in the novel, seems authentic.

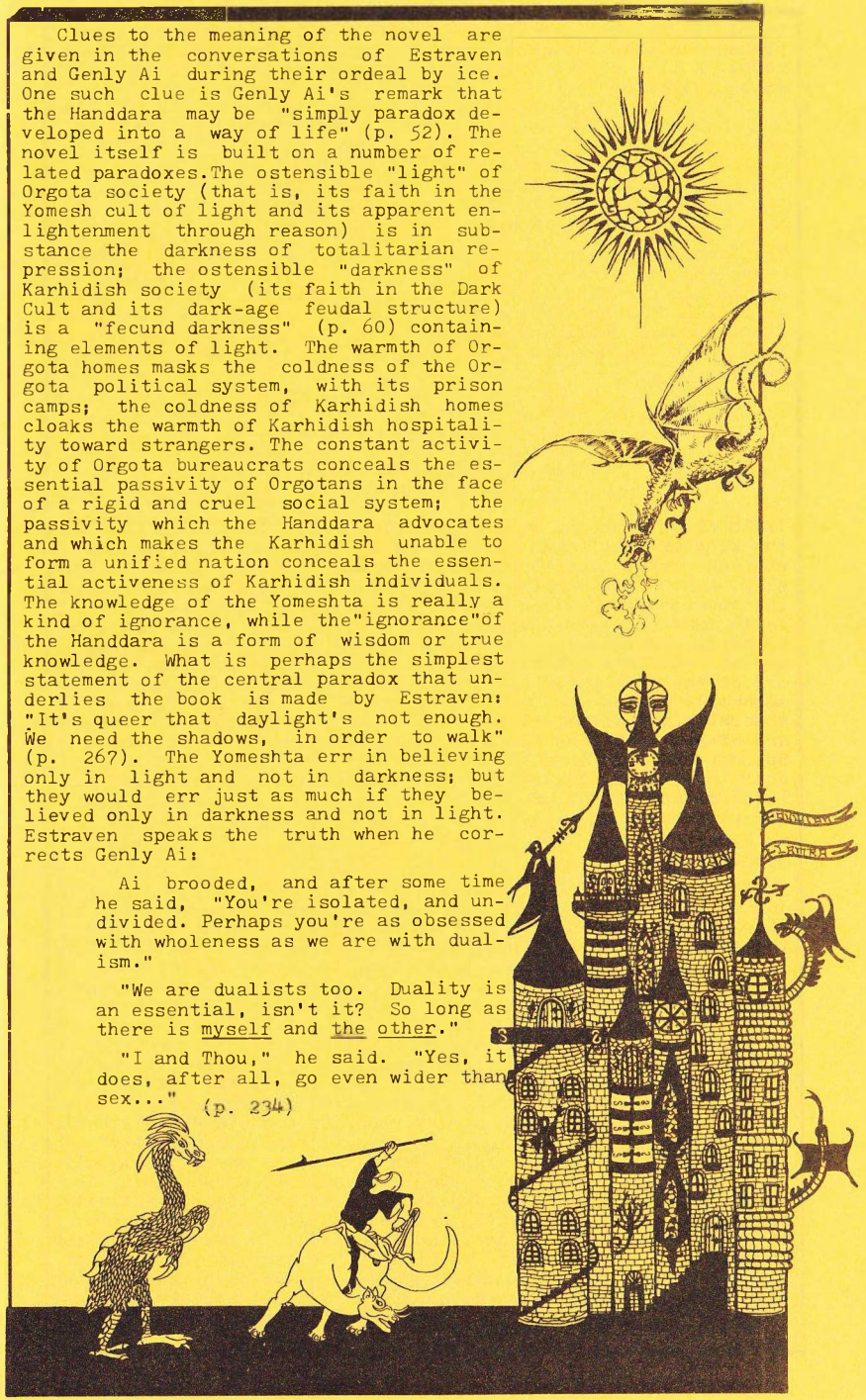
Moreover, the imaginative rebirth that Estraven elicits in Genly Ai is accomplished through Genly's deepening comprehension of the central concept of the Handdara, the concept of ignorance:

> Ignorant, in the Handdara sense: to ignore the abstraction, to hold fast to the thing. There was in this attitude something feminine, a refusal of the abstract, the ideal, a submissiveness to the given, which rather displeased me. (p. 212)

Genly Ai's mind, schooled in generalizations by the Ekumen, fell easy prey at first to the abstractions of Orgoreyn; but during the long journey over the Gobrin Ice he "unlearns" his submission to abstractions. The Gobrin Ice is called "a houseless, speechless desolation" (p. 272), "the dirty chaos of a world in the process of making itself" (p. 227), and "the snow of ignorance" (p. 225). Like the great creature whose belly Jonah inhabited for a time, the glacier seems to the two friends a sort of monster, who "has spewed us out of its mouth" (p. 270). Just as Jonah fled from the Lord's summons, so Genly Ai has fled from Estraven's offered help; and just as Jonah purified his spirit while in the whale's belly, so Genly Ai purifies his sensibility during the trek across the great glacier. But the Biblical parallel should not be pushed too far: Le Guin says in her Introduction that she is an atheist, and her glacier becomes a symbol not of divine intervention but of brute insentient nature: "But the Ice did not know how hard we worked. Why should it? Proportion is kept" (p. 257). An illuminating comparison might be made with the journey over the ice-cap in Mary Shelley's Frankenstein. Victor Frankenstein, who pursues his "creature" in order to destroy him, and the "creature" himself, who leads Frankenstein into terrible hardship but keeps him alive in order to perpetuate his creator's anguish, seem almost two halves of the one soul, divided cruelly against itself. By contrast, Estraven, who rescues Genly Ai at extreme peril to himself, and Genly Ai, who responds with deepening gratitude, come to seem to Genly Ai to be two halves of one soul that is unifying itself. They progress over the ice in a "weaving" movement; and at the same time their imaginations "weave" together into what Genly Ai calls "joy" (p. 241), "love" (p. 247), and "sharing" "whatever we had that was worth sharing" (p. 247). In communion with Estraven, Genly Ai discovers "the real center of my own life... that time which is past and lost and yet is permanent, the enduring moment, the heart of warmth" (p. 240). The heart of civilization, it is implied, is the intimate communion of equals. "Not We and They; not I and It; but I and Thou. Not political, not pragmatic, but mystical. In a certain sense the Ekumen is not a body politic, but a body mystic" (p. 259). The closest thing to such communion that is possible in Orgoreyn, the pathetic kindness of prisoners huddling together for warmth in the dark prison van, is a parody of true communion because it springs not from strength but from helplessness and consists in sharing bodily warmth instead of thoughts and feelings.

Clues to the meaning of the novel are given in the conversations of Estraven and Genly Ai during their ordeal by ice. One such clue is Genly Ai's remark that the Handdara may be "simply paradox developed into a way of life" (p. 52). The novel itself is built on a number of related paradoxes. The ostensible "light" of Orgota society (that is, its faith in the Yomesh cult of light and its apparent enlightenment through reason) is in substance the darkness of totalitarian repression; the ostensible "darkness" of Karhidish society (its faith in the Dark Cult and its dark-age feudal structure) is a "fecund darkness" (p. 60) containing elements of light. The warmth of Orgota homes masks the coldness of the Orgota political system, with its prison camps; the coldness of Karhidish homes cloaks the warmth of Karhidish hospitality toward strangers. The constant activity of Orgota bureaucrats conceals the essential passivity of Orgotans in the face of a rigid and cruel social system; the passivity which the Handdara advocates and which makes the Karhidish unable to form a unified nation conceals the essential activeness of Karhidish individuals. The knowledge of the Yomeshta is really a kind of ignorance, while the "ignorance" of the Handdara is a form of wisdom or true knowledge. What is perhaps the simplest statement of the central paradox that underlies the book is made by Estraven: "It's queer that daylight's not enough. We need the shadows, in order to walk" (p. 267). The Yomeshta err in believing only in light and not in darkness; but they would err just as much if they believed only in darkness and not in light. Estraven speaks the truth when he corrects Genly Ai:

> Ai brooded, and after some time he said, "You're isolated, and undivided. Perhaps you're as obsessed with wholeness as we are with dualism."
>
> "We are dualists too. Duality is an essential, isn't it? So long as there is myself and the other."
>
> "I and Thou," he said. "Yes, it does, after all, go even wider than sex..." (p. 234)



Similarly, Le Guin's concern with dualism is far more comprehensive than a simple concern about male and female sexual roles. A list of the main dualities present in the novel might go as follows:

Light	Dark
Warmth	Cold
Self	Other
Male	Female
Activity	Passivity
Knowledge	Ignorance
Reason	Intuition

The Yomesh Cult errs by favouring a half of each duality and rejecting the other; the Handdara Cult wisely values both halves. In the Handdara Foretelling ritual, the central figure is called "the Weaver"; and the Handdara's essential enterprise is to "weave" dualities together into unities. Tormer's Lay, from which the novel's title derives, expresses the Handdara vision:

> Light is the left hand of darkness
> and darkness the right hand of light.
> Two are one, life and death, lying
> together like lovers in kemmer,
> like hands joined together,
> like the end and the way. (pp. 233-4)

It is clear where Le Guin's sympathies lie. The Yomesh Cult has the kind of Apollonian creed she rejects in her Introduction when she says: "Apollo blinds those who press too close in worship. Don't look straight at the sun." The Handdara Cult is not the obverse of the Yomesh Cult, a Dionysian faith, but rather a faith that unites or "weaves together" the Apollonian and the Dionysian. Similarly, the vision of The Left Hand of Darkness and of Le Guin's other works of fiction is a "weaving together" of the Apollonian and the Dionysian. The novel's narrative technique mimics its thematic concerns by "weaving together" several kinds of material, the first-person stories of Genly Ai and of Estraven, the first-person discursive essay of Ong Tot Oppong, and some traditional Gethenian stories, including some oral tales from Karhide and some written tales from Orgoreyn. These diverse kinds of narrative are woven into a single design; as Genly Ai says: "The story is not all mine, nor told by me alone. Indeed, I am not sure whose story it is; you can judge better. But it is all one..." (pp. 1-2).

In many ways, the central character is Genly Ai; and when he unites imaginatively with Estraven, he simultaneously unifies his own imagination. Genly Ai's inexperience has divided his thoughts from his feelings, his reason from his intuition. Genly Ai's hardest task, as a human man, is to see Estraven as neither a man nor a woman but as a "manwoman"; as he says, he has "refused" Estraven "his own reality"(p.248). It is here that the feminist concerns of the novel emerge most clearly. As an Envoy of the Ekumen, Genly does not consciously identify with patriarchal or "masculine" cultures--yet he is from Earth, which has had just such a culture; thus he naturally if mistakenly identifies at first with the closest thing on Gethen to a patriarchal culture, that of Orgoreyn. He consciously distrusts and unconsciously fears Estraven's "soft supple femininity" (p.12). Estraven is one of the few Gethenians who are not only physically androgynous but also imaginatively androgynous; he has "woven together" the supposedly masculine traits--activity, knowledge, and reason--with their supposedly feminine counterparts--passivity, ignorance, and intuition. In the Introduction Le Guin says that humanity is already,"at certain odd times of day in certain weathers," androgynous; in the novel she implies that any psychologically whole person is imaginatively androgynous in the way that Estraven is and that Genly Ai becomes.

To be imaginatively androgynous is, for Le Guin, to cultivate the "dark powers" of the mind as thoroughly as its rational powers. In cultivation of non-rational mental powers, the Handdara far surpass the schools of the Ekumen: the Handdara disciplines include fasting (voluntary deprivation to toughen the will), the "untrance" (undivided concentration on what is presented by the senses), dothe-strength (a voluntary inducement of what we call "hysterical strength"), and Foretelling (a group ritual that induces infallibly accurate precognition). Farfetching (the intuitive apprehension of a moral entirety) is a skill Genly Ai has been taught by the Ekumen; yet he is far surpassed in it by Estraven, who has never been taught it in any direct way. Only the Ekumen's discipline of mind-speech (a voluntary form of telepathy in which mendacity is impossible) is unknown in Gethen and disturbingly strange to Estraven. In her Introduction, Le Guin sees the artist as someone disciplined to surrender to the "dark powers" of the mind: for her, inspiration is temporary possession by what she calls a "god," who, she tells us, is neither Apollo nor Dionysios but a disturbing non-rational power, felt as originating outside the self. If truly possessed by the "god," the novelist will succeed in writing a novel that "possesses" the reader--and changes him or her a little. The novel will be a composite symbol or metaphor, which "says in words what cannot be said in words"--that is, truths that evade the intellect but possess the imagination.

It is a mark of Le Guin's maturity as a writer that she de-emphasizes the differences between s-f and so-called "mainstream fiction": what distinguishes s-f, she says, is "its use of new metaphors," drawn from "science, all the sciences, and technology, and the relativistic and the historical outlook." Modern fiction has two main branches, one that tries to assimilate the primitive, the irrational, and the nominally anti-human into a deepened rationality and one that claims hostility to all rationality. Le Guin, it seems to me, moves in the first of these. Of course, modern fiction as a whole is deeply indebted to certain workers in the "life sciences," particularly to anthropologists such as Frazer and Malinowski and to psychoanalysts such as Freud and Jung; and Le Guin's fiction is similarly indebted. Freud's notion that each sex contains traits of the opposite sex, which Jung elaborated into his well-known concepts of the "anima" and the "animus," has obviously helped to generate Le Guin's conception of imaginative androgony. In Jungian terms, what Genly Ai initially fears and later loves in Estraven is the embodiment of his own "anima."

What may be less obvious is Le Guin's use of contemporary discoveries in neurophysiology. During the 1960s, studies of patients with brain lesions led to the discovery that the temporal lobes of the neo-cortex have specialized functions, the left hemisphere controlling verbal and analytic perception, and the right non-verbal and holistic perception. Each hemisphere has its own importance: if the right or intuitive hemisphere is needed because of its creative ability to perceive patterns and connections, the left or rational hemisphere is needed because of its ability to test the logical and empirical validity of these patterns. In the normal brain these two lobes communicate constantly through several neural cables, of which the main one in the corpus callosum. As Carl Sagan summarizes, "To solve complex problems in changing circumstances requires the activity of both cerebral hemispheres: the path to the future lies through the corpus callosum."[3] In the brain, it seems, "two are one," "like hands joined together": the metaphors of Tormer's Lay find a surprising biological application. What made me suspect that Le Guin may have been consciously influenced by recent findings on the brain is that she places light at the left hand of darkness, in accordance with contemporary neurophysiology but contrary to the custom in theology (Christ is "at the right hand of God," Satan at the left), politics (the nobles were placed to the right of the king, the merchants to his left), and ordinary life (most of us being right-handed).[4]

Ursula Le Guin's The Left Hand of Darkness has been interpreted as a male's reaction to an androgynous human species,[5] with its "real" underlying science being anthropology. But this notion is overly simplified, as is the idea that the novel is primarily a study of "sex as a role indicator."[6] We now can see that the novel is better regarded as a study of dualism and unity,[7] in which the concern with sexual roles is subsumed in a larger concern with division and wholeness of being--with its perspective arising not just from anthropology but also from modern psychology and neurophysiology.

FOOTNOTES

1) All quotations will be from the Ace Books edition, New York, 1969.

2) Cf. David Ketterer, "The Left Hand of Darkness: Ursula K. Le Guin's Archetypal 'Winter-Journey,'" in New Worlds for Old (Indiana University Press, 1973), p. 89. This critic speaks of the "mutual understanding" of Genly Ai and Estraven on the Gobrin Glacier as "equivalent to a rebirth."

3) Carl Sagan, The Dragons of Eden: Speculations on the Evolution of Human Intelligence (New York: Ballantine, 1976). Sagan speculates that the rational left hemisphere is "suspicious" of the intuitiveness of the right hemisphere and has built its suspicions into the verbal perceptions that it generates. The left hemisphere controls the right sight of the body; thus it would make sense for the left hemisphere to give the word "right" a positive connotation and "left" a negative one. Certainly "right" is conventionally associated with high moral principles, firmness, and masculinity; while "left" is conventionally associated with evil, weakness, and femininity. Such associations are as arbitrary as the traditional association of masculinity with firmness and femininity with weakness.

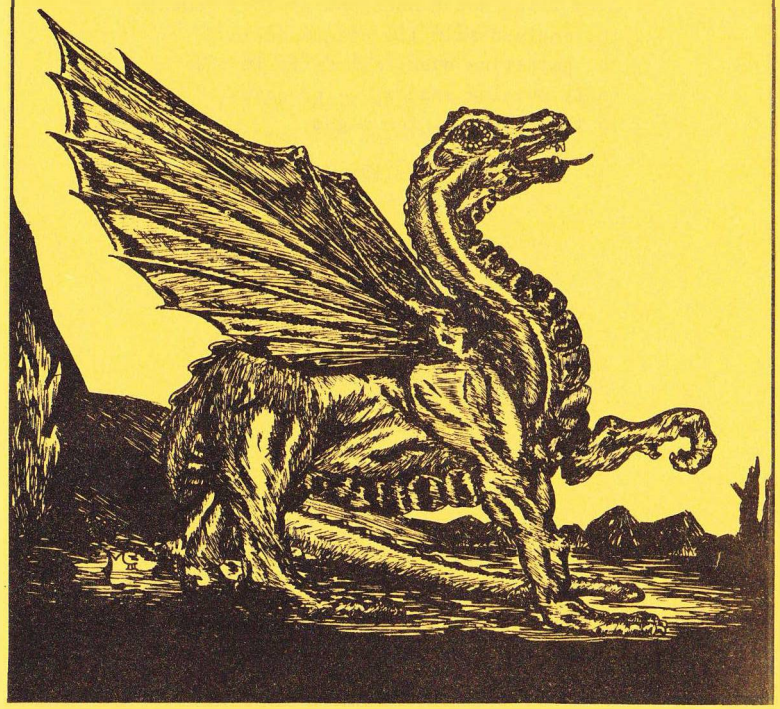
FOOTNOTES (continued)

4) Le Guin's awareness of contemporary findings in neurophysiology is also indicated in her novella The Word for World is Forest, where Captain Lyubov thinks to himself: "The speech centers are in the left cerebral cortex..." See Harlan Ellison, ed., Again, Dangerous Visions (New York: New American Library, 1973), p. 62. This novella has a copyright dated 1972, three years after publication of The Left Hand of Darkness.

5) Beverly Friend, "Virgin Territory: The Bonds and Boundaries of Women in Science Fiction," in Tom Clareson, ed., Many Futures, Many Worlds: Theme and Form in Science Fiction (Kent State University Press, 1977), p. 160. This writer decides that "Le Guin's answers seem a little pat" besides those of Joanna Russ in The Female Man, but I disagree: to me, Le Guin's is a far subtler novel because she avoids thinking in the simplistic categories of radical feminism and Russ does not.

6) Eric S. Rabkin, The Fantastic in Literature (Princeton University Press, 1976), p. 121.

7) Again see David Ketterer (op. cit., p. 80), who sees the novel as containing "the underlying mythic patterns of destruction or division and creation or unity."



FALL

Black peony days drift anxiously
by in solemn autumn watchfulness;
the amber hours of summer after
noons forgotten in the mist of win-
ter's approaching chill.
Dead flies and dandelions crushed beneath
the endless rain lie abandoned in
the gathering dusk that falls in the
early evening shadows -- presages
to the coming winter night.

--Hillary Bartholomew--

PAINTING EVENING

The red sun slides into the wash
of evening.
Bird song
intrudes into the enveloping silence

of the twilight.
Soon total darkness enfolds
all distinguishing features
in its voluminous cloak

until the moon rises
to soften the darkness
highlighting one forced iris
on a delphinium canvas.

--Jean Wiggins--

RESPONSE IN THE NIGHT -- FLIGHT 92,
MIAMI TO ST. LOUIS, JANUARY 18,1982

I enjoy flying at night.
Sitting by a window, I do not turn on the reading light.
Instead, I look out and talk to the stars.
Frozen in darkness, they still manage to glitter,
sending off their own seemingly unintelligible language.
I even talk to myself and finally say
that darkness can never swallow stars.
Distance of darkness is not overwhelming;
when you think you are buried in it,
a star responds.

--Matthew Diomede--

Horribile Dictu

by

J. N. Williamson

Intelligent mail is a motivation for most columnists and, for once in a somewhat perverse career, I'm no exception. In this department's initial appearance, it was pointed out that publishers sometimes get it into their heads that horrific fiction has enjoyed and exhausted a trend; then, in truly self-fulfilling fashion, some houses stop publishing it.

A letter arrived from one Jean Lamb who wrote, in part, "What Williamson points out about horror is well-known in all the other genres as well...First...great books come out by authors who soon will become /successful/. Then the flood of imitators...some /of whom/ will become quite good."

But this has not to any extent occurred in recent horror fiction. The one recent writer in the genre who is imitated to any extent is Stephen King, who has been prolifically imitated with the result of some middlingly successful novels, the emergence of no "quite good" novelist or very few further books by the given imitator.

However narrow, my point was that the specific success of King and a few others effected an avarice on the part of some publishers to acquire virtually any horror story of 75,000 words and up. Not necessarily imitations and, when they had been written and printed, not necessarily good imitations.

Ms. Lamb continued: "...suddenly the bloom is off the market, as attention becomes directed to a different genre by the publication of several...best-selling books in it. The genre then passing its prime is usually neglected except by a hard-core cadre of True Fans and by a few exceptional authors who have broken through the ghetto wall of the genre." She adds, correctly, that some "fine work" is written for "love of the genre, which then generates a few really great books" -- and thus, the cycle is repeated.

Jean Lamb's comments apply, however, only in the case of s-f and some fantasy subsets, I believe. The rest of my point: The bloom goes "off the market" because publishers have chosen to ignore that genre's standards of excellence; the assumption that there are enough "True Fans" of any genre to publish fictive tripe safely, imitation or no, has never been proved.

I don't wish to compare the popularity of horror/supernatural to another genre's beyond noting that, whether it's momentarily hot or not, a well-promoted shockingly speculative novel with a commercial cover--written by one of the twenty or so established writers in the category--always seems to have the potential to sell exceptionally well, and that I am markedly less sure that this holds true for s-f and certain it does not for other kinds of fantasy. Consistently, large numbers of paperback readers have demonstrated that they are always ready for a truly original, well-crafted horror novel. And I believe that it could be proved that the "True Fans" who tried and rejected the follow-the-leader tripe I mentioned are unfailingly eager to obtain new books by the twenty experienced hands I estimated. Point of probability: that the sales of King, Dean Koontz, Whitley Streiber, Bari Wood, Robert McCammon, Robert Bloch, James Herbert, Ramsey Campbell, Peter Straub, Charles Grant, J.N. Williamson and a few other regular novelists have gone up since the boom ended, and because "True Fans" trust such writers and learned about those whom they could not.

When all publishers cease to obtain any sort of fantasy fiction without acquiring a working knowledge of what constant buyers expect, I think that, rather than narrowing publication lists, they'll be able to increase them--by virtue of acquiring new writers of talent, discrimination, and a personally voracious interest in that genre wherein they're writing. But so long as publishers accept books that seem to be written versions of the latest hot, so-called horror, s-f, or fantasy film, only the very determined, skilled, and prolific can reasonably hope to break through.

I've referred to "regular novelists" to lead in to the observation that the horror/occult genre has, since the last manufactured horror boom whimpered away, developed relatively few writers who manage to publish more than one book or two, for whatever reason. Yet during the same period, an extraordinary number of wonderful horror short story writers have come along. They constitute youngsters, established authors crossing over from another genre, and any-age-at-all newcomers who've survived such disciplines as the Writer's Digest School --for which I have instructed over two-hundred would-be writers of wrath. I mention the fact merely to support my contention that horror is always welcomed when it's good, since 99% of these newcomers are extraordinarily well-read in the genre -- which is why they wish to write in it.

But it's an exceedingly established author whose book of short stories I wish to recommend, specifically, at the close of this column: William F. Nolan, whose great success until now was his co-written s-f novel, Logan's Run. While it is marvellous news that that book and two more in his Logan trilogy are presently being gathered for one-volume hard-cover release, I want to draw your attention to Things beyond Midnight, Nolan's collection of stories from Scream Press. It doesn't matter whether you prefer s-f, fantasy, or horror -- or humour, or mystery -- Bill Nolan has written it and it's included in Things. Want to hold in one hand ten or twelve stories notably reflecting the writer's almost unmatched versatility and know that they'll become classics in each of their genres? There's not one thing wrong with the rest of this collection, either. By all means, get it.

LOOKING BACKWARD: 2084 A.D.

BY

TOM EGAN

Isaac Asimov & Martin Greenberg, eds., Election Day 2084: A Science-Fiction Anthology on the Politics of the Future, New York, Prometheus Books, 1984, $19.95.

The Orwellian terror of 1984 has come and gone, yet history's nightmare continues to haunt Western societies. The hope for miraculous future solutions to our unending political dilemmas never stops. It's a field ready-made for s-f, and our editors have combed the pulps of the 1940s through the 1970s. These 18 stories chiefly explore the American political scene in the twenty-first century, a time near enough to give us a sense of the familiar--and far enough to consummate our own personal hopes and fears.

The threat of totalitarianism usually is seen via the technocratic and bureaucratic state (i.e., Asimov, Jakes, Pohl, Herbert), not in the ideology of Marxism: the menace of a growing Soviet imperium is ignored by most authors. In his future world of 1976 (no Cold War here) Arthur C. Clarke ("Death and the Senator") pictures an unusually cooperative Soviet officialdom aiding a powerful senator. "A Rose by Other Name..." is clever, but Christopher Anvil's solution to end the Cold War and prevent World War III is a deux ex machina with no logic behind it. Randall Garrett's "Hail to the Chief" is much better, with the public being manipulated by a well-meaning politician (later president) who assumes the "Best Man" could never win an honest election. He uses a Kissinger associate-figure to foil the Soviets and prepare the public for a new administration. For its "benign" conspiracy the story is quite disturbing: Machiavelli wins over Tom Jefferson here.

Asimov's two short stories, "Franchise" and"Evidence," line up the author's concern with robots and his conviction that moderns no longer really want to govern themselves. The growing indifference in the U.S. (from the 1950s on) to voting will coincide in Asimov's view with the computer society's rule over us:

> "The first computers were much smaller than Multivac. But the machines grew bigger and they could tell how the election would go from fewer and fewer votes. Then, at last, they built Multivac and it can tell from just one voter."
>
> Linda smiled at having reached a familiar part of the story and said, "That's nice."

The simple-mindness of Linda (she's only ten) is used by Asimov in "Franchise" to show the passivity of a typical Mid-western family that is totally malleable by the State. Only the irascible grandfather, Matthew, harkens back to the time of lost freedoms with all their abuses:

> Matthew's voice rumbled over her protest without as much as a stumble or hitch. "Listen, I was around when they set up Multivac. It would end partisan politics, they said. No more voters' money wasted on campaigns. No more grinning nobodies high-pressured and advertising-campaigned into Congress or the White House. So what happens? More campaigning than ever, only now they do it blind...I say, wipe out all the nonsense. Back to the good old--"

Yet the Good Old Days won't return to our electronic democracy. For that takes an act of "free will"--missing everywhere.

This lack is encouraged by public-relations groups, using the modern media of electronics and technology to shape the ordinary citizen. In a bitter mode Larry Eisenbery's "The Chameleon" shows this for his politician made into hologram. With different degrees of bitterness, the tales of Frank Herbert, John Jakes, Frederik Pohl, Michael Shaara, Ward Moore, and Sam Sackett throw light on the media's power. Herbert proclaims the common fear of today in "Committee of the Whole":

> "I'm probably wasting my time," Custer said, "but I'll try to explain it. Virtually every government in the world is dedicated to manipulating something called the 'mass man.' That's how governments have stayed in power. But there is no such man. When you elevate the non-existent 'mass man' you degrade the individual. And obviously it was only a matter of time until all of us were at the mercy of the individual holding power."

As a solution Ward Moore posits a romantic robot-figure who cultivates a local ward politician, captures public imagination with a "Down with Progress" philosophy, and becomes President of the U.S. -- restoring honesty, local initiative, social justice, international peace, and leading us back to a pre-industrial age. He even marries the daughter of the scientist who created him. But this "Frank Merriwell in the White House" is pure whimsey: the other authors are not so innocent. Generally, it's clever political manipulation by socially respected men (no women here at all!) that saves us and the world. The means include lies, laser weapons, computer technology, propaganda, and assassination.

Would this trickery save our democracy? It is to be doubted. More likely, it would reinforce the kind of secret dictatorship by intellectuals portrayed in Sam Sackett's "Hail to the Chief."

As scholars and intellectuals, Asimov and Greenberg select "alternate" future politics in terms of today's problems and hopes -- but in such a purely cognitive approach lies their weakness. See their essentially "evolutionary" approach to social progress via governing institutions in the Introduction and prefaces for each story. They give no warrant for such progress. It's a writer's assumption straight from the tradition of the Enlightenment, natural in an age of prosperity and unceasing innovation -- but unprovable.

Even more important is the limitation Asimove himself admits grudgingly in the Introduction: s-f concentrates on technology, not social order. And even more than in the novel, the s-f short story is limited to this approach. Asimov and Greenberg are restricted to this literary form. They claim to take only the best of the bunch. True enough, I suppose. Drama, satire,* comedy, tragedy -- they are all represented and done well. But with the exception of Barry Malzberg's assassination story, "On the Campaign Trail," these tales lack the passion and horror that may come to the future Western world as constitutional government becomes a brittle legalism.

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*R.A. Lafferty's "Polity and Customs of the Camiroi" breaks with the other stories in its style and convoluted satire. It sets up the reductio ad absurdam of American individualism and punctures its unending varieties with gusto, though a subtle horror at some of the manifestations of the me ethic is adequately portrayed.The form of the tale is reminiscent of Thomas More's Utopia and other travelogues. The irony is light, but Americans can recognize their culture in the Camiroi's "Constitutionalism."

There are a number of s-f novels that offer a wider scope. For example, Damon Knight's Hell's Pavement probes the many alternate societies linked in oppression (i.e., business-corporate rule; Amazon tribalism; the technocratic state; fascist or "democratic" secret societies, etc.). The anthology has none of the terror of theocracy gone wild as in Fritz Leiber's Gather Darkness or Robert Heinlein's Revolt in the Year 2100 or Richard Meredith's Run, Come See Jerusalem. There is no racial conflict tearing up democratic politics here. The horror and glory of the city is ignored -- letting us remember by default Thea von Harbou's Metropolis, Ed Bryant's Cinnebar, even James Blish's Cities in Flight. Finally, there is silence on the growth of divisive ideologies (utopian, Marxist, nationalist, etc.) and the concurrent terrorism spreading like cancer on the body politic. (Fred Pohl would be good here but he jumps instead to the CIA for his "Cool War" -- although "Beyond Doubt" by his militaristic opposite number, Robert Heinlein, is, thankfully, innocent of everything but a satiric poke at campaign propaganda from ancient Mu to the modern USA.)

Election Day is a good collection of stories with points competently raised, but so much more needs to be said.

When the World Screamed
Literary Echoes

by

Dana Martin Batory

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's fourth Professor Challenger tale, "When the World Screamed," appeared in The Strand Magazine (April and May, 1928). Of the five strange adventures featuring the famous scientist, George Edward Challenger, it ranks as the strangest. Though several critics have pointed out that many of Doyle's plots and characterizations aren't totally novel, his creative process and achievements can't be slighted. Doyle possessed expertise at building new, often superior stories around old plots and discarded ideas. His "borrowed" pieces mesh like fine clockwork.

The story is an intriguing combination of science and fantasy. Professor Challenger after careful deliberation has arrived at a startling new theory, as he explains to Peerless Jones, expert artesian well engineer.

> "It is this--that the world upon which we live is itself a living organism, endowed, as I believe, with a circulation, a respiration, and a nervous system of its own...It is quite unaware of this fungus growth of vegetation and evolution of tiny animalcules which has collected upon it during its travels round the sun as barnacles gather upon the ancient vessel. That is the present state of affairs, and that is what I propose to alter."

To change this, Professor Challenger has supervised the sinking of a great shaft through the Earth's outer crust and proposes to make the living Earth cogent to human existence by piercing its tough old hide with an iron drill.

"Several years of constant work which has been carried on night and day," explains Challenger to Jones,"and conducted by every known species of drill, borer, crusher, and explosive, has at last brought us to our goal...We are through the crust. It was exactly fourteen thousand four hundred and forty-two yards thick, or roughly eight miles."

Jones in his visit to the site describes it thus: "In the concavity of this horseshoe, composed of chalk, clay, coal, and granite, there rose up a bristle of iron pillars and wheels from which the pumps and the lifts were operated... Beyond it lay the open mouth of the shaft, a huge yawning pit, some thirty or forty feet in diameter, lined and topped with brick and cement."

Among Doyle's idols was Jules Verne (1828-1905), an author whose works he was familiar with since childhood. There are distinct images in this tale of Verne's lunar burlesque, in which the Gun Club of Baltimore, Maryland, plans to shoot a projectile to the Moon from a giant cannon. Contributions to the project give the Club's chief engineer, Murchison, sufficient money "to set high standards of intelligence and skill for his workers. There is every reason to believe that he had filled his working legion with the finest mechanics, firemen, smelters, smiths, miners, bricklayers and laborers of all kinds, black and white, without distinction of color."

The funding for Professor Challenger's project came from a wealthy eccentric, and he uses it in the same manner. "A man, Betterton," Edward Malone tells Jones,"left his whole estate to Challenger some years ago, with the provision that it should be used in the interests of science. It proved to be an enormous sum--several millions."

According to From the Earth to the Moon (1865), an isolated spot in the Florida wilderness, Stone Hill, is chosen by the Club as the cannon site. "Its dryness and rockiness seem to indicate all the conditions favorable to our project," says Club President, Impey Barbicane,"so it's here that we'll build our powder magazines, our workshops, our furnaces, and the houses for workers, and it will be from here that our projectile will begin its journey through space to the moon."

Challenger's work site is much the same. "Challenger then bought a property at Hengist Down, in Sussex," explains Malone. "It was worthless land on the north edge of the chalk country, and he got a large tract of it, which he wired off. There was a deep gully in the middle of it. Here he began to make an excavation...He build a little model village with a colony of well-paid workers who are all sworn to keep their mouths shut. The gully is wired off as well as the estate, and the place is guarded by bloodhounds."

Both Professor Challenger and President Barbicane are efficient heads of efficient operations.

"Now there," says Malone, pointing to a cluster of pleasant red-roofed bungalows,"are the quarters of the men. They are a splendid lot of picked workers who are paid far above ordinary rates. They have to be bachelors and teetotallers, and under oath of secrecy...That field is their football ground and the detached house is their library and recreation room. The old man is some organizer I can assure you."

Verne gives one more vision of science and industry coming together in the wilderness to carry out an engineering project of unheard of magnitude under the guidance of a skilled leader.

"On November 1 he /Barbicane/ left Tampa with a group of workers. The next day, a town of sheet-iron houses rose around Stone Hill. A stockade was built around it, and from its bustle and animation it might have been one of the biggest cities in the country. Life in it was regulated with discipline, and the work was begun in perfect order."

The Club's intention is to dig a shaft sixty feet wide and nine hundred feet deep and cast within it a cannon with an inside diameter of nine feet and walls six feet thick, surrounded by a layer of stone nineteen and a half feet thick.

Though far shallower than Challenger's shaft it is dug in much the same manner. "We won't be digging a dark, narrow artesian well" /remember Peerless Jones?/, says Murchison, "where the drill, the casing, the sounding rod, and all the other well digger's tools have to work blindly. No, we'll be working in the open air, in broad daylight, with picks and mattocks, and with the help of blasting we'll get our work done quickly."

In the novel we are treated to a fleeting blur of the projectile and its crew "blasting-off" to the Moon.

> Instantly there was a terrifying, fantastic, superhuman detonation which could not be compared to thunder or any previously known sound, not even the eruption of a volcano. An immense spout of flame shot from the bowels of the earth as from a crater. The ground heaved and only a few people caught a brief glimpse of the projectile victoriously cleaving the air amid clouds of glowing vapor.

This is exactly the scene described by Doyle's engineer when all of Challenger's experimental apparatus is vomited out by the living Earth.

> "The first emergence from the bowels of the earth consisted of the lift-cages. The other machinery being against the walls escaped the blast, but the solid floors of the cages took the full force of the upward current...So the fourteen lift-cages appeared one after the other in the air, each soaring after the other, and describing a glorious parabola which landed one of them in the sea near Worthing Pier and a second one in a field not far from Chichester. Spectators have averred that of all the strange sights they had ever seen nothing could exceed that of the fourteen lift-cages sailing through the blue heavens."

Another probable source is Francis Richard Stockton's novel, The Great Stone of Sardis (1897). Rather dull by any standard, filled with engineering knickknackery, Stockton's novel did come up with an amusing theory about what actually rests at the Earth's core.

In the distant future of 1947, American engineer Roland Clewe has invented two devices that give the novel its impetus. The first is called the Artesian Ray /remember Jones?/ described as "a powerful ray produced by a new combination of electrical lights, which would penetrate down into the earth, passing through all substances which it met in its way, and illuminating and disclosing everything through which is passes."

This light's pre-eminence is its ability to illuminate an object, pass through it, render it transparent, illuminate the opaque substance below, render that transparent, and so on, ad infinitum. The "shafts" it produces are as sharp and clear as if excavated by pickaxe and shovel.

Clewe soon resorts to using a telescope to follow the ray's progress through the Earth's strata. One day he is dazzled by a bright light. "But, gaze as he would, he could see nothing --nothing but light; subdued, soft, beautiful light." Yet the ray is passing steadily downward. There is no apparent way to discover the true answer, bringing us to device number two--the Automatic Shell.

"This extraordinary...mechanism...was of cylindrical form, eighteen feet in length and four feet in diameter...it was not intended to fire /the shell/ from a cannon, but to start it on its course from a long semicylindrical trough...simply to give it the desired direction. After it had been started by a ram worked by an engine at the rear of the trough, it immediately began to propel itself by means of the mechanism contained within it."

When the shell encountered a solid substance or obstruction of any kind its propelling power increased--the greater the resistance, the greater its velocity and power. Its onward course would continue until its self-contained force had been exhausted.

Prior to shipment, the shell is accidentally tipped off its scaffolding and before anyone can stop it, the mechanism kicks into gear and bores its way out of sight. A plumbline touches bottom at fourteen and an eighth miles. A camera is lowered but when it enters the chamber where the shaft ends it shows only the "great shell surrounded by light, resting on light." The same strange light the Artesian Ray revealed at roughly the same depth

Clewe has himself lowered into the chamber and studies the situation. "There was the great shell directly under him, but under it and around it, extending as far beneath it as it extended in every other direction, was the light from his own lamps, and yet that great shell, weighing many tons, lay as if it rested upon the solid ground!"

Leaving the car, he "raised himself and stood upon the substance which supported the shell. It was as solid as any rock. He looked down and saw his shadow stretching far beneath him. It seemed as if he were standing upon petrified air." Clewe gathers a few specimens and returns topside.

Clewe's theory about the true nature of Earth is just as remarkable as Professor Challenger's. "I believe," he says to a gathering of eminent scientists, "the whole central portion of the earth is one great diamond. When it was moving about in its orbit as a comet, the light of the sun streamed through this diamond and spread an enormous tail out into space, after a time this nucleus began to burn."

"It burned and burned and burned. Ashes formed upon it and encircled it; still it burned, and when it was entirely covered with its ashes it ceased to be transparent, it ceased to be a comet; it became a planet, and revolved in a different orbit. Still it burned within its covering of ashes, and these gradually changed to rock, to metal, to everything that forms the crust of the earth."

Clewe's wealthy patron (and eventual bride) was "Mrs. Margaret Raleigh, partner with Roland Clewe in the works at Sardis, and in fact, the principal owner of that great estate. She was a widow, and her husband had been not only a man of science, but a very rich man; and when he died, at the outset of his career, his widow believed it her duty to devote his fortune to the prosecution and development of scientific works. She knew Roland Clewe as a hard student and worker, as a man of brilliant and original ideas, and as the originator of schemes which, if carried out successfully, would place him among the great inventors of the world."

It must have been Challenger's like reputation that led Betterton to bestow his great wealth on the Professor. Both Clewe and Challenger also keep their exact plans a secret, though the isolated sites of their experiments are common knowledge. Such behavior has long been archtypical of literary scientists.

When Clewe returns from studying in Europe, "It was towards his own workshops, which lay out in the country far beyond the wide line of buildings and settlements which line the western bank of the Hudson that his heart went out and his eyes vainly strove to follow."

Clewe's complex is as extensive as Challenger's (and Barbicane's). "Here were laboratories, large machine-shops in which many men were busy at all sorts of strange contrivances in metal and other materials; and besides other small edifices there was a great round tower-like structure...This was Clewe's special workshop; and besides old Samuel Block and such workmen as were absolutely necessary and could be trusted, few people ever entered it but himself."

In both stories all physical evidence of their monumental feats are subsequently destroyed. In Challenger's case it's unforeseen, the Earth acting on its own. Writes Jones:

> "And then came the closing of the pit...There was a prolonged high-pitched crash as the sides of the shaft came together, the sound reverberating from the depths and then rising higher and higher until with a deafening bang the brick circle at the orifice flattened out and clashed together, while a tremor like a small earthquake shook down the spoil banks and piled a pyramid fifty feet high of debris and broken iron over the spot where the hole had been. Professor Challenger's experiment was not only finished, it was buried from human sight forever."

After the accidental death of Polish industrial spy Ivan Rovinski in his shaft, Clewe's mind "was made up beyond all possibility of change and by means of great bombs, the shaft was shattered and choked up for a depth of half a mile from its mouth. When the work was accomplished, nothing remained but a shallow well, and, when this had been filled up with solid masonry, the place where the shaft had been was as substantial as any solid ground."

So we find the common features of a scientist, his wealthy patron, isolated building sites, the select workers, the sophisticated equipment, the great shaft, and with the exception of Verne, the destruction of said shaft.

There was also the influence of Camille Flammarion (1842-1925), the famous French astronomer who originated the term "psychic" and put forward one of the first schemes of building a shaft deep into the Earth. He sketched out his proposal in an illustrated article entitled "A Hole through the Earth," which appeared in the September 1909 issue of The Strand Magazine. We can be sure Doyle was familiar with the article because this issue also contains Doyle's piece,"Some Recollections of Sport." (Also, both Flammarion and Doyle were devoted Spiritualists.)

"I have had the idea in mind for some time past," writes Flammarion, "of sinking a shaft into the earth for the express purpose of scientific exploration, descending as far below the surface as the utmost resources of modern science would permit. The idea has just been forcibly recalled to my attention in consequence of the recent earthquakes and the extremely contradictory opinions of geologists upon the interior state of the globe."

Flammarion calculated that "It will be necessary to penetrate two, three, or even four miles downward. Besides being very deep, this shaft ought to be of considerable diameter, say two hundred to three hundred yards, supported by a very thick cast-iron lining."

The astronomer also deals with science's great difficulty--one solved by Challenger, Barbicane, and Clewe. "Again, where is the money to come from to realize this dream? Free gifts and generous subscriptions would doubtless be forthcoming, to judge by the kind offers I have already received of vast spaces of land suitable for the sinking of such a shaft."

Flammarion does not "claim that the idea of a colossal shaft penetrating the bowels of the earth is altogether new; a much more gigantic, and, indeed, impossible, scheme was once proposed--namely, that of a tunnel perforating the entire thickness of the globe--a scheme which gave rise in the eighteenth century to the most lively discussions between Maupertius and Voltaire."

Even the illustrations of Flammarion's article are reminiscent of those by Doyle's illustrator, Francis E. Hiley -- forests of enormous derricks, armies of men and equipment, a colossal shaft lined with lift-cages, pipes, and electrical cables.

Lastly, in 1912 and 1913, one of Doyle's own major concerns was the construction of a Channel Tunnel, which had been an on-again-off-again project since about 1800. In several letters to the press in 1913, he urged the government to start building a tunnel two hundred feet underground, twenty-six miles long across the English Channel, for a two-way railway connecting England and France. It would prevent any effective naval blockade and in case of war ensure a continuing food supply from that of the Mediterranean and Black Sea via Marseille. It would also permit easy troop movement to and from the continent. This horizontal tunnel never materialized, but there is a faint but definite echo of it in Challenger's vertical eight mile shaft.

When Doyle took personal interest in a project he totally immersed himself in its every aspect in order to become a knowledgeable spokesman, with facts and figures instantly available. In the case of the tunnel he would know how it would be built, the cost, the time, etc. In the story this is reflected in a plethora of actual engineering equipment along with the names of their manufacturers.

Thus Doyle carefully modified the diverse materials surrounding him, borrowing bits and pieces, and mixing in scientific fact and literary invention. From this mixture of creativity and borrowing came a truly unique fantasy tale of science. But concerning the main facts of the story's genealogy there seems little doubt.

Editor's note: Scheduled here were several Strand Magazine illustrations for the Doyle-Flammarion project. That is, these illustrations had been photographed by critic Dana Martin Batory and then "fixed" for photo-offset reproduction by art editor Mary Emerson. But all copies were lost in the mail, and deadlines allow no chance for a second try. Printed here instead are newspaper clippings that show current thought on the France-England tunnel.

6 bid for construction of Britain-France link

Reuters

LONDON — At least six rival groups submitted bids Thursday to build a multibillion-dollar fixed Channel link between Britain and France and realize a dream dating back nearly 200 years to Napoleon.

British officials said the six had submitted plans to the two governments for a road or tunnel link across the 22-mile sea channel that has historically isolated Britain from Europe.

Major British and French banks and companies have lined up behind the rival "Chunnel" schemes, which involve either road or rail links or both.

The British and French governments agreed to the idea in principle provided they did not have to supply any cash. They are expected to select one of the plans within 100 days and set a target date for completion by the mid-1990s.

But ferry operators and port authorities, anxious to protect their traditional monopoly of cross-channel travel between southern England and France, Belgium and the Netherlands, oppose the plan.

The idea of a link, one of the most ambitious engineering projects ever undertaken, was floated by Napoleon in 1802. It has twice been started and abandoned.

Since Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and French President Francois Mitterrand approved the scheme in principle last year, two Anglo-French consortia, the Channel Tunnel Group and Euro Route, have made most of the headlines.

The Channel Tunnel Group wants a $3.2 billion, 31-mile twin tunnel with a fast rail shuttle between Folkestone and Calais.

Euro Route, whose backers include Barclays Bank, proposes a $7.5 billion road and rail link with bridges, artificial islands and a 13-mile tunnel.

A third group, Eurobridge, suggests an $8.5 billion, 21-mile road bridge with seven spans and motorways on several levels.

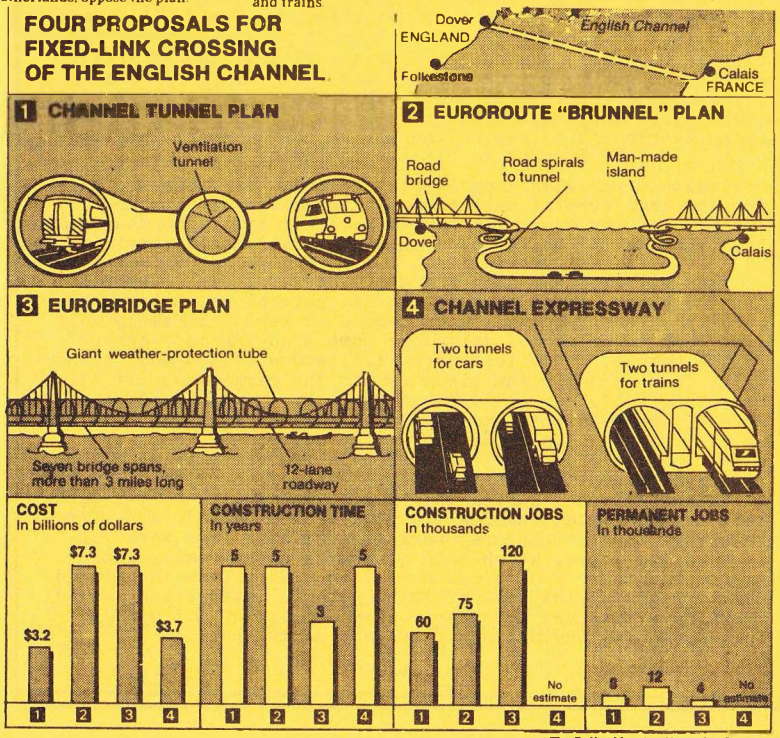
Sea Containers, parent company of the British ferry operator Sealink, a vigorous opponent at the outset, unveiled a $3 billion plan for a single tunnel shared by both cars and trains.

"If an Englishman's home is his castle, then the (English) channel is his moat . . . And I want a drawbridge that can be pulled up when need be."

— Sallie Wimble, opponent of project

The Dallas Morning News 25 A

Sunday, December 29, 1985



The Dallas Morning News: Jan Brunson

Selected Letters

4846 Derby Place
Klamath Falls, OR 97603

Dear Leland:

The cover is beautiful. I like it very much. "Dry Thoughts in a Dry Season" by Joe Milicia was especially interesting to me, since I am acquainted only with Ballard's later works, which are strange even considered as s-f. I also enjoyed the examination of the early stories of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. There are some fascinating parallels laid out between "The Polestar" and Mary Shelley's Frankenstein. One might also make a comparison between "The Polestar" and Doyle's other creation Sherlock Holmes, since that cerebral detective is someone who considers the exercise of intellect his only polestar and has few other resources when that one fails him. The accompanying poems, "Shipwrecked" and "Vis Inertiae," are well matched to the prior theme, while "Transportation" echoes the vampiric theme evidenced in Polestar.

/William/ Tenn is correct in that there is often a technological snobbery among many intellectuals. (For instance, mathematicians look down on physicists and both look down on engineers. G. Harry Stine has a good article about this in the April 1986 Analog.) By the way, there are even techniques for working as a strawberry picker--how to cope with the wide tree rows, when to straddle and when to squat, how to deal with flat carriers with bent wheels, how to grow one's thumbnail long enough to deal with stems in the easiest fashion (not to mention the green tips of otherwise unmerchandisable berries), and how to fill the flat in the easiest, most efficient manner despite frozen fingers, rotten berries, and the occasional berry fight. One also learns a vast quantity of unprintable songs, singing on the bus on the way back (everyone's asleep on the way up there--we're talking 4 o'clock in the morning to hit the fields by 6).

I also agree with Tenn's point about Caesar. The whole idea is that even if Caesar does have epileptic fits and sleeps with whatever will have him, he is still the Caesar that stomped the Gauls and tromped all over the Senate.

What Williamson points out about horror is well-known in all the other genres as well. First, several great books come out, by authors who will soon become at least extremely well off. Then the flood of imitators come sludging out--except /that/ some of these imitators will become quite good, eventually. Then suddenly the bloom is off the market, as attention becomes directed to a different genre by the publication of several great (or at least best-selling) books in it. The genre then passing its prime is usually neglected except by a hard-core cadre of True Fans and by a few exceptional authors who have broken through the ghetto wall of the genre (however, anything published during this period is usually better than most of the garbage during the peak of the cycle). A few true believers then get hard at work at producing fine work for love of the genre, which then generates a few really great books, and there we are again. But in a way, even the sludge that appears at the peak of this cycle is interesting, as authors have to start somewhere--they usually do not spring full-grown from Heinlein's forehead, so to speak.

Sincerely,
Jean Lamb

There also exist techniques (perfected in the U.S. Marine Corps) of loafing while appearing to be hard at work--the idea being that if you've nothing to do, they'll find something for you to do.// Snobbery also was exhibited by some mathematicians toward Applied Mathematics, regarded as something useful and therefore unfit to discuss--"The most useful household object is the toilet, but we don't talk about that"--although such attitudes are disappearing. For, it turns out that even the most abstract branches of mathematics--like group theory and differential forms--have practical applications.

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Great Britain

Dear Leland,

Joe Milicia on Ballard's The Drought made for interesting reading, and may even prompt me to go back and re-read the book, an unusual thing for me to do with Ballard, as I've never been a fan of the man, and have quite often failed to finish his books. I'd be quite interested to see what Joe would make of Empire of the Sun, Ballard's semi-autobiographical novel set in China during the Japanese occupation in WW II. Having read it, I thought that the earlier books were attempts at exorcising the nightmares of that period when the schoolboy Ballard had to endure years of harsh and unrelenting terror, as prisoner of the Japanese. There are plenty of analogies to be drawn between Empire and The Drought: the Quilter-Lomax duo have their counterparts in the later book, for example. I rather regard Ballard as a chronicler of his own aberrative thinking than a true reflector of modern day life, and, I think Empire tends to bear that out.

Nice to see my own institution's work being quoted in such esoteric areas as fanzine lettercols. I refer to Johan Schimanski's letter mentioning the Open University's text books. I do feel Johan's being a little naughty--the OU produces special text books designed for distance-learning (the student takes all the courses at home), so they are structured in such a way as to pace the students' learning throughout the academic year. There is a substantial difference between that and doing an article with "defined sections," which may be used in ways that illuminate or confuse (going back to Ballard again here: remember the sectionalised The Atrocity Exhibition). Good device it may be, but only if used in the correct way.

I must admit to slightly boggling at Flint Mitchell's letter complaining about the reduction of quality in appearance of fanzines produced using computers, or even [electronic] typers. Has the man never heard of daisy-wheel printers, which give output as good if not better than any typer? Or is it he's just an old-fashioned fan who bemoans the passing of mimeo? As a user of computers in fanzine production, I reckon the quality of reproduction in my fanzine has improved enormously since I switched, and I sure as hell wouldn't want to go back to the old multiple-draft way of working: fanzine publishing is supposed to be fun, not bloody hard work!

All the very best,
John D. Owen

As a member of the lower middle class that can't afford a word-processor, I must adopt the puritan standpoint and say it's wicked of you to enjoy fan publishing, which ought to be an endless sequence of cutting, pasting, and recopying.

Editor's note: Concerning our next-to-last issue, RQ#27, a letter arrived from a British reader, Roger Waddington, 3 months late, and from another, Janet Ellicott, 6 months late. So the first had to be truncated at both ends, with only the middle part printed, and the other, squeezed into the several inches left over in the WAHF section. But the record was set by our (usually) most reliable U.S. reader, Harry Warner, whose letter took an entire year and so missed the issue altogether. Printed here, then, are some of Harry's comments on RQ#27.

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423 Summit Avenue
Hagerstown, MD 21740

Dear Leland:

I am in the middle of the mad project of writing locs on all the fanzines that arrived last year and didn't get locs at the proper time. Of course my failure to respond to the May, 1983, issue that arrived early in 1984 had nothing to do with its quality or my enjoyment of it. Even though I'm now retired I still find it impossible to respond to every fanzine that arrives and I haven't been able to find any factor other than chance that determines which ones get neglected.

I haven't been able to find that new Tom Mix series on radio stations that are audible in Hagerstown. I hope this is just my bad luck rather than an indication that the series got bogged down somewhere along the line. Jim Harmon deserves a chance to become part of the radio entertainment to which he has devoted so much of his time and talent.

Stanislav Lem isn't my all-time favourite writer of s-f. But I wonder if a bit of charity shouldn't be mixed with the disapproving criticism in articles like that of Frank Bertrand, because of the language barrier. No matter how thoroughly Lem has studied English (and I don't know how much of the quoted material represents his own words and how much may be a translator's version of them) misunderstandings and wrong shades of meaning are bound to creep into one's use of a foreign tongue.

After all this time, I've still succeeded in failing to see any of the movies reviewed in this issue. E.T. is the only one that interests me to any great extent. I'm sure it will have a beneficial effect on the possible course of events if genuine bems should turn up on this planet, perhaps causing someone to hesitate before pulling a trigger. On the other hand, E.T. seems from what I've read of it a potential cause for starting a deadly war between the generations, in case everyone under the age of ten years decides to get rid of the old people who behaved so stupidly in that movie.

Yrs. , &c.,
Harry Warner, Jr.

Even in Dallas it appears impossible to tune in on Tom Mix, so there'd be still less chance of catching him in the States./ Single sentences may be garbled in translation, but the central idea (s-f as a meaningless game) seems to be repeated by different articles, different journals, and presumably different translators. It's hard to believe all these are mistranslations. / Grade this for adult stupidity: the curtailment of all health, social, and educational programmes in order to fund a project that can only mean extinction of the human race.

Another note: Printed below is a fusion of 2 letters, the 2nd a response to my enquiry about references in the 1st. So the resulting discontinuity is my own doing, not the correspondent's.

2 Copgrove Close, Berwick Hills
Middlesbrough, Cleveland TS3-7BP
Great Britain

Dear Leland:

I did, I'm afraid, prefer the later pages of the mag to the earlier. For a fact, I can't stand Ballard's work, and whatever anybody else sees in it, /he/ can't communicate to me--the man is repetitive, dismal, and very ungenerous about people. Empire of the Sun showed why. Ballard simply does not believe there are reasons for people to survive anything at all--disaster, marriage, work, life. The study itself is worth reading, but I've long since given up on Ballard, not just because of his fictional drudgery--as blasted by Schweitzer in "The Drowned Giant" and by Sladek--but because I read Bax's Hospital Ship, which delightfully inverts Ballard's characters and rehabilitates their rather strained personalities in ways I agree with. I don't know if anyone else ever read it, but Ballard was involved, so he didn't object...

/Empire of the Sun/ is, in fact, a fictionalization of Ballard's own life--and proved conclusively that the imagery Ballard had used throughout his '60s and '70s career--luxury hotels disintegrating under the sun, swimming pools cracking in desert heat--were what Ballard had actually seen while imprisoned behind the wire of the camps. I wonder if it's significant that Ballard has gone silent since the novel, as if he had finally cauterised or exorcised a memory and was no longer pushed to write.

Sladek's isn't an article, it's a story /from/ a set of parodies of various authors. "The Sublimation World by J G B*ll*rd" was first published in F&SF July '68 and reprinted in Sladek's collection, The Steam Driven Boy, which also included parodies of Wells, Poe, Gernsback, Heinlein, Asimov, Bradbury, Clarke, Dick, and Cordwainer Smith. The sheer brilliant mimicry of these stories showed Sladek's artistry, but alas he really doesn't like people.

Hospital Ship is a novel by Martin Bax, published in 1976. Bits had appeared in Ambit earlier, a mag that Bax himself founded in 1959. What Bax did was to use--with permission--several of Ballard's obsessive characters, specifically Coma and Kline, and psychoanalyse/rehibilitate them so that the book ends in a myriad of marriages. The actual plot is the title ship sailing the seas of a devastated Earth and trying to cure/help/alleviate pain. The Coma/Kline stories (some of which are listed in the back among the references) are shown to be fantasies forced by Kline on Coma in a sado-masochistic relationship whose cure parallels the cure of the world. This lovely book has a lot more levels than I can indicate, but I hope this is clear enough. (Ballard is an editor of Ambit, by the way, or was at the time.)

Jim Harmon is right, but I would suggest the reason for the imitation of visual-media s-f prose form is to replicate the shudder of excitement /gotten/ from the visual effects. Those of us who started with prose had to create our own images from the words, and these images rarely accorded with whatever interpretation was placed by the usually dull film adaptations. The high tech s-f of the '70s film has (alas!) in some ways produced incredibly powerful imagery, imagery moreover that has no real solid basis in anything other than imagery. So I'm unsurprised that media s-f fans do not pursue fiction other than that which replicates the visions they have seen.

Sunrise & Twilight,
Ian Covell

To fault Ballard for personal defects is to make a moral rather than a literary judgment. The critic cannot ask if an author's obsessions make him a likable fellow, only whether their fictional embodiments possess unity and coherence. E.G., Robert Kerans and Charles Ransom (of The Drowned World and The Drought, respectively) are "self-isolating individuals... more at home with their landscapes than with other people." But as Joe Milicia pointed out, it's precisely this isolation that makes them "ideal perceiving eyes for Ballard's phantasmagoric visions." So where you say Ballard fails is exactly where I think he succeeds.

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39 Lynwood Place#3
New Haven, CT 06511

Dear Leland,

I feel vaguely incompetent to comment on most of this, since I haven't read the works these articles are talking about. In fact, I'm not sure I've read any J.G. Ballard. I liked the William Tenn interview, and agree that we tend to underrate our humourists. It's a damned shame really, because there's too little decent humour around, in or out of s-f.

Poetry: I am in awe of poets. I've tried poetry, and it never works. I liked "Vis Inertiae," "A Divine of the Black Hole Offers Mass" (nice pun there), and "A Cup of Sinister." The others I didn't understand. The problem with writing between the lines is that communication becomes even more problematic than it is to begin with.

Roger Waddington may be right that some attitudes pass permanently out of favour. I have my doubts, speaking as a student of history, but we haven't got enough of a baseline to really say. But what does that have to do with literature? I don't believe in the White Man's Burden, but I still read and enjoy Kipling, and appreciating the Iliad doesn't require a belief in the Greek gods, or in the glory of dying in battle. Good writing will justify itself, and bad writing won't survive just because we happen to like the ideas in it.

I suspect you don't want to fill your pages with a discussion of neo-pagan theology, but I do want to argue with one point in Norman McKinney's letter. Neo-paganism is not about "personal salvation," because that only makes sense in the Judeo-Christian context, which assumes that we're all sinners who need salvation. In the pagan worldview, humans have as much right to be here as trees or wolves.

Thanks for the idea that the U.S. and Canada may be local to each other, with Texas as a foreign country. I certainly feel more in common with Ontarians (is that the word?) than Texans. Maybe it's just that we all suffer through those goddam winters.

Take care,

Vicki Rosenzweig

To cite another example, we can immerse ourselves in Paradise Lost precisely because we're separated from it. Only Fundamentalists still believe in a literal Hell, so there's no fear that reading Milton will bring back the Middle Ages. But the White Man's Burden is a notion discarded just recently (in this century), so we still reject not just the idea but any author who advocates it. Greater temporal separation is one reason why Milton (or Homer) is read and Kipling is not.// The orthodox view is that the U.S. joined Texas about 150 years ago; but despite common postal and monetary units, they're viewed by Texans as independent republics. See, e.g., Continental's ad (Dallas Observer, June '84) claiming "the lowest...fares from Dallas/Ft. Worth to the USA"--which makes no sense if these are conceived as cities already in the USA.

P.O. Box 215, Forest Hills
Vic. 3131, Australia

Dear Leland,

The Tenn interview was fascinating. Tenn is one of my favourite authors, despite the paucity of material available. We really need more people like Klass. The man really thinks. He wouldn't put departments of social security at the tops of flights of stairs where invalids couldn't reach them. He wouldn't design libraries where the number of exits mean that security is impossible. He's an academic with sense, and as such should be registered as a national treasure, to be let out only to attend conventions.

Tenn's vision of man as a creature in a smelly urinal scratching his armpit is delightful. (Does he see women in the same light?)

Jim Harmon's point strikes home rather nastily. Not only are real honest and for true writers learning their trade from television, but so are the kids I teach. The result is that they have trouble, in general, in sustaining a piece of writing, and have concentration spans best measured in the duration between advertisement brackets. And if I read another plagiarized A-Team script, submitted as an original composition...

Yours antipodeanly,

Marc Ortlieb

What's alarming is that plagiarism is condoned--which is a fancy way of saying it's encouraged, since one unpunished crime is generally considered as justification for another. The best-known example is Starwars' "borrowing" from Jack Kirby's '71-'72 Third World trilogy. Starwars producers will perhaps dismiss the Darth Vader/Luke Skywalker=Darkseid/Orion relationship as coincidence, but I think there's no doubt in the minds of Jack Kirby fans or DC publishers.

P.O. Box 707
Worchester, NY 01602

Dear Leland:

I was very pleasantly surprised to find RQ#28 in my mail box recently. Has it really been over two-and-a-half years since #27? Have you considered changing the name to "Riverside Biannual" or "Riverside Whenever-Possible"?

"Horribile Dictu": Williamson has some good observations and suggestions, but isn't the "genre cycle" an old story in the entertainment and publishing industry? A significant and/or innovative work appears, gains monumental popularity, subsequently motivating a slew of quick-buck imitators who must scramble to cash in on the genre's newly blossomed popularity while it lasts. Eventually, as public tastes change and the imitators grow too numerous to support themselves, a shakeout occurs; the "hot" genre returns to the realm of the "not hot" once again, and only the most dedicated followers of the form hold on to it.

But I don't think it is accurate to categorize s-f on an equal footing with horror, romance, Western, and espionage, as the article seemed to do off-handedly. What distinguishes s-f first and foremost is its unbounded scope and breadth of vision. This is what has kept it (at least in its written form) the most popular and resilient genre for decades. Movie-wise, s-f is capable, I would think, of reaching greater heights as "art" than any of these other genres, if handled with talent and expertise. The movie industry has had a spotty track record in recognizing this.

Until RQ goes weekly,

Peter Lima

In the first Gothic cycle we had the old castle, complete with chorus of shrieks and groans, and in the second, to quote our columnist, a collection of "severed heads,...satanic kiddies, /and/ warmed-over monsters." Be assured that these (and their s-f derivatives) have little in common with the romance, cowboy, or spy story--so they were grouped together only in the sense that there is "an avid audience for all /italics mine/ the genres cited."

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30 N. 19th St.
Lafayette, IN 47904

Dear Leland,

One of your poems, by Morgan Nyberg, was too much of a black mass, or like one, to suit my tastes. I mean that benediction is seen as being encased in it, and still being carried on, but no one who has not seen the poem stands in immediate need of it; /the poem/ seems to me not to follow the better laws of meaningful poetic contact and communication.

Harmony is a relief from this, as the title indicates. I also see DEA, a name I haven't seen for a long time, but like many an artist, DEA hasn't seen fit to preserve the linear care and precision of earlier work; perhaps influenced by Bob Rose and others of a concentric trend, she loses much from the earlier days of drawing for Indiana fanzines.

Best,
John Thiel

Of our poet's satanic affinity there's no doubt. Recall William Blake's apophthegm on another poet: "The reason Milton wrote in fetters when he wrote of Angels and God, and at liberty when of Devils and Hell, is because he was a true poet, and of the Devil's party without knowing it."

P.O. Box 606, La Canada
Flintridge, CA 91011

Dear Leland:

I see you pubbed almost two years ago, judging from what you quoted by me /in/ the lettercol. My, my, a lot has happened since I left the alcoholism unit. For one thing, I am still sober. Not bad eh? Of course as an atheist I have been having a little problem with some aspects of Alcoholics Anonymous, like turning my will and life over to the care of God.

So as a counterweight to all the God-shit, I have joined the Unitarian Universalist Church in Pasadena, which doesn't mind if you are an atheist, if that is what you truly believe. Also, I have started a "We Agnostics" group of recovering alcoholics. It keeps me occupied.

I cannot say much on the RQ itself, as I have had little time to read s-f this last year, what with one thing and another--such as the Voyager Two Uranus encounter. We are now trying, somehow, to hang together until NASA decides what to do with the Galileo spacecraft at the cape, which was supposed to be launched in May of this year.

All in all, the Challenger disaster is setting back NASA by years, and also reveals how badly the organization has deteriorated from the gung-ho 1960s. All very sad. I hope a lot of top heads at NASA roll, but they will probably find a way to weasel out and blame the lower ranking techs and engineers for the fiasco.

Harry J.M. Andruschak

Let's be thankful the big heads were flushed out, not the little. So long as military applications exist, so will NASA --but better that it be continued for the wrong reasons than not be continued at all.

---

c/o MGA Services
P.O. Box 863994
Plano, TX 75086

Dear Leland,

"Harmony" by Jim Harmon really sums up my own views about the state of mainstream s-f writing. I personally was raised on the classic writers (Ray Bradbury, Robert Heinlein, Isaac Asimov, Arthur C. Clarke, etc.) and much of the new material today seems to be utterly devoid of depth, perspective, or imagination. It is terrible stuff.

However, I do not believe that this is the state among writers, but it is the state of publishing. The established press has grown fat and happy off of the well-established writers of the past few decades, and seems unable to continue on with new writers of the same calibre. The fact of the matter is that such writers do exist--and there is nothing short of a conspiracy in the marketplace to keep them out of mainstream--and New Pathways intends to prove this. I am already in correspondence with other writers who are being kept out of mainstream /s-f/ and will support my position.

Sincerely,
Michael G. Adkisson

If there's a way out it's up to NP to find it (for specifics write the address above), since the news-stand fiction mags in the U.S. don't seem to be trying. Concerning the book publishing industry, I don't think there's a planned conspiracy, merely the making of literary decisions by salespeople--or persons with a sales mentality. For more details see Gene van Troyer's communication later in this section.

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27 Borough Road, Kingston on Thames
Surrey KT2-68D, Great Britain

Dear Leland,

Many thanks for sending RQ 7/4. I had heard of RQ, so I was pleased to be able to read a copy. As far as reading is concerned, small print on green paper is a mistake; I imagine you're stuck with the small print--but white paper would make reading your magazine easier on the eye.

The illustrations were a bit disappointing (except for those by Mary Emerson). With a quarterly, isn't it possible to get illos that match the articles?

The poems, too, did not fire me with enthusiasm. Enough carping; your letter column is a lively one and, I'm glad to see, not entirely devoted to praising your magazine. A refreshing change from some fanmags I see.

Film Clips: I was about to compliment you on being the only fanmag without reviews! (I have reached a point where I shudder when I get yet another mag almost entirely filled with reviews. Who wants to read them? I don't.)However, it struck me as extraordinary that Steven Dimeo should describe the idea of "a girl who can start fires with her mind" as unique. This must be one of the oldest in the business, and King has also used it in his previous novel, Carrie. What King did was to take a genre idea to the mass market.

All the best,
Sydney J. Bounds

The prime evil (high postal rates) is countered by thin paper, while Bible-paper's see-through quality (a secondary evil) is minimized by colour--since coloured paper is less transparent than white.// As to film reviews, I definitely want them since I go to just one movie a year and the reviews help me decide which one.

34-45 201st St
Bayside, NY 11361

Dear Mr. Sapiro:

About Harmon's article, one possible reason for the lack of adult s-f in the movies is /that/ the movie industry does not think adults would be interested in s-f. At least not as much as children are. Notice how most big-budget s-f movies are released during the summer because children are out of school and they are the biggest audience for this type of movie. The industry figures, Why risk showing some serious s-f when /we/ are making millions off the Star Wars/ Special Effects oriented movies?

Sincerely,
Rosaire Orlowski

OK, you win that one: the timed summer release of s-f films never occurred to me. Now here's one for you. Who's the source of that one-liner--"Unfortunately, Darth Vader isn't available" --concerning Ron Reagan's early search (in the '70s) for a running mate who shared his own social and political philosophy?

2422 E. Verde
Holtville, CA 92250

Dear Mr. Sapiro,

Joe Milicia's "Dry Thoughts in a Dry Season" on J.G. Ballard's The Drought was interesting. I liked his examination of the surrealist art imagery. I only "discovered" Ballard about five years ago, and enjoy his work greatly.

I knew very little of A.C. Doyle before reading "The Rime of the Polestar" and was familiar with only one of his characters (Holmes) through Rathbone's representation of him in film. (I did know of his interest in the paranormal, however.) I think I shall have to look up some of his other books.

Thanks for the comics review in RQ. Not knowing what is included in the regular "Eighty-Year Shaft," I will limit myself to saying that I like several contemporary comic books, including Nexus, Love & Rockets, and The Badger.

Jim Harmon: What is Hot Ralston?

Letters: I recommend Fragments West/The Valentine Press books, Philip K. Dick: In His Own Words and Philip K. Dick: The Last Testament. My husband, Dave Garcia, wants to some day get permission to adapt some of Dick's works into a comic book form. Dick, Sturgeon, Herbert: too late for me to tell them how much I enjoyed their writing.

Sincerely,
Monica Sharp

You'll never qualify as Texas ranch-hand if you don't know about Hot Ralston (a clue: "Straight shooters always win--Law breakers always lose--It pays to shoot straight"), but you make up for that by being the first reader to appreciate Joe Milicia's comments on the "painterly" aspects of Ballard's works.// The Basil Rathbone series began strongly and ended miserably, with the last film showing Holmes's favourite enemy, Professor Moriarty, trying to sell a secret bombsight to the Nazis--a sequence that would have required Holmes to be over ninety years old.

7234 Cappa Ave
Reseda, CA 91335

Dear Leland,

I thought that the interview with William Tenn was the most interesting item in the issue. His comments on the generally low regard for trades are quite true. When I was in school everybody with an IQ of more than 13 was supposed to go to college and preferably become an engineer. I've sometimes mentally kicked myself with the realization that if I'd only become a plumber I'd be a rich man today. But no, I had to be a smart guy and go to college. I was talking to an engineer who worked on the space shuttle, and he commented on the serious decline in trade skills such as welding from the WW II period to the present. The fact that they couldn't get the same quality of welding on the shuttle programme that the U.S. was able to get out of its wartime aircraft factories was having a definite impact on the shuttle programme. The all brains and no hands approach to things has its problems.

Yours truly, Milt Stevens

Don't forget, in the trades it's a matter of hands and brains. The thinking by a mechanic who fixes your car is on a par with that of a physician who treats a patient--the main difference being that the one finds it easier to get spare parts.

2123 N. Early St.
Alexandria, VA 22302

Dear Leland,

I was astonished to read your rhetorical question (RQ#28): "How can a funny story be taken seriously?" Perhaps I am sensitive on this point--the reformed-drunk effect--because I too held this opinion a decade ago. But I would have thought that any well-read person would discard such a notion soon after the solemn age of, say, 25.

Chesterton, as is so often the case, gave the best retort when he said, "Mr. McCabe thinks that I am not serious but only funny, because Mr. McCabe thinks that funny is the opposite of serious. Funny is the opposite of not funny, and of nothing else" (Heretics, John Lane:1905, p. 220). And, of course, Chesterton himself is the best example of a serious writer discussing serious ideas via the use of humour, both in fiction and non-fiction.

Not to be forgotten is the use of irony, one of the most powerful dramatic techniques, but also fundamentally a species of humour. Victor Hugo was a supreme ironist, and his work is certainly serious. Another great ironist (as well as satirist, parodist, etc.) was James Branch Cabell, whose work expresses a world-view that is more coherent, comprehensive, and serious than what can be found in the vast majority of authors who are outwardly more "serious."

Chesterton was quite right: humour is a style of expression, not a litmus test for content.

Sincerely,
Mike Shoemaker

I'm astonished by your astonishment, since I've always enjoyed William Tenn (see my remark in RQ#26 about his being "the country's most underrated s-f writer") and the satire his writing exemplifies. The "William Tenn problem" refers to the public apathy, cited in Richard Brandt's letter, as exemplified in towns (like the one I last lived in) where not a single bookstore or library lists any of this author's titles.

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32 Warren Road
Donaghadee BT 21
North Ireland

Dear Editor:

I don't come across much of s-f these days, and can't read much of what I do see (who was it who said that the Golden Age of Science Fiction is 13 ?)so I can't comment sensibly on your various well-written articles. I did wonder though why Joe Milicia didn't mention my own favourite world catastrophe novel, the one in which the Earth is obliterated by great yellowing piles of J.G. Ballard world catastrophe novels, among which scattered groups of survivors of terminal boredom fight each other with blowpipes made from rolled-up endpapers and darts of poisoned staples. I think it was called The Remaindered World.

Best,
Walt Willis

Down here at the B-RQ (say it, "bar Q") ranch, hombres got lots of hoss-laffs from your "Remaindered World"--but those words do point out a scary real problem, as you see in the next letter.

Ojana 554, Ginowan City
Okinawa-Ken 901-22
Japan

Dear Leland,

I'm glad to see that you're featuring poetry so favourably. I was the co-editor for two years (with Robert Frazier) of Star*Line, the newsletter of the S-F Poetry Association, and poetry in s-f is a subject near to my heart. I noted with interest the negative reaction of Mr. Flint Mitchell. I have the feeling that very little of what I read in the 7:4 RQ could be called "fan" poetry, though indeed the poets may themselves be fans. I can say with certainty that Edward Mycue and Douglas Barbour publish their poetry in places other than fanzines. I published a poem of Mr. Barbour in Portland Review (a literary magazine) a few years back, and also bought a couple of pieces from Mr. Mycue, who I know publishes in the literary mainstream as well as in s-f. I find it unfortunate that people put poetry down so in s-f; did you know that the SFWA has for the last three years recognized poetry as a legitimate credential for professional membership?

By the way, if I may be allowed, I'd like to make a plug for the S-F Poetry Association. For those of your readership who love poetry and have not heard of the SFPA, they can join for $8.00. For this they will get six bimonthly issues of Star*Line and an annual Rhysling Anthology. Write to Bruce Boston, SFPA, 1819 9th St#B, Berkeley, CA 94710.

"Dry Thoughts in a Dry Season" was a worthwhile piece of criticism. As an aside, has anyone noticed that at least one s-f author, Lee Killough, has fashioned--or rather, derived--an entire series of short stories from Ballard's Vermillion Sands? I say derived because a lot of Ballard's familiar stage props--psychoreactive houses, clothes, furniture, and the like--seem to crop up in Killough's stories.

J.N. Williamson's comments in "Horribile Dictu" said nothing particularly new to me, though it might be news to readers in general. The publishing industry has been infected with accountants and sales departments assuming editorial power for the last few years. Many editors have commented upon the fact that sales departments have veto authority over an editor's judgment about a book. Most editors these days seem to be second guessing the sales people, rejecting good books simply because they do not think the sales people will approve. A major reason for these developments is, I believe, the merger mania that has gripped the industry since the very late '70s. This brought in the bottom-line mentality of corporate accountants who are incapable of seeing farther than the next quarter's financial statements. It used to be that a book was a long-term investment on the publisher's part, but no more; either it earns back the cost plus profit within the first six weeks or it gets remaindered and then pulped. This is not having a beneficial effect on publishing as a whole, let alone science-fiction publishing.

Best regards,
Gene van Troyer

Despite its Defence of Poetry, your letter is horrifying, since I know of a publisher that did indeed remainder a book after just six weeks. Remembering Arkham House's The Outsider, which took five years to sell out, I wrote this was a blunder --and learned the company was just clearing the decks for "mass-market paperbacks." The publisher's conclusion:"If acting like Viking or HRW (Talisman, Usher's Passing remaindered a year later) is a 'blunder' /we'll/ probably continue to make them." Now I can't accuse the head of this operation of being a "corporate accountant," and I dislike viewing myself as morally superior to anybody making a fast buck. But I'd be dishonest if I didn't emphasize that such behavior means not just the death of s-f but the death of literature in general.

WE ALSO HEARD FROM...

Brian Suth (330 Ewingville Rd, Trenton, NJ 08638), who thought the magazine "excellent" and plans "to buy issues as they come out" --

Robert Briggs (730 Hazel St #3, Punta Gorda, FL 33950), a follower of "the 19th century Romantics," who disdains RQ's brand of "modern" poetry --

Lynn Hansen (1480 Calkins, Idaho Falls, ID 93401), who found "some very insightful material" last issue and, agreeing "with most of the contents...can't write to disagree" --

Ed Chambers (809 Green Ave, Mt. Ephraim, NJ 08059), noting that RQ has "a very active lettercol. This is something I am trying to achieve with my zine, Sirius" --

T.K. Atherton (3021 N. Southport, Chicago, IL 60657), explaining that "severe brain damage from a collision with s-f fandom" has rendered him "unable to write a LOC without assistance from my nurse."

WAHF REVISITED

Brian: I'm glad you liked the mag, but I'd prefer to learn why -- Robert: Why not return to the Age of Chaucer or, better still, "Beowulf"? If you want to regress, go all the way! --Lynn:If you can't disagree then write to agree: criticism can be positive as well as negative -- Ed: The Heaven-Hell "hotline" (in Sirius) was a good idea, and I hope you liked my own Beelzebub Boogie -- TKA: Quit slinging it, pal. If you can write a letter explaining why you can't write a letter, then you're smart enough to write a letter.

R Q Miscellany

After self-congratulations for my cleverness this issue in squeezing twenty two missives into twelve alloted pages of Selected Letters, I was roused from smiling complacency by discovering a cache of eight more, uncopied and unacknowledged. Listed here, then, totally out of place, are communications by:

Bob Lee (1720 Burgundy Rd, Leucadia, CA 92024), who enjoyed the magazine despite his tendency to "find it personally disgusting to be serious about anything"--

Al Morrison (Box 75 Old Chelsea Station, New York, NY 10013), who "can really depend on RQ to keep me in peripheral touch with the mainstream of s-f, as I do not go to conventions any more and have not all that much time and money for subscriptions/readings"--

David Palter (9137 Howland Ave, Toronto, Ontario M5R-3B4), who was "startled to read that a Wiccan publication had printed a justification for burning crosses on lawns. Wicca doesn't seem well suited to racism. Rather, something Lovecraftian, perhaps...Klansmen for Cthulhu. Since HPL was himself somewhat of a racist and his writing emphasizes horror and madness, this would seem to fit " -- Such a notion would have been accurate, as in HPL's letter describing the KKK as a "maligned band of Southerners who protected their homes against the diabolical freed blacks and Northern adventurers in the years of misgovernment just after the Civil War." This was printed in All Story Weekly (7 March, 1914) and was reprinted by Langley Searles in Fantasy Commentator II (1948), p. 218. But now I can quote a personal note from Dr. Searles himself: "HPL later changed his views on the KKK. See Selected Letters, vol. 5, pp. 306 ('backward fundamentalists') and 402 (a 'variant of Nazism')."

In these last few column-inches I had intended to list those five correspondents lucky enough not to be quoted above -- but I am obliged instead to note that there no longer exists an accurate correlation between the section title-headings (pages 3 and 24) and items they designate. For purely aesthetic reasons the relative ordering of articles was changed, but for a purely logical reason (impossibility) the corresponding section-titles were not. "Alas!" in the original ordering referred to the barrenness (and horror) of a purely cognitive existence, while Speeches and Screams denoted articles on people-talk and Earth-talk, respectively.

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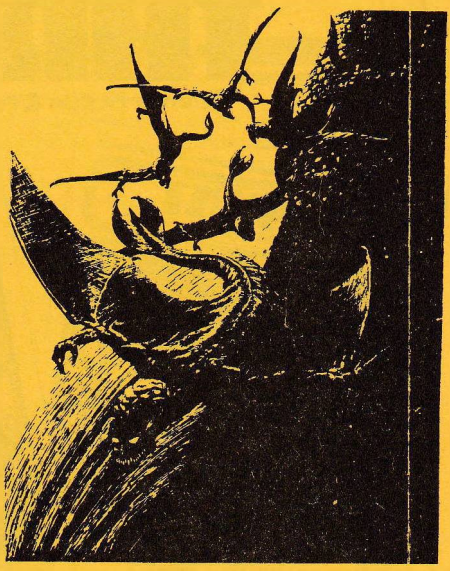

Edited by Jani Anderson

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