

ALL DIGRESSION WEEKLY #3

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Saturday night I finally got a chance to see Metropolis. During the last five years, this film has been shown in L.A. at least half a dozen times, but somehow it was always shown in exactly the wrong place and at exactly the wrong time. This time it was shown at a theater half way across town at midnight on a night I had already sceduled a date but this time I made it.

Before the main feature was shown, I had to sit through some selected cinematic errata and addenda. They ran a trailer on a film called Woman of the Dunes, which they threatened to show next week. The trailer consisted of a shot of a pair of bare feet walking across the sand followed by a shot of a naked female breast followed by a shot of somebody running their fingers through the sand followed by a shot of a naked female breast followed by a worm's eye view of the hair on a human arm followed by a shot of a naked female breast. The film is probably the story of a mad cameraman, who spends a lot of time photographing female breasts. The theater also showed a serial called The Purple Phantom Strikes. Like most serials of the 30's, the script was probably done by the monkey in the British Museum.

Metropolis was a strange mixture of the genius that Fritz Lang exhibited in his later directorial efforts and the cinematic peculiarities that were prevalent at the time. In his later efforts (Last Will of Dr. Mabuse, M, Fury), Lang directed films that were very austere and very compact. Metropolis is marred by the creeping romantacism that detracted from most of the American and some of the German movies of the period. The protagonist is an effeminate fop, who emotes effusively throughout the entire film. His feminine characteristics are accentuated by the knickers that he wears in about half the scenes. Of course, he falls in love with the girl, who is the leader of the workers' underground (literally and figuratively) movement. The love interest tends to trivialize the important struggle that is taking place. The film is done in a surrealistic manner that makes it appear quite modern (except for the lack of a sound track). The special effects are excellent, especially the design for a robot, which would not disgrace any modern science fiction film.

Now that I have seen Metropolis, I have seen most of the major pre-war German films with the notable exception of Triumph of Will. There are still several major American silent films that I have not seen such as; The Big Parade, Hearts of the World, Way Down East and Modern Times. Good heavens! I sound like a completist of some sort.

MAILING COMMENTS ETC.

Len Bailes; Your defence of Ayn Rand's philosophy is quite reasonable. But since I am willing to agree with your point of view, the local Randists probably won't. If they do agree, we will have succeeded in compromising ourselves out of a good argument.

Jack Harness; My statement in regard to truth and philosophical systems was not a goof. I was entering the discussion as a pragmatist and not a rationalist, and therefore I had to disavow the concept of truth in favor of workability. If a person is working on a problem with incomplete data, his conclusions will probably contain a certain degree of error. Since we have no way of knowing how complete our information on the physical universe is, we have no way of knowing the degree of error that is likely to occur in our conclusions. The one thing we do know is our own experience. We know if we are happy or unhappy and we know if we feel pain or pleasure. I believe that all human activities are designed to obtain pleasure and avoid pain. I feel that both faith and reason are good, if they help us obtain pleasure and avoid pain and bad if they don't.

Tom Gilbert; Amazement of amazements, you do have human limitations like the rest of us. Cataclysms, such as finals, can actually stop you from justifying your right hand margins and even stop you from writing six pages of mailing comments. Such minac relieves my fears that you had developed the dread St. Vitus Write.

Ed Baker; Even though Len Bailes seems to have made some rather terminal comments in regard to the Rand vs. Anti-Rand controversy, I better answer your comments in El Manantial #9. You ask, "Can't it be immoral to act against one's own best interests?" Only if you do something like blowing yourself up in a plane with 150 other people. Morality is a system that governs the interaction of men. Whether you act for or against your own interests is not strictly germane to the subject of morality. The effect of an individual's actions on other people is the only factor significant to morality. In early cultures, men believed that if certain taboos were broken that it would have a detrimental effect on the entire community. Therefore, certain activities that involve only the individual were considered immoral. Some of these beliefs still persist in some contemporary moral codes.

In regard to feeling pity for the guilty, your system demands that reason should govern human actions, however, pity is a feeling and not an action. If you believe in the inviolate supremacy of the individual, you certainly ought to grant a person the right to feel whatever he likes about a situation. Whatever those feelings may be they would certainly not be a crime such as treason.

On the next page, I'll have to answer Phil Castora's comments.

Phil Castora; Needless suffering is that suffering for which there is no reason. There seems to be no reason for people going hungry when there is adequate food or enduring the elements when there is adequate shelter. You ask, "What about people, who bring suffering on themselves?" This is a rather large category of humanity, consisting of most people some of the time and some people most of the time. Now there's the fellow, who raped and murdered a dozen women and then ground them up and sold them as 19¢ hamburgers to the residents of a small Mid-Western town. For some unknown reason the town's people are now dragging this fellow off to a little neck-tie party that they have planned. I must admit a lack of humanity, because I really can't worry too much about this fellow's fate. However, if a person's only crime is incompetence, I would not feel that he had committed a grave enough crime to merit capital punishment via starvation. A society that casts out all non-functional members puts all the members of society in danger, because who can fortell what accidents may occur that might render anyone non-functional and therefor to be cast out. One of the strong points of our present system is that is partially secures the members of society against the workings of chance. One of the weaknesses of Objectivish is that it disregards chance and ascribes success entirely to ability.

Well dear, how did you do in your general semantics class?
Look mom, 20% fewer ambiguities.

Hank Stine; It's too bad that you're dropping out of Apa L. The gusto with which you presented material was always interesting.

Fred Patten; You and Baker are not the only people, who are mistaken for other people. Several times I have been confused with Earl Thompson. Earl Thompson has no physical resemblance to me whatsoever, but if any of you people become confused in the future, remember, Earl Thompson is the fellow, who is constantly necking with his wife and I don't do that sort of thing (at least not with Earl Thompson's wife). I have a theory that would explain the phenomenon of identio confusium. Science fiction fans spend a great deal of time looking at bad repro in fanzines and after a period of time their eyes adjust to this sub-standard condition and they can't distinguish anything that doesn't look like bad repro in a fanzine.

Ellie Turner; The idea of a publishing party might be fun, but something in my sixth or seventh sense tells me that it would be so much fun that publishing would be completely forgotten. Of course, I wouldn't consider that to be a criticism of such an event.

I can't really understand how you and Fred can get depressed by a novel. Sometimes I become disgusted or bored by a novel but never depressed. Novels about young business executives and naturalistic novels such as Bennett's The Old Wives' Tale and some of Zola's novels tend to bore me. Novels that feature

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scenes in which sex is depicted in all its mechanical grandeur tend to disgust me. I can't think of any category of fiction that would depress me. I think many of the novels that were written about the depression are quite enjoyable because they are tragedies and therefor relieve emotional tensions.

Richard Mann; I've heard of some strange and perverted dreams, but never anything as perverted as dreaming about comic books and science fiction fans. I write down all of my dreams. Someday I'll edit the whole mess and sell it as a surrealistic dirty novel.

Bruce Pelz winced, his mimeo had just gronked.

Dave Van Arnam; "Free verse is like playing tennis with the net down," said Robert Frost. This seems to be somewhat of an overstatement, but it's the first thing that crossed my mind regarding free verse and it is typical of most people's first reaction to free verse. It seems strange that it takes more work to develop a taste for free verse than to develop a taste for rhyme and meter. This is probably because rhyme and meter have an emotional effect apart from the meaning of the words involved.

A chicken can become hypnotized by following a straight line and a human can be hypnotized by rhythm. When rhythm is added to the emotional effect of particular words the effect can be tremendous. Unfortunately there is only a limited number of rhymes in the English language and most of them have been gobbled up by twenty generations of poets. So free verse is the order of the day and in most cases the effect of free verse is not too different from the effect of blank verse, providing that both forms are of a reasonable quality.

Coleridge framed about the best definition of poetry when he wrote, "A poem is that species of composition, which is opposed to works of science, by proposing for its immediate object pleasure, not truth; and from all other species (having this object in common with it) it is discriminated by proposing to itself such delight from the whole, as is compatible with a distinct gratification from each component part." Obviously this is also a pretty good definition of art in general. It also makes no distinction between compositions of prose or verse. In fact, I like this definition so well that I have had it printed in 36 point type and hung over my desk.

Your poetry seems to fit quite well into this definition. Your idea that a poem should be unified by thought rather than structure is a very difficult critical principle to apply, because it removes consideration one step away from the actual poem. The poems you have printed so far are unified primarily by the flow of sound. In "A Melody of Wander", the flow of sound carried me away, and I read the poem without having any

It all started when her father, the king of eastern Westphalia, traded her to Sigfried Thorvaldson for two war horses. In her opinion she was worth at least a half-dozen war horses. This point annoyed her so much that she categorically refused to have anything to do with Sigfried.

She rationalized the situation by saying that Sigfried had lice, but this was really not much of a criticism because all Danes had lice during that period. In fact, if the lice left it was considered a grave misfortune, comparable to rats leaving a ship.

Ignoring Sigfried's lice, he was really quite a good marital prospect. He had a thriving business which involved burning, pillaging, raping and murdering the residents of adjacent countries. He had built his business up from a small raiding band until now he disturbed the peace and safety of millions of people.

Although Hildegaurde disliked Sigfried with passionate intensity she didn't have a similar aversion to Danish men in general. She would often invite some of the local barbarians over to the house for a quiet game of cribbage. Sigfried was quite narrow minded about this practice. Once when he found Hildegaurde and a friend playing cribbage he became so infuriated that he pulled out his sword and cut the gentleman into thirteen pieces. This made a horrible mess in the bedroom.

Two months later Sigfried and his men went to pay a visit to the northern coast of France and Hildegaurde went back to playing cribbage. Sigfried had made twenty-seven infernal oaths that that he would do something about Hildegaurde, although he didn't know what, when he returned.

While Sigfried was visiting a small coast town in France, he met with one of those accidents that happen in even the best run businesses. He happened to be setting fire to a house, when who should appear but the owner, a ninety-three year old woman. She had an axe which she used. This action served to separate Sigfried's head from Sigfried's body, much to the annoyance of Sigfried.

That same night Hildegaurde had invited a friend over to play cribbage and who should walk in but Sigfried with his head under one arm. Sigfried walked over to Hildegaurde's guest, took his head from under his arm and shook it in the guest's face. The head snarled at the guest and then spit in his eye. The poor fellow was so upset that he jumped out the window. He had obviously forgotten that the room was on the third floor.

Hildegaurde lived through the evening although later she couldn't remember how. From that night on, Sigfried and his head were permanent residents. This ended Hildegaurde's career as a cribbage player. It also made it very difficult to keep servants.

It was ten years before Hildegaurde jumped out of the same window that her last cribbage playing friend had used as an exit. At this point they both descended into Nifelheim. Once in Nifelheim Hildegaurde reintroduced herself to some of her old cribbage playing friends. Sigfried despaired of ever breaking Hildegaurde of this annoying occupation, so he left to look for a certain hundred and three year old woman with whom he had business.