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DICEBAMUS HESTERNA DIE

It has been a quiet Labour Day in West Brunswick. My Italian neighbours had a family celebration, which I always enjoy, though uninvited (perhaps because I am not invited), but otherwise I spent the day listening to great music (Bach, Strauss, Haydn, Zemlinsky, Bruckner, Mozart) and browsing through the **Oxford Book of Literary Anecdotes**, a superbly browsable book. At page 71 of this book I almost stirred myself to write an editorial for ASFR, but the day was young, so I merely marked the place as one to return to later, and here I am. On page 71 one finds an extract from the letters of Lord Chesterfield (1694-1773) to Gogol or someone, which reads as follows:

I knew a gentleman who was so good a manager of his time that he would not even lose that small portion of it which the calls of nature obliged him to pass in the necessary-house; but gradually went through all the Latin poets in those moments. He bought, for example, a common edition of Horace, of which he tore off gradually a few pages, carried them with him to that necessary place, read them first, and then sent them down as a sacrifice to Cloacina: this was so much time fairly gained, and I recommend you to follow his example...Books of science and of a grave sort must be read with continuity; but there are very many, and even very useful ones, which may be read with advantage by snatches and unconnectedly: such are all the good Latin poets, except Virgil in his *Aeneid*, and such are most of the modern poets, in which you will find many pieces worth reading that will not take up above seven or eight minutes.

One pauses for a moment to consider, and agree, that in the eighteenth century there were poets worth reading for upwards of seven minutes; muses momentarily on a meeting between Les Murray and Dr Johnson; and rushes on to bring Keats and Chapman into the argument. Keats, we shall say, happens upon Chapman's mangled Horace, and begs to inquire 'How this Horatius came thus to be abridged?' 'Sir,' says Chapman, in the approved manner of the time, 'It lacks but the loo'd parts.'

And as we were saying yesterday (to Foyster, as it happens, who disapproved, albeit politely, no end), I just happen to have here a short piece on the subject that I wrote in 1971, when the world was young and

anything was possible and so on. I offer it as my final up-front contribution to the second series of ASFR.

GARDY-LOO REVISITED

Professor W. C. Head, Dean of the faculty of Comparative Plumbing at the University of Ard-Knox, is perhaps better known as a writer of science fiction (under the pseudonym 'John Jakes', I understand) than as a musicologist, and the record under review* serves to show why this is so.

Professor Head has, it seems, spent many years recording the sounds of flushing toilets and arranging them into almost recognizable renditions of popular and classical melodies.

Most of the items on this record, I must say in all honesty, are pretty rotten. Once you have heard a few flushing toilets, as most people listening to this record probably have at some time or other, you have more or less heard the lot. (One must admit that the thrilling choleratura of the Melbourne Science Fiction Club's convenience at Somerset Place - recorded, of course, before the evacuation of the club to South Yarra in 1970 - is something of a collector's piece; and I believe that in fact John Breden or some other notorious connoisseur has collected it, although it is no longer in working order. But such a virtuoso performance can only be regarded as a flush in the pan, to coin a phrase or, as we sometimes say, spend a penny.)

I won't bore you with a list of the tracks on this record. Those that rise above the crushing futility of the majority to achieve something approaching mediocrity include 'All I Want Is A Room Somewhere', 'Unchained Melody', 'Claire de Loo', and the theme music from the film *Five Oozy Pissoirs*.

The one worthwhile feature of the record, academically speaking, is Professor Head's theory about the final movement from Haydn's Farewell Symphony, which he sets out in the sleeve notes. According to Dr Head, this symphony, far from being a symbolic protest by Haydn against the lack of tea money and sick leave for musicians, in fact attained its present form simply because the members of the orchestra rehearsing its first performance happened almost simultaneously to answer a call of nature (to use the Professor's own elegant phrase).

There can be no doubt that in its own way (and in a remotely biblical way: refer Deuteronomy 23:13) this record does break new ground, and must be regarded as yet one more example of the value of

**Dunny Boy, & Other Lewd Songs: an experiment in Hydrophonics* (Ajax Recording Co., Upper Ferntree Gully. Mono only. POQ-44329)

cross-fertilization of disciplines. Both musical historians and plumbers will be in Professor Head's debt for the scholarly light he has thrown on their mutual interests.

The average listener, however, seeking merely entertainment, or perhaps some cultural value, from gramophone recordings, will be bitterly disappointed by this one.

Technical Footnote: I should perhaps mention that my stereo system failed to reproduce adequately all of the sounds on this record (which I have to admit caused me no great concern). If you insist on acquiring the record and are wondering if your record-player can cope with it, you should refer to the handbook that came with it, or consult a hi-fi expert, either of which should tell you whether it handles water music.
JB 15.3.87

OUR COLLECTIVE WAYS

Of mice, cats, feminists, theme issues and dunnies

As the poet nearly said, the best laid plans of mice and hyperdaughters (note non-sexist language) gang off a-glae. The mice tend to get eaten by the Collective's cats - Bruce, Finnegan and Fuligin - who then play with the plans for the next issue of ASFR and lose them. ASFR 8 was intended to be feminist in theme, a fact concealed from Bangers in case his editorial was full of 'How many feminists does it take to change a lightbulb?' jokes. Instead, he served us right with an editorial on waste-products, his last (editorial, not crap).

The editorial, though, was relevant to 42 Wolseley Parade, which is having the bathroom redecorated in Scheherazade style. This has necessitated use of that great Aussie institution, the dunny (not the fairy) at the bottom of the garden. 'Ooer,' said the plumber. 'I wouldn't like to go down there drunk. Ooer. That plumbing's antique, hundred years old at least.'

Said inconvenience has been aggravated by the latest in the series of kittens to arrive at Wolseley Parade. Either somebody dumps them over the back fence or there is a message in Moggy on the gate: 'Suckers within'. This stripy little baggage specializes in footy tackles of anyone fool enough to venture out the back door, all the while crying: 'I'm cute! Adopt me! Adopt me!'

So here Marj Hall and I are stuck, between devilishly cunning kitten and the deep blue dunny. Does anyone want a very pretty young tortoiseshell cat, before she breaks our necks? The last kitten but one

found a good science fiction home with Asmus and Karen Small, but it took some blackmail. I'm trying advertising this time, and anyone is welcome to the feline. (There was a famous, probably apocryphal advertisement in Reading's Bookshop: 'Good lesbian home wanted for black and white kitten').

Ahem. Returning to the putative feminist issue, another plan a glaeing was an article on feminist utopias. The writer developed terminal misandry (actually glandular fever) so it will appear in a future issue. Flushed with this success in organizing a theme issue, the Collective then boldly decided that the next issue should be on fiction magazines. You wanna bet? Loser takes Stripy Little Baggage.
LS 16.3.87

Oh No, Not Another Official Filler

So, you thought that Australian History was dull!!! The textbooks obviously don't tell all!!! Ed Naha reveals the seamier side of our famous explorers Burke and Wills in his review of the 1986 Australian movie in the March 1987 SF Chronicle:

Finally coming from Australia is **Burke and Wills**, the story of those two notorious graverobbers.

THE ALIEN CORN

CHERRY WILDER

Well, that was the Festive Season and now we're racing into the new year, mad as March Hares. First a look at the books which turned up at Christmas. How about *Galapagos*, the best Kurt Vonnegut for a year or so, an outrageous, sad, lovable end of the world fable. I note that the plague which puts an end to human reproduction, more or less, begins at the Frankfurt Book Fair. Always knew there was something creepy about that shindig...

Another treat was *The Cider House Rules* by John Irving. A big, gross, compassionate work all about abortions, orphans and apples. The author includes a few rude limericks and has a scholarly note upon such pieces of verse. I'll bet he gets some funny fan-mail with lewd limericks from all over. I know a great many filthy ones, don't you? Here are a couple that are printable, I believe, and funny:

There was a young man of Australia
Who painted his arse like a dahlia
The colours were bright
And the shape was all right
But the scent, on the whole, was a failure ...

There was a young lady of Tottenham
Who'd no manners or else she'd forgotten 'em,
At tea at the Vicar's
She tore off her knickers
Because, she explained, she felt Hot in 'em.

NEWS FROM DOWN UNDER

...is few and far between. The reports of the America's Cup were sketchy. We heard about poor old Boris showing more Elend than Glanz in the tennis. We cheered an Australian girl violinist who was well placed in the fiendishly difficult Tchaikowsky Competitions in Moskow...and I have forgotten her name. Strangest Australian story was a film called *Forgotten Prisoners* about Alex McLelland and Walter Steilberg, two hardy diggers who were taken prisoner in Greece, escaped several times, were recaptured, and flung into the punishment block at Theresienstadt, a concentration camp in Czechoslovakia, then part of the Third Reich. The point of this documentary was that nobody believed their story - in fact

about twenty or more Australian and New Zealand soldiers had the bad luck to end up in Concentration Camps, via Greece, Crete and North Africa, but this has never been acknowledged by the Allied or the German governments and of course no compensation has been paid.

STORM IN A B CUP

Rudi Carrell, a tall, suave toothy showmaster, is everyone's favourite Dutchman. For years he ran game and give-away shows on German telly but now he has switched to 'Rudi's Tageshow', not to be confused with the real Tagesschau or Daily News on ARD, the First Program. His special gag, which works well, is the montage shot. Why is Maggie Thatcher looking into her lap in Westminster Abbey? A montage shot shows a Thatcher-substitute reading *The Joy of Sex*. The politicians in Bonn are grist to Rudi's mill - his trusty cameramen have miles of footage of these guys doing mysterious or hilarious things. Chancellor Kohl protested feebly the other day at a sketch showing two actresses playing prostitutes waving at the politicians as they cruised past in their huge limousines.

The fourteen-second clip which shook the world was a dreary little gag about what the Ayatollah Khomeini received for his 80th birthday. There was the Ayatollah, then there was the fake Ayatollah before something that looked like a department store counter full of things barely recognizable as ladies' undies. He held up a bra. Ho-hum. And fourteen seconds later the Iranians went bonkers. A hail of protests were phoned in, Iran Airlines went on strike, the poor old Goethe Institute was shut in Teheran, a couple of German diplomats were kicked out, angry mobs - the sort that Teheran has waiting around every corner - stood outside the embassy heaping execration on the infidel. It was Holy War Time. Rudi had a bodyguard. Everyone apologized like mad. Worst of all it seemed that Bonn was over a barrel because of the negotiations concerning two German businessmen kidnapped in Beirut. (Kidnapped in order to prevent Germany handing over to the U.S. a man suspected of having bombed a U.S. plane...) The goodwill of Iran is necessary for these unfortunate hostages.

One correspondent of Stern magazine, an Iranian living in Germany, had the following sinister comment: 'This looks like the over-reaction of fanatical Moslems but there is more behind it...Khomeini's officials must keep the minds of the people off their own internal problems, which are getting worse and worse. They do this by conjuring up new pictures of the Enemy.'

And everyone tuned in with bated breath to Rudi's next Tageshow. Still suave, if a little jittery, the jolly Hollander carried it off

well. A TV 'Police Inspector' with a walkie-talkie assured him it was okay for him to make his appearance. When the time came for him to 'read the news' Rudi looked at the first page of his script and said, 'The biggest news story of the week was - ' pause - 'Well, the second biggest story of the week was - '. So it goes. No business like show business.

THE SEARCH FOR SOMETHING SERCON

is unavailing. I find it very hard to make any sensible pronouncements upon sf and the writing thereof. An end-of-the world mood is abroad in the neat and chilly streets of Langen. I look out at the brown wastes of the garden, with its lingering patches of snow. If the earth and vegetable matter out there were analysed I feel that they would be (a) dangerously radioactive or (b) full of noxious chemicals.

I skim wistfully rather than hopefully through the pages of *Locus*. All those guys making deals, churning out scads of books, winning awards, getting fulsome reviews or full-page advertisements...How high is a Cyberpunk? How are things in Seraneb? When she smiles, are there dimples?

Time to shake off this melancholy mood and end up with a hopeful quotation. I am beginning a new fantasy novel and so are thousands of other poor writing persons. This extract from one of my favourite poems must give us all inspiration:

With a host of furious fancies
Whereof I am commander
With a burning spear
And a horse of air
To the wilderness I wander.

By a knight of ghosts and shadows
I summoned am to tourney
Ten leagues beyond
The wide world's end -
Methinks it is no journey.

THE BRODERICK-RUSS CORRESPONDENCE

DAMIEN BRODERICK AND JOANNA RUSS

[Foreword: The letters printed below were written nearly seven years ago, and with no idea of their being published. Both authors mentioned these facts when approached by the ASFR Collective - which nevertheless held that the letters remained relevant and interesting to readers of sf. Despite their reservations, both Joanna Russ and Damien Broderick then gave their permission to publish, and the Collective is very grateful to them.]

Joanna Russ to Virginia Kidd

Seattle, Washington, USA

12 August 1980

Dear Virginia,

Thanks (?) for the galleys of *Edges* [ed. Ursula K. Le Guin and Virginia Kidd, Pocket Books, New York, 1980].

Unfortunately I read the first story ['The Ballad of Bowsprit Bear's Stead' by Damien Broderick] first. I thought at first that Broderick was in his early twenties - the cuteness of the style, which is interesting but ultimately too much, and the wispieness of the plot (I-decided-not-to-watch-the-tragedy) resemble so much the kind of thing I often get from my students. The story would not be a totally bad one for a beginner and some of the language is interesting, but Broderick is too old to be this self-indulgent.

He's also very much a sexist and I'm a little baffled that you and Ursula printed the piece. Instead of snarling & keeping my reaction to myself, I thought I'd try to explain.

Why are the barbarians so bad? (i.e. us)

Well, they're puritans. That is, they don't enjoy the glorious sexual freedom of the hero's people.

Insisting that Bad People are sexually repressed is a very old ploy in the USA (and England, too, if I remember the 'angry young men'). It is one of those received ideas that goes back at least to the 1950s (a book like *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* is a good example). Pauline Kael expressed her exasperation with this anent a fairly recent film, I think 'Judgment at Nuremberg' but am not sure which. It's a very stupid idea and doesn't stand the test of experience but it's one of those

ninnies that crops up again and again. All through the 'fifties and 'sixties it was used against women (women are prudes who want to spoil men's fun) and I have seen it recently used against homosexuals: the My Orgasm Is Better Than Your Orgasm approach. I remember that in the '50s (and in the supposedly liberated company of the '60s) women were prudes if we protested against hostile dirty jokes, uptight if we worried about unwanted pregnancy, neurotic if we feared rape, and so on. After all, these things didn't bother men, so why should they bother us? They were also detrimental to men's living the kind of 'free' life men thought they should be living or wanted to live, i.e. women available and no responsibility. The whole macho war in which jokes like this were ammunition was a direct result of sexism: if women protested, we were scorned; if we tried to actually live up to the 'freedom' held up as an ideal we were punished - and somehow the reality of the punishment didn't get into the jokes.

Then, bless us, Broderick, turns on his head and has it both ways - not only are the Ainu free and joyful; they are also monogamous. The mind boggles. You might argue that Broderick has to stick to the real customs of the Hairy Ainu, but since he's freely invented such venerable Ainu customs as time travel (or is it space travel? I'm afraid to go back and look!) and life-support systems, I think he can be held responsible for all of them.

The baddies are also bad because their women are arrogant. No comment. (How could you miss this one?)

Also, these awful people MASTURBATE. I hardly know what to say about this one. It's one of those idiot ideas that parts company with reality altogether. If you read Kinsey (who is even earlier than Broderick) or Victorian diarists, it becomes no secret that 99% of the English-speaking male adolescents born in the last couple of centuries have spent rather a lot of time masturbating and also most female ones, and (read Kinsey) most adults. If Broderick is an ex-Catholic (as his schooling seems to indicate) I suppose he may well be naive about a lot of things at 36 but the self-righteousness is really eerie. It is a continuation of nineteenth-century ideas, minimally transformed. From Victorian times, more severe sanctions were exercised against masturbation than against intercourse. I suspect Broderick believes them - see page 28 [*the pinched, trap-lipped hordes of the Glorious Republic [...] locked their tender places up in the bands of prohibition. [They were] as inveterate a tribe of brain-softened masturbators as the species*

ever spawned.']. If this author were 22 and the year were 1965, some of this would make sense. But perhaps Australia is backward.*

Having condemned masturbation, arrogant women, and sexual repression (all aspects of the bad life) the author goes on to tell us only one fact about the hero's mother - she was pretty. His wife is hardly more: she is beautiful, mute, uncomplaining, and has long nipples. We also learn that the child's inheritance from its mother is fleshly, that from its father, intellectual (page 29 ['A woman cares for the tiny growing thing within her, but it is a man's place to fill its wrinkled red head with intellect.']). The only female character given self-assertiveness (and dialogue) is the Empress - patrician where her husband is admirably plebeian (despite his being called 'the wickedest man in the world' he is clearly the noblest one), stupidly self-contradictory (she doesn't 'wish to hear' about her ancestor, who has committed murder, as she proposes to do), and murderous. We then see - and this is where I had some trouble going on - the 'prolapsed uterus' and the 'massive piles' of 'the poor bitch' (page 42) who has been kept drudging at childbearing for seventy-five or eighty years. Assuming one can see piles and a prolapsed uterus from outside (my G.P. says no) there is something dreadful about this, something I have often met in my sophomores: old women are not only wrong, they are also sexually grotesque. And they are victims. Here's Dorothy Dinnerstein in *The Mermaid and the Minotaur*: 'on the faces of some men a ... helpless smile of self-congratulation when some female disadvantage is referred to.' (page 216) I have met this sort of thing too often to like it.

Put all this together and you get a very sexist and very stupid story despite the cuteness of the language. Stories don't have to have chromium-plated brassieres and women who go 'Eeek!' in them in order to be sexist.

Virginia, what would you think if you overheard a young man talking about you and saying, 'Poor bitch. She's grotesque, but old women are like that.'? Because this is what Broderick is saying. I'm used to hearing it from sophomores, but it doesn't matter who it comes from - I could, I suppose, say unkind things about Broderick's country and his bringing-up, but I won't. I'm not surprised that Broderick wrote this. But I am very surprised, very baffled, and very sad that you and Ursula printed it. The beautiful, mute, tragic wife, the evil grotesque old

*Kinsey (and Masters and Johnson): Those who do more, sexually, do more of everything.

empress, the noble old man, the boy becoming a man, &c - it's really cruddy. And it's stupidly stale.

A young writer of my acquaintance urged me to write you: I suppose that otherwise I would have given up on the whole business. I don't wear armour-plate when I read your work, or Ursula's, whether it's fiction or selection.

Forgive the length and the bad typing. This is from the heart, honestly. But what can I do with the shock except tell you? If you doubt that my reaction is accurate, ask Suzy Charnas, or ask Chip Delany about this. It's the kind of thing men like Damon [Knight] never did, or Gene Wolfe, either, and others gave it up years ago. And then you and Ursula, of all people, include this dopey little piece of offensiveness in your very own anthology!

Damien Broderick to Virginia Kidd
Brunswick, Victoria, Australia
26 August 1980

Dear Virginia,

The letter from Joanna Russ, the woman writer I most admire.

Shock: head-whirling, empty-gutted shock. Then a kind of boringreiterative betrayal, which grotesquely goes back to childhood schooldays: the, you know, high IQ kid misread to stupefying simplicity by the single sensitive teacher. Then rage and ranting around the empty house, tail thrashing and teeth bared; rushing hours later out into the chilly street (oh yes, violins whining), and my friend Dianne somewhat taken aback by the babbling force of my reaction asking if I was feeling that it was unfair for Russ to misrepresent me, one of her oldest and closest intimates... Well, quite. What's Hecuba to her?

There's a smartass turnabout: 'The tiredness of it. The inevitability of it. The tediousness of it. The gratuitousness of it.' Fuck that.

Essentially I'm appalled that a reader whose reviews I have found astute and whose work I hug to my soul like a thorny rose should be so dumb, so superficial, so clockwork.

Has she been hurt so much more badly than any of the feminists who are my friends? To return a comment from her letter: 'the self-righteousness is really eerie.' The reason it's eerie is that it turns about on the spot stamping its horrible great feet over nuance and gross black effects simultaneously.

I won't talk about the literary evaluation she offers; this is something I'll have to consider carefully. There again, maybe I'll make

one point, since it is relevant to her reading: the wispy plot is **not** 'I decided not to watch the tragedy', but (a) 'the lofty remote observer is thrust into involvement' and (b) 'the tragedy became less gripping when I got the real news'.

Essentially, as you noted in your reply to Russ, she makes the amazingly vulgar mistake of confounding narrator and narrator's values with author and author's values. Nor is this done at the level of some arguable tussle over the weight of the sub-text: as can be seen by the monstrously funny assertion that I think masturbation is wicked. The only published material on that score is the bio note in *Galileo* No. 1, which only an idiot would take as a condemnation of wanking. Strangely, Russ has been quite selective in adducing her evidence for my naivety and conventional hideboundness: I see she has left out 'my' endorsement of incest, bear-suckling, surrogate child-murder, actual child-slashing, casual murder of intelligent beings...

In a word (or three): Russ says I am 'very much a sexist.' I would characterize myself, on the evidence of **Bowsprit** if no other, as an 'anti-sexist ironist.' Although I agree with you that art ought not to be propaganda, I do have a leaning toward committed art (as early drafts of **Judas Mandala** rehearsed at some length). I would not write 'for a market' against my express beliefs, and since I write fairly infrequently I tend to vent my genuine bitter concern at narrow intolerance and smugness. In **Mandala**, I had a chance to make some of this (ambiguously) plain on the surface; elsewhere, I keep my distance from the material. If Russ cannot see that I regard **Bowsprit** with distaste (though perhaps it is no business of hers how I view my characters), she needs her eyes tested. I fear to imagine what barbarity she would emit if she read 'Coming Back' ... perhaps that it was a charter for joyful rapists. I don't want this rancour in my tone; it comes as I say from a sense of betrayal - by sloppy reading and kneejerk indignation. (Reading so sloppy, incidentally, that she admits to not recalling if **Bowsprit** is a space or a time traveller... though the fact that he comes from a fairly remote future, descendant of the events he witnesses, is entirely crucial to the story's thrust.)

Feel free to convey these reactions to Russ. If she has any interest in pursuing the matter I'd quite like to hear her views on **The Judas Mandala**, written some years before **Bowsprit**. I tremble to suggest this, because I am sensitive to the anger some feminists feel about male writers attempting to speak through fictional female narrators; still, it might serve to balance with its own ironies the parodic effects of **Bowsprit**.

[...] many thanks for forwarding me word of Russ's criticism. I've throttled myself back savagely above, refraining from a point-by-point hermeneutic rebuttal, because my abiding sin is self-justification. But if Russ wishes to engage me in that degree of detail, I'll be glad to do so.

Joanna Russ to Damien Broderick
Seattle, Washington, USA
7 September 1980

Dear Mr Broderick,

I would never have written to any writer on earth in the way I wrote to Virginia Kidd about you. Also, I didn't give her any permission to send you a copy of my letter and consider that she's acted very badly towards both of us. The process of blowing off steam to a third party and that of raising important questions **with another writer** are very different & my letter was bloody well not intended for you; sending a private Vesuviation to you (I was questioning her judgment and she's someone I know well) was, I think, unforgivable - by me or by you.

Of course it's perfectly possible I misread your story. It's not the first time & won't be the last. I wasn't reviewing the book, you weren't a student of mine, and after 60 students a year for 14 years, 3-5 reviews a year, correspondence about possible essays with some 40 editors a year, and jobs in five universities, I occasionally read sloppily. I even read for fun. It's also possible that your story is less than clear. If you're an ironist (in this story) then your attitude towards your characters is not only to the point, it is the point. And there are enough badly sexist male writers around to make it statistically highly probable that you are one of them rather than being that relatively rare creature, an anti-sexist male sf writer. It's hardly unnatural to mistake the tone of a piece of fiction when this piece of fiction takes place in a much bombed-on and shelled-out piece of territory. And of course an ironical story (with therefore an unreliable narrator) is not such an easy kind of fiction to spot, either, at the best of times.

Virginia, besides telling me that I was mistaken and that art is not propoganda (a view first spread in the USA by John Crowe Ransom & other Southern gentlemen - and T.S. Eliot, the arch-conservative - in the 1930s to combat rampant Communism like **The Grapes of Wrath** and imported poems by such as Stephen Spender) has left the matter of what the hell you DID say entirely unclear. Your own tail-lashings are natural, under the circumstances, but they leave me similarly in the dark. Tell me what the story is about & I will re-read it. It will be very nice if I do see the

anti-sexist ironist at work - there's little enough of that kind of fiction to delight my weary soul.

Again, I can't apologize for Virginia's sending the letter to you; I think she ought to apologize to me. (I'm sending her a copy of this.) Private yelling is a matter between the yeller and the yellee & I intend to continue to scream my head off when I think it's justified; otherwise life would be unlivable. I'm sorry the Vesuviation drifted your way, but then I did not send it in that direction. Public, published reviewing has room in it for vitriol but only when the reviewer is entirely convinced that the vitriol is deserved & when the principle at stake matters enough. The principle matters enough here; but private correspondence, first of all, deserves vitriol only for private matters. Someone else's politics are not private matters, at least I don't think so. If Virginia, instead of unnecessarily harrowing you, had written to me, 'Broderick wrote A, not, as you say, B' the shock waves would not have reached Australia. When I yell behind someone's back it's because I don't want to knock them over; when I do try to knock people over, it's because I think nothing else will have any effect on them and because there are others out there whose views must be defended. It's a far more serious undertaking than a private screech.

Tell me about your story.

Damien Broderick to Joanna Russ
Brunswick, Victoria, Australia
6 January 1981

Dear Joanna,

I delayed responding to give myself some distance. Then the back of our recently purchased house sort of fell off and I've been busy learning the carpenter's trade. Also a kind of fugue kept the entire matter insulated from short-term memory. But I find even now, stopping to re-read your original outcry, that I'm getting uptight and ungenerous. So this will be fairly sketchy, I guess:

My comments in reply via Virginia still seem broadly to cover the matter (minus my histrionics). Your reading insists on making the logical error of identifying writer and protagonist. Since many of the protagonist's values are abhorrent to you, you resent the publication of the story in much the same way you would resent explicit sexist insult. But surely the moment I point out that this identity does not exist it becomes unnecessary for me to 'tell [you] what the story is.' Additionally, I find a number of your assertions to be inconsistent with the text of the story, and others plain wrong.

'Why are the barbarians so bad? (i.e. us)'. Well, it seems plain to me that the barbarians are not us, but are some grim 1984ish Asiatic tyranny. Your answer: 'they're puritans.' It's one reason why Bowsprit thinks poorly of them. Another is that in his history they have exterminated the Neanderthals in a cosmic genocide (or at least tried to?). Much more to the point is that Bowsprit finds their lack of sensuality explanatory of their cruelty, and that I as author mock his down-home smugness by repeated ironic references to sexual inconsistencies borrowed from Ainu culture. You missed the boat, Joanna, by getting cross at me instead of at Bowsprit-the-shaggy-Polonius. As well, the whole texture of that strand shows that the Ainu being what they were (in the story) simultaneously confirms and invalidates the simple-minded 'bad-are-repressed' hypothesis. The reader must, by that logic, move to a meta-level.

Your sermon on masturbation, as I mentioned in another letter, is not news. It's one of the signals to the reader that Bowsprit is a culture-bound old fart. Your G.P.'s speculation about prolapses is, according to my sister (who has specialized in such disorders at one time), simply wrong. She finds my description sickeningly accurate. It was meant to evoke pity and horror. If there's one observation you make which really makes me want to punch you in the nose, it's your gratuitous quote from Dorothy Dinnerstein. You make it impossible for a male writer to express sympathy for a woman, by invalidating any such expression into 'helpless self-congratulation.' I am not a Fanonist in relation to race conflicts or gender conflicts: I am not so despairing that I will vitiate the possibility of good will between men and women.

A feature of the story you did not mention but which might well have infuriated you was the fucking-robots scene; perhaps you had this in mind when you wrote of 'jokes like this' and 'hostile dirty jokes.' It's the only place where I would not be completely sure of my ground. Obviously, much of the force of that scene derives from my expectation that the reader will laugh, and broadly. But I think it is a joke on a joke, an embedded riddle. If it offended you I am sorry, and I'll reflect further on it, but I think it was legitimate in its place.

I dunno. Ever since those Orbit stories I've wanted to be your friend, Joanna. Does this help or hinder?

Joanna Russ to Damien Broderick
Seattle, Washington, USA
3 February 1981

Dear Mr Broderick,

I'm afraid your story still seems to me confusing because it is confused. If the narrator is an unreliable one, the question immediately arises as to who or what in the story is a reliable source of values or information, and as far as I can tell, the only possible one is the narrator's life-support system, which does little except express the sadness of it all. If what you were trying for was a sort of Everyone is Tragically Flawed and Isn't That Too Bad sort of effect, I think I was right to be angry - that kind of Tragic Sense of Life has been a staple of liberal nonsense for quite a long time and serves only to mystify who is really doing what to whom. If you meant something else, I certainly can't find it.

There are things in your letter I find genuinely offensive. Not the robots, certainly, although I don't think they're quite as funny as you seem to. But I've been meeting this sort of pattern for twelve years now and am very angry at it. Tact seems only to prolong it, so I'm going to give up tact for the nonce.

What business have you calling me by my first name? We've never met. I have not called you by your first name. I have not addressed you in terms of intimacy, as far as I know. This would be an intrusion if anyone did it. Since the terms of our disagreement are precisely in the area of your putative sexism, this becomes really rather surprising.

And what does your desire for friendship with me - someone I've never met, someone whose company I haven't sought, someone with whom I'm doing nothing but quarreling - have to do with anything? You say you've read the Orbit stories. Surely you must know those were written in 1967! Have you, since then, read *The Female Man* or *The Two of Them*? It would surprise me if you had, but then maybe not - every few months during the last thirteen years until I forcibly put a stop to it some man, after the *How Dare You Accuse Me of Sexism and I'm Not a Separatist* line decides to get sentimental about me. It is utterly exasperating, it is totally one-sided, it is as sexist as can possibly be, and I don't give a damn if you want to swallow this or not. Tact simply prolongs the whole impossible business, as I said.

I had to be beaten out of my liberalism as far as black people are concerned - I no longer believe that I am entitled to get angry if one of them accuses me of racism (she is undoubtedly correct), I no longer criticize any criticism of me or my actions as separatist (which is what

we call the position in the States you mean by Fanonist), I never declare my desire for personal friendship as either a bribe or a reproach, and I do my level best to keep my mouth shut and my ears open. When it comes to racism I am no authority and if I am going to shed it, the last thing in the world I can do is protect my own dignity.

In the realm of sexism & talk about it, you and I are not remotely equals in knowledge or experience or analysis or reading (I am quite sure of that last) or anything else. Your only appropriate attitude in this business is to keep your mouth shut and your eyes open and your ears opener until you know where you are. Which you do not yet - and I judge this by your letters, not by your story, which (naturally enough, no doubt) you call me stupid for not understanding and I in reaction call you stupid for not expressing better, but that's not (now) what I'm fighting about. You have come, actuated by sincere concern for the plight of the peasants, down from the big chateau on the hill, asking only that the peasants listen to you, accept your definitions of what's going on, smile when you tell them you want to be their friend, not offend your dignity in any way - in short, you do want to help quite sincerely but have not taken the first step towards giving up control of the situation to them. And that is the first step. And you have not brought the castle cash-box with you, either. When the peasants (who are not impressed or grateful and who are planning to burn the chateau to the ground) don't embrace you with cries of gratitude (or those of them who don't) you are offended. You have, after all, taken what looks like a big step from the p.o.v. of the chateau. From our point of view it is a very little one & a Godawful energy drain, of which I'm very tired at age almost fifty. I swear every year to stop this and then forget & think I can do something with relative tact. Whereupon I get a letter like yours. Middle age means honesty or it isn't worth it. I once told a man to walk in front of a truck; it (he says) improved his soul in the long run. So be edified or not; I have done.

[Afterword: Following these letters, in 1982, Damien Broderick's **The Judas Mandala** was published with this dedication:

Joanna Russ
for her rage
the sinews of her text

Kate Jennings
utopian anger
made new this book.]

WHO IS JOHN NORMAN AND WHY IS HE SAYING THESE DREADFUL THINGS ABOUT WOMEN?

LUCY SUSSEX

For starters:

'You are cruel, all of you!' cried out Linda, the blond Earth-girl slave of Samos, springing to her feet. All eyes turned towards her. 'You put us in collars! You take away our clothes! You make us serve you! You do with us as you please!' She looked beautiful, in her brief tunic, barefoot, her body filled with passion, her small fists clenched, in her collar.

'And you love it!' laughed a man.

'Yes!' she cried. 'I love it! You cannot know how I love it! I come from a world where there are almost no true men, a world where manhood is almost educated and conditioned out of existence. I come from a world of love-starved women. I did not know what true men were until I came to Gor, and was put in a collar! Here I am disciplined and trained, here I am owned and fulfilled! Here I am happy! I pity ... my miserable free sisters of Earth, so far away, longing for their collars and masters!' (Players of Gor, p. 22)

The above may sound like a feminist writer with her tongue firmly in her cheek, but it was written by a man. Moreover, John Norman means it. In over a score of sorcery and soft-porn novels, he has chronicled the alternate world of Gor, where men are men, women are slaves, and there are no discernable soft furry creatures from Alpha Centauri.

The basis of Gor society is misogyny. In this fantasy world, women really really like being subservient to men, as the first extract shows. They also require minimal foreplay:

I then joined her on the netting. In moments, gasping, looking at me wildly, gratefully, she was in the throes of slave orgasm. To arouse a free woman to the point of orgasm ... takes, usually, from a third to a quarter of an Ahn [hour?]. The reflexes of the slave, on the other hand, for psychological reasons, and because of her training, can be much more easily, profoundly and frequently activated. This is not really surprising. (PoG, p. 63)

And have stupendous orgasms:

No man yet in his arms had taught her the exquisite, transforming degradation of the utilized slave, the wrenching surrender spasms, enforced upon her by his will, of the conquered bondwoman ... (PoG, p. 20)

What sort of man writes this locker-room crap? Biographical information available for Norman states that he is one John Frederick Lange Jr, born 1931, a former Sergeant in the US Army. He is currently a Professor of Philosophy (Misogyny 101?) at the City University of New York, married, with two sons and a daughter.

The man is also kinky as a rusty bed-spring. The following describes a slave-rack, for public intercourse:

It was a holding strap. These straps are adjustable. I would take it twice snugly about her wrist [and also ankles] and then, angling it, press the cap-topped stud at the end of the strap, from the bottom, up through one of the small, sturdy, suitable eyelets on the same strap. No buckles are used [what has Norman got against buckles?]. The occupant of the rack ... cannot, from her position, free herself. She is helpless ... this custody, in virtue of the nature of the studs and eyelets, may be easily imposed or removed, a convenience to the handler. (PoG, pp. 78-9)

One feels that this description was written with loving detail, as in the beating described below:

There was enough time between the strokes to allow her to feel each one individually and fully, and enhance, maximizing the irradiations of its predecessors, enough time for her, in the fullness of her pain, imagination and terror, to prepare herself for, and anticipate, fearfully and acutely, the next blow. It was not much of a beating ... (PoG, p. 12)

John Norman is just the sort of person to leave chained up in a dark room with Dale Spender and an assortment of battle axes. But such a reaction is gory, not to mention Gorean. A more Earthly reaction was Michael Moorcock's try at banning Norman in the UK. The September 1986 SF Chronicle reported that Moorcock 'has been attempting to convince retail distributor W.H. Smith to stop displaying John Norman's Gor books and magazines showing nude women' (p. 25). This move must have been highly endearing to DAW books, who publish Norman's fiction and the non-fiction *Imaginative Sex* (John Clute in the *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* states this book 'argues the sexual bias of the novels very explicitly' - presumably it is a bondage manual). DAW, incidentally, is now headed by a woman, Betsy Wollheim, and one wonders what she thinks of Norman.

The news of Moorcock drew a reply in the November SFC, from one Jessica Amanda Salmonson, which contained the extraordinary statement:

'I hate those novels, though counting a few sadomasochistic women among my dearer friends' (p. 16). Some of my best friends are... Joking apart, Salmonson defended Norman on the grounds of civil liberties: 'It is far more terrifying that someone of Michael Moorcock's calibre is able to perform the mental gymnastics necessary to justify any level of bookburning'. In fact, Salmonson is right - Moorcock's tactics are perilously close to those of the Moral Majority, who are rumoured to pressure distributors to withdraw gay literature in particular.

Sigh. Like Jerry Pournelle's wife, I could not be civil to John Norman if I met him at a cocktail party. However, by gritting my teeth I could possibly defend to the death his right to say that, deep down, I yearn to be whipped, branded and chained. (If anybody actually said that to me I'd...) Should the Moral Majority stop persecuting innocuous children's authors like Robert Cormier, and blacklist the Gor books, though, I doubt I'd be very outraged. But would they? The view of women in Gor is not a million miles from Biblically-sanctioned inferiority.

The August 1986 issue of SFC contained more Gor news, in that the first of a series of movies based on the novels (*Gor 1*, *Gor 2*, *Gor 3 ad infinitum ad nauseum*) is being filmed. Director is John Hough, responsible for such riveters as *Twins of Evil* and *Biggles* (why doesn't he combine the films and have *Biggles in Gor?*), and the location is South Africa. Now, assuming the misogyny quotient remains in the films, the premiere will probably be picketed not only by women but by Anti-Apartheid groups. The financing for the films is British, which should delight Mr Moorcock, another likely picketer.

A sad postscript to the Gor film is that the February 1987 SFC reported that two crew members were burned to death during the filming of a battle scene. Without wishing to trivialize these deaths, one wonders if the ANC or SCUM (Society for Cutting Up Men) will claim responsibility.

I shall conclude this article with a comparison between a Gor book and this item from the Melbourne Age of 28 March 1987:

Officers said that at his [a Gary Heidnik's] home, they found two women, half naked and shackled with chains to the sewer pipes in the cellar. A third woman was found handcuffed and chained in a pit more than a metre deep beneath the basement floor.

One of the woman had been chained in the cellar for four months. All had been tortured and raped and fed only dog food and dog biscuits ... all the women involved were black and slightly retarded, aged between 18 and 26. In addition to the sex slaves he kept in the cellar ... (Age, p. 15)

How would she look, how would she act, I wondered, if slave fires had been lit in her belly ... She must then do other things, such as putting a bondage knot in her hair, offering them wine or fruit, dancing naked before them, or kneeling before them, whimpering and whining for attention, licking and kissing at their feet and legs. (PoG, p. 45).

Enough said.

(Note: Apologies are made for only quoting from one Gor book, but unlike Norman's fantasy women, I am not a masochist. It was quite bad enough to dip into *Players of Gor*, without reading the whole series. In any case, the philosophy of Gor is consistent from volume to volume, as Leslie Hurst attests. His (highly recommended) hatchet job on Norman is in *Foundation 33*, Spring 1985).

CHAINED TO THE ALIEN: CHANGE AND DELANY

MICHAEL J. TOLLEY

[Author's Note: in effect, this piece is a kind of pendant to the perceptive review Russell Blackford has written already for *ASFR* (Second Series, vol. 1, no. 4, September 1986); I have therefore been sparing in summary of the novel's superficial contents and structure.]

Elsewhere (*Aphelion 4*, Spring 1986), I have suggested that science fiction, Darko Suvin's literature of 'cognitive estrangement', can sometimes begin by estranging us in order to make the strange, in the end, familiar to us. In *Stars in My Pocket Like Grains of Sand*, Samuel R. Delany takes that principle to an extreme. The title suggests such a movement by its trope of reversing the familiar Blakean evocation of wonder or the Biblical promise of fruition ('Grains of Sand in my Pocket Like Stars'), in which we begin with the dull familiar and are taken into the sublime unknown. Instead it appears that familiarization with the glorious unreachable worlds of outer space will breed only a kind of scrotal irritation. The effect of reading (or, rather, attempting to read) this rococo assemblage of dazzling (and so, dim) impressions is for me what I imagine a conducted tour of an elaborate oriental palace would be like, were the guide to have an incomplete grasp of the structures she

is describing and little familiarity with my own culture: she might speak my language but she will not explain the terms to which she is habituated but which I find esoteric. Although she is describing objects which seem wonderful to her, I will soon become jaded by her uncommunicated enthusiasm. At a deep level one source of this discomfort is the awareness that the more things change the more they are the same: let her come to my home and she will soon find that I can make comprehension just as hard for her (and this will be partly because I do not know my own home very well; I might know the library well but be ignorant of the larder).

Although Delany generates the old Preacher's feeling that there is no new thing under whatever sun, he partially corrects it by the novel's 'Epilogue', which beautifully evokes both the sameness and the different experiences of morning recollected by Marq Dyeth, its principal narrator. He observes, for instance, the built-in corniness of a tourist's view of the largest sun in the galaxy:

'... We will use the viewing chamber's simulation facilities to imitate a rotation of the ship, so that the stellar disk of Aurigae will appear to rise to your left, cross the sky, then set on your right.'

Blessedly, as the dome began to clear, there was no music. We realize that we could parallel such exotic memories with equally powerful ones of our own: as Thackeray has put it in the first chapter of **The Newcomes**,

The sun shines to-day as he did when he first began shining; and the birds in the tree overhead, while I am writing, sing very much the same note they have sung ever since there were finches. Nay, ... a friend of the writer has seen the New World, and found the (featherless) birds there exceedingly like their brethren of Europe. There may be nothing new under and including the sun; but it looks fresh every morning, and we rise with it to toil, hope, scheme, laugh, struggle, love, suffer, until the night comes and quiet. And then will wake Morrow and the eyes that look on it; and so *de capo*.

It is perhaps inevitable, unfortunately, that Delany's evocations of morning should remind us of a famous essay he wrote called 'About Five Thousand One Hundred and Seventy Five Words' (to be found in **The Jewel-Hinged Jaw**), in which he shows how every word in the first phrase of a story must characterize the world in which the story takes place. I write 'unfortunately', because the reminder might awaken us to how much not only the Epilogue but the novel as a whole smacks of a literary exercise, that aspect to which Slusser seems to call attention in his subtitle to a Borgo Press critical work, **The Delany Intersection: Samuel**

R. Delany Considered as a Writer of Semi-Precious Words. It is not altogether disarming to have it pointed out that the same accusation may be levelled at James Joyce's *Ulysses*. Neither writer is, however, to be dismissed as merely clever.

It is Marq's character to be shallowly rooted in the familiar world of home (for all that one of his employments is to serve as a guide to students who visit Dyethshome, a castle baffling in its structural complexity) and highly attracted to the exotic. Some of his mothers are aliens, members of the evelm, a winged dragon-like species native to the planet Velm. For this reason, Marq's erotic preference for tall men with bitten fingernails and pitted complexions seems less convincing than his lover Rat Korga's fixation on Marq's type, which is small and hairy, one, as he says in the chapter, 'Strangers and Visitors', 'whose head I could look down at, to bend my face down to his when he looked up, to rub my mouth and eyes in his hair when he looked down'. Korga's lust is assimilable to the love of father for son, man for woman; Marq, on the other hand, is turned on by claws in aliens, bitten nails in male humans, which are almost as attractive to most of us readers as runny noses. Rat Korga, whose background as a slave deprived of will by a form of brain mutilation known as Radical Anxiety Termination is described in the Prologue, is very different from us in major respects but an easier object of sympathy than Marq, who appears to be not simply weird but silly with it. Thus, although Marq presents himself to us as (and evidently is) highly intelligent and sensitive, he irritates and disturbs us more than he would if he were not the prime narrator and, thereby, purveyor of values to us.

One gut reaction of the normal WASP sf reader to this novel is that he (traditionally he is male) is being got at by Delany, that an attempt is being made to turn him into some kind of an alien, a pooffer, a lizard-lover, or even a feminist. It is therefore instructive to observe that although those who affirm traditional sexual ethics are marginalized in the book's narrative, what can be discerned of the plot seems to support their view. Rat Korga himself is puzzled by the liberalism of Marq's geosector of Velm; on his home planet, homosexuality was a crime. Korga is perhaps the one survivor of his planet's destruction by conflagration; Rhyonon has been a victim either of the mysterious Xlv, whose fleet orbited Rhyonon just before the occurrence, or of Cultural Fugue, a kind of collective suicide. The two may be connected, as a Xlv fleet is reported to be observing Velm at the same time as Korga's visit and Korga's mere presence on the planet is, according to one character, enough to provoke extreme symptoms of impending Cultural Fugue. Korga, brought to Velm and placed under Marq's care in order to rehabilitate

him, after his experience of slavery, thus inadvertently threatens Velm with the fate which overtook Rhyonon. The principal crisis of the book, accordingly, is the reaction of the Velmian populace to Korga's presence on their planet, yet all that happens is that masses of people gather outside Dyethshome (which is pronounced, for some reason, Death's Home) in order to see the mysterious lone survivor, much as they might in our own society for a comparable celebrity. Marq does not take them seriously, though he is persuaded so to act as to defuse the situation, after which Korga is removed from the planet. Marq is labelled a fool and the likely reason for this is his impercipient; in the course of his primary work as an Industrial Diplomat, he has shown a similar lack of concern at the threat of Cultural Fugue others have observed on the planet Nepiy. The troubleshooters appointed to help Nepiy turn out to be friends of the Dyeth family, the Thants (who, however, live on a distant planet); they are openly shocked by the sexual behaviour of the Dyeth family and one denounces Marq the lizard-lover as guilty of bestiality (a notion Marq can hardly understand in ethical terms). For the Dyeths, the Thants are behaving like uncultured buffoons when they express their cultural shock at an absurd formal dinner party; Marq almost seduces the reader into agreeing with the Dyeth view. Within the endless talk of aesthetics, idiosyncratic erotic preference and family history that constitutes much of the text (and which can be highly tedious) such crude ethical dogmatism must seem muffled.

An admirer of surfaces, Marq has little interest in the interiors of others; in the reasons why people bite their nails. Korga is principally an object of desire for Marq and when he is taken away, he behaves like a child deprived of a toy: the question of whether he would come to love Korga had been shelved during the short days they were together. Marq is able (by advanced technology) to share the behavioural experience of a dragon but it is Korga who articulates the experience in song (Marq analyses its prosody and the whole account seems a mere indulgence in preciousness as a result). Marq doesn't mark. It goes without saying that Marq's world seems to lack a metaphysical dimension. God's place is taken by the Xlv, an alien eye in the sky (does the name signify the 'X' quality, divine love?) and those agents of Sygn (clearly a significant name perhaps connoting those who find meaning in the world) or the Web, a pangalactic agency, who care for Korga, are called spiders by their opponents, the Family (which is itself denatured by having the purpose merely of 'Ordering experience'; see the chapter, 'Formalities'). (The Dyeth family itself has abandoned blood relationships.) Intent as he is on the flavours of individual experience, Marq is unable to relate the local to the global or the universal. In line with this attitude, he

gives much weight to a theory of fuzziness, according to which, as nothing in the multiplex universe is unique, so nothing is capable of having significant value. In his own review of the novel (ASFR September 1986) Russell Blackford has pointed out that Marq uses the idea fallaciously, although he inclines to blame Delany for this, whereas it seems to me to be a function of Marq's characterization. In accepting that the question of whether Korga is the only survivor of Rhyonon is fuzzy-edged (what about those Rhyonians who happened to be absent from the planet at the time?), Marq can ignore the problem of how far Korga's predicament has been responsible for the death of the planet. Similarly, his response to the suggestion that Korga's presence on Velm constituted a threat to its cultural stability is to assert that whatever happens locally can have no global significance.

Delany's whole narrative proves that the way any one individual perceives the world must render that world unique; as Blackford points out, Delany's violation of normal descriptive coding creates 'a very strong cumulative sense that we are in someone else's mental world'. Considering that the worlds of Marq and Rat Korga are so repellent and that Marq's in particular is so tedious and irritating in the reading, it is remarkable that they should also be so seductive. Delany's perverse achievement is highly remarkable. I have suggested that his stylistic pyrotechnics, far from being an exercise in *épatant le bourgeois*, can be read as tending to reinforce some solid middle-class values. I hope that the second part of the diptych, *The Splendor and Misery of Bodies, of Cities* (not yet available), will prove me right, for otherwise we will be allowed only to admire the work's ludic value. It is, indeed, very playfully that Marq enunciates the imagery of the first title in the section called 'Visitors on Velm'. An elder Thant approaches Marq, where he is sitting with his 'sister' Alyxander and a younger Thant, Fibermich. Thadeus Thant asks what the youngsters are plotting and receives some extravagantly jocular replies. Marq caps those of Alyxander and Fibermich by telling Thadeus, 'We're planning to pluck all the best stars out of the sky and stuff them in our pockets, so that when we meet you once again and thrust our hands deep inside to hide our embarrassment, our fingertips will smart on them, as if they were desert grains, caught down in the seams, and we'll smile at you on your way to a glory that, for all our stellar thefts, we shall never be able to duplicate.' Thadeus takes this as a sincere compliment, a sign of respect. The reader might find in it a dramatic irony, a true word spoken in jest. We must wait and see. The conversation turns to discussion of the nature of a background religious symbol, a 'cyhnk', which Fibermich describes as 'a sign of the Sygn'. At this point, the glazed reader, who has no reason

to be interested in such signs, is unlikely to follow very closely the account of the cyhnk's variability of form; Marq himself, though he dutifully records the conversation at Delany's behest, fails to notice its significance. Accordingly, when in the next section he sees Japril, a Sygn agent, fiddling with what may well be a cyhnk, he fails to identify it as such, although Delany forces him to keep niggling at the problem to the end of the novel.

Perhaps I should explain why I used the term 'rococo' rather than the broader 'baroque' to describe Delany's fiction. I am thinking of the supposed etymological connection of the rococo style with the rocaille of a grotto, in which one has a strange, ambiguous, amalgamated exterior which forms the curiously attractive mouth to some dark, unknown interior. We view a labyrinth from the outside, as it were, and all the clues run coiling inward as if into the deep recesses of a conch shell. (An even better image, in this context, is that of the *Distorsio anus* - blame Linnaeus for the name, not me). To Marq, who is within the labyrinth, but fails to read the signs, the cavernous universe appears to be an Aladdin's cave. To Rat Korga, also, the Aladdin's cave analogy may apply; when he became enslaved, he lost the 'Open Sesame' key, which was temporarily restored to him by his sadistic mistress in the form of a glove that enabled him to speed-read libraries.

As it is with such careful attention that we are invited to read Delany's text, his novel is clearly ready-made for the academic scholar who might be expected to turn with relief from the torturous unreliabilities of Gene Wolfe's hero to the merely foolish deceptions of Sam Delany's. Obviously, whether they like it or not, all serious students of science fiction just have to read this book. The trouble is, that reading it once is not enough. I can't say, read it once for the story and the second time for the meaning, because it hardly has any story worth reading once one gets past the Prologue. Johnson recommended that *Clarissa* be read not for the plot but for the sentiment, but you must read Delany's novel for the feeling of being a stranger in a strange land. So I can only say, read it once for the experience of being bewildered and dazzled by excess of light, then read it again just before you read the second part of the whole diptych, so that you are properly set up for the surprises still left up Delany's sleeve, or should I say, the stars still sparkling in his pocket.

THE SHORT VIEW

YVONNE ROUSSEAU

Towards the end of the Second World War, George Orwell speculated in *Tribune* (25 February 1944) that the British Ministry of Information might begin to commission women's magazine stories which would be designed specifically to lure their readers into occupations that the war had left open to women, and that were short of recruits:

One can almost hear the tired, cultured voice from the M.O.I. saying:

'Hullo! Hullo! Is that you, Tony? Oh, hullo. Look here, I've got another script for you, Tony, "A Ticket to Paradise". It's bus conductresses this time. They're not coming in. I believe the trousers don't fit, or something. Well, anyway, Peter says make it sexy but kind of clean - you know. Nothing extra-marital. We want the stuff in by Tuesday. Fifteen thousand words. You can choose the hero. I rather favour the kind of outdoor man that dogs and kiddies all love - you know. Or very tall with a sensitive mouth, I don't mind, really. But pile on the sex, Peter says.'

Orwell's flight of fancy was inspired by seeing telephonist vacancies advertised straight after a story about a girl telephonist whose seemingly humdrum job involves her in capturing a U-boat crew and taking a motor-ride with a handsome naval officer.

A similar vision came to me, when I read Eric Vinicoff's story, 'Windrider', in *Analog* October 1986, and observed the advertisement straight after it.

'Windrider' is set in the future, when Earth's surface is uninhabitable after wartime use of nuclear explosives and chemical and biological weapons. People now live either in underground 'enclaves' or in 'windriders' which float in the upper troposphere - while cargo dirigibles voyage up and down between them with trading goods. The story concerns a spherical windrider with a diameter of one mile and a population of 618. A meteorite punctures the shell of this 'hot air balloon' and shears one of the essential load-bearing cables that are webbed around it. Warm air is leaking out, causing the windrider to sink and the shell to deform - it may easily tear itself apart before the workcrew can reach the puncture and attempt repairs. Awaiting them below is the Caribbean Sea and the radioactive 'killzone' created by the 'saturation nuking' of Cuba.

The situation is saved by 14-year-old Wanda Grigg, the nubile daughter of a chief engineer. She happens to be hang-gliding very near the puncture and, by displaying exceptional skills and courage, in startlingly dangerous conditions, she makes adequate temporary repairs well before the workcrew arrives. Unfortunately, she then falls from the windrider and is in deadly peril; but again displays astonishing skill and panache in the course of her rescue by the dazzled but dashing Miguel Ramirez, the 'almost regal' looking captain of a cargo dirigible, who sees in Wanda a kindred spirit.

If this were wartime, and the story I have outlined had been commissioned in the way Orwell described, it would have been in a women's magazine and followed by a recruiting advertisement for something like female air-corps engineers. It appears, however, in a peacetime magazine reputedly aimed at male adolescents, in a time of high unemployment - and its effect is very different from that suggested by my synopsis so far. It is merely contemporary background, after all, that women now have jobs that were once forbidden them, and that they claim to have ambitions, resourcefulness and capabilities which traditionally were denied expression - and which Wanda Grigg is seen expressing. The actual message of the story is that even when not restricted to a sedentary lifestyle with no horizons beyond the home and family, the human female is at heart the way she appeared to be in 1950s America - so much so that the juvenile mating costume and customs are retained in this windrider of the future. In saving her fellow citizens, Wanda has nothing in mind but ensuring that the evening's dance is not cancelled. She has been envisaging for months how she will impress a fellow teenager, Jeff, who still thinks of her as 'one of the gang' and whom she intends to dazzle with her (1950s) 'honey-blond hair done up, wearing an off-the-shoulder pink organza dress' (in other words, 'the formal Mom had made her for the end-of-term dance') complete with 'a white stole and Mom's locket'.

The message is that women are not normal. When they seem to achieve the kinds of things men value, it is for frivolous reasons - and society's honours mean nothing to them. However, despite 'Windrider's' tendency to reduce stress in adolescent males seeking employment - by demonstrating that it suits their female competitors to be unemployed - my Orwellian dream envisages another reason why the American Heart Association's advertisement is placed straight after this story. Wanda tells Miguel that 'Mom is waiting dinner'; and how better to follow the advertisement's advice - 'If you're a teenager slow down on fast food' - than to persuade your Mom to stay home? She can fix you tuna hot-dish and coleslaw followed by vanilla cornstarch pudding!

REVIEWS

Caroline Forbes, *THE NEEDLE ON FULL*, Onlywomen, 1985, 267 pp., US\$7.95

reviewed by Lucy Sussex

Caroline Forbes and Onlywomen press obviously believe in labelling: 'lesbian feminist science fiction' adorns the cover of this book in bright green letters. For my ex-nun workmate, who innocently asked what I was reading, the green must have signified 'poison'. Sf was clearly bad enough, but if as well?

On the other hand, this label informs the clientele of Shrew bookshop that sf is not all rapes and rayguns. It is this audience, not the McGill's browsers, that is unsubtly sought by Onlywomen. However, Shrew also stocks the Women's Press, purveyors of quality f and lf sf. Those Shrews who have discovered Joanna Russ via the Women's Press (who market her as plain 'Science Fiction') will find Caroline Forbes not on the same level. In fact, Forbes' innovation lies largely in her blatant self-categorization.

The above may sound like the prelude to a nasty review, which it is not. *The Needle on Full* has promise - or rather, some of its component stories are quite promising, others not at all. Curiously, in this collection quality does equal quantity: the shorts are slight and the novellas substantial. It would seem that Forbes is a stayer rather than a sprinter, or perhaps the longer pieces indicate authorial maturity and confidence.

The shorter pieces include the crassly obvious 'Snake', in which a sexually harassed woman changes into the eponymous phallic symbol and bites her tormentor. Less heavy but still leaden is 'The Visitors' in which little green sexless beings zap the husband of a suburban housewife. In reward she gives them high tea.

As can be seen from its potted-meat plot, 'The Visitors' is not serious, but neither is it humorous. The fault lies with the prose, which is competent but without zest, like the food served at an English high tea. This criticism applies to all *The Needle*: if we are to be told that men are beasts and womyn are humyn, it is more palatable with spice. Forbes is not (yet) a stylist, and she can be clumsy. I am indebted to Janeen Webb for noting that 'She was in the middle of doing the dishes when they landed in the back garden' (opening sentence of 'The Visitors') is a subjunctive tension. Did the flying saucers come from the kitchen sink?

The longer narratives give Forbes space to detail characters and their webs of relationship. It is here that she shows real ability. 'The Comet's Tail' tells of two women sent on a space mission, who are first enemies, then lovers, then friends. Unfortunately this story is marred by some dodgy science - the earth is destroyed by nuclear war, then implodes and becomes a black hole. This conclusion seems dubious.

More accomplished is 'London Fields', set in an England where men have died out. Gwyneth Jones in her *Interzone* review called the lesbian community in this tale 'grumpy' and 'disorganized' - it is also convincing. Here Forbes eschews the obvious, confronting her characters with the reappearance of men. The intruders are not hostile (they are described in noble savage terms) but the community is bewildered and unable to cope. Finally one womyn cracks under the strain and kills the men. 'Before they departed, each one had approached the bodies and looked into the faces of the dead men. And each one accepted that, by whatever route, the final emotion that gave them a dreamless sleep that night, was relief' (p. 151).

'Fields' is the sharpest part of *The Needle*, the rest being duller. Forbes is clearly a writer to watch, even if *Onlywomen* have rushed her into print prematurely. For the moment the collection shows potential, and has excellent shock value. A copy of the book left prominently on a coffee table is useful as Aunt-rid, and it is pleasant to contemplate its effect on John Alderson.

Margaret Atwood, *THE HANDMAID'S TALE*, Cape, 1985, 324 pp., £9.95

reviewed by Lucy Sussex

What do Sister Mary Mary Quite Contrary and Margaret Atwood have in common? One is a Sister of Perpetual Indulgence, and the other a sister in the feminist sense - but both have reacted strongly against the self-righteous Right. The Sisters' weapon is burlesque and Margaret Atwood's the dystopia. While the former laugh at Fred Nile (and also copyright the term 'Moral Majority' to prevent him using it in Australia), Atwood asks, coldly and at length: what would happen if these creeps came to power?

Several dystopias have described theocracies, for instance *Pavane*, but Atwood's focus is narrower. Her specific target is Women Who Want to Be Tautological, who cite the Bible in support of their inferiority. The women of Atwood's Gilead, formerly middle America, surpass Babette Francis's (The lady doth protest too much, methinks) wildest dreams:

they are veiled, confined to their homes and forbidden literacy, abortion or divorce.

The model for Gilead is Iran, or fundamentalist sects like the Amish - with the added twist of widespread infertility. Because of 'chemicals, rays, radiation...exploding atomic power plants, along the San Andreas fault...the mutant strain of syphilis no mould could touch' (p.122) only one in four pregnancies is viable. Enter the handmaids of the title, women in second or de facto marriages, declared adulteresses by the regime and reduced to slavery. The handmaids are allotted to the infertile elite, to be surrogate mothers, in accord with the biblical precedents of Rachel and Leah.

The result is probably the nastiest female dystopia outside the Gor novels of John Norman, with Atwood ransacking the Bible for suitably horrific precedents. In Genesis, Rachel declares that her maid Bilhah 'shall bear upon my knees, that I may also have children by her.' Atwood expands this phrase to cover not only the surrogate births but sexual intercourse: the handmaids are impregnated (or not) actually lying between the legs of the legitimate wives. AI would involve masturbation, considered sinful by the theocrats. The handmaid narrator wonders: 'Which of us is it worse for, her [the wife] or me?' (p. 106).

And yet *The Handmaid's Tale*, although unpleasant reading for any woman (even Babette F.), somehow lacks the emotional force of 1984. Part of the trouble is Atwood's narrator, all too obviously an Everywoman, for maximum identification purposes. She marries, works, has a child pre-Gilead, and is also a total 'wimp', as even Atwood, via the feminist character Moira, observes (p. 234). The dystopia, as seen by this woman, is suffused with a dispiritedness and resignation that detract from the power of the novel.

Repeatedly, the reader is drawn to the contrasting figure of Moira, not a character everyone could identify with, being a devout dyke. She is also sassy, bloody-minded and unbowed until almost the very last. How much more interesting *The Handmaid's Tale* would have been if Moira had related it!

The result, of course, would have been closest to Joanna Russ at her fire-spitting best, mean, misandrist and thoroughly angry. Perhaps it is the lack of anger which is the most disturbing feature of this novel, as if Atwood feared emotional involvement with her depressing subject matter. She is too detached, too well-mannered - and these qualities do not a powerful polemic make.

There are other problems with the novel, suggestions that it may have been written hurriedly (on p. 102, Moira has difficulty walking before the bastinado). It is also hard to believe that Gilead deprived

American women simultaneously of their jobs and bank accounts without causing economic chaos. However, these problems pale beside the afterword.

Following the novel proper are 'Historical Notes', from a conference in the year 2195. In these notes, the Tale is revealed to be a series of tapes surviving from the Gilead era. The conference paper on these tapes, though, contains sexist puns like 'Underground Frailroad', referring to the smuggling of handmaids from Gilead (p. 313). Either Atwood is proving the persistence of sexism, or after three hundred pages of gloomy plain prose, she felt like some word play. Whatever the cause, the humour is puerile: three tapes are recorded over 'Boy George Takes it Off' (p. 314). This depiction of an academic smartarse jars with the preceding narrative.

The best features of *The Handmaid's Tale* are odd, wry touches, such as the Commander whose perversion is to play scrabble with his handmaid, or the brothel stocked with rebellious handmaids. The rest though, lacks passionate intensity. Sister M. M. Quite Contrary is much more fun than Atwood, and probably in the short run more effective against the wrongheaded Right.

TWENTY YEARS AGO IN ASFR

John Foyster wrote (in series 1, no. 8, March 1967) about J. G. Ballard's remarks in *New Worlds* 167, October 1966:

Sometimes [...] one is uncertain about what Ballard means. For example, he asks: 'at what point does the plane of intersection of two cones become sexually more stimulating than Elizabeth Taylor's cleavage?' The immediate problem is, of course, that there is no plane of intersection of two cones (which makes it easy to answer the question, of course, but which somehow seems to avoid Ballard's point), but the one evolving from this is more complex: it presupposes that this point is common to all men - it reduces men to common denominators. Which they are not. This 'point' doesn't exist, either. This would have excited the dadaists, this discussion of the relationship between two nonexistent things, but it doesn't seem likely that there'd be much in it for Joe Fan.

LETTERS

Joseph Nicholas
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I completely fail to understand why you [Lucy] think I should send you a 'paint stripping' letter in response to your editorial in ASFR vol. 1, no. 3. You surely do not imagine that because I am the subject of the illustration you discuss I am therefore responsible for having drawn and captioned it? If so, your logic is as specious as your argument is foolish.

Getting a bit touchy aren't you, cobber? (For those not in the know Lucy made some jocular comments about a depiction of Joseph Nicholas as 'leveller cavalier' - on its face an oxymoronic caption - in *Fuck the Tories 2.*) (RKB)

I'll go and stand in the corner (LJS)

Douglas Barbour
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As a longtime follower of the ups and downs of Gene Wolfe's reputation, and the general air of saying he's good but not quite being sure of what he's really up to, I really enjoyed Bruce's take on his work [in ASFR vol. 1, no 1]. I can't read it without being aware of almost a scholar's delight in the writer as he writes out of and against numerous conventions of the genre and of fiction itself; how intriguing to see [in ASFR vol. 1, no. 5] that Wolfe doesn't really like discussing that aspect of his work.

Cy Chauvin
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Already [ASFR] seems to be among the 2 or 3 most intelligent and articulate fanzines that discuss sf, surpassing *Vector* and easily any of

the American fanzines I get. And Bruce Gillespie doesn't want to publish anything about sf anymore. So you may soon have the field to yourself.

I think I may have enjoyed **Blood Music** more than you [John] did, although this may have been influenced by the fact that I read all of the Hugo-nominated [novels] this year: **Blood Music** was the only one that really deserved the honour. [...]

George Turner's review of another Hugo nominee, Brin's **The Postman**, is perhaps too kind. [...]

I admit that I have always had a particular fondness for post-disaster stories. But after the first two sections of the novel (which were first published as separate stories, I believe), most of the originality is gone. In addition to the objections George raises, I would add that the super-computer introduced as the supposed guiding force behind the advanced colony that our hero joins is a little tired and stale too (even the twist that the computer is a fake is old hat, too). I don't think I'm quite so willing as George to forgive all this ('Would a seriously considered examination of the natural drama of communication drawing together people who have grown apart ... have found a publisher?' he asks. All I can say is that another post-disaster novel, perhaps one of the best, has been in print almost continuously for nearly 40 years: **Earth Abides**.)

I, by contrast, have not read all the Hugo-nominated novels, and number **Blood Music** among those still to come. But I can comment on **The Postman**, which I considered one of the best novels I read in 1986. What struck me about the novel, which you don't mention and George does not make explicit in his review, was the way in which it reflects upon and subverts a whole tradition of ultra-survivalist post-holocaust sf which goes back at least to Heinlein's **Farnham's Freehold** and finds its apotheosis in some of Niven-and-Pournelle's blockbusters. As Doug Barbour says above, I'm sure quite correctly, about Wolfe, Brin is also writing out of and against numerous conventions of sf itself.

I'm not applauding how Brin does this simply because I agree with the implicit politics of his novel; rather, I applaud the complex and convincing way in which his novel defines, takes issues with, and makes concessions to the above traditions/conventions. Like George, I consider the whole 'postman' plot strand to be a master stroke (a wonderful myth about the building up of civilized order out of a Hobbesian survivalist chaos, in which the reactions and preferences of the individual characters strike me as wholly convincing and touching). Also like George, I am disappointed by

