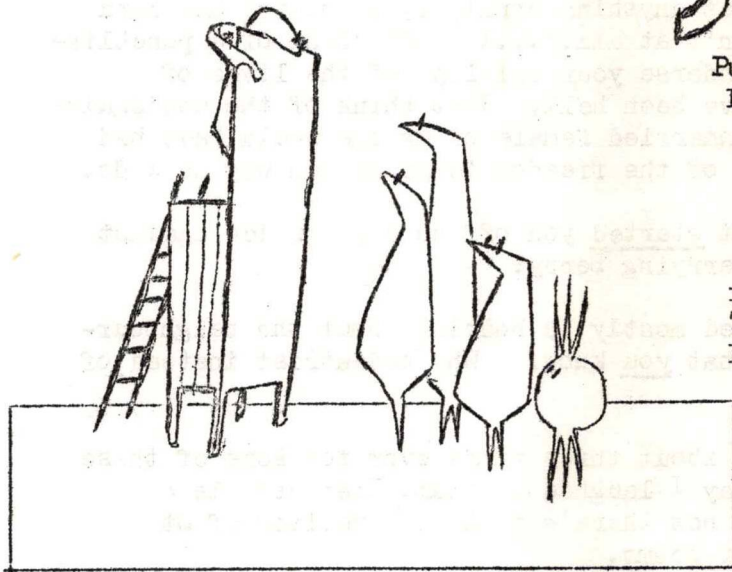


# Bletherings #37



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Heading by ATOM

## On the 40th Mailing:

Cognate:Hickey: I was intrigued by your cute covers and wished we had as nice stationary as that. In Disneyland - the gang nearly lost me as I drooled over the Hallmark shop. You are on the right track here, Rosemary, just keep telling us of what's happening there in Chicago. To us over here it's all new.

Amble:Mercer: Trifle mixed aren't you? It's next year that is Worldcon year and I will finish as editor with the March mailing. We view death differently - I think of it in a very personal way. To me; death is an enemy, something to fight against. I grieve at anyone's death; yes, even the Bad and the Wicked (after all they might have become better). I've never been able to console myself with a belief in afterlife; it would be nice but I feel it's all just wishful thinking. So death, to me, is final, and grievous. I grieve more for the deaths I've seen than the ones I haven't (being human), I grieve more for the deaths of people I admire than the ones I do not know.....I don't know why I am stumbling on like this..Donne has said it so much better. ...."Any man's death diminishes me." It isn't really an "obvious" distinction between Americans and Californians. Once start that and where do you stop? Texans or New Yorkers could be as easily substituted. I liked Jim's illo.

Farrago:Crilly: I rather like the colouring; but the material is so light-

## Bletherings 2

wight as to be almost non-existent. If you can't think of anything else to write about-tell us about yourself. We are a curious lot.

Dolphin:Busby:I think you might have confused some of we British by your use of the word 'liberal'. Your meaning is quite different from ours. However, with the Goldwater nomination so much in our news - the political expressions used in America are beginning to be understood a little more. I don't think I'll get into an argument with you over your remarks as we might get into a real misunderstanding with you using the word 'liberal' to mean one thing and I to mean another...I am fair taken with your line "Human beings never get anything straight, no matter how hard they try, and sometimes they don't at all."...I can't think of a punchline as you request but I heartily endorse your opinion of the lives of Victorian womanhood--it must have been hell. Just think of the undisguised pity I would have got! An unmarried female of my age would have had sneers and snubs galore instead of the freedom to go my own way as I do.

Compact:Parker: What was it that started you off on a prejudice against Shakespear? I see Art is out-Berrying Berry!

Congante:Hickey:I'd be interested mostly in hearing about the neighbourhood you live in, the Chicago that you know. Why podiatrist instead of chiropodist?

Erg:Jeeves:Sid ought to be shot about three times over for some of these terrible puns..I'm ashamed to say I laughed at them. That article on Heraldry ought to come in handy now there's talk of a revival of St Fanthony. Muchly amused by your poems.

Mein Omp-f:Freeman:You could fill this all up with hospital tales and there would never be a dull moment! Your interchanges with Betty on the subject of folk's reactions to disablement - leaves me with nothing to add. You've both said it all and said it very well.

Morph:RolesIt will seem odd when you Rollings comes to an end-what will you do next, I wonder? The amount of detail has become less as time wears on; I wish you'd filled out the notebook entries with your memories. Your life then is beginning to sound very lonely now. My! you're a fine one to chaff me about page credits! The editor, as you will recall, can claim OT as activity credit and therefore hardly need add anything else. I did not count the TAPP flyer as credit to anyone. You too, are making me think of the subject of grief. But I really think I'll make a separate article of my thoughts. By now, of course, you know that leather trousers are still worn!

Whatsit:Cheslin:It's a beautifully done cover alright! Taht's a wonderful letter from Japan; what fascinated me was the ease with which Toshio strolled from subject to subect. Bon is as entertaining as usual though I'm often beat to know whether he's having us on or not. Now hear this Ken! I'm not going to nag at you any more to be neat; it doesn't make any difference and I like you too much to keep on with it. Also that disconnected style occasionally throws up a spontaneous naturalness that is unbeatable. Such as your remark that you won't discuss Ella in public.

Bletherings 3

You've driven right to the heart of the matter there - all our friends have faults (as we do too). And I see you've done something sensible about OMPA by writing it up in BRAMBLE.

Pantheon:Bluem:Naturally I read avidly your ideas on TAFF; for I would very much like to see it extended to the rest of Europe. Fanzines like your own and SOL which let US and British fans know about Gerfandom; meetings at cons (which increase all the time..Vienna in '66!) will in the end achieve this object. So thanks for the news on Gerfandom, please keep this up.

Lefnui:Patten:I wanted THE SWORD IN THE STONE too - but as I didn't expect it I wasn't disappointed in the film. You must admit that the scene in Merlin's cottage was really marvellous! I like so much book talk in your zine. Pardon my asking though - do you really get on alright with such a steady diet of sf and fantasy? What 'straight' authors do you like?

Souffle:Baxter:I'm glad that you warned me that THE GUARDIAN was fiction! But I enjoyed your film reviews. Tsk! you mistake me meaning. I didn't write that American fans (I certainly never mentioned any other overseas fans) had lowered Ompa's standing. I was complaining that the number of US fans who have joined and left Ompa in rapid style had contributed to an almost constant turnover that has weakened the cohesion of Ompa. Do you realise that Armistead joined September 1963..has received all the mailings since and has as yet not contributed one page of activity? If he does not produce 12pp by this coming deadline he will be dropped. This is the kind of overseas fan that Ompa can well do without.

Kobold:Jordan:Did you ever see the cover of A BAS No 11 which featured a photograph of Castro in full flight with the caption.. "Andy Young addresses Science-Fiction Convention on the evils of "Fancy Expensive Restuarants"?....To be dead honest (since you asked) I do think you should have been kicked out of Ompa for your lamentable activity rate..and this isn't particularly great either!

Procastinator:Trimble:An American giving a history of the British police to a British apa is not as incongruous as it might at first seem. I never even knew the half of this!

Vagary:Grey:You are a bit coy of saying just what exams you have been sitting; are you afraid fans will scoff? Your witchcraft 'talking point' is well done; but I think you dodge the issue. To give a history of witchcraft is fair enough, but all those hints that there is something in it (but you don't say what) that there are genuine witches (but you dart away from that); isn't good enough for me. Do you or don't you believe in the power of witchcraft? If you do where do you think the power comes from? As to the Astrology--I think it's a lot of bunkum that hardly ever does anyone any harm.

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## Bletherings 4

Grief is an emotion we humans do not monopolise; animals can grieve too - there have been many tales of animals who grieved themselves to death. People often make a great noise with their grief; we have all heard of the practise of keening. In our western culture however, this type of grieving is considered unsophisticated and the stiff upper lip school of thought definitely frowns upon it. Grief, like rage, is one of the most natural expressions of emotion and, like rage, is apt to be viewed by the non-participants with amazement.

As a junior nurse I saw little of the grief that accompanies death - although there was the sound of muffled sobbing sometimes from Sister's office. When a patient dies the relatives are always seen by a senior member of the staff. A junior nurse could sit at the bedside of a dying patient, or help to dress the body afterwards; but could not attempt the delicate task of breaking the news to the relatives or of comforting them afterwards.

It must have been in my third year of training that I first essayed this task. A man had died suddenly during the night, too suddenly for his wife to get there for the end. When she did arrive at our urgent summons, Doctor had gone back to bed so the job of breaking the news fell to me. This woman, seemed to me, strangely unmoved by the news. Her one concern was that I should see that her husband's false teeth were in his mouth! I assured her earnestly that this would be done and with that she seemed satisfied. Not a tear..the whole thing struck me as very odd. In my inexperience I decided she must be a rather callous person. Now I know that she was in a state of shock; her mind had really refused to believe the news and was busily filled with bizarre alternatives. It was this same type of shock, no doubt, which caused Robert Kennedy to adjure people, on the day after his brother's death, to "cheer up!" At the time of a great shock we are not really responsible for what we say - and the mind often throws out the queerest things at the surprised bystander.

Our first reaction too, is often to try not to make a naked show of our grief, to keep it private - this comes from the bite-on-the-bullet philosophy. Another reaction is to busy the mind with details; funeral arrangements, for instance, can be seized upon thankfully as something to occupy the mind. Which explains why people can be so imposed upon at this time as the book THE AMERICAN WAY OF DEATH explains.

Is grief a useless, wasteful emotion? I do not think so; it helps the pain to cry, for instance. Men in our culture are very handicapped here of course, they are not supposed to cry, but they often do. Yes, the outward expression of grief helps the pain; and anything that makes pain bearable isn't useless. John Role's method for dealing with grief is by not thinking of it..but this is not always possible when it is a human who has died and when there are a great many bits and pieces of that person's life still to be tied up.

What can you do when someone grieves? There is very little you can do; but you can listen to the grief being talked out..for once it is talked out it is easier to bear. However, if you listen sympathetically you may become engulfed too..maybe it isn't your loss..but you'll know what it



## Bletherings 5

will feel like when it comes to you. I can remember one small pathetic man who wrung my heart..his wife was a very big woman of 16stones in weight. Her sudden death was, he said, not too big a shock because of this. "I always knew she was too fat" he sighed, and then he added wistfully -"But she did like her food!".

Shakespear touched on grief once(although I do not know from where this quotation comes)and it sums up rather what those who grieve would say to those who tell them it is a useless emotion:

"GRIEF FILLS UP THE ROOM OF MY ABSENT CHILD  
LIES IN HIS BED, WALKS UP AND DOWN WITH ME  
PUTS ON HIS PRETTY LOOKS, REPEATS HIS WORDS  
REMEMBERS ME OF ALL HIS GRACIOUS PARTS  
STUFFS OUT HIS VACANT GARMENTS WITH HIS FORM,  
THEN HAVE I REASON TO BE FOND OF GRIEF  
FARE YOU WELL: HAD YOU SUCH A LOSS AS I  
I COULD GIVE BETTER COMFORT THAN YOU DO"

Two OMPA members have said that they were amazed at the sense of personal loss felt by many people at the death of President Kennedy. Last November there were so many eulogies..but the one I remember best was in the letter column of the magazine NEWSWEEK. It caught my attention as the address was in south England. I'll quote the first lines....

"I cannot begin to express my feelings. I am only 17; but at 17 one needs heroes to look up to, and John F. Kennedy was the man I revered and still revere the most..."

It isn't only boys of 17 who long for a hero. This is another one of those human emotions at which the more sophisticated might smile. Men aren't expected even, to be heroes nowadays..we all know that a man cannot be perfect and, presumably, anything less should not be considered heroic. It used to be pretty easy to find heroes..but not nowadays. Of course people can throng the streets to cheer some feat of physical courage such as shown by the astronauts..but somehow that is not considered so naive. To have the same emotion for a politician..tsk,tsk.

Yet Kennedy undoubtedly did arouse this emotion. He came along at a time when people knew that war could be the end of the world as we know it in a way that had never been possible before. War suddenly loomed - we were all afraid - and then thanks to him (and the Soviet leader) it went away again. People then became aware very suddenly of Kennedy and when they studied him they found he was young and good looking (as a hero should be) his brand of politics frightened neither the left nor the right of our political parties. All of a sudden, for the very first time, the ordinary people of many countries really looked to an American President as a leader. It must have been a bit of a shock to some of our own leaders when they realised just how many people had looked upon President Kennedy in this way. It was a beginning; a breath of hope - it wasn't just the man that caused this enormous grief. It was all he had come to mean..sanity, hope and the belief that 'right' was respected. All that went away and we were left with uncertainty again. The amazing thing isn't that millions of ordinary people felt a sense of loss--what is amazing is the people who were untouched by it.

## Bletherings 6

Speaking the same language (to a large extent anyway) sure has been a help in encouraging our relations with US fandom. There is hardly a British fan who is at all active, who has not at least one correspondent in the US. Hyper active fans are in touch with dozens. Yet, much nearer to us and so more easily met, are a large bunch of fans of which we know practically nothing. I am referring, of course, to European fandom. This ignorance can be wholly blamed upon ourselves. We so rarely bother to learn a European language..or to use it much when we do. There are the odd fans who have contact with an odd European fan..but all the advances have come mainly from the continent to us..and it doesn't say much for us.

This year, for the first time, a sizeable amount of British fans attended a European convention. I'm sure we all felt the same sense of a "break-through". From now on, I hope these meetings will grow..and British fandom will not be the losers I'm sure. Compared with the US we have so few members to muster..but combined with European fandom we could promote much more equitable exchanges.

As all the programme was in German we could not participate in this. However we could participate in all the social events which do so much to promote friendship between fans. I personally got rather a thrill at being surrounded by people all talking a language I could not understand. I had to try to judge from their gestures, their expressions, the tone of their voice...just what it was they were saying. I'd like to bet that I often guessed right!

Although as yet we do not know the full ins and outs of European fandom the growing number of English-speaking Europeans who are directing their fanzines at us is filling in the gap. For long I laboured under the impression that nearly all Gerfandom were very 'serious' and that fandom was rather frowned upon. Yet the majority of them attended the fancy dress dance and acted as happily daft as ever our own folks do. The crowds of fans all busily discussing away like mad were exactly the same as our own. The number who could be said to be 'serious' were, I fancy, in the minority. They all looked as if they enjoyed a good time, once the programme was over. Mind you, they may be still talking over the subjects which we exhausted years ago---but then so are we! I attended one lecture on SF AND THE CRITICS which was translated for me in a whisper by Thomas Schueck. From that I gathered that I could have pretty well given the lecture myself..had I also the patience to collect cuttings from the various critics.

I felt rather ashamed at the number of fans who were able to communicate to me often in halting English and I with nothing but my native tongue in answer. So much so that I am determined to enrol in German classes this winter. Now, when I go to Vienna in '66 (let's all go.) I hope to be able to say more than the one German sentence I brought home with me.....  
"Veer bier, ein Kirshwasser!".

Ethel Lindsay