



Derogatory Reference 78

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Staff: Bernadette Bosky, Kevin J. Maroney, Dell-Viking, Courageous, Daphne, Earl Warren, and Lee Harvey Oswald (the rabbit).

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They say that if you eat a live toad first thing in the morning, nothing worse will happen to you all day. In that spirit, I begin with bad news, and I don't imagine there'll be any worse news in this zine than this:

Novelist Robert Shea died this month. Best known as co-author (with Robert Anton Wilson) of the *Illuminatus!* trilogy, he also wrote the historical novels *Shike*, *All Things Are Lights*, *The Saracen*, and *Shaman*.

Shea's historical fiction can be described as "traditional." Each novel told a story, with beginning, middle, and end, pretty much in that order, and pretty much without obliqueness, irony, ambiguity, metafictional self-reference, and other such postmodern qualities. The books can likewise be described as traditional in morality. Though they do not reflect the punitive sexual code often indicated by that phrase, they unabashedly treat such traits as compassion, courage, and loyalty as Good Things.

There are those who condescend to this sort of novel. (It is particularly easy to do so if one has not attempted to write one.) In reply, one might, at the very least, point out that each apparently simple and straightforward story is also a skilled and complex weaving of many plot threads, told in graceful prose with style and wit, and peopled with richly detailed and fascinating characters.

As a person, Shea was much like his novels. First and foremost, he believed that people should be nice to each other, but behind this apparently simple approach was an intelligent awareness of the problems it entailed and a perceptive skepticism about the organizations and ideologies which purported to provide and institutionalize niceness.

I had the pleasure of knowing Bob Shea, first postally and then in person as well, for 15 years. When Bernadette Bosky and I had our nonlegal wedding ceremony, he officiated, with the style, humor, and warmth he brought to everything. He was

a flawed human being like all of us, but his good qualities far outweighed his flaws. I will miss him.

The news of Bob's death was surprising only in its suddenness. He'd been battling cancer for a couple of years, but seemed to be holding it at bay. The timing was particularly awful because it came shortly after a hoax Internet report, complete with fake newspaper story, that Robert Anton Wilson had died. (Apparently, some poor soul's prosthetic sense of humor malfunctioned to the point where he thought that sort of thing was funny.)

The news also came near the conclusion of a thoroughly nasty winter, rich in snowstorms, traffic accidents (caused by the snowstorms), and ailments. As I mentioned lastish, Bernadette found that she was suffering from diabetes (type II), Hashimoto's disease (which destroys the thyroid gland), and apparent glaucoma.



More recent news on the health front is good. The glaucoma, which was brought on by taking a steroid eye medication for too long, seems to have gone away, or at least gone down to borderline status, since she stopped taking the medicine. One doesn't really need a thyroid gland all that much, as the same results can be obtained by taking thyroid pills. That in turn has helped with the diabetes, which seems controllable with oral medication, exercise, and a food plan that does not require going hungry.

Kevin continues to thrive. He is still working at Crossover Technologies. His digestive tract is still not entirely happy, and medical science is still not entirely sure why, but that doesn't seem serious.

And I've declared myself a Survivor of Winter. As I proudly told a Narcotics Anonymous meeting, I didn't go back to drugs, and I didn't go back to North Carolina.

I even have gainful employment (part-time, very part-time), as a first reader of sf/fantasy manuscripts. It's not what I'm really good at (copyediting), but it's something I can do, and I trust that more work will follow.



I feel a kind of ambivalent embarrassment every time a new Kurt Vonnegut book comes out, and I suspect that I am not alone. I remember that I not only enjoyed his earlier books as fiction, but even thought that he was a brilliant and perceptive thinker, and the shame creeps over me.

Then I remind myself that the early books did have a lot to offer. They were genuinely and deliberately funny, and they did not promote the dumb ideas that one now associates with his name. In those days he was not saying that fiction writing is simply a form of lying, morally inferior to any sort of physical work, or that our species would be happier if only we weren't stuck with these terrible large brains that think all the time. Even his more recent work is not entirely devoid of merit.

I'm starting to have similar feelings about Spider Robinson, to see him as the sort of wretched excess that I took seriously in the Sixties. It's unfair to him, but I don't think I am being entirely mistaken.

In the Sixties, there were any number of books about how They (the

Establishment) were uptight, repressive, narrow-minded, and invincibly ignorant, about sex in particular, but about all sorts of other things as well, but that We were free-thinking and open minded.

In retrospect, the books were right about Them, but wrong about Us. The critique of sexual puritanism, for instance, was incisive (and, alas, not dated), but next to that we can see unexamined assumptions that now don't look a whole lot better than the obvious nonsense they were attacking. (In many cases, feminism offered an instant corrective.)

Spider Robinson's writing is in that tradition. It shows up in perhaps its purest form in the Callahan's Bar stories. They are sf stories, often quite good as such. They are also representative of a particular sensibility, reminiscent of the Sixties, but updated to avoid some of that decade's less enlightened views, about women and gays for instance.

And now, *Off the Wall at Callahan's* [Tor tpb] presents the ideas, in what purports to be the wit and wisdom of the denizens of Callahan's.

Much of it is witty and wise, things like "Where I come from, anything that says, 'Excuse me' is considered human." Some is good, but strikes this particular reader as overly familiar. (Your mileage may vary.) But there's also stuff like:

"Triads have a very short shelf life--unless all three members are ambisexual. For a heterosexual species with two sexes, odd numbers are unstable. If a commodity is scarce, competition for it will ensue. Triads are as interesting as hell--while they last. But so is a chimney fire."

I picked this Horrible Example not because it's more categorical and dogmatic than others--it isn't--but because it is one that I know from my own experience to be a bunch of shit. I am a part of one of those nonexistent long-lasting het triads--going on seven years now and getting better all the time. We've had difficulties, as has every relationship involving more than one person, but Robinson's alleged diagnosis is relevant to almost none of them. If someone came into Callahan's and announced that there could not be any sort of good sexual/romantic relationship between two people with the same sort of genitalia, he would be scorned and pitied, and rightly so. Robinson's statement is less ignorant--there are fewer counterexamples and they are less publicized--but I don't think it is any less stupid.

ICFA Report

At the beginning of 1982 I moved in with Bernadette Bosky. A couple of months later we both attended the International Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts (ICFA) for the first time. We have continued with both. I have also continued to write and publish my own subjective and opinionated version of the goings-on.

The ICFA is an academic conference on science fiction, fantasy, and horror which is also attended by professional fiction writers and editors in the field. Most of the material presented there is safely between the extremes of gosh-wow fannishness and impenetrable academic seriousness.

I am tempted to say that the whole Conference was an anticlimax, because the first paper in the first session (not only the first temporally, but the first one listed) was the best thing there.

This is a biased opinion, as the paper was Bernadette's, and in my more lucid moments I don't believe there really is such a thing as The Best Paper In The Conference. I will, however, say that it is an extremely good paper. It is called "Haunting and Healing: Memory and Guilt in the Fiction of Peter Straub."

Straub is a fascinating writer. After a couple of efforts at mainstream fiction, he wrote the supernatural horror novels which made his reputation. His latest work is the Blue Rose series, a trilogy with ancillary works of shorter fiction, which combines horror and mystery elements.

The paper traces how Straub has used the image of "a sexual crime in the past" (which he got from his studies of Faulkner) as a major element in his fiction, in a way that dovetails with the specific requirements of the horror and mystery genres. Like Bernadette's study of fat and size imagery in Stephen King's fiction (published in *The Dark Descent*, a collection of essays on King edited by Tony Magistrale and published by Greenwood Press), this paper combines insightful literary analysis with a look at one of today's important social issues, without slipping into polemic.

At the same session, Rhonda Lee Brock discussed the image of an inhuman race existing alongside ours in Dean Koontz's *Twilight Eyes* and Whitley Strieber's *The Hunger*, and Janeen Webb talked about Romanticism in Tim Powers and Dan Simmons.

We awoke bright and early the next morning. We had to. Well, actually I just

had to be early, but Bernadette had to be bright as well, as she was chairing a paper session that began at 8:30 AM.

The session, one which she thought up and solicited the papers for, was on "Renaissance Thought in Contemporary Fantastic Fiction." Two papers were presented. Lisa Padol gave us a thought-provoking look at a new telling of the King Arthur legend, Phyllis Ann Karr's *Idylls of the Queen*, which gave voice to hitherto silent figures in the saga, mostly women, but also the narrator, Sir Kay. Don Riggs compared Nostradamus with one of his fictional analogs, the prophet Neeses in Tad Williams's trilogy *Memory, Sorrow, and Thorn*. I remain convinced that Neeses did a lot better, perhaps through closer collaboration with his Author.

The second morning session I attended was on Postmodern Speculative Fiction. The one paper in it I found most interesting was Alison Calder's on Mark Leyner. One of Bernadette's sisters (the one who gave us the Magic Cock Ring Ken doll) also gave me a copy of Leyner's *Et Tu, Babe*. I bogged down somewhere near the middle, deciding that what Leyner wrote was mediocre *National Lampoon*-style humor, interspersed with comments on itself. Calder's paper emphasized the postmodern and metafictional aspects of this work. Conceptually interesting, but it is as if Leyner were simultaneously Jerry Lewis and the French critics who adulate Lewis, and that is not enough to make me want to read him.

The luncheon featured a Guest of Honor Address (presumably more impressive than the mere Guest of Honor speeches conventions have). Roger Zelazny, a cadaverous-looking man with voice to match, amused and informed us about his literary collaborations, from an involuntary one (someone who won a writing prize by submitting as his own a Zelazny story) to a posthumous one (finishing an incomplete and unoutlined novel left by Alfred Bester). The novel sounds fascinating; I'm looking forward to its publication.

I cannot tell you about the afternoon sessions, as Bernadette suffered an attack of conjunctivitis. We've had a winter of bad weather and worse health, and I guess this was our lesson that fleeing the former would not protect us from the latter. The Fort Lauderdale Hilton, site of the convention for several years, has always been quite helpful, and this was no exception.

They sent us to a nearby doc-in-the-box, and Bernadette is now OK.

Friday morning, we were up early again, as the Stephen King session was scheduled for 8:30 AM. All the papers were good. Edwin Casebeer talked about King's recent linked pair of novels, *Gerald's Game* and *Dolores Claiborne*, as a feminist breakthrough for a writer who had previously been admittedly weak in the treatment of female characters. David O. Oakes brought out the Lovecraftian elements in King's "The Mist." Faye Ringel called our attention to some promising new New England writers of horror: Joseph Citro, Rick Hautala, and (a familiar name to sf fanzine fans) Don D'Amassa. One irony she pointed out is that these new denizens of Lovecraft's territory represent one of HPL's own greatest fears: non-Anglo rabble from Southern and Eastern Europe.

The horror continued in the next session. There is a forthcoming book of studies of contemporary American horror writers, to be called *Understanding the Contemporary American Gothic*. Bernadette is doing the chapter on Straub, but I can now see that there we will be lots of other good stuff in the book, as the panel previewed three other chapters: Michael Morrison on the recent horror scene in general, Lynda and Robert Haas on Anne Rice, and Tony Magistrale on the unsupernatural, but very horrifying, writer Thomas Harris.

The luncheon speaker, James Flannery, has staged Yeats's plays in Dublin. These works are not merely fantastic, but phantasmagorical, putting gods and miracles in front of us, so staging them presents problems. Flannery discussed the plays, then showed slides of his productions, indicating that he had done remarkably well at meeting these challenges.

The afternoon was devoted to a subject of great interest to me: hypertext. I've been hearing about hypertext for years, and it always seems to be around the corner, real soon now, etc. I think it would be great. For instance, it's the one civilized way to handle footnotes. You don't want them on the same page interrupting the flow of the text. (Well, maybe you do, but publishers don't, unless the book is clearly marked as an academic one.) You don't want them all at the end, so that the reader has to keep looking back and forth. (Hypertext means never having to keep your finger in the book.) With

hypertext, the main text could be simple and direct, with the reader touching the screen or pressing a key for further explanation of any term.

I'd love to have hypertext to write this, so people would have as much explanation as they needed. The fanzine readers could look up the literary stuff that the IAFA mailing list would take for granted. The IAFA could look up other references. (His sister-un-law gave him *WHAT* kind of doll?)

But something happened to hypertext. For one thing, it became hypermedia, then multimedia, in a process like the camel getting his nose in the tent. First we heard how nice it would be if hypertext could include a few pictures, and then they added a bit more, and now it has become multimedia CD-ROMs which merely give the user a choice of what pictures to see and what sounds to listen to. (Someone pointed out that leading interface guru Brenda Laurel's popular image of Computers as Theater is turning out in practice to be Computers as Television.)

The first session offered a demonstration of two hypertext programs, and I was cheered to see that the first was so monomedia that it didn't even use a Mac-Vermin. Judith Kerman's Colloquy is a poetry-writing and -reading program that works entirely with text files. The writer creates a first line, then writes a line to go with each word in that line, then a word for each word in each new line, etc. (Of course, it is a good idea to eventually repeat oneself; apparently, 50-100 words works best.) The reader chooses a word at a time, cocreating a new poem. The program isn't quite ready, but Kerman was kind enough to give me a beta test version, which I have been playing with. I like it. (For information, write Judith Kerman, Saginaw Valley State University, 2250 Pierce Road, University Center, MI 48710.)

The other hypertext program we saw was much more sophisticated, postmodern, and multimedia. (My notes do not disgorge author or title.) It had all sorts of amusing things in it, but it also was deliberately set so that ordinary ways of getting out of the program did not work. Someone pointed out that for all the rhetoric of hypertext as a new medium that does not privilege the writer, this particular piece took away two of the traditional readerly recourses--skipping ahead and closing the book. My guess is that a commercially successful version of this program might seem to work like this one, but would also

have to provide an escape, though perhaps not by the usual computer commands--an electronic safeword.

The following paper session was fascinating. Whatever I may have sounded like a few paragraphs ago, I am not entirely an old linear-literate fart who despises all other media, and I thoroughly enjoyed Bud Foote's multimedia discussion of the hypertextuality of Kim Stanley Robinson, which included bits of the traditional jazz songs Robinson mentioned in his story "Coming Back to Dixieland." I've described my own sensibility as retro, cyberdoowop rather than cyberpunk, but this was a step further back: cyberdixieland. Foote also discussed the way the three novels of Robinson's Orange County Trilogy hypertextually refer to each other while apparently discussing mutually exclusive possibilities.

The next paper dealt with the similarities between hypertext and postmodernist critical theories. This is a popular idea now, and I wonder if it isn't being taken a bit too far. Science fiction has always had an experimental and neophilic approach to technology, but when "New Wave" writers took a similar approach to storytelling, a lot of sf fans felt it was not the same thing at all. One wonders whether the purchasers of hypertext programs that are sophisticated as software will be persuaded that a literary approach just as experimental in its own way is what they really want.

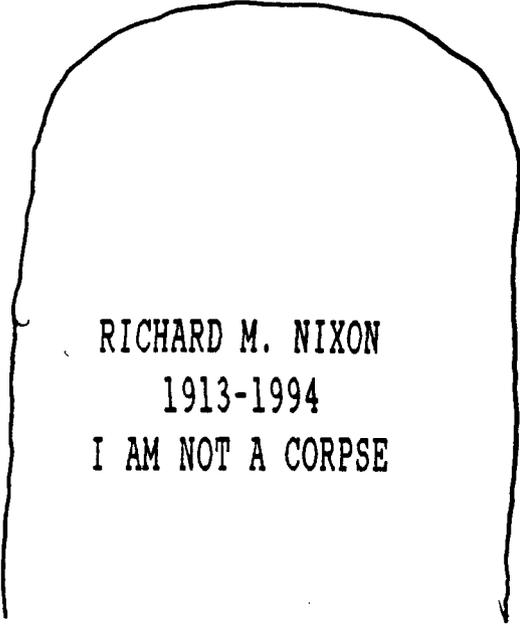
The third paper, by Len Hatfield, informed us about implementations of e-mail, hypertext, etc. in the classroom, as well as some of the literary resources that are now electronically available. I thought it was an excellent paper, and I'm not saying that just because he runs the IAFA mailing list and can presumably reduce this report to random symbols before anyone on the list sees it.

Saturday morning, we once again had to get up early, as Bernadette had been added to a panel discussion on New Directions in Horror. This was my major schedule conflict this year, as it was opposite a discussion of a topic that fascinates me: Star Trek fan fiction, including the kind where Kirk and Spock are lovers. At the risk of sounding postmodern, I find myself interested in alternatives to the traditional one-author approach. For instance, I am less offended than most by the current spate of books which are outlined by a well-known author and then actually written by a newer writer. This is generally treated as some brand new idea, but it is

in fact how paintings were done in the Renaissance. Similarly, I like the idea of a number of people treating a tv series as if it were folk material and writing their own stories in that milieu. (Though, as with many nonstandard sexual practices, I find it more interesting as an idea than actually to do, or even to watch.)

But I went to the Horror panel, and I'm glad I did. Michael Collins talked about the blurring of the lines between horror and "mainstream" fiction; Rob Latham discussed the interface between horror and sf, with writers like K. W. Jeter; Jack Skrip talked about horror in graphic novels and comics; and Bernadette gave paired lists of nine trends and nine nontrends (e.g., there is much more horror being written by women, but little or no politically feminist horror). It was a fascinating and thought-provoking discussion, whose only problem was that there was a good deal more than an hour and a half worth of material in it.

From there to the Alternate Histories session (actually the second one; in this universe I didn't go to the first one). Olena Saciuk discussed the alternate universe in which Robert Silverberg set his brilliant and subtle novella, "Lion Time in Timbuctoo." Robert F. Geary described the ironies of Ward Moore's *Bring the Jubilee*, and Dena Bain Taylor made Tim Powers's *Last Call* sound so good that I'm going to read it very soon.



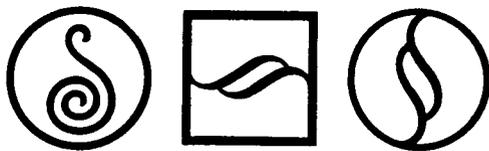
RICHARD M. NIXON

1913-1994

I AM NOT A CORPSE

The last session I attended was a thoroughly enjoyable panel on Gender Roles in Science Fiction, featuring Brian Aldiss, Nicola Griffith, Joe Haldeman, and Jeanne Larsen. (I am happy to hear that the British-born Griffith has just been given permission to stay in the United States, being described in the INS's inadvertently science-fictional prose as "an alien of exceptional ability.") The most fascinating thing I heard at that panel was something Joe Haldeman said: "I have written stories where the main character is homosexual, but no one knows it." He went on to explain that, like Hemingway, he will often write a scene about one of his characters that is not included in the published story, but gives the author an insight into the character that is reflected in unobvious ways in the actual story.

As usual, the Conference was a delight. There are always things that don't fit into the report format, like the help we got from native (or at least resident) guide John Fast, for which we are most grateful. Or my favorite line from the weekend, from Jennifer Stevenson: "You can marginalize anyone if you put your mind to it." That in turn reminds me of the enjoyable conversations we had with those two; with others who've appeared in this report (such as Lisa Padol, Faye Ringel, and Rhonda Brock); and with old friends I haven't mentioned, but definitely enjoyed seeing, like Joe Sanders, Judy Kollman, and Peter Malekin. We'll be back next year.



I continue to enjoy the Internet. Of course, any time I am tempted to get smug about e-mail freeing me from the post office, I get disconnected by line noise and thereby reminded that depending on the phone company is not entirely wonderful either.

I love the ability to quote what I'm commenting to simply by marking & moving. It's what I always wanted to do in apas, to free me from the choice between overly-cryptic comments and excessive retyping. I do, however, quote sparingly, just enough to provide context. And I never quote signature files unless I'm commenting on them. My own is a modest two lines. (I will, however, pass along my favorite one, an unattributed quote used by one Max Chuang: "Let me die peacefully in my sleep,

like my grandfather, not screaming in terror like his passengers.")

Newsgroups I'm now reading: rec.arts.sf.fandom, rec.arts.sf.written, rec.arts.books, rec.sport.football.pro, alt.football.ny-giants, rec.humor, rec.humor.funny, alt.horror, alt.discordia, alt.culture.internet, alt.animation.warner-brothers (looking for stuff about My Totemic Hero), and alt.zines.

My favorite group is rec.arts.books. In science-fiction fandom, I have always preferred the zine culture that starts with books, but feels free to wander off to other topics. R.a.b works that way, with some old friends like Tom Maddox and Jim & Laurie Mann, and a bunch of fascinating new people like Rebecca Crowley, Francis Muir, and a chap named Ted Samsel, who like me seems to have found his art form of choice in the brief mailing comment. The group occasionally descends to surliness or outright meanness, but I am not unfamiliar with that from sf zine fandom.

For a while, I was in alt.tasteless.jokes, but I found too much tasteless and too little joke. Tastelessness, like obscenity and political incorrectness, can coexist with humor, but is a poor substitute for it.

I run into some of the usual problems. Thus far I've posted only one thing that I meant to e-mail privately, and the reference to a third person who then read it wasn't *really* nasty. I might be tempted to fear that everyone but me understands this system perfectly, but I keep seeing "unsubscribe" messages, blank posts, and other indications that I am by no means the only stumbler on the Information Highway. One of my fellow Information Professionals on the ASIS (American Society for Information Science) list just sent me (and God knows how many others) a note saying "UNSUBSCRIBE KISTSERV."

I do occasionally yield to the temptation to use the dread smiley. I was told on one of the good old-fashioned print apas that I should resist. But I'm beginning to think that smileys are like the Words You Can't Say on Television: They offend people; they are horribly overused by most of those who use them; but sometimes they are precisely what one wishes to say.

This argument has of course come up before in print zine fandom, over slashouts and acronyms like HHOK. The case for a digital irony indicator convinced me then and still does. It is very difficult to convey precise tone on the page (or screen), and if the price of failing to do so

is a feud, we should be willing to take advantage of what alternatives we have. There are fans who have the stylistic macho to insist that they can always convey and detect irony without such devices. Such people deserve to be embroiled in bitter wars caused by misunderstanding each other's tone of typer :-)

On the other hand, this comment reminded me that smileys have their drawbacks. I suspect that trying to get much beyond a single Irony Indicator is doomed; I recently saw someone in a newsgroup apologizing for using what he thought was a symbol for raucous laughter, but was being interpreted as a symbol for vomiting. And so I remember that I should probably take a cortico-thalamic pause every time I use a smiley and ask myself if this particular use is really necessary, as I already do with the Words You Can't Say on Television.



Any system that classifies people can be used for praise and blame. There is not an absolute difference between a psychiatrist saying, "latent homosexual with an Oedipus complex," and a street person saying, "motherfucking cocksucker."

I was recently thinking of psychological terms, and how they get used in other contexts. A group of people who feel they've been wronged by a particular writer have banded together in a group called Victims of Ellison. Someone (I wish I could remember who) said that they would be much more in keeping with current psychological paradigms if they called themselves Survivors of Ellison.

A few years ago, Alan Dershowitz did a similar thing. He said that refusal to accept the idea that the German government deliberately killed millions of Jews should be called, not "Holocaust revisionism," but "Holocaust denial."

This strikes me, though, as more than a clever adaptation of a pop-psych paradigm. The evidence of the Holocaust is so overwhelming that saying it didn't exist is in the category with Flat Earthism and *Weekly World News* articles on "Eat Garlic and Live Forever." It is a denial of known fact, different from "revisionism," which asks reasonable questions. (What about groups other than the Jews? Didn't Stalin have a comparable body count? Etc.)

I'm coming to believe that there is another idea that deserves the same sort of terminology: Intelligence denial.

There *is* such a thing as symbol-using intelligence: the ability to understand and change the world by using symbol structures. We see it done every day; many of us do it. It also seems that some people are very good at this sort of thing, and some are less so. Further, I perhaps belabor the obvious by saying that this is a valuable trait.

It is, to be sure, a problematic concept. IQ tests may be culturally biased and probably do not directly measure intelligence. (But those who say "Intelligence is what IQ tests measure" should ask the next question. Is "what IQ tests measure" something completely irrelevant to real symbol-using intelligence?)

The concept has also been used in bad ways. There have been those who said that all Black people are less intelligent than Whites. (A statement no more credible than "There was no Holocaust.") Surely, though, we can separate those out. In fact, it is easier to deal with misuses of a concept if we do not find the concept generally too unpleasant to deal with.

There are good, revisionist questions we can ask about intelligence: Is it the only valuable human trait? (Of course not.) Do current tests measure it well? (Probably not.) Is it better to think of verbal, mathematical, and pictorial intelligence as different things, or aspects of the same thing? (You've got me.) These should not be confused with simple denial.

And the human race needs all the intelligence it can get. We should probably even resist the temptation to take the Intelligence Deniers at their word (about themselves) and ignore what they say.



is the general title I started using for sf reviews when I was in library school and discovered that it's the Dewey Decimal number for "Extraterrestrial History and Culture." This particular collection of reviews, however, will deviate somewhat into associational items.

In the late 1970s, Isaac Asimov put together a couple of tombstone-sized volumes of autobiography: *In Memory Yet Green* and *In Joy Still Felt*. He seemed cursed with the most retentive memory since Borges's Funes the Memorious and all too willing to share the contents with the rest of us.

If Asimov's dubious gift was memory, mine is superficiality, and I was able to read these two massive volumes for the hundred pages or so of genuinely fascinating information therein quickly enough that I did not feel put upon.

We now have the posthumous *I. Asimov* (Doubleday hc), which I can recommend more whole-heartedly. It not only contains more nontrivial material in fewer pages, but it somewhat corrects what I perceived as another excess of the earlier two volumes, that of tact. Asimov lets out his feelings about his first wife and in-laws and lets us know that he never particularly cared for Robert A. Heinlein and liked him even less after Heinlein's simultaneous change of wives and political views. All in all, this is a book with much information and much of the Asimov charm.

That same charm seems to peek through unbidden in an essay on Asimov in Martin Amis's new nonfiction collection, *Visiting Mrs. Nabokov* (Crown hc). Having slogged through the aforementioned two-volume autobio, Amis was in no mood to be pleased by Asimov. (Perhaps not even to read any more of him. Amis describes *Earth Is Room Enough* as an "ecological jeremiad," but in fact that title was slapped on an unrelated collection of short stories.) But in between the condemnations of the books and the descriptions of Asimov as he "mooched out into the street" and "skulked off to his apartment," he lets Asimov speak for himself, and I think that, even if it was not someone whose writing I have enjoyed for years, I would feel affection for someone who describes himself as "a genius, but also a schmuck. It's a big effort for me to behave like other people. I have to concentrate on it, otherwise I'd be impossible."

The Asimov essay is neither the best nor the worst thing in the Amis book, which I found disappointing after his delightful first collection, *The Moronic Inferno*, and his brilliant sf-or-perhaps-slipstream novel, *Time's Arrow*. Better parts of the book include his discussions of J. G. Ballard, Anthony Burgess, and Philip Larkin (who was his brother's godfather or perhaps godlessfather).

Another thing I learned in library school is that neither major classification system (Dewey Decimal, Library of Congress) subdivides fiction by genre, category, mode, etc. My family has adapted that sensible rule for our own books, thus freeing us from a decision on Rosemary Edghill's *Speak Daggers to Her* (Forge hc), which has claims to be described as mystery, thriller, occult, fantasy, speculative fiction, horror, and perhaps good old slipstream. (It also goes on associational sf lists, as its author also has written a space trilogy, as eluki bes shahar.)

What it is, specifically, is a novel about a detective who is a practicing Witch. This effort has been made before, in Mercedes Lackey's Diana Tregarde books, which failed for me by being structured like detective stories, except that they began with a presentation of the occult bad guys, leading to the temptation to look down upon the detective for failing to see what the reader already knew.

Speak Daggers to Her has a charming and witty detective/narrator, and it gives us a perceptive, sympathetic look at the current Pagan community. It is least successful as a mystery, with little or no detection and a dubious plot resolution. It is a pleasant read and, as the first of a projected series, offers the promise of better.

And finally, a real science-fiction novel, though not extraterrestrial. Rudy Rucker was one of the first writers coopted into the cyberpunk movement, but his work has always been far more "cyber" than "punk"--his characters are nerds and neep-neeps, rather than the street-smart toughs of William Gibson. That's fine with me, and I like his sense of humor as well. His newest, *The Hacker and the Ants* (Avon/Morrow hc), is an appealing slapstick cyberspace opera.



A technician who recently gave our photocopier its periodic checkup, cleaning, etc. informed me that the manufacturer is thinking of discontinuing this particular model because it offers too many features for its price. This reminds me of the infamous IBM PCjr. (known to Frank Zappa fans everywhere as the Idiot Bastard Son), designed by IBM not to compete with the company's more expensive PCs in such areas as having a decent keyboard, instead of rows of Chiclets. This is one example of the market working as it should. Junior didn't take customers away from the expensive PCs or from anything else, and eventually it was shelved, at great cost and embarrassment to the Immense Blue Monolith.



We seem to be having a Year of the Jackpot for fiction writers, losing Bob Shea, Ralph Ellison, Raymond Z. Gallun, John Preston, and those two under-recognized novelists, Richard Nixon and Albert Goldman.

Nixon set his fictions in the pseudo-confessional mode, with an implicit "I am not a crook" replacing the more traditional "I am not mad." Robert Coover handled the same material better, but Nixon did what he could.

Goldman is best known for his Celebrity Junkie trilogy, loosely based on the actual lives of Lenny Bruce, Elvis Presley, and John Lennon. Like 1950s Nightstand Books, these tales condemned their characters for giving in to pleasures the author enticingly described, but the subject was drugs, rather than sex. There are those who maintain he'd have had greater thematic unity if he'd concluded the third volume with Lennon overdosing on the toilet as Bruce and Presley had, but for some reason he chose to stick with historical verisimilitude in this one particular case.



There are times when I think that the nation I live in is not quite civilized yet, but at least has outgrown a few of the grosser barbarisms. Other times, I think I am being overly optimistic, having run into one of the things I'd hoped we'd outgrown. Here are three recent atavisms I have encountered:

At the ICFA, a venerable Caucasian gentleman chairing a paper session referred

to the other male participant as "Dr. ----" and the females (both Ph.Ds) as "Miss ----" until called on it by one of the female Doctors.

In Florida an artist was convicted of drawing obscene comics. That in itself is not remarkable, but what takes the case from mere oppression into the realm of surrealistic cruelty is the ruling that he is not even allowed to draw, and will in fact have a probation officer assigned to sneak in and check on him. Perhaps they can achieve the same result at lower personnel cost by adapting one of those 19th-century antimasturbation devices. I imagine they're proud of themselves for not chopping his hand off.

A high-school principal in Alabama threatened to cancel his school's Senior Prom, rather than allow interracial couples to attend. I hope he gets lots of couples who stay with their own kind, the way God meant for them to do. Same race, same sex. . . .



There are times when I enter the voting booth and wish I could vote for "None of the Above." There are times when even that is insufficient to show my distaste, and I wish I could cast a ballot indicating my preference for "A Syphilitic Warthog." Many people would put voting for Howard Stern in that category, and, as a New York State resident, I will probably have the chance to do so.

The pucoming gubernatorial race seems a good choice for that sort of thing, as there is no one I really want to vote for or against. Whether I want to use him as a way of showing my contempt is another question. I do not listen to his notorious radio show, and I haven't read his book. His only serious campaign pledge is restoring the death penalty, which is, to put it mildly, not one of my enthusiasms.

One interesting thing about the election is that the rules may require that if his show remains on the air, his rivals be given equal time. That sounds reasonable, but I think that, to be really fair, if they take the equal time, they should have to use it to discuss flatulence and penis size.



Growing up among Secular Humanists and other unbelievers, I was spared some of the brainwashing most Americans get, but I did hear a certain amount of nonsense, fantasy, and the folklore of the Egghead tribe.

For instance, I was told that the best reading list in the world was the Catholic Church's *Index of Forbidden Books*, a marvelous example of the enemies of free thought selecting the most sexually and intellectually stimulating work.

I never tested this hypothesis, and just as well. The *Index* was abandoned about 30 years ago, but even then it wasn't doing a very good job of keeping up with the latest in smut and godlessness. In fact, the most recent English-language novel on it was *Clarissa*. It did, on the other hand, have at least as many books on ancient Christian heresies as anyone would ever want to read.

This was a valuable lesson in the limitations of "my enemy's enemy" as a selection principle. Those who opposed the Catholic Church were no more uniformly wonderful than those it opposed, including some oxymoronic dogmatic freethinkers and some fundamentalists like Jack Chick whose real message seemed to be "Don't let the Scarlet Whore of Rome imprison the minds of the masses with religious dogma. Let us do it."

Likewise, the anti-communism of congressional committees made many wonder if communism could be *that* bad, and I was cured of my belief that I was a particularly extreme and dogmatic foe of competition when I read Alfie Kohn's *No Contest*, which informs us that competition is something that would not exist at all if it weren't for nasty old capitalism, and therefore we should prevent people from engaging in it.

It's been said that the opposite of a great idea is another great idea, but this seems to indicate that the opposite of a dumb idea is another dumb idea.



Until recently, I was unaware that periwinkle was a color. Then I bought a new parka and was given the option of getting it in periwinkle or spearmint. I would have preferred blue or green, which probably would have been cheaper, but settled for periwinkle. ||

Today, someone was unfairly nasty to John Lennon. I wouldn't have thought it possible; I know I am in a minority here, but I consider him grossly overrated as an artist, and so vile as a person that he deserved both Yoko and Albert Goldman (though probably not Mark David Chapman).

But CBS-FM (the oldies station) managed to be unfairly nasty to him. They listed the top 101 Oldies Artists, in order, and he was somewhere in the 90s, *behind Johnny Tillotson*.



I hear that the physicists have finally discovered the "top" quark. I know that quarks have charm, strangeness, and color, but isn't a bit much for them to have a sado-masochistic orientation as well? Perhaps it should be called the John Preston Memorial top quark.



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Sequel (and ye shall find better)

Someone pointed out that it makes sense for UPS to send mail to people at addresses it can't deliver to because the Post Office might have a COA for them.

Sean Haugh has suggested a some more literary Chris Bermanisms, including Doris "Let That Be a" Lessing "to You" and Stanley "Teach a Man to" Fish. Another that occurred to me is current superstar Robert James "Fats" Waller. Which reminds me: Does Grisham's Law say that lawyer novels drive everything else off the best-seller lists?

Susie Bright liked Bernadette's story; it will appear in the next *Year's Best American Erotica* collection. Bernadette also appears in *Fat Women Speak: Journeys towards Self-Acceptance* (Crossing Press tpb) and will have a scholarly essay in a collection of writings on Charles Williams. Is that versatility or what?

Apparently, Judith's Room is a feminist, rather than Lesbian, bookstore. Just shows you what I notice. (I'd probably be a Lesbian if I could pass the physical.)

Last issue I said that criminalizing tobacco would "further clog our already costive criminal justice system." A helpful and perceptive reader asked if I meant "costly." Nope--~~costive~~--clogged, blocked, not moving properly. Sometimes I think I am too clever (or try to be). The phrase "sister-un-law" in thisish is not a typo; Bernadette and I are not lawfully married, so her sisters are my sisters-un-law.

Neil Rest's statement that anyone who Really Really knows Unix has substantial impairment in English has drawn replies from counterexamples such as Liz Copeland and Eric Raymond.

I mentioned earlier in this zine that a paper I heard at the ICFA made me want to read Tim Powers's *Last Call*. I did so, and I thoroughly enjoyed it. I love the idea of a story in which Bugsy Siegel is the Fisher King.

In fact, I generally like what I think of as Gringo Magic Realism--fantastic treatment of the folklore of urban, electronic US society. This includes Robert Coover's *The Public Burning*; great conspiracy fiction like *The Manchurian Candidate*, *The Crying of Lot 49*, and *Illuminatus!*,

Sharon N. Farber's "Space Aliens Saved My Marriage" (based on tabloid lore), and some of the alternate celebrity stories in the Mike Resnick anthologies. Other suggestions are solicited.

I finally learned how to transfer addresses from e-mail direct to my address file, using the computer's copying skills, which are far superior to mine. (The command in pine is "t" and it is not shown on the regular screen.) This and other useful information appears in *Internet Instant Reference*, by Paul E. Hoffman (Sybex tpb), which I strongly recommend.

I still do not know how to send news posts to my printer, using tin, but I can mail them to myself and then use pine's print command. It is possible that my failure in this regard is Not My Fault.

We Also Heard From

Doug Barbour, Neil Belsky, Camden Benares, Mark Bernstein, Al Bouchard, Janice Christopher, Chris Conway, Chris Croughton, Rebecca Leann Smit Crowley, Reina Delacroix, Benet Devereaux, Don Busky, Janice Eisen, Sharon N. Farber, John S. Fast, Doug Faunt, Elizabeth Fox, Bill Garland, Jesse Garon, Janice Gelb, Mary Gray, Mike Gunderloy, Dave Haber, Blair Haworth, Alan Hecht, Robert K. Hinton, Ken Holder, Sharon Klavins, David Kovar, Brant Kresovich, Dave Langford, Eric Lindsay, Laurie Mann, Phillip Moon, Patrick Nielsen Hayden, Bryan Perry, Neil Rest, J. Katherine Rossner, Heath Row, Joyce Scrivner, Kelly Setzer, Anton Sherwood, Jack Speer, David Thayer, Amy Thomson, Henry Welch, and the inevitable People I Forgot to List.

Art Index

Linda Hardy--cover
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Let me remind you again: There are electronic and print versions of this zine. If you're getting both and want only one, getting one and want both, or want the other, let me know.

