

The Diagonal Relationship 14



Cop walking his beet

H. Bogin
4/25/30



The Diagonal Relationship

This is the July, 1980, issue of THE DIAGONAL RELATIONSHIP. Editor & Publisher: Arthur D. Hlavaty, 250 Coligni Ave., New Rochelle, NY 10801, 914-632-1594. Consultant: Adrienne Fein, All material written by the editor unless otherwise indicated. Copyright © 1980 by Arthur D. Hlavaty. All rights returned to contributors. This is W.A.S.T.E. Paper # 175; Volume 4, Number 2; Whole Number 14. This issue is available for \$1, letter of comment, trade, or artwork. If there is an X after your name on the envelope, you should send at least one of the above if you wish to receive the next issue.

The Engineer and Me

0. Intercourse and Relationships

We begin with a deceptively simple question: What is a story? Of course, we can define the word "story" in the two ways words are defined--verbally ("a story is a work of fiction") and ostensibly (by pointing to suitable examples). But what does it mean, for instance, to say that two stories are "really" the same story?

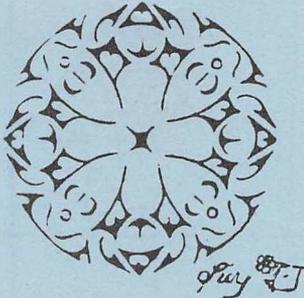
For instance, imagine that a story is published in a magazine, and there is a typographical error, which is corrected when the story is reprinted in a book. Presumably, the two stories are "really" the same story.

But are they? When Norman Mailer's novel WHY ARE WE IN VIETNAM? was first published, it concluded with the words, "Vietnam, hot damn." Mailer was incensed. The publishers, he said, had blundered and ruined his book. Subsequent editions have concluded, as Mailer intended them to, with the words, "Vietnam, hot dam."

In fact, I know of another book where I found a change amounting to less than a single letter significant. In that book, or the hardcover edition of it, one comes to a scene where the protagonist is about to find out What It All Means. This occurs on the bottom line of the right-hand page.

One turns the page, and the next page, and all the rest of the pages are blank. In the paperback edition, the novel clearly ends there, and (to me, anyway) something is lost.

Then, too, there is the fact that stories, like everything else, exist in a context. A story is written by a particular person, in a particular culture, at a particular time. There are critics (those who practice what I believe is still known as "the new criticism") who insist that this fact must be utterly ignored. Others maintain that the more knowledge one has about the context of a story, the better one can discuss it. Each approach has problems. The new criticism seems like a sort of willed ignorance. And yet the other approach leads to paradoxes too, as pointed out by Jorge Luis Borges in his "Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote," where he interprets a quote from Cervantes and a quote from his fictional author Menard as greatly different in meaning, even though they consist of the same words. (A similar paradox that I've mentioned here before is a story about the relationships of the sexes, called "The Women Men Don't See." It was published under the name of "James Tiptree, jr." It is now known that the author is a woman named Alice Sheldon. In what sense is Mr. Tiptree's "The Women Men Don't See" the same story as Ms. Sheldon's "The Women Men Don't See"?)



Tibetan Buddhist psychology includes the concept of sparsa--the idea that any act of perception is actually a ternary relationship among perceived object, perceiving self, and perceptual medium. Before I'd seen this term, I suggested (in DR 1), a similar view of literature by which a "story" may be defined as an act of verbal intercourse between a writer and a reader, in which the printed words on the page are the medium.

This approach has several advantages. It is neither strictly objective nor strictly subjective; that is, it does not reduce reading to an activity like monitoring scientific devices, but leaves room for treating the act of perception as a personal and even creative one. At the same time, it avoids absolute subjectivity, since disagreements over a given story can at least be discussed by reference to the text. (If someone were to maintain that there is no character in *ILLUMINATUS!* named Hagbard Celine, the answer would be not, "That's your opinion," but "That's wrong.")

It means, too, that if we are going to judge books, the standards by which we do so are not absolute. We can, if we wish, judge in terms of traditional literary standards such as style, characterization, & plot. On the other hand, others may choose to decide on the basis of Excitement, Social Relevance, or Exquisitely Described Blow Jobs, and their judgments can be as valid within their system. Thus a reviewer's recommendations are valid for a particular reader only to the extent that reviewer & reader share the same criteria.

We can use this model to look at the approaches to literary criticism in general, and choose whichever one seems the most comfortable on an individual basis. The traditional historical approach to the study of English literature is that one begins with *BEOWULF* and reads the Major Works up through, let us say, T. S. Eliot, seeing how each fits into the historical pattern established by its predecessors. The advantage to this is that it gives a much more varied & much richer view of the works read. The disadvantage is that you have to read a lot of shit. You may decide for yourself which consideration is more important for you.

The New Criticism represents a certain purity of approach. The mind is disciplined to ignore such matters as historical background, biographical information on the author, etc. I find such discipline to be

beyond my powers, but I do not condemn those who can do it.

I prefer to read with some sense of history, and to relate one story by a given author to previously-read stories by the same author. If a story is an act of intercourse, then the reading of many stories by the same author can constitute a relationship, sometimes a highly meaningful one.

In the very first issue of DR, I remarked that I did not care for certain approaches to story telling, including oblique and evasive presentation, fragmented story telling, etc. I carefully indicated that I was describing my own preferences in literary intercourse, rather than setting down laws of literary merit. Nonetheless, some felt that I was slighting favored authors of theirs, and indicated that there might be inconsistencies in my approach, especially as I spoke of liking particular works which might seem to fall under the headings I was condemning in general.

Considering those replies, I came to realize that my reactions to a given story are in part conditioned by my previous relationship with the author in question. So when John Brunner opened *STAND ON ZANZIBAR* with a burst of seemingly random information about characters unknown to me, I decided to grant the author of *THE WHOLE MAN* and *THE LONG RESULT* a presumption of competence, reading a while longer with as open a mind as possible before condemning the book as the sort of gibberish it at first appeared to me. I was rewarded for this approach by one of the more enjoyable literary experiences of my life. Other writers, however, have not convinced me that they have earned the trust I gave Brunner, and thus I will abandon their books with a feeling of auctorial persecution when perhaps a further reading would have been justified.

Of course, this business of having a relationship with an author is a bit tricky. Authors are, in a sense, paid liars, and they learn certain forms of guile. One should beware the common vulgar error of assuming that if the narrator of a story is a child molester, a mass murderer, or a socialist, the author must be one, too.

At the same time, I would avoid the equal & opposite error of assuming that since fiction is all made up anyway, we can never know anything about authors from their work. There are, of course, writers like Harlan Ellison who go to great lengths to remind the reader (via prefaces, etc.) that the story being read is not some self-begotten artifact, but the work of an actual human being who lives & breathes & suffers.

It seems reasonable to me to think of a sort of hypothesized author that I create from the actual author's writings. I do not presume to know even so open a writer as Harlan Ellison, even though I have read every word of his I could get my hands on.

And yet, I do have a relationship with "Harlan Ellison"--the name on a story that tells me that it is likely (tho by no means certain) that I will enjoy & appreciate the story in question. My expectations (and thus my reading of the story) are conditioned by the relationship.

With that philosophical background out of the way, we may turn to my major topic--the writings of the Engineer, Robert A. Heinlein, and my relationship to him, or more precisely, to the authorial personality I perceive in his writings. I call this personality "Mr. Heinlein" because there is a certain formality to his approach and because one of the things he has been to me is teacher, and I was brought up to address my teachers in such as formal manner.

1. The Engineer as Writer

The fact that Robert A. Heinlein was an engineer before he was a writer is frequently brought up in discussions of his work. To many people, the idea of the same person being an engineer and a writer at the same time seemed like a contradiction in terms.

I am tempted to feel that way for one idiosyncratic reason. The college I attended (Swarthmore) attempted to attract engineers & made it easier for them to enter. This led to the Affirmative Action Syndrome, in which most of us were there because we were qualified, but the engineers were there because they belonged to the appropriate minority, and it showed. Thus, both artistic types & pure scientists (and I, as a student of philosophy & mathematics, was on the borderline) felt justified in regarding engineers as inferior, a conclusion which I have since learned does not hold in the Real World.

But there are more general reasons for finding the idea of a writer-engineer paradoxical. There is the whole Two Cultures bit--the idea that there is some sort of conflict between the arts & the sciences. Some think it reasonable that ability in one would conflict with ability in the other. To me, this makes about as much sense as assuming that one could sing or dance, but not both. (Of course, it might be fairer if one could do one but not both, but as everyone knows, or should know, the Creator is ~~not~~ fair.)

Furthermore, at least in theory, engineers are professionals, and writers are artists, and these are two different personality types. There is something to that. Professionals, in the ideal, are like the rest of us, only more competent in their chosen field. Artists are Different. We can go back to Socrates and his image of poets as Holy Lunatics, writing in fits of creative madness, with no idea what they are doing, and afterwards no more understanding of what they have done than any other reader. An exaggeration, to be sure, but there is something to it.

According to the currently popular hemispheric model of the human brain, professionals work largely with the steady, rational left hemisphere, applying the Thinking function. Artists, on the other hand, work largely with the right brain, that dark mysterious portion wherein resides the puzzling Intuition function. The right brain is by its nature untrustworthy & unpredictable, subject to flashes of genius, but resistant to being told to behave predictably.

Another oversimplification, of course. Both hemispheres work in everyone, except a few pathological cases, and even there it is apparently possible for one side to take over some of the functions of the other. Thus, it would seem perfectly possible for the same person to be part engineer and part artist.

But I would take the argument one step further, and say that there is room in the literary world for those who are primarily professionals, rather than artists.

A work of literature can be seen as an attempt to do 2 things at once--to communicate with the reader, and to express the writer's Self. These two functions are not precisely opposed to each other, but there is a certain tension between them. There is the highly personal self-expressive work of writers like Joyce & Pound, which is hard to comprehend, and there is the formulaic writing in genres such as SOL & Gothics, which shows little self-expression at all. Of course, a good deal of writing (and this is the kind I like best) does some of both, but probably it does less of either than work that concentrates on one. Thus we may speak of the professional writer as one who is primarily concerned with communication, and learns certain skills & techniques to further that end.

Which brings us to Heinlein and his contribution to science fiction. In 1938, a would-be scientist named John W. Campbell became the editor of ASTOUNDING SCIENCE FICTION. He ran the magazine in a way not unlike a laboratory. He proposed ideas which his professional writers "experimented upon" by writing stories. This cooperative method worked in many cases. Isaac Asimov was one of the writers Campbell developed by this method. Asimov's account of the origin of the famous Three Laws of Robotics makes it clear that the laws were discovered by the two of them; neither would have done it alone.

Heinlein was perhaps the best of these scientist-writers, and certainly the most influential. I would say that his influence was not so much a matter of any of the stories that he created, but rather in the way he designed the tools which science fiction writers have used ever since.

Science fiction faces one specific technical problem: It is set in backgrounds which are different in kind from those in which the reader lives. To deal with this requires a different approach, and it was Heinlein who had much to do with developing this approach.

Before him, characters tended to go on at great length about matters which should have been obvious to both of them. Windy expository lumps filled page after page as readers waited more or less patiently for the characters to do something interesting. It was Heinlein who did most to develop subtler ways of indicating the differences between the world in which the story was set and contemporary consensus reality.

I do not wish to oversimplify. There were writers before Heinlein who recognized the problem and did things about it. And it would certainly be overly optimistic to say that he solved the problem for once & for all.

Another contribution Heinlein made was the Future History--a consistent pattern for a future into which a number of novels & stories could be fitted. This too can be seen as a technical solution to a technical problem: The fact that the background may be the hardest part of the book, and it's used up. (This was especially serious as long as it was assumed that a science fiction book had to be less than 200 pages.)

Finally, Heinlein served (and continues to) as science fiction's recruiting agent. It is generally conceded that he wrote some of the best juvenile books the field has ever produced.

This too can be seen as a function of technical abilities. I would suggest that the best way to write juvenile science fiction is not (definitely not) to say, "What can I write for the sweet innocent little dears?" but to produce a stripped-down minimalistic form of writing in which plot & character complexities are minimized. To do this is by no means easy, but it's a matter of professional skill, rather than artistic inspiration. (One difference between adult & juvenile fiction that may spring to mind is that the latter is required to have little or no obscenity or explicit copulation. Doing this without appearing wishy-washy is likewise a technical matter. In any event, allegedly adult science fiction, at the time Heinlein was writing his juveniles--the 50s--rarely had much of these ingredients.)

I was not, in fact, recruited by Heinlein in my teenage years, as so many science fiction readers were. I began to read him when I was 23, and familiar with writers like Pohl & Asimov. And then I read STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND.

2. The Engineer Steps Out

Let me backtrack a moment, and reintroduce the shadowy "Mr. Heinlein"--the figure I project from my reading of the works written by an actual human being named Robert A. Heinlein and somewhat resembling the real Heinlein, as a representational portrait resembles its subject. I see him in the year 1959, with no more worlds to conquer, or so it might seem. He has written the short stories & novels since collected as THE PAST THROUGH TOMORROW. He has written a bold metaphysical speculation called BEYOND THIS HORIZON and a minor masterpiece called DOUBLE STAR, the one book I would recommend to those who wish to see the best of Heinlein in a small space. He has written a group of highly successful juveniles, such as STAR BEAST and RED PLANET. For him to remain within the confines of his craft would be to condemn himself to repetition of what he has already done. For him to become an artist after his years as a professional would be the sort of drastic and incredible character change that is rightly condemned whenever it shows up in fiction. What to do? I imagine him deciding to move from the science fiction he has mastered (in his own terms) to the overlapping field of didactic fiction.

As the professional writer is considered secondary to the artistic writer, so we may say that didactic fiction is secondary to more esthetic types. C. S. Lewis, in his brilliant EXPERIMENT IN CRITICISM, suggests that the highest form of relationship between writer and reader is one in which the reader "receives" the work of art--accepts it as a thing unto itself--rather than "using" it.

I confess. I use fiction. If a work of fiction seems to me to contain interesting ideas or useful insights into the human condition, I use them, and I will admit that I find such values more important than the standard literary ones. There are works of fiction (CATCH-22 and ILLUMINATUS! spring to mind) which have in a very real sense made me what I am today. I cannot imagine a person who had not read those books and yet was still me.

A more public argument. Eric Berne's GAMES PEOPLE PLAY has enough fascinating, well-rounded characters in it for a dozen novels, yet it is a work of nonfiction. Florence King has written three delightful books--SOUTHERN LADIES AND GENTLEMEN; W.A.S.P., WHERE IS THY STING; and HE--which do not purport to be works of "social science," are generally shelved in the nonfiction sections, and are full of fascinating characters who may be disguised real people, or composites, or constructs. Do I have to decide which category I must put her books in before I am permitted to decide whether I may use them or must receive them?

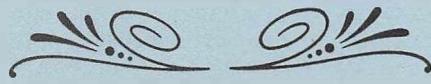
Perhaps I grow cynical and smart-assed. In all seriousness, I believe that receiving a work of literature can be a magnificent & ennobling experience. All I wish to question is the apparent assumption that those who use literature are dummies or slobs, or at least in some sense second-rate.

Didactic fiction, then, is impure literature, but what it is alloyed with need not be valueless. To be sure, didactic fiction may have been a source of even more bad writing than porn. If it were literally impossible to write the stuff, all the world's vanity presses would probably fold tomorrow. Even

the stuff that gets published without being subsidized by its author tends to be quite bad. Often the book does not meet even the most charitable literary criteria, and often the ideas presented are banal, vicious, or both. And yet if one can put up with limited literary merit and story values in a book: that expands consciousness with a sense of wonder, why not make the same concession for something that raises consciousness through its discussion of ideas?

Consider George Bernard Shaw, whose plays are often debates, but brilliantly written & argued ones. Consider BRAVE NEW WORLD, ISLAND, and 1984, with their differing looks at What Might Be. Or consider THE HARRAD EXPERIMENT, by Robert H. Rimmer. Its flaws are many and obvious: The dialog could not be spoken, the plot is crude, there is an impossible niceness to virtually the characters, and when Rimmer speaks through a female narrator, the result is every bit as convincing a woman as Milton Berle in a dress. But many people, including me, have been changed by the sexual ideas presented in that book. I read it 13 years ago, and read such far better (literarily) novels as DUNE and THE COMEDIANS at the same time. I remember much of HARRAD, and no longer remember the others.

In any event, at the cusp I spoke of earlier, Heinlein wrote a book called STARSHIP TROOPERS. That creaking noise you just heard was me bending over backwards in an attempt to be fair to the book. I believe it is fair to say that the book is militaristic. It glorifies the military, particularly the foot soldier. I believe it is neither fair nor accurate to say that it is totalitarian, fascistic, bloodthirsty, or latently homosexual, tho each of these has been said by at least one intelligent critic. I am too unsympathetic with militarism to discuss the book properly. I agree with Alexei Panshin's description of the book as the written equivalent of a recruiting poster. It is, shall we say, didactic fiction, and perhaps effective with those who lean in the way it points.



3. I Meet the Engineer

In 1966, I didn't know all this. I'd read a few of Heinlein's earlier books, and enjoyed them, and so when a family friend (who, I later realized, resembled Jubal Harshaw more than anyone I had met before or have met since) recommended that I read STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND, I took his advice.

And was changed. The book has been misunderstood even more than STARSHIP TROOPERS. What I give you is my interpretation of the two most relevant (to me) parts of the book.

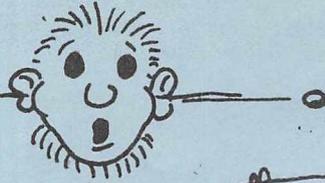
1. Thou Art God. When STRANGER came out, its religious doctrines were misunderstood even by such knowledgeable critics as James Blish, who assumed that they were some sort of weirdness that the author had made up all by himself. I had the good fortune to realize shortly after reading the book that its Martian blasphemy was in fact Hindu orthodoxy. When I say that Heinlein explained Eastern doctrine as an engineer would, I am paying him a compliment. Another aspect of the hemispheric brain model is that verbal abilities are localized in the left hemisphere, while feelings of oneness with the Universe appear in the right half. This makes it hard to discuss such feelings in intelligible terms, and leads to the sort of "yeah, you know, man, like, everything is, like, you know, everything, man, and like it's all groovy" that those of us who lived through the hippie era are all too familiar with. But like Alan Watts, whom I also discovered around that time, Heinlein literally had his head together and found ways to discuss his right-brain feelings with left-brain skills.

2. Let's Grok Again. And then there was the sex. The writings of Albert Ellis had already convinced me that there were people who were not made for heterosexual monogamy & were not necessarily sickies & perverts, but it was STRANGER that convinced me that I might be one of them. Oh, at first I figured that I might not quite be ready for the sort of Nest Heinlein described until such time as I developed telepathy & other Powers, but the feeling was there, and other books (such as the aforementioned HARRAD EXPERIMENT) would move me further.

One thing that did not bother me about STRANGER was the fact that it was written by the author of STARSHIP TROOPERS, even though the supposed inconsistencies between the 2 books bothered a lot of people.

The idea that the same author could write a sex-freedom manifesto and a defense of militarism bothered quite a few people. To some, it indicated an acutely split personality; to others, reaffirmation of the dogma that you can't tell the writer by the book, but everyone took it as strange.

Fuck Off! I'm busy loving the world.



I didn't. I took it as further evidence that one of the basic images I had grown up with was wrong. I'd been taught that political & social views could be put on a scale from Left to Right, and that people were consistent in such matters, so that someone who was 2 units to the Left (as I was brought up to be) favored civil rights, a mixed economy, legalization of porn as long as it had literary merit, and so on, and that anybody who liked some of these but opposed others was inconsistent, or simply wrong.

I think the first time that bothered me was when I heard of the Leo Frank lynching. Frank was lynched for being a not-too-plausible subject in a rather gross murder, and mainly for being Jewish. The leader of the lynch mob was a Populist. Now that didn't make sense, according to what I was taught, because Populism was Left and anti-Semitism was Right. Didn't he realize he was being inconsistent?

Inconsistency was everywhere. I was reading the PLAYBOY Philosophy & watching Hugh Hefner defend sex freedom (Left) and free enterprise (Right). THE REALIST seemed Left (sometimes excessively so), but they published a fellow named Wilson who appeared to be neither Left, Right, nor Center, and insisted that were other people before him (named Tucker & Spooner & Stirner) who likewise did not fit the mold, but you wouldn't find out about them in your Official History books.

Anyway, with all this, it did not bother me that this Mr. Heinlein could write a militarist book and a sex-freedom book. In 1967, he wrote a book called THE MOON IS A HARSH MISTRESS (which you might want to call a libertarian book), and a lot of stuff began to make sense to me, but that is one digression too many in what is already a long & loosely structured ~~various~~ essay.

4. The Fired Engineer

Meanwhile, back in the science-fiction community, there was consternation. For one thing, even among those who read the literature of the future, there are some who are comforted by repetition of what they have loved in the past. Heinlein was clearly doing something different. And of course, even among those who were not hidebound traditionalists, there was the feeling that Heinlein's new emphasis on didactics was a mistake.

As they say in the world of music, Heinlein had become a crossover performer, and a lot of science fiction people were wondering why. Two other science-fiction writers--Ray Bradbury and Kurt Vonnegut--

had crossed over, but they had done so by denying their roots and being picked up by the Literary Establishment. Heinlein hadn't done this. He was attracting a different following.

For this militarist had become a guru to the hippies. His blend of group sex & Eastern religion was very close to the ethos of the Haight-Ashbury, so much so that he could be forgiven a few negative references to marijuana and such.

Some science-fiction people took offense at this alliance, and when it was revealed that Charles Manson & his gang had claimed to be following the precepts of STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND, there were those who said, "I told you so."

It is of course at least as unfair to blame the Manson murders on STRANGER as to blame the Bible for the millions of murders done in its name. Manson was obviously reinterpreting the book to suit himself. To be sure, the good guys in the book did disincorporate a number of bad guys. (Nowhere near as many as in STARSHIP TROOPERS) But they did so by mental powers. There is a belief in occult circles that advanced mental powers come only through a training program which assures that the trainee is ready to use them, thus assuring that no one will kill out of ignorance or simple-minded greed. STRANGER represented this tradition. The message of the book in this regard is that the Enlightened Ones are licensed to kill only when they have reached an advanced stage of consciousness such that they can do so by sheer mental abilities. If you need to use knives, you're not ready.

In any event, at this time of discontent with his writing, Heinlein published what many of us consider his worst book. I WILL FEAR NO EVIL is long, talky, actionless, & repetitive. Worse, yet, it seems to show a loss of creative control. Johann Sebastian Bach Smith is supposed to be the sort of lovable old curmudgeon Juhul Harshaw was. Instead, he comes across as the sort of cranky old fart who is forever dis-inheriting his grandchildren for yawning the 23d time he tells them how he made his first million. There is a point about seven-eighths of the way through the book where something happens that makes no sense to me. I accept the idea that Johann & Eunice can share the consciousness of Eunice's body after Johann's brain is transplanted into it. But then, another character dies and joins them. I've never gotten an explanation of this because almost no one has read that far.

I WILL FEAR NO EVIL was almost universally despised within the science-fiction community, but if Heinlein cared one way or the other about this reaction, he gave no sign of it. Three years later, he published TIME ENOUGH FOR LOVE.



5. To the Uncertain Future

TIME ENOUGH FOR LOVE is a mixed book that drew a mixed reaction. It is immense, and at least as loosely constructed as this essay--a fictional frame into which are jammed several short stories, a few vignettes, 2 selections of aphorisms, and a great deal of dialog. There is a lack of story values in the main narrative; a crucial escape by the good guys takes place entirely offstage and is hardly described. (I imagine Mr. Heinlein deciding that he needn't do that sort of thing again because he's already proved that he can do it, and getting away with it--in the sense of getting the book published without it, if not escaping critical brickbats--because of his reputation.)

There are those who say that Heinlein, having written a number of Juveniles, is now doing Seniles. There are those--like Spider Robinson--who consider him a near-perfect writer who's never been better. Both views strike me as oversimplified. The continuing-decay approach fails since I consider TIME ENOUGH FOR LOVE much better than I WILL FEAR NO EVIL. And yet, there are, for me, problems & defects which continue, and some which continually worsen.

There will be 2 new books by Heinlein out soon--a novel entitled THE NUMBER OF THE BEAST and a compendium called EXPANDING UNIVERSE, consisting of stories, essays, and much newmaterial.

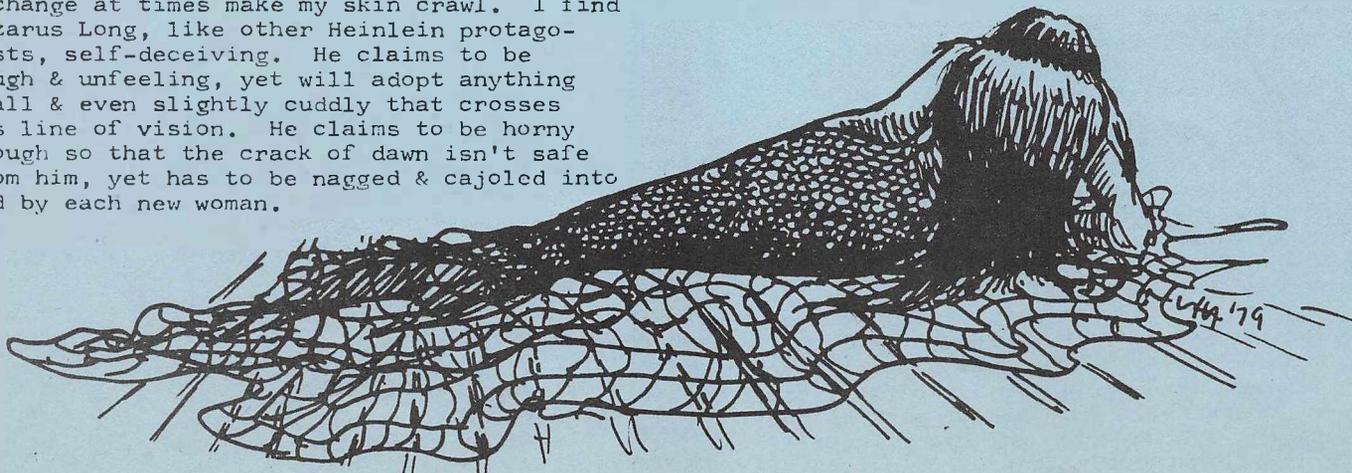
And then there is sex. Heinlein has always tried not to be a male-chauvinist pig, even before others noticed such problems, and that is a point in his favor. He has not, however, succeeded. Twenty years ago, he wrote PODKAYNE OF MARS, in which he presented a teenage girl as competent, intelligent, & efficient, something that feminists would be calling for years later. And yet, he gave her a prose style cute enough to gag a maggot because he could not imagine a teenage girl talking any other way. There are similar problems in TIME ENOUGH FOR LOVE. The sex in the book is casual & permissive; bisexuality is utterly accepted. (Those who say that Heinlein suffers from hardening of the categories should note that this is an advance from the squeamish dismissal of gay sex in STRANGER.) But the sex herein is more unusual than that. It has been described as masturbatory, incestuous, or just plain solipsistic. One might say that the Heinlein protagonist, faced with the two traditional obscene insults of Western society--go fuck yourself and fuck your mother--treats them as reasonable suggestions. This too has bothered many readers.

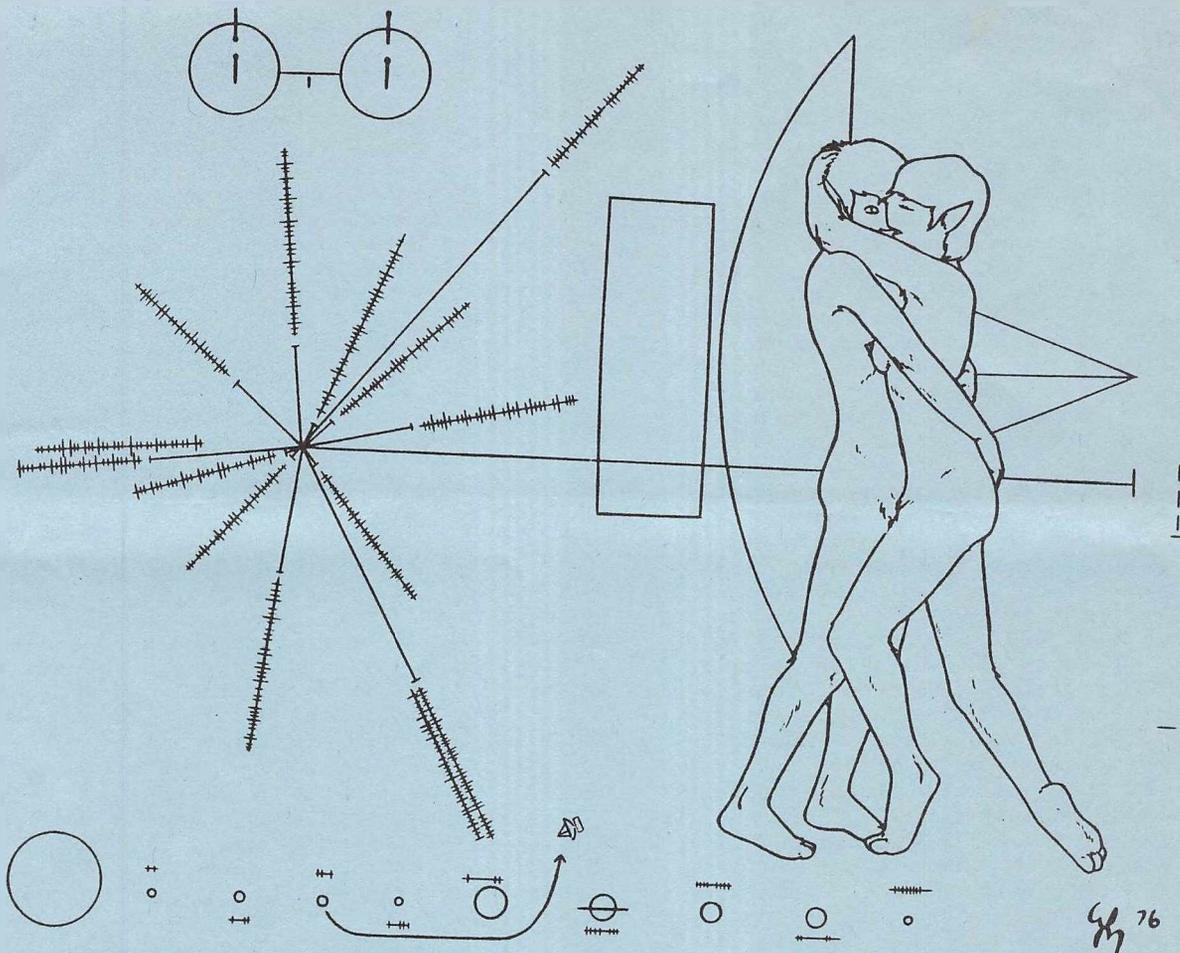
THE NUMBER OF THE BEAST has been excerpted in OMNI. I began to read it, but foreboding seized me immediately when I noticed that it began with the hero & heroine having a light-hearted discussion of the latter's tits. It is generally agreed by all but the staunchest Heinlein worshippers that light-hearted erotic/romantic banter has always been one of the Master's weak points. He hasn't changed a bit. After a page or so, my teeth were standing on edge; my crap detector was buzzing, ringing, lighting up, and setting off smoke bombs; and my suspension-of-disbelief mechanism was loudly announcing that it would never function again if I did not disconnect it at once.

Thus the irritating but fascinating Mr. Heinlein. He glorifies war & children, but has never been involved in the former or had the latter. He can be windy, cranky, & opinionated. His hand has lost at least some of its skill.

And yet there is the other side. He presents ideas well. His dialog, at its best, crackles with wit, and only a few of the best writers--like Lawrence Sanders & George V. Higgins--surpass him. He can be unpredictable. Mr. Heinlein, I eagerly await these 2 meetings and hope there will be many more.

I believe that the book has been treated unfairly, but there are fair negative things one can say about it. I consider it verbose, tho not as much so as I WILL FEAR NO EVIL. The continuing endearments the characters exchange at times make my skin crawl. I find Lazarus Long, like other Heinlein protagonists, self-deceiving. He claims to be tough & unfeeling, yet will adopt anything small & even slightly cuddly that crosses his line of vision. He claims to be horny enough so that the crack of dawn isn't safe from him, yet has to be nagged & cajoled into bed by each new woman.





ANOTHER IMMODEST PROPOSAL

"The trouble with minorities was that they tended to outnumber you."
 --Peter De Vries

there are many who consider us Weird, or at least Not Real Folks.

Now here's my plan.

There are advantages to belonging to an officially designated minority. Not only does one become fashionable and have a built-in excuse for failure, but there are now a great variety of Official Government Protections for Standard-BRAND minority members. And so, taking their cue from groups like Blacks & women, who really are at a diasadvantage, others have flocked to claim Persecuted status, and demand assistance from the Great Parent in Washington.

We should have excessive intelligence officially declared a Handicap. We can get our social scientists (there are some social scientists in our minority, tho not many) to write treatises explaining our oppression. One part of the trick is to devise a new word; I suggest *hyperlexia*.

I've always wanted to be part of a minority, but it hasn't been easy. I'm half Jewish, but in Suburban America, that hardly counts. I mean, I'm not going to tell some Black dude that I understand oppression because there are country clubs that won't take me. There was a brief fad for Ethnic Americans--Slavs and such--about 10 years ago, but that didn't last.

Consider the advantages. Special classes & even schools for Our Kind will be permitted again, and there can no longer be the argument that these are oppressive because those left out will feel picked on. We can have money appropriated for those with our handicap. We can even have quotas, and force people to hire us, because once hyperlexia is officially declared a handicap, it will be as illegal to discriminate against us as it is to discriminate against those who suffer from other officially declared handicaps like schizophrenia and alcoholism. (I am not making that up.)

Now, however, I've decided that I do belong to a Minority--the overly intelligent. Not only are we numerically a minority, but we are persecuted. School kids pick on the intelligent as they pick on anyone who is Different. Teachers weight us down with the burden of a Great Potential. In later life,

I call upon the overly intelligent everywhere to rally 'round. I call upon Mensa to redefine itself as a liberation movement.

Equal rights for the hyperlexic!

FROM SILENT TRISTERO'S EMPIRE

Adrienne Fein
26 Oakwood Ave.
White Plains, NY 10605



Robert Anton Wilson
California

For someone who claims to be allergic to layout & real art, your zine is getting very visual, but I must point out that the lettering on the cover of DR 13 has no redeeming social graces.

Agreed. *sigh* The larger I do lettering, the worse it is.

The idea of male/female energy as opposition may be related to the concept of monotheism. There is human, and there is God: opposites. C. S. Lewis went so far as to suggest that the force of God is so far above us that it is masculine and all human beings are feminine in relation to it (THAT HIDEOUS STRENGTH). Polytheism, a diversity of powers, might be more consistent with male/female as similar as well as opposite, with male/male, female/female... a variety of types of creative life-giving and life-supporting energies.

The belief that a man must give a woman an orgasm--in the sense that it is purely a matter of his competent performance--is sexist. On the other hand, it might be less-worse than the idea that a man has no obligation to help his partner enjoy sex. The English language doesn't seem to have a suitable vocabulary in common use for sharing sex! Most of the terms seem to imply that sex is something one person does to the other, rather than something they share. In fact, the way I think many people feel about orgasm is that one per partner--at least one--is a Dire Need, and if it doesn't happen every time, one person must have Failed.

I don't think it works that way at all. Sex is sharing pleasure, and the less performance-oriented or goal-oriented it is, the better. It is true that if one person continually has orgasms and the other does not, or one person feels that s/he CANNOT reach orgasm, that is a frustrating situation. It is true that one should be considerate in helping a partner to reach maximum pleasure. It is not true that each partner needs an orgasm each time, and that it is a terrible frustration and a Serious Problem if one misses one. In fact, I sometimes suspect that a lot of this business about whose "responsibility" and "fault" things are is a plot on the part of anti-sex people to keep others from enjoying sex.

One step in the right direction is the Masters & Johnson approach of treating "impotence" and "frigidity" as continuing conditions; rather than individual occurrences, and as things which are done by two people, rather than one.

Adrienne Fein is quite right about the term "temple prostitute": It is a projection of Christian prejudice backward on pre-Christian theology.

Certainly, sexual yoga or sex magick or hierogamy is powerful magick, and that is what the so-called temple "prostitutes" were doing. It takes a considerable amount of shamanic training to work up an equally passionate and devout religious mood by any other method.

The trouble with Christians is that they are constitutionally incapable of understanding anybody else's point of view. I mean literally I have never heard or read a Christian describe a non-Christian belief system accurately. (The one exception to this rule is the Jesuits, but there is some doubt--shared by the Pope lately--that they are really Christians.)

Do you consider this a distinctively Christian problem?

I was amused by your account of the parapsychology class where everybody thought skepticism meant a dogmatic refusal to believe. This confusion has been created by a band of vehement and intolerant fanatics (the Fundamentalist wing of the Materialist Church) who have coopted the word "skepticism" to describe their own bigotry.

I haven't been able to take the so-called "skeptics" seriously since the burning of Wilhelm Reich's books in 1956. The ringleader of the "skeptics," Martin Gardner, was one of the instigators of the persecution of Dr. Reich, and I was young and naive in those days. I kept expecting Gardner to say, when it became obvious that the government was going to throw Reich in jail and burn his books too, "Hey--that isn't what I meant. I meant Reich's theories should be criticized, not obliterated." But Gardner never objected to the mutilations of the Constitution in the Reich case, and I finally decided that having Reich in jail and his books in a bonfire was exactly what Gardner wanted. I strongly suspect that what he wants today is all the parapsychologists in jail and their books burned, too.

If you will pardon me, I think you misuse the word "nature" just as badly as the pop ecologists or ecologoids do. That is, both you and they seem to mean by "nature" something which does not include humanity. I think it is semantically and scientifically more accurate to use the word for something that does include humanity, as a domesticated primate species as much a part of the biosphere as the wild primates.

In the latter usage, not only are our bodies part of nature in general, but so are our brains, as tools of adaptation for our bodies. The purpose of the dog brain is to make survival of doggihood possible; the purpose of the human brain is to make survival of Homo Sap possible. I believe Freud pointed this out before me.



The idiocy of the ecologoids is that they believe, or talk as if they believe, that nature stops at around the human neck, everything above there being "unnatural." On the contrary, I cannot conceive of my thoughts being any less natural than my bowel movements, my endocrine system, or my blood circulation.

I agree that we are a part of nature, and that, as I've heard in both sexual & ecological contexts, the only unnatural act is one that can't be done. But there are still problems. I used to hear that I was a part of "society," and thus that social evils, such as war, poverty, & racism, were in some sense things that "we" were doing. Further thought convinced me that this was overly vague, and that some of the worst evils could in fact be traced to a precisely & operationally definable entity--the State. This squared with the view that I certainly do not meddle in foreign wars, arrest people for victimless crimes, fukkup hostage rescues, etc. So I believe there should be a word for "non-human nature" or "nature other than sentient entities," so that we can at least ask how we should relate to this part of the universe.

In this connection, it obvious that the dog brain does not abstract enough information to create a perfect model of the total universe; it abstracts enough for the dog's survival, pack-status, and reproduction scripts. I assume the same is true of the human brain. Those who are looking for the Total Truth are probably looking for more than a domesticated primate brain can achieve. I do, however, think it is amusing, entertaining, and survivally useful to look for more of the truth than we presently own.

No, the Craft is not a front for Discordianism. But, since more and more witches are Discordians, and more and more Discordians are getting initiated into Wicca, the two are increasingly hard to disentangle. Which is just the way I want it....



Linda Frankel
1261 Central Ave #302
Far Rockaway, NY 11691

You want to know about the psychology of "the heart of America"? It's not only that misery loves company. See THE BASEMENT, by Kate Millett. It's about a woman who had an unconscionable number of children and no means of support, who lived in unspeakable poverty but was too dull to even consider public assistance. She had been totally fukked over by men who also gave her no assistance. So she took out her anger and frustration by being a petty dictator over her children. She believed that if she was having a tough time, they should too. Of course she couldn't brutalize them enough to satisfy her craving, because they were hers. So she took in two stranger children, which worsened her situation. The worsening gave her an excuse to torture one of them to death. This is the story of Adolf Hitler in miniature. It's also the story of some anti-gay crusaders. If you like, you can waste sympathy on them because of their "persecution" that led to their lashing out in anger at any convenient target. However, they weren't really persecuted. Hitler simply had no talent. He demanded what he couldn't have.

Gertrude, in THE BASEMENT, simply had no initiative. It's difficult to believe that anyone could possibly live as she did without doing something about it. Her children also had no initiative. THE BASEMENT is an excellent portrayal of this kind of personality. Too bad that a girl had to die horribly for it to be written.

Do you know why skepticism about psi is unproductive? It's because psi depends very strongly on belief. Your own belief releases mental forces locked away in storage. You cannot do anything that doesn't exist in your own reality structure. Thus if you are skeptical, you will never experience any psi forces and will never have any basis for being other than skeptical. I can tell you about my own experience, but you're free to say that I hallucinate. Your metaphysics isn't sufficiently Discordian, apparently, to permit possibilities that can't be objectively demonstrated. Psi has to be subjectively felt, you see. How will I ever explain it to a Terranan?

I like to think that I'm open enough to accept a psi experience if I have one, but I refuse to assume such things exist until I have such an experience. This is a trap unless there exists something like what the theologians call "gratuitous grace" in the form of psi experiences for the truly open-minded.



Anita L. Cole
Box 33
Chattahoochee, FL 32324

Your article about SOL was interesting, but I don't know what I think about it yet. I have to admit that I am against porn, and for erotica, considered as two separate things. I am against porn because it upsets me. Every time I read about some man raping a woman, I get upset. I wonder if the guy who raped me thought from reading this type of book that all he would have to do is force me and keep me there long enough and I'd enjoy it. I did not enjoy it. I have nightmares about it occasionally six years later. It has made me less trusting of men and more reluctant to get intimate with them. Not so much physically, but I tend to decide on first impressions whether I want to go to bed with the guy or not, and if not, I won't have much to do with him, for fear that this person will try to rape me. Unreasonable, I know, and I do fight it and try to act normally, but when I am not paying attention to what I'm doing, this is how I act. So I would be encouraged by SOL, if it were erotica, because it might help reduce rape by turning men on to other ways of relating to women that are more pleasurable for both. And more realistic, in that they are more easily copied and get more predictable results. After all, I tried to kill the guy who raped me, which is a far cry from loving it--not that I succeeded. It is rather hard to kill someone without weapons, after they have already ripped an arm out of its socket. Now if this guy had been reading erotica, maybe he would have waited another day and then come over to my house and tickled me with a feather until I begged him for other things. Who knows?

All I would add is that many rapists are inspired by the same hatred for sex and for women that motivates many traditional censors.



Samuel E. Konkin III
 New Libertarian Enterprises
 Box 1748
 Long Beach, CA 90801

I have read several reviews of BREAKING RANKS and engaged in studying the Neo-Conservatives with Peter Steinfelds (by book) and David Gordon (by lecture). As far as I can see, the Neocons are the main Court intellectuals defending the Higher Circles of the State today. What I find fascinating about your review of Podhoretz's book is that nowhere do you mention the political significance (save for sexual repression), and what you found relevant--his sexual psychoepistemology--was not even mentioned in the other reviews. One could conclude many reasons for this, ranging from acute perception on your part as opposed to the less gifted Establishment (and Libertarian) reviewers to a sexual obsession on your part lacking in the others. Whatever; it's still a noteworthy disjunction. I still commend the LIBERTARIAN REVIEW review of BREAKING RANKS if you would like to see where the rest are getting off.

No, no, Sam. I have interests; THEY have obsessions. Seriously, one reason I skipped the political aspects was that I thought Roy Childs (in LR) had covered that part better than I could.

Now to a rare disagreement with Robert Anton Wilson --though it's a disagreement of choice, not fundamentals. Wilson chooses to define as follows: "An atheist is one who is quite sure there's no Higher Intelligence; if there is any doubt on the matter, you are not an atheist but an agnostic." (Emphasis in original.) He goes on from there quite entertainingly.

The problem here is that that is not how atheists define themselves or atheism. (Bob can, of course, ignore their wishes in the matter.) See George H. Smith's THE CASE AGAINST GOD or Nathaniel Branden's Introduction to Objectivism tapes. Theism/atheism is a question of proof or demonstration of existence. (Many theists, perhaps most, heartily agree, though they may disagree with atheists on what constitutes such proof.) One cannot prove a nonexistent; that is, one cannot prove God does not exist. But that's all right; one cannot prove anything does not exist.

Aristotle & Co. knew this well; hence, logic does not require an anti-proof. Logic requires proof of existence; that is, the burden of proof is on those who assert an existence. The theists can bring up any argument they want; the atheists need only shoot it down. One is an atheist as long as convincing proof has not been tendered.

As long as any doubt remains, then one is an atheist! Not an agnostic, as Wilson (and Heinlein, by the way) claim.

The problem with Wilson's choice of terms is not merely the confusion of calling atheists agnostics and vice versa, but he will be unable to understand why many atheists (such as myself) reserve the lowest rung of nonexistent hells for agnostics. An agnostic (see Rand, Branden, Smith--and many theists such as Lewis) is one who rejects all evidence to cling to a (non-existent) border are between existence of God and nonexistence of same. In the agnostic's own words, God is unknowable. (Not unknown or not yet discovered; note the profession of certainty about being uncertain!) An agnostic wishes to embrace God and not-God simultaneously; or reject God and not-God simultaneously; it obviously doesn't matter which.

Philosophically, the absurdity of claiming A and not-A is asking for a "free lunch" and there ain't no such thing. Which leads one to question the motives of these theological flim-flam men: What's the sting?

I think this question of proof is more complex than you make it out to be. Proofs of nonexistence are in fact fairly common. It is somewhat elementary mathematics to prove the nonexistence of a largest prime number or a rational number whose square is 2; indeed, I taught the latter proof to seventh-grade classes. One could say

that Lavoisier proved the nonexistence of phlogiston and Michelson & Morley proved the nonexistence of the cosmic ether, at least as previously defined.

I have never seen a convincing proof of either the existence or the nonexistence of God, and I have seen the classical purported "proofs" on both sides, but there is more to it than that. I don't believe that any physicist would maintain that the existence of quarks has been proven, or even that it can be. Rather, we are presented with evidence which, given the present state of knowledge, is more consistent with the existence of quarks than with any other hypothesis. This is the way science goes in general: There are no Truths, only extremely convincing hypotheses. Thus we may say that, applying different standards of evidence there are those who believe that there is sufficient evidence to accept the hypothesis of God's existence, those who believe that there is sufficient evidence to reject that hypothesis, and those who believe that there is insufficient evidence to decide the question either way. It seems reasonable to me to refer to these groups respectively as theists, atheists, and agnostics.

Of course, this whole discourse of Bob's could be taken as a humorous exercise. And his concluding statement that "these arguments are totally logical and quite mad" could be intended to apply to his arguments as well. Alas, being a fan of C. S. Lewis, though probably less in agreement with him in this area than I am with Bob Wilson, I cannot concur that these mad writings "are at least as lucid as the other writings about God produced by the humanmind to date."

When, o when, will atheist defenders tackle the best in theistic writing and vice versa? (And I would like to address Rand, Branden, Smith, and Mad Murray O'Hair more than you an Bob in this regard. Smith is the least offensive, since he tries to deal with classical theologians.)

And why do you assume, Arthur, that "if you are on the side of the One True God, of course, you are permitted to wipe out the competition by whatever means necessary"? Suppose said God gave you the Libertarian Commandment, as Christian Laissez-Faire (anti-Party) and Galatians Seven (Partyarch) libertarians assert.

Good point. I should have said that you are entitled to wipe out the competition if God tells you to.

I WONDER WHAT
 CARDINAL RICHELIEU
 IS DOING THESE
 DAYS?



Ed Zdrojewski
1891 Union St., #1-D
Benton Harbor, MI 49022

Lynne Holdom
PO Box 5
Pompton Lakes, NJ 07442

If Norman Podhoretz hates anarchists because they are opposed to technology, he must have something screwed up somewhere. The government he so loves and wishes to give power to spends a great deal of its energy suppressing new technology, whether it be for cowardly oil and auto companies, for screaming fundamentalists, or for whining ecofreak death wishers. The military Podhoretz wants to see strengthened has been doing its damndest to have research into fusion power generation stopped because it's afraid someone might get the secret to building an H-bomb. (All you have to do is read THE PROGRESSIVE, but don't expect intelligent thought from the military.) If Norman Podhoretz fears anti-technologists, he's on the wrong side of the tracks.

Puritanical reasoning doesn't just apply to sex. It's a world view. For example, you can find it among opponents of space colonization. They note that the world's population will reach 6 billion by 2000, and things are going to be none too pleasant for the majority of them. Then they point to L-5 with maybe about 10,000 people living the good life with unlimited solar energy and pie in the sky and all that. "How unfair!" they whine, "that these people should be privileged to live in some kapitalist pig space colony while billions on earth starve!" They want equality above all else, and if some people should starve, it's only fair that everyone starve. That kind of reasoning is rather strange to me, since I believe that if it is possible to make life decent for only a handful of people, then that handful having it is at least better than everyone starving to death, if not fairer.

Adrienne's loc: Elvis is next, of course! Those Who Know are well aware that Elvis Presley is alive and well and merely staged his death to reap the financial rewards of all the incredible hype and Elvismania that followed his supposed demise. Actually, he is living as a recluse in a luxurious Las Vegas penthouse.

Obviously you missed the page in the Lord Darcy series where he cries, "Heavens, Marquis, how much speed is this shit cut with?"

"Morbid and shameful interest in sex, nudity, or excrement" is a contradiction on the face of it. Nothing morbid or shameful about it. Just the other day I had a turd I was particularly proud of bronzed and set on the mantlepiece.

I suspect that Anita Bryant is using the crusade against homosexuality as one way of avoiding the conflicts in her role as wife and mother. She would probably be happier as a liberated woman, but she can't admit that to herself. Because she subconsciously resents the role she is in, she wants to make sure that everyone shares it. Every woman (or man) who is making her own way without the family role threatens her because she suspects she might have been happier that way.

However, I also suspect that you (and I) tend to underestimate the power of pure dogmatic faith, because neither of us has it.

A. D. Wallace
306 E. Gatehouse Dr #H
Metairie, LA 70001

The Constitution gives us the right to organize against the Constitution. Let us establish WOA, the World Organization for Anarchy. You can be First Dictator for Life--until the next revolution.

Oh, no. You ain't pulling that one on me! You be dictator.

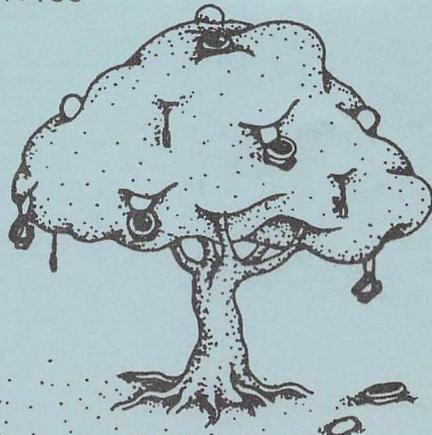
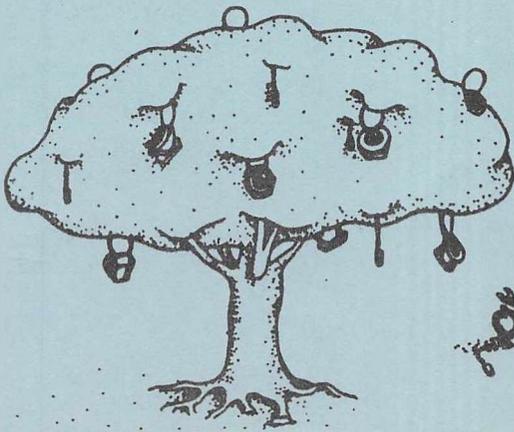


Sally Ann Syrjala
PO Box 149
Centerville, MA 02632

DR 13 arrived this day with its bulk mailing permit proudly displaying itself on the envelope. This led to a thought: Is bulk mail the roughage which keeps the postal system moving?



toiletries



Book Review

Mechasm, by John T. Sladek (Pocket pb, \$1.95)

Any literary critic worth his salt has a few fanaticisms, obsessions, pet Lost Causes, etc. This sort of thing prevents repetitiousness (if one can remember to write about other subjects on occasion) and provides energy. The reader is hereby warned that this is one of mine.

In the sixties, there was much talk about a literary genre known as Black Humor. This was a kind of humor of bizarre and sometimes morbid exaggeration, perhaps not quite credible but too fascinatingly weird & funny for the reader to mind. CATCH-22 would be an example of it.

The term fell into disrepute for several reasons. There was the justified protest against using the term "black" as a negative one when it also referred to a few million people. (And besides, it sounded a bit strange to call Ishmael Reed a Black Black Humorist.) Perhaps more important was the fact that the Great Black Humorist in the Sky began outdoing his mortal counterparts by creating great farces like the Vietnam War and ludicrously laughable, yet evil, characters like Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon, & Spiro Agnew. (Standards here, as everywhere, are falling; Jimmy the Peanut is more like a mere situation comedy bumbler.)

In any event, the Black Humor tradition evolved into a kind of creative fantasy that may have no name. It included such writers as Thomas Pynchon and Tom Robbins.

At the same time, there appeared a writer named John T. Sladek. For individual reasons that I do not know about, he wound up in England, hanging out with a bunch of science-fiction writers like Thomas Disch, J. G. Ballard, and Michael Moorcock, and writing for a science-fiction magazine called NEW WORLDS. He published a novel that was known in England as THE REPRODUCTIVE SYSTEM and reprinted in America under the title of MECHASM.

This book was published as science fiction, and indeed it did present the traditional science-fictional theme of machines taking over. But it more closely resembled the tradition of Black Humor, with ideas like a Japanese scientist who is hired because the boss's idiot son believes that all Japanese know deadly martial arts like *habuki* and *origami*.

The book has never found its audience. SF readers have found it bizarre & not science-fictional enough. Mainstream readers have not found it. But it has always had a small & faithful audience. It has now been reprinted, by Pocket Books, and I urge you to read it.



VENTING HIS SPLEEN

Readers will note that I have kept my word, and included a substantial letter column with this issue. I intend to keep doing so. There are 2 ways of guaranteeing that letters you send me will not be published: 1) Ask me not to. 2) Handwrite your letter. I prefer the former.

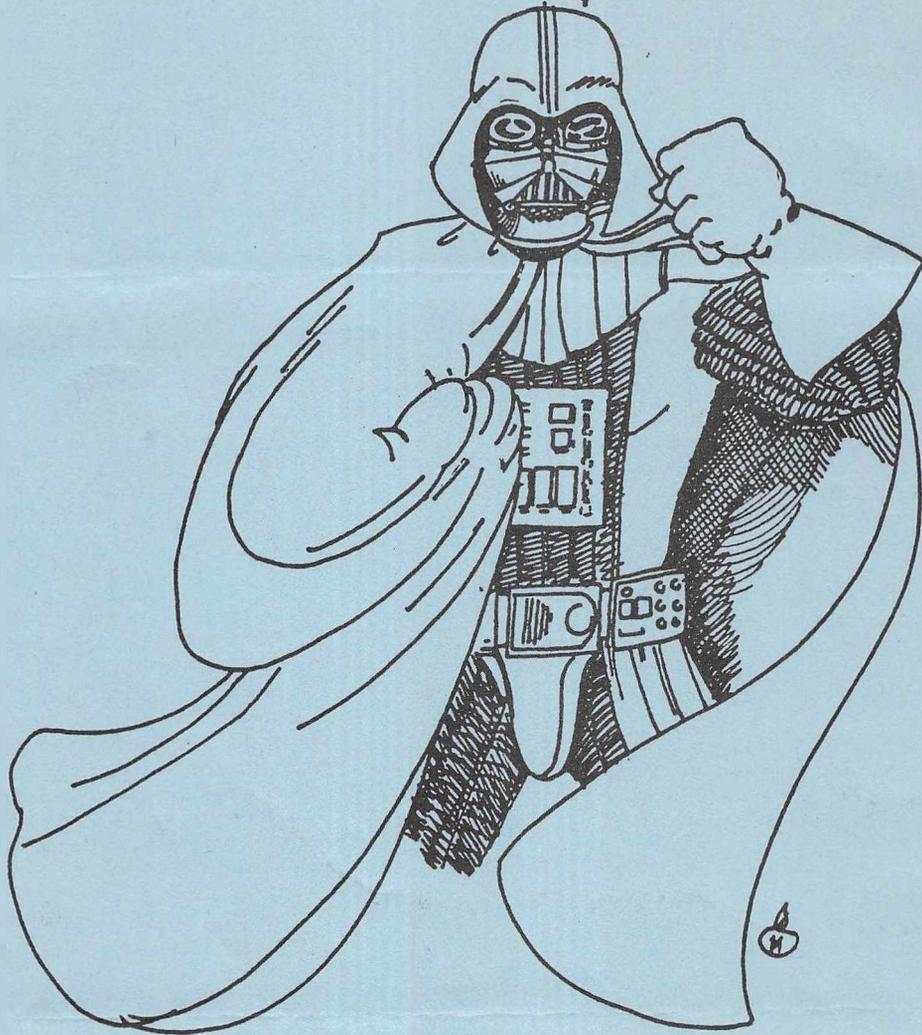


In reviewing SCHRÖDINGER'S CAT: THE UNIVERSE NEXT DOOR, I implied that the entire SCHRÖDINGER'S CAT trilogy was written at once (like ILLUMINATUS!), and that Pocket Books was delaying publication of the other two volumes for reasons best known to themselves. Robert Anton Wilson informs me that this assumption was incorrect, and that the books were written separately. The second volume, THE TRICK TOP HAT, will be published in December, with THE HOMING PIGEONS following some time in 1981. Many of my readers will be as glad as I am to note that we can look forward to other Wilson books. THE ILLUMINATI PAPERS, a collection of essays, is scheduled to appear from And/Or Books in August. In addition we can look forward to MASKS OF THE ILLUMINATI (a novel, from Pocket) and HOW TO TELL YOUR FRIENDS FROM THE APES, (a book about psychology, published by Donning books) sometime next year.



Last issue, I once again misstated the Official Holy Name of the one who is known to the mundane world as Eric Raymond. He is Amphigoricus the Turgid. The continuing confusions may indicate that he is an object of Discordia's special favor. This will be the nearest thing to Nut Cult Notes in this issue, as the Official Authority on Subversives who reads each issue has announced that he refuses to believe in the existence of organizations with names like The Dread Inner Five, the Legion of Static Discord, The Ancient and Esoteric Order of Buzzards, and The Holy Atlantean Temple of The One True Primal Wombat, Reformed.

I SAY IT'S AN ALLEGORICAL
SEARCH FOR THE HOLY GRAIL
AND I SAY THE HELL WITH IT!



Art Index

Nina Bogin-- cover	Taral Wayne--8
Tim Marion--1 (logo)	Charlie Williams--9
John Packer--1 (illo)	Fred Jackson III--11
Olivia Jasen--2	Stephanie Klein--12
Arlie Adams--6	Adrienne Fein (from an idea by Dave Locke)--13
Sarah K. Swider--7	Eliki Kenobi --14

Tom McEvoy & Christine Gever, are you out there?