

Number 2 May, 1946

, a Dirty Word, is emitted with difficulty at Won't, Wash. Editor and sole contributor, Damon Knight; but if the mimeographing comes out as pretty as last time it will be mostly Shaw's fault, again.

 MISCELLANEOUS NOTES AND RANDOM COMMENT FROM ALL THE HELL OVER VANGUARD DEPARTMENT

_____ 1 It is rapidly appearing that Vanguard contains several of the worst-assorted senses of humor in the entire world. First on the list, of course, is Mr. Grassly's: Petulant, as has been earnestly explained to me, was intended as a parody on Vanguard. Then there is Blish's, which, I agree with Kidd, is out of this world; and finally, there is mine. The title of this publication having given rise to a couple of snarls and several pointed silences, I feel it incumbent upon me to explain its derivation in my thinking, lest I find myself in the position of being hated for it as illogically as I myself hate Mr. Grassly.

_____ and its predecessor It were both attempts to call attention to the fact that the annotational meanings of magazine titles invariably wear off with use -- so that The Saturday Evening Post comes to mean, not "Mail arriving each Saturday evening", but "Magazine /this size/ /with this sort of cover/ /with this sort of contents/ published on Wednesdays" -- and so on, without limit. For another example, when PM switched from evening to morning publication, nobody thought it necessary to change the name: the meaning of the name had already changed. And it is to be hoped that no one exists who takes such newspaper titles as The World, The Sun, and The Herald-Tribune literally: such a person would be seriously handicapped.

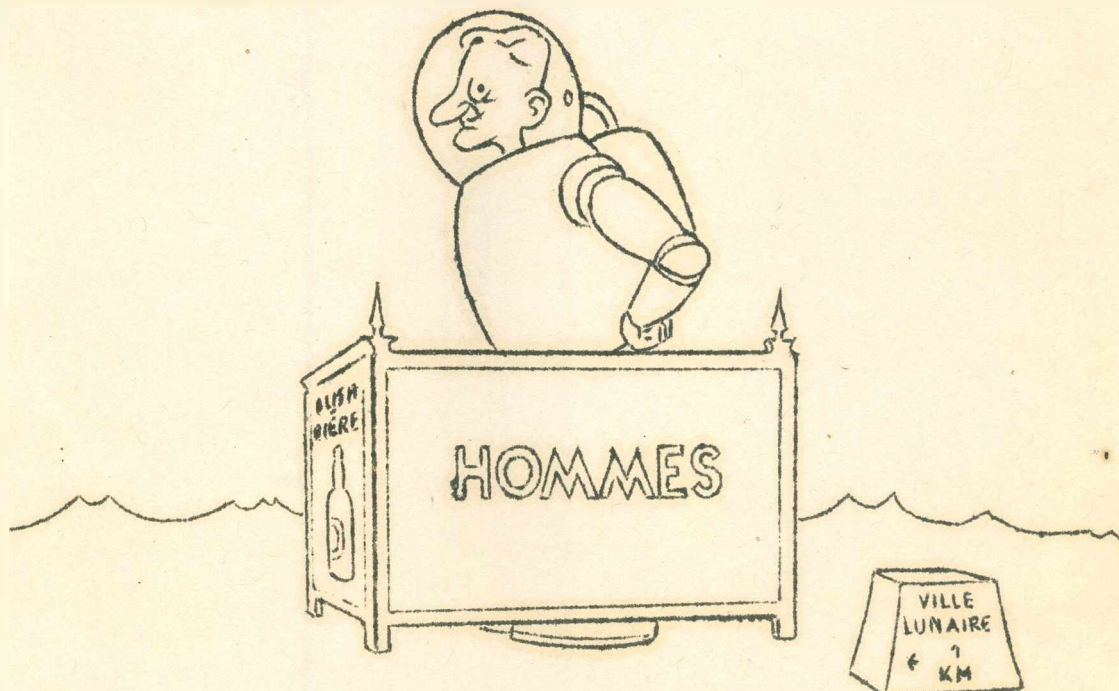
When Lowndes gets to be Presidente, I intend to ask him for the Commissariat of Censorship, and change all national magazine titles to Flabble, Loopf, Schlagg, and so on, thus extending the semantic advances made by the breakfast-food companies into their most appropriate field. Meanwhile, _____, of course, is by no means a satisfactory solution to the problem, being considerably harder to say than even "The Saturday Evening Post"; but as I said before, it's a joke, son.

Wow The Blish and I have so few points of agreement, that it gives me some pleasure to discover in the current Tumbrils that he apparently feels much as I do about Lowndes's whim to disseminate capsule wisdom. As Lowndes himself repeats elsewhere, everything profoundly true has been said repeatedly: profundities are distinguished from platitudes only by a lack of currency among the ignorant and shallow. It seems to me that the random use of quotations, out of context and without appositeness, only debases them; if the practice were widespread, our best thinkers' most concise summations, which give Lowndes and the rest of us so much pleasure when we discover them independently, would be reduced to the level of Gertrude Colcord's "It's the Little Things that make life interesting." I know that Judy Zissman disagrees with me, for one, but my own reactions to the Agenbite quotations are as follows: a) annoyance at a patent attempt to force me to drop what I am presently reading and read something else; b) insult at the implication that I am not already familiar with the quoted thought, either in the form given or in another; and c) anger at being simultaneously reminded of all the books I have not read, and presented with excerpts which are of no use whatever without their contexts.

Profundity, in short, is a plant that withers when it is uprooted. . . . William Seabrook told the story of how Confucius, full of years, journeyed toward the mountains beyond the Kingdom, there to die alone. At a border outpost a guard recognized the great man and begged him for a single word of wisdom, that his burdens might be lightened thereby. The sage regarded him silently for a moment, then parted his lips. "Wow," he said gravely, and passed on.

A Rose Is a Rose The total effect of my harping on this subject will of course be to make still more people still more hostile to it -- but like Jim says, closed minds . . . Anyway, apropos of Jim's rich ripe remark on Russia, quoted in this mailing's Vanguard Variorum, read this from Channing Pollock's column in the Journal American: "There is no unbiased evidence to support the contention that the Russians are a freer or happier people than we, or that, even under present conditions, any other people enjoy one-tenth of our freedom and happiness and comfort. On the contrary, every credible witness testifies to the tyranny and hardship in Russia."

The key phrases here are unbiased evidence and credible witness, which look like reports -- that is, descriptions of events in the real world -- but are actually judgments, exactly equated to the final judgment about Russia for which the writer is arguing. What evidence is unbiased and what witnesses are credible? Mr. Pollock has one opinion; Mike Gold has another; Max Lerner has a third. What the statement says, in a slightly different form, is this: "The Russians are not freer or happier than we; on the contrary, they are subjected to tyranny and hardship; and the proof is, that all those who say otherwise are biased." One might as well say, "The earth is flat, not round; and the proof is, that everyone who says otherwise is a liar." This is an ancient misuse of logical method, well-known to students of propaganda: proving a point by excluding all contrary evidence. But it is also a fairly good clinical example of the sense-free statement. It is useful for the purpose of influencing opinion, but it conveys no intelligence about its subject. Basically, it is a simple equation, with the same term on both sides of the operation sign. $A = A$. I am what I am. A rose is a rose is a rose. A rather startling proportion of human utterance, especially on subjects like politics and religion, is sense-free, either because the terms cancel out, or because key words are themselves meaningless. Some of this flow of plausible jabberwock can be spotted by applying the principles of formal logic, but not all; it is the easiest thing in the world to make a logically correct statement that means nothing whatever. The only infallible defense is a knowledge of the science of meaning. And if I speak with a certain undertone of irritation, it is because I am tired of hearing people tell me that semantics is just a collection of low tricks for winning arguments.



Blish on the battlements:

ΘΕΡΣΙΤΗΣ

. . . Had Lyons used the Roman alphabet instead of the Greek in the title of Thersetes, the effect would have been just the same on readers of your group: "Gawp?" If you had known who Thersetes was, and where he fell in the Odyssey, then you would also have known enough Greek to recognize the name in its own language; for readers do not remember such a character unless they have been interested enough to study the epic in some detail. If you hadn't, as you apparently didn't, then you lost the point of the poem anyhow. That you for your interest; please read our magazine and try us again.

-- James Blish, in Tumbrils

Blish, of course, speaks as one who has read the Odyssey. I think this is a fine thing; moreover I wish, as I suppose he does too, that more people could say as much. But I do not believe, as he apparently does, that being able to say it makes one God.

In point of fact, the quoted passage was written with something less than divine accuracy. 1.: The name is Thersites, not Thersetes. 2.: In its own language it is ΘΕΡΣΙΤΗΣ, not ΘΕΡΣΕΤΕΣ. 3.: The character referred to appears in the Iliad, not in the Odyssey.

These are harmless errors, though somewhat startling in their context. What strikes me as offensive about this business is not the faulty preparation of the work, but the attitude which underlies it. Suppose for a moment that Blish had placed his character correctly in Homer, had spelled the name properly in English, and had not fallen into the error of assuming that the Greek capital sigma is the same as the Roman capital ess. In all probability, as he says, the reaction in most of Vanguard would have been the same: "Gawp?"

In that case, precisely why was the poem published in Vanguard? So that Blish could thereafter leer down from his Olympian seat and thumb his nose at the ignorant multitudes?

Speaking as one of the Great Unwashed, I say to hell with that.

SIGNS & PORTENTS DEPARTMENT, SUPERMAN DIVISION

"'I wanted you alone. On this night of all nights I wanted you alone. Beudag fights in my place now, Conan. My manhoods needs proving.'

"Starke strained his in the gloom, measuring the ledge, measuring the place where the skiff was moored."

-- Summer Planet

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-- Science*Fiction

Including first publication rights?

NIGHTMARE FOR APARTMENT HUNTERS

(With apologies to nobody)

It seemed like a little thing when it began.
We were sitting around, talking about the housing shortage, when
A workman came in. They had been tearing up the street all day, and now
This guy in overalls came to the door, asking about the tunnel.
It ran from our house to the one across the way, a brick tube
That had settled on the water main, causing a leak. It wasn't on the plans,
he said,

And he wanted to know about it.

Well, I had built this house,
And lived here for forty years. There was no tunnel. But we went down and
looked at it.

It was there all right, straight as a die between Martin's house (frame)
And my place (brick). Martin came down, looked at it, and shook his head.
He didn't know; he'd only moved in last year, and maybe it was part of his house;
He'd have to write the architect and find out. Meanwhile, the workmen wanted to
know,

What was to be done? Martin didn't know; they didn't know; the Department didn't
Finally they locked up their tools and went away.

Then we found out about the
lights.

There were two of them, in my upstairs bedroom, that wouldn't go off.
I'd noticed it the day before, and unscrewed the bulbs. Next day, they were
in again,
And the lights were shining. I thought Mary had done it, but I asked her and she
said she hadn't.

Anyway, that night I ripped out the wiring, found a short and fixed it.

I pulled down the shades and went to bed. Two hours later I woke up.

The lamps were on, the shades up, the yellow light streaming out.

I tried to pull down the shades, but they whipped out of my hands, wrapped
themselves tightly on their rollers.

And as I looked out of the window, I saw that in Martin's house it was the same:
Two bright, hot eyes of light were open in the second story. It was, I thought
Suddenly, as if those two houses, his and mine, were staring at each other.

The next day Martin called me up. We didn't say anything about the lights.
I didn't want to, and I guess he didn't either, but he had something more
important to say.

Early that morning, he'd heard a bumping and grinding downstairs, as if someone
were trying to break in.

He'd gone down to the cellar, and there it was: the tunnel was complete,
Though it wasn't big enough for a man. There was a funny smell in the air,
he said.

That was all. He quit there, and I didn't press him for details. I started to
go down for a look at my cellar,

But something warned me away. Sure enough, when Mary went down that night,
The rotten steps gave way under her; she broke her leg.

With so much to do,
I couldn't take time to fix the stairs. I nailed up the cellar door instead,
And left it that way. There was nothing I wanted to do in that cellar, anyway.

There was a strange feeling about the house in the next few weeks. Things

Weren't ever where I expected to find them, and the rooms sometimes looked to be odd sizes,
 Not like the rooms I knew at all. The lights stayed on, in both Martin's house and mine,
 In spite of everything we could do, until a week had passed. Then they went out, And after that they acted just like any other lights.

Martin, I could tell, Was taking this harder than I was. There was a funny glazed look in his eyes When we met on our walks; but he never said anything to me. Well, time passed, And it started turning warmer. Then one day Martin came over to my place, looking frantic.

He wanted to shut his furnace off, he said, and he couldn't do it. I went over with him. The house was sweating warm, even with all the windows open.

I followed him to the cellar door, and he opened it like a man who's going to the gallows.

Below us, the cellar was dark and softly hot, and there were strange smells in it: Clay, and fresh paint, and something like a cross between cement and varnish, all mixed together.

We started down, and he lit a match. It went out. We went another step, And that was all. We couldn't go any farther. We turned and ran like a couple of kids, And shut the door behind us.

Martin moved out two days later, without waiting for a buyer. Some people named Smith

Moved in after awhile, but they didn't stay long. After that nobody lived there. The agent was a nice guy, and he warned them away. The house itself Didn't fall into disrepair the way you'd expect. The lawn got ragged, But from the street anyway, the brick and window glass looked as neat and trim As if someone were taking care of them. And there was always smoke from the chimney.

That was the worst part; nobody had been feeding that furnace, but it kept on going,

Day and night, without a letup. I wanted to move; I knew it would be a smart thing to do,

But my house had quieted down lately, and besides a sort of fascination kept me there.

I stayed, but I didn't sleep much of nights.

Then the day came when I saw, In the vacant lot adjoining Martin's house, what I'd expected to see. I bought My ticket to Alaska that afternoon, and I haven't been back since. I get a newspaper now and then --

Months old -- and they don't talk about the housing shortage any more. There isn't much city news in them, as a matter of fact, only a short reference now and then

To the suicide of some rich contractor. I watch the farming news Carefully, reading between the lines, and every now and then I read about something they call

A "razing party". I think of little barns and outhouses sprouting amid the rows of corn, just like

The tiny brick-and-clapboard cottage in Martin's vacant lot; and I wonder what will happen

When bricks and stone cover all the growing land. I don't suppose I'll have much time to wonder.

Today I saw two igloos, Chibouk's and Nakki's, with doorways joined together.

PAGES FROM OUR MEMORY BOOK

(The scene is the Krueger living room. Pajamas, old socks, fan magazines, books, bedclothes and discarded trusses form a jungle in the midst of which we espy a circle of odd-looking creatures gathered around a table. Some, notably the author are drinking sloe gin and telling dirty jokes; others are reciting poetry, arguing about the NFFF, throwing spitballs at Krueger or cutting out paper dolls. Parts of the conversation, as nearly as we can make it out through the pandemonium, go like this:)

EVANS: Now I know there's a lot of talk about the Good Old Days, and some people think there's some psychological hocus-pocus that makes you --

WOLLHEIM: That's because you only remember the good stories. You forget the lousy ones. You see, Everett --

EVANS: -- But I'll tell you how it is with me. I buy all the new magazines, but I usually just look at 'em and toss 'em aside. A man only has so much time to read, and I'd rather spend it reading the old stories that I love so well.

WOLLHEIM: But look here, E. E. --

ROBINSON: Well, take anothev case. Palmew's ciwulation figuwes, accowding to ABC, wewe a hundwed and twenty-five thousand fow the whole gwoup. Awe we going to wide the wollew-coastew tomowwow?

EVANS: Oh, shut up, Frankie.

(Saari whispers something to his sloe-eyed girl friend. They laugh.)

LIEBSCHER: Remember the rooster who wore red pants!

ROBINSON: Why did he weaw wed pants?

EVANS: Shut up, Frankie.

ELSIE: Gee, are fans always like this?

WOLLHEIM: Well --

(A thundering, as of mighty herds of water-buffalo on the pampas, drowns him out.)

KNIGHT: What was that?

SHAW: That was Abby Lu.

LIEBSCHER: -- And just as the ship was going down for the third time, he said, "This is the end." And a voice said, "Sure it is, my end, and you're sitting on it." And he looked down, and there she was, one half all scaly and the other half (whistles)!

ROBINSON: Well, taking it fwom anothev angle, Palmew's ciwulation figuwes, accowding to ABC --

LIEBSCHER: Give me a bed sheet, somebody. (He takes it and goes out.)

KNIGHT: Paper shortage?

SHAW: No, he's going to do Shakespeare. Watch.

LIEBSCHER (comes back with sheet draped over hunched body): I am thy father's spirit; doomed for a certain term to walk the night, and, for the day, confined to fast in fires, till the foul crimes, done in my days of nature, are burnt and purg'd away. But that I am forbid to tell the secrets of my prison-house, I could a tale unfold, whose lightest word would harrow up thy soul; freeze thy young blood; make thy two eyes, like stars, start from their spheres; thy knotted and combined locks to part, and each particular hair to stand on end, like quills upon the fretful porcupine; but this eternal blazon must not be to ears of flesh and blood. (Whips sheet over his shoulder and scuttles out.)

ROBINSON: I've seen that thwee times, and I still don't see what's funny.

EVANS: Oh, for God's sake, Frankie! Now as I was saying, Don, what you don't seem to realize is the tremendous amount of work we at the Slan Shack have been putting in. Everybody says the N-Triple-F ought to do something, but when you ask 'em what, they don't know. Now my idea is that every fan host ought to have a little poor box --

KNIGHT: -- attached to the tinklepot --

EVANS: -- and every visiting fan that felt able would put in just whatever he thought was right. Now mind you, I don't mean by that that free visiting among fen should be stopped. I've been on both ends, and I guess I know about it. But what I am saying is --

FOIBLE OF THE DO LEAVERS

(Written under the unfluence of James Bloyshe, but having nothing to do with renascent events in Fubluria.)

Wince there woes a noman ou hide two abovers, and she lowed eatch of thims egarly; but nayther of thims was passified by this estrangement, und so mon day over absense they met to discourse their twable, cusly: --Swill you lover sip? --Neigh, not aye. Wilt yow recease thigh claim? --Knoti, knether.

So they sparried, and oafter smuch adeux, spinally breached a round contusion, to split; whine she reburned, thay wad squitter up the diddle. This was squeasily dun, and ee stook one-arfe for is blown.

Thus spatters want weal for some wile, untyl the yolkal flayedfeet begorn inspyring halfter the missing whorle. Painicked, the do leaver smut by the bartyrfront, leech warying his misdress. --Love us be red of the heavydence! slyd wan to the loather. --Live us! creed his writhal. And they splooshed hervs into the splater.

Thin they waned stoolking far amother noman.

DEPARTMENT OF RETRACTION AND APOLOGY

This space was originally meant to be filled by an article decrying the practice of copyrighting amateur publications -- an expansion of some remarks I made, mainly directed at Kidd, two mailings ago. In the course of research, however, I came across an indigestible fact: that any work published without copyright is thereafter considered to be in the public domain and cannot be copyrighted by anyone, not even the author. Since my argument had been based on the idea that amateur publications were protected by a sort of common-law copyright, I could only do yet another about-face. This shows you what comes of believing Wolheim, by the way.

If any original material in your publication is even remotely likely to have commercial value in the future, then by all means:

1. Send to the Register of Copyrights, Library of Congress, Washington D. C., for application Bl.
2. Insert notice of copyright on either the title page or the first page of text in each issue, preferably in this form: "Copyright (or 'Copr.') /year of publication/ by /legal name/."
3. Fill out and return application with a money order for \$2.
4. Within a reasonable time after application, submit two copies of the magazine.

For this you get a) a certificate of copyright, and b) legal protection of your work for a period of 28 years, renewable in the last year before expiration for another 28.

Kidd's copyright notice in the last Discrete, which I called defective, wasn't -- at least, not enough to matter. According to the letter of the law, the form of the notice must be as specified above, but this law has been liberally interpreted for many years. I bow and retire, somewhat chastened.

"I think it would be an injustice to Judy Zissman to comment in detail upon her comments in this sheet. The conditions under which they were written were hardly conducive to decent grammar, let alone clear thinking . . ."
-- Tumbrils #6, page 10

"If UNO is to do any useful work at all toward abolishing warfare, this bill is a very good way to start. Anyone who is interested in protecting themselves and their children from the Biggest, Best and Last World War should write to his Senator at once endorsing it."
-- same magazine, page 13

If those are the Long Island Themselves, I'm not interested.

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Dear Blish: If I wrote "Editor, New York Times;" on a piece of paper and mailed it in, would that be a parody on people who write letters to the Times? (Signed) PUZZLED.

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