

FROM SUNDAY TO SATURDAY

Don Fitch to Apa L & cet

HFP # NS21

TUESDAY, 28 Dec 1965: The weather has been fine for the past week or so, and at this time of the year such good conditions must be taken advantage of, if the garden is not to be a burdensome chore in the spring. But most of the fall clean-up is done now, some of the beds have been spaded, and I've even put in a few of the spring flowers -- though there are still a number of ranunculus and calendulas in pots, waiting upon the removal of the last of the chrysanthemums. At least, the back driveway, covered with hundreds of pots of Rare Peruvian Weeds and Stuff, is now in some semblance of order. The coldest months of winter are yet to come, but in many ways it seems like spring already -- the winter grasses are green on the foothills, and in the garden narcissus and roses are blooming, the Dutch iris have their foliage well up, and the Johnny-Jump-Ups are sprouting from seed in the bulb beds where they were used last year as a ground-cover. And bare-root roses are now at the nurseries-- I'm thinking of getting a half-dozen (they're only 79¢ apiece) to put up in pots or small tubs.

The yard will take up a minimum amount of time the next few months, and maybe some of the many other Projects On Hand can be attended to...possibly there'll even be more time for Apa L, though that's not highly likely, for various reasons (painting, building bookshelves, sorting many cubic yards of old fanzines, reading for an article on Phillip K. Dick, printing, and a couple of evening classes at the Arboretum, among other things).

Comments on Apa L, Distribution # 62:

Len Bailes: While I've sometimes seen the word "Hebrew" used in reference to "people with a certain ethnic background and cultural heritage," this usage has always felt uncomfortably like a euphemism, as though the writer found the word "Jew" distasteful (or perhaps "improper"; it seems most common among Victorian British novelists. I tend to associate with "Hebrew" the general Old-Testament scene, and find it difficult to relate this with the people, the culture, and the religion of today.

Felice Rolfe: It looks as though you are beginning to construct a sort of Utopia -- as might be expected in a post-destruction-of-our-civilization situation. I like your turning from the bad aspects of Christmas to a celebration of the Winter Solstice, but there's a jarring feeling about it of not quite coming off. I rather think that people, if they retained a sufficient link with the past to retain their language, would retain Christmas as well, especially after the passage of ten years or so; it seems to me that they would remember the good, rather than the bad, aspects of the holiday -- or at least of the celebration; they'd probably remember at least parts of a lot of carols, for example.

Fred Hollander: I rather expect to find the 69th Distribution of Apa L fairly well-salted with...err...the salty sort of things you seem to anticipate. Anyone objecting to it will immediately be Put Down, of course, as being Stuffy, Prudish, censorial, & cet., so there's probably no point in saying anything. Actually, my lack of appreciation for such material doesn't stem from those grounds at all; the word I'd use to describe it is not "shocking" or "obscene" -- the word is "trite". Having myself gone through this phase of giving the expected response, and having seen so many others pass through it (especially in fandom), my usual reaction now is along the lines of "Oh, shit, not that again," accompanied by a vague general wish that the person would go away and do his growing up somewhere else. It tends to affect one that way, the umpteenth time.

On thinking it over, boredom from the repetition of this Same Old Pattern would not entirely explain my aversion; there is another element in operation. the adolescent (a term technically including through age 25) who comes on strongly in an

attempt to shock people, is making an ass out of himself, and is generally an object of ridicule or at best of tolerant amusement (often politely unexpressed) among people slightly more mature. If the individual is one towards whom I entertain friendly feelings, this makes me rather uncomfortable -- moreso, even, than the pointing-out of the more ridiculous aspects of some of my own actions. Strange. I'll have to keep an eye on this for a couple of years & try to figure out why, but tentatively: it may be that I'm sufficiently confident of myself to be able to tolerate substantial imperfections, whereas I'm either not as confident of my friends, or I feel that they are not as confident of themselves.

Bruce Pelz: The individual who vegetates all his life (for any reason) has a perfect right to do so -- he is not harming me or anyone else. On the other hand, haven't we the right to attempt to dissuade him from such a course? That which he does not do cannot benefit us. Naturally I'd not exert much effort in the attempt, since the benefit would not be that great, but the doctrine of ~~self-interest~~ enlightened self-interest, to say nothing of the responsibilities of friendship, would seem to make a certain amount of "interference" permissible.

Jane Ellern: That spice & herb booklet messes up the Binding Situation most foully, but it is interesting, and useful, too; High John the Conqueror Root is not easy to come by.

Ruth Berman: The passage you mention isn't what I had in mind when considering the advisability of revising one's writing, but it does fit the situation; I was lumping together several different things, or something. Ultimately, it is the brevity of the short story which dictates the limits and the special requirements of the genre. In general (there are, of c., always the Geniuses who transcend the limitations of the form) the short story is limited to a simple, direct plot, a few characters (who are by no means completely rounded-out, the author restricting himself to those aspects of character which have a direct bearing on the plot or mood). Either the background and setting are sketched in very broadly, or a very few salient details are dwelt upon in such a way as to suggest the remainder. And (again, "as a rule") the requirement of unity is such that the protagonist remains substantially unchanged throughout.

The novel, on the other hand, can indulge in the dynamic counterbalance of many different moods, the plot can be complex and enhanced by one or more concurrent sub-plots, characters can be rounded to the point of being free-standing, with their actions and reactions in various situations predictable, and the characters can grow and develop through their experiences, giving the reader the satisfaction of seeing something accomplished. All sorts of rich and complex background can be filled in -- not only details which can be used later to forward the story, but also many which simply lend mood, color, or verisimilitude.

The novel which adheres to the techniques of the short story may be said to have a simple (or at best, episodic) plot, cardboard characters, and an obvious background, the whole being done, generally, with only one level of meaning. I think the majority of mystery, western, and science-fiction novels can be included here.

Ted White: You're right, your advice to would-be writers (in the YANDRO article) properly stressed the need for strong plotting and an interest-attracting opening -- common weaknesses in beginning writers -- and it would not be correct to assume that the points you stressed there were your idea of the be-all and end-all of writing.

The problem of considering all fiction (including Great Literature) as entertainment is complicated by the necessity on the part of the publisher to entertain hundreds of thousands of people; this sort of mass-media entertainment almost by its very nature, must seek the lowest common denominator; all too often

this will be very low indeed, especially since it must usually be easy entertainment, for an audience which does not care to exert its mental faculties very much. Some writers (Shakespeare's the classic example) can write well on several levels at once, others (G.B.Shaw) appeal primarily to a more sophisticated audience (though once one has heard the comment "Shaw makes people think they think"....), while others are popular, acclaimed as Great, and later have their works turn up in the children's section of the libraries (Charles Dickens). The more I think about all this, the less certain I am about any of it.

Agreed -- subjectively (the only way one can approach such a matter) I read, as I do almost everything, for entertainment. The point is, I am entertained by books which probably the majority of people in the U.S. would consider abstruse, incomprehensible, or utterly boring. And conversely, many other people are highly entertained by books to which I would apply those adjectives.

I tend to agree with your requirement for a Good Plot ... but then (to drift off into another -- though related -- art form) the plots of most operas are pretty wretched, as are those of, say, Pickwick Papers and The Divine Comedy; the treatment or embellishment can overcome this strikingly well, and it's not difficult to think of books which are dismal failures despite excellent plots. It is valid, I think, for a work of fiction to try to do something besides -- or other than -- tell a story.

Pseudo-Literature, like Pseudo-anything-else, will indeed sink rapidly into oblivion; the problem lies in deciding what is Pseudo and what Real. That makes me feel too much like Phil. Dick.

I've gathered a strong impression that one Big Difficulty in the Watts Riots was that a lot of people were/are carrying over their Southern experience with "the White Man's Law", "often ... enforced to Keep Them In Their Place" to an area where this does not at all accurately correspond with the Situation (or with Reality, as we say when pretentiously trying to point up dichotomy). If this be true (and there are strong indications that it is), then not only must the authorities make it clear (by practice as well as propaganda) that the Law exists for the benefit of all and will be administered impartially, but also the inhabitants of Watts will have to take a good look around (and within) to see how well the facts, in general, correspond with their preconceptions.

In point of fact, the Law is, in a sense, White Man's Law. The laws of the State of California reflect the mores of the caucasian majority in this state; there is some accomidation, and a certain amount of conflict, between these mores and those of various minority ethnic groups, but the tradition in this country (as almost everywhere) has generally been to require that people, who want to merge into the Society, conform to the broad standards of that Society. As the amalgamation progresses, the minority, of course, will have some effect on the majority; the transitional period is going to be tempestuous when the minority is a large one, and I'm not sure that there is any approach with will make the alloying process less uncomfortable for all concerned. /hh! here's one point where we differ -- I've been assuming that the Negro sub-culture is (and has been) moving towards the mainstream American Culture; you believe it's becoming "alienated from the mainstream." Hummm...maybe. But I'm dubious about that, even though it is a major thesis or thread in contemporary Negro writing -- to feel Alienated seems to be the sine qua non of all Writers, these days. Somehow, I can't visualize most of the Negroes I know as being much like the "small child who continuously misbehaves despite spankings;" they're more like reasonably intelligent adults who are, in the final analysis, capable of applying a considerable degree of rationality to their examination of a situation, and are as capable as most people of seeing where lies the advantage to themselves.

Barry Gold: Yes, I was rather taken aback some months ago when Bjo said that she looked over the Distribution and skipped those pages on which the word "Objectivism" appeared. To do this, to reject an idea simply because the person

who introduced it is "a well-known fugghead", or to accept an idea merely because the proposer has a Good Image, seems to me to be unwise -- but it's also an individual's prerogative, and in a way it's understandable. One simply does not have the time to consider everything in this world, so it's necessary to follow those veins which contain a high percentage of that particular ore in which one is most interested. In fact, you might even say that I'm following this principle myself, since I'm most interested in by-ways and curious side-paths such as fandom and Apa L.

You were talking about the New Money last time, I believe. People seem to dislike it for a number of reasons, but I suppose the deepest and most important one is that they consider that money should have an absolute, intrinsic value--one which might be expected to remain fairly stable despite inflation or fluctuations in the economy. Maybe the common ordinary man has some vague idea that if things really get tough, he can melt down his hoarded silver and sell it to Eastman Kodak, or make jewelry out of it, to sell at a profit. He doesn't realize, of course, that if the economy ever reaches the point where paper money is nearly worthless, a little silver isn't going to be much help, not even if he can manage to smuggle it out to some country still on the silver standard, since the whole Western world would be involved.

As you said, money today is simply promissory material, backed solely by faith in the established government; this is perfectly ok as long as everyone agrees to accept it, and no-one rocks the boat. I believe that the Conservatives are of the opinion that the Communists intend to rock the boat most vigorously as soon as they are certain that they can capsize it.

You might be surprised at the number of people who are stashing away as much of the silver Old Money as they can, presumably thinking along the above lines. Sir Thomas Gresham, I believe, once said "Bad money drives Good money out of circulation", and while this applied to an economy based on the metal standard (rather than the Gross National Product, whatever that is), many people are still activated by the same motives.

As for me, I favor Louis Bromfield's suggestion, and am toying with the idea of trying to buy a small farm somewhere -- though this too seems a popular hedge against inflation, considering the high prices good farmland brings. Bromfield, whose observation included Europe from pre-WWI to post WWII, reasonably concluded that, after all, eating is about the most important thing, and no matter what wars or depressions sweep over the world, farmers are the ones who are most likely to have enough to eat, plus being able to get along fairly well in the way of shelter, clothing, &cet.

"Time, Gentlemen, Time!"