



the New Jersey Curriculum Transformation Project that science was essentially a masculine rape of a passive and feminine Nature.

What she said was:

"Mind was male. Nature was female, and [scientific] knowledge was created as an act of aggression--a

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passive nature had to be interrogated, unclothed, penetrated, and compelled by man to reveal her secrets."

It strikes me that Fee's belief that Nature is passive might just possibly come from somebody who has never been caught unprotected in a hurricane, who has never seen near-at-hand the ravages of disease, who has never had to fight off a shark attack, and who has been living with a very romanticized view of nature. (Or is it me who has lived with a romanticized view of femininity?)

Ms. Fee might ask a chipmunk just how passive nature is. Humans have the luxury of seeing Nature as a big, friendly Mother Nature because of a number of factors, not the least of which is that we have just about always been the biggest and meanest animal around. I occasionally brush my tongue across my sharp teeth and think to something like a chipmunk we must look like pretty scary fighting machines. The truth is that those sharp teeth are each bigger than the vast majority of animals on this planet. The world is a much more terrifying place to a chipmunk than it was to Fee's pre-technology ancestors.

But even these ancestors lived in a dangerous world. Even at their tremendous, there were still other animals to prey on them. And there was a constant threat of starvation. That was where came in this technology and science that Ms. Fee characterizes as being masculine and rapist. Science and technology kept away the animal predators, kept away diseases, put food on her table. Nature is anything but passive. It is an unending arena of life-and-death struggles in which Fee had a distinct advantage because her forbears were big and mean and had science to help them.

Fee strikes me as the maiden who, once saved from the dragon, turns around and first says it wasn't much of a dragon, then criticizes

the knight for how he rescued her.

3. Well, the discussion of the Hugo-nominated short stories was quite spirited, and went well over the official hour for the meeting. I will not attempt to recount the entire discussion here, but will give a few comments. Of "A Walk in the Sun" Rob Mitchell said that he enjoyed stories about the indomitable human spirit, to which Charlie Harris responded, "Unlike Rob, I dislike stories about the indomitable human spirit, especially when they involve long walks across rough terrain." Charlie also said he disliked fantasy, then voted "Winter Solstice" first, saying it had a "hopeless, relentless, driving urgency." People divided sharply on whether "Buffalo" or "In the Late Cretaceous" were actually science fiction, over whether they liked humorous stories, over whether they liked fantasy, over whether they liked hard-science puzzle stories, and over just about everything else--so it's all the more surprising that the "winner" won by such a large margin as it did.

And yes, there is a winner. We had all read the stories, and so we all voted. Since this is an AT&T science fiction club, I guess these are the first annual "Alexanders." Given below are the raw votes ("1" means first place, etc.; tie votes were averaged and are indicated with decimal places), the total score per story, and the rankings.

ECL	RTM	DLS	NJS	CSH	TOTAL	RANK	TITLE
2	2	2	2.5	1	9.5	1	Michael Resnick: "Winter Solstice"
7	1	3	7	5	23	2	Geoffrey A. Landis: "A Walk in the Sun"
3	7	1	5.5	7	23.5	3*	John Kessel: "Buffalo"
6	4.0	5	5.5	3	23.5	3*	Mike Resnick: "One Perfect Morning, With Jackals"
5	8	4	1	6	24	5	No Award
4	4.0	6	2.5	8	24.5	6	Martha Soukup: "Dog's Life"
1	6	7	8	4	26	7*	Connie Willis: "In the Late Cretaceous"
8	4.0	8	4	2	26	7*	Terry Bisson: "Press Ann"

\* tie

4. Patrick Connolly in Columbus sends the follows announcement:  
Context is a science fiction convention focusing on the written

word. Scheduled October 2 - 4, 1992, Context V will be held at the Hilton Inn North in Worthington, OH (just south of intersection of US 23 and I270 near Columbus). The Guest of Honor is George Alec Effinger; the Editor Guest of Honor is Martin H. Greenberg; the Fan Guest of Honor is Debbie Hoginson; special guests are Joan Slonczewski, Buck & Juanita Coulson, and Dennis McKiernan (who used to be a member way back when!). Events include a variety of panels, presentations and seminars; a short story contest for best original science fiction or fantasy; story; entries must be received August 15, 1992, winning entry to be published in L\_a\_n'\_s L\_a\_n\_t\_e\_r\_n; childrens' programming for younger fans; art show and auction; masquerade featuring costumes based on written SF/fantasy; the finest hospitality suite in central Ohio; autographing; babysitting; dealers' room; filking; and the SF limerick contest. Membership rates are \$30.00 until September 15, \$35.00 thereafter (payable to FANACO, Inc). For more information, contact Context V, PO Box 2954, Columbus, OH 43216.

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All the world's a stage and most of us are desperately unrehearsed.

-- Sean O'Casey

ENCHANTED APRIL  
A film review by Mark R. Leeper  
Copyright 1992 Mark R. Leeper

Capsule review: This is a light and v\_e\_r\_y pleasant comedy that could be used as an ad for the Italian Tourism Board. It starts like E. M. Forster's indignant social dramas and then

unwinds under the warm Italian sun into a rich romantic comedy. It features beautiful settings and people you would love to meet. Rating: +2 (-4 to +4).

I admit it. The reason I wanted to see this movie was because I wanted to see more of Miranda Richardson. No, I wasn't taken with her stunning beauty. I just saw her in one film clip in which she had no lines. She was only reacting to a conversation between Josie Lawrence and Joan Plowright. The conversation was funny but Richardson's reactions were priceless. I admit it was a silly reason to pay \$7 to see a film but nothing else in the film appealed to me. And this is a film that turned out to be well worth seeing. This film seamlessly bridges the gap between E. M. Forster social indignation and a Shakespearean romanticism.

It is a rainy, ugly winter in 1922 London. Lottie Wilkins (played by Josie Lawrence) sees a stranger, Rose Arbuthnot (played by Miranda Richardson) wistfully looking at the same newspaper ad that she had. It offered a Northern Italian castle for rent for April ... "wisteria and sunshine." Both women are unhappily married, Lottie to a miserly businessman (played by Alfred Molina) and Rose to a writer of sexy novels (played by Jim Broadbent). With four women they might be able to swing the vacation. They find a crusty old harridan, Mrs. Fisher, whose father knew every great literary genius of his generation. Also there is a world-weary heiress, Lady Caroline Dester. Soon the mousey Lottie and Rose find why it is not good to travel with strangers. Mrs. Fisher is selfish and nasty, Lady Caroline is cold and aloof. Then the warmth and the beauty of Portofino begins to work a kind of magic on all.

Mike Newell, who previously directed the horror film T\_h\_e\_A\_w\_a\_k\_e\_n\_i\_n\_g and later directed Richardson in D\_a\_n\_c\_e\_w\_i\_t\_h\_a\_S\_t\_r\_a\_n\_g\_e\_r, here directs a surprisingly magnetic film. Peter Barnes adapted the 1922 novel by Elizabeth von Armin. The film was shot in the same castle where von Armin wrote her novel. Each of the four actresses has opportunities to stand out and Molina's half-serious, half-comic role is also a positive pleasure. Watching this film is like taking a pleasant vacation. This is one of the year's best films. I rate it a +2 on the -4 to +4 scale.

A FIRE ON THE DEEP by Vernor Vinge  
A book review by Dale L. Skran  
Copyright 1992 Dale L. Skran

Vernor Vinge is one of the little heralded great pioneers of modern SF. Several times a nominee for the Hugo, he has not caught the fancy of the mass of SF fans, yet is recognized as a seminal innovator by a tiny group. T\_r\_u\_e\_N\_a\_m\_e\_s showed us cyberspace long before Gibson started his career, but more than that, it opened the door to a new generation of writers(including Gibson) that dealt in human transcendence. The torch was taken up by Bruce Sterling in his Shaper/Mech stories and novels, as well as by Gibson and others. Yet still Vinge went unrecognized, relegated to the back pages of A\_n\_a\_l\_o\_g.

With M\_a\_r\_o\_o\_n\_e\_d\_i\_n\_R\_e\_a\_l\_T\_i\_m\_e Vinge reached what may be the peak of his form. He created a gripping murder mystery with fascinating, engaging characters just for starters. He piled on a sweeping vision of time and the human future with the "Singularity." Simply put, Vinge posits an endpoint to human history, a moment of true transcendence when, artificially boosted, human intelligence becomes something unknowable, something akin to godhood.

Then Vinge stopped writing. He had stepped too close to reality for his taste. In the not too distant future he could foresee the end of knowable humanity, and the end of the time period SF writers could honestly write epic stories of the future.

Now, Vinge returns with a sweeping tale of an unlikely, even impossible future. He creates a gimmick to allow him to write the kind of "super-science" stories he likes to read--the Slow Zone. In some twisted fashion, the center of the galaxy inhibits thought, both human and electronic, as well as faster than light travel, which is apparently tied in some complex fashion to thought itself. This gimmick is similar to that used by Poul Anderson in B\_r\_a\_i\_n\_W\_a\_v\_e, but with some significant differences.

In the "Unthinking Deeps" no civilization can arise; real intelligence is simply impossible. Woe betide the ships that wander here! In the "Slow Zone" thought is possible, as well as simple computers, but faster than light travel is not. In the "Beyond," computers and minds work much better, and "ultra-drive" works. Finally, in the "Transcend," it is possible to achieve transcendence and vanish from the ken of lesser beings.

On this canvas Vinge spins a tale of pack-intelligences and little boys, of a woman who survived the murder of billions and a man who was godshatter, of a Power who learned too late that there are always the greater and the lessor, of a hollowed-eyed crew

lusting for vengeance the heroism of the tool of an ancient evil,  
and of the courage of a young girl.

While reading A\_F\_i\_r\_e\_o\_n\_t\_h\_e\_D\_e\_e\_p\_s, I kept saying to myself, "This is pretty good, but aggh! what a gimmick!" Toward the end, I came to the realization that by showing us this unlikely caravan of miracles, Vinge is reminding us of just how strange the universe may yet be! There are even those, such as Roger Penrose (T\_h\_e\_E\_m\_p\_e\_r\_o\_r'\_s\_N\_e\_w\_M\_i\_n\_d), who believe that thought and consciousness may have a quantum mechanical component. And if it did, is it impossible that the subtle twisting of spacetime by the black hole at the center of the galaxy might, just might have some effect on thought--human and machine?

Recommended to fans of Vinge, Bear, Benford, Reed, Gibson, Sterling, E.~E.~Smith, hard SF, and anyone who has a net address.

P.S.: To all those loyal readers of Skran reviews, this is the first to be composed on a notebook PC while flying over the Atlantic Ocean.

THE LAST OF THE MOHICANS by James Fenimore Cooper  
Bantam, 1981 (1826c), ISBN 0-553-21329-6, \$3.50.  
A book review by Mark R. Leeper  
Copyright 1992 Mark R. Leeper

I guess the question arises, why review in 1992 a book published in 1826 which has been in print most of the intervening time? Does it even make sense to review an acknowledged classic? I think it does make sense, as there is a film version coming up in the near future and there may well be people made curious about the novel by the film or, as in my case, by the coming attractions. I do recognize that a number of literary people have already given up on the film because 1) the main character's name was changed from Natty Bumppo to Nathaniel Poe and 2) the film interpolates a love interest. (I am not so ready to condemn these decisions since I remember seeing the name Bumppo only once in the novel. The character is always called Hawkeye in the novel. As for love interest--well, that is one interpretation for what Hawkeye does in the novel. It is never made explicit in the prose, but you might find love interest if you choose to read between the lines. In any case, how bad can a film be if it stars Daniel Day Lewis?)

The Last of the Mohicans manages by a strange coincidence to be the second of the five Leatherstocking tales. It is the second written, the second published, and the second by internal



chronology. I say this is a coincidence since, if I read my Britannica correctly, the three orderings are fairly different from each other. "Leatherstocking," incidentally, is another alias for Natty Bumppo. (Actually elsewhere Indians call him "La Longue Carabine.") Just why such an upstanding citizen as Bumppo needs three aliases is a mystery to me unless it is just an effort to escape that silly surname.

    T    h    e    L    a    s    t    o    f    t    h    e    M    o    h    i    c    a    n    s is an acknowledged world classic. The

same Britannica article talks about how Russian and Polish school children know Natty Bumppo. Actually it is my suspicion today that it is a novel that reads better in translation than it does in its original. The plot leans much more to action than to deep consideration of universal themes. I was, in fact, somewhat surprised to find that this respected novel was so much an adventure story with so little introspection. I would almost say this was a thumping page-turner except for the usage of prose. The novel is written in a stodgy early 19th Century prose that, at least for me, ruins a lot of the impact of the story-telling. It is one thing in a story set in a forest to be told that your enemy is creeping ever closer. It is another thing to be told in a sixty-word sentence that the varlet is drawing nigher. I am not sure if it is the vocabulary that is out-dated or the lack of concrete prose. But the language, I found, really distanced me from the action. I often got

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through paragraphs with only a vague sense of what they actually had said, and perhaps settled for that too easily out of laziness.

Part of what made this novel considered good was its treatment of the Indians in the story. Only some of the description of their lifestyle and practices really struck me as realistic. The Indians often used the same stodgy language that the white men and the author used. (Well, perhaps if the only English they heard was stodgy, they would use stodgy language.) Somehow it just did not sound like language that Indians would use. The Indians were also not shown as paragons of tolerance either. There clearly was no love lost between some of the tribes. Probably worst was the old cliché that Indians lust after white women. But the Indians were treated as full characters. Some were good, some bad, but all were

people. They were not just bright animals or vicious demons. They were full-fledged characters and some had real nobility.

I have said a lot about the book without really mentioning the plot. The story is set in what is now upper New York State during the French and Indian Wars. An English party, led by Major Duncan Heyward, is being guided to Fort William Henry by Magua, an Indian scout. Little do they know that Magua is working for the French and leading the party into a trap. Then, in the best tradition of Tarzan, out of the wilderness comes the great white scout Hawkeye, accompanied by his faithful Indian equal Chingachgook and Chingachgook's son Uncas. Chingachgook and Uncas are the only two survivors of the disaster that befell the noble Mohican tribe. Our scouts chase away the treacherous Magua and agree to guide the party themselves. But the evil Magua has more up his sleeve.

If this plot strikes you as being more characteristic of a juvenile adventure film than of a towering classic, you are not alone. Yet well into the 1800s, people were certain that the author who would be best remembered from that century would be James Fenimore Cooper and that Cooper's best work was \_ T\_ h\_ e\_ L\_ a\_ s\_ t\_ o\_ f\_ t\_ h\_ e\_  
\_ M\_ o\_ h\_ i\_ c\_ a\_ n\_ s\_. And they were not entirely wrong. One hundred sixty-six years later there are still people responding to this story. One twelve-year-old saw the coming attraction for the new film version and told his friend, "That's gonna be \_ a\_ w\_ e\_ s\_ o\_ m\_ e\_!"