# MOSS ON THE NORTH SIDE

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I'll have you know that in order to do this, I've had to tear myself away from my new toy:  I finally went and bought a home computer.  Aside from being able to do all the things that computers usually do, this one has some fancy built-in graphic effects that let you draw pictures and other neat stuff. It comes with 64 pre-programmed graphics characters (in addition to standard upper and lower case typewriter symbols), and you can put in another 64 of your own, personal, customized symbols.  (Anything you can draw with an array of 8x8 dots.)  (In fact, you can overwrite their 64 with your own set, too, giving you up to 128 of your own symbols.)  That means, aside from making it easier to do animated cartoons, you can program it to talk to you in any alphabet from Farsi to Tengwar.

However, though what I have is fine for playing games and doing calculations, all of its output is to a video monitor; what I <u>really</u> want to do is hang a Selectric on it so I can throw together a proofread fanzine (using the screen), and then press a button and *voila*! instant stencils!

But I am not in a position to double the cost of my system just now.  Drat.

Enough of this.  On to mailing comments.

JANE:  Re devaluing the word 'racist' -- don't you think that indiscriminantly applying it to <u>everyone</u> who "reaps benefits from an oppressive system" devalues it?  That includes year old white babies (who get better health care, nutrition, etc.) and whites who got killed in the civil rights movement.

Point taken about "the wife" -- it is just a slang expression, a straight substitution with no equivalent usage for other nouns, and irrelevant to the argument.

Gee, I have to admit to a fair quantity of bigotry in my conception of engineers.  Of course, jokes about engineers are just for fun -- don't engineers have any sense of humor? Do you know the engineer's proof that all odd numbers are prime?... But seriously, some of my best friends are engineers ... Er.  But Jane, I find it hard to think of you as an engineer -- maybe if you had a crewcut...

Rather than pursuing this suicidal course any further, let me move on to

DEBBIE:  I agree completely on Bakshi's LoTR.  Especially the part about mixing animation techniques.  And as far as the film standing on its own is concerned -- Lynn Dollis hasn't read the books, and she said she found it somewhat confusing. Especially identifying good guys and bad guys in the first third.  (I wondered about "Aruman" too; that's an interesting theory.)

Thank you for listing the items in the Terror Trick!  I guess the champagne has more class than frying an egg at the end.  But why doesn't the champagne explode?  (Don't tell me they cheat?)

I simply can't resist this:  You ask "Why is being gay against God's laws?" "Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is abomination." (Leviticus, 18:22).  Then there's also the 10th commandment --"Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, ... nor his ass."  But perhaps that's not what they meant ...  Now, the exhortation in Leviticus is preety explicit, so I'm sure homosexuality is a sin.  It probably ranks just under breaking the second command- ment -- "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth".  You don't know anyone who'd do <u>that</u>, do you?

PAUL:  Re silmarils -- you gotta remember Tolkien was a philologist, and after twisting his tongue around whatever languages, he might not have seen any difficulty.  The sound actually helps make it sound exotically foreign.  I had the interesting experience of reading LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS aloud, to a blind friend, and one of the minor subtleties in the book is that the names of people and places sound different in the different countries.  Karhidish is a harsher-sounding language than what they speak in Orgoreyn.

Re racism -- I guess I would use the word to mean what you call "blatant racism", and say "passive racism" when that was what I meant.  I really do agree with you and Denys et. al. that the latter is an important and valid concept; I still feel, though, that using the unmarked word for the far broader passive case is only valid as a pure shock tactic, to shake up white liberal friends. Clearly, if all whites are racist, it is pure redundancy to say of x whites, o£æparticular whites, that is, that they are racists (i.e. it suffices to say "Paul is white"; it then follows that "Paul is racist" by your usage).  To me that devalues the word because it loses precision.

And now on to that subject dear to my heart:  Computers.  You won't let me say that computers are value-free, because they are the product of rational, scientific thought, which is not value-free.  OK -- I'll amend my remark. A computer is as value free as a typewriter, an airbrush, a piano, or a camera. I could pick other objects, any tools, in fact, but those seem to require a fair degree of technology, they are all artists' tools, and specifically, a computer can be used to write novels, make pictures, produce music, and make movies.

It took engineers, scientists, and mathematicians to make computers, granted, but do you think that using them would automatically taint one's thoughts with the scientific value system?  I would think that a writer who wrote a sweeping attack on technology using a Selectric would be something of a hypocrite; but no more so than one who had a smallpox vaccination.

The actual, working computer takes far more of its values from its program than from its electronics.  An irrational programmer will produce an irrational program.  I have personally, at work, sent our PDP 11/45 into autistic withdrawal (to the point where we literally had to pull the plug).  If what the program is doing is producing your paycheck, you probably want it to be highly rational. But if it's supposed to be writing poetry, some gibbering may be necessary.

You can take it as an axiom of systems analysis that any complex system will exhibit unpredictable behavior.  I don't know that much about behaviorism, but everything I've heard has been bad (I find Maslow's psychology far more interesting and congenial, from what I've read of it -- though he is occasionally sexist and has some gratuitous attacks on homosexuals).  If computer systems ever get complex enough to mimic the higher human functions -- such as flashes of insight -- I don't think they'll offer the behaviorists much joy.  And as educational tools -- well, I don't see why humanists should be poorer programmers than behaviorists, when it comes to computer-assisted instruction.

DENYS:  As far as the waitlist is concerned, if there are extra copies, I think it's a fine idea to send them to the top n people on the waitlist.  Offhand, I'd think the first two or three people would have a chance of becoming full members before the frustration of peering in through the window got too bad (if they were really gung ho, I suppose their stuff could be franked through).  Do people want to set limits on the apa g size by copy count (that is, on the grounds of what is a convenient number for duplication) or body count (that is, how large a group can you have and still keep it feeling comfortable)?

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