

Motley #15

Jim Benford

August 2020, FAPA # 332

I am sometimes criticized for avoiding the great discordant notes of the times and closing my ears to the drums of daily doom. I have found that the momentary sound very shortly becomes a whisper and the timely fury is forgotten, while the soft verities persist year after year.

-John Steinbeck

ON JW CAMPBELL AND THE CAMPBELL AWARD

-Two Opinions-

James Gunn

I would like to respond to a few evaluations of John W. Campbell. Campbell published women writers, such as C. L. Moore and others, when there weren't many around, and Jewish writers such as Asimov, Bob Silverberg, H. L. Gold, and others. He published numerous British writers. There weren't any translated writers, but there weren't that many in the Golden Age and translations were rare (except for Gernsback's German writers). There were almost no writers of color in the field during the Golden Years.

An editor has to show for his work the stories he published, and Campbell had an advantage in having a more stable publisher in Street & Smith (it's hard to say at this point if he influenced the increase in rates back to two cents a word (which seems minor at this time, but was actually worth more at the time than the current ten cents a word). He was forced to raise his rates to three cents a word when Horace Gold's *Galaxy* started there and increased its rates by half a cent for each three stories an author sold to *Galaxy*. But even an extra half-cent a word (the other markets were paying a cent or a cent and a half) was enough by itself. There was Campbell's own Don A. Stuart stories that provided an example of what he wanted and what was possible. Cliff Simak is reported to have turned to his wife when he heard Campbell had been appointed editor and said, "I can write for Campbell." Campbell also had to go out and get writers. He was the first editor to work with writers, talking to them in his office (I got the idea for "Wherever You May Be" from my first office visit with him, and Fred Pohl sent it over to Horace Gold for the lead novella in the May 1953 issue). Campbell published appeals for new writers in his editorial and gave ideas to them, there, in his office, and in letters. Horace Gold did that later, but mostly to authors he saw in his apartment. And Campbell established science-fiction as a fiction with a philosophy and a mission. He wanted stories that were scientifically based or logically extrapolated, and he wanted good stories as well. He provided standards and a focus. "Grant your gadgets and get on with your story," he said, and "science fiction exists between the laboratory and the marketplace." And he wanted a story that could be published in a magazine in the 25th century, that is: with the background implied (as Heinlein perfected) rather than laid out. That is why during *Astounding's* Golden Age, between 1938 and 1950, when *The Magazine Of Fantasy And Science Fiction* and *Galaxy* provided significant competition, writers (and readers) looked to *Astounding* as publishing what was recognizably science fiction, the real stuff (as I wrote in an article, "The Gatekeepers," for *Science Fiction Studies*). It was Campbell who established that, and everything that came after (even the Moorcock NEW WORLDS, which privileged anti-*Astounding* stories, benefited from it).

Many of Campbell foibles came after 1950 (not Dianetics, which appealed to a number of science fiction people as a kind of scientific (or science-fictional) Freudianism, and his belief that WWII had validated science fiction but also pre-empted much of its favorite topics, and urged writers to explore parapsychology. I suspect that the changed situation of science fiction made him look around for more borderline topics.

Finally, on a personal note, I should set down that I was attracted to *Galaxy's* social science fiction and turned to writing for Horace Gold rather than Campbell, although my success with both was about even at half a dozen stories each during Campbell's and Horace's tenures--substantially more with Bova and Schmidt, and Fred Pohl, but I never lost my respect for Campbell, who was, I think, science fiction's indispensable man, as Gernsback was in his days (as a publisher, not an editor). It is hard to say that about anybody else.

I urge anybody who would like to see what Campbell was like working with writers, check out my "Lunch with John Campbell" film, his essay in *Worlds Beyond*, or his collection of editorials edited by Harry Harrison.

Oh, yes, about the early days of the Campbell Awards. Harry and Brian were pretty casual administrators, coming to decisions, sometimes with the help of committee members, sometimes not, with winners sometimes being selected at the last minute, as was the first. I remember having the committee being gathered together in a bedroom in Dun Laireagh, Ireland, at the founding meeting of World SF, to decide who would get the award the next day. I think I was influential in it going to Fred's *Gateway*. The jury system finally got organized when I took it over in 1978.

Gregory Benford

I think Paul Kincaid gets much wrong in his view of the sf world literature. I've been in 80 countries, lived abroad over 10 years, met many foreign sf writers, publishers, editors. I had drinks with every SFWA writer in Africa & most in S America and even most of Europe. They don't dislike Campbellian sf—they often try to make it their own, with their culture. This is true in China, Japan, Germany especially. They find Campbellian sf is not easy—both tech abilities & social crafty thinking on the future, with clever plots. (Meant broadly; I think of "Flowers for Algernon" is a Campbellian tragedy.)

The rude ignorance from Worldcon is no diagnostic of the whole—just read it! Informed? She got 3 things wrong in first sentence! Not Joseph, not *Amazing*, and JWC was no fascist. She though is a citizen of China, by many definitions a fascist state. Being ignorantly ranted at while at Worldcon by a citizen of a fascist state is beyond irony. Nobody claims JWC ever DID anything wrong. Speech is free. Allowing figures to be culturally exiled for their opinions is evil in itself--typical Millennial thinking, alas afoot on the internet.

[I asked old friend still at CIA (I still serve on a panel for them) about Ng. Her father is close to the Party and may be a full member. (Normally need Party connections to get a passport, which she has.)]

[Side issue: what's next? Who criticizes Austen for portraying characters who accept Regency-era mores uncritically? Who criticizes Melville for portraying characters who have no interest in saving the whale? Soon, we may find out.]

Again, I emphasize that we name awards after people for the positive, good, and important things they have done, not for their shortcomings or frailties. Despite their faults, people who have overcome them and fulfilled the promise of their innate skills and have added significantly to whatever field of endeavor they are part of, should be our candidates for honoring them by naming an award after them. Let's honor the higher aspects of our natures, not dismiss the accomplishments. We reward success, not failures.

To me the Worldcon speech was another juvenile display of those what want to have their cake and eat it too. She should've at least rejected the award. Instead she provoked overt sexist racist rants like this:

<https://www.hindustantimes.com/columns/rewriting-the-history-of-science-fantasy-fiction/story-we3B4NbtEf7ItDCTP2cSgO.html>

While Paul wants to rename or destroy awards because of an honorees' shortcomings, the negative, we should keep the named awards of the honorees for their accomplishments, the positive. It's the negative view of everything permeating the field today against those of us wishing to celebrate the positive in all of us. I think Trevor panicked big time by renaming the JWC Best New Writer Award the *Astounding* Award. Campbell made *Astounding* what it was, and in so doing his glory years as editor, 1939-1950, are known as SF's Golden Age (so saith Alec Nevala Lee in his book). Without Campbell there would be no *Astounding* as we know it, nor no Golden Age, yet we want to dismiss the man responsible for the field's longest running magazine while under Campbell's command for some 34 formative years, and the Golden Age his time at the helm gave us. He gave the field so much despite his flaws but he's now not good enough for the field to honor him.

[Note no one, not Paul even, has proposed another name.]

If Paul does not respect the culture of Campbellian sf which our award invokes, I respectfully suggest he leave the Jury deciding on it. His tastes and philosophy clearly do not align with our goals and stated purpose. That act would be principled.

Mailing Comments

Fred Lerner, *Lofgeornost* 139: Although there is much celebration of the sharp reduction in emissions due to the pandemic, this event is actually bad news for the carbon restrictionist strategy that climate advocates have been pushing for a quarter of a century. The current estimate is that global emissions are going to fall 8% this year compared to last year. But the United Nations environmental program estimates that emissions will have to fall 7.6% each year from 2020 to 2030 in order to keep the world temperature from rising let less than 1.5°C. That would be a net of 55%, roughly half of all world emissions dropping in only a decade. But you can't get there from here.

This drop is economically unsustainable. The economic damage due to the lockdowns has pushed economies to the brink already. The less wealthy countries can't afford even as great a

lockdown as the wealthier countries have already done.

Although reducing commuting by having people work at home is something advanced economies can do, only 18% of world emissions is due to transportation, so the UN target can't possibly be met from just having people work at home. The capacity of humanity for sacrifices of economic well-being is greatly limited.

The climate movement is going to have to move is going to have to change its tune and seriously undertake mitigation and geoengineering in order to have a hope of actually adjusting to climate change. It's remarkable how opposed to geo-engineering the carbon restrictionists are. For example, *Scientific American* has had several negative articles about geoengineering. Their main point is that not enough research is been done to assess their efficacy. You would think that *Scientific American* would be beating the drum for geoengineering research, but instead they're ideologically opposed. They and other carbon restrictionists may change. In fact, they'll inevitability have to change as we go further in this decade.

Freeman Dyson was a friend of mine for half a century. In fact I was to do an event at UCSD with him in January, but his health deteriorated in December and his doctors told him not to travel. The fall that apparently caused his death was probably on top of the illness he already had.

Also I also regret the loss this year of Margaret Burbidge, the great astronomer that I worked for in the 60s. She was quite charming as well as quite intelligent. Her husband Geoffrey was blunt and pretty ugly, the opposite of her. She died early this year at the age of 100. Cause was also a fall. I've sometimes wondered if getting to know such a fine Englishwoman influenced me when I met Hilary at about the same time She's also a wonderful Englishwoman; we were married in 1966, so it's 54 years and still counting!

In this lockdown I bought the entire *Rockford Files* series and am watching it intermittently. It's really quite good and very characteristic of the 70s. Another favorite I'm revisiting is *Jeeves and Wooster* the Stephen Fry/Hugh Laurie series. It perfectly captured Wodehouse.

Eric Lindsay, *For FAPA*: It's always struck me that Australia is the ideal place for nuclear power because you have abundant supplies of uranium mine up in the north. I toured a surface uranium mine outside Darwin of 11 years ago. And you could cool nuclear plants with seawater on your enormous coastline. It's China & India that are increasing greatly carbon emissions. The US is dropping coal because natural gas is cheaper, more convenient and less polluting.

Tom Feller, *Senior student*: I appreciate your movie reviews. Occasionally I learn of something I would like to see.

R.G. Cameron, *Entropy Blues*: I recently read Alva Rogers *FTL & ASI* and think it's an interesting perspective on LASFAS of the time. I sometimes felt that the Southern California fandom was made up of somewhat dysfunctional people who seemed to think they were slans. There's always been some of that in fandom. I think that I agree with you that fandom is a more mature place now simply because the people are so much older than the very young fans of the mid-20th century.