



the only thing about living with

# OBSESSIONS

...is that you don't get enough sleep.....

OBSESSIONS... #2... JEANNE GOMOLL... 143 W. Gilman St.  
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Hello again.

Unfortunately this is going to have to be a short submission, seeing how I am just barely going to have this postmarked by 1 December, much less sent--

I'm just completing layout work on the sixth issue of Janus. It's our first offset issue and with all the people involved on this one, new techniques, etc..., we are nearly two weeks behind schedule ---and coming fast upon the next issue's submission deadline, which because of postal regulations and a decision to have Janus 7 out in time for Madison's February sf convention, is very soon indeed. I hate to think about it. Getting back to the issue at hand however, we are all very proud of it. I'm especially happy about the artwork in this issue and about my editorial which continued themes from my first APA submission and a review in Janus 5 on Evelyn Reed's Women's Evolution. Our taped conversation with Suzy Charnes and Amanda Bankier, Jan Bogstad and myself came out pretty well too.

That alone would have kept me busy enough to at least partially explain the hurried and much postponed work on this. But also in the works is our group's (the Madison sf group, MADSTF) current project, WISCON, a con to be held Feb 11-13, 1977. We've got Katherine MacLean for our Guest

of Honor and Amanda Bankier as Fan Guest of Honor. There is lots of programming, including a feminist sf panel. Janice Bogstad and I are planning this and hoping to avoid some of the problems that were commented upon as occurring this year in Kansas City by more thorough organization and researching of discussion topics, making the occasion less of a general and chaotic consciousness-raising session. Large one-time gatherings seem to me to be the wrong plane for such things as they end up being participated in by only a few very assertive conference attendants and we all lose valuable opportunities to draw upon the resources and experience of people we so seldom come in contact with.

In terms of subject material, we want to discuss the application in sf writing of the various new points-of-view and developments in scientific and academic fields brought about by recent feminist awareness. So, by developing some "idea-units," (Anthropology, Psychology, Biology, for instance) and bringing research material or (hopefully) resource people in to point out what has happened in those fields as a result of feminist re-evaluation (or just presence), we hope to generate some provocative discussion on the application of those ideas in sf, that being what it's all about anyway (ideas, I

Bundle  
up for



# Wiscon

(bring your own sin...!)

Madison, Wisc.

Feb. 11, 12, 13

mean), in plot, idea; character development, or style. I can see some really good discussions resulting from the studies from anthropology on the ancient matriarchies, or sex-role theories in Psychology, or developments in Biology that are giving women greater control over their bodies. I can see problems only with time, there not being enough of it that is.

I was hoping that by explaining Jan's and my desire to do something different with this feminist sf panel, I might get some response from you people of the APA... Any thoughts on how the MidAmeriCon or other similar panels might have been changed/improved upon, would be greatly appreciated. If you would like to participate with us on the program, you will be even more appreciated... More information, as well as our first PR, in press right now, or communications regarding the con can be obtained from this address:

WISCON

Post Office Box #1624  
Madison, WI 53701

Our Madison group is varied in interests and thus, so too will our convention be, even though it will hopefully have a strong feminist slant. We've got a fantastic-science speech by Professor March of the UW ("Quarks: The things that the things that atoms are made of are made of" ...I think I've got that right.), and a fantasy discussion with Richard West (ed. of Orcrist) and a panel discussing religious themes in sf, a contemporary sf exhibition/discussion (on Delany, Brunner, Zelazny), a multi-media presentation of early 1900's speculation with emphasis on H.G. Wells. Plus a fannish panel ("Can fans be fannish with frostbitten noses?" a tentative title based on the probable weather conditions in mid-February), a Video-Room in which MidAmeriCon film will be shown, and a dramatic presentation put on by a women's acting group, APPLE CORE, and, more, gawd, more... We are very open for suggestions and, please, help.



And well, not to sound like I enjoy listing, but then there is also a little presentation that Jan and I are doing this week, Wednesday in fact, for our group's open sf meeting on the science fiction of Doris Lessing. We'll be covering Briefing for Descent into Hell, Memoirs of a Survivor, and Four-Gated City.

How did November go by so fast?

So what I had been planning to do for this submission will have to be only lightly covered: I haven't got my notes. They're scrawled on little pieces of note paper, crumpled into the pockets of my other coat. Of course. What I had been hoping to do (besides do some reactions to the first APA--which comes last, in case you're wondering if I even read any of the thing) was to talk about a book I just read and am reviewing for WORT-FM radio, that is, Marge Piercy's Woman on the Edge of Time. I wanted to talk about it in comparison with some of Doris Lessing's stuff, seeing how she's been on my mind this past week... So:

I loved Woman on the Edge of Time. I also greatly enjoy, am impressed by, identify with at times, and refer to a lot of Doris Lessing's writing. But I think Piercy is taking Lessing's ideas in another (and further, and better) direction than Lessing herself will ever do. Both authors deal with people primarily from a female perspective and talk about what a journey through insanity means for an individual.

For Lessing, "insane" people, or rather people defined by society as insane (and not coincidentally, often women), are the only ones who really understand what is going on. Their "true" vision is an experience that is incredibly painful. "Sane" vision is a perception that buffers the individual from that pain. And

so Lessing's women can see society falling apart. As in Briefing for a Descent into Hell, they are the messengers-of-the-gods (or the gods themselves) who alone realize the precariousness of human existence. In Memoirs of a Survivor, they are the ones aware of "it," the disintegration of social communication and binding that must lead to chaos. However, it is precisely this "insane"/"sane" perception of the reality of chaos and real lack of connection among people that can save Lessing's characters, make her a survivor. It is the true perception, defined as insanity by society that enables her to become a survivor. Martha Quest's vision, so fleeting at the beginning of Four-Gated City gradually becomes more solid through her insanity (a very real loss of connection with our reality and ability to interact with others as her perception of another reality grows more powerful). At the end of Four-Gated City, she, and others like her have found a new level of communication to deal with this other reality. They develop a sort of telepathy. In



Memoirs of a Survivor, the main character's growing ability to project herself into another world (through a wall covered by a wall paper reminiscent of Gilman's The Yellow Wallpaper) is paralleled by the destruction of the real world around her. In the end, her survival is marked by her escape through and into this wall. In Briefing for Descent into Hell, the main character's only method of saving the world is through his

memory of his actual role of god-messenger sent to bring new perception to human beings. As a result of electroshock treatment, he "forgets" this reality, is "cured" according to sanitarium standards, but human beings are thus doomed to probable self-destruction for lack of his message and teaching.

Where Lessing sees insanity as a necessary thing to go through, and into, in order to escape our culture's definition of reality, in order to see a more truthful representation; Marge Piercy conceives of insanity as a thing to go through and come out of, free in a different sort of manner entirely, in a view that is more consistent with radical psychology. Piercy's main character (Connie, a middle-aged, Mexican woman in New York, unjustly committed to a sanitarium), escapes the world which she finds herself incapable of fighting to a future world in which things are considerably better. She is contacted by future people, who know themselves to be one of many possible alternative worlds and believe Connie's world to be a crux time in which the existence of their's is decided. By participating in a world (or by imagining a world) that she can live in with integrity and happiness, she finds herself growing in strength and assertiveness, freeing herself from the guilts and sickness that made her powerless and searching for escape. She finds the ability to rebel against the real world-- but not by negating its existence.



As this strength grows, so too does her ability to travel in time decrease. Her cure is marked by the closing of a door on this escape... The people of the future have achieved their goal, that is, to support and aid one of the "crux" repressed people of that era that will give or not give reality to their own existence (this, an objective, sf-reading of the novel). And Connie has survived her insanity by finding strength in her own subconsciousness, dreaming a reality that she can aim for, emerging from the isolation which is insanity, able, once more to interact with the world without destroying herself (this, a more metaphorical reading of Woman on the Edge of Time).

Where Lessing sees insanity (retreat, defining of a personal reality) as an end in itself, Piercy goes much further and agrees on the potential healthiness of an experience with insanity (such experiences, in fact, are normal lifetime events in the lives of her novel's future people) --But she insists on the necessity for the individual's return and application of those dreams and strengths in reality and with others.

I like that. I've had far too much experience with the real nightmare and terrible isolation of people not accidentally or thoughtlessly placed in sanitariums. I have never been able to fully accept Lessing's (or others') romanticization of such people's lives. And then I've always felt better about sf that seems more optimistic about what we as women can do with the materials-at-hand, that is, ourselves, not changed into something other-than-human by biological rearranging (cloning, removal of reproductive capacity, etc...), or drastic mental renovation, as Lessing proposes. Piercy seems both sensitive to this latter need of women today for dreams that we can accomplish as well as being very aware of the reali-

ties of insanity. She acknowledges her debt to a list of people involved in radical psychology and demonstrates what I think must be personal experience.

What did I say about this thing being short??!!



Before going on to final business and last minute notes, if anyone is interested in Piercy's book, Woman on the Edge of Time, it is published (so far, just) in hardcover by Alfred A. Knoph (New York: 1976, 369 pp.). It really is excellent. The description, which I haven't even mentioned here, of the Mattapoissett future community is fascinating and lovely.

If anyone is interested in that T-Shirt described in OBSESSIONS #1, you'd better write me or even call immediatly (608-251-5851, late nights). I have enough orders now to make it economically feasible and intend to have them printed in time for Christmas. I will need sizes and color preferences.

I was very impressed by Ann Weisner's and Denys Howard's support for the plural pronoun for use in place of 3rd person, non-sex-specified, singular pronouns. I've also been in favor of such a usage (since it is already done commonly in much spoken language now) and it seems so much more practical to accept a deterioration/evolu-

tion of language than to force-graft a desired change upon it. It used to feel uncomfortable to say women/woman when speaking of my friends and self. But the more I used these words, the easier and less <sup>sex-</sup>conscious I became with them. Now, to refer to a friend or myself as a "girl" unless I wish to emphasize someone's youth, seems incongruous and demeaning, and uncomfortable... The same could easily happen with the use of the pronoun "they" in unorthodox cases. When it can be applied, one is refering in many cases anyway, not to a certain, specific person, but to an anonymous one-of-many... almost a plural situation in any case.

Speaking of being in agreement, I too do not understand why the "blatant" sexism of Von Sternberg's strip at MAC that Terry (Ctein) talks of should attract so much more venom and attention than the certainly more damaging and more subtle sexism that goes on at such affairs. It seems to be still a form of chic to be (though in slightly different costume) a liberal civil rights marcher, oh-so-aware of those rotten red-faced bigots, as easy to identify as the blacks they marched for. (As a friend of mine, recently returned from a visit home in Greece said upon her arrival back in the US, sighing, "It's so refreshing to deal with blatant sexism again...")

...To continue with reactions to Terry (Ctein)'s words, I was intrigued with the metaphorical 'Click!' you spoke of... And I tried to recall back to when I first felt free in that way, back to when I'd broken financially/emotionally from my family, to when I was feeling that I was defining myself from within more than from without. I came up with a remembered image of myself walking home from classes one day, feeling extraordinarily excited and happy, stopping every block or so to sit on the grass and scrawl something in my journal because my mind was doing crazy things,



zig-zagging about like some dog I had out for a walk, and I knew I'd never remember it all when I got home. But besides that, I felt so comfortable in the world, and with myself. That feeling is part of the sense of freedom, but there's more to it. Perhaps now, I'm getting rather far from Terry's original conception of the meaning of that 'Click!', but then everyone has different boundries to be crossed to make changes happen in their lives: For me, it has involved to a great degree in recent years, a crash course in People, 101... From near total isolation I have rearranged my priorities to put friendships right up there. One finds out there is potential for a lot of pain but once having experienced the good parts of touching others, it's impossible ever to close the door again.

To put things in writing, to say them, to articulate -- has always been the only way I've known to understand myself and my world. And since my emotional life is just as important to me as any other aspect of my life, that too has to be articulated. Thus I was rather put off and objected to Diane White's derisive comments about the APA, should it be used partially as a CR forum. Why restrict our subject matter? And I don't agree that intelligence of an individual is in any way reflected by their ability/proclivity to argue as she seemed to suggest. To assume that there are not different basic assumptions (all valid) which individuals base their decisions and opinions upon, and to hammer away seems rude to me at best, and blindly chauvanistic at worst. Ideas and understanding are conveyed easily and often in better <sup>ways</sup> forms of communication other than with argument for its own sake.

I wanted to talk a little more this time about my life/self (as opposed to MADSTF activities and literary musings), but there's not enough time. On reading the other APA submissions, I felt a bit guilty for having been rather distant in my own pages (not even mentioning my

sexual orientation, for goodness sake), and hoped to counteract the impression in OBSESSIONS #2, but maybe I'll be able to do more along that line in #3; there's just no more time now.

I'll see you again in a couple more months. If I survive.

Jeanne



