

OBSESSIONS 7

This is OBSESSIONS number 7, typed on 29 November 1977, yup right on the deadline, to be printed this very evening on Hank Luttrell's mimeo and sent off tomorrow morning, 30 November. Immediacy. My address is 143 W. Gilman St. #303, Madison, Wisconsin 53703, USA. My phone number is 608/251-5851.

The reasons for the mailing-commentless feature of this issue of OBSESSIONS are! mostly long and involved; I'll get into some of the more interesting ones in the course of these pages. But the most succinct reason is that I have not yet read most of the zines in the past two (one and 1/2?) mailings. Last night at Lesleigh Luttrell's house where Diane Martin (#1 on the Wait List) were visiting and where I was stensiling a couple of drawings onto her first WAPA Zine, I was convinced to try to whip up a couple of pages today and to come back to the Luttrell's home this evening to print up a contribution. If you are reading this now, we were successful and managed to send off all 3 zines (Lesleigh's, Diane's and my own) Wed. morning. If you're not reading this I sure wasted a lot of time.

More convincing than Lesleigh and Diane's suggestion of last-moment heroics though, was my own thought that if I think I'm busy now, what am I going to consider myself next deadline, Feb. 1st, with probably 3 apa mailings to comment upon...

Realizing that Feb. 1 would be the next deadline sent shivers of horror up my spine (bent over a light table as it was), and I quickly agreed to have some stensils ready sometime, probably late sometime, Tuesday night.

Some of you may know already that around the beginning of February I will be very busy indeed with helping to put on the second Wisconsin Science Fiction Convention --WisCon II. I'll get back to that in a while but first a few paragraphs on how come OBSESSIONS 7 was so nearly delayed another couple of months.

JANUS 9 came out a few weeks ago: all of you should know about that, because for this issue at least, you were all on the mailing list. If we don't get some response from you though (not including comments in AWAPA), I'm afraid we won't be able to afford to keep you on the mailing list, unless we have other privately negotiated reasons for sending JANUS to you. I normally spend about two solid weeks illustrating and laying out each issue just before we send it to the printers. This is enormously satisfying and really a great deal of fun for me to do: it is perhaps what I think of as the most worthwhile and exhilarating thing that I do (and am learning/growing from). But still it means putting in between 55 and 60 hours a week during that period of time working on it. I get rather reclusive and tend not to want to see anyone or talk about anything except the zine when I do see people at all. I feel distressed about having to sleep so much not to mention having to go to work full time, besides. My eyes sometimes take on a glazed appearance. [For those of you not around during the first mailing of AWAPA, this has been an example of my reasons for naming my zine OBSESSIONS.]

There was a long period of nothing going on with JANUS after the last issue and before this one came out, but things went into high gear about late Oct. and things have been frantic since. And will be for a few more months. We're doing one more issue before the end of the year, a short one though, in order to be able to say that we are, yes, really, a quarterly. So right now I'm again beginning work on illustrations and layout for that one, which will be published around the end of December, just before Christmas. Then...the deadline for written material for the WisCon issue of JANUS is Dec. 31, and we start in all over again because that issue has to be printed in time for WisCon which will be Feb. 17-19.

And that's just JANUS, a minor part in the franticness of recent months. Well maybe not minor... Anyway, before I go on to telling you more about other obsessive type activities, I want to tell you about the WisCon issue of JANUS (and the con itself too) because the WAPA being what it is, including who it does, I'm hoping that a lot of you might be very interested, possibly have ideas, and maybe even want to participate in the production of JANUS for that issue and/or WisCon itself. Some of you are already involved.

As we did last year, the Madison Science Fiction Group will be attempting to put on a very feminist oriented convention. I say attempting, because I've learned through experiences at last year's con as well as this year at WesterCon, that a convention's themes and philosophy and politics is much more the product of the people who attend and get involved in programming and parties, than it is of the people who plan the convention. Of course it does help if the planning involves getting the right people interested in coming to the con and providing them with the space and programming possibilities to make good things happen. That's what we are trying to do. That's why I say "attempting" instead of promising you, for instance, that WisCon will definitely be an inspiring and exhilarating experience for those people who read SF or are involved in fandom as feminists. I think it will of course, but I won't say that.

I'm involved with the con primarily with the Art show, art programming, feminist programming and all programing involving people from out of town, and you'll notice a bias of information stemming from the fact that those areas are what I know most about right now. (If you want more information about the film program or the Simarileum, for instance, you should write the con PO box and the appropriate people will get in touch with you.)

WisCon
P. O. Box 1624
Madison, WI 53701

Right now, coordinating the out-of-town people programming and solicitating for contributions for the program book/JANUS #11 are taking up a lot of my time, so I'll tell you about those first. The program book for WisCon will actually be a delux issue of JANUS 11: the contents of that issue generally relating to the con. There will be biographies of both Vonda McIntyre and Susan Wood (our GoH's) with portraits drawn by Virginia Galko. There will be bibliographies for both too. There will be book reviews of all of Vonda's stories and novels--including --ta da!-- of her newest, not-yet-published novel, DREAMSNAKE. DREAMSNAKE will be coming out in early 1977, at WisCon (!!) if Houghten-Mifflin manages to shift up their publishing schedule as they say they are trying to do. As we did with Suzy Charnas's MOTHERLINES, Jan and I will do a major review/comment-by the author, article on DREAMSNAKE for that issue of JANUS. [By the way, the book is fantastic, extraordinary, WONDERFUL! If you need an excuse you should come to WisCon at least so that you can buy a first edition copy and get Vonda to sign it for you and read parts of it to you.]

As for other McIntyre book reviews, here is a section that is still open to submissions (although you should write to me first about what you want to do before you work on a story or book that we may already have enough reviews for). I especially

want to find a very good review of THE EXILE WAITING to reprint in JANUS. Do any of you recall one?

Besides the book reviews, I've been getting really excited about another sort of tribute to McIntyre's writing in the WisCon issue of JANUS. We will be printing about 12 or so pages of portfolio drawings (similar to the kind of centerfold arrangement --paper, position, etc.--that was used in JANUS 9), by a number of artists who will be illustrating scenes/images drawn from McIntyre's work. Again, this section is also still open, though I've written to quite a few artists and it may have to close soon if they all want to contribute to it. But if you have any inclinations yourself, or know of someone who might want to contribute a full or half-page size drawing to the portfolio,, put them in touch with me. But again, write first: I'd rather not have scenes/images duplicated and have to reject on that basis.

Other features of Janus 11 will include: an article by Susan Wood on feminist programming at conventions, a whole lot of small essays explaining/expanding on ideas that have prompted our other programming items (for instance, on Tiptree/Sheldon, on language and SF and women, on fandom and feminism, on Children's Literature, on fascism in SF, on education and SF, on the Simarileum, on the Artist programming, on H. G. Wells and Jules Verne, ...and (this is not, I repeat not, a joke:) the Madison Parade of cats--as opposed to homes you know). You'll have to write to the appropriate people for that last one if you want more details. I won't be involved with that. Try Leigh Luttrell and Diane Martin. Another aspect of the convention to be discussed in JANUS will be a series of movie reviews of films to be shown at the con. And then besides all that, there will be the usual JANUS features and columns.

About the only thing about WisCon programming that you can't deduce from their counterparts in JANUS as described above is the Readings. Vonda McIntyre will of course read from DREAMSNAKE, and I'm looking forward to that a lot. But also lined up (and also to be ~~looked forward~~ to) are some other writer/readers: so far they are all women, purely coincidental except for the fact that I haven't asked any men... Jessica Amanda Salmonson will read from her Anne Bonney stories (dyke pirate tales) and perhaps from her Atalanta tales too, and Ann Weiser has promised to read a play she has written, the title of which I don't know, but it's good: she gave an extemporaneous synopsis memory-reading of it at WindyCon a couple months ago. And then there are about 5 or 6 potential readers, which I guess would be unfair to list here since they haven't committed themselves yet. But there are a few big names, all interesting names among them. You'll all be getting a copy of the Wiscon PR brochure in a few weeks, around Christmastime I expect, and the list should be finalized by then.

Anyway, the coordination of programming and soliciting for JANUS 11 articles has turned out to be an energy saving combination of activities, and I am enjoying it. There is time yet--but not too much--for you to get involved if you want to. Last year WisCon began to acquire its reputation as a feminist con, and with our GoH's and the number of people who are already involved in designing feminist programming, I can't see how WisCon can turn out except more strong in this theme. It looks good. It also looks as if the convention will be a reunion of midwest and northwestern fans, strange axis it is. Loren McGregor has commented that the Vancouver-Seattle-Bay Area-Madison-New York of this period may someday be recognized by people who see in fandom terms as a fandom (you know, numbered). The membership roster of WisCon is bearing him out. So if you want to meet, or see again friends from the NW, you might consider coming to WisCon... Of course there are lots of other reasons too.

OK: I've been involved with JANUS (or perhaps I should say the JANI: it's amazing --we have the next two issues almost completely planned out...) and the convention. Maybe if that had been all I would have gotten around to reading the apa. There have been other things of course, but one of the reasons I didn't neglect all that, and

plunge into the mailings irregardless (at least for an ego-scan, or as Diane has heard it called, Psychic Income), was that the disagreements about men being allowed in the apa are so discouraging. They are energy-draining. They are the opposite of what this apa is supposed to be doing. What is happening is what I said (originally) that I didn't think would happen in this written CR/Support Group. Since it is happening, I have to change my opinion about who I want to be in the apa. I have found myself trying to make up all sorts of convoluted arrangements so that men who are not involved in loss-of-energy type arguments and conversations could remain in the apa, but now I agree with some others who've suggested we're just hurting the apa to try to hold to general rules with certain exceptions that, for instance, would keep Denys in the apa. We need time alone, the women in the group, to talk. If the men in the apa drop or are dropped, I don't expect the arguments to stop, or the energy-draining sorts of hurting to stop all together, but we've got to be able to deal with that sort of thing first between ourselves, as women, to become sure of the way we interrelate as women, before getting into a mixed situation again. There are difficulties, frictions, between women in this apa that must be dealt with, I think, in a somewhat more simplified situation, without the added complications that comment by and interactions between the men with the women of the apa seem to inevitably bring up. And so I want to belong to an all-women apa. If forming one here does not happen and one is formed outside this apa, I will probably drop AWAPA and join that. But I'll probably continue in AWAPA if no alternative appears and try to find time for the subapa. If the men drop or are dropped, I intend to continue sending OBSESSIONS to some of them: we all have that alternative if we wish to continue conversing with and getting feedback from certain men.

As to the rules as they are, as they were drawn up originally, as they are "supposed to be," I say let's have a constitutional congress and redo the whole thing. The rules of the apa (of any organization) should facilitate and reflect, not hinder and confuse a group's goals and philosophy. So: there were mistakes made when this apa was first conceptualized. And we've gone through a year now with those rules drawn up based on what and how we would theoretically want and do. It's time to make new rules based on what we want now. (And maybe at some later date, we'll need some other set of rules.) I think its horrible that because of the rules we must threaten to drop Jessica from the roster. She is acting upon ideals and decisions that a lot of us are sympathetic with. Our rules about minac should not be twisted to discriminate on moral grounds rather than the purely mechanical ones they are meant to cover. And similarly, with the question of men in the apa, if enough of us believe that the situation is no longer (or never was) a good one, damn it, let's just change it, and not argue about what the original intentions were. We know more now about what we want and how all this works than we did then.

Actually effecting a change in how this apa's structure (or even a title) is defined, is obviously going to be difficult. We have no process that can be invoked by an individual or even a majority of us, except to write to Janet, who may set up the voting procedure, etc. That's one thing I would really like to see incorporated into a new set of rules: some easy process whereby if a conflict comes up within the group about the apa's structure, anyone can start the impulse towards change. But unless something like that does become formalized, we are apt to continue as we have been struggling towards uncertain, and improbable consensus through a long, often painful time of apa mailings, letters, etc., in which everyone is proposing their own solution, noone able to solidify the points of view.

As I said, I am discouraged by all of this. Part of the pain of this whole set of disagreements, for me and a lot of you who have expressed frustration at the length we've gone to without coming to group conclusions, is that there is no really good way to conclude and act upon agreements.

I would be willing to work on with others, or by myself some statement of a process that could be used in the future to eliminate some of the drawn out back-and-

forth arguments about apa structure. That's about all I can offer after I've given my opinions and described my feelings about all this.

One more thing before I finish up on this: I will be sending this issue of OBSESSIONS out to a few more people than are on the mailing list, partly as a letter-substitute in most cases. To you I'd like to say that I'd rather you not consider this last discussion a comment-hook. I'm sure you will have lots of disagreements based on what I say here, and also based on what I haven't said, so that to answer you, I'd have to go back and describe why the things that have happened in the apa have happened and why I've reacted as I have. I'm not going to try to justify myself, and so don't want to get into an argument with you about the whole thing, especially with anyone not in the apa, but also I'd rather not have to spend time detailing the history of AWAPA, at least not by mail. OK? Thank you.

I work for the Women's Research Institute of Wisconsin, Inc. and presently we're working on a study of Madison's High School Senior girls: why they do or do not take mathematics in their last couple years of H.S. I've mentioned that before I think, but right now we're going full steam into the project, and it's really getting interesting. Working on the interview was fascinating, and plumbd a lot of memories for me of my own experiences in mathematics during my H.S. years. Feeling as if I was going to be able to make my career in mathematics while I was doing H.S. Geometry, loving it so much --feeling that doing a proof was one of the most fascinating things I could possibly think of doing (obsessions even then), the proof just "appearing" in my mind, magically, as I looked at a diagram--all this was a part of my sophomore year. And it all stopped the next year when I signed up for an advanced level of Adv. Alg. and came plunging down to a very un-magical world. The problems were suddenly no longer fun; I couldn't conceptualize the whole thing in one glance, I felt as if I'd hit a brick wall. I blamed myself, my abilities, ...and simply gave up, didn't try, accepted low grades. I blamed my teacher a little: he supported my belief that I wouldn't get much further even if I did try harder. The fact that I was the only woman in the whole class only made my earlier aspirations to find a career in math seem more ridiculous. And so escaping from that last year in math with solid "C's", I vowed never again to return and turned my attention to my interests that were not dependant on a math background. History, Political Science, English, Art. The first two combined to lead to an eventual BA in Urban Geography. The last two developed into what will probably remain life-long obsessions. But sometimes I wonder what I missed. For one time in college, I took a logic class in the Philosophy dept. and felt again that old thrill of exhilaration that I used to feel when doing a geometry proof. And sometimes I get into discussions of a theoretical math idea with friends who continued, and again I feel the excitement. Knowing that, and learning about how the sexes are treated differently in schools today (and yesterday) with regard to math and the hard sciences, I know that I missed out on finding out how far I could have gone, that I quit far, far too early.

Boys are told, when they encounter difficulties "Well, work harder, you're going to need math in the future." In the same circumstances, girls are told "Well try your best, but don't worry, you won't really need a lot of math in the future." This is one of the major reasons why there aren't more women in certain fields, academic and technical, that depend upon math knowledge...an extension of the self-fulfilling prophesy. theory.

But there are other pressures too; the one I felt: teachers of elective courses in math departments who make assumptions about boys' and girls' abilities and future careers. Social pressures on girls not to be smart for boys will like them less. Career notices/information that support sexist assumptions, and non-existent role models. Parents who do not support their daughters' interest in math. Counselors who continue that non-support and actively direct girls elsewhere.

Oh we're discovering all sorts of horror stories, even in liberal Madison. I

shudder to think about smaller communities.

The really hopeful thing about all this though is that with a little bit of encouragement (career counseling, teacher support, parent support, counseling that emphasizes the importance of math "even" to girls), the statistics change drastically. The differences between boys and girls, in their goals, in their grades, in their aspirations, disappears completely! Just hearing about these ideas, and reading some articles has caused my sister Julie (a sophomore in H.S., that crucial year) to become more determined to take math and put effort into it.

We can change ourselves by knowing that assumptions are not necessarily the truth. We can start making up our own self-fulfilling prophecies.

It doesn't pay too well (I'm always on the edge of financial disaster), but I feel good to be working at the Institute (WRIW). The project we're working on now is funded by NIE (the National Institute of Education) and is the Institute's Big Break: it's a large, long-term (2-year) grant and has enabled us to move out of quasi-grungy, but very comfortable quarters in an old University-owned house, out to the West Side, to shiney, efficient, prosperous-looking (but rather uncomfortable in comparison) quarters. Sometimes I feel like a secretary-receptionist now...but it's still immeasurably a better shit job than most.

I make ends meet now primarily with supplemental income brought in by freelance artwork. Some designs for cards for people who want unusual Christmas cards. Several people who my friend Anne Steel has introduced me to who want their poetry illustrated. A book cover for the woman who is conducting the mathematics research through the WRIW. Some brochures and book illustrations. And most recently, I've begun a comic strip for a Milwaukee newspaper, THE MILWAUKEE BUGLE. There are some other possibilities too...all of which prevent me from getting another job to be secure, and none of which will pay me anything until after Christmas sometime, which puts me in a nightmarish bind right now. But I have given little thought to finding another job; I keep working on the illustrations. And I think I'm getting better.

Tomorrow it's my turn to do the MADSTF open meeting, and I'm doing it on Tiptree/Sheldon, in preparation for the WisCon panel. TO TELL THE TRUTH: "Will the Real James Tiptree, Jr. please stand up? We'll have 4 contestants (one, a cardboard cat) and four panelists, and one announcer. If it works, it should be fun.

And on this last quarter of the page, I'll tell you about my reaction to LOOKING FOR MR. GOODBAR. I can't tell you about the film because I've been unable to analyze the political statement that the film makes. But see it; for Diane Keaton's performance alone. She is magnificent. I identified too much and didn't know about the ending enough to keep my distance... Her Catholic family, her sometimes scizophrenic life--divided between professional and personal, the pick-up scene and her assertiveness there, living alone... Well I was sitting on the inside seat and would have had to climb over 6 or 7 people in order to get out: if it had been easier to get out, I would have had to rush out of the theatre at the end to the rest room. As it was, I just managed to hold my stomach in control. Afterwards, for the whole week afterwards in fact, I hid out, not wanting to see or talk to anyone. Luckily I pulled out in time for Thanksgiving. In some ways my reaction was and still is a very personal, but in some other ways I think a great number of women will have an equally intense reaction to the film and Keaton's performance. The connections of her disease which prevent her from having children with her lifestyle, or the way the film possibly connects them, cause and effect like, bothers me, but I can't consider her motives from that angle very easily. That part of the film seems almost superfluous because I substituted my own motives, as I think Keaton must have been doing with her own to have sustained so fine a performance, and recognizing the characters actions, reactions and feelings with astonishing intensity. So see it. I'll be seeing you in February...here, or at WisCon.

love, Jeanne