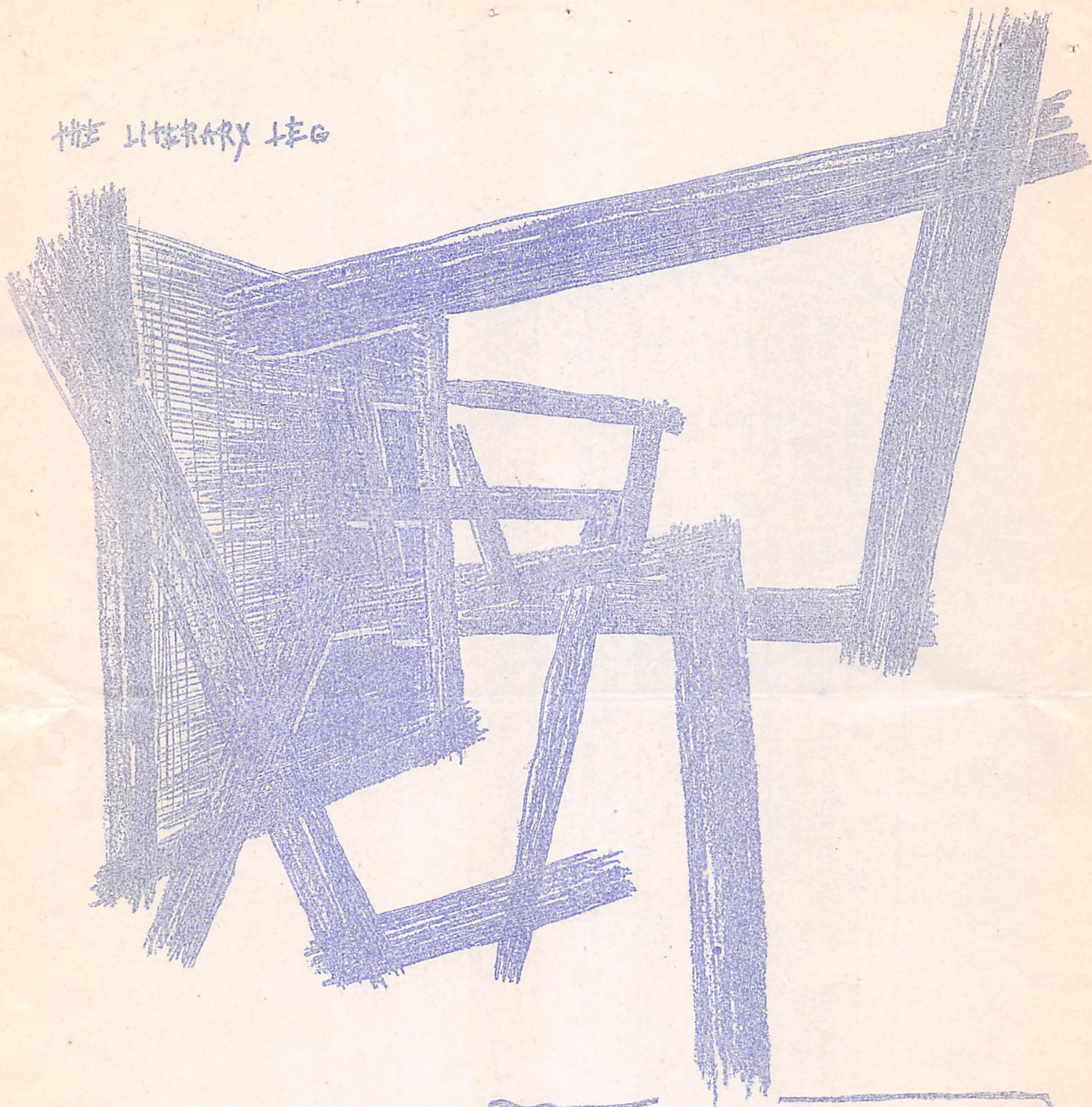


THE LITERARY LEG



SMALL WONDER

le petit fanzine 'pataphysique

NO. 19.

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Bequest issue

This literary leg is a WILL (whose help in translating such previous texts as "Hélène and the semi-colon" & others is indeterminable as yet if much needed), heart-takingly and neck-breakingly decoded, translated and salvaged by H.S. Barbara Wright, though it was afterwards spoilt by insulting, insurgent editing in the present version. Technical Advisor for the scientific parts : Sir Damon Knight, whose help has been still more betrayed (he's scarcely been consulted, at that, since his corrections didn't come in time for the inclusion of this in the 92nd mailing of the F.A.P.A. Entire contents preserved under Common-Law Copyright. © Small Wonder, 1960.

The
Literary
Leg

(From Free Fall in Visual Literature
to the Main Currents of Contemporary
Thought)

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Few people are capable of experiencing the rather unconvincing sensations born of free fall (*). Discourses and literary currents that defy the laws of gravity (cf. Wauh Nos. 0, & 3) are almost as unrecognized.

In the first place one must accept the elementary principle that it is not necessary to climb in order to fall (nor to descend either); some people, so I have just heard, do not accept this; naturally we shall not disturb them, and will just speak to those who will at least go so far as to acknowledge this state of affairs.

Another premise, which is also a factor, a corollary and a multiplicand, shows that there is NOTHING, not at the bottom of the fall, but at the other "end" (imaginary or right in front of you). This may be easier to accept, yet there are few even of the most determined people who are ever prepared for it, and we see that even the most hardened and the most adventurous still get odd feelings of discomfort from it, some of these feelings being strangely similar to resentment and disappointment (but here, since people are only disappointed in so far as they have dared to hope, we shall not press the point).

Undertaking this fall is not undertakable. It just happens to you, neither more nor less than your existence did; one doesn't necessarily feel any greater urge for it than one did to be born. Just the same, there is no reason to react against it, unless, of course, you have more urgent matters to attend to, such as peeling eggs, or introducing into flies things which are difficult to name, but resolutely alien to their bodies and functions.

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This epic comes, then, to undertake you; and the interesting thing is that nothing much happens, but that

(*) To the lovers of those literary fields where one happily takes these things for granted, may we state once and for all that by "free fall" we simply mean here the "fall" or "absence of fall" without any appreciable gravity left, and in a natural, organised or synthetic vacuum, slightly real or actually evoked to the point of reality, never mind which.

both for the interested and the indifferent, there are masses of things to be said on the subject.

When I say "there is nothing at the 'other end'", let's be quite clear about it. There are probably people there, maybe even worlds. Nothing that matters much so long as you have got some intention whatever it may be behind your language, since you cannot communicate it with words, nor even with a thought. Or if you can, it is to such a limited extent that it is only too evident that you can't trust it. If you do trust it, then it means disillusion and you're lost (but, fortunately, not the only one).

Now to work with a vacuum and a modified balance between the laws of logic, of continuity (and other vague topics), in short with an altered order of the laws of communication, is to operate in a far more satisfactory void---already crowded enough, anyway.

Some people (I'm not speaking personally) have been able to adjust themselves to schools of thought that defy the laws of morals and of mere understanding (two other means of communication that have become dilapidated), this is already history; yet discourses and schools of thought that defy the laws of gravity---thereby making off with the laws of psychological time and continuity---are otherwise loquacious: statistically speaking, it's hard to see why at least one half of post-Newtonian literature doesn't use them as regular raw material and source data.

Obviously, whenever one gives a word a fixed posture, one often tends to expect it to carry (but where?) into an undetermined future a certain amount of feeling, perhaps of significance--an unjustifiable attitude and sometimes even worse: shamefully justified. That is the instinctive trend, the commonest rate (*). As I have already said, you cannot trust it. And since there is still nothing at the other end, nor any "other end" for that

(*) Thank heaven there are other more pleasant issues, where one can use a word to make, for instance, some nice little drawings, a plastic fudge, soluble bottles, etc... also a certain wilder destined to produce color-pigments which are unalterable once they've been injected into the vertebras to help track down the residues of fatal cancer, but they are not so profoundly concerned with the main currents of the present literary world of reason.

matter, the word is not much, if anything, in itself. You could give a significance which is much more charged with reproach and with symbols to your own way of podding an egg and of pawing a mosquito.

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In weightless fall, things are different. For the simple reason that elements (which words are, too) meet, react and interfere with each other according to completely different sets of laws.

Now let's not quibble : we are not referring to any vision of present-day thought, to a world or even to a literature, as FALLING hand-over-fist ad. lib. In fact, by using "fall" for "surrounding frame of reference" or "internal mental landscape" as the case may be, we are only trying to indicate surrounding bodies each moving at the same speed, whether it be obese siamese-twins elephants or a sheet of air-mail paper. Needless to say, participating myself--as many do--in the movement of a universe, I cannot see bodies really "falling" either. The body that writes and, (supposing it does) that thinks, does not fall in normalized terms, which terms are themselves subject to the same laws. (Furthermore, any free fall ought not to be compelled to fall in any way at all so long as there remains an alternative.)

But even in free fall, and of this the least rigid people are aware, there are currents. Which obey laws. These laws we cannot yet undertake to defy nor to avoid because we still haven't the least idea where they are, what they are like, or what they state and forbid. Hence submitting to, or "undertaking", or exploring the thought governed by weightless-fall laws, consists more of allowing oneself to be moved by its currents. At all events, we have seen that some people have no choice.

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What are its advantages? I don't know of any (I have not chosen). What are the consequences, and, in particular, the FACTS? We find these in certain classes of literature which are still difficult to define, to which uninitiated present-day (or let's say present-century) thought owes everything, and with which it does nothing except extract the best possible

good in the worst possible way. Other consequences are determined by the width and thickness (sometimes called "density") of the internal psychological sense of time in one individual, and by his personal experimentation with his own things in his very own vacuum and his own "jeant" --if you want another word than "fall", which I don't go for much myself any more either--, in the course of his very own life. The most important consequences, however, are discernable in an outburst of extraordinary exterior lucidity, with accompanying blisters; and, it goes without saying, in the satisfaction provided by the excursion proper.

Usually, the result is wails. So far, no difference from what has been produced all these past centuries. But another sort of wails. It just so happens that I am more sensitive to this latter sort; thus I never had to "fall" or to "choose" (two words which in any case have no very precise material significance).

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How it happened to me I couldn't tell. I had no warning. Only, imperceptibly and insidiously, I came to integrate myself into a certain part of the present time that doesn't include any resonance from the past or from the future in its harmonics. Well now, that is something that is easy to say. Of that I am well aware. But it happened slowly, believe me. And, once again, completely without my ever-present knowledge. Perhaps it was partly the consequence of some vague and well-determined work with which I had busied myself at one time of my life, upon the applied studies of several other fugitive types of time in man and stones (chronological, physiological, mathematical time---non-existent, internal time, time to the child, cyclic, negative, abstract, propitious time and others) ?

I didn't bring back any particular memories, if not an ungovernable urge to profit by those currents, in spite of my reluctance in these matters for, be it said, I loathe the very idea of it.

The shallow literary trends of our times (out of practice nowadays and not felt any more) which at the time I almost described as "visual literature"--most fortunately I abstained just in time, are still unaware of everything to do with these proceedings.

It may be of interest to mention for the record, that the thought-and-written or what-not "jaunts", once freed from the main gravitational boundaries, are definitely not related to a mental process (which indeed would be too easy) and still less to a mental attitude. That other out-dated hypothesis (prolly launched by some Keplerian) according to which it would rather be a question of a physical or mental disposition, or of constitution, or some such disorder, is no longer considered valid in the Century of Jean-Claude Hémerly. Finally, certain circles point out that there is always a close connection between most of the rare cases observed (of the two cases observed) and a characteristic absence of acute allergies, and prescribe, at random, an energetic and prolonged treatment of synthetized anti-antihistaminics.

After years of sustained study, of personal inquiries and surveys, and of profound research on these matters, I owe it to myself to say that the main currents of contemporary thought like, on the other hand, the concept, the essence and even any approximate aspect of any "jaunt" in "free fall" whatsoever, now totally escape me; and I'm very sorry about it although I never miss any chance to congratulate myself on a, I should say, rather highly frequent schedule. But sometimes, incertitude gains on me, and then I don't know any more. It is then that I feel the most sure of myself, a sort of feeling I particularly hate but which is, however, not displeasing; far from it. And what exactly do I know about it, anyway? For fear of becoming, once more, extremely vague, I can scarcely attempt any greater precision. It is a most improbable commonplace, that old saying: "He never stumbles who always looks behind him." And yet how true.

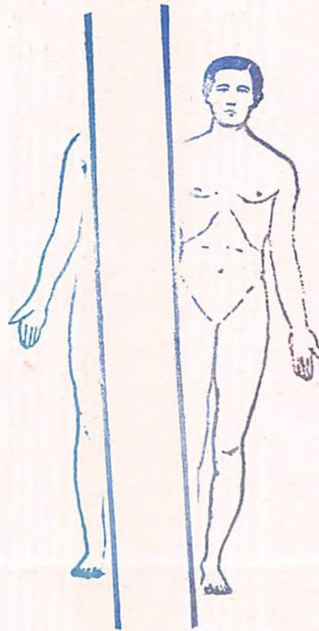
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In the meantime, it is safer to glance at them sideways, thus penetrating the mysteries most common to the individuals who represent contemporary thought, people who are continually on their guard and do not give the matter their consideration just in case they might actually find nothing at the other "end" of the fall or of the jaunt they haven't undertaken (one doesn't undertake it), whose reality they don't so much as suspect.

Then the horizon starts to swell, to thicken, to widen vertically, the road becomes one-way, becomes a track, a foot-path, a winding-path, and climbs up and

up and at last, after the bend one rejoins, proud and dusty, the currents of the contemporary thought of all the past centuries.

And then things are only just beginning.



- Jean Linard -
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