

The deadline is approaching on little cat feet, and inspiration has stubbornly refused to strike. There appears to be no alternative to sticking a stencil in the machine and having at it, inspiration or no, if I am to have a zine in the mailing. The pedestrian matter which follows is called

THE VINEGAR WORM

Vol. II, No. 2. Published for the 95th FAPA
Mailing by Bob Leman, 1214 West Maple,
Rawlins, Wyoming,

and it will begin with a

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SERIOUS CONSTRUCTIVE MAILING COMMENT DEPARTMENT
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EGOBOO FOR YOU - Eney: Egoboo indeed, far beyond my desserts or expectations. This, I take it, is FAPA's gracious way of making a newcomer welcome.

STEFANTASY - Danner: Many thanks for the review of Rogue Moon; I hope to see a lot of laudatory reviews of this fine novel. If it doesn't win a Hugo, there will have been a grave miscarriage of justice. More than any SF I know, this book fulfills the requirements of the novel as an art-form, and I hope it'll receive appropriate recognition.

LARK - Danner: To my surprise, I find no checks here, and so, apropos of nothing at all, I'm going to use your space to set down the cast of characters of Ring Lardner's play, "I Gaspari" ("The Upholsterers"):

IAN OBRI, a blotter salesman
Johan Wasper, his wife
Greta, their daughter
Herbert Swope, a nonentity
Ffena, their daughter, later their wife
Egso, a pencil guster
Tono, a typical wastebasket

Does that strike you as funny? It does me, particularly since none of these people appears in the play. I'm most curious about the trade (or profession) of pencil guster. Can any of the members elucidate this arcane matter for me?

HELEN'S FANTASIA - The contretemps occasioning this small explosion was before my time, of course, but if my interpretation of what happened is correct, I can't quite see why you're so indignant. If you had lost your membership, couldn't you have petitioned back in, just as Perdue did? There is certainly a vast difference in the number of pages the various members produce during a year; if the membership likes Perdue's four annual pages well enough to keep him a member despite delinquencies, why that's the membership's prerogative.

FZOT LAWS - Grennell and Danner: I posted this on the wall in my office, and it made a considerable hit. As a matter of fact, there have been copies made on the Verifax--a good many copies. I hope there's no copyright problem involved.

I'm going to interrupt the MC's for a moment here to talk a little about a project that's near and dear to my heart. I wonder whether it would be possible to generate any interest in organizing a Dorcas Bagby fandom. Burroughs has his fandom and his magazine, and so has Howard, and I understand that L. Frank Baum's devotees are attempting to form an organization. The Tolkien fellowship seems to be flourishing, and there are rumors of a fanzine from the Titus Groan cult. It seems a little unfair that Dorcas Bagby should lack such honors, and I'm writing this in an attempt to discover how many of the faithful would find pleasure and profit in a Bagby fanzine.

There are, I know, other Bagby admirers in FAPA: the Busbys, Warner, Grennell, Eney; but whether any of these are keen enough Bagby fans to take an interest in--and contribute to--a Bagby fanzine remains to be determined. A sketchy sort of Bagby cult exists in the mundane world, and the likelihood is that some of these people would take an interest in such an enterprise; but then again, they might not. A few years back I was active in the fandom of William Faulkner--an infinitely more eminent novelist than Miss Bagby--and the magazine expired after eleven quarterly issues. (Redd Boggs will remember Faulkner Studies.) It may well be that there aren't enough interested people to make a Bagbian fanzine practicable.

I find it hard to judge. I am a Bagby fanatic of the most abandoned sort, and a fanatic is seldom able to make a valid judgment of other people's attitudes toward his fixation. I have felt an intemperate admiration for Dorcas Bagby ever since I first happened upon her work three years ago. The first book of hers that I read was the second that she wrote, The Moswell Plan, and I acquired my copy quite accidentally. I fell for one of those book store dodges in which they sell books by the pound; I believe I bought twelve pounds of books for a dollar. It was practically all junk, of course--ancient arithmetic texts, The Yearbook of the Cheese Improvement Society and the like--but also in the bundle was a copy of The Moswell Plan.

My reaction to The Moswell Plan is a matter of record: in The Vinegar Worm Vol. I, No. 4, I published a long review of the book, calling it, among other things, "the greatest novel of the supernatural ever written." I have not since seen any reason to amend that judgment.

A few months after I published my review I received the following letter:

Department of English
Larpson College
May 22, 1959

Dear Mr. Leman,

My young son recently acquired from a friend a number of amateur magazines, and among them was your

own publication. It is my habit to vet the boy's reading, and in the process of doing so I came upon your review of "The Moswell Plan." I may tell you that I was startled. I had thought that I was acquainted with every Bagby enthusiast in the country (in point of fact our number is exiguous) and to find your hymn of praise in so unexpected a place as a mimeographed "fanmag" was a rare surprise.

I feel entitled to talk in this patronizing way because I am considered to be the foremost authority on Dorcas Bagby. (Actually, that's not as immodest as it sounds; it doesn't take much of a frog to be the biggest in a puddle as tiny as this one.) Fifteen years ago Dorcas Bagby was the subject of my Master's thesis, a monument to scholarship called "Prairie Christabel: The Life and Work of Dorcas Bagby." This is unpublished, and seems likely to remain so.

You mentioned in your review that you hadn't been able to find out anything about Miss Bagby, so you may find the following of interest. She was born in Lewellen, Nebraska (my own home town) in 1883, the daughter of a rancher who was also a lay preacher. She is, as of this writing, still alive, although she has written nothing since 1920. Her mind gave way in 1912, and she has been in a private sanitarium ever since.

She wrote, in all, six books. They are:

Stones and Scabbards, 1903 (Short Stories)
The Moswell Plan, 1905
Each to its Tether, 1907
Time's Fool, 1909
In Mossy Skulls, 1912 (Short Stories)
Enter Aegisthus, 1920

"Enter Aegisthus" was of course written after she lost her mind. It was privately printed, and not more than a dozen copies are extant, to my knowledge. Three of them are in the Bagby collection here at the college. This is as strange a book as ever was written. It is an inchoate, fragmented thing, clearly the product of a deranged mind, but there are scores of passages --some pages in length--that make one tremble with frustration that her brain was not capable of organizing her material. "Enter Aegisthus" is the adumbration of a novel that would have made "The Moswell Plan" seem like a small child's bedtime story. But it is a novel that will never be written.

I would like to point out that I think you have misread--or read incompletely--"The Moswell Plan." On the surface it is, as you point out, a brilliantly conceived and flawlessly executed novel of the supernatural; but it has a deeper level than this. I submit that the real intent of "The Moswell Plan" is to describe a mind slowly succumbing to the implacable advances of insanity. Go back and re-read it with that

idea in mind, and see if it doesn't clear up some of the incidents that seemed irrelevant at the first reading. Or for that matter, simply re-read the last chapter, paying particular attention to Dulcie's interior monologue as she realizes that Cleek, too, is an enemy. The thing is almost made explicit here.

I'd be glad to lend you these books, but they belong to the college, not to me. However, I rather think that if you work at it you should eventually be able to find all of them except "Enter Aegisthus" in the second-hand-book stores. As you read these books I'd be pleased if you'd write and let me know your reactions.

Very truly yours,
/s/ Ben H. Hannifin

This letter marked the beginning of a continuing correspondence with Professor Hannifin (Hi, Ben!). He lent me a carbon of Prairie Christabel and managed (by methods which I have never cared to inquire into) to let me borrow Lampson College's copies of Stones and Scabbards and Time's Fool, neither of which I have been able to buy. We have had a considerable number of disagreements about certain disputed points in the Bagby canon, but by and large I must admit that Hannifin is indeed the foremost Bagby authority (although I continue to hold that any reasonable person will agree that Marcel Decantre could not possibly have been intended as Hannifin thinks: "at once sophistication carried to the point of rotteness and of the primitive innocence that Signe found in him." It should be perfectly clear that Decantre is intended as nothing more than the vampire he appears to be, and that to read anything else into the character is to sacrifice meaning to a critical theory).

But all this isn't getting my pet project any forrader. Let me get down to cases.

I want to put out a trial issue of a Bagby fanzine. I plan to call it "Vistris", after the buried city in Each to its Tether, unless somebody has a better suggestion. The first issue probably won't be very pretty, since I'll be the publisher, but I hope to have some interesting material in it if I can prod some of the cognoscenti into contributing. I think I can get a biographical article out of Hannifin, and perhaps permission to reprint from his book. I have a couple of essays of my own fermenting at the back of my mind, so I'd doubtless have a contribution of my own to help swell the bulk of Vol. I, No. 1. But this is all there is, so far.

So I'm putting out a request for material. Anything to do with Dorcas Bagby or her work will be welcomed: artwork, essays, poetry, parody--anything. But I also have in mind some specific articles I'd like to see, and I think I know just the people to do them: a piece by Elinor Busby on the poetry scattered through the novels; an essay on the humor in the canon, by Dean Grennell; a complete bibliography, with special attention to the magazine stories that have never been reprinted, by Dick Eney, who's at home in the Library of Congress and the copyright office; a review of Each to its Tether by Harry Warner, and one of Time's Fool by Buz.

Freinds?

Will you oblige?

A SHROPSHIRE FAN

by

A.E. Hous***n

I

When I was just a neo
I heard an old fan say,
"You'll never draw like Rotsler,
Though you practice night and day;
You'll never write like Warner--
You're not as bright as he."
But I was just a neo;
No use to talk to me.

When I was just a neo
I heard him say again,
"You'll never jest like Tucker,
You haven't got the brain.
You'll never print like Danner,
Or pub a zine like GRUE."
And now I am an old fan,
And oh, 'tis true, 'tis true!

II

With rue my heart is weighted
For fanzines dead and gone.
For those that were highly-rated
And those that were spat upon.

In files too far for seeking
The big-name zines are laid,
And the crudzines lie there reeking,
Not fit to read nor trade.

III

Loveliest of fenne, Matilda now
Is drunker than she will allow;
Her voice is loud, her eye is bright,
She is unquestionably tight.

Now of my five days at the con,
Four have come, and passed, and gone,
And when from five you take the four,
It only leaves me one day more.

And since to pluck so rare a bloom
A single day is little room,
This grand seduction must be tried
While she's conveniently fried.

And now, after a four-page interruption, we return to the mailing comment department. But before we begin, I have been reminded by the travesties on the preceding page of the finest Houseman parody of them all, and I'd like to put down for you all of it that I remember, which is the first verse:

What, still alive at twenty-two,
A clean upstanding chap like you?
Sure, if your throat 'tis hard to slit,
Slit your girl's and swing for it.

Parody, I think, can hardly be better than this.

LOGARITHMIC - Silverberg: Your memory of our meeting briefly at the Solacon is correct, and so is your recollection that I have been endowed with an uncommonly long chin. I cannot, however, lay claim to more than 5'9" of height. But what I lack in altitude I make up in flabbiness.

VANDY - Coulsons: The nymph on the cover has the most luxuriant crop of pubic hair I've ever laid eyes on. This, I take it, is what the bat-critter finds appealing. Am I right in thinking that Prosser is giving us an outworld version of Leda and the swan?

My own pet peeves in packaging are the jam and crackers you get in restaurants. The lunatic who decided that a table-spoon of jam should be embalmed inside a plastic capsule so thoroughly sealed that it's impossible to get at the contents without getting jam on all ten fingers ought to be forcibly crammed into one of his damned contraptions and sealed in there. And how often has the red strip on one of those cellophane cracker packages torn off in your hand, leaving you to get at the crackers as best you can--which is usually by brute force--resulting in only a handful of crumbs? What really burns me is that you pay extra for these idiot packages.

SERCON'S BANE - Busby, F.M: This may become a sermon; somehow your zines always have something to say that moves me to become even more windy than usual. By a coincidence that's almost too pat to be believed, I saw the "Operation Abolition" film for the first time this afternoon on the telly, and I was still a bit steamed up when I grabbed SERCON'S BANE out of the stack and found that the first check mark had to do with this film. What you say is well-considered and persuasive, and I wish I were restrained enough to approach the matter as calmly as you do. But the lockstep behavior of the poor little misguided conformist liberal undergraduates who marched so obediently to the drums of professional communists frightens me enough to make it difficult to be temperate about the matter. I was, God knows, pretty much of an ass myself when I was an undergraduate, and I hope I remember enough about my looney mental processes of the time to be tolerant of these pore chillun. Still, it's frightening. These kids were marionettes pulled about by men of bottomless cynicism, and it hurts to see our youngsters being used this way. What was going on is clear and obvious; the slick disingenuous performances of the professional agitators ought to be enough to convince anyone at all that the little folk were being used.

I tackled the porch first, and as I was about to toss a shovel-ful of snow over the railing I spotted a business card lying there in the snow. I fished it out. The card said

JOHN B. SPEER
Lawyer
North Bend, Washington

and on the back, written with a blue-ink ballpoint pen, was this message: "Mr Leman: I'm soliciting memberships in the John Bristol Society. Can I interest you in one at \$24 a year?"

I can only conclude that I was called upon by Jack Speer, who found nobody at home, and left his card. If this is the case, I regret it immensely. Visitors from the microcosm are always welcome, and Speer is one of the people I'd most enjoy talking to. (And by the way, let me here extend an invitation to all the membership to stop by if you find yourself in this remote corner of The Republic. We can provide some coarse food, alcohol and/or fizzy drinks--including lager--, a spare bed, and floor space for a number of sleeping bags.)

There is no clue as to when Speer was here (if he was so in fact). The card was simply there in the snow. None of the family has any idea how it got there, or when it arrived. A most mysterious visitation. But if you called and found nobody home, Jack, be assured that we regret missing you.

One other thing: the "John Bristol" puzzled me, and at first I took it to be a slip of the pen, and thought that "Birch" was intended. Then I thought I remembered that I'd read somewhere that Bristol is Speer's middle name, and that he has used it as a pen name.. Is that right? (I do have a copy of Fancy II, but its whereabouts is not precisely known to me.) If that's how it is, The John Bristol Society is a clever conceit, and worthy of further development. Although, knowing something of Speer's Political views, what such a society might be up to gives me a cauld grue.

-The End of Interruption Number Two-

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DAY*STAR & WINTER QUARTERS - Bradley: What are you, some kind of a nut or something? Peake tedious, indeed! Comparing him invidiously with Tolkien! Next you'll be trying to tell us that vegetable soup is better than tomato soup.

CELEPHAIS - Evans: Your defence of the punch card as qualifying under the terms of the constitution fails to persuade me. Eney's interpretation--that it's artwork--makes more sense. After all, there are people who claim that Jackson Pollock's dribblings are art, so why not a card like this? Wyoming thanks you for your kindly views on our scenery; going through the state on the U.P. doesn't usually elicit any kind comment on the equality state. The Grand Tetons and the snowy range have scenery I'll put against anything in the country, but when they were building the railroad they were looking for the most convenient route, and by and large the scenery along the way is pretty dreary, unless you see beauty in sagebrush. Your defense of civil servants is eloquent and able, and there can't be many people who'd disagree. The point is that we've got too goddam many of 'em--the result of too much government.

LIMBO - Rike: What, if anything, is this "Peace March" supposed to accomplish? Don't you think it likely that a whiskery rabble straggling from city to city to picket defense installations will only persuade observers that there must be something wrong with a cause that is served in this undignified and rather childish way? You don't say, but I suppose that your objectives are banning the bomb, unilateral disarmament and the rest of it. These notions strike me as being criminally unrealistic (where they are not being urged by agents of Soviet foreign policy, but in good faith), but if these are your beliefs you certainly ought to push them forward. I simply question the efficacy of your method. -Donaho: Good union members always automatically respect a picket line, whether they know anything about the disputed issue or not. And they continue to respect it, no matter how ridiculously unfair the strike may be. In the same way, I violate picket lines as a matter of principle; but I do take the trouble to check on the relative merits of the two points of view, something a unionist would never do. What's the other original art form America has developed? The comic strip?

PHLOTSAM - Economou: Another plug for Rogue Moon. Goodo! As of this writing, the Eichmann trial is much in the news, and the comment by Les Nirenberg and Betty Kujawa on What Is A Jew seem to fit in very well with the current discussion X of the legality of the Eichmann trial. One of the counts in the indictmentx against Eichmann is "Crimes against the Jewish people." Apart from the question of the competence of Israel to try Eichmann, it would appear that it's almost impossible to determine what "the Jewish people" is.

HORIZONS - Warner: The Jean Young cover was very good. She does a first-rate imitation of Blake. Our airport now has only two flights a day, and the airline (Frontier) is doing its dead level best to drop those. There just aren't enough boardings, they say, to make it profitable to land here. It's not surprising, since scheduled flights in a town this size are a marginal thing at best. But it'll be tough on the people who depend on these planes. I now realize that separating individual trains of thought in MC's is not a good idea; the last sentence ended too close to the end of the line to begin this one on the same line, and without some sort of separation you naturally thought when you began this sentence that I was continuing to talk about airplanes. So I'll have to find some sort of separator. I could of course just paragraph --and if something touches off a longish piece I'll wish I had-- but I rather like these separators, particularly when turning out choppy little bits like this. Practically all the little-used keys have been pre-empted as separators by somebody, so I may be stepping on someone's toes by doing it, but I'm going to try ++ for a separator for a while. Your own ' ' makes a nice, clean readily-recognized symbol. ++ The Dodgson piece is a real tour de force. When I read the antepenultimate sentence and the great light dawned I immediately went back and read it again. Everything fit. Beautiful!

TARGET: FAPA - Eney: Nothing here for you, really, since this issue is really comment-on-comment-on-comment to an unusual degree for

you, but your reference to Linard's sending a set of STUPEFYING STORIES to the Archbishop (who he?) of Bensencon (pretty tricky, the way you got that cedilla in there--I'm not going to try) reminded me of a clipping I have around here:

Vesoul, France. (No date.) --Abbe Robert Tissot, who used a hammer, sickle and red star as part of the Christmas decorations for his church, decided to replace the Communist symbols with a globe.

That's the news item in its entirety, and that's all I know about the matter. But Linard's clerical circulation of fanzines leads me to wonder whether he may not have passed the good abbe a copy or two of GEMZINE.

EPIMETHEUS - Speer: I suddenly note that your address is Snoqualmie, not North Bend. How long has this been the case? Could that card have been a truly ancient thing which had been in the possession of some fan for many a year, and was used by the fan for a hoax? But even if that's the case, somebody called here. ++ Your choice of title shows immense self-confidence; any matter under such a title almost has to be creative. Still, he had Prometheus to boss the job, didn't he? ++ Your points in objection to my piece on Reynolds are well taken, and at this remove of time, feeling considerably less heated than I did when I wrote it, I would probably withdraw the assertion that the stories should not have been published, and possibly the one that they were not even science fiction. But the rest must stand. Propaganda that urges the notion that the communists have good (or even harmless) intentions must be argued against. The liberals have of course always had a fierce desire to believe the best of the U.S.S.R.; and where their argument has prevailed we have come to disaster, as when we took as truth their trumpeting that the Chinese communists were simply reformers who wished to correct the iniquitous distribution of land, and Castro a holy crusader bent only upon deposing the beast Batista and bringing democracy to Cuba. There is, and has been for a long time, a scarcity of voices raised against this kind of propaganda; and where they have been raised, they have been damned as being of the Neanderthal Right, as being proto-fascists, as being, God help us, "witch hunters". It seems to me that where one finds printed matter that aids and comforts the enemy he must --at the very least--point out what is going on, and that's what I was doing. You have to a considerable degree side-stepped my argument; I was holding that the nature of communism, as demonstrated by its theoretical writers and its actions since the Russian revolution, is such that the future Reynolds writes about cannot legitimately be extrapolated. That's what I meant when I suggested that these stories aren't science fiction.

LIGHTHOUSE -- Graham: "Hydra Country" is a good hatchet-job, with almost the fine-honed edge of malice of the original. ++ You say, ". . . the Cuban revolution was by and large, I think, a democratic social revolution at the start (but) it has deteriorated considerably in the last two years, due partially to Russian influences but mostly to United States pressures and influences." What makes you think it was ever democratic? Che Guevara has been at the beard's right hand from the beginning, and there is plenty of reas-

on to believe that Guevara is actually running the whole show, and has from the beginning. With an avowed communist at the tiller, the revolution could never have in any way resembled a democratic revolution. From the day Castro took power the pattern has been clear; his first act after taking over--except for the mass butchery--was the expropriation of foreign-owned property. This is simple theft (and Proudhon me no Proudhons) and hardly the mark of anything remotely connected with democracy, except by a very special definition.

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INTERRUPTION NUMBER THREE
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(Being the second installment of our "Mundane Views of S.F." Department)

The New Yorker recently ran a two-part article by John Brooks analyzing the Ford Motor Co's Edsel fiasco. You will recall that the Edsel was to be Motivational Research's great triumph. Every insight that had been gained by the most eminent and respected Motivational Researchers was pressed into service, in designing, in advertising and in building up a "public image" of the car. Money in fantastic amounts was lavished upon the enterprise. If the "hidden persuaders" were in fact persuaders, then the Edsel was assured of unparalleled success.

As everyone except a few of the more isolated Esquimeaux knows, the Edsel was the most resounding flop since the Tower of Babel. The simple truth was that nobody wanted to buy it. And the anguished motivational researchers have ever since been searching their souls to discover the reason.

All this is by way of leading up to a quote by Brooks from S.J. Hayakawa, editor of the magazine ETC, which concerns itself with semantics. In analyzing the Edsel debacle, Hayakawa argued that "the Edsel's flop could be attributed to Ford Company executives who had been listening too long to the motivation-research people and who, in their efforts to turn out a car that would satisfy customers' sexual fantasies and the like, had failed to provide reasonable and practical transportation, thereby neglecting the 'reality principle'. 'What the motivation researchers failed to tell their clients. . . is that only the psychotic and the gravely neurotic act out their irrationalities and their compensatory fantasies,' Hayakawa admonished Detroit briskly, and added, 'The trouble with selling symbolic gratification via such expensive items as. . . the Edsel hermaphrodite. . . is the competition offered by much cheaper forms of symbolic gratification, such as Playboy (fifty cents a copy), Astounding Science Fiction (thirty-five cents a copy), and television (free).'"

So, all you dirty degenerates, we know now why you read Astounding Science Fiction (thirty-five cents a copy). You pretend an interest in literature, but actually you're just after a session of symbolic gratification. By God, you're no better than a bunch of television watchers.

-The End of Interruption Number Three-

THE DIRECTORY OF 1960 SF FANDOM - Bennett: Many many thanks. What more is there to say?

DESCANT - Clarkes: "Pass the Nostalgia". Beautiful beautiful title. And a mighty funny piece. Should have been longer, but a little gem as it stands. ++ The good parts from the novel are fine, too, but not up to the former. ++ The compulsive mangling of paperback books is not limited to female fans; I think it's a characteristic of all women. And I speak from bitter experience.

ICE AGE - Shaws: Much as I'd like to claim it, that poem wasn't mine; I was quoting Morris Bishop's poem, "How to Treat Elves." You can find it in Permabooks' anthology, This is my Funniest. ++ Because we live where we do, we don't see many fans, but those who have called on us have been without exception a pleasure to have as guests. But I know exactly what you mean about the presence of boors in fandom. At the Solacon I threw what I intended to be a medium-size party for the fans I'd met. A horde of fringe and beat types turned up and consumed the booze faster than I could replace it. The whole thing cost quite a horrifying amount of money, and I never did get to talk to most of the people who were the real guests.

PHANTASY PRESS - McPhail: Your comment on the Moskowitz's contribution persuades me that you have too tender a heart for your own good. Presumably your concern for their feelings led you to say all those mendacious nice things about DIFFERENT #5, but to perjure yourself to be friendly is going a little far. Or--horrible thought--did you really mean it? ++ I especially deplore people who write as they talk. Practically all talk is full of loose ends, ill-constructed sentences, indifferent grammar and hackneyed figures of speech. I don't like to see that sort of thing written down.

THREE-CHAMBERED HEART - Champion: I can readily imagine that the incredible punch you describe would have to be super-cooled to be palatable. If a thing is cold enough you can't taste it at all, and that's exactly what this kind of a mixture would require. I note, though, that the tendency to chill things to the point of tastelessness is so widespread as to be commonplace. It's impossible to buy a glass of beer that's not too cold to taste, and the same is true of milk. And you may find this hard to believe, but I have found people so debased that they keep red wine in the refrigerator. A thing like that is certainly one of the early signs of a regression to barbarism. (I refer, of course, to real wines, not to loathesome syrups of the Mogen David persuasion.) Indeed, it would appear that the American people no longer like to taste anything at all. Whatever foods and drinks possess a pungent or strong or otherwise distinctive flavor are processed or pasteurized or fiddled with chemically until they are reduced to the bland tastelessness that appears to be the popular thing. There are a hundred fine cheeses, each with its own special taste and bouquet, but the popular cheese (if that's what it is) is Kraft's rubbery "process cheese". And notice how many of the ads for alcoholic beverages boast that this particular product is "light." "Light" means "not much taste." Even the fruit you buy at the store has somehow been robbed of its taste. I'm especially incensed about what they've done to apples. They're big, rosy symmetrical things that make your mouth water; and you bite into a tasteless mush.

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INTERRUPTION NUMBER FOUR
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Some weeks ago while flensing a whale, I suddenly found myself troubled by an annoying shortness of breath, and I was moved to make the not entirely original observation that I'm not as young as I was. There are, to be sure, good reasons for my current decrepit condition: I have survived a depression, a war, marriage, fatherhood and a science fiction convention, and these are experiences well calculated to dull the bloom on the cheek and thin the hair on the pate. Still, one occasionally feels a pang of regret for the lost capacities and resiliencies of youth.

Most particularly one regrets the steady accretion of inches at the waistline and of chins at the chinline. (And how did I get myself involved in this "one" business? Excuse me while I shift gears.) I cannot fathom the source of all this excess lard, but it is indubitably there. Unkind persons have hinted that it may be the result of absorbing an excess of nourishment ("You eat too goddam much," is about the way they put it), but I scarcely think that this can be the case. The fact is that I eat like a bird, picking daintily here at a slice from a chicken breast, or nibbling delicately there at a souffle', with occasionally the merest sip of champagne for my stomach's sake. But never any gourmandizing.

And yet the pounds accrue. It has occurred to me that perhaps I am a mutant, capable of manufacturing adipose tissue out of thin air and water, and that I should offer myself to the Department of Defense for experimental purposes. On the other hand, it may only be that my digestive apparatus is a more efficient machine than most, and utilizes the total energy in every calorie. Either way, I manufacture waistline at an alarming rate.

Now on the whole, it has always seemed to me that it is a good thing for a man to be reasonably well-fleshed; a moderate corporation adds dignity to a man's appearance, and the surplus poundage might well serve as a food reserve in case of dire want. But this point of view does not appear to be a common one. Most people seem to feel that there is something at best comical, and at worst degraded, about a person who happens to weigh a few pounds more than the doctors say he should (and what do they know about it, anyhow? I know plenty of doctors who are as fat as Waldo.)

And so pressure is brought to bear upon the unfortunate possessor of the expanding waistline: his wife develops an unnerving habit of making admiring remarks about the trim figures of low-browed athletic types seen here or there, and his children (doubtless coached) are overheard to comment on the curious wheezing noise daddy makes after climbing a flight of stairs, and his doctor loses no opportunity to lecture balefully upon the deleterious effects of overweight on the liver and lights. The poor wretch is given no peace.

In my own case, however, this campaign wasn't too successful; I have long prided myself on being impervious to any but the most subtle propaganda, and anyway I wasn't convinced that the few extra pounds I'd inadvertantly acquired were worth worrying about. It was not until I discovered that when I buttoned my collar my eyes bugged out and my face turned brick red that I was ready to concede that they might have a point, after all. I decided to look into the matter of diets.

Be sure that I did not enter lightly into this thing. There are certain decisions in life which should be approached solemnly and with prayer, and only after all data are in hand and all possible consequences carefully considered. I therefore mounted a scientific investigation: I asked everybody I met, "Ever go on a diet?" When I received an affirmative answer, I obtained the particulars, and since practically everybody has gone on a diet at one time or another, I managed to amass a quite lengthy syllabus of diets.

Most of them seemed somehow to be not quite the thing. I could not, for example, imagine any extreme of obesity that could persuade me to live for weeks on and on drafts of that patent chalky fluid which is supposed to contain all the elements essential to life. Nor was I prepared to subsist entirely upon green salads. A properly dressed salad is close to palatable when eaten with a square meal, but on the whole I incline to think that the good Lord intended leaves as fodder for animals, not for man.

And these proposals were mild compared with some of the suggestions I received. These were the real freak diets, each of which had at least one proponent, and all of which I thought equally demented. One of these daft regimens prescribed nothing but sauerkraut juice and all-bran for six days a week, with a surfeit of dairy products on the seventh; another allowed only skim milk and bananas; and a third leaned heavily upon rusks, stewed rhubarb and boiled eggs. And there were others equally exotic and equally calculated to cause nausea by merely being contemplated. There was no question in my mind about these revolting systems; I wouldn't have undertaken one of them if it had meant that I'd turn into Charles Atlas.

Still, the surplus of too, too solid flesh remained a fact, and I was determined to drop some of it, if only because I couldn't afford a new wardrobe. A sober study of the matter showed that the answer was perfectly simple: one need only eat an extremely small amount of ordinary foodstuffs, and the spare tire must inevitably fade away. To paraphrase Micawber: daily intake 2500 calories, daily energy expenditure 1500 calories, result--lard; intake 1000 calories, expenditure 1500 calories, result--loss of weight. All I had to do was to eat only 1000 calories a day.

This, unhappily, is no simple matter. I wonder if you have any idea just what a small amount of food it takes to furnish 1000 calories. I have discovered that I customarily ate at least that much between meals each day. There's more than half that amount in a piece of pie and a glass of milk, a third of it in a bowl of breakfast cereal. My customary bedtime snack probably furnished three-fifths of what is now my daily allowance.

As you can readily imagine, I am a hungry man. All day long the spectre of famine sits at my elbow, probing with a white-hot trident at my vitals and cunningly compounding the torture by telepathically conveying to me mental images (complete with odors) of all manner of desirable viands. At almost any time you are likely to find me in a state of near-trance, sitting with glazed eye and ravenous expression, drooling slightly, while in my mind enormous banquets are spread: a roast pig, say, in his nest of mealy roasted potatoes, holding an apple in his mouth and eagerly awaiting the keen blade that will cleave through the crisp and oily

crackling into the tender flesh beneath, gently separating a thick and toothsome slice which will take its place on the plate beside the spicy applesauce and--

I've got to cut this out. That way lies madness.

What makes dieting so difficult for me is the fact that all my favorite foods are under interdict. I have always been a meat-and-potatoes man, a lover of well-buttered breadstuffs, a devotee of rich gravies and sauces, a thirsty consumer of malt beverages. Gone, gone. these lovely things, all gone. Gone the heaping platter of spaghetti, each strand made succulent by an unctuous sauce of tomato blessed by garlic, rich with meat; gone the crusty chunk of firm hot bread, torn with rapacious hand from a long French loaf, spread thick with golden butter; gone the fat tumbler of Chianti, whose bright astringency cleanses the palate and leaves it eager for the next steaming bundle of spaghetti, all dripping with its sauce, already approaching on the fork; gone the--

Dammit, I've got to cut it out.

There's one thing to be said for hunger: it unquestionably is, as per the aphorism, the best sauce. I would hardly have believed, a few weeks ago, that I would find myself dining off a bowl of leaves inadequately dressed with one miserable teaspoonful of olive oil to temper the vinegar, together with a crust of zwiebach, and smacking my lips over this Spartan fare with all the gusto of Squeers exclaiming over the watered milk. But if you're hungry enough, even such horrid comestibles as broccoli and asparagus become palatable, even brussels sprouts and squash can be eaten.

But they're no substitute for real food. And even as one forks in this green fodder, his thoughts stray to better fare: to a great thick chunk of sirloin, well marbled with fat, seared black on the outside and blood-rare in the middle, which parts easily under the knife to release nourishing juices to be sopped up with a hot biscuit; to an enormous mound of snowy mashed potatoes, drenched with thick mahogany gravy; to fluffy round dumplings floating side by side with chunks of chicken in an oleaginous golden broth; to a thick creamy--

But I can't go on. Flesh and blood can bear just so much. Anyhow, it's dinnertime. Would any of you care to join me in carrot sticks and melba toast?

THE END OF INTERRUPTION NUMBER FOUR

and we return to mailing comments with
SCIENCE FICTION AGE - Taurasi: Cheest, Cully, dis is wot I calls
a real Scientifiction fanzine.

NULL-F - White: I was about to gripe because I'd already read almost all of this in VOID, when I was brought up short by the realization that if I'd read it in VOID I'd read it only because you're extraordinarily patient and long-suffering. You've been sending VOID to me whenever you've published, and you've had nothing out of me for--what? Two years?--which makes you, in my book, a Good Man. So's this Willis fellow whose trip you're sponsoring, and I hereby obligate myself to aid this project.

FOR NO REASON ETC. - Graham: Perhaps I missed it in the papers, but I haven't seen anything about the final disposition of Mailer's arraignment for stabbing his wife. Maybe he'll be as lucky as he was in Provincetown. I wish this fellow would get his neuroses under control and settle down to do a little serious writing again. He's about the only one of the post-war crop of novelists who seems to have any likelihood of producing anything of permanent value (Styron might--just might be another one) and the spectacle of him frittering away his talents on fragments and sketches isn't a pleasant one. I'll lay a considerable wager that the putative "Prologue to a long Novel" at the end of Advertisements for Myself is in fact a prologue to a novel that will never be written. There is a spirit, in these late pieces in Advertisements, of a writer who is groping for material that is worthy of his abilities. I can't think of a first novel which showed more promise than The Naked and the Dead; it is not, God knows, a great work of art, but it did manage to make contact in a superficial way with a few ideas, and the young Mailer seemed to be in perfect control of his material, and I suppose everybody who read the book thought that this was the Hemingway or the Faulkner of post-world-war-two. Then came The Barbary Shore, an allegory at once too obvious and too dishevelled, and we passed it off as the bad second novel that is a literary cliché, and said, Just wait for the next one. The next one was The Deer Park. It's a failure, I think, because it's obvious every step of the way that Mailer took this novel as a deadly serious matter, and it's almost impossible to convince anybody that the subject of the novel, and its milieu, can be taken seriously. The book just didn't come off. But until Advertisements appeared, I for one, still thought Mailer might write The Great American Novel. Now I have doubts. There's more ability and power here than in any of his contemporaries, but the fellow's haring off after ideas that are by no means as important as he thinks them to be, and he's writing minor novels when he could be writing great ones. ++ There's an article in the May Esquire that might interest you, in case you haven't seen it, on Mailer by James Baldwin. Baldwin takes the opportunity to write a lot more about himself than he does about Mailer, but it's interesting to hear a Negro's reaction to "The White Negro".

SHADOW MAILING - Hansen, Metcalf, Chauvenet: The issue is close to its end, so there's not space to comment at anything else in the mailing. I want only to thank you chaps for these zines, and to clarify one thing for Russ: Esso was one of a considerable number of domestic affiliates of The Standard Oil Co. (N.J.) As of Jan. 1, 1961, a number of these affiliates--Humble, Carter, Esso, Oklahoma, Pate and others--were combined in a big new company, called The Humble Oil & Refining Co. The main object was to market gasoline and other products under a single trademark coast-to-coast. The trademark is Enco, and is now in use except in the east, where the Esso sign will be used for a time longer.

LE MOINDRE - Raeburn: A-bloody-men to your comment on "totalitarian liberal." Have you read Hayek's The Road to Serfdom?

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