

GENRE RAT



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Allyn Cadogan. Official Editor
 Bill Gibson. Official Editor
 Susan Wood. Official Jewish Mother
 John Park. Official Silent Partner

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UP FRONT

Dangerously Amateur

...the birth of Genre Plat

"... her self-conscious, rubber-soled awkwardness lent her a dangerous amateur quality."

--J.D. Salinger,

"Just Before the War With the Eskimos"

By evening a heavy fog had settled over the city. . . .

John was the first to arrive. I like John immensely but can rarely think of anything to say to him beyond how've you been? ((Bill here:)) *Allyn's inability to think of anything more to say to John than "How've you been?" leads to exchanges on the order of:*

Allyn: How've you been?

John: Fine, thanks. Shall I put this beer in the fridge?

Allyn: Well, how have you been, John.

John: Really well, thank you. How have you been?

Allyn: Fine. You've been well yourself?

John: Oh, I've been doing fine, very fine. --so we sat on the floor and stared at the telly until Bill and, eventually, Susan arrived. We chatted and drank tea (ghad!) (well, Bill drank beer) and eyes kept swiveling to the television. "What is this?" I finally shrieked, shutting it off. "Are we supposed to be discussing a fanzine or watching Wonder Woman? There are certain intellectual parallels between discussing a fanzine and watching Wonder Woman.

That's when it came out that I'm the only one in our small group to own one of these technological marvels. So I promised them all if we were good little kiddies and got business taken care of by midnight I'd let them watch *Saturday Night*.

... At eleven-thirty we were still deep into the feminism discussion. "Can't we at least name our fanzine?" I cried in desperation. "But this is much more interesting," Bill protested. "Genre Plat," Susan said, staring at the giant toothpick box I have in my living room. "You're so small you look like you need protecting," Bill said to Susan.

(Despite this remark, Bill is one of the most un-MCP-gish people anyone would ever want to meet. Bill Gibson is also 7'10" tall and weighs 102 lbs. He has a lot of dark brown hair, wears huge glasses and smokes Rothman's when he's not smoking mine. His printing cracks me up; he has a sweet but retarded cat named Lenny.)

The giant toothpick box in Allyn's living room is one of those terminally wierd objets Former Occupants abandon for whatever obscure reasons of their own in flats all over the world. Why is there a gallon milk-carton filled with old razor blades under the sink when you move in? And why has each blade been evenly coated with what seems to be Hot Pink nail-varnish? The giant toothpick box is in a class by itself - it's actually a costume, with a system of leather straps inside. ((We could get into a whole new area of fetishism here....)) Susan confesses to having abandoned a huge pile of the world's worst crudzines this way, and today some-one somewhere is probably still worrying about what those horrible little homemade magazines were, and why there were so many of them. ..."Jesus, Martha, I think the people who lived here before were flying saucer maniacs or something--."

"I think I'd better stick to book reviews," John said, pausing in his note-taking.

At two a.m. Paul got home and made Spanish Coffees all round. From three to four we passed around copies of MAYA and JANUS and PHILOSOPHICAL GAS and decided we were going to turn out a really earth-shaking genzine. (It must have been the Spanish Coffees.) "What's a genzine?" John asked.

John Park is slight and quiet and I think he has a beard. If he doesn't, he should. He has a Ph.D. in physical chemistry and writes a lot of fiction. He recently had a story published in GALAXY. Also, John has formulated an original literary-critical methodology involving the view that all works of fiction are in some sense basically Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness. John is from Hull. "Myself am Hull, nor am I out of it." Since Allyn and I are American, Susan serves as our token Canadian.

At four-thirty we handed out writing assignments and set a deadline for copy. By that point we had also evolved into an editorial co-operative. Bill and I first considered co-editing a fanzine over pizza (but the fanzine would be on paper, Susan) last December, and agreed we'd be certified nut cases to attempt it. "That way lies the road to madness," Susan agreed when I told her of our discussion two weeks later. "It's such a waste of time," Paul commented. John offered moral support. So here we were.

At four-thirty-one Paul and Susan acted out an impromptu scatological drama. Susan Wood is small and blonde (she calls it "mouse brown" but I maintain her hair is blonde; that's just for the record), wears glasses and talks incessantly. She also makes yummy cookies. I always feel a little wierd visiting her house because nearly everything she has right down to the silverware duplicates something in my house, books, records, furniture (mostly Middle Canadian packing crate). Visiting her home for the first time was an Experience. I don't, however, have an Eli Cohen or avocado plants or rocket-shaped bookends. Bill Gibson likes Susan well enough to tolerate periods of extended smoke-withdrawal while visiting her house.

At five I threw everyone out. I do, after all, have two young children who think six-thirty is a peachy time to begin their day. Me? Well, lemme see, I'm 5'8" tall, have dark brown hair and a huge gap in my front teeth. My weight fluctuates between 120 and 140 lbs. I am also developing an inferiority complex because I am the only one in our group who hasn't made a professional sale to the sf markets. I'm not sure whether it's for lack of trying or lack of talent. I spend a lot of time not working on a novel. I smoke Du Maurier's when I'm not burning Bill's.

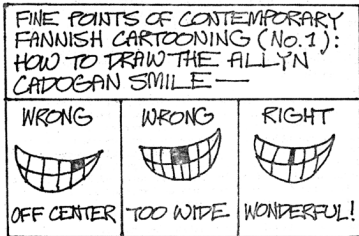
It's for lack of time. Allyn edits the BCSFAZine which is really monthly, and recently has been doing things hard over fist for the coming Westeroon - at which, by the way, we hope we'll run into you. I wouldn't call Allyn's tooth-gap huge, actually - it wouldn't, for instance, admit a pencil, although a kitchen match would be a distinct possibility. ((I used to push buttons through my teeth when I was younger and hadn't yet heard of Alfred E. Newman.)) And I've never actually seen her weight fluctuate, although I understand it's very impressive - the gain-loss cycles alternating at five-minute intervals....

We're really doing a fanzine, huh?" Bill kept muttering as he went down the hall. "I think you're all above this sort of thing," Paul commented. (Paul is not what you'd call your definitive trufan.) "Could this be the birth of Vancouver faandom?" John wondered. "Don't forget the deadline," I pleaded. "We're really doing it," Susan said sounding slightly bemused. As I closed the door behind them I noticed the fog had lifted.

Welcome to Genre Plat.

-Allyn Cadogan

-Bill Gibson



doug barbour talks about sf criticism

UP THE GUTTER FROM NEW ORLEANS

As a professed critic of science fiction (or speculative fiction, ^{or what have you}) - at least, the major part of my publications in fanzines tends to be devoted to 'serious' (*cough, cough*) discussion of sf - I am, perhaps more than most, *sensitive* about the ways in which such an interest is so often, and in such a feisty fashion, attacked. The latest example of what I mean at hand is Mel Gilden's letter to SCINTILLATION 11, in which Mel attacks 'the academics,' and makes what I suspect is a now hoary comparison of science fiction and jazz ('sf came up the gutter from New Orleans. Didn't you know that?'). His reference point is Dena Brown's by now famous, and even correctly attributed, statement, 'Let's get science fiction out of the universities and back into the gutter where it belongs!' Is it simply that I'm in the university and an academic that makes me take umbrage at the totality of that statement? Nothing but fear that she's right? I don't think so.

But how to make my case in a fitting manner? You see, I genuinely *like* sf; hell, I love it. I also love jazz (and classical music and rocknroll), and I love some of the jazz made by those very musicians who have formal training, just as I love some of the sf by those very writers who have had formal training. Must knowledge and craft always ruin a popular art? Surely not. Yet, I think I've hit the point of controversy here: sf is a popular art, and, like jazz, it first achieved prominence outside the boundaries of what was accepted by the ruling intelligensia of the day. (Parenthetically, I'd like to point out that one of my other loves, the contemporary poetry in both Canada and the U.S. which emerges from the line that leads from Ezra Pound through William Carlos Williams, through Charles Olson and the rest of the 'Black Mountain' group, was, until very recently, totally ignored by the academics.) No doubt about it, the academics can be wrong, tend to be too conservative, and hate to find they've been wrong, which they are a good portion of the time. As are we all, of course, including all those sf writers who put man on the moon in every conceivable way but the way they got there, and who never thought the first man on the moon would take time off from his duties to send a golf ball into space.

So, if I love sf, and enjoy it as a popular art, why should I go around trying to make it an academic subject? and subjecting it, therefore, to the indignities of academic formalism? A good question, actually, and one I am going to try to answer here. With the kind of great good luck that tends to make me a believer in coincidence, I borrowed a particular book from one of my movie-freak friends recently: Andrew Sarris's *The Primal Screen*. What I lucked into here



MANNER OF HOLDING THE VIOLIN.

was Sarris's own apologia, and I think it fits my feelings close enough that I can wear it. Besides, anyone who can dream up such a fine pun for a title will undoubtedly put his position better than I can, and, when in doubt, steal.

Cinema is, of course, one of the most popular of the popular arts (and is perhaps still understood to be even a popular art by a minority, of which I am a member), which is Sarris's point. In his Foreword, he talks about our first experience of film (at least the experiences of those of us, and I am one, though ten years his junior, who did not grow up sucking at the glass teat); when one is young, he says, the movies are truly miraculous and one can absorb 'the luminous forms and movements on the screen as personal fantasies without any intellectual interference whatsoever.' Sarris goes on to point out that such a primal response can't remain untouched forever, and that, for most people, the shift is only so far as the recognition that 'those people up there were not really phantoms of their own infantile imaginings' but stars. But 'what is gained in sophistication is lost in perception,' for the viewer who, in paying so much attention to the stars, begins 'neglecting the over-all spectacle.' 'Hence,' he says, 'the compleat film critick must often return to the innocence of his earliest childhood to recapture an instinctive comprehension of *mise-en-scène*.' (Note that even as he says this, he uses a critical term; I want to say it's unavoidable.) Sarris goes on to point out, however, that 'until very recently the earliest moviegoing experiences ...were mercifully free of the stink of culture.' At which point, perhaps, my reasons for quoting him at such length begin to come clear. For, as individuals came to some kind of intellectual/cultural awareness, Sarris feels that the 'gap began to widen not so much between what we thought and what we felt as between what we really liked and what we dared to admit we liked.' Oh yes, and I recall how I didn't read any sf during my undergraduate years because I was taking English Literature and I had left childish things behind and knew better than to read things that weren't approved (and what was 'approved,' included a lot of books of the fifties which I now feel to be not only less 'fun' to read than the best sf of the same period, but not even as 'interesting' or as 'good'). Although Sarris has a number of psychological points to make in the rest of his Preface, the point I wish to drive home has to do with *how* we enjoy *what* we enjoy. For if we dare to admit that we like certain things which the cultural leaders tell us are unworthy, perhaps we shall want to be able to argue for those things by being able to argue coherently about them. Sarris's final point is my defense, too:

I am thus resigned to my role as professional spoilsport. How can you still enjoy movies, I am often asked more in sorrow than in anger, when you spend all your time analysing them and researching them? All I can say in response is that I enjoy movies more than ever, but admittedly in a very different way from my first excursions into the illuminated darkness. In the beginning the movies were miraculous manifestations of my own fantasies. Then came an awkward period of demystification with the cumbersome jargon of scenarios and camera angles, and it is this awkward period from which otherwise enlightened debunkers of film scholarship never quite recover. But at the end of this awkward period I have found a richer pleasure, less miraculous perhaps but certainly no less amazing than the first. Through the veils of magic I have perceived the essence of art. And what is amazing is that out of all the back-screen chaos and confusion and bickering and brawling there has emerged so much beauty and lucidity.

Much of what Sarris says in this paragraph can be transposed to the context of sf. And, what is so important, he still loves the stuff, still enjoys it all to hell, but on many levels of awareness, simultaneously. Although I am but a simple neophyte as a critical viewer of films, I begin to see what he means in his own context. In one of those temporal conjunctions which make life interesting, I was lucky enough to see an



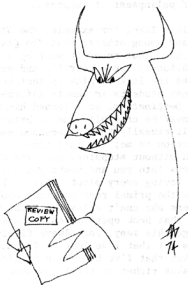
MANNER OF USING THE BOW

of horror which is what most people remember with delighted fear when they think of this great film (Robin Wood, at least, and a number of other film critics, as well, I believe, rate *Psycho* as one of the ten best films). My point, then, is that knowledge, critical concepts, a technical approach, do not have to destroy one's ability to enjoy a work on the primal level of enjoyment. Indeed, they simply add layers of further enjoyment unto that first one, a kind of palimpsest of responses.

Take sf, for example. Take, for example, *The Stars My Destination*. It has been argued, by Samuel R. Delany among others, that *The Stars My Destination* is the greatest sf novel of its time. Well. That means it must be a heavy book, right? A book which is deep and difficult and obviously not a terrific and exciting and fun read. Right? Wrong. As anyone who has ever had the luck to pick up that book for the first time knows. (Recently one of my first year students in CanLit informed me he liked sf. Turned out he hadn't read *The Stars My Destination*, so I loaned him my paperback (which turns out to be the original edition, I must be careful), and he brought it back the next morning. Seems he'd started to look at it causally that night, and hadn't been able to put it down. Seems like a typical reaction to me; the last time I read it (for about the 10th time) I had read it right through without stopping. Yes, *The Stars My Destination* has one of the grand plots, one that hooks into you and hooks you in, and you are there for the duration, rollercoasting along and loving every minute of it. I still thrill to that incredible narrative drive, which is the primal response that book seeks, and usually gets (I feel sorry for those few readers who can't enjoy the book, but so it goes). But I also delight in the many other levels that book operates on. Bester's lively prose rhythms, his sensual awareness of language, his many, and always fitting, allusions, all these things bring me great joy. It's not that I've lost my first, innocent, delight in a great piece of gutter storytelling, but that I've been able to add, with each reading, other levels of pleasure, all of which makes richer my total response to the work.

Of course, it must be added, and this is the kicker which can kick me right back into the nasty academy for those readers who just want the gutter flash, it's only good, by which I mean, I guess, many leveled and well crafted, stories or films which can do this to you. Alfred Hitchcock is, in fact, a great film-maker, no matter that he has made his great art for the Hollywood dream factories. Alfred Bester, at his best, is one of the finest writers of his period. The Gor books simply can't offer (even on first reading as far as I'm concerned) the rich experience *The Stars My Destination* can. Of course. Value judgements, based on the real value of the writing, will and must be made. One way or another. Meanwhile, the best will, I believe and hope, find its way to those who want it for the delight (as well as all else) it offers.

So I guess I'll go on being a spoilsport, too, because I enjoy, as well as reading sf which touches me on many levels at once, talking about sf in as complex a fashion as I can. I want to respond as fully as the work asks me to, and then I enjoy discussing my responses with others who like talking about sf that way, too. I guess I'm a reprobate critic, and it's too late to cure me of the disease now. Besides, as I said, I like it. I like it.



THEM & US

or

"Toto, I have a feeling
we're not in Kansas any more...."

by Bill Gibson

Nebula Award Stories Eleven
edited by Ursula K. Le Guin
Harper & Row, 1977, \$8.95 US.

This review sails under Panamanian registry; it isn't properly a review at all - you won't even find out which stories Ursula Le Guin chose, or whether I liked them or not. Instead, you're about to get stuck with some rhetorical analysis of the two critical essays included in this latest collection of Nebula winners. The two essays are Vonda McIntyre's "Potential and Actuality in Science Fiction" and Peter Nicholls' "1975: The Year in Science Fiction, or Let's Hear It for the Decline and Fall of the Science Fiction Empire!"

The casual reader, assuming you can find a casual reader who'll sit still for two critical evaluations of the state of the art, probably comes away from these essays feeling that both express more or less the same thing: that dreadful as sf may have been in the past, times are changing and things are looking up. But McIntyre and Nicholls are actually operating from very different positions. I believe these positions are tidy expressions of a dichotomy I've glimpsed lurking somewhere just below the surface of sf's auto-criticism for some time, and I'm determined to finally Get On The Case....

People are always asking Vonda McIntyre why she writes that tacky Sci-Fi stuff. "My answer," she writes, "is always that I write sf. . . because it is potentially the most valuable literary tool we possess, and the most powerful art form around." (At this point I'm gnashing my teeth; I want to drag in Bob Heinlein's modest declaration that sf is "the most difficult of all prose forms", Amis' remark that "a legitimate pride in a specialised calling unites with an equally understandable desire to see science fiction treated respectfully and produces wild hyperbole", and a half-dozen far more damning examples of or comments on the genre's embarrassing lapses into missionary ardor - but I won't, specifically because I have a degree of sympathy with McIntyre's argument.) Even hardened readers of the stuff, she tells us, are inclined to take her answer with a grain of salt. (Arguing, I think, an altogether unlikely sophistication on the part of the average reader of sf, but we'll let that pass.) The stands, she says, are choked with so much rank kitsch that when you say "sf" people think of Perry Rhodan, or worse, *Space:1999*. This is so true that it sometimes amazes me that fans can still resent academic criticism's traditional (but fading) contempt for sf, when so much of the genre was and is so patently awful.

Sf, she tells us, has sold its birthright for a pot of technology - and I agree, with bells on. The predictive capacity sf has prided itself on is "accurate" precisely in the way a saved-off double-12 shotgun is accurate - one or two of those little lead balls are bound to hit the target. (As far as I know, no one has ever attempted to catalogue our *Amazing*, utterly *Astounding* techno-extrapolative bloopers; McIntyre cites Campbell's lack of interest in television, and the failure to predict the effects of little things like automobiles and the Pill.) What can you expect from a body of literature that only discovered sex a decade ago?

Taking up Joanna Russ' model of first-, second-, and third-stage sf, McIntyre calls for a fiction that "deals not directly with technology or innovation but with the effects of technology and innovation: the changes the new toy may cause." We want more than just entertainment - or Vonda McIntyre and I do, anyway. But Kafka once pointed out that we never want the books we need; he said that they come on us like a plague, like an ice-axe to break the mind's frozen sea. Be that as it may, the man who stocks my corner druggist's twenty-foot wire rack seems to feel certain down to his very wallet that people are hot to buy some very slick, very nasty, very facile shit. Some of which is sf. Or has rockets on the cover, or floating neon jellyfish. In any case, it's in that section of the rack.

Rhetorical analysis - I promised - Here, you do it: "Sf . . . is the only literary form that gives a writer the latitude to explore possibilities, instead of the premutations of everyday certainties." (Italics mine.) Now, for twenty points on your final mark, what's wrong with that statement? Or to put it more rhetorically, what is (are) the root metaphor(s)?

Whose everyday certainties, exactly? Mine, yours, Vonda McIntyre's? A twelve-year-old Jamaican's, dealing ganja in Trenchtown? Rudolph Hess', last prisoner in Spandau? Whose? Are they all that everyday, these certainties? Is reality really all that *mundane*? And just how certain, gentle reader, are those everyday certainties of yours?

Not too certain, I hope, for the occasional vision or revision.

The central root metaphor of McIntyre's essay is that sf and the mainstream are two basically different things - that in some sense they exist independently. Which is to say, that in some sense they *do* exist. Which brings us to Peter Nicholls.

Nicholls has been quietly but publicly doubting, for some years, that a "mainstream" exists. He won't even use the term, if he can help it. Without having said as much - as far as I know - he's consistently opted for an entirely holistic view of fiction, refusing to draw those eternal Mickey Mouse distinctions that are the true walls of the sf ghetto. (Put this distaste of mine for line-drawing down to having been taught all through elementary school that my country had God on its side; patriotism has never been the same, for me, and I make a poor literary partisan.)

Nicholls has decided, like Mr. Yeats, that the centre cannot hold. Sf as we knew it is coming apart at the seams - but in a very interesting display of torn velvets, burning pinball circuits, and ill-guarded borders. Delaney throws *Dhalgren* into a sustained slow-motion power-drift, crashing cheerfully through sf's traditional barriers of taste and style every five or six pages; Russ writes such a savagely intelligent satire on sexism that her critics are too upset to bother attacking the book's advanced narrative mode; Ellison writes Harlan Ellison stories; Haldeman's brutalized space cadets fight an endless war that has ultimately no point whatever; Tom Reamy frames an *Unknown* urban fantasy with real live drag-queens and burnt-out hustlers; Keith Roberts - well, fill out your own list. And you can find all of this cheek-by-jowl with E.E. Smith, *Bondage Queens of Gor*, and *Have Spacesuit, Will Travel*. All in your favorite section of that twenty-foot rack.

"We are faced," Nicholls writes, "with the paradox that a field of literature famous for its originality is subject, partly for economic reasons (give the customers what we *know* they want), to a rigid conservatism. Once the center of an empire becomes frozen into stiff, hieratic rituals, even at its most commonplace levels, then we know that the decline and fall has set in." He looks forward to a day not far away when "the label 'science fiction' may be seen as archaic as the Roman Empire, or at least - if it is retained - seen as a token courtesy-label, much as 'British Commonwealth' is a token nostalgia-term for a bunch of nations that pretty well mind their own business and sing the National Anthem, if at all, with a marked lack of enthusiasm."

Nicholls' root metaphor is that the least valuable aspects of sf spring from its awareness of itself as sf, as a genre distinct from the main body of literature. What McIntyre sees as growth toward Russ' third-stage sf, Nicholls sees as a healthy movement away from a sense of genre-identity. The things McIntyre actually wants for sf are simply the inherent characteristics of the best *fiction*, period.

I don't think I'm capable of dealing calmly with statements that sf is "the most powerful art form around." I'm not even sure what "powerful," in that context, would mean. I can't see how anyone cognizant of anything like the full range and depth of art - or merely of literature - could believe that. It boggles the mind; it's the National Anthem Nicholls mentioned, I guess.

While readers of an earlier sf were busy constructing the ghetto walls we'd like to be able to attribute to a fabulous - but now nearly extinct - race of hostile Academics, walls built up brick by brick in letter columns and fanzines, the mainstream's Big Name Pros - people, for better or worse, like Joyce and Lawrence - were trying desperately to undermine those everyday certainties of ours that McIntyre would like to see sf transcend. I don't think I've read too many pieces of really world-class fiction that didn't cause me to question at least one of my own "certainties," and I like to think that that is what good fiction is for. It's exhilarating, but as Kafka pointed out, it can scare the hell out of you because good art changes your life. And the record leaves me fairly certain that the people who forged the reader-editor-author feedback circuit that determined the content of so much of American sf were not really very interested in getting quite that sort of hell scared out of them.

That dichotomy I promised you - The next time you read a state-of-the-art statement on sf, ask yourself whether or not the author assumes - and root metaphors are usually only present as unspoken assumptions - that sf is a Whole Other Thing. (Two typical giveaways: missionary hyperbole or the belief that sf has a Mission.)

I'm in the other camp. I want everything Vonda McIntyre wants for sf, but like Peter Nicholls I think we'll only get it by giving up our commercial self-image as a literary suburb eons ahead in technology and twenty years behind in style and content. And remember that it's in the nature of a genre's deepest constraints on style and content that the practitioners of the genre are themselves unaware of those constraints. The best writers we have in the field today are discovering these constraints and either ignoring them or playing fast games of ideological handball off them.

Down with the Empire!



LORD OF THE RINGS:

A Fond and Scholarly Retrospect

by M. L. Petard, ob, fus., cate.

My readers will perhaps bear with me through these perhaps, if not certainly, frequently, if not too frequently but indeed necessary, academic exercises before any firm postulations are reached if they are assured that our primary source for all our suppositions, allegations, and indeed, research has always been none other than Samuel P. Trilling. If we may pause, as I'm sure the reader is more than willing to do, to cull along the path to literary erudition one of Trilling's epigrammatic tidbits, which may serve, if we may be excused no small amount of presumption, as the guiding beacon for this endeavour, "Thought is the root from which the plant of knowledge grows."

It has often been a matter of some dispute amidst my academic colleagues as to whether that same plant of knowledge can grow, indeed should grow, in any soil, or is but a delicate hot house plant, a living organism which must of necessity be fed upon, and in, that rarefied atmosphere of *academe*. But, if we may digress but a moment, is that atmosphere exclusively to be found within the cloistered walls of our universities? Is the savant, of necessity, gearboxed in the flowing robes of the don? Must we say, with L'artreche, "*Le boulanger connaît son pain mais aucun autre?*" What is the nutritive element, from whence springs the fertilizer for that most precious of man's possessions, that glowing gem, which as Trilling so aptly states, "separates us from the savages." *Of what is this food composed?*

With this in mind, we may proceed, but not before we must pause yet again to credit the one person, or set of fingers, that has contributed singularly to the completion, and I trust, the success of this work, and that is my wife Myrna. But for her typing and tireless, if occasionally misguided advice, this work would be but another "castle in the air," floating in my brain.

Any writer, as Ben Jonson said of playwrights and Annette Funicello said of Mousketeers, must be willing to suffer the "slings and arrows" if he dares to offer his work to the press, and hence to the critics, and hence to the public, and hence to posterity. It is only caution and care, which is, as it were, the shield and buckler of the swordsman, which protects him from the glaring error and the bad review. As Trilling says, "without caution, literary criticism is merely opinion."

His judgement is echoed by Pigmont, who says, "*le grande sont le grande par'ce que ils ont tenir le 'slings and arrows' tout le temps.*"

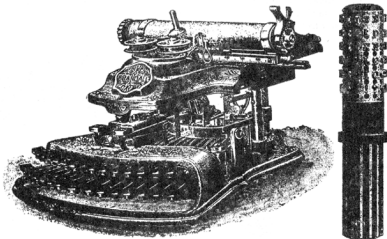
If this cautionary and reverential approach requires, of necessity, more pages than the hasty or ill-judged review, then so be it. Better a work of a thousand volumes than a pamphlet of nonsense, as any discriminating readers must surely, if not certainly, agree.

The subject of this review is, of course, that master-work of fantasy, *Lord of the Rings*, by Tolkien. What is it about this work that causes it to coruscate like a brilliant star in the often murky firmament of adult fantastic literature?

Lest we be too blinded by its glare, however, we must quickly warn ourselves that all too often the reviewer, ill-prepared or, God forbid, just an ordinary person off the street, can make the most ill-judged and unfounded statements, which due to the miracle of modern printing, are circulated, spreading their well-intentioned but false message to the unwary, the unwise, and the stupid. As Trilling repeatedly cautioned his undergraduate class (among whom I humbly count myself), *caution* is the by-word of the literary critic. All too often his arrows of truth fall a little short of the bull's-eye and hit the periphery of the target, if, indeed, at all. It is, of course, difficult to shoot arrows when you are holding a shield and buckler; but this is the area where we separate the men from the boys, the dilettantes and intellectual dabblers from the true aficionados, as Trilling makes manifestly clear.

My point is simply this. Beware literary distraction! Leave the serious literary judgements for those who are equipped! In fact, it were best not to read *Lord of the Rings* at all. A quick glance at the cover should suffice. Maybe one of Bomba- what's his name's songs. Then wait, until the standing committee of my university have finished our tireless scholarship work, the *Annotated Lord of the Rings*. It is with no small measure of pride that I can safely, if not positively, state, that we have succeeded in completely analyzing the first three pages and that this part of our analysis, published in two beautifully bound volumes, will be available by subscription shortly.

By all means, enjoy the book. Breathe in its ambience. But beware, for as Vendrome says, "*Il y a beaucoup de merde autour de les roses.*" (cf. Trilling, comparison of knowledge to a plant.)



Bill Beard reviews

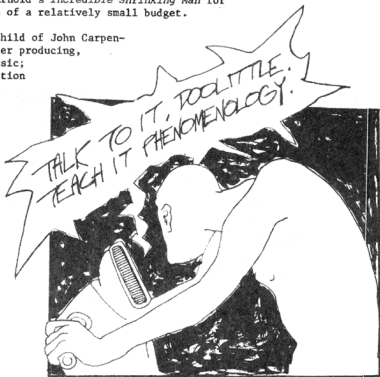
DARK STAR

Dark Star is such a beautiful little enterprise that it's going to take some beating as sleeper of the year. It's not entirely a sleeper, since I recall some mention of it a few years ago in a couple of film journals, and it was given exposure at more than one film festival at that time. But there's obviously been some delay in getting it into distribution, and it's showing up only as a specialty item on university campuses or on schlock commercial double bills where you have to be sharp-eyed even to notice it. In any case it's obviously failed to make it commercially.

I'm not a particular devotee of science-fiction movies, but I've seen a fair number of them one way and another, and I would unhesitatingly rank *Dark Star* in the top half-dozen. It's certainly not disgraced for intelligence and sophistication even by such metaphysical heavyweights as Tarkovsky's *Solaris* or Kubrick's *2001*, and it competes successfully with little masterpieces like Don Siegel's *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* and Jack Arnold's *Incredible Shrinking Man* for imaginative and effective use of a relatively small budget.

Dark Star is the brainchild of John Carpenter and Dan O'Banion - Carpenter producing, directing, and writing the music; O'Banion taking care of production design and special effects, and also acting in one of the lead roles; and both men collaborating on the screenplay. I understand Carpenter also produced *THX-1138*, the first film of American Graffiti director George Lucas; but though *Dark Star* lacks the slick visual surface of *THX-1138*, it's by far the better film of the two.

Dark Star confines itself entirely to the adventures and activities of a five-man interstellar scoutship (called "Dark Star") operating many light years from earth. The pre-credit sequence consists of a taped television message from a base on earth to the



spaceship in which hollow rhetoric ("you men are certainly doing a fine job up there") is mingled with red tape and administrative neglect ("I'm sorry, but we're unable to send you the additional radiation protection you request"). This effectively sets the scene for the attitudes and life-style of the men aboard the ship, which is the subject of the movie. The captain of the mission has been killed by an electronic malfunction, and the remainder of the crew drift through the weeks and months and years in a malaise of boredom, nostalgia, smalltalk and petty quarrels. Their mission, it seems, is to destroy so-called "unstable" planets. Exactly what an unstable planet is is left a little unclear; at one point it seems to mean any planet with intelligent life, and at another a planet which will eventually drift in towards its sun, causing a supernova. In any case, the actual bombing of these planets gives the "Dark Star" crew their only moments of real purpose in life, and for these they momentarily wake from their lethargy. Otherwise they more or less abandon will, and allow their lives to be dominated by the ship's computer, which monitors all systems, including the crew, and communicates with them in a reassuring, attractive young female voice sounding like a cross between an airline stewardess and a high-priced call-girl.

The bombs used to destroy the planets are large, complicated things, which are also endowed with voices, and some of the most fascinatingly hilarious moments in the movie come when computer and crew are drawn into debate with the bombs. At the end of the film one of the bombs is about to detonate while still in the bomb-bay due to a damaged laser communications monitor. The crew tries to talk the bomb out of exploding, but the bomb refuses in a tone of petulant annoyance. In desperation Doolittle, the ranking crew member, communicates with the body of the dead commander, now on ice but apparently still capable of intermittent thought. The commander's message is faint and garbled but intelligible: "Talk to it, Doolittle. Teach it phenomenology." Whereupon follows an incredible colloquy between Doolittle and the bomb, with Doolittle asking questions like, "How do you know you exist?" and "How do you know that the data presented to you by your senses corresponds with objective fact?" while the seconds are ticking away towards detonation-time.

The entire screenplay is astonishingly witty and inventive, as well as occasionally plumbing more resonant depths. The individuals in the crew are beautifully defined and well contrasted, and the dialogue is cool and funky when it isn't being more serious. The visuals are equally effective. It's obvious that the production hasn't had the large budget that's necessary for the kind of superlatively three-dimensional special effects that appear in *2001*, or even the less extravagant *Silent Running*. But without that much money to throw around, O'Banion manages very creditable presentations of interstellar drive, an asteroid storm, an exploding planet and a couple of space-walks. I don't know who's responsible for inventing the alien creature one of the crew members keeps as a pet - it looks like a beach-ball with webbed feet and displays a distinct personality. The creation of the illusion of living in a spaceship drifting through the void is very well captured, both in set design and in lighting, and there are one or two haunting moments which owe their power to visual content - like the colloquy with the dead commander. The acting is first-rate throughout. Carpenter's electronic music and the miscellaneous noises he provides are superb. If I have a criticism of the movie at all, it's that the ambitious ending teeters very close to not coming off, and that the final joke is a little too facile.

But on the whole *Dark Star* is a thoroughly delightful film. Much of it is very funny, mostly employing a beautifully deadpan wit, and yet the humour is permeated by a finely-caught sense of *ennui* that balances the action neatly between farce and quiet desperation. It's not everyday you run across such a pleasant surprise - don't miss it.



HOW I JOINED FANDOM AND LEARNED TO LOVE ITS OUTLAWS

by Allyn Cadogan

My friend Mike tells me the only thing he dislikes about Harlan Ellison's writing is that it doesn't make good reading.

Now that you've stopped snickering, let me explain: He says Ellison's stuff sounds just fine when read aloud, but is not the sort of literature that goes down well when read silently. The way Mike figures it, Ellison doesn't really bang away at his typewriter but composes his pieces aloud into a tape recorder.

As Mike talks, I build this fantastic mental movie of Harlan Ellison making a short story. He is wearing a purple print silk shirt, top three buttons undone, white pants, wide black belt with an elaborate gold buckle, white loafers and no socks.

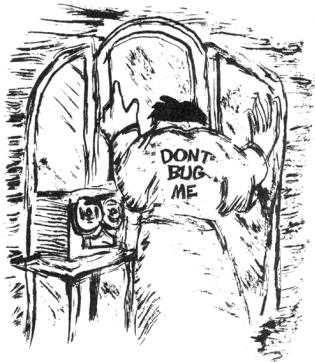
He is moving in front of an oversize three-way mirror; off to his left is a small table upon which rests the tape recorder. He paces, gesticulates with his arms, body following the flow of his words, eyes constantly on the mirrors, acting out his composition. Sometimes he stops and repeats a phrase or an entire sentence with a different emphasis, creating a different motion.

The carpet is cherry red shag.

Yeah, Mike, I could dig that scene, though I prefer the other one, the one where Ellison sweats nude over the typewriter at four a.m.

Somehow I get the impression Mike feels oral composition is cheating. He didn't actually come right out and say that; I just picked up on it. I think, well, Ellison's been writing in Hollywood for twenty years now; he must by this time have become extremely aware of the visual and aural value of what he writes, and I personally can't fault anyone who writes with one eye on the possible markets.

Mike also tells me everybody who reads Ellison either loves him or else hates him. He hasn't met anyone who takes the middle path when it comes to Ellison; he appeals or repels on an emotional level. It seems to be just that emotional basis to his writing that puts Mike off. I have read a fair amount of Ellison, though by no means everything he's done, but in what I have read, from very early creations to fairly recent, I have yet to come across anything that suggests he desires to appeal on an intellectual/literary basis. I would imagine that at some point, probably early, in his career he had the hope that one day he would write "great literature." He must have soon realized, however, that



his creative power lay in his ability to provoke gut reaction in his readers. Personally, I don't think what he's done is bad literature so much as clever writing.

I vividly remember the first time I read anything of Ellison's. There were about two hundred of us sitting around an apartment in Minneapolis, circa 1967, smoking a lot of dope, talking to Alf the avocado plant, and discussing the merits of becoming professional hippies when someone put a copy of *I Have No Mouth And I Must Scream* into my hands. I chuckled my way through the intro. Then I read the title story and, frankly, it gave me the creeps. I read some of the other stories and thought them all unduly pessimistic.

Through the years I kept coming across his stuff, mostly short stories falling into the sf category, and nothing really turned me on until I found "A Boy and His Dog" a few years back. I reread that one several times, but overall,

my opinion of Ellison as a writer was not high.

Several months ago, someone whose intellectual judgements I do not value made some snide comments about Ellison in one of the prozines and I thought to myself (convoluted logic at its worst), If that, um, *person* thinks Ellison is a dud, then Ellison probably has something going for him, and I filed it.

A couple of weeks later I read an Ellison quote (get this!) defending sf writers to the general public, saying that even the most pessimistic-sounding writers are really cockeyed optimists because they predict any future at all. He put it rather more tidily than that but I've lost the exact quote. I thought, what's this? Ellison an optimist? This bears further investigation! I rummaged around in a closet and found my yellowed copy of *Mouth*, and read it cover to cover in about ninety minutes. I still didn't care awfully for the title story (to be honest, I think he's at his weakest when writing sf), but by the time I'd finished "Lonelyache," I was well on the way to being madly in love with the mythical beast Harlan Ellison.

Right about that time I also discovered fandom and I learned, among other things, that all one has to do is mutter "Harlan Ellison" quietly under one's breath and forty people will immediately come out of the corners to regale one with all sorts of spicy stories about said subject.

The first time this happened I was stunned. A group of us were sitting on the floor tossing names around and I casually mentioned Ellison. Do you like him? someone asked. Oh, I love him, I assured them, to which three chorused, Have you ever *seen* him? Well, um, no, I stammered suddenly feeling hopelessly inadequate, and wondering just what seeing a writer has to do with assessing his literary worth. And they started.

He's always on. (They said.) He never stops moving. He's very loud. Totally intolerant of people whose opinions differ from his. He's obnoxious. Frequently makes no sense whatsoever. He's egocentric. He's a very good writer, yeah, but.... He's an incisive critic. He's a dreadful writer. He's an iconoclast. He can be awfully abrasive. He's a jerk. I rather like him, personally. He's a Personality.

There's no denying the effect he has on those who have come into personal contact with him. What I find more amazing is the whallop he packs for those who have merely read him. As an experiment, I gave assorted Ellison titles, fiction and non-fiction, to assorted friends who had never heard of him.

They said: Everytime I finished a story I had to turn to the back of the book and look at his picture. He spoiled my appetite. He's certainly voluptuous. He's awfully punchy, isn't he? He's a very good writer, but.... Do you suppose he's always that horny or was it just a phase he went through? He's a punk. He makes me go warm all over. What a fantastic man!

The reaction is almost invariably to the author first and to his work second. The personality just comes roaring through. Playing with writers' personalities is a tricky thing. It's something that most critics ought to know enough to stay away from, but few can resist doing.

Shortly after I finished reading *The French Lieutenant's Woman* I observed to a friend that John Fowles certainly seemed to have a hang-up about women, seeing them all as manipulative monsters, this theory also based on my readings of *The Magus* and *The Collector*.

I have since learned that roughly ninety percent of what any author writes bears little more than a third-cousin-twice-removed relationship to the truth. It's a waste of time to look for clues to the author's personality in what he writes. It's conceivable that Fowles is merely fascinated with the theme of what manipulative women can do to a man.

Nevertheless, I'm still frequently tempted to try to read between Ellison's lines; he almost seems to invite it. There is a nebula something to his writing that encourages readers to build fantasy images of Ellison, and to take what he writes as whole cloth.

There are people who write so powerfully that their readers must wonder about the author's real personality. It's more or less par for the course for such writers to protest that they are not what/who they write. Ellison, though, has done an about-face to the usual position. He has said, Yes! I am everywhere in my stories. He has consciously engendered and fostered the growth of the Ellison mythos. He's unique in that he has been able to pull it off. In fact, the only thing wrong with the scheme is that he simply has not yet been popularly acknowledged as a major modern writer.

When I read between Ellison's lines, I see someone who cares so much it hurts a lot, who makes obnoxious statements because that's his way of getting people to look at themselves, to see where and who they are, and hopefully, to set them on a better course. Like a fat person living in a house with no mirrors: This fat person doesn't think much of other fat people, but can't see enough of himself to realize he's just as bad as the others. Then one day someone hangs a five-by-seven foot mirror on the bedroom wall, and next to it a sign in two-foot high letters saying, YOU ARE A FAT SLOB. So I have this mental image of Ellison hanging figurative mirrors.

A good writer, when he turns to fiction, can't help but let the essence of what makes him human creep into the work: his dreams, hopes, fears, motivations - forgive the clichés. This human-ness isn't to be found in what the author writes, but somehow in the

way he writes and weaves theme, plot, words through each other. These whiffs of humanness are what make a fiction piece believable, whether the reader is consciously aware of them or not. Sure, there are prostitutes writing fiction: I honestly can't believe there is much of Erich Segal in *Love Story*, for instance. Segal may be a technically proficient writer, but his book lacks *honest* emotion. The whores in literature are fairly easy for the discerning reader to spot.

Ellison is no whore.

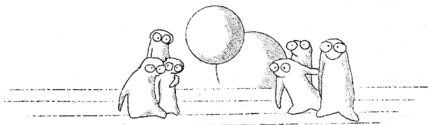
When I was a pre-teen, I used to look at my classmates in school and wonder what motivated them. I would look at the popular, clean, well-dressed ones and think, I wonder what it feels like to be Sally Hughes. I'd look at those we all knew were going to end up on Skid Row and I'd think, I wonder what it feels like to be Bill Brajek.

Ellison shows me. He puts me inside Sally Hughes' head, and Billy Brajek's head and makes me see out of their eyes, feel their emotions. He takes me places I'd not have had the courage to visit alone, and he shows me other ways of living, and he shows me I'm not all that very different from either Sally or Billy. Ellison is an honest writer. He gives me the feeling that he's never given less than one hundred percent of himself whenever he's sat down at his typewriter. For that I thank him.

That's why I love Harlan Ellison.



The above article was written in April of 1976, about two months after I discovered fandom. Occasionally I am asked by long-time fans just why I "joined fandom," and in more flippant moments I have been known to reply, "to meet Harlan Ellison." So anyhow, something like nine months after writing to Susan and asking if she could put me in touch with some real live fans, Harlan came to town, and I got to spend an evening and the better part of a day in his company. I'm still in love with him.





Tidepool

In a fine flush of nostalgic neofannish enthusiasm, I volunteered to do all sorts of editorial-staff chores for *Genre Plat*: acquire envelopes, teach Allyn how to slipsheet, write a sercon article, type up a mailing list, write a fannish column, write a fanhistory column, and bake scones for the collators.

In trufannish fashion, I have done none of these things. At last night's BCSFA meeting, Allyn rather pointedly reminded me of my promises, as she flourished a stack of brilliant-witty-comments-on-sf, her editorial, masses of cartoons, and rows of neatly-letraset headings at me. (Allyn Cadogan not only has cheekbones, she also has the ability to apply letraset in a straight line. I am consumed with Envy.)

Clutching one of Al Betz' chocolate chip cookies defensively, I mumbled excuses. I've been re-acquiring my roommate (Eli Cohen, finally fleeing Regina); I've had a hundred essays to mark in the past two weeks; I've had houseguests; I *haven't* had a reply from John Bangsund, who wrote the article I wanted to reprint for a fanhistory column. Besides, I'd given Allyn a dozen stencils and baked oatmeal cookies for the editorial collective and what more did they want, mutter mutter... I hid behind Bill Gibson.

I have, in fact, been Busy. Besides grading more termpapers than I care to remember on *Heart of Darkness* ("Conrad described the black men descriptively as black,") I've been drawing up the outline and ordering the books for my new course on fantasy; I've been working on the curriculum committee submission for a full-time sf class; I've been working on my sf-essay-book outline; I've been writing Serious Stuff about sf; I've been discussing a graduate student's M.A. thesis proposal on sf; I've been... I've been spending my fanac time on scholac, except my scholac all seems to be fanac.

I am, in fact, in the happy position of being able to spend my "work" life talking about *A Wizard of Earthsea*, the influence of Campbell on Heinlein, and the influence of the fan community on sf publishing... while getting paid for doing this.

Let me, from the goodness of my trufannish heart, share this secret with you, so that you too can become too busy grading exams on sf to read sf, too busy organizing worldcon panels as "scholarly activity" to have dinner with your friends, too busy... No, wait a minute. That doesn't sound right.

Let me talk about taking sf seriously... in the most fannish manner possible.

If you're a student, or a teacher, who thinks it would be all sorts of fun, and a revolutionary act besides, to talk about sf, talk about sf-as-literature, in some sort of organized way, actually *get credit* for studying something you *enjoy* (revolutionary, did I say?) and apply those ivory-tower modes of thought to Real Life... let's talk about sf courses.

((If you want specific help, there are any number of Teacher's Aids available. Some are valuable. Jack Williamson's book on teaching sf, due from Mirage Press realsoon, should be a boon-- I found his pamphlet, *Teaching SF*, very helpful, and the book adds essays by other people. Some "aids" are publishers' ripoffs, cashing in on the new market in college and highschool courses. Most of the dreadful texts I've seen (*Anthropology Through Science Fiction*, *American History Through Science Fiction*, *Uganda Through Science Fiction*) fall into this category, as do David Allen's *Ballantine Teachers' Guide to Science Fiction* (tied to a Ballantine sales package, of course), and his *Cliff's Notes*. Beverly Friend's *The Classroom in Orbit* might be useful for a junior high school non-fan-non-sf reader, but I mistrust any book which blithely tells the kiddies to put on their own convention, where-- and write it up for *Locus*. I have various mimeographed help-sheets, course outlines and so on, which I'll be happy to send along if you drop a note to the Department of English, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, B.C., Canada V6T 1W5.))

* * * *

I was a terribly Earnest undergraduate in English, ten years ago, when I rediscovered sf lurking in the tunnels underneath Carleton University. People had brightened the walls with clever graffiti: "Frodo is alive and well, he's lost under Patterson Hall," and suchlike. ("There is no plural for grilled cheese.") Under the Tolkien references and Elvish runes, someone else had taped personal runic scrawls, decipherable as: "Interested in sf? Call Richard Labonté at 733-2811." Quiet Richard in the newspaper office was a pusher. He lent me Delany's books, he lent me strange things called fanzines, he inveigled me into writing, collating, and driving to conventions. In short, he started me on the path to Terminal Silliness, where you find me today. Enroute, he encouraged me to draw up a proposal, for the English Department, for a course in sf. There were the radical '60's, remember; and under the combined influence of make-education-relevant rhetoric and truly literate sf, I drew up a pompous 4-page document suggesting that what Carleton faunched for was a credit class in sf. In, to be precise-- I'd been reading the New Wave rhetoricians, and Ellison-- "speculative fiction."

"Susan," said my department chairman, raising a practiced sardonic eyebrow, "all fiction is speculative."

Rule 1: don't be pompous. Don't be phony-academic. Don't ever, ever be defensive. This stuff we love is worth taking seriously. You know that; so relax.

In fact, the chairman was sympathetic. (The happy ending to this story is that he too is now teaching *A Wizard of Earthsea* on his children's literature and fantasy course...) He did give me rather a rough time about my interest in "untraditional" (read, unrespectable) subjects like sf and Canadian lit, so I'd feel defensive, work hard in my "traditional" subjects to prove I was "scholarly," make an A in his Blake class. I did.

"Susan, we'd really like to offer a science fiction class, but there's no-one to do it. If you're so interested... do it yourself."

"Fine. Give me a room."

Rule 2: The only true learning occurs when you, yourself, want to learn. Do it.

The Carleton University SF Freeschool and Bookswapping Group boiled itself down to about 20 people, meeting evenings in the summer of 1969... and through the fall and winter of 1969-70. There were first year and MA students, physics majors and visiting cytotechnologists (Rosemary Ulliyot and Alicia Austin), a math grad student not-working on his thesis, and me, in Canadian lit, working on mine; people who never went to their "real" classes, and teaching assistants who should have been preparing classes: people finding out how and what they wanted to learn. Oh, we were frequently naive, often banal. ("Heinlein is a fascist." "Naw, I liked *The Rolling Stones*." "Hey, yeah, their new album is sorta sf." "Wanna go see *2001* again, gang?" "What about Heinlein?" "Aw, he's a fascist.") Sometimes we were superlatively neofannish-- as when I discovered that, in Canada, a bookstore could not order Ace books directly, but had to deal through a news agent (the local softcore porn distributor.) Why couldn't the Carleton bookstore order us Ace Specials, directly? Because Ace said no. Why couldn't the assistant sf editor, the Specials editor at Ace, bug someone to make a Special Exception? As a class project, we wrote individual letters suggesting this arrangement to the assistant editor at Ace. At that point, there were still about 35 people in the class. It was three years before Terry Carr spoke to me again.

Rule 3: pay some attention to practical matters: the type of classroom (as informal as possible, for discussion), the format, the booklist, and so on-- because these govern how you learn. Do you want structure, or not? Above all, though, be flexible and innovative. The universities have forgotten this. The fans sometimes forget it. Be willing to experiment. Be willing to be silly.

The freeschool class showed us all valuable things, about how you got, from any experience, rewards proportionate to the enthusiasm you put in. It convinced me that

a freeschool environment is the best possible forum for learning, too, if some structure can be persuaded to arise organically, like mushrooms, from amid the group. These were lessons I tried to carry over to the bed of Procrustes what was The University, when I became a real live Professor-Person in Regina, with (in 1973) my very own Hugo and my very own sf class. I has to choose the books, and order them. I had to work a format with a large, chilly classroom filled with rows of bolted-down desks. I had to "play Teacher." Still, once I got rid of the people looking for a gut course (one of whom handed in 8 hours' worth of computer printout from a space-war game as his "essay") we had a roomful of psych majors talking to biology majors talking, for the first time in their lives, to the two English majors who kept asking plair* tively: "But how do you talk about sf? Can you talk about Characterization? Theme? Imagery?" "What's an imagery?" "What's a galactic empire?" "Hey, you know, I've never actually read a novel before. This Heinlein, he's good. May I write a story instead of an essay?"



Rule 4: nothing, nothing, not even correct punctuation, is as important as enthusiasm.

Rule 5: Break down preconceptions. And get around, under, through administrative red tape, so English majors can take Chemistry 230, Science Fiction and can talk to biologists, while chemical engineers can take English 314, Science Fiction and not feel out of place. If someone who's always been afraid of words on paper wants to write a story, encourage him/her instead of saying "the department wants 2 essays and an exam." This is why I like freschools, though the thrill of getting credits for fun is pleasant.

"You realize we want you to teach Canadian literature and other literature courses, not sci-fi stuff?" said U.B.C.'s English Department head.

"Yes," I smiled blithely, got the job, and proceeded to obtain permission to teach English 314, Studies in Fiction, special topic Science Fiction. This succeeded so well that, urged by the head of the curriculum committee (a full professor who wants to teach sf himself) I'm working on approval for a full year course, English 320, Science Fiction and Fantasy, and meantime preparing next year's English 318, Children's Literature with an emphasis on fantasy. It's strange to be Respectable, all of a sudden.

This year's course looked at the North American or Gernsback tradition, sf as a popular literature, the influence of marketing and editorial assumptions... fannish matters, as opposed to the "Susan, give us a definitive definition of sf" debates which this class, largely English majors and creative writing people, wanted to engage in. Perhaps I made a mistake. (Bill Gibson's essay here comes partly from thoughts stirred up in the class, I think.) I know I refused to pin sf down to one function: cut, dried and mounted. Yet I too want to know what this-thing-we-mean-when-we-point-to-it is, so I can understand what it is capable of doing and encourage it to reach its best. That's what taking sf "seriously" means, for me.

Rule 6: there are no easy "definitions" of anything as alive as sf.

Rule 7: keep it alive.

At the 1974 worldcon, I sat on a panel called "Teaching SF" with some Heavy Scholars and a couple of fan-pro-profs like Jack Williamson. I decided that, if I were taking sf from some of these people, I would cut class. Harlan Ellison, in the front row, was twitching impatiently, and finally jumped up to protest, in the best fannish tradition, "You people are going to kill sf! you're going to make it dull and boring!"

"Aha!" I thought, waking up. I started to heckle Harlan back, which, since I was onstage and had a mike, wasn't as unequal as it sounds. "The only reason I, or Jack, say, teach sf is because we love it, and think it's worth taking seriously."

"I love it too, and I take it seriously. That's why I don't want the universities getting their hands on it."

"Instead of the universities killing sf, maybe sf'll shake up the universities, knock down a few walls. Think of it... studying something you actually enjoy!"

The audience cheered. I grinned at Harlan. Harlan, who spends a lot of his time shaking up university audiences, grinned at me. The rest of the panel went back to talking about structural fabulation, or possibly speculative fiction.

Rule 8: "Let's get science fiction out of the classroom and back into the gutter where it belongs."--Dena Brown

The approach to sf I've evolved means having my cake, eating it, licking the icing bowl and sticking to my diet too. Sf's vitality comes, in part, from its "gutter" nature; from the pressure of its fans, which can limit and support; from its status as a "popular literature" that ordinary people enjoy and get excited about. Yet it can also transcend its rockets-and-blasters origins. Moreover, in North America at least, alas,

The Reader Who Appreciates Literary Subtleties is a rare furry creature who lurks in university libraries. Reading sf; appreciating sf; encouraging those sf writers who want to experiment, by showing them they have an audience; even capturing part of the lucrative college book market for Ursula Le Guin, Pam Sargent and Kate Wilhelm; having fun, getting paid, getting our gold stars for talking about something we enjoy: I want to do it all.

Rule 9: stay fannish.

The English majors in my class this year kept making surprised, pleased noises as they read sf criticism, like Bretnor's collection *Science Fiction Today and Tomorrow* and the essays in Robin Scott Wilson's *Those Who Can*. "Hey, they're writing for real people. Hey, they're so clear! Hey, this is the best thing I've read on plotting. Hey, this is *real*."

The class also made surprised, pleased noises when I brought in (on a budget of \$0.00) all the guests I could inveigle into the classroom: Paul Williams on tracking the wild Dick, Sturgeon and Heinlein for *Rolling Stone*; David Suzuki on recombinant DNA; Terry Carr on editing; Harlan Ellison on... loving sf, enough to take it seriously. As Harlan soared, exploded, and generally presented The Harlan Ellison Show, several random thoughts came to me.

One was that, under the present regulations for the Hugo Award for Best Dramatic Presentation, any sf class could be eligible, as an episode in a continuing series. If Ginjer Buchanan could almost get nominated in 1973 for her efforts to turn into a koala bear, why can't a good performance in an sf class be acclaimed too? English 314, University of British Columbia, October 25, 1976, medium live theatre, produced by Susan Wood and starring Harlan Ellison running through two end-of-class bells: "The Harlan Ellison Show." It was the best sf dramatic production I've seen in five years.

The other thought was a *click* of recognition as an idea came clear: what distinguishes sf is its sense of wonder.

Rule 10: keep your Sense of Wonder.

If we can lure the Sense of Wonder into the university, what won't we be able to do?

I'll tell you one thing you'll be able to do. Cheryl Cline and Lynn Kuehl, of Martinez, California, took an sf class from First Fandomite Art Widner. No, they weren't looking for an easy credit, reading Heinlein; no, they weren't even intending to write essays about books they enjoyed, for a change. They were neofans, see, and their idea was to "sit at Mr. Widner's feet and learn about early SF and fandom: the personalities and events." As a result, they became even more interested in fandom. Fanhistory. Fandom. Publish. Response, egoboo. School, ditto machine, publish, *fanaa*, CREDIT!

Thanks to a liberal school and a fannish prof, Cheryl and Lynn produced two issues of a nice, literate, very fannish zine, *Brick 'n' Board Journal*, for school credit. Yes. Before gafiating into matrimony, I'm sure they learned more about sf, writing, editing, interviewing people, the sociology of special interest groups, graphics, and the care of ditto machines than I've ever "taught" anyone on a formal "course"-- and they enjoyed doing it, and shared that enjoyment with other fans.

I think that's great. I am, in fact, terribly jealous.

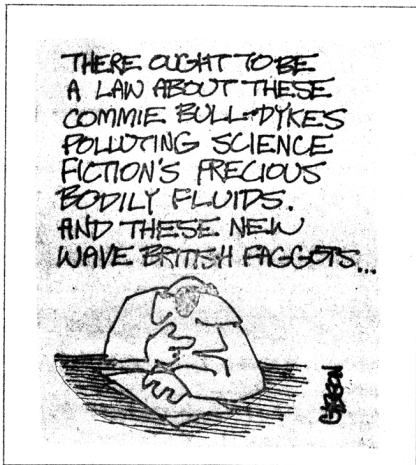
"Education," someone once wrote, "is revelation that affects the individual" I've arrived at a lot of my revelations about Art, Literature, Teaching and Learning, through teaching sf. Oh, I complain about my workload (and Allyn complains about

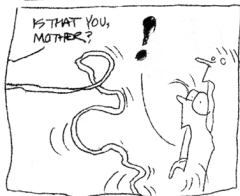
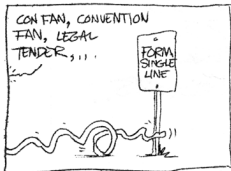
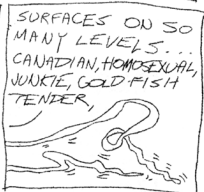
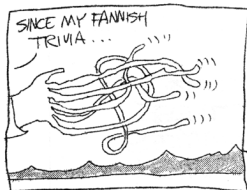
her lack of a column) but secretly I enjoy it. After all, better to have 45 papers to mark, than only two because your course is renowned as the most boring, irrelevant academic nonsense going! The insights-- how pompous I'm getting-- boil down to this:

Let's get education out of the classroom, and back into the gutter with us, where we live, where it belongs.

As long as sf will help me do that, help give me a connection between literature and life, then I'll keep teaching it. Because I love it. Because it's worth taking seriously.

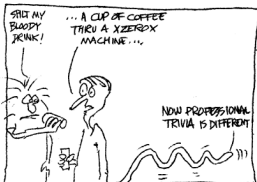
Are there really any other reasons?





25 April, 1977

Ken Fletcher
A 2-page collaboration between & w/ Gibson



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ADDENDUM

"Lord of the Rings, a fond and scholarly retrospect" first appeared in *BCSFAZine* 44, February, 1977, edited by Allyn Cadogan. Used by permission of the author.

"How I Joined Fandom and Learned to Love Its Outlaws" first appeared, in a slightly different form, in *No. 27 VARIATION*, Fall, 1976, edited by Mike Bailey. Used by permission of the author.

Electrostencils by Victoria Vayne. Special thanks to Eli Cohen, who sweated blood over the mimeo, and on his birthday, too. Collatio performed by Jim Andersen, Lynne Dollis, Eli Cohen, John, Bill, Susan. Dinner by Susan Wood.

DEDICATED TO:

Rob Jackson
&
MAYA