

THE AVIARY



From a weary but inspired Francis Baumli, an epistle for the multitudes.

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"... let us now suppose that in the mind of each man there is an aviary of all sorts of birds--some flocking together apart from the rest, others in small groups, others solitary, flying anywhere and everywhere."

Theaetetus by Plato

Rather late it is, this issue of The Aviary, begun this June 28, when it should have been out in March at the latest. Still, even though it begins this late in 1993, I will refer to events and states of Baumli's mind (however atemporal the latter nevertheless is) which have occurred in 1992 only.

So here it is. My yearly newsletter. My catharsis that is never a purgation. My act of verbal excretion which never empties me. My exercise in modest narcissism. My indulgence in humility. My pretense at pride. My attempt to gild my life with a bit of literary plumage. It is all this ... and less. Less, because this Aviary is always such a truncated accounting of my life and the lives of those around me. The major dramas in my life do not get told herein. Why? Because the dramas that surround Baumli are so sublime as to be ineffable. And the dramas that afflict my friends are so sordid as to be unspeakable.

I suppose I should confess that the most minor dramas do not get told either, and this is comprises no small omission when it comes to Baumli's biography. I leave these things out because I know they would not interest anyone, and in fact, might give some people further ammunition by which to ridicule and persecute the Baumli. Yet, I must here vouchsafe the importance of those many trivial events which define, encumber, and in many ways govern one's most rarefied and most spiritual inclinations. What am I referring to? Well, I did say that I should not go

into particulars; doing so might occasion many a peril. So I will speak hypothetically: For example, isn't it true that a serious case of constipation, lasting perhaps no more than 48 hours, can completely define a man's character during this time, and perhaps even cause him to make decisions which will have magnitudinous effects not only on his own life but also on the lives of many other people? Another example: If one has an erotic dream that is so torrid as to seem tactile, then one's relationship with one's spouse can, for the next several days--even weeks--be either very much improved, or become carnally uninteresting. A flat tire on a car can ruin one's day, cause one to miss a meeting, necessitate rescheduling planned events, and still be affecting one's life adversely as long as a month later.

Do you see? My point is that while I, in this Aviary, shall focus on things like great literature, fine paintings, and such, the truth of the matter is that even though a particular great painting may inspire and uplift me, it may be the case that my soul is more transfigured (not necessarily for the better) by dealing with a paper bag of groceries that rips askew just as I am walking along the cement sidewalk to our house, than by viewing that great painting.

But as I say: People would not be interested in, for example, hearing about which brand of motor oil Baumli's hearse prefers, or which of Baumli's testicles hangs lower than the other, or how Baumli's tomato plants did last year. No. None of these things are relevant to this Aviary since what the voyeuristic multitudes what to hear about is Baumli's inner life--the regions of the spirit, both mephitic and empyrean. Thus, out of deference to the expectations of others, I shall give them what they want: A treatise which, even if it now and then dips to the mundane, will nevertheless focus on the aesthetic, ethical, and metaphysical dimensions thereof.

This year I had thought to again alter the structure of The Aviary, and to some extent further its telos by including a section of "letters to the editor," i.e., letters to Baumli. I had thought to do this because some of the letters responding to the 1992 issue of The Aviary were very well written, thoroughly trenchant, and in some cases very edifying as well as entertaining. They deserved a broader audience, and perhaps a public response. But I have decided against adding such a section to The Aviary for several reasons. It would be very lengthy, and therefore make this project that much more expensive. I would feel obligated to get permission from people to print their letters, and this could involve the exchange of several letters: The person might not remember what he or she had written, would want to see the letter again before giving permission, then would want to excise certain parts or make changes, might later have second thoughts and retract the letter or wish to make even further changes, and likely there would be a good deal of procrastination by others as I would be trying to get all this accomplished. There is another reason as to why I decided against this addendum. I am already being criticized, by many people, for publishing a newsletter which contains so much that is critical, angry, bilious. A few of the letters I receive are appreciative, and in fact, these are the most intelligent and lengthy ones. But there are all those other letters, short and nasty, which come at me like a gust of birdshot, and if I were to include all those, well ... then the negative tone of this form letter might begin depressing even a hardened, calloused soul such as mine. I might instead, I suppose, be selective, and publish only those which please, or edify; but then I would be accused of being unfairly selective, i.e., undemocratic. Plus, there is the not inconsiderable possibility that the critical letters might bore my readers, not because of the criticism per se, but because such letters, generally speaking, tend to be both unintelligent and repugnantly inarticulate. Allow me to give two examples of such letters, to illustrate my theses; I can do so without worrying that these people will protest my having printed their letters without getting their permission, given that I shall not be sending further editions of The Aviary to either of these people.

A selection from the first letter: "I think before you criticize everybody for sounding uneducated with their way of speaking, you should watch your own mouth. Do you know how bad you sound when you speak? I mean, like, saying things like 'anymore' which should be used in the negative sense at the end of a sentence, but never in a positive sense to begin a sentence? It's okay to say, 'We can't do that anymore,' but it isn't okay to say things like you do, like, 'Anymore we try to watch our diets better.' Have you ever even thought about this? I doubt it. You say things like this all the time, and you just end up sounding like a redneck. How can you criticize the rest of us, when your sounding that way sounds like you just being a redneck?"

To which I replied, in part: "I never sound like a redneck. I concede that, on rare occasions, I do use phraseology which might resemble (although never mimic) such slang. But be assured that on such occasions I am not sounding like a redneck, I am being pastoral."

And a selection from a second letter: "You act like popular music is beneath classical music because you write about classical music so much. I find this offensive. I think my opinions matter and carry weight on this because I know something about classical music too. I happen to have 28 versions of Vivaldi's The Four Seasons (I'll bet you don't have that many!) and lately I've been listening to Verdi's Requiem. This is a much better requiem than Berlioz's, and that brings me to something you didn't say in your Aviary (is that the way it's supposed to be spelled?) but you did say in a different letter to me when I had asked you what version of Berlioz's Requiem is your favorite. Do you realize that you actually referred to the "Deus Irae" movement?! Note the way you misspelled that! It isn't 'Deus'--that means God. It's 'Dies' which means day. You try to act so intellectual, brandishing foreign words around, and then you let it out through mistakes that you can't even spell when you're trying to seem so sophisticated. I think you ought to go back to school and study Latin some more, if you ever hope to impress me with your pretendings about these things you think you know."

To which I patiently replied, in part: "Go back to school to improve my Latin? I never learned Latin in school. I learned it on my own, and thereby, I assure you, learned it better than the average professor of classics. The question remains: Do you have a point? You did much jeering about my lack of proficiency with Latin, having no other basis for your accusation than my having accidentally substituted 'Deus Irae' for 'Dies Irae.' I weary of your braying, although I do find humor in the fact that you, quite unawares, instead of demeaning me as you intended, actually gave me praise. Praise, I say, because my mistake was not at all reflective of any compromised proficiency with the language. Rather, it was a mere slip of the tongue, and, if anything (given the associations I unconsciously let slip into my language) reveals the fact that I have such thorough command of the language that I can make a Freudian slip within it. This is a point which, given your shallow (or, to be fair, rudimentary) understanding of the language, you would never be able to appreciate."

So you see? Such letters are scarcely worth printing, they scarcely deserved their reply, it would be an obscenity to fill a dozen pages of this Aviary with such letters, and the whole exercise would (actually, in this short nod to such letters, already does) inject a stale bile which contaminates the otherwise fair and graceful critical attitude which I direct toward the deserving world.

You see, I am the one whose mission it is to criticize the world. The duty is mine because, unlike others who direct criticism so maliciously, I am entirely untainted by malice. Moreover, unlike so many critics who voice their condemnations with such sneering superiority, my voice is never without a humble compassion, given that I am so thoroughly convinced that I myself am more deserving of criticism than anyone whom I might be so bold as to criticize. The result is that my stance, highly moralistic though it may be, is replete with hesitancy, mercy, even tenderness. Hence, my criticisms of others can be trusted. Lacking any of the exaggeration which comes from malice, and lacking any of the distortion that results from conceit, I am allowed the rare privilege of viewing the world without the filters that so commonly cloud the judgement of the average person. The result is that I see the world clearly and dispassionately; I therefore am in the privileged position of being able to judge it truthfully. Hence, my right, as well as my duty--to be the world's critic, judge, and confessor.

While some people chaff at my judgements, they usually, at the very same time, are very grateful to be known so truthfully--even if the truth is sour and scarcely flattering. It does seem, as the years go by, that people are less likely to grouch at my judgements, and to instead, albeit sometimes begrudgingly, acknowledge and even thank me for this task I have unwillingly (and unwittingly!) assumed. I wonder if this gratitude explains why it is that, over the last year, people from all over the country have begun, in letters to me and in communications with others, thus referring to me as Saint Baumli. When this salutation first began, I took it with humor, assuming that it was intended in a jocular way. But when I became aware that other people, in their conversations with one another, and especially in the letters they exchange, refer to me this way, I naturally became somewhat suspicious, thinking that people were being, if not malicious, then exquisitely sarcastic. But as more time passed, and more people--many of them my most intimate and trustworthy friends--began addressing me personally as Saint Baumli, I slowly became aware that there is something more unconscious, and more pervasive, going on than anything so simple as malice or good humor. No; it seems as though a rather strange cultural attitude has been growing for some years, and now, through a confluence I do not understand, which perhaps no one understands, has taken on the coherence of an archtypal circumscription of Baumli's personality such that the many manifestations of his character, whether determinate or vague, are at last, within the conventions that govern our culture, taking on sufficient definition as to finally not only warrant, but also demand, an appropriate signifying index. Hence, the need for, and the conferral of, an appellation--the "Saint Baumli." Do I deserve it? Of course not. But to other people's way of thinking, less paradoxical than it might at first seem, my thus denying my right to the title may, in their minds, mean that I am all the more deserving. There is something of a mystery here--not of the unknown, but of the ineffable. So perhaps it is best to leave the subject be for now, and not encumber it with further words.

One last matter, which actually is a grouch: Despite my caveat, it happened again with last year's Aviary. Many people who received it gave no response at all to anything I stated within its pages. More than half the people did not even acknowledge having received it. This leaves me wondering. Do people actually not read it? Do others find it so irrelevant to their lives that they discard it after giving it no more than a glance? Maybe. I don't really know. And not knowing means that I am more reluctant to send copies of it to those who do not display a desire to receive future copies. So in the future I am going to be even more selective about sending it out.

Mind you, I do not feel at all insulted, rebuffed, or wronged if people do not read my yearly exercise in narcissism. Some people know me well enough through our personal interactions that perhaps they believe they simply do not need to read about Baumli's previous year when they have already heard it from his lips. Other people simply do not read very much. And others, who do read a great deal, might believe that they have better things to read, e.g., Shakespeare, Tolstoy, Borges, etc., and if indeed this is what they read, then I would be the first to agree with them--that they have better things to read than this Aviary. It also is the case that some of my friends have already achieved that fine balance of just the right amount of contact with me, and to read a lengthy issue of The Aviary upsets that balance. All this is well and fine. I do not insist that people read what I write. And, while indeed this Aviary is an exercise in narcissism, even I am not so egoistic as to believe that everyone should know my every opinion.

So this year I shall be sending out even fewer copies than I did last year. Moreover, I shall, to some degree, monitor who does or does not respond to what I write, or at the very

least acknowledge having received this Aviary from me. Next year, I'll simply not mail a copy to those who made no acknowledgement of having received this one. All a very simple way of saving paper, money, and time. And there will be no hard feelings involved.

So here you have it: The story of one year in the life of a man whose proper residence is eternity. Proceed with piety and prayers.



If we had a window into the mind of a sleeping saint, we would see the dreams of a criminal.

Corey Homer Jones

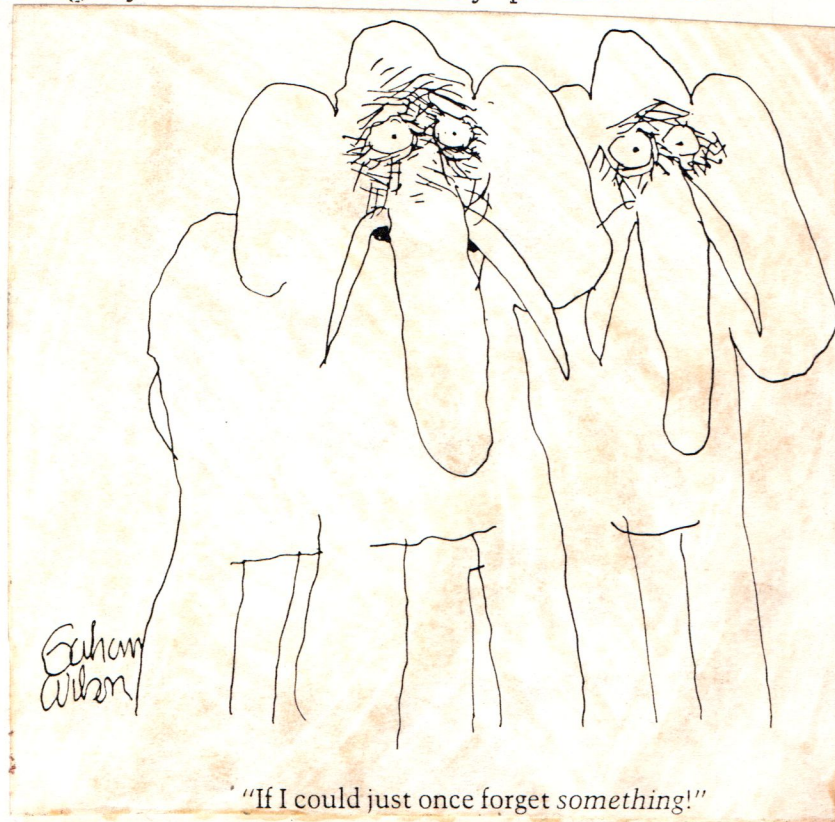
SIGNIFICANT EVENTS OF 1992

Jan. 11: On this date, Dacia left for Florida. Some weeks before, we had lost the court battle for continued custody of Dacia. The subsequent weeks while she lived in our house were miserable. Dacia was sullen, frightened; Abbe and I were angry, hurt, in a true agony. It was terribly painful for Dacia to at last leave, but at the same time we were not entirely sorry to see her go. The tension was terrible, any attempt on our part to resolve any of it was only met by a stony silence in Dacia, and the result was that Abbe and I had both pretty much given up trying to work anything through with Dacia. It was just too painful to try and talk matters through, and come away only feeling that now everything had been made worse again.

People have told me that the best strategy in all this is to just let it be for now, that eventually Dacia will "come around," and that I will come to "understand," and there will be good times and I will forget the difficult times.

I don't think so. I am not one to forget easily; in fact, I often wish that the painful parts of life could more readily be blotted from my memory.

But my psyche simply does not work this way, and I do think that before all this craziness with Dacia is ever to be resolved, it will happen not through forgetfulness, but rather, through an accounting of not only Dacia's feelings but also my own--as well as Abbe's.



"If I could just once forget something!"

Jan. 11: On this date we bought Marion his first pair of shoes: Nike tennis shoes, size 4½. We tell Marion, "This little boy Marion has big puppy-dog feet. He has big feet like a puppy-dog, and he's going to have to grow into them just like a puppy-dog does!!" To which Marion giggles and shows a genuine curiosity about those feet of his.

Jan. 12, 1993: We saw the movie, For the Boys. It had a very slow start, but it picked up momentum. The acting was fair, Bette Midler's singing excellent, and the story very believable. The movie was flawed by some odd

problems, e.g., people momentarily acting younger than they were, very poor makeup, and the like. It served as a very powerful anti-war movie, and all in all was a worthy piece of art.

Jan. 13: I discovered that my Uncle Rawlings Tindall had died a few days before--on January 8. His only daughter had died less than a year before, and he had just sort of wasted away. My dear Aunt Jean thus was bereft of her immediate family--having lost her only daughter and her husband in less than a year.

Jan. 16: The troubles I had had with my turntable, lamented at length in last year's Aviary, seemed to have been brought to an end. I finally obtained a third motor, and installed it along with an outboard power supply, and it then seemed to work fine.

Jan. 27: A bit of a scare, in terms of health. My annual prostate exam by a physician showed the prostate to be somewhat irregular--larger on one side than on the other. He seemed worried, and said it should henceforth be watched carefully.

Not one to take an attitude this relaxed about the future, I arranged for further testing through a urologist.

Feb. 5: The prostate-specific antigen (PSA) test came back negative, showing that my PSA is 1.7, which is below normal. So any worries I had been entertaining about prostate cancer could be put aside. I would not have to worry that by age 55 my prostate would be big as a softball and hanging out my ass.

A discussion with the urologist revealed that it is not unusual for a real man's prostate to be somewhat irregular in shape. The huge quantities of testosterone circulating in his body cause many metamorphoses, all of them quite benign. He assured me that there is no likelihood that this testosterone will ever cause prostate cancer, as long as I make sure the testosterone is put to good use. On this matter I gave him unequivocal assurance.

Feb. 16: We saw the movie, Grand Canyon. It is very well done, and has a powerful message, and at the end is very inspirational about the heights of human potential. I am glad it did all this for me, especially imparting the message of personal responsibility regarding race relations. But its depiction of ubiquitous violence in the big cities caused me, for a couple of months after having viewed this movie, to feel paranoid whenever I would be in St. Louis.

Feb. 23: I had feared it, and it finally happened. On a day when Abbe was off from work, in fact, on a Sunday when her parents were visiting us, an angry patient came to our home. Abbe spoke with him outside for about half an hour. He was angry because his little girl was sick, Abbe was their doctor, and he wanted Abbe, and not Abbe's partner who was on call, to be the one to see his little girl. As a matter of fact, his little girl, with mother, was in the car, parked right there in our driveway; why couldn't Abbe just go over there and examine the little girl this very moment? Abbe was tempted to do so, just to get rid of the fellow, but she knew that if she did, then other patients would start coming to our home. The fellow got angry, and more angry. Inside our house, I could hear the exchange, and had to keep fighting down the urge to go outside and put that peasant out of his misery.

He finally left, vowing to find a different doctor, and meanwhile would take his daughter to the emergency room at Carbondale. Abbe, later, checked at that hospital's emergency room just to find out if indeed the little girl had been all that sick. No; she just had a cold. No fever.

My God that felt like an intrusion. The fellow had come up on our porch just as we were sitting down to eat lunch. One more reason for getting away from Southern Illinois.

Feb. 23: We attended a concert by the South African group, Ladysmith Black Mambazo, which had appeared on Paul Simon's album, Graceland. The concert was rather disappointing. The performers seemed tired, uninspired, as if they had performed this very program just too many times. The music, while very beautiful at first exposure, quickly became very monotonous and dull to my ears. I found especially irritating the explanations, or translations, of the Zulu language which preceded each song. The lyrics were inane, to say the least, and the singer giving the translation, in his attempt at injecting drama into the story, would only succeed in making it all that much more pedestrian. E.g., "There is this young man." (Imagine the accent.) "He is in love with a girl. He goes to her father and tells he wants to marry her this girl. The father says the young man to him he must have nine cows for the dowry. But the young man has only five cows. He does not know what to do. He is very sad. He goes and sits under a tree and he sings this song."

Feb. 24: I attended a concert by The Borodin Trio. The three pieces played were: Trio in A-Minor, Opus 50 by Tchaikovsky, Fantasiestuecke in A-minor,

Opus 88 by Schumann, and Piano Trio in G Major, Opus 121a "Kakadu Variations" by Beethoven.

This trio played splendidly, and while each of the three pieces was brought off with verve and command, the Tchaikovsky rendition was nothing short of perfection.

I resolved to try and hear this trio more often, even if it must be through recordings. While in this concert, Rostislav Dubinsky, on violin, and Luba Edlina, on piano, were both showing some signs of aging in their playing, it was so minimal as to be scarcely noticeable. As for the young cellist, Yuli Turovsky, he is, in my opinion, perhaps the best chamber cellist in the world. We must keep an eye on him.

March 1: I attended a production of the play, Driving Miss Daisy. I had never seen the popular movie version, so this was my first exposure to the story.

The unfolding of events is very well done in the play, and all in all I must say that it comprises a first-rate work of literature. As for the production itself: the son, and the chauffeur, were both very well cast; the woman playing Miss Daisy was barely adequate for the role.

I came away from this play with my usual sense of discouragement about theatre. It seems as though it is a wonderful thing, but I seldom am lucky enough to see anything more than a very bad, or very mediocre, performance.

April 3: After months of discussion, Abbe and I had made the decision, and on this date it happened: Abbe had a tubal ligation. I felt a strange admixture of vague, inchoate feelings, none of them quite having the identity of a specific emotion. This date finalized, if not my reproductive years, my reproductive intent. No more. At age 43, going on 44, I didn't have any business having more children. I had considered a vasectomy, but the idea of imposing a physical trauma on my body, a trauma which can elicit an autoimmune response, seemed rather risky considering that, with multiple sclerosis, I already have an autoimmune disease. So the physical trauma was incurred by Abbe, which I didn't feel entirely good about, and which ... but as I say, there were many vague, uncertain feelings. There was also the awareness that Marion will have no siblings, except for Dacia--and what relationship she will choose to have with him is unpredictable, and at present not auspicious.

April 4: We bought the fast-growing Marion his second pair of shoes. He was already into a size 5.

April 5: I gave Marion his second haircut, which actually consisted of trimming his bangs. The auburn locks fall in waves down to his shoulders.

April 6: For \$250., I sold my Gibson guitar, an electric MM-2, i.e., Melody Maker with two pickups and tailpiece. This was the guitar that pretty much earned my living during my undergraduate days in college, when I worked as a folk singer (a major heresy to other folk singers, my using an electric!). This guitar, which had been a baby-blue color when I bought it, had, over the years, turned to an aqua color. In very good shape, and having a very good tone (although not as good as that of better Gibsons with Hummbucking pickups), I had been keeping this guitar well cleaned, and its neck at proper tension, for several years while virtually never playing it. I realized I was keeping it primarily for reasons of nostalgia, and I happened across a person who really wanted to buy it. So we struck a deal, and the guitar and I parted company.

I wish now that I had taken some color pictures of it just



"Bad guy comin' in, Arnie! ... Minor key!"

before selling it, but ... there are no big regrets. I was ready to part with it. I knew I would probably never again play it seriously. And I was tired of taking out about three hours a year to clean a guitar which I never used. My long-time companion and I separated, but I still have my electric bass--a Gibson EB-III. This, I intend to keep. Health permitting, I may one day play it more than I now do, and my sentimental attachment to it is even stronger than was my attachment to the guitar.

April 18: I attended a very uneven concert put on by the St. Louis Symphony. The first item on the program was Copland's Suite from the Film The Heiress. I had never before heard this piece, and in fact did not even know of its existence. It was interesting--pleasant in places, never profound, generally a bit inane.

Nina Bodnar, the concert mistress, next played Korngold's Concerto in D Major for Violin and Orchestra, Op. 35. We were seated in the second row, almost directly in front of her, with her solid-metal music stand directly between her violin and ourselves. Hence, the sound of the violin, with us this close and that metal interposed, was rather distorted to my ears. She brought the piece off quite well, however, while the truly impressive playing was done by the orchestra, especially in the way the string sections bounced different tonalities and emphases back and forth.

Next was a supremely spectacular performance of Martinu's Concerto for Two Pianos and Orchestra played by Katia and Marielle Labeque. The orchestra was inspired, and the two sisters were both dramatic and meticulous. Truly, this was the finest concert by two pianos that I have ever heard, and I keep hoping that the Labeque sisters will record it, but as of yet, no recording has appeared.

The next performance was almost, but not quite, spoiled by Slatkin himself. Saint-Saens' Carnival of the Animals was up, and while it indeed is a funny piece, and might deserve something in the way of humorous gesture and such in the performance, it did not warrant the buffoonery and stage-clowning that Slatkin put on with some of the musicians. He is an eminent and very skilled conductor, and, I suppose, has every right to now and then put dignity aside and have his fun. But the horseplay was too much, interfered with the music, and seriously compromised the general effect of the entire evening. Fortunately the Labeque sisters, although they joined in with the fun, had the good sense to desist at a seemly time, and Slatkin's antics then did not detract from the program so much, but instead focused some rather embarrassed attention on him by members of both the orchestra and audience.

April 22: The Community Concert Association of Southern Illinois had been braying all year about their having arranged to bring in Alexei Sultanov, the young Soviet winner of the Eighth Van Cliburn International Piano Competition in 1989. So I attended, and was appalled. I also was chagrined, because I should have known better. For a long time I have uttered the cynical but true judgement that, "Piano competition winners have two primary traits: they are young, and they can play Liszt very fast." This certainly seemed to have been the case with young master Sultanov. He never missed one of those many fast and very bland notes. He fled through Mozart's Sonata No. 10 without a trace of emotion. He went through Chopin's Scherzo Nos. 1 & 2 at a white heat, and then romped and clashed his way all over the surface of Chopin's Polonaise No. 6. His emphases were wrong, his phrasings off, the tempos were too fast, the emotion nonexistent, and it was all very horrible. I wanted to leave halfway through the second Scherzo, and would have, had I not been penned in on both sides by several terribly plump, geriatric specimens of the female variety.

The second half of the program, after the intermission, was going to include, along with works by Rachmaninoff and Liszt, the wonderful Sonata No. 7 in B-flat Major, Op. 83 by Prokofiev. This work I dearly love, and if there is any piano sonata in all creation which demands the utmost in emotional felicity precisely because, especially in the third, "Precipitato" movement, the piece moves at such a fast tempo, it is this demanding piece by Prokofiev. I certainly was not going to stick around while this young Liszt lisper made carnage of Prokofiev. I accordingly made my exit at the intermission.

Two days later, I ran into the person who manages the auditorium where Sultanov played. This man I have come to know since moving to Southern Illinois, and occasionally he calls upon me for advice when booking classical musicians for the hall. Usually, at a concert, we chat for a few minutes before the program, or afterwards. Having left at the intermission, and not having spotted



"Stop! Stop! What's that sound? What's that sound?!"

him before the concert, I suppose each of us assumed that the other was not at this concert. Hence, a few days later, when we crossed paths, our conversation went something like this:

"Francis, you should have been at the hall the other night. We had the most spectacular musician. It was probably the best concert of classical music I've ever heard in my life."

"Really? I'm sorry I missed it. Who played?"

"This new young pianist. I can't pronounce his name, but ... I think it was Alexis, or something like that."

"Do you mean the fellow named Alexei Sultanov, the fellow who won the Van Cliburn competition?"

"Yes, he was tremendous, you should have"

"I was there."

"You were? I didn't see you. What did you think?"

"I left at the intermission."

He stared at me.

"You mean you didn't like it?"

"I'd never heard worse classical piano in my life."

"Well ...," he hemmed and hawed a bit, "I guess I just don't know anything about classical music."

"That's okay. We can't all know everything about everything."

"It was a complete sellout."

"I could tell the hall was full."

"We covered some other concert losses that didn't sell well with tickets to this one."

"Was the hall still full after the intermission?"

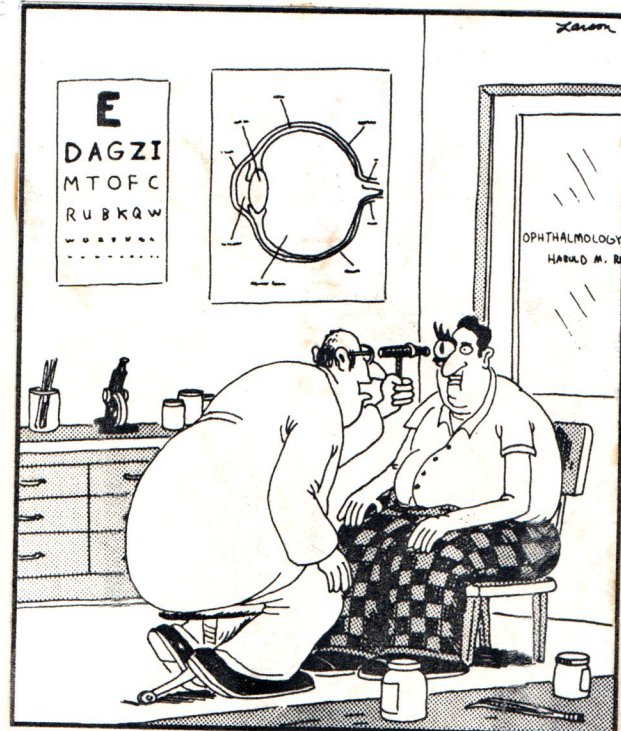
"I think it was fuller. People came in who knew they could get in for the second half without paying."

"Did he butcher the Prokofiev like I thought he would?"

"Uh. Which one was that?"

May 6: For over a year I had been trying to get a prescription for my eyeglasses. Over and over, I would go to an optometrist, or ophthalmologist, come away with a new prescription, get it filled, and I would see worse than with my old glasses. Finally, with Abbe's help, some phone calls were made, and a neuro-ophthalmologist was located. A specialist in neuro-ophthalmology has always been, in my opinion, the top of the totem pole in neurology. They do a residency in both neurology and ophthalmology, and then do a combined study in both fields. They come out very knowledgeable, very academic, and are usually awesomely brilliant people.

An appointment was set up with the fellow, and I arrived, telling him that my sole purpose for being there was to get a prescription for eyeglasses. He began his exam, which went through several stages--the preliminaries of which were handled by an assistant, and then he began examining the damaged neural conduction to my eyes. He became excited, was soon making exclamations, grunting noises, and then became very animated and vociferous, saying things like, "This is really neat!" "I can't wait to tell my colleagues about this!" "My God! I've only seen this once or twice before in my life!" And then he began saying, over and over, "This is great! Great! I can't believe it! This is great!" I sat there wondering what in hell he was discovering, and also taking on an incredibly optimistic, even euphoric, attitude. "This is great! This is the greatest thing I've seen in years!" he would say, and my hopes would lift even more. I thought he was going to finish his exam and sit back to tell me that I do not have multiple sclerosis, that quite the contrary, it is just a strange anomaly affecting my eyesight, there is an easy cure, and, "Isn't that great?!" So I sat there another twenty minutes while he called in his assistant, and then called in a woman who was doing residency training in that office, and heard him say, "Isn't this great!? Do you see that?! This is great! Look at it! I'm going to tell you all about it, but you figure it out first yourself!" Well; neither of them did figure it out, although they pretended to have done so when he began explaining. He said that he had found what is called a "one and a half," which merely means that one eye is so paralyzed it can not move laterally past midline, and when this eye looks up, it tires over the course of about a minute, drops back down to horizontal midline involuntarily, at which point, just as it hits midline, there are at least three beats of nystagmus in the other eye.



"Oh, this is wonderful, Mr. Gruenfeld — I've only seen it a couple of times. You have corneal corruption. . . . Evil eye, Mr. Gruenfeld, evil eye."

This "one and a half," the neuro-ophthalmologist said, is virtually never indicative of multiple sclerosis; rather, it indicates myasthenia gravis.

"So what is the great news?" I asked him, but I was already beginning to sense what was going on. He merely looked at me blankly, then went back to talking to his assistant.

Finally he began addressing my questions. He said he could not believe that a person could have MS for 18 years without sufficient optic neuritis as to cause atrophy of the optic nerve. Well; I am no neuro-ophthalmologist, and I didn't even know what a "one and a half" is, but I had studied a great deal of neurology, had virtually specialized in multiple sclerosis, and I knew that was not true. I asked him about the main problems I was having with vision, the fact that as the day progressed, things I would try to read, while using my reading glasses, would progressively appear smaller and smaller until I had to use a magnifying glass, and eventually they would become too small even for that. He didn't know why this happens; a spasm perhaps. As for my other main problem, namely, experiencing double vision with one eye, he merely said, "Maybe it's supratentorial, but I don't want to get into that now." Well; most people don't know what the word "supratentorial" means, but I do. It means hysteric, psychosomatic, nonorganic, whatever term you prefer--it is all in your imagination. The sonofabitch could see that here is someone with severe optic problems, but he gets hit with one question he can not answer, and being a pompous, macho egotist, he can not bring himself to say the scientist's three magic words: "I don't know." Instead he has to tell me that it's all in my head.

He was not interested in giving me an eyeglass prescription; instead, he wanted me to visit a neurologist to see if the neurologist would concur with his belief that I have myasthenia gravis. Abbe was there with me, and we both pressed him for the prescription; so, acting very irritated, he went ahead and tested my eyes for glasses.

I left feeling like the whole visit had been a waste. He had a new theory regarding my diagnosis, he wanted me to see a neurologist, and he had reluctantly given me an eyeglass prescription--which meant that I did not very much trust its accuracy.

May 16: My youngest brother, Richard, finally got hitched. He married a very nice woman whose name is Dana Dunbar (now Dana Baumli) and has settled in for domestic placidness. I was unable to attend the wedding, but I understand that the ceremony went very well, and that the only altercation happened when someone was overheard to say, "Looks like Richard's finally going to be getting some legal nookie," whereupon Richard, angered not by the comment but by the fact that it was said within earshot of his new wife, promptly decked the fellow.

May 24: I saw the movie, Earth Girls Are Easy. It easily passes for being one of the worst movies I have ever seen. Basically it was a teeny-bopper fuck flick (no; make that a teeny-bopper foreplay flick). But it did have one redeeming quality: Julie Brown's singing, and her ability to play the bimbo role to the hilt.

May 27: On this date I went to see the neurologist to whom the neuro-ophthalmologist had referred me. This fellow was less macho, more kind in temperament, than the neuro-ophthalmologist. He said he did not believe that any of my problem is psychosomatic, but he concurred with the neuro-ophthalmologist in stating that he believed that my MRI results, showing no apparent cerebral lesions after 18 years, indicate that I have something besides MS. He thought it likely was myasthenia gravis, but he acknowledged that this hypothesis could not explain the paresthesia I experience, or the documented and long history of having a hypotonic bladder.

He ordered an EMG which certainly was the most painful medical test I have ever been through in my life. The person administering the test was reluctant to discuss the results, but she did say that they indicated myasthenia gravis rather than multiple sclerosis.

I left St. Louis, where all this testing had been done, in quite a vertiginous state of mind. If it was myasthenia gravis, how might one explain these other symptoms? But regardless, if it were indeed MG, then there are

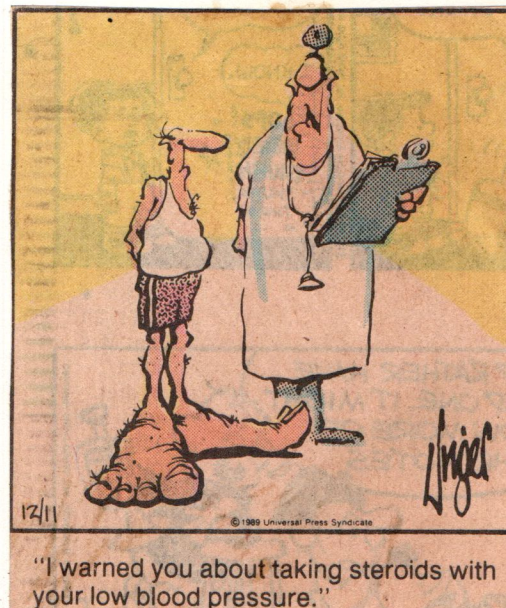


drugs, and even surgical approaches, which could cure this! I began anticipating, with an admixture of euphoria and a bit of dread, how my life might be changed. *For the better!*

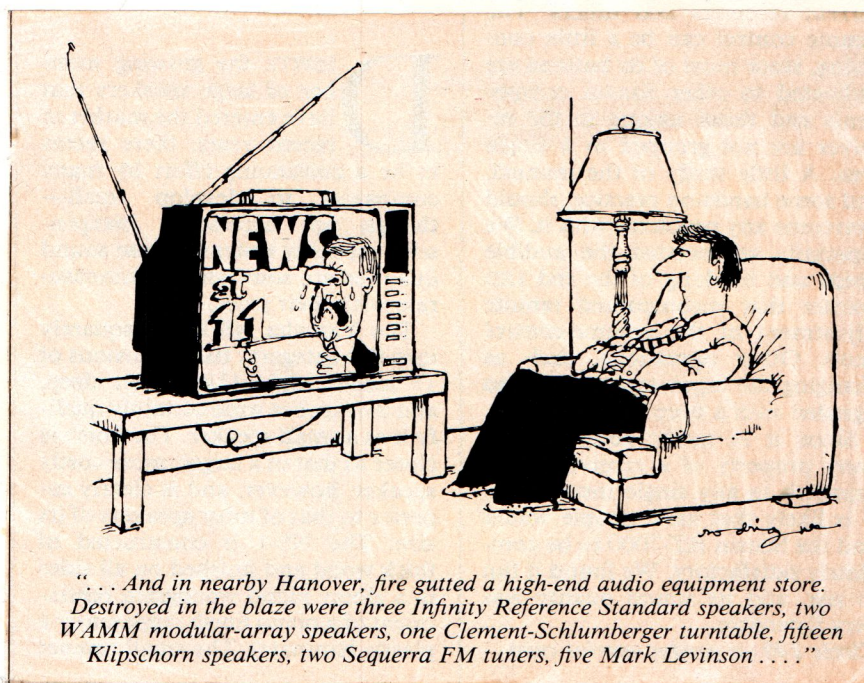
May 31: On this, my 44th birthday, I saw the movie Blazing Saddles again. Having seen it but once before, many years ago, I had pronounced it my favorite movie comedy. My judgement remained the same. Incidentally, at the end, Blazing Saddles is a movie about making movies--my favorite genre of movies!
 May 31: A hair was discovered to be growing out of my right ear. Last year one had been discovered growing out of my left ear, and had already been trimmed several times. Why this onset of new simian characteristics as I get older?

June 7: Over the last 1½ weeks, several tests, including blood workup and careful scans of the thymus gland, all gave negative indications regarding MG.

Proceeding with the hypothesis that I might have MG, I this date went on a regimen of Mestison. If indeed I have MG, then within hours of beginning the drug, there should have been marked improvement in the symptoms, and perhaps even complete disappearance. But no change in the general ocular symptomology was present. But at the advice of the neurologist, I decided to stay on the drug for several weeks in the hope that it would help. This was not an easy decision. I was having a terrible reaction to the Mestison, which involved my being unable to speak by early evening, a lot of muscle twitching, constant nausea, lowered sex drive--with the hair on my legs starting to fall out at the ankles, and a constant sense of having to fight against being grumpy and bad tempered.



July 1: I bought a used Apt/Holman preamplifier, and it replaced the cheap integrated amplifier I had been using in my system. It is an excellent little solid-state unit, with a quality that is reputed to be among the best of the solid-state rigs. Indeed, I think it has a sound that is about identical to the solid-state Conrad Johnson preamps, but unlike the Conrad Johnson units, the Apt/Holman has its full sound when first turned on, whereas the Conrad Johnson preamps do not sound good until after they have been on for about two hours--which causes owners to often leave them on all the time. It is an old preamplifier--the company was small, and its products, although very good, were considered to be over priced. Hence, it went out of business in the early '80s. Still, the unit seems to work fine, causes no problems, and just sits there and does what a piece of audio gear is supposed to do--make music, without causing any problems.



July 5: I viewed the movie, The Freshman. A background in the Godfather movies was perhaps essential for following this one, but I possess this background, and found this movie to be thoroughly enjoyable, and at times, very high satire on both the movie industry and on many elements of our society.

July 8: Again I saw the neurologist in St. Louis, and he by this time was certain that the Mestison was not helping me at all, and decided for me to stop taking it. I was not at all sorry. All I had experienced were very debilitating toxic symptoms, with no relief of the other disease symptoms at all.

July 14: The only other drug which might help the general symptomology of this disease process I have, whatever it may be, is Prednisone. Although I had taken the drug years ago, to no avail, the neurologist thought it would be worth another try. So on this date the next phase of the experiment commenced.

July 26: On this date Sandy Sudvarg, Abbe's sister, married a very becoming chap named Jon Gale. It was rumored that this union's etiology was provided by Baumli's pheromones, and that the subsequent marriage provides naught but a ritualistic concretization of biological forces, the genesis of which neither participant suspects, but, as long as Baumli's corpus endures, they may nevertheless enjoy.



Aug. 19: The Prednisone I had been taking was having very strong, toxic side-effects also. And it was not helping at all. This date I went back to see the neurologist, and noting the extent of the toxicity, he wanted me to begin tapering off the drug. (One dares not stop it abruptly; that could cause extremely dangerous, even fatal, consequences.)

I left this appointment feeling very depressed. The doctor said he had "run out of bullets" (his phrase) by which to fight the disease. So ... there would be no cure, of whatever I might have.

But most depressing was the doctor's attitude. When I first went in his office, he could not remember why I had come in the first place. Then, when he finally remembered, he was saying something which suggested to me that he still was not very cognizant of my situation, and when I thereupon questioned him, it turned out that he had forgotten that this disease process has been active for more than 18 years; instead he was thinking that I had come in with an initial onset of symptoms.

So before leaving I asked him, now that the prognosis had in no way improved, what, at least, were his opinions regarding a diagnosis, given that he initially had suspected that I do not have multiple sclerosis. He replied that despite the fact that all the tests had turned out negative, and the fact that the drug therapy had proved ineffective, he still thought I have myasthenia gravis. I asked him how this could explain the bladder hypotonicity, the paresthesia, and the fact that I tend to have more energy late in the day, which is the opposite of people with myasthenia gravis. He said that he couldn't explain any of this.

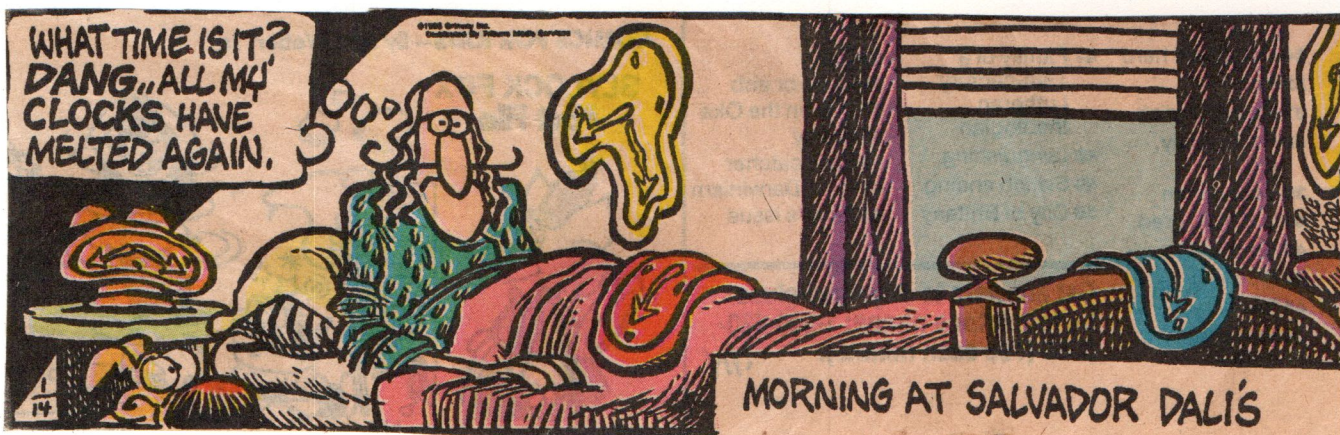
He was uncomfortable, obviously wasn't sure of anything at this point, and I saw no value in pressing it further. I left, very aware that many dollars, much time, and a lot of emotional energy had gone into scouting out another diagnosis for this disease I have, and exploring a cure. And it all had come to naught.

Aug. 22: Another occasion for the sacrament of holy acrimony. My sister Cathy took nuptial vows with an



innocent young man named John Weaver. I failed to show the good social grace during their courtship to extend to John all due proprieties, given that I did not even know that Cathy was actually involved with this man of tender years. Instead, on several occasions, I heard people refer to "Cathy's john," and given my proclivities for a pessimistic view of other people, I immediately assumed that Cathy had taken up a new profession, and people were making a generic reference to one of her customers. But being a perfect gentleman, too discreet to ever broach a subject this delicate, I never did discover that the appellation was proper rather than common, until the day I actually met this John,

Aug. 21-22: Abbe and I managed a very quick trip with very cheap tickets to Washington, D.C. The state of my health,



given that I was just starting to taper off of the Prednisone, was very difficult. The fact is, I felt like hell. But while there we did enjoy some very good Indian food, and of course, spent most of our time at the National Gallery. A big disappointment was the absence of Rembrandt's 1659 self-portrait, which of all his self-portraits is my favorite. But this time I did especially enjoy his painting of Saskia--the one which occupied him from 1633-1640--and also his Lucretia which, although not as good as his Lucretia at Minneapolis, is nevertheless a very powerful painting. My main intent during this visit was to spend more time with the Botticelli portraits, and at the same time focus in on Botticelli's Florentine contemporaries. Doing so gave me some very pleasant hours with some great paintings I had never before sought out, and it also had the effect of making me realize that Botticelli was not as far ahead of his time as I had always thought.

We of course spent time with the several paintings by Raphael, e.g., The Niccolini-Cowper Madonna (1508) here depicted at right. And also time with da Vinci's portrait, Ginevra de'Benci. While I seldom read the posted notes beside a painting if I already know the painting well, I made an exception in this case, and discovered what to me is a rather remarkable little fact; namely, Ginevra de'Benci was something of a poet, but all her works have been lost except for one surviving line which, translated from the Italian, reads: "I ask your forgiveness; I am a mountain tiger." Contemplating these words, while viewing this woman's portrait, gives an added dimension to the experience.

I sought out other old favorites, such as Fragonard's Diana and Endymion (c. 1765) which in some ways almost excels the technique of Boucher. And I realized, while looking at Fragonard's A Young Girl Reading, how the Rococo movement certainly served as a precursor to Impressionism.

The Impressionists, of course, like most painters prefer to think that they were moving out into uncharted realms, but I would defy anyone to view this 1776 painting by Fragonard and tell me that it does not foreshadow very much that would later be claimed by the Impressionists.

While enjoying the Rococo paintings, I of course could not but spend a fair amount of time with Boucher's Venus Consoling Love (1751) which is one of his best, and is the sort of painting which causes Boucher to be one of my favorites.

Dali's The Sacrament of the Last Supper (1955) was hung in a different, and more accessible, location, and we were able to enjoy it much more this time than we ever have before. Dali is probably my favorite painter of this century, and this is one of his very greatest. Viewing this painting is by itself worth a trip to this gallery.

There were a couple of "discoveries" while there, i.e., my coming across certain very fine paintings which I never before had noticed. For example, Elisabeth Vigee-Lebrun's The Marquise de Peze and the Marquise de Ronget with her Two Children (1787) is a stunning portrait, flawlessly executed, and replete with emotional nuance and power. And I was overwhelmed by the beauty of Bernardino Luini's Portrait of a Lady (1520-1525) which has a singular, piercing individuality to it which is extremely rare in any portrait from that era. In addition to these particular paintings, I spent a good deal of time with several works of sculpture and some paintings too by Verrocchio, the Florentine with whom da Vinci studied as a young man. I am finding more value in the works of Verrocchio, and am a bit baffled as to why I never before appreciated him this much.

But ... I promised myself that I would not take up much space in this edition of The Aviary with a soliloquy about the paintings I enjoyed. I have learned that such discourses are often not very interesting to my friends, and I do rather suspect that I evince little ability for conveying my enthusiasm about certain paintings. So, better to desist with words, and allow myself the luxury of private memories.



Aug. 23: On this day I took the last dose of Prednisone. the dosage had been tapering off for some time, but the side-effects had scarcely remitted. But after this day, the side-effects did begin diminishing, although they were slow in doing so.

Why have I said so much in this Aviary about this encounter with these medications? Well; it was a huge drama. The idea that I might have a neurological illness other than the one I had been fighting for so many years caused, ironically, a strange kind of identity crisis. Yes, it truly was a matter of identity, because so much of my life, in terms of work habits, diet, limitations I place on what I can do, is carefully geared toward all the exigencies of multiple sclerosis, and trying to keep it in check. Was I to discover, after all these years, that I had been tilting at a nonexistent enemy, and my energies would have been better spent fighting the real enemy?

There also was the frustration of coming away from those drug trials and all the visits with doctors with ambiguity about the diagnosis. No one likes ambiguity in this sort of situation. Having a name to put on one's symptoms helps retrieve one's psyche from what otherwise is a very bewildering state of uncertainty and even self-doubt. After all was said and done, I came away with the feeling that I do have multiple sclerosis. Only it can explain many of the symptoms I have experienced over the last 18 years. If the MRI shows no cerebral lesions, I suspect this is because of the benefits afforded me by the Modified Swank-MacDougall diet which I have been on all these years.

And then there was the sheer torture--and yes, I do not use the words unintentionally, or self-indulgently--of those horrible drugs. I would be tempted to say that they assaulted my body, but it was an even worse feeling: those drugs made it seem as if this body were not my own. It was a state of complete bodily alienation. Abbe says that I was rather difficult to live with during those months, and I believe her. The symptoms caused by the drugs ... but no, I will not register my subjective views here; that might seem self-pitying, and frankly, it was so awful I don't care to try and describe it. I will, however, report on a few of the more external, and obvious, manifestations. As I before stated, the drugs caused my sex drive to drop to zero. Now this, I vouchsafe (with nary a nuance of machismo!), is certainly very unlike my usual state of self-identity. I tell you, during this time, sex with another person seemed about as interesting as picking each other's pimples, or each other's toenails. Not that I didn't go ahead and have sex. If anything, I perhaps did more of it than usual. To prove that I could still do it? Of course not. It's just that I like doing carnally base things such as picking another person's toenails.

The side-effect of the hair around my ankles falling out did little for my self-image. One of the less seemly effects of getting old, it seems to me, is losing the hair on one's legs. (Unless one is a woman, of course, and then it might be a most seemly effect; but of course nature always exacts its vengeance, and the effect upon aging women is that they seem to get more hair on their legs.) At some point during this drug therapy, watching that hair disappear, it suddenly occurred to me that these drugs might be having effects similar to those caused by exogenous estrogen which is administered to men who have sex-change operations and turn them into women. After all, one of the effects of exogenous estrogen is to cause a loss of bodily hair. Could it be that these drugs might be turning me into a woman? It took some maneuvering and no small amount of assertiveness, but I finally arranged for a series of brain scans to be performed twice weekly over a course of three weeks. At the end of these tests it was clear that I was not being turned into a woman, since there was no evidence whatsoever that my brain was shrinking.

Slowly, after stopping the Prednisone, the hair on my legs began growing back, and my sex drive, sluggishly but surely, began creeping back to its pre-drug level. The other symptoms abated quickly, but even after many months I could not say that they all had completely disappeared.

I have resolved: Never again. Never again will I submit my body to those crazy drugs. The Prednisone especially was terrible. I realize that many people feel somewhat euphoric while taking it, but not Baumli. And the fact is, Prednisone is rarely a cure for a neurological illness anyway. It seems that doctors always prescribe it for neurological illnesses, theorizing that it will help, but I have never, ever seen it provide anything more than minimal and temporary relief of a very few symptoms. And I have seen it cause a good deal of damage via its side-effects. I think that the approach by neurologists, when it comes to treating with Prednisone, is very like the attitude of the military in Vietnam when they used cluster bombs: Drop a cluster bomb, so as to maybe hit them if they're the enemy, and maybe miss them if they're friendly.

Aug. 29: Having replaced my receiver with my Apt/Holman preamplifier, I was in need of a tuner, and had been looking for one for a good while. I finally found an old Marantz 115-B which was priced reasonably, and bought it. It works better than did the tuner in my receiver, and although one of these days it is going to need a new on-off switch, it is discharging its duties just fine.

Aug. 31: My little JBL 4406 Studio Monitor speakers had been perched atop two larger speaker cabinets, and I was becoming more and more aware that their sound quality was seriously compromised by this placement. Those tweeters needed to be at ear level. I tried buying a pair of stands which should have positioned them correctly, but the stands, which I purchased by mail-order, turned out to be poorly constructed and held the speaker so it was tilted back at an angle. I wanted the speakers to be pointing directly at me. So despite my reluctance about such projects, I got busy and built a pair of excellent stands. Each

was filled with sand, was fitted with four adjustable spiked feet, and weighed in at about fifty pounds. The tweeters now are right at ear level, and the speakers themselves sit solidly on a cork mat which is glued to the top of the stands. When the speakers were positioned correctly, in terms of recommended geometry relative to the position of the listener, the sound improved more than I ever would have dreamed. The image moved forward, solo voices are exactly at center, and the sound stage is wide. Nothing I have ever done to improve my stereo system has provided as much improvement as did this pair of speaker stands, and the simple matter of positioning these stands correctly.

Sept. 11: The Beethoven Society for Pianists, based in Carbondale, Illinois, hosted a grand and wonderful event. During the nine-day period from Sept. 11 to 19, more than 80 pianists attended the festival. Performed were all 32 of Beethoven's piano sonatas, as well as the Liszt arrangements of the nine symphonies for piano, four hands, and many other works.

As for the performance of the symphonies, I simply did not want to attend. Liszt arranged those symphonies so they could be enjoyed by people who would not be able to attend an orchestral performance of them. This master did a wonderful job of converting such vastly complex works to the keyboard, but no version (not even Glenn Gould's playing of the two-hand piano version of Beethoven's Fifth) begins to approach the original symphonies themselves. For the serious appreciator of Beethoven, they are curiosities, perhaps worth a listen for the sake of exposing oneself to the novelty, but that is about all. Rehearsal for performance of the symphonies was very limited, and many of those playing were students. In fact, in most cases, different pianists, in a great flurry of hurrying on and off stage, played the different movements of the symphonies as arranged for four hands.

I did later hear tapes of the Fifth and Ninth, and while they were full of mistakes, and inherently uninteresting, I must say that I was quite impressed by the sheer enthusiasm of the performers. This made up for a lot, and it did elevate the performances, somewhat, beyond what otherwise would have been a very unimpressive level of performance.

As for hearing the piano sonatas and other works: Well, what with the many demands of work, parenting, and such, I simply could not take off every evening to go hear all 32 piano sonatas. Moreover, I was quite aware that a goodly number of the artists on hand were far from stellar. However, I was also aware that on hand was Stephan Möller, who, from my previous exposure to him, perhaps ranks as the foremost Beethoven pianist in the world. Hence, I did make it a point to hear every solo recital which he participated in.

On the evening of September 11, when the series opened, there were four of the sonatas performed. A professorial Kenneth Drake did No. 1 and No. 16. At times he managed to get a bit excited, but basically he plodded his way through without inspiration or finesse. But then Möller did No. 12 and also No. 21, the "Waldstein." Both were brilliant performances, with exact felicity to the tempo of the scores, an unremitting aggression all the way



"Gloria has always had this habit of sitting on my speakers. So I thought that if I bought these tower speakers . . ."



through, and, with his square face up there, and a chin as determined as any profile even Rudolf Serkin ever managed, one almost had the uncanny feeling that one was hearing Beethoven himself performing.

Sept. 12: This concert was a special treat. The afore-mentioned Kenneth Drake was scheduled to do No. 11, which he did. (One can't really say anything more.) There was to follow No. 15 done by Möller, and Nos. 14 and 8 by Ana Maria Trenchi de Bottazzi. This latter pianist did not show up, however, because of illness; the result was that Möller played his scheduled sonata, and also did the two she was scheduled to play. When this was announced at the beginning of the program, I immediately felt the beginnings of a small turmoil inside myself. After all, Möller plays Beethoven better than anyone I have heard among the living.

But not long ago my favorite pianist in all the world, Walter Klien, died. He recorded very little Beethoven, but he did do the No. 14 "Moonlight," and the No. 8 "Pathetique." I have listened to these recordings many times, I am predisposed to loyalty toward artists I have come to love in the past, and yet, I also am eminently fair. I knew that I would be making a judgement as to whether Möller is a better pianist than Klien, at least with regard to the Moonlight and the Pathetique.

Well, Möller played the No. 15 powerfully and with an unusual grandeur. He perhaps played the next two sonatas as well, but I was listening critically, and I was very aware of one thing which actually surprised me: He was not playing them as well as Klien did. Truly, I was surprised. Having seen the extent of Möller's virtuosity, and having talked with him about some of the Beethoven scores, and also being aware that Klien considered himself a Mozart pianist and not a Beethoven pianist, I really did think that Möller would play those two better than Klien did. But he did not. In fact, in the Moonlight, he was at times careless with his phrasing, and even made several mistakes. One had the impression that he had been playing this piece for many, many years--probably since childhood--and it had been much too long since he had followed the score in his playing, thus progressively deviating further and further away from what the score calls for.

Sept. 13; This was the most edifying part of the festival, because Möller played the Diabelli Variations, but before he played them, he gave a careful analysis--and explanation--of what goes on in that complex piece of music. With a copy of parts of the score in front of me, I was able to follow his explanation, and also his playing. Thus, I came to understand not only the many individual and interwoven themes, but also the overall geometry, of this piece of music. Until this playing, it had always eluded me, but I came away from this performance much more knowledgeable and very excited about going back to listen to other pianists perform these variations.

Sept. 14: Robert Roux did Nos. 19, 25, and 23--the "Appassionata." He played all three very badly, especially the Appassionata, and the terrible playing took on a rather ridiculous aspect given that Roux was so stout he could not seat himself at a proper distance from the piano, and his attempts at giving a bow to the audience's moderate applause were both comical and worrisome--one could not but wonder if he would succeed in physically negotiating the act.

Sylvia Kersenbaum then did the No. 24. It was not a great performance, but it was quite adequate, and she played it in an especially friendly and light-hearted style.

Möller then did the No. 29--the "Hammerklavier." And for the first time in my life I heard this piece of music. I heard humor, anger, small interspersed themes among the grander themes, and a dozen voicings from the instrument that I had never known were there. He played this work, like all his Beethoven, at the tempo demanded by the score, and while for some listeners this made it difficult to follow, for me it caused the entire piece of music to finally settle in to its proper empyrean niche--rather like Socrates, in the Euthyphro, carefully shepherding the concept of Piety to its proper place as a species of Justice. I came away from this performance aware that I had heard one of the finest interpretations of Beethoven ever. For years the Hammerklavier had eluded me. I did not understand it, and I did not find it to be a very pleasing piece of music. But when Möller played it I was dining on nectar and ambrosia. I pray that one day the heavens will grant him an assumption without the intervening necessity of death.

One sad note characterized this Beethoven festival. While the performances of the symphonies were well attended (primarily by school children who went under the auspices of the schools--as a sort of "field trip"), the



sonatas were poorly attended. The auditorium, I believe, seats about 1200 people. The person organizing the festival had predicted it would be filled every night. On the first night, there were 257 in attendance. I hoped this was merely because people were not yet oriented, i.e., had not yet put themselves into the necessary mind-frame for it. But then on the next night, when one would have thought that the Moonlight and Pathetique would pull in more people than on any other night, attendance had dropped to 187. I felt sorry for the director of the Society; his optimism had brought a fine program to fruition, but few had plucked the fruit.

Oct. 17: The St. Louis Symphony Orchestra gave a very uneven performance this night, but the star attraction was perfect.

The first piece, Beethoven's Overture to "Coriolan," Op. 62, was done terribly. The orchestra was not at all together. And the third violins played so terribly as to be shameful.

But then Alicia de Larrocha came out and the orchestra played with absolute precision, and gave a stirring performance as de Larrocha masterfully worked Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 1, Op. 15 for all it could give forth.

After the intermission, members of the orchestra did Beethoven's Rondino in E-flat major for Wind Octet, WoO 25, and again the playing was embarrassingly bad. I suspect the horns made as many as 50 glaring mistakes in this piece. I am not exaggerating; it was this bad.

But then the full orchestra did the Symphony No. 8 and the evening was thoroughly redeemed. Having heard so much Beethoven of late, I really had not been in the mood to hear Beethoven's eighth symphony, but the orchestra played so well I was glad I had opted for this performance.

One final note: Raymond Leppard, not Leonard Slatkin, was conducting for the evening. His style of conducting is odd, and I am told by some of the SLSO musicians that he left his post as principal conductor some years ago because he simply could not get along with the SLSO personnel. And yet, when he comes back to do these guest appearances, he seems very much at ease, and the orchestra seems to like him. Curious. But then, I suppose that the matter of personalities should not interest me. It is the music--the end result--that counts.

Nov. 7: Another performance by the SLSO. Their first and last pieces, Vaughan Williams' Five Variants of "Dives and Lazarus" and Beethoven's Symphony No. 7 were both performed well, although certainly not spectacularly. The main attraction was James Galway, who played in the second and third

pieces on the program. His first piece was C.P.E. Bach's Concerto in D minor for Flute, Strings and Continuo, H. 484.1. This one was an affront to the audience's aesthetic sensibilities, as well as any person's view of what comprises good decorum at a symphony concert. For those of you familiar with this work, you will recall that there is an orchestral introduction lasting several minutes before the flute begins playing. During this introduction, Galway, standing there on the stage, decided to ham it up a bit. He did a little shuffling dance for a few bars. Then, as the strings on the right and left sides of the orchestra throw the themes back and forth, he would cup his ear and bend to one side that was playing, then cup his hear and bend to the other side. All the while smiling hugely, shuffling about, as though he were in the mood to do an Irish jig instead of a piece of classical music. And then, what was the final straw for me, he began flirting with Nina Bodnar, the Concertmaster. Bodnar is a strikingly beautiful woman, one very fine violinist, and a worthy leader of the strings. Beautiful as she is, she certainly is not a bimbo, and Galways' attempts at enacting, there on the stage of Powell Symphony Hall, a crude flirtation was unseemly in the highest degree. Given the conventions of our society, Bodnar very well might have had occasion to enter a sexual harrassment suit against Galway for the way he was treating her there on the stage. But ... aside from Bodnar's feelings about the matter, I know that I was there to sink my spiritual teeth into C.P.E. Bach, not to be distracted by Galway's need to make a fool of himself while winking at Bodnar, lifting his eyebrows, and doing his best to turn the



audience's polite titters into appreciative laughter.

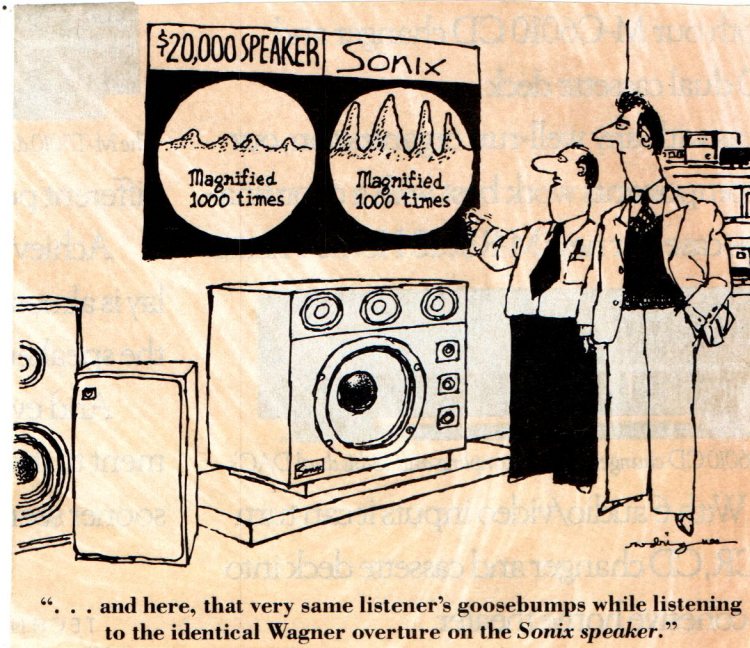
When at last the flute playing began, the entire audience was relieved; they did not have to continue pretending politeness. Galway went on to do a very poor job with the work's first movement, but by the second movement he found his stride, and turned in a very fine showing.

His next piece, Lowell Liebermann's Concerto for Flute and Orchestra, Op. 39, was perhaps played well, I can not be sure. Generally, the work itself was so uninteresting, dull, unimaginative, that it scarcely held my attention.

This concert performance pretty much crystallized my growing opinion--or, my lessening estimation--of Galway. Twenty years ago he was one of the two or three best flutists in the world, in the ranks of Rampal and Debost. But during the last two decades he has opted for popularization, commercialism, and he has turned out too many albums which are nothing more than a flute whistling along at popular tunes. The result: The former first-chair of the Berlin Philharmonic is little more than a flashy hack, perhaps a couple of cuts above the likes of Liberace, but not for much longer fit to hold court with an audience the likes of me.

Nov. 12: How is it that an artist, as busy and important as Alicia de Larrocha, two times makes it to Missouri in the space of less than one month? On this date we drove to Columbia, Missouri to hear her in concert there. She gave a solo recital with highly varied, exquisite fare. For her first piece, she substituted for a planned Mozart sonata two Soler sonatas which she played back to back; this was a special treat for me, given that I am especially fond of Soler. She then played Schumann's Op. 17, which is probably my favorite solo piano work by this composer. After the intermission, she played three works by Manuel de Falla, none of which I was familiar with, but all of which were done wonderfully and are memorable: the Serenata Andaluza, the Quatro piezas españolas, and the Fantasia bética.

Nov. 13: This long period of time with my Sony CDP-970 CD player had never been satisfactory. Unlike my old Magnavox, it was too bright, not very smooth. After a great deal of investigating, I was able to find a CD player that has basically the same sound as my old Magnavox (using the same Philips 16-bit converter), but having a little bit better quality, namely the Rotel RCD-955AX player. It is not a great player, but it is very smooth, very musical, and has fewer remote gadgets with which I might unwittingly irritate Abbe when we are listening to music together. I this date made the purchase, and as of this writing, find it to be a very satisfactory player.



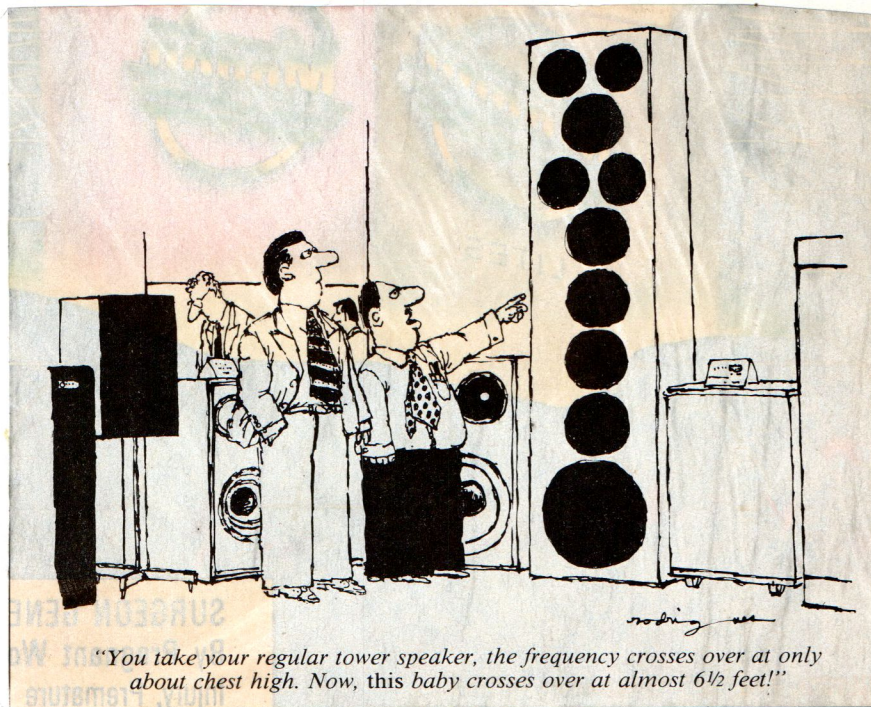
Nov. 14: In previous discussions about movies, I have claimed that Dennis Hopper's The Last Movie is my all-time favorite. For years I had hoped to see it appear again at a theatre. With the advent of home video, I had been looking in the catalogs, hoping to find a copy. At last I did, and on this date, in the company of three friends, I was able to watch it on a home video screen. This time I was able to see many faults in the movie: Some rough editing in many places (even allowing for the intentional Dionysean formatting of sequence), a great deal too much narcissism in the main actor--Dennis Hopper himself, poor lighting with some of the filming, and a poor music soundtrack. But still, the movie worked. It is a multidimensional reality which is a movie about moviemaking, and subsequently, a commentary on the movie about moviemaking genre, and so on ad infinitum. The many layers of reality were placed one upon another so precariously, and yet so deftly, that one realizes the spectacle here played out is not merely a mirror of the mundane world's reality, but rather, is an index to the phenomenological complexity and interweaving of the cosmos itself, and the way we know that cosmos. It is a seduction of the Sinnggebung which Merleau-Ponty detailed; the conscious intentionality which Husserl described approaches the horizon of experience, and dares not grasp the world it apprehends, because it knows that the synechistic whole is too great to ever be known. But it is knowable, and so consciousness moves forward, or rather, it moves in circles, and reality takes on a complexity which we daily negotiate but forever try to deny. Until a movie like Hopper's comes along and reminds us.

In this viewing of the movie, I found more by which to fault, but these faults did not cause me to appreciate it any less. Of my three friends in attendance, one left midway through the showing, one fell asleep, and the other, at the end, commented, "Interesting."

Well, there are those of us whose judgements do not keep company.

Nov. 27: I saw the movie Sneakers. It was a very engaging, high-tech thriller, very fun amidst the viewing (if you could stand the tension), but not memorable in the long run. I.e., good fun, but not high art.

Dec. 6: After several months, and a worthy showing of Abbe's capacity for patience, I finally cleaned out the many parts from our extra bedroom and assembled those parts into a monster of an equipment rack I had built. Based on the "Justa-Rack" design, it stands a little over six feet high, is 36 inches wide, 16 inches deep, and has seven shelves. Built of particle board and steel, painted a flat black, it is gorgeous. And it does the job--it holds all my stereo components, and does so in a very solid fashion. I was curious to find out how much the thing weighed, but had no simple way of weighing it. So I went to K-Mart and bought four identical bathroom scales (which I later returned) and hoisted the rack atop these scales, one leg on each scale. It weighed in at just under 240 pounds. Rather excessive, if I do say so myself.



"You take your regular tower speaker, the frequency crosses over at only about chest high. Now, this baby crosses over at almost 6½ feet!"

Why do I go on about stereo equipment in this Aviary? Am I, as Abbe worries, turning into an audiophile instead of a music lover? Maybe. Probably not. There is one major impeding factor when it comes to listening to music these days. This is Marion--his interrupting, his incessant talking. I think that, quite naturally, I have focused the energy I otherwise might use (would prefer to use!) for listening into doing some improvements to my stereo system, with the hope that when one day I am able to listen for more protracted periods of time, things will indeed sound better than they ever did.

Dec. 26: We just didn't need to be a four-vehicle family. So we today sold our old 1970 red Volvo. We had bought a '79 Volvo, an automatic, for Dacia to learn to drive on; but all these plans went by the way when she moved out. The '70 Volvo probably was not destined to last much longer, it leaked water at the windshield and air through the right door, so we parted with it and Abbe now drives the '79 Volvo. We retain the '62 Chevy pickup, and the '55 Caddy hearse.

Most momentous about this occasion: Marion, recently two years old, went into an indignant rage when the people who bought the Volvo drove it away. For months he, with a jealousy that was amazing, decried the foul deed--those people driving away in "mommy's red car."

GENERALLY:

1. Meanwhile, pervading the entire year and supplying its ruling aura, there has been this continuing incarceration in Southern Illinois. The fact that plans are being made to leave in autumn of 1994 has not much lessened the oppressive atmosphere. Last year, I relayed what for me was a profound insight about this area: That the unfriendliness, the general hostility, can be characterized as a passive aggressive personality at the sociological level. At the time I shared my insight, I was only beginning to understand this. Now, having pondered the matter (actually, having verified the theory in hundreds of instances) I realize that my theory is both thorough and unerringly true. This area is impoverished. The adults here are second- or even third-generation poverty, as it is called hereabouts. Any sense of the work ethic is a forgotten part of this subculture. Little remains in the way of values, except for fetid vestiges of vague religious superstitions. But people have their televisions: They are aware that there is more opulence out there. And they are angry, hostile, resentful, full of bitter resentment. And, what is crucial, this hostility is not always focused; rather, it is a free-floating attitude which is more or less constantly there, regardless of the circumstances. Even when one is being friendly, generous, helpful to these people, it is still there. And this is what drives me crazy about this place. Yes; there are exceptions. There are some wonderful, golden souls in this area. People who have risen above the social squalor. But they are precisely that: exceptions. I forget this almost daily because, despite my pessimism and even my cynicism, I always remain an optimist in my one-on-one dealings with human beings. And hence I am continually disappointed.

I do think that, to a minimal degree, I do get along better with the locals now. To some extent this is because I am a more familiar face. Also it is the result of my having learned to try harder. I am so very friendly in every interaction. I smile, ask personal questions, and am so generally ebullient as to be almost aggressive about it. It does pay off. People are so startled by this much effusiveness, so seemingly overwhelmed, that they respond with a show of, if not friendliness in return, then at least with politeness. There are days when I am driving toward town, not feeling well, or in a particularly bad mood about something, and I wonder if I have the energy for being this friendly today. Sometimes, with a certain resentment, I wonder why it is that Baumli can't ever have an "off" day. But then I consider

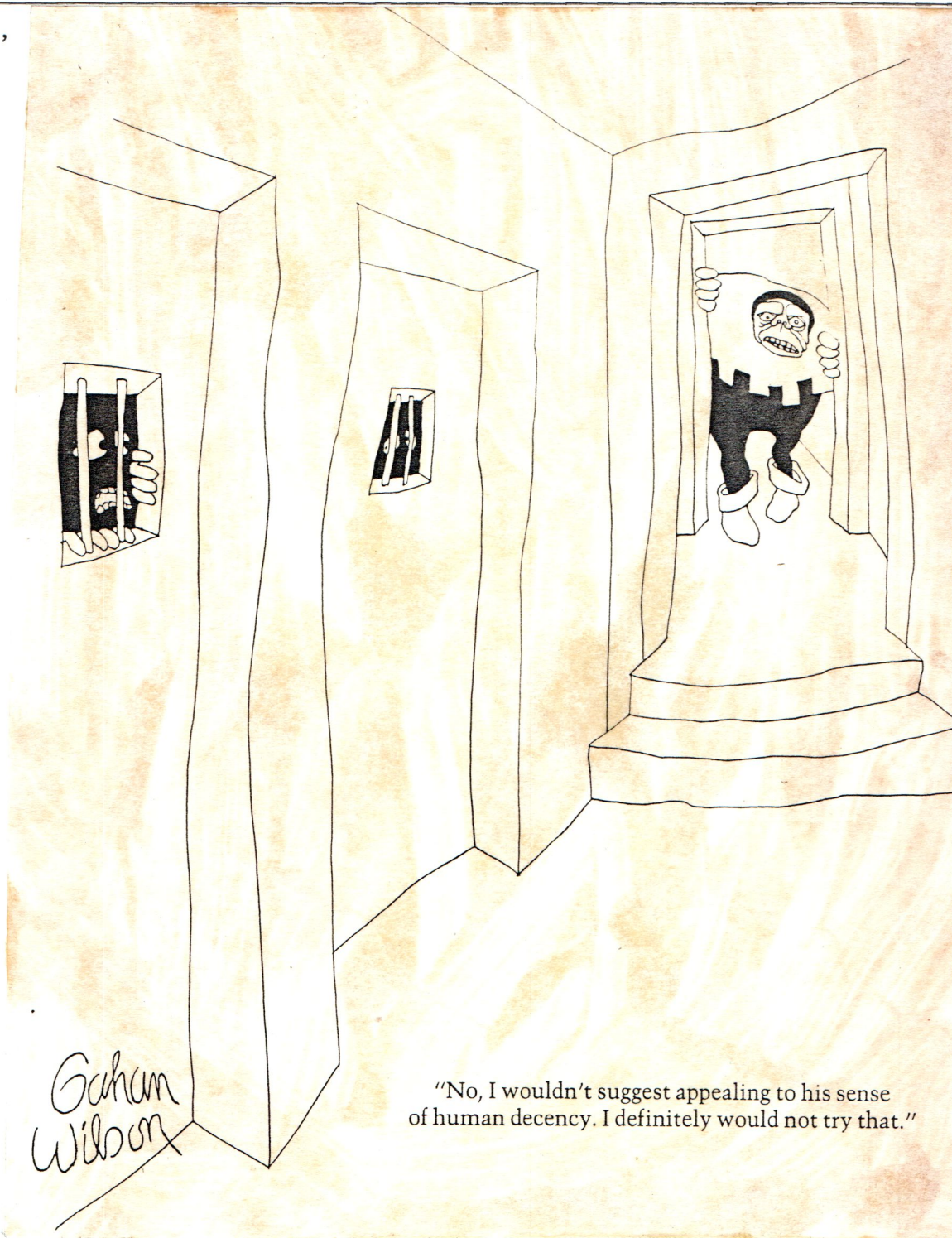
the alternative--the predictable hostility--and I put aside my own bad mood and make sure to put forth my saintliest visage.

We have tried socializing with these people more--inviting them over for dinner, and such. While this is most enjoyable with certain individuals, even this simple show of neighborliness is often met, not with hostility, but with a gesture I still do not understand. Namely, if we have someone over for dinner (someone toward whom we have good feelings, and who has already displayed sufficient social graces as to elicit our good will), they almost invariably will, in the next couple of days, send us a thank-you card, and on several occasions, have even sent us a pot of flowers by way of showing their appreciation. Why do they do it? I have opined to Abbe that surely it must be because such shows of hospitality happen so rarely in this area that they are uncommonly impressed, and think our gesture deserves a grand and formal response. Abbe thinks it is something quite different--that they know they will not choose to extend an invitation to dinner in return, but they think they should return the gesture of hospitality in some way, so they send flowers as a way of more or less discharging their perceived sense of obligation.

But then, I shall not try and decipher this strange show of proprieties. I shall be content to enjoy whatever rare displays of friendliness the locals are capable of manifesting, and do what I can to avoid the many sordid, almost subhuman, acts they habitually indulge.

Shall I give examples of such this year? Last year, one of my readers said that the examples I gave afforded her much laughter, and that next year I should devote the entire Aviary to a depiction of how the people in Southern Illinois live and go about their daily lives. Well ... an entire issue? I fear that were I to indulge in this much literary squallor, I would forever cripple my abilities as a writer. But, to briefly cater to my friend's request, I shall here present a couple of examples.

The first, I think, will afford little in the way of humor, much less, laughter. The event occurred at the local hospital. There, I observed a



"No, I wouldn't suggest appealing to his sense of human decency. I definitely would not try that."

physician grimly conferring with family members--about a dozen--regarding the state of their aged mother's health. The doctor was being clear: The old woman was not receiving good care from the family members. Either they were going to have to make a concerted effort at giving her better care, or she was going to have to be put in a resthome. The doctor would give details of the poor care she had been receiving, and then ask, "Who here is able to make this different?" No one would reply. The women were teary eyed, one or two women let out a few forced honks as if crying, but not one would say a thing. The men shuffled their feet and stared anywhere but at the doctor's eyes. The doctor pressed the case. "It's very simple. She needs to get her medicines on time. You people aren't even getting to the drugstore to get her prescriptions. And there's no excuse for that. She's on public aid. It isn't costing anybody anything but a little time. Who here will take responsibility for making sure she gets her prescriptions? You all live in Murphysboro. Who will make sure of that?" Not one answered. It was clear that not one of these people wanted to do a thing, but none of them were willing to say so. "Nobody? So are you going to sign papers for me to have her transferred to the rest home?"

Instantaneously the group became agitated. People moved about. Groans were heard. A woman started crying. The cluster of people came apart a bit, less cohesive, and then, in a loud wailing voice one of the women looking on uttered, in what sounded like a single expectorated exhalation, "Uhguhogimesumsigrez!" She broke from the group and, pretending to sob, hurried to the door. One man, muttering something about checking the oil in his car before he could drive home, followed after her. Other people were muttering various things, and truly, within ten seconds, that room was cleared. I looked at the doctor who, with a shrug of the shoulders and a scornful sigh, said to me, "That old woman is a saint. I don't know how she ended up with kids like these."

I am sure many of you are wondering what that woman meant by her, "Uhguhogimesumsigrez!" I dare say you have a better chance of deciphering her meaning from my prose than you would have had, had you been there hearing it. But I have become somewhat accustomed to these people's dialect, so I did know what she was saying. Her declaration: "I've got to go get me some cigarettes." Yes; it is amazing how these people can cram so many syllables and consonants and vowels (most transmuted to the "uh" sound) into what spews forth as one unbroken stream of verbal vomitus amounting to a pseudo-word or pseudo-sentence. But they do do it. As for the lack of human compassion in this interaction, I need not comment, except to here register the speculation that within twenty minutes of those dozen people leaving the room, I would have bet money that every single one of them was either sitting in a bar, or sitting at home in front of a television.

Two examples I promised: The other one is a bit difficult to explain. It involved a fellow who, perhaps a year previous to this event, had been to our place to do some work installing two new windows. He was a very unpleasant fellow, we had hired him this time only because we couldn't find anyone else, but his general conduct this day had been so unpleasant that I had resolved to never again, under any circumstances, hire him. But it was the end of the day, and it was time to pay him. I could not remember his last name, and asked him. He told me, and I then asked him how it is spelled. He blew up at me, yelling (I do not here try to spell out his dialect), "Do you know the other day I almost punched someone when they had to ask me how to spell my name?! How can anybody not know how to spell my name? It's simple! It's false! False! Like in true and false! F - a - u - s - s! Fauss! Like in true and fauss!" I looked at him evenly, and said quietly, "Well, I never was a very good speller," and I proceeded to write him a check, spelling his last name, "Fauss." This man had actually lost his temper because I did not know how to spell his last name, and self-righteously thought he was giving me a lesson in spelling, when the fact was, he didn't even know the correct spelling of the very simple word, "false."

But then, the general level of education around this area is rather depressed (a kind word!). Even with the university nearby (Southern Illinois University at Carbondale), one encounters little that would approximate a show of erudition. When Abbe and I moved to this area, we thought that the educational level of the people would be very similar to those where we had lived before. After all, we lived in the country outside of New Franklin, near Columbia, a university town. Here we live outside Murphysboro, near Carbondale. But there the comparison stops. When the students leave Carbondale for their vacations, the town is virtually deserted. There are few bookstores, and the ones that are there do very poorly, usually open only a few hours a week. Even the main bookstore in Carbondale, which sells students' textbooks, sells very few books. To give but one comparison: At the University Book Store in Columbia, Missouri, 30 copies of my book Men Freeing Men were sold per year. But at the main textbook store in Carbondale, the Southern Illinois University Book Store, they have sold a total of four copies of my book in five years. And no; this is not because I was well known in Columbia. I was virtually unknown, given that it had been years since I had been associated with the university, or had done my radio show in Columbia. The difference is in the two locales. That is the depressing whole of it.

Meanwhile, the problem of rich people hitting me up for money--asking that I donate to their favorite charities--continues. After all, Abbe is a doctor, so therefore, in their minds, we must be rich, with vast quantities of money to dispose of. So at various functions we happen to be at, usually concerts we attend at the university, up they come, reminding us of the letter they sent us, and wanting to know if we are going to donate, and trusting that if we do donate we surely will give beyond the minimal amount. Abbe handles such people graciously, and usually manages to put them off with a promise of a small amount of money eventually. Given my saintly disposition, I abide these people with a protracted tolerance which eventually strains my patience to the point where I, contrary to my nature, become momentarily nasty and obnoxious. Such happened with one fellow who was especially persistent and boorish about asking that we donate money to a scholarship fund for university string players. After what was perhaps his tenth request, I flatly told him, "No; I don't want to give money. I would rather support art."

He was momentarily taken aback, but then, thinking I had not understood him, persisted with, "You must not understand. This is a scholarship fund for string players at the university!"

I stared at him coldly. "Like I said. I would rather support art." This efflux of anger sufficed to cleanse me for the moment, and aware that I had so angered my interlocutor that we might immediately come to blows, I turned and walked away so as to spare him the ignomy of a beating.

Meanwhile, I continue to tolerate, more or less, the mundane, yet not insignificant, difficulties of living in this region. I have come to realize, for example, that one of the chief difficulties of living here is coping with the humidity, which almost always is hovering at 100%. This is because of the precipitation, the weather patterns, and the many lakes hereabouts. This level of humidity persists even in the winter, and is most difficult, in terms of physical comfort, when the temperature is between 60 and 70 degrees. At this temperature, one isn't really cold, isn't really hot, but there is all that filthy moisture sticking to your body.

Yes; I said filthy. A strange description? Not really. During the first three years we lived here, I wondered why I always felt so dirty, e.g., when after taking a shower, I would be in front of a fan for about five minutes, and feel clammy, sweaty, even though minutes before I had felt completely clean. One evening I hung my white bathrobe on the bathroom door, which was open, and thus my robe intersected about six inches of an open window. Upstairs, the attic fan was turned on, and my white robe hung thus, in the breeze coming through this window, for maybe five hours. When I took it down, I saw that the portion of the robe which had been in the path of the incoming air at the window was almost black--the black area, about six inches wide, perfectly demarcated there at the edge of the window. How, I wondered, could it get so filthy just from the moving air?

I later learned that just as every ice crystal in a snow storm has, at its center, a tiny speck of dust; so also, every water droplet that is suspended in humid air contains at its center a tiny speck of dust. Hence, moist air is very dirty--and as it becomes more moist, it actually sucks up more dirt from the ground if there are not sufficient particles already suspended in the air. Thus I came to realize that there is some sense in the oft-heard comments on this area's humidity, e.g., "It's so humid I feel like I'm walking through dirty water," or, "I feel like I'm breathing dirty water," or, "It seems I'm always in a bathtub of dirty water."

The discomfort of this high degree of humidity (something I have never experienced elsewhere) is very difficult to ameliorate. In the winter, after having run the heat for a couple of months, one can usually get the degree of humidity down to about 60 inside one's house. As for the summer, even though running a dehumidifier in our house constantly, and sometimes using the air-conditioning, we are lucky to get the humidity level below 70. Some people in this area, desperate to get the level down, equip their houses with extra-large air-conditioning systems, and during the summer run both their air-conditioner and heating system at the same time to bring the humidity down.

I said "desperate" to get the humidity level down. Sometimes it feels like this, what with the invasions of mold and fungus which can happen in one's house if the humidity level is allowed to stay high. I spoke in a previous issue of The Aviary of the mold which invaded our music room, and even got inside my instrument amplifiers. This year, on July 29th--to be precise--we discovered that my large wood sculpture, the one entitled, Woman in Labor Searching for Her Thirteenth Orgasm was covered with a thick, greasy, filthy muck of slimy greenish-brown mold. (I can hear the witticisms on this!) A complete cleaning was necessary, involving many hours of work.

Truly, one of the great comforts of leaving this area, for example when we drive to St. Louis, is getting away from all this oppressive moisture.

Of course, there is great comfort in knowing that one day we shall leave this area permanently. There is much we will be glad to leave behind. One such thing is the constant worry about "the big one," as it is called, i.e., the big earthquake which is predicted to happen one day--nobody knows for sure, but geologists often say that there is a 40% chance of a quake registering at least 7 on the Richter scale happening in the next 40 years. A quake this large

would level our house. It was built in 1855, is three-course brick construction, and has no steel reinforcing for the main structure at all. A quake registering 7 would reduce this house to a pile of rubble about six feet tall. Bodies inside would be a pulp.

People ask me why I worry about the big one, why I can't just play the odds and hope that I--we--will be safe? The main reason I can not is that I am reminded, almost daily, of its potential. There are often as many as 100 small shocks a day in this area. They register about 1 on the Richter scale, occasionally are as high as 1.5 or 2, and rarely reach slightly above 3. But I feel these, especially in the evening. In fact, this very night, as I write, there was one which lasted for about a minute while we were eating supper. Before that, when I was upstairs in the bathroom, one which probably registered about 1.5 was causing the whole house to rock for about a full minute. Such constant reminders cause one to contemplate the big one with a good deal of dread. And geologists, when they make their predictions, remind us of those big quakes of yore, and go on to say that this area, because of the underlying substructure of the rock and such, is considered the most dangerous earthquake zone in the world. California, they say, is actually relatively safe. Quakes registering as high as 7 will cause damage, a few deaths, but the shock does not travel very far from the epicenter because the subsoil is sandy, absorbs the shock, and does not transmit it well. But here, the substructure is compact, hard, and will transmit the shock from any quake very effectively.

During the last eight months, I have become especially worried about the possibility that the big one may be nearer than anyone but me suspects. My reason for such worries is perhaps all awry; I certainly hope it is. But ... let me try to explain: As most of you know, I am in the habit of doing my writing at night. I go back to my study at about 10:30 at night, and work until about 2:30 or 3:00 A.M. My study is in a block building that is about twenty feet from our house. Out here, there is no bathroom, so when my bladder needs tending, I merely step outside and tend to its needs in the dark.

One night, about three years ago, I stepped outside and very suddenly felt terribly frightened. Something was different, and I was not sure what it was. It took me several minutes to finally realize that what was missing was the sound of traffic on the highway which goes by our house not one hundred yards from our door. On this night, the usual noise of traffic on the highway was not to be heard. When I finally realized what was unsettling--even frightening--me, I calmed down. I realized that there must be coincidences which would explain such a lack of traffic on the highway. Or perhaps there was something very special on TV, or some such. Regardless, I stepped outside again, perhaps an hour later, and still, the highway was very quiet. It was eerie, but now I was not so frightened, and the next night traffic was back to normal--as was the noise level. And things stayed this way.

Until about eight months ago. Suddenly, the flow of night traffic stopped. I noticed it one night, and was very surprised that it was the same the following night. And it has remained the same since. Occasionally, on a Friday night, there will be a heavy flow of traffic for a few hours, but almost always, by one or two in the morning, one rarely hears a car. Whereas before there would be streams of cars, one following the other--separated by a distance of perhaps 100 yards on the average. But then, a sudden change ... which has persisted.

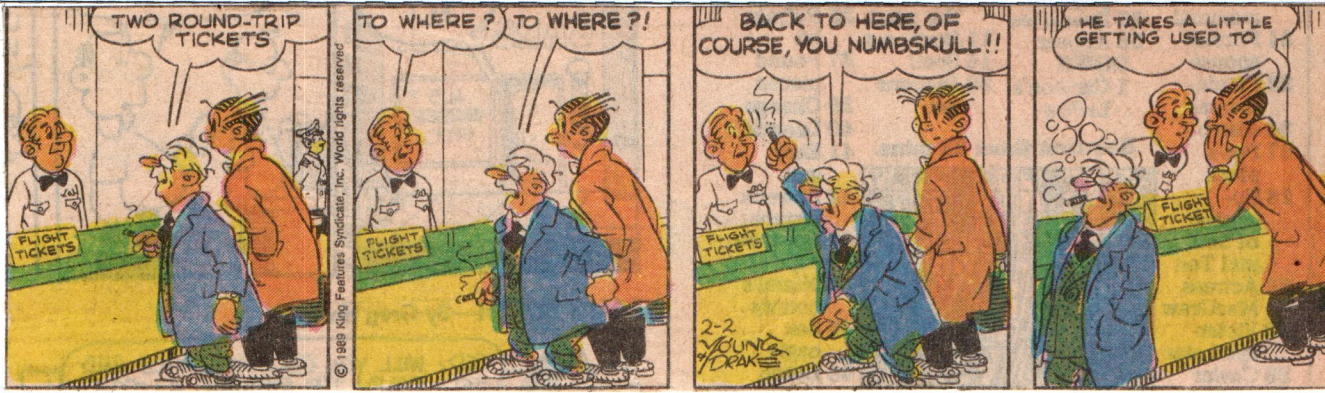
Why? Surely it is not because the people of this region can not afford gasoline for their cars. Yes; the people here are impoverished. But not more so than they were a year ago. And even when people do lack money, putting gas in their vehicles is always a high priority. There must be a very malevolent, sinister, dangerous reason as to why these people have stopped driving at night.

It is well known that the lower life-forms have an uncanny ability to sense the approach of an earthquake. Snakes come out of their holes in the ground. Insects race about in circles. Spiders leave their webs, or begin weaving huge, very elaborate webs. Goats, even sick ones, fight each other without provocation. Lower life-forms can sense these things, and I do wonder if perhaps the people of Southern Illinois have unconsciously sensed the imminent approach of a major quake, and have, without even realizing it, changed their driving habits in response to this subliminal awareness. A far-fetched hypothesis? Perhaps. Paranoid? Probably. Wrong? Maybe not. I hate this region called Southern Illinois, and it would be just my luck to incur the disaster of an earthquake here before we succeed in escaping this area.

But even with this pessimistic thought, I continue to prepare for our departure. Things I use daily are continually being rearranged so that when the day comes for packing, they can be put together more easily, and in a tidier manner.

And I continue to assess my own attitude, keeping in mind that I will be leaving this area more because I hate where I live than because I will have already come to love the place I will be moving to. This, I realize, is a somewhat dangerous scenario. I do not fear moving to a place that would feel more difficult than where we live now; the likelihood of this happening is so very, very small. But I am aware that we could move to a different place, and

even though we would have scrutinized the place very carefully in advance, discover that we do not like it at all.



This would certainly be a most depressing turn of events.

It also is possible that we might move to a place, which would appear to work out perfectly in terms of Abbe's work ... and, initially, it would work

out very well. But it then could happen that the job situation changes, and because of this we would feel obligated to move elsewhere. In other words, it is possible that our dissatisfaction with the new

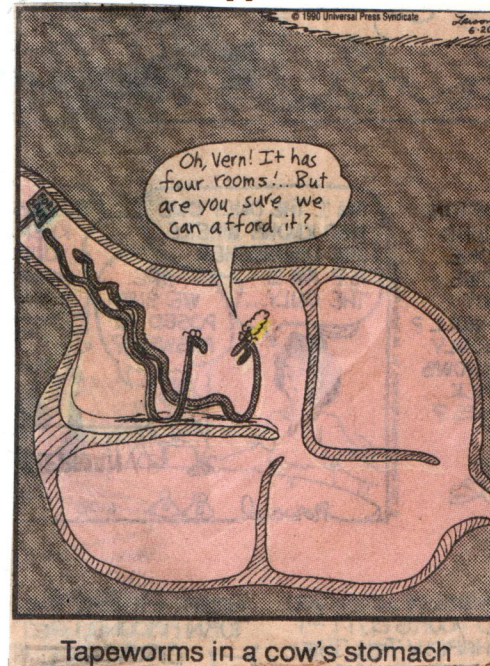


community could necessitate another move, or practical circumstances might necessitate such. Hence, I am wary of a move. But not so wary, be assured, that I am not eager to get away from this place.

Thus far we have spent a good deal of time looking over health sites in both Kansas City and St. Louis. It is very possible (actually, it is very likely) that we will end up in one of these two places. This would necessitate this country boy moving to the big city. We have looked at housing options. It might be possible to live in the country, or at least in a small community somewhat outside the city which has some land around the houses. But this would necessitate Abbe doing a commute, which neither of us want. The other alternative is to live directly within the city, but I am not sure I could stand this. I need to feel a sense of some solitude. Mostly, I need not to hear noise around me all the time. And I do not want to feel that I am living amidst a conglomerate of dwellings perched atop a slab of concrete which stretches several miles in all directions. I never want it to happen that everywhere I look I see buildings and people.

We looked at real estate, both in Kansas City and in St. Louis. The dwellings in the city are, for me, terribly depressing. The houses in the cities are stacked together like cordwood. People are crushed together like rats in a tin can. Or worse--like lice on a carcass.

The males especially, perhaps because of the way they are conditioned--to be highly kinetic and express themselves by interacting with, and altering, their physical environment--seem especially trapped in those houses. They pace forlornly, like mice that have fallen into a milk-jug and think they can't get out. Of course, for many of these men, there really isn't any place to go out to, unless one steps outside and stands on the street corner. Of course, some of these men live in the suburbs--rows of houses stacked together like Orwellian cocoons. But even in these houses, the men stay inside, seldom venturing outside to do anything more adventuresome than retrieve a newspaper or, perhaps once a week, mow the grass. It is a sad sight, observing how these



men seem to feel so trapped inside these houses, even when they need not feel this way. For example, when a city fellow wants to look outside to see what might be going on--with the weather, or a commotion down the street--he stands at the window, and if what he is trying to look at is up the street to his left, then he moves to the right side of the window and cranes his neck out to where his forehead touches the glass, and does his best to get as good a view as possible. When that perspective bores him, he then shuffles over to the other side of the window so he can press his head against the glass there and look up the street to his right. They thus stand in front of that window or door, and pace back and forth (or, more often, actually seem to rock back and forth on spread legs), like a little kid who is about to pee his pants. Never once, it seems, does it occur to them to do what a country fellow would

do, which is to simply step outside to see what is going on, first putting on his coat if the weather so dictates.

There is another aspect of city living which deters me. This is the pervasive classism which to me seems even more ubiquitous than racism. For example, when in Kansas City, we were told that the "sub-city" of Kansas City, Kansas which is called Overland Park, Kansas, has the lowest poverty rate of any city in the U.S. Its poverty rate is less than five percent. Also, Overland Park is ranked as the best city in this country in which to raise a child and send it to school.

I am not entirely naive about such things. I know that if this city has such a low poverty rate, it is not because it has wonderful social programs which prevent poverty. No; it is because this subcity, both tacitly and directly, makes sure that impoverished people can not move inside its borders. This happens tacitly simply because property prices are so high that people can not afford to buy or rent housing there if they are impoverished. It happens intentionally through the instrumentation of living codes, or "neighborhood governance codes." These codes must be agreed to if one buys property in these neighborhoods, and if the owners, or renters, fail to abide by these codes they can be evicted from the neighborhood. Sometimes the codes are minimal, e.g., one must cut one's grass no less than once per week from the months of April through October. Other times they are very extensive, e.g., one can not leave an old car, deemed unsightly by the neighborhood committee, ungaraged. Vehicles larger than a pickup can not be parked or garaged permanently in the neighborhood, excepting motorized mobile homes which must be garaged. No car ports can be attached to a house. Any dwelling must be maintained in good repair and aesthetic condition so as to match the quality of the other houses in the neighborhood. No person can run any business out of the home which would necessitate visitors by motor traffic amounting to more than two such visitors per day. Etc. The lists of rules are carefully designed to exclude specific behavior and specific things, with the end in mind of excluding people of low or even modest income. It is an economic apartheid.

So you see? There are barriers to our living in the city. One of these is moral repugnance. Others involve reluctance about commuting very far. And also reluctance about living in a community that is cramped for space.

The bottom line is that Abbe wants to live in the country, and this country boy wants access to the big city but doesn't want to live inside it. So we shall, over the next year, do a lot of looking and pondering.

And meanwhile, I must keep in mind that wherever I move, there are going to be certain difficulties which will result from the disharmony between Baumli's refined, sensitive, aesthetic temperament, and the crude, brutish, slovenly temperament of those peasants who people our country--defining its every class, its every race, its every profession.

Do you see how ruthless I am being? I have just finished with criticizing our country--or, parts of our country--for abiding classism, racism, and such, and here I am going on about peasants. Does it seem that Baumli thus is being a hypocrite?

He of course is not. Baumli is not condemning people merely because they happen to belong to a class. And in fact, he is condemning no one. Rather, he is criticizing, and he is directing his criticism at certain behaviors only. The appellation "peasant" applies not as a simplistic class distinction, but rather, because it suffices to circumscribe these various types of behavior. These types of behavior are (if I may explain myself via philosophy) perversions of what Plato terms, in The Republic, the virtue of temperance. In any well-ordered society, the artisan class should possess this virtue; when it does not, Baumli chooses to eschew the term "artisan" and use the more appropriate term, "peasant." Thus, you see, there is nothing prejudicial about my categorizing at all. I am merely describing behavior--which is manifest as a soul which, ruled by passion, is not governed by temperance.

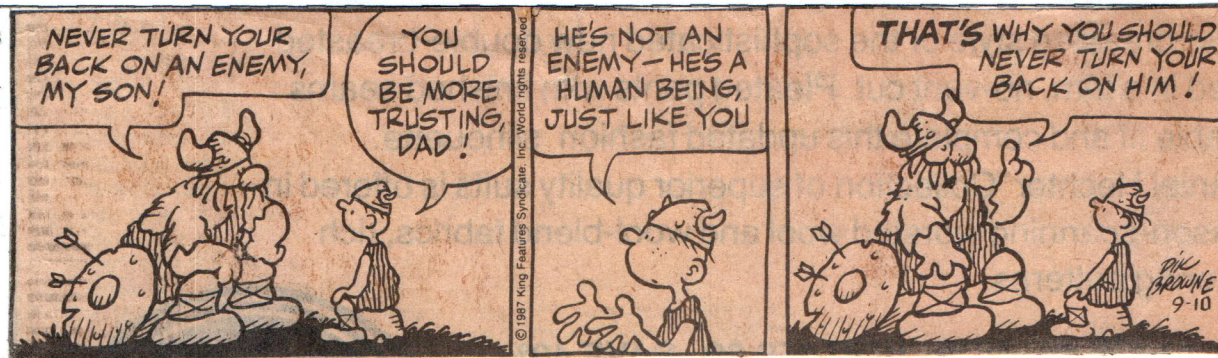
What, you may ask, is a life not governed by temperance? I could enter upon a lengthy phenomenological discourse, or I could simply be aporetic about the matter and state that the life which irritates Baumli is one that is ungoverned by temperance.

And of course there are many, many things about other people's lives which irritate Baumli. Baumli tries very hard to avoid such irritations, and toward



"Goldberg, you idiot! Don't play tricks on those things -- they can't distinguish between 'laughing with' and 'laughing at!'"

this end he leads a very reclusive life. But now and then he does open his door (and heart) to other people, and invites them to his home. Here is where the problem starts



(or rather, takes up again), and Baumli's cultivated sensibilities assaulted. For example, I become weary of the presumptions in other people regarding bringing their children to my home. On several occasions, Abbe and I have invited a person, or a couple of adults, over for dinner, and have looked forward to an enjoyable evening. But then, when the guests arrive, there they stand with their many children, none of whom were invited. It is not that their children are disliked, or misbehaved, or any such; it is simply that we were looking forward to an evening with adults only, and we had ourselves made plans for this. But these peasants never once gave it a thought. They presumed to bring their kids. So thus the evening is defined.

Once in the door of our house, there often are other difficulties. In last year's Aviary, I spoke of how people often bring a television to our house. They of course have to take it back to their car. Others come in our house and without even asking, perhaps while sitting at the supper table, turn on the radio which is in our kitchen, or the one in our music room. They may do this for one of their children who seems to need entertaining, or likely they will do it, as they often say, "out of habit." Or, just as often, the reason is, "for background noise."

Well; in my world, there is too much background noise already. I spend a great deal of time and energy trying to eliminate such background noise; I certainly am not going to do anything about encouraging its presence.

So when people turn on a radio in my home, I forthrightly remonstrate with them, letting them know that even those of us who live in this house do not listen to a radio without getting permission of everyone else.

To my reasoning, one disgruntled fan of "call-in" radio informed me that his turning on a radio, in my home, without permission, was no different from me walking into his home and opening a book to read without first getting permission. I actually had to patiently explain to this fellow that there is scarcely a comparison, since my reading a book does not impinge upon the sensibilities of other people, what with it being a private act and not a public nuisance.

And then there are the people who, once here, do not know when it is time to leave. I read in a magazine some time ago that in 1991 there were four million visitors to the Grand Canyon, and they stayed an average of only fifteen minutes! This, to me, is truly amazing. Amazing that people would not want to spend more time with such natural beauty, and amazing in the comparison to how long people seem to want to stay at my house once here. When people are invited over for supper, no number of hints--which begin being dropped about eleven o'clock--can move them out the door. Sometimes it is one in the morning before these guests, who claim to be early risers, finally find the presence of mind (and presence of decent social graces) to at last make their exit. There are other people who not only outstay an evening, they outstay an extended visit. They might have arranged to come for a couple of days, and without even consulting with Abbe or me, decide to stay an extra day or two. A couple of years ago, a woman had come to visit for one week, and at the end of that period of time, blithely announced to me that she had decided to stay another three or four days. She did not first bother to explore what our domestic or work schedules might be. She did not display a bit of sensitivity to how I might feel about it. She did not even bother asking. She merely announced that she was going to stay these extra days. I was thus put into the uncomfortable (and unnecessary) position of having to tell her bluntly that this was not okay.

One final thing about visitors: There are those who, when they come to visit, without even asking in advance if it is acceptable, bring a dog. They seem to give it not a moment's thought. There they are, getting out of their vehicle in the driveway, with the dog. Of course, the dog has been riding, so it needs to immediately deposit a fresh one on my lawn. And then it comes rushing up to me, jumping up on me, perhaps licking my face, and then generally,



"Well, time for our weekly brain-stem storming session."

for the rest of the visit, making a pest of itself. This problem became so bad a couple of years ago that, with Abbe's agreement, a new rule has been implemented in this household. Namely, if someone brings to our premises a dog, then the dog has to stay in their vehicle. If they have come for an extended visit, and brought a dog without asking, then they have but one alternative: They have to take it to a local kennel.

This angers people, of course. But then, being peasants, they do not understand that a dog can be a terrible inconvenience not only to Baumli, but to just about any person who has to put up with that dog's unseemly behavior. The problem is, these peasants can not understand that the dog's behavior is indeed so unseemly. A dog that shits in my yard and then licks me in the face?! Well; I would not lick another person--a stranger--in the face. And I would not shit in someone else's yard. I could be arrested for either. And yet, it is commonly accepted in our culture that dogs (whose excretory functions and salivary habits are surely somewhat more despicable than are those of human beings) should be allowed to perform these functions at will. People accept these impropriety-deposited excretions as commonplace; they think the lickings are cute. Does anyone wonder why I would refer to such people as incorrigible peasants?

But there is no solution to these problems, except in trying to avoid them as much as possible. I am a recluse. I work at being a more thorough recluse. In past years, I have more or less tempered my reclusive nature by writing many letters. Even these acts of generosity are becoming less frequent. I enjoy writing letters, but they do take away time from my other writing, and too often, people never--or, rarely--write me back. The same is true with a different activity of mine--giving gifts. I have, for many years, enjoyed sending gifts to a few of my friends, and to many members of my extended family. These seldom are expensive gifts. Often I send them for birthdays, but I usually buy the gift, not out of a sense of duty, but at some time during the year when I happen to come across an item which I am sure the person would enjoy. The problem is that over the last two or three years, people have stopped thanking me for the gifts I send by mail--which is how most of them are given. They do not even acknowledge the gift. Hence, I am never even sure that they received it. Not to mention the fact that it leaves my feelings a bit sore, if not bruised, that another person would not bother extending even a gesture of gratitude for my small thought, and effort. So ... this habit is changing also. I am sending fewer gifts to others.

Thus, I become more of a recluse. I become more selective about who I bestow my affections on. And not so paradoxically, I thus find more time for those people whose temperament befits mine. By having become less tolerant of other people, and in some instances giving less to other people, I am finding more time for blessed solitude, and more time for the blessings of my true friends. As it now stands, just about the only time I have to deal with people other than my good friends is when we need to have work done on our house, and have to call in someone to have it done.

Which brings me to one further topic, which in some ways may seem like a digression, but actually is appropriately treated here, since the topic has been peasants, and the odd phenomenon I must here broach certainly refers to, even in some way defines, the peasant mentality.

What I am referring to is the classist view toward work that seems to be terribly pervasive in this country. It is one of those maladies which is so ubiquitous, so subtle, so constant, that one can live with it daily and never be consciously aware of it. I suppose that I had not been very aware of it until a certain situation presented itself this last year.

The situation: This property we own had, at the time we purchased it, a dump--as it was called in the purchasing contract--in the southeast corner of the yard. In this area, for about twenty years, the previous owners (and subsequently, several neighbors) had deposited their trash. We at last arranged for an excavator to come in with a pair of dump trucks and a high-loader and haul it all off to a landfill. After the initial work was done, there remained a huge amount of small litter, broken glass and such, atop the ground. The big high-loader spilled bottles from its bucket, then crushed them with its steel tracks, and glass fragments were everywhere. Abbe and I spent hours picking it up. We needed to get it picked up before winter set in, knowing that then it would be very difficult to pick out of the ground, and once spring came in, the grass would cover the glass and it would never be picked up. So we tried to find someone to help us. This was when the realization came: Picking up fragments of broken glass is lower-class work. We could call someone who is unemployed,



Civil Service History: On Oct. 12, 1979 (Columbus Day), government employee George Sullivan goes in to work for a couple of hours to, in his own words, "take care of some unfinished business."

and ask them to help, and they would actually laugh at us for making such a request. This kind of work was beneath them. They even, at times, thought we were joking. These were former school administrators, artists, store clerks, musicians, a sculptor who makes no money and complains about not being able to find employment, a radio disc jockey who was only working part-time, an unemployed accountant, an unemployed carpenter, and the list goes on. I phoned everyone I could think of, and they would not do it. Not one. And it was obvious that every one of these people considered this work so menial as to be beneath them. I was stunned. I had never before realized that this attitude is so pervasive, but now, realizing it, I recognized that I had encountered it many times before in my life: An unemployed computer operator who turned down a job as a checkout man in a grocery store which I told him about, just because he considered it beneath him, electing instead to live with his parents for more than a year after his unemployment checks ran out. A fellow who was hired to come to my place to help move filing cabinets, and when the process of moving them was held up about an hour while some measurements on the building were being completed, he refused to spend the time cutting up a pile of kindling in our front yard with the sneering rebuff, "I didn't come here to chop wood." (Later, Abbe Sudvarg, M.D., and Francis Baumli, Ph.D., cut up this pile of kindling, which fueled our stove for the next four years.) A female nurse who, temporarily unemployed, turned down a two-week job as a receptionist because it was, as she put it, "beneath her." A bank executive who lost his job, and turned down an offer to run a weighing scale for farmers bringing in harvested wheat, even though this job would have actually paid more by the hour than did his job as a bank executive.

Well; Abbe and I put in as many hours as we could spare, picking up all those glass fragments. We kept trying to find someone to help us. People kept turning us down. (Some readers here might think that we were being turned down because the pay was so little. Well; we were offering eight dollars an hour, which I think isn't so very little.) At last we found two people to help us for one evening; they were two young black teenagers. The next day I found two men who worked two full days picking up the glass; they were Mexican migrant workers. So ... two blacks, and two Hispanics, helped finish the job. A job which those unemployed, and underemployed, white people wouldn't even consider doing. A strange country we live in, with strange people, and a sad morality.

As for my using the term, "peasant." Do you begin to see? These people actually deserve a descriptive that is not so kind.

(I must at this point pause to reflect, and take stock of myself. I have been writing very quickly; the above having been composed over the course of about five evenings. And look at how very much I have written. I began with the intent of writing about significant events. But surely they aren't all so very significant. And not all of them are "events," in the usual meaning of the word. It would be more accurate, I suppose, to refer to them in the phenomenological context as significations. Much has been said above which displays remarkable forbearance on my part, and an unusual kindness, even beneficence, toward an undeserving humanity. I really do, you see, strive to be saintly, even though I am the first to concede that my general personality does not deserve the adjective. But ... I was just complaining about how I have been going on too much at length, and already I am discoursing anew about a matter which is already so sufficiently substantiated that it does not warrant further comment. I must try now for brevity--better descriptives which are so fertile they cause the imagination to soar, and serve as a barricade to further words.)

2. I am sure that most of my readers anxiously await word of Marion. (Actually most of my readers have already heard a great deal about Marion, and, if they have met him, they have heard a great deal of Marion.) His disposition is kind, and his temperament is unusually cheerful; in fact, I have never seen a two-year-old who is as ebullient and joyful about most things in life. He is not highly kinetic, although he is becoming more so. Intelligent? Of course. Should I brag? Modestly: At age 22½ months, Marion evinced a remarkable awareness of musical progression, even in classical music. When we listen to music (rarely, because he seldom stops talking), he becomes very enthusiastic about it, and keeps insisting on, "Mo sees! Mo sees!" which is his way of saying, "More music!" What I discovered, when he was 22½ months old, was that he would turn to me when a piece of music was still five or six bars away from ending, but thus about to end, and already be saying "Mo sees!" He would do this even with chamber music which he had never before heard. I find this very remarkable. There are schooled

musicians who are not capable of doing this.

As for other aspects of learning: two weeks before his second birthday Marion could identify all the letters of the alphabet, all his numbers to ten, and he knew all of his colors. (We had been concerned that he might inherit color blindness via Abbe from his maternal grandfather. But even though this handicap is inherited strictly through the mother's genes, it is obvious that my superior genes nevertheless interfered sufficiently with the process to shove aside those unbecoming chromosomes and replace them with more aesthetically oriented DNA.)

Well before the age of two, Marion was potty trained, sleeping through the night, feeding himself, but ... not thereby any the less wearily.

Does he drive his patient father crazy? Yes. He has one quality

which Abbe, over and over, feels she must describe as follows: "Well, it may be beyond the norm, but it certainly isn't abnormal." I refer to his talking. Yes; he knows many words, and speaks quite well. But this is not what I am here referring to. I am complaining about the fact that this kid never, ever shuts up except in his sleep. He talks constantly--a stream of questions, comments varied only slightly and overall quite redundant. He even talks while he is eating. While he is chewing, swallowing. He doesn't even shut up when he is in the midst of a difficult defecation. He continues talking even as he is put into bed. He does not stop talking as he is drifting off

to sleep. He only stops talking once he is sound asleep.

Other people uncertainly ask, "Do all two-year-olds talk that much?" Or, an older person might say, "I don't seem to

remember mine talking

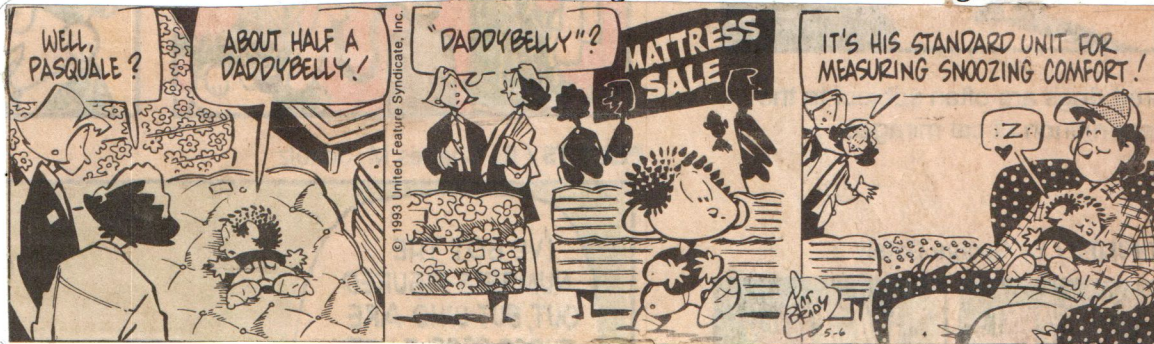
that much." Abbe says that it is a normal two-year-old's way of learning language skills. I suggest that this kid should be given lessons in Zulu. Then he might start looking at talking as something of a chore, and do less of it.

Do I exaggerate? No. But come to think of it, I am mistaken. There is one situation which does cause Marion to stop talking. This is when we record him, on a tape recorder, and then play it back to him. He then sits, rapt and all smiles, listening to himself talk.

Perhaps because now I am older, and have been through more of life's hard knocks, I feel much more protective toward Marion than I did toward Dacia when she was his age. (For most people it is the opposite; they feel less protective toward a second child.) I find myself often having morbid fantasies about horrible things that could, or might very well, happen to Marion. I am much more watchful of everything he does. When he and Abbe leave, the thought often goes through me that I must savor this moment because it could be the last time I see him alive. This morbidity has even extended to my feelings about Abbe. If, for example, she leaves in the morning and writes me a note telling me something, I, thinking that if Abbe is killed in a car wreck then this is the last communication I would have had from her, will keep that note, even it says nothing more than a mundane, "Would you please put my laundry from the washing machine into the dryer? Love, Abbe," until I see her again. Silly of me, I know.

It seems to me that I must protect Marion from abstract, relatively unlikely dangers. And then there are the real dangers--physical and otherwise. There are many rules for protecting him physically. There are more complicated interactions involved with protecting him emotionally. For example, I continue to be surprised (and disgusted) by the number of people who, when Marion was not yet even two years old, would kneel down in front of him, put their fists forth, and enter upon a game of play-boxing, saying, "Fight! Fight!" or, "Put 'em up!" Neither Abbe nor I tolerate this. Human nature is quite capable of erring on its own, and falling into emotional disarray, without that sort of corrupting influence.

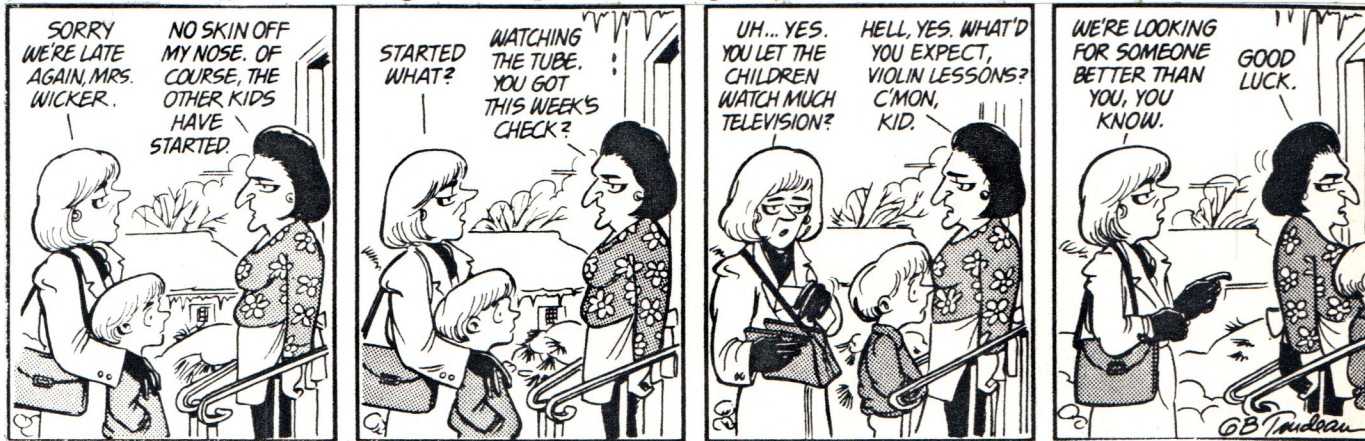
Life is very, very different now than it was three years ago. I divide my life into what I call the "Pre-Marion Era" and the "Post-Marion Era." During this Post-Marion Era, there are times I can almost remember what it was like for both Abbe and me to be well rested.



But ... to here borrow the oft-heard aphorism, "I would not trade him for anything."

Marion gives me unutterable joys. He teaches me profound lessons. With him there is the daily blessing of experiencing the familiarity of miracles.

As is the case with most parents, we struggle with the difficult issue of finding good, and reliable, child care. Our arrange-



ment of having someone coming to our home four days a week became unworkable for a variety of reasons. We subsequently put Marion in day care, but this proved disastrous; he simply was not ready, and cried all the time. We finally worked out an arrangement whereby he would be with various sitters on a one-on-one basis about four days a week, and this has been working out fine, excepting those days when one of the people is ill, leaves town, or, on holidays, when it seems (typical of the Southern Illinois penchant) they all leave town at once.

Marion has his dolls, and he likes to spend time playing with his babies as their daddy. Trucks are his favorite toys, and he very much enjoys playing with our cats. He loves going for rides in his wagon with an adult pulling, and especially likes sitting on Daddy's lap while we ride the tractor about the yard.

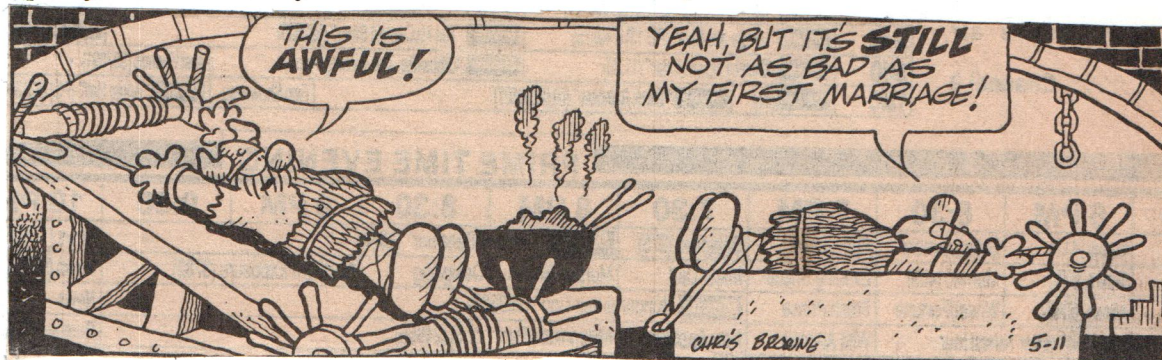
With very fair skin (one begins to understand the English appellation, "alabaster"), he has to be protected from the sun when he is out. But he enjoys swimming, and perhaps more than anything (except riding the tractor) he loves going for long walks in the woods.

As for his parents: Our time with him is an admixture of weariness and joy. I do not forget that I will be sixty years old by the time he is but eighteen.

Two final things about Marion: One is his looks. Yes, he is beautiful and cute, etc. But I make no objective claims here; I am his loving parent. But his hair--auburn, in curls down past his shoulders. I have cut his bangs several times, but I have not been able to bring myself to cut his long, flowing locks. They are too beautiful. And ... a strange effect. They cause most people, in public, to think he is a girl. And it is obvious that he gets much more attention, affection, smiles, and compliments because of this. I like him getting the attention, and am not sure I want to take away one of his means for getting it.

And he now and then asks about his sister. Rarely does he use her name. Usually he merely says, "Where's my sister?" We tell him, but there isn't much to say. She displays virtually no interest in him, and ... but this is another topic.

3. Actually we know very little about what is going on in Dacia's life. Phone calls are strained, and she is very guarded. It is obvious that the living situation there in Columbia is very



stressful--economically depressed, and likely punctuated by a great deal of domestic strife. Has Dacia obtained what she wants, i.e., a relationship with her biological mother? I do not know. At this point, all we can hope to do is keep the lines of communication open--avoid burning the bridges behind us. We write Dacia about three times a week, thus hoping to keep her informed of who we are as her long-time parents, and also to hold forth the possibility of some kind of future reconciliation. At the same time, we to some extent feel as though we are discharging a duty toward Marion. Regardless of our relationship with Dacia, she is Marion's big sister, albeit half-sister; and the day may come when he wants to have a relationship with her which is not tainted by how we feel toward Dacia. If Dacia is open to that, then we want to be able to say that we never prevented Marion's being able to explore and have that relationship.

Some visits happened in 1992. They were tense, unhappy, and nothing in

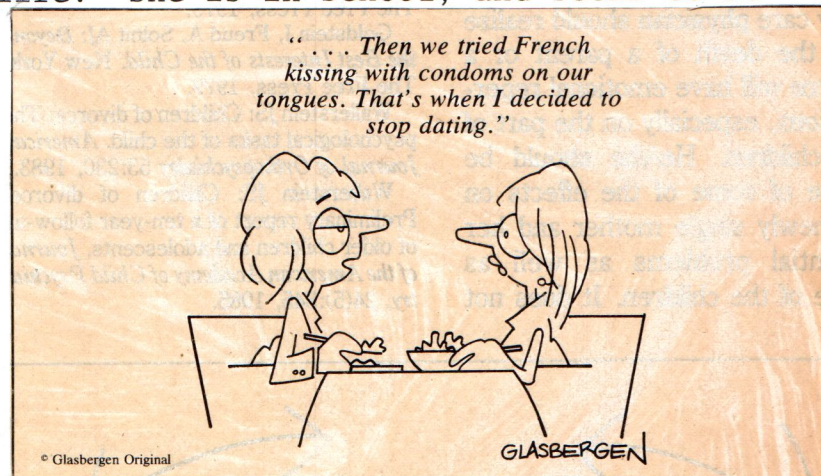
the way of working out a new way of happy interacting was accomplished. At this point, Abbe and I are probably as much at fault for the stress level as Dacia is. Our feelings are pained, raw, sad, and we have pretty much given up trying to work them through with Dacia, given that we then are met by a sullen silence and only come away feeling worse.

So what is Dacia doing with her life? She is in school, and seems to be making good grades. Is she learning very much? I do not know. She works part-time at a fast-food place, and thus earns spending money. There is a fellow who works there whom she "likes," but she hasn't really begun dating. We know that she has a healthy fear of AIDS, some of this garnered from living with us--and hearing Abbe's stories about it, given that Abbe is a physician. As for socializing with other kids her age, it seems that Dacia does little or none. She seems to be planted there at that house, still hoping to get something--who knows what?--from her mother, and meanwhile most of the remainder of her life has been put on hold while she waits ... and waits.

Well, there just isn't very much to say about Dacia. I can, however, write about certain aspects of what losing Dacia has involved for me. In last year's *Aviary* I primarily spoke of what this involved personally. This time I think I shall say a bit about what it has involved interpersonally, or socially.

In 1977, when my wife left me and a divorce ensued, it was a horrible and unanticipated loss. And aside from the personal anguish, there was, at that time, a major sense of betrayal from too many of my friends and acquaintances. For about one month I walked about in something of a daze, feeling about as weak and worthless as a pool of vomit being flushed down a toilet. People saw this vulnerability, and in some of these people, old angers, vendettas, grudges surfaced. Now was the time, they realized, when they could unleash all their old anger toward Baumli. And they did. I experience no small horror in contemplating human nature when I remember how certain people cornered me and vented their anger over situations that were, sometimes, many years old. Other people were simply unkind, or overtly cruel, because they had never really liked me and now wanted to express that. And it was a safe time for them to do it, because I was questioning myself so utterly that I never protested a single person's anger, or judgements, or condemnations.

Fortunately there was a balance--a social justice--which eased the burden of those many execrations. Just as some people used my vulnerability to show an uncommon cruelty, there were other people who came forward with a kindness that was nothing less than sublime. Certain of these people were already friends. Others were only vague acquaintances. For example, I clearly recall returning to a counselor I had seen several months before. I had gone to see this counselor for several sessions just to try and smooth out some difficulties I was having. The counseling was only mildly helpful, but the fellow had made a good effort it seemed, and we terminated the process partly because of the lack of success, and also because, for me, the problems simply had never seemed that major to begin with. But now I returned to him in a state of complete desperation. I had phoned him, he had made an appointment with me, and I entered his office and presented to him this sorry spectacle of a human being. What ensued was awful. The counselor went into a tirade about how, in our previous sessions, I had always wasted his time, spending too much of each session chatting about insignificant matters. And now he was trying to finish up his dissertation, and how could I expect him to have time for me when he is so busy? Moreover, couldn't I see that I deserved what my wife had done to me? Because Well, I no longer remember the because. I left his office horribly shaken, very betrayed, and not at all sure what I might next do. I got into my car and drove over to a friend's place. As I stepped out of my car, I began vomiting, right there in the driveway. I vomited for a long time, and it did not help. I felt just as bad, spiritually and physically, as when I had begun the purgation. But as I stood there, leaning against the pickup, aware that my friend was not home because his car was gone, a fellow who was his roommate, whom I barely knew, came out of the house and walked up to me. He knew what was going on with me, because of having talked with my friend, but he barely knew me. Still, this fellow walked up to me, speaking very kindly, and literally took me by the arm, led me inside, helped me clean myself up, sat down and talked to me very gently for a few minutes, and then took me upstairs and put me to bed. I fell asleep, and three times that afternoon he came upstairs just to see how I was doing. Thus, the balance was created. I have never forgiven that counselor. But I have never



forgotten this man's kindness. He now lives on the East Coast, we do not keep in touch with each other, and I don't even know exactly where he lives. But if I heard that this fellow were in difficulty, I would do just about anything in my power to help him, without being asked. This is how much his kindness has meant to me.

But why do I bring up this history, when I am trying to grapple with a more recent history? Because although there were crucial difference, something similar happened with the loss of Dacia. There were people who came forth with a great deal of unexpected kindness. And there were people who ... no; this time it was not venting their anger. Instead it was something different. This time certain people used my weakness, my self-doubt, my exhaustion--what with losing sleep, dealing with the legal machine, and also parenting Marion--as an opportunity for circumventing certain proscriptions I have, for many years, set forth in how I go about life.

This proscription involves not wanting to hear, at interminable length, other people indulge in complainings about their dissatisfactions with their love life. It is not that this topic is taboo with me. If a friend is in trouble, then of course I will listen, for many an hour if need be. But I am not willing to let this topic become the only focus of my relationship with someone, i.e., I am not willing to let a friendship be defined as one in which we talk about the other person's romantic difficulties. In years past, I let this happen too many times with friends, and the result was a lengthy period of my life when I felt very unhappy, and very used, by other people who were willing to chew up my soul just so they could enact, for me, the dramas which, albeit miniscule and not infrequently ridiculous, were the only thing which excited them enough to make them feel more alive than a corpse. After years of putting up with this, and after feeling very violated when, going through a romantic crisis myself, too many people used my needs to talk about this issue as a means for turning the conversation back to their own fixation, I had had enough. I fought a grim battle for a couple of years, but finally established new boundaries regarding what I would be willing to do in terms of this need so many people have. In so doing, I not only protected myself, I also exposed myself to something wonderful: I began appreciating, and learning from, the brief reports I would get from friends about how their romantic relationships were succeeding. I came to realize that, when it comes to viewing romantic relationships, I seem to have a very unusual view of this small cosmology. Whereas in loving relationships most people are fixated with the destructive aspects, I scrutinize, and celebrate, the creative forces, and the aesthetic offspring, of such relationships.

I suppose that I was guarding my boundaries less carefully, and thus, many an encroachment was made across my personal borders, during those several dire months before the trial over my parental custody of Dacia. Over and over, people would phone me, ostensibly to give sympathy and personal support, and within two minutes the conversation would be turned back to the person who initially called, and there would begin the unsavory ritual of Baumli listening to someone talk about the love gone wrong game. I gave certain examples, in last year's Aviary, of this having happened. It indeed was gruesome, was it not? One example I did not give involved a phone call from a woman in Canada. She called me about one week before the trial, when the whole frenzy was becoming manic, delirious, insane. She let me know that she was just calling to "lend support." Fine. But, she added quickly, she wanted to talk to me about the man she was wanting to have an affair with, and her husband whom she was planning to divorce. Her husband, in company with their son, was gone at the moment, and, "He'll be back any minute, so let's talk about me until he gets back, and then we'll talk about you." And so it commenced. She talked and complained and whined and waxed self-righteous and waned considerably as a friend, and after forty minutes, her husband came in with their son. The little son, who supposedly misbehaves only because the father can not control him (one of several reasons this woman was going to divorce him), began pestering the mother, wanting her to get off the phone and give him her full attention. So in less than five minutes she got off the phone, and her so-called lending of support had instead turned into a fifty-minute phone call, forty minutes of which involved an already frayed Baumli listening to one more litany of the love gone wrong game. This time, by the end of it, Baumli was feeling so overwhelmed, so used, and most of all, just so goddamned weary, that his poor head was doing a wobbity-wobbity back-and-forth shivering loll as he kept that phone receiver to his ear. Thus began the unraveling of a friendship with this woman. And soon thereafter, Baumli began putting up a fortress against those espousers of the love gone wrong game. He succeeded, and with some lapses (there will always, I am sure, be such), has managed to pretty much keep that species of pathological narcissism at bay.

Getting help from friends, around the topic of Dacia, was difficult during this time. There were those who took the approach, "Don't worry. It's just a phase, and someday she'll come back to you." Well, it wasn't (and isn't) just a phase. It is a young adult dealing with the horror of being a little girl who was abandoned, and continued to be abandoned over and

over, by her biological mother. It involved this little girl, deep inside a young adult, doing everything necessary to get to go back to live with her mother, in the desperate hope that the huge void might somehow be filled. And who knows? Perhaps, at this age in her life, and if her mother has matured to any degree, then perhaps that void can be filled a bit. But there will remain a good deal of animosity in Dacia toward me as long as she continues to deny the hurt--even the horror--she experienced because of her mother's repeated abandonments.

Even were it the case that Dacia's animosity was just a phase, being told this in no way provided comfort. I was grieving for what I had lost, and was continuing to lose in the present; no amount of reassuring about the future was going to change the past or the present.

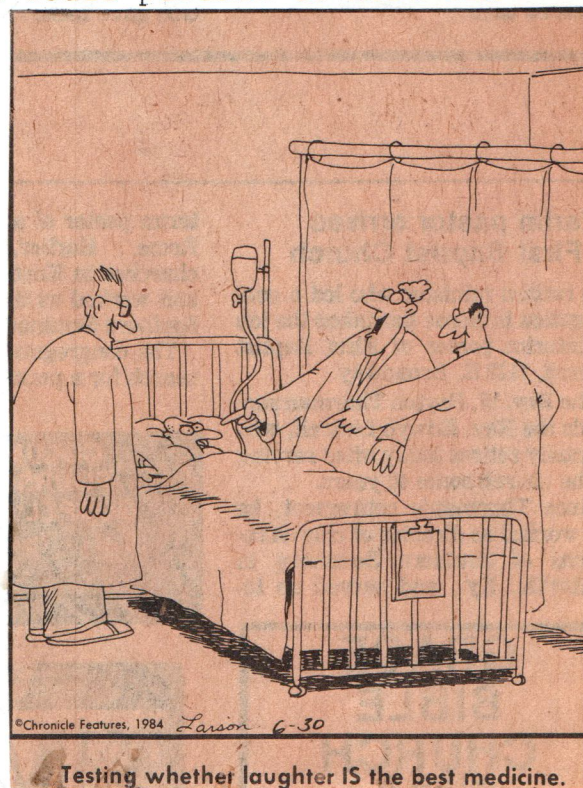
There were other people whom I believe wanted to give comfort, but they seemed to be encumbered by what I have come to call the "empathy affliction" in their dealings with other people. By this, I mean that some people simply can not give sympathy for someone else's pain unless they themselves have experienced the very same thing. In other words, they can not extend sympathy unless they also feel empathy. Unfortunately, this extension of sympathy, via empathy, often takes the form of, "Yes, I'm really sorry about all this. I know exactly what you're going through because I went through the same thing when" And then ... another wearying ritual.

But fortunately, just as a balancing beneficence was present when I was grieving during the first month of my divorce, so also there was a beautiful balance with how friends came forth to extend help over the loss of Dacia. Again there were people whom I scarcely knew who extended an unbelievable amount in the way of personal support, some at great emotional expense to themselves, I am sure. Probably the most support I received was from my old friends in Columbia, and also from two people I have never actually met, but with whom I have corresponded for a very long time. A well-meaning preacher even held a prayer for me at his church. Being a devout atheist, I placed no faith in his ritual, but I certainly appreciated the generosity of the gesture. Members of my extended family, some of whom scarcely know the Baumli, went out of their way to express concern and give aid. Other people did me the kindness of just letting me talk. Other people did me the graceful, and perceptive, favor of, at crucial times, insisting that I put aside my trial preparations and instead do something relaxing or playful. Abbe was very much a friend. And so it went--my own crisis gave me a glimpse into the souls of many people I know. In some I discerned unbelievable selfishness, and subsequently altered my relationships with them accordingly. In other people I observed unexpected generosity and resourcefulness, and I shall never forget the gifts they bestowed.

As for Dacia herself--just writing all this makes me all the more acutely aware of how little I know of her. She is a shadow of the person she used to be. Is she becoming a person one would (or should) want to be? I do not know. Ergo, taciturnitas stulto homini, pro sapientia est.

4. Should I give news of Abbe, my dear friend and wife? I did say, did I not, that in my life the major dramas are left unreported herein. So, being a perfect gentleman, I must eschew most topics which would pertain to Abbe and myself. I can, however, say a few things about Abbe and her life. She does the same juggling act I do--trying to balance work and parenting. She is more likely than me to feel guilty about not spending as much time as she believes Marion needs, while I am more likely than she is to experience guilt over the belief that I am not being a good enough parent when I am with him. At work, Abbe continues to put in too many hours, but she loves her work, given that she does have an excellent support staff, and the administration where she works is excellent. She does not have to worry about billing, malpractice insurance, scheduling patients, or any of that. Rather, the administrative staff takes care of such duties, and all she has to do is go in and put in many hours being a physician.

Being a more tolerant and flexible person than is the Baumli, Abbe feels considerable consternation about our plans for leaving this area. There are many people, especially her very old patients, who depend on her not only as a doctor but also, in many ways, for a kind of emotional boost. It is going to be very difficult for Abbe to leave these people. Plus there is the fact that Abbe does work at an excellent health care facility, doing the kind of work she has always wanted to do, and experiencing few difficulties outside the fact that



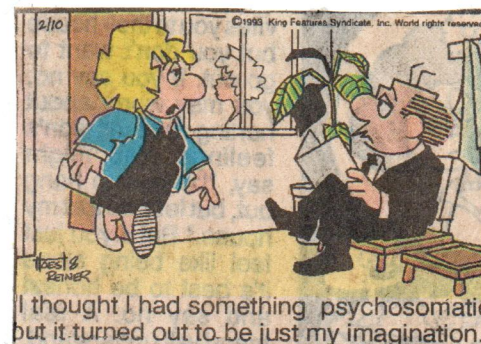
Testing whether laughter IS the best medicine.

she not infrequently puts in too many hours of work. We both are very aware that when Abbe and I depart for other pastures, Abbe's work situation likely will not be as appealing.



Still, when I sold my farm to follow Abbe to Southern Illinois, so she could here discharge her obligation to the National Health Service Corps, she promised that if I wanted to leave after she had discharged that duty, then she would come with me. So we have begun looking, scouting out Kansas City primarily, and St. Louis somewhat.

While wherever Abbe next works will likely not be as appealing in terms of the work facility itself, likely it will have the boon of not being so demanding of her. This area really is terribly underserved medically, which is why it qualifies for Abbe doing her payback work for NHSC. Plus, Abbe is an excellent doctor--a fine clinician, and also very giving toward her patients. Hence, they flock to her. Some of them, of a hypochondriacal bent, tend to flock a bit too



often, but Abbe is getting better at dealing with such people. She is more adept at spotting drug seekers, more assertive about giving people what they need--and a little more, but not giving so much that they can presume the right to take up an hour of her time telling her about their every problem. Of the many aspects of her work, Abbe likes delivering babies the most. This part of her job is the most stressful for her, and for us as a family, given the odd and unpredictable hours. But I am glad Abbe continues with this role, and has not given it up as many family practice specialists eventually do. I am glad partly because I know Abbe is providing a sorely needed service, but to be honest, I am mainly glad simply because I witness how it gives Abbe so much in the way of (for want of a better phrase) spiritual strength.

The two of us continue as partners. We remain good friends. We are fortunate in that after all these years since ... uh, you know, we still are in love. And we both manage to occasionally find time for each other amidst the weary haze of being overworked parents.

5. As long as I am on the topic of family members, should I say something about our two cats? Star-I-Are remains the skittish, but very affectionate, hunter who prowls the yard. She does us the favor of catching mice and moles, but also causes consternation because she likes to torture birds, mice, and baby rabbits. Buttercup, since being neutered, has grown fatter and lazier. He lies on the porch, or on a chair in the house, virtually all the time, and eats entirely too much. We fill his bowl with Purina Cat Chow, and the moment it runs out, even if he has just eaten several ounces, he begins clamoring that we fill it again. The result is that, having eaten so much, he defecates nearly as much. Now our yard is spotted with huge piles of the obese Buttercup's shit, the reddish-brown mounds very visible all over the yard when the grass has just been cut (and too invisible when the grass is high; more than once I have carried an odor with me into the house, wondering where in all hell it could be coming from, only to later--too late--finally lift a shoe for inspection).

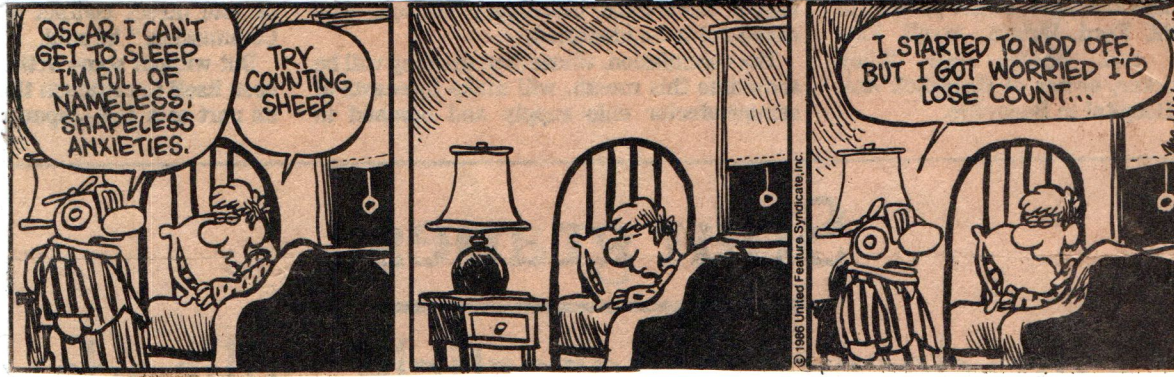
Both cats remain affectionate, remarkably tolerant of Marion, and generally remain continent while in the house. All in all, we coexist peacefully.

6. During 1992, another volume of my Phenomenology of Pseudo-Sentient Aeschatology was finished. This volume was shorter, tidier, perhaps less abstract than the ones which preceded it. In some ways, it might even be said that in this book I was more immersed in psychology than in philosophy.

This work will yet take many years to complete. In a way, I hope I will never complete it, because the idea of going back through what now amounts to nearly four million words (yes; the work is already this long), and polishing it is very oppressive. But I suppose I will finish it one day, and then go back to polish. Actually, I have gone back to some sections already and have polished them up, and I am relieved to discover that this work needs virtually no correcting at all. The first draft seems to be quite finished in and of itself.

So ... consider this work to be in process for many more years to come. Having said this much, I believe I shall make no mention of it in future editions of The Aviary, except to one day let you know when (if ever?) it is at last completed.

7. And what has happened with the poor Baumli's insomnia? Many a page has been devoted to this difficulty in past issues of The Aviary. As you know, there was a period of time several years ago when I went through a very acute phase of insomnia that lasted several years. During this period, I rarely got more than four hours of sleep per night. Years of



seeing counselors for the problem had proved futile, but finally I discovered the emotional cause of the problem, and was able to discern a solution. An insomnia of a different sort has set in since that fateful day--July 27, 1991--when Dacia did not return from Florida. I still continue to wake up early, and I begin thinking about Dacia, the court trial, and such. Now I consider 6 hours of sleep to be about average, and 6½ hours of sleep to be good. I suppose this isn't so very bad, but it isn't as much as I need. But at present I have not found a solution for it.

8. I suppose that 1992, really, was not such a bad year for health in terms of this mysterious neurological disease I have (which I shall continue to refer to as multiple sclerosis, partly out of habit, mainly because I really do believe that this is what I have). The main health problems were caused by taking those very toxic drugs prescribed by a speculating neurologist.

But as for any serious exacerbations or setbacks, there were none. The usual rhythm of having good days, bad days, and longer cycles of ups and downs, continues pretty much as it has before.

Further deterioration of the 3rd and 6th cranial nerves has taken place, causing more difficulty with the remaining eyesight in my right eye. The left eye, now, has been "retired" for more than a decade. But overall the progression is slow, and for this I am grateful.

The problems with the 8th cranial nerve definitely speeded up during the trauma over Dacia in 1991, and the damage then incurred remains. That damage worsened what already was the most difficult symptom I experience with multiple sclerosis--namely, hyperacusis (also spelled "hypercousis"). The sheathing of the nerve has been damaged, but the nerve is intact. Hence, neural conduction is faster and less controlled than in a healthy ear, and the result is that I hear things much more loudly than do most people. There is a roar of sound about my ears all the time. I hear more acutely, but I do not thereby hear more accurately or more easily. The fact is, the ticking of a clock in a room, or the bubbling of a pump in a small aquarium, can seem so loud as to cause normal sounds to become a buzzing confusion--lost in the midst of this interfering noise. The symptoms are simple--pain in the ears most of the time caused by the damaged nerves themselves, and painful noises assaulting the ears.

My approach, mainly, is to try avoiding sounds. Solitude, far away from traffic and farm machinery, I love. Small noises which other people do not mind, scarcely even seem to notice, such as a radio on while conversing, are things I have to avoid. And midst it all, there is a depressing fear. Most people with MS who have hyperacusis carry the problem for several years, during which it progressively becomes more acute. And then, usually rather quickly, the nerve can not sustain any more damage from the disease process, and just as the myelin sheathing succumbed before, now the nerve succumbs, and deafness is the result. This I do fear. I would suffer more from the loss of hearing than from the loss of sight, because then I would be deprived of all that wonderful music. Whereas with the loss of sight, one can still hear literature being read, and continue to compose literature. But I am not a composer of music; I am only an appreciator (and sometimes a player). To lose the means for appreciating music, truly, this is one of the most sad of mortal lessons I think I would ever endure.



"What have I got?"

I do what I can to control this disease. I remain on the Modified Swank-MacDougall diet. It is a very difficult diet to stay on, but I suppose it is worth it. I consume fewer than 15 grams of saturated fat a day. I eat no sugar, no grains with gluten, etc. In other words, it has been about 15 years since I have had ice cream, fudge, pizza, a smoked sausage, a candy bar, or even a piece of bread. All very difficult. This last year I even modified my diet further--I now eat no refined fructose at all.

There is one mystery, or question, in this disease, and my dietary approach, which I very much wish doctors would take more seriously. This issue was what occasioned my halting the intake of refined fructose in my diet. I refer to a strange, but very predictable, consequence of eating sugar or refined fructose. If I do eat either (always only by accident now), within minutes I begin experiencing a strong paresthesia on my face, especially about my eyes. My hyperacusis becomes much worse, and I feel very tired and out of sorts for as long as 2-4 hours. I realize that the latter symptom would suggest hypoglycemia, and I have no doubt but that to some extent I am hypoglycemic. But for many years I have been very curious as to why ingesting Carbon-12 sugars, or refined fructose, causes this predictable and sometimes acute paresthesia, and increased symptomology in the hyperacusis. I have long believed that the predictability of this symptomology means that there are factors to this disease I have, and perhaps to multiple sclerosis itself, which simply are not understood, and are not being sufficiently considered. Is it possible that such sugars somehow worsen the effects of MS? If so, wouldn't it be potentially valuable to study and come to understand how this happens? Might such a study uncover more in the way of what can be done to lessen, or halt, or even remedy the progression of MS? What is so frustrating about this issue with sugar is that I am absolutely convinced of the effect it has. There is no doubting that sugar is a culprit in this, because there have been several times when I would begin experiencing the symptoms, and this provided the impetus for my exploring more carefully what I had just eaten, whereupon I would find out that indeed, contrary to what I had been told, this food really did have sugar in it. So you see, I am sure of something. But when I try to bring this up to doctors, it is obvious that they are not impressed. Some are willing to opine that they simply do not know how to explain this. Others look at me sternly, as though I am somehow encroaching on their domain by thus trying to pose a medical hypothesis. Others--most--are merely flippant. They say something like, "Well, you eat sugar and you say it makes you feel a certain way. That's all it is. You feel a certain way." And thus they dismiss it--and me. But when the issue here is my mortality, and a premature physical debility accompanying this inevitably terminal mortality, I am not content with being dismissed. I continue to question, and hope that one day I might discover some answers as to why certain sugars can so predictably worsen certain aspects of my symptomology.

In terms of health, there was one very good thing that happened in 1992. I finally obtained glasses--one pair for reading, the other for distance--which are a workable prescription. I took the prescription given me by the neuro-ophthamologist in St. Louis, and all the other many prescriptions I had been given over the last ten years, to an optometrist. I explained to her my difficulties, the fact that I see double with one eye, and the fact that so many prescriptions that would be given me would seem to work at first, but then, within a day, would be worse for me than my old--obviously inadequate--prescription. I asked her to test me and see if the most recent prescription seemed to be right. She did, and yes, it did seem to be right ... or, almost so. I asked her then to let me come in several times over the next two months so she could test me against the last prescription she would have ordered, and see if she could come up with consistent results. Or, if lacking that, then come up with a reasonable average of the test results. She agreed to do this, charging me only twenty dollars more than her usual charge for a single exam. As it



"His doctor told him to stay away from anything fatty."



turned out, my acuity--and resulting prescription--did vary somewhat with each visit. But after about three visits, she was able to narrow down the range of variance, and come up with results that were fairly consistent, and which in the end, could be safely averaged. Now I see vastly better, and the problem with double vision in one eye, although continuing, is not as severe as it once was. When my eyesight is very weary, from much reading or from riding in a vehicle, then the double vision in one eye comes back. But except for this, I see quite well with the one eye. The problems with fatigue in the eye are still present, but my God! When the eye is rested, I can see more or less properly again! Such a blessing!

9. It remains the case that the major irritation in my life is dealing with the telephone--its many interruptions, and the general inconsiderateness of those who ring me up with so many unnecessary, and seemingly unending, messages which to their minds simply must be hurried along to me by phone instead of sent me by letter. No number of requests to others, and no amount of cavailing even in the pages of the Aviary, seem to very much change the situation. People still call, without asking if it is a convenient time for me to be taking their call, and usually presuming the right to talk as long as they wish, taking no note whatsoever of my own time constraints and busy work schedule. Last year, the absurd scenario even occurred when a woman, having just finished reading my latest edition of The Aviary, promptly phoned me to commiserate with me, and to assure me that she feels exactly the same way, over the problem of people phoning so much. Truly, I am not exaggerating. She had just finished reading the last word of The Aviary and immediately dialed the phone. The length of the phone conversation: a full fifty minutes.

In September the situation with the phone suddenly became much worse than before. Our unlisted phone number got out. An errant

friend of mine in the men's movement gave my number to a couple of people, and phone calls began coming in from strangers, old colleagues, etc. At the same time, our phone number was published in one of the local publications of an organization Abbe works for. Suddenly, several patients began calling Abbe on our home line instead of using her professional line. We were being overwhelmed by phone calls. We considered changing our phone number, but first, we decided to try an answering machine to screen calls.

The message I put on the machine was, I thought, so very clever. I wrote it out before recording it, and it went as follows: "You have reached the residence of Francis Baumli and Abbe Sudvarg. Keep in mind that Abbe is a busy parent and a busy physician. She therefore may not be able to get back to you right away. As for Francis Baumli, he is a busy parent, a very busy scholar, and very much a recluse. He therefore does not always return personal calls, although he will always show you the courtesy of replying to your message, likely with a letter. He does, however, return business calls as quickly as his busy schedule allows. If you are one of Baumli's enemies, you may wonder if he is using this machine to screen his calls. If you are one of Baumli's friends, you know that he is. This machine takes messages of up to three minutes in length, but do feel free to talk as long as you like."

The machine proved to be a handicap. It took messages which, too often,



"No, Thursday's out. How about never—is never good for you?"



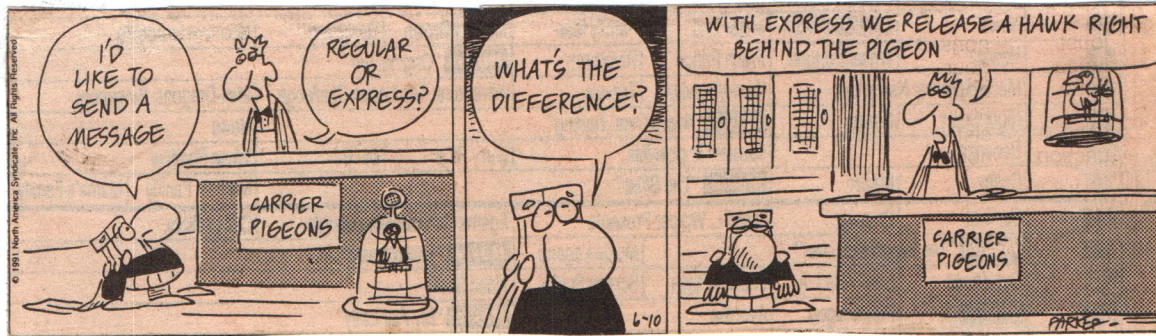
had to be returned. Doing so cost too much time and money. Moreover, the machine kept malfunctioning, and finally I had to return it. Only after I had returned it did I realize how gawdawfully hostile that supposedly clever message was.

Over the next few weeks, I more or less slowed the influx of unwanted calls by being very terse, direct, and sometimes loud with rude, unwanted callers. By the end of the year, in fact, the number of phone calls was more or less back to the (intolerable) level it had been before our unlisted number had gotten out.

I do continue to get a bit better at dealing with the problem. I am direct with people. I am very courteous.

I try to let people know exactly what my needs are when they phone. I not infrequently ask people why they bothered phoning me with this piece of information when a letter would have sufficed, and would have been cheaper. If people phone at what is an inconvenient time for me, I always (with a few exceptions, e.g., if it is an emergency, or if they are calling from as far away as Europe) let them know that I simply can not talk right now.

So ... if you are one of my friends, don't feel paranoid wondering if you are one of the culprits who plague me with unwanted phone calls. The fact is, most of my friends are very considerate about this matter, and I am always direct with my friends about the issue. Hence, there are no unspoken resentments that anyone need worry about. Still, there are all those many other phone calls which I have to respond to, even if the response involves nothing more than telling the person that now is not a good time for me to talk. A plague, it is, and truly there are times I consider getting rid of the thing altogether. But then, I would have to deal with the many inconveniences--which I readily acknowledge--of not having a phone. So the ambivalence continues.



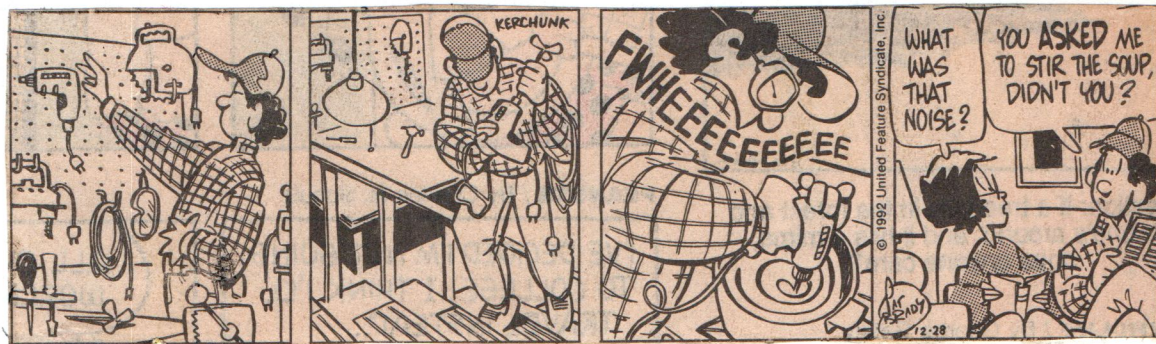
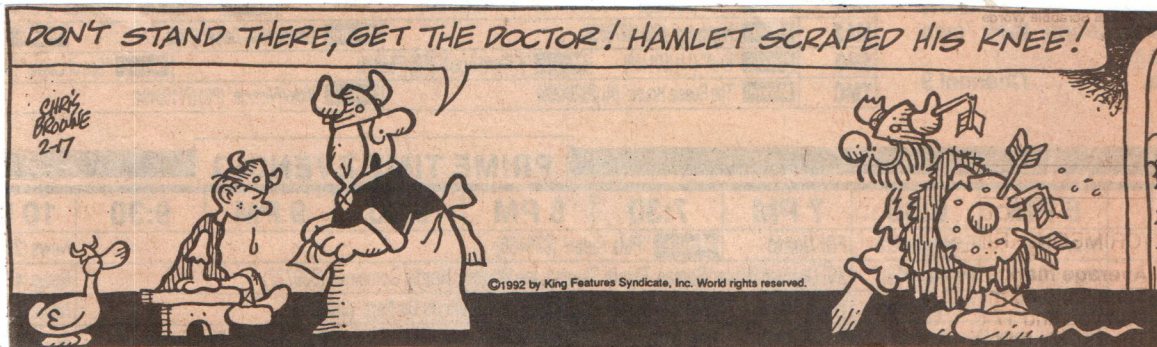
10. Again, this year, several people have brought to my attention a matter which really does not interest me at all. Namely, their perception that I am, as they put it, a "real man."

These people assure me that this trait is rare, and go on to declare that I evince the characteristics pertinent to such a species much more copiously than do most members of this species. I ask these people how this is possible,

i.e., how it can occur that I am so archetypically the real man, and yet so unaware of it. They tell me that this is part of the personality, that the real man is so thoroughly who he is that he never really needs to reflect upon the matter.

I ask these people for examples of my acting like a real man. They give many, only one of which I now remember: this being that Baumli carries not one but two Swiss Army Knives. A small one for easy access and small jobs, and a big Wenger Handyman model for the many demanding jobs which he has to face as he goes about his daily, rigorous life. Why are my Swiss Army Knives the Wenger brand instead of the Victorinox? Both are worthy tools, and the Victorinox is certainly not to be disparaged. In fact, the Victorinox has the two advantages of being slightly longer, and a bit slimmer, than the Wenger. But the Wenger's springs virtually never break; the springs of the Victorinox brand, e.g., in the scissors tool, do break fairly often. And the Wenger is a slightly stronger knife than the Victorinox. Hence, I prefer it.

As for other things which might pertain to the real man personality: The group of men who were here two years ago to observe me came again in early 1992. They stayed for more than a week, taking notes as they followed me about. Their presence was a bit distracting at times, although they were courteous



enough that they never were actually intrusive. They continue to claim that they are gathering material for a biography, although I fail to understand why they would want to write such a thing about me. After this last visit, they even sent me a copy of their typed notes, and the truth is, I do not at all understand how they could turn their notes into a prosaic biography. They had nothing more than a list of traits which supposedly describe the real man. The list they drew up, from having been with me those several days, was several hundred pages long, and included many thousand entries. It would bore me to spend time going through the list, culling out ones which I find especially interesting, so here, opening the box of pages at random, I now list the four traits which begin page 121:

--Real men do not drink "lite" beer. If a real man wants a beer, he has a real one. He would rather drink one beer with flavor than six that taste like mare piss.

--Real men don't "work out." They work. Hard.

--The real man loves women, but he will not put them on a pedestal, and as for those feminists who have tried to erect, within our country, a vaginocracy, he considers them a vermin not worthy of his sputum.

--The real man does not have contempt for males who are testicularly handicapped. He merely ignores them.

I confess that I am rather impressed by the prose of whoever wrote out that third trait. As for whether it describes my personality, well ... but I really should not waste time going into the matter. I have more important things to write about herein, and meanwhile I've got to get back to work on my tractor.

11. The full-page ad to the right (I reduced it in size on the copier) came from the February 1970 issue of Playboy. The fact that this ad very obviously would not work today, i.e., would have no appeal, attests to the fact that our national consciousness is somewhat raised on the issue of smoking. But it isn't yet raised enough.

I have become even more intolerant. Almost a tyrant about the matter. When I am in a public restaurant, or even walking through a public building, and I see someone light up a cigarette, I often fix them with a glare that can melt ice at fifty yards. Abbe opines that I have become too intolerant--that my angry looks cause these people to squirm. She reminds me that it is an addiction, a terrible one for most people, and most of them would stop smoking immediately if they could. Well; maybe I am being unkind, but I haven't yet chosen to eschew the glare for a compassionate gaze. When Abbe remonstrates with me, telling me that my glaring at a person might be the very thing that just ruined their entire day, I tell her that, quite the contrary, my angry stare might be the very thing which will cause this person to quit smoking, and in twenty years that very person might still remember my glare as a fortuitous gesture of benevolence which finally gave the added impetus to stop smoking.

There is, I readily concede, a certain self-righteousness in my attitude. I chewed when I was about 16 years old, for several months. I was getting up to go to work at about four in the morning, and a hit of Red Man was like a blast of speed. In thirty seconds my heart was pumping hard, my eyes were



Blow in her face and she'll follow you anywhere.

Hit her with tangy Tipalet Cherry. Or rich, grape-y Tipalet Burgundy. Or luscious Tipalet Blueberry. It's Wild! Tipalet. It's new. Different. Delicious in taste and in aroma. A puff in her direction and she'll follow you, anywhere. Oh yes... you get smoking satisfaction without inhaling smoke.

TIPALET Cherry	TIPALET Burgundy	TIPALET Blueberry	TIPALET Menthol
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Smokers of America, do yourself a flavor. Make your next cigarette a **Tipalet.**

New from Muriel. About 5 for 25¢.

wide open, and I was functioning. Later, when I was a sophomore in college, I smoked twenty cigars a day. And I inhaled. They were William Penn "Perfectoes," and I loved them. Foul, they were--to the noses of others, but they tasted sweet. I smoked each one about a third of the way down, occasionally half-way down. They began tasting very bad by the time you got half-way down, so I usually stopped before getting nearly that far. So it would actually be accurate to say that I probably smoked a total of about six or seven cigar-lengths per day.

But I stopped. I went cold-turkey on each habit. So don't tell me that quitting isn't possible.

"But," people often reply, "you obviously weren't an addict!"

How do we know that I wasn't an addict? Maybe I was just as much addicted as anyone else, but I had sense enough to put sense above addiction.

Still, suppose it really is the case that I wasn't an addict. It nevertheless remains the case that for over fifteen years now I have been on this very rigorous, unpleasant, and demanding Modified Swank-MacDougall Diet. For fifteen years I have gone to family gatherings and have walked past all those

homemade chicken pies and pots of baked beans and potato salads and barbecued ribs without once, ever, breaking my diet. At these family gatherings



it is customary to put all the food out, and array the desserts on the last table. Let me tell you something: those farm wives in my extended family can prove their mettle when it comes to baking. I might pick up a homemade cherry pie and hold it to my nose, and then put it down. Or a homemade blackberry pie. (And I am talking about real blackberries, the kind that are not much bigger than a pea, not those hybrid blackberries that are more like a black raspberry.) There might be a dozen varieties of chocolate cakes. Several pans of brownies. Several containers of chocolate chip cookies. Homemade sourcream cookies with enough saturated fat in them to harden your arteries just from looking. All these I look at, sometimes sniff, and then move on. And you want to talk to me about addictions? I tell you, at one time, I would have gone through a line like that and piled full a plate of baked beans, potato salad, and two or three kinds of meat. And then, from the dessert table, I would have, over the course of three or four hours, as many as two dozen pieces of chocolate cake, half a dozen pieces of pie, several dozen cookies, and then would have gone home, without the aid of even a wheelbarrow, and half an hour later wished that I had had the endurance (or capacity) to eat more. Not infrequently, when I went to town, my first stop would be at the grocery store where I would buy the largest available bag of M&Ms--I believe it was a two-pound bag. The rest of the day, I would nibble, and before I headed home, that bag would be gone. And if there ever was a Pepsi addict, it was me. Do you remember those six-packs of quart bottles they used to sell of Pepsi? (See how awkward my prose becomes, when I start remembering my former addictions? If this does not attest to the existence of a previous pathology, I don't know what would.) Not infrequently, I finished off one of those six-packs per day. That is one and one-half gallons of Pepsi. Every night, before taking up my writing, I would drink at least one, and then work my way through another one or two over the next several hours of writing. At buffets I was awesome. At outdoor barbecues I was obscene. At chili parties I was stupendous. My idea of breakfast on a lazy Sunday morning often was three large smoked sausages, slit in half and fried, then eaten on bread with mayonnaise. My idea of a quick supper, when I was headed for a music gig, was to stop at a grocery, buy two quarts of chocolate milk, a large bag of chocolate cookies, and one of those vacuum-packed bags of Vienna Sausages. I would place it in the seat beside me, and munch it all down on my way to the job. My idea of a big celebration on a Saturday night was to go out for pizza, eat a large one by myself, and then go by Baskin-Robbins and have their huge, extra-deluxe sundae which consisted of five scoops of ice-cream, your choice of flavors, with five different toppings--your choice, with nuts and whipped cream on top. My idea of an afternoon snack might be to mix up a double-batch of peanut butter cookies and eat half the raw dough, which to me tasted better than the baked cookies.

But when, after several months of study, I was convinced that the diet I now am on would indeed help me drastically in dealing with this multiple sclerosis I have, I went cold-turkey on all those things. It takes about one year for the diet to start helping. Those are a lot of opportunities for a

person to be at a big family gathering, or be in a candy shop, and think to oneself that well hell, life is short, I've been on this diet several months now and it hasn't helped at all, so ... life doesn't have enough pleasures as it is, and this disease is going to kill me someday whether I'm on this diet or not, and the scientific studies had a few holes in them anyway, and that coconut-chocolate cheesecake isn't going to even exist in another five minutes, so why not just....

I confess that for a while there I did slip. I thought that, well, I'll stay on the diet except for two hours a week. Those two hours were a very busy two hours, I assure you. But the two hours became one day. Then the day led to other lapses, and pretty soon I wasn't on the diet at all. I wallowed about in self-pity for a few months, took careful stock of who I am and what I wanted out of life, and again I went cold-turkey, and I stayed that way. Over fifteen years. So if you want to talk to an addict, come talk to me. But don't come whining to me about how hard it is, because I'll get in your face. The bottom line, for me, is that if I can go without all those wonderful foods, then I can--and will--expect you to do without your cancer sticks.

I am fully aware, of course, that the diet I went on, aside from helping me cope with MS, probably saved me from an early death from a heart attack. I am also fully aware that people who stop smoking are saving themselves from a plethora of health risks.

Still, not every smoker I know complains about wanting to quit. Some love the habit, and say they have no intention of stopping. I suppose I can't complain too much about such people, as long as they keep the stuff away from me. I just want them to do me a couple of favors. One is: Don't say things to me like, "Listen, I love smoking, and it's the best thing I do, so don't ask me to stop." I don't want to hear these kinds of statements unless the person can also assure me that he or she is very good at dying, because dying from emphysema or lung cancer usually takes a long time--and all of this time is painful, terrifying, unnecessary. Also, I ask of this person that when they are finally succumbing to their illness, that they keep in mind all that flippant bragging they did, and now that their time has come--or, is slowly but inexorably on its cruel way--they kindly avoid pestering society with the expense of their self-inflicted, albeit protracted, suicide, and instead, crawl off to a quiet spot where they can make a great noise as they die in private.

Does it seem that Baumli is full of venom? I tell you, I am becoming weary of having to stay away from certain public places just to avoid getting "slimed" by the cigarette smoke. I am now aware that if I go to a party, most people require that any smoking be done outside. This means that while the air inside the house is relatively uncontaminated, one has to walk a gauntlet of foul toxins going in to the house, and it is impossible to step outside for fresh air--or, open a window to allow fresh air in. I appreciate it when people tell me that they are stepping outside to have a smoke, but they fail to realize that when they come back inside, the odor on their clothes is so strong that it can make me break out in hives. I am tired of becoming sick when I travel because I am exposed to so much cigarette smoke. I tire of having to launder all my clothes when I return from traveling, even those which were never removed from my suitcase, given that they are so impregnated with the cigarette smoke that one can not avoid when traveling.

Thus I bitch, and it might seem that I am primarily upset about cigarette smoking because of how it makes me uncomfortable. But to be honest, this isn't quite the case. The main thing which upsets me is the fact that people I know and love are setting themselves up for a protracted, horrible death. My God! To slowly die because your diseased, miserable, hardened lungs can not suck in enough oxygen. For your poor heart to beat itself to death because it is desperately trying to pump more blood through a body--more oxygen through a body--that can not, and is not going to, get enough. I tell you, there is enough suffering in this world, and there is no excuse for thus inflicting more of it on yourself and on others.

What can I do about this social pathology? Probably not very much. I can bitch about it in the pages of this Aviary. Does this help? I can nag my friends. That doesn't seem to help. I can ask government officials to step in with certain barriers to smoking. No one is going to ban smoking, but at the very least I can ask that cigarettes and tobacco not be advertised, subsidized, or romanticized. Making these big changes would drastically reduce the consumption of tobacco, but of course, it isn't going to happen. So I bitch about it. And in small ways, I practice what I have come to call my "anti-tobacco terrorism." For example, people lax enough to leave an opened pack of cigarettes lying about where I can have a few private moments with it, will likely return to pick up the pack, not realizing that a few of the cigarettes have been removed and destroyed, and the others perhaps now contaminated by an unpleasant-smelling foreign substance. When I go to the grocery store, I make it a point to pick up a couple of packs of cigarettes. As I do my shopping, I surreptitiously crush and knead these two packages until I am quite sure that their contents are nothing more than confetti and dust. I then straighten the packages out carefully, and put them back as I leave

the store.

Later, during one of those moments when life is dull, I entertain the following fantasy: A person, in a huge hurry, and also desperate for a cigarette, is driving by this store. The appointment is an important one, but yes, for a cigarette, it won't hurt to be a couple of minutes late. The car is parked, the person rushes inside, grabs a pack of cigarettes, not noticing that its box isn't quite as smooth as the others, and hurries through the checkout lane. There is then the quick rush to the car, and the adept process of starting the car, backing it out, and heading it into traffic, while at the very same time tearing off the top of the cigarette pack, and giving it that hard shake necessary for bringing two or three of them up an inch or so from the pack so one can be plucked. But instead of a cigarette poking its way up for this eager addict, a small cloud of crushed debris spills all over the person's clothes.

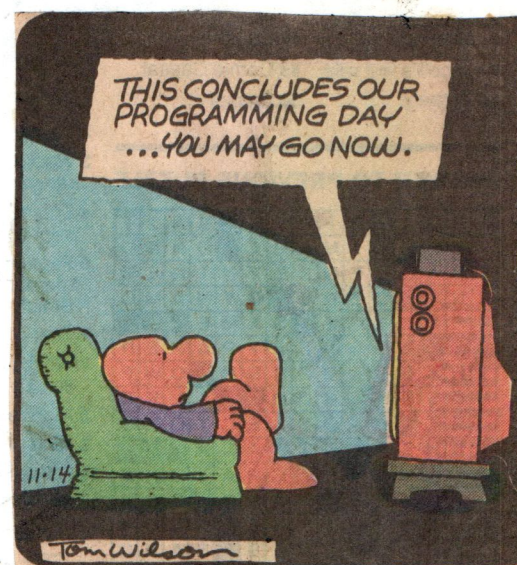
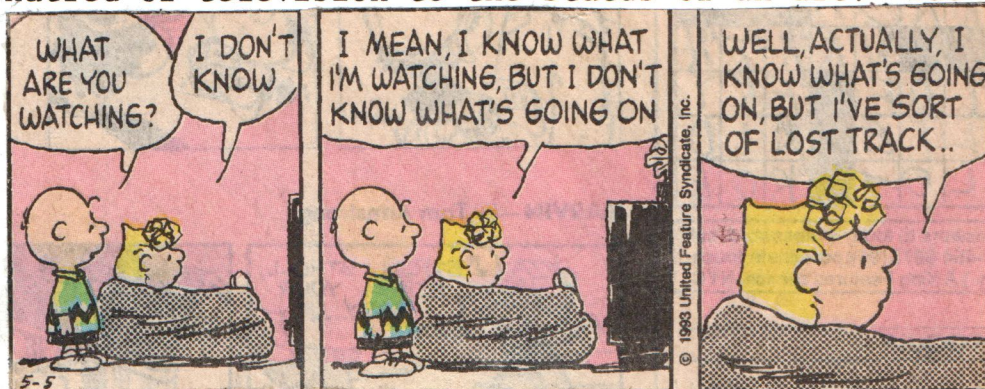
This fantasy affords me much cruel delight. Which suggests, I suppose, that maybe my hatred of cigarette smoking is less altruistic than I like to pretend.

12. After having spent so many years at hating the television media, I have come to a somewhat profound realization.

Namely, there are other media forms which I have not hated so much which I now must admit are just as bad, and in some ways worse. Over the last few years I have elevated my hatred of television to the status of an art. But it also is the case that over the last several years I have spent a good deal of time in the household of a family which chooses to always--and I mean always, with one in every room!--have a radio on. What do they listen to? No. It is not music. They listen to radio talk shows. These talk shows occasionally feature special guests, but for the most part, they utilize "call-in" people. Hour after hour, garrulous lint-brains call in to give their confident opinions to an even more garrulous, and usually less intelligent, talk-show host whose only qualifications for the job are a shallow mind, a loud voice, and an ability to evince such stupidity that potential call-in guests are not shy about voicing their opinions.

Yes; I have been unwillingly exposed to many hours of these radio shows, and my penchant for honesty forces me to admit it: The worst television is not as bad as the worst radio. Television depicts more overt violence, and hence is probably more dangerous in terms of its effects upon viewers. But even the worst of it, when it is a matter of intelligence, or simple imaginative quality, is not as bad as those call-in radio shows. When I began to suspect this comparison, I asked some friends who are avid TV viewers to tell me what are the worst of the TV shows. I then went out of my way to view about five minutes' worth of each of these shows. With the exception of one which was called "The Dating Game," I have forgotten the titles of them all. They were bad. Terrible.

And I realized that there is a quality other than the presence of violence which makes them worse than radio--namely, when a television is turned on, it is more difficult to ignore it than it is to ignore a radio. So yes; perhaps television is more dangerous than the worst of radio, but the worst of radio commits more in the way of intellectual and spiritual violence. I even have to concede that were one to ignore the call-in radio shows, and focus on the music only, the radio fare is, overall, as bad as television. Of course there are good radio stations, but there are excellent television programs too. But when one begins comparing the merits of rap music, heavy metal, and such, to the worst programming on television, even here I have to admit that



radio is probably no better, and in some ways is perhaps worse.

So what shall my new approach be to both radio and television? I suppose I shall not hate television any the less. But perhaps I should, out of fairness, begin hating radio the more.

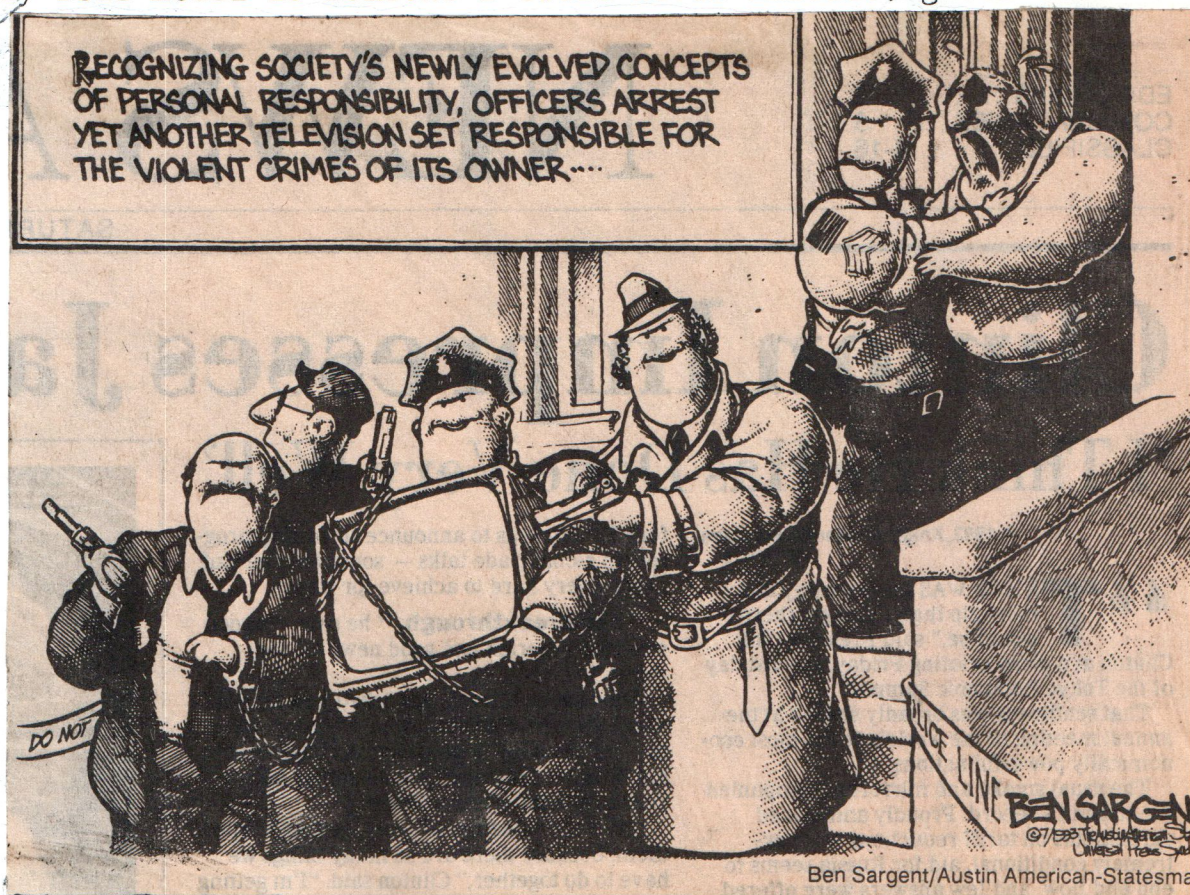
I also should take stock of one rule in this house. Namely, televisions are banned from the premises. Should radios also be banned? I am not willing to do this. Should I therefore be more tolerant of televisions? Maybe.

Actually there are times we do consider getting a television, to use as a VCR monitor. Sometimes we are almost ready to make the decision to get one, but then it seems that we always pull back, aware of how addictive the things can become, aware of how little time we have for other things, and also, aware of how this would likely cause people who come here to think that they would have a right to vegetate in front of a television while here.

This new realization has also caused me to reconsider issues of fairness with regard to my work as an artist. I have written a good deal of poetry and prose. I once did a radio show, and have helped out with many radio shows that other people do. Perhaps, out of fairness, I should try writing something for TV. Come to think of it, I would probably have a better chance of having my writing accepted for television than I do for the dwindling book market. But the problem is, I really don't know anything about writing for video, and am not sure how I could find out. I simply could not bear to watch enough TV to learn how. And there is no one I could talk to in order to learn how. The scriptwriters for television whom I do know are but very casual acquaintances who live a far distance away. Some years ago I did know a fellow who was working hard at writing what he called screenplays for television. I did read some of his screenplays, but they interested me not at all, and in fact seemed to be of very poor quality. They all were several years old however, because he would not show me anything he had written since he had met me. We met because he was living with a friend whom I visited frequently, and for some reason, he absolutely would not let me see a single thing he had written since the first day we met. Only after some months did I find out why. I cornered my friend, and she explained it to me, and in fact was surprised that I had not figured it out for myself. She pointed out that when the three of us were together, and I would say anything clever, he would excuse himself, retire to an adjoining room, and there, surreptitiously, write down whatever clever thing I had said so he could later use it in one of his screenplays. (Needless to say, when in my conversational presence, he spent a great deal of his time in an adjoining room.) This was why he had not wanted me to see any of his more recent work; he did not want me to discover that he had been stealing my best lines. (This would partly explain why the fellow never could sell anything. Any screenplay replete with my filched witticisms would, by implication, be far too subtle for the average TV viewer.) Some time later this scriptwriter moved out East, and within a few months, began selling quite well. The report came back to me, via our mutual friend, that this fellow, once he ceased relying on a rarefied Platonic mind for his material, and instead showed the fortitude to rely upon his own mediocre intellect and lame humor, found himself capable of writing for the television mentality. At last report, this young man had become immensely successful writing for serialized television shows, is now tremendously wealthy, and is envied by most writers who work for television. So you see? My only role model is someone I could never imitate, given that he only became successful when he finally ceased imitating me. So I am at a loss as to how to go about writing video, and must leave that territory alone.

As for hating televisions? Yes; I retain the art. And perhaps I should expand it to include those humble little gadgets called radios.

So much to hate. So little time. And meanwhile, there is the task of doing all this hating in an exemplarily saintly way.

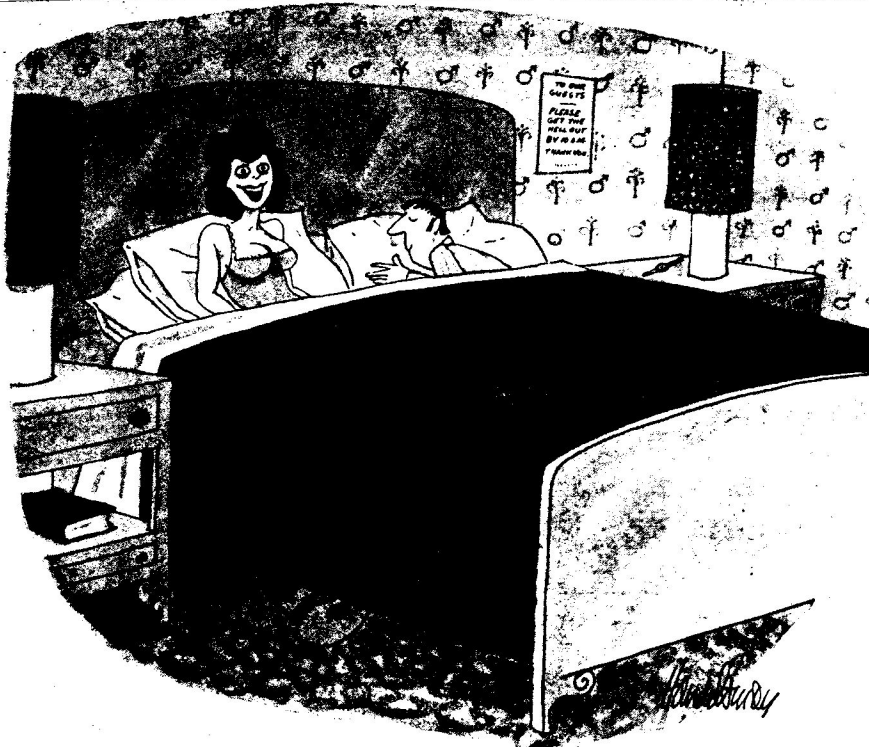


13. In one very important way 1992 was a merciful year. On only a very few occasions was I pestered by airheads. There was the incident where a fellow, having heard about my newly conferred rank of sainthood, came to visit me, and, after talking with me a few minutes, stated that I manifested all the visual signs of the Boddhisatva. I thought he was going to prostrate himself, and not wanting to subject myself to such an embarrassment, I began telling him a few of my milder sins of the previous 24 hours. In less than two minutes I had brought him to his senses, he was re-examining the veridicality of his visual faculties, and soon enough he was off and away.

Other than this, there have been several letters from people who want to, as they put it, "see my chart." I had to question a couple of friends before I discovered that this means seeing a chart of my astrological status at time of birth. Well; actually I do have such an artifact, which was provided me by a couple of people under circumstances I am reluctant to talk about. For reasons of a somewhat carnal nature, I had compromised (even prostituted) myself spiritually, and I allowed these people to do a "chart," as I now realize it is called, and they even took up several hours of my time while one of them, a self-styled expert, told me what the chart says about me, all the while trembling with fear. (I am not exaggerating; he was trembling so hard at times he had to clutch the cloth of the couch with both hands. When I asked him why he was so frightened, he said something vague, to the effect that my chart brought him into uncomfortable proximity with dimensions of himself he did not clearly understand and could not very well deal with.) I think I kept the chart, since it was drawn up in pretty colors and intriguing symbols, but I have not been able to find it, and hence can not supply it to anyone. Several people have, in lieu of a chart, asked me to provide them with my birthdate and the exact time of my birth. So I shall here provide it, with the hope that this information will silence the clamorings of these people, and put a halt to further inquiries about the issue.

I was born on May 31, 1948 at 6:55 A.M. Central Standard Time. Place of birth: Maryville, Missouri. State of mind at birth: Profoundly depressed. Awareness of whereabouts: Glad to be out of that neurotic woman's womb. Worst fear at birth: Now that I'm out of the womb, is it possible she can cause me even more harm? First visual sight: Like looking down a long corridor, the walls of which are defined by white, cellulitic thighs. First aural sensation: My own scream. First olfactory sensation: Blood.

There is one detail which here pertains to my sordid birth, an event which has been often discussed by my mother, and which my family doctor confirmed for me when I was about twenty years old. Namely, the two nurses on duty when my mother was rushed to the hospital, there to deliver me, were young, inexperienced, and afraid. When it seemed that I would be delivered--spontaneously--prior to the doctor's arrival, the two young nurses crossed my mother's legs for a duration of about ten minutes, to delay my entrance into this world. I have been told that I am very fortunate that this meddling on the part of the nurses did not inflict upon me no small physical harm. As for how it might have confused the data pertinent to my chart, and subsequently obfuscated the astrological implications, I, not being privy to the secrets of this doctrine, have no idea whatsoever.



"I knew it! The stars never lie! When I saw you, I thought, 'He's a Sagittarius and he's going to lay me,' and you did, even though you're a Libra."



 READING FOR 1992

Again this year, because of parenting duties and deteriorating eyesight, I did much less reading than I once did. I managed to get through 61 books, but most of them were scholarly, a bit dry, although usually quite good. I did, however, spend some time going back and reading certain novels which I have only read in college literature classes. I have always suspected that my appreciative faculties were truncated by the academic approach, and indeed I did enjoy these works much more this time. I was amazed at how much of the books I had forgotten; books I read simply for pleasure, and not for course



work, during that period of time did not slip from my memory so thoroughly. When I read those old course books again, I must say I was at times amazed at my marginalia. So much attention to inane detail! I do remember why. It was because a fair proportion of the students in the courses would not read the books, or would rely on Cliff Notes; so the professors would give pop quizzes to try and catch up these lazy students. The problem for me, however, was that I did do all the reading; however, one's pleasure in the reading, as well as one's grasp of the broader thematic scope, were always compromised by one's dread of those pop quizzes, and the perverted diligence that was necessary for passing them.

Of the following list of best books for 1992, the ones which I had previously read for a class were: Wuthering Heights by Emily Bronte, The Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald, For Whom the Bell Tolls by Ernest Hemingway, and The Grapes of Wrath by John Steinbeck. Sad it is, to think of how much I missed in these books, during that initial exposure.

My list of favorite books read in 1992 contains a total of ten titles. The list includes:
 1. Wuthering Heights



by Emily Bronte. The skill of the prose, and the full personality of the characters, is truly impressive. This time, however, I was not so impressed by the romanticism; in fact, at times I found it rather puerile. The theme of child abuse which permeates the latter half of the book, and how it taints a person's life forever, was what struck me as most original, and interesting, during this reading.

2. The Roominghouse Madrigals by Charles Bukowski. These early poems do not appeal to

me as much as do his later poems. But this, I think, is simply because I was first exposed to his later work. Despite



my much preferring his later work, I nevertheless recognize the value of this early work, just as I prefer the "middle" to the "early" or "late" Beethoven-- largely, I think, because it was the "middle" Beethoven which I was first exposed to.

3. As I Lay Dying by William Faulkner. This is a novel that shouldn't work. The tale is too improbable for any form but the tragic, the language which he interjects into the thoughts of these characters is simply too sophisticated to

ever be used by such backward people, and the story plods so slowly it should bore. And yet the improbable comedy is believable, the aspirations to "high" language do not distract during the reading, and one remains riveted to the story and its outcome. The fact that Faulkner can make it work, when by all the rules it seems it shouldn't, truly attests to his genius.

4. The Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald. I thought this story thoroughly dull when I read it for a college class, but this time I better understood the subtle (and unconscious) motives of the various characters. Gatsby's desire to try and mold Daisy so that she would, in a sense, recognize in herself a different history of loves and loving than what actually had happened, was especially profound. X

5. God's Fool: The Life and Times of St. Francis of Assisi by Julien Green. Of modern books about St. Francis, this is the best of many I have read. The early history of Francis' life is told especially well, and there is more history with less anecdote than occurs in most accounts. The book was very flawed, in one respect: About two-thirds of the way through, the author, who had been writing with a very elegant and easy third-person prose, began lapsing into the first-person voice. This voice might not have been so dissonant, except one did not hear it until one was moving toward the end of the book, and even then its appearances were so inconsistent as to be both intrusive and distracting. Still, the book achieved a very high spiritual tone, which was appropriately, even tenderly, wedded to the mundane.

6. For Whom the Bell Tolls by Ernest Hemingway. Like many readers, I readily concede that much of what Hemingway wrote is shallow both with regard to style and substance. However, when he is at his best, as in The Old Man and the Sea, or A Moveable Feast, Hemingway can stand in rank with the best of writers. For Whom the Bell Tolls is not one of his best books, but it is great art nonetheless, with a powerful story, fine exploration of character, and an excellent grasp of personal lineage--how one is linked to one's forebears, and how one's conduct will affect who comes after.

7. Thoughts of Dr. Schenk: On Sex and Gender by Dr. Roy Schenk. This slim book is a compilation of quotes from other writings by Roy Schenk, and having read all those other writings, I thought that encountering those thoughts--this time fragmented--might prove frustrating. Quite the contrary, the organization of the book at times lent fresh perspective to ideas I had before encountered, and it was thoroughly enjoyable simply reading them again. This book, like his others, reveals Roy Schenk to be one of the most profound and inventive thinkers in the men's liberation movement.

8. Cannery Row by John Steinbeck. I can't believe that I waited all these years to finally read this very funny book. The precursor to Sweet Thursday, it is not as good. Sweet Thursday develops characters and space much better, is more masterfully written with regard to style and organization, and is a much funnier book. But Cannery Row is an excellent preparation for Sweet Thursday, and will have you laughing aloud many times during the reading.

9. The Grapes of Wrath by John Steinbeck. This book was a struggle for me when I first encountered it in a college literature course. Not because of the book, but because of the professor: a very dogmatic woman, as pompous as she was plump, who did not hold a high opinion of the novel, and, because I disagreed with her about this, did not hold a high opinion of me. She condescendingly dismissed the novel as "period literature," i.e., a book which limits itself to a very specific and circumscribed time in history. She believed that the historical specificity deprived the book of any highly universal appeal, or relevance, either to the human condition or to the interest of readers.

Well; I am not going to bother arguing the point here. But I think the book does have very broad scope insofar as it reflects the human condition, and I would go so far as to claim that this novel is one of the four or five best ever written by an American.

10. Letters from the Earth by Mark Twain. As is usual with Mark Twain, he makes many a blunder with his writing, descending to burlesque and caricature when he is not sure where to go with his story, groping instead of exploring, suddenly losing his stylistic stride and also (seemingly) his train of thought right when he is waxing profound. Still, despite these several faults, the book's philosophy and humor are wonderful, and his criticisms of religion are as devastating as they are true. I absolutely love his observation that human beings have such a terribly distorted view of what they consider to be a desirable afterlife, pointing out that all human beings detest noise, and yet they describe a heaven that they aspire to even though it is filled with the sound of millions of harps being played all at once--and, interminably.

The disappointing books of the year were:

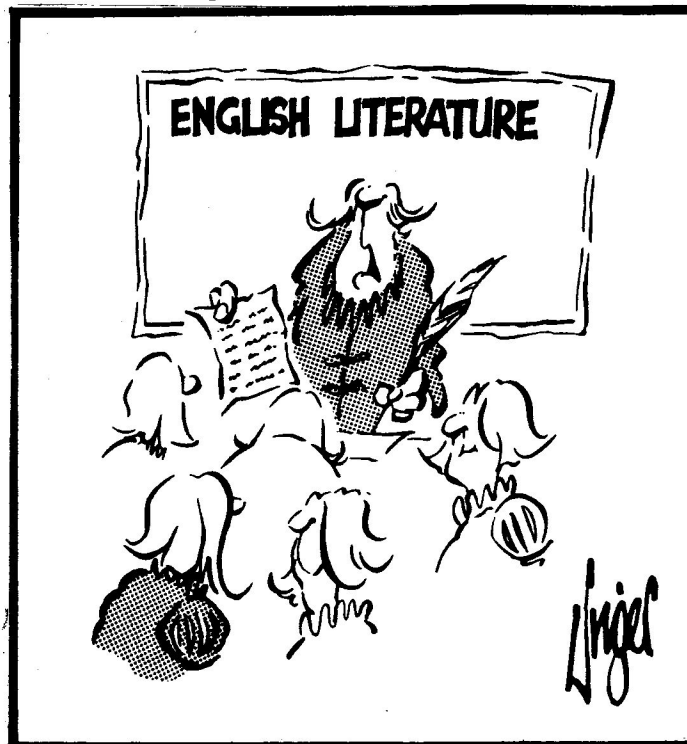
1. Mockingbird Wish Me Luck by Charles Bukowski. This "later" book is too careless, as though he is writing poems just to keep kicking them out. They sound a bit like his young, awkward, uncertain poems, i.e., his "early period," but they are all given to a lazy bravado that ends up emptying these many words of any genius.
2. The Brotherhood of the Grape by John Fante. Fante was Bukowski's favorite writer, and I can certainly see the influence on Bukowski. But the present book is not great literature. Fante strains to tell the story, never seems very sure as to how much he wants to tell, tries to build characters through innuendo but is overly clumsy in the attempt, and as for the story itself, it is not at all interesting. Basically it came across as a mild farce about a bunch of lowlife greasy alcoholic dago wops who shout and fight a lot and call themselves dagos and wops. This book was a waste of time.

Again this year the same book takes the prize for being the worst, and also the most offensive. In this case, it is intellectually offensive. As for quality, it is so bad that actually I did not finish reading it. The book in question is: The Eclogues and the Georgics of Virgil by David R. Slavitt. I bought it through a mail order catalogue, and from the accompanying ad, presumed the book to be an excellent translation of the two lengthy poems by Virgil. I suppose I should have known better, given that the translator was listed as the author. But no ... actually I should not have known better, since I have never in my life encountered what I met up with in this book.

Let me first tell you that I have read several translations of these two poems, and also have read them several times in the original Latin. In fact, I even began my own translation, convinced that I could better any of the existing translations, but I abandoned this project because I wanted to focus more on French, and also because, while I thought I could indeed do better than had previous translators, I did not think that my translation would be so good as to easily elicit the attention of a publisher, especially since I am not a scholar with a plethora of academic credentials in Latin. I say all this to let you know that I am quite familiar with these works.

I began reading Slavitt's book, and found the translation to be not good at all. After pushing ahead for a time, and beginning to wonder why this translation seemed to scarcely resemble my memory of the poems, I took down my Virgil volume and started with the first eclogue, doing a line by line comparison. At first I thought I was going mad. Or worse--losing my intellectual powers. Or worst, had never had any intellectual powers to begin with, and had been leading a life of utter delusion, believing I had certain language skills which now I was discovering had never actually existed. Instead, I had merely been faking it all along, being a very successful imposter, leading people to believe that I knew Latin quite well when actually I could scarcely read it at all. But I kept reading Slavitt's book, comparing the English translation with the Latin, line by line. It did not make sense. I skipped ahead to another of the eclogues, and still, something was amiss--so awry that I was beginning to believe that my brain had calcified. At last I had the good sense to turn to the book's introductory preface, and therein I discovered that this book was never intended to be a translation, but rather, is a free-verse transmutation (yes; this is the word that was used!) of Virgil's works. Well; that explained it. The author was not even translating. Instead, he was summarizing each poem and then weaving in his commentary while trying to be somewhat poetic. And failing to be at all poetic.

Slavitt should have left Virgil alone and stuck to composing his own offallic lines. I assure you, Slavitt can not translate, he can not interpret, and he can not compose poetry of his own, much less write poetry which imitates the sheen of a master like Virgil. Still, if he wants to compose his own verses, that is his business. But it should not be the business of a publisher. I find it almost reprehensible that a publisher as reputable as



"Shakespeare, did your father help you with this homework?"

Doubleday published this book. It is utterly worthless. Were it the only book with me in a prison cell, and I were to occupy that cell the rest of my life, I would gladly cast that book out rather than taint my mind with such drivel.



There are books I read which are neither the best, the worst, the most offensive, nor of the mediocre type which do not warrant mention in this Aviary. They are books which, in some way or other, do not fit into these categories, but nevertheless are noteworthy and deserve comment. So here, and in future editions of The Aviary, I shall list what I term, "Books of Note." This year, in my reading, there was one such:

1. The Crisis in Men's Health: A Silent Tragedy by Ian Wilson. This is a self-published book, with many a grammatical error, and some awkward writing. But it is an exhaustive overview of men's health issues in this country, and the many ways men's health issues are not addressed via funding, research, or primary-care physicians. It is available through the national offices of The Coalition of Free Men, and despite its cosmetic and grammatical shortcomings, I highly recommend it for those who are interested in this subject.



In this section of The Aviary, I have in past issues commented about my other literary pursuits, and also have at times made a few disparaging comments about the general state of literature in this country. As you would gather from things I have said previously, you are well aware that the literary life, of this country--whether in the average person or even in academia--is tending toward utter inanition. A part of this dismal picture is portrayed in (of all places!) Alumnus, a magazine published by Southern Illinois University at Carbondale. In the Fall, 1992 issue (Vol. 55, #2), some trenchant comments are made on pages 15-18. We discover that our high school libraries are well stocked. The average public high school library contains 7,991 books, which is the highest average in the world. This article does not mention how many books are owned by the American high school student, but I would guess that it is one of the lowest averages in the world. The article does note, however, certain reading habits of adult Americans. It points out that only 6 percent of American adults read more than one book a year. Which to some extent is understandable, given that 13 percent of American high school graduates lack even the minimal reading skills necessary for literacy. (In Japan, 1 percent of high school graduates remain illiterate, and in Germany, the number is 4 percent.) But this article notes only illiteracy among high school graduates; it also goes on to state that nearly one million teenagers drop out of high school per year in this country. Surely these dropouts add significantly to the illiteracy rate. While this article does not give statistics on the national illiteracy rate, I have read elsewhere that it is now above 20 percent.

If you recall the statements I made in last year's Aviary, about my experience with Dacia's high school system, you might, to some extent, understand why these kids drop out. The schools are so bad, the teachers so disillusioned, the support from parents so minimal, that children scarcely get an education in our public high schools. Add this problem to another, and you begin to see why our high school educational factory is a failure. The other problem I refer to is that our children spend so little time in schools. Kids in Germany and Japan spend 48 weeks a year in school; this is 12 more weeks than U.S. children spend in school. In other words, if we describe our children as getting a total of 12 years of schooling through grade school and high school, then we could say that kids in Germany and Japan, during their 12 years in school, actually receive four more years of schooling than do our kids. (These statistics are also gathered from the above-referred-to Alumnus.)

Is the picture any more promising at the college or university level? My commentary in previous issues of The Aviary suggests that it is not. My continuing experience with these institutions suggest that the situation at the universities is only getting worse. As most of you know, I do a fair amount of translating. As happens with any translator, now and then I get stumped on a phrase, or a word that I have never before encountered and which is not illumined by my several dictionaries. This last year, I was having much difficulty with an essay from the French, because it was making references to everyday situations and phraseology which I do not encounter in the scholarly French I read. So, not knowing where else to turn, I phoned some of the French professors on the campus at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale. I could scarcely believe the reception I received. They were suspicious. Paranoid, indignant, befuddled, but most of all, suspicious. And virtually every one of these professors said almost exactly the same thing to me when I first talked with them. I would introduce myself, ask if this is a convenient time to call,

and then simply tell them that I was in trouble with translating a phrase, and ask them if they would be so kind as to help me with it over the phone. Did they answer me? No. Their response: "Who are you?!" I would repeat my name, state my interests, and they would reply, "But who are you?!" By this time I might be getting a little testy myself. I might reply, "I am someone who is very interested in French, and doing some translating. Doesn't that qualify me for calling you up?" The reply, "But who are you? What is your affiliation? Are you a professor?" I would explain that no, I am not, but I am a scholar, and I was hoping they could help me with a small problem in French. With every person, the next question followed, with the "who" changed to a "what." "What are you? I mean, who ... what are you? What department are you in?" So I would try and explain, "I have a Ph.D. in philosophy, and I am here doing private research." "But ... you're just calling me up for advice? What university are you from? What department are you affiliated with?" Never, while these exchanges were taking place, was there a bit of politeness. Not one bit of social grace. Nothing in the way of propriety. They were treating me as though I were a salesman at the door, and they wanted nothing to do with me until I had convinced them that I have academic, professorial, and college credentials.

The exchange would go on, and at last, after I had patiently explained to them that at present I am neither a student nor a professor nor a college administrator, but am merely a lowly self-taught reader of books, they might then condescend to try and answer my questions about French. Usually they could not. It turned out that my reading French is much better than any of the professors on the SIUC campus. Still, there are times I get snagged on an unusual phrase. I gave up on getting help from the professors, and finally found a polite, although not very intelligent, graduate student who sometimes is able to help me (given that she is a native of France, but spent many years in England).

Truly, these professors are locked inside an ivory tower. They simply could not fathom why someone who is not somehow affiliated

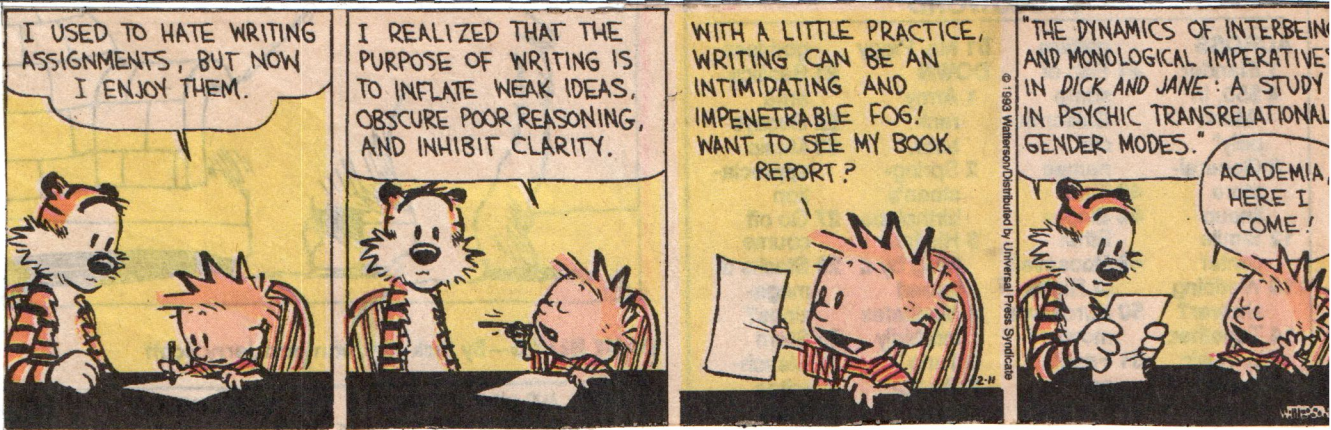


with academia could possibly be interested in scholarly issues.

Meanwhile, in just about every daily issue of the local newspaper, there are articles bemoaning the financial woes of the university. Departments are being phased out, professors are not getting raises, degrees are being consolidated, student apathy is at an all-time high, academic performance is at an all-time low. This seems to be the case with just about every university in the nation. And yet it does not seem to afflict the departments of science, which generally do have very excellent standards of scholarship and, from my experience, very nice people who are not locked inside an ivory tower. As for most departments which come under the rubric of the humanities--literature, philosophy, the arts, etc.--the general standards of academic excellence in just about any humanities department in just about every university in this nation long ago left behind the adjective, "excellent." But of course the beleaguered humanities professors put up a great cry, claiming that they need more money, more students, better support from the community, more travel money, more library funding, more office staff, more ... but they can't even recognize scholarly interest in a person if he is not safely tucked away inside their bureaucracy. They themselves show virtually no interest in the community outside their ivory towers. They evince a malice and competitiveness, laced with poisonous envy, toward every colleague and associate. They are fixated on vast intrigues and grievances over the most petty things. And they keep asking for money and shouting that the world of academia is about to come to an end if emergency measures are not implemented. My attitude, over the last few years, is that, at least in the colleges of liberal arts, perhaps in most universities we should just let these divisions die. The professors can not write an intelligent sentence, can not speak any language except a cloistered and obfuscated one which is dull and without relevance to anything that would relate to "higher" learning. The students are not interested. These universities are, as I have said on several occasions, intellectual ghettos. My view: let the colleges of liberal arts die a natural death. This, rather than trying to keep them alive through expensive and futile resuscitative efforts, when these lazarettos (if not their inhabitants) would be better off if they ceased to exist.

Is my tone so venomous as to suggest that I hate professors? Such is scarcely the case. I am one of those enlightened, saintly souls who is

sensible enough to hate the sin but love (well, tolerate) the sinner. Let me emphasize: My feelings of repugnance are not at all manifest



toward professors of science. And I concede that even in the humanities, there remain some wonderful departments, and even in the worst departments there remain a few good academicians. But for the most part the inhabitants of liberal arts academe are possessed of cerebrums that might as well be pickled in embalming fluid, for all the good they do the world of ideas. When I hear their shrill voices warning us of the impending disappearance of their bastions of premature senility, my only prayer is that they are right.

Universities are not the only culprits undermining our general level of learning in this country. Publishers and writers are at fault too. The contemporary novel has become a virtual atrocity, in its attempt to set forth an interesting story no matter how bad the writing, or how irrelevant the story may be to readers even a decade from now. This irrelevance is underscored by the appearance, in books, of many an idiom pertinent to television. The Fante book, above examined, made references to, for example, Groucho Marx and Archie Bunker. These are names I recognized. Other names I did not recognize. It also referred to Lysol. I know what he means, but will readers a couple of decades from now know? It depends on the success of this particular product.

The references, in books, to artifacts of our current consumerist (sic) and televisionistic (sic) culture cause these books to be so steeped in the frenzy of modern-day products and trinkets that they lose all touch with the atemporal, not to mention the eternal. And having lost touch with those realms, how can they persist--endure--as literature? This attachment to the modern artifact was the main shortcoming, and downfall, of the last book in Updike's Rabbit quartet. It is a device which was used (and abused) by Gore Vidal in his Myra Breckinridge. (Vidal, although perhaps our greatest living essayist, is most decidedly not a first-rate novelist.) It is not a device, but rather, a constant (and unconscious) accessory in most novels published today. This insertion of the contemporary--names of models, movie stars, products, politicians, dances, snack foods--causes each book, however much relevance it might have to contemporary people, to have virtually no relevance to the future (which is usually fortunate). But then, if the number of readers is declining so dramatically, why should I worry about these issues of relevance? It really won't much matter if a book isn't relevant to readers when no more readers exist.

The art of writing books is no longer an art. This is partly caused by the fact that writing is not cultivated from an early age. In fact, the finest means of preparing a person for writing as art, is virtually a forgotten practice. I refer to the practice (was this, too, once an art?) of letter writing. People no longer write letters; instead, they use the telephone. In Proust one discovers that, less than a century ago, children were, not infrequently, required to take out a significant portion of an afternoon for writing letters. At the end of their practice, certain of the letters would be examined by the adults so that suggestions could be made about how to improve the practice. I had, to a small degree, begun an exercise similar to this with Dacia a few months before she left our home. I had noted that most of her letters were little more than token notes. At the age of 14, most of her letters would begin with, "How are you? I am fine." She and I worked out an arrangement where, with one letter per week, she would first outline it, and then she and I would go over the outline. Then she would write it, and we would discuss it together. We would, of course, always pick a letter that would not be private in any way. And although at first Dacia complained and pretended to resent my doing this, it was obvious that after a couple of tries she was impressed with the results, and enjoyed the outlining especially.

But today? There are a few people with whom I enjoy a stimulating correspondence. But most friends do not write at all, and even business people are reluctant to write a letter about business. Business people (especially lawyers, I have noted) have even come up with a new excuse for why one has not received their letter. At one time, the lie, "It's in the mail," was common. Now, if one phones to find out why an important letter has not yet arrived, their excuse is, "It's in my computer." If they are at home, they add, "... at work." If they are at work, they add, "... at home." Thus their excuse tells you that they have, basically, done their work; but they do not have to get the letter out to you the next day, as is the case when they use the excuse, "It's in the mail."

In previous issues of The Aviary, I have commented at length on how people not only can not write well, they can not even speak well. In this edition of The Aviary, I was going to this year forego this topic, but then, just this morning, I opened my new edition of The American Heritage Dictionary, and discovered that the word, "microwave," is now allowed to be used as a verb, e.g., "I'm going to microwave this potato." I suppose the dictionary's advisory board is correct; the word, as verb, is very entrenched in common parlance. Yet I am rather sorry to see the allowance now being made. It deprives me of a not uncommon opportunity for feeling contempt about how people are speaking.

And now, having said this much, I find that my reticence on the topic of people's elocutionary maladies has retreated. I must proceed to give a few of the more sordid examples of bestial utterances which I have encountered over this last year:

1. On Southern Illinois radio, I heard a woman commentator using the word, "remediate," as a verb in place of "remedy," e.g., "This is the only way we can hope to remediate the problem of adolescent crime." Hers was not merely a momentary slip of the tongue; she used the word a dozen times in the course of a few minutes, before I shut the radio off.

2. More and more, I am hearing people use a word which I suppose should be spelled, "partiabile," even though they pronounce it with but three syllables, as, "par-shu-bl." I have heard sentences such as, "I think letting the factions just fight it out among themselves would at least be a partiabile solution," or, "I'd agree that you're partiably right, but I think I'm partiably right too."

3. The word, "rejuviate," seems to be replacing the correct word, "rejuvenate." A radio commentator says, "What we need is to rejuviate this country's inner cities!" A college professor says, "If we could rejuviate class motivation and get at least partiabile improvement in our salaries, maybe we'd produce students who are somewhat better."

4. And now, over and over, I am hearing people use "together" as a verb. A neighbor says, "I'd have come over sooner but I had to together the laundry." One of my publishers says, "As soon as I together my life at home, I'll have more time to do this job correctly." I overheard a man saying to a group of people, "My wife and I went shopping separately but later we togetherd in front of the mall."

5. The top prize for this year's grammatical atrocity goes to that awful tendency of people to ejaculate, at the end of a sentence, the qualifier, always triumphantly sounded forth as an exclamation,

"Not!" The people who do this act as though they are being so very funny. They make a statement, and then, pretending to catch their listener unawares, thus suddenly deny it. Well; using the word this way is not grammatically correct. Moreover, it is not at all clever, as its users seem to think it is. And finally, it is thoroughly irritating not only to a refined mind, but to anyone wishing to carry on either an ordinary conversation or exchange a bit of pleasant banter. Where did this atrocity come from? What nimwit of a screenplay writer for TV invented it? Or was it a politician? I pity the philologists of the future who will be wracking their brains, trying to figure out the meaning, every time they encounter this specimen of carrion grammar.

Yes; I said philologists. Because already the word "not," used in this morbid way, has begun insinuating itself into not only verbal speech but also into prose. I have encountered it in music magazines, in health publications, and even in a publication supposedly as august as The Smithsonian. To the right is a copy (reduced in size on the copier) of the table of contents page from the August, 1992 issue of Smithsonian (Vol. 23, # 5). Do you see the title to that article which begins on page 97? Does it make you cringe? Do you see why I no longer subscribe to The Smithsonian?



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As long as I am on the subject of language's incipient rigor mortis, as evidenced in this country's culture, I must say a few words about another topic which is dear to me, and the passing of which is a great sadness.

Some years ago, in one of the volumes of his autobiography, Bertrand Russell lamented the fact that in this modern era we have lost the art of good conversation. But of course, how could we not, when the basic tool--good language--has been lost? But other basic tools which are requisite for goodly conversation are virtually lost too. People seldom listen to one another when they are supposedly conversing. One must presume, too, that they don't even listen to themselves; otherwise, they would speak better. No; it seems that they instead are merely waiting for the other person's soliloquy to come to an end, and in the meanwhile, are rehearsing their own lines.

I concede that in one-on-one encounters, I retain the type of friends with whom wonderful conversation is still possible. And even in groupings of my friends, these people are possessed of sufficiently impressive intellect, and also good social graces, as to allow animated, inspired, edifying, and entertaining conversation. But when I move outside the circle of my best friends, the art is absent. People mumble, mutter, ejaculate, exclaim, and murmur. But even these awkward verbalities are evinced but infrequently, and then, sporadically. Instead, most of the time, they excrete a hypertrachial grunt, then do another or two, and this is the extent of their conversational ability. A few people do talk, more or less, but it is so punctuated by lapses of attention, interruptions, loud voices, shared ennui, and the distractions of "background noise," i.e., radio or the TV, that these verbal exchanges certainly never attain the level of art. Being a recluse, I seldom encounter these parodies of conversation, although in my occasional business dealings I sometimes have reason to spend several hours in a rather crowded household that is populated by several children and about a dozen adults, all of them related in one way or another. What I experience, in this household--where every occupant's voice is harsh, incontinent, unfettered, and not infrequently stentorian (especially amongst the women)--is neither art nor even conversation. Instead it is a veritable cacophonous babble of yelled questions which neither want nor allow an answer, exclamations, declamations, expletives, lines sung from songs that are cued by certain phrases heard, e.g., someone says, "I'm going to San Francisco next time I'm out to Los Angeles," and a different person breaks in, singing a couple of lines from the song, "I Left My Heart in San Francisco," or someone says, "Is anyone going to church with me tomorrow?" and another person's wavering out-of-key voice intrudes with a line or two sung from, "Get Me to the Church on Time." All of this taking place amidst a verbal spillage about an idea that never quite succeeds at being an idea, with everyone there yelling except for myself and the reigning matriarch who needs not raise her voice because she reigns so absolutely.

Most of the time, I simply avoid such gatherings of people, but sometimes business matters make it impossible to eschew such pseudoverbal mastications. Fortunately, when with friends, I do get to experience goodly conversation, but when with acquaintances, the conversational milieu is usually nonexistent. Occasionally it limps along dismally. And very rarely it does succeed in attaining a passable level of interest--which seems to happen only when these people direct their attention to the one topic which never fails to arouse them, and we end up talking about me.

This topic is so predictably interesting, I am sure, because so often it focuses on my humility. For example, as much as I might criticize other people and the world, I am never less critical of myself, nor am I ever reticent about admitting my many mistakes and foibles. For example (since we are here dealing with the topic of good language usage), I will gladly admit that now and then I myself commit a verbal or prosaic solecism, or am lax in my grasp of language. For example, on my 44th birthday, I realized that I still have not mastered Greek, and I experience no small shame in admitting to this failure, which sets me apart from, and diminishes me in the eyes of, so many of my friends and colleagues. I am almost as ashamed to admit that, until I was in my late 20s, I used the word, "nonplussed," to mean exactly the opposite of what it actually means; I would say, for example, "He was very nonplussed by the trauma," and mean by this that he was very unaffected by it.

And just the other day I discovered that all my life I have been misspelling the word, "paraplegic." I had assumed that since the name of the affliction is "paraplegia," that the person afflicted would be called a paraplegiac. I felt terribly humbled by this discovery.



"For heaven's sake, Henry, tell the kids a pleasant story for once -- they don't always have to hear the one about your head."

Mind you, I am never not trying to improve my ability with the English language, whether it be in speaking or writing skills. And I do think that I have been somewhat successful in my attempts at better utilizing (and improving!) my native language. If the testimony of other people can at all vouchsafe for my success, then I am most pleased by some lines penned by my recent biographer, Spencer J. Mastersons, who wrote, "When in Baumli's presence, one can not but be impressed by how his diction evinces flawless, even impeccable, enunciatory precision. Hence, his inability to tolerate what he has, in a letter to me, referred to as, 'the expectorated cacophony I encounter when proximal to the average peasant's oral orifice.'"

Yes; Baumli is not an overly tolerant man. But he is forgiving, and polite, and let it be proclaimed many a time that he is never lax toward himself. (And much less forgiving toward himself than toward others!) He is constantly on an odyssey of learning when it comes to language. This next year he plans to be doing more translating in the French, and going back to his Latin even more than usual. He remains impressed by the beauty of Latin, and the fact that if a Latin phrase seems to have more than one possible meaning, then a good translator will probably conclude that this particular phrase should be translated as though it contains all those possible meanings at once. As for French, Baumli knows that it is more finicky, and he welcomes the challenge of carefully preening the horizon of meanings from a French phrase and coming out with the purest and most exact prose possible.

Meanwhile, Baumli is well aware that one of the best means to improving one's language skills is to read those who write well, or at least write inspiringly. This next year he plans to return to the American writers, perhaps focusing on John Steinbeck and Ernest Hemingway. There is much to be learned from these two writers, not only from their successes, but also from their failures. It is most interesting to note how each writer handled perspective--writing from either first-person or third-person. For example, Steinbeck was a great writer of novels, magnificent with the third-person voice. Yet, when he wrote his first-person book, Travels with Charley, it was awful--thoroughly an artistic failure. Hemingway, on the other hand, except for The Old Man and the Sea and a few short stories, was usually a mediocre writer when he used the third-person perspective. Yet, he did his best book, A Moveable Feast, in the first-person voice. There may be certain profound lessons to be learned from studying this.

Oh, the blessings of great literature. The grandest books are like incarnate gods compassionate enough to keep us company on this earth. We are negligent if we do not seek them out, converse with them daily, and nightly keep them by our bed.

***** MUSICAL MUSINGS *****

Despite the fact that I am a writer, especially of fiction, and despite the fact that I am a philosopher by inclination and training, it remains the case that music is for me a greater passion than either literature or studying philosophy. And although I was a musician for many years, playing the whole gamut of styles ranging from rock to country to folk to jazz to classical, it has always been the case that I would rather listen to music than play it.

It also is the case that I am very much a recluse. But like most recluses, I do come out of hiding now and then. And one of the most enjoyable of all things for me to do, when I do socialize, is to listen to music with people. Unfortunately, the friends with whom I can do this are rather far flung, and there is no one in this area who would consider, for example, sitting down with me and spending a couple of hours listening intently to classical music, and then enjoying one another afterwards as we talk about what we have heard, along with conversing about other things too. I confess that this is, if not a "great" sadness in my life, then it certainly is a significant sadness, and truly, one of the most lovely facets of visiting people, and having them visit me, is being able to sit down and enjoy, together, a great work of music.



"... So you're Joseph Paul Carruthers and you were president of Audivex speakers. You made many claims for your speakers. Tell me, Joseph, what is 'flux impulse driver'? And 'no-lag midrange crossover'? What about 'vectored ubiquitous maxi-woofers,' what is that, Joseph?"

I never pass up an opportunity to try and engage people I have recently met in musical conversation. This attempt, however, virtually always meets up with failure. Sometimes the failure has a humorous, though scarcely redeeming, edge to it. For example, some months ago when in Kansas City, I was enjoying a business dinner with about ten people in a very swank home. The stereo was on, I recognized the piece of music, and commented that I wouldn't have expected hearing this piece of music being played during a dinner. "Oh; that's just the radio," our hostess said. "I wasn't even noticing what was on."

One of the fellows there said, "I've heard this! What is it?"

"It's Carmina Burana by Carl Orff," I replied, "but I'm not sure who's playing it."

"I've heard this too!" one of the other fellows said, with considerable animation. "Where is it from?!"

"The music he composed himself, although he made some attempt to imitate what he thought would be the mid-medieval musical style. As for the poems, that's a more interesting story."

The two fellows were looking at me with an admixture of dismay and disbelief. "No! Where is that from!" one of the men persisted.

"All of Europe!" I replied, glad that these people were this interested, but curious as to their dismayed perplexity. "It's based on some secular poems that were discovered in a relatively isolated monastery near Munich sometime during the mid-nineteenth century. They were found in the nineteenth century, but were actually written in the thirteenth century by the goliards."

"The what?!" the more aggressive of the two said. "I want to know where it's from!"

"Like I said. All of Europe. The goliards were troubadours, in a way, except the troubadours wrote mostly love songs, and the goliards wrote bawdy songs. They were traveling students, monks, wayward priests. They were so bawdy their conduct was banned, and they had pretty much faded away by the end of the fifteenth century."

"How do you know this?"

"I studied a great deal of medieval philosophy. When you study the philosophy, you study the theology. And when you study the theology, you read about the heretics. The goliards were"

"I heard you say they wandered all over Europe. I want to know where this music is from!"

"Yeah! Where does it come from?" the other fellow emphasized.

"Oh," I said, finally understanding. "It is a strange language, isn't it. The Latin isn't at all pure, and sometimes I can't even make my way through it. What was discovered was a collection of about two hundred poems, and they are written in a language that combines Latin with what we today call low German. So I guess you'd say it comes from a fusion of secular Latin with early German."

"From what?!"

"Secular Latin and"

"No! I mean, what movie is it from!"

"Movie?"

"Yes! This was in a movie. What movie was that from?"

Baumli knows when it is time to shut his mouth. I sat there while, for the next two or three minutes, the two fellows, while eliciting opinions from their mates, kept guessing at movies, until one of them said, "OH I KNOW!! IT'S FROM RED OCTOBER!"

"YEAH! RED OCTOBER!" four voices said in chorus.

They then began discussing the movie. When the conversation at last lagged and died, I timidly began with, "The goliards, you realize, were imbued with Latin, which isn't a very bawdy language. It doesn't even have words that match many of our words that are only slightly lewd. Of course, the Roman Latin had such words, but virtually all such references were lost when the Library of Alexandria was burned. The result is that the Roman Church's prudish Latin needed a foreign influence so it could expand into sexual terrain. By borrowing from the German language, the Latin language as well as the Latin influence was weakened, and it could be argued that the Catholic Church thus eventually succumbed to the influences of Luther and Protestantism not only because of the Church's moral corruption, but also because of the Latin stagnation when it came to morphic variety. Perhaps, come to think of it, the wrestlings with the hylomorphic question, which occupied all the late medieval philosophers, were a feeble attempt, via the worldly philosophy of Aristotle, to try and reclaim, for the Catholic Church, the entire physical dimension of the world--which it had lost, not because of the influence of Neo-Platonism, but because the Church refused to acknowledge sexual matters except when condemning them. In fact, even Aquinas was willing to" I realized that Abbe had a strange expression on her face--something of a compassionate grimace. The other people looked positively horrified. Baumli raised his eyes heavenwards and said jokingly, "Well, I do go on too much, don't I. Like I said, this isn't your usual dinner music."

The hostess tried to smooth over Baumli's gaffe with, "Well, I'm sure you and your philosophy friends have a lot to talk about when you listen to

music, don't you."

I looked around the table. How could I have done this? This was a business meeting for Abbe. These people, every one of them (except for the token lawyer), were medical doctors. How could I have expected them to be interested in what I was so enthusiastic about? How could I have blundered so clumsily? "Well, actually most of my philosophy friends don't listen to music. We all have a habit of talking too much," I looked around the table and tried to inject a self-deprecatory joke, "while saying too little."

There was a moment's polite pause then, after which one of the women said, "You say your little boy may be going to daycare soon?"

I burned with embarrassment (Abbe was kind) for the next several days. And I am sure I will never again repeat such a social blunder. Not long ago, in fact, I was at another dinner party. This one involved all lawyers, with me the token philosopher. This time the background music was Ravel's Bolero. The question was posed in almost exactly the same way: "I've heard that before! Where's it from?!" Baumli said nothing, but after another moment's listening, the woman said, "Oh! I know. It's from the movie 10. I saw it when I was younger."

"Who composed that?" asked the polite Baumli. "I think I've heard it before."

The lady lawyer replied, "It's just music from a film. That's all."

Oh well. Experiencing classical music, and enjoying it, is for me most always a solitary (and sometimes lonely) exercise. I wish I could experience a similar loneliness when it is a matter of another kind of music ... or, pseudo-music. I refer to the bass-heavy thumper songs that are being played in cars with huge, powerful stereos which drive by on the highway which goes past our place. Our house is situated a little less than one-hundred yards from the highway, and even if I am in my study, which is made of concrete blocks and has 3½ inches of foam insulation, the pounding thumps from those cars can still actually hurt ... not only one's ears, it seems, but also one's body. While still a quarter of a mile away, one hears the approach: "WHUMM ... THUH-BUMP!! WHUMM ... THUH-BUMP!!" The sound gets closer, one's skull is vibrating, and then it moves off into the distance, only to, before long, be followed by a car with a slightly different beat, for example: "WHAMM-DUH-BUH-WHUMP! WHAMM-DUH-BUH-WHUMP!"

I need say no more. In the Tuesday edition of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, on February 27, 1990, Mike Royko, on page 3D, published the article to the right. He makes the point. But even if he didn't, I am sure all of you have heard the point too many times.

There is another type of pseudo-music which is equally as bad, in terms of quality, although fortunately it does not so ubiquitously assault one's ears. I refer to what is called "techno music." I found out about it quite by accident. I had gone into a used record store, and the most terrible whamming squawking sound began coming out of the store's speakers. I looked over to the proprietor to see if something was wrong, but he continued with his bookkeeping. I went up to ask him what kind of music this could be. He reached behind himself, turned down the volume, and asked me to repeat myself, I did so, and he explained that this is techno music. You take a record, usually a "maxi-single" that is intended to be played at 33 rpm, and you play it at 45 rpm. "You have to use all-instrumental pieces, so it doesn't sound weird," the fellow assured me. "I even have a modification on this turntable so you can play a 33-rpm record at 100 rpm. Here, I'll show you." He proceeded with his demonstration while I smiled politely and wondered if I would even notice were my bladder, right now, in the process of emptying itself. Fortunately the piece was finished in less than two minutes. "I sell these maxi-singles as fast as I can get them in," he said. "Six months ago I couldn't give them away. Now ...," he gestured toward a bin. "Three bucks a whack,



MIKE ROYKO

Decibel Freaks Take To The Streets

THE CAT heard it first, the deep rumbling in the distance. Her back hunched, then she dashed for safety under a couch.

As it grew louder, the blonde said: "This isn't tornado season, is it?"

When the roar was almost upon us, causing the windows to vibrate, I said: "Gorbachev tricked us. It's World War III."

We peered through the blinds. It cruised slowly by, the newest plaything of society's walking, talking brain dead. The Boom Box on Wheels.

From the outside, it looked like just another car. Inside was a monster stereo system, capable of making as much noise as a small war.

Had I been able to examine the inside of the vehicle, I would have found thousands of dollars worth of amplifiers, speakers and other electronic devices.

When played at even less than full blast, the wham-bam can be heard several blocks away. Of course, this assault on the ears of the innocent is the goal of the bozos who cruise in these noisemobiles.

As an audio dealer said: "That's the whole idea, to be heard three blocks away. It's like a guy who drives a car with fire stripes on it. He wants to be seen. But with the sound guys, they want to be heard. It's a status symbol."

Is a status symbol worth destroying your eardrums?

"To some it is," the dealer said. "But some of those guys wear ear-plugs. That way, everybody hears them, but they protect their ears. As I said, it's status."

There are appropriate punishments that might make a decibel freak think twice about sending thunderclaps of heavy metal rock into some sleeping granny's bedroom.

One possibility might be to confiscate the first offender's car and take it to a vacant lot and blow it to bits.

For a second offense, the offender himself could be taken to a vacant lot and blown to bits.

But the ACLU would probably consider that cruel and unusual punishment, and as an occasional liberal, I'd have to agree.

So for a second offense, I would settle for something less cruel and unusual, such as filling the noise freak's ear cavities with Krazy Glue.

But in all likelihood, nothing will be done. And as they grow older, the noisemobile crowd will become just as deaf as the rock concert regulars and the other bedlam lovers of recent generations.

And future history books will say: "The fall of the United States finally came in the year 2032. Little Albania, the last of the communist nations, invaded and took control without a shot being fired. Nobody heard them coming."

and I may raise it to four." He turned around and adjusted the speed on his turntable. "I usually play them at 45 though. Playing them at 100 is hard on the needle. You usually use 100 only for dancing."

Some of my friends would say that I don't have much room for complaining about this issue, given my stereo set-up. Yes; I have finally admitted to myself that my stereo system just doesn't work for relaxed listening. For those of you who do not know it, for a time there I was amplifying six speaker cabinets: two home-stereo JBL 4406 Studio Monitors. These have a one-inch tweeter and a 6½-inch driver per cabinet. These were for the highs and midrange. Plus I was using two cabinets, each of which houses a JBL D-130 and a JBL D-140. These are 15-inch drivers, and I had the tone controls set so that these two cabinets handled midrange and midbass. And then there were two more cabinets, one housing a single 15-inch driver--a JBL E-130, and the other housing two drivers: a JBL D-130 and a JBL D-120. These were for the deep bass. All in a listening room that is about 18' by 18'.

Those three big amplifiers, all those speakers! And all but the two little studio monitors were actually instrument speakers, as opposed to home stereo speakers. I could certainly get the volume, although I never used it, of course. And the sound was actually quite impressive, since I kept everything turned way down. In fact, the sound was better than some home systems I have heard that cost more than twenty-thousand dollars. But still, with all those speakers, and even with it turned way down, the sound was just too fatiguing. To get the proper tone from those speakers, I would have to turn it up just a bit too loud, and then, one could only listen for a short time. I finally retired the latter two speaker cabinets mentioned above, and used the two big instrument cabinets to handle the lower midrange, the midbass and deep bass. This way it is less fatiguing, but still, it is too loud when it sounds balanced. So, except for dance parties (usually organized by Abbe), I find that when listening, I virtually never turn on more than the one amp which runs the little monitors. So ... some changes are going to be made one day. Likely I will end up with nothing more than the little monitors and a good subwoofer. As for those big cabinets? They can be left idle except for dancing. It is rather amazing, to think how I was using all those cabinets for my living room, using six as a matter of fact, when often I had played music in a room as big as a gym and used only one of the big cabinets.

I finally realized the craziness of it when a fellow, recently over from China, came into my listening room, saw all the speakers and amplifiers, and said, "Oh! Like in a bar!" I was indignant, and pissed off, after hearing him say that. But later I had to admit he was right. Indeed it was like being in a bar. In fact, it was too much for even a large bar. I then realized that it is time to make a change.

I now usually listen with only the little monitors. They are deficient at bass, of course, but a good subwoofer would solve that. So one day, when I find a subwoofer that suits, maybe I will have good sound that is appropriate for a listening room in one's home.



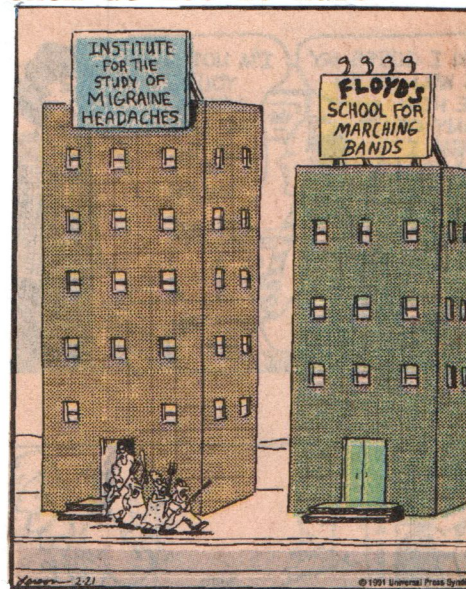
Just as I have done with books, I shall here give commentary on albums which over the year I imbibed, and which warrant an opinion. Again, as with books, I list the best, the disappointing, the most offensive, the worst, and albums of note.

Realize, that when I refer to an "album," I am designating a recording, and am imparting no information as to what format it is recorded on. Plus, this recording might consist of several LPs, cassettes, or CDs.

When I look over my list of best recordings I have heard for the year, I am struck by the fact that it includes fewer classical recordings than is the case during most years. The reason is simple. A busy parent seldom has the time to sit down and listen to classical music, because such pieces require more focused attention, and more protracted blocks of time.

The best albums I heard during 1992 are:

1. We're All Together Again for the First Time with Dave Brubeck on piano, Paul Desmond on alto sax, Berry Mulligan on baritone sax, Jack Six on bass, and Alan Dawson on drums. The two saxophones worked well together, Alan Dawson immerses himself in the entire spectrum of experimentation without once intruding, Brubeck is constrained, sure, intense, and Jack Six does his usual wonderful work on the bass. This album has a 16-minute version of "Take Five" which is truly wonderful!
2. Songs of the Auvergne by Joseph Canteloube, sung by Netania Davrath. Canteloube wrote little else that, to me, sounds worthwhile. But I had always



been attracted to these songs when I would hear one or two played on the radio. I bought this two-CD set of the complete songs at the recommendation of two friends, and indeed it is one of the finest song cycles I have ever heard. Canteloube is not Schubert when it comes to song, but he can write beautiful melody, which virtually no modern songwriter can do. This recording is one of those which both challenges and pleases. One can sit and listen intently, studying the music, so to speak; or one can simply relax and let it flow over one's soul until the cup runneth over with nectar.

3. Josef Hofman Plays Chopin was the name of this album, and although its sonics were compromised, given that they were derived from old player piano rolls, the playing itself was wonderful. This album includes the second piano sonata, plus the first three scherzos along with the Berceuse, Op. 57. Hofman has a sure touch, subtle emotion, and a sense of perfection. He may not be as lush or romantic as Rubenstein, but one has the sense that here there is less in the way of flourish and more in the way of Chopin. I realize, better and better, why people think of Hofmann as the greatest pianist of this century. While I do not quite agree with the superlative, I acknowledge that an album such as this one makes the perspective plausible, arguable, and at the same time, quite irrelevant.

4. Various albums by the bass singer, Shura Gehrman. I have so much to say about his singing, so much admiration, and at this point--having listened many times to virtually all of his available recordings--I have decided to include in this edition of The Aviary an essay I wrote on Shura Gehrman. His recording company is planning on publishing a retrospectus on Gehrman's life and music, and asked me to submit an article to this book-length publication. The publication has not yet come out, but I shall publish my essay herein to register my opinion as to his recordings. See the "articles" section later in this edition for the essay.

I should here say that Shura Gehrman was something of a discovery for me, not only as an individual artist, but also in terms of introducing me to a new echelon of artistic appreciation. I have long loved the soprano, and only more recently have come to appreciate the mezzo-soprano. I have not appreciated the male voice enough ... or, have appreciated it only sporadically. Over the last couple of years, I had been trying to learn more about the male voice, focusing primarily on the tenor range, supposing that since I learned to appreciate the mezzo-soprano after the soprano, the next level of the scale--the tenor--would be the one I could best learn to appreciate. But as it turned out, I bought two CDs in the "cut-out" bins at a record store for \$2.88 each. Entitled, Eyes to a Distant Horizon with songs by Schumann, Brahms, and Schubert, and Fair Maid of the Mill by Schubert, these two CDs were stunning, and perfect, introductions to the possibilities of the male voice. With these two albums as a starting point, I came to realize that the reason I had so long had difficulty appreciating the male voice was because I had been listening to the famous, instead of the fine, tenors, baritones, and basses. Gehrman's voice, for me, was a kind of grand aesthetic consummation, introducing me to a new hierarchy--a new crucible--of aesthetic scope and richness.

5. Rickie Lee Jones by Rickie Lee Jones. This was my first listen, ever, to this album all the way through. There is something very right about it, very precise, and yet completely fluid. She sounds mature, solid, assured, and she has excellent backup. It is not as exciting as her later albums, but still, it is one of the finest albums in my entire collection.

6. Pop Pop by Rickie Lee Jones is, in my opinion, her best album ever, and frankly I doubt that she will ever be able to better this one. The songs themselves are gorgeous, and as for that voice! Her voice wanders about so carelessly, and yet is exactly where it is supposed to be. She sings hard and raspy but then becomes all fluid and bliss. Her choice of backup musicians is impeccable, her range is impressive, her interpretation flawless, she lulls and excites, she clamors while singing a constant lullabye. Pop Pop is one of the greatest records of all time. Rickie Lee Jones has a voice sweet as a blowjob, and she knows how to rub my soul until it is wet all the way through.

7. Julie Is Her Name by Julie London. This singer is very inconsistent; she has put out some of the best torch songs of all time, but, in her later (and alcoholic) years especially, many of her songs became mechanical, lifeless. But this early album shows her at her confident best, full of verve, her voice controlled and yet full of many a creative nuance.

8. My Kind of Country by Reba McEntire. I like all of this woman's recordings, although I am especially fond of her older ones. On this 1984 record, she has a cheerful, commanding voice that is full of lilt and replete with power. Her backup is reminiscent of George Jones' bands, and the result is that this album is traditional country all the way through. A balm, it is, to the ears of this country boy.

9. Izibani Zomggashivo by Mahotella Queens. This is great African music, similar to reggae, but more precise and containing a lot more excitement. I loved the female voices and harmony in this, along with the hard-driving bass.

10. Word Jazz by Ken Nordine. This is a very difficult album to describe. This fellow's rich voice tells some very funny, and often uncommonly profound, stories while accompanied by some very fine jazz playing. The concepts are ethereal, speculative, yet mundane and pedestrian. It is very good fun, very idiosyncratic, very memorable. I recommend to anyone that they try to obtain a copy of this rather rare recording.

11. Eagle When She Flies by Dolly Parton. There was a time there when Dolly was taking on a Vegas persona and voice, but this is the old Dolly back again, with that wonderful combination of folk and country, and a voice that grabs on to each note and, even when it is no more than an eighth-note, does half a dozen things with it before she is finished fondling it and goes on to the next.

12. Tribute by Roy Rogers (with friends). I would never have noticed this one, had I not heard that Emmylou Harris does excellent backup on one of the songs. This song, and one with Randy Travis singing backup, were good. As for the rest--rather weak, and often not even in key. Still I liked the album because of the nostalgia, and the truly atavistic feelings it evoked. When I was young, I rarely saw a television show since we did not have one in my family until I was about a junior in high school, but when I wasn't yet even in grade school, I did manage to see a couple of Roy Rogers episodes on TV. He was my cowboy hero, and I still remember the earnest arguments I would get into with cousins and the neighbor kids as to who was the better fighter, Roy Rogers or Gene Autrey. I always argued that Roy Rogers could certainly, without any trouble at all, knock out Gene Autrey. As for The Lone Ranger, I acknowledged that he would have a rougher time of it, but I still avowed that Roy Rogers could "beat up" The Lone Ranger. Strange values, but still, even at this later and wiser age, not without an aura of sweet innocence.

13. The Elisabeth Schwarzkopf Christmas Album by Elisabeth Schwarzkopf. This one appealed simply because I listened to it during the Christmas season, and it was so very refreshing to hear those very familiar songs being done so well. I love Schwarzkopf's voice, and on this album, she gave as much by way of effort as she does to more demanding and sublime songs.

14. Sibelius Songs sung by Kirsten Flagstad, with Oivin Fjeldstad conducting The London Symphony Orchestra. I bought this album for a dollar from a musicologist in academia who said it was terrible. Well; I consider it to be one of the finest albums I have ever heard. I had never before realized how wonderful are these songs by Sibelius. And I had never before heard Flagstad sing so sweetly, so true to the music and so inspired. Even though this is a 1976 recording, which in terms of the engineering sounds even older, there is a way Flagstad's voice fills the soundstage so fully, and causes it to move forward and back, that one feels completely engrossed in--contained within--the music.

15. Sojourner Truth by Soldier String Quartet. There were moments when I almost disliked this album. It is highly experimental, modern, dissonant at times. And yet it is one of those recordings of contemporary music which works simply because the music is so creative (even if not always melodic), so passionate (even if at times a bit dissipated), and so structurally elegant (even if, at times, the structure threatens to tilt askew).

Usually I can not stand contemporary music of this type, but this album appealed greatly. That cellist! The jazz things she could do--as well as an accomplished jazz bass player! Percussion in this recording was used to good effect. The voicing of the instruments was not always well done, but still, this is a startling and impressive album.

16. Padre Antonio Soler: Sonatas for Harpsichord played by Gilbert Rowland. It was Sir Thomas Beecham who said that he hated the sound of a harpsichord because it sounds like two skeletons copulating on a tin roof during a hailstorm. When I listen to someone like Martin Galling on the harpsichord, I understand his sentiment. But when I hear Rowland playing Soler, I have very different sentiments. Truly, on this album, Rowland's playing is supreme. He brings impressive bass out of the instrument, and gives it a majestic mien, while revealing fully the unique genius of this composer.



Cattle drive quartets

17. The Indestructible Beat of Soweto. This album, which essentially is an anthology of African rock groups, is not the kind of music I normally would be drawn to. And yet this one has a primitive energy which stirs me, and gives me a sense of rhythmic appreciation which I derive from only a few pieces of music. It is so unique I would be reluctant to recommend it. I suggest to my friends that when they visit me they ask to hear this one.

18. Put Yourself in My Place by Pam Tillis. This woman is new on the scene, relatively speaking, and this last year was my first encounter with her. She has such beautiful control of a strong, yet tender voice. The way her voice blends with that guitar on "Maybe It Was Memphis" gives one chills. Her dad, Mel, may have been the force who got her started, but she obviously can proceed with this journey by herself.

19. Homeward Looking Angel by Pam Tillis is even better than her above-mentioned first album. Her song, "Shake the Sugar Tree," is pure honeyed caresses. Her songs rarely have that "I've been done wrong," emotion to them, but instead, have a sense of joy and fun which is very refreshing.

An aside is in order here, as regards this and the above album: I wish the promoters, and photographers, would give up on trying to make Pam Tillis look like a Cosmopolitan model. She doesn't have the face, the height, or the figure. But she is pretty--prettier than that image. But the photographer tries to make her look beautiful in the way society believes women should look beautiful. The result is that she looks painted and artificial on the album covers. I am weary of the attitude which seems to dictate that a female singer can not be successful unless she is beautiful, can do a sexy music video, and look like a sleek, air-brushed, idealized fashion model. These singers' voices deserve more credit than that.

20. Can't Run from Myself by Tanya Tucker. Some of the songs are rather hoaky, but the Tucker fire and lusty voice are present in full force. This album must be damned good for me to place it among the best, because the truth of the matter is that I can not stand Tanya Tucker herself. Her boasting about illegitimate motherhood, her own conduct as a mother, and her exploitative attitude toward the media and other people makes me detest her as a person. I have to put all that aside when I enjoy her artistry.

21. Wildflowers by Cassandra Vasik. Vasik won the award: "Country Female Vocalist of the Year" for 1991 in Canada, with this album. It is pure country all the way through, and yet there is something different about Canadian country. It tends to have less of a folk element in it than C&W in the States, which is surprising. If anything there is a trace of jazz, a sophistication, a polished precision (which, however, is never artificial) which tends to characterize Canadian country music. This album is one of the best in the country genre to ever come out of Canada, and I highly recommend it for my (few) friends who enjoy country music.

22. Trisha Yearwood by Trisha Yearwood. The voice is strong, not yet mature, but generally precise, and with a tonal timbre reminiscent of Emmylou Harris. I especially liked the song, "She's in Love with the Boy," on this album, and look forward to new albums by this "rising young star."

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Here follows a list of disappointing albums for 1992:

1. The Best Songs by Eric Anderson. He was one of my favorite folk singers during the late '60s, and some of his best songs are on this album. The problem is that all (or virtually all) of the songs on this album are not taken from old albums; instead, they are retakes. Obviously done much later than were the original versions, these sound stale, and Anderson sounds bored. He is careless, he drops syllables, takes odd liberties with the songs, and seems to have the attitude that, "You know how this song usually goes, so here is how I will harmonize with your memory of it." The result is disappointing, irritating, not entirely bad, but not worth another listening.

2. Carreras Domingo Pavarotti in Concert. I listened to this album twice, and concluded that the problem must be not with the album but with me: I am the one still struggling to appreciate the tenor voice. It was only after listening to many albums by Shura Gehrman that I came to realize how some of my objections to this album might have considerable merit. For example, I did not like the love songs on this album. They lack tenderness; they are replete with grief, but the grief is so staged--feigned--as to sound overly artificial. The splendor of those sustained high notes can raise goose bumps, but too often the display seems discontiguous with the music before and after. Also, there is too much nasal tone in these tenors (as, with notable exceptions such as John Aler, there is in just about all tenors).

As for this particular album, the songs were too uneven with one another for me to ever get into its overall mood. I did like hearing these three voices, together and contrasted. Domingo's sheer power is unbelievable, and his range down to a rich baritone level along with his tenor soaring is glorious. Pavorotti's strength is with emotional subtlety--the many nuances of a song's meaning. Carreras, of course, overflows with raw emotion, but I must say that on this recording it does not seem that his voice is what it was prior to his battle with leukemia. On many notes, especially the high ones, he was searching for the exact pitch, and on some occasions, when he seemed to believe he had found it, he was actually a bit flat.

One note: I did very much appreciate the last piece on this album; it is an encore, done by all three tenors together. I refer to the "Nessun dorma." I must concede that the work of the orchestra (conducted by Zubin Mehta) coalescing so well with these voices on this particular song raised the level of aspiring emotion to a very high glory, and was almost sufficient to convert me over to loving the tenor voice. The depth of sad but joyous feeling was truly overwhelming. But at the same time, the success of this song removed me even further from any conversion to liking the tenor voice. Why did it remove me further? Because that song, done so perfectly and yet so humanly, made me too aware of how imperfect, flawed, or simply elusive are so many of the other works on this album, and virtually all other recordings by tenors.

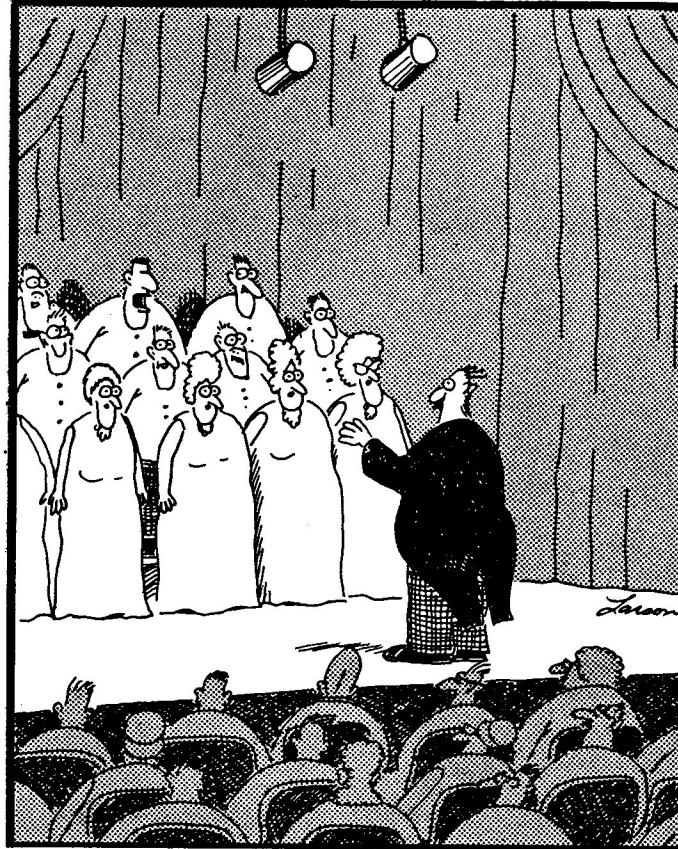
3. Pure Desmond by Paul Desmond. It was lifeless. Now and then the Desmond sound on tenor sax would come through, but then he would lose the tone, and without that Desmond tone, there is little left. Ron Carter was doing his usual poor job on back-up bass. (Yes; I will go on record with the claim that Ron Carter is a very poor back-up man. On solo bass he can be fantastic, but when he has to lay a foundation for someone else, you'd be better off finding a brick layer.) On this recording, Connie Kay sounded like a blushing, shy little waif on drums, barely keeping time and certainly doing nothing interesting. Ed Bickert on guitar was most interesting, but his tone was muffled and too heavy on the bass, and while he did some imaginative things there was never a bit of vitality there. A waste of vinyl, this one was.

4. Shepherd Moons by Enya. Although I have loved her two previous albums, this one does not have their quality. It sounds forced, as though her record producers pressured her to put together an album before she was ready. The singing is not very good--the high notes tend to be raspy and rough, which is not disguised even by all the reverberation used. There is little imagination in the song-writing. The voice's tonality is disjunctive with the instruments. A piano used on several of the songs is not very well in tune. I had hoped this one would be even better than her previous Watermark, which was a tremendous recording. But this one is a diminution which we can hope is only a lapse.

5. A Crystal Christmas by Crystal Gayle. I bought this album because I have liked just about everything Crystal Gayle did during her younger years. But as it turned out, this one was just one more tired recording of the same old Christmas standards. She simply took the songs and waded her way through them, not injecting one bit of novelty, and certainly making no effort to imprint her personality. A waste of money.

6. Ain't Gonna Worry by Crystal Gayle. My experience last year with Crystal Gayle's 1986 album, Straight to the Heart, suggested to me that this long-time favorite of mine is beginning to slip. But I bought this 1990 recording--and it was awful. The band backing her is mediocre, the bass kept changing tempo, but the main problem is that her voice is gone. She can not hit the high notes, she has to strain when she wants to extend a note, and her enunciation has become terribly careless. The results are boring, and Crystal Gayle herself sounds bored doing these songs.

I would guess that either she, or her producers, were very aware of her vocal shortcomings; they shoved in a lot of vocal harmonies, did a lot of overdubbing with her own voice, added reverb, but it was all to little avail. Age has taken its toll.



In that one split second, when the choir's last note had ended, but before the audience could respond, Vinnie Conswego belches the phrase, "That's all, folks."

7. Three Good Reasons by Crystal Gayle. I bought this 1992 album in one last effort to see if I could salvage my flagging loyalty to this singer. This one was better than Ain't Gonna Worry. It was obvious that she was giving it her all, and she was using a very good band. Plus, the songs are generally better than those on Ain't Gonna Worry. But each time, while listening to a song and starting to appreciate it, it would become glaringly obvious that her voice just doesn't quite achieve what she needs. Again, I think someone was aware of these shortcomings. The overdubbing of her own voice was so heavy on this album to at times sound almost like a chorus. I will concede that some songs on this album almost do pass for enjoyable listening, but the irritations are too many, and one gives up.

I did go back for a second listening to this album, thinking that, having heard the songs once, they might sound better to my ears a second time around. But no; they sounded worse. I am about to give up on this formerly wonderful singer.

8. Emmylou Harris and the Nash Ramblers at the Ryman. I will go public with the claim that of all popular singers--folk, country, rock--Emmylou Harris is probably my favorite. But over the last few years she has been complaining that her aging voice simply does not have the strength to keep performing the type of music she has given us in the past. So she has decided to convert to an all-acoustic format, and switch from her usual style of country to more traditional bluegrass. And that's what this album is: traditional bluegrass. But she does not have the natural voice--the twang--for bluegrass. The album is very poorly recorded. And the musicians, although adequate, are far below the caliber of people she has customarily used on other albums.

9. Last Tango in Paris--the movie soundtrack. Until one listens to a movie's soundtrack, separate from the viewing, one often does not have a clear idea of how nice the music was. Several times I have been quite amazed at how good a movie's music was, and at how I utterly failed to notice this during the viewing of the movie. Of course, at other times, one has the opposite experience. This time I was surprised at how bad the soundtrack was, and at how it failed to evoke any memories of this very excellent movie. I gave the album away, and have no memory as to the unmemorable composer's name.

10. Mozart's complete Symphonies as performed by The Academy of Ancient Music, and conducted by Christopher Hogwood. (I think there was another conductor or two involved also, but my memory is not very clear on the matter.) The original instrumentation on this set simply did not interest me. Even so, I have heard this orchestra play better, e.g., on their wonderful recording of Handel's Messiah. In this performance the entire ensemble played very poorly, with no attack, little passion, and no precision at all. Even in the most lively of Mozart's symphonies, this orchestra waddled along like a fat lady in high heels. I traded this entire set of LPs away.



"Who, me?"

11. A Holiday Celebration by Peter, Paul and Mary, with The New York Choral Society. It was Christmas music. The orchestra sounded utterly terrible. (Or was it a synthesizer? One could scarcely tell for sure.) Peter and Paul played and sang well, even though they were not quite up

to their old form. But Mary's voice is gone--uneven, raspy, almost a croaking baritone. The engineering had parts of the recording out of phase with other parts, and ... well, it was a short album, maybe forty-five minutes long at the most, but it seemed to drag on for two hours.

Another note: Not only did this album's music fail to please, there was an aspect to this recording which actually assaulted the ears. I refer to the audience's applause between songs, which was recorded at a much louder level than the music, so that the sound between each song was positively deafening.

I tell you; this album almost received my award for worst of the year.

12. The Very Best of the Righteous Brothers: Unchained Melody. This duo is remembered for having some very great hits, but a review of those hits reminds one of how few there were that were great, and how too many of those hits were marginal at best. Three songs on this album are great: "You've Lost that Lovin' Feelin'," "Unchained Melody," and "Soul and Inspiration." Two are passable: "Go Ahead and Cry," and "On This Side of Goodbye." As for the others, e.g., "Ebb Tide," or "He," one suspects that the only reason they ever made it to the charts was because they were riding the tails of the other hits.

13. Schubert: Sonata in B-Flat Major and Wandererfantasie played by Vladimir Ashkenazy. Shortly before this recording came out, I had heard Ashkenazy perform Wandererfantasie in London. His performance of the piece was the best I had ever heard--even better than Richter's recording. But Ashkenazy's recording was terrible. Ashkenazy is uninspired, idiosyncratic, careless. And the sound quality is terrible. It sounded like they were using a microphone that had been placed on a snare drum inside a tunnel. Truly, this album was almost impossible to listen to.

14. Knoxville: Summer of 1915 by Dawn Upshaw. This album evokes a very ambivalent response. Upshaw's voice is nothing short of stunning. But the engineering is poor: her voice needed to be miked more closely, and the orchestral balance was skewed because of poor placement of the microphones. The album also suffers because the songs, for the most part, are so very poor in quality. Dawn Upshaw, it seems, must struggle over and over to turn a tune into a song. But while her voice is spectacular, a great voice does not a song make. It is when listening to songs such as these--composed by Barber, Menotti, and Harbison, that I truly appreciate the great composers Mozart, Schubert, Brahms. I did decide to keep this album, primarily because of the one truly great song it contains. I refer to "No Word from Tom" by Igor Stravinsky which has stunning orchestration and gorgeous melodic lines for the voice. The Stravinsky song, appearing at the end, brings this recording effort to a rousing climax. But as for what comes before, the only song worth hearing is the third of Harbison's songs: "Why Mira Can't Go Back to Her Old House." Upshaw's voice is spectacular on this one, even though the song itself is boring and the lyrics (translations by Robert Bly of Mirabai) are so hoaky as to be embarrassing.

Judging from what I have heard of Upshaw, she is perhaps one of the finest sopranos in the world today. But hers is a voice that is not going to be sufficiently appreciated until she embraces the classics in her recording repertoire.

15. The Girl with Orange Lips by Dawn Upshaw. Again, the voice is startlingly pure, with a command of the upper register that goes far beyond the abilities of most sopranos. But again, the songs, all modern, simply are not very interesting. The orchestra does play better in this recording than in the above-mentioned recording. (I neglected to mention, that in the above recording, the groundwork is provided by the Orchestra of St. Luke's, conducted by David Zinman. In The Girl with Orange Lips, no name is given to either orchestra or conductor, although names of participating musicians are listed, which causes me to believe that the orchestra was put together especially for this recording.)

I suspect I shall keep this album, even though I am not very fond of it. I do think it deserves further listening; there is a uniqueness to some of the songs which I want to better understand. And there is a worry, on my part, that there might be something more to contemporary music than I am able to appreciate. In other words, I sometimes wonder if my dislike for contemporary music is not entirely the fault of the music. Hence, this gesture of patience--or, of generosity.



"Oh, my word, Helen! You play, too? ... And here I always thought you were just a songbird."

16. Hearts in Armor by Trisha Yearwood. In the section of best albums of 1992, I listed Trisha Yearwood's first. This, her second, does not at all follow the quality of the first. Her voice is hesitant, off-key, unpracticed. She sounds like an amateur with no training, no sense of how she might sound to others as opposed to how she sounds to herself, plus the album is overly produced--too much mixing, over-dubbing, reverb, double-miking, and all the trappings which indicate that too many people besides the singer were straining to make this a better album.

It is interesting (perhaps comforting) that in the above listing of disappointing albums, I have generally eschewed a critical tone. Instead, I note that my reaction is usually more one of mild bewilderment, or confusion, as to why these albums, which I think should have sounded good, did not. However, I will not be so kind as to forego a critical tone as I here list what was the most offensive album of the year. But no; I can not list but one such album. There are two, which this year must share the prize. The first of these is: Blazing Away by Marianne Faithful, a live recording. I tell you, this woman's early recordings were done in a voice that was one constant sensual caress. But since then ... she has smoked too many cigarettes, slugged too much whiskey, done too much morphine, and tried to glamorize to the press and public her bouts with various addictions. (Aging beauties who lose their physical glamor try to make glamor of their dissipations. I find this boring. The public, it seems, finds it titillating--gossip being a good substitute for glamor.) After all these abuses to her body, her spirit, and her voice, Marianne Faithful's voice has left her--or, one wishes she would show enough sense to leave her voice. But no; she continues to sing with a voice that is a dry rasp that croaks and squalls its way through each song like a raven dying of poison. She knows that her voice is now harsh and brittle, so she tries to capitalize on her shortcomings--aware that she can not really sing now, she tries on the persona of a singer who can no longer sing but still gets up there and proves that she can belt out sound even if it isn't song. Well; her attempt at thus capitalizing on her shortcoming does not work. It bores. She sings the same old songs, but most of them by now sound very stale, and in fact they do not sound like songs--most of them sound like a protracted exercise in gargling a mixture of soap and razor blades. Yet, she stands up there on the stage, acting so very sophisticated, pretending she is a heroine because she has, once again, managed to temporarily surmount her latest chemical dependency. This is what I find so offensive about the album. She expects us to admire her singing simply because she goes on doing it despite her battles with drugs. Well; I admire good singing, not stale vanity.

I must concede that this album's acoustics were excellent, and the backup band was one of the best I have ever heard; these qualities were enough to make parts of the album enjoyable. But as for Faithful's voice? Broken English was the last one I could tolerate. As for subsequent ones, I have listened, and discarded. Henceforth, I won't even bother listening to her new recordings. As for her career, I hope that the day will soon come when she has enough sense to quit performing and recording. At that point she should seek out the appropriate facilities, lie down on their concrete slab, light a cigarette, and stick in two needles, with the embalming fluid flowing in one end while the chemically-laden stale blood flows out the other. If someone insists on being a walking corpse, the least they can do, by way of good social grace and acceptable norms of propriety, is take measures to preserve themselves so they are less offensive to people they come in contact with.

The other album, which shares the prize for being the most offensive or insulting, is Handel's Messiah: A Soulful Celebration. This is a "take-off" from Handel's Messiah by various black artists, or black groups. On the one CD, they do not do the entire Messiah; in fact they do virtually nothing from the Messiah at all. Instead, each selection, or "cut," would involve taking a beginning theme from a part of the Messiah, and then going on to interpret, or reinvent, or butcher, the original theme in the course of transcribing it over to a rap, soul, or onanistic genre. Over and over these so-called artists would begin a selection from the work by using the true orchestration as an introduction, and I would think that, yes, this time, they are going to make it work. But then the orchestration would be abruptly cut off, the synthesizers would start buzzing, the drummers flailing, the electric guitars wailing, and off they would go into another perverted transmutation of a beautiful piece of music. The recording has all the grace of an old woman face-down in a pool of her own thick vomitus, trying to chew her way past the cohesive string of mucus so she can suck in a breath of air.

I gave this one away, cursing the fact that I had wasted my money on it.

As for the worst album of the year: this one is an odd category, because my pronouncement only refers to the worst of those I listened to all the way through. There are many others that would probably be more deserving of the prize, but they were so bad, from the beginning, that I quickly took them off and hence did not hear them all the way through. Usually, when I do

listen to an album all the way through, even though it starts out by sounding bad, it is because I had hoped it would be good based upon past recordings by the same artist; or because of other people's recommendations, I thought that perhaps I was missing something, and hoped that somehow, by the end, I might see some value in this album.

As I stated before, that awful Christmas album by Peter, Paul and Mary almost took the prize for being the worst. But I ended up doing an autovisceral exam, and elected to give the prize to George Crumb's Ancient Voices of Children (and) Music for a Summer Evening (Makrokosmos III). It is always dangerous to criticize "contemporary classical" music. One can not but think of those critics who disparaged music by the likes of Stravinsky, Mahler, even Beethoven, and who have since been proved to be fools. Still, one must be honest, and as for Crumb, well ... I almost wonder why I even bother. Yes; a mezzo-soprano singing directly into a piano, the microphone thus picking up not only her voice but also the many harmonics of the resonating piano strings; that is interesting. I think Marion might enjoy doing it some time. And then there is the sound of a mandolin with each "seconding" string tuned one-fourth of a note lower than the main string. I have encountered many an unintentional tuning at amateur bluegrass festivals. As for using the sound of a metal chisel being scraped on a piano wire; well, I hope it was a dull chisel, or a piano wire that needed replacing anyway. I suppose that, in some ways, this recording was interesting. For a few moments--lasting but maybe ten seconds--the music would even become strikingly beautiful; but then it would all dissolve back into its scarcely-differentiated tedium of nonmusical sounds and omnidirectional mania. I must conclude with one uncompromising judgement: Experimentation does not a melody make. These two attempts by Crumb deserve to be forgotten. As for his future recordings? Next time it occurs to him that some dots on a score can be made into music if the mezzo-soprano sticks her head inside a piano, I suggest that he instead send her to a bathroom and see if she can find something in there to stick her head into. I am quite sure that the results would not be any less musical.

Albums of note, which deserve comment, but which do not fit into the above categories, are:

1. Beethoven's Violin Concerto, Opus 61, played by Gidon Kremer with the Academy of St. Martin-in-the-Fields, conducted by Sir Neville Marriner. The playing is excellent throughout, both by the orchestra and by Kremer. But in this recording, Kremer used the cadenzas that had been written by Schnittke, plus a brief cadenza Kremer himself wrote, which is more or less in the Schnittke style. They simply do not work in this piece of music. They would be very nice short pieces to encounter in a recital of experimental or contemporary violin music, but certainly not in Beethoven's august and lyrical concerto for violin.

2. Requiem and Aventures and Nouvelles Aventures by Gyorgy Ligeti. The Requiem is very striking, unique, and at times terribly powerful. It deserves many a listen, and is the kind of grand flight that can not but impress a novice appreciator of classical music. But the latter two pieces of music on this album are virtually worthless. Unimaginative, uninteresting, unmusical, they fit into the genre of what I call "professor music." Enough said?

3. Reba McIntyre's Live. The music is good, but the production is an embarrassment. Whoever edited this album actually cut her off mid-word, in several instances, as she would be introducing a song. There were a couple of places where Reba, not actually introducing a song, decides to wax nostalgic and philosophical. She is too young to succeed at nostalgia, and she certainly is not a philosopher. But when she can keep from talking, and stick to singing, this album is a very wonderful experience for those who enjoy country music.



*** ARTICLES ***

My writing life proceeds apace. My immersion in both fiction and nonfiction keeps me terribly busy. Occasionally the urge takes hold of me and I do a few poems, but the urge is infrequent, and I am rather glad, given that poetry always seems to distract too much from my other writing. My other writing--my prose--is something I must avoid being distracted from, must take care not to neglect. Its proper care is, if anything, necessary to my health. In many ways, for my physical and spiritual constitution, prose, for me, is like defecating. Regular. Every day. Or, if I miss a day, then I become ill.

curiosity, determination, courage, aggravation, resignation, bliss. It is truly amazing that Shura Gehrman can explore these lengthy works by Schubert from beginning to end, all the while grasping these many emotional colors, without ever succumbing to the vocal fatigue which mars so many recordings of these lengthy works.

Schubert is not the only composer Gehrman interprets so wonderfully. His rendering of Brahms does him the justice of revealing him as one of the greatest of lieder composers. Gehrman's approach to Schumann is thoroughly unique--introspective, even meditative. He unfolds, layer by layer, all the wistful, painful complexity that underlies this difficult music, but at the same time he unerringly transmutes this complexity into joy. As for Gehrman's recording of Mussorgsky's Songs and Dances of Death, I am not at all hesitant in voicing my judgement that, in the entire history of all recorded music, this is one of the very greatest recordings ever done.

I stated above that Shura Gehrman's singing causes one to return to other singers. For any musicologist, or avid appreciator of lieder, this exercise at some point becomes social. Listening is done with others, opinions are exchanged, argued, refined, and sometimes promulgated. When interacting with others who know Gehrman's recordings, I have found that there is no middle ground. One might explain this by stating that people either love or hate Gehrman's voice, but such a simplistic summary would fail to represent the matter. It is more accurate to say that there are those who love his voice with fervent devotion, and those who are his wary detractors. As for this latter group, I have always been struck by how uncertain are their protestations. They find themselves confused, even distraught--not by Gehrman's singing, but by their inability to articulate what displeases them about his singing. They clutch for cliches and empty phraseology: "He allows himself too much freedom." Or, "He tries to make sure he doesn't sound like anybody else." Or, "He's always so emotional." Judgements such as these are more feeble than cogent, and we are fortunate that Gehrman's detractors have never prevailed against either his stellar artistic courage or the unassailable musical beauty of his singing.

There are those of us whose souls are not timid. We eagerly approach Gehrman's recordings, aware that his phenomenal singing, replete with warmth, power, and passion, results in a miraculous synaesthesia of interpretative freedom and musical exactitude. Shura Gehrman, the consummate artist and commanding maestro, has generously bequeathed to us many gifts of truly empyrean beauty, and he deserves the highest accolades our century can bestow upon any singer.

(written October of 1992)

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The following essay--actually, an exchange of letters--came about from my attempt at publishing an essay which was, in essence, a satire of philosophical pedantry, stuffiness, shortsightedness. I believed I had found a forum, in scholastic philosophy, which would be brave enough (or, simply cheerful enough) to publish my essay. Having grossly underestimated the rigidity of academicians, I proved myself wrong.

METAPHILOSOPHY AND METAHUMOR: AN UNSUCCESSFUL TRYST

LETTER # I to:

John O'Connor
Executive Secretary
Editor: The Featherless Biped
American Philosophical Association
University of Delaware
Newark, Delaware 19711

Dear Doctor O'Connor,

March 2, 1979

Your "call for papers" for The Featherless Biped laments the dearth of good papers, and requests that philosophers condescend to put seriousness aside and submit works in a lighter vein. Heeding your call, I respectfully submit the enclosed short article entitled, "Descartes Blunder." I think you will find it to your liking, and suitable for the needs of The Featherless Biped.

I look forward to your decision on this paper, and meanwhile, extend to you and yours my very best wishes.

Very truly,

Francis Baumli, Ph.D.

The reply:

Dear Doctor Baumli,

April 26, 1979

Thanks for letting us see your contribution. The Biped is growing smaller and may disappear in a little while. We decided to use some other material in the issues we have planned and so I return your contribution.

Thanks again.

Sincerely,

John O'Connor
Executive Secretary

Letter # II to:

Dr. Terry Bynum, Ed.
Metaphilosophy
Dept. of Philosophy
State University of New York at Albany
1400 Washington Avenue
Albany, New York
12222

Dear Dr. Bynum,

May 2, 1979

It has long been my contention that the most profound humor--a metahumor, so to speak--is a necessary condition for the highest form of seriousness. In other words, serious endeavors are neither complete nor trustworthy if they are not mollified and made human through the levity and play of humor. I believe this idea should apply to philosophy especially, given the scope and subtlety of its study. With this in mind, I submit to you the enclosed short article, "Descartes' Blunder."

I originally wrote this for The Featherless Biped section of the APA Proceedings, but John O'Connor tells me they are planning to discontinue that section. Hence I thought I would try your patience with it.

.....
Yours truly,

Francis Baumli, Ph.D.

The reply:

Dear Dr. Baumli,

June 12, 1979

Many thanks for the opportunity to read "Descartes' Blunder." I enjoyed it, and commend you on your ability to successfully write philosophical humor!

Humor, as you know, is the hardest thing to carry off successfully. I've often given thought to trying some sort of humorous column in Metaphilosophy (perhaps like the featherless biped of the APA newsletter); but I don't think I could pull it off (the APA didn't!). Perhaps something will be worked out for the Philosophy Teacher's Handbook.

At any rate, we are not able to use your piece in Metaphilosophy. (Why is it that the work you do is so good, yet Metaphilosophy can never use it? Perhaps we're too conventional and starchy--not open to innovation! I never thought of us like that!)

With best wishes,

Terrell Ward Bynum, Editor

The above letter acknowledged that many times I had tried to publish in Metaphilosophy, always being rejected because my works, supposedly, were too far "outside the realm of usual academic pursuits." Not quite daunted, I sent my Letter # III:

June 21, 1979

Dear Dr. Bynum,

Your letter of June 12 roused my spleen, if not my ire. I think there is something I need to reiterate about philosophical humor. As I opined in

my letter of May 2, I believe truly good humor gives a dimension to serious endeavors which mollifies and humanizes them somewhat, and at the same time--perhaps not so surprisingly--provides an added seriousness. I.e., he who is fully serious--whether hobo, philosopher, or mystic--is humble enough to laugh at how meager and finite his opinions really are. Humor then is an avenue toward further searching, further growth, and further seriousness.

In this sense, humor can provide an avenue toward the "meta" of even "metaphilosophy." Yes; metaphilosophy. And so on ad finitum. If you're smiling smugly, you're close to seeing what I mean.

You see, when I wrote "Descartes' Blunder," I was in the midst of working on three other articles. But I had an idea; namely, that Descartes did write many of his more important works in both French and Latin, and since I know both languages, it occurred to me one day that when Descartes formulated his maxim, "I think, therefore I am," he might have been led astray by unwittingly confusing the French word, "exister," which means to exist, with the Latin word, "existimo," which means to think or judge. But like I say, I was too busy to go tracking this down right then, and I am going to be too busy for maybe the next two years. So I thought, why not give a few philologically inclined Descartes scholars who have easy access to all his French and Latin works a chance at this. And at the same time, poke some fun at those of us--all of us!--who need to nudge ourselves out of our overly esoteric reveries. Hence, my short article.

Why do you need a "humorous column" to include such things? That is setting yourself up from the beginning. First of all, it is like an apology: "Sorry folks; if this doesn't please you, we'll hastily jerk it out and pretend it didn't happen. Just a joke, you know." Secondly, it commits you to the task of finding enough good humor to fill that column as long as you continue it. But like you say, good philosophical humor is somewhat rare. So what you would probably end up doing with a column is putting some mediocre humor into it. This, in my opinion, is what happened to The Featherless Biped section of the APA Journal.

Humor should be integrated into philosophy without fanfare and without apology. You don't need a column for it; if you see something that is of value, then publish it. Let your readers worry themselves over it, if somebody must worry. It seems to me good readers would enjoy an opportunity for an occasional laugh at themselves.

So I have a new suggestion. Why don't you publish my original letter of May 2 and your letter of June 12 (xerox copies enclosed), along with this letter and the article I originally submitted. That way you can ease your readers into the seriousness of philosophical humor slowly. Not to pamper them, but to tickle their egos gently.

Yours metasincerely,

Francis Baumli, Ph.D.

Letter # IV:

Dec. 19, 1979

Dear Dr. Bynum,

I wanted to query you and see what the status is regarding my submission and correspondence of June 21. I know it is a rather unconventional thing I have suggested. I have definite opinions about this matter, but please do not feel pressured by my persistence. I am not pretending to be a gadfly, and I've no craving to run amuck among imaginary ivory towers.

If you decide to reject my suggestion, and article, I shall not hold it against you. I will just laugh at myself, maybe give my cerebral hinder-parts a scratch, and be on my way.

Yours very sincerely,

Francis Baumli, Ph.D.

The reply:

Dear Dr. Baumli,

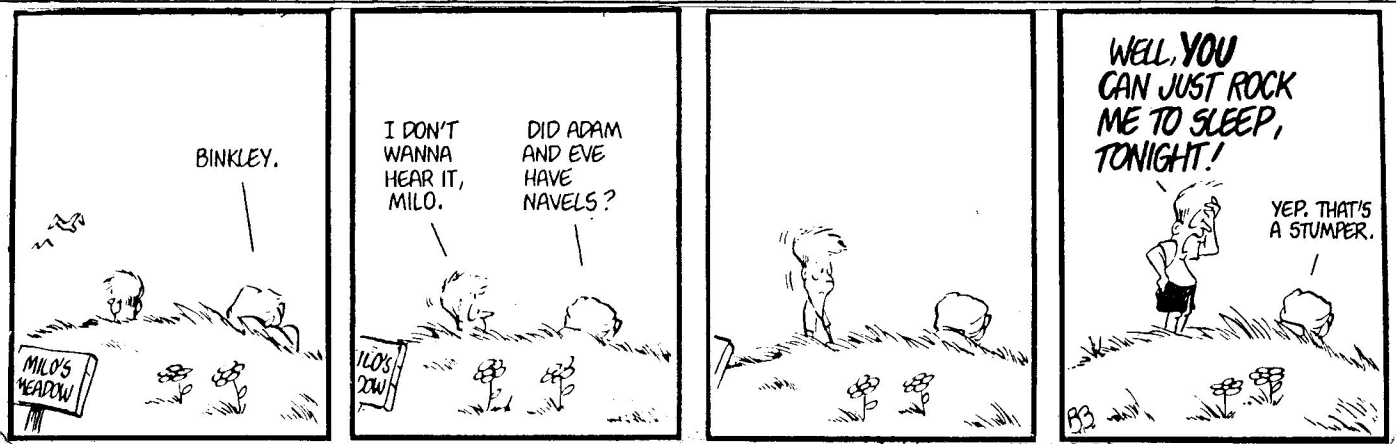
Sorry for the delay in dealing with your suggestion of last summer. I was tempted and intrigued by it, but I've finally decided not to proceed with it.

Sorry that we can't seem to get together on anything.

With best wishes,

Terrell Ward Bynum, Editor

I believe it was Oscar Wilde who said that if one does not give in to a temptation, then it wasn't really a temptation. Meanwhile, my little article, a gem of rarefied and trenchant humor if ever there was such, remains unpublished. Oh well.



*

The following letter, while expressing my opinion that Madonna's book, Sex, is a tiresome exercise in second-rate pornography, would probably not have been written were I not also miffed at how poorly written it was. As for the subject herself: Depending on the persona she puts on, she can, on rare occasions, come across as somewhat sexy. But most of the time, to quote a friend of mine from Columbia, Missouri, "Madonna has so little sex appeal you could eat her on a street corner in broad daylight, and it would be ten minutes before anyone would even notice." Being a perfect gentleman, I would never, of my own doing, make an observation such as this, but my friend's cautious statement has truth to it, and so, in service to the truth (even though it might appear to compromise my otherwise pristine erotic sensibilities) I have thus quoted from my friend so that verity might be served.

I do not here list the letter I did receive back from one of the company's staff. It was pretty much a form letter, and contained a lot of words that said virtually nothing.

PORNOGRAPHY OR EROTICA?

Attn: Desk of the President
Book-of-the-Month Club
Camp Hill, PA 17012

December 4, 1992

Dear people,

I am returning the enclosed book, Sex by Madonna. It is thoroughly offensive, and should never have been offered as a piece of "erotica." It is sleaze pornography at its mediocre worst.

At one time your club offered a huge selection of "high" literature. Over the last decade, too much chaff has been offered through your club, but at least the classics seem to persist in your offerings. But now, with the offering of Madonna's Sex, I fear that your club's focus on good reading is going to be replaced by a fixation on the pop culture's intellectual sterility and bored perversions.

I concede that your advertisements of Sex described it as "wicked" and "lusty." Such descriptives could equally well describe The Sun Also Rises by Ernest Hemingway or Black Spring by Henry Miller. These books are great literature. It might have been helpful, to a customer such as myself, had your advertisement proceeded to describe Sex as lewd, violent, and boring.

Can your customers trust, for the future, that you will concentrate on selling worthy literature, rather than purveying juvenile and neurotic pornography?

Sincerely,

Francis Baumli,
club member

*

The following "article" is also a letter, this one to an editor. When no written response came to my letter, I phoned the editor, asking her why she had made no commitment to publishing my letter. She conceded that the cartoon was not in good taste, and promised that they would try to avoid publishing any more like it. This was a small victory. But she did not want to bring further attention to the subject by publishing my letter. I pressed her on the issue, and somehow, in the course of our conversation, she discovered that, contrary to her initial assumption, I am not a medical doctor. She thereupon began sneering at me and generally denigrating me for having dared to try publishing a letter in a magazine devoted to the interests of physicians.

In the course of our very heated conversation which followed, I referred to her by her first name, Dymna. She became shrill. How would I like it if she addressed me by my first name? I told her I didn't mind

at all, that in fact I rather prefer it. So for the next five minutes Francis and Dympna (pronounced Dimp-nuh) jawed it out. It was thoroughly unpleasant, and was not helped by the fact that she apparently had always been touchy about her first name. (Probably since early grade school, with a name like that!) I had not used her first name to upset her; I just tend to use first names; that's all.

Her last statement was, "Well Doctor ... I mean, Francis Baumli. I hope you feel better knowing that you've ruined my day. I came in on a Saturday to get some extra work done. At the end of every day I'm so stressed out I can hardly function. I'm worn out and depressed. Now it's only early afternoon and I already feel that way. I don't know how I'll make it through the night. Goodbye."

"Ms. Burkhart," I pressed, and she paused to listen. "I think you would make it through the night without any trouble at all, if you would print my letter and thus ease yourself of a guilty conscience. As for your feeling ... , but she hung up.

**LETTER TO THE EDITORS:
ON MISANDRY AND MALE SEXUALITY**

Dympna Burkhart, Editor
Medical Aspects of Human Sexuality
Cahners Publishing
249 W. 17th St.
New York, NY 10011

April 30, 1991

Dear Ms. Burkhart,

This letter refers to a cartoon, on page 60 of the March '91 issue of Medical Aspects of Human Sexuality, which I find personally and professionally offensive. This cartoon (here included) depicts a female clerk showing a small guillotine to a female customer, saying, "It's the ultimate in birth control." The intended joke is that the woman can use this little guillotine to cut off her sexual partner's penis.



In my opinion, and the opinion of several other professionals with whom I work, this cartoon is scarcely funny. Joking about cutting off a man's genitals is sick. I am sure that you would never have considered publishing a similar cartoon about women. Had the genders been reversed, with a male clerk holding up a huge drill or blowtorch, saying, "It's the ultimate in morning-after birth control," you would have had feminists picketing your offices.

Yours is a fine magazine. Why compromise its quality by thus ridiculing, demeaning, and entertaining violence toward a man's genitals.

Sincerely,

Francis Baumli, Ph.D.

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NOTES FROM TWIN FRANCES



I felt like a querulous child. "Francis, I don't want to! I don't have to have a reason. I just don't want to! Please! I don't want to do it!"

Would my brother relent? Of course not. He is a stubborn tyrant when it comes to such things.

"You have been saying for more than a year that you are going to give it up. Now, suddenly, you've decided to do another. And now, suddenly, I'm supposed to participate! Is that fair?"

Fairness is not the issue when tyranny is the agenda. He wanted it, and let me know that he would feel betrayed, bereft, and hurt if I did not comply. So at last I agreed. I would compose, and give to my obstinate twin brother, another donation to his Aviary.

So now, having expressed my reluctance, I fear I have conveyed a message of ill will to readers of what I've to say. All I can ask is that you trust me, and know that I harbor nary a negative feeling toward my audience. My reluctance about writing for this Aviary stems from simple, practical motives. For example, I refer to my audience; yet, for the most part, this audience is, for me, entirely imaginary. I do not even know most of the people who receive Francis's protracted exercise in narcissism. So how am I supposed to be personal (and personal I should be, in a letter), when with few exceptions I know neither the names nor faces of the Aviary's audience.

My reluctance also stems from the fact that I lead a rather simple, although, for me, quite exciting life. I am not a writer. The things I am excited about, or what is memorable about my year, are sufficiently expressed in conversation with friends. Not reclusive by temperament, as is Francis, I spend enough time with people that I do not have his crying need to send out a shrill message from inside a scholar's cell.

Finally, I hesitate to participate in The Aviary because I fear I am furthering Francis's self-destructive temperament. His doing these Aviaries is a type of insanity. They exhaust him. He considers them a duty to those friends he sees but rarely; but I believe he does not like this duty, although he will not admit it to me. He does, however, admit that they distract him from what he considers to be his more important writing. And because The Aviary is a distraction, his approach to each issue is to work terribly hard on it, and this way get it over with as soon as possible. I have not yet read this year's Aviary, so I have no idea as to how long it is, but Francis has just told me that he wrote the entire issue in nine days. Such effort exhausted him, and now, rather than choosing to pace himself temperately during the future, he merely complains: He complains about his weariness, his insomnia, his fears that he will die before he finishes his "major works," some of which he anticipates will require another two or three decades to complete. It is insane, that he should work himself this hard. And neurotic that he should worry so much about the future.

So what am I doing helping Francis further a project which every year takes a toll on his physical health and on his emotional equilibrium? Aren't I, as psychologists term it, "enabling" Francis's practice? Maybe if I stopped participating, he would be less committed to continuing it, and might finally do what he has for several years been threatening: abandon it.

But now, having committed myself to a small message, I am uneasy as to what to say. As I said; I do not know who my audience is. When I pointed this out to Francis, he had what is, I admit, a practical answer to this problem: "Then just write about me."

Francis knows that there is some risk in saying this. He has promised me that he will not change anything I write for The Aviary, and will not even comment on it in the issue it appears in (although he says he reserves the right to comment on what I might say this year in next year's Aviary). I have embarrassed him not a little with things I have previously written. And yet I take no pleasure in doing so, not because I am without occasional malice toward my brother, but because I know that even when I embarrass him, Francis loves the attention, and is willing to endure this discomfort for the sake of what he probably thinks transmutes to fuel for people's adulation.

So I will say little about Francis this time, except to comment on one more general thing. When I last saw him, now many months ago, I was shocked at how much both he and Abbe, his wife, have aged. The trials of the heart that they both have experienced over Dacia's abandoning them have preyed upon their bodies too. Two or three years ago they both were very youthful-looking people. Abbe looked like a young woman in her mid-twenties. Francis like a man in his late thirties. Now, after the trauma over Dacia during 1991 (and continuing, as it does, into the present), they both look their age: Abbe at 34, and Francis at 44. Parenting does take its toll. Whenever I meet an adult who looks unusually young, it virtually always is the case that this person has no children.

Do I appear young? I am told I do. I am not yet haggard enough to have lost my modeling jobs. In fact, I am receiving more requests than ever, now that being tall is not such a desired criterion as it has been over the last few years. But the photographers must view me as an older person now. All my modeling this last year has been of women's business clothes. It has been four or five years since I last did a swimsuit ad, and although I keep myself very trim, I think the photographers do not see my body as youthful enough for such things. No matter. I actually receive much more money for the kind of modeling I now do, and I continue with my previous job too, directing and managing company security in my very nonglamorous job at The Isle of Man. I had thought of giving up my flat in London a couple of years ago, but with so many new modeling jobs in London, I must keep it. My company pays me very well, gives me much time off, and with both jobs I make too much money, spend little of it, give some (but too little) to charities, and generally enjoy moving through life at my usual pace. (To deter the voyeuristic queries of Francis's friends--two asked, by letter, last year--I will here give an update on my romantic life. No; I am not yet

married. Yes; I do have a "boyfriend." He lives in Wales, is originally from Scotland, and we get along capitally. So no, I am not interested in setting up a date with anyone by mail or telephone.)

While Francis's health continues to deteriorate, mine continues to improve. Those many health problems I had as a child, and as an adolescent, are truly in the past. I am given to exercise, can walk forty miles in a day over the countryside and not be tired, and am aware that being this blessed with good health makes me all the more unhappy about anticipating the infirmities of old age.

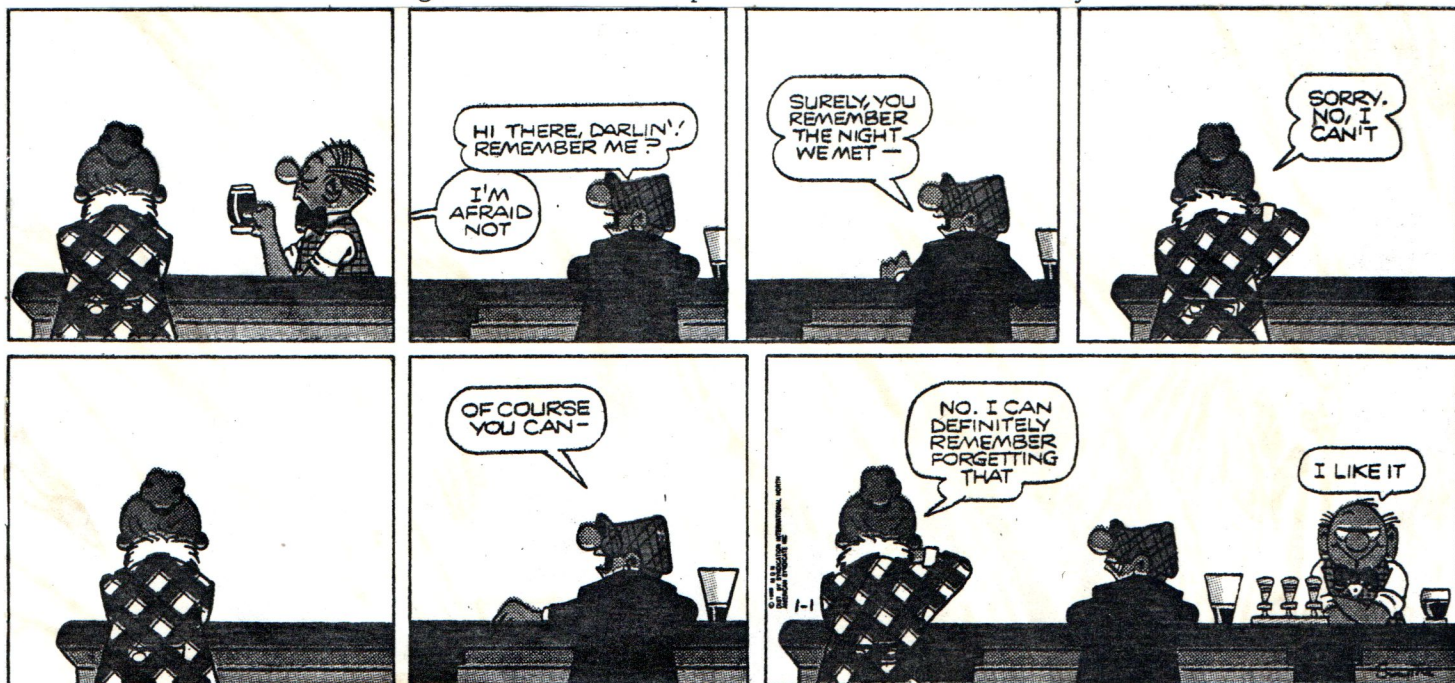
As for the health problems of my youth--Francis told me by telephone that he is going to talk about the events, and complications, surrounding our births in 1948. Why he should want to broach a subject that, for me at least, is painful, I do not understand. Francis can be so blithe in talking about our births. He was born first. He always brags a little about this, as though the happenstance of nature is reason for pride! He speaks of the birth complications, as though they were minor. He always fails to note that his umbilicus was strangling me, and that our births, already delayed by a meddling nurse, were further complicated by this dangerous conjoining. Thus began my health problems, and subsequent assumptions about further health problems which actually were nonexistent. While I have Francis himself to thank for finally extricating me from the maze, and ignorance, of the medical system that, in a sense, was imprisoning me, I do think it is less than appropriate for him to use this event--or, these events--as a means to furthering his spiritual exhibitionism. Francis even told me by phone that, if he can find it, he is tempted to print a map of our astrological birth signs which was made for him by an astrologist. Why? What perverse motive could be at work, causing him to want to do such an odd thing?

Thus Francis goes through life, always complicating matters, always stirring things up, riling his friends, baiting his enemies, (and baiting his friends too!). The result is that he never leads a dull life. And people always have an interesting, and amusing, time when with him. His exploits cause him to often be the subject of exasperated conversation among his friends and family. Often, in fact, I am, at the end of an evening with friends, rather irritated with myself over the fact that, once again, we spent too much time recounting his idiosyncracies, his dissipations, catharting our vague angers which he always evokes, and yet, somehow, always ending the conversation with the pronouncement, "But well, you can't help but love him." And yes, I do find it irritating that people in the States and also people in England who know him have begun prefacing his name with the title, "Saint." Occasionally they call him "Saint Francis," but usually it is "Saint Baumli." No; I am not jealous. I have no desires to take on that role. But I do find it rather a mockery of too many things, and I don't really understand what those things are. I am not very religious by temperament, so I am sure I do not experience it as a religious insult. It is just that people, when they use the word, seem to mean it, and yet, when they are pressed, they can not quite explain exactly what they mean by it. I try to joke with them about the word, and thus make them give it up. But no; they grimly retain it, almost as though it is something sacred, and therefore, to be preciously preserved.

And now I truly am exasperated with myself. I set out with the intention of very expressly avoiding Francis's suggestion that I write about him, and here I have done it. I wrote very much about him, and almost nothing about myself. I am sure he will take great pride in realizing that I ended up doing this even though I was expressly intending not to.

I can comfort myself by promising him that not only will I never address him as Saint Francis, I will seldom let an opportunity slip for doing what I can to mock his attachment to the title.

Maybe, however, I should be more kind. Francis is not able to continue the debauchery of his youth. His health, his role as a parent, and his role as a monogamous devoted husband do not allow it. So if he must debauch and cavort in these more genteel ways, and take perverse pleasure in other people calling him "Saint Baumli," then so be it. Let him, in his prideful fantasies, enjoy himself while he may. For the day will come when he leaves this world, and then, if there is an afterlife, and he, no longer occupied with this physical world, looks to his pantheon of peers for companionship, he will not find it. Because, if indeed they are his peers, then they will be conducting themselves exactly as he does, and they will refuse to talk about Francis; instead, they will talk about themselves. And what will Francis do then? Then he will have good occasion to put his sainthood to many a test.



Do you see? In one way or another, Francis and I are always poking fun at each other. Or quarreling. It seems that the only times we are at peace with one another is when it's just the two of us together. Then we get along very well. The problem is, I can not blame him for all of our quarreling. Still, he is a trial. He knows it. He loves it. And he capitalizes upon it at every turn. Fortunately, for his soul, one can't help but love him. Otherwise, all of us, long ago, would have fled from his presence.

My best, as always!

**

Francis

profinis

This is not the longest Aviary I have written. But perhaps it is the worst. I suppose I really shouldn't have done it. It did distract me from other projects in which I was completely immersed. The result was that I rushed my writing. And when I rush, I usually end up writing more words instead of fewer.

There is another reason I have certain qualms about this edition of The Aviary. When I say it is my worst, I am not referring to quality of writing only. I also am referring to (for want of a better term) the spiritual side of this newsletter (and of myself).

I confess to it: The tone of this issue has gone beyond pessimism; it has reached the point where it is thoroughly (if devoutly) cynical. And I do not like this.

What has happened to me? It is my nature to complain; yes, I know this. But it is not my nature to complain as much as I have done in this issue of The Aviary. Last evening I did something I've never done before.



I went back and read over what I have written in an issue of The Aviary--this Aviary. I did not like some of what I read, especially the bitching about people not knowing how to behave as courteous guests in my home, and the like. Why did I go on like that, even to the point of redundancy?

I do understand. Planning to leave this area in autumn of '94, I decided, in a sense, to give this area one last try--make one last heroic effort at letting the people of Southern Illinois demonstrate to me their good qualities. So I began interacting with them more. Doing my best to give them a chance to demonstrate their own best. I began participating in more social functions. I invited many people over during 1992. I made sure to open my doors to visiting guests even, of other people, when their own houses were too crowded. And what was the result? I ended up, I confess, becoming just a little bit like the people I was associating with. Proximity breeds similarity, you know. I began taking on an angry, resentful attitude toward the world. I became less friendly. At times I was even verbally bellicose. Fortunately, the similarity was only partial. Quite obviously I did not take on their character fully; otherwise, there would not even remain the intellectual faculties requisite for doing this Aviary. Moreover, there would not have impinged, between myself and those people with whom I was associating, something more akin to moral indignation than rank resentment. Yes; I lay awake most of last night, flogging my soul, aware that my acts of generosity had resulted in little more than my own undoing. I realized that my resentment toward guests, toward people who overstay their welcome, toward people who come in my house and turn on a radio--these are Southern Illinois natives. Excepting the one person referred to who decided to stay an extra three or four days without consulting with her hosts, it was Southern Illinois people--guests, neighbors, acquaintances--who were the recipients of my lame compassion, my hesitant generosity, my meager altruism. I extended myself half-heartedly, I interacted experimentally, I responded with blame. Thus, really, it was all my own fault. I should never have attempted to thus involve myself in a mediocre exercise of spiritual hospitality. My heart was not in it. I was acting out of a sense of duty, instead of a feeling of fervor. I was issuing invitations, but given the character of the recipients, and given

my already corroded soul, I could not have hoped to achieve the sort of intimacy, good fellowship, and relaxed amiability that is possible with my friends and the members of my extended family. Instead, I was tense, I was scrutinizing people, and in me there was no sense of trust. I was prepared for disappointment; and even had the possibility for fulfillment been there (and it certainly was not!), I would have, in one way or another, sabotaged it.

I am, however, a person who learns lessons and remembers them. This lesson I shall remember. As of this morning, I resolved to halt these morbid experiments. Instead, I shall go back to judging the people of this area as they deserve, and being a more consistent recluse, which is the most healthy response. Thus I shall confine my criticizing to those people who deserve it, and spare those who are my friends and family, since they do not deserve being impaled on my sharp tongue.

Where is the confessor who will hear my sin, and impose upon me an appropriate penance? I must not look for such a confessor among other people. Most are not fit to judge me. And those who are fit would, of course, be too terrified of me to judge me as I deserve.

So I must judge myself, and certainly, there is no one more fit to impose the deserved penance. As for this penance? I shall not reveal it. Other souls are too fragile to witness the spectacle of my private hell, especially when I am enduring its punishments silently--refusing to scream--so that I may, the more exquisitely, endure my sufferings and thus atone for my sins.

Thus realizing that I am to be my own confessor and judge, I already begin to take comfort, not only from my eventual atonement, but also from my sins. I am aware that, even though I might try to cast off the title, other people are insisting on referring to me (perceiving me!) as a saint. So this role is my lot. Whether or not I actually am a saint, if I appear to be one, then I owe it to those--who look to me as an exemplar--to conduct myself as a saint. And if I am to be a truly exemplary saint, then it is necessary that I sin. Otherwise, I would seem to be perfect, and this appearance, even if I myself were not deceived by it, might very well cause others to think that I am lacking in humility. Thus it is better that I sin--in this way I can hope to present a personality to the world which no one will mistake as prideful. In this way, by constantly sullyng my saintly soul, I can end up making myself all the more saintly because I have revealed my willingness to renounce my saintliness in the eyes of the world. Thus, even in my sinfulness, I can perhaps attain a selfless humility which, were there a God, even He would be tempted to envy.

It is my nature to experience the world in an overly abstract way; hence, I am sure that my atonements, and my experience of humility, will be rather rarefied. Perhaps I should try to be more concrete. In fact, I can begin with The Aviary itself. Yes; I am resolved that next year's shall be a very short one. In fact, I rather suspect that I have been anticipating future brevity (and thus anticipating my grim realization of last night, and my subsequent search for an appropriate penance!) ever since I first began writing this edition of The Aviary. I do think that this edition has turned out to be so very long because I was wanting, herein, to wrap up a lot of loose ends, say my last words on several topics, finish up with some long-standing agendas, and thus prepare for future editions of The Aviary being considerable more humble--shorter. Next year, I am resolved, that The Aviary will simply be a newsletter, rather than turning into an exercise which arouses, and to some (not inconsiderable) extent, embodies my literary propensities.

Meanwhile, I shall continue with my various roles: scholar, writer, musician, aesthete, husband, clown, not infrequent resident of pluralistic corporeal confines, parent, and saint.

Perhaps it will attest to my saintliness, but yes, I shall maintain my composure, my virtue, even in the course of committing myself to the role of parent so avidly. Marion is such a challenge; at the same time, he is such a joy. And



"So I said to him, 'Where is it written down that women should always be the one to look after a baby?'"



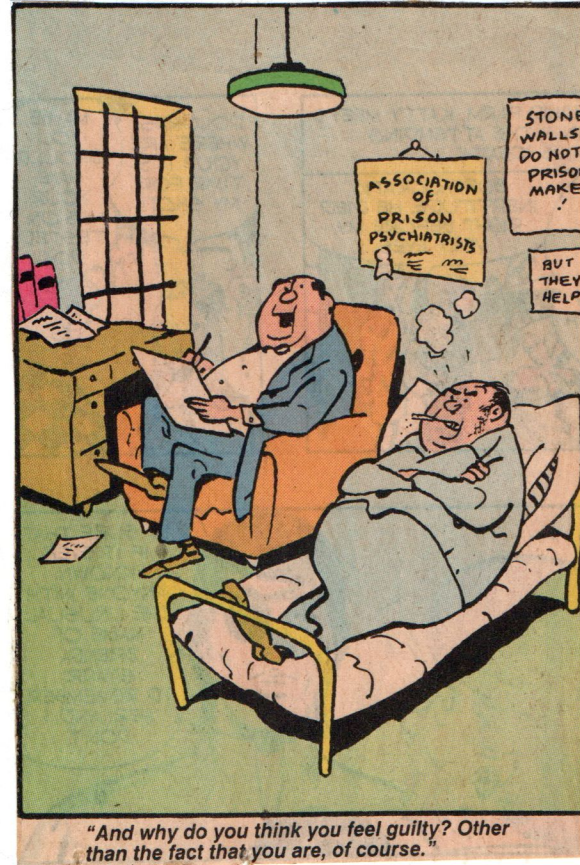
he changes constantly. Only a few days ago, when I had scarcely begun this edition of The Aviary, Marion was chattering constantly, always needing someone to play with him, unable to entertain himself, and ... most of all, like I already said, chattering on and on. But then, just a few days later, one evening Abbe and I noticed that we were eating supper, and Marion, who had already eaten, was quietly playing with his toys in the living room. That wondrous diversion perhaps lasted no more than twenty minutes, but within days Marion had learned to thus entertain himself for longer than an hour. So ... just when I thought his flow of words would drive this parent over the edge, the problem resolved itself.

The year 1993 will prove to be (is proving to be), a rather hectic, and yet relatively uneventful, year. I am busy with many an idea, but most of these are internal adventures, and not easily translated to the pages of this Aviary. Some of these are internal struggles, one of which will be the lengthy process of atonement I have already promised (indeed, have already begun, by so humbly having admitted the error of my ways herein, and by already castigating myself thoroughly--thus effecting a kind of public confession). I shall serve the remainder of my Southern Illinois incarceration, no longer being so foolish as to fraternize with, much less convert, my fellow inmates. And I shall continue with my writing.

Meanwhile, many plans are being made for the sake of facilitating our escaping this place. The grounds (3.15 acres) are being put in order. All necessary repairs are being done on the house so as to make it less difficult to sell when the time comes. We are announcing to people that we are going to be leaving within a year. And Baumli is carrying himself cautiously when in the vicinity of Abbe's workplace, given that a goodly number of her workmates, and also patients, feel angry about our leaving, and are fully aware that were it up to Abbe, we would stay. Some people have already let me know that our leaving--"your taking Abbe away from us!"--inflicts an injury and a deprivation. Their anger is ill concealed. I suspect that once Abbe sends out a letter to all her patients letting them know that we are indeed leaving, then the anger, and unpleasant incidents, will increase. I have even told Abbe, not always jokingly, that perhaps I should leave two or three months before she does. Otherwise, some disgruntled patient, hoping to keep Abbe here, might come by and shoot me. (No; I am not exactly joking. The thought has crossed my mind, and even those who despise me would never accuse me of being a paranoic.) The anger is intense; I can already feel it in those who want to express it but, thus far, curb their tongues. And regardless of whether there is any overt violence toward my person at the time, I do know that more than one person will seek me out with the intent of giving me a scolding. It will be a tense time. At this very moment my stomach is burning, just thinking about it.

But there will be an escape. And then a reprieve. And yes, many difficulties. I am not so naive as to believe that the next place we live will be the Elysian fields; we will still be proximal to members of the human species.

For now, there is much to do. Not only in the way of external deeds, but also by way of this inner transformation which other people are already acclaiming, and which it is my duty to discover--and embody. I had hoped to live out the rest of my days in obliquitous depravity. But ... it seems that there is a higher calling. I have already heeded it. I am striving to embrace it.



Yours in
incipient
sanctity,