

THE AVIARY

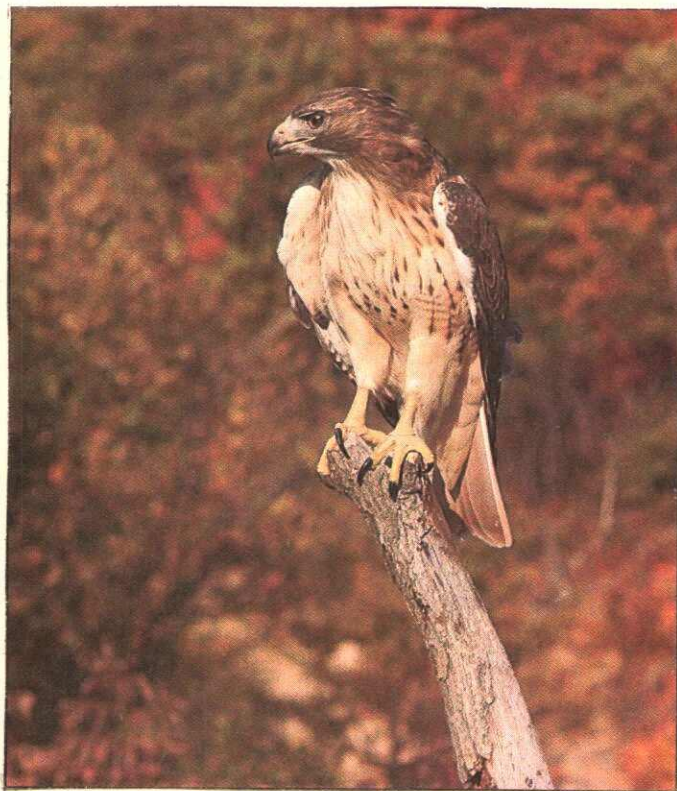
Volume 12,
1994



A letter is not a
letter unless ...

" ... 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



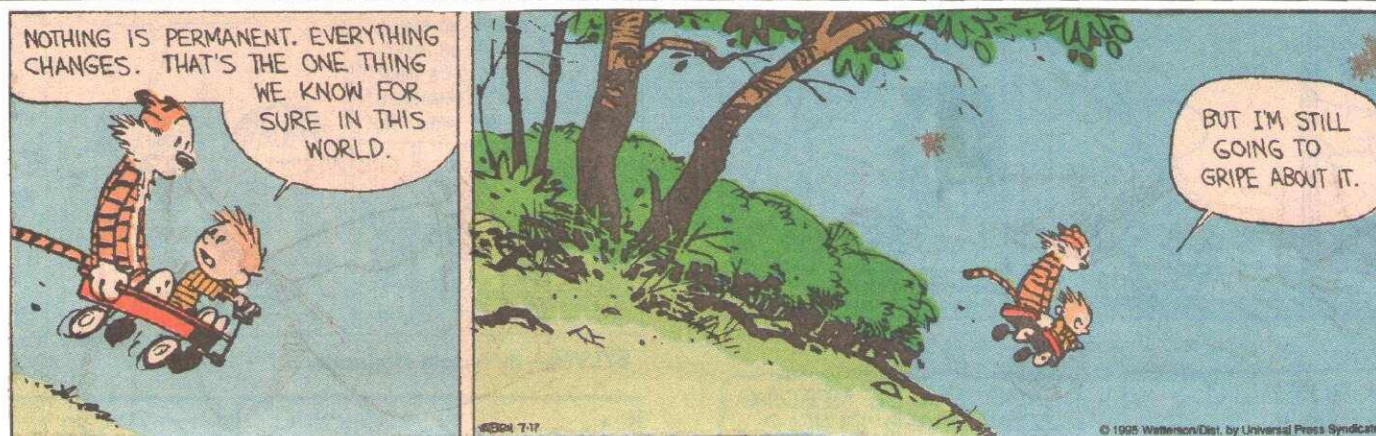
Sharp-eyed readers of The Aviary (and there are a few) will note a change in the way this issue is indexed. Always before, they have been indexed by year and month, along with volume number. This began with the idea in mind that, for example, Jan-Feb. 1994 would be the issue referring to events of the previous year; thus I would be allowed, should the year so demand, to put out, for example, a July-Aug. 1994 issue indicating what had transpired in the first six months of the year 1994. But all times which might have contained a sufficient number of significant events to warrant such a publication have also been times without the leisure to put out such a recounting. So henceforth, for clarity, I intend but one issue and I intend for that issue to be an encapsulation of what has happened for the span of

one year only, i.e., one issue per year. Since the most-recently published issue of The Aviary, dated Jan.-Feb. '94, and listed as Vol. 11, #1, recorded the meager history of the year 1993, I shall suffice to allow the present proffering to take the next volume number: 12, and simply be dated 1994 since it intends to vouchsafe the peregrinations of my life for this entire year. And so shall proceed my future editions of The Aviary, if indeed there are more. (Yes; "if indeed"--a history as sordid, boring, and self-absorbed as mine might better be not told at all!)

As for those who receive this Aviary, keep in mind one thing primarily. I consider it a letter, not a grand work of literature. It isn't even a minor work of literature. It is a letter, which means I am not interested in anyone writing me back and telling me that this edition of The Aviary somehow failed to satisfy their expectations. (The failure, in question, usually being that it did not sufficiently entertain them. Or, which is more often the case, it somehow angered them.) I do not care whether this little (well; maybe not so little) missive entertains you, and I care even less if it angers you. All I care about is whether I get a response, i.e., a reply. And I hope you will give it. Yes; this is indeed a form letter. Perhaps, it thereby is somewhat less personal. But likely it thereby also is more revealing, engaging, and provocative. Surely it will evoke thought. And in more than a few ways it likely is more personal than are many letters written these days, which usually are little more than obligatory dalliances with words. (Not that, in this day and age, many letters get written at all!)

A very particular gripe people have had about recent editions of The Aviary has been my tendency to complain about living in Southern Illinois. Well; yes, certainly I have complained, and I even acknowledge that it has been more than a tendency. Well; does a person have a right to complain? Certainly Southern Illinois deserves my complaining. Moreover, I notice that I do a lot less complaining about Southern Illinois than most people do about their lives. One couple, a doctor and a housewife who live many states away, had been so enthusiastic about The Aviary that they even wanted to sponsor it financially. I was flattered, but I turned them down; I can afford to put out this little letter. But exactly one year, or one issue, later they did a complete about-face. The wife wrote me a nasty letter stating that I need to either put up or shut up when it comes to Southern Illinois. I happened to call their home about matters of mutual family interest, and I spoke with (allow me to use fictitious names) Jerry. He did some complaining about his work, then about his house which was requiring many repairs, and then when I registered a complaint of perhaps two-minutes' duration about Southern Illinois, he interrupted me to tell me I was reminding him of the fish in his aquarium when they blow bubbles. He was quite insulting, and I accordingly changed the subject, and soon terminated the conversation. However, it bears noting that only a few weeks before we had visited them at their place. Jerry had spent the entire early afternoon--at least three hours--complaining about a friend who was taking up too much of his time because of a troubling divorce. And he complained about his parents too. Then later, when Jerry and my wife, Abbe, went off to fetch carry-out food, the wife, Ann, spent the entire time complaining about her life. And most of this complaining was about her husband. He had been obese before she married him; now he was morbidly obese. And she had begun having sex ("No; not an affair. Just sex," was how she put it) with her private tennis instructor. She explained that this was the only way she could stay with her husband, because now she could fantasize about having sex with her tennis instructor while having sex with Jerry. "Otherwise I couldn't keep up the sex, and our marriage would fall apart." I suggested she just go ahead and let it fall apart. "There are the kids." I said, "Just give up sex. A lot of women do." Her answer, "Then Jerry wouldn't buy me things." That was Ann's cold-blooded response. And thus that day had been spent, with at least five hours listening to them complain about the entirety of their lives, and they got pissed off over my letter doing some complaining, and over my complaining for two minutes during a phone conversation. This was not, shall we say, quite keeping perspective. This was, I righteously say, the terminus of that relationship.

But yes; I do complain, perhaps overly much sometimes, about Southern Illinois in this Aviary. But please keep perspective. Keep in mind the fact that I complain about few other aspects of my life. Keep in mind that I, in conversation, rarely complain at all. This letter, in a sense, is my yearly release. A release amounting to a catharsis--insufficient though it may be. So once a year I (to borrow the phrase from the common vernacular) "let it out." All at once I urinate, I defecate, I vomit, I menstruate. And in the process, I do something else which, it does seem, most people note and even value. Namely, in the process of this bestowal of the Baumli bile, I work the miracle of turning it into something humorous. Something which allows me to laugh (somewhat) at the situation, and which other people (yes) actually find entertaining. So let it be proclaimed: When Baumli complains, he is, at the same time, giving his blessing. So kneel, ye multitudes, and receive!



An idealist is one who, on noticing that a rose smells better than a cabbage, concludes that it will also make a better soup.

The Vintage Mencken by H.L.

Mencken, p. 231.

SIGNIFICANT EVENTS OF 1994

Jan. 28: The greatest bass singer in the world, Shura Gehrman, died. I not only knew his recordings well, I also knew him as a friend--his "off-stage" name being Count Numa Labinsky. This Welsh basso truly was one of the finest musical instruments in existence, and it is a pity he will not be able to do more recording. Having participated in his recording by proxy, i.e., by writing liner notes for certain of his CDs, I herein will print two short pieces I wrote which concern him, and which have never before seen print.

Feb. 2: I attended a concert by The Vermeer Quartet given at Shryock Auditorium on the SIU campus in Carbondale. "They came, they sawed, they conquered ... my insomnia." This is the judgement I so often make about string quartets, but this night it was not warranted. They did Mozart's Quartet No. 21 in D and it was sublime. The 1964 String Quartet by Witold Lutoslawski was, I admit, rather remote, elusive, and almost too modern for my taste; still, it appealed and certainly maintained aesthetic merit throughout. The final piece, Ravel's Quartet in F, I am not very familiar with, and so it was a special treat--to hear a piece so warm and accessible also achieve such sublime dimension.

Mar. 2: When it comes to listening to music, I prefer vinyl--LPs. The problem is getting them clean enough so they can render their potential. I this date bought a VPI 16.5 record cleaning machine, and it truly is the most significant improvement I ever made to my vinyl playback system. Years ago I used a Discwasher D4 handheld cleaner, which worked somewhat. I later would switch to a Nitty Gritty cleaning machine, which worked somewhat more, although it did not live up to its hype. This VPI is more of an improvement over the Nitty Gritty than the Nitty Gritty was over the little hand-held Discwasher D4. Truly, this VPI has allowed me to enter new dimensions of musical enjoyment; thus my being so narcissistic as to here note the purchase.

Mar. 23: While in Pennsylvania, I attended a circus for the first time in years. It was fun, exciting, novel: I confess that I felt almost like a small child myself. The trapeze artists were the best part, but seeing the elephants also was a thrill. Marion got to ride an elephant, which for his little psyche was quite an exercise in glory.

Apr. 1: On this "April Fool's Day" Abbe verbally accepted a contract for working at a health center in Saint Louis. Was it some vestigial trace of superstition which caused me to feel that an acceptance on this date was a bad omen?

Apr. 5: Abbe signed a contract for the job in Saint Louis which she had verbally accepted. Yes; this meant we would be moving away from Southern Illinois, and I would, before the year was out, be living in a big city.

Apr. 9: With Abbe I attended a concert by The Saint Louis Symphony Orchestra, with one of my favorite conductors, Robert Shaw, at the helm. The first piece, Barber's Prayers of Kierkegaard, I had never heard before; but truly it was beautiful, as a composition, although the performance was somewhat flawed by the soloists. The second piece, Mozart's Mass in c "The Great" is of course a sublime piece of music, but the tempo of the first movement was much too slow, and one had the sense throughout that

Shaw was struggling to get a feel for the orchestra, and they for him. The tempo never was quite right, and here, too, the soloists were remiss. It was a worthy concert, but with flaws that caused an ache.

Apr. 21: We attended the play: Grandma Moses: An American Primitive. The lead was played by Cloris Leachman, who is supposed to be somebody famous. The co-star was the much better actor, Craig Richard



Nelson, who I believe isn't somebody famous. The play itself, about the mediocre, if unique, painter was itself mediocre but not unique. The first half of the play was disjointed, many parts superfluous, and the acting so garish at times as to seem like cheap hamming. But by the second half of the play the actors hit their stride, and it ended well--thus achieving some degree of limited aesthetic stature.

For others in attendance, it seems that the main attraction of this play was the fact that Cloris Leachman was playing, and everyone I knew was talking about her, and talking to me as though I should know who she was--bris. Well; I didn't, and don't. The name, Cloris Leachman, did however put me in mind of a certain pseudo-medical procedure which, during the late-medieval period--especially in Spain--was practiced upon a certain part of the female anatomy. But when I asked the director of the auditorium if this reference was intended by the star's name, i.e., if she had adopted this as a "stage name" as a way of referring to that practice, he did not know what I was talking about. I patiently explained, whereupon he either took offense or pretended to, and thenceforth made sure to avoid me for the rest of the evening. Thus rejected, I took solace in thinking of the woman as Cloris of the Clitoris, and reminiscing about that practice which involved the use of leeches. Rather a waste of cogitational opportunity, I admit, but I believe it was fueled by a sense of indignation.

Apr. 30: With friends, I went to a concert by the duo-pianists, Anthony and Joseph Paratore. One part of it was very funny: So many women used to go to their concerts because they were such a handsome pair of Italian brothers. So many women were there for this concert because of what these two men used to be, but so many of these women were disappointed, because these brothers have aged considerably in the last ten years and aren't handsome at all anymore. I actually overheard several huffing women complaining about this. (And only men treat the opposite sex as sex objects?) As for the concert, it was just awful, and I shall not list the pieces here. Some they played as though they had never encountered the works before; others they played as if they had played them a few hundred times too many. The encore (yes; they scurried back onstage to pretend they were being asked to do an encore) was a ridiculous medley of Jerome Kern songs.

It bears being mentioned that this concert took place in Southern Illinois, with the usual out-of-tune piano--or, this time, pianos. Plus the problem was made even worse this time, given that the duo were out of synchrony not only in their playing, but also because one was seated at a Baldwin and the other at a Steinway.

May 26 & 27: We went to visit my favorite spot on the face of this earth: Alley Spring. Its thousands of shades of green and blue and aqua in its waters are truly mesmerizing, and sitting on the path back in behind the spring transports me back thousands of years. We also saw Big Spring and Round Spring. In order, these three springs have an average output of water, measured in millions of gallons per day, of: 81, 152-840, and 26. So much wasted water! Why can't they figure out a way of piping it all to Los Angeles?

June 7: I suppose this counts as the day we bought what would be our new home in Saint Louis, since on this date we signed a contract for it. It seemed like a place this country boy might be able to live, given that it is on an acre of land, as are the other eight houses on the street. As for the house, it's just a little cottage, modest and not at all ostentatious. (Was I being clear with my prose? I did not mean that our house shares an acre of land with eight other houses; I mean that each of the nine houses on our street has its own acre of land, i.e., boundary of privacy.)

One matter I did not at all understand: When people would be told that we had bought a house,



they, with considerable enthusiasm, would say, "Congratulations!" Why do people say this? Yes; I suppose that, for some, buying a house constitutes something of a financial achievement. But you don't congratulate someone when they buy a new musical instrument. Or a different prostitute. Or a set of fine books. So why congratulate them when they buy a house? I found the practice indecipherable, and dismayingly predictable.

June 13: We sold our house in Murphysboro. This didn't deserve anyone saying "Congratulations!" but it certainly was a relief. We had feared we would not be able to sell it, given how economically depressed the entire region is.

I can not report whether our buyer heard anyone say "Congratulations!" but I rather suspect he did.

July 13: On this day we "closed" on the house. Unexpected ("hidden") costs were revealed, and paid. Much money changed hands, and so the house was officially ours. We spent time at the house cleaning, and such, and noted much more noise than had been the case before--traffic noise, the roar of airplanes going over, the sound of neighbors' mowers and the barking of dogs. We felt worried--considerably so--at what this might portend.

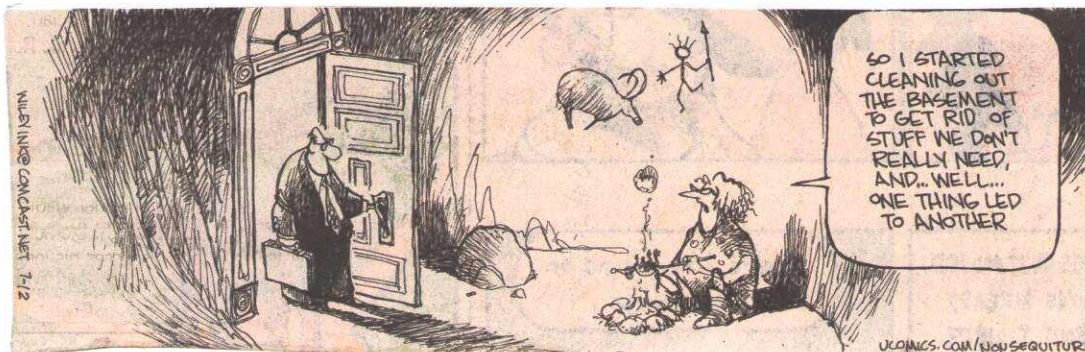
July 30: I sold the two wood-burning stoves which had been used at my home in New Franklin, but never hooked up in Murphysboro. We got \$500 for the old cookstove, with the two oven warmers above the range, the big side-tank for heating water, the beautiful finish of rusted chrome and nicked white porcelain, all a patina of age and functionality. I had been offered \$750 for the stove years before at New Franklin, but that was back when people were "collecting" such stoves. The other stove, of lesser quality and not so beautiful, fetched a mere \$125. But that was a great deal of weight gone from our possession, i.e., that we would not have to move. Still, those two stoves had served me well for many a year, and it felt very sad seeing them leave my keeping forever.

July: During this month, a wondrous event occurred which can't quite be given a specific date--or dates. I went outside one late morning and over by my study was a tall, truly gorgeous flower. Its stem--so tall as to be almost a stalk--was about three feet in length. It was a deep-green stem, with not a single leaf, as though all photosynthesis in this plant was to take place through the stem only. Its one flower was a pink almost shading to violet. And the fragrance was just divine. Truly it was one of the most beautiful sights I have ever beheld, and over the next few days there would be six buds blossoming into six flowers.

Many people were questioned as to what this flower might be, and finally several people were able to give an answer. It is called a "Surprise Lily" by most, and a few call it a "Resurrection Lily." I looked it up in a botany book devoted to flowers, and if I identified the correct flower in the book, then what we had is called a "Nerine Lily. The Latin name is "Nerine bowdenii" and the catalog listed a subtitle: "Pink Triumph" which I suspect referred to the color.

That late morning, seeing this flower, caused a shock of sensate intensity which could not have been surpassed had there been a huge spaceship parked there. Truly it was one of the most beautiful sights I have witnessed in my life, and I often indulge the fervent hope that I will get to see one again before I die.

Aug. 10: We moved into our new house. And it was awful. Just as when we moved to Murphysboro, everything went wrong with the movers. Given the fragile nature of my books, LPs, and other things, a specific contract had been drawn up as to



how things were to be stacked, how much could be loaded on top of other things, etc. The driver of the truck, who was the boss of the crew, simply refused to abide by the contract. He refused flatly; when we finally reached his boss after two hours' of phone calls, he made a show of abiding but then started refusing again, and when I tried to force him to, he went berserk, kicking boxes of LPs, and worse. We couldn't fire him and his crew; we had to be out of the house because the new owners were moving in the next day. So we were at their mercy, and by the time things were unloaded in Saint Louis, plans were already being made for a lawsuit--which forthwith was speedily and aggressively pursued.

Sept. 8: The brakes on the 1962 Chevy pickup went out completely. It

needed all new brake lines, new wheel cylinders, pads, all four drums, and meanwhile the frame which had been twice repaired with welding was going the way of all things once again. The pickup went to the dump. The pickup I had owned since--if memory serves--1976. Eighteen years is a long time to own a pickup. Especially when your little daughter calls it "her favorite blue truck" when she is little more than an infant, and her father starts calling it "the good ole pickemup truck." But it was going to cost over \$700 just to fix the brakes, and as for fixing that frame again, no one seemed at all willing to do it and I myself had little confidence in another attempt at repairing it. Off to the junker went that truck with the 235 engine and the four-speed with dual-low (or, as many a farmer I knew called that feature, "granny low"). This grown man was very sorry to part with it.

Sept. 15: With the pickup gone, we needed a second vehicle, so we bought a new (new used) car: a 1981 brown Volvo. A 240 sedan. The safe ones, you know. (Not that we didn't have a second vehicle, since there was the 1955 Caddy hearse; but that wasn't much of an option for Abbe if our 1979 Volvo broke down and she needed something to drive to work.)

Oct. 8: I woke to the sound of rain coming down outside, and it felt soft and peaceful! After that constant rain in Southern Illinois, I had thought I would never again be able to feel good about rain, but obviously, even if at only a convalescent's rate, I was recovering from that aversion.

Oct. 12: I have long admired the writings of Richard Selzer, and he was giving a lecture at Graham Chapel on the Washington University campus here in town. So I attended. As usual, the writer is smaller than his works. Yes; his works are genius. As a speaker Selzer was timid, spoke with a fag-like lisp, and although he occasionally let slip a bit of wit he was never eloquent. He mainly spoke about his own writings, but did so with all the verve of an English professor astraddle a blackboard. He also, referring to the theme of his play which would be performed within a few days, did a great deal of homage to the fact that old people have sexual feelings. In fact, he dwelt on this topic at such length it almost seemed as though he were trying to champion the geriatric libido. He did, however, toward the end of his talk do some speculating about some interesting issues in the English language, and this was well done.

And then ... yes, it happened. It. You know what I mean. Baumli pissed everybody off. It always happens, and I swear, I do not know how. Certainly I don't mean to do this: anger people. The time had come for questions and discussion, and my hand shot up. So I asked the first question, and I did so in the most friendly tone imaginable, even with a hint of jest as I turned my language into a question. My question I can repeat here verbatim: "I want you to know that I very much appreciate your coming here to give this lecture, but given all those years being a surgeon, and now not enough years to be a writer, wouldn't you rather be at home writing?"

He was immediately angry. He also was embarrassed and unsure of himself. He spoke haltingly: "Well, yes and no. I ...," and he gave a vague answer about how honored he was to be with old friends and to be back in town to see his play produced. And then he sternly admonished me to make sure I would be attending his play. I assured him that I would, and he quickly took a polite question from someone else. Again he gave a vague answer. I had more questions to ask, and since no one else's hand went up, I raised mine. But the moderator, with a sharp glance in my direction, quickly brought the presentation to a close.

And then ... as people started to leave, a throng of irate, indignant people--most of them professorly men--pressed up to me. They were admonishing me for having asked that question. Couldn't I understand that a play isn't actualized until it is performed? Couldn't I understand that a writer would want to see his play performed? Couldn't I ... and so the angry questions went, and finally I laughed loudly and told them that I was mainly jesting, and I had presumed Selzer would take my question as a jest. This lie actually mollified them. They all immediately began apologizing for having misunderstood me. It was bewildering, realizing how I had engendered such anger in this assortment of people, realizing too how I had lied so flippantly and sneeringly--being so sarcastic as to expect them to become even more angry, but instead all that anger and indignation immediately dissipated amidst apologies.

Truly, I do not understand how it is I anger people so easily. And truly, I do not understand how, in that situation, when I did attempt to make them angry by ridiculing their indignation, all their ire immediately dissipated!



Oct. 18: At last, after what seemed like an eternity of aesthetic deprivation, my stereo this date was hooked up and working. And this time it is in a much better room than it had back in Murphysboro. That room, at the old manor house, was just awful. Over in the right far corner was a steam radiator. Along the left wall was Abbe's piano. Behind the listening couch was a huge space heater with many an odd resonance in it. This new room, though somewhat too small for my preferences, is proportional for good listening, well damped with much in the way of acoustic treatment, and it is distant enough from the sleeping area that I can listen at night without disturbing her petulant majesty's sacred slumber.

Oct. 23: That play which Selzer had been here supervising, the play he referred to in his speech, the play which was heralded-- it was performed this date at Edison

Theatre's "Stage Left" series. And it was just awful. The play was terrible, the acting pitiable, the production stupid. There were a few Selzerian verbal gems, but they scarcely redeemed what was a true fiasco. Had any indignant professor come up to me this time, I would have flatly told him (or her) that this was one play the writer would have been better off not seeing produced ... ever.

Oh yes--the play's title. How could I have forgotten to mention this detail? The Black Swan. A better title might have been: The Black Swan Song.

Oct. 31: The brakes on the hearse went out. This meant that it now needed a new master cylinder, new cylinders on all four wheels, plus there were other problems: a tail-light kept shorting and the cause could not be found, a knob on the dash crumbled, the windshield was badly cracked, it had an exhaust leak, it needed a tune-up (and I had only found one person in all the world who could tune this car properly, and he lived far away). The cost of the repairs for these problems would come to at least \$1500, and involve (the usual) many months of waiting for parts to come in. The choice was a terribly painful one, but the hearse got parked--more or less permanently. I could not bear to send it to the junkyard, but I could not afford the expense, or invest the patience, necessary for getting its many repairs done.

Nov. 13. I went to see the musical Kiss of the Spider Woman. The only impressive part of this Broadway production was the set design. The music? It had all the volume of a Heavy Metal band and all the precision of a circus band. The female lead, or star, was Chita Rivera as the Spider Woman. As a singer, she tried for the Edith Piaf persona, trying for the sultry whiskey-and-cigarette voice, but all she did was manage to sound like a baritone profundo. As for dancing, she did, a couple of times, prove to us that a 60-year-old woman can kick her feet higher than her head. But as for the dancing itself, what one witnessed was a grim battle of arthritis versus ambition, and an even more grim battle between cellulite and gravity. I am sorry to say that her dancing had all the grace of a peeled hard-boiled egg rolling across the floor. The male support dancers were generally good, and as for the two main male actors, the fellow playing the fag was good. The other fellow--the political prisoner--was fair. But when they broke into song, well, it was just too discordant with the play's story. Too much out of context with a play about brutality under a fascist regime--brutality made worse in a prison. At this singing I grimaced inwardly many a time, and stifled a thousand sighs so that my partner would not be distracted from enjoying how gruesome the spectacle was.

As I left that performance, I said to my companion, "She didn't dance. She rolled waddlingly across the floor." My



"I'm sorry, madam, but these units are for display purposes only."

companion didn't hear me, and I was fortunate, because I was about to discover that she had enjoyed the play i.e., musical, immensely. I was dumbfounded. When I go out to an event such as this, I try to take along the best arm-candy I can find, and I almost always succeed. But to, this time, discover that my arm-candy liked this disaster? How amazingly unperceptive of me, to have actually fumed through the entire performance with a bimbo at my side and hadn't even been aware of it.

Nov. 15: We bought a 1976 Chevy one-half ton pickup. And it has an automatic transmission. I almost writhe with shame at this admission. Me? Me drive a pickup

with an automatic? But there is a reason. My dad went to driving an automatic pickup, which I found hard to believe. When I asked him why he would have bought an



automatic instead of a pickup with a standard transmission, he merely replied, "A standard, you can't work with it." He didn't explain. Always a man of few words. But when I began testing out pickups, in the course of looking for one, I would find out what he meant. The pickups made today that have standard transmissions aren't made for working. They are made for highway driving. The result was, every pickup I did a test-drive on was geared too high. Every one I drove was a five-speed, and on every one of these, the first gear--their lowest gear--was geared at a ratio about half-way between the second and third gears of my old 1962 Chevy 4-speed. Well, if you're trying to pull a heavy load up a hill, you'll burn up a clutch with a transmission geared that high. Or you won't make it up the hill at all. The gears were so high some of the pickups were even difficult to get going from a standstill. But the automatic transmission has a built-in fluid slip, so you can start moving at high torque while at a low speed. So while those standard transmission pickups might get great highway mileage (for a pickup), you couldn't work with them. The automatic transmission pickups aren't as good at highway mileage, but at least a man who buys a pickup for doing things like hauling wood, well, an automatic turned out to be the only choice.

Milage, for my driving habits, isn't that big a concern anyway. I keep track of the milage I drive because I keep careful records regarding when the oil needs to be changed. During the six years we lived in Murphysboro, I put a mere 18,000 miles on the pickup, or about 3,000 miles a year. As for the hearse, I put only 13,500 miles on it, or about 2,300 miles a year. That's a mere 5,300 miles per year I drive. Not much compared to the average person. And I suspect that, although Abbe will be doing more driving in Saint Louis than she did in Murphysboro, my own driving now will be much less.

Strange it is, I admit, to be going on about vehicles. But for a person of my identity, parting with my two vehicles has been a major event. I am a farm boy at heart, and that 1962 pickup has been my work vehicle for many a year. That hearse was bought in August of 1978, so it has been a part of my life for 16 years. I used it to haul my music equipment when I went out on music jobs. It was called by my friends a "love wagon." (Little did they realize!) It was my portable bedroom. It was my status symbol: Take note of me but keep away! I am death in motion!! It was the vehicle I slept in during many a rainy night, snuggled against the warm female I would one day marry. It was "Daddy's beautiful black car" according to Dacia when she was little. It was my surrogate brain. Its big body was my brain and memory in motion. It was, in many ways, my identity. I loved that hearse and pickup, and they had to go out of my life.

There won't be another old hearse. The newer ones don't have aesthetic appeal, and I can't hope to keep an old one running. They break down, and the old parts are too difficult to find.

I did realize, with acute dismay, that I now am living in a very citified city when I was shopping for that new (or used) pickup. I would call a dealer, get a salesman on the phone, and that salesman would be able to tell me everything about every pickup on the lot: the motor options, transmission options, differential options, the various "dress-up packages" as they are called--involving running lights and running boards and such, the trim options, seat options, and so on.

Except ... not one salesman was ever able to tell me the one piece of information that was absolutely essential to me--namely, what was the length of the pickup's bed? They couldn't even understand why I cared to know. I would explain: I wanted one with an eight-foot bed. A piece of plywood is four-feet by eight-feet. If I need to haul plywood, I don't want it sticking out the back of the pickup. So also with other things. One young salesman got very lippy with me about this topic, so I got very lippy with him, and insisted he find out for me the length of the bed of a certain pickup they had on the lot. He didn't possess a tape measure, and didn't know where to find one on the entire premises--which included a service center. I threatened to have a stiff talk with his boss about him, so finally (without taking his mouth away from the phone, which meant I walked about the rest of the day with my head cocked on sideways) he yelled, "Hey Bill! How long is the bed on that '92 blue pickup?!" I heard Bill's answer, "Eight foot two inches!" The young man came on and started to repeat it, but I told him I heard the answer. I asked, "How old is Bill?" The young man said he was at least in his late forties. I asked him if Bill was raised in the city. The young man opined that he acted like he probably came from the country. I retorted, "Well, I suggest you quit telling customers like me about all the running-light options, and pay attention to the kind of things Bill pays attention to. You might learn something." And I hung up. The '76 pickup we would eventually buy was purchased from a fellow who lived in the country and had a construction business.

Nov. 22: I had before heard Sylvia McNair in concert, but this night was the first time I ever heard her do a solo recital. Always before her mezzo-soprano register was blended with other voices, so this was a special treat.

The program was quite varied. Purcell came first, and she did him best. Those four songs were just tremendous. She followed with four by Schubert, and they were done almost as well. Her next piece, Mozart's "Misera, dove son," was most definitely not done well; this was the only mediocre performance of the evening. But there were mediocre songs which thence followed. Andre Previn's "Four Songs" with words by Toni Morrison was just an awful piece of music.

(Or pseudo-music.) There was decent music in the accompaniment: the piano and cello back-up did well. But the vocal line was stupid, and as for the words, they were more than stupid. They were garishly, embarrassingly tawdry and irrelevant to whatever has a right to appear on the classical stage. Witness these lines from the first of the songs, which was called, "Mercy":

I could watch heads turn
from the traveler's look,
The camera's probe;
Bear the purity of their shame;
hear mute desolation in syllables ... [and so on].

What the hell is this supposed to mean? And believe me, it didn't get any better. The first line of the following song went:

I don't need no man telling me I ain't
one.

Previn, you are a third-rate classical composer at best, and if you want to put on your best face when plying this trade, then you had better be prudent enough to leave the vapid rhetoric of flaccid feminism out of your vocal music.

Several songs by Debussy followed, but I can not judge their quality, because I always have problems with his music and I think my problems are a problem in me. All I can report is that Debussy almost bored (as usual) although I did like the last song which is called "Spleen."

Then came two songs by Bizet, which were truly great, especially the second, which is called, "Tarentelle."



For encore she did two "light" songs, and--most unlike me--I have completely forgotten what one of them was. The other was Bernstein's "I Hate Music" and I daresay hers was the only good rendering of this song I have ever heard. In fact, it was a great rendition, and I am very sorry that she has never recorded it.

Obviously this was a very full concert. McNair had much to do for this evening, and she gave a splendid accounting of her voice and of the songs. She is maturing, her voice is strong, and she has better command of pitch. Her recent work in opera has helped her. The mezzo range is a bit rounder, even thicker, but also more dramatic and so it comes across with much more authority. Occasionally this newly-acquired maturity evinced itself as something of a liability however, since she carried this more weighty approach into domains where a softer, more restrained grace would have worked better. But this is a mild criticism. Overall it was an exciting evening, and I am grateful I got to hear her. I do, however, confess to a mild irritation with McNair's way of displaying her personality. She has appeared in Saint Louis many times, is quite popular here, and there were times during the evening she seemed to be acting like a coy little girl, as if to say, "I am good. All of you like me. So I can be silly and girlish if I want to and we'll all laugh together." A little of that might have been okay, but she carried it a bit too far. As a result, her personality came across as too narcissistic and self-indulgent at times, even though the music came across well. But, of course, it was the music I went there for.

Nov. 26: We attended a concert by the Saint Louis Symphony Orchestra with Dawn Upshaw, the soprano, singing along on certain numbers. I went to this concert primarily to hear Upshaw. I have heard her sound well, especially on certain "art songs" which come from musicals (i.e., the best part of musicals). But I had never quite appreciated her voice, and knowing that so many people do, I wanted to hear her live.

The first work, which did not involve Upshaw, was Haydn's Symphony No. 85 "La Reine". It is an easy piece, but it was totally lackluster, as if the orchestra hadn't even given it a run-through before the concert.

Then came Jacob Druckman's Counterpoise for Soprano and Orchestra. The first movement was perhaps the most wretched piece of professor music I have ever heard. The second movement actually was quite good. (Every professor has one piece of good music in him.) The third and fourth movements steadily declined in quality and overall it was a completely besodden, amateurish piece. I do readily vouchsafe that Upshaw's enthusiasm lent to the work a certain dimension (though not a certain grandeur). Enthusiasm--this is what she was most capable of. Unfortunately it contained nothing else. Her style of delivery was strictly glandular, ranging from hysterical to vacuous, with intimations of chronic though not entirely undeserved postcoital frustration.

After the intermission, Upshaw did Mozart's K.528, and it was a dismal failure. Here her limitations were most obvious. Obviously she very much enjoys singing. She loves what she does. But she is all volume and fortissimo with nary one bit of ability to sing softly or tenderly.

Upshaw left the stage, and the orchestra proceeded with Mendelssohn's Symphony No. 3, the "Scottish." They seemed to move in to it properly at first, but within two minutes Slatkin lost control. He had no concept of what he was trying to do. One wanted to go up to that podium and whisper in his ear, "It's Scottish, Lenny. Don't you know it's supposed to sound Scottish?" He proceeded, groping constantly, the strings were all ill defined, and the horns actually were missing cues. When the violins were supposed to play staccato they did glissandos. When the woodwinds were supposed to be enthusiastic they were muffled and timid.

Overall, it was a bad concert, but I got to hear Upshaw and finally understand why other people like her. It is because of her energy. Not because she is a good singer. She has the true soprano range, but I preferred hearing McNair do Bizet's "Tarentelle" in a mezzo that tried for the soprano range, doing it with so much emotion that it put me in mind of Joan Sutherland's rendition of it. If McNair had to strain for the high notes, at least she did it with emotion, whereas Upshaw hit the high notes easily but with lackadaisical alacrity.

Dec. 2: I give this news for my audiophile friends. On this date I got my stereo speakers rewired.



Yes; those little JBL 4406 Studio Monitors were rewired with S&K 14-gauge wire, and the improvement was just amazing. In terms of volume alone, they measured a full 12 dB increase in volume miked at one meter @ a 1 kHz tone at 50 watts. This was the one parameter that could be measured objectively. The tone--much better. Impedance response--a bit flatter. The old wire that came out of those two speakers--you could wad all of it up into one fist, that is how minimal it was.

As for my nonaudiophile friends--Do you see how weird I get on this topic?

Dec. 17: The massive shelving project, for holding about 3,000 LPs in the music room, was at last finished this date. The room now feels complete.

GENERALLY: Yes; some commentary is warranted on certain topics which are not well defined by date.

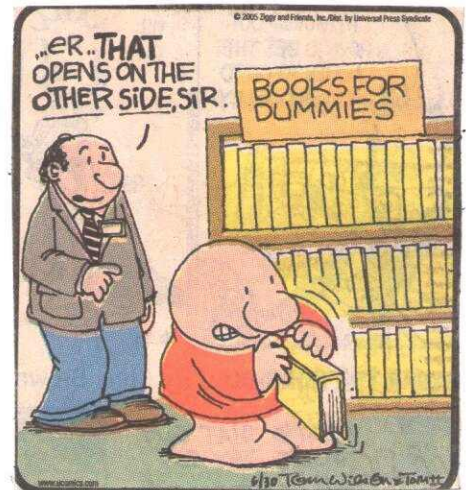
1. There remains the drama that is not worth being called a drama, which involves my living in Southern Illinois--during the first half of this year. But there is also a move to Saint Louis. A house sold. A house bought (after many that were looked at). This meant coming into contact with a group of people who are odd indeed. One would be tempted to call them a "breed" of people, except there seemed to be no purity in the genetic line. The only consistency was in certain external characteristics. The group I refer to is real-estate agents. The male ones invariably state that they are selling real-estate because they do not have a regular job, they usually smoke cigarettes, and often (though not always) refer to "my" divorce as though it is an event to be taken for granted in a male real-estate agent's identity. The female real-estate agents, comprising the vast majority of this group, were the more difficult. They would wear about five layers of make-up, three layers of polyester, and enough perfume to repulse a cavalry attack. Moreover, virtually all of these creatures seemed entirely incompetent at their job. (A very nice exception was the woman who found the house we would buy in Saint Louis.) They would fail to send promised documents, or if they sent them they would always come by express mail because these creatures had put off their duties until the last minute. They would spend maybe two hours giving us a "tour" of the area the house they were going to show us was in, but then only show us that house when we had but five minutes left before getting on to our next appointment or duty for the day. They were, putting it simply, an incompetent lot.

Incompetent, but not dangerous. Danger would present itself when, for example, we first drove to Murphysboro to look at houses, and camped at a local campground for the night, planning to meet the real-estate agent the next day. We were "hassled" (as the word has it) by a group of young thugs at this camp ground, who decided they should make trouble with whoever might be sleeping in the back of that 1955 Cadillac hearse. The only thing which deterred a major confrontation was my confusing, or frightening, them by pretending to know one of the fellows.

And so began my gruesome experience with Southern Illinois, which would soon go from bad to worse to mephitic.

But I have written about all this in previous Aviary's. Perhaps proprieties behoove that, since 1994 involves leaving Southern Illinois, then I say a few kind things about the area--thus being so respectful as to give a kind of memorial, so to speak. And yes; there were some very nice aspects to that area. For example, there was a Thai restaurant in Carbondale which I believe I can say is the best restaurant I have ever been to in my entire life. We ate there maybe three times. We would have eaten there more often, but the place closed after having been open only about three months. Rumor had it that the establishment failed to comply with health-code regulations. One man's speculation had it that these Thai people concluded, based on their experiences with Southern Illinois, that if this is what the promise of America is all about then they would be better off going back to Thailand.

Southern Illinois University at Carbondale had an excellent radio station. Called WSIU, I would do a bit of volunteer work there, and truly they had the best classical program of any radio station I have ever heard in this country. This excellent programming was the result of the station's director--his own appreciation for classical music and his hiring practices.



Unfortunately this quality would come to an abrupt end when budget cuts would force the station to depend on "satellite feeds" for their material rather than being able to continue doing their own programming. My not inconsiderable powers of forgiveness were evinced toward this station even before their excellent work came to a halt. The occasion involved their decision to cease carrying the weekly radio show by the musicologist Karl Haas. His show had long been a favorite of mine, broadcast from a radio station in Columbia, Missouri. Unfortunately, it was not favored by the Southern Illinois peasantry, and their complaints, in tandem with a lack of financial support for this particular program, caused it to drop off the air. I was acutely disappointed, but loyalty being one of my virtues, I did continue to help the station--both financially and as a volunteer--for several years thereafter until we moved away.

The area definitely had its pluses for Abbe. The health center where she worked was good to her, and good for her. It was close to where we lived, and it was situated only a few hundred feet from the hospital where she admitted (committed?) patients. She had good support from most of her health staff, and certainly was well treated by the administrators.

It also bears being noted that her position with this health center afforded certain opportunities for humor. Not having the luxury of two phone lines, much less "Caller ID," there was no telling whether a phone call coming to our home was for me or for Abbe. When she was on call, I might pick up the phone and it would be a patient for Abbe. If Abbe were momentarily busy, I might say, "No, Doctor Sudvarg is not available at the moment. This is Doctor Baumli. Can I help you?"

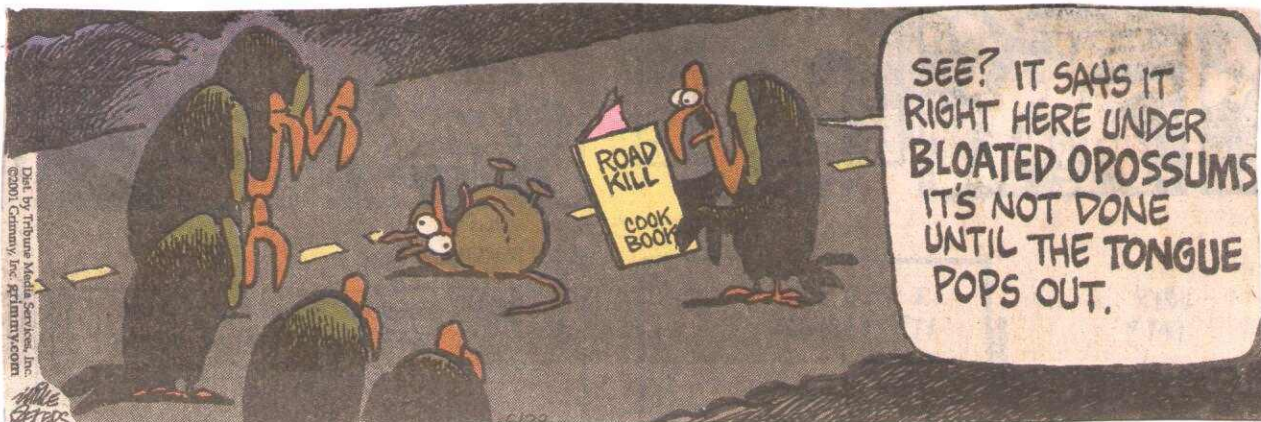
Don't get me wrong. I never tried to play doctor to Abbe's patients. I answered this way simply because the patients then would be more formal and cursory, i.e., courteous, to me if they thought I was a medical doctor. But (and here is the humor) sometimes this approach would backfire--on me. Usually it involved the same basic complaint: The person would say, "Uh ... yuh ain't Ductur Ubbuh? Uh." Then I would hear a kind of sniffing, expectorated, whimpering sobbing. Amidst this medley of cacophonous sounds, there would be emitted an approximation of: "Uh gut peeen. Uh gut peeeen!" This would proceed for too long a while, putting one in mind of chants done by savages, until, impatient and disgusted, I would interrupt with, "I'm sorry. You must have the wrong person. This is Francis Baumli."

Whereupon the savage, i.e., patient, would immediately halt the sobbing lamentation and say something like, "Uh thut yuh sud yuh wuz uh duktur."

I would then ever so sweetly inform them that yes I am a doctor, but not a medical doctor, and usually by this time Abbe would be available, and I would turn the phone over to her, along with the, "Uh gut peeeen," ululation--something Abbe had more stomach for than I did.

So do you see? Despite my many complaints about that area, I have not been unable to appreciate its benefits--occasional opportunities for humor accompanied by dispensations of my benevolence being one of these benefits. Also, with one exception, the winters were mild. Also, amongst all the bad construction people who would work on our house or on my study, there was one wonderful fellow whose name was Rodney Brown who worked with his brother who also was a capital fellow.

From the perspective of (shall we call it?) culture, there was The Beethoven Society for Pianists which brought in some of the finest pianists I have ever heard. They have been given due mention, and homage, in previous issues of The Aviary. There also has been a community concert series with some fine performers, and a concert series at the university. And Dacia, as she pursued her flute studies, had the privilege of studying under Jervis (I spell it correctly) Underwood, who was an excellent master of the instrument himself along with being an excellent teacher. (The two abilities do not often go together!) Not to be overlooked, in this country where



public transportation is always difficult, there was easy train transit to Chicago, which we availed ourselves of several times.

As for people--individuals--there were a few who were just sterling. I give them my admiration without qualification because they, unlike myself, proved that they could live amidst the squalor of a rural ghetto, and yet rise above it and feel spiritually unaffected by the offal around them. There were the folks at Wright Building Center, who were unfailingly friendly and helpful. (I would learn that the owners had made it clear to all who worked there that this store--actually, a lumberyard mainly--was to prove itself an exception to the norm in this area.) The folks at True Value were friendly, the people at the Cub Cadet place who worked on my tractor were friendly and conscientious, and then there were some very fine individuals: The aforementioned Rodney Brown and his brother (whose name I can not remember). There was the carpenter, George Mason, who had a heart of gold and never would give up his conviction that I am a preacher who just isn't "practicing" right now. And a fellow named Laverne Murray, whose work involved nothing more exotic than installing screens, windows, and such, and who was as honest as the day is long. (A wonderful old expression, this, and Laverne Murray deserves it!)

I am not being disingenuous in stating my admiration for these people. I do not even feel reluctance in giving them praise, because I also am not reluctant about dispensing my hatred of this area so liberally. Hatred, yes; and if it is a sin, then I have committed the sin many times and each time did so without repentance and even with glee. Have I been hateful to the point of malevolence? Have I been nasty? Maybe. But not as often as some might judge. For example, I could imagine a person scowling at my tale (a true tale, be assured) about how I dealt with the hypochondriacs who called Abbe and spoke of their "peen." Am I being nasty in referring to them as hypochondriacs? No. They indeed were this. Maybe they actually were in pain, but they were exaggerating their expression of this pain; otherwise, how could they have so quickly snapped themselves back into a (more or less) normal demeanor upon learning that I am not a medical doctor? Am I being nasty in claiming that I was dispensing benevolence to them? Perhaps. However, I don't think so. I did do them the kindness of turning them over to Abbe, didn't I? And even more, I did them the kindness of giving them opportunity for using me as a mirror--someone who would reflect back to them just how ridiculously exaggerated their gutteral histrionics were.

I have hated Southern Illinois and I have hated most of its people. And I should have been forewarned as to what would happen in this area. Years ago, between my junior and senior years in college, I went to an area of Illinois--just a bit north of Southern Illinois--which also was a rural ghetto. There I experienced the ubiquitous alcoholism, the spiritual putrescence, the poverty and the seething hatred that accompanies white blue-collar poverty. I experienced it close-up because I went there with the fellow who would be my roommate the next year, and who had believed he and I could find employment in this area--which was where he hailed from. We didn't find employment. Day after day we went to the employment office (which we soon came to call the unemployment office) and we would sit in that row of metal folding-chairs for more than half an hour before even the first name would be called. As we sat there, we would watch the employment personnel come in and sit down at their desks. All the desks were in one large room. There were no partitions. All the office clerks were bunched. And they sat there, fully visible to all, leisurely reading a newspaper, drinking coffee, chatting on the phone. One fellow, every morning, even shaved at his desk with an electric razor. All these government employees, without a trace of guilty conscience, sat there and went through their ablutinal rituals, their coffee, their newspaper, and after about half an hour a name would be called. This name would be called by the fellow who obviously was the most ambitious of the clerks. He would take two or three people, before a name would finally be called by someone else. Always, always, it was the same story. "Well, there isn't much work these days, you know. We don't have a single thing in our files." And they needed forty people in that room (yes; the number was about this!) to tell us such simple news?! After a few days of this we gave up. The last day, for me, involved being the first person called by a certain clerk who had sat at his desk with two newspapers before calling anyone. I went back, sat down in the metal chair by his desk, and patiently waited while he made at least a dozen calls to various places as he searched for a rear-view mirror. It was for (I do remember) a Studebaker. He didn't find one, and finally turned to me, giving me the usual line. This time I was bellicose. When he said



the usual lines about there being no jobs these days, I said to him, "So how about you giving me your so-called job?" He looked at me uncomprehending. He felt neither alarm nor anger. He just did not understand anything. I got up and went to the receptionist and asked to see the supervisor. She asked me why, and I told her I wanted to complain about how all these clerks were sitting there doing nothing instead of trying to find jobs for the unemployed. She informed me archly that they were there to find me employment, not to deal with my frustrations, and besides, the director wasn't in. I said, "Oh, of course. I suppose, being the director, he gets to stay home until he's finished reading his newspaper." And I left. Two weeks later I would drag my beaten ass back to Missouri, and there I would find employment for the summer.

That was an experience I had not forgotten, and why I failed to realize that Southern Illinois would be peopled with the same vermin is beyond me. I should have realized this long before we made a choice to go there.

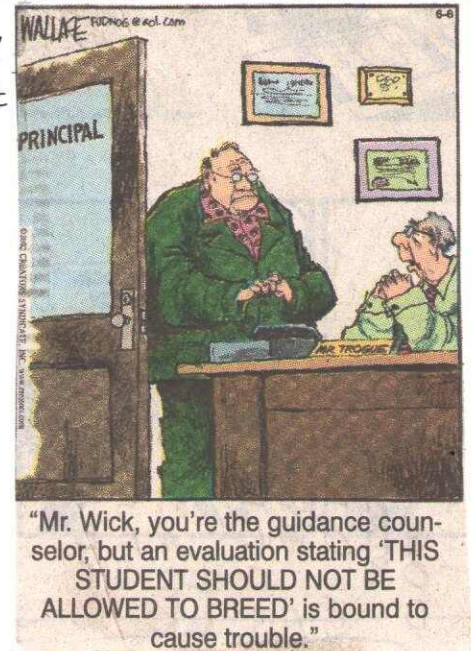
But we did go, and it is with some embarrassment that I make the following admission: After the first month of living in Southern Illinois, I probably spent an entire year, sobbing for at least part of each day, at how awful I felt living there. My embarrassment does not stem from any machismo. Rather, I am embarrassed because it reflects a spiritual weakness on my part. Instead of surmounting, I succumbed. I have always been especially susceptible to passive-aggressive people, and certainly this type abounded in all of Southern Illinois. Actually, this personality disorder wasn't just something evinced by a number of individuals; it was truly a community trait, which had been honed to a fine art. And I, who had been overwhelmed with this pathology in my mother, my first wife, a three-year relationship with a girlfriend after that first wife, shriveled and shrank, then hunkered down and nastily waited to escape.

It did not help that the move itself had been a disaster. The moving company had neglected to load some of our things on the big truck, had then loaded these things into a pickup, and then had left that pickup parked at their warehouse for several days while employees helped themselves to its contents. So too many of our things disappeared. Plus, the entire load of goods had "shifted," and many things were bent, torn, or damaged in subtle ways. (Or not-so-subtle ways. Our clothes dryer was about an inch shorter after the move than it was before the move.) There would ensue a long, laborious, and ridiculous claim against the moving company which would finally be "settled" primarily to their financial advantage.

Also it did not help that the paid building inspector for the house we bought had done such a bad job one would almost think

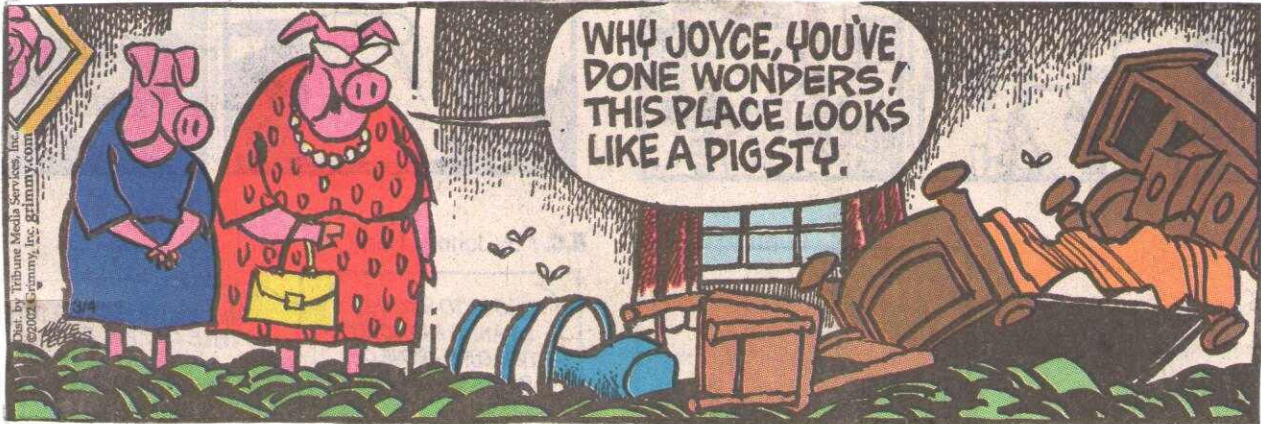
he had gone to the wrong house. We sued him, but only recouped the inspection fee. We proceeded to do our best to make that house a nice domicile, and its lot (a bit over three acres) into something attractive. We spent thousands having the dump, on one corner of the property, hauled away ... only to, within days, see a next-door neighbor, without a trace of shame, begin hauling his junk by wheelbarrow to that same spot. (Which occasioned righteous ire on my part, and subsequent bad feelings with that neighbor for the duration of our stay. Bad feelings which I scarcely regretted.)

The house we had bought needed many repairs; and I needed to build a study close to the house. All this involved hiring, and firing, dozens of laborers, craftsmen (sic), and a motley of indescribable peasants who dropped by saying, "I hurd yuh gut sum wurk," and then they would stand there mutely, as if I were supposed to jump up and down for joy and hire them on the spot. Yes; getting "good work" done is difficult everywhere--anywhere. But in Southern Illinois it was an unending fiasco so surreal as to make me feel insane at times. The study got built in fits and starts. The new roof, made of a steel frame, was sheathed with metal and the job was done entirely wrong and it had to all be torn off. The new crew did it correctly, but a leak developed from a defective bolt, and water came pouring in during a



storm. By the time that problem was located, and solved, more than a year had gone by before I had my own study. As for the house, it also needed a new roof. After 1½ years, it too was leaking in several places, and the original crew could not repair it. The same crew that had fixed my study addressed the house matter, and finally fixed it. People lied, failed to show up (I don't mean they were merely late; I mean they would start a job, and then just never show up again); in the course of all this, I began becoming more "handy." The carpet installed in my study came up in several places within a month. The crew foreman came out to fix it, blew up at me (of course), and then the next day the carpet was coming up again. That was when I learned to install carpet. (And got it right the first time.)

Surely you have not failed to note my penchant for scholarly exactitude evinced in how I so carefully have tried to faithfully convey the local dialect



of the Southern Illinois peasants. I confess there were times I found it somewhat appealing, as when the aforementioned carpenter, George Mason, once said to me, "You oughta build some shelves in your kitchen so your wife could put her purties up there." Yes; the word was "purties." He meant items such as decorated plates, pewter, that sort of thing. Rather charming, this. Quite the opposite, revolting in fact, was the time I remarked to a local farmer that this day's rain marked a return to the norm of rain every day, given that we had had a two-day period of sunshine. That peasant replied, "Yup. Glud ut's rainun. Muh tuhmuhtuh plunts wurh startun tuh get kinda peakedy." Not charming, this--using "peakedy" for "peaked" which itself was scarcely the correct word.

There were certain words, or phrases, which baffled me and required months of living there to figure out. "Jishayuhbut," was one. For a long while I thought the people were referring to a species of fish related to halibut, but one day I suddenly realized the phrase meant, "Just habit." This "Jis hayuhbut" was always pronounced slowly, carelessly, with not a nuance or trace of ... well, what? That was the problem. It seemed to be applicable to almost anything, for a long while, but finally it began taking on some degree of specificity--which perhaps was occasioned by my questions. For example, "Why do you beat your son?" "Jis hayuhbut." Or, "Why do you keep smoking those cigarettes?" "Jis hayuhbut." "Why do you get drunk every evening?" "Jis hayuhbut." I got tired of hearing this phrase all the time, and began trying for remedieis to what I believed were problems--of act and speech. "Don't you think that if you get drunk every evening, that this means you have a drinking problem?" "Nah. Ut's jis hayuhbut." I learned, finally, to give up.

Many of the amenities which one takes for granted in a more civilized area also had to be given up. I mentioned the merits of the train service to Chicago. But there was no train or bus service to Saint Louis, and the only plane route was from Marion, Illinois about thirty miles away. The cost of a plane ticket from there to Saint Louis was twice as much as plane fare to Seattle. As for other amenities, or services, such as a nanny for Marion. I have before written of the ludicrous process of getting one for Marion. We did finally settle on a matronly woman in her mid-fifties, whose one virtue was being prompt, and whose failings were so many I remain ashamed to this day that we did not fire her immediately. She was an obese lazy creature, whose duty was to take care of Marion a certain number of hours a day, do up the dirty dishes, and do one small household task which she would be assigned. She didn't like taking care of Marion; in fact, at every opportunity tried to put him down for a nap. The dishes often had to be done over. The one household task was seldom done right, if addressed at all. Also, what was most bewildering about her, was the fact that during the last few months of her employment, she took a sexual interest in me. It was not so blatant



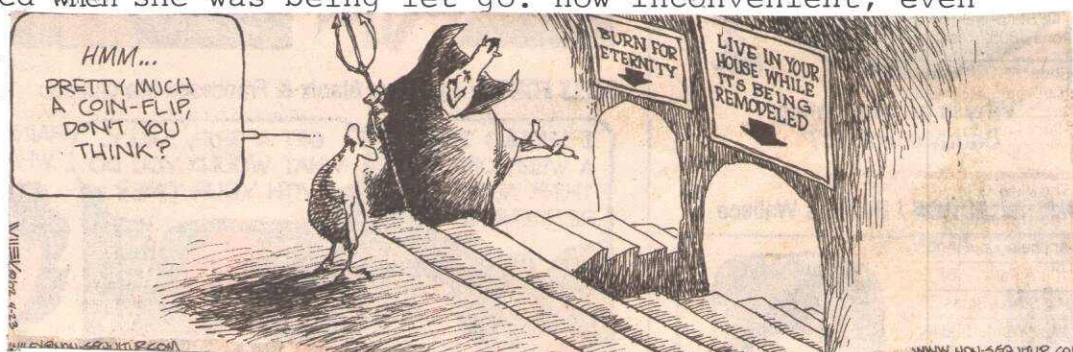
as to warrant a clear reprimand, or to constitute grounds for immediate dismissal. But it was so frequent as to be very disagreeable, and so weird for me as to be truly distressing. I might be sitting at table having a quick lunch, and she would go into the adjoining restroom, comb her hair, and then come out into the kitchen, walking back and forth in front of me, only a few feet away, primping her hair. This was just crazy--the way it could go on, nonstop, for twenty minutes. The most difficult was a habit she took on of pretending to need to whisper something to me, stepping close, pulling me even closer, and shoving her mouth into my ear. I would jerk away each time, and ... well, I would discuss it with Abbe, and we agreed that anything I might state to her by way of rebuff could be denied, and if we fired her, she could sue--and she would be believed instead of me. So we began gradually making preparations for other childcare arrangements, with plans to dismiss her on the grounds that Marion was growing up and now was ready to move on from a nanny. Well; this creature proved herself to be a sly one. She of course sniffed out what we were doing; I had anticipated she would do this. I had not anticipated how she would take advantage of our employment arrangement. We had promised her two weeks of vacation time per year, only requiring a certain number of days for notice regarding this vacation time. We, trying to be fair, let her know about one month before her last day of employment would be, and she promptly gave us one week's notice that she was taking two weeks of vacation. We could not protest, on either legal or moral grounds. We had said two weeks of vacation per year, and had not thought to pro-rate this vacation time to part of a year. She had just begun her third year of employment ... yes; just begun ... and she slyly demanded all her vacation time for that entire year even though the year had just commenced when she was being let go. How inconvenient, even a handicap, for my work. And how humiliating that Baumli had been outsmarted by a shrewd peasant. Yes; Doctor Francis Baumli and Doctor Abbe Sudvarg both got outsmarted by a lazy, inept, indecent, but punctual peasant.

But I suppose I should be generous about forgiving myself. When people are that lazy, they almost always are cunning. After all, this is how they get by with being lazy, and all those hours they spend being lazy--well, they don't have anything else to do but plot more ways of taking undue advantage of worthy people.

"The amenities of civilization"--I made reference to this above. They were in short supply, in ways I would never have expected. Our mail carrier was inept, often not leaving express mail, simply taking it back to the post office. Often flicking his cigarette butts into our mailbox along with the mail. Often ... well, he got fired after three years. Or rather, he was given the option of quitting or being fired. So he quit. As for good doctors, there were few. Abbe was a good doctor. A good internist came in to the area shortly before we left, and there was one good urologist in the area. Most of the others were awful. And that includes the Carbondale area. There was one excellent neurologist in the area, but she left shortly after we moved there. She would be replaced by a fellow of Asian vintage who was a joke, but he was the only neurologist in the entire region. His wife was also a joke, and she was the only psychiatrist in the entire region. Getting a new pair of reading glasses required about twenty trips to ophthalmologists, opticians, optometrists, and such.

The university in Carbondale was about the only thing "happening" in the entire area, and since it wasn't quite happening in the summer, the entire town of Carbondale pretty much closed down for the duration. The Unitarian church closed its doors for the season, many businesses closed entirely or were open only a few days of the week, music lessons stopped, even the public swimming pools were open only a part of the summer.

But hot-tempered people never bothered keeping their mouths shut in the summer. Being yelled at by strangers, by clerks in stores, by people doing work in your home, was a commonplace. The inhabitants of this ghetto possessed little of what the counseling profession sanitarily calls "impulse control," and I, along with other people in my family, were the brunt of inappropriate yelling many times. I was yelled at in a music store, for asking a question. Yelled at in a shoe store for wanting to

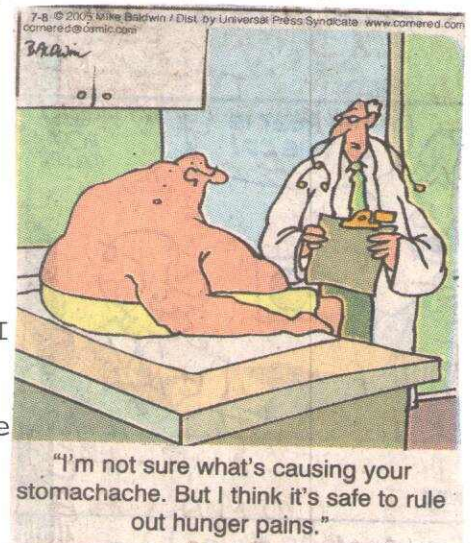


return a pair of defective shoes that had fallen apart after only one day of wearing them. Yelled at in a record store for asking where something was. Yelled at ... well, I need not go on. I must merely point out that this kind of behavior does not happen in what one calls the civilized world. I will, however, mention one more example: A woman who was hired to wallpaper a room in our home. She was there, with one female helper, and I walked in as the job was proceeding, and saw that she had actually run the wallpaper over across the top of the closet doors. One would not be able to open the doors without ripping the wallpaper. I couldn't have been more polite in pointing this out, but the woman just lost it. She began yelling, then screaming--truly screaming, and then crying--wailing, sobbing, screaming that she was going to go home, her shy helper kept looking at me and shrugging her shoulders, and this tantrum lasted perhaps ten minutes. Abbe arrived on the scene, and after many ministrations of sympathy, got the woman calmed down, assured her that the matter could easily be remedied, declared that she was not a "bad person" because of this mistake, and I got the hell out of there, only to reappear at the end to inspect matters and make sure they were done right. They weren't, but it was acceptable, and the hysterical bitch walked out with our check and a piece of my sanity tucked away in her gullet.

If being yelled at was a part of what drove me insane in Southern Illinois, there was another factor which made it difficult to recapture my sanity. This was a concept among these primitives, amounting to a cultural (sic) institution, which entailed their right to "check it out" whenever anything which interested them was going on. This right, exercised by these savages, one and all, meant that a person could never drive to the country and there spend private time in the many scenic spots of that wild terrain. Abbe and I might drive to an area, and sit there beside our car, looking out over a beautiful vista, and actually feel baffled at how, in the space of maybe 90 minutes, more than 200 cars would appear, seemingly out of nowhere, drive up to ours for a few seconds, then drive away. Only after a couple of years had passed did we come to realize that these people were merely "checking us out"--which meant driving to where we were, and having a look at what was, or might be, going on. We soon gave up going out to the country. It was impossible to enjoy any sense of privacy.

If we were inconvenienced by this sacrosanct right to "check it out" which these people held, they themselves seemed to be inconvenienced by it to a considerable degree. This often happened in their confrontations with the police. In almost every issue of the newspaper (which we subscribed to for about a year) there would be a story about a difficult scene involving the police, the various violent matters, and how one or more people were beaten or arrested because they were exercising their right to "check it out" at the crime or accident scene. A policeman might have someone on the ground, putting handcuffs on that person, and two or three people might be bending over him, checking out exactly what was going on. A terrible wreck might occur, and someone would be there sticking his head in a broken window to "check out" the carnage. The police would warn him to get back, repeatedly and with threats, or even do some pleading, but the years would continue with their exercise in craven hilarity, and simply ignore all matters of propriety, decency, prudence, not to mention the clear warning, and proceed with their gawking ritual of checking it out. And then they would push past the limits of the police officers' patience and get arrested, a process which, given the mentality of this region, also meant getting clubbed. And some of these clubbings were nothing short of brutal. Mind you, I am not endorsing how the police officers behaved. I can very readily note that the police seemed to do a great deal of unnecessary beating in these situations. At the same time, if a police officer orders someone to get out of the way when a vehicle accident is being "worked," and someone ignores that order and crawls inside a mangled car to see the mangled corpses, well, one can at least understand why a policeman might decide it is not inappropriate, in this instance, to do some knocking on this head which houses the pair of eyeballs which are "checking it out."

The conviction these people had about the right to "check it out" was just amazing. Halloween was a huge orgy of a party in Carbondale, and the police would be very busy all night. At the first Halloween, we found ourselves in Carbondale, not having been warned of the carnage. As we were (hurriedly) making our way back toward our vehicle, we came to a place where a vehicle had been overturned and the police had cordoned off the vehicle. As we neared it, we saw two police officers roughly push three young men away, as they were trying to step over the cordon to "check out" the vehicle. One police officer pulled his club, and the three young men



finally stepped back. One of the young men actually began crying--wailing--that, "Ull uh wunted tuh do wuz check it out! Uh jus wunted tuh check it out!" And so he continued as we hurried past him, proceeded the 200 feet or so to our own vehicle, which had not been turned over, and hauled our asses for home.

"Vehicle." Cars. Pickups. The people of Southern Illinois are not enamored with cars, i.e., they don't decorate them and "soup them up" or that sort of thing. But being in a vehicle, "going for a ride," is an important part of their daily life. We might go to visit someone for the first time, and as we would pull into their drive, they would come out the door, meet us outside, and we would all get in their car and go for a ride. The ride might last only half an hour, but for them this seemed an indispensable part of socializing. This time spent in cars, of course--given the personality of the people of the area, could not but at some point become manifest in their usual plenum of passive aggression. And it would be manifest in but one way, as far as I could tell, although it did require about two years before I realized that the phenomenon in question was a manifestation of passive aggression. It would happen this way: One would be driving down a road, perhaps even a highway, and see a car up ahead, sitting at an intersection as though waiting to pull out on the highway, as much as half a mile away. Then, when maybe only 150 yards away (if traveling at a high speed, e.g., on a highway), or perhaps only 30 feet away if traveling on a street in town, that driver would abruptly pull out in front of your vehicle. And always, always, there would be a smiling grin on their face as they looked directly at you. They would not wave, but they would always bestow upon you this friendly smile. But one day I realized that the smile wasn't actually friendly at all. It was smug, self-satisfied, and full of gleeful malice. Whereas before I had begun thinking that this was these people's way of being social, waiting until you were near before pulling out, I suddenly realized that it was actually one more way they were passive aggressive. One might accuse me of here projecting the worst, but I am sure I am not at all projecting a judgement. Rather, I saw it. That look on their faces was never friendly, never beckoning or neighborly; it was full of malicious glee. They were pulling out in front of my car--any car--to inconvenience, even scare, the driver. The driver would have to slam on the brakes to keep from broadsiding the car pulling out in front, and they were timing their entrance carefully so as to be sure to thus inconvenience you while not risking being hit.

If I am easily undone by passive aggression, I am just as easily disgusted when I see a man flirting with a woman. And believe me, this was an

unremitting practice amongst the men in Southern Illinois. If the clerk in any store was a young or pretty woman, and there were male customers in front of you, then despair of your time. Many minutes would be spent, minutes that felt like hours, with each man in front of you flirting with the clerk. I need not give the disgusting details, except to note one incident in which two other men thought I was the one flirting, when of course I wasn't. It happened only days before we moved away. I made it a point to go to the aforementioned Wright Building Center to say goodbye to the folks there. I had said goodbyes to all, except for Vanessa who worked at the service counter. Vanessa was pretty, blonde, slim, and she had recently had a child whose birthday fell on the same date as my daughter's. Two men at the service desk were flirting with her, indulging in banter, taking up her time and attention. Vanessa and I had liked each other, she had been very helpful on many an occasion, and I definitely was going to wait the necessary time for saying a goodbye. She, obviously irritated by the pseudo-amorous attentions of the two men, turned from them to me and I began speaking. But being one of those people who can do two things at the same time, I clearly overheard, and noted, what one of the two men said to the other: "Whut duz he think he's duin cumin in here an flurting with hur whun we wuz flurting with hur furst?" He was looking at me with sheer hatred. Vanessa noted this with alarm, turned back to the

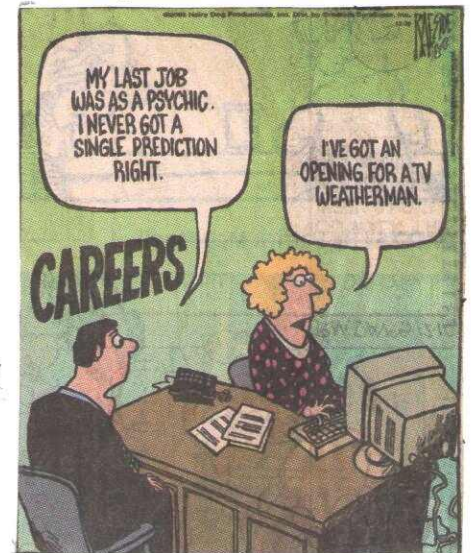


two men with smiles and charm, gave them a minute's worth of attention while also slipping in a farewell, and that seemed to satisfy them. Whereupon I continued my brief, but pure, goodbye.

Am I "going on and on"? I suppose. I shall soon desist with this tirade. And I will, beginning now, try to focus on the parts of Southern Illinois which I hated the most. Which, for me, clinched the despairing attitude I took toward this region. One of the main factors was that constant rain. It felt as though it rained all the time. Rarely did it come in torrents, but rarely was it not copious. And after a time this just began wearing at my nerves, and unlike some of the local people, I never did discover any coping mechanisms for dealing with it. The locals, for example, would indulge the delusion that during the long, hot summers the rain cooled the temperatures. "Ut least ut'll break thuh heat!" they would exult. I might reply, "No. It never does that. I pay attention to the thermometer. It never makes things cooler. It only raises the humidity, to the extent that's possible." "Nuh, ut breaks thuh heat!" they would expostulate, and I would leave them alone with their conviction. Had I been able to indulge such delusions, maybe that rain would not have bothered me so much. But it did bother me, and it even seemed sinister at times. Next to our house was a fallout shelter. An amazingly well-constructed two rooms below ground, with vents placed so that no direct radioactivity could get in, and obviously a great deal of money, thought, and optimism had gone into constructing this shelter, which had been built by the previous owner back during the late '50s or early '60s. This shelter was spacious, cool, and it might even have been a nice place to spend a cool evening at times, but there was something too sinister about it. It felt dangerous, because it filled up with water when there was a downpour. I don't mean that it just got a few inches of water. It filled to the very top. Many thousands of gallons of water would be in that shelter, and it would stay there, until the heavy rains stopped, the water table subsided, and then it would all drain away out a big drain in the floor. I had many a nightmare, thinking about cowering in that shelter after a nuclear blast, and then a torrential rain coming, the water rising around us, and our having to flee from that death trap, at the last moment before drowning, only to emerge into a radioactive atmosphere.

Truly I became neurotic about the rain, which is quite proved by my becoming neurotic about the sunshine. The sun shone brightly so rarely in Southern Illinois that when it did I found it actually frightening, walking about in a near panic, probably rather like an eclipse might have frightened a primitive person in ancient times. But I rarely had opportunity for feeling this sense of panic, which was much preferred to the tedium of the rain and that dirty, constant humidity. Yes--dirty humidity. Just as every drop of rain is formed around a speck of dust, so also much of the humidity in the air--when it is as humid as it always is in Southern Illinois--is attached to a speck of dust. You walk through the air, and you get dirty. You turn on a fan, and if you are wearing a white shirt, it actually blackens. You take a shower, and two hours later you feel like you need another.

But what was the worst thing about Southern Illinois? It was the outcome of that custody trial over Dacia when she had turned 15 ... and later, while she was 16. The outcome of the trial--losing that daughter whom I had raised by myself for many years, and the abusive attitude of that judge toward me in the courtroom ... after that, I could never stay there. I could never remain in a community which had, in many ways opened its arms to embrace Abbe--their one and only good doctor, but had not somehow extended the necessary resources to help us keep Dacia there. What would these have been? I am not sure. And I am not ungrateful for those few people who did help us--even helped us during the trial itself. But somehow, in a way I can not quite articulate, we were too alone during the time of that trial. Our daughter was being taken away, by a judge of that community, with the help of two lawyers in that community, and while there were those who felt sorry for us and a few who helped us, the community itself did not succor us. Should it have? I suspect so. I am not sure of this. Maybe nothing could



have made the outcome of that trial different. After all, Dacia had reached an age where she had a legal right to choose which parent she wanted to live with. And she wanted to live with her mother, even though her mother didn't want her to, and the law said that she had a right to live with a parent of her choosing even if that parent didn't want her to. (This lack of desire, by the mother, however being well concealed during the trial since the mother and stepfather had their sights on what they hoped would be a monthly child-support check so huge as to support their entire household.) So I could not forgive a community in which my parental rights toward Dacia were stripped away. (And yes; I do not exaggerate. They were stripped away entirely.) I could not forgive this community, and I could not trust it, and I could not even trust my ability to survive spiritually in that community any longer. At the terminus of that trial, my entire intent, with regard to that region, was to leave it as soon as possible.

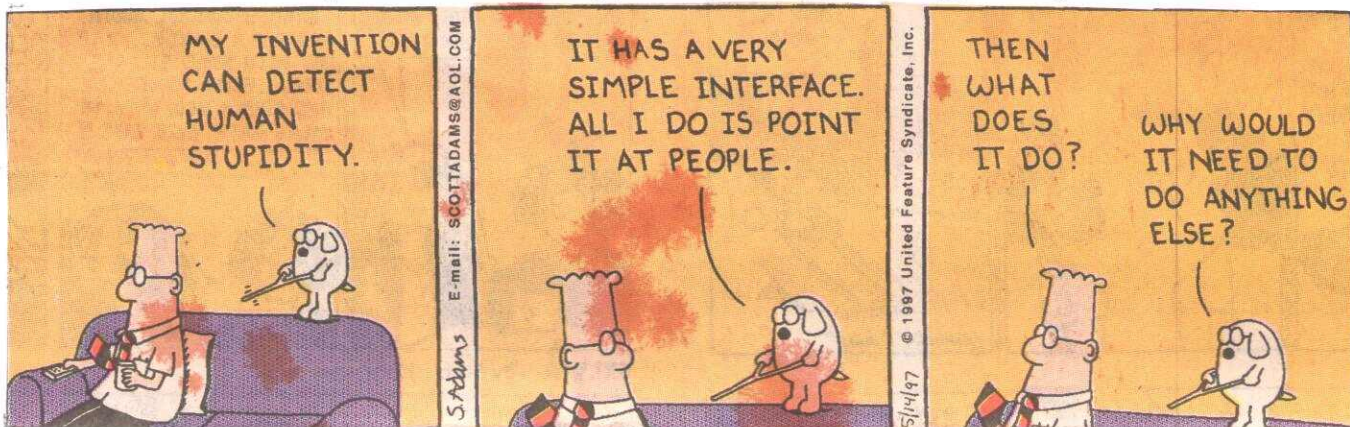
While I above stated that I hunkered down to wait until I could leave, this is not the whole truth. I also made efforts at trying to make my new-found environs a community. There was, to my considerable surprise, a men's consciousness-raising group functioning in the area, and I asked to join it. They allowed me in, but I soon found that this group had already become so dysfunctional it was about to explode--and in fact did so when I was at a meeting. The efflux of undirected rage and mis-directed rage at that meeting was just unbelievable. I did not even observe the propriety of letting them know I was resigning; I merely never went back. (Although I am not sure they could have held any more meetings after that last one I attended.) Enough said on this subject. After all, rules of confidentiality were set up for that group, and I shall observe them.

I also started a philosophy discussion group, which functioned at a tepid pace, moved along primarily by my own enthusiasm. It was very well attended, mainly by church people who somehow felt that a dose of philosophy would do their religious convictions proud, and also by people just looking for something "cultural" to do. The meetings were moderately enjoyable, but since I do almost nothing in moderation, this was not enough reason for me to continue arranging for them. And without me doing the arranging, they stopped happening.

At the university in Carbondale there was a philosophy department, and I made some

efforts to get involved in their activities, which mainly involved people "giving papers"--which involves reading a paper to the assembled attendees, then having some discussion. I actually attended perhaps half a dozen of these, and myself gave a paper on Sartre. This kind of forum is very much foreign to me. I never could understand why people at such meetings read their papers to the group. Why not instead mail out the paper in advance, let people read it on their own time, and then devote the entire meeting to discussing it? The papers were either very good (like mine) or very bad (like most), the discussions were laced with the usual dose of pompous

machismo and vapid splutterings. After a little more than a year I gave up on them. I wearied of the mediocrity, and I could not understand the hostility--sometimes quite overt--that was directed toward me, especially by the chairman of the department. Only after I had decided to never come back, and had a conversation with one of the professors when I happened to cross paths with him, did I find out the root of this hostility. The professors there had believed that since I have a Ph.D. in

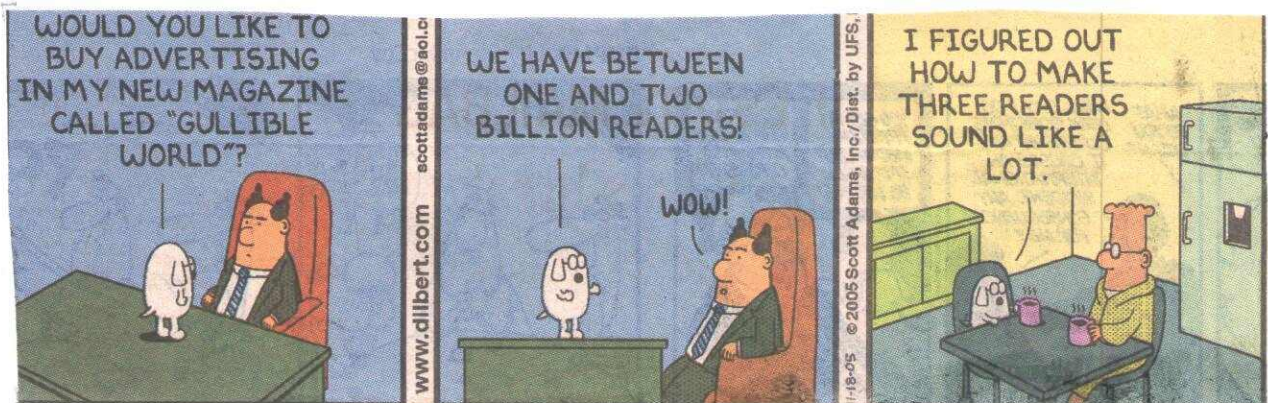


philosophy, but was not working as a professor, that I must be hanging around their department trying to sniff out a job opening. This is laughable. Me teach at a fourth-rate department like that? Never. Me in need of employment? Scarcely. The work I was doing was vastly more important than what they were doing, although this is something a professor could never be expected to understand. Oh well. I gave them the "good old college try." Pun intended.

Then there was my (scarcely puny) skill as a bass player. I proffered it. I had especially enjoyed, for many years, playing jazz for a variety of groups, so why not do it in rural Illinois? With many jazz groups in the small clubs, and playing at university functions, I did some prowling and scouting and did try to sniff out a job. But there was nary an opening. None of them were hiring. None were very good, but I have always taken the attitude that playing with a poor group is more fun than sitting at home practicing scales. So whenever I found myself with a poor group, I kept myself cheerful about it by simply looking upon it as a way to practice while making a little money too. Here also I met with overt hostility. These people took the attitude that there were not enough jobs for too many musicians, and one more musician might deprive them of a job, even if there was a shortage of bass players in the area. During the six years we were in Southern Illinois, I only played one job, and that was because the bass player for that group ("head of the jazz department at the university," as he described himself) had to be out of town.



I am almost embarrassed to admit to one other thing I tried. But since I am a master at the fine art of degrading myself, I might as well.

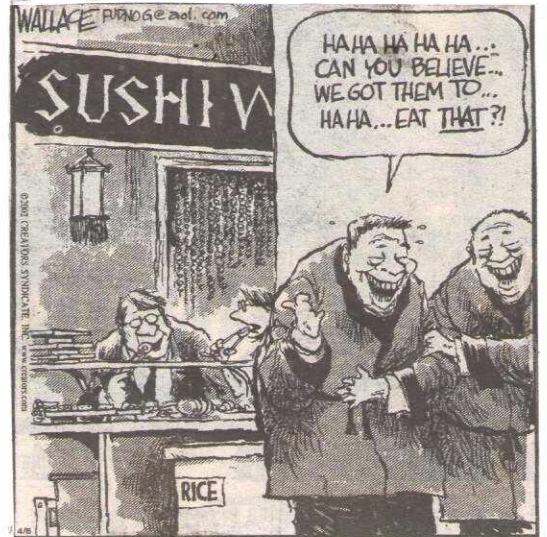


Yes; on one occasion, I attended a writer's group. It was as awful as I had predicted it would be. The fellow in charge of the group read a little article he had published, which actually wasn't bad, although it was about a battle, with much attention given to gore. This seemed quite odd, considering that he thought of himself as one of the alpha-peaceniks in the area. A woman there read a poem she had published. It was worthless. They talked of their publishing failures. I kept politely quiet for the duration of that stale meeting. However, that meeting did lead to something worth telling. This tale will give some of my readers especial glee, because it will allow them to brand me as a sexist pig, even though I'm not. It will also allow them to think of me as both crass and foul, neither of which I ever am not. The tale involves a situation which ensued from that meeting. The



fellow in charge was named Gary and he was both a writer and a peacenik.

Later there would be a party which he and his wife hosted. I got invited, because I had attended that writer's meeting. It seems that Abbe was invited and attended, but I do not have a clear memory on this. When I arrived, I was introduced to the hostess, who wore a timid smile, was in a wheelchair, had porcelain-white atrophied legs, and possessed probably the biggest bosom (oh, such a benign word!) of any woman I had ever seen. Were I a tit man (which I definitely am not since I believe in the law of gravity) my eyeballs would have succumbed to a speedy exhaustion in the course of trying to traverse that vast terrain. I moved on to other introductions, and made my way through some rather stale conversations, whereupon I found myself seated on the floor directly across from our hostess. No one was engaging her, so I, being never less than a perfect gentleman, took upon myself the duty of giving her attention. And so some murmured and exploratory proprieties were exchanged, leading to my asking an open-ended question which essentially asked her what niche she had carved out for herself in the local community. She straightened herself, and with considerable pride in her voice, answered, "I am head of the local la leche league." My eyes wavered from hers, momentarily took in that mammarian expanse, and with a jovial smile I replied, "You mean you are the local la leche league." I laughed at my own joke, but she stared back blankly, and then said, "Oh no. We have several members." I let it go. Most men should never have made such a comment, but since my credentials for gentlemanly stature are impeccable, I was perfectly qualified to make the joke. But she was uncomprehending,



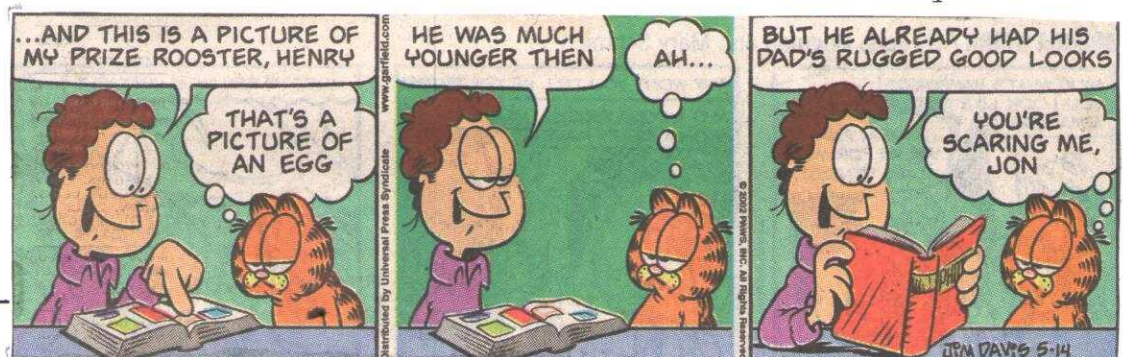
so I let it go. However, since I possess a personality which has solipsistic tendencies, I have nevertheless been able to garner considerable



satisfaction out of this riposte, which was one of my best for the year. Also I garnered some degree of smug disdain, since she, even though she was, after all, head of the local la leche league, nevertheless mispronounced leche as "lesh." That, of course, is unforgivable. (So you see? I am not a sexist pig. I am a linguistic snob.) (And yes; I do intend "linguistic" as the correct adjective here.)

There would be a different interaction, with a different woman, only weeks before we left, which would not involve a display of my amiable and jocular personality. It did, however, begin with a similar display of initial goodwill. It came about because of a certain rancor I had felt for years

about Abbe's job. She would go off to deliver those many babies, sometimes leaving me mid-sentence in a valued conversation with her, and often leaving me with many domestic duties, which included taking



on all the imminent duties of childcare. Not infrequently, after she would deliver a baby, the family would thank her, send her gifts, and praise her at length. I stood by, the ancillary doctor's wife (husband?), and would sometimes feel angry that these people never thought to thank me for the fact that I was giving up my work, my wife, my sense of routine while they were thus being blessed with the ministrations of a good doctor. There was, however, one exception. A certain woman, one of Abbe's peacenik associates, had actually thanked me for "giving up Abbe for so long" during what had been her 48-hour period of labor. The thanks came weeks later, but it was very much appreciated on my part. So, only a few days before we were to move away from the area, I saw this woman at the food coop and made it a

point to go up and remind her of her having thanked me, and thank her for having shown her appreciation. She listened impatiently, and then proceeded to dress me down for "taking Abbe away from us." It was true that we were leaving because of my dissatisfaction. Abbe liked her work there, liked the health center, and received much support from the staff. Had it been up to her, she would--we would--have stayed. So the woman was right in her judgement of the situation, but she was not in her rights to give me an ass-chewing which lasted a good five minutes and was truly an efflux of rage. I backed away from her as she ran out of breath, and said sweetly, "I think I just discovered another reason I am leaving this area," and I walked out of the store without having made my intended purchases.

Why was I so dissatisfied? I think I can delineate certain main reasons. One was the climate--the constant rain and filthy humidity. The other was the chronic hostility and lack of acceptance displayed by the residents of this rural ghetto. And then there was the outcome of that custody trial with Dacia. Yes; these are the three main reasons.

And yet, some people liked living in this area. Some people ... well, I started to write "thrived" but that is not accurate ... wallowed blissfully in this mudhole. How was this possible?

I learned, as time went by, that there were five groups of people which seemed to do well in this area. There were those who identified closely with a church, and became a part of that community. They felt accepted, integral, valued. This option, however, was scarcely open to a nultheistic atheist such as myself. Then there were the professors and the professors' wives. As a group, these people were mired in the sordid milieu of pseudo-education, but at least they worked (even as they fought) together as a group, and more or less liked their environs. If they were not well paid, they at least were not on welfare, as were most of the ghetto residents. If they were pompous, shallow pedants, at least they could pretend to themselves that they were profound, eminent scholars. I did explore this group of people, as stated above, but found it more distasteful even than other professorly groups I had encountered, so soon gave up on it. The third group was a small clique of organic-gardening farmers which was located, or scattred, somewhere on the outskirts of Carbondale--or perhaps many miles away. I was never sure. This avocation interested me little, I did not know about this group until shortly before we left, but I did discover that they very much liked the fertile fruit-growing soil and were a closely-knit group which supported each other. The members of this group I met, shortly before leaving, seemed very satisfied with the area--they were getting to do the work they wanted, and felt an obvious sense of strong community with their fellow farmers. The fourth group were those who, for want of a better word, might be called "professionals"--a word I utterly detest. You know: doctors, lawyers, dentists, realtors, business people. Those who made better money than most. Those who drove nice cars, lived in nice houses, and had status in the community because of their jobs. I suppose Abbe and I fit into this group by default, although since I never do anything by default, I failed to fit in. Abbe did not fit in because she, in her work as doctor at a community health care clinic (a clinic that serves the poor), was constantly rubbing elbows with the poor. But this group of professionals, even though they associated with one another but little, associated with the poor as little as possible. They kept high walls up--personal walls in the form of emotional armor, and often actual physical walls up around their homes and property. There was a fifth group which really wasn't a group. It was a scattered assortment of individuals who, possessing sterling character, managed to rise above the sordid plenum of mutual resentment, spiritual malaise, and alcohol dependency. They thrived because of what they possessed within themselves. They would have thrived in prison, in a labor camp, as hermits in the wilderness. They were, put simply, better people than I was. They thrived despite their difficult environment and rose above it. I did not thrive. I succumbed to my environs, and, given the level of resentment (scarcely here redeemed by my attempt at eloquent protest) which I myself succumbed to, I grimly admit that, in too many ways, I became like these people I detested. (Which perhaps is not surprising, given how I have always detested myself anyway.)

I do admit to one thing about these people: given their poverty, their culture or lack thereof, they should be forgiven their descent into squallor. Moreover, I do think that the constant tremors--the small earthquakes that were nudging reminders of "the big one to come"--put people on edge in a way that was both chronic and acute at one and the same time.

Still, I find myself unable to forgive those people--that community. There was a savage quality to their squallor which went beyond excuses. Do you, for example, think I exaggerated the behavior of these people as manifest in their Halloween orgies? I assure you I did not. Note the report printed on the next page in its entirety. The page comes from Alumnus: Southern Illinois University at Carbondale (Winter, 1995), which we continued to receive after we had moved to Saint Louis. Note that this

Halloween referred to happened after we had moved. And the implication is clear: This Halloween was not as wild and turbulent as those of previous years, i.e., the years we lived there. So read and believe--and recoil:

finale

Halloween Déjà Vu

Despite continuing efforts to bring Carbondale's Halloween street party to an end, some 2,000 people gathered on South Illinois Avenue on Saturday, Oct. 29, 1994. What started out as a low-key celebration took on violent overtones as the crowd turned on police, flipped two cars, and threw rocks and M-80s indiscriminately.

Before the weekend was over, more than 120 people were arrested, 16 had been treated in the emergency room of Memorial Hospital. At least one police officer was injured when a firecracker exploded.

Since 1988, the University and city have tried different tactics to quell the

party that often develops into a small riot. SIUC sent students home for a fall semester break for several years, but this penalized the majority of students who behave.

This year, students living in University residence halls were prohibited from having overnight guests for the weekend. Bars along South Illinois Avenue closed early, at 10 p.m. The sale and transportation of kegs within the city limits were banned.

Still there were problems, and the story attracted local, state, and national media coverage, damaging the reputation of the city and the University.

Just before *Alumnus* press time, SIUC President John C. Guyon and Carbondale

City Manager Jeff Doherty announced that a joint city-University task force will tackle the problem before Oct. 31, 1995, arrives.

About 20 people will serve on the task force, although most members had not been announced as this magazine went to print. Carbondale Police Chief Don Strom and SIUC Security Director Sam Jordan will be non-voting members. Others will likely be named before the beginning of Spring Semester.

Guyon and Doherty believe the task force will come up with a plan that can be implemented by Oct. 31.



A car is flipped over during Halloween 1994 in Carbondale. Some good news: almost 200 student volunteers helped clean up areas along and near The Strip during the weekend. ("Daily Egyptian" photo by Jeff Garner)

Do you begin to understand why I wanted the hell out of that region?

Yes; 1994 is the year we left. And it is odd, reading over what I have above written. I note that I have kept shifting from the present infinitive to the past tense--as though I am still living there, or as though I have left. Well, some of what I write about happened while there; but also, all of what I write about is now already from the vantage point of hindsight. In some ways I was so oppressed by that area that it seemed as though I were incarcerated. I had a certain nightmare while living there which I

had never before experienced. It was a recurrent nightmare. I was in prison, in my cell, feeling horrible, it was dark in the cell and dark outside, and I had no idea as to when I would get out of that prison. I would wake from these dreams in a state of absolute terror. And then, during the next few hours, or days, I would wonder why I had that dream. Silly me. Now I see the answer is ever so simple.

Yes; I was incarcerated there. And yet, in some self-preserving ways, I never quite allowed myself to be there. In all the six years we lived there, I tended to keep using my old New Franklin zip code when addressing letters, and always had to check my envelopes carefully before mailing them.

When we finally left that area, I felt more than relief; I felt like Orpheus coming up from the underworld. But unlike Orpheus, who

didn't quite succeed in rescuing Eurydice, I fear my ascent did rescue Abbe ... but it was a reluctant, and sorrowing Abbe. She had become quite involved in the peacenik coalition, and at work received good support from office and nursing staff, loved the little hospital where she delivered babies, and had great administrators at her workplace. She was a member of that fifth group I wrote about--the saintly ones who made a place for themselves in the community and defined a community amongst themselves. Abbe did this, because the other doctors respected and admired her; even more, she was appreciated by her patients. So while I was exulting about leaving Southern Illinois, Abbe was grieving, and I fear I was not very generous to Abbe about her own emotions on leaving that place. I should have been more generous. I think I selfishly believed I had been generous enough for having given her six years--the four years she was obligated to serve (sic) there, an extra year for our daughter to finish high school (which ended up not happening, since she went off to Florida to live with the cur who whelped her), and then I had, with reluctance of the highest magnitude (yes; the highest one can go, without it becoming a no) even agreed to a sixth year because the health center where she worked had been unable to recruit someone to replace her. I had run out of generosity. (No. This isn't quite correct. I could and should have been more generous. I was, now, selfishly looking out for myself, and not caring anymore to look out for Abbe's feelings--on this matter. Shame on me.)

As relieved as I was to be moving, I nevertheless felt a certain trepidation. This of course stemmed from what I knew would be the considerable stresses involved

with moving to any new place--no matter how desirable it might be. But it stemmed primarily from a certain nagging suspicion. This suspicion itself came from a certain experience I had undergone when I was teaching, as a graduate assistant, in graduate school. Allow me to explain.

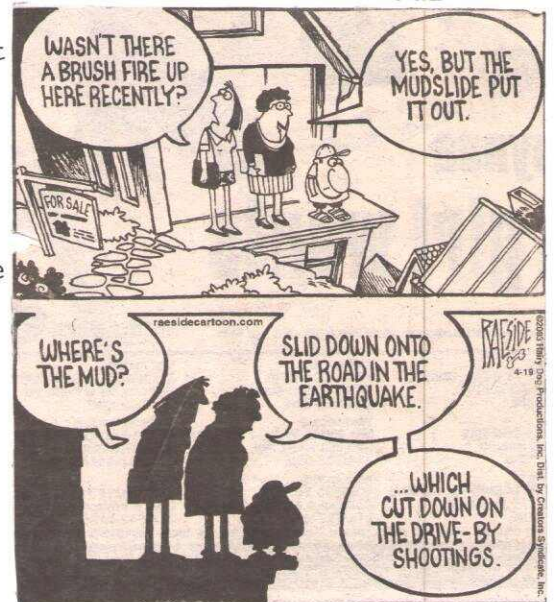
When I first began teaching those undergraduate, elementary classes in philosophy, I was impressed by the quality of the students: their eagerness, enthusiasm, dedication, even scholarship. Teaching was fun, uplifting, rewarding. But then it all abruptly changed. I think this was in winter of 1972, i.e., the second semester of that year, although I could be off by one or two semesters. Regardless, it did change. Drastically. The new semester began, and it was as though I were teaching at a different school, with a different student population--and attitude. The students, virtually all of them, were cynical, lazy, hostile, reluctant about class participation, sometimes openly sneering, often overtly rude, given to cheating on tests, and often there would even be a "troublemaker" or two in each class. We graduate students were a close-knit group, and I found out very quickly that other teaching assistants were experiencing the same thing--a new unhappy classroom situation, with a feeling that everything had changed so suddenly. Literally, in the course of one semester. We talked



about this shift, wracked our brains to try and figure out what had happened in our culture, and most of all were just overwhelmed with an awareness that truly this shift had happened, so swiftly, and universally. Yes; there were exceptions--exceptional students. Some of these I remember (with fondness, and gratitude) to this very day. But they were exceptions. Several of us--the teaching assistants--even asked to sit down with some of the senior faculty and discuss the problem with them. Their response was most unsympathetic. They, rather vainly--almost sneeringly, suggested that we must be doing something wrong to have caused such a marked change that was so widespread. So we kept the problem to ourselves; we didn't want the faculty judging us critically. And so we plodded on, the joy of teaching gone, and our philosophical curiosity piqued--because now we were trying to figure out what had happened, sociologically, to demarcate such a different group of students. Some people reminisced about what changes had happened in television programs at what might have been crucial stages in these students' lives. Political changes were discussed. We even talked about family values. But we could not explain it. However, exactly one year later, the senior faculty began complaining about the same problem to us. Their students were apathetic, lazy, dull, mocking, recalcitrant, surly. What could have brought on this change so suddenly? It was obvious that the very students we had had the year before, in the elementary classes, were now, in droves, entering the upper-level undergraduate classes, and since these were the same students we had had problems with the year before, well, they now were causing the same problems in the next level of classes. On one occasion we even reminded the senior faculty that we had discussed this problem, i.e., these very students, the year before. They had no memory of this. None. They now were transfixed with trying to figure out the change, just as we had been--and still were, but had no memory of our having brought the problem to them a year earlier. That situation--that change, never did get explained. It would persist to the end of my teaching career, except for the year I taught strictly post-graduate students. And I have never, to this day, explained how that shift could have been so abrupt and also so universal. Not to mention irremediable--because, judging from what has since ensued in so-called "higher education," that change was permanent. What huge, and obviously very powerful (however well camouflaged), social force was at work there? I shall never know, it seems, but that shift was so complete, climactic, even harrowing that not only will I never forget it, I also will never trust that it could not happen in other arenas of our culture--or, in our entire culture.

Thus I explain the primary genesis of that sullen, uneasy trepidation I harbored. I had experienced something just awful in Southern Illinois with the people who lived there. But could it be the case that what I experienced there was just the beginning of a new cultural norm--which would spread out and infect all cities, all rural areas, perhaps taking a little while to become manifest because these people's attitudes might "move up" a bit more slowly than did those students, but still, inexorably and painfully, the attitudes and personalities I had experienced in Southern Illinois would become universal in this entire culture, and I would discover that whereas I had moved away from that Hades to escape it, the legions of demons who had occupied and defined it had spread out over the face of this earth and now they would be with me again and there never would

be any escaping them? I could only hope not. I would see. I did know that there had been one experience, of a personal nature, which would forever define how I felt regarding Southern Illinois. It had never occurred before moving there, and I was sure it would never occur again. It happened in my own home, during the winter. Because the heat was on, the humidity inside the house was low. (Outside, it was probably its usual of 100 percent. Where we lived, the humidity--summer or winter--was above 90 percent 90 percent of the time, and during over 50 percent of this 90 percent of the time the humidity was 100 percent. There you have it, in hard numbers, a report on the suffocating humidity of that area.) But I was reporting an incident inside the house. I had just come in from being outside, and ... well, you know how it is possible, in the winter, to walk across a carpet, reach out and touch something or someone, and get shocked by the static electricity? Which builds up because the humidity in the air is so low? Something similar happened this night. I came in from outside to a very dry house, and I was wearing a very thick, wool sweater. I needed to empty my bladder, and I quickly pulled off the wool sweater, stepped in the bathroom where the lid of the stool was up, and let loose



with a stream of pee. And the second my piss hit that water, the static charge of having taken that sweater off discharged, and the shock came up the stream of piss into my penis and groin. It was an awful assault, against both my body and my psyche, and yes, only in Southern Illinois would something like that happen: where I would get shocked--hurt--by my own stream of piss. The world of Southern Illinois is always pissing back at you. Always trying, like a possessing demon, to enter your body and possess it. So do you see? I fled that area because, like a demon, it was trying to possess me. That, I say to you, is the one experience which would forever define how I felt about Southern Illinois.

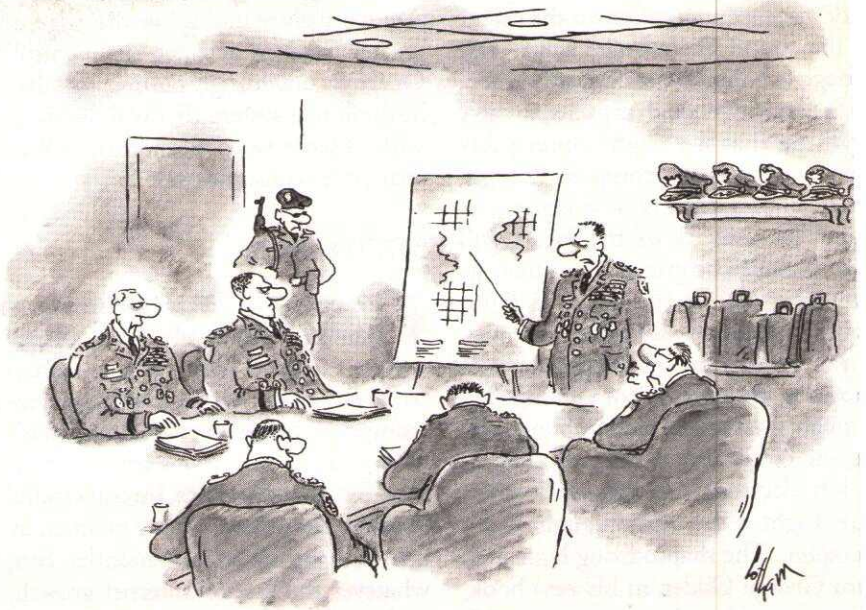
If that one experience defined how I felt about Southern Illinois, there was another experience which would forever define how I judged Southern Illinois. Most of you who know me likely are already suspecting that this experience has something to do with how the people in Southern Illinois talk. And indeed, being a bit of a literary snob, and possessing certain understandably-elitist attitudes about language as it is, and should be, spoken, I can well understand why my friends would think matters of language would most stolidly define my judge-

ment of this region. Indeed there is much to judge from this perspective. More than a few times I have emitted my disgust with how the people of this region speak nearly every vowel as, "uh." For example, "Suh yuhr thuh wuhn thuht druves uh hurse?" "Yuh ... I mean, yeah," I would answer." This observation, or question, was one often posed, and it was just as often followed by, "And your wife, she drives a Volvo?" except they would say, "Und yuhr wuf, shuh druves uh Vulvuh?" to which I would cheerfully answer, "She sure does!" and would neglect to wipe the grin off my face for at least an hour after the exchange. As disgusting (or humorous, depending on the case) this tendency of theirs was, it does not define what that one experience was which most clearly defined how I judged Southern Illinois. That experience? It was this:

Early spring of last year, Marion and I partook of what had become something of a Sunday ritual. If Abbe were not working that day, then we would leave the house so she could "sleep in." During that time, our jaunt would usually take us to a very large flea market which took place in a large building just outside of the town of Murphysboro. On this particular Sunday morning, we headed that way, and just before arriving, my eye went to the gas gauge and my heart sank. The gauge read "empty." We were in the 1955 Cadillac hearse, and it was not "easy on gas." So there was a good chance that driving the remaining half-mile to the flea market, and the four miles back to the nearest gas station, would involve running out of gas. I decided to go on to the flea market, where we would not likely buy anything, but Marion certainly loved going in and looking at all the odd objects arrayed on the many tables. As we were looking things over, I glanced outside through one of the windows and saw a young fellow, maybe 16 years old, looking through a window of the hearse. He kept going from one window to another, and was spending enough time with my car it was making me uneasy. What to do?

I stepped outside and, in a friendly voice, confronted him. He was friendly enough himself, so my confronting him quickly became merely engaging him. He had seen the car, and had walked up the road to have a better look at it. At some point he asked me what kind of gas milage it got, which caused me to remark on the fact that I was out of gas and hoped I could make it to a filling station back in town. He turned and pointed down the road to where he had just come from. It was a gas station, nestled back in amongst some tall buildings and upright gas tanks. That was where he worked, his dad owned the place, and I could buy gas there--less than half a mile down the road. I thanked him, said we would be down there in a short while, and went back inside.

And so we did go down there in a short while. At this point a small



"They're not worth the uranium it would take to blow them to hell."



digression is in order. A '55 Cadillac has a "hidden" gas-tank cap. It is under the left rear tail-light. One pushes a button below the main part of the light, and allows a sprung hinge to raise it. The problem is, when a 1955 Cadillac is almost 40 years old, that entire contraption, including the fragile wires which go to the tail-light and must bend everytime it is raised, is delicate and brittle. So when I would pull into a gas station, rather than letting any attendant who might know where the gas cap was hidden start fumbling with the mechanism, I would immediately jump out of my car, raise the gas cap, and (as was the case in this rural area where the tanks were not turned off and on from inside the gas station) I would turn on the pump, take the nozzle off, and start pumping the gas in myself. So this is what I did when I pulled into this gas station. I jumped out, raised the tail-light, and started pumping the gas. As I did, I noted a tremendous commotion coming from inside the gas station. In the bay where tires were changed or fixed, an older man was yelling at the younger fellow whom I had met earlier. This older man, in fact, was yelling at the top of his lungs, throwing tools about, kicking the big bay door, yelling so loud it was almost like a gruff scream. He then saw me outside, and came walking out, somewhat chagrined, it seemed, that I had witnessed his display. He wiped down the windshield, then took the nozzle as I removed it from the tank, and replaced it on the pump as I replaced the gas cap and carefully lowered the tail-light. As I turned to pay him, the younger fellow came walking out, wanting to see the car again. The father glanced in the direction of the approaching boy, and as if to relieve his embarrassment at my having heard him screaming, said, "Damned kid. I've taught him everything I know, and he's still ignorant." The "kid" was now looking the car over again, and I noticed how he was dressed and built almost exactly like the father. They both had big bellies, although the father's was bigger. They both were wearing old bluejeans, dirty white T-shirts, and brown shoes. The son was a morphological clone of the father. I paid the father in cash, thanked them both, and drove away. My tongue was perhaps bleeding. I had almost bitten it in two, to keep from commenting on the father's, "Damned kid. I've taught him everything I know, and he's still ignorant." Of course he had pronounced it as, "Dumned kuhd. Uh've tught hum uvuruhthung uh knuw, un huh's stull ignurunt." I this time did not wince overly much at the language. I was simply feeling astounded at the vast implications of that, "Damned kid. I've taught him everything I know, and he's still ignorant."

That, my friends, is how I judge Southern Illinois: a genetic tautology of unending, irredeemable ignorance.

Upon moving to Saint Louis, I would begin discovering some of the many things I had left behind. Not things I had left in Southern Illinois; rather, things I had, to put it bluntly, and sadly, pretty much abandoned in terms of my own personality. For example, upon moving to Saint Louis, I realized very soon something crucial about Southern Illinois and how that area had changed me. I learned that the people in Southern Illinois not only are very unfriendly, they also are almost never cheerful. In fact, I came to realize that this lack of cheerfulness in those people had, over time, altered a part of my own person--or persona. I had, in Southern Illinois, come to use cheerfulness as a tool. When people in that region were unfriendly, I would become extremely cheerful as a way of getting them to loosen up. After several years of this cheerfulness being used as a tool, I had truly forgotten that it could be anything else--that it could be a natural expression of how I feel as opposed to being only a way of trying to alter how other people feel or act. I had been in Saint Louis a little over a month before I realized that this alteration had taken place in me, and that I could relax, let my natural expressiveness come through, and be cheerful when with people--cheerful in a way that would cause them to appreciate it, rather than begrudgingly respond to it.

We arrived in Saint Louis amidst a jumble of junk, given what the movers did to our possessions. But already I was feeling in better spirits. I was even able to appreciate certain aspects of the move itself, which had been pleasant. The process of packing, of course, had been very



"Not that it really matters, but how will this play out among the serfs?"

tumultuous and wearying, all those tedious hours, all those brown boxes. But there had been one pleasant note even amidst all this. Namely, for exactly one day, Abbe's house plants were gone. There had been so many of these house plants in the kitchen, especially fast-growing ones that were arrayed around the microwave, that at the end of a busy day's worth of cooking, during which there had been much opening and shutting of the microwave's door, so much foliage would have gotten clipped off of these plants it would be lying in heaps on the floor, enough in fact to make a good-sized bale of hay. Yes; how pleasant it was, for one day, to be moving about the house without long stringers of plant debris trailing behind me whenever I left the kitchen.

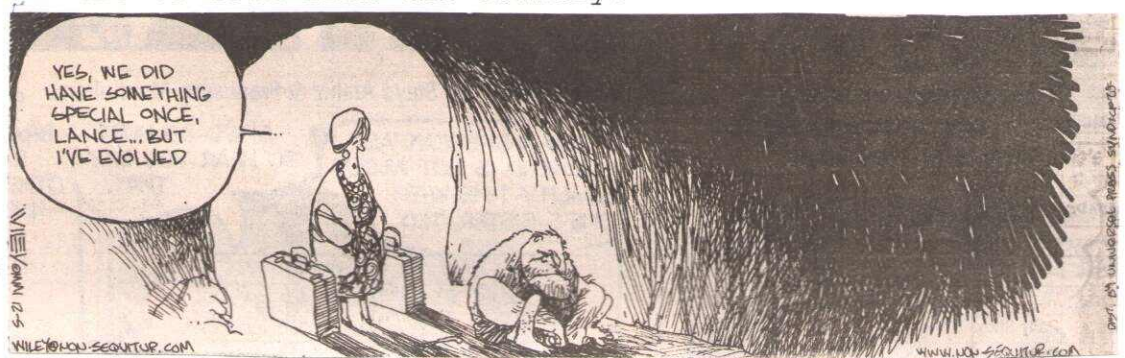
On moving to Saint Louis there were many pleasant aspects for one to get used to. For example, there is curbside pick-up for



trash and recyclable items. To this country boy, these amenities feel like true luxuries. There is plenty of water. Those many years of living on my farm at New Franklin, using a cistern, and depending on the generosity of the rains ... well, after those years I have never taken plentiful water for granted. I had it for six years in Southern Illinois, but even that did not spoil me. I remain grateful.

In this city there are matters I have to become accustomed to. For example, one does not measure distance in miles; one measures it in time. There is the traffic, the lack of streets without stoplights, and the speed limits. A store only ten miles away might take half an hour to get to; it might take an hour. And finding essentials is more difficult in the city. Suppose you need a breaker-switch box for a pump. Living in the country you always knew where to find this item. In the city, one has to plow through the yellow pages, and whereas in the country that one place having the item may serve only five-thousand people, in a city serving over one million people there is only one place which carries that item and you might have to drive twice as far to get it as you had to drive when you went to town from the country.

There have been matters in Saint Louis which are not easy to understand. For example, those who live here take a very odd view of questions. It appears that simple curiosity, or even polite interest, is



not something they know much about. The result is that a simple question posed to someone causes them to become suspicious and start defending themselves. "Why did you choose to drive a Ford Crown Victoria?" is a question posed because I have found the "ride" of this car to be the best of any car I have ever been in. And I wondered if this was their reason for choosing the car. But instead, to such a question the immediate response is suspicion, and the answer might be something like, "Yeah, I know the cops all drive the Crown Vic, but it wasn't as though I was trying to pose as a cop." I might respond, "Well, of course you wouldn't be doing that. I just wanted to know why you chose it." The answer might be, "It's not as if I couldn't afford a better car. I just always liked Fords and this one, well, I liked the color." By this time the level of suspicion might be so high I would drop my line of questioning. This--a suspicion at questions, instead of recognizing them as an expression of simple, even good-willed, curiosity, is something I have never encountered in any other country, or in any other part of this country, whether city or rural. I do not understand it.

Another surprise is the rampant, and artificial (Is it ever otherwise?) classism throughout the city. Saint Louis County is divided up into townships, and amongst these townships, there seems to be a very well-entrenched pecking order. The people of Frontenac look down on the people of Ladue, Ladue people look down on Clayton, Clayton looks down on Town and Country, Town and Country looks down on Des Peres (where I live), Des Peres looks down on University City, University City looks down

on Maplewood, this little township looks down on Rockhill, and ... well, at the bottom of the pecking order, as far as I can tell, is South Saint Louis. When two people were



here doing tile work for us, and I found out they were from South Saint Louis, I very tactfully (without asking questions), probed to find out how they feel about being looked down on, or, what may have been just as crucial, how they feel about not having anybody to look down on. As it turned out, they didn't have any feelings about being looked down on by others, because indeed they had someone they themselves could look down on, and that was (oh yes; how could I be so naive?!?) the niggers. The niggers "downtown," or in their neighborhood, or wherever they might be. This topic, be assured, I quickly steered away from. This classism was not merely something made manifest in verbal statements; it also was--is--made manifest in certain policies, or "codes," in some of the townships. For example (fortunately, not in ours), certain townships do not allow residents to own a pickup. Other townships allow ownership of a pickup, but only if it is kept off the street and always parked in a garage. Why this? Well; supposedly, people who drive a pickup are of a lower order ... rural, or hick, or blue-collar, or something like that. No one ever bothered explaining the exact nature of this prejudice, perhaps because they know I drive a pickup, and am not infrequently seen with a tire-iron in my hand.

One matter of visual interest, in all the townships, which struck me was the dismal shape of people's mailboxes. So many of them were smashed, broken, toppling from their poles or stands. In the rural area where I grew up, having a nice mailbox was a matter of pride. But in this city, people might own a million-dollar house, and yet have a rusted mailbox that dangled from its stand by a single bolt. I could not understand it. I put up a new, nice mailbox, and painted it a gleaming white. I set it atop a wrought iron stand, also painted white, and the mailbox itself was huge--big enough to hold an abandoned infant, or, for that matter, a dead dog. Alas, I would soon discover why people in this city do not have nice mailboxes. Young boys, about high school age, all over this city find it great sport to drive around at night and, presumably with a ballbat, smash mailboxes. Mine got smashed, and over and over, I took it down, hammered it out smooth, repainted it, only to again, a few weeks later, have it get smashed again. I finally left it that way. This rural boy now also has a smashed, rusting mailbox. So be it. If the Saint Louis peasants must find their fun in smashing mailboxes, instead of doing something more productive, well, I have more productive things to do than keep repairing my smashed mailbox.

The strangest, and most difficult, part of moving to Saint Louis, however, involved our house. Or rather, the attitudes of people toward our house. Or maybe it is not "attitudes." Maybe it is attitude. I really am not sure, because I still have never understood its etiology, teleology, or appeal. It is something called the "tour" which is usually pronounced "too-wer." Two syllables, in a mincing tone of voice which, at one and the same time, sounds ultra-effeminate (whether uttered by male or female) and vaguely enthusiastic. The purpose of the too-wer is, I suspect, rather classist or ostentatious or simple vanity--if given by the owner of a house in Saint Louis. The owner, acting the role of docent, moves through the house, one room at a time, at times pointing out features, though usually simply naming what the room is called, e.g., "Susie's bedroom," and then the people move on to the next room. This too-wer is thrust upon a visitor (me), who doesn't give a damn about the interior specificities of someone else's house. But I would politely move through their house, listening to the words while not listening, nodding politely while fuming, and then it would be over and all details forever forgotten. If in Southern Illinois, upon going to someone else's home, you would be met at the door and walked to their car to take a ride about the adjoining area, in Saint Louis you are met at the door and the host, or hostess, in that liquid, gushing, estrogen-laced voice says, "Do you want the too-wer?" And then they proceed with the too-wer without waiting for your answer.

If being accosted with this ritual, when visiting someone else's home, was not bad enough, the real insult was being greeted by people who would come to our house and, immediately upon entering, as they would be led to, say, the living room and shown to their seats, one of the



Guests, with a shudder throughout the body putting me in mind of a mare in her stall as she is being artificially inseminated, would say, "Aren't you going to give us the too-wer?!"

I soon lost all patience with this ritual, and would simply reply that no, I do not indulge in this Saint Louis institution. Whereupon the guests would succumb to a



state of both bewilderment and hurt, so acute at times as to seem to border on panic. Abbe, more tolerant of such deviancy than myself, often would oblige such people if she were here. Whereupon I would hear, from the guests, various exclamations and expostulations as they would be ushered from room to room. I say "various." Actually the repertoire was quite limited. The women would say, "Cute!" or "Nice!" (this word often drawled out as if they were licking cream off the floor) or "Fancy!" along with many cooing sounds emitted which put me in mind of how a baby sounds after it has finally succeeded with that much-needed bowel movement. The men tended to also use the word, "Nice!" along with "Impressive!" or "Impressive spread!" (more likely uttered if they were outside in the yard), or, "You've done well!" This one I never could understand! What did owning this house have to do with my writing? That is the only thing I do well. (Come to think of it, there are a few other things I do well, but these I do in private so they would not know about such matters.) And then there was the oft-spoken laudation, "Congratulations!" which might be uttered amidst the too-wer but was more likely to be said at its terminus. I was informed by Abbe that, to this word, one is supposed to say, "Thank you." But I didn't. Why should I? What was I being congratulated for? And what business did these people have handing out congratulations for something I was unaware of?

An even more weird situation seemed to surround this ritual, which involved guests coming in and, when I would not offer to give them the tour (I might as well stop spelling it as they pronounce it), they would say, "We'll just do the tour ourselves," and they would go walking off to all reaches and recesses of the house, looking about at will. Or worse, they would not even announce that this was what they were doing. Instead they would just go walking off to do that tour. Or, an already-arrived guest might take on the duty of, without permission of host or hostess, going off to give the tour to a newly arrived guest.

Need I point out that, before long, I began feeling like I was living, not in a house, but in a fish-bowl? As though this was not a place for me to live, it was a place for other people to see, and which I was supposed to want to show--to brag about, or something like that. My ire began rising. It got a special boost when a relative, whom I had not seen in over a year, came in and without even greeting me, went off to give herself the tour. I protested that she was doing this without even having said hello, and I thought it discourteous that seeing this house was more important than engaging me. Her reply was blithe: "I've seen you before. I've never seen your new home." So I turned back to the cooking I had been doing at the stove, which was why I had not been aware of her coming in, and she went off to give herself a very protracted tour, uttering the word, "Nice!" so often and so loudly it almost sounded like a verdict.

My patience with this practice came to an end that same weekend when a newly-arrived visitor of geriatric pedigree was given the tour by a senior matron already in



the house. I had been doing much cooking for a party which was to take place that evening (although, given the parade of pre-party tours, it seemed that in some people's minds the party had already begun) and I stepped into the bedroom in order to change for the party. The door was closed though not locked. (We had just moved in, and would not discover for some days the fact that there was a rather concealed lock already on this door.) At this point I knew nothing of the tour in progress being given by the matron to the elderly woman, and I do not exaggerate--just

at the very moment I had shed my last article of clothing, and was standing there butt-naked, about to walk to my closet for other clothing, that bedroom door opened and the two women, tongues busy, walked in. In one leap I flung myself to the part of the bedroom which could not be seen by someone coming through that door, and truly I panicked. I was not sure what to do. Yell out a warning? Give a loud and stern reprimand? I do think they would have rounded that corner to discover a mute and naked man in another two seconds, had it not been for the fact that they took a left turn into the master bathroom, at which point I recouped my sensibilities and hastily put on the clothes I had just taken off.

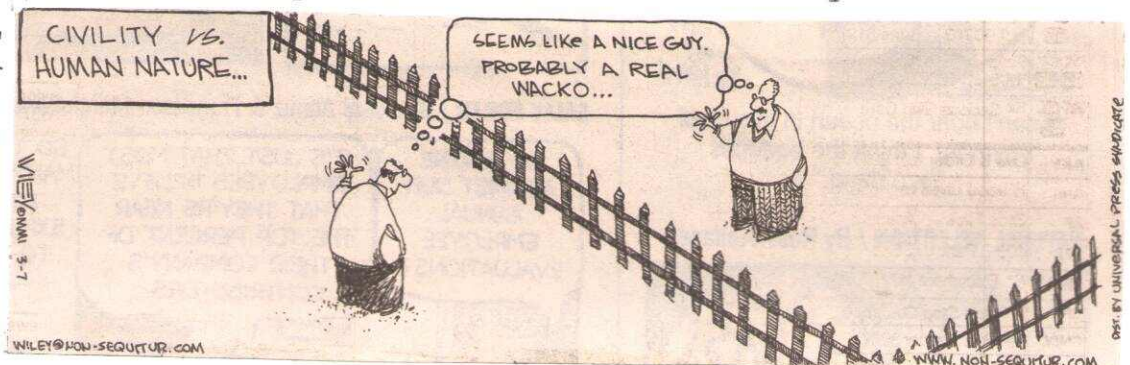
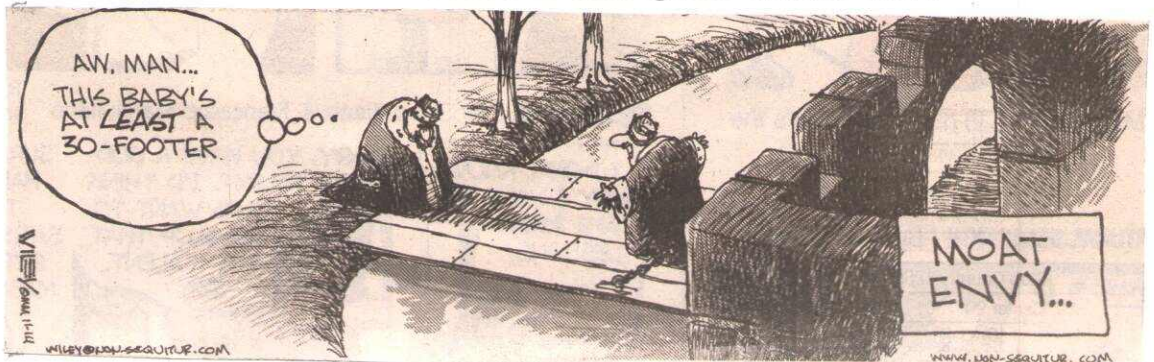
After this incident, the tour indulgences soon came to a virtual halt. I say "virtual" because there were a few exceptions, made for reasons of propriety, or just because I

wasn't in an assertive mood that day. But for the most part they were halted. And yes; if this causes you, my friends, to at last discover that your suspicions have been warranted, namely, your suspicions about my being a prude, given to modesty and privacy, well, so be it. Eventually the truth does get out.

If the "tour" problem got more or less solved, other problems in the same vein came up, which even more impressed upon me the fact that the house I live in, if utilitarian to my needs, would

always be looked upon by other people as my means for trying to impress them. For example, within weeks of moving here, I had installed rheostats--or "dimmer switches"--on the lights in four rooms. These are not highly expensive items. They cost about five bucks each. All they do is dim the lights. I also have rheostats on three of our lamps. Having these dimmer switches is important to me. What with having MS, and given all the damage that has happened to my eyes, I am at times very photophobic. I can see much better when the light level is set to suit my needs. Hence, the rheostats. However, whenever guests might be here, whenever I would walk over and lower or raise the light level, someone would say something like, "Oh yes! That makes for a better mood!" Then they would smirk and mince as if they had just gotten their incontinency pad changed and now they felt all clean and tidy. Or, the reaction might be quite the opposite, as happened on more than one occasion when a guest would sarcastically say, "Are you trying to impress us?" Impress? No. I was merely getting comfortable. "The only thing we are impressed by is your incivility!" I might have replied, but being a civil person in deed, I would content myself with merely thinking such things and utter nary a word. (Baumli's exterior is always so saintly; it is his interior that is sarcastic, resentful, punitive.)

Yes; for me this house would be a place to live, work, have some fun, but it would never be a place intended for impressing people--others or myself. We promptly set to work trying to locate a woodstove that would fit the chimney of our living room, but shopping for a woodstove in "the city" is a difficult task. For most people in Saint Louis, a woodstove is merely decorative--something to use those nights you have guests over to watch the football game. It is not something intended to actually heat the house. So there was a paucity of stoves to choose from, but there was a plenitude of merchants posing as sellers of woodstoves. In one such establishment, what they actually sold were "video fireplaces." And that was all. Not woodstoves and video fireplaces. Are you wondering what a "video fireplace" is? Or am I the only one naive about such things? A video fireplace is merely a VHS, or DVD, of a fire in a fireplace. One sets a TV in front of the fireplace opening, puts on the video, and sits there and watches a video recording of the fire. Of course, one does not merely watch. One also gets to hear it. There are crackling, hissing sounds, and apparently this artificial fire on the television screen is supposed to induce a state of blissful relaxation--or something like this. I am not sure. At some point, I let myself stop trying to figure out



these city people.

I was not, however, allowed to halt combat with these city people. There would commence a protracted battle which would soon suggest itself to be interminable. This fracas began via my encounter with the dog pile. Allow me to explain.

Shortly after moving here, the grass (note that I do not write "lawn;" I am not one to quickly be citified) needed to be mowed. I fired up the trusty Cub Cadet 125, a 12-horse "lawn and garden tractor," i.e., a very heavy-duty mower, and began on the front yard. Just as I began at the periphery near the street, I heard the motor pull down, the governor gave it gas, it sputtered and then roared with the torque needed for the challenge, and then an odor hit me which actually made me feel like I was going to lose consciousness. I slumped forward on the tractor, yet possessing enough wherewithal to clutch the mower blades, and shove the tractor into full-forward. Something had just been run over, and that something smelled so bad it was like the devil's own stench, and I had just shoved the tractor thirty feet at full speed down the edge of the yard to get away from it. I looked back, and there, gleaming with a surface carved smooth by the mowers' blades, and already steaming in the sun's heat, was a huge pile of dog shit that I had just run over. I circled about the yard, the mower still clutched, and drove upwind of the pile to have a look at it. How could one dog do that?! And then I realized. Yes; I had seen them out there. Dogs running loose, and dogs leashed to their owners, would all go to that same spot and do their fecal duty. I had noted this several times, but had not suspected that so much could have been piled in one place. The dogs, even the ones running loose, like to shit where dog shit already is. It seems to stimulate them, or so a veterinarian told me.

I continued the mowing, exercising extreme caution, but encountered no more such huge piles. I later went out and tried to dilute it with a garden hose, and only made the mess worse. Realizing there could only be one solution, I took upon myself the futile task of confronting owners who brought their dogs to that corner of our yard to do their duty. I was civil, but firm, and they were uncooperative and uncomprehending. It deserves being noted here that the house we bought had been unoccupied for 1½ years. So it is quite understandable that people "walking their dogs" would use the lawn of an unoccupied house as the dog shit repository. But how could these people be so uncomprehending--when I would tell them that now this house, and yard, are occupied, and it is not acceptable to have their dog poop (such a nice word) on my lawn? "But we've always done it here," was the common rejoinder.

Calls were made to the police. To the animal control department of Saint Louis. I would learn that there is a "leash law" in this area, i.e., dogs are required by law to be kept on a leash. The law had been ignored, by mutual agreement, by the local inhabitants. But I was not going to allow them to continue ignoring it. So I kept calling animal control, they would drive through and issue citations, and still the problem continued--a few dogs off a leash would do their duty in that corner of the yard, and people leashed to their dogs--always watching ~~closely~~ as that turd would be expelled through the straining and protruding anal sphincter--continued their habit of bringing their dogs to that part of the yard for their (was it thrice-daily?) shitting. Some stiff encounters, and arguments, ensued. The people were unwilling to change their habits. It seemed, in fact, that in terms of cognitive ability, they truly could not change. I got tired of calling the animal control people. I could sense that

they were getting tired of me calling. I considered shooting the dogs, but Abbe had peacenik philosophical reservations--actually, adamant objections--which I will not repeat since they made no sense. Also, I reasoned that even if I shot the dogs, the owners would just replace them. Moreover, I would discover that firing a gun in the city limits is a felony. (That didn't make sense either.) Not wanting to go to prison for years just over shooting a few dogs, I pondered different tactics. I covered the pile of dog shit with straw. This did not deter the dogs or



their owners. I tried sprinkling bottles of after-shave, which I myself would never use, all around the area. This tactic often deters animals, but it did not work with these domesticated canines. And then, finally, I hit upon a splendid idea. The idea was so simple, and so seemingly innocent, and yet so effective I rather upbraided myself for not having thought of it sooner. I began putting out food for these dogs. Yes; I would take some Purina Cat Chow, which is what we feed to Buttercup, our cat, and sprinkle it along the edge of our yard just by the street, so any dog coming to that pile of dog shit with intentions of adding to it would have opportunity for sniffing out a few morsels and eating them. This terrified the owners. Was I putting out poison? No. In more than one confrontation, I told them that I was merely putting the food there, thinking it might cause the dogs to stop at the edge of the street and not come into my yard. But it was cat food and it might hurt them! So the dog owners' protested. "My dog is a pedigreed such-and-such and it should only eat a special diet!" I might hear. To which I would smile and kindly explain that, well, if they didn't want their dog to eat this cat food, then they should take it elsewhere to do its duty.

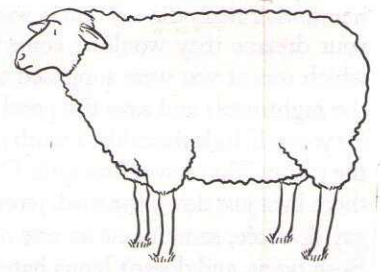
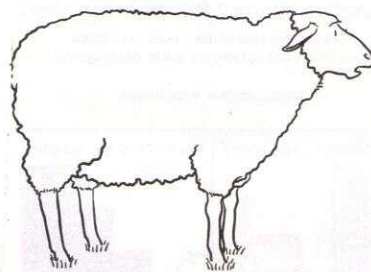
Yes; now the battle's tide had turned. They were furious at me. A couple of dog owners even yelled at me. To one man's accusation that its dog

could get poisoned eating "that stuff," I blandly replied, "Only if it eats some of the pieces that have been out here for several days and are moldy." At which thought the owner fled. Soon enough, this solved the problem of the leashed dogs being brought to that corner of our property. There was still the problem of the dogs running loose, and only more calls to the animal control people could help that. Except one incident did happen which caused many of the "off-leash" dogs to be put on a leash.

Abbe, Marion, and I went walking outside through the garage, and we saw two of a neighbor's grandkids up in our apple tree, teasing two dogs with long sticks. The dogs were barking furiously, leaping and snarling. These were, if I remember correctly, Boston Terrier dogs. Marion, seeing them, took off at a run toward the dogs, and the dogs, enraged by now, wheeled and charged for this little 3½-year-old morsel. I ran after him, kicked both dogs soundly, whereupon Abbe scooped Marion up, and there, in our driveway, were the two neighbors these dogs belonged to--an arrogant urologist and his dainty wife. Abbe went over to the man, who by now was holding both dogs in his arms, and yelled to him at the top of her lungs, "KEEP YOUR DOGS OUT OF OUR YARD!" He apologized, retreated quickly, and for the remainder of that Sunday afternoon we saw clusters of neighbors standing at a distance, their dogs on leashes, talking while looking in the direction of our house. The peacenik Abbe had turned into a momma bear, and it had scared the shit out of these people. Now they didn't quite know what to do.

They did, however, feel more banded together--bonded--at their new problem. It wasn't just the man of the house being the "meanie" now; the lady of the house had claws too! I would, the next evening, be given a great gift by the neighbor who lives directly across the street from us. They also have a dog, a tiny one, and it has never been a problem. But this dog owner obviously

felt quite distressed at the new level of tension in the neighborhood, and when he saw me working outside, he came over. He said something like, "I wanted to talk to you about this problem with people being alienated by your feelings about dogs. I thought it might be better to talk to you than to your wife because, well, it seems you are more rational about this topic than she is." Oh my God I could have kissed his feet! For once in my life, just this once, someone was seeing Baumli as the "good guy" and Abbe as the "bad guy." Always, always, it is the other way around. At all other times in our lives, Baumli has been, is, and ever shall be the bellicose, combative, unyielding assertive one; while Abbe is the peaceful, smiling, compromising diplomatic one. But this time--this



GREGORY

"Sure, I follow the herd—not out of brainless obedience, mind you, but out of a deep and abiding respect for the concept of community."

one precious time--I was being looked upon as the rational, level-headed, steady one who could be approached. The neighbor really didn't have much to say. He was just hoping that somehow the tense relations would go away, and he was just believing somehow that talking about it to me would make these tensions disappear. So I talked to him, reveled in his perception of me, but did not fail to again assert that all we wanted was for dogs to be kept out of our yard. We did not care if the dogs were supposedly nice dogs. Or that they supposedly would not bite. Or that we would feel good about these dogs if we got to know them. We just wanted them kept out of our yard. Did the problem get solved? No. Did it get better? Yes, only after more citations by the animal control people, only after I kept feeding the dogs more cat food, and only after I visited upon these errant dogs certain bestowals of my benevolence of other kinds--which I shall not here relay since doing so might incur the wrath of, not the animal control people, but of the people-control personnel.

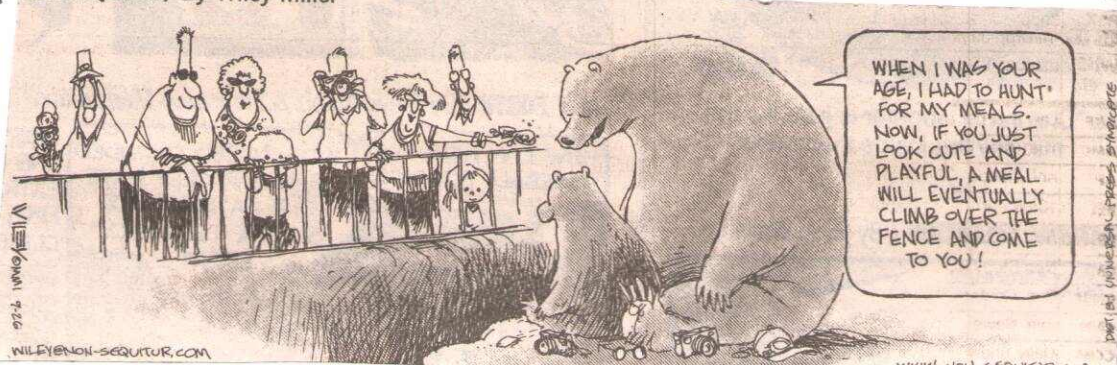
This on-going fracas with dogs--or rather, with dogs' owners--has caused many people who know me to brand me as a dog hater. So allow me to go on record: Baumli does not hate dogs. Baumli is, to be sure, quite allergic to dogs. This, even though he is not allergic to cats. But the allergy to dogs is not the usual kind--involving runny nose, coughing, or breathing difficulties. Rather, if I am around a dog, or dogs, for only a short time, I get a blindass splitting headache. Maybe hives too, but certainly the headache. So I avoid dogs. But this does not mean I dislike them. In fact, when they are gentle and not obtrusive, I very much like dogs and in fact go out of my way to pet them vigorously if I then can go somewhere and wash my hands well. So please be clear; being allergic to dogs does not mean I dislike dogs. Also, wanting neighbors' dogs to stay off my property does not mean I dislike dogs. I merely do not want to have to deal with their foul feces, and I do not want to have to worry about my son being bitten, plus I do not want to worry about them molesting (or being molested by) my cat.

NON SEQUITUR/ By Wiley Miller

Dislike? No. Cruel? Never. And I certainly do know something about cruelty to dogs because I often witnessed this in my father. Did he hate dogs in particular? Maybe not, given

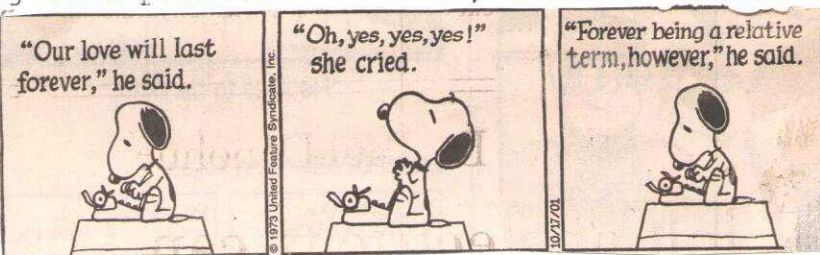
that he seemed to hate just about every creature--human or nonhuman--in general. Certainly he hated dogs in general, and since dogs were about, he sometimes had opportunity for hating a dog in particular.

We had two dogs, at different times, who were trained to herd cattle. When these dogs did not do what they were supposed to do, he would pick the dog up by its ears, and hold it that way, while the poor thing yelped so loud it would sound like a shrieking. This might go on for two minutes, after which he would let the dog go, and the dog then would go about its duties--none the better though, as far as I could tell, at discharging them. And then there were the stray dogs that, every so often, would show up on the farm. What to do with them? I am not even sure if there were humane societies back in those days. Some neighbors would adopt these strays, or if the dog was an unwanted nuisance, shoot the dog. But my father believed in simply running the dog off. His method was unique; I have never heard of it being used by anyone else. We had hired men back in those days, and my dad would pick the dog up by the ears, and then have one of the hired men pour a soda bottle, full of gasoline, down its throat. The dog would yelp, shriek, strangle, gag, cough, and after the contents of that pop bottle were poured down that dog's throat (How much of it did the animal actually swallow? I never knew) the dog would be released, and it then would usually run off. There was one dog which came to our farm when I was about five or six years old (I remember my age, because I remember where we lived then.) which was a medium-size gray dog, not attractive, no personality, but tenacious--because over the course of several weeks it got about six or seven doses of gasoline from the soda bottle. Miserable as it was afterwards, and even though it was not being fed, it would not leave. It did, however, learn to not allow itself to be caught, so my dad's one-and-only method could no longer be used. He did not own a rifle at the time, so finally called a neighbor to



come over and shoot the poor thing. I remember feeling very glad, because I hated the idea of it getting another dose of gasoline. I also remember feeling angry at the dog, thinking it a pathetic creature, to not run off given how my dad was treating it.

So do you see? It was my father who hated dogs, not me. I would like this to be made clear once and for all, because I tire of hearing people, who know nothing more about my relationship with dogs other than the fact that I am allergic to them, always saying, in a tone that is both matter-of-fact and also condemnatory, "Francis, he just doesn't like dogs!"



One faithful reader of my several editions of The Aviary once said to me, "When you get on the topic of those peasants, you just go on and on." I suppose he is right. This time there were two groups of peasants to go on about: the Southern Illinois peasants, and the more benign Saint Louis ones.

Yes; I admit to it: I am so very condemnatory toward these creatures. Maybe I should try to be less harsh. So I shall try to end on a positive note about my new set of peasants. I have found, since moving to this township of Des Peres, that even though my 1955 Cadillac hearse (before it got "parked") arouses considerable disapproval and even suspicion in my immediate neighbors, is nevertheless quite accepted, even with a fun sense of enthusiasm, by the general residents of this township. At first I was quite surprised by this, and to some degree remain so, but I did figure out why they are so accepting. This is a rather rich neighborhood. Many of the residents are rather on the hoity-toity side, so to speak. And if one lives here, one is considered to be one of their rank. And if one of their rank should do something odd or unusual like drive a 1955 Cadillac hearse, well, he is doing this because he is somewhat eccentric, or more likely, because for him it is a kind of party symbol. He takes it to ballgames, keeps a cooler of beer in the back when he is headed for a barbecue, or perhaps uses it for hauling his kid with his kid's friends to their "little league" baseball game. So he is greeted, accepted, and even heralded with the same kind of enthusiasm they give to those amongst their ranks who tend to be gregarious, quirky, and always in the mood to party. The result has been that if I do something so innocent even as to go to the grocery store, I get enthusiastic waves and yells from other cars, people come up to me and start talking about "the big game" which of course I know nothing about (but I am adept at faking both knowledge and enthusiasm about such fictions), and there is such good will expressed toward me that I find myself almost liking these people, often appreciating the sense of acceptance even if it is based on false assumptions, and almost able to not detest them for their base, nonphilosophical interests.



So you see? Baumli actually is capable of being becomingly benign. Do ye give to him all due and all superlative obeisance accordingly?



2. So I proceed to the next topic, which is to write about my family. This is always a somewhat delicate matter, because being a man addicted to his privacy, and always both a prude and a recluse, it is difficult for me to write much on this topic without feeling that I am stressing my soul, and also perhaps abridging other people's rights to privacy. So I must here proceed with caution, continence, and even at times reveal what I have to say while at the same time utilizing crafty camouflage.

As to Marion, he remains an innocent child, and I can say honestly that he both thrives and impresses. Moving to Saint Louis has been a boon

for him because he gets to be near his maternal grandparents. Plus this area is simply more intellectually stimulating. There are "things to do." He can go to a park one day, a few days later go to the Saint Louis Science Center, and we have been socializing more. The two grandparents do dote, and our friends here are quite taken by him, so he receives the social approbation he deserves. He is quite a talker; in this he takes after his mother. He also is quite studious; in this he takes after his paternal genes. Astronomy at present is his main interest, while his main deprivation is having a mother who believes he is not old enough to be allowed to cuss. I remain his advocate on this matter, his incipient teacher, and, as the world well knows, a worthy exemplar.

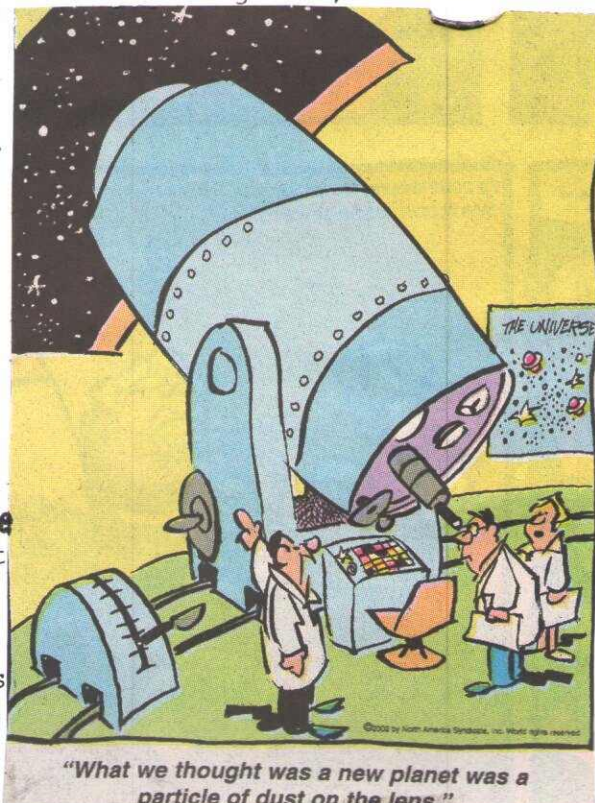
In Southern Illinois, Marion began attending a child care situation at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale (SIUC), which had the advantage of allowing him to interact with peasants his own age, and thus learn some of the hard facts of life at an early age. His time there actually had its advantages, although there were "situations" (such a polite term) there which caused some feelings of relief when that experiment (yes) came to an end. This stay of his began on March 21, and lasted until the beginning of the summer (when all activities in Southern Illinois come to a narcoleptic halt). It was during his protracted stay there that Marion would embark on a very non-promising attempt at a career in comedy. One evening at supper--it was on May 19, to be precise--Marion told his first joke. Or, it was his first relating of what he took to be a joke. Normally he is given to teasing, but this... his first joke! He came out of the bathroom grinning, sat down at table, and said, "Daddy, why did the potty flush by itself?" "Why?" I asked, indulging him. "Because it did!" he exclaimed, and he then roared with laughter, to the point that he nearly fell off his chair.

Note: I do not relate this anecdote because it is cute, although it is. And I will not try to claim that this counts as any kind of humor beyond--what?--the primitive. Rather, my interest is two-fold: Marion himself found it hilarious; he obviously, in the telling, looked upon it as setting up a true joke. So I am given to wonder where the incongruity, which characterizes a joke, lies in this. I can not tell. The other point is Marion's enjoyment. I have never seen anyone, in telling a joke, take so much pleasure in their own telling of it.

So Marion grows. He has very pale skin, fragile under the sun, and gorgeous auburn hair like Dacia's. In fact, Marion was a little more than 3½ years old when, on June 18, I cut that length of hair in the back for the first time. This gave him considerable relief from the oppressive heat and Southern Illinois' humidity, but I was sorry to see that gorgeous mane cut short. But I was also glad that our incarceration in Southern Illinois was soon to be cut short too, not only for the many



"He's swearing in full sentences now."



reasons mentioned so briefly above, but also because, on July 12, as I was proceeding along the highway toward Carbondale, I saw, in front of me, a pickup sporting a bumper sticker which read: MY KID BEAT UP YOUR HONOR STUDENT! A parent giving his child that kind of lesson? I was glad we were moving elsewhere.

Am I, as proud parent, allowed to relate just one thing Marion did, or said, which was supremely (sublimely?) cute? I shall: I was about to go to my study, and Marion asked me what I was going to do. I told him I would spend some time working on an article. "Is it broken?" he asked. I explained that, no, it wasn't broken, that in this case working on an article means something very different. But then later I realized that perhaps his question was more to the point than I had realized. And so I spent more hours, that night, working on that article than I otherwise would have. Yes; a child's innocence gave me a lesson in humility.

As to what is going on with Dacia. I have reported on what has already transpired--my losing custody of her, because she is "of age" and wanted to go live with her mother in Florida. Well; that group of



people would soon leave Florida and move back to Columbia, Missouri. And so that is where Dacia is now living. She keeps her--is it sullen, haughty, or defensive?--distance. I know little about her. When I ponder what I do know, it all seems quite simple--like one of those elementary puzzles that are made for one-year-old children. You know--a big picture, with maybe six pieces. So it is with Dacia: School: She is attending college part-time. Work: She continues to work at Hardee's. Car: It continues to be an expense. Boyfriend: She is romantically involved with a fellow who wears black lipstick. Modeling: She continues pouring huge quantities of money into trying to be a model, taking lessons from a matron who insists that her students look like anorexics, while excusing her own rotundity by explaining that she herself specializes in "full-figure" modeling. Household: She continues to live with her biological mother, although she spends a great deal of time at her boyfriend's place.

There should be a seventh piece, which would include the involvement of this household in her life, but that part got lost. Abbe remains sad; I truly grieve. I grieve the loss--her rejection and abandonment of this household. And I also grieve, just as much, her continued rejection of any real communication with us.

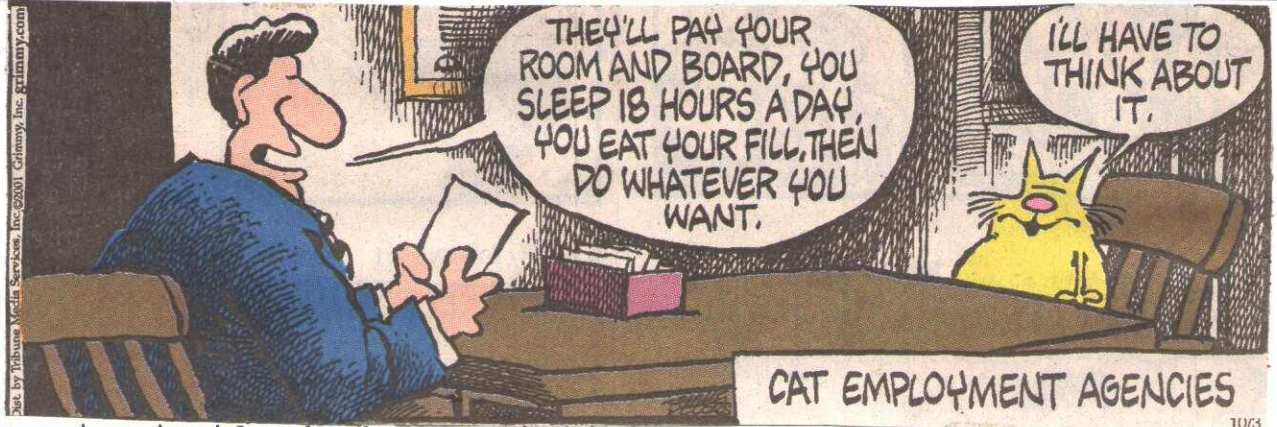
As for news of Abbe, I must here proceed with redoubled caution. There is my privacy, hers, and her anticipated swift reprimand should I



fail to abide by her mandates regarding privacy. So I shall say only a little. In The Aviary previous to this one, I noted that my relationship with her remains good. Abbe, in reading this, asked (jokingly?): "Do you mean 'good' like in those mail-order catalogs where they have three items arrayed together, and one is described as 'good,' the next as 'better,' and the third as 'best'?" Even though Abbe may have been only facetious with her query, I nevertheless proceeded to an explanation which drew upon matters of Biblical import (as when God created the world in six days and "pronounced it good"), a foray into Plato's doctrine as when he states that all men seek the Good and the Good is Knowledge and the Good is equivalent to Beauty, the "good" as it is defined etymologically, and "good" as it is defined as a state of grace by the RCC. I am not sure I satisfied her curiosity, but then, come to think of it, does a woman ever actually ask a question because she is curious? Or does she ask it only to stave off any future instantiations of that species of curiosity called suspicion?

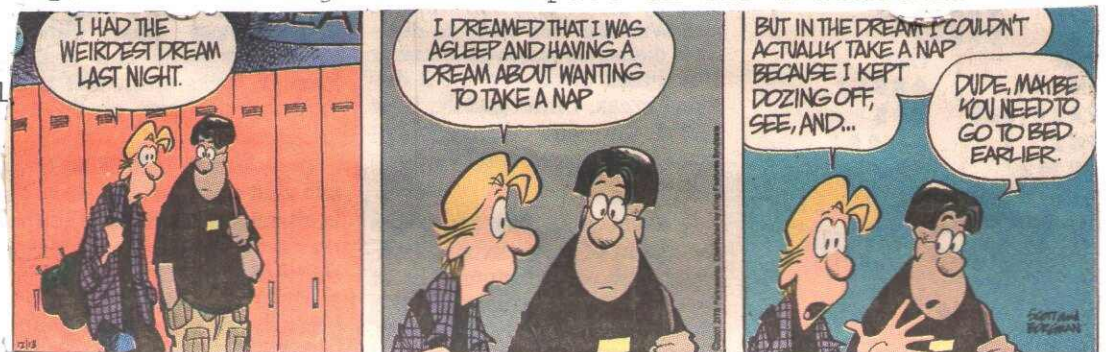
Since I am writing about my family (and especially since I just wrote about Abbe) perhaps it would make sense here to write a few words about our pets: Buttercup, aka "the handsome Tom," is only handsome when he is clean; and having not been weaned properly, he is seldom given to cleaning himself. The result is he is disgustingly filthy much of the

time, and any petting he gets is given reluctantly, to be followed by a vigorous washing of the



hands. He remains inside the house, given the "leash law" in this neighborhood, and we try to keep him confined to the parts of the house with a linoleum floor. (Need I explain?) Our other cat, Midnight, was adopted by some generous friends who live in the country. This happened back on February 26, before we had left Southern Illinois. He had some "stink glands" around his anus, which apparently all cats have, and they are biologically similar to the stink glands skunks have. But in most cats they are safely atrophied. In Midnight, they weren't. We even had him operated on, to try and remove them, but enough of them remained to make him truly lawful olfactorily. So he went off and became a country cat, seemed to thrive for a time, but then got an ear infection of some sort and quickly succumbed to it. On November 27, the day after Marion's fourth birthday, we acquired a new pet--this one for Marion. I had built a special cage for it, and this guinea pig, since its color was white and vaguely an orange, was dubbed "Garfield" by Marion since these are the colors of the cat "Garfield" in the cartoon strip. This little animal seemed to take an immediate disliking to me, because as we were headed home from the pet store, I was carrying it in a cardboard box on my lap. On the way, this little fellow (I write "fellow" although we never were sure if it was male or female.) managed to let loose with a bladder so full--though quickly being emptied--that it soaked through the box, through my jeans, and thoroughly drenched me. So like most humans I know, this guinea pig suffered to piss on me if given the chance. Regardless, it soon became evident that Marion was highly allergic to the animal, and it then had to be confined to the garage, there to be warmed by a heat-lamp during the cold months. Thus this guinea pig began costing us a good deal of money, because I assure you, when a 250-watt heat-lamp is left on 24 hours a day, it has a significant impact on one's electric bill.

3. People kindly ask about my mental health, making a special note to inquire about my insomnia. Well, I suppose I deserve to note that for a man suffering (yes; the word is apt) from posttraumatic stress disorder, I don't do too badly. I have never gone the route of drug abuse, or sociopathic "acting out," or inability to work. My main symptom is insomnia. Maybe it is a bit better of late, but I am not sure. There are the nightmares, the fact that the slightest noise (if it is unfamiliar) can bring me out of sleep, and those many hours when I fight my own body and mind, trying to sleep. But as I suggest, this isn't bad, given that it is my only PTSD symptom. (Well; the main one, anyway.) Given that I am a man for whom the smell of gun oil is comforting, I think I have made my way through the world quite well since back then when But on this topic, I try to say little, because writing or talking about it never helps; the only result is to make the insomnia, the startle reflex, and the host of other more minor problems, all the worse.



4. People also make inquiries about my physical health, and I can report that I continue to do well with my MS. Having been on the special diet for MS for many a year now, I am,

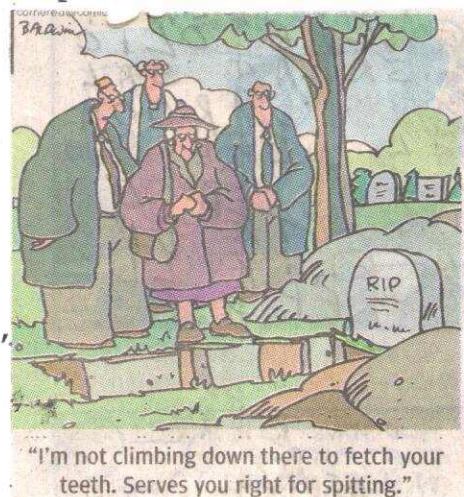


I suspect, the most worthy "poster boy" in existence for taking a proactive approach to this disease. Which is not, however, to suggest that I am immune to the general process of aging. On June 30, I discovered a white hair on my chest. Abbe confessed to me that she had seen it there several months ago, but had not told me about it so as to spare me the horror. White, or gray, hairs on my head, a beard turning white, these I can abide. But a white chest hair? Allow me my shuddering. If I do badly with the idea of aging, and well with my MS, this is not to say that the MS does not kick my ass periodically. I incurred a severe exacerbation in late November to the end of the year. Why? Because I was working too hard. Also I had had three viral infections in a row, culminating in a bacterial bronchitis. These infections, and the working too hard, perhaps came about because, not being in Southern Illinois, I was allowing myself to feel so euphoric emotionally that I just wasn't paying very careful attention to bodily signals, symptoms, and warnings. And so I succumbed, and although the symptomology was very difficult for more than six weeks, I did seem to recoup all functions when the exacerbation was over.

A not inconsiderable health problem involves the dental part of who I am. I just burn when I think of that Southern Illinois dentist beginning what he promised would be a "full mouth reconstruction" which would take only two days. That first day, without even telling me he was going to do it, he pulled my wisdom teeth. I didn't want my wisdom teeth pulled, and yet, he did it because my mouth was numb and I didn't know what he was doing. And so began one series of infections after another, many root canals, and that two-day job has turned into a seemingly interminable process which, for my teeth, may be terminal. The pain--constant, the uncertainty, the worry ... all these have aged me, it seems, several years. And the expense has been exorbitant--especially now that we are in Saint Louis and I am trying to address the problem with specialists, who charge more than that previous hack down yonder did. Abbe, jokingly with company present, said that if I were to die, she would want to keep all of my teeth given the expense that has gone into trying to preserve them. I told her this would be fine with me. It even gave me a warm sense of intimacy, to contemplate the idea that, during the first hours after my death, Abbe would be going after my jaw with a hammer and chisel. I advised her, "Allow me to suggest that you wait until rigor motis sets in. That way my jaw won't be flopping around so much while you try to get a good aim with the chisel." Whereupon she rather abruptly wished to drop the subject, although I do hope her not wanting to talk about her anticipated course of action has not caused her to abandon the idea of following it through.

As for other health difficulties, I do think it is time for me to admit to a certain congenital one which, out of--what?--embarrassment,

I suppose, I have kept pretty well hidden for most of my life. The time has come, I fear, where I just can not keep on hiding it. So I have a confession to make because the effort expended in keeping this problem hidden has become too overwhelming. Moreover, I know that this problem not infrequently causes certain friends a good deal of confusion, and sometimes, inconvenience. The confession I am making is to possessing certain handicaps. If one uses the old terminology, the handicaps are two: dystemporalia, and dyspatiolia. In later years, realizing that the two handicaps are often conjoined, psychologists have come to refer to the problem as one handicap with one term, or phrase: spime deficiency. (For those of you who have neglected the study of physics, be informed that the word "spime" was a term coined by Einstein and associates for referring to conjoined space and time.) What this means, put simply (although it rarely feels simple), is that I have a very difficult time negotiating the realms of space and time. Few of you--my friends--upon reading this will consider this way of putting it as giving you something you did not know about before. My noting, however, that it is called "spime deficiency" and is, not merely a personal quirk, but something that even seems to have neurological roots, may however come as a bit of a surprise. My own way of experiencing the deficiency (deficiencies)



involves a combination of distress and obliviousness. The distress comes from my difficulties with space--navigating my way over this earth. I get lost easily. This is especially the case if I am behind the wheel of a car, or if I am in the city. As I often say to people, "Put me in the country and I can track a mosquito through a swamp, but put me on concrete, and I become an idiot." I set out, driving, to a place I have been many times--but if it is a considerable distance, or if it has been a few months since I've been there, or if it involves a complicated route, I may become totally lost. I panic, I curse, I scream. It does no good. Sometimes I call people on my cell phone, and sometimes they help, although just as often they are unable to help because I can not follow the directions they try to give. So I compensate as best I can. I have a large file of maps, many for getting to places which are only a mile or two from where I live. I carry a compass whenever I leave my home in a car. And very often I just don't make a trip I otherwise would make. It isn't worth the time and stress of getting lost and maybe never even getting there.

The extent to which I am oblivious to this condition (am I allowed the word?) pertains more to my sense of time. No; this does not mean I am a person who

is chronically late. The problem does not manifest itself this way. The problem is more a matter of memory. I have an excellent memory; in fact, I am sure it is the best of my mental faculties. I can remember just about anything that happened in my past (as opposed to those fewer things I remember which will happen in my future), but I can not remember when they happened. I can remember a conversation almost word-for-word, but I have no idea if this happened two weeks ago or two decades ago until I sit down and carefully think through the context, the time I have known the person, where the conversation took place, where I lived during those years, and so on. There are advantages to this kind of memory; it means people have a very difficult time getting by with lying to me. There are disadvantages to others. If someone says something hurtful, it does not fade "with time." For my memory, it will remain as if it happened only days ago, when perhaps it actually happened many years ago. And so I come across as a very unforgiving person, when actually I am an unforgetting person. The main disadvantage for me, I suppose, is simply feeling embarrassment in situations where memory should be serving me instead of undoing me. I've had some very weird conversations, in which the other person is baffled, and I am adrift, as I flounder in trying to make sense of something they are wanting to sort out. This has happened legally in depositions, when lawyers start asking questions about events, and I get the events mixed up. They nail me to the wall, and then my lawyer asks for a break, and this gives me a chance to avail myself of my main crutch--memorizing dates. This I can do, and so when the deposition resumes, the lawyers, who were moving in for the kill, suddenly find themselves stymied by a person who manifests not only an invincible memory when it comes to the content of the matter, but who also has it all sorted out so well by date and even hour and minute that they are actually intimidated.

So now you know. Baumli is afflicted with spine deficiency. This is part of the reason he is chary about making commitments regarding visits. It also is part of the reason you are absolutely baffled when he starts talking to you about an event as though it happened yesterday, and you are wondering if it even took place in this lifetime.

So having allowed you a glimpse into the deficiencies of my body--in this case, the brain of my body--allow me to emphasize that I am a person who tries to take good care of himself, eat in a healthy way, and sleep in the least unhealthy way I am capable of. I am not entirely a



"We want two round-trip tickets to here."



vegetarian at present, but I remain on the special diet for MS that has kept me in relatively (sic) good health these many years, and I avail myself of whatever new avenues I can find for becoming even more healthy. Or rather, I avail myself of most such avenues, if they do not repel me. Yes; some such avenues do repel me. For example, a woman I know tried to get me to start eating "free-range" eggs, which I was not opposed to doing, but the "free-range" eggs she wanted me to choose were not just the ordinary kind. No; these were ones laid by chickens in an environment where a rooster is allowed to "run with" the hens. She explained that when a rooster "fertilizes" (her modest word) the hen, it alters the egg so that its cholesterol is attenuated by the presence of a "good" (her immodest though unspecific word) kind of lecithin. She also assured me that eggs taste better if they have been fertilized by a rooster.

Well, somehow the idea that those eggs taste better because the hen got fucked by a rooster did not appeal to me. Perhaps in my younger, more bawdy, years it would have. But the truth is, this knowledge made me more than a little squeamish about eating those eggs.

Mainly I just try to keep in touch with my body. I try to know when I am ill, when I am becoming ill, and I learn how to protect myself from simple things (which often are not so simple) like catching a cold. I have even rescued myself from peril by retaining self-prepossession in the face of an immediate threat to my health. No; I am not referring to those times I knocked someone unconscious before the blow they had already launched had yet connected. I mean, for example, the time I almost choked. I was by myself, eating a meal, and I swallowed part of an orange I had, I thought, masticated sufficiently. It went part way down, would not go the rest of the way, and I tried coughing it out. It would not come out. I tried reaching for it with my fingers. It could not be grasped. The idea came to me, rather slowly I admit, that I was not breathing--could not breathe, in fact. I did not panic, but I was alarmed. I was beginning to see large, shadowy, swimming pools of light, and I knew what was happening. No one was nearby to perform the Heimlich maneuver on me, so the only thing for me to do was perform it on myself. I immediately knew what I could do, and rising to my feet, even though I was becoming unsteady because of the hypoxia, I quickly walked from the kitchen to the living room, and threw myself forward--my diaphragm forcefully hitting the arm of the couch, with all my weight behind it, and sure enough, the lodged matter was expelled. I lay on the floor for perhaps two minutes, just regaining my breath, and feeling considerable pain from where the arm of the couch had hit me.

5. Thus you see? I am not without resourcefulness when it comes to taking care of myself. I do wish I were more resourceful about avoiding smokers--and their pollution. I have, in the past, been accused of taking a very nasty and unforgiving attitude toward smokers. So I have tried to mend my ways. Now I try to make sure I hate the sin and love the sinner. This means, I think, that I hate the act of smoking but love the smoker even if he is lighting up and blowing smoke in my face. Yes; I love him, fully, even when he returns my pickup, after borrowing it with my reluctant but generous permission, filled with the odor of cigarette smoke because he stupidly made the assumption that smoking in my vehicle is fine if I am not in it. I even love him, or her, if I take an expensive suit to be dry-cleaned because it got befouled with the odor of cigarettes, and then, when I go to pick it up, discover that now it smells even worse because the people in that dry-cleaning place all smoke and do not consider their smoke something to be cleaned out of clothing. I make sure to love these people ever so well, and if I once had fantasies about shooting such people in the head, now I make sure, in my fantasies, to chastize not the sinner but the sin, and hence my imaginary gun is carefully aimed, not at their cranium, but at the cigarette they are holding in their mouths.



6. In past issues of The Aviary I have said much that is unkind about the phone--the way it is intrusive, takes up my time, and so on. But once we moved to Saint Louis, matters got better, because here we could have separate lines--one for Abbe and one for me. What a difference that made. No more picking up the phone when people call for Abbe and, when the people find she is not in, decide that I just might serve as an Abbe-substitute. Still, it does happen that people call Abbe, and do not get an answer; if they know my (unlisted) number, they then immediately call me. Which gives me opportunity for giving these people a lesson in social proprieties as I icily but nicely inform them that I am not an Abbe substitute and I also am not her social secretary.

7. Meanwhile, just as matters with the telephone get better, things get worse with the computer. Now there is the medium of email, which means I get pieces of literary garbage from too many people. The letters they write are atrocious--from the stand-point of good literature. There is no effort to spell correctly, and obviously not even any caring about it--stupid misspellings are not even corrected. Ideas are communicated in brief phrases, clauses, or encrypted within a sort of shorthand which is irritating and sometimes impossible to read. For example, "I am gd, r u?" is sent for, "I am good, are you?" which at least can be deciphered, but it takes no more time to type the sentence out, and ... what does it mean to write, "I am good," when the word "good" can have so many different meanings? Does it mean your health is good? Your wife hasn't spanked you today? You haven't gotten any traffic tickets? Am I, after momentarily pondering such a meaningless sentence, supposed to care? Also, encoded within these cryptic messages are symbols which are supposed to mean something that the reader otherwise could not glean from ordinary prose. For example, ":)" is supposed to mean "smile," although they might just write "(smile)" and this is supposed to mean that what they just wrote is ironic--intended to be facetious, i.e., it was intended as only a joke. Well, I have been, for many decades, reading prose which dates back more than two millennia, and I have never needed those ancient writers to give me a special sign to let me know when they are being facetious or ironic. If now, with email and computers, people need such a symbol, then this suggests that prose written on the screen is harder to write because of that screen, and hence, the need for these distracting, superfluous, even insulting crutches.

So now I am hating not only televisions but computers also. As for the televisions, I am avoiding them, as always, although I am not shooting them these days. People are slowly learning to keep them out of my sight.

8. Do you remember my story of last year about the fellow who thought my Radio Shack microphone stand was a piece of sculpture? Well; this was a very educated fellow. Or, I should say, pedigreed fellow. He was a minister, a professor of religious studies, fluent in Greek, knowledgeable of Latin, and a big force (whatever that means--it was his way of describing himself) in the Unitarian Church. As you, my friends, well know, I make it a point of avoiding that detestable class of people I term "airheads." People who try to shove their superstitions, their magical thinking, their religions, at me are just revoltingly tiresome. But stupidity is too, and this fellow obviously suffered from an excess of intellectual deficiency. May I recount one piece of evidence? The first time I met him was at a dinner a friend of Abbe's kindly arranged so we could meet this fellow and his wife. Somehow, in that conversation, I began talking about Diotima, her influence on Socrates and other philosophers, and at some point this fellow challenged me vigorously, noting that while indeed she is--was--a character in Plato's *Symposium* she actually was fictional. I assured him she is not, and gave humble evidence: that there is an entire book written about her, it is in French, the library at the University of Missouri-Columbia has a copy of this book, I had read it, and had even considered doing a doctoral dissertation which would involve translating this book and adding whatever additional evidence I could find about Diotima in my dissertation. He still would not give up his position. He became more adamant, macho, loud, whereupon I, trying to keep matters calm, asked him if he owned the multi-volume set called *The Story of Civilization* by the Durants scholars. Yes; he did. I suggested that when he get home, he take down the second volume, which is entitled *The Life of Greece*, and in that book, on page 300, he would find mention of her in the context of a fascinating discussion regarding the hetairai. He was steely then; he felt threatened by my being so specific. In truth, I do not always remember such matters to this degree of specificity, but it was an easy reference to remember. I kid you not, as we were outside, going to our cars in the dark, he angrily proclaimed, as he strode past me, that he was going to look up that reference as soon as he got home.

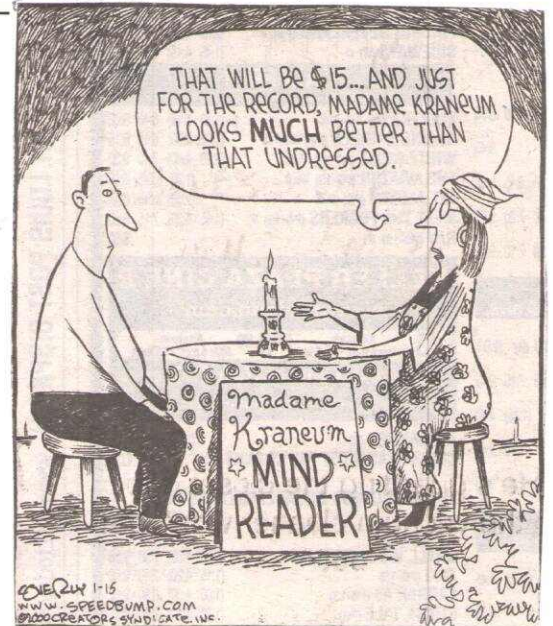


I responded mildly, even trying to sound humble. And I suspect he did indeed look up that reference when he got home, because although we would cross paths several times over the next few weeks, he never made mention of Diotima again. Nor did I, since I am an unfailingly polite person.

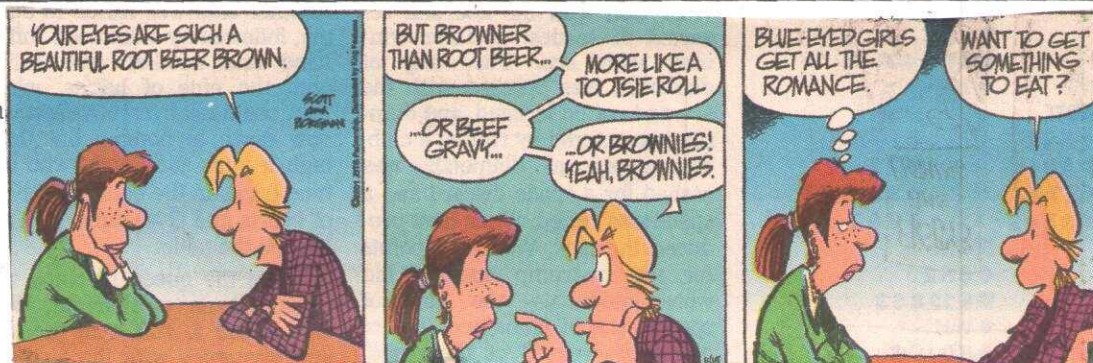
Allow me to here set down in writing something I have often said in conversation: Scientists can be airheads too. A very good example of this was a most unusual natural event which happened in Saint Joe (Saint Joseph, as some would rather say) when I lived there. The event happened in the summer of--well, I am not sure. It was likely 1974, but it might have been 1973 or 1975. The "natural event" was an epidemic of fleas. Small fleas such as infest cats or dogs, and will get on humans too. Of course we would now and then find a flea on ourselves while living there because we had cats, but this invasion of fleas--within days they were everywhere. The side of a white house would look black in the shade, there would be so many fleas on it. A man wearing white slacks could step outside and the slacks would look gray half-way up his legs. They came in the house in droves, and we vacuumed several times a day. They were on our bodies, and we slept with flea collars on our ankles. This problem lasted approximately four weeks. Entomologists came to the town, collected specimens, watched them breed, tried to discover new species, appeared on talk radio, were quoted in newspaper articles, all of them espousing theories as to why the fleas had proliferated like this. But after a month the fleas were gone, no evidence could be gained as to why they had disappeared as quickly as they had come, and so after a couple of weeks the entomologists departed, having spilled many an opinion while giving us no knowledge, though all the while posturing as experts on the matter--unwilling to concede that it was a mystery. The fleas were gone, and the only tangible evidence of their having been such a prevalent nuisance was the fact that one could not buy a flea collar within a hundred miles of that town for at least a month.

So you see? It isn't just airheaded hippies who read Tarot cards Baumli reviles. It can even be scientists. Or preachers, such as the Diotima-detractor. (I should note, regarding this fellow, that the people in Southern Illinois actually liked him very much. Why? Because they feel proud when their small, stagnant pond finally has a big duck sitting in it making a great deal of noise. They fail to note that actually it is not a very big duck; it merely shits a great deal. Yes; shits. In his case, verbally. As once when, sitting at dinner, in someone else's house, he, directing his conversation to Abbe, told her of a Latin inscription he had seen on a piano in a certain museum. He asked if anyone present could translate it, and I told him that of course I could, and I then began giving a rendition, whereupon he loudly interrupted me and gave his own translation. He could not abide not being the alpha duck in that pond, and I, of course, just shut up because I wasn't going to compete with him. But that is what he was doing--just a verbal shitting.) (And yes; I obviously still feel resentful toward that fellow.) I truly do detest religious airheads--and he was one, along with being an airhead in many other ways. I have previously written about how, when reading Thomas Merton, I felt such disgust at his so wanting his brother to be baptized. I also feel disgust at Jews who insist that their male children be circumcised. (Why the z and then an s? The English language needs to be called to account here.) I also feel disgust at people who wallow in their disgust, and fail to leave off with ridiculing the objects of their revulsion, and instead go on to more worthy pursuits. So I shall desist in this tirade.

9. Desist? Or merely go on to another topic, which involves more of the same bitching and complaining? Well; on this topic, I have less complaining to do, although I confess that this topic interests me very little, and in fact I only address it because many of my friends clamor about it. They want to know. Yes; what they want is to know more of what it is which makes Baumli a real man. They want to know what is the quintessential definition of a real man. They want to know why there aren't more

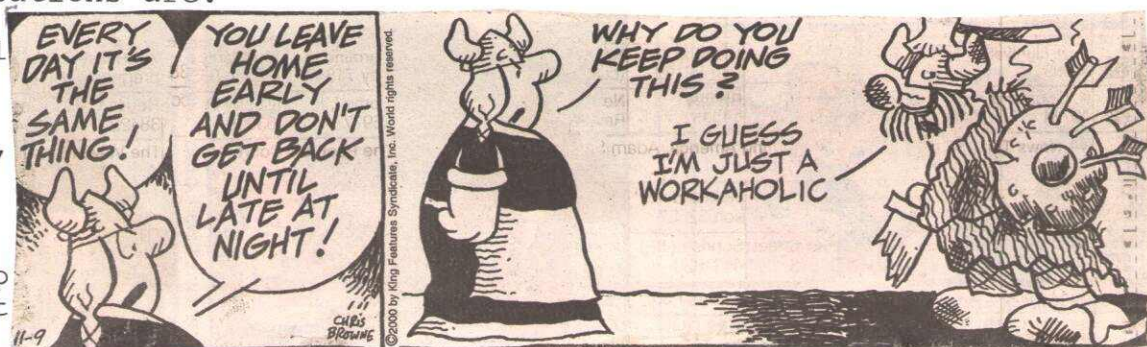


real men. Males seem oblivious to how I glare at them when they ask me this question. Females are rarely oblivious to how kind I am when they ask me this question. What is the quintessential



definition of a real man? Well; I have said it before. Perhaps I have even written it before. But in case I have never put it in print, I shall merely state that while one can give many, many descriptives regarding what a real man is, the quintessential definition is: "A real man is a man who washes his hands before he goes to the bathroom." The implications of this statement are manifold, and I shall leave it to the imaginations (whether feeble or vigorous) of my readers to begin the noble task of deciphering what these implications are.

As to his qualities: A real man is never afraid of work. He is never lazy, never squeamish, never reluctant. And he is never unwilling to keep trying to work at a task which



some people might say can not be done. Shall I give an example?

Before we left Southern Illinois, we sold our house, and I tried to leave the house and grounds in as fine a shape as could be. There was one problem which had always rankled me. The sewer drained into a lagoon. A large tree which had died leaned way out over that lagoon. The day would come when it would collapse into that stinking body of water, and then there would be one big mess to be taken care of. It would be much better to bring the tree down before it fell into the lagoon, but with it leaning that far out, there seemed to be no way. I had asked about twenty (yes; that many) professional tree removal people about doing the job, and they had refused the work, saying it could not be done--to just wait until the tree fell, and then plan on draining the lagoon, remove the tree, and use that as an opportunity for cleaning it out. But this did not seem fair to the people buying the house--to leave this big a problem for them. Could I try it? I am not in the best of health, after all. I tire easily, I have but one working eye, and my chainsaw isn't the best. So no; I couldn't do it either.

But one evening I pulled into my driveway and shut the pickup off. I sat there, for maybe five minutes, looking at that tree and thinking. I pondered, I measured visually, I thought of the thousands (yes; truly, there were thousands) of trees I had already brought down. And I also thought of the fact that about twenty professional tree removal people said it could not be done. And then I felt very puzzled about something. I had pulled into the driveway, but I had not shut the pickup off in the driveway. Rather, the pickup had just sort of guided itself around behind the house and had stopped over there on the east side of that tree. What did this mean?

I stopped thinking. I went and got my chainsaw, some rope, the wedges, my sledgehammer, and I set to work. I roped the tree to my pickup, I double-notched it, and wedged it too. I've double-notched a lot of trees in the past to bring them down. Only once in my life have I ever roped a tree. And only once in my life have I ever wedged a tree. I've never felt challenged enough by a tree to both rope and wedge it, although I've many times double-notched a tree. On this tree, I did all three. I roped it, I wedged it, and I double-notched it. It took about two hours of very careful cutting, gauging the lean, repositioning the wedges with the big sledgehammer, varying the tension on the rope. By the end, I probably had about ten thousand pounds of pressure on that tree, mainly with the wedges where I drove them into the notches, hoping to get that tree to move the ten feet it would have to move--in an arc as it fell--so I could get it to come down without it falling into the lagoon. But after two hours, during which the tree creaked, groaned, protested, and while I did a worthy job of giving Marion, who was looking on, a proper lesson in how to cuss, I kept working away. Twice I hit wire in that trunk, each time necessitating a complete resharpening of the saw. But at the end, my Homelite XEL-12 chainsaw, after ten years of faithful service, burned out its innards and gave up the ghost, necessitating that I finish the job with the wedges

only. That was a lot of blows struck with my ten-pound sledge against those wedges, but just before I knew the tree was about to pay homage to the law of gravity I did something extra. Is it pride, or bragging? It is something I have done many times, when bringing down a tree, and I am more likely to do it when alone than when with other people; so I suppose the act is more a matter of pride than of bragging. I picked up a stake about a foot long, and went over to exactly where the tree was predicted to fall, and drove it about four inches in the ground. Never in my life had I missed the stake. I went over and told Marion what I was doing, and admitted that I would probably miss the stake this time. Two more blows of the sledgehammer, and ... let's just sum it up by saying I didn't miss the stake. In the course of not missing the stake, I also proved twenty men wrong (professionals, mind you), and one real man right.

The next day I borrowed a chainsaw and cut the tree up so it would be firewood for the people who would be moving in. And as my last mark upon that piece of property, I left the stake in the ground, driven all the way in by that tree.

So do you see why I have little patience for men who look at a chainsaw as if it is a lethal weapon? Do you understand why I have no patience for men who do not want to do a job just because the weather is hot? Do you begin to understand why I insist on calling a spade a spade instead of a "gardening tool"? And another thing: Maybe you can understand why I will tolerate someone calling that extra brake in a vehicle the hand-brake, but I will not tolerate them calling it a parking brake. It's a goddamn emergency brake. Find yourself in a two-ton trunk loaded with hay going down a hill when the brakes go out, as I and many men have, and you will damn well learn at that moment and forevermore that the brake you reach for isn't a dinky little parking brake, it is an emergency brake and you will damn well be grateful if it does its job. With this attitude, you will learn a great deal about tools--how to use them, and even how to fabricate them when need be.

The weather outside is so cold your car won't start--even by jump-starting it? There is a solution. Just get the engine warm. Not the way one fellow I knew did it. He took his charcoal grill off its legs, built a good hot charcoal fire in it, let the flames die down, then slipped the glowing charcoal under the engine of his car and covered the entire thing with a tarp. While he was sitting at the kitchen table with his wife, he suddenly heard her exclaim, "The whole car's on fire!" Well? Right under the goddamn oil pan? What did he expect? What I do is take a 1500-watt hair dryer outside, use a short piece of hose that is just the diameter of the oil fill-hole on top of the engine, and using heat-resistant tape attach the hose to the hair-dryer and put the hose down into the engine. Then I position the hair-dryer well away from the engine, secure it so it won't move when it is working, and turn it on. Half an hour of its warm air blowing into that engine, and the engine starts easily.

Both women and men, often with a challenging tone in their voice, inform me that since I know what a real man is, then I also should know what a real woman is. And for this

(scarcely cerebral) concept, they want a definition. And I am happy to provide it, but must first point out that there are two kinds of definitions: discursive and ostensive. The distinction between these two types of definition was well made by Plato, in his *Symposium*, and also in the aporetic dialogues. I could enter upon a lengthy disquisition about this topic, but I believe, for the present purpose, a simple one suffices. Namely, a discursive definition is verbally explanatory; you enter upon an attempt, via words, to define something. An ostensive definition is made by giving an example. You point to what someone else might try to explain verbally, and hope that your questioner pays attention. And some phenomena are more amenable to one kind of definition than others are. The color "red" is most easily defined with an ostensive definition;



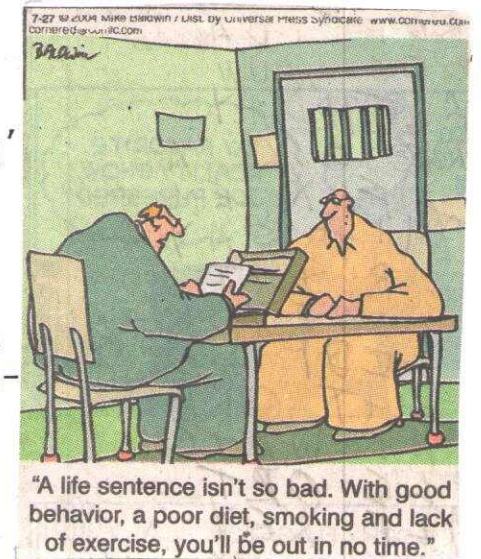
the difference between a democracy and a republic is more amenable to a discursive definition; a definition of terror is perhaps best given by utilizing both types of definition.

As to giving a definition of a real woman, I could just as easily utilize either type of definition, and I could perhaps most enjoyably use a discursive definition while most accurately use an ostensive definition. However, it occurs to me that perhaps a discursive definition would not be entirely appropriate, since, after all, I do try to produce this Aviary in a way that would not cause a concerned mother to prevent her child from reading it. So I suppose I should content myself, and you should be content, with an ostensive definition only. So let me put it this way: What is a real woman? Just pay attention to the women whose company I keep. Not, do note, to the type of women who seek my company. Most of those women I shun. After all, a real man does not need a fan club, nor does he care to be distracted by squealing bimbos. Pay attention to the women whose company I actually keep, and you will decipher, admire, and ultimately know about what a real woman most impressively is.

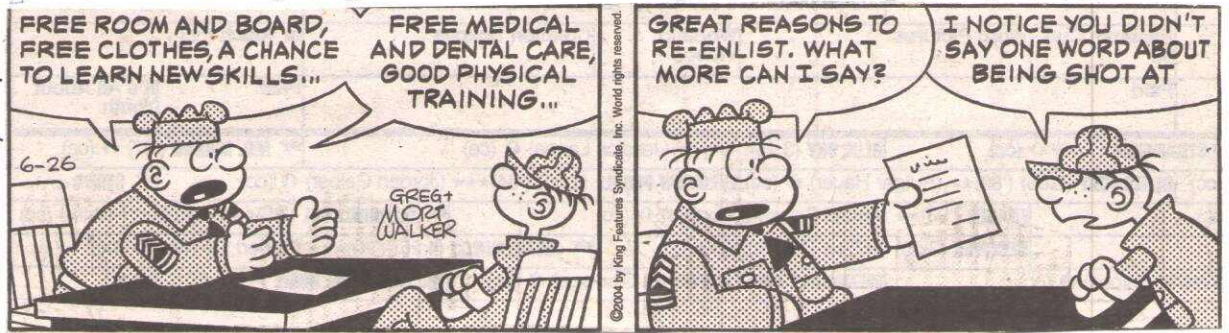


know all there is to

10. I suppose I should say a few nasty words about that detestable profession practiced (sic) by attorneys (AKA by their less classy name "lawyers"), and about that thoroughly despicable terrain called politics. What I have to say, i.e., write, about lawyers and the judicial system actually involves referring to an alarming article which appeared in the November 1991 issue of AntiShyster. This work, entitled "Preventive Therapy," by Alfred Adask, if somewhat speculative, nevertheless provides considerable evidence for supporting its troubling statistics and conclusions. Adask claims that a full 20% of American litigants stagger out of the legal system fully as emotionally impaired as any person diagnosed with posttraumatic stress disorder. He calls this syndrome post-litigation stress and depression, and believes our legal system is so corrupt, and monolithic, that there probably are more American citizens suffering from postlitigation stress disorder than from the kind of PTSD which results from being in a war. He gives various estimates about the incidence of this postlitigation syndrome, relative to the type of court involved, but believes that a full 50% of litigants in divorce court depart that fracas severely impaired emotionally. As for myself, I am courageous enough to readily concede that I truly suffer from this postlitigation stress disorder, but I am too embar-



rassed to go into details. And I suspect you would be too shocked, were you to ask me about the fantasies I have regarding what I could so exquisitely do to that judge who took my daughter away from me (and would do, if I were sure I could get by with it).



As for the broader political arena--well, that judge got his position because of a political appointment. As for those bastards who befriended him and appointed him, I could (and would, if !..) inflict upon them a slow justice that would make Caligula worship me. But enough said on this topic, or even my best friends will be getting worried over how sane I have become.

***** READING FOR 1995 *****

This year, on the subject of what I have read, I believe I will write less. I find that my friends tend to read less (which perhaps explains why, as time goes by, I have fewer friends), and so giving news of my readerly pursuits does not seem to interest most people, nor do they very often have much to say by way of reply.

One matter is of special note, and this is my sense of depression when I look over the list (yes; I do keep a list of the reading I do each year) of works I have read. In 1994 I read only 22 books. That isn't even two per month. And there are thousands--literally thousands--I want to read before I die. Whatever happened to those years when I read more than 300 books per year?

As is my custom, I shall here give an accounting of the best books I read this year. They were ... well, no, an ungenerous look at the list yields only one such book: Raising the Dead: A Doctor's Encounter with His Own Mortality by Richard Selzer (who happens to be an M.D.). He is an excellent modern American writer, with a penchant for style, a self-effacing demeanor (in his writing--not in person, you can bet!), and ... well, I said a "penchant" for style. That isn't quite true. The fact is, the man is a master stylist, and in this little book--only 118 pages long--he presents an autobiographical tale which has the dimensions of an epic.

In the past I have listed the books I read which were disappointments, and also the books which I found highly offensive. But why bother with these? I have become less compulsive about finishing a book, just because I started it, or because people tell me I "should" read it. So the truth is I encounter many books which promise disappointment, or look as though they will be offensive, but I put them aside and never return to them. So let me go on to simply list the worst book I read. This is easily done, and no doubt I will arouse the wrath of one resident of this household in so doing. Yes; the worst book I read this last year was Anna Karenina by Leo Tolstoy. I read the worthy translation by Constance Garnett, and the cogent introductory essay by Thomas Mann which dealt with writers of high pedigree along with Tolstoy, and made the accurate comment that the real hero of Anna Karenina is not the heroine of the novel's name but is Levin.

I will generously concede that this novel has perhaps the best beginning of any novel ever written. It is so finely drawn, one sees everything unfolding and all the characters, as if moving through a gallery of paintings. But then the novel begins its march--toward grandeur, romance, and religion. As for religion--oh my God, those scything scenes, and that supposed religious epiphany Levin goes through. It all becomes so boring, fallow, trite. And as for the heroine, who has vague carnal aspirations, but no courage to match the carnal passion--well, by the time she kills herself, who cares? Who even much notices? And please don't tell me that Tolstoy was actually not much interested in this particular character, that he was actually merely using her as a means for parodying high society. Yes; he did want to poke a few sharp jabs at high society, but in doing so, he mainly managed to reveal that he himself is a part of this society too, given that he just can not give up his addiction to romanticism--an addiction which has resulted in his internalizing it to the point that, by the time he wrote this book, he had a streak of romanticism in him as thick as fat down a hog's back. I got so tired of reading about who is going to propose marriage, who is going to have an affair, who is already having an affair, who will feel guilty about the affair and succumb to despair, who won't feel guilty about the affair and hence will one day succumb to eternal damnation. One wants to believe Tolstoy is not really interested in all this; that actually he is, not so much parodying these romantic enmeshings, but ridiculing readers who are drawn to the topics. But alas, this was not Tolstoy's motive. He quite obviously loved his subject, revealing much of his own personality--both his own attraction to religious mysticism and also his penchant for committing base adultery. He wanted to glorify religion and mysticism, while vilifying marital infidelity, but what did he accomplish? Vronsky is about as shallow, and Anna Karenina about as silly, as any two romantic characters in all of fiction. If he was trying to make a strong point for holiness or virtue, he bludgeoned us with his preaching so much the point became dull, and by the end one could not care any more for his didactic message than for his characters.

Tolstoy was at his best, in this book, when he moved laterally--painting portraits of characters who are not highly central to his story. But when he went to other people who were not quite characters, especially the peasants, he also failed dismally. Those peasants! All of them so noble! If a peasant was ugly, it was only because he or she was old. The others were always cheerful, attractive, with broad smiles, strong teeth, a strong religious sense, and ... well, Tolstoy, as his biographers have told us, liked nothing more than a roll in the hay with one of the peasant girls on his farm, so he perhaps had reason for romanticizing them, along with much reason for failing at his moral preaching.

Of course, an artist is not a mystic, and can be expected to fail at instantiating his ideals. And an artist is rarely a paragon of virtue,

and so can be forgiven a good deal of hypocrisy.

But if we are to forgive all these things because Tolstoy is, after all, an artist, this is all the more reason why I am disinclined toward forgiving him his artistic failings. These are many. The tedium of those scything scenes, in which Levin tries to levitate his spirit to God, is perhaps the worst part of the book. But the most revolting part is Tolstoy's romanticism. Do I exaggerate? Here, I open my two-volume set, and the second volume is in my hands. I am almost at the beginning of this book, and right here, on page 540 of my copy, is:

"Can it be true?" thought Levin, and he looked round at his bride. Looking down at her he saw her face in profile, and from the scarcely perceptible quiver of her lips and eyelashes he knew she was aware of his eyes upon her. She did not look round, but the high scalloped collar, that reached her little pink ear, trembled faintly. He saw that a sigh was held back in her throat, and the little hand in the long glove shook as it held the candle.

I turn ahead two pages, to 542, and gag at:

And putting his big ring on Kitty's touchingly weak, pink little finger, the priest said the same thing.

What, I ask, is all this to put the reader in mind of? Are we to wonder if Kitty is destined to, despite her helpless wilting demeanor, bestow upon Levin's little weak pink something a blowjob that wedding night? But once again, as with just about everything else in this book, who cares? The issue, or question, does not even tantalize.

Having said this much that is critical of Tolstoy, I do think it only fair that I make note of my belief that he truly is a great writer--in fact, one of the greatest I have ever encountered. His "After the Ball" is a powerful and shattering short story. His Kreutzer Sonata does everything that Anna Karenina tries to do and accomplishes it perfectly. His The Death of Ivan Ilych is as fine a work as ever could be written on the journey of the soul to mystical repose. In fact, thinking on these works just now, it occurs to me that perhaps I should go back and read Anna Karenina again, to see if perhaps I could glean something from it I failed to do this time. I hope I resist the temptation.

I know many people who enjoy--even take glee--in comparing Tolstoy to Dostoyevsky. In fact, I have noticed that many of these gleeful commentators actually want to take sides in a kind of argument as to which writer is the better. As for myself, I am not sure which is the better. Of the two I prefer Dostoyevsky, and I suspect he is the better, but when one encounters writers of this caliber it perhaps is best not to rank them against one another and simply appreciate them for their separate merits. I believe Dostoyevsky, as a writer, more often succeeds at accomplishing what he sets out to do than does Tolstoy; Tolstoy too often bungles the end of his stories. I think that when either writer attains superb quality, there remain considerable differences in terms of what they are exploring. Tolstoy reaches for the spiritual heights--even the summits; Dostoyevsky goes into the depths--even the subterranean depths, of what is spiritual. The gravitas of the spirit is a slower, more cumbersome thing than is the motility of the spirit; hence, Dostoyevsky is more demanding, more depressing even, than is Tolstoy. Dostoyevsky plumbs some terrifying regions; Tolstoy attempts to soar but often his flight is impeded by, not his artistry, but his personality, and so we follow him with some degree of skepticism. But Dostoyevsky we follow with a considerable degree of caution. He takes us where we fear to tread. Tolstoy, however, takes us where it seems he himself fails to tread. The fact is, neither writer is perfect, as an artist, and both were both laudable and dismal as human beings. Both of them challenge, disappoint, and inspire ... while remaining two of the greatest authors who ever lived.

I note that the above-reviewed book by Tolstoy is the only really bad book I read this year. There was, however, a close call. Last year I began reading Herzog by Saul Bellow, and this year I again picked it up, determined to make my way through what is considered by many to be his greatest book. But I put it down more quickly even than I did a year ago. This time, however, I did better understand my difficulty with Bellow, and his difficulties with art. I look at him this way: For a painting to be a painting, instead of a drawing, it has to have some color. Bellow uses too little color. His novels, accordingly, are more like drawings than paintings. They can be interesting, they are not stimulating, and usually they become quite boring. One gets the impression that he sets high standards for himself, and each time he begins writing a novel, he intends for it to be done perfectly. Writing the perfect novel--this is something William James could do. Sometimes Nabokov did. But Bellow hasn't

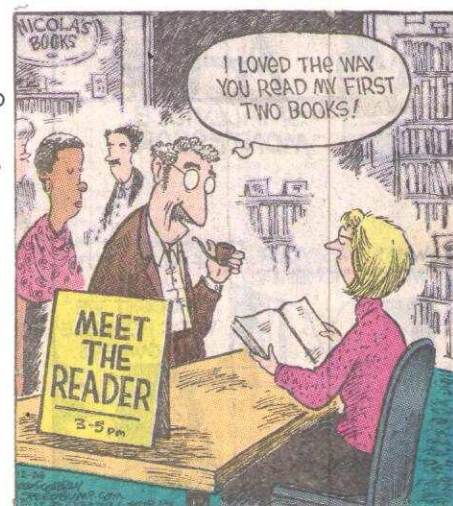
the genius for writing a perfect novel. He has talent, and enough craft that he keeps the reader intrigued--for a while. But even his craft ceases to impress because it courses in too narrow a channel. It is not adventurous, and ends up seeming almost stagnant, as Bellow once again has his characters ascend those gray stairs, dangle their flabby bodies, and pretend to profundity with their flaccid souls. All in all I have to pronounce him a very bad author, his books an exercise in little more than tedium and redundancy. Bellow did, however, occasion me the opportunity for giving forth one of my finer witticisms of the year. I was in company with several English professors, one of them a "Bellow expert" (as he so pompously proclaimed), and when the discussion seemed to pivot on an opinion I had just given about a different author, this Bellow expert turned to me and loudly asked, "Just which of Bellow's novels do you prefer?" I cheerfully responded, "Of Bellow's novels, I most prefer the ones I have not read. That is how bad I think he is." That response did not make for an amiable ensuing discussion.

Other books of note: well, only one, this time. It is entitled On Being Blue: A Philosophical Inquiry by William Gass (William H. Gass, as he was known in my youth). It was truly an ingenious book, exploring terrain both literary and painterly with regard to the color, while also looking deep into its psychological meanings and metaphorical horizons. The book failed dismally when Gass began discussing Plato, Aristotle, Berkeley, and the deeper philosophical meanings of the color blue; in this realm he proved himself a lightweight. But when Gass allowed the subject to carry him, rather than trying to shoulder it as Atlas carried the world, the results were nothing less than profound and the grace of his language was scintillating. I am grateful for the results, and hope to again, one day, read this proffering to the gods. This book is a slender little thing--only 91 pages long--and I recommend it to any of my friends who want an exercise in sheer, aesthetic gratification.

But no; there isn't just one. I do want to comment on a second book. This one has a title not entirely dissimilar to the one by Gass. Called, A Patch of Blue, I first encountered it indirectly when I saw the movie based on this book. That movie was powerful, believable, wonderful in every way. The book deserves comment because it was just so disappointingly mediocre. The author, Elizabeth Kata, is an amateur, and could go on to write another dozen novels and would still be an amateur. The story she wrote was not very believable; or rather, the story itself was believable, as were most of the characters, but the main character wasn't believable. I suppose the book was worth reading, as adjunct to the movie, but on this occasion one, without hesitation, judges, "The movie was better."

On the subject of essays and articles, I shall also give mention to the best, the worst, and those of note. The best is rather difficult to select out, but I believe the prize has to go to a piece which is as much an essay as it is an article. Its title is "Some Notes on Healing Male Shame" and it is authored by none other than yours truly. In this essay, I contrasted shame with guilt, showed exactly what each is from a phenomenological (albeit simplistically so) perspective, showed how in our culture women suffer from guilt primarily and men from shame primarily, and the overall discussion established this, in the eyes of those who follow my works in men's liberation, as the best piece I have ever written in the field. I do not agree with their assessment, but certainly it is one of the better works I have written in the arena of men's liberation.

As for the worst, I fear this is an easy one to name. It is "Glass Cellars, Death Professions, & Slightly Different Options" by Warren Farrell, Ph.D. This fellow, like myself, is a writer in the field of men's liberation, and if he also has a men's rights perspective like myself, it is relatively tepid and tinged by his long (and slavish) devotion to the feminist creed. Although he is gregarious, and is a most effective and articulate public speaker--in fact, probably the best in the movement (I do give credit where credit is due), he is probably the worst (though not the least popular) writer in the movement. I think he probably had some worthy theses to make in this article, but given how bad, even craven, his prose consistently is, one could not even decipher what those theses were, must less assess their merit.



Other essays or articles of merit, or uniqueness, deserving mention are several:

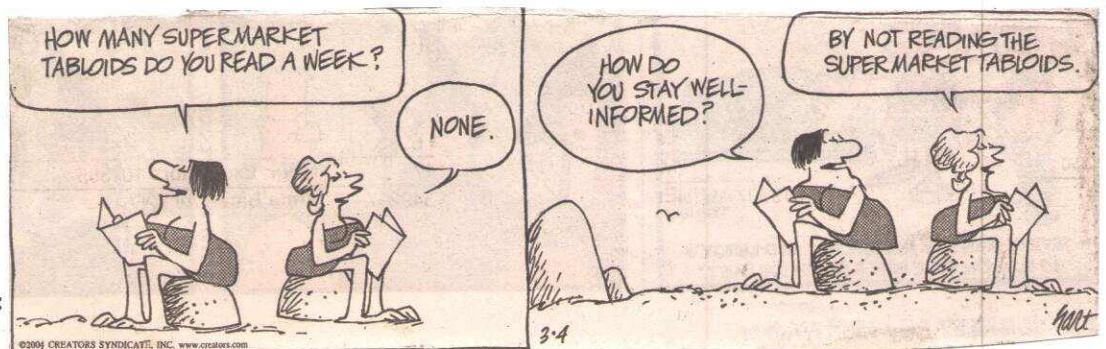
1. "Some Notes on Healing Male Shame" by yours truly, like the above-mentioned article, garnered much attention from readers and (Am I being immodest? Yes. But modestly immodest.) deserved it. This article took up where the earlier article left off, and tried to take a prescriptive rather than descriptive approach. Perhaps its most unique contribution was a scathing criticism of the counseling profession, and how that profession, amateurish at best--in all ways, especially fails men not only in its inability to understand what men's problems are but also because of its rank prejudice toward men.

2. "Penile Mutilation and Our Country's Snuff Mentality toward Men" by (well? again?) yours truly. No; I am not trying to sound the trumpets in mine own name. It's just that it was a good year for my own writing of essays and articles. This essay took on the Bobbitt case--you know, the wife who cut off her husband's penis, whereupon American feminists demonstrated on her behalf and the American media decided that mutilating a man's sexual organs is humor rather than horror. My own article was massive in size, but nevertheless was reprinted in more than one venue, and received a most sympathetic response--at least from men.

3. "At Play in the Fields of Audio: Wine, Physics, and the Tice Clock" by Vanessa Vyvyanne du Pré. This work would not be interesting to most people, although it would to my audiophile friends, since it humorously deals with the realm of "tweaks" which, supposedly, help an audio system sound better. I happen to know the author of this work, and was most impressed by her thesis, her verve, and her humor. Not to mention her willingness to write for an audience that usually is receptive to male authors only.

As to short stories, here the picture becomes rather embarrassingly shameful. So let me begin by mentioning the best short story I read. It is called, "Ladue: Still Life with Carcass" and it

was written by you-know-who. Yes; once again, yours truly. It is a very fine story, and although unpublished, it was read by many people because one fan who was given a copy took upon himself the duty of disseminating it far and wide. It is the best, because it is very good; it also is the best because (and here is the shameful part) it is the only short story I read this year. Why, oh why, did this happen? I think I was just too enmeshed in reading nonfiction.



Since the above-mentioned short story is the only one I read this year, it must, of course, follow that there is no candidate for the category of worst, nor are there any of note worthy of comment.

Obviously my reading life is way out of balance. Will I be sensible enough to make amends?

*** MISCELLANEOUS MUSINGS ON LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE ***

Since I spent the year doing so much reading of articles and essays, I suppose I am well qualified to make some comment on how the use of the English language fares in these repositories. In a word: poorly.

There are virtually no decent writers of good nonfiction prose left. Or rather, it probably is the case that there are many good writers in this realm, but they are not the ones publishing. Instead, the publishing ones write to a "dumbed down" audience, and use phraseology accordingly. And what is amazing is how these writers all seem to use the same dumb stock phrases, to the point that they have become cliches. Some of them:

**"But wait! There's more!" Yes; somewhere amidst an article, the author, having just waxed enthusiastic about a point, seems to be at pains over how to go on and continue the same enthusiasm. So they pause, as if to get their breath, expostulate this verbal, i.e., prosaic, inanity, and then proceed.

**" ... , er," This "er" gets inserted in the course of making a joke, or saying something intended to be ironic or humorous, e.g.,

"Ladies and gentlemen, er, germs, please hear me out." Or, "Our flag-wavers, er, flag-wearers, all seem to want apparel that depicts the American flag." This "er" is a sophomoric crutch, and I get weary of seeing it used by authors, er, writers.

**"Hey!" (or) "But hey!" This one has become very popular. A writer makes an assertion, he isn't quite sure of himself, or he wants to pretend he isn't quite sure of himself, so he interjects these words, as in, "I know not everyone is going to like these conclusions, but hey, can't we be openminded?" Or, "That's what the scientists say. As for my opinion? Hey! I'm just the journalist!"

**"I'm outta here." This, as you likely know, is being used by writers who do not know how to pen a conclusion to what they have written. They have put forth their little article, and, having written all (or, usually, more than) they could come up with, they abruptly end the article with, "I'm outta here." E.g., "So these are the facts, and my interpretations, about the baseball players fit to wear a jockstrap. Take it for what it's worth. I'm outta here." If I had opportunity to take all the writers who ended their piece with this sentence in 1994, and kick their asses until they were no longer "outta here" but were back "in there"--wherever that is, I would be a very busy, but very satisfied, man.

**"Fast forward to" Yes; this gets used also. It refers to the process of "fast-forwarding" a tape, or other recording device, so as to move the action forward more quickly than the writer's prose skills can naturally, much less, gracefully, accomplish. So we are reading something like, "All that happened back in 1990 when we didn't have any idea of the implications. Fast-forward to late 1993, and look at what mortgage futures were doing then!" Why use the phrase "fast-forward" instead of just writing, "But as of late 1993,"? Oh well. I suppose the real question should be: Why expose yourself to such drivel?

**"But I digress." This one drives me crazy. It gets used so often as to have become a cliché, and it is almost never accurate. Rather, what is transpiring is simply the fact that the writer has made a point, is not sure how to write a transitional sentence by way of introducing the next paragraph, so he ends the present paragraph with, "But I digress." If you have been reading along, you note that there was no digression at all. The points or theses were being made, naturally if not exactly skillfully, and the writer did not know how to go on. All he or she needed was a transitional sentence. So, "But I digress," gets used, even though there was no digression at all.

**And then there is the most mind-boggling, and mind-numbing, misuse of language I have encountered in these lazy, inept, ignoramuses who pose as writers. They are writing along, they put forth to the reader the thesis of someone they wish to counter, and after stating it, they write, "That begs the question." (or) "But that begs the question." They advance this powerful assertion simply to state that what they are encountering is wrong. Or they don't like it. The fact is, "begs the question," just so happens to be a very specific informal fallacy. There are two types of informal fallacies: those of relevance and those of ambiguity. The informal fallacy of "begging the question" is an informal fallacy of relevance, and is specifically called the fallacy of petitio principii. I am not going to here enter upon a complete explanation as to exactly what this fallacy is, how it should be demarcated, and the problems it gives rise to. I will simply state that it is the shallowest use of language I have encountered, and the most startling example of thinking at its most flaccid, when writers express nothing more than simple disagreement with another writer or thesis simply by declaiming, "But that begs the question!" For god's sake, people, the informal fallacy of begging the question is about as elementary as logic can get. Is it asking too much of someone who dares make his or her writing public, to expect them to know when and how this assertion applies?

I had thought to perhaps here write a paragraph for the sake of humorously illustrating all the above mistakes, compressing them into one paragraph by way of parody. But why bother? Surely my point is made. And the point is about how slovenly writers can be--in their thinking, and in their writing. I need not sully myself by pretending at being equally slovenly.

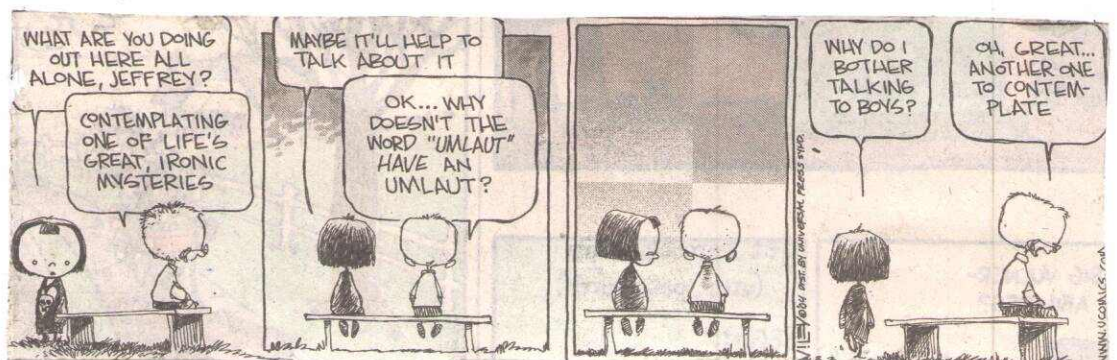


Perhaps a part of the reason I lament such ill-usage of language is the fact that there seems almost no respite from such abuse--at least not in the world of magazines, newsletters, and the more popular journals. I find such insults to the English language in even a magazine as prestigious as The New Yorker. This magazine claims to be the most patrician vehicle available for fine literature in the English language. Sometimes it is indeed a fine vehicle; but this "sometimes" actually is rare, and most of the time it does not even do its job moderately well. And of course, The New Yorker pretends to be the grand purveyor of the other arts, in its reviews, criticisms, and advertisements. But what gets published shows that this magazine's writers actually know very little about the other arts; in truth, most of what they write about music, painting, drama, comes across as affectation, clever posturing, snobbish pretense.

My concern with these matters of language also stems, I concede, from the fact that I feel so alone with these concerns. The average reader doesn't seem to much care; but then, there isn't much of an average reader because there aren't many readers. The average writer ... well, most writers are pretenders at the craft, and the ones who are not pretenders are doing what I do--avoiding people so they can ply their art while chafing at what they encounter when they read. There are those who want to be writers, share some of my concerns about the shortcomings of language, but it is difficult to talk with them because of their shortcomings as writers--or, more accurately, the simple fact that they fall short of being a writer. For example, I will never forget a fellow I encountered at the University of Missouri-Columbia, who was a graduate student in the philosophy department, being mentored by Arthur Berndtson--the great aesthete who had been my own mentor and dissertation advisor. At this point I had long ago graduated, but Berndtson had asked me to talk to this young man because of his frustrations as a writer, and so I did. He was a very personable young fellow--handsome, articulate, and very inhibited about being a writer. But it was not because of the usual inhibitions one spies in such "frustrated" artists. Rather, he was quite candid about his problem. "I have never had any experiences to write about," this young fellow complained. John Impey was his name, and I kept asking him, "Haven't you ... ?" and no, he hadn't. I then urged upon him the powers of the imagination, and even made the (unusual?) assertion that he might be better off never having had such experiences, because then he could go forth to write on the basis of imagination only. He didn't think so. And thus our conversation just sort of ended at an impasse. I didn't know how I could help him. Or rather, I did know precisely how I could help him, but I knew it would be too shocking. All he had to do, given the wild life I was leading back then, was come and spend an evening with me. At the end of one evening, he would have had plenty of experiences he could write about, and maybe plenty he would just as soon never own up to ... much less, write about. But he was, after all, an advisee to Berndtson, and I respected Berndtson too much to inflict upon one of his students a possibly debilitating immersion in the world of raw, carnal, mucal, combative, and dangerous reality. So I parted his company with a comment that was mildly ribald, noted his dismay at hearing something this mild, and so resolved to leave his innocence intact.

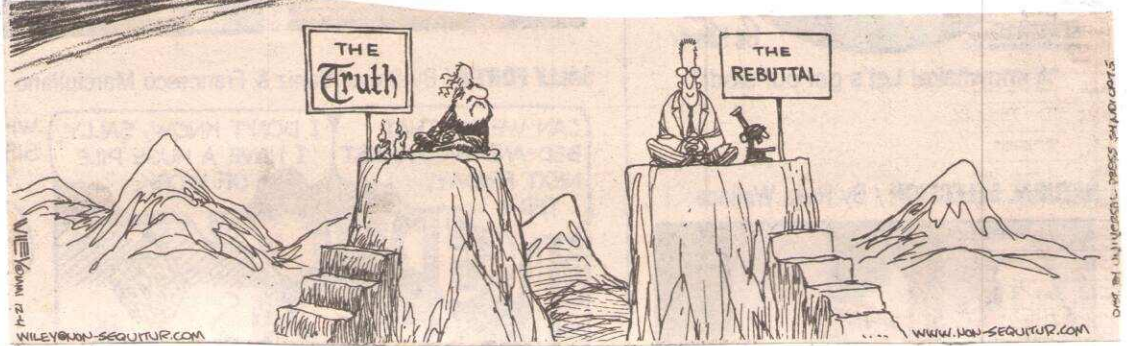
Then there are those who succeed at writing, but do not succeed at writing well. An example is "the poetess," whom I have written about before--in fact, in the pages of The

Aviary. She, like myself, took considerable umbrage to problems she encountered in the language of others; she, however, was rarely able to recognize the problems she herself inflicted upon others with her poor command of language. The result was that, even though she and I were lovers for too long a time, there was much combativeness between us--about language, and about other things too. She kept a journal at



her side, at all times, and often made entries even while in the midst of conversation with people. More often than not, these entries were critical, snide, sneering. I didn't really care about this, although I did find it irritating when she would thrust her journal at me, wanting me to read something she had just (uncomplimentarily) written about me. One night, after some shared humid hours, she got out of our shared bed and went to the living room. I fell asleep, but after a short while she came in, woke me, and insisted that I read what she had just penned. The entry was long, boring, and it ended with the comment, "I think he likes to talk about sex more than he likes doing it." This comment I found most odd, and even unfair, because she was the one who, pleading that she was "sore," had put a stop to what we had been doing earlier. I'm sure I, in my usual character, had said something jocular, but apparently it had not gone over well with her. She had taken offense, and now was trying to get even. She also had written a poem about the love-making we had just indulged.

The poem was awful. The journal entry was uninteresting, not to mention, insulting to me. So I sat there, having read the journal entry, then the poem, and then she



insisted I again read the journal entry. I did, and as I put it down, she triumphantly said, "It's true, isn't it! You like talking about sex more than you like doing it!" I answered mildly, "It depends on the partner I'm with." She was duly insulted, which afforded me considerable satisfaction, and the night continued with that unhealthy admixture of conflict and tense passion which kept us together too long.

What I did not tell this poetess was that she had actually written something very true. While there are few things in life I enjoy more than sex, indeed it is true that I probably like talking about it more than doing it ... with anyone. Even though, it would seem, from my experience, that I have always enjoyed "doing it" more than just about anyone I have ever known.

Be it known that my quarrel with people and their ways of using language is not confined to the written word only. There also



is the problem of how they speak it. I have, in passing, given gruesome examples of this as regards the peasantry in Southern Illinois. That morbid tendency to pronounce as many vowels as "uh" as possible was just enough to turn the stomach. But they had other weird habits also. For example, they pronounced "coffee" with a w (kawfee), which is obviously incorrect, and yet they could not even pronounce "hawk" with a w where the w does belong, and instead they would pronounce it like "hock" as in "ham_hocks." Entire sentences could sometimes be difficult to grasp, as when one peasant, having asked me to haul a couch for him with my pickup and I turned him down (a total stranger, he was) on the grounds that I did not have time to help him, commented angrily to his companion, "Whut duz e mean e duzn't huv tahm?!" Yes; he pronounced "time" as "tahm" (rhymes with "calm"), then added, "Tahm's cheap!"

But I should not be critical of Southern Illinois only. I encountered many unsavory examples of misused language even back when I lived near Columbia, Missouri. For example, I was, on one occasion, visiting a fellow who lived outside Columbia who had an 11-year-old son, and this son was standing outside beside us, splitting my eardrums with a chant which went something like, "Way way go way kuh gih nuh da!" Over and over. It was like a carrion bird's call. We were standing outside, I was talking with this boy's father, it wasn't exactly raining but it was sprinkling a bit, and finally I figured out that this imbecile of a child was yelling, "Rain rain go away! Come again another day!"

Mind you, Columbia, Missouri is considered an educated town. A university town. So I was surprised to encounter such language, although I should be forgiving enough toward an 11-year-old. I was not, however, inclined to forgiveness with the adults. I shall never forget an interaction I had with a married couple shortly before I stopped working as a counselor. Why this couple had been assigned to me I could not understand. But there they sat, the husband dressed in a checkered suit so garish you would have thought he was headed for a costume party. He was thin, prim as a schoolmarm, his face both indignant and grim. His wife there beside him was hugely obese, a heavy dress draped over her bulk, and they both spoke in clipped, earnest tones. The woman worked as a receptionist at a school; the man was an accountant. They had no children, had been married for some years, and what was their problem? Well, yes; sex, of course. For a change, the problem wasn't not enough sex. Their problem was very specific. The man was upset because, during oral sex, the woman would not swallow his sperm. I remember sitting there and thinking, oh my gawd, I am trained to deal with personality disorders, I am the goddamned best there is in certain areas of psychology and medicine, and here I am hearing a man complain about how his wife doesn't want to swallow his cum. What the hell am I to say? That I can't blame her, since I wouldn't want to swallow your cum either? And so it went, and I said several polite things, made arrangements to transfer them to an intern who could maybe stomach dealing with a problem this basic, and as we were ending up, the man said, "So you don't think you can hep us, huh?" I was actually startled by his language, and asked him to repeat it. He did, and sure enough, he had said "hep" for "help." I told him I could help them, but I thought they would be better off seeing a female counselor for their problem, and so managed to transfer the marital problem to another counselor and, more importantly, I managed to get such misuse of language out of my earshot.

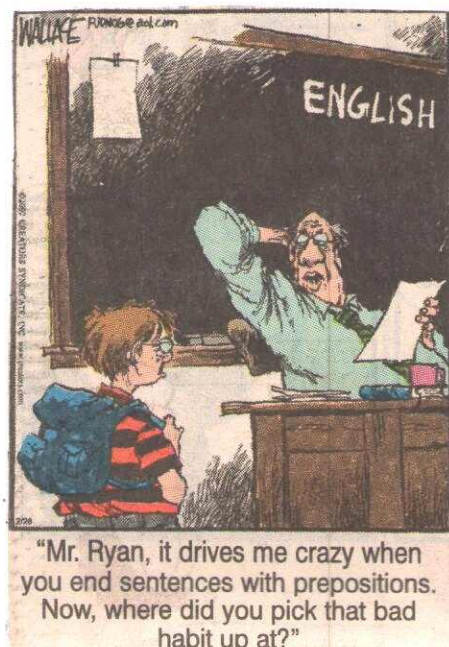
Another such situation, involving both sexual conflict and bad language, happened not in my role as counselor but with two people I knew too well. They were moving in the direction of a divorce, although neither of them knew it yet, and they were always fighting about how there wasn't enough sex. The man wanted it; the woman didn't. They fought in private; they took their fight to the ears of anyone who would listen ... or, anyone who would listen just because they were nearby even though they didn't want to listen. And so I, one day, listened when I didn't want to. It happened right in my living room, and the woman was saying to the man that he was always trying to push her into having sex, and the man said (Yes; he actually said this): "But I wouldn't have to aggress you ... if you would aggress me!" He usually spoke with some degree of normalcy with his diction, but this sentence, perhaps because it was said in anger, came out as, "But ah-uh-ah wouldn't ha-yuv to aggress you-uh-ou ... iyuf you-uh-ou would aggreyus meyuh!" The way he said it caused it to be perhaps the most revolting utterance I have ever heard. The subject-matter didn't help either, and that using "aggress" as a verb (and a transitive one at that!) was just unbelievable. As events would uglily transpire, opportunity soon presented for me to never, ever have contact with these people again.

But now that I live in Saint Louis, all such difficulties with language are forever solved? No. One could never hope for such. The problems are, I readily vouchsafe, more benign. Still, they are irritating, and often, unique. My first encounter with a problem was when seated in a restaurant, and at table, I heard two educated people, when referring to the food in front of them, refer to "dip" as "dee-yup." Two syllables, both of odd pronunciation. Regarding the food, it, in fact, should not even have been referred to as a "dip." It more properly should have been called a "sauce." Other such difficulties involve:

<u>correct</u>	<u>St. Louis way</u>
I'll	Ah'll
warn	worn
just	jist
unless	unluss
wish	woosh (or weesh)
dish	deesh
fish	feesh
flashlight	flishlight

(I must admit that I myself even picked up the habit of using this last word, "flashlight," as "flishlight," that long i coming to my lips more than once. Oh gory shame! Oh unspeakable solecism!)

So yes; Saint Louis residents have their share of pronounciatory



problems, but they are mild compared to what I encountered in Southern Illinois. In Saint Louis, at least it's "do-un" instead of "do-wun" for "doing." And it's "gonna" in Saint Louis for "going to" instead of "gunnuh" as it is in Southern Illinois.

And yes, even Baumli (he of pristine tongue!) has a few problems with words, although let us not forget the qualifier "few." As humbly admitted above, I have pronounced "flashlight" as (make me writhe!) "flishlight." (That *i* pronounced as in the word "fly.") And I this year found two other problems with my speech. The word "business," in the strictest sense, should be pronounced with three syllables, not as two with the middle syllable silent. Most people do mispronounce it as having two syllables. I don't. Or so I believed, until one day I caught myself thus mispronouncing it. I also learned that, for years, I have been pronouncing the word "Judaism" incorrectly. I learned how to pronounce it from all those Catholic priests and nuns, who often curled their upper lip rather derisively when they said it. They pronounce the word with a long *a* on the second syllable and with an accent on that second syllable. I have, to my surprise, found that this is not correct. The word is properly pronounced with a primary accent on the first syllable, and for the second syllable to be pronounced with a long *e* instead of a long *a*. But this is (or was) not the entire problem. I looked into the word, and discovered that virtually no one--not even those who get the accent right on the first syllable and the vowel right on the second syllable--pronounce the remainder of the word correctly. They pronounce the remainder as one clipped syllable, when actually it is two syllables, with the secondary accent on the third syllable. I have heard only three people pronounce these last two syllables as two instead of meshing them into one. These three people were my twin sister Frances, a woman who has a Ph.D. in philology, and a Persian scholar from Wales. These three people pronounced the word correctly--as four syllables. Now a fourth person does. But I have yet to even hear a single Hebe succeed in the small task of giving that word its small due of two syllables (secondary accent on the first of these two) after having pronounced its first two syllables correctly. Shame on all of us.

If I, on some occasions do words wrongly, it would appear that (at least according to the English professors) I simply do everything right.

My awareness of this came about via a very odd phone call. I was in my study, amidst studies, when the phone rang and I picked up. This was before we had moved away from Southern Illinois, so I was quite surprised to hear a fellow introduce himself as calling on behalf of The Modern Language Association (also known as the MLA--the most prestigious, and governing, of those organizations in this country which steward what English professors do). I am not generalizing here, but generally speaking, I find English professors, as an academic lot, to be stupid, uneducated, and not very well-read. However, I was most polite, especially given the direction the conversation soon went. I asked the fellow, "How did you get my phone number?"

He replied, "You just said 'get' with a short *e* instead of a short *i*."

"True, but I was posing a question, and you haven't yet answered it."

"You didn't put 'yet' at the end of the sentence you just said."

"Well? Is that worth commenting on?"

"You just said 'well' with one syllable, whereas most people say it as two syllables. Uncorrectly ... I mean, incorrectly, of course."

"Do you find that odd?"

"I guess what I'm saying is that I'm impressed."

"By what? When, I mean, how were you impressed?"

"Just now you said 'when' with a short *e* instead of a short *i*!"

"Isn't that how it's supposed to be pronounced?"

"Yes, but this is most out of the norm ... I mean, outside the norm. Out of the ordinary."

"I don't want to be impolite, but your end of the conversation, so



to speak, has you sounding quite nervous. You were the one who called me. Is there some reason this phone call is making you nervous?"

"I guess I'm a little uneasy. It's because of how you did on that test."

"Your nervousness stems from what?"

"You just pronounced 'your' correctly, instead of saying it like 'yore,' like most people do."

"I was asking about your nervousness. What did you say it stems from?"

"How you did on that test."

"What test?"

He went on to explain, and something that had transpired a few months earlier, came back to my memory. It had been an unusual situation, even fun, but I had not given it much subsequent thought. This situation had also happened in the middle of the afternoon, but I was in my house, not in my study. A fellow knocked at my door, and wanted to do a brief survey about the use of the English language. Well, this of course interested me, so I invited him in. He was carrying papers, a tape recorder, and he explained his mission. The MLA was doing a survey to find out how accurately people in this country pronounce words. If I would be willing to participate, it would take no more than fifteen minutes of my time. I consented, and he explained what they were doing, and even handed me a paper describing their project. A total of 2,072 people would be interviewed--and these people had been selected in a way which was statistically adjusted in terms of income, demographics, and age. The test was to be given in person, not over the phone, and the verbal answers--or, responses--were to be tape-recorded. The test was quite simple. The subject--myself--was given three cards, one at a time. I was to read the sentence on each card once, silently, and then read it aloud while he recorded it. And so I did. The three sentences were also printed on the introductory paper he had handed me, and so I have them here by me now. The sentences are as follows:

"When men sin I'll allow myself no conceit, for I know very well that within my body there resides this weakness of the flesh, and in every heart there lurks many temptations and the ghosts of other evils too."

"I'll let him get the six ends of welding rod into the empty bin before starting him on the same job the rest of us have been doing."

"When I saw them I said, 'We should let it be this way: I think that that fellow should at least either take a foreign tour so he can relax, or wait until after the carpenters have built the wooden subfloor, and then, before letting his female traveling companion stay there, delay for two weeks so his boss can see to their getting the final estimate and dimensions.'"

After our exercise was over--the tape-recording finished--I asked where these three sentences had come from. They all came from utterances that had been recorded in the last year. The first came from a sermon delivered by a Catholic priest. The second was recorded in a machinist's shop. The third came from an insurance adjustor. (I never could quite decipher what that third sentence was supposed to be about.) And the whole point of this exercise was to see how accurately a person pronounced the words within these sentences. The first sentence was described as the "formal" sentence, the second as the "blue collar" sentence, and the third as the "white collar" one. And so the fellow had thanked me, I had offered him something to drink, which he declined, and he then went on his way. And I had then pretty much forgotten about the matter, although I had kept the piece of paper he had handed me, putting it in my file of "miscellaneous" papers, not sure where to put it.

And so here was a phone call referring back to that interview. The fellow now talking to me was a Professor Hugh Morrison (his name was on the brochure also), and, losing his nervousness, he informed me, with considerable warmth, that the MLA had set this test up with the end in mind of measuring how much of each sentence a person could pronounce correctly. They had not expected anyone to pronounce the entirety of any one sentence, much less, all three, correctly. But I had.

We discussed the matter at some length, and I asked him what was the most commonly mispronounced word. He said it was the fourth word of the first sentence, with people pronouncing it "a'll" (like "Al"--a man's name) instead of "I'll."

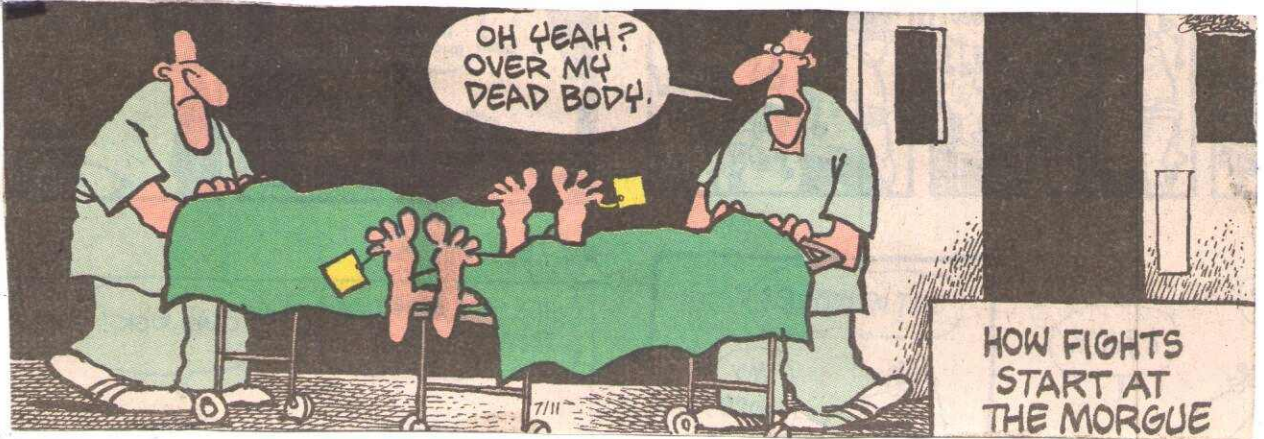
I did proceed to inform him that I would surely be expected to pronounce these words correctly. After all, English is my first language, and I have the Ph.D. in philosophy. He then noted that he and his colleagues had given this test to more than 100 English professors before sending it out for the field study, and none of them had ever gotten everything right.

"But of course you did," I wanted to say, but politely eschewed

utterance of the statement. I did not want to put him in the awkward position I was sure he occupied given that, after all, he was (lest we forget) a commonplace English professor himself.

The fellow did note that there was to be a special meeting (I think he referred to it as a "symposium") discussing this test and the results, and he kindly invited me to attend. The meeting would be in California, Los Angeles if memory serves, and he even invited me to attend and said he could perhaps arrange for me to give a short address to the assembled group. He was not polite enough, however, to offer an honorarium, and I politely declined his invitation, pleading lack of time. My actual reason was not because of the absence of a proffered honorarium, although I did take mild offense at this; rather, the real reason I would not have wanted to attend is simply because I can not stand being around English professors for very long. Especially not that many at once.

So, do you see? Despite my occasional lapses from good speech, I do seem to have a reason for laying claim to some degree of



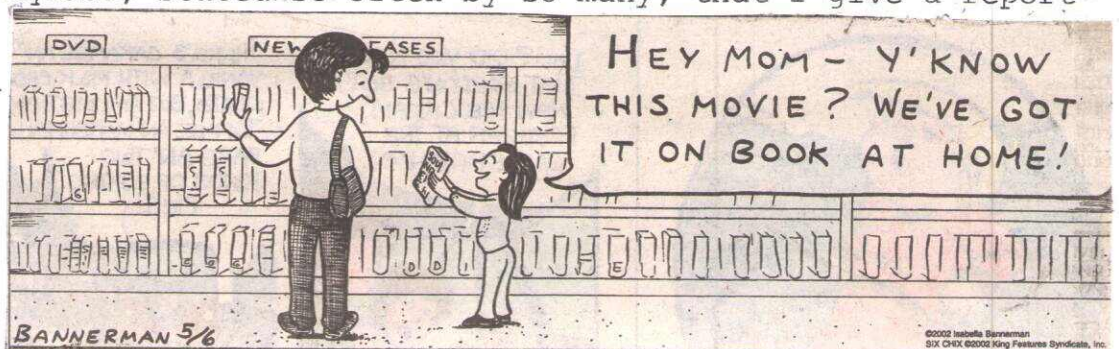
pedigree in matters of English usage. Enough that I can evince sufficient confidence when challenged about certain matters of English usage. For example, one woman (less than a lady, to be sure!) asked me how many women I had, "done, you know, with" (her exact words) in my life. I answered her, "I haven't, like some men, kept count of the women I bedded. But I think it could safely be said that it was more than sixty, but less than one hundred." She challenged me on my use of the word "less," claiming that I should have used the word "fewer." If you, my reader, are inclined toward siding with her view, then I suggest you figure it out, or show enough verve to ask me to explain.

If I betray confidence about my command of language, I am not without humility, and I am not infallible. I will continue to make at least a few mistakes. I am not perfect. Moreover, I continue to be contaminated by my environment. I am a good listener; so when people talk, what they say takes up a certain tenacity of residence within my psyche. I am a voracious reader; constant exposure to bad writing, even though I try to avoid the bad part as much as possible, debilitates my language skills. And then there is the verbal media. Just the other day, on the radio, I heard the host of a show ask the guest, "Would you repeat that telephone number?" The guest answered, "Absolutely." What does this mean? How does one repeat a telephone number absolutely? How does one repeat a telephone number nonabsolutely? How does one ... and you see? I begin contemplating the matter, wondering if something in my grasp of language is amiss, thus deteriorating my own command of the language, when instead I should merely grimace, smirk, and put that ~~serdid~~ answer forever out of my mind.

FLICKER SHOWS

I should be saying a prayer on behalf of my friends, instead of now bowing to their request, stated so often by so many, that I give a report

on the movies I have seen during the year. I'm not sure I can do this very well. I don't know enough about movies to comment on them with much in the way of

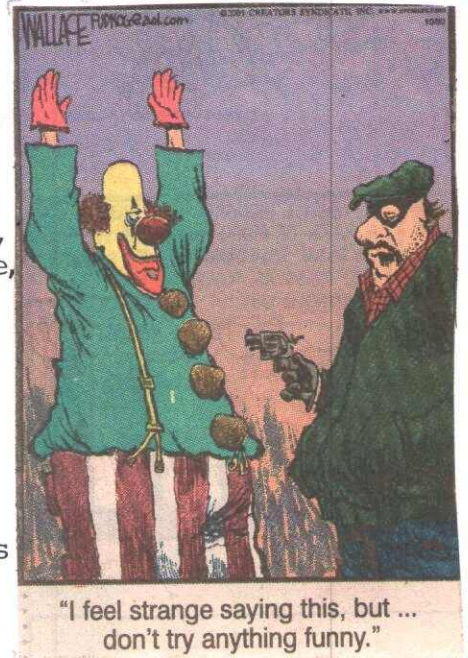


insight--much less, eloquence. Moreover, "movies" is perhaps the wrong word for me, since often what I see in the way of "films" are specials done of a certain program which originally was given on (I shudder!) TV. So what I have to report on might not always qualify for being called a movie per se. And my qualifications for such reporting, being as minimal as they are, cause me to head this section by the very old-fashioned

substantive "flicker shows."

Since I watch so few flicker shows, and since I tend to remember them best in terms of when I saw them, I shall list them in order of viewing, and supply a bit of commentary.

Jan. 7: Mrs. Doubtfire. As a produced film, it was a poorly written screenplay, it was poorly directed, and the filming was just awful--a scene, for example, in which he was doing impressions had them doing only part of the scene at a time, and then over and over trying to begin the scene again by having him "boxed" in the same position. But it didn't work. The boxing was never quite accurate, and the segments jerked along. However, the acting--by Robin Williams and others too--was just wonderful, and this was what turned it into a good movie. There was much good humor too; in fact, some of the scenes were so funny I had to stifle a desire to scream--yes, scream--with laughter. This laughter, however, was evinced by care given to the humor; the dependence on slapstick, especially toward the end of the movie, was a considerable detraction from the movie's ability to supply a goodly dose of high-octane low humor. (Here, you see, Baumli is pretending to try and write like a movie critic.) I came away from the film, however, affected in a way most people weren't. I am, after all, very much involved in men's liberation. And in this film, we see a father fighting for the right to see his children. He succeeds through subterfuge, and in the end, it is this subterfuge which causes the judge to deny him more legal access to them. However, the mother, realizing the father's devotion and determination, relents and lets him have his way in the end. Yes. She lets him have some parental rights. (And remember? This is how it ended in Kramer vs. Kramer. The father, even though he had been the one taking care of the child while the mother was away--having abandoned both husband and child--finding herself during those many months' absence, ended up losing all custody, and in the end was only given access to his child because the mother "let" him. In the goodness of her glandular heart, or something like that. I do not like movies, or any other messages, which put across the idea that a man only deserves custody of his children if the mother lets him have that custody.) So you see; I came away from this film having enjoyed its humor and its acting, but feeling very disgruntled by the bad screenplay, the slapstick, and the social message. I'm not one to settle in for entertainment without having a chip on my shoulder, you see, when it comes to men's liberation issues.



Mar. 12: Cats: Caressing the Tiger. This was a National Geographic special with some merit, but not deserving much in the way of comment. Like many of these specials, we see much footage of what animals do--eat other animals and make more little animals of their own species.

Mar. 13: Among the Wild Chimpanzees. This one, unlike the one on cats which was quite mediocre, was excellent. Jane Goodall's physical beauty I had never noticed, when reading accounts of her work in The National Geographic Magazine. I found it odd that I would notice this in a film, but not in a magazine's photos. The behavior of the chimpanzees, their misfortunes, their human-like tendencies toward aggression--all these were enlightening, often horrifying, just as often saddening, and thus it made me feel no less unfortunate to be a member of the human race just because chimpanzees are so like us.

Mar. 13: Requiem for a Heavyweight. It was a short film, supposedly the "early" version although I've no idea what the later version would be. The star was, if I remember correctly, Ed Wynn; or was it Keenan Wynn, or both? All in all it was just a piece of celluloid I saw happen, and I soon forgot it until now, when my drudge of a memory goes dredging. Oh yes ... how memory does keep unearthing things! Rod Sterling (no middling talent, he!) wrote the piece. And in fact it was, of all he wrote, his favorite. Well; it wasn't my favorite. I found it all too forgettable. Which is probably my loss. As I duly note, and emphasize: I know little about these flicker shows.

Apr. 2: Schindler's List. This is, without doubt, one of the best movies I have ever seen. The story is wrenching and inspiring, the acting was superlative in all respects and in all characters, and the producing was exemplary. It may seem terribly morbid to praise the producing on these grounds, but I shall; namely, I was impressed by the simple fact that when people were shot at close range, the producer knew to show the recoil of the gun, the shock of the bullet hitting

the body, and also (what most producers do not show because they likely do not even know it happens) the way the force of the bullet knocks the body so hard against the ground that the body often bounces. This is but one example of a thousand details which this producer paid attention to, thus making the film more believable, and in the end, making its moral telos more effective.

Aug. 22: Antarctica. This one was seen at the big Omnimax at the Saint Louis Science Center. The venue was, of course, spectacular; as for the film itself, there was much busy clutter and much bustle amongst the many animals and I came away feeling that, once again, a film not only did not provide anything aesthetic it barely succeeded as entertainment.

Sept. 4: Forrest Gump. It was a warming, funny, sometimes powerful, always believable, and almost beautiful movie. Really, I rather think

I should see it again-- something I am rarely inclined to do unless a movie has very high aesthetic stature. This one



does not possess such high stature, but it comprises a constant series of small moral lessons, some deep insights into the human psyche, some depictions of life as it really is (as opposed to how people want it to be), and oh my lordy the acting was good. However (yes; Baumli just can not get that chip off his shoulder), when at the end Jenny contacts Forrest to reunite with him, I felt angered by this turn of the plot. She is dying. Of HIV (we presume), and it appears that the only reason she wanted Forrest at this point in her life (whereas before she had rejected him over and over), was so she would have someone to care for her as she was dying and to care for her (their) son after she had died. This was an ugly part of human nature, I felt, which certainly is acceptable as material in a film; what was not acceptable to me was how every other viewer of this film I talked to thought there would be nothing wrong with this in real life. I thought it exploitative, selfish, and crassly sexist in the way a man once again got used for a woman's ends.

So do you see? Baumli doesn't see many flicker shows. And he sees even fewer movies. So is it worth knowing what Baumli has seen? Especially since this seeing sometimes involves autocontamination?

And as for my commentary: It has little merit, wouldn't you hearily agree?

And (yes; lest we forget) as for that chip on Baumli's shoulder, about men's liberation, don't you find it irritating? I do. But I can't seem to knock it off of there, and to be honest, I think I would find the world even more irritating were that chip not stubbornly there.

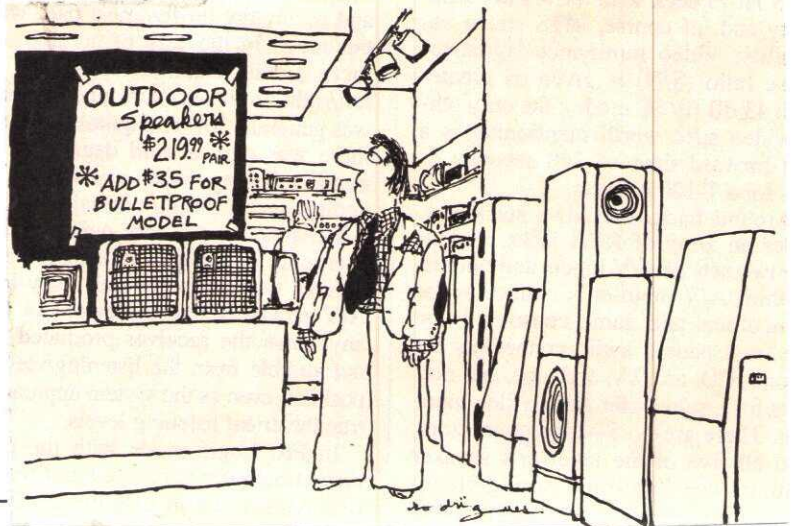
It occurs to me that I entirely neglected to list one movie from this year, and it is one of the most deserving ... or, put more accurately, one of only two that are most deserving. It is:

Mar. 2: The Piano. Yes; like Schindler's List, this movie goes down on my list of "Ten Favorite Movies" (which now contains about thirty movies). The visual content of this movie was nothing less than stunning. The story was unique, powerful, richly complex. The acting by everyone was truly stellar. And it deserves to go down in history as one of the finest works of aesthetic art in all of movie making. Schindler's List is as great, but its didactic bent does at times detract from its aesthetic attainments. So if The Piano is greater in its ability to achieve Beauty, it is no greater than Schindler's List given that the latter so wonderfully melds the practical art of Morals to the aesthetic attainment of Beauty.

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

Sometimes certain insights into our cultural mainstream, as it applies to music, come about because of unexpected juxtapositions. In this case, I had (once again) been listening to the tremendous musical artistry of Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, the great exponent of the Islam Sufi music known as Qawwal. The man's emotional energy, and vocal power, are nothing short of amazing, and I had come away from a listening session reduced

to ashes--the kind that persist when the fire is far from being out. And then, on a whim, hoping to put myself in a less weighty mood before going to bed, I put on a CD by Tiny Tim. I had not even listened to him in years, and I realized that, not having been drawn to him in this long, I might come away having decided to give away this compact disc. So I put it on, and ... well, aside from the fact that it was awful, I could not believe that there are people in this world who even find him entertaining ... or amusing. I had once heard him on a radio talk-show, and it was obvious that this man certainly knew his music history. But was he a musician? No. He is an oddity of an entertainer who has made a living out of being incompetent, ugly, and most of all, uninhibited. Yes; I did give that CD



away. And for perhaps two days I walked around, feeling somewhat stunned, realizing that there are people who enjoy listening to his posturing. When they might, instead, listen to Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan. With that huge, obese body of his, one could certainly suggest that he is just as much a physical oddity as Tiny Tim is. But as for comparing the voices? Ali Khan has such unfettered energy in his voice. When that man sings, he sits like a boulder but floats like a feather. When Tiny Tim sings, he minces like a monkey and squawks like a dying chicken.

But this involves discussing individual musicians. There also, for me, is an issue regarding types of music. For example, I have a problem with Irish music. Or, Irish music has a problem with me--because yes, the problem may indeed be me. But if so, I haven't yet come around to this realization. So many Irish musical instruments are just plainly out of tune. Uilleann bagpipes. The button accordion. The penny whistle. All inherently out of tune, and they can't be put in tune! And those Irish people, who often possess such beautiful voices, and praise the beautiful voice, are yet willing to assault their ears with musical instruments that are out of tune! I can not understand it. And there is so much interest in Irish music these days. There were Irish music groups in Columbia, Missouri when I moved away from there in 1988. There are Irish music groups in Southern Illinois. In fact, on one occasion I was in the food co-op in Carbondale, and some Irish musicians were seated in there with their instruments. They were not playing them (fortunately) but they were talking to one another within earshot of myself (unfortunately for me). One of these musicians apparently belonged to a group, and someone asked him about his gigs at a certain coffee house. He talked about it briefly, and someone interjected, "Suh, duh yuh git paid?" The musician paused and then he emitted, "We-yull, yuh git free tea, heh-heh." I will never forget that embarrassed answer of his, containing a giggle at the end, all of it a medley of e sounds sounding as dignified as a timid fart squeezed out of a shy anus. He was, indeed, quite obviously embarrassed about admitting that his only payment for playing at a coffee house was that he got free tea. I would be embarrassed too. But not as ashamed as I would be at speaking this way.



As long as I am on the subject of music, and Southern Illinois, it is a good time to admit that not quite everything in Southern Illinois was thoroughly reprehensible. There was the couple I met in the parking lot of a grocery store. They had, apparently, come in separate vehicles, had done their shopping, and were about to leave. I spotted their personalized license plates, and noted "TWEETER" on one car and "WOOFER" on the other. I jovially made mention of this, and learned that they considered themselves audiophiles. They had a third car, and were trying to decide what name to give its license plate. I suggested "SQUAWKER" which at one time was the name given to the midrange driver in speakers. They had not known this, and were nothing less than grateful for my benevolent intervention. They went on their way, without my bothering to tell them that I could not share their conviction that they were audiophiles. I mean, Cerwin-Vega speakers? How low-life can you get? How snooty can Baumli get?

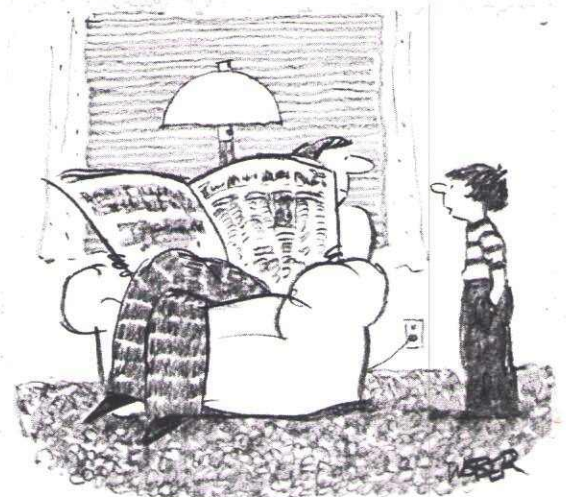
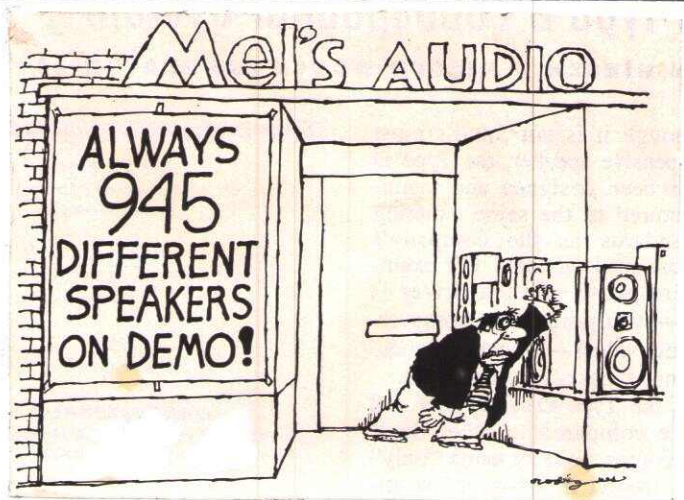
I would move from Southern Illinois with one experience unchanged, despite the change of state. This involves my irritation at those gawdawful stereo systems people put in their cars. All that loud bass,

those thudding woofers--or subwoofers--coupling with the air inside the car and turning its shell into a vibrating, buzzing, undamped resonance chamber. In Southern Illinois they would drive by on the highway. Here in Saint Louis, they are beside you in traffic, or sitting in the neighbor's driveway. Either place, they sound the same--about like a dinosaur farting into a jug.

Out of fairness, I should note that it isn't the peasants only who are capable of abusing music, and music's listeners. One sometimes finds this form of cruelty being practiced even by some of the best (and, one would think, most patrician) classical musicians. For example, I was listening to a radio show featuring the Beaux Arts Trio, and in the course of this show they performed part of a contemporary piece which required that the violinist do a great deal of percussion on the wood of his instrument, literally beating on the body of the violin with his fingers and hands. At the end of their playing this piece, the violinist voiced his concern that every time he does this piece he worries that he might have damaged his instrument. Well ... yes indeed, he should be worried. While it is perhaps permissible to use some instruments for occasional (and light) percussion, even though the instrument is not primarily intended for such (e.g., the light finger-tapping that is sometimes done on the flamenco guitar), yes, while this might be quite acceptable, I certainly do not see the sense in expecting a violinist to hammer on his two-million Stradivarius just because an uninspired lint-brained "modern classical" composer couldn't think of any other way of sounding original. I do not remember the title of the piece of music, nor do I remember the composer. I am sure I intended to forget both. But I do know the music itself sounded bad, the percussion seemed contrived and loud (sic!), and I can not for the life of me understand why a trio as accomplished as the Beaux Arts Trio would stoop to playing such a piece of worthless drivel. Someone with money probably composed it and dedicated it to them, thus causing them to feel somehow beholden--especially when that person with money gave a generous endowment to an institution in their name. Shame on this group for stooping so low. And shame on that composer for being so rash, brash, and boorish as to impose upon other people--whether musicians or listeners--such a putrid piece of postured music.

As for music that is most definitely not postured--there was, for me, a very significant accomplishment on Jan. 23 of this year, 1994. Yes; on this date I at last succeeded in obtaining (affording) all 45 volumes of the complete Mozart set recorded on the Philips label. I certainly haven't yet listened to all of it. Some of the selections used were far from being the best available (some of this because of the recent craze for original instruments, and hence, too many inclusions of music done on such instruments). But most of the selections done were quite acceptable, even supreme among those that are available, and I am most grateful to at last have obtained all of Mozart. Of course, I write "all," but without a doubt a few pieces by Mozart, undiscovered as of the date of this set's being issued, will surface from time to time. I will do nothing but welcome those new additions, even though they will not have been included within the covers of this, The Complete Mozart. So now there is only one thing of great importance with regard to this acquisition. The 45 volumes of this set contain 180 compact discs. That is a lot of time. A lot of listening. When will I find the 200 hours necessary for this task? But surely I shall! It will be 200 hours of pleasure, much of that pleasure ecstatic, and no small degree of that ecstasy almost mystical. I am blessed.

I shall, as has been my custom of many years, proceed to list the best, the disappointing, the most offensive, the worst, and the noteworthy albums I have heard this year. But first allow me an aside. Our cat Midnight, whom I mentioned earlier (the one with the offensive olfaction); well, that little shit shat in the music room probably half a dozen times during his time with us. That by itself was almost reason enough to get rid of him--the little slovenly sneak. Since he was gone



"Push me, Dad. Mozart was pushed."

(banished and discarded) by the time we moved to Saint Louis, he never did get a chance to sully the music room in our new home. And so I have settled in, and although I had experienced some nice listening in my Southern Illinois residence, there would be vastly more such experiences in Saint Louis, even though we were in the midst of getting "moved in."

But let me be on to listing the best recordings heard for 1994. I suppose it might be easiest if I group them, and do classical first, then jazz, and finally "pop" which can include all the other genres.

1. Amongst the best I must list La Divina which was a four-CD boxed set of recordings by Maria Callas. This deserves mention not only because it involves recordings by such a great soprano, but also because this set of recordings was what finally pushed me beyond my reluctance about her voice. It does seem that many classical appreciators need this push. Callas, initially--even for years, deters them. They realize her beauty, her greatness--especially with emotion in those difficult operas, but there often is something about her voice which doesn't quite please. For me it was always that way her vibrato would slow, the higher she reached on the scale. Somehow I simply let this irritation go. It is a part of who she is; it is how she sings. I accepted it. And the full beauty, power, and unparalleled emotional reach of her musical personality was truly revealed to me. Note I write "unparalleled." Other (if only a few) sopranos have outstripped her in technique, vocal purity, and timbral richness. But none have ever matched her ability to chart the nuances of emotion in musical interpretation. I have gone on to more Callas listening since experiencing this set, and the rewards have been unremitting.

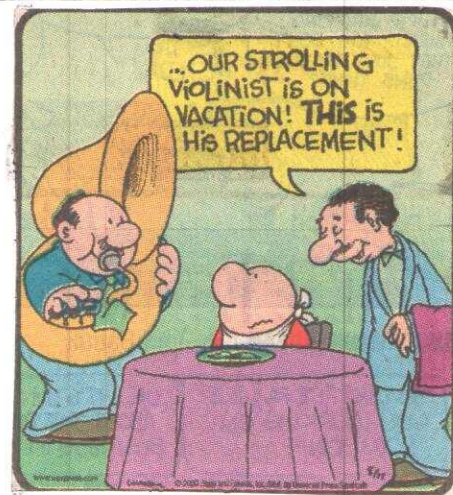
2. Songs, Dances, and Fantasy with Jerry Fuller on double bass was also one of the best this year. Most of these classical pieces are either contemporary compositions or

transcriptions of older works for the double bass. (Or, I assume they are transcriptions. The liner notes are sparse.) The problem with most solo double bassists is that they use so much treble for the sake of tonal definition. They are doing solo work so they want to project, and so they use small strings, and a bass without a lot of bottom end. But Fuller uses a very fat, deep tone, which, however, because of his very precise intonation, has excellent definition and projection on individual notes. All the works done on this CD are excellent, except for the last piece. Overall, the recording's only drawback is that there is not more music on this CD.

3. Arie Antiche by Shura Gehrman, with Adrian Farmer on piano accompanying, is unquestionably the best CD of the year, and one of the best I've heard in my life. No; I am not prejudiced because I wrote the liner notes. I wrote the liner notes for this CD because I was so impressed by the singer and the style he uses on this CD. He is a true heroic bass, and on this CD he goes back to the "first voice," singing in the true alto range, not by using countertenor pitching but by using natural pitching via cooperation between the vocal cords, the larynx, and trachea. How this is done, physiologically, is explained in my extensive liner notes, and if you want more detail than I here provide, then avail yourself of the CD. You will be both edified and transported.

4. Fauré and Duparc by Shura Gehrman, with Adrian Farmer and Nina Walker on the piano for different pieces. This recording is done, not in the "first voice," but in the bass, and it delivers the best renditions of these works I have ever heard. I wrote part of the liner notes for this CD, but other people contributed too. (There was one small offering which would not fit into the booklet; I print it later within this edition of The Aviary so that friends who have asked for it can have a look at what I wrote.) Stated simply, I consider Shura Gehrman the best bass singer who ever lived. Those of you who love the voice are well advised to not neglect him.

5. Walter Klien and Beatrice Klien: Brahms, Dvorak, Schubert, Grieg. As most of my musical friends know, I consider Walter Klien the best pianist of the twentieth century, and perhaps the best pianist who ever lived.



His duet work with Alfred Brendel was not very good, simply because it seemed that these two "alpha" pianists, although personal friends, were competing. But when Walter did recordings with his (then) wife Beatrice, there was a sense of perfect partnership, and this recording is energetic, gorgeous, empyrean.

6. Olympia's Lament by Monteverdi, sung by Emma Kirkby, accompanied by Anthony Rooley on chitarrone. Kirkby's voice, with rare exceptions, does not well work for the classical repertoire. She is sweet as saccharine, her tonal approach possessing purity but no variance, and her technique not precise enough. But she does work very well with the repertoire of "classical folk" pieces, and she does well with the renaissance composers. So her sweet voice, on this recording, does Monteverdi's genius worthy service, and in fact elevates this musical offering to high status indeed.

7. Szymanowski conducted by Simon Rattle. Szymanowski isn't exactly one of my favorite composers, but this CD brings him to life for me. Rattle conducts The City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and Chorus, and uses the assistance of various soloists in the Stabat Mater, the Litany to the Virgin Mary, and the Symphony No. 3. It is in this third piece that Rattle really brings Szymanowski forth as a superb composer, and I am forever grateful to Rattle for opening my eyes (again) to Szymanowski, and causing me to continue giving him a chance (so to speak) with my listening.

8. The Baby's Family by Villa-Lobos, played by Katrina Krinsky. This truly is exquisite piano music, which I had never heard before. If Krinsky's touch is a bit uneven at times, the emotion is perfect, turning this composition into a piece that not only is playful but also is virtuosic. Many pianists can be either playful, or virtuosic, but few can do both at the same time. Katrina Krinsky is perfect at doing both.

Only one recording, in the jazz idiom, stands out as among the "best" recordings I have heard this year. It is Presenting Red Mitchell. There is such a nice, full tone to that old beat up bass of his. His solos are not glittering, but then, he opts for the kind of strings that work best for backup, and strings that heavy are not conducive to fast solos. But his solos at least are right, melodic, and they work well with the rest of the music. Best of all, in his work, is that solid rhythmic backup. He is far better at backup than even Ray Brown.

The only flaw of this album was James Clay, who although he played wonderfully on the flute, was irritating when on the tenor sax. He has a harsh tone, a grating staccato, and the sax was so forward in the way it was miked it seemed like someone had dropped a microphone right down its bell. The pianist, Lorraine Geller, did very well, and I especially liked her way of contributing minimally when other instruments were more in the spotlight. And Billy Higgins on drums was solid, visible but completely enmeshed with the ensemble work.

1. In the popular category, there is one by a relatively underappreciated country artist named Lacy J. Dalton. Her The Best of Lacy J.

Dalton gave me much pleasure, and my thus listing it will remind my friends that this well-schooled autodidact is a country boy at heart. In fact, there is a large used-record store here in Saint Louis, and the owner

tells me that whereas he has many customers come in who are primarily interested in classical but also buy rock, I am the only one who comes in with a primary appreciation in classical who also buys country. As for Lacy J. Dalton, if you've an evening for something more raucous than Mozart, then try on this lusty, friendly, rollicking voice.



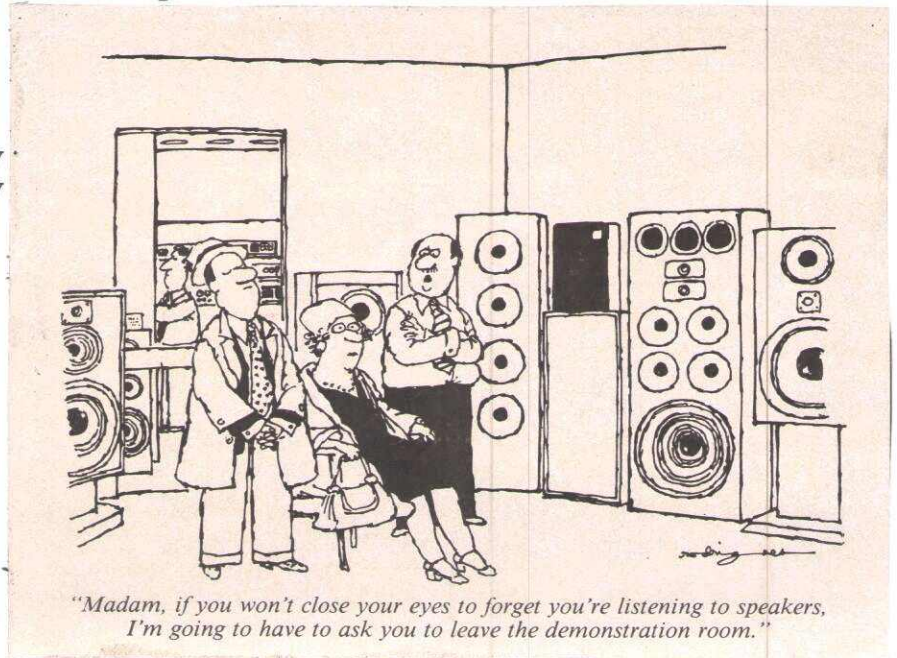
2. Traffic from Paradise by Rickie Lee Jones. That little-girl voice, that unique intonation, that carelessness combined with exquisite attention to the song's emotion ... well, as I have written before, Rickie Lee Jones has a voice as sweet as a blowjob. When I listen to Rickie Lee Jones, I almost feel as though I am being sexually unfaithful

to Abbe. But as for this album: Traffic from Paradise has more of a rock flavor than did her Pop Pop, and if not quite as creative and unique as that one was, it nevertheless shows R.L. Jones still in full flower.

3. Just the Way I Am by Dolly Parton. No, it's not her mammarian assets I am drawn to; it is her voice. On this album that voice is in perfect form, and these sentimental, sappy, sweet songs of pathos are what I have a weakness for.

4. Just the Two of Us by Porter Wagner and Dolly Parton. This was only their second album together, and I had never heard it until this year. Or, more accurately, I had never heard it on my own stereo system. At this point Dolly's voice was already in perfect form, Porter was still in a good mood with her, and the band was spot on. That woody Fender bass laid a foundation for the band such as few bands before or since have ever had, and they were well practiced enough to do every song right but not so well practiced as to be predictable. They satisfied and surprised, even while Porter and Dolly made the best duet music since George and Tammy.

5. Rosa Mystica by Therese Schroeder-Sheker. This album also I had heard before, but only in part, and never on my own stereo. It would probably be described by most people as being in the "New Age" genre, and I suppose this is accurate enough. Truly it has a most unique sound, especially on the song which is the album's title. All the other songs vary from good to great, but the "Rosa Mystica," with its actual recording of night winds accompanying the music, is haunting and also prayerful. From a sonic standpoint, this CD can well serve as a "reference recording," given that those recorded night winds are real, and if they seem artificially generated instead of like the wind actually does sound, then something is not quite right with your stereo (which, from somebody's judgement, means something is not quite right with the world).

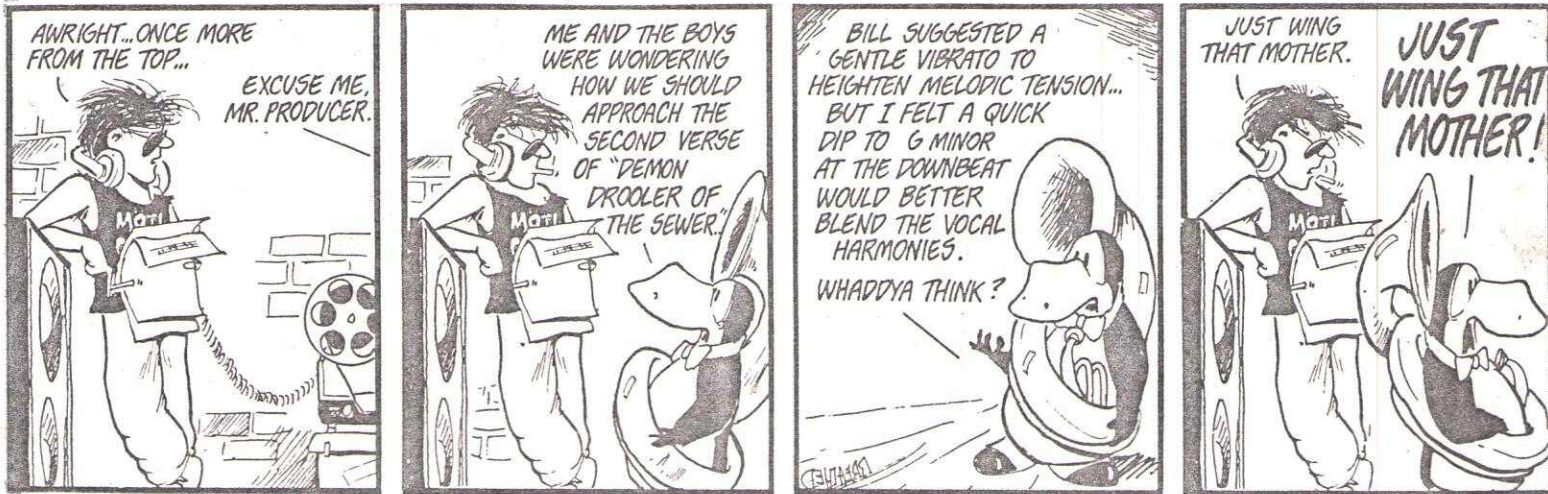


As for disappointments, there were many this year. The main reason being that once I begin listening to a piece, I compulsively need to go ahead and listen to it through to the end. I need to stop this. They are:

1. Anne-Sophie Mutter doing Bartok's Violin Concerto #2 and Norbert Moret's En reve. The latter had some fine moments, but they indeed were moments only, quickly followed by long excursions in boring dissonance. The Bartok was very unique, and interesting in this sense, but the pacing--even in this unique interpretation--was never even and it tended to addle the listener. As usual Ozawa, who was conducting the Boston Symphony Orchestra on both these pieces, did his best to display to us what a miserably bad conductor he is. Even an orchestra as fine as the BSO could do little that really sounded right under his baton. More and more, as the years go by, I come to think that the only thing Seiji Ozawa was ever good at was giving blowjobs to Leonard Bernstein.

2. Henryk Górecki, Symphony No. 3 with Dawn Upshaw, soprano, and the London Sinfonietta conducted by David Zinman. I went to this piece because it was being reviewed everywhere, generally favorably (no; make that "generally gushingly"), and I thought it might be time for me to expose myself to this composer. And so I listened, and I judged: Yes; it is minimalist music. But no; it does not have the kind of religious fervor which minimalist music needs in order to escape the tedium which always threatens it. Maybe the score holds promise of religious feeling, but I have not seen the score, and all I can go by is this performance. Upshaw, as soprano, did her usual--relying on volume, range, and confidence, not bothering to express one bit of emotion. And although she does often get by with relying on her facility with the high notes, on this performance she often faltered in those nether regions. In fact, there were times she did more than falter. On certain notes, high tones, her voice sounded about like a circular saw does when it begins binding in the

middle of a cut. She evinced no emotion; she merely sang notes, and not a few of these notes were sung badly. Zinman seemed uneasy with the score; he likely had never heard anyone else do the work, and thus was "winging it," so to speak. The orchestra played well, although the double basses needed better articulation and closer miking. And both the piano and pipe organ, which play considerable roles in this work, were too timid; a more aggressive, forward approach was needed by these instruments. All in all I would say that this recording is the kind of music which, given how badly it is played, could defy all laws of physics by traveling in a vacuum. And which, one would hope, would obey all the laws of morality by staying there.



3. In Formation by the Kronos Quartet. I bought this one on the original Reference Recording LP all-analogue pressing. So one would have expected a very fine sounding recording, right? But the engineering was terrible, as was the vinyl pressing. In fact there was something wrong with the pressing, causing a constant low-frequency rumble at about 14 Hz varying in intensity, i.e., volume, from about -12 dB to about -5 dB. It was very annoying to my ears, and my subwoofer's amplifier didn't like it either. So I tried the CD. The rumble was there too, although not as bad. So thus I learned that the problem was not with the vinyl pressing; it was with the recording, or the engineering, or the producing, and likely the only reason it was not as loud on the CD is because the CD is not as good at producing sonics as the LP is. Aside from these engineering problems, I simply did not like the music. I suppose it was played adequately, perhaps even very well; but as for the compositions themselves--Mozart would have yawned, Schubert would have laughed, and Beethoven would have fled aghast.

4. Verdi: Quattro Pezzi Sacri/Vivaldi: Credo performed by the Berlin Philharmonic, conducted by Carlo Maria Giulini, with the Ernst-Senff Choir, itself conducted by Achim Zimmermann, and Sharon Sweet singing soprano. I bought this entire album because I wanted to hear a recording by the soprano Sharon Sweet. I had heard her in live broadcasts, and had marveled at her voice. She sounds almost exactly like Callas, but hasn't that irritating slow vibrato on the high notes. And there was--is--such a paucity of recordings by Sweet that I settled for this recording because I could not find any others. The problem is, the soprano only appears at the end of the fourth movement of the Four Sacred Pieces, for all of about two minutes. In this fourth movement, the "Te Deum," I could tell that Sweet's voice was glorious, but it was miked from so far away, and it was buried behind the horn and the violins, one could scarcely hear her. So one came away from hearing Sharon Sweet with the feeling that one didn't get to actually hear her. As for the Berlin Philharmonic, it played about as badly as I have ever heard it play. Cues were missed, the pacing was sluggish, the tempo uneven. I have no idea how much of the blame for all this is on the orchestra or on Giulini; when the playing is this bad, one can not tell. The best part of the recording was the Ernst-Senff Choir, which sang beautifully and with convincing drama, especially on the Vivaldi piece.

I have the CD Trios done by Rob Wasserman filed with my jazz and New Age titles. I'm not sure where to put it; maybe it should be in the pop section. Regardless, there were a couple of good cuts on this album, and some that were okay, but there also were some truly awful ones. And no single piece stood out as truly excellent. So unlike his earlier Duets! I shall be very chary about spending money on any future recordings by this experimental bassist (ie., double bassist). If Duets had some mediocre cuts, it also had some stellar ones. Trios has nothing that even approaches the stellar region.

1. In the pop medium, there were several disappointments, the first here to

be mentioned: Breaking Silence by Janis Ian. According to the liner notes, and reviews, she--having been absent from the recording scene for a long while--actually took out a mortgage on her house to help finance the making of this album. The title seemed to refer to the fact that she indeed has not recorded in a good while; it also perhaps refers to the fact that she, in this album, comes out as openly gay. (Well; actually openly bisexual.) But as far as I am concerned, this album would have better been titled Breaking Wind, because although it had excellent sonics, the lyrics were dumb, and the melodies redundant. There were some instances of excellent guitar work and impressive bass work, but overall there just wasn't enough in this album to keep me engaged or interested, much less earn my praise.

2. Devout Catalyst by Ken Nordine. The two tracks with Tom Waits were nice, and one other was all right, but generally it was just Nordine going through the motions of reciting some trite poetry he had written. The best part was the music backup--Jerry Garcia on guitar carefully making sure to indulge only in understatement, and then there was a string bass player who was wonderful. (However, if he was named on the album, I could not espy the reference.) Nordine has done some excellent recordings in years of yore (of long yore!), but this recent recording was, as the liner notes stated, a cleaning of the vocal stovepipes. This is all well and fine, but the cleaning wasn't enough, if no one got around to lighting a fire.

3. Mary O'Hara: At The Royal Festival Hall. Hers is a pure soprano with a very nice vibrato, but there is too little control over movement from one range to another, the enunciation is poor, and once again I tried to like Irish music and failed. Part of the problem with this recording was that, despite Mary O'Hara's dabbling in Gaelic, her voice just didn't sound Irish most of the time.

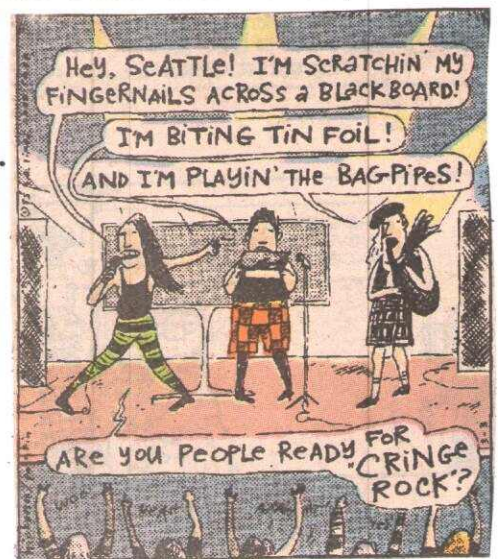
4. This Is Me by Randy Travis. The songs are generally bland, the recorded sound is as hard as a hammer on ice, and Randy Travis at times sounded almost bored. There were two decent songs: "Oscar the Angel" and "The Box" both appealed, but two songs do not a successful album make.

So now we come to the worst recordings of the year, and while some people refer to me as "Baumli, the critic from hell," and while it therefore might seem that I would most enjoy writing this section, the truth is, when the worst is as bad as these that were the worst, well, I just can't muster much enthusiasm.

1. Pat Benatar: Interview Picture Disc. In this interview she came across as an empty-headed bimbo trying to sound profound. But trying didn't get her past sounding silly, juvenile, irrelevant. I've liked some of her rock music, but she should stick to singing and not try to act like a guru or philosopher. This LP itself was one of those with a large picture of Pat Benatar on it, and it might have eventually been worth some money, but I gave it away and was glad to be rid of it. Worth noting, too, is the fact that the interview was just so difficult to listen to. It took place in a restaurant, and along with the voices, there was the clink of silverware, glasses, the sound of chairs scraping, and while what she was saying wasn't worth hearing, the task was made even more onerous by the fact that one had to strain to hear what wasn't worth hearing.

2. Cafe on the Corner by Sawyer Brown. I had heard the album's self-titled song on the radio, liked it, and thought I would like it much more on my stereo, i.e., on a good sound system. Not so. The song was bright, hard, and the vocals were poorly done--bad enunciation, the tenor voice sounding more like a grunting, the songs having boring melodies and boring lyrics. The one song I had liked had too much treble edge, and so I got rid of the CD, once again learning that just because something appeals at one listening on the radio, this does not mean it deserves to live in your music room.

3. Why Not Me by The Judds was probably the worst of these three. This thing actually won a Grammy, and I felt that I should at least get to know this group. But oh those voices! These two women could not finish a syllable with its consonant. For example, it wasn't until I looked at the CD's liner notes while the song was playing that I managed to discern that "Love Is a Lie" was actually "Love Is Alive." The backup band was

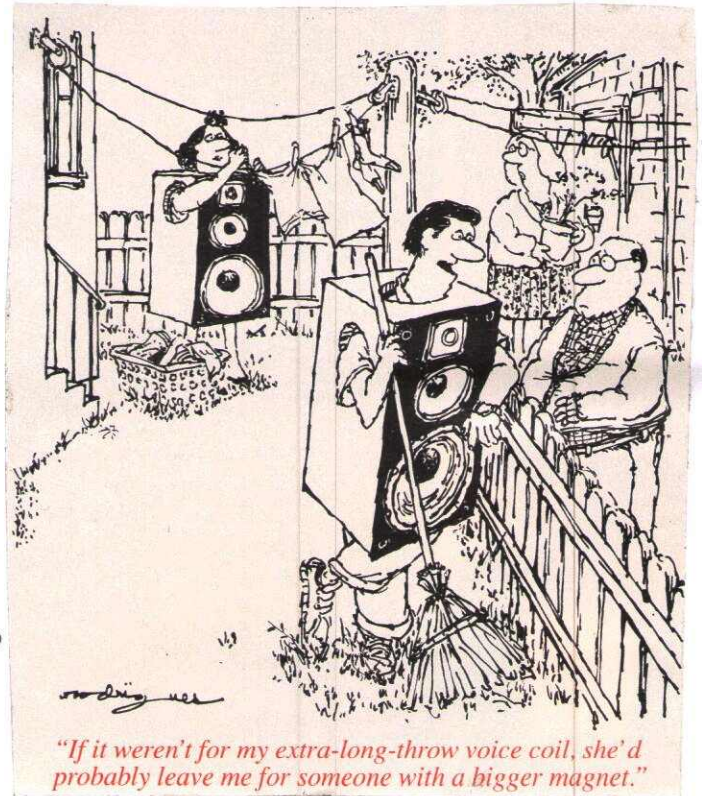


meandering and uncertain, and the songs were just plain uninteresting. The only one on the album that was actually done well was the old standard "Endless Sleep." But one song well done does not for a decent album make. So how, do tell me, is it that this album won a Grammy?

There are a few recordings which warrant comment because of certain noteworthy qualities, even though they do not fit into any of the above categories. They are:

1. Symphonies Nos. 31, 35, & 39 by Mozart, played by the Orchestra de la Suisse Romande and conducted by Sir Thomas Beecham. This way of interpreting the symphonies was most unusual. It was scarcely classical--in the strict meaning of the word. Rather, it was, if not rococo, then quite baroque sounding. The approach was so florid as to almost be erotic, and it was nothing less than amazing the way the entire orchestra attained a coherent coloratura in the third movement of No. 35. While I do readily admit that this approach does not comprise my recording of choice for these symphonies, it is a unique, engaging, even instructive approach nonetheless.

2. Harpsichord Sonatas by Padre Antonio Soler played by Virginia Black. Hers was a very aggressive style, but with a phrasing and emphasis unlike any other virtuoso when it comes to these works. There are better versions available, but this one is worth hearing for its unique interpretation. And since this Soler is one of my very favorite composers who ever lived, I am always open to a new approach to his works. (I realize that I just wrote "this" Soler. I am distinguishing him from Martin y Soler.)



1. In the jazz medium, I encountered an amazing LP--one of those 180-gram audiophile pressings (but which, as is too often the case with these supposedly deluxe pressings, has too many ticks and pops). It is called Super Bass and the main bassist on it is Ray Brown, but John Clayton is doing much of the work also. It's hard to follow who is and who isn't playing; for example, on one work, "Happy Days Are Here Again," there are no fewer than ten basses at once! I think highly of Ray Brown, and was impressed by the skill of the other bass players, but in an odd way the entire album irritated because these double basses all (except for Ray Brown's) had very small, light strings. These are conducive to this kind of fast extemporizing, but the tone can start to sound like a huge hive of large angry hornets buzzing at different pitches while going off in different directions, instead of like those big stringed boxes of wood which to me make a double bass.

2. Oscar Peterson and the Bassists Ray Brown, Niels Pedersen: Montreux '77. It was good, it wasn't bad, it was a disappointment considering what I had hoped for. Peterson, one of my favorite jazz pianists, playing with two basses at the same time! And two of that caliber? I thought it would be a great performance. And at times it was great indeed. But there were problems. Ray Brown, whose music came from the right, was too often a bit clumsy, his intonation precise but the individual tone of each note too bloated. Pedersen did his usual magic with solos, but his bass sounded too thin, and there was a very irritating buzz on or in his instrument during much of his playing. I could not be sure what was causing it; perhaps it was a light string wound loosely buzzing against the fingerboard, or it might have been that his fingernails were too long--buzzing against the strings as they vibrated.

If Oscar Peterson's playing was brilliant at times, he too often neglected his own playing while (it seemed) trying to coordinate the two basses. Moreover, whether it was from microphone placement or problems with mike hook-up, the piano was out of phase with the basses, and this definitely made listening difficult.

All in all, the recording appealed, but was irritating. I gave it away to someone who, ignoring my warning, approached the recording with the same optimism I had. (And came away with a similar disappointment.)

3. Feels Like Home by Cassandra Vasik. Next to Holly Cole, this woman is

my favorite Canadian jazz vocalist (albeit not much recorded). On this album she does her part so well, and yet is recorded so badly. Her voice is miked out of phase with the other instruments, and some of the other instruments seem not quite in phase with each other (which could be caused, not by miking, but by how they are placed), and in one song a timpani (one can't be sure though; it may be a bass drum, or even a string bass) is so perfectly out of phase with everything else that is going on in the song that one can't even be sure what the song is supposed to be. Cassandra needs to take a trip to Nashville or Los Angeles and let a good team record and produce her. If she doesn't, and sticks with this kind of record making, she is soon going to be buried.

In the popular medium, I listen to not many recordings, and I come to them with relatively low, or uncertain, expectations. So I often am not disappointed, nor am I surprised, nor do I come away having much of a need for comment. But I will comment on two:

1. Stones in the Road by Mary Chapin Carpenter. I have certainly liked some of this woman's songs, but this album is rather different from her usual country style. It is more a folk sound, and was criticized by some reviewers for this. I would not criticize it on this account, although I do confess that it makes her sound unfamiliar enough one has to assess her anew. Here she has a very fine voice, of pleasant tonality and unusual control (for her). When she has sense enough to keep that awful drummer out of the picture, and rely primarily on her acoustic guitar, the results can be quite stunning. She has, in the past, won three Grammy awards (although I could never quite see her having that kind of caliber); she will not win a Grammy with this album, but it is worth hearing a couple of times. It is thoughtful, and shows a different side to this fine singer.

2. Sweetheart's Dance by Pam Tillis. This one is better than her two earlier albums, especially in terms of the sheer singing--which is melodic, powerful, and at times emotionally gripping. But is it really better? The singing and musicianship are better, but the songs themselves were a marked diminution in quality from what is on her two earlier albums, so perhaps it isn't quite as good as what she had already done. It is a difficult musical journey to assess. Better musically in every way except that the songs are worse--much worse, than what she had done before. Both rewarding and disappointing.

I can't believe I am going to do this. Having done my usual--to comment on certain recordings I have heard--I am going to here add a postscript. It came about because, thinking of that Ken Nordine recording and how Jerry Garcia was the best part of it, caused me to comment on a small incident which transpired (no; it didn't transpire--it occurred) many years ago. Relating this incident to a friend got me to thinking about it, and this caused me to relate it to another friend, who relayed the matter to a friend of his, and soon I was being asked, over and over, about that incident. And believe me, it is not worth talking about over and over. So I shall here write about it, once, and if people want to hear me talk about the situation again I can refer them to the pages of this edition of The Aviary, they can read the pertinent pages, and then shut up about the matter now and forever amen.

It happened at an event that took place in a tiny town down in the southeast corner of Nebraska.



The town was Brownsville (or it might have been "Brownville," although my memory opts for the former). The event was called The Brownsville Bluegrass Festival. Just driving there was difficult, because Brownsville is so tiny that it isn't even listed on most road maps. It is close to an Auburn, Nebraska. That is how I would find my way there. The festival happened during the summer, and I went there several summers with The Country Playboys, a group I played with now and then (and regret that I didn't get to play with more!). The town had a bar; this I remember, and I doubt it had a grocery store. The festival took place at a campground on the outskirts of the town down along a small river, and hundreds of people would converge on this location for the festival. There were

contests, the winners being chosen by the amount of applause they received from the crowd. There were concerts by a select few of the best groups. And mainly the festival had almost nothing to do with bluegrass music. Maybe at one time bluegrass had been a major component, but by the time I was attending, it was almost all country music. And as for the occurrence, I don't quite remember when it happened, but likely it was somewhere between 1968 and 1972. What went on mainly at these festivals was the "jamming," which involved circles of musicians playing together, the best musicians at the center, the young kids learning their instruments on the outside, and then those listening pressing as close as they could. There might be two dozen such circles, all well separated, by ten o'clock at night. There were plug-ins, since most groups had electric instruments, but they played at relatively low volume and people could be part of one group without feeling bothered by the music of other circles. Then there was the event which had already become the least popular attraction, and this involved paying to have a "big-name" group come in. Some of these groups I had never heard of. Once it was the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, and although I did not hear their concert, I did happen upon them out in the woods when they were practicing together and they introduced themselves. The concert which pertains to this topic, however, involved The Grateful Dead. Or something like that.

I write "something like that" because by the time I got to the festival, there was much anger in the air, because only one member of The Grateful Dead had shown up for this concert. And the anger was fast becoming open hostility toward this one member, whose name was Jerry Garcia. I had some notion of who The Grateful Dead were, but had never been interested in this group. And I had no idea of who Jerry Garcia was, and didn't care. The patriarchs of the festival were angry because they had paid for The Grateful Dead to come, although their agent had been on the phone and had pointed out that this wasn't true and they would have to pay the one person he had sent. I saw him. He was a little older than me, his hair almost black (although this isn't the case in pictures I've since seen of him), youthful looking, and also very lonely looking given the hostility. He had maybe 15 to 20 fans with him, but they were pretty much staying in their tents over at the campground site, and he was walking about listening to the musicians. I was playing with a country group I didn't even know the name of--jamming, as we did, in the middle of a hot afternoon, and he came walking by carrying his electric guitar in its case. He stopped and watched the group, and then I became aware he was watching me. Maybe I looked friendly. Unlike virtually all country players at the time, I had a beard. He also had a beard. Also I was playing through a Fender Dual-Showman amplifier, which pretty much was the deluxe bass amp of the time, so it by itself got people's attention. Plus there was my gorgeous Gibson EB-3 bass. Also, and perhaps mainly, ^{he} was something which often caused people to stop and watch me; namely, having trained on the double bass, when I used an electric I strapped it on upright. Maybe I also got attention because I was (if I may say so without boasting) a very good bass player. (I also would later realize, from an album cover I saw, that I was playing the same exact bass and running through the same exact amplifier that his own bass player used. So maybe this was why he stopped to watch.) So he watched, I played, and he took out his guitar--an electric Gibson SG which was the same color as my bass, and is shaped almost exactly like my bass--and began strumming along even though he wasn't plugged into any amplifier. After a couple more songs, the group I was with sort of disbanded, while other musicians were stepping up, one of them with a double bass, so I unplugged and put my bass in its case. That was when he came up to me. He politely introduced himself, and explained his predicament. He was interested in bluegrass music, that was why he had agreed to come for a low price, but the contract hadn't stipulated the entire band, or so his agent said--he hadn't seen the contract, and so here he was, he was supposed to give a concert, and this wasn't a bluegrass festival as far as he could tell, it was mainly country. So he was going to go out on that stage, and ... well, did I know much bluegrass? I was candid. I told him that was one kind of music I most definitely did not like. I preferred country, and mainly what I played was jazz. Did I play rock? He asked this, and I told him I had, and still did occasionally when the right job came along, but I didn't much care for it anymore. I mainly played jazz. So he screwed up his courage and presented his request. He was to give a concert. Only 45 minutes' worth, but obviously the people here weren't much liking him. He had set in on a few groups already, and nobody seemed to like his style, so would I consider backing him while he did sort of a bluegrass-rock medley of songs? It was a moment of weakness, I suppose. And I did feel sorry for him. The fellow looked cowed, and the hostility of the others toward him was obvious. Plus I didn't know anything about him personally, likely wouldn't have even recognized a song by The Grateful Dead, and had I known what his music

was like I might have turned him down. Had it been Jimi Hendrix I would have refused, because I knew how Jimi sounded and I hated that sound. But I didn't have any commitments for the afternoon, he was to go on in about an hour, and he looked scared and needy. I agreed to do it.

I lugged my big amp over behind the stage, and he lugged his Fender Twin-Reverb back there too, and so we waited. We exchanged a few words. He said something to the effect that if he had known this was country, he would have brought his banjo or his steel guitar. I remember making a jocular comment something like, "So you play guitar, banjo, and steel guitar too? Is that all?" He grinned and said he could play a little harmonica, and I said, "Yeah, can't we all." He then grinned and said he wanted to learn to play the dulcimer, and I said, "Too easy." So thus we relaxed, and then it was time for the big concert of the festival, and we carried our amps out on stage and got set up in the 10 to 15 minutes we were given for that. Already, before we began, there was booing, catcalls, along with a little cheering from his fans who were definitely not going to miss this part of the festival.

An aside is here in order. I told a fellow here in Saint Louis about this event, and he said it could not have been The Grateful Dead during this time because Jerry Garcia was with a different band during this time. Well, I don't know. I'm quite sure it was The Grateful Dead who had been hired to do the festival, because this was what was being talked about, and I had heard of them. But maybe they were not the band Jerry Garcia was usually with. I don't know. I don't much care. I relay this story so I won't have to tell it again ... and again. All I know is that The Grateful Dead was supposed to be there, they weren't, but their lead guitar player was. I only remember the time frame vaguely; I can't be specific about which summer it was. And for all I know Jerry Garcia wasn't The Grateful Dead's lead player at that time, or maybe he was only part of the time. All I know is that I did play with him.

And yes; there we were on the stage, and we both cut loose. And that, artistically, is about the summation our playing deserves: "cut loose." Because all we did was jam, as it is called, and it was indeed a mixture of him playing bits of bluegrass, bits of country, bits of rock, bits of jazz, and long stretches of something that could have been called anything although much of it didn't deserve being called anything and shouldn't have been played, as far as I am concerned. But I did my best to follow him, filled in well I think, added something to his something enough that at times it amounted to a little something, and it went on nonstop for the full 45 minutes. I don't know if that was his usual style, or maybe he didn't want to stop for fear of getting a round of catcalls. He played skillfully, though to me it was mostly quite uninteresting, and believe me, when you're a bass player doing your best to fill in the gaps those gaps begin to feel like a void and your arms and hands begin to feel like lead. The only time the crowd seemed to actually warm to him was when he went into "Wildwood Flower." It sounded gorgeous, and then he did a variation, and I did a solo-- repeating the song's melody and also his variation (not easily done, I assure you), and then he went away from the "theme and variations" approach to some extemporizing that was so far afield one scarcely would know it was still working with the "Wildwood Flower" theme, and then he was no longer working with that theme, and he just went on and on. He had actually gotten applause from the entire crowd during that four minutes or so of doing the theme and the first variation of "Wildwood Flower" (with the bass doing it too), but he soon completely lost that crowd and never got them back. He ended. We ended. He was very relaxed by now. I was very tired by now. And the crowd gave him what I would have expected:

booing, catcalls, cheering and female screaming from his own fans, but nothing was thrown. The man announcing came on the stage and said something like, "Let's give a big hand for Jerry Garcia!"



but, except for his loyal fans, that crowd interpreted this as a cue to fall silent and did. We quickly unplugged, I put my bass in its case, and usually in such situations I took my bass off first and then came back for the amp head and last the amp's speaker cabinet. But as I straightened up from shutting that case, a man maybe 20 feet from the stage yelled, "Get the hell off that stage! Both of you!" Our eyes locked, I glared, I almost gave him the finger, but instead I did something else I was good

at doing in such situations. It was a macho display of strength. My way of being a redneck, and letting someone know that if they wanted to fight, then here is what they would be up against. I was strong as a bull back in those days, and when I carried that Fender Dual-Showman cabinet off the stage, I usually picked it up by both handles. But I was capable of tipping it slightly so I could get a hand under its bottom at the center, reaching over with my left arm to steady it as I slipped my right hand under its bottom, and then just raising it in the air to about shoulder level and carrying it that way. I had once seen another fellow do this, and it was impressive, so once in a while I would do it myself--just to show off. Or, as in this case, to challenge the fellow. I picked the cabinet up this way, easily, and carried it off stage. Then I came back out for the bass and amp head, and our eyes were locked the whole time. I glared at him as I picked up the bass and amp head, and he wisely looked away. And so there I was, having stared down a belligerent redneck after flexing my muscles in a very visible way, and I was backstage with a very befuddled Jerry Garcia. "I didn't think we did so bad," he said, and I answered that the crowd obviously didn't like us. He replied by saying, "I should have brought my steel." (I relayed this to one of the people I talked to about this matter over the last few days, and he--having once been a "Deadhead," one of those people who followed the Grateful Dead from concert to concert--declared that I must be wrong in what I am remembering. He says that Jerry Garcia never played the steel guitar in concert, and considering himself a knowledgeable historian of the Grateful Dead, declares that Jerry Garcia never played the steel guitar. I wouldn't know. All I have to go by is what Jerry Garcia said: he had told me he could play it, and now he was saying he should have brought it. But maybe he was joking at the time, and I didn't realize it.) I shook his hand, which seemed to unsettle him, as though I were being too formal. He said something like, "Thanks for playing with me. If you're ever at a concert, come up and sit in." This was when things turned awkward. He had said, "at a concert." I went to lots of concerts, and I often sat in. I said something confused and confusing, he didn't understand why I was confused, and only as we parted ways did I realize he had meant, "If you're ever at a concert I'm playing in, come up and sit in." It was his way of showing gratitude by extending an invitation for the future, but I hadn't understood, and so we parted ways amicably but awkwardly.

I lugged my equipment back to where The Country Playboys were, and Richard, the lead singer, lead guitar player, and leader of the group, was polite but stern: "I know it ain't exactly up to me, but I'd just as soon you never did that again." Those were his words, and mine went something like, "Well, I know it is exactly up to me, and I'd just as soon I never did that again and I won't." So that smoothed things over with the group, but for the next half hour, every face I saw in the crowd was looking at me with hostility. Jerry Garcia had tucked tail and gone back to the tents where he and his friends were staying, so he wasn't around to deal with the hostile looks, but I was. For a few moments I envied him, having a place he could escape to, and the ornery thought went through me that I could maybe just go join him and his fans for the rest of the afternoon and evening, and maybe I could get a blowjob from one of those very attractive female fans who were with him. (But I let the thought go, and later that night, I got something better which wasn't an ornery thought at all, it was an ornery deed.)

Meanwhile, I was playing music again, and staring down a lot of hostile looks, but I was getting tired of staring them down and by this time it was my eyes that were looking away. About this time, a very fat, red-faced fellow who obviously was one of the fellows in charge came up to me and asked me if I was a member of The Grateful Dead. I told him I wasn't--that I had only met Jerry Garcia about an hour before we played, and he had asked me to play with him. "So you aren't a member?"



I reaffirmed that I wasn't. The fellow nodded smugly and smirked, "So it's like we thought. He came alone and not with any of the band." I realized what he was doing. He was making sure none of the band had come; he was laying the groundwork for getting out of paying Jerry Garcia. If my musical sympathies were not with Garcia, my sympathies as a musician were, because I had certainly been in situations where the people hiring had tried (and too often succeeded) with getting out of paying. So I didn't like this fellow one bit, but at the same time, I was feeling pissed off toward Jerry Garcia for the irrational reason that here I was, getting the crowd's hostility, while he had managed to get away from it. I didn't want to spend the rest of my time at this otherwise very enjoyable festival feeling that hostility, so I immediately hit upon the opportunity for using this exchange as a way of redeeming myself in the eyes of, if not the entire crowd, then with at least some of the people. So I added, "Like I say, I'm not a member of the band. I just played with him to be polite, since he asked me to, but I wouldn't play with him again. I would rather give a blowjob to a snake." The fellow laughed loudly at that, and walked away. And sure enough, during the next hour, at least a dozen people, with friendly, forgiving grins on their faces came up to me and said something like, "We hear you said you'd rather give a blowjob to a snake than play with that guy again." I would just grin and reaffirm what I had said. That expression, "I would rather give a blowjob to a snake," was original, as far as I know. It's possible I had heard it somewhere, but I think that was the first time it was ever said, although it isn't the last time, because it was "catchy" enough it apparently entered the cultural mainstream, at least to some degree, and it has been said back to me a few times over the years.

A very few years after this incident, The Brownville Bluegrass Festival came to an end. I myself had stopped attending; I no longer played with The Country Playboys and was back with jazz groups. Explanations as to why the Festival ended varied somewhat, but the theme was discernable. One matron put it as, "The hippies started comin' and they'd dance bare nekked out in front of everybody." I remember exclaiming something to the effect, "No clothes at all!" and she replied, "It was the girls. They'd be bare nekked from the waist up." That was the motif. I heard it several times. "Condoms on the ground everywhere around their tents." "Rubbers on the ground and the guy that cleaned the park wouldn't even pick 'em up." The Hell's Angels came one summer. They didn't

cause any trouble, except to alarm the local folk (and probably excite more than a few, who had itchy fingers for their deer rifles). But basically it was obvious that this bluegrass festival that had become a country festival began going back to being bluegrass, and this was because of the younger people. The older people did not like this musical direction, and the hippies liked bluegrass, so they began coming in droves. And it only took a few condoms found on the ground to horrify the locals, and only a few incidents of girls spotted being bare-breasted to horrify the elder matrons, and so the patriarchs of the festival called an end to a good thing gone bad. And Brownville, Nebraska went back to being a tiny one-bar town with fewer than 200 residents, and, unless my memory is wrong, not even a grocery store. It no longer had the distinction of, once a year, hosting a fine country/bluegrass festival on the banks of the Missouri River.

If you are a discerning reader, you will note that I began by describing this locale as "Brownsville, Nebraska," but now am noting that it is Brownville. I realized I had an authority I could phone, and did so just minutes ago. She is the wife of one of the musicians who was in The Country Playboys (they disbanded years ago), and she remembered it all very well. She even has brochures advertising the Festival. She told me where to find it on the map, and sure enough, there it was--is. It's on the map, even though it isn't in the index for the map. Brownville, Nebraska is about a 10-minute drive west of I-29 on US 136. It is situated on the Missouri River. I above noted that the campground was near a small river. It was indeed a small river, apparently a little tributary to the Missouri River.

That all happened more than two decades ago. I had pretty much forgotten about it. I had played with the lead guitarist of The Grateful Dead. I didn't even know if he was still with The Grateful Dead; after all, groups lose members, who get replaced. Little did I know that Jerry Garcia had gone on to become the most important member of, even the defining persona for, The Grateful Dead. It was after Marion was born, around 1991 or 1992, that I learned from a neighbor in Carbondale



that Jerry Garcia was a household word for many people. Her husband had once been a "Deadhead" who followed the band, and he was still a fan. She was a born-again Christian who considered them evil. So this was a considerable (and vociferous) point of contention between this couple. She, pointing out to me the evils of The Grateful Dead (with her husband present, of course), told about a friend who had had a bad year, and described it that way because she had been divorced, her father had died, and Jerry Garcia had been sick (with diabetes, if I recall). In fact he apparently had been gravely ill, had almost died, and this woman's friend had found this to be just as awful as her divorce and her father's death. My neighbor believed that anyone with a scheme of values this skewered had to be in dire need of a spiritual home, and this was why she felt so negative about The Grateful Dead, and ... by implication, although she didn't quite say it, this was why she didn't exactly approve of everything about her husband. So this is part of the reason I never even had much reason to think about having played with Jerry Garcia. Not until 1991 or 1992 did I even discover that, in the musical world, he was someone of some importance ... or, fame.

One thing I do remain rather curious about. I wonder if he got paid for that job. I doubt it. Those townsfolk were cer-



tainly indignant on that score. I suspect Garcia's agent made a few irate phone calls, and then gave up, while the locals smugly felt that a dose of justice was righteously doled out.

Looking back, I do, now, wish I had a tape of that brief excursion into "Wildwood Flower." I am mainly interested in what I played. I want to think it was a pretty spectacular performance, considering that it came from a bass, but at the same time I am not unaware that hearing it might be appalling. So I shall content myself with memories which tell me that, in that situation, what the guitar player did could have been done by many guitar players, but what the bass player did was supreme.

So thus it is: my story about having played with Jerry Garcia. Thus it is. There it is ... was. And that's all it was. It wasn't a "happening." It happened. It wasn't an "event." It was an occurrence. And as for Jerry Garcia's playing, I wasn't impressed. Not then, not now, not since. Besides, before I got around to writing this Aviary for 1994, Jerry Garcia, as of 1995, would become a corpse. And I'm not. Yet.

One more addendum is in order here, this by way of postscript. I above referred to Cassandra Vasik as my favorite Canadian jazz singer, except for Holly Cole whom I rank first. Well yes; I do know she isn't really a jazz singer. She is country. Through and true. I was indulging in a little irony. But haven't I learned by now that, when Baumli indulges in irony, few readers get it? Or even suspect it? So thus I acknowledge that yes, of course, she isn't jazz. Isn't even close to being jazz unless you are perceptive enough to realize that she ... but forget it. If I have to explain it, then you'll never appreciate it.

*** PUBLICATIONS: THERE AND HERE ***

It happened again. The number of publications I claimed credit for in the last Aviary is wrong. I found out that something of mine had been published which I did not know about. Editors and publishers like to do this, it seems. I submit something, it lies unread for months or years, and then, when published, I am not informed. Or, as is more often the case, they take something of mine which has already been published elsewhere and reprint it in their own publication, never bothering to ask my permission, or even inform me. Only later, by accident, do I find out about the new publication. Maybe I should be flattered that the publisher at last got around to my piece, or that a different publisher pirated it. But at this point in my publishing life, having passed the 200 mark, I don't much care one way or the other. If they want to publish me without my knowing about it, well, at least someone out there thinks my words are

worth being read. As it has turned out, the year 1994 has proved to be a busy year for publishing. A total of 16 pieces were published this year, bringing the total number of published pieces (which I know about) to 214. This seems like a large number, but when I look back at some of those publications of years past it is embarrassing. (Actually it is worse than embarrassing; it can at times be depressing. To think I wasted my time writing all those letters to editors, all those responses to people who criticized what I wrote, all those little "news pieces" which pertained to what was going on with the men's liberation work I was doing. How irrelevant it all is now!)

I hope I will not, one day, find myself looking back at what I wrote this year and feeling the same way. And actually I don't believe I will. Despite 1994 being a terribly busy year, busy with many matters that have nothing to do with writing or publishing, I managed to write and publish some of the best works I have put out in years. So whereas it has been customary for me to make mention of what I believe is my best published work for the year, I must say that this year it is tempting to list several works. But I will try for modesty, and list only one. It was an article entitled: "Shura Gehrman: Arie Antiche: The First Voice." I am proud of this piece. It comprises the "liner notes" for Shura Gehrman's Arie Antiche (with Adrian Farmer on piano), and thus my writing is in company with what is perhaps the most important set of recordings in all the history of recorded music. The music is just stunningly beautiful, and I daresay the liner notes do the compilation justice. In fact, a member of the London Symphony Orchestra's administrative staff wrote me a very nice letter which read, in part, "Your article about this amazing 'first voice' is the most scholarly commentary inside a CD I have ever come across. Obviously you have keen musical sensibilities, and your writing style is impeccable. Are you an American citizen?" The sad irony of that question was not lost on me.

For those of you who would wish to purchase this CD, its "bar code" number is: 0 83603 53952 8 and it is on the Nimbus Records label, which comes out of Great Britain.

Of course, writing gets done before it is published; and recordings are made before they become available in retail sales. So the appearance of this CD in 1994 was sadly ironic because Shura Gehrman, who had seemed to be in relatively good health, became ill one day, incurred a rapid series of strokes, and within hours passed away. His day of passing was January 28, 1994, and it was a sad day for me personally and also it marked a great loss for the musical world. I am grateful he gave the musical world so much in his 69 years of life, that he gave so much to me personally, and that his amazing charisma touched the lives (or, I should write, "inspired and altered the lives") of so many people. With this sentiment in mind, it behooves (nay; it is a duty beckoning) me to here publish a letter I once sent to Shura. Allow me, thus, to publish it after its initial bestowing, as an "open letter" which even deserves a title:

**A CONTEST OF COMESTIBLES
(AND)
THE SUPREME VOCAL RECORDING**

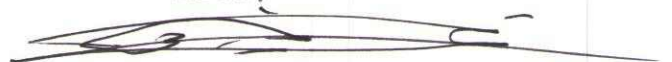
January 17, 1994

Dear Shura,

This afternoon I sat down with a portion of freshly made bitter-sweet chocolate, and ate it while listening to your CD of Mussorgsky's Songs and Dances of Death. The competition was fierce, but at the end of the dualistic consummation, I decided that the performance was slightly better than the chocolate.

Is it rash to make categorical superlative claims? My claim: Shura Gehrman's recording of Mussorgsky's Songs and Dances of Death is the greatest vocal recording ever made. Period.

Love,


Francis Baumli



I would have loved the man's music even if I had hated him personally. And I would have loved the man mightily even if I had hated his music. What a redolent relationship that was. How truly rich and fertile, even though we related "from afar," what with him living in Wales, and me living in (the saying of it seems so truly inappropriate here!) Southern Illinois.

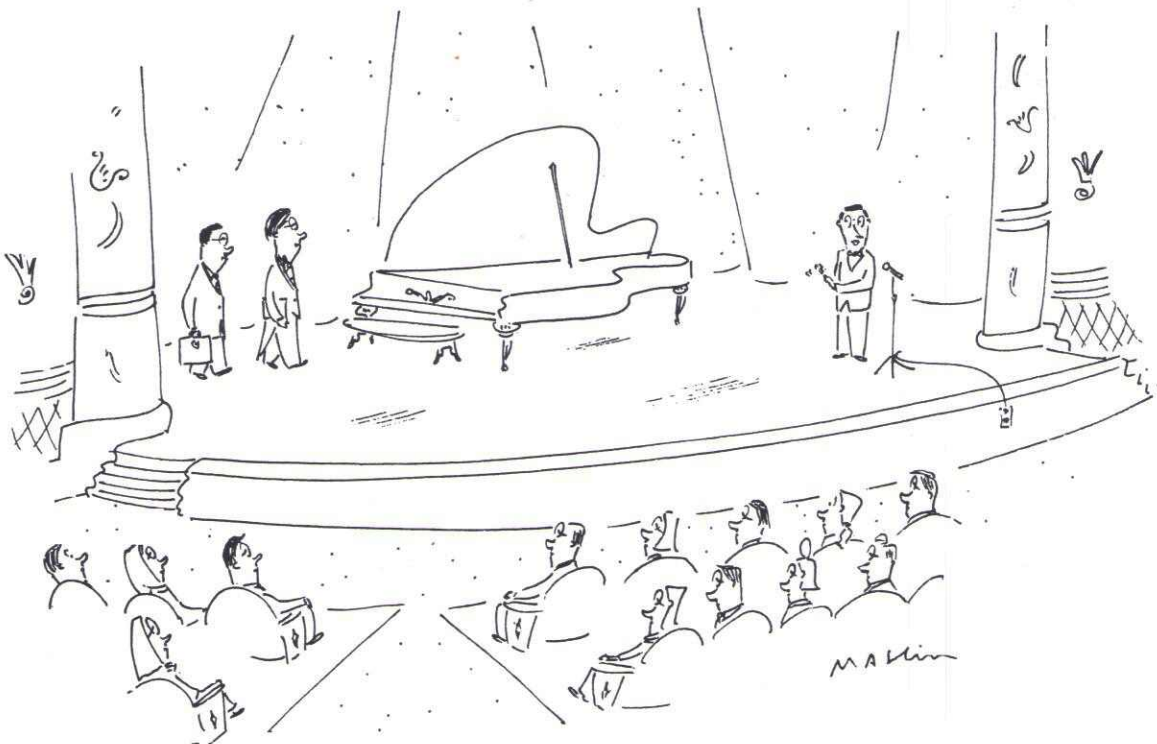
My association with Nimbus Records scarcely entailed my being the court hagiographer for Shura Gehrman, but the truth is, I could not have done anything but welcome even more opportunities for extending my highest appreciation at every opportunity. I contributed to the liner notes for his 1994 CD entitled: Fauré and Duparc, but so did many others, and hence, one small proffering which I had penned for that album did not make it into its booklet simply because there wasn't enough room. Several of my friends have requested copies of what I wrote, so I here forestall future requests by printing what I wrote. It was written, somewhat in haste, on December 16, 1993, and I here publish it with the title I supplied for it at that time:



NOTES TO SONGS BY FAURÉ AND DUPARC SUNG BY SHURA GEHRMAN

Shura Gehrman has no equal when it comes to what I call the forte ed piano vocal technique--the ability to masterfully present a song's entire dynamic range: loud when necessary, soft where appropriate, both extremes performed with equal ease and control. In Songs by Fauré and Duparc, Shura Gehrman displays even more mastery of dynamic control than usual, especially at the pianissimo end of the spectrum. In the softest of passages there are times when his voice is almost a whisper; yet it always retains full resonance, clear diction, and more authority than most singers can muster even at full volume.

Stated simply: Shura Gehrman, our century's greatest basso, in his Songs by Fauré and Duparc, gives us the best recording ever done of these works. The Nimbus sonics are perfect; it seems as though one is attending a live performance while seated no more than ten feet away. And the piano accompaniment is truly exemplary, displaying virtuosic technique, equal companionship with the voice, and an unremitting solicitude for the aspirations of each song.



*"Won't you please welcome Edwin Nells—accompanied,
as always, by his attorney."*

I readily admit that my audiophilia is a strange, expensive, even degrading perversion. One can become too interested in the sound and neglect the music. Then there is the obsession with putting together a better and better system for the sake of better sound. This system is no longer a "stereo" or a "hi-fi;" it is a system, and that is something sacrosanct. It also is a maudlin stone around one's neck, because the trouble (and money) involved with maintaining and improving it takes an unjust toll on one's resources. However, there are the rewards--musical riches and glories! And yes; these I cherish, and so I remain attached to my perversion. I even write about it. The below article was done for The Absolute Sound, but unfortunately was submitted when they fell into financial ruin (temporarily), so the article was not published. Until now:

**THE HARRY PEARSON REPORT
ON AMPLIFIERS:
A REPLY**

by Francis Baumli, Ph.D.

Harry Pearson, editor-in-chief of The Absolute Sound, published in its issues 90, 91, 94, and 96 a four-part essay on the sound of amplifiers and High End listening.¹ In this lengthy treatise he negotiated terrain that has been tentatively explored, but never really mapped, by many audio writers. Mr. Pearson, in his essays, has attempted to provide us with a map. If his cartography, at present, lacks detail and fails to be comprehensive, this attests not to his shortcomings as an audio scientist, but rather, to the fact that he has shown the courage to publish the outlines of a theory still in the making.

I wish to address two main points which Mr. Pearson discusses in his essays, proffering my own caveats, detractions, endorsements, addenda.

The first point involves Mr. Pearson's worthy lament that recorded sound, i.e., reproduced sound, simply does not match the original performance. To wit: "Our best systems can reproduce only shards, or fragments, of the orchestra's gestalt."² Indeed he is correct. There are occasional audiophiles who--either deluded or deaf--say to their listening companions, "When the music starts close your eyes, and you won't be able to tell that it isn't a live performance." But anyone who has ever attended a live performance knows the difference. In fact, the difference is most obvious when you try to make the opposite comparison: Go hear a great symphony orchestra performing in a fine hall, seat yourself front center, close your eyes, and try to imagine it is a great stereo system you are hearing. It can't be done. At present no stereo system can even come close to reproducing the live performance. (Which, however, is not to say that every live performance is always better than a good recording. More about this anon.)

Harry Pearson, while conceding that the very ambitious goal--faithful reproduction of the live performance--is not really possible, nevertheless believes that High End audio should pursue a more modest goal for home stereo. This is, "not the reproduction per se of the sound in Carnegie or at Tanglewood, but rather its 'presence' and 'naturalness,' just those qualities the live experience has in abundance, no matter what the venue."³

I take mild exception to Mr. Pearson's generous judgement that any live performance, regardless of the setting, has a sense of "presence" and "naturalness." Maybe Mr. Pearson has been spoiled by Carnegie and Tanglewood. Both settings have their problems, which Mr. Pearson acknowledges, but both allow any fine orchestra, no matter where you are seated, to come across splendidly. However, from my many experiences listening to symphonic music in a goodly number of orchestra halls, I know that this magic is not always possible in live performances. For example, Atlanta Symphony Hall has many dead spots which completely ruin the experience for anyone unfortunate enough to be seated in one of them. Powell Symphony Hall in St. Louis has one very pronounced dead spot toward the rear, audience right, about six yards in diameter. Sit there and you will hear virtually nothing. Move ten feet away in any direction, and everything comes alive again. Severance Hall in Cleveland has very poor acoustics for the audience, yet the acoustics for the musicians are perhaps better than at any other symphony hall in the world. (In fact, many musicians would assert that, in large halls, there is an inverse proportion between how well the musicians can hear the music, and how well the audience can hear it.)

So to Mr. Pearson I must address this caveat: Do not assume that just because two fine orchestral settings sound wonderful, they all do. There are problems in halls, just as there are problems in stereo systems. Hall variations can be so pronounced that occasionally a recording of a



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great performance is actually better than attending a live performance in an abominable hall. For example, something as seemingly innocuous as the way hall ambience is affected by the mere presence or absence of an audience can ruin the realism of a recording. I am not merely referring to audience noise--coughing, shuffling, etc.; rather, I am referring to an even more important variable: how fully-clothed human bodies sitting in a hall's seats affect the sound. Some of those old European halls, whose seats have cushioned bottoms but wooden backs, are especially problematic. Remove the people, and those curved wooden seat-backs become harsh, glaring reflectors. More than once, when listening to rehearsals in Europe, I have seen the musicians in the orchestra use their coats, sweaters, even the men's undershirts, to cover as many seat-backs as possible so they could hear themselves in phase with the hall's acoustics instead of the sound clashing with the reflections from the seat-backs. This "hall tweaking" does not, however, solve the problem if, at the actual performance, too many of those seats are unfilled. Especially if there is a cluster of empty seats slightly off to one side. The result is not echo; rather, it often is a smudged, smeared plethora of pseudomusical periphrases very unlike the sense of presence and realism which Mr. Pearson believes always characterizes a live performance.

Still, on this topic, Harry Pearson is, for the most part, correct. Even allowing for problems such as I have mentioned, plus all the problems with information retrieval (microphones) and storage (CDs or LPs), the playback equipment--even granting its decibel limits (what 4½-inch midrange driver can match half a dozen five-inch trumpet bells?)--rarely succeeds in reproducing that sense of fullness and immersion which an audience can experience with live orchestral music. A good, live performance is the standard by which High End reproduction should be judged, and thus far, reproduction has not at all measured up to the live performance, i.e., it is not really reproduction, it is substitution.

A reasonable goal for High End audio should be, not to match the original decibels, but to try and match the original sonic spectrum or waveform, and (just as important) try to match the original emotion. Yes; I said emotion. For example, a live performance of *Fratres* by Arvo Pärt bequeaths to me an emotional sense of inspired bliss and mortal humility. Later, when I hear this very performance reproduced on my stereo system, I again experience the inspiration, the bliss, but ... that sense of mortal humility, which is the indispensable emotional component of this piece of music, is missing. And I am left with the judgement: As long as something emotional is missing, High End audio has not done its job.

Now to my second point, which addresses what I believe is the most trenchant thesis of Mr. Pearson's essays; namely, how can we address the problems which plague High End stereo reproduction when we do not even have a common language by which to define, much less rectify, these problems? Mr. Pearson emphasizes that this paucity of shared language was most apparent in the early days of digital technology: "I found that the audio vocabulary of that day [was] useless to describe digital distortions: We had no language to describe the spectacular shortcomings of the new medium."⁴ He is right. I have read the articles of that period. Digital defenders were verbally incontinent but never articulate, while digital detractors were virtually dumb--muttering vague protests about edge, grain, fatigue, etc.

Harry Pearson believes that, since those early days of dismal digital, things have improved. Now we at least have rudimentary terminology by which to discuss the difficulties of not only digital audio but also a whole gamut of other audio issues. Still, "we have to expand our listening vocabulary"⁵ in order to evaluate the best equipment using a much more severe standard.

These ongoing difficulties with procuring a language by which to describe musical reproduction can perhaps better be tolerated if we keep in mind the fact that, for many centuries, there was a similar problem plaguing music itself. The main task which confronted Western music



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during the first millennium A.D. was to create a common and clear notational language by which to record and subsequently expand upon that music's oral tradition. Early attempts at such notation were crude, inconsistent, and by no means universally promulgated, much less accepted. When in the 6th century, Pope Gregory the First attempted, through the influence and scholarly resources of the Catholic Church, to create a language for notating music, a major step was taken. But much was yet to be done, and it was not until the middle of the next millennium that musical notation was standardized. Hence, scholarly debates rage to this day as to what was signified by those crude dashes, dots, and staves which attempted, even as late as the fourteenth century, to properly denote the intended music. When musical notation was eventually standardized, the results were profound and ubiquitous. Consequently, today, however much latitude remains for interpretative nuance, and however much controversy may yet exist about tempi and such, we nevertheless have very accurate knowledge as to what people like Tallis, Monteverdi, or Bach wanted us to hear.

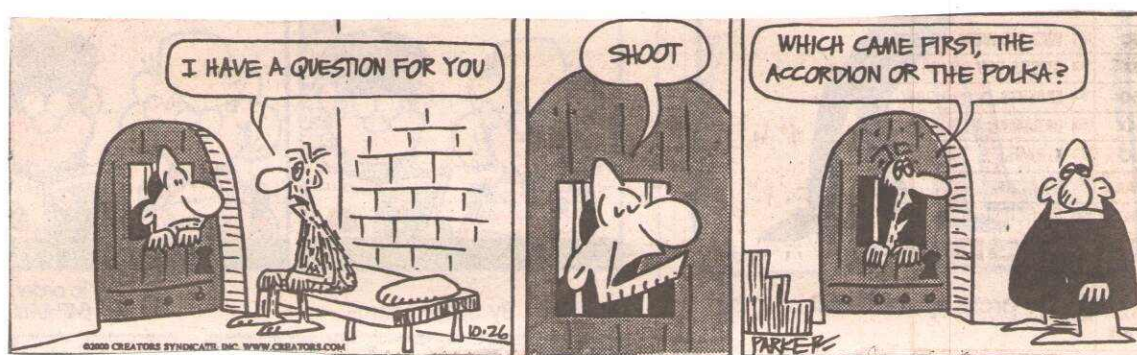
Satisfied as we are with this language for musical notation (a language which continues to expand and clarify itself), we nevertheless do not have a language for describing the qualities, subtleties, and differences which characterize reproduced music--the music that we hear on our home stereos. Words like "dark," "airy," "depth," "punch," "coherence," and such are bandied about by High End enthusiasts, but when one tries to decipher the meaning of these terms, the results are often unclear, inconsistent, and quite discouraging.

Far too many terms, although they do possess a certain degree of shared meaning, are burdened by a Babylonian plethora of interpretative differences. For example, imagine a musical anthropologist of the future trying to decipher a statement such as the following:

The Angst speaker system, though flawed by a cardboardy bass and a plummy midbass, had a pleasant if somewhat processed-sounding midrange, and a natural though occasionally edgy treble. With an extremely fast amplifier such as the Prejac, the Angst has a soundstage that is open and deep, but with a fuzzy hole in the middle the size of a soprano's bosom. Laboratory measurements showed less than 2% distortion over the speaker's claimed range, but could not account for the tumescent bloom at about 300 Hz (causing Tito Schipa to sound like an irate castrato). Measurements did reveal a sharp rise in load impedance at the 2,000 Hz level, which would explain this listener's perception that brasses lacked attack and electric guitars sounded sluggish. Quality for the money makes the Angst a decent value, although I suspect that, in this price category, most listeners would opt for the Wicca which, if darker and less predictable than the Angst, yet has an almost mucosal affinity for the inner ear, along with an uncanny ability to auscultate the soul's most sacrosanct subempyrean realms.

Or imagine a foreigner, with a dictionary (musicological or otherwise), trying to decipher the following descriptive:

In our auditioning of the Cantabile tower speakers, we concluded that while the midrange's squawk is perfectly suited for the hooting of an aging tenor, it scarcely does justice to the liquid mezzo of the Diamonds & Rust Baez. The Cantabile lends neither inspiration nor salvation to the audiophile who hungers for musical paradise. Instead it is like mediocre pornography: vaguely arousing, never satisfying. The speaker does not deserve its fine-sounding name. It would have been better christened, "Dysarthria," or, better yet, "Dysonanism." After I had sent these mutant misfits back to their maker, I



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was never so glad in my life to sit down in front of my reference speakers: the Audio Altar Reliquary Corpus 2s.

I suggest going back through the above two statements and giving attention to each individual word. Do you have an exact idea as to what each means? No. Do audiophiles, more or less, in a general way, know what they mean? Yes, if we emphasize "more or less," and "general." Still, this language is not precise, and even though we can use it, there remain ambiguity, uncertainty, confusion.

Developmentally, our language for describing the nuances of musical reproduction is in the dark ages--the medieval period--so to speak. Will Harry Pearson's encyclicals provide a nascent groundwork by which to describe both what we hear and what we fail to hear? Judging by this four-part series on High End sound, Mr. Pearson is wrestling more mightily with the task of creating a new language than anyone I have read. Yet there lurks a problem in his approach. For example, his proposal for using color terminology as a symbiology by which to describe speaker coloration at times borders on the mystigological. Witness his, "It is helpful to see these /speaker/ colorations along a scale from dark (near black) to the very white. We have sometimes appropriated the Chinese concepts of yin (the dark) and yang (the bright) to help us get a grip on 'character' and how it may be described meaningfully."⁶ He also uses terms such as "gray," "golden," and asserts that there are several shades of each color which might aptly describe the coloration of speakers or amplifiers.⁷ Are these descriptives helpful, i.e., is it possible for them to become clear, distinct, useful terms in a language about High End reproduction?

My own tendency is to believe that such terms, although not entirely antithetical to precision, will in various ways burden the task of describing speaker coloration. I do concede that such terminology will at least motivate many of us to more eagerly ponder the nature of sound, as once happened when, in Richard Selzer's short story, "Semiprivate, Female," I came across the following sentence: "He is a big man, a surgeon after all, with a clumsy face rescued by pale green eyes and by a mahogany voice which any number of nurses have said is a powerful therapy in itself."⁸

"A mahogany voice," he said, and I knew exactly what he meant. I knew that here was a voice with a complex yet pleasing timbre, a baritone both insistent and caressing, with a confident and commanding volume that shapes itself into both warmth and wisdom. All this, I knew, from that one word "mahogany."

The success of Selzer's descriptive attests to his genius as a writer. But the fertility of his descriptive--of such descriptives in general--is another question entirely: Can we, from the success of this one word, proceed with confidence as we go about trying to formulate a language, about sound, that uses color terminology?

Let us first consider one small topic in the development of color theory in physics.

Goethe was the defender of subjectivity in the study of color, and was more interested in how his theories about color might help the artist than in how they might aid the scientist. He believed that colors are phenomena which emerge when the polar opposites of light and dark are mixed in varying degrees, and his penchant was to analyze the emotional appeal of colors as they are juxtaposed on the painter's canvas.⁹ More objective, and quantifiable, measurements eventually prevailed over (but did not entirely nullify) Goethe's subjectivist theory when Newton demonstrated that white light actually contains all the colors already; a prism, rather than varying increments of darkness added to light, is the means by which to reveal all of light's colors.

So let us now utilize, as we proceed, both the subjectivist observations of Goethe, and the more objective findings of Newton.



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A study of Goethe's writings suggests that he himself had realized, to some extent, that there are sufficient similarities between color and sound to warrant comparisons between the two realms. Note his statement:

For it would not be unreasonable to compare a painting of powerful effect, with a piece of music in a sharp key; a painting of soft effect with a piece of music in a flat key, while other equivalents might be found for the modifications of these two leading modes.¹⁰

Keeping Goethe's tantalizing observation in mind, let us look at some basic experiential comparisons between sound and color.

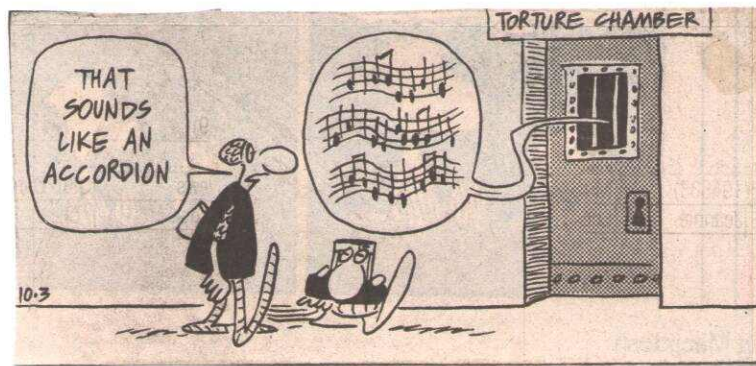
Imagine a seated person, who is looking straight ahead at a white light. Behind that white light is a string quartet giving a live performance. Our listener is looking at pure light. He is hearing pure music--the live performance. The sensory input is fully real, uncompromised, unfiltered.

But we are already overstating the case. We said, "pure," "fully real," "uncompromised." Even in the best of circumstances, we can not quite have this. There are filters, veils, even impediments in this supposedly pristine setting. Both the light and the sound are traversing a medium--space filled with air. For light, this medium is an impediment. With very few exceptions, the velocity of light is less in a material substance (and air is a material substance) than it is in a vacuum. As for sound, it depends on a transmitting medium in order to travel at all, yet its velocity varies too, depending on the density and the elasticity of the transmitting medium. Thus, light behaves optimally in a vacuum; sound can not exist in a vacuum. In the real world where viewing and listening take place, the very air about us places the subtle stamp of its personality on what we see or hear. For light, air is an intervening medium; for sound, air is a necessary but variable medium. Some of the main factors which cause such variance in the transmission of both light and sound are:

1. humidity
2. temperature
3. density of the air molecules themselves, measured as weight or barometric pressure
4. altitude
5. noise pollution, whether easily audible, or subliminal (Maybe one source of noise pollution is even that Pythagorean "harmony of the spheres," which we scarcely hear because we are hearing it all the time.)
6. particle pollution

We need not, for our analysis, enter upon an extensive explanation of each of these variables. But a few points can be made here. For example, a friend of mine who is a musician once showed me, mathematically, that a speaker has to work 5 times harder when the temperature is 85 and the humidity is 85, than when the temperature is 70 and the humidity is 50. Particle pollution, quite obviously, is the main variable that will scatter photons, degrading the white light our viewer is looking at. And I am convinced that particle pollution--and I mean nothing more than the presence of small bits of dust hovering in the air, visible in a shaft of sunlight coming into a relatively dark room--degrades sound, most noticeable as a slight veiling of the upper midrange. (In our listening room we use an electrostatic air cleaner, as well as a humidifier and a dehumidifier--one of which is almost always on. We keep the temperature at about 72, the humidity a little below 60, and the air as clean as possible. These various machines, of course, are all turned off during actual listening so as to eliminate their noise pollution.)

Eschewing further analysis of the above-mentioned variables, suffice it to say that any comparison between light (or color) and sound (or audio) must acknowledge the fact that the transmitting medium, air, will to some extent degrade the information, no matter how pure that information is at



its source.

We need not here belabor the obvious point that our sensory receptors--sight and hearing--along with our neurological equipment, also alter our perception of both light and sound. A person who is fatigued sees and hears differently than when he is rested. A very old person sees and hears differently than a younger person.

Let us examine a few other comparisons between light and sound, keeping in mind, still, the question: Can a language which includes color terminology help us formulate a better language by which to describe music and audio?

A look at the basic components of light and sound reveals some very interesting correlations. Light allows one quantitative variable: brilliance or intensity. Intense light is white, weak light is gray, and the absence of light is dark. Light also allows two qualitative variables: hue and saturation. Hue is color: a single wavelength or (more frequently) a small band of wavelengths known as a spectral color, i.e., a color defined by demarcating or bounding a certain portion of the entire color band. Saturation is an inverse reference to the fact that, outside the laboratory, most colors are not pure; instead, although the predominant wavelength may define the presenting color, other wavelengths are likely to be present and thus dilute, modify, or detract from the purity of the color. The hue itself is fully saturated; but colors found in nature almost always have varying degrees of saturation, i.e., detractions from the relatively pure, or fully saturated, hue.

Similarly, sound has one quantitative aspect, and two qualitative aspects. Its quantitative aspect is amplitude or volume--the intensity of the sound which reaches the ear. Its two qualitative aspects are frequency or pitch, and timbre--the waveform which contains the fundamental pitch as well as the harmonics which are relative to the pitch. Pitch or frequency is how high or low a note is, e.g., 440 hz, or 880 Hz. Timbre refers to the presence of overtones, undertones, and relative harmonics such as the presence of a harmonic fifth, or a harmonic third resonating along with the fundamental pitch. Said in a different way, pitch is the pure or fundamental tone or waveform, while timbre is a more complicated waveform containing harmonic overlay--what makes middle C on a piano sound very different from middle C played on a violin.

Thus, both color and sound each have one quantitative aspect, and each have two qualitative aspects. (Of course, color's hue and saturation can be quantitatively described, as can the frequency and timbral waveforms of sound. But most physicists, despite their penchant for mathematical descriptives, are content to describe hue and saturation as the qualitative aspects of color, and frequency and timbre as the qualitative aspects of sound.)

These similarities between color and sound can be juxtaposed thusly:

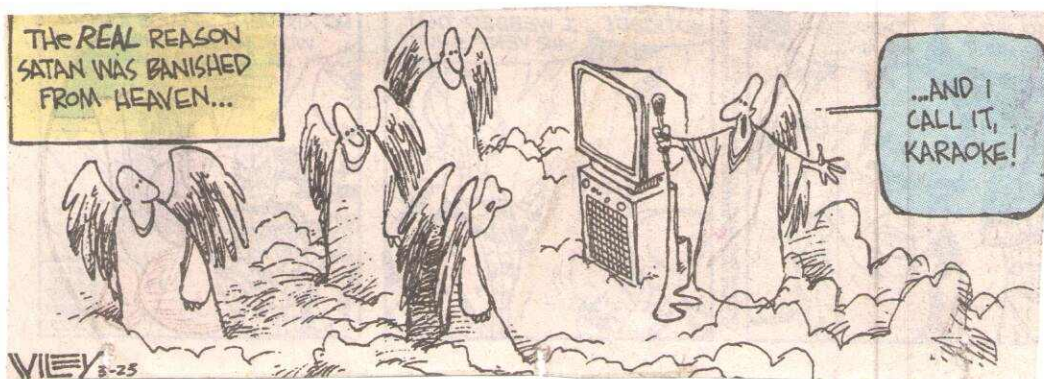
	<u>COLOR</u>	<u>SOUND</u>
1. quantitative-----	intensity	volume
2. qualitative purity, simplicity, singularity-----	hue	frequency
3. qualitative complexity, pluralism, variety-----	saturation diminutions	timbre

(Beyond the limits of the above descriptives, i.e., outside the limits of workable theory in physics, there also exists):

(4). qualitative dissonance-----	obscurity	noise
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Having said this much about sound and color, and keeping the above juxtaposition in mind, we are somewhat prepared to begin examining the feasibility of using a language of color by which to analyze audio phenomena. But first, we must reckon with certain dissimilarities between color and audio.

For example, probably the most commonly made mistake in color



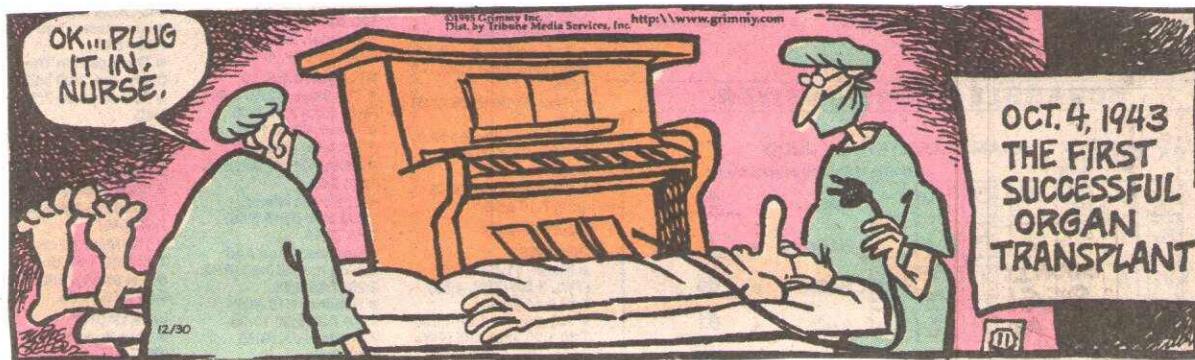
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analysis, especially with paintings, is to believe, when trying to get a color right, that the problem can be rectified by varying the shadings of the color used, i.e., by using a less saturated color. The painter, for example, believing that the red he is using lacks emotional impact, applies an overlay of a slightly different shade of red--which, to some extent, mixes with the shade beneath it. Still dissatisfied, he reworks the patch of red so that it has several shadings or gradations of red merging together into what he hopes will, with the presence of these many tinctures, be a more impactful and startling red. But the more he applies these various reds, the more muddied, vague, and "washed out" the effect becomes. The whole spectrum of red shadings fails to become a "redder red"; instead, it becomes a browner red. A finer artist, witnessing the failed attempt, will often realize that what was needed was not a more varied, i.e., less saturated, red, but rather, a more singular, pure, highly saturated red. (This is not to suggest that the answer to a compositional difficulty in painting never involves more varied, less saturated, colors; rather, I am pointing out that one of the most common mistakes made by novice painters is to substitute variance for high saturation. In fact, one of the most common characteristics of paintings by the masters is the presence, somewhere in the painting, of one or more highly saturated colors, whose pristine quality gives the painting emotional focus, a spatial dimension which seems to project outward or forward from the canvas, and a sensory basis which supports or helps harmonize less saturated tints which are indispensable to the painting's realism.)

Probably the most commonly made mistake in audio analysis is, not to confuse the two qualitative aspects as happens with color and light, but rather, to confuse sound's quantitative aspect with the qualitative aspect of timbre. This happens when audiophiles attempt to compensate for deficiencies in the qualitative spectrum of timbre with added increments of quantity. I am referring to the practice, indulged by many listeners, of turning up the volume of their stereo system in an attempt to compensate for the lack of presence and realism--lackings which, under the rubric of the terms we have defined, are actually certain deficiencies of timbre. Volume thus substitutes for timbre, and sometimes this substitution more or less satisfies. Only later, when the listener gets better speakers, or a better amplifier, does he realize that he was not replacing the deficiency, but rather, was substituting volume for realism. Many of us have heard someone, with a new piece of fine equipment, remark, "You don't have to play this one so loud to get all the detail!"

Having thus noted certain dissimilarities and similarities in color and sound, let us address some problems which might arise when attempting to describe audio's assets and limits with a language that utilizes color terminology. Harry Pearson has stated that, regarding speaker colorations, "It is helpful to see these colorations along a scale from dark (near black) to the very white."¹¹ In the same paragraph, he muses about how we might meaningfully describe the character of a speaker, and states that, in formulating such a language, "The use of a few colors might help as well, since there are components with sounds that are 'gray' (several shades of it at that), 'golden' (several tints here too), and white."¹²

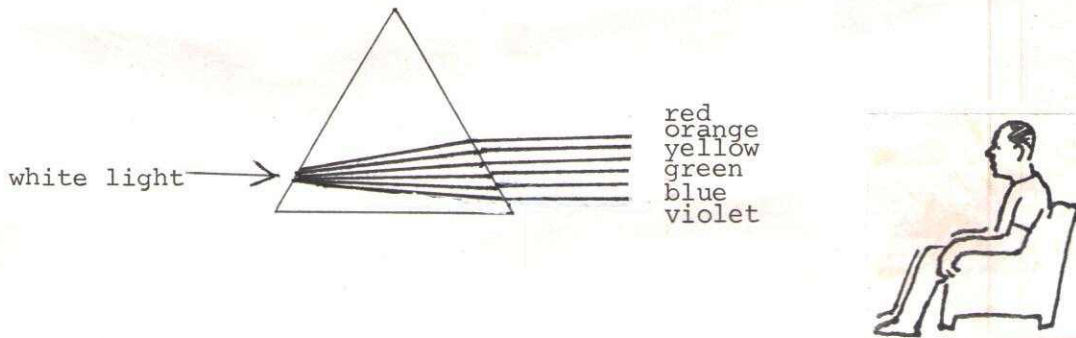
Harry Pearson's borrowings from color language are not inconsistent with how other audio commentators (perhaps in error) speak or write, even if he is more ambitiously comprehensive in his strivings for a better language. But there is a difficulty with Mr. Pearson's approach, and I think it is not a negligible one. Namely, if he hopes to formulate a workable language for audio which incorporates color terminology, then, at the very least, for the sake of introducing clarity rather than obfuscation into this newly-emerging language, his terminology should be consistent with what is known about the physics of sound and light. For example, it is potentially confusing to try and perceive speaker colorations along a scale ranging from dark to white. Such a perception utilizes Goethe's



physics of color, and this physics is wrong. Colors do not emerge from gradations of dark and white; they emerge from the fracturing of white light via a prism, or the absorption of parts of a light beam so that the nonabsorbed part shows itself as a color. It therefore is not at all accurate to describe speaker colorations as gray or white, for the simple reason that gray and white are not colors. Rather, they are two different intensities of all the colors combined. Hence, it would be more accurate to suggest that an amplifier's power, or a speaker's efficiency, i.e., the available SPL of an audio system, be described along a scale ranging from various shades of gray to white. If we are going to describe speakers as colored then we should start by sticking with actual colors. A colored speaker can then be described as one which has a deficiency in timbre--certain harmonics not in the original music are being produced, or certain of the original harmonics are not being reproduced, or some of the original harmonics are being transformed into different harmonics. The speaker thus is adding, deleting, reducing, or emphasizing one or more parts of the musical spectrum as compared to the original.

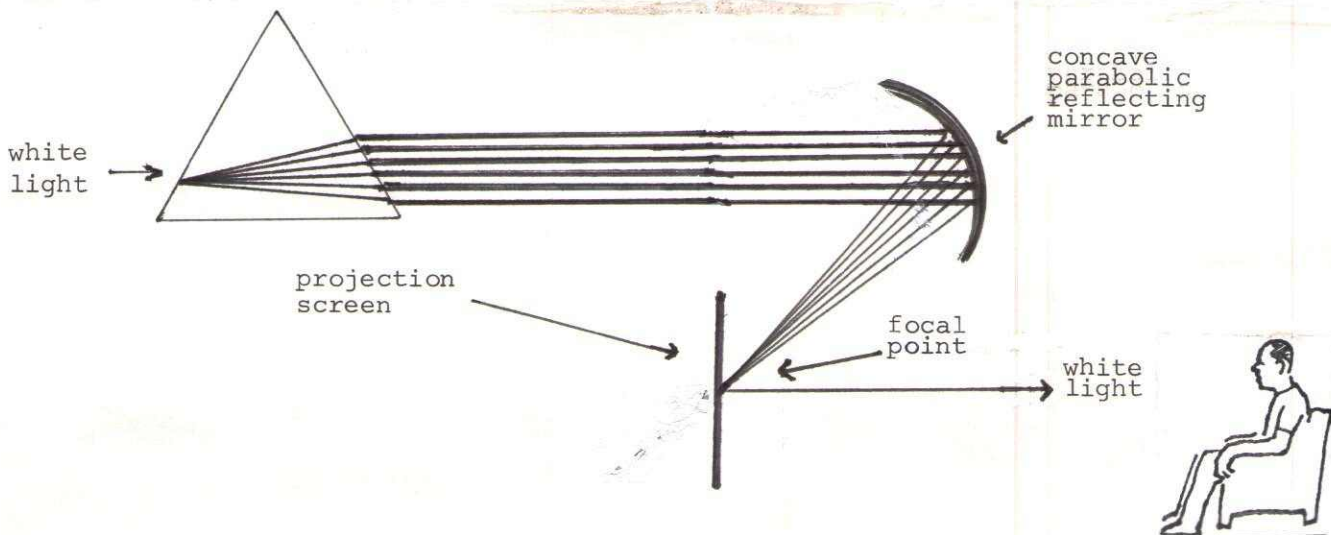
For the sake of better understanding how a language of color might better describe a speaker's deficiencies, let us keep in mind Newton's model, which demonstrates how white light is converted to colors.

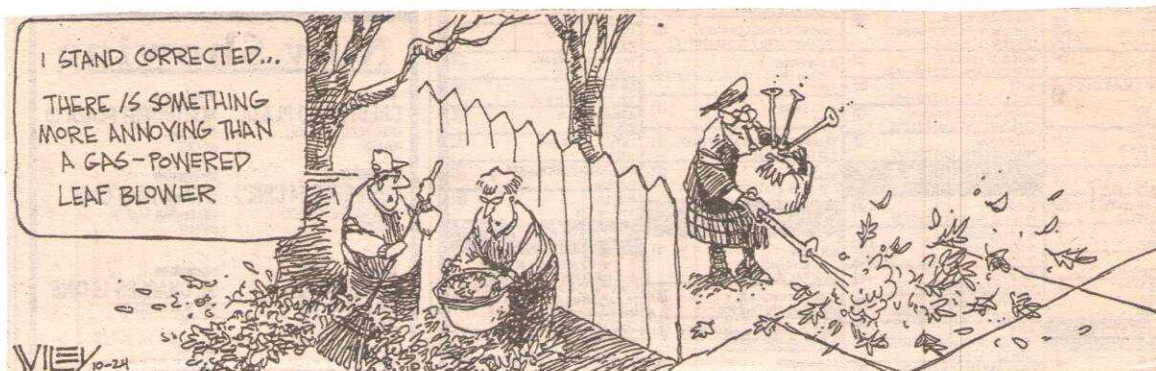
With pure light entering a prism, we get the following:



The above is a simple matter: white light, fractured, via a prism, into its constituent colors. All this assumes that the light is pure and the prism perfect.

For the sake of drawing an analogy to speakers, let us ask ourselves the following: In the above drawing, how could our viewer hope to convert those fractured colors back to the original white light? It would necessitate a means of reproduction like the following:





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The question which immediately comes to mind is: Would our viewer actually see white light? Only if the original light is pure, the prism perfect, the parabola true to the appropriate equation, the mirroring of the parabola such that it provides a perfect reflection, with the focal point on the screen in perfect focus, and the screen a perfect reflector. Over and over, in one way or another, we are saying that the original white light could be reproduced if this or that were perfect. In short, we are acknowledging that it can not be reproduced, except in a compromised way.

If the prism is not perfect, then certain hues will be distorted, and saturations of varying degrees will replace pure hues. If the mirror is not a perfect parabola, then spherical aberrations will intervene, and obscurity sets in. And so on. The light the viewer beholds is not exactly the same array of photons which, a fraction of a second before, emanated from the original source.

Now, let us discuss the above diagram insofar as it is analogous to audio. Any system for audio reproduction is inherently imperfect, even if only minimally. Thus, a defective audio system might be thought of as having defects analogous to defects which might plague the transmission of light as depicted above. For example, a poor microphone might be likened to a defective prism. One color is emphasized over the others; or, certain colors are scattered or obscured. A good speaker might be thought of as an almost perfect parabolic mirror, which resolves all the colors of the original white light back into a relatively pure white light.

So how, from the above illustration, as well as from what we before said about color theory, can we extract helpful terminology from color theory for the sake of describing our audio experiences? We must begin by critically redefining some of our conventional audio descriptives. For example, "dark" has customarily been used to describe a component's sound when its timbre is relatively lacking in harmonic overtones. If we are to be consistent with the terminology of color physics, then we must halt this usage, and henceforth use "dark" to refer to a component which is relatively quiet--we could utilize it for describing a component which does not very well reproduce original volume, e.g., a low-current amplifier, or an inefficient speaker, or a highly resistive cable. Similarly, gray should be used to describe gradations of available volume or SPLs, not a variety of tonal timbres. And as for specific colors ... well, on this topic we really are entering virgin territory.

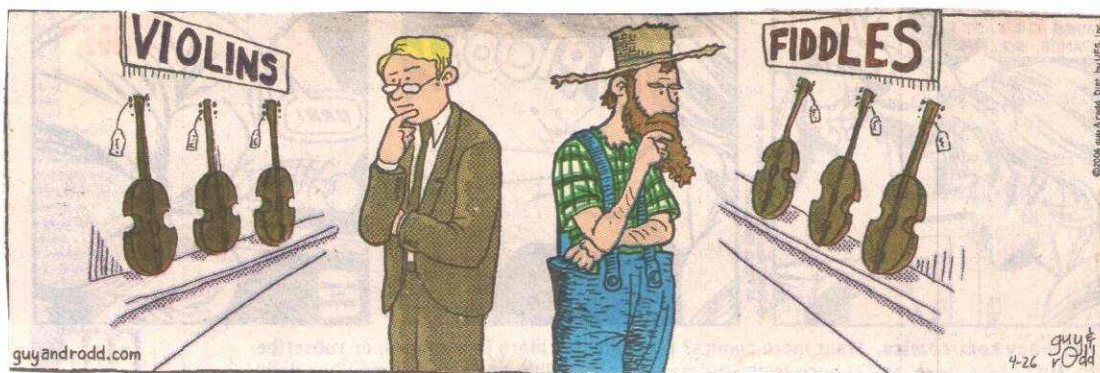
In all truth, I have absolutely no idea as to what Harry Pearson means when he says speakers might be described as having several tints of golden. I think he himself knows, but ... we are audiophiles seeking a common language, not proto-solipsistic proselytizers murmuring words to the world that no one understands but ourselves. Harry Pearson himself would be the first to acknowledge this. It is not enough to state one's own opinion about how certain speakers might be described as possessing certain colors, or colorations. We need common agreement about our terminology.

Must we create, ex nihilo, a color terminology for describing timbres that are askew? Or are there color theoreticians to whom we might turn for advice?

The writings of the Swiss psychologist, Doctor Max Lüscher, are fairly well known, especially via his book, The Lüscher Color Test.¹³ Lüscher's theories on the psychology of color are vast, profound, and, I believe, accurate. It is not possible to herein consider the full scope of his theory, but let us note a few of his observations, and see what we can do by way of applying them.

According to Lüscher, the emotional or affective associations we make with certain colors are as follows:

blue:	depth of feeling, sensitivity, calmness
green:	elasticity of will, perseverance, resistance to change
red:	force of will, aggression, authority
yellow:	spontaneity, unpredictability, novelty
violet:	shallow feeling, unrealistic, immature
brown:	physical ease, mind-body balance, passivity.



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Taking Lüscher's color parameters as our guide, let us turn our attention to how we might, via his color terminology, describe a speaker's character. (Keeping in mind that if a speaker has any defining character at all, then it is to that extent defective since character--or, coloration--is a departure and distraction from the realism and purity of the original performance.) We shall consider a speaker which a fair number of readers might be familiar with (and which I, after extensive auditioning, have many objections to):

Turning our attention to the KEF 103/4's sound: It gives highly varied results, and leaves the listener with ambivalent, even uncertain, impressions. Although this speaker showed itself to be highly colored in every register, it lacked evenness of coloration. The deep bass was very weak, and can only be described as a dark gray. Midbass was surprisingly red, given the small size of these speakers, but the red faded to orange around the upper bass where, at 120 Hz yellow began creeping in. With every note on up to the lower midrange the tonal balance of red and yellow changed. The entire midrange was faulty: ragged, shrill, the timbre tending too much toward yellow and never settling with green. At times, especially at the upper midrange, the yellow would suddenly merge to a vague violet, then it would abruptly go back to yellow again. The lower treble tended to stabilize itself at a lush green, and this perhaps was the speaker's best register. Moving higher into the midtreble, the speaker flickered (one would almost say strobed) from green to yellow; at moments the music would sound natural and real, but then it would immediately give way to an excursion into pale yellow.

As for imaging, there was never a sense of brown repose, so commonly associated with, e.g., the B&W 80ls. Instead, the image was unfocused, never even possessing that blue calm we associate with the Vandersteen 3s. If anything, the imaging was a pale violet, too shallow to sustain music by large orchestras, although sufficient for small chamber orchestras which do not have a highly layered configuration.

My recommendation: If you want red bass, go with the Chapmans. If you want the greenest midbass, spend more money and buy the ProAc Response Three's. For midrange, the Merlin EXL1 is the speaker of choice. If you want smooth highs, go with the Magnaplanar 3.3s (but be prepared to spend more money on the amplifier). And if you want it all in one speaker, well, sorry, but it isn't available at any price. That's why speaker companies keep coming out with new models.

The main strength of the KEF 103/4 is in stereo imaging. After listening to music through these speakers, and becoming accustomed to the separation, other speakers sound almost like mono. (Although, when one then goes back to these KEFs, the stereo separation is so pronounced as to seem almost artificially exaggerated, especially with music that requires a high degree of cohesiveness, e.g., the string quartet repertoire.)

At \$1850. a pair, these speakers can be bettered, although listeners who can't get enough stereo out of their stereos might want to give these KEFs a listen, since this is their strong point. A word of warning: They work best with tube amps, which move some of the yellow to a lighter shade. If you intend to use solid-state, then avoid the MOSFETs such as Hafler, Muse, and Conrad Johnson. They revealed the speaker's yellow tendencies throughout. Go with a good bipolar amp such as the Aragon or McCormick. These browner amps at times masked the yellowish proclivities, and occasionally caused the violet soundstage to give over to a trace of blue.



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It just doesn't work, does it? The terminology is occasionally illustrative, at times it is amusing, but overall it is not very edifying. Of course, were we more accustomed to using such a language, a description such as the above might be a little more instructive. Still, I suspect that it would be more distracting than explanatory.

There is a further problem in that using color language this way is not entirely consistent with how we use it when referring to a context other than audio. For example, in our ordinary way of speaking, the term "yellow" is much more likely to mean cowardice than spontaneity. Red may mean aggression, but it is more likely to be associated with anger than with willfulness or authority. And blue is much more likely to suggest sadness than calmness.

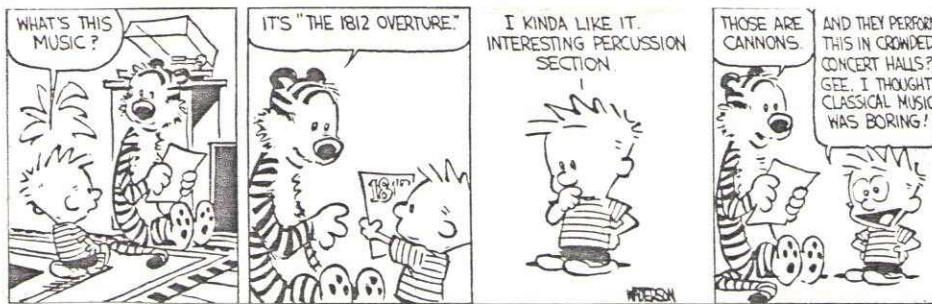
There also is the problem that every color has many shades. You can select many hues of a particular color, and many varying saturations, and yet, with accuracy, call each of these variants by the same name. For example, look at what William H. Gass does with the color blue:

For our blues we have the azures and ceruleans, lapis luzulis, the light and dusty, the powder blues, the deeps: royal, sapphire, navy, and marine; there are the pavonian or peacock blues, the reddish blues: damson, madder and cadet, hyacinth, periwinkle, wine, wisteria and mulberry; there are the sloe blues, a bit purpled or violescent, and then the green blues, too: robin's egg and eggshell blue, beryl, cobalt, glaucous blue, jouvence, turquoise, aquamarine.¹⁴

All this is very beautifully written. But it does not make for scientific precision--the kind of precision which Harry Pearson wants for describing speaker coloration. The fact is, many of these shades of blue would seem, in terms of their emotional connotations and possible musical denotations, to differ from each other more drastically than blue, as a generic color, differs from another generic color, e.g., red. Which suggests that utilizing these terms in a language about audio is much more likely to invite confusion than scientific precision.

Frankly, I think we know what we mean when we say a speaker is colored; but I fear that we are only going to confuse ourselves, and each other, by trying to get specific about describing what its colors are. The problem we must beware of here is that in attempting to elucidate a language of sound reproduction, Mr. Pearson is very intent on utilizing certain overly subjective resources. Note how he speaks of the yin and yang--the dark and the bright--of sound coloration. In this vein, Mr. Pearson sounds very like Goethe. But unlike Goethe, who was hostile to mathematics and equations, Mr. Pearson does hope to discern strict quantifiable criteria by which to measure seemingly elusive audio phenomena. This is evidenced, for example, in the second installment of his essay, wherein he proposes a preliminary schema showing how a quantifiable analysis of dynamic range might look on a scale of one to twelve.¹⁵ An even more ambitious, and successful, attempt to quantify musical nuance is advanced in the fourth installment of Mr. Pearson's essay. Therein, his plan is "to take as many separate characteristics of amplifier sound as I could devise and then rate each amplifier on a scale of one to ten ... and then tally up the points."¹⁶ By way of illustration, he takes fifteen characteristics, ranging from soundstage width to microdynamics, and applies each of them to two amplifiers, assigning numerical values which attempt to precisely quantify his subjective judgements. Thus the two amplifiers are ranked, with respect to one another, on the basis of total points received.¹⁷ Such ranking, while it may not confer on these amplifiers an absolutely objective description of their sound, nevertheless succeeds in providing the most thorough and helpful description (and ranking) of an amplifier's sound I have yet encountered.

Still, Mr. Pearson's proposed criteria for giving amplifiers' character a degree of quantifiable exactitude are, as he himself acknowledges,



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preliminary and incomplete.¹⁸ But he hopes that his attempts might serve as guideposts (and goads?) for those who want a language with which to discuss home audio.

Meanwhile, the audio language we have already been using has been growing and even evolving. It now has some terms which are useful, i.e., communicable. Most of us know what is meant by "soundstage," "hard," "harmonics." Some of us know what is meant by "depth," "euphonic," and "distortion." But few of us agree about "neutral," "bottoming out," or "sonics versus musicality."

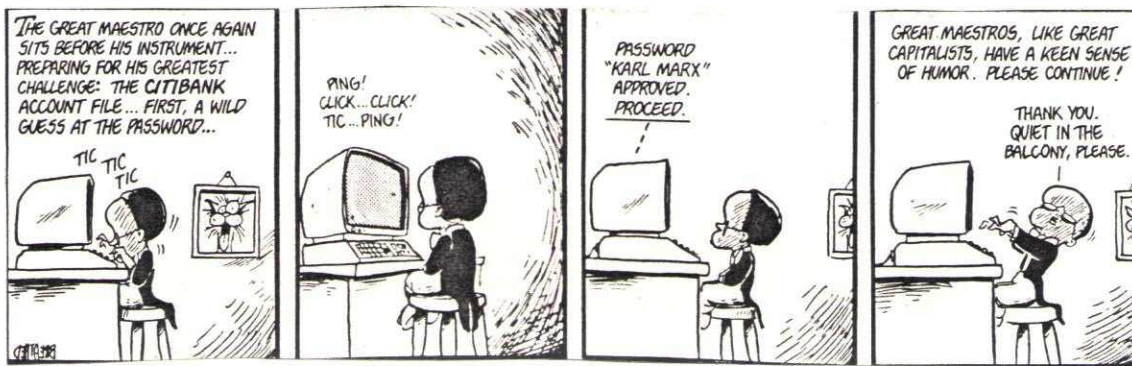
As we proceed to define, refine, and create our terminology, it is necessary, while we strive for more precision in our language, that we also make sure we do not compromise or distort what precision is already available. In other words, we must be wise enough, when using words, to retain the full and precise scope of their conventional meaning. For example, one writer, in The Absolute Sound's pages, has complained that, too often, the phrase "extended dynamic range" is used to mean but one thing--loud--when actually it should refer to the entire spectrum of dynamics, from soft to loud.¹⁹ The same goes for the phrase, "sound pressure level"--which reviewers almost always use for referring to varying degrees of loudness, when actually the phrase should also refer to varying degrees of softness or pianissimo. Another example of improper terminology involves calling a speaker a subwoofer when it is -3db @ 60 Hz and -9db @ 40 Hz. A speaker which can not even faithfully reproduce the fundamental of a string bass's bottom note (41.2 Hz) should never qualify for being called a subwoofer. (But these observations merely point out what we should not do when establishing a language about High End audio. Figuring out what we should do is a much more difficult matter.)

Just as music needed a language of its own--the score--audio reproduction sorely needs a language of its own. I confess that I myself have very little idea as to how to go about creating this new language. I think we have terms which we already understand and share. These we can continue to use, just as the score uses certain terms from verbal language, e.g., pianissimo, decrescendo, etc. But the magnitudinous and yet subtle task of describing audio coloration, i.e., audio deficiencies, needs an entirely new symbiology. A symbiology that is more precise than our verbal language, and yet not so complex as Egyptian hieroglyphics. I do suspect that a successful audio language must be built from very simple component symbols. Consider how very simple is the "alphabet" of the musical score!

How can a language about audio attain such simplicity? For one thing, it must avoid choosing descriptive terms which are already fraught with ambiguity, or laden with vagueness. Keeping this in mind, I must suggest to Mr. Pearson that he forego his tendency to inject color terminology when describing audio. In so doing, he might end up abandoning his proclivity for following Goethe's outdated physics of color, while at the same time following Goethe's own cautionary advice about mixing the two realms:

Color and sound do not admit of being directly compared together in any way, but both are referable to a universal formula, both are derivable, although each for itself, from this higher law. They are like two rivers which have their source in one and the same mountain, but subsequently pursue their way under totally different conditions in two totally different regions, so that throughout the whole course of both no two points can be compared. Both are general, elementary effects acting according to the general law of separation and tendency to union, of undulation and oscillation, yet acting thus in wholly different provinces, in different modes, on different elementary mediums, for different senses.²⁰

If Harry Pearson does give up attempting to mix the terminology of the two senses--visual and auditory--perhaps he will be able to take a somewhat different path which would allow him to conjoin the (somewhat poetic) resources of our existing audio language with more rigorous quantifiable



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precision. If, at the same time, High End reviewers would show language the courtesy of adhering to its conventional meaning, even as they try to expand the breadth of its symbiology, then we may eventually succeed in formulating a lucid language by which to describe audio colorations in our home stereos. And if this language is richly varied but uncluttered, poetic but precise, then our clear and distinct descriptions of unwanted musical colorations can begin the process of eliminating them from our listening systems.

I must emphasize that I do not at all believe any such language is near at hand. To Harry Pearson's valiant attempt at formulating such a language, I have registered many a disagreement. I do not mean, by this, to disparage Harry Pearson's attempt. The problem is not with Pearson but with the magnitude of the task before us. Formulating a better language by which to describe audio's failings involves difficulties which not only are inherent in audio, but also plague the nature of every language's birth. On this topic, too, Goethe's opinion is worth hearing:

We never sufficiently reflect that a language, strictly speaking, can only be symbolical and figurative, that it can never express things directly, but only, as it were, reflectedly. This is especially the case in speaking of qualities which are only imperfectly presented to observation, which might rather be called powers than objects, and which are ever in movement throughout nature. They are not to be arrested, and yet we find it necessary to describe them; hence we look for all kinds of formulae in order, figuratively at least, to define them.²¹

Powers in motion, which we are trying to describe! Yes; no wonder it is such a mystery. And our mission such an odyssey.

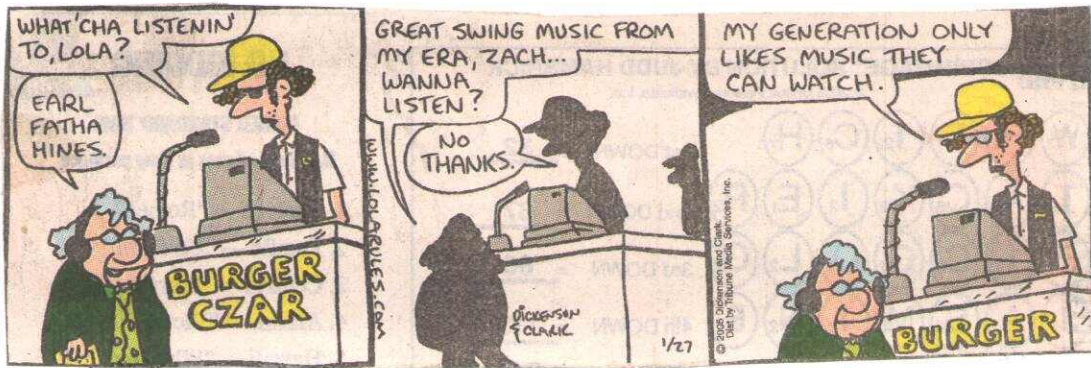
So we proceed, taking many a halting step toward our goal. Our goal, we must keep in mind, is not a new language per se, but rather, the end we hope to achieve with this language. Our end, very simply, is to succeed in describing both musical neutrality, i.e., musical realism, and audio coloration, i.e., audio contamination. Once we succeed in describing these two poles, we then can better communicate with one another as we get on with the task of building uncolored audio systems--systems which allow a palpable aura of true, realistic musical presence, and a relaxed but inspired aesthetic atmosphere in which the undistracted listener can allow his feelings to fuse with the music.

So let us hope that someday someone will build an audio system with a brand name that no one would argue with: WHITE LIGHT. A name which implies that the reproduced music is completely uncolored.

But note how this brief allusion to light in relation to sound brings us right back to the issue of audio language and colors! Are the two realms more closely related than my skepticism has been willing to admit? My confidence about insisting that the two realms do not readily conform to a common language is, at mere mention of WHITE LIGHT speakers, fast dissolving. And I experience a new humility when I ponder the following statement by William Gass:

When the trumpet brays, Kandinsky hears vermillion. The violin plays green on its placid middle string. Blues darken through the cello, double bass, and organ, for him, and the bassoon's moans are violet like certain kinds of gloom. He believes that orange can be rung from a steeple sometimes, while the joyous rapid jingle of the sleigh-bell reminds him of raspberry's light cool red. If color is one of the contents of the world as I have been encouraging someone--anyone--to claim, then nothing stands in the way of blue's being smelled or felt, eaten as well as heard. These comparisons are only slightly relative, only somewhat subjective. No one is going to call the sounds of the triangle brown or accuse the tympanist of playing pink.²²

On reading this, I feel sure that Gass is speaking truly. And he causes me to wonder if a language about audio, which incorporates color terminology,



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might indeed prove helpful, if only we would put forth more effort toward formulating that language. Maybe Harry Pearson's success with such a language was stunted not only by his problems with physics but even more by his uneasy, tentative groping. And maybe my own attempts were undone, not because the path is wrong, but because I was being flippant and superficial.

I have a feeling that there is much more to be said on this topic before it can either be laid to rest, or brought to iridescent fruition. I even wonder if there might be a vast equation, not yet discovered by physicists, which would precisely describe an exact correlation between the mathematical descriptives of waveforms in sound and wavelengths in light. I do not possess the mathematical genius necessary for such discovery, and, for that matter, physics has not, at present, collected the necessary data. Audio waveform analysis in physics is rudimentary at best; analysis of light is more advanced, primarily because of our space program and the needs of astronomy, but even here the theoretical overview is far from finished. Still, it is tantalizing to hope that there lies aslumber an equation which, once discovered, would mathematically unite the essence of light and audio such that we could one day satisfy that yearning of the ancients for et lux lumine et ab acutissimo sono usque ad gravissimum sonum.²³

Will Harry Pearson be the Audio Bodhisatva, poling the great raft, who will one day take us to that Audio Nirvana where WHITE LIGHT audio systems exist? Probably not. Aural redemption is not so near at hand. But his four essays on the sound of amplifiers and speaker coloration are worthy meditations--preliminary preparation. He deserves our gratitude.

FOOTNOTES

¹The four essays in question are: "The Sound of Music and the State of the Art 1993: A Query into Component Reviewing and the Sound of Amplifiers," The Absolute Sound (Early Fall 1993; Issue 90), pp. 77-84; "Redefining The Absolute Testing Vocabulary: An Inquiry into Music: II: The Sound of Amplifiers," The Absolute Sound (Late Fall 1993; Issue 91), pp. 87-95; "The Essay: Part III: The Sound of Amplifiers: The Recording Process vs. The Musical Truth," The Absolute Sound (Early Spring, 1994; Issue 94), pp. 84-93; "IV: Amplifiers & The Sound of Music: The Advent of the New Wave Amplifiers," The Absolute Sound (June/July 1994; Issue 96), pp. 85-92. I suggest that, henceforth, this series of essays be referred to as, "The Harry Pearson Report on Amplifiers," or HPRA for short. Subsequent footnotes herein, when referring to this series of essays, will follow this form, indicating the four separate installments by Roman numeral, with page numbers supplied.

²HPRA, I, p. 81.

³Ibid., p. 82.

⁴HPRA, II, p. 88.

⁵HPRA, III, p. 90.

⁶HPRA, I, p. 83.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Richard Selzer, "Semiprivate, Female," in Letters to a Young Doctor (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), p. 133.



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⁹Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Goethe's Color Theory, arranged and ed. Rupprecht Matthaei, American edition trans. and ed. Herb Aach, with a complete facsimile reproduction of Charles Eastlake's 1820 translation of the "didactic part" of the Color Theory (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1971), pp. 71 and 87.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 186.

¹¹HPRA, I, p. 83.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Dr. Max Lüscher, The Lüscher Color Test, trans. and ed. Ian A. Scott (New York: Random House, 1969).

¹⁴William Gass, On Being Blue: A Philosophical Inquiry (Boston: David R. Godine, 1976), p. 59.

¹⁵HPRA, II, pp. 92-93

¹⁶HPRA, IV, pp. 87-88.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 88.

¹⁸HPRA, II, p. 93; HPRA, IV, pp. 87-88.

¹⁹Vanessa Vyvyanne du Pré, "Women against the High End: Audiophilia Is a Dead End," The Absolute Sound (Late Winter, 1994; Issue 93), p. 36.

²⁰Goethe, Goethe's Color Theory, p. 166.

²¹Ibid., p. 167.

²²Gass, On Being Blue, pp. 76-77.

²³The second phrase of the conjunction is from Cicero's "The Dream of Scipio," and translates as, "from the highest treble to the deepest bass." Lux lumine means "all pervading light" and was a medieval phrase which denoted cosmic or divine emanations throughout nature. (This fascination with the harmonious conjunction of sound and light had its beginnings in Pythagoras, was taken up by Cicero and many other philosophers, received systematic analysis by the thirteenth-century philosopher Robert Grosseteste in his De Generatione Stellarum and De Generatione Sonorum, and was given theistic qualities by St. Bonaventure in his Breviloquium and De Reductione Artium ad Theologiam.)



As a writer, I not only turn out my own creations (my own drivel?), I also put forth some effort at communicating with other writers--or authors. In last year's Aviary I listed, as a book of note, The Secret History by Donna Tartt. I need not repeat my comments; the book was worthy, but it had many artistic flaws. Unfortunately, it also had some minor errors--typographical (or typesetting) errors, which too often plague books being published these days. I have, over the last few years, made it a point to list such errors and send them to the author or to the publisher. I did this with Donna Tartt's book, and below is a copy of the letter I sent, here given an appropriate title so my future biographers can properly index it:

AN OPEN LETTER TO DONNA TARTT;
ON THE SECRET HISTORY

Donna Tartt
Care of: Gary Fisketjon, Editor
Alfred A. Knopf
201 East 50th St.
New York, New York
10022

May 13, 1993

Dear Ms. Tartt,

Your The Secret History was something of an addiction during the reading, and I must say that it was most pleasant to be reading a well-crafted story that also was thoroughly intelligent.

I have published a good deal myself, and am always grateful when readers point out to me any copy errors they encounter in my writings. I have, over the last few years, taken on the habit of bringing to authors' (or publishers') attention any copy errors I find in their books as I read. Below is a list detailing such. Do not consider this a criticism; I am extending but a basic courtesy:

Printing errors noted in The Secret History by Donna Tartt:

1. Bunny's girlfriend's name is spelled Marion. The usual feminine spelling is Marian. I rather presume that the spelling as Marion was intentional, but in case it was not--perhaps caused by one careless stroke at the typesetter's computer--I here point it out.
2. page 4, line 5: "four" should be "five," unless I am missing something. I went back and reread pp. 252-254, and it seems to be that "five" is correct.
3. page 82, line 8: "his" should be "its," yes?
4. page 147, 5th line after copy break: There is an extra "to."
5. page 210, 8th line after copy break: The comma after "torture" should instead be a question mark, or at least a semicolon, should it not?
6. page 342, line 28: Did you intend "what to said" to be, "what to have said"? (I realize license with the vulgate may be at issue here.)
7. page 382, line 18: Did you intend a question mark, instead of a comma, after the word, "What"?
8. page 391, line 6: Was "grandsaid" the word you intended? I have never encountered it before, nor have a couple of other people I asked. Nor, for that matter, is it in the venerable Oxford English Dictionary.
9. page 488, line 18: A broken hyphen here should be a solid dash.
10. page 524, line 9: The word "a" is missing.
11. Conscience takes precedence over incipient embarrassment, causing me to add one more possible error to this list, an error which, given the ordering, might have been listed much earlier. I use the word "embarrassment" because I am quite aware that I may be wrong in thinking this to be an error. I refer to the first line of the text proper, after the prologue, i.e., the first line on page 7. Virgil's Latin seemed to be lurking nearby, somewhere amidst that phraseology, which put me in mind of the word, umbra, and caused me to think that perhaps a mere two letters were omitted from a word, causing that sentence to be transmuted from "... shadowy dark crack ... ," to "... showy dark crack" Am I right or wrong?

I trust you will accept my notes, not as criticism, but as a small assistance. Having poor eyesight, I read with difficulty; but the

extra effort necessitated by my visual affliction causes me to note, more easily than most, what seems to be amiss. The cripple more easily stumbles over the crack in the marble.

Wishing you the very best, I do remain,

Very truly,

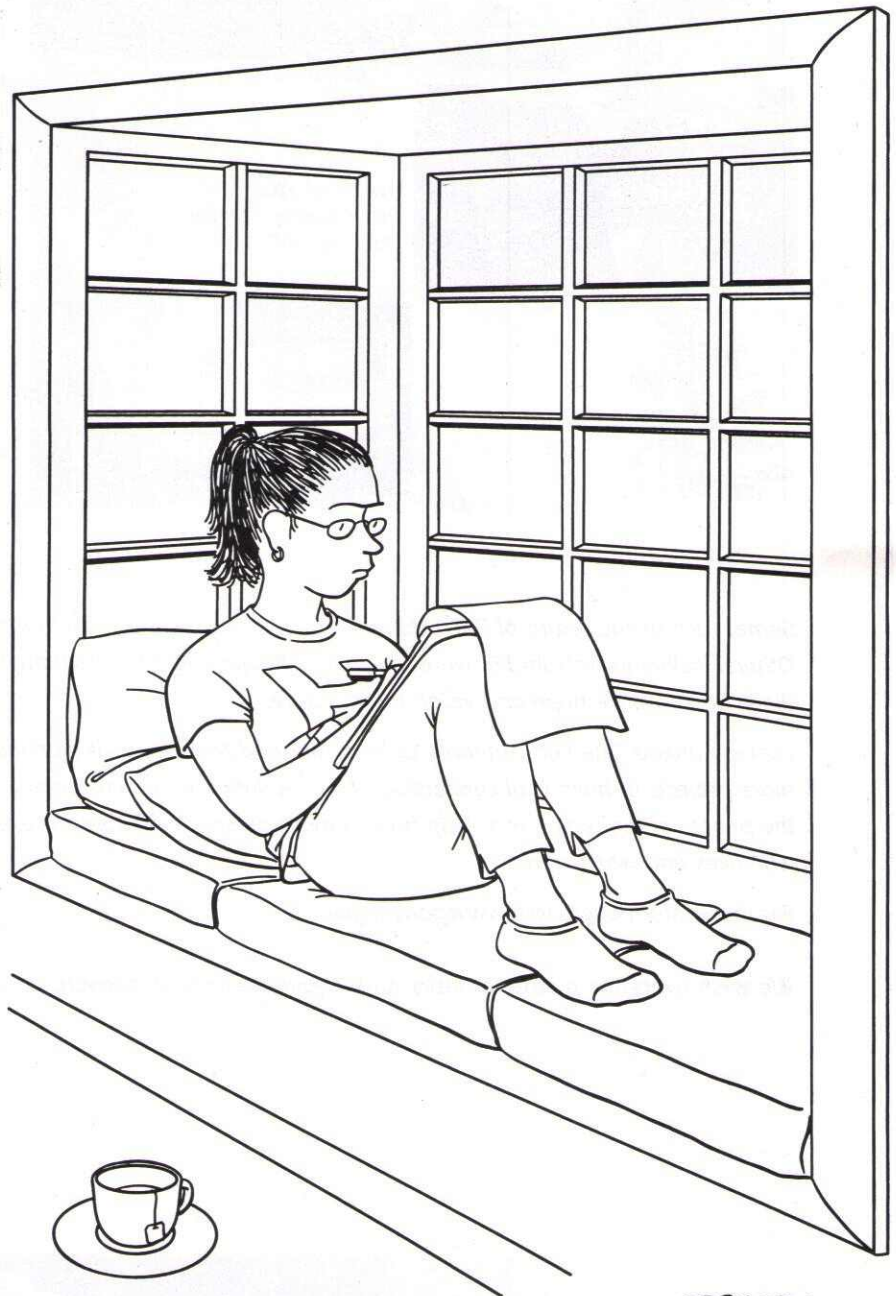
Francis Baumli, Ph.D.

FB/ns

Thus, the letter I sent. It went to Donna Tartt herself; I also sent a copy to her editor, and also to her publisher.

Was I thanked? No. Did I even receive an acknowledgement? No. This is why, as the years go by, I do this less and less. Why bother, when I don't even know if the errors are noted, much less corrected?

I have related to not a few of my friends a similar, although also more glaring, incident when I was doing some reading of Saint John-of-the-Cross. I had just finished reading one of his books, which contained many phrases in Latin, and I had noted many typesetting errors in the Latin--errors that had not been caught by a proof-reader not familiar with the language. It took some careful attention keeping track of these errors as I read the book, and perhaps two or three hours to type up the two-page list and send it off to the publisher. This time I did receive a thanks. But with my letter I also had made it a point to thank the publisher for having put out so many of this saint's books, and made it a point to note that a certain treasured work of his had not yet been put out by their press. In his thank-you, the publisher, whose tone was appropriately grateful and cordial, told me that this missing volume had just come out in paperback and I could now purchase it for the price of ... I do not remember the price, but it was less than ten dollars. Well; that stung. I had put forth this many hours providing a copy-editing service which few readers could have provided, and which fewer readers would have bothered to provide--and yet, this editor could not, as a courtesy, send me a free copy of this new book which had just come out? Shame on him.



GREGORY

"Dear Mom and Dad: Thanks for the happy childhood. You've destroyed any chance I had of becoming a writer."





It also is the case that I write too many letters which are nothing of more lasting literary value than the fact that they are "query letters," i.e., letters to editors, or publishers, about whether they will consider a piece I have done. Hoping to get a better sense of the market, I sometimes do a bit of research in that market, and came across the below little exchange which was done some years ago. I publish it (again supplying a title, for the same reason) because some of my fellow friends who are writers might find it of interest.

AN OPEN LETTER TO PLAYBOY:
THE SUBMISSIONS GLUT

9-2-1983

Don Gold, Managing Editor
Playboy
Playboy Bldg.
919 N. Michigan Ave.
Chicago, IL 60611

Dear Mister Gold,

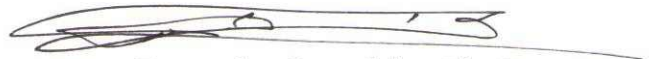
This letter likely is unusual in nature. I am asking a favor. Namely, I am doing some research regarding the number of submissions major magazines receive per week.

If you have such information available, would you be kind enough to send me the number of submissions you receive per week which are either submitted expressly for publication, or are submitted without the author expressly seeking publication but nevertheless would be considered for such by your magazine? The former category would include all submissions of articles, fiction, vignettes for your monthly sections, and jokes for your "Playboy's Party Jokes" section. The latter category would include such things as letters to the editor, which although perhaps not submitted for the express purpose of publication, would nevertheless be considered for publication by your magazine.

I very much appreciate your attention to this matter, and am enclosing a self-addressed, stamped envelope for your reply.

With very best wishes, I do remain,

Yours very truly,



Francis Baumli, Ph.D.

Encl: SASE
FB/ns

The above letter was written more than a decade ago. I did not believe the editorial staff would bother to reply. But they did. The letter, in its entirety, is pasted in below. Note the plethora--the glut--of submissions they receive. I will make the assumption that matters have only gotten worse, i.e., they receive even more submissions, which means that this writer has an even more difficult time of ever getting his material looked at.

PLAYBOY

September 19, 1983

Francis Baumli, Ph.D.
Family Counseling Center
Stephens Building, Suite 104
1005 Cherry Street
Columbia, MO 65201

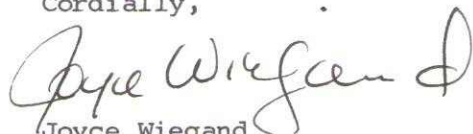
Dear Dr. Baumli:

I have broken down by department and section the approximate number of submissions/letters we receive each week.

Dear Playboy (letters column)	230
Playboy After Hours (up-front section)	25
The Playboy Advisor	70
The Playboy Forum	75
Playboy's Party Jokes	200
Fiction	400
Articles	150

Thank you for your interest in the magazine.

Cordially,



Joyce Wiegand
Editorial Department

/jdw

NON SEQUITUR / By Wiley Miller



 ** NOTES FROM TWIN FRANCES **

"Why not?" Isn't that the question Timothy Leary, the LSD user and experimentalist, was always saying? This was the exact sentence Francis said to me when, once again this year he asked me to write for his Aviary, and I said, "Why?" This is the level my dear brother has fallen to, when it comes to his aptitude for eloquence.

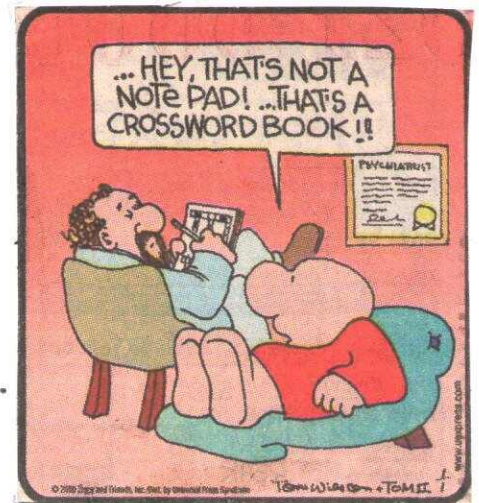
I myself have sunk to a rather low level of something, because when I said that, "Why?" I confess that I was whining. My question means, really, "Why me?" I don't quite deserve this responsibility, just because I am his twin. I have met only a few of his friends, some of these people are excellent and others I would not care to meet again. And unlike Francis, I am not reclusive, not highly educated, not a spouse or parent. We are related by old bonds, we keep those bonds current by renewing them as best we can, and somehow, because he is quirky and likes to torment me, dear Francis thinks that my contributing to his yearly pontification (I learned this word from him, and like it), is one of the ways we keep our relationship functioning. ("A relationship, without relating, is a dangerous thing," he likes to say, and I do suppose there is truth in this.)

For starters, let me say a few words about Francis. I am worried about him. So worried, in fact, that I have even begged him to see a counselor. He pleads mental health on the grounds that he has finally escaped from Southern Illinois, and it is true that in some ways he is more sane, centered, and creative than I have seen him in years. But losing his daughter, that is another matter, and I have never seen Francis so depressed and joyless. The way he has responded to losing her does him credit. I do grant this. He has told me more than once that if he weren't this upset, then that would be a symptom of moral ill health. I can see this. But moral health should not come at the expense of mental health, and Francis is not availing himself of any solution. I don't know what the solution is, or might be, but surely there is one even if it is only a partial solution. This is why I think he should see a counselor of some kind. The counselor might not have the solution, but could maybe help him carry on a bit better with life while he is dealing with his sadness.

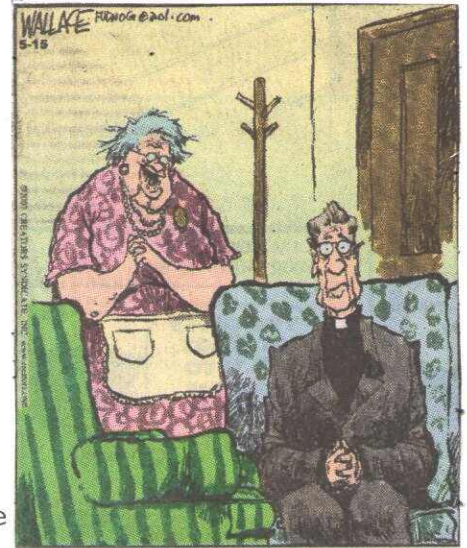
He will be angry with me for saying this publicly. And he must print it, because he has agreed to not change anything I have written nor leave any part of it out. So if I have made Francis angry, he will surely forgive me, eventually, since I bring this matter to public attention so he will take a start on the path toward feeling better.

As for myself, I have given up my little flat in London. It simply became too expensive. Also it was broken into twice, and vandalized once. I have my little cottage here on the Isle of Man, continue with the same work, do some business traveling, and occasionally am generous enough to

go see Francis even if he lacks in feelings of duty on matters of reciprocity. (He has visited me. I



must be fair about admitting this. But I do wish he would take the time to visit more often.) And in truth, when he does visit, he makes it a point to commit every impropriety he can think of. He relates smutty jokes to my friends. He insists I come with him on the strangest shopping trips. He declares that he hates to shop, but we spend hours in record stores where he searches for classical LPs (he still insists they sound better than CDs), and we even go to stereo shops where the prices are shockingly dear and the shopkeepers predatory and there we listen to classical music which is something I have very little interest in. Then, back at my house, he protests as "quaintly British" the one practice I most enjoy, and that is to sit with someone and read to one another. An evening seated by a full shaker, with one person reading to the other, and then vice versa, is probably my favorite way of spending pleasant hours, but Francis does not like being a reader because he says it makes him dizzy to read aloud, given his poor eyesight, but he doesn't like being read to either because he says the process is too slow and his mind doesn't want to slow down for it. I do not think it fair, or even accurate, to claim that this practice is "quaintly British." I have friends in France, and also in Portugal, who do it. He says he knows no Americans who indulge in this practice, except when parents read to their small children. But I am forgiving. We do have most amusing conversations. And Francis, though possessing gourmet skills, is avowedly a reluctant cook. However, I press upon him many entreaties and then he becomes most industrious, and will spend two days doing nothing but cooking the most amazing comestibles. I ask my neighbors or friends over, and they find Francis very amusing then, and when he is playing the role of cook he behaves like a good host and curbs his saucy tongue, somewhat at least, and is continent with his smutty stories. When he leaves, he is the most popular fellow in the neighborhood. But he is always one to fling discord, and each time I ask him to come visit, he declares that he is a recluse and his reluctance about coming is precisely because he becomes too popular in my little neighborhood. He is, as is so well put by a saying which is is quaintly British: "a capital but curmudgeonly fellow."



"Oh, mercy me, Pastor Bob, where ARE my manners? Can I offer you coffee, tea ... a massage?"

He continues in surprisingly good health, given his Disseminated Sclerosis (or Multiple Sclerosis, as it is called in America), although I have been worried by his weight gain. (He will be furious with me for writing this.) His weight had soared to almost 14 stone, but he has been dieting, and is now at 13 stone and appears of a mind to continue in the direction of a more befitting form. Being as vain as most women, I have kept my figure trim throughout my life, and since I am as impertinent as most women I let no opportunity slip for reminding Francis that only a decade ago he was as trim as I am.

While I have never regretted not having children, I must say that if there ever were a small creature who could tempt me in the direction of regretting this course, it is his little son Marion. That little fellow has inherited his father's intelligence but his mother's good cheer, and he takes adults--including this dotting aunt--so seriously. He is never naughty, never without something to talk about, and (I say this with no jealousy) his father spends hours reading to him. Has it taken a little son to make my brother over into someone who is quaintly British?

I should close by noting that those plans about my moving back to America were only vaguely entertained. They could not have come to fruition and are now abandoned. I am snugly at one with my neighborhood, at ease in my little home, and my lover now lives nearby. (Francis is quaintly American is telling me that using the word "lover" is not proper in good company; he insists I should call him my "boyfriend," which to me sounds quaintly juvenile.)

Thank you, Francis, for this dubious opportunity to appear in your Aviary. And thank you, friends of Francis, for abiding me this while.

Fondly,

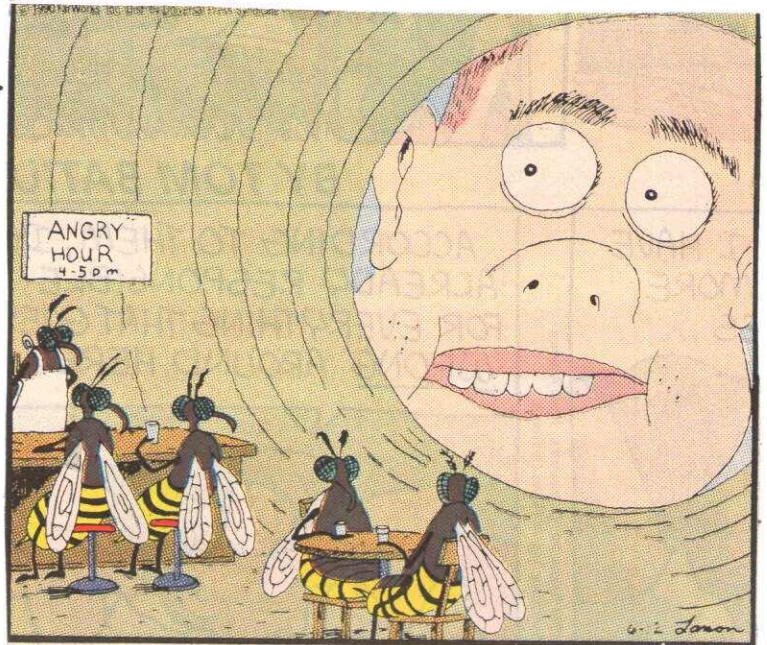
Francis



*** FORTHCOMING EVENTS ***

Predict the future? That feels dangerous. Moreover, I wonder if this section is mistitled. When do "events" happen in my life? What is more likely to occur is a continuation of certain ill-defined and quite indeterminate vague tendencies of qualitative heterogeneity which account for differentiation but never invite definition.

I can, however, make at least one anticipation which is so sturdy as to likely amount to a prediction. Namely, I intend to never, ever do an Aviary again that is as long as this one. At the finish, I fear it will be an even 100 pages. I began thinking about this, compiling mental notes and actual notes from old appointments' calendars, and a few notes I randomly jot down with the uncertain view that they might prove useful should I one day do an Aviary again. I began this preparatory task on June 26; and I then began writing on June 29. This date is August 31. So I have spent more than two months doing this silly piece of spillage, and I am not yet (though almost) finished. Of course I have done other things too in the course of composing this Aviary, but the task



It was foolish for Russell to approach the hornets' nest in the first place, but his timing was particularly bad.

has been long and arduous, and it has detracted too much from my other, more creative, and less narcissistic endeavors. If I am wise, I will show enough prudence to never again do any Aviary, long or short. I do know that there is something about this exercise which almost invariably



arouses people's ire. I also know that getting it printed is scarcely inexpensive. And to my dismay, I have found that many readers consider it disposable--after they have read it, or have read the parts which interest them, they merely throw it away. Instead of treating it like one would a book, and pass it on to someone else, they treat it like a daily newspaper. Once read, it is discarded. But it is neither book nor newspaper; it is a letter. And as a letter, it should be valued, treasured, hoarded. It should be clutched in your hands when you are a corpse being buried. When archeologists of the future disinter you, they should discover, wrapped around the bones of those collapsed hands, not only that rosary which your grieving relatives insisted should be there, but also the still decipherable fragments of that ancient piece of prosaic sanctity called The Aviary, proved to be composed by the hand of none other than Saint Baumli.

I did promise my sister Frances that I not only would not change anything she has sent me, I also would not comment on it. She is



rather controlling on such matters. She even, on a piece of paper, signs her name and when I type in what she has written, I have to cut out her signature and then paste it in on the page to be copied. I am one to keep

my promises, so will not comment on what she wrote; however, I do not think she will take it amiss if I use a comment she made as reason for commenting upon myself. Such comment is deserved as regards the sorrow I continue to have (harbor, nurse, and even cherish) over losing Dacia. I here comment on this, because I intend to try and do better with it. I not only sorrow, I hate--not Dacia, but her mother. In fact, when I look back at what I wrote herein on page 25, I truly am somewhat ashamed. That was pure hatred spilling out. Even if I might be able to justify that hatred to myself, I can not but

know Dacia must sense it (perhaps even hear it, at times?). This is not good for whatever I might hope to one day achieve by way of reconciliation with Dacia. So I intend to pursue a different path with my own attitudes about what Dacia did. There should be contrition, at least. Perhaps contrition is the atheist's only way of praying.

As for other forthcoming events that are not events: I intend to continue in my quest for solitude and becoming more successful at being a recluse. I certainly am not in the mood to travel. I want to get settled into our new home. I want to do my work. And besides, at the present we haven't the means for much travel anyway. (At this moment, a keen memory of a meal I had some years ago in Edinburgh: it was in a Chinese restaurant--yes; they do proliferate in all of Great Britain. And I ordered prawns with pineapple and ginger. It was, and remains, the most delicious Chinese meal I have ever had. The prawns--huge shrimps--were perfect. The pineapple had been cut fresh, and cooked into the mixture in large chunks. And there was ... well, what was it? Small, round, absolutely delectable pieces of something which tasted sweet and spicy with an afterglow almost like that of a burnished single-malt Scotch. I asked for the cook to come out so I could give him my congratulations. He did come out, was most pleased, and explained to me what the small, round pieces were. They were about the size of medium radishes, but actually they were "baby gingers" as he put it. The ginger root, rather than being allowed to grow large and woody, is dug while the tubules are small and round and sweet. Oh my dearly lord, that was an excellent meal, and I would travel to Edinburgh again just to eat at that restaurant and once again partake of those little white spheres of divine ginger.)

Obviously, in writing this, I am tempting myself toward the itinerant life and fully intending to tempt! But I am doing so just to remind myself that it is a temptation to be resisted for now. Besides, I have not weakened in my resolve to become even more of a recluse. I have many a reason for this resolve, most having to do with the mere fact that being reclusive suits my temperament and my work. But there also is a reason which beckons my sense of modesty. How to explain this? Allow me simply to note a fact: On August 30, of 1994, a certain young creature named Ryan Gale was born into this world. I would discover, subsequently, that exactly nine months prior to this event his parents, Jon and Sandy, had, before retiring for the night, spent the entire evening talking about me. And so, this long discussion about Francis Baumli, it would seem, had led from one thing to another--from conversation to carnality. I blush in noting this, and would eschew all mention of the event, except that news of such contiguities (scarcely coincidences!) between conversing about Baumli and a child being born nine months later causes me to resolve that such biological events should occur more on the basis of animal motives and less on the basis of neodivine inspiration.

Yes; modesty on my part about all sexual or reproductive matters causes me to desire the kind of reclusiveness which would even make me no longer the subject of conversation. Besides, what business have I, in any situation, inspiring other people? I am concerning myself these days with more mundane matters. For example, at the last two places I lived, a fireproof study was built, separate from the house, and in that structure I housed my precious books, manuscripts, and therein I gave birth to more than one literary creature of merit. Will we build such a structure here? I doubt it. We live closer to a fire department than we once did, so the worry about a fire is not as pressing. Plus, I have heard the opinion that a fireproof structure, if its contents ever catch fire, is more likely to entail a total loss for those contents than a structure that is not fireproof because the building, itself immune to fire, holds the heat from the burning contents inside and essentially acts as an oven, reducing everything inside to ash, i.e., a total loss.



So to build a new study or not? I am not sure. There is the concern I just registered. There is the expense. There is the added expense that anything built in Saint Louis is taxed to the hilt. So you see? Mundane matters occupy my mind these days; I do not have time for hearing about how I inspire other people to ecstasies and frenzies. Mine own suffice for my post-refractory meditations. Besides, mine own ecstasies are inimitable.

PROFINIS

Why should he try to guess his future, when the outcome of the imminent moment was often uncertain?

Blind Date by Jerzy Kosinski, p. 220



As I now proceed toward ending this unwieldy, ungainly, and unseemly edition of The Aviary, one remedy is in order. On page 13 I gave mention to the fact that I could not remember Rodney Brown's brother's name. It just now came to me: Scott. Scott Brown. One more of the sterling people in Southern Illinois, and, given his rare distinction, he does deserve mention by name.

There is something almost shameful, too, which deserves mention. Or perhaps it is not shameful at all. Maybe it is admirable. But I do feel hesitant, even shy, about this admission. Namely, I earlier noted that I began this edition of The Aviary in June. I began preparing it--collecting ideas and notes--on June 26, and began writing on June 29. I now bring it to a close on September 3, 2008. Yes; this is the part I have difficulty admitting. I did not write this in 1995, as you might have been suspecting all along. I began writing it in June of 2008, almost 1½ decades after the year at issue. I had not wanted to do this issue. People had clamored for the next Aviary, and this had made me feel as though they were looking over my shoulder, and so I simply could not feel as though I had the privacy I needed to write. But for some reason I wanted to, if not renew the continuum, at least bring it up to my move to Saint Louis. So here it is. I have been tardy. I am not convinced that I have been remiss.

I have been asked to explain something, so I shall. Once, to an assembled group of disciples, I grumbled, "I am always being interrupted. Even my every fuck is interrupted." They laughed, thinking I was joking. I wasn't. Yes; for my entire life, virtually my every fuck has been interrupted. Apparently my body emits a pheromonic redolence which attracts every fan, every voyeur, and every nearby creature when I am in the midst of the carnal act. If it isn't the doorbell, it's a tornado siren. Many years ago, in the deep woods on a blanket with a delectable young thing, while amidst, we heard a loud hiss. There, not 15 feet away, was a mother skunk carrying a baby in her mouth as a mother cat carries a kitten. The mother hissed, she dropped the baby, and reared up on her front paws with her rear aimed in our direction. At that moment the baby squealed, she hastily picked it up again, and took off at a run even as the two of us bolted. We gingerly returned, minutes later, to retrieve our clothes. The fuck was resumed at my house an hour later, but it was actually interrupted by an insistent knock at the door. It was a salesman. His wares? Encyclopedias. I obnoxiously told him I was in the market for sex manuals only.

Why do I go on about this topic here? Because I am disgusted with myself. Always an interruption. If it isn't my sex life, it's my writing. If it isn't others, it's myself. Yes; I interrupted my important writing to spend nine weeks, working almost every night, doing a paltry Aviary. Shame on me.

Yours most quaintly,