

# THE A V I A R Y

Vol.6, #1 (Jan.-Feb. '89)

From Francis Baumli:  
for friends & associates.



"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."

Plato (Theaetetus)

Have I no dignity left? Am I to finally conclude that I should even give up what remnants of self-respect I have managed to keep about me these last few years? What, I ask, has caused my world to come to this?

The this in question is the fact that only yesterday I received two more letters, each of them a veritable sewer of venom, and each of them responding to the Vol.4, #1 issue of The Aviary. Beware that the two people who sent me these letters received this issue certainly no less than 1½ years ago. Had they waited this long to read it? No. They each declared that all this time they have felt wounded, insulted, but reticent about telling me because of my arrogance. Yes; they each used the word "arrogance." And they each, while stating that this trait of mine is what prevented them from writing me sooner, staunchly claimed that the very thing they were so wounded by was this very same arrogance of mine. I wondered: Is it possible that these two women planned this coordinated assault? Unlikely; they live more than two thousand miles apart, and I have reason to believe they have never heard of one another. Yet, both wrote me essentially the same letter (although one's prose style was less insulting than was the other's). Each heaped accusations upon me. Each of these women was obviously shaken to the roots of her being.



What foul sentiment, guised as arrogance, could I possibly have indulged to arouse an anger this enduring, this strong? But then, whatever it is about me that elicits such responses does not have a delayed effect only. There also were those (yes; many of you, who have already raised your shrill voice) who did not tarry so long, but instead, were prompt with their invectives and condemnations.

I am not a callous man. Such diatribe is difficult for me to bear, and there have been times, during the last two years, when I have been tempted to abandon these yearly missives altogether. I compose them in fun, and for the sake of saving time: I can inform all my friends of the main events that are a part of my life, and thus not have to, over and over, tell everyone the same news. By sending an Aviary, I can dispense with the telling of such trivia and discourse about the things common to who we uniquely are together.

So, given the purity (and humility) of my intentions, why is it--how is it?--that I can arouse such ire? What of it if a bit of arrogance now and then shows itself in these pages? Is arrogance such a sin? Especially when it is assumed so infrequently, and so transiently? And especially when, if it does show itself, it has such worthy motives?

Ah--that phrase: "worthy motives," irks you, does it not? But allow me a few moments to explain, and perhaps you will understand that, while indeed it is my intention to prick you, there is nothing in my arrogance which need cause your own fragile ego any harm.

Can you not see that I am feigning? Pretending to an arrogance I do not actually have? And that I am thus deluding my-

self even more than I could possibly be deluding you? My dear friends, do you not know me well enough to discern that it is impossible for me to harbor an authentic arrogance? Surely you have realized, and have often been both confused and inconvenienced by, your awareness that here, in this pseudo-person called Baumli, there is something that is the diametrical opposite of arrogance. Yes; you have often been struck by the fact that there scarcely has ever existed a person who has a lower opinion of himself than I do. You have witnessed the appearance of this; I can give concrete evidence of it. Many times I have taken the MMPI (Minnesota Multi-Phasic Personality Inventory) test, which is generally acknowledged by psychologists and psychiatrists to be the most accurate measure in existence of someone's personality. On this test, there is a measure of one's ego strength, i.e., how well one thinks of oneself, how self-assured one is, how resilient at withstanding the criticism of others, how immune to despair. Every time I have taken this MMPI, I have shocked the counselor who has administered it by measuring at either the very bottom of the graph which charts the scale, or actually dropping off the bottom of the graph. Truly; I do not exaggerate in saying this.

Should one conclude, from what I have just said, that now everything is clear: that if indeed Baumli has such poor self-esteem, then of course he must compensate by pretending to be arrogant? But no; this conclusion is not warranted. Keep in mind that my mind seldom works in ways that are so simplistic. And please understand: My arrogance is not compensation for a lack of ego-strength. Quite the contrary, this arrogance which appears in The Aviary can compensate for nothing, certainly not for a fragile ego, since it not only is a feigned arrogance, it also is an entirely intentional feigning. There is nothing, be assured, unconscious about this feigning; no subliminal compensation at work. No; I am fully conscious of--I fully intend--my pretense.

Why, then, do I pretend to arrogance? Well, for one reason only: because I am quite aware that few things anger others so much as arrogance, and, fully believing that I am a worthless being, I further believe that I deserve not only others' low opinion of me, but also their anger, their abuse, their execrations. Hence, I pretend to arrogance, so that other people's perception of me might better match my own perception of myself. Thus, although I do not feel any better about myself, at least, knowing that others can thus be tricked into sharing my own low opinion of myself, I can feel less lonely. You, my friends and readers, can scarcely imagine the comfort I find in convincing the world that it should hate me. Once convinced, then the world and I share the same view, and even though the world's opinion of me may be based on falsely presented evidence, well, at least I have found a companion--someone who mirrors to me my own sordid self-concept. There is gratification--entirely non-narcissistic gratification, be assured--in the opportunity to then discourse about a topic which we all agree upon.

Do you see? It all works out very nicely? I pretend to arrogance,



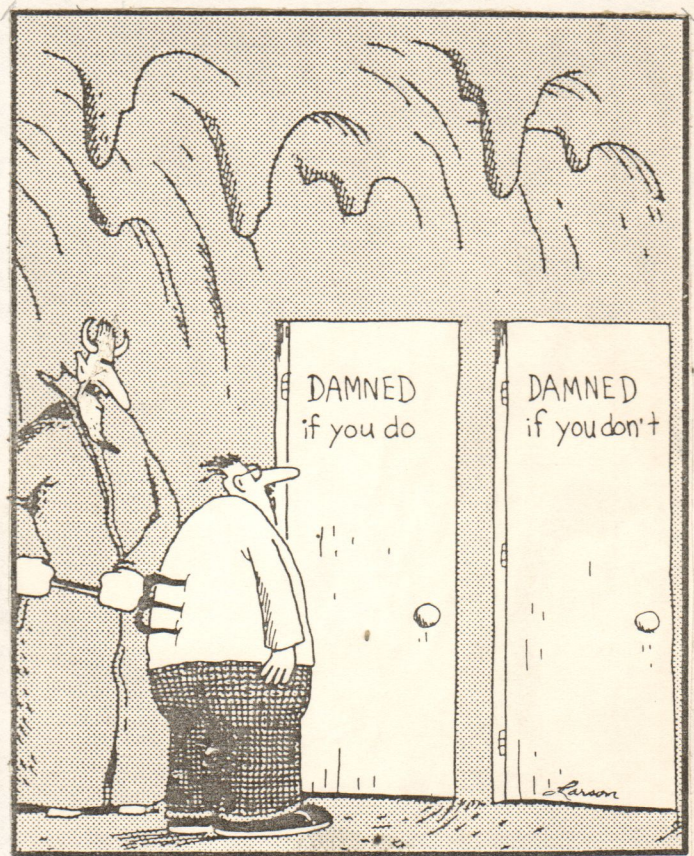


people get angry at me, their estimation of me is lowered, and thus we share the same perspective about me. And I am so grateful for the company. Of course I get upset about all this. That is part of feeling such low self-esteem. And of course I must protest it when I am feeling bad about myself, and other people join me in this opinion. But still, even amidst my protestations, I am grateful. Even though my feelings may be hurt, I am thus able to more completely (perhaps more externally?) concretize these vague depressions and these many anxieties.

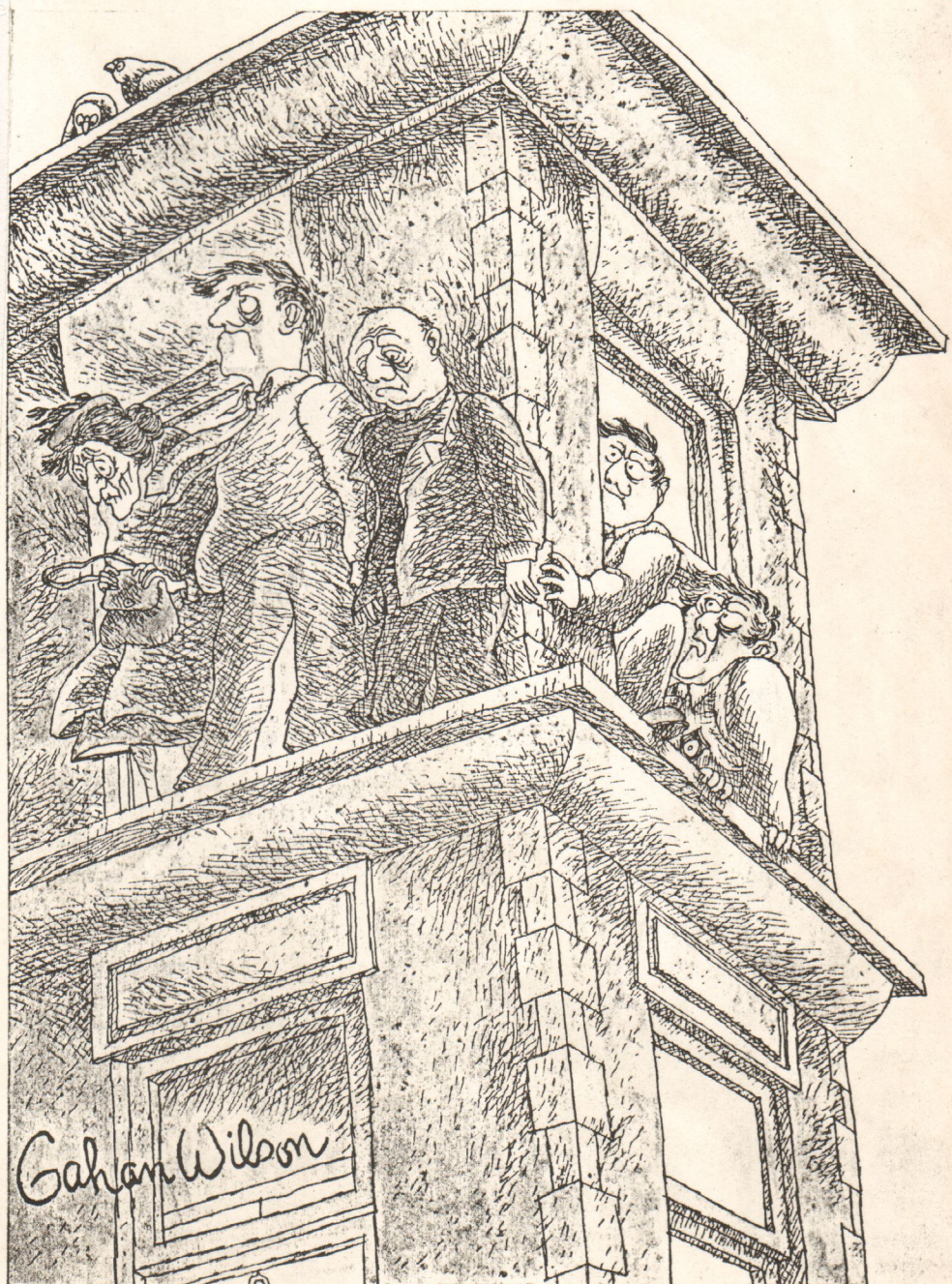
Do I risk losing people's aid in maintaining this low opinion of myself by thus exposing my method--my manipulative treachery? I rather doubt it. When it comes to dealing with the difficult parts of my personality, an impressively large number of people, despite their redundant resolutions to the contrary, succumb. Pretending to remain aloof from me, or worse yet, striving to be compassionate, they almost inevitably become not only hostile, but also utterly pusillanimous. Their opinions then, as well as their pronouncements, while not quite equal to my own, are a sufficient verisimilitude.

Meanwhile, however, I scarcely require the aid of my friends when it comes to living in a familiarly oppressive world. Much has transpired in 1988. In fact, the only thing which prevents my stating that the last half of 1988 has been the worst six months of my life is my not wanting to here ponder, and review, the dismal history of my entire forty years.

Herein is a recounting of what has happened during the latter part of 1988. It is not an enjoyable tale. So ... do you really want to read it? Likely you do, since I have hinted at the fact that, with life as oppressive as it is, you may at last have an opportunity for reading an edition of The Aviary in which I haven't even the verve to pretend to arrogance, and I haven't even any inclination for insulting those people who deserve such. All of which, I am sure you perceive, is a most dangerous and desperate frame of mind. This dispirited, this unable to rile other people into joining me in my self-hatred, I am condemning myself to a lonely existence indeed. Shall I endure? Of course I shall. There is too much comfort in self-loathing to leave life to those pampered souls who have never known the rigors of self-abuse. (Moreover,



"C'mon, c'mon—it's either one or the other."

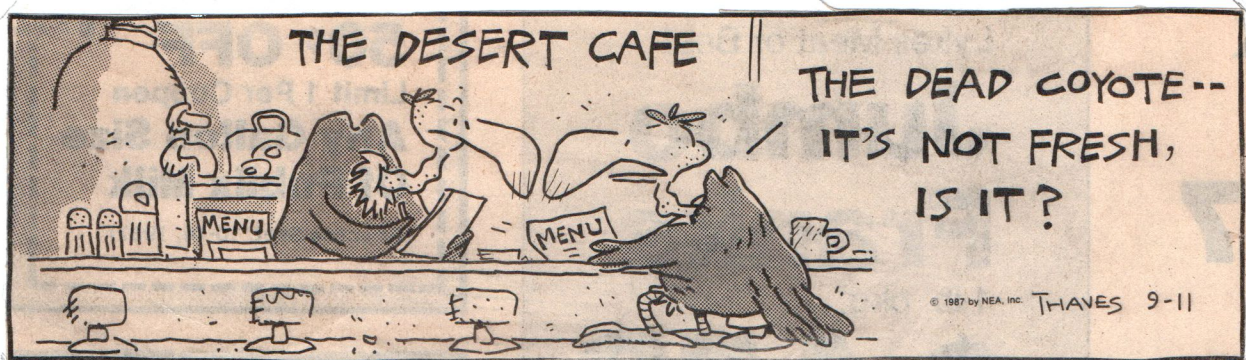


"Now, for God's sake, Harrington, don't let him convince you!"



I have just written a sentence which I am sure will incur the ridicule of certain of my friends, who will delight to no end in pointing out to me my sin of stringing together three prepositional phrases. I am already cheering up somewhat, looking forward to the pleasure I shall gain from such ridicule. As explained before, it will provide me with company in casting aspersions upon my character. Moreover, its absence will also provide me with a modicum of comic relief, as I humbly, and certainly with no arrogance, evoke discomfiture in certain of my friends by pointing out to them that it was not three prepositional phrases, but rather, two prepositional phrases and a verbal clause disguised as one.)

Ah well; you see? I am in a bit of a better humor already. And maybe this is the most dangerous stance of all!



When a man laughs at his troubles he loses a good many friends. They never forgive the loss of their prerogative.

H.L. Mencken

### SIGNIFICANT EVENTS OF 1988

January 22: On this date, Abbe reminded me that this was the fourth anniversary of that fateful day, in 1985, when, even though she had been my mistress for more than 2½ years, I at last salvaged her reputation by marrying her.

January 25: I went to Small Claims Court and won a case for less than 20 dollars against a little snippit of a man who had tried to avoid paying me this small bill. He skipped town without letting me know, and I had the satisfaction of not only winning, but also causing him to have to make all of that 250 mile round trip to Columbia. Why did I bother with such a small debt? Well; he was a bitchy little wimp, and he did a good job of pissing me off.

Such a waste of time it is, though, for me to fight small battles like this in court, when I have more important things to do. I need to focus my attention on the bigger battles. Or be less susceptible to an anger that requires revenge.

February 25: After an absence of about three months, my big, magnificent, splendid, gorgeous tom-cat named Buttercup came back. He seemed more healthy than he had ever been, weighed a full 14 pounds, and had strengthened his character considerably. I gave him a big meal, sat down on the floor with him, and while rubbing his belly and his chin, told him that he had been gone for so long that it would not have been impossible that another tom-cat might have replaced him. I further informed him that if indeed another tom-cat had been here, and had resembled him, then I likely would have been unable to resist the inspiration, and would have (I composed a bit of a ditty so he could remember it) realized it was, "Time for a tome about a team of tame tommycats with tumultuous tummiters!" (Disgusting, how shameless Baumli is.)

February 26: I attended a production of Pirandello's Six Characters in Search of an Author. Staged by the UMC University Theatre, it was the first well-done play I had ever seen at the University. But, this play was more than well-done! It was truly superb! The role of the father was played by a fellow named Zachary Bloomfield, who did as fine a job on stage



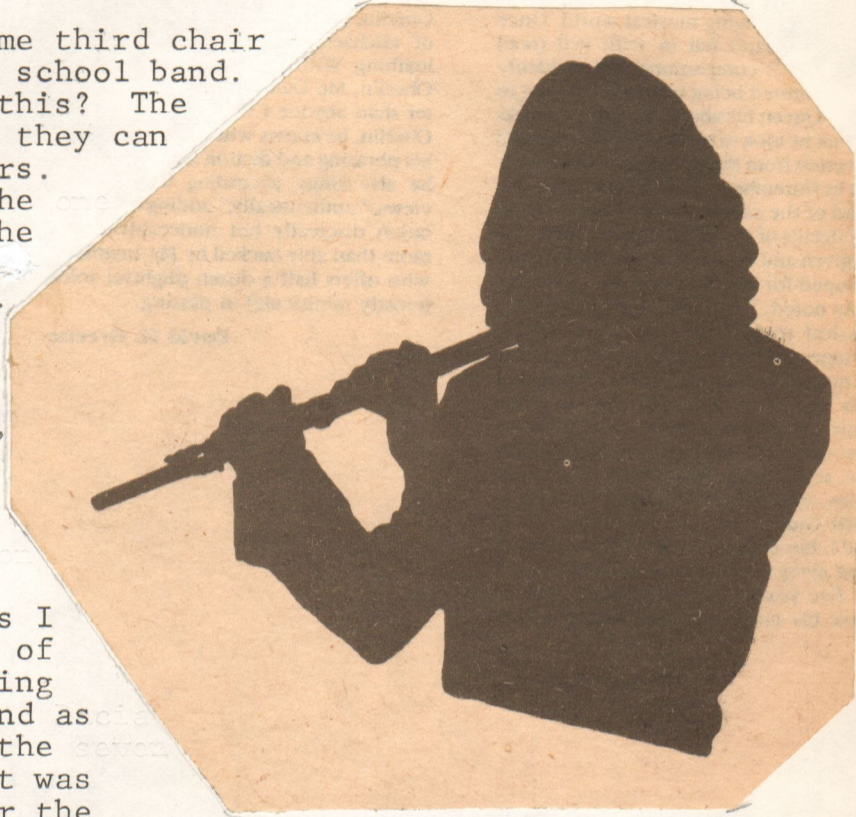
as I have ever seen performed. I have written a five-act play which, I hope, will one day be staged. When that day comes, I will try to contact Mr. Bloomfield, in hopes that he can play the role of the leading actor. Truly, if this young fellow gives the big-time a go, he will make it.

March 4: I attended a concert by the pianist, Murray Perahia. See a commentary in the music section herein.

March 26: I attended a concert by the Cathy Barton and Dave Para at Thespian Hall in Boonville, Missouri. I had heard them several times, in Columbia, Missouri, a few years back when they were living there. Their specialty is bluegrass and folk music. The concert was enjoyable, although not as good as I had expected. Barton's playing on the hammer dulcimer, however, was quite impressive. This much said, I shall say no more about it in the music section herein.

March 31: I went to The Museum of Art and Archeology in Columbia, Missouri. See notes regarding this viewing in the pertinent section within these pages.

April 15: On this date, Dacia became third chair out of fifteen flutists in the high school band. What process was used to determine this? The students have a system within which they can challenge each other for their chairs. When a challenge goes forth, then the person who wins moves up. But in the course of any one challenge, there usually is a lot of shuffling about. Students, who were not directly involved in the challenge, may get moved up, or down. Dacia, not one to be competitive about such things, has never issued a challenge for a higher chair. But when all the shuffling was finished after the latest challenge in the flute section, my daughter was none other than third flutist. Now, as long as I am bragging, allow me to remind you of certain facts. Namely, we are talking about the high school band here. And as of this ranking, Dacia was only in the seventh grade, i.e., junior high. It was quite a juxtaposition, going to hear the group play, and seeing my very young daughter sitting there amongst the seniors in high school.



I am sure that, had she been inclined to issue a challenge herself, Dacia could have moved up to second chair by the end of the school year. But, just to convince you that pride does not cloud my judgement of her abilities, I here vouchsafe that I do not think she could have taken first chair. The first chair was a graduating senior, who had taken honors at state. But Dacia, who was only in the seventh grade, against all those seniors, had moved up to third chair! I had long dreamed that Dacia one day be first-chair with the Berlin Philharmonic. She says she does not want to live in Germany. Okay; I will settle for her being first-chair of the Chicago Symphony.

May 18: Abbe had surgery on her jaw, to have two wisdom teeth and a cyst removed. A couple of days worth of convalescence, and she was back on her feet. The craziest thing about this was what happened between us as I was driving her home from the surgery. Lying over against the door, her head resting on a pillow while she held two packs of ice against her jaw, she began talking to me about our real estate concerns: selling our own house, and buying a house in Illinois. This is how obsessed she was with the matter; and, I must admit that I was equally obsessed.

May 19: Dacia received, at school, the "Most Improved Musician" award!!

May 29: There was held, in my honor, a huge party to honor my birthday. To, in return, honor my friends, I made chili. And I am very sad to say that the quality plummeted to the point that its rank was just above a nine. I can plead worthy excuses. Always before I have made my chili in the fall. This time, making it in the summer, I was unable to obtain certain seasonal ingredients which are not available this time of year. Moreover, the meat which I had ordered, and had already bought, turned out to be of very inferior quality, and I simply did not have time or opportunity for taking it back. Still, the chili was wonderful, but I was understandably depressed



about the drop in quality.

The day was a wonderful celebration. Many members of my family, and a strong contingent of goodly friends, kept me company as I succumbed to the ravages of age.

May 31: On this day, two days after the party, I actually turned forty. In the past, from Abbe, I have always asked for a list of 25 things, e.g., 25 descriptives about myself which are superlatives--best, worst, most, and such. This year, I asked for a list describing 25 traits about myself, but I dare not here say what this list was. Otherwise, there might be hordes of lusting ladies languishing at my door, arousing Abbe's jealousy, and making demands upon me which, now that I am 40, I could not possibly ~~satisfy~~ meet.

June 7: I sold my house and farm in the country. Yes, it was sad; but also, it was quite anti-climactic. I had spent about three months, grieving through the fact that soon I would be leaving my place. And then, after putting our place up for sale through a realtor, we discovered that this realtor was generally undependable, dishonest, and a charlatan. Basically, we sold the house ourselves, but nevertheless had to pay this shyster her commission. At the official closing, when the papers were signed, this woman fairly hovered over us, her right hand actually opening and then snapping shut spasmodically until the commission check had been put in her hand.

Have I, in either this or the last Aviary, explained the reasons for this move? The federal government had paid Abbe's way through medical school, and she had agreed to work for the National Health Service Corps for four years, to pay them back. The unpleasant condition was that she would have to work in a medically underserved site. Most of these places were a bit frightening, at least in terms of where we would have wanted to move. We began weeding out the sites we definitely would not go to, using as our criteria: any site we would go to had to be within thirty miles of a commercial airport, and within fifty miles of a town with a population of at least 30,000. We used some good maps in plotting out which sites fit these criteria. Out of 150, only seven did. Of those seven, only two looked like places where we could be happy. One of these sites was at Murphysboro, Illinois. Carbondale, Illinois, is but seven miles distant from Murphysboro. It has a commercial airport, passenger train service to St. Louis, Chicago, and elsewhere, and we thought it had a population of above 30,000, although it is actually a little less than 20,000. But this matters little, as it turns out. Southern Illinois University at Carbondale swells its population during part of the year, and because of the university students, there is a bit more of what passes for culture in the town than there would be in many towns that might be larger.

So now you know why we moved, why I was selling my farm and house, etc. As to the specifics of the move, and the new locale--more about this later.

June 18: I attended a concert by The St. Louis Symphony Orchestra. Contrary to their usual quality, this concert was quite bad. See the music section for details.

July 11: We bought a house in Murphysboro, Illinois. Actually, although it has a Murphysboro mailing address, it is in the country about half way between Murphysboro and Carbondale, and Dacia will attend school at Carbondale. The house: a very large, brick structure, built in 1855, with some additions made at later dates. It sits on a plot of ground a bit larger than three acres, and although it is close to the highway and rather close to several other houses, the wooded, spacious yard gives one a feeling of some privacy. The house, because it needs many repairs, was affordable. It is beautiful, in a way, but will not have a sense of comfort until many needed repairs have been completed.

July 14: We moved away from the house where I had lived for 12½ years. It was a cozy little house, with my study about sixty feet behind it. The six acres of land had provided me with many an hour of relaxation and that sense of rootedness which I seem to require. Leaving it was very sad. But the fact that I had done my best to put everything about the place in perfect repair before leaving, and had just mowed all the pastures, helped somehow. Maybe it also helped that I had lived there for five weeks as a renter, since we sold the house that many weeks before actually moving.

July 14: We arrived at our house in Murphysboro, with our household goods, being moved by a moving company, to arrive five days later. As of this date, the period of exile has begun.

August 22: Abbe turned 30, and although a party had been planned in her honor, she canceled it. Why? She was feeling miserable. I was feeling miserable. Already, this soon, we were feeling overwhelmed by the demands of putting the house we had bought into repair. But even more, we were being overwhelmed by the people of this locale. They are a special breed,



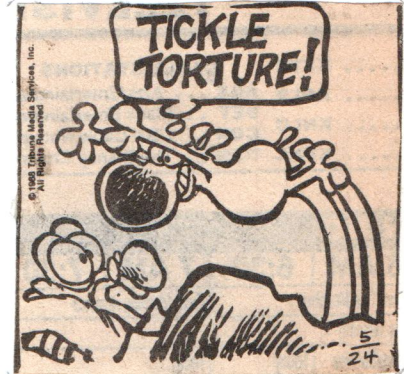
and already they were skulking about, inflicting ruin of some ilk upon us at every opportunity.

Abbe was in virtual despair, and I was feeling no better at this point. Neither of us could muster the enthusiasm, much less the physical energy, to have a party for her. Hopefully we can make amends this next year.

September 14: Into our home, there was introduced an automatic dishwasher. I looked upon it askance, recoiled suspiciously, and waited to see if it would actually make the onerous task of washing dishes any easier.



September 17: My lovely daughterly Dacia became a teenager. Family from St. Louis came to visit, and we had a nice celebration. Dacia is growing up. She remains a little girl, but more and more she is becoming a woman. Her body is changing, her outlook on the world is changing, and her attitude toward her parents is changing. She now talks about politics, the difficult aspects of human relationships, gives erudite analyses of movies she has seen, and is spending too much time on the phone with her friends. Meanwhile, she has become indignant (too mature?) about certain games, such as "tickle torture," which her father has customarily played with her in the past. She is more open with her feelings, and more verbal about their complexity. But fortunately, for this jealous father (the sins of whose youth will one day be haunting him!), she has not yet professed interest in dating and such.

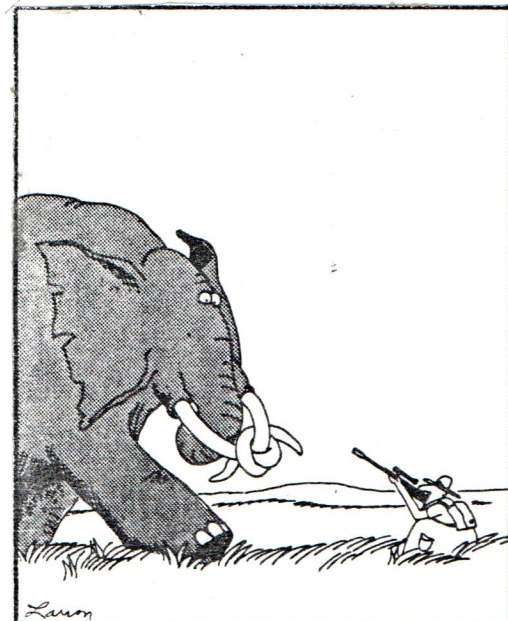


October 6: A very strange deed it was, for me; so strange, that I am somewhat embarrassed admitting to it. But, on this date, I sold my guns. All three of them. I took the .22 Remington clip-feed bolt-action rifle, the .22 High Standard Nine revolver--a double-action nine-shot job with a six-inch barrel, and the .44 magnum Auberti revolver--a single-action six-shot pistol with a 7½ inch barrel; yes, all three of these, I took to a gun dealer and sold cheaply. Cheap enough that I could get rid of them this day. Without further delay, further indecision, further emotional struggle. And it was difficult. I am embarrassed to admit that it was one of the most difficult decisions I have made in several years. I was very attached to those guns. Especially with that .44 magnum. I was proud of the fact that I could shoot at the expert rank with it. This was a beautiful gun: heat-treated frame-work with the heat pattern intact, a softly blued barrel, "Cattleman" grips and sights: smooth walnut grips with fully adjustable rear sight and side-slant front sight. And all that power at the barrel. More than 1300 footpounds of energy at the end of that 7½ inch barrel. No need to worry about not having enough power with that gun.

And yet, whatever security those guns were giving me was obviously not intact. It seemed that every couple of months, I would have a dream in which I was shooting a wild animal, or shooting it out with someone, and I would have to re-load. And then that .44 magnum would jam on me. And indeed it tended to do this at times. The pistol had so much force that the spent cartridges would almost be fused to the chamber wall, and as a result, ejecting them could be very difficult. In my dreams, I would be trying to get the spent shells out (a slow process with a single-action revolver; you punch them out with the slide-ejector one at a time), one would be especially difficult, and the enemy, or monster, or whatever would be pressing closer and closer. And I would wake up, terrified.

Why had I kept them for so long? Well, the rifle for hunting. The .44 magnum for hunting too, but also for self-defense. And the .22 revolver--well, that for both too. I enjoyed target-shooting with the pistols, I liked the idea that with my guns I could defend myself if need be, my ego was pampered by the fact that I was such a good shot with the pistols, and ... Well, I need not go into all that. The question for now is, why did I get rid of them?

First of all, for about three years, I had scarcely used them. It just seemed that I had lost all interest in them. Except for shooting a few snakes with my rifle, and target-shooting maybe a couple of times with my pistols, I had not even taken the guns out. But even an unused gun has to



Suddenly, his worst fears realized, the old fellow's tusks jammed.



be cleaned periodically, and I must say that I hate cleaning guns. So the task of cleaning those guns when I was not even using them became a chore I hated. A second reason I sold them was my awareness that the possibility of their being stolen by a burglar was probably considerably greater than my ever using them for practical purposes. I kept it quiet to all my neighbors that I owned that .44 magnum, but still, word got around, and more than one person I knew with a .44 magnum had his pistol stolen; it seems that thieves covet that caliber. A third reason: well, I had to admit that I wasn't sure I would ever need the pistols for self-defense. Three times in my life I had drawn a pistol in self-defense. Once it was against a fellow who was threatening to attack myself and some other people. But he lost his nerve and ran, and never even knew that one of the people he was threatening was aiming a pistol at him. Another time, the intruder turned out to be a very stupid acquaintance coming into my house, without knocking, through the back door. The third time a fellow who actually had vowed to kill me was after me; I thought he was breaking into my house, I was ready to kill him, but it turned out that it was not him. The final resolution of this conflict was settled (more or less, without guns or death). There was a fourth time I drew, not one of my pistols, but my rifle on a fellow. It was a very strange situation: I was down at the Missouri River with two woman friends, target-shooting. A fellow about twenty-five yards away went berserk, yelling at me, cursing me, and he emptied his pistol at me, missing with all six shots. Let me tell you, time really does stand still in such dangerous situations. In about two seconds, it seemed that I had a full hour to casually think the matter through. I realized that I was not sure how many, if any, shells were left in the clip of my rifle. So I quickly pulled the clip out and shoved in a full clip. I yelled at the two women who were with me to run to the car, which they did. I wondered if the fellow might have more shots left in that pistol. From the sound--a loud pop, but not a boom, like a high caliber pistol, I knew it was small caliber. But the only pistol I have ever known of, which carries more than six shots, is a .22, and this pistol did not have the crack of a .22--unless, it was .22 shorts, which was very unlikely given that for several years they have scarcely been used and no gun-shop that I knew of carried them. The man was wearing overalls, and I did not think he was carrying a quick-load pack for the pistol, since if he were it would be quite visible, given their bulk. The first thing I had noticed was that it was a revolver--so, it was likely a six-shooter, he had shot six times, it had not sounded like a .22--unless it was firing .22 shorts which was most unlikely--so the revolver was probably empty by now, to re-load a revolver, even a double-action, without a quick-load takes at least 15 seconds, and easily up to 30 seconds. The man raised the gun toward me again, and I raised my rifle and took perfect aim at his heart, even making sure to aim about two inches below and to his right of that left metal button on his overalls so that the button would not in any way slow the bullet. I took perfect aim, heard two car doors slam in quick succession--that was the two women who were with me getting in the car, and I thought: "No; I don't want to shoot this crazy man. His gun is empty, and I can get the hell out of here before he can re-load." So I ran too. I drove as quickly as I could to the nearest filling station, called the sheriff, and let them do the dirty work. They came to investigate, by this time the fellow was gone, and the people he was with said they did not know him, that he had been coming up the river in a boat, had stopped to talk, and became angry at me for shooting my rifle so decided to teach me a lesson. (To a dead man?) And that's the end of the story, as far as I'm concerned. Yes; one of my friends may be right. Maybe since I didn't shoot him, the fellow a few years later drew down on someone and was a little more accurate. But I'm not going to worry about that. I'm simply glad that I didn't have to kill the guy, and I'm glad that I didn't have to go through the consequences--emotional, and probably legal--that would have ensued had I killed him. So you see, I had had a gun by me in several situations in which I could have thought I was using the gun for self-defense; but in each case I did not need the gun. So why not sell them? Well; I thought the matter through. And no--I still wanted to use them for target-practice, and I still wanted to have the guns with me for self-defense, "just in case." Of course, I knew that in most situations where I might need a gun for self-defense, I probably would not have one of my guns with me anyway. But still, you never know. Thus I reasoned, until one day I realized (again) that there is always the possibility that someone who doesn't know anything about guns, especially a child, might find my guns and get hurt. I pondered this realization for a good long while, and came to the conclusion (a very cogent one, I think) that the possibility of a child getting killed through an accident with my pistol was probably greater than the possibility of my ever using that pistol to keep myself from getting killed. In fact, thinking back over the history of my life and the history of a few friends, I became more and more convinced that indeed, without doubt, the possibility of my guns accidentally killing a child was much, much greater than the possibility of my guns ever being used to keep me from getting killed. So when I dropped those two considerations onto the



scale, the message was quite clear. Get rid of the guns. But no; I wasn't ready yet. Emotionally, I simply could not, or would not, part with them. I talked the matter over with a few friends. One of the friends told me that I should destroy the guns, cut them up with a welding torch or go bury them somewhere. Do this?! To my beautiful .44 magnum Auberti? No way! Thus I pondered and wrestled, and truly, I do not exaggerate in saying that it was something of an agony.

But then another reason presented itself to me for getting rid of the guns. A rather convoluted reason it was, but apparently it sufficed. Abbe, Dacia, and I were all driving to Carbondale in my pickup. Abbe was at the wheel, it was night--pitch-black, and because the road was bumpy I was, as has been customary since this multiple sclerosis has started affecting my last good eye, riding with my eyes shut. I had opened my eyes earlier, and had realized that there was a lot of on-coming traffic, all moving at high speed on this out-of-the-way highway. As we were riding along, I again opened my eyes for just a second, and there--again, in one of those split seconds that allows you many minutes worth of thought--I saw, ahead of us, at a distance of perhaps 150 yards--a distance that was fast closing, two fellows on bicycles over toward the side of the highway but not off on the shoulder. If they had lights on the bikes, one could not have seen them, what with the stronger lights of the on-coming traffic. But I saw the reflectors on the back of the bikes, I knew that Abbe did not, I yelled, "Bikes!! Stop!!" and Abbe fortunately hit the brakes of that pickup as hard as she could, because we barely managed to get stopped. And there they were, two dumb-asses pumping their bikes up a steep hill, refusing to get off the pavement onto the shoulder because the going was so tough, and we crawled up the hill after them, and then finally was able to pass them when there was a break in the on-coming traffic. And for the rest of the night I was terribly shaken, because I know Abbe's driving reflexes very well, and although it is possible that she would have run over these two fellows without ever having seen them, it is likely that she would have seen them just before impact, and, knowing her reflexes, she would have jerked the vehicle we were in to the left--into the on-coming traffic. And thereupon--a head-on collision, with who knows what in the way of consequences, although, with the speed of the traffic, I suspect people would have been killed, and anyone not killed would have been terribly injured. We had been saved, or the bicyclists had been saved, because for no reason at all, I had opened my eyes for a second. Abbe had not seen the bicyclists, and said that the lights of the on-coming traffic, cresting the hill, were coming into her eyes so directly that she would never have seen them in time to avoid an accident.

For the next several days, I was furious at a traffic system in this country which will allow bicyclists to travel on highways at speeds slower than a car's minimum-allowed speed. But it did not take me several days to come to another conclusion.

And here, at last, I can perhaps begin to make sense out of what the above had to do with my selling my guns.

I have for a long time been very upset about the carnage on our highways. I applaud the seat-belt laws. I wish the speed limit would be lowered to 55 mph, where it used to be. I wish people would drive less. I wish the penalties for drinking while driving (accounting for more than half the highway fatalities) were much stiffer, I wish gas were rationed so that people could not do pleasure driving, and so on. All this I have felt for many years. I have also been aware that my fellow citizens do not share these sentiments. Even though more than 50 thousand people are killed on our highways per year--more Americans killed per year than were killed in the entire course of the Vietnam war--no one does very much by way of protest. All this I have known. I have said to myself: it is senseless, unnecessary killing, and I wish it were different.

Well; that night, when we arrived in Carbondale, I got out of the pickup and I realized: I have to do something about this. I don't know what, exactly, but I am going to be driving less than the little I now do. And yes ... the thought came to me clearly, I am going to get rid of those guns. If unnecessary driving can involve more people being killed, and if owning guns can involve more people being killed, then I am going to get rid of those guns. This decision--more a realization--came to me in a split second. How dispose of them? I agonized over this for the next several days, while truly mourning the loss of my guns. I considered many things, but finally, I came to this conclusion: I would drive less, but I would not go so far as to destroy one of my vehicles, or expect anyone else to. And I simply did not want to destroy those guns. I did not want to give them to a friend. So I would sell them. And this is what I did. I took them out, cleaned them one last time, took some pictures of them, drove to a gun-shop, named a price which caused the owner to look at me suspiciously, and after producing ID to vouch for myself and allow the owner of the shop to protect himself from the possibility that I might be selling stolen guns, I sold all three--including the holsters to the two pistols--for \$325. And to think that I could have gotten as much as a thousand for that Auberti. But I wanted to be rid of them. For some reason I did not want them destroyed. I hoped that whoever



might buy them would treasure them as I did, and ... so be it. Yes; I know all the arguments against my course of action. I know that those guns were probably more safe in my keeping than in just about anyone's. I know that now they are just as dangerous, maybe more dangerous, than they were when I owned them. But emotionally I was not prepared to destroy them, I knew no one I was willing to give them to, and I needed to come to a decision quickly. So I sold them.

For about one week, I told no one about having sold them. I did not even tell Abbe that I was considering selling them, because I did not want to be influenced in any way by her own thoughts on the matter. At last, about one week after having sold them, I told her. It was good to finally get it off my chest to someone. I think I hadn't been very easy to live with the prior two weeks, during the struggle about what to do with the guns, and after having sold them.

But it is done. And obviously, I must concede that I still do not rest easy with the decision, given the space I have taken up with my lengthy explanation. But I am becoming more accustomed to living without guns. And surprisingly, I find that I am less afraid of possible situations in which I might have to use a gun, than I was before when I had the guns. Would I--could I--still use a gun, and kill someone, in self-defense? Yes. I am sure I could and might--if I felt there were no way of avoiding the situation. But now, I'll probably never use a gun to kill someone. And all in all, the people who come in to my house--friends, children, dumb-asses who think they know all about guns but pick them up and do stupid things with them--will probably be safer. As for other people out there in the world, including the people who bought my guns--well, I will tackle that problem one of these days.

Meanwhile, I am learning how to get along in this society with doing less driving.

October 8: On this date, it was not guns we got rid of, but that damned automatic dishwasher. We took it back to the store and re-claimed our money. Why did we get rid of it. (Fear not; this explanation is easier.) The detergent it used was too polluting. It was a loud beast, making entirely too much noise when it was doing its work. And it did its work very poorly. The things that I most hate to wash--skillets, casserole dishes, pans with food stuck to them--it could not wash anyway. As for the other things, I could do those in less than fifteen minutes, which to me was preferable to listening to that damned machine hissing and gurgling for more than an hour.

October 21: I attended a concert by The Tokyo String Quartet. More words on this event later.

November 6: I attended a concert by the Chamber Orchestra of Paris, conducted by Paul Kuentz. Refer to the music section herein.

November 18: This time, a concert by the pianist Konrad Wolff. I left at the intermission. See the music section for details.

December 2: A very powerful performance of Handel's Messiah, by the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra & the St. Louis Symphony Chorus, conducted by the great maestro, Robert Shaw. More about this concert in the music section.

December 14-17: I went to Chicago, in Abbe's company, and spent most of my time there looking at great paintings in the Chicago Art Institute. I will say a few words (Why does this clause seem okay, whereas the clause, "I will write a few words," does not?) about this in the appropriate section herein.

Generally: Other things of note, which happened in 1988, but can not be so specifically dated:



1. There now is a black void in my life, and it has a name: Murphysboro. Murphysboro, Illinois, to be exact. We made many a trip to that region during the spring, trying to buy a house, getting matters



put aright with regard to Abbe's new job, and such. The drive always felt so agonizingly long: 242 miles to the city limits from where we lived at my farm, 224 miles from Columbia, 107 miles from Abbe's parents' place in St. Louis. Every time we drove down, we would put about six hundred miles on the car, what with all the extra driving. We tried to be so careful in choosing a place where we would be happy, choosing a house which we could feel good about, choosing a locale which would be conducive--or, at least not a hindrance--to my work. On all these accounts, we have failed. Abbe likes the place where she works, and the people there; in this aspect, we have been successful. As for other aspects, we failed to anticipate the worst. And, out of fairness to ourselves, I must say that this community has done a good job of failing us.

There are small things about this place that bother me. There are no whipporwills here. The air never smells clean and fresh. But I can overlook such things. And circumstances prior to our move were difficult too. The realtor who sold my farm was a jowl-licking shyster. It was emotionally painful leaving the farm I had owned for so many years. But, again, these are things I can overlook. Other things I can not.

As it turns out, the house we bought has been a terrible financial drain. The owners did not reveal to us defects which they knew about. We paid an inspector a steep price to go over the house for us, and note any damages. He noted some damages, but overlooked others. For example, he stated that the house's roof would be good for another ten years; we awoke in the middle of the night, the first time there was a heavy rain, with water dripping on us. He described the electrical service wrongly. He said that the adjacent guest house was sturdily built; I thereupon planned to use it for a study, but when work began on converting the building, the walls were deemed so unstable that it had to be torn down.

And as for the move itself: the movers managed to destroy a good many of our things. I could have done nearly as good a job with a high-loader and a dump-truck. Our insurance claim against them is approximately thirteen thousand dollars.

The problem is, with all these things, we have consulted with attorneys, and we keep getting the same answer: Yes, we could go to court and collect damages, but it would cost us just about as much to collect on damages as we could count on recouping. So these legal matters come down to the usual legal dilemma: How much justice can you afford?

All in all, despite extreme caution on our part, we have lost about six thousand dollars since moving here. This does not count the loss from the move; I'm not counting it because we've not yet failed to recoup that, although we are warned that the insurance company will never, ever pay without a legal fight.

I do not exaggerate in stating that, thus far, we have probably had about fifty people out to our house to do work of various kinds on it. Most of these people have been hustlers who would do their best to cheat us. Some of these people would be hired for the work, but then never show up. Others would show up for work, demand payment in advance, or ask for payment at the end of the first day, and then never show up for work again. Others--and this is the part that drove me (drives me) crazy--come to do the work, but never quite finish it. This strange attitude toward work, as angry as it has made me, has also aroused my curiosity. Why this revulsion, which seems to be almost a phobia, to actually finishing a job? A carpenter may be putting siding on a section of the house, and then actually refuse to put on that last, final piece. I prod him. He says he is in a hurry to get home and will come back another day to finish it. I point out that it should not require another three minutes to put on that last piece. Still, he will not do it. Of course, he will try and get me to pay him for the entire job before he leaves for home, but he will not put that last piece of siding on. I need not go into other examples here, except to say that this malady afflicts people other than just construction workers: The fellow who came to work on Abbe's piano did everything except replacing that one last string. He just could not bring himself to do it. Another fellow ... but no; I said I would give no more examples. But, as I said, this thing has been driving me crazy. And it drives Abbe crazy. At first, we thought that it was something endemic to the lower classes only. But no; it inheres in every class. I have challenged some of these people about the matter; they grow sullen and will not comment. I have wondered if this approach is taken toward newcomers only, and is not directed toward fellow natives. But no; after watching them, and hearing their complaints, I see that it is something that they put up with daily. Why they are willing to put up with it, I don't know. I am not willing to put up with it, and by late summer, it was actually beginning to drive me a little over the edge. I confess that one day, for a few moments, I



"As president of the Procrastinators' Club, I'd like to welcome you to last year's meeting!"



slipped over the edge into something akin to psychosis because of this. I had just spent the last several days dealing with recalcitrant construction workers, I had driven to Carbondale to buy some supplies, and as I was driving back, I entered a busy intersection. Quite suddenly a stark perception came flooding in upon me. I realized that the cars in front of me would not quite make it through the intersection. Not that they would put on their brakes, not that there would be a collision, but rather, they just would not quite be able to make it through the intersection because, to go all the way through would mean finishing something. And then it would happen--spreading out for miles about me, everything would come to an inexplicable stop, with everyone paralyzed where they sat or stood, because they could not quite take that next breath because that would mean having to finish it, or they could not finish their bowel movement, or . . . . I shoved the gas pedal through the floor, and drove home as fast as I could. Not to escape that intersection, but to keep my mind on the road, and not let it wander off again into that never-never land. I got home and went out to the back porch and there lay down, trying to get a grip on myself. I wondered about the sex lives of these people. Could it be possible that none of the women are orgasmic because they can never quite bring themselves to get over the edge? Is it possible that the men all have besodden prostate glands because, at ejaculation, they can never quite muster the courage for that final throb? These things I was pondering when my thoughts were interrupted by visitors. Three men had driven in, and were, "looking for work," and thought I, "might have some." Yes; in this area, where unemployment is high, the men drive about, from one place to another, looking for work. One might feel sorry for them, did it really seem that this is what they are doing. The problem is, it's not all they are doing. They are doing exactly what I did, about 19 years ago, when I went to Northern Illinois with a college classmate who was from that area. We were going to live there, in his home town for the summer, working at jobs we had been promised, saving money for the next school year. The jobs, however, did not materialize. So we, like just about every other man in the region, went out, "looking for work." This method involves going to bars, sitting down and having one or two or three beers, talking with the other men who have paused in their search for work, exchanging rumors about where work might be found, telling a few lame jokes, talking more about this abstraction called work, and then driving another twenty or thirty miles to scout out the latest totally unfruitful rumor about where work might be found. For two weeks I stayed in that area with the fellow, looking for that work that never materialized, drinking about two beers a day (compared to his dozen), driving about 100 miles a day, until I sickened of the entire game and left for Missouri, where, in less than two weeks, I had landed two jobs which got me through the summer and earned me enough money for the next school year. My memory of this experience causes me to believe that this aimless search for work, while drinking a lot of beer, is not indigenous to Southern Illinois only, but rather, may characterize the entire state. I do not like any of this. I am from Missouri, where people are sparse with words when work is the issue, and if anyone talks too much about work, they are met with the simple admonition, "Show me," which means, if you can do it, then get up off your verbal ass and show me how it's done. But the people hereabouts, they like to talk about work. Their work has become such an important part of speech, as opposed to being a part of their daily activities, that it has even taken on a peculiar ring in how they pronounce it. When one of these natives says, "I'm lookin' fer wuurrk!" this latter word sounds like a belch--the kind that surprises the owner of said belch with a sudden mouthful of unexpected vomitus--conjoined with a mouth-jarring expletive. What is amazing is that these peasants can state the word this way, and strut at the same time. One expects to see a person gushing a stream of offal from the mouth; but instead, there is a braggart's smile and a stiff-legged gait as the assbone, mistaken for the pelvis, gets wagged.

Of course, these people who are "lookun' fur wuurrk!" never quite want to do the work once it is offered them. Or they give it a go, but do it in such a piss-poor way that one has no choice but to fire them. But even when doing their "wuurrk!" in such a shoddy way, they appear so enthused, so macho, so in control of this "wuurrk!" I am reminded of what was, at first, a very funny experience, and subsequently, a rather surreal experience. I had hired some men to fill the basement of an outbuilding with rock; they were to scoop it in as soon as the first truck-load arrived. We were waiting for the truck, so I gave them a couple of axes, and told them to cut out the stumps of some small trees that had been cut off about six inches above the ground. I was doing some measuring of the building, and after about five minutes, realized that the three men had not yet taken ax to wood. So I walked over to see what the problem was. They were standing there, very animatedly discussing how the stumps could be removed so much more easily with a chain-saw and a spade. One was explaining how one would have to avoid getting the blade in the dirt, so the trick would be to dig down around each stump a few inches, hold a board behind it while cutting with the



chain-saw, and that way you could get each of the stumps out in a matter of seconds, once the hole around it had been dug. Now, there were not more than eight or nine of these stumps; most of them were about two inches in diameter, and the largest was maybe four inches in diameter. The fellow was doing his demonstration with that largest stump, holding the imaginary board while delivering his speech. I laughed out loud, listening to him talk. I actually thought he was putting on an impromptu dramatization, and doing one hell of a good job of it. But the dramatization went on, it became very, very repetitively redundant, and ... it dawned on me that, no, this was not a pretense, it was another resident of Illinois talking himself out of a job. Without saying a word, I picked up an ax, and with about ten strokes, cut that four-inch stump out in less than one minute. I then dropped the ax in front of the fellow who had been talking, said, "I don't think you need a chain-saw," and walked back to the building. From there, I watched them. They had not for one moment felt that I was making fun of them. Nor had they learned a thing from what I had just done. No; they spent another five minutes talking about the task at hand, before they finally picked up the axes and sort of went to work. Later, of course, I discovered that they left three of the stumps. When the load of rock finally came, they went to work with shovels. They soon were complaining. They tried to talk me into renting a high-loader to do the work. When I asked them if they realized that, with a high-loader, I would not need them, they replied that, no, they hadn't thought about this. Couldn't they still "help" with the high-loader? I told them I didn't see how. When they finally realized I was not going to go rent an expensive machine to do the work, they went back to work. But two of them soon quit, and the third I had to fire.

Another time, I hired two men, each in his early forties, to do some work with an ax. On this occasion, they were joined by a third person bearing an ax, namely, my then 12-year-old daughter, Dacia. Both of these men weighed close to 200 pounds, both of them were very muscular, and both of them set to work--sort of. Dacia, who at the time weighed right at 100 pounds, and who is very thin, not very muscular, but very experienced with an ax (being the daughter of a real man), was working right along with them. It was absurd. I didn't know whether to laugh at the two men, or be impressed by my daughter, but she was moving along at a clip that was half again as fast as either of these big, grown men were doing.

Slowly, too slowly, things progress--a bit of work gets done on the house, another small stage of building my study gets completed. Ironic, to think that Abbe and I hoped to have my study built during the two weeks prior to our moving to Illinois, and now, as of the end of 1988, about six months after our having moved here, it still is not finished. The result is that work on my new novel has come to a complete halt. I have continued my editing, and my work on phenomenology, but I have been unable to continue my work in fiction.

The upshot of all this is that Abbe and I are seriously considering a move. She has contracted to work at this site for two years. She owes the government four years of service. We are considering, at the end of her two-year contract, moving to a different government approved site, or taking out a loan so we can pay the government the money they would demand were Abbe to not work those last two years, and then move on to a location where we might want to settle permanently.

I do not relish the idea of moving again, and Abbe does enjoy her work and the people with whom she works; but somehow, this environment, this community, simply does not fit us. It has not been kind to us. Even the people at Abbe's work-site have extended virtually no hospitality. Except for one person who works there, who had a small gathering of people from the community so we could meet a few folks, the people where Abbe works have extended nothing to either of us in the way of hospitality, a dinner invitation, a query as to whether we might need help with practical matters, or anything of the sort.

Meanwhile, I am rather embarrassed to say that I have made not a single friend, and we do not have a single person whom we would call a neighbor. The people who live nearby are all students, rich landlords, or alcoholics. As for the university--I have made modest forays there, but thus far have only succeeded at making acquaintances. People in the pedagogic community are cautious with a Ph.D. who does not fit into any well-defined cubical within their world. This Baumli is a Ph.D. who does not teach. He claims to be an editor and an author. All that, without the bosom of academia? They are suspicious, these professors, and they have not yet extended anything in the way of hospitality or warmth, and certainly nothing has emerged which would show promise of friendship. Six months I have lived here, and I've made not a single friend?! Truly, this is so very different from the days of my itinerant youth, when I moved about a great deal, and never lived anywhere without, within two weeks at the most, having a sense of community, likable neighbors, and relationships with people that were clearly headed toward friendship.

I have tried to make friends, but the trying seems to get in the way of achieving my goal. Thus far I have gone to three different groups, to see



if there I might find people of my ilk. The first group--a writer's guild--I first went to as an invited speaker. I spent an entire afternoon preparing my talk, and arrived to discover an audience of four people. As for the quality of my audience--after the meeting, the walk to my car was about 200 yards, and I do not exaggerate when I say that I alternated between laughing out loud, and audible crying, the entire distance to my car. The second group was a religious discussion group; they were focusing on a book that pertains to issues on women's, men's, and gay liberation, and I thought this might be quite interesting for me. Indeed, the people at this group were very warm, hospitable, and attractive; sterling people, it seemed, at least in terms of their good will and enthusiasm. However, religious superstition is not a sentiment I can withstand in protracted doses, and I simply could not continue going to this group. The third group I tried was a men's support group. Now here was a unique experience. These fellows--six young men--were varyingly attractive to me as individuals; but the group itself held virtually no attraction to me at all. The men would begin each meeting, and end each meeting, with required hugs--it mattered not how genuine the hug might be. As for passion, it seemed at first that there was not an iota of it. Instead, they all sat there quietly, drinking their herbal tea, murmuring themselves and each other into oblivion. Moreover, there was an extremely macho competition within the group to see who could be the most in touch with his feelings. The fact was, no one seemed to be in touch with his feelings because no one seemed to really feel anything. But still, the competition was there. If anyone indulged in what they sneeringly called, "abtracting," for even a moment, that person would be soundly scolded and sent to his emotional corner. It was so bad that one dared not begin a single sentence with the words, "I think," "In my judgement," "I believe," or any words of such tenor. Instead, one had to preface everything with, "I feel," or, "I sort of, kinda' like, you know, maybe, uh, wonder if ... ." During the second meeting, I sat there and imagined the following scenario: A man, whose child has just died, is a member of this group. He comes, one week after burying his child, and begins sobbing, saying, "I don't think I can handle this. I don't think I'm ... ," whereupon his sobs are interrupted with a chorus of jeers, with every member of the group trying to be the first to shout, "You said THINK! THINK! You mean feel, don't you!?! Stick with your feelings, please," snicker, smirk, chuckle, snort, giggle. I went to the third group, intending to quit, and brought up my objections--pointing out to them that there was not an iota of real feeling being expressed in the group, that at one instance when it did seem that passion would break loose, the fellow immediately put a lid on it. I also pointed out that I had never heard, from them, one moment's worth of healthy laughter. And ... I had scarcely got going before the whole group erupted, and the passions really did fly then. They all blamed one fellow in the group for causing this artificial repression of feelings, then quickly affirmed that they too were responsible as a group, and one fellow yelled at another fellow and then needed to give him a hug, and then everything went silent and strange and there was death all over the room. But at least something in the way of passion had been expressed, I was glad for this, and thought I would go back to the next meeting. But upon going out the door of that house, I knew that, no, I would never attend another one. Here, again, these people had not quite been able to finish something. They started to get emotional, but then, no, they just could not follow through on it. They either got scared and retreated, or they behaved like a typical Illinoisian and just could not take that last step toward completing or consummating something. I knew that, what with the shock to their sensibilities (no; make that--to their feelings) which they had just endured, that one of two things would happen at the next meeting. Either they would all sit around in a frightened state of stupifying emotional repression, or they would be angry at me for having elicited something so unfamiliar and frightening. So I quit. I would not have gone back to that fourth meeting for a thousand dollars. I had had enough of their simpering grins, their leering posturings of emotional superiority, and I would endure no more. And I was not going to put myself in a position of being scapegoated by the entire group for having interjected a few minutes of authenticity into their lives.

I suppose it was wrong of me to have ever attended any of these three groups in the first place. I was using them as a means to an end; i.e., not attending the group because of what the group itself might have to offer, but rather, hoping to meet interesting individuals. The groups themselves, I really didn't care about. So it was wrong of me to attend; I should have stayed away.

But how to meet individuals with whom I have something in common? It is not proving easy at all. There are many impediments, not the least of which is the very strange habit of speech (if you can term it such!) people around here practice. When I first moved here, I was struck by the fact





that no one ever seemed to say anything. Instead, it seemed that all these people in Southern Illinois were afflicted with a severe and chronic gastritis which occasioned vast spasms of the gut and a constant belching. But then, one day, I realized that there was a sort of rhythm to their guttural excretions, and a vague responsiveness in other people to each efflux. I thereupon realized, with no small sense of shock, that these people were not belching at all, but rather, this was their language--they were actually, in this most unseemly mode, speaking to one another! And apparently, during the first few weeks I had lived there, they had been speaking to me without my realizing it! Instead, I had merely stood there, doing nothing more than looking on in sympathy, wagging my head with concern for their intestinal problems.

Not one to be anti-social, I began trying to better decipher these people's strange language, and slowly, painfully, I succeeded. But it was a difficult process. At first, shocked at this horrid means of communication, I elected to simply speak as I usually do, while trying to understand their own pattern of speech. By thus maintaining my own polished speech, they might note my example and follow it. But I soon realized that these people could not at all understand me when I spoke as is my wont. So for a few weeks I took to trying to speak as they do. They more or less understood me, although, of course, there was little to understand, since to speak as they do is to say little or nothing that is meaningful. Very soon I became quite disgusted with this attempt at joining them, and I next took on an exaggeratedly precise way of speaking so as to assure myself that I had not picked up any bad habits from them. Since that time, I have more or less reverted to my old ways of speaking. These people understand virtually none of my words, which, however, is not overly lamentable, given that they would probably understand even less of my meaning were they able to understand my words.

For any of my friends who might come to visit me, and, en route to my place, have occasion to interact with some of the locals, I want to assure you that their language can be picked up fairly quickly. Just keep in mind that they preface most sentences with the contraction, "I'm," but they pronounce it, "U'm." I, of course, was accustomed to backward, rural people pronouncing "I'm," as, "Ah'm," e.g., "Ah'm gonna git busy an' do it." But I was not at all accustomed to people saying something like, "U'm gonnuh try un' do ut tuhmurruh, er sum tum latuhr." If, when driving to my place you get lost and need to ask for directions, be patient with these people. Listen carefully, expect little, nod your head as though you understand, and soon enough the repeated sounds will take on a modicum of coherence and you will be able to extract what little meaning there is in what they say.

Having said this much on the topic of these people's speech, allow me to share with you another observation: The people of this region are unusually barrel chested--a physique which seems to be occasioned by the large quantities of air required for their very unusual way of speaking--involving constant guttural usage of the "uh" sound which they insert not only as interjections, which of course many people in various regions do, e.g., "I think, uh, I'm going to throw up," but also in nearly every word within which the grunt can be camouflaged. For example, witness the following sentence which is a true example of many I have heard uttered: "Uh um unsuccessfuhl ut dealun with muh humuphubiuh." Truly, when this man had finally finished delivering all thirteen of those "uh" sounds in one long



"OK, you passed the fire test, the riding test, and the combat test. But now, pale-face, now you must say 'toy boat' three times real fast."



"Sorry I'm not making myself clearer, but it's hard to express yourself in a language as crude and primitive as ours."



unbroken confessorial continuous sentence, none of thum--I mean, them--interrupted by an inhalation, I thought he would keel over and promptly expire on the spot. But no; his big, spastic chest gave a mighty heave, the ribs creaked at the effort, and he sucked in an impressively massive bellyful of air sufficient that he could again be prepared to deflate his ponderous lung sacs with a similarly airy exhalation.

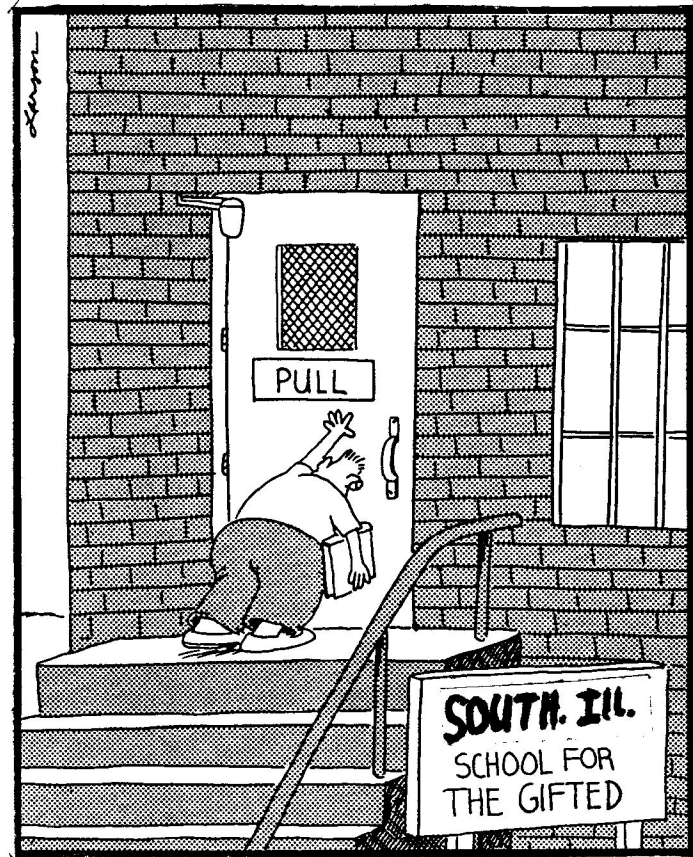
Abbe, given that she is a doctor for many of these natives, is likely more keenly aware than am I of the physiological descriptives unique to these people. I have not questioned her about such adjectives, but she has often complained that, excepting the obstetrical care she provides, she must mostly direct her healing arts at problems occasioned by alcohol and nicotine addiction.

My conclusions are based on more general, and pedestrian, perceptions of these people. For example, I have noted that, as of the end of 1988, I have met only one woman in this entire region whom I would describe as sexy. And I have yet to meet a single person who is intellectually stimulating. As for real men, forget it. Most of the men in this region drive pickups, and each of them calls his pickup a truck. A real man might occasionally, speaking carelessly, refer to his pickup as a truck; but a real man knows that this is shoddy speech, and would never, ever, when speaking precisely, allow it to be said that a mere pickup (even a four-speed with dual-low such as this real man drives) is a truck.

I do not want to sound as though I have bad feelings about all the people here. I have met about five men whom I really like, and a few women too. They are all friendly members of the artisan class, and I am grateful for their presence, their good cheer, their rare sense of personal responsibility about things. But friendly as these people are, they do not move within the same intellectual echelons that I occupy, nor do they traverse the same emotional substrata. Hence, they are not my peers, and I thus, within this community, must, except for my goodly family, subsist alone. How dreadful it is, to thus live in a community where none of the clever things I say are understood, must less appreciated.

Are there advantages to living in Southern Illinois? I can think of one. It gives intelligent cynics ample opportunity to practice and refine their outlook on life.

I was complaining about this area to a friend who lives in Detroit some weeks ago, and he opined that my problem is not with the people here, but with the regional pride I have always felt toward Missouri. This friend believes that I am being too loyal, too partisan, and simply will not find good traits in another region when I am so accustomed to bragging about the state I grew up in, and the state I have pretty much called home for 40 years. It is true that I have taken on a facade, over the last several years, which would seem to be regional pride. I think this facade was erected because I grew so weary of people from other states making fun of me, stating that I live out in the middle of nowhere, that Missouri "doesn't have anything," that a Missouri man is a Midwestern hick and that's all there is to it. I became accustomed to certain replies--or, reminders, which would set these people to thinking, if not change their minds. I would, for example, point out that Missouri produced Truman, one of our better presidents. I would further point out that, until the late '50s, there was a period of many years during which Missouri was the only state in the Union to have two cities with a population of more than one million people, namely, St. Louis and Kansas City. I would add that these two cities did a great deal more than New Orleans ever did toward producing, defining, refining--actually, creating--jazz, which is the one music that this country has contributed to the world. I might also point out that the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra is one of the four or five best in the nation, and that the Nelson-Atkins Art Gallery in Kansas City is definitely one of the ten best art galleries in the nation. Thereupon I would likely say a few words about the great writers Missouri has produced, such as Mark Twain, T.S. Eliot, Tennessee Williams, Langston Hughes ... Yes; I have cultivated a certain pride about Missouri. But this pride is not blind. I have been quick to point out that the people of Southern Iowa are perhaps the most friendly and hospitable people in this Union. I have readily conceded that my two favorite cities are New York City and Minneapolis. I have even ... but enough of this! I need not defend myself. My objections





to my current place of exile have nothing to do with regional pride. I am a friendly, generous person when it comes to accepting new people, new places. But I cease to be friendly when a people, or a locale, sets out to consume my soul.

And perhaps I have allowed them to consume a bit of my soul by thus spending so much time, taking up so much valuable space in this Aviary, succumbing to a hatred when I should be content with contempt. Let us be on to other topics.

2. I have completed Volume 11 of my Phenomenology, and continue with the next volume while spending a good deal of time polishing the prose of previous volumes. This massive work of mine is good--very good. I am sure of this, when I find myself going back to what I have written many years ago, and becoming so completely absorbed in the text that I forget entirely that I was its author.

3. My insomnia has lessened a great deal. When it comes to sleep, I am much healthier. But not yet so healthy that I care to herein give an explanation of how I have attained this new level of ease. To show this aspect of myself to others would be to finger the gore too soon.

4. My difficulties with the telephone, since moving to Illinois, have eased a great deal. This is because I have an unlisted phone number now, and have made it a point to not give it to people whom I do not want calling me. This especially includes men in the men's liberation movement. Those people were taking up too much of my time. Even when they had legitimate requests to make of me, I simply did not have the time and energy to give them what they needed. And not infrequently, men would call me with what I considered to be very bogus requests for aid. For example, in early spring, before we had moved away from our old home in Missouri, a fellow called my home while I was at work. A friend who was at my home answered the call, and the caller told her that she must get in touch with me immediately and have me call him back in the next fifteen minutes because it was an absolute emergency! He did not leave his name, but said he was calling from Arizona.

Well, my friend contacted me at work immediately, relayed the urgent message, and I of course assumed that, since I have no friends in Arizona, then one of my friends must be traveling in Arizona, is in bad trouble, and desperately needs my aid.

I called the phone number I had been given. It was a fellow who had recently joined The Coalition of Free Men, and assumed that because I am the Missouri State Representative for The Coalition of Free Men, then I am the very person to call when he has an emergency. What was his emergency--so dire that, at great inconvenience to myself and others, I had to call him within fifteen minutes? Well, he had been to a feminist men's conference the day before, had spent the afternoon watching tv, and now he was depressed. He needed my, as he put it, "support and warmth" to help him get through the rest of the day.

Now, I really don't mind giving those things. But it is difficult to feel warmth toward someone you have never met, who has just interrupted you at work, who has alerted you to an emergency, which turns out to be nothing more serious than an afternoon depression.

So now I do not give out my phone number in the men's liberation publications. If you know me, and do not have my number, then don't be afraid to ask for it. I'll be candid about my willingness, or unwillingness, to give you my number, and I'll even give explanations as to why I do or do not choose to give you my number.

5. In early February, I gave away two more pairs of socks. And, unless my memory is inaccurate, I did not buy a single new pair of socks or any new underpants! Maybe I have almost conquered this neurosis of mine, and one day will cease to hoard and covet undergarments such as these.

6. As for my health; yes, there is always that. This multiple sclerosis I have is such a constant, there are times I forget about it. But then it hits me between the eyes, so to speak, and I have to give it my full attention. This time it happened in mid-February. An exacerbation hit, and for about one week, I was blind. Actually, I could still see out of my right eye (as I can out of my blind left eye); the problems were that I could not keep the lid up to see out of it, rather, I could only raise it with my hand. And I could scarcely move the eye since the muscles governing it were paralyzed. Emotionally, it was devastating. My mother (note the cartoon at right) happened to phone me during this week, asked me how I was doing, and I told her that my right eye was





ailing--that the lid would close and I could not use it. This time I actually watched the clock to see how long it would take her to say the customary, "me too," which is her response to anyone's statement about their ill health. It took her exactly twenty seconds. Whereupon she entered upon a lengthy, and plaintive monologue. Ah well; I suppose the reason I am so emotionally healthy is because I learned to deal with all that at a very early age.

It is oppressive when new symptoms come to the fore. Blind? Me? But no. Not entirely blind. If I would hold my right eyelid up with my finger, then I could see, and I could even read. But my eye would tire quickly from this, and then I would get dizzy, and would have to stop. Fortunately, the symptom was intermittent during that week, and quickly remitted, although it has since occurred for brief intervals several times.

Perhaps even more distressing than the problems with vision have been the continued deterioration of my hearing. Deterioration is not a very apt word since

the actual problem with my hearing is hyperacousis--I hear things much more acutely than do other people, because of damage to the eighth cranial nerve. Believe me, this is not a blessing. I have to keep my ears stuffed with cotton at all times, and occasionally, when the problem is really bad, I have to wear ear protectors even when eating a meal because the clink of silverware is unbearable. Fortunately, this problem varies with magnitude, and most of the time cotton suffices to allay the difficulties. Still, in terms of sheer discomfort, the problem with hearing is more difficult than any other symptom this MS presents. Not only is there the pain of noises that are too loud, but it is difficult for me to converse with someone or hear music if there are other noises in the background. The other noises, because I hear everything so loudly, become a roar, and it then is exhausting to try and concentrate on the sound I am wanting to hear. This is one of the reasons I have become quite conservative about talking on the phone. Even with the help of an expensive aid, the problem is ameliorated only a small bit, and I quickly become exhausted when talking on the phone, especially if there is a bad connection, or if the person with whom I am speaking has a voice that is not very resonant.

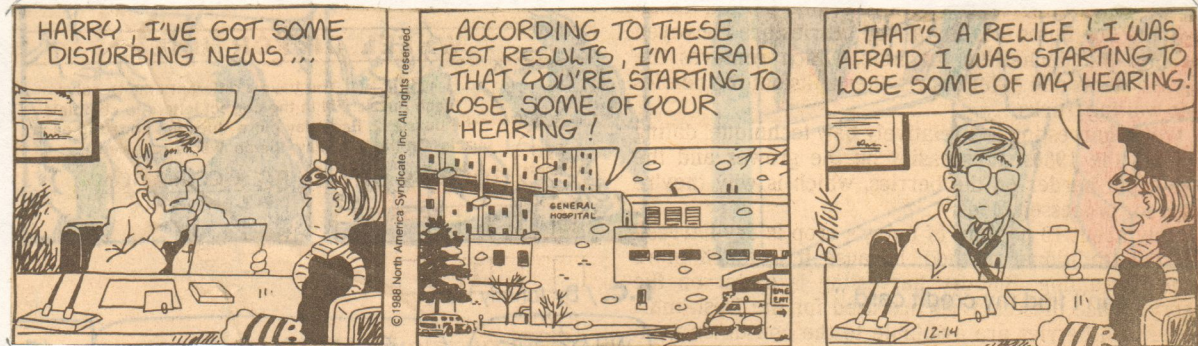
Despite the new, very concrete, health difficulties in early 1988, about the middle of the year I dropped my health insurance. The premium, even though it is a group plan, on myself had risen to nearly \$200. per month and was going to go well beyond that as soon as I turned age 40. This was \$200. per month on me alone! I said to hell with it. Let them throw this corpus to the fishes, if the symptomology becomes that financially dire.

7. Okay; you have been patient long enough, and I will at last consent to say a few words for the fixation many of you manifest about my real man character.

Surely you know that this is a trait which interests me very little. I suppose that, yes, I am a real man, but I pay little attention to this facet about myself. The point is, real men do not have to monitor how well they are being real men. It is only the male bimbos who have to be on guard when they try and assume traits not indigenous to their character.

I do, however, now and then become quite conscious of what the real man personality is all about when I see it being referred to inaccurately, as in the cartoon here reproduced at right. The joke may be funny, but it attests to a falsehood. Namely, only male bimbos drink "lite" beer. A real man would never drink something as flavorless as lite beer. If a real man drinks beer at all (in lieu of hard whiskey, taken stright) then it is always the heavier beer, brewed as the real men of yore intended it.

I also become more conscious of the real man's personality when other people bore me by pointing out how I embody such traits. For example, I had never thought it unusual that a man, when he travels and must rent a vehicle, insists on renting a pickup instead of a mere car. But other people, with whom I have traveled, have thought it unusual, and have brought it to my attention that only a real man, such as myself, would put





the nerves of car rental agents on edge by insisting that they get him a pickup.

A second example of such real man traits being brought to my attention occurred when, this last year, I bought my father-in-law an ax for his birthday. Someone actually had the nerve to say to me that my giving him this gift was an inspiration! And that only a man of real man character, such as myself, would be capable of such inspiration. Well; let me point out, first of all, that there is nothing of inspiration here. Inspiration only characterizes the real man's aesthetic or sexual activities. Let me further point out that, even were the term "inspiration" being used loosely when thus applied to me, it would be most inaccurate. I felt nothing like it when I bought that ax. Quite the contrary, I had been appalled to learn that my father-in-law did not own an ax. I had thought that any man would own at least a couple--a single-bit and a double-bit. My buying the ax was merely an attempt to set aright what I perceived to be a serious deprivation. But then, upon giving him the ax, and having all this attention brought to my so-called "inspiration," I found out that not a single other man (of which there were several) in our company at the time owned even one ax. I thereupon had to learn another sad lesson: that it is in the nature of real men to make false suppositions about all men, suppositions which actually should apply to real men only.

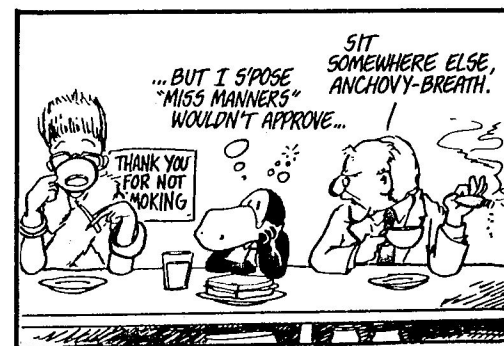
Which reminds me. I need to sharpen that double-bit of mine. Dacia used it to cut three cords of kindling last weekend, and she put the head in to the ground a few too many times.

**\*\*NOTICES ABOUT FORTHCOMING EVENTS\*\***

To the embarrassment of certain of my friends, I have become more and more militant about my rights to a smoke-free environment when in public. Just a few weeks ago, while asserting my rights, I was told that if I continued to behave in this way I might get myself arrested for creating a public disturbance. So be informed ... your dear friend Baumli may be sitting in the caboose one of these days simply because he disturbed the peace while trying to put other people who were disturbing his peace in their place. More and more I am aware of how cigarette smoke deleteriously affects my already damaged cranial nerves. Moreover, I have, as the years go by, become more and more sensitive to the stuff. It has gotten to the point where, to avoid getting a headache, I even have to wash my hands after reading mail that has been sent me by smokers.

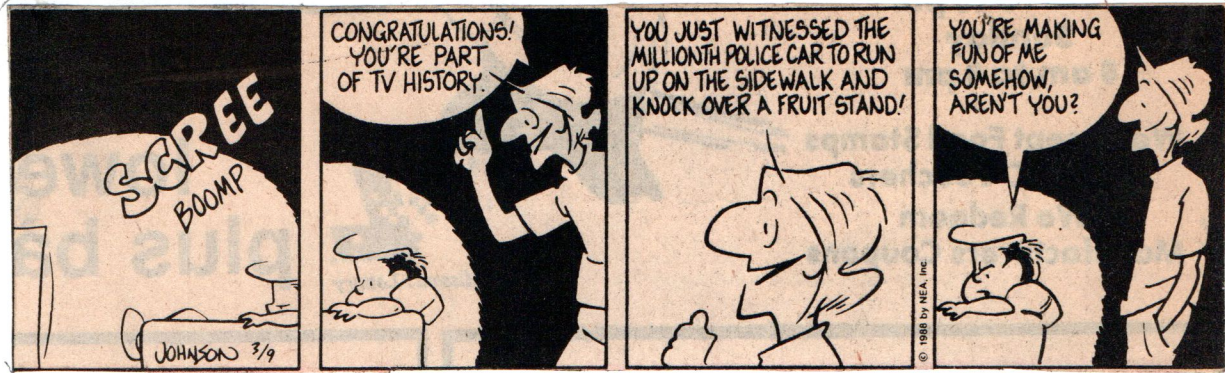
I myself have been more considerate of smokers. I understand that it is an addiction--a powerful one. I have my addictions, and they have me by the throat. But I try to keep my own addictions from making other people uncomfortable, and in fact, I go out of my way to give other people as much pleasure as possible from the effects of my various addictions, e.g., my addiction to Beethoven's music, my addiction to Plato's dialogues, my addiction to the poetry of Whitman, my addiction to paintings by Boucher.

I plan, during this next year, to continue my war against that





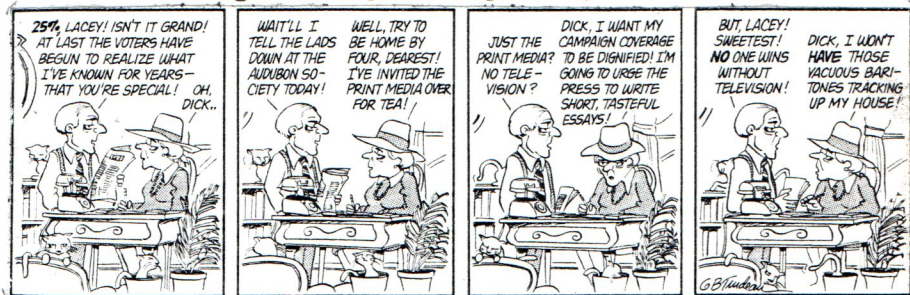
ubiquitous cause of adolescent senility--the television machines. My house remains uncontaminated by one, but Dacia is too often exposed to the things when she visits her friends and members of my extended family.



I have not killed any televisions of late, although I've been tempted, on more than one occasion, to go ahead with an ax murder. Now that would give me pleasure, to feel metal, glass, and plastic crunching and breaking with each hefty swing of the hickory and steel.

Another forthcoming event--or, non-event--is my intention to quit giving talks on men's liberation, to stay at home and avoid the life on the road. This way, I can avoid the hazards common to those who are on the road promoting ideas: I refer to constipation, bladder infections, and weight gain. The first comes from sitting too much, the second from being in too many situations where it is socially awkward to excuse oneself for such amenities, and the third comes from eating poor quality food that never seems to fill you up. The second difficulty I have thus far avoided; as for the other two, they have bothered me somewhat. Henceforth, I shall not be subject to even these two, since I have chosen to give up the road. My choice, be assured, is not based on the practicalities just mentioned; rather, I prefer to stay at home where, doing less promulgating, I can be more creative.

Another resolve: I am going to quit posing for the television cameras. Those people always hold forth the maxim that I need that, that if I talk to them, and put my mug on the air, then they will have done me the favor of selling books. I'm not



sure I have ever bought this line. Maybe they do sell my books, but I'm not sure that the tv viewer who buys a book because he or she saw it on tv is someone who will read my book. Besides, I have come to realize that those television hosts need me much more than I need them. They expect me to appear on their shows for free, because it supposedly is "free advertisement" for my book, for my ideas. Well, I think what they really mean, but would never say, is that they need cheap guests to keep their production costs low. The fact is, they need me more than I need them, and if only other authors realized this, and refused to appear on those shows for nothing, then they would suddenly find that either they would start receiving nice salaries for their appearances, or the television shows would fold. So ... henceforth, what will my price be for appearing on a television show--for whoring myself out to that disgusting form of media? I think I'll start with a minimum price of \$3,000 per appearance, plus expenses. That should spare me the agonies.

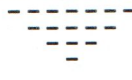
What else is in the future for me? Well, I suppose there may be as many as three lawsuits--one against the fellow who inspected our house, one against a contractor who did some work on my study, another against the Illinois-based moving company which wrecked our things.

All in all, it seems I've plenty of work ahead of me, especially given my resolve to succeed in cutting a new asshole for Southern Illinois, so it can get rid of some of its internal impactions.

\*\*\* ON-GOING WORK \*\*\*

As for on-going work, there is the usual: editing, writing, reading, and various other scholarly endeavors. Meanwhile, there is the task of getting my study completed so I can work better. The house too needs many repairs. I am behind in my correspondence. And there is this edition of The Aviary, which already has taken up too many pages, and has been too long in the making.

Enough said.





## READING FOR 1988

Looking back over my list for 1988, I see that during this last year I read 113 books. Again, memory always deceives me, because if someone had asked me how many I had read, prior to looking at this list, I likely would have replied, "Not more than a couple of dozen."

It's been a good year for reading. I had sense enough to not read--or, not finish--most of those that were disappointing. I stayed more with philosophy this year, and read less psychology. This was refreshing, like doing calculus instead of algebra.

Consistent with my usual habit, I here list the best books I read during 1988:

1. Deliverance by James Dickey. Those first fifty pages were rather tame, even boring; but then, one could scarcely put the book down. In this sense, the book is exactly like Golding's Lord of the Flies. Dickey's tale is so gripping, so terrifying, that it amounts to a trauma I would not want to inflict on very many people. I suppose the book attains aesthetic resolution with it all, but that interim--I think I do not want to ever read another book that consumes me during the immersion. A great novel, this one is, but too scary to recommend.

2. Oracle of the Turtle: Poems on the I Ching by Robert Dyer. Bob Dyer is a Boonville, Missouri, resident--living eight miles from where I lived at my recent Missouri address. In Missouri, this is close enough to consider

someone your neighbor. Bob and I made a trade: a copy of my Men Freeing Men for his book of poetry. It was a bargain for me, because I read his book five times. Some people may consider this a strange practice, but ... doesn't one listen to a nice piece of music more than once? Still, to read a



book of poetry five times is excessive, even for me; such lack of moderation on my part attests to the book's quality, as well as to how captivating it is.

3. West with the Night by Beryl Markham. This is the best book I read during the entire year. It is an autobiography--an adventure about a little girl growing up in East Africa, who later becomes a pilot. Adventure books seldom interest me at all, and to state the above brief description makes the book seem terribly trite. But it is Markham's style which makes this book great--as great a book as The Seven Pillars of Wisdom by T.E. Lawrence. Markham's book diminishes in quality, somewhat, during the last third or so, and I am not sure why. Still, it is superb, and is one of those few books which I would say that a person should read in the course of a literary lifetime.

4. Walt Whitman: The Measure of His Song edited by Jim Perlman, Ed Folsom, and Dan Campion. This collection of essays and poetry, all by authors writing about Whitman, is the best companion volume to Whitman's own works I have ever come across. I wrote a review of about 6000 words for Transitions, and those of you who want to know more about this book can request a copy of my review. It has essays about Whitman by authors as diverse as Thoreau, D.H. Lawrence, Henry Miller, Allen Ginsberg. Fat and cheap, it is well worth buying.

5. The Debs Underground by John Petersen. This is an unpublished manuscript, and therefore, in the eyes of certain pedants I know, does not qualify as a book. I however, call it a book because, without doubt, it deserves to be published. It's a crazy story, entirely believable, amazingly complex and yet not difficult to follow, with an ending that is brilliant and very mystifying.

Despite being careful to avoid books that I thought might disappoint me, I nevertheless submitted to a few. They are:

1. Why Men Are the Way They Are by Warren Farrell. This book begins as an ambitious exercise in men's liberation, and it has its fine points during the first fifty pages. But Farrell can not sustain a good thought, he can not think coherently, and he certainly can not write. His book, in fact, beats out all the stiff competition by taking the prize for containing what is probably the most atrocious sentence I have ever encountered in



what passes for prose. I refer to something on page 181 which goes: "To casually say that it took four or five months to move out of this stage is to minimize the extraordinary pain I felt with every overture that was unresponded to . . . ." It makes the stomach twitch and heave, does it not?

2. The Inner Male: Overcoming Roadblocks to Intimacy by Herb Goldberg. This author, whom I know personally, has written two of the finest books in men's liberation. He told me he was going to write this book just to keep his momentum going. I warned him that this was not a very good motive for writing an entire book. Unfortunately, my opinion--shared by every other commentator with whom I have spoken--is that, with this book, Goldberg has done the very opposite of what he intended. He has lost all momentum, and will have a difficult time gaining a hearing for any future book.

3. Taking the World in for Repairs by Richard Selzer, M.D. I have praised this writer's earlier books to the heavens. I have proclaimed him another Whitman. And indeed, his earlier books deserve such praise. But in this book, his energy is inconsistent. One gets the impression that he is writing to preserve his identity as an author. He condenses his lines, hoping for poetry, but it does not emerge as frequently as it does in his earlier books. And when it does not emerge, the prose is too broken, too lacking in flow. The book's short story, "Diary of an Infidel: Notes from a Monastery," is one of the finest things Selzer has written, but unfortunately, the book as a whole has a quality that is too uneven, sometimes even bad.

4. Memoirs of an Egotist by Stendhal (translated by David Ellis). Perhaps I should be cautious in judging this book. The translator's preface was terribly written, and if one can assume that his rendering of Stendhal's style (however accurately it may convey the literal meaning) is equally lacking, then one should maybe conclude that it is the translation, and not the text itself, which is disappointing. I tried to locate a copy of this book in the original French, to get some idea as to whose the lacking was, but I could find no such copy. I nevertheless will allow myself the conclusion that Stendhal, here, did not write a worthy book. Very simply, this book contains too much obese twaddle, a great deal of frustratingly discreet gossip. There were so many brief biographical portraits of people that it made my head spin. Despite Stendhal's frequent apologies for writing too much about himself, I rather wish he had used his mirror more. Stendhal himself then would have been more interesting, and he might also have been motivated to write more about these other people, of whom he allows us no more than a glimpse.

I suppose there were some fine moments in reading this book. It is even possible that this book does not belong on the list of those which disappointed me; maybe I am merely including it here so my friends will know that I continue to read literature by the well-established (classical?) authors.

As an aside, I must here register the fact that I took umbrage to Ellis' toying with Latin. At one point, Stendhal quotes from Virgil's Eclogues, "Hic . . . captabis frigus opacum." I agree with Ellis that the literal translation goes something like, "Here you shall enjoy the cooling shade." But I do not believe this is what Stendhal meant. Latin is a rich language, allowing many a nuance of meaning, and Stendhal's prose is always given to implying more than one meaning. In the passage which contains this quote from Virgil, Stendhal is writing about a time he was depressed--in virtual despair. It jars the senses too rudely to think that he would disrupt his emotional keening with a soft, pastoral reprieve. Rather, he has been speaking of his solitary excursions on Lake Como, in a small boat, and the despair he felt at such times. Given this context, I believe he meant the Latin to imply something to the effect, "Here, if I wish, I may overturn my boat and, drowning, at last attain peace within these murky waters." I think I am not being too loose with the Latin to believe it can mean this. My friends' opinions on this matter are welcome.

5. Choices by Liv Ullmann. I had read Ullmann's Changing several years ago, and thought it a wonderful little book. Choices is splendid when Ullmann writes about others, especially about her work with UNICEF. But too frequently she writes about her self--attempting to elevate her many trite narcissistic encounters to grandiose metaphysics. And the stories about her lovers are seldom interesting, and distract as much from the book as they seem to from her life. Still, the book has merit, and is a powerful story about a woman's ability to strive toward (instead of pretending to embody) a genuine love for humanity.

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Again, this year, the same book shares the distinction of being the most offensive book as well as the worst book I encountered. It is, The Horned God: Feminism and Men as Wounding and Healing by John Rowan. Basically, it is an attempt to tell men how they can grovel more thoroughly



before the feminist altar, while trying to salvage something of the masculine ego. This is why the book is so offensive. As for why it is the worst book: it is a loose amalgam of half-formed ideas, thrown together with a confessional narrative in which Rowan boasts about how sorry he is that he's a man. Simplistic in style, content, and metaphor, it is the kind of book I could write on a weekend drunk, laughing all the while.

I almost talked myself out of it--out of complaining, as I usually do herein, about the regressive tendencies of these people who pretend to speak and write the English language. But it seems that when rancor is in my heart, I can not forego my due portion of complaining. However, out of respect for the sensibilities of my articulate and highly literate friends, I shall keep my comments brief.

One such friend, a very bright and knowledgeable woman, talked me into reading The New York Times on a regular basis, for a few weeks this year. This friend was appalled to discover that I almost never read newspapers, since I find them to be the primary purveyors of our plutocracy's propaganda. Moved by this young woman's enthusiasm, I started reading The New York Times. I was not impressed. I read carefully, always trying to find news of what might be happening in Belize, in Thailand, in Finland, in Malawi. Nothing. Instead, there would always be the usual rhetoric, the same shallow analysis, the same lies about what supposedly (but isn't) happening in Washington, D.C., and its affiliate empires.

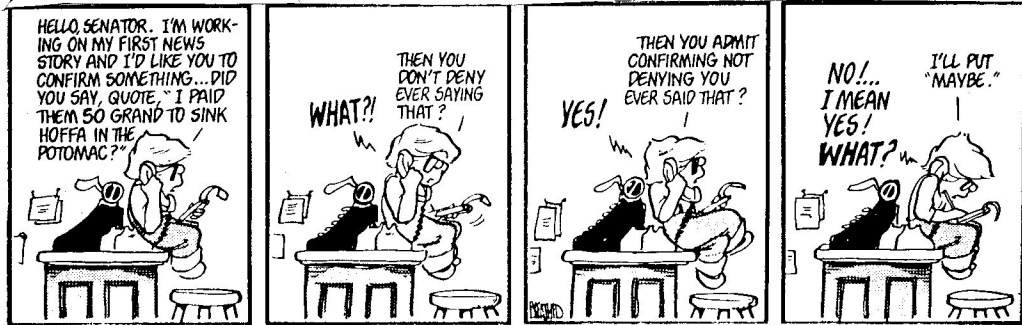
I have complained about the lack of truthful reporting to many friends of mine who are journalists; they all say the same thing: if a reporter writes the

truth, it does not get printed, because the publisher is at the mercy of the Great Beholden Bank, whose bulimic habits must be indulged, no matter what lies are necessary to get the American People to pay it monetary homage.

I soon gave up on The New York Times. I began to realize that the National Enquirer is, as a newspaper, perhaps superior to The New York Times because at least the National Enquirer does not expect intelligent people to believe its lies. So I am back to living in a world where the newspapers do not touch me, and as a result, I am the more pristine because of this wholesome practice.

When the day comes that I have given up not only newspapers, but also magazines, that will be the day when I discover that the future holds much more in store for me by way of the fruits of fine literature. But for now it seems I am somewhat addicted to them, especially the journals that claim to deal with the topic of men's liberation. It is in such journals that I often encounter the most discouraging prose of the year; in fact, during this last year, I believe that the most offensive sentence I came across was in the magazine called Nurturing Today. On page 16 of the Winter '87-88 issue, there is the sentence, "The child's reaction will likely be one of confusion and may be evidenced in many ways, one of which may be tantruming." It causes the frontal lobes to shrivel, does it not? In a similar article, which was about people who have become invalids, the word, "invalid," became a verb. "They were invalidated . . ." was a clause that cropped up again and again. And in the premiere issue of Men's Health, on page 38, there was the sentence, "Our girlfriends were seriously appalled." Here, I tell you, is an appalling redundancy if ever I heard one! If the author really needed a kind of cadence in that sentence, which required another four syllables, then surely he could have found a different adverb. Another example of, if not butchered English, then skewered English, is the following sentence found in the February '88 issue of Stereo Review, page 193: "With works like the Second Cello Concerto, he has turned inward to that dark night of the soul where his Slavic predecessors liked to hang out." I suppose Saint John of the Cross would have had a few words to say about this metaphor. In his books, of which I have read many, the "dark night of the soul" is a spiritual region wherein there may be shrieking, despair, horror, prayers, and anguish, but I don't think there is anything that quite qualifies for the phrase (clause?) "hanging out" ("hang outing"?).

Most of you are aware of my anger and sarcasm about that word "relationship," and its clone, "relationshiping," both of which have quite general referential meaning, but have over the last few years come to have a specific meaning that is presumed unless the speaker or writer states otherwise, i.e., the word, "relationship," used without descriptives, means a romantic or sexual relationship. Being a lover of philosophy, and one to appreciate the metaphysics of thinkers like Schopenhauer and Santayana, I





find such presumed specificity to be both demeaning and delimiting when it comes to allowing language its potential and philosophy's meaning its due. I hate it, and I protest, when people use the word with this unwarranted specificity; it allows them the habit of lazy presumption, instead of allowing a word to do what it should--give someone motivation for thinking creatively, or give them a cradle for cherishing a meaning they have already created.

A particularly disgusting encounter with such wrong usage of the word, "relationship," happened this last year when I was being interviewed by a television reporter about my book, Men Freeing Men. This woman began the interview with a question which showed that she had not read my book, and was not very interested in the topic of men's liberation; she queried with a gush: "What do you think of the future of relationships?"

"Abominable," I replied, "largely because people are so fixated on them. As is reflected by the very question you just asked."

Contrary to the protocol of tv interviewers, she was visibly taken aback, and for a moment both said nothing and forgot to smile (this latter deficit is the cardinal sin among television interviewers).

I added, "As also is reflected by the fact that when you just asked me about relationships, you presumed that I knew you were talking about romantic relationships. What about other kinds of relationships? For example, relationships with one's extended family, one's community, one's hobbies and passions such as music, philosophy, art? What about the future of those relationships? If they don't interest you, then the future of what you call 'relationships,' that is to say, romantic attachments, is going to be cut off from the rest of the world. Therefore, sterile, and doomed."

By now she had composed herself. She brightened (smiled), and said, "You mean relationships work best when we don't concentrate all our energies on them!"

"Something like that."

She was all gushes now. "Sort of like Zen and the Art of Relationships!!"

"No."

Apparently my smirk was stronger than her smile, for she mercifully changed the subject.

That very day, leaving that town, I was glancing over the magazine rack at the bus depot. There it was! The premiere issue of a new magazine called Relationships Today! I took it down, glanced through a few pages, put it back, and went to the restroom to wash my hands.

I was discouraged. Should I give up this fight? Should I quit caring about language being assaulted so constantly? Maybe it is time to quit protesting. Likely, I have already begun to cease noticing even some of the more gruesome crimes. Others I do not ignore, but I have learned to pass them by with no more than a sad glance and a stifled snort. For example, I have become somewhat callous to the constant usage of that barbarism, "proven," of which I have never approved--I mean, approved. As for other such words, I could ... but no. I said I would keep this diatribe short, and thus spare my refined friends the torture.

I'll considerately hurry on to the next section herein, and write about my movieing of the year.

### \*\*\*MOVIES AND SUCH\*\*\*

Because of deteriorating eyesight, and also because of the many distractions necessitated by our move, I saw very few celluloid fantasies this year. And the quality was nothing noteworthy. Still, for the sake of consistency with previous editions of The Aviary, I here list the movies I saw:

1. Feb. 19: Good Morning, Vietnam. Good, but not at all great. Come to think of it, maybe not very good. I know that most of my friends feel otherwise, but ... the story was a little too thin, Robin Williams' comic monologues, as funny as they were, do not by themselves a movie make, and, although they tried, they couldn't even bring off the female bimbo role.

2. Mar. 31: Barfly. Terrible, terrible! The acting was a charade of acting, the story was haphazard, the ending abrupt and seemingly without meaning, and ... well, I went to this movie really expecting a good one. Bukowski had written the script, it supposedly is based on Bukowski's life, I believe this man is one of our best contemporary fiction writers, and he had said it was so much better than that first movie about him, Tales of Ordinary Madness. Moreover, the movie had drawn a few favorable reviews, and much attention. Well; the movie was not better than Tales, and Bukowski would be better off if he would stick with writing literature.

3. May 31: The Milagro Beanfield War. It was nice fun, a story that managed to go somewhat beyond the sentimental, and surprisingly good acting. "Sweet," as my dear wife, Abbe, would say.



4. Aug. 11: Pee Wee Big Top. I saw this for the sake of taking Dacia to a movie. Terrible, it was; worse than Barfly. Even Dacia hated it. They pulled the female bimbo role off fairly well, but ... one can't be sure about such judgements. When one sits through a movie that bad, one becomes rather satisfied with mediocrity before the movie is over, simply because mediocrity is so superlative compared to everything else.

5. Oct. 1: Gorillas in the Mist. Also a very bad movie. The footage of the gorillas was very good, but the role played by that so-called leading actress never came off. The temporal overlay never worked, the story was too compressed at the end, and the directing might have been good did it not seem that the director was in love with the leading actress (I can not remember her name). I got so sick of those scenes--the woman is making her way through the forest, she moves forward a few feet more (toward the camera), the flesh of her face moves into the camera, up, her face takes on a radiant look, her eyes roll up to her left, then her eyes followed by the jugged jaw of her face roll to the right, she gives a massive smile, a small sigh, and then moves on. One could imagine the director (he was a man), watching these preliminary takes at night, nursing a hard-on and trying to figure out how he could fill up a full one-third of the movie with scenes of this bimbo of the face.

6. Oct. 8: Imagine. A very nice documentary of John Lennon, although I rather suspect that, for people who were not a part of the Beatles' rock revolution, the story would be rather lost on them. I tried, in this movie, to like Yoko Ono. I did manage to shake some of the negative feelings I have had in the past, but still, I have difficulty seeing her as much more than the daughter of very rich Japanese parents, who had the money to posture as an artist, and who must have had certain deep recesses of warmth and comfort (whether corporeal or spiritual, I shall not judge), which appealed greatly to John Lennon. She meanwhile has become one of the world's wealthiest people, showing no small acumen in the business world when it comes to investing the deceased John's money. As for John Lennon, he was an intriguing person. Many wanted him to be a saint; he had his share of failings, disappointed many people, and hence was the butt of a great deal of anger. The movie, I suspect, will help many people forgive his contradictions. John Lennon himself struggled with them, which is more of a spiritual odyssey than most people are willing to undertake.

\*\*\*\*\* PORTRAITS BY AN EXHIBITIONIST \*\*\*\*\*  
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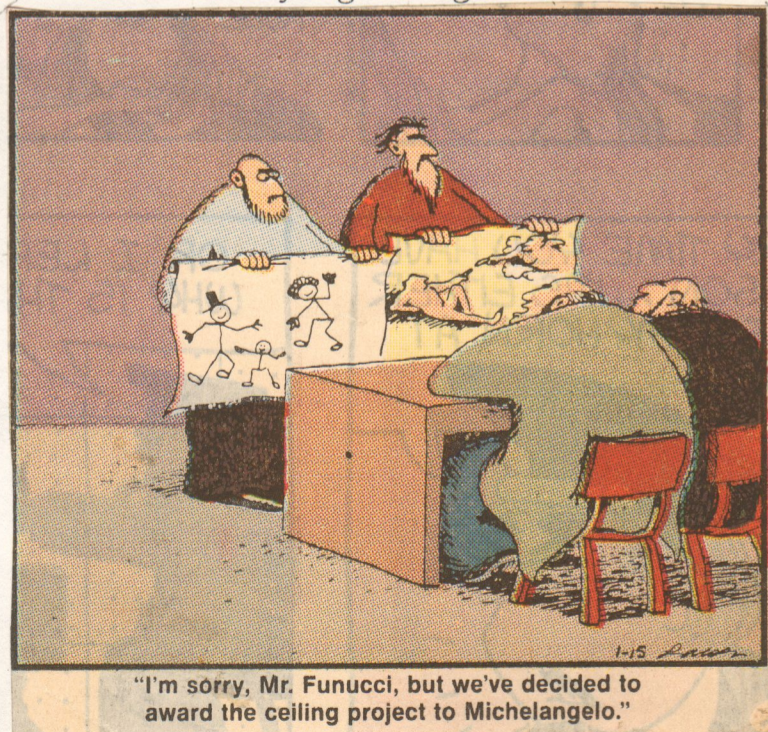
I made it to the art galleries but twice in 1988. The first time was to the small Museum of Art and Anthropology in Columbia, Missouri. This time, I made a rather startling discovery--or rather, admission. I have long admired the twin figures in Johan Von Halbig's Bathing Nymphs, and had, unwittingly, allowed myself to take an attitude rather common to me (common to my undoing, I should perhaps say). Namely, I had become very loyal to this work of art, and would not abide the thought that there might be some imperfection in it. But this time, what I had been trying to ignore for a long while could no longer be denied. The heads on each figure are a bit too small. One tires to ignore this, one can almost ignore it, one can even deceive oneself for a time into believing the problem is not there. But it is there, and once acknowledged, does detract from the quality of what otherwise is a stunningly beautiful work of sculpture.

My second visit was to the Chicago Art Institute. This is the first time I have ever been to this gallery when there was not a part of it that was closed.

There is much great art in this gallery, of course, and I can not mention it all here. I would like to mention a few, however, which had an especial effect on me. For example, I loved Rodin's Portrait of Balzac, a bronze figure which was not popular during Rodin's lifetime, and drew much criticism.

I like the work for its realism--its portrayal of Balzac as an old man. The Rodin penchant for naturalistic exaggeration does not characterize (nor flaw) this work, as happens in many of Rodin's sculptures; hence, my strong appreciation for this piece.

Then there are the Dali paintings and sketches, the best being his 1937 Inventions of the Monsters. Renoir's Woman at the Piano is there, as is his





justly famous Two Sisters (On the Terrace) of 1881. My favorite paintings in this gallery are the ones by the classicists, and this gallery has a goodly showing of such greats. There are three by Lucas Cranach the Elder: his Eve and his Adam, both done about 1530, and The Crucifixion which was done in 1538. Every time I see works by Cranach the Elder, I am again reminded of the fact that he was painting during the first half of the sixteenth century; and it is then I appreciate him even more. A similar appreciation occurs when I see works by Botticelli, who was painting during the latter part of the fifteenth century. This gallery contains his Madonna and Child with Angel (1475/1485) which, although one of his simpler--even primitive--works, is awesomely beautiful. This gallery contains three paintings by Rubens, who is one of my very favorite painters. Best is The Holy Family with Sts. Elizabeth and John the Baptist (c.1615); I especially like the way Rubens paints a wrinkle on the side of Mary's nursing breast--it is almost identical to the way he painted Delilah's breast in the painting of Samson which is at the London National Gallery. As for the St. Francis in Chicago, I really do not think Rubens painted it. It of course is possible that he sketched it in, but from my knowledge of Rubens, which is not inconsiderable, I believe his brush never touched this canvas. Titian, or at least his workshop, is represented by a large and luscious painting of Danae. And Rembrandt's Young Woman at an Open Half-Door (1645), although not one of his best, makes a nice addition to the gallery. A very small etching by Rembrandt of Adam and Eve (1638) is strikingly perfect. He depicts the bodies very naturally--or, naturalistically. They are executed with a finished detail, and are quite ugly, but not monstrously so--which is how most artists deal with the ugly. Rembrandt's result is that ordinary bodies make a modest claim to beauty, and this claim, mediated by his genius, achieves more in the way of aesthetic satisfaction that would a depiction of bodies that might be more stylized or idealized.

In a more modern vein, Turner's Dutch Fishing Boats (1837-38) is at this gallery; this very large canvas is one of his finest, and I suspect that the trustees of London's Tate have often cast covetous eyes in the direction of Chicago.

The Chicago Art Institute also contains some very fine sculpture. Perhaps most impressive is Adam's Bust of Amphitrite, done about 1725; this piece, perhaps, is the best work of sculpture in the gallery. I have already mentioned the Rodin. I must here give homage to two works by Cordier: his Bust of a Nubian (1848) and his Bust of a Negress (1851). These two works are sublimely powerful, and reflect a sculpting skill (as well as flawless casting with bronze) which I have rarely witnessed. Close by was the 1874 Odalisque by Jules Joseph Lefebvre. This work is almost unbearably erotic. And it has a special historical significance for me, since it is so similar in pose to Velazquez' The Toilet of Venus which is at the London National Gallery. I have long pointed out to my friends that the Velazquez painting is seriously flawed. The face in the mirror is magnified too much, and at a plane not allowed by the angle of the mirror. The mirror image, however, is quite dominant in Velazquez' painting, and hence, its angular proportions set the nude askew. It is nice to see this earlier figure of Velazquez' (c.1648/49) done in a way that, however different, is stylistically successful in what Lefebvre accomplishes.

In the same room where the works by Lefebvre and Cordier were, is Bouguereau's The Bathers (1884). I above spoke of how I criticize the Velazquez painting, sometimes to the discomfiture of my friends. With Bouguereau, the case is different. Most of my friends do not like him--they claim he is too pretty, too ethereal, unable to paint his figures as human beings. "He's afraid to paint pubic hair," is how one of my Kansas City friends puts it. I concede all these criticisms, and yet ... I think he achieves a naturalism, at least with most of his paintings, which is too convincing to be dismissed, no matter how many liberties he may take with nature. The Chicago painting is so realistic it almost looks like a huge photo. If Bouguereau has left a few things out, he makes up for it by what he adds: the skin tones are entirely realistic, the facial expressions have a convincing balance of formal study combined with individual expression, and the pose--at least in the Chicago painting--is perfectly natural, while at the same time combining both a static and a dynamic quality. In short, Bouguereau is one of my favorite painters, and I believe The Bathers is one of his best.

Earlier, when discussing Dali, I should have mentioned a very large painting which this gallery houses; I refer to The Crucifixion (1627) done by the Spaniard, Francisco de Zurbaran. This painting is not great; the



"Where can I get a bunch of sunflowers?"



subdued colors juxtapose too clumsily, the figure of Christ is vaguely drawn, the applied oils have not cured well. But the pose is awesome in its similarity to Dali's Christ of St. John of the Cross. As some of you, of refined aesthetic sensibility, know full well, I consider the Dali painting, to which I just referred, to be the greatest painting in the world. And here, a painting done by a Spaniard 2½ centuries earlier, which prefigures the Dali painting. I can not but suspect that Dali saw the de Zurbaran painting. If, however, he did not, then I must assume that each, with his painter's eye, perceived a spatial dimension which is never glimpsed by the ordinary mortal's eye, except through the privileged perspective of the artist's brush.

But I have neglected to mention what I think is the greatest painting in the Chicago gallery. I refer to the Judith (c. 1540) done by Jan Sanders van Hamessen. This female figure attains a perfect synthesis of feminine beauty and masculine power. There is voluptuous beauty in her face, and yet a stern anger too. She is all sex, and all violence, and all virtue that transmutes sex and transcends violence. I could not get enough of this painting.

But, contrary to my resolve, I am going on too much. I had thought to mention only five or six works of art in the Chicago gallery, but my enthusiasm has overtaken me. Why do I mention so many works? Not, I assure you, to satisfy any sort of compulsion. Rather, it is sheer love for such art, and a desire to share--even impose--this love upon my worthy friends!

I might mention a couple of other things, not about the art in the Chicago Art Institute, but about certain other of its characteristics. One thing: the guards there, although very friendly, are more ignorant of the art in that gallery than are the guards in any other gallery I have ever visited. In trying to locate certain paintings which I knew were there, I asked perhaps thirty guards questions about the collection over the course of three days. Not once did I receive any help. Guards who had been there for years could not identify a single work in even some of the smaller rooms. This, contrasted to the guards, at, say, The Minneapolis Institute of Arts, where the personnel can tell you not only where a work of art is, but can, if pressed, recite from memory every painting in nearly every room in that very large gallery.

And I was involved in a rather interesting interchange with one of the gallery's docents. She was taking a group of adults from room to room, and when they intruded upon the room I was occupying, I gave the woman's speech my attention for a short while. She was comparing two landscapes, and pointing out how one of them is accurately **described** as a "miniature," and yet the other, although similar in many ways, is not. Yet, she could not state why one deserves the term, "miniature," and the other does not. She gave a fairly erudite analysis of the various definitions that have been proffered for what a miniature in painting is. Often a miniature is done on ivory, vellum, or polished metal. It thus has a very smooth finish, and allows for a fine sense of detail. Of course, quite often a miniature is a very small painting. And, there is much detail in a miniature. But, this woman pointed out accurately that there are paintings which strike one as being a miniature which are done on regular canvas, which are quite large, and which indeed have a great deal of detail but which do not seem to have any more detail than do other paintings which one would never refer to as a miniature. So ... what is the defining characteristic of a miniature? She asked the question a final time, said that no one seems to know although everybody knows a miniature when they see one, and was ready to move on to the next room. Whereupon I stepped forth and ventured an opinion of my own, using the two canvases she was contrasting to illustrate my point. Indeed, both were quite large, both were done on fairly rough canvas, and both had a great deal of detail; yet, one was clearly a miniature, and the other was not. I pointed out that the most clearly defining characteristic of the miniature is how the detail is viewed. From a distance of several feet, each painting appears to have the same amount of detail. But as one approaches the paintings more closely, the one that is not the miniature begins to lose its detail--one sees brush strokes instead of figures. "The defining characteristic of a miniature," I said, "is that the closer you view it with the naked eye, the more detail emerges. The detail of figure and form is never lost to the brush stroke or to the texture of the canvas." The woman thought about this, examined the two paintings very closely, and very enthusiastically stated that she thought I was right. She added that she might want to write an article about this, and asked me if it was okay with me if she could borrow my idea. "You can steal if it you want; I don't care," I said. And I meant it.

I still mean it, but nevertheless, in this edition of The Aviary, I just want to make it known that Baumli's lips uttered it first.

The woman later came back, found me out, and discussed the concept with me further. I emphasized that by "close" I meant just that--i.e., not how carefully one views the painting, but rather, how closely one stands to it. And I emphasized the importance of the fact that, in a miniature, it is



not the case that the same amount of detail remains as one moves closer to the painting; rather, more detail keeps appearing no matter how close one gets to it with the naked eye! Even viewed at a distance of one inch, instead of four inches, one sees more detail.

Well; she was impressed. She even promised to quote me. But after we had parted company, I realized that she had neglected to discover my name. Not that it matters, of course, to anyone but my friends. Hence, this minor, seemingly self-serving, revelation.

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 \*\*\*\*\*MUSICAL MUSINGS \*\*\*\*\*  
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1988 was a good year for music; in fact, every year is a good one for music when I've the time for listening.

In my almost desperate attempts to collect certain LPs before they are forever out of print, I have made some very fine acquisitions, among them the complete Beethoven piano trios done by The Beaux Arts Trio, and a six album set of Schubert's piano music played by Artur Schnabel. Also, I found more recordings by E. Power Biggs, and fell in love with the recorder as played by Michala Petri. Previously, I had never even liked the instrument, but when played by Petri, it attains virtuosic status, and I am grateful to her for opening my heart to this instrument. Another fine acquisition was the complete Mozart Symphonies, as played by the greatest chamber orchestra in the world, namely, The Academy of St. Martin-in-the-Fields, conducted by Sir Neville Marriner. A great discovery was an album entitled Tabula Rasa done by Arvo Part; he is a great composer, and I look forward to hearing more of his compositions.

Most satisfying of all was the acquisition of recordings by Walter Klien, whom I consider to be the greatest living pianist. I at last obtained a copy of him playing Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 21, and Mozart's Quintet for Piano and Strings. They are glorious performances, and further attest not only to Klien's artistry, but also to the injustices of the musical world--given that Klien is not very well known in the arena of performances and recordings.

On December 29, I had the pleasure of hearing a radio broadcast of a concert featuring Klien. With the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Erich Leinsdorf, he performed Stravinsky's Concerto for Piano and Wind Orchestra. This performance was better than the broadcast I heard on June 4, 1986, with both Klien and Leinsdorf performing the same piece. The 1986 broadcast was with the New York Philharmonic, and the difference in orchestras made for two decidedly different performances. In the 1988 performance, Klien did not contrast so much with the orchestra in terms of quality, given that



the Chicago Symphony is vastly superior to the New York, and therefore could play in a way more commensurate with Klien's quality. In the 1988 performance, Klien was just as powerful as in the 1986 rendering, although he was somewhat more free and fluid in his approach to the work. But even with this freedom, there was the sense of command which Klien always commands. This Stravinsky piece has a fairly lengthy introduction by the winds, before the piano ever comes in; but, when Klien's piano announced itself, the entire piece took on a new character. What previously had sounded pleasing, now sounded authoritative and inescapable; what before had tantalized, now both satisfied and inspired. Yes; Klien is a master, and one of my greatest dreams in life is to hear him do a live performance.

It has been my custom, in these pages, to say a few words about the concerts I have heard over the year. The March 4 concert by Murray Perahia was good, but not great. He played Mozart's Fantasia in C Minor, K 475, and the Sonata in C Minor, K 457, back to back. The two pieces go together well, but Perahia made many mistakes in the Sonata, and as a result, it was not a pleasing piece. His rendering of Beethoven's Les Adieux was much better, however, as was his playing of five small pieces by Chopin. Of these five pieces, his playing of the Nocturne in C Minor, Op.48, No.1, was truly great. For encores, he played two of Schubert's Opus 90 Impromptus--the G-flat and the A-flat. The latter one was truly great, and caused me to wonder if Perahia might one day become a great Schubert interpreter. My present opinion, however, is that while Perahia has an impressive list of recordings, and is obviously well-liked by both audiences and other great musicians in the world of classical music, he has not yet attained the status of being a first-rank virtuoso.

The June performance by the St. Louis Symphony was very disappointing. On this all-Mozart program, their first piece, the Masonic Funeral Music, K. 477, was played in a way that was bland, tepid, entirely uninteresting. There was not a bit of the sombre melancholy that characterizes most performances, and they would have been better off leaving the piece alone. Their performance of Mozart's Concerto No. 27 was no better. The orchestra fumbled, faltered, groped and wallowed. Raymond Leppard, in a white suit, went into virtual histrionics, trying to appear in control, but his attempt at bombast succeeded only in being ridiculous. As for the pianist, Helene Wickett, she has long blond hair, looks very pretty, and smiled so engagingly that the audience loved her. But as for playing the piano, she did little more than go through the motions of the concerto. She made many flagrant mistakes--missing notes, hitting wrong notes, losing her timing, her hands groveling about the keyboard like two diseased crabs dying of palsy. But the audience loved her. Like I say, she was pretty, and had a nice smile. For their final work, the Orchestra did Mozart's Symphony No. 40, which is in their standard repertoire, and played it well. I am thankful that I stayed to hear them play this final piece; otherwise, my opinion of the orchestra might have gone into a rapid decline.

In October, I heard the Tokyo String Quartet, and they gave a quite commendable performance. They first played Beethoven's Quartet No. 4 in C Minor, and although unsatisfying in some ways, it is an interpretation I am glad I heard. They did the first two movements superbly, and in fact, ended the second movement with so much bombast it was difficult not to believe one was hearing a small symphony orchestra. Unfortunately, this high degree of power evaporated with the following movement, which compared to what came before, was too romantic, sweet, even timid. The final "Allegro" was played much too fast, and at the end of the work, one could not but feel more musically confused than aesthetically satisfied. Still, I am happy that I heard their rendering of the piece's first two movements; they stand as a worthy example of the power a string quartet is capable of.

The second work they performed was Janacek's String Quartet No. 1. This was their best piece of the evening, and although it did not measure up to my recording of the piece as directed by Gidon Kremer, it came very close.

Their final piece was Schubert's Death and the Maiden Quartet. They did a fine job on this piece, and although their reading was not as subtle as some I have heard, they played the "Presto" better than I have ever before heard it played.

Overall, from this performance and from their recordings, I rather think that the Tokyo String Quartet is quite uneven. They certainly have technical mastery, and they are capable of exploring the extremes of musical emotion. But as for the many nuances of musical probing that lie between those extremes, they do not negotiate them very well. They are a fine quartet, but I must here say what I have said before: The Cleveland Quartet is better.

In November, I heard The Chamber Orchestra of Paris conducted by Paul Kuentz. It was pleasing, but very uneven. Individual musicians were unable to contribute to the orchestra, and the solo performers seemed distracted, uninspired. Fortunately, the orchestra did a rendering of Barber's Adagio for Strings which was perfectly executed--played at a level that would match almost any chamber orchestra in the world. Some people would say that this is an easy piece, i.e., easy to play well, rather like Pachelbel's Canon. I am not sure I would agree with this, but



regardless, I have heard many versions of this piece, and there is only one--done by The Academy of St. Martin-in-the-Fields, conducted by Marriner, which I would say is better.

Unfortunately, the November 18 recital given by Konrad Wolff was a complete disappointment. He is a worthy pedagogue, and a worthy exponent of Artur Schnabel. But he has aged, and with 81 years weighing upon his body, he simply could not get through the works without making too many glaring mistakes. His first piece, Beethoven's Sonata in E flat Major, Opus 31, No.3, was played so badly I saw members of the audience looking around at other members, wondering if they too were wondering what was going on. At one point, Wolff played a two-bar set of chords, paused, turned on the piano bench to fix a stare upon the audience, turned back to the piano, played the two bars again, paused again for effect, and then went on with the work. I do not know, even now, if by doing this he was attempting to make a pedagogical point, or if he had actually momentarily forgotten the score and was trying to locate it in his memory. After this sonata, he played five of Beethoven's little Bagatelles, and these simple pieces were rendered more or less satisfactorily.

At the intermission I left. He was going to play, after the intermission, Beethoven's Sonata in E minor, Opus 90, and Beethoven's Sonata in A Major, Opus 101. I could not bear to hear these two lovely sonatas played so badly. Even more, I was feeling sorry for Mr. Wolff, embarrassed for him and sorry for him. I did not want to feel this for him; it seemed that, by harboring these feelings, I was somehow insulting him. So I left.

Sad, that a worthy musician thus succumbs to age, and does not know when to quit doing public performances. Of course, other musicians, much older than Wolff's 81 years, have continued to play superbly. But Wolff's playing was clumsy, haphazard, geriatric. A fine gentleman, he is, but no amount of daring, bombast, or verve--all of which he tried for--could rescue his feeble fingers.

The best concert I heard during the season was a performance of Handel's Messiah done by the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra conducted by none other than the great maestro, Robert Shaw. They used the Saint Louis Symphony Chorus, directed by Thomas Peck. And the soloists were: Sylvia McNair, soprano; Janice Taylor, mezzo-soprano; John Aler, tenor; and James Michael McGuire, baritone.

The chorus was truly splendid, and Mr. Peck is to be congratulated for having built such a fine choral ensemble. The orchestra was a bit uneven at first, with a pronounced weakness in the cellos and double basses. However, there was a pause lasting nearly five minutes after the baritone recitative, "Thus saith the Lord . . .", while a group of at least 100 late-comers (I presume they were the Illinois contingent) slowly made their way into the hall; while the members of the orchestra glared at the late-comers, Shaw, standing to the right side of the podium with his back to the audience, talked to the cello and double bass players, and I could tell that in a very gentle, but firm way, he was doing his best to rouse them to better playing. His approach (certainly different from what would have been the approach of tyrannical Toscanini, or a stern Sir Neville Marriner), yielded the results he wanted. When the oratorio finally resumed, the cello and double bass players were the best section in the orchestra for the remainder of the work.

The baritone, McGuire, was excellent, with a voice very suited for both the performance and the hall. John Aler has one of the purest tenor voices in the business, but he does not have impressive volume, and although he always sounds splendid on recordings, he sounded weak in the orchestra hall. Janice Taylor's singing was an embarrassment. She missed notes, attempted for a drama that would have been more appropriate for an opera, and at times could not keep from singing flat. I know she is well known for her singing in the Mahler symphonies, and for various opera performances, but if this showing is indicative of her current abilities, then she deserves to quickly fade from the musical scene. I had the impression, listening to her, that she had performed the Messiah perhaps twenty years ago, and for this performance, assuming she still knew the piece, had perhaps done nothing





more by way of practice than to hum through the score a couple of times. Fortunately, Sylvia McNair gave a superb performance as soprano. Her stage presence is stunning, her voice very pure and with a controlled but natural-sounding vibrato, and her volume was entirely adequate without in any place coloring notes of different registers differently. I must say that hers was the finest vocal performance I have heard in some years, and I rather suspect that the musical world will be hearing much more from her over the next two decades.

Hearing this performance convinced me that I must soon get a copy of Shaw's latest recording of the Messiah with the Atlanta Symphony. Shaw is a great conductor, very humble in a peasant-like way, and hence not always included by gushing reviewers among the front ranks of conductors. But when it comes to ability, there are no more than three or four conductors in this country who can match him, and now that he has resigned as director of the Atlanta Symphony, it will be gratifying to see what he does when recording or conducting various orchestras around the country.

In this section of The Aviary, I have in the past enjoyed describing my reactions to various recordings of a certain piece of music--always a work by Beethoven, thus far. This year, despite inclinations to the contrary, I must forego this exercise. Realize that when I began this edition of The Aviary, I swore that I would keep it at 20 pages. And now look at what I've gone and done. So, those of you who have told me you like best my analyses of pieces of music must forgive me, for I simply have not the time to go into such a work this year. I had entertained the idea, and the piece of music which came to mind was none other than Handel's Messiah. But realize, a piece so long--2½ hours, or thereabouts--would require so much analysis herein. There are the orchestra, the chorus, the soloists, and various versions of the score. Moreover, I would not feel competent to give an in-depth analysis without going back and listening again to each version which I might analyze. As it is, I own more than twenty versions of this work, and at 2½ hours each ... well, perhaps you can understand my predicament. And some of you, who are compulsive about reading things all the way through, but are not overly fond of music, will perhaps be grateful to think of what I have spared you. I don't think I could have done the work justice in less than a dozen pages. Which probably means I would have required thirty or more pages to satisfy my own compulsive bent. Hence, I must leave the Messiah for another time. It is one of my favorite pieces of music, and I think it one of the greatest artistic achievements of all time. But I shall have to be content with such praises, and as for details, leave those for now and be on to other topics.

### NOTES FROM TWIN FRANCES

Now I begin to understand! It made no sense that, having received so many letters from Francis' friends before, as a result of what I would write for his Aviary, that not a single letter came to me this last year. Now Francis explains himself. He writes me, requesting a contribution for the present edition, and informs me that not only has he not published the last, he has not even finished writing it. I experience some reluctance in penning these words, since I have doubts as to whether Francis will ever publish another Aviary.

What deters him? He says he is tired of receiving so much criticism from friends when he publishes these things. I have seen the letters, and it is true that people are too hard on him. I even find myself joining my voice to theirs in criticizing him, and I'm not sure why I do it. Usually he and I are quite convivial with one another. But in this public letter, he often pokes fun at me, and I find myself flinging things back. All this is curious, really, fighting in public when we are so friendly in private.

I believe there is something else deterring him. It is his depression--a depression that has virtually paralyzed him, artistically and spiritually, since he moved to Illinois. Not that Francis had much in the way of self-esteem to begin with. Other people, less perceptive than myself, or perhaps not enjoying my vantage, believe him to be conceited and possessing a very high opinion of himself. Quite the opposite is true. He is consistently harsh with himself, often tells me that he believes himself the most demented and worthless creature on this earth, and not infrequently goes out of his way to earn other people's hatred. He actually likes it when other people hate him, because then he believes he is less likely to be erring in hating himself.

All this I would not say, except to explain that, what with Francis' already low opinion of himself, it is understandable that the community to which he has moved would take a heavy toll on his spirit. I have not visited him since his move there, but from what he tells me, by letter and phone, it seems that the people there, and the general environment, would try the fortitude of a saint.

Francis has promised me that he will not change, edit, or censor a word of what I write for his Aviary. If nothing else, Francis is an honest man; hence, I can with confidence write that I am fearing for not only his sanity, but also for his life. He has been so depressed the last three months that I believe he is actually suicidal. In a phone conversation, I told him that I am actually worried that he might commit



suicide. To my genuine worry, he cryptically replied, "When have I ever neglected that option?" I asked him if he was presently considering it. He laughed, "When have I ever not?" And then he dismissed the whole topic, and became irritated when I tried to return to it. In subsequent letters to him, I twice broached the topic, and he has ignored my concerns each time. I remain worried. Although I know little about psychology, I did read, somewhere, that people who joke about suicide are the ones most likely to actually do it. So what am I to think? Or do? The least I can hope for is that other of his friends will take his morbid state of mind to heart, and do what they can to rouse him from it.

I do have faith in Francis' ability to rescue himself. If he does not do it by a creative surge, then, knowing him, he will do it with an impressive outpouring of cynicism and criticism. Cynicism is usually an attitude entirely foreign to him. He likes to quote his mentor, Arthur Berndtson, with, "Cynicism is pessimism enjoyed." Keeping this in mind, he has always tried to eschew the attitude. But when last we spoke by phone, he told me that he has refined the definition to, "Cynicism is pessimism enjoyed, and preferred." He went on to explain that there perhaps is nothing wrong with enjoying one's pessimistic stance, as long as one does not prefer it to a better world. He argued that it is more healthy to enjoy one's pessimism, if really there seems to be no available alternative. I warned him that enjoying one's pessimism could become a habit, blinding oneself to a better world when it is presented. He assured me that this would never happen to him, that when he enjoys his pessimism, it is a partial enjoyment only, intended only to make the burden more bearable. "Give me one rose, and I will forget that I snickered at the thistles," he said.

There is something to all this. I suppose as long as he hates his current state of being, then he might as well enjoy hating it, i.e., take pleasure in deriding what he can not withstand, and thus, perhaps withstand it a bit more successfully--if not more easily.

While Francis has agreed to change nothing of what I write for him, he did ask, in advance, that I avoid writing about him and say a good deal about myself. He believes I have a difficult time describing my own personality, and I suppose he is right. The problem is, my life remains much the same. I still work for the government, do some modeling when I am in London, write occasional poems, and continue with my peace work. However, I have decided that I shall make some important decisions about the latter work over the next year. I have found that the word, "peace," is scarcely appropriate to the work that many of the peaceniks do. Except for three or four people (Francis' wife, Abbe, among them), the hundreds of peace workers with whom I have associated know not a thing about peace. They know only violence, and they are against that. But as for peace, they know only that it is the absence of violence, and they have not a bit of internal peace. Their work seems to be motivated by a terror of violence, and an even greater terror of interpersonal conflict. Many of these people, because of their terror, have attempted to become experts at resolving interpersonal conflict. But their way of resolving such conflict is so practiced, so ritualized, so sanitized and (in the end) bereft of any real emotion, that a "conflict-resolution session" with one of these people ends up inflicting a spiritual violence so vile that I can scarcely bear to argue with them. Afterwards, I always feel that I have been emotionally raped. But they smile serenely, happy in their conviction that conflict has been resolved because it got covered up with a layer of emotionally neutral words.

Ah well. Enough of complaining. I shall leave that exercise to Francis.

As for other aspects of my personality: Francis challenged me to write about my sex life. Of course he is joking. He knows I am a private person, who would never give details about such matters. As for generalizations? I am straight, satisfied, and secretive. Is that enough?

Having said this much--so much!--in so few words, I think I've discharged any obligation I might have felt toward Francis' request that I write more about myself. This said, I close, with the hope that Francis finds the time to finish and publish his tardy issues of The Aviary. I miss hearing from his friends, and I also pine for my twin brother's diatribes. They afford me vicarious relief from my own propensity toward cynicism.

My very best!

*Francis*



\*\*\*\*\* ARTICLES \*\*\*\*\*

In 1988, I was true to my resolve: that I would put forth less effort when it comes to publishing articles. This year, I published only eleven short works; and indeed, putting less time into this activity has given me more hours for working on my longer things. I mentioned to one of my friends recently that I have been publishing less, and he worried that my



reputation as a writer might consequently suffer. I told him not to worry. Nowadays, I see that I am being quoted quite often. In footnotes, within other people's articles, in speeches people give, and even (perish the inescapable reality!!) on television talk shows. I suppose that when other people are quoting you, this is a surer measure of success (although not a definition of success that is any the more clear!) than gauging yourself by the number of articles published per year.

Have I accomplished that one, elusive goal which I hoped to move toward this last year, namely, getting one or more of my novels published? Not at all. And now, past the age of forty, and going blind--how many years have I left?

So what more is there to say about a topic so depressing? I suppose I should leave it be, and go on to

do something I have customarily used The Aviary for, namely, to herein publish examples of my writings from recent years. But, as I said, I am publishing fewer articles these days. Hence, I shall grant you but one: the following, letter to the editors of National Geographic Magazine:

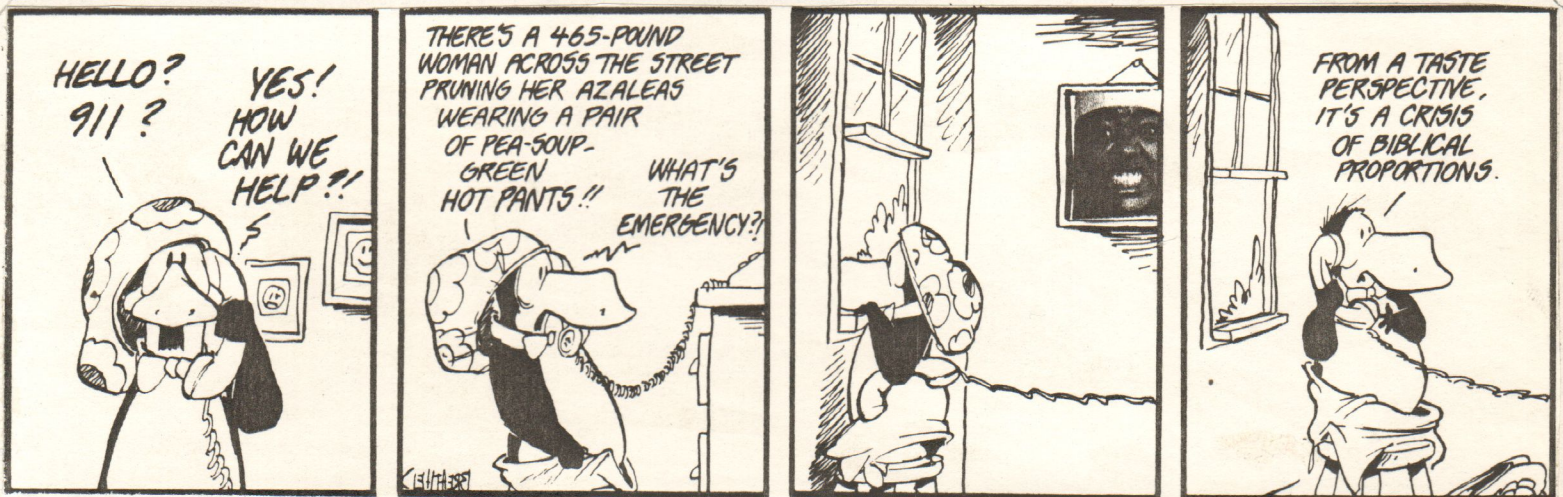


### ON ECOLOGY AND HYPOCRISY

The December '88 National Geographic is your best yet! There is such a fine balance of perspectives: cogent articles that present not only strong warnings about our endangered earth but also convey a cautious optimism, photography that captures not only our destructiveness but also our generosity toward one another, and a gorgeous front cover that portrays earth's beauty as well as its vulnerability. So why did you mar this wonderful issue with that McDonald's advertisement on the back cover? I could heat my Illinois home all winter by burning the paper which one McDonald's discards in less than a week. What kind of hypocrisy are you indulging, to thus devote an issue of your magazine to our earth's fragile ecology, while at the same time advertising the one company that is the perfect paradigm of how big business wastes our earth's resources?

Francis Baumli, Ph.D.

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Sore of body, deranged of soul, I bring this missive to a sad close. The fact that I am willing to stay in a locale as depressing as Southern Illinois attests to my devotion to Abbe. She must work here another few years; at the end of that time, unless this place has by then deprived me of every last vestige of my personality, I shall take my lame and disfigured hylomorphic ghost and depart for a different region.

I look about me, hoping to espy some bit of beauty to break the barren landscape. But all I see is a multitude composed of wailing children, cataleptic children, crippled children, women with monstrous bodies, women with wormy bodies, women with untested bodies, men with consumption and black lung, men without genitals, men without character, all of them wretches afflicted with premature senility, a practiced laziness, and an unpracticable but incurable demented dysarthria. All of them, I say, except for a very few sterling exceptions, people



