

Weber Woman's Wrevenge

Volume 4, Number 3

February 1985

Registered by Australia Post, Publication No NBH4389



WEBERWOMAN'S WREVENGE TWENTY-ONE
(Volume 4, Number 3, February 1985)

Registered by Australia Post, Publication No NBH4389, ISSN 0728-3792.
Publication dates are quarterly: August, November, February, May.

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This issue typed on a Taiwanese copy of an Apple II microcomputer, using the word processing program Sandy's, printed on a Brother CE-60 daisywheel electronic typer with IF-50 interface, and duplicated on a Roneo 750, except for the cover and this page, which are photocopied. Electrostencils by Allan Bray and Ron L Clarke. Missing question marks by Apple-Brother connection, except where I've corrected them.

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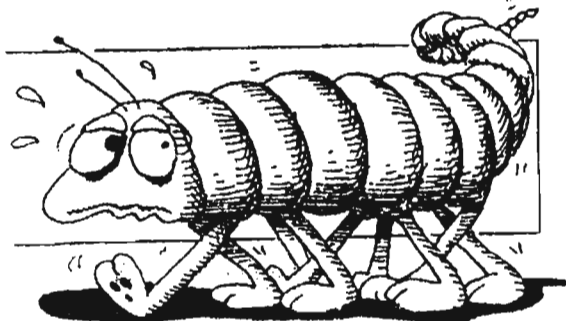
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THE RUBBISH BIN



Brad W. Foster 1983

An Editorial by Jean Weber

Love, friendship and the variety of "primary relationships" (marriage, partnership, groups, singles, etc) have been hot topics in a lot of my fannish reading in the last few months (much of it in apas, but also quite a bit in more generally-available fanzines. And I've been getting letters and articles on these subjects, so this issue has, again, something of a "theme": love.

Leading off is Adrienne Fein with an analysis which grew out of apa discussions on monogamy versus other forms of pairing (and multiples). It frequently amazes me that people still seriously debate which is "better" (no matter how you choose to define "better") -- I keep thinking that by now (1985) intelligent, educated people have learned that no one way of life is "better" or more suitable for everybody, and that as long as no one is deliberately hurt or exploited, whatever a person (couple, group) choose to do is their business, and not a matter of value-judgement on abstract grounds. Especially amongst fans, who I persist (in the face of a lot of evidence to the contrary) to continue to think of as less bound by rigid ideas of human behaviour. Then an argument will surface in one of the many apas I belong to, and remind me that these ideas still persist. No wonder America is returning to the fundamentalist notions of rigid rules of behaviour, if even the FANS can't go beyond such thinking. (No, I've never heard a fan suggest people shouldn't be ALLOWED to do whatever they want that doesn't hurt someone else (though they may debate whether something does hurt others or not, which is a different matter entirely), but only that some ways of life and love are clearly SUPERIOR to other ways, and so those who adhere to the inferior ways are to be perhaps tolerated, perhaps pitied, perhaps assisted to See The Light. Maybe that's an improvement over coercion, but it isn't much of one.)

Moving on from Adrienne, we have some letters which I've turned into an article, still on the subject of "love". Then another installment in what I think of as my series on childhood horror stories. This one, by Terry Frost, I've been sitting on for almost a year. I first read Terry's story several years ago in an apa. I think his rewrite has toned down the

anger and pain that I recall in the first version I saw, but I still think it should be read. I don't really enjoy publishing painful histories, but I think the more such things are talked about, the less everyone can pretend it doesn't exist. (I have more in the files, too.)

Next we have the usual lengthy lettercolumn (as usual, drastically edited from the mountain of mail I receive), and finally some book reviews.

Are any of you overseas readers planning to attend AUSSIECON II? If so, please let me know in advance so I can try to get together with you, especially if you want to visit. I have quite a bit of space, but very little bedding, and it's COLD in Canberra in August -- the middle of winter, remember (Not all that cold by the standards of many North Americans, since the daytime highs get above freezing, but the nights are often below zero -- Celcius, that is.) At the con itself, you will mostly find me in the vicinity of the fan room. I do hope lots of you can attend!

DIARY NOTES

In early November I had a chance to spend 4 days in Melbourne at CSIRO's expense. All day Thursday and Friday morning were devoted to work, then I took the afternoon off and visited Space Age Books. Later I had dinner with a group from Women's usectoral Lobby. When I had accepted the invitation, I'd forgotten that with an Australian federal election looming on December 1, all good WEL women would be discussing politics. This was of even less interest to me than usual because it was all the Victorian politicians they were talking about, and most of them I've never even heard of. The food was good, though. Got to bed rather late that night. (The incumbent Labor party was re-elected, by the way.)

Saturday was overcast and threatening rain. I visited the Victorian Arts Centre in the afternoon. The evening was spent at a fannish gathering at Marc and Cath Ortlieb's, where I heard more than I really wanted to know about WorldCon organising. An enjoyable evening, nevertheless. I got to bed even later that night.

Continued on page 18....

Do People Change, or just Change Around?

Written and/or edited by Adrienne Fein

The subject of change has come up in a discussion recently; Jean liked my comments, even though I got on my horse and galloped off in all directions, so -- this article.

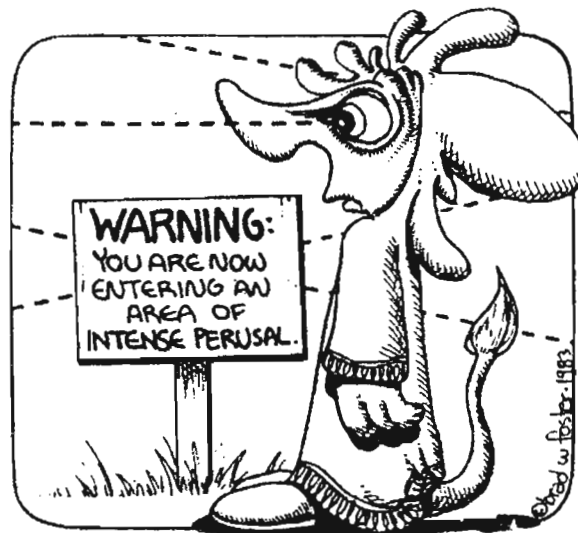
One discussion started with comments to the effect that lots of people seem to be disappearing into (monogamous) marriage.

One woman said that she'd had many extremely intense relationships with men. While these relationships were sexual, mainly they were very emotionally and psychically intense. But she hadn't had any of those in a long time, and the ones she had had were over (with one exception). These relationships had been based on love and friendship, rather than on any formal tie or commitment. She hadn't thought she wanted formality, and in fact was living with someone. Yet it bothered her when all these friends "settled into some sort of commitment" and she became only a "special friend" to them. It seemed she was becoming less involved with many of her closest friends, as they settled down.

Jean mentioned a couple who had had an open marriage, with each person having a regular lover. The marriage broke up -- possibly because the woman thought that if she was really in love with her lover, she MUST have fallen out of love with her husband. Perhaps she didn't believe it was possible to love two people at once, and to try to set up a lifestyle based on loving more than one person. Jean thinks it's sad that people feel they have to limit their lives to the standard definition of love and marriage. I agree.

Does settling down mean settling into a rut. Are alternate lifestyles and extremely intense relationships just youthful phases. Or are some people unnecessarily and even painfully restricting their lives by expecting to love, live with, and be committed to, only one other person.

I've been deeply involved in a few non-standard relationships. I don't think of them as youthful follies or experiments, but as reflections of my basic values. (As well as what



I happen to like.) But if what one had felt as deep convictions later seems just a stage one had been going through, then what is identity.

I tend to think of myself as partly what I feel and believe, and though I am capable of changing my mind, I have long felt that many seeming changes were only expressions of different tendencies that had already existed, at least in potential. Certainly that seems true of my non-sexual behavior patterns.

For instance, most people who knew me before college probably thought of me as rather quiet and inhibited. For some reason, I became a lot more talkative my first year away at school. A change. No -- I'd always had the potential to be talkative; every once in a while I found someone I could talk with.

For most of my life, I haven't worn a bra, stockings, nail polish, lipstick, or other makeup. Once in a while -- say, once in four or five years -- I get my hair streaked, and then I start wearing nail polish or other makeup for a while. I have the feeling that when that happens, my mother thinks, "Oh, good, Adrienne has CHANGED. Now she will wear makeup and stockings (a bra goes without saying) every day from now on, clean up her apartment, and get a job as an executive secretary or administrative assistant, and maybe even marry a doctor." Well, maybe I'm exaggerating a little -- mother doesn't LIKE doctors. But I do think she sees starting to wear makeup as a symbol of fundamental change in attitude, rather than liking to play dress-up for variety.

I suspect that if I ever do get my apartment cleaned up, everyone will think I've CHANGED and I'll never be untidy again. Seems some people think someone so untidy will have a very difficult time changing to being tidy. One apau said she didn't believe people who lived in a mess would be neat and organized if they only had the time -- people who feel a need to be organized find or make the time. She added that people can slowly change, but it's not that they could as happily live either way.

I don't think it's that simple. I seem to feel some need to be organized and some need to be chaotic; depending on circumstances, I might be tidy someday -- I might enjoy expressing either quality. (At home I keep half my stuff in the middle of the floor, but I do know where most things are; at work, I tend to be highly organized, bringing in holders for different size paperclips and lifting typers to dust underneath. The potential tendency towards neatness is there.)

To what extent is it a change if people behave differently, and to what extent is it just different circumstances bringing out things that were there all along?

In the apa, I mentioned feeling for a while that lots of people I'd been close to were disappearing into primary relationships with others; I felt a little left out. Relationships were changing; it almost seemed for a while that all my friends were turning stodgy, or something. But feeling a bit left out is not the worst that could happen -- moving from the narrative to the hypothetical.

For instance, there might be people who were not only involved in, but advocates of, multiple open relationships, who suddenly found one person and settled down, AND started saying monogamy was the only way to go.

(I use the term "multiple relationships" to suggest the relations among close friends, some of whom are sexually intimate as well, and how relationships can sometimes spread out through friends of friends. It's really meaningful multiple relationships; "meaningful relationships" originally was coined to describe two college students who cared about each other, openly sharing various aspects of their lives, including sex -- as opposed to the male sneaking into town for sex with a Bad Girl while his co-ed girlfriend pretended to be a virgin. "Multiple relationships" does not imply that all relationships among a group of friends are of equal importance, or even all sexual -- just that each is important.)

Most of my friends strongly advocate individual people choosing what's best for them in particular relationships and circumstances. That makes sense. Monogamy may not be my preference, but there's one time when monogamy is far superior to multiple relationships: when both members of a couple prefer it. (Bernadette Bosky suggested in the apa that since there isn't time for everything, a couple with family, careers, and involving hobbies might choose to make sure they had time and energy for each other by eliminating outside sexual involvements.)

But there seem to be some people who practice a form of monogamy when it might not be what anyone wants, but only what someone thinks s/he ought to do. Sometimes, it seems, people will act a bit unconventionally, but still not challenge the basic assumptions of our culture enough to produce real changes in lifestyles. If people are stuck in old assumptions, I think that's not a happy situation.

However, some ideas for change may not work out in practice. I prefer open relationships. I don't want to cut friends off just because I'm in love with someone. Well of course I assume any friend of mine would still be a friend even if sex was no longer part of the relationship -- but it isn't that simple. Pledging to keep one person primary, may seem a limitation on how other relationships can grow. There may be aspects of having more than one undefined relationship that may not combine well with having a strong, primary, committed relationship.

Certain relationships have a certain intensity. In this culture, I think part of the intensity comes from assumptions about having found The Love of One's Life, having found Prince/ss Charming, with whom one will live happily ever after... Even if marriage isn't in the cards, there seems to be a certain intensity that comes from feeling a relationship is free to develop in whatever direction it may...

So, suppose you've had a very intense sexual friendship with someone. Suppose that someone finds someone else, and they get engaged and, in due course, married. And you friend says, "You'll always be someone special to me..." But what that person really means is, "Maybe half a dozen times in the next sixty years I'll think of you, and the memories will be good, and I'll feel very nostalgic for several hours." In other words, suppose the person settles down into monogamous pairing off to such an extent that not only is the intensity not there, not only is the sex not there, but

the friendship isn't there either. And you wonder if it ever really was, because just daydreaming about someone doesn't mean much.

I think situations like that make it seem as though "open relationships" had been a phase someone had been going through, but would of course give up when the right person came along -- of course then they'd grow up and be monogamously married. (N.B. -- I wouldn't like it if someone said monogamy is fine for people who aren't mature enough to handle multiple relationships.)

I believe it's possible (at least for some people) to have a hearth/core, heart/center relationship, and other close -- and sexual -- relationships as well, with any limitations on the number of such relationships imposed by considerations of time and energy, rather than from people having only a given amount of love to give. I think there are people who can maintain a marriage of three people. Or four. I simply don't think the standard monogamous dyad is the right way for everyone.

I believe it's possible to maintain a close friendship, with or without sex, with someone who is married to someone else. How the friendship is expressed would of course vary (and it's difficult to define friendship apart from expressions of it); no two friendships are exactly alike. Most friends talk and share what matters to them -- but it could be an expression of friendship to carefully avoid writing letters if your friend hates answering mail. Friendship might imply some shared activity (perhaps one the spouse does not care for), or offers of help to a friend who's moving...

Friendship, to me, means being there for someone, sharing joys and sorrows, being involved in each other's lives. (It also means knowing someone well enough to have a good idea of what expressions of friendship s/he'd want.) Yes, there may be some times when friendship between a single and a married person doesn't come first because another relationship does -- but there are times in any kind of friendship when a friend may have to "not be there after all" because s/he is with a relative or other friend whose need is greater or more immediate, or because of circumstances in her/his own life.

If someone who had seemed to believe in multiple and open relationships starts saying (or acting as though) marriage is the Real Thing ("it's okay to play around on the side, or to have fooled around before marriage") -- that seems like betrayal and hypocrisy. Reminds me of some men who say that of course they'll continue to love and respect a woman who has sex with

them, because they believe in sexual freedom -- but if they marry, of course they won't have sex with "the woman I love" before the wedding night, and they'd really prefer HER to be a virgin.

Sure, people can change their minds. It might not even be that much of a change if someone who had been in multiple relationships wants to focus on a core relationship for a while, or forever. There may be lots of things going on. But I feel that someone who goes from professing belief in multiple relationships to acting like monogamy is the only right way, had probably been lying. (I'm still good friends with an ex-lover who's monogamously engaged; he doesn't say monogamy is the one right way for everyone; in fact, he objects to such statements.)

One apian said that while some people seem to think multiple relationships are more "advanced" or a "freer" form of love, she thinks it's a matter of personal inclination; for her, falling in love with someone DOES mean falling out of love with any predecessor. Although others could love more than one person, she didn't think she could "learn" to, because it's not something that can be learned. She said it's sad that our culture gives people the idea that everyone is supposed to find one person and love him/her exclusively forever, so even people who aren't naturally inclined that way still try to follow that script. I don't think multiple emotional ties are necessarily "higher" or "freer"; trying to find out what one and one's close friends/lovers really want, instead of going along with the established pattern just because it's there, does seem in some ways better.

Arthur Hlavaty asked whether I'd assume someone was lying if s/he went from wholeheartedly espousing monogamy to having multiple relationships. Assume, no. Suspect, yes.

At least, if such a person happened to proposition me, saying his/her spouse had agreed to open the relationship because that was a more advanced form of love, I'd fear s/he had been cheating all along, and was just trying to justify his/her actions with a false display of philosophy. I think people change around a lot more than they really change; that makes me suspicious of people who switch soapboxes.

But when people seem to be saying something like, "Well, monogamy is of course the right way but people aren't perfect so it's okay for men to play around a little" -- I do think that's wrong. Even if they say it's okay for "people" to play around. Maybe "playing around" doesn't

have the same negative associations for others as it does for me (all terms used to discuss emotional and/or sexual relationships carry too many personal associations to be useful: Fein's Cynical Law of Communication), but what I mean by "playing around" is non-caring sex, in violation of agreement(s). Someone who is "playing around on the side" is probably hurting his/her spouse and the people played around with -- that's just not a nice way to treat people.

Screwing around would, it seems to me, be the opposite both of monogamy freely chosen and desired by both parties, and of caring sex among several friends (which harms none directly involved). It seems to me that people who say it's okay to cheat know perfectly well on some level that they are talking about doing something which violates their own professed system of belief. I think that's hypocritical; I associate it with the attitude shown up in Shaw's MAJOR BARBARA, that as long as one advocates rules, it's okay to break them in practice.

If someone went from professing monogamous values, and seeming to live that lifestyle, to saying open relationships were okay because faithfulness to one person didn't matter, I'd feel someone was lying somewhere.

Of course I'm paranoid, and I mind other people's business. (I was permanently warped by early exposure to Sophocles' ANTIGONE: do it in public, talk about it in public, all the talk and action better match, and be What's Right -- of course, that was about religious rites, not sex, but...) It bothers me when people do monogamy wrong. I think making little cheating exceptions to vows of sexual exclusiveness is doing monogamy wrong. There's a difference between living by mores different from those of most people, and feeling that rules and ethics don't matter. I believe it was Spiro Agnew who said that a lot of new morality was just old immorality; so it seems, but that's because a lot of people are doing "new morality" wrong.

The difference, as with the sexual revolution, is in attitudes rather than behavior. (It's fallacious to argue that people are having the same amount of sex as they ever did, therefore there was no sexual revolution.) The goal of the revolution I support is not more sex (though that could be a nice side effect) but rather a better attitude toward sex as a way of sharing, something women and men are free to choose (or refuse).

LOVE ... LOVE ... LOVE

Several people have written to me on the topic of love, and it's also featured in quite a few fanzine articles recently, so -- since it ties in with Adrienne Fein's article this issue -- I've collected some of the comments, and my own thoughts on the subject, and present them to you here.

JAMES DEAN WARYK writes as follows (11 November 1984):

What is love? Does anyone really know? Are there 5 billion versions, each unique? Is it a chemical reaction, built up of behavior patterns over millenia? I asked my friend Dave the question. Dave had been married and was now separated. He had been "in love" once, where I had never been "head over heels, irrationally in love".

He told me he could not explain it very easily. So I began with a series of presumptions and some questions.

- * Love is trust - that two people trust each other to the very core of spirit.
- * Love is loyalty - how can a person in love with another ever consider cheating?
- * Love is teamwork - that two people work together to make life easier or to improve each other's life.
- * Love is growth - "real love" can only be attained through years of devotion, commitment and loyalty, proving that the partners are serious and the bond can only get stronger.
- * Love is until death - a person who really loves another will risk his/her life to save the other, even trade places.

My mother did not hesitate to rescue me in an accident, even though she got injured herself; she proved that she loved me, but that was parental love, based on genes -- I am talking about love between "strangers", a bond that goes beyond genetics.

I thought that I was in love once, but I let her go. Dave let his wife go. He said that he had loved her once, but people change. He no longer loves her. He felt that his "love" was not as intense as other people's "loves".
* Love is blind - tell Dave about it. All of his friends warned him that she was not right for him and vice versa, but he ignored all warnings, and always ended the argument with the unarguable: "But I love her!"

I guess I am exploring this fascinating phenomenon because I am nearing the age when I am beginning to search for a full-time partner -- a life long mate. The search for the "ideal woman" may take years, and in the meantime, one risks "love" with many bedside companions. I had met my ideal mate down at WorldCon in September, but unfortunately she live in San Diego, California and I live in Victoria, B.C.

Are you in love? I would like to know your opinions.



((This was my reply --JHW))

"Love is certainly a term that covers a diversity of relationships and emotions: love of parents, children, siblings; love of country; etc. Talking only of adult "love", I distinguish several levels. Number 1 is for one's "significant other", and I don't dismiss the possibility of there being more than one of these at a time. To me, to love someone in this category is to place his or her happiness/welfare/ (choose word with meaning to you) equal to ~~your~~ own -- not more or less, but equal. Trust, loyalty, teamwork, growth are all part of this. Such a love does not necessarily last forever, of course, nor is there any reason to feel you've failed if it doesn't. People change. I've long believed that if you really love someone, you will let them go if you believe they would be happier (have a better opportunity for growth, etc) without you. "Love" is far too often perverted into possessiveness.

I generally equate the term "in love" or "fall in love" with what I call "infatuation". Head-over-heels, incredibly intense, "blind" feelings usually appear to be accompanied by a great need for self-gratification (not necessarily a bad thing in itself) rather than a mutual feeling of trust, loyalty, teamwork, etc. Then there's lust, a perfectly worthy feeling, but often mistaken for (or rationalised as) love.

Am I "in love"? No, though I have been. Do I love? Yes. Is it reciprocated? I think so. Will it last life long? Who knows? Eric and I will stay partners "as long as we both shall love". If it ends, I will be disappointed but won't feel I've failed. Besides, I love /have loved /will love other people - some of them sexually -- but none are on the same level as my "significant other".

Now we could get into levels of friendship, which I won't discuss now. That would take several pages all to itself, and be highly theoretical! I'll just end by noting that up until a few years ago I was not interested in a long term (more than 5 years, say) relationship, so was quite happy with a series of shorter-term special friends. A few, unfortunately, found this hard to handle; had I been able to spot them in time, I wouldn't have got involved in the first place. I had no intention of hurting any of them. Others were delighted, as they felt the same way. About the time I met Eric, I was getting ready for a longer-term (even life-long) relationship. So now, if this is "it", great - I'm ready!. If not, fair enough, too."

FRIENDSHIP

The topic of friendship was discussed in fascinating depth and detail in MYTHOLOGIES 15, February 1994 (edited by Don D'Amassa, 323 Dodge Street, East Providence, RI 02914, USA), and I urge you to read a copy if you haven't already. Don devotes 6 pages to his analysis of friendship and why we don't want to talk about it in a meaningful way. We all know that the term "friend" in our society is used to cover a vast range of relationships, from the extremely superficial to the most intimate, but few of us talk to each other about these differing levels of "friendship", much less attempt to tell our friends what level we place them on (especially if we care for them deeply; this is apparently very embarrassing to admit, especially for me). Sometimes I wonder whether it matters in the least how we categorize our friends, but now and then some situation will arise where someone is deeply offended that a "friend" of theirs treated them in a way that they consider inexplicably awful, and I realize that this hurt stems from the basic misunderstandings of what level of "friendship" our friends occupy. Don's analysis covers the subject well, and is also applicable to the subject of "love", a word which is used for even more diversity of relationships, and causes even more confusion, misunderstanding and hurt than "friendship" does. I recommend Don's article -- and his whole fanzine, which is superb.

LOVE AND LIFE

((Moving from the hypothetical to a real-life example, LYN McCONCHIE has some follow-up comments to her article "I Remember", published in WREVENGE 17, March 1984 --JHW))

When I first discovered an inability to remain permanently with any partner I was grieved. I rushed into marriage with someone totally unsuitable in an effort to try and change. I then discovered that I didn't like being married either. I need a lot of privacy. I am happy to have friends stay the weekend, which they often do. But I hate to come home from work and have people there most of the week. My marriage broke up, faults fairly evenly distributed, and I settled down to live alone because I prefer it.

I don't know if I would have been like this if there had been no abuse. I have two other friends who also live alone because they prefer to. One is male and gets regarded just as oddly. Neither were abused.

This is not only a matter of sex. I don't even want a flatmate in the place. I have flatted and found that this annoys me just as much as having a live-in lover. To me it is bliss to get home after a 12-hour day and just crawl into bed with my cats and tea. Read over tea, then do a bit of typing or crocheting while I watch TV or a video.

I also love it when friends (or my lover) come home with me on Friday night for the weekend. I have a happily crowded weekend, the cats get lots of attention from everyone, and the place is full of laughter, silly jokes and people hooning around.

Maybe I have the best of both worlds: little responsibility, and people only when I want them. Maybe that's selfish as Martyn said. But it is how I need to live. As I said, I don't know if things might have been different if... I do know I have neither the time nor the money to spend on years of having myself altered at a psychiatrist's. I have made one successful adjustment to life and I am happy. Why should I try to change what works? Yes, sometimes I am unhappy, lonely or depressed, but it's news to me that marriage or a committed relationship inoculates one against these things. You know the saying... if it works, don't fiddle with it!



SURVIVING CHILDHOOD

by Terry Frost

My parents married in the mid-fifties under some unusual circumstances. Had it happened twenty-five years later, when people and Australian laws were on the whole slightly wiser, it wouldn't have happened at all. As it was, a combination of violent threats and family pressure coerced my mother into marrying at the age of seventeen. She didn't want to; childhood traumas of a sexual nature gave her a built-in aversion to the physical sides of a relationship, and at that age in that time and place (Sydney's western suburbs in 1953) she wasn't psychologically old enough to begin setting up a household. Of course, in those days, the man supplied nothing but the money for the setting up of the nest. Not even that in this case. My father liked drinking and gambling too much to supply the largest chunk of his wages for this purpose.

I was born in 1957, and my brother in 1959. In 1962, after nine years of violent arguments and abuse, my father left to live with his girlfriend (who had two children of her own by a previous marriage). We were living in a fibreboard Housing Commission house at the time. My mother went back to work and for a short time things settled down. But only briefly. Several times over the next couple of years, my father broke into the house, drunk, and raped my mother. At one stage I tried to fend him off with a broom after he broke in. But a five-year-old kid doesn't stand much of a chance against a sixteen stone adult.

In 1963, subsequent to one of the rapes, my sister Sandy was born. My father never claimed her as his. It would have upped the maintenance money he didn't often pay. We found out eighteen months later that one of Sandy's legs was shorter than the other. This difference was cured by physiotherapy, but for years afterwards he referred to her as "the cripple". This all took place before the laws of the land recognised rape within marriage, and assault charges by one spouse against another were abysmally difficult to bring to the proper judicial conclusion, especially when getting the limited free legal aid often required taking two days off work, plus another one for the court case itself.

In 1965, my father wrote a letter to the Housing Commission stating that the house we



were occupying wasn't being lived in by a two parent family. The HC in their Victorian era wrath threw us out. We went to live with a cousin of my mother's, who rented a rat-infested house. For about a year I slept on two lounge chairs pushed together, listening to the noises coming from the spaces between the walls. This discomfort was complicated by the frequent sight of my father driving his truck around trying to talk with my brother and I on our way home from school. Garry, my brother, didn't have the clear memories of "the old days" that I did and was therefore better disposed toward my father than I was. I refused the money my father offered, but Garry took it.

In early 1966 my father sued for divorce and for custody of Garry and I. He got some powerful legal aid, affidavits from his girlfriend, he bullshitted outrageously about his good character and, in August 1966, gained full custody of my brother and me. My mother had tried to lessen the blow for months before. She told us we were going to live on a farm (which all kids like the idea of) and explained exactly why it was happening. Money really is the root of (most) evil. He won because he had more of it than she did.

So on a bright spring afternoon I climbed into the back of a utility truck and went to live with the bloke I'd been having nightmares about for at least five years, and his girlfriend whom I had never even seen before that day.

Suddenly I had a pair of older pseudo-siblings, was living in a different environment, without my sister (whom I'd been helping to take care of since I massaged my mother's feet during pregnancy) and with two adults who were totally contemptuous of my mother and everything she'd

taught me. At the age of nine I started bedwetting again and began to get beatings with a length of electrical flex for minor things that other children did as a matter of course. My father quickly got my brother on his side, but I had a longer memory. I quickly learned that it was a good idea to yell a lot when getting beaten. Staying staunchly silent only meant a worse beating. There's no fun for the sadist without the noise.

The older ersatz sister and brother were a girl a few months older than me and a slightly retarded boy two or three years older who attended a nearby school for "slow students" as a lodger. He didn't take to me but I was, by then, an old hand with bullies. They have short attention spans once they catch you and beat you up.

At school I breezed through most subjects with little efforts, getting B's a lot and A's occasionally. But the teachers, benevolent creatures that they were, kept putting "can do better" on the report cards. This netted me more beatings, though there was never any scholastic encouragement at home. By then, my wit was emerging and I developed a fine, juvenile line in sarcasm (which has stayed with me). It was the only way to pierce my father's shell. It was almost worth the bashings to see a barb strike home somewhere.

Every now and then my father would beat up his de facto wife and, out of old reflex I ran interception and called the coppers occasionally. He always got off with a fine or dropped charges, but the fights ended for the night when he spent the rest of it in the lock-up. By this time I was in high school and we'd moved. The area was a rougher one than I'd been living in previously, and the school bullies were larger and tougher. I got sick of it after awhile and found that school libraries were kryptonite to school bullies. They withered in proximity to books and the eagle eyes of school librarians. So I began to read. Damon Runyon, Time-Life Science books and even SF.

But still came the "can do better" report cards. Finally I turned fifteen and my father made me leave school and take a job in a supermarket. I hated it and soon lost the job, beginning a long chain of short-term dead-end employment. Around this time my father stopped using electrical flex and began using his fists, though one time he did flay my scalp open with a belt buckle. He also began to use words, which are a more lasting weapon than anything physical. It's a funny thing, but if you're told something is true long enough, you believe it. So under the pressure of insults I became lazy,

useless and a lot of other things. It got harder to keep jobs and I slipped toward my nervous breakdown.

Being one of the biggest homophobes of the known world, my father began to worry that I was a "poofter". (His sexual techniques, as related to me by more than one of his girlfriends, in conjunction with his homophobia, make me think that he's a latent gay himself.) So he picked up a woman at a pub and threw her in my direction. She was about ten years older than me and fairly attractive. But I wormed my way out of it on the strength of the thought that he'd get a blow-by-blow report on the act later on. That I couldn't stand. Nor the thought of him using the incident as a weapon later.

A few days after, he tried to bash up on me. Something gave way in my head and I threw bottles and a knife at him (the knife stuck in the wall behind him - a concrete wall, too) and when I calmed down he had a broken cheekbone, a nose that was flattened against his cheek, and a face that, in general, looked like John Merrick's. I ran into my room and cried myself dry. I'd gotten down to his level, bashing someone up. The next day he made arrangements for a well-known criminal to send a couple of heavies around to bash me up. He told me of this, and I knew he knew the bloke, so for a week I walked around with a pocketful of pepper. I planned to throw it in the eyes of anyone who tried to beat me up. After that week I found out from someone else that the bloke had laughed in his face, but I was bloody twitchy for that seven or eight days.

By this stage I had broken the conditioning that had been pumped into me, trying to poison me against trying to find my mother. I did some clever detective work and got in touch with my sister Sandy and, at Christmas 1980 we had a big reunion. My mother had remarried and I discovered that I had a delightful half-sister called Linda, who is now 12. Since that Christmas, I haven't seen my father and have no wish to. My mother's second marriage recently broke up and now she's living with Linda in a house in the Eastern Suburbs. But Sandy got married, so it balances.

Sandy and her husband tried to locate our father just before last Christmas. They found him living in a cheap and nasty room in a pub. He told them that he didn't have a daughter, slammed the door in their faces and that was it. So maybe the wicked do get their just desserts sometimes. He could live for another thirty years in that room, hopefully dwelling on what he's lost.

MATTER & ANTI-MATTER

BRAD W FOSTER
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2 November 1984

It was quite a pleasant surprise to find a copy of WREVENGE #19 in my mailbox ... This is one of those zines I'd seen mentioned in so many places that it had taken on almost legendary proportions in my mind... by the time I'd gotten to the start of the locs I was beginning to wonder if I was the victim of some kind of elaborate hoax. Could THIS be the WWW that I'd been reading about in other zines for years as being full of outrageous material, militantly feminist and/or overtly sexist depending on who you read So far it had been fun, but nothing outrageous. Evidently thought, this was some kind of a breather issue, as the locs seem to be about meatier subjects from past issues... I love soul searching and nitpicking. Do it!

BUCK COULSON
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16 November 1984

Pete Presford mentions that we all have cycles but that most men won't admit it. I suspect that most men don't know it, and therefore can't admit it. If I have cycles, I don't know it, and I at least have read about the theory, which puts me one up on 99% of the world's male population. (Of course, Juanita would tell you that unless my cycles included falling down and frothing at the mouth, I WOULDN'T notice them; that I don't notice the obvious.) Then again, speaking of Pete's reference to "grumpy nature" as being part of the cycles, perhaps MY cycles are not noticeable to anyone else, either, being indistinguishable from my normal temperament. Or maybe they actually don't exist...

If one wants "total spiritual and physical freedom of each other", I can't see any reasons for getting married to begin with. I don't think we need to widen our definition of marriage, as that we need to be more tolerant of lifestyles that don't include marriage. One doesn't even have TOTAL freedom with friends, let alone



spouses. If you have to consider the wishes of another party, then you don't have total freedom. That's only possible with people you don't know or don't like.

((It depends on what you mean by "have to consider the wishes of another party"; nobody HAS to (and a lot of people, including married people, apparently don't), but many people CHOOSE to. To people like Eric and me, CHOOSING to consider someone else wishes IS part of "total freedom" -- though I wouldn't use the word "total". -- JHW))

RICK KENNETT
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Australia

27 November 1984

Unless there's another meaning for "scapegoat" that I'm ignorant of, I must assume that Greg See-Kee is confused as to this word's definition: "goat allowed to escape when Jewish chief had laid sins of people upon it; person bearing blame due to others". In the context of his article, it seems the word that Greg is really after is "stereotyping".

MARC ORTLIEB
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14 December 1984

I wouldn't have thought that Greg See-Kee was "scapegoating". I think that what he is doing is making excessive use of stereotyping. His comments about the play...are an example of this. Note that he does not say that he's been put off that particular aspect of the Catholic stereotype, but that he's been put off Catholics

and ex-Catholics. I'd rather see Greg talking about individuals as such rather than about stereotypes. Sure, there is a place for categorising people, and we all do it, but I'd rather see more useful categorizations than racial/religious classifications, which are not only so broad as to be useless, but which evaluate people on the basis of something that they were born and conditioned into, rather than on the basis of something that is a free choice. (Of course this opens the questions of "free choice, is there any such thing", but I'm not sure I want in on that.)

Being a lapsed Protestant, married to an ex-Catholic, I guess I don't like being lumped in with Greg's stereotypes. Surely, if you are aiming at a heterogeneous culture, then insulting one component of it, and pointing out its limitations, is not a good way to start the integration process.

((I certainly didn't find Greg's comments "insulting", simply a different point of view. Pointing out the limitations of the dominant culture in a mixed society may be the only way to draw people's attention to the obvious. I know Greg's article summarised a lot of what I'd felt when I first encountered people who did things a different way from what I'd grown up thinking was "The Way Things Are Done" -- once that fact that captured my attention, I could go on to learn about diversity, though it was many years before I even began to believe that somebody else's way might be just as valid as my own. --JHW))

I found Jessica's comment about Tanith Lee's SAPPHIRE WINE intriguing. After all, SAPPHIRE WINE itself, and DON'T BITE THE SUN, are overt parodies of Arthur C Clarke's Diaspar in THE CITY AND THE STARS. I don't find the works pedestrian, but rather humorous and enjoyable. I don't see them as inadvertently parodying sf, but more as deliberately parodying sf. ((I agree with you on that! -- JHW))

I wouldn't have thought that terminology was that much of a problem for Eric. After all, there's an ideal term for his significant other: Jean. If he wants to delineate you further, then he can say "We live together" or words to that effect. If he feels it necessary to make that statement, then it's obviously to someone whom he either knows, or is going to know, and so the conversation can establish the relationship further.

((Wrong on both counts, Marc. The article grew out of the question we faced the two times I was in hospital, when with both the medics and Eric's employers, we needed each other to have

some sort of "status". In fact, we DON'T "live together" in the usual sense of sharing a household. We tend to use "partner" or "de facto", though we don't like the latter because of the Department of Social Security's attitude that if one is legally or de facto married, then the unemployed partner isn't eligible for unemployment benefits, and also because to us "de facto" carries almost all the same assumptions about one's relationship that "married" carries. --JHW))

CHRISTINE ASHBY
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28 November 1984

...a de facto calls herself "Mrs", so apart from the generally lower-class connotations it's not suitable for the situations Eric addresses himself to. My family law experience gives me the idea that most people use "Boyfriend" or "Girlfriend", and if the speaker is over 25 you assume they're living together anyway. "Friend" usually implies a homosexual relationship. Ah, the joys of etiquette...

I enjoyed Greg's article, but felt that he had barely begun to explore the topic before he ran out of steam. ((Partly I ran out of room, and cut him off short. --JHW)) I am inclined to challenge his notion that people avoid discussing personal problems, and I will go so far as to say that he has this idea because he is a man. I understand that men in our society don't go in much for intimate personal conversations, but I know from my own experience that women are at it constantly with other women whom they feel they can trust. ((I had the impression that Greg was talking about men when he made that statement; my experience with women is the same as yours. --JHW))

Greg's observations of Roman Catholic attitudes are not exactly original. His remarks about CATHOLIC SCHOOL GIRLS, however, tie in very nicely with some of the letter in WUWU on the subject of stereotypes in (mostly sf) fiction. Good art has an effect on our experience of life. It makes us think, shows us things we hadn't previously noticed, gives us another perspective... Good art doesn't contain stereotypes. Where are the stereotyped characters in THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS The sort of books your correspondents complain of will by definition be populated by stereotypes, because the characters are merely the mechanism by which the all-important narrative progresses, exactly as Jessica points out. Swapping one sort of

stereotype for another is no solution... ((No, but it can occasionally be a lot of fun! --JHW))

JULIE VAUX
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2 January 1985

Greg See-Kee says, "Love is a fabrication of White Anglo-Saxon culture". Romantic love as cult or obsession is as we know it partly the result of the southern French troubadors' glorification of Courtly love - a Latin attempt to civilise the Norman overlords.

Some of the earliest ballads suggest an attempt to raise the status of women in the culture of that time, but western culture being what it is, courtly love became a new perversion and neurosis to while away long castle-bound winter nights in games of obsession and flirtation.

The stress of Romantic love as divorced from real life may be very Anglo, but many non-Anglo cultures have their great romances -- a word that is derived from the fact that the dominant literary languages of the Middle Ages in Europe were "Roman": derived Latin, French, Provençal, Catalan, Ladino, etc.

I might also remind you that the most popular Chinese classic is the Dream of the Red Chamber, a love story being one of its main themes.

Few cultures are immune to the infection of romantic love -- the luxury and emotional hedonism of mistaking or tangling and confusing eros, affection and charity. The Japanese are almost as bad as Anglos, having several plays written about suicide love pacts and almost as many famous poems as English literature dealing with romances.

Perhaps the Chinese are the sane exception to this. Most of the great love poems that I have read in translation are between husband and wife.

I'm not sure I agree that there's a White Anglo-Saxon monoculture either, but perhaps that's cos as a well-read Anglo-Celt, I have few delusions about the alleged purity of that mythical culture that seems to me to exist only in the minds of bigots and Victorian RSL presidents.

A final note of irony: the original literature of the Saxons has almost no love stories or romances, but it is England that produced *shudder* Mills and Boon... perhaps that's the trouble with true "Anglos" -- they long for spice but destroy it

LARRY DUNNING
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As a sensitive nonstereotyped fannish male, how do you bridge a certain "gap" and express your interest in females (1) without appearing sexist, macho or some other type. Obviously certain members ((of a con at which this issue was discussed)) were finding it difficult to strike up relationships without appearing to be clods, bastards or no-hopers. It would seem that after agreeing to "play the game in a fair manner" (3), that the decent bloke is without a set of rules!

Notes: (1) I am of course referring to social as well as sexual interest. (2) I don't mean to imply that seeking out people who might like you or enjoy your company or even have intercourse with you should be looked upon as a game, but that all manners or accepted social practices can be looked at as a set of rules, hence can be played in one way or another.

((Several men have written to complain about not knowing how to treat women these day, because they don't know what the "rules" are any more. I've got news for you: the "rules" always varied greatly between subcultures, and unless you were "playing" within your own narrow social circle, you didn't know what the rules were 20 or 30 years ago any more than you do now.

My techniques for dealing with these situations (chatting up people) are two: (1) treat women the same way you would treat a man in a similar situation; (2) treat the woman as if she were the sort of person you'd want to be involved with, on whatever level you want to be involved. If she is offended, you wouldn't have got along well with her anyway. If you feel you are not acceptable the way you are, and are trying to find some guidelines for being acceptable, that's a different problem -- but "rules" won't help you much. --JHW))

((On stereotypes) I couldn't help thinking of Keith Laumer's RETIEF and LAFAYETTE O'LEARY stories when everyone is a stereotype. Funny this is, I enjoyed them just the same.

((I think the blatant, heavy-handed use of stereotyping, when done with style, can be a marvelous fictional device, often in the service of satire. That's rather different from the other use you mentioned, sloppiness or laziness on the part of the author. --JHW))

JAMES DEAN WARYK
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5 September 1984

It is difficult to persuade a person to look at your point of view, because everyone it seems, thinks that their philosophy is superior... The games people play in order to survive are criminal to a true philosopher, or a person who is being true to herself, but the reality is that with these games come rules, and these rules, good or bad, are what society is originally based upon: agreement between individuals to modify their behavior in order to survive together... So, no matter what anyone else says, the only free individual is the completely alone one. As soon as two or more people get together, they modify their behavior to suit the other individual (except the assholes of course).

((Rules (or at least customs) are necessary in society, though often a too-narrow set is considered acceptable. What I mostly object to is the assumption that someone is operating (or should be operating) by certain rules, even when that person has indicated that s/he operates by different rules. Games, now, to me are perversions of the rules, playing with someone else's mind - not always deliberately, of course. But I know that term is used more widely. See also my comments earlier to Larry Dunning. --JHW))

Like most men, I can have sex with many women without guilt. In fact I enjoy the variety and change. This is a major difference between male and female that will cause problems for many more generations. I can see why women turn to other women for steady relationships; they can UNDERSTAND and share each other's needs.

((I think the differences between men and women on this subject are less than is commonly thought. Although it's probably quite true that more men than women feel this way, it's certainly not a set of universal traits, and it's also very difficult to determine how much is biological and how much cultural. After all, many lesbians are into multiple relationships; many others are into monogamy. It seems to depend partly on which lesbian community one happens to be in. --JHW))

11 November 1984

It seems that when I make a statement or observation about a subject, and I emphasize the "generality" of it, women always counter argue with a specific example, which may be perfectly correct, but totally ignores the opening statements of "generality" or "averaging". It seems like such a trivial thing, but it happens

so often. It got me thinking about how men and women perceive the world around them. In most discussions it seemed that women tended to concentrate on individuals that they knew, or experiences of their own, and based their arguments on that, where I referred to people as general populations of cities, countries, and the world, etc. This perked my interests in sociobiology and I began seeking ut women who discussed politics and war, etc. I could not find any, but begin a conversation about their body, or life or boyfriend, and whammo we had a lengthy discussion. I was just wondering if you had come across similar experiences and if I am justified in saying that "in general" most women are more worried about their nail polish, soap operas, clothes and boyfriends than they are in building and running this world, preparing it for the future.

((I've read of several studies which indicated that women are more interested in specific examples, while men emphasize generalities (as you noted). As a generality, yes, women do tend to concentrate on individuals, though not necessarily such trivialities as nail polish and soap operas. (The male counterpart is sports and cars; men loathe talking about relationships, or are horribly embarrassed to do so - the exceptions don't like to admit it.) But certainly, when men want to talk about "the economy", women are more likely to discuss how this affects themselves or people they know. And so on. But this does not necessarily indicate a lack of interest in or concern for "building and running this world, preparing it for the future". It merely means that our priorities are different. This is a major reason why some feminists (and many of the suffragists) naively think the world would be a far more humane place if women were running it - women care more about the effect of things on individuals. My experience has been, however, than this concern tends to get bogged down in daily detail and rarely translated into looking ahead and trying to build the future - which I suppose is about what you were saying. This is, in my opinion, largely due to the way women are trained from birth: to let men make the decisions and plans. --JHW))

I ALSO HEARD FROM: Harry Andruschak, Chuck Connor, Leanne Frahm, Anne Marie van Ewyck, Ben Indick, Rick Kennett, Joyce Scrivner, Gregory See-Kee, Arthur Thomson, Sam Wagar, Roger Weddall, and probably some other people whose letters I've mislaid or put in the pile for next time.

More letters on next page.....

LYN McCONCHIE
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9 December 1984

It is my own opinion that a proportion of Lesbians are not born with that preference, but are turned off so thoroughly by male abuse, often as small children, that the only solution for them is another woman, from whom they get the loving affection and gentleness they would otherwise have got from a male lover.

Before I am jumped on, I would point out that I said "a proportion", and yes, I could detail cases. That is not just another version of the "real women want men" MCPism. I could have easily gone that way myself if I had not been quite so heavily indoctrinated with heterosexuality so that I have never found a female friend sexually appealing (although I have gay friends and have had passes made from time to time).

LEE PELTON
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5 November 1984

In an apa I belong to, there's quite a debate on the sexism of beauty standards. A few of us seem to be bucking the tide when we say that we don't particularly care what Playboy or Penthouse publish as their idea of feminine beauty, which a number of women seem certain we are lying through our collective teeth. Why would these women deny the validity of our own standards of beauty because they aren't the norm for our society? It strikes me as a height of arrogance to do so. There was a bright ray of hope, though, in that one woman outside the argument said that it is perhaps true that women are internalizing the pressure to conform to abstract standards and blaming the men for that pressure. Is this something that could be discussed in WWW?

((Sure, if anyone has something to say, let's hear it. --JHW))

THE RABBIT'S PROGRESS

by Lyn McConchie

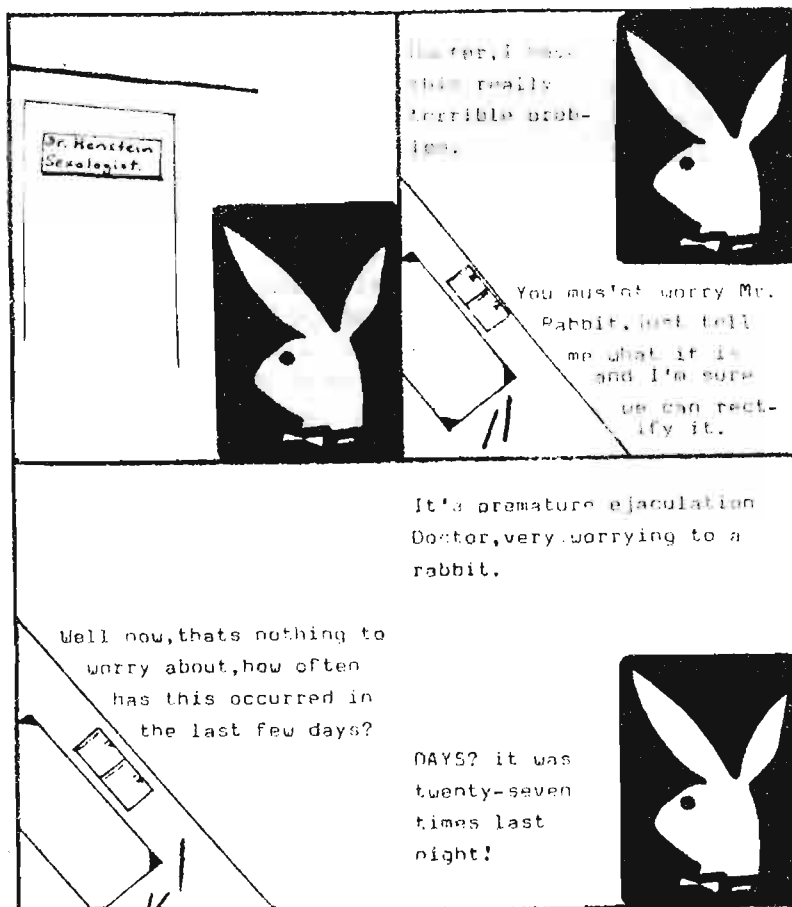
OSCAR DALGLEISH
67 Robslee Road
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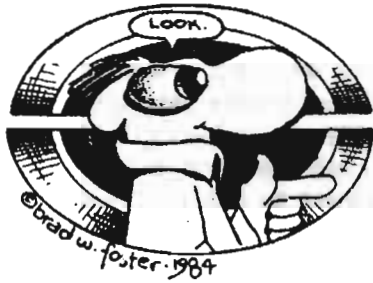
2 October 1984

((Oscar wrote a lengthy letter on the biochemistry and physiology of PMT, which I simply don't have the space to reprint; but in the middle of it he made the following statement: --JHW))

You can't poison yourself with B6 to any recognised state, unlike for example vitamin D which gives a very easily recognisable disease state if you get too much... Both enkephalins (breakdown products of endorphins, we think) and B6 are related to gammaminobutyric acid or GABA. This stuff suppresses things, especially things like nerves, and may be responsible for the changes seen. B6 may help in the formation of GABA, which may control the symptoms ((of premenstrual tension))...

((I am concerned with the suggestion that because a poisoning state isn't "recognised" as with Vitamin D, then it doesn't exist. If B6 helps for GABA, and GABA suppresses nerves, then it seems quite logical to me that an overdose of B6 could lead to all sorts of nerve function problems, some of which have been reported by women. And since different people react differently to things, even allegedly "harmless" or "edible" foods for the general population may indeed be "poisons" to some people. --JHW))





BOOK REVIEWS

by Jean Weber

Marion Zimmer Bradley (editor), *SWORD AND SORCESS*, DAW, 1984.

A collection of short stories by various authors. As in most collections, the quality varies, but overall I enjoyed this volume thoroughly, even if it wasn't superb. The lead story, 'The Garnet and the Glory' by Phyllis Ann Karr, is about Frostflower and Thorn, and is as good as either of her novels about these two women. Another of my favourites is Emma Bull's 'The Rending Dark', full of wit and humour.

Jessica Amanda Salmonson, *THOUSAND SHRINE WARRIOR*, Ace, 1984.

I've enjoyed each volume of Salmonson's Tomoe Gozen saga more than the one before (I really wasn't very keen on the first). In this volume Tomoe Gozen has become a wandering nun. Despite her determination not to kill anyone any more, she cannot resist helping deserving people. Mostly she gets herself, and them, out of scrapes without bloodshed (though not always). Quite a bit of discussion here about one's philosophy of life, and the problems of living up to one's philosophy (and the necessity to re-examine it from time to time), especially when placed in what appears to be a no-win situation. I really like this sort of thing, especially when it's well written, as this is.

R.A. MacAvoy, *TEA WITH THE BLACK DRAGON*, Bantam, 1983.

I loved this book, though it's not without flaws. MacAvoy does a wonderful job of characterization in brief descriptions. On the first page we are introduced to Martha, a fascinating woman in her mid-40s, quite a non-conformist who knows how to enjoy life. She's come to California from her home in the East, at the request of her daughter, a computer programmer, who seems to be in some sort of trouble. Martha meets a charming Oriental gentleman, Mr Long, and soon they both are busy trying to sort out the

mystery of Martha's daughter's disappearance. Unfortunately for my interest in Martha, she disappears herself before long and doesn't return to the story until near the end. Meanwhile a most intriguing mixture of fantasy and computer science unfolds. Eric says MacAvoy got most of the terminology right, except for one crucial point which even I spotted, and which grated a bit. Aside from that, a well-told and thoroughly delightful tale.

R.A. MacAvoy, *DAMIANO* (1983), *DAMIANO'S LUTE* (1984), *RAPHAEL* (1984), Bantam.

Another delightful trilogy; I liked the second book best. The whole tone of the first volume was brisker and less introspective than the next two; I wonder when they were written. They take place in an alternative Renaissance; Damiano is a young witch, who is taking lessons in lute playing from an angel, Raphael. When a conquering army from another part of Italy comes through his province, Damiano hits the road: first to try to help his village, then to try to help various people he gets mixed up with on his way. Eventually he has several run-ins with the Devil, and dies. In the last book, the Devil is still trying to get even with his angel brother Raphael, using anyone he can (including the departed Damiano); Raphael finds out what it's like to live as a mortal. Again, in these volumes, MacAvoy's talent for characterization -- and her delightful sense of humour -- shines.

C.J. Cherryh, *VOYAGER IN NIGHT*, DAW, 1984.

A rather bizarre tale of two ships that meet in space. The smaller, human craft, is 'absorbed' by the much larger 'Voyager'. Two of the three humans died; all were studied by the Voyager and copies made, to allow the Voyager to see how these creatures interact. Neither the copies, nor the one live human, remain particularly sane. But then, the inhabitants of the alien craft don't seem, even by their own apparent standards, especially sane either. As the cover

blurb says, here's a book that asks 'what does "alien" mean, what can an infinite universe hold, and what would being merely "human" signify in that context' Well written, as are all of Cherryh's works.

C.J.Cherryh, FORTY THOUSAND IN GEHENNA, DAW, 1983.

I enjoyed this book more than VOYAGER. Despite its cover illustration, it's not fantasy. It takes place in the same universe as DOWNBELOW STATION and MERCHANTER'S LUCK, though none of these can be said to be in a 'series' as the term is usually used. Here a colony ship is deposited on a planet and then abandoned for a generation, due to political upheavals elsewhere. The supposedly unintelligent inhabitants of the planet cause just enough trouble to undermine the colony, which regresses to subsistence fairly quickly. The children of the colonists either 'go native' and disappear into the burrows of the Gehennans, or rebel in a less spectacular manner, not understanding or caring about the concerns and priorities of their elders. When contact with human space is re-established, the Gehenna humans are mostly studied, though an attempt is made to reabsorb some of them into the Terran culture. After 200 years, Gehennan human-native culture is well established. Cherryh does a wonderful job of skewering bureaucrats and that breed of sociologists who aren't as open-minded in interpreting their data as they might be.

My only real quibble with this book is that, in choosing a sort-of 'dragon' form for the native Gehennans, Cherryh appears to be pandering to the follows of other dragon books (e.g. Anne McCaffrey): dragons are popular, so let's write about dragons. I'd much rather she had used the ant-like aliens of SERPENT'S REACH. In life-style, they appeared to have much in common with the Gehannans, though the latter aren't quite hive animals in the sense that bees or ants are. Still, she's done an excellent and believable job.

Gail Sheehy, PATHFINDERS, Bantam, 1981.

Like all 'pop psychology' books, this one mustn't be swallowed whole, uncritically. But, like many such, it has a lot of positive thinking to offer -- especially to people who feel they are swimming against the tide. Essentially, Sheehy's message is: Do what's right for you, as long as it doesn't involve deliberate hurt to others. (She recognised that

sometimes you can't avoid hurting people, and discusses the ethics of these situations as well.) The book is especially valuable for people trying to overcome sex-role conditioning, by emphasising -- with numerous examples -- how people found happiness by breaking through stereotypes, and were often accepted by people they'd expected would reject them. She also demolishes the common American idea that only through wealth is 'success' measured, and offers encouragement (again my example) to people whose personal goals don't involve much money. I found her descriptions of common female and male life stages and crises quite fascinating, although few of the female ones fit me (since I never had children). Her psychology may be a bit simplistic, but her writing style is engaging, and I always enjoy a book that agrees with my opinions, but explains them better than I can! (I also enjoyed her previous volume, PASSAGES, for the same reasons.)

Cherry Wilder, THE TAPESTRY WARRIORS, Argo (Atheneum), hc, 1983.

The third in a series based on the planet Torin, following THE LUCK OF BRIN'S FIVE and THE NEAREST FIRE. I've enjoyed this series for its underlying themes of sexual equality (there are few skills which are not followed by both males and females), its extended (group) families, and the nice touch of a marsupial species of humanoids. The stories revolve around the differences in lifestyle and attitudes of humans and Moruians (the inhabitants of Torin), and some political infighting amongst the Moruians exacerbated by the arrival of the humans. Each book has focussed on a different aspect of Moruian life and society. In this one, it's the young people of the ruling class, who spend a summer or two in training away from home. A charismatic teacher intends to lead the young people in a revolution, but not all the youth feel comfortable following him. (War is almost unknown to Moruians, so when fighting breaks out, it's quite a cultural shock.) How, and by whom, the crisis is resolved, unfolds in this book, and offers Wilder an opportunity to make some telling comments on the preoccupations of our own leaders and those who would overthrow them.

Margaret Bennett, ALICE IN WOMANLAND, Prentice-Hall, hc, 1967.

For a long time, I've been wanting to write a series of articles sending up the excesses of the women's movement, but when Diane Fox loaned me this book I realised it had been done long ago, and much better than I could do too. Nothing and no one (feminist or anti-feminist) is safe from the authors' (*) keen eye and biting wit, and the whole book draws for inspiration on ALICE IN WONDERLAND -- including some hilarious poetry. I cannot do this book justice in a brief -- or even a lengthy -- review; all I can suggest is that you find a copy somewhere and read it! I don't often shriek with laughter when reading, much less on every page, but this book had me doing just that.

I cannot resist a small sample. In the chapter on the Responsible Citizen Drink Me, the following subspecies of Partially Trained Apes (P.T.A.) are described: the Glorylla, the Harangutan, the Primpanzee, the Gabbon, and the Flonkey. Some of their characteristics can be inferred from their names; the descriptions are delightful and very recognisable to anyone who's dealt with Parent/ Teacher Association members. Or how about the entry test for the "Famous Madams School" -- could you seduce this man Or a translation of learned works on child-raising, or a collection of cooking recipes written in the style of famous poets, or "Can This Marriage be Saved", about a woman with an alcohol problem (abstinence), or a discussion of sexual technique thinly disguised as dining etiquette. All of this, and more, is presented in the context of knocking down the impression that any one lifestyle will "liberate" women, or allow them to develop their full potential. There really is a serious message hidden in all this amusement: people aren't all the same, and no one way of life will satisfy everyone.

(*) Margaret Bennett is the pseudonym of the writing team of Barbara Toohey and June Biermann; these articles were first published in numerous magazines in America.

Joanna Russ, THE ZANZIBAR CAT, Baen Books, 1984.

A collection of Russ' short stories, including my favourite, 'When it Changed'. Contrary to her reputation in certain circles, not all of Russ' writing is overtly and heavily feminist, though she does generally focus on strong women with minds of their own. This collection shows her talent and her versatility.

Suzette Haden Elgin, NATIVE TONGUE, Daw, 1984.

This is a fascinating book featuring linguistics (Elgin's field of study) and the background on the women's language Laadan, about which I'd read in the fanzine AURORA.

I'm sure there will be many people, especially men, who will be offended or put off by Elgin's heavy-handed stereotyping. Virtually all the men are pompous asses, and all the women competent. I felt, however, that this extremely overdone stereotyping was deliberately aimed to point out the absurdity of a strictly sex-segregated dichotomy. Each of the absurd attitudes in the society follows "logically" from the stereotypes she sets up, but if you reject the stereotypes, you must also reject the attitudes for what they are -- absurd. Yet each of these attitudes and beliefs is strongly held by one or more segments in society today: beliefs about men's "logical minds" and women's "intuitive, illogical minds", for example.

Elgin also sends up the (serious) suggestion by anti-feminists that women actually control society by their manipulation of the men, rather than doing it openly. In this book, this is true, and when one young woman is upset about the way her husband treats her, the others are incredulous: hasn't she learned how to manipulate him yet Poor thing... and they set about to give her instruction.

In the meantime, a very serious business is going on regarding the learning of languages by young children; in this case it's alien languages. The bureaucrats and merchants desperately need the linguists' skills, but hate and fear them and revile them at every opportunity. Linguists' children work long hours from very tender ages, and the bureaucrats demand even more from them -- while mouthing platitudes about their opposition to "child abuse". Again, the blatantly overdone stereotyped dichotomies point out the absurd and often dangerous attitudes involved -- disturbingly similar to those prevalent in our own society.

I thoroughly enjoyed this book, but I wish the last chapter had been omitted. The second-last was a delightful ending, and the last was definitely anti-climax.

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Sunday I struggled out in time to say hello to people arriving for a WEL meeting, then hid in the bedroom and read a book until the boring bits were over and the potluck lunch appeared (you can see my priorities). Chatted with various people, who by then were mostly tired of discussing WEL stuff and were quite interesting, then off to the airport and a flight home. Wish CSIRO would send me somewhere interesting a little more often, like twice a year instead of once.

The rest of November disappeared in a morass of work and last-minute chores associated with Circulation 3, a relaxacon held in Canberra 30 November through 2 December. No prizes for guessing who was the major organiser. The opening night party was held in the room occupied by Eric, Gordon Lingard and me because (a) the function room wasn't available at the last minute; (b) nobody else on the committee has taken a room at the venue, the cheap sods; and (c) our room not only had a kitchen but it was next door to the room booked for the video program. Yes, it was convenient and probably worked better than if we'd had the function room -- most people stood around in the car park talking, as it was a very pleasant evening. In my usual style, I went into the second room (it was almost a suite), put in my ear plugs, and fell asleep about midnight. Gordon and Eric are both party people, so I don't think either minded the arrangements at all.

Not much of what was planned (I use the term loosely) actually occurred on Saturday and Sunday, but if anybody particularly minded, they didn't tell me. The highlights of the "programming" were the Aussiecon II panel and the Fan Funds auction. During the panel, it appeared that the major concern of those in the audience was the party facilities planned for Aussiecon -- considering the interests of relaxacon-devotees, this is hardly surprising. The auction raised quite a bit of money, amidst great hilarity and spirited bidding.

In the midst of all the last-minute con rush, I sold my Mazda and bought a slightly-used Ford Laser hatchback from Carole and Jim Nomarhas. I had not planned to sell the Mazda for another year or two, but I haven't been feeling comfortable with it for over a year, so when a really good deal presented itself, I decided to take the opportunity. Moving from a 1200 cc station wagon to a 1500 cc sedan is quite an experience -- I'd forgotten what it's like to have good response to the accelerator!

My cat Minou showed her true faanish colours the other day when she got locked in the fanac room (aka garage) overnight and for a full day. During that time, she unsurprisingly had to answer a call of nature that couldn't be ignored. Of all the heaps of paper in the room easily reached by a cat, she chose a pile of crudsheets upon which to urinate. Very discerning, that animal. (The fact that the crudsheets were on the couch, and the urine soaked through, is hardly her fault.)

Lastly I'll mention what Christmas Day was like around Eric's place in the Blue Mountains west of Sydney. It was hot and humid, probably over 30 C at its worst (not so bad, really; it's 37 C as I'm typing this on 13 January), until midafternoon when a dramatic storm came through, with high winds and lashing rain, dropping temperatures dramatically. The pre-storm weather was perfect "bushfire" (= forest fire) weather, and the Blue Mountains are well known for summer fires whipped up by high winds, but as far as I know there weren't any fires around here yesterday. (It's been that kind of hot windy weather in Canberra for several weeks, and there have been quite a few fires, some of which I could see from my yard, burning on the hillsides. Fortunately I don't live near any large areas of open space -- I just hope I live far enough away.)

The preceding paragraph was written several weeks ago. Two days ago another fire started near CSIRO, on the side of the hill towards my house, and the wind was blowing in this direction. It was quite exciting, even though about 1/2 km away. I did set up the lawn sprinklers to wet things down as much as possible, just in case, but thought that if the fire got this far (at least 6 blocks into a heavily residential suburb), it would be a disaster of magnificent proportions. But the way the wind was blowing, sparks igniting dry grass or brush at some distance from the main fire was a distinct possibility. This particular fire was brought under control, but did set a few bushes alight in gardens across the street from an open-space area by a major highway. Meanwhile, huge grass fires have been sweeping across vast stretches of New South Wales and Victoria (and possibly other States, but those are the ones most in the news), including in the Blue Mountains. Few people have died, and not many homes have been destroyed, but stock losses (mostly sheep) have been high.