



Dolphyne Woods ©2008

**Nice Distinctions 21**

## Nice Distinctions 21

Arthur D. Hlavaty, 206 Valentine Street, Yonkers, NY  
10704-1814. 914-965-4861. hlvaty@panix.com  
<<http://www.livejournal.com/users/supergee/>>  
<<http://www.maroney.org/hlavaty/>>

The print version is available for \$1 (\$2 outside the USA), arranged trade, or letter of comment (e-mail counts). If there is an X after your name on the envelope, send at least one of the above if you wish to receive the next issue. The e-mail version is available on request, in text and .pdf formats. Copyright © 2011 by Arthur D. Hlavaty. Staff: Bernadette Bosky, Kevin J. Maroney, Qala Devi, and the Valentine's Castle Rat Pack. Permission to reprint in any nonprofit publication is hereby granted, on condition that I am credited and sent a copy.

This is Discordian Regimentation #121, a Church of the SuperGenius publication. In Wile E. we trust.

Hello again. I write this as the rich pigs and their minions threaten to stop the motor of the American government and even the NFL, but I have hope.

I am an alphabetic guy who usually prides himself on publishing pure text, but Delphyne Joan Woods sent me such a nice cover I can't resist using it.

In *Hitchhiking through Asperger Syndrome*, a memoir of having a son with that condition, Lisa Pyles remarked, "The child who said the emperor has no clothes was probably one of our kids."

I was reminded of that by reading *The Big Short*, Michael Lewis's account of some men who recently profited by realizing that Wall Street was going through another bubble. One of Lewis's protagonists had been diagnosed with Asperger's, and several others showed lacks of social grace and skill that only their financial success could make tolerable. They also, like many maladjusted types, had a tendency to focus excessively on matters that people not afflicted with such conditions could accept on their face, in this case being able to dig through the tangled webs of CDOs and other postmodern financial instruments to find that they were actually tissues of fantasy built upon deliberately fraudulent loans to people who couldn't repay them if they hit the lottery twice.

There were others who noticed. In Harry Harrison's space opera parody *Star Smashers of the Galaxy Rangers*, the brave boy heroes

are facing with barely concealed glee the life-threatening adventures that they will have to undergo to win the Giant Plot Coupon. The female lead (i.e., prize) calmly points out a strategy whereby they could grab the coupon at no danger to themselves, but they ignore her because "she was just a silly hysterical girl."

The boys' adventure club known as the George W. Bush Administration had a wonderful plan to keep the economy expanding forever, and didn't listen to silly hysterical girls like Sheila Bair and Brooksley Born who thought there might be something dangerous about subprime loans.

On Juneteenth, I recommended an appropriate book for the occasion: *Black Gotham*, by Carla L. Peterson, published by Yale University Press.

Professor Peterson set out to learn about her African American ancestors in New York in the 19th century. There were not a lot of records kept, but thanks to the heroic efforts of Arthur Schomburg and the archive he created, she found enough to learn some and imagine more.

Slavery ended in New York in 1827, but of course there was still a lot of legal and social oppression. Still, some black people were able to make lives, to find work (they couldn't be doctors, but they could be pharmacists—a profession that was just beginning to be scientific), and to nourish their minds with literature and the arts. Of course they weren't perfect; they were no better than the white people of the time at finding ability among women. Still, it's an inspiring story.

### Ambiguous headline

Uganda People News: *Woman Stripped in Market for Witchcraft*

For the crime of or for the purpose of?

### Cognitive estrangement, with lots of amps

At the end of the great San Francisco music era (1966–8) there appeared a band called Blue Cheer. All their songs were repetitious, interminable, mutually indistinguishable, and 10 decibels above the threshold of pain. They were laughed at, which is the usual fate of those who are years ahead of their time.

At about the same time, I discovered the sf criticism of Darko Suvin, which I didn't like either. I have since realized that he too was

bad in ways that had not yet become fashionable.

There are complete and absolute differences between the sexes that are so natural and hard-wired that we have to keep enforcing them and shaming those 5-year-old criminals who don't go along with them. Left to their own devices, little boys may fail to follow their rigidly determined nature, enjoying flowers, glitter, and painted fingernails, even wearing female clothes on Halloween. It might be a problem if that meant the kid was going to turn gay, which it doesn't, and if there were something wrong with that, which there isn't.

### **If you're so rich, why aren't you smart?**

If the Communists were as diabolically clever as we used to believe, they would have schemed to make a mockery of capitalism by faking up a successful money-making career for an obvious buffoon. They could have him make a public fool of himself by insisting in the teeth of the evidence that the president of the United States was not born in the United States and maintaining that a good snow-storm disproves global warming. They might further discredit their exemplar by having him make embarrassing efforts to look young. For instance, their clown could go to grotesquely obvious cosmetic means to pretend he wasn't going bald. (We shall overcomb.)

I wonder how they would actually make the money. My first guess is that they'd have the smart people in a windowless room somewhere while the figurehead was never allowed to decide anything meaningful. That might be overly subtle, though. Consider how few people noticed George W. Bush's path to the presidency, on which every time he tried to make a profit by his own abilities, his father's rich friends had to bail him out.

The AP Stylebook is dropping the hyphen from "e-mail." We cannot, however, conclude that the AP has been taken over by sub-literates. The AP has always been forced by the necessities of putting ink on paper to strip down to something like English but simpler; it also eliminates the essential comma before "and" or "or" in a series and forms the possessive of names ending in "s" by simply putting an apostrophe after. That does not prove that the AP is too stupid to know better any more than texters and Twitterers can be

presumed incapable of spelling "you." I will, however, give the AP a warning I've given before: Don't come crying to me when you see lines ending with "em-" followed by "-ail" (which is not as amusing as "hor-" "-semen").

---

We have two images for smartness. To derogate the intellectual content of an activity, we say that it's not rocket science or it's not brain surgery.

It strikes me that the two activities are in a sense opposites. Rocket science is rich in verbal and mathematical symbols, and it can work at a distance—at interplanetary distances, in fact. Brain surgery is nonsymbolic and done by direct contact. Malcolm Gladwell wrote an article about brain surgery, pointing out that surgeons have great intelligence in their hands; they are able to cut out all the bad parts and save all the good parts, no matter how closely entangled. Gladwell added that this intelligence is not necessarily joined to verbal and symbolic skills.

I greatly prefer the intelligence of rocket science. I think we became really human when we figured out verbal and mathematical systems and structures to deal at a safe distance with a material existence that I find simultaneously too boring and too exciting,

Robert Anton Wilson didn't agree. In fact, in one of his books (*Natural Law, or Never Put a Rubber on Your Willy*) he used me as a horrible example of the sort of person who doesn't love the material world enough. (I *was* being somewhat melodramatic about it.) He later recommended Leonard Shlain's book, *The Alphabet vs. the Goddess*, for its view of the approaches.

I could not make it through the book. It featured a form of gender essentialism so extreme that it probably would have offended Robert A. Heinlein. Men are verbal and violent (which always go together); women are neither; and that's it.

And yet I feel I could have profited from the book if only someone had cut out the malignant and necrotic bits. I love the Alphabet (actually two: letters and numbers) and am tempted to diagnose those who love the Goddess with Stockholm Syndrome. But a theory that doesn't recognize the intelligence in brain surgery is obviously inadequate, so I need an approach that values both kinds. Too bad that Shlain didn't have the verbal skills to

think his theory through better and explain it clearly. He was a brain surgeon.

I am tired of both sides of the serious lit vs. story values battle: that the serious stuff is good because one makes heroic efforts to read it while popfic is trash that offers mere thrills, and that adventure and suspense are the only real fun in reading and one reads the likes of Nabokov and Joyce only because one is assigned to.

### **Birth control control**

Many who think it's awful that the poor and minorities are breeding like rabbits to outnumber us also believe that the government must not help the poor and minorities limit their own numbers.

### **International Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts**

It was fun as usual. The conference theme a couple of years ago was the Sublime, so it was only fitting that this one's was the Ridiculous. (Conferences are planned a couple of years ahead so it took some time to catch up.) GoHs Connie Willis and Terry Bisson admirably represented the theme.

It was there that I learned of the new phenom Amanda Hocking, who has sold hundreds of thousands of self-published paranormal romances. Several people there found the books unreadable because of all the errors. When I returned, I found that she had signed a contract for her next series with a "real" publisher, quite possibly because she wants to be edited. If she's really lucky, she'll be copy-edited by Deanna Hoak, whom I had the pleasure of meeting at the conference.

Maura Heaphy did an excellent paper on Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*, which turns out to be rather typical of Mainstream-Writer-Drops-in-on-sf. The prose and characterization are significantly above the average for works from within the field, there is no sugar coating or happy ending, and the science-fictional horror that the book threatens us with is self-evidently unworkable.

Ever since that Paine in the ass Thomas wrote a pamphlet called *Common Sense*, there have been people who think common sense is wonderful and people who think it's awful. I am one of the latter, but I try to be reasonable. Common sense is what tells us

that the Sun goes around the Earth. More generally, it's what seems obvious to us because we learned it before our critical faculties were developed. Sooner or later, we learn that it's not that common, and those who were indoctrinated differently may have common sense that is the opposite of ours (in my family it was common sense that the light-skinned people are no better than the dark-skinned ones), so I am wary whenever anyone says it is what we should all be doing or makes the absurd claim that it is as valuable as uncommon sense. Still, there are people who don't use the phrase that way, and I often encounter it as part of good advice, though when that happens, it can usually be replaced by "common courtesy" or "common decency."

### **Acceptance**

The last Marxist government (Cuba) has realized it can't stop people from wanting their own stuff. Now the Catholic Church should realize that it can't stop people from wanting to decide when and if they will breed, and governments in general should admit that people are going to do drugs.

Thomas Szasz never said that there are no crazy people. (Even R.D. Laing didn't.) He said that "mental illness" is a metaphor, rather than a simple description, so we must always examine particular uses to make sure the metaphor works. Maybe the most dangerous misuse is the image of contagion, whereby beliefs and behaviors we don't like are treated not as matters of individual choice but as plagues that can infect innocent outsiders. Treating Judaism as a communicable disease is seriously out of fashion, but there's still some enthusiasm for applying the image to homosexuality, obesity, (some) drug use, and other offenses.

*Mysteries of the Diogenes Club*, by Kim Newman, is delightful, like its two predecessors. I particularly enjoyed the first story, which one might say sets a good foundation for the series. I would have been tempted to call it "Mycroft's Plan."

Back in the 70s I was a libertarian, or at least a fellow traveler. A post on *Bleeding Heart Libertarians* reminds me of why I was one: the strong principled opposition to things like the

war in Asia (different one) and the war on some drugs (same one, pretty much).

And the comments remind me of why I'm no longer one, with people insisting on the importance of economic libertarianism because "freedom is indivisible." Actually, freedom is divisible at least two ways: The idea that as soon as a state tries to regulate the market in any way, it is on an inevitable path to gulags is, to say the least, faith-based. Over on the other side, people say, "I can't be free until everyone is." If so, you will never be free, and no one ever has been.

Of course, many liberals opposed the two wars, but they often had doubts. Maybe we should be interfering in other countries' affairs for their own good; maybe we should be protecting people from those nasty substances they want to abuse themselves with.

Bernadette loves a quote from *Valis*: "Your problem is that you try to help people." Helping people can be great, especially if they want to be helped. But helping people for their own good, whether they want it or not, is a recipe for disaster, whether it's Woodrow Wilson and his spiritual heirs trying to inflict democracy on the whole world or the narcs protecting us from the current list of Harmful Substances. Oversimplification: Liberals help people; libertarians don't.

There was a third issue in the 70s where the conservatives, as ever, wanted to control and forbid, the libertarians wanted to leave people alone, and the liberals were divided between leaving alone and helping by protecting people from themselves. I was very strongly on the libertarian side, and I'm glad it is turning to be the winning one in the debate on homosexuality.

### **Nasty, Brutish, & Short**

What do they call it when it's just like terrorism except that white Christians do it?

**Illiteralists:** people who demand absolute obedience to and literal interpretation of a document they have not read and do not understand, such as the Constitution or the Bible.

The French have discovered that their law against wearing a burqa in a public place

cannot be enforced against a woman who insists on wearing a burqa in the courtroom.

The stock market closes on Good Friday because the moneychangers are celebrating what they did to that guy who ran them out of the temple.

The Oakland Raiders are like Renaissance Italy, except for the part about arts and sciences.

**How *Variety* would discuss former Rep. Anthony's Weiner**  
CHIX NIX DIX PIX

If all you knew about your society was "from each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs," which would you rather have?

Allopathic Western medicine has pulled another genocide. Rinderpest has joined smallpox as a victim of mammal exceptionalism.

A new advertising campaign wants to make women fear that their armpits look ugly. I think my chin looks ugly, and I found a way to keep people from noticing. Just saying.

### **Not Forgotten**

Lastish, I somehow forgot to mention the deaths of two dear fannish friends: **Len Rosenberg** and **Reen Brust**. Len was a mainstay of New York fandom and pagandom since before I first joined both. My relationship with Reen, like many these days, was online, and very pleasurable. I will miss both of them.

#### **Joanna Russ**

- Those great F&SF reviews
  - "When It Changed"
  - Discovering K/S
  - "Useful Phrases for the Tourist"
  - all those reasons women can't really write
  - "Nobody's Home"
  - trying to reason with Poul Anderson & Philip K. Dick
- and more, more, more

Like Joanna Russ, **Diana Wynne Jones** excelled at criticism as well as fiction. *The Tough Guide to Fantasyland* hilariously exposes the

assumptions on which so many of those trilogies operate (economics: totally implausible; ecology: totally implausible). My favorite of her fiction is perhaps idiosyncratic: *Deep Secret*.

**Elizabeth Taylor** was beautiful and talented and did a lot of work for good causes, and many people hated her. I was particularly sympathetic to her when Joan Rivers targeted her as part of her crusade to stigmatize women who have enjoyed too much food and/or sex.

#### **Carlton Chester Gilchrist**

Cookie Gilchrist was a great running back, but he did something even better. In 1965 the American Football League was going to play its all-star game in New Orleans, but Gilchrist led a boycott because of the way the black players were being treated there, and the league had to move the game.

**Peter Falk:** But then Death turned around and said, "Just one more thing..."

**Dave Duerson** was a hard-hitting defensive back who was hit back so hard that he wound up with senile dementia in his early 50s. He had enough mind left to decide not to go on living like that, and he shot himself in the chest so that science could see what happened to his brain. (Déjà vu? Andre Waters a couple of years ago.)

**Peter J. Gomes:** I first encountered Rev. Gomes in Stephen Fry's book about his travels in America. Fry was obviously captivated by the flamboyant Harvard professor and communicated the feeling to me. As Fry put it, "You're obviously gay, but many people don't know that you are also openly black."

**Hazel Rowley** wrote excellent bios of Christina Stead and Richard Wright, then told of two particularly odd couples, Franklin & Eleanor Roosevelt and Jean-Paul Sartre & Simone de Beauvoir.

**B.H. Friedman** wrote some highly enjoyable fiction, particularly *Yarborough*.

**Jack Kevorkian's** final stats: 0 points, 0 rebounds, and 130 assists.

**Daniel S. Bell** wrote of *The End of Ideology*. Another dream that didn't come true.

I enjoyed watching **Sada Thompson** in several Broadway and off-Broadway shows.

**Carl Gardner:** Lead singer of the Coasters in their glory years. Death walked right down that street like Bulldog Drummond.

**John Hospers** wrote a textbook I used in college (*Meaning and Truth in the Arts*) and was still around this year. He also ran for president as a Libertarian in 1972, and a "faithless elector" switched his vote to make Hospers the first openly gay candidate and his running mate Tonie Nathan the first female candidate to get electoral votes.

**[Augustus] Owsley Stanley** provided Better Living through Chemistry.

**Wilfrid Sheed** wrote a lot of good fiction and nonfiction.

Fandom suffered four more major losses: longtime fan **Terry Jeeves**; **Ann Cecil**, a mainstay of Pittsburgh fandom; filker **Marty Burke**; and **Mike Glicksohn**, one of the great fanzine creators of the 70s.

And also **Ryne Duren**, **Neil Barron**, **Reynolds Price**, **Duke Snider**, **Johnny Preston**, **Ferlin Husky**, **Farley Granger**, **Harmon Killebrew**, **Margo Dydek** (a basketball player taller than Shaq), **Andy Robustelli**, **Rosalyn Yalow**, **Lillian Jackson Braun**, **James Arness**, **Joel Rosenberg**, and **Elizabeth Sladen**

And one more graphic, perhaps as controversial as anything in this issue



Excelsior,

*Arthur*