

Nice Distinctions 23

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This is Discordian Regimentation #123, a Church of the SuperGenius publication. In Wile E. we trust.

Hello again. Little has changed around here. Bernadette continues to instruct ambitious high school students. Kevin continues to maintain the computers for an important organization. I continue to copy-edit computer journals, and although my sex life may not be as offensive to the Republicans as some people's, I've started doing something else that bothers them: getting Social Security. Also a lump of wax not quite as big as the Ritz was removed from my ear, and I now hear less deficiently.

FAPA is even older than I am

The Fantasy Amateur Press Association was begun 75 years ago by Donald A. Wollheim as a way to help science fiction fans distribute their zines. I joined more than 30 years ago, and it was there I first encountered Bernadette. (The venerable Jack Speer said we were FAPA's only boy-meets-girl story.) I am proud that this zine will be appearing in the 300th mailing.

You want to look away, but you can't

It was one of those degrading TV reality shows where people make fools of themselves to win a prize. The producers selected a particularly repulsive set of participants, so that sometimes contempt for a contestant's intelligence and personality overrode the compassion we knew we should feel, and we took a mean pleasure as one after another was voted off the virtual island. But now it's running down, and Willard Romney is the nominee.

Respectable Sheckley

This is important. *The New York Review of Books* (or as some of us call it, the other New York Review) has a book program, bringing back really good writers such as Dwight Macdonald and Murray Kempton. Now they have ventured into our ghetto and returned with one of our best. In my arrogant opinion, Robert Sheckley was the funniest writer of them all at the time when Philip K. Dick, Frederik Pohl, and William Tenn were in their prime. *Store of the Worlds* collects 26 of his best stories. (*NYRB* isn't perfect; they left out "Bad Medicine," just as they missed the evisceration of Colin Wilson when they collected Macdonald's best.)

The dream

Like Martin Luther King, I had a dream; in fact, it's the same dream. (He was happy to share.) We dreamed of a world where institutional racism had been conquered, where no one was treated worse because of the color of the skin.

It's a good dream; it means social justice and a decrease in needless suffering. I must admit, however, that I also dreamed it for selfish reasons. It would mean that I could make my decisions without the weight of racism, without having to be careful to lean towards helping the oppressed whenever possible. Like the judge who had taken equal bribes from both sides, I could decide the case on its merits.

Unlike many who dreamed the dream, I know that it hasn't come true, and I am convinced that the idea that it has is a mixture of smugness and wishful thinking. But I also wonder about those who are glad that we still have to be actively antiracist.

Years ago, when Jerry Pournelle edited a series of anthologies with the fatalistic title *There Will Be War*, I felt that the spirit of the books would have been better expressed if they had appended the words, "Thank God." I wonder how many people think, "There will be collectivist politics, thank God."

Block that metaphor

It may have been the most inappropriate imagery since Mets manager Davey Johnson described Dwight Gooden's return from a drug suspension as "a shot in the arm for the team." William Donohue, best known for informing us that Hollywood is run by secular

Jews who like anal sex, is worried about a group of pedophilia victims who hit the Catholic Church back first. He emphasized the need for strong resistance by saying, “We don’t need altar boys.”

Stolen property

When a dog lifts his leg at a tree to make it his, he does not then attempt to sell the tree. The dog thus differs from “conceptual artist” Richard Prince. There was a lawsuit over one of Prince’s extremely artistic “creations”—photographing someone else’s photographs and putting his ~~urine~~ name on them—and a sympathetic article says,

No artist should have to go through what Prince went through here, forced to reveal in detail his artistic process to a bunch of philistines. It’s a horrible grilling, one that sucks all the mystery out of his creative practice. It’s hard to imagine Andy Warhol—with his monosyllabic responses and his legendary reluctance to speak at all—submitting to such a process. Had he done so, the mystique of Warhol would be much diminished today, which is the reason he wisely settled out of court when sued in a similar case. Clearly Warhol understood mystery’s correlative value to legacy.

I think it’s exactly what those “artists” deserve, and I really like the idea that we could have aborted the whole movement by submitting Warhol to a cruel and degrading intellectual cavity search, perhaps ending like the aliens telling Whitley Strieber he’s got the nastiest anus they ever probed. Too late, though.

Mother’s Day

On this auspicious occasion I remember my own mother, who passed along to me a number of ideas that have educated and enlightened me, one of which is that Mother’s Day is a commercial shuck. I also remember the man we called Benno Brutalheim.

Mother is half the word I imagine the Rude Pundit applying to Dr. Bettelheim, who had some good ideas (fairy tales should not be bowdlerized, Freud was ill served by his translators), but also some really awful ones, the worst of which may have been the idea that autism is caused by “refrigerator mothers” not loving their children enough.

Today that idea has fallen into well-deserved disrepute. One of my favorite psychologists, Jerome Kagan, listed it next to masturbation-induced insanity as Dumb Things We No Longer Believe. But it was not always thus; I have read of mothers forced to wait in the cold outside the doctor’s office as symbolic punishment.

One unintended consequence is that a woman whose child has autism may seize upon any scapegoat, no matter how implausible, so it’s Not My Fault. In particular, Jenny McCarthy was presumably relieved to learn of a Scientific Study that blamed vaccination for her child’s condition.

It wasn’t much of a study. At first it seemed to have been done with insufficient caution and controls, but it has since turned out to be deliberately fraudulent. It was enough, and now the state of Washington, among others, is faced with an outbreak of pertussis that could have been prevented by vaccination.

What makes it worse, of course, is the way government has been starved of the funds needed to deal with the crisis by the Gospel of St. Ronnie, with its dogma that Government Is the Problem (unless it’s messing around in Asian countries we don’t understand or making sure that Jamie Dimon is covered if he rolls snake eyes). Sometimes I think humanity will stupid itself to death.

Arizona, in another effort to live down the shame of having produced someone as reasonable as Barry Goldwater, has with a straight face proposed a law stating that pregnancy begins before fertilization. Isaac Asimov fans are thinking of thiotimoline.

Property

The TV networks are suing DISH Networks for making it too easy to skip the commercials. They are calling it “copyright infringement,” which makes no more sense than calling it “metaphysical sodomy” or “moperly with intent to gawk” but gets fewer cruel snickers.

It appears to be impossible to sell intellectual property. The only way is to fasten it to something you can sell, like a physical book or disk. Failing that, one attaches it to advertising, which can be sold, but the problem with that is that nobody wants to watch the advertising.

Maybe that's why the Facebook IPO was disappointing: Facebook hasn't figured out how to force us to look at the ads.

On the other hand, I noted that General Motors announced just before the IPO that Facebook does not repay its advertising dollars. I am cynical enough to believe that GM noticed that the emperor has no clothes, but I am also cynical enough to believe that GM had ulterior motives. I hate it when cynicism is insufficient to decode the world, as in deciding whether Dominique Strauss-Kahn was a powerful government official who assumed that mere hotel employees were his for the taking or whether he was set up by the banking interests.

Willard

The Republican candidate is often called "Mitt" Romney, but I would rather refer to him Willard, because I am a formal sort of person who speaks of people by their proper and correct names. (The fact that *Willard* is what President Clinton called his penis is purely coincidental.)

Anyway, this particular willard has a number of flaws as a candidate. He is now running around desperately trying to deny that back when he was governor of Massachusetts, he often simulated the behavior of a decent human being, such as promoting a healthcare system alarmingly close to what he now condemns as President Obama's socialistic assault on all that is free and good and American.

He also represents a way of eliminating the middleman. Rather than being a tool of the malefactors of great wealth, he is himself a malefactor of great wealth, having done much to export American jobs to foreign countries: Believe in America, invest in the Cayman Islands.

For those who consider personal qualities, there is his teenage history of homophobic bullying, and, more recently, tying the family dog to the roof of his car. (America, like the UK in Jeremy Thorpe's day, needs a Dog Lovers' Party.)

But wait—there's more. Among the right-wing Christians who represent his natural base, the important issue is his religion: They will not support a minion of the Scarlet Whore of Salt Lake City, no matter how much he hates women and poor people.

Which is fine with me. Our side does not even have to perform *praeteritio* upon the issue of his faith. Let the wingers insist that he belongs to a polytheistic cult that baptizes dead people and mandates Special Underwear.

A study has revealed that a remarkable number of 16-year-old girls identify as lesbians. The most common reason is precisely what I would have guessed: 16-year-old boys. Some of the girls will remain, and good for them; some will branch out or move on to opposite-sexing, and good for them.

When I was 16, I was a hard-core baseball fan, angered when ruralities such as Milwaukee usurped the world championships that belonged by right to the Yankees. Within a decade, I had switched to pro football, where I remain.

I consider images of maturity and cure (or betrayal) every bit as appropriate to both changes, which is to say, not at all.

Condemning transhumanism as "warmed-over Christian apocalyptic eschatology" is simply the genetic fallacy. Religion, being very old, was the first to notice the common human desire to escape our doomed, raging, demanding meat. Transhumanism merely offered a more plausible way to achieve it. If it works, it works; if it doesn't, it doesn't. Who cares if it has religion cooties?

That's what I want: recognition

The world was supposed to end on December 22, 1985. It wasn't announced beforehand, but that was the date of something my tribe expected would end or at least change everything if it ever happened: *The New York Times Book Review* did an intelligent, respectful full-page review of the latest Robert Heinlein novel (*The Cat Who Walks through Walls*).

They didn't even lead up to it gradually. We thought they might start by hiring a condescending little prig to sprinkle judicious praise on a few of the more assimilated examples, but no. (Dave Itzkoff didn't come along until years later.) And the world didn't end. In fact, the apocalyptic review didn't seem to change much of anything, but I no longer would be surprised by "mainstream" acceptance.

So I'm a bit blasé about *The New Yorker's* Science Fiction issue, but I like it. So that's

how Colson Whitehead got to be like that (specifically writing *The Intuitionist*, which I love). I guess the big surprise was finding out that China Miéville survived starting out with Alfred Bester's *Golem 100* (the cruelest Bester parody, as *Slapstick* is the cruelest Vonnegut parody). Miéville noted the "disrespect for text" and kinda liked it. I figured that in Bester's case it came from not being able to write anymore; before Viagra, there was a lot more disrespect for sex. (I hasten to add for those who don't know him that China Miéville does not write like someone with a disrespect for text.)

Speaking of disrespect for text, I again noted one of my least favorite things about *The New Yorker*: the difficulty of finding articles amidst the advertising pages. Tom Wolfe's famous attack on the zine was vicious, one-sided, and gratuitously personal, but he was not entirely mistaken when he said that the words are a gray background intended not to be too distracting from the important part.

Rush Limbaugh in five words

Prude who wants to watch

I shouldn't be, but I am astounded that some people who call themselves libertarians aren't disgusted by Limbaugh's prurient fascination/horror with women who have more sex than he thinks they should. Admittedly, I was a DFH* libertarian, the kind who figured that the obviously reasonable approach to sex, dope, bad words, etc. (leave them alone) would generalize. We always assumed that the smut stompers were suppressed perverts, practicing the manly art of self-abuse (or desperately forcing themselves not to) as they contemplated what they despised. I see no reason to doubt that slut stompers are the same.

*Dirty filthy hippie, he said euphemistically.

Logic

British nurses are forbidden from wearing necklaces on duty because the patients might grab them. British nurses are forbidden from wearing cross necklaces on duty because British hospitals hate the Baby Jesus.

ODD

There's an article about the danger of treating resistance to authority as a mental health problem, such as "Oppositional Defiant Disorder" (ODD). I mostly agree, but I think I

myself am an ODD-ball. One symptom is that I reflexively distrust political, religious, financial, etc. authority, which all by itself makes me right an alarming percentage of the time, but there's also a certain amount of sheer perversity, like wanting to shit in the environment and wipe my ass on the social fabric.

Envy is the deadly sin I don't have. (Everybody should have one of those.) It is regrettably necessary to envy the rich (or at least act that way) when they do the economic equivalent of sucking all the air out of the room, but it seems extremely counterproductive when we are dealing with a non-rivalrous, nonconserved quality like spiritual advancement or knowledge. I belong to a 12-step fellowship that postulates that the more recovery there is for others, the more there is for you. That strikes me as the best way to be, when possible.

From 1954 to 1960 I attended Horace Mann, a boys' prep school in NYC. I didn't like the unisex aspect, but I admitted—grudgingly at the time—that I was getting an excellent education. Now that I have accepted my geek nature, I am grateful, and I particularly remember the great teachers I had, such as one English teacher, a small, gentle Asian man named Tek Young Lin.

Horace Mann has been in the news lately. A few weeks ago there was a *New York Times Magazine* report revealing that 20 years after I left, at least three teachers were sexually abusing their students. Now there is a follow-up story reporting that Tek Young Lin had sex with some of the boys in his classes.

I never knew, or even suspected, that he was gay, but in retrospect I am not entirely surprised. What also does not surprise me is that he appears in this story far less abusive than those usually reported on. We read of a couple of people who do not feel harmed by what happened, and one who reports that Mr. Lin took No for an answer. Where the earlier story brought tales of traumatized lives, this one has textbook material about "unequal relationships."

When I was at Horace Mann, everyone knew that same-sex relations were bad; the only question was whether the perps should be imprisoned or just cured. Now everyone knows that adult-teen relationships are bad, particularly in schools, which I have to admit

is a lot less irrational. (In the 50s we were told that heroin and marijuana were unthinkably awful drugs. Failing to distinguish between them led to problems. In the 50s we were told that gay sex and teacher/student sex were unthinkably awful....)

So maybe Mr. Lin harmed some of those he was involved with. And maybe he was good for some. There are a number of men my age who are deeply grateful that when they were teens, an adult man showed them that they were not The Only Homosexual in the World, and gave them ways to express their forbidden feelings. I am told that the current relative sanity in these matters means that such adults are no longer needed. It would be nice to think so.

But I also believe that in many cases it didn't make that much difference. In *I Will Fear No Evil* and later books, Robert A. Heinlein noted that a lot of teenagers experiment with same-sex acts (sometimes with a teacher or scoutmaster) and most are neither traumatized nor converted.

For a long time I felt guilty that I had never written to Mr. Lin to express my gratitude for the knowledge and inspiration I acquired from him. I have now done so.

In a better universe, Alice Sheldon wrote cautionary sf set in an alternate world where they still had cancer and had to use fossil fuels, because they discouraged women from becoming scientists.

It could be worse. If the authorities had been able to enforce the belief that Percy Lavon Julian was the wrong color to be a scientist, either someone else would have figured out how to synthesize corticosteroids or I'd be dead. And if the British cops had been better at entrapping gays, we'd know a lot less about computers and the Axis would have had a better chance in World War II.

Temporal retromingency

There are few sources of pride cheaper than knowing more than those who came before us. Why did Mark Twain use that terrible word when he could have called Jim an African-American? Why did some guy who placed his faith in Russia in the 1930s not know that Marxism would rack up a nine-digit body count? To use a trendy phrase, we are temporally privileged and should STFU.

Jo Walton's *Among Others* won the Nebula! Tomorrow the Hugo!

"Cure"

About 40 years ago, a light went on over my head. Some shrink was talking about "curing homosexuals," and I finally thought to ask the next question: of what?

I have just been reminded of those quaint old precivilized days, by an article on how snorting oxytocin* can make people more outgoing. It concluded, "More research will clearly be needed before people would be prescribed oxytocin for introversion." Cure me of what?

*Thanx to Radley Balko, who offered the helpful reminder "That's *tocin*, not *contin*"

Sometimes thou shalt murder

Many years ago, I read a novel called *The Cardinal*, by Henry Morton Robinson, based on the life of Francis Cardinal Spellman (except for the part where, as Angelo D'Arcangelo put it, he spent a lot of time on his knees for the benefit of the troops). In it a doctor chooses to save the life of a late-term fetus and let the mother die. Because it is Catholic fiction, the woman was a no-good tramp slut all along and the baby turned out to be a wonderful person.

In real life, the usual problem is that a woman will die if she remains pregnant and the choice is to save her with an abortion or let her die and then make a desperate effort to save the fetus. According to the Bishop of Phoenix, the latter option is "respecting the equal dignity" of mother and "baby," and if the hospital saves the life it can save, the church will no longer support the hospital. I presume that if the government did anything to support the hospital, it would be violating the bishop's First Amendment rights.

Nasty, Brutish, & Short

When a southern Republican suggests treating women like livestock, I assume he is used to treating livestock like women.

I had to fast for a blood test. I hate fasting. Every year on Yom Kippur, I thank God for not making me an observant Jew.

If you depend on a computer system, the scariest word in the world can be *upgrade*.

Finnegans Wake demonstrates that James Joyce suffered from OCD, or more precisely, enjoyed it.

There is going to be a Three Stooges movie. My mother was the sort of leftist who often said, "That's not funny." She was right about the Three Stooges.

There are a lot of relative pronoun errors in the articles I am copy-editing. Must be the Season of the Which.

I have never been successfully dared or shamed into posting on Facebook, and I never will be.

There are people who are disgusted that the survival of humanity requires that nasty business with pee-pees and hoo-hahs. I feel the same way about the need for politics.

Perhaps solipsism, like homosexuality, seems terrifyingly tempting to people who'd be disappointed if they actually tried it.

I just saw an "opportunity for budding film makers." I thought they reproduced like mammals.

In 2012, there are still "Girls Only" and "Boys Only" books called *How to Survive Anything*. Boys who need to survive a fashion disaster are SOL.

Not Forgotten

Don Markstein is justly remembered for that marvelously informative Web site *Toonopedia*, but to me he was a longtime sf fan who appeared in every SFPA mailing, the kind of libertarian who knows that a government is what a corporation wants to be when it grows up, and a friend.

Fandom and I will also miss **Rusty Hevelin**, **Greg Baker**, **Jay Kay Klein**, and **Jackie Jernigan** ([jackiejj](#) on livejournal).

Ray Bradbury wrote a lot of great stuff and then lived another fifty years.

Two of my less edifying interests are the NFL and the *Police Academy* movies. **Bubba Smith** was good in both.

Jerry Saye did a great job of teaching Cataloging to me and many, many others at the UNC Library School.

Earl Scruggs died. There is no truth to the rumor that his banjo delivered a brief eulogy.

As someone pointed out, now that **Dick Clark** is gone, we can no longer ring in the New Year. Well played, Mayans.

A dark-skinned Greek named Ioannis Veliotos decided to pass the other way. As **Johnny Otis**, he lived as an African American and made much excellent music, such as "Willie and the Hand Jive."

Maurice Sendak has gone where the Unknown Things are.

M.A.R. Barker built a world.

Harry Crews picked up the torch for creepy Southern Gothic when Flannery O'Connor died and burned down everything in reach.

I really enjoyed **Nora Ephron's** early books (*Wallflower at the Orgy*, *Crazy Salad*, *Scribble Scribble*), so I was glad to see her achieve fame and fortune.

LeRoy Neiman was alleged to appeal to people with vulgar taste in art. I am evidence for that.

And also: **John Arden**, **Christine Brooke-Rose**, **Gary Carter**, **John Christopher**, **Ray Easterling**, **Jonathan Frid**, **Levon Helm**, **Etta James**, **R.C. Owens**, **Mel Parnell**, **Adrienne Rich**, **Junior Seau**, **Bill Skowron**, **Freddie Solomon**, **Wisława Szymborska**, **Jack Twyman**, **Mike Wallace**, **Doc Watson**.

Last issue before the election. My voting suggestion seems obvious, but I'll say it anyway: There are three kinds of people who should refrain from voting Republican: women, men who love women, and gay men.

Excelsior,

Arthur