

THE WILLIS PAPERS



WALT WILLIS

The Willis Papers

by Walt Willis

Edited by George W. Field

Published by Ted Johnstone

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Untitled Tribute

A. Vinç Clarke

I've known Walter Alexander Willis for six years, ever since I was a reasonably active and constructive fan. The past tense in the latter half of that sentence is directly attributable to Mr. Willis, and, sometimes, when I think I might have been a filthy rich professional by now, I almost wish that the charming Celt had kept to hi-fi and his collection of *La Vie Parisienne*.

Almost ...

I've no idea what my fellow writers are saying about WAW ... keep it clean, boys ... but as an active British fan from pre-Willis times I can truthfully say that, as far as I can see, he has done more than any fan in post-war years to change the face of British fandom.

Before the War we had never, on this side of the Atlantic, produced a humorist of the calibre of Bloch, Tucker or Knight, and when the remnants of fandom started to gather together after '45 the atmosphere was sober, serious and constructive ... as was natural in the circumstances. By '48 we were making an attempt to gather into one Society all the active fans in the country, and to create new ones. There was no attempt to create an esoteric group; fandom was for getting together and discussing s-f books and magazines, then, and the tables of the White Horse, the weekly meeting place of the London Circle in those days, were littered with prozines at every meeting.

Into this endeavour to become organized an unknown Irish fan introduced a printed fanzine. Printed, when there were only three or four duplicated fanzines covering the whole country! In the Science Fantasy Society we regarded this entrant to the active field with very mixed feelings; a fan with that amount of spare energy could have been more usefully employed, we felt, in turning out a modest duplicated 'zine and spending the rest of his time in being an Active Society Member. Like most serious-minded societies, we were extremely short of Active Society Members. The tone of the 'zine too ... poking fun at s-f and practically everything associated with it! How could we attract those elusive outsiders when in fandom the Sacred subject was held up to ridicule?

Thus, WAW found the then active British fans somewhat less than enthusiastic, and exhibiting his very distinctive trait of independence of organization in fandom, he turned to the States. There he found a fandom that hadn't been so disrupted by the war, where the time-binding essence of "Trufandom" had caught his imagination, and in a very short time, he had far more contacts with Stateside fen than with Europeans.

In Britain the Society struggled for a short time, but there just weren't enough active fans to keep the thing going. Those of us with some initiative but not enough time for organization became disenchanted with serious constructivism, and fanning for the fun of it was a darned sight more interesting. Look at *Slant* ... getting more interested help than a serious organ ever would, because, to people like myself, the Right Kind of Fan became, not the fellow interested in s-f, but in Fandom.

Now, we've had brought to our notice recently a distinctive feature of US fandom that has hitherto remained virtually unknown to British fandom; the existence of a large band of US fans who are not members of fanzine fandom. These null-F's, if I may call them that, attend Conventions, discuss s-f, and regard themselves as fans, but never write for fanzines or receive them.

This state of affairs is very different in Britain. Here, if a fan is an active fan then he publishes fanzines, organizes Conventions, and partakes generally in all activities; very few Null-F's are prominent in Convention organizing, meetings, etc., and even those who are, such as Ted Carnell, have a fanzine background.

Thus, fanzine fandom became entranced with the beautiful job WAW made of *Slant*, and later *Hyphen*, and in the humorous material he poured out, and British fanzine fandom was active fandom. From such fanzines introduced by WAW to British fandom as *Oopsla*, *Quandry*, etc., which reported Conventions in the 6th Fandom manner, British fans built up a visualization of their ideal Con. Disregarding the minor fact that the reports they most liked were invariably slanted towards humour, they went ahead and organized Conventions that staggered Walt.

With the example of *Hyphen* to inspire them, fans leaned heavily to humour in all their activities, and when, in '54, native s-f boomed, the serious and constructive reader who encountered fandom never had a chance. If you could quote yourself onto *Hyphen*'s bacover, write a fanzine article interlarded with puns, or cartoon, the red carpet was unrolled; otherwise, you

were not unwelcome but there was just no place where you could expound your feelings on the latest *Amazing* or *Astounding*.

Walt had not, I think, created this atmosphere by intent, and, of course, he was not alone, but his influence pervaded the field. He published the epic *Enchanted Duplicator*, was always sympathetic towards requests for material from neo-faned, and was conscientious in writing fair and inevitably witty letters of comment. But it was by example that he showed British fans how to enjoy fanning and how, sometimes, to introduce a note of serious criticism and sincerity when needed.

The preponderance of fanzine writers and editors in British actifandom has meant that until recently Walt influenced the whole field of fan expression here, and it is only in the last year or so, with little from Belfast and the emergence into activity of the hybrid s-f/jazz fan, that any quantity of material has been published that has not, consciously or sub-consciously, set itself against the standard of “Good enough for *Hyphen*”.

It’s difficult to assess the ultimate value of the fannish anarchy that now prevails in Britain, where the only national fan club is, significantly enough, a fanzine publishing association. There is no association which can be entered by the youngster who is interested in exchanging opinions and hearing news concerning s-f ... which is, basically, the first step towards the curious entity known as s-f fandom taken by the usual reader. *The Immortal Storm* of the early ’50s will require some deep psychological delvings.

“We want articles, preferably humorous. We’d ask for serious articles too, only they’re usually so damned dull.” Thus ran a Willis request for material.

Being a contemporary of Walt’s in fandom has meant the total defeat of dullness. I’ve differed with him, sometimes quite bitterly, but the man is exhilarating, charming ... and, after reading this, embarrassed. Walter A. Willis is quite definitely a Good Man.

– A. Vincent Clarke, 1957

Walt Willis – God’s Gift to Fandom John Berry

I have been asked by Mr. Fields to say a few words about a subject on which I am an authority – Walter Alexander Willis.

It has been my good fortune to have been in almost daily contact with this fannish paragon for the past number of years. I realize, of course, my good fortune in having this continuous contact with him, and I have often been told by other fen that for this reason they are terribly envious of me. Some of the biggest BNFs in the business pay frequent pilgrimages to his abode at 170 Upper Newtownards Road, Belfast, and although Walt has tried to contain this persistent hero worship, fans like the Bulmers and LeeH and Larry Shaw and Chuck Harris ignore these subtle reproaches, and, treading carefully over the big pot-holes and high waving grass on the path, visit him again and again.

For myself, I must admit without qualification that Walt Willis has been a great help to me throughout my fannish career. Several years ago, when I was a dewy-eyed neo-fan, attempting to formulate my own science fiction library, Walt went out of his way to assist me. Not only did he personally sell me his complete stack of *Vargo Statten* and *Other Worlds*, he even lent me his wheelbarrow to carry them home. I might add that Walt is sometimes falsely labelled as being a vile huckster. I wish to take this opportunity to refute those malicious accusations once and for all. The prozine kiosk in his front garden is surely a sensible way of getting rid of his surplus British Editions with the minimum of fuss and bother. I should hate people to get the impression that when they visit Oblique House they are almost physically assaulted at the front door by a Shylock type Willis, rattling a tin of halfpennies, and forcing his spare *IFs* and *Galaxys* on them. Oh no. Subtlety, as always, is the watchword at 170. As you enter those hallowed portals, Walt will merely politely indicate a small wooden box on which the legend “**PLEASE TAKE ONE**” is stencilled in three-inch letters. These brochures will prove of interest to every s-f collector. And if you forget to take one in the hallway, don’t worry ... you’ll find another box in the toilet.

In my many factual articles about Walt Willis, I have striven to represent him as I myself see him. His untidy hair, waving above a noble and intellectual brow, a brow creased only by the worries of the latest £/\$ conversion rates ... his flamboyant dress, the hall-mark of his fannish status, dashing original in its blatant duplicating ink stains ... his dual purpose trousers, cunningly tailored to incorporate his position as a high official in the Northern Ireland Government, and when turned inside out, becoming the ultimate in ghoodminton wear ... his many and varied capabilities, as for example, a skilled motorist. It is perhaps not widely known that his present prowess as a driver is a classic example of Walt's persistence ... his unflagging efforts to reach perfection. The trail of mutilated gear boxes strewn behind him being a mute testimony to his unrelenting perseverance. It is common knowledge to those in the motoring trade that the automatic gear change was developed principally to bring down the overheads on car dealers in the Belfast area, it being referred to somewhat jestingly as "Willis-proof".

Walt Willis is also a self-professed cookery expert. At first, when he produced such classics as his home-made ginger cake, we visitors took it as a subtle hint that he didn't want us to go there anymore. George Charters strongly resented his slice of cake, pointing meaningfully to his solitary tooth, his "pickle-puncher", and saying he wasn't going to sacrifice it to boost Walt's ego. I was able to smuggle my slice out, and it now performs a useful function in my house as a door wedge.

Walt's ready wit, his superb analytical mind, is always at our disposal. He has titled many of my stories with the genius for which he is rightly famed. His "Rust in Peace", "This Goon for Hire", "Robin Hoodlums" and "Shill-Shock" being brilliant examples which spring to mind. Just yesterday, for instance, I was in a dilemma. A week previously, I had written a story about the members of Irish Fandom growing beards, and I couldn't think of a title. I telephoned Walt, and within thirty seconds, he gave me the perfect title, "The Non-Shaver Mystery". Pure genius.

My friend Walt Willis is good, kind, patient and forgiving. Knowing him has been an inspiration to my efforts. He has nurtured my limited talents, given me every assistance, even selling me a mechanically perfect Gestetner duplicator for £3 (about \$9) when he could have sold it for much more commercially.

A volume of the works of Walter Willis is a noble venture, and I feel proud to have been asked to write an introduction for it.

– John Berry, 1957

Editor's Preface

George W. Fields

When I abandoned activity in fandom in 1958, shortly after the Solacon, the most important thing I left behind was a collection of papers all written by Walter A. Willis.

The actual soliciting had been almost completed, but I had little hope of it ever really being completed. I had good intentions of continuing work on the volume even in *gafia* (since I *had* told Willis I would see that it was published whether I *gafiated* or not).

But I underestimated the co-editor, publications manager, purchasing agent, and old friend of mine, Ted Johnstone (his name was changed to protect the innocent). Ted went ahead, financed and published the volume, and got it ready in time for the 1961 World Con. He, and those who helped him, deserve my thanks for not making me out a liar ...

This is my final contribution to fandom (for the time being) and even considering the little work I actually did on it, I hope you remember I gave the work the initial shove. I only wish I could have found the time from school, work, and painting (not to mention parties) to work on the actual publication.

I know everyone who likes Willis will enjoy reading the collection, which was a good enough reason to make an effort to publish it. There is not very much you can say about the writing herein except that it is not the usual trite, dull writing you usually read in fandom. Rather, this writing is extremely subjective, intelligent, and entertaining.

It will undoubtedly go into many printings – of course, if we could print better, we wouldn't have to do it over.

As for my personal and social life of late (I'm sure you are all interested in *that* ...) I have been busy. Maybe I will pull a General MacArthur, but then I don't think I'd like the Phillipines. A lot of people would like me shipped there, but I'd only turn in the ticket and go to Hawaii instead.

So who is to say what will happen – *The Willis Papers* will be the first thing I will have read thoroughly (from the fan world) in years. The noise I hear from fandom is no louder than the fall of dust.

But at least I started something, and that is a means to an end.
Here is the end ...

– George W. Fields
August 1961

Publisher's Preface

Ted Johnstone

It has been four years since George Fields began this monumental work, and a little over two years since I caught the torch from his falling hand when he gave up the great race and gafiated. Still, though he never set hand to stencil for it, to him belongs the greatest credit for creation of *The Willis Papers* – inspired by the writings of Irish Fandom and the plans to bring Walt over to the States for the Solacon, George began compiling articles which Walt had said he considered among his best, and preparing a publication to benefit the fund which was being raised at the time.

When that fund died, so did George's interest. He never really recovered from the blow, and faded into gafia the following year. But loath to see his greatest project left uncompleted, I got the manuscripts and what little work had been completed – George's lettering for the Clarke and Berry introduction, and the title page – and took over, with his dying blessing.

This was about the time the LASFS purchased their Gestetner, and I was able to begin cutting stencils with the security of knowing how they would be run off. In 1959 I finished some twenty stencils, and then got sidetracked on other projects; in 1960 the dust gathered undisturbed on the already-run pages, and the bundle of manuscripts eyed me forlornly from a top shelf in my closet. I cut one stencil that year – I had been waiting for an explanation of what looked like a typo in one manuscript, and when it arrived, I completed that article and then shelved *The Willis Papers* once again.

Then came 1961 and the announcement of the new Willis Fund, and it became clear to me that this was the purpose for which George had given his fannish life. I buckled down to work, promising enough people to have *The Willis Papers* ready for the SeaCon that it would have been tantamount to suicide to have failed. I advertised for the last two needed articles, got them from Les Gerber and Richard Bergeron, asked Bjo to do the cover which Atom had never prepared, and, in August of 1961, I have completed *The Willis Papers*. Now maybe I can get back to work on *Zap* #2 ...

This publication, I fear, has been a training ground for me. The first stencils were the first I had ever cut and the first I ever ran off; I'm afraid

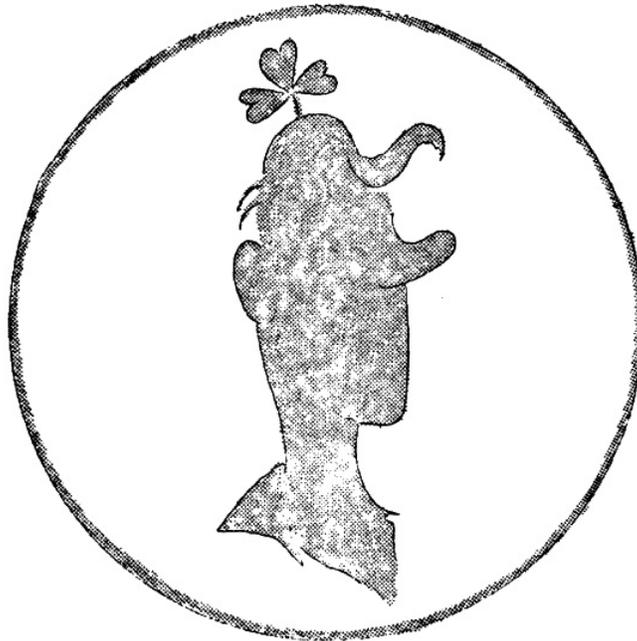
they show it in spots. My unsure hand learned to wield a stylus on these stencils. But I hope the technical weaknesses will not distract from your enjoyment of our star entertainer; in many cases, the original publication was much worse.

My thanks to all for your patience; my special thanks to the fifteen fans who had enough continuing faith to enter advance orders. And finally, thanks to Walter Alexander Willis, without whom this publication would have been a great deal shorter – and duller.

– Ted Johnstone
18 August 1961

The Willis Papers

the
willis
papers



Original cover artwork by Bjo Trimble

Telekinesis and Buttered Toast

.....Searching back into the deep dark vaults of the past, we find a short, very short essay. It appeared in the first issue of a small letterpress fanzine called Slant, which, if you'll read the "Autobiographical Notes" in this volume, was the project of two new Irish fen, James White and Walt Willis. And this essay, which greeted the world in late 1948, was the first published work of Walter A. Willis.....

Dr. Rhine's study of parapsychology has now been published in England, and those of you who read Williamson's "And Searching Mind" will notice with interest that the experiments in telekinesis were performed with a pair of dice. These the subject had to will to come up "sevens", i.e. 6&1, 5&2, or 4&3, and the results were such as to rule out chance as an explanation.

There seems accordingly to be no doubt that telekinesis (the control of inanimate objects by thought) does frequently occur. But how are we to reconcile this conclusion with centuries of human experience of the obdurate intractability of certain material objects, in particular, buttered toast. As the old poet says:

I never had a piece of toast,
Particularly long and wide,
But fell upon the sanded floor,
And always on the buttered side.

The explanation undoubtedly lies in Dr. Rhine's apparatus. It will not have escaped the incisive intelligence of my readers that the total of the numbers on the opposite sides of the two dice is also 7. It is now clear that the apparent success of the subject's will is really an abject failure: **THE SIDES ON WHICH HE WAS CONCENTRATING ARE ACTUALLY UNDERNEATH.**

It is not, however, necessary to conclude that material objects are activated by a malign intelligence. Indeed the apparent anomaly we had discovered provides us with a valuable clue to the mode of operation of the telekinetic faculty. Its effect is apparently to increase the gravitational inertia, or weight, of the object concentrated upon. Thus, the butter on the toast,

which has, for the entire period of its fall, been assailed by the whole power of the human mind, in agonized concentration, acquires enough extra weight to turn the piece completely around in mid-air. I need hardly add that the same force acting on molecules of water easily explains the delay in the boiling of a watched pot.

Slant #1, November 1948

Black Mail

Poised as I am here between Britain and America, I often find myself having to explain one to the other. Puzzled neofans come to me with their little worries, plaintive questions like “What does PTO mean?”, “How can they have 31 months in the year?”, “What is Harlan Ellison?”, “Why do they print their calendars sideways?” and so on. One of the things that puzzles Americans most are the sheaves of black paper they receive from time to time bearing British stamps. Some recipients merely throw them aside after an idle glance but others, fans being the sensitive finely-wrought creatures that they are, worry themselves into an early FAPA membership by fears that they are being put on the spot – that these sheaves of black paper are a fannish equivalent of the black spot that Captain Kidd used to serve on his friends when they got his goat. I can comfort these unhappy people. These sheaves of black paper are nothing but *British fanzines*! If you examine them closely you will often be able to distinguish individual words, and investigators with high-powered microscopes report definite traces of margins round the edges. (Much the best place for margins.)

This British peculiarity, this psychopathic abhorrence for `o p e n s p a c e s` in fanzines, has been remarked on by many people but until this moment nobody has explained the real reason for it. It is not meanness, nor the high cost of paper, nor any obvious cause like that. It is simply that every British faned walks in the shadow of fear, knowing himself to be a hunted man, a law-breaker, an enemy of society. He is the victim of a guilt complex that compels him to shun the free wide spaces beloved of US faneds and to crowd his material into a confined space as if huddling together for protection.

How this comes about is a sad and terrible story, and I suggest that the more sensitive and highly strung people among my audience stop reading at this point and go to see *Them*. It begins just as the new British faned, innocent of the doom that lies in wait for him, is happily completing his first issue. Determined that there shall be no mishap in conveying the glory of it to the world, he consults the Post Office Guide. This is an enormous red book which tells you everything you could possibly want to know about the Post Office except what is happening to your mail. He looks up the section on

“Printed Papers” and there, under the heading “Admissible Documents” he finds the following fateful words:

“Reproductions of manuscripts or typewritten originals. Such reproductions, when obtained by a mechanical manifold process, are accepted for transmission as printed papers if:

They are handed in at a head [this itself is sufficiently confusing to anyone who has been in the Navy] or branch post office, or one of the more important rural sub-stations authorized to receive them;

Special attention is drawn to the fact that they are reproductions of the kind specified;

At least 20 packets containing precisely identical copies are handed in at the same time; and

A form of Declaration, P241, is signed by the postee stating that all the copies are identical in text and bear nothing which is not permitted under the regulations related to printed papers.”

Now, imagine what happens to the wretched British fane. First, he must forego his cherished plans to dash out to the mailbox with a half-dozen still wet copies for his best friends, closest rivals, and Rog Phillips. He must wait until the whole mailing is ready. Then he must find a suitcase big enough to hold it. Then he must get off work, because the Post Office closes at teatime.

But this is nothing compared to what follows. At last he is ready and staggers down to the Post Office with his load, wishing with every step that he hadn't published so many copies. It is an important Post Office, as the Law requires, and naturally there is a queue. [*He means a line, Webbert.*] If it were an American post office it would be a line, but it wouldn't be like this one. It consists of three old age pensioners drawing their pensions and arguing over their tobacco vouchers, two women drawing family allowances, four people drawing money from the savings bank, one consulting the register of electors, one changing his Health Service doctor, two buying television licences and one a radio licence, two sending telegrams, one paying his telephone account, and three paying their National Insurance Contributions. There is even somebody trying to buy a stamp. Grateful for a rest the fan sits on his case, moving it forward nine inches every few minutes until eventually he arrives at the counter. With a last convulsive effort he hoists the case up onto it.

Before he can get his breath the clerk drags it over to the scales, looks at the dial, and drags it back to the counter.

“Too heavy,” he says, “Send it by rail. Next?”

And before the fanned can open his mouth the clerk is deep in conversation with a gentleman who wants to send three parcels to Nicaragua, airmail, special delivery, registered, and is having difficulty filling up the Customs Declaration.

“Excuse me,” says the fan timidly, having now got his case open. “I want to mail these. Printed Papers.”

He proffers a diffident fanzine.

The clerk looks at it with suspicion.

“Doesn’t look like printing to me,” he says.

“No,” says the fan, “It’s duplicating.”

He draws a deep breath.

“I hereby draw special attention to the fact that these are reproductions of manuscript or typewritten originals obtained by a mechanical manifolding process.”

“You *what?*” says the clerk.

“I draw special attention,” the fanned repeats, “to the fact that these are reproductions of manuscript or typewritten originals obtained by a mechanical manifolding process. Page 247 of the Post Office Guide. Now you give me Declaration Form P241.”

“Are you trying to teach me my job?” asks the clerk nastily.

He goes behind his panel, takes a surreptitious look at the Post Office Guide, and comes back with a small form which he slaps resentfully on the counter.

The fan closes his case again and shambles over to the far wall where the writing things are. Having filled out the form he then takes his place at the end of the line again.

Eventually he arrives back at the counter, submits the completed form, opens his case, and begins lifting bundles of his fanzine onto the counter. The clerk looks on in silence as the pile grows. Two hundred and fifty copies of a fanzine take up quite a lot of space.

Eventually the operation is completed. The clerk’s voice is heard faintly from the other side of the mountain.

“What are these?”

“It’s a fa—, a sort of magazine,” says the fan.

The clerk takes a copy. A small avalanche now starts on his side of the counter and after a few moments he becomes visible again. He is seen to be still clutching a copy of the fanzine.

“What sort of a magazine?”

“Er ... a science fiction fan magazine,” says the fan awkwardly.

“You mean that crazy Dan Dare stuff?” asks the clerk. “My kid listens to that. Let’s have a look at it.”

He opens a copy and begins to read the editorial aloud, with growing puzzlement.

“Ghu ... fandom ... crudzine ... ish ... illos ... egoboo.... Is this in English?”

“Yes,” says the fan. “Those are, well, technical terms, sort of.”

“H’m,” says the clerk. “Doesn’t sound very scientific to me. And what about these pictures of naked women? What sort of science is that?”

He holds one up. The line, which has been listening with rapt attention, cranes forward to look.

“Er, ... biology, you know,” says the fan desperately.

“First time I ever heard it called that,” sneers the clerk.

The line titters, and the fan smiles a sickly smile.

The clerk glares at him.

“It’s not a laughing matter. I suppose, with your profound knowledge of the Post Office Guide, you know what it says about sending indecent matter through Her Majesty’s mails?”

“Yes,” says the fan stoutly.

He doesn’t, but then neither does the clerk. It is now a battle of wills, of bluff and counterbluff.

But I think I’ve harrowed your emotions enough to show you that no sensitive fan can be expected to go through this sort of ordeal more than once. Instead, he resolves to defy the law. He goes underground. He mails his fanzine illegally. During each night of the mailing he sneaks out with a bag full of copies of his fanzine, trudging from mailbox to mailbox and mailing a predetermined number in each. This number, this mailing quantum, is arrived at after careful and complicated calculation. It is evolved from an equation taking into account the number of collections per day, the number of magazines to be mailed, the estimated total number of postal packets mailed in the district, the estimated number of sorters employed by the postal authorities, their speed of operation, and their psychological make-up. The

aim is to arrive at a mailing quantum which will produce an optimum rate of flow of fanzines through sorters. It must be a rate slow enough so that the sorter won't suddenly lose patience and exclaim, "My God, more of these things? Hey, Inspector!!" On the other hand it must be fast enough to get the mailing out within a reasonable time. There is, British faneds believe, an optimum rate of flow – one that will be just below the sorter's threshold of perception, so that while he may be wondering vaguely whether he hasn't seen something like this item before, his subconscious is telling him that he has and he didn't do anything about it then, so why bother now? This is known among experts as the "Ah well" Level of Flow. (It is rumoured that Ahwell Research Station was named after it.)

There are other minor consequences involved in this behaviour pattern imposed on British faneds. For instance they must at all costs avoid calling attention to their fmz by allowing them to be what the Post Office Guide calls "embarrassing postal packets". This does not mean ladies' underwear or French postcards, but things like soft fruit mailed in paper bags and fanzines with jagged staple ends sticking out. So all British fanzines are thoroughly bashed with a hammer before they are mailed. But I've told you enough of their worries, I hope, to persuade you to make allowances for British zines against American ones. They're beaten before they start.

Le Zombie #64, January 1955

The Immortal Gael

(An Obscure Chapter in the History of Irish Fandom)

.....“This is really a slightly fictionalized account of an actual event and might be more appropriately under some other category than essays.” – WAW, in a letter. So it might, but mainly it serves to describe some of the problems of the novice fan-historian in an encounter with the Mundane World.....

One day, in his ceaseless combing of the second-hand bookshops of Belfast, my friend and co-editor James White was rewarded by the discovery of a 1935 issue of *Wonder Stories*. Concealing his emotion as best he could, he bought it from the trusting dealer for merely six times its face value and hurried home in triumph, reading as he went. Like any true fan he turned first to the readers’ departments. There, in faded grey and yellow, was the startling intelligence that a Chapter of the Science Fiction League had been formed in Belfast under one Hugh Carswell. His address was given, and with a thrill James realized it was no more than a short walk from where he now stood rooted to the pavement. Inspired by Moskowitz’s *Immortal Storm*, James immediately decided to track down this hitherto unknown founder of Irish Fandom.

The address was one of a long row of identical houses in a working-class street. The door was opened by a middle-aged woman with a truculent expression.

“Mr. Carswell?” asked James, politely.

She gave him a suspicious look and would probably have slammed the door in his face if it hadn’t been for the fact that James is roughly a mile high and wears heavy round glasses which make him look like an electronic brain in its walking-out clothes. She contented herself with gradually reducing the width of the aperture until she was in danger of cutting her head off.

“Which Mr. Carswell?” she asked warily.

“Hugh,” said James.

She reddened, insulted.

“What do you mean, *me*?” she enquired angrily.

Her moustache bristled. She was hurt.

“Not *you*,” said James hastily.

He gave her an aspirate to remove the pain.

“*Hhhugh*. Hugh Carswell.”

Malevolently she seized her opportunity for further obstruction.

“*Which* Hugh Carswell?”

Now, I have the sober type of mind that mentally falls off every bridge before I come to it. If I had been going to make this call of James’s I would have cased the joint first. I would have looked up the house in the street directory to make sure the Carswells were still there after 17 years. Then I would have looked up the Register of Electors to see the names of all the people in the house who were of voting age. Finally I would have walked past the house a few times and then had a pint in the nearest pub and seen what dirt I could dig up. Such intelligent preparation and brilliant detective work wouldn’t have made the slightest difference, of course, but it would have been fun.

“Er ... the one who’s interested in science fiction,” said James at last.

The woman looked at him blankly. It seemed to come naturally to her. Obviously, she was waiting for him to say something intelligible. She didn’t seem to think there was much hope.

“Signs Fixin’?” she asked. “What signs?”

Faced with the task of giving a short definition of science fiction, James quailed. It was a pity he hadn’t been studying his Campbell carefully enough, or he could have said: “You know – fictional extrapolation from current or potential psychical or technological development.” If he had, I venture to say he would have remained master of the situation.

As it was, James could only fall back on his copy of the 1935 *Wonder Stories*. He started to open his coat so that he could draw the magazine out of his large pocket from the inside rather than drag it through the smaller outer opening. Even in the direst of emergencies, James is very careful with magazines.

As he undid the buttons, the woman looked at him with the expression of a cover girl on *True Detective*. I don’t know whether she thought he was going to strangle her or what – probably what – but she had her mouth lined up for screaming when he produced the magazine.

This anti-climax took her breath away, and she waited while James opened the magazine and began to search hurriedly for Hugh Carswell’s

name. Of course, he couldn't find it. James is very shortsighted. He is the only fan who leaves nostracks between his eyetracks. After reading a fanzine he has enough mimeograph ink on his nose to run off another copy. And news about the SFL never hit the front pages of *Wonder*. As a matter of fact, it was usually concealed among the advertisements, and this was where James finally ran it to earth.

Now James is a very high-minded character, and not only in the sense that his head is usually surrounded by cirrus clouds; and he is very fond of science fiction. The result is that he has arrived at the stage where the advertisements in science fiction simply do not exist for him. He probably knows vaguely that there is something on the parts of the page that aren't devoted to the fan departments, but I don't believe he could for the life of him tell you what it is. So it was quite natural for him merely to pass her the magazine open at the correct page.

The woman started reading, speaking aloud.

"RUPTURED?" she read, "THROW AWAY THAT TRUSS!"

"No, no" said James, Aghast. "Further down."

She gave him a peculiar look and started reading lower down.

"SEX FULFILMENT!" she read mechanically. "Love life ... normal sex relations ... frustrations ... anatomy ... problems ... full diagrams ... outspoken ... medical profession ... plain wrappers ..."

She stopped, horrified. Her worst suspicions were confirmed. She tried to back away and close the door. Since her head was still outside, she succeeded only in elongating her neck a full six inches. This was fortunate for James, because it delayed the delivery of her scream long enough for him to disclaim all responsibility for the advertisement, and to wave the cover in her face. It was a pleasant little painting, showing a few cubic miles of futuristic machinery and a couple of thousand terrified human beings being devoured by tentacled monstrosities. The idyllic charm seemed to have a quieting effect on her.

"Oh, you mean our Hughie," she said. "he *used* to read them books."

"Is he here?" asked James.

"No."

"Well, where is he?"

"He's away," she replied defensively.

"Where?" asked James, not noticing the warning signs.

She gave him a hostile look, this time more of hate than of fear.

It started at his head, and after some time arrived at his feet. James' feet *are* rather big. Suddenly James realized that this was Belfast, where there are other organizations besides the SFL – the IRA for example – and that some of them do not take kindly to strangers who ask questions about their members.

He looked down the street. A number of lean, hungry-looking men seemed suddenly to have manifested themselves, huddling against walls and obviously not looking at James. They had their hands in their jacket pockets, where they seemed to be holding something. They didn't look like pipe-smokers.

James quickly tried to explain that he was only interested in magazines. One of the men caught the word "magazines" and jerked his head toward another man down the street.

"*Them* books," said the woman, with all the scorn of a rabid non-fan. "Hughie doesn't read them things anymore."

Her tone implied that no grown man would, and that the police were adding insult to injury.

James took another look down the street. One of the lean men was lounging at the near corner, looking up and down the road. Another was walking quietly towards the other end. They seemed to draw closer, menacingly, like James Mason in spy movies. James decided he had better go. But the instinct of the true collector was still stronger than the will to survive.

"Did Hughie leave any of them ... *those* books?" he asked.

But he was already walking away. He knew what the answer would be. He'd been through this, many times. True enough, the ritual answer came, in the time-honoured words with which collectors all over the world wake screaming:

"Oh, there were hundreds of them in the attic, but they were threw out last week. If you'd only come then ..."

So James had hardly bothered waiting, and was already striding past the look-out man. He gained the safety of the main road with a second to spare, otherwise this account of our researches into the history of Irish Fandom would have been even shorter.

We often wonder – did Moskowitz ever have trouble like this?

Fantastic Worlds #1, Summer 1952

The Subcutaneous Fan

.....With the recent surge of interest in “other fandoms”, this early article is of especially timely interest, dealing as it does with “Sauce Bottle Fandom”

This was meant to be one of those scholarly, constructive articles that Redd Boggs so excels in, but I’m beginning to think that he has discovered some important principle in life that has so far eluded me. Redd: do you never find that when you want to look up a reference someone has invariably borrowed the book? It’s always happening to me – people are so dishonest. The worst of it is that I never seem to find anything worth quoting in the books I have of theirs.

The one I was looking for this time was Rachel Ferguson’s *The Brontës Went to Woolworths*. It was to have been the first link in a long chain of speculation about the ways in which the fan mentality expresses itself in the absence of fandom. As far as I remember – don’t bother to correct me if I’m wrong – Rachel Ferguson and her sisters had invented an elaborate private mythology concerning the Brontës, and lived in it themselves a sort of pseudolife in parallel with their mundane existence. I think the Brontës themselves had one which they shared with Branwell, and I know that lots of other people, like Shelley, also had these private worlds of their own. I was going to argue that this was a manifestation of the sensitive fannish mind. To me at any rate the main attraction of fandom is this property it has of being a combined mythology and microcosm – an artificial private world which does actually have a real existence (but not too real), and in which one can enjoy a sort of contemporary reincarnation. (A whole bunch of reincarnations, if you follow Speer’s example and split yourself into more than one identity.) At the very least, two lives for the price of one. It could be argued that fandom is not an escapist hobby after all, but almost the reverse – an overflow outlet for the creative imagination. Fandom is a nocturnal emission. (I put it baldly like that with a view to the remark’s immortalization on a *Wild Hair*-type cover.)

However, in the absence of the Ferguson book I’m afraid this article is going to degenerate into personal reminiscence. I only hope I’m right in assuming I can get away with this sort of stuff in FAPA. Certainly I can’t think of any other audience likely to be interested in the rise and fall of Sauce

Bottle Fandom.

Sauce Bottle Fandom flourished in Belfast about 15 years ago and at one time had as many as four members. We met twice a week in a local cafe, and at first we talked only of the usual things students talk about – art, religion, politics and other dirty jokes – but it wasn't long before we invented Sauce Bottle Fandom. We were all the sort of people who read at meals and if there was nothing else to read we would read the labels on the jars and things on the table. We soon found that we all knew off by heart the label on a sauce known as “H.P.” Not only did this label carry a much greater wordage than any marmalade jar, it was of immensely higher literary standard. For one thing, part of it was in French, which gave it an immense distinction in the eyes of us Francophiles. The label had three sides. The middle one had a picture of the Houses of Parliament at Westminster, a statement that the sauce was made by Garton and Company, and a description of its constituents – pure malt vinegar and oriental spices. On the lefthand side was the blurb in French – “*Cette Sauce de premier choix ...*” – which we intoned with the solemnity we gave to Baudelaire and Rimbaud. And on the righthand side was a copy of a certificate by two public analysts that they had “regularly taken samples from stock and found the sauce to be in every way pure and wholesome. – signed A. Bostock Hill and William T. Rigby.”

It was those names that got us. There seemed to be a limitless significance in them. A. Bostock Hill was obviously a short stocky type, stolid and unimaginative, but steady as a rock and honest as the day was long. William T. Rigby, on the other hand, was a wayward genius, brilliant and erratic with a streak of the Bohemian artist. In no time at all we had the two characters fitted out with parents, schools, careers, love lives, friends – an entire world. Every detail was filled in with loving care. Finally we had constructed an entire imaginary universe for Hill and Rigby, with a cast of scores which included virtually every proprietary names in British bottling, canning and confectionery industries. Every change in a proprietary label was the outward sign of some vast drama taking place behind the scenes, and the occasion for long and serious speculation by us. We were, for instance, saddened when the H.P. people suddenly substituted typed signatures of Hill and Rigby for the holographic ones we had known from childhood. It could only mean that poor old Hill was failing. No doubt he had for some time been unable actually to take the samples from stock himself, but his loyal friend Rigby, ever the more dashing of the two, had shown him his results and

guided his faltering hand in signing the hallowed document. Then in 1938 two things happened. The war broke out, and the certificate disappeared altogether. The latter could mean only one thing, and Sauce Bottle Fandom came to an end.

By that time the mythos was really immense. We had not only accounted for every idiosyncrasy in proprietary labels, but had incorporated dozens of other items that had caught our imaginations. Things like an enormous and mysterious unsigned painting of a lady in blue that hung in the attic of my grandmother's old house, several Victorian lithographs of domestic scenes in the downstairs rooms, and a photograph of an unknown Edwardian ancestor whom we christened Wallace Willis. And finally we had integrated the whole thing with another equally massive mythology in a different field, quite incommunicable since it dealt mainly with local placenames and Irish words, and ingenious theories as to what ever happened to the Picts.

Nobody ever got around to writing the whole thing down – it would have been quite a job – and I thought it had perished completely until the other day I found among some old papers a draft I had sketched of the main events in the Hill-Rigby story itself. It started off with a period A. Bostock Hill's childhood, and already one of the two Holy Grails of the saga – *absolutely pure* malt vinegar – was making its appearance. As you probably know, vinegar is made from inferior wines, and in the first chapter, based on one of the Victorian lithos, old Squire Hill is staggering home drunk after his nightly debauch.

“D—n and b—t,” he roared thickly as he reeled up the stairs. Mrs. Hill blanched. ‘Shut your ears, children,’ she murmured, clasping her eldest son in her arms. ‘Arbuthnot,’ she cried, ‘tomorrow you embark on the great sea of life. Swear to me by a mother’s love that you will to fight this daemon Empire Wine that has since enslaved your father, and that you will remember always our family motto, SPIRIT VINI RECT.*’”

* The pharmaceutical name for vinegar.

In the next chapter Hill goes to boarding school and falls afoul of the school bully, Guy Fletcher (Fletcher's Tomato Ketchup) and his toadies Cyril Urney and Sidney Needler. (Urney and Needler were makers of chocolate we thought vastly inferior to Cadbury's.) He is rescued by William Terence Rigby, one of the school bloods, and confides in him his dream of

transforming his father's curse into a blessing for all mankind. Later at the University, where Rigby is specializing in tropical plants, they meet some of the other characters in the saga – Wallace Willis, Vladimir Potemkin the mad painter, Richard Cadbury and Sidney Garton. They also spend a holiday at Heidelberg, where they meet Gustav Tobler and Heinrich Heinz.* Towards the end of their university life, however, both Hill and Rigby fell in love with Wallace Willis's sister, the mysterious blue lady painted by Potemkin, and Rigby goes out East to forget. Worried by reports that he is gone native, Hill presses on with his monumental work.

* "Ich habe mein Heinz in Heidelberg verloren."

"The furore which greeted the publication of *Pure Malt Vinegar, Its Past* need not be described. The book was at first greeted with derision and obloquy, but when it was realized that the author had effectively discredited all previous thought on the subject a wave of despair swept the world. Such was the position when Hill produced the second volume – *Pure Malt Vinegar, Its Future*. It was the young men who first realized the daring scope of Hill's ideas. *Absolutely* pure malt vinegar, hitherto thought but a vain dream, *was possible!* In Paris, Montmartre student opinion rallied to the new leader as a result of some anonymous prose poems and manifestos ..."

Hill can now afford to organize an expedition to search for Rigby. He enlists the aid of old Professor Heinz ("57 varieties have I made, and I will no more until Rigby is found make.") and with Tobler they set out for the Orient. They find Rigby in the heart of the Burmese jungle, "writing feverishly on a bamboo table covered with scientific instruments. The piercing gleam in his eye belies the signs of dissipation on his features ... 'Your book made a new man of me,' he says, 'and I have begun my researches again. I don't want to raise false hopes, but I think we have an appointment with Sidney Garton ... and I have one of my prose poems ready for Sydney if he cares to use it. "*Cette sauce de premier choix ...*"'"

They all return in triumph to England (except old Professor Heinz, who succumbs to malaria with his life's work uncompleted) and Garton produces the ultimate sauce. Not without opposition from Fletcher, Crosse and Blackwell, but the saga ends at one of the "quiet dinners Hill gives regularly to his friends. The genial old man sits at the head of the table, with Rigby, frail but indomitable and with still a youthful gleam in his eye, on his right hand and Dr. Otto Heinz, son of the revered Professor, on his left ... The gay

conversation rises and falls, stilled only when the butler enters bearing tenderly a priceless cobwebbed bottle of old vintage vinegar.”

And to think I might have poured all that energy into fandom instead of a sauce bottle, if I had come across the Belfast SFL in 1935!

Skyhook #13, Spring 1952

A Question of Title

In *Quandry* 8 there was an article about fanmag names. The writer pointed out how lacking they were in originality and inspiration. He called for “sparkling, eye-catching titles”. He rightly stigmatized as “dull and insipid” such titles as *Fantasy Review*, *Universe*, etc. Altogether there was nothing in the article to which and right-thinking fan could take exception.

But suppose the curious neofan notices the author’s name – Bob Tucker. “Ah,” he asks, “what then is the sparkling, eye-catching title this Mr. Tucker has chosen for his very own fanmag? What evocative, glamorous, semantically powerful name has his inventive genius conjured up?” The answer falls about his ears like a soggy rice pudding – *Science Fiction Newsletter*.

“No doubt,” will say our warm-hearted neofan, “Mr. Tucker was stuck with this title before the light dawned on him, and fears to change it lest he lose his goodwill?” Alas, no. Bob Tucker *has* changed the name of his fanmag recently, but only like the man in the old joke who went to immense trouble to change his name from Joe Stensch to Harry Stensch. His mag used to be called *Bloomington Newsletter*. Not an inspired title: it does not sparkle noticeably. But nevertheless it had some merit. It had local colour. It was distinctive. One imagined the inhabitants of the quiet town of Bloomington sitting in their rose-covered cottages listening to the newsboys pattering up the street. “Newsletter ... Newsletter ... Boggs raps Campbell ... Vance is Kuttner ... Read all about it ... All the news that’s fit to photo-offset ... Extra ... Extra ... Vance not Kuttner ... Newsletter ... Newsletter ...” As the childish voices fade away into the distance the gentle people of Bloomington say to one another, “God bless Mr. Tucker for bringing such fame to our little town.”

And then Bob ruthlessly wipes the colourful name of Bloomington off the map and substitutes the epicene words “Science Fiction”, as if he were afraid the readers might start looking for gossip about the Bloomington Sewing Circle. What possible justification can there have been for this? A small matter, you may think, but how superior was the old name to this new epitome of dullness and insipidity. *Bloomington Newsletter*. It rolled trippingly off the tongue. It was memorable. It had tradition. And

furthermore, it started with the second letter of the alphabet.

This last is a very important fact, as all you Wilsons and Youngs will agree. If your name begins near the bottom of the alphabet your whole life is overshadowed. You sit in the back row at school. Your name is always at the end of lists. It is called last on every possible occasion, from *viva voce* examinations to firing squads. You follow where the Adams and Bonapartes lead. You assume the role of an onlooker. For your fanmag it is equally serious. If its name begins with a late letter it comes far down the review columns at a point where even Rog Phillips is beginning to run short of superlatives, and where the inattentive reader has already started on the little advertisement offering fancy articles in plain envelopes.

Furthermore, take the case of the neofan sending out sample copies of the first issue of his fanmag. He starts at the top of the column and writes labels for every address. Then he begins to get tired. He starts missing out names. If he is a very innocent neofan he might even miss out Bob Tucker. There may come a day when a new fanmag of promise starts up and Bob doesn't know about it. That will be the beginning of the Dark Ages. If Bob Tucker doesn't know everything in SF, what security is there left in the world? No one will know where he is. The corner stone will have been removed. Fandom will fall into anarchy.

Well may you blench. I trust you now see the importance of having a name for your fanmag which starts near the beginning of the alphabet. And it's not difficult to choose one, when you remember that a fanmag name does not have to shout at the top of its voice that it is connected with sf. No one will be in danger of thinking it is not a fanmag, for no one but a fan will ever hear about it, and he will always hear about it in circumstances that leave no doubt as to the type of magazine it is. No need to assume that your fanmag is going to be put on a newsstand and have to distinguish itself from the *Poultry Breeder's Gazette*.

So let us pick a few names from the first few pages of the dictionary. I hope you don't mind my throwing out a few suggested slogans too – by the looks of them I'm afraid they should have been thrown out long ago.

ABACUS – “The fanzine you can count on.”

ABASEMENT – “A really low storey every issue.”

ABATTOIR – “This fanzine will slay you.”

ABBESS – “The Superior fanzine.”

ABDOMEN – “The fanzine with guts.”

ABROAD – “The Femfanzine.”

or even

ABSINTH – “Be conspicuous by your ABSINTH. The fanzine of spirit.”

Had enough? But of course there *are* other things to consider when picking a name for your fanmag. For instance, the name should be very short so that irreverent fans can’t make embarrassing abbreviations of it, and so that it doesn’t take up space in your reviews which might have been filled by egoboo. It should also consist so far as possible of straight letters, which are far easier to draw and cut in lino.

So you want a short name, one with straight letters, and beginning as near the front of the alphabet as possible. Well, of course you could just call it “AAA” (“The mag with the indefinite articles”) but I feel that the ideal title should have a little more significance. You want a word that fulfills the three desiderata above, and also carries some suggestion of innovation, of mutancy, and if possible of fannishness, or some hint of some typical faned characteristic. There is only one word that answers all these requirements. I offer the ultimate in fanzine titles. The word “AI”. I need hardly explain to all crossword puzzlers and Lexicon players that this is the name of a three-toed sloth, known for the “feeble plaintive cry which it utters while in search of its kind.”

Wastebasket #3, 1951

The Fan From Tomorrow

.....For those of you who don't remember, Ray Palmer was a one-time fan who edited a series of prozines. For those of you who do, no more need be said.....

“Well, here we are again with another issue of your favourite magazine, and mine. Of course, yours must have been out for quite a while now, and mine is a bit late this year. Sorry about that, folks, but things have been kind of rough with your old pal RAP. First thing was, the Australians let off one of those phlogiston bombs of theirs and blew all my cows off their feet. That wasn't so bad, because the Russians let off another one and blew them all right way up again, and now I get my butter without having to churn it. But then the Chinese dropped a whole battery of bombs and blew all my carrots right up out of the ground. One of the really big ones came down again on Dick Shaver and hit him a terrible blow on the head. I'm afraid it's affected his brain, because he doesn't believe in the Shaver Mystery anymore. And from that special issue of *Doubt* that came out the other day it looks to me as if a couple of those carrots landed as far away as New York and hit Tiffany Thayer just as he was leaving a meeting of the Fortean Society. This sort of thing has got to stop. I want to say right here and now that I'm getting mighty tired of all these governments pushing my crops around, when I'm perfectly able to rotate them myself. I warn them frankly that they'd better stop right away or I'll do something drastic that'll shake them to their foundations. I might even publish another pocketbook. *The Coming Of The Carrots* maybe. It wasn't so bad when the Government just messed up the weather – nothing but rain or snow or clouds or sunshine all the time – but what am I going to do with all these carrots? I just don't know where to put them. Any suggestions?

“I'll bet you took one look at that contents page and sat right back on your seat. Right? What a line-up – Robert N. Webster, Richard S. Shaver, Frank Patton, A.R. Steber, Wes Amherst, and C.H. Irwin! What more could you ask for? Well, some of you – maybe not more than a mere 99% but I want *all* you readers to feel you have a say in 'our' magazine – have been asking what about all those stuffed-shirt writers I used to run in *Other Worlds*, people like Sturgeon and Russell. I'm glad you asked me that. Some

of you won't know the full story of why I left *Other Worlds* and I'd like to straighten you out on it.

"Well, first off I got to admit it was all my own fault. Palmer is willing to admit when he made a mistake and it was me and nobody else who promoted Bea Mahaffey to Associate Editor of *Other Worlds*. I take full responsibility. Of course I should have known what would happen from the way she called me a liar about *The Demolished Man* in my own letter column. But at the same time it was the only way I could think of to keep her on the staff. As it was, I had to fight my way into my own office every morning through a crowd of fans all waiting to propose marriage or something to her. It was just a question of keeping the wolves from the door.

"Then after I made her Associate Editor I made my second big mistake. I let her force me into signing an agreement which said that if I could reject any manuscript I didn't like, *she* could reject any manuscript *she* didn't like. Well, that seemed fair enough. It worked fine at first, and it sure did mean a big saving in trouble and money. But I guess it was too good to last. After six or seven issues, a few of the nosier readers began to notice there was something missing. They even began to write in about it, nasty sneering letters full of complaints, just because the magazine was all blank paper. They said they had always figured the best thing about *Other Worlds* was that if they were stuck they could always read it as well. They said if I didn't start putting something to read on those blank pages pretty soon they'd go back to my old rival, Sears-Roebuck.

"Well, I've made my reputation by playing both ends against the middle, and I knew that if I didn't put something on those blank pages soon nobody else would. I went along to Bea and showed her the letters. 'Look, Bea,' I said, 'Read these letters. And think of Calkins and all those other poor letterhacks breaking their hearts trying to comment on the last issue so they can have an excuse to write to you. We just *got* to start printing stories and things again. I've got some terrific stuff here by Webster and Steber and Irwin. All good boys, and I happen to know they could use the money.'

"But she says no, if she printed that stuff she wouldn't be able to face the Beappreciation Society at the next Beacon. She'd got a position to keep up now. All these people looked up to her and she couldn't let them down. Then she produced a sheaf of manuscripts she'd been given at South Gate, all by stuffed-shirt writers like Van Vogt and Bradbury and Heinlein and Tucker and so on. I took a look at the manuscripts and saw at once that they wouldn't

do for *our* magazine. You wouldn't have liked them. All dull heavy stuff, full of scientific jawbreakers. No caves, no heroes, no half-naked goddesses. In a word, no human interest. I tried to reason with Bea, but it was no good. I even called in Calkins and Burwell and Vick and Entrekin, but none of them could get anywhere with her. So I gave up and left *Other Worlds* to its fate and started my own magazine. And now *Other Worlds* has gone slick with four-colour interior illustrations and John W. Campbell, Jr. as Assistant Editor. It isn't a fans' magazine any more.

"You sure can't say that about *our* mag. This is a magazine for fans run by fan, and pretty soon I'll be crowding those snooty slicks off the newsstands. Just wait till you see some of the things I've got lined up for the next issue. Right now my co-editor R.J. Banks is scouring the country, using all his influence to pick up the very best material we can afford. Why, the other day he picked up twelve original cover paintings by Ralph Rayburn Phillips! Picked them up out of an ordinary garbage can. (We're pretty sure they're paintings and if they are they're certainly by Ralph Rayburn Phillips.) Not only that, but if things go the way we hope the next issue will have a three colour cover, illustrating our new serial, 'I was A Captive In A Flying Carrot'. Hectographed of course but – hold on to your hats – the interior of the mag will be mimeographed! How about that? Surprised, eh? But that's the *Palmer Mystery Magazine* for you. Yessir, whatever else you may say about it, it sure is a real *fan* zine!"

Opsla #9, January 1953

Wilde Heir

.....This item appeared in a FAPA one-shot bearing the awkward and unwieldy title of WAWCRHBSJWGATWCMWPMSSACW (pronounced as spelled), which title being made up of the initials of those involved. On the off chance that anyone who might read this might not know, Charles Burbee was one of the Elder Ghods of Fandom.....

The other morning I was eating breakfast when the mail came. I opened it. "Ghod," I said, spreading marmalade distractedly on a crudzine from N. Carolina. "Ghod!"

"Not ...?" said Madeleine, growing pale.

"Yes," I said, "It's from Him. Charles Burbee."

"What does He say?" she asked.

I pulled myself together, and spoke in hushed tones. "He says I have Impeccable Taste."

"Burbee says you have Impeccable Taste?" said Madeleine.

"Yes," I said, "He says I have Impeccable Taste. He also says that one of my articles was Very Fine."

"Will you continue to live with me?" asked Madeleine humbly.

"Yes, woman," I said. "I shall not allow this to turn my head. I shall continue to mingle with ordinary people. Besides you need not feel inferior. Burbee says I have Impeccable Taste and since I chose you, you must be a very paragon among women."

"Thank you," said Madeleine, "You make me feel humble ... and sort of proud."

"That is all right," I said approvingly. "Burbee thinks well of Pogo. Your taste, while not so Impeccable as Mine, is quite good."

I continued reading His fanzine, absent-mindedly proceeding with my breakfast. "Another crudzine?" asked Madeleine, passing me the marmalade.

I ignored her. My mind was on higher things.

"Ghod," I said, "I wish I could write like Burbee."

"Hell," said Madeleine, "You're always saying that. Why don't you try to write like Burbee?"

"Because," I said, "for one thing I do not live in California and do not

know Frances Towner Laney, Al Ashley, and similar fabulous fannish characters. Observe that even Lee Jacobs did not write like Burbee until he went to California. My Taste is far too Impeccable to attempt to produce a travesty of Burbeeism.”

“You have fabulous fannish characters here,” said Madeleine. “Chuck Harris, he who is coming to stay with us tomorrow, is a fabulous fannish character. It is not essential to live in California to be a fabulous fannish character. Though it helps.”

“Woman,” I said, “You are right. My Impeccable Taste tells me that you are. I shall suggest to Chuck Harris that we produce a one-shot for FAPA.”

Next morning I went down to the docks to meet Harris. I saw his sensitive fannish face loom greenly towards me through the cattle. I ignored his greetings.

“Burbee,” I said, “Burbee says I have Impeccable taste.”

“He said that?” said Harris.

“Yes,” I said. “He also said that one of my articles was Very Fine.”

Harris turned humbly to get back on the boat again.

“No,” I said, “You may stay. With my Impeccable Taste I have decided that you are a fabulous fannish character. We shall produce a FAPA oneshot after breakfast. Do you like marmalade on your crudzines? Or I have some books from Ackerman in JAM condition.”

Harris looked doubtful.

“I am sorry,” I said, “That was not worthy of my Impeccable Taste. That was not Burbee-like, that was a lousy Willis-type pun. It is my Impeccable Taste which enables me to recognize these things.”

“What are you talking like Burbee for?” asked Harris.

“I am not talking like Burbee,” I said, “and if you had Impeccable Taste like I have you would realize this.”

Harris abased himself and beat his head on the ground.

“Never mind,” I said kindly. “I am in fact talking like Lee Jacobs talking like Burbee. It would be disrespectful to Ghod to imitate Him; instead we shall imitate Lee Jacobs imitating Burbee. Lee Jacobs, though a fabulous non-fannish character, and whom I have met in London and Chicago, is not Ghod.”

“What shall we do first?” asked Harris.

“First,” I said, “I must now address you as Randolph instead of Chuck. Then you must go out and expose homosexuals.”

“Have you,” he asked, “any particular homosexuals in mind, or is the ability to recognize them a by-product, a facet, of your Impeccable Taste?”

I smiled kindly at Madeleine, who was cleaning my shoes in the corner. “We shall find them,” I said. “We shall have no difficulty. Vinç Clarke, one of England’s fabulous fannish characters, has declared that North Irish Fandom is remarkably homogenous. I am the genius, therefore the others must be homos.”

“That was not like Lee Jacobs talking like Burbee,” he pointed out. “That was like Willis talking like Lee Jacobs talking like Burbee. That was a lousy Willis-type pun. Are you *sure* you have Impeccable Taste?”

“Burbee has said so,” I pointed out reprovingly.

“I am sorry,” he said humbly. “It is just that I cannot become accustomed to the honour of being a fabulous Burbee-type character. Could I not be a fabulous Harris-type character instead?”

“Very well, Randolph,” I said. “I know how difficult it is to be a fabulous Burbee-like character. Even I should find it difficult were it not for the Impeccability of my Taste. After we have finished breakfast I shall go to my fabulous attic where I have *Fandangoes* which list the characteristics of these homos. Meanwhile I can tell you that I understand they are fans who prefer to go about with men rather than girls.”

Harris went out into the morning.

Some hours later he returned. “I have found no less than three homosexuals,” he said.

“Randolph,” I said, “I am proud of you. What are their names?”

“Peggy Martin, Sadie Shaw and Madeleine Willis,” he said.

“Randolph,” I said, “I am no longer proud of you. You have made a mistake. These are not homosexuals.”

“But they go about with men instead of girls,” he protested. “They are effeminate.”

“Randolph,” I said, “These *are* girls. I fear you have been concentrating too much on your fanac. Since you have been out I have been reading my *Fandangoes*. It seems that homosexuals are men who act like girls, have high voices, wear strange clothes etc.”

Harris went out into the afternoon. Some hours later he returned. “Bob Shaw wears a green corduroy jacket,” he said doubtfully.

“No,” I said, “Bob Shaw is a fabulous Burbee-like character like ourselves, who collaborated on *The Enchanted Duplicator*. He is above

suspicion.”

“Well,” he said, “George Charters wears shirts with coloured pockets.”

“No,” I said, “George Charters is also a fabulous fannish character. He cut the stencils for *The Enchanted Duplicator* and is above suspicion. That shirt is merely part of his cowboy set which he wears while reading Max Brand.”

“Well,” he said desperately, “James White helps pro editors off mountains and lies in hotel corridors passing notes under their doors until walked on by chambermaids.”

“Randolph,” I said, “you are wrong again. The pro editor in question was a female-type creature called Bea Mahaffey. James White is a fabulous fannish character too.”

Harris went out into the night. Some hours later he returned. He had a distraught look on his face, like Laney finding out that E.E. Evans had several stamps he needed for his collection.

“There are no more fans in Northern Ireland,” he said.

“Very well, Randolph,” I said. “You may finish your breakfast. Do you prefer mimeo or hecto?”

“No!” He cried. “You, with your Impeccable Taste, have declared that there must be homosexuals in Northern Irish fandom. It is my Ghod-given duty to expose them. I realize that James White, George Charters, and Bob Shaw are above suspicion, but the others I mentioned answer your description. I shall denounce Peggy Martin, Sadie Shaw, and Madeleine Willis. I shall run them out of fandom.”

“Randolph,” I said patiently, “Calm yourself. I explained this to you. These fans are *girls*.”

“No!” he said wildly, “They are men! Homosexuals!”

He began to roll about the floor, frothing at the mouth. “I shall expose them!” he screamed. “Perverts! That Madeleine Willis is the worst of the lot. He has been sleeping with a man for years!”

“Randolph,” I said. “Randolph. She is a girl.”

“NO!” he cried. “A queer! A homo! Painted and padded! Disgusting! It must be exposed!”

“Randolph,” I said. “I assure you that Madeleine Willis is a girl. I am in a position to know.”

He rose to his feet, a wild gleam in his eye. “Let her prove it!” he shouted. “Let her prove it to me!”

I looked at him for a few minutes.

“Very well, Randolph,” I said. “You may call me Oscar.”

WAWCRHBSJWGATWCMWPMSSACW, July
1954

The Consternation of Orion

.....*One of the cleverest pleas for material for someone else's fanzine.....*

It was James White who first noticed it. He belongs to the BIS and reads the articles in *Astounding* (though of course he doesn't understand them any more than you or I) and he's got what, among fans, passes as a keen serious constructive scientific mind. You would realize this if you ever saw him sailing his motorboat in my bath or flying paper aeroplanes in my living room. All his work shows his deep understanding of the theory of wave mechanics.

Some of the rest of us had of course noticed that odd things were happening in fandom. You couldn't miss it. Fanzines folding and other ones starting with bewildering rapidity. Those that survived changing editors, publishers, formats and titles every issue. Eighth Fandom succeeding Seventh Fandom while Sixth Fandom was loudly protesting its continued existence and Ninth Fandom was rampant in the crudzines. Fans becoming BNFs and retiring into FAPA or OMPA before anyone has heard of them. English fandom active. Derek Pickles paying out money. The London Circle publishing a fanzine. Obviously there was some force at work shaking the very structure of the microcosm.

It was however James White who noticed that each wave of inexplicable phenomena occurred just after the eighth of every other month, and who made the correct deduction.

The explanation came to him as he was re-reading George O. Smith's "Pattern For Conquest". In this story, you will remember, the hero forcibly increases the speed of a beam of light. Since in this universe it is a natural law that the speed of light is constant at 186,000 miles per second, our intrepid hero and his accelerated lightbeam were flung into another universe, one whose natural laws were such that a lightbeam of that speed *could* exist.

James cleverly reasoned that something similar was happening in fandom, and identified the fannish equivalent of the Mad Scientist. It was Paul Enever, an apparently normal happy-go-lucky fan who concealed beneath his innocent exterior a wild and desperate resolve.

He was going to publish a regular fanzine.

Now in the savage early days of our fannish civilization many foolish and ignorant people attempted to publish regular fanzines. Only gradually was it realized that such a thing is quite impossible. The natural laws of fandom simply do not permit it. After this had been proven beyond doubt a countless number of times, the concept of a regular fanzine was relegated to the region of chimeras along with Perpetual Motion and the Philosopher's Stone.

Until Enever came along. No one knows what complex and intricate machine is concealed in the framework of that flatbed duplicator of his, and it is better thus. There are things into which the mind of man is not meant to pry, mysteries so awful that they are better left undiscovered. Suffice it to say that by the use of this devilish machine Enever contrived to strain the very fabric of the fannish continuum, and published a regular fanzine.

The results we see all around us, in ever more dreadful form. We live in a strange, half-lit fandom, in transition to the Unknown. All around are the portents of approaching chaos. Nothing is secure or certain any more. Awful things confront us on every side. Already the graves are yawning open and giving up their dead. They stalk among us, the Undead, their disintegrating corpses sending neofen away screaming with terror. Rosenblum and Tucker in the tattered shrouds of *The New Futurian* and *Le Zombie*, Harry Turner, D.R. Smith, Dennis Tucker, Nigel Lindsay, Sam Youd, Damon Knight, all walking the earth again as if they were alive.

Friends, we must turn Enever from his mad course before it is too late. We must make him go irregular: preferably more frequent, but at least irregular. A band of stalwarts have by a clever ruse delayed publication of *Orion* No. 5 by two days and earned a brief respite, but it is not enough. Enever is still bent on his mad endeavour and all our arguments and blandishments have proved to no avail. We need your help, for there is only one way left. The man is a True Fan at heart. We must deluge him with manuscripts and letters of such transcendental brilliance that they will tempt him to alter a publication date to fit one of them in. This is our only choice if fandom as we know it is to survive.

I know it is a lot to ask, but imagine the alternative. One morning we may wake up to find ourselves in another fandom altogether, one where fanzines appear on schedule, faneds keep promises, and Projects materialize as planned. What's wrong with that, do I hear some dewy-cheeked neofan say? Child, think! What would become of Vinç Clarke? Have you forgotten

*SFN?**

* “*SFN* [*Science Fantasy News*] was the title of Vinç Clarke’s magazine, which was notorious for its inveterate unreliability ... (he had a penchant for Projects too at the time, none of which ever materialized). However as it happened Paul Enever deleted that [last] sentence, because presumably even by then most of his readers *had* forgotten *SFNews* ...” – WAW, in one of his letters of explanation and encouragement to the publisher [of *The Willis Papers*].

Orion #6, October 1954

Film Notes ... or Something

..... “Stuart Metchette wrote me after he read this article and said that while he’s never gotten into a cinema for jampots, he had while a child gotten in for a jar of cooking fat; he said this was an example of getting in by de-grease. I said it seemed more an example of ‘out of the frying pan into the foyer’.” – WAW, 1957.

I’d like to enter a provisional claim to be the last fan to have seen *Rocketship XM*. I saw it for the first – and last – time the other day. If there are any fans who haven’t seen it yet, I say to them, “Go and see this film if you’re down in the dumps – that’s where it’s showing.” At least that’s where it is showing in Belfast. It went to one of the first run houses, then to the suburban chains, and now it has ended up in what a kindhearted person might call our local repertory theatres. It might give you a rough idea of what these places are like – and the rougher the idea you have the better – if I say that one of them has a notice outside, “100 PERCENT ALL TALKING”. And they don’t mean the lady behind you who has seen the film before. Everybody there has seen the film before anyway, but they don’t care. Half the audience is hiding from the police and the rest are in the impenetrable darkness of the back rows, known locally as fingerstalls.

I deliberately stayed away from *RXM* before not because I am an intellectual snob – though of course I am – but because I didn’t want to encourage the producer Robert Lippert to pull any more dirty tricks. I always act on high ethical principles like this, providing of course they don’t cause me any personal inconvenience. But by the time the film had reached the fleapits I figured that my jampot would hardly stand between Lippert and bankruptcy. (There now, I’ve run up against one of the things I don’t know about America. When you were a kid could you get into the really cheap cinemas for empty jam-jars?) I visualized Lippert sitting in his office while the filing clerks manicure his nails. The balance sheet for *RXM* is brought in. Lippert’s face drops. He picks it up hastily – it never does to lose face in the movie industry – but his knees start to tremble, throwing a couple of blond secretaries against the walls.

The Balance sheet looks something like this:

	EXPENDITURE
Shooting the film	\$3000.00
" three directors with scruples	\$3000.00
" them again with bullets	\$3000.00
Bribe to <i>Imagination</i>	\$1000.00
Technical advice, research, special effects, one Mars, one Moon, scotch tape & mousetraps	<u>\$0000.25</u>
<i>Total</i>	\$10000.25
Less Income	<u>\$10000.00</u>
<i>DEFICIT</i>	\$.25

Ruin stares Lippert in the face, because he can expect no quarter (from his enemies). He buries his face in his hands, then hastily digs it up again as a thought strikes him. He reaches for the transatlantic phone – he has very long arms – and calls his European agent. “There is only one hope for Lippert Productions,” he says. “What about that fan who hasn’t seen *RXM* yet? Is there any word from Willis?” “Yes, Boss,” says the agent, “He went to see it last night.” “Thank Ghu,” says Lippert (he is of course a Ghuist). He weeps with joy. His seventeen blond secretaries – he’s afraid of the dark – won’t have to be turned out without a roof to their mouths. “Well,” he says, “Don’t just stand there, send over what he paid for his seat!” “Must I, Boss?” says the agent. “I’m keeping my petunias in it.”

This is the end. No use any longer keeping a stiff upper Lippert. He takes a revolver out of the desk drawer and puts it in his mouth. “Cancel my engagements,” he says, “and if anybody calls tell them that I have a Colt in the head.” So saying he shoots himself both quicker and deader than his films.

Now I’m not going to review *RXM*. Honest. I know there was a glorious time when all you needed for a fanzine was an article on Dianetics and a comparison of *RXM* with *Destination Moon*, but I bravely recognize that those days are gone. We must march with the times. Progress... science... fearlessly forward... new dawn... way of life... outworn shibboleths... etc. etc. (Sorry, I’ve been listening to too many election speeches.) So I steadfastly resisted the temptation to write a brilliantly witty critique of *RXM*. One thing which made this a bit easier for me was that I couldn’t think of anything witty to say. And besides it wasn’t really such a bad film. Old Father Lippert, the movie industry’s original Pop Corn, made quite a good job of the early scenes, and it only got really annoying when the ship started to slow down *in*

space. Pardon me, Mr. Lippert, but your ship is slowing.

I'll bet no one before ever took so much time not to review a film. I hope it won't come as too much of a shock to you to know that I started out to review another film altogether and thought it would be a good idea to lead up to it by a few remarks about *RXM*. After I saw it, you see, I was discussing it with James White and Bob Shaw and we decided that given half a million dollars or a movie studio we could make a really good sf film. So if any of my readers happen to have half a million dollars or a film studio we'd be glad if you'd send them along. We'll pay postage, of course. In the meantime we thought we'd better start on the scenario and decided on a van Vogt novel. Or at least I did, because I think there is no one to touch van Vogt at his prime, or at least there wasn't until he got himself cleared of all those things that distinguished him from Hubbard – little odds and ends like engrams and ideas and ability and inspiration. James doesn't mind what sort of a film we make as long as it has a high moral tone and possibly Doris Day, and Bob couldn't object because he still owes me for all that space he bought in the last *Slant*. So van Vogt it had to be, and of all his stories I think the most photogenic would be *The Search*, if only because of the Palace of Immortality, the building with the endless corridors and the flight of steps that ended in space.

Now, after agreeing with Bob and James that the commercial movie industry would never make a fantasy movie ambitious enough to please fans I went to the cinema again the next night and was proven absolutely wrong. Not perhaps the best, but definitely the most extraordinary. It's that lavish, magnificent and incredible production *The Tales of Hoffman*. I have never seen a film, not even *Citizen Kane* or *Spectre of the Rose* or *Winterset*, which makes so few concessions to commercial ideas of what the public likes. It is just unbelievable that people would have had the nerve to sink so much money into such an uncompromising gamble. There's not a single word of spoken dialogue in it, just music and singing and dancing and trick photography and fantastically beautiful sets. It's true there are some nice girls in it, including one red-head who looks a bit like Lee Hoffman (surprisingly enough) and another who looks very like Moira Shearer (which is less surprising, since that's who it is) and a very convincing orgy that will undoubtedly be cut out by the Hays office, but what you should go and see it for are those wonderful sets. They're all in colour of course, and it's the best fantasy artwork I have ever seen. If I was a prozine editor I should buy a few

thousand stills from this film and sack all my cover artists. And if I couldn't get the stills honestly I would steal them. If my covers had punch like that I wouldn't mind if it came from illicit stills.

Pendulum #1, January 1952

The Immoral Storm by Walt Moscowillis

.....*The writings of Walter A. Willis often tends toward the intricately esoteric. But if you didn't like esotericism, you probably wouldn't have read this far.....*

To us in the 95½ Fandom, Era 17, Period 49, Stage 63 (knock Wollheim and ask Taurasi) the shattering events of the year 1952 seem as real as they did when they first took place – perhaps even more real. Few of those who took part in the great battle to clean up the Filth Fandom can have realized that their efforts would have brought about the tidy little fandom of today, with its three antiseptically clean fanmags, *Soperation Sanitas*, *Saint*, and *Flushing Newsletter*, with their three high-minded subscribers, Kleen Slater, James “Lily” White and Larry Newscap. A fandom without the slightest vestige of so-called “humour”, sober, responsible, and kept firmly in order by the paternal discipline of the prozines.

Ragnarok, “The Twilight of the Bawds”, opened quietly. Towards the end of 1951 our revered St. Watkins, the Pope of Wampum, issued his first Papal Bull. In this long message – that issue of *Dawn and the Imaginative Collector* consisted almost entirely of Bull – he called on fandom to arise against the sex maniacs. With admirable restraint and the better part of valour, he forebore to name these fans, but there can be little doubt that he was referring to F.E.G. Davis and his fanmag *Insinuations From F.E.G.* and to the notorious Keasler of *Banvariety*. Fans of today will find this hard to believe, but these blackguards went so far as to publish anything they thought interesting or amusing, even when it dealt with s-x. Let us be thankful that nothing like this can happen today, now that fan-eds have realized that the only way to be sure of not giving offence is to avoid everything interesting or amusing and confine themselves to reprinting from *Dawn and the Imaginative Collector*.

Fandom’s response was at first very galling to St. Watkins. Like many other prophets he was stoned by the unbelievers. But he braved the shower of gallstones and finally aid arrived from an unexpected quarter. He lifted his eyes toward the setting sun and to his side there strode that staunchest of

allies, none other than our beloved St. Francis.

St. Francis de Laney had for many years been waging a lone war against certain aspects of s-x in fandom. Without fear or favour he had spoken out on every occasion when it seemed appropriate, and on many when it did not. No considerations of personal friendship or enmity lay behind his disinterested campaign – the principle was all. So, when St. Watkins made his clarion call for the suppression of all s-x in fandom, St. Francis, in the fabulous *Quandry*, invoked his help in putting down the particular form of s-x he had dedicated his life to eradicating. This was a considerable sacrifice for St. Francis, for he did not see eye to eye with St. Watkins on other matters, but he had not spared fandom in his unremitting propaganda, and now he did not spare himself.

But even now fandom was reluctant to turn from its evil ways. The voice of St. Francis had been heard daily throughout the land denouncing the evil practices of certain fans, but since he never thought to tell fandom exactly who the offenders were, fandom was at a loss to know whom to cast out. They were eager to do so, if only so that St. Francis and themselves could have some peace, but although they carefully studied every fanzine for signs of a fundamental bias towards some base subject, the only ones they could find were edited by St. Francis and his friends. The fan in the street was baffled. The march of CFF seemed to have ended in a *cul-de-sac*.

A miracle was called for. And then, like a sign from heaven, it came. Fandom was rocked to its foundations by the most startling disclosure of all time, the N3F Scandal.

It is interesting to speculate how long the infamy in the inner circles of N3F might have continued had they not been betrayed by one of their most trusted henchmen. The rest of the N3F Directorate had been fiendishly cunning. They had devoted just enough time to a mock attack on *Banvariety* to prevent fandom asking too loudly what they were doing, and they had taken special care to prevent any copies of the *National Fantasy Fan* from reaching European fans whose keen perceptions they had, as it proved, good reason to dread.

It was doubly unfortunate for them that R.C. Higgs' conscience smote him at the very date when the October '51 issue was being prepared, for a strange accident had made it possible for Higgs to destroy the whole cesspool of N3F by the simple, if unprecedented, act of sending copies of the Official Organ to the European members.

During Christmas of that year copies of the October issue came into the hands of European N3F members Harris and Willis. From that moment the N3F Directorate was doomed. Both these fans would have perused their copies very carefully in any case, if only because they were apparently worth a dollar, but on this occasion they subjected the entire magazine to the closest semantic analysis. It was obvious to them that Higgs must have had some ulterior motive in sending them voting papers and literature for an election which had already taken place.

It was Harris who first noticed the all-revealing sentence that spelled the downfall of the vast sink of iniquity that was the N3F Directorate. Higgs had worded the sentence so cunningly that while it would escape the notice of the rest of the N3F Directors in their licentious stupor, it conveyed a message to clean living and keen minded fen like Harris and Willis that was unmistakable in its stark and dreadful clarity. The fateful sentence read:

“Ed. note. In fairness to both members running for the office of president, I suggest that the winner of the office choose the *looser* to fill the office of secretary-treasurer.”

With the revelation that the criterion of success in N3F was *looseness*, fandom rose up in arms against the N3F Directorate. The whole seething mass of dreadful corruption was dragged into the light. St. Francis exposed the real reason for Sneary’s interest in Young Fandom, Elsberry exposed the wild night life of Upton, Wyoming, Les and Es Cole revealed the hideously perverted mind that lay behind the lace frills and odd formats of G.M. Carr’s APazines, and Jack Irwin exposed the White Slave traffic being carried on in the *Kaymar Trader*.

All these fiends were at once run out of fandom, along with Keasler, Rotsler, Nelson, Bloch, Burbee, Moffatt, Tucker and Ackerman. Shortly afterwards Harris and Willis voluntarily retired from fandom, closely followed by Hoffman, McCain, Vick, Burwell, Elsberry, Boggs, Fabun, Venable, Ish, Pesetsky, the Coles, Riddle, Conner, Silverberg, Hickman, and several others. Laney, from force of habit, brought up the rear.

With nothing left in fandom but the very cream of the cream – the very clots – peace reigned supreme. The fanzines that remained were combined into the four best, in accordance with the Watkins Plan. But within a year a terrible catastrophe struck Watkins. The joint Editorial Board was enlarged to two, and *Dawn and the Imaginative Collector* was considered unworthy to be

published. Rather than continue it as a hootchzine Watkins took a short course from Bob Tucker and successfully committed suicide.

So at the present day only one of these great leaders remains in our midst. In a recent interview for *Flushing Newsletter*, St. Francis announced, reflectively sticking pins into a wax doll, that he was at last going to retire from ex-fandom. "I may still insult a mere dozen or so fans every day," he explained, "but no more. I am getting old, and the strain of ex-fandom is becoming too much for me. I shall become an active fan like Duggie Fisher and have a little rest for a change. Besides I seem to have lost interest. It was all very well when I was fighting the good fight to rid fandom of perverts, but now all the homos have left fandom." He looked dazed. "I feel somehow as if the bottom has dropped out of my life."

Opus #2, January 1952

How I Write My Columns

I got a fanzine the other day in which the editor had scrawled: “How about something from your talented pen?” Now, I hate to disappoint people like this, but I’m afraid I’ve lost my talented pen. I have other pens of course, but none of them has half the talent that that one had. It was the most talented pen you ever saw. For one thing, it could write in any colour you liked. Just choose your colour and that pen would write in it, provided of course you used the right ink. Furthermore it was one of those you could empty by pushing a little button at the top. If you ever got into a fight you could just draw your pen and let the enemy have it, a deadly deluge of ink all over his face. Talk about the pen being mightier than the sword? Why, you could leave your adversary blue-black! Another thing about this pen was that it had more things to unscrew than any single article you ever saw. This was a tremendous asset to someone like me, who has spent the best years of his life absentmindedly unscrewing things and taking them apart. (Once I went on a long bus ride through very dull country. I had to walk home, and the Company is still wondering what ever became of that bus.) Not only did the cap of this pen screw off in the usual way, but the cap itself had a little cap you could screw off, and then you could unscrew the clip. Nor did even that exhaust the resources of this wonderful pen. The barrel unscrewed in two so that the morbidly curious could peep at that obscene looking sac that grows inside fountain pens, and on top of that there was the cap over the plunger. I spent many happy hours screwing that pen. There should be more pens like it. Every young man should have some such innocent occupation to distract him from the temptations of this wicked world. I venture to say that if everyone spent their time unscrewing fountain pens the world wouldn’t be in the state it’s in today. It would be a lot inkier.

But enough of Willis the Thinker. As I was saying, I lost my pen and had to fall back on the typewriter. A very painful thing to do, let me tell you. It made quite an impression on the typer too, and for a while it would only write Laney-type articles. Sometimes I think the experience must have warped it. If there are any faneds in the audience tonight who want me to write them some really good material I suggest they send me a portable typewriter. After all, the more enterprising faneds send their writers stencils.

Why not do the thing properly? Why stop at stencils? What's the use of stencils without something to type on them with? I should like to see all faneds sending their contributors typewriters. Especially me.

I would like a nice portable typewriter. A talented one if possible, but I don't really mind as long as it's nice and light. I could write a good many more articles and columns and things if I had a lighter typer. You see, the one I have weighs roughly six tons without the paper in it, and I can't rest it on my knees. At least I suppose I could, but then I might want to walk again. This typer was built in an age when things were made to last, probably Ancient Egypt. When they'd got themselves limbered up good building the pyramids they turned to and built this typer. I'll bet that when this planet is nothing but an asteroid belt circling a dying sun, one of those asteroids will be this very typer. I am pretty sure that when it was first made it had little chisels at the ends of the keys.

Incidentally, it has a carriage exactly a yard long.

I remember once I pressed the TAB key.

I will never do *that* again.

Never.

However, if anyone here is interested in a spaceship drive, let them come over and press this TAB key. Just as long as they let me get well away first. I don't like to talk about it much, but when you press that TAB key, things *happen*. There is a roaring noise like an express train thundering over your eardrum, the carriage whirs past at roughly three times the speed of light, and then the entire structure of the universe shakes as the irresistible force meets its old friend the immovable object. I don't like to raise anyone's hopes unduly, but those earth tremors that were thought to mean a Russian bomb test occurred just about the time I pressed the TAB key on my typer.

Well, as you know, all typers with built-in interstellar drives are inclined to be on the heavy side, so I keep this machine on the big table over by the window. But it's cold out there, and the chair is hard. Usually I find myself deciding that the article isn't gelling nearly as well as my blood and that I'd better take them both over to the fire. That's the end of the article for the evening.

Then one day I had a brilliant idea. Anyone looking at me at the time would have seen a little balloon floating over my head with "!" in it. I would make a little bedtable for the typer – just a piece of wood with two shorter pieces for legs. I would be able to sit on the sofa in front of the fire with the

typer over my knees and hammer away happily at it. I might even put the hammer down now and then and do some typing. It was a wonderful idea. Only six hours sooner said than done. Now, I thought to myself, having no other espers to think @, I will be able to *write*. Fandom will ring with the name of Willis. Fandom will be deluged with high grade Willistuff, fine hotblooded material full of life and warmth, deep, penetrating, profound and subtle, yet withal touched with sympathy and warm human interest, and lit with a saving grace of humour. I sat down on the sofa and placed the trestle over my knees. It was perfect, steady as Redd Boggs, and yet I had plenty of room to move about. There was even room on the trestle for fanzines and ashtrays and other of the columnist's simple needs. I was just ready to start when I realized that the typer was still away over there on the table. Silly of me, ha ha, but of course it was just a matter of putting the typer on the trestle and carrying it back. I lift the typer onto the trestle. I stagger back to the sofa. Comes the grey dawn of disillusionment. This typer is really *heavy*. I can not sit down with it. Our sofa is one of those deep ones. People have to be pulled out of it with ropes. I knew quite well that if I tried to sit down holding that typer I should finish up either in the foundations of the house or that the momentum of the enormous mass would spread me in a thin layer over the back of the sofa. And that would never do – Madeleine had the sofa cleaned the other day. The outlook was grim. But was Willis daunted?

Yes.

Nevertheless I tried again. The thing to do was obviously to lift the typer onto the trestle while it was in position. I moved a chair over to the sofa, put the typer on it, and put the trestle over my knees again. Then I tried to lift the typer onto it. Alas for the vain hopes of mankind. I just could not lift that typer. I had to reach up over the arms of the sofa, a position in which I could get no leverage. If I sat too far up I would knock over the trestle and find myself holding the typer with no place to put it, crying weakly for help. So here I am back at the window, feeling like a prozine editor getting into training for Tuktoyuktuk, and appealing to fandom for a portable typewriter. In return I can offer one solidly constructed bedtable, only slightly soiled with blood, tears and sweat.

Confusion #7, 1951 or 1952

Comes the Revelation

The Corporeal manifestation of the divine being who founded the Roscoeite faith, known in his bodily form as Corporeal Arthur Rapp, recently announced a new revelation to fankind. This was, on the surface, merely a suggestion that fandom should adopt a new calendar. The importance of this suggestion was recognized even by the infidel Hoffman, for she quoted it both in this magazine and in *Quandry*, but we Roscoeites know the great Rapp would not have intended his message to be given such a frivolous interpretation. No, we must look deeper. We must read between the lines – and if necessary, up and down the margins. Like many other mystical utterances, this one was expressed in terms unintelligible to the heathen, and comprehensible to the devout only after *fasting and meditation*. Since I have been sitting here for the last half hour wondering when Madeleine is going to make my supper, I am probably one of the first fans to be in a position to interpret the Rapp Revelation correctly.

First, we must ask ourselves, *how* is the existing calendar wrong for fandom? Well, first, obviously the days are too short. No actifan ever finds them long enough for all the fanning he has to do. Secondly, the years are too long. The interval between conventions is much too great. And thirdly, the months are too short. Ask anyone who has tried to produce a monthly fanzine, even Lee Hoffman. But none of these things can be changed by law. They depend on the rotation of the Earth on its axis, of the Earth round the sun, and of the moon round the Earth. And that, friends, is the meaning of the Rapp Message! The calendar of this planet is not natural for us *because we are natives of another*. We really *are* star-begotten!!

Let us visualize a civilization which has developed an interstellar drive. What sort of people would they be? For the answer, look at our own world. How many non-fans do you know who have the slightest interest in space flight? Not one! Who are the only people who are interested? Science fiction fans! Therefore, any great intergalactic civilization would be a *fan* civilization. Imagine it, a galaxy full of fans, all writing and publishing, feuding and organizing, coming and going in fannish friendship? And imagine a great space-ship, manned by neofen, carrying a group of galactic BNFs to some Cosmic Convention. It crashed on an obscure planet. The

drive cannot be repaired. The radio is smashed. They are lost. With true fannish courage they decide to build their life anew on this savage world. Bravely they fight the hostile environment while still struggling to preserve their fannish way of life. But the odds are too great. As time goes on the carefully hoarded stocks of mimeograph ink become exhausted. The mimeographs themselves rust and fall to pieces. The old fannish traditions begin to die out. The Sacred Fanzines decay and are gradually forgotten. Inter-marriage takes place with the natives. After many thousands of years the fannish culture has disappeared, and all traces of it have been obliterated. But no, not all! Preserved in the genes and chromosomes of humanity the fannish mind lives on. And every now and then there is born to apparently normal parents a viable mutation which we refer to as a "fan". With some deep subconscious racial memory he senses his fannish ancestry. He knows he is different from the crass non-fans around him. Through ridicule and persecution he preserves the living flame handed down to him from his god-like ancestors. Knowing deep down inside him that this world is Not Enough, he turns his eyes up to the stars. To home!

Amateur fan astronomers should look for a planet circling a G-type sun every eight months, rotating on its axis every 30 hours, and with a satellite having a six-week periodicity.

Sol (issue not identified), early 1950s

Shaw – Ireland’s Gift to English Fandom

.....In July of 1952, Bob Shaw left Belfast for London, and Irish Fandom joined with Vinç Clarke to publish The Bob Shaw Appreciation Magazine. Struck by this tribute, Bob returned to Belfast for a time before going to Canada, and then bounced home once again. Walt Willis wrote up an explanation of Bob’s background.....

The ancestry of Bob Shaw on the paternal side cannot be traced with accuracy, but a recent investigation shows that there is a strong possibility that he is in fact related to the respected Shaw family of Eastern Ireland – the same family who, it will be remembered, later changed their name by deed poll to Slopbottom. The startling news that he was actually related to George Bernard Shaw was conveyed to that great man shortly before his unhappy death.

The Shaw family settled in Ireland just before the mass emigration of the Irish to America during the 19th century, and flourished luxuriantly on the edge of the Plantation of Ulster. They reached a position of great wealth and influence during the famines of the 1840s, attaining a prestige in Ireland comparable with that of the Campbells in Glencoe, and ranking second only to Cromwell in the esteem of the Irish people. Even today their name can occasionally be seen scrawled by simple peasants on the walls, coupled with a sincere, if somewhat crude, suggestion that the populace should demonstrate their love in a practical manner.

The British Government had every reason to be grateful to the Shaws for their monumental work during the famine, especially since that work consisted not merely of one, but two great public services – the disposal of the bodies of the famine victims, and the sale to the survivors of food in the form of what are now known as *sausages*. (So called because they were first produced under *Shaw’s aegis*.) Nevertheless the ungrateful English soon showed that they were jealous of the power of the Shaws and proceeded to whittle away the basis of their vast fortunes by a series of acts of injustice (The Corrupt Practices Act, The Public Morality Act, The Public Health Act,

etc. etc.). Even the cultural life of the Shaws, in spite of their services in the Bore War, was undermined by the harsh Corn Laws. Embittered by this persecution, the family turned against the English and on the outbreak of the First World War and the Irish Civil War they, like many true Irish patriots, went underground.

Emerging from the family vault at the cessation of hostilities, the more talented members of the family entered the public service, some of them attaining important stations in which they ministered to the needs of the common man. Indeed it is not too much to say that they dedicated themselves to attendance on the public convenience. It is often said, if not in so many words, that the nature of this work is reflected in the personality of Bob Shaw and certainly he shows in every aspect of his daily life his thoughts of the feelings of others and his determination to provide any assistance to his fellow men that lies in his power, short of actual help. For example, not only does he graciously allow his name to be linked with our little magazine *Slant*, but he visits us occasionally while we are at work, and from time to time goes so far as to look up from his perusal of my correspondence to mutter odd words of encouragement. (We are almost *sure* they are words of encouragement.) Moreover, he is generous to a fault with promises of contributions to our little journal and has several times actually supplied the contributions themselves. He also frequently regales us with detailed accounts of the many stories he writes for the prozines, and we often think what a pity it is that these amazing stories cannot have a wider audience – or at least a different one. But unfortunately the blind and illogical prejudice of these ignorant pro editors in favor of the outworn shibboleths of “syntax” shows no signs of abating, though Mr. Gold and Mr. Campbell keep urging him to continue trying to place his stories in *ASF* and *Galaxy* respectively.

While abroad, Bob is still his own inimitable self, and leaves behind him an impression that is not readily effaced. While staying at the Epicentre, for instance, he set an example to us all by tactfully remaining in bed until breakfast was made so that he would not be in the way, and afterwards would go to immense trouble to efface himself so as not to disturb the people who were washing the dishes. And yet in his own quiet way he contrived to show his appreciation of all that was done for him, by forcing himself to eat with a convincing appearance of relish all the food that was placed in front of him, and much that was not. After their experience I am sure the Epicentrics will join all of us here in heartily endorsing the resolution recently passed at the

Belfast Congress of Dispensing Chemists, when they declared Bob Shaw to be “The Fan We Would Most Like To Dispense With.”

Note to English Fandom: Now that you know what Bob Shaw is really like, won't you *please* send him back? Of course it couldn't be affection we feel for this character, but we've got sort of used to having him around and I don't know how we're going to get along without him. I warn you, if you don't give him back you won't get any serious constructive fanning done. He will hang around making you split your sides with laughter and being such good company that you won't want to write letters or publish fanzines to keep yourself amused. Don't say we didn't warn you. He will be the death of English fandom just as he was the death of us.

Anyway, take good care of him.

Bob Shaw Appreciation Magazine, July 1952

Autobiographical Notes

.....Walt Willis writes interestingly on all subjects, and especially on subjects on which he is best informed, such as himself. Here we have a fast coverage of the time which passed between the incidents related in “The Subcutaneous Fan” and now.....

If some enterprising hobbyist manufacturer ever starts manufacturing “Fandom Kits” he can come to me for a testimonial. I can recommend the hobby to anyone with a surplus of mental energy, a sense of humour and an interest in people. (A liking for science fiction is no handicap.) It seems to me one of the few hobbies that give an actual and continual return commensurate with the energy expended. Admittedly if I had diverted the same amount of energy into dull mundane channels I should no doubt be earning a few pounds more a month and people would be able to find their way through my front garden without a compass, but then look at what I would have missed. As a result of having become involved in fandom I have learned to type; I have acquired an intimate knowledge of the reproductive processes (printing and duplicating I mean, not sex – though I could have learned about that too at some conventions); I have acquired a rudimentary facility for stringing words together; I have been to Oshkosh, Cheyenne and Tallahassee; I have introduced Lee Hoffman to Forry Ackerman, watched the latter sneer at the Grand Canyon as mere terrestrial scenery and taken the former to the Okefenokee Swamp; I have learned to drive a car; I have been offered the Associate Editorship of a leading promag; I have fixed the lock on the bathroom door (it would never have been done if Bea Mahaffey hadn’t been coming to stay with us); and I have met some of the most likeable and interesting people in the world.

Thinking of all this, I sometimes wish it had occurred to me to write to the letter column of those *Astoundings* I used to read in the early Thirties; I might so easily have entered fandom along with Bob Tucker. But for some reason I didn’t, and in the late Thirties I stopped collecting promags and turned my attention to women. Fortunately I wasn’t a completist. After a while I started going steady with one Madeleine Bryan. We’d been going together for quite a while when one day she darted in a newsagent’s shop. I followed her because I’d noticed a copy of *Astounding* in the window, and

found she'd just bought it. She had, it turned out, been reading science fiction for years. It didn't seem so important or surprising at the time but as the newer Campbell authors, mainly Van Vogt, made their appearance our interest began to increase. By the time we were married (1945) we knew to the day when the next British Edition of *Astounding* was due out, and sometimes we used to read it together.

Then one day in early 1947 I came across in a secondhand bookshop a copy of the American Edition of *ASF* for January of that year. I was shocked to the core. The last time I had seen the American edition of a science fiction magazine was in 1939, and I had innocently assumed that the miserable little British quarterly reprint was all there was of it. It hadn't occurred to me that there could exist any fiend so black-hearted as to suppress any of it, no matter how great the wartime paper shortage. But here was the evidence of the crime. This magazine was monthly, had twice the wordage of the BRE*, and had contained *serials*. Moreover this had been going on for *years*! Filled with a burning sense of injustice we embarked on a determined investigation of all the secondhand bookshops in Belfast. We didn't find any more *ASFs*, but we did find a copy of *Fantasy*, a short lived British promag, containing a letter from a James White of Belfast. I wrote inviting him to come and see us, mentioning casually my large collection of British Editions. We soon found that the James was the reason we had never found any other American ones in the secondhand bookshops. James had been camping on their doorsteps for years and had acquired almost a dozen. We regarded with awe and envy this wealth beyond the dreams of avarice.

* BRE – British Reprint Edition.

James and I at once joined forces, and for months our only interest was in furthering our collections. We wrote to all the dealers we could find, and joined Ken Slater's *Operation Fantast*. At that time Ken was enclosing with his mailings various one-page fanzines by various fans. By now James and I had read each other's collections, had want lists written in blood with all the dealers, and had nothing left to do but gnaw our fingers. We got the idea of producing one of these fan magazines as part of our collecting drive. But we hadn't access to a typewriter or publishing equipment and after making enquiries from professional duplicators we rather lost interest in the idea. Then one day I happened to be in the loft of a shop where one of my friends worked. There, lying in a heap of junk was a curious looking machine. I

asked what it was and was told it was a printing press the boss had got to print letterheads on and later thrown away. I smuggled it out under my coat and we started right away. We had only enough type to print about a third of a page, so we spread it out with em spaces between the words and James made woodcuts with plywood and a razor blade to fill the rest of the space. We called the magazine *Slant*. We sent out the first three issues free.

By the fourth issue, however, we had progressed to 42 pages, a subscription rate, and linocuts. James' work in this medium has never been surpassed in the history of fanmag art. Manly Banister, editor of *Necromantikön*, was so impressed that he crated up his old press, a massive brute of a thing, and shipped it off to us. When this arrived we really went to town, with photo-engravings and multicoloured linocuts. But by now each issue was getting so ambitious that the intervals between them were getting to be something like six months. *Slant 6* was probably the most ambitious handset magazine ever printed and after it we felt we needed a rest. Besides James' eyesight was going and I'd found a new type of fanactivity. So far I'd only written what I had to write to fill up blank pages in *Slant*, but recently I found I was tending to have several hundred words left over. It seemed to me it might be a good idea to foist them off on some other editor, so when a new mag called *Quandry* arrived I offered to do a column for it. Freed from the inhibitory feeling that every word I wrote would have to be set up in type, I let myself go and spread myself over page after page of *Quandry*. Nevertheless the column turned out to be popular. So much so that within a year Shelby Vick of Florida had started a campaign to bring me over to the Chicon. By the middle of 1952 it had succeeded. I travelled about the States – New York, Chicago, Salt Lake City, Los Angeles, Kansas City, Panama City, Savannah – for a hectic four weeks. When I got home I was in a state of complete mental exhaustion, partly from the strain of the journey, and partly from the effort of all the fan writing I'd done in the previous months. But even during a long bout with pneumonia in the following Spring, I never really lost touch with fandom. For one thing it would have seemed ungrateful after all fandom had done for me. I soon became active again ... but in a different way. It no longer seemed sensible to devote most of my spare time to pure drudgery like setting type. In the old days James and I had been quite happy to sit working all evening listening to symphony concerts on the radio, but now we had a third fan, Bob Shaw, and we kept putting down our composing sticks to talk. We did produce one more issue of *Slant*, Number 7,

but it was mostly mimeographed and we didn't feel happy about it. And yet once having known the comparative luxury of duplicating, we could never go back to typesetting. So *Slant* fell into suspended animation. I egged James into starting his pro-writing career and in collaboration with my friend Chuck Harris of England started a new mimeoed mag called *Hyphen*, strictly for amusement only.

Which brings you more or less up to date. We have so much fun with *Hyphen* that I doubt if *Slant* will ever appear again, and yet I hate to proclaim it officially dead. I shall have to make up my mind about it one of these days. One thing I'm sure of, and that is that I'll stay in fandom. I have met more fans than probably anyone in the world except Forry Ackerman, and I'm still not disenchanted with them. They can be infuriating at times, but at least they're never dull.

Canfan #25, June 1955

The Immortal Teacup

.....In SF Digest, Walt started a column on the history of Anglofandom. Since it consisted largely of an article by Bill Temple, reprinted from Novae Terrae (1938), we decided to take a trimmed version of Walt's introduction to the article. Besides, we had to fill just one page here to bring our page count out correctly.....

“I shall never break completely with fandom.” – Arthur C. Clarke, VoM #40, March 1945.

Some years ago Rick Sneary sent a questionnaire to various prominent fans. One of his questions was whether it would be a good thing if all fans lived in the same town. With uncommon common sense, most of the fans replied that it wouldn't, because if fans could talk to one another instead of writing, some of the most enjoyable of fan activities would tend to die away, such as fan publishing and letter writing. In London, this is what has actually happened. It has at once the biggest number of fans and the least activity of any city in the English speaking world.

But London fandom is far from dead, whatever unkind things we provincial barbarians may say about it from time to time. Old English fans never die, they merely fade away into the saloon bar of the White Horse Tavern, where every fan in the greater London area congregates on Thursday nights. Coming into this place, the astounded neo-fan feels like his American counterpart entering FAPA and encountering the giants of a former era. But the White Horse is no elephant graveyard, full of whited sepulchres fulfilling their minimum activity requirements. It is more like the Elysian fields. There, any Thursday night, can be seen our ancestors, the legendary heroes from the *Fancylopedia*, alive and fanning still after their fashion.

So that quotation was not a gibe. Clarke has not broken with fandom, however little he may be known to fandom at large as a fan. He fans still, in the circumscribed way of the London Circle, that microcosm in the microcosm. And as everyone knows who has ever been to the White Horse, or attended a London Convention, Clarke is a very important fan indeed. So important that when Norman Ashfield suggested some time ago that I write a History of British Fandom, he added, “But who knows the full story, except

Arthur C. Clarke?”

Well, Ted Carnell, for one, I should think, but we were talking about Clarke. I can air my Carnell Knowledge later. At the time he made the promise quoted above, Clarke was a Flight Lieutenant in the RAF and had just sold his first story. As for the man himself, I have met him only a couple of times and found him very amiable. I can't really say, on that acquaintance, what justification there is for his nickname of "Ego", but on the one hand, it has certainly stuck, and on the other it seems to be used with real affection. As for instance by William F. Temple, that old friend and sparring partner of Clarke's, who shared "The Flat" with him at 88 Gray's Inn Road, one of the most famous addresses in the history of fandom.

SF Digest #4, November 1951

In Defence of the Pun

.....A few words by one of the world's foremost proponents of this particular form of wit.....

In the last FAPA mailing but one Harry B. Warner said something so dreadful that I can hardly force my hand to write it down. (Three of my fingers are willing enough, but my thumb and forefinger are opposed.) He said – Ghod forgive him – that the pun was “the simplest and lowest form of humour”. Comes the next FAPA mailing and I see that Warner is still alive – by FAPA standards anyway. He has not been struck down. Obviously Simon Salt Peter, patron saint of punsters, has left it to me to warn the Warner, and to prove that the pun is not only the most complex, but the very highest – I might even say the all-highest – form of humour.

1. **The Argument from Authority.** In the two most famous books in the world, the humour consists almost entirely of puns. Everyone knows that this is so with Shakespeare, but the Bible is an even more striking example. This is not generally regarded as a humorous work – not by Christians anyway – but there *is* one joke in it, and that joke is a pun. I refer of course to the famous verse: “Thou art Peter, and on this rock I shall build my church.” If I may say so without being impious, this is not a very good pun, but then it has lost in translation. In the original language of course the word for “Peter” meant also a rock or stone – c.f. the Latin “petrus” or the French “Pierre”. It was on this pun that the whole structure of organized Christianity was based, and on it the Roman Catholic Church still maintains its claim to the apostolic succession. Can anyone doubt that the history of Christianity and the western world would have been very different if Peter's name had happened to be “Sandy”?

Truly, as Ackerman said in the *Fancylopedia*, “the pun is mightier than the sword”, and now that it and it alone of all forms of humour has approval at the very highest level there hardly seems to be any need to look for any other recommendation. I might just point out that puns occur throughout the highest works of English literature, from stray lines like “tread softly, for ye tread on hallowed ground” to the later works of James Joyce which consist almost entirely of puns and wordplay. I might also quote, without looking in any particular direction, the following passage from Fowler's *Modern*

English Usage:–

“The assumption that puns are *per se* contemptible ... is a sign at once of sheepish docility and a desire to seem superior. Puns are good, bad, or indifferent, and only those who lack the wit to make them are unaware of the fact.”

2. The Argument from First Principles. In the “Preface to the Lyrical Ballads” Wordsworth came off with one of those statements so profound that one remembers them all one’s life and applies them to every situation. This statement was to the effect that the basis of all aesthetic satisfaction lay in the recognition of similarity in dissimilarity and vice versa. This is very true when you come to think of it, and it might also be an actual definition of the pun. But the pun is not only the most artistic forms of humour, it is different in kind and superior to all other types. The origin of laughter, I suggest, is in the savage’s abrupt release of breath in relief at the unexpected downfall of a dreaded enemy. The most primitive form of humour is therefore the spectacle of the “boss symbol” slipping on a banana skin, and almost every form of humour is a variant on this. All depend for their effect on the discomfiture of other human beings – mother-in-law jokes, jokes about foreigners, jokes about people at a disadvantage in sexual positions, jokes about deaf people or morons or lunatics. All jokes are more or less sadistic. Think of any jokes you know and see how true that is. There are only two exceptions, the shaggy dog story and the pun. Even the shaggy dog story is suspect, because you are enjoying the discomfiture of your audience when they expect a point and find none. This leaves only the pun as the representative of humour in its most advanced and complex form, the very punnicle of civilization.

3. The Argument from Practice. The pun is one of the most genuine forms of humour because it is usually spontaneous. The opportunity comes and passes and only the quickest mind can seize it before it vanishes never to return. It is seldom pre-fabricated wit. For the same reason it is difficult to quote, because it usually needs an explanation of the circumstances, which spoils the element of surprise. As an illustration take the complaint in *VOM* about the artist who kept defaulting on his obligation to produce a cover. Ackerman’s comment was: “He’s got aint’s in his paints.” Ackerman kept up for years a barrage of puns like this. Not that he only made good puns. He made them *all*. But among them were some that deserve to rank with the greatest in history, puns that are remembered not just because they are clever

in themselves, but because they add meaning as well as amusement. I would hate to have to choose Ackerman's best pun – it would be a life's work – and otherwise the best example I can give is from a speech by an Irish MP in the late 19th Century. He was making an impassioned attack on Irish absentee landlords when someone shouted "Treason!" Quick as a flash he retorted: "What is treason in England is reason in Ireland, because of the absentee!"

It could be, of course, that he had a confederate in the audience. Most people who like puns have some in reserve that came to them as it were *in vacuo*, and which they file away in their memory banks to await the appropriate set of circumstances. For instance, the next time I come across one of those old-fashioned washing sets – a jug and bowl on a chest of drawers – I shall say: "Ah, ewers of water and drawers of wood!" And Bob Shaw here brought off a beauty the other day. While staying with friends he asked where the salt was and they told him it was in a jar on the shelf. When he looked the jar had fallen over and the salt spilled out. This was it. The chance of a lifetime! "The salt, dear Brutus," he said, "lies not in the jar, but on our shelves."

Wastebasket #4, 1953

“Corn” Becomes Callous

.....*Willis in a serious mood reveals a more thoughtful side of his nature.....*

In a recent issue of *Super Science*, English author Bill Temple has this remark to make about a story called “Gateway To Darkness”:

“Craig (the hero) has, apparently with the author’s approval, the blind end-justifies-the-means philosophy which we keep getting thrust at us via American films as something admirable. (There’s a typical crop just arrived in London glorifying Gable as a gambler, Bogart as a night-club owner, various others as ‘smart’ reporters, with no regard for truth or for people’s feelings, and interminable gangsters and racketeers slapping each other down monotonously.) In these things violence seems to be accepted as the only worthy solution to any problem, and the crazy values are just – crazy. Pitiable – and dangerous.

“Craig batters a guard to death and then feels wronged when the dead man’s fellow-guards rough him up a bit. He even takes their names and addresses with a view to avenging this ‘wrong’. It’s possible that the guard might have had a loving wife and children; they don’t count in Craig’s philosophy – only Craig does, and he imagines, it seems, that he’s a lord of life and death. Rather too many people are getting that idea these days, and rather too many other ones, especially authors, are taking it for granted.”

This seemed to me something that has needed saying for a long time. Admittedly, heroes killed people in the old days, even wiped out whole universes with gay abandon, but it was always done in the most honourable way and with the very best intentions. Never, no matter how intolerable the provocation, were they guilty of anything discreditable – or even credible. But nowadays we have “realism”, and they go in for torture and murder quite as enthusiastically as the villains. Now under Mr. Hubbard’s guidance they have even graduated to genocide, and the only way you can tell them from the villains is that their names are usually monosyllabic and their exploits invariably successful.

In my naivete I thought this was a bad thing, but the editor of *Super Science* reassures us: “We think violent and amoral fictions are unpleasant as a symptom of our *Zeitgeist*, but not necessarily unpleasant or dangerous itself. But what value has popular fiction if it *does not* reflect the temper of our times?”

This is such a muddle-headed piece of nitwittery that I hardly know where to start on it. In the first place, since when has s-f been supposed to reflect the temper of *our* times? Isn't that just what we've been complaining about all these years, that in s-f the twentieth century world is too much with us? Bad s-f is contemporary pulp with pseudoscientific garnishments, whereas good s-f, whether escapism or serious extrapolation, should be as much out of temper with our times as it can possibly get.

Then there's this crack about the *Zeitgeist*, which I take it is in for some other reason than to show that the editor has heard of the word. Well, it may be true that the American nation has a collective guilt-complex about dropping atomic bombs on the Japanese and needs to identify itself with heroes who throw them around like pebbles. But personally I refuse to believe that the ordinary American, or even the cultured and socially conscious reader of *Super Science Stories* thinks about the atomic bomb for more than ten minutes from one day's end to the other. The journalists over here talk the same claptrap. The nation is horrified about this, the nation in mourning over that. Looking at the nation you wouldn't notice it particularly. A little mild emotion when he is actually reading the daily papers, perhaps, but it's ten to one that the worried look on his face when he puts them down is about his girl. There are a few thousand intellectuals who think themselves into ulcers about the state of the world, but the vast majority couldn't care less. They know, if you ask them, that the world is going to hell, but they don't feel any responsibility for the actions of “them” (the government). Why should they; they weren't consulted. No, this collective consciousness is a figment of the journalistic imagination, and always has been. While the Bastille was being stormed, there was a far bigger crowd in the street queuing up for the theatre. And ask yourself how many times today you have thought about atomic war. Don't you know you're supposed to be thinking about it all the time?

Zeitgeist, indeed! When you find anyone quoting German it's a sure sign that they're going to be woollyminded. The truth is much less pretentious. It is that some years ago Hollywood discovered the commercial possibilities of

sadism. The public really IS interested in sex, and sadism has the immense advantage of being the only sexual perversion, except chastity, which can get past the Hays office. Furthermore, it is photogenic, and acceptable to even the most puritanical. You might say even especially acceptable to them. After Hollywood, the pulps, and now the editors of *Super Science Stories*, heaven help their wit, think it is part of the temper of the times. Well, I have never been to America, but I'm pretty sure that the people there are as kindly and polite as anywhere else and don't spend their spare days beating each other up *à la* Bogart, any more than we in Ireland are continually exclaiming "Begorra", and splitting one another's skulls with shillelaghs. (Really, we don't!)

As for the glorification of violence not being an unpleasant or dangerous thing, ask yourself who was to blame for Belsen or Buchenwald – *fundamentally* to blame. Not the guards, perverts or cowards as they were, not even the white-collared men in the distant offices, but the millions of kindly people who like ourselves *condoned*: who were able to put these happenings out of their minds because to them the victims were not real people, just so many Jews or Gypsies more remote than a wounded child from a stratosphere bomber. Which of us would dismember a living child? Yet many of us have done it by remote control and still sleep nights. It's not the evil that fills the world with cruelty, but the sheer stupid lack of imagination.

It's the most difficult thing in the world to make oneself realize that other men are centres of the universe, like ourselves, but it's also the most important. And anything that dulls the edge of sensibility, even the facile callousness of pulp authors, is not only dangerous and unpleasant, but damnable.

Rhodomagnetic Digest Vol 2 #5, March 1951

Up the Garden Pathology

Have you noticed how short-lived BNFs are nowadays? In the old days three years was considered the normal life cycle of a fan, from serious constructivism through BNFdom to permanent gafia, but these Seventh Fandomers seem to have speeded the process up. Nowadays us oldtimers sit back dazed as a bewildering succession of BNFs flash past us almost as suddenly as they appeared. From comet to comatose, you might say.

I have studied this phenomenon and I have come to the conclusion that it's largely the result of a new disease which I have called *annishthesia*. I know that Professor Boggs in the *Vegannish* pointed out that annishes are a plague, but as Dean Grennell is my witness I thought of it first, and as the discoverer of Stigwort's Disease I feel that my researches go more deeply into this vital matter.

Annishthesia attacks fans in the prime of life and is so much more deadly on that account, wreaking as it does such havoc among the very flower of fandom. There are two forms of it, primary annishthesia and secondary annishthesia, but the first symptoms are identical. The young and enthusiastic fan publishes several promising issues of his fanzine and a type of euphoria sets in, indicated by an insatiable thirst for egoboo. This in itself is not a serious complaint, being almost endemic in fandom. But often a young fan neglects the most obvious precautions and with a reckless expenditure of energy begins to produce more and more ambitious issues, like a child throwing stones into a pond to make splashes. This can have only one result – annishthesia sets in. He decides to publish a hundred-page annish.

In primary annishthesia, which is almost invariably fatal, the effort is too much for him and after a short fever he succumbs to permanent gafia. Those with stronger constitutions survive and eventually publish their annish. Haggard, wan, his fingers bleeding from misguided staples, his back stooped from gathering, his pores stopped up with mimeo ink, in advanced malnutrition through poverty brought on by the high cost of paper, the fan stumbles to the mailbox and mails his annish. In his ignorance he thinks his troubles are over. But no, secondary annishthesia has still to strike.

Back at home, the fan eagerly awaits the plaudits of fandom, the

prospect which has given him strength to carry on through all these months of toil and strain. He half expects to receive that very same afternoon an enthusiastic telegram from the Postal Inspector. But the days pass and there is utter silence from fandom. But the poor wretch is not dismayed – rather he is awed at the effect he has produced. Obviously, he thinks, fandom is stunned. All over the world fans are sitting around open-mouthed, numbed with admiration, refusing meals, neglecting their families and jobs while they gaze and marvel at the wondrous thing he has wrought. It is just a matter of waiting until they recover enough strength to crawl to their typers and airmail paean after paean of praise. But no. The days, weeks go by, and still no paean. (That’s why it’s called annishnesia – there’s no paean.) Finally, just as he has wildly decided that the Postmaster General is in the pay of rival faneds, two letters arrive. One is from Dave Ish, who says it’s not a patch on the *Quannish*. The other is from Redd Boggs, who says it’s not as good as the Insurgent issue of *Spacewarp*. In another week or so he gets a letter from Vince Clarke saying it’s not to be compared with the November 1945 issue of *Zenith*. He refuses to open the letter from Bob Tucker.

This is the crisis. If the fan survives this he will slowly recover. The treatment is complete rest and frequent injections of egoboo. It must also be patiently explained to him that he has unwittingly run counter to one of the fundamental laws of Fannish Thermodynamics, that comment always flows from a cold fanzine to a hot one. He has made the terrible mistake of publishing something which is too big to be read at one sitting, a zine that fans will tend to put aside to read and comment on adequately later. By which time its priority has been yielded to the latest oneshot.

However recent research has shown that there is new hope for the victim of annishnesia. In the first place, any victim who emerges from the ordeal is the stronger for it. In the second place, it seems clear now that the amount of egoboo resulting from an annish is not in fact less than it deserves. It may even be greater. What happens is that its impact is temporally as well as spatially dispersed. For one thing, dozens of fans now have guilt complexes about not praising his annish. This, like murder, will out; and over the years those fans will keep alluding to his annish in their articles, columns and editorials. It will become a legend. And in a few years he will have the joy of knowing that at this very moment some poor Neofan is being made wretched by being told that his annish “is quite good but ...”

Oops! #12, March/April 1954

How to BNF Without Tears

At this title I suppose there will be a howl of derision from the neofans in the audience. (If there are any, that is; Neofans are as rare as ladies over forty.) What, they will shout with indignation, has a bloated BNF to complain about, compared with the wretched Neofan?

Very well, let's consider a day in the life of this wretched Neofan. Bright-eyed, the little fellow wakes early, listening for the tread of the postman. His ears are so sensitive to this faint sound that he will leap out of bed, every nerve quivering, when the man is a hundred yards away ... whereas before he became a fan a whole battery of alarm clocks barely fluttered an eyelid. (Observe, parents, how the manly and educative hobby of fandom not only improves the mind, but sharpens the senses. No other hobby can make this claim.) While he waits he takes from under his pillow that wonderful letter he got yesterday and rereads it for the 85th time, savouring every intoxicating word. "Saw your letter in *Peri*," it says, "Wasn't bad." Such adulation!

He has read it only fifteen times more when he hears the nerve-shattering sound of the postman's rubber heels rounding the corner at the end of the street. He dashes downstairs, but waits behind the door. He fancied the postman looked at him a trifle oddly the last time he met him halfway down the street in his pyjamas. It may have been only because it was snowing at the time, but all the same he doesn't want to run the slightest risk of offending the postman.

Instead he lifts the flap of the letterbox and peers through. He does this more cautiously than he did yesterday, when he got the morning paper shoved halfway down his throat. Some mornings the postman passes callously by, and the whole day is ruined. All that is left is to watch him despairingly out of sight in the hope that he'll realize his mistake and turn back; and then go back to bed full of a black hatred for the inefficient bureaucrat and the people who are getting his mail. But this morning the postman, that great-hearted and intelligent public servant, undoes the latch on his garden gate and comes up the path. The Neofan gazes hungrily at the bundle of letters in his hand, trying to guess how many of them are worthless trash and how much is real fan-type mail. Then he retreats hastily into the

hall. One day last week the postman wondered why he wasn't hearing any sound of the letters hitting the floor inside, and peered through the letterbox himself. Guiltily the Neofan remembers the unfortunate man's scream when he saw a pair of gleaming eyes two inches from his own staring at him from the darkened porch. So he lets the letters hit the ground before he pounces upon them. There are no less than three this morning – oh joy! But bitter disappointment supervenes. The first two are heartless frauds. No one can estimate the hate that rages in fannish hearts for football pool promoters and detergent manufacturers.

But the third is a real letter. He tears it open. It's from Ken Potter himself! The Great Man writes, with a truly democratic lack of condescension and what looks like the burnt end of a wax match; "Liked your letter in my last issue. If you want to try an article I might consider it for publication in my next magazine."

Fame! Glory! Immortality! Never taking his eyes off the letter, the Neofan floats upstairs, into his clothes, and eventually off to work or school. Here he spends the whole day in an ecstatic daydream in which he turns over in his mind polished phrases and pungent epigrams for The Article. It will set fandom by the ears. It will make history. Fearless, trenchant, outspoken, it will make his name ring through fandom. That evening he writes it out and sends off the eighth version, special delivery, registered. Then to bed to count the days that will elapse until publication, every one to be filled with the delicious pleasures of anticipation.

Consider now a day in the life of the BNF. He too is driven from pillow to post, but since he was up to two o'clock in the morning finishing an article he had promised for ten days ago, the postman has to knock twice to waken him. He staggers down the stairs, observing with a sinking feeling that the porch is covered with a layer of various sized envelopes. Kicking them aside he opens the door to see what the confounded man is still knocking about. It is three more letters from America on which excess postage is due. He totters upstairs for the money, wishing that American fans knew as much about their postal regulations as he does. Then he gathers the mail off the floor, looks at the return addresses, and stacks it on the hall table while he goes to shave. Judging by some of those names it'd be safer to have the razor out of his hand before he opens their letters.

Later, fortified by his first cup of tea, he nerves himself to start on the mail. Some of it he can put to the side without opening. A complimentary

copy of a US prozine, for instance. It was nice when he began to get free issues, but his conscience demands that he send a letter of comment on each one, and he hasn't had time to read last month's yet. Some of the letters are from his friends, and he puts those in his pocket to be enjoyed later. Some are from self-appointed enemies, and he puts those aside until he feels stronger. The rest are from Neofen. Some of them want subscriptions to his fanzine. Some want information. Some want material for their fanzine. Nearly all of them are rude. He wonders for the hundredth time why so many Neofen are rude. Probably each of them thinks that all the other Neofen write servile, adulatory letters, and that the BNF receiving this refreshing piece of impoliteness will be so impressed with the writer's fine independence of spirit that he will fall over himself to cultivate his acquaintance. He puts the letters aside and starts on the fanzines, opening the right staples with unerring instinct and a nail file. Some interesting first issues, one containing an article by himself. Part of it is almost legible, and contains only 15 typos. Hello, here's a copy of Potter's latest magazine, and there's an article about himself by some Neofan. Oh dear. It's one of those fearless, trenchant and outspoken ones, resounding with phrases like "not afraid to criticize" ... "high and mighty BNF" ... "egoboo-sated" ... "over-rated" ... "the so-called Big Names" ... He wonders for the hundredth time why so many neofen think that the way to the top is by pulling other people down. More trouble.

Now, on the way the BNF handles this mail depends whether he shall stay in fandom or retire suffering from chronic disenchantment like so many others. To a certain extent it also, which is more important, determines the future of fandom itself. And this is a responsibility that some BNFs take quite seriously; some of them spend more than half their time dealing with Neofen. Since their names and addresses are widely known they are the first contact many potential fans have with fandom, and in addition, their reactions to new fanzines carry undue weight. So I am going to suggest some rules which you might consider following when *you* become a BNF. (All that is necessary to become a BNF is to maintain a reasonably energetic standard of fanactivity for approximately two years.)

Fanzines. You won't be able to comment on them all, but try to comment on as many first issues as you can, and always find something to praise. Of course you might get a sarcastic letter back saying the fanned knows his zine was lousy and you must have damned bad taste. This has happened more than once to me, but never mind, you may have given just that

necessary encouragement to some budding Lee Hoffman. No first issue is a true criterion of a faned's worth. Bob Tucker's first fanzine was by all accounts one of the worst ever published.

Requests for material. Here you'll have to select the fanzines that look most promising, and most congenial to your style of writing. And of course you will have to consider yourself. Absence of typos, promptness of publication, presence of reader's letter section for egoboo, and so on. But there are a couple of general rules. First, never write for a hectoed fanzine. They have no future, and the sooner the editor realizes it the better for him and everyone else. Besides, their circulation can't be more than a few dozen, so you're wasting your time. Second, never write for a first issue. Most first issues are never published, most of those that are published are illegible, and most of those never see a second issue. Let the editor prove himself first. If he can't produce a first issue singlehanded in the fine old tradition he can't have the vocation to make a good faned. (There are exceptions to this rule, of course, as when you know the editor well enough to have confidence in him, or he knows you have just embezzled the TransAtlantic Fan Fund and have booked your passage to South America.)

Letters. Always be polite and kind to Neofans. The usual result of this is that the ones who wrote you a polite first letter, write a second just as rude as the usual first one, but that's because they are trying too hard to be fannish geniuses. Persevere and usually they begin to write naturally and may turn out to be quite nice people.

Feuds. Humorous attacks on you should be encouraged – they add to the interest of fandom, rank as egoboo, and might give you something to write about. Malicious attacks should be ignored, unless they're from another BNF. If there is some misunderstanding you feel should be corrected, write a short mild letter to the editor of the fanzine that printed it. Don't make it long, or faneds will use this as a means of getting material; and don't be vicious or you'll be accused of bullying. Humorous remonstrance is the right approach, if you can manage it. It's hard though, for while egoboo soon loses its effect on a BNF, malice always hurts.

If you exercise never-failing tact, be kind and helpful to everyone and preserve a high level of fanactivity, you may be able to maintain your position in fandom without losing ground – until Convention time. This will be your worst hour of tribulation. It's hard for a BNF, especially if he's normally rather a shy person, to remember that these two days every year he

is a celebrity and must try to master the technique. Everything you do will be noted, misunderstood, and held against you in the Conreports. If you spend your time with another BNF you will be accused of monopolizing him/her or being monopolized, depending on which of you is the more famous. If you stay quietly among your own friends you will be accused of cliquishness. If you run around introducing yourself to people you will be accused of conceit. If you just sit quietly you will be accused of being aloof and stuck up.

The only really satisfactory way of coping with Conventions is to stay away, following the precedent set by oldtime BNFs D.R. Smith in England and Harry Warner in America. But if you feel you must go wear a false beard. Unfortunately this method is now impossible for British Conventions, on account of the danger of being torn to pieces by bloodthirsty provincials in mistake for Bert Campbell. Frankly, I don't know what the answer is for British Conventions now. I suppose the only thing to do is keep in the background as much as possible, while grinning vaguely at everyone all the time. In other words try to remain only half aloof from the proceedings. It may not be as successful as the old method, but ... er ... half aloof is better than no beard.

BEM #1, April 1954

Love in the Cornfield

Sometimes there doesn't seem to be much hope for the world. Europe is full of Old World suspicions and New World atomic bomb bases. In Asia the great powers are defending democracy and justice to the last private soldier. South America is whirling around at thirty revolutions a minute. Everything is in a hell of a mess. Nearly everyone hates nearly everyone, and the newspapers are working on the rest. But in all this animosity there recently appeared one tiny gleam of hope, one oasis of loving kindness. A group of men who had apparently been natural enemies suddenly turned to one another with innocent affection. Pulp editors began to love one another. They greeted each other like longlost brothers. They fell weeping on each other's necks. It was touching. People began to point them out to the UN.

It was Palmer who started it. One day he came right out and threw his readers into a dead faint with the news that there were other sf mags in existence besides his own. Recklessly he went on to blurt out that some of them sometimes printed good stories. All over the country, readers with weak hearts went blue in the face and died with staring eyes. The other editors rubbed their hands and gloated. This was the end of Palmer. Years of editing *Fate* had finally had their inevitable result. Palmer had joined the ranks of the coverlet pluckers. But no. Palmer seemed to be no crazier than he ever had been. His mag survived. It didn't exactly go from strength to strength – it wasn't in a position to – but it seemed to be doing all right. The other editors were heartily ashamed of themselves. They began to fill their editorials with glowing tributes to other magazines. It got so you hardly knew what mag you were reading. Sometimes you felt like sending it back and asking the publishers to change it for one of the others, if they were so damned good; this one certainly wasn't up to much.

You half expected to see Rog Phillips start reviewing prozines in the Clubhouse. “Now here's a very interesting little mag from a young fellow in California called Anthony Boucher. Tony has started this mag with a young fellow-pro called McComas and they are doing a very fine job. In fact, I'd like all of you to dig into your pockets and send these two young fellows a couple of hundred dollars to help them with this fine job they're doing. I know you won't regret it. I don't think I've ever seen a better mag since the

one I reviewed just above. The printing is just fine – I don't know how they find the time – and the stories are just tops. Some of these pro-authors, I think, could teach us fans a thing or two about writing. In fact, I wouldn't be surprised to see some of them in fanzines one of these days. The paper these lads use in their mag is very white and the printing comes out nice and black. There isn't too much artwork inside, which will please people who don't like too much artwork in magazines, but what there is is very fine and it must cost them a lot of money. With this issue I got a nice letter from Tony telling me that my sub was overdue and I had better renew it. I'm certainly going to do that, and I think all of you should write to Tony for a copy of this very fine magazine of his and see just what these pro-editors can do. If you haven't seen one of these prozines for a long time you don't know what you have been missing."

But this happy state of affairs was too good to last. Somebody had to come along and spoil it. First, those two unscrupulous scoundrels, Campbell and Gold, preferred producing good magazines of their own instead of praising everyone else's. Now they're even insulting one another in public, just as if they were more interested in pleasing the public than in scratching one another's backs. Let us hope such selfishness will not lead other editors to take an unfair advantage of their brothers by printing good stories, and similar underhanded tricks.

And now here's Mr. Fairman. No one can accuse him of these unethical practices, but he leans too far in the other extreme. He strikes an even worse blow at the mutual admiration society movement. He goes too far. He is destroying public confidence in the sincerity of the praise editors bestow on one another. Look at this in the first *IF*: "No greater boost could be given an infant publication than Howard Browne's name on the cover." Offhand I could think of quite a few names that would be better infant-boosters, but I don't suppose Bob wants this annish devoted to a reprint of the author's index of the Don Day checklist. "*Amazing* is the best science fiction your money could buy." You talk for your own money, Mr. Fairman. I've no doubt Browne could lay his hand on his pocketbook and swear that his mag has the biggest circulation, but to say it is a good magazine is like calling "Chopsticks" the greatest piece of music ever written. People run shouting down the streets when *Amazing* prints a good story. The rest of this ridiculous blurb is devoted to Mr. Browne himself. Devoted? It's crazy about him. Apparently he's an "astounding [*he means amazing*] mixture of Balzac, a

ten-ton dynamo, and Peter Pan.” Fairman doesn’t say what attributes he has of each, but he insists he’s a “great guy”. Also that when he does a thing he does it in a big way. Certainly it seems that when he writes a bad story he writes a real stinker, and when he makes a fool of himself he does that in a big way too, as when he threw his 150,000 circulation into a lone fight with little *Fanvariety*. But the real case against Fairman’s Mr. Browne is this quotation from Fenster’s Norwescon Report in *Incinerations* No. 4:

“Howard Browne, editor of *Amazing Stories*, was approached by Jerry Waible with: ‘Say, I’ve got a really hot idea for some of your authors to get to work on. The earth is full of big caves, see, and these caves have sub-human monsters living in them that cause all the trouble up here on the surface by using rays – why, you could work up a whole series, and –’ But Browne had turned away, saying to Dorothy de Courcy, ‘Somebody ought to bring this boy up to date.’ He wasn’t smiling.”

These last three words are the most damning indictment I ever heard.

Spaceship #17, April 1952

Interfanna

.....When this was first published, The Willis Papers was already in the first stages of publication, and we decided the article was too new to be reprinted. But now.....

As all of you hotblooded young fans will know, there is a firm called Interflora which allows you to send flowers by telegram. You pay for a dozen red roses at the nearest branch (no, not the tree, silly) enclosing a message to the effect that you are pining away from soulful passion, and you have barely worked out if you've enough money left for a packet of fish and chips when a dozen red roses are delivered to your true love many miles away, barely crushed by their passage along those tiny wires. Now this is one of those obvious ideas like the gramophone, the wheel, and the ballpoint pen which I could have easily thought up first if I had happened to put my mind to it, and I thought I'd better stake my claim here and now to a further development of it before Gernsback beats me to it.

Let's peep in at your true love's boudoir, as she is clasping your bunch of roses to her lilywhite breasts. After dowsing them in cold water (I say, that note of yours was pretty hot stuff, wasn't it?) the dear girl casts around for some way of conveying her appreciation. Now, much to the ineffectual regret of the unenterprising directors of Interflora, it is not the custom for girls to send flowers to their young men. Such is the primitive state of the business that they let this eager client take her custom to Western Union, where she sends you an amorous telegram. Now I am sure you will agree this is frustrating to any self-respecting girl, and even more so to you. After all you sent actual organic matter; what return is it to get a bit of paper reading "Love and kisses", not even in her own handwriting and delivered by a pimply youth with adenoids? Obviously, what we want is some way she can send you actual love and kisses, just as you sent her actual vegetation.

All that is needed is for the firm to introduce a new service – Interfauna. Your true love pays in a certain sum at her end and within minutes a young lady from your local branch comes around and expresses her sentiments clearly and unmistakably, just as present Western Union messengers sing birthday greetings. I could leave to your feverish little imaginations the various ways in which this service could be expanded with the collaboration

of your friendly neighborhood brothel; Richard Geis would probably jump at the chance to write the catalogue. There are of course other Thinkers in fandom working along these lines; Curtis Janke having already alluded in FAPA to the practice of TV repair shops who lend you a set while your own is unserviceable and having audibly speculated as to when this businesslike example would be followed by maternity hospitals. But of course this is a science fiction fanzine and such matters are really not suitable for discussion here. Let's turn to a more serious and constructive possibility.

What I'm leading to is a special department of Interfauna for fandom. We've already seen ordinary correspondence largely superseded by the greater intimacy of tape. Now the time has come to carry this a stage further, for even the spoken voice on tape is often inadequate. How often have you felt that the powers of mere language are inadequate to convey your feelings? Fanzines, like daffodils – and offhand I think this is the first time this exceedingly apt comparison has been made – can “oft convey thoughts that do lie too deep for tears”, or any other such ineffectual display. Let's take an example.

You observe, for instance, putting together an ostentatiously tactful reference in a Ron Bennett con report and a suggestive *Hyphen* baquote, that your wife was unfaithful to you at the Solacon with a fan from Vancouver. You live in Florida and weigh fifty pounds less. You may of course be satisfied with cutting the villain off your mailing list but, not knowing how your zine rated in the *Fanac* poll, I'd suggest that superficially this could indicate too low a rating for your wife. In most cases I think that a fan, looking hard at his conscience and his last issue, should feel that something even more drastic was needed.

Enter Interfanna! A telephone call and a representative is hulking on the dastards doorstep with a horsewhip, while another nips around the back to seduce *his* wife, or even pour treacle in his duplicator.* Or, to take another example, suppose you get a letter from Belle, Frank and George inviting you to join them on the board of the revived WSFS. Even before Dave Kyle can slip a writ on you, Interfanna agents trained by James White and Bob Silverberg knock simultaneously on the doors of everyone concerned and deliver psneers so witheringly devastating that New York fan politicians are not heard of again for years.

* Molasses in his mimeograph. – WAW

But of course not all the activities of Interfanna need be of such a baleful character. Suppose you get a very good fanzine in the mails, and you feel like conveying your appreciation really enthusiastically. All you need to do is pay the appropriate Interfanna fee, and stage-trained representatives will do the rest: call on the lucky fanned, ask for copies of his zine and read it then and there before his very eyes, exclaiming with admiration, crying with emotion and rolling on the floor with laughter at every appropriate point. Why, this could take the place of cold written egoboo overnight!

Some of you old conservative fans will be objecting that messages delivered by Interfanna like this would lose their subtle fannish flavour, that special fannish way of communicating ideas which has been built up through the years in a fine old tradition. Fear not, old fan. Fortunately it so happens that Irish Fandom working here in its secluded island fastness many years ago developed a completely efficient system for conveying the nuances of fannish writing in spoken conversation. It is a bit like Victor Borge's system of "audible punctuation", with the important difference that the actual spoken remarks need not be interrupted by rude-sounding noises, but are instead tastefully illustrated by graceful gestures, making fannish conversation not only a delight to the mind and ear but an example of the poetry of motion worthy to rank with the finest ballet.

Perhaps a few examples will illustrate what I mean. Speaking with your head leaning sideways on your shoulder clearly indicates that your remarks should be regarded as being in italics. Invaluable for quiet emphasis, or if you want to say a phrase in a foreign language and like most of us are not quite sure how to pronounce it. Further emphasis can be provided by underlining, i.e. holding the forearm horizontally below your chin. A combination of the two is so striking in appearance (especially if you happen to be wearing a cloak) as to completely obviate the need for shouting (capitals) except for remarks you hope will be overheard and put on the *Hyphen* bacover. A combination of underlining while simultaneously holding the other forearm just under the nose indicates that you are delivering an interlineation, and it is of course a convention that a remark may be so interpolated at any point in a conversation without relevance to what has just been said. You can see, I think, how much added interest this gives to fannish conversation, taking it even further beyond the superficiality of mundane chatter. If a bright remark occurs to you, you need no longer wait until you can guide the conversation round until a suitable opening develops. Briskly making the interlineation

sign you deliver it immediately into a sudden and attentive silence. The conversation then proceeds as before, except of course that at intervals thereafter other people may inject their own interlineations, perhaps inspired by yours; the meeting of minds is now on two or more levels, a brilliant and complex lattice of wit.

Brackets of course are cupped hands at the side of the mouth. For particularly juicy gossip about what happened behind the scenes at conventions, “DNQ” is indicated by an upright finger in front of the mouth. An exclamation point is a raised fist, a question mark has the arm in the same position but with the hand hanging limp. Quotation marks are denoted by putting your fists to your ears and raising the forefingers; for quasi-quotes stick the thumbs out too.

But I think you see by now what I mean, and I’m sure you’re quite bowled over with admiration for this wonderful innovation. Shucks. As I said, Irish Fandom thought it up years ago, but only as a possible convention turn – we meant to get someone to deliver a short and lively fannish oration with all the appropriate signs. We just never got around to it and if in the meantime anybody wants to popularize it we’re willing to sell the rights for a purely nominal number of hundred dollar bills. We can’t wait to see a few hundred fans in some big hotel lounge carrying on animated conversations in Interfanese. It would be a wonderful sight, maybe even better than the hotel manager’s face.

Void #18, June 1959

Way of Life

The Psychiatrist handed back the bundle of fanzines. “Remarkable,” he said. “Remarkable.”

“You have read them all?” asked the Fan.

“Every word,” affirmed the Psychiatrist.

“And do you agree with the Russell Hypothesis?” asked the fan eagerly.

“On the whole, yes,” said the Psychiatrist. He got up from his desk and paced the room thoughtfully. “The Russell hypothesis,” he went on, “as expressed in *Hyphen* 10, was that fanning is a form of sexual perversion which might be defined as ‘deviation of aim’. That appears to me to be substantially correct. In more technical terms, it is a form of fetishism, or substitution. But what distinguishes it from all known forms of fetishism –” A gleam of enthusiasm lit his countenance. “– such as concentration on secondary sexual characteristics or inanimate objects such as shoes or clothes, is that here the fetishism is directed towards an abstraction. It is therefore an entirely new form of perversion. I have prepared some notes on it for my inaugural address to the Psychiatric Congress next month, and I would be most grateful if you could give me permission to use some of these ‘fan biographies’ as sample case histories.”

“Certainly,” said the Fan. “Perhaps you could let me know the gist of your address?”

“By all means,” said the Psychiatrist. “In fact I owe you at least that much for bringing to my attention this interesting and completely new field of research. I begin my address by describing the nature of ‘fanac’ and the relationship of the average fan to fandom as a whole. I point out that this relationship is psychologically a sexual one, in that fandom supplies a complete intellectual substitution for the physical sexual relationship. Take, for example,” he said, warming to his subject, “the neofan, or virgin. He learns about fandom from hints in magazines or from furtive conversations among his school-fellows. Nervously, he makes his first amorous overtures ... a letter to a prozine, a guarded request for a copy of a fanzine. His desire for closer contact is heightened by this tentative loveplay. His courtship becomes more intimate and strenuous until he can contain his passion no longer. He Goes All The Way. He publishes a fanzine.”

“You regard this as the equivalent of the sex act?” asked the Fan.

“Of course,” said the Psychiatrist. “By publishing a fanzine he, as it were, inserts a portion of himself into the body of fandom, procuring thereby a sense of gratification and discharge of the tension which has been building up inside him. The period of preparation of the fanzine ... soliciting contributions, preparing stencils, the rhythmic manipulation of the mimeograph ... these constitute his period of tumescence. The phase of detumescence includes the final collation of the fanzine, the reading of the first finished copy, and culminates in the dispatch of the mailing.”

“Itself a symbolically suggestive act,” offered the Fan.

“Quite so,” agreed the Psychiatrist. “The mailing slot ... I also drew attention here to the prevalence of the conventional phallic spaceship on covers and to the significance of the various methods of mailing ... in open envelopes, in ‘clasp’ envelopes, in wrappers, rolled up, and ... er ... unclothed. These last types offer a particularly fascinating avenue of speculation – the difference between the carefree or exhibitionistic fanned who sends out his fanzine unfolded with just one securing staple, and the inhibited, fear and guilt-ridden multiple folder and stapler.”

“Then the actual act of mailing is the climax?” said the Fan.

“Yes,” said the Psychiatrist. “It is the final irrevocable step, the culmination of the fan’s act of love towards fandom. Obviously it will be accompanied by a sensation of discharge of vital forces, of relief of tension. This is followed by a feeling of lassitude which, if the energy expended on the fanzine has been excessive, may amount to the trauma known as ‘gafia’. The duration of this phase depends primarily on how satisfactory the relationship between the fan and fandom has been for both parties. In a well-adjusted relationship fandom readily responds to the fanned’s act of love by overtures of its own, in the form of the titillation of egoboo; this leads normally to the restimulation of the fan’s energies and thus to another act. If however the fan has been clumsy or inept, fandom becomes frigid and unresponsive. This in turn may induce frustration in the fan, leading eventually to impotence and sterility.”

“The same result may be produced by excessive effort on the part of the fanned,” commented the Fan.

“Quite,” agreed the Psychiatrist. “He may ‘burn himself out’. There are of course many such difficulties in the way of a satisfactory mutual adjustment between the fan and fandom. But on the other hand the rewards of

a full fan life are correspondingly great, comprising as they do not only the pleasures of intercourse but the joys of parenthood.”

“You mean,” said the Fan, “The relationship between the fan and his fanzine?”

“Yes,” said the Psychiatrist. “It is quite clear from the fanzines you leant me that the attitude of a normal fan towards criticism of his fanzine can be compared in Nature only to that of a lioness defending her cubs. Not only will the fan go without the necessities of life to provide for his fanzine, he will attack viciously any enemy that approaches it. In serious cases this excessive love of his fanzine can lead to a kind of auto-eroticism which one might term ‘self-defence’, in which the fan’s natural love towards fandom is twisted and turned inwards to his own fanzine exclusively. It may involve him succumbing to actual hallucinations about his fanzine, such as the well-known ‘Delusion of Legibility’. He may go to such lengths to preserve his illusions as to send his fanzines only to persons who he knows will praise it. This practice should however not be confused with what one may classify as group marriages, such as FAPA and OMPA and similar semi-incestuous relationships; though these too may lead to evil effects eventually through inbreeding.”

“Your conclusion, then, is that fanac is a form of sex substitution?” asked the Fan.

“Definitely,” said the Psychiatrist. “One might call it a sublimation, if the nature of it were not, as I have made clear, so quasi-sexual in character. Since, however, it is not in any way criminal or anti-social I hesitate to classify it as a perversion. Yes, on the whole I think ‘substitution’ is the correct term. I would venture to conclude that fans will normally have low power sex drives on the physical plane.”

“I thought you might come to that conclusion,” said the Fan, “and I took the liberty of bringing you a further batch of fanzines.” He handed them over.

The Psychiatrist took them doubtfully. “What is the difference between this lot and the first one?” he asked.

“These,” said the Fan, “contain convention reports.”

•

Next day the Fan again called on the Psychiatrist. He found him muttering at his desk, scribbling furiously on scraps of paper.

“I take it you have read the second lot of fanzines,” said the Fan.

“Yes,” said the Psychiatrist ruefully. “They have certainly upset my

theories. I cannot understand it. Here is a sexual perversion which appears not at all to detract from the subject's normal libido. In fact," he added, looking at one of the convention reports again, "quite the reverse."

"If I may make a suggestion," said the Fan.

"By all means," said the Psychiatrist. "Please do. I must confess I am rather at a loss."

"Mankind," said the Fan, "is motivated by two main drives – self-preservation and the preservation of the species. Both are allied and interdependent, since an animal must be alive to perpetuate his kind."

"Granted," said the Psychiatrist.

"Mankind is a social animal," went on the Fan, "and the most important part of his environment, especially now that civilization has largely conquered the forces of Nature, is his fellow men. The ability to get along with people is therefore the principle survival characteristic of civilized man."

"Adjustment of, or to, environment," muttered the Psychiatrist. "Yes."

"Fanac," continued the Fan, "offers, I suggest, a unique and efficient training and exercise in this ability, a field in which the effect of any particular aspect of one's behavior is more clearly and rapidly perceived than in the more complex and less candid world of mundane relationships.

Fandom is, essentially, a correspondence course in getting along with people, with yearly *viva voce* examinations. It is therefore, like sex, an expression of a basic survival drive; towards communication and intercourse."

"Your hypothesis is, then," said the Psychiatrist, "that fanac is not a substitute for sex, but a complimentary and allied activity?"

"Exactly," said the Fan. "I might also add that fanac helps not only in the understanding of one's fellow men, but in that of oneself. Being a medium of frank self-expression, and mutual criticism, it offers immense potentialities for curing mental maladjustments of various kinds. For instance ..."

•

Next month the Psychiatrist delivered his address. His commendation of fandom as a means of treating mild personality disorders such as introversion, inferiority and superiority complexes, paranoiac personality, etc., was widely reported in the Press and caused a major sensation in medical circles. Questions were asked in the House. Two months later the Ministry of Health announced the official recognition of fanac as a

therapeutic measure in suitable cases, and it was included in the National Health Service. Typewriters, duplicators, stencils and paper were supplied free by stationers' shops on production of a medical prescription. The Post Office delivered fanzines free of charge. Chairs of fanac were established at some of the more progressive universities. Finally, at the beginning of the following year, the Government announced that hotels had been taken over in all the major cities as permanent convention sites.

Unfortunately, their luxury was enjoyed only by neofen. The Fan who started it all found to his chagrin that he and his friends still had to pay for their own publishing supplies and conventions. The doctors they went to refused to certify that they needed fanac on medical grounds; obviously, they were in fandom only for fun.

The Fan's noble attempt had, however, one successful aspect. It solved fandom's recruitment problem for all time....

Hyphen #17, December 1956

Appendix

Ebook Note

This ebook would not have been possible, or at least would have been very much more difficult to produce, without the HTML transcription of *The Willis Papers* articles by Judy Bemis posted at Fanac.org as below. Many thanks to her, to editor George W. Field and publisher Ted Johnstone, and of course to Walt Willis himself.

- http://fanac.org/fanzines/Willis_Papers/

The original collection was illustrated by the great Atom (Arthur Thomson), but the on-stencil artwork doesn't transfer well to ebook format and has been regrettably omitted. Changes to the Fanac.org text are minimal: a number of typos have been corrected, eccentricities of punctuation made consistent, and source attributions moved from the beginning to the end of each article (where they seem less distracting).

– David Langford
December 2019

Original Appearances

As first published, *The Willis Papers* sometimes named the editors of the fanzines where the Walt Willis articles had appeared, but for the most part didn't. Some attributions were undated, dated with a nervous question mark, or even given the wrong date. I've carried out a little further research where possible, with much gratitude to today's online fanzine references such as Fanac.org and Fancyclopedia 3:

- “Autobiographical Notes” – *Canfan* #25, June 1955, edited by Bill Grant.
- “Black Mail” – *Le Zombie* #64, January 1955, edited by Bob Tucker.
- “Comes the Revelation” – *Sol* (issue not identified), early 1950s, edited by Dave Ish.
- “The Consternation of Orion” – *Orion* #6, October 1954, edited by Paul Enever.
- “‘Corn’ Becomes Callous” – *Rhodomagnetic Digest* Vol 2 #5, March 1951, edited by Don Fabun.
- “The Fan From Tomorrow” – *Oops!a* #9, January 1953, edited by Greg Calkins.
- “Film Notes ... or Something” – *Pendulum* #1, January 1952, edited by Bill Venable.
- “How I Write My Columns” – *Confusion* #7, 1951 or 1952, edited by Shelby Vick.
- “How to BNF Without Tears” – *BEM* #1, April 1954, edited by Mal Ashworth and Tom White.
- “The Immoral Storm by Walt Moscowillis” – *Opus* #2, January 1952, edited by Max Keasler.
- “The Immortal Gael” – *Fantastic Worlds* #1, Summer 1952, edited by Edward W. Ludwig and Sam Sackett.
- “The Immortal Teacup” – *SF Digest* #4, November 1951, edited by Henry Burwell.
- “In Defence of the Pun” – *Wastebasket* #4, 1953, edited by Vernon L. McCain
- “Interfanna” – *Void* #18, June 1959, edited by Greg and Jim Benford.

- “Love in the Cornfield” – *Spaceship* #17, April 1952, edited by Robert Silverberg.
- “A Question of Title” – *Wastebasket* #3, 1951, edited by Vernon L. McCain.
- “Shaw – Ireland’s Gift to English Fandom” – *Bob Shaw Appreciation Magazine*, July 1952, edited by Walter A. Willis.
- “The Subcutaneous Fan” – *Skyhook* #13, Spring 1952, edited by Redd Boggs.
- “Telekinesis and Buttered Toast” – *Slant* #1, November 1948, edited by Walter A. Willis.
- “Up the Garden Pathology” – *Oops!a* #12, March/April 1954, edited by Greg Calkins.
- “Way of Life” – *Hyphen* #17, December 1956, edited by Walter A. Willis.
- “Wilde Heir” – *WAWCRHBSJWGATWCMWPMSSACW*, July 1954, edited by Walter A. Willis, Chuck Harris and others.

– David Langford
December 2019

The End

This free ebook is exclusive to the unofficial TAFF website at taff.org.uk. If you enjoy reading it, a donation to TAFF is a fine way to express your appreciation.

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