

Tut, tut, and a little history

The Urth list — 7 messages, 5 voices, 29 Jul 2003

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/4130>

Exported from an unofficial mirror of a public mailing list. Copyright in each message remains with the person who wrote it. Email addresses are obscured as `user at host`, the form the original archive published. This file was rebuilt from parsed fields rather than retained headers, so it is faithful in content but not byte-exact.

Alice K. Turner — 29 Jul 2003, 05:26

It seems to me that there is enirely too much ad hominen squabbling going on here--if this list degenerates into Usenet, I, for one, will depart. Take it to e-mail if you want to insult one another, especially wrt race or religion.

Or sexual preference. Which reminds me...

Let me give you a little bit of sf history. Back in the 70s, an experimental time in all sorts of ways, there was a small group of ambitious young sf people living in New York. They had been influenced by the New Wave, of course, and wanted to bust out of genre. Two of them, Samuel Delaney and Tom Disch, were out-of-the-closet homosexuals, as was Baird Searles, a prominent reviewer and bookseller. Crowley, a little younger than the others, was a good friend of Disch's. Spinrad and even Ben Bova{!!) were also around, but let's leave them out of it, except to note that Spinrad was also pushing the envelope wrt to explicit sexual writing. But I get ahead of myself.

Now about Delaney specifically. First, he is a very nice (by which I mean affable, amusing and generous), very intelligent man and a beloved teacher. Second, even with the support of his friends and the temper of the times, it took a lot of nerve for him to "come out" in print in a notably conservative field (think of poor old Sir Arthur who had to hide out in Sri Lanka in order to live what for him was a "normal" life). Did Delaney go too far? Yes, probably, but he was a pioneer, and they often do. But I can tell you, with certainty, that the publication of "Dhalgren" and of "Little, Big" at just about the same time, two big genre-busting books, was quite an event in the sf world. Interestingly, in both cases the publishers were afraid of the books and put them out as paperback originals, thus virtually guaranteeing that they would get no review attention except in genre--had they come out in hardcover things might have been quite different, by which I mean that the lines between genres might have blurred somewhat, as they do in Britain. My point is that this group wanted to write books for grown-ups, relevant to the times, and they also wanted the kind of liberation that the fantastic or "magic realism"--a term just then coming into use--can give. (Joyce Carol Oates published "Belle-Fleur" at the same time, which is the closest book to "Little, Big" that you will ever encounter--the two books make up the entire school of Hudson River Gothic. Mark Halprin published "The Winter's Tale," same sort of book, widely reviewed, but I never could finish reading it. "One Hundred Years of Solitude" was being translated into English.)

So what happened next? Judy-Lynn del Rey happened, that's what, a brilliant publisher with a crass, commercial mind (and a conservative old fart of a husband). They launched Terry Brooks upon the world, set firm guidelines as to what would or would not fly in sf (which did not include any of the above except for Bova) and more or less defined sf/fantasy As We Know It, which is to say, mostly crap. (Sorry if that's offensive to some who love it indiscrimately, but at least it's not about race, religion or sex.)

How do I know all this? Well, at the time I was the paperback editor (i.e. reporter and reviewer)

of Publisher's Weekly, the beating heart of the publishing universe, and I knew a lot of things. Sorry for the pedantry. Also sorry if my pub-dates are a little muddled--I don't have time to check them. But the above is *generally* true.

-alga

Andrew Bollen — 29 Jul 2003, 13:22 · follows Alice K. Turner

alga wrote amidst lots of interesting stuff:

Mark Halprin published "The Winter's Tale,"
same sort of book, widely reviewed, but I never could finish reading it.

I thought of this book while I was reading the LB discussion here - specifically the New York stuff. I liked it when I was a youngster, but I couldn't finish it when I tried it again a couple of years ago - kind of flatulent and self-indulgent, though some of the set-pieces were nice. Dhalgren was certainly a better book, IMO.

Helprin is/was a New Yorker regular, I think? I guess that would help for getting mainstream cred, as against being locked up in a genre box.

Josh Geller — 29 Jul 2003, 14:06 · follows Andrew Bollen

On Mon, 2003-07-28 at 22:26, Alice K. Turner wrote:
It seems to me that there is enirely too much ad hominen squabbling going on here--if this list degenerates into Usenet, I, for one, will depart. Take it to e-mail if you want to insult one another, especially wrt race or religion.

Yes. Well. I find it interesting that the only person here who *really* has understood what I meant by my original, regrettable and regretted remark has been Dan'I Danehy-Oakes himself, the target of my misdirected barb, whose wife hales from this very district and in fact shares my attitude towards people who disrespect mi barrio, esse?

Or sexual preference. Which reminds me...

Let me give you a little bit of sf history. Back in the 70s, an experimental time in all sorts of ways, there was a small group of ambitious young sf people living in New York. They had been influenced by the New Wave, of course, and wanted to bust out of genre. Two of them, Samuel Delaney and Tom Disch, were out-of-the-closet homosexuals, as was Baird Searles, a prominent reviewer and bookseller. Crowley, a little younger than the others, was a good friend of Disch's. Spinrad and even Ben Bova{!!) were also around, but let's leave them out of it, except to note that Spinrad was also pushing the envelope wrt to explicit sexual writing. But I get ahead of myself.

Yes! Thank you!

I remember the time also. It was an exciting time. Thank you for writing all of this historical stuff.

Now about Delaney specifically. First, he is a very nice (by which I mean affable, amusing and generous), very intelligent man and a beloved teacher.

Yes, that is what I have been forgetting to mention. Chip Delany is one of the sweetest people you could ever want to meet. I've met him, I think, three times, and I can't imagine anyone meeting him and not liking him. One of the only other people I have met who acts as nice as he does as consistently is Gene Wolfe. If the two of them have ever met, it would surprise me if they did not get along well with each other, at least on a personal level. I'd like to thank the person who criticized my lame perception that GW might think SRD was a better writer than he:

as soon as I read the criticism I realized how bogus that idea is. Considering the sociocultural gap between the two men, that person's remarks about Wolfe not getting Delany's writings strike me as far more likely.

J.

James Wynn — 29 Jul 2003, 13:56 · follows Josh Geller

Andrew gives an honest personal opinion (which is what I've noticed people usually do around here, but suddenly some people have gotten very sensitive and simultaneously thick): I thought of [Winters Tale] while I was reading the LB discussion here - specifically the New York stuff. I liked it when I was a youngster, but I couldn't finish it when I tried it again a couple of years ago - kind of flatulent and self-indulgent, though some of the set-pieces were nice.

Crush responds:

Flatulent? No, definitely not. Self-indulgent? Only to the extent that he attempted to completely indulged his imagination, which Wolfe is also guilty of. The difference is that Wolfe does not back away from where his imagination leads him, while Helprin seems to have consciously done so.

As for the Delany/Baldanders connection, I'm still not sure what it is. Is it the castle? Well, I think that's just a rationalization of the fairy-tale Giant in a Castle motif. Wolfe has introduced a Giant in a SF story. Very cleverly. Just as he introduced Vampires, Ghosts, Frankensteins, and Werewolves into the Long Sun. I've only seen pictures of Delany, he didn't look like a big man to me. But I'm no Delany-expert and Blattid (the reputed expert) has yet to pipe in.

--- Crush

Lisa Schaffer-Doggett — 30 Jul 2003, 03:38 · follows James Wynn

On Mon, 2003-07-28 at 22:26, Alice K. Turner wrote:

It seems to me that there is entirely too much ad hominem squabbling going on here--if this list degenerates into Usenet, I, for one, will depart. Take it to e-mail if you want to insult one another, especially wrt race or religion.

Don wholeheartedly agrees with this, however . . .

On Tuesday, July 29, 2003, at 07:06 AM, Josh Geller wrote:

Yes. Well. I find it interesting that the only person here who **really** has understood what I meant by my original, regrettable and regretted remark has been Dan'l Danehy-Oakes himself, the target of my misdirected barb, whose wife hales from this very district and in fact shares my attitude towards people who disrespect mi barrio, esse?

I too understand. This place (bay area) is a little like the Balkans sometimes or maybe more like "Gangs of New York" with BMW's. The sharp economic divide, combined with the overpopulation, xenophobia, and covert racism that festers below the surface here can really do a number on your attitude. Plus it's been hot as hell here lately. Still courtesy and care (especially with emails) are best. I'm not sure why I wrote this except to say that while I disagree with what happened, I know it didn't come from some emotionally unstable neverland.

Regards to all
Don

James Wynn — 30 Jul 2003, 09:31 · follows Lisa Schaffer-Doggett

Don said:

I too understand. This place (bay area) is a little like the Balkans sometimes or maybe more like "Gangs of New York" with BMW's. The sharp economic divide, combined with the overpopulation, xenophobia, and covert racism that festers below the surface here can really do a number on your attitude. Plus it's been hot as hell here lately. Still courtesy and care (especially with emails) are best. I'm not sure why I wrote this except to say that while I disagree with what happened, I know it didn't come from some emotionally unstable neverland.

But we can put that sort of thing aside on this list, act like grown-ups, not rise to bait (real or perceived), set aside extreme profanity, etc. Or if not, take it off-list. If that means we're not discussing important things, then so be it.

-- Crush

Lisa Schaffer-Doggett — 31 Jul 2003, 02:42 · follows James Wynn

On Wednesday, July 30, 2003, at 02:31 AM, James Wynn wrote:
Don said:

I too understand. This place (bay area) is a little like the Balkans sometimes or maybe more like "Gangs of New York" with BMW's. The sharp economic divide, combined with the overpopulation, xenophobia, and covert racism that festers below the surface here can really do a number on your attitude. Plus it's been hot as hell here lately. Still courtesy and care (especially with emails) are best. I'm not sure why I wrote this except to say that while I disagree with what happened, I know it didn't come from some emotionally unstable neverland.

But we can put that sort of thing aside on this list, act like grown-ups, not rise to bait (real or perceived), set aside extreme profanity, etc. Or if not, take it off-list. If that means we're not discussing important things, then so be it.

I agree completely.