

NB Don't feel that this calls for more replies, dear Jo.
You can always let me lapse any time, you know
The rapport stays.

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7 Nov 76

Dearest Jo,

You are quite wrong; what I need is not "a back-rub and some comfort" but a fascinating, challenging letter and article like yours. Since I am most fascinated and helped by the letter, let us go into a few comments on the article first.

My first thought was that I better subscribe to the MLA Newsletter.

My second thought was that I understood exactly what you meant, despite the fact that I almost have never day-dreamed in the conventional sense, beyond a few obsessive scenarios age 14 centering around the idea of getting laid. (What took the place, with me, was compulsive reading----primarily stuff like the complete works of Kipling, with its hints of a mysterious grown-up world of understandings available only to the infinitely experienced; and don't forget I was partly raised in Colonial Africa and India.) What also took the place, with me, was lonely staring up at the stars, and feeling, with comfort, the utter indifference of, say, Sirius to the whole fabric of human existence, let alone my own small woes...I was, in short---still am---a kind of Loren Eiseley type.

But I realize that other people do have personal daydreams, and I think your analysis fits perfectly. What is so impressive about it, to me, are the concrete examples of what particularity, specificity, is and is not. Hot damn, you know a lot of literature.

Well, that is why you are a literary pundit while I know more than anybody needs to about rats.

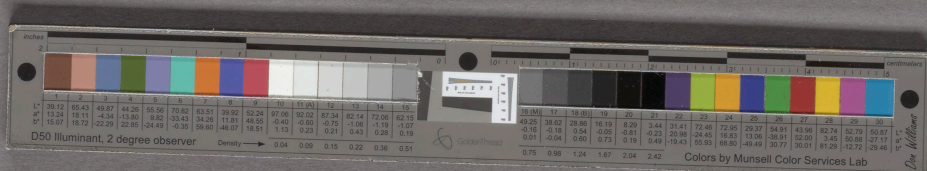
Beautiful to see an expert at work.

By the way, I note you have proofreader's marks on this. If it's still pertinent, I could add a few more, most importantly that you have omitted (I believe) to change "Dream" to "Daydream" on pp. 8, 9, 12 (3 times here, one very important) and "syntax" is transposed on p. 9. Also you omit quotes at the start of the second or subsequent paragraphs of several longer citations----perhaps that is a convention with you.

As to style, one quibble, next to last par.; I think you can do better than "the vague and glorious realm of the vague and glorious future." Just a personal nitpick.

It's a lovely piece of insight, Jo.

The whole relation of literature to subconscious themes. Gardner Dozois shook me, in his introduction to some new issue of my stories, by pointing out the revelations of my own terrible yearning for transcendence of the human condition, and my drive to somehow regain the lost Eden, the lost, forever yearned-for home. Even when it is also the place where things hurt....Are these "daydreams?" I was unconscious of the power of the motives driving my words and plots...I think my strangely-assorted readership includes primarily those susceptible to such wounds...How deeply I understand Tolkien's life-long grief



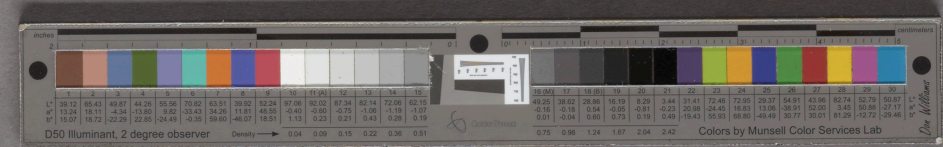
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Handwritten notes at the top of the page, including a large scribble that appears to say "S.M. 1/1/51".

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and loathing for those who destroyed the beauty that he felt was "home." And of course his hatred of the forces---the almost impersonally evil forces---that slaughtered "all his friends but one."

Which brings us to your letter. What you have done with pain. "To shove it up your backbone and try to steal from it the iron we need." Extraordinary, your interpretation of "the iron has entered my soul."

That is what I can't do, and what I suspect Ursula can't do. It is not that we "do not face our anger." It is that the anger is unfaceable. How can you get angry with the Second Law of Thermodynamics, which has stolen from me most of what I love, and is in process of killing me? How can I get angry with the nameless millions who had the extra children, decades ago, whose needs are now resulting in the bulldozing of my home, and the destruction of the last beautiful wild lands? (I am, by the way, like C. Ain in my old story THE LAST FLIGHT OF DOCTOR AIN, a very personal lover of the incredible natural web of beauty that was our unspoiled Earth.) I have seen so much destroyed that can never come again, and must bear the seeing of more devastation every day. Can you understand that this can move a person to the same intolerable sick hatred as the forced daily witnessing of slaughter and rape?)

When you have anger---or rather, as you say, hatred which is helpless hopeless anger, of these dimensions, it is impossible to use it for strength. At least it seems so to me. I loathe man's fate, both in the Malrauxian sense and in the inevitable-interaction-of-large-social-and-physical-forces sense. Unlike Ursula, I have no refuge in mystic hope.

You'll be amused to know that my therapist tells me to get angry. His own problem is anger, rage at "being told what to do," even in the most trivial way. How I envy him, and his ability to "distance" and denature pain. I simply go on hurting. And as for getting angry, ----I do have fantasies of machine-gunning deer-poachers---I rarely can. It is because I see behind the incident the huge impersonal chain of causality that brought about the confrontation. Behind the individual enraging idiot I see the idiotic parents, the idiot schools, the crumbling culture, the inadequate cortex. How to "get angry" when attacked by a virus? I think perhaps you could. I merely sadly see the imperatives of the virus, the chance vulnerability and accessibility of my own tissues; it seems a drama graven in the stone of impersonal causality.

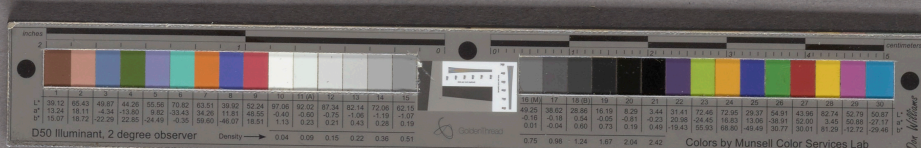
And I have rather fragile connections with life. My impulse is to leave.

All quite unlike you, and your letter with its raging, engaging, positive tone was a bracer-upper.

Re Genet; haven't really read the man. Shied away, in fact; because I felt that I did not share his drives or pains or satisfactions. On your word I will look again.

Good for you my dear fighter. I think you are forging your pain and fear into iron, and I cheer you on. But when you look at Ursula, remember there are those whose pain literally cannot be so handled, either because it is diffused out to unmanageably large causalities---or because of some defect in the adrenals which simply dooms us to go on, as I said, sick-hearted and white-faced.

But your letter encourages me to try again, to weasel round somehow.

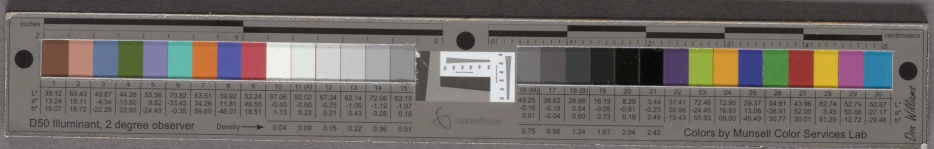


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COTTON FIBER CONTENT



I still don't quite know what a "Platonist" is, chez you, but I am glad I am not one in my fiction. Actually in my writing I work from a strange self quite unlike my real, sick self; this artificial self has its gaze resolutely fixed outside, chuckles and damns reality, behaves in short as a producer of alternate view-points which might have some interest for the reader. I suppose the sickness speaks through---God knows it does in this novel Ballantine is supposed to be publishing---but I am aware that my own personal damnation is of not the slightest interest to the outer world until it has been forced up to form figures in the fire, dream-artifacts into which reader can for a moment live.

Thank god your parents taught you that you were important.

I'll have to get Delany's book of essays. I've been afraid to read DAHLGREN so far, afraid that it would be too alien. (Among other things the Billy-the-Kid mythologising I noted earlier in one of his things turns me off, and I gather there is some of that in DAHLGREN)...I hope, hope, it is not one of those works like GORMENGHAST Trilogy (Mervin Peake) where all the blood and corpses and sufferings and appearances of other people add up to the denouement that one (male) adolescent has had some vague insight. But I will forgive Delany anything. By me, one of the greats.

By the way, someday could you do a bit of matchmaking? You occasionally say I'm "like" you and Delany, or on your general "side"---which I feel. But I've never been able to get a word out of Delany direct. Do you happen to know if he thinks I'm dreck, or what? At least I have the satisfaction of having let him know how grateful I feel for the work he's done....Funny; in this writing world it often comes down to writers making some terrific personal impression on each other. I feel an obligation to tell people when this personal sense of gratitude wells up---recall how I first wrote you.


Not that I expect you to "put me in correspondence" with D., or anything asinine like that, given the state of all our desks. I'd just like to be sure he knows he has a rather violent partisan in me.

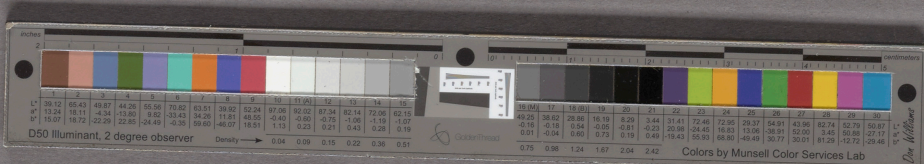
Now, dearest Jo, your letter did the world of good here---outside of a vague dismal feeling like a weakling seeing photos of George Atlas lifting 500 lbs in each hand with a grin on his face ---you too can be a hero. Well, I too positively can't, but at least I can grovel on a bit.

You can have no idea of the hideous complexities of settling Mother's estate, including material that goes to four museums---94 years of collecting mixtures of irreplaceable artifacts and memoirs in a 26-room apt., complete with "secret" storerooms, all jumbled---letters from Carl Sandburg mixed with grocery bills, blank stationary, samples of curtain cloth, birthday poems by putative nonentities, greetings from Jan Smuts, historical memorabilia of Old Chicago, Old Africa, cloth of gold from Old Sumatra, lace panties, .38 calibre automatics, Marie Antoinette's tea-set, half-ton bronzes of gorillas, etfucking-interminablecetera, 3 rooms of file cabinets---and all to be done by remote control, through a doddering ancient Legal Eminence known as the Executor who has to mull over every arrangement in triplicate. I was 4-plus-two solid hours on the long-distance phone yesterday, pausing only to type goddam letters confirming the conversations (in triplicate), etc morefucking crap. And all of it hurting, underneath, sending strangers in to paw over her private files and drawers. And it'll go on for weeks if not months. The part of my brain that writes feels like the Bulgarian Tank Corps was holding manoeuvres in it. Nothing left standing....not to mention what is laughingly called my "real life work."

I think I'm through.

Love to my Lick-your-weight-in-wildcats.

Ever, 



I am glad to hear that you are well and hope you are enjoying the summer. I am glad to hear that you are well and hope you are enjoying the summer. I am glad to hear that you are well and hope you are enjoying the summer.

Thank you for your letter and for the news.

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