

XXXXX October 1, 1976

Dear Tip,

(Just turned the ribbon around; doesn't seem to make the slightest difference.)

(It fell on the floor, too.)

I wish I did live in words. Actually I don't live in a flaming bramble patch; it only feels that way.

Glad you got ALYX.

Real writing is really possible. But it always looks peculiar, and to say anything reasonable one does have to sacrifice the surface gracefulness. That is why WE WHO looks all loose ends. Actually it's almost too tight; I was expecting someone to accuse me of having plotted it all out from the beginning. Anyway, I like it. I don't think it's two stories, really; rather it's the one impulse all through--to die, essentially--with the stock-taking that comes (I suppose) as part of it. You know, Part I is the present and the "plot"; and then, having got there she has to turn around a review the whole past in Part II, including Part I. Jim Baen told my editor at Dell that he got a lot of mail about the novella, all unfavorable! No wonder. People aren't supposed to die in Galaxy, especially not for nothing.

Yeah, Kate is the Lincoln Memorial all right! I liked your description of her work; I'd add an immense and formidable dignity which sometimes ~~wa~~ makes me want to jump up and down yelling "Yah! Yah!" and sticking my tongue out. But it's absolutely the real thing. I found myself extremely angry at the book, actually, since (partly, I suspect) huge chunks of the world do turn up missing, as you say, and so I'm tempted to do what I would imagine many male critics of hers would do, i.e. (when not intimidated by her, which they obviously are) complain that I am not getting my usual goodies. What I felt about Clewiston was that basically it was a fake, or a cryptogram for something else, or in code, or unreal. It is not a bit what it purports to be, which is a realistic novel about the near future and a drug company; it's not that at all, not one little bit. And I found the heroine's being a scientist unreal and the whole environment of the drug company peculiarly realistic and yet all wrong in some massive way. And I can't decide if this makes the book bad or is simply part of that cryptogrammatical method of hers, in which everything turns into something else. There is really something magnificent in saying "Here's your realistic thriller and who the hell cares". The one thing that did bother me very much was Deena the Nasty Lesbian. Kate really does believe, I think, that homosexuals are naturally bad or unstable people, or rather she simply uses Deena's Lesbianism as a sort of unexamined code-word, to show that Deena is (1) unstable and (2) treacherous. It's too nastily close to the whole split in the women's movement, in which straight women are told (or say) "Oh, you can't work with her; she's a Lesbian," as if, you know, we really are beyond the pale. To Kate it really is something unthinkable, freakish, and (I suspect) rare. She doesn't have the dimmest idea, as far as I can tell, that I'm gay, or that there are people like me. She just has a very conventional consciousness about this subject. I tried talking to her in Michigan about it, but every cue I got warned me not to go on. So she still doesn't know, or if she does, probably wouldn't



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Dear Tim,

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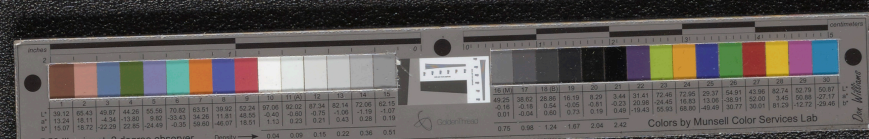
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credit it. You know, I don't act strange or clump about in combat boots.

Really, I know that frame of mind because I used to be in it! It's something weird that freakies do out there, on the edges of ordinary society. I do think Kate would take some standard liberal position if asked, but she's used Lesbianism this way before, i.e. in "The Funeral," simply assuming that if anybody's gay, that says something per se about their normality or healthiness or what-have-you. As I said, I tried to talk to her and said something about how Deena (the Lesbian, who is mad) is really pretty sick and she said, "Oh, but I know women like that."

So I didn't quite know what to do in the review. There's only one way to handle this kind of thing, really, and that's the one way I couldn't take, i.e. Look here, Kate, I'm a Lesbian and I bloody well resent that kind of writing. This is what happens to people who don't come out. Ugh.

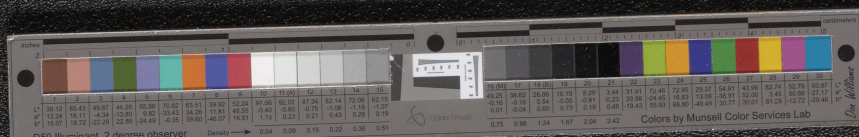
But of course the book is very valuable in other ways. And yet her writing bothers me horribly; I don't really think it's good writing. And it's eerily private. And yet there are touches in the book that are fine.

By the way, I've been reading The Wind's Twelve Quarters and driving myself batty over Ursula, too. The woman is beyond doubt, an essentialist and a traditionalist. Yet where does that leave her? There's no traditional place for a woman! Everything in her work is somehow derivative; I swear, except in the lyrical evocations of nature (and sometimes not there) everything smells bookish or story-ish, and her writing about men and from a male point of view is at one with her whole method. I really feel like saying nastily that Ursula can't recognize experience unless it reflects what she's read in a book! The stories especially have some very attractive and impressive presence in them, and yet they themselves (aside from their "poignance") are so utterly false! The moral decisions her people face give me an especial pain--they're simply not real and can't be connected up with anything real. They are absolutely literary. This has its virtues--but God knows a connection with real life isn't one of them. It really drives me mad. In her later novels life does begin to intrude, but even then stuff that looks very very good in excerpts (like the birth scene from Dispossessed) still gets me all smartassed and dirty-mouthed, "Oh, yeah?" It would take Ursula to write a scene of a woman giving birth from the viewpoint of her husband! And yet it's a good scene.

Kate's just exactly the opposite: bare and desperate and desolate dedication. (No, I take back the "desperate.") Anything that lives in Wilhelm is real; I don't think she's capable artistically of absorbing anything at all from art. Technique, perhaps, but I doubt it. And fluent Ursula, who can't write quite that well (Chip's collected essays, out next year in Dave Hartwell's small press, will include a very long one on The Dispossessed) but who picks everything up from literature like a sponge.

Women artists really do face the most extraordinary hazards.  
tell

I prefer Kate, far and away. You can/in her books exactly where she runs out of real experience and substitutes clichés, although now the clichés are getting quite polished. But you can still tell. I've





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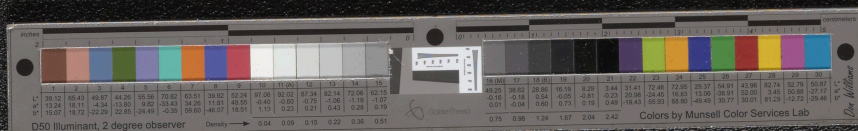
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never seen anybody do husbands the way she does; Tall, Dark, and Handsome. And Bad. It's amazingly convincing. I'm sure she's got a model from life in mind. It's to her credit, in a way. She's incapable of lying. I feel at times like yelling that LeGuin is capable of nothing else. It would take an earthquake to get her to write from her own life. She sees real things, all right (the introductions to the stories in her new book show that) but they get Transformed, God help us.

I think what you see as gaps in WE WHO is like Kate's method: long ago we both decided that if we didn't feel any interest in it, the hell with it, we'd just leave it out. There is something magnificently snotty about that.

Thank ~~fa~~ you for saying that the dying monologue in WE WHO is "apparently" self-indulgent! I worked hard to get all that surface chattiness. And oh yes, I do appreciate your comments on the present tense. It is NOT easy. It is HORRIDLY HARD. I am finishing up a novella (now 160 ~~x~~ pages) all in the present tense and it has been far and away the hardest damned thing I've ever done. It wrenches all sorts of other devices into strange shapes.

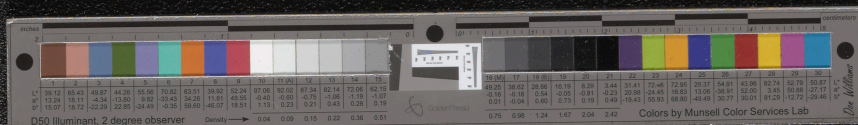
What on earth ever got into any of us to decide to work in s.f.? Of all places! Adolescent male optimism fantasies, that's what they are. And megalomania and callowness and stupidity. Bleah.

Dave Hartwell just called, and wants me to tell you that he's looking for introductions to his new G.K. Hall series, and would love for you to do one. If you'll drop him a card (address below) he'll ~~x~~ write you a list of what books need intros. I'm half-committed now either to do one for Leiber's Conjure Wife, or Delany's Fall of the Towers. Have you seen the G.K. Hall s.f. reprint series? It's marvelous. Half recent stuff (like 334, Alyx, etc.) and half 19th century rarities. And the screenplay for Things to Come. Stuff like that.

Dave Hartwell  
153 Deerfield Lane  
Pleasantville, N.Y. 10570

My dear friend in New York is not much of a wife, I'm afraid. But we enjoy each other so much that it doesn't seem to matter. Or rather, perhaps we are wifely to each other, writing advice and such back and forth. I keep getting cold feet about it but it does seem in the right direction. At any rate, everybody is suddenly telling me how much nicer I am and how much prettier I look and friendlier I am up here; this has happened ever since this late spring when I decided I really was a Lesbian. Pieces of one's personality are attached to one's sexuality, I suppose, and things begin to fit together.

The c.r. group, alas, has broken up, alleging as the cause my aggressiveness, if you please and my talking too much and intimidating others. The whole thing was very femininely manipulative, and for a while very painful. I'm coming out of it, but it's one of those scæes where X calls you up and says "I don't think so, but Q and Z and V think you're egotistical. Do you want to come back to the group?" And when you ask her "Why are you telling me all this?" she says, "Well, I think you ought to know about it." I learned a lot, but Lesbians are, it seems, not the least bit different from other women. I am still somewhat upset about the whole business. But it's obviously over and there was obviously a lot of lying and a lot of passive-aggressive





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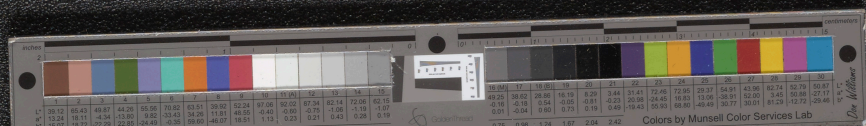
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stuff going on.

Good news: I've been asked to stand for promotion by our Faculty Committee and am busy assembling a bunch of people to be the reviewing committee. This is, it seems, a good sign. I may be an Associate Prof. yet. And that would mean, I should think, more money. With my salary ~~is~~ equalized this month, I'm now taking home about \$80 more a month, which right now looks ~~q~~ like quite a lot.

People keep calling from Tennessee and Manitoba and God knows where; they're putting together a lecture program and do I want to come? No, I do not.

Yes, activity helps. It's not a cure, but it's something. When in doubt, vacuum the rug, was my panacea for years. It at least gets one moving. You sound eerily like Des Esseintes, although nowhere near as foolish. It sounds like depression, that's all ("all!"). I mean the urgings not to act. The lethargy, the Aw-learnme-lone.

No, it is NOT time to go. It is never time to go. Anyway, I would no longer get those extraordinary letters from you, all blue. And you are, dammit, young. And the depression and gloom, far from being no subject for fiction, is--I suspect--the subject, considering what numbers of people are suffering from it. THE 20th century subject. It's just that we're dazzled by all this nonsense fiction around, in which people conquer mountains or get buried under them. I used to wonder in my 20s, dully watching films in which people suffered with their human relations, how they managed to get any to suffer with. Or from. Seeing myself in fiction at all would've been an immense help. And the subject is perfectly legitimate.

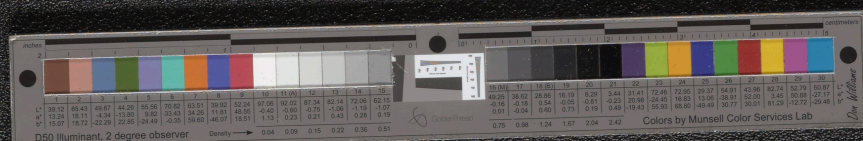
So there.

If you could, could you write George Hay about Josephine? I've gotten no answer from her, although she was always a lagging letter-writer. I'm worried about her. So anything you could do would be welcome.

Believe me, it took something like twenty years of miserableness for me even to come to the conclusion that when I was feeling rotten it helped to Do Something, no matter what, even if it was only scrubbing the floor.

Alas, nobody can not be life. Everybody's stuck in it. I was up about 5 hours last night with facial neuralgia, which had been diagnosed for months as a molar about to go; it seems that it isn't, since it shows no signs of going, but something else. I'll be seeing a neurologist in a few days about it. I feel like a neurotic mess, but then I always do when anything happens to my teeth.

The novella is going well. That is, it's coming to an end and I grunt and sweat with every scene looking like the last one. I'm always sure I'll have to leave it unfinished, but then it does come. It's boring in a way; here is the usual feminist Sudden Consciousness and what-have-you. I'd like to turn it into comedy but I can't make it do that; it's lumbering right towards a real tragic show-down and there doesn't seem to be anything I can do about it. I'm up to the usual trick ~~of~~ using the second half of the story to comment on the first. I.e. part one is a takeoff from Suzette Elgin's short story:





start going on.

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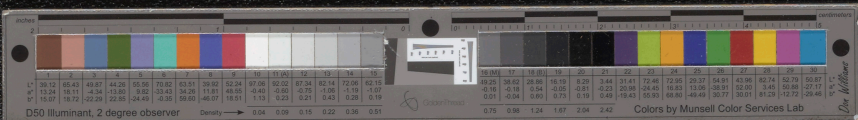
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Also, nobody can not be life. Everybody's stuck in it. I was up about 5 hours last night with facial neuralgia, which had been diagnosed for months as a matter about to go; it seems that it isn't since it shows no signs of going, but something else. I'll be seeing a neurologist in a few days about it. I feel like a neurotic mess, but then I always do when anything happens to my teeth.

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grossly sexist society with one female rebel (12-year-old poet). A couple from the interstellar C.I.A. comes and rescues her. Then the woman of the couple splits up with the man of the couple, i.e. you find that she is actually in the same position as the 12-year-old, although much more subtly. One is a magnifying mirror for the other. Now I'm in part two, the somber part, the "dull" part, and my ~~xx~~ heroine Irene is getting herself free of her partner, a very nice and amiable person, by the way, who might come back in the end and try to change his consciousness, but somehow I doubt it. Trouble is, one can see the end coming and I shrink from it. I'd much rather show them reconciled and happy, but I suspect it ain't gonna happen.

Perhaps a couple from the super-C.I.A. in the sky should come and rescue both the heroine and the little girl? A sort of infinite regress?

I have a horrible feeling the story will have to end like Brecht's Threepenny Opera, all irony and auctorial apologies. It wouldn't be a bad idea. But it's a total cop-out, fictionally. Only neither you nor I nor anyone ~~ga~~ knows/How oats and beans and barley grows. Suzy Charnas just wrote me a very depressed letter, that she now knows what happens at the end of Vol. III of her trilogy. In Vol. II, you know, the slave-heroine runs away to the desert and finds a culture of Amazons living there. There is also a society of runaway slaves, who try to live with the Amazons but can't; they decide to return home as an army.

Now when they ran away, the society back-home was collapsing. What will they find? What will they do? What will be done to them? Suzy tells me she now knows (gloomily).

Well, damn it, I know that I don't know.

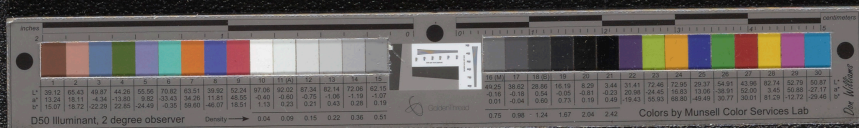
The sun is setting behind the aspen tree, which is beginning to turn gold. Nothing like fall back East, though.

Foof! I'd better stop. I've been home with a cold, so I have more time than usual, but will have to go back to work Monday, alas.

Do write. And tell me about your novel, eh?

Love,

*Joanna*





probably exist society with one female rebel (12-year-old post).  
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Do write, and tell me about your novel, etc.

Love,

*[Handwritten signature]*

100% HAG CONTENT  
 COLORADO BOND

