

8/5/81

Dearest Troopline,

Here is the letter I promised you. The postman (who never rings at all) came late + carried off the other missive.

I have still been crying in odd corners, without any insulation against really dreadful misfortunes — like catching 'flu — or coming home from the library with the wrong book — so Dr. says "More Asendin." He wrote down, "Still exquisitely susceptible to environmental influences." It sounds elegant, that way. I haven't gotten to the More yet, but will shortly. Thus does the tangled carpet of my life smooth out under something-or-other's expert Gaze. Anyway, put in some 18 cent. metaphor here.

The only woman in the world with a koi pond in her living room.

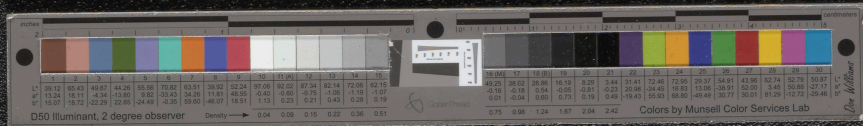
I should think so!

Fish that signal their hunger — oh, my!

Tipup says "Excuse Ting + me; we must go home to weed/feed the living room."

Sounds like an absurd horror film, "The Little Shop ^{of Horrors} ~~on Main St.~~" (?) in which a carnivorous plant yelled "Feed me!" which enchanted one 5-year-old I know so much that she repeated the line from then on for weeks.

You must tell me how you are — only don't if there's no time. I'd rather you wrote when you



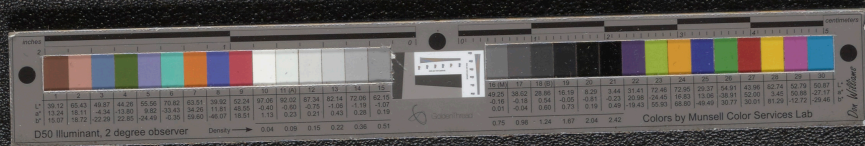
* is rather welcome.

felt like it, at 3 A.M.

I am enchanted, myself, by the possibility of being already O.K. — i.e. so much past behavior has been a very rational reaction to being depressed, this feeling of never being solid inside. When I wake up it's 50-50 that I will be in despair before the sun's down — and not over anything new. I'm very tired of it, tired of perpetually living on or in Despair — a very dull town, Despair, PA! (Western PA, natch) The idea that this is chemical + not psychodynamic*

I have finished Story #3 of the future history + am 13 pp. into Story #4 — it's rather odd, a sword + sorcery plot (Castle-Princess-Alien from Earth-Court Wizard, etc.) with the characters all Community College frosh from N.J. I can't possibly invent any rational alternate world-plus-details (it would be far too real + sophisticated) + yet the thing's a story, not a parody. So I evade — I'm lousy on real details anyhow — and hope nobody notices. The thing really has a daydream-structure anyway, not a logical plot. The characters are idiots, but again this mustn't be too obvious. I have been writing like mad. Am exhausted. Glitch after glitch. Obstacle after obstacle. Detail after detail to invent when what I really want to do is get to the fucking.

~~So there.~~ I love the story, though. It's poised right between the seriously realized and the obviously artifactual — the male Court dress is



* Merlin?
Merlinus?
(Peanuts!?!?) -2-

vaguely Japanese — the full, boxy ob, over it the thickly padded lena + wrapped about that the embroidered vistula. On cold days a long, sleeveless bug is added. (The dnieper, says a friend, are ^{their} galoshes!) The narrator then says: I hope you recognize that these are the names of Russian rivers. So it remains both, I hope: the original impression of barbaric strangeness (and accuracy) doesn't just disappear — the names do sound right after all.

I am currently chewing over a name for the Court wizard.* His explanation of why a certain piece of magic works will be, "I don't know." "Nobody knows."

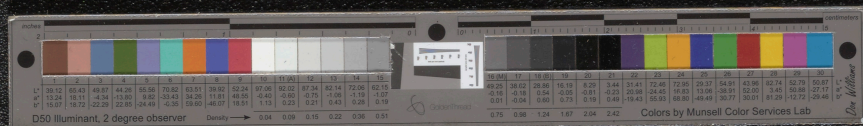
Anyway, I seem to have to write out all the obvious plot moves + then throw them in the wastebasket. See (you obviously know this) there are 3 deployments of information in s.f.:

- 1) The PLOT (usual specie)
- 2) The INFORMATION (s.f.-al)
- 3) The DREAM or UNDERSTORY

To get all these in sync is no easy task. Most (bad) writers manage 1+2 and let 3 go except for the most conventional of gestures. But we have to do it all.

Send Booth's Rhetoric of Fiction, then. Send it. I will await passively. I will even read it. When Tiptree commands--!!!

About Delany — I am ABSOLUTELY SURE you mistake his reaction. I am almost certain of what



* or played vehemently,
never lightly. -3-

My own depression has worked like that. My behavior looked odd; I wasn't "spontaneous," I did most things compulsively and not for enjoyment, I was always in dead earnest.* These weren't substances in me but reactions to depression, to the fact that I enjoyed very little. Being spontaneous would've been suicidal in those circumstances; I might as well be compulsive—that way at least I had some movement + achievement in my life; and the earnestness ditto. I avoided getting close to people precisely because a) any rebuff or disappointment made me feel terrible, and b) I had enormous dependency needs + felt addicted to people, addictive needs I knew wouldn't be filled.

I was perfectly right!

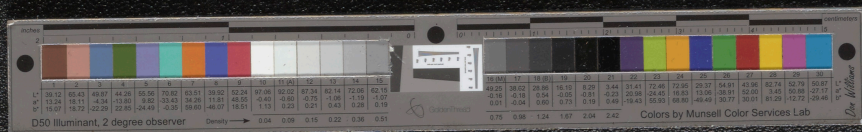
I also couldn't distinguish between "trivial" + "serious" bad events — they all felt terrible — and as for the earnestness — you would be too if despair was always at your elbow.

All of it makes perfect sense, given the depression.

I also questioned my motives continually and distrusted myself thoroughly — the result of 25 years of psychotherapy, itself the result of . . . depression!

It is nerve-racking to be perpetually dropping into the Pit of Utter ~~Deep~~ Despair + wandering around ~~the~~ house weeping. It's hard to live that way.

~~that~~ So you see it all makes sense as a reaction to, but not as a substance contained in.



What is so heartening about this diagnosis, by the way, is that it makes sense out of my character, as 25 years of psychotherapy failed utterly to do. I am NOT my shrink's self-contained schizoid, emotionless and irrational. And I don't "live in my head." I simply ignored a body whose geschreies of "I'm dying!" I had long ago learned were false — if I listened to them I'd have passed my life in bed.

I did what I could do, given the limits. I think I did amazingly well.

I don't think, either, that human behavior is anything but imperfectly understood. Which is why I write so often in the 1st person — characters exist always in relation to an observer, never alone. The observation IS the character, in fact. So morality is far from a viable discipline.

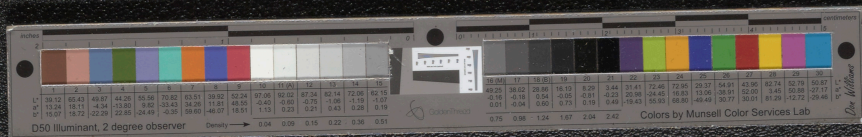
Which is why I love Chekhov.

Bielgud — oh, dear! Yes, it's disillusioning. Luckily you and I don't have dogs. No, I agree — some ~~two~~ artists (like you + me) are titanic marvels of ethics.

I suspect we really are.

I know why your heart is enlarged — it's all that pain from The Human Condition + compassion for the poor gourami + koi — though the koi sound self-assertive enough.

Oh dear, dear, you have all my Good Health vikes (which are increasing at this point)! I am being subcutaneously injected in my trigger points



with anesthetic. (That means where my muscles hurt.) Each week for 5-6 they do it. It's supposed to change my circuitry - but whether it's the anesthetic or the needles, nobody knows. Or if it will work.

It's very odd, having my experience of the world change so drastically - I have always felt rather unsolid, emotionally, "sensitive," I guess.

THIS NEW STORY IS TERRIBLE!

IT'S AWFUL!

I SHALL NEVER FINISH IT!

(The above to deceive the gods.)

I am exercising, doing biofeedback for posture, and self-hypnosis for relaxation.

I also have a sore throat + drippy nose - this after a weekend ~~of~~ of severe gastritis, which turned out replicated in 3 friends - a bug. So I will cease. Temporarily.

Much love,

Joanna

P.S. I would write more about your health + your heart, but am afraid to make you feel worse. You know that you have all my love + care + that I am concentrating on everything coming out splendidly. And when I am well, I will visit you.

J.

