

21 May 75

Dearest Joanna -

This is dreadful, and you must promise not to let this make you waste time answering, etc., but your letter of the 16th, with article, which arrived just after I mailed my last woozy one to you is so extraordinary and has me muttering telepathically at you to such an extent that I can only stop it by writing.

I am struck with admiration. This is very beautiful analysis and I know no greater joy than to see someone worrying sense and definition out of a foggy muddle which has tormented me too.

Take the article first. Now I have a name for what I have always called in a vague sort of way, "robot" writing, or "masturbatory" writing. (I was delighted with that wind-up paragraph about the relation to pornography.)

I shall have to read Redd and Lindsay just to understand properly. But the excerpts pushed the message through, and of course the Poe centerpiece made it all intelligible to me. I have always seen a pale blue question-mark framing his name in my mind. (?oe)

(By the way, you doubtless know that Poe is incredibly revered, or was, in France---there must be some insane trick of translation at work. Quoth the raven *Jamais de la vie....?*)

As to van Vogt, I must confess that I always assumed he was an android. (I mean, really.) Canada has a fairly large android population. I felt he did rather well, for an android, but that no real people read him.

Your use of the concept of "specificity" or "particularity" interests me. I see what you mean, as you put it---god, how I love people who give examples of what they are talking about---the single most difficult, most important act in communication. But to my very inexperienced sense---and you must remember that as a writer I am 6 years old---I find difficulty in understanding rhythm and syntax as media or carriers of specificity---I mean, I guess I think of specificity as visual, audible, sensory, metaphorical, etc.---and ~~rhythm~~ and syntax as, well, rhythm and syntax---good, bad, or missing. In other words, your ~~rhythm~~ and syntax examples carry specificity of image---and of concept---and also carry punchy and positive rhythm and word-use.

(It is very hard to keep spelling ~~rhythm~~ correctly, isn't it?)

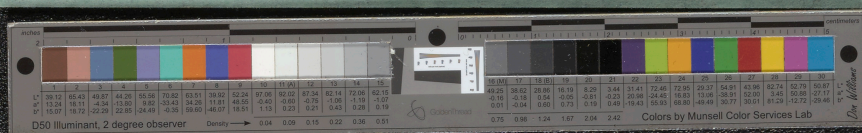
Your criticism, your thinking about writing, is a joy to read.

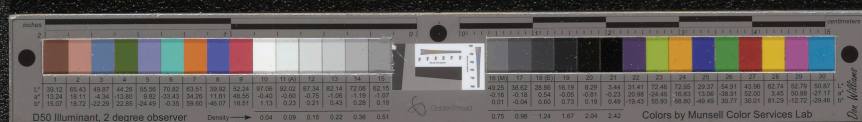
(And by the way, I adore ^{your} the marvellous last line, where the patient expert explainer simply breaks down into glorious human fiat. Bug off!)

The "ondulations chez Edgar" is a bit mysterious; are you sure it isn't a quote from some ineffable French Poe-ophile who got drunk on whatever the French version of Bells sounds like---you know, "Sine-curve assonances in E.A.P." by some undergraduate?

Jumping back to U.K.L.G., yes, I see what you mean about the day-dream element, the "in the song", the avoidance and flatness even. (That's why I like her L.A.T.H.E. the best, despite flaws. I agree with you that she hasn't

Have you really worked it out in L.A.T.H.E.?





found her real voice yet, hasn't said it. That she is in your sense "safe." I personally think she will grow on, but not without trouble.

But I value what she has done perhaps more than you do, for a funny reason. It has to do with pain.

No! let's talk about what you said about pain, about how can there be a "solidarity of pain" if the painees are hurting each other. True, true. But what I was thinking of was not pain which by any conceivable standard you and Ursula and other women can be thought of as inflicting on each other, but the pain you each suffer from being women in this miserable world. And this pain, while it is basically in common, does hit people in different ways and parts of their being---especially in the young and middle years. It has hit you in some way---slightly or strongly---differently than it has hit Ursula---or Vonda---or anybody. It takes time to realise how much of it is common, I think. Just as the desperately middle-class black medical student doesn't ---at first ---see his pains as the same as these of the black pimp dealing skag in Lorton. (And to some extent they are different---the whole wrong is so big it has room for many mansions.)

Thus you, in your exasperated, raw-nerved, lonesome abrasive honesty cannot possibly find or tolerate an "escape" or "emigration." Perhaps, in a strange suffering way, you even have too much hope to go dream-world. (I bet I must be one of a very few people who think of you as having hope.)

Whereas Ursula may be so fundamentally without hope, so convinced that the pain is of the bone and incurable, that she really sees the duty of life as distraction, as a brave conventional person might tell children fairy-tales while going down on the Titanic. I offer this thought for your consideration, because it is of deep interest to try to understand different ways of suffering, different ways of enduring "this long disease, my life," as our mutual friend put it.

And another thing. There are, you know, other sources of suffering. (For example, Tolkien's almost unendurably transparent agony of the loss of the beauty of the natural world. That happens to be my thing too, in part---it's impossible to convey to those lucky enough to not feel it, but I can tell you it feels like watching your most dearly loved one flayed, raped, and disembowelled ---a pain unending. It was from that, plus the deaths of his friends, that Tolkien "emigrated"---and his emigration did not include freeing himself or us from class structure and the rest of the crap he hadn't suffered from.)

People have different pain. Nathaniel West (Miss Lonelyhearts), Lenny Bruce, Spinoza, Dostoevsky, Herblock. And some pains are ignoble, not worth sympathy: Mervin Peake---I have just digested the Gormenghast lump---is ignoble. (All those corpses---so a boy may "become a man". Really.) Stapledon's was noble. (Do you realise you have made me read the entire works of O.S.? See what power you have!)

Well, enough of this. It's really just thanks for your letter. And a last by the way---I was a Marxist. Years---you should see the cartons of earnest tomes I spilt sweat over in my day. Broke when Stalin signed the pact with Hitler. Was a Socialist for awhile, now am some kind of anarchist. The interpretation of sexism in class-economic terms is still my probably basic approach.

Goodbye, dear. Soar on bravely, all thousand-watt headlights flaming through the dawn's early demise---

