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10 October 1975

Dear Tip,

Thanks for the "dull letters." I know they are "dull letters" because you mark them that way. Otherwise who'd have guessed?

Bob Scholes' letters are enclosed. He wrote me a third, which I threw away before the siren voice of curiosity was making too much music in my mind. So I don't know what was in it.

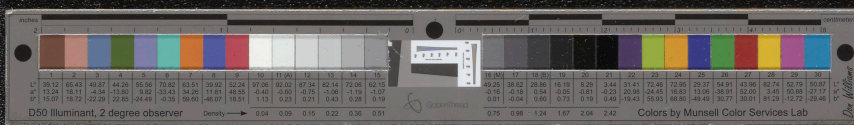
OF COURSE I have read Thinking About Women. I read everything. I have a five-foot shelf on feminism and kindred topics. Good heavens! Do you really think I could be kept away? Yes, she does pin down a lot of important topics, e.g. I remember off-hand the bits about how babies get themselves born and wombs don't do anything about it; there's that false detail in some s.f. work, which is sort of the final~~ix~~ lie, i.e. that women don't even do what sexism prescribes as quintessentially feminine. I remember my surprise, seeing a movie of a woman in~~ix~~ labor, that her belly actually moved about; nobody had ever even suggested that it did. But somehow in contemporary male imagination, the baby (especially if it's a male baby, as in the s.f. story) starts kicking and banging and forces his way out. A most amazing ~~unhappy~~ usurpation.

I don't know what lawsuits in SFWA, either. Except somebody sent me a long screed about why he was going to have to sue someone else, it was transcendently dull, actually.

My s.f. class hit "When the Sleeper Wakes" and respond with what looked like apathy but is probably stubbornness mixed with gloom. The consensus seemed to be that that world was coming, all right, but why get upset about it? Anyway, I tried to tell them it wasn't that easy for either side, but they're thoroughly ensconced in middle age at the age of 20, and they don't want to hear. They perked up when I got into city planning & the automobile, but I really felt like shaking them. Only when it comes right down to it I haven't the heart to yell at them so I say OK, we'll change the subject. It's amazing; they really have been thoroughly cowed when there's so little reason to be. It's the economic depression, I guess. But young people now point gloomily to Watergate and the oil companies without thinking for a moment that the public yelling and fuss is the most heartening thing possible. I keep hearing "Isn't it awful?" and I respond "Think what it'd be like if we didn't know!" Actually I wonder sometimes if they're not (most of them) from quite wealthy homes and are reflecting the gloom of incipient loss of privilege.

I'm trying to convey to my writing the class the unspeakable. They really do not know the difference between particulars and general statements and I've typed up a batch of poems to show them; ~~my~~ they're a lovely frosh class, full of bounce and zip and not at all bad writers. With really good writers I feel abashed and useless (there's nothing to say, after all) and with bad ones, frustrated and mad, but they're enough of both to make it worth while. Trouble is, I haven't written beans.

I've been having trouble with my eyes and assumed it was merely the old too much reading (which has been diagnosed too many times to count). It stayed bad for a couple of days and then I woke up with a cold. It doesn't affect my focusing, just gives me eyestrain and red eyes. Next time to doctor again, who will tell me: You read too much.





Part of it may be the Colorado climate, since I woke up with cold and without eyestrain after ~~xx~~ activating my new Sears Roebuck humidifer, which has a nerve-racking way of stopping dead just as I start to fall asleep.

In fact the chinook is what coincided with my eyestrain: our hot, dry wind which goes in gusts up to 80 mph and has been ripping off tree branches, pulling part of the house's gutters off and spilling apples off apple trees everywhere.

I've been having a CLOTHING ORGY (did I tell you?) after exhausting Lane Bryant in Denver, I found that Sears and Wards have tall clothes and after galloping through them, I borrowed a J.C. Penney catalog and ordered a mess of stuff there. Sears has wonderful sweaters unlike those fashionable ones I can't wear (curses) and cheap, cheap, cheap. So I have SIX new sweaters. And am buying a pants-suit for conventions, and new blouses (one with a neck-bow) and suchlike. I feel unbearably elegant.

How did your maternal emergency come out? Fritz Leiber has a mother who is sick in a nursing home. It seems very--well, what? --unamerican?-- anyway, permit me a little quiet and silly wonder at you marvelously long-lived WASP types (are you?) with parents of 80-odd. I suppose part of it is that in my family the women tend to have children at about 35 or 40, which changes everybody's relative ages. But Fritz at 64 has a mother of 84, and I can't help assimilating you to this pattern.

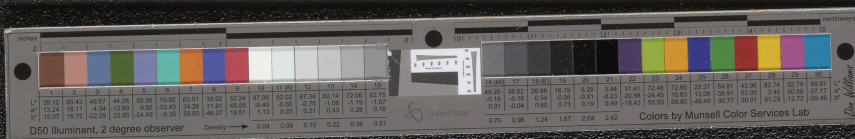
By the way, people here are genuinely nice, and today I had coffee with a graduate student who's writing his thesis and we had a lovely talk about Westerns and s.f. which do have a lot in common. He was pleasant enough to say I knew a lot about Westerns (because I'd read "The Virginian") and he's full of ideas, and grew up in Montana. The group of people about here is slowly growing more human and personal. It's very nice and totally unlike Binghamton. I can't think that it's all a change in my eating habits (!)--a lot of it must be this place, which I'm beginning to think I'd like to stay in.

Undoubtedly right after I get tenure, then Comes the Revolution. Like the Jewish story about the ~~laxy~~ lazy man who was given the ~~xx~~ job of blowing the shofar to announce the Messiah and who remarked gloomilyk "With my luck the Messiah'll come tomorrow."

next day

Another 85-degree day with cobalt blue skies and 17% humidity. The humidifer keeps going, since I set it on "high" humidity and "low" fan--otherwise there are nerve-shattering silences.

Went to the kiddie movie series today, and hit a couple of animated films. One was about a bear and a fox (in Russian), sex unspecified--I mean the titles were in Russian--and the other was about a whole gang of animals and the rabbit, he and the tiger, he and the fox, he so this particular he cut out and went to return some clothes at Sears Roebuck leaving the audienceful of little children absorbing their lesson. You know, life is really better than fiction this way--I mean in life you can't help absorbing the news that people do not behave uniformly or at least not that uniformly. But having migrated into The Word I must live by it. Actually, ordinary people misperceive the world quite according to what they read and see. My landlady (who takes it ~~fxd~~ granted that women can't make household repairs) says she'll pay for someone to nail up the rain gutters, which came loose in the latest windstorm. This house is a series of improvisations, and they start falling apart every once in a while.





Really I'm lonesome here and that's at the root of everything. But it is my mission in life to provide some of that lost female culture, i.e. a world in which there are she-animals as well as he's, and that's what I must keep doing.

Actually there is a lot of sociability, only I get tired of always beginning things. There's a wedding tomorrow, which I'm supposed to dress up for (this means clean pants, not grubby jeans) which the whole women's studies group is invited to. Don't think from the letters you get when I'm in a bad mood that Boulder is no better than Binghamton. There's an enormous difference. I'm like some specialized organism that's finally found its way into its 73-degree-precisely salinated puddle and feels that at least this is suitable.

Three more sweaters from Sears. The greed is beginning to ebb. Now I shall have to concentrate on saving money; I've been spending far too much.

And some time in the spring I must get into an apartment. The lawn is slowly dying. (I hope this is O.K., several people said it's late enough in the year to let it go), the gutters are hanging loose, the place is growing dreadfully dusty, and to boot the new humidifier will have to be cleaned every couple of weeks or else there's going to be mineral scale all over the inside.

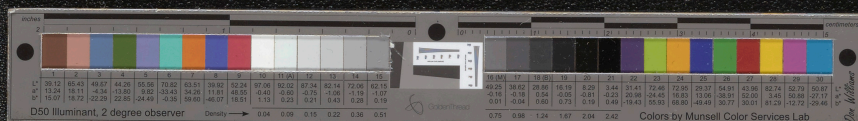
I really can't tell you what it's like to have oneself edited out of the universe, and to see these endless stories for little kids (written by women) in which there are no girls or stories in which girls watch boys climbing trees and go Gee all the time, or movies about animals in which the only animals are mommies. If little girls think of themselves as men manqué, this is only what they've been taught. Sometimes at the films there are little girls of 5 and 6 in full drag: long skirts, ribbons around the pony tails and lockets. I really wonder sometimes what would happen if children weren't so rigorously groomed for their roles--would the sky fall?

And the same little boy who's been spending ~~xxxx~~ the time before the movie vigorously asserting himself over (say) his ~~x~~ sister and against his mother, suddenly claps both hands to his ears (don't ask me why ears) and whimpers, "I hate skeletons!" when Disney's skeleton dance comes on. Watching people with children is very instructive, the manner in which girls and boys are treated is very different. It isn't just the clothing, but the whole gestalt. I can see a little boy's life laid out in a sort of ground-plan, constant demands for self-assertion and achievement, and constant dollops of rewards. Until you get to be a teenager, I suppose, and things get much more complicated. It's a loaded deck; if the demands are there, so are the carefully-prepared rewards. By the way the second movie was especially offensive because it purported to be a narrative told by an ex-slave. Very liberal and all that.

Of course by an irony of ~~xxxxx~~ history all the animals shown in these cartoons are female. It would not do for an animal to have genitals that show. Or rather, they're castrated males--no wonder.

Are people so not-responsible for what they do?

But you see why I hate Ursula sometimes. She's square in the Quisling tradition, all those women writers who write books about little boys and books about teenage boys and books about male heroes. Somebody (a





Lesbian radical, of all people) once tried to sell me the idea that children didn't really notice what sex their protagonists in children's stories were. Sure they don't.

Starting old as you do, you'll only have ten years or so of misery, not a lifetime. Sorry to be so kvetchy, but I'm sick of being lonesome and wretched all the time. I suppose in the long run I am slowly conquering it, but God damn it, this isn't the long run, and I have to live in the short run. In a way it's a good thing I can't any more read all I like (my eyes hurt if I do) because I'd spend my life in a book if I could. But all my life long it has been difficult to find people who are congenial. For quite a while it really was purely circumstantial, but after a while I internalized it, I think, and now it's part of me. The worst thing I've ever had to deal with is social relations which looked superficially O.K. and yet I knew they weren't. And all this very much produced by parents who are terrified of intimacy with anyone and manage to enforce all sorts of distancing devices. That's what I learned how to be. And then when I was older, I hit all sorts of things and couldn't field all of it at once--to be embroiled in all sorts of radical politics and also wound up in personal psychological troubles is a really loathesome combination. And when I was in therapy my feminism was taken as a disease and my difficulties with men, likewise, and for all the lip service given to individuality, it was really expected that I would turn out exactly like everybody else. I have never quite had my revenge on that, or exorcised it (is probably a better term) and some day I must do so; it was really quite as mad as anything any of us brought to therapy. Trouble is, they can help with some things, but there's always the danger of messing up in other ways. It's like doctors who have learned half of medicine, and do things like treating you for one disease with medicine that brings on another.

The best people get into the worst personal situations. Which of course led all the way to Freud in my youth (you can't imagine how steeped I was in that stuff via my mother) to exclaim that personal creativity or achievement was in itself a disease and the condition of absolute health was to do absolutely nothing. I find it hard sometimes to look back and believe what in fact I went through. I suppose only stubbornness and a weird kind of negativity saved me at all; I had just sense enough to know that if I shut my ears and yelled "No!" at everything, I would at least stay alive. But now to unstop the ears and manage to say Yes is very difficult. It's really like surviving a blizzard in the arctic and moving to the tropics, only to scream and cut-and-run every time the temperature drops.

Have you seen "A Woman Under the Influence"? It's not a feminist film (lots of things are being characterized by reviewers as feminist, partly because they want them to be, partly because any realistic portrayal of a woman at all strikes them as such a novelty they have to find an explanation of it) but (or and) it's a very fine film about really going crazy. Not chic crazy or petty-crazy or male-symbolism-crazy (like Monica Vitti--lots of male moviemakers give you madwomen whose madness is either evil or pathetic and nothing else) but genuinely, humanly crazy and very moving and engaging because of it. Bet you've seen it. We spend our time recommending marvelous things to one another which we've both seen.

What gets me maddest about Bob Scholes is that he obviously feels entitled to instruct me and condescend to me. Maybe I am Luciferish myself, but one part of the outrage I feel is an irresistible spontaneous voice saying DON'T YOU KNOW WHO I AM? I never let anybody know how well I think of myself; it makes me feel ashamed. On the other hand, if everyone felt this way about everyone, it'd be a lovely world. There's a lot of false humility around; I learned to pretend it in psychoanalysis because it was expected and rewarded but I never believed it.

