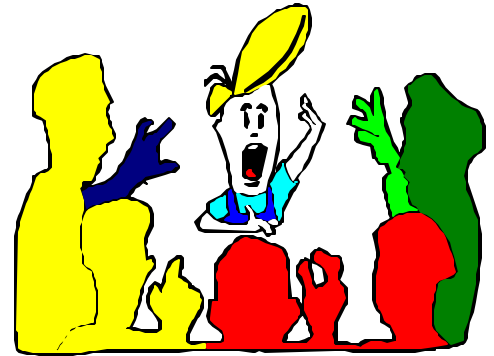


Officer Stats:

It's time for the annual review of WSFA officers and their attendance. Because elections were held in May, some officer positions changed in June. I have broken up the attendance for December 1997-December 1998 into three columns with the first through May, the second with the new officers, and the third for the full year (for those offices that did not change).

Officers	12/97-5/98	6/98-12/98	Full Year
(1) Prez. John Pomeranz	11		
(2) Prez. Judy Kindell		11	
VP Elspeth Kovar	6	8	14
Burgess			
Sec Sam Lubell	10	12	22
Treas. Bob MacIntosh	8	13	21
(1) 98 Chair Joe Mayhew	10		
99 Chair Sam Pierce	6	7	13
2000 Chair Covert Beach	7	9	16
Trust Mike Walsh	8	3	11
(1) Trust Eric Jablow	7		
(1) Trust Mike Nelson	11		
(2) Trust Chuck Divine		4	
(2) Trust Steve Smith		6	



During 1998, only one meeting had all officers, chairs, and trustees present, the meeting held on May first. Yup, when all WSFA offices are in the same room, everyone yells Mayday! Please note that the first Friday meeting in August was cancelled due to something called Bucconeer.

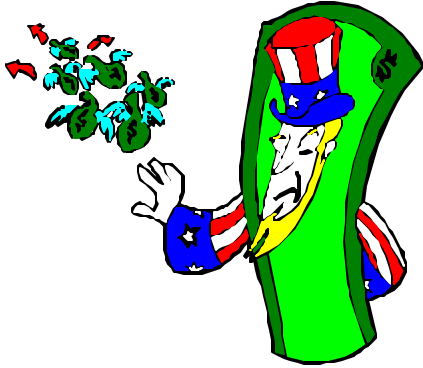
March Backwards

Marching to a different drummer, WSFA will March backwards by holding its March meetings in reverse order. The First Friday meeting on March 5th will be held in Maryland at Chez Ginter. The Third Friday meeting on March 19th will be held in Virginia at the U.S.S. Gilliland. A betting pool will try to predict how many people will go to the wrong place. Okay, troops! You have your Marching orders. Hup, two, three, four!

WSFA Starts New Year with a Whimper

The first meeting in 1999 took place at the Gillilands 1/1/99. Eric pointed out that because of the calendar's chicanery, everyone had an extra second and asked the club how they spent it. "I didn't give it a second's thought," replied Mike Walsh. "Okay, who hasn't paid up?" Elspeth, chairing the meeting, tried to muster people to pay their dues. Bob pointed out that dues are ten bucks. While he was collecting money, Elspeth asked Sam if there was any old business. Sam said that January has a Fifth Friday. Bob reported a treasury of \$5,277.60. "How long will

that last?" asked Elspeth. "About a year and a half," replied Bob. "Let's buy a hotel" suggested Eric. Alexis offered him a hotel from a Monopoly game. The Entertainment Committee announced that the calendar has rolled over and it is now MIM. This sparked a debate on Roman Numerals.



Sam said the other old business was that the dues were raised to ten dollars. There was no new business.

Mike Walsh announced that *Galactic Patrol* was #16 on Amazon's list of best sellers, beating out a Robert Jordan book. Joe offered to give away a really bad book (*Pleistocene Redemption*). Keith Lynch announced a Life Extension party.

Eric's brother has returned from duty overseas. Political jokes were made about Henry Hyde and Clinton. Sam Pierce called out "Procrastinators of the World, Unite!" to which Mike Walsh said, "Later, later." Elspeth asked, "Does anyone have an idea of what to do with this meeting. Hint, hint." Alexis moved we adjourn. Meeting adjourned 9:30.

Attendance: VP Elspeth Kovar Burgess, Sec. Samuel Lubell, Treas. Bob MacIntosh, Trust Michael Walsh, 2000 Chair Covert Beach, Alexis and Lee Gilliland, David Hines, Eric Jablow, Keith Lynch, Nicki and Richard Lynch, Joe Mayhew, Walter Miles, Kathi Overton, Sam Pierce, John Pomeranz, George Shaner, Michael Taylor, Charles Gilliland, and Baby New Year

Madeleine Reviews By Madeleine Yeh

First To Fight by David Sherman and Dan Cragg

This is an extraordinarily bad book. It took me two weeks to force myself to read it. An adequate book will normally be read in a day or two, a good book in a single sitting. The only reason I'm writing a review is that the sequel is out, and I want to save all of you from wasting your time and money on it.

The people are lifeless, the planets are boring, the ships are terrible, and the plot. The plot is copied from bad movies. Our heroes find themselves in troubles which could be avoided by anyone with a room temperature IQ. I know brownie troops which are brighter and better organized and have better contingency plans.



This is the story of the marines in the 25th Century. In the opening chapter, Charlie Bass of the Confederate Marine Corps, is leading an infantry squad armed with rifles on a bandit attack. He is also testing a new radio. This is its first test under field conditions. By official orders, the old equipment has been left behind. Sergeant Bass obeys these

orders. Soldiers are killed. The salesman claims that the equipment worked as per the manual, which of course the marines didn't bother reading.

Huh? Huh? Reality Check? Does anyone take untested equipment into combat? Why would anyone give such stupid orders? Why would anyone obey them? What is the Sergeant doing for a brain? The worse case scenario for obeying orders is getting everyone killed. The worse case scenario with disobeying orders is getting court marshaled. A single point of failure? Are we stupid today? And why didn't the marines read the manual? Has the intelligence of the human race decreased in the last five centuries?



The next character to be introduced is Joe Dean, a new recruit. He has lived and breathed and dreamed about entering the army all of his life. Now that he's finished college, he is going to do it. As he talks to the army recruiter, two marines walk by in full uniform. Entranced by the spiffy outfits and gold braid and masculine presence, Joe follows them into the marine recruiting office. The colleges of the 25th Century must have really

low standards, Joe doesn't seem bright enough to walk and chew gum at the same time.

Neither the characters, nor the worlds, nor the Confederate Marines ever get any better. The characters never become real people, they remained as caricatures of World War I and World War II stereotypes. There is a W.W.II boot camp, followed by a marine barracks in Minnesota, followed by a State Department action putting down the rebels in North Africa. The marines follow stupid orders and stupid tradition and stupid leaders into stupid situations. The authors never explain anything about the rest of the universe, or even the rest of the military

The Last DragonLord by JoAnne Bertin

This is a perfectly good, although not great fantasy. Despite the blurb on the front flap, this is not the story of great battles, high melodrama, and a lonely, desperate hero, the last survivor of his magic race. It is not the story of a great and terrible and overwhelming evil about to conquer the world, with our heroes attempting a last desperate quest to avert catastrophe.

This is a perfectly good romance story, set in a vivid, believable, slightly magical world. The world is a high medieval or early renaissance world, with nobles and servants; traders, and sailors; kings and councils; healers and

bards; grooms and dock hands. Added to this are true humans, merpeople, kir; weredragons, and truedragons. The world and the inhabitants are slowly, carefully and skillfully introduced. The humans come with from different cultures, and kingdoms, with various laws and beliefs. The generic cookie cutter faceless people used as spear carriers and extras are absent. The hero's servant Varn has twin boys who love pillow fights, and sleep. The little prince Rann loves his dog and his nurse; in that order.



The first and even the second time I read this, I thought it was merely a good novel; nice distinct characters, good actions and a normal world. As I am writing this, and looking through the book for examples, I realized the book has a lot of very fine craftsmanship and polish in it. The story was such an easy read, and such a comfortable one; that the fine style and workmanship are swallowed unnoticed. Think of a really superb cheesecake; the whole thing has disappeared before the mind really appreciates the flavors, and the textures and the glorious feel as the cheesecake enters the mouth and slides down the throat.

The dragonlords of the title are a society of weredragons. They keep mainly to themselves in their own castle, Dragonskeep. Much to some human's dismay, they have a role in true human life; they are often asked to judge matters of high diplomacy and politics. In this novel, the human kingdom of Cassori has asked the dragonlords to decide which uncle should be regent for the child prince Rann. The two contestants are Prince Peridaen, and Duke Beren. One of the judges is Linden Rathan, the youngest, the "little one" of the dragonlords. He is only 6 centuries old and 6 1/2 feet tall in human form. Human bards call him the "Last DragonLord" as no others have appeared in 6 centuries. The weredragons are born to truehumans and seem human until as adults their dragon selves manifest.

Linden Rathan is the hero of our story. He is waiting for his soultwin, the female were dragon whose souls will complement his own. She hasn't appeared yet, and most likely hasn't even been born yet. However while he's waiting there are still other pleasures in life, visiting friends, flying, riding horses, dances and parties. There is also work. The novel tells how Linden finds and wins his soultwin, while dealing with minor problems caused by jealous lovers (he wasn't saving himself for marriage), political factions, tedious and dreary judicial hearings, conspiracies and evil magic. While the political rivalry between Duke Beren and Prince Peridaen for the regency is well done, it is a distinctly minor subplot. The author writes the story from several points of view. including the evil conspirators. We know from early in the story the identity and motivations of the bad guys. The only secrets left unrevealed

are the extent of the conspirators magic and abilities. It is a pity that the author chose this approach. This could have been a good mystery, as well as a good romance and a very fine fantasy.

I only have one serious quibble about the logic of this universe. Dragonlords are born human, and subject to the normal hazards of a human infancy and childhood. Given the normal childhood mortality of a medieval society why do most weredragons find their soul mate? Surely it would be common for a weredragon to have lost their soulmate in childhood, before they ever changed into a dragon? Given a 20% early mortality rate, some 32% of the weredragons should be partnerless. The only solution I can think of is reincarnation. If the souls don't survive to adulthood, they get to try again and again until they do it right.



True Story: NSA Declares Toy a Spy!
The Furby Menace to National Security
 By Samuel Lubell

This past Christmas, the hot toy, the Cabbage Patch Kids of 1998, were the electronic Furby toys that speak their own language and have a computer chip that can record and play back a few English words. They were popular everywhere except at the headquarters of NSA (~~National Security Agency~~ No Such Agency) which banned them. In an effort to figure out why even the world's most paranoid organization would ban toys, *The WSFA Journal* embarked on an investigation.



"The Furby is an enemy agent," insisted one spy code named "George Smiley" "It records top secret words and then plays them back to its Soviet handlers." When asked how it would do this since the toy lacks a modem and the Soviet Union is long dead, Smiley showed how he got his name by smiling sinisterly. "That's what they want you to think."

"Man, they were afraid someone would feed it after midnight," said agent Austin Powers. "They already have enough gremlins in their computer system. Groovy baby."

"They're dolls," said another agent, James Bond. "Playing with dolls indoctrinates a feminine peaceful attitude. You'll note they didn't ban toy guns. We need our security groups to have a proper male militaristic attitude. No dolls. Unless they're women. Pretty women."

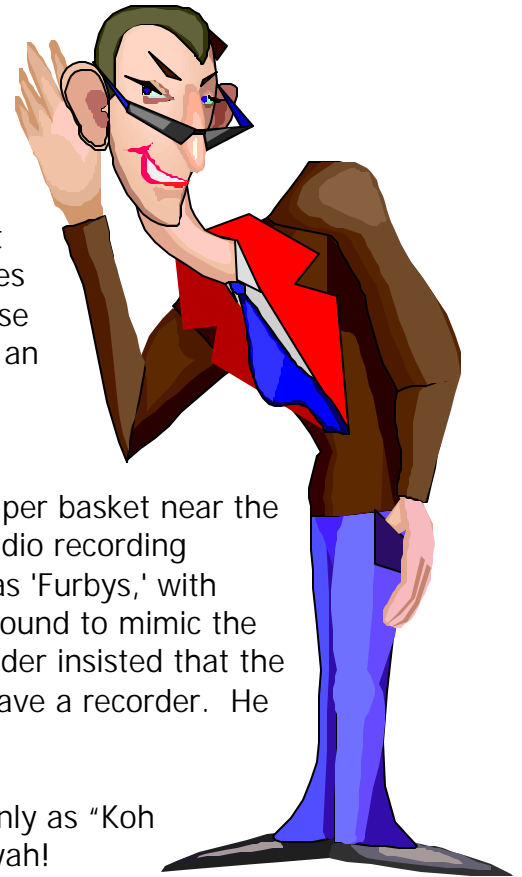
security groups to have a proper male militaristic attitude. No dolls. Unless they're women. Pretty women."

Another agent, Jaime Sommers, said, between spasms in her legs and right arm, "The circuits in the Furbies cause interference with certain top-secret electric components. Get them away from me right now!"

"There's no secret to those in the know", protested agent Fox Mulder. "The brochure in the box says that the Furbies came from the clouds and they moved to the Earth because they liked the people. Clearly they're the front-beings for an alien invasion. I can prove it." His attractive partner just shook her head. "No Mulder, I won't autopsy a toy."

The official NSA communication, obtained from a wastepaper basket near the NSA read, "Personally owned photographic, video and audio recording equipment are prohibited items. This includes toys, such as 'Furbys,' with built-in recorders that repeat the audio with synthesized sound to mimic the original signal." Confronted with this evidence, agent Mulder insisted that the memo was just part of a cover-up since the toys do not have a recorder. He offered to try to recover a Furby's memories.

An interview with a Furby informer, who gave his name only as "Koh Koh" said "Party! Whooopeeee! Okay hide. Nyah! Nyah! Nyah! Nyah! Nyah! Nyah! Hide. Twinkle Twinkle Little Star. Me done."



WSFA On Ice

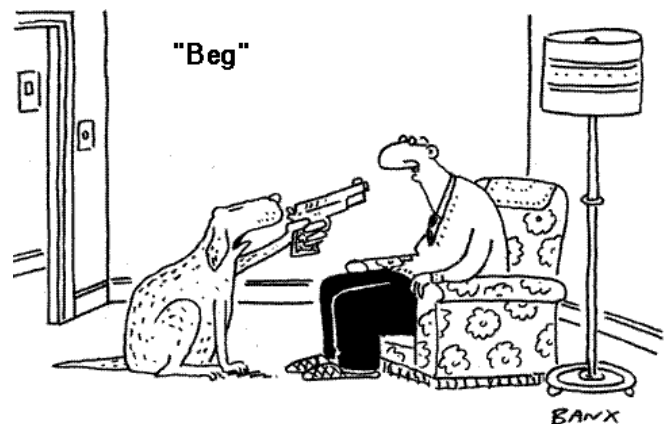
By Special Guest Secretary Joe Mayhew

The January Third Friday meeting was held at the Ginters.

Judy called the meeting to order at 9:25. The secretary was not present and so Judy asked Joe Mayhew to take the minutes. The treasurer was also absent. Judy reminded members that dues had gone up to \$10 a year. There were no committee reports. Kathi Overton volunteered to host the January Fifth Friday party and was given the job.

Meeting Schedule. The First Friday meeting in March will be at the Ginters because Alexis is going to be at Lunacon. He will host the Third Friday meeting instead. There was no new Business.

Announcements. Abner Mintz and Sara are closing on a three bedroom townhouse in Laurel. His new email address is AJM@clark.net. Elspeth Kovar Burgess will be moving out of her



apartment soon. She needs help moving. One of Erica's cakes will be a Mailbox magazine. Joe asked her if she ate it after it was photographed, thus having her cake and eating it too. The meeting adjourned 9:45.

Attending. Judy Kindell (Pres), Elspeth Kovar Burgess (VP), Chuck Divine (Trust), Erica Ginter, Joe Mayhew, George Shaner, Alexis Gilliland, Eric Jablow, Bernard Bell, Abner Mintz, Sara Miskevich, Shirl Phelps, John Pomeranz, Kathi Overton, Evan Phillips, Bill Squire, and Nick Sanders (new!). Sam Lubell (Sec) showed up just as the meeting ended.

An Essay on the Importance of Books By Alexis Gilliland

In 1932 James Branch Cabell published a collection of three essays entitled "These Restless heads," meditations on writing and the writing life. In it he declares: "(The author) must manage to believe, somehow, that the book he labors on is an important enterprise: and he must resolutely keep out of mind the truth that to no other one human being can it ever be important for any ponderable while." Cabell goes on to suggest that the wisdom of age and experience "have brought the assured knowledge that every author is perforce about rather trivial ends. He writes well or he writes badly: either way it does not actually matter." The reason? While the author's book may outlive him, even during a greatly prolonged existence it will achieve nothing of importance.

This is arguable. Cabell tips his hat to Harriet Beecher Stowe, whose badly written book, "Uncle Tom's Cabin," might, as Lincoln suggested, have started the Civil

War. At a later time Barry Goldwater's "Conscience Of A Conservative" became the organizing principle for the Conservative movement, and "The Gulag Archipelago" by Aleksander Solzhenitsyn bore witness against Soviet evil to delegitimize and

thereby help bring down the Soviet regime. It is noted that these books are not fiction, being philosophy and social history respectively, so that they are more like the profoundly influential Darwin's "Origin of Species" and Newton's "Principia

Mathematica" than the fictions and mere entertainments contemplated by Cabell. And yet—did Richard Wagner's Ring Cycle—an operating evocation of Teutonic legend having much in common with Cabell's best work—contribute to the Holocaust?

Wagner's music is banned in Israel, after all, but maybe it was only that the self-important Nazis liked the self-important Wagner. Or maybe it only needed Adolf Hitler to like Wagner; in the minds of his victims, Hitler and his musical taste have



been linked together. Hitler did what he did, and he liked Wagner, who was also a bit of an anti-Semite, but were the works of Wagner the mainsprings of Hitler's madness? If so was it the music or the libretto-the book? Cabell regards his work as unimportant, but suppose a Mozart or a Wagner had written operas based on "Jurgen" or "The Cream of the Jest?"

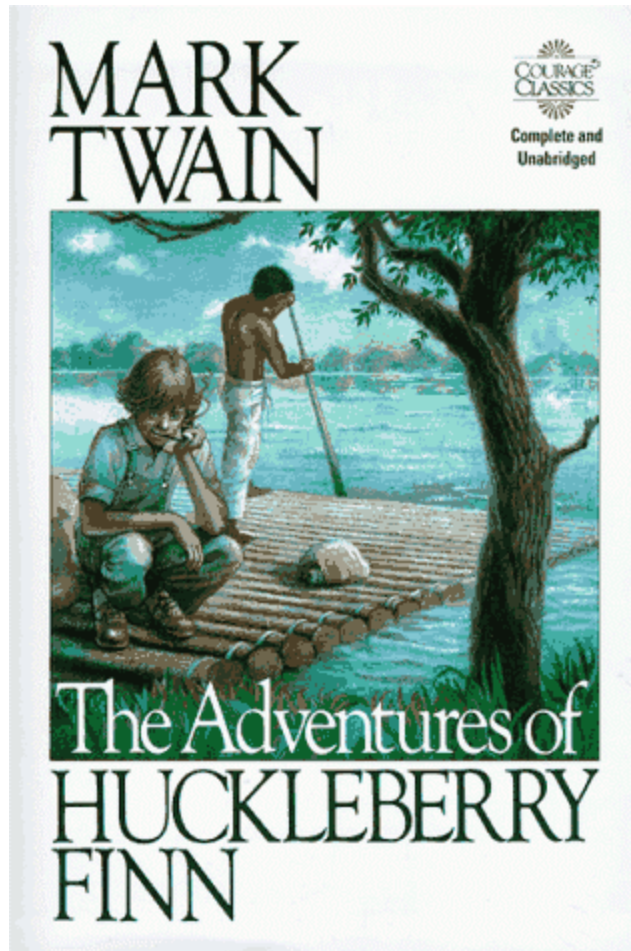
Set against this handful of examples is the fact that most of the people who were willing to die to affirm the literal truth of the Bible were unable to read. For them, the book in question was a kind of banner to be followed, a metaphor encapsulating the essence of their group. And yet not all books are gonfalons;

sometimes books make their mischief by being read-or heard. When Pierre Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais wrote "The Barber of Seville" (1775) and "The Marriage Of Figaro" (1784) shortly before the French Revolution (1789), his two plays were immensely popular, and immensely controversial, since they took a cool, rational look at the follies of an established order which was on the verge of collapse. Half a dozen composers set them to music, of whom Rossini and Mozart were the most notable. Was Figaro popular because it resonated with the discontent of its

audience, or did the plays somehow contrive to overthrow Louis XVI by the sheer excellence of Beaumarchais's prose? Cabell would surely assert that the former is more likely, while conceding that by giving a voice to the discontent, Figaro may have amplified it somewhat. Of the good Beaumarchais, the Encyclopedia of the Opera says: "...his writings did much to precipitate the French Revolution," an opinion shared by Napoleon who recalled that seeing "The Marriage of Figaro" in 1784 was "like seeing the Revolution in action."

Seeking support for Cabell, we turn to the USSR and note that the sheer

awfulness of its official art-Socialist Realism ground out by meretricious hacks-was not what brought down the Soviet Union. Socialist realism that yoked artists in the service of the state achieved, as Cabell hand predicted, nothing of importance. The fact that Socialist Realism was bad art didn't matter because it was



symptomatic, reflecting internal

contradictions of a more serious nature. The symptoms? Art is a mirror that reflects reality, so that by arousing indignation against perceived evil, society may be moved to correct that evil. For example, in "The Jungle" Sinclair Lewis took on the meat packing industry of his day, reforming it considerably. And in "The Silent Spring" Rachel Carson took on the pesticide industry so that a number of pesticides, including DDT, have since been banned. By controlling art in order to prevent it from reflecting any uncomfortable truth, the Communist nomenklatura were acting as they always did, maintaining the status quo by lying about awkward realities. What the USSR needed was better bookkeeping, a little honesty to offset the national malaise of pervasive, systematic corruption. At the end, Soviet statistics were so corrupt that Gorbachev and his ministers took the CIA's estimate of the USSR's economy as the best available guess. Might better art have preserved such a corrupt system? No, even the great Wagner couldn't save Mad Ludwig, the last King of Bavaria who had internal contradictions of his own.

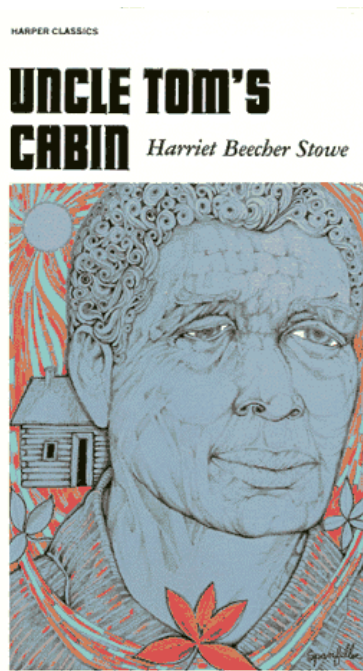
In the present day, Figaro & Co. continue to provide some of the more lively nights at the opera, providing gainful employment for theater and musicians, albeit reduced to a 'mere' entertainment. Even if they once overthrew the state, the barber and his Marriage can do so no longer, which is, of course, because the state has changed, robbing the plays of Beaumarchais of their

trenchancy, their bite, to leave them with only their wit, charm and theatricality. The music of Mozart and Rossini doesn't hurt either.

Might a book that took on a situation that didn't change maintain its influence over time, its power to engage and enrage? We have mentioned "Uncle Tom's Cabin," which has, since the Civil War, become a period piece, having lost much of its power. And yet, it has contributed the epithet "Uncle Tom" to describe a Negro Black African American overly deferential to whites. Billie Holiday verbed that epithet when she described Louis Armstrong as "Tomming with his whole heart." In 1884 Mark Twain wrote "Huckleberry Finn," which could be regarded as a belated piece of anti-slavery propaganda (Twain may have left Missouri for Connecticut because of that perception.) The Civil War is over, and slavery has been abolished, but

"Huckleberry Finn" is still in print, and people are still seeking to have it banned, because, among other reasons, it uses the epithet "Nigger" 137 times. Twain wrote with truth and power about the relationship between Blacks and whites, and because that relationship remains strained and contentious to this very day, his book retains the power to disturb. Might "Huckleberry Finn" provoke reforms, as Sinclair Lewis did with "The Jungle?" Maybe; it is

arguable that such reforms have already been provoked and already failed. The



problem is that there are no simple solutions, so that Twain keeps his readers riled up and compels them to keep striving for justice until they get it right.

Thus Cabell is wrong; some books do have influence. The works of Shakespeare and the King James Version of the Bible affected the English language profoundly. Yet in another sense Cabell is right; books are written mainly to entertain. And while entertainment is a primal need, albeit not impressively high on the list that begins with air, water, and food, it is not contemptible either. Bored humans develop strange vices. And while books are written to entertain, they also—because you cannot do only one thing—provide illumination, (assuming the reader is receptive to being illuminated) on the contemporary society. By illumination I mean that the author not only provides a description of what is, but offers a moral critique as well. One book may be useless, but a dozen or a score may provide readers with a holographic image of their society, a useful map of the world, absorbed like the vitamins in Calvin's Chocolate Frosted Sugar Bombs.

Back in 1932, James Branch Cabell, old and tired and with his major work behind him, declared that sink or swim it doesn't matter, either way books will do nothing of importance. Leaving aside the question of importance, just what IS it that they are actually doing, these books that somehow persist in human memory? It is true that most authors complete their artistic trajectory in a decade or so, and vanish, but there are lots of authors and even more people who want to be authors. Despite this mayfly transience, their books, taken en masse, provide readers with a

holographic image of the world as it was at the time each individual manuscript was completed. Notice that we are not talking about any sort of canon here, we are talking about the flood of run-of-the-mill books which connect the readers with the world they live in through vicarious experience. A canon is selection of some number of books, selected because they are persuasive in support of the particular pov espoused by the canoneers. Note also that these transient books serve their purpose and vanish. Someone told the Greek philosopher Demosthenes that you couldn't bathe in the same river twice, to which he replied that you couldn't bathe in the same river once. With bathtubs, you can bathe in the same water for as long as you like, ignoring the river from which it was drawn, and with libraries you can relieve the controversies of your youth, comforted by your fore-knowledge of the outcome; Nixon resigns, the Titanic sinks, whatever. At some point readers realize that they have as good a fix on the world as they are going to get, and forgoes enlightenment in favor of delight.

For the readers delight now, writing well is not unimportant; there is a world of difference between the books of Jane Austen and A.E. Van Vogt, between "Pride and Prejudice" and "The Weapon Shops of Isher." Quality as opposed to meretricious crap (Theodore Sturgeon tactfully observed that 90 percent of everything is crap. Maybe he should have said 99 percent.) The work that survives, that continues to be read, the plays of Shakespeare and Chekov, the novels of Jane Austen and Fyodor Dostoevsky, the poetry of Dante Alighieri and John Lennon, provides the magisterial view of the culture that produced it, or

maybe that should be Culture. The 1,000 books that define a civilization. As Hermann Goering said: "When I hear the word culture, I reach for my revolver." Unlike Cabell, the Nazis and their Communist cousins, took the power of writers very seriously. And who knows – what if Rossini had written the Ring Cycle instead of Wagner? An idle dream that, an impossibility; Wagner was subsidized by Mad King Ludwig of Bavaria, and the resulting work resonated with Adolf Hitler, who was differently mad. If Wagnerian opera had not been available for Hitler, he would have looked elsewhere for what he needed. The present is ruled by the past,

even as the past controls the future. Since our view of the past influences how we try to get into the future, we are guided by the view from the only window we have; books. We "remember" the London of Sherlock Holmes and Dickens, the English countryside of Jane Austen, the Paris of Victor Hugo and Alexander Dumas, and so forth. If today's rulers find themselves in the thrall of dead economists, then today's masses are equally in the thrall of dead novelists, James Branch Cabell to the contrary, notwithstanding.

The End

