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This is the 2000th issue of the MT VOID (and its 40th year). (Yes, there are *three* zeroes on that.)

MT	Middletown
HO	Holmdel
LZ	Lincroft

Which I think makes it the second longest running personal zine, and the personal zine with the most issues, in science fiction fandom. The word count for the issues on-line (half of 1984, and 1986 to the present) is just over 4 million words. (DUNE is 187,240 words, so this is about 21.8 "Dune"s, or just about the length of the entire "Wheel of Time"). The current issues average about 3500 words each.

2/5/18, 9:49 AM

The longest-running personal zine seems to be Mike Glyer's "File 770", which began forty years ago last month. The MT VOID will not reach forty years until August.

(And I will add that of the eleven original charter members of the Bell Labs science fiction club, only three are left on the mailing list: the two of us and George MacLachlan. So a big congrats to George for his staying power!)

I think I will now go listen to Tom Smith's "ConValescence":

So let us all gather at ConValescence, The fannish retirement con, And true to our habits, like drumming pink rabbits, It keeps going on and on.

...

So let us all gather at ConValescence, Where old-timers go to renew, Where Doug Adams' hero is named Effer Dent, And the Film Room shows Mister Magoo.

...

[-ec]

The History of Illustration in the MT VOID (comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

Other than the annual ASCII illos I put in the MT VOID to meet some people's definition of "fanzine", we have run only one (real) illustration in our history. Inspired by an on-going discussion about Colin Wilson and Jack Vance, with Mark Leeper supporting Wilson and Rich Ditch supporting Vance, "Sophists of Fury" (by D. Kirby) appeared 01/28/81. At the time the MT VOID (known as the "Holmdel Science Fiction Club Notice") was hard-copy, not electronic. Since our mailings do not support attachments, I cannot send out a copy, but it can be found at:

http://leepers.us/mtvoid/Sophists_of_Fury.jpg

[-ec]

Mashed Potatoes Still in Crisis (comments by Mark R. Leeper):

Well, we are very nearly there. This piece is being written just nine days before we publish our 2000th issue of the MT VOID.

People have asked us what were we planning to do for the big issue. I realized today that I still had no idea. This was a most august issue and not just anything deserved a place. GREAT! Well, I asked myself, what did we do for the 1000th issue? We let it go uncelebrated, unnoticed. What is more we didn't even know it was the 1000th issue at the time. We did not keep track of that being the modest (and ignorant) people that we are. We were not even numbering the issues at the time. Evelyn at one time presented me as a fait accompli that she had counted issues and on January 7, 2005, we were publishing issue number 1264. That made things a little easier. I just had to figure out what the date was 264 weeks prior to January 7, 2005. That is 264×7 or 1848 days. My palmtop does date calculations so that made things easier. Our 1000th issue was published December 17, 1999.

At first that 1999 issue seemed not very promising. I wrote a column for the issue, but it was on mashed potatoes. That did not seem very promising. The topic of mashed potatoes does not seem like it has a whole lot of drama. But wait. It certainly did not lose us readers when that was the topic of issue #1000. What could be more typical of the way I write? This column could be just the right thing to put into issue #2000. Maybe it will be in #3000 also. Without further ado...

Mashed Potatoes in Crisis

As we approach the end of the century I think there is one subject on just about everybody's mind. Not all writers have been willing to face the situation, but part of the reason people read the MT VOID is that we handle the issues that nobody else will touch. In that spirit I think it is time to look back and assess just what exactly has gone wrong with mashed potatoes and how we have arrived at the current deplorable mashed potato situation. I think it is purely human nature and the invisible hand of the marketplace that have brought us to the current sorry pass. But let us look unafraid at the facts. It was not that long ago that mashed potatoes were different...

Old-fashioned mashed potatoes were a standard dish. My own mother used to make mashed potatoes. She would take a special device called a "potato masher" and mash them and they would come out the consistency of mashed potatoes. All the way through. There were no lumps. Well-mashed potatoes should have no lumps. "Silky" would almost describe the way they came out. People who had lumps in their mashed potatoes simply had not taken the time and made the proper effort to make

the dish correctly. A good cook made perfectly homogenous mashed potatoes. Oh, those were such wonderful times. Little did we see that change was coming to the world of mashed potatoes.

Then came the mashed potato flake and the mashed potato bud. Add boiling water and butter and they made perfect mashed potatoes. Every time. Well most times, sort of. They were easy to make but they were not always perfect mashed potatoes. If you added too much water you could end up with mashed potatoes you could sip through a straw. This was not good. Also the flavor might not always be exactly right. This was even worse. But they were easy to make so lunch counters, cafeterias, and bad diners everywhere made instant powdered mashed potatoes from flakes and passed them off as real mashed potatoes. Sometimes they made them well. Sometimes they were made not so well.

Then the public started catching on. There were those who refused to order mashed potatoes altogether claiming it was one more step downward in the sausageing of America. Or they felt they really were mashed potatoes but they had been made in a food processor. Even good restaurants where the potatoes were hand-mashed were caught up in the paranoia. Their answer was to try to find some way to make mashed potatoes that would obviously been hand mashed. They began to not make the potatoes quite so perfectly. Leave a few lumps in the potatoes, that was their philosophy. If they missed a few lumps that only proved that they made them the right way with a potato masher. It is the imperfections that confirmed they did the job the old fashioned way. A lack of lumps altogether makes the potatoes suspect. It is just like the fact that you can detect an artificial diamond by its total lack of imperfections.

And that was how things remained for many years. But things have not continued like that forever. I realized this the day I ordered turkey and mashed potatoes in a diner. And the potatoes came a little too liquid and smooth. They were almost the consistency of a thick milk shake. But as I ate them I was amazed by finding a lump in the potatoes. Had they really over mashed these potatoes to this extent and still left a lump? But then my tongue noticed edges on the lump. It was a diced potato. Then it dawned on me what was happening and the full horror of the situation hit me. Yes, these were powdered potatoes as I had first guessed. The powdered potato mixes were now coming with lumps. I don't know if they have them mixed into the powder or if you get a little packet of potato lumps as part of the mix. That was about a year ago. Since then no matter where I get mashed potatoes, fancy restaurant or cheap diner, they ALWAYS have lumps. The mixes have gotten smarter and they are now not usually diced potatoes, but every restaurant that serves mashed potatoes has lumps. This was not how it was supposed to be. Mashed potatoes should not have lumps. But you cannot serve mashed potatoes without lumps in the mad race to make all mashed potatoes seem hand-mashed. But the lumps no longer prove anything. Some mashed potatoes will be hand mashed and some will be assembled from hobby kits, but ALL will have lumps. This is the legacy that the 20th century will leave the 21st in the field of mashed potatoes. The next generation will grow up believing that mashed potatoes just always have lumps. This is not a legacy we can be proud to have left. An inexorable part of the dumbing down of America will be the lumping up of mashed potatoes. And we will have done it to ourselves.

Now don't get me started on what has gone wrong with the taste of Coca-Cola. [-mrl]

Now They Dun It--THE BLACKLIST (Season 5) (television review by Dale Skran):

An idea bouncing around in the background of THE BLACKLIST is that Red's plan for Lizzy might be that she should become his successor, and his real agenda was to train her via inducing her to pursue and destroy the world's worst criminals, in the process becoming #1 on the BLACKLIST. Lizzy does end up shooting a cop, killing the Attorney General, and being on the FBI most wanted list, but with Red's help she backs away from all that and seemingly returns to a more peaceful life. In the latest season, it is starting to look like the writers are playing with the idea of Lizzy as the #1 Blacklister pretty seriously.

+++++ spoilers +++++

The first arc of the 5th season ends with murder of Tom Keen and Elizabeth in a coma. She wakes up ten months later to discover that she has survived Tom but his killers have escaped. Leaving her daughter in the care of her grandmother, Susan Hargrave, Tom's mother and the President of the private military contractor Halcyon Aegis, Elizabeth heads to Alaska for some frontier living to build up her strength. There she encounters a group of mob killers bent on finding someone in the witness protection program for torture and execution. They think they have the numbers, the weapons, and, after all, she is just this little woman, but they have not reckoned with the monster she has become. Stealing a great line from BATMAN BEGINS, the thugs are just "practice" for her revenge on Tom's killers. At the end of the episode two have been burnt alive, one poisoned, and the fourth killed with an ax. Lizzy disappears into the Alaskan wilderness, a ghostly modern day HIGH PLANS DRIFTER, hitching a ride to parts unknown like Jack Reacher, her cabin scrubbed of all evidence but surrounded by bodies, and filled with mystified police.

This is just the start of a series of escalating episodes. Next she tortures her way up the ladder of a criminal organization to find one of the members of the gang that killed Tom and put her in a coma. Later, after she kills the gang member in a brutal hand- to-hand encounter, she steals the "Stewmaker" files from the FBI, and uses the Stewmaker's protocols to destroy the body, but finds that one of the thug's eyes is really an advanced piece of technology. She also orchestrates an elaborate plot

worthy of Red himself to steal a piece of cloth with her blood on it from the police evidence locker, and in which she makes Reddington an unwitting pawn.

Regardless of what happens next, Lizzy (one wonders about a possible reference to "Lizzie" Borden, who bears an odd resemblance to Megan Boone/Elizabeth), in her pursuit of Tom's killers, is well on her way to remaking herself as a grade-A monster, and perhaps, in time, to be the #1 Blacklister. Whether this was always Red's plan, or something he wanted to prevent is left to future episodes, but there is a sense that now that Elizabeth knows Red is her father, that, inch by inch, she is becoming more like him.

THE BLACKLIST has always borrowed from the comics, and now appears to be recapitulating the Dark Phoenix saga, with appropriate modifications, of course. This sequence promises to be filled with harrowing violence, but there is also something engaging about Elizabeth coming into her own as a master player of games and dealer of death.

Perhaps the most amazing thing about THE BLACKLIST is that although many details of Elizabeth's relationship with Reddington have been revealed, there still appears to be a cosmic secret that drives men to kill to find it out or control it. It surely has something to do with the fate of her mother, and just exactly what happened in the fire where her hand was burned. We'll just have to wait and see, while keeping score as Lizzy rises, reborn, as the most dangerous Blacklister of them all. Perhaps this was inevitable, since, as Nietzsche said, "Whoever fights monsters should see to it that in the process he does not become a monster. And if you gaze long into the abyss, the abyss will gaze back into you." THE BLACKLIST is the ultimate abyss, and there is no escaping the consequences of hunting monsters, not for the team, for Red, or for Lizzy. [-dls]

CASANOVA VARIATIONS (film review by Mark R. Leeper):

CAPSULE: This is a film that intentionally keeps radically changing its style from stage play to opera to present-day in period costuming. This intentionally disorients the viewer and has a little fun with the character of Giacomo Casanova. Director Michael Sturminger co-authored the philosophically leaning script based, of course, on the life of the notorious libertine Giacomo Casanova, who claims to have seduced and bedded a thousand women. The film is something of a puzzle with reportedly inside jokes. (I say "inside" because I am on the outside.) The music by Mozart might be the most welcome element of the film. Rating: +1 (-4 to +4) or 6/10

Giacomo Casanova, the mega-libertine, is writing his memoirs. A publisher wants to buy the memoirs and publish them, but Casanova does not want them to be public knowledge. That is how the story begins and at least for a few minutes the audience should be able to follow the plot. But that will not be true for long.

CASANOVA VARIATIONS is a puzzle box of a film. It is one or perhaps multiple stories told on three or more tracks of storytelling. One track is in the form of a Mozart opera (staged at the Sao Carlos opera house of Lisbon), though this opera is really a fraud--pieces of several Mozart operas. Malkovich has no singing voice, incidentally, and that plays into what is going on. In the opera Malkovich is playing Casanova with a ravenous appetite for sex, while his outer self philosophizes.

Another track is a stage play telling what seems to be the same story. Yet another track is John Malkovich backstage playing himself in the present. It is not clear any of this is consistent with anything else. Just about every scene is a variation of what we have seen previously and Malkovich as Casanova philosophizes about his need for variation. It is not clear what writers Michael Sturminger (who also directed) and Markus Schleizer (who didn't) are really trying to say beyond expanding the limits of cinematic expression and perhaps having a good time with the audience. I am sure nobody expected it all to work for the viewer. The telling is full of in-jokes that require special knowledge. When Casanova collapses on stage he is brought back to life by an 18th century defibrillator.

It might have helped the viewer if the portion of the film done as opera would have been subtitled, but then it might have been obvious what was being sung was mismatched pieces of other operas sewn together. To further complicate issues there are flashbacks thrown in that are not entirely obvious. This is a film that is probably not intended to be followed, but to show off the visual imagery and give the viewer some beautiful Mozart music. Malkovich as Casanova seems to be playing the dirty old man version of the dirty young man he played in DANGEROUS LIAISONS. In the end the story is about Malkovich as much as it is about Giacomo Casanova. If you are bothered by opera sung in Italian you might find it excessive.

I rate CASANOVA VARIATIONS +1 on the -4 to +4 scale or 6/10.

Who really was the greatest seducer of all time? Technically that title would almost certainly go to Genghis Khan. I have been told that about one third of the Earth's current population bear DNA from Genghis Khan who considered rape his right as a conqueror. But perhaps no European can claim so many successful seductions as Giacomo Casanova.

Film Credits: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt2614400/reference>

What others are saying: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/casanova_variations

[-mrl]

Ionic Moments (letter of comment by Charles S. Harris):

In response to [Mark's comments on "ionic moments in cinema"](#) in the 01/26/18 issue of the MT VOID, Charles Harris writes:

If you want ionic moments in cinema in February there is Marlon Brando confronting his brother Charlie (Rod Steiger) in ON THE WATERFRONT. We have Brando as Stanley Kowalski yelling "STELLA-!" and Daniel-Day Lewis's line "I ... drink ... your ... milkshake!"

I couldn't put my finger on what is ironic about those scenes. Well, maybe the milkshake....

Then I reread it, and tried "iconic". That works. [-csh]

Mark responds:

These are classic particles of film history, charged with emotion. It is that charge that holds them to be appreciated by contemporary audiences. That is what makes them ionic moments.

(Yeah, I guess that makes sense.)

And my column in the last VOID was neither Doric nor Corinthian. [-mrl]

Charles replies:

Thanks. I tried to come up with an explanation along those lines, but failed to come up with one. [-csh]

Ulysses S. Grant (letter of comment by Jim Susky):

In response to Evelyn's comments on Ulysses S. Grant in the some issue or other of the MT VOID, Jim Susky writes:

Another Grant bio--this one is rumored to be a door-stopper:

<https://tinyurl.com/void-grant-bio>

[-js]

Evelyn notes:

It is 864 pages in paperback. [-ecl]

This Week's Reading (book comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

A DOLL'S HOUSE (a.k.a. A DOLL HOUSE) by Henrik Ibsen (translated by Rolf Fjelde) (ISBN 978-0-451-52406-5) is a classic, but it has its flaws. Neither of the two main characters is very likeable, or even very three-dimensional. Character changes happen entirely too quickly. (I suppose they have to, if Ibsen was trying to observe the Aristotelian unities.)

The first thing that everyone comments on (because it is so obvious) is the way Torvald refers to his wife Nora: "my lark," "my squirrel," "the little spendthrift," "my little songbird," "my little Nora," "my stubborn little creature," "you little goose," and "you little helpless thing." He even elaborates on these: "the little lark's wings mustn't droop," "don't be a sulky squirrel," "a songbird needs a clean beak to warble with," and referring to Nora's "frightened dove's eyes." And Nora goes along with this, referring to herself as "your lark" and "your little squirrel," and saying, "I'd be a wood nymph." This isn't a doll house--it's a menagerie.

At the beginning of the play (Christmas Eve) Nora is completely wrapped up in herself, one minute consoling Kristine about her childless widowhood, and the next going on and on about her own wonderful children and Torvald's new job and how rich they are. Even after Kristine talks about having to support herself, Nora suggests that she go off to a spa, indicating that she has not really listened to what Kristine was telling her.

In Nora's first discussion with Krogstad, Krogstad asks whether she ever considered whether she did a fraud against him, and

she replies, "I couldn't let myself be bothered by that. You weren't any concern of mine." (For that matter, when Torvald asked what would happen if they borrowed and then he died and they could not repay their lenders, Nora says, "Them? Who cares about them? They are strangers.") But when she wants something of Krogstad, she asks him to think of *her* children, and to think of the "horrible unpleasantness" *she* would face, and so on. She expects that Krogstad should consider *her* feelings and wishes, even though she has no thought for anyone else's--not even her friend's. What favor Nora does for her friend does not inconvenience her, but their conversation, as noted above, indicates that Nora is completely self-centered. Nora also has no idea of how much of the loan she has paid off. Her clumsy fraud indicates she does not think things through very well at all, but acts impulsively to her own ends. Surely she could have written an earlier date?

Nora also regularly lies to her husband, both before and during the events of the play, even knowing what importance he places on her honesty. She lies about eating macaroons, about who bought the macaroons, about whether Krogstad has been in the house, about the mail, about Torvald's illness, and of course about the loan from Krogstad, and she was also going to lie about why she was asking for Krogstad to be retained. Nora first brags about her influence over Torvald, but when she is asked to use it, completely reverses herself and says she has no influence. Whether she is consciously lying at first, or really believes it until she is called out on it is not clear.

As an aside, it seems as if Ibsen is trying to lay some of the blame on Nora for Krogstad's dismissal, by having Torvald say that he gave Torvald's post to Kristine, so he cannot take Torvald back. But from everything else he says about Krogstad, it is clear that he would have dismissed him anyway, and Kristine's arrival just provided an easy replacement.

Ibsen seems in general very sloppy with his medical details. What kind of illness (that Torvald apparently does not even know about) requires a year in Italy ("the south") to be cured of? But then again, does a son really inherit "tuberculosis of the spine" from a father who acquired it through dissolute living? And does one even acquire "tuberculosis of the spine" for oneself by dissolute living? In GHOSTS, Ibsen has the son inherit syphilis from his father. One might believe that Dr. Rank refers to what he has as tuberculosis to avoid admitting to syphilis, but it still seems as though Ibsen has no concept of how diseases are acquired and transmitted, and seems to buy into the notion of the inheritance of acquired characteristics. (One attempted explanation, at least for GHOSTS, is that the father passed his disease to his wife, who then passed it on their son. That is, in my opinion, a very weak explanation.))

To return to Nora and Torvald, she asks Torvald to decide what she will wear to the party, but he then also decides she will dance the tarantella. Torvald does not restrain his attempts at control just to Nora (which at least might be understandable in the context of the times), but presumes to tell Kristine she ought to embroider instead of knit. Why? "... because it's a lot prettier" with the needle moving "in an easy, sweeping curve." He goes on, "Knitting- -it can never be anything but ugly [with] the arms tucked in, the knitting needles going up and down." That Kristine might prefer knitting or even that she might be able to earn more money from knitting than from embroidering does not matter, or even occur to him; what is important is that *his* aesthetic sense is not assaulted. (This is parallel to the more modern phenomenon of men telling women whom they do not even know to smile--because that makes the men feel better.)

And then Torvald tops it off by calling Kristine "a deadly bore," when he has exchanged barely a dozen lines with her, monopolized both conversations, and told her she should embroider instead of knit.

Not content with reducing Nora to an animal, he now calls her "my dearest possession," putting her on the same level as his razor and his fountain pen. He finds the idea of "little Nora talking about scientific research" laughable.

And if Nora is completely self-centered at the start of the play, so is Torvald. Nora at least attempts to shield her husband from unpleasantness, but Torvald's reaction to their salvation is to say, "I'm saved!" When Nora asks, "And I?" he says, "You, too, of course," making her sound like a mere adjunct to me and completely forgetting that it was her actions that started this. Torvald is not willing to take the responsibility on himself to save Nora, but he assumes that everyone will focus on him anyway.

And at the end of less than three days, Nora has supposedly undergone a complete transformation from flibbertigibbet to independent woman. This seems awfully sudden. [-ec]

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Quote of the Week:

I don't need you to remind me of my age. I have a bladder to do that for me.

--Stephen Fry

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