

THE REFRIGERATOR

**SPECIAL
LIFE AND DEATH
ISSUE!**
"OPINIONS, PROPERLY
CHILLED"
ROCHESTER, NY

#4

There has been much hoopla lately regarding that odd loop of pavement that wraps the downtown area. The inner city once referred to the ghettos of the city, and many loop haters think the loop was built as a last defense of the downtown central business district in the event of riots. Think of the Inner Loop's function as that of keeping the "inners" outta the downtown area. Confused? So is your writer. Recently the loop haters were given cause to celebrate when a downtown planner suggested filling in that portion of the loop that connects East Main and Monroe Ave. to bring it up to the level of the world. The Vision 2000 planners reasoned that commuters might feel more affinity for the downtown area if they didn't pass through it every day while riding down in a ditch. The Refrigerator suggests that if each resident of the city were to bring one wheelbarrow load of dirt downtown and dump it into the inner ditch, we would save tax dollars and provide a valuable improvement to the quality of life in our fair city.

On another note, now that the rains and snows are falling, the controversial skyway system will be getting more use. We have a suggestion for a promotional event to focus attention on the sterile bridge system that connects some of the finest empty buildings in Rochester. Why not run a mountain bike race through the Skyway? Turn off the escalators, throw some carpeting on the floors and let them loose! A creative P/R pro should be able to get national press coverage for what would promise to be a unique event. Give the Skyways back to the people for a day. The Replacements' song, Skyway, would be a great theme.



Five Hundred Years!

For years I've racked my brains to come up with a suitable coherent articulation of what constitutes an historical truth. Sometimes, failing utterly to articulate this attempt at my desk, I go up the street to the tavern and deliberately bring up some subject that I know will lead around to a general (and controversial) discussion, bearing upon my dilemma.

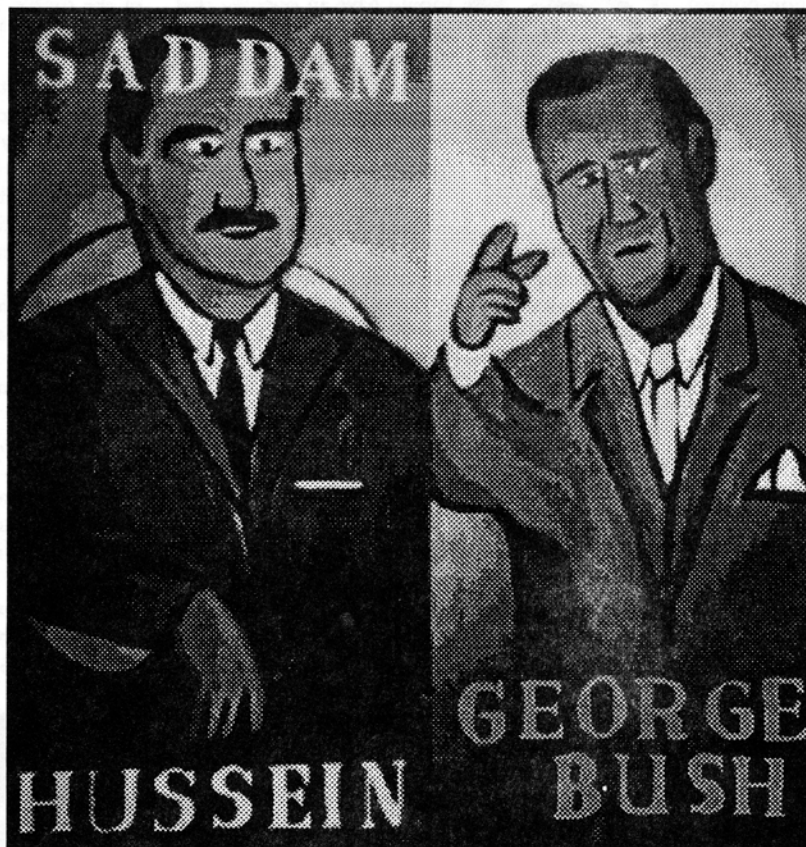
What I did last night was bring up the subject of Christopher Columbus. I just brought it up suddenly, of course, when nobody was saying anything; I said a new biography of the discoverer of America was claiming the original accounts of him are a pack of lies. (I had learned that fact on the late night television show, Nightwatch--which, of course, I shouldn't be watching, but . . .).

What happened was the first biographer of Columbus was his son, who perpetrated the first legends. But, five hundred years late, these legends are investigated, and the real Christopher Columbus finally begins to emerge. So, I say, it isn't that I am even interested in Columbus, but what is interesting here is the historical process. I wonder if historians always think they are emerging into the daylight. I think, aren't legends that have endured that long themselves now historical facts, even if they are lies? What is the idea of getting to the real Columbus, anyway?

At this point, of course, I see I have confused

my small audience. So I say, "for years I have racked my brains trying to come up with a suitable coherent articulation of what constitutes an historical truth."

I can tell when people want me to get to the point. They don't even have to say: "what are you driving at?" I can tell before they say that, I better make the point. It's like this, I say, "as soon as anything happens, the interpretations, or revisions, or insistent references to it immediately



begin. Nobody stands in awe simply of what happens, but people make it certain that it appears something happened."

Like in the case of Christopher Columbus--and his very normally prejudiced son. The historical fact is that the story told by the son survived for five hundred years. The newly investigated Christopher Columbus won't survive five years, because . . . nowadays we lack a suitable coherent explanation for what even constitutes an historical truth. Because of this, we are destroying all history!

"Oh, is that right?" I hear someone shout. (I might be back in my office at the desk at this point, because it doesn't seem plausible in the tavern anymore.) "Yes," I reply, "I do this all the time, even with my own biography, I mean I bolster it all the time with descriptions of what just happened. I am determined that something will go down in history!"

And what about the rest of us--I hear a chorus of small voices ask. Well, it's like this, I write down in my notebook: Many people seem to move in a realm where they are psychologically blocked from acknowledging any events. They speak about nothing, make no approximate version available to anyone else, seem to be afraid of being investigated later. What happens to them?

They are . . . traumatized, calcified, eradicated from within. Like I said in another instance, history is merciless!



Cheeseburgers.

These invitations to congestive heart failure are being threatened on all sides by a barrage of tofuburgers, lentilburgers, turkeyburgers, grilled chicken sandwiches, etc. But for those of us who

are diehard fans of the cholesterol blast, the cheeseburger cheeseburger (sic) is still the king. In Rochester the CB comes in two styles; those served near the lake and those served in diners. The optimal lake version comes loaded with hot sauce (the ultimate mystery meat and hot pepper sauce), grilled peppers and onions (order P&O), relish, catsup and mustard. It's done on a barbecue grill and the burger must overflow the bun. The diner version is best dressed on a roll;

that is, lettuce, tomato and mayo. Both versions require a dexterity to consume them that comes from years of juggling condiments at lunchcounters all over town. My recommendation for diner style brings me back to Gina's at Culver and Atlantic and for lake burgers (and I'm going out on a limb here) it's Don's Original in SeaBreeze.

Another Boring Museum Piece

It used to be the hippest thing there was. The kings were awesomely creative musicians, technicians with soul, so much stronger, so much closer to the edge, that they were the embodiment of cool; poets with horns and drums and basses and pianos who stretched the boundaries of their art form. People like Joe Henderson, Don Cherry, Ron Carter, Sun Ra and many others still play like that, writing and improvising new music in a continual exploration of jazz. World music showed up in their music in the fifties. Blues and funk got their deepest explorations in the hands of Miles Davis and Ornette Coleman. Which brings

me to my point. The state of jazz in Rochester sucks. At two recent "open" jams I watched the more experienced musicians hog solos, mercilessly cut each other at every opportunity and generally behave like egotistical older children while playing the same old tired post bop licks. They endlessly trade fours on tired standards or stand around with ridiculously hip expressions on their faces. When is the last time these guys had a band that wrote music, rehearsed and went out and took chances live in a nightclub? The Charlie Parkers and Thelonious Monks they idolized wouldn't have given them the time of day. How about an attempt to create some jazz that moves the audience out into an awesome world and shows it to us in all its resplendent colors and sounds.

"It is regrettable for the education of the young that war stories are always told by those that survived."

Louis Scutenaire



Based on the fact that life is a mystery, any conscientious description (keeping that fact in mind) of one's immediate surroundings, and/or the current circumstances of life, should produce . . . a feeling of mystery. But, in most everything you read, this fact is missing.

Those of us who spend too much time in bars and nightclubs take consolation in the fact that once in awhile we are rewarded with something special: an evening of being in the right spot at the right time. The best bet for the right spot lately has been Maxwells on a Thursday night. The sign says: musicians from local bands, playing acoustic, for free. That's right, no cover,

reasonable drink prices and the chance to see some local heroes take risks with wooden instruments. Chuck Cuminala, alias Colorblind James, and Bernie Heveron, bassist extraordinaire, provided an evening of mainly original music that was worth paying for. And you didn't have to. The atmosphere is noisily irreverent and intimate; something difficult to achieve these days. Look for Mic Fambro of Miche and Greg Townsend of the Essentials in the near future. Maxwells, Thursdays, South Clinton near Alexander



Another Day

Two men at a bar in downtown Rochester are talking about guns. There are no other comments offered by the non-plussed three-o'clock in the afternoon alcoholics who sit there wondering what there is left worth to think about, lending their ears to the ambience that tells them they're still alive. The television at the upper corner of the bar is always on. We act like we don't even see it, arriving for a couple of beers for lunch, our construction work in a sudden lull because our boss is out playing golf and our best worker is home nursing his sore weekend softball muscles.

Although it's Monday, the beers are really flowing. First topic of discussions: the gentlemen I work with are brothers, so their stories overlap, whether they fought with their women, got radically drunk, or both. Work seems more peaceful than their domestic lives, though they can't confidently say that they missed work, even though they constantly complain and take three hour lunches at least twice a week at Pooche's Pub. I'm just a laborer, and go along with the plan of the day, though it seems improvised.

It took me five rounds, three hours, and several topics later to notice what was happening, or at least come up with a theory of explanation of the appearance of the Devil himself in the content of our conversations: first about tools, then, almost without clear reason, shifting to the problems associated with insurance. Then Irv started on the problems he's having with his woman, followed by myself, whose problems are much less pressing but the lure of the topic was too enticing.

It wasn't until after a talk about our youth that I noticed a pattern. The three of them were arguing about toys, the best ones they had when young. The whole afternoon was a total regression: from the best circular saws to Tonka trucks, from hanging dry wall to Rock-um Sock-um robots. It was four o'clock and we were all drunk. There was a toy commercial on the television; we were in the middle of some late afternoon cartoon.

Wait. What was going on here? Could the television be exerting such a subtle influence that we were not consciously aware of it infiltrating into our conversations? As if there were only certain things you could talk about at certain times of the day, an agenda already laid out for us, and it didn't matter whether we were adults or children, we were anything our thoughts could harbor. I mentioned this to Irv and said, "Isn't it scary?" He said, "yeah," shrugged his shoulders and rose to take a leak and the topic was immediately dropped.



At the edge of the country (not farmland but the US of A), where 590 North abruptly ends (I mean you can drive 55 mph on a four lane divided highway to a stop sign on a dead end), you'll find yourself on sacred

ground. The historical markers have not been put up yet but you'll feel it in the lake air.

A walk on the pier (it's more exciting in the winter) will wet your appetite for a ground steak sandwich. You'll have three stands to choose from although I haven't made this decision in almost thirty years. I've heard that if you went to

Irondequoit High, you favor Don's Original and if you spent your formative years in Webster, you'd choose Vic and Irv's.

Irv is gone. The place has been here since the late thirties. Vic Jr. is being primed for the inevitable. Quality does not predominate, atmosphere does. Florescent light, a TV on in the corner, WCMF on behind the counter and Vic's wife will have her green polyester stretch pants on. They serve real onion rings here. They grind their own beef and their shakes don't come out of a foam machine. Don't expect good service; expect service with style, teenage style, and if you need something to settle the grease, go to Don's window (don't go inside) and grab a scoop of chocolate-almond ice cream.



has accomplished.

A well constructed sentence should have an opening that catches your interest, then digress or entertain upon its subject for what seems like a suitable stretch of time, and then close with a phrase that throws light back on all it

Perfect Life

It's an outrageously perfect life whose circumstances insist that you're foolish. It's a tender God whose chief endearment calls you back to the voice of yourself. It's a profound sleigh of hand that raises this theater, to the spectacle of world History--and every night. A colossal allowance has been made for your approximate wisdom. Precious tentative syllables you've learned on route to any appearance here, Would not even rate were not your neighbors all saints, favoring in the end some faint Harangue, defending the sky, which is nothing we know about--like the absence of thinking. Too bad you are thinking, too bad about life--

For he, the adolescent cowboy sinner, used to ride on boxcars, used to watch a million films Of himself, drank a million stale beers at dark tables with several unknown friends . . . And couldn't talk. But he kept waiting, for outrageously perfect life, like that were you!



You could sing this if you wanted. Used to sit in coffee shops, wandered all the aisles, Was the profligate consumer never buying it right now, but using it by degrees. Never

Bought anything by luck, was too jaded by what life offers anyway without meaning. Couldn't Understand that process! I said, it's a tender mother who calls you back to the voice of Your sudden self, a father amused all the while.

What is the text, they often ask, you are Faintly preparing? Is it . . . God taking something back? One always wonders why the children

Can't stop the flow of their profligate admiring, while one is stalled on the progress report.

The trouble is, I said, no one is talking from their thoughts, but being interviewed. They Don't believe in miracles--like they used to.

Maybe we ought to discuss the dead historical.

Why else would it be there? These beautiful Girls won't be beautiful for long unless we take them, with some dilemma that is strong. They want to know, like the sinner, want to know about the movies, scenes in boxcars, the rest. The day's inside the night, now, and coming fast.



Take the Picture

The photographer is exerting his conversational charm on the subject, to catch him in a natural light . . . We are so familiar with photographs that we omit the photographer from our judgement, when looking at the photograph. I

wonder, who was the first photographer to say: "just act natural!"--or to sneak around and take pictures of subjects unsuspecting.

Well, the whole charade may be caused by a passing verisimilitude. I mean people actually think that photographs render a realistic image. But someday photographs might be unrecognizable to people--like Egyptian art. Which leads me again to my favorite idea, that things actually looked different in the past.

Anyway, that's what I was thinking about as the photographer was exerting his conversational magic, asking me questions on another subject like he was going to distract me so we could pretend we weren't setting up an artificial shot. It was for the 1990 Rochester Poets Calendar, I was going to be the poet on the month of July. This calendar, I immediately imagine being fished out of the rubble (like of a ruined city) in about the year 2075 by some tourist, or student archaeologist.

In the future, you see, only trained scholars will be able to decipher these photographs. It's like I was saying about Egyptian art--you see. "Hurry up!" I say to the photographer, "I'm beginning to think of this in historical terms."

He's bending down and looking through the lens of his camera and smiling, but like the eye doctor smiles. "You mean when you're famous," he says, charmingly. Aha, a discourse on that subject, by the subject being photographed (for the calendar), might disarm the subject (me), or make me relax, or look really fiercely into the camera.

"Well no," I say, "if this isn't fame, I don't know what is." That makes him laugh. "Well, take the picture," I say.

But he starts packing up. "I already did," he says. Ah, I think, history is merciless!

The media provides a (subliterary) book for everyone to read in serial. It's the big book, and it's cheap, and it never ends.



The Refrigerator Talks Back!

Refrigerator,

I have a problem. I have two brothers. One is in advertising. The other was put to death in the electric chair for murder. My mother died from insanity when I was three years old. My two sisters are prostitutes, and my father sells narcotics to high school students. Recently I met a girl who was just released from a reformatory where she served time for smothering her illegitimate child to death, and I want to marry her.

The problem is - if I marry this girl, should I tell her about my brother in advertising?

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