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believe it or not,

THIS IS
COSTAGUANA
XI, 13.5

This demi-issue of COSTAGUANA is not brought to you by Uncle Connie-poo, but courtesy of Her Holiness, Pope Joan II, and the entire crowd down at the California Riviera Vatican. Ain't we got fun, or what? This is Pandemonium Publication #901, and it is not the first time that this noble 'zine has received the imprimatur of the Sexiest Pope in Christendom.

SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT

Owing to a personal emergency, Conrad will be out of town until approximately the 2nd week in January. He and Jean request that you please refrain from calling and/or visiting. COSTAGUANA will, in consequence, be late. Not ~~too~~ much, we hope -- however, bear in mind that Conrad will not be able even to begin work on the next issue until he returns to San Diego. It will not do you any good to phone up about it, so please write if you need to contact Conrad for any reason.

EVEN SPECIALLER ANNOUNCEMENT

Clearly, Conrad will not be able to take Diplomacy orders by telephone, since he will return after the deadline. Do not phone in your orders. Orders which would have been phoned may be mailed. This one time only, any orders POSTMARKED by the date of the deadline (8 January 1988) will be honored, so long as they are received not more than one week afterward (that is, on the 15th). The deadline is not thereby changed to the 15th; it is still the 8th. If you phone orders to Conrad, and it is after the 8th, they will be late. Please respect Jean's wishes in this matter and don't phone orders to her. If it's the 8th or before, you can mail them; if after, they're late anyway. (How many different ways can I give you the same information, I wonder?)

DAS AM SPECIALLSTEN ANNOUNCEMENT

You are getting a wonderful present with this. For the last two (count 'em, 2) issues, Conrad has forgotten to print the latest issue of EREHWON (the Subzine). Since we have an ounce to play with, anyway, and it's only 4 itty-bitty pages, I am (at last!) including this wonderful and deathless prose, which you may attach to your last issue of COSTA as a beloved and treasured memento, without which Hanukkah will seem as bare and empty as a Phillip Glass opera.

Now, we will have recapitulation:

1. No Conrad for a month.
2. Write, don't call. Post it, don't dial it.
3. Enjoy.

Now, we will have coda:

Tatty-bye.

Hm. Do you suppose Conradisms are catching?

Rod Walker

At first, after the Princess Hotsiititts had put the ring on the idol's finger, nothing happened. Then, slowly, to Conanrad the Barbarian's horror, the idol began to change. It began to melt and flow, its limbs and eyes (as well as other appendages) began to multiply horribly (not to mention disgustingly), its color changing to a nasty, pasty white with little black marks all over it. Suddenly, he realized the cosmically terrible Truth: the statue was not merely changing into an ordinary super-loathsome monster; no, far worse, it was changing into an

EREHWON 132

EREHWON IS AN UTTERLY IRREGULAR SUBZINE WHICH READERS OF COSTAGUANA MUST PUT UP WITH WHETHER THEY DON'T LIKE IT OR NOT. LAPSES INTO TASTEFUL, INFORMATIVE, AND ILLUMINATING PROSE ARE ENTIRELY ACCIDENTAL AND ARE NOT TO BE CONSIDERED ANY PART OF OUR NORMAL POLICY. THIS TAD OF TASTELESS TRASH IS PANDEMONIUM PUBLICATION #900 (!!!), EDITED BY ROD WALKER, 1273 CREST DR., ENCINITAS CA 92024. LETTERS TO THE EDITOR ARE WELCOME (HINT, HINT), AS WELL AS INTERESTING TIDBITS WHICH MIGHT (HAVING BEEN REJECTED BY PENTHOUSE AS BEING TOO RAUNCHY FOR THEM TO HANDLE) BE SUITABLE FOR PUBLICATION IN THESE PAGES.

This will go about 3 pages. I'm going to start with some items which have diverted and/or amused me in the recent past. Maybe some other things will be here, and if there's room, we'll have the beginning of an essay on limericks which is the preface to my uneagerly un-awaited limerick contest. The good news (for those who are waiting to run down to your bookstore and buy it) is that my novel, A Death in Jerusalem, is about 130K words along, and has reached the 2/3 mark approximately. I have a pretty high opinion of it (which obviously proves nothing), but in addition so does a friend of mine who has himself published a couple of hundred books or so. Well, next year we'll see if this turkey can fly.

* * * * *

Our first selection is from Robin Ray, Words on Music, 1984.

"The following is an extract from a synopsis of Carmen, thoughtfully provided some years ago by the Paris Opera for the benefit of its English and American patrons:

"Carmen is a cigar-makeress from a tabago factory who loves with Don Jose of the mounting guard. Carmen takes a flower from her corsets and lances it to Don Jose (Duet: 'Talk me of my mother'). There is a noise inside the tabago factory and the revolting cigar-makeresses bursts into the stage. Carmen is arrested and Don Jose is ordered to mounting guard her but Carmen subduces him and he lets her escape.

"ACT 2 The Tavern. Carmen, Frasquita, Mercedes, Zuniga, Morales. Carmen's aria ('the sistrums are tinkling'). Eger Escamillio, a balls-fighter. Enter two smuglers (Duet: 'We have in mind a business') but Carmen refuses to penetrate because Don Jose has liberated from prison. He just now arrives (Aria: 'Slop, here who comes!') but here are the bugles singing his retreat. Don Jose will leave and draws his sword. Called by Carmen shrieks the two smuglers interfere with her but Don Jose is bound to dessert, he will follow into them (Final chorus: 'Opening sky wandering life'). ...

AXT 4 a place in Seville. Procession of balls-fighters, the roaring of the balls heard in the arena. Escamillio enters, (Aria and chorus: 'Toreador, toreador. All hail the balls of a Toreador.') Enter Don Jose (Aria: 'I do not threaten, I besooch you.') but Carmen repels himwants to join with Escamillio now chaired by the crowd. Don Jose stabbs her (Aria: 'Oh rupture, rupture, you may arrest me, I did kill der') he sings 'Oh my beautiful Carmen, my subductive Carmen. ...'"

[Really, honest to God, the entire passage is sic.]

* * * * *

Next is a bit from Donald MacCampbell, The Writing Business, 1978. MacCampbell, a highly successful New York literary agent, on pp.66-70 quotes from various letters he's received from prospective clients, and comments on them. On p. 70 is this gem:

"Dear Mr. MacCampbell:

I have sold over 50 novels to West Coast publishers. They're all very sexy and deal with sodomy, incest, child-molesting, bestiality and necrophilism. Am I ready for New York publishers?
Sincerely,"

"Comment: I wrote back and told him he was years ahead of the local publishers who were still preoccupied with rape, homosexuality, and simple fornication. I suggested he try again in five years."

* * * * *

Here is another gem from Ray's book, this time quoting from one of his own essays originally published in Preview in 1978. It's about conducting and this section is entitled, "Maximising the Applause".

"Make the orchestra stand immediately a work is over. This is essential to satisfy their democratic instincts, and if you get it over at the outset the applause will appear to be as much for the composer as for them. Then leave the rostrum and wait in the wings for at least a minute before returning to grab the glory of a solo bow. One recall like this is worth half a dozen rapid, greedy rushes to and fro; it adds great dignity and hints at personal exhaustion after the overwhelming experience you have been so generous to provide. 'Bleeding' or 'milking' applause is an exact art and should not be undertaken by a tyro. The finest example on record is that of a famous American conductor and pianist, who is also a composer of serious and lighter music, who was conducting a performance of a concerto played by another conductor and pianist from the USA. At the end there was a big reception, and the conductor turned to the pianist and said: 'Go on to the platform and take a bow alone.' The pianist demurred. 'Go on,' urged the conductor, 'you played the piece, you deserve the appreciation.' The pianist returned to the platform to an even greater storm of clapping. The moment he came off the stage, the conductor gripped him fiercely on the shoulder and hissed intently in his ear: 'Right. Now drag me on!'"

* * * * *

I'm going to put in here a short passage from my novel. However: it is not humorous and it will take a bit of explaining. I'm rather proud of this section because it has good emotional appeal and helps delineate the essentially cruel character of Pontius Pilate. In the novel, events in the life of Jesus appear only when narrated by witnesses, never directly told by the author. This section is part of a narrative by the beloved disciple, John, a priest in the Temple (and, as the Gospel of "John" will tell you, a relative of the then-High Priest, Joseph Caiaphas).

The tragic center of this small episode is not Jesus, but Gamaliel bar-Simon bar-Hillel. I've set the reader up for this bit pages earlier. Gamaliel himself, of course, is a real person (he is the same Gamaliel who appears briefly in Acts, and who is a famous rabbinic figure, along with his grandfather Hillel and his grandson Gamaliel II). In the novel, Gamaliel has a much younger brother, also named Simon, who is often called "Son of the Rabbi" (or Bar-Rabbas). Simon Bar-Rabbas has been arrested as an agitator during recent rioting in Jerusalem over the use of Temple funds to pay for an aqueduct (an event well-documented in Josephus, although its exact date is unclear). He is awaiting condemnation and execution at this point. To complicate matters: Gamaliel's (and Simon's) late sister (she died in childbirth), Sarah, had been the wife of Jesus. [A man cannot be a rabbi without being, or having been married, and Jesus was definitely referred to as "rabbi" and even "master" (rabboni).] There is a further complication. John, the beloved disciple, is a distant cousin of Gamaliel, the brother of Jesus' aunt (by marriage), and was a fosterling to Jesus' family for 5 years. So the narrator of these events is as involved in the tragedy as its victims.

With me so far? OK -- Jesus has appeared before Pilate once, been sent over to Herod Antipas, and now is brought back to Roman jurisdiction. Pilate, puzzled by his refusal to offer a defense, has tried (unsuccessfully) to get him to offer one in a private interview. Now he returns to his judgement-seat to continue the public hearing. In addition to those already mentioned, Joseph Caiaphas, his father-in-law the ex-High Priest Hanan (Annas), and about a dozen representatives of the Sanhedrin are present. Plus soldiers and members of Pilate's staff, including his advisor/interpreter Philo. John, however, is interpreting officially at Caiaphas' request. Pilate announces he's ready to continue and ...

Just then Gamaliel came forward, knelt in front of the Governor, and held his hands out in supplication. "Mercy, Lord Pilate," he said.

Pilate squinted through his eye-piece. "Who ... ?"

"My lord, I am Gamaliel, the son of Simon, the son of Hillel."

"Ah, yes. Gamaliel the son of Simon." His eyes went up and down, and side to side as he pondered something. "So," he finally said. "I have another of old Rabbi Simon's sons to deal with today."

Philo came over and spoke softly into Pilate's ear for several moments. The Governor nodded and smiled several times. Then he looked at Gamaliel again. "You ask mercy. Very well, you will have it. I have two condemned rebels -- ordinary sorts who should be of no interest to this assemblage of Jerusalem's luminaries. And I have two more not yet condemned officially. But, alas, my work crew have only three uprights ready for their crosses this afternoon. Clearly I cannot condemn four men to hang on three crosses."

Pilate sipped at his wine and held the cup in both hands. "Now, my clever Philo has reminded me of an ancient custom, which I have tried to observe each year of my residence in your holy city. Did not the Maccabean Kings release one condemned prisoner as an act of Passover mercy each year? Very symbolic, that, no doubt. Well; then, Gamaliel, I will do my solemn Passover duty, since I now stand in place of your former kings."

He set his wine-cup down and smiled in a way I did not like. "But let the choice be that of him who first begged it. Which shall it be, Gamaliel? Jesus, son of Joseph, called the Nazarene? -- or Simon, son of Simon, called Bar-Rabbas?" He turned and told one of the guards to go fetch the other prisoner he'd named.

Gamaliel stood up and backed away, saying nothing, a horrified expression on his face. Several of the others of the Sanhedrin were already around him, saying, "Bar-Rabbas; choose Simon Bar-Rabbas. How can you reject the claims of blood?"

Caiaphas, however, seemed outraged at Pilate's gesture. "Lord Governor! How can you consider letting this traitor go? He is an enemy of Caesar by word and deed. The man who sets him free is no friend to Caesar."

Pilate laughed. "Do not threaten me, Joseph." He held up his right hand to show a large ring on the index finger. "I am presently, at least, a known Friend of Caesar, and you have never been one."

Caiaphas turned his attention to convincing Gamaliel to claim the mercy-release for Simon. The great rabbi at last covered his ears and pushed his way past the others and away from them. Two Roman soldiers escorted a shabbily-dressed man into the Courtyard -- Simon Bar-Rabbas.

Pilate picked up his staff of office, and smiled in Gamaliel's direction. "Well? Which is it to be? Whom shall I release?"

Gamaliel fell to his knees, tears running down his face. "Oh, my lord Pilate, you pose a harder choice than you know. This man" (indicating Simon) "is my own younger brother ... and this man" (indicating Jesus) "is my late sister's husband, and a man in whom there is no guilt."

Pilate's smile did not change a bit. "Oh, but I do know, Gamaliel. You'll agree, I think, that this adds a bit of drama to the tedium of my office. Now choose. Who will live? Who will die? Will it be Simon Bar-Rabbas?"

Pilate gestured with his staff toward the other man. Several of the priests were saying, "Free him. Free him."

After a moment, Pilate continued, "Or will it be Jesus of Nazareth?"

The Governor pointed his staff at the Master. Caiaphas and some of the priests began saying, "Crucify him. Crucify him."

Gamaliel stood up. He stared coldly at Pilate, then at Caiaphas and Hanan, then back at Pilate. He undid his robe so that it hung loose. Then he reached up to the neck of his tunic with both hands, and with a great effort tore it from top to hem.

"Let it be Simon," he said, his voice broken and sobbing. "Mercy for Simon Bar-Rabbas." Then he turned and walked away, toward the Temple gate.

"So be it," Pilate said, but without enthusiasm. He gestured toward Simon. "Release." The soldiers pushed him toward us, and he ran over. Two of the others untied his hands and escorted him back toward the Temple gate. Then Pilate gestured toward Jesus and the soldiers holding him. "Bring," he said.

When Jesus stood before him, Pilate sighed, and held out his staff of office. He gave his sentence in the old Latin formula:

Condemno:
ibis in cruce[m].
Lictor, contiga manus.
Verberetur!

("I condemn thee: thou shalt go to the cross. Lictor, bind his hands. Let him be flogged!")

Jesus was bound and led away. We stood and watched, as if there were something more to do. Pilate laid his staff down and then looked at his hands. He clasped and unclasped them a few times. "Sticky," he said simply -- with the spilled wine, I suppose. There was a small basin of water on a table nearby, and he asked Philo to bring it to him. Carefully, he rinsed his hands and dried them on the towel in his lap.

Well, that took more space than I thought it would. I should mention that just before this begins, Pilate has filled his winecup during the private interview, rather too full, and spilled some on his hands while walking back out. He'd wiped them on that towel, but as you may know, Middle Eastern wines tend to be thick, even syrupy sometimes, and spilling wine on your hand is going to make it sticky if you just wipe it off.

I hadn't planned this incident originally, but it occurred to me when I noticed that Gamaliel's father's name was Simon, the same name I chose to give my semi-fictional Bar-Rabbas. There have been a lot of happy accidents like that in this book. I think this incident is especially felicitous because it introduces a wholly unexpected element into a narrative which (although it has other slight departures from the traditional story) is so well-known the reader is scarcely going to be surprised by the main body of it. It also, as I said, makes the character of Pilate more fully realized, and helps to show something I may also rewrite portions of the book to point up more; namely, the inherently sadistic nature of Roman culture in its innermost recesses.

This seems to leave about half a page for limericks. It's been my intention for quite some time to sponsor a hobby limerick competition. I'd like to couple this with an introductory essay on the subject. I'll eventually be sending this to several other Dipzines, but remember, you saw it in EREHWON (oops, in COSTAGUANA; sorry, Conrad).

* * * * *

THE LIMERICK

It's sometimes said that the limerick is the only native English verse form. That may be, as various versions of the limerick meter and form can be found in quite ancient English folk-verse. It even appears in various places in Shakespeare -- most notably in a drinking-song in *Othello* ("Clink the cannikin, clink ..."). There is evidence, however, that like the sonnet, the limerick is a transplant -- in this case, from France by way of Ireland. If so, its luxuriant growth in the English-speaking world has eclipsed and blighted its Continental version, so that today a limerick in French sounds, at best, awkward and mannered. As do limericks in most languages, except possibly Dutch (which, in many ways, is closer to English than any other living tongue).

Limericks, in anything like the modern form, first appeared in the early part of the 19th Century as verses of moral instruction for children (the Pious Old Lady of Leeds and all her loath-somely goody-goody kin). That sort of thing quite properly died out with satisfying suddenness, but the form was revived by Edward Lear as namby-pamby nonsense verse -- again for children. He was right to consign such stuff to the nursery. Perhaps his best effort might have been:

There was an Old Man with a beard,
Who said, "It is just as I feared: --
Two Owls and a Hen,
Four Larks and a Wren,
Have all built their nests in my beard."

Heady stuff, huh? Actually, this is pretty sophisticated compared to most of his efforts. It is a typical Lear limerick, in that it opts for the weak and now almost unacceptable technique of repeating the first rhyming word in the last line (Lear wrote only 4 -- out of many dozens -- limericks in which a 3rd rhyming word is employed; but, alas, they have little other merit).

[Nextish: More, much more, on the limerick. Beware!]