

STATE OF THE ART

A column of opinion by David Gerrold



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A couple of years ago, Robert A. Heinlein published a novel called *Time Enough For Love: the further adventures of Lazarus Long*. Lazarus Long was the oldest human being in the galaxy and he had opinions on everything; some of these opinions were included in the novel in a section called "The Notebooks of Lazarus Long." Some of these opinions were outrageous, some were thought-provoking, and some were just-plain infuriating. Just which was which, however, was something that many of the book's various readers could never agree upon.

The thing that interested me was that so much could be said in such an economical form: a one-liner or a paragraph, the *aphorism* is an art unto itself. I admired the concise elegance with which each thought had been expressed. It was a writing skill I wanted to learn, and because the best way to learn something is to practice at it, I began to practice . . .

But—as I quickly discovered—one does not just sit down and write a few pages of aphorisms, profound or otherwise; it doesn't work that way. For the most part, aphorisms happen by accident; they are those snappy little observations that pop out of your mouth in the course of a conversation and hang there in the air for a few second while you belatedly realize the deeper truth in what you thought was just an ironic joke.

The trick is to keep a notebook. I carry "Boswell," a pocket-size micro-cassette recorder to note ideas and thoughts for present and future projects—and occasional "profound" remarks, too. Every time something falls out of my mouth that even remotely resembles a profound remark, I record it for my file. The long pauses between the remarks don't show when you put them down on paper. I've been collecting these little half-witticisms for two or three years now with the intention of eventually using them in a novel as chapter headings. The last time I went through the file, there were enough remarks for a dozen novels. Once you

get into the habit of writing aphorisms, it's hard to stop.

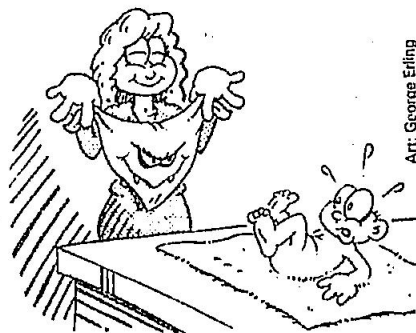
As a respectful recognition of the source of the idea, I call my quote file: "THE QUOTE-BOOK OF SOLOMON SHORT."

Here are a few:

Any great truth can—and eventually will—be expressed as a cliché—a cliché is a sure and certain way to dilute an idea. For instance, my grandmother used to say, "The black cat is always the last one off the fence." I have no idea what she meant, but at one time, it was undoubtedly true.

All fiction is lies. Good fiction is lies based on truth.

I think people can go crazy thinking too much about sanity.



Art: George Erling

A truly capable human being should be able to diaper a baby—or kill it—as the need arises.

Old age is horrible only to those who've never experienced it.

If a thing is worth doing, it's worth doing for money.

Nobody is ever *ready* for anything. If they were ready for it, there would be no point in living through it.

Contentment is the continuing act of accepting the process of your own life.

Too bad common sense isn't.

There's no suspense in stories about supermen. We know a superman is going to solve his problems. The real suspense is when we see an average guy, just like you or me, trying to solve a superhuman problem. Now, *that's* exciting.

To err is human—to blame the other guy is even more human.

Say what you will, lightning is one helluva murder weapon. The only problem, of course, is aiming it.

There ain't no justice. Fortunately.

What's wrong with the universe is that God was working without critics. If he'd had a good half dozen reviewers to point out to him exactly what he'd done wrong and how he could have done it better—why I'm sure we'd all be resting six days a week and working only on the seventh.

True genius can be identified by the fact that its expression changes the world into something it has never been before.

Isn't it amazing how much fun two people can have just by taking off their clothes?

Half of being smart is knowing what you're dumb at.

Death can't be all that bad. Nobody who was dead ever complained about it.

Malpractice makes malperfect.

Fame is a pedestal that other people keep shoving under your feet whether you want it there or not. It makes it hard to walk.

History is full of the bones of those who were smart enough to say no, and the triumphs of those who were foolish enough to say yes.

The liberal of any species is always more dangerous—because he always seems so much more rational.

Nothing brings so much pain as the pursuit of pleasure.

I gave up chess in favor of sex because sex has two winners.

Truth can only be understood in myths—but how better to be precise than wrapped in the robes of allegory?

A free society is one in which you choose your own crimes.

Art is almost always a political statement—and politics is almost always an art.

Neurosis is a communicable disease.

Even bad advice is better than no advice at all—you don't have to follow it, but it gives you one more option to consider, and that at least widens your perspective on the problem.

The more we know of the universe,

the more we learn through science, the more knowledge we gain, the more truth we perceive, then the more accurate portrait of God we are painting.

The right to criticize the American government is strictly an American rite—and it is the rite that Americans will most vigorously defend against outsiders. Only an American can say terrible things about the American government and mean it as wholeheartedly as he does.

The only winner in the War of 1812 was Tchaikovsky.

Richard Nixon was thrown out of office for burning his scandal at both ends.

A city is a machine of *too many* moving parts—why should we be surprised when it breaks down? That's what it's designed and built to do.

Immortality is easy. It's wearing your watch that makes you grow old. (Also, cut out spicy foods after age hundred and seventy.)

Everything is connected to everything else—that's why it's so hard to keep a secret.

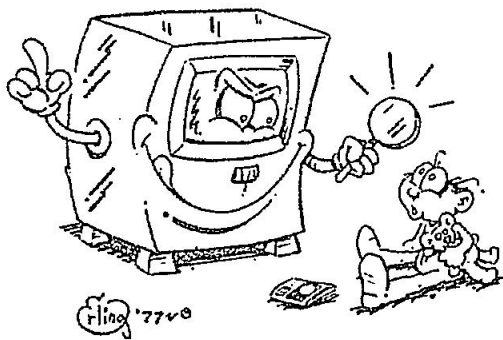
There's an inevitability about human history that cannot be ignored. Certain events *have* to happen so we can learn from them and progress beyond them—so we can learn never to repeat them. Like World War I, for instance, we never did that again did we?

Nature abhors a hero. For one thing, he violates the law of conservation of energy. For another, how can it be the survival of the fittest when the fittest keeps putting himself in situations where he is most likely to be creamed?

When you pass the buck, don't ask for change.

A little ignorance can go a long way.

Any person seeking special dispensation under the law is admitting failure to compete equally in society. When Anita Bryant asks the law to protect her children, she is admitting her failure to do so herself.



The best example of child molesting that I can think of is Saturday morning television.

Thoreau was no band-leader. The sound of all those different drummers makes it hell to organize a parade.

Learn to be sincere. Even if you have to fake it.

Morality and practicality should be congruent. If they're not, then there's something wrong with either one or the other.

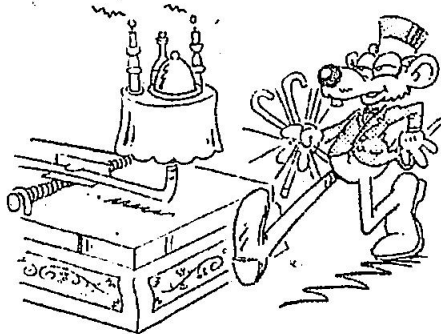
It only takes one person to make a marriage work—but it takes two people to really foul it up.

Of course life is bizarre. The more bizarre it gets, the more interesting it is. The only way to approach it is to make yourself some popcorn and enjoy the show.

There's no such thing as absolute truth—that is absolutely true.

Television watching is the only perversion left in America today. It should not even be performed by consenting adults; but if you *must*, then it should be performed alone, in private, in a darkened room, and should not be discussed in polite company—ever.

There are only two things in the universe that violate the law of conservation of energy. One is the Road Runner, the other is the Coyote. You can't do it, neither can I.



Sure you can build a better mousetrap—how else will you catch a better class of mouse?

It may very well be that death is the best part of life—that's why they save it for last.

If we are all part of the image of God, then each of us is closest to God when we are held in the arms of another human being.

Some of the things I say are to shock, and some are to be true. Unfortunately, the truth is almost always shocking and the shocks are almost always true.

The big problem with human beings is that we don't come with an instruction book.

Old age is such a wonderful thing—it's a shame to waste it on the elderly.

Love and death are anti-thetical. One can be used to cure the other.

People will go to the most incredible lengths to make fools out of themselves.

Some of the things I write and say, I do not agree with—perhaps I will never believe in them at all—but still they must be said so we can think about them for a while—even if only for our own amusement. But, of course, there are always the louts who confuse the message with the messenger.

Never trust a grapefruit.★



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