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Letters

Fucking garbage, mate. Just stop.

-Dave K.

What a mistake it was reading that.

-Anon

A mockery of intelligence.

-Anon

Sad.

-Dave K.

Glad to see someone else sucks dicks.

-Claire

Whatever. Also: your website is stupid.

-Anon

Suck. Suck. Suck. Pinecone sucks.

-Anon

Can I write NotPynchon a love letter?

-PJ

/lit/ doesn't need this. Fuck off.

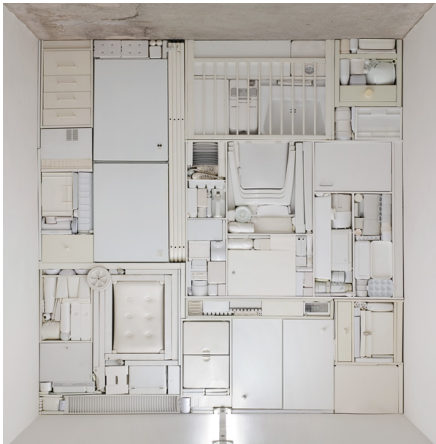
-Anon

What qualifies YOU to decide what's good?

-Alex S.

Letters are welcome and should be addressed to the Editor at:
AtticusPinecone@gmail.com





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SELF

by C.A. SHOULTZ

January Henderson was sitting at her desk when she looked up and saw herself walk past.

She'd had her morning staff meeting where she reported on the movement of user data over the week. She'd had her coffee and she'd had her doughnut and she sat down at her desk to work on spreadsheets. Then she looked up and there she had been.

It gave her awful pause. She sat up straight. Blinked. Must have been a mistake. Seeing things. Too much sugar. 'Crazy' she muttered. She turned to her laptop and typed her report. Then she went to the door.

She could still see the bobbing of her ponytail, *her* ponytail, the ponytail of her that was not on her. Only for an instant though—the doppelgänger vanished around the corner. January bit her lip and followed. She stopped. It would do no good to bolt through the office. She gathered herself up and carried on.

Her double was gone. Breathing hard and feeling her grip on reality was giving way, January walked down the hallway, coming out to the central atrium. She walked out to the railing edge and looked across. There were banks of mirrors on either side and she could see herself and she saw herself—her double, there, going through the door that marked the company's adjacent offices.

January tried to hurry, but her heels were not created with running in mind. Trotting at an even pace she made a circuit around the outer walkway of the atrium. Her heels were thumping on the carpeting and she was trying to move as fast as she could. At length, she reached the other offices. She swiped her card—it didn't take. She swiped her card again—still no. She was about to try a third time when the door came open and a woman exited. 'Oh, Janny!' she exclaimed. 'Didn't I just—?' January passed her and hurried through the door before it closed. She spun about, getting looks from people in their cubicles and at their desks. Her head pounded, and she took a chance down one long hallway, a hopeful shot that took her past some restrooms and around a bend with glass-walled conference rooms on either side. Then she saw her. The double was bending down to drink out of the fountain. She moved stiffly. January started forward—'Ah, there you are.' January stopped. She was about to speak. Mr Charon came around the corner, big and boisterous with his booming voice that carried even in the hushed and carpeted expanse of hallways. The doppelgänger stood to her full height and smiled. Mr Charon clapped her hand. He did not notice January, who was standing in the shadows of the hall. 'I'm glad I caught you before you left today, Ms Henderson. It's time we had a talk. You've more than proven your worth

to Hecate Biotech. Why, you're one of our most valuable personnel. You got my email, right?' January gasped. The email—the one she'd gotten just that morning, it had said 'Promotion, yes, I think you're more than due. Quickly, come into my office. There's lots of details to iron out, lots of paperwork for both of us to do, but here and now we can at least begin to lay down some fundamentals.' His big arm wrapped around the doppelgänger's shoulder as he led her off. That January followed in silence. The January who was January stood in numb shock for a moment. She trotted on her heels down the hallway, down the bend. By then, though, it was too late.

Mr Charon had directed the other January through the doorway to his office. He closed the door behind him. January didn't even make it halfway down the hall before she heard the lock click shut. The lights seemed to dim. January stood in silence and in shadow. Feeling slightly hazy, she turned round and wandered back the way she'd come. Around one bend and down the hall and round another bend she tottered on those heels—she stopped abruptly, stepped out of them, and then threw them one by one against a nearby wall. She was by the ladies' room. She pushed open the door and walked inside. Half the lights were out. Two banks of mirrors were on walls behind her and in front of her. She paused and looked into them. There was that old illusion that she'd seen a thousand times before. The mirrors on the wall behind her bounced back the reflection of the mirrors in front of her, and those mirrors in turn reflected back into mirrors behind her, on and on forever. It seemed as though there were ten Januarys, fifty or a hundred or a thousand, or a hundred thousand on and on unceasing. January stared into her infinite reflection. She leaned against the countertop and ran her pale soft fingertips against the glass. She tapped the mirror then and all the lights went out. ▲





Blind Watchtower

BY
Tom Caul

1968, Tay Nigh Province, Vietnam

‘All right ladies and gents, we’ve got another hit for you here at the most scenic firebase this side of the Mekong. Here’s Bob Dylan telling us all about our job—this is *All Along The Watchtower*.’

Guitar and harmonica unfolded across the canvas tents of firebase delta, the impact craters still smoking from the night before, wind whipping a ripped tent where a medic tended the remains of a private. Raymond Spillane sat in the other half of the tent, a Marlboro unlit between his lips. He stared at the torn fabric, the brown dried blood around the holes.

In his head, the endless popping of flesh and visions of flaming silhouettes falling prostrate on the ground. He, John the Evangelist, seeing stars falling to earth, men in mountains, the great beast from the ocean—the bloody tide of sin rising to reap the fields. Bugs surrounded his head as they fled the heat. A sergeant screamed at him, and he felt the weight of his rifle. Gun fire still cracked from the south. He turned and sprinted toward it. A line of troops lay prone behind a wall of sand bags, firing shots into the woods. On the far end, a maelstrom of red tracers vanished into the treeline, into green viscera. Fear twitched his trigger finger, contributing to the storm. Whistles arced from out of the trees. Soldiers screamed ‘Incoming’. His face hit the mud. Twisting, he looked into the eyes of a corpse. Blood and cream leaked from the man’s face. An officer towered over the corpse—was he drooling? Raymond turned back into the mud.

‘Private. Wake up.’

Raymond lurched awake in the shredded tent.



‘Drink.’ The medic handed him a canteen, hands caked in a hectic red. The canteen was cold. Unscrewing the cap, he tilted it to let it pour over his mud-caked face. Filth rinsing off to reveal a single cut.

A soldier was leafing through a copy of *Stars and Stripes*. ‘What are you reading?’ he asked Spillane.

‘Quiet American, Graham Greene.’

‘Isn’t that some commie trash?’

‘Greene’s a Catho—’

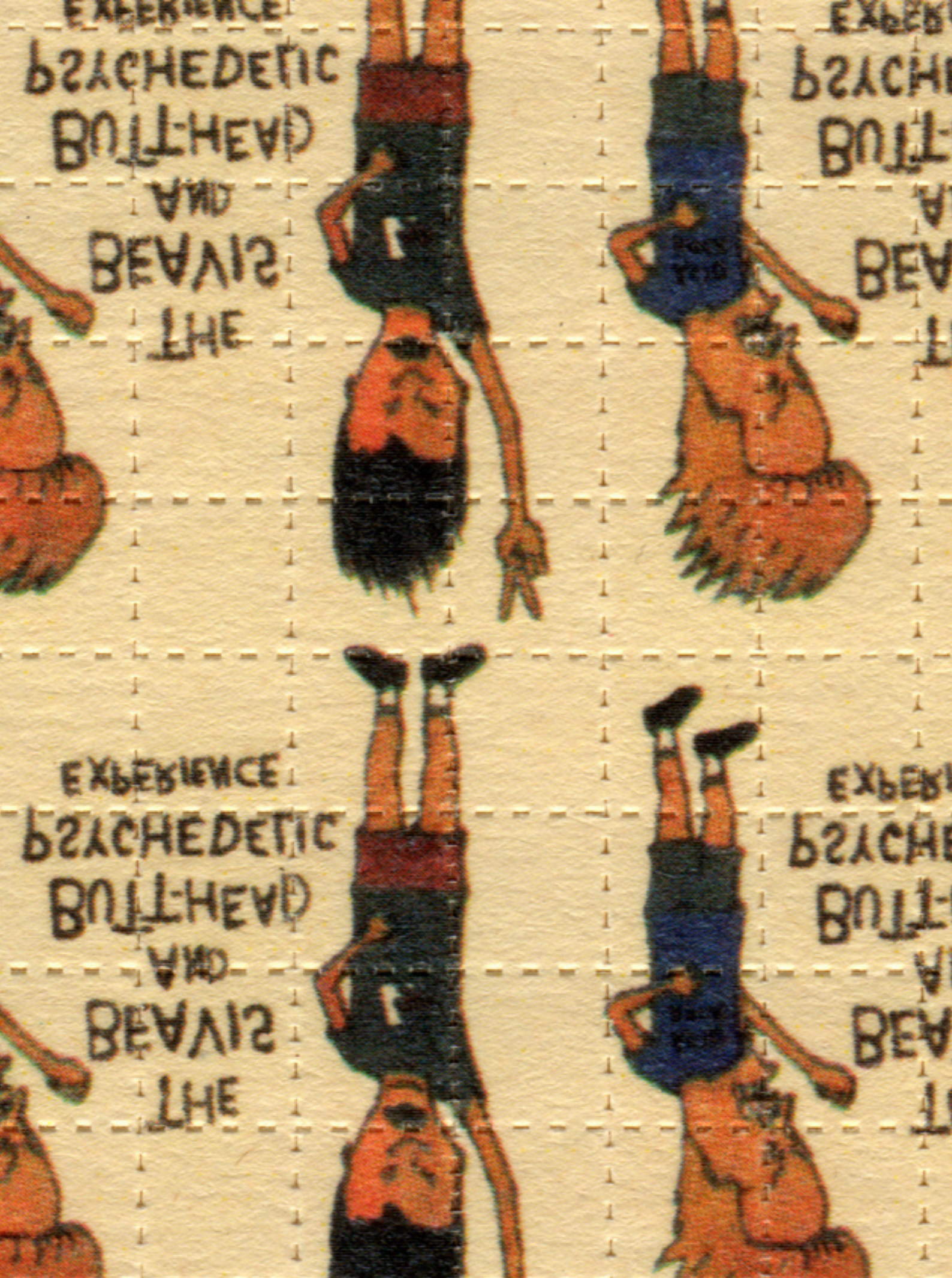
‘Shit don’t matter. Ain’t none of it matters.’ He scratched his crotch.

‘Yeah?’

‘When I look out there,’ He gestured at the trees. ‘All I see is war. Which trees to hide behind, how to flank, how to kill.’ He sat up and placed the paper on his cot.

‘You ever not been a soldier?’ asked Spillane.

In 1968 Spillane sat on that cot. His head a confused mess of images and words, a white noise of screaming. He looked out the torn tent at the flag. He thought of Kennedy, of LBJ, of Westmoreland, and of the decisions they presented him. The coke bottles lining the streets of South Vietnam, the sugar, the metal shavings scraped into the empties by VC. He thought of markets, of cars, bikes, trucks, planes, tanks, rifles, cloth, grain, uselessness, death, the drool dripping. ▲



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Inside the apartment there was a blue couch and a CRT TV about 5 feet in front of it. There was a dirty kitchen and a bathroom and brown carpet everywhere. MX and his cat sat on the couch watching TV. The cat began to flip through the channels.

'So can I ask you something?'

'What.'

'Can you make like... anything?'

'Yeah dude whatever I want. Once I went to this dimension where I was human writing on a computer and there was a cartoon that looked like our situation here but it wasn't really. It's weird, like it feels like the same sort of mold or formula or something but everything looks different.'

'Okay cool man. Make me pussy I wanna get laid.'

'Sure, whatever.'

There was a knock at the door. MX got up and opened the door. Behind him, the cat was packing a huge bong.

'Hi, are you MX?' asked the girl.

'Yeah.'

'Let's bang.'

'Okay.'

MX led the girl inside to the couch. The cat was taking a huge rip from a 3-foot-tall bong.

'Is here fine?'

'Yes.'

The girl rode MX right there on the couch next to the cat. It only took a few seconds before he blew his load.

'Let's do it again.'

'Okay'

The girl rode MX. MX looked over at the cat. He had been milking that bong for ages. The cat cleared the bong and slowly turned his head towards MX. He blew the smoke over them as death metal music played. Horns grew out of the cat's head as he opened his mouth and a snake tongue lolled out. He began to headbang. Lightning and thunder exploded outside the house.

'That's badass.'

'God damn right.'

MX blew his load again. 'Let's do it again.'

'Sure.'

The cat rolled up a joint and held it out to MX. He lit up. When he exhaled his brain exploded into the air staying suspended for a moment before his head returned to normal.

'Righteous. This is in no way coincidental to any cartoon or any person in any dimension any may have seen or experienced. Anything I am experiencing is totally original.'

The cat flipped through the channels as the girl adjusted herself on MX. MX didn't care anymore and was getting bored. He was paying more attention to the TV than the girl on his lap.

'How about this channel?'

There was a man eating guitar strings.

'No.'

The cat changed the channel. There were people jumping backwards out of pools.

'Nope.'

There was a boy laying in his bed typing on a laptop. The boy looked up and started talking.

'Hey MX, it's me! You're in a book!'

'Nope.'

On the TV there was a man crouching naked on the sidewalk with a magnifying glass. He was burning a trail of ants. A mother and a daughter walked up to the naked man.

'Mom what's he doing?' The man looked up at the little girl.

'Burning ants.'

He stood up and held the magnifying glass over his head. The beam concentrated on the girl's forehead and her face caught on fire. The more MX looked at the screen, the more he realized it may be actually happening.

'Dude stop that guy. He's killing her.'

'DUDE JUST RELAX. WATCH.'

The girl melted and the mother screamed. 'You're next.' He pointed the magnifying

glass at the woman.

'I don't want to watch this—it's fucked up.'

'Don't be such a pussy.'

'No dude.'

MX threw the girl off of him and grabbed the TV. 'FUCK THIS SHIT.'

He threw the TV against the wall. It broke into pieces but the screen still played the program. The girl got up and started to blow MX.

'FUCK THIS SLUT.'

MX pushed the girl but she got up again and started giving him a handy.

'Quit it.'

The girl used every ounce of her strength in an attempt to sexually satisfy MX. MX held both her arms but she still gave him head. Suddenly her brain erupted all over the wall. MX looked over at the cat. It was holding a smoking revolver.

'Dude.'

'What?'

'You can't just do that.'

'What?'

'You can't shoot people like that.'

'Why?'

The girl was still alive. She rubbed her exposed brain against MX's dick. MX looked down.

'Oh my god...'

He puked all over himself and the girl. His puke filled up her open skull.

'Hey! Chill out. Look, you don't like it? There. She's gone. Don't worry about it. Come sit down let's smoke some more.'

MX looked around him. Everything was back to the way it was. His pants were on and the TV was sitting on its milk crate. The girl had vanished.

'Come sit!'

The cat patted the cushion next to him. ▲



NotPynchon on Gatsby

If an Englishman had written *The Great Gatsby* it would not occupy the position of 'masterpiece' as it does today.

Only an Englishman is capable of condescending to an Irish Catholic American like that.

An Englishman would be incapable of writing *The Great Gatsby*. It's really a quite specific sort of American phenomenon, and that's why it's regarded as a classic.

Read it again. First: the book begins as a broadly satirical indictment of America in the Roaring 20s. Fitzgerald was fully aware of the element of satire: his working title was *Trimalchio in West Egg* (borrowed from the great satire on the nouveau riche in Ancient Rome, the *Satyricon* of Petronius). For a good example, look at the catalogue of guests from Gatsby's party: the Leeches, Doctor Webster Civet, or my favorite, 'The Jazz History of the World' by avant-garde composer Vladimir Tostoff (!).

These names could come out of Dickens, although the last one only if Dickens had known what sex was.

But then structurally Fitzgerald's admitted model for the book was 'Heart of Darkness'—Nick Carraway's firstperson narration matches Marlow's, and Gatsby is only seen in glimpses and hints through most of the novel, kept revealed from the reader in the way that Kurtz is.

But here's what makes it specifically American: the idea of taking a broad satire / Conradian philosophical indictment of society, and letting it suddenly open up at the end into a sort of lyrical transcendental-religious vision. This is something an Englishman would never do. 'A Handful of Dust' covers the same territory, but ends where it began: nastily. 'The Great Gatsby' works in the same direction as a film like 'American Beauty' or a book like 'Huckleberry Finn'—it starts as satire and ends with a kind of desperate quasi-religious leap into something else entirely. As though one's faith in America might be preserved if one could only escape all the other Americans...

My argument isn't with how or why it was written but with its reception.

I just think a book of equal quality written by an Englishman wouldn't be held in the same regard today because English literature has the advantage of a centuries head start and is far more storied and congested. I just don't think *The Great Gatsby* is that good, despite the fact that I really loved it.

Well, the case against it is that it's short and elliptical. But so is *Heart of Darkness*. Then again Conrad was no more an Englishman than Fitzgerald. And if you're arguing that it's not a long serious English novel like *Middlemarch* or *Sir Charles Grandison* or *The Forsyte Saga* or *A Dance to the Music of Time*, then I say thank fuck for that.

Also you might compare it to actual English novels published in the same year as *The Great Gatsby*, 1925... say 'The Painted Veil' by Somerset Maugham or 'Mrs Dalloway' by Virginia Woolf. If you think Maugham and Woolf haven't been overrated in excess of their talents even beyond Fitzgerald, then you know nothing about the history of literary reception. And those other 2 novels continue to be overrated: there were films of the Maugham in 2006 and the Woolf in 1997, whereas *Gatsby* hasn't been seen on the big screen since the 70s (The 2000 telly-film doesn't count). Then again, Virginia Woolf wasn't exactly an Englishman either, and the high regard in which she's held is precisely due to the way in which she wasn't.

Not going to bother writing a considered response to a typical passive-aggressive know-it-all nerd.

First, it wasn't passive-aggressive, it was openly aggressive.

You said *The Great Gatsby* was overrated. That's a fair opinion. Then your proof was that it was overrated because it was written by an American, and that an English writer would have a higher bar to cross. I gave you 2 English novels written in 1925 which are equally overrated... 'Mrs Dalloway' even enjoys modern classic status just like *Gatsby*, and it's in no way enjoyable to read.

I think it's fair to say *Gatsby* has been overrated. Lots of intelligent readers agree. Gore Vidal agrees with you. You're also right that America has a shorter literary tradition than England does. But I don't



For the original thread see:
<https://warosu.org/lit/thread/1118715>

think the existence of Gulliver's Travels or Robinson Crusoe or Pride and Prejudice affects the reception of English novelists negatively. If anything, it overinflates the reputations of English novelists on the same basis that De Beers overinflates the value of South African diamonds. People think, 'Oh, that's where the good ones come from.'

I guess the best question for you would be to ask what novel you've read that you think is underrated, or better than its reception history would lead somebody to believe.

Is 'genera' how you Americans have decided to spell genre or is it a word I've never heard before?

I didn't [write] that, but it's the correct Latin plural of 'genus' (i.e. 'genus and species'). As in, 'Genera among primates include Homo, Pan, and Gorilla.' Otherwise, I think it gets used in lit-crit speak as a kind of equivalent to 'genres'. ▲



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