

FOREWORD

My preparation for writing a foreword to the latest volume of Gene Garfield's essay collections resembled my composing an acceptance speech for a well-established award: I first perused the words of my twelve predecessors. I am not superstitious, but just in case, I decided to play it safe and start the foreword to the thirteenth volume of Garfield's *Essays of an Information Scientist* in the same manner as my predecessors by paying tribute to some of Garfield's inventions as an informatorissimus. This is not a word to be found in a dictionary, but its derivation and meaning require little explanation. Garfield's very first essay (over a quarter of a century ago) dealt with "The ideal library—the informatorium." If the entrepreneur and scholar behind an informatorium is an informant, then clearly Garfield deserves the superlative ending. My public tributes to *Current Contents* and to the *Citation Index*, however, have already appeared, yet I suspect that most readers are unaware that I have done so in the guise of fiction so as to smuggle Garfield's bibliographic inventions into the consciousness of the scientifically illiterate.

In *Cantor's Dilemma* (Doubleday, 1989; Penguin, 1991), the main character, Professor I. Cantor, has this to say to his favorite postdoctorate fellow, Jeremiah Stafford, as he puts him on a hot new project: "If I were you, I'd start with the *Citation Index*. You should thank God for it. When I was your age, all we had was *Index Medicus* or *Chemical Abstracts*." And then, the novel's author (Carl Djerassi) continued in the following vein:

It was true, the *Citation Index* simplified life. In contrast to all of the other bibliographic aids that searched the literature backward, this one did it forward. Maeda's original paper [a reference given to Stafford by Cantor] had been published in 1983. The *Citation Index* would list all publications since 1983 citing the Maeda paper and thus would lead Stafford quickly to other workers who had used the same method. It would save Stafford hours, but he knew all that, and Cantor knew that Jerry knew.

I had an even better reason for extolling the virtues of *Current Contents* in my novel.

When the tumorigenesis article appeared in *Nature*, even Cantor was surprised by the number of reprint requests. They came in waves. The first arrived from people who always head for the library as soon as the latest number of *Nature* hits the Current Periodicals shelf: the eager beavers who can't wait a day for the hot news in their field. After a temporary lull, when the table of contents of that particular *Nature* issue appeared in *Current Contents*, a second avalanche poured in. As journal subscription costs soar, *Current Contents*, which simply lists the titles of articles in other journals, along with the addresses of the authors, is God's gift to scientists from soft-currency countries....

I had a very special reason to pay homage to *Current Contents*, Garfield's first

contribution to the creation of an informatorium. As every reader of these collective volumes knows, *Current Contents* not only simplifies life for the perusers of the current literature, but Garfield's original essays, appearing at the beginning of each weekly issue of *Current Contents*, also amuse and instruct his readership on a remarkable variety of topics. Garfield, to my great delight, has on several occasions^{1,2,3} used some of my literary contributions as a topic of his editorial essays. One of these caused me to appreciate the extraordinary geographic penetration of *Current Contents*. In the fall of 1989, I spent a week in Vladivostok, then one of the most inaccessible areas of the Soviet Union. I had barely entered the Institute of Marine Biology when a scientist started to question me about Alfred E. Neuman, the character featured on the cover of all issues of *MAD* magazine. For a moment, I interpreted this familiarity with *MAD* in far eastern Siberia as just one more manifestation of *glasnost*, but a few seconds later, I realized that I had just witnessed the range of Garfield's readership, since an issue³ of *Current Contents* had contained a reprint of my memoir in *Grand Street*⁴ entitled "The Quest for Alfred E. Neuman."

For years, Garfield's extraordinarily diverse range of topics for his essays seemed to me proof that he had taken the advice of the manager in the Prelude at the Theater in Goethe's *Faust*:

Die Masse könnt ihr nur durch Masse zwingen,
Ein jeder sucht sich endlich selbst was aus.
Wer vieles bringt, wird manchem etwas bringen,
Und jeder geht zufrieden aus dem Haus.
Gebt ihr ein Stück, so gebt es gleich in Stücken!

Was hilft's, wenn ihr ein Ganzes dargebracht,
Das Publicum wird es euch doch zerpfücken.

[Only by mass can you subdue the masses—
there's then enough for all to have their pick.
Offer a lot, and lots get what they want,
and no one leaves the theater uncontented.
Don't wait because your piece is still in pieces!

Nor does it help to offer anything complete—
your audience will only tear it all apart.]

(Translation by Stuart Atkins, Suhrkamp/Insel, Boston, 1984)

Even if I had not known anything about *Current Contents* or Eugene Garfield, inspection of the table of contents of this Volume 13 through the narrow perspective of my personal spectacles would have proved Goethe's theater manager correct. Essay #6 (p.38), "Did C.P. Snow Have It Right?" immediately made me think of Snow's fiction genre, which I have categorized⁵ in another creation of Garfield's, the biweekly newspaper *The Scientist*, as "science-in-fiction." Garfield's essay #12 (p.88), "The Impact of Fraudulent Research," dealt precisely with the topic that

caused my own entry into “science-in-fiction” through the novel *Cantor’s Dilemma*. Essay 38 (p.346), “A Tribute to Joshua Lederberg,” would have instantly caught my attention—had I not read the piece in its original form—since it dealt with my best professional friend from Stanford days.

If that were not enough, the subtitle of essay 46 (p.413), “Dr. Djerassi, How Do You Get Them [the cockroaches] To Take the Pill?” would have convinced me that Volume 13 was worth reading, since this is also the title of a chapter in my forthcoming autobiography.⁶ But one doesn’t need Djerassi’s glasses to enjoy and profit from this latest assembly of Gene Garfield’s essays. Just try skimming on your own and then see whether you won’t get hooked!

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References

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2. _____. *Cantor’s Dilemma* by Carl Djerassi: Through fiction the real world of science. *Current Contents* (47):3-7, 20 November 1989.
3. _____. That way lies *MAD*-ness: Carl Djerassi confronts his past. *Current Contents* (24):3-7, 12 June 1989.
4. **Djerassi C.** The quest for Alfred E. Neuman. *Grand Street* 8:167-174, 1988.
5. _____. Illuminating scientific facts through fiction. *The Scientist* 4(15):16, 23 July 1990.
6. _____. *The Pill, Pygmy Chimps, and Degas’ Horse*. New York: Basic Books, 1992.