

Dear Dave,

Age of Reason was, of course, published in 1794, not 1974, as I mistyped in my last letter.

You've avoided responding to specific points in my last two letters, so I'll drop a lot of this. You seem to have pre-selected your tautology, and don't seem at all interested in considering facts you haven't previously reviewed and already accepted as axiomatic, even when (especially if?) they appear to undermine your points ("You mean the Dead Sea Scrolls *aren't* word-for-word perfect to the modern Torah? Don't be pedantic."). With #300 right around the corner, I realize you have even less incentive than usual to discuss these issues with strangers, but please feel free to respond to any of it in the future if the whim strikes you (I'm specifically interested in any thoughts you might have on Mailer and Vidal in light of their published responses to the aftermath of 9/11 -- no, not their personalities, but what they actually have to say in the books I sent). If you're going to view my withdrawal here as evidence of a kind of left-leaning inability to address your specific arguments, please understand instead that I'm withdrawing specifically because you've made it clear you're not interested in arguing; if you'd prefer to continue I am prepared to tackle a lot of it point-by-point, as I find that your generally astute "high altitude mapping" is typically marred by factual mistakes that render your arguments neuter. I don't believe you're satisfied with "you *know* what I *mean*" style thesis-building either. I'm not going to badger you with pedantry if that's all you're prepared to see in what I'm writing -- though I would hope you can see that when your entire argument is based on anecdotal evidence that turns out in many cases to be false, it casts a shadow on your conclusions. Your work spurred me out of much intellectual laziness in my formative years, and it would be improper not to hold you to your own standard. I might return to mid-summer and start this correspondence over with no mention of back-of-the-book essays to begin with, but my time-traveling Audi A8 is on back order and I can't afford to drive it anyway. So here we are.

There are other things to talk about.

I did a four page comic (two leaves; eight page faces with the accompanying text piece and covers) a month or two ago, and last week received a check for fifty dollars from someone who saw it, requesting that I mail copies to a list of thirteen addresses which they included. This kind of thing always surprises me when it happens. Especially since the mini (you should find it enclosed) was cover priced at twenty-five cents. Politics: these same folks were vocally uncomfortable with my criticisms of the Clinton administration a few short years ago ("Ray, you'd find some problem with *any* President!")(I actually remember reading **your** assessment of Clinton at the time and wondering why you didn't notice the stuff you've started complaining about now, post-9/11). I'm curious to hear back from them after they see the second issue, which will probably be interpreted as apologism for the current U.S. administration...

[Intermission of some days]

I just called you and put in an order for a subscription to the remaining seven issues of

Cerebus. I can't help but think that you must be impressed with my mutant ability to sound like a twelve year old girl over the phone. Call it an annoyance; but I just don't argue with most folks when they insist I "can't possibly" be me. It does provide an education on the mental shortcuts people use to "size you up" over the telephone -- and it's clear from experience how preconceptions about gender color a conversation about highly technical subject matter (I currently work in the telecom industry).

I first saw your comic book in an issue of *Comics Scene* magazine, in the 1980s. A friend of mine was the only one of our group of friends (which consisted of him, his cousin, and myself) who had access to a real direct market comic shop. Some time later I made him track down a copy of *Cerebus* #77 -- the cover of which was featured in the *Comics Scene* article. I never understood the uproar over "four pages of pissing." Sometimes people piss for a long time... where's the controversy? I started buying monthly in late 1992, with #164. That same winter my regular shop had a fire sale of 80s overstock and I picked up most back issues from the early #50s on up along with huge crates of books that were going at roughly \$30 for a hundred comics. I reinvested the profits from sorting, bagging and re-selling most of the contents of those crates into a full collection of *Cerebus* phonebooks (and several packs of Diamondback cards, and *Sandman*, and a slew of Moore and Miller stuff, and reprints of just about every other comic I ever wanted). (Also in those crates came large quantities of *Dark Horse Presents* back issues, where I was first exposed to the fine work of Eddie Campbell, but that's another letter entirely).

I spent the entire next summer closely studying these artifacts.

I've considered subscribing several times over the years, but have always held the nagging suspicion that shipping from Canada would prove to be a problem (read: would prove to be prohibitively expensive). In any case, I figured, it's better to get them through the shop, if only to help keep the wheels of the direct market churning. Now, however, events have converged: Last winter I brought a friend almost up to date on the book by gifting him a set of phonebooks, and I intend to turn the copies of the last few issues which show up in my pull file over to him. Shipping from Canada be damned. (And now I find out there *is* no shipping charge on a subscription -- My first stop in the time-traveling A8 would be to thwack my younger self in back of the head.)

#293 will theoretically show up in my pull file tomorrow afternoon. Some shops seemed to be receiving their copies *last* week -- but my local one is typically on the tail end of scheduling (or so it seems) when it comes to Diamond. I have advance word that "Why Canada Slept" has expanded to 29 pages for this final installment. The *Cerebus* Yahoo Group has been studiously tight-lipped about the actual comics content of a given issue until after its broader release, but often start discussing your essays immediately.

Today my thoughts are scattered out all over the table, as I've been concentrating on moving all my belongings from Rental Property A into Mortgaged Property B for the last week or so. Little ideas are rolling around, inching perilously close to spilling over the edge and getting lost on the floor. I tread lightly. It's generally 10:00pm before I sit down and take my tea and assess the day. It occurs to me to somehow try and bend the floor down so everything at least rolls towards the middle, but no luck; and now my knees and elbows are bruised as well from crawling around after these little ideas. My hair is

mussed. Let me arrange my papers.

Not sure how much fiction you're reading through these days, but I have to recommend Henry Miller. There are some striking passages in *Tropic of Cancer* that, contrary to received wisdom, have nothing to do with pre-, post- or extra- marital sex. I wasn't expecting this. Mailer is right about him I think; but maybe not in exactly the way he explains it in *Genius of Lust*. Still, it has to be acknowledged Miller got a basically raw deal, what with the book banning, besmirched literary reputation, etc., et al.

I am thinking of that age to come when God is born again, when men will fight and kill for God as now and for a long time to come men are going to fight for food. I am thinking of that age when work will be forgotten and books assume their true place in life, when perhaps there will be no more books, just one great big book -- a Bible. For me the book is the man and my book is the man I am, the confused man, the negligent man, the reckless man, the lusty, obscene, boisterous, thoughtful, scrupulous, lying, diabolically truthful man that I am. I am thinking that in that age to come I shall not be overlooked. Then my history will become important and the scar which I leave upon the face of the world will have significance. I can not forget that I am making history, a history on the side which, like a chancre, will eat away the other meaningless history. I regard myself not as a book, a record, a document, but as a history of our time -- a history of all time.

-- Henry Miller,
Black Spring, pg. 23

[Purchases *Cerebus* #293 and reads it over]

Nice. I eagerly await the *Latter Days* phonebook(s), as I'm certain this one is going to read very well in a single chunk. During the last few years you've been doing a lot that's very interesting with panel arrangements (and the arrangement of elements *within* the panel arrangements). Not sure whose idea it was, but the variable surface area covered by the backgrounds within each panel in the last few issues is brilliantly evocative of the shifting focus that *Cerebus*' consciousness is undergoing. I'm wondering just how many years he's been wandering from chair to bed and from bed to chair in that room -- we've seen that he hasn't flipped a calendar page in quite some time, but he doesn't seem to realize he's been forgetting.

Cerebus continues to entertain, invigorate and gladden droll days. I will be sorry to see it end -- consistent monthly pleasure that it's been -- but I will be satisfied to finally read it in completed form. Thanks for putting in all this work over the years to make it happen. I'm certain it can't have been a painless, trivial exercise to keep laying pavement as your new road snaked out into what looked like the middle of nowhere, waiting for "all the people" to show up. (He says, sitting on a handful of completed comic book pages and

several outlines for undrawn stories.) Anyway, good show, old chap. I'll keep an eye open for whatever else you put out once *Cerebus* is finished.

Nice knowing you,

- R.

postscript:

Not sure when you wrote this final installment of "Why Canada Slept," but you do realize that Toronto is far from the only place where SARS has been reported in North America, don't you? By July of 2003, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention was reporting 379 suspected cases in the United States alone (World Health Organization reports 33 confirmed from November, 2002 to August, 2003, with tests still ongoing -- so clearly you're correct in pointing out that this was hardly an "epidemic"). You spent the better part of a page explaining why the fact that the SARS "outbreak" was confined to Toronto was a self-evident message from God. You spent some time humiliating the (presumably atheistic. from your viewpoint) tendency to assign the implausible circumvention of these "astronomical odds" to pure chance (as a matter of course) instead of recognizing the event as a self-evident message from God. Do you see how it tends to erode your message when such snide derision doesn't dovetail with the facts?

You seem to have addressed my questions about Norman Mailer. Thanks.