

An Appreciation, a Plea, and a Clarion Call

AN Editor, according to Ambrose Bierce, is "a severely virtuous censor, but so charitable withal that he tolerates the virtues of others and the vices of himself; who flings about him the splintering lightning and sturdy thunders of admonition till he resembles a bunch of firecrackers petulantly uttering its mind at the tail of a dog . . . Master of mysteries and Lord of Law, high-pinnacled upon the throne of thought, his face suffused with the dim splendors of the Transfiguration, his legs intertwined and his tongue a-cheek, the Editor spills his will along the paper and cuts it off in length to suit . . ."

Elsewhere in this issue, there appears a detailed description of the philosophy, method, and criteria under which a paper submitted to the archive journals of the AIAA is appraised. The system remains, however—fortunately or unfortunately—very much touched by human, and therefore fallible and prejudiced, minds and hands. This is Volume 3, Number 1, and it is dated January 1965, a customary time for introductions, appraisal, review, and resolutions. It thus seems appropriate to recognize our associates, indicate changes, and review some problems.

We also wish to express the deep appreciation of the Institute and the professional community to our retiring Editors Irvin Glassman, Walter G. Berl, and Alfred M. Freudenthal. Having given freely and loyally of their time and substance for many years, they have earned our gratitude and Emeritus status. May they prosper, regain their families and friends, and write good original papers and reviews. We are sorely missing—for a school year—Holt Ashley, on leave as a Visiting Professor at the Indian Institute of Technology in India, and Winston Markey, on leave as Chief Scientist of the United States Air Force. We are honored by their call to high office but look forward to their return.

We note, with a little sadness and regret, the departure of Martin Summerfield as Vice President—Publications. In that capacity he has served as our mentor, teacher, conscience, and talented adversary. But "old Editors never die . . ." and so we welcome him as a colleague and wish him success as Editor-in-Chief of *Astronautica Acta*.

It is again a great pleasure to recognize and thank our loyal and hard-working reviewers. The judicial function of conscientious and timely manuscript review remains a vital part of professional life; the dialogue initiated by constructive criticism, detailed suggestions, and comments assures our community of the vital "control of quality" in the field and the author of recognition by his colleagues and peers. In the name of the authors and the professional community, and as individuals, may we again express our sincere appreciation to our colleagues, listed on the following page, who have read and reviewed the papers published in Volume 2. This Journal could not exist without their cooperation.

We should finally like to pay tribute to our Managing Editor—Scientific Publications, Ruth Bryans. The editorial procedures referred to above and described elsewhere in this issue are administered and enforced by her. The Editors, now scattered from coast-to-coast, as is appropriate for a Society of the stature, scope, and membership of the AIAA, rely on her

to implement their decisions and generally to make things go. Authors will find it to their advantage to address their manuscripts and correspondence through her to the attention of the Editors, as the procedure suggests.

Turning now to problems, we view with alarm:

1. The Issue of "Obscurantism." The following is quoted from an editorial by S. A. Goudsmit, in *Physical Review Letters*, Volume 13, pp. 519–520, October 1964:

Referees and editors often complain about the obscure style of the majority of Letters and Articles. In addition to using unintelligible, twisted sentences, many authors create and use slang expressions known to a few specialists only, and indulge in unnecessary abbreviations. Such practices may help the writer but they slow down the reader considerably and exclude the uninitiated completely. In fact, many papers give the impression that the author was writing a memorandum to himself or merely for the benefit of a close collaborator. Yet when we ask authors to write their papers so that a few more colleagues can appreciate their significance, some of them rebut that popular articles do not belong in our journal.

We are convinced that an Article or even a short Letter can be written in a style that helps the interested physicist to understand its aim even if he is not a specialist. One of the causes of bad writing is that so many young research physicists lack teaching experience. They have never faced the challenge of explaining something they know very well to a student who knows nothing about it.

But there is still another reason for writing an obscure paper. It is the common subconscious fear of exposing oneself to scrutiny. If a paper is too clear, it might be too easy for readers to see through it and discover its weaknesses. We observe this same behavior with the lecturer who writes a formula on the blackboard and erases it almost immediately. We see it with speakers who address the blackboard instead of the audience and who keep the room dark between slides. They themselves do not realize that they are subconsciously afraid of being clearly understood.

Thus, we believe that writing incomprehensible papers is not an indication of the author's erudition but merely reveals a common psychological defect. We hope that this insight will induce a few more of our authors to come out from behind their screen of specialized terms and machine-inspired sentence construction.

Even with the modifications induced by the Editors, the phenomenon has been apparent occasionally on our own pages. The situation is doubly serious for *AIAA Journal*, serving, as it does, an *Engineering Society* as a medium for the exchange of ideas. May we suggest to authors that the object of publication is to *enlighten* a technically highly *literate* audience on *its* field of *expertise*, so that appropriate reduction to useful practice can proceed.

2. Technical Notes: The concept of Technical Notes was formulated both as an outlet for short manuscripts and also to afford a relatively quick mechanism for exposure of new developments in cases where prompt disclosure is desirable. Only cursory review is applied in the latter case since more complete manuscripts are expected upon completion of the work. In recent months, there are some disturbing trends.

We see Notes which are basically correct but essentially routine extensions of existing work; more seriously, however, Notes, frequently sequential, covering various aspects of a problem, the whole of which should be covered in *one* paper. May we recommend to authors that they appraise the status of work in progress against the appropriate timing and scope of disclosure so that the several means of communication can continue to fulfill their function properly.

Since its inception two years ago, the Journal has gone through major changes in scope, philosophy, and format. During this period, the Editors have had the benefit of counsel and advice from their peers in the technical community and the AIAA. Communications from the authors of rejected manuscripts also have been to the point—albeit narrow in concept. The Editors would welcome comments from perhaps

the most important section of the aerospace community—that dedicated to the future. Where are the wild and creative young (at least in spirit) men who are now working on the frontiers of aerospace technology, too busy perhaps (perish the thought) to attend Institute meetings and to write papers or letters to the Editor? What are the great technical issues of the day and the future as *they* see them? The Editors and the Institute would most earnestly welcome not only manuscripts but other communications from this group and will give them most careful consideration.

Finally, may we again share with the authors the intellectual stimulation and pleasure we derive from our role in contributing to the exposure of their creative ideas.

Leo Steg
Editor-in-Chief

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