

22 August 1977

Dear Mr Amis,

I'm writing to tell you how much I have enjoyed reading your novel The Alteration, which has just reached Australia. Well, in fact I have enjoyed every one of your books, but I am particularly pleased with this one for two personal reasons. (1) I am an ex-Catholic; (2) I am myself a writer of what you so coyly call TR (not of CW so far, but that type fascinates me); and in my second and third novels\* I also have taken a few swipes at the Church under a very transparent disguise.

Not long before I got my hands on your Alteration I had read John Brunner's Times Without Number, which you probably know is also CW and about an England which was conquered by the Spanish Armada. However as Brunner's title implies, there is a lot of time travelling in his story and messing up various alternate worlds, and (inevitably) it all comes right in the end and our own world emerges. This is one sub-genre of CW, but I much prefer the type you chose (like Nabokov's Ada) where the other world remains solidly real. And you did make it real! I liked especially your careful handling of language, which went just far enough but not too far (De Camp went too far with The Wheels of If, which I had to give up halfway through because his altered English was unreadable).

I liked, of course, the typical CW jokes—Henricus Himmler etcetera. I hope Lupigradus Viaventosa doesn't mind being portrayed as a singing eunuch! Or is Windgassen still alive? I lose track of performers, since in music I feel the composer is what matters. And that's another reason why I liked your book: I thought your basic symbolism very well chosen. You are 100% right: if the Church had stifled the Reformation, creativity and progress would have been emasculated. Milton saw that happening in Italy in his own time, as he testifies in Areopagitica. Of course, it is possible to feel that "progress" is a Bad Thing—I myself do have a nostalgia for airships—but you are right that the alternative would have been pretty frightful. And, on the literal level, it is the sheer sexual perversion of most Christianity which gives them such mucky values. I broke with the Church myself largely because I came to see that its morality was anti-human and therefore untrue.

I don't know if you have time to reply to fan letters, but if you can find the time to write to me I'd be very interested to hear how the Catholic Church

\*The Right Hand of Dextra and The Wildings of Westron: DAW Books, New York, 1977.