MacCready and the Abatross
Try the Channel

by R. Wilborn

"A man-powered flight across the English Channel should be a lead pipe cinch," claimed Dr. Paul MacCready, a Caltech alumnus (PhD '52) and president of Aeroenvironment, Inc., who spoke in Pan Auditorium Tuesday night to announce the latest developments in his pursuit of man-powered flight. Dr. MacCready is best known as father of the Gossamer Condor, a man-powered craft which last year set the conditions of the 50,000 pound sterling Kramer prize. The plan, which required that the steaming plane cover a 1.5 mile figure-8 course with ten foot strides at each end, had gone redefined for 18 years before the successful flight of the Gossamer Condor. That magnificent specter of obscure aerodynamics is now on display in the Smithsonian, alongside the Wright brothers' plane and Lindbergh's Spirit of St. Louis.

The original Kramer prize has been replaced by an offer of 100,000 pounds (about $215,000) for the first man-powered flight across the English Channel. To meet the challenge, MacCready is working on a scaled-down version of the Condor, which he calls the Gossamer Albatross. This craft is similar to the predecessor in that it has a large stargum (about 90 feet), is very light (about 70 lbs), is wired construction, and is sail-covered, but its more advanced design makes it much easier to fly. The Albatross, which uses carbon-filament tubing instead of the original aluminum, and has wing stiffness to provide a smoother surface, requires roughly 1/4 horsepower to fly and is expected to have a flight time of several hours, compared to the Condor's 8-minute times.

The Albatross, like the Condor before it, moves quite slowly in order to reduce drag, and so the 21-mile crossing is expected to take over 2 hours. The flight will probably be made after dusk in order to avoid wind, so the plane is equipped with a sonar altimeter adapted by the Polaroid company from their recently introduced self-focusing cameras. The altitude is not expected to reach more than about 20 feet, so that the dangers of a possible fall will be minimal, but at this low level one major hazard will be posed by air turbulence caused by the passage of large ships, of which 300 traverse the Channel each day. MacCready likened the situation to that of "a turtle crossing a freeway."

The Albatross team had thought to make an attempt at the new prize during the good weather of this past summer, but just as time was running short a control line malfunction caused a major crash. A new prize attempt is expected sometime next summer, (Dr. MacCready preferred not to say just when in order to avoid being pre-empted by competitors) and the expenses of development and the logistics of the attempt are expected to be at least as much as the value of the prize.

Beausoleil's is too Big

I suppose I don't have to tell you what time of year (or term) it is. Finals week manifests itself in some rather unusual ways, and a smaller Tech is merely one of them. (I decided to start my vacation early. --ed.) Unfortunately, I had last week promised a commentary on undergraduate life in general and the survey in particular. But size won't permit it just yet: my prose got so lengthy I had to divvy it up into several installments (when I see a soapbox, I sometimes get verb-bose), and the first one wouldn't fit into the space available in this Tech. You wouldn't have time to read it anyway; you have tests to take. Enjoy.

Get Out of your Rut

by Donald Korycansky

Amidst the current proliferation of "heroic fantasy" writing, Dr. David Burchmore, of the department of Humanities and Social Sciences, prefers to deal with the poems that helped to spawn these modern works. Dr. Burchmore joined the Humanities this fall as an instructor. His range of study is medieval and Renaissance poetry, which ranges from Old English epic poetry to Milton. This is a larger field than is studied by scholars of later literature. In general, medievalists study a very broad range of works, including those in languages such as Latin, Old French, Old Norse, and Italian.

His interest in literature growing out of childhood, and such books as The Lord of the Rings, Burchmore did his undergraduate work at Princeton University. He studied the work of Chaucer, and Old French literature with recognized scholars in the field such as D. W. Robinson and Carl Uitti. These men interested him in professional work in literature.

His graduate studies were done at the University of Virginia with his Ph.D. dissertation on the use of classical mythology by Chaucer and Spenser, who incorporated it as it had been interpreted by various earlier writers. Dr. Burchmore is now working on publishing sections of his dissertation.

While at the University of Virginia, Dr. Burchmore taught a literature course for non-literature majors, especially those in science and engineering. He says he enjoyed doing this, as his students had a different perspective towards the subject. It got him out of his "intellectual rut." He feels that it has also prepared him for teaching at Caltech.

As far as his teaching here is concerned, Dr. Burchmore has found that students here were fairly interested in literature, but in a manner different from what he expected. The literature that he has discussed this term has been mostly old sagas and poetry, like Beowulf. He expected that his students would find their interest in it stemming from interest in fantasy and epic, such as Tolkien's works. Instead he has found that the students are more inclined to treat the literature as such--in terms of theme and plot and character. Another advantage of Tech is the relatively small number of students, freeing him to do a greater amount of work on his own.

Dr. Burchmore feels that the humanities play a unique role, especially at a place like Caltech. He views this role as getting people out of their own "intellectual ruts"--to broaden their thinking and remind them of their cultural heritage. He feels that subjects such as literature counterbalance the specialization that is increasing in many of the sciences today.

He is one of the instructors for the freshmen literature course, "Literature Past and Present." Next term he will also teach a course entitled "English and Continental Medieval Literature."
When is an RF not an RF & When is Enough Enough?

Well, those evil, nasty Flems have been punished for their malicious acts—a victory for the Good Guys, right? Now peace and tranquility will return to campus, right? Wrong.

The Flems are not solely to blame for the shit that has been going down this term, despite what a lot of people make themselves think, and unless a large number of people, in all the Houses can manage to disassociate themselves from their convenient self-delusions, the situation is going to get a lot worse before it gets any better.

And let there be no erics of “We’re only doing an RF, they’re the ones who aren’t playing fair.” An RF is a well thought out, imaginative, and then. Our small size allows us largely under the guise of RF’s, have created an environment of action, reaction and escalation. Unless everyone involved will stop their “we’re reasonable, but they aren’t” moans, the situation will continue to feed off itself, and will continue to degenerate.

--- Bielecki

Random Numbers

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I must say that I was very impressed by the response to the survey. I feel that most people have a pretty good idea what the basic problems around here are and that at least some of us are willing to admit that we are part of the problem rather than just assuming that it is all the other person’s fault. I hope that this is a step towards finding solutions to our problems.

--- ed. Bielecki

A Native Reply

To the Editor:

While I appreciate Mr. D. Korycansky’s article on Asian culture, I would like to point out some mistakes that crept in while reporting. As a person whose mother tongue is Tamil I have the responsibility to correct them.

Tamil is a language spoken in one state of India, and in part of Sri Lanka, Malasia and Singapore. It has its own script and a well defined grammar. The people who spoke the language are classified as Dravidians and they are the natives and not as reported earlier. The structure of Tamil is the same for both written and spoken parts.

After talking to Dr. Dirs I understand that there was a complete lack of communication between Dr. Dirs and the reporter. Thank you.

Yours sincerely,
M. Mahomian

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Judy Klingen

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Beausoleil, Duncan

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Lord of the Rings—Brings the Tale to Life

Lord of the Rings, a film by Ralph Bakshi. Showin at the Regent in Westwood and the Bristol in Costa Mesa. It is only fair to say at the outset that the enjoyment of this film is very dependent upon the attitude that the viewer takes before entering the theatre. If the viewer expects to see Tolkien’s book of Middle Earth come to life, with all of its detail, subtlety, and complex character development, he will probably be greatly disappointed, for even with a two and a half hour movie (which only covers the first half of the Trilogy) one could not hope to convey all of the imagination and imagery present in the book.

What Bakshi has accomplished, however, is to make not the book, but the story come to life. He has taken the major events and characters from the book and shaped them into an animated epic. He performs the task with a style and movement quite worthy of the original book.

The animated characters have some simple traits to them, yet they have enough detail to allow the greatest barity of facial expressions and moods yet seen in full length animation. The expressiveness of the characters in both script and animation allow them to react with one another with the full range of expression and emotion. This is of utmost importance in a story like Lord of the Rings, where emotion plays a great part.

The story of the Lord of the Rings is one of adventure and magic. It tells the story of how the friendly Hobbits came into possession of the One Ring of Aragorn. This ring, if brought back into Sauron’s hands, would give him control over all of Middle Earth. The story then shows the adventures of how a group known as the Fellowship of the Ring attempts to destroy the Ring before Sauron can reclaim it. Unfortunately, the Ring can only be destroyed by throwing it into the Crack of Doom, deep within Sauron’s dark land of Mordor. Before the film’s end they have held battles with many evil creatures, such as Orcs, Nazgul, and a Balrog. The story, however, does not lead to a climax as this is only part one. It therefore becomes a succession of larger battles and more suspense.

The large battle scenes were accomplished using the same technique that Bakshi used in Wizards. It is a process by which both live-action and animation are used, with the contrast and color tones of the live-action changed to match that of the animation. This technique has greatly improved since Wizards, and the matching of the two styles works much better now, but is hardly perfect.

The background scenes are beautifully styled, closely resembling water color paintings. The shading and contrast of the colors used set the moods of the scenes with exquisite perfection. Of special note for the moods are the night scenes (with stars and a crisp full moon) and the scenes where Frodo, the bearer of the Ring, enters the world of the Nazgul.

But the movie is not perfect. The live action is overwritten and completely incongruous in a couple of spots. Some of the characters seem quite misrepresented, such as Treebeard, the ent, who ends up looking like Foghorn Leghorn with leaves. Even the script, though fast paced and not wasting a scene, is flawed. It lacks continuity at some points, and at others assumes a knowledge of the Trilogy, thus leaving those who have yet to read it a little confused.

But overall the film is an animation masterpiece, highly enjoyable as long as one doesn’t expect it to be a miracle come true.

—Stan Cohn
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