

The new Trojans

Mark McCain of the New York Times News Service reported in May 87 that 'a new breed of vandals' is at work within the vast network of computer 'bulletin boards' across the United States. They are known as 'Trojan horses' or simply 'Trojans'. Like other enthusiasts, they offer software that anyone consulting an electronic board through a telephone link-up can use for such apparent purposes as word-processing or games. The Trojan, however, is not what it seems; it is a kind of terrorist program that, once it has been incorporated into a computer system, begins to follow its own clandestine, pre-arranged instructions, erasing or scrambling data already

painstakingly stored.

'It's like poisoning the candy in the supermarket on Halloween,' says Ross M Greenberg, a Manhattan computer consultant. 'I guess the people who devise these things take pleasure in destroying other people's work.' Of the dozens of Trojans now circulating, some begin their destruction immediately, while others perform as legitimate software for weeks or months, before being triggered off. Greenberg, like many others, operates a computer bulletin board 'as a public service'. Every 'sysop' (system operator) who runs such a board keeps a computer hooked up to a telephone 24 hours a day, a clearing-house for hundreds of public-

domain software programs. People connect their computers into the boards via their modems (telephone hook-up devices) both in order to donate programs to the system and make copies of those already 'posted' there.

The Trojan horses work by giving their new computer home internal instructions of a destructive kind while pretending to be benign and useful. The result is 'electronic suicide', as existing data is tampered with or erased, and another Troy falls, taken from within. However, even if the perpetrator of these antisocial pranks were identified, it is uncertain whether the laws exist to prosecute that person. The offence is entirely too new.

Towards more books by and about women

'When planning the literature curriculum,' states the press release, 'supervisors and teachers of English too often forget that at least half of their students are female.' Issued by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) in June 1987, the release announces 'the latest Starter Sheet' issued by SLATE, 'the action wing' of the NCTE whose acronymous title means 'Support for the Learning and Teaching of English'.

Margaret Carlson ('English department chair' at Conval Regional High School, Peterborough, New Hampshire) is the author of the SLATE brochure, and points out that many educators continue

to build their literature programmes around books that focus on males, their achievements and concerns. 'When deciding which books to teach, teachers tend to look for heroism, for journeys of self-discovery, for ethical questions arising from human conflicts, and for resolutions deriving from character. "Because half of our students are female, and because role models are important in forming ideas and images, we need to devote new attention to finding more titles with heroic, tragic, or significant female characters," Carlson says.'

Teachers, she adds, must be aware of ways in which women's writing differs

from men's in content, genre and tone, and be prepared to deal with resistance to studying women's writing on the part of some male students. She suggests that teachers 'pair' books so that the perspectives of men and women on similar situations can be compared and contrasted. [For a free copy of the Starter Sheet, readers in the U.S. can send a stamped, self-addressed envelope with their request to SLATE, NCTE, 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801. Interested readers from other countries may be able to send stamp coupons, or make similar arrangements.]

Refusing to go Dutch

In the *Daily Telegraph* of 3 Aug 87, Alan Osborn reported from Brussels that 'the real-life Belgian comic opera known as the "Fourons" problem has taken a new twist with the re-election for the ninth time of Mr Jose Happart as burgomaster of the tiny community near the Dutch border'.

The community is a cluster of villages with some 4,000 French-speaking inhabitants surrounded by, and governed along with, the Dutch- or Flemish-speaking province of Limburg. The problem is that Jose Happart is a militant Francophone who has the loyalty of local voters. The comic opera results from the Limburg regulations which state that all public officials should make use of Dutch. Happart will not do this, and so as soon as he takes his seat in the Town Hall, the provincial authorities take the seat away from him, on the grounds that he will not or cannot fulfil local requirements.

'No-one really knows whether Mr Happart can actually speak Dutch,' writes Osborn. 'He was once summoned by the Limburg authorities for a language test but spent the day visiting an

exhibition of Wallonian arts in Paris. Yet according to one report he came top of his school class in Dutch.'

The impasse is now four years and nine elections old, and has ominous implications at the national level for Belgium. On several occasions the Fourons affair has provoked a crisis in the Belgian parliament, whose membership reflects the uneasy coalition of French-speaking

Walloons and Dutch-speaking Flemings in a small state riven by a kind of linguistic tribalism.

When warned that his election was once more invalid, Happart apparently responded by saying he would confine his first duties to matters affecting Dutch-speakers, so that any annulment of his signature would affect them rather than Francophones.

Waking up Westminster

According to the *Independent* (11 June 87), Michael Montague, chairman of the National Consumer Council in the United Kingdom, is calling on the British Parliament to alter its ways. Important legislation is often being discussed as late as 2 a.m., with MPs lying around in sleeping bags in the corridors of Westminster.

Montague says: 'People sometimes complain that our laws are unjust or unclear. What would they think if they knew that vital bits of legislation affecting their everyday lives are sometimes

finalised in the small hours of the night by a handful of MPs who can just about manage to keep their eyes open? What would they think if they knew that members of both Houses of Parliament are sometimes expected to deal in three days or less with more than 500 amendments to a proposed new law? Is it any wonder that the result is sometimes laws which are written in gobbledygook, whose meaning is so unclear that even the lawyers can't agree on it? The top priority for an incoming government should be to write laws in plain English.'