

We human beings have no intrinsic sense of identity. We become who we are by what is around us. Some of my identity came from my parents; the rest from larger groupings. And it is in those larger groupings where every new human generation now loses its self-identity.

Oh, we could revert to insular tribalism and in our ignorance we could be very certain of who we are. We, though, know too much to allow ourselves the comforting certainties of ignorance.

We are lost.

Young people always want to be — whether they are aware of it or not — something other than themselves, something more than themselves. Yet, a psychological paradox, they want to be neither their present geography nor their history.

My geography, my generation, my sub-group of a sub-group existed on that city/world — type 34, deep core, external atmosphere — one of six extant throughout Space. (Type 34 living chambers are in the hollow between the spherical core and the surface. On the surface, within the tropical zones, is where all the city/world's food is manufactured. Polar regions are reservoirs. Temperate sylvan zones are designated safe Play Areas.)

History I was born to was that my city/world was 450 years old. We educated young, though, could take no pride in it, identity from it. Nor did we take any identity from our belonging to the collection of worlds, cities and stations that called itself Space.

History told us that the momentum of empire had long left Space, that Space did not now know what it was. Save that it was worth preserving in its present state. If only because, though we might not now like to remember them, there have been long periods of dissolution, when lawlessness was rife and for 'safety' people returned to organic planets and to the closed groups of primitive tribalism; and there succumbed to the cyclical descent into savagery.

After each period of dissolution, however, the rule of law has been re-won; and lost again. Brigands and other self-serving opportunists have existed, and will always exist, on the edge of Space, will always creep inwards along the division lines.

There was also the Age of Experiment, when whole Space Departments were actually encouraged to become independent, to govern themselves and see what new social machinery emerged. None did; and all were reabsorbed.

There had been no such positive-thinking trends in my time. My generation, like the many before it, belonged to a civilization whose dynamism had long expired. All that we owned was a vague, difficult to define for the individual, disillusion. A disillusion with ourselves and with all about us.

Moribund is the word best suited to describe our civilization entire. Mediocre was the word best suited to describe my city/world. As on city/worlds elsewhere our diminishing population kept to the band of middle levels, middle thinking.

Faced with all that inertia the frenetic efforts of my city's poetry groups to create identities for their members, all posturings and mispronunciations aside, seemed even more pathetic. As did I being feted by them.