> I do leave, it is only for short distances, and I return as soon as I can....[P]lease let me impress upon you the fact that I am happy with myself exactly as I am and I am spending my life *exactly* the way I want to spend it.

So much for my idea that Asimov might have been making his fiction serve a restitutive function. As he presented matters in the letter, he seemed to be ruling out even a defensive function. Thinking I should clarify the latter point, I wrote again, asking as politely as possible whether Asimov might be denying his anxieties "by avoiding introspection and by writing vast amounts of material that divert your and others' attention away from some kind of underlying uneasiness or self-doubt? I suppose that question represents the stereotypical psychoanalytic assumption, with which I do not necessarily agree, that everybody is neurotic somehow but that not everybody realizes it. Do you have a response to that that satisfies you, if not the psychologists and psychiatrists who might ask it?"

Asimov's response was emphatic:

> Honestly, I am not defensive. I am a genuinely happy person except where the outside world impinges -- if I develop clogged coronaries and am threatened with death, if those I love are unhappy for good reason, etc. When unthreatened by the outside and left entirely to my own devices, I am openly happy. The fact is I write easily, I receive instant appreciation for my work, I make a good living, my wife and daughter love me, I have good and affectionate friends -- I have no *reason* for unhappiness. And in my whole life I have never had self-doubt. I have known exactly what I could do from the very start and I have gone out and done it.

Until those last two sentences, I felt willing to give Asimov the benefit of the doubt. After all, he knew first-hand whether he was happy or not, whether he was anxious or not. He had a lot more information about his psychological state than I did. But *never* any self-doubt? Not if we can judge from the voluminous evidence of his autobiography. Was he being totally honest with himself, and genuinely undefensive, when he said he was "a genuinely happy person" with "no *reason* for unhappiness"? Well, as the narrator of Asimov's mystery novel *Murder at the ABA* (1976) puts it, "The super-secure are never secure."

I realized, of course, that nothing is more likely to put a person on the defensive than a psychologist asking, "Are you being defensive?" Maybe Asimov was just overreacting to my questions when he said he'd never felt any self-doubt and so on. Maybe in less defensive moments he would have admitted to occasional self-doubts, or to intermittent moments of unease amid all the happiness. I was willing to grant in turn that as he now lived his life, mostly indoors and mostly in front of his word-processor keyboard, Isaac Asimov probably was one of the world's happier people. But I decided to never again consider using him as an example of a writer whose work served no significant psychological function.

Alan Elms is a professor of psychology at UC Davis, where he teaches undergraduate and graduate courses on psychobiography and on personality theory. His most recent book is Uncovering Lives: The Uneasy Alliance of Biography and Psychology (Oxford University Press, 1994). He is currently working on a psychobiography of Elvis Presley (in collaboration with Bruce Heller) and on a full-scale biography of Paul M. A. Linebarger (aka Cordwainer Smith). This article is adapted from material first published in the science fiction research journal Extrapolation and in Uncovering Lives. The Asimov correspondence was published with the permission of Isaac Asimov. ❑

Reflections on Isaac Asimov

Paul H. Elovitz
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The most famous man to use the word *psychohistorian* amazed, inspired, frustrated, and puzzled me.

Isaac Asimov's (1920-1992) incredible productivity and erudition still amaze me. He, according to a newspaper article I read some years ago, wrote his first hundred books in only 20 years (five books a year). This New Yorker's second hundred took nine and one half years (10.5 books a year) and his third hundred was achieved in less than six years (16.5 books a year). At that rate of increased efficiency, had he lived to 100 years,

instead of merely to 72, just imagine how many books he would have produced! In fact, he wrote a *mere 500 books* rather than the astronomical number that would follow from the geometric progression he seemed to be approaching. I still chuckle and remain awestruck at the thought of such literary profundity. In contrast to Asimov, my first recollections of writing are of not being able to do it. While my days of writing blocks are long gone, writing is still a slow process for me: I am still at the beginning stages of my first 100 books. I am hoping for a long life so I may achieve my goals!

Towards the end of his life Asimov declared "writing is more fun than ever. The longer I write the easier it gets." A friend of his told me that "the man was a machine" when it came to writing; which is why "he turned out stuff incredibly -- with incredible speed." As an example she mentioned that "someone at the United Nations asked him to write something on children. He did it in two days (with research!) and it was perfect, ready for the printers." Asimov's example is one of many which inspired me to write and to enjoy writing.

In the late 1970s I thoroughly enjoyed a commencement speech Asimov gave at Ramapo College. He spoke of the enormous creativity and curiosity of the young child, creativity and curiosity which are usually lost in the process of schooling. Ramapo's strait-laced academic vice president, a former seminarian, was pleased to meet this popularizer of science and science fiction. Afterwards, he commented that during the processional and the ceremonies the speaker kept propositioning the good-looking valedictorian in her early 20s -- less than half his age. The administrator, who is now back to teaching philosophy, wondered aloud if the secret of Asimov's literary profusion was an uncensored quality which allowed him to let it "all out." I thought there might be some merit in this suggestion; certainly, Asimov wrote so quickly that he had little time to censor his own thoughts or words. I also wondered if the vice president was as "straight-laced" as I had imagined.

In 1979 I became co-editor of *The Psychohistory News: Newsletter of the International Psychohistorical Association*. One of my first endeavors was to attempt to interview Asimov in person. The project began auspiciously with Asimov being the most prompt correspondent I ever engaged before or since. His replies arrived so rapidly that it crossed my mind that the writer may have told the mailman to wait while he typed a reply to me! His answer said, "Yes..., but...." Yes, I could interview him, but first I would need to do the proper background reading which included the first volume of his autobiography, *In Memory Yet Green (1920-1954).* This seemed like a reasonable request. So, after writing him that I accepted this condition, I started reading. Additional epistles from him added to my pre-interview homework. I soon enlisted my rapid-reading younger son to assist in the task. The second volume, *In Joy Still Felt (1954-1978),* appeared in print well before I was halfway through the first. And there were numerous additional homework assignments as well!

At that point, I suggested to this denizen of the 33rd floor of a Manhattan skyscraper that we get on with the interview since he wrote so much faster than I (and my son) could read. I got no response and this marked the end of his part of the correspondence. I sought the advice of a psychohistorical colleague who was an old friend of Asimov. Had he cut off communication because of my honesty: "You write faster than my son and I read"? She said that had nothing to do with it. In her experience, Asimov would never give a personal interview to anyone who was psychological in their approach. "But," I stammered, "isn't he married to a psychoanalyst/ psychiatrist?" My colleague simply shrugged her shoulders and declared that it made "no difference" He would not accept a personal interview by anyone with *psycho* as part of their qualifications.

After Asimov's death the same colleague reported that this "helpful, kind, decent, dear, lovely guy" was "very horny." She reported that whenever they were alone together, however briefly, he never stopped propositioning her. I asked how his wife dealt with his womanizing and was told, "She ignored it." Clearly, I was not alone in finding this science fiction writer and popularizer of science puzzling and at times frustrating.

I was not puzzled or frustrated when I learned from reading Alan Elms that Asimov feared heights: that he was an acrophobe (with agoraphobe tendencies) who wrote about space travelers. As a psychotherapist, I readily understood the inclination to devote psychic energy to something that one experienced anxiety

about. He avoided air travel, until he marshaled his courage later in life, while relishing literary space travel on the pages of the *Foundation Trilogy* and elsewhere. In his autobiography, he does make reference to the possibility that his absorption of his mother's fears that stemmed form his "babyhood experience with pneumonia" resulted in his disinclination to take risks -- including flying. He seemed to have been one of many people who can make vaguely psychological comments about themselves but who are most uncomfortable if any professional makes such comments.

Returning to the subject of space, a vital point is that we project out into space things that we cannot do within ourselves or on this Earth. Space is such a fertile place for our fantasies, dreams, and endeavors that in less then one century humans have flown both close to the Earth and in outer space. If people, even acrophobic men like Isaac Asimov and his fellow science fiction writer, Ray Bradbury, can think of doing something, other people will actually do it! And here on Earth I will continue to be inspired by Asimov's erudition, literary productivity, and belief that knowledge should be accessible to all humankind.

Paul H. Elovitz is editor of this publication.

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The Humane Use of Space

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Review of Peter Petschauer, Human Space: Personal Rights in a Threatening World. Westport, CT: Praeger, 1997. ISBN 0275956458, i-xx, 187 pp., $55.

Peter Petschauer's *Human Space* is a rewardingly reflective yet apprehensive book. He is a man of intellectual gifts matched by sensitivity, trying honestly to make sense of his own experience; there is little comfort in it. It is good that a historian can stand apart from his profession enough to consider his personal part in it, and try to sum up what living in America on the verge of the millennium means to him. The theme of space and how humans inhabit it is a device capacious enough for the great diversity of topics Petschauer addresses. The organizing theme is how he survived the rigors of a World War II European childhood to migrate to the United States, where he became a highly effective professor of history and administrator at Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina. The book is not an autobiography but a set of reflections on the prospect for a just and decent social order in his adopted country.

Petschauer's interest in psychohistory arose from reconstructions of his own childhood "abandonment" by his German parents when they left him for reasons of safety with an unrelated family in the village of Afers in northern Italy. (His insightful commentary on Lloyd deMause's theory of the abandoning mode of childrearing appeared in *The Journal of Psychohistory* Volume 13 (2) Fall 1985.) Through the kindness of strangers, Petschauer and his brother spent the war in a remote and very traditional farming community, entirely different from the New York City he was to enter as a student. Cultural difference and extensive travel, including many returns to Afers, give Petschauer a vantage point on contemporary America; though no Swiftian satirist, he is a sort of Gulliver surveying the pretentious, misled, and alarming features of contemporary America.

What Petschauer sees is not reassuring. He rightly fears America's gun culture and predicts violence on an unmanageable scale unless the history and dynamics of ethnic violence in other parts of the world are understood (p. 157). Economic and social justice in America are deteriorating as "the rich get richer and the poor get poorer." These are common enough concerns, but Petschauer brings to his concern the cogency of an ability to compare societies.

A liberal humanist in the best tradition of American higher education, Petschauer's disquiet shows most strongly in comments on the sector of life he knows best: academic departments -- especially departments of history. If there is hope of students' understanding the dynamics of groups contending along ethnic and economic rifts in society, and if persecutions and tyrannies are to be understood for their uselessness in solving real social problems, it must be through the insights of historians. The historians best equipped to see into the dynamics of justice and conflict are those equipped with psychological, as well as historical, techniques. Petschauer would like to see more cross-disciplinary work, but he despairs of it because of rivalrous territoriality and personal