

Short Story: \*EXEGESIS\* by Nancy Kress

Nancy Kress just completed teaching a semester at the University of Leipzig. She says that nearly all of her German students confessed to not reading much SF before the course began -- but they do now. Her most recent book is *Steal Across the Sky* (Tor, February, 2009), which involves aliens, space flight, atonement for mega-crimes, and the nature of what we think we know about reality. The following story, however, is in an entirely different vein: a light-hearted look at what we think we know about language.

1950

from *Branson's Quotations for Book Lovers*

ed. Roger Branson, Random House

"Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn." One of the world's most famous quotations, this is the film version of Rhett Butler's (Clark Gable) immortal farewell to Scarlett O'Hara (Vivien Leigh) in Margaret Mitchell's 1936 novel *Gone With the Wind*, a crowning achievement of American literature. It occurs at the end of the film when Scarlett asks Rhett, "Where shall I go? What shall I do?" if he leaves her. The print version does not include the word "frankly," which was added by director David O. Selznik. The line was bitterly objected to by the Hays Office, but remained in the 1939 film, due to a last-minute amendment to the Production Code.

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2050

from *Critical Interpretations of Twentieth Century Literature*, Random House,

eds. Jared Morvais and Hannah Brown

TEXT: "Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn."

Line from a twentieth-century American novel, *Gone With the Wind* by Margaret Mitchell, now largely dismissed as both racist and romanticized. The male protagonist, Rhett Butler, speaks the line to the abrasive heroine, Scarlett O'Hara, as he leaves their marriage.

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2150

*Dictionary of Modern Sayings for the Faithful*

Church of Renewed Enlightenment

ENTRY: "Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn."

Line from a twentieth-century novel written by Margaret Mitchell in Southern Ezra (a section of the former United States of America), in which a man, Rhett Butler, abandons his legal wife, an adulteress ("scarlet woman"). The passage is a stark illustration of the sinfulness and irresponsibility of pre-Ezran so-called "Christianity." Praise!

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2250

from \_Studees in Lawst Litrucher\_, Reformd Langwij Co-ullishun, Han Goldman

SUBJECT: "Franklee, my der, I dont giv a dam."

Line frum Pre-Kolapse novul -- awther unown -- that twoday iz mostlee fowk sayeen in Suthern Ezra. The prahverb means -- ruffly -- that the speeker wil not giv even wun "dam" -- wich may hav bin a tipe of lokul munee -- to by a "der," an xtinkt meet animul. Implikashun is that watever iz beein diskused is over prised. This interpretashun is reinforced by the tradishunul usoceeashun of the line with peepul hoo served meels, nown as "butlers."

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2350

Harox College Download 6753-J-ENLIT

TEXT: "Frankly<sup>1</sup>, my dear<sup>2</sup>, I don't give a damn<sup>3</sup>."

New research sheds interesting light on this folk saying from Mubela (formerly Southern Ezra). The Pre-Collapse Antiquarian Grove humbly makes this offering to the Forest of Enlightened Endolas:

1 "Frankly" means that the speaker is talking without subterfuge or lies. Since only liars emphasize their truthfulness -- enlightened endolas, of course, represent truth with their very beings -- the speaker is openly announcing that he is lying, signaling to the hearer that everything which follows is therefore untrue. In fact, the speaker does give a damn. This sort of convoluted speech was often necessary in pre-Collapse societies, in which "governments" were so politically oppressive that truth could not be openly spoken.

2 "My dear" is an honorific, similar in construction to the equally archaic, hierarchical "my lord" or "your excellency." This suggests that in the original, the speaker was addressing some sort of lord or commander.

3 "Damn." Rigorous scholarship by Kral BlackG3 reveals that this was a curse. Its presence in a coded message to a high official is intriguing. For centuries the folk saying has been associated with an extinct "servant class" that included ditch diggers, butlers, and dentists. It may be that in ancient times, when humans compelled other humans rather than robots to provide services, a folk saying was the only acceptable way to "curse" or condemn the owner class, even as the speaker obediently transmits whatever coded information followed. Unfortunately, the sentences following "Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn" in this political drama have been lost.

NOTE: The common variation, still occasionally seen even in scholarly forums, is scripted in the short-lived and silly "Reformed English": "Franklee, my der, I dont giv a dam."

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2450

Fragment of a Download Recovered After the EMP

Catastrophe of 2396, with Exegesis

"Frank Lee, my dear, I don't give a dam." "Frank Lee"<sup>1</sup> means that the speaker is talking without subterfuge or lies. Since only liars emphasize their truthfulness -- enlightened endolas<sup>2</sup>, of course, represent truth with their very beings -- the speaker is openly announcing that he is lying, signaling to the

hearer that everything which follows is therefore untrue. In fact, the speaker does give a damn.<sup>3</sup> This sort of convoluted speech was often necessary in pre-Collapse<sup>4</sup> societies, in which "governments"<sup>5</sup> were so politically oppressive that truth could not be openly spoken.<sup>6</sup>

1 Frank Lee -- Unknown folk persona who seems to have represented "straight shooting," either verbal or (as is to be expected in violent historical periods) the use of personal arms. See \_Frank and Jesse James\_.

2 endolas -- religious scholars of the pre-Catastrophe EuroPolar Coalition. They conflated some solid learning with much mysticism. Organized into "groves," "forests," and "amazons," in the eco-heavy nomenclature of that era.

3 This explanation is typical of the confused and ignorant thinking that prevailed in the Endola Age.

4 Collapse -- one name given to the economic and social upheavals, circa 2190-2210. Exact dates have, of course, disappeared with much other history in the EMP Catastrophe. Other names: Crash, Cave-in, the Big Oops (etymology unknown).

5 governments -- vernacular name for ruling bodies, some consensual and some not. All pre-date Electronic Fair Facilitation and Enforcement.

6 "so politically oppressive that truth could not be openly spoken" Unable to say whether this analysis is or is not correct.

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2850, i

Unified Link Information, Quantum-Entangled Energy Center

DB 549867207 (Historical)

DATUM: "Franklee, my dear, I don't give a damn."

VARIATIONS: "Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn."

"Frankly, my dear, I don't give a dam."

"Franklee, my der, I dont giv a dam."

CLASSIFICATION: Proverb, class 32

DATE: Pre-QUENTIAM, probably pre-twenty-second century, specifics unknown

ORIGIN: Human, Sol 3, specifics unknown

LANGUAGES: Many (recite list?). Original probably Late English

EXPLICATION: "Franklee" (or "Frankly") indicates origin in era pre-telepathic-implants, with choice of offering true or untrue information. "My dear" is an archaic term of endearment for members of a "family"; indicates pre-gene-donate society. "Don't give a damn" is antique idiom meaning the speaker/projector is not involved in a current project. Equivalents: "apathy," "independence," "non-functioning implant."

LAST REQUEST FOR THIS INFORMATION: No requests to date

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2850, ii

\_\*Ser, don't screen your implant from me!\*\_

\_\*I go now.\*\_

\_\*Why? Why leave me? Why leave the pod? We desire you!\*\_

\_\*I go now.\*\_

\_\*But why?\*\_

\*\_I tell you, pod mate, I no longer care\*\_