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ARTS & LEISURE

Hubbard: bare-faced messiah

Hubbard holds forth

● GERRY ARMSTRONG had been a dedicated member of the Church of Scientology for more than a decade, swept away by its heady promise of superhuman powers and immortality. He had been twice sentenced to long periods in the Rehabilitation Project Force, the Scientologists' Orwellian prison; he had been constantly humiliated and his marriage had been destroyed; yet he remained convinced that L Ron Hubbard, the founder of Scientology, was the greatest man who ever lived.

That is, until in 1980 Armstrong discovered 21 boxes of Hubbard memorabilia inside a secret base set up by Scientologists in the Californian desert.

Hubbard was nearly 70 and had been in hiding for years, but Armstrong knew it was possible to get a message to him and sought permission to use the material for an official biography of Hubbard, arguing that it would prepare the ground for "universal acceptance" of Scientology. Hubbard approved.

As Armstrong began to catalogue and index the documents, posters appeared in Scientology offices announcing a screening of a 1940 Warner Brothers movie, The Dive Bomber, for which Hubbard had written the screenplay. Every Scientologist knew Ron had been a successful Hollywood screenwriter and the screening was to raise funds for the defence of 11 Scientologists, including Hubbard's wife, indicted on conspiracy charges.

Armstrong decided to help by finding out more about Ron's contribution to the film. But he discovered that two other writers had been credited with the screenplay for The Dive Bomber.

Hubbard explained that in the rush to distribute the film his name had been left off the credits. He had been getting ready to go to war so he just told the studio to send the cheque. After the war he used the money for a holiday in the Caribbean.

Armstrong had one niggling worry. Like all Scientologists he had been told that Ron was blind and crippled at the end of the war and had only recovered through the power of his mind. He must have taken the holiday after his recovery.

To clear up the chronology, Armstrong applied under the Freedom of Information Act for Hubbard's United States Navy records.

Scientologists were proud of the fact that their founder was a war hero who had been wounded several times. So it was with a sense of disbelief and dismay that Armstrong leafed through Hubbard's records. They seemed to indicate that Ron was an incompetent, malingering coward who had done his best to avoid seeing action.

Armstrong decided to go right back to the beginning, to Montana, where Hubbard had grown up on his grandfather's huge cattle ranch. But he could find no trace of any property owned by the family, except for one small house. Neither could he discover any documentation covering Hubbard's alleged teenage wanderings through China or his fabled expeditions as an explorer. At George Washington University, where Hubbard was supposed to have graduated in mathematics and engineering, the record showed he dropped out because of poor grades.

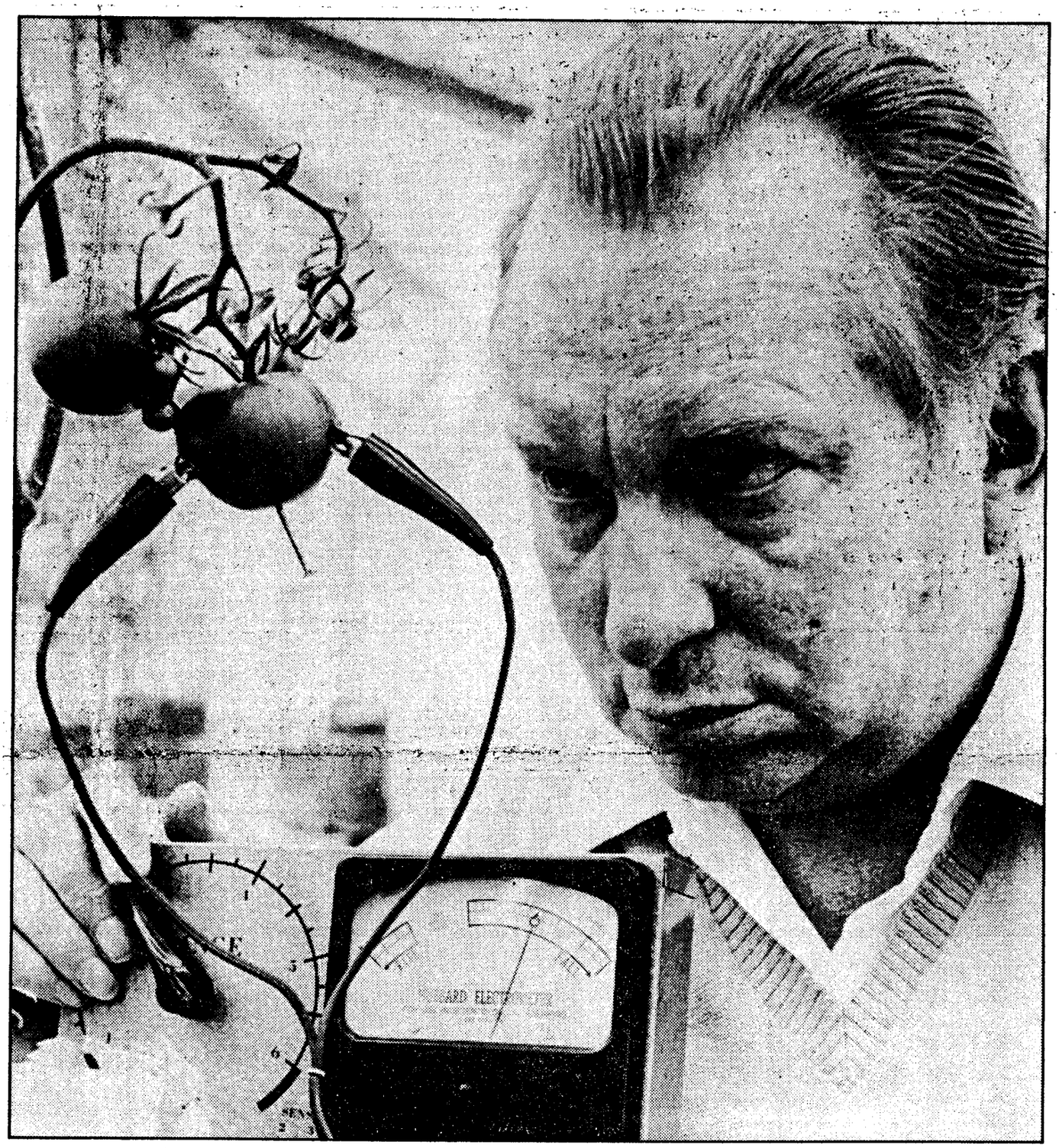
Armstrong said: "I slowly came to realise that the guy had consistently lied about himself."

Since Hubbard had gone into seclusion, the Church of Scientology had been taken over i young militants known as "messengers". November 1981 Armstrong presented a report the messengers, listing the false claims abo Hubbard and asking that they be corrected. "If present inaccuracies, hyperbole or downright li as fact of truth," he wrote, " the man will look, outsiders at least, like a charlatan."

The messengers accused Armstrong of 18 d ferent "crimes" and "high crimes" against t Church of Scientology. He was declared to be "suppressive person" and "fair game", whi meant he could be "tricked, cheated, lied to, su or destroyed" by his former friends Scientology.

"I realised I had been drawn into Scientolo by a web of lies, by Machiavellian mental contr techniques and by fear," Armstrong said. "T betrayal of trust began with Hubbard's lies abo himself. His life was a continuing pattern fraudulent business practices, tax evasion, flig from creditors and hiding from the law.

"He was a mixture of Adolf Hitler, Charl Chaplin and Baron Münchhausen. In short, was a con man."



Vegetable matter: Scientology's founder, L Ron Hubbard, with his famous E-meter, "proving" that tomatoes feel pain

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SCIENCE FICTIONS

PART 1

In this first exclusive extract from the book the Church of Scientology tried to ban, RUSSELL MILLER explores the bizarre career of the church's founder, L Ron Hubbard, and the science-fiction myths of the worldwide cult

THE MAY 1950 issue of Astounding Science Fiction magazine featured on the cover a hairy, ape-like alien with yellow cat's eyes that glowed menacingly. Readers would discover this was the evil Duke of Kraakahaym, special envoy from the Empire of Skontar to the Commonwealth of Sol. But everyone knew there was something much more diverting in the magazine that month – the long-awaited introduction to Dianetics, the first science ever to be launched in a pulp magazine.

So startling were the tidings that the editor of the magazine, John Campbell, felt obliged to emphasise that the author was entirely serious. "I want to assure every reader, most positively and unequivocally," he wrote, "that this article is *not* a hoax, joke, or anything but a direct, clear statement of a new scientific thesis."

It was certainly very different from the previous, science-fiction writing of L Ron Hubbard. The customary narcissistic swaggering was notably absent and his usual racy prose was replaced by a sober, textbook style, sometimes not immediately comprehensible: "When exterior determinism was entered into a human being so as to overbalance his self determinism the correctness of his solutions fell off rapidly."

Hubbard began by drawing an analogy between the human brain and a computer with an infinite memory bank and perfect function. Every human brain, he argued, had the potential to operate as this optimum computer, with untold benefits to the individual and to mankind, not least restoring sanity to the insane, curing all manner of illnesses and ending wars.

Constraints were currently imposed on the brain by "aberrations", usually caused by physical or emotional pain. Since pain was a threat to survival, the basic principle of existence, the sane, analytical mind sought to avoid it. Evolution had provided the necessary mechanism by means of what he called the "reactive mind". In moments of stress, the "analytical mind" shut down and the "reactive mind" took over, storing information in cellular recordings, or "engrams".

He provided an example of how an engram was stored. If a child was bitten by a dog at the age of two, she might not remember the incident in later life, but the engram could be stimulated by any number of sights or sounds, causing inexplicable distress.

The purpose of Dianetic therapy, Hubbard explained, was to gain access to the engrams and "refile" them in the analytical mind, where their influence would be eradicated. Having cleared the reactive mind, the analytical mind would function like the optimum computer, the individual's IQ would rise dramatically, he would be freed of all psychosomatic illnesses and his memory would improve to the point of total recall.

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Dianetics was easy to apply, he asserted, once the axioms and mechanisms had been learned, and he envisaged the science being practised by "people of intelligence and good drive" on their friends and families. "To date over 200 patients have been treated," he claimed; "of those 200, 200 cures have been obtained."

It was an alluring prospect: a simple science available to ordinary people that invariably succeeded and claimed amazing results. But Hubbard knew better than to reveal in a 25-cent magazine *how* to practise his wonderful new science. That was left to his forthcoming book, Dianetics, The Modern Science of Mental Health, price $4.

IN THE book, Hubbard introduced his new science with breath-taking grandiloquence: "The creation of Dianetics is a milestone for Man comparable to his discovery of fire and superior to his inventions of the wheel and the arch . . . The hidden source of all psychosomatic ills and human aberration has been discovered and skills have been developed for their invariable cure."

But the first challenge of Dianetics was to get through the book, for the text was abstruse, rambling, repetitive, studded with confusing neologisms and littered with interminable footnotes, which Hubbard seemed to think added acacemic verisimilitude. His fellow science-fiction writer, L Sprage de Camp, admitted he found it incomprehensible.

Hubbard's anxiety to invest his work with intellectual authority should have deterred him from laying bare his own fierce prejudices, but he could not be restrained. The book exposed a deep-rooted hatred of women, exemplified by a prurient preoccupation with "attempted abortions", which he claimed were the most common cause of pre-natal engrams.

When the women in Hubbard's "case histories" were not thrusting knitting needles into themselves, they were usually being unfaithful to their husbands, or they were being beaten up, raped or otherwise abused. Almost without exception they allowed the wretched embryos in their wombs to be grievously mistreated.

Hubbard's secondary target was the medical profession, towards which he directed almost rabid hostility, accusing neurosurgeons of of reducing their "victims" to "zombyism", either by burning away the brain with electric shocks or tearing it to pieces with "a nice ice-pick into each eyeball".

But the most portentous section of the book was that explaining how to put Dianetics into practice. Artfully employing the jargon of modern technology, Hubbard called the process "auditing". The practitioner was the "auditor" and his patient was a "preclear". To become "clear" of all engrams was the goal.

Here was a do-it-yourself therapy for the people. Any doubts were swept aside by the book's absolutism: who would dare make such sweeping claims if they were not true?

All over the United States, science-fiction fans bought the book and began to audit their friends, who then rushed out to buy the book so they could audit *their* friends. Dianetics became a national craze somewhat akin to the canasta marathons that had briefly flourished in the hysteria of post-war America.

The new guru set up the Hubbard Dianetic Research Foundation in Elizabeth, New Jersey, and was inundated with inquiries when it was announced that he would be teaching the first full-time training course for Dianetic auditors. The course cost $500.

Such was the public interest that Hubbard could not be ignored by the media. In the Scientific American, a physics professor said Hubbard's book contained less evidence per page than any publication since the invention of printing and said its huge sale was distressing. The New Republic described it as a "mixture of complete nonsense and perfectly reasonable common sense, taken from acknowledged findings and disguised and distorted by a crazy, newly invented terminology.".

A Los Angeles psychiatrist declared that the "so-called science of Dianetics could be dismissed for what it is – a clever scheme to dip into the pockets of the gullible with impunity".

But constant publicity spread the word as effectively as a nationwide advertising campaign. The more the medical profession railed against Dianetics, the more people became convinced that there must be something to it.

CALIFORNIA, ever enchanted by fads and facile philosophies, was the natural habitat for Dianetics, and in August 1950 Hubbard went to lecture there at the newly formed Hubbard Dianetic Research Foundation of California. He was also to attend a rally at the Shrine Auditorium. It promised to be Dianetics' finest hour, for the identity of the world's first "clear" was to be announced.

The evening opened with Hubbard demonstrating Dianetic techniques, with the

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help of a pretty blonde. It was not a great success, but the atmosphere among the predominantly young audience remained perfectly cordial, even if shouted comments were increasingly irreverent. As the highlight of the evening approached, there was a palpable sense of excitement and anticipation. At last Hubbard stepped up to the microphone to introduce the "world's first clear".

She was, he said, a young woman by the name of Sonya Bianca, a physics major and pianist from Boston. Among her many newly acquired attributes, she claimed she had "full and perfect recall of every moment of her life" and she would be happy to demonstrate.

The audience erupted into applause as a thin, obviously nervous girl stepped into a spotlight which followed her to centre-stage, where she was embraced by Hubbard. She said that Dianetics had cleared up her sinus trouble and cured an allergy to paint. She answered a few routine questions from Hubbard, then made the mistake of inviting questions from the audience.

"What did you have for breakfast on October 3, 1942?" somebody yelled. Miss Bianca understandably looked somewhat startled, blinked and shook her head. "What's on page 122 of Dianetics, The Modern Science of Mental Health?" someone else asked. Miss Bianca opened her mouth but no words came out. Similar questions came thick and fast, amid derisive laughter. Many in the audience took pity on the wretched girl and tried to put easier questions; but she was so terrified that she could not even remember simple formulae in physics, her own subject.

As people began getting up and walking out of the auditorium, one man noticed that Hubbard had momentarily turned his back on the girl and shouted: "OK, what colour necktie is Mr Hubbard wearing?" The world's first "clear" screwed up her face in a frantic effort to remember, stared into the hostile blackness of the auditorium, then hung her head in misery. It was an awful moment.

Hubbard, sweat glistening on his forehead, stepped forward and brought the demonstration swiftly to an end. He offered an explanation for Miss Bianca's impressive lapses of memory. The problem, Dianetically speaking, was that when he called her forward, asking her to come out "now", the "now" had frozen her in "present time" and blocked her total recall. It was not particularly convincing.

It would be some time before Hubbard produced another "clear", though his followers would frequently declare that their own protégés had reached that blissful state. One of these was a 15-year-old girl of such remarkable powers that she was said to have made her bad teeth fall out and grown new teeth in their place. Nobody suggested producing her at a public meeting.

But the debacle at the Shrine was no more than a hiccup in the rising fortunes of L. Ron Hubbard. Money literally poured in. Only a few days after the meeting, the foundation moved its headquarters into the former official mansion of the governor of California. It cost $4.5m, but enough money had already come in for a down payment. Other branches of the Foundation had opened in New York, Washington DC, Chicago and Honolulu.

WHILE money was pouring in, however, it was also pouring out and there was no accounting, no organisation, no financial strategy or control. Trying to hold the reins, refusing to delegate, Hubbard became ever more authoritarian and suspicious of the people around him.

"He was having a lot of political and organisational problems with people grabbing for power," said Barbara Kaye [see box on right], a public relations assistant at the Los Angeles Foundation. "He didn't trust anyone and was highly paranoid. He thought the CIA had hit men after him. We'd be walking along the street and I would ask, 'Why are you walking so fast?' He would look over his shoulder and say, 'You don't know what it's like to be a target.' No one was after him: it was all delusion."

By October, when Hubbard returned to the original foundation in New Jersey, he was greeted with the news that the organisation was approaching a financial crisis – its monthly income could no longer cover the payroll – and Dr Joseph Winter, a general practitioner from Michigan who had done much to validate Dianetics, was about to resign. Two "pre-clears" had developed acute psychoses during auditing and Winter was worried by the foundation's willingness to accept anyone for training as an auditor.

"People had breakdowns quite often," said one student at the foundation. "It was always hushed up before anyone found out about it. It happened to a guy on my course, a chemical engineer. He never ate or slept and was in a terrible state, no one could do anything with him and in the end they took him off to an asylum."

Hubbard stayed less than a week in Elizabeth and made little attempt to resolve the financial crisis. He had no interest in balance sheets and operated on the optimistic, if unrealistic, belief that somehow everything would come out all right.

In this case it did, in the shape of Don Purcell, a businessman from Wichita, Kansas. Mr Purcell was not only an enthusiastic Dianeticist (he had turned to the new science in the hope of finding a cure for chronic constipation); he also happened to be a millionaire.

Hubbard spent Purcell's money at a prodigious rate. He moved into a large house in a select residential area of Wichita and re-established his foundation, where staff were hired and fired arbitrarily as Hubbard's attention and enthusiasm flitted from one grandiose scheme to another. Courtesy of Hubbard, Wichita was briefly the home of "The International Library of Arts and Sciences", which no doubt caused some head-scratching among the local farmers and factory workers.

It had been agreed that Purcell would be responsible for the management and business affairs of the foundation while Hubbard looked after training, processing and research; but a simple division of responsibility proved to be unworkable.

"Things went along fine for a while," Purcell recorded, "then Ron began to encroach on my territory. Ron established an overhead structure that far exceeded the gross income."

Purcell's lawyer said: "The bills were reaching astronomical proportions. The foundation was losing money hand over fist at a rate faster than Purcell could replace it."

THE excitement of the previous summer had faded. To thousands of people across America, Dianetics was no more than a passing whim. A conference of Dianeticists organised in Wichita at the end of June, 1951 attracted only 112 delegates; but Hubbard continued to behave as if the organisation was going from strength to strength.

Early in 1952 a court ruled that the Hubbard Dianetic Foundation in Wichita was liable for the very considerable debts of the defunct Hubbard Dianetic Research Foundation in New Jersey. It was a disaster. Purcell, now deeply suspicious, believed that the only option was to file for voluntary bankruptcy. A bitter feud followed, but Hubbard had another scheme on his mind.

At a small convention at the "Hubbard College" in Wichita, Ron first introduced an ingenious little gadget called an E-meter, which he claimed was capable of measuring emotions accurately enough to "give an auditor a deep and marvellous insight into the mind of his pre-clear".

It was a black metal box with a lighted dial, adjustment knobs and wires connected to two tin cans. He demonstrated how it worked by inviting a member of the audience to hold the tin cans and then pinching him – the needle of the dial flickered in response. Then he asked him simply to imagine the pinch and the needle flickered again!

But the excitement generated by the E-meter was as nothing compared to Hubbard's next revelation. He had, he said, discovered an entirely new science which transcended the limits of Dianetics. It was a science of *certainty* and he already had a name for it – Scientology.

Extracted from Bare-Faced Messiah, by Russell Miller, published by Michael Joseph price £12.95

NEXT WEEK: MESSIAH AT THE MANOR HOUSE

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Paranoid, depressive and deeply unhappy

BARBARA KAYE, a public relations assistant at the Dianetics Research Foundation in Los Angeles, knew a lot about Ron Hubbard because she was having an affair with him. She was just 20 years old, an exceptionally pretty blonde and a psychology major.

"I wanted to get into public relations and an employment agency sent me along to the foundation," she recalls. "They were looking for someone to answer the scurrilous attacks that the press was making on Dianetics. Ron interviewed me and hired me straight away.

"My first impression was of a husky, red-haired man with a full, flabby face – not by any means what one would call handsome. If I'd seen him on the street I wouldn't have given him a second look; but I soon learned he was a very creative, intelligent and articulate individual. He had a marvellous personality and was very dynamic.

"There was a lot going on in the office at that time and sometimes when I worked late he took me home. One night he kissed me and, well, one thing led to another. I knew he was married, but I was very young and not as concerned with other men's wives as perhaps I should have been."

Barbara soon found herself hopelessly in love. She was thrilled when Hubbard rented a "love nest" apartment at the Chateau Marmont Hotel, a fake castle overlooking Sunset Strip. On their first night there, Ron seemed to want to reassure her of the permanency of their relationship. He put his arm round her shoulders and took her through the apartment. "This is your closet," he said, "this is your dressing-table, this is your toothbrush . . . "

Two days later, Hubbard's second wife, Sara, and their baby moved into the love nest. When Barbara turned up for work at the foundation next morning, she found her toothbrush on her desk along with the few personal possessions she had left at the apartment.

Despite the hurt, Barbara could not bring herself to break off the affair. "I was completely infatuated with him," she said. "Being with him was like watching a fascinating character playing a role on a stage. He was a magical, delightful man, a great raconteur, very bright and amusing and a very gentle, patient and sweet lover.

Barbara Kaye: "I was frightened."

"At the same time I recognised early on that he was also deeply disturbed. Some of the things he told me were really bizarre, but I never knew what to believe. He said his mother was a lesbian and that he had found her in bed with another woman and that he had been born as a result of an attempted abortion."

Barbara accompanied Hubbard on a lecture tour in September, 1950 and had an unhappy time. When she found him kissing the wife of a San Francisco Dianeticist who was their host, she refused to sleep with him. He lost his temper and bellowed: "They're all against me!"

Barbara wrote in her diary: "I see him now as vain, arrogant, self-centred and unable to tolerate any frustration."

They soon made up the quarrel and, according to Barbara, "he fell in love with me a little again". But she noted: "He drank excessively and talked in proportion to his intake. Grotesque tales about his family mostly and his hatred of his mother, who he said was a lesbian and a whore . . . He is a deeply unhappy man."

Barbara, who would later become a psychologist, once made a clinical diagnosis of Hubbard. "There was no doubt in my mind he was a manic depressive with paranoid tendencies. Many manics are delightful, productive people with tremendous energy and self-confidence."

But at other times "He was very sad and lethargic, lying around feeling sorry for himself and drinking a great deal . . . He told me that people . . . attempted to insert a fatal hypo into his eye and heart to try and stop him from ever writing again."

One of Hubbard's favourite topics of conversation was psychiatrists. One night he told Barbara about an occasion when he had demonstrated auditing techniques to a group of psychiatrists and one of them had said to him: "If you claim to cure people by doing that, if you're not careful we'll lock you up." He laughed excessively and spluttered: "They called me a paranoid, can you imagine it?" Barbara wrote in her diary: "My blood ran cold as he was saying that."

Yet by May, 1951 Barbara had decided that she was going to marry Ron, who had divorced his second wife. "If love can break men's hearts it can restore them too," she had written to him. But when she saw him after a long separation "He had visibly deteriorated both physically and mentally. He was extremely unkempt, his fingernails were uncut and his hair was long and stringy. He talked in a monotone all the time and was obviously clinically depressed."

Hubbard took her out to buy her an engagement ring, but she was already having second thoughts. "I felt extremely distanced from him because he was so strange, he was like a different person. I began to think I could never marry this man; I was frightened of him." She left next morning.