Speculation

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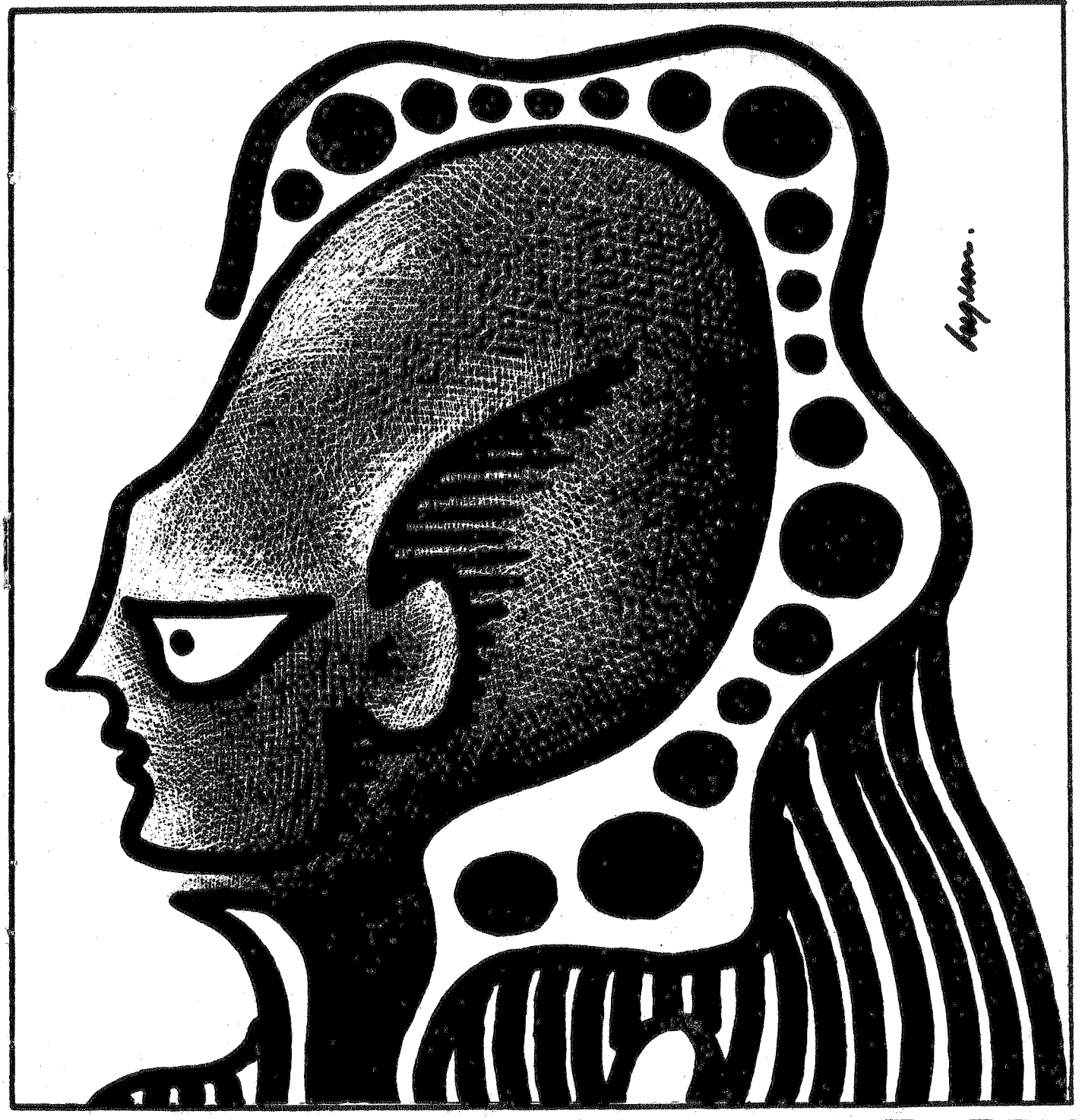

FREDERIK POHL • MICHAEL MOORCOCK
CHRISTOPHER PRIEST • JAMES BLISH

Speculation

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Cover "Warrior Robot" by Richard Bergeron; Interior artwork by Eddie Jones

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AT first sight the current issue looks a particularly indigestible solid lump, with none of the Letraset headings I used to be so proud of and with only the one solitary illustration on Page 10. Grumpily I have finally conceded defeat, at least temporarily, so far as the business of decorating SPECULATION is concerned; as Walt Willis says, British fanzines are beaten before they start.

(You haven't yet encountered Willis, fandom's best and most accomplished writer? Get Richard Bergeron's Warhoon-27, out soon with some 150 pages of Willis columns. Send Dick a 10/- note for convenience; he's honest and you'll get a number of issues for that. 11 East 68th St., N.Y., N.Y. 10021, USA).

I don't know whether any of the Americans who complain to me about poor reproduction have ever tried to produce a magazine themselves on completely inadequate sheets of the too-small too-thin too-white too-expensive duplicating paper we British have to use because there is nothing else. Going into purely mechanical problems now (and promptly losing all audience save other fanzine editors) the set-off and show-through is frightening to behold, especially when one is idiot enough to try to print the sticky black headings I've been using of late. And I'm not slip-sheeting for 600 copies! Therefore I propose to abandon the battle; stodgy as it looks this issue at least contains several 1000 words more than usual. It may even be easier to read; it was a devil of a lot easier to print. (Cont/d P.2)

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I'd like to extend a welcome to those members of the BSFA who will be rather puzzled to receive SPECULATION. Let me explain that it is a sort of private-enterprise journal not a great deal different from the Association's own Vector. The Secretaries suggested that this might be a pleasant sort of bonus to members, who haven't received too many issues of the latter magazine this year: so far as you need be concerned for the moment the only important difference is that you must pay me to receive any more! I hope you enjoy this sample.

I have a lot more to cover in this limited space. To begin Hartley Patterson announces impending formation of the Tolkien Society of Great Britain, a counterpart to the flourishing societies in America and Australia. Interested parties should contact Mrs Vera Chapman, 21 Harrington House, Stanhope Street, London N.W.1.

Mention of Tolkien leads me naturally into notice of something recently organised by the Midlands Arts Centre at Cannon Hill Park here in Birmingham. Titled "An Afternoor In Middle Earth" this was a conference held for some 200 people over a Sunday afternoon. Professor Tolkien spent his childhood in Birmingham, and it is said that The Shire, the complacent, cosy little Hobbit country comes from the area of the River Cole, Sarehole Mill, and the lost fields of Hall Green and Yardley Wood just off the thundering Stratford Road. Here in the city we still have Sarehole Mill, now reconditioned and open to the public, and existing on the site as a water-mill for grinding corn since 1542.

Not far away is Cannon Hill Park and the Arts Centre, a futuristic collection of studios and theatres devoted to the arts and crafts in a beautifully-wooded setting alongside the River Rea. When I went along to see press officer Leslie Holloway (who used to work in the same office at BSA before I came; the world is small and paths keep crossing!) he said that squirrels play outside his window. It is a place ideally suited for a conference on science fiction.

I'm rather pleased to announce, therefore, that after discussioms with Paul Clements, director of courses, we plan to arrange such an event, to take place on Sunday 14th June 1970. This will involve a fairly intensive discussion sponsored by the Centre under the general title 'SPECULATIVE LITERATURE - science fiction today', between both professional and 'academic' interests, and also with films and an exhibition. Some of those provisionally taking part are Brian Aldiss, James Blish, Ken Bulmer, Philip Strick and Prof. Willis McNelly.

Admission will be by ticket, and these will be available by March. A limited number will be open for SPECULATION readers; however you might like to note that the Centre has its own mailing list of some 3000 names and the auditorium only seats 200. The Tolkien conference sold out in three days; therefore if you want to attend the SF event you should write to me now (without commitment) rather than wait for further details in the next issue of SPECULATION, which may be too late. The proceedings will be published here during the Summer.

The annual British convention, Sci-Con 70 will be held in two months time in London. Despite Michael Moorcock's unjustifiably harsh comments further on about conventions generally, this will be a fine opportunity to meet people from the SF world. Guest of Honour will be James Blish, and there will also be a fashion show and an exhibition, with several panel discussions including one sponsored by SPECULATION, at 4.30 PM on the Saturday. This will feature Chris Priest, Pamela Bulmer, Michael Kenward, Bob Parkinson, your editor and one other. We will discuss John Foyster's comment in this issue (P.31) "If a guy can't tell a consistent story then surely one is entitled to question his motives and understanding?". Registration for the convention (27-30 March 1970) is 10/-, to Sci-Con 70, c/o 'Dark They Were And Golden Eyed', 28 Bedfordbury, London WC2.

Looking at the remaining 47 action-packed pages of this issue I realise with not a little awe that I am now the only contributor to SPEC. who is not writing professionally. (Bob Parkinson writes technical books; Michael Kenward works on New Scientist). This is also now the only fan-magazine to have TWO professional SF-magazine editors as regular columnists; at least unless Geis can Co-opt Campbell to go with White, or Bergeron snares Ferman to accompany Lowndes! If I bend the rules slightly and call Ken Bulmer a regular columnist then I can up the total to three, because from what Ken tells me by telephone today he is shortly to begin editing a new British fantasy magazine (along the lines of Unknown) for the Ronald Graham Group, who publish Visions of Tomorrow. That's fine news all around; particularly for Ken himself, who deserves it!

Even with so much else happening, two of the most exciting things for me this quarter have been getting Frederik Pohl and James Blish to write for SPECULATION. Mr Blish's review of BAREFOOT IN THE HEAD appears on Page 24, while Mr Pohl's column begins overpage. About the latter, Mr Pohl said in his letter accepting my invitation: "(it) would be a rather personal, quite discursive column. The closest thing to what I have in mind is Budrys' column. The principal difference... apart from, of course, some differences of taste, is that A.J. pulls his punches to some extent. I would expect I would be more outspoken."

Chris Priest's piece came in under the bar in a flurry of midnight typing all round; evidently he has a deadline to meet on another novel. So let's reward him with some comments on 'Suburbia' this time! (P. 12) Andrew Offutt's 'Impressions of St. Louiscon' was inspired by his first meetings with a number of people at the 1969 World Convention; he says for the benefit of British readers that 'Rosie Greer is an enormous black football player who looks as though he'd be taking unfair advantage if he offered to Indian-wrestle a bear. So does Elliot Shorter'. (You might note that this feature begins with a cartoon by Eddie Jones, this year's TAFF delegate to the USA, who is now working on an illustrated report of his trip. The feature ends with Jay Kay Klein, and he produces excellent photographic albums of various World Conventions. Details from Jay: 302 Sandra Drive, North Syracuse, N.Y. 13212. Recommended).

One of the things I've unwittingly had to postpone using is Al Snider's 'Old Wave Primer', which is an interesting although somewhat biased comment on John J. Pierce and the Second Foundation. Equally prejudiced is Pierce's own magazine, Renaissance, which does however contain some first-class critical thinking and writing. I had intended to reprint some sections of this to give both sides of the 'controversy' along with Snider; perhaps next time. What it boils down to, of course, is that many of the things John Pierce says are correct, but his overall viewpoint is wrong. He's confusing what some authors may say with what they actually write. Now turn to Page 30.

Of the other contributors, Michael Moorcock asked me to use two of his recent letters as a column because he is still trying to catch up the time he lost by going on holiday this year. At one stage I nearly added a rather laborious personal reply to some of his comments, because we markedly part company on Mike's attitude towards fandom. I feel that fandom has achieved amazingly much for a small scattered group of people with no commercial backing. A lot of people in this country complain about fandom; they ought to stop and look for any other amateur group that has done more, for its size, so far as good writing, intelligent discussion and thoughtful interest in its subject matter is concerned. I'm rather proud to be involved with fandom.

Peter R Weston, 15.January.'70

* This issue is collated and assembled by the University of Aston SF Group *

SF CRITICISM: "Certain Voyages of the Soul"

A column by Frederik Pohl

About a decade ago, while Horace Gold was still editing *If*, I put in a year or two as its book reviewer. It is astonishing what you can forget in ten years. Somehow time prettified and sentimentalised the memory of the dreary plodding through dreary books and the scorching letters from victims of a bad notice — or actually, funnily enough, from beneficiaries of a good one; the two ugliest bits of hate mail I ever got were from writers I had bent over backwards to be kind to. I had forgotten it all until just now. For while amnesia was still in effect I agreed to sign on with this column, at least for a trial period, and now I have to face up to the task of writing it... and blessed amnesia has gone and I remember!

Well, I promised so let's give it a try. It may not be so bad. I fear I will be passionate from time to time, but if you'll be tolerant when it happens I, on my part, will try to keep the seizures to a minimum. I cannot promise not to kick and pull hair ever, because I have the Shavian (Shavian as in Shaw, *not* as in Shaver) view that it is a critic's business to shout and wound. I don't remember the exact words, but he said that a critic was obliged to treat the author of a bad work as a mortal enemy, who could earn forgiveness only by writing a good one. I have noticed this same disease in myself.

Of course, that implies that the words "bad" and "good" mean something. That is, that there exist certain objective tests, as a piece of litmus paper is an objective test, which will turn blue for "bad" and pink for "good" when properly administered by an accredited expert. Most of us would agree that this is true and that such tests can be made. Most of us who express our preferences in a public forum have to subscribe to this belief, reserving only the qualification that there are damn few really qualified experts (our single selves and who else?), and so the objective standards are poorly understood and badly applied; if we didn't we might have to face up to admitting that all we can really say about a "good" work is that it happens to scratch where we, personally and idiosyncratically, itch. Or, to put it in Anatole France's words, admit that "there can no more be objective criticism than there can be objective beauty; and anyone who thinks that he puts into his appreciation of art anything but himself is a dupe of the most fallacious sophistry."

There are, to be sure, many such dupes. A lot of them are reviewing science fiction. Apart from the specialist reviewers in the fanzines and prozines, most persons who bother to review science fiction at all in the United States appear to do so from the objectivist position. For example, the two New York newspapers I read are the *Post* and the *Times*. Both of them are in this respect objectivist (or what France would have called "dupes") through and through. The *Post*, indeed, never says more than a single word about any SF book, only "Poor", "Fair", "Good" or "Excellent". (Once or twice it has slipped up and listed a book twice — not always with the same one-word rating. Which says something about objectivism.)

In fact, about the only current SF reviewer of any standing who France would not dismiss as an objectivist dupe, I think, is Algis Budrys. And he is a curious case. His virtues are considerable, but it appears his way out of the objectivist dilemma is to suppose that every SF book is good, his task being to ferret out that particular quality which makes it so; wherefore the archetypal spectacle of an A.J. review which flays an author for illiteracy, ignorance, commercialism and talent-prostitution and winds up with, "Anyway it's a first-rate job and you should run, not walk, to the nearest bookstore and buy a copy." In a sense I suppose A.J. is following France's injunction as to proper critical behaviour; for after the above, France went on by saying: "We must recognise that we speak only of ourselves when we have not the self-control to remain silent. The good critic is one who recounts the adventures of his own soul as it voyages among masterpieces."

Now I wish I could do that for you. I really do. I would like nothing better than to voyage among masterpieces and tell you what my soul made of them; but I do not seem to have found all that many masterpieces to voyage among. The most recent batch of titles to have come my way are slim enough pickings, to be truthful. There are reissues of Jack Williamson's LEGION OF SPACE (Pyramid); Hannes Bok's THE SORCERER'S SHIP and James Branch Cabell's THE SILVER STALLION (both Ballantine); and while there is a lot that could be said about each of these, the time for saying it would appear to have been from 25 to 45 years ago, when they first came out. There's also a collection of Isaac Asimov shorts under the title NIGHTFALL AND OTHER STORIES (Doubleday; ditto), and his OPUS 100 (Houghton Mifflin) which is an amiable pleasantry, rating a salute rather than a review.

There are two skinny little pieces, Murray Leinster's UNKNOWN DANGER and Michael Kurland's THE UNICORN GIRL (both Pyramid), which cheerfully enough say nothing that hasn't been said a hundred times before. There's a James White short-story collection, THE ALIENS AMONG US (Ballantine), and White is a writer I would like to discuss in detail some day; but these are mostly pretty early work. I'm glad I read them. It's interesting to see the beginnings of a man who has developed into something individual and promising. But I can think of nothing else to say about them that would serve any purpose without enlarging the frame of reference to include White's entire corpus. And I'm not prepared to do that just now. And, with about two exceptions, there's little else that I've seen in the past two or three months that strikes me as worth mentioning at all.

M. France doesn't say what to do when you don't have any masterpieces to voyage among. Discuss the general question of literary values, maybe. In the old days when we demicentenarians were ambitious young would-be writers and looked up to the Ray Cummingses and Arthur J. Burkses, a specimen of that kind of writing was called a "think piece". If there were a heaven for writers, we would all go there and write nothing but think pieces; but on this side of paradise we run up against such commandments against them as, for instance, Kierkegaard's. He did not approve of discussing general questions. Like the U.S. Supreme Court, he felt it proper to weigh only specific and concrete problems. You remember the passage, of course. "It is more difficult to describe one actor than to write a whole philosophy of art," he philosophised. And then, "The more one can depend upon generalisations," he generalised, "the easier it is, for the material is so vast that all the completely abstract observations, which anyone can learn by heart, seem to mean something. But the more concrete the observation the more difficult it is."

I'm not a bit sure that I will be able over the long haul to observe all these strictures, but I append them so that you will know, when I fail, what standards I am failing by. Let's now turn to the two specific books I have reserved for discussion out of the year-end crop, and see if we can isolate some of what is "good" about them, and what is "bad".

The first book is an anthology, DARK STARS, edited by Robert Silverberg (Ballantine). I don't mean to review anthologies in general, but this one happens to contain one or two signally interesting stories.

One of them is C.M. Kornbluth's 'Shark Ship', nearly his last completed piece of science fiction before his untimely early death, and a story which has special qualities for me. I worked closely with Cyril over a period of twenty-odd years, and I almost always knew in general what he was writing. 'Shark Ship' is one of the very few stories that I never saw or heard of until I read it in print. It is, as Silverberg accurately states, quintessential Kornbluth. It is brilliant, and it is morbid. The story opens in a static culture, as most of Cyril's did; this one is a fleet of phosphor-bronze sailing vessels, cruising the South Atlantic for trash fish to eat, exiled from the overpopulated land. The stasis bursts (again as usual) when one vessel loses its net and thus condemns itself to ultimate starvation. They have only one hope, and that is to return to the land, which none of their people have seen for centuries. Astonishingly, they find the land is no longer overpopulated. In the course of time a death cult has caused landlubbers to kill each other off, and now it is free for the sea-people to reconquer.

It is to this death-cult I would like to direct your attention. The cult is that of

> 'Merdeka the Chosen, the All-Foreigner, the Ur-Alien... He began as a retail mail-order vendor of movie and television stills.'

What sort of stills did he sell? 'Whipping and torture stills'. Were they obscene? Not under the law:

> 'Merdeka's girls always wore at least full panties, bras and stockings; he had them there. The post office obscenity people were vaguely positive that there was something wrong with pictures of beautiful women tied down to be whipped or burned with hot irons, but what?'

In 'Shark Ship' Merdeka goes on to huge affairs - the publishing of a murder-and-torture newsweekly called Death, the reshaping of the morality of the human race, anti-sex, pro-bloodlust. That's as may be; but the thing is that up to the point I quoted above Merdeka was not a fictional character at all. He was a real-life purveyor of just those stills. I've forgotten his name, but he had a store in lower Manhattan and often enough when Cyril came out for a visit or a collaboration he would have one of the fellow's latest catalogues with him to browse over in the train. People like that fascinated Cyril. (And he did them; his personal fandom included a number of barely-this-side-of-the-law types.) Albert Fish, the Westchester psychopath who filled his scrotum with razor blades and ate the roasted flesh of little girls. Lesbians. Confidence men. Cyril's curiosity about deviates of all kinds was immense, and among them he included, for example, the perpetrators of kiddy shows on television ('The Advent on Channel XII'), automobile manufacturers ('The Marching Morons'), and prosperous middle-class Americans in general. The best place to see these interests are in Cyril's non-SF books, (THE NAKED STORM, HALF, VALERIE, etc) with their taxi-dance girls, cops, salesmen, car mechanics, and so on, but you would expect them there; what Cyril did that was unexpected was to put the same sort of frustrated yahoos into science fiction.

I don't think 'Shark Ship' is a great story. It goes all to pot at the end and it doesn't even start out in the same league as, say, 'The Little Black Bag' or 'The Silly Season'. But it's pure Cyril Kornbluth, warts and all.

There are some fifteen other stories in DARK STARS. There's an acid (acid as in acidulous, not acid-head) Brian Aldiss called 'Heresies of the Huge God'. There's John Brunner's finest short story, 'The Totally Rich'. There's R.A. Lafferty's 'Policy and Customs of the Camiroi'; All very good, but not very long (and I have objections to writinglong comments about short stories). There is also, both good and bad, 'On The Wall Of The Lodge', by James Blish and Virginia Kidd. (The editor would have you believe that it is published complete here for the first time, but that's not exactly right. It is the first part of a long-abandoned novel which certainly will never be finished, which means it can hardly be "complete".) I regret I have not the space to discuss this one in detail. It is not perfect; it hangs in the air, evidently because the authors could not cope with finishing it, and that's a pity, but it's a fragment worth a good many completed jobs.

The other stories range from all right to awful. (As we objectivist dupes say.) Everyone of them suffers from acid indigestion. This is not an accident. Bob Silverberg picked them out to be gloomy, he calls them "a book of dark dreams for a dark time." Well, probably we've used up all the good ideas for "theme" anthologies of science fiction and now we are fated to see the other ones published, but I would not have judged that we were ready for this one quite yet. Of course, there are plenty of dyspeptic SF stories around, but the trouble with making an anthology of them is that most of them are terrible.

Next time Silverbob gets an impulse like this I wish he would take a couple of Tums instead.

In Poul Anderson's SATAN'S WORLD (Doubleday) the adventures of fat, smart, avaricious Nicholas van Rijn and company continue.

Van Rijn, to me, exemplifies fun-SF. We have the colour of non-human 'sophonts' (i.e. intelligent creatures) in astronomically exciting places. We have the adventure of space battle and planetary skullduggery. I don't disparage it when I say that it is exactly like a thousand other stories in plan; those thousand stories are the basic stuff of science fiction, without which hardly anybodywwould be reading it today. And besides, Poul Anderson's product is qualitatively better than most of the thousand others, the villains are more imaginatively foul, the heroes are more satisfyingly flawed, yet victorious, and the 'go' of things is more convincing. But when you've said that, you've said about all there is to say about SATAN'S WORLD as a science fiction novel.

You have not, however, touched on it as a propaganda piece, and it is that which I wish to discuss in what remains of my space. (I will try to explain why I think that important later on.)

In Anderson's mythology, entrepeneurial capitalism is what makes the perfectibility of man a realistic hope, and van Rijn is the personification of that trait. His enemies are blind zealots, given to tongue-lashing him in endless sentences like;

> "I've watched you and your fellow plutocrats in your Polesotechnic League make a mockery of government — intrigue, bribe, compel, corrupt, ignore every inconvenient law, make your private deals, set up your private economic systems, fight your private battles, act like barons of an empire that has no legal existence but that presumes to treat with whole civilisations, make vassals of whole worlds - bring back the rawest kind of feudalism and capitalism!"

So says the Director of the "Federal Centrum of Security and Law Enforcement". I.e., a cop. But van Rijn's enemies are not only policemen. They include criminals and traitors to humanity who say things like:

> "I admit no guilt," Kim said, His eyes kindled. "We serve another cause than your ignoble money-grubbing."

Nearly all of van Rijn's human enemies are posturing caricatures like these. And what unites them is that they all despise his desire to make money. Now, Poul Anderson is skilful both as a writer and as a proragandist. So van Rijn doesn't preach. If he has principles, he never states them. His utmost apologetic is a disclaimer of ideology of any kind:

> "Me, I am a poor lonely old fat man only wanting a tiny bit of profit so he does not end up like a burden on the welfare."

And there it is again, the word "profit"; what distinguishes the Good Guys in the White Hats (van Rijn, employees and allies) from the Bad Guys in the Black Hats (crusading civil servants and traitors to the human race) is that the Bad Guys would deny a man's right to make a profit.

For explication, let us shift our view to the real world, where this impassioned opposition to those who oppose the profit-motive has become an article of faith with the right wing. It figures heavily in the conversation and debating tactics of members of Young Americans for Freedom. A very lovely (if politically insane) lady producer I know told me the other day that her dream of salvation for the world was ABC-simple: "I only want 'profit' to stop being a dirty word". Etc.

Now, the astonishing thing about all this is that I don't know who these anti-profit people are. In fact in the United States at least, I can think of hardly anybody who sees anything wrong with making a profit. Everybody's an entrepeneur -- if not at the helm of his own corporate giant, at least through owning a couple of shares of something; if not in the flesh, at least in his dreams. The nearest I know to a widespread condemnation of the profit motive is a small minority, rapidly dwindling, who feel that although there is nothing wrong with making a profit, it is immoral to steal one.

Of course, a certain objection to profits is basic to Socialist dogma, but that doesn't seem to me to be relevant, for two reasons. First, in the specific case of SATAN'S WORLD, Kim is surely not shown as a Socialist, and if the J. Edgar Hoover-type is meant to be one he is singularly ill-schooled in his own basic texts. (No real socialist would flout holy writ by lumping feudalism and capitalism in one category.) But more important, even the Socialists are cordial to entrepeneurs these days, at least outside of mainland China; witness the workings of the governments of Messrs Wilson and Tito, and even to a lesser extent the Russians. So van Rijn is battling a straw man. What is wrong with this?

Certainly what is wrong is not that Poul is slipping in propaganda. Who doesn't? How can anyone write anything without pleading <u>some</u> cause? Nor is it that it is propaganda for a philosophy I find personally distasteful. I'm not all that ape for Keith Laumer's line, or Mack Reynolds's, to name two writers who seem to me to propagandise heavily in political ways, but I don't think it affects the merit of their work.

But I do think that this particular propaganda of Poul's does affect the merit of SATAN'S WORLD, in just the same way that an awesomely fat-headed scientific blooper, basic to the theme of a story, affects the merit of that /story.

I don't mean some little gaffe about the number of Jovian moons, I mean something like Van Vogt's 'The Ultimate Prime' (it is easy to demonstrate that there is no "ultimate prime") or that hazily-remembered story from the Tremaine Astounding (was it called 'Colossus'? Was it written by John Russell Fearn? one of the Wandreis?) that had the Lorentz-Fitzgerald contraction effect going the wrong way, so that the accelerating ship got bigger rather than smaller as it neared the speed of light?

The trouble is that the phenomenon the propaganda is aimed at simply does not exist. Thus reading SATAN'S WORLD gives me the same feeling I've had from reading about what the Crusaders did to the European Jews en route to the Holy Land, or about the trial of Cnaeus Piso. I understand that medieval man believed Jews poisoned wells, and that Roman man believed that magic could kill. But I know better. So although I understand the motivations of the principals in these events, their actions seem paranoid to me.

And so does Nicholas van Rijn, and that seriously affects how much I can enjoy SATAN'S WORLD.

— But if you can suspend disbelief, it's still rattling good space opera.

Frederik Pohl, 1969

THE HAPPENING WORLD: Review by Peter Weston

Over the Christmas period I read John Brunner's massive 395-page novel from Ace, THE JAGGED ORBIT, which in some ways is very similar to the Hugo-winning STAND ON ZANZIBAR. Because by chance it was published in the USA at roughly the same time as ZANZIBAR (which internal evidence suggests was written first) it has received comparatively little attention; even though I believe it is the better book of the two in many ways.

Let's summarise. To me THE JAGGED ORBIT postulates a far stranger, more frightening and yet more believable world than the other novel. Somehow John Brunner's setting seems more consistent, his plotting less contrived here, and his assumptions are more definite. Basically they are that sometime in the next 40 years the authorities (at least in America) will largely abdicate from their peace-keeping and law-making role.

Elsewhere I've tried once more to list my objections to ZANZIBAR, and these are largely absent from the new novel. John Brunner isn't the first author to write about computers but he must be the first to show what this really can mean. As Graham Charnock said elsewhere, "Forget THE MOON IS A HARSH MISTRESS; this isn't where computers are at."

THE JAGGED ORBIT is actually very difficult to read, for two reasons. One is the multiplicity of characters, the second and more annoying is the way the book is split into one hundred 'chapters', for no particular reason that I can see other than that of cleverness. But other objections are few. Where STAND ON ZANZIBAR was essentially a fairy-tale, of imaginary people imperfectly fitting into an impossible world, following a contrived plot to a story-book ending this is in contrast a possible world, full of genuine extrapolations, excellent characterisations (with a hint of Heinlein. Chad Mulligan = Xavier Conroy = Jubal Harshaw, maybe?) and an ending that is almost convincing.

I think endings are John Brunner's weak point. He tends to tie things up too neatly, things that don't really have endings. Worse, he uses standard SF elements to do this, which in a book that almost might be described as "good journalism" seem oddly out of place. P. Schuyler Miller noticed this in Analog; it is my sole quibble of any importance. A fascinating novel.

Impressions from St. Louiscon by Andrew J. Offutt

GORDON DICKSON: a redheaded Fred MacMurray after a bad night.

JOE HENSLEY: looks exactly like Harlan Ellison except his hair's prettier.

TERRY CARR: a tall and straight fellow who looks as if he MUST be the power behind the throne of a W. European Kingdom.

ROBERT E. MARGROFF: the quiet and bespectacled King of that same realm.

JAMES GUNN: a tall and very slender fellow who I think looks like Michael Rennie and who Jodie thinks resembles Rex Harrison. This is because she is nutty about Rex Harrison while I have always wished I looked like Rennie. Weighs 37 pounds at about 6'1".

JACK GAUGHAN: Roy Rogers plus 25 pounds and a brain.

ROBERT BLOCH: W.C. Fields less 100 pounds, 10 of which came off the nose.

HARRY HARRISON: Mephistopheles disguised as Jack Leonard on a diet.

ELLIOT SHORTER: Rod Steiger disguised as Rosie Grier disguised as a kodiak bear. Harlan Ellison once voyaged down the Mississippi in Shorter's left shoe.

POUL ANDERSON: a 22-year-old college student disguised as a great and prolific writer named Poul Anderson who, considering his volume of output, MUST be 89 years old.

ANNE McCAFFREY: The Good (Celtic) Witch of the East Coast. If Yul Brynner could grow such a magnificent mane he'd play God rather than Pharaoh.

LESTER del REY: looks exactly as Lester del Rey should and wears a beard that was the prettiest, in both design and colour, at the Con.

SPRAGUE de CAMP: a tall and erect and dignified chap with a diminutive crewcut beard. I am sure Sprague de Camp was NOT at the con; the gentleman posing as that wildly-humoured writer MUST have been the British ambassador to Krishna.

EVELYN del REY; a 22-year-old miniskirted college student trying to pretend she's old enough to be Mrs Lester del Rey.

ROBERT SILVERBERG: Satan, definitely, with the eyes of a Yiddish-speaking angel*

JOHN JAKES; this kind and gentle(looking)man looks as if he writes Ohio Flower-Growers Digest rather than Brak the Barbarian (who is really a beautiful Nordic gentleman named Bounds). I have told my sons, though, that John Jakes is 9 feet tall, carries a bloody ax, and eats entire steer-haunches at a single sitting (these sold for $187.95 in the Hunt Room; $197.85 with coffee and a fork).

DANIEL F. GALOUYE: I swear to heaven he looks like a newspaper editor.

ALAN E. NOURSE: Peter Ustinov, beard, eyebrows and all. Oh - less about 40 pounds. He sure doesn't look like an intern.

ALEXEI PANSHIN: I know I have seen his picture many times but could not remember where until I saw a leper kissing his robe. I swear.

Mrs ALEXEI PANSHIN: entirely too much a doll to be married to a man who goes around letting lepers slobber over his robe.

Mrs POUL ANDERSON: the handsome Deaconess of an esoteric California religion or perhaps scribe SF of the Rosicrucians. She also came within an ace of hitting a lower note than I in Ole Man River (Ribbah, dammit, ribbah!)

V.M. McINTYRE: As you all know this is a penname for Ambrose Bierce who disappeared south of the border many years ago. He is alive and well in Washington, writing wicked stories in collaboration with a tall thin man who looks like James Stewart without socks.

T.L. SHERROD: without doubt the nicest and the second most beautiful man in attendance. He resembles no one, although he could play the part of a country doctor a damnsight better than any country doctor.

CLIFFORD SIMAK: The most beautiful man in attendance. He does NOT look like a newspaperman, could not have written both GOBLIN RESERVATION and THE WEREWOLF PRINCIPLE and is really the proprietor of a very small but gentle bookstore in Nantucket. Or a bourbon-taster for Stitzel-Weller.

EDMOND HAMILTON: We don't have any yet, but when we do this is what a retired spaceman will look like. He has NOT retired. Perhaps spacemen won't either.

PHILIP JOSE FARMER: doesn't really look old enough to have grandchildren - but takes them fishing and to Disneyland.

JAY KAY KLEIN: he and his ubiquitous camera move entirely too fast to be seen; One suspects the presence of a very warm, rather shy gentleman. Perhaps the only one in his part of the country.

Andrew J. Offutt, 1969

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*A Californian cantor advised that ALL angels speak Yiddish. Yahweh is not about to admit into his peaceful haven any of the descendants of the bad types recruited by Paul of Tarsus, who went in for quantity rather than quality.

"...the original question of why so many people are writers and why so many more other people want to be writers goes unresolved. "

V I E W O F S U B U R B I A

By Christopher Priest

David Rome Esq.,
c/o Vision of Tomorrow

Dear David Rome,

I trust you'll forgive this for being in the form of an open letter.... To keep the preamble brief, I have been reading a story of yours, coming to it, I hope, with a fairly unprejudiced mind. The story to which I refer is 'People Like You', which appeared in Vision of Tomorrow No.3. You may even recall writing it. On the other hand, if, like many freelance writers, you are obliged to produce a large volume of work in order to keep your head above financial waters it is possible that you may have let a few of its details slip from your memory. So let me remind you of one or two of them.

The story starts with a section of dialogue, which as you probably remember being taught is a good touch. It gets the reader straight into the story, with no messing around. However, at this stage the dialogue remains on the cryptic level and not much is revealed, although the reader learns that the two characters, Gordon and Gail, have mislaid "it". No clues here, though we must trust that "it" will be explained before much longer. Nor do we know much about the characters, beyond the fact that they are worried. (Gordon, "tall, lean and a handsome sun-tanned man", rubs his jaw, and Gail contrives to smile and frown in one facial contortion.)

No doubt searching for "it", Gordon decides to visit his neighbour George Abbot, who is marked down as a villain from the very moment we meet him. Not only does he knock his ten-year old daughter sideways with a flat-handed blow to her head, but has a great rolling paunch and hooded eyes as well. The man's obviously a slob.

Unworried by this George shakes hands with him and they drink beer together. But funny things are going on, partly because George's feet seem to be "firmly planted" in the ground and also because he has unusual eyes. Not only hooded they bore first into Gordon's eyes (fresh themselves from a fleeting stay on the heavy-tyred jeep that it nearby), then settle on the backs of his hands. But more is to come: "Abbot leaned closer. His small eyes were blades, slipping cleanly through Gordon's own. For an instant Gordon read something more than mockery in those sharp eyes. He read greed - and hope." Just as Gordon is leaving George peels back his lips and grins at him. Gordon, not surprisingly under the circumstances, leaves at once.

Safely back at his own house Gordon is in bed with Gail. She, using her woman's intuition, has already realised that George knows where "it" is. Gordon leaves the house straightaway (presumably still naked from his bed) determined to solve the whereabouts of "it". Somewhere along the way he evidently finds some clothes - or at least a pair of boots - for by the time he is crossing the bluff his feet are ringing on the stony ground. The, quite unexpectedly, we find out what "it" is. "It" is called the Anhk.

But where the Ankh was expected to be turns out to be a disappointment: "The flat oval of strangely rich green grass stared back at him and dissolved his hopes." Before leaving the place, Gordon puts his eyes to good use, drawing a line with them to a cleft in the wall of red rock, and observes the sun falling into the dark teeth of the mountains on the other side of the canyon. Chomp.

At this point Gordon visits George once more, but meets instead George's wife. They hit it off at once: "Her eyes came to Gordon's and then darted away!" Do Mrs Abbot and her eyes play more than a neutral role at this point? Evidently her husband suspects dirty work between the two coffee-drinking friends. "George Abbott stood watching him. The slab face held eyes that flashed and glittered with emotion that seemed to well from somewhere deep inside the fat man."

But later we are given a clue. George shows Gordon a piece of rock, his grin flashing in the starlight. It's the Ankh ... or is it only part of the Ankh? Gordon, his skin prickled and chilled, is forced to look into the rock and sees a gay beach with naked men and women leaping in the surf. Now George's motives are clear. Taunting Gordon with the Ankh or part thereof, he first offers to sell it, then snatches it away and goes "chuckling softly back towards the yellow lights of the house."

Gordon now realises the seriousness of the situation and secretes his wife and child in a nearby hotel and goes back to observe George's movements. Following George in his car (and also by levitating, the while envying his one-hundred-year old daughter's greater facility for it) he sees him go to a cave. When George leaves, Gordon investigates and... sure enough: "the Ankh was there."

The next night, Gordon, Gail and Dorinda (the daughter) go to the cave. Dorinda goes in first but is attacked by George. The cold air burning in his lungs, Gordon sees the danger in George's glittering eyes as a rifle is aimed at his chest. Gripping stuff this. In the grand manner of all villains with the upper hand George tells his story. Finding the Ankh by chance he tapped it with a screwdriver and woom!, it opened into a spaceship as big as an airliner. But this isn't all.

Now it seems that George is a bit of a D.O.M. and has been watching Gail through binoculars, getting a mixoscopic kick from seeing her "going about without nothing on but her skin" as is his wont. "That's what I'd like ——" he says. And not only Gail but all the others who frolic so freely in the surf on which ever world it is from which they come. Evidently a sexual athlete, George's true motivation is at last revealed.

Gordon nods reluctantly, makes a tinging! noise in his throat and they trudge into the Ankh, George again peeling back his plastic lips in a grin. His Ankhy-panhky has paid off. At the throw of a lever they're off on a preset course to the other world.

But... not all is as it seems. When the people of Gordon's world come to Earth in the Ankh on vacation they only assume the form of humans. "A scream seemed about to burst from Abbot's bulging throat. 'But if you're not like us, what are you like?'"

Gordon smiles, and takes something "grey and shapeless" from his coat. It's one of Dorinda's dollies. She hugs it to her and there the story ends, the ensuing collapse of stout party going undocumented.

Why, you may ask me, Mr Rome, have I picked so heartlessly on you? After all, you could argue, does not the same issue of the magazine contain similar gems of creative writing? What about 'World to Conquer' by Sydney J. Bounds? Here we have a character by name of Ziegler, whose stony eyes bore into those around him, and a hero called Crane, beetle-browed and rough-mannered, with a granite cast to his features that gives him an air of toughness he does not feel.

And is not the oak, in Philip E High's 'The Adapters',"weeping in anticipation of Autumn" a perfect pathetic fallacy, matched equally to the strength and consistency of yours?

I picked on you, I think, because there is such an abundance of poor writing in your story that it brings into question the motivations of someone like you, people like you, writing a story like this. That's all.

Yours, &c.

Drawing the letter rather hastily to a close, I add quickly that one might equally question the motives of someone like me writing a letter something like that. Graham Charnock muttered something about 'honour among thieves' and in truth I have, for the past couple of years, been conscientiously attempting to follow a broad policy of no-knocking. But one has one's lapses...

Anyway, reading Rome's story has, combined with various other recent activities, given rise to a particular question. That is; why write? Or, more to the point; why writers? What is there in writing that makes it an activity which is attempted unsuccessfully by many, admired (in general) by most,and practised successfully by only a comparative few?

For if you think about it, writing is one of the few vocations for which basic education fully prepares us. Few people coming out of school are unable to string together a literate sentence...and "writing" is only a series of literate events. And yet a "writer" is held in some kind of esteem by those around him; whereas a professional man, such as an actuary or a solicitor, who devotes a large part of his formative years in preparation for his career is accepted by and large as an ordinary and indeed somewhat dull member of society. Almost any job can be said to be in some ways a more "worthwhile" one than writing.

A dustman does filthy work for abominable money, yet performs a function of absolute necessity to society. A car-assembly worker exists in arid surroundings and does a monotonous job. A teacher spends years learning a subject and devotes the rest of his life to passing it on to those who follow, again for money out of any proportion to the acceptability of the result.

A writer, though, spends a considerable amount of time doing nothing except thinking and muttering... something most people do anyway. His only physical labour is typing; something a fifteen-year old girl six weeks out of school can do better.

Taking things right down to a basic level, a fiction writer is a provider of a medium of entertainment - often one that appeals to not the highest of critical faculties. He writes uninvited - on subjects of his own choice - in any manner he chooses. Within the limits of his own particular need to earn money he is not subject (unlike similar workers in the film or television industries) to bureaucratic controls; nor is he required to follow any editorial "line" as he would if he worked for a newspaper.

What I'm trying to say is that the art, the craft, whathaveyou, of writing is generally overrated.

Accepting this, the original question of why so many people are writers and why so many more other people want to be writers goes unresolved. The answer must lie, I suppose, somewhere between the twin devils of Artistic Creation and Making Money.

I should say before continuing that the inspiration for much of this column comes mostly from two sources; a recent television programme and a conversation at the Globe with Ted Tubb. In the television programme ('Review' some weeks back) the overall message was that there ain't no money in writing and if that's what you're after than look somewhere else.

The argument with Ted centred around his assertion that the only justification for writing was the money earned, and that to attempt to justify it with anything else was to descend to the pretentious.

Both of these are pretty inarguable (in particular Ted, who is a mean man with whom to disagree), though for myself I have great difficulty in believing that anyone can continually write either absolutely for money, or absolutely for the creative joys involved. Regarding the latter, I feel that successful writing is an amalgam of expression and communication (or message and style, if you want it that way), and neither one should be dominant at the expense of the other. No-one should write seriously without thought for a reader, and to one degree or another this involves writing in a manner acceptable to a commercial publisher.

As regards the other... Surely Ted cannot be entirely serious when he says that money is the only justification? Because if that were the case then no-one at all would write. In the first place, in terms of expended energy and financial reward therefor, the writing equation is pretty badly balanced; to earn a respectable living (possible) one has to write continually. If good money is what you want, go and assemble cars. Secondly, to write for no other reason than to make money is a soul-destroying and (perhaps) dangerous process... and is, incidentally, difficult to do. Very few people can do it continually. (I'm excluding from this class all professional writers, novelists and journalists, going on the theory that there is some element of personal content and self-expression in virtually any kind of writing). The sort of person who can do it usually ends up writing copy for advertising agencies, or working for some technical journal.

Thinking back myself over eighteen months of freelancing, I can remember only one piece of work I had to do which I can honestly say was written exclusively for money. That was a re-write job for a premium publishers on a book of horoscopes. The actual writer of the book was an astrologer of wide public repute (I can't give you his name but Boris Dandruff is a clue) who seemed to be under the impression that paragraphing was a dead art-form and that full stops had been replaced by commas.

The job I was assigned was to transcribe his words into writing. It was fun for the first thousand words.. After ten thousand words I was nervy, paranoid, biting my nails, smoking twice as many cigarettes as usual; and by the time I finished I was hung-up on writing for days afterwards.

On the other hand, as an illustration of the kind of faceless freelance work that can be enlivened by what might be called personal intervention, filler work for the popular general-interest journals is a good source of income for a writer hard-up for ideas or markets. For a period of about three months I wrote nothing but filler-work, of which about ninety per cent sold. In this time I remained my normal nerveless, non-paranoid self, simply by flavouring each priceless feature with useless 'facts' torn from imagination and memory. For anyone starting out as a freelance, filler-work is as good a thing to start with as any.. all one needs is a pile of back-numbers of the sort of magazines in question, a steady supply of newspaper cuttings, a Guinness Book of Records and an ability to tack a sex-angle onto anything. The market pays well, is constantly short of material, and the editors are (surprisingly) human. There are several "writers" of my acquaintance who write for nothing else.

It has its amusing sidelights, too. Each filler that is published passes into the currency of the literature as it were, and it is not at all uncommon to see one's work reprinted (written-out a different way) in obscure transatlantic journals. I have even seen filler-work that is being published now, that is based on work I did twelve or fifteen months ago, and which uses as hard facts

several things which were pure imagination. One can see a whole network of totally imaginary facts, every one useless as hell, going on down the centuries, passed on from freelance hack to freelance hack for evermore... Full circle comes when they appear in the Guiness Book of Records...

However, I digress.

I'm trying to establish, in my own mind as much as anything else, that the financial side of writing is inextricably woven into the creative side, but that neither aspect is the whole story. Of course, I was talking above of non-fiction, but markets exist too for formula-fiction. I could point you today at a magazine that will buy formula-written stories which must contain at least two sex-scenes, which must have reference to crime or violence, and which must be exactly two thousand five hundred words long.

But this is the big bad world outside. I assume that most people reading SPECULATION are, like myself, oriented roughly around science fiction. I tend to relate what I think or know about writing as a whole to what I think or know about science fiction. I hope that I am able to differentiate between good and bad; that if I write crappy filler-work for a girlie magazine for one period it won't taint the serious novel I write in the following months.

And I hope, too, that when I read science fiction by other writers that they have had the sense to wipe their boots and have left their hack formulas behind, and approach it freshly. Science fiction is mediocre enough these days, it's lacking something for me, though I'm not going to try and determine exactly what at this moment. This is bad enough, but when hack techniques are brought into the field so that SF stories are produced by one writer with much the same spirit as another writer might bring to a feature on (say) staggering statistics about the Chinese people, then I feel we have cause for worry.

Which brings me back to David Rome and his story. Looking at it as a reader I feel vaguely dissatisfied with it. Looking at it as a writer who has written in similar vein in other fields I see the word CYNICAL writ large upon't. I feel I want to know more about how he came to write it, whether it was originally intended for some market outside the regular canon of SF magazines, and subsequently rejected, whether it is a very old story, or whether it was in fact written specifically for an SF magazine.

Just as it is easier to write a destructive criticism of a book than a constructive one, so it is sometimes easier to write a piece of fiction that is shabby and cryptic than something that has care and depth.

David Rome, how plead you?

Christopher Priest, 1969

CONVENTION NOTES:

Beside the annual British convention and our own Birmingham event, on Page 2, the World Science Fiction Convention, 1970, will take place at Heidelberg, Germany, weekend 21-24 August. More details can be obtained from Archie Mercer, 10 Lower Church Lane, St Michael's, Bristol BS2 8BA. A number of British fans plan to attend and a coach party has been suggested by Tony Walsh. Details from 61 Halsbury Rd, Bristol BS6 7ST. A more attractive air-trip is also a possibility, and Archie Mercer can advise on this.

The following year's World Convention is to be held in Boston. In a letter Tony Lewis, chairman of the NOREASCON says that only 8 people in Europe have joined (1 from the UK) against 405 from the USA. Really I'm not at all surprised; supporting membership is $4.00. (£1.13.0) and this is a lot of money for a programme book and a vote for the Hugo. It would be nice if the World convention was supported worldwide - but the costs are very high! PRW

THE CRITICAL FRONT

My little note last issue that I was looking for reviewers brought in a surprising response; you'll be seeing some new names soon in this column as a result. A warning however to anyone else rash enough to volunteer; I've been re-reading Damon Knight's IN SEARCH OF WONDER again recently with the usual unfortunate result that it has fired me once more with resolve to look for reviews of greater depth and more perceptivity than has sometimes been the case in SPECULATION in the past. Proper evaluation must be more than plot-synopsis and generalisation. And now after that draconian declaration, see what you make of this latest batch! PRW

NOVA by Samuel Delany (Gollancz 30s; Doubleday)

Reviewed by Pamela Bulmer.

Among the many peculiar afflictions of the science fiction field is the unique position of its reviewers. Reviewers can never be wholly objective - they are after all giving a subjective evaluation - but the relationship which exists between readers and writers in this field is closer than in any other literary medium. This means that when, as often happens, reviewers are avid readers of the genre they can find their evaluation of a work complicated by their knowledge of the author or by friendship, so that there is a temptation to review the author and not the book. The reviewer may find himself personally prejudiced against a book, or for it out of friendship.

This may be partly why SF criticism is not as meaningful as it could be. Delany himself has expressed dissatisfaction with many of the reviews of his work, not because they are unjust, but because they do not have any real relevance to him as an author. I suspect one of the reasons for this is that he is handicapped by having achieved too much success too soon, so that a reviewer now who condemns a Delany book would run the risk of appearing a tasteless and ignorant fool.

Having said which I will now stick my neck out and say I was disappointed with NOVA and would not have finished reading it had I not had to. It is the story of Captain Lorq Von Ray's struggle to capture an immense supply of precious Illyrion from an imploding sun, thereby upsetting the economic equilibrium between the Draco and Pleiades Federations. The driving force behind him is the vendetta which has simmered for years between his family and that of Prince and Ruby Red. The story is unfolded through the eyes of Mouse, a 31st-Century wandering minstrel playing 'music' for all five senses; Katin, a frustrated pseudo-intellectual trying to resurrect the novel; and Captain Lorq Von Ray who behaves throughout like a thwarted child in a tantrum.

I read THE EISTEIN INTERSECTION with a good deal of enjoyment, so here I was expecting poetic and colourful prose. Perhaps this expectation was a little unfair, based as it was on the assumption that other people meant by 'poetic prose' what I mean by poetic prose. I mean prose which not only has vivid and fresh explicity imagery but uses a density of language which gives it an added dimension which has to do not so much with width of vocabulary as with comprehension of vocabulary. Further, poetic prose must be definition employ a structure which itself enhances its meaning.

It will be obvious from this that in common with many other 'new wave' writers Delany has received some very extravagant praise. But the imagery in NOVA is strained and often ineffective. That is to say it creates a feeling contrary to what a reasonably perceptive reader would think the author intended. Skilfully-used adjectives can create a chain-reaction out of all proportion to their individual power because of the connotations which adhere to them. If the connotations are wrong the effect is confused and cloying. For example, let's take a look at this passage from the beginning of Chapter 5:-

> "They passed the hundred-meter column. Scales burnished under the dawn, bled the mists scarfing the plateau; the Serpent, animated and mechanical, symbol of this whole sequined sector of night, writhed on his post. As the crew stepped onto the moving roadway, an oblate sun rouged away night's bruises."

Scales, bled, Serpent, mechanical, writhed, bruises, are all words which conjure up feelings of evil, menace and violence. Their concentration and the fact that this highly-emotive passage is slipped in between two coldly-scientific descriptive passages would seem to indicate that our hero - and in this book I am not at all sure who this is - has stepped onto a world vibrating with danger for him, and specifically a place where danger is increased at night. Or it would be if the imagery were consistent. The Serpent symbol referred to frequently in NOVA undeniably represents evil and treachery to a Western culture, unless the author specifically indicates otherwise - and it has to be a very brilliant author indeed who can overcome such subconscious associations. Here, the plot of the book simply does not support the use of this symbolism. And "animated" and "mechanical"; these two adjectives are contradictory - was it lively or wasn't it?

"Sequined" is associated not just with evening but specifically with leisure, sophisticated dances, and when we get to "an oblate sun rouged away night's bruises" (emphasis mine) we really are confused! Rouged does not just mean redden, it means redden artificially, and there's a tarty flavour about it which does not tie up with the bruises implying fisticuffs around every dark corner. Whilst this last phrase has a certain ugly syllabic precision it does not seem to be working to any purpose. In fact the whole passage, thought containing a high proportion of evocative words, fails to convey more than a muddled impression. The fact that I have quoted it is due solely to the fact that I was reading with a critical eye.

In contrast, let's take a look at Delany when he uses imagery successfully. In Chapter One he is describing a volcanic fissure, one of 52 all appropriately called 'Hell', and after giving measurements for Hell 3, we get "a flaming worm broiled on its bottom". This is a much more successful image, precise and vivid, and if we take it apart we can see why. It is impossible to think of a worm as a straight line - they squirm - so that without actually saying so he indicates a wriggling shape. The word 'broil' also suggests 'coil', but subtly, so that one is not consciously aware of it, so that once again we have shape and movement. In other words, the language is earning its keep and working hard.

In the next Chapter we have Delany describing his characters' reaction to fear; "And Katin spun backward across the pits of many moons, his eyes bulged beneath the face-plate while somewhere, wombward, a sun collapsed". I'm not at all sure what this means but I think he is using the symbols to parallel Katin's mental and physical reactions, so that "somewhere, wombward, a sun collapsed" can be read two ways. The trouble is that although I can accept that the Universe might have a womb (though why the sun is collapsing there is not

clear) I can't accept that Katin has a womb! Delany is in good company here of course since D.H. Lawrence amongst others used the expression 'wombward' for a man, but it is an essentially feminine word and used in this way it loses impact and blurs the imagery.

A couple of pages earlier Delany is describing Tyÿ, a future crew-member, Mouse having already indicated gentleness in her face: "Her eyes were the colour of steel..... Then steel glittered as she looked about. (She's a strong woman thought Katin, who could perceive such subtleties.)" Obviously we are intended to accept the word 'steel' as an indication of strength but leaving aside the fact that this is an old and very tired image, steel stands for implacability and hardness, and this is reinforced by 'glittered'. Eyes the colour of steel are a cliche for someone hard and insensitive and the feeling persists in spite of Delany's attempts to head the reader off, so that the effect is to blur his attempt at characterisation.

The sub-Jane Austen irony of Katin's thoughts serve to confuse the issue further. We already see Katin as weak (though physically strong) and not particularly perceptive. In effect his method of coping with life is to run away by pursuing an obsession he has not the capacity to achieve. The tendency therefore is to distrust his assessment of Tyÿ as being an obvious and not a perceptive one; in which case how come Mouse - who is the most perceptive of all - fails to make the correct assessment? It could be argued here that I am reading too much or too little into the author's words, but an author should not expect his readers' perception or mental agility to make up for his lack of lucidity.

These may seem minor quibbling points but a book is after all the sum-total of a lot of words and this book has a fractured feel about it. It is difficult to pinpoint exactly why this is so but I think the handling of the language has something to do with it. The other aspect which bothers me is Delany's character-motivation. In a world where limb deficiency is very rare, it seems to me that someone born without an arm, (given the kind of parental conditioning Prince has) is quite likely to wind up psychotic. But Delany has to explain this in terms of deprivation of 'studs', the system whereby everyone can make machines into extensions of themselves by plugging-in at wrists, base of spine, and neck, so as to use brain impulses directly, which supposedly does away with the alienation between man and machine. I found this reasoning hard to take, perhaps because it is all too easy to turn the theory on its head so that men would feel like extensions of machines instead of the other way round.

However, accepting Delany's premise, he has ignored the very real motivation which already exists and he does this again in the case of Mouse, whose speech defect and insecure childhood more than account for his feelings of inadequacy. When Katin explains to Mouse that he's so mean because he didn't get his studs till late (an explanation repeated with reference to Prince by Mouse - our perceptive viewpoint - which indicates that it is not meant to be ironic) I felt quite exasperated, since up to that point I didn't think Mouse was supposed to be a mean character - and even his turning the syrynx on Prince and Ruby Red didn't convince me. In short, when Delany is being subtle it doesn't quite come off and he winds up being obscure.

In an article in SF Review 31, Delany says 'The controlling irony of NOVA is that it is a novel about a time when there are no novels. Its spaceships are purely poetic symbols of movement between worlds we cannot know, which I tried to inform with as much jewelry as they could bear and still fly in a manner "..that does not clash inordinately without that which is known to be true."" If there is any controlling irony in this book it is the character of

Katin, who comes over as a colossal bore, a man who plainly does not have the equipment to become a novelist in any age and who will spend eternity sharpening pencils. So far as character goes, Katin is the most consistently portrayed (which does not mean that he is necessarily a consistent character). The other characters are somehow unconvincing, with the possible exception of Prince and Ruby Red who are stock characters and in that context convincing; and the spaceships certainly don't come across to me as 'purely poetic symbols of movement'.

Although it is quite usual for authors to switch viewpoint from character to character, this somehow seemed disconcerting in NOVA. Perhaps one of the reasons for the fractured, 'bitty' feel of this book is that the author is too conscious of what he is trying to do, particularly when he defines his character motivation instead of handling this in an implicit way. In places it springs vividly to life - Mouse stealing the syrynx from the market; the net-riders; but the total effect is as though Delany could not quite make up his mind what kind of book he was writing. It misses being an action-packed thriller and it's not good enough to be a profound symbolic-type novel, so that it is difficult to see who it was written for, other than for the author.

Delany shows evidence that he is capable of becoming a very fine science fiction writer. He is clearly fascinated with language, and when his current flirtation deepens into a full-blooded affair we can look forward to some highly interesting and entertaining progenies.

Pamela Bulmer, 1969

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* The last time I saw Pam Bulmer she said she was attending classes on literary
* criticism, and I think the above review along with NOVA itself, show just how
* far science fiction and its attendant fandom have come in the last few years,
* giving the lie to those who seem to think there is no future in either. I was
* not altogether happy with NOVA on first reading and was especially pleased
* that Pam could suggest some reasons for this feeling. The same sentiments
* apply to Ursula LeGuin's THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS and now that our iconoclas-
* tic team have dissected the one major novel, Brian Stableford takes over with
* the other.

THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS by Ursula LeGuin (Ace 'special', 75¢; Walker & Co)

Reviewed by Briam M. Stableford.

This long, impressive book contains some very fine writing. Its author is Ursula K. leGuin, whose previous work for Ace has consisted of rather run-of-the-mill space operas (ROCANNON'S WORLD; PLANET OF EXILE and CITY OF ILLUSIONS). THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS is essentially different in that its theme is far more ambitious than anything in the three earlier novels, and its execution is bold and confident. But although Mrs LeGuin has attacked her work with an admirable assurance, she remains the same writer who penned ROCANNON'S WORLD and she has not left all of her faults behind.

The backgrounds of Mrs LeGuin's stories have always been beautifully drawn, the product of serious consideration and an eye for detail. But her plots are simply not in the same league, her sequence of events is usually uninspired and mechanical. Given the situation which exists on the world of Winter in her latest work, which is a brilliant conception, it is unfortunate that she has been unable to find a plot to fit it.

Winter is a 'lost' colony of human provenance, whose population is apparently the result of a genetic experiment. The inhabitants are hermaphroditic, passing through regular periods of sexual activation during which an individual

may become either a functional male or a functional female. This has profound effects on both the personal lives and the society of the people of Winter. Some of these become obvious during the progress of the story, others are brought out via interpolated 'folk tales' and legends.

The story-line concerns the exploits of an outsider, Genly Ai, in trying to persuade Karhide, a nation of Winter, to join the galactic fraternity. A 'man' named Estraven acts as go-between with the king of Karhide, but because of his political manoeuvres and natural suspicions of the galactic civilisation, the negotiations break down. Ai transfers his attentions to the neighbouring nation of Orgoreyn, and under very different political pressures gets into deep trouble. Eventually Ai and Estraven return to Karhide where their individual problems are brought to a conclusion.

There is nothing basically wrong with the plot of THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS. It is simply that there is a perpetual failure throughout the novel to reconcile plot with theme. The basic idea of the book - the hermaphroditic society - is committed to a depth of consideration which is both fascinating and original. To put it across would need a fine plot whose intricacies were totally bound-up with the unique problems of Winter. Theodore Sturgeon, perhaps, could build such a story. But instead, we have a plot which is pure Poul Anderson - politics in the galactic back yard, plus action and a touch of sentimentality.

I don't mean to imply that Mrs LeGuin writes like Anderson. Her talent is unmistakable, if not fully exploited. Where Anderson is over-exuberant during the action and decidedly corny where emotions are involved, Mrs LeGuin has a good sense of proportion and balance. Her creativity often approaches credibility, but never quite comes to grip with her chosen theme. THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS is always a little beyond the readers' grasp, it is difficult to become involved with Winter via the particular problems of Genly Ai.

There is only one moment in the book which shows the reader the picture he wants to see. This is during the long trek across the glaciers, where the personal relationship between Estraven and Ai assumes paramount importance. This moment covers fifty pages of masterpiece, suspended in a couple of hundred pages which never really get off the ground.

I have tried to judge this work on the basis of what it obviously sets out to be, and what it might have become. It must, however, be stressed that THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS has none of the superficiality, the vagueness, the ignorance and the neglect which are all too typical of science fiction novels. There is thinking behind this book, and feeling in its execution. There has been no rush job, no jury-rig, no liberal use of well-established conventions. There are a hundred supposedly good SF writers who could not have written this book nor any failure half as impressive. I will be surprised if the novel fails to win yet another Nebula for the Ace 'Special' series, but I suspect that its appeal to the readers (as opposed to writers) will be inadequate to win it a Hugo.

Brian M. Stableford, 1969

THE NEW S.F., edited by Langdon Jones (Hutchinson, 30s)

Reviewed by Bob Parkinson.

"What's the difference between a letterbox and an elephant?"
"I don't know"
"In that case I'm not asking you to post my letters!"

It is a little difficult when your first quarrel with a book is its title.

But it seems to me that this is crucial. Michael Moorcock, in his preface argues that the boundaries of science fiction are so indistinct that it is useless to say what is and what is not SF. Now this is fair enough, if what you really want to say is that there is no real difference between science fiction and that which lies outside the category. But to label a book THE NEW S.F. is to say that you do understand a distinction. And if you understand a distinction albeit that the boundaries are very fuzzy, then there must be stories which are NOT science fiction. And this book contains a number, perhaps a majority, of such stories.

Which is not to say thatbsome might not be good. Brian Aldiss' 'So Far From Prague', for instance, is a good craftsman's job. But it must logically stand against Günter Grass' 'The Plebians Rehearse the Uprising', which dealt with essentially the same theme. And the criticism of Aldiss' story is that it has nothing essentially new to say, either inside or outside SF. Maybe what he says needs saying, over and over again regularly, I don't know. But it is only a second-rank story.

This is it, you see. Science fiction, dealing in possibilities, can achieve an importance just be raising those possibilities without any very deep insight. Non-SF which must at least pretend to deal in actualities, can only achieve importance by insight.

Having said all of which, let's examine what you get for your money. Nine stories, three er-poems? (I care about poetry,too), another Mr Ballard explanation about seven pages too long, a dramatised piece about somebody writing a science fiction story who is not really very interested in science fiction (very self-revealing!), and a preface by Michael Moorcock. Two of the stories, almost predictably, are Jerry Cornelius stories, wishful fantasies, the level of internal violence of which horrifies me. The best story, as story, is as might be expected Brian Aldiss', to which I would assign a B+ for talent. As any sort of SF story I would pick Michael Butterworth's 'Postatomic', a confused post-William Burroughs item, not because I liked it but for trying.

And at the end I find myself saying, "Not Recommended", which is a pity really because a critic should be constructive and so few are. And the trouble with this collection is not that it is bad. It is not. It is simply not-good. The question properly remains, why (apart from agression) should the compilers of this book have chosen the title THE NEW S.F. ? It is not as though science fiction had a particularly good status - sure, it has been accepted by the litterati as a potential source of literature, but still by-and-large the good stuff has to escape, to be reviewed 'straight'. Or is it that the editor aims to "sucker" the SF buying public into reading the book when it comes out in paperback, and in this way thus convert them?

The best answer seems to be historical. Most of these writers grew up associated with a magazine that published (still does, sometimes) science fiction and they think of themselves as SF writers. What Mike Moorcock is saying in part in his introduction is (it seems to me): "SF is what SF writers write." And if you ask further, then "An SF writer is a writer who is daft enough to choose to be called an SF writer". We should perhaps be proud that this sort of pride still survives.

But if you have thirty shillings to spare, go out and buy Samuel Delany's NOVA instead. If you already have it, read it again. That's real progress. This is not important.

Bob Parkinson, 1969.

THE TIME DWELLERS by Michael Moorcock (Hart Davis, 30s)

Reviewed by Michael Kenward

By now Michael Moorcock should have rid himself of a good deal of the backlog of material that he has built up over the last ten years. I have lost count of exactly how many books he has had published this year but they seem to have come along at the rate of something like one a month!

THE TIME DWELLERS certainly shows that Moorcock has improved as a writer since most of these stories were written. This is not to say that those included here are unreadable. Far from it, but the difference between 'The Deep Fix' and 'Escape from Evening', for example, is noticeable. The former is clumsy:-

> "Hallucinomats, neural stimulators, mechanical psychosimulatory devices, hallucinogenic drugs and machines, all had been developed to perfection at the Hampton Research Laboratory under the brilliant direction of Prof. Lee W. Seward (33), psychophysicist extraordinary, one of the youngest pioneers in the field of hallucinogenic research."

Moorcock would never resort to such elongated and crude reportage today, not even to send it up. The seriousness with which this story is presented belies the possibility of a satire, but the shallowness of the dream-world imagery is so transparent that attempts to suggest it is real are laughable.

However, this is the weakest story in the selection, suggesting that it is even older than its 1963 copyright. It would be unfair to offer this as a representative example from THE TIME DWELLERS. It isn't. The most SF-like story in the collection, it differs from the others in that the central character has a meaningful role - to save the world, no less. No other character in the book has a similarly defined role. Their driving forces are summed up in 'Escape from Evening':-

> "Yet he still yearned to go there and see if he could find some trace of what he needed - though he would only know what he needed when he found it."

"He" is Pepin Hunchback, member of a lunar society; "there" is a slowly-dying Earth; "it" turns out to be less esoteric than Pepin expected. The aimlessness of Pepin, the false goal of Jephraim Tallow in 'The Golden Barge', the fixation of Jordan Mennell in 'Consuming Passion', predate similar attitudes in Jerry Cornelius, Karl Glogauer, and one sadly suspects in Michael Moorcock.

'The Time Dweller' and 'Escape from Evening' are both set on the ageing Earth mentioned above, both feature The Scar-face Brooder who in the first story discovers how to manipulate time. I have always found "time" stories like these, and those in Ballard's FOUR DIMENSIONAL NIGHTMARE collection particularly intriguing.

But these stories are from the past and I must warn the unwary that some of them have appeared before as THE DEEP FIX, a collection by James Colvin. This should be an unnecessary comment but I was recently taken to task for mentioning Moorcock in a review of THE WRECKS OF TIME. By return of post I was told that this novel was by James Colvin. Very true!

That Moorcock's style has changed since those early days is shown by his latest offering, THE BLACK CORRIDOR (Mayflower, 5s). Here Moorcock shows that he was sincere when he said that he was still interested in SF. Here too we have a drug-induced stage similar to that in 'The Deep Fix'. But here it is handled more convincingly, with reality and illusion inextricably intertwined.

Michael Kenward, 1969

BAREFOOT IN THE HEAD by Brian W. Aldiss. (Faber & Faber, 30s)

Reviewed by James Blish.

In the Sunday Times not long ago this year , a very well-known reviewer awarded almost awed praise to a novel which -- as his highly-detailed plot summary made clear -- was only another worn retread of the post-World War III barbarism story. The present text is also set in a post-World War III barbarism, although a mint-original one; and on the immediately preceding Sunday a Times reviewer unknown to me gave it about three paragraphs so uninformative about the book and so abusive in tone as to suggest some sort of personal vendetta.

If jealousy or enmity is not the answer, then what did make the difference? For clearly the Aldiss -- to a disinterested eye, however unfriendly -- could not possibly be all that bad and its successor in the good grey pages merited virtually no attention, let alone praise. One reason might be found in the fact that the blurb on the jacket of BAREFOOT twice mentions science fiction, while the other book was published "straight"; many readers, and almost all publishers, still have compartments in their heads stuffed with broken dolls, like the striking Erro jacket illustration for Aldiss' novel.

But I think the difficulty reaches more deeply than that. Aldiss' war, like that in Franz Werfel's STAR OF THE UNBORN, was fought with psychedelic agents (now a much more likely proposition than it was in Werfel's day) and in consequence almost everyone in the novel is mad -- and the language reflects this. They are the "new autorace, born and bred on motorways; on these great one-dimensional roads rolling they mobius-stripped themselves naked to all sensation, beaded, bearded, belted, busted, bepileptic, tearing across the synthetic twencen landskip, seaming all the way across Urp, Aish, Chine, leaving them under their reefer-smoke, to the Archangels, godding it across the skidways in creasingack selleration bitch you'm in us all in catagusts of living."

It is not all like this but there are enough such passages to baffle - and thereby give offense -- to the lazy. Clearly the kind of mind that greeted the denser chapters of ULYSSES and all of FINNEGANS WAKE with snarls of ignorant scorn is with us yet.

Although BAREFOOT includes one highly explicity bow to ULYSSES (a hideously effective pun on page 93, "Agenbite of Auschwitz") and resembles it in both structure and narrative (though only in the most fundamental sense in each case), its texture is much more like that of FINNEGANS WAKE, even to the echoing of some of FW's most easily recognisable mannerisms (puns that cross over word breaks, chains of long words ending in "-ation", catalogue sentences) and its unique grammar (which, to the best of my knowledge, no other imitator has ever even recognised, let alone captured). Like ULYSSES it includes many of the popular songs of its time (in this case, of course, the future); like FW it also includes original verse (some of it the "visual chiromancy", or magic-square arrangement of words so that pictures are also formed, which so fascinated the American scholastic realist Charles Peirce of Milford; some of it concrete poetry, consisting of repeated letters or sometimes syllables or words, in what are supposed to be significant arrangements -- happily, Aldiss' samples make surface sense, which is rare in this kind of thing).

Okay. It has been observed before by friends of the New Worlds school -- not often by its enemies, who seldom seem to have read anything but old science fiction -- that the techniques it has been exploiting are all thirty to fifty years old; dada, surrealism, vorticism, dos Passos, and now late Joyce. The only new aspect of all this is the application of these techniques to science fiction.

Though I have expressed in print my disturbance that a genre focussed on Tomorrow should become so fascinated by the idioms and fads of Yesterday, John Brunner has correctly reminded me that Yesterday is just as much a part if the Past as are such techniques as the sonnet. Under this rubric I have no more right to judge a writer harshly for imitating dos Passos that I would for his faithfully following Fowler's ENGLISH USAGE. What counts is: (a) How appropriate is the device in the individual example at hand, and (b) how well assimilated is it, ditto?

Obviously the smashed and reassembled fragments of language ("the abnihilisation of the etym") Joyce invented to tell a dream are equally appropriate for the conveying of the thoughts of madmen bombed (both literally and in the slang sense) "back into the Stone Age", with shattered memories of their old cultures still sticking to them. I am less sanguine about the problem of assimilisation. Certainly Aldiss has come closer to making the language of FW his own than has anyone but Anthony Burgess; but unlike Burgess' similar passages Aldiss' are often more Joyce than they are Aldiss, to no visible purpose. Take, for example, the above-mentioned chains of long words ending in "-ation". In FINNEGANS WAKE, these chains invariably announce the pub-keeper hero's twelve customers, who in the dream are also the jurymen who are to pass upon his shadowy crimes, and also Joyce's pompously hostile critics; the device is therefore both funny and functional. I can find no such function for it in BAREFOOT, and though echolalia is indeed one of the symptoms of a toppling mind, the borrowing is what strikes the eye first, sending me, at least, on a vain search for Joyce's twelve Doyles. (Or does Brian mean to suggest that Charteris' disciples are analogous figures? An allusion that subtle would be hard to find outside FW, too.)

The question may be a relatively minor one, bit it further raises a critical problem which BAREFOOT also shares with FW. In the Joyce novel, though it includes chapters told from several different points of view, all these seem to be filtered through the unconscious mind of the dreaming pub-keeper — but there is a fairly substantial section toward the end where he appears to be awake and observed from the outside, though the dream language continues. Is it now Joyce's dream? Is it all Joyce's dream?

Similarly, BAREFOOT shifts viewpoints fairly frequently; but although the language does show that some of the characters are less stoned than others, or stoned in different ways, they all seem to share the same specific culture, including details of education. (For the most obvious example, they all have to have read FW.) The only way around this is to assume that the language is the author's throughout, and that while the characters are thinking these thoughts and making these speeches, they are not doing so in this way... Melville's illiterate sailors spouting high Elizabethan blank verse; Joyce's lower-middle-class barman dreaming in a mixture of thirty languages, including classical Greek and Sanskrit. It's a convention the reader simply must accept for the sake of its poetic effectiveness; should he stop to examine its implications, as though this were a realistic novel, the whole structure will come apart in his hands.

It is somewhat easier to accept the novel's philosophical underpinning. As FW leans on Vico and Bruno, so BAREFOOT leans on Ouspenski and Gurdjieff, whom even the walk-ons seem to have read. As mystics go, Ouspenski was a remarkably rational and certainly difficult thinker and it is impossible to imagine a world of acid-heads following him for more than three pages; but his disciple was the more usual kind of nut, a shell of impressive phrases connected any old which way and completely hollow inside, the perfect guru for the world Aldiss describes

I think I have said enough to show that BAREFOOT IN THE HEAD is a long way indeed from being any sort of naturalistic novel, conventional or otherwise. It is a poetic construct, highly artificial, allusive, multi-levelled, symbolic; and built around the skeleton of a convention, the post-Bomb science fiction novel. (GERNSBACKS WAKE? Oh God!) It is also very difficult to read, unless you actively enjoy an almost continuous stream of puns and portmanteau words; if you do, you will find wit, gusto, and some genuine poetry (I except the imitation pop stuff, whose pretentious emptiness Aldiss has captured all too faithfully) in BAREFOOT... and, as an incidental dividend you will have been nicely trained to take on FINNEGANS WAKE itself.

Beneath all the wordplay, and quite frequently on top of it, is a rather simple, straightforward story. Its hero, like the central figures of most recent Aldiss, is a lonely man on a physical odyssey which is also a search for himself; crippled by being ninety percent a product of the madness of his time, and surrounded or assaulted by figures who are totally immersed in and victimised by it. He is a Serb whose Drang nach Albion has led him to adopt a literary English name, Colin Charteris, after Leslie Charteris, author of the Saint; and in the Midlands takes over a messiah racket from a fading guru, killing his manager in a semi-accident and also taking over the manager's wife. He is highly successful at it, which doesn't entirely surprise him, for from the beginning of the novel he has felt that he has had a new insight into reality, though it remains uncaptured. He leads a motorcade into Europe which ends in a multi-car smashup which, in turn, is restaged as part of a documentary film being made about him; and in the immense premiere in which the film is not shown but Brussels is burned down instead, he becomes briefly convinced of his own divinity; and by the end, having become unconvinced, he is en route to becoming a sort of divinity after all, that is, a myth.

Even after allowing for the fact that this plot summary has left out all but one of the important secondary characters, it is no better an account of the book that would be a summary of OTHELLO which told you the play is about a Negro who murdered his white wife because she had lost her handkerchief. The story could have come from any hand; some elements of the treatment are distinctly second-hand; but the whole is unique, moving, and almost completely successful.

Be warned, however, that it demands study. Any work of art, of course, requires study for its understanding; but BAREFOOT IN THE HEAD belongs to the more specialised category of works which without study are incomprehensible even on the surface. It does begin in a fairly straightforward prose, and leads only gradually into the multi-level language, but the farther reaches are complex indeed. Nevertheless, do persist; the rewards are considerable.

James Blish, 1969

OPINION 31: NEEDED CONSIDERABLE EDITING? (Ian Williams)

"...DRAGONFLIGHT, by Anne McCaffrey, is an excellent example of a book that needed considerable editing. The first part, 'Weyr Search' is very good and deserved its Award. Unfortunately the writer proceeds to inflate the idea into four times the length. I contend that the story could have been neatly wrapped-up in another hundred pages and been a memorable piece of SF. Instead it is dragged out so that there are pages and pages when the characters stand around arguing over futile points and displaying incredible stupidity. Ploughing through the final third, the characters lose interest and the reader finds the anti-climactic menace has become a bore."

THE CHALK WON'T STAY ON THE BISCUITS.

A dialogue by M. John Harrison.

A: SF criticism? Don't talk to me about it. The standard's laughable.
B: Granted
A: Eh?
B: You're right. Don't look so surprised.
A: I'll get over it. One doesn't expect an SF critic to agree with a statement like that, that's all. You'd better tell me why, I suppose, before you burst.
B: Firstly, the vast majority of critics within the genre are amateurs, people writing for and writing to the editors of amateur magazines. Secondly, most of them have forgotten or never learned a very simple rule of thumb.
A: Which is?
B: There is little difference between a critic and a maintenance engineer.
A: What?
B: I said; there is little difference...
A: I heard...
B: ...a garage mechanic, a grease-monkey, a sewage-plant technician, the man from....
A: All right. Sut up shouting and I'll buy it.
B: Before dismantling a machine to locate a fault in its operation it is necessary to ascertain the intended finction, to 'type' it...
A: Go on with you.
B: I'm only trying for preciseness. Put it that there's an appreciable functional difference between a steam engine and a wrist watch..
A: Go on with you.
B: So its necessary to type the mechanism in order (a) to choose the correct tools and techniques for stripping it down; (b) to locate the fault; (c) to appreciate the fault in the context of the machine being serviced.
A: You're shouting again.
B: That's very important, that bit.
A: So, taking your example, it wouldn't be much good trying to examine a watch using methods suitable for dismantling a steam engine..
B: And it wouldn't be easy to locate the fault in the steam engine if the guy doing it thought it was a watch..
A: In effect, it's no good concluding that a steam engine doesn't tell the right time because it's got no mainspring? Big deal. Where does that get us?
B: In time, in time. There's more to it. A work of fiction is designed to produce effects desired by the author in the mind of the reader....
A: You can't be fairer than that. Or more vague...
B: ...and it operates at maximum efficiency when it conveys to the reader the effect/s it was designed to produce. Looked at this way, fiction is machinery.
A: Look, I don't like this 'effects' business. Define the term.
B: Ah. You name it. Good feelings. Vicarious excitement, pleasure, bad feelings, grotesque feelings, tenterhooks, frustrations. It might be a simple case of communicating a narrative, with or without a catharsis. It might be what they used to call an 'atmosphere'. It might be an image, a philosophy, a puzzle with or without a solution. A feeling of grandeur or mystery or shame. They all produce a response from the reader, they're all 'effects'.
A: I thought you were going to talk about Entertainment versus Art...
B: Nothing to do with that. It doesn't matter what the effect is, not to the critic. What concerns him is that the writer wanted that effect, whatever it was. Or he wouldn't have written the book, presumably.
A: So now we get to the critic. (Cont/d)

B: It's the task of the critic to locate the particular effect/s the book is d designed to produce; and then to ascertain whether it is performing this function efficiently.
A: Oh-ho!
B: He can do this most effectively by 'dismantling' it.
A: Oh no...
B: Before dismantling a book to locate any faults in its operation it's necessary to...
A: ...'ascertain its function'?
B: Ascertain its intended function. Thus...
A; A Hemingway novel is noticably different in function...
B: Intended function....
A: ...from an Enid Blyton novel.
B: You're home.
A: And its necessary to type the book in order to; select the right technique for taking it apart; find its successes and failures of function; and appreciate those successes and failures in terms of that particular book.
B: You're home. Whose side are you on, anyway?
A: Sorry. I was so pleased you'd finally got it out. Do go on.
B: Thanks. Working on those lines, we get this: it's silly to deal critically with a sword-and-sorcery novel using 'tools' built for a psychological novel; it's no good trying to locate the strengths and weaknesses of a puzzle story when you're under the impression it's a romantic novel; and its nonsensical to maintain that a tragedy is a bad romance because it hasn't got a happy ending.
A: Fair enough. When do we apply this to SF?
B: Wait a bit, there's something we should get straight first. No absolute criteria can be employed in typing a fiction. It isn't reasonable for a critic to expect uniformity of function. He wouldn't demand it of subject-matter. He shouldn't expect every novel written within a genre to supply standardised
A: Because of the writer? /effects.
B: Quite. Some of them are individuals, you see. All the critic should suggest is that whatever effect the writer produces should be produced as efficiently as possible.
A: Now we come to SF.
B: You've read this before.
A: I took a peek.
B: The trouble with the majority of SF critics is that they use the same tools...
A: Coal hammers...
B: For every machine. The amount of broken watches lying about on the SF floor is incredible. And they do this because, although the idea of standardised subject matter is (on the face of it) anathema, production line effects aren't. They want SF books to do the same things to them every time.
A: Aren't you confusing them with SF readers?
B: Is there an operative difference?
A: Go on then.
B: The best illustration of this lies in the New Rave/Old Thing 'controversy'.
A: Must we?
B: I'm afraid so. You see it isn't logical to smash - say- one of Ballard's 'condensed novels' because it doesn't tell a rattling good story. It isn't meant to do anything so simple as that. If you make that complaint, you're not criticising it on its own terms. You're saying it should be something else, you're criticising a figment of your own imagination, not Ballard's.
A: What is a condensed novel doing, then?
B: That has nothing to do with this discussion. It doesn't matter at all. If you haven't had enough experience to tell a watch from a steam engine you shouldn't be coming on strong as a cobbler of either. (Cont/d)..

A: You're a New Raver, then?
B: Not in the way you mean it. I was about to say that both parties are equally guilty; plenty of New Ravers expect good solid extrapolative fiction to be long condensed novels. They expect complex modern fiction when the writer's target...the intended function, remember,...is simple, comfortable escapism. I've done it myself, it's one of the snares of evangelism.
A: Don't go holy.
B: Nobody's perfect.
A: That's ripe, that's very ripe. That's a cliche fit for a McCaffrey. Do we get any examples?
B: Yes, what about Michael Kenward, New Scientist and all that?
A: Mmmm...interdisciplinary, too...very tasty.
B: Right then. Michael Kenward, from SPECULATION-22. "The recent Moorcock-Cornelius things are completely weightless, very funny but full of gas." He isn't discussing the book Moorcock wrote (or the book he thinks Moorcock wrote; the complaint's a bit short-sighted) he's talking about a book he wants to criticise, not the one in front of him.
A: He should have said...
B: Well, he types it as a comic thing and admits it's very funny. Following that, a more logical attitude would have been that it's a good book of its type. He's certainly maintaining that intended function (as he sees it) matches the effect gained. But he's implying that because it lacks a function that he would like to read, it somehow doesn't come up to scratch. That's irrelevant.
A: I see. You're also intimating that you'd type it differently?
B: We aren't here to criticise books. That question's about as pertinent as the one about the condensed novels. Stick to the point.
A: You're adamant about that?
B: Oh yes.
A: What about another example?
B: Donald Wollheim on BUG JACK BARRON: "There isn't a nice thing I can say about this depraved, cynical, utterly repulsive and thoroughly degenerate parody of what was once a real SF theme..." Now there's a case of burnt fingers. The book dealt with immortality - an area of subject-matter, not of effect, - so he expected what he's used to getting from such a book; vicarious immortality. Not the effect Norman Spinrad's book was intended to produce at all. That's very bad criticism indeed; if the book in question is a bad book, those certainly aren't the reasons for its failure.
A: Is it a bad book?
B: STOP TRYING TO DRAW ME INTO IRRELEVANCIES!
A: Sorry.
B: Wollheim is hung-up on absolutes based firmly in emotionalism - that list of value-judgements is about as far from criticism as you can get.
A: And that splendid connotation of 'degenerate'!
B: Wollheim wants to talk about morals, not BUG JACK BARRON.
A: You'd say, then, that the majority of SF critics..
B: ...within the genre..
A: ...are complaining that the chalk rolls off the biscuits?
B: I think I might very well be saying that.
A: Don't you think that's the complaint of a writer rather than a critic?
B: No, but it's a point. I can't think of anyone better qualified to repair watches than a guy who's spent most of his life building them.
A: What?...oh yes...I was just thinking that what I'd really like to do is write speeches for the Pope.
B: Pardon?

M.John Harrison, 1969

T H E M E L T I N G P O T; Letters from readers.

Because of transatlantic (and trans-Indian Ocean in the case of John Foyster and Bruce Gillespie) postal delays this Melting Pot is a peculiar jumble of comments on Heinlein, comments on Ballard from 3 issues ago, and comments on comments two or three times removed. I might suggest you keep your file of back issues handy for rapid reference; also, because it has come up recently, I ought to point to our masthead where it warns that unless mentioned otherwise, all letters received are liable to be published! PRW

John J. Pierce, New Jersey.

Dear Sirs, "I was quite fascinated by the panel discussion on the 'new wave' in your July issue, and was pleased to discover that the debate on this issue isn't as one-sided as the fact of New Worlds being the only British prozine (at the time) would suggest.

Some obvious but overlooked points should be stressed. First, the term 'new wave' was invented by supporters of this type of writing, not by its opponents. If the 'new wave' writers feel unjustly lumped together they have no-one but themselves to blame.

Second, when the 'new wave' writers talk about "traditional" SF being bound by 'formulas' and 'conventions', I believe they do it an injustice. There have always been differences in outlokk and approach between Wells and Stapledon, Weinbaum and 'Doc' Smith, Moore and Heinlein, Simak and Pohl, Bester and Schmitz, Zelazny and Niven - or any number you care to name. To hear some 'new wave' proponents talk, one would think that everyone outside New Worlds writes exactly alike.

Furthermore, "traditionalist" SF seems to be judged entirely by Captain Future, or S.P. Meek — Brunner, for instance (on the panel) criticises Joseph Winter as if he had been a major writer, typical of the 'Golden Age'. When in fact Winter was nobody, even then.

Third, there is a false dichotomy raised about whether fiction is to be about 'people' or 'things'. The best science fiction is neither about people or things in themselves but about the relationship between the two. The universe is real and so are people. They interact. There is nothing "unreal" about dealing with spacetravel or dealings with aliens (and I don't mean just BEM's either). I have nothing against stories dealing with people - but some seem to think this means completely isolating them from the universe, regarding reality as totally subjective.

I suspect that the reason the lives of most characters in 'new wave' stories are so meaningless is that meaning can come only through active involvement between consciousness and exterior reality. The pulp hero, at his worst, (and I don't think he was representative of the best "traditionalist" writing) acted without thinking. The 'new wave' antihero thinks without acting.

Charles Platt's commentary on IMAGE OF THE BEAST sidesteps the main issue concerning sex in science fiction or anything else; attitude. Now there's a lot of talk about Puritanism, and how we must get rid of it. But Puritanism is an attitude about sex (and in a broder sense about life in general); It says sex is dirty because it is pleasurable (and in a broader sense, anything that is pleasurable is dirty). It goes back to the Pauline tradition - the flagellants who whipped themselves and lived on top of pillars to mortify the flesh.

Now what IMAGE OF THE BEAST does is to associate sex with sadism and violence, to make even the least distorted sexual relationships mindless and impersonal, to put the whole thing together in a package and say "This is sex."

Not that sex is dirty - not in so many words. But Platt praises Geis for having noticed that IMAGE treats sex in such a way as to be "not pornographically exciting" and therefore properly. What the hell is wrong with sex being "pornographically exciting"? That's what it's all about!

The "cool and clinical" descriptions in IMAGE may be interesting to those interested in psychiatry, but they have nothing to do with sex as such, anymore than pathology is identical with physiology. Platt objects to categories yet he seems to feel that the only kind of sex that should be allowed in print is that which has no emotional appeal or any relevance to a normal person's healthy sexual needs and desires. These he describes as "lascivious" - a term frequently used by Puritans trying to ban LADY CHATTERLY'S LOVER. I'm not saying we should have mindless pornography based on just physical motion. We need psychological insight, but this sort of insight has to be related to what sex is for.

I'm told even Farmer's wife didn't like IMAGE, and I can hardly blame her. Even some pulp writing - say Merritt's THE SHIP OF ISHTAR - was far more 'liberated' in its attitudes, though lacking explicit scenes and 'psychological' interpretation. I'll close by adding that I am absolutely opposed to any form of official censorship. This has only suppressed some good fiction while at the same time giving undeserved publicity to a far greater amount of bad. Let the reader decide!"

* As the first letter I've received from the 'Second Foundation' I think this
* deserves comment from me, if only to say that I agree with each of John Pierce's
* remarks about the British convention panel in SPECULATION-23. Leaving aside
* the questions of sex in science fiction, which always bore me, I'd only like
* to suggest a little less ready use of labels, as a substitute for examples.
* For instance, be specific when talking about '"new wave' antiheros" or about
* what is meant by 'new wave' itself. I suspect there is no real
* controversy in science fiction at all, only between a majority of readers and
* a small number of writers and critics who have their own peculiar standards
* and who do insist on talking about them. At length. Correct, do you think?

John Foyster, Australia.

Dear Pete, "Your transcript of the convention panel (in SPECULATION-23) seemed a trifle tame; is it that damned British reserve? For example there seems to be no reasonable excuse for Morgan and Platt not to have been at each other's throats (indeed, Carnell's comment suggests that he was expecting it), yet what emerges doesn't really go very far. Maybe I shouldn't hold up Australia and its lowly conventions as an example, but you'll have by now SF Commentary 3, which reprints the 1968 author panel - I'll grant that there aren't any fireworks but at least people disagreed firmly.

Bruce will soon be printing part of the 1969 convention panel and this goes just a little further in the right direction; after some very bland noises from the panel I got up and said I thought that what they were saying was a pile of shit. This produced some mild reaction, so Bruce got up and said the same thing. Then a few others joined in and although no blood was spilt the audience at least thought it was on the cards.

So much for conventions. Australia is, in truly extravagant fashion, having two next year. One in January in Syndney (that one I believe in) and another in Melbourne at Easter (that one I doubt). Maybe we'll produce something worthwhile from the two of them.

I'm glad you cut out some of my less restrained comments on Ballard - he isn't worth it. But really, Pete, if a guy can't tell a consistent story then

surely one is entitled to question his motives and understanding? Anyway, my letter comes out unintelligible to anyone without Ballard's original alongside. Maybe that is a comment in itself.

Piers Anthony asks 'Whoever heard of Ursula K LeGuin?'. Now that ASFR is dead, Pete, I hope you won't mind a plug for an old rival. The answer is, of course, readers of ASFR, for Mrs LeGuin's work was discussed at length there in 1967 and in much the same terms as are now being used."

* You've just given me the inspiration I was looking for, John, with your
* remark about consistent story-telling. To explain I'll mention that there
* are two conventions planned in this country next year, although most people
* don't know about the second as yet. The first is our annual Easter convention
* (in London) where I hope to be chairing the SPECULATION discussion panel. The
* second event will be a semi-literary sort of affair in Birmingham in June
* 1970. This has not yet been confirmed and I might look pretty silly in a
* month's time if it all falls through. See my editorial for an up-to-date
* report. But as I was saying about inspiration, my idea is to have a set
* theme for discussion by the panel at Easter, and you've just provided that.
* So now, not necessarily restricting the topic to Ballard's work, I'd like to
* hear any comments on John's remark; these also could be read out and discussed
* at Easter when the Great Minds convene!

James Blish, Bucks.

Dear Mr Weston, "This seems to be the second time that I have fallen afoul of F.M. Busby, both times in SPECULATION. On Page 30 of your September issue he quotes me as saying "Heinlein proposes a religion that compounds orgiastics with the worst of BillySunday-type revivalism", and then proceeds to take me to task for the underlined words.

But I never said any such thing, in the review in question or anywhere else. I have never held any such view of STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND, nor, I hope, have I ever written a sentence in such appallingly bad English. What I did say about the Heinlein novel is on record in THE ISSUE AT HAND, as well as in Warhoon, and Busby could have checked it easily.

I wonder how many of Mr Busby's other quotations are actually his own invention?"

Patrick McGuire, Illinois,

Dear Peter, "I had myself given some thought to the validity of 'mythical' countries in nonfantasy fiction. I think that in STAND ON ZANZIBAR they are employed in a way that does not invalidate any 'prophecy'. But Brunner did use some real countries. It's rather reminiscent of Aristophanes' comedy where he portrays a great number of real people on the stage because Athens was too small for anonymity in certain functions. At the same time I don't see why the fictionalisation was necessary, especially in the case of Yatakang. It is obviously based mostly on Indonesia with some Japan thrown in. I think the real Indonesia would have served as well, even if it does use a Roman alphabet. There aren't that many speakers of Indonesian around in the western world, I'm sure, so Donald Hogan's language specialisation (in the book) would still be important.

Benina is tougher. Such obscure colonies abound, but none of them have natives exuding brotherly love, and probably do not have a history much like Benina's as a result. But then again that very notion is sufficiently improbable that we may assume Brunner was not trying to be prophetic when he made it. The 'prophetic' parts take place mostly in America (Why? Brunner is, after all, British. Because he assumes America, being technologically more developed will be in the 'forefront' of wherever we're all going?), and in the USA (in the book, again) all the names are real.

I enjoyed ZANZIBAR but did not vote for it for a Hugo. I thought it somewhat facilely contrived, from any number of best-sellers, recent Scientific Americans, and so forth. It seemed that the time from which Brunner was extrapolating was only the late sixties, which gives you a not-very-accurate curve. He did, after all, have the last 4000 years of history to employ as well and I'm not sure he used them to full effect.

I don't think THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS came off exactly as intended but I would warn you to beware of first impressions. I'm intending to read it again when I find time. I think the novel has greatly to do with social attitudes which depend on biological class - sex and race, mostly. I wrote Mrs LeGuin regarding the novel, and from her reply I found out that she was well aware of certain things I had regarded as mistakes the first time around. So no quick judgements!

In particular the background is not so damned important as certain people, conditioned by LOTR and perhaps DUNE seem to think. Panshin's arguments in F&SF, for instance, ignore such traditions as the appendix to A CASE OF CONSCIENCE which is by no means a novel dependant upon setting. (Now that I've mentioned C OF C, compare the Cocktail Party demonstrating the Evil and Depravity of the World in it with the one in ZANZIBAR.)"

* It would appear that I'm about the only one who was bothered by the use of
* imaginary countries in STAND ON ZANZIBAR, and I'm tempted to try once again
* to set out my difficulty and perhaps find more success than I did last time.
* You see, STAND ON ZANZIBAR I regard as a fantastic achievement and uncomfort-
* ably close to a genuine prophetic work in many places; but by referring to
* countries which don't exist Brunner is in effect shouting to me, continually,
* "this is only a story". Does that matter, you might ask? To me it does, I
* think, and I would prefer either a novel set well away from the present so
* that it could come true or a novel which adheres rigidly to the facts-as-we-
* know them. I can't accept a composite, and indeed the very foundations of
* science fiction as a form rest with extrapolation from present-day data. By
* presenting ZANZIBAR with a wholly-untrue "history" of Benina, Brunner in
* effect was writing a fantasy, when I didn't want a fantasy! Or as John
* himself said last time about STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND, 'What you want is a
* different book!'. And the answer is that yes, I do. (see my editorial on this).

Sandra Miesel, Indianapolis.

Dear Pete, "Zelazny and Delany both use mythology (and both are kindly, erudite gentlemen) but their approach is quite different. Zelazny finds myths and modern cultural features which have mythic characteristics (movie plots, motorcycle gangs, etc) convenient frameworks, labels, packaging for his continual concerns; Love and Hate, Life and Death. Delany however doesn't just wrap-up his thoughts in decorative myths, he is trying to use mythology as a kind of meta-language to 'say more' than he otherwise can say.

Thus Zelazny can more easily meet his own goals and his writing has much more 'finish' and neatness than Delany's. THE DREAM MASTER is so tightly constructed that the proverbial knife-blade cannot be inserted between its components. This, I believe, is his best book to date and all its myths are well-known ones, plainly labeled. Zelazny's mythological expertise can be deceptive. After two and a half readings and much research I must conclude that LORD OF LIGHT is a simple western-tradition story wearing a gorgeous Indian costume.

Delany is something else again. He is desperately trying, through mythology to express his unique, non-western, non-traditional, post-McLuhan Vision of the Whole. The strain of this ambitious enterprise is all too evident in NOVA; he wields mythology like a club.

One might seriously ask whether Delany's Vision can be communicated in ordinary printed English prose. Perhaps he may have to resort to a giant cyclorama collage or market multi-media kits of prose, poetry, artwork and music tapes. (A project of the latter kind, Corita's FOOTNOTES AND HEADLINES has been well received in this country, It doesn't include music, though)."

Sam Moskowitz, New Jersey.

Dear Pete, "Let me reveal a horrible secret. I am not against the 'new wave' and never have been. They are against me! It never bothered me one iota that they did their own thing. I am helping to rally a movement to beat them down in self-defence. A sort of a preventative war. There is no rancour at all, merely enlightened self-interest. If someone asked me to turn out an anthology of the Best of the New Thing I could do it at a week's notice. I've got more 'new wave' material in my collection than anyone one of them, no exceptions. I've got every book Aldiss and Ballard ever have published. Before Amazing was sold one of the articles I had proposed was 'The Young Lions', dealing entirely with the strong new British writers, with special emphasis on Aldiss Ballard and some of the others. It would not have been an unfavourable piece, because I judge writers by their best, not their worst. I will someday write the history of The New Thing. I enclose a copy of an editorial that gives reasons for my action as published in Different, October 1967, titled "How I Was Dragged, Kicking and Screaming, Into The Arena As A Reluctant Antagonist of The New Thing". (excerpted below);-

'...I had tolerated seemingly senseless barbs in print by various members of the New Thing movement, but as Harry Harrison began to express these in public at the Eastern Science Fiction Association meeting of Sept. 10, 1967, in Newark, N.J., I felt moved to ask why these persistent attacks on me, since I had never said anything specifically against the group in public or in print at any time.

'He replied that my views were on the record. I responded that I liked some of the things that Ballard and Aldiss had done and had even editorially termed Aldiss "one bright new author". He said that while that was a point in my favour, it would in no way affect the fact that I was, whether I wanted to be or not, an enemy of The New Thing and would have to accept the consequences.

'I implored him to tell me what I might do to curry favour with the movement and avoid an altercation. He replied that there was nothing, since the doors had shut in my mind at the age of eight, that my reading was too circumscribed to permit me to begin to understand what the New Thing was about. Besides I had once implied that THE DARK LIGHT YEARS by Brian Aldiss, which had been dedicated to Harry Harrison, might be less than a masterpiece; therefore there was no succour.'

What gets me is that those with something 'new' always feel they must drag down the old to elevate themselves. Because someone writes a great novel today doesn't make outstanding novels of the past irrelevant or passe. It adds to the richness of literary work available. The truth is that many newcomers feel that if they can drag down an old work they won't have as far to climb to be noticed! Don't raise the bridge, lower the river! I reserve the right to enjoy a variety of science fiction, old and new, action and cerebral, traditional and experimental. Others can place themselves into straitjackets, to me science fiction is a field, not a road.

I can well understand the distaste for Fearn engendered by the latter-day parade of Vargo Statten and Volsted Gridban. But there was a time when 'Liners of Time' as a serial in 1935 Amazing Stories was one of the most exciting cliff-hangers of the period. Within a few years we realised its grave weaknesses but

not at the time we read it. 'Mathematica' and 'Mathematica Plus', until we found out we had been hoodwinked, read real good. When the 'new wave' was "concepts", and 'thought-variants' were in vogue, John Russell Fearn was one of the more popular authors of the leading magazine, Astounding Stories. A few of his stories are permanent classics. There has never been a better story written on the theme of 'The Man Who Stopped The Dust'. It is a masterpiece which explores what would happen if virtually all of the dust particles were removed from the atmosphere. A simple idea but with incredible implications based on sound science. Because Fearn so discredited himself his earlier, better works are not reprinted.

One would never think of Fearn as a stylist but at one time he was writing in three different styles under three different names in the magazines, and all three were popular. They included Thornton Ayre and Polton Cross. As Thornton Ayre he first imitated Weinbaum with success and then introduced webwork plotting along the lines of Harry Stephen Keeler's famous detective novels, beginning with 'Locked City' (Amazing Oct 1938). As Polton Cross with 'Wings Across The Cosmos' in Thrilling Wonder in June 1938 he championed an emotional aspect to new concepts and Groff Conklin liked it well enough to reprint in A TREASURY OF SCIENCE FICTION.

If the year were 1936 and I were asked to write a series of articles on the most outstanding SF writers of the day, John Russell Fearn would have to be one of them. A fact that younger fans and writers cannot face is that improvement and progress are not inevitable. Of the young writers of today, 'new wave' or not that could be selected as the most brilliant and promising, only a few will continue to grow in skill and depth until they develop their present promise. That does not mean that the others will be failures. They may be sidetracked into films, television, comic-strip continuity, sex novels and become very rich and proficient. A number are probably past their peak even though they are in their twenties. Inevitably a few considered today's mediocrities will develop and become great figures in our field in fiftenn or twenty years."

* As with John Pierce, I think you're wrong in part in the first section of your
* letter, Sam, even though I sympathise with and share a number of your feelings.
* I don't think any 'movement' can be 'rallied' to beat anything down unless you
* mean with shillelaghs and fisticuffs! In perspective, all we have is a small
* group of individuals saying one thing (or a number of related things) and in
* the end this will make little difference to what the vast majority prefer to
* buy and read. People aren't stupid. They make up their own minds without
* literary propaganda. They don't need any Holy Causes!

Bruce Gillespie, Australia.

Dear Pete, "SPECULATION-23 seems mainly about the New Stuff, but there's hardly a word about the current state of the mentor itself. I haven't received a copy since May (No.190) and I'm not too happy about the delay. On the other hand there are all sorts of interesting cracks from people like Moorcock, Platt, Priest and nearly everybody else as well. Unhappily there seems little sign of a basis for a concensus of opinion, let alone a concensus itself. Nobody gets around to saying what IS so good about so-called 'new wave' science fiction.

For instance, my own remarks on New Worlds (SF Commentary 1 & 5) might be taken by some (as I realised to my horror last night) as an expression of the 'A-Good-Yarn-In-The-Hand-Is-Worth-an-Experiment-In-The-Bush' school. It's certainly true that Lang Jones' liking for Real Live stories was apparent in the first two issues of New Worlds he edited, and I was as glad as anybody to welcome the trend. At the same time I'm conscious that a good yarn in New Worlds

is quite a different thing from a good yarn in If magazine. For one thing - no, let's say the main thing - is that most New Worlds stories are written in English of some description rather than the 40-years-old pulp variety of hysteria which mainly dominates the American magazines.

The more I look at it the more I think that this is the central issue in the whole debate. Needless to say it is the least debated point. For instance Charles Platt (pp 9) says that "(CAMP CONCENTRATION) is one of the most successful pieces of 'new wave' fiction that has yet been written". You don't say. Of course it is one of the most successful 'new wave' efforts for the simple reason that it is one of the best novels written in English during the last two or three years. Take it from its New Worlds connotations and put it in Galaxy or let Ace call it THE GENIUS IN CELL 7, or serialise it in whatever pop magazine still serialises fiction in Great Britain and it would still be the same novel and would, ultimately, attain the same reputation. The main difference in each of the cases cited would have been the different initial reaction, which may have helped Disch's pocket more than his reputation.

Similarly there are other journals publishing experimental and/or intelligent mainstream stories, and practically all of New Worlds' stories could have appeared in them. The main problem is that they didn't; they appeared in a magazine with a tradition that stretches back to Carnell and beyond and not in (say) a magazine that stretches back to Henry James.

So, the good stories in New Worlds are the stories that would be enjoyable lively and well-written in any journal in the world. You could not say the same perhaps for the short fiction that wins the Hugo Award. Why not? Not because of the ideas but because of the words. Most of the American SF writers don't really believe in the power of words, with words' complement of subtlety, tradition/novelty, and multiple imagery. If New Worlds and 'new wave' writers have any faults (and they have plenty of them) it is that they lean so heavily on the power of words that the strain often breaks the stories, and they do not acknowledge that the power must proceed from their own minds in the first place.

Too many words? Too few? to sum up the nearest SF has ever had to a worthwhile controversy. I've just been reading Proust and it makes me wonder if any SF writers anywhere know ANYTHING about the power of words. Even Aldiss might seem lukewarm after Jean Sauteail."

* The usual plug - Bruce edits his own magazine, SF Commentary, which is
* available at 40¢, $3.00 for 9 (Australian). Enquiries should be sent to Bruce
* at what appears to be a new address: P.O.Box 245, Ararat, Victoria 3377, Aus.

Michael Kenward, Sussex.

Dear Peter, "I agree with Ballard over the matter of SF fans and their stupidity; I too am appalled at their behaviour at Conventions, and it is unlikely that I will ever stay at one again. Your open letter was, as someone else pointed out, sad and slightly nauseous. If you go around 'leaning on castles' (which you don't - you actually add more bricks to the pile) then you must expect to have some people leaning back. Ballard may have been bad-mannered but in a way it was kind of him to have maintained his 'nastiness' by being extreme. If he had ignored you, or responded in your terms, then you would surely have been extremely confused. How could you have formulated a consistent opinion of the man in that case?

You must really expect, and almost sympathise with Ballard's action. He has had to put up quite a fight to get out of the SF scene and on to the 'literary' scene, where he can be read and talked about intelligently. To do this he has probably been forced to adopt some extreme attitudes both in his

literary style and in his attitudes towards SF. He may, in fact, have been forced to go further than he wanted to. I don't know. But I do know that he deserves the change - he writes bloody well - and it is clear that while some writers couldn't make a living without fans and their like, Ballard has had to fight the force that wanted to drag him into the morass.

If you talk to Ballard you will find that at least some of what I have said is true. He is not an extremist. His explanation of his ideas and the effects he is trying to create with his writing are new in SF terms but not revolutionary. I found myself to be in agreement with most of his comments. Most of all he was far from bad-mannered and was most willing to discuss his work. Perhaps individuals are more easily-handled than the mass of fans sitting out there poring over their fanzines."

* Mike, I don't want to disagree too violently but I think you know we part
* company on some fundamental points. Let's look at your letter again from
* the top: 1) Why do you think fans are stupid? I'd like to see some examples
* and even then suspect you're generalising dangerously. 2) What behaviour
* at conventions? Cheering Ted Tubb? Room parties maybe? Don't forget these
* are not primarily literary events (which Mike Moorcock reckons are anyway
* even more depressing) but are gatherings of SF readers and fans who quite
* naturally want to enjoy the weekend. 3) Why precisely was my letter 'sad'
* and 'nauseous' ? I expressed some honest feelings, that's all. It wasn't I
* that was rude. 4) Why was it 'kind' of Ballard to be bad-mannered (You
* admit he was? Viola!) Black is white and the moon up there is the sun.
* Good is bad, Love is hate. Jabberwocky! No-one else seems to need to be
* rude. 5) What do you mean by 'your terms'? I usually manage to communicate
* well enough with other English-speakers! 6) What 'fight' to get out of the
* SF scene? Ballard entered it by choice and can leave tomorrow. If he wants
* to be a 'mainstream' writer there are other markets beside SF magazines.

Ted White, New York.

Dear Pete, "The principal item of comment in the July SPECULATION as you've probably guessed is Charles Platt's gratuitous slap at me in his review of two Farmer books. Platt is of course entitled to his own opinions, nit-like though they usually are, but after a great opening declaration "A critic should be aware of his own tastes" he stops short of any meaningful conclusion.

The facts are simple ones, so simple that one might expect even Platt to grasp them; One responds to a given work on more than one level. Two such levels are the basic type and content of a work (does one like swashbuckling heroics , to grab one popular example), and the realisation of this content (granting that one does like swashbuckling heroics, did the author do a good job in writing about them?). Most non-introspective readers will plumb for type. "I like that kind of story" such a reader will say in defence of whatever piece is under attack.

Critics on the other hand are usually more concerned with the success of the author's attempt to bring-off his story. Most of us will admit our blind spots as to story-types and will try to avoid reviewing books which fall outside our basic interests (I, for instance, have less than no interest in Edgar Rice Burroughs and would never try to review one of his books or a book written in his genre, pace Charles Platt.)

Platt betrays his own blind spots when he says that "a critic lacking such self-awareness will subjectively condemn anything he doesn't enjoy." He seems to think that criticism is, at root, objective, a notion which has been

thoroughly debunked, and doesn't require going into again. He also seems to think that a critic's enjoyment, or lack thereof, is immaterial, when discussing a work. Again, he is very wrong. His own review points this up: he obviously enjoyed Farmer's books - although for somewhat esoteric reasons (reasons having relatively little to do with the quality of those books - he just likes the type, like most non-introspective readers) - so he considers them, per se, Good. Anyone whose view differs with his MUST be wrongheaded, and a "prolific fanzine enthusiast" (I gather this is intended as a stinging epithet) as well.

Platt calls me a "master of misplaced criticism", simply because I pointed out how inadequately realised Farmer's IMAGE OF THE BEAST was. He says I "complained at length about the slowness of the book, the flaws in its writing, and its inadequacies as a 'private eye' novel." This is a very incomplete summary of my criticisms as Platt well knows, and it demonstrates his basic dishonesty of attack. However, "the flaws on its writing" can hardly be considered peripheral to a book's quality or success, and the fact that Platt thereafter ignores the dismal quality of Farmer's prose in his review is significant of something.

I'm struck by the extent to which Platt exhibits his own style-deadness. "...the sex is not pornographically exciting, and is not written to excite. Nor are the scenes of bizarre death and mutilation morbid or sickening, as for instance is the average book on Nazi concentration camps. Farmer's writing is cool and clinical..." And then he compares this writing with Disney's "The Living Desert" in what must be an all-time inappropriate parallel.

Fact: the sex scenes in IMAGE are, for the most part, written in standard pornographese. This may not in fact be exciting to Charles - it wasn't to me, either - but Farmer's language, his use of pornographic cliche, was purely of the one-handed book variety - and not of the better examples, either. Likewise, if the "scenes of bizarre death and mutilation" were not "morbid or sickening", Farmer failed, since his intent was fairly obviously to hit the reader with these things with a strong emotional impact. Take them away or regard them as "cool and clinical" and what little vitality the book does possess is rendered impotent.

I categorised the book as, in part, "pornography" because it is realised within that sub-genre. Pornography is now freely published in this country, and I suggest Platt read a few of the hundreds of titles available. If he has any literary sensitivity he will find these books quickly boring, the repetition of their standard sexual cliches very familiar.

As for Jung's archetypes, I imagine I was aware of them before Charles Platt had yet learned to read. The fact that Farmer does to some extent exploit archetypal figures is probably to his credit, but since nearly all writers use these figures in their work, consciously or unconsciously (thus bearing out Jung again), it is certainly not of central importance. And, Charles, the pseudo-Ackerman is not a classical archetype. He's just a "type".

* I've often thought, Ted, that if one picks the words carefully enough it can
* be proved that black is white and the Sun shines cold. It takes a fairly
* rigorous analysis to spot the unsubstantiated assumptions. Personally I found
* the second Farmer book, A FEAST UNKNOWN, to be much more entertaining, if even
* more revolting than the first.

Robert Coulson, Indiana.

Dear Pete, "Charles Platt seems to share one of Ted White's less enjoyable attributes; the inability to write an article without attacking someone. And even Ted isn't quite as prone to state his opinions as documented facts as Charles does in his "review".

Of course, Michael Moorcock is pretty good at assuming that his opinions are solid fact, too. It seems a distinguishing mark of the so-called 'new wave'.

I can't pass up a chance to comment on your Heinlein issue, since Heinlein is still - despite FARNHAM'S FREEHOLD - my favourite SF suthor. Brunner first. Minor point; 'All You Zombies' was not one of Heinlein's early short stories, in fact it was one of the last short stories he wrote and was actually a copy (and perhaps an improvement, though I doubt it) of one of his earlier shorts, 'By His Bootstraps'. A more major point; Brunner falls into the same pit as 90% of the liberal reviewers, and downgrades STARSHIP TROOPERS because he doesn't agree with the message. I don't happen to agree with a lot of Brunner's messages, either, but that doesn't mean he isn't a top writer. (His other criticisms are more valid, but it is interesting, if the book is actually as bad as all that, to find it still capable of arousing emotion and discussion ten years after it was written. Name something - without looking it up - that Dick wrote 10 years ago.) And Jubal Harshaw might not have what Brunner thinks is believable character but he was based on a real person.

I see Busby pointed out that STRANGER was a religious satire (or at least incorporated a religious satire); nobody seems to have mentioned that GLORY ROAD is an extremely deft parody of all the sword-and-sorcery novels ever written. (In fact large groups of fans are too dense to believe that when its pointed out to them.)

Williamson provided a new (to me, anyway) polarity of SF writers; certainly at first glance it seems valid. At second glance not so valid; the difference between Heinlein and Ballard are the differences between scientists and hippies; Both have a belief in the potential of Mankind but they differ in their methods of realising it. Neither, however, is negative about man; only about science.

Which seems to be it. Either I can agree pretty well with the other writers - including middle-of-the-road ones such as Aldiss - or I consider their comments beneath contempt and certainly beneath argument. But I would like to mention - because nobody paid any attention when I said it before - that while Heinlein does have some resemblance to Kipling and occasionally even to other writers he is compared to, his real resemblance is to Clarence Buddington Kelland.

Probably nobody notices this because nobody but me reads Kelland any more. (He wasn't all that good, to be honest). But Heinlein's characters are lifted bodily from Kelland. The background is improved considerably, but the wise old man, the seemingly-bumbling hero who can do anything required when the chips are down, and the sharp-tongued educated heroine with the heart of gold are pure Kelland characters. They are stock characters, of course, but there are real people just like them. I know some. Probably Kelland and Heinlein did too."

Dan Morgan, Lincs.

Dear Pete, "The Heinlein issue was interesting and very worthwhile. You were right to put Harry Harrison's piece first, because he really says it all and at the same time provides a good standard against which to judge the others. Something that this kind of multiple-focus on one writer does very well is to bounce back on the critics and illuminate their attitudes - which is fine. Interesting for me, in particular, was the opportunity to try on different critical hats as I went through the various pieces, finding that I agreed with points which would have seemed mutually contradictory if included in one whole. Thus I was able to acknowledge our debt to Heinlein with Harry Harrison whilst at the same time agreeing with John Brunner's strictures of FARNHAM'S FREEHOLD and THE MOON IS A HARSH MISTRESS.

I think the point made by both Ken Bulmer and Jack Williamson about Heinlein's positive attitude towards the universe is an important one. SF should be positive in its outlook. If it is to retain any vitality it must be so. On the other hand I have seen little evidence in the last few years to support Jack Williamson's suggestion that 'each new generation is full of optimists'. The vice of most of our younger writers seems to be pessimism. But this is nothing new - fifteen and more years ago I was writing some dreadfully downbeat stuff and thinking it was rather clever. It's fun to be miserable when you're young and have no real experience of the darker sides of life, and death. Later on you get to thinking that the thing really worth doing is to "rage against the fading of the light" - it may be hopeless in the long run but at least it's positive. That's the way it looks from the chilly side of forty, at any rate. From such a standpoint there just isn't time any more to be a cynic, or a pessimist...."

Piers Anthony, Florida.

Dear Pete, "I regretted having to turn down the invitation to participate in the Heinlein issue. But apart from the usual pressure of time I felt that what I would have to say would merely duplicate what others would say more carefully. Now that I have seen their comments I'm not sure. But I found Daniel Galouye's comment revealing, Harry Warner's fascinating (though I would not agree that Heinlein's usage defines good writing), F.M. Busby's introduction hilarious and Norman Spinrad's thesis intriguing.

I suppose I see Heinlein as a giant in the field who is now being gained on by others; perhaps the days of his absolute pre-eminence are past, but he has a long way to fall before he can be considered less than a master, and he isn't falling. When I want to read something worthwhile Heinlein is still about my surest guide."

Harry Warner Jr, Maryland.

Dear Pete, "This issue interested me much more than seemed probable after all the repetitive things that fanzines have been publishing on the topic of Heinlein and his fiction in recent years. The fact that the flood of Heinlein criticism and analysis has ebbed a trifle in the past year or so may be one reason why I read through everything in this issue without looking ahead to determine how many pages remained before the end, the most strenuous test for any serious material to pass.

The anti-Heinlein sections weren't as long or as harsh as the preview in Locus had caused me to expect, and the one or two people who took the con instead of the pro position did it with the kind of vehemence that proves some hidden reason behind such a too-much protest. Still, there does remain the problem of why Heinlein's stock has been lowering gradually in recent years, as your editorial suggests. I can think of one possibility beyond those mentioned in various portions of this symposium.

Heinlein is in almost every high school library in this nation and this is a highly-dangerous place for any writer to be, if he hopes to retain his place in the hearts of young people. You may not comprehend over there the full extent of the anti-establishment stand so much of the young generation has taken over here. The young people are very much for education as an abstract thing, but for the solid, concrete manifestation of education that public schools represent there is grave suspicion and mistrust because the schools are run by the establishment. And if Heinlein is on the shelves for sixth-graders to read, Heinlein is approved by the establishment and contaminated by it.

I hope the people who write letters on this SPECULATION won't overlook David Redd's little letter. The last paragraph deserves a great deal of attention.

Someone elsewhere in the issue chooses FARNHAM'S FREEHOLD as an awful example of Heinlein's st bborness, and when I read it my eyes popped at the final pages. I got the firm impression that Heinlein was finally making one of his he-men act like an absolute fool. I don't know if this is the 'inversion' that David Redd is talking about, but I do know what my subject matter would be if each reader of SPECULATION were offered the chance to ask Heinlein one question with a firm promise of an accurate answer. I would ask; Did Heinlein illustrate Farnham starting to do the same impossible and stupid isolationist thing over again, to show that some people will never learn by past experience that it won't work?

In general though, I am in sympathy with several contributors to this symposium who feel that science fiction has extracted most of the benefits that can be expected from Heinlein's genius. His greatest work is now a couple of decades old, it has influenced one entire generation of science fiction writers and there is no shame attached to its failure to remain a permanent model for the next generation. If someone as talented as Heinlein had appeared in the past five years or so we wouldn't be criticising his stories for their failure to serve the same function today that they provided many years ago."

Mats Linder, Stockholm

Dear Pete, "First the Heinlein symposium. Before I forget it I must quote a paragraph from THE PUPPET MASTERS, Signet edition P.53:-
'I felt warm and relaxed, as if I had just killed a man or had a woman -'
(Gollancz edition, A HEINLEIN TRIAD, P.61).

Some hero, huh? I'd say he's sick; not only does he feel warm and relaxed after killing somebody, he feels the same way after killing as after screwing! I don't condemn the book because the hero is sick. But it strikes me as a bit inconsistent, from an author who so strongly himself condemns the 'sickie' literature.. No, I'm kidding actually - I'm aware that Heinlein wasn't thinking of this guy as a sick person; very likely he himself thought this a natural reaction. And this might even be an occasional slip, but it does fit the general picture of Heinlein, the author, as seen by me, the reader.

The fact is I like much of what Heinlein has written, and only a few years ago I'd have said the man could do nothing wrong. I read HAVE SPACESUIT, WILL TRAVEL when I was young and raved over it, I read SIXTH COLUMN and loved that, too; I was fascinated by 'The Man Who Sold The Moon', PUPPET MASTERS, and...but why go on? I read everything he wrote and loved almost all of it. Then I grew older and read STARSHIP TROOPERS. I had to re-read it, because I thought I must have been missing something - after all it had won a Hugo and a lot of praise besides. But no, it was still a sermon and what was worse it was a sermon set in 6000 years hence - in a society just like ours! This one hadn't changed at all, except for some minor details. That made the book a sermon, nothing more, even if it was an exciting sermon at times. At the time I didn't much care about the philosophy, neither for nor against.

Then I read FARNHAM'S FREEHOLD. Jesus, more sermon! And a wholly unsympathetic hero, yet! (Not that that necessarily makes the book worse; to me it made it less enjoyable). And the story was unusually weak, too. Finally there came THE MOON IS A HARSH MISTRESS, which too was chock-full of someone teaching someone else.

All this preaching sort of put me off. The stories weren't, to me, as enjoyable as Heinlein stories used to be. So I reread some of them. PUPPET MASTERS, for instance. And by God! there it was again! Only I hadn't noticed it before because 1) I was younger and 2) it isn't as conspicuous as in his later works.

At the same time - like some sort of a catalyst process - all those small mannerisms of his began to irk me. Like his way of always putting in those "uh's" and "eh's" and "mmm's" in dialogue. People may talk like that sometimes but I don't want to see it in print (I don't want to hear it, either). To me it looks ridiculous. Also it irritates me the way the people who speak are excessively addressing each other, even when no others are present.

Don't get me wrong; I'm not knocking Heinlein or his work. I'm just trying to describe my feelings and how they have changed, and I still think he has written more good stories than most SF writers, and I fully recognise his pioneering (although I'd like to point out that to a newcomer to the field this doesn't make his stories one iota better now).

Many of his older stories - particularly the shorter ones where there isn't time for philosophy to appear - I like very much. He is a very, very good storyteller and his imagination is more often fascinating than not. His shortcomings are that he can't write dialogue (all his people talk the same) and he can't write about women. And one other thing; his outlook seems to incorporate a somewhat puritanical viewpoint on sexual matters which makes for unrealistic traits in otherwise realistic stories.

That I very much disagree with the views that are put forth in his works - whether they be Heinlein's own or not - has, or should have, nothing to do with my opinion of the stories. Heinlein isn't God or Jesus - but by the same token he shouldn't be crucified."

* Odd you should mention a figure of 6000 years in the future for the world of
* STARSHIP TROOPERS. I may be wrong but I don't think any date is mentioned in
* the novel; certainly I've never noticed one. My impression was that the book
* was set only a couple of hundred years into the future, and this is born out
* by the jacket blurb on my Putnam's edition which mentions "in the not distant
* future". I do remember that the old UK Four Square edition carried a jacket
* blurb about '5000 years in the future', but this was apparently made up out
* of whole cloth. Maybe the blurb was carried over to a Swedish edition?
* I must admit that your quote from PUPPET MASTERS worried me. I couldn't
* believe the quotation until I found it myself. Strange how I never noticed it
* before - it is disturbing. I now hear, incidentally, that Heinlein has just
* delivered a new manuscript to his publishers and if this is true I imagine a
* lot of people will be interested to see what this new book has to offer. If
* it proves possible I hope to review this in SPECULATION soon after publication.

Brian W. Aldiss, Berks.

Dear Pete, "Reading your Heinlein Anniversary issue I thought of what Dr. Johnson said in similar circumstances; "In lapidiary inscriptions a man is not upon oath". Your contributors were so obviously not upon oath. Everyone was trying to be generous, so that even my old pal Harry suggests that Heinlein's bust should be stood right beside H.G. Wells's. I would not quarrel with that if the operative word were 'below'.

I was surprised that you got such enthusiasm - even from such bright chaps as Fred Pohl (a writer whom I prefer to Heinlein). Enthusiasm for Heinlein in 1945 was one thing; in the greatly different world of 1969, entirely another. Heinlein is essentially a writer of the American forties when Americans were saving the world from oppression and realising for the first time their own amazing strength; and when most of the world looked to America with affection and respect for its rough freedoms. Very sadly that epoch has gone. Nobody looks to any country with affection and respect any more. Life has become much more complex.

This complexity some writers try to mirror. Heinlein mirrors the old simplicity. The world is still his oyster. Brunner puts the point well. Rating Heinlein below Dick and others, he says "Heinlein is still putting the universe through his hero's hoops, and the illusion is becoming progressively less convincing". We remember - by God, and with love and regret - when the world seemed as if a new dawn were coming, into which we would stride, big and compulsion-free, towards the stars, like the rock-faced heros in a Rogers' cover painting. We tripped over our own feet and have since realised the mixed nature of our humanity.

My belief is that the standard of debate in SF circles is terribly thin because it confuses the central issue of one's world-picture with such quarrels as the 'Is it literature?' and the 'Old v. New Wave' controversies. Both style and content are subsumed into a writer's world-view; world-picture dictates style and content. The nostalgia I mentioned may draw us back to Heinlein's novels, but nostalgia always implies a setting aside of critical standards, an agreement to indulge; on this level of course some people can still find Heinlein a 'good' writer; on this level Moskowitz finds Otis Adelbert Klein a 'good' writer. But we need not pretend that such judgements are objectively arrived at.

Some of your contributors say things that just stun me. One of them, when reaching what he terms 'a sticky bit of plotting' or 'difficult character delineation', leans back, pinches his nose, and asks himself what Heinlein would do. Possibly one of your sharper readers will claim that this is what makes his books read like watered-down Heinlein; but I prefer to think that you occasioned a sort of jolly SF party where everyone got together and enthused about the super and fab plot-twists and alien-bashing in STARSHIP TROOPERS - and now the partygoers are sober again and back in the real world, a little bashful about what they said in their cups the night before."

* Perhaps, Brian; but maybe you'll find some of the contributors to the sympos-
* ium really MEANT what they said? I'd like to think so.

M. John Harrison, London N.7.

Dear Peter, "What's all the fuss about Fearn? I used to get a big kick out of Fearn. Are Charles Platt's detractors (including, presumably, yourself) trying to tell him that he absolutely must be narrow-minded about his choice of fiction if he reads Ballard? Oops-a-daisy, now; that's blatantly illogical as well as being unkind... Could it also be a case of projection? As to the assaults on Fearn: granted, he was never the most accomplished of writers but, if I remember correctly, at least he never adulterated his escapism with fifth-form political allegory, or attempted to sell a minor flair for story-telling as a public service..

So, as a gesture of limited solidarity with Charles; I remember reading in quick succession (in fact almost simultaneously, due to my habit of putting one book down half-finished and reading another before returning to it) THE DROUGHT, ADONAIS; the preface to ANDROCLES AND THE LION: Lewis' STUDIES IN WORDS; and one of Fearn's 'Golden Amazon' series. Each gave me a particular buzz, and no single book served to make the others redundant. As a bonus, study of Lewis's book suggested techniques with a common root used by Ballard and Fearn to opposing ends...A semantic key by any other name.. Well, you never know, really, do you? Fearn's epic was admittedly ephemeral but then I don't retain more than a hazy image of the Shaw, either."

* Well, it was Graham Hall not I who in the last issue said so tactfully that
* "anyone who has in the immediately-previous issue praised a no-good hack like

(concluded on page 48)

THE MICHAEL MOORCOCK COLUMN

Being not so much a column more a double-letter-of-comment on the previous two issues, which I have cobbled together into this form for Mike. PRW

I WAS interested to note that in SPECULATION-23 you claim me as one of the first users of the 'new wave' term. I was certainly not aware of it and am conscious of having tried to avoid using labels of any sort. I think it was the Americans who first started using the term - perhaps Judy Merril. These days I tend to use it only because it's in current usage and vaguely describes a certain kind of SF (though that's debatable). I'd be genuinely interested if someone could point out the first place I used the term. I talked a lot about modern SF at the time, but I can't remember calling it 'new wave'. I just re-read my maiden editorial in New Worlds 144 and was surprised at how little my views about SF have changed since I wrote it. Science fiction, however, has changed quite a bit. Some of it almost comes up to the claims I made for it then!

I enjoyed reading the debate, in spite of Dan Morgan consistently lowering the tone every time the discussion seemed to be getting somewhere. Even that was amusing at times. Ted Tubb for instance, whose best work still remains superbly enjoyable (he's one of the few I can still read with great pleasure) - though Ted doesn't seem to be aware that the Interminable Obscenity Debate often centres on the fact that there is, in fact, no legal definition, as such, of what is and what is not 'obscene'. And as for Dan Morgan, he shouldn't really complain that his 'intelligence' is being insulted when he seems incapable of recognising a Telcomp printout when he sees one. One feels that, even if a science fiction writer can't familiarise himself with a few modern writing techniques he should at least keep up to date on what's happening in the sciences.

Pam Bulmer's comments on the 1957 convention are fair enough (though I remember enjoying myself quite a lot - that may have been due to the little yellow pills Ray Nelson was kind enough to let me swallow). However, I've found SF conventions increasingly depressing. During the 1967 New York convention I hid most of the time because I was frightened, and I fled the Oxford convention in 1969 partly because I was horrified that the level of discussion was still so low and I couldn't have kept going much longer without being extremely impolite to some perfectly decent people whose interest in science fiction is not, it seems, a literary one (and I include a number of the writers there). And I was not alone in this feeling - you'll remember that quite a few people left much earlier than usual.

It wasn't your fault that the panel you were chairing was suddenyl used as a platform from which Don Wollheim could spout his nonsense (I remember you trying in vain to get the discussion back on to a reasonable basis) but that was the last straw for me. If I was undecided about staying for another day or so, Wollheim's speech, though it made me laugh, helped me make up my mind to go. One does begin to feel that the people who speak most at conventions are not representative of one's readers and yet one knows that there are readers with whom one can communicate because otherwise one wouldn't be making a living.

One literally does retreat in confusion and I sympathise with Jimmy Ballard's remarks, and, at times, find myself close to agreeing with them, even though I have many friends who are SF fans. I tend to be astonished by the ferocity of people whom I have liked and who are generally-speaking reasonable men and women.

I am surprised that people with whom I have spent quite a lot of time drinking and talking amicably suddenly get onto platforms and begin maligning me for actions and staements that they have attributed to me but which they know very well I have never made. Is this politics? If so, what are these politicians after? One begins to suspect that one has fallen into a nest of paranoid schizophrenics or, as it were, is trapped in a loony bin.

There are many people with whom I have strong differences of opinion, both inside and outside the SF world, and yet we seem able to air these differences without insulting one another, without ceasing to be friends. It could be an illusion of my own, I know, but it does seem to me that SF conventions have become quite peculiar affairs in the last few years - in which members of the 'old guard' gather together for mutual reassurance, to do little war dances togther and to complain about the way the world is going, rather like a bunch of retured army officers at an annual reunion. Is this what the Starborn have come to?

Thank god for John Brunner, Ken Bulmer and the few people who still seem prepared to bring a note of reason to the proceedings. I have a feeling that I'm not made of such stern stuff. To hear people I have liked braying like donkeys, betraying greatvareas of illiteracy and lack of understanding as they babble their incoherent insults at an audience that by and large seems to appreciate these performances, makes me genuinely sad and deeply depressed. Next time a convention comes round it will be that much easier to make the decision not to attend. Jim Diviney can rest assured - the last thing he needs to attend a convention are degrees in Philosophy and English Language.

I regret that there's nothing I can say about Heinlein that I haven't said before — i.e. that he's a mediocre writer whose work doesn't bear discussion in literary terms. As for the sociological and psychological terms in which his work would have to be discussed I doubt if you'd print my private view of poor old Heinlein's problems and I certainly haven't the right to voice it in public anyway. Live and let live.

Actually I <u>have</u> had a thought about Heinlein, I suppose. Have you ever noticed that those of an authoritarian disposition always claim that those of a non-authoritarian disposition wish to 'impose' their views on the authoritarian type which disagrees with them? I can imagine Heinlein saying, for instance, something like this: "Moorcock and his kind intend to force this so-called liberal, laissez-faire, live and let live philosophy onto decent men and women whether they agree with it or not". Note a similar sort of argument in many old-fashioned Tory politicians and writers (Angus Maude, Peregrine Worsthorne - Ronald Reagan if you like). This sort of tone also colours the pronouncements of people like Morgan the Gorgon and Don the Con. Their attitudes seem to indicate that they would, if they could, impose their views on people and that they therefore suspect that those they oppose would, given the opportunity, do the same. A thing which reactionaries of all types, in all spheres of human endeavour, seem to have in common. 'Golden Age' SF, of course, abounds with such authoritarian heroes and heroines.

Perhaps that is why Gully Foyle remains the only credible hero of that period, for me. A messiah figure he may have been, but his message was "We're all in this together" (STARS MY DESTINATION). Heinlein's message is basically the opposite; "The people need strong leaders".

(Cont/d).....

About a month passed before I received Mike's second letter, during which time I sent my own reply and a new issue of SPECULATION (PRW)

I'm afraid I can't comment much on the Heinlein stuff. Fritz Leiber compares him with Fleming and is probably right. I've nothing against good popular fiction but I don't like bad popular fiction. I've never finished a novel of Heinlein's that I can think of — not because I became angry with him, but because I lost interest. If I were to do a critique on Heinlein I would have to, in fairness, read most of his novels (as I did Fleming's for a polemic essay on Bond and his admirers) but I would only do that for a good sum of money. I doubt that my own work has been influenced by Heinlein, though it has been influenced, probably, by the writers whose style seems echoed in his.

I admire, for instance, Chandler and Hammett very much and I do not admire Spillane. The thing that distinguishes a good popular writer from a bad one is for me the quality of observation to be found. I see no real quality of observation (of character, environment, situation and so on) in Heinlein, just as I find none in Spillane.

I find it in some of Scott, Stevenson, Conan Doyle, Kipling, the thriller writers I have mentioned already, in Bester, Leiber, Harrison and a handful of other traditional SF writers, in James M. Cain, in many otherwise not very good writers not worth mentioning. It is an ability to look at the world and what it contains with a sympathetic, if sometimes caustic eye, to see individuals, however corrupt, as individuals. It is for me the central element of what people sometimes call intelligent popular fiction.

I find this quality of intelligence lacking in Heinlein. I see it lacking in most SF writers - particularly those most popular with the largest section of SF fandom. I wonder if SF fans have ever considered that there are beings of superior intelligence, with certain alien thought-processes difficult for the fans to understand, living and working amongst them? Rest assured, science fiction fandom, we mean you no harm.

In passing; You mention that Wollheim's brilliantly argued statement of the cold truth embarrassed you almost as much as if I had been sitting on a panel chaired by you and had launched an attack on Heinlein, with Heinlein in the audience. The answer there, of course, is that I would not have done so. By and large the SF fraternity is a feeble fraternity whose response to Heinlein's "a man's gotta do what a man's gotta do" philosophy is rarely one of emulation. If you want it in Heinlein's terms; most SF fans have no guts.

Which is probably why they admire Heinlein so much. They'll attack a man roundly in their fanzines; they'll talk fighting talk on panels; but if they come face-to-face with the object of their distaste, they'll assume weak placatory smiles and at best 'agree to disagree'. That, certainly, was one of the things I found unpleasant about the Oxford convention (see previous letter). Wollheim and I are not strangers. We have conversed at some length on various occasions. Last year he visited me and took me out to lunch. This year he told his audience what my intentions and delusions were, and it was the first time I had heard his opinion.

I have heard harsher and better-argued opinions from the lips of my friends concerning my intentions, and delusions, and I have been less amused by them than by Wollheim's, but I have never felt contempt for those people as I feel contempt for Wollheim and the sad sods he represents. And so I display some of the arrogance I condemn in Heinlein and display little of the sympathy and humanity I praise in better writers.

To be fair to myself (or, if you like, to rationalise to my advantage) I don't condemn such fans for their weaknesses but I do find them exceedingly irritating. And I find their support for an author like Heinlein understandable but not, in Heinlein's own terms, admirable.

Jimmy Ballard was puzzled when he was told you had taken offense to his request not to be sent further issues. His letters are never long at the best of times - he tends to stick to explicit replies to letters, which he usually scribbles on the back of the letter received. He wasn't interested in receiving further issues of SPECULATION. He said so. I've done the same in my time. So have other people I know. I shall probably do it again. There is a kind of fuzziness about much of the contents of any fanzine which tends to, if you give in (as you usually do) to the temptation to read it, leaves you puzzled and depressed. Doubtless many fans feel much the same after reading an issue of New Worlds. Usually they stop reading it.

As Chris Priest says - literary conventions of the kind held at Harrogate are as depressing as SF conventions. Perhaps more so. Which is why I, for one, didn't go to Harrogate and don't go to others. If I've been nasty to SF fans you should hear me, some time, on ag (avant garde) fans....

Letters; Galouye's innocent enthusiasm got a chuckle in this hardened household. Perry A. Chapdelaine's thirty-year diet of cold porridge has obviously made him bilious. Don Lundry makes a fair point, of course, that there are intelligent and literate people in SF fandom. On the other hand Ballard had no idea that the interview he gave would later turn up in a fanzine. He said no more to the interviewer than many SF writers (including some of those greatly admired by the majority of fans) have said in private.

I couldn't understand Bob Parkinson's comments addressed to me. There you go. I don't know what he means about composers. My favourites do not include Stravinsky, but I find that my favourites - Mozart, Beethoven, Ives, Schoenberg and Messiaen (the last being, I suppose, the only actual 'modern') are all equally, in their different terms, 'accessible'. I do not agree that standards have slipped so that you cannot tell whether the Beatles are good or not, and I've written the best part of a book (POPCORN) to prove it (this, incidentally, contains the Fleming essay). And I think I agree with Graham Hall about the Essex House books I've seen - I haven't read one yet that seems to come up to the claims made for them by those who enjoy them.

I agree with Gabe Eisenstein's comments on the 'new-old wave' controversy. Like him I am a conservative, hoping to preserve the best of the old and encourage the best of the new. Unlike him I didn't enjoy LOOK AT LIFE - 2001 (and I went to see it a second time just to make sure I hadn't been in a bad mood the first time) which I think was called by Chris Evans " 2001 B.C." I agree with you that it all boils down to what you enjoy reading. I don't agree with you that it is as big a mistake to dismiss Heinlein as it is to dismiss Ballard, if you are, as you seem to be, talking in terms of literary quality. Still, time will probably give perspective to that one and I could well be proven wrong when we discover that we have all been forgotten, or that, at best, our works are regarded as Curiosities of Literature, as something called "science" fiction.

I suppose, if I do manage to do another column after my present work stint is over, there is a case to be argued concerning the 'literal' and the 'poetic' approach in literature to science.

The New Worlds approach is, generally speaking, the poetic approach; the Analog approach is, generally speaking, the literal approach. Even when a poetic notion is expressed by John W. Campbell - as it often is - it is expressed in literal terms, i.e. (by my terms) tortured into the superficial appearance of a logical argument. There seems to be a moral need, here, to turn a poetic notion into a 'useful' one.

Jim Sallis once pointed out, with delight, that a piece by Campbell having something to do with crystals was, in fact, verse presented as prose. Campbell's response to many scientific ideas is definitely poetic, even if he does not seem to understand the ideas themselves too clearly. I offer, without cynicism, that John W. Campbell might well be a great loss to the world of poetry. There is small comfort, I suppose, in the view that, indirectly, he might well have influenced many lesser poets. Like many poets, Campbell is a poor thinker but a marvelous creator.

Michael Moorcock, 1969

THE MELTING POT (concluded)

* Vargo Statten...has dealt his critical credentials a death-blow". Without
* going quite so far I'll comment that anyone who likes both Fearn and Ballard
* BUT NOT Heinlein must have rather unusual standards... and should not seek to
* offer those standards as any sort of hard-and-fast guideline for others to
* accept. At a risk of boring people to death I'll add that I don't think
* there is anything blatantly illogical in my position; I just don't see how
* it is that Fearn can be accepted and enjoyed (and his mistakes freely admitted)
* without equal tolerance being shown to Heinlein. After all, Heinlein's work
* may be altogether different in intent from that of Ballard - but it is surely
* the same sort of thing that Fearn tried to achieve and should by logic there-
* fore possess at least as many virtues as Fearn's. Or does it boil back to
* the fact that Heinlein was rash enough to include a firm political (philosoph-
* ical?) standpoint in his fiction, and it is that which causes the antipathy,
* not the literary standards of his novels at all? Enough said, I think.

* There have been rather fewer letters on the last issue than I might have
* expected, and this combined with a longer lettercolumn have reduced the back-
* long almost to manageable proportions. I Also Hear From... Harry Warner,
* again, who shall be quoted at more length when he mentions the 'Irish Mafia'
* and also what Thackeray said about the world last century. Graham Charnock
* sends a long letter inspired by the fact that he disagrees with Chris Priest
* in his column on whether or not the novel will survive in its present form.
* And calls Heinlein a "dead issue". Remind me to kick you for not doing that
* interview with Michael Moorcock, Graham, that someone else did for SFR. Then
* there's Larry W. Propp who acquired an issue from Bob Tucker (he won't get any
* more because Bob's subscription has expired.) I heard from James Koval a long
* time ago, who says "obscenity - in its 'purest' form - is literate pornography"
* Maybe so; I'm not that interested. Jannick Storm asks me to disclaim that the
* audience applauded Dan Morgan for his 'attack' on Ballard at the Oxford con-
* vention; Sorry, Jannick, they did. Jannick also says that in discussions with
* SF fans he finds that the more illiterate they were the more contemptuous they
* were of Ballard's work. Sorry again, Jannick. It doesn't prove anything. Bet
* you the illiterate ones didn't like Zelazny, Theodore Sturgeon or Leiber,say.
* And it doesn't follow that the more literate readers are, the more they like
* Ballard. Gary Woodman, in Australia, sends a friendly letter, handwritten
* unfortunately, and asks why don't I print addresses in my letter-column?
* Because too many otherseditors notice these things, is one reason; even if I
* wanted more competiton some of my correspondants don't want fanzines. Finally,
* Ian Williams writes an interesting letter - he is a new reader, a teacher
* evidently, and he encloses a review of NOVA that I can't use (see Pamela
* Bulmer's review this time) and a number of provocative comments. He says also
* that he's baffled by the cries of outraged and outmoded Victorian prudery
* against BUG JACK BARRON. I'm also baffled; WHAT cries? Not in SPECULATION.
* And that seems to be it. I enjoy doing the letter column, write again, please!

SPECULATION BOOK GUIDE

The Guide contains mention of every SF title received since the previous issue of SPECULATION. Longer reviews in 'The Critical Front' (Pages 17-26) include NOVA by Samuel Delany (Gollancz 30s; Doubleday $4.95): THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS by Ursula LeGuin (Ace 'Special' 75c; Walker & Co.); THE NEW S.F. ed. Langdon Jones (Hutchinson, 30s); THE TIME DWELLERS by Michael Moorcock (Hart-Davis 30s) BAREFOOT IN THE HEAD by Brian W. Aldiss (Faber & Faber, 30s).

In addition I hope the following issue will treat at length the following titles: THE PALACE OF ETERNITY by Bob Shaw (Ace, 75c); ISLE OF THE DEAD by Roger Zelazny (Ace, 60c); A ROSE FOR ECCLESIASTES by Roger Zelazny (Hart-Davis 30s; also as Ace title 'FOUR FOR TOMORROW', 45c); THE AGE OF THE PUSSYFOOT by Frederik Pohl (Gollancz 25s; Ballantine 75c); THE MEN IN THE JUNGLE by Norman Spinrad (Avon, 95c); THE BLACK CORRIDOR by Michael Moorcock (Ace, 75c); MAGELLAN by Colin Anderson (Gollancz 28s, not listed as science fiction); QUICKSAND by John Brunner, (Sidgwick & Jackson, 27s).

THE MAN IN THE MAZE by Robert Silverberg. (Sidgwick & Jackson, 24s)
- An entertaining story owing something to Budrys' ROGUE MOON, although here the fascination lies almost entirely with the details of the alien 'maze' which the story describes. Ultimately there is no explanation of this, and I found the human characterisations insufficiently interesting. But a very interesting story nonetheless, better than both THORNS and THE TIME HOPPERS, in my opinion.

THE SWORDS OF LANKHMAR by Fritz Leiber (Hart-Davis, 30s)
- Some of you may remember our review of the Ace edition in SPECULATION-17. To me this is the sort of 'heroic fantasy' I like best, handled by Leiber with just the right touches of excitement, suspense, and wit. There have been three books in this 'Swords' series from Ace; this is the best, and the only complete novel.

ORBIT-4, ed Damon Knight (Rapp & Whiting, 28s).
- I found the nine stories here rather better than the previous number of this series of collections. Outstanding is Robert Silverberg's 'Passengers', which is just about the best short story Silverberg has written. Then there are other first-class items like 'This Corruptible', principally an 'idea' story and R.A. Lafferty's 'One At A Time'. (Lafferty is one of the most individualistic writers in SF today). I didn't like stories by James Sallis ('A Few Last Words') or Carol Emshwillers' 'Animal'. Maybe the fault is in me? The balance is of good to fine stories by Kate Wilhelm, Charles L. Harness, Harlan Ellison, Vernor Vinge (this one very much a composite Poul Anderson-Jack Vance 'other world in its youth' adventure). 254 pages.

THE AGE OF THE PUSSYFOOT by Frederik Pohl (Gollancz 25s; Ballantine 75c)
- From Galaxy a few years back, and obviously inspired by Ettinger's suggestion of 'freezing' the newly-dead for eventual revival. From what Fred Pohl says as an introductory note, he believes it quite possible that this may come about; and for that reason this novel may have more than usual relevance to the real world. That's the background. As a story it is fast-moving with more than a taste of DRUNKARD'S WALK as well as Sheckley's IMMORTALITY INC. Worth getting.

NEBULA AWARD STORIES-4, ed. Poul Anderson. (Gollancz, 35s).
- I'm not quite sure how much work can be involved with editing a volume such as this where the stories are more-or-less chosen in advance. What Poul Anderson has done however is to write an introduction that takes immense pains to offend absolutely nobody, and to use a long essay by Professor Willis McNelly of California State College on the Best SF of the Year. I am hoping that in the not-too

distant future Prof. McNelly will write for SPECULATION; in the menatime it is clear that he doesn't altogether agree with the official SFWA choices for 'Best' particularly so far as the novel selection is concerned, where he tips John Boyds' THE LAST STARSHIP FROM EARTH. Stories include 'Mother to the World' by Richard Wilson, Nebula prizewinner from ORBIT, Terry Carr's 'The Dance of the Changer and Three' (3rd appearance I know of so far for this one, and Kate Wilhelm's 'The Planners' (ORBIT). Thus we have less and less stories going into more and more collections. Others are H.H. Hollis' 'Sword Game', 'The Listeners' from James E.Gunn, & 'Dragonrider' from Anne McCaffrey. Not really the best of 1968, but they'll do. Useful list of Nebula Award-winners, and In Memoriam.

MAGELLAN by Colin Anderson (Gollancz 28s) - not listed as SF, this novel is something of an oddity, though obviously owing much to standard SF themes. To be reviewed in the next issue.
THE SECOND LIFE OF SUSAN GANIER (Leslie Frewin Publishers,35s)
- A documentary on reincarnation; my wife found it almost convincing.
EXTRA-SENSORY PERCEPTION AND YOU by Hans Holzer (Leslie Frewin, 30s)
- an investigation into ESP, with many case-histories of mediums, etc.

PAPERBACKS

PAVANE by Keith Roberts (Ace 'Special', 95c) - A finely-detailed book, a little slow reading but rewarding, spoilt by an ending of sheerest falsity. As Buz Busby points out in Cry, the book deserves its proper conclusion in line with what has gone before; even if this did cause offence to the religious-minded.
THE JAGGED ORBIT by John Brunner (Ace special, 95c) Reviewed elsewhere.
RITE OF PASSAGE by Alexei Panshin (Ace Special, 75c) Reissued, review SPEC-21)
THE BLACK CORRIDOR by Michael Moorcock (Ace Special, 75c) also Mayflower (UK).

OTHER ACE TITLES: FINAL WAR & OTHERS by K.M. O'Donnell/TREASURE OF TAU CETI by John Rackham (75c); TOWER OF THE MEDUSA by Lin Carter/KAR KABALLA by George H. Smith (75c); THE STAR VENTURERS by Ken Bulmer/THE FALL OF THE DREAM MACHINE by Dean R. Koontz (60c); TIMES WITHOUT NUMBER by John Brunner (60c, reissue); SERVANTS OF THE WANKH by Jack Vance (50c); ARMAGEDDON 2419 A.D. by P.F. Nowlan (60c); DARK PIPER by Andre Norton (60c): OPERATION TIME-SEARCH by Andre Norton (60c); THE REBEL OF RHADA by Robert Cham Gilman (60c); THE MAD KING by Edgar Rice Burroughs (60c);

OTHER PAPERBACKS: WE ALL DIED AT BREAKAWAY STATION by Richard C. Meredith, Ballantine 75c); NOMADS OF GOR by John Norman (BB,75c); FIGURES OF EARTH by James Branch Cabell (BB fantasy, 95c); DRAGONS, ELVES AND HEROES ed. Lin Carter (BB fantasy 95c): THE YOUNG MAGICIANS ed Lin Carter (BB fantasy 95c).
THE MEN IN THE JUNGLE by Norman Spinrad (Avon, 95c); THE FARTHEST REACHES (collection of shorts) Pocket Books 75c; SF TERROR TALES (Pocket Books 75c) 14 GREAT TALES OF ESP, intro by J.W.Campbell, (Gold Medal 75c); 13 GREAT STORIES OF SF. ed Groff Conklin (Gold Medal 75c); NINE TOMORROWS by Isaac Asimov,(Gold Med.75c)

TWO DOZEN DRAGON EGGS by Donald Wollheim (Powell Sci?fi, 95c); Yes, by Donald Wollheim, not edited. You may not have realised, like me, that Wollheim is also a successful writer. These stories span many years (copyrights not given) and in general are entertaining, unusual ideas. Some have been printed elsewhere. There is an introduction by Forest J. Ackerman and a preface by Don Wollheim himself.

REVIEWERS WANTED! My little note last issue brought a surprising response, but there are still exclusive positions remaining for SPECULATION reviewers. If you are interested, read Fred Pohl's column, Page 4, to see what sort of thing I'd like to publish, if I could get it, and if still keen after that get in touch.