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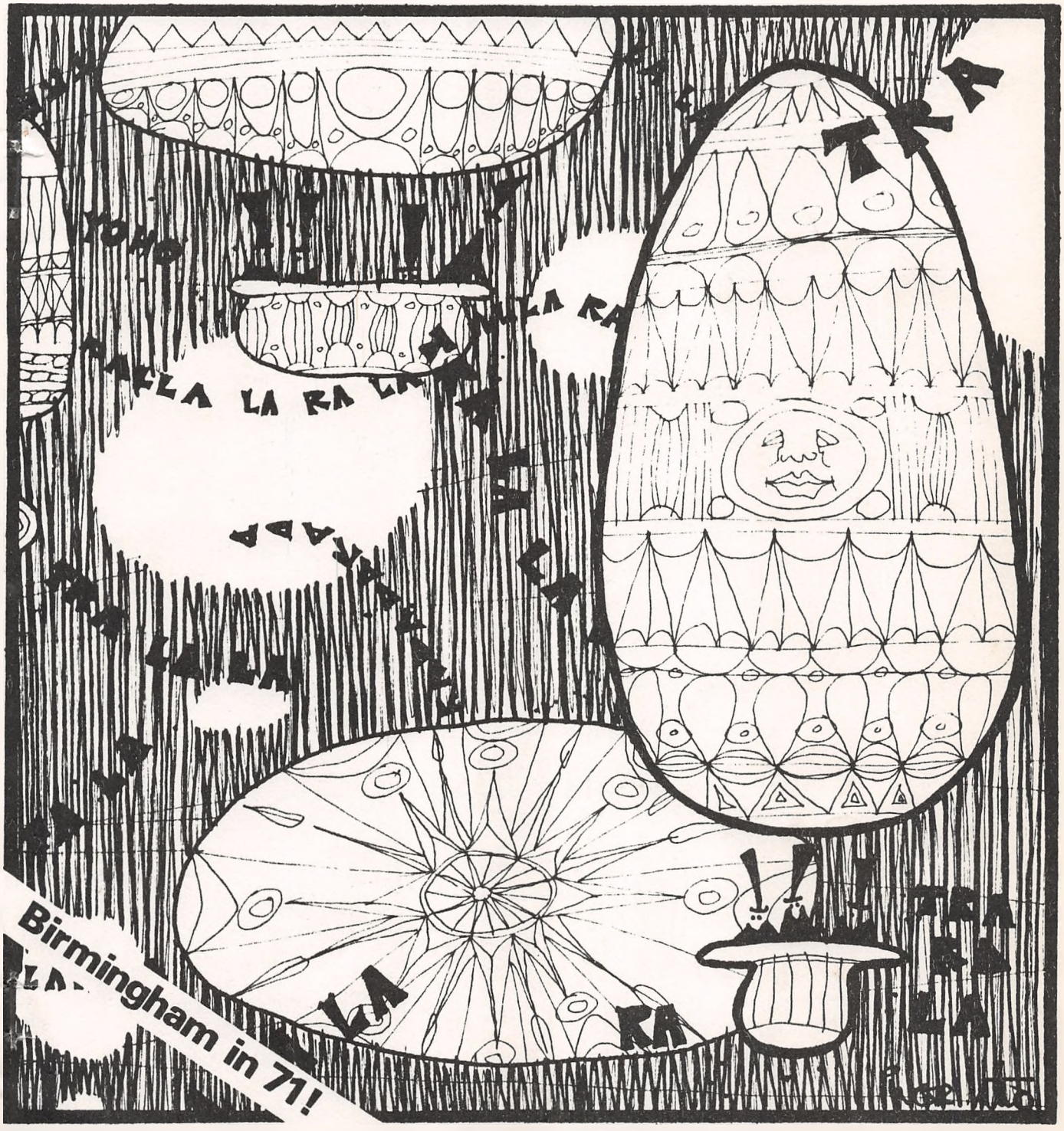

DAVID I. MASSON: SOME THOUGHTS ON LANGUAGE IN SCIENCE FICTION

Speculation

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Cover: "Balloon Jamboree on Counter-Earth" by Ivor Latto.

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THE VIEW FROM HERE (Editorial)

Beware of the organising type! The whole world can be divided into those who take a certain weird delight in organising and those who follow, and science fiction fandom is no exception. There are a few people - and George Hay is one, I myself am fast becoming another, I'm afraid - who persist in getting involved with things they perhaps shouldn't.

I recently saw George at his 'Environmental Consortium' (which is a fascinating sort of offshoot of an architects/surveyor's office) during a business trip to London, and over lunch at the Family Planning Clinic (no kidding, if I may make that pun) we talked over some ideas to put some life into the science fiction scene in this country.

When people say that "it's all happening" it is usually an empty shout to cover the fact that really NOTHING is happening. But you know there really are any number of things taking place at the moment. The trouble is that not enough people ever seem to hear about them, and that the same few organising types have to run themselves ragged in doing all the work. Not that we don't enjoy it! Brian Aldiss wondered about my motives at the Sci-Con at Easter (and more about that episode later) but the simple answer is that it's fun to have a finger in lots of different pies. The fact that all this organising business can be done around my major interest, science fiction literature, makes it that much more rewarding. I like to see the results, too. Now if only I could make some money out of it all!

But one of the functions SPECULATION can usefully fulfill is to spread all this information on forthcoming events to the people who should theoretically be interested. First on the agenda is:-

EASTERCON '22, the annual British Science Fiction Convention.

As you've probably heard by now (or should have heard at any rate) I am the poor fool who is responsible for the organisation of next year's British convention over Easter weekend 9-11th April 1971.

One of the reasons why this issue of SPECULATION is a month late is because I have been heavily involved in junketing around almost every major hotel in the English Midlands in search of the very best location for next year's convention. Selection of a really suitable hotel is the single most important factor in holding a convention - and we've found the one we want. But I can't tell you now which one it will be!

Not yet, at any rate. I did hope to announce our choice with this number, but would prefer to wait a little longer until the agreements are down in black and white and are duly signed to everyone's complete satisfaction. I can reveal that we have chosen a large hotel in the centre of a Midlands city, easily accessible by road and rail. The hotel is reasonably-priced with comfortable rooms and everything that a convention needs - see back cover for more details - and this should be one of Britain's best and biggest conventions yet. Register now for full information, progress reports, etc.

Guest-of-Honour is Brian Aldiss, and I am hoping that more than usual of our native British authors and some of the American fans and professionals will be present. So far as programme events are concerned our committee (Vernon Brown of the Aston University Group; Roger Peyton of the BSFA and my old pal Bob Rickard) have lots of original ideas. How about a Fan Guest of Honour, for instance, and a dramatic performance? Can we get a local cinema to show '2001'? Let's have more accent on fandom and fanzines - why not have NASA talking on the space programme? And our programme items (please don't laugh; I mean it) will begin on time.

There are a lot more ideas. One of them involves money, which we need just as badly as everyone else needs it. Which is why we want you to register now. At the time of writing, 100 people have registered as members at 10/- per time (or $1.50 - we do want to encourage overseas members even if you can't attend). That is a nice round number - I aimed at a hundred at Sci-Con itself but came away with 86. Which is not too bad. But the real breakthrough will come if we get our Arts Council Grant; the application is already being considered and there are other, even stranger ideas up my sleeve yet!

One more thing. Wherever we hold the convention, it will not be in Birmingham itself. The 'Birmingham in '71' tag on the cover refers to the location of the organisers, not of the event, regretably. There is still no suitable hotel here although - with the decision to build the National Exhibition Centre at Elmdon - how about a WorldCon here in 1975 or so?

SPECULATION CONFERENCE, June 14th 1970

Arrangements for this conference have proceeded smoothly enough aside from minor panics over the programme booklet for the day. English readers will find a leaflet enclosed with this issue; try to come along, tickets are only 10/- for the day, with speakers including Blish, Aldiss, Bulmer, Philip Strick & Willis McNelly. Write to Booking Office, Midlands Arts Centre, Cannon Hill, B'ham 12.

OTHER PROJECTS, IDEAS AND BRAINSTORMS

LeRoy Kettle writes from the University of Warwick at Coventry to tell me about a radio station which the University plans to open in October, and in the running of which he is involved. He hopes to begin a series of SF programmes including interviews with authors, reading of stories, etc, and promises to plug both the Eastercon and SPECULATION over the air.

Mentioning radio, my office telephone rang the other day and a man asked if we could talk about science fiction. I said I didn't particularly mind, and we went into details of a programme being planned by the BBC, which he would like SPECULATION to help promotoe. The interesting thing here is that in conjunction

with the programme they would intend to run a competition for the best amateur SF story, which is something our readers might like to pick up. The BBC-man promised to send me more details when available and I will pass them on. I told him that he would get a load of rubbish submitted immediately, but he seemed to be expecting this. George Hay put him on to me; I should have known! (Incidentally, have you seen George's anthology from Panther, 'The Disappearing Future'? I hear that it may have been banned from W.H. Smith's because "no-one has ever heard of George Hay". Are they going completely mad at Smith's?)

Only this Sunday I heard Brian Aldiss and Dr Christopher Evans nattering away about '2001' on BBC-4. I was quietly digging my garden (it's rather a case of civil engineering at the moment) when Jack Cohen, Professor of Zoology at the Birmingham University and a keen SF fan roared up in a huge gust of misplaced enthusiasm with bearded friend Bob Parkinson (editor of Vector)in tow. While I was showing Bob around my 'study', trying to pick each other's brains, Jack stormed up the stairs shouting that"Aldiss is on about 2001!", and we were just able to tune my portable from 'Family Favourites' to Brian's rich, fruity tones and the closing remarks of an interesting discussion.

I was digging the garden, by the way, in preference to writing this editorial, because the Sun was shining brightly and science fiction seemed not quite as important as usual. I've finally found out where house-bricks come from, as well. They grow deep underground, like truffles and other subterranean lifeforms, and have to be dug up laboriously to the surface when required.

Back to the world of the Organisational Man. I recently had a fascinating note from Stanford University in California to the effect that they are running an Institute for Science Fiction and Fantasy, on June 22- August 15th 1970. This will offer four courses in conjunction with the Stanford Summer Session, with such speakers as Philip Klass (William Tenn), James E. Gunn, Harlan Ellison, Frank Herbert, and a number of academic faculty staff. For detailed information on admission, fees, housing, etc, write now to the Director, Institute for Science Fiction and Fantasy, Summer Session Office, Stanford University, Stanford, California 94305, USA.

The above is the sort of thing which I would like to see being done by one of our own British universities, and in comparison to which the June SPECULATION conference, though a step in the right direction, is very small fry. Five years, anyone?

This year's NEBULA AWARDS go to winners Ursula K. LeGuin for best novel, THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS; Harlan Ellison for 'A Boy And His Dog' (novella); Samuel R. Delany for 'Time Considered As A Helix of Semi-Precious Stones (novelette); and Robert Silverberg for 'Passengers' (short-story). The parallel Hugo Awards will be given this year at the World Convention at Heidelberg, and have been characterised by extremely bad publicity, worse than usual for a WorldCon. (I offered to circulate nomination forms and details through SPECULATION, but -) As a result, British fans will be more-or-less unable to nominate for the Hugos, since no distribution of ballots has been carried out in this country and nominations were required to be in by 1st May. The first rule of successful P.R. is: "Find what channels are available - then use them!"

People who want to attend Heicon can obtain further details from Archie Mercer, 10 Lower Church Lane, St Michaels, Bristol 2. Unfortunately Eileen and I will be unable to attend Heidelberg, although our Eastercon representative will be there in the shape of Vernon Brown. Give him your money!

Back at the beginning of this tirade I complained that not enough people in Britain actually do anything about science fiction fandom. Like the dinosaurs we are in danger of being supplanted by a new-fangled species more adapted to the changing conditions; in this case (shudder) comics fandom.

Did you know that there is a flourishing comics/fantasy fandom in this country? I had hardly encountered them until recently when I discovered, as some sort of Cosmic irony, that Birmingham was the de facto centre of their activities, with an informal sort of local-group, scads of fanzines, and the organising committee of a national convention which is being held weekend 22-24 May this year. Parallel fandom. When Roger Peyton and I used to hang around Hudson's to recruit people for the old BrumGroup, we had visions of meeting someone else doing the same thing! What has happened is that orthodox SF fandom has grown so feeble in this country over the last 5 years that a new lot of people have grown up in ignorance of established institutions and traditions. (This fandom doesn't appear to have heard of the BSFA but has their own association).

I'm probably exaggerating a little, and the subject-matter is slightly different, but comics/fantasy fandom has all the youthful enthusiasm that more staid and unenterprising SF fans appear to have lost. For instance, while I'm messing around with different hotels for the Eastercon, trying to find one that is the right size, not too expensive, and convenient for all points of the compass, these people book huge hotels at places like Leeds and Sheffield. They fail to understand why SPECULATION is still duplicated while their fanzines circulate 2000-odd (or print that number) and are produced by litho. ("only costs £150 or so").

The comics/fantasy people are at what I would call the 'primitive' stage as yet; their fanzines may be printed but they can't spell "weird". They use expensive convention hotels but make a mess of organisational details, or so I hear. But the point surely is that they are doing something and are not afraid to think big. Comics/fantasy fandom may be at a stage we were at some 20-odd years ago ('a bunch of bug-eyed monster enthusiasts') before science fiction became respectable, but they can certainly show a thing or two to some of our older members who may have been living in the past for far too long.

WHAT I SAID TO GEORGE HAY WHEN THE BAILIFFS CAME:

Now, finally, I can get to the subject which may interest you the most; that of Sci-Con '70, the 1970 convention of the British Science Fiction Association, held over Easter weekend at the Royal Hotel, London.

To be blunt, it was a pretty awful convention.

I wrote a short report for Locus which wasn't exactly complimentary, and have already warned George Hay that I'm going to complain. This years' convention was the worst I've ever attended, and I dread to think of the impression it must have made upon people who had ventured to one of these events for their first time. And yet strangely enough, I quite enjoyed it myself, and Jack Cohen (who was one of the newcomers) said it was one of the best weekends he had had in his life. It shows that a con. is what you make of it - one has to overcome the surroundings and make your own fun.

When George Hay took on the organisational work last year, he made one fatal mistake. That was in his choice of hotel. Everything else followed logically from that, with encouragement from another factor I'll detail below. It may be simply that London is so completely unsuitable with regard to hotels that an SF convention should never again be held in the capital. I don't know. But the Royal Hotel -- !

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S T O N E   S O U P

By Frederik Pohl

(SF review column No.2)

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Well, sir. I had it in my heart this month to review Brian Aldiss's BAREFOOT IN THE HEAD, and along came Jim Blish with a copy of the English edition and beat me to the punch. To an American this is a foul blow. We know perfectly well how the trans-Atlantic time difference is supposed to go, and it's the other way. But there it is, and what are we to do about it?

One thing, of course, is that we might review Jim's review. What is wrong with that is that, apart from detail, I don't much disagree with what he says. Jim cites James Joyce as an obvious Big Daddy to the school of writing of which HEAD is a part, as you might expect since Jim is a Joycean of green-fez status, having made the obligatory pilgrimages to Dublin and Trieste; I think I might have leaned more on the echoes of Lewis Carroll and Marcel Proust. But that sort of nit-picking is of very little interest and I could not expect you all to sit still for it.

So here's what let's do. Let's do exactly what Anatole France and I cautioned against last time and discuss some generalisations. In particular let us take a statement that Jim made about HEAD and I would have, and that all of us have made about any number of other books, and see if it has any meaning. The general form of the statement is:-

> "This is a damned difficult book, but it will repay the effort of reading it."

To begin with, I doubt very much that that sort of statement is any more true of BAREFOOT IN THE HEAD than it is of, say, any random book by Jackie Susanne or Percy Keese Fitzhugh. All books are difficult. You have to have learned to read to manage them in the first place, and you have to keep yourself turning the pages to get through them in the second. And all books repay the effort of reading them. Some pay off better than others, to be sure. But all give some sort of reward. I say this out of the hardwon experience of a man who, stranded in many a hotel room, has derived some benefit from the study of such unpromising literary works as the Italian editions of Lufthansa timetables and bedside copies of THE BOOK OF MORMON. On one dull Marcon afternoon, the Columbus, Ohio, telephone book produced some interesting conjugations of names for me. The DC-8 emergency procedures card, one sleepless flight from Los Angeles to Honolulu, gave me my first inkling that the Japanese language could be understood. I have cited these particular examples to show that what one gets out of a work does not rest wholly on what the author puts into it (indeed, in most of these cases there wasn't any "author"), so that even if the general statement above were both true and relevant, it would not tell us anything worth knowing about the merits of a book.

Now, techniques exist whereby sense-free statements can be amended into statements which do carry information of a kind. One such technique is to introduce relativity to the argument. Like this:

If I read a Lufthansa timetable, it is because I want to read something and the only other printed words available to me are matchbox covers. If I had a newspaper handy I would read that in preference to the timetable; if I had a Doc Smith Lensman book I would read that in preference to the newspaper; a new Heinlein in preference to the old Doc Smith, etc.

Performing a series of mind experiments like this, one might come up with some sort of ordering of values for literary works. In each pairing it is easy enough to decide which of the two books will yield "more" (let us not try to say more what, just yet) per erg or calorie or foot-pound of effort. Whatever the "more" is, whether insights or information or pleasure or shock or whatever, one might work out a sort of scale of values in which the "content" of a work divided by the "difficulty" yields a value Q, such that by comparing the Q for VALLEY OF THE DOLLS with the Q for BAREFOOT IN THE HEAD, one might put numbers into our general statement, thus making it relativistic and useful. I am not proposing to do this - I am not even proposing that anyone else try to do it, but if in principle it can be done it suggests a way in which we objectivist dupes might feel free to presume to call one book "better" than another. There would still be many a difficulty to be resolved — differences in taste; incommensurability (for how do you measure space opera against satire?); etc. But we don't have to resolve those difficulties to make use of this quantification, because the mere fact that we propose quantifying our terms at all leads us to a useful discovery. That discovery is:

There are two factors which are involved in our "Q". One is the richness of the ore — the content of the work in question. The other is the effort needed to extract the content.

You see how it works? $Q = C/E$. The quality of a book is equal to the content divided by the effort required. A "difficult" book is one that has a high "E". But the higher the "E", the lower the "Q". Therefore, the more difficult the book, the worse it is.

Does this mean that a difficult book is a lousy book ? No, because the equation is in relativistic terms. If the "C" of the book — the substance, the content, the essence of the book — is high enough it can stand even a relatively high "E" and still come out a good book indeed. But difficulty is not in itself a favourable factor; it is an unfavourable one.

If I have belaboured this point I apologise, but you see the way of the world is that most people in the critical line of work appear to assume the opposite is true. It is certain that they have appeared so to many writers, because it is perfectly obvious that a number of stories have been gimmicked, hoked, flummoxed, and complicated in such fashion as to make them more difficult to read in the hope of attracting an admiring comment from the critics. Often enough, the stratagem appears to have worked. Complex statements are markedly favoured over simple ones.

To be sure there are concepts which require complex statements. There is no royal road to mathematics; there is no way of explaining, say, Gödel's proof in sugar-coated form; there is no better way of writing ULYSSES than the way it is written. (Cont/d)...

But it is easier to be obscure than to be profound, and the bookstalls are flooded with texts more cryptic than Joyce, containing no original thought at all. Indeed the flying saucer and astrological and dianetics books (not to mention the texts of such other cults as Freudian psychology and Christian metaphysics) are frequently, if not invariably, marked by opacity of style and absence of content. To this flood of drivel science fiction has contributed its share. We have been shrieked at and drowned in images. We have been offered trick typography and tortured tenses. We have been exposed to every "experimental" complexity that transition abandoned in the '30s, warmed-up as something new and daring. And what a bore it all is!

As a writer who would like to see his job made easier, I admit that it is tempting to create ink blots instead of stories, trusting to the reader to put in his own meaning as in any other form of Rohrschach test. But I do not think this practice should be rewarded. It seems to me that a writer who makes his meaning accessible deserves more respect than a writer who makes it obscure. And if he doesn't have a meaning to reveal to us, if like the monkey in the fable all he contributes is a stone and we readers have to supply the ingredients for his stew. why then let him write political speeches or TV scripts where the lack of content won't matter, and leave science fiction alone.

A writer who I wish very much would follow that advice is John Lymington, whose newest novel (TEN MILLION YEARS TO FRIDAY, Doubleday) seemed to me at first to be intended as a parody of Ballard until I noticed that it wasn't funny. I won't say that this is the worst book on Doubleday's rapidly-worsening SF list, but I will say that if there's a worse one I'm not going to read it. The thing starts out with some forty pages of Cornish quaintness and sex play before we get to the science fictiony part, which has to do with a great beast that has been hiding underground for millions of years. How do we know it's there? A scientist has built a machine for viewing the past and he has watched it. Somebody asks him how the machine works, and ...

> "He explained simply what he had done. He had selected seventeen stars at an equal distance from Earth, and covering all planes. He had then bounced signals off the stars and received them back in the barn on seventeen receivers. These signals were then retransmitted from small UHF aerials in the vastest part of the barn and a picture recreated on sensitised air in the space in the middle of the aerial bombardment."

See what I mean by stone soup? But it is not the worst example of sententious emptiness you get when you acquire this volume, although the other example I wish to call to your attention is of a kind I consider it ordinarily unfair to review. It's from the jacket copy, and I generally think it is cross enough for an author to bear if he is held responsible for his own words without being required to defend the ditherings of some editorial assistant.

But in this case it seems to me it may not be unfair at all because the jacket copy winds up like this:

> "John Lymington has created a science fiction tale which exceeds the sometimes narrow confines of sheer pleasure and enjoyment. All the pathos, hope, dignity and brilliance of man is pitted against his all too dominant and gross stupidity, fear and ignorance — especially of the unknown. There would be no final victor but man could be the defeated in almost incalculable terms."

Well, what's your guess? Lymington does his own jacket copy? Or, fearful thought, there are two persons capable of darkening counsel by words like these?

Two other recent Doubleday offerings are better, without being really very good. Philip Jose Farmer's LORD TYGER is a Tarzan retread. There's this madman, see, who was so taken by the Tarzan stories that he devoted his immense fortune to making them come true, hiring kidnappers to steal a baby, attempting to have him brought up by great apes — Well, never mind all that. To the Burroughs canon Farmer adds great gobs of sex in all the usual forms — anal, oral, coital, masturbatory, interspecial — you know. The result is kind of awful, and I think I know why; the combination of Portnoy and Jean Jacques Rousseau seems to unite the silliest parts of both kinds of fable; it takes a lot out of the spectacle of the noble savage battling the depraved blacks when he has been buggering them in the chapter before. But that's not what I really dislike about this piece of Doubleday Science Fiction. What I really dislike about this piece of Doubleday Science Fiction is that I cannot think whatever gave anyone the notion that there was anything resembling science fiction about it.

Then there is Gordon R. Dickson's short-story collection, DANGER — HUMAN which is an example of writing complexly about simple things in other than experimental ways. That's a turgid sentence for you, but what I mean to say is that Gordie doesn't write in acrostics like Brian Aldiss or pinwheels like Harlan Ellison, nor does he practice his latrine-wall vocabulary or reverse the time arrow at will. Yet he does investigate very deeply some ideas of only moderate intrinsic significance. Some of the ideas in DANGER — HUMAN are so simple that one hesitates to call them SF at all; change a proper noun or two and 'An Honourable Death' for instance, could have been about the Jesuits among the Iroquois, and 'Call Him Lord' might have concerned, say, the Imperial Romans in Boadicea's Britain. Gordies other bad habit exemplified here is a playfulness that almost seems to be contempt for the reader. I mean, look at 'Flat Tiger'. It is a joke. Tigers, it says, are a galaxywide species, and if you pump them full of a certain gas they can be the engines of your spaceships. (One of his tigers has run out of gas, which is why it's a "flat tiger".) Or, in 'James', he says that snails are the oldest, wisest race in the universe, and they'd tell us the secret of everything if only we'd be patient enough to let them get it out. Well, all right, there's humour in there somewhere, but because it goes on and on it becomes the kind of humour we used to get in the old Charlie Chan movies where Warner Oland is in a two-shot with the mumbling shaking rabbit's-foot-clutching black man, and the fun is making fun.

I don't mean to suggest that DANGER — HUMAN is a bad book, in the monumentally awful way of the Lymington. It just isn't a very good book. What it does have to say it says too often. Dickson's variety of SF is written mostly in terms of individuals trying to bridge a cultural and technological gap. Earth is Earth, he says, and Space is Space, and never the twain shall meet. He says it over and over again in these thirteen stories, and once would have been enough.

I must have read, or tried to read, a couple dozen SF books since I wrote the last column, and actually finished ten or twelve. I did find, let's see, four I liked. Two of the four are fantasy rather than SF, and the other two are pleasant rather than overwhelming; but still that's four books that I thought worth reading. The funny thing is that all four were published by Ballantine. The funnier thing still is that Ballantine published five other books in this period and they range from poor to ghastly; so it is not that Betty Ballantine has impeccable taste, or that my subconscious forces me to like what is published by the people who publish most of my own books.

I do have a tentative theory which would explain this datum, and that is that publishers are simply publishing too damned much SF these days and so even publishers who can tell the good from the bad are publishing some bad to keep their lists full. But I don't want to go into that, so let's get to the four books I liked.

Both fantasies are reissues. LAND OF UNREASON (Fletcher Pratt and L. Sprague de Camp) read light and lively when it was an Unknown novel in 1941, and it reads light and lively now. It starts in wartime England, where an American named Fred Barber gets careless with the Little people and winds up in fairyland, where he turns out to be Frederick Barbarossa. It is fun, and there is no point in dissecting it; there is however a lot of point in reading it, because you will probably enjoy it. There is an introduction by Lin Carter, as editor of the Ballantine adult-fantasy series; he has somehow got it into his head that Yorkshire is in Ireland, but apart from that the introduction does no real harm.

Carter also provided LUD-IN-THE-MIST, a reissue of even older vintage, and a book which I had not only never read before but had never heard of. It is gentle, thoughtful, persuasive and entrancing in the Tolkien style; it is the story of a city that never existed in a country that lies somewhere between Graustark and Poictesme. Read it. The author is a woman named Hope Mirrlees, and I am told she still lives and flourishes in England (Carter in his introduction wasn't sure). If she turns up at an Eastercon and I know about it ahead of time, I'll try to be there. She should be urged to write more.

The SF titles I liked are both examples of that little domestic pleasure of a reviewer's life, the unexpectedly enjoyable small book. One is PHOENIX by Richard Cowper; the other is ALIEN ISLAND by T.L. Sherred. If I tell you that ALIEN ISLAND is a first-contact story in which primitive Earth falls apart at the seams when confronted with the moral and technological superiority of the Great Galactics, and that PHOENIX has to do with Earth gone barbaric after the destruction of our machine civilisation, your response will be a huge yawn, right? You've seen all that before, haven't you? Indeed you have; but there's life left in these tired old themes.

The way in which Sherred keeps his morality play alive is that he shies clear of symbolism. The characters are not animated poses labeled "Greed", "Power", or "Everyman". They are human beings, and he cares about them; he wants them to thrive and be merry, and he made me want that too.

PHOENIX is not exactly one story, it is two. The first is laid a few decades in the future, when London is sort of like those slick cellophane towers in the space-gun section of the movie 'Things To Come'. The second is many centuries later, when that same London has become a sort of city-sized tumulus mined for its minerals by the savage descendants of our own time. Here two there are people in both worlds, and you will care what happens to them.

Bravo, Ballantine! But tell me, Betty, why did you spoil it all with things like Martha deMey Clow's STARBREED (extraterrestrials interbreed implausibly and uninterestingly with Earthmen) and Douglas R. Mason's MATRIX (giant computer rules world but is overthrown by humans intent on restoring freedom, decency, and macrobiotic wheat bread)?

Just for the record, I also read Julius Fast's THE LEAGUE OF GREY-EYED WOMEN (Lippincott), which has to do with a man who takes a DNA preparation to

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

By Christopher Priest

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I'M TOLD that the magazine habit is dying, though they go on being published. Although most periodicals in this country come from one of two sources, nearly all aspects of leisure-reading are covered. I believe myself that the magazine habit is thrust upon us in childhood when we read comics, and that why so many people spend so much money on entirely superficial reading is largely because it's a form of recall to childhood. Or somesuch.

But one of the things that you rarely see in adult magazines is the kind of editor/reader rapport that goes on inside children's comics. I remember in one that I used to read, for instance, there was always a short piece from "Eddie the Happy Editor", and it was comforting in those days to know that somewhere in the building that printed my paper was a man in a white shirt and black armbands who knew how to tie a bowline-hitch or could make an electric motor from paper-clips and cotton reels, and who knew everything there was worth knowing about the biggest bridges or the fastest trains.

Perhaps it is something like this that appeals to us about science fiction magazines, for, judged by the criteria of almost any other kind of magazine on sale, an SF magazine is in general rather an inferior-looking object, and without some kind of hidden quality could surely never sell at all.

Take, for example, a look at any recent edition of Galaxy and compare it with a superslick such as Nova. Same price, same periodicity, same kind of outlet.. but there the similarity ends. Of course, the type of markets for which they cater and the circulations they achieve are also miles apart.. but even such relatively minor subjects such as winemaking and needlework have magazines which are printed and laid out in a professional manner.

Your average SF magazine, by other standards, is badly printed, made of poor paper, and has an overall appearance of extreme shoddiness.

It sells, I am sure, not for its appearance but for its content. I hope that last sentence doesn't sound over-trite because I am not necessarily meaning that an SF magazine sells because it contains SF. Naturally this is so, but there's something else as well, and I think it's to do with what I think of as the Eddie-the-Happy-Editor quality. (ETHE from now on.)

The kind of magazine a science fiction fan seems to like is redolent with ETHE. As a general rule, all those long-lost magazines that bring forth sighs of nostalgia in convention-hotel bars are those that had pages-long letter-columns, reader-rating tables, editorials about the fab illo on this month's cover, and Arnold-Wilson-your-favourite-author-who-dropped-by-our-office-last-week, and all the rest of the 'departments' everyone who's reading SPECULATION will probably know what I'm meaning.

I think I can generalise to a certain degree and say that the editor of an SF magazine is usually one of two kinds; either an uncaring professional who is allotted the task of editing the magazine because he works for the firm who pub-

lishes it, who does as he is told and produces a competent and generally unexciting magazine; or the enthusiastic amateur, who throws his entire self into the job and manages to infuse his excitement into his readers for as long as he can sustain it.

Perhaps because such an editor has his own ideas about how an SF magazine should be run, or because he consciously or unconsciously harks back to the mood and style of young people's papers, he will give his magazine a healthy ration of ETHE.

For too long, it seems to me, we have been without ETHE. I lost interest in science fiction magazines about three or four years ago; this being partly a reflection of my changing tastes in reading, and partly an overall boredom with the SF-magazine medium. I think that when John W. Campbell started at Astounding he had the ETHE-touch. So did Ted Carnell when he began New Worlds, and Mike Moorcock when he took it over. Fred Pohl had it for a short while in If. Cele Goldsmith when she was at Amazing. Lots of others who were working before the war, at a time of which I have no knowledge.

But now, quite unexpectedly, we have a science fiction magazine so brimming with ETHE, so energetic and extrovert, so enthusiastic that it is irresistible. I'm talking about Ted White and Amazing.

I gather from what people have told me that it is not easy to have a neutral reaction about Ted White. One likes him, or one does not. Whatever else can be said about him, it seems likely that he has a positive character. I don't know; I have never met him, nor have I ever corresponded with him. But it seems to me that judging by results Ted White makes a good editor. He is ETHEical.

I have been reading the last few issues of Amazing, and they are truly remarkable. Ted White oozes from every paragraph. His editorials run across several pages; the letter-column is full of his italicised interpolations; the story-blurbs are long and informative; the current serial is Ted White's latest novel ("big and powerful, gut-hard stuff!" says Philip K. Dick on the cover, and inside too); he has published his own illustrations; his own books are reviewed in depth; he reviews some of the other books himself.

I'm not objecting to this, merely remarking upon it. My reaction to this kind of thing is almost wholly favourable because it is so positive. One feels unmistakeably that one is being taken into the confidence of The Editor, who knows everybody worth knowing, and has science-fictional bowline-hitches dropping from his fingertips.

One month he goes on at length about how hard it is to sell SF magazines another month he talks freely (and at length) about his own writing. (He gets his plots by watching Star Trek.) He throws in pieces of fascinating and entirely irrelevant information; the photo of Philip Dick on the cover of the Penguin edition of THE MAN IN THE HIGH CASTLE is really (guess who); Michael Crichton, who wrote THE ANDROMEDA STRAIN, also wrote those GONADS OF NOR novels as John Norman. ** He runs a lengthy fanzine-review column, and a science column. He reprints book-reviews from such excellent fanzines as Science Fiction Review, as well as many original ones.

Somewhere in there he also runs about 70,000 words of new fiction, but then I don't read much of that. It's not to my taste, and it hardly matters. The rest is entertaining enough.

(Cont/d)...

** He didn't; or so I recall reading elsewhere recently. (PRW)

Amazing looks very much like many other SF magazines. In a word, its production is scruffy. But if, like me, you are something of a sucker for ETHE, pick up a copy or two. I like it for purely personal reasons which I've tried to express here, and I hope that what I've said hasn't seemed to patronise.

I can't honestly see the magazine market either here or in the States supporting this kind of product much longer, and even if it could I'm not certain that Ted White will be able to maintain the pace for ever. As such, his Amazing, the one he is publishing now, might well be the last of its kind.

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"A rattling good space opera" was how Fred Pohl described Poul Anderson's SATAN'S WORLD in the last Speculation. Okay, okay, forgetting that it's a rather hackneyed phrase (particularly coming at the end of an article which tried to go against objective dupery), was it good space opera? And if so, is that of any importance?

It seems to me that there is something of a critical cop-out on the behalf of many reviewers, who will question (as did Pohl) some thematic or structural point, explain why it is just not on, then go back to grass roots and say: "Well, it's good space opera, so forget my quibbles and just enjoy it, eh?" The implication in this disturbs me. It is as if the only content obligatory to certain kinds of SF is lots of spaceships and shootings, and that anything above that is gratuitous. In addition to this, the reviewer is insulting his own readers by implying that they'll be able to enjoy the space opera content anyway, so don't worry about these intellectual points he's taken the trouble to discuss.

I think, on consideration, that Pohl probably didn't mean quite this, particularly in view of his earlier remarks. It seems to me that he was in need of a concluding sentence, and that one just came to mind. He threw it in without real consideration.

But let's consider what he said, in the way he said it. "Good space opera." What is it? I'm sure you don't want me to go through a list of ingredients that make up the sort of stew generally associated with space opera. (Recipe: mix thundering, majestic stars with lonely, dust-strewn wastes of interstellar space; stir; beat in spaceships like golden needles; add rugged-jawed captain, beautiful girl, friendly multipod alien, evil pirates, hostile alien space-peasants; leave to simmer; serve with loincloth and sword, and spice with Middle English syntax.) Rather, let's think of what it shouldn't be. The first thing that occurs to me is that it shouldn't be boring.

I have a particular difficulty with the work of Poul Anderson; it sends me to sleep. I mean this quite seriously and literally. I cannot read more than about ten pages without dropping off. As it is, you can appreciate therefore that it takes a considerable amount of discipline and determination for me to finish one of his books. By a peculiar twist of fate (which I cannot enlarge upon right now) I have had to read very many of Anderson's novels, including SATAN'S WORLD, and I am therefore fairly-well versed in the work of this writer, who tends to represent in the minds of some a purveyor of quote good space opera unquote.

But is it "good" if it knocks me out? We're getting back to Fred Pohl and his subjectivity here. (Cont/d)...

Perhaps to some readers, Anderson is "good" space opera. I don't know. SATAN'S WORLD was to me an exponentially difficult uphill climb. For most of the time I was hopelessly confused by it. Was I missing something? Why did each chapter seem to start in a different part of the galaxy? Is the scene I'm reading set on a spaceship? Or are the characters on a planet?

Some people say they find the 'new wave' obscure... to me, the obscurities of SATAN'S WORLD made J.G. Ballard look like Dennis Wheatley. It was evident the future of the universe was at stake, but it certainly didn't involve me. The odd thing about this is that Poul Anderson is a very experienced writer, and one cannot just dismiss him, whatever one's personal reaction may be. While I was reading SATAN'S WORLD I was conscientiously trying to see what was wrong, but everything about the writing seemed all right. It wasn't as if it suffered from amateurism, or was trying to do more than the author could cope with. Anyway, by the time I'd finished, I felt in need of a good holiday.

A few weeks later I found myself reading Anderson's latest novel, TAU ZERO, which is coming out shortly from Doubleday (previously serialised in Galaxy). This again might be termed "good" space opera, but to me it was more of a clarification of why I have such a blind-spot for Anderson. TAU ZERO had the usual soporific effect, but because it is the book it is, I was able to understand it a little better, and this in turn revealed to me part of what goes wrong.

TAU ZERO is really two books. One is a novel of Human Passion Among The Stars; and the other is a novel of Wonderful Scientific Marvels. The basic idea is this; There is a spaceship going to another star, and there are fifty colonists aboard, all of whom are resigned to never seeing Earth again. The ship is powered by a kind of hydrogen-dust ramjet, which can accelerate continuously -- the trick being that you cannot reach the speed of light but that there is no limit to how close you may go towards it. All straightforward stuff so far. Then an accident happens, and the ship loses its ability to decelerate. The colonists decide to accelerate the ship through the galaxy and out to another. As time goes on, other misfortunes occur and the ship is forced to go on accelerating and accelerating, until it is whipping through whole galaxies in the literal blink of an eyelid. (The ship isn't actually travelling any faster than light, but the time-values of those inside it are dilated.)

So that's it. The spaceship that cannot be stopped, but that must go on accelerating forever.

Not the sort of science fiction notion that sends you hopping down the road whistling with joy, but original enough to strike a spark of interest, and cleverly-constructed enough to make you read to the end to see how the author gets out of it. (He does, and without any kind of cheating. You'll have to read the book to see how.)

However... You'll notice that I have related the plot of the book in terms of what the spaceship is doing. This is the Wonderful Scientific Marvels novel, and the one that, in its own reference, interests me the more. But Anderson has not written it this way. Instead, he has told the story through the eyes of the characters on board. Only to be expected, I suppose, but this is where the book goes wrong. For the characters are a motley crew of clichés, forever raising quizzical eyebrows and spitting out their words. We have the dour Frenchman, the bear-like Russian and the tactless American, the pretty

Oriental and the mannish Swedish heroine, and the tough, graceless policeman hero who is stolid and reliable and itterly dull. Just about the only character missing, as far as I could see, was Jock McTavish from Aberdeen, but then I might have been asleep while he was on.

These flesh-and-blood cosmopolitans spend most of the novel's length going to bed with one another, fighting, talking science, discussing politics exercising in the gym or looking at star-maps. All very necessary I suppose, but all the really interesting stuff with the spaceship and the acceleration is dropped in only every now and then, and if you don't keep a sharp watch you might miss it.

I wouldn't be so impertinent as to suggest how Poul Anderson might have written it better, but the book reminded me in some ways of the work of Arthur C. Clarke, and I would be curious to see what he would have done with the idea. Though I cannot claim that his techniques of writing are any better or worse, a lot of the success of science fiction comes from the question of emphasis rather than style. Clarke may people his spacecraft with Jock McTavish and his friends, but somehow that doesn't seem to matter.

In TAU ZERO the emphasis is on the interplay of the characters and as such is a banal and fruitless story. The reader's mind is blown by the sheer size of the Universe in Anderson's book, but to read at the same time of Boris the Russian engineer knocking back the vodka while the radio plays cradle-songs, is only to make for bathos.

This, I feel, is the factor that levers me apart from Anderson's work; my inability to relate his characters to his situations, or worse, his inability of style to express that relationship.

Anyway, let's not take it all too seriously. It's only entertainment after all, and if it soothes us and sends us to sleep it can't be all bad. Bloody cop-out.

Christopher Priest 1970.

STONE SOUP by Frederik Pohl (Continued from Page 9)

..cure him of his cancer. It also cures him of his humanity. Every time he subsequently gets into trouble he changes into something else - big bird, small shark, telepath, - until he is caught up in a conspiracy of mutant women who force him to change into the mutant man who will father on them a new race. (Fast takes much longer to explain all this, but I do not honestly think you miss much by reading it in 60 words instead of 60,000.) And I read Henry Wilson Allen's GENESIS FIVE (Pyramid), which has to do with genetics too - these mad Commie scientists breed a superbeing out of equal parts of wolf, bee, and concentration camp inmate. (Slick, flashy, utterly meaningless, like a poor imitation of Ian Fleming.) And I read a number of others that I didn't like either, but they were mostly reissues and I see no point in mentioning them.

Heigh-ho, fans! What a lot of junk does get published! But maybe tomorrow will be better.

- FREDERIK POHL, 1970.

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SOME THOUGHTS ON LANGUAGE IN SCIENCE FICTION

By David I. Masson.

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Franz Rottensteiner asked me for an essay on language for his magazine Quarbur Merkur, and now Peter Weston kindly gives it secondary hospitality in its original English. Words and language fascinate me. But living in the midst of a cultural time-tract of what used to be called chaos and corruption and is now called experiment and permissiveness, it's hard to tell genuine from pseudo; the range is too short to focus. To me, however, words, however wild, must be charged with the force of 'reality' or the ironies and furies of the writer - preferably with both. You can't get this without something that they used to call discipline: those words must be made to do their drill, and in training them the writer is training himself.

"Le style c'est l'homme meme." Well yes, and style is also a product of the author's environment and times. But so, indeed, is the author himself. Style represents the resultant (in the vector sense) between the author's personality and his efforts towards objective statement, extrovert communication, appropriate presentation. In many writers, particularly writers of the shallower sort of fiction, style is merely a series of cliches, the striking of a more or less brash attitude, the entertainer's bawl and strut. Some writers of SF aim to amaze or to express the amazing. Their writing tends to be a series of screeches their syntax moronic, and their typography relies heavily on italic sections.

One can see why they do all this, but really, this is not the way; at least if one is to write with any claims to serious consideration. It seems to me that licence with linguistic "truth", whether in style or in encounters with language in the narrower sense, is permissable (though not essential) where satire, humour or fantasy are intended, but illegitimate in forecast-SF and hardly legitimate in SF of any kind which adopts the guise of a forecast. And even "licence" here implies control, adherence to some sort of rules.

I am not so presumptuous as to advise writers when I have only published a few short stories myself; but I am going to discuss what I feel appropriate and what wrong in certain cases. I cannot avoid reference to my own few stories in so far as they embody attempts at certain linguistic approaches.

'Lost Ground' begins in a slightly future Britain with a domestic scene. * A weather-forecast in weather-forecast language turns out to be a forecast of something else. This exemplifies what I believe to be a very important stylistic tool in SF: the shock of the unfamiliar-familiar. However, it was not constructed in cold blood as a device for shock, but, rather, arose from the careful working-out of the question "What would such a forecast sound like?" The question "What would happen if?", which is central to SF, should always be firmly supported by the question, asked of the writer (plus any experts he can get hold of) by himself, "What would be the language-features used in these circumstances?"

(Cont/d)...

* David Masson's stories mentioned here were published by Faber & Faber in the collection THE CALTRAPS OF TIME, 1968, 21s.

This is the guts of the matter. If it sounds genuine it has twice the impact. You must live in the world you depict - not present it as a travelogue, a specimen, or a joke. The same sort of unfamiliar-familiar opening is used in my 'Psychosmosis', and 'Treveller's Rest'.

For 'Lost Ground' I invented (or adopted) technical terms like microdiathesiclogy, acron, poikilochronism, chronismologist, new uses of domain and bound, and technical slang like peik, [illegible] slipper. That is what these things would be called, I said to myself. If these terms are convincing, it is because I have read some scientific literature and hope I know the sort of coinages that scientists make, and the principles on which they make them.

'Mouth of Hell' has transpex and heat mills. 'The Transfinite Choice' had glossopsychic, hyposubdeps, subquarkons, i-h-s-q, l.-b., Wunkun (slang) and a plentiful use of normal technical terms. 'Lost Ground' may be considered future, 'The Transfinite Choice' further future, 'Mouth of Hell' an alternative-world story: 'Traveller's Rest' (an alternative-world of sorts) has a whole series of technical and other neologisms, military, artistic, and everyday. The last in particular are intended to "distance", to "alienate" the world presented, by refusing to call a spade a spade (as it were) and calling it a digtool instead.

'A Two-Timer' is a special story. It is told, or written for publication in his own day, by a 17th-century English gentleman. Naturally he tells it in 17th-century English. What else? This meant a lot of hard work, though fortunatly I knew many 17th-century works. This gave some opportunities for humour and satire. No doubt I made some mistakes; but I did my damnedest. No half-hearted shoddy pastiche will do. This leads me to a vital point about language. If you write about Century xyz the natives must speak (or at least appear to speak) the language of Century xyz (and of the part of the world concerned). Little compromise is admissable. I am tired of 21st, 31st, 101st, 10,001st-century hominids who speak mid-twentieth-century American. Of course they shouldn't, in SF worthy of the name. If we survive that long, they won't! Language changes all the time, and mere print and mass-media won't freeze it.

Of course, what is worse, these hominids of the 21st... 10,001st centuries are made not only to speak like 20th-century Americans (of a kind), but to think and act like them, and their concerns and basic assumptions about truth, rightness, achievement, pleasure and so on, are made out little more than exaggerations of those felt by 20th-century Americans. Well, we all know that SF cannot really foretell the nature, language or achievements of men more than a few decades ahead. We also know that if a writer tried to present a complex forecast in as full and faithful detail as possible, the ideas and language he would present would be incomprehensible to most readers and would bring in no royalties. But we must at least give the impression of truth.

In 'The Transfinite Choice' I had to present the pseudo-English uttered in the world of A.D. 2346-2395. I attempted this by giving, at the critical moment, a few preliminary specimens, and then saying that all after that was only a rough translation. (This is honest but risky.) I then rendered the dialogue by a sort of telegraphese which, it seemed to me, was the probable syntax of this period; here and there I had to expand the phrases for the sake of clarity. I had "computed" the probable sound-changes, also, by extrapolating from past changes and consulting the work of one or two linguists who have attempted serious short-term prediction, and these sound-values I represented in the initial specimens and in a few names. For in four centuries or so the sound-values as well as the vocabulary and syntax would make the "English" virtually incomprehensible to a 20th-century time-traveller. (Cont/d)...

The same is true of four or five centuries back, notwithstanding the survival of earlier literature. What, then, is the SF-writer to do who presents the 1400's or earlier, or the 2300's or later? We can hardly expect him or his audience to understand and handle Middle English or Mittelhochdeutsch, or whatever. A comparable leap forward leaves the writer more licence but, if he is an honest worker, nearly as hard a task. Either way he must perforce translate into suitable modifications of modern language. In any case the concepts, the tone, the degree of complexity of thought, the degree of abstraction or of earthiness, must correspond to the era. My 17th-century man expressed himself in a more homely, racy way than a writer of today would on the same ground. A Victorian would be more fulsome, an eighteenth-century person of any cultivation more polished (if more brutal) than we are, an Elizabethan different again. But brief remarks can do no justice to the complexity of the problems confronting a writer who wishes to represent the speech of some other time.

From these differences of vocabulary, syntax, sound-changes, expression, preconceptions, tabus and background, a time-traveller must always be in stupendous difficulties and dangers, particularly (1) at his first arrival, and (2) when he has gained his first rush of confidence. Any serious writer on time-travel ought to realise this, but few do. Even in humour the difficulties can be touched on and may even produce a good comic-plot; Harry Harrison has made some use of them in THE TECHNICOLOUR TIME-MACHINE, where he even throws in some genuine Old Norse. Some writers such as Aldiss or Kornbluth have made plots out of the incomprehensions of the time-traveller, alternative-world-jumper, or cryogenic survivor. In 'A Two-Timer' my hero had to surmount the risks before he was accepted, and barely scraped through by a hairsbreadth. In 'The Transfinite Choice' he only attained a viable persona after a (fudged) linguistic operation performed on his brain-cells.

In quoting from existing languages, accuracy must be seen to be achieved. in Delany's BABEL-17 a character is called Jebel with a spaceship called (Jebel) Tarik. Tarik (which ought to be Tariq) is explained as meaning "mountain" in Old Moorish, and Jebel Tarik as meaning "Jebel's Mountain". This may be true, but everyone who has had anything whatever to do with the Middle East knows that it is "jebel" which is the Arabic for "mountain" (variously transliterated). The repetition of these two words thereafter through the book is a maddening and increasing irritation to such a reader.

In my 'Psychosmosis', a relatively light-weight but serious story, there is a dual system of language; that of the doomed versus that of the saved. The People = The Hard of Hearing. The Land= Outside. (the vanished) = The Invokers. Vanishment (a coinage, cf. banishment) = Crossing. (presumed nowhere) = Inside. The ideas and words of the doomed are harsh, coarse, and barren; those of the saved are compassionate, tender and rich. The narrative changes tone, too. And the landscapes and geographies are in tune with the two populations, indeed they influence them. The respective moralities are nowhere stated, only presented, and so are the clues to the catatonia of one boy, the doctor's misappropriation of a basket, and the final fate of the doomed. Both worlds are simple, tribal worlds, and a simple style suits them. The men have monosyllabic names, the women dissyllables with final -a. Of course, to suit the tone of the words of a society to its nature is fundamental to authorship; compare the stridency and barbarity brought out in the advertisements and the small-talk in Brunner's STAND ON ZANZIBAR (of which more anon). The difficulty is to keep it up consistently and not to let it get overridden by didactic claims, the need to tell the reader what the author thinks or to fill him in on the background. (Cont/d)....

In 'Mouth of Hell', another of my slighter stories, the names, which some people suppose unpronounceable (because they have some dohbled vowels), are chosen mostly to prevent the reader from recognising their owners as belonging to any language-group on Earth, but as the rest of the apparatus is relatively commonplace, he is to suppose the world to be a species of "alternative world". This enables me to insert a geographical feature in it which Mankind would have discovered long ago if it had been on our Earth. A change of key at the end, however, goes with two rather snide puns, as well as a slight stirical twist and a rapid acceleration of tempo.

Tempo and language are even more closely bound up in 'Traveller's Rest'. Here not only are the bizarre names and terms those of an alternative world, but the names change with latitude, to fit the differential logarithmic curve of time-dilation from South to North. Place-names are progressively shorter as one approaches the Northern Frontier where time-dilation is apparently infinite. Those in the South are quasi-African, those in the North quasi-Germanic, those in between something in between. To some extent, too, the descriptive style becomes more curt and suggestive of frantic hurry nearer North, especially during a flight from the Front. The personal name of an individual as he goes North shrinks from a long rolling African-like appellation (as benefits the near-tropics) to a mere initial (in the South the middle syllables constitute his affectionate or family name); and the same things happens to the names of those he thinks of. This is not only to fit the time-dilation, but, more relevantly, to express the progressive emptying of personality as one approaches the Frontier. No explanation is given to the reader, beyond a spurious "of-course" allusion halfway along the story to the workings of "onomatosyntomy". This is another result of my feeling that the strange must be treated as familiar in order to increase its power and its mystery.

There are linguistic pitfalls in the representation of alien worlds. A writer must curb his natural playfulness and give them careful consideration. Firstly, the names of strange planets and strange topographical features must either have been given by invading Man, in which case they will be the names of human beings or human topography (or fanciful names like Horse Neck), or else have been given names taken from an alien race, in which case they will be human attempts at, or genuine examples of, utterances totally non-human. To call them 'Cibarra' or 'Zil' is not good enough; to call them something like 'Axxtx' is nonsense.

Secondly, languages; the intelligent inhabitants of an alien planet are in stories almost invariably given one race-name and one language. Why? It is unlikely that only one language could have developed on one planet, except perhaps in special circumstances where world-government was in full power and tight control there. Thirdly, grammar; it is inherently improbable that an alien syntax could resemble the syntax of a European language, and quite possible that it would be totally different from that of any terrene language. My own lightweight 'Not So Certain' was comparatively timid in its treatment of grammar in spite of the shocks about language which it sought to administer to the reader, being less bizarre than that of some Amerindian languages. But perhaps it takes the learning and philosophic fervour of a Borges to interest the common reader in the statement that in the language of Tlön, "The moon rose above the river", hlör u fang axaxaxas mlö, is literally "upward beyond the on-streaming it mooned".

(Cont/d)....

Kornbluth knew what he was about when he introduced the interstellar moral-thriller 'That Share of Glory' by having a monastic training-college of heralds dine to the accompaniment of a brother reading excerpts from an alien vocabulary: "Tlon--a ship ... Rtlo--some ships, number unknown. Long--some ships, number known, always modified by a cardinal. Ongr--a ship in a collection of ships, always modified by ordinal. Ngrt--first ship in a collection of ships; an exception to ongr." (The linguistically alert reader will notice that these words are all quadriliterals comprising a non-finite circular word ...longrtlongrtlongrt...; and will be seized with a doubt whether Kornbluth realised that a final or initial ng could, and in most languages certainly would, stand for one sound unit, not two. But let this trifling carelessness pass.)

Having brilliantly and sufficiently hinted at the sort of linguistic assault-course that the herald has to master, he went on largely to ignore language as such and to concentrate on mineralogical, legal, and ethical cruxes. Attempts such as these have been made to show and use alien concepts and preoccupations, but this has only been related in the most elementary way to language. (A good humorous-serious example is 'The Monsters' by Sheckley, which turns on a contrast of ethologies.) The other-worldly, holier-than-us communications in Blish's 'Common Time' are only plausible because they are, in essence, garbled memories of a dream.

Fourthly, (with some reference to Kornbluth's ships), the phonetic expression of grammar in an alien tongue must be similarly non-human. Blish's "beademungen" are barely excused for the reason given above. And only the domestic authority and imaginative power of a C.S.Lewis or a Tolkien can carry off the incongruity of a supra-human language that has umlaut-plurals.

Fifthly, phonology and phonetics; alien voice-apparatus and alien auditory circuits are likely to differ from those of terrestrial animals. The phonological elements can only be approximated. (An early Aldiss story gives the four "Lords of the Galaxy" names apparently concocted respectively from medieval European legend, ancient Egyptian religion, the American business world and (perhaps) astronomy or mathematics. The whole bunch are clearly phoneys but Aldiss carried the thing off, as a piece of rather frivolous doom-SF, by sheer impudence.) My own 'Not So Certain' did bring out a certain degree of variation from human voice-production, articulation, etc, and suggest other aspects. However, one could go much further.

Blish and Kornbluth have both used vibratory imitation of human speech (cf dolphins), one in a paramoecium, and one in a Martian parasitic egg-layer. (You and I know -- never mind Mars -- that the paramoecium is incapable of mental activity, at least as complex as that -- but this is one of the impossibilities here in which we can legitimately suspend our disbelief for the sake of a well-told story. SF subsists largely on impossibilities but they must be possible impossibilities keeping to the rules of the game.) Much alien speech could be unreproducible in print, and some alien communication could be visual, electrical, or tactile. A clever story, Jack Vance's 'The Gift of Gab' has a human being teaching marine dekabrachs to communicate by arm-semaphore, one sign per "word".

All this amounts to saying that people's imagination is too limited, and that they prefer for that reason flamboyant but superficial fantasy to detailed imagination. (In the same way many writers cover their planets with perhaps showy but essentially terrestrial trees, grass, mammals, insects, fish, clouds

rain, lakes and rivers. This is pure Edgar Rice Burroughs and worse.) I know it has been argued that the basic design of the human body is likely to have evolved wherever an intelligent species has appeared. This presupposes earth-gravity, earth-atmosphere, earth-humidity, and of course carbon- and water-based life. But even if the argument is sound, the detailed mechanisms are certain to differ. (If this Universe cannot do better than Earth's climates and the human race, it's beyond hope.)

However, space-travel and aliens are likely to be given a rest in SF for a bit, now that two or three men have actually tiptoed a hairsbreadth outside Terra. In science fiction we are likely to be stuck with homo insipiens and his toys, games and tantrums for a few decades, provided SF survives that long. Some refreshment may be gained by the presentation of alternative-Earths, alternative-histories, variations of the theme of humanity. But perhaps someone, sick to death of the imbecilities and machinations of this species, may seek total relief in the exclusive exploration of an invented alien psychology. Man, however, is so besotted with his own fascinating image, that not many such stories are likely to appeal.

There are a few writers whose style or whose treatment of languages particularly interest me. Tolkien's LORD OF THE RINGS does not really qualify as SF, but we can learn valuable lessons from this unique work, not for coarse-grained imitation of its surface features, but for consideration of method, imagination, and discipline. Tolkien uses all his skill and knowledge as a professional philologist (if that is the best term) to deploy a whole continent-full (and more) of languages and "alphabets", which he carefully places on a (really alternative) version of a supposedly ancient Western Europe; and even to provide a series of linguistic and other appendices. The West-Elvish or Eldarin tongues Quenya and its less ancient relative, Sindarin, appear in many quotations, utterances and texts, and place-names and personal names in them are thick enough to furnish the Tolkienologist with some evidence for the grammars and etymologies, not to speak of the assistance of the various appendices. East-Elvish is mentioned in an appendix.

Adunaic and its derivatives (1) Westron or Common Speech in its many varieties (represented in the story itself by English), (2) the language of the Rohirrim (represented in the story by Anglo-Saxon), and (3) northern Mannish (e.g. in Dwarves' names; represented by Old Norse, etc.) are much discussed, particularly in the appendices where "genuine" versions are given of examples. True Dwarvish appears in a few places. The Black Speech appears in an ancient and a debased form in a few places. True Entish and also the language of the Wild Men come in very rarely. Dunlendish is touched on in the appendix. It is apparent that there are varieties of Sindarin and perhaps even of Quenya. The tengwar and the certar (letters and runes), invented forms, are presented (and codified in the appendices) in many differing forms and functionings. Tolkien even goes at great length in these appendices into the various calendars and the ancient names used in them.

Tolkien suits his style to the speaker and the occasion, and ranges from the heroic to the clownish. In this he may remind us of Scott, but he does not always pull the thing off; some passages creak a little, some seem derivative (I seem to recognise Juliet's Nurse in one old woman, for example), and, almost as in an opera, many of his characters seem to have a lot of time at their disposal to express their feelings in at moments when they should be hurling themselves into violent action. Nevertheless, read aloud as it should be, the saga comes alive. (But I find the gambolling, rhyme-jingling earth-spirit Tom Bombadil hard to stomach)

(Cont/d)...

Coming back to science fantasy with a bump, Ballard may be noted as specialising in making his personages utter scientific (or even common) nonsense and semi-nonsense with deadpan authority. This lends a kind of power and mystery to his atmospheric fiction. Nearly all his personages speak in the same rather formal tone, too, of slightly mystical calm, at odds with their often bizarre or violent actions. But then, he is not describing a world, he is actualising a dream. Ballard uses science as a principal flavouring ingredient in his concoctions, both in his middle period and in his latest writings. There is also a strong element of self-parody and obsessively recurrent words such as the adjective "terminal" and "time"; and the latest series appear to be close variations on the same theme. For readers that find him congenial, however, there is enough power behind his vision to carry off all these idiosyncracies successfully.

Disch in CAMP CONCENTRATION employs an interesting hysterical, lushly allusive style at the moment when the hero's genius and agony are at their height. In general his cool, ironic tone seems to hone his stories into weapons of uncommon sharpness.

Blish in A CASE OF CONSCIENCE, part 1, scatters some linguistic clues to Ruiz-Sanchez' Jesuit verdict on Lithia. The coarse physicist Cleaver calls the gracious Lithians "the Snakes"; their language is rich in hisses and rasps; topographical names translated suggest (in the complete volume) the biblical Field of the Potter and Field of Blood, and there is also the Tree. These vague associations with biblical crises connect Lithia to "the second-best Authority in the Universe", etc. But what are we to make (in the complete volume) of the botched statement that "x" = k, and "g" = (in effect) German ch? Presumably Blish meant to indicate two varieties of velar fricative as transcribed by the Peruvian Ruiz-Sanchez.

Brian Aldiss has some telling similes and metaphors in his works. Many of his personal names are cranky and diverse, one had almost said perverse, but all the more memorable for that. The psychedelically drugged society of BAREFOOT IN THE HEAD and other acid-head Charteris stories is presented in language full of Joycean dislocations and free-association-ridden speech, etc, which seems appropriate, though it is hard on the reader. A nice use of linguistic confusion occurs in his earlier story, 'The Failed Men', where the incomprehensible thought of a future generation is brought out in maze-like sentences, which lead the unsuspecting reader little by little onto an explosive little mine, "You are the struback", an ambiguous condemnation of, in effect, modern man.

Brunner uses a collection of styles in (the A.D. 2010) STAND ON ZANZIBAR, including brilliantly observed native legends, radio and wall adverts, police announcements, TV scripts, and straight narrative. This is to involve the reader (with greatest economy) in a total world. It demands a keen ear, eye and memory in the author. This world is also evoked by a convincing host of invented future slang terms, metaphors from space shots, etc, and eugenic or other scientific jargon, all carefully worked out. The atmosphere of sterile violence, overcrowding, and the combined cosiness and stridency of mass media and the consumer world, come over well.

Much could still be learnt from style in Kipling. Not only did he write horror stories, mystery stories, supernatural stories; we have 'A House Surgeon', 'The Dog Hervey', and others written round telepathic influences, as well as an induced Keats in 'Wireless'. We have 'Unprofessional', in which a cancer is controlled by tides from outer space. We have 'With the Night Mail', written

ostensibly by a journalist accompanying a cross-Atlantic aircraft on a stormy night, with a long appendix of startlingly-realistic extracts from the magazine of 2000 A.D. (forecasters of circa 1919 were rather conservative) in which the account is supposed to have appeared, advertisements and all; and as a sequel we have 'As Easy as ABC'. All these stories, given the prejudices of the time, are written with perfect realism and as human documents. In comparison with Kipling, H.G. Wells, with his radical idealism and his clever but ultimately rather irritating mannerisms of dialogue, seems less professional, despite his vivid imagination and skill.

To revert to the subject of miscommunication. The stallion lowers its head when most domineering. The chimpanzee grins and chitters when frightened. Some animals (including children) scream when happy. A stranger's feelings and intentions may be misunderstood and he may misunderstand ours. Perhaps someone would like to go further and with more subtlety than Sheckley's 'Monsters', and construct a story in which a human being innocently infuriates aliens, or humans from another age, alternative world, or merely another part of this world, and equally mistakes their expressions, voices and words.

David I Masson, 1969

* David I. Masson lives in Leeds and is a rare-books librarian. He was born in
* Scotland and has a university background, and for a dozen years around the
* 1950's he wrote articles on phonetic sound in poetry, which were published in
* encyclopedias and learned periodicals.

The OPINION! column: Some views on current science fiction.

OPINION 32: "Dominated by insight?" (Ian Williams).

"...I get the impression that fandom these days is dominated by discussions of profound, multi-level, symbolical, novels that are full of 'insight'. So much so that fans seem to lose sight of the virtues of good story-telling and unprofound entertainment. I'm not condemning this attitude, just think it appears to have gone too far. So much so that well-thought-out melodramas like BUG JACK BARRON are acclaimed with virtues that they don't possess. When BJB was reviewed in a couple of newspapers as a mainstream novel it was criticised for weak characterisation and too much use of stereotypes. Other than that, it wasn't a bad thriller.

The point I'm really trying to make is that there is no excuse for ignoring good storytellers like Keith Laumer and shoving them to the short-review section of fanzines, because a good writer of this type is just as deserving of attention as 'serious' writers, providing that he or his afficionados don't start trying to claim merits that aren't there. Laumer's novels (GALACTIC ODYSSESY, WORLDS OF THE IMPERIUM, etc) have provided me with hours of pure enjoyment. They are fast-moving and well-written. I wish I could say that of a lot more writers."

OPINION 33: "Symbolism of the most obnoxious sort" (Sandra Miesel).

"...The symbolism in NOVA is of the most obnoxious sort; it stands up and shouts, 'Look, readers, I'm a symbol - S*Y*M*B*O*L, Grail symbol, got that?' And the docile reader of ordinary education looks in vain for anything resembling Mallory, doesn't find it, still feels there's supposed to be some meaning in names like 'Roc', etc, and gets annoyed that he doesn't recognise the SIGNIFICANCE OF IT ALL. (Such was my husband's reaction and he's been hostile to the author ever since.) Samuel R Delany is being undone by his anxiety to communicate and lack of editing."

THE CRITICAL FRONT

Book reviews at length

THE FINAL PROGRAMME by Michael Moorcock (Allison & Busby 25s)
BEHOLD THE MAN by Michael Moorcock (Allison & Busby, 21s)
THE BLACK CORRIDOR by Michael Moorcock (Ace 'Special' 75c; Mayflower 5s)

Reviewed by Brian Aldiss

It's Moorcock year yet! The words leap from his electrified typewriter like a dose of salts, by no means all tarred with the same feathers. Should we celebrate his productivity or his variety? Consider already - the first of these three novels takes place in a present-day Ladbroke Grove, the second in the stained alleys of Christ's Palestine, and the third on a socking great spaceship of the future. That isn't creativity?

Another thing one likes is the way all the novels are dedicated to people whem we chosen few who read SPECULATION know and love. Tom Disch, George Ernsberger, Hilary... That would be Mrs Moorcock, now, not Hilary Rubinstein. And the jacket of FINAL PROGRAMME - by Mal Bean who also provides interior illustrations - includes a cartoon of Michael Moorcock, not to mention Mal Dean himself. (But the figures on the front of the jacket, who are they? Busby and Allison?) Now, to complete the charmed incestuous circle, Mike's old pal Pete asks Mike's old pal Brian to criticise the novels.

Well, Mike, criticism-schmiticism, what do I say? What would you like me to say? It is a confrontation in a way - for you, like me, have your protective haragei, your maks behind which you move at ease through the busy world, just as I have mine. Perhaps you even envy me some of my masks, just as I envy you some of yours. Perhaps you envy me my mask (let's use the word haragei, since we are less sure of what it means) - you envy me my haragei of transparent honesty, so let's come right out and say that I both adore and admire FINAL PROGRAMME, that I like and rather resent BEHOLD THE MAN, that I couldn't quite face reading THE BLACK CORRIDOR, though I see it's recommended by Spinrad & Ellison and packed with good things and references to enzyme-inhibiting substances. Perhaps it was the references to enzyme-inhibiting substances which put me off. Perhaps having Spinrad & Ellison gang up on me put me off.

This is probably what you would like me to say - you seem genuinely to fear the loud hosanna. I say it nonwithstanding. SPECULATION readers (all fifty of them)** were delighted last issue by the pleasant rending sound of Chris Priest tearing up a bit of Roman nonsense; perhaps this issue they will enjoy the sound of hearty back-slapping as I confess affection for you as a writer, an affection which grows now that you have cast off your stimulating and somewhat messianic role as editor. What I enjoy is your refusal to promote writing to a sort of throne on which you can sit, issuing lofty pronouncements. You do not pretend to be a Writer, while your anarchy is of a mild squib-throwing king, which is fun. Your dexterity in throwing off pot-boilers (to keep the home-cooking pots boiling) is admirable when coupled with your refusal to admit that they could be anything but pot-boilers. The Elric sagas are a case in point. They are immensely popular, they must have won you many fans - yet you laugh at them. Bloody good! We all know writers who would go around floodlit if they'd had that sort of success. It would have ruined them. They would have postured all the way to the bank. (Cont/d)..

** Cheek! (PRW)

This detachment of yours (are you still reading, Mike?) is of course part of your personality, though it springs also from your contempt of fans. Okay, okay, not all fans - some fans, right? British fans are such sheep, by and large. The deadness of the English fan scene (as opposed to say the Aussie scene) is that here they accept the American lead and stick to American topics, whereas they might contribute more to literary discussion or SF discussion by studying what is happening over here. Surely, this would contribute more to the whole scene than does imitation? And surely the differences between American and European thought have never been wider? On the whole, the States seem to be going rightist and monolithic, while here we coast along on a sense of irony. I tried to make the point over the affair Heinlein that his right-wing romanticism rang very foreign in England now, but most fans evidently thought not; maybe they are alienated from their own culture.

We'd better leave the subject of fandom, since it always leads to an unprofitable discussion of the great fan-totems, Heinlein, Ballard, Fearn, Zelazny. Let's get back to Jerry Cornelius, the Mickey Mouse of the 1970's.

At its best, your writing arises from a response to the present day and perhaps (in the FINAL PROGRAMME) becomes something more than that - an actual shaper of present attitudes. Definitions of 'the present day' may vary; my own weltanschauung is perhaps darker than yours; but I recognise your city-goers, your sexual ambiguities, your crisp decadences, as part of my own experience of the world. I like your acceptance of this world, the lack of moral judgement, the lack of total disaster hanging over all (despite the sinister title of THE FINAL PROGRAMME). You do - I must use up this sentence which the TLS cast out - pretty nimbly walk the slack-rope between Ronald Firbank and Ian Fleming. Your vision of lovely old wicked amoral Europe as the centre of the only possible world, with Ladbroke Grove stretching all the way from St. Ives to Trieste, has the bite and rightness of a good caricature. A fascination with London is not an entirely inadequate test of a man's attitude to life - a pedantic way of echoing Johnson's "Sir, when a man is tired of London, he is tired of life".

Enjoyment. You don't find it often enough in contemporary writing. There is enjoyment in FINAL PROGRAMME, and that I also liked. Also, I could understand it. Jerry Cornelius is a good invention. He serves you well. He is both epicene and epicure, and moves gracefully through a world of technological toys without a message. It is true that his chain of fuel caches across Europe, and the great cupboards full of food which is never used, speak of more interior hungers than appear on the surface, but I take it this is part of your game. I like the game.

I could write a Jerry Cornelius novel myself without feeling I hunted in alien forests - while you would be too indulgent to convict me of poaching. Perhaps in exchange you might care to write a hand-reared novel.

This isn't much of a review, or meant to be. I should run out a long precis, just to show I read the book, and bugger whether I responded to it. Well, I did both, I read and responded. Generally, when I feel the urge to read upon me, I go and write till it disappears. Not this time.

BEHOLD THE MAN I also enjoyed. My reservation is that the central donné, that a man goes back in a time-machine and takes on the role of the historical Christ, is a bit plonking. You hush it up with a number of admirable obliquities - the dialogue is particularly terse - but the subtilties merely reveal that in the middle of the whole schtick stands one of those great blinding SF ideas with which one sometimes gets stuck; great for a quick short story, nothing but an impediment for a novel. (Cont/d)

If you disagree with this, I'd love to argue it - as time goes by, as experience accumulates along with wrinkles (did I tell you our cat had flu last week?), I increasingly feel that the core of a novel should be a proposition rather than a statement.

To elaborate. I know you thought very little of my novel AN AGE (CRYPTOZOIC!) Yet its parts are very good. Much better than the whole. It was meant to be a disintegratory novel, since it portrays a man's descent into illusion. Nothing novel there but, more originally, I was also trying to show why he was failing and how salvation might lie through his art. Apologies for the apologia - the point I want to make is that at the centre of the novel stands another of those damned SF statements, time-travel, and all the obliquity round the edges could not hush it up. Whereas, in more recent novels, PROBABILITY A, BAREFOOT, and THE HAND-REARED BOY, I have been able to make the whole thing depend on a proposition. "Maybe the world works like this..."

Perhaps this is one difference between speculation and science fiction. There is no permanance in Ladbroke Grove or Cape Kennedy, or wherever lies the centre of your immediate world. Everything must be looked at anew, askance, for at least we are certain of one thing; there is no certainty. You are now constructing characters who move easily through uncertain worlds; the pleasure is in the peril. And - he added, getting to the important bit last - you have tumbled on, or perhaps it is more than a happy accident, a style in which to express it all. I'm after the same thing from my own vantage point, so I'm pleased to see you having success.

Although I grumble about the big statement in the middle of BEHOLD THE MAN, I do see that it provides for nice major uncertainties in the Judeo-Christian universe. Perhaps the same sort of thing happens in THE BLACK CORRIDOR. I shall read it soon - I just had another attack of writing coming on.
There was something else I wanted to say, but it eludes me.

Perhaps we might go on to discuss why you and I still trouble to write for SPECULATION when we both take a pretty dim view of science fiction. It can't be just because the editor keeps pestering us. We are both aware that we have large audiences who probably don't read any other SF - and fans blind to our virtues! Part of the answer must lie in the fact that here we can address a readership which is interested in a vein of continuity in writing, which likes to see the growth and diminution of talents and reputations year by year. (Algis, where art thou?) It's rather like reading a strip-cartoon version of Gibbon's DECLINE AND FALL, year in, year out. One is aware of one's own continuity; writing here is a possible way of testing it. Besides, where else would I get such a slippered article on an unsung genius published? (Though you've had your measure of singing in the Press lately!)

Oh, yes, that was the other thing I was going to say. It comes back to the Firbank reference. It's perhaps the aspect of your recent writing which I enjoy most. Yours is an aesthetic approach to life. Hardly a quote to match up to the claims Spinrad and Ellison make for you on the back of BLACK CORRIDOR ("most humanly-involved of modern British SF writers" and "I was surprised by this book; at least eleven times" - deft use of the colon there), but perhaps it's more accurate in pin-pointing your essential quality, no? Science as much as art springs from the creative impulse. Why have the two strains remained seperate in SF for so long? It can't all be Campbell's fault! Now the strains re-combine. You amalgamate them. (Cont/d)..

It's lunch-time and my praise always grows fulsome towards sausage and mash. Don't let me put you off, Mike, by too many hosannas! I know Jerry is really old Elric back in disguise. But that's the way myth-figures survive. And you have been very canny with the grease-paint. Congratulations!

Once more, the SF scene is shifting. The winds of change blow, and you are again cast in the role of Chief Zephyr! Is not innovation one of the qualities which a speculative genre values highly?

So let me end by quoting from trendy old Tennyson:

"Forward, forward let us range,
"Let the great world spin for ever down the Ladbroke Groves of change...."

Brian W Aldiss, 20.2.70

THE PALACE OF ETERNITY by Bob Shaw (Ace 'Special', 75c, Gollancz 25s)

Reviewed by Tony Sudbery.

"Bob Shaw?" I thought; "Oh yes, the author of 'Ligh of Other Days'. I'm sorry to say that reading his new novel has not changed the way I identify this author; and annoying though it must be for him to have his past success hauled up to act as witness against his later work, I can't help using comparisons with the old short story to show just what's gone wrong in THE PALACE OF ETERNITY.

'Light of Other Days' was a story about things rather than people - which is no disgrace - and its form and length were perfectly suited to the presentation of Shaw's simple but strikingly original notion. THE PALACE OF ETERNITY, on the other hand, has a metaphysical subject instead of a physical one - it's about souls instead of glass - and this change of gear seems to have shattered both the imaginative quality and the formal mastery that Shaw displayed in the short story. He has failed to make the transition that Arthur C Clarke made when he wrote CHILDHOOD'S END.

The central figure in the novel is Mack Tavernor, a disillusioned army man living an obscure and peaceful life on Mnemosyne, "the artists' planet", while a galactic war rages between Earth and the merciless Pythsyccans. We follow his involvement with and eventual leadership of a protest movement when Earth's war headquarters are transferred to Mnemosyne on the decision of the inscrutable central computer - all quite enjoyable stuff, this, and moderately promising, until halfway through the novel Bob Shaw kills Tavernor dead. But we stick with him. In heaven, we learn, there is much distress; mankind is wreaking havoc with his new faster-than-light spaceships, which have the unprecedented power of killing immortal souls. (Shaw calls them 'egons' - I keep trying to hear an Irish nun saying "Children, think of your immortal egons"). Moreover, by destroying Earth's "mother-mass" of unattached souls, men are cutting themselves off from the source of all artistic, scientific and philosophical inspiration. Tavernor agrees to be reborn to put a stop to these disgraceful goings-on.

Taking over the body of his own son, he sees the final Pythsyccan assault on Mnemosyne and the capture of Bethia, a girl who we had met in the first section as a strange telepathic three-year-old with the power of healing. Bethia, it seems, is a New Type of Person, and on her death her egon will provide a direct channel of communication between living humans and the mother-mass. (Cont/d)..

The Pythsyccans had realised this and determined to keep her alive until the rest of humanity was exterminated. But she manages to kill herself, and the aliens meekly withdraw to a distant sector of space. And that's it.

This structure, with the hero dying and the action jumping to a previously unsuspected level halfway through the novel, is not unknown in SF. What is unusual is the brutality with which Shaw chops off the plot-strands of his first section. Now it's quite in order for a writer to suddenly tell the reader that the significance is not where he thought it was - but not when he does it as clumsily as Shaw does here. If we feel a shock on being told we're not going to hear any more of certain characters and unresolved situations, that means we'd got too interested in inessential matters, and the author shouldn't have let us get so interested.

There are other faults of organisation which can also be traced to a mishandling of emphasis in the first section. The metaphysical structure of egons and mother-mass is supposed to solve some mysteries in the first part; why the war is going so badly, why Mnemosyne is the only planet where artists can work, why Tavernor's modest technical ideas were so eagerly taken up when he was in the army. Unfortunately, until they're solved the reader is hardly aware that these were mysteries! Again, it is clear that Shaw intended to make his hero's death acceptable by providing him with a death-wish; but in fact this is only referred to immediately before his death, which is not exactly effective. Earlier references get lost in an opposing facet of Tavernor's psychology, his vague awareness of "panspermism". (Splendidly orgiastic though this sounds, it turns out, disappointingly, to be only Shaw's coinage for a principle of the unity of all life.)

Given the context of an army takeover, demonstrating artists, and Tavernor's own military background, the only effect is to build up a standard SF character, the all-purpose sensitive man of action; Shaw simply doesn't give himself enough room to develop the complex character that the rest of the plot demands. Nevertheless, beneath the tough action and the psychoanalytic catchphrases, wisps of originality can be glimpsed.

The level of incidental invention in the first section is high; when Shaw's imagination works on the technology of his society and the biology of Mnemosyne it strikes sparks. This is in marked contrast to the last two sections, the metaphysical ones, which suffer from acute anaemia of the imagination. From early childhood I have known what a soul looks like. It is shaped vaguely ovoid and its colour is a sort of bright off-white. I'm delighted to see that Bob Shaw seems to agree with me, but I can't think much of the general level of imagination of which this is a fair example.

In view of all this, I am strongly tempted to commit the cardinal sin of reviewers and condemn THE PALACE OF ETERNITY for not being a different book. The political situation in the first section is genuinely intriguing, with the potential ingredients of a serious novel. If Shaw had concentrated on what he was doing and not on what he thought he was doing, he might have made a better job of Tavernor's character and realised that the proper setting for the rest of the novel was on Earth, not in Heaven. There are glimpses of the book that might have been when he hints, later on, that his merciless Pythsyccans may after all have the right of it; but unfortunately he never follows this up.

Why do people write this sort of metaphysical science fiction? On the face of it this is a contradiction in terms, which is to say that on a direct, literal level such stories are almost bound to be implausible (it depends on the reader of course: when I was well-versed in Thomistic metaphysics and took it literally, C.S. Lewis's interplanetary trilogy seemed to me an exciting speculation). Some sort of a symbolic interpretation, then? But you see, you can't separate the two. Lewis's books didn't suddenly become valueless for me when I stopped being a Catholic; but my judgements shifted, and I came to regard PERELANDRA as a better book than THAT HIDEOUS STRENGTH because it showed a tougher imagination at work. The former has an internal plausibility which could not depend, like the purely external plausibility of the latter, on the reader's personal beliefs. On the other hand, there's no special value accruing to a dull implausible work of fiction just because it can be translated, symbolically or otherwise, into a statement about something else.

For what advantage does such a novel have over its translation? The purpose of symbols is to illuminate and make more powerful the ideas they symbolise; to do that they, the mediate agents, must take an immediate effect on the reader; they must be plausible and interesting in themselves; and so a novel must be successful on a literal level before it can be successful on a symbolic /level.

Having deployed all this critical apparatus, I'm reluctant to use it on so fragile a nut as THE PALACE OF ETERNITY. Nobody, I imagine, will want to shield it from the raspberries I have been blowing; but what our establishment critics may miss is that very similar considerations apply to their own darlings. A few hints will have to do; I'm thinking of such things as when Bob Parkinson took the will for the deed in SPECULATION-21 and acclaimed Philip K. Dick as "Greater Than Heinlein" because he is concerned with reality; someone who recently mentioned Michael Butterworth and Thomas M Disch in the same breath without any apparent sense of incongruity; Michael Moorcock introducing one of his own stories saying that "There may be nothing new under the Sun but there <u>are</u> new ways of getting across the old messages" and so on.

Let's get back to THE PALACE OF ETERNITY. This could, I suppose, be given a symbolic interpretation. The "mother-mass" is a fair metaphor for a racial subconscious which could plausibly be regarded as the source of inspiration; Mnemosyne, the mother of the Muses; yes, Bob Shaw's read his Koestler (or if he hasn't he's got a direct connection to the Zeitgeist). But the metaphor is elaborated in such a pedestrian fashion that it adds nothing to what it is supposed to be describing. Indeed, it must subtract something because of its irrelevant features - I can see no meaning, purpose, or interest in the idea of direct communication with the mother-mass through Bethia (who was an intriguing figure before her significance was revealed); here, the symbol has run away with the author and in doing so has betrayed its essential triviality.

From the examples of poetic and scientific inspiration that he cites, it seems that Bob Shaw really did intend to offer some sort of explanation of these phenomena. Now speculative "explanation" of real events and phenomena is a standard part of SF - think of Asimov's story about the origin of jokes - and it's apleasant enough form. But essentially minor, bearing about the same relation to the best of SF as after-dinner conversation (where most of it probably arises anyway) to a full-scale lecture. If the phenomena treated are really important and deeply interesting, enjoyment of the story cannot survive (Cont/d)..

the realisation that other people have thought deeply about these problems, and the only response is irritation. Especially if, as in this case, the writer is close to an idea that has already been proposed, so that one tends to react like Mr Malone in MAN AND SUPERMAN:- "Read Koestler. Read Poincare" - not a very constructive or fruitful response. To claim our attention, the author has to go further or deeper than everyone else - and that's a tough proposition. It shouldn't be tackled lightly.

Tony Sudbery, 10.3.70

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* Tony Sudbery is at present in Glasgow studying mathematical physics at university on a post-doctoral Fellowship. He hopes to be lecturing next year and returning South to civilisation. Franz Rottensteiner, who writes the following review, is also at University in Austria while the author of the rebuttal immediately following (though both were actually written quite separately around the same books), Bob Parkinson, is another ex-campus now working for the Ministry of Technology. Pamela Bulmer, represented in this issue only in the letter-column hopes to enter the new University of the Air and Gregg Benford, of the University of California, has submitted an interesting short article for the next number. I know SPECULATION is billed as the Quality Fanzine in my handouts, but this is getting ridiculous! PRW

A ROSE FOR ECCLESIASTES by Roger Zelazny, Hart-Davis 30s, Panther 5s.
(FOUR FOR THE FUTURE, Ace 45c)
THE ISLE OF THE DEAD by Roger Zelazny, Ace 'Special' 60c.

Reviewed by Franz Rottensteiner, and separately, by Bob Parkinson.

"He impressed me always as so empty. He's very skilled with language, but behind the facade of his skill I've always felt a pitiful emptiness of thought. There is nothing new, nothing original, no food for the intellect as well as for the aesthetically civilised taste. Dull he therefore appears to me, and his leaps, his buoyant phrases, somehow resemble the repetition of very old, very well-known motifs which have become trivial. The difference between him and first-class literature is the difference between the trick and the revelation. The tricks sometimes are quite good, but it is unsympathetic when someone pretends the tricks are not just a skill of the fingers, but an important revelation heavy with meaning."

This is what Stanislaw Lem once wrote about Theodore Sturgeon, and much the same can be said about Zelazny, I think. No doubt he has a very great skill with words, perhaps unparalleled in science fiction. His style often dazzles the eye and the senses. But behind the glittering facade presented by the show-master you more often than not find only a gulf of vacuum, or a tiny bit of meaning. The "Tokyo Bay philosophy" and some sentimentalising about love and death is about the utmost you'll get; or perhaps some old myth, banalised and warmed-up for easy digestion; never to be compared with the original creation.

In my opinion, which I don't believe will be shared by many, those myths are just crutches for an unoriginal mind turning to the past because it is either unwilling or unable to come to grips with the realities of the present or a probable future. The trouble is that we cannot believe in the gods of exotic mythologies any more; at least, the educated cannot believe in their literal reality. (Cont/d)...

The use of mythologies, presented like pearls on a string, was properly and very well-done in THE DREAM MASTER, for there the action was only in the minds of the characters in the novel, and the old myths may still have their subjective meaning and importance; but when a supposedly physical universe is peopled with "real" gods and demons, we moderns feel impelled to laugh, as when we read those mesalliances with Indian and Egyptian mythologies, LORD OF LIGHT and CREATURES OF LIGHT AND DARKNESS. It has been suggested that LORD OF LIGHT describes the fate of a spaceship crew who decided to build a civilisation after the pattern of Indian mythology**. If one accepts this, one should like to hear about the genesis of such a society.

In the recent novel ISLE OF THE DEAD, we have one Francis Sandow, who is not only a millionaire (or more), but also a man of name, a shaper of whole planets (just as other people make sculptures, he forms whole planets - such a "superindividualistic" notion is ridiculous in an age of huge government projects involving thousands of people, but it may satisfy some yearning for a mythic past that is irrevocably lost), and even a god who goes under the funny name of Shimbo of Darktree, "Shrugger of Thunders". Some girl-friend has been stolen from this bored and boring accumulation of superlatives, and he sets out to get the kidnappers, private-eye fashion. He finds her again, and some enemies of old, resurrected from the dead, on some obtrusively symbolical Isle of the Dead. He kills his main enemy in personal combat, following an ancient ritual of American pulp literature.

All's there that is dear to the heart of the reader of sub-literature; it is a story about Red Indians, dressed up in pretty, gaudy colours, free of intellectyal ballast that might disturb the sound sleep, all speed and excitement, all froth. Superficially exciting for people seeking only adventure, its pretensions make the story hard reading for anyone more sophisticated. It's not very different from Leigh Brackett's SWORD OF RHIANNON: only Brackett can be enjoyed more, since she doesn't pretend anything about godhood or immortality or other such big words.

At the back of the book Farmer tells us that Zelazny uses archetypes; so that's what they now call the cliches.

The stories in FOUR FOR THE FUTURE are in much the same league. There's 'The Furies', a freak-show with three extraordinary hunters who are after some criminal; a nice catalogue of super-qualities. There's 'The Doors of His Face, the Lamps of His Mouth', a story of hunting a sea-beast on Venus; 'A Rose For Ecclesiastes', where a poet from Earth is needed to ensure the propagation of the Martian race; and 'The Graveyard Heart', a tale of life in the "set", a high-society clique wasting their lives at parties, sleeping through the centuries, only now and again sampling a sniff of the times. This is probably the most impressive and original story in the book.

Zelazny's characters, as in ISLE OF THE DEAD, are mostly elevated figures of some sort, furies, the best poet in the world, an ex-millionaire, and so on. All is somewhat larger-than-life, and painted in the brightest colours. Zelazny belongs to those who believe that the inhabitants of a palace are intrinsically more interesting than the inhabitants of a mud hut. To a large extent this can only be sensational interest, much as a calf with two heads or the woman without a womb; exhibition pieces from a cabinet of curiosities, figures from Madame Tussaud.

(Cont/d)...

Take for example Gallinger, the arrogant poet in 'A Rose For Ecclesiastes' As Frank Rainer Scheck pointed out in a German review, there really is no need, no dramatic necessity for him to be the most important poet of the world. Any poet or any moderately-gifted linguist would have sufficed to father the Martian girl a child. That he is such an important man shows Zelazny's youthful enthusiasm, his inexperience, and perhaps some wishful thinking, since the story is told in the first person. And then Zelazny makes the mistake of actually presenting a sample of the poetry of the great man:

"In a land of wind and red, where the icy evening of Time freezes milk in the breasts of Life, as two moons overhead - cat and dog in alleyways of dream - scratch and scramble agelessly my flight..."

That's the product of a man who in one place is being mentioned in one breath with Pound and Eliot? In these pages (SPECULATION-18) in a review of Disch's CAMP CONCENTRATION, Bob Parkinson compared the poetry of Disch and Zelazny, finding Zelazny's poetry better than Disch's. Perhaps this is so, but their respective merit is pretty irrelevant when we consider the way in which poetry is used, and included, as part of the characterisations. Disch had no ambition to portray the best poet in the world, he characterises just a poet, a minor one at that. His characterisation is good. Zelazny, on the other hand, claims qualities for his poet that appear ridiculous in view of the example offered and they mostly consist of a catalogue of degress acquired and things studied.

Still, there are moments of real beauty and real insight in this story, and it goes without saying that the book is much better than 99 percent of the science fiction being written elsewhere. But I think it is typical of the ill-judgement of the average SF fan, especially in the U.S.A., that Zelazny should be so much more popular than, say, Disch, if one can judge from the reviews in fanzines. Disch is a much more precise writer, and is closer to the spirit of the times. Zelazny pulls off shows, carnivals, a firework of words, presents heroes with extraordinary powers who do extraordinary things. In many ways he is closer to Bester, another writer of deception fiction.

In Bester's 'Time Is The Traitor', there is this Big Talent with Monumental Idiosyncracies. And what the story does say - and all that it says - is spelled out at the end; "We only remember the past, we never know it when we meet it. The mind goes back but time goes on, and farewells should be forever." What tiny meaning and what an apparatus to surround it! Much the same with Zelazny's soap-bubbles.

Disch's characters, on the other hand, are quite unexceptional beings, commonplace men and women. There is nothing of the exuberance that delights the low-brows; they don't do things, but things happen to them, most often terrible things. Often they are victims of vast anonymous, inevitable forces. That is much closer to the spirit of our times. And this, I think, makes the average SF reader uncomfortable. The fans want to read of sensational events as far removed from their own lives and experiences as possible, they want to escape into another world. Zelazny is acceptable, enjoyable even to Second Foundationists, because he offers them only what they have read before, though maybe presented in a new package.

But there is a world of difference between Zelazny and real literature, for all his technical skill. Literature embodies concepts and does not just arrange words; it is the beach where thought and form unite. For anyone who loves a good show, Zelazny cannot be too highly recommended, but he is not for me.

Franz Rottensteiner, March 1970

A ROSE FOR ECCLESIASTES & ISLE OF THE DEAD by Roger Zelazny.

Reviewed by Bob Parkinson.

In a way it seems only right that the introduction to Zelazny's collection of short stories should be written by Theodore Sturgeon. My admiration for Zelazny is closely akin to Sturgeon, and if you want to know how I feel about Sturgeon, let me advise you to read the appropriate chapter in Damon Knight's IN SEARCH OF WONDER. I subscribe to that, one hundred and one half percent. Therefore any review of a book of Zelazny's by myself is going to be, a priori, biased.

Zelazny deals with the archetypes under the skin. There are no pure Oedipus-kings among his characters, no primal Orestes. But it is interesting to see how many of his characters are gods (or immortals) in the Hindoo or Greek sense. Mahasamatman in LORD OF LIGHT. Nomikos in THIS IMMORTAL; Render in THE DREAM MASTER through his ability to shape worlds. And Francis Sandow in ISLE OF THE DEAD, although his deity is not of humans.

Zelazny's interest in mythologies is enormous. At one point (New Worlds 173 - 'In The House Of The Dead') he launched into Ancient Egypt and its gods. But for all that, his heroes are not believers. Mahasamatman, Sandow, Gallinger in 'A Rose For Ecclesiastes', none of them believe in gods and such nonsense. They are twentieth-century agnostics caught up in the myth that lies beneath the surface of his stories.

Having said that, I find that I can do no better than to describe my gut-reaction to each of these stories in turn, and leave it there. To begin with, 'The Furies' deals with the way three paranormal human beings track down and ultimately destroy Victor Corgo, the man with no heart, who has finked out of the human race. Standard enough, except that by the time you finish learning about Victor Corgo your sympathies are with him. And Zelazny has achieved this without, at the same time, converting his pursuers into villains. It is a story about the implacable course of Justice, but in the end I found myself crying "No, it is wrong, wrong!" While saying the opposite, Zelazny makes us into villains (would that we felt that way about what we do). And at the end, the author casually allows the myth to surface.

Next in order is 'The Graveyard Heart'. Now if I say this is the weakest story of the five I am reviewing here, I still mean that it is good. It is just that I can observe flaws in the structure - the starburst of Zelazny's talent no longer completely blinding me. It is an extrapolation of a single possibility into a milieu, but into this milieu Zelazny has put real people and seen what it does to them.

The characters here, the "Set", carried hopelessly out of their time by periods of suspended animation, are in the process of being converted into symbols by the very process that extends their lives. The problem is that you do not see this happening. The people are real, but they are hothouse flowers driven inward on each other, leaving the reader neither part of their "Set" nor of the outside watching world. Still, it is head and shoulders above most science fiction stories as it stands.

I first read 'The Doors of His Face, The Lamps of His Mouth' when it appeared in F&SF back in 1965. Now, half a decade later, it still makes my hair stand on end - all of it. Dispassionately it is a story of a big-game

(Cont/d)....

hunt for the biggest fish of all in the oceans of a Venus that - since the Russians slid their space-probe into its atmosphere - is altogether fantastic. But it obeys Hemingway's advice to "tell it as it is". So much so that I looked to see whether it followed Hem's style and described only surfaces. It doesn't, as it happens. It is still Zelazny, mixing myth and story. But in about 14,000 words, Zelazny has created an epic.

Just one reservation. The last line does not scan, and it uses a substantive as an adverb. But consider what sort of criticism that is! And then there is 'A Rose For Ecclesiastes'.

Sturgeon says "...Ecclesiastes is one of the most important stories I have read." Sturgeon says "...that this particular fable, with all its truly astonishing twists and turns, up to and most painfully including its wrenching denouement, is an agonising analogy of my own experience; and this astronomically unlikely happenstance may well make it what it is to me and may not reach you quite as poignantly."

Awards they gave it. I should have known. Whenever I get to read a story after the advance publicity has reached me telling me how good it is, I read it with jaundiced eye and come away thinking - it is not, after all, the world-shaking event they said it was. This is specific. And then, a month or a year later, the ground will move and I will no longer be able to think rationally about it.

To Theodore Sturgeon. Dr Mr Sturgeon, if your assessment of 'A Rose For Ecclesiastes' is determined by personal and private matters, then we have much in common. Perhaps we have the same love of the books between Proverbs and Isaiah. Or of roses and Rilke, maybe. But I think not. I think Roger Zelazny has surfaced something deep and shown it to us without our understanding, and afterwards our assessments of ourselves are changed. Perhaps, given time, I shall be able to take 'A Rose For Ecclesiastes' apart and see how it works. When I do I shall learn something else. But not here. It would be too personal. Not now.

Your editor wrote to me and asked me to include a review of ISLE OF THE DEAD, - a novel, he said, "important I think only in that it is unimportant when compared to Zelazny's other works." I'm not so sure. I'm not sure I would care to use the word "unimportant" about any Zelazny story. I mean - imagine that when the fire comes, ISLE OF THE DEAD is the only book of his to survive. Would it be unimportant then ? I wrote that, finished the article, and then came to revise it. And only then did I observe that, just possibly, ISLE OF THE DEAD may mark a progress on Zelazny's part.

As I have said, the protagonist of the novel, Francis Sandow, is a god, though a god among the Pei'an people. He shapes planets for a living (a god needs a living?) He is also 87th richest man in the known universe. He is also a man born of the 20th Century and living in the 32nd. And what happened to the convention that an author is allowed one improbability per story? It doesn't matter. There is a stoty to be told - and Zelazny has that No.1 SF writer's requirement, the ability to make anything sound probable. It is, you know.

And once again the story is simple. Sandow is challenged by his Pei'an god-adversary, accepts the challenge, and the consequent duel. But that is like saying the Grail-saga is simple. There is no simple good-and-evil about it. At the end the archetypal duel between the gods goes on, but the player (Cont'd)

who is that adversary has changed. Zelazny is not telling about yes-and-no, good-and-evil. He is talking about something more basic.

What is different about this book is that Zelazny has suddenly written about an invented mythology. I may have missed something. And because it is invented it does not have the roots of the available myths. But it is further out. It indicates that Zelazny has absorbed what he needs instead of using it as structure. It is progress.

Now, about concerns;;observe how lightly death walks among his characters. In LORD OF LIGHT re-incarnation was a matter of engineering. And now in ISLE OF THE DEAD, Sandow has survived twelve centuries, and the figures out of his past are almost casually resurrected. Life and death have become diffused, part of a continuing process. At the end of LORD OF LIGHT he says:-

"Death and Light are everywhere... and they begin, and, strive...
perhaps to create a thing of beauty."

Somewhere in there seems to be the essence of what Zelazny is saying. I do not have such equanimity in the face of my personal oblivion. The terror of extinction drives me into constant attempts at construction of structures which will survive me. And perhaps Zelazny understands this. But deep within his writing I feel (rather than see) a different, an exotic viewpoint. He is putting names to this desire. He is telling us not only of how we are but how we might be - of better worlds than this, at least.

* * * * * *

Ahem.

Sturgeon at least saw that eulogy was not enough. Zelazny is still climbing the mountain, he must be encouraged onward. So, let me mention what I consider is a fault.

For among the mythologies which Zelazny has swallowed is the mythology of science fiction. Venus is a world of swamps and oceans. Mars an old, tired world with philosophic people. And in doing that there is the danger that he will be bypassed by history. Not necessarily the history of the hardware - of the Mariners and Viking projects - but the history of his fellow SF writers, who are busy considering the way things are,

I hope this will not happen.

Bob Parkinson, March 1970.

** The double-asterisk in the first paragraph of Franz Rottensteiner's review on Page 30 was intended to refer to a piece published in SPECULATION No. 17 February 1968. This was Brian Stableford's review of LORD OF LIGHT which some readers may like to look up for interest's sake.

THE CRITICAL FRONT next time will include, among others, Brian Aldiss' review of Josef Nesvadba's IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE ABOMINABLE SNOWMAN (Gollancz 30s); Tony Sudbery's long essay on John Brunner's QUICKSAND (Sidgwick & Jackson 27s) Bruce Gillespie reviewing INFINITY ONE (ed Robert Hoskins, Lancer 75c) and ORBIT 4 (ed Damon Knight, Berkeley 75c; Rapp & Whiting 28s) . I also hope to have reviews of AND CHAOS DIED by Joanna Russ (Ace Special 75c); FOURTH MANSIONS by R.A. Lafferty (Ace 'Special' 75c); THE POLLINATORS OF EDEN by John Boyd (Gollancz 25s); NEW WRITINGS IN SF-17 ed John Carnell (Dobson 21s); and BEYOND THE BEYOND by Poul Anderson (Gollancz 30s).

THE MELTING POT

I am continually amazed at the enthusiasm and energy which people in the science fiction world bring to bear on their hobby. Professional writers and editors obviously have a vested interest in keeping in touch, but even so we have the remarkable situation whereby an amateur magazine like SPECULATION with a total circulation probably not much over 500 achieves a fantastic sort of response both percentage-wise and in the quality and intelligence of comment. Do you have any idea of the sort of response usually received by million-circulation Daily newspapers? By magazines in general? By direct-mailing or circulating a house-journal to people in industry who supposedly ought to be interested? I'm belabouring the issue because it is important; and in the last two cases mentioned above, where I can speak with a little authority, I can promise that you will receive no more than half-a-dozen letters for 10,000 copies despatched.

Last issue I disagreed with a couple of people who appeared to have very little time for fandom; this issue the whole magazine and especially the letter-column is full of others who disagree. We have something very good in science fiction fandom; I'm anxious not to lose it.

For the record, all letters received are assumed to be intended for publication unless stated otherwise. Also, of course, opinions below are not necessarily those of the editor; nevertheless I do take responsibility for publishing these comments and therefore reserve the right to amend or delete items accordingly. This is nothing new - I've worked this system in the past, but because of some recent upsets I'm warning in advance. I'm not a censor, just would like to keep things on a reasonably cordial basis, and expect I'll make errors of judgement in the future just as I've made them in the past. Thank you, all, for your letters that are much appreciated.

James Blish, Henley, Oxon.

Dear Mr Weston, "I can add a little - though not much - to Fred Pohl's puzzle about the genesis of Kornbluth's 'Shark Ship'. At the time, I was preparing what turned out to be the only issue of my prozine, Vanguard, and phoned Cyril to see if he had anything in the hopper. He described the two ideas of the then-unwritten story and asked me if I thought it would do, and if so, whether I could come up with a title. After some brooding, I phoned again to suggest 'Reap the Dark Tide', as suitable to both halves of the story; Cyril liked this but evidently forgot it in the heat of composition, for when the manuscript came in it was headed, "Whatever The Hell We Agreed To Call This Thing, by C.M. Kornbluth". Luckily I still remembered the title and used it. At that time, too, Cyril was particularly short of money, and it was coming up on Christmas, so I squeezed cash, not a cheque, out of my publisher and drove out to Levittown with it. It was the last time I ever saw him; he died later that same winter. The first time the story was anthologised, the anthologiser was Fred Pohl, and it was then that the story first came to be called 'Shark Ship' - a title that fits neither half of the story, whoever thought it up.

By coincidence, 'On The Wall of the Lodge' is also Fred's title; ours was 'Intersection with Change of Light'. He quite often changed author's titles perhaps in reaction to Horace Gold, who when he was editor of Galaxy was constantly changing endings. I hope he is wrong in saying that the novel (Cont/d)..

out of which it was quarried "certainly will never be finished", because I have nigh 300,000 words of it now and I would hate to let so much work just trail off. It almost certainly will never be published, though; like the fragment which did appear, it has a surface air of sanity but is fundamentally incomprehensible, and I won't explain it, either.

I second Fred's endorsement of John Brunner's 'The Totally Rich', which may be the most moving SF short story of the past twenty years or more. Some day I hope Fred will explain why he hid it away in Worlds of Tomorrow rather than running it in one of the two better-read magazines of the string. I must say, if the intent was to make people pay closer attention to WoT than before, it certainly had that effect on me.

M. John Harrison seems to be saying (he interrupts himself so much that it's hard to be sure) that criticism should take into account the intent of the artist. I counter-propose that in the telepathic society this implies, we wouldn't have any artists.

You ask how much work there can be in editing a volume like the Nebula Award Stories (SPECULATION-25, P.49). I can tell you; I am this year's editor. First, you line up somebody (this year, two people) to do the reviews of the year. The first five people you ask are too busy. Throughout the year you have been morbidly collecting the names of writers who died that year; now you decide whether to try to get a different obit-writer for each, or do them all yourself; the first course seems too complicated, the second too depressing. You ask Doubleday, through Lloyd Biggle, to get you some money for your reviewers; while you're at it you ask Lloyd for help in rounding up four copies of each story, because you need two manuscripts (one for Gollancz, one for Doubleday) and DDay will no longer accept tearsheets. You worry over whether the reviewers will make the deadline; when they do, you find that one of them has used his review to attack one of the winners and getting him to tone it down produces a great inter-organisation hassel because somebody else has promised him a free hand. (This obviously happened last year, not this.)

When the final ballot is sent out, you write to everybody who has been nominated and ask him for a three-month option on his story, or stories, by air mail, please. One writer on the U.S. east coast replies instantly; dead silence from the others, most of whom are 3000 miles farther away. Then you realise that you gave all these writers your new address, into which you won't be moving until next week. Wife drives madly to Henley daily. There it is discovered that my U.S. agent, from whom comes Most of our Money, is also using the new address; also a cable from wife's mother, which has been illegally dropped through the letter-slot of an empty house. Back to the ballot; you must decide how you yourself are going to vote, but also you need to guess the probable winners (without, ho ho ho, letting the first operation influence the second), and make a tentative list of which short-listers you are going to use. This is made more difficult because you have only a vague idea of the lengths of most of the pieces in question. And of course you must write an overall introduction for the book. As you sit down to do this you realise that Doubleday also expects, just seven days from now, a novel from you on which you have at present just 56 pages plus two sentences on the tape recorder.

Well, I won't go on, but I think it is visible that the job is somewhat more difficult than making up the more usual kind of anthology - and I say to both, Never Again.

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Back to Kornbluth again for a moment; One facet of his work that has been seriously neglected is his comic side. When he was just beginning his career, he wrote a series of marvellous Carrollian fantasies under the pen-name of Cecil Corwin, very few of which have ever been anthologised. I am happy to report that I have remedied this oversight; last year I got the estate's permission to make a book of the Corwin stories, under the title THIRTEEN O'CLOCK AND OTHER DEADLINES, which Dell is doing. This incidentally required a complete typescript, partly because the original old magazines were too fragile and too valuable to tear, but also because the originals were full of misprints. Several of the originals also contained non-Kornbluth lines inserted by the magazine editor to fill out a column of type or to accomodate the shape of an illustration; these had to come out (except in doubtful cases which I left in). But I loved every minute of this job; it was as much fun as doing a collection of my own."

Bruce Gillespie, Victoria, Australia.

Dear Pete, "I wish all SF reviewers would go to whatever class in criticism that Pam Bulmer attended. Beautiful stuff, wasn't it? (review of NOVA, SPECULATION-25) You can see clearly why there is so little basis for agreement among your correspondents in the rest of the magazine; none of them is willing to quote his evidence, so there is nothing concrete with which his opponent can argue. The NOVA review is magnificent, though - from my point of view, most of Delany's irritating mannerisms are set out precisely. The Delany fan, on the other hand, as something with which to argue. Also congratulate Jim Blish for me on the BAREFOOT IN THE HEAD review. This sort of standard is so rare anywhere; there is probably not much more to be said about the book except (a) all the infinite varieties of anger with which the American fans will greet it, and (b) my own review of it, where I will try to point out the many obvious links between BAREFOOT IN THE HEAD and all of Aldiss' other novels. There's no sign of the book here yet - the Customs Department have been talking loads of rubbish about drugs recently, and they may be holding the book on that score. It's almost certain that HAND-REARED BOY will be banned, anyway.

"David Rome", as you probably know, is David Boutland. He'll probably have a bit of a chuckle at Chris Priest's piece. As Chris has guessed, David counts his words in the millions - his main money-earner is TV scripts, with SF very much as a side-line. I'm inclined to think that 'People Like You' is an old story, but I don't know the full story on it."

* The following letter was written privately to Pamela Bulmer, but since it is
* of general interest Pamela has kindly allowed me to reprint it here.

Samuel R. Delany, San Francisco.

Dear Mrs Bulmer, "A note to thank you for your review of NOVA in SPECULATION. I particularly enjoyed the specific analysis of the early paragraph in Chapter five, and the discussion of Tyy's eyes and Katin's perception of them and her character. What you had to say there was immediately useful for something I'm working on now. While I don't feel a book-review has to be a personal letter to the author (as somebody or other in some fanzine mis-quoted me as saying), if a review manages to speak to a writer directly, certainly well and good. There's no way for the writer to know what his effect is until somebody takes it apart as you did.

For instance; I intended the word "animated" to be taken in the sense of "animated cartoon" - I might have said "cartoonish and mechanical" (though there are reasons why I didn't) -- which you, quite rightly, took to mean (Cont)

"lively". "Wombward" for me was a temporal word, to wit "In the direction of the womb", i.e., in the direction of embryonic infancy. The only womb Katin "had", of course, was his mother's. But I certainly see, as I used it, it is ambiguous - unfruitfully so. "Eyes of steel" to indicate strength is, of course, a perfectly terrible cliche. I vaguely recall thinking that it might be interesting to have them in a small, oriental woman who is travelling with another oriental who has blond hair (all over) and blue eyes. But no, it doesn't excuse it.

It's terribly helpful to know how words are interpreted. Nor do I mean to imply that you have mis-interpreted any of mine. All of them in our language carry an immense load. "Conotation" and "denotation" only fix points on a spectrum. It's quite a job for the author to find his voice - that particular presence that directs us through what he is saying so that we hit his intended shadings (the most fruitful shadings...) But we try.

Quibbles: I hope I've never expressed (publicly at any rate) dissatisfaction with reviews of my own work. I do believe it's the writer's duty to bear silently anything said in detraction of his work. Of course I'm apalled at the general level of most SF-criticism - but who isn't?

Now I suppose I shall contradict myself by going on to mention (under quibbles) that I saw Katin as physically weak and physically large (stooped shoulders, watery eyes, "...his big, weak fingers.." end ch.5, etc.) and the most knowledgeable about what was going on, if not the most perceptive. And after all, he is the 'author' of NOVA so that a bit of his 'finickyness' has to be taken as an author's attempt at scrupulous honesty in a self-portrait. At any rate I did intend him to be somewhat over-garrelous and you ("..a colossal bore...") certainly picked up on that.

A final point that's just an interesting irony, because it concerns the SFR article you quoted, that spends a lot of time talking about typoes. The line you used contains a sense-muddling misprint (Not your fault - I noted it when the article was first reprinted;) I was quoting John Foyster, and what John had said was: "..that does not clash inrdinately with that which is known to be true." With, not without! At any rate, the review strikes me as well thought through. Certainly I can follow all the hows and whys of your thinking. And that I am always grateful for."

Pamela Bulmer, Kent.

Dear Pete, "I was delighted with your comments about the NOVA review. Incidentally there is a mistake on the first page (my fault, I left out a clause when I did the clean copy). As it stands my meaning is not very clear so in case someone writes in and says so, it should read:

"Further, poetic prose must by definition employ a structure which gives it a rhythm which itself enhances its meaning."

The classes I attend aren't strictly speaking in literary criticism though that is part of their effect. They are in fact 'non-degree courses' run by the W.E.A. (Workers Education Association), which sounds more political than it is, its primary concern being educational. In practice though I've found a predominance os left-wing political conviction both amongst tutors and students, but at the same time it's tolerant and intelligent and adult so that none of the true-blue Tories I've met seem to feel out of place. All the tutors I've had have been Extra-Mural Tutors from Oxford University and the classes are run on the tutorial system. In practice this means that, bearing in mind

the students are all adults, we get some pretty lively and stimulating discussions, guided by tutors who have to be good because they haven't got a captive audience. To quote from the syllabus of the Open University (for which I've applied) one of the aims is 'to help students towards intelligent reading and assimilation, the clear expression of critical judgements, and habits of intellectual analysis and synthesis." You jolly well have to try and express yourself clearly and intelligently if you don't want to sit Uhming and Ahing in front of 15 or more intelligent adults and sounding a right Charlie!

I must say I've felt I am in a vacuum with the reviews I've done so far both for you and for Vision. Of course I've had comments from friends and even writers on the receiving end. They've all been very kind and encouraging but I don't know what disinterested people think of them - whether they are interesting in themselves, or informative, or too diffuse or (horrors) dull and pretentious. I can't even ask people what they think of 'Kathryn Buckley', since I've made no secret about the pen-name, mainly because I think a critic or reviewer ought to be prepared to stand up and be counted, particularly in such an uninhibitedly vocal field as science fiction.

* Incidentally, I do suggest readers take a careful look at Pam's review of
* BAREFOOT IN THE HEAD, in the March 1970 Vision of Tomorrow, which strikes
* me as being one of the best SF reviews I've ever read anywhere. PRW

Mike Moorcock has some interesting things to say in his column, but I can't agree with his remarks on Michael Kenward's regarding Ballard. Ballard is a writer and well aware of the effects of language and that is why his letter was rude and discourteous. It is one thing for an illiterate adolescent to try to be forthright and be accidentally rude (for example); Mr Ballard is far too mature and experienced a writer not to be aware of how his letter would sound to the recipient. While I can sympathise with Mike Moorcock's feelings I think it might be interesting to speculate on why there is antagonism instead of a straightforward difference of opinion. Too many young 'new wave' writers go around implying that the old-wavers are too lazy/unintelligent/insensitive to appreciate their thing.

If Mike thought the standard of discussion at Oxford was low - he should have stayed for the Guest of Honour Speech. Such a speech from a new-wave advocate makes those who've been slapped down and made to feel inferior, feel angry, and rightly so. A Speaker who accepts an invitation to speak is being discourteous in delivering such an obviously inferior product. I think fandom has shown far more tact than could have been expected on this occasion. The unfortunate thing is that it is people like Mike who get the backlash. Perhaps the thing to keep in mind is that there are a lot of very clever people around SF, many of whom haven't highly-trained intelligence and are sometimes inarticulate or clumsy at expressing themselves. A little of the tolerance which is being pleaded for Ballard might be a good thing all round."

Donald Wollheim, New York.

Dear Mr Weston, "I read Mike Moorcock's "column" in the latest SPECULATION with quite a little regret at having, in an outspoken manner, hurt the feelings of a chap I do regard as sincerely sensitive and one of the "Good Guys". It was rather reckless of you to ask my opinion of the New Wave at Oxford (it was hardly the subject of that panel), but you could not have known that it has never been my habit to dodge questions and issues when confronting the public. I felt free to say what Mike described as "the cold truth" especially because Moorcock was in the audience, no one could say I was talking

behind his back, and he could be free to comment, refute, or run away. He chose the latter, and I do not hold that to his discredit since it is quite evident that Mike is just as sweet a guy as they come and quite honestly shy. He says that he hid most of the time at the New York 1967 convention because he was frightened, and I can respect him for this. I rarely attend the various panels at conventions myself because I find them altogether too full of empty talk, ignorance, vague thinking, or egotistical bushwah. The panel specifically on the 'new wave' at the Oxford convention struck me as singularly weak precisely because no-one dared come to grips with the thing.

It seems that I really underestimated the extent with which I impressed Mike as an agreeable sort when I visited him the year before. My mission at that time was to present him with the Nebula he had won from the U.S. SFWA for his 'Behold The Man', a work I found wholly admirable and an award I felt truly won. It was hardly the time or place to engage in differences of opinion on Mike's handling of New Worlds. This is one of the handicaps of being an editor professionally. One must tread carefully when dealing with authors. One is an object of fear, awe, desire, and a great deal of hidden hatred. The editor is the man whose criticism really hurts - he must learn therefore the fine art of amiable evasion. (I recall one of my experiences as a guest at a writers' conference, one of those affairs where one is the imported New York editor surrounded by crowds of would-be writers, mainly middle-aged ladies. During a question-and-answer session (and I am always honest in answering their questions), one lady stood up and thanked me, saying that for one of the 'enemy' I was quite a decent fellow. I think that's when I realised just how not-quite-successful writers look on the chap at whom they aim their brain-children.)

Anyway, Mike's comments hurt me just as much as presumably mine hurt him. One final comment, this on his reference to me as a Con. I am not sure how he derives this for me, but I wonder if he is not somewhat of a better "con" than I am. Back in 1967 I published a novel entitled THE WRECKS OF TIME in one of my double-books. It was submitted in the form of tear-sheets from New Worlds carrying the by-line of James Colvin. Mike Moorcock allowed that this was his own work, signed the contract, and allowed the book to be published under the by-line of Michael Moorcock. Now in the January 1970 New Worlds (no.197) there appears a boxed obituary for a James Colvin, with photo, and a listing of credits asserting him to be the author of THE WRECKS OF TIME. Mike was neither the editor nor the publisher of that particular issue of New Worlds, still it is hard to believe that he is unaware of the insertion of an item like this. Who, might I ask, is "conning" the public now? The fact remains -- I like the guy.

When you get the next batch of Ace Books releases you will find therein the paperback reprint of the original New Wave presentation, Judy Merril's ENGLAND SWINGS SF. This was my purchase and my presentation. My viewpoint as an editor is stated in my opening remarks on the first two pages. I had asked Miss Merril to write a new introduction to this edition which might bring the subject up to date and possibly answer the unfavourable review given the book by the very group it sought to praise. Miss Merril refused to do so - refused as a matter of fact to even answer my enquiry. Quite possibly she, too, felt that the manner in which her efforts had been rewarded by New Worlds was sufficient to make her wash her hands of the whole affair."

Dan Morgan, Lincs.

Dear Pete, "My first reaction to Moorcock's abuse was one of annoyance at his deliberate misinterpretation of my remarks. So the thing in question was a computer printout (DR CHRISTOPHER EVANS LANDS ON THE MOON) - I'd have to be even more stupid than he seems to think I am if I had failed to recognise that. My point was that it was bad Science Fiction.

I have always respected Mike's sincerity and his single-mindedness, and I know that he has made considerable personal sacrifices in trying to make a go of New Worlds. However, I do reserve the right to hold the opinion that his efforts are misguided."

Greg Benford, University of California.

Dear Pete, "SPECULATION-25 arrived today. Very good issue, I think, perhaps the best in a year or more. The general level of commentary seems to have risen in this issue, particularly due to Pohl, Blish and Bulmer. Pohl is a master of casual commentary combined with insight into the roots of much SF writing.

It is fascinating to watch J.J. Pierce become more and more reasonable in your letter column, while others such as Platt and Moorcock, seem to feel called upon to defend themselves in terms increasingly personal. Surely Moorcock would find some people at conventions friendly towards his views? While, as Aldiss remarks, the level of SF criticism is not high, I do feel that there is some confusion between the academic style of criticism and "good" criticism. Academics tend to select certain types of writing for their specially-improvised scalpels, but these are not necessarily the best or most significant published works (Hammett and Chandler, to cite two fine writers whom I admire as much as Moorcock, were not precisely the darlings of university criticism when they were writing.) In fact, if the direction of Aldiss' work is any example, a certain infatuation with the conventional monuments of ULYSSES may lead to a remarkable timidity in his "bold" new non-SF approaches. (While I appreciated BAREFOOT IN THE HEAD, I really prefer Joyce, on several counts and on all levels. There is also something a bit stereotyped about Aldiss's ideas of the acid experience and what it will mean for society. If he really feels the primary social effect of LSD is that of shattered consciousness I would suggest a few months sabbatical in California for some research.)

Michael Moorcock surely likes to have both sides of the argument. If a fellow professional condemns him in public Mike cries that he is gutless. If in fact the professional makes his views known forcefully and in private, he is called 'rude'. It really seems to me Michael is being more sensitive than he needs to be; he has done such good work that I think it safe to assume generalised 'new wave' criticism isn't directed at him, and, if they are aimed at his general principles, so what? A man should not assume he is bodily interchangeable with his ideals; otherwise it will become impossible to attack literary manifestoes, and then what will we do for amusement?"

* It's now safe to say that almost no-one argues that there shouldn't be some
* experimentation and innovation in science fiction. What very definitely does
* require refuting is the idea that a certain body of 'new' writers have a
* monopoly on the right to be heard, and a sort of moral righteousness over the
* SF writers of the past 25 years who are usually dismissed as beneath notice.
* Usually, in fact, the 'new wave' type stories owe much to earlier writers
* and are hardly distinguishable from the main body of science fiction.

John J. Pierce, New Jersey.

Dear Mr Weston, "Both Michael Moorcock and M.John Harrison deserve some sort of award for supercilious hypocrisy on the basis of their remarks in SPECULATION-25.

Harrison is mad at Donald A. Wollheim for engaging in moral criticism of BUG JACK BARRON. Seemingly, a valid point. But coming from a man who condemned Robert A. Heinlein on moral grounds in the previous issue, the outrage seems less than sincere, somehow. Moreover, Harrison ignores the fact that Wollheim's outburst -- admittedly an overreaction -- was caused largely by Norman Spinrad's own polemics. Spinrad has compiled a record of labeling editors and writers he dislikes as "pimps","prostitutes", "fascists", and the like, and for some reason he can't imagine how this sort of abuse could possibly offend anybody. His polemics have been made both in panel discussions and in articles. What for Wollheim is a lapse from civility is for Spinrad standard practice.

Harrison also, while pretending to be broad-minded in condemning the critical excesses of 'old' and 'new wave' alike, makes the usual distortion that all 'old wave' stuff is "simple, comfortable escapism", while all 'new wave' material is "complex modern fiction". Well, I've read both, and Harrison's generalisation just isn't true. There's more complexity in Ursula LeGuin's 'old wave' novel THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS, for example, than in any of Ballard's writing (and I've read the "condensed novels" too). Notice the cop-out when Harrison refuses to say exactly what it is that a "condensed novel" is doing. Either he doesn't know, or he's afraid that revealing the truth would make him - and Ballard - look silly. This is an example of the Argument from Authority. "It's great because I say it is".

I've read enough reviews to discover that, contrary to popular belief, most "Old Wavicles" lean over backwards to be tolerant of the 'new wave' writers, whereas the 'new wavicles' condemn all 'old wave' stuff out of hand and write articles for "critical reviews" explaining that anyone who reads or writes the stuff is mentally disturbed. One New wavicle here even called Lester del Rey a "psychotic" because del Rey didn't like "2001".

As for Moorcock, what can I say? He calls Heinlein a "mediocre writer whose work doesn't bear discussion in literary terms," I could make the same comment about Moorcock, having read THE FIRECLOWN, BEHOLD THE MAN, THE ICE SCHOONER, THE BLACK CORRIDOR, etc, etc. I've read enough of his stories and comments about other writers to see an obvious pattern. The 'literary' value he sees in any work is directly proportional to the degree to which said work reflects his own ideological attitudes. When he talks about "quality of observation", he means, "seeing the world the way I do". Apparently he is upset at fans because they get mad at him for insisting they accept everything he says as gospel.

Anyone who could be moved to tears by as silly a piece of writing as Pamela Zodine's 'The Heat Death of the Universe' is, in my opinion, reacting to something other than "literary" quality. As you yourself pointed out, simpering after John Russell Fearn while condemning Heinlein makes no sense whatever. Moorcock's tastes are as subjective as anyone else's - that would not be so bad in itself. But he hypocritically condemns "authoritarianism", then turns around and demands that we accept his authoritarian pronouncements on what constitutes "literary" quality, giving us no reason to accept them other than his say-so. (Cont/d)..

I'm not surprised that Moorcock "hid" most of the time at the 1967 World Convention. He says he was "horrified" by the level of discussion there. I was at that convention, and the horror consisted of two things that stand out; Spinrad calling Fred Pohl a "pimp" and all of Pohl's writers "prostitutes", and del Rey trying to find out what kind of "ideas" Moorcock was trying to have incorporated into science fiction. I don't know if Moorcock was present during Spinrad's polemics, but I do know he was incapable of explaining to del Rey about his "ideas" and had to be rescued by Judith Merril. Perhaps this is what "horrified" him. Small wonder.

Well, I guess this all sounds like 'personal' criticism, but it's really no more 'personal' than what Harrison and Moorcock themselves are doing. I wonder how many people will notice that fact? "

* I still don't like the way in which you classify everything in terms of
* 'new' and 'old' waves, and I don't know anything about Norman Spinrad other
* than that he has sent me a couple of kind letters. But otherwise - and toning
* down your remarks just a little - yes, I agree with you 100%. Incidentally
* John, have you ever tried writing stories? I know your style is basically
* that of a newspaper reporter, I have some pretensions in that direction
* myself, but your letters are tremendously vivid and it occurs to me that you
* might have a lot of success actually writing science fiction.

John Foyster, Victoria, Australia.

Dear Pete, "It is odd that there was little reaction in number 25 to your Statement of Position on page 48 of number 24 ("...asking for tolerance for their own work, they (the so-called 'new wave' writers and editors) refuse to allow it to others.." Look it up!). To far too great an extent does this New/Old Wave controversy remind me of the little boys who pick sides in order to have fights. But your remark about "pretentious and arrogant" claims is worth noting, and it is in this context that I think you picked up my remark about "castles (made) with bricks of straw". I notice that Michael Kenward has a slight run-in with you on this subject in number 25. Now what is close to unique about science fiction is the extent to which the practicioners of the art indulge in discussion and argument about it, and, in particular, their own works. In my view this is unhealthy anyway. But the way in which it is done is even more unpleasant. It is to this that I object and I think you do, too. On the other hand, you have published a good deal of material by writers, which is, I think, what Michael Kenward was getting at.

Australian readers of SF are in a peculiar position vis-a-vis the writers of their favourite reading matter, by comparison with the citizens of the US and the UK. A reader who is an ardent fan in the UK, say, has the opportunity not only to read the works, but to hear the author discuss, describe or defend them at conventions and perhaps in fanzines. These opportunities are so nearly non-existent in Australia that they might as well be forgotten. So Australian readers concentrate upon the work, not the man.

That could be an advantage. For instance, you refer to a character I described as being 'full of shit' as being just that, but an "interesting and pleasant enough chap to talk to". Consequently you will be inhibited when it comes to saying what you think about him. I, however, have not had the pleasure of his company, and therefore consider only the worth of what he has to say. But there can also be a disadvantage in this remoteness from what is sometimes laughingly referred to as 'civilisation'. And that is that people like myself are cut off from 'what's happening'. (Cont/d)..

So far as knowing what is going on presently in the minds of science fiction writers are concerned this is perfectly true. That, however, has rather more to do with the state of the art as a whole rather than with specific works. Overall, for a variety of reasons, I don't think this is too damaging.

All this arose out of my suggestion in SPECULATION-23 that Ballard was hard to follow when one has the intent of making a coherent whole out of his published mutterings. This doesn't mean that I required a simple picture, merely a meaningful one. In fact we must expect the picture to be complex. In ASFR-9 Moorcock wrote: "Foyster is quite rightly reacting to some of the deliberate overstatements made by me and Ballard. This kind of overstatement is used to heighten what we believe to be the issues at hand. We know we exaggerate simplify, and often sound wild - but it gets its effect, and it gets people talking," etc.

This is to say that some at least of the claims made for New Worlds and Ballard, say, are purely PR, and are not believed even by Moorcock and Ballard. There is nothing 'wrong' with this, for New Worlds is a commercial venture, and needs sales. Controversy sells, and so on. But what it does mean is that the person who tries to approach New Worlds and its writers seriously faces considerable problems. On the one hand the PR material must be separated from the true feelings of the writers (if these latter are to be considered at all, which I would regard as a debatable question), and on the other the writers concerned are forced to defend the PR image, which is not necessarily an image in which they themselves believe.

There are other dangers in this situation; some writers, for example, may come to believe the PR which at first was well-understood to be 'exaggeration' - in this way a Frankenstein monster may be created. New writers may buy the PR at face value, and never come to see its origin. And so on. But the worst thing about it all is that any serious intentions which the New Worlds stable may have had must now be regarded with suspicion, for who can tell the serious from the flack? No, not the writers any more, as I've indicated above. To be noticed nowadays (or at any time) one does not have to make sense, merely a lot of noise.

Now where does this leave Ballard, the original subject of this ramble? In addition to the New Worlds PR there is also Ballard's personal PR, so to try to form any picture of Ballard as a writer from his published opinions (say as in SPECULATION or IT last year) is doomed to failure. There is only one way to get at Ballard, and that is through his published fiction, leaning heavily on the works published before the new New Worlds. Having done that, one can gently approach the heavily-mined present-day works. If Ballard is a good writer, what one sees will make sense. But if he is less than claimed, this will become painfully obvious.

My own view is that Ballard is more-or-less as good as is claimed for him. But, without seeking to make a comparison between the two names, most of the New Worlds PR has been somewhat akin to an attempt to establish Newton as a leading theological writer, largely because no one is willing to do the work required (I'm not keen on it myself). New Worlds writers are mildly notorious with regard to the seriousness of their approach (see, for example, Charles Platt on Page 62 of NW 187). So long as New Worlds is trivial, it can safely be ignored.

(Cont/d)..

There are times when I wish the New Worlds School (I know that's an exaggeration) would shut up for a while and do some thinking. I also wish there could be some straight talk from them. But meantime we have to plough through all the inconsistent, almost meaningless PR. It can be fun, though."

* Interesting point there, John, about judging an author by his fiction rather
* than by what he may say he is trying to do. I wish a few others would use
* this method. This ties in with my reply to Sam Moskowitz last time, of
* course. If there is a 'new wave', the only way to 'beat it down' is for the
* non-'new wave' authors to show they can produce good science fiction without
* throwing the experience of the last 40 years overboard.
* Just in case you haven't seen it yet, John, I'll quote a passage from an
* interview with Michael Moorcock in SFR No.34: "...the next thing to do was
* to revitalise the whole field of science fiction, which was then done in a
* negative way to begin with by making outrageous attacks on what we believed
* to be sacred cows of science fiction, and various well-respected authors.
* Which got a lot of feedback. Which is the reason why it was done..."
* John J. Pierce started his Second Foundation because he believed there was
* a deliberate 'conspiracy' to distort the SF field. Seems he wasn't far wrong!

Bruce Gillespie, Victoria, Australia.

Dear Pete, "Personally I find the attitudes you describe quite mysterious. For a start nobody in England seems to have a sense of humour. In Australia we judge a Convention by the number of good laughs it generates; in England the card seems to be scored with insults. Surely nothing is worth being insulted about - if somebody writes slightingly of an author's book ... well, the mind boggles at the thought of an author who really thinks himself liked by all of the people all of the time. The question remains; how much SF measures up to even the most superficial standards of good writing? Hardly any of it. I think most writers should be puzzled by any and all good reviews they get, and should suspect the competence and motives of the reviewer. And again - if (i) the reviewer dislikes your book and provides no competently displayed evidence against it, then the author may merely ignore the review, but (ii) if a reviewer dislikes a book and provides good evidence for his view, then the author may answer with a competent answer.

In no case is there any excuse for whining or huffing or getting annoyed. Writers in Australia, and, for the most part, in America are the most affable of people. The best letters I've received have come from people like Silverberg and Aldiss and Delany - gentlemen all. And yet I've never received anything from any of the New Worlds crew, when I've taken such pains to present their work fairly. And I've seen what Mr Ballard thinks of Us All.

Is it the climate over there?"

* Your attitude is fine by me, Bruce, being a fairly affable type, but what do
* you do when people (some people) seem to like insulting and being insulted?
* Maybe it is our weather - or they're nuts! But if you're wondering about
* motives, there's no mystery. Read my old pal Charles Platt's letters in
* SFR 30, 34 & 35, of which the single most idiotic statement is "...it doesn't
* really lead to the sort of slam-bang nastiness we used to get. The phrasing
* of someone like Piers Anthony is too laborious to meet the necessary standards
* of unpleasant repartee."

Franz Rottensteiner, Austria

Dear Pete, "I found SPECULATION for January 1970 interesting but not inviting comment; I have my periods. Occasionally I feel like writing letters to anybody, but most of the time I'm too lazy to do anything, even when I dislike something. The Heinlein-issue was a bad dream, and not even my own painful remembrance that some years ago I might have written in the same terms as most of your contributors doesn't help to dispell the sour taste.

Mats Linder's letter was good. It served again to point out the amusing difference between what some people claim to like or do and what they actually like and do. Science fiction might best be described in terms of paradoxes; loudly-proclaimed liking for change with an open love for the institutions of the past, superficial changes to hide the essential alikeness of all those supposedly future societies (Heinlein's success is to a great extent due, I believe, to the assuring quality of his fiction - that the future will remain essentially the same as the present, and that the same philistines that rule the U.S.A. today will rule the galaxy tomorrow), love for intelligence combined with great stupidity (one reads and hears that SF authors are all very intelligent but they seem to forget all about it as soon as they sit down to write fiction), a stressing of the individual without the ability to portray individuals, enthusiasm for science without an understanding of science, and so on.

I must agree with J.G.Ballard; fandom has achieved nothing and it has always been a severe handicap for SF. Without fandom SF would be almost ignored today, most SF books would never see reviews. But in fandom SF authors get the echo that they don't get from the world at large; and the reviews in fandom are written by 'specialists', people who supposedly love SF and understand something about SF. In reality most science fiction fans are an ignorant and almost illiterate bunch; exactly the kind of people the authors need to get praise. Or else how could one explain the enthusiastic reception of the dreary stories that won the Hugos and Nebulas during the past few years? And when someone stands up and shows a genuine desire for a better and more complex science fiction, he is instantly attacked by the multitude as a Quisling of some sort. As a blasphemer against the accumulation of trash that is the body of science fiction.

(Later)..As to why I sound so 'bitter'. It is perhaps the result of disappointed love. Once there was a time when I believed SF to be something special, but now I know how inferior in all respects it really is, but still feel it could be something important. If I had always considered it as some sort of cheap popular entertainment, I would hardly be so disappointed as I am now.

But generally, I feel that English criticism is far more friendly and trys to give a "well-balanced" picture of a book than does German criticism (and this is true not only for SF criticism). I'm sure that most of your readers would be appalled if they read some of the nasty things very well-respected German authors have said about other, equally-famous authors.

I sometimes appreciate the English thing - but in most cases I feel that the reviews of SF books are far too 'literate' - they are discussed as if they are important literature, which they aren't. This applies to many of your SPECULATION reviews; they are often far better than the books discussed, but nevertheless very wrong in their evaluation. It isn't acceptable to compare a science fiction author with Shakespeare, Thomas Mann, Auden, or with whom

(Cont/d)..

whatever, if you don't also note the gulf that exists between them on the one hand and SF on the other. This gulf is perhaps hard to prove, but you just need to read any SF story and then a work of real literature."

* Franz, obviously I can't agree with what you say above. And if you call the
* body of SF "trash" and fans "an ignorant and almost illiterate bunch", then
* you must expect to be attacked from time to time. Those are strong words.
* I also feel you are getting a bit carried away with your regard for "real
* literature" to a point where you are looking for things that aren't intended in
* science fiction and are ignoring the important things which SF can offer.
* Don't forget that SF is mostly intended as "popular entertainment", and of
* course, as I said in one of my letters, if you really find recent SF stories
* to be that dreary then why continue to read them?
* I suppose I ought to mention here that a long article by Franz Rottensteiner
* about Robert A. Heinlein appeared in SFR-35 along with an answer by Alexei
* Panshin. For those who would like to read Science Fiction Review themselves
* rather than second-hand, the address is: Richard E. Geis, P.O. Box 3116,
* Santa Monica, California 90403. Subscriptions 2/$1. Or In England, from
* Ethel Lindsay, Courage House, 6 Langley Ave, Surbiton, Surrey. 4/- each.

Ted White, New York.

Dear Pete, "The Heinlein issue was probably unharmed by my absence. I found myself checkmarking certain items, but not specifically because I thought them the best or the worst items in the issue. Usually it was simply that they niggled me into nit-picking. John Brunner, for example, was the first to earn a rash of marginal checkmarks, and less because I disagree with his thesis than because he garbles his facts unnecessarily. 'All You Zombies' is not an "early" story -- it appeared after all in 1958 or 59 in F&SF. Perhaps John is thinking of 'By His Bootstraps'. And while John professes no interest in Heinlein's juveniles, he devotes space to CITIZEN OF THE GALAXY which was one such juvenile. (So was STARSHIP TROOPERS). And John seems to think that GLORY ROAD follows FARNHAM'S FREEHOLD instead of the reverse. None of these points really, as I have said, have much to do with the points he makes, but I note them in the interests of science and nit-picking accuracy.

Brian Aldiss, I note, is still sneering at Heinlein. One presumes this is a case of the dog yapping at the heels of his master, particularly since he throws in a gratuitous slam at Weinbaum. I recently read 'A Martian Odyssey' for the first time (actually, about the same time I read DANGEROUS VISIONS, to put a date on it), and thus can't be faulted for childhood nostalgia if I state that it read better than anything Aldiss ever wrote (and the science was no poorer either).

M.John Harrison, on the other hand, isn't even up to yapping at Heinlein's heels. He throws us a few ex cathedra pronouncements from some lofty moral perch, but they apply equally well to his own piece. To wit: "Harrison is essentially a purveyor of shoddy goods; his stereotypes are mentally and emotionally crippled; his idealogies are shopsoiled and terrifyingly obsolescent; his image-vocabulary is quite barren, his piece as undernourished as a Jew in a Konzentrationslager. Etc." Basically, he has trotted out all the lip-phrases of the modern European Liberal, including neatly gussied-up references (no matter how out-of-place) to the persecution of Jews, which he somehow manages by inference to transplant from Germany to the U.S.A. and Heinlein... There is no solidity to what he says; he preaches from the height of moral outrage but says nothing whatsoever and ends up with the usual pious pointing finger; "The answer is Chicago." What shit. (Cont/d)..

Spinrad betrays his own lack of awareness of either Heinlein or science fiction. He credits Heinlein with "the invasion of Earth by hidden mind-controlling aliens", when it might be fairer to credit Eric Frank Russell (although I doubt that he was the first either), and he seems to assume that "the SF produced in the late '50's tended to cater to this juvenile enthusiasm as a result /of the publication of Heinlein's juvenile SF novels/." Spinrad hasn't the vaguest idea of what he's talking about, of course.

"Juvenile" SF entered our field in a noticeable way in 1930 with the first issue of Astounding Stories of Super Science, an unabashedly juvenile action-adventure pulp with a thin gloss of what we consider SF. When Street & Smith bought the magazine and tamed it down, others claimed its mantle. Wonder Stories was sold and became Thrilling Wonder Stories and spawned a twin, Startling Stories. Both were pretty "juvenile" in their earlier days, achieving respectability only in the late forties. But in the early forties they were eclipsed by such titles as Captain Future and Planet Stories, to say nothing of the fly-by-night titles like Marvel et al. And the Ziff-Davis Amazing and Fantastic Adventures were also edited for the eight-to-twelve-year-old set.

What Heinlein did was to set high standards in SF aimed at that age-group; he neither created the market nor pimped for it. If Spinrad had even the foggiest notion of the traditions and history of SF (which he doesn't, as his Knight magazine piece on fandom proved), he could not have made the ridiculous assertions he makes here. The SF of the late fifties had damned little at all to do with Heinlein's juveniles, or the sophisticated audience they created; it had a lot more to do with the policies of various publishers who were running scared at that point. The cause-and-effect which suggests makes Heinlein "the bastard grandfather, twice-removed, of the 'new wave'" is founded purely on Spinrad's ignorance and nothing more.

Chris Priest's column in the same issue was, by contrast, a breath of fresh air, and a delight to read. But British writers must be very different from their US counterparts if "when writers get together there is very little to say to each other about writing." Any gathering of two or more writers around here is guaranteed to produce volumes of shoptalk, in fact.

(Later)..I enjoyed Chris' column ~~(in this current issue)~~ but he exaggerates a little. Only one of my books -- a hardcover which was also reviewed quite favourably in Analog -- has been reviewed in Amazing, "in depth" or otherwise. I did publish one illustration of my own (it wasn't very good), mostly for the fun of it. I have much better artists now, and I rely on them. I review books for the book-review column for one simple reason; the column is budgetted at $25.00 an issue. Some issues I've run more than five outsized reviews, for which I pay a munificent $5.00 a piece. Since I receive nothing for my own reviews, by using them I balance out the budget.

Chris's remark that "He gets his plots by watching Star Trek" was probably meant ironically, but I hope no one takes him seriously. I didn't identify Star Trek in that editorial, specifically because I have been identified before as "anti-Star Trek" and the Trekkies hate me accordingly. But I only "got" one plot from the series, and that by inversion. The show I saw was so awful and so irritating that I had to write a story which stood it on its head. 'By Furies Possessed' is that story and it is getting a lot of enthusiastic acclaim. It will be a 95¢ Signet novel in June. I'm glad Chris likes what he terms ETHE editing, because so do I. I don't know yet whether it will be the answer to the problems the magazines face, however. "

Philip Jose Farmer, California.

Dear Peter, "Guts with grace! I wish I'd said that about Heinlein, Busby's phrase is beautiful and appropriate (Symposium, SPECULATION-24) Heinlein, as a man, impresses me that way, too. There's no need for me to comment on him as an author, since your last two issues have covered him in that role quite thoroughly. Every author has faults, including Dostoyevsky, Joyce, Twain, Miller, Fielding (the greatest English writer). Proust, Balzac Nietzche, etc, and so has Heinlein. But he balances out more than favourably as far as I'm concerned; his virtues outweigh his flaws. Need or not, I did comment, I see".

Stephen Compton, Oakland, California.

Dear Mr. Weston, "The Heinlein Symposium was interesting but it had the basic weakness of such affairs; i.e., it was little more than a collection of opinions almost entirely unsupported by careful argument and citation from Heinlein's works. (A weakness of SPECULATION generally, perhaps). Thus the comments could range from Daniel F. Galouye's comparison of Heinlein to Hemingway and Proust at one extreme to M. John Harrison's attack on Heinlein and his readers as mental cases at the other. (In a similar way other people damn William Burroughs and Celine as sick, sick, sick -- in both cases the charge is irrelevant to literary considerations. At best Harrison is like T.S. Eliot, the 'new wave' of his day, downgrading Milton; but Milton still stands, and Eliot too; there is room for both). One exception to this pattern of unsupported opionion was G.D. Doherty's brief article.

Like Christopher Priest, I too am seduced by the "compulsive quality" of Heinlein's writing, while remaining "poles apart" from him philosophically. Even the lectures of his recent novels are presented with a vigour and charm that make them interesting.

Heinlein is the field's most-discussed writer, I think, becuase, apart from his storytelling abilities, every new book, whatever its faults, is fresh and surprising, not a tired retread of old ground, old routines. This, and his almost combative vigour and colourfulness make other worthy writers like Arthur C Clarke seem pale by comparison. Yet other writers must be discussed; there should be future symposia on, say, Clarke, Sturgeon, Aldiss, to name a few!"

* At the present moment I am starting to receive requests for the Symposium issue, accompanied by sticky dimes and quarters, as a result of a mention in the July Amazing. I may have to reprint the issue. And still the letters on Heinlein roll in; I have here an extremely interesting account by Perry Chapdelaine of his first meeting with Heinlein which will regretfully have to wait until the next issue. There are many other comments. In the meantime I must note that Heinlein's new novel, I WILL FEAR NO EVIL will be published by Putnam and in Galaxy during the latter part of the yaar. Alexei Panshin will review the book for SPECULATION as soon as it becomes available.

George W. Price, Chicago

Dear Mr. Weston, "I think I know the origin of the misapprehansion that STARSHIP TROOPERS is set five or six thousand years in the future (as Mats Linder said in SPECULATION-25). It began with the jacket blurb on the original U.S. edition, (Putnam 1959):

> 'From the battle of Marathon to Korea's Porkchop Hill a certain breed of men have come forth to shoulder the burdens and beliefs of their particular world. For the Mobile Infantryman (MI) of this hard-hitting story of combat 5,000 years in the future, the passage of time has not made the job any easier.'

The error is perpetuated in the first U.S. paperback edition (Signet 1961), with blurbs placing the story "five thousand years in the future" and "in the seventieth century." But the second paperback printing (Signet, 1963) has substantially the same blurbs, changed to "two hundred years from tomorrow" and "in the twenty-second century."

Presumably Putnam made the original error and Signet copied it until someone - perhaps Heinlein - set them straight. But why did Putnam's blurb writer make such an absurd mistake in the first place, since the story is very obviously only two or three hundred years in the future? I suggest that he misunderstood the following, from early in Chapter VII (P.123 of Putnam, P.80 of Signet):

> 'We're the bloody infantry, the doughboy, the duckfoot, the foot soldier who goes where the enemy is and takes him on in person. We've been doing it, with changes in weapons but very little change in our trade, at least since the time five thousand years ago when the foot-sloggers of Sargon the Great forced the Sumerians to cry "Uncle!" '

This ignoramus apparently thought that Sargon the Great was a future character invented by Heinlein! Note also the blurb's reference to the battle of Marathon as if it were at the beginning of military history; presumably the writer would not have said that had he realised that Sargon lived circa 2800 B.C."

* I thought that was the answer! How galling for an author to be so misread. Substantially the same deduction came from Peter Bilbrough of Malvern, Worcs.

WE-ALSO-HEARD-FROM-DEPARTMENT:

When I typed Page 35 a few weeks ago I said that SPECULATION draws a fantastic sort of response, in relation to numbers printed. Since then more letters have come in, so many more that I just haven't room to publish them; probably more letters than I've had for any previous issue. I intend to use most of these in the next issue (a special Letters-issue?) but in the meantime here are some of the other people I heard from:- Rick Sneary; Perry Chapdelaine (two letters); John J. Pierce; Andrew Offutt (two letters); Tony Sudbery (a huge exercise in the analysis and logical demolition of John Harrison's article last time); Alex B. Eisenstein; Ian Williams; George W. Price; Peter Bilbrough; Ursula K. LeGuin; John L. Millard; Joe Patrizio; Patrick McGuire; Roger Waddington; Sandra Miesel; David C. Piper; Harry Warner Jr (two letters); Steve Craddock; Allan Lloyd; Michael B Caines; Bryan Bird; Robert Conquest; David Boutland ("David Rome"); Patrick Strang; Darrell Schweitzer; George Hay and many others.

BOOK GUIDE ANNEXE: Since I completed the Book Guide some other books have arrived, from Doubleday in New York. They are:-

TAU ZERO by Poul Anderson, $4.95 (short version in Galaxy as 'To Outlive Eternity' in 1967) As you'll recall, Christopher Priest made some comments on this novel earlier in the issue. I hope to have more discussion next time on the book.

THE SCIENCE FICTION HALL OF FAME edited by Robert Silverberg, $7.95. This is an incredible 560 pages in length and is supposedly a basic one-volume library of the short science fiction story. The twenty-six stories were chosen by the Science Fiction Writers of America as a kind of retrospective 'Nebula' list for the years up to 31st December 1964, the date of inception of SFWA. Amon this select company you will recognise many all-time favourites; some examples are;- Nightfall (Asimov); 'Surface Tension' (Blish); 'First Contact' (Leinster); THE COLD EQUATIONS (Godwin); ITS A GOOD LIFE (Bixby); COMING ATTRACTION (Leiber) and many others. Further comment on this volume next time.

SPECULATION BOOK GUIDE

This Guide contains mention of every SF title received since the previous issue of SPECULATION. For longer reviews see The Critical Front (Pages 23-34), Frederik Pohl's column (Pages 5-9) and View of Suburbia (Pages 10-14).

FROM GOLLANCZ:

BEYOND THE BEYOND by Poul Anderson, 30s. Five novellas,'Memory'; 'Brake'; 'The Sensitive Man'; 'The Moonrakers'; 'Starfog'. To be reviewed next issue. Recommend
IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE ABOMINABLE SNOWMAN by Josef Nesvadba, 30s. /-ed eight stories by the Czechoslovakian author, to be reviewed next issue.
THE POLLINATORS OF EDEN by John Boyd, 25s. The second novel by author of THE LAST STARSHIP FROM EARTH, but very different! To be reviewed next issue.
TOWARDS INFINITY ed. Damon Knight, 25s. Nine stories chosen for younger readers. 'Man Who Lost Sea', Sturgeon; 'March Hare Mission',McCormack; 'Earth Men', Ray Bradbury; 'Who Goes There?'Stuart;'In Hiding'Shiras; 'Not Final!', Asimov; 'And Be Merry', Maclean; 'Witches of Karres', Schmitz; 'Resurrection' Van Vogt.
STAR GATE by Andre Norton, 18s. THE FORGETFUL ROBOT by Paul W Fairman, 18s.

FROM SIDGWICK & JACKSON:

THE CITY DWELLERS by Charles Platt, 25s (to be reviewed);
THE BLIND WORM by Brian Stableford, 25s. New novel from one of our reviewers.
OUTLAW OF GOR by John Norman, 27s. Second in the series published by Ballantine.
THE JAGGED ORBIT by John Brunner. 35s (395pp). Published last year by Ace and briefly reviewed in the last SPECULATION. One of Brunner's best novels.

FROM WALKER & COMPANY: (U.S.)

One of the very best series of hardcover science fiction is currently being published by Walker & Co, of New York. Although fairly expensive by British standards, these books are presented attractively and in many cases are otherwise unobtainable in hard covers. They may be ordered by post from Walker & Co, 720 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10019, USA.

A CASE OF CONSCIENCE by James Blish, $4.50. Still one of the most thoughtful SF-theological novels after 12 years. (Original novella dates from 1953).
A GIFT FROM EARTH by Larry Niven, $4.95. Recently published by Ballantine and (in UK) by MacDonald. Serialised in If. Niven has a rather special storytelling ability, not liked by everyone, but extremely popular in SF circles.
THE WANDERER by Fritz Leiber, $5.95. This giant novel won a Hugo in 1965 and has nenver had the critical attention it deserves. There was a strange sort of review in SPECULATION-7, way back in 1964, but we hope to consider this at some length in our next issue. Fritz Leiber can show a clean pair of heels to most of the 'new wave' authors so far as style and originality are concerned!
MAGELLAN by Colin Anderson, $4.95. This was recently published by Gollancz in this country and I'm afraid I didn't much care for it. The trouble is that the author is not an SF writer; inevitably in such a case he treads ground which he must think is fresh - but to readers of the genre it very definitely isn't!
THE SPACE MERCHANTS by Frederik Pohl & C.M.Kornbluth, $4.50. The most original novel of the Fifties, maybe, at least until TIGER TIGER appeared. Although a little dated now after nearly 20 years, this stands as one of the first really well-thought-out satires to come from the SF field itself, as we know it. It is still mandatory reading for all new SF enthusiasts, and I enjoyed reading it again when it arrived for review. Perhaps I can persuade Fred Pohl to talk about it in a future installment of his column? (Cont/d)

WALKER (Cont/d)

DRAGONFLIGHT by Anne McCaffrey, $4.95, 308 pages. The first part of this huge novel won a Hugo Award, and the book itself won a Nebula, if I am not mistaken. Personally I did not find it easy reading; as with DUNE, I am evidently in a minority. Like DUNE, the novel goes into great depth about a feudal-type society and if you didn't encounter it in Analog you must read this version.

THE WATCH BELOW $4.50, by James White. This novel was reviewed at length, a little unkindly, by Brian Aldiss in SPECULATION-13. It's worth looking this up, if you can, because Brian's comments are very relevant now, even though I think after finally reading the novel, that it contains one of the most original situations to be developed in science fiction. Unfortunately James White does not develop it the way I would have liked (but then I'm criticising the book I would have liked him to write), and the dialogue between characters is incredibly naive and stilted. Even so the book stimulated my imagination for a couple of days. I'd like to see some more comments about it, but certainly it should be read.

BUG JACK BARRON by Norman Spinrad, $5.95, 327 pages. What more is there to say about this book? Second in the Nebula voting this year, it has been reviewed and discussed intensively in SPECULATION 19 & 20, and there are further brief comments elsewhere in this issue. Reading it for the third time it became obvious to me that despite all the publicity it is, essentially, as Charles Platt said to me last year, a bore. Or, more kindly, a gripping but overwritten thriller. Inventive, a mile-stone of sorts, but by no means the answer to all SF's problems and no more 'realistic' than most traditional science fiction. Even so, the book is another that is essential reading.

THE STAINLESS STEEL RAT by Harry Harrison, $4.95. Essentially slight and entertaining reading. The first section is the best but it is all enjoyable.

THE SHIP WHO SANG by Anne McCaffrey, $4.95. Individually these stories about 'Helga' and the shell-people were not spectacular; here the five sections add up to a greater whole. Good, solid science fiction. To be reviewed next issue.

RE-BIRTH by John Wyndham, $4.95. The well-known CHRYSALIDS under its U.S. title. Available fairly easily as a paperback this book deserves the permanence of hard covers and is what the world at large points to when it says "science fiction".

FROM DOBSON BOOKS:

JUNK DAY by Arthur Sellings, 25s. Posthumously published, Mr Sellings' last novel is rather a good story about the world after the bomb.

THE WORLD OF NULL-A by A.E. VanVogt, 30s. If there is one thing science fiction does not need it is a re-publication of VanVogt's nonsense. For a field that is supposedly about the scientific method and logical extrapolation, VanVogt's saga is a jumbled, mystical world of gobbledegook. This book makes no sort of sense whatsoever; read it at your peril. Better, read Knight's demolition of it in Chapter 5 of IN SEARCH OF WONDER. Far more entertaining!

THE REEFS OF EARTH by R.A. Lafferty, 21s. Lafferty is an odd one. I'm not sure whether he is ever serious or is instead laughing at the lot of us. I have asked for a review of this book and his other recent novels for a future issue.

DANGER FROM VEGA by John Rackham, 21s. A cowboy adventure in spacesuits. There will always be a market for space-opera and this is a reasonable example.

THE TIME MERCENARIES by PHILIP E. High, 18s. Unfortunately this has appeared about fifteen years too late. It is a first-class story of the type which used to appear in the magazines in the 1950's. It is extremely entertaining but will not attract much attention because there is very little more to say about the novel. But do give it a try for light reading.

LET THE SPACEMEN BEWARE! by Poul Anderson, 18s. Much the same applies here. This is an Ace novel that is entertaining reading, but no more than that.

DOBSON (Continued)

NEW WRITINGS IN SF-17, ed John Carnell, 21s. Seven stories by H.A. Hargreaves, L. Davison, Lee Harding, Joseph Green, R.W. Mackelworth, Ernest Hill, and Michael G. Coney. I have asked for a review of this novel for the next issue.

DOUBLEDAY:

BAREFOOT IN THE HEAD by Brian W Aldiss, $4.95. New readers are referred to the lengthy James Blish review of this novel in the previous issue.

FABER:

OUTCROP by Colin Cooper, 28s. A new novel.

CAPTIVE UNIVERSE by Harry Harrison, 25s. A new novel which rather puzzled me; it seemed almost to be a juvenile though was not listed as such. Michael Kenward was supposed to review this for the current issue; the review may yet appear!

MACDONALD:

NONE BUT MAN by Gordon R. Dickson, 30s. This is in the style of Dickson's novel THE ALIEN WAY which nearly won awards a few years back. A space-going action story, it is treated much better than most and is worth reading. More comment is invited.

RAPP & WHITING:

LIGHT A LAST CANDLE by Vincent King. 28s. In Ballantine edition last year, this is another action-packed tale of aliens, mutants, and so forth; all old hat in conception but told rather well with a certain verve that is quite refreshing. Not a great book but enjoyable; the kind of thing people mean when they say SF.

THE FREAK SHOW ed. Peter Haining. 32s. A monster book of 250 pages built around the theme of freaks and freak shows, billed on the jacket as macabre and the title page as 'fantasy and horror', but in most cases straight science fiction. An interesting idea; I didn't know there were so many SF stories about funfairs, oddities and monsters. This is all to the good, of course, since it means that the stories are generally new to the reader. Running through quickly, we have 'The Magician' by Daniel Defoe; 'Hop Frog' by Edgar Allan Poe; 'Spurs' by Tod Robbins; 'The Ampoi Giant' by Clark Ashton Smith; 'The Dwarf' by Ray Bradbury; 'The Gnarly Man' by L.Sprague DeCamp; 'The Gay Deceiver' by Mildred Clingerman; 'The Rabbit Prince' by Davis Grubb; 'Beidenbauers Flea' by Stanley Ellin; 'The Power of the Puppets' by Fritz Leiber; 'The Rising Man' by Joseph Payne Brennan; 'Jizzle' by John Wyndham; 'Carousel' by August Derleth; 'Heads You Win..' by Esther Carlson; 'Girl From Mars' by Robert Bloch; 'At Last, The True Story Of Frankenstein' by Harry Harrison; 'Mutants For Sale' by Eric Frank Russell; 'Horror Howce' by Margaret St. Clair; 'Big Sam Was My Friend' by Harlan Ellison; 'After The Fair' by Dylan Thomas. A good collection.

PAPERBACKS FROM ACE BOOKS:

AND CHAOS DIED by Joanna Russ 'Special' 75c. How telepathy, etc, appears to someone experiencing it. Review next time. FOURTH MANSIONS by R.A. Lafferty 'Special' 75c. What is Lafferty writing about? Review next issue. THE STEEL CROCODILE by D.G. Compton 'Special' 75c. I don't particularly care for these Compton books I'm afraid, although Terry Carr appears to be very enthusiastic about them. Very 'English'. Very dull.

BABEL-17 by Samuel R. Delany, reissue, 60c. THE BEST FROM F&SF 15TH SERIES, ed by Edward L Ferman, 75c; THE WEAPON SHOPS OF ISHER by A.E. VanVogt, 60c; THE FAR-OUT WORLDS OF A.E. VanVogt, 75c; THE WAR AGAINST THE RULL, by A.E. Van Vogt, 75c; PERRY RHODAN Nos. 4 & 5, INVASION FROM SPACE and THE VEGA SECTOR, 75c each. Terrible rubbish! MEN ON THE MOON, ed Donald Wollheim, 60c. This is a reissue of a 1958 anthology, the stories of which have dated badly, with the

Cont/d...

exception of H.B. Fyfe's 'Moonwalk'. The cover is terrible, too. But editor Wollheim has collected some comments made by prominent SF authors after the first manned moon-flight, and this is the most interesting 45 pages in the book. These pages read like a section of the SPECULATION lettercolumn, the optimists and pessimists ranking up in much the same order. You might read the comments of Michael Moorcock on the planting of the flag by Armstrong and Aldrin: "..What was done was admirable and, I think, worth doing. The manner in which it was done was ludicrous - a piece of cheap PR work..."

HIGH SORCERY by Andre Norton 60c; THE MERCI MAN by Alan E. Nourse, 60c; ALMURIC by Robert E. Howard, 60c; THE PNUME by Jack Vance, 60c; THE TIME-TRAP GAMBIT by Larry Maddock, 75c; THE YELLOW FRACTION by Rex Gordon, 60c;
THE WINDS OF DARKNESS by Marion Zimmer Bradley/THE ANYTHING TREE by John Rackham, 'double', 75c; EARTHRIM by Nick Kamin/ PHOENIX SHIP by Walt and Leigh Richmond, 75c; GALLAGHER'S GLACIER by Walt & Leigh Richmond/POSITIVE CHARGE by same authors, 75c; THE BLIND WORM by Brian M Stableford/SEED OF THE DREAMERS by Emil Petaja, 75c.

FROM BALLANTINE: (Frederik Pohl reviews many of the following titles, Page 5-9)
ALEIN ISLAND by T.L. Sherred, 75c; MATRIX by Douglas R. Mason, 75c; STARBREED by Martha deMey Clow, 75c; PHOENIX by Richard Cowper, 75c.
BY POUL ANDERSON, at 75c each: BRAIN WAVE, GUARDIANS OF TIME, AFTER DOOMSDAY.
BY JOHN BRUNNER, at 75c each: SQUARES OF THE CITY: THE WHOLE MAN: THE LONG RESULT
(The above are 2 Ballantine 'packages' of titles in uniform formats.)
LUD-IN-THE-MIST by Hope Mirrlees, Ballantine adult fantasy, 95c; LAND OF UNREASON by Fletcher Pratt & L. Sprague DeCamp, 95c; AT THE EDGE OF THR WORLD by Lord Dunsany, 95c. THE HIGH PLACE by James Branch Cabell, 95c.
THE ENVIRONMENTAL HANDBOOK, ed. Garrett de Bell, 95c. PERILS OF THE PEACEFUL ATOM, by Richard Curtis & Elizabeth Hogan, $1.25. Reading these two titles makes me wonder how we still happen to be alive!

FROM LANCER BOOKS:
THE LONG LOUD SILENCE by Wilson Tucker, revised & updated, 75c; MASTER OF THE DARK GATE, by John Jakes, 95c; THE SORCERER'S SKULL by David Mason, 75c; TWO DAMON KNIGHT SCIENCE FICTION NOVELS, 75c ('World Without Children' & 'The Earth Quarter'); RETURN TO THE STARS by Edmond Hamilton, 75c; THE NAKED SUN by Isaac Asimov, 75c; ICEWORLD by Hal Clement, 95c. TIME ROGUE by Leo P Kelley, 75c.
** Lancer are now doing a very attractive SF series, with good packaging and some, if not all, very good items. ICEWORLD and LONG LOUD SILENCE are examples, both excellent and long out-of-print.

OTHER PAPERBACKS FROM VARIOUS PUBLISHERS:
CITIES IN FLIGHT by James Blish, Avon $1.25. Most rewarding buy of the quarter in paperbacks. All four 'Okie' novels plus an afterword by Richard D. Mullen from Riverside Quarterly. HAWKSBILL STATION by Robert Silverberg, Avon 60c.
NEBULA AWARD STORIES No. 1,2, & 3. 75c from Pocket Books. Again, first-class buys and 'musts' if you missed the phardcover editions. STRANGE CREATURES FROM TIME AND SPACE by John A. Keel, Pocket Books, 75c. Another Charles Fort report.
WINDOW ON THE FUTURE, ed Douglas Hill, Pan 5s. A not particularly good nor original anthology. NINTH GALAXY READER, ed Frederik Pohl, Pan 6s.
THE COMING OF THE SPACE AGE, by Arthur C Clarke, Panther 9s. invaluable.
THE DISAPPEARING FUTURE, Panther 5s. The incredible George Hay's anthology of speculation in stories and essays. Intriguing.
NIGHT WALK by Bob Shaw, New English Library, 5s. I actually had to buy this one but found it worth the expense. One of the best novels of the year.

Imagine if you will, a vast shabby 4-500 room establishment with corridors "long enough for B-29's" (Graham Boak) and two tiny lifts which accomodate 2-3 people at a time and which never rise above the 3rd floor (Eileen and I were in a closet on the 6th). Imagine a totally hostile staff. Imagine conditions at any big London hotel where dinner is served for a period of about half-an-hour only and not to couples with children (the Shorrocks). The horror stories that will be told about that hotel could be repeated all night. John Brunner ordering wine with his meal and being told "get it yourself, you don't pay our overtime". The porter who gave the V-sign to Ella Parker and Ethel Lindsay. The bar which closed at 10.00 p.m, every night. The queues for a cold, greasy breakfast. Payment demanded in advance at the registration desk (we refused) And so on.

George, how could you do it to us!

The basic trouble was obviously that the hotel management couldn't have cared less about the convention and the staff regarded the whole thing as an imposition. For 45/- per night in a building scheduled for demolition (it breaks the various fire-regulations) I'm not surprised.

After Oxford in 1969 people wanted (or thought they wanted) a 'cheap' hotel. But you always get what you pay for, and if one has to live for 3 days in a hotel then give me the Randolph rather than the Royal every time. (The 1971 hotel, by the way, should have the facilities of the Randolph at the price - or just over - of the Royal).

But the fans didn't help matters. I don't blame Brian Aldiss for leaving on the Sunday morning. I've never been so disgusted as when I saw the convention hall after the Saturday evening punch-party had left its residue of overturned furniture, spilled alcohol, vomit and that pile of used and crumpled paper cups. People who behave like pigs will get treated that way.

The second mistake which George Hay made, granting that the hotel management behaved in a manner far, far worse than he could possibly have expected, was of forgetting the basic function of the convention. He was so eager to organise new, different, exciting things that he omitted to arrnge anything to do with science fiction. Or almost omitted.

On the Friday evening there was a talk by Willis McNelly. On Saturday morning we had Ken Bulmer's publisher's panel and James Blish's G-o-H speech to follow in the afternoon. And that was all there was on science fiction! There were scientologists, computermen, environmental specialists and not-so-specialists, psychologists, poets, and so forth. But we can see these every week in the colour supplements. The mixture at London created an aching void, a sense of waiting interminably for something which was never going to happen.

Which is not to say that some of these events were not interesting. They were, very definitely. I really enjoyed the speech from Raymond Fletcher, M.P. for instance (Can you imagine a U.S. senator being an SF-fan?). But to tell a little tale, I was supposed to chair a small panel on the Saturday afternoon, which was finally - and inevitably - crowded out before we began. In the hours before and during the period it should have been 'on', I became somewhat uneasily aware that there were vast throngs of people hanging around waiting, and waiting. "When's your panel going on?" became the question on all sides, wherever I went. I began to get nervous. What was conceived as a minor filler-item had become, in the absence of anything else, the key event of the afternoon (Pam Bulmer, David Redd, Michael Kenward, Chris Priest and Bob Parkinson were the panellists) It didn't happen, and everyone instead went across the road for dinner in a pleasant little Indian restaurant. (They said that they would go out of business

if the Royal closed down; the entire guest-list evidently ate across the road). But it was a pity; we had spent over an hour working on our arguments together, and David, Bob and Mike had come specially to London for the occasion.

You can clearly see, I think, what the problems were at Sci-Con, and it was not really the unfortunate George Hay's fault that circumstances came together as disasterously as they did. Out of the shambles of Sci-Con came some lively moments, almost as ghosts of the convention that might have been: Tony Walsh in fancy-dress costume as a rubbish heap, with olefactory effects; Brian Burgess bidding for the 1971 convention; dinner with Ken and Pamela Bulmer; Brian Aldiss' sleeping head swaying perilously towards the floorboards during the exposition of "a scientific theory of mysticism" (Splat! What a talent, what a waste!); the Sunday evening trip across to the pub when the hotel bar closed, with Ken and Pam, Chris & Christine Priest, Graham Hall, the Jack Marshes, and a few others.

One interesting thing emerged for me from the convention, and that was the utter demolition of the mythical 'new wave'. Already sadly battered and visibly losing credibility before Sci-Con, nothing was said or done by the 'movement' at the convention, in the manner of the 'new wave panel' at Oxford, to rejuvenate the image. Quite the contrary.

We were treated to the incredible spectacle of Michael Moorcock (who so roundly condemned the behaviour of fans and the low level of discussion at the Oxford convention in SPECULATION-25) shambling around with followers, with whiskey bottles and asses heads. Who, new-wavers, made all the noise during Raymond Fletcher's speech and others? Who had uproarious room-parties every night? Who threw that historic glass that cut open John Brunner's shin when he was leading that poetry session? (It wasn't Mike, I hasten to add).

I'm all in favour of people having fun; but please, Mike, don't try to feed me that line about 'irresponsible behavior' again.

(Incidentally, you'll notice that the Michael Moorcock Column isn't in this current issue. Mike and I have had our little differences of late, mainly over the issue of censorship, or editing, as I prefer to call it. That is, I thought Dan Morgan had been insulted enough. Never mind, despite the appearance of this issue of SPECULATION to the contrary, I admire Mike tremendously and like him a lot, as does nearly everyone else who attends conventions. Mike, back to direct address again, I think you are a marvelous storyteller and a tremendous, paradoxical character!)

With the finger of suspicion over "who-threw-that glass" still hanging menacingly in the air, and amid the ruins of what began as some kind of a convention report, I think it is time I closed for this issue. There will be a page or two of convention pictures in the next issue, but because James Blish's speech will appear in a professional publication and there was nothing else said at the convention which would be suitable for SPECULATION, there will not be a report on the proceedings this year.

This issue has been put together, at very short notice and in the middle of the examinations season, by the science fiction group of the University of Aston. And they earn my fervent and repeated thanks, yet again.

Peter Weston, 18th May 1970