

Dear Fans (and Fannettes, both of them),

Here I am again, and delighted to renew your acquaintance. So you didn't feel my SNAG to be quite the thing for gentile [sic!-DW], peace-loving British fandom? Perhaps you'll feel kinder towards Bibliophan. Not that it matters, really, because I shall just keep turning 'em out whenever I have time & inclination. Though I suppose it is only fair to point out that there are three effective ways of stopping the flood: you might put pressure on Michael, who's kindly distributing this sheet: or on Douglas Webster, who, with very much altruism, is stencilling it: or you might cut off your sub. to Fido. So don't, my dear fans & fannettes, complain to all & sundry that RGM is importing fascism into fandom.

What I want to talk about is stf. in book form. At least, that's the central idea, though I may wander, now & then. Fans (and fannettes) don't seem to realise that magazine stf. is a mere trickle off the main stream of book stf. Tales of Atlantis, of the Moon-trip, of the mighty promise of science, were familiar enough to the Greeks, and since then they have been thrust upon a not always appreciative world in ever-growing numbers. In the three large collections in the country, those of Bert Lewis, Michael Rosenblum, & myself, there are between seven and eight hundred different titles (my own is, at the moment, up to its 641st. volume!), and I am reasonably sure that we have merely skinned the surface. All of which is intended to demonstrate that you're missing a lot when you stick conservatively to your TOWs and your BRGs. [To the mentally defective & those who came in late: this annoying "I" fellow is one, RGodhurst, quite a decent chap really--DW]

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I hope you all pondered and digested a remark of Don Doughty, in COSMOS No.2 (see Fido, Feb.41). He holds forth as follows: "WONDER I cannot say much about as I have only read about the last 3 years' issues, but they seem to get a great many authors of the type I object to in their pages . . . Kummer, Kuttner (did you see that muck he turned out for MARVEL?), FBLong, Burks, and several others."

I don't know what is the grievance against brother Long (the poor man just harmlessly carbon-copies his story about the last-man-and-woman-bumped-off-by-their-insect-masters, over and over again), but I must spring to the defence of our maligned Hank Kuttner. The unfortunate man was merely doing his best to write to an editorial line ("Wanted--science-fiction shorts from 4,000 to 6,000 words. The stories must occur in the far future, and if possible lean towards the horror type of yarn; plenty of sex, and the machines of the future furnish the horror."). Unfortunately, Hank isn't that type of writer at all, and what he finally turned out was straight thud-a-blunder "classic" stf., with what Don would call the "muck" passages spaced in with curious regularity throughout the narrative. Rather as though he conscientiously timed himself, and ran in a measured portion of "muck" every ten minutes.

I suppose I had better quote, for the benefit of those who haven't read the "muck" in question. This is the sort of thing "Avengers of Space" is sprinkled with:

"Against the further wall lay a slender figure, Lorna Rand, her rounded breasts and the lithe curves of her young body revealed in utter nudity!" A little further on: "She wriggled free, a warm flush mantling her face and bosom as she glanced down at her nudity. Quickly Shawn stripped the kirtle from the dead guard and gave it to her. Lorna donned it swiftly." But Hank might have saved her the trouble. Right on the next page, we are shocked to read: "Cursing, Shawn strained against the paws that held him. The monster's talons ripped blindly at Lorna's body, tearing the kirtle away in rags. The girl fought frantically, vainly. The milk-curtains of her bosom, sweeping lines of white beauty, were splashed with blood from her captor's crushed flesh."

Every now and then, scattered among the more substantial slabs of "muck", one finds, like a plaintive echo, "utter nudity", "utter nudity"!

And that is the worst of it! Rather funny, you see, but quite harmless. Rather more unpleasant are some of the yarns in the single issue of the degenerate MARVEL TALES of December '59.

However, what I started out to say is that, as usual, the magazines lay well behind stf. in book form, in respect of "muck". Two examples should be quite sufficient, or even more than sufficient. My first is:

BRAVE NEW WORLD: A novel by ALDOUS HUXLEY. (London, Chatto & Windus, 1932, pp 306).

As most of Fido's readers will know, this is a brilliantly done picture of the stabilised state that is to enwrap our happy descendants. It is stable because our descendants are cut to its pattern, and they are happy because from their fifth year the sentence "Everybody's happy nowadays" is whispered as they sleep, many thousand times, night by night. But why I want to recommend it to friend Donald Doughty is that the brave new world is founded on one major pastime, unrestricted indulgence in the physiological mechanism for reproduction, with the rather less popular consequence eliminated.

On a point of "muckiness" I think "Brave New World" scores decisively over

"Avengers of Space". Partly because Huxley, as has been pointed out elsewhere, has a mind that rather runs to lavatories, and he makes effective use of "buttocks" to vary what in Kuttner becomes rather monotonous anatomy. Partly because, whereas Kuttner's young ladies are merely characterless automatons, lay-figures for stripping, Huxley makes some attempt to get into the minds of his victims (although I think this point could easily be stressed too much). But principally because of Huxley's incomparably higher literary standard. Translator's note: the Webster finds himself at wild disagreement with much of this par., & should our pet Snag not deign, in Bib 2, to deal with the attack about to be launched on him, the pages of FANTAST are always open for further discussion.]

My second example is:

RED SNOW, by F. WRIGHT MOXLEY (London, Jarrolds, 1931, pp 287).

The publisher's blurb-writer clamours: "What would be the passions and fates of men and women under the shadow of extinction? . . . In a prose wherein are blended savagery and high imagination, the author traces the consequences of sterility from the terrible moment when the last baby . . . is born, down to the stark and desolate horror of a world in which only one man is left alive. Between these two points in time lie about a hundred years of horror, madness and grim humour, a feverish whirlpool of fanaticism, pogroms, massacres, laboratory near-miracles, race war, orgiastic paganism and sex conflict . . ."

The emphasis is largely on the last two items. I don't propose to discuss this work at any length, and I certainly shall not quote from it. To justify my recommending it for Don's Medal of Muckiness, I will merely say that when I re-read the scene at the end of Chapter XXIII (describing the rape of a band of crazed women who hoped to reproduce the "immaculate conception" by prayer, virginity, and nakedness) I still feel slightly sick. But that, of course, may be due to me, rather than to the author.

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Gems of Wisdom, Filtered out of the Hlire of Stf.
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Fans and fannettes, pray consider a typical Burroughsian scene illustrating an Honourable Man doing the Right Thing:

"Cease, blasphemer!" cried Zat Arras. 'Hope not to save thy cowardly carcass by inventing horrid lies to--' But he got no further. One does not call John Carter 'coward' and 'liar' thus lightly, and Zat Arras should have known it. Before a hand could be raised to stop me, I was at his side and one hand grasped his throat.

"Come I from heaven or hell, Zat Arras, you will find me still the same John Carter that I have always been; nor did ever man call me such names and live - without apologising.' And with that I commenced to bend him back across my knee and tighten my grip upon his throat. . . ." (see THE GODS OF MARS, Chapter XVI.)

And so, once again, we are taught how advisable it is, if you insist on being In the Right, to take a Strong-Man-in-Two-Weeks course.

Percy Greg, however, has different ideas of how the Civilised Martian's Book of Etiquette. His terrestrial strong-man blusters:

"If', I said, 'You choose to disbelieve what I tell you, you are welcome to do so. But you are not at liberty to express your disbelief to me. To do so is to charge me with lying; and to that charge, whatever may be the customs of this world, there is in mine but one answer', and I laid my hand on the hilt of the sword I wore in deference to Davilo's warnings, but which he and others considered a Terrestrial ornament rather than a weapon.

"The President of the Academy quietly replied - 'Of all the strange things we have heard, this seems the strangest. I waive the probability of your statements, or the reasonableness of the doubts suggested. But I fail to understand how, here or in any other world, if the imputation of falsehood be considered so gross an offence - and here it is too common to be so regarded - it can be repelled by proving yourself more skilled in the use of weapons, or stronger or more daring than the person who has challenged your assertion. (see ACROSS THE ZODIAC: The Story of a Wrecked Record, 1880, Vol.II, p.141).

Ier tykes yer choyce.

Quoting further from Percy Greg (this is quite irrelevant, but if I don't mention it now I shall forget it when/if the next Bibliophan comes to be ground out), we find a Martian damsel (one of our gallant terrestrial strong-man's eight wives), holding forth:

"One book much read in our schools says . . . that 'half the pleasure of power lies in giving pain, and half the remainder in being praised for sparing it.'"

I commend the alliteration.

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PROFESSOR AYLMER'S EXPERIMENT, by ARTHUR JAMES ANDERSON (London, Hurst & Blackett, 1922, pp287), is an interesting but not too convincing Catholic attack on Spiritualism, its stfical. interest deriving from an experiment with artificial life that seems to have, also, a rather artificial relevance. However, ever alert for passages to instruct and uplift the faithful public of Bibliophan, I came with much delight on the following gem:

"'But', suggested Bruce-Smith anxiously, 'I thought spiritualism was all fraud.'

"'The omniscience of the man in the street', replied Professor Aylmer, coldly, 'seeing through the mechanism of spiritualism, perceives that it is fraud. It remains for fools like Crookes, Wallace, Barrett, Lodge and myself to become convinced of its reality.'" (Loc. cit. p.97.)

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Stf. has its fair share of mysteries: books that are never published, though advertised (Talbot Mundy's "Man From Jupiter", for example, of which the publishers, Hutchinsons, deny all knowledge), bashful authors who lurk, trembling, behind a flimsy barrier of pseudonym. Of this latter tribe, about the most elusive is the gentleman known as "Neil Bell". He has for the pseudonym a passion from which a Freudian, I imagine, would draw the most shocking conclusions. His earlier stf. was simply signed "Miles" - Heaven knows why! "Death Rocks the Cradle" appeared, in 1933, as by "Paul Martens". Most of the "Miles" and "Paul Martens" stf. was reprinted under the authorship of "Neil Bell", and with, apparently, a sudden rush of courage, he has allowed this pseudonym to appear on the title page of all his more recent fiction (or all that I know of!) These, of course, are merely his nommes-de-guerres for purposes of fiction. On the poem and newspaper-article fronts his personalities must be legion. Some time ago, the mystery was in a fair way towards solution. In the preface to "Lucky Dip" (1936), we are told "I began to spawn stories for children with the dreadful fecundity of the herring. . . . I regret I can't give their names, as I am pledged to secrecy regarding this side of my work." But the clue petered out. I hope I'm not liable to prosecution, or persecution, or anything unpleasant, if I tell you that the children's books in question were written by Stephen Southwold: and the best that a bibliophile can do with that is to suggest that the man (assuming there is a man behind these multitudinous masks) lives in Southwold!

It seems to me that there is some relevance in a passage from J. Leslie Mitchell's "Gay Hunter" (Heinemann, 1934, a brilliant future-tale that no fan can afford to miss, by the way). Gay and a fascist gentleman, Major Ledyard Houghton, have been precipitated into the far future. Unfortunately, their clothes have not been precipitated with them. When Gay first sees the Major, "Absurdly, she remembered a story from some Victorian romance of the heroine, nude, discovered by a man, and the modest female covering her face with her hands to hide her identity . . ." There seems a similar incongruity in the efforts of authors to hide their identities, when, if they write honestly (or even otherwise), so much else is revealed. Thus, "Neil Bell" exhibits what the unsympathetic might call "crankiness" in a degree only equalled, in English stfdom, by S.Fowler Wright. One of his notions is that modern man is poisoning his mind and body by the food he eats, that doctors and surgeons are knaves, or fools pitting their pills against Nature. In "Death Rocks the Cradle" he superimposes this onto his deep natural pessimism to produce the most depressing account of the future of mankind that I have had the good fortune to read.

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Another point of stfical obscurity, and one that possibly will never be cleared up, concerns the pseudonym us "Christopher Blayre". In 1921 Philip Allen (yes, that unholy firm that so grievously mutilated Postus Pragnoll's "Green Man of Graypec") brought out a volume whose title page ran: "The Purple Sapphire, and Other Posthumous Papers: Selected from the Unofficial Records of the University of Cosmopoli by Christopher Blayre, Sometime Registrar of the University." "Christopher Blayre" contributed an Antepscript, from Cosmopoli, January 1952, and thereafter followed a series of "papers", deposited by various Dons of the University. The tales comprise a mixed bag of fantasy and stf: of a sapphire that brought disaster on its owners, of Markward, who talked with a damsel of Venus, and the death he found, of the deadly cosmic dust, and half a dozen others. Hardly profound, but well written and readable.

The last item on the contents page reads:

"The Chectah-Girl". (Deposited by the Professor of Biology).....211

And on page 211 we read: "The Publishers regret that they are unable to print this MS." (I told you my opinion of Philip Allen, didn't I!)

In 1932 the collection was reprinted as: "The Strange Papers of Dr. Blayre: By Christopher Blayre, Ph.D., D.Litt. (Sometime Registrar in the University of Cosmopoli)". The Publishers have taken fright at the "1952", and transferred the action to the "middle years of the nineteenth century", four tales have been

added, and all mention of "Cheetah-Girl" deleted.

The only other information that I have is second-hand. In the catalogue of the Cambridge University Library is the entry:

'The Cheetah-Girl: being the MS not published with the collection under the title of "The Purple Sapphire". (Privately pr. edn., limited to 20 copies) - London, 1923.'

The press-mark is Arc.d.92.16., but that won't do the enquirer any good, because the people who run the Cambridge University Library have nasty minds and a lot of arrogance, and they have constituted a class of books, the "Arc" class, that, in their moral uprightness, they withhold from the people who, financially, make the University and its Library possible.

Also, in the British Museum Catalogue, is an entry:

"Some Women of the University. Being a last selection from the Strange Papers of Christopher Blayre." pp 171 - Tip. Sorelle Nessuno: Nubiana, 1934, edition ltd. to 100 copies. (The name of the printer is given in the colophon as R. Stockwell, London)."

And that's the limit of the data I have. Communication through Philip Allan is impossible, because that unhappy firm collapsed some time ago. "The Cheetah-Girl" is unavailable, for High Moral Reasons. So also is the British Museum volume, for reasons most people will be aware of. The only remaining source of information is Mr. R. Stockwell, and this gentleman I have not, as yet, been able to trace. Presumably he has no connection with the publisher, Arthur H. Stockwell.

Can Fido readers shed light on the mystery of Christopher Blayre?

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Those of you who can conveniently get to a "Left" bookshop, e.g., Collet's, of Charing Cross Road, will find it worth while to srop in and pick up a copy of the Left Book Club Edition (1940) of Murray Constantine's "Swastika Night", remainderd at sixpence. Provided, of course, that you are so hardened that you do not scruple to be seen in such dens of vice. "Swastika Night" is a striking and well done picture of Europe under Nazidom, seven hundred years from now. Maybe it'll tell you, in spite of Mr. Churchill, what you are fighting for. Or maybe you don't want to know.

NOTE: This novel was first published in 1937 and showed a future Holy German Empire (worshipping the Holy Adolf Hitler, Saviour of Germany and the World), all the features of which were logical projections of tendencies then visible in Hitler's Germany. It contained remarkable Nostradamus-like predictions, among the more lurid of which was that a certain von Hess went into voluntary exile shortly after the destruction of all historical knowledge, and passed down his line a manuscript containing what little remained of this knowledge. Actuality just a little confused, perhaps! . . . DW

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It is not, thank Heaven, my job, as a mere bibliophan, to lavish praise or wage war on the prozines, so I don't propose to pass general judgment on Wollheim's brood, COSMIC and STIRRING SCIENCE. For which, I hope, he is truly thankful. However, the thing perpetrated by Basil Wells (note the surname!) in COSMIC No.1, under the title "Biped", is the business of the Bibliophan. It is lifted, without the slightest acknowledgmennt, from the great H.C.W.'s "Country of the Blind". As far as plot goes, it is a virtual carbon copy, though somewhat smudged and blurred. It follows its original slavishly, except that, by what must have been a mighty effort on his imagination, the author has made his hidden race legless instead of eyeless. I know the arguments against charges of plagiarism ("merely because a plot's been used once is no reason why it should never be used again", and so forth), but this is barefaced robbery. How a widely-read fan of Wollheim's standing came to publish it I can't imagine.

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Please to note, fans and fannettes, that R.G.Medhurst can be contacted at 126, Pinborough Road, London, S.W.10. If you have any bibliophanatic material you want to put out in Bib the second, send it in by all means. Criticisms and suggestions welcomed, but not necessarily acted upon. Be good - RGM

ERRATA--- Many of you will have noticed that "nommes-de-guerres" 28/74ths. of the way down p.3. Taking it to be some joke too subtle for me, I left it strictly alone, but a later letter from RGM begins: "Hi, I've just remembered with a spasm of horror that somewhere in the depths either of Bib. or the Analysis (coming up in Fay--DW) - probably the former - I've spelt 'nom de guerre' 'nomme de guerre'. God, what an appalling state of mind I must be in! Wilt thou correct this atrocity, please?" To hear is to obey - but I'm still suspicious...DW

So you see that if a silly fool says he's sending 4 foolscap pages & really sends 3½, one has to fill up with padding. And free advertisement. Like this --

READ FAY! READ FANTAST!! READ FAY!
