

## NORSTRILIAN REVIEWS

NORSTRILIAN REVIEWS, vol 2, no. 1. January 1972

Published irregularly but approximately monthly for subscribers to NORSTRILIAN NEWS and a very few others by John Foyster, 6 Clowes Street, South Yarra, Victoria 3141, Australia.

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THE MULLER-FOKKER EFFECT by John Sladek (Patchinson, London, £1.50, 1970 & Morrow, New York, \$5.95 1971)

John Sladek's THE REPRODUCTIVE SYSTEM (MECHASM in the U.S.A.) rightly won the first Pat Terry Award for humorous science fiction. THE MULLER-FOKKER EFFECT seems a likely winner of the third. I doubt that a better science fiction novel has been published in 1971 (or 1970).

Although THE MULLER-FOKKER EFFECT employs techniques of writing grossly similar to those used in THE REPRODUCTIVE SYSTEM John Sladek has nevertheless adapted the method to the material an approach to the writing of fiction not dreamed of by 99% of science fiction writers. Although both novels have points of contact with Leiber's THE WANDERER (stylistically) this latter novel has signs of influence by Harry Mathews' novels and also, I suspect, by the novels of Caryl Brahms and S.J. Simon.

How else could one treat the Muller-Fokker Effect, shovelling a human mind onto tapes? To write a melodrama would be to illuminate only a fraction of the value stored in such an idea. So from the beginning in which the protagonist is replaced in his job as a technical writer by a Golden Retriever through to the end in which he squirts from the MF tape back into real life as a part of a TV family drama Sladek is able to explore and exploit all the oddities of the existence of the MF tape and of the weird world (reminiscent both of our own and that of THE REPRODUCTIVE SYSTEM) of the novel. After reading this I couldn't resist reading all the Sladek stories I could lay my hands on. That was worth it, too.

QUARK (tm)/ 4 edited by Samuel R. Delany & Marilyn Hacker (Paperback Library, NY, August 1971)

Quark has been a real disappointment, I think. It has managed to print some very good stories (for example, BODIES by Thomas M. Disch and THE FOURTH PROFESSION by Larry Niven in this edition are good, but not nearly as good as Disch's story in the first Quark, LET US QUICKLY HASTEN TO THE GATE OF IVORY, which in fact dominates the whole run of Quark) but it also publishes some bad stuff and, with this fourth edition, some incomprehensible stuff (by Davidson, Parsky, Madonia and Obtulowicz). I don't know into which of these two categories Charles Platt's contribution to Quark 4 fits. I don't particularly mind being told I am dumb and illiterate and insensitive, but I am certainly not going to pay for the privilege of reading that, and I guess that is how a number of readers of (one copy of) Quark felt too. A pity, because the good work was very, very good indeed.

FOCAL POINT (Vol 3, nos 1 - 3) 3/\$1 from Arnie Katz, 59 Livingston St.,  
Apt 6B, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11201, USA.

The end of the pretence that Focal Point was a newszine and its consequent appearance as a monthly was one of the ~~most~~ ~~encouraging~~ changes in fanzine fandom, 1971. These three issues, nominally July, August and September, add up to about 90 pages of good reading.

There's only one problem for Focal Point, so far as I can see, and strangely enough it is pinpointed by Arnie Katz's review of ENERGIUMEN 9 in the September Focal Point. Arnie writes '...I have the impression that the Kindly Canadians who edit this mag have a hard time bringing themselves to reject all but the worst written material'. Focal Point has a touch of these troubles, but only in the lettercolumn. My impression, all too often, after reading Arthur Snurdley's letter which mentioned that Focal Point has a letter column and some drawings, but which seemed to have no other content, was that FP felt the need to print every letter received. This may be a good idea, but it can certainly lower the standard of the contents.

There are columns by Terry Carr and Bob Toomey in each of these three issues, and as well less frequent columns or articles by John D. Berry, Mike Glicksohn, Ted White, Bob Shaw, Harry Warner, Denny O'Neil, plus heavy doses of editorial material. Covers by Ross Chamberlain, and plenty of illustrations from all over the shop.

Terry Carr's columns are probably the best items. He has one general column and the others are devoted to PghLANGE and a term of jury service. The last of these annoyed me particularly. Terry's snobbish sneering at the 'silent majority' comes pretty oddly from the author of THE DANCE OF THE CHANGER AND THE THREE. Take this paragraph: 'I had a feeling of encountering another world entirely when I sat among the people on that grand jury. Those were people to whom the American flag really meant something (one guy pointed out that the flag in the jury room had only 48 stars on it; I'd never have thought to count), to whom cleanliness isn't so much next to godliness as a prerequisite for being human, to whom democracy is synonymous with capitalism, and who have all those attitudes about Mom and apple pie. It was godawfully appalling.' Terry Carr gives every sign of being, in the words of F.M. Busby, an age-chauvinist pig. But this sort of self-revelation is rare, and FP is built around Terry Carr's columns (in my opinion).

The other columns cover fairly standard fanzine fare - conventions, travel, fanhistory - but all at a relatively high level. These issues of FP demonstrate very clearly the advantages of running a fanzine almost entirely in the form of well-written columns. Arnie Katz's fanzine reviews seem to be avoiding the New-York cliquishness and bitchiness which sometimes infected FP as a newszine.

I can't help but think that FP can really become successful (even though its circulation mightn't reach 1200) if it can maintain the present standard, even if this means a less regular appearance.

But oh, that lettercolumn!

(to be reviewed next time: Farmer's TO YOUR SCATTERED BODIES GO, Beard mutterings, Yandro, BeaboHEMA and other stuff perhaps)