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Edited, published, and printed by  
BRUCE R GILLESPIE, of GPO BOX 5195AA, MELBOURNE,  
VICTORIA 3001, AUSTRALIA.

Available for letters of comment, contributions, or  
traded fanzines; or for subscriptions of \$3 for 9.  
USA: \$3 for 9 surface mail; \$8 air mail from Charlie  
Brown. England: £1.50 for 9 surface mail; £4 air  
mail, from Malcolm Edwards. Published monthly.

# I MUST BE TALKING TO MY FRIENDS

\* I have a week's holiday this week, so I wrote some reviews, published a NORSTRILIAN NEWS, and finally decided to have a night out. I arrived at the Space Age Bookshop (find the shopfront with the green sign above it, wait for the ancient lift for five minutes, take five minutes to travel seven floors in the ancient lift, and you reach the bright and cheery SAB). "Lo Merv." "H'lo." Normal bright conversation. From the back of the shop came the voice of the genial Lee Harding, ace s f writer and Assistant Manager of the Space Age Bookshop. "Come here a minute," he said, "I have something to show you."

Fearfully I went to the back room. What ancient AMAZING STORIES had Harding discovered now? What incredible joke did he have to tell?

There, on the table, sat a fair representation of Buddha. For a full ten seconds the gears of memory scrambled. I forget what I said next - something like: "The one and only Alex Robb!" In the 15 months since I saw him last, he had grown a beard. Any conversation after that moment was a let-down - "How did you get down to Melbourne, Alex?" "By Pioneer coach"; "Where are you staying in Melbourne, Alex?" (Not our place, thinks I, not at such short notice). "At the Melbourne Science Fiction Club." "Gee, that'll be exciting, Alex".

Somehow Alex and Lee and Carla and Leigh and I all invaded the Degraeves Tavern on the same night (a carefully planned accident). Lee had lots of funny stories and bright tales to tell, Carla was much brighter than I had seen her for quite awhile (she insisted she was "a bit tiddly"), Leigh Edmonds nearly fell asleep on the table (he'd been up to 2 am the night before), and Alex and I exchanged words between mouthfuls of beautiful food.

All the while I was thinking that you couldn't find a more incongruous (and therefore, more enjoyable) group of fans anywhere. Harding writes s f but he doesn't talk about it, Edmonds wasn't talking much that night, but usually he won't write or talk about s f, Carla talks pleasantly about everything, I prefer not to talk about s f over dinner... and Alex is known for his willingness to talk about science fiction. Yet somehow all conversations met in the middle.

\* Which is, I suppose, what should happen in this magazine. It's much easier

to write about science fiction than talk about it anyway. But even when people write about science fiction, and I publish their letters, the readers get the impression that it's a teddibly serious business. With a bit of luck, John Foyster's SFC 19 may dissuade people from that belief. It's a game, people, and we invite you to join. Here are a whole bunch of letters I've received over the last six months, and which I haven't had room to print before now. Some of them discuss topics that reach back to S F COMMENTARY 13. On the other hand, I've already had a few letters about SFC Numbers 19 and 20. Most letters discuss science fiction, but like any good conversation over dinner, most letters tell more about the people writing them than about science fiction. Others shed some real light on science fiction. Some are just nice letters. Feel free to join the conversation.

And what happened on Wednesday night? Lee and Carla and Leigh went to see CATCH 22, and I helped Alex carry his suitcases down to the Melbourne Science Fiction Club. Did Leigh and Carla fall asleep during CATCH 22? I still haven't found out. Alex and I discussed science fiction, and we still disagree on lots of things. "Nobody understood S F COMMENTARY 10," said Alex. "It was one of my favourite issues," said I. We passed onto another topic.

Here are all sorts of people with whom I disagree. Should be fun:

\* ALEX EISENSTEIN (4340 North Clarendon, Chicago, Illinois 60613, USA)

Your essay in number 18 strikes me as somewhat intemperate and wilfully misleading (or misinformed). Why take the field to task for the fatuous, foolish, or cliché statements made about it by Healy and McComas? And what makes you think ADVENTURES IN TIME AND SPACE was the very first s f anthology, hard cover or otherwise? It's not even the very first of the 1940s. OUT OF THIS WORLD, edited by Julius Fast, appeared in 1944; THE GARDEN OF FEAR AND OTHER STORIES, edited by William C Crawford, in 1945; and Groff Conklin's first anthology, THE BEST OF SCIENCE FICTION, appeared in the same year as that of Healy and McComas. Include paperbacks, and Don Wollheim scoops the Random House volume twice, with the PORTABLE NOVELS OF SCIENCE in 1945 and THE POCKET BOOK OF SCIENCE FICTION in 1943. The latter is generally conceded as the first s f anthology, although Walt Cole's index lists a collection called ADVENTURES TO COME, compiled by "J Berg Esenwein", dating from 1937.

I cannot call the Healy and McComas book the "most consistently enjoyable" s f anthology ever produced; I don't even believe it is the best possible compendium of stories from the late 30s and early 40s.

Your selection of stories for analysis is interesting but deceptive - interesting in that they are two of the three or four longest stories in the book (admittedly, in a book that prints fairly long stories and also runs the gamut of possible lengths for such stories); deceptive, in that these are hardly the very best (or the worst) stories in the book, nor can you call them archetypal (as you claim for WHO GOES THERE?). Perhaps you mean "representative" of their time or later trends. NERVES is the longest story, at 69 pages. The only one longer than WHO GOES THERE? is HE WHO SHRANK, by Henry Hasse. (The next longest after that is the classic BY HIS BOOTSTRAPS, by Heinlein). The aspect I noticed particularly about your choice was that they are stories once highly acclaimed, by two authors who are now voluble defenders of "old-fashioned" science fiction of one sort or another, as

well as strident denouncers of much that is "new" in the field. A pity there's no Don Wollheim story in the book.

Re. DANGEROUS VISIONS: I see no reason to kick Asimov for his testy defensiveness. You can never know the long gauntlet of years through which he suffered the casual contempt or mountainous indifference of the prevalent public attitude towards science fiction (and neither can I, of course). Now he suffers a similar contempt all over again, apparently, from the microcosm that once truly cherished him.

Neither of the passages you quote from NERVES exemplify "skilful and imaginative writing". Taken out of the original context, the second passage appears less readable and clear than the first. Del Rey does not "beguile and flatter with beautiful words" - his style now seems deficient in several respects.

I can't imagine what gave you the impression that H G Wells "used the magician's wand of beautiful words". Wells never became a "prose stylist" in the accepted sense of the term, and though some of his writing is quite vivid, he never bothered to develop extensively metaphorical language or euphonious phrasing or any other self-conscious, purely aesthetic concerns. He grabbed the figures of speech that came to him without striving to perfect them or work them further into the fabric of his stories. When Wells, in THE TIME MACHINE, wrote that "night followed day like the flapping of a great wing", he created a simile of some genius, but at one remove from the actual metaphorical entity (the shadow of the wing). Perhaps this abridgement is fortunate; nevertheless it indicates that he wrote hurriedly, with little thought for fine elaboration. The prose in this first of the "scientific romances" is of a high quality because, over a number of years, the story went through at least six different versions, four of which were printed and copies of which still exist. Four were major revisions (not the same four). WAR OF THE WORLDS, on the other hand, is a very rough-hewn and spotty work.

Your assault on Campbell's WHO GOES THERE? reminds me forcibly of the similar (and similarly narrow) attack on Frank Robinson's THE POWER, launched 10, these many years ago by Damon Knight. Knight crusaded, without much justice, against elements of horror in science fiction (much as you are doing), under the banner of Protector of Logic and Science, Destroyer of Irrational Superstition and Panderers to Ignorance. (\*\*brg\*\* Sounds like a good name for a review column\*) Your banner, of course, is "humanism" - perceptive portrayal of humanity and human character. As Knight totally ignored the purpose of THE POWER (and subtly misrepresented the main direction of its narrative), so you misinterpret the scope, relevance, and basic intent of WHO GOES THERE?

Do you really read s f for witty lines to spout at parties?

I'm beginning to think that the syndrome you display is the result of voracious and indiscriminate reading in the field. You waded through a tremendous lot of crap that has always glutted the field because we have a literary ghetto and low pay rates, and you become disillusioned with the field, developing a bitterness toward it because of its overall lack of quality. In the most extreme form of this syndrome, the victim drops all activity relating to science fiction (especially the reading of it) and becomes a world famous advertising executive or something. In less

severe cases, like yours, the afflicted individual continues to search among newer writers for the elusive perfection of Science Fiction as Literature. But by then the sufferer's literary perception has been destroyed or permanently impaired by the vast sea of sludge through which he has made his "progress". But, except for the most cynically transparent adventure-story imitations, the worst stories of the near past were those stories with the largest philosophical and psychological pretensions. They appeared in now forgotten and short-lived magazines during the fifties. Most of the post-1960 "revolutionary" and "experimental" and "humanistic" s f only follows that ersatz-literary tripe of yesteryear....

....If only you could but see that. Harlan Ellison never will, of course, nor will he ever realise that his clutch of "dangerous visions" is about as revolutionary as the aforementioned tripe. For instance, James Cross's THE DOLL HOUSE is like a bad TWILIGHT ZONE episode. Harlan's "revolution" was never necessary, partly because of the actual trends towards "literary" stories in all prozines but ANALOG, partly because of the paperback outlets opening up for short fiction, but mostly because of the trend of Supreme Court decisions about artistic expression. Harlan rode the times and did not help to create them. (April 1971) \*

\* Both Lee Harding and Ron Graham were fairly sure that ADVENTURES IN TIME AND SPACE was the first major hardback anthology. Perhaps I should have checked with Don Tuck as well. On the other hand, Don received S F COMMENTARY 18, and he did not query my claim. John Foyster, George Turner, or anyone else care to settle this matter?

I hadn't noticed your point that the stories I chose for the THIRTY YEARS OF MISDIRECTION article were the longest in the book. Naturally I had realised that NERVES was the longest, and I also thought it was the best. :: A handy dictionary (not the Oxford, I'm afraid; I left it at work) defines "archetypal" as "constituting, or pertaining to, a model". That's the word I meant. :: Campbell and del Rey weren't too bad in their day (says he, young enough to join APA-45), but somehow they lost touch with some of today's developments in science fiction. :: Poor passage-picking admitted in the case of NERVES. The story has an accumulative power which goes beyond individual passages. However, there were better ones to quote.

My impression of Wells' ability as a prose writer was reinforced by a radio reading on the ABC of THE TIME MACHINE. I admire the clarity and conciseness of his writing, not the complexity of it. At least one of my criteria of good writing, but not the only one, is that the writer includes only that which is essential for his purpose. I like Henry James' writing better than H G Wells' but in terms of Wells' purposes, most of James' prose is superfluous. But wasn't my point that Wells' writing is still far ahead of that of any science fiction writer?

The main problem with WHO GOES THERE? is that people imitated it. I admire Campbell's story greatly, and did when I wrote that article. Campbell brings to life some of the strongest human emotions, and manipulates them superbly through the length of his story. Campbell's story is a spine-chiller, if you like, while many imitators write only paranoia. :: And I'm delighted that you compare my writing with Knight's - not that I deserve the compliment for a moment.

It's interesting that I started this column talking about Alex Robb - the

two Alexes would get along fine. Alex Robb especially wants fanzines to talk about science fiction, because, as he put it, "I haven't got time to read .. rubbish." Who can you trust to sort out the rubbish? As John Foyster and others showed in SFC 19, you certainly can't trust the professional reviewers, although Blish and Russ say some interesting things in F&SF. Del Rey is not bad at times, once you account for his many prejudices. Not too many fanzines talk seriously about science fiction; and even some of those can't be treated seriously. (Have you ever read a column of Paul Walker reviews?). You couldn't use SFC as a touchstone of the s f scene - I tend to write reviews for intellectual pleasure, and I'm usually about a year behind the latest releases. In other words, if you stick with science fiction, you need to read a fair bit to find the good stuff for yourself. And, as you say, Alex C, that can make one very dispirited. My present solution: I read most of the short stories that appear, and ignore most of the novels, unless I get a hot tip from somebody like John Foyster or Dick Jenssen, whose judgments rarely leads me astray. :: Alex sent a fairly lengthy reply to similar remarks I wrote to him directly. I'll try to publish it next issue. \*

\* BOB SMITH (Flat 1, 64 Elouera Road, Cronulla, NSW 2230)

Reprinting this complete series of Foyster fanzines in S F COMMENTARY 19 illuminates, for me, some of the more shaded facets of an individual I thought I knew well. When I received JOE 2 I wondered in a somewhat hurt way why I hadn't received Number 1, and when Foyster published a list of his fanzines for the past ten years I tended to mutter sulkily at the large number of 'em I had never seen...And in fact until I received S F COMMENTARY 19 I hadn't realised just how restricted the distribution of magazines like EM and JOE had been. Which just goes to show how much one doesn't know about one's friends of many years.

Of course, if Foyster exposes this complete series to 250 odd s f fans and invites them to comment on the issues, it's quite possible that even the "jerks" will come up with some thoughtful discussion on s f criticism. Some of them might also be inclined to return Foyster's "up yours" attitude, with a reasonable amount of justification, in my opinion.

You, Bruce, suggest that the magazines should be read carefully "between the lines", and indeed very often this is the only way of interpreting just what the hell Foyster is trying to say. This is one reason why EM failed to live up to the aims Foyster gave it in Number 1, and why the original dozen or so recipients apparently honoured as non-jerks didn't respond as enthusiastically as Foyster might have hoped. John Foyster, in his writing, does not win friends and influence people. He shows too much of his impatience with some people and subjects, and he has a style of writing that one could dismiss as "snide" and often facetious.

As for "watching the important concerns develop" in these issues of EM - in my opinion it's almost pathetic the way in which most of the discussion hasn't developed from Foyster's dozen serious thinkers of matters science fictional! There's certainly nothing loftier than what could be expected of the jerks and individuals who probably recognise the differences between Van Vogt and Tolstoy. And in at least four cases(?) there was no visible reaction from the privileged at all. So in some cases the individuals chosen to give forth with some meaty profundities about science fiction apparently didn't get too "hung up" on what Foyster had to say about 'em.

I do not like John Foyster when he writes like this, and it's possible that he ruffles the feathers of valuable communicants who might - just might! - otherwise come good with their experience and knowledge of the field. He gives the impression that he imitates the more crusty critics of the past, and I can't help feeling that he sought to impress the dozen or so overseas non-jerks who received EM. A not so subtle difference from his articles in, say, ASFR, and far removed from his articles about Basho and Sappho.

I'll close this letter by actually agreeing with what you, Bruce, had to say in EM 5. (April 24, 1971) \*

\* I'll leave John to answer this letter, although I'd like to say that (a) the percentage response to EM was far higher than to most fanzines, and the letters John did receive were worth the tactics he employed to get them, and that (b) John probably finds it as hard to understand why I publish over 300 copies of this magazine, as I found it hard to understand why he only published a dozen of his. Each issue of EM only cost \$1 each to publish and post, and that's a lot less than it costs me for SFC! :: Thanks for your footnote. As my only contribution to EM/JOE, I think that letter, well-edited by John Foyster, still summarises my views on s f criticism. \*

\* GEORGE TURNER (4 Robertson Avenue, St Kilda, Victoria 3182)

Have just finished reading SFC Numbers 19 and 20, and must agree that the reprinting of the Foyster fanzines, which I had regarded as a project of doubtful value, was in fact worthwhile. I had not previously seen the first two issues of EM, and the information contained in them gave an entirely fresh slant on what had seemed to be a rather scrappy publication. The total collection has a solidity of intention not observable in the individual issues. Criticism and comment would require a fairly lengthy article which I will leave to others; it should be done by someone with a more complete knowledge than mine of the whole of the Foyster fan output, and could be of use to John, who seems to have reached the point where an outside summation of directions, successes, and failures would be of value.

In SFC 20 the standard of reviewing seems to be definitely on the upgrade. I was particularly impressed by David Boutland's handling of AN AFFAIR WITH GENIUS - a proper appreciation and a proper questioning. Few reviews inspire me to seek a book out, but I shall buy this one.

Stanislaw Lem's exposition of Borges is interesting and accurate, but contains little that is not at once obvious to the sensitive reader; it makes, however, a useful introduction for those unfamiliar with the man's work and should arouse some interest among such.

I must make an effort to get hold of SOLARIS, but hope that it is not written in the style of his essays, wherein one has to stop too often to disentangle meaning from word-linkages. "Mechanistic-determinist" I can accept, but "paradigmatically-culturally" allows far too many alternatives of meaning and "structural topology" turns out, when the rest of the sentence is understood, to refer merely to story structure; "topology" is perhaps justified in the sense of connectivity but is rendered tautological by the use of "relationship" a few words later. One feels that as an essayist Lem is being a mite pompous where

simplicity would serve his purpose much better. Another thought is aroused by the fact that the translation is by Franz Rottensteiner, and this perhaps accounts for the curious fact that a Lem article always reads as though written by Rottensteiner. How much of the translation, one wonders, is rendered into the Rottensteiner idiom rather than the Lem idiom? For Rottensteiner's preoccupation with the professorial word rather than the simple and often more exact phrase is the distinguishing mark of his writing.

Be all this as it may, Lem is worth the trouble, even if you have to do a certain amount of re-translating as you go.

The opening line of Ursula LeGuin's reference to myself had me wondering if in a drunken moment I had inadvertently played her work instead of treating it with my customary vast respect. I had to read the rest of the paragraph carefully before I could return to my beer and self-esteem. "Health and savagery" indeed! I wouldn't harm a fly, unless it happened to be called Delany or Heinlein or some such.

James Blish's note about blurbs is welcome, and is indeed something which I should have realised for myself, but I retract not a word I wrote on the subject. Responsible authors should have a respect for truth, and Blish's own work in the blurb line is both restrained and truthful (cf. the back cover of Ace Books' CHRONOCULES) and as effective as the bloated praises-of-others.

The Grail legend I referred to is the first Blish mentions, which is, as far as I can discover, the basic legend; the others being later inventions which scarcely rate the name of legend and are rather literary transformations. (In the original legend, by the way, the Grail is a plate, not a cup.) The supreme crudity of the Grail being used merely as a supply line to gross appetite has always seemed to me a sharp comment on the nature of the religious aspirations of the time; one is reminded of one's own small-boy conception of heaven as a place of inexhaustible peppermint creams. And it isn't so far from the Norse Valhalla, where drunken guzzling proceeded all night, followed by bloodshed all day. I was, of course, aware of the sense in which Delany used the symbol, and the "laughable single use" was merely a side note.

PS: Have you taken a look at McGill's since Mervyn Binns left them? You can't find a damned thing in the demented piles on the counter.

(May 9, 1971) \*

\* A good cue for an ad for Merv's new venture, I think - remember, 7th floor, 96 Elizabeth Street, for all that hand-picked science fiction.

I also liked David Soutland's review in SFC 20: it was one of the few items in the issue I didn't have to sub-edit. Also, I thoroughly enjoyed it although I haven't read Green's work and never intend to. <sup>that</sup> I've tried to impress upon Franz, although I very much enjoy Lem's work, the essays as translated just don't read as good English. UNITAS OPPOSITORUM was rewritten by me and resubmitted to Franz - but somehow I couldn't convey my point. Let me assure you that SOLARIS is written in beautifully clear and simple (though never simplistic) prose that reminds me most of the best work of H G Wells. At last there is hope that I will have time to review it. \*

NOW PLEASE TURN TO PAGE 38

# FRANZ ROTTENSTEINER

## A Symposium of Innocence

### THE DISAPPEARING FUTURE - A SYMPOSIUM OF SPECULATION

edited by GEORGE HAY

Panther 586 03323 :: 1970  
158 pages :: \$40.80

This slim volume is something of a novelty, for, as George Hay puts it in his otherwise unnecessary Introduction, "fathered by compassion upon irritation", it combines stories about a mostly sinister future with speculative essays, some of them already well-known, such as Dr Christopher Evans' SLEEP, DREAMS AND COMPUTERS.

Not inappropriately, the book opens with I F Clarke's essay on THE FIRST FORECAST OF THE FUTURE, which he sees as THE REIGN OF GEORGE VI, 1900-1924, written by an anonymous author in 1763.

David I Masson's THE SHOW MUST GO ON is primarily a catalogue of atrocities, with little attempt at motivation or justification. Quite interesting is Kit Pedler's DEUS EX MACHINA, an essay on biological robots. John W Campbell complains in POLITICAL SCIENCE - MARK II about the scientists who think that presently it impossible to do relevant research into the relationship between genetic make-up and the intelligence of racial groups. He suspects some sinister conspiracy against enlightenment.

Anne McCaffrey's THE THORNS OF BAREVI is a fast-moving, but unstimulating piece of cops-and-robbers fiction, complete with deus ex machina social feature designed to save the heroine.

Christopher Priest's short story DOUBLE CONSUMMATION contains an interesting idea about future social relationships, brought about by drugs, and ends with a passionate plea for old-fashioned love.

Edward J Mishan's THE TEMPLE SCIENTISTS essay deals with some important problems of the future, especially what to do with the masses in a scientifically regulated future. He says, "The important problem will be to provide for their self-respect."

Michael Moorcock believes, one of my friends once told me, that we are

living in sub-literary times; the result (among others) is Jerry Cornelius, who reflects the spirit of our times. Perhaps so. Anyway, the "moral tale" THE SUNSET PERSPECTIVE is another Cornelius adventure, and another exercise in obscurity.

Not surprisingly, one of the best essays in the book, FUTURE RECALL, is by James Blish. I wish he'd kept it up towards the end, where he definitely ran out of ideas. He is trying to define a function for s f. He quite rightly demolishes some of s f's claims:

Thus far, then, I have said that s f is not notably prophetic; that it is not educational in the usual sense; that it is steadily writing itself out of the business of suggesting inventions, or careers in science; and that even the free-wheeling speculation which used to be its exclusive province can now be found in many other places, including the pages of NATURE. I have only to add that even as fiction most of it is poor - and it will appear that I have pulled the rug out from under the genre entirely. (page 103)

Not so, says Mr Blish, for s f is the literature of change, "It attempts to help prepare us for the changes" that the real world is undergoing. Now, as we know, "change" is indeed the om mani padme hum in the prayer-mills of s f authors, repeated there ad nauseum. Perhaps I need to look at some principal considerations.

How can change be shown in literature? In two ways: by contrast, or as a process. The second way, of course, is the more difficult, and intellectually the more sophisticated. Therefore it isn't surprising that most s f is conspicuously silent concerning the rules that govern and motivate change; that s f offers only the cliché of the "progress of science and technology" instead of useful analyses. When s f attempts to show motivations, it falls hopelessly behind the theoretical level achieved by contemporary philosophical and sociological thought on the subject. When sociologists have written about s f, they have mostly diagnosed its static, conservative nature.

Therefore most s f shows change by way of contrast: another, strange and alien world is presented; some other time, space and society, with nothing to explain how these worlds came about. The reader can only accept the premises of such stories. But then s f does only what any historical novel or any "mainstream" book from another era does. And while it is true that "mainstream" fiction does not emphasise change, a fair sampling of the world literature of all peoples and all ages makes it quite obvious that the world is changing and has always been changing, at least in the field of social attitudes, cultural norms and mores, and so on. And one of the major themes of literature is the struggle between generations, between the old and the young, because the old can no longer understand the quite different views of the young. But you don't find this conflict in s f (e.g. Heinlein, who depicts different, but quite static societies, where children believe exactly what their daddies tell them, with no back-chat) or character development. In s f there can be no development of character, because there are no characters. If a "character's" ideas change, then we are forced to believe in miracles, since we are shown no other psychological motivation.

But I have still not looked at the main question about the "therapeutic"

value of s f as postulated by Blish. Are readers of s f really better equipped to face change than the people who refuse to read the stuff? What really can ESP powers, feudal societies, time travel, worlds in the atom, intelligent robots, invaders or avatars from space, and all the other paraphernalia and worn-out gambits of s f contribute to our preparation for the future? Anyone who reads s f to help him survive in the future would not only be wasting his time, but must be considered a mental case. After reading widely in s f, the disinterested observer will find a total innocence of s f writers as far as real problems and likely developments of the future are concerned. He will find that the "changes" s f envisions bear no relationship whatever to the real course of the world, as they are only resurrections of old cliches, dead modes of life, dim myths and popular superstitions firmly rooted in the subconscious of mass-man. S f is not a branch of epistemological fiction, but a new kind of opium of the people, offering wish-fulfillment instead of cognition.

The best indicator of the intellectual degradation of s f and its resistance to radical and real change can perhaps be found in its attitude or rather silence towards Marxism. It must make you think when you realise that no American or English author has written a story that would endorse a Marxist view of change, or at least contain an intelligent discussion of it. Now those s f authors would probably all claim that they consider Marxism to be wrong. They may even be right, but the question of rightness and wrongness is irrelevant in this context, for s f authors endorse views or incorporate views into their stories that most certainly are wrong: the Bates method of eye-training, for instance, dianetics, the tarot, or astrology. Even on statistical expectations, one would expect at least a few authors to be familiar with socialism. For Americans, Marxism is probably a most alien system of thought, therefore those authors who say they describe change and other possible societies should leap upon Marxism as an example of radical change. That they don't recognise this direction of thought, is a clear indication of their conservatism. Also, wrong or not, Marxism is one of the most important philosophical and economic systems of our time, the official doctrine of millions of this planet's inhabitants, the hope of several hundred million more in the undeveloped countries, and it is heatedly discussed by intellectuals all over the world. It just isn't possible to dismiss such a system out of hand, even if you consider it wrong, for it will invariably help to shape the future. The main difference between the ready acceptance of crank theories by s f and the neglect of socialism seems to be this: the more banal a system is, the more easily it can be assimilated and digested by trivial fiction. An example: note the crusade-like manner in which even the most trifling stylistic innovations are quarrelled about by the fans. This seems to show that s f readers are ill-equipped to realize the various claims for their acceptance of "change". For when they react so violently in such unimportant matters, how will they react to changes involving their personal lives?

To sum up: to stress change is but a fairly useless cliché. It is far more important to look at the specific qualities of change, and this s f does not do. For in the future we will find no galactic races offering gifts to us; no talking human-like robots; no "spindizzies" with the physical properties of flying carpets, but lacking their charm; there will be neither time-travel nor extrasensory perception; and Poul Anderson's naive belief in the fine art of fencing won't help anyone in the future.

There is another point which Mr Blish should have considered, but he

did not touch on: why must s f be a fiction of change? With so many popular journals, newspapers, books of futurology and so on to tell you about change, how does s f justify itself, especially as other media (a) reach a much wider audience than s f, and (b) are much more precise in their descriptions of change?

Perry A Chapdelaine's SOMEDAY YOU'LL BE RICH!, typically American in its cheap motivation, aside from its poverty as a story, is the product of an uninformed author. It is based on the old idea harking back to Raimundus Lullus that everything that can be expressed in language at all can be expressed by a finite number of permutations of a handful of signs. In fiction, it was first used by Kurd Lasswitz in his 1902 story, THE UNIVERSAL LIBRARY, and later, under Lasswitz' influence, by Borges in his LIBRARY OF BABEL. Lasswitz found that the whole universe wasn't big enough to contain all the printed-out volumes with all possible information, even though his universal library was still of finite size.

Mr Chapdelaine's principal contribution to the problem is a "Dirkstein" effect that allows all this information to be stored in the head of a mannikin. However, in his mathematics he has remained behind Lasswitz's successors, for he assumes the 57 characters of an ordinary typewriter as a basis for his permutations. Now, since his story is about getting rich, first by copyrighting all possible stories of a given length, then by patenting all possible inventions which necessarily are also contained among the permutations, he probably thinks that the \$ sign is of special importance; but it just complicates the process, without contributing anything, for \$ can be spelled "dollar" (and all the numbers and extra characters on the typewriter can also be spelled), and those combinations are already contained in the number of permutations of just the letters of the alphabet. In short, Mr Chapdelaine's fictitious mannikin is very badly programmed. Also, our author totally ignores the time it would take to program the mannikin, even if the "Dirkstein" effect could exist. The universe would not last long enough to carry out the task.

Any clever geometry student... can construct a proof for the etymological tautology, "all information is formal", as well as its corollary, "it is impossible to vary the form without varying the information." I will not try and reproduce it in detail. I would like to say in place of it, however, that "content" can be a useful word; but it becomes invalid when it is held up to oppose style. Content is the illusion that a myriad stylistic factors create...

The above can be found in Samuel R Delany's already often reprinted article ABOUT FIVE THOUSAND ONE HUNDRED AND FIVE WORDS, and is perhaps the core of his aesthetic theory, which is quite opposed (if we remain in the field of fantastic literature) to Borges' praise of Cervantes, who found that purely stylistic values are the most easily destroyed in a writer. Borges - a much better stylist than Delany - praised in Cervantes those virtues of DON QUIXOTE that could not be destroyed by any number of bad translations and adaptations.

We face certain difficulties if we apply Mr Delany's criteria meaningfully to s f. For one thing, we face the absence of competent critics. I have yet to see a linguistic analysis of s f as detailed as it would have to be done. More commonly we hear the vague and general noises

about the feeling for the sound of the English language. Usually these noises are made about writers such as Sturgeon or Budrys. As a man to whom English is a second language, I'm hardly equipped to judge such subtleties; I think it is fairly easy to detect very good or very bad language. Greater sensitivity is needed for judgments in the middle range, into which most s f falls. What makes such linguistic evaluations especially suspect is the difference between American and English reviewers, for instance. While some Americans seem infatuated with, say, Budrys' style, most Britons remark that he employs only a very un-individual American commercial style. If we find such differences of judgment between speakers of the same language, any evaluation by a foreigner must be particularly suspect.

But I for one think that no s f writer can be read for style. At the moment there must be several thousand writers around the world who write much better than even the best s f author. Fannish critics are no guide; the only in-depth linguistic analyses of an s f author I have ever seen are by Ryszard Handke, a Polish linguist who wrote several articles about Stanislaw Lem; and he did not write for fanzines or s f magazines or even newspapers, but for specialised periodicals like POLISH LITERATURE or symposia like STYLE AND COMPOSITION.

That shows a second difficulty: before you can write such an analysis, you must have an object that is worthy of such an investigation. The Poles have such a writer; but to analyse average works of s f in such a way would take a special kind of madness. I suspect the common view of the "impartiality" of critics, for different texts must be read in different ways. Edgar Rice Burroughs must be read and analysed in a different way (if at all) than William Burroughs; and anybody who would read ERB as carefully as WB has to be read, must be classified not as an especially conscientious critic, but as a madman.

Mr Delany's own example as a writer is a case in point, even though he strives after stylistic perfection. He may well write programmatically: "The story of an infant's first toddle across the kitchen floor will be an adventure if the writer can generate the infantile wonder at new muscle, new efforts, obstacles and detours. I would like to read such a story." But he does not write such stories - the fact is that his stories are excessively determined by their content, which is cheap and sensational. There is no serious critic who would earnestly analyse the language of a piece of jingoism like NOVA. And when one considers how critics like Winter have mercilessly dealt with the language of EA Poe, who surely stood head and shoulders (and more) above any s f writer, one can imagine the results of such an investigation, if anybody should apply it to an individual work or writer of s f. Some of the more exaggerated claims for s f can only stand while s f isn't subjected to the more severe winds of serious literary criticism, which won't be found in amateur magazines written by (sometimes professional) dilettantes. Given the present state of s f, such a criticism as <sup>is</sup> implied by Delany's aesthetic principles could lead only to wholesale s f slaughter.

Delany himself exemplifies the absence of competent criticism and competent critics, when he turns to particular examples, such as the various translations of Merezhakowsky's THE ROMANCE OF LEONARDO DA VINCI:

Gurney: "Grey smoke rose and curled from the slate chimney."

Tench: "Billows of smoke, grey and gloomy, elevated and contorted up from the slates of the chimney."

Delany says about the two:

You'll find that the mental energy expended on the latter is greater by a factor of six or seven! And over seven-eighths of it leaves that uncomfortable feeling of loose endedness, unutilized and unresolved. Sadly, it is the less skilled, the less sophisticated reader who is most injured by bad writing. Bad prose requires more of your mental energy to correct your image from word to word, and the corrections themselves are less rewarding.

I first had a mind to accept this, for as a speaker of the German language naturally I am prejudiced in favor of long and complicated sentences, preferably with Latin punctuation. So I was assured to read that Harry Warner Jr also did not share my view that the second sentence was bad prose. Delany would probably be amazed if he read some really difficult German writers such as Albert Paris Gutersloh, Hans Honny Jahnn, Hermann Broch or Arno Schmidt, who write sentences that sometimes extend over half a page, and which are really complexly built, and do not contain only simple images. Of course, some writers are very easy to read; but one cannot ask that all good prose follows the same patterns of simplicity and ease. A wider range of literary experience just cannot be covered in this way. Bad readers may be "injured" by some writers - but why should they ask the writers to adapt themselves to their requirements? Perhaps they should learn to read properly. Also, I doubt whether good prose can be appreciated without expending mental energy: a reader can get out of a writer only what he first puts into reading him.

I can show simply what my own point of view is, in any discussion of style versus content. While I would prefer more content-oriented analyses, which are more appropriate to the trivial status of s f, I don't think that the difference has much effect. Whether you conclude from the poverty of the language the poverty of the thought, or conclude from the poverty of content the poverty of the language, you will find little distinction between content and style. Perhaps the only difference in s f is that while it is possible to make beautiful sounds without saying anything, we may assume a priori that people who cannot express themselves have nothing to say.

For, as Nietzsche put it, to improve your language means nothing more than to improve thought itself.

- Franz Rottensteiner 1971

(first published in German -  
QUARBER MERKUR 26, February 1971)

# DAVID R GRIGG

## Highway 31 Revisited

(This article first appeared in THE FANARCHIST, Number 3, February 1971, under its original title of A FANNISH ODYSSEY. We expect more articles from David in future issues of S F COMMENTARY.)

There were a lot of reasons why I went to Sydney. To see the people I know, to give myself a holiday, to let myself unwind and solve a few of the personal problems that had been haunting me since the catastrophic failure of my University course. To see Sydney. To discover in what direction I should go from where I was. I left on Sunday, January 23.

I learnt a lot. Like what the phrase "saddle-sore" really means. Like what it feels like to be overtaken on a motorcycle by an interstate transport. Like what monotony means on an empty road. Driving 600 miles from Melbourne to Sydney on a 125cc Yamaha motorcycle is a pain in the ass.

I thought a lot of things, travelling the first day. I dreamt up a science fiction story involving a race of technologically advanced nomads, endlessly driving the highways of their world. That's how I felt. I noted the ever-present colour of the Australian countryside, that pale khaki that is our national colour for four-fifths of the year. I noted the sparse trees and the dried-up creeks in one spot, and the rivers threatening flood in another. I crossed the Murray river and found Albury a town of bikies this quiet Sunday.

I was saddened to see that Australia has covered its meagre history with American commercialism (we copy America always). There was Glenrowan, with its Ned's Milk Bar and its Kelly Country Motel, and there was Gundagai, with the dog-on-the-tuckerbox surrounded by a petrol station and glaring advertising. I saw the billboards along the empty road, mainly after I made New South Wales. They didn't suit the landscape.

I forced myself on through the wearying miles: Seymour, Benalla, Wodonga, Holbrook, Gundagai, and incredibly and exhaustingly, Yass. As I came into Yass, the rain that had threatened all day began, and I got wet. I pulled into a motel rather than follow my insane notion of trying to go onto Canberra. This at about seven in the evening. Found a Gideon Bible in my room, and read Zechariah, the only book I haven't read, because I had nothing better to do. No, Virginia, I am not a Christian. Slept heavily.

I woke the next morning, aching in places that I didn't believe I had, ate a costly breakfast, and decided to try to see Canberra. I drove the thirty or so miles through the quiet morning, and saw Canberra. It's nice, I guess: impressive, because it is built that way. I parked my motorcycle outside the National Library and pondered on the fanzines that are enshrined there, and suppressed a temptation to go in and ask to see back copies of THE SLITHY TOVE, my ANZAPAZINE (they subscribe, believe it or not). Since I still had nearly two hundred miles to go to Sydney, I did not stay very long in Canberra.

Monday was the day I saw the hitch-hikers from the recent pop festival strung out along the Hume Highway. For the most part, the kids in tie-dyed sweat-shirts and beads ignored me; they concentrated on traffic from the opposite direction. But on the outskirts of a small NSW town, one member of such a group of kids turned around and saw me coming, with my peace sign emblazoned on my crash helmet, grinned and waved. I waved back, and it was a good thing.

The rest of that day was made up of the now familiar routine of endless driving, frequent stops, and all-pervading bodily aches. The last thirty miles to Sydney seemed endless. But finally I reached the border of what might be called the Greater Metropolitan Area of Sydney. In other words, I hit heavy traffic about twenty miles out. I proceeded at a fast crawl, weaving among the traffic with my bike (not a healthy practice, by the way). I finally entered the city itself).

#### ALL ROADS LEAD TO SYDNEY

Well, the Hume Highway does, anyway. (I was going to use as a heading for this section, SYDNEY THE GREAT, MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ADOMINATIONS IN THE EARTH, but I felt this might offend someone.)

Quailing at the multitudinous One Way Street signs, I found a street that I could drive down, and parked my motorcycle by a "Quarter Hour Parking Only" sign, and walked off to look for the YMCA. This was the first time I had ventured to stay at one of these establishments, and I was not quite sure what to expect. I had intended to at least all week there.

It wasn't what I expected. It was a shared room for three dollars a night, on the fourth floor (the lift was temporarily out of action, though it looked as though they might have to exhume the maker), in humid, hot weather, and no windows in the room. The doors fell off the wardrobe. My room mate, thank God, looked normal and sane enough, unlike some of the other inhabitants that I had seen. I returned to my motorcycle, to be greeted with a little note from a representative of our beneficent government....A six dollar parking ticket.

I resolved to move out the very next day, into a motel or something. Taking into account my fairly tight budget, that would have meant a stay of a maximum of three days. I was not too happy at the prospect.

I pulled out my address list and compared it with a BP MAP OF SYDNEY AND ENVIRONS. The only place that seemed safe enough to try for was Normanhurst, a little way from the Pacific Highway, where lived that wandering bus-conductor, Ron Clerke (he actually works for the Customs people: watch out!). Decision made, I set out. I found it somewhat confusing to get over the Sydney Harbour Bridge for the first time.

However, I reached the Pacific Highway by a rather circuitous path, and drove for what seemed ages. I finally succeeded in finding the turnoff to Normanhurst. I went slowly along the main road, praying that Redgrave Road

would be a direct turn from the main road. I saw the sign, and it was. Sighing with relief, I knocked on a door. Then came the first major blow. Ron was working some strange shift which let him home at about ten in the evening. Hmmmm...

So I set off back towards a sign that I had noticed on the way. It indicated the way to French's Forest, where lives that (former) arbiter of ANZAPAN destinies, Gary Mason. Unfortunately, he lives in a rather obscure road, well away from the main thoroughfare. I could not find it. I became lost, but luckily found my way out again. I returned to the YMCA in defeat.

Now most of my troubles here were caused by the fact that I had not let anyone in Sydney know I was coming. I had left on what could be called the spur of the moment. No one knew I was in Sydney; I did not know how to contact Sydney fandom, if it existed. I felt pretty bad that first night.

Nevertheless, the next day, Tuesday, I checked out of the Y and set out on the roads with my pack on my back. I reasoned that if Ron Clarke was working a late night shift, he should surely be home in the mornings. Strangely enough, this logic turned out to be correct, although in fact this Tuesday was Ron's day off. He staggered out of bed when I arrived, and gave me a look that said: "What the hell are you doing here?" I told him, and feasted on tea and biscuits.

I said to him, "I don't know what a twelve thousand mile bus trip is like, but six hundred miles on a motorcycle is quite enough for me." (Ron recently went half-way around the world in a double-decker bus, but that is a long story). Ron was very helpful and kind, considering that I had met him precisely once before, at the Tenth Australian Science Fiction Convention. He showed me his science fiction collection, and I croggled.

I also leapt upon Ron's duplicator and ran off THE SLITHY TOVE 7, which I later delivered, together with Ron's EOS, to genial Gary Mason, for the fifteenth mailing of the Australian and New Zealand Amateur Press Association. My stencils were in a somewhat disreputable condition, because they had been stuffed at the bottom of my haversack during my mammoth journey. But eventually the fanzine appeared in a fairly legible form.

Ron gave me a street directory and demonstrated the manner in which I could find Peter Darling's place, a pleasant beach, and Gary Mason's residence. As it was now after lunch, I took the hint about the beach and drove off into the distance, leaving some of my heavier luggage at Ron's.

The weather was nice and hot, and the beach was a good one. I like going to beaches so I can watch the antics of the people thereon. A certain lady in front of me was running around after an urchin who had stolen the valve from her air bed. Numerous bikini'd girls were being swept out to sea on treacherous currents. All was normal.

Later in the day I meandered back to Peter Darling's place. He looked at me aghast. Ten minutes or so later he invited me in, and showed me his science fiction collection. I croggled. I explained my now rather pressing need for accommodation. He explained that unfortunately his sister's girlfriend was staying with them and they could not have me at any price. Peter turned white with horror when I mentioned that I intended to stay in a motel. "They're not as cheap as in Melbourne, y'know!" he said, and suggested that we call up Gary Mason and hint strongly. He rang up, and the conversation was something like this:

PD: Hello, Gary. As a candidate for the imminent election for the official editor of ANZAPA, how would you like to speak to one of the electors?... what?...David Grigg, who is standing here beside me...No, you fool, I'm not in Melbourne yet...what?...no, he's up here in Sydney...yes, now...here he is...

DRG: Hello, Gary...how long am I up here? Well you see, at present I don't have a place to stay, so it might be rather short...what?...yes that was meant as a hint...a strong hint...OK go talk to your parents...what?...oh gee thanks Gary, I'll be there in about an hour...

I don't like imposing on people, except in times of dire need, when I am more than willing to do so. While I was at Ron's place earlier in the day, we rang up Shayne McCormack, who set about trying to convince her parents to allow a complete stranger to sleep in their caravan. This process, it was expected, would take at least a couple of days.

#### DAVID R GRIGG, THE CLAUDE DEGLER OF AUSTRALIAN FANDOM

Arriving slightly embarrassed at Gary's house, I was greeted by Gary with the news that there was a phone call for me. This turned out to be Shayne McCormack, whose plan to accommodate me at her place met a great deal of resistance. I became more embarrassed, as it now seemed that the issue was breaking up Shayne's happy home. I promised to come around and see Shayne the following evening, and to bring Gary and possibly Ron as well.

Gary introduced me to his parents and his science fiction collection. I crogged. Gary made some comments on the second issue of this fanzine ((THE FANARCHIST)), and demonstrated the stencils for the next issue of AUSTRALIA IN SEVENTY FIVE. Or could it have been THE NEW FORERUNNER? One of those, anyway. In which he commended my idea of donating subscription monies for my fanzine to A175. I informed him of the amount I now owed that fund. He realised how low was this source of income, but hoped that the idea would spread.

Later, having pushed aside several tons of old ANZAPA mailings, I was shown a bed, into which I readily collapsed. My various haversacks and panier bags I spread around the room, inbetween the fanzines and drafting equipment. I slept heavily.

The next day, Ron Clarke had invited me to go on a trip to see the Blue Mountains in his car (his second day off), so I shot off to Normanhurst. Now Ron's family have an interesting parking problem. They have four cars, and they have to be stacked in a line in their narrow driveway. It's an interesting logistical problem to avoid the problem of having one car blocked in by the others when it wants to go out. After about fifteen minutes, the car was free and my motorcycle installed beneath Ron's house. We set off.

I won't go into detail, except to say that it was a good day, and I enjoyed the Blue Mountains immensely. Melbourne has no equivalent natural attraction. We arrived back at Ron's in time for dinner, and I convinced Ron to go to Shayne's place. I left my bike at Ron's and we headed for Bass Hill, with me carrying a clever plastic model of the USS Enterprise (STARTREK-type) which fell to bits at frequent intervals. It was an experience finding the way to Bass Hill, as neither Ron nor I quite knew where it was. Notwithstanding, we eventually arrived at 49 Orchard Street. Shayne informed us we were an hour late.

An interesting evening. While we were there, Alex Robb called up. Ron pried Shayne away from the phone about fifteen minutes later, and talked to Alex for an equivalent length of time. I begged to be allowed to speak to Alex, whom I had not yet met. Ten minutes of an interesting discussion later, Gary Mason pulled up outside in his car. Gary was the person to whom Alex wished to speak; he had rung Shayne in order to find out whether or not he had been thrown out of ANZAPA. It transpired that he had not. I told Alex that I would come around and see him the following day. Finally, he was allowed to hang up.

A problem of transport arose. I had to return to Ron's to pick up my motor cycle, but this might mean that I would arrive at Gary's house after Gary and family were asleep. So Gary decided to follow Ron to Normanhurst, get me on my bike, and then go to his place. This we did, with certain complications. Like having Gary's windscreen/wipers start up unexpectedly on the way to Ron's. They resisted all attempts to stop them, other than disconnecting the motor entirely. Like making a detour on the way back to Gary's, in the direct opposite to French's Forest. Like following a certain Barry Danes driving Gary's car, finding every conceivable winding path to throw me off his tail. But I came through it all regardless, and remarkably, still alive.

The next day, Thursday, I wanted to do two things: see Alex, and see Sydney. On the way to Alex's place, I stopped at a shopping centre and browsed around for awhile. I looked into a bookshop and picked up THE PENGUIN JOHN LENNON (containing IN HIS OWN WRITE and A SPANIARD IN THE WORKS).

#### GRIGG THE BIKIE, CLARKE THE BUSMAN, AND ROBB THE TRAIN DRIVER<sup>1</sup>

No, I will not explain that. Alex lives in the Baptist Theological College in Herring Road, Eastwood. Not a great fault, but dampening to us unreligious bums. After hunting around various buildings, I found Alex crammed into a tiny room, full of his book collection. I crogged. I spent a very pleasant morning talking to Alex about all sorts of strange things. I gave him a fit of hysterics when I revealed that I was under the misapprehension that Alex was training to be a Baptist minister. He is not, but his place of accommodation had misled me. Alex is progressing very nicely thank you towards his BA (that is right, isn't it, Alex? - not a Master of Biblical Engineering or something?) A well-spent couple of hours, anyway, and the pleasure of meeting someone with whom I had only previously corresponded.

I left Eastwood and headed off to the city, hoping I could find a place to park my bike without picking up another parking ticket. I did, beneath a huge above ground expressway. I caught an underground train, and marvelled that I only had to pay five cents to go across the city (Melbourne's trams cost ten cents for an equivalent distance). I spent rather a lot of time window-shopping, observed the Harbour Bridge, the opera house, and finally took a lift to the top of Australia Square. That lift! It reaches about two gee on the way up, crushing the passengers into the floor. Coming down you are virtually weightless. Not a very pleasant experience. I stayed at the top of "The Tallest Building In The Southern Hemisphere" and read John Lennon. It was raining, so I couldn't see much of a view.

On the way home to Gary's I observed once again that rain and motorcycles don't mix. That is, I got wet. I spent a quiet and amusing evening watching television, including, among other things, the election speech of

<sup>1</sup> \* I've left in this heading, which is puzzling because, as David says, Alex has no plans for a career in New South Wales Railways. (brg) \*

the premier of New South Wales: I forget his name.

I woke late on Friday and resolved to go and see a few films in the city: I very rarely do this in Melbourne, and I was determined to enjoy this holiday, even at the expense of my sorely lagging funds.' I made up my mind to see CATCH 22, since I had heard some very good reports about it. So when I arrived in the city, I went down to the cinema. Unfortunately, when I got there the theatre was surrounded by assorted policemen, firemen, and rescue trucks. It meant that I missed the morning session of CATCH 22, so I went to see GETTING STRAIGHT instead. A beautiful film, but I won't review it. I saw CATCH 22 in the afternoon, and enjoyed it equally.

#### A WEEKEND OF DEBAUCHERY

Wishful thinking. But fun it was. A very informal sort of party on Friday evening at Sabina Heggie's house: very few people. I saw another showing of Gary Mason's slides of the New Year's Convention. This added up to the sixth time I had seen these particular slides, and I was not impressed.

Saturday dawned at a late hour and I was dragged off with Gary to unknown parts of Sydney. Now Shayne had convinced her parents to let me stay for a couple of days, and although Gary was still quite willing to have me, I hesitated to disappoint them of the joy of having me, as I had put Shayne to so much trouble working on her parents. (Or, as Gary put it, I would spread around the discomfort of putting up with me.) And I was to move over to Bass Hill at about lunchtime on this Saturday. However...

I found myself in some distant suburb of Sydney, helping Barry Danes and Sabina and Gary and Lyn and Jim to choose a car for Barry. He wanted a \*Austin eighteen-hundred mark two automatic in portafine gold and black interior\* (unquote). At 2 pm I rang up Shayne to tell her not to expect me, at 3 pm to tell her that I wasn't coming until the following day. I was being driven around Sydney at a marvellous pace, meeting Kevin Dillon for a whole ten minutes, and being driven off again. No one seemed to know where we were going. I ended up at a drive-in with Jim in Jim's mini. Where the others went, I dare not ask.

Sunday, and I reached Shayne's, with baggage, at lunch-time. I spent the afternoon driving around in Montgomery (the generative name for all green Volkswagens), stretching Shayne's arm at a bowling alley, and deciding, at Shayne's suggestion, that the generative name for all red Yamahas should be Yoko. Several classical records later, we found ourselves at a Midnight Drive-in, watching THE CHILDREN OF THE DAMNED. Goshwowgeé. Got home at 4 am, Monday morning. Needless to say, I slept late.

Monday went in a bit of a daze. It was Australia Day, a holiday, and a DUSK meeting. I hesitate to describe the DUSK meeting - they're all mad, as I kept muttering under my breath. Mad, like getting out of cars during a rain-storm to see a place called Waterfall. It did. Mad, like sitting in a hot, stuffy room watching endless slides of Mr Spock. Gaaahh! But I suppose I could consider the experience interesting. Exhausted by all this, I left the morning after, as I had run out of money. The whole thing was great, and the best time I have had in years. I passed a lot more hippies on the way home, and arrived safely on Wednesday in Melbourne. Loved it all!..

- David R Grigg 1971

# BRUCE R GILLESPIE

## The Original Fiction Anthologies

### PART ONE

I welcome the news that an increasing number of US publishers now propose to issue collections of new short stories. The guaranteed readership of such collections is much higher than that of any of the magazines. Publishers need not fit within debilitating monthly or bimonthly schedules: the second DANGEROUS VISIONS will appear six years after the first, for instance. Now Damon Knight edits three ORBIT collections per year instead of one. Samuel Delany is optimistic: his QUARK collections will start with four issues per year.

In short, such collections should present high quality stories to a very wide public.

### INFINITY ONE - A MAGAZINE OF SPECULATIVE FICTION IN BOOK FORM

edited by ROBERT HOSKINS

Lancer 75-100 :: 1970  
253 pages :: 75c

Something went seriously wrong with INFINITY ONE. The collection promises a great deal: Isaac Asimov provides an Introduction, Steranko draws a high quality cover, and the Contents list looks spectacular. It features names such as Dickson, Clarke, McCaffrey and Lafferty.

The reader turns first to Robert Silverberg's THE PLEASURE OF HIS COMPANY, which starts in the following punchy, but vaguely pulpy way:

He had a dozen fellow voyagers in all. He wouldn't be lonely, though he had three years of solitary travel ahead of him before he reached his landfall, his place of exile. It was the third hour of his voyage. He was growing calm, now, after the frenzy of his escape.

A lot of information spins out from a few words, but the total effect sounds hackneyed. This is an escape story. The "dozen fellow passengers" are not people but information cutes programmed to hold conversations in the

way famous people may have done had they been alive. They should be elaborate "companions", pick-me-ups. Thomas Voigtland was President of the Citizens' Council on Bradley's World. He escapes when a rebel group takes over. Voigtland leaves his family behind, but plans to return "as soon as possible" to stage a political comeback.

But - and unfortunately this is really all the story - Voigtland begins to hear his Conscience speaking. He has dreams about his son Juan, probably murdered or jailed under the new rulers:

They brought Juan to him in his dreams. COWARD. COWARD.  
COWARD. Juan's lean bony body was ridged and gouged; he had been put through the tortures, the wires in the skull, the lights in the eyes, the truncheons in the ribs. I STAYED. YOU FLED.  
I STAYED. YOU FLED. I STAYED. YOU FLED.

Does that move you to tears of compassion or tears of boredom? We've read this kind of naivety too often in the past. Silverberg puts no wise words in the "mouths" of Ovid, Hemingway and Plato, the cubes; there can be only one of two possible endings; so the story is not interesting. Worse still, the reader knows that Silverberg can write much better than in this story; THE PLEASURE OF OUR COMPANY is all so predictable.

This word could sum most of the stories. A synonym for "predictability" might be "simple-minded", and simple-mindedness leads straight to bad writing. The writers in this volume hold one or two ideas in their heads and think no more about the rest of their stories.

From ECHO, by Katherine MacLean - a frenzied little collection of words:

Pain wiped out the thought. The plain seemed still to heave like a rolling surf, but he staggered to his feet and glared defiantly around in a circle.

"Die!" screamed the grass.

"Die!" screamed the flowers.

I suppose pain is as legitimate a subject as any other - but haven't we been screamed at in precisely this way so many times before?

Also unreadable is Anne McCaffrey's THE GREAT CANINE CHORUS in which cuteness clings to incredibility:

The thought of Maria dead choked Pete up. Her fragile laugh, her curious beauty gone? No!

and

Maria's incredible laugh chimed through his head. Al says it's

cute the way I talk. And he really does like me.

Gee whiz! Is INFINITY ONE really SECRET ROMANCES or WOMAN'S WEEKLY in disguise?

Do I need to quote further? Probably not, for most of the stories may be interchanged with each other. If McCaffrey's style comes from kind of juvenile literature, then Dean Koontz's NIGHTMARE GANG comes from another sort:

Jimmy-Joe had his hands full of knives. The one in his right was dripping something red.

Kill them!

I took my pistol out. It felt cold and unmanagable in my hand...

What sort of people will swallow this? Surely, only readers of the crudest boys' comics.

It's not as if Hoskins merely picks the worst from what the Americans call the "Old Wave"; he also has a talent for picking the worst from the "New Wave" as well. For instance, in PACEM EST, K M O'Donnell and Kris Neville have an uncanny ability to imitate the most ridiculous features of Ballard's writing, without many of the virtues.

It's difficult to be fair to the editor. He did have everything on his side. Fortunately he managed to sneak in one good story, although it does not justify buying the book.

Poul Anderson's THE COMMUNICATORS includes one typical piece of the biff-and-suffle we expect in Anderson's worst fiction. Otherwise the drama arises naturally from a series of conversations on a space-ship arriving on the Moon on its way to Earth. Two "brothers" of The Communicators grind personal and ideological axes with Luizo, a representative of an Asiatic race that now controls most of the Earth, including North America. It would be predictable, if it were not continually surprising. The Order of the Communicators has kept alive a type of culture during a series of global wars. The Order has aimed to make contact with surrounding solar systems.

Two riddles must be solved simultaneously: why does Man always kill himself when he is on the brink of controlling the environment?; and, what kind of beings will finally speak to Earth from the stars? Anderson maintains the link between these questions superbly to the end of the story, and the twin "answers" are properly chilling. Anderson finds it difficult to shed that hectoring, whining tone developed under John W Campbell, but at least he tries to argue and not lecture.

But one good story will not do. Mr Hoskins will need to try much harder before INFINITY becomes a satisfactory "magazine of speculative fiction in book form".

NOVA 1

edited by HARRY HARRISON

Delacorte :: 1970  
222 pages :: \$4.95

Within the next few years, it seems likely that the original fiction anthologies will replace the science fiction magazines. NEW WORLDS has taken the hint already and changed from magazine to book format. Therefore I'm looking at individual examples of these anthologies with more care than the books deserve in their own right.

The prize game at the moment is to guess the policies of the new editors. For instance, Damon Knight's policy for ORBIT is still changing with each new volume. Despite his lengthy explanations, Harlan Ellison's policy for DANGEROUS VISIONS was never clear to me.

Neither is Harry Harrison's in NOVA 1. The reader may see some pointers in Harry Harrison's previous career. On one hand, he has expressed admiration for John W Campbell and the values he represents. On the other hand, he keeps strong links with the so-called "New Wave" writers.

Harrison's own Introduction is ambiguous. Predictably, he claims that NOVA 1 contains "good stories, new stories, first-class stories". "I have had the chance," he says, "to read more, work harder, dig deeper." But he is careful not to offend any of his readers (for American sf readers can be offended by literary tastes other than their own). He says that his policy has "had a freeing effect on the contributor's powers" but points out that they are "not... overly nasty or overly sexy - or overly anything."

It sounds like a dull meal. How does the cook treat the stories once they are between hard covers?

"'Man, you really groovin',' said the Maha". Unfortunately this sentence from THE BIG CONNECTION by Robin Scott, is the first line of the book. It precedes an unfunny account of two hippies' attempts to make the "big connection" - electronically. Hippies will feel that Wilson has slandered them in this story. Surely no hippie speaks this way ("Oh, I dig. Inna plug. Inna wall... You need a plug for them two loose wires!"). In no way does Scott convey the electronic trip that his heroes are supposed to experience. He merely tells us what trivial events happened.

Barry Malzberg is another of the many writers in this collection who merely tell us that something happened, though nothing happens in the reader's mind. TERMINUS EST tells of a right wing spacer who objects to the drop-out colony on the Moon. Spacer meets drop-outs. Spacer says: "Pigs as companions would compare favorably with the bohemian colonies... on the moon." No prizes for guessing the story's end. The story suffers from the Alf Garnett effect: you tell the story from a right-wing viewpoint to make fun of that view, and find that half your readers will agree with the right-winger's expressed opinions. The language is silly and falsely colloquial; there is no verbal tautness that might lead to irony.

Perhaps the worst example of hollow laughter is David Gerrold's LOVE IN THREE ACTS. A married couple are depressed by a common enough problem, although they do not bargain for its technological aspect:

He ripped the readout from the computer and went through the motions of studying it. This was the deluxe model which recorded the actual moment-to-moment physical reactions of the band-wearers...

"Well...?" Marsha demanded acidly, "did we enjoy ourselves?"

"Yeah..." he muttered. "About thirty-four percent..."

But does Gerrold make this situation comic? Unfortunately he treats the situation with all the sympathy and subtlety of a women's magazine "family doctor". A salesman assures the unhappy couple that his machine will save their marriage. The machine installed, the dramatic situation resolves itself so satisfactorily:

They forgot the wires, the bands, the guidance module on the dresser. Their external beings had disappeared and they immersed themselves in their lovemaking. It was a surging climbing wave, a bright crashing thing that built every higher. Ever higher.

And it was very good.

He smiled at her. She smiled back, and they kissed.

The reader can only be appalled by coyness and ignorance of such a passage. These people become love-making machines; a good author may have looked at this idea or any one of many aspects of modern marriage. Gerrold merely writes a silly series of words.

Most of the other writers also write trivially of trivial problems. They expect us to understand problems that have no importance (as in Chan Davis' very bad HEXAMNION) or they fail to write well about problems that deserve more consideration (as in Gene Wolfe's THE HORARS OF WAR). "Speculative fictions" become collective giggles.

However, there are at least two stories which make this volume worth looking at. In SWASTIKA!, Brian Aldiss displays many writing skills that are absent in the other stories. The joke of the story threatens to be trivial, but Aldiss avoids this threat.

"Brian" interviews Adolf Hitler who "is alive and well and living in Ostend under the assumed name - at least, I assume it is assumed - of Geoffrey Bunglevester." But interviewer "Brian" is not an agonised investigator from TIME magazine. No, this is the chance for "Brian" to meet his boyhood hero:

"Looking back," I said, "do you ever have any regrets?"

"I wish I'd done more with my painting." A faroff look came into his eyes.

and

He leaned over the table toward me and glanced over one shoulder.

"You are Aryan, aren't you?"

"I went to an English public school, if that's what you mean."

"That's good enough for me. Very fine unrivalled disciplinary system!"

What better guarantee for the eager young reporter? But this is only Aldiss' opening round. He fights dirtier as the story proceeds, aided by the ever doting "Brian":

"Defeated! Who was defeated? Have you fallen victim to all the lying Jewish bourgeois bolshevik anti-Nazi propaganda too? I've not been defeated - "

"But surely in 1945 - "

"What happened in 1945 is neither here nor there! It just happens to be the year when I chose to step back and let others take over the arduous role of waging war and waking whole populations from their slave-mentality inertia."

Indeed, "Geoff" is quite pleased with his successors: LBJ came to consult him, although he was not pleased with the Texan's sentimentality:

"If you can believe it, he had some harebrained scheme for preserving India from destruction. He was a yellow liberal at heart, and the deal fell through."

"Geoff's" grand plan was to deal with the "Communists abroad and the Negroes and white-trash subversive crypto-mulatto elements at home."

Apart from his American set-back, "Geoff" sees the world proceeding quite satisfactorily along the lines he first envisioned in the twenties.

Perhaps Aldiss has it easy in this story - all he does is make fun of the political cliches of the last thirty years, and link them together so they show each other's falsity. But nobody else has put this idea into practice, and certainly nobody else in the science fiction field could write this story. Besides, there is a good joke on the last page.

SWASTIKA!'s virtuosity only shows up the mediocrity of the rest of the bunch. But JEAN DUPRES, by Gordon R Dickson, overshadows much of the science fiction written during the last few years. Where the other stories are chatty and meaningless, JEAN DUPRES is compressed, understated and thoughtful. Where the other stories make Big Points and expect us to gasp, Dickson tells a story and knows everybody will listen.

Humans settle a planet where they expect to live side by side with a race whose customs they do not understand. Most puzzling is the practice of sending the race's teenagers into the woods to fend for themselves. During this time, the tribe's sons become almost a separate race, uncontrolled by either the tribe or human beings.

The settlers do not bother to find out what caused this social custom: they build their farm houses and hope the original inhabitants will leave them alone. They don't, of course, and the settlers must wage a war with rules they have not made.

Now that situation would be the sole subject of an ANALOG story, or a piece like Robert Silverberg's A HAPPY DAY IN 2381 in NOVA 1. The heroes of such stories would explain and "solve" the problem and end things happily ever after.

Dickson doesn't. His story-teller tries to protect the settlements. As part of his duties, he meets a small boy, Jean Dupres, who has learned to speak to the "natives". Jean's father and mother do not appreciate this ability, and they are puzzled and annoyed because he does not share their longing to go "home" to Earth.

When war engulfs the settlement, Jean is kept out of sight, although he might have stopped the slaughter:

Jean knew what he was; but he believed what his father and the other adults told him he was. If they told him he did not understand Klahari and he did not belong on the wall of the Strongpoint, then it must be so, even if it was against all the facts. He went back to fetching and carrying cold drinks to the wounded, and after a while the voice from the jungle ceased and the sun went down.

The small boy continues to act in this role until he is the only one left alive in the settlement.

However the story is not about a smart little kid, or about a conflict between civilisations. As the war worsens, the story-teller is left stranded by events. He returns to the settlement to rescue the group, but cannot approach it because of the Klaharins who surround it. He rests in a tree-hut, forced to watch events:

As I had suspected, the other posts were empty - and Strudenmeyer had not even set a watch in the communications room at the Strongpoint. The room when I looked into it was empty, and the door closed. No one came to the sound of the call buzzer.

I could see most of the rooms of the Strongpoint's interior. I could see outside the buildings, all around the inside of the walls and the court separating them from the buildings and the watch tower in the centre. The scanners set in walls and ceilings were working perfectly. But I could not tell Strudenmeyer and the rest I was there.

Dickson shows the anguish of the story-teller who must watch the settlement wilt under the opposition, but can do nothing to help. He can even hear events through the wall-telephones - but can make nobody hear him. The story is a parable, of course, but not of limited significance - it tells of the impotent observer watching any overwhelming situation.

Even Jean Dupres is not one of those depressing super-children of other science fiction stories - he is just a child who may have saved the situation if his parents had not been as pigheaded as parents can be. The story ends fittingly.

I wonder what Mr Harrison calls "first class". JEAN DUPRES is first class, and so are two or three other stories. This may be all that's offering: I shall look at this idea more closely when I examine the latest ORBIT collections. Unfortunately, few collections can boast of anything better.

#### NEW WRITINGS IN S F 16

edited by JOHN CARNELL

Dennis Dobson :: 1970

190 pp :: 21s

John Carnell's NEW WRITINGS series has survived the rigours of English publishing and 16 issues. One is entitled to ask whether it was all worthwhile. With Aldiss barefooting through his head and bank balance, and Harbottle and Gillings recently recalling and refurbishing past eras of English s f, I wonder what place

there is for Carnell's collections of new fiction. Since he promoted the idea of original fiction anthologies in the first place, what has he achieved?

You would still be asking this question after you had read the first story, and the second story would resolve none of your doubts.

Colin Kapp's novella GETAWAY FROM GETAWEHI leads off the collection with lines like:

"Fantastic! If I hadn't seen it myself I'd never have believed it."

and

"You know, Fritz," said Jacko as he sank back into his pod, "Colonel Nash was right. There is no place in space quite like Getawehi."

There is no evidence that Kapp was joking when he wrote that dialogue. Presumably he is afraid that we had not discovered Getawehi's uniqueness for ourselves, a fear that he is justified in holding.

The Unorthodox Engineers (which at least do not have the cheek to call themselves scientists) face up to their latest heart-stabbing gut-wrenching problem:

Each step the ship took was preceded by the curious hop-skip motion with which it had precluded its new mode of transport. Its continuing drunken dance through the fern banks soon carried it out on to the edge of the steppe. There it abruptly disappeared from view except for an unmoving stain ... Said Van Noon morosely:

"An inebriated rocket I could learn to live with, but I know from bitter experience that the abrupt removal of half a billion credits of Government money invariably needs a good explanation."

Actually the story contains quite an interesting problem, as science fiction problems go. Kapp outlines it early in the story. All he needs to do is spin a good yarn.

Kapp does his best to evade this elementary responsibility. First he gums up his engineering problem with 50 pages or so of fatuous non-dialogue - I've already quoted two typical examples. Perhaps I should run a competition to find out if there is anything more boring than a spaceship-full of engineers lecturing each other at length about a simple problem. Kapp finally throws away the story when the characters solve the last piece of the puzzle off-stage and then explain it all in the final few pages.

Much the same happens in Chris Priest's THE PERIHELION MAN, a story which is worse than Kapp's, if possible, and insignificant beside Priest's stories in VISION OF TOMORROW, and elsewhere. The story has some promise, if you bear in mind from the first page that the whole thing comes strictly from the thirties. Jason Farrell (that name's a good start) loses his job as a space pilot, is hired by a Mysterious Government Organization, and flies off to Venus' orbit to pick up some missing atomic bombs. The reader begins to yawn at about this point in the narrative.

As with all the other stories in this book, there <sup>are</sup> pages of trivial gossip before the fun starts, and by then we suspect that there won't be any. When it comes, it is the "fun" of an extremely bad E E Smith, and is embarrassing rather than amusing:

For a start, its hull had been fined down and glazed, so that it shone like a mirror. Then, over this original hull they had laid on fifteen separate outer skins, made of black inflammable fibre.

If you are willing to believe in space ships with skins, you will probably believe in star ships made from rabbit fur, or the following:

He jabbed at the controls and changed direction. At once, a second explosion shattered the approximate part of space he would have been in. In front of him he saw the cross-shaped ship rear up and away from the cloud of nuclear bombs and come directly towards him. Its movements were sudden and quick as it bore down towards him.

That paragraph alone qualifies this story for some kind of "Worst SF Story Ever Told" award. Biggles looks like Einstein beside the hero of this story, and the "climax" of the story is deleted as summarily as in Colin Kapp's story. Tedious explanation replaces it.

There are better stories in this book, but they don't win by much. Only Douglas R Mason's ALL DONE BY MIRRORS interested me at all, not so

much for its unoriginal ideas and papier mache scenery, as for its last paragraph. But the effect of one paragraph is not much in 190 pages, and I am still left wondering what sort of niche fits NEW WRITINGS. Why is the 16th volume no better, or even worse than the first? Who still buys stuff like this? .

Possibly not even the editor could answer questions like this. My guess is that school libraries and public libraries still buy them - there is no sex in these stories, although a few characters dare to swear. There's not much violence either - not even the crude stuff that Fred Pohl published in IF. The book is, in short, a sum of its negative virtues. It doesn't excite people, it does not sexually stimulate them, and it certainly does not make them think. When Carnell publishes a few good stories, as in Number 15, his sales probably drop. NEW WRITINGS is television with words - a book for long afternoons, unnecessary train rides and necessary jet flights.

Perhaps Number 17 could even better Number 16, but would that suit either the editor or publishers?

#### ORBIT 5

edited by DAMON KNIGHT

Berkley Medallion S1778 ::  
Dec 1969 :: 222 pp :: 75c

Perhaps it only took time for the writers to wake up. Perhaps Damon Knight missed the grapevine when he commissioned the first few issues. Perhaps the event is inexplicable and we should just be grateful.

For the ORBIT collections have struck form at last. I said at one stage that Knight had an unerring eye for the predictable, as most of the stories in the early collections read like rejects from glossy women's magazines or scruffy s f magazines. In the meantime scads of these uninteresting stories were winning awards all over the place while NEW WORLDS had to make do on an Arts Council grant. The clangers are still here - but I'm surprised for the first time by the front rank of stories that overtop them.

The best story in the collection, and one of the best stories ever labelled "science fiction", is Langdon-Jones' THE TIME MACHINE. The story opens in a nouveau roman prison cell - an object of not much beauty but Great Possible Significance. A man sits looking at a post-card. The writer sniffs around the cell's interior, noting its sterility and inhumanity. He slips into the prisoner's mind and the focus of attention changes:

The photograph is of a girl. It is just a little larger than two inches square, and is in black and white. It is a close-up, and the lower part of her arms, and her body below the waist are not revealed. Her head is not directly facing the camera, and she appears to be looking at something to one side, revealing a three-quarter view of her face. Behind her is a brick wall - a decorative wall in Holland Park on that day after the morning in the coffee shop; soon they were to part again at the railway station.

The writer must be precise and objective - he and his main character would like to confine their attentions to the commonplace but somehow emotional details crowd the mind and the writer's attention is directed towards more important matters. But it is that initial note of reticence that lends power to the rest of the story. Jones would like to "see things as they are" but he also makes sure that these are matters worth seeing.

Jones conducts his search by means of three simultaneous analogies, one of them the formal "story". A man casually meets a married woman. He becomes infatuated. A time machine is examined, entered, and it tears the fabric of reality and lets the reader's mind through. A vast future Gomorrah whirls in a frenzied orgy and dies of its own spent energy. Each experience reveals a third side to the triangle begun with the other two experiences.

The "time machine" is both a structure described by the author and man himself, represented by Jones' dowdy English lover:

What was going to happen this time? He could visualise that one morning she wouldn't come, but he would, and instead of loving there would be hatred and fighting. She had told him during the week, and he had been very upset. But he wanted her to continue, for he knew what it would do to her to have to stop now. What had been set into action was a series of circumstances that had to run a certain course until it was possible to break it.

He can't escape from his own selfishness and lack of insight. Only his lover can widen his emotional vision and dazzle him with that heightened experience that gives energy to the whole story.

The act of love is necessary and inevitable - but it gains its significance from its finality. The lovers' experience stretches through time and transforms itself into a paradise which destroys its occupants:

(They were) ... saying "Just after making love is not the best time for taking a picture of me," and then being quiet and looking at one side, and the shutter opening, slowly, slower, and then freezing wide open, this "time" a tangible material like film going through a camera, that can be wound on, stopped and taken out.

compared with:

The city is the city of time - the city knows no time -  
...serious musicians play only some Mozart and some Berg -  
Beaches and pavilions glisten like mirrors in the sun - The city  
beats like a bird's wing - people float in aerial choreography,  
like the sinking drowned -

Still the author wants to categorise, to enjoy everything abstractly, while he feels the growing urgency of the demands of his insights. It is this open conflict between the intellect and the emotions, so rare in the

the s f field, that gives power to this story.

The time machine tears through time with hallucinogenic intensity (one sound experienced: "Straight files of fingers tap on miles of desks"). The city consumes its own life in a few pages and finishes magnificently destitute:

The city implodes, the towers, spires and struts of metal raining to the centre like a waterfall - liquid pours in on the dead city - whirlpools of vegetation - dead people dance in the water - all that is left is a floating mass of flowers and machines.

The lovers meet, merge completely, and part for the last time: the symbols of death spring from their most private, intense moments:

When he finally withdrew his hand, he slowly moved it up, arching his wrist so that his fingers did not touch the bedclothes and brought his hand to the light. His first two fingers were covered from top to bottom in thick, bright red blood. She was watching his hand too; it had suddenly assumed a position of paramount importance, like an object framed by perspective lines in a photograph... He felt as though he had just been probing a terrible wound in her body.

In every paragraph of the story, Jones shows an awareness of the implications of all his major themes: of the decay of life and love; of the cyclic nature of time; of the inevitability of its progress. Seldom does an s f author show so much sensitivity in his themes and his language.

Signs of maturity and exciting seriousness abound in this collection. The story from ORBIT 5 that has aroused most interest so far is Norman Spinrad's THE BIG FLASH. Various mediocre people - a pop group manager, a military strategist, a submarine crew - scratch their heads as they watch the rise of the scruffiest, most acid-stricken group ever to howl down a microphone: the Four Horsemen. Everything they touch turns to gold, and soon into something less substantial. For the moment, the gold has more glow than usual:

And the guy at the visuals console diddles around and rings of light start to climb the walls of the tent, blue at the bottom becoming green as they get higher, then yellow, orange and finally as they get higher, then yellow, orange and finally as they become a circle on the ceiling, eye-killing neon-red. Each circle takes exactly one heartbeat to climb the walls.

Boy, what an awful feeling! Like I was a tube of toothpaste being squeezed in rhythm till the top of my head felt like it was gonna squirt up with those circles of light through the ceiling.

You may have felt that feeling at a pop concert or a disco - as if somebody was hammering the top of your head. Thought is not so much

set aside as cudgelled out of existence. As in BUG JACK BARRON, Spinrad mixes jargon with precise description in a convincing rhetoric. Spinrad attempts to involve us in the experience of loud pop music - and the rest of the story is no less terrifying.

Story's end is inevitable after we roar and twang through:

An awful explosion-sound came over every speaker, so loud it rocked me on my feet -

Then:

An explosion became a rumble -

The light seemed to run together into a circle on the ceiling, leaving everything else black.

And the circle became a fireball.

The fireball became a slow-motion film of an atomic bomb cloud as the rumbling died away. Then the picture faded into a moment of total darkness and the house lights came on.

What a number!

Gevalt, what an act!

That's how one entrepreneur first experiences the unique stage act of the Four Horsemen. The big game of pop music is swept aside by the endings of their songs - always the mushroom-shaped cloud. Missile-technicians watch it (Washington orders them to), submarine crews watch it, and the Pentagon shows more interest in the Four Horsemen than they've ever shown in a pop group.

THE BIG FLASH is a verbal hard rock song, made more effective because Spinrad analyses the subliminal influence such songs might have. The worst of it is that the Four Horsemen could be buying their first guitars and rehearsing right now. Watch for them in GO-SET.

You might expect that anything else in this collection would appear tame after THE TIME MACHINE and THE BIG FLASH. At least two other stories compare favorably with them.

Kate Wilhelm's SOMERSET DREAMS nearly matches THE TIME MACHINE for precision of language, but is a far more reflective piece. Janet Matthew, the story-teller, spends her last summer in the village of Somerset, somewhere in rural USA. The quiet streets and decaying houses fold around her mind like ivy around a wall, but Janet seeks to awaken from this comforting mantle:

I walk to town, remembering how I used to skip, or ride my bike on the sidewalks that were large limestone slabs, as slick as polished marble when they were wet. I am bemused by the tilted slabs, thinking of the ground below shoving and trying to rid itself of their weight. I am more bemused by myself; I detest people who

assign anthropomorphic concepts to nature. I don't do it anywhere but in Somerset. I wear a shift to town, observing the customs even now. After high school, girls no longer wore shorts, or pants, in town.

Again we see those abstractions about the emotions that I noted in Langdon Jones' story; the sense of mind-observing-mind-observing-reality that is so unusual in s f. Kate Wilhelm writes so carefully that the reader must try to weigh the importance of each word. The above paragraph ties in with so much else in the story, as we see the process of memory ("how I used to...") slowly replace reason, compared with the protest of reason and life squashed under the weight of those memories ("the ground below shoving and trying to rid itself of their weight"). Janet Matthews' spirit contains both the stones and the ground below, and the story concerns her almost unconscious decisions about her attitudes to Somerset and her former life.

At the beginning of the story she enjoys her nostalgia, and even wallows in it. She wants to bring back her dying father to Somerset so she can take care of him. But her effort to recall childhood is escapist, although the reader realizes this before the main character does. Almost in boredom, she joins an experiment in dream research conducted in the town by an arrogant Ph D and a group of undistinguished college students. Wilhelm's imagery and narrative increasingly echo Janet's larger delusion - her dream of an idyllic childhood which can only bring disappointment to her:

The cemetery is tended in spots only, the graves of those whose relatives are still in Somerset have cut grass and a sprinkling of flowers. My mother's grave is completely grown over and shame fills me. What would Father say? I don't try to weed it then, but sit down under a wide oak tree...

I am yanked hard, and stumble, and hands catch me and steady me...  
"Janet, do you know how long you've been there at the cemetery?"

"Half an hour, an hour."

"It's almost six now."

"I must have been sound asleep."

"Sitting straight up, with your legs stretched out in front of you?"

SOMERSET DREAMS is, in a sense, a ghost story, and about the exorcism of ghosts. All the ghosts, and the exorciser, inhabit the same body. The situation is universal, and peculiar to that type of fiction that could only be presented in a selection of s f. A whole picture emerges, Janet "wakes up" in time, and Somerset resumes its slow death-in-life. But the story's ending is more extraordinary than prosaic.

I will not dwell on Gene Wolfe's PAUL'S TREEHOUSE, although it is also very effective. It begins predictably enough. The kids riot at a nearby university, jaded air-conditioned parents impotently worry about the oddities of their son Paul, and the suburban bourgeoisie are due for

yet another kick in their wall-upholstered backsides.

The story is forceful because it does not run to form. We never meet "Paul". He has dragged rocks into his treehouse and has decided to stay invisible. His father looks pathetic because he is reduced to begging:

Morris waited under the tree until he had left, then called Paul's name softly several times. There was no reply. Raising his voice, he said, "We don't want to hurt you, Paul." He tried to think of a bribe. Paul already had a bicycle. "I'll build you a swimming pool, Paul"... There was no answer.

Gene Wolfe builds a bridge between an incompetent father and a silent son as a seventies city's summer takes its toll on its inhabitants. The story is at least as scary as THE BIG FLASH, and its understatement is just as effective as Spinrad's overstatements.

And I've still failed to mention stories like Carol Carr's hilarious LOOK, YOU THINK YOU'VE GOT TROUBLES, one of the few Jewish s f stories around, and Lafferty's CONFIGURATION OF THE NORTH SHORE, which is far less mundane than the work he has been doing recently. The other stories in the volume are not very interesting. But Damon Knight has at last hit stride in ORBIT 5. He will find this volume hard to beat - but I certainly hope he can.

- Bruce R Gillespie July 1970  
: Review of NEW WRITINGS 16  
first published in SPECULATION 28.

(Next issue: reviews of ORBIT 6, ORBIT 7 and QUARK/ 1, and perhaps more).

Although I do not mean to clutter up your pages with long letters answering letters arguing with reviews in the first place (breath), I feel bound to reply to Franz Rottensteiner's letter (SFC No 17, pages 7 to 9). The only words which might describe the letter are "mistaken" and "intemperate", neither word quite characterising Rottensteiner's essential condescension towards s f. He classes NOVA with ERB and Van Vogt but names not one novel which he thinks is better.

As to NOVA: The passage he quotes ("Her eyes were the colour of steel. Small breasts rose beneath the laces of her vest, steady in breath. Then steel glittered as she looked about. (She's a strong woman, thought Katin, who could perceive such subtleties.)") is from Katin's point of view. Katin sees her eyes as steel coloured (a not unreasonable description nor actually a cliché). Now when Katin thinks, "She's a strong woman" we are listening in on the thoughts of an adolescent would-be writer and Delany writes ironically. For it is Katin who would think of himself as an acute observer, as one who "could perceive such subtleties". Delany very plainly (I would have thought) tells us that this is no subtlety at all: ~~it is Katin's idea of subtlety.~~

Though the relationships are not everyday ones and may lean toward the sensational, Mr Rottensteiner uses the wrong word when he calls them "gross". And to condemn a book because of its subject ("incest and assassination...") is as ill considered as the words of one critic who condemned PSYCHO because it was about a homicidal maniac.

That the social and economic problems of the galaxy have been reduced to a personal feud between two robber barons is certainly a valid criticism. But, given the scale Delany deals with, and the very size (figurative) of the characters, I did not find this a fatal flaw. I suppose Mr Rottensteiner would not accept the fact that this has been a tradition in s f (Heinlein, Bester, Doc Smith) and America (Rockefeller, Pullman, Vanderbilt)?

Next: "The motivation of the villain is wholly incredible." It is not at all unreasonable that a man should be bitter for life because of a physical debility and that he should direct this burden of hate at a family foe. Mr Rottensteiner first complains about the lack of subtlety in the characters in NOVA and then asks for a single one to one reason for Prince Red's actions. Human motivation is not so simple.

To quote Mr Rottensteiner again: "There is no reason why a socket couldn't be installed in his shoulder or an artificial arm." The socket could apparently have been installed in his shoulder but he refused it, I believe, for the same reason he refused an artificial arm. The socket could not have been put on his prosthetic arm because it must be directly in contact with his nerves.

Now Mr Rottensteiner inveighs against English language readers of s f for their idea that emeralds and amethysts are the "epitome and essence of poetry". Since this observation was presumably sparked by reading my review I feel that an answer would not be out of place. I cannot speak for anyone else but I might note that the only times I used the word "poetry" were when I referred to Wallace Stevens' THE MAN WITH THE BLUE GUITAR, the first segment of which I quoted in the review. I expressed admiration for Stevens and Delany, citing "the tactile quality

of their colours, the palpability of their images." I will stand by that.

Mr Rottensteiner complains further that "this kind of fuzzy language ((referring to the amethysts and emeralds)) is what passes for "poetry" among people who admire poetry in a prose writer...". (1) "This language" is not fuzzy in the least, as I stated in my NOVA review. It is clear and precise. (2) I am not one to define poetry but three characteristics stand out: condensation of language, use of imagery, and rhythm. Burgess in his RE JOYCE (UK: HERE COMES EVERYBODY) gives "white space" to a passage from ULYSSES and states that if one did not know its source it would stand quite well as poetry. It is not, though. It is "poetic". This description can be given to ULYSSES, much of Nabokov, some of Donleavy, Proust, the best Gogol, and MADAME BOVARY. But I digress. I consider a writer like Delany also "poetic" if in a smaller way than the above.

"How many s f fans actually do read poetry?" Again, I cannot answer for anyone else, but I do. I read quite a bit of "it". My favourites include Stevens, Shakespeare, Yeats, Eliot, Pushkin, Voznesensky, Marianne Moore, Elizabeth Bishop, and Conrad Aiken. But I certainly don't think I'm a typical fan. (Neither, probably, does anyone else).

Although I sneakily mentioned ULYSSES in the same breath with NOVA I am fully aware of the distance between these two books. I cannot convince Mr Rottensteiner of the worth of NOVA - or of any other book. If he does not react of his own will, there is nothing to be done. I might just suggest that he is missing something, and if he deals with all s f in this condescending manner, he is missing quite a lot.

I am, in any case, glad that NOVA is coming to the fore in discussion. The only interesting review I've seen, and that to a certain degree unfavorable to the book, is Pamela Bulmer's in SPECULATION 25. And there I felt she was being a bit willful in assigning meanings to Delany's words to make her point. I do await seeing the result of a task in store for some ambitious writer: a thematic and stylistic analysis of Delany's oeuvre. (November 8, 1970) \*

\* At one stage I intended to do this myself, but I'm sure Sandra Miesel, or Barry Gillam, are both better able to perform the task. Except that I would begin the task as an unfriendly critic. ∴ I leave this discussion to those interested - except to say if I must ignore a letter for a few issues, I probably will, but that does not necessarily mean that I've shelved it indefinitely. Witness the date on Barry's letter. \*

\* JOHN GIBSON (2 Baringa Street, Blaxland, NSW 2774)

In S F COMMENTARY 16, you have two reviews of ALPHAVILLE, a film I didn't see at the cinema, but saw on tv in an abominably bad English-dubbed version. It didn't impress me, probably because of this. But then again, I haven't been terribly impressed by Jean-Luc Godard as a director or the subjects he chooses. My favourite French directors are Truffaut, Resnais (pre-MARIENBAD), and Jean Vigot. (Unless you belong to a film club you probably don't know that name. Jean Vigot

l \*brg\* I think the spelling's right; John sends his "letters" of comment on tape. \*\*

only made two films about forty years ago, and they are still being played because of their innovations and brilliance. ZERO DE CONDUITE was about the revolt of a boys' school against the masters.

Some French directors are okay, but most of them are Hollywood copyists, including Truffaut to a great degree. A lot of the ones I've seen on television have been influenced by cheap gangster movies - based on themes that were done to death in Hollywood in the early and late 1930s and early 1940s. Now they feature people like Jean Paul Belmondo, who is a kind of Bogart ham.

I didn't like what I saw of ALPHAVILLE, mainly because it was a terribly preachy movie, including the references which were extremely obvious - numbers tattooed on the people, etc. You may remember I said that in LEVEL 7 ((reviewed in SFC 6)) the director also showed numbered people. However it was effective in that sequence, although it had been done so many times before. I think I expected a little more originality from a French director, and I didn't see it. Probably the best sendup of science and technology is Charlie Chaplin's MODERN TIMES. ALPHAVILLE presents no challenge to that. I can't understand the reviewers' enthusiasm for it, but then I didn't see it in the cinema.

I like Barry Gillam's review of NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD. It sounds more like the kind of movie I'd like, although most horror movies usually leave me laughing. I liked the review because it read at about the same breathless pace as you would expect when seeing the film.

A few quibbles: Barry Gillam says the film is derivative, especially from Hitchcock's THE BIRDS. Perhaps. There have been lots of movies that isolate people in a house, surrounded by Indians or something hostile. This was done in STAGECOACH, and lots of other films.

He says that the image of grasping arms from the walls was first used in Cocteau's LA BELLE ET LA BÊTE, followed by Polanski's REPULSION - and here they are again. But this image was probably first used in BEDLAM, an old Boris Karloff movie, when the Quaker hero enters the lunatic asylum and he must run down a corridor between two rows of cells. As he passes down the corridor, the inmates reach out to touch him from the cells on either side. It's terribly dark in the place, and you can understand how a chilling atmosphere builds up as all those arms reach out of the dark. For all I know such images may come from two thousand years ago. They certainly weren't original with Cocteau or Polanski.

In his ALPHAVILLE review, Barry Gillam says that there are three good s f films: 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY, LA JETEE, and ALPHAVILLE. I'll scratch the last, and 2001, although it was a bit more fluent, and certainly Stanley Kubrick is a far better director than Jean Luc Godard could ever be. That leaves LA JETEE, which I didn't see and would like to see.

The other movie I'd like to see which I think is s f, is SECONDS.

(November 1, 1970) \*

\* Yes, SECONDS is a science fiction film. I'd better not begin to review it, or I might take up the rest of the issue. The first time I saw it, I thought it was poor s f (I'd seen those ideas before). Second time, I thought it was a great film about the debilitating effects of modern society. Third time, I saw that it was a modern Faust legend. I wish I'd seen it again at Q-Con.

\* JOHN BRUNNER (53 Nassington Road, London N4 3, England)

Thank you for S F COMMENTARY 16 received today, and especially for spending so much space on STAND ON ZANZIBAR. Concerning ALPHAVILLE: I'm surprised those knowledgeable reviewers didn't spot what (I suspect) Godard didn't, either - that "Lemmy Caution" is not American, but the hero of a series of mock-US tough-guy thrillers by the British writer Peter Cheyney, beloved of the lunatic fringe of French literary critics. (See Thurber on French Westerns; there are interesting parallels.) And JE T'AIME JE T'AIME is the best s f film I've seen since Bunuel's LA VOIE LACTEE. Go see it if you haven't, and can.

(October 8 1970)

\*

\* I've never found out the true story of "JE T'AIME JE T'AIME In Australia" (so to speak). It was shown at last year's Melbourne Film Festival, and I didn't see it. Paul Stevens hoped to obtain it for the film program for the New Years Convention; instead he showed L'ANNÉE DERNIÈRE À MARIENBAD, which I was glad to see again. One of the theatre chains bought it for commercial release, but it has not been shown at any commercial theatre in Victoria. This sort of thing happens to films when they reach Australia.

\*

\* JERRY LAPIDUS (54 Clearview Drive, Pittsford, New York 14534, USA)

Re. the discussion of Bob Shaw's books in SFC 14: I haven't read SHADOW OF HEAVEN, and THE TWO-TIMERS I read so long ago that I'd probably make some slips if I discussed it. I will, however, disagree with Ted Pauls' unqualified rave over PALACE OF ETERNITY. What hurts is that the book could have been a really extraordinary piece of writing, if Shaw hadn't insisted on joining the "Big Surprise" school of writing. Members of this school, including Piers Anthony and Bob Tucker, withhold a vital fact from the reader and spring it on him as a "surprise", presumably for dramatic effect. In MACROSCOPE, the reader is so concerned with the question, "Who is Schön?", and, later, "Is it really Ivo?" that his attention is drawn from the rest of the material. In YEAR OF THE QUIET SUN, it's impossible to understand what's really going on early in the novel unless you know that the hero is black. You have no way of knowing this until Tucker tells you near the end. In the first section of THE PALACE OF ETERNITY, Bob Shaw brilliantly builds up an extremely realistic, fascinating future war background, takes his hero as far as he can survive, and quietly kills him. And then, with what ranks as the biggest deus ex machina in s f's history, he introduces the egons, so that Tavernor is "not really dead" after all. I don't really object to the idea of egons. We've seen them before, and Shaw writes about the idea fairly well. But he flaws the novel because he saves the idea for a surprise. The reader feels so let down by a cheap trick that he can't read the final sections seriously, provided he reads the final sections at all. (September 30, 1970)

I must complain yet again about the total lack of artwork in both the two big, serious fanzines (S F COMMENTARY and SPECULATION). It's become a mania with you and Pete Weston, that the interiors of your magazines are filled with nothing but page after page of brilliantly-conceived writing. Now this is all very nice, but would it really hurt that much to put in a few little illos here and there, to break the monotony of the printed page for a poor clod like myself?

\*

\* Yes, it would hurt - my pocket. Noel Kerr only charges \$2 per electronic stencil, but illustrations in SFC would still cost too much if I decided to use them. That's not to say there won't be any. I have some good Jeff Schalles cartoons to hand, Stephen Campbell brought some very good quarter page drawings with him from South Australia, and I still have some good cover artwork to use. But there won't be much of it. \*

\* Since you read SPECULATION, you must know about yet another addition to your bidding woes, the possible British bid for 1975 as well. Frankly, I can't see a satisfactory result for any of us if this keeps up. I fear that American cheap fandom will favour Britain or Sweden over Australia. Or, if both Australia and Britain bid for the same year, some American local bid will sneak in there, take all the local votes, and win the convention because of split overseas votes. I've written to Pete Weston about this matter, and I hope he considers this aspect as well. Even those of us willing to vote the convention overseas as often as possible must remember that there are others who do not feel as we do, and want to keep the convention in USA as often as possible. But anything may happen from now on: Minneapolis has dropped out of the 1973 race (and therefore given Toronto a much better chance against Dallas, as it now gets all the fanzine/fannish vote).

In S F COMMENTARY 16, you have an American fan editing an Australian fanzine. That's really strange. ((~~\*brg\*~~ But I hope exchanges like this happen more and more often.)) Your review of STAND ON ZANZIBAR is especially interesting, Barry, because the summary seems to contradict most of the rest of the review. You spend most of the review praising the novel, making good points with which I heartily agree. Then, you add a few minor quibbles at the end of the review, minor but well taken. But the summary says, "This is not one of the best novels of the last ten years; it wasn't even the best novel published in 1968." I'll accept that, certainly, but I want to know why you say this. What were the major flaws, the important drawbacks? Or, as you seem to imply, the fault lies not in the writing but in the writer himself. So what are Brunner's problems as a novelist, or as a novelist in this particular novel? I enjoyed the novel immensely, despite its length, and was disappointed only by the rather banal solution for the Beninian question. (December 23, 1970)

I think the item I will most look forward to in future SFCs is the continuation of John Brosnan's tale of the Bus Trip to Heicon. I think such light but well-written material goes a long way towards making S F COMMENTARY more readable, more enjoyable as a whole. Since you're reluctant to use illustrations, "fannish" writing is especially appreciated.

In S F COMMENTARY 17 I was especially fascinated by totally divergent reviews of the same book, THE BLACK CORRIDOR (which I have not yet read). You describe the opening passage as "refreshingly unsentimental", and George Turner calls it "banal statements in banal prose". It's most unusual to see opposite opinions in the same issue of a single fanzine. George Turner then mentions Kurt Vonnegut's "thoroughgoing contempt for s f", and wonders why he is reviewed in the fan press, despite this. But what Vonnegut writes is s f, in the purest sense; especially PLAYER PIANO, SIRENS OF IITAN, CAT'S CRADLE, and most of his short stories. SLAUGHTERHOUSE FIVE is probably s f. Vonnegut has

indeed claimed not to write s f - but he has also admitted that he's said it is because he's paid better if publishers don't think he's an s f writer. Probably he most dislikes the incompetent, space opera type of s f, written by people like Kilgore Trout. His attitude seems similar to that of say, our editor, or of arch-iconoclast Franz Rottensteiner; they don't hate the field, but they just feel it doesn't come anywhere near its potential. \*

\* I must interrupt here for a shout a joy and a waving of arms. At last someone has got the point of Franz's viewpoint and mine. How can I put it most clearly?.... from hints I get, Franz has one of the best collections of s f magazines in the world, and he now edits s f for three German publishing houses. He knows more about the field than I will if I reach 100. I have read nearly every s f magazine for the last nine years, and nearly a thousand s f books collected since I first had decent pocket money (I have many other books as well, of course). But, there's a way of talking about s f which seems appropriate to its status in the whole realm of literature, and I think Franz, John, George, and our other top reviewers speak in this appropriate way. Perhaps SFC 19 will make things even clearer. Thanks for that one sentence, Jerry. \*

\* You discuss the US prozines, especially AMAZING and FANTASTIC. In the months after your reviews, Ted publishes novels or at least novellas by Bob Shaw (ONE MILLION TOMORROWS), Lee Hoffman (ALWAYS THE BLACK KNIGHT), Piers Anthony (DRN and HASAN), Ursula K LeGuin (THE LATHE OF HEAVEN), Keith Laumer (THE SHAPE CHANGER), Brian Aldiss (CARDIAC ARREST), and John Brunner (two of the TRAVELLER IN BLACK novellas). Sure, there's been some crud, but the general level has been high, with a much greater variety of stories than is available in any other s f magazine.

I wonder why you are so ecstatic about WARHOON 27, especially since you publish material very different from Richard Bergeron's? W27 was a magazine of lightness, extreme fannishness, and strong visual impact. You put out a serious magazine of intensive discussions and reviews, not much concerned with the visual. But you constantly praise SPECULATION, which has a similar orientation to your own magazine.

(February 25, 1971) \*

\* I agree that Ted White is doing his best to obtain good novels (but not always succeeding). In SFC 17 I was disappointed with the short stories he has published, and except for a few items like SONS OF MAN and THE SNOW WOMEN, I haven't changed that opinion. I still thank him for publishing Dick's A LINCOLN SIMULACRUM, for I suspect it is one of the books Dick could not sell during that period in 1962-1963 when he tried to write and sell "mainstream" novels. Maybe that would explain why a sufferer from mental disease turns out a Jewish android in the last chapter (!). I still hope to review the magazine serials for USFA JOURNAL, but Don Miller already has some idea how long he may have to wait. :: I like good writing - right? And where can one find the best writing in fanzines today? In WARHOON. My attitude is different from Bergeron's in that I would say that he could publish the same good writing in any format, and it would still be the same great fanzine. Presumably he would say that his format is as important as his written material. :: Well, now that I've had that pleasant chat to Jerry Lapidus, who's next in the conversation? \*

\* And ah! what pleasant companionship. Here's  
ANDY PORTER (55 Pineapple Street, Brooklyn, New York 11201, USA)

I actually took the time to read S F COMMENTARY 17, or most of it. You suffer from the same disease that affects Dick Geis; you must publish an issue whether you have anything truly worth publishing or not. Unfortunately, in your case you're not as proficient at slapping together an issue together an issue as Geis is, and it shows. Like every month.

I've said elsewhere that I don't like page after page of book reviews; so I skipped over them in this issue. The issue was noteworthy for your own comments on the s f magazines, which are quite disjointed and rather inaccurate in parts. For example, contrary to what you say about VENTURE, it is not "a financial success". As a matter of fact it lost quite a bit of money and is now Dead. Dunno where you got your information. You say that F&SF "declines into senility" - then spend a paragraph praising the contents of one issue. Odd.

You talk about "Pohl's bankrupt policies" as if they were the reason the magazines were sold to Universal. On the contrary, Robert Guinn, GALAXY's publisher, was at that time entering the lucrative computer typesetting field (Compucomp Corp., which incidentally has extensive dealings with Quick Frozen Foods) and wanted to be rid of his low money earners. The reason IF/GALAXY may have improved in sales is that UPD has their own distribution network, something Guinn was never very good at. Guinn also makes money as a printing broker; it was his fault that the magazines looked so bad, as he was always trying to get the cheapest possible printer for them. Currently the magazines are printed by Danner Press, Canton, Ohio - a printer they used prior to their sale.

S F COMMENTARY doesn't particularly impress me; but then, you didn't like ALGOL, either, did you? Let me know what you think of the ALGOL on its way to you. (December 29, 1970) \*

\* I should explain that Andy is "Assistant Editor" for FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION. Andy also publishes a fanzine called ALGOL, which recently published its first edition for about 18 months. Without reading Number 16, I scorned its contents (mainly because they were written in 1968 and early 1969) in NORSTRILIAN NEWS. But recently I've spent a lot of time catching up on my fanzine reading... and ALGOL 16 isn't too bad. Gian Paolo Cossato's SCIENCE FICTION IN ITALY is hopelessly outdated, but still interesting; THE DEVALUATION OF VALUES, by J J Pierce, is the most coherent statement I've seen of his views (although his opinions have nothing to do with literature); Ted White writes about the Smothers Brothers; Jay Kinney has a very good cartoon; Dick Lupoff's <sup>reviews</sup> are not bad, as fanzine book reviews go; Greg Benford's DOORWAY is interesting, and the letter column is very well edited. But can you only find this amount of good material every 18 months, Andy? In other words: a magazine is a periodical. The essential thing is that comes out regularly, and provides a continual flow of opinions, reviews, news, or what you will. Besides, as I've said already, the main enjoyment of a fanzine is publishing it. I wouldn't get much fun out of publishing ALGOL. :: LOCUS reported that VENTURE was changing to a two-monthly schedule - I took this to mean that sales were picking up, and reported this - a week later LOCUS reported that VENTURE had folded. Y'can't win, mate. :: Sorry you don't like book reviews. Love 'em myself, especially the ones in SFC. \*

\* PAUL ANDERSON (21 Mulga Road, Hawthorndene, SA 5051)

In S F COMMENTARY 17 Leigh Edmonds comments on my review of SLAUGHTERHOUSE FIVE. He states that the Tralfamadorians are completely justified in accepting their philosophy as true merely because they appear to experience it. He also says that "because a human being cannot live any part of his life when he wants, doesn't mean his philosophy is the only right one." I agree with him on this point but it can just as easily be applied to the Tralfamadorians. I would like to know which human philosophy Leigh refers to - each civilisation has evolved a different explanation of the world's creation. Aldiss' AN AGE proposed that the time stream moves in the opposite direction to the one we usually think of as true. If that were correct, the viewpoints of both humans and the Tralfamadorians would be wrong.

Why does Leigh hold the view that "a human being can hide from himself the fact of the hopelessness of life"? Shakespeare said "Hope springs eternal...." Why continue living if you have no hope at all of any improvement of your lot? A fatalistic view of life may help a person to accept his current position, but it also conveniently absolves him of all responsibility for his actions. He would probably drown in self-pity because fate had put him in such a position. So what if one million Pakistanis die in a flood, since no matter what I do, it is fore-ordained.

In OUTWORLDS 1, Paul Wyszowski talks about the Mechanistic vs the Statistical theories of the origin of the Universe:

Intelligence, therefore, has real utility in a statistical universe as opposed to a mechanistic universe where intelligence is superfluous; in fact, a curse rather than a blessing.

Therefore there would be little likelihood that intelligence would evolve in the Tralfamadorians' universe. Would either Man or the Tralfamadorians have been given intelligence in a pre-ordained or mechanistic universe?

A mechanistic universe is, therefore, an idiotic toy which practically demands the postulation of a Supreme Idiot to whom its construction can be ascribed, because in such a universe a transcendent, interfering God is an intelligent being's sole hope of escape from an inevitable fate.

But the only religion that accepts a fatalistic view of life is Mahomedanism ("the will of Allah") and it has not been recorded that Allah has ever intervened on behalf of any of his followers. Free will is one of the basic tenets of the Christian religion. If one accepts the Christian religion, one cannot accept the theory of a mechanistic universe. Vonnegut says that the Tralfamadorians now have fore-knowledge of coming events, and think of time as an immutable, unchanging sequence of events. But such a view does not rule out the possibility that at one stage a Tralfamadorian did not exercise free will. To maintain the sequence these people must have lived their entire lives at least once, without omitting any of their less pleasing aspects. Vonnegut says that the Tralfamadorians found little to interest them in

life, but he also refers to their interest in his idiot hero, and so they do have a scale of preference. Since they control their wanderings in time, we must assume that they would choose to live only those moments that interested them, therefore breaking the sequence. So it goes - some of the time. (December 4, 1970) \*

\* There you are, Leigh: the ball's back in your court. (Shucks - I must read SLAUGHTERHOUSE FIVE and NOVA some day so I can join all these marvellous fights.)

\* HANK DAVIS (Box 154, Loyall, Kentucky 40854, USA)

Re. Bob Shaw's THE PALACE OF ETERNITY: The first strike against this book is that the first part crawls with brutal militarists. In the 1970s, there are stereotypes that a writer cannot get away with. The old movies with happy-go-lucky darkies with natural rhythm look pretty silly now. But there are others in vogue: including the stupidly sadistic and brutal cop and the ditto ditto and ditto soldier. They are the same cardboard cutouts with different uniforms. Shaw puts a bunch of cardboard soldiers through some routine motions of killing some small animals, a civilian or two, throwing their weight around (and the people they push around are artists), and everybody applauds. Shaw has pushed their buttons. In an earlier time, he would have waved a flag, had a violin playing HEARTS AND FLOWERS, and managed to work in mother and apple pie (I prefer pumpkin pie, myself...). But he has not shown any real characters; just held up a cue-card.

When I read the book in Vietnam, I had been in the US Army for about a year. I had known several career soldiers. They were a hell of a lot more complicated than Shaw's puppets. (Which doesn't mean that I liked them; there were several whom I would have cheerfully disembowelled with a rusty church key.) Tavernor's time spent with his "troops" in the forest may make Ted Pauls think how much better Shaw does it than Spinrad did, but it makes me think how much better Poul Anderson (in THE STAR FOX, for one) did it than Shaw does.

John Gibson strained at Delany and apparently eats camels for breakfast (with sugar and cream). He is upset by the tarot in NOVA, but the malarky in THE ROSE, by Harness, does not muss his hair. Does he really believe that the 5/4 time movement in Tchaikowsky's 6th Symphony would interfere with anyone's physical activity? I've listened to that movement (and Brubeck and Desmond doing TAKE FIVE, for that matter) and never noticed that it affected my coordination while I was building houses of cards, juggling knives, wrestling alligators, etc. And in THE NEW REALITY, that shutter that will pass only one photon takes remarkable liberties with the uncertainty principle, without rhyme or reason. At least Delany makes the Tarot's use plausible (to me, anyway).

AUSTRALIA IN 75! Let's see here, now...if I save a penny a day, by 1975 I'll have....um. (November 10, 1970) \*

\* I couldn't read past page 75 of PALACE OF ETERNITY, I must admit, because there seemed to be nothing but cliches. Perhaps I'll try reading it again one day. :: I've just received the best review of NOVA I've seen: Sandra Miesel's in OUTWORLDS 7. :: Let's hope everybody has started saving pennies.\*

\* Without comment:

\* STUART LESLIE (59 Mary Street, Lonqueville, NSW 2066)

Some things give me hope. One is SOLARIS, another SFC 19. QUARK 1 is pretty good. Unfortunately SFC 20 is back to the usual fannish standard of superficiality, with the exception of Lem on Borges. Cursory notes on conventions are pretty useless if you are trying to keep a high standard - which is what I have come to expect from SFC. Equally space wasting are short reviews of ancient stories. What I want is Criticism. Leave the other garbage to the other fanzines, as well as award notice, reports etc. Or anything else you can stick in NORSTRILIAN NEWS.

After the Foyster reprints, a labour of love for you, and which you obviously admire very much, I would expect you to exercise some discrimination in your own choice of material. But, you will plead, I can't get that sort of stuff; people won't write it. (\*\*brg\*\* That's right.\*\*)) But if you can't publish something good, then publish nothing at all. Most is wasted space. If the childish crap in MENTOR is where Australian fandom is "really at", then so much for fandom. I look to you for something more than that. I have come to expect more. Don't disillusion me completely.

You complain that you have done little or no writing recently. If you are serious about writing, you will need to curtail your fan activities. Reread that Proust quotation on page 60 of SFC 19. You must be dedicated, Bruce. Or, corny as it may sound: Dedicated. You will achieve nothing if you waste your time and your mind on fandom. How many of the best s f writers are active in the general run of fandom? None.  
(May 10, 1971) \*

\* compared with this letter from:

\* DAVID GORMAN (7934 Ella Dobbs Lane, Apt 38, Indianapolis, Indiana 46227, USA)

Thanks very much for S F COMMENTARY 20. Your layout is getting much better and I am glad that you decided to use Letraset headings. I agree with your attempt to keep from becoming an art magazine. I always dislike to receive a 60 page magazine and find only 20 pages of reading. :: Australian fandom sounds as if it is THE PLACE TO BE IN 71. I'm glad that I was aware of Australian fandom's accomplishments while everyone else debated the social relevance of S F REVIEW vs FOCAL POINT.

And now, here is Bruce Gillespie wondering in public if S F COMMENTARY could win a Hugo (or even make the nomination list). However there are a few things that stand in your way. First: you do not run an art magazine, and don't publish folios etc. Second: You don't have holy wars and controversies. Most fans don't care whether or not F&SF is a good magazine, or what is John Brunner's definition of a "hack". Third: you don't talk about the writers and subjects that are relevant to the average American voting fan - Jean Koontz; the fannish resurgence, marijuana, rock music, and the private life of Harlan Ellison. Most American fans not only don't appreciate the books of Dick or Aldiss but they don't even know of the existence of Lem or Rottensteiner or Turner. I don't know how ASFR made the Hugo ballot, for instance. (May 20, 1971)\*

\* It's now four weeks since I wrote the beginning of this column. Letters about SFC 20 have started to arrive. But, as you can see on the previous page, the impressions I receive from these letters can be fairly confusing. Stuart seems to represent the Alex Robb-type writers: Dave shows the viewpoint of most American fans. Naturally I lean towards Stuart Leslie's argument. But I do publish for the pleasure of publishing, and so I can hold conversations with people both here and overseas. And there are s f writers who still take an active part in fandom. Terry Carr and Bob Tucker are two names that spring to mind at the moment. More importantly, nearly every major s f writer began writing in fandom. :: On the other side of the coin, I think David Gorman underestimates American fans. The letters I receive convince me that there are many American fans who particularly like the type of reviews I publish. But as I've said many times: I publish the type of magazine I would like to receive. A Hugo nomination would help Aussie fandom, but probably not help me much. It would lead to yet more navel-gazing - so let's return to less egotistical concerns:

\* MALCOLM EDWARDS (28 Kinch Grove, Wembley, Middlesex HA9 9TF, England)

Re. SFC 20: I enjoyed the extended editorial ramblings. Odd comments about the LOCUS Poll results. Well, I enjoyed CHRONOCULES, but I didn't think it was so brilliant. As Tony Sudbery said (pause to dig out letter - I have a very sophisticated filing system: everything goes into a drawer in order of receipt, unless it's dug out again, in which case it goes back on top)... anyway, as Tony said, there are places in CHRONOCULES where healthy human concern slips into unthinking conservatism, and even philistinism. Tony has promised to do an article about Compton for QUICKSILVER. Compton has never been to an English convention as far as I know, let alone a Worldcon. I know he lives somewhere around London, but I don't think he's ever visited the Globe. John Brunner knows him, I think, but then John knows everyone. Until his books were published in Ace Specials, Compton was thought of as a mainstream writer dabbling in s f. He's written one completely non-s f novel, THE PALACE. The rest, I think, are now published by Ace. FAREWELL, EARTH'S BLISS just appeared as ordinary s f, and THE QUALITY OF MERCY was published without the s f label. It's typical that Ace, after picking him up at his fourth novel, are now ahead of his English publishers.

Barry Gillam's review of THE CUBE ROOT OF UNCERTAINTY is very good indeed, as you presumably realised, as you started your review section with it. His observations about the paired short stories and novels are, I think, wholly accurate. Silverberg has been working around several themes in his recent stories, and I think there's a wider network of relationships than Gillam identifies. The most obvious of his themes is time travel - he has systematically reworked the theme in books like THE TIME HOPPERS, HAWKSBILL STATION, THE MASKS OF TIME, and finally, UP THE LINE. Otherwise, he seems obsessed by the idea of redemption in its various forms. FLIES and THORNS deal with this in a way, but they talk about ugliness. DOWNWARD TO THE EARTH (I haven't read SUNDANCE) shows joy. NIGHTWINGS lurks somewhere in the middle. The main problem with writing about Silverberg is that he publishes so much. At the moment I'm waiting for the last installment of A TIME OF CHANGES, the Ballantine novel SON OF MAN, and collection MOONFERNS AND STARSONGS; and the serial in AMAZING, called THE SECOND TRIP. Compared with that, it's easy to keep up with Philip Dick!

Lem on Borges: Now here's a problem; how can I attempt to refute a critic who always leaves me rather glazed? Lem makes some astute observations about Borges, but his criticism seems to spring mainly from the line on page 35: "(His stories) can never be taken seriously as an interpretation of the world and existence." This is true enough; to a large extent Borges does play literary games, as Lem observes. He is also a very recondite writer - deliberately so. He plays intellectual games, writing them out as fictions (for the wrong word is "story" - perhaps it's best to stick with the Spanish "ficciones"). For example in THE LIBRARY OF BABEL Borges simply plays with a bit of mathematics, while he demonstrates the futility of any attempt to encompass everything. PIERRE MENARD, THE AUTHOR OF THE QUIXOTE, my favorite, parallels it in some ways. I would hardly call it a satire, although it is funny. It is a very interesting abstract idea, and no doubt we could see the nonsense of its procedure if we were to attack its premises. But that's hardly the point. The idea behind PIERRE MENARD may have no useful function, but nevertheless it is original (as far as I know), interesting, and valid. For instance:

It is a revelation to compare Menard's DON QUIXOTE with Cervante's. The latter, for example, wrote (part one, chapter nine):

...truth, whose mother is history, rival of time, depository of deeds, witness of the past, exemplar and adviser to the present, and the future's counsellor.

Written in the seventeenth century, written by the "lay genius" Cervantes, this enumeration is a mere rhetorical praise of history. Menard, on the other, writes:

...truth, whose mother is history, rival of time, depository of deeds, witness of the past, exemplar and adviser to the present, and the future's counsellor.

History, the mother of truth: the idea is astounding. Menard, a contemporary of William James, does not define history as an inquiry into reality but as its origin. Historical truth, for him, is not what has happened; it is what we judge to have happened... The contrast in style is also vivid. The archaic style of Menard - quite foreign, after all - suffers from a certain affectation. Not so that of his forerunner, who handles with ease the current Spanish of his time.

For me, that passage expresses exactly what I find so fascinating about Borges' work. Perhaps Lem would dismiss it as mere intellectual playfulness. I guess the last paragraph is just that - Borges cannot resist adding a stylistic comparison. But there's a core of truth to it. Lem wants more. It seems that he criticises Borges for not writing something else. (May 11 1971) \*

\* I don't think Lem "dismisses" Borges' work - he just tries to summarise what it is. I would agree with Lem that there is a certain predictability about the punchlines of Borges' less interesting stories. More importantly, Lem describes precisely what is meaningful in Borges' best stories.

(S F COMMENTARY 21 CHECKLIST -  
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2)

Jean Vigo (dir.): ZERO DE CONDUITE (40) \*  
Kurt Vonnegut Jr (42-43) \* Kurt Vonnegut Jr: SLAUGHTERHOUSE FIVE (45-46) \*  
Harry Warner Jr (16) \* H G Wells (6-7) \*  
H G Wells: THE TIME MACHINE (6-7) \* Pete Weston (42) \* Ted White (ed.): AMAZING, FANTASTIC (43) \* Gene Wolfe: THE HORARS OF WAR (27) \* Gene Wolfe: PAUL'S TREEHOUSE (36-37) \*

Last stencil typed: June 11 1971

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WE ALSO HEARD FROM: Lots of postcards from BRIAN WILLIAMS (Bucks., England) who says to Jack Wodhams ((SFC 15)) that "Wells is GREAT!" Suggests Jack should read ISLAND OF DOCTOR MOREAU. :: DEREK KEW made some remarks on earlier issues from a scientist's point of view, and has a long letter coming in a future issue of SFC. :: Last July ROBIN JOHNSON thought Stanislaw Lem seemed "the arrogant type". Thinks no cosmological possibilities can be ruled out. Perhaps Robin has different views after he read SFC 19. :: HARRY WARNER JR sent several of his splendid letters just before he went into hospital. Most of his comments are now outdated, unfortunately. :: BOB SMITH also sent interesting short comments which I have had no room to publish. :: Ditto for MICHAEL CAMERON and NEIL RAHMAN from Brisbane. Since then, Michael has changed most of his views about science fiction, stopped reading books, and moved to Melbourne. Neil has also had an exciting 1971 so far, including the first Q-Con. :: BERT CHANDLER saw a piece of moon rock on display but "I hate to admit...that I found the WW1 German tank outside the building rather more interesting than that rather drab little piece of stone rotating inside its shoddy plastic sphere, with a bored Commonwealth policeman standing guard over it." :: LIZ FISHMAN refuses to reveal the real name of Rotten, her rotten little brother. :: SYDNEY J BOUNDS asked to be remembered to Bert Chandler :: And there's lot of other comments I would like to have published from STUART LESLIE, CHRIS PRIEST, CY CHAUVIN, RICK SNEARY, BOB BOWDEN, JEFF SCHALLES, PHIL HARBOTTLE, JOHN BROSANAN, KEVIN DILLON, SANDRA MIESEL, and GEORGE HAY. Other letters hel for future publication. Au revoir; and remember: AUSTRALIA IN 75!

