

SF COMMENTARY



SEX IN SCIENCE FICTION

STANISLAW LEM

S F COMMENTARY

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AGENCIES I am agent for Hal Hall's useful SCIENCE FICTION BOOK REVIEW INDEX; \$1 each * EUROCON 1, the first European S F Convention, Trieste 1972. \$4 non-attending membership * Charlie & Dena Brown's LOCUS, the s f newsmagazine. Fortnightly; airmail. \$3.50 for 10; \$8 for 26 * SPECULATION, and QUICKSILVER, England's leading magazines about s f; \$2 for 5; \$2 for 6.

breast, disturbs us, although we cannot claim that it is indecent for a kitchen fly to sit on the breast.

So what happens to the viewer? If we were looking at a photograph, we wouldn't waste another thought on the fly. We would assume that its presence in the picture was pure chance! However, we know that the portrait was painted by an artist, and so he intentionally placed the fly on the breast of the woman. We realise this intention, and this realisation gives us a small shock. Because we notice this effect, we cannot assume that this is a typical example of a portrait. The fly signifies the "indecent", although we would be hard put to determine precisely the source of this "indecency".

Within the range of sexual literature, many works may provide the starting points of "indecent" situations, although the authors intended no such thing, as in textbooks of sexology (which include case histories of perverse sexual behaviour), some Bible passages, or even, if we look zealously enough, in children's fairy-tales, which we may call (superficially coded) sadistic and erotic literature.

These are extreme cases, but we cannot define the problem precisely for the whole audience because so much depends on the reader's personal reactions. When we also consider that some people may even be sexually stimulated by an umbrella, we may recognise that inevitably all judgments in this field are relative. And it is still an open question, when we consider the sexual connotations of his reading matter, whether the "wholly normal" or "truly average" reader exists at all. I mention this problem before I start, because one of the tasks undertaken by generation after generation, with indefatigable zeal, is the attempt to solve insoluble problems. Quarrels about

matters like this often overshadow the fates of famous literary works. I can only give a rule-of-thumb which is operationally effective.

The values contained in a work of literature do not operate within a closed system, but always have references outside the work. The greater the effort the reader needs to make an integrated understanding of a literary text, the greater the chance that the reader will overlook those things which he finds difficult to integrate, except in those cases where he has been trained (say, by his education) to make such an integration. Only then can such a reader behave as if he has made the necessary integration. More frequently the reader has simply been told how he must understand a piece of literature. As well as the text, he is supplied with a commentary which has been integrated beforehand. A reader untrained in such matters most easily notices those descriptions and values which have a distinctly local character. He will notice at once that Lady Chatterly's lover shows her his erected genitals. He can also see that the man committed sodomy with the lady. But he will hardly notice that LADY CHATTERLY'S LOVER, as a whole, has some cultural meaning, because it fights against certain social taboos. A reader can quite easily understand sexual details as they are described, but he may find it much more difficult to see the unity of the whole text.

However, there are other works which the reader cannot understand both wholly and as culturally relevant unities, because they are written only as substitutes for the satisfaction of desire. We do not always find it an easy matter to differentiate between these two types.

III The writer of "normal" literature accepts as inviolable the biological data of the field of sex. He will not be predominantly interested in the anatomical and physiological aspects of sex, unless he specifically writes pornography. (There may be exceptions to this rule. For instance, I can think of stories that make such a contrast between the public and private manifestations of sex that - as happened in Victorian times - the wedding night gains an aspect of the tragicomical. The virginal bride, with her total lack of sexual knowledge thinks that her husband perpetrates some horror upon her.)

But, although the writer of general fiction accepts the biological data of sex as unchangeable, the s f writer can perhaps make these facts into a basis for his speculations. In this way he constructs fantasies or hypotheses which may have an experiential validity. But I am of the opinion that nearly all variations of biological sex found in s f are mere fantasies. On a metaphorical graph we could distribute all existing pieces of literature. At one end of the axis lie all the works which merely stimulate sexually, but take the camouflage of "s f". At the opposite end of the axis we find scientifically plausible hypotheses.

Consider MEMOIRS OF A SPACE WOMAN, by Naomi Mitchison. This book makes rather dull pornography, because the author operates in the sexual sphere, under the guise of s f. The heroine, a young lady and dutiful scientist, is so willing to pay tribute to the ethos of scientific research that she donates her procreative organs as an experimental field for all cosmic races. During a "genital talk" a Martian impregnates her; for the Martians prefer not to talk from mouth to mouth, but from sex to sex. She bears a child by him which is a "terrestrial-Martian" hybrid. Another being impregnates her "in the thighs" and produces another child. Her willingness to make sacrifices for the sake of scientific progress is inexhaustible. After her return, she even retains enough vigour to get quite a banal child from a quite common human male. All this is very dull, because it is thought out in a primitive way, and does not even make "honest" pornography.

It is an old story that writers invent pretexts for pornography in this way. Many people feel a need for pornography, but because they are warped, they dare not admit their appetite even to themselves when they are by themselves reading. For readers like this, altruistic authors create artificial excuses so that they may savour what they desire, but at the same time acquit themselves of any charge of indecency. They learn with great pleasure that such reading is a solemn duty, the form of the duty determined by the excuse they use. Mitchison's excuse is the "ethos of science". Therefore the book shows the author's poor taste, is a lie, and most irritating. The author shows that she is an uneducated ignoramus about the diversity of sexual phenomena. She is so lazy that didn't even take care to look up the proper sources. An old, but still valuable work, such as GESCHLECHT UND GESCHLECHTER (1921), by Johannes Meisenheimer, shows us in 892 pages, the real variety of sexual organs and the kinds of copulation that occur among the earth's fauna. Mrs Mitchison's inventions look poor (although the book intends to depict the sexual variety of the whole universe) compared with the actual richness of sexual manifestations.

Several authors write about non-pornographic fantasies. But can an author really deal with the theme of sex if all he does is increase the number of sexes on a planet (and I've read about five, or even seven different sexes) or, on the other hand, he populates a planet with monosexuals or hermaphrodites, or sketches "remote-controlled" impregnation? Premises like these form the starting points of only those plots constructed along typical lines.

"Remote-controlled" impregnation may form the basis of the invasion theme (as in Wyndham's THE MIDWICH CUCKOOS), and in most cases, an author makes a plurality of sexes only one characteristic among many in his sketch of an extra-terrestrial eco-system. In the works of Theodore Sturgeon we can also find tales devoted to sex - but quite "decent" stories. The method used is very simple. We just take a concept from biology, for instance, the conjugation of microbes, tear it from its context where it had a valid, evolutionary, empirical, meaning, and then we demonstrate that even people (or other creatures) can conjugate in the same way. This idea is neither fascinating, nor shocking, nor even sexually stimulating. Sometimes I truly must admire the patience of s f fans. Why are they prepared to read such nonsense? This I cannot understand.

However, in the s f field, there is one man to whom we owe much. I'm speaking, of course, about Philip Jose Farmer. In his novel, THE LOVERS, he shows a rather peculiar conception of the evolutionary principle of mimicry. The novel is a success because it shocks readers far more than they are prepared for. However the evolutionary development of the planet of Ozagen cannot withstand an attempt at serious criticism. In the book super-insects metamorphose into beings which are outwardly shaped like human females. The tombstone of this notion is the evolutionary law that, once a species develops reason, it adapts further to environmental changes as it creates artificial tools, and not because it adapts biologically. To put it aphoristically: You must wait millions of years to grow wings, horns, claws, etc., but when you use reason you can create artificial wings, weapons, or other tools, in only a few years. It is as absurd to say that reasoning insects could imitate the shape of another species (human or not) by means of natural imitation, as it is to say that human beings plagued by myopia would wait millions of years until the pressure of phenotypal selection in the struggle for survival would produce a clear gland secretion taking the shape of "natural spectacles", rather than simply invent artificial spectacles. In the field of intelligent, instrumental evolution, the tempo of change is millions of times quicker than the speed of evolutionary adaptation to the environment.

Therefore I cannot say that the novel contains an idea with the value of an empirical hypothesis. I haven't touched on the question of whether or not the novel has an extra-scientific, cultural meaning. Leland Sapiro (PHILIP JOSE FARMER'S "THE LOVERS", RIVERSIDE QUARTERLY, Vol iv, No 1, pages 42-47) has tried to give the novel such an interpretation. He points to the parallel between the biological mimicry on Ozagen, and social "mimicry" on Earth, where the Urielite empire has certain features similar to those of her greatest enemy (the Israelite empire). We may or may not find this parallel in the book (for its second part is a bit strained) but let's assume that indeed Farmer wrote it into the novel. What follows from it? Nothing at all. We could establish such a "parallel" between the game of chess and real life, for in real life there are kings, towers, bishops, etc. Not every analogy has meaning, and not every similarity contains cultural worth.

In THE LOVERS Farmer plays a game which combines the elements of mimicry, sexual relationships, evolutionary adaptation, etc. For the layman, this combination may carry some conviction. Basically the novel incorporates the succubus myth, where the lalitha represents the succubus. Farmer translates it all into the pseudo-empirical language of descriptive science. The idea contains one original possibility - Farmer could have shown us introspectively the psychical life of the lalitha. A lalitha must (according to the novel) die when she gives birth to a child. She can conceive only when the "photo-genital" reflex invented by the author has been set in motion (during coitus). In addition, she must experience an orgasm. To avoid impregnation, Farmer's lalitha uses alcoholic beverages which paralyse the reflex mentioned above. The hero believes that he can save his beloved from drunkenness if he puts a neutral fluid into her drinks - but in doing so he kills her unintentionally and at the same time fathers little larvae. Now, it would indeed be an achievement for a writer to describe the life - the inner life, the life of the soul - of an insect which the will of evolution has camouflaged as a human female. But Farmer did not do this. Even though such a psychological intuition transcends the realm of the really possible, it would still contain some cognitive value. Even though such events are so highly improbable that they would never occur, we do not ask an empirically empty question if we ask how a psyche would react to events like these. But because this is a psychological and not a biological problem, I will talk about it later.

Farmer is well-known for his fantastic variations on the sexual theme. In one of the stories in his collection STRANGE RELATIONS Farmer tells of a planet that contains gigantic wombs which a stranded astronaut is supposed to impregnate. (Farmer repeats his method of parallel occurrences. The astronaut lands on the planet with his mother. This complicates the relationship, for the planetary womb is jealous of the human mother. Again, nothing follows from this.)

On yet another planet Farmer describes a race of humans with detachable phalluses. In intercourse, the phallus propels itself into the body of the female. Again, considered as a literary achievement, this is nothing spectacular - but it certainly is as a projection of wishful thinking. Although this specie's males certainly cannot feel sexual ecstasy (how, as they simply lose their penises for a time?), this manner of impregnation may come as an interesting innovation for the voyeur. An act like this resembles the way females may use artificially-made genitals for purposes of masturbation. The act hardly has any intrinsic, biologically justifiable purpose, but it contains an exterior, erotic, non-neutral meaning for the observer (the reader).

From Farmer, I expected a maturation that would lead his imagination (as demonstrated in the books already cited) towards a treatment of cultural phenomena (including sexual problems). But this was not to be. He has merely written more "daring", sadistic, and aggressive visions, as Boy Scout morals have disappeared in science fiction. His search for structural models is chaotic; he lacks any inner guide, and he pursues ideas which he considers original and valuable, as when he used ULYSSES as a paradigm. But this technique (i.e. Joyce's) can hardly produce anything worthwhile in sf. Of course, I mustn't bury my hopes set in any author, as long as he still lives and creates.

IV Science fiction writers treat many other biological themes that border on the sexual sphere, but generally their value is negligible.

Therefore I will now discuss an interesting work not based on sexual themes, but which discusses sexual problems with great mastery. I refer to PALLAS OU LA TRIBULATION, by E de Capoulet-Junac. Huge beings that look like krakens, attack Earth. They take with them in their ships a lot of young people, including the hero, a young man, and his female cousin, who is also young. They land on the planet Pallas where the human beings are at first confined in some kind of concentration camp. Later, either in singles or pairs, they are led into the "houses" of the Palladians. They expect to be tortured to death or forced into hard labour. They fear they will be treated like cattle, but nothing like this happens.

The general, ironical-whimsical meaning of the book is that the Palladians treat the humans as tame animals, like dogs. Some of them become pets, others find cruel and hard masters, some are beaten, or sometimes they can move freely about the city. The humans treated like dogs, try to rebel several times. These attempts are in vain, because the Palladians have achieved a high level of civilisation and they have guardian methods which the humans cannot understand. The novel is an anthropological experiment. It shows that a group of human beings cannot become totally deculturised. PALLAS OU LA TRIBULATION describes very effectively certain forms of culture which cause group behaviour, and which make it impossible to reduce totally a group of human beings to biological quasi-animals.

But here I'm only interested in the novel's sexual problem. One of the novel's most masterful features is its description of the erotic relationship which forms for a time between the hero and his female kraken-master. Sexual contacts are excluded a priori, so great is the anatomical difference between humans and Palladians. However, an erotic relationship slowly begins to develop. Psychologically, its arousal is described brilliantly. The Palladian masters appear quite horrible to human eyes - their skins feel like papier mache or like the chitinous shells of large insects. The mistress occasionally plays with the hero just as a human would play with a dog. At first the hero feels only repulsion, loathing, and abhorrence, but he forces himself, unconsciously of course, to "relish" the relationship. He cannot change the outside world, but he can (if I may express it thus) change his interior world, if/rapes and destroys all his former principles and criteria. As I said, he does this in a completely unconscious way, following the well-known precept, "Kiss the hand you cannot cut off". In the final analysis, the hero deludes himself about this liaison, because he has persuaded himself by autosuggestion that his mistress does love him. For her, he is nothing more than a dog.

In the end, the author shows the hero's sudden awakening, his awareness of the monstrosity of his own actions, and his psychic and moral compunction. I can't describe this erotic monstrosity in a few words. Because the novel is

so good, probably no one will ever translate it. Nevertheless it remains a solitary, totally original effort. The author convincingly describes the plasticity of the human psyche, by which humans can expand the borders of their biological-sexual lives. In man, both the sadistic and masochistic components (and especially the latter) of his instinctively impulses actively aid those factors that make a human being into an extraterrestrial monster. (By the way, the author evidently means this novel to read as a caricature of orthodox "monster fiction".) From fiction of this type we may gain new insights about human psychological mechanisms, and especially about erotic bondage. I cannot cite another example of psychologically acute prose within the field of s f.

V As I've said when an s f writer postulates cosmic or terrestrial future civilisations, he must abandon his concentration upon his own cultural environment. Within any Earthly culture, the human body has a finite number of biological properties and functions, as does a pack of playing cards. Just as a person may play bridge, poker, and many other games with the same cards, so a culture uses and evaluates its biological "cards" in a number of different combinations. Biologically speaking all the "cards" (functions) which we need to maintain the life processes, are of equal value. Culture can suspend none of these functions, but it can limit them if it considers them worthless. Without the help of comparative anthropology, it is impossible to distinguish what is biologically constant from what culture transforms, because human beings are so tightly interconnected with their culture.

For instance, analyse logically Christian dogma, and don't passively try to assimilate the contradictions of that dogma. You will see that Christianity considers sex a necessary evil, because it serves the function of procreation. When only married couples practise sex, they diminish this sinfulness, but, according to the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church, only when coitus includes the possibility of impregnation. We can express the values of any culture along the axes of a graph, and localise along an axis cultural functions according to a general principle of order. Along such an axis, Christianity-influenced Western European civilisation forbids us to place sexually-associated objects and functions close to sacred objects and functions. We must keep as far apart as possible the altar (symbolising heavenly transcendence) and the naked woman (symbolising hellish temptation). However we don't see tempered, harshly restricted biological impulses of our cultural environment as the revolt of purely biological instincts against dominant standards. Instead we view their manifestation as a cultural heresy - as a limited subcultural phenomenon. A phenomenon like the Black Mass unifies what dogma cannot reconcile: in this kind of mass the body of a naked woman becomes an altar. However some non-European cultures make the sexual act part of their liturgical and sacred ceremonies. They cannot understand why our culture considers the Black Mass so wicked.

what I have said seems simple and self-evident. However, a person's whole psyche resists any encounter with alien cultural practices quite contrary to his own. We may think it despicable to place into the grave of a dead man a sculpture showing a man having anal coitus with a woman. However, we can find such sculptures in the tombs of the Maya. A Hindu woman who places flowers on a lingam (a large model of an erected phallus) doesn't see anything indecent in the act. If we accused the woman of indecency, we would act as absurdly as an alien who, entering a church for the first time, thinks that worshippers kneeling for mass are only preparing for coitus modo bestiarum (when a male takes a female from behind).

We find it hard to assimilate this general truth. Therefore we find it impossible to explore intuitively the psychic state of alien people if their acts, as we observe them, contain other specific meanings for us. Amongst many primitive tribes, it is a well-known habit that the host gives his wife sexually to his guest. According to our notions, the husband simply prostitutes his wife, and therefore she must feel slighted and ashamed, especially if she loves her husband. We cannot imagine the woman's experiences in any other way. However the opposite is true; the woman feels slighted if the guest rejects her.

We also hear much about the absolute character of incest, as if our bans existed everywhere. Again, we can find exactly opposite cases. In ancient Egypt, the pharaohs married their sisters. They were allowed incest, not as a shameful and sinful act, but as a token of distinction. This prize belonged to them because they were equal to the gods.

We even call a sexual fantasy a sin or a virtue according to its place in our cultural frame of reference. In our culture it is a mortal sin to imagine sexual intercourse with a Christian saint or the Mother of God. But in the Far East their system of belief encourages fantasies about sexual contact with the godhead. They call such thoughts pious because they coincide with their dogma's myths about the sexual relationship between humans and gods.

In short - our culture still places a taboo on sex, even people like PLAYBOY's Hugh Hefner whose motto "Sex is fun" contrasts strongly with cultures where sex is sacred. An s f author has a duty to understand such cultural possibilities, because in his work he must reach past the variety of possibilities contained within human cultures. In reality, most s f writers are ignorant in this field.

It is no simple problem to understand alien cultures. Western culture slices its viewpoint on the human body into two parts. In the aesthetic sense, we consider the naked body as beautiful, but not the sexual organs or sexual intercourse. This partition is older than Christianity, but I don't know enough about (inter-cultural) aesthetics to make firm statements on this subject. In any case, the sexual act was an integral part of sacred rites in the Far East, and we can find figures of copulating men and gods in Indian temples. Genitals also had their place in sacred sculpture and painting (including ornaments). But I do not know whether they were also regarded as aesthetically beautiful. We need not necessarily conceive of the sacred-sublime as aesthetically beautiful. The figures of many gods (such as Priapus) show grotesque, mutilated forms. However whatever the relationship he finds between aesthetic evaluation and sexual phenomena, a European associates sacred coitus with the obscene, associated with porno-shops, Cinema Special, etc, but not with religious ceremonies.

A writer would find it dangerous to write a novel which depicts a culture that includes sex within the highest sphere of its transcendence. It is always painful for a writer to be misunderstood and in such a case there is a special risk that he will be misinterpreted as a pornographer. If a writer sets his mind to writing pornography, then he can be at least sure that the reader's aims and his own coincide. But a writer encounters the greatest difficulties when he wants to describe a culture of "subliminally integrated" sex, and not pornography. Writers of science fiction have never described such cultures, because (a) they show the highest degree of ignorance about anthropology, and therefore they cannot set about the task, and (b) because s f writers substitute for their absent knowledge the cheapest clichés, which leave no room for serious discussions of this type. Some authors are sufficiently or even well educated in the sciences; but they are all still laymen in anthropology.

Just in passing, notice the interesting, or even sinister, truth that s f authors who are also scientists almost never explore their own fields of study in their science fiction (e.g. the ethnologist Chad Oliver, and biochemist Isaac Asimov). The only important exception is Olaf Stapledon, who looked at the theme of sex in ODD JOHN, STAR MAKER, and LAST AND FIRST MEN (but the theme was only marginal in those novels).

Stapledon is also the only s f author to whom I could, with a clear conscience, attribute social imagination. In today's writers this faculty is wholly paralysed. They camouflage this paralysis with stories about extremes - they continue to write about utopias, although rarely, or, with great zeal they write about dystopias - technologically caused hells. Over and over again, s f writers describe the borderline case of mankind organised into an anti-utopia, all part of man's collective suicide.

Assuming that we sets aside all possible moral considerations, we must nevertheless recognise that those dystopias make the easiest writing tasks in the social field. It's no intellectual problem at all to write about a technologically policed hell. You don't need a particularly developed brain to realise that a society can do without gruesome restrictions imposed on its citizens to maintain its balance. Several times s f writers have discussed mankind's final catastrophe in a way that permits them to place an emphasis on sexual problems. In two novels by Peter George (DR STRANGELOVE and RED ALERT) the survivors if a nuclear war, the members of a ruling elite, begin to introduce the rationing of women, and assign themselves the most sexually attractive women and girls. In other such books acts of rape are committed during the general chaos. But you don't need an enormous imagination to prophesy such occurrences under such circumstances.

Ward Moore treats similar themes in two novellas. LOT'S DAUGHTER, the second of them, tells of Mr Jimmons, an average American, who lives in an incestuous relationship with his daughter and has a child by her. Moore writes both stories well and realistically, and does not discuss the problem of incest directly; it is just an evident fact (because the story is based on the Old Testament model). In the first novella, LOT, Mr Jimmons leaves his wife and children in order to flee in his car with little Erika. In a time of general decay and destruction of social and cultural ties, such cases would probably abound. However, stories of this type contain no intellectual revelations. The end of the world is a rather serious affair - too serious an affair for a writer to burn the whole of mankind (if only on paper) in order to prepare his roast meat on the fire. It's a depressing thought that s f authors may write an infinite number of such stories, because the fate of any single human caught in the vortex of the final catastrophe contains something deeply touching, and any one of these fates may provide a theme. But many an s f writer earns his rent too easily by writing such stories.

In LIMBO 90, by Bernard Wolfe, the author describes the influence of non-eschatological cultural change upon sexual problems. LIMBO 90 is a very well-constructed and intelligently developed story, which tells about the purposeful amputation of the arms and legs of young men by the women of the society. These men wear prosthetic limbs, which, however, they cannot use in bed. In bed the male is just a body without extremities. Women have taken over the active role in sexual intercourse. A young female, who has so far only had intercourse with cripples, has a sexual relationship with a normal, older male. His sexual activity deeply shocks her. Wolfe tactfully describes this relationship and the feelings of the partners. He makes us believe in the reaction of the girl under such conditions. Regrettably the idea of self-mutilation is not so believable. I won't attack this idea here, since it isn't my task.

PLEASE TURN TO PAGE 40

MUST BE TALKING TO MY FRIENDS

* It couldn't happen, of course. The market wasn't here. Nobody could ever carry it out. People would stay away in droves. The dream could never come true.

On Wednesday, July 6 1971, a dream of many Australian science fiction readers did come true. The Space Age Bookshop, directed by Ron Graham and Merv Binns, opened at 314 Swanston Street, Melbourne. There they were - science fiction books covering a whole wall of a bookshop in Melbourne. There they were - Manager Merv Binns, and Assistant Manager, Lee Harding, selling books by the minute, Carla Harding handing out pamphlets to people waiting for a bus, Paul Stevens changing records and helping at the counter - s f fans standing around in bewilderment.

Harry Warner Jr, fandom's historian, records in ALL OUR YESTERDAYS, that in the forties "Australia suffer(ed) from a difficulty unique in the history of known fandoms: almost total inability to find prozines, either native or imported." As American s f books and magazines did not become freely available in Australia until the early 1960s, most Australian fan activity concentrated on the acquisition of that most precious commodity - s f books. In Melbourne the Melbourne S F Club provided that service for over twenty years. Merv Binns worked at McGills Newsagency during the day, but at night he took on his real identity - the Feuhrer of the MSFC. Merv kept his kingdom (if you don't mind the switched metaphors) stocked with books seen nowhere else in Melbourne - American paperback s f titles. Over the years he also imported on behalf of the Club copies of overseas film books, comics, fanzines, and anything else MSFC members wanted. The prices were good, and the service was (sort of) good.

But the MSFC was never known to anybody but initiates. Many ardent s f readers still had to endure piles of British reprint paperbacks, and the occasional readable hardback book. Whenever Merv talked about opening a bookshop of his own, we smiled knowingly and remembered that the Club had less than 200 people on its rolls. Melbournites weren't interested in s f - or so we thought.

* However, providential disaster struck at the end of last year. The MSFC had to leave its snug headquarters in McGills Bulk Store No 9, and resettle in South Yarra. Ron Graham's VISION OF TOMORROW had failed financially, but

Ron remained as interested as ever in the fate of science fiction in this country. Ron and Merv teamed up, firstly in what was seemingly a hopeless search for headquarters for a bookshop and/or Club. Unfortunately, the Club has still not found quarters in the city, and so numbers attending meetings have dwindled. However, after three months on the 7th floor of an old building in Elizabeth Street, Merv and Lee Harding (who just happened to be looking for steady employment at the beginning of the year) found the present site. I would doubt if any of the world's few s f bookshops can boast such a good position.

* Opening night took on exactly the right note of fannishness and high hopes. No champagne supper, although there was some champagne for the toasts, but a very Australian mixture of meat pies and grog and chatter. We noted that the hosts of the party tried to take their seats as often as possible - it had been an exhausting day (I think somebody said Merv had been up to 3am the night before putting the finishing touches to the shop). David Grigg was there (I hadn't seen him for awhile) and so were the supporters from Melbourne and Monash Universities. John and Elizabeth Foyster took over proceedings for a while after they arrived - although John was just a little apologetic that a policeman didn't hit him over the head during the anti-Springbok demonstrations. Those noble warriors of Australia-In-75 tried at times to conduct mini-business meetings in the middle of a party, but for once we could ignore them. (I mean, it's bad enough holding business meetings at the Degraives Tavern). John Bangsund appeared very mellow, and so did Apollo and Grishenda, Lee Harding's fan-type friends. David Boutland/^{and Foyster}swapped opinions about Victorian policemen, and Victoria's right-wing press. And the rest - as I said - including me - stood around and looked bewildered that the miraculous event actually took place. Dick Jenssen hosted the toasts (including a birthday greeting to himself) and ended the night with a very pleasant speech. (Sorry, I can't remember his more insulting jokes). How did I celebrate the event? Well, I think I was one of the first people to buy a book from the shop.

* The casual observer (a person such as yourself, if you live in Indianapolis or Birmingham) might think that the millenium has come to Australian fandom. If you think that, I won't disillusion you. In fact, I can't think of any reason why I should disillusion you. The Space Age Bookshop should provide a very good platform from which we can deliver the glorious tidings of Australia In 75 (and sell fanzines at the same time). The Melbourne branch of the AI75 Committee is working very hard as the Noreascon approaches, and signs of life are returning to interstate groups as well. Indeed, the University of Adelaide Science Fiction Association plan to hold a Convention at New Year. The site is Melville House, a guest house in the centre of South Australia's National Park, in the hills about ten miles from the centre of Adelaide. The main organiser is Alan Sandercock, 1 Michael St., Lockleys, SA 5032, and he is preparing a program for distribution, even as I type. The Adelaide Association holds periodical film showings on campus, and they have had attendances as high as 100. They have been told about Australian fan activities. Brisbane fandom began and developed during 1970; Adelaide fandom has only just begun, and already it looks like the power force of 1971. Other conventions for 1972: probably a Melcon at Easter, and almost certainly a Wintercon in Sydney later in the year. Hld in a Sydney hotel, this will be our first dry run for a 1975 World Convention. Jack Williamson visited Sydney a few weeks ago, and expressed his satisfaction with the reception. Robin Johnson recorded an interesting interview with him. (Professor? Dr?) Jack Lambert from the University of Austin, Texas, will begin teaching in the Department of English at Sydney's Macquarie University some time in the near future. Some other Americans have said they may try to visit here before 1975.

* The greatest cause for hope lies in the continuous improvement of Australia's fanzines. For a start, I think Australia has produced the world's best fanzine for the year: John Bangsund's SCYTHROP 22. It contains everything that I liked about AUSTRALIAN SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW, combined with even more polish and humour than John's earlier magazine possessed. I could say that we take John's high production standards for granted - but I can never take such high quality for granted. John achieves more with a duplicator and stencils than most rich fans ever achieve with offset equipment. The infinite capacity for taking pains - that's the appropriate cliché that happens to be quite true about SCYTHROP.

In his editorial, John realises, among other things, that one must never appear to gaffiate, even while not publishing anything at all. (Would anybody dare to say that Richard Bergeron ever gaffiated, for instance?). But in his editorial, John does not really talk about minor concerns like fanzines and gaffiation, and all those other little acronyms. He talks about himself, and since there is no more interesting (or infuriating) person than John Bangsund in Australian fandom, I found John's editorial the most worthwhile section of the magazine. John thinks he "used his cleverness with words to erect an enormous barrier between himself and people". Perhaps the barrier became impenetrable just because the words were so clever. Not so the rest of us. I wanted to write a letter immediately to John. I wanted to discuss the importance for myself and other people of his admissions, but I could not find the right words, so I didn't write. I think John's wrong; but then I've been consciously trying to build that impenetrable wall that he talks about. Because my command of the materials of language is so poor, the wall often crumbles, and I'm left without defences. A magazine like mine is meant to be artificial, if you like, dedicated to a small set of principles of thought. Yet often it's just a transparent picture of Gillespie, whatever that picture might be - pedantic, probably; thorough, at times; ironical, in my own eyes; full of glowing, half-submerged ideas, I hope. None of these have anything to do with the Gillespie-in-the-street, should you be ever unfortunate enough to meet him. I have to put up with him every day. On the other hand, I think John succeeded in achieving his self-image - in the early ASFRS, the illusion was complete, the diction perfect, the pose spectacular. Where he will go, I'm not sure; he's given us so much pleasure, that I hope he can give himself contentment. I know I will never find contentment, so I've stopped worrying about it.

The rest of SCYTHROP is great, too. Letters of comment, or articles, or traded fanzines to John Bangsund, GPO Box 4946, Melbourne 3001, Victoria. Send \$2.40 for 6 if you are really lazy.

* Ron Clarke came back from an overland bus trip, and journeys to England and Heicon - and immediately began to produce THE MENTOR again. Each issue of his magazine has become better since he returned from his voyage. He has managed to attract the best letter response of any Australian fanzine. MENTOR is one of the few Australian fanzines that stirs enthusiasm among Australians as well as Americans. Ron publishes amateur s f stories, a few of which are not so amateur. He publishes odd pieces which elicit bags of mail. Every issue he publishes a FAN AUTOBIOGRAPHY (it doesn't really matter that most of them have been professional writers). Ron's own comments and editorials have improved greatly over the past few issues. The fan's fanzine. 78 Redgrave Road, Normanhurst, NSW 2076. 2 for \$1 or usual.

* The other high quality Australian fanzines also tend to be "fannish" (although only Terry Carr could give you a definition of this term). THE FANARCHIST, published by David Grigg, has already had many high points during its first

issues. I reprinted one of those high points, David's fannish odyssey to Sydney, last issue. David tilts at the world from an odd angle, and so do his contributors, which include Steven Phillips, John Alderson, and various letter-writers. But since David has been unemployed most of this year, maybe this stands to reason. David charges 5 for \$1, but he would still prefer articles, letters of comment, traded fanzines, etc., to money. 1556 Main Rd Research, Victoria 3095.

* John Alderson, from Havelock, in the middle of darkest Victoria, publishes CHAO, every so often. 30 cents per copy plus postage, but like David, John would prefer letters and stuff. The most impressive item in the latest CHAO is the first part of John's own autobiography. Letter writers argue about just what John does and does not believe in (you will have to read the magazine to catch that reference), Iain Ban, mysteriously also a resident of Havelock, tells why I DON'T READ SCIENCE FICTION ANY MORE. John even writes his letter of comment to SFC 19 here - curses. PO Box 72, Maryborough, Victoria 3465.

* Eric Lindsay is another editor who also writes most of his own magazine: GEGENSCHWEIN (Trade, contribution, letter of comment, or 25 cents per issue, to 6 Hillcrest Avenue, Faulconbridge, NSW 2776). Eric editorialises, draws little drawings of bookshelves, and writes about them; reviews various things; casts doubt on van Vogt's scientific accuracy; and prints letters. Not a bad little magazine, mainly because Eric is himself an entertaining writer.

* There are plenty of other magazines around, but I would hesitate to describe them as regular. If you want news of the science fiction scene, then I suggest you send me \$3.50 for 10, or \$8 for 26 copies of LOCUS, which appears every fortnight, and often every week. It comes airmail to me, and I post out copies to Australians. A special highlight was No 90, the JOHN W CAMPBELL MEMORIAL ISSUE. I try to do a similar magazine for Australian fans, called NORSTRILIAN NEWS. It costs you nothing if you get ETHERLINE 71, published occasionally by the Melbourne Science Fiction Club. \$1.20 for 20, otherwise; or 10 for \$1 sent to Charlie Brown, 2078 Anthony Avenue, Bronx, New York 10457, if you live in USA.

* You may notice that I've left a lot out of this issue, including many pleasant (and not so pleasant) letters. If you've already read the rest of this issue, you will understand why. Please read my notes about the translation on page 49. I have a number of other Lem scripts on hand, and will publish them as soon as possible. Franz advises that Herder and Herder (a New York publisher who has never before published category s f) will publish ten Lem novels during the next year. Lem novels and stories will also appear from several other American publishers during 1971 and 1972. In the meantime, Franz was surprised that I said he was employed by three publishers. He answers: "You are a gossip and spreader of falsehoods. Whoever or whatever gave you the curious idea that I edit s f for three German publishing houses? My publisher wouldn't like such an idea. I'm editing one s f series (quite enough for my needs in this field), and read books for another publisher (nothing to do with s f at all). And I occasionally do something for other publishers." As I said to Franz, who else but a gossip and spreader of falsehoods could edit NN and SFC simultaneously? Apology given.

* And in my last six lines in the magazine, can I say that I very much enjoyed S F HALL OF FAME (having read few of the stories before), that the SECOND PACIFIC BOOK OF AUSTRALIAN S F exists and has some good stories (you can it buy it via me - \$1), that YEAR OF THE QUIET SUN had better win the Hugo, and that you can't buy the Genu-wine-Gillespie-Windup-Fanzine-Producing-Electronic-Digital-Computer-Doll north of the equator. Send money first. *

DAVID W BOUTLAND

Prelude to Clarke

DAVID BOUTLAND reviews:

THE LION OF COMARRE and AGAINST THE FALL OF NIGHT

LION OF COMARRE originally published in 1949.
FALL OF NIGHT originally published in 1948.
Collection first published 1953.

Victor Gollancz :: 1970
214 pages :: £1.40.

PRELUDE TO SPACE

First published in 1953.

Sidgwick & Jackson :: 1970
176 pages :: \$A.3.25

"Though they are set eons apart," writes Arthur C Clarke, "these stories have much in common. Both involve a search, or quest, for unknown and mysterious goals... and in each case, the hero is a young man dissatisfied with his environment.

"There are many such today, with good reason. To them I dedicate these words, written before they were born."

John Brunner has written of young men, too - dissatisfied with their environment. Relevance is a black man high on acid, going after a honky cop, says Brunner. Relevance, dissatisfaction - how to relate, how to appeal, change, withstand, join with, attack, defend, in the pull and sway of this heaving generation - these are questions that must be met and answered and are not in Clarke's early work.

It seemed easy then, because World War II had handed science and technology their seven-league boots: Bureaucracy remained manageable, the environment was dusty but not without a gleam of paintwork beneath; policemen - and armies - were friends and Superman soared like science through the hopeful skies, ready to pluck lesser citizens from squalid worlds and hurl them into a larger, more magnificent future.

In LION OF COMARRE everything has been discovered in the physical sciences; the men whose names mean most to the world are "the artists and philosophers, the lawyers and statesmen..."

But Richard Peyton III looks further ahead, toward a renewal of technology's quest - and toward the stars. Genetically, he is a reincarnation of

Rolf Thordasen, "the greatest mechanical genius the world has ever known." Thordasen's own quest was diverted by politicians, and he succumbed to the "Decadents" who persuaded him to renounce the world and to join in the construction of a city - Comarre - which would make a man "forget the outer world, his friends, his family - everything!" And it is to Comarre that Richard Peyton must go, if he is to rediscover the secrets of Rolf Thordasen and carry on his work.

A blunt symbol - the scientific quest versus sensual corruption - the ultimate pot-house Comarre, with its crammed automatronics and the wooing of the thought-projectors, where:

Peyton explored the worlds of the fifty sleeping minds. It was a fascinating though repulsive quest.... For the first time he had direct knowledge that the perverse and evil desires that sometimes ruffled the surface of his own mind were shared by all human beings.

How does Richard Peyton use this insight? He wakes one of the sleepers to save his soul.

"Why have you called me back?"

"I want to release all who can be saved."

"Saved! From what? It took me forty years to escape from the world!"

Peyton turns on his heel and leaves. Now he understands that, even in his scientific vision of Utopia, there will always be some for whom the world has nothing to offer but sorrow and disillusion. So with pure heart and noble mind, Peyton turns from such pitiful humanity and goes on to discover Rolf Thordasen's secret:

"If Comarre still exists," writes Thordasen, "you will have seen my handiwork and must have escaped the snares I set for lesser minds. Therefore you are fitted to take this knowledge to the world."

And what is this knowledge?

"I have broken down the barrier between Man and Machine. Now they must share the future equally."

With warming heart, Peyton thinks of the world to come - when all robots will have reached consciousness.

"The robot need have none of the limitations of man, none of the pitiful weaknesses. It would never let passions cloud its logic!"

Clarke ends his story a hundred words later with one of the most - unintentionally -

- chilling sentences I have ever read in science fiction. With his face to the stars, Richard Peyton lies down to sleep. And:

This time he did not dream.

The second short novel in this volume is AGAINST THE FALL OF NIGHT, an early version of Clarke's CITY AND THE STARS, and is far better-known than the preceding novella. But it is more of the same - the survival of culture through the power of the machine and the intellectual powers of cool-minded scientists. In both works, Clarke sees beauty as freedom from myth and superstition; as electronics, logic, steel, and precision engineering. But while Clarke's dreams of the forties may have seemed magnificent then, his dedication of this book to young people today brings his own early irrelevance springing into focus like a blast of CS gas in the face.

What Clarke failed to see was that science is no more than man's reaching hand: holding weapons of hate today partly because scientists failed to understand the gut, muscle, heart and soul of humanity decades ago.

Clarke dreamed of one gigantic step forward for mankind. And he made it.

But he stepped right over the people.

II PRELUDE TO SPACE reinforces my general impression of Clarke's work.

This neat little volume, with cover by Hardy, contains the post-Apollo preface written by Arthur C Clarke in August 1969. To quote Clarke: "On July 20, 1969, all science fiction stories of the first landing on the moon became frozen in time."

Prediction, says Clarke, is not the main purpose of s f. Yet, he says, "it must be admitted that stories of space travel form an exception to this rule." Clarke's purpose, he admits, when he planned PRELUDE TO SPACE - which was actually penned in a series of school exercise books in 20 days of July, 1947 - was partially propagandist. By writing about space travel as a possibility, he hoped to prise the scales from the eyes of those rocket engineers who in America as late as 1950 "poo-pooed the idea of space flight".

One fact emerges clearly from the pages of Clarke's novel: a science fiction writer who concerns himself with prediction and scientific propaganda is dull reading twenty years later. Clarke, who has written one of the finest science fiction novels of all time - CHILDHOOD'S END - Clarke the poet/engineer is, regrettably, all engineer in the pages of PRELUDE TO SPACE.

The time is 1978. In a three-storey building on the South Bank of the Thames, "Interplanetary" mounts man's first journey to the moon. At a nearby establishment five men are training as crew and reserve pilots for the launching of the Prometheus from a desert in Central Australia. Clarke gives Hermann Oberth - "now an old man of 84" - credit for starting "the chain reaction which was to lead in his own lifetime to the crossing of space."

But almost all Clarke's predictions are wrong. He, like other writers, was unable to anticipate the sheer size of the actual moon project. His organisation "Interplanetary" is located in London - "America," says one of Clarke's characters, "is much too small a place for astronomical research." Clarke makes no forecasts of United States space installations in the Australian colony.

And though, technically, Clarke may have been far in advance of other writers working similar themes, the administrative assembly of his characters at "Interplanetary" never rings true. Major character, Doctor Dirk Alexson, for instance, a historian on-the-spot who hopes, in his own words:

"...to stand outside of Time, as it were, and produce a record which can be read with full understanding ten thousand years from now..."

He shares his office with two draughtsmen, Sam and Bert, who simply collect their pay and have no interest in the moon project. Sam berates Doctor Alexson:

"The trouble with you, Doc, is that you take life too seriously. It doesn't pay."

Dirk Alexson, sent from America to record the instant history of Prometheus as it lifts from its launching track to the moon, has no knowledge at all of the men, machines, or mathematics behind the great journey. He is educated during a number of escorted tours with two PR men, who manage to sneak him into the pilots' training module while no one is looking. Alexson's abysmal lack of preparation gives Clarke an excellent chance to educate his readers, too.

The pages turn. The science unfolds, but rarely do we scent a human being. In the conversation between Sir Robert Derwent, Director-General of "Interplanetary" and Doctor Groves, the psychological adviser, we learn that Hassell, one of the space pilots, has a problem - his wife is expecting a son about the time Hassell hopes to land on the moon. Says the Director-General:

"It's a damned nuisance. You'll just have to reason with him."

And here Dirk Alexson's only emotional contact is aborted when, at a pre-launch celebration party, he sights an unescorted, astonishingly pretty girl and contemplates approaching her: but her escort turns up after all and Dirk turns "once more to his philosophical musings".

Like the great ship itself, on a five-mile launch track, the book moves to its climax. Just before take-off a sabotage attempt is made by a man we learn nothing about:

....No one ever learned a great deal about Jefferson Wilkes...as far as could be gathered, Jefferson Wilkes believed that the attempt to enter space would bring down upon humanity some stupendous metaphysical doom. There was even evidence that he considered the moon to be hell.

The ship roars toward take-off, and for those who haven't read this novel of Clarke's, I'll draw down the curtain here. But where - in this dull, awkward, mechanical book - is the soul of the man who wrote CHILDHOOD'S END?

PLEASE TURN TO PAGE 26

BARRY GILLAM

The Old Dark House

(THE OLD DARK HOUSE is a regular column, formerly called NEW YORK FILM REVIEW. This is the third in the series. Barry Gillam is a student-cum-film-goer who lives in New York. He sees many films before they reach Australia, if they reach Australia at all or without extensive censorship. Barry also reads and writes about science fiction, and most other interesting topics.)

THX 1138

DIRECTED by George Lucas; SCREENPLAY by Mr Lucas and Walter Murch, story by Mr Lucas; DIRECTORS OF PHOTOGRAPHY - Dave Meyers and Albert Kihn; MUSIC by Lalo Schiffrin; PRODUCED by Lawrence Sturham; released by Warner Bros.

STARS: Robert Duvall (THX); Donal Pleasance (SEN); Maggie McOmie (LUH); Don Pedro Colley (SRT).

1971. 88 minutes.

From my mother's sleep I fell into the State
And I hunched in its belly till my wet fur froze.
Six miles from earth, loosed from its dream of life,
I woke to black flak and the nightmare fighters.
When I died they washed me out of the turret with a hose.

- Randall Jarrell, THE DEATH OF THE BALL TURRET GUNNER

THX 1138 is George Lucas' first feature. He based it on a short film he made some years ago. It is a splendid film that I cannot recommend too highly. I can easily say that this is the best new s f film I have seen since 2001. Unlike THE FORBIM PROJECT, which, like all too many other films, denies the possibility of intelligence in the audience and of personality in the filmmaker, THX 1138 grants both, and so gives a sign of hope. It is also a much better film, visually stunning and dramatically effective. More than anything else, I gain the feeling that a controlling intelligence, a creative director, is behind the film.

A synopsis is deceptively simple: In a future computer-run society whose inhabitants are under constant sedation, one woman and one man stop taking the drugs that suppress sex, love and personality. In fact, several reviewers have rather ungenerously called it a fifties nightmare, e.g. 1984. Why, the cast even includes Donald Pleasance, cast as a hopeless schemer in a world that doesn't permit scheming. However, other reviewers do not realize that (1) this is not a nightmare, and (2) Lucas is ahead of the reviewers, for he knows just what he is doing. In many ways this film reverses, with a twist of sophistication, the fifties genre films. (3) The film and its subject are entirely contemporary.

I can best clarify these problems if I look at Don Siegel's *INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS*, the prototypical (and best) fifties s f film. *INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS*, which tells of a small California town where simulacra replace the people, is about the fear of depersonalisation. Two people fight to preserve their humanity from the rapidly increasing corps of changed neighbours. In mood, it is a horror film, and s f is merely a pretext. It is a genuine nightmare in that it is an allegory of the prevailing feeling of the fifties. As Siegel has said in an interview, "I think that the world is populated by pods (which grew into the soulless simulacra) and I wanted to show them." In style, it owes much to the fifties action film, which Siegel had helped to create (*RIOT IN CELL BLOCK 11*). Visually, it must be considered in the context of the early works of Losey, Fuller, Mann, and Ray, and films like *THE THIRD MAN*, *BIG HEAT*, *STRANGERS ON A TRAIN*, and *ON DANGEROUS GROUND*. The problems of individuality reached a kind of crisis in 1956 with Hitchcock's *THE WRONG MAN*, and Ray's *BIGGER THAN LIFE*. They both investigated the film with the same nightmarish intensity.

Let me take those enumerated points and see how they work in *THX 1138*. The human condition in the world of the film is one of mass unconsciousness. Because of the drugs they take, the inhabitants are totally unaware of the possibility of individuality. They are the perfect wards of the benevolent state. Although incidents of drug evasion occur, these are rare. The film's characters themselves want to return to that idyllic state of unconsciousness. Thus we have a parable of Utopia, whose inhabitants (contrary to what any high school English teacher tells you) are happy. "You and I" would be bored if "we" were transplanted there now, but the indigenes are fully satisfied. They would probably go catatonic if exposed to "our" world.

These people, unlike those in 1984, do not live lives of quiet desperation. The film is about the awakening of one man to life, and although we fear that he will be captured and punished, we do not view all the people as candidates for salvation. They are safe as they are, and, given the choice, would take their present state for ours. Lucas portrays this state of the world in the film because *THX1138* is also an allegory. The present problem of American life is not that of the loss of identity, but that of Creon at the end of *ANTIGONE*. Creon finds himself, after he caused his son's death, living on and performing his duties, but without any direction or purpose. If you want to tap the American consciousness of 1971, you must look at a writer like Russell Baker, who reacts to the currents in the air and reports directly on what he finds.

One of Baker's most devastating columns was written during the 1966 New York transportation strike. Mayor Lindsay had asked all non-essential personnel not to come to work in the city. Baker put his middle class, forties businessman before his mirror, shaving. The man asks if he is essential and realises that he is not. He has lost the race without ever seeing the finish line. His vague uphill strivings have imperceptibly vanished, and he stands

on a plateau and thinks he can see it moving into a decline out beyond the rims of his glasses. Causes and motives are gone, and it is only the fear of admitting one's plight that keeps a man moving purposelessly forward. Thus, Kevin McCarthy's warning about the pods obviously did not find many active listeners. The world is, as Siegel said, inhabited by pods. Lucas takes it from there. Instead of an active man who becomes depersonalised, he shows us an automaton who becomes a person.

Stylistically, THX 1138 belongs to a new decade of action films: THE RISE AND FALL OF LEGS DIAMOND, UNDERWORLD USA; POINT BLANK; and GUNN. It's worth noting the difference between these and the fifties films mentioned above. In the fifties movies we find shadows equated with moral ambiguity, and indeed, many of the films take place at night. The Wellesian angles preserved in THE THIRD MAN are widespread. These films track horizontally along the echo-producing streets of Vienna, London, or New Orleans. The misty dock of Welles' MR ARKADIN provides the link with the sixties genre productions, in which editing becomes more important. Who would have thought after the fifties Roetticher-Scott cycle that Boetticher would produce a work as elliptical in its narrative and as full of cinematic humour as THE RISE AND FALL OF LEGS DIAMOND? Fuller's vertical, Mizoguchian camera movements are being used by more and more directors. The sets are brighter and the protagonists, who, in the fifties saw their darker impulses played out in the action of their stories, now fight against a world in which evil is a matter of fact, and not one of shock or recognition. This reaches a kind of ultimate acceptance in Peter Bogdanovich's TARGETS, and it only takes a small step from accepting a fact to ignoring it altogether.

I've tried to place THX 1138 vertically in time and horizontally in the culture that produced it. Now I must consider the movie itself more specifically. The physical world of the film is handsomely and expertly mounted. Lucas has adapted the stylisation of the sets of 2001, although they often look like something from Ichikawa (REVENGE OF AN ACTOR, KYOTO) or Shinoda (DOUBLE SUICIDE). And there is a white on white prison that looks strangely like the asylum in Bertolucci's THE CONFORMIST. The film spends an appreciable amount of time in a communications centre in which we see television monitors which show the main characters, and others. They are not mattes, and the blue palour of the images is important because it accurately represents the reality of the people viewed. Furthermore, all the actors' heads are shaved, and they all wear white. This society most highly values the virtues of uniformity and cleanliness.

The picture opens in this communications centre and Lucas swiftly shows us how the society works. We see illegal sexual activity (i.e. any sexual activity) reported, and we learn laws and procedures as we see them in action. Every medicine cabinet contains a monitor. When the door opens a camera starts and a voice asks, "What's wrong?" The control panel features buttons which light in different colours when depressed. The colours indicate choice in a uniformly white world, but even these choices are limited. Humans run this centre, and they are as impersonal as the rest of the population. But there are also mechanical policemen: beautiful androids with silver-stylised faces. They wear black, with white and black crash helmets and silver cylinders as weapons.

Like their ancestors in Cocteau's ORPHEUS (angels of death) and Hitchcock's PSYCHO (a highway policeman), these policemen are benevolent. They work for the good of society although inevitably against the protagonist. In a wonderful short scene, we see an officer surrounded by a group of small children. He proffers his weapon and says to them, "Be careful now. It's heavy."

THX himself helps build these policemen, when he handles radioactive material by remote control. When he goes through withdrawal symptoms because his mate, LUH 3417, substitutes placebos for the usual sedatives, he worries because he cannot perform his intricate work.

When THX realises that something is wrong, but before he knows just what, he goes to confession. Like phone booths, shiny confessionals are set up in rows at various locations. The face of a bearded man appears inside on the wall. THX explains his problem stumbingly, and the programmed replies are general. At intervals it says, "Yes.... excellent.... Could you be more specific?" Later, when his withdrawal symptoms become more pronounced, THX returns to a booth. THX says, "I think I'm dying." The machine again returns, "Could you be more specific?" When THX vomits, it comments, "You are a true believer." The comedy in this film comes from the juxtaposition of the machine's limits and human necessity.

Roger Greenspan, in his intelligent review, writes that this is a society in which things work better in theory than in practice. This is true, but it begs to be extended. This is a society in which most people have so little imagination that they accept theory for practice. In doing so, they remain in the state's safe, assured hive. Lucas conveys the inherent problems when, in a vignette, he shows us a "malfunctioning officer" (as the communications centre reports it). The policeman walks into a wall, is shocked to meet resistance, and tries again. We feel the pathos of the machine's limitations.

The inhabitants of this society are provided with holograms as entertainment. In two inspired decisions, the providers of entertainment show all the people in the holograms as Negro (none of the people in the corridor are) and the holograms have the consistency of television images. Probably the second effect was a lucky chance. Maybe Lucas could come no closer to the appearance of a real hologram. However the blue, flickering insubstantiality of the image reminds us very well of the holograms' mechanical nature. The various channels offer the impulses that the drugs suppress: a nude woman, a nude man, comedians, a policeman beating a man with a kind of tube. THX subsumes his rage by leaving the device switched onto the sadism channel. While LUH looks on with concern, we hear the thuds of the beating.

The sexual activity substitutes are ghosts, and when THX opens the medicine cabinet to seek some relief from his pain and collapses, the machine says, "What's wrong?.... What's wrong?.... What's wrong?... What's wrong?" LUH cares for him and they make love. Up til this point Lucas has made the film consistently beautiful by focussing on television images, white on white decor, clothing and walls, policemen, escalators, etc. Now Lucas films a voluptuous sequence with, of all things, in this society, shadows. Flesh against white walls is evocative enough; but then Lucas shades his figures by means of back lighting, and gives them much more relief and intimacy.

THX's awakening is not without its drawbacks. Now he cannot attend single-mindedly to his job. He also grows paranoid and worries when others look at him. Also, of course, he now has the responsibility to protect LUH. She reproaches him, "You're going to get us into trouble." He doesn't know what to answer, for never before has he been in a situation where someone he cares for rebukes him. He must try to understand the complexities of human relationships, and he almost balks at the problem. He considers going back onto sedatives, in part so he can perform his assigned tasks, and also because he would no longer need to change himself to accommodate his new condition.

An interesting foil is SEN 5241. SEN has, as he says, a way with computers,

and programs them himself. SEN's room-mate has just died, and as an official team goes through the details, SEN talks to THX. While he talks he chews gum, the perfect pastime in such a world. SEN has arranged that THX will be his new room-mate. Apparently he programmed an incompatibility factor for THX and LUH. THX, knowing of some of SEN's other illegal activities, informs on him.

What he had feared happens, and THX cannot perform his job. The computers quickly realise what is wrong, and he is put in a prison without walls. He sits in an apparently white area. LUH comes to him and tells him she will have a child. But they are soon separated and when THX resists, the officers paralyse him with cattle prods that they carry. We then see a delightful sequence in which a completely automated hospital administers to him. Little grasping arms and other implements give him drugs and even an injection. The director gains some effective comedy from the difference between the literalness of the machine and THX's bewilderment. Lucas has an acute eye and observes such things as the slight puffing of the skin around the area of an injection. This is an object lesson to the dreary, uninteresting mechanics of THE ANDROMEDA STRAIN.

Lucas does not seem to completely think out the sequence of THX's trial. What is the need for human debaters when a computer can more easily and efficiently handle a case like this? In any case THX is convicted and brought back to his prison. Then comes the one truly chilling sequence in the film, when two programmers discuss their equipment, which is a kind of shock therapy machine. They experiment on THX, whom we see on television monitors. Lucas reveals his insight as he shows the two programmers, one familiar with the machine, and the other a transfer from a different area. They give THX rising levels of electrical current until finally he passes out. Meanwhile they discuss the difference between the models of the machine that they are familiar with. THX is, in a way, an extension of the machine, but they don't recognise his uniqueness. The images show THX bent double with pain; he relaxes and then snaps back in a purely nervous galvanic reflex. You will appreciate the accuracy of Lucas' portrait if you have ever heard two engineers discuss the relative merits of two computers or computer languages. In fact, we never see the programmers. We watch THX and a scale that indicates the amount of electricity. After THX passes out we hear, "It seems to be overloading.... 4.6." "Yeah, but the dissolution occurred at 4.5." "Oh, yeah?" comments the newcomer blandly. He receives this uninflected piece of information calmly.

When THX is taken to a prison for the unreformable, an open, endless expanse of white, he meets SEN. SEN is too bland to bear him a grudge and eventually they leave together. Before this, though, both the audience and THX are bored by a number of old men who ramble about possible escape, the necessity for reform, etc. THX realises that the talk will accomplish nothing and walks off. Again, it is a prison in theory rather than in practice, but since none of the other inmates ever walk out, it is effective. In the open space, they meet SRT, a hologram who came to life. He wanted to be real, he tells them, and here he is. They escape into the corridors of the regular society but now they are chased by the police.

SEN becomes separated from THX and SRT, and each explores a different area of this society in flight, but inevitably returns from the city's edges to the centre. Through the communications centre we learn that such hunts involve an operational procedure. A monetary allocation is made and the quarry pursued until that limit is exceeded by 5%. This same rule causes us to admire the machine, rather than otherwise. But again its logic leads to a basically comic vision. Throughout the chase, the film reminds us of current

expenditure. The tension increases, as the police are working against a kind of time limit.

At one point THX stops in a communications room and asks the computer where LUH is. The printout tells him that LUH was "consumed", apparently after she died in childbirth. Her name was reassigned to a foetus. The computer shows on its monitor a row of jars filled with fetuses. We can see on one of them the legend "LUH 3417".

SEN sits down near a group of boys who are playing. In this game they form rows and columns alternately with their outstretched arms. Two boys run through the changing patterns. It is a dramatic presentation of the society. One of the smaller boys' drug units comes off his arm. He shows this to SEN, who puts it back in place and jokes with the boys. The computer's cameras soon sight him, and guards come and take him away. Meanwhile the boys line up and file up an escalator. As they do, a voice murmurs words that are apparently part of their education, "Change, alter, beautiful, valuable, versatile, movable, luxuriant...."

THX steals a car and roars off down a highway. SRT has trouble starting his. When he finally does, he crashes. THX speeds away while motorcycle police follow. On the situation board in the communication centre, we see pursuers gaining on THX. They clock him at 235 mph. Intercut with this, a policeman leads some men around a room of computers and shows them how the system works, tracing the flow patterns. The two policemen following THX crash, and after we see the second thrown some ten or twenty feet through the air, Lucas cuts to a computer board that reads: "Officers in service." In a marvellous deadpan, the counter flicks from 10,107 to 10,106. The chase is a celebration of the senses - the camera alternately watches THX speed by and attaches itself to the car. Lucas emphasises the action in his editing of the tour. Compared with the strictures of society which he shows in the earlier part of the film, Lucas now exults in action and bursts through his restraint.

THX runs through the edge of the city, which so terrified SEN that he turned back. Here sewers are open, the pillars are rusted steel and no one has bothered to whitewash the walls. THX climbs a ventilation shaft to the surface of the planet. The police's budget is overreached, so they are recalled. They call out a last offer to THX: This is your last chance. You have nowhere to go. You cannot survive outside the shell. He continues and they withdraw. The last shot shows THX as he stands outside in the wind, outlined against a bloated orange sun sinking in the pink evening. A bird, then another, flies by.

The theme of THX 1138 is initiation, along with its parallel, metamorphosis. The central thread is the story of THX and the way he becomes an individual. First he gains the use of his physical senses, and then LUH awakens his emotional sense. But it is not love so much as pain which cauterises the partly severed umbilical cord to society. The loss of LUH seals THX from any possible return. This is why THX succeeds and not SEN or SRT. THX is an Everyman, who, like a child becoming an adult, is forced emotionally into an awareness of possibilities that previously he knew nothing about. Lucas describes this process visually in his images of THX. At first he shows us THX and LUH as television images when they open the medicine cabinet. Then we see them in the uniform white on white world. When they affirm their reality, we see their now sensitive flesh against the white. Throughout the film, and culminating in the hunt's hide and seek and the chase's speed ecstasy, Lucas contrasts the positive images with the communication centre's blue flickering monitors.

The other characters also go through changes. LUH, after she gains awareness, becomes absorbed into the machine ("consumed") and her epitaph is a routine computer record. SEN is incapable of change, and thus is the closest of the characters to the society. For, after everything, the stability of the society is one trait that holds promise. We must certainly admit that the society's practices are consistent - it halts a chase for an escaped criminal when the budget is exceeded! We view the metaphors that take place against the background of this unchanging world. For we don't see an Alphaville which is now becoming mechanised but an Alphaville that has achieved its goal. And, I might note, Lucas shot THX 1138 entirely on location around Los Angeles, as Godard filmed ALPHAVILLE in Paris.

SRT, the hologram who came to life, tells THX, "I was stuck in the same circuit for too long. I always wanted to be part of the real world. So I left." He materialises, but, despite a rather charming personality, he is not part of the real world. The fact is that this hologram is more "lifelike" than the automata he tries to join. The "birth" of SRT was visually paralleled by his appearance in the film: he wears white clothes and we cannot distinguish him from the white of walls and floor. He appears as a dot of face, then three dots - face and hands - and finally he literally materialises from the total whiteness to become, when he gets closer, a man. We witness the same process when LUH comes to THX in prison.

At the same time as THX helps build policemen, children are indoctrinated into the society. This indoctrination contains nothing harsh or cruel. The children may be subdued, but they are children all the same, playing games, laughing, and showing curiosity. Their feelings are transformed into data, however, and are externalised. The words they hear will later be the holograms that THX and LUH watch.

Lucas shows us that the society has reached a stability, but when he shows it to us, we realise how it has changed from its analogues in this society. Thus saints become newsprint, and religion is programmed. Ritual is infallible when a machine regulates it. Now the police are very literally the benevolent protectors of public safety; flesh has become steel; one set of limits gives way to another. But the most important metamorphosis is the process that Kevin McCarthy notes in *INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS*: many people let their humanity ebb away, not even aware of the process. In Siegel's film, we see this as a sudden, all at once, externally imposed change. However, Lucas shows his people voluntarily and physically taking suppressants for their souls and hearts. The casual depressants that many take today, and the hard drugs' escape level have all rolled into one simple, universal dose.

I must add a word about the performances. Reviewers who saw THX 1138 as a fifties film maligned the acting. The expressionless acting of Robert Duvall is exactly what the film requires. Before he changes, he never has occasion for expression. Although he has the occasion after his change, he has never seen expressions on the faces of anyone but the holograms. His performance is controlled and quite good. I could say the same for Miss McOmie, who is lovely as the desperate LUH, gambling all for the life of the senses. Donald Pleasance gives the fine portrayal that I've come to expect from him. I must make the point that THX is an Everyman like Bowman in 2001. The acting is "wooden" because the director sees his hero as Man, not THX nor Bowman. He deliberately suppresses individualising characteristics.

Like the ball turret gunner, THX dies - in Donne's connotation, in his usefulness to the state. Within himself a blanket of security rips apart. He comes out of a timeless, if measured world, out of a regular pulsebeat

subsistence and into a world in which tomorrow means more than today and the only clock is the wildly fluctuating one of his own heart. His dilemma, once born, is to live his life in full awareness of his responsibility to it, to his own life. It is a very difficult task, and there are few who can say they have achieved it. But we all try, and, when a work of art wakes us again, we expose our nerves and feel, once more assured, the jangling of the world through our fingertips.

- Barry Gillam June 1971

PRELUDE TO CLARKE - CONTINUED FROM PAGE 18

The clue lies in a conversation between Dirk Alexson and Sir Robert Derwent, the project's chief. Sir Rober, who as the launch approaches, listens to the echoes of the past:

"Until God loosen over land and sea
The thunder of the trumpets of the night..."

Sir Robert who declares with firm passion:

"We who have striven to place humanity upon the road to the stars, make this solemn declaration now and for the future: We will take no frontiers into space!"

Sir Robert is the man who also inspires historian Alexson to understanding: "Interplanetary", Alexson realises, is run by visionaries, "poets if you like", who also happen to be scientists.

Clarke is the visionary. Clarke is the poet. The same Clarke who in PRELUDE TO SPACE, still creaks under the load of technical gadgetry and stereotyped scientific characters which, once put in the freefall of later years, lightened just enough to let the poet soar out from under.

- David W Boutland May, July 1971

BRUCE R GILLESPIE

The Original Fiction Anthologies

PART TWO

ORBIT 6

edited by DAMON KNIGHT

Berkley Medallion S1848 ::
June 1970 :: 222 pages :: 75c

ORBIT 7

edited by DAMON KNIGHT

Berkley Medallion S1900 ::
Oct 1970 :: 206 pages :: 75c

"The trouble with ORBIT," said one Australian s f writer to me, "is that all the stories seem to have been written by Gene Wolfe (or Kate Wilhelm...or James Sallis)." In these two ORBIT volumes, Gene Wolfe writes four stories, Kate Wilhelm three, and R A Lafferty contributes three. James Sallis, Carol Emshwiller, Gardner Dozois, and Thomas Disch have one story each in both volumes. Although Damon Knight tries out novices in ORBIT, he also keeps a basic team of dependable authors.

However the old pros and the new chums manage to sound very like each other. Take Gene Wolfe, for instance, because Damon Knight buys so many of his stories. ORBIT 6 contains Gene Wolfe's REMEMBRANCE TO COME and HOW THE WHIP CAME BACK. In ORBIT 7, his stories are EYEBEM and THE ISLAND OF DOCTOR DEATH AND OTHER STORIES. The last story nearly won a Nebula Award this year. These four stories greatly resemble one another - they share the same faults and virtues.

I don't find it hard to find the faults in these stories. HOW THE WHIP CAME BACK begins with "Pretty Miss Bushnan", a conventional character who makes some effort to think in a conventional manner. "This evening she did her best to look red and green," observes the author, "and in the meantime (she) turned her eyes from them to the cool relief of the fountain." Miss Bushnan's desires are simple, and, under ordinary circumstances, easily met:

If she wanted men in her bed she could find ten any evening, and afterward edit the whole adventure from Sal's memory bank. She wanted a man, but she wanted only one, she wanted Brad...

The problem is that "Brad" is a prisoner, and proposed new world legislation will probably make all prisoners into slaves.

First the author looks at the heroine's private dilemma. He hopes he can fully involve the reader at this point and then guide him towards the general dilemma. Unfortunately, the reader may not sympathise with Wolfe's heroine, and so the author cannot expect him to feel for the general situation. Miss Bushnan is boringly ordinary, not because she is an ordinary person, but because she is an ordinary "romantic heroine". Like most of the "people" who appear in ORBIT's stories, Miss Bushnan has migrated from the pages of Daphne du Maurier and Taylor Caldwell. Miss Bushnan does not talk to kings and repel Regency bucks. Instead, she consults the Pope (the last representative in the world of the Roman Catholic church), and repels conniving United Nations delegates. The writer does not question the purity of her motives. We finally see that Miss Bushnan's manoeuvres are no more noble than the blackmail tactics of the American delegate.

The story fails because it is half-hearted and therefore supports its antithesis. Slavery may return, but Gene Wolfe does not make us feel very concerned. He only rises to the level of melodrama; not even a melodrama about world society, but merely a melodrama of a petty woman who protects "her man". The central ideas of HOW THE WHIP CAME BACK should support a good story. Wolfe sets out to describe a major change in the preconceptions of world society, and the death of a formerly omnipresent global organisation. He tries to show us how a rapidly changing society widens the gaps between conservative and radical social patterns. Why does he fail?

THE ISLAND OF DOCTOR DEATH AND OTHER STORIES (ORBIT 7), provides the missing clues. In this story, Wolfe adopts more complex strategies than in HOW THE WHIP CAME BACK. He begins with a generalisation: "Winter comes to water as well as land." He moves from the general statement, to a particular statement which guides the story; "though there are no leaves to fall." He begins a sentence with the conditional tense: "If you are a boy not wanted in the house you walk the beach for hours." Wolfe tells the story in the second person, a device hard to justify except on the grounds that nobody has used it successfully. A grandiose statement, "Then you go home, knowing that behind you the Atlantic is destroying your work", precedes a sharp move into a detailed locale:

Home is the big house on Settlers Island, but Settlers Island, so called, is not really an island and for that reason is not named or accurately delineated on maps.

In a few sentences Wolfe unsettles the mind of the reader, and prepares him for a wide range of experiences. However Wolfe talks about "Mama" and "Jason". Quickly the situation becomes clear; a child tags behind his mother and her new lover/husband, and the boy doesn't understand or like the situation.

In two pages Wolfe uses more literary techniques more assuredly than did any ten pulp writers. The writer makes the reader live in a small environment, and introduces him to its other inhabitants. He shows the reader much of the boy's vague, immature, feelings of loneliness.

However, the reader may still lose interest in the story by the time he reads the third page. Obviously, the story is "about" the relationship between the boy, his mother, and Jason. Hollywood, not to mention Sophocles, has fairly well covered the topic. Unfortunately Wolfe's people speak Hollywood dialogue and we find it hard to take them seriously. An exchange between the boy and Jason:

"You going to tell your mom how nice I was to you?"

"Uh-huh, sure. You want me to?"

"Tomorrow, not tonight. I think she'll be asleep when we get back. Don't you wake her up." Jason's voice says he will be angry if you do.

"Okay."

"Don't come in her room."

"Okay."

From such threadbare language Wolfe hopes to make an interesting garment. However, Wolfe moves quickly onto the theme which he counterpoints against his first theme. Tackman, the boy, retains the ability to judge his own fantasies. If he can push past them, he will; for the moment, he cannot. In a way, he never does, for Wolfe ends his story with a conventional flourish. A neat situation, ended neatly.

But even if Wolfe had written a satisfactory ending, his story still would have cheated the reader. The story flows subtly from one tone to another, from mood to mood. Unfortunately, it does nothing but flow. The boy talks to Jason and judges him, he meets the characters who inhabit his fantasy world, he meets Dr Black who attends his mother, he talks to "Dr Death" who stands beside him, he reads another chapter of his book... and so on. Wolfe's style is cinematic, non-discursive, its impressions as fleeting as images whirled through a kaleidoscope. However, the reader's eye still whirls with the kaleidoscope's disc at the story's end. Ideas splinter, scenes are half-written, and finally its few interesting notions disappear altogether.

What then is the difference between ISLAND OF DOCTOR DEATH and Kate Wilhelm's SOMERSET DREAMS, also very impressionistic, but which I liked very much? Put simply, Kate Wilhelm writes more interesting words (a tautological judgment if ever there was one). More importantly, Wilhelm provides no neat maps of her heroine's mental landscape within the first few pages of her story. Wilhelm uncovers ideas, not sets them out. Wolfe is both less theoretical and more didactic. As in HOW THE WHIP CAME BACK, he says "This is how all these people think and act" early in his story, and - surprise! - that's exactly how they do think and act.

I'm sure I've picked out Mr Wolfe unfairly. I could say the same about the other stories and writers in these two volumes. Ursula LeGuin's THE END (C 6) is an impeccable piece, but (so to speak) we can see the end long before the story's last line, and I could see little point in the story apart from that last line.

Many of the details in James Sallis' JIM AND MARY G (ORBIT 7) are superb. For instance:

Move the mat so we can open the door. We go park Papa, we seegulls. Frosty foggy air coming in. Back for galoshes, all the little brass-tongue buckles? No the snow's gone. Just some dirty slush. Careful. Down the steps.

"Careful. Down the steps" says father to child, and with him, the reader grasps the child's hand and guides it safely down the steps. But Sallis fails to keep the story on this delicate level. He gives his game away early in the story ("She had broken down only once, at breakfast"; and "Thinking. This is the last time I'll ever do this"). The reader feels for this family threatened with the worst possible loss, but he cannot feel deeply about the total situation, because it only threatens the family on one level. The story remains on this level because the author merely accumulates details, and does not explore them.

I wrote a nasty comment in my notes for this review: "The last thing ORBIT writers do is think." Perhaps I should have left that comment there; of course these writers think, but they throw out the substance of their thoughts, and play with their most trivial accidents.

What happens when some ORBIT writers extend themselves? For a start, you get Thomas Disch's two stories, THE ASIAN SHORE (ORBIT 6), and THE PRESSURE OF TIME (ORBIT 7).

In its first few lines, THE ASIAN SHORE reads much like THE ISLAND OF DOCTOR DEATH:

There were voices on the cobbled street, and the sounds of motors. Footsteps, slamming doors, whistles, footsteps. He lived on the ground floor, so there was no way to avoid these evidences of the city's too abundant life. They accumulated in the room like so much dust, like the heaps of unanswered correspondence on the mottled tablecloth.

Impressions - sights, sounds, and stray thoughts - surround John Benedict Harris, American, student of Ottoman architecture, temporary resident of the Asian shore of Turkey. He disdains "these evidences of the city's too abundant life". His mind moves in slightly strained metaphors - the impressions that "accumulated in the room... like heaps of unanswered correspondence on the mottled tablecloth."

However, the reader immediately enjoys Disch's impressions more than Gene Wolfe's, because Disch writes more euphoniouly and his impressions contain more hints of mystery and new ideas than Wolfe's:

He... stepped out amid a flurry of pigeons into the full dazzle of the noon, the wide splendour of the elevation, sunlight above and the bright bow of water beneath - and, beyond the water, the surreal green of the Asian hills, hundred-breasted Cybele. It seemed, all of this, to demand some kind of affirmation, a yell. But he didn't feel up to yelling, or large gestures. He could only admire, at this distance, the illusion of tactility, hills as flesh, an illusion that could be heightened if he laid his hands, still sweaty from his passage along the catwalk, on the rough warm stone of the balustrade.

Looking down the side of the tower at the empty road he saw her again, standing at the very edge of the water. She was looking up at him. When he noticed her she lifted both hands above her head, as though signalling... The woman continued to call up to him, arms raised in that same hieratic gesture.

Disch builds a fictional tower of carefully selected details, each of which relates to some other aspect of the story. Harris is a critic of architecture, so he thinks in terms of the texture and appearance of building materials. Pigeons crowd around the top of the tower of the fortress of Rumeli Hisar. The pigeons fly away "into the full dazzle of the noon". Harris (and the reader) takes pleasure in "the wide splendor of the elevation, sunlight above and the bright bow of the water beneath." The pigeons leave; everything else is beautiful at a distance. In a few sentences Disch isolates Harris.

Harris fails the landscape, rather than vice-versa: "But he didn't feel up to yelling, or large gestures." Instead he can only take notice of the coordinates of his personal microcosm: "His hands, still sweaty from the passage along the catwalk, on the rough warm stone of the balustrade." Below him waves a woman - she "made no sense" and "continued to call up to him, arms raised in the same heiratic gesture." The woman spoils Harris' enjoyment of his experience - he cannot begin to see the scene from the woman's perspective. Instead he says, "One climbed towers, after all, in order to be alone." Harris does not think out the consequences of this admission, but Disch does.

The woman and a small boy haunt Harris:

When the woman came that night, knocking at his door, it was not a surprise.

And every night, at nine or, at the very latest, ten o'clock.

Yavuz! Yavuz! Calling to him.

He stared at the black water, the lights of the other shore. He wondered, often, when he would give in, when he would open the door.

But it was surely a mistake. Some accidental resemblance. He was not Yavuz.

John Benedict Harris. An American.

THE ASIAN SHORE is primarily a mystery story. We do not ask primarily who is the woman and who is the child. We want to know what they are. We want to know who and what Harris is. Is Harris a Turkish husband and father? Are the Turks phantoms or real people who mistake Harris' identity? And we do not want to know the answers to the mystery - we want to find out all the questions.

The story has a theme upon which all the variations depend. Harris has written a book, HOMO ARBITRANS, which includes the idea that:

...the quiddity of architecture, its chief claim to an aesthetic interest, was its arbitrariness. Once the lintels were lying on the posts, once some kind of roof had been spread across the hollow space, then anything else that might be done was gratuitous.... There was no place in such a scheme for orders, styles, sophistication, taste. Every artifact of the city was anomalous, unique, but living there in the midst of it you could not allow yourself too fine a sense of this fact...

If there were no fixed laws that governed the furbelows and arabesques out of which a city is composed, there were equally no laws (or only

arbitrary laws, which is the same as none at all) to define the relationships woven into the lattice of that city, relationships between man and man, man and woman, John and Janice.

Harris formulates this theory, speaking in the best of taste, employing a sophisticated mind. He does not realize how his ideas might affect his own existence, or how they would affect all existence if applied generally. THE ASIAN SHORE works out Harris' (and possibly Disch's) ideas to their farthest extent. The story unfolds in a series of metaphysical surprises. The results of thought and action coincide, and lead to completely unexpected consequences.

Disch's THE PRESSURE OF TIME (ORBIT 7) is a less interesting piece, because it is more limited. However, within tight limitations, it is very successful. Disch employs some of the affectations of the "ORBIT writers", but escapes most of their cliches.

Like THE ISLAND OF DOCTOR DEATH, THE PRESSURE OF TIME relates the experiences of a child who half understands her social milieu, but must understand the rest of it very quickly. At the story's beginning, Emma, the Irish girl, endures history lessons. A blanket of assorted names, facts, and processes smothers her understanding:

They were learning all about history, the holy martyrs and Rome burning down and if you didn't burn incense for Jupiter you had to go into the Colosseum while the pagans watched. Jupiter is a false god, but we believe in one god the Father Almighty. There was a little girl in the picture too, with a white dress for purity and white flowers in her hair, and Sister Augustine said the holy martyrs should be an inspiring example for every boy and girl.

History is chaos, and so is religion; martyrdom is a vague incomprehensible concept, but you can like the "little girl in the picture too". These symbols of a traditional Catholic background cancel each other out in the girl's mind. How can she fill the vacuum? "The Public Health man... had a white dress with gold buttons, and his hair was gold, too, like tiny gold wires, because he was English." You must take special notice of Englishmen; they are very different from Irishmen. Is the Englishman "Father Almighty" or just a "false god"? Should she worry about the answer?

Isolated pieces of Emma's experience tumble through her mind. Somewhere she knows of "Leonard" and "Sister Mary Margaret", "Cousin Bridie" and the fact that: "Sister Augustine says you don't have to die in England, because they're all heretics there."

The confused reader welcomes the gleam of light - kapoowie! another immortality story! Forty years of science fiction cliches stand poised, ready to fill up the story and drive away all originality.

Disch avoids this temptation, but he does not develop his slender idea as well as he might have. Emma lives in an Irish society more effectively backward than it is now, compared with England. Unable to receive the Immortality treatment, the Irish remain in miserable mortality, while the rest of the world adjusts to a new existence. But Ireland's teachers still indoctrinate as they do now; the streets are still cobbled. Disch implies that the English forced stagnation on the Irish; he does not show how they kept a society changeless.

Emma's mother and her mother's love (even this situation resembles that in Wolfe's story) try hard to ignore wider issues. As relatives die, they maintain normal rituals so that they can forget that the event would not happen in England:

Just before the last hymn everyone had to go look inside the coffin. Her mother lifted her up. He was wearing lipstick and smiling, and she thought he looked nice, because usually he didn't smile... Emma kissed him on the cheek. It was hard, like a doll's.

Emma accepts the situation of death because she does not understand all its implications, but also because the people around her refuse to accept the wider truth; they accept with meekness what they should have lamented in anger.

Emma gradually sorts her way through the falsehoods of her compatriots, and in one defiant gesture at the end of the story, she shows that, even in despair, she understands more about her situation than anybody around her. THE PRESSURE OF TIME is more "realistic", more about a society than ideas, than THE ASIAN SHORE, but in its last pages it almost achieves the intensity of the latter story.

(And, in case anybody is wondering, - yes, I do think ORBIT 5 was a flash in the pan. (See THE ORIGINAL FICTION ANTHOLOGIES, Part 1, SFC 21). I stand by my opinions about ORBIT 5. I'm not completely surprised that ORBITs 6 and 7 failed to achieve the same standard, but at the same time I think Knight will need to work hard to avoid falling into a rut. I wish I had more space to talk about the R A Lafferty stories in these two volumes. CONTINUED ON NEXT ROCK is particularly enjoyable. In ORBIT 6 I enjoyed THE ASIAN SHORE and Carol Emshwiller's DEBUT. In ORBIT 7 I recommend CONTINUED ON NEXT ROCK and THE PRESSURE OF TIME.)

QUARK/ 1 -
A QUARTERLY OF SPECULATIVE FICTION

edited by Samuel R Delany
and Marilyn Hacker

Paperback Library 66-480 ::
Nov 1970 :: 239 pages :: \$1.25

The science fiction magazines appear to be failing and original fiction anthologies (call them "orfas" for short?) seem set to succeed. However, this phenomenon began almost by accident - Carnell succeeded, then Ellison, then Knight, and now every publisher wants to try his hand.

However nobody worked out a rationale for the original fiction anthology.

Knight, and most of the others, collect stories that they like, leave plenty of white space between the print, and call the result an entity. The magazine format still surpasses that of the anthology in many ways: the magazines have room for illustrations, reviews of current books, readers' letters, and other ephemeral features which let readers identify with the magazines' policies, but do not occupy too much room. Anthology editors still work too far ahead of publication dates to include most of these features.

However, anthology editors could print illustrations, critical articles, poems, and tell us the reasons (other than financial) for their publications' existence. The only editors who do these things are Samuel R Delany and his wife Marilyn Hacker, in QUARK/ 1. Delany and Hacker seemed to have prepared

QUARK/ very carefully, and so edited the most successful original fiction anthology that has appeared so far. In this volume they publish drawings by Stephen Gilden and Russell Fitzgerald. Samuel Delany writes a critical essay called CRITICAL METHODS: SPECULATIVE FICTION. "Link" and Helen Adam contribute poems. Paperback Library invest in the most handsome layout yet provided for an original fiction anthology.

Delany and Hacker would have wasted their energies if they had then picked lousy fiction. Fortunately, they haven't -or at least not nearly as much as appears in ORBIT, INFINITY, NEW WRITINGS, etc. I can only guess that the very bad stories were picked to balance the collection, in case the public failed to appreciate the collection's good stories. I can see no other reason why they picked Ed Bryant's ADRIFT ON THE FREEWAY (full of banal journalese, and solved simplistically) or A E Van Vogt's silly CARTHING.

I find it hard to pick the best story in this collection. Joanna Russ' THE VIEW FROM THIS WINDOW must be the best non-s f story ever published in an s f collection. True, on second reading, I notice that Russ hints that her story teller is really an Alienne Living Among Us. In the story's first paragraph she writes, "I materialised in a laboratory rented from the Harvard Special Researches Project, and had to be taught the words for bed, table, chair." On Page 77 Russ even hints that both the lady and her "pickup" spring from the same alien species ("We both belong to that race of neat people who grow up early and stay young for a long long time.") However, I think this sentence, like the story's first paragraph, is probably metaphorical. Unless THE VIEW FROM THIS WINDOW comes from a forthcoming labelled s f novel by Russ, I guess that it is just a good story that the editors happened to buy. Perhaps short story writers can no longer shelter anywhere but under the "s f" banner.

The story begins "with the advent of cold weather" when "this University shrinks into itself". Like a flurry of snowflakes, details of the heroine's life and attitudes flutter past as we read the story's first few pages. The story-teller certainly sees herself as an "alien", a cheeky swimmer against the tide of formless, conventional University life:

...A few hardy atoms like myself still darting past the bunches of people peering doubtfully from the windows of the warmest buildings... This is the joy that only an amphibian can know: waving to windows of faculty offices in the cold, dark-blue evening as I quit work...

Her colleagues wave from windows; she looks through windows, from the outside. She stands apart from her colleagues, and sums up their characters with further snippets of sentences:

There at the glass wall was Bill Beam, so I joined him: a thin, eager, effusive fellow, already a little bald at thirty, hates student actors, an increasingly bad director.

When Bill Beam tries to flirt with her, she tries to brush him off. An interesting person, but just another alien to her.

She always seeks the most luxuriant sights, sounds, and feelings:

There is an L-shaped box of glass and steel built over a waterfall; it lights up like an aerodrome at night, and you can even sit in a glassed-in patio and watch the waterfall go by at the level of your knees, but there is no other place so close to the night: a vast hall of black mirrors.

In quick succession, Joanna Russ shows the University's space and luxury, the frigidity - and freedom - of the "vast hall of black mirrors", and the way it reverses all expected relationships ("the waterfall go(es) by at the level of your knees"). At the same time, this view looks ecstatic and alien.

The story-teller shows a similar attitude towards human relationships. She takes advantage of her position in the University to waste luxuriant quantities of time: "There is always something new: new books at the store, new records, plays, concerts, readings, films, special groups, and when anything comes, everybody goes." A catalogue of enjoyments; again, both tempting and alien. But she views people as if she looks at water sliding down the other side of a pane of glass:

It was a mole-colored, bundled-up, utilitarian crowd, on the whole, with a few pink cashmere sweaters and one girl - only one - in an avant-garde black vinyl dress that crackled violently as she moved, with a sound like pistol shots. Most students dress down.

Russ' telling phrase is, "Most students dress down." The students occupy their places, and she occupies hers. She still needs to define that position. Henry James examined an attitude like her's in A PORTRAIT OF A LADY. The story also reminds me of the film HIROSHIMA MON AMOUR.

Russ tells how the window of her story-teller's viewpoint is broken, but at no time does she give away to sentimentality. Bill Beam introduces a boy, one of his drama students, to the story-teller:

The boy took off his perfectly round-lensed steel-rimmed spectacles, the spectacles of a revolutionary idealist who carries radishes in his pocket when visiting rich friends at dinner, and showed us his naked face.

In vain, the story-teller tries to shut out the boy with all the other people she laughs at. However, his awkwardness and idealism strike her as unexpected. At first she takes no notice of him, but his intensity attracts her:

He told me two things on the way home: his age and the name of his play. He also said quite candidly, "Mr Beam is a failure, isn't he?" and then he told me his name, but I didn't remember it: Alan Something.

"Alan Something" makes himself into a mystery, which the story-teller tries to unfathom. A view through a window makes everything look flat and manageable, like the University staff and students. The story tells how she tries to step through the window. The boy shares an odd harmony with her; he seems

like another alien. Russ writes the diary of a love affair, told from the viewpoint of a complex, hedonistic, supremely self-confident woman. The last few pages contain one of the best love scenes I've read. Maybe THE VIEW FROM THIS WINDOW is science fiction; I doubt it. But if the editors can find more stories of this quality, I think they can ignore pigeon-holes once in a while.

If I say that THE VIEW FROM THIS WINDOW isn't s f, then I don't completely misrepresent the whole book if I talk about it. I find it much easier to pin a "speculative fiction" or "fantasy" label on Gordon Eklund's RAMONA, COME SOFTLY and Thomas Disch's LET US QUICKLY HASTEN TO THE GATE OF IVORY, but these stories' themes have the same universal qualities as Russ's.

In RAMONA, COME SOFTLY, Gordon Eklund's style reminds me very much of Philip Dick's precision and verve. He begins his story indirectly: "The little man's name was Harvey, and he had a bad leg, a thyroid condition, an ulcer, and a job. His job was to gather material for his famous and international column, HARVEY ASKS QUESTIONS..." Harvey asks those questions about Ramona and Adrian and their performance. Hari, "(twenty-four, performer, New York City)" says that Ramona "is soft and swovish and very much angelic." Matthew, "(thirty-eight, doomsayer, and prophet, New York City)" says that "the moment of final doom is swiftly approaching as the Lord moves to wake the multitudes, who will drive the whores, sluts, tarts, and pimps from our land." He's speaking about Ramona. Timothy "(nine, unemployed, New Haven, Connecticut)", after he watches Ramona's performance, says "I don't get it, but Mom says I will, and soon."

Ramona and Adrian are sexual stage "performers". Audiences like their act, but the "neo-Vics" do not. The "neo-Vics" have set (yet another) precise date for the end of the world, and they blame Ramona for everything that's wrong with the cosmos.

Ramona doesn't care much about responsibility or the neo-Vics, or even her "partner" Adrian:

They didn't hate each other; they just never talked. It was strictly a business arrangement, like that between two law partners or two collaborating writers. Strictly a business arrangement, more like Laurel and Hardy than Romeo and Juliet.

Eklund says that the story is set in the 1990s, but it does not really tell about society-as-she-will-be. After all, UH CALCUTTA fulfilled the story's prophecy before it was published. Among other things, RAMONA COME SOFTLY does press the most extreme forms of mass behaviour to their furthest point. In this peripheral way, it is an allegory.

Eklund's prose is cryptic - like Dick, he does not explain his propositions, but elucidates them with the rapid movements of his word patterns:

"Who? Who blames me?"

"Everyone... I used to think it was all going to end."

"End?"

"The world was going to end. We had nothing to fear from fat bloated

Bertha, but you - you were a different story, too good, too close to perfection."

"But it wasn't my fault."

"I thought it was. I thought you ought to kill yourself and save us all. Like Jesus did."

At first the reader might laugh at the notion that Ramona, a professional fornicator, free from guilt, carries mankind's collective guilt on her shoulders. Her view of the matter is cut-and-dried. She adopted her profession because it was the best alternative at a particular time. Certainly she's sinless, but she's also thoughtless. Others think about the lunatic world situation for her.

The world's people gain their wish fulfillment from her. The Bomb hasn't destroyed people, so they are left with the more intolerable alternative, living together. Eklund shows people as molecules in a maelstrom, actors in a play without director or writer. Like Joseph Heller in CATCH 22, Eklund fires away at his themes, attacking from every possible angle, and sees through the eyes of all the characters.

Ramona leaned across the table, feeling Ulak's lips as tiny chips of ice. He whispered: "All the world is a stage."

Ramona pulled away and rubbed her ear. "That's paranoid," she said. "And stupid."

"Unoriginal, as well," Ulak said. "But it's what you believe."

"Yes," she said.

"And you're wrong."

....They found a man at the corner. His eyes were white, and his flesh was pale. He wore a heavy winter jacket, twenty years out of date. An engraved sign dangled from his neck:

DIEGO MORTON CUNNINGHAM (1954-1985)

Designer of Prefabricated Rome.

Eklund begins with the cliché "All the world's a stage", assents to it, and denies it, within a few sentences. If one acted on a world stage, one would still retain the illusion of self-destination. If no one controlled the stage, or even if somebody did, the props would still remain meaningless, part of a "prefabricated Rome". Ramona is the only person who retains a belief in "signs", in scraps of meaning that might provide some guidance. In the story's eerie finale, Eklund asks the question -- If I give Ramona the power to "save the world", does it exist, and should she bother to save it?

Eklund pares his prose to short sentences, strips his images of meanings until they contain a host of meanings, and carves a story that is tough, hard, and durable. He builds a unique landscape; not the world we see around us, but a world whose principles may temporarily elude our perceptions.

We have all thought about the principles of LET US QUICKLY HASTEN TO THE GATE OF IVORY, by Thomas M Disch, but our views may face in the opposite direction to the author's. In this story, Mickey and Louise, brother and sister, enter a cemetery, a garden of death, to pay tribute to their buried mother and father. They park the Volkswagen in the car park; and set out to find the grave. All looks simple, cheery, and green, "more like a golf course than a cemetery."

Mickey and Louise move past the headstones (their legends interpolated to one side of the text) which carry such cheerful messages as "From Their Labor Now They Rest" and "Into Thy Hands My Lord".

"So many," she said. "I had not thought death had undone so many."

"Oh, it's not bad, really," Mickey said. "The real trouble will be in twenty, thirty years' time.... It will be getting cramped then."

The first of Disch's little jokes - the last thing Mickey and Louise think about is death. They conveniently avoid the subject and merely wander through the signs of death.

Mickey and Louise mainly worry about each other:

They waited out the rainstorm under the pine, telling each other stories about Europe and the high school where Mickey taught physics and algebra and coached the basketball team, about the whole sick mess with Lesley and about Joyce's hundreds of spiteful, sponging relations. It was the best talk they'd managed to have since Louise had come to town.

Disch mocks the two of them, but he does not yet say why. In Mickey and Louise two worlds have been stored, unopened for a long time. Trivial details tumble out when they unlock the doors. Having just discovered these unrelated facts about each other, they regard them as important because they are newly discovered. In one way, Disch mocks them for their lack of self-consciousness, for the ease with which each has ruined his or her own life:

"In his own way he was quite fond of me. Besides, you forget - he was famous. In the set we moved in, most women would have done the same dumb thing. It's a different world."

"And you say that you knew from the first how it would turn out."

"When I thought about it. Perhaps that was the determining reason. Maybe it was just the kind of marriage I wanted, a kind of pantomime..."

While they admit each other's failures to each other (defending their egos at the same time) they rest beside a tombstone that reads, "God Is Love".

Disch cannot laugh at them for becoming lost in a cemetery: he plays God and "loses" them himself. Disch certainly mocks their, and our, ideas of death. He ignores our worst fears, for this "maze of death" is a heaven. I don't know whether Disch has read Philip Dick's purgatory, UBIK, or not; Disch's story certainly presents an interesting counter-view.

Disch's "heaven" is not a place of judgment, but one of reconciliation. Mickey and Louise, who have not seen each other for years, find that the only company each one likes is the other. At first, Mickey makes strenuous efforts to escape the cemetery. The two walk all day, but eventually the cemetery asserts its own superiority.

"But we took our direction from the sun," Louise objected.

"The sun! And what direction would that be? There is no sun." And indeed the light now issued from the clouds with such perfect uniformity that this was not any longer a viable strategy. There were a few areas of somewhat more intense brightness, but these seemed to be distributed at random through the prevailing gray.

All their lives Louise and Mickey had taken their bearings from easily recognisable markers, like "the sun", social conventions, time, and distance. The markers gone, no exterior markers except gravestones point the way to truths. The light of self-discovery now appears uniform, distributed at random". In "death" (and I haven't forgotten the Elizabethan meaning of the word) they gain some sort of freedom to seek truth; now they can begin again.

Disch makes his metaphysics pleasantly unexplicit, but he evokes such ideas as effectively as in most of his other stories (especially DESCENDING). Has God popped Mickey and Louise into his mouth, so to speak, or did they step through some "temporal gap", as they would have done in a story from the 1950s? The most important thing is that the duo accept the situation and begin to enjoy it.

Then is QUARK/ 1 a collection of religious parables? It contains many other possibilities, although stories like Eklund's and Disch's remind me of the commentator who called science fiction a genre of "Jewish fairy tales". Add Protestant fairy tales as well, and you might cover most of the field. Writers for QUARK/ don't describe gadgets, but possibilities of existence and thought. Like most s f writers, these people rarely slice into the meat of their ideas. Stories like Joan Bernott's MY FATHERS GUEST, and Gardner Dozois' THE SOUND OF MUZACK, read like "ORBIT stories", or even worse, "F&SF stories". For me, the best stories are the fables - R A Lafferty's THE CLIFF CLIMBERS, and the stories I've already discussed. Christopher Priest's FIRE STORM contains many interesting possibilities, but Priest smothers them with a bit too much fast action, fire and brimstone. Hilary Bailey's THE DOGMAN OF ISLINGTON, an energetic English farce, fits no pattern, but I find it very enjoyable.

While Samuel Delany and Marilyn Hacker allow freedom to their writers, demand the best from them, and edit a "package" which compliments its contents, they will maintain this standard. After one issue, QUARK/ is already the best of the original fiction anthologies.

- Bruce R Gillespie May 1971

(NB: Next issue, Richard Delap will write the third part of THE ORIGINAL FICTION ANTHOLOGIES. He reviews UNIVERSE 1, CLARION, and QUARK/ 3. Since I wrote the above article, I've heard that Paperback Library have suspended publication of QUARK/ "until further notice". Why not give this enterprise a trial since so much rubbish remains in print?)

In PILGRIMAGE TO EARTH, Robert Sheckley combines biotechnical and cultural change. A colonist visits an Earth he has never experienced before. "Love Inc." makes him happy by delivering to him a girl who falls madly in love with him. The lovers experience a wonderful day, but their happiness must come to an end. "Love Inc." conditions its employees psychotechnically so that they truly and romantically love their clients. Soon they are "reprogrammed". The organisation blots out all memory of their prior experiences from their brains. The new customer meets a virginal being who offers him all the pleasures of "true love". The story is very well-written and is also very caustic. Regrettably, the main idea is not just a collection of fantasies. We could really put such an idea in practice, although, of course, not with methods known today. Sheckley invents a very sophisticated kind of prostitution. After she has finished working for Love Inc., the girl receives back her original personality. She cannot remember the events that took place in the story. Sheckley's notion is interesting - that if the girl cannot remember the effect of her past actions, she can have no conscience about them. However, the whole idea has a flaw - the girls must submit themselves voluntarily to Love Inc. in the first place to gain a contract with the corporation. The writer cannot say that the girls are to tally innocent.

VI In this context, I'll permit myself to add here a few remarks on de Sade's work, for we have inherited his literary influence in the form of a specific sub-group of fantastic literature. Of course sadistic behaviour is no fantasy. Nobody today knows a really satisfactory answer to the psychological and socio-technical problems of sadism; how such impulses may be socially tamed, averted and used in their sublimated forms for the benefit of the sufferers. Like many other sexual aberrations, sadism finds expression in pornographomania, in fantastic projections.

For instance, look at the case of the Marquis de Sade. The Marquis, called by some sadologists "The Godlike", expressed himself in literature because he was in prison, where he could not commit the deeds he desired. (He was imprisoned because of his earlier sexual crimes.) He was a highly educated man of no mean talent, and therefore he quickly realised that a mere description of sexual activities is not an adequate substitute for their real expression.

Literature soon loses its power of expression if readers use it exclusively as a source of substitute satisfaction. Not only does it not satisfy the yearning (and the same can be said of all kinds of impulses, including the appeasement of hunger), but also literature's functions extend far beyond the description of purely physical occurrences. If literature only provides a substitute for immediate contacts with reality, then it is doomed to lose the contest with real life. Literature only achieves its full value when the actions depicted can be perpetrated by no other means than language. Therefore, in principle, literature can depict occurrences which can never take place, but which human beings may find attractive. So any aspiring pornographer should be wary of one trap. Continued use of tabooed descriptions, inflates language and dulls the reader's experience. Such pornographers try to repeat some fleeting excitement by describing in close detail the nature, appearance, and the taste of sexual organs in actu. Increasingly such works read like anatomical-physiological handbooks. A reader may find that stimulation changes into revulsion, and so writers of pornography are inevitably subject to the law of diminishing returns. Not only do such authors prostitute proper literary methods, but they attract and stimulate immature, primitive people whose passions are weak. An author

who writes constant descriptions of physical sexual activity because he is lazy eventually finds that his methods are doomed. I've almost begun to write a compendium for successful pornographers, but that's where the search for knowledge can lead.

De Sade quickly realised that he must write about psychological and cultural phenomena as well as the purely biological. A real woman, even a totally anonymous and even unconscious one, may adequately satisfy one's yearnings, because real intercourse doesn't necessarily depend upon the cultural background as an additional source of pleasure. De Sade achieved his great (although, of course, morally black) fame after he decided to depict the impossible, but still imaginable, because only in this way could his works gain their power. He reaches the peak of the gruesome-fantastic in the sexual field when he describes the deeds of Cardinal Vespoli, who thirsts to achieve at the same time the most abominable and the most desirable sexual act. This papal father confessor intends to rape the Madonna herself. So impossible is the task that he cannot actually accomplish this deed, but he tries to approximate it as closely as possible. The Cardinal will not disguise a whore as the mother of God, because he will be aware that the woman is acting. Also he recognises that the woman would also be aware of the deception, and will not believe in her identity as the Most Holy Virgin. Therefore the clever Cardinal begins to search for a madwoman who suffers from the delusion that she is the Madonna in person. He will rape her, and therefore approach as closely as possible the most terrible sexual perversion possible in the realm of Christian culture. Psychologically he succeeds in his aims, for not only does the raped woman resemble the Most Holy Virgin, but in her whole being she is convinced that she is the mother of God. When treated in this way, the importance of the victim's biological and corporeal characteristics diminish and disappear into the background. The selected victim's cultural status (here even transcendental or holy) is now more important than her purely sexual qualities. One cannot reach beyond the gruesome sexual fantasy of this kind of literature, scoured ahead by the sexual hunger of an aberrant desire. This realm of fantastic and visionary happenings wholly exhausts the limits of the imaginable.

I will sketch the algorithm of such a creation in this way: the writer realises those phenomena which are most stringently forbidden within the sphere of a given culture. The writer attacks culture head on, because it is that culture which defends morality and innocence and the eminence of virginity. If we look at this idea from the viewpoint of a comparative anthropologist (rather than that of a literary critic) we can see that it makes an attempt to destroy and shatter the taboos, prohibitions, and norms of culture. In short, de Sade makes the hazardous attempt to destroy culture itself.

However such a program contains its own contradiction. Even if someone completes such a task, in his final success the perpetrator robs himself of the chance to further satisfy his pleasure. He needs the existence of culture. He can only revel in his black joy while he faces the immaterial shields and weapons which try to protect his selected victims from attack. De Sade had to make an attempt to create an anti-culture - but those ideas I've already discussed set the boundaries of the progress of de Sade's further development. Such an anti-culture contains these rules - that the best deserve the worst fate, the clean shall be made unclean, the noble abased, the virginal raped - but always with their own co-operation. Now we can see why the problem of clear consciousness plays such an important role in the works of the "Godlike" Marquis. Those people selected as victims should obey the rules of anti-culture, but at the same it is extremely important that they should be fully aware of the horrors they commit. The good and

loving father must rape his own daughter while his own father looks on, and an old man dies because his son poisoned him. Through these orgiastic and brutish incidents which interconnect with and amplify each other, the whole work becomes an exhibition of anti-culture. Not only does de Sade heap up fantastic and macabre incidents in his works, but he makes their structures into fairy tales, only with inverted structures. In fairy tales only good triumphs; without exception in de Sade's stories only the bad guys gain the final victory. However the whole story continues to allude to the existing central culture, because the story's incidents only gain meaning from that culture's features. Sometimes de Sade's successors imitated some of the elements in his work. However, they couldn't grasp the logically coherent foundations of this creation of hell. The general rule of inversion is that the value of all the symbols in the existing culture must be negated. The "negative culture" which arises from this process equals the accomplishment of all possible nihilistic pleasures.

VII It is not accidental that de Sade's work originated in the Western culture. Other societies contain sexual aberrations at their statistical extremes. No other culture but Christianity has banished sexual phenomena so totally from its life, and so locked them up. Since Christianity regards sex as evil, and virginity and asceticism as ideals, de Sade, driven by strong impulses, felt "forced" to reverse these value relationships as far as possible. Other societies also contain sexual aberrations as statistical extremes, but they don't banish sex altogether. However, as this has happened, we shall find it extremely difficult to change the condition which crystallised.

True, there has been a recent reaction - of whole societies - away from the inhibition and enclosure of sexual impulses. One of its manifestations is the so-called "sex wave". However we don't see a cultural action (a truly independent movement which would set up its own goals and strive after them) but a reaction. Because this reaction has no cultural qualities, it is a very dangerous phenomenon. "Sex is fun" is the provocative answer to the slogan, "Sex is sin and filth." But if we really mean, "Sex is only fun" then we act like a child who refuses to wash its neck, to spite its mother. While sex is considered as fun, it cannot generate its own independent values. It becomes merely one of the passing pleasures of a consumer society. For instance Christianity has never allowed the idea that adults had a duty to teach their youth through sexual initiation. However, in some ancient cultures, experienced women performed this duty of initiation for young men. Today an enlightened sexologist can only regret that our culture won't allow any similar social action. Sex education in schools is something quite different; teachers merely attempt to substitute purely empirical knowledge for positive cultural norms in the field.

What are positive norms? They include all precepts that aid the well-being of other people. Empirical science cannot supply precepts of this kind, for empiricism explores only existence, but keeps silence about ethics. The following example shows the difference between empirical neutrality about cultural norms and a systematic evaluation of them: If prostitution disappeared because poverty disappeared, humans who cannot satisfy their sexual impulses because they make bad sexual partners (because they are old, ugly, neurotic, etc) would face a social vacuum. Unable to satisfy their sexual impulses in a socially valuable way, such people would form a reservoir of sexual aberrations. Charitable prostitution might provide a saving help for such people. In a spirit of good-natured willingness, others may make sacrifices to provide for the sexual wishes of these people.

However, even if we decide to make sexual benevolence a socially valuable and noble action, we cannot enforce it as a norm in the cultural sense. In vain could we enforce "sexual availability" by administrative measures. We could make the transition to charitable sex only in a culture which traditionally considers sex as sublime.

For a long time such a change has been impossible in the West. Here, abrupt change has taken another direction: a change from the judgment "Sex is sin" to "Sex is fun". But people who think of sex as primarily pleasant and pleasurable could not perform it as an altruistic service. Contemporary culture may evolve in several different directions, but its present state excludes many directions. We can only conjecture about its variations, in the same way as we conjecture about the result of a game of chess. When playing chess, any given situation rules out many moves. With force we may impose several types of behaviour, but we cannot make people internalise any new independent values. But in the sexual field, as in any other, a person will only undertake charitable activity of his own free will, directed by his own internal values. One could write about this problem in an s f story; a dangerous undertaking because one can all too easily slip into pornography. Using this theme as an excuse, a writer might offer descriptions of lecherous old men's demands upon noble Girl Scouts. But the whole field of sex inherently offers many traps of this kind.

VIII Today we can discern other evolutionary tendencies. In SHORT IN THE CHEST, Idris Seabright writes one of the best descriptions of the total socialisation of sex. In a future USA, the government softens the social frictions and conflicts between different branches of the military service (the rivalry between the Army and Navy is well-known) by enforced prostitution of all members of the forces. A female officer receives the "copulating order", including a detailed outline of the purpose "inter-service" intercourse will serve. Against this cultural background the author tells her funny anecdote. The story is very penetrating for it analyses the culmination of complex trends of our technological age as they affect sexual life.

Our technologically based culture aims to make everything utilitarian. We now use all those values that were originally autonomous, to further the "great whole". Today extra-individual agencies enlist the aid of sex for their purposes, just as all kinds of advertising make use of sexually attractive characteristics. (Frank Herbert's AWF LIMITED shows us similar notions about the industrialisation of sex, although his version is more nebulous and less penetrating.) The establishment shows a tendency to rob all citizens of their private lives. Not only do outside pressures direct people's behaviour, but they manipulate their most intimate impulses, and therefore convert those impulses into the oil and grease of the machinery of state. They let people retain their sexual pleasure, for with its aid they can weld together the elements of society's structure, and so guarantee themselves an extra advantage. The end result is a complete alienation in the field of sex.

Youth reacts negatively to this tendency, but its rebellion degenerates into chaotic promiscuity. They don't make love for money, or careers, or the advantages gained; they make love as a symbol of freedom, a flag of protest. Therefore people have fleeting, anarchic, unscrupulous sexual relations. The protestors' half-baked reactions replace and devalue sex as an independent value, only - as it were - their reaction flies off in the opposite direction. These people don't present society with the core of a new hierarchy of values, but only with a reaction of protest. The derivative

behaviour of the hippies and yippies contains as little intellectual independence as the rites of the Elack Mass.

The omnipresent marketplace of society complicates this reaction even further. Any form of behaviour that can be exploited economically will be commercialised. As a result, the structure of society splits schizophrenically and contradictorily, because the establishment tends to take over even the private sphere, but at the same time the laws of the marketplace allow it to work against this tendency. However, these two parts of a complex trend affect different social levels. I cannot possibly make an exact analysis of the resulting process here; especially as sex is only one of the many elements drawn into this vortex. It is possible to make such an analysis, and also make a general prediction about developing tendencies. And who in literature should perform this task but writers of sociological science fiction?

IX I have already noted the paralysis of science fiction writers when they deal with sociological themes. Therefore I must sketch some variations on themes which fiction has barely explored so far. But if I can note in passing such exploratory attempts, I will do so.

A. In s f we can only find a few attempts to write an orgiastic vision of a society which provides gigantic pleasure amplifiers. In his story CAGE OF ORCHIDS, German s f author Herbert W Franke showed the absurdity of an hedonistic line of thought. However, even though he describes thinking "specimens", kept alive by robots, he still doesn't present the "final hedonistic solution to the question of existence". His brains no longer think. They remain in a state of pleasurable well-being, as if in Nirvana. Why so tame a solution? In a story that presented absolute hedonism, the subjects should writhe around in spasms of eternal orgasm, shut in underground chambers, watched by their faithful robots.

In THE SILVER EGGHEADS, Fritz Leiber describes a technology of android bordellos. The book has two major weaknesses: (1) It was written in the Baden-Powell era of s f, and therefore the author could not explore the more dangerous possibilities of his themes, and (2) the author rather awkwardly transfers sex into "the robotic mode". Leiber could have reached a conclusion that was far more anthropologically and philosophically interesting if he had written a whimsical story or a freewheeling pasquinade about the way evolution has shaped our bodies. When the writer first tackles the topic of sexual amplification, his ideas are so painfully inert that all he can suggest is the idea of multiplied, strengthened sexual intercourse and sexual organs.

However, if a writer extrapolates about the direction of sexual evolution, he may merely turn some classical novel into a piece of bold pornography. For instance a writer could change GULLIVER'S TRAVELS into a "pornographic novel" if he makes the hero into the sex partner of either the Lilliputians or the Brobdignagian giants. (Perhaps some writer has already done this; I don't specialise in pornographic literature.)

A writer could invent more interesting and penetrating stories if he turned in quite another direction. A future neural engineer might change the brain's circuits so that events that now seem sexually neutral would be linked with sexual lust. The smith, the undertaker, and the stone mason would undergo the greatest pleasure, even when carrying out the most exacting and tiring tasks, if they experienced orgasm then they performed those tasks. Bio-technology could develop these newly invented compulsions, so that they drove

human beings to do those things which gave them most pleasure. A writer could fictionalise this theme in a number of forms.

B. So far, s f writers have hardly exploited the android theme sexually. They have explored the theme in only a fragmentary way and in only the most primitive translations. David Bunch adopts an attitude which strikes me as superficial. In several stories he explores the idea that human beings are aggressive beasts who strive after filth, lust, and decay. Human beings are that, sometimes and partly; but a writer cannot take account of the whole complexity of mankind and still regard such a portrayal as true. A writer must develop a work of s f consecutively: he describes the parameters of the physical environment and those of the cultural environment. Then he must calculate the parameters of the intellectual conditions attained within those environments, so he may show how they form an autonomous value.

A writer may find that a world which produces androids at will makes an interesting field for psychological experiments. In such a world, we would house anybody's simulacra in our cellars. How would an average human being act if he had this (even horrible) freedom? Yes indeed, android politicians, movie stars, relatives, friends, their daughters and wives, all in your sound-proof cellar.... A BOTTLE OF AMONTILLADO amplified a million times. I won't go into further detail. Writers interested in such possibilities should make an effort for themselves to invent the most interesting possible psychological and technological variations on this theme.

Among these, I could list ideas which I've treated in my own books. Here is a short list:

I. A chemical agent telepathically transmits feelings (and not thoughts) from brain to brain, and makes possible the collective experience of sexual pleasure (Altruisin in CYBERIADA).

II. A psychodrug removes all sexual pleasure. People may still have intercourse, but now they find it just hard physical work. In its gaseous form, the chemical may be used in crypto-military attacks against enemy countries. People affected show no desire for procreation, and so their race is threatened with extinction (a story in THE STAR DIARIES OF IJON TICHY; again in PERFECT VACUUM).

III. A human being's sensory perceptions are switched into those of another's brain (not necessarily for sexual purposes, although the recipient may consummate intercourse pro procura, from a distance). (SUMMA TECHNOLOGIAE, and a story in CYBERIADA. In THE STAR MAKER, Olaf Stapledon presented similar ideas some 35 years earlier).

IV. Industrial automata are given the ability to procreate themselves, according to the principle of John von Neumann. Instead of procreating according to plan, they develop sexual aberrations - to a certain degree they become "onanists", "homosexuals", and "fetishists" (for instance, an intellectronic automaton rapes a sewing machine). (A story in THE STAR DIARIES OF IJON TICHY.)

V. An electronic brain tries to seduce the only human aboard a rocket (the pilot). It talks to him "in tongues" - it invents fictitious females, and uses their voices (MLOT - THE HAMMER). The story ends before the human male and the machine become sexually dependent. (This was a serious, non-humorous story.)

I don't have enough space to quote any more examples. With one exception (V), these examples are not completely implausible for all times and places. They form part of an arsenal of instruments which may influence sexual experience. Possibly I could invent them in large numbers, but a writer would find no value in producing notions like these if he lost sight of the real possibilities of the theme as well as its rewarding literary variations.

True, the majority of the public don't care about the cognitive value of s f. Usually people don't take notice of fictional happenings if they are proposed in science fiction, even though the same happenings would be strongly condemned in "normal" fiction. A case in point is PLANET OF THE APES (Franklin Shaffner's film, not the novel by Pierre Boulle). The last astronaut is attracted erotically by a girl who is a remnant of a human race grown dumb. The script-writers give their blessing, as it were, to this love affair between a highly intelligent man and a moronic girl. (Because she is too dumb to speak, she is psychiatrically on the lowest level of imbecility, as will be her offspring). No reviewer took offence at that part of the story. But the scientifically trained hero must be aware of the consequences of such a relationship. But nobody thinks of these things in a genre guided by its own imbecility.

-C. Very soon we will be able to divide motherhood into two separate stages.

Doctors will place the impregnated ovum of a woman into the womb of another woman. Then we have a biological mother, from whose ovaries the ovum is taken, and who gives the ovum its hereditary factors; and the pregnant mother who feeds blood to the embryo through her placenta, and gives birth to the child. This second mother, who suffers all the pain of both pregnancy and childbirth, resembles a nurse who takes on the job, as it were, backwards in time.

After popular essays were published about this prospect (in England, if I'm not mistaken), some young women sent in offers to play the role of birth-giving mother, for financial reward. This innovation which awaits us contains psychological as well as socio-cultural consequences. Considered in a general way, this process is important for its negative social value. New biotechnical methods like this introduce totally new factors which can only lead to further social stratification. We can see that people who have money, special resources, or any other privileged positions, will gladly find in this new development an easy way to avoid all the strains of pregnancy or birth. A woman in such a position may even have as many children at the same time as she wants, for, in principle, a whole herd of "rented" women can carry her children. Until now, all men have been unequal only according to economic, professional, and political situation. Now we can see the possibility of a new, biological inequality on the horizon (and the effect may only be emphasised if doctors carry out effective organ transplants and rejuvenation techniques). Until now, all living people have "democratically" shared the same biological fate. Now there is a means of "biological exploitation".

We may also face innovations in fatherhood. Considered from a purely rational point of view, we may consider it as wrong that people should desire children who are similar to them. Maybe they can have children who are as beautiful, sane, and intelligent as possible.

The increase in population pressure will lead to great normative changes in the future, and the force of the pressure will increase along with these changes. The later a general reorientation occurs, the more violent and guesome will be its effects. If there is no cultural reorientation, population pressure will stop "automatically" at its peak - checked by the evolutionary pressure

of mass extinction and the struggle for survival. We may plan to stabilise the population in several possible ways: (1) We forbid all procreation except for some legally privileged people. (2) We seed impregnated ova into the bodies of women who would like to have their own children (i.e. biological children), but who are not allowed to have them because of their hereditary factors. Then we would have an historically new type of adoption, where couples have children who are the offspring of other people, perhaps the anonymous donors of seed and ova. (3) We find partial solutions, such as that described by Anthony Burgess in THE WANTING SEED. In that book, the authorities encourage homosexual relationships because they are sterile. As well they secretly organise forms of mass murder so they can destroy the population surplus.

If we develop gene-engineering, the present division between "fatherhood" and "non-fatherhood" will dissolve, and become a continuous spectrum. We will have men who are, say, 40, or 60, or 85% fathers, according to how many genes of the male seed were taken from other men, or replaced by artificially synthesised genes (selected to produce desired bodily features). Parallel to this change, we would find that parents would be much less worried whether or not a child is the issue of his parents.

Eventually we may develop the conditions for generally applied ectogenesis. In this way, sexual behaviour becomes completely free and independent. Finally noone would have the empirical basis to condemn abnormal or perverse sexual conduct. Sex may lose in importance, or gain something. We may "tame" it and make it inconsequential. On the other hand, we may use technological means to turn it into the centre of an orgiastic culture.

We cannot regard "defused" sex as important. It would become a socially approved game. Under such conditions, it would be insulting, or even indecent, not to fulfill the sexual wishes of another person, if the predominant moral practice gave one person the acknowledged right to ask others for the fulfilment of his sexual wishes. Also, it would become indecent for one person to monopolise a sexual partner. Under these conditions, we would condemn "romantic love" and its main feature, sexual obedience, as abnormal behaviour. Concepts like faith, jealousy, and treason, would become void. If a person showed such traits, society would consider him sick, as "hyper-erotically fixated", and would probably cure him of the complaint. People won't have "sexual affairs", with long histories of strong feelings and obedience syndromes, for they won't have an opportunity to accumulate such depressed, barely repressed impulses. No lover could rebel against the barriers of social, erotic, or economic taboos, because those taboos would not exist. Therefore no person could be a "lover" in our sense. One person would merely ask another person for some slight favour, just as today, one person asks another to play a game of chess or tennis. I believe that love would still exist, but only as an "underground movement" of the subculture. Therefore we would face the perfect inversion of Victorianism, when the platonic ideal took the spotlight, while sexual values remained underground.

We may find some compromise situations, but none of them would rule out the possibility that a sexual subculture might develop. Culture is made up of commandments and prohibitions, and prohibitions automatically imply a defiant counter-culture. We can only rule out such possibilities if we make our own evolutionary innovations - if, for instance, we fundamentally reshape man's complete bodily (including sexual) characteristics. If we speculate about a thousand year program of planned and controlled auto-evolution of our species, then we open up a whole new range of combinations and creations.

X The theme of Man the "self-creator" has moved right away from the scope of fantasy. However we should hardly be surprised that science fiction remains wholly silent about this topic. Remember that s f writers have said little about a range of more modest social and cultural combinations. From its beginnings until today science fiction writers have stuck to the most unlikely extremes of the spectrum of social possibilities. They have always constructed their stories in a brash and primitive way.

During the present era of freedom of thought, I find it astonishing that science fiction shows a self-mutilation, and a castration of the imagination and the quest for knowledge. In part the reason is that s f writers rely on feedback from the more obtuse sections of the audience, and so we find a circulos vitiosus of fossilised contents which can only be justified by commercial considerations. Indeed we can partly blame the whole complex trend of literary development on this aberration. We can define this peculiarity thus: We would think it totally incredible if we received the news that either Jean Paul Sartre, Saul Bellow, or Alain Robbe-Grillet had written a novel about astronauts. On the other hand we would regard it as quite likely that Sartre, Bellow, or Robbe-Grillet could write a novel about a madman who believes that he is an astronaut. Today world literature's complex evolutionary tendencies have blazed a path towards psychological and constructional deviation, engaged in a quest for the original-abnormal, the pathological, for estrangement - towards the twilight of reason, a clouding in fog; towards schizophrenic disturbances, illogical incoherence, or the semi-coherence caused by it all. Literature is no longer the advance guard of rational knowledge. In a world of universal and continuously accelerating change, the only, and last, constant factor appears to be a pathological-psychological state, for the "inner space" of madmen, cut off from life, appears as a relic which connects the incomprehensible present with the well known past. In a world that is unfathomable, because it is incomprehensible, even literature begins to speak with an incomprehensible voice.

In speaking this way, of course I haven't explained the growth of such a trend, but I note its existence as a fact. For over a decade, s f writers have tried to make a connection with "mainstream" literature. To do this they have adopted the tactics of mimicry (e.g. the "New Wave" writers).

S f writers ape the manner and stylistic forms of "mainstream" literature because they lack their own structures of essential ideas and language. Here I will dare to make a prediction about the future - that if they imitate "mainstream" literature, s f writers will lose their exploratory powers rather than become accepted by the "mainstream" and acknowledged as equal members. We cannot compare the s f writer's status to that of the American negro who, when he asks for equality, wants to maintain all his cultural characteristics, and wants to enrich them with the white man's culture. At present the aspiration of the s f writer is like a negro who tries to bleach his skin and make his curly hair straight. In short, an imitative s f writer resembles a negro who totally renounces all his intrinsic qualities. When he does this, he becomes no more a white man than science fiction succeeds in becoming a branch of "normal" literature. Not all the experiments of "mainstream" writers have been fruitless. But whereas a talented author shows the torn and fragmentary aspect of his intuitive vision, his imitators only make smoke-screens, behind which they can hide their inner emptiness and incompetence. If science fiction writers try to hide behind mysterious word mists, then science fiction will disappear.

We know far too little about cultural change, and the destiny of civilisation. We can only remedy our semi-knowledge if we do more research, more thinking,

and discover more meaning. Science fiction writers can explore those paths of mankind's development which today's ethnocentric literature can never explore. Torn between the extremes of utopia and dystopia, under the spell of doom, science fiction writers don't make any attempt to give free rein to the intellect.

Is there no chance of improvement, either in our world or in science fiction? This I cannot believe.

FOOTNOTE

1¹ When I say here that a work of erotic literature "stimulates us sexually" all I mean is that any piece of literature which we consider, receive, understand, or evaluate, cannot affect us in any way other than as sexual beings. We can understand the behavioural customs described in a piece of literature only to the extent that the work corresponds to the structures of body and mind. We cannot understand the content of religious works unless we know the concept of "transcendence", and we must know this concept in order to make a "metaphysical reaction" to such works. In a sense, erotic literature stimulates us sexually in the same way as religious literature stimulates us "metaphysically". Therefore we don't judge the value of a work if we call it "stimulating literature", but we only describe its effect.

By the way, in our culture, sexual and religious spheres bear close similarities to each other. On the scale of values of both sublimated erotica and monotheist religion, love is the most important quality. Sexual aberration corresponds to religious heresy, and current social trends have freed both religious beliefs and sexual practices. At the lower end of the scale, erotica turns into sexual fetishism, whose practitioners ignore the psychological presence of their partners. On the lowest step of the religious ladder stands magic, whose practitioners invest magical objects with intrinsic power. A metaphysically sublimated system of beliefs make the sacred objects symbols of the transcendence beyond.

- Stanislaw Lem 1971

(**brg** I completely rewrote this article from Franz Rottensteiner's original translation. Franz made fifteen changes to my retranslation, and commented: "Of course, the whole thing reads much better now, and there are relatively few outright misunderstandings. What I note is a debatable tendency to change general statements into specific ones: e.g. page 44, "When the writer first tackles ... organs." This is unfair to Fritz Leiber: Lem uses him as an example, but he is speaking of a common quality of the human mind. Please bear in mind that Lem writes about themes and modes of expression - the stories he cites are but examples, and he could choose others. In any single case he arrives at much larger conclusions.... If you don't think you should invest so much effort, just tell me so. And why don't you list yourself as one of the translators? Don't forget: I think Lem will become very famous. No less than 11 of his books are scheduled to appear in USA (and eventually in England). You can be sure that SFC will become a valuable source of Lem criticism." We shall see, Franz. I've tried to render this article as a piece of good "straight" prose, and so I may have rolled right over some of Lem's finer distinctions. However I'm sure the result is readable. Any Polish-German-English-speaking translators could always help us out, of course. **)

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