



PAUL R. 84

A NOTE FROM  
THE PRINTER, COLLATOR, AND USUAL EDITOR OF

S F COMMENTARY 32

(40 PAGES, FEBRUARY 1973)

of which this is a copy, despite what it says on the front cover. However, I will admit that this is also THE JOURNAL OF DMPHALISTIC EPISTEMOLOGY No 6, dated November 1972, and that John Foyster edited and typed all the pages except this one. Many thanks, John.

I'm butting in here, before you read any of the rest of the magazine, to say just why I've published three issues of S F COMMENTARY within two weeks.

Let's go back one issue. Right at the end of SFC 31 I said that "SFC is facing the usual difficulties, all of them involved with the personal problems of the editor." I'm not sure whether the following difficulties can be called "usual", but they will certainly play merry hell with SFC's schedule during the next few months:

It is now January 18, 1973. On Monday the house is due to be redecorated (in other words, raped; the house is splendidly shabby and rundown at the moment and any redecoration must ruin it). The Painters Move In, we are told. That means I must have this issue of SFC printed and collated by Monday. Now the temperature outside today was 104°F and inside it feels like about 90°; tomorrow will be 108°. Not ideal printing and collating weather, you must admit. But it must be done by then, so it will be. If the painters hadn't been due to move in, I would have gone straight on and typed, printed, and published SFC 33, which will be an all-letters issue. (Some of the letters go back to January 1972.) Because the painters are coming, I will be immobilised for I don't know how long.

Obviously the next question is: why don't I get out? Well, I've been thinking of moving into a flat for ages. However, I've applied for a job in Canberra. If I get that job, I go there. If I don't, I'll move into a flat. But I don't know yet whether I have the job or not. So I can't move out yet.

So, the specific difficulty is that for 1973 I have no idea (1) whether or not I will be able to publish an issue of SFC for months, (2) where I will be living, (3) what job I will have, or (4) anything else. The world may be a light and happy place seen from your angle of vision, but my bit of it is obscured by the thickest possible clouds.

If I cannot keep producing fanzines (and that will mean I will miss out on yet another ANZAPA mailing, and be set on by the great god Edmonds and his lackeys) then I might get to answer some letters. I've written about six letters during the last three months; sometime during the next three months I may answer your letter.

Footnote: please subscribe to that invaluable fortnightly, airmailed newsmagazine LOCUS (\$3.50 for 10; \$8 for 26), or to those brilliant English magazines about s f, SPECULATION (\$2 for 5) and VECTOR (\$5.50 for 10), recent issues of which have been top-class; or to Hal Hall's useful S F BOOK REVIEW INDEX (\$1.50 per copy). I am agent for them. \$17 buys you the lot. Au revoir, for I don't know how long. Wish me luck as you wish me goodbye... and other clichés. Last stencil typed January 18, 1973. \*brg\*

the journal of omphalistic epistemology 6 : november 1972

&

s f commentary 32 : february 1973

\*\*\*\*\*

THE JOURNAL OF OMPHALISTIC EPISTEMOLOGY is edited by John Foyster, 6  
Clowes Street, South Yarra,  
Victoria, Australia 3141, and is free to interested persons.

S F COMMENTARY is edited by Bruce Gillespie, GPO Box 5195AA, Melbourne,  
Victoria, Australia 3001, and is sold in various ways to  
assorted people around the world: some copies are given away, though.

This joint edition is produced by the flying fingertips of the editor  
of the first-named journal and the heaving shoulders of the publisher of  
the second: a fair and just division of labour.

\*\*\*\*\*

This fanzine began as a footnote

About six months ago I decided to write a longish article about science  
fiction, in all its aspects. I started gathering reference material,  
and as this accumulated I realised that a lot of very sensible things  
had been said about science fiction. This suggested that perhaps I  
should first do an article about people's attitudes to science fiction  
- the attitudes of writers, readers, editors, critics and others.

Pretty soon it became plain that there was an awful lot of material  
there, Meyer. Obviously an article on attitudes was out of the  
question. So I decided to use the 'attitudes' material to illuminate  
the other article. Well, of course by now the 'other article' had  
broken itself into small pieces, as the richness of thought about  
science fiction impressed itself upon me. The 'article' has become  
'articles', and this issue of JOE contains the footnotes to the articles  
and these 'footnotes' are the original 'attitudes' material.

So this issue of JOE contains a set of quotations about science fiction  
some of which will be familiar. Some won't. I hope you'll try to get  
right through it, because there's a lot to it. You see, although this  
is a joint issue of JOE and SFC, it is only a part of JOE 6 - the first  
40 or so pages. Judging by the amount of material I have here, JOE 6  
will run for another 120 or so pages. With Bruce Gillespie's aid it  
will.

Many of the quotations are shorter than is desirable, and there are a  
couple of books worth reading - for the authors covered so far, the two  
Atheling books from Advent are essential reading, as are the essays by  
Alfred Bester and Robert Bloch in THE SCIENCE FICTION NOVEL (also  
Advent). Some of the most interesting remarks are further down the  
alphabet, but don't let that stop you.

Paula did the cover. Thank you, Paula. Turn to page 40a for more  
editorial. John Foyster

Brian W. ALDISS:: But a lot of science fiction has been written from the other point of view: those dreary sociological dramas that appear from time to time, started with a didactic purpose - to make a preconceived point - and they've got not further. (OF OTHER WORLDS by C.S. Lewis, *ibid*, p.88)

2. A wonderland, that's SF, a realm of the curious, through which a twentieth-century reader wanders like a terylene-clad Alice. Myself, I like this facet of SF greatly, preferring it to the sort of 'Popular Science' side. I'd as lief hear how crazy the world is as how fast it progresses technologically. (PENGUIN SCIENCE FICTION edited by BWA, Penguin, p.10)

3. The science fiction writer performs a balancing act between two gulfs. On the one hand, he must preserve a certain likelihood in his narration; on the other, if he only writes about what we expect to happen, we find him dull. (MORE PENGUIN SCIENCE FICTION edited by BWA, Penguin, p. 9)

4. A myth must contain various elements: traditional values, veiled meanings, and preferably illumination of some fact or phenomenon that interests its listeners or readers. These elements are present in most of the stories selected here. They are the more striking because the traditional values are presented in futuristic guise.... (YET MORE PENGUIN SCIENCE FICTION etc, p. 12)

5. But during the early fifties many SF writers, some no longer writing, became more or less propagandists for the space race. The climate of the times was such that it seemed as if the astronomical adventure might divert men's minds from their obsession with war; now we see that such was far from being the case, and that to 'conquer' - to use the popular and pathetic word - to conquer space is merely to extend both the possible casus bellorum and the theater for those wars when they eventuate. ...

For that successful binge, science fiction, as well as the nation, is still paying. A sort of slave mentality was created. The idea got around that SF was not a literature but a sort of promotion racket for big technological enterprises - hence the willingness of its leading writers to appear in adverts for electronic firms or to associate themselves as prophets with large-corporation ventures. More irremediably than ever, SF is confused with the Buck Rogers stuff. Nothing fails like success. The result is that a field which should have concerned itself with people (as did Wells) has been de-peopled. The gadgets gobbled up the guys. All that are left are robots and mutants and supermen and slave camps and big-empty-eyed jack-booted bigheads bestriding the bridges of colossal spaceships. Reality? We lost that in the matter-transmitter before last! (BEST SF: 1967 edited by Harrison and BWA, Berkley, pp. 246-7)

6. Magazine sf was cut very much to this pattern between the wars. It was written either by optimistic teenage Americans or by a few English who copied American idiom and dream. But the war and increased responsibility has brought a new inquiring spirit to American sf, as to other forms of literature; a note of scepticism we might once have regarded as English has crept in. (New Worlds 170, p. 9)

7. So the science fiction tradition over here has I think been different from the States in that the writers have not been conscious of this continuity.

Whether you regard the Gernsback thing as special I don't know. What has obviously been happening is that the two have come together, or rather, they came together in the '50's, quite dramatically. The hybrid of the pulp then revitalised this rather sort of shagged-out English rose, which we had over here, to produce I think among other things the "new wave", although I wouldn't like to attribute simple literary origins to these new movements. They obviously reflect the world outside, which is something science fiction should always do. (Speculation 27, p. 33)

8. The science fiction empire is essentially a commercial one, a loose connection of vested interests formed by people with an interest in maintaining the status quo: writers and critics, historiographers, editors and anthologists - and most of us invited to Rio double in more than one capacity.

9. I want to convince you that there is not only a science fiction empire (of which we guests here are all members in one way or another of the ruling caste), but that there is no such thing as science fiction. Admittedly, there is a fickle jade called SF. Yet, who can define her?

10. Once writers realise that SF does not exist, they can write their own thing, can attempt to satisfy themselves instead of bowing to some vague set of external standards; they can be free of all the trappings of the medium that, to our mind, have become stale - cliches that no longer work, even in the hands of the masters.

11. If writers do their own thing, they are as free as anyone can be. The very idea that there is something called SF is an impeding one, because it stands between a writer and the greater thing which stimulates the production of all art, including SF: i.e. the current state of the world and the victors by which our little brains carry us over into the middleways of tomorrow, SF becomes a barrier, baffling the perceptions of a writer and his world. Few would deny that SF is a fruit of the Industrial Revolution and the forces that still power that continuing revolution. And in this respect SF can be a useful, imaginative tool, that helps us probe all the profound changes that we, ourselves, are undergoing in our own lifetimes. But when SF degenerates into dogma - as any movement tends to - when it becomes an autocracy - as any empire tends to - then it merely obscures the wider view inherent in its origins.

12. The people who have so much to say about the role of SF have often stressed the need for an understanding of science before life can begin to make sense. But there is also an older claim to be met; the claim that history must be understood before life begins to make sense. And I would like to make a similar claim for art; but at least it is unarguable for the present that we are a part of the inexorable processes of history and must draw from them before we begin to make sense as writers.

13. What I do find really tedious is a literature without cognizance of corruption. All great literature pays tribute to corruption; all nursery literature - whether Soviet SF or Analog SF - seeks to deny corruption. SF writers like Dick, Disch, Sturgeon, and the incomparable Ballard are familiar with corruption and use it without base sensation-alism.

Of course, there are divisions between writers, as surely as there are illusions. But the illusion of the empire of science fiction has grown so tatty that I, for one, have begun to write in other modes of fiction where this certifying petty spirit behind it does not operate. The major division in the ranks of empire, as I see it, is between the philistines and the artists; or between the creators and the hacks; or, perhaps I just mean between those who can and those who cannot.

(SF SYMPOSIUM p. 69-73)

Heinrich ALTOV::      ATTRACTIONS (600 people approached)

	School- children	Indust- rial workers	Engin- eering college students	Arts students	Resear- chers & engin- eers	Teachers Doctors Office workers	Writers
Thrilling subject	72	47	30	18	39	13	8
The logic of unravell- ing the mystery	91	33	33	18	37	18	13
Paradox	64	22	35	20	43	19	27
New techno- logical ideas	63	44	37	17	52	18	7
The future of science	66	38	16	13	22	10	7
Social con- sequences of scientific progress	51	23	27	24	36	13	30
Man in unusual circumstances	63	33	32	10	29	13	12
Life in the world to come	60	29	14	7	26	16	6
Social struct- ure of the future world	54	36	30	13	41	16	15

(Results of a survey of 600 SF readers in Baku, Moscow, Leningrad, Sverdlovsk and Khabarovsk. The relative numbers of responses for each group of readers indicates which aspects of SF are important to the differing degrees.)

(Sputnik, August 1968, p. 36)

Kingsley AMIS:: As is the way with addictions, this one is mostly contracted in adolescence or not at all, like addiction to jazz.

(New Maps of Hell, p. 12)

17. The two modes themselves, indeed, show marked similarities. Both emerged as self-contained entities some time in the second or third decade of the century, and both, far more precisely underwent rapid internal change around 1940. Both have strong connections with what I might call mass culture without being, as I hope to show in the case of science fiction, mass media themselves. Both are characteristically American products with a large audience and a growing band of practitioners in Western Europe, excluding the Iberian peninsula and, probably, Ireland. Both in their different ways have a noticeably radical tinge, showing itself again and again in the content of science fiction, while as regards jazz, whose material is perforce non-political, radicalism of some sort often appears in the attitudes of those connected with it; a recent article in the Spectator claimed that one might as well give up hope of meeting a British intellectual committed to jazz who was not firmly over to the left in politics. Both of these fields, again, have thrown up a large number of interesting and competent figures without producing anybody of first-rate importance; both have arrived at a state of anxious and largely naive self-consciousness; both, having decisively and for something like half a century separated themselves from the main streams of serious music and serious literature, show signs of bending back towards those streams. (op. cit. p 12-13)

18. Science fiction is that class of prose narrative treating of a situation that could not arise in the world we know, but which is hypothesized on the basis of some innovation in science or technology, or pseudo-science or pseudo-technology, whether human or extra-terrestrial in origin. (op.cit. p14)

19. It might be thought that, to push it to the limit, a fantasy story could be turned into a science fiction story merely by inserting a few lines of pseudo-scientific patter, and I would accept this as an extreme theoretical case, although I cannot think of an actual one. Even so, a difference which makes the difference between abandoning verisimilitude and trying to preserve it seems to me to make all the difference, and in practice the arbitrary and whimsical development of nearly every story of fantasy soon puts it beyond recovery by any talk of galactic federations or molecular vibrations. One parenthetical note: it should not be thought that no story dealing with elves and such can be science fiction. (op.cit.p. 18)

20. To restate matters, then: science fiction presents with verisimilitude the human effects of spectacular changes in our environment, changes either deliberately willed or involuntarily suffered. (op.cit, p.20)

21. Leaving aside the question whether there was enough science around in the second century to make science fiction feasible, I will merely remark that the sprightliness and sophistication of the True History make it read like a joke at the expense of nearly all early-modern science fiction, that written between, say, 1910 and 1940. (op.cit. p. 22)

22. In the first place, one is grateful for the presence of science fiction as a medium in which our society can criticize itself, and sharply. I say nothing here as works not in fictional form, but I find it remarkable that, for example, all mainstream advertising novels that I have read go in for a series of assaults on various aspects of the system, but typically as these affect the worker within that system, and in every case with the reservation that, after the ethical doubts have been gone into, it's a fascinating game

that gives you great knowledge of the world. Only in science fiction is the whole concept of advertising attacked and the sense of its fascination used to criticise and ridicule the individual who experiences this sense. In the second place, one is grateful that we have a form of writing which is interested in the future, which is ready, as I put it earlier, to treat as variables what are usually taken to be constants, which is set on tackling those large, general, speculative questions that ordinary fiction so often avoids. This is no less true when all allowance has been made for the shock and pain felt by some when they find those questions answered in a way that does much less than justice to their complexity. Most answers to anything are overwhelmingly likely to be crude, and I cannot bring myself to believe that the most saturating barrage of crude answers really menaces the viability of the sensitive and intelligent answer; if that were the way the world worked, it would long since have stopped working altogether. But perhaps this is just an instance of my own sentimental, science-fictional optimism, so I will go on to observe as coldly as possible that I must not be taken as implying that every writer of science fiction is hopelessly limed in crudity. This is not the stage at which one names names, but at least a dozen current practitioners seem to me to have attained the status of the sound minor writer whose example brings into existence the figure of real standing. Even if this hope should prove illusory, the suggestion can be made that we could do with more, not less, of that habit of mind which will look beyond the attempted solution of problems already evident to the attempted formulation of problems not yet distinguishable. That is the path which science fiction, in its faltering way, is just beginning to tread, and if it can contrive to go on moving in that direction, it will not only have secured its future, but may make some contribution to the security of our own. (op.cit. p 134-5)

(with Robert CONQUEST) Science fiction, in fact, has had to grow up under its own power, developing its standards from within, from among its own writers, editors, and readers. This may have slowed it down, for self-criticism does not flourish under conditions of intellectual isolation. And yet we cannot feel that what might be called the provincial status of science fiction has been altogether to its disadvantage. To put it no higher, people like ourselves have been enabled to put in a couple of decades of stimulating reading in a field where the writ of the more portentous type of literary critic does not run. In the last thirty or forty years there has been far too much self-consciousness about 'significance', self-importance about 'art', self-approval about 'extending the bounds of moral awareness', with a corresponding lack of regard paid to older ideas of what fiction can and should provide: entertainment as well as edification, profusion and novelty of ideas as well as technical originality, speed and suspense and surprise in narrative as well as depth of psychological probing. These older ideas have, in our own day, found an important custodian in science fiction. (Spectrum 2, p 8-9)

24. In general, the implication that science fiction is largely concerned with self-indulgent daydreams is simply false. On the contrary, few kinds of writing attempts to explore more boldly the disturbing areas of the human imagination or to deliver a more urgent warning about the darker possibilities of human ingenuity.

But the old-line opponents of science fiction are not the only nuisances

left over from the age of ignorance. There are also critics, writers, and others who accept, and try to exploit, the new forms without bothering to overcome inadequacy and superficiality in their feeling for or knowledge of it. Science fiction proper went through its phases of Super Science Marvel and Horror a generation ago. The fact that similar attitudes are now being reproduced by those inadequately aware of the genre is significant. They substitute a childish crudity for the adult development of the true sense of wonder. And, curiously enough, they present in a gross and undigested fashion the very novelty and 'science' which in science fiction proper is totally incorporated into the story in the most natural and unemphatic way. (op.cit.10-1)

25. This raises, of course, the question of the 'science' in the words science fiction. It has often been pointed out that the word in many respects is an inadequate one and should be replaced by some expression like 'possibility' fiction, or 'context manipulation' fiction. But of course the term is now well established, and if the first half of it seems to give too much of a flavour of the exact sciences and of the technologies, one should at least note that the anthropological disciplines, such as they are, are equally involved in most science fiction. Nevertheless, even emphatically social and psychological science fiction is most conveniently set in the future, or on another planet, for reasons which are obvious enough. And if such a setting is needed, then it is essential for the writer to know enough about science and technology to make it plausible. (op.cit. p.12-3)

Poul ANDERSON:: George asked if we might want to discuss whether it is legitimate to put propaganda in science fiction. My view on this is yes, it is certainly legitimate. Anything is legitimate if it is entertaining, using entertainment in the broad sense in which I tried to define it in a talk a couple of years ago, namely - entertainment is that which captures the interest.

The entertainment of the intellectual might easily be found in Aristotle. The old Utopian novels that Ted Cogswell mentioned are, with a very few exceptions, nearly impossible to read now because they are just plain dull. This is not because the writers are not good writers. Many of them were very fine writers. It is because of the nature of the Utopias. As Toynbee has pointed out, one characteristic of an Utopia is that it is a static society; which is to say, a dead society. I myself feel furthermore that the Utopian novel is necessarily populated exclusively by carbon copies of the author. It can't be helped. If you have real people they are going to disagree so much that you can't have a Utopia.

I think one reason current science fiction is not written with, shall I say, self-conscious social consciousness is due to the growth of the realization that in the first place the concept of the perfect society is naive and in the second place it is dull.

The better science fiction nowadays, I think, tries (or at least should try) to use a more scientific approach to examine what is, rather than what ought to be - and then use your findings to construct the closest possible approximation of your desires. Of course, science fiction cannot really predict (as I remarked in another discussion last night) - even in its wildest dreams science fiction never foresaw that the most direct and obvious immediate social effect of the first satellite put up around the earth was a public reappraisal of the American

education system. Life is just too complex for prediction, but not too complex for a certain amount of examination. (The Proceedings: CHICON III p 193)

27. I don't believe a total nuclear war is inevitable, and hope as sincerely as Messrs. Brandis and Dmitrevskiy that no such thing ever comes to pass. Still, I feel free to deal in fiction with this as a possibility, and with the possible consequences. "Progress" was actually an optimistic story. It suggested that man can survive almost anything, even a nuclear war, and rebuild and know happiness again. It also suggested that perhaps our present machine culture is not the optimum one for the human animal. I don't know if this is really so or not; but I don't believe anyone does, either.

It seems to me profoundly unscientific to maintain that history has had one certain character and will in the future take one certain course. True, Marx and Lenin (as well as Stalin and Mao!) have made some very interesting observations about history. But to insist that these were the most basic observations that will ever be made is to go far beyond the data we possess.

Science fiction in the West operates in the area of what man does not yet know and has not yet experienced. In the nature of the case, these things are unknowable before they come to pass. Therefore our science fiction, unconfined by dogma, treats of many conceivable situations, some pleasant, some unpleasant. It has no more ideological significance than that. (F&SF, October 1965, pp66-67)

28. As long as science fiction keeps its vitality, it will never quite fit anyone's picture of what it is or should be. Only a fossil can be fully described; only an inanimate machine - of the very simplest kind, at that - will meekly obey every order given it. So in what follows, I do not wish either to define or prescribe, merely to suggest. However, the aspect of science fiction that we will deal with is an important one.

This is the theme, motif, procedure or what-have-you that is commonly called extrapolation. You go from the known to the unknown not at a single bound, but by taking what exists and reasoning out the consequences of its further development. Roughly speaking, the development may be either through space or time. The first approach is likely to generate physical settings, the latter to generate sociological backgrounds.

...  
Extrapolation has been so basic to so much science fiction that some commentators have said science fiction is, or should be, nothing else. This is a mistake. There isn't any way to go from known physical facts to such common motifs as time travel and faster-than-light travel. We get to these by a direct leap into the unknown; we postulate that radically new laws of nature will someday be found. Likewise, Wells's The War Of The Worlds postulated a historical event, interplanetary invasion, for which there is no precedent in history. (IF, May 1968, pp4-5)

29. Science fiction has only one absolute master of dialogue, Avram Davidson. Theodore Sturgeon probably comes second, especially when his characters are being affectionate or witty; or perhaps this rank belongs to L. Sprague de Camp. But even these men lack Avram's ear for the uniqueness of every individual's speech. The rest of us range from fairly good to terrible, most, of course, being somewhere in between. Needless to say, this is no reflection on anyone's talents. Nobody is topnotch at everything, and all the leading writers have their own strengths. I am the first to admit that dialogue is not one of mine.

Still, a chap keeps trying to improve, and meanwhile is irked, not by fair criticism but by the ignorant kind. For instance, it is true that my characters sometimes deliver monologues - "lectures", the fans call them. It is not true that real people don't talk that way. I know a fair number who do. In fact, I avoid making uninterrupted fictional speeches more than half as long as many that I hear in life. Furthermore, the supply of persons who will tell me common knowledge in the worst Gernsbackian tradition is distressingly large.

The literary function of the lecture is to convey a solid block of information - which sf has frequent need to do - without invoking the omniscient author. (It does no good to maintain that the information can be woven in subtly, a piece at a time throughout the narrative. This is possible for some material, not all. In most instances, that subtlety would leave the reader - who, let's face it, is nearly always a casual reader - wondering rather disgustedly just what the hell is supposed to be going on.) Other methods exist, such as the invented epigraph which Jack Vance in particular has made skillful use of. But the monologue or the engineered dialogue is often indispensable. What's good enough for Plato is good enough for me.

Besides, why should anybody object? Fictional speech is never identical with real speech. It would be unreadable if it were. At best, it creates an illusion of realism, and does so by being essentially nonrealistic, for the simple reason that a reader (or an auditor, if the story is being read aloud) does not function the way a person actually in the situation of the story would function.

What we use to create this illusion is a set of conventions, and these change with time. Hamlet is still considered one of the most thoroughly developed characters in literature; yet the Elizabethans didn't speak in blank verse. (And hoo boy, do Shakespeare's people indulge in monologues!) In like manner, the Victorians scarcely sounded like the figures in Dickens or Conan Doyle, though these men have given us the best portraits we shall ever have of their era. Americans of the 1920s and '30s did not talk in Hemingway style. We are still so much under the Hemingway influence that the last statement may seem outrageous. I can only suggest to doubters that they spend a while listening carefully, not just to their educated and articulate friends but to such Hemingway types as they may meet. They will find, for example, that live human beings don't speak anywhere near that compactly.

The great dialogue writers are those who, without stretching contemporary conventions to the point where the reader is put off, can skirt real language close enough that we imagine we actually are seeing a transcription. I envy them that ability. But I suspect they would agree that dialogue in fiction is always a means to an end, never an end in itself. (OUTWORLDS 8, pp295-296)

ANON:: What should be the nature of science fiction? From what fields of knowledge should it draw its themes? What are its specific characteristics? All these and many other questions are discussed in magazines and newspapers and in debates. Perhaps the most extensive disputes arise regarding the so-called "theory of limitations" still supported by some writers and critics.

This theory appeared at the end of the forties. Its supporters demand that science fiction should correspond to the facts of science. That is why it is sometimes referred to as "realistic fantasy" or "the fantasy of the present sf commentary 32 page 9

day". The adherents of this theory, who include Vladimir Nemtsov and Vadim Okhotnikov, say that dreams should be kept within the framework of the tasks confronting Soviet society in the near future, and that it is the immediate problems that should be solved. The present day is too rich and interesting, they argue, for us to break away from reality and write about the distant future. (SOVIET LITERATURE MONTHLY, 3/61 p 141.)

31. But fantasy is more than just dreams about the technology of the future. One of the special characteristics of Soviet science fiction is that it deals above all with the people of the future. I should like to repeat the wise words of Albert Einstein, who said that machines will be able to solve all kinds of problems but they will never be able to pose one.

What will the man of the space era be like? How will the latest technology influence the life of society? And what will this society become in the epoch of the atom and cybernetics? The Western writers of science fiction give scarcely any answer to these questions.

The principle distinctive feature of Soviet science fiction arises from the fact that it links the development of science and technology with the most profound transformations in social life and the minds of men. It is a literature of a great future.

It is this which constitutes the theme of Ivan Yefremov's novel Andromeda, which although only three years old has already become a classic. It aroused a great deal of comment abroad, and a great deal has been said about the author's powers of imagination and the humanist trend of his work.

The best Soviet science fiction books have a positive influence on their readers thanks above all to their optimistic faith in science, in the genius of man and the power of his thought. They help man to become better.

Optimism is the most important distinctive feature of Soviet science fiction.  
(op. cit. pp142-143)

32. The achievements of Soviet science in the fifties, particularly the conquest of space, widened the horizons of science fiction, made it more bold and daring and raised it to a new and higher level, enlisting new authors in its ranks. Its popularity with readers increased considerably.

Now science fiction is a full-blooded branch of our literature in its own right and is represented by a galaxy of talented writers. (SOVIET LITERATURE MONTHLY, 5/68 p2.)

Piers ANTHONY:: I do not believe in obscure writing. A novel should have a clear plotline unencumbered by the artificiality of the so-called narrative hook, unnecessary sex or violence, or arty and impenetrable prose in the guise of style. If a writer is not able to begin at the beginning, tell it as it is, and keep the reader interested - why then, that writer is a farce, and he would do better to take up some more appropriate pursuit such as politics, glue-sniffing or transvestism, where he is more likely to be appreciated for what he is. (ALGOL 14, p 9.)

W. H. G. ARMYTAGE:: Indeed no genre has been so conscious of its reading public. One editor instituted a survey in 1949 in America and found that four out of five readers were under thirty-five and that over 66 per cent were directly concerned with science and engineering  
the journal of omphalistic epistemology 6 : november 1972 : page 10

as administrators, researchers or technicians. A similar distribution was revealed by an English survey in 1954. This estimated that the proportion of readers with secondary or higher education was 'very substantial and far higher than the proportion which these bear to the population as a whole.' A reputable English political observer considered that this reflected the new popular faith that 'though there are many things modern technology cannot do now, there is no reason to suppose they cannot be done in the future and many reasons to suppose that they can.'

In 1964 one English science fiction magazine found that its readership was composed mainly of young technicians in the mid-twenties, who tended to purchase an average of four paperbacks a month. (YESTERDAY'S TOMORROWS pp133-4) 35. The fantasy of environmental change, which led Erasmus Darwin in Britain's first industrial spurt to suggest that icebergs should be rigged with sails so that they could drift southwards to moderate the heat of tropical climates, appeared in Russia too. As N. G. Chernyshevski anticipated in What Is to Be Done (1863) a time would come when the ploughman would live in a splendid club, always protected from wind and rain and only going out to set machines going. (op. cit. p147.)

Isaac ASIMOV:: Mr. Moskowitz tells the story of how I provided an item for Donald A. Wollheim free of charge and was then threatened by John W. Campbell, Jr., editor of ASTOUNDING SCIENCE FICTION with a blackballing unless I obtained payment.

This incident (which took place in late 1940) is a bit more complicated than it appears to be in the Profile. However the point is that the editor who did the threatening was not Mr. Campbell. It was another man, now dead, whose name is not important.

Let me state as flatly as I can that Mr. John W. Campbell, Jr. has never, never, never threatened to reject my stories for any reason whatever, except for that of being unworthy of publication. I have known him very well over a period of nearly a quarter of a century, and I wish to state that using his editorial position as a club is foreign to his nature. Furthermore, as far as I personally am concerned, in all the years we have worked together, John Campbell has been kindness itself to me at all times, and if I owe my career to anyone, it is to him. (AMAZING STORIES, June 1962, p 141)

37. I think Messrs. Brandis and Dmitrevskiy are being a little harsh with me. They themselves, in referring to American science fiction stories published in the Soviet Union say: "Judging solely from these translations, one might get the erroneous impression that bourgeois science fiction writing is now for the most part nonpolitical and quite harmless..."

In other words, they say that what the Soviets see of American science fiction is not representative of the whole and is deliberately selected to be "nonpolitical and harmless." They ought, then, to hold me fairly blameless if the same thought had occurred to me about Soviet science fiction published in the United States. (F&SF, October 1965, pp64-5)

38. Pre-Campbell science fiction all too often fell into one of two classes. They were either no-science or they were all-science. The no-science stories were adventure stories in which a periodic word of Western jargon was erased and replaced with an equivalent word of space jargon. The writer could be sf commentary 32 page 11

innocent of scientific knowledge, for all he needed was a vocabulary of technical jargon which he could throw in indiscriminately.

The all-science stories were, on the other hand, populated exclusively by scientist-caricatures. Some were mad scientists, some were absent-minded scientists, some were noble scientists. The only thing they had in common was their penchant for expounding their theories. The mad ones screeched them, the absent-minded ones mumbled them, the noble ones declaimed them, but all lectured at insufferable length. The story was a thin cement caked about the long monologues in an attempt to give the illusion that those long monologues had some point.

...

Campbell's contribution was that he insisted that the exception become the rule. There had to be real science and real story, with neither one dominating the other. He didn't always get what he wanted, but he got it often enough to initiate what old-timers think of as the Golden Age of Science Fiction.

...

With real science, stories came to sound more and more plausible and, indeed, were more and more plausible. Authors, striving for realism, described computers and rockets and nuclear weapons that were very like what computers and rockets and nuclear weapons came to be in a matter of a single decade. As a result, the real life of the Fifties and Sixties is very much like the Campbellsque science fiction of the Forties.

...

As long as science fiction was the creaky medium it was in the Twenties and Thirties, good writing was not required. The science fiction writers of the time were safe, reliable sources; while they lived, they would write science fiction, since anything else required better technique and was beyond them. (I hasten to say there were exceptions and Murray Leinster springs to mind as one of them.)

The authors developed by Campbell, however, had to write reasonably well or Campbell turned them down. Under the lash of their own eagerness they grew to write better and better. Eventually and inevitably, they found they had become good enough to earn more money elsewhere and their science fiction output declined. (DANGEROUS VISIONS, pp8 - 10)

39. Science fiction tends to be lacking in science these days. It has gone "mainstream" with just enough of a tang of the not-quite-now and the not-quite-here to qualify it for inclusion in the genre.

I disapprove. I think science fiction isn't really science fiction if it lacks science. And I think the better and truer the science, the better and truer the science fiction.

...

...there is a very special future for the writer of science fiction.

Right not, the knowledgeable, skillful science writer is worth his weight in contracts.

...

The question then is this: Will science fiction abandon science and act as a feeder for show business only?

To be sure, show business is very glamorous and the remuneration is (at the journal of omphalistic epistemology 6 : november 1972 : page 12

its very best) equally glamorous. But on the other hand, I happen to know that science-writing can be very glamorous and remunerative, too, and you also get to keep your self-respect (if you're the kind that values such a thing.)

...  
Science writing on the other hand has become the cement that holds our technology together. It is the bridge between the scientist and the layman, and even between the scientist of one specialty and of another.

Modern society needs such bridges badly; I might even say desperately. A second-rate performance here will do far more than merely increase boredom; it could, conceivably, contribute greatly to the asphyxiation of technology in the waste of its own over-supply of information. And in that way the material could be supplied for the eventual book to be entitled The Decline and Fall of Earth if anyone survived to write it.

So, I hope that science does not go entirely out of science fiction. I hope that when the New Wave has deposited its froth and receded, the vast and solid shore of science fiction will appear once more and continue to serve the good of humanity. (GALAXY MAGAZINE, August 1967, pp4-6)

**40. What I said is there is a growing tendency to delete the science from science fiction. The tendency has not borne fruit yet, but it is there and I want to fight it.** There are science fiction writers who think that Science is a Bad Thing and that science fiction is a wonderful field in which to make this plain. This is part of a much more general attitude that Society is a Bad Thing and must be destroyed before a new and better system can be evolved. This may strike youngsters today as a daring and novel notion but when great-grandfather was a boy they called it Nihilism. I'm afraid I'm too square to be a Nihilist.

Anyway, Science is not a Bad Thing; it is a Thing, and it is men that make it either Bad or Good. I want science fiction to do its part in persuading men to make it Good for the sake of all of us and that requires that Science - Honest Science - continue to be in SF. I want it there not just now but in the future and I don't want the antiscience literati in the science fiction movement to win out. I admit that's a personal prejudice born out of the fact that I have a sneaking fondness for humanity. (see also H.L. GOLD)

(IF, November 1968, pp160-161.)

J. O. BAILEY:: Scientific fiction, the subject of this book, does not provide all this wisdom, but it may be one among many sources of suggestion. For many years, this fiction has been busy with imaginative treatments of the coming, and now present, Machine Age; lately, it has even told imaginative stories of how man might learn to live with the terrible secret of atomic power, and how he might use this power to make life more abundant in a new way. Some of this fiction has dealt thoughtfully with concrete instances of startling new discoveries in science, their impact upon man's life, and the various possible readjustments to them. It is only fiction, but it may have graphic value now that we have got to anticipate a course of events in what is essentially a realm of sheer, unpredictable fiction, the future. Insofar as statesmen today need facts, fiction has nothing to offer, but insofar as we all need to bring to the consideration of certain new facts, such as atomic power, every scrap of foresight we can find, many pieces of this fiction are worth review. (PILGRIMS THROUGH SPACE & TIME p.2)

42. A piece of scientific fiction is a narrative of an imaginary invention or discovery in the natural sciences and consequent adventures and experiences. The invention must be imaginary at the time the romance is written, an imaginary airplane, space-flier, radio, rocket, atomic bomb, or death-ray. The discovery may take place in the interior of the earth, on the moon, on Mars, within the atom, in the future, in the prehistoric past, or in a dimension beyond the third; it may be a surgical, mathematical, or chemical discovery. It must be a scientific discovery - something that the author at least rationalizes as possible to science.

On every side, scientific fiction overlaps other kinds. Any piece of realism may describe science and scientists, as Lewis's Arrowsmith does. Any romance may express the utopian dream of a better world. Many novels today reflect some impact of Darwinism and relativity. The most fantastic tale of terror may exhibit its scientific formulas. In these phases scientific fiction overflows into other classes of literature.

Certain types that resemble scientific fiction may be excluded. The realistic novel that interprets character in the light of scientific fact, such as Huxley's Point Counter Point, does not belong to this group. The utopia or satire concerned solely with human nature and social polity is not included; hence I am ignoring Plato's Republic, but noticing that More's Utopia describes a wonderful machine, the incubator. I am excluding the imaginary voyage that has only geographic interest and fiction of the supernatural and weird unless its phenomena are "scientifically" explained - as Poe's "M. Valdemar" purports to be the experiment of a medical student. I do not include fiction describing an actual invention; the imaginary tank of Wells's "The Land Ironclads" is, of course, not the same thing as a tank realistically described in 1946. There is a thin line between the pseudo-scientific and the scientific, but I am omitting most stories of the occult and psychic - though some astral bodies engage in adventures that concern the natural sciences. For instance, Kepler's Somnium is a dream, but is also the first attempt in fiction to describe the moon as scientists viewed it.

The touchstone for scientific fiction, then, is that it describes an imaginary invention or discovery in the natural sciences. The more serious pieces of this fiction arise from speculation about what may happen if science makes an extraordinary discovery. The romance is an attempt to anticipate this discovery and its impact upon society, and to foresee how mankind may adjust to the new condition. Naturally, the resulting narrative is often utopian, or satiric from a utopian viewpoint.

...

The method followed in serious scientific fiction is either to predict that what will happen tomorrow is what has begun to happen today, or to predict that causes operative in the past to produce certain results will be operative in the future to produce similar results. Inventions of the nineteenth century produced the Machine Age in the twentieth; the airplane implemented World War II. Now we have the secret of atomic power. What Atomic Age will it produce?

Scientific fiction offers many answers, some of them strange. Yet in a present confused beyond fantasy, we may ponder what hints for our journey into a strange future may be gathered from scientific romances. The hysteria when Orson Welles broadcast and the way we understood immediately the nature of the

atomic bomb indicate that the fancies of scientific fiction have indeed made some impression on popular thought. Perhaps the people of the world, through this fiction made familiar with the idea of a World State and other utopian adjustments, are more ready for leadership into an Atomic Age than our statesmen suppose. (op. cit. pp10-12)

43. Because scientific romances treat inventions and discoveries that are imaginary, they have the task not imposed upon other fiction of making the improbable seem true. They must describe machinery in some detail, in order to make it credible, and yet must keep a narrative going. Their subject-matter is intellectual, rather than emotional, and yet, to be popular, they must have emotional interest. (op. cit. p 191)

44. Whether scientific romances are considered art depends upon, first, the definition of art, and second, which of many romances are judged. If art is only the impassioned expression of powerful feeling, or if it is limited to the interpretation of mankind on the stage of the actual world, past or present, it does not include scientific fiction. But if art may include in its subject-matter the adventures of man's mind, scientific fiction may be art whenever it is thoughtful and well written. (op. cit. p 318)

J. G. BALLARD:: Visually, of course, nothing can equal space fiction for its vast perspectives and cold beauty, as any sf film or comic strip demonstrates, but a literary form requires more complex and more verbalised ideas to sustain it. The spaceship simply doesn't provide these.

(NEW WORLDS, May 1962, p 3)

46. But my real objection to the central role now occupied by the space story is that its appeal is too narrow. Unlike the Western, science fiction can't rely for its existence upon the casual intermittent pleasure it may give to a wide non-specialist audience, if it is to hold its ground and continue to develop. As with most specialised media, it needs a faithful and discriminating audience who will go to it for specific pleasures, similar to the audience for abstract painting or serial music. The old-guard space opera fans, although they probably form the solid backbone of present SF readership, won't be able to keep the medium alive on their own. Like most purists, they prefer their diet unchanged, and unless SF evolves, sooner or later other media are going to step in and take away from it its main distinction the right to be the shop window of tomorrow.

...

To attract a critical readership science fiction needs to alter completely its present content and approach. Magazine SF was born in the 1930s and like the pseudo-streamlined architecture of the '30s, it is beginning to look old-fashioned to the general reader. It's not simply that time travel, psionics and teleporting (which have nothing to do with science anyway and are so breathtaking in their implications that they require genius to do them justice) date science fiction, but that the general reader is intelligent enough to realise the majority of the stories are based on the most minor variations on the most minor variations on these themes, rather than on any fresh imaginative leaps.

...

Firstly, I think science fiction should turn its back on space, on inter-stellar travel, extra-terrestrial life forms, galactic wars and the overlap of these ideas that spreads across the margins of nine-tenths of magazine SF. Great writer though he was, I'm convinced that H. G. Wells has had a disastrous

influence on the subsequent course of science fiction. Not only did he provide it with a repertory of ideas that have virtually monopolised the medium for the last fifty years, but he established the conventions of its style and form, with its simple plots, journalistic narrative, and standard range of situation and character. It is these, whether they realise it or not, that SF readers are so bored with now, and which are beginning to look increasingly outdated by comparison with the developments in other literary fields.

I've often wondered why SF shows so little of the experimental enthusiasm which has characterised painting, music and the cinema during the last four or five decades, particularly as these have become wholeheartedly speculative, more and more concerned with the creation of new states of mind, new levels of awareness, constructing fresh symbols and languages where the old cease to be valid. Similarly, I think science fiction must jettison its present narrative forms and plots. Most of these are far too explicit to express any subtle interplay of character and theme. Devices such as time travel and telepathy, for example, save the writer the trouble of describing the inter-relationships of time and space indirectly. And by a curious paradox they prevent him from using his imagination at all, giving him very little true freedom of movement within the narrow limits set by the device.

The biggest developments of the immediate future will take place, not on the Moon or Mars, but on Earth, and it is inner space, not outer, that needs to be explored. The only truly alien planet is Earth. In the past the scientific bias of SF has been towards the physical sciences - rocketry, electronics, cybernetics - and the emphasis should switch to the biological sciences, particularly to imaginative and fictional treatments of them, which is what is implied by the term science fiction. Accuracy, that last refuge of the unimaginative, doesn't matter a hoot. What we need is not science fact but more science fiction, and the introduction of so-called science fact articles is merely an attempt to dress up the old Buck Rogers material in more respectable garb.

More precisely, I'd like to see SF becoming abstract and 'cool', inventing completely fresh situations and contexts that illustrate its themes obliquely. For example, instead of treating time like a sort of glorified scenic railway, I'd like to see it used for what it is, one of the perspectives of the personality, and the elaboration of concepts such as the time zone, deep time and archaeopsychic time. I'd like to see more psycholiterary ideas, more meta-biological and meta-chemical concepts, private time-systems, synthetic psychologies and space-times, more of the remote, sombre half-worlds one glimpses in the paintings of schizophrenics, all in all a complete speculative poetry and fantasy of science.

I firmly believe that only science fiction is fully equipped to become the literature of tomorrow, and that it is the only medium with an adequate vocabulary of ideas and situations. By and large, the standards it sets for itself are higher than those of any other specialist literary genre, and from now on, I think, most of the hard work will fall, not on the writer and editor, but on the readers. The onus is on them to accept a more oblique narrative style, understated themes, private symbols and vocabularies. The first true SF story, and one I intend to write myself if no one else will, is about a man with amnesia lying on a beach and looking at a rusty bicycle

wheel, trying to work out the absolute essence of the relationship between them. If this sounds off-beat and abstract, so much the better, for science fiction could use a big dose of the experimental; and if it sounds boring, well at least it will be a new kind of boredom. (op. cit. pp116-118)

47. For science fiction the lesson of Burroughs' work is plain. It is now nearly forty years since the first Buck Rogers comic strip, and only two less than a century since the birth of science fiction's greatest modern practitioner, H. G. Wells, yet the genre is still dominated by largely the same set of conventions, the same repertory of ideas, and, worst of all, by the assumption that it is still possible to write accounts of interplanetary voyages in which the appeal is to realism rather than to fantasy (what one could call Campbell's Folly). Once it gets 'off the ground' into space all science fiction is fantasy, and the more serious it tries to be, the more naturalistic, the greater its failure, as it completely lacks the moral authority and conviction of a literature won from experience.

Burroughs also illustrates that the whole of science fiction's imaginary universe has long since been absorbed into the general consciousness, and that most of its ideas are now valid only in a kind of marginal spoofing. Indeed, I seriously doubt whether science fiction is any longer the most important source of new ideas in the very medium it originally created. The main task facing science fiction writers now is to create a new set of conventions. Burroughs' methods of exploring time and space, for example, of creating their literary equivalents, are an object lesson. (NEW WORLDS, May-June 1964, pp126-7)

48. Science fiction, above all a prospective form of fiction, concerned with the immediate present in terms of the future rather than the past, requires narrative techniques that reflect its subject matter. To date almost all its writers, including myself, fall to the ground because they fail to realise that the principle narrative technique of retrospective fiction, the sequential and consequential narrative, based as it is on an already established set of events and relationships, is wholly unsuited to create the images of a future that has as yet made no concessions to us. In The Drowned World, The Drought and The Crystal World I tried to construct linear systems that made no use of the sequential elements of time - basically a handful of ontological "myths". However, in spite of my efforts, the landscapes of these novels more and more began to quantify themselves. Images and events became isolated, defining their own boundaries. Crocodiles enthroned themselves in the armour of their own tissues. (NEW WORLDS 167, pp 147-148)

49. Modern American science fiction of the 1940s and 1950s is a popular literature of technology. It came out of the American mass magazines like Popular Mechanics, that were published in the thirties, and all that optimism about science and technology that you found in those days. Anybody who can remember reading magazines in the thirties or looking at books published in the thirties will know what I mean ... they are full of marvels, the biggest bridge in the world, the fastest this or the longest that ... full of marvels of science and technology. The science fiction written in those days came out of all this optimism that science was going to remake the world. Then came Hiroshima and Auschwitz, and the image of science completely changed. People became very suspicious of science, but SF didn't change. You still found this optimistic literature, the Heinlein-Asimov-Clarke type of attitude towards the possibilities of science, which was completely false. In the 1950s during the

sf commentary 32 page 17

testing of the H-bomb you could see that science was getting to be something much closer to magic. Also, science fiction was then identified with the idea of outer space. By and large that was the image most people had of science fiction. The space ship, the alien planet. And this didn't make any sense to me. It seemed to me that they were ignoring what I felt was the most important area, what I called - and I used the term for the first time seven years ago - "inner space", which was the meeting ground between the inner world of the mind and the outer world of reality. Inner space you see in the paintings of the surrealists, Max Ernst, Dali, Tanguy, Chirico. They're painters of inner space, and I felt that science fiction should explore that area, the area where the mind impinges on the outside world, and not just deal in fantasy. This was the trouble with SF in the early fifties. It was becoming fantasy. It wasn't a serious realistic fiction anymore. So I started writing ... I've written three novels and something like seventy short stories over the last ten years - I think that perhaps in only one story there's a space ship. It's just mentioned in passing. All my fiction is set in the present day or close to the present day. (SPECULATION, February 1969, pp4-5)

50. I'm not hostile to science itself. I think that scientific activity is about the only mature activity there is. What I'm hostile to is the image of science that people have. It becomes a magic wand in people's minds, that will conjure up marvels, a kind of Aladdin's lantern. It oversimplifies things, much too conveniently. Science now, in fact, is the largest producer of fiction. A hundred years ago, or even fifty years ago, even, science took its raw material from nature. A scientist worked out the boiling point of a gas or the distance a star is away from the Earth, whereas nowadays, particularly in the social, psychological sciences, the raw material of science is a fiction invented by the scientists. You know, they work out why people chew gum or something of this kind... so the psychological and social sciences are spewing out an enormous amount of fiction. They're the major producers of fiction. It's not the writers anymore. (op. cit. p 5)

51. Strictly speaking, I regard myself as an SF writer in the way that surrealism is also a scientific art. In a sense Asimov, Heinlein, and the masters of American SF are not really writing of science at all. They're writing about a set of imaginary ideas which are conveniently labelled "science". They're writing about the future, they're writing a kind of fantasy-fiction about the future, closer to the western and the thriller, but it has nothing really to do with science. I studied medicine, chemistry, physiology, physics, and I worked for about five years on a scientific journal. The idea that a magazine like Astounding, or Analog as it's now called, has anything to do with the sciences is ludicrous. It has nothing to do with science. You have only to pick up a journal like Nature, say, or any scientific journal, and you can see that science belongs in a completely different world. Freud pointed out that you have to distinguish between analytic activity, which by and large is what the sciences are, and synthetic activities, which is what the arts are. The trouble with the Heinlein-Asimov type of science fiction is that it's completely synthetic. Freud also said that synthetic activities are a sign of immaturity, and I think that's where classical SF falls down. (op. cit. p. 6)

52. For me, science fiction is above all a prospective form of narrative fiction; it is concerned with seeing the present in terms of the immediate future rather than the past. (THE NEW SF, ed. L. Jones, p. 52)

the journal of omphalistic epistemology 6 : november 1972 : page 18

53. I think that the great strength of science fiction is that there is no past - it's all future in science fiction. It tallies with the way people look on their lives today. I mean look at most people and you find that they have declared a moratorium on the past. They are not interested.

(INTERNATIONAL TIMES 60)

54. I suppose I'm identified with the so-called new wave, therefore a certain hostility is attributed to me against the older school of science fiction and now and then people like my friend Brian show me a fantasy - and he even showed those magazines "fanzines" - full of attacks on me and I get the impression that I am at times regarded as a kind of anti-Christ. In fact, I am the greatest possible defender of the traditional values of science fiction. I genuinely believe that science fiction is the greatest literature of the 20th century, without any doubt. In literary circles there is a convention that the main literary tradition of the 20th century is the so-called modern movement, or whatever you would like to term it, that tradition which runs from French symbolists such as Rimbaud, Baudelaire and so on, all the way through James Joyce, Eliot and so on, to Hemingway and more or less concludes with William Burroughs' "100 years of literature" which is the literature by intellectuals, which is the literary culture where all of us in fact base our lives' imaginations on. This is regarded as the main literary tradition of the 20th century in science fiction. Arthur and I write, many of us write it. Let's face it. It has rather been looked down upon, although in the last ten years it has come somewhat into vogue, let's say, among other French intellectuals, for example, and certain English intellectuals regarded very highly. But more than in a way they are interested in the iconography of mass advertising - in a kind of conceptual and very abstract way.

(SF SYMPOSIUM, pp157-8)

55. Now, science fiction must change, otherwise it will become a literature of the past. I began writing my first science fiction roughly 12 years ago when "Sputnik-I" was sent out, and I chose personally to turn my back on outer space. It seems to me now - let's say - very odd that at the time when these great-greatest dreams seemed to have been confirmed - the great dream of space travel into planetary flight - that what in fact happened was that science fiction or at least its new and younger writers, turned their backs on this tradition of outer space and inter-planetary flight. So that, if one looks at the new science fiction written over the past ten years, one sees not stories about spacships, inter-planetary flight, and so on, but in fact sees a very private and speculative kind of fiction coming in. It is not coming in to the American magazines, because it is ruthlessly kept out - and more to shame - but if you look at the British magazines one sees (for that matter in books published in America and Great Britain) a new kind of speculative fiction that is appearing.

The writers are searching for a new metaphor for the future. The space-ship and inter-planetary travel was the most magnificent possible method for the future, when it was first conceived - let's say 100 years ago, not to go back too far, or in its great heyday of modern American science fiction. The most magnificent method that broke away from this sort of rather dull world of the 1910s, 1920s and 1930s (the time we know the stories of science fiction by gathering the first American Science Fiction magazines that came out), roughly speaking, at the time of the great slump. It seemed to me marvellous that here was a literature, a fighting literature, which revealed this huge

optimism about the future of mankind at a time when millions of people were on the dole.

The metaphor of spaceship isn't any longer a valid method for the present because it is simply an image of the past. I mean, the iconography of space travel, that ringed planet, the spaceship that looks something like that microphone. The notion that the future was something with a fire on it... this is something that has gone out. One thing about "2001" that I liked was that spaceships there did not look like this sort of paper dots of classical science fiction. They looked like early Pollock's sculpture; they have no aerodynamic forms, but are almost icons from inner space, and this was one of the good things about this movie.

The problem then is to find a new metaphor (or a new system of metaphor) for the future, if one can say that the future - in the old-fashioned sense of the term - still exists. I personally think that very probably 50 years from now nobody will look back to the past or forward to the future; they will simply live in the present. And the technology will serve the present, will serve their needs within the present, maximising their own intelligences, pleasures, and so on.

I think this has something to do with the sort of process that has taken place in science fiction over the past 10 years; this rejection of its grand tradition - space travel - for some kind of an alternative.

I think that the whole basis of fiction and reality in the world seems to have reversed. Perhaps 100 years ago, one at least can visualize, there was a very clear distinction in people's minds between external reality - on the one hand the world of work and industry and commerce and so on and one's social relationships; and on the other, the world of one's daydreams, the world of the mind, let us say. It seems to me this relationship has reversed itself totally so that the greatest production of fiction today is external reality, materials of ordinary life. It is almost fictional now from the world of politics. I mean, Vietnam is not just a TV war; it is a war of enormous political fictions that are not solved simply because the people running them are incapable of the kind of happy plot ending that we who are sitting here, are. And the same is true of a whole range of activities going on in life. I mean, one doesn't buy an airline ticket to Rio de Janeiro - none of us bought our tickets to come here; but let us say, one does not buy an airline ticket to the South of France, or Miami, or whatever place it may be, on holiday; one buys the image of a certain kind of transportation.

It is very difficult, in fact, to find any points of old-fashioned reality in our old environment. We are trapped in a maze of fiction, politico-conducted mass advertising, the immense range of consumer goods iconography that is pouring out - not just verbal but visual fictions all day long. By the same token, given the external realities on a type of fiction, one finds a much more sharp awareness on people's part of the materials of their minds. The people are far more aware that there are motives, there are states of mind, moods, - and this is the new reality. One has to find a fiction that will, in some way, express this new interchange and maybe the writer's role is no longer to invent anything. His role is not a synthetic one but an analytic one. He does not need to invent any fiction because the fiction is already there.

In the writing I have been doing recently, as John Brunner pointed out, I the journal of omphalistic epistemology 6 : november 1972 : page 20

began to use characters like Elizabeth Taylor, J. F. K., and so on, because it seems to me that these are fictional characters far greater than any writer could invent. Not only that, but they are the main fictional characters who are alive, and our role as writers is to understand the particular points of reality that exist where all these various fictions intersect. And I think a much more private and speculative fiction is going to appear, much more introverted, probably. I use the term in this case to describe something that, I assume, is the landscapes of a soul. I think the idea of the future, which is enshrined in science fiction, will go out. I can't see the future, and Brian said that science fiction may not exist. I think definitely it does exist. What I think is that possibly the future doesn't exist.

The notion that our life is predicated ahead of ourselves, by all kinds of possibilities, is something that is probably going out. We are living in the present. I think the main task of the science fiction writer is to write about his own present; and when he does this, science fiction will at last come of age and one that will have a vital literature for the first time, that is wholly concerned with the present, and will be that much more real for it.  
(op. cit. pp158-159)

Renato BARILLI:: The core of Calvino appears to be an attitude of close attachment with keen curiosity to the world, things in general, animals and human gestures and actions. The writer looks at them with crystalline clarity, childlike innocence that is at the same time extremely prehensile and retentive; as if there were between the eye and the objects observed a clear transparent film, throwing them into sharp relief without blurring line or colour, hence providing a well-defined image. Linguistically, this accuracy of perception is expressed in the search for a precise, specific vocabulary, that is to say, which tends to move from the vague and abstract level of the generic to the species, the family, until it aims directly at the individual. And in this urgent desire to reach a hair-fine, valid definition, Calvino undoubtedly has the merit of avoiding the deplorable mediocrity and generality of so much of our contemporary narrative writing (limitations which we have previously had occasion to regret in the cases of Cassola and Bassani). A mass of things pile up in his narration and ask to be catalogued, each to be given a specific place in the limited space they share with their neighbours. To borrow terms frequently employed in semantics, we might say that he uses a denotative type of language in which each word bears a clear, precise relation to one particular thing, one to one, and not a connotative language, that is to say, allusive, ambiguous, inspired by vague feelings. (ITALIAN WRITING TODAY (Penguin) pp 255-256)

Charles BEAUMONT:: As to the question itself ((Is There Too Much Sex In Science Fiction?)), it seems to me that it is like asking, "Is there too much breathing in science fiction?" Are there too many people in science fiction? Sex can, depending upon the treatment, be simply dirty writing, or sex can be what it is in most people's lives, one of the greatest motivational factors.

Since science fiction is about people, and since people are motivated by only a few powerful influences - sex being one of them - it seems to me that it is a perfectly superfluous question.

I speak in theory only, because I find that out of all the science fiction I have written, I have written only one story containing sex and that between  
sf commentary 32 page 21

a man and a cockroach - there are issues to this union, too.

(The Proceedings; CHICON III, page 101)

Greg BENFORD:: I sometimes think the emphasis on literary performance among our SF writers is beginning to do them harm. Surely not to their product - the average level of the novel and even the short story is rising rapidly - but to their selves. Stress upon the virtues of characterisation, style and the simple craftsmanship with words is never out of place, true; but SF's prime virtue, I think, is the vision it gives of the world, the distance from the turbulence of the present. In this it has some claim to an original source of energy and power. This is really the only reason it is important, the reason SF is now taught in university. (Does anyone imagine SF is taught for its literary mastery?)

The difficulty arises when well-meaning authors begin to compare themselves with the best writers in the world, and come away depressed. Recently one of our most promising new talents (Alex Panshin) and a resurrected oldie (Robert Silverberg) seem to have run aground on this shoal, with a resultant diminution of their output to near zero. I am sure they would both say that there are only a few good writers in SF - and in the list include, say, Tom Disch and Joanna Russ and maybe Lafferty - the rest are merely commercial wordsmiths. Many other writers would doubtless agree with this or some slightly modified statement. This is simply a sign of how ingrown SF is, though, for Russ and Disch are writer's writers, with little real selling power. Perhaps in 10 years they will rank with Heinlein, etc., but I doubt it. Bester, the paragon of the 50s, never made it as a big seller and consequently I believe he has little influence among most people who regularly buy and read SF. Understand, I do not mean these people are not our best writers - personally I think they are - but rather that the great host of citizens who read SF do not read it for what Russ, Disch, Lafferty, etc., provide. It is a pity but it is a fact. I still believe the remembered SF of this decade will be fairly classical, perhaps even moderately "hard science" work. Though I am willing to be proven wrong. (SPECULATION, October 1971, p. 38)

Alfred BESTER:: Young people often withdraw into unadulterated escape fiction, including science fiction. They also engulf science fiction along with everything else as a part of the omnivorous curiosity of youth. Arrested adults ... that is, arrested in development, also withdraw into unadulterated escape fiction, including science fiction; but we're not discussing the youthful and/or withdrawn readers of science fiction here. We're discussing the mature fans who enjoy science fiction just as they enjoy hi-fi, art, politics, sport, escape fiction, serious reading, mischief and hard work ... all in sensible proportions, depending upon opportunity, season and mood. I contend that science fiction is only for the euphoric mood.

I think the strongest support for my contention is the fact that women, as a rule, are not fond of science fiction. The reason for this is obvious, at least to me. Women are basically realists; men are the romantics.

(THE SCIENCE FICTION NOVEL (Advent) p. 86)

60. ...it's my claim that when it comes to social criticism, philosophy and so on, science fiction is usually making the big decision. It knows little and cares less about the day-to-day working out of the details of reality; it's only interested in making the big decisions: Who to run for galactic president.

the journal of omphalistic epistemology 6 : november 1972 : page 22

What to do about Mars. Should we help Alpha Centauri. (op. cit. p. 87)

61. The science in science fiction is usually Pshush-Making. We gather rare materials ... the theories, ideas and speculations of genuine scientists ... we put them together in strange contraptions ... we heat them white hot with the talent and technique of the professional writer ... and all for what? To make a huge Pshush! If the Admiral had gone into a serious conference with his top brass to discuss the military value of Pshush-Making, it would be no more ridiculous than discussing the serious scientific aspects of science fiction.

But there's a silver lining ... or should I say a Pshush-Lining ... to the cloud, because it's my contention that this is the essential charm of science fiction. I said before that men are the romantics. Unlike women, we can't find perpetual pleasure in the day-to-day details of living. A woman can come home ecstatic because she bought a three-dollar item reduced to two-eighty-seven, but a man needs more. Every so often, when we're temporarily freed from conflicts ... euphoric, of you please ... we like to settle down for a few hours and ask why we're living and where we're going. Life is enough for most women; most thinking men must ask why and whither. (op.cit. 88-9)

62. I can only answer that question by committing the heinous crime of discussing your literary religion. And the best way to begin is to mention Ignatius Donnelly, the patron saint of American readers ... although very few know his name. Donnelly wrote a book called The Great Cryptogram. Does that ring a bell? It was Mr. Donnelly who tried to prove that Bacon wrote Shakespeare.

He's the patron saint of American readers because few American readers really believe that Shakespeare wrote Shakespeare. Few Americans can comprehend or understand artistic genius. Faced with unique achievement in the arts, Americans always poke around behind the scenes, looking for ghost writers, the unknown collaborator, the hidden power behind the throne. It never seems to occur to them that once they've found the hidden power, they'll come up against the same problem all over again, and have to poke around ad infinitum.

Now it's interesting that Americans never feel this way about science. No one has ever written a book trying to prove that somebody else invented Edison's inventions. Nobody ever digs up Morse's grave to see if he really invented Marconi's wireless. There's an ancient superstition that an unknown Negro writes Irving Berlin's music, but no one dreams that a Japanese invented the airplane for the Wright brothers. Oh, it's true that scientists sometimes get into priority hassles, but no American is ever incapable of comprehending scientific genius.

The reason is that we're a nation of amateur mechanics. We're simpatico to science and invention, and can identify with mechanical genius. Four Americans out of every five are nursing a secret invention, and take this dream quite seriously. I'm still convinced that da Vinci is a popular painter with us mainly because of the appeals of his beautiful mechanical drawings. I'm also convinced that photography became a passion with us because it made it possible to simulate creative results through purely mechanical means. (op.cit92-3)

63. Since art, literature and poetry are concerned with the human being as a fellow creature ... almost a part or reflection of ourselves ... we're not very sympathetic to them or to their great craftsmen. This is why we find it

difficult to understand the artistic genius. It is also why we prefer our science fiction to concentrate on the mechanics of life and leave human beings alone.

Science fiction rarely, if ever, deals with genuine human emotions and problems. Its science ranges from the 20th to the 50th century A.D. Its characters usually remain back in the 16th century A.D. They are drawn in the two dimensional style of the Morality Plays, and they face problems of horse-opera depth. When science fiction attempts comedy ... which is the essence of humanity ... it only succeeds in belabouring itself with empty bladders.

Any art form which studiously avoids human reality as a subject can't hope to move its audience. Science fiction can entertain and intrigue us, stimulate and enlarge us with its novel ideas and ingenious extrapolations, but it can rarely move us to pity and terror. There are exceptions, of course ... but in general, science fiction suffers from high emotional vacuum. (op. cit. pp93-94)

64. What are we, then, in terms of science fiction? What is science fiction in terms of us? Let me piece the picture together for you; and remember that it's only a part of ourselves. It's a picture of a passionate young romantic who runs away from his soul and focusses his passion on the objective world ... a romantic with the courage to entertain daring and complex concepts, yet who is afraid of the perplexities of human behaviour ... a romantic full of curiosity, yet curiously indifferent to half the marvels around him ... a romantic; vigorous and honest in his speculations, yet often deluding himself as to the value of his speculations ... a charming romantic, but a withdrawn romantic ... a Renaissance romantic, but a neurotic romantic. (op. cit. pp95-96)

65. The average quality of writing in the field today is extraordinarily low. We don't speak of style; it's astonishing how well amateurs and professionals alike can handle words. In this age of mass communications almost everybody can use a pen with some facility. The science fiction authors usually make themselves clearly understood, and if they rarely rise to stylistic heights, they don't often sink into the depths of illiteracy.

No, we speak of content; of the thought, theme, and drama of the stories, which reflect the author himself. Many practicing science fiction authors reveal themselves in their works as very small people, disinterested in reality, inexperienced in life, incapable of relating science fiction to human beings, and withdrawing from the complexities of life into their make-believe worlds.

There are exceptions, of course, and we've praised them often in this department; but now we're speaking of the majority.

Their science is a mere repetition of what has been done before. They ring minuscule changes on played-out themes, concepts which were established and exhausted a decade ago. They play with odds and ends and left-overs. In past years this has had a paralyzing effect on their technique.

This department is exasperated with the science fiction author who seizes upon a trifle and turns it into a story by carefully concealing it from the reader. His characters behave inexplicably in a bewildering situation; little by little he lifts a corner here and a corner there, and leads the reader down the garden path of curiosity until at last he removes the cape with a flourish to reveal ... nothing.

...

We're not merely shooting off our mouth when we say that it is the authors who are killing science fiction. We know how and why science fiction is written today, and are prepared to state a few hard truths. Outside of the exceptions mentioned above, science fiction is written by empty people who have failed as human beings.

As a class they are lazy, irresponsible, immature. They are incapable of producing contemporary fiction because they know nothing about life, cannot reflect life, and have no adult comment to make about life. They are silly, childish people who have taken refuge in science fiction where they can establish their own arbitrary rules about reality to suit their own inadequacy. And like most neurotics, they cherish the delusion that they're "special".

(F&SF, February 1961, pp 105-107)

66. Nowadays the contemporary novel of which many science fiction writers seem to be rather jealous because they feel - and perhaps rightly - that the contemporary novel receives a lot more of attention and a lot more of respect than the science fiction novels which very often are much better than contemporary novels; the science fiction authors, as I say, feel a little jealous, a little hurt, and a little irritated by this. Which brings me to my point, and it is this; Science fiction is iconoclastic - science fiction is stimulating. I do not care what its pretenses are to philosophy, or to science, or to anything like that. The important point is that it is mind-stretching. It stretches the imagination, it stretches the mind, and for this reason it is adored by young people, particularly or by older people who still have young minds, who enjoy having their minds stretched.

The contemporary novel does not stretch the mind. The contemporary novel, nowadays, has a tendency to more or less report on the social scene to people who would like to sit comfortably at home and read a report without any sense of responsibility, without any response whatsoever.

But science fiction demands response, and By God! we get it; we kill ourselves to get it!

Which brings us, of course, to the last point about good and bad science fiction. Since science fiction is mind-stretching and since its purpose is to really grab people, shake them, and make them think it implies that the science fiction author must himself have been capable of thought, must have had experience, must indeed have something to say in his book. In other words, science fiction, I think, is the supreme test of the career of the author. There is no other form, (no other form of art) that tests the artist as science fiction does - which is why I would like, in the Russian manner, to applaud my colleagues. (SF SYMPOSIUM, p. 124)

67. No author should live off science fiction alone. That way, you produce a lot of damn bad science fiction. My point is, don't write unless you've got something to say. I do love science fiction, very deeply; God knows there are guys who write rotten stories because they haven't got any talent, but there are also talented men who have to meet monthly bills and they grind out stuff which they should never have considered writing. I say, for Christ's sake get into additional lines of writing so that science fiction becomes just one aspect of your work. (NEW WORLDS QUARTERLY 4, p. 221)

Dmitri BILENKIN:: The readers were asked to evaluate about forty works of Soviet and foreign science fiction writers published or re-printed in recent years. The subsequent analysis revealed the "readers' opinion factor".

If a book was praised by everyone its was given one hundred points, if by no one, nil. Fifty points meant that approval and disapproval divided equally. It is only natural that a hundred and nil were factors practically unattainable in life.

What were the readers' judgements on various works of Soviet writers? The books of the Strugatsky brothers were in the lead. It Is Diffisult to be a God received 81 points. Monday Begins on Saturday - 80. (By comparison, the "literary jury" gave the former 82 points and the latter, 65. Further on the opinion of the "literary jury" will be given in brackets).

The readers also gave a high appraisal to the works of Ivan Efremov: Andromeda 69 (75), The Edge of the Razor 64 (56).

It is interesting to compare the popularity of these Soviet books with that of the classics of foreign science fiction: Ray Bradbury's Martian Chronicles - 78 (79); Isaac Asimov's I, Robot - 74 (82); Robert Sheckley's Stories - 75 (74); Stanislaw Lem's Solaris - 78 (78) and Return from the Stars - 74 (75).

James BLISH (as William ATHELING):: There are a number of questions which could be raised here if they werenot all off the subject, among which the most interesting might be: What constitutes speculation? Actually, however, it seems to me that the trouble lies in my having called the Sturgeon formulation a "definition" in the first place. (Ted himself calls it a Rule.) The virtue which inheres in it is not that it defines or fails to define what a science fiction story is, so that he who runs may read. What it does do is to make unmistakable what is needed for a good science fiction story. (And if it includes Arrowsmith, so much the better; had that novel been printed at the same time that Wells' early novels appeared, nobody would have questioned its status as science fiction. It seems to me that it is still science fiction, regardless of whether or not it includes some of the more conventional gestures of the idiom.)

Indeed, I can think of no function for a definition of science fiction which would be of interest to anyone but a librarian, except the function of tekking us how to measure critically a specimen at hand. To say that a story is a science fiction story is about as useful as to say that a play is a comedy. The whole discussion is a matter of taxonomy. (THE ISSUE AT HAND pp33-4)

70. To be sure, the story is the thing. There Mr. Crossen and confreres are indubitably in the right of it. The purists (among whom I list myself) have long ago lost this battle, simply because the anti-science boys had the great good fortune to have an artist on their side. The story is the thing; Bradbury writes stories, and usually remarkable ones; he is of course a scientific blindworm, but in the face of such artistry, it's difficult to care. Most writers, I think, would be happy to grant Bradbury this - and would be equally glad to grant it to anyone else in Crossen's camp who could show something like the same deference for writing as a serious thing in itself. This was the major difficulty with the old anti-science writers, such as the

younger Hamilton, who not only did not care whether or not their facts were accurate, but displayed an equally manifest contempt for the craft of writing as a whole. Probably, I would add, Mr. Bradbury did us good: In the heyday of the scientifically accurate story, bus-bars often got substituted for plots, and more generally speaking respect for fact went hand in hand with ignorance of writing. As I say, the purists have lost that battle, and everyone benefits by the loss.

If, however, the respect for facts is now to be swamped out, nobody is likely to win, least of all the reader. This respect is fundamental to fiction, not just science fiction alone, but all fiction. Once the observed fact goes - whether it's an observation on the breathability of the atmosphere of Mars, or an observation on what a human being (not a child, a robot, or an imaginary alien) might do in a given situation - the writer can no longer be trusted; he is not looking at the universe around him, but simply into his liver. And if the reader is encouraged to think of this kind of writing - which is not even self-examination in the Socratic sense, any more than keeping a record of the amount of lint one's umbilicus accumulates between baths is self-examination - as the utmost he should ask from his authors, he will find himself at last with nobody to read but Janifers: writers who respect neither the craft nor the materials used by the draft. ((op. cit. pp46-47))

71. I submit to you that very few science fiction stories, even the best of them, are about anything, and that in this sense they fail Poul Anderson's unitary test in the worst possible way. For all their ingenuities of detail and their smoothness as exercises, they show no signs of thinking - and by that I mean thinking about problems that mean something to everyone, not just about whether or not a match will stay lit in free fall, which is a gimmick and nothing else. In that realm they are about as interesting as rope-dancing, trick roller-skating, or any other act on the Ed Sullivan television show, and like most such acts they are fatally preoccupied with imitating each other. (op. cit. p.126)

72. I am trying to discuss the kind of book from which the reader emerges with the feeling, "I never thought about it that way before"; the kind of book with which the author has not only parted the reader from his cash and an hour of his time, but also has in some small fraction enlarged his thinking and thereby changed his life. For this kind of operation an exploding star is not a proper tool; at best, it is only a backdrop.

Isn't that, in fact, what we all felt about science fiction when we first encountered it? It's still a young field, and most of us encountered it as youngsters. It was a wonderful feeling, that sense that interplanetary space was not only there to be looked at, it was there to be travelled in - which the scientists themselves were busy denying that we would ever be able to do. We felt bigger thereby, because what we were reading made our world seem bigger. But both we and the field are not children any longer, and we have reached the stage where our physical horizons can't be extended much more without bursting the bubble of the physical universe itself. The ethical, the moral, the philosophical horizons remain, and those are infinite. It is there, I believe, that the realm of good science fiction must lie.

Before his death, my dear friend Cyril Kornbluth had come to roughly the same conclusion: I quote from his essay in The Science Fiction Novel (Advent: Publishers, 1959; 1964):

We are suspending reality, you and I. By the signs of the rocket-ship and the ray gun and the time machine we indicate that the relationship between us has nothing to do with the real world. By writing the stuff, and by reading it, we abdicate from action; we give free play to our unconscious drives and symbols. We write and read, not about the real world, but about ourselves and the things within ourselves.

This is true, but it is not all of the truth. The real world is not different from what we have inside our skulls; in fact, all we know about the real world is what we have inside our skulls. This dichotomy that Cyril described is not a real dichotomy. The real insides are what make fiction, and if it is not about that it is just gadgetry and talk. This is where good fiction has always made its land and home, and I think that now either we must invade it, or else become just another brackish little backwater of literature, as deservedly forgotten as the mannerisms of Euphues. (op. cit. pp128-129)

73. There is at least a little of the private vision in every work of fiction, but it is in fantasy that the distance between the real world - that is, the agreed-upon world, the consensus we call reality - and the private vision becomes marked and disturbing. The science fiction writer chooses, to symbolize his real world, the trappings of science and technology, and in so far as the reader is unfamiliar with these, so will the story seem outré to him. It is commonplace for outsiders to ask science fiction writers, "Where do you get those crazy ideas?" and to regard the habitual readers of science fiction also as rather far off the common ground. Yet it is not really the ideas that are "crazy" but the trappings; not the assumptions, but the scenery. Instead of Main Street - in itself only a symbol - we are given Mars, or the future.

(MORE ISSUES AT HAND, p 11)

74. It is not even essential that the symbols be used correctly, although most conscientious science fiction writers try to get them right in order to lure the reader into the necessary suspension of disbelief. There is no such place as Ray Bradbury's Mars - to use the most frequently cited complaint - but his readers have justly brushed the complaint aside, recognizing the feeling as authentic even though the facts are not. This is probably what Mr. Aldiss means by "near-SF", as it is what I mean by fantasy. The essential difference lies only in how close to the consensus the writer wants his private tattoo to appear.

...

The absolutely essential honesty, however, must lie where it has to lie in all fiction: honesty to the assumptions, not to the trappings. This brings us back, inevitably, to the often quoted definition by Theodore Sturgeon:

A good science fiction story is a story about human beings, with a human problem, and a human solution, which would not have happened at all without its science content.

This is a laudable and workable rule of thumb, it seems to me, as long as the writer is aware that the "science content" is only another form of tattoo design, differing in detail but not in nature from those adopted by the writers of all other kinds of fiction.

Viewed in this light, the writing of science fiction is an activity which cannot usefully be divorced by the critic from the mainstream of fiction writing, or from artistic creation as a whole. It does not even differ from them in being idiosyncratic in its choice of a symbol-system, since every artist must be odd in this respect, choosing from the real world (has anyone seen it lately?) those parts which make the best fit with the universe inside his skull. The science-fiction writer centers his universe - of - discourse in the myths of Twentieth Century metaphysics, as other writers found their intellectual homes and furniture on Olympus or the Mount of Olives.

(op. cit. pp 12-13)

75. Yet it is striking that there has been no qualitative change in magazine science fiction since the technical appreciation of the 1940s, even if one counts some fairly striking changes in subject-matter. The technicians-per-se are still front and center, and the newcomers to their ranks have acquired the firm notion that a bag of tricks - a rather small bag - is all there is to writing (or at least, all that's needful to keep selling). The next logical stage, the infusion of genuine human emotion into the speciality, has by and large failed to materialize; we have no writers who are consistently trying to write science fiction the hard way.

There are of course writers who have tried it now and then - "Stuart", del Rey, Kornbluth, Sturgeon, Bradbury, and perhaps one or two others - but successful though they sometimes were in bringing it off, they failed to set an example the majority of science-fiction writers were willing to follow. Any number of reasons could be adduced for this, and I will offer here only the most immediately obvious:

(1) Individual writers such as Bradbury and Sturgeon proved to be too idiosyncratic for other writers to follow without turning into disciples or outright parasites, especially since they made their understanding of English a form of private property;

(2) Striving for genuine human emotion is one hell of a lot harder work than mastering a Mysto Magic Kit, especially at two or three cents a word; and,

(3) The overwhelming majority of science fiction readers have made it clear that they actively distrust and dislike emotional content in stories, even in the rare instances where the author has it under perfect control. (Admittedly I would find this last point difficult to demonstrate, but I think the list of Hugo winners - especially when compared with their defeated competitors - strongly suggests it, for a starter.) (op. cit. pp 60 -61)

76. Wells wrote stories about magic, too, and also with relish; but always by his hard rule - hardest, of course, upon himself, but he was not a lazy author - that only a single fantastic assumption was admissible per story, and must thereafter be developed with the strictest logic of which the writer is capable. Most writers of fantasy, on the other hand, adopt the idiom in a blind and grateful abandonment of the life of the mind. Most science fiction writers today are prosecuting the same sort of one-handed adultery, under the impression that they are uttering a public protest or a social criticism, to cheers from Kingsley Amis and others.

These science fiction writers have adopted Wells' despairing view of the uses humanity would probably make of science (and I certainly cannot declare that they are wrong in so doing); but they have utterly rejected Wells' respect for the facts themselves, and so are systematically falsifying any claim they

might have had upon the respect and attention of the reader.

These writers decided in advance that rockets were only going to multiply tragedy; that the new planets we visited would defeat us if they were hostile, and that we would defile them if they weren't; that we could expect nothing from television but brainwashing, nothing from atomic energy but explosions and lung cancer, nothing from universal literacy but book-burning, nothing from better medicine but overpopulation, nothing from ... But there is nothing wrong with these propositions, experience should have taught us already, but the word "nothing"; except for that, they can be defended at length.

I want to repeat here, AT THE TOP OF MY VOICE, that I am not attempting to dictate any other writer's attitudes or choice of subject.

If these writers even wish to make the general case - The future of Progress is universal human degradation - that can be defended too, with a little care, and they can enlist Wells to support it. But Wells took pains to be precise, and if possible, right, about the ways in which it might happen, and the facts which already pointed in that direction. The annoying thing about the modern romantics of science fiction is not the moral they preach, but the fact that they seem to take almost equally great pains to be wrong, even about what is already known. They have passed from fiction to pamphleteering, from art to advertising.

...

If science fiction is to have any value as social criticism, or as moral paradigm, or as real examination and prediction of human behaviour, or any of the other special virtues it has claimed for itself, it has damn well got to be believable above almost any other possible form of expression. Otherwise, the burden of the story, whatever it may be, will not carry conviction, and the whole operation of writing it becomes at best only a game for children, at worst a piece of cynical buckturning on a par with lying about the virtues of one indistinguishable brand of hair-oil over another. Wells knew this, and he practised in accordance with the knowledge, though he shared the moral gloom of our chiefest modern fablesmiths in the idiom he invented almost by himself.

(op. cit. pp 104-105)

77. A further qualification is also important. It is a matter of fact that science fiction today is one form of commercialized category fiction. Once one examines the implications of this statement, much that is wrong about modern science fiction is instantly explicable, though perhaps no less regrettable. For this fact we owe that same Mr. Gernsback a blow to the chops. Prior to 1926, science fiction could be published anywhere, and was; and it was judged by the same standards as other fiction. Some of the pre-1926 work looks naive to us now, but unredemably dreadful work almost never got past the editors' desks. Today it does so regularly, because there are magazines with deadlines which cannot appear with blank pages, and there is also a firm and ever-widening audience which will devour any kind of science fiction and rarely reads anything else. This is a situation already quite familiar to us in the field of the detective story. Once Gernsback created a periodical ghetto for science fiction, the gate was opened to the regular publication of bad work; in fact, this became inevitable. (op. cit. pp118-119)

78. In other words, the subject-matter of science fiction criticism is not science fiction, but literature as a whole, with particular emphasis upon philosophy and craftsmanship. I stress philosophy not only because science is the journal of omphalistic epistemology 6 : november 1972 : page 30

a branch of it, but because all fiction is influenced by the main currents of thought of its time, and to be unaware of these is like having no windows on the east side of the house; you don't get to see the sun until the day is half over. Craftsmanship should be an obvious item, but I am perpetually startled by how many science fiction readers, editors and writers try to get by on intuition instead; as for the critics in science fiction, the only ones whose published work shows any awareness of writing as a craft are Damon Knight and Sour Bill Atheling - and before you conclude that I am blowing my own horn, let me add that it is profoundly dissatisfying for a creative writer to find that half the informed technical criticism he can find in his chosen field has been written by himself under a pen name. (op. cit. pp 120-121)

James BLISH :: I was fascinated by Chip Delany's letter, though unlike you I disagree with most of it. Like you, I was baffled by his reaction to Judith Merrill's pieces, and particularly by his selection of examples from it. Take the Sturgeon piece: it was written (as was mine) for a Sturgeon issue of F&SF, to accompany his being the guest of honour at that year's convention. In such a situation adverse criticism would have been out of place, and neither Judy nor I attempted it. Furthermore, her piece makes it clear that she would have been incapable of it, out of sheer adulation - and in fact, if my recollection is correct, about half of what she had to say was not criticism of any kind, but was about Sturgeon as a person.

Chip is, I think, quite correct in requiring that the critic know the past. This again would seem to me to let Judy out the rear door, for until recently her only reading outside science fiction had been done under the gun of a high-school English course. This, I think, accounts for her explosions of enthusiasm over fifty-year-old Dad and Surrealist techniques, stream of consciousness, and so on; she simply does not know that these are not new and original experiments. I have no objections to SF writers trying these things on for size, but I maintain it is ridiculous to greet the attempts with cries of a coming millenium.

Chip, of all people, should know that in the house of criticism there are many mansions. If he doesn't, he should go right now and buy a copy of THE ARMED VISION by Stanley Edgar Hyman. The kind of critic he seems to be calling for is a Pound type, the man who leads you into his library, points to a book and says "That's wonderful" or "That's awful". This is evaluative criticism and in the pure state it isn't worth a dime, in my opinion. I think C.S. Lewis demolished it definitively in AN EXPERIMENT IN CRITICISM; if that were all there were to Pound's criticism I wouldn't bother with it. Luckily, there's a hell of a lot more. Of course, if it turns Chip on, it obviously is worth more than a dime - but even if it were invaluable it would not represent more than a fraction of the main body of criticism. (EXPLODING MADONNA, April 1969, p. 8)

80. ... it's a little alarming to see Chip saying, "I agree with practically every statement in the Sturgeon and Leiber articles." I did not see the shorter British version of the Leiber article, but the F&SF version contains a completely distorted summary of SF magazine history transparently loaded towards UNKNOWN (which hardly needs the help, and certainly not this kind of help); a disastrous sentence about the state of physics in 1926 containing two howlers which could have been corrected by reaching for the nearest cheap encyclopedia; and a view of recent mainstream literary history which would earn Judy ((Merril)) an E in any freshman survey course.

(I'm aware of your passion for specificity, Mr Geis, and hooray for it, but I've previously gone into the details in another article, which I've submitted to F&SF as a courtesy, though it will doubtless wind up in a fanzine.)

Sensibility as Chip uses the term is unarguably an asset to a critic, providing he can distinguish between sensibility and gush; but it is no compensation for falsifying the history of one's own field, making confident statements about an alien field without even checking them, and attempting to do without the very body of reading which Chip himself prescribes. I submit further that no critic of real sensibility would do any of these things, simply because doing them would make him acutely uncomfortable.

If Judy holds to her Eastercon announcement that she is leaving SF, we are not going to see any more of such work after whatever she has in the pipeline is exhausted. But what she has already written is still on the page, and ought to be approached with as much caution as one would approach the critical writings of John J. Pierce - and for much the same reasons.

... There seems to be considerable wool between me and Chip's remark that the Knight-Blish criticism was directed at the General Public of SF, though the wool may be more rather than his. I can't speak for Damon, but my Atheling stuff was directed in part to readers of SF, and in part to its authors and editors. The only alternative that I can see is not gush, but critical articles which begin, "Dear Chip," which doesn't strike me as a practical approach. It is of course true that most of the time I was expressing the obvious, but here Chip has the benefit of hindsight. On page 50 of this issue, Mr Geis, you say "But there are objective writing yardsticks that can be applied to fiction." Absolutely, and also obviously; I don't think you'll get much argument. But when Atheling launched himself in 1952, very few SF readers seemed aware that any such yardsticks existed, and what was worse, neither did most writers and editors. I addressed Atheling to correct this situation as best I could; my intent was openly and avowedly didactic, whatever the degree of my equipment for it, and I don't feel the least apologetic about directing it to the Unwashed; who, after all, would bohter to teach before a class that already knew the subject? If many of Atheling's and Knight's points are now obvious, it's at least conceivable that that is due at least in part to Atheling's and Knight's having made them so. It's certainly the outcome I was working toward. (SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW, August 1969, p 44)

81. The largest body of SF criticism, as with any criticism, has been the Spingarnian, or impressionistic kind, which looks at the work in question and then describes the critic's personal reactions to it. That does not in fact say anything about the work itself, but is creating a new work of art, large or small, using the original as a springboard. This is the commonest form of criticism in any field, although most of the critics don't know that that is what they are doing. There has been quite a bit of absolute value-judgement in SF, for which I can only refer the reader to C. S. Lewis's AN ESSAY IN CRITICISM, in which he disposes for all time, it seems to me, of the whole question of value-judgement of literature. Beyond that, the main body of SF criticism has been the Moskowitz kind, which is criticism of infinite regress. You look at one story and say "that reminds me of a similar story back there" and that one reminds you of a similar story back here like the picture on a Quaker Oats box!

Once you do get back there, all you discover is Moskowitz digging through the journal of omphalistic epistemology 6 : november 1972 : page 32

piles of old magazines! This kind of critic believes that every idea comes from something else that the author has read. It is utterly useless even in the historical sense, eventually. Almost all SF criticism that we know today, and that has been widely published, has been of the influence-detecting kind, and in my opinion it is pernicious. In the first place because there were so few ideas in SF to begin with that were worth borrowing, and in the second place because the ideas don't matter anyway, it's the way they're handled that matters. (SPECULATION, September 1970, p 25)

82. So my final expression is this: in my opinion - in my profoundly religious opinion, I might add - it is the duty of the conscientious science fiction writer not to falsify what he believes to be known fact. It is an even more important function for him to suggest new paradigms, by suggesting to the reader, over and over again, that X, Y and Z are possible. Every time a story appears with a faster-than-light drive, it expresses somebody's faith - maybe not the writer's; but certainly many of the readers' - that such a thing is accomplishable, and some day will be accomplished. Well, we have a lot of hardware - including, I'm sorry to say, a couple of old beer cans - on the moon right now, to show us what can be done with such repeated suggestion. It can be done I think philosophically on a far broader scale than we have ever managed to do it before.

So I come down now, having prepared my retreats as best as possible, to my conclusion, which surprised me as much as it may surprise you. It seems to me that the most important scientific content in modern science fiction are the impossibilities. (QUICKSILVER, April 1971, pages 25-26.)

83. Plot is an essential limitation of fiction which an author either has to accept and master, or transfer his attention to some other field of literature. It's quite true that it was the only criterion the pulps cared about, which was wrong; but one can say with equal justice that writers trained in that school perforce learned how to manage it, while a lot of the new experimental writers don't even seem to have heard of it. The pulps didn't invent it, and it's not a formula, but simply a balance of ingredients which time has shown to be necessary to capture the attention of the maximum number of readers over the longest possible time. You must have a central character with whom the reader can identify (either with love or with hatred); he has to be faced with a problem (any old damn problem, so long as it's not trivial); he has to make some attempt to solve it; complications - the main body of the story - must ensue, and it's more fun, and more compelling, if these arise out of his attempts at solution (the shorthand word for that is suspense); these need to reach a point at which the problem seems quite insoluble (crisis); and finally, either the hero solves the problem or doesn't, success or failure alike evolving from his own nature and his own efforts. Even the Odyssey, with its interfering gods - and the Iliad, where they're even more interfering - shows all these aspects, since the way the gods behave is so humanly unpredictable that they are essentially part of the normal cast of the story.

Nobody imposes, or has the authority to impose, these elements on a story like a strait-jacket, and they can be subject to endless variations (Kuttner alone employed dozens). For example, the standard New Yorker story, by a preference which I think must have been unconscious, consisted almost solely of the crisis; only a few hints were supplied as to how the leading character got himself into that pickle, and the reader was left to imagine how he got out of it

- if he did; but all the ingredients were there, only the weighting was different. To play games with these elements, as Kuttner so gleefully did, you have to know what they are, and I wish more of the present generation of SF writers did. (For that matter, I wish more mainstream writers did, too. So many of their stories just sit there - even the simple pattern of an ordinary human event, stimulus/response/result, is ignored.)

The traditional models have become traditional only by reader acceptance, not by any professional process, or editors' dicta. There is nothing sacrosanct about them, and they have been subject to many variations since Homer's time; but they work, and the experimentalist can't even know what he's doing is really a valid experiment unless he's aware of them, as, for instance, Ballard is.

(MOEBIUS TRIP, May 1972, pp 7-8)

Robert BLOCH:: Is there a sound sociological reason why so much of science fiction must concern itself with so-called Key Figures? It is certainly not a criminal offense to do so, but to some extent I believe it is a literary offense. Because in science fiction novels which are deliberately presented as glimpses of our possible society of tomorrow, the writer is in effect offering a promise to the reader. He is saying, "Come with me and I'll show you how the world of the future will be - the kind of people who live there, what they think, and what effect tomorrow's social order will have upon them."

In 1984, Orwell did just that. But in the average tale of tomorrow, the author goes straight to the top. He may make grudging mention of the lower classes or even present picturesque (and usually criminal) specimens in one or two chapters - but the greater part of his book usually offers glimpses of Important Officials Guiding Destiny and Revealing Their Philosophy. The heroes and their peers seem just a bit larger than life-sized, and you seldom come away from your reading with the feeling of, "Yes, this is how it really could be."

You may, if the author is skillful - and many of them are - enjoy sharing the experience and the danger, and revel in the hero's eventual triumph. But your attention has been directed away from the theme and centered upon the gaudy melodrama of Intrigue in High Places.

It's fun to read about d'Artagnan and the Queen - but you don't go to The Three Musketeers to find out how life was actually lived in the days of the French Monarchy.

Science fiction as a vehicle for social criticism is stalled when one of those super-heroes climbs into the driver's seat and insists on racing full-speed-ahead right down the center of the main highway. You're so busy watching for the possibility of accidents and smashups that you never really see the scenery. Thrilling? Yes. Contemplative? Hardly. (THE SCIENCE FICTION NOVEL, Advent: Publishers, pp106-107)

85. The "protest" literature of the thirties has given way to the "hardboiled rugged individualism" of today - and while Cash McCall grabs the loot and Mike Hammer unravels the umbilicus with a bullet, one can hardly expect to find different attitudes or aspirations adumbrated in science fiction or any other field.

the journal of omphalistic epistemology 6 : november 1972 : page 34

But is science fiction, therefore, failing in its function of social criticism?

Quite the contrary.

When a literature of imaginative speculation steadfastly adheres to the conventional outlook of the community regarding heroes and standards of values, it is indeed offering the most important kind of social criticism - unconscious social criticism.

With its totalitarian societies, its repudiation of individual activity in every role save that of the self-appointed leader and avenger, science fiction dramatizes the dilemma which torments modern man. It provides a very accurate mirror of our own problems, and of our own beliefs which fail to solve these problems. (op. cit. pp120-121)

86. But this is the very crux of the movie-makers' problems. Good science fiction, as opposed to fantasy, must carry with it an illusion of realism. The settings, the mechanical devices, the special effects often succeed to a greater or less degree. But the better the job is done in this area, the worse the characters look, by sheer contrast. One would literally have to create a new world in order to make these people convincing, individualistic, arresting. We can and do believe in the characters in The Hustler or Room At The Top because we are familiar with the milieu against which they move. But the space-suit boys and the leotard-and-ropes aliens immediately reduce most science fiction films to the level of space-opera; even the plaster-of-Paris "monsters" are more credible. (AMAZING STORIES, March 1962, p.142)

87. It has frequently been said that fantasy and science fiction are two sides of the same coin.

There are some writers of science fiction who disagree. I think I can understand why. In this world of ours, the average science fiction writer sees very few coins come his way - so perhaps he doesn't even realize that a coin has two sides.

But I assure you it does. And the hypothetical coin of which I speak is emblazoned with a face that is turned upwards and outwards, staring into the future and worlds beyond. This is the science fiction side of our coin, heads. Turn the coin over and we find tails - tails of dragons and monsters and demons disappearing into the past, avoiding our direct gaze, but still visible to us. This is the fantasy side, carrying the same weight and substance as the other; without it, the coin could not exist.

Our coin is counterfeit, of course. For we writers, whether we call our work fantasy or science fiction, are dealing with appearances, not reality. (SF SYMPOSIUM, p41)

Francois BLOCH-LAINE:: For the economist, or the sociologist, acting also as a philosopher who is trying his hand at the method of "prospective", to be concerned with utopia is not a deviation, as an excursion into science fiction might be. Science fiction is not to be condemned in itself, but it is the concern of the novelist, while utopia is still in the domain of the philosopher.

How is one to go about constructing a utopia seriously, in such a way that it remains within the sphere of normal concern for the economist and sociologist?

To begin with, some things must doubtless be eliminated. For instance, one could begin with the following postulate: in a century characterized by the irreversible phenomenon of socialization, man's happiness depends on the conditions in which he is integrated into society. There is no question of searching for happiness outside society, but only of describing the ideal integration. This eliminates utopias of the "pastoral" or anarchistic type. Such realistic utopianism, which takes the difficulties of life in society for granted and reckons with the constraints it necessarily entails, may seem insufficiently utopian. Serious utopianism, however, deals with things as they are: the nature of man, who is neither angel nor beast - this excludes utopias founded on angelic natures in a universe where everyone would always be good and pure - and the nature of the material world, a hard world where the easy life will not arrive tomorrow - which also excludes utopias characterized by such an abundance of material goods that everyone might soon be satisfied without threatening his neighbour. (UTOPIAS AND UTOPIAN THOUGHT, ed. Frank E. Manuel, Beacon Press, pp205-206)

Tom BOARDMAN:: To too many people science fiction still means rockets to the moon, slying through space, intergalactic wars, bug-eyed monsters, and mad scientists. Science fiction still has to live down the sensational magazine covers of twenty years ago when scantily-clad females in fishbowl helmets fought off the unwanted attentions of eight-tentacled venusians.

...  
To my mind, science fiction (the title) is the hopelessly inadequate description of a genre which is simply any speculation about what may happen (or may have happened) to Mankind. (CONNOISSEUR'S SCIENCE FICTION, pp 9-10)

Anthony BOUCHER:: The past few years have seen two principal trends in fictional thinking about the future: an abject reliance on the coming superman, who will, singlehanded, bear all our burdens and solve all our dilemmas; or a despairing belief that man is going to hell in a chromium-plated plastikoid hand-basket, doomed to be a slave of his own machines - if he doesn't blow himself up first.

Frankly, we - Healy and I and the other writers here - have a little more faith in man than that; and we think that it's time that more of that faith should be expressed in fiction. Certainly some of the warnings of possible doom in the fiction of the '40s were healthy (if the superman-worship was not); but let us occasionally have a new tune in a major key. If pride is deadly to the soul of man, so also is despair. (Introduction to NEW TALES OF SPACE AND TIME, p xii)

91. Science fiction is proud of being the ideologically freest form of popular entertainment - perhaps the only such form in which a man may advance whatever ideas he believes in, and in which his readers are as much interested in his ideas as in his plot. And it's as satisfying as it is paradoxical to see such a form growing inpopularity in a period which otherwise tends towards increased timidity and conformity. (op. cit. p xiii)

Ray BRADBURY: ((technocracy combined)) all the hopes and dreams of science fiction. We've been dreaming about it for years - now, in a short time, it may become a reality. (quoted by W.H.G. ARMYTAGE, YESTERDAY'S TOMORROWS, p/ 132)

93. My reaction to the comments of Brandis and Dmitrevskiy is sadness. I have always felt that it is science fiction's business to teach us, while entertaining us, about our old foolishness, our present foolishness, and our future

foolishness. We spray each other with words and insist on misunderstanding what could be understood if we got in a room together and saw each other's faces and knew our mutual humanity. Any future destruction will be brought about not by one group of poor fools, but by two groups blindly moving in the dark and pulling back from the warm touch of recognition. (F&SF, Oct '65, 69-70)

Evgeni BRANDIS & Vladimir DMITREVSKY:: In the West, and in the USA in particular, science fiction serves as one of the means of ideological indoctrination of the broad masses of the people.

...

The most striking feature of the social prophecies of the American and English fantasy writers is that they are not based on any concept of the progressive development of society, but involve regression, decline, degeneracy, backwardness and the destruction of mankind. Modern Western science fiction writes of an anti-Utopia, and it is significant that bourgeois critics and writers themselves use this term in speaking of social science fiction. (F&SF, October 1965, pp 62-63)

95. The characteristic aspect of contemporary science fiction by Anglo-American bourgeois writers is the projection into the future of present state relations, social problems, and events and conflicts inherent in modern capitalism. These writers transfer imperialist contradictions to imaginary space worlds, supposing that they will be dominated by the old master-servant relations, by colonialism and by the wolfish laws of plunder and profit. (op. cit. p. 63)

96. The traditional view of science fiction writing as scientific prevision akin to popular science is out of date and needs to be reviewed.

Fantastic images and improbable situations continue to be the most characteristic feature of science fiction writing, but its relationship with science is no longer as straightforward as it used to be in the days of Jules Verne and his followers.

Whole scientific prevision will continue to be an element of science fiction writing, it should not be regarded as its distinctive mark. It is, in fact, something of an exception, for it is much more difficult perhaps to forecast a scientific discovery than to plot the flight path of a space rocket on its way to a specified point of the sky. Of course, leading scientists may ponder the various prognostications of science fiction writers, and bear them out in some way, but the correctness of a forecast is not in itself the touchstone of good science fiction writing. Its main task is to stimulate thought and quicken the emotions, which is the task of all real works of art.

The same is true of the popularizing mission of science fiction writing, rather, the fusion of two trends: science fiction and popular science. This fusion goes back to the time of Jules Verne, who for a variety of historical reasons happened to be both a popularizer of science and a science fiction writer.

Subsequently, these two branches of literature diverged and today the popularizing aspect is not the leading one in science fiction. Socio-psychological, ethical and philosophical problems have come strongly to the fore. Fantastic situations allow for the presentation of highly unusual collisions in which conflicts are developed to a high pitch of intensity.

Modern writers increasingly make use of fantasy as a literary form facilitating the statement and solution of definite ideological and aesthetic problems, instead of an occasion for the substantiation of various hypotheses.

That is not to say, of course, that science fiction writing has lost its informative value. Even those writers who do not directly pursue popularizing aims are informative in the broad sense of the word. After all, even the fantastic assumption used as an element of literary technique usually meets the current level of scientific thinking, and all the motivations of plot are in one way or another held together by scientific and technical activity which transforms nature, society and man himself.

That is why we do not agree with those who insist that the trinomial "science fiction literature" should be stripped of its first term to give more elbow room and modernize the term itself. Is it not the author's attitude to science that determines the character of modern fantasy as compared with that of the past? Is it right to range alongside each other the old myths and fairy-tales, and the stories of Asimov and Bradbury, the novels of Rabelais and the tales of Hoffmann, and the books of Efremov and the Strugatsky brothers? To eliminate the first term - science - would be to mix together the writers of all ages, all the fantasies of the world from hoary antiquity to our own day, depriving ourselves of the possibility of drawing a line between different types and genres of fiction.

We find an extremely broad range of subjects, artistic approaches and techniques in the works of science fiction writers, both Soviet and foreign. In this context, science fiction reveals to the analyst ever greater complexity and diversity. It makes successful use of all literary genres, from social utopia and political pamphlet to realistic novel and psychological tale, from philosophical drama and film script to satirical review and fairy-tale.

Science fiction is not determined by some external genre characteristics (the term genre can have only relative application here) but by content, ideological message, the purpose of the plot itself.

The best science fiction works are always topical, in touch with the burning issues of the day, although the connection may not be all that evident. The fantastic image is by nature hyperbolic, and is based on varying exaggerations of actual possibilities. When it is not used for the purpose of illustration, it opens up a second plane, which is allegory. However a fantastic image may appear to deviate from the empirical truth of life, it must be related to reality.

Like any other types of writing, science fiction develops according to the laws of the theory of reflection. The content of any fantastic image ultimately boils down to reality.

Let us recall what Lenin said in this context: "The approach of the (human) mind to a particular thing, the taking of a copy (= a concept) of it is not a simple, immediate act, a dead mirroring, but one which is complex, split into two, zigzag-like, which includes in it the possibility of the flight of fancy from life..."

Fantasy is all-embracing and virtually boundless, like the creative mind. The only limits set to it are those arising from various modes of perception of reality, moulded in the struggle between progressive and reactionary ideologies.

Apart from the immediate literary merits, we take as a criterion in assessing the value of a work everything that promotes the development of the human personality, extends its horizon, inspires it with lofty ideals, ennobles it morally and intellectually, improves its aesthetic perception of the environment, helps to gain an insight into the good and evil of this world, and to respond to them more keenly - in short, it is everything that promotes the truly human in man.

Soviet science fiction is an embodiment of mankind's hopes and anxieties: the dream of a bright future and a warning of impending disasters and calamities. Social transformation interwoven with scientific and technical development has been and remains the leading theme of Soviet science fiction, but it has never depicted the future communist society as a cloudless idyll of abundance and complacency, a society in which no conflicts take place. On the contrary, the heroes of Soviet science fiction dealing with the immediate or distant future are shown in a state of ceaseless quest, beset by a sense of dissatisfaction with their achievements, which is a prod to further advance; they are shown as craving action, projecting and performing grand schemes, and essaying great feats. (SOVIET LITERATURE MONTHLY, 5/68, pp 146-148)

Reginald BRETHERTON: (1) To say that science fiction holds within itself the seed of an entire new literature does not mean that science fiction as we know it, is that literature. Nor does it mean that we can now foretell the exact forms that literature will take when it evolves from science fiction and non-science fiction. . . .

(2) . . . The impossibility of stretching the "old maps" to fit the new terrain, or of preserving them by trying to exclude it, will become constantly more obvious. The unperceptive reader will react to this as he is reacting now, but even more intensely; he will demand and get, on levels appropriate to his own complexity, stronger and stronger "emotional shock" values in his non-science fiction. . . .

(3) All fiction derives from the experience of reality. All fiction creates imaginary times, imaginary worlds, to be experienced only through acts of "the imagination". And the subjective reality of fiction depends, not on the spacio-temporal coordinates assigned to it, but on the author's direct or indirect experience of reality, on his frames of reference for the interpretation of reality, on his ability to abstract and synthesize fictional experiences, and on his selection of symbolic media capable of evoking these experiences completely for his readers.

(4) Therefore, the "serious" writer of non-science fiction . . . will find that the expansion of his frames of reference will neither force him to write about the future nor forbid him to write about "the present" and the past. If he determines to write science fiction as we know it now, he will learn that a hypothetical future is merely an interesting and plausible device particularly well suited to the presentation of those human problems and experiences promised by the nature of the scientific method and by its continued exercise. He will see that it is possible to write science fiction set in "the present" or the past - possible, and sometimes necessary, and usually just a bit more difficult.

(5) Eventually, we will again have an integrated literature. It will owe much, artistically, to non-science fiction. But its dominant attitudes and

purposes . . . will have evolved from those of modern science fiction . . .

(in MODERN SCIENCE FICTION: quoted by Judith Merril in SF: THE OTHER SIDE OF REALISM edited by T.D. Claeson, pp 83-84)

97. To science fiction, man is the proper study of the writer - man, and everything man does and thinks and dreams, and everything man builds, and everything of which he may become aware - his theories and his things, his quest into the universe, his search into himself, his music and his mathematics and his machines. All these have human value and validity, for they are of man. (op. cit. p86)

Howard BROWNE:: Bill ((Hamling)) said flatly that the majority of science fiction writers read such stories because (1) they are vitally interested in science, (2) they want fiction that has a basis in fact, which is why out-and-out nonsense science would not go over with them at all and (3) all readers of science fiction are actually fans whether they do or don't write letters, belong to fan clubs and attend sf conventions. Bill went on to say, very heatedly, that the primary purpose of science fiction, like any other type of fiction, is to entertain, but that in its case entertainment alone is not enough. Everybody, said Bill, would like to be able to look into the future and find out what kind of world and life is in store for him. Science fiction helps to gratify that wish, plus giving the reader the vicarious thrills of actually being a part of the future. This is why the "science" in science fiction must, in a broad sense at least, have some foundation in the science of today. (AMAZING STORIES, November 1950, p 6)

John BRUNNER:: A friend of mine, in London, recently asked me what science fiction writers are doing. In other words, what function do they see themselves performing.

And he being very much a person for absolutes, not to say dogmas, pressed me so until I finally gave him an answer that satisfied him.

You are perhaps acquainted with the dictum of the English poet Robert Graves, that there are two kinds of truth; there are Apollonian truths, scientific truths, and there are Dionysian truths - which are valid in human terms. And the answer which satisfied my friend was that science fiction writers are attempting to create the appropriate Dionysian truth to match an environment that has been severely changed by the discovery of Apollonian truth in science. That satisfied him, but, unfortunately, it did not satisfy me. And it went on nagging at me and this paper is more or less the result. I went from that point, you see, to wonder why the science fiction writers feel it necessary to do this - if this is what they are doing - and, of course, to how great an extent are they succeeding. (SF SYMPOSIUM, p 103)

100. One of the things which has annoyed me for the 17 or so years that I have been writing science fiction is the incredible conservatism of literary taste among the typical science fiction audience, which for a group of people who are theoretically using the entire Universe for their playground, strikes me as being a little bit sad. I will not attempt to define my view of the 'new wave' any more closely than this, but I will say that I feel the arrival of people with different approaches, different styles and different areas of interest is not cause for quarrelling, a cause for faction-forming, I think it is a cause for satisfaction that our field is being enriched and extended. (SPECULATION, 7/69, p6)

the journal of omphalistic epistemology 6 : november 1972 : page 40