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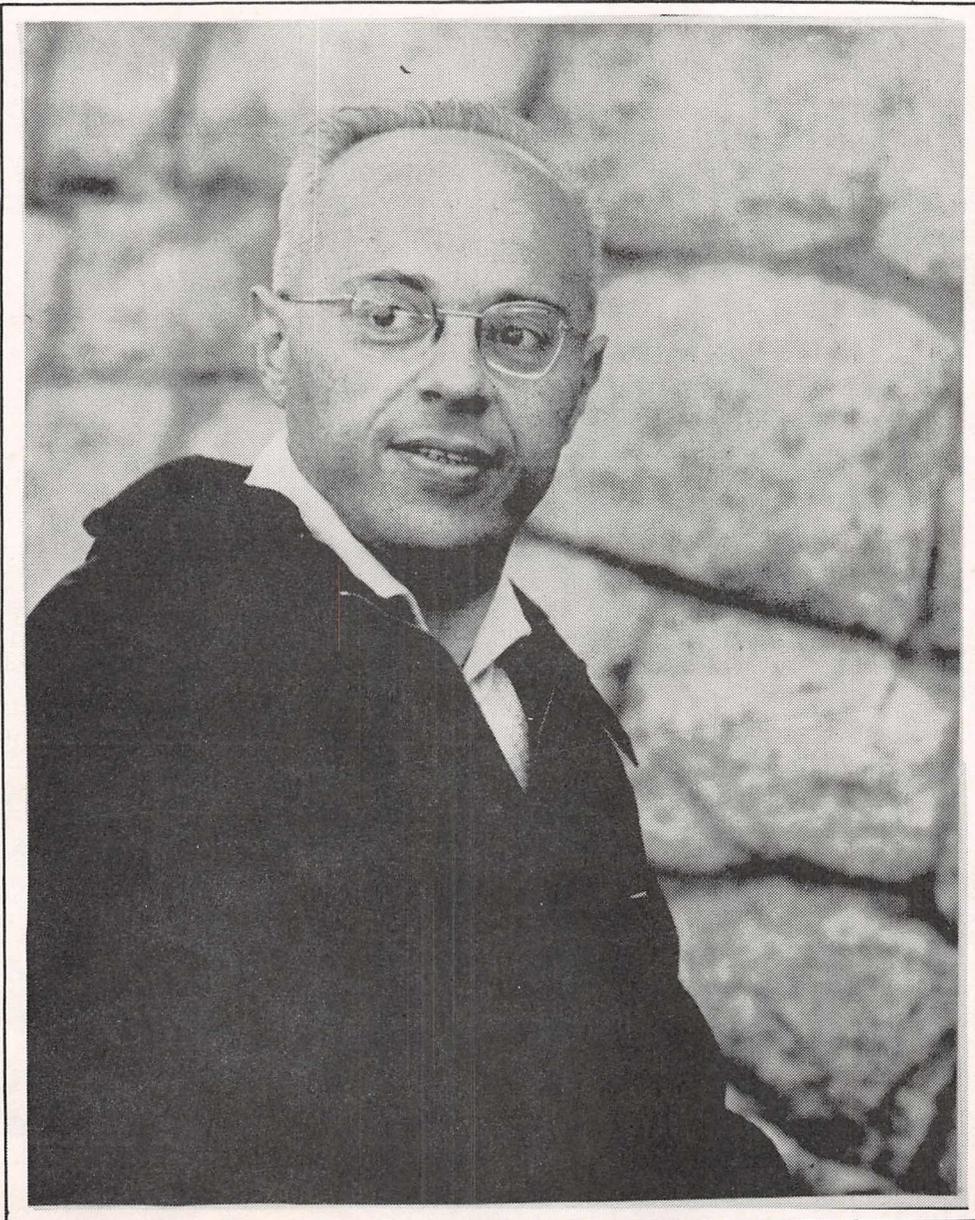
presents

STANISLAW LEM

in

S F COMMENTARY

35 · 36 · 37



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Dedicated to
WERNER KOOPMANN

As some of you know, I will be leaving Australia for Torcon, USA, and elsewhere, on the day after this magazine is published. First important note: Please continue to send all mail to GPO Box 5195AA, Melbourne, Victoria 3001, Australia. If you send it there, it should reach me. If you try to send it to me while I'm travelling overseas, it probably won't. Second important note: I am agent for several magazines - LOCUS, VECTOR, and SPECULATION as the most important. Robin Johnson, GPO Box 4059, Melbourne, Victoria 3001, will be my agent for these magazines from August 25 onwards. Third important note: This magazine could not have been produced in three weeks (from first stencil typed to last copy collated) without the help of such people as Stephen Campbell, Ken Ford, Bill Wright, Carey Handfield, Robin Johnson, and David Grigg. In fact SFC 34 would not have appeared at all without this help. Thanks a lot.

Um: This is the last page typed. I'm just about to collapse from exhaustion, but I'm supposed to leave for Torcon in three days anyway. This magazine has no right to exist - it's a bit of a miracle, which happened only because of valuable help from the people I've mentioned, plus lots of help from all sorts of other people, including Martin Dodgson. Never again? Well, I said that after SFC 26, didn't I? Never again on this duplicator, anyway. The 1939 model Gestetner 120 really showed its age this issue, and I apologise for pages that are a bit hard to read. And if I cannot afford a new duplicator when I return?...

More apologies: Firstly, a most sincere apology to the organisers and members of Advention (this year's national convention) for not turning up at the last moment. As you will realise, I just could not have finished this magazine if I had travelled to Adelaide. But I still wish I had been there. (And thank you to you all for awarding me my second Ditmar for Best Australian F nzine). :: I must apologise to Richard Delap for leaving out his sixteen-page article on AGAIN, DANGEROUS VISIONS. But, again, I would not have had time to produce the whole magazine if I had included the extra article.

This issue splits very much down the middle, as you will see while looking through it. For the first time ever, I have placed I MUST BE TALKING TO MY FRIENDS at the end of the magazine, but that column ties up well with the articles down that end of the issue, while all the articles at this end tie together very neatly. I hope you see the connections. Lem's article reads to me rather like a combined letter of comment to SFCs 9 and 17, and therefore I must thank again Werner Koopmann for making it possible for this particular article to appear first in SFC. Irene Pagram's cover (SFC's best ever) illustrates SOLARIS.

S F COMMENTARY 35/36/37

July/August/September 1973

148 pages

COVER

Irene Pagram

5 IMPORTANT NOTES

Editor

7 SCIENCE FICTION: A HOPELESS CASE - WITH EXCEPTIONS

Stanislaw Lem

(Translator: Werner Koopmann)

37 YES, BUT WHO SAID WHAT?:

A RECONSIDERATION OF 'SOLARIS' AND ITS PROBLEMS

George Turner

46 OUTSIDE INSIGHT

Gerald Murnane

49 OF FICTION, TRUTHS, AND BILLY PILGRIM

Gerald Murnane

Barry Gillam

57 A SURVEY OF SOVIET SCIENCE FICTION

Darko Suvin

69 BREAKTHROUGHS AND BREAKINS

Philip Dick

73 SEIZE THE TIME!

Tom Collins

81 I MUST BE TALKING TO MY FRIENDS

Editor

Jerry Kaufman

Angus Taylor

Allen Evans

Harry Warner Jr

Richard E Geis

Ken Ford

Joanne Burger

Sandra Miesal

James Cameron

Darko Suvin

Buck Coulson

Mike Glycer

Poul Anderson

Philip Dick

Brian Lombard

George Turner

Thomas Disch

Michael Shoemaker

John Bangsund

Joan Dick

Leigh Couch

Gerald Murnane

Ken Ozanne

Malcolm Edwards

Leigh Edmonds

Frank Bryning

Akitsugu Tashiro

John Brunner

Sam Moskowitz

Donn Brazier

Seth McEvoy

Philip Jose Farmer

Simon Joukes

Mel Merzon

WAHF

94 ORSTRILIA!: A FAIR-DINKUM NOTIONAL ANTHEM

John Bangsund

Page 3: Design: Stephen Campbell; Photo of Bruce Gillespie: Petr Wright-Smith (Q-Con); Photo of Stanislaw Lem: courtesy Franz Rottensteiner. Illo. page 56: Lindsay Cox. Poem page 81: Martha Charalambous, London (from FIRE WORDS).

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By now the career of STANISLAW LEM is almost so well-documented that it scarcely needs repeating. Articles by and about Lem have appeared in such "fanzines" as S F COMMENTARY and LUNA MONTHLY, and this eminent Polish writer of science fiction (with six million copies sold in Europe) has already gained fame in English-speaking countries since SOLARIS, the first of his many novels translated into English, appeared. Continuum Books, a division of Seabury Press, has just published two more of Lem's most famous novels, THE INVINCIBLE and MEMOIRS FOUND IN A BATHTUB. Perhaps the most interesting facet of Lem's career during recent years has been his love-hate relationship with American and English s f: while Lem makes biting attacks on the literary blunders of its members, Science Fiction Writers of America has recently awarded him an honorary membership. But Lem keeps up a keen interest in Western s f, as his tribute here to PHILIP DICK demonstrates, and one would gather from his delightful correspondence that we fanzine editors have so corrupted him that he threatens to turn into a "fan". The debate continues:

STANISLAW LEM

Science Fiction: A Hopeless Case ————— With Exceptions

THE TRANSLATOR

WERNER KOOPMANN is not yet well-known outside of German fandom, but I hope that the quality of this translation will bring him the fame (and perhaps some payment eventually) that he so deserves. Lem's usual translator, Franz Rottensteiner, was too busy to translate the following article, and for some time I feared that it would never be printed in an English-language magazine. However, more than a year ago Werner offered to translate it, although he was facing exams and problems in earning an income. Some time later I was amazed when the completed translation arrived. All done for SFC alone, and just because I asked. Such a debt cannot be repaid. Werner describes himself as a student who "always wears a tie and white shorts, and never on Sundays, when I let my beard grow. Am studying Law and Economics at Hamburg University, with odd jobs, esp. bookseller." Not surprisingly, his greatest vice is "books" - "spells doom for me; I can't leave the books alone... I'm muddling through quite comfortably in spite, or maybe because I'm still a bachelor." Happy muddling, Werner.

STANISLAW LEM:

S F: A HOPELESS CASE - WITH EXCEPTIONS

Translated from the German by WERNER KOOPMANN.

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I On reading IN SEARCH OF WONDER by Damon Knight and THE ISSUE AT HAND by James Blish, a couple of questions, the answers to which can be found nowhere, came to my mind.

For example: in science fiction fandom rumour has it that science fiction is improving every year. If so, why does the average production, the lion's share of new productions, remain so bad?

Or: we do not lack definitions of this genre. However we would look in vain for an explanation for the absence of a theoretical, generalising critique of the genre, and a reason why the weak beginnings of such criticism can be found only in "fanzines", amateur magazines of very low circulation and small influence (if any at all) on the authors and publishers.

Furthermore: Blish and Knight agree that the s f readers cannot distinguish between a high-quality novel and a mediocre one. If they are right, how are readers selected to belong to the public who reads this literary genre, which intends to portray the (fantastically magnified) outstanding achievements of mankind?

The important question is: even if science fiction were born in the gutter, living on trash for years on end, why can't it get rid of the trash for good?

My essay tries to answer these questions. Therefore it is a PROLEGOMENON TO SCIENCE FICTION ECOLOGY - or an INTRODUCTION TO A SOCIOCULTURALLY ISOLATED REALM OF CREATIVE WORK - or a PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR SURVIVAL IN THE LOWER REALM OF LITERATURE. These pompous titles will be justified below. The books by Blish and Knight were of great assistance to me in writing, but I did not regard them as only collections of critiques, but more as ethnological protocols of several explorations into the exotic land of science fiction, i.e. as raw material to be subjected to a sociological analysis. For me the facts collected by these authors were often more valuable than their opinions; that is to say, I arranged this material in a way not completely corresponding to the spirit of the sources.

II I call science fiction a "collective phenomenon" of a sociocultural nature. It has the following parts: (a) The readers - on the one hand, the mute and passive majority of science fiction consumers; on the other, the active amateur groups that constitute "fandom" proper. (b) The science fiction producers - authors (some of them also critics) and publishers of magazines and books.

Science fiction is a "very special case" because it belongs to two distinct spheres of culture that overlap nowhere. We will call these spheres the "Lower Realm" - or Realm of Trivial Literature - and the "Upper Realm" - or Realm of Mainstream Literature. To the Lower Realm belong the crime novel, the western, the pseudo-historical novel, the sports novel, and the erotic-sentimental stories about certain locations, such as doctor-nurse romances, millionaire-and-the-playgirl stories, and so on. I'd like to spare the reader a detailed description of what I mean by mainstream. Perhaps it will suffice to quote the names of some of the authors who inhabit this Olympus: Moravia, Koestler, Joyce, Butor, Sartre, Grass, Mailer, Borges, Calvino, Malamud, Sarrault, Pinget, Greene, etc. STANISLAW LEM

It cannot be maintained with universal validity that these authors do not descend to the lower floors occasionally, for we know of crime novels by Graham Greene, "fantastic" novels by Orwell and Werfel, and Moravia's "Fantasies". Some texts by Calvino are even considered science fiction. Therefore it should not be conceived that the difference between authors of the "Upper" and "Lower" Realms is that one of the first does not write fantasy or other literature related to science fiction, while a subject of the second does just this: the difference can be examined neither according to intrinsic type nor to the artistic quality of a single work. To be a subject of the Lower or Upper Realm does not only and exclusively depend upon the product made by the author. There are much more complicated interrelationships of a sociocultural nature. I shall talk about them a little later.

At this point I want only to propose a practical rule of procedure which will predict with 98% accuracy whether an author will be considered as an inhabitant of the Upper or the Lower floor. The rule is simple and can be stated as follows: if someone starts to write in the mainstream, and the public and critics get to know him by name, or even as a world celebrity (so that, on hearing the name, they know that they are talking about a writer, not an athlete or actor, then his attempts at science fiction and/or fantasy are regarded as "excursions" or "sideleaps", even if repeated) then that man lives on the Upper floor. For instance the "entertainments" of Graham Greene express a private mood or tactic of his.

During the lifetime of H G Wells, there was no such clearcut border between these two "Realms" of literature. They shaded into each other gradually and continually. At that time Wells was known simply as an English writer, and the readers who appreciated his prose often knew of both his ambitions - the realistic and the fantastic. Only much later did an Iron Curtain descend between these two kinds of literature so that the typical science fiction fan often knows the works of science fiction written by Wells, but ignores the fact that Wells also write "normal" realistic prose (and highbrow connoisseurs value it highly today, and more so than his science fiction). This curtain, this concrete ceiling (to maintain the image of a two-storey building) has grown little by little, and this ceiling, hermetically sealed, became an impenetrable barrier only during the twenties. We can recognise this by the fact that Capek's works are still classed with the literature of the Upper Realm, while Stapledon, who was writing about ten years later, is not accredited with being there. Therefore some authors do not earn their classifications exclusively on their merits. On the contrary their works are subject to higher rules of taxonomy, rules that have developed in the course of history and know no exceptions.

If, in spite of all this, a classificatory exception is made, the judgment is given that the (literary) case under consideration is not essentially science SFC 35 9

STANISLAW fiction, but wholly "normal" literature which the author intentionally camouflaged as science fiction. However, if we proceed disregarding all these "extenuating circumstances" some novels by Dostoyevsky become "crime novels"; however, in fact they are not regarded as such. The experts say that the plot of a crime novel served the author only as a means to an end, and he definitely did not want to write a crime novel. This is the same situation as the case of a brothel which is searched by the police. For simplicity's sake the nameless, ordinary guests are regarded as customers of the prostitutes, but a prince or a politician defends his presence on the pretext that he descended to these lowest floors of social life because he longed for something exotic, because his fancy took him on such an excursion. In short, such people stay in the land of pestilence as extravagant intruders or even as curious scientists.

III The status of trivial literature can be recognised by several typical attributes.

First, its works are read only once, just like the cheapest mass products which are also intended for a single use. Most of them become obsolete in the same way as mass products do. If crime novels were selected according to their literary merits, it would be superfluous to keep throwing new ones onto the market, because we could find so many good ones among the multitude there already that nobody could read the choicest of them during his lifetime. However, the publishers keep on putting "brand new" crime novels onto the market although there are quantities of crime novels of undisputedly better quality which have sunk into oblivion. The same goes for refrigerators and cars: it is a well-known fact that today's models are not necessarily better, technologically, than those of yesterday. But in order to keep going the machinery of production must put new models on the market and advertising exerts pressure on the consumers to make them believe that only the current year's models have the best quality. The dogma of continual change of models becomes a law of the market, although every specialist can distinguish clearly between fictitious obsolescence of the product and authentic technological obsolescence. Off and on there are real improvements in technological products. However more often change is dictated only by fashion, a dictatorship in the interest of profit by supplying it with new goods.

The entanglement of real progress and economic laws constitutes a picture of a situation quite similar to that which reigns in the market of trivial literature. On principle, publishing houses like Ace Books could put onto the market exclusively science fiction from the first half of the century, in ever-renewed reprints, because the number of this kind of book has already increased to such an extent that nobody could read even the better ones among them, even if he devoted all his time to this genre. To print new books, 98% of which are miserable products, published for purely economic reasons, makes many older works fall into oblivion. They die in silence, because there is no place for them on a clogged market. The publishing houses provide no filter to bring about a positive selection, because to them the newest book is also the best, or at least they want the customer to believe this, the justification for the well-known total inflation of publishers' advertising. Each new title is praised as the best in the science fiction genre. Each s f writer is called the greatest master of science fiction after one or two of his books have been published. On the s f book market, as well as on the whole market of trivial literature we can perceive the omnipotence of economic laws; and the literary market has in common with the goods market that the existence of

economic laws is connected with the typical phenomenon of inflation. When all STANISLAW books and writers are presented as "the best", then a devaluation, an infla- LEM
tion of all expressions of value is inevitable.

Compared with these carryings-on, with this escalation of advertising, the behaviour of mainstream editors is quite shy and silent. Please compare the blurbs on the jackets of science fiction books with those that serious publishers put on the jackets of a Saul Bellow or a William Faulkner. This remark seems to be banal, but it isn't. Although instant coffee or cigarettes of every brand are always praised as the best in the world (we never hear of anything advertised as "second best"), Michelangelo's frescoes and Tolstoy's WAR AND PEACE are not offered with the same advertising expenditure as the best artwork possible. The activities of the publishers of trivial literature make us recognise that this literature is subject to economic laws exclusively and to the exclusion of any other laws of behaviour.

Second: I must remark that a reader of trivial literature behaves just like the consumer of mass products. Surely it does not occur to the producer of brooms, cars, or toilet paper to complain of the absence of correspondence, fraught with outpourings of the soul, that strikes a connection between him and the consumer of his products. Sometimes, however, these consumers happen to write angry letters to the producer to reproach him with the bad quality of the merchandise that they bought. This bears a striking similarity to what James Blish describes in THE ISSUE AT HAND, and indeed, this author, more than five million of whose books have been printed, said that he received only some dozens of letters from readers during his whole life as an author. These letters were exclusively fits of temper from people who were hurt in the soft spot of their opinions. It was the quality of the goods that offended them.

Third: The market of trivial literature knows only one index of quality: the measure of the sales figures of the books. When an "angry young critic" snubbed Asimov's NIGHTFALL AND OTHER STORIES as old hat, Asimov put up the defence that his books, this year and for years previously, had sold excellently and that none of his books had been remaindered. Therefore he took literary merit for the relation of supply and demand, as if he were unaware that there have been world-famous books that have never been printed in large quantities. If we use this yardstick, Dostoyevsky is no match for Agatha Christie. There are many fans of science fiction who have never read a novel by Stapledon or Wells in their lives and with an easy mind I can assert that the silent majority of readers do not even know Stapledon by name. Blish and Knight agree that the public cannot distinguish a good novel from an abominable novel; and this is correct, with the proviso that only the readers of the Lower Realm are concerned. If this generalisation were valid for all readers at all times, we should have to consider the phenomenon of cultural selection in the history of literature as a miracle. For if all or almost all readers are passive and stupid beings, then who was able to collect Cervantes and Homer into the treasure troves of our culture?

Fourth: There are crass and embarrassing differences between the relations that link the authors of Upper and Lower Realms with the publishers. In the Upper Realm it is the author who alone determines the title, length, form, and style of his work, and his right to do so is guaranteed unequivocally by the letter of his contract. However in the Lower Realm the publishers appropriate these rights. We can recognise from paragraphs of the printed contracts of large science fiction publishing houses like Ace Books that it is the publishers who can, at their own discretion, change title, length, and even the SFC 35 11

STANISLAW LEM text of a book without express permission of its author, just as fancy takes him. Naturally the editors of the Upper Realm also make encroachments. In practice these actions are quite different; they occur before the author signs the contract, i.e. first the editors propose to the author what they want changed, and only after he has agreed is the contract made, and not one syllable says that the original manuscript must be revised. The difference is because in the Upper Realm literary texts are considered in their integrity untouchable and taboo because they are almost sacred art objects. This is an old custom, in the spirit of the historical tradition of Western culture, and the practice of publishing, even in the Upper Realm, is not always so pious and fair as we are told. However this difference between the two Realms is of great importance.

For in the Upper Realm one always strives at least to keep alive the appearance of intact virtue, in the same way as in high society women do not permit themselves to be called prostitutes although they indulge in open promiscuity. However the "ladies" of the underworld do not have such pretensions, and it is no closely guarded secret that one can buy their favours at the appropriate price. Sad to relate, the authors of science fiction are quite similar in behaviour to those "ladies", and they do not feel the disgrace of making transactions, either, as part of which they hand over willingly their works to the publishers who are allowed to revise the texts at will. Thus James Blish tells us that his A CASE OF CONSCIENCE is only so long because his publishers of the time, because of certain technical circumstances, could not produce a work of greater length! Just imagine if we read in the memoirs of Hermann Hesse that his STEPPENWOLF was only so long because his publishers... Such a disclosure would cause a shout of wrath among literary circles, but Blish's words do not affect either him or any other author or critic because in the Lower Realm the station of a slave is taken for granted. The publishers are within their rights when changing the title, length, and style of science fiction books as these encroachments are determined by economic considerations: they act like people who must find a purchaser for their goods, and they have a firm conviction that they work hand-in-glove with the author, like project leaders and advertisement managers for the Ford works. Naturally, nobody thinks it strange that the project leader for a new model does not have the right to think up a name for it.

IV Seen in isolation, a number of the traits of trivial literature, as described above, are quite unimportant. However, when added up, they form an ordered structure of the environment in which science fiction is born and gains a scanty living. These traits are clues, pointing out how in different ways the status of a work of literature is determined; it depends upon whether it is born in the Upper or Lower Realm.

Thus science fiction works belong to the Lower Realm - to trivial literature. Thus sociocultural analysis finally solves the problem. Thus words said about it are wasted; the trial can be closed with a sigh of relief.

But this is not so. For without a doubt there is a difference between science fiction and all the neighbouring, often closely related, types of trivial literature. It is a whore, but a quite bashful one at that; moreover, a whore with an angel face. It prostitutes itself, but like Dostoyevsky's Sonya Marmeladova, with discomfort, disgust, and contrary to its dreams and hopes.

else, something different from what it really is. It lives in perpetual self- STANISLAW deception. It repeats its attempts to disguise itself. Has it got the shadow LEM of a right to do so?

Many famous science fiction authors are trying to pass for something better than their fellow writers - the authors of such trivial literature as crime novels or westerns. These pretensions are often spoken out loud. Moreover, in the prefaces to their books, embarrassing praise is given to the authors by the authors themselves. For instance Heinlein often emphasised that science fiction (that is, his own science fiction) was not only equal to, but also far better than mainstream literature, because writing s f is more difficult. Such pretensions cannot be found in the rest of the field of trivial literature.

This does not mean that there is no standard of quality for crime novels. Here, too, we distinguish bad, boring novels and original, fascinating ones. We can speak of a first-rate crime novel - but it does not occur to anybody to consider such a hit as equal to the masterpieces of literature. In its own class, in the Lower Realm, it may be a real diamond. When in fact a book does cross the borders of the genre, it is no longer called a crime novel, just like a novel by Dostoyevsky.

The best science fiction novels want to smuggle themselves into the Upper Realm - but in 99.9% of cases, they do not succeed. The best authors behave like schizophrenics; they want to - and at the same time they do not want to - belong to the Realm of Science Fiction. They care a lot about the prizes given by the s f ghetto. At the same time, however, they want their books to be published by those publishing houses which do not publish science fiction. (So that one cannot see from the book jackets that their books are science fiction books.) On the one hand, they feel tied to fandom, write for fanzines, answer the questions of their interviewers, and take part in s f conventions. On the other hand, publicly, they try to stress that they "do not really" write science fiction; they would write "better and more intellectual books" if only they did not have to bear so much pressure from the publishers and s f magazines; they are thinking of moving into mainstream literature (Aldiss, Ballard, and several others).

Do they have any objective reasons for surrendering to frustration and feelings of oppression in the s f ghetto? Crime novels are another, an open-and-shut case. Naturally a crime novel reports on murders, detectives, corpses, and trials. Westerns - on stalwart cowboys and insidious Red Indians. However if we may believe its claims a science fiction book belongs to the top of world literature! For it reports on mankind's destiny, on the meaning of life in the cosmos, on the rise and fall of thousand-year-old civilisations: it brings forth a deluge of answers for the key questions of every reasoning being.

There is only one snag: in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred it fulfills its task with stupidity. It always promises too much, and it almost never keeps its word.

For this reason science fiction is such a remarkable phenomenon. It comes from a whorehouse but it wants to break into the palace where the most sublime thoughts of human history are stored. From the time it was born, science fiction has been raised by narrow-minded slaveholders. Thomas Mann was allowed to work on one novel for fourteen years; John Brunner complains that there was a time when he had to write eight novels a year in order to stay alive comfortably. From shame science fiction tries to keep some sides of this situation SFC 35 13

STANISLAW a well-guarded secret. (Often we hear from s f authors how much freedom they LEM enjoy in their work.)

Science fiction is subject to the rigid economic laws of supply-and-demand. It has so completely adapted itself to the "editors' milieu" that there are recipes on how to write an s f work which appeals to a certain editor and gains his appreciation (for instance the late John W Campbell Jr was an authoritative man who published only a certain, easily definable kind of science fiction, and some authors knew how to foresee his demands). In Geis' SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW Perry A Chapdelaine gives us a detailed account of how he was carefully briefed by well-known s f authors when he wrote his first novel. Special care was taken to include those qualities that maximise sales; no mention was made of the immanent quality of the work itself. Often the same is the case in the Upper Realm - but only for beginners. However s f authors remain minors in the eyes of their publishers - all their lives. Such circumstances breed frustration and compensatory behaviour. Indeed, the same sort of thing abounds in the s f ghetto. All these compensatory phenomena, taken together, clearly have the character of mimicry.

(a) In the s f ghetto there is no lack of makeshift and ersatz institutions which exist side by side with those of the Upper Realm. The Upper Realm has the Nobel Prize and other world-famous literary awards. The s f ghetto has the Hugo and Nebula Awards; and American s f poses (still) as "world" science fiction, as can be seen from anthology titles such as THE WORLD'S BEST S F.

(b) The Upper Realm has academic and other highbrow literary journals, containing theoretical and hermeneutical articles. S f also has its highbrow fanzines (RIVERSIDE QUARTERLY from Canada, S F COMMENTARY from Australia, and QUARBER MERKUR from Austria). These are parallel, although not analogous phenomena. The highbrow periodicals of the Upper Realm command real authority in cultural life. The most famous critics and theoreticians of the mainstream are all known to the cognoscenti and to almost all intelligent readers, at least by name (e.g. Sartre, or Leslie Fiedler in USA). However the names of the best s f critics are not known to one soul outside the inner circle of fandom, and the silent majority of s f readers does not know of the existence of the highbrow fanzines. Even if they did know of them, they would not care for the evaluations of the cognoscenti, i.e. they are not influenced by these fanzines when choosing the new s f books that they are going to buy.

For the structure of the flow of information is quite different in the Upper Realm than in the Lower Realm. In the Upper Realm the highbrow periodicals form the peak of a pyramid whose basis is mass culture. The popular critics of the dailies need not agree with the judgments of the initiated highbrow experts, but if one of them opposes a man like Sartre, he knows quite well that he is fighting a worldwide authority. Nothing of this sort in s f. Its pyramid is hidden deep in the fan underground, the best fanzines have only insignificant circulations, and they cannot count on financial help from social or cultural institutions (there are rare exceptions such as NEW WORLDS which at one time received essential aid from certain British cultural institutions, but this is no longer the case in USA).

(c) S f conventions are intended to form a kind of match for the meetings of the PEN club and other similar gatherings. This also involves mimicry because PEN meetings do not have in the slightest the character of gay parties which is so characteristic of s f conventions. At conventions, theoretical reflections are nothing but seasoning; at PEN meetings, however, they are the main course, as well as at similar conferences of professional writers.

I must stress that no esoteric highbrow magazine of the Upper Realm has any direct influence on the policy of the publishers. They possess only a purely moral authority founded on tradition. They do not try to wage open warfare upon the typical phenomena of mass culture today (e.g. normally they hide all data about one-day bestsellers) and their activity becomes visible only in the long run, as all of the institutions in the structure feed the slow process of selection. If we want to give a suitable name to this institution of the Upper Realm, it should be the (often quite powerless) conscience and memory of world culture, its highest tribunal which is at the same time an unbiased witness and judge. Often it loses a single skirmish but wins the great, epic wars - just the way Great Britain did. It cannot give a guarantee of today's fame to a great, misjudged poet, but it provides a memory, helping the next generation sometimes to dig up treasures that are almost lost. In short: these tribunals are not subject to the economic rules of the market, and because of this they are able to defend the cultural heritage against the chaotic onslaught of mass culture.

Nothing like that can be seen in the Lower Realm. S f has no independent periodicals which supervise critically the whole production and form a similar fraction of the bulk of publications in the field, as is the case in the Upper Realm (measured by the yardstick of the circulation of books and especially of literary periodicals). The evidence of the best and best-known s f authors is suppressed when it is contrary to the interests of the publishers - a fact that Knight reports on. The highbrow fanzines are known exclusively to a very small circle of initiated readers, and their influence on publishers' policies is equal to nil. These amateur magazines often publish analyses and reflections which are equal in quality to the best of what is published in the Upper Realm. But this does not change the fact that no one listens to the voices of the critics. This important fact shows clearly that it is not the immanent quality of a statement that determines its scope of action, but this radius is contingent on the broader structure of the whole network of information with which the medium that published this statement is connected.³ It is a typical s f custom that critiques are not produced independently, but are written either by the authors or the editors of anthologies who evaluate each other's works. This state of affairs only helps to cloud the line of demarcation between apologetics (a public relations affair) and objective criticism.

Taken as a whole, s f institutions (cons, fanzines, and awards) appear similar to those of the Upper Realm, but dissimilar as regards the function of furthering social values and selections. In the Upper Realm, as time goes by, the worst and the best literary works drift apart from each other; in s f, however, the forces that are the result of economic laws of the marketplace, an absence of independent criticism, and a lack of cultural assistance, all are directed towards the opposite tendency. They put trash next to valuable books, they impede any experiments in literary creation, choke independent, demanding, probing criticism, and assist the publishers to camouflage as true criticism the advertising that boosts the sales of their products.

Furthermore, the chain of publishers who specialise in s f - and the silent majority of mute, passive readers - form an environment to which even the most gifted s f authors must adapt themselves eventually. The authors are initiated early into the rules of the game, and either they must obey or take immense risks. Suppose an ingenious, even inspired author enters the realm of s f. This man must adapt rapidly and without scruple to the simple truth that it is impossible for him to be valued and esteemed according to his SFC 35 15

STANISLAW LEM extraordinary achievements. The silent majority of the readership will devour his valuable books in just the same way, at best, as they are used to absorbing the worst nonsense of mass production. Taking into account just the economic barometer of the market the publishers will treat him in the same way as they treat his colleagues, i.e. as authors who willingly allow the titles, lengths, and structures of their books to be changed in advance according to the wishes of their masters. This author will watch helplessly the embarrassing sight of his books submerging in an ocean of trash, for the stigma of s f links them irrevocably to this sea. Surely Sturgeon is right in maintaining that 99% of all books in every genre are trash, but the fact remains that in the Upper Realm of culture there are forces which do not cease from furthering positive selection. However in the Lower Realm the best books are placed beside the worst and most stupid and submerged by them under the pressure of the objective situation.

Thus, s f institutions only seem to be the equal of the institutions of the Upper Realm. In fact we see before us a superficial mimicry. S f merely apes and simulates the Olympian quality of literature, without reproducing the same performance capability. No famous author from the Upper Realm concerns himself with disqualifying trashy literature or in defending himself against the attacks of graphomaniacs. For a while the Knights and Blishes tried to do this, but in the end their aggressiveness had to give way to a moderated, more passive attitude. To some extent these intelligent men are conscious of their own defeat. They feel that this behaviour, typical of s f, merely apes grown-up literature. They can see how grotesque such goings-on must look to an outside observer. The unauthenticated (because not earnest) quality of fandom, with its letters, parties, and friendly exchange of opinions is for the authors only a weak substitute, an asylum where they can play the part of the great writer by confessing in fanzines with circulations of 200 or less the secret of their creative writing and their deep psychological secrets.

We could consider these phenomena as insignificant and pay no attention to them, because in the end the ways in which the literati compensate their inferiority complexes, their feelings of frustration, and their Wille zur Macht are not necessarily those aspects of literature that flourish in the Upper Realm. However, in the Lower Realm these are symptoms of the chronic illness that impedes so embarrassingly the growth of the s f genre. Thus the only way to better the prevailing situation is to make an outspoken diagnosis. We could support this conclusion with hundreds of examples. In an article by a contemporary s f critic the names of authors like Farmer, Joyce, Sturgeon, and Kafka are listed indiscriminately. But mainstream critics never reciprocate this striving for equal status. In today's s f anthologies we find, apart from s f authors, such writers as Grass, Calvino, Ionesco, and Michaux, but the Upper Realm does not offer any just return. The inhabitants of the Upper Realm are invited to the Lower; they accept these invitations, but there is no return service. The inhabitants of the Upper Realm treat those of the Lower Realm properly just as the gentry treat the rabble properly. A lady may enter a honky-tonk, but the "ladies" who reside there permanently are not allowed into a respectable house.

V We shall now show how the work of a gifted s f writer grows in the s f environment and how it is accepted there. (The fate of the untalented does not concern us - but we will report on it, too, if only marginally, as it turns out in quite a characteristic way in the Lower Realm.)

its authors feeds, is kitsch. It is the last, degenerate form of myths. From STANISLAW LEM them it inherited their rigid structure. In myth the story of Ulysses is the prestabilised structure of fate; in kitsch it becomes a cliché. Superman is a spoiled Hercules, the robot a golem, even as kitsch itself is the simplified, threadbare, prostituted but original, constellation of values central to a given culture. In our culture kitsch is what was once holy and/or coveted, awe-inspiring, or horrible, but now prepared for instant use. Kitsch is the former temple which has been so thoroughly defiled by infidels for so long that even the memory of its ancient untouchability has been lost. When hitherto untouchable idols get the status of mass products, through mechanical reproduction, and become obtainable as everybody's objects of enjoyment, we observe how the originally sublime is degradingly transsubstantiated into kitsch. The venerable paradigm is reworked in order to make it easily consumed and as simple as possible. And - quite importantly - kitsch does not present itself as such to its consumers; it believes in its own perfection and wants to be taken seriously. The psychic process which originally kept the mass of the uninitiated at a distance from the object of worship because it was an obstacle that had to be overcome - even this process comes wrapped up with the goods as an appetiser. Kitsch, free from all difficulties of consumption, is a product that has been pre-chewed for the consumer. In literature, kitsch results when all the complexity, multi-sidedness, and ambiguity of the authentic product is eliminated from the final product.

However the people concerned (both authors and customers) have a splendid feeling of well-being if this final product retains the air of being an objet d'art, in full bloom, without restrictions. Kitsch is composed exclusively of ersatz products: of heroism, of need, misfortune, love, etc. In science fiction, kitsch is made from ersatz science and literature. From reading "inner circle" critiques and considering what s f prospectuses have to offer, you would hardly believe that the authors who are reviewed display an abundant ignorance of grammar, syntax, style, of their mother tongue; it is as if one suddenly hears that a team of athletes preparing for the Olympic Games cannot yet get up and stand.

In a stabilised culture, the sphere which kitsch might inhabit is quite small. In mass culture, it tends to overflow into neighbouring genres; it has an aggressive and explosive pressure; it is a tumour that grows exuberantly, devouring that part of the body which is still intact. It is quite hard to justify morally a defence against its attacks, because the dilemma always arises as to which is the lesser evil: the trashy deformation of an art object, or its total absence from the circuit of a mass culture which cannot assimilate the real thing. S f is a clinical case of a region occupied exclusively by trash, because in kitsch, the culturally and historically highest, most difficult, and most important objects are produced on the assembly-line, in the most primitive forms, to be sold to the public at bargain prices.

Knowing no discretion and no reverence for things inconceivable by the human mind, piling universes upon universes without batting an eyelash, mixing up physics, metaphysics, and trite trash from misinterpreted philosophical systems without end, science fiction is the true embodiment of kitsch, because of the cheekiness of its total ignorance, which even denies the existence of a higher knowledge towards which it finds no path, and denies it triumphantly and obstinately.

Even if there are subjects about which philosophers dare not even think, topics about which world-famous scholars can say scarcely anything at all, SFC 35 17

STANISLAW they can be bought for 75¢ to \$1.25 at every newsstand for immediate inspection. S f provides a pleasant substitute for the study of the handbooks of the greatest thinkers, cosmologists, astrophysicists, and philosophers who have ever lived - yes, it can even report on what scientists born a thousand years from now will know. I am not even ridiculing this maximum offer; I can only repeat what you read in the s f advertisements. If somebody ridicules somebody else, you could not tell from the earnestness of these statements; it is just another case when you can't take a single word seriously, for this is just advertising which is used to talk only about the best possible and previously nonexistent products. If all this is not meant to be taken seriously, then what is the real content of all their cipher language?

One of the most incredible secrets of s f (however, one which is not too closely guarded) is the fact that 99% of its authors do not know even the titles and authors of today's learned works, but still they want to top these scholars with their knowledge of the year 6000. If an author understands school-teacher's physics, he is praised by Knight, quite in earnest, and presented as a model to authors who seem to have been forced to drop out of school after three years because of general mental weakness. The public does not seem to wait to find out about these interesting facts, probably because such news would annoy them. It is quite embarrassing to find out that for the cheapest cost of money and mental effort, one has been convinced of becoming initiated into the vastest secrets of the universe and existence.

VI The title of this essay is S F: A HOPELESS CASE - WITH EXCEPTIONS. The exception to the rule, as mentioned in the title, is the work of Philip K Dick. Because of a lack of a selection process to struggle against trash and promote real value, the works of Dick are sometimes compared with those of A E Van Vogt.

The novels of both authors share the common characteristic that (1) they are composed of trashy parts, and (2) they are full of contradictory elements. These contradictions include those of an external nature (as when the world depicted in a book runs counter to empirical scientific knowledge) and of an internal nature (as when during the course of a novel the action becomes self-denying, i.e. contradicts itself).

Such a diagnosis does not automatically invoke a subsequent condemnation. It is true that literary judgment is undemocratic, but nevertheless in the course of each critical trial it is also just. However, it must be ascertained why the case under scrutiny allows a sacrifice of values. For these works contain local nonsense and a local destruction of values (as sense is always to be preferred to nonsense), but this local inroad might aid the construction of a higher sense of the totality. This point is connected with the general relativity of all values: even a murder may be justified in a civilisation where it is considered a link in a chain of connections in which, according to prevailing belief, the lesser value, a man's life, is sacrificed to the greater, the godhead.

Judged prima facie, there are no relevant differences between the two cases under review. Both authors disregard empirical knowledge, logic, and causality, categories upon which our knowledge is founded. They seem to sacrifice these basic values to the momentary stage effect; therefore, they destroy the greater values in order to create a lesser one - something always culturally taboo.

fully. As Knight and Blish have proved, the phantasmagoric acrobatics of Van Vogt do not add up to a meaningful whole. He does not solve the riddles posed by him, he does not draw conclusions from the things depicted early in his books, and he sketches only ephemeral ideas, piling them chaotically on one another. With all that, he does not hypnotise the wary reader, but only lulls him into sleep; this sleep comes from increasing boredom, not fascinating magnetism. The only problem posed by Van Vogt's prose is its financial success, at the same time irritating and annoying an intelligent reader like Knight. Why is it possible that work the stupidity of which was amply and unequivocally demonstrated by Knight still enjoys such great popularity? STANISLAW LEM

But no deep secret awaits discovery. The Van Vogt fans do not care a jot about the Knight line of deduction. Most probably they do not know it and do not want to, either. From Van Vogt they get the whole cosmos with its inhabitants, wars, and empires, excellently served up, because the plot can be seen without thinking at all, and they close their eyes to the knowledge that they are fed with stupid lies. We can say no more on this topic.

Philip K Dick seems to write in similar vein to Van Vogt, although he does not, like Van Vogt, violate grammar and syntax as well as physics. Dick, too, works with trash. However his novels are structured with more logic. He is accustomed to let action issue from a clearly and precisely built situation and only later in the course of a novel does decay, perplexing the reader, begin to undermine initial order to that the end of the novel becomes a single knot of fantasies. Dreaming and waking are mixed, reality becomes indistinguishable from hallucination, and the intangible centre of Dick's world dissolves into a series of quivering, mocking monstrosities so that in the end each novel of Dick's mainstream (for Dick has also written second-rate, insignificant works) destroys the order of things that he erected at the beginning. Even if the worlds of Dick owe their explosion to a technology or a disease (or madness) of the space-time manifold, in ever-increasing speed they multiply their "pseudo-realities" so that (as in THE THREE STIGMATA OF PALMER ELDRITCH) the levels of hallucination and reality, which initially were separate from one another, become a space-time labyrinth. This said, Dick moves always among the typical trash of s f, in this realm of androids, of the usual prophets ("precogs"), "psi", "esp"-fields, brain transplants, and hundreds of other, similarly scurrilous products and phenomena.

Trash is present everywhere in Dick's books; however, from time to time, in some of his novels, Dick succeeds in executing a master-stroke. I am convinced that he made this discovery unconsciously and unintentionally. He has invented an extremely refined tactic: he uses elements of trash (that is, those degenerate molecules that once had a sacramental, metaphysical value) so that he leads to a gradual resurrection of the long-extinct, metaphysical-erotic values. In a way, he makes trash battle against trash. He does not deny it, he does not throw it away, but he builds from it a ladder that leads straight into that horrible heaven, which, during this operation, ceases to be an "orthodox" heaven, but does not become an "orthodox" hell. The accumulating, mutually negating spheres of existence enforce the resurrection of a power that has been buried for eons. In short, Dick succeeds in changing a circus tent into a temple, and during this process the reader may experience a catharsis. It is extremely difficult to grasp analytically the means that make it possible for him to do so.

On the contrary, it is easy to say that this catharsis justifies the sacrifice of values which shocks the reader at the beginning. I cannot devote this SFC 35 19

STANISLAW essay to the Dick Transsubstantiation Method; therefore, only a few remarks on LEM his tour d'adresse.

The promise of "allmightiness" is implicit in s f. This omnipotence has a bipolar nature - the omnipotence of the bad (as of the dystopia) and of the good (the utopia). In the course of its evolution s f has renounced the positive omnipotence and for a long time it has occupied the opposite pole - that of maximum despair. Gradually it has made this pole its playground. For the end of the world, the atomic Last Judgment, epidemics provoked by technology, the freezing, drying-up, crystallisation, burning, sinking, the automation of the world, and so on, no longer have any meaning in s f today. They lost their meaning because they underwent the typical inflation that changes eschatological horror into the pleasant creeps. Every self-respecting fan owns an s f library of the agonies of mankind that equals the book collection of a chess amateur, because the end of the world should be as formally elegant as a well-thought-out gambit. I believe it is a very sad phenomenon to witness the indifferent workmanship with which such novels are produced. There are specialists who have slaughtered mankind in thirty different ways, but still search diligently and calmly for further methods of murder. Structurally this (End-of-the-world) s f has put itself on the same level as the crime novel, and culturally it acts out of a nihilism which liquidates horror, according to the law of diminishing returns. A space occupied by trash is a vacuum in which lead and feathers fall at the same speed. It is indeed a great venture to coerce the resurrection of dead metaphysical values from such a novel.

It cannot be maintained that Dick has evaded all the traps waiting for him: he has more defeats than victories in his work, but the latter determine his rank as an author. His successes are due to Dick's intuition. Average s f authors form their hells of existence, their flaming grounds to head for, in social institutions, especially police-tyrannies-plus-brain-washing as from Orwell's school, but Dick makes his out of ontological categories. The primary ontological elements - space and time - are Dick's instruments of torture, which he uses with great versatility. In his novels he constructs hypotheses that are prima facie wholly nonsensical (because of the contradictions they contain) - worlds which are at the same time determinist and indeterminist, worlds where past, present, and future "devour" each other, a world in which one can be dead and alive at the same time, and so on.

But in the first world even the "precogs" prove to be powerless to evade their own cruel end that they foresaw themselves. Their wonderful gift only makes their torture harder to bear. In the second world time becomes a laocoon's snake that strangles its inhabitants. The third world embodies the saying of Chiang Tsi who, upon waking, posed the famous question of whether he is Chiang Tsi who has just dreamed he was a butterfly or a butterfly who now dreams that he is Chiang Tsi. Dick writes about a technological realisation of an ontological problem which has always occupied philosophers (i.e. the controversy between subjectivists and objectivists) so that it may be considered as an earnest problem of the (far) future, and not just a speculative question.

The common opinion that philosophical problems can never change directly into technological feats is an illusion caused by the relatively brief period of the technological era. In the year 1963 I discussed this problem in my SUMMA TECHNOLOGIAE, in the chapter entitled PHANTOMATICS. One possible way to build a synthetic reality is to "encapsulate" the consciousness by connecting the brain of the person in question to a computer-like apparatus in the same way as it is connected normally to real environments through the senses and

STANISLAW
LEM

nerves, i.e. with feedback. The most interesting puzzle is whether a "phantomatically imprisoned" man can divine the real state of things, i.e. whether he can distinguish the machine-simulated environment from the real one, by means of any one experiment. From either a logical or empirical standpoint it seems that the person could not make a correct diagnosis if the program of the machine were sufficiently developed. In a civilisation which has such phantomatic techniques there may be much mind-napping. But also there may be many legal uses of such methods so that a person could witness while awake as many happenings as could be programmed, and as in principle there are no obstacles, the phantomated person could realise the counter-empirical (he could, subjectively, live through many metamorphoses of his body).

In Dick's book, UBIK, we find a literary variant of a similar project. He deals with a biotechnological method that is complicated by the fact that it allows dying people to remain in a specific state between life and death, i.e. "half-life". Dick develops a quite horrible game so that it is not clear at the end which of the main characters lie in half-life and which live in normal reality. The action runs zigzag, with different ideas of what the reader is led to believe to be true. Also there are such macabre effects as the dissolution of earth and jumping back in time. You can find similar things in SF, but this masterly, gripping guidance of the play, in particular the behaviour of all the characters, is psychologically depicted without fault. The border that separates the adventure novel from "mainstream" literature is transgressed in UBIK; something which I want to prove later in this essay.

Now I want to come to a review of the "message" that several of Dick's novels communicate to us in an unequivocal way, imbedded in the action of the novel. He seems to want to prove an equation, in the form of "We exist, therefore we are damned", and this equation is supposed to be valid for all worlds, even for impossible ones. His novels are the results of pessimistic ontological speculations about how the fate of men would change if total revolutions in the basic categories of existence occurred (e.g. revolutions in the space-time system, in the relationship between dreaming and waking, etc). The result is the same, for insofar as these changes are induced by biotechnologies or drugs (as in PALMER ELDRITCH) they can only worsen the fatality of earthly existence. The greater an innovation in technological innovation, says Dick, the more horrible its consequences.

In his first "major" novel, SOLAR LOTTERY, Dick has not yet tried to destroy the fundamentals of existence completely. He "shyly" introduces a new socio-technology in which all men are supposed to have an equal chance to gain political power, for the allocation of power depends upon a comprehensive lottery. As can be expected the result is a new kind of misery and inequality. Thus Dick has good reasons to sacrifice logic and causality; he shows that even the variants of existence that violate causality and logic are inherent in the invariant of texture and doom. One could call Dick an inverted apologist of "progress", because he connects unlimited progress in the field of the instrumentally realisable with bottomless pessimism in the field of human consequences of such progress in civilisation. His novels are pieces of fantastic belles lettres, but his underlying philosophy of life is not fantasy. Dick seems to foresee a future in which abstract and highbrow dilemmas of academic philosophy will descend into the street so that every pedestrian will be forced to solve for himself such contradictory problems as "objectivity" or "subjectivity" because his life will depend upon the result. With all his "precogs", "cold-packs", and "Penfields", he tells us, "And if you could achieve the impossible, it would not alleviate your misery one bit."

STANISLAW LEM Dick's main characters are engaged in a battle not only for their lives, but also to save the basic categories of existence. They are doomed to failure in advance. Some exhibit the patience of Job, who looked quietly into the face of what was coming, for everything that can happen to a man had already happened to him. Others are valiant wrestlers, striving after power, while still others are small and petty people, officials and employees. Dick mans all his misleading worlds with contemporary Americans. Probably this is the reason why they seem so living and authentic - because there is a feedback between them and the world surrounding them. The authenticity of these people corroborates the fantastic background, and vice-versa, the background makes the normal people seem especially noteworthy and true-to-life. Dick's main characters do not become greater during the apocalyptically terrifying action of his novels; they only seem greater - or more human - because the world around them gets ever more inhuman (that is, more incomprehensible to the mind of man).

There are moments when they have a tragic effect. In the Greek sense tragedy is inescapable defeat, with several ways of being defeated. Some of these ways, if a man chooses one of them, give the opportunity to symbolically save an inestimable value. For one of Dick's heroes, the love of a woman or a similar human feeling is the kind of value that is worth saving, a value to be guarded even if the world goes to pieces. They are the last islands of spiritual sanity in a world gone mad, a world that heaps on them objects used in ways other than originally intended and thus become instruments of torture and objects which spring from the sphere of the most trivial consumer goods and behave like things obsessed (e.g. a tape-recorder or spray tin). Dick's main characters engage in conferences with monsters which, however, are not little BEMs ("bug-eyed monsters", the embodiment of trash) because an aura of grotesque and dramatic dignity clings to them, and they have the dignity of misshapen, tortured creatures. With the example of such monsters - one of which is Palmer Eldritch - we can see how Dick vanquishes truth: in the shape of a mutilation he makes simple the macabre and the primitive by giving it a trace of fragile humanity.

In UBIK, the twitching world reminds us of the "will" of Schopenhauer, will gone mad; spurned onto everlasting time explosion and implosion, devouring itself. As an aside, measured by the yardstick of Dick's black pessimism: Schopenhauer's philosophy of life seems to be a real joie de vivre, compared with Dick, who sees our world as the best of the worst, and there are no other worlds. According to Dick, we are everywhere damned, even where we cannot go, Dick once said that he does not consider himself a limitless pessimist. Possibly, though conscious of reason in the cosmos, he does not draw the nihilistic conclusion because he does not ascribe an exclusively negative value to the agony of man. But this is my private speculation.

Dick's planets, galaxies, men, children, monsters, elevators, and refrigerators are all symbols of a language which, mix it as you please, always crystallises into the same form of a mane tekel.

With that I don't want to say that Dick's novels - even his best, like UBIK - are faultless masterpieces. The surfaces of his books seem quite coarse and raw to me, connected with an omnipresence of trash. I like what he has to say in one chapter more than what a page shows, and that is why his work forces me into fast reading. Upon looking his details in the face, one beholds several inconsistencies, as if looking at an impressionist's painting from too close a distance. Dick cannot tame trash; rather, he lets loose a pandemonium and lets it calm down on its way. His metaphysics often ship in the direction of

cheap circus tricks. His prose is threatened by uncontrolled outgrowths, especially when it boils over into long series of fantastic freaks, and therefore loses all its function of message. Also he is prone to penetrate so deeply into the monstrosities he has invented that an inversion of effect results: that which was intended to strike us with horror appears merely ridiculous, or even stupid. STANISLAW LEM

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With that I'll stop this immanent review of Dick's work and pass over to its sociological aspect. The s f environment is unable to separate and make distinct the types of works that are born into it. This environment is incapable of distinguishing clearly between the work of Dick, which is artistically bunched together into sense, from that of Van Vogt, which collapses senselessly. On a higher plane a title like THE WORLD OF NULL-A belongs to Dick, not to Van Vogt, although it was the latter who actually wrote it; but only with Dick can we talk about a "non-Aristotelian" logic, whereas this title is merely tacked onto Van Vogt's book without any justification. In its actions the s f environment is by no means chaotic; obeying its own laws and regulations, it extols the stupid and denigrates the valuable until both meet "halfway" - on the level of insignificant trifles. For in s f Dick has not been honoured according to his merits. Some people acknowledged the entertainment values of his novels, and one of the best living s f critics, Damon Knight, also spoke about Dick's distorted pictures of contemporary reality (in IN SEARCH OF WONDER) when he reviewed SOLAR LOTTERY and some other early books by Dick.

But that was all the praise that this author came to hear. Nobody saw that his "unchecked growth" is quite strikingly similar in content and form to what goes on in the Upper Realm. Judged according to the problems he deals with, Dick's novels belong to that stream of literature that explores the no-man's-land between being and nothing - in the double sense.

(a) We can count Dick's novels as part of the prose which is today called the "Literature of Ideas" or "Literature of Possibilities". This type of experimental prose tries to probe the neglected, latent, untouched, as-yet-unrealised potentialities of human existence, mainly in the psychological sphere. Probably one can find fountains of such prose in, among others, the works of Musil (MANN OHNE EIGENSCHAFTEN - MAN WITHOUT QUALITIES) in which the outer world, randomly manifesting itself, affixes qualities to the individual, so that he remains a soul "without qualities". In such books as his LE VOYEUR Robbe-Grillet tries other tactics; this prose seems to fit the motto Quod autem potest esse totaliter aliter - "that which, however, can be something wholly different" (which, in Poland is represented by J Andrzejewsky in his MIAZGA, a work that is written partly in the future subjunctive mood and therefore describes what could possibly happen, and not what has unconditionally happened), which has its parallels with Dick's work. Robbe-Grillet proceeds from the typical s f blueprint of "parallel worlds", but whereas most s f writers flatten this motif into unbearable trash, running over it like a steamroller, Dick knows how to raise the problems that rise from this inspiration to a fitting level of complexity. Therefore he is an original representative of the "Literature of Ideas" in s f - a wide field, but one with which I cannot deal here exhaustively.

(b) In connection with Dick, we can think of authors like Beckett, because of the "unhealthy curiosity" that both have for death, or more exactly, for the flow of life as it approaches its end. Beckett "is content" with natural processes that will devour man from the inside, slowly and continually (as when SFC 35 23

STANISLAW growing old, or becoming a cripple). Dick devotes himself to grander speculations, in the true spirit of the genre he is working in.

We could say many interesting things about his "theory" of "half-life" (not as a sensible empirical hypothesis, but as a variety of fantastic-ontological speculation) but, once again, I cannot dig too deep into an exegesis of a desecralised eschatology.

We draw these two parallels to show how an area of creation, closed into a ghetto, suffers from the situation of its own isolation. For such parallel courses of evolution are not accidental coincidences. It is the spirit of time that mirrors itself in them, but s f knows only short-lived fashions.

The peculiarity of Dick's work throws a glaring light upon relationships within the s f milieu. All s f works have to make the impression on the reader of being easy to read as has all fiction. S f works before which 200 Nobel Prize winners in the department of physics kneel down are worthless for the s f market if, in fact, the precondition of being able to evaluate a work of s f is a minimum of knowledge. Therefore it is best for s f books not to contain any deeper meaning - either physical or metaphysical. But if the author smuggles any sense into his work, it must not stir the phlegmatic and indolent reader or else this invaluable man will stop reading because of a headache. Therefore the deeper meaning is admitted only if it is "harmless", i.e. if we can neglect it entirely while reading. The following anecdote may explain this problem: If many coloured flags are put upon the masts of a ship in the harbour, a child on the shore will think that this is a merry game and perhaps will have a lot of fun watching, although at the same time an adult will recognise the flags as a language of signals, and know that it stands for a report on a plague that has broken out on board the ship. The s f readership equals the child, not the adult, in the story.

Their trashy surface helps Dick's novels to survive in the milieu of s f. I do not maintain that Dick is a Macchiavelli of s f who, under the cover of s f trash, intentionally carries out a perfidiously thought-out camouflage in order to deceive his readers (i.e. in giving them gold disguised as iron trinkets).

Rather I believe that Dick works intuitively without knowing himself that he plays hide-and-seek with his readers. Please note the difference between an artist and an artisan: the artist grows in his environment, deriving from it the elements that serve him as a medium of expression - of those differences of tensions to which his personality is subject. However the artisan is a producer of things for which there is a demand and which he has learned to produce - after the models that enjoy the highest popularity. Ninety-eight per cent of s f is a craft, and its authors are day-labourers who must obey to demand payment. Almost any artist can become an artisan when he strangles his inner voice- or if he has no such voice at all.

For a long time Philip K Dick has been only an artisan, and a skilful one, too, for he knew how to produce the things that were bought immediately. However, gradually he began - and I must continue to speak in metaphors - to listen to his inner voice, and though he still made use of those elements that s f put at his disposal, he began to put together patterns of his own.

But this is not an infallible explanation. As is always the case, it arises from a kind of cross-breeding between what is in the books I read and what I can do with this material as a reader. Therefore I can imagine other

explanations for Dick's novels, explanations that differ from mine, though STANISLAW naturally the role of such an explanation cannot be played by just any idea. LEM There is no doubt about the fact that with trashy elements Dick tries to express a metaphysics of an extremely "black" nature, mirroring authentically the state of his mind. A logical, 100% sure, unequivocal reconstruction of the deep semantic structures of a complex work is impossible because there are no discursive series of phrases to which a work of art may be reduced without leaving something remaining.

Thus it must be; for if it were otherwise, this work would be entirely superfluous. For why should I talk in so complicated and obscure a manner about a theme, if this theme may be put into clear and simple words? That which you can say briefly and intelligibly you need not describe with long and unintelligible words. For this reason, every authentic work of art has its depths, and the possibility that such a work of art carries a message about existence for subsequent generations of readers, although in society, in civilisation, and in life there is endless change, bears witness that the transitory things that do not disappear in a masterpiece are buried in its semantic variability. Out of the glaring cliches of trash, behind which yawns a horrible vacuum for every s f artisan, Dick makes for himself a set of messages, i.e. a language, just like somebody who puts together from disparate coloured flags a language of signals according to his own judgment. S f criticism could help Dick to collect the coloured flags, but not to put together sensible entreties from this crude material, because in practice it denies the existence of semantic depth.

Those s f readers who are keenest of hearing feel that Dick is "different"; however, they are unable to articulate this impression clearly.

Dick has adapted to the s f milieu - with positive as well as negative effects. He invented a method of how to express with the aid of trash that which transcends all trash. But he was unable to withstand to the end the contaminating influence of this quite poisonous material.

The most striking lack is the lack of penetrating, detailed, and objective criticism. The critical books by Blish and Knight are no exception to this rule; however the book by Lundwall (SCIENCE FICTION: WHAT IT'S ALL ABOUT, Ace, 1970) is not a piece of criticism or monography, but rather it is merely a traveller's guide to the provinces of s f. The innocent sin of Blish and Knight is that they only and simply reviewed current s f production, paying attention to all the authors. However, in their length and detail the negative, destructive critiques written by Knight are totally superfluous, because it is impossible to help authors who are nitwits, and as I said before, the public does not give a damn about such disqualifications.

Literature has no equality of rights: the day-labourers must be dealt with in one sentence, if not with scornful silence, and a maximum of patience and attention is due to the promising author. But s f has different customs. I am no enthusiast; I do not believe that shrewd critiques would make s f author Dick into a Thomas Mann of s f. And yet it is a pity that there has been no critical selection among his work (although this state is consonant with the lack of selection in the whole s f field). Unfortunately the above-praised work of Dick also has its reverse side. One is used to calling such work uneven. It is not uneven - it divides neatly into two basically different parts. The contradictions in THE THREE STIGMATA OF PALMER ELDRITCH and UBIK (and also partly in SOLAR LOTTERY) are of a fleeting nature, i.e. these SFC 35 25

STANISLAW LEM seeming contradictions constitute the claim of completeness - the semantic value of the work (as I tried to show very briefly). Therefore the local contradictions are meaningful messages that direct the reader's attention to the problems that underlie the works. The novel GALACTIC POT HEALER is only negligible. Every author is free to produce works of different value; there is no law against a great epic master allowing himself a novel of pure entertainment.

However OUR FRIENDS FROM FROLIX 8 and DO ANDROIDS DREAM OF ELECTRIC SHEEP? are not unimportant literature, but they cheat the reader. Especially in the latter do we see the sad picture of an author who squanders his talent by using brilliant ideas and inspirations to keep up a game of cops and robbers. This is far worse than putting together a valueless whole from valueless parts. The idea of the "Penfield apparatus" with which one can arbitrarily change one's own mental disposition, is a brilliant one, but it does not play a role in the novel. In order to unravel the logical mystery which makes up DO ANDROIDS DREAM OF ELECTRIC SHEEP? a whole study would be necessary, but it would have to be written with the embarrassed feeling that it is wholly superfluous.

But I must not say this without furnishing proof. The first premise of the plot is that a policeman may kill on the spot everyone who is discovered to be an android, because on Earth only androids kill their masters (this premise does not hold good in the face of what is written later in the book). We get to know that some androids do not know their true nature because they were filled with the incorrect information that they were normal humans. The police system has been undermined by androids who, disguised as humans, kill policemen in order to bear false witness that the dead human has been unmasked as an android. However at the same time we discover that some policemen have the same type of android nature, i.e. with an artificially implanted consciousness that they are humans. But if somebody does not know himself whether he is an "android replica" or a normal policeman, in what sense is this "infiltration"? If an android has a synthetically "humanised" consciousness with a falsified memory, for what is he called to account? How can one be responsible for that which he has no knowledge of? With these actions did Dick intend to present a model of discrimination, such as the kind of persecution of the Jews administered under the label of a "final solution"? But then (1) the androids are innocent victims and should not be depicted as insidious creatures, something that the novel does in places, and (2) people who are persecuted, e.g. persecuted because of their race, are certainly conscious of their innocence but at the same time conscious of their identity, which is not the case with the androids. In other ways the parallel is not valid. It remains obscure whether every android is killed on the spot because of what he once did (he is supposed to have killed his master) or because of what he is. As I have shown, the claim that every android is a murderer because it is unthinkable there is an android without an owner, is not valid. Why are there no humans, masters of androids, who die natural deaths in their beds? And the difference between human and android: We hear that it is almost impossible to distinguish between humans and androids with 100% accuracy. To do this one needs a psychological test which measures the suspect's reactions with a psychogalvanic apparatus. The test is nonsense; besides, on another occasion we hear that androids have a life span of only a few years since the cells of their tissue cannot multiply. Therefore is it not child's play to discover the difference by means of an organic examination of a microscope slide preparation of their cell tissue, a procedure which takes about three minutes?

the readers must be multiplied at all costs. A trial to identify a suspect is STANISLAW far less shocking than the situation in which two policemen, working hand-in- LEM glove, may kill one another if either of them should suddenly be unmasked as an android. This is all the more thrilling if neither of them, subjectively, knows who he really is, android or human. For then both are subjectively innocent, both could be androids, or only one, or none - all of which heightens the tension, but at the same time increases the nonsense. In order to shock us when applied, the differentiating test must be applied fast and sure, but then suspense is lost if it is not coupled with the uncertainty of whether the suspect is an android or not, but with uncertainty of whether the test itself might fail, which causes somebody's death instantly, in error. Because the author did not want to do without these logically exclusive alternatives, the test must be at the same time reliable and unreliable, the androids must act at the same time with malice aforethought and in complete innocence; as an android one is at the same time conscious and unconscious of one's nature; a girl who has slept with a policeman is sentenced to death because it is forbidden for androids to sleep with humans; however, at the same time the girl does not know. She is an android, etc, ad lib. The problem that is spelt out originally and begins to unfold, of human conflict with human-like creations endowed with spirit by humans themselves, is torn to rags, while the game of cops and robbers continues merrily. This nonsense, offered by the author of UBIK, can be construed as an offence to the reader, an offence which, however, evaporates without trace in the highly concentrated thoughtlessness of the s f milieu.

But we cannot deny this: the author of UBIK knew quite well what he was doing. But did criticism catch him redhanded and hold him responsible? I do not jest: for he who could write UBIK must understand the fraudulent character of his work. But criticism only took offence at his novel as being in a way insipid, i.e. not as full of suspense as the best of Dick. Such a brew of trite remarks is held out as criticism in s f.

There is no justification for this primitive dalliance; there is only an explanation, of a general character, which transcends the work itself. Ross Ashby proves that intelligence is a quality which does not foster survival under all possible variants of environments. In some environments stupidity serves better the drive for self-preservation. He spoke of rats; I would like to apply this claim to that part of literature called s f. For in s f what does it matter if UBIK is a piece of gold and DO ANDROIDS DREAM OF ELECTRIC SHEEP? a counterfeit coin? I don't know what an average reader thinks while reading these two novels. If we could reproduce his thoughts as they correspond to his behaviour as a library borrower, we must conclude that he has an extremely short memory; at the utmost he can remember what is printed on one page. Or he does not think at all; an alternative, however, which scares me so much that I'd prefer to drop it.

But the problem remains that all s f books are similar to one another - not according to their content, but according to the way they are received. Innumerable imitations of each original work appear so that the originals are buried beneath mountains of trash, like the cathedral towers around which garbage has been dumped for so long that only the spire projects out of the rubbish that reaches toward heaven. In this context the question arises as to how many gifted beginners have insufficient power to preserve their individuality as writers - unless by way of compromise, like Dick - in spite of the equalising trends of s f?

STANISLAW LEM Probably the pressure of trivial literature has crushed many highly talented writers so that today they deliver the products that keep highbrow readers away from s f. This process brings about a negative selection of authors and readers: for even those writers who can write good things produce banalities wholesale; the banality repels intelligent readers away from s f; as they form a small majority in fandom the "silent majority" dominates the market, and the evolution into higher spheres cannot occur. Therefore, in s f, a vicious circle of cause and effect coupled together keeps the existing state of s f intact and going. The most intelligent and most demanding readers, who form a small minority, still long for a "better" s f and feel ill-at-ease when reading its current production, showing their uneasiness in their letters of comment and essays in fanzines. The "normal" reader - i.e. the "silent majority" and their representatives in fanzines - gains the impression somehow that the others are tense, scurrilous, and even malicious creatures just like - I wrote something like this once in a private letter - missionaries in a whorehouse, i.e. people who feel that they are doing their duty, but at the same time conscious that their efforts at conversion are powerless and that they seem out of place. The missionaries, ready to make the greatest sacrifices, can just as little change a whorehouse into a temple as "genial" readers can change s f into a fully qualified citizen of the Upper Realm of Literature.

I'll close this essay with one last remark: the disfigurement of Dick's work is the price that he had to pay for his "citizenship of s f". Dick owes his exuberant growth, as well as his own peculiar downfalls, to this circle of life, which, like a dull teacher, cannot distinguish its brightest pupils from the plodding swotters. This circle of life, like such a teacher, strives to treat all its subordinates in the same way, a way improper in schools, and disastrous in literature.

FOOTNOTES:

1 This essay is a rewritten chapter ("Sociology of S F") from my PHANTASTIK UND FUTUROLOGIE (FANTASY AND FUTUROLOGY). I have polemically sharpened the original text in several instances, and added the later review of Dick's work, which is absent in the book. I confess that I made a blunder when I wrote this monograph, for then I knew only Dick's short stories and his DO ANDROIDS DREAM OF ELECTRIC SHEEP? I believed that I could rely on reviews published in the fanzines of other novels by Dick, with the result that I considered him a "better Van Vogt", which he is not. This mistake is due to the state of s f criticism. Every fifth or eighth book is praised as "the best work of s f in the whole world", its author is presented as "the greatest s f author ever", great differences between works are minimised, and annulled, so much so that in the end UBIK may be regarded as a novel that is just a little better than DO ANDROIDS DREAM OF ELECTRIC SHEEP? Naturally, what I say does not justify my mistake, because it is not fit to consider any arbitrary criticism as a substitute for reading the books concerned. However my words describe the very circumstances guilty of causing my error, for it is a physical impossibility to read every s f title, so that there must be a selection; as you can see, one cannot rely on s f criticism to make this selection.

2 It is quite difficult to shake off either a bad or good tradition, once it is established. In THE ISSUE AT HAND James Blish complains that

English criticism surpasses the American, and that this difference of level can be seen also on another plane - according to Blish, English publishers treat s f authors with a consideration scarcely to be found in USA. His words date from the fifties; as far as I know of the state of things today, this difference has decreased insofar as American criticism has improved insignificantly, and English publishers have become a bit less considerate. STANISLAW LEM

However these particular differences should not make us wonder. American s f descends from the pulps; English s f had as its father, not Hugo Gernsback, about whom nobody outside of US s f knows a thing, but H G Wells. What else? American s f worked itself up from the gutter of literature (though it could not fly up into the sky); English s f has americanised itself partly for commercial reasons, and partly stepped into Wells' shoes, something which should not be taken as praiseworthy. The "classical" successor to Wells, John Wyndham, worked like a huckster, seeking to supplement the work of the master and teacher with what was, in his eyes, a gap that had to be filled. But even as anyone who paints like Van Gogh today cannot become a Van Gogh, so Wyndham did not add anything principally to Wells' work. He worked according to the known principle of escalation so that in THE WAR OF THE WORLDS, Earth is attacked only by the Martians; but in Wyndham's THE DAY OF THE TRIFFIDS the author does not think it sufficient to let all mankind go blind - he foists poisonous plants upon it; but as those plants do not seem dangerous enough, he adds the gift of active motion as spice.

After all, there are two distinct traditions in s f - the English, with the better manners and customs of the Upper Realm, and the American, which has lived from its beginnings in the slums of the Lower Realm, this slave market, which has no overabundance of courtly manners. Also the language of English s f has always been more cultivated.

3 This does not mean that the radius of effective action of a statement varies directly with the range of a medium, i.e. in our case, that this radius grows in proportion to the increase of circulation of the periodical in which this statement is printed. In regard to circulation, many highbrow literary periodicals are no better off than the high-circulation fanzines, and the literary and theoretical publications of University faculties sometimes have tiny circulations, as low as 300 or 400 copies. What I am saying is that the degree of attention paid by the public to a "message" (a normative judgment) is determined by quite different factors from those of circulation. So, in some countries, an extreme degree of public opinion is paid to several "underground" papers, though these pamphlets look shabby and are circulated in very tiny editions. The authority, the weight of such statements belongs to the imponderabilia of civilisation; the public must be aware in advance that somebody important has something important to say; but the "inherently wise" or even the "eggheads" do not possess such authority and attraction in their own right. The channels that serve to disseminate information are not built by technical and material means (such as the number of copies of a periodical distributed) but these copies find their own way and have their maximum effect only if they flow into a broader structure that strengthens the message. This is the case for the highbrow periodicals because they live at the peak of the cultural pyramid. It is an extremely important phenomenon which has been almost neglected. In many circles of fandom people believe that one could wake the "silent majority" of the public from its slumber if only one could bomb the public incessantly with beautifully made publications with mass circulations. Most probably the public would throw these fine pam- SFC 35 29

STANISLAW phlets into the nearest waste-paper basket because this bombardment of mass-LEM produced s f would still lack the necessary influence. Authority and influence are not acquired easily.

4 This point of view may prompt some fans to ask the question why s f writers should not be allowed to make an intellectual game out of the topic of mankind's doom, and why the s f field should be forbidden that which is done with complete justification in the field of the crime novel? My answer is: Surely nothing in heaven or on earth prohibits us from doing so; in the same way as there are no "absolute" prohibitions to hinder us from playing with corpses or the genitalia of our fathers or from concentrating our whole love life on the goal of sleeping as fast as possible with as many women as possible in order to establish a record. We could do all these things as a matter of course, but surely nobody praises such programs as something to further social values; neither can we deny that these actions promise certain new liberties only annulling forever taboos that have stayed intact until today. As the English put it: you cannot have it both ways; you cannot respect a life, a topic, a feeling, and prostitute it at the same time. At the utmost you can falsify the real appearance and real meaning of a situation brought about by your own actions deliberately or unconsciously; but hiding one's head in the sand is fraught with well-known dangers. According to the whole historical tradition of our culture truth has inherent value, whether pleasant or depressing. If crime novels follow their own schemata to falsify reality, it does not matter since nobody looks into these novels for the highest revelations and initiations into the abysses of human nature. If s f adapts itself to the crime novel it must stop claiming to be considered as something better than the crime novel. Its peculiar state of continual oscillation between the Upper and the Lower Realms of literature is a symptom of its repetitive attempts to have it both ways. But this is impossible without self-deception.

5 This applies only to the novels by Dick that I know: SOLAR LOTTERY, THE THREE STIGMATA OF PALMER ELDRITCH, OUR FRIENDS FROM FROLIX 8, NOW WAIT FOR LAST YEAR, DO ANDROIDS DREAM OF ELECTRIC SHEEP?, UBIK, and GALACTIC POTHEALER. In addition I have read several of Dick's short stories, mainly in s f magazines.

6 Each society is stratified according to its own pattern. In each society there are powers of selection with local effects to attract and repel individuals. Among others, such mass processes give rise to different readerships for widely differing varieties of literature. If one compared the intelligence and level of education of the average s f reader in USA and that in the Soviet Union, one would draw the conclusion that the Russians know more about literature and are more intelligent than the Americans. However this would be a fallacy; the selection processes of s f readership in Russia and in USA have taken different courses, because of the different traditions which prevail in the two countries in regard to the broader question of the duties and psychosociological status that literature, as a whole, must play in society. Certainly USA has, by percentage, similar numbers of bright boys and girls as in Russia, but intelligent readers in USA approach s f far less often than is the case in Russia.

Robinson Crusoe, for, like the unhappy man on a desert island, I had to sweat for years, under the most primitive conditions, to produce the necessary (intellectual) tools on my own. My tactics concerning trash was to ridicule it - i.e. to blow up its model until its nonsense, multiplied many times, became ludicrous. But this is the simplest of tactics. On my own I thought there was no better way than to avoid trash and to remove all traces of it from my work. STANISLAW LEM

Dick set me right, and for that reason - as a guidepost - his work is so important. With the tactics I was using I could write only humorous (or grotesque) works; this is worse than if one remains in earnest all the time. It is worse because humour shows up the rich ambiguity of an earnest way of narration in but a lesser degree. The reader must recognise that an example has been ridiculed, or else the reader and writer are as much at cross-purposes as when somebody does not grasp the point of a joke; one cannot misunderstand a joke and savour it at the same time. Therefore humorous prose is assured of a more stable reception than complex prose which wants to be taken seriously. Because of Dick's method of "transformation of trash", I have found a third (just this) tactic of creation. A novel by Dick is not - and often is not - bound to be understood, because of its peculiar maximum span of meanings; because trash is not ridiculed; therefore because the reader can enjoy its elements and see them isolated from reciprocal relationships within the same work. This is better for the work, for it can survive in different ways in the readers' environment, either correctly or incorrectly understood. Similarly one can recognise a humourist at first glance, but not a man who makes use of Dick's tactics. It is far more difficult to grasp the complexity of the work in its entirety, and in no other way can we deal with the "transformation of trash".

Only the complete lack of a theory of s f makes it comprehensible why the New Wave of s f did not pick Dick as their guiding star. The New Wavers knew that they should look for something new but they did not have the slightest idea what it could be. Surely there is no more diffuse definition of anything than that of the New Wave, which is supposed to be represented on the one hand by Spinrad, on the other by Delany, and on a third by Moorcock. Until now the New Wave has succeeded well in making s f quite boring, but this is the only characteristic in which it is approaching the state of modern prose in the Upper Realm. Repressed but powerful inferiority complexes are constantly at work, and we can detect this because all the experimenters seem to believe from the bottoms of their hearts that the medicine and models for redeeming s f can be found only in the Upper Realm. Because of this belief came Farmer's RIDERS OF THE PURPLE WAGE (no mean piece of prose, but of a markedly secondary, or even tertiary character, to Farmer's model, ULYSSES by Joyce, which is itself modelled on THE ODYSSEY) and STAND ON ZANZIBAR, which as we all know, was written by Brunner on the model of MANHATTAN TRANSFER by Dos Passos. The New Wavers seize expressionism, surrealism, etc, and so they complete a collection of old hats - it becomes a race backwards which still arrives in the nineteenth century before they know it. But a blind search can give only blind results; just "blind shells" (duds).

As I said, I believe that a writer can either make a caricature of trash, and ridicule it, or throw it away. Dick found out how to blaze a third trail, a discovery which was important not just for himself, but which remained unnoticed. The newness of Ursula K Le Guin's THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS was observed instantly because it is localised in the action, but the more volatile discovery by Dick was misjudged because it cannot be localised and can be described only with the utmost difficulty for the reasons I have set out. For SFC 35 31

STANISLAW it is not sufficient, milord's critics, to enjoy a book, and criticism is not a
LEM cry of joy; one must not only know how to prove that one was delighted but also know how to explain by what one was delighted and charmed.

POSTSCRIPT:

The laws of science fiction form a dynamic structure at a balance of flow. Translated into the language of a futurologist; they are long-term, complex trends. There is no hope that they will be reversed. However there are real possibilities that these trends will creep gradually into the Upper Realm of Literature, because of the ongoing explosion of information. The premise of selection that filters values, implies a filter of sufficient capacity. But even today the capacity of this filter - the critics - as a value-selecting system is overtaxed by the quantity of books on the market. Generally, one is unaware of this situation. Consequently, the career of each literary work reminds us less of a directed trajectory than of something which takes on the motion of a Brownian particle - i.e. order becomes chaos. From the viewpoint of a critical filter, this chaos is not perceived easily, as a selection process is still taking place. But the fact that it takes place at all is no longer due to the filtration of the whole quantity of all the works that come onto the market, but to the random collision between prominent books and prominent critics. For as the number of books flowing onto the market increases continually, in the course of time the books form a kind of umbrella, i.e. they form a shield against the critics, and they frustrate an encompassing selection, something which the critics do not realise for a long time because they are still fishing the "best" titles out of the stream of the market. However, they do not see those books which, although they are just as good as the ones picked out, or even better, remain unknown to them. Selection no longer encompasses the whole quantity of published material, and this cultural area converts itself into a blind lottery. But this lottery takes only a marginal part in the selection of values. In due course, we can see that true values in abundance can have the same effect as a devastating flood. If they abound, these values begin to destroy themselves because they block all the filters intended to select them. Thus the fate of literature as a whole can become quite the same as that of trivial literature. Perhaps culture itself will be drowned in the Great Flood of information.

APPENDIX: "UBIK" AS S F

In S F COMMENTARY 17 George Turner wrote:

In UBIK we are given the living and the half-living; the half-living are actually dead but exist in another version of reality until their vestigial remainders of consciousness finally drain away. Their "reality" is subject to manipulation by a strong personality among the half-living, while piles complexity on complexity, until inconsistencies begin to stand out like protest posters. The plotting is neat, but cannot override the paradoxes. The metaphor fails because it cannot stand against the weight of reality as we know it.

Now I am ready to prove that there is a rational viewpoint from which UBIK can be seen as a novel based on scientifically sensible notions. Here is the line of proof.

In UBIK dying people are put into a state of "half-life" if medicine does not know how to heal them. The critically ill are placed in "cold packs" in which their bodies are intensively cooled down. At a very low temperature, their life functions decelerate so that death cannot occur. This is not fantasy. We know today that at temperatures close to 0° Kelvin, for all practical purposes the growth of cancer cells stops, and even deadly poisons no longer destroy cells. Therefore an analogue of the process mentioned in UBIK can be realised today, except that it would be regarded as senseless to carry it out. Although cooling (better known as hibernation) will delay death and stop agony, one cannot speak of saving the patient: he is unconscious, he cannot be allowed to be warmed to consciousness again, because then the death that has been delayed will occur. People speak of deepfreezing a man, and preserving him in this state of cryogenics until medicine discovers a method of healing this special case after years or centuries. We do not know now yet whether reversible cold death, the idea of which lies at the base of this opinion, can be realised because until the present day, experiments performed on mammals have shown no positive results, as freezing and later defreezing wrecks irreversible damage on all tissue. UBIK presupposes that reversible cold death cannot be realised - something considered by specialists to be plausible or even highly probable. Thus hibernation can be regarded as useless, and freezing at low temperatures as unobtainable. But there is one escape route, viz, one could keep the body of the patient in a state of continuous hibernation and supply his brain with warm blood with a suitable apparatus (artificial heart and lungs), so that the patient will regain consciousness.

The patient would find himself in the same position as a paralytic, or maybe we should call it a situation much worse than that. His sense organs do not function for only his brain can be supplied with blood; however even if someone were ready to face such a cruel risk as near-death, even then he could not be helped. For we know that the idea of keeping intact the paraphysiological functions of an isolated brain is utopian. When the normal flux of sense data to the brain ceases, and a state of sensory deprivation sets in, an ever-increasing decay of all, especially the higher, brain functions sets in. An isolated brain cannot function normally; therefore we meet a barrier even in this escape route.

But all is not yet lost: if we succeed in creating a synthetic environment for the patient's brain, he will continue to live, although not in our normal reality - he will live in a substitute reality. This pseudoreality is the common good (or bad, as you like) of all people in cold storage. The key question to answer is whether we can create a substitute world for those lying in cold storage, and if so, how? Now we cannot put into effect such an achievement at the moment, but the chances of doing so are quite good. Often during surgical operations on the brain the cerebral cortex has often been irritated electrically and circumstances permitting (with which I do not wish to deal here) this irritation may produce a series of hallucinations that the patient lives through as reality. The subject hears the voice of a dead acquaintance, sees him, witnesses whole scenes from his past, and so on. Please bear in mind that these are primitive experiments to which very little time was devoted, for the main purpose of the operation was to heal the patient, and one is not allowed to attempt tests which bring with them the slightest shadow of danger. However perhaps we will gain more knowledge which will allow us to perfect this method. There must be machines that we can call SFC 35 33

STANISLAW LEM simulators or environment-producers, to which people lying in cold storage could be connected. The simulator becomes a source of information used necessarily to create a fictitious environment in the patient's brain; it works according to a program attuned to the needs of each case and becomes a fountain of new facts and impressions previously unknown to the patient. (Even today we can bring about by irritation of the cerebral cortex not only sensory hallucinations, but also feelings including, for example, erotic experiences.)

In principle, the technical problem in the real world is soluble, and so we come to the next, untechnological question: how much knowledge can the patient have about his true situation? UBIK makes the assumption that some people in cold storage, such as Runciter's wife, have been conscious of their situation for years, but also some people such as Joe Chip, who was put on ice after an accident, or people placed there because of incurable disease, who do not know about their situation. Somebody - and this happens to Joe Chip - meets with catastrophe, loses consciousness, regains it after a period of time and finds himself returned to his well-known environment without knowing that it is part of a pseudoreality to which he is condemned "for life" because this is the only way to save him.

Morally it is quite questionable whether the false belief of these people that they are still living normal lives should be maintained - but this problem is irrelevant because a much more important one displaces it, i.e. his next-of-kin prefers the situation in which the patient lives to his death; however at the same time nobody could call it an agreeable situation. People are not content to keep the patient alive, for from the point of view of people in the normal world, he is leading only a half-life isolated from the real world. They want to reach him, to talk to him, listen to him, etc. This is technically possible - but only under the most extraordinary conditions. Pseudoreality makes up an integral whole for the patient; therefore if someone who exists outside intrudes, the patient experiences this intrusion as an anomaly in his environment. The "quest" cannot reach into pseudoreality in a fully plausible and harmless way. This is unimportant if a patient such as Runciter's wife is conscious of the situation. But it is extremely important if he or she does not know it - such as in the case of Joe Chip.

Two curious phenomena must still be explained: (1) the "mad" behaviour of pseudoreality, and (2) the manipulation by one man in cold storage of the consciousnesses of his fellow sufferers. (In UBIK the problem is the curious relationship formed between Emily, Runciter's wife, Joe Chip, and the strange guy named Jorg.)

The first phenomenon is a realistic presentation of a fictitious technology. We may in advance claim that whichever way the technology of reality-fission will be realised, it must be subject to certain malfunctions because no technology is invulnerable to malfunctions. The fact that at some time a breakdown in the production of pseudoreality will occur, can be regarded as a realistic prediction, as none of today's predictions can tell us what kind of mishaps will happen. UBIK's author was justified in describing the "breakdowns" and "defects" of pseudoreality at his own discretion. Different types of disasters may occur.

In pseudoreality certain anomalies of the flow of time and space might happen, and both have a dreamlike character, i.e. they resemble what we experience in dreams. This type of creation of "reality breakdowns" seems to be correct insofar as (according to what we said before) the main source of the information that makes up pseudoreality is the brain of the man lying in cold storage; in

this way we can account for the fact that each relaxation of the direction of STANISLAW
psychic processes by the simulator correlates with changed appearances in the LEM
mind of the patient. He will experience this as a change of environment as if
in a dream. (At this point I should like to remark that as a rule a dream is
not recognised as such by the dreamer; for this reason Joe Chip also does not
think of such an interpretation for the events around him.)

We may assume that the "overgrowth" of one consciousness by another occurs be-
cause a lot of people are lying in cold storage and for economic reasons, not
everyone is allotted a separate simulator. Rather, a handful of people is al-
ways connected with a multi-channel machine. Even if one circuit is insulated
from the others, it may happen that electrical impulses flash across, or cause
the induction of another current; subjectively, this may be experienced as the
"devouring" of one consciousness by another, neighbouring one.

The last question still to be answered is: who is really lying in cold
storage: Runciter or Joe Chip? Because of all the facts found in UBIK, one
may conclude that both men lie in cold storage (i.e. that all the men on the
Moon were killed by the explosion and subjected to cold storage treatment).

Quod erat demonstrandum - and in several places we have "filled" the gaps left
in the novel. But it would not be correct to speak in earnest about such
"gaps".

Firstly, an author need not necessarily describe the technological details in
a novel. As is wellknown, the writers of contemporary novels do not describe
the principles that underlie the functions of refrigerators, radios, and cars,
and in these novels we would look in vain for the information that all the
main characters are "vertebrates" and "mammals". The basic assumption of UBIK
is a technology of split reality, and it is not particularly important what
kind of technology caused this split, so it need not be described in detail.
It can occur in many ways; the technological details have secondary import-
ance. The most important detail is that in a world where split reality has
already been realised, its inhabitants face new, previously unknown dilemmas
and must solve problems with the greatest impact. The existence of such a
technology changes the ontological perspective of life and, as UBIK shows con-
vincingly, the problem is not just that of people put in cold storage because
they are severely injured. In principle, anyone can be incarcerated in a
pseudoworld for his whole life. Whether this is legal or illegal is a problem
of jurisprudence, not philosophy. In a world with split reality, general
knowledge shows that as well as the normal level of reality other levels may
exist, levels which may exist for some other people... or for everybody. As
always, this is a question of the price to be paid for so-called progress (in
UBIK, progress in the battle against death).

At any rate the point set out above is a perspective from which the novel may
be seen as a science fiction work that depicts the human consequences of a
biotechnological revolution. Perhaps it is not superfluous to remark in the
second place that observers who watch the spectacle of an expressway catas-
trophe do not usually indulge in reflections which call into question the
facts of civilisation and the history of technology, because when people are
looking at destroyed cars and maimed bodies they do not think about the price
which has been exacted in human lives because Otto once invented the four-
stroke engine and other inventors put this motor into the body of an old
coach. So we may doubt whether the above technological exegesis is really
necessary and whether we may think that Dick should of his own accord fill the
gaps in technological detail that I have tried to fill.

STANISLAW LEM Rather I believe that Dick left no gaps in the novel and in fact that the technological explanation is superfluous. It pursued only one object: I wanted to demonstrate that the novel is coherent as science fiction as well and that contradictions and loose ends in its structure are out of the question. If technological details abounded in UBIK they would rather interfere with our reading; they do not add anything relevant to the text, and they can only rationalise it in a way that the author does not like. From the point of view of an artist, he is correct, for this novel is not "futurological s f", though it may be read as such. However Dick has taken a different point of view; he renounces all "empirical justifications" and "scientific" foundations. Primarily UBIK is a poetic achievement; we may draw this conclusion from the fact that the biotechnological premise, as outlined above, could also be the basis of a novel whose factual details were impeccable but despite all this, a blind shell as a work of art. The contradictions in UBIK need not be defended at all costs by appealing to technological authority. The novel has neither gaps nor signs of the author's negligence. The "contradictions" form a mode of expression that serves to expose to full daylight the messages that are stressed by affection and a special philosophy of life. In a word, they are metaphors that should not be examined for empirical content, even if that seems possible. As I could show, even if they withstand logical and scientific tests, this is not their main value as an experience that can be exchanged with the currency of practical knowledge.

This experience is called catharsis.

- Stanislaw Lem 1972

GEORGE TURNER

Yes, But Who Said What?

A Reconsideration of SOLARIS and its Problems

SOLARIS came to Australian fandom in a burst of publicity inspired mainly by Bruce Gillespie* and perhaps too much was expected. General reaction to the book was tepid. Yet this was much less than it deserved and some effort at rehabilitation is worthwhile.

The unimpressed reaction is understandable (though Silverberg's contemptuous dismissal is less so) and much of what I write here will be an appreciation of some of the difficulties standing between the book and the reader.

Difficulties exist and they are not negligible. My own first reaction was of impatience and then of doubt and finally of a decision to re-read it after a lapse of time. Having done this I now realise (what should have been obvious in the first place) that the problems lie for the most part within the reader and his reading habits.

Unfortunately - and I really mean unfortunately - I was given the book to review for THE AGE when it first appeared and was faced with a devil's choice which comes too often to a reviewer. I was conscious of the need for re-reading and felt it was too early for a worthwhile review on my part, but also that it was too noteworthy to set aside for months and review when public interest would have waned. And "public interest" means only a few weeks. So I chose to be cautious when it might have been better to pass it over altogether - but any decision would have been wrong - and produced the review below.

After seven months I have re-read SOLARIS and could wish that review had never been written. So, part of this article is a retraction of that review, part is an implicit apology to Stanislaw Lem and the rest is an examination of some of the reasons why SOLARIS has received less than its due. Here is the review:

* ((*brg* Aided, abetted, and encouraged by Franz Rottensteiner.*))

GEORGE
TURNER

BOOK REVIEWS: (THE AGE SATURDAY REVIEW)

SCIENCE FICTION - George Turner

MORE GUIDES TO THE ABYSS

SOLARIS, by Stanislaw Lem (Faber and Faber: \$6.35).

Stanislaw Lem, of Poland, is reputedly the leading s f writer of Europe, and his much-heralded SOLARIS is his first to be translated into English. His output is large and he should not be judged on one novel, but this is less interesting than its premises promise.

It is a philosophic novel, hammering a philosophic point, but on the level of plot and background it is less s f than fantasy. Its only science is of the invented sort which is beyond disproof or dispute, and Lem provides little logical basis for it, so accept it as fantasy. But can you argue a philosophic point from a fantasy premise?

Planet Solaris is covered by a living ocean, a single entity in solitary lordship. (Biology and psychology out the window - you just have to accept the statement.) Earthmen establish a satellite base for observation of the phenomenon, to discover that the phenomenon is observing them. This it does by creating other humans modelled on the Earthmen's significant memories, and literally haunting them with these all-too-real manifestations. They are helpless before a power beyond their understanding.

The reactions of the humans form the main base of the story, and Lem hasn't wasted too much psychological realism on them because he has a point to pursue. They move as the plot requirement says they must in order to get from argument A to exposition B.

And Lem's intellectual journey ends in the analogy of an evolving God, an incomplete God still striving for perfection in itself and its creation, which is itself. Perhaps he worked this out from basic premises, but it is one of the tired old heresies of Christianity and its alternative version - that perfected man will be God - has at some stage occurred to most thinking people.

If Lem wishes to re-affirm it, that's his right; but the re-affirmation must include the re-definition of such words as God, creator, perfection, etc. He can't expect the lectured reader to do the work for him. And though his great dialectical strength is his refusal of an either-or logic, the result is an ability to do more than describe the problem. And the problem, of the helplessness of intellect confronted with an incomprehensible fact, is an old one in philosophy and logic.

All this having been said, SOLARIS remains a beautifully written work, handsomely served by its translators. On the plane of sheer ingenuity and entertainment it pleases well; there is much originality of conception, particularly in the sections describing the ocean entity and its activities. If in the end it disappoints, it would be best to wait further work before coming to conclusions as to his status in the genre.

SOLARIS is worth preserving for re-reading, for there are gems and subtleties along the way.

The review isn't entirely nonsense, but it is less than just. It represents, GEORGE possibly, the critical reaction of fandom at large, but that reaction has TURNER little to do with the real value of a novel - which is also true of the review. So let me say, mea culpa, and set out to right a wrong. (Re-write a wrong? No, that's pure Bangsund; and he does it much better.)

Solaris is a planet of a double sun many light years from Earth. It is a mystery world, scientifically unintelligible (and this unintelligibility is the central fact of the novel) because it is inhabited by a single organism manifested as an ocean-entity covering most of its surface. The organism is intelligent (if that word has any meaning in this context) but the nature of its intelligence is ambiguous. Does it indeed think, or does it operate on some other level of sentience? WHAT 'SOLARIS' IS ABOUT

Generations of investigation have produced only theories. Factual research tells what it is not, but not what it is. A research station has been set in orbit around the planet and Doctor Kelvin joins the staff of three to assist in the enquiries. He finds a disorganised, barely maintained establishment of which one member has committed suicide just before his arrival. One of the remaining two can only talk to him in meaningless riddles and the other has locked himself incommunicado in his quarters.

It appears that the investigators are at the wrong end of the microscope because after years of quietude the ocean-entity has begun to investigate them. Its method is to sift salient memories from their subconscious minds and to confront them with these memories as realities. This is investigation on a very deep psychological plane. The entity is not interested in them physically but in what they basically are as intelligent forms. (Lem never states this outright and I may well be open to correction as to his intention. It could also be that the thing reacts without volition or meaning.)

Suicide Gibarian's confrontation was with a gigantic negress. Snow and Sartorius also have their revenants but we never discover quite what they are. Kelvin is confronted by Rheya, a girl who once killed herself because of him.

Gibarian, Snow, and Sartorius react with fear and loathing to their resurrected pasts but Kelvin falls helplessly in love again with his. But what is it he loves? It is not Rheya, who is forever dead, but a creation which represents her as if she lived. So his emotional and intellectual attitudes towards her are in conflict; he wants her but knows that he must dispose of what is only a sham.

But destroying these creatures is not so easy. The ocean-entity can re-create interminably. For instance Rheya drinks liquid oxygen and recovers in a matter of minutes.

Eventually a method of destruction is arrived at and some sort of peace comes to Solaris Station.

So much for plot, which is meagre but full enough for its purpose. A question remains, because only an immediate problem of physical and mental comfort has been solved. And the question is: What is the value of science and intellect in the face of something outside the definitions of science and intellect?

Lem provides no answer (only some consideration of possible answers) but answers are not necessarily the novelist's business, and he has set out to SFC 35 39

GEORGE present the question in a forceful dramatic form. In so doing he has been
TURNER forced to question the entire basis of human understanding and even to ask if
it is finally possible to understand anything at all.

There is nothing new to philosophy here and it sounds like the dead end of
hopes for success with readers, and to some extent Lem fails to maintain in-
terest at its highest level, but it is a measure of his artistry that he suc-
ceeds even partially. To make drama of a negative argument is no easy matter.

At this point I would suggest that those disappointed in SOLARIS will do well
to read it again with the care and attention it needs. It will be a rewarding
exercise.

But - and a large but...

Read it in full understanding that this is a translation. If I am correctly
informed it is indeed a re-translation of a French translation of the original
Polish, and the problems are magnified by twice-removal. And this is one of
the barriers between book and reader.

PROBLEMS OF TRANSLATION One of the difficulties of SOLARIS is, paradoxically, the gen-
eral excellence of the English of the two collaborating trans-
lators. It is readable to the point where occasional infelicit-
ties pass under the eye with scarcely a jolt, and only on
second reading does one wonder if here and there they struck trouble and came
awkwardly out of it.

For instance, on page 1 we find this: "I attached the hose to the valve on my
space suit and it inflated rapidly. From then on I was incapable of the smal-
lest movement."

Precise and logical statements.

But on page 5 Kelvin has to operate controls to free himself from the suit and
actually takes a quite impossible step forward while still in it.

Whose error? Lem's or the translators'? Lem might find it worth his while to
tell us. It is, after all, not a really tendentious matter but an early
example of pitfalls awaiting the reader, of moments of hesitation when he won-
ders who is at fault.

On balance such errors are likely to be slips in translation, if only because
the translators lack the overall view of the work which is always present in
the writer's mind; the translators are less able to observe small discrepan-
cies separated by hundreds of words.

Alas we find, also on page 1, following directly on from the last-quoted sen-
tence: "There I stood, or rather hung suspended, enveloped in my pneumatic
suit and yoke to the metal hull."

The sentence will not do. Somewhere a verb has been distorted or mistranslat-
ed. "Yoked", perhaps, instead of "yoke"? Or is "yoke" a noun and the verb
"enveloped" a mistranslation? Or is the whole sentence a sample of careless
editing by the firm of Faber and Faber?

the tenor of the whole. But one is reminded of John Foyster's "Moskowitzian Riddle": If I have observed so much, how much more have I missed? GEORGE TURNER

It must be remembered while reading that the responsibility for these errors does not necessarily rest with the writer. Lem must be accorded the benefit of doubt and the reader must pass determinedly over them. But I noted a few more such in passing and they cause those tiny breaks in concentration which force one momentarily out of the mood of the work and tend to irritate. And irritation is a bitter enemy of fair appreciation.

Also I suspect that a few cuts have been made in the English text. This is not easy to substantiate, but occasionally one meets with a reference which rouses suspicion that something has been omitted.

Thus (also unfortunately early in the book) on page 5 comes the sentence: "Here there was even greater disorder." But nothing in the previous description of the satellite's interior had indicated disorder at all. The reader is presented with a jolting fact, a change in direction for which no preparation has been made.

This could be a matter of editing. Publisher's editors raise an endless chorus of "cut, cut, cut", and are generally right (most novels could do with pruning, as I know to my cost, and SOLARIS is no exception) and when they do the cutting themselves instead of referring back to the author the results can be disastrous.

So much for technical problems, but for the translator there are far greater aesthetic hurdles.

How do you represent the tone and "feeling" of a work when transcribing it into another language with different rhythms, different nuances of meaning in apparently straightforward phrases and often a totally different range of symbolic reference? (Let alone the brainbreaking dilemmas involved in adequate representation of idiomatic usages.)

This difference in word values may be partially illustrated by quoting a famous line of English verse, Chaucer's

He was a verray parfit gentil knight.

Easy! "He was a very perfect gentle knight."

It makes sense, but it is very much less than Chaucer's middle-English original, which means, "He was a truly (in the sense of 'verily') perfected (thoroughly trained in the arts of arms and courtoisie) gentle (of noble lineage) knight."

Neville Coghill, in his modern English version, settles (in some despair, I imagine) for, "He was a true, a perfect gentle-knight", which offers about half of what Chaucer intended.

There is not space here to consider the various and often highly suspect means of overcoming these problems, and the reader can rarely know what is missed.

Dialogue has other difficulties. Differing nationalities have different conceptions of emphasis and delivery, and nuances of character which can be indicated in a single word might become cumbersome or lost altogether in translation.

GEORGE Any reader of the Garnett or Magarshack translations of Dostoyevsky will re-
TURNER call the feeling that all the characters are shrieking continually at the tops
of their voices (as in Dostoyevsky they very often are, but not all the time).
Worse still, he will come to a passage like the rich and wonderful "fete"
scene in THE POSSESSED and slowly realise that this is knockabout farce. Much
comedy passes unnoticed in such writers because nuance is so hard to repro-
duce. This is probably the reason why the West tends to consider Ibsen, Tol-
stoy, Goethe, et al, almost totally lacking in humour, which is disastrously
untrue.

How many little jokes and sardonicisms did Lem include in SOLARIS which have
simply not come through?

One can only say, in the long run, that a translation reads well or badly.
Allowing for obvious errors, SOLARIS reads well. But how accurately?

STRUCTURAL Language aside, there is another aspect of Eastern European
CONSIDERATIONS literature which tends to irritate the Western reader, and
this resides in a fundamental difference in attitudes to-
wards the structure of the novel. (We are not, repeat not,
about to consider ideological matters.)

You may recall Lem's (or was it Rottensteiner's?; one tends to think of them
in tandem) agreement with Bruce's speculation in a recent SFC that there is no
trash in Eastern European publishing. I take this with the customary grain of
salt but must agree that their literature has not been flooded, like ours,
with rubbish cynically tailored to the lowest reader-requirement. (And that
goes for s f also.)

The result, for us, has been not only a debasement of literature in the broad
sense but a degradation of public taste.

The cry is for action at all costs (in or out of bed) and for a hard, driving
style that sweeps the reader along in spite of himself. The contemplative no-
vel has a hard time in the West.

Even the best English-language novelists have had to learn to live with the
demand for incessant movement and so have devised methods of conveying ideas
by symbolism, juxtaposition, and sharply pointed reference, and in putting
across whole sermons in terms of activity and colourful dialogue. In this way
they have managed to make their works acceptable to mass-man without losing
essential artistry. (People like Ivy Compton-Burnett, Angus Wilson, and
others have resisted the trend, but their mass popularity is small.)

But if you turn to the Eastern European novel you are back with the structural
modes of the nineteenth century and must make adjustments to your reading ex-
pectation. Worthwhile adjustments, be it said; they will improve your reading
habits.

The structure of SOLARIS is outdated in Western terms and the reader must
orientate himself in this respect. "Orientate" here means simply read with
care and don't become impatient with lengthy passages where little happens,
because these passages are the heart and value of the novel. (Please recall
that I have always insisted, in my fan writing, that every work must be read
within the context of its provenance.)

In Western terms SOLARIS is a novel of stops and starts and relatively little GEORGE movement, one in which dramatic opportunities are seemingly passed over in fa- TURNER
vour of exposition and argument. But emphasis on action would have been to
turn it into melodrama, and God knows s f is more than overloaded with that.
SOLARIS is a novel, not a romance, and must be read as such. And as such it
is rewarding.

True, it starts in the middle of the action in accepted narrative style, but
in the first chapter one comes upon the infuriating dialogue between Kelvin
and Snow. Something, it seems, is badly wrong on Solaris Station. Kelvin
asks what, and Snow drivels and dithers and makes mysteries and refuses to ex-
plain and mutters that he "can't". One begins to suspect that here we have
one of those plots which would cease to exist if just one person in the first
few pages gave a straight answer to a straight question.

It isn't so. It is only on re-reading, with a full knowledge of the subse-
quent narrative, that one realises that this dialogue is tight, exact, and
meaningful, and that Snow's statement that he can't explain is literally true.

A Western writer, careful of his reader's impatiences, would have handled this
sequence differently (not necessarily better) to give the reader at least one
concrete fact to keep him looking for the next, and I feel that many a
reader's attitude may have commenced to harden at this point.

Lem does not do this. He persists with the nineteenth-century method of myst-
ification increased by the slow piling up of detail. Eastern European writers
commonly use this or similar approaches; it is part of their tradition (even
in such moderns as Solzhenitsyn and Sholokhov) and must be accepted. In fact
you must actually read the book instead of merely engulfing words in a race to
a hoped-for bang-up finish. A novel is a totality, a little more than the sum
of its parts.

The plot, which is minimal, unfolds in a series of "action" chapters separated
by stretches of discussion and contemplation. All of these stretches could
have been rehandled as dialogue or action flashbacks - and the book would have
in consequence been twice as long without adding anything to its statement.
Lem has adhered to a method we begin to find archaic, and for me he was right.

He has something to say which you are required to think about and he wants to
say it in a compressed form which presents all the argument, not to leave it
splayed here and there throughout the book as implications riding on sputters
of action.

So, Gentle Reader (how's that for the nineteenth-century touch?) please go
back to SOLARIS and take it again, slowly. Stop expecting outbursts of inter-
stellar houha and gimmicks galore and treat it with the respect that litera-
ture deserves.

In other words, this time damned well read the thing.*

If you still don't like it, go back to "Lensman" Smith.

When I use the term s f I mean science fiction. Asimov's
definition will do for rule-of-thumb: "That branch of
literature which deals with the future of science and

IS 'SOLARIS'
SCIENCE FICTION?

* ((*brg* Bravo, George!*))

GEORGE scientists." Add that the scientific element must be as accurate as author-
TURNER research can make it and that "invented" science of the psionics-and-space-warps type won't pass unless it is given some rational justification.

On the surface SOLARIS fits Asimov's phrase; it deals very much with the future of science and scientists. Indeed it bundles the lot into a ball and tosses them up with the question, "Has science as we know it any more than a local and transient meaning?"

How, asks Lem, are we to regard our accumulated knowledge if it breaks on a single, hard, unassimilable fact?

The scientist's answer should be pretty obvious. He will point out that investigation will eventually reveal the nature of the fact and (a) it will be assimilated into the body of accepted knowledge or (b) the interpretation of accepted knowledge will be revised on the basis of this new fact. Both these things indeed happened when Einstein set about redesigning the cosmos overnight.

But Einstein's ideas were assimilable - although there are still mathematicians who refuse to accept the time paradoxes and some other implications - and Lem's question rests on his "fact", i.e. the nature of the ocean-entity of Solaris, being assimilable.

Paradox, paradox! How can one imagine a fact which by its nature is unimaginable? That's the problem that Lovecraft and Ashton-Smith always stumbled against in their silly reaching for "inexpressible" horrors.

However this does not mean that the question cannot be put as a philosophic ploy. Whether or not it can be put as a concrete argument in a novel is another matter.

Lem, simply because he is writing a novel, is compelled to produce his "fact". Worse, he is forced to describe it - in comprehensible terms. And so, little by little, we cease to believe that the ocean-entity is not assimilable into the body of scientific knowledge. The more real it becomes, the more its activities impinge upon human beings, the more it becomes simply a mystery rather than something outside understanding. All Lem's careful and immensely talented insistence cannot overcome the consequence of elaborate presentation. Hence the query in my earlier review as to whether a philosophic question can be asked on a basis of fantasy?

I think it cannot. Lem's question can only be put as an abstraction. Attempt to present it in concrete terms and you immediately bring the ungraspable fact closer to our grasp. We begin to refuse to believe that the thing will not eventually succumb to investigation.

The question is valid but the means of presentation are not.

Yet, curiously, he might have got away with it - with me, at any rate - had he not included the long sections (pages 111-124 and 164-171) describing the history of failure in all scientific attempts to understand the entity. Some such resume sections are essential to the book, but the satirical overtone as of amused genius watching the scurrings of ants is not. One feels that he is loading the dice emotionally or trying to bait the reader into agreement by appealing to his intellectual snob instinct. One ant despising the other ants! Logically the super-ant must also despise himself or be in turn des-

And that is where Lem's question ends. The universe is ultimately unknowable if every answer is immediately nullified by a fresh question. It is a despairing conclusion, unacceptable to any evolving life form. Accept it and the reason for existence vanishes. GEORGE TURNER

That every answer will be questioned (not necessarily nullified) by the acquisition of fresh facts is undeniable, but the fresh fact must be another goal of endeavour, not a dead end to all understanding. Lem's scientists were right to keep on trying, and no threat of hopelessness could or should stop them, nor should their endeavours be regarded with something at times close to contempt.

Yes, his question is valid, but on the strength of the evidence adduced his answer - possible/suggested/inferred - is not.

Still, his answer must be allowed as "Not proven", and reaction to it will inevitably be personal to each reader.

His final soliloquy and conversation about an evolving God or god (the text is here unhelpful in the matter of capitals and transpositions could be made which alter the tone of the argument) leaves me fairly cold, being simply a rehash of familiar religious navel-gazings and Kelvin's remark (page 199), "That is the only god I could imagine believing in, a god whose passion is not a redemption, who saves nothing, fulfils no purpose - a god who simply is", seems semantically meaningless. It requires a new definition of "god" to have meaning.

All this, however, is imply argument about his thesis and no doubt he wrote with argument in mind. Disagreement with thesis is no ground for disparaging a novel, and SOLARIS remains a courageous attempt on the nearly impossible. One can't dislike the book on such a ground - rather one should admire it on precisely that ground.

So, dealing as it does with the ultimate future of science, SOLARIS fits the s f niche, though its proper classification may well be the "philosophical novel".

The scientific detail is not aggressive, and such of it as concerns the ocean-entity cannot be questioned because the entity is presented as being beyond our science. Thus even the question of how an intellect can evolve without the presence of another intellect is not allowable.

In its purely science-fictional aspect one might query the idea of the revenant figures being constructed of neutrinos. The neutrino can exist only in motion; at rest it becomes massless and chargeless, effectually non-existent. To form a construct of such is equivalent to catching a beam of light in a box and slapping down the lid on it. Science fiction demands something less careless than this. It is perhaps a small intrusion but it adds to the impression that the argument is superior to the means employed to purvey it. And that, in philosophy as well as in simple debate, is not allowable.

For me, then, SOLARIS stands ultimately to one side of genre s f, allied to but not fully belonging, along with such works as LAST AND FIRST MEN, LIMBO, INTENSIVE CARE, and NOTES FROM THE FUTURE.

To sum up, SOLARIS is a fine novel although I feel that it fails to make its point. But the attempt is stimulating as a pointer to those new directions in

GERALD MURNANE

Outside Insight

Gerald Murnane discusses

SOLARIS

by STANISLAW LEM

Translated from the French
by Joanna Kilmartin
and Steve Cox
Afterword by Darko Suvin

Faber :: 1971
216 pages :: \$A 6.15

Walker :: 1970
216 pages :: \$4.95

Berkley :: 1971
223 pages :: 75c

Original Polish publication
:: 1961

If fiction is one of the supreme achievements of the human imagination, then the effect of a work of fiction read for the first time ought to be a kind of revelation. The reader should find himself in new territory, confronted by a vision of things that obliges him at least to question and perhaps to change his own map of the universe.

The science fiction author who writes of other planets or other life-forms might seem in a better position to create a fictional "new world" than, say, the author of a contemporary comedy of manners. But too often the other planets of science fiction are depressingly like the sets of fifth-rate movies. As for the new life-forms: although they come in a variety of marvellous shapes, their much-vaunted intelligences usually give rise to nothing more startling than schemes for expanding their dominions - an idea

that was already old hat in Xerxes' day.

The plot of SOLARIS is superficially of the man-discovers-other-life-on-a-new-planet variety. Even the kind of life-form has probably been thought of many times before. Yet SOLARIS has a richness and originality that places it far above the general run of science fiction.

Lem's novel opens with the arrival of the narrator, Kelvin, on the planet Solaris, where a handful of scientists from Earth are already established on elaborately equipped research station. The prose of this opening section is a delight to read. Not a word is wasted. The crisp sentences convey unmistakably the intimidating eeriness of the vast, complex station where dirt and debris clutter its corridors and luminous signs glow all day in its chambers. "I went down a small stairway," observes Kelvin. "The metal floor below had been coated with a heavy-duty plastic. In places, the wheels of trolleys carrying rockets had worn through this plastic covering to expose bare steel beneath... The ceiling of the hall descended in a fine parabolic arc until it reached the entrance to a gallery, in whose recesses gas meters, gauges, parachutes, crates, and a quantity of other objects

scattered about in untidy heaps."

GERALD
MURNANE

The chapters that describe Kelvin's efforts to find out what has gone wrong on Solaris relate a memorable narrative of suspense and terror. But woven into the narrative are other themes that give SOLARIS the depth and complexity of a great work of fiction.

As Kelvin tries to solve the mystery that surrounds the space station and its frightened, secretive inhabitants, he calls to mind the history of the exploration and study of the planet Solaris. This history extends over several centuries and has been recorded in a vast body of writings ranging from accounts of early expeditions to far-reaching speculations about the nature of the planet. (The concensus of opinion about the sea-like substance that covers Solaris is that it is some kind of stupendous brain.)

So vast is the literature about Solaris that compendiums have been published in an attempt to summarise the bewildering array of theories in the field of "Solaristics". "The thirty or so years of the first three 'Gravinsky periods', with their open assurance and irresistibly optimistic romanticism" give way to the "concept of the 'apsychic ocean', a new and almost unanimous orthodoxy which threw overboard the view of that entire generation of scientists who believed that their observations were evidence of a conscious will, teleological processes, and activity motivated by some inner need of the ocean.. It was the golden age of the archivists," says Kelvin. Later "the essential spirit of the research flagged, and in the course of this period, still an optimistic one in spite of everything, a decline set in." This scientific era gives way to yet others.

As an exercise in pure inventiveness this creation of a whole body of historiography is superb. But it is also a brilliant parable on the subject of man's struggle to understand the nature of the universe - or even that largely inscrutable part of it that some have called God. The great names among the Solarists have made exhaustive catalogues of all the visible marvels of the strange planet. They have observed and named the many peculiar formations that the gigantic ocean gives rise to. But the fundamental questions remain unanswered - what is Solaris, what is it doing, and what is its attitude (if any) to man?

There is one theme in SOLARIS which it would be unfair to discuss fully because its gradual disclosure is one of the main elements in the plot of the novel. The Earthmen who live on Solaris are tormented in a subtly horrifying way - apparently as a result of the planet's cerebrations, but whether from motives of malice or simply as part of some genuine search for knowledge no one can say.

The account of Kelvin's desperate battle to cope with this situation is a gripping tale of a man at odds with an antagonist whose strengths and motives he must discover by trial and perilous error. At the same time it has overtones of an even more compelling theme. This might be called the problem of whether a searching and fearless examination of the human personality can lead to any conclusions about the "laws" that Man has often supposed to govern the universe.

But no attempts to paraphrase the meaning of SOLARIS can do justice to this tantalising novel. SOLARIS is a parable on which a host of speculations can be based.

GERALD MURNANE One of the reasons why so many science fiction novels read like adventure stories for boys is surely that too many authors (and, by implication, too many readers) have not even begun to question the trite, absurdly simplified notions about Man that journalists, psychologists, computer programmers, biologists, and self-appointed experts of all kinds have spread among us through the medium of magazine articles and half-brow tv documentaries.

Current theories might be said to consider Man as a kind of computer whose efficiency is marred by the presence in his works of a few oddly functioning glands and by vestiges of an obsolete organ once called the soul. These theories lay great stress on Man's ability to "crack the code" of the universe by the use of logic and reasoning. The proponents of these theories are usually too sure of themselves to recall that every past century has cherished its own theories about Man, only to have them overturned by later ages.

On the planet Solaris the massive station equipped with every kind of technological gimmick bears witness to the efforts of science to grapple with the unfamiliar. In the library of the station the rows of volumes of studies in Solaristics are silent evidence of the efforts of scholarly speculation to give an account of the mysteries of the universe.

But the station is going slowly to ruin because the men inside it have proved inadequate, and the vast library is a faintly ludicrous catalogue of Man's attempts to classify the unclassifiable (and of the cranky bees that buzz in scientists' bonnets). Meanwhile, just beyond the windows of the station, Solaris, gigantic and wonderful, goes on with its mysterious superhuman operations whose nature and purpose can only be guessed at.

SOLARIS has the form of a traditional science fiction adventure story. But the other world that it describes is far more marvellous and disturbing than most of the fantastic planets visited by science fiction adventurers. It is a world that cannot be fitted into any accepted frames of reference. Yet anyone who has ever found that even the ordinary phenomena of his daily life are not adequately explained by twentieth-century systems of thought will find the world of SOLARIS vaguely familiar.

In recent years lone voices have been heard bemoaning Man's obsession with the exploration of outer space while the regions of "inner space" still offer so many unsolved mysteries. In this outstanding novel Stanislaw Lem explores both outer and inner space. Lem is far from denying that marvels exist in the universe as a challenge to Man's understanding. But he suggests that the most astonishing marvel of all is the interaction of the wonders "out there" with the wonders "in here".

- Gerald Murnane 1971

GERALD MURNANE BARRY GILLAM

Of Fiction, Truths, and Billy Pilgrim

Vonnegut's novel:

"The imagination is downgraded every day. Hack works of non-fiction get acres of reviews while many competent novels - genuine creations - get miserly paragraphs or pass unnoticed." By a happy coincidence I read these lines (in THE TIMES LITERARY SUPPLEMENT, April 28, 1972) on the very day when I was trying to devise an introduction to this review. The lines are part of an article by W J Weatherby. (I had never heard of him, but if he's a novelist then I've missed something valuable by not having read his novels.) The main point that he makes in the TLS article

is that generally speaking the imagination is rated poorly today, while intelligence (or, more precisely, that inferior sort of reasoning which can deal with nothing more complex than statistics, sociological norms, psychoanalytical jargon, and the like) enjoys the adulation not only of journalists and self-styled "critics" and "commentators" but, worse still, of writers of fiction.

Some years ago I fell under the spell of the "-ologies". The year was 1965, and I had just read a closely argued, "heavyweight" review of some translated works of Claude Levi-Strauss. Hidden away in an abstruse passage about the significance of variations in cultural patterns were hints of what seemed to be a truth more profound than anything I had ever found in the dozens of novels that lined my shelves. I ordered from England, and collected some months later, a ponderous tome entitled STRUCTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY. The very name was reassuringly solemn - no more novelists' flights of fancy; no more escapists' dream-worlds for me! I opened the book, expecting to find truths about human nature impaled like a collection of splendid butterflies on the precise terminology of the great scientist.

The big volume still stands on my bookshelf, looking isolated and faintly ridiculous among the rows of novels and poetry: like a self-conscious adolescent among a mob of precocious children. My investigation of the "-ologies" lasted no more than a year, but occasionally I still have reason to regret it - as when I discover a paperback novel that I should have read years before, and SFC 35 49

Gerald Murnane discusses

SLAUGHTERHOUSE-FIVE

by KURT VONNEGUT Jr

Jonathan Cape :: 1969

186 pages :: \$3.90

Panther 586 03328 :: 1972

143 pages :: 95c

GERALD MURNANE wonder why I missed it - until I learn that it was first published while I was far away in the arid wastelands of anthropology and sociology.

I wish I could say that the moral of this little story is obvious: that every intelligent reader knows without being told the uses and advantages of imaginative fiction and the serious limits of everything that goes by the name of non-fiction. (It occurs to me now that those school libraries of earlier days, in which the non-fiction section consisted of a few shelves in a corner surrounded by whole walls of fiction, served their readers far better than is admitted by educationists nowadays.) But, as any lover of fiction knows, there are thousands of otherwise discerning people today who are utterly oblivious to the merits of imaginative writing; who listen open-mouthed to the jejune outpourings of "hard" and "soft" scientists alike; and who fancy themselves as realists while rejecting the greater part of human reality - myth, fable, and the vast galaxies of the imagination.

It needs to be repeated often and forcefully that fiction (perhaps I should say, "first-rate imaginative fiction") is not a refuge from the "tough" world of reality; that, for example, a book like SLAUGHTERHOUSE-FIVE has every right to stand beside any volume of history or journalism as a valid record of man's response to war.

In a curious way, SLAUGHTERHOUSE-FIVE argues the very point that I am making. In the opening pages the author speaks directly to the reader before beginning the novel itself. He has not yet assumed the role of a creator of fiction. He feels the onerous responsibility of recording, for the benefit of the millions who did not experience the terrors of bombing raids, the simple tale of just "how it was", but he is not certain how to go about it:

I happened to tell a University of Chicago professor at a cocktail party about the raid as I had seen it, about the book I would write. He was a member of a thing called The Committee on Social Thought. And he told me about how the Germans had made soap and candles out of the fat of dead Jews and so on.

All I could say was, "I know. I know. I know."

In laconic, almost toneless, prose, Vonnegut sizes up (in the first chapter) the task that faces him. As a reader who had no idea of the contents of SLAUGHTERHOUSE-FIVE I felt intensely concerned during this first chapter. It seemed to me that the author had two main options: he could follow the example of the thousands of writers whose only asset is that they have experienced something that few others have been through, and write some sort of memoir or "I was there" account - or he could write fiction.

There were times during my reading of this chapter when Vonnegut seemed to be about to choose the first of these options:

"Listen -, " I said, "I'm writing this book about Dresden. I'd like some help remembering stuff. I wonder if I could come down and see you, and we could drink and talk and remember."

There are other occasions when he seems to be tentatively exploring other means of mastering his experience.

I used my daughter's crayons, a different colour for each main character. One end of the wallpaper was the beginning of the story, and the

other end was the end, and then there was all that middle part, which was the middle. And the blue line met the red line and then the yellow line, and the yellow line stopped because the character represented by the yellow line was dead. And so on. The destruction of Dresden was represented by a vertical band of orange cross-hatching, and all the lines that were still alive passed through it, came out the other side.

In the end, of course, Vonnegut writes fiction; but the experience of reading the book as a whole - including the all-important first chapter - gave me a startling insight into the nature of fiction and its superiority over "straight facts" as a means of communicating genuine human experience. It is important to stress that the book is a whole. The first chapter, in which the narrator - Kurt Vonnegut, alive and well in present-day USA - addresses the readers of his book and tells them matter-of-factly that he is trying to describe his experiences as a prisoner-of-war in Dresden, and such later passages as the description of Billy Pilgrim's trip to Tralfamadore, a planet three hundred million miles from Earth, do form part of a coherent statement.

This statement is no less serious and persuasive for being largely in the form of fiction. And the converse is true: the fiction is no less compelling and satisfying for being enclosed in a layer of fact. SLAUGHTERHOUSE-FIVE, I repeat, is a whole - the testament of a man who tells the reader plainly and earnestly that he (the author) is committed to telling the truth and who then recounts a piece of (literally) marvellous fiction. The truth, Vonnegut seems to be saying, is something that can only be fully apprehended by the imagination. Fiction, therefore, is not the opposite of truth but a more complete expression of it.

Significantly, Vonnegut does not narrate the events of the novel from the point of view of Kurt Vonnegut, ex-prisoner-of-war. Instead he chooses as his "hero" Billy Pilgrim - a bewildered, painfully vulnerable naïf who is utterly incapable of responding to suffering with any of the stereotyped reactions that war films and journalists' prose have almost "bred into" twentieth-century man.

There is one scene in SLAUGHTERHOUSE-FIVE, too long to quote, in which Billy and his fellow POWs trudge through the streets of Dresden, watched by crowds of the citizens. The other prisoners look pathetic enough, but Billy is a scream. He is dressed in a blue toga, silver slippers, and a lady's muff (for all of which there is a logical explanation). When, from out of his trance-like state of bewilderment, he observes that a spectator is confronting him and demanding an explanation for his bizarre clothes, Billy fishes out of his pocket a two-carat diamond and part of a denture - and holds them under the affronted citizen's nose. In this scene, and a dozen others like it, Vonnegut the novelist points up the craziness of war in a way that no factual account could equal. We know the statistics to prove that war decimates populations, destroys the economics of nations, and reduces cities and artifacts to rubble. The war scenes in SLAUGHTERHOUSE-FIVE make no appeal to our commonsense or our appreciation of facts and figures - they work on our imagination.

But while it is true that only a superior imagination could have conceived such incidents as the procession of the American POWs with their leader dressed as Cinderella, this must not be taken to mean that the novel is utterly improbable - a wild, fantastic romp bearing no relation to what really happened to Kurt Vonnegut in the year of Our Lord 1945. Vonnegut, the real-life narrator, has lived through an experience so shattering that it cannot be

GERALD described in "reasonable" terms - he has to call on the utmost resources of MURNANE imaginative fiction to give the reader some approximation of it.

In one superb passage the novelist's imagination runs free and creates an effect that only the most audacious review would try to interpret. Billy Pilgrim watches a war film on tv. He watches it passively and resignedly, taking in all its details. As well as watching it "forwards" he is privileged to watch it "backwards", having come "slightly unstuck in time". This is the last part of the war film, seen backwards:

When the bombers got back to their base, the steel cylinders were taken from the racks and shipped back to the United States of America, where factories were operating night and day, dismantling the cylinders, separating the dangerous contents into minerals. Touchingly, it was mainly women who did this work. The minerals were then shipped to specialists in remote areas. It was their business to put them into the ground, to hide them cleverly, so they would never hurt anybody ever again.

The American fliers turned in their uniforms, became high school kids. And Hitler turned into a baby, Billy Pilgrim supposed. That wasn't in the movie. Billy was extrapolating. Everybody turned into a baby, and all humanity, without exception, conspired biologically to produce two perfect people named Adam and Eve, he supposed.

Now I'm told by at least one s f fan that this technique has been written about before in the field. But it was the quality of the imagination in this particular passage which showed me just how good this book is. Moreover, this business of time and its dislocation raises the whole matter of Billy Pilgrim's "travels in time".

Billy Pilgrim knows how he will die:

As a time-traveller, he has seen his own death many times, has described it to a tape recorder. The tape is locked up with his will and some other valuables in his safe-deposit box at the Ilium Merchants National Bank and Trust, he says.

I, Billy Pilgrim, the tape begins, will die, have died, and always will die on February thirteenth, 1976.

At numerous points in the narrative Billy finds himself alive and prosperous after the war but unable to live whole-heartedly in the "present" because he experiences the past (or the future) as intensely as the present.

I suppose this is a familiar enough theme - the returned soldier who has been through hell sees life after the war as essentially ridiculous and trivial. The difference with SLAUGHTERHOUSE-FIVE is that the war throws its shadow ahead and behind. Everything - past as well as future - that comprises the life of Billy Pilgrim is affected by his experience of war. In this way the rather banal device of time-travel achieves, in this novel, quite a powerful effect. The most terrifying experiences of Billy Pilgrim's life actually reduce all the other experiences to the level of triviality or, at least, a kind of fragile fatuousness.

If the time happens to be before the war, then Billy's experiences are made to seem pathetically unimportant because of the impending disaster. If the time is after the war, because of the constant threat of time reversal, the war is

just around the corner. A time-traveller cannot win. Even if he believes GERALD that he has emerged from the worst experiences of his life, he is just as MURNANE likely to find himself embarking on them all over again. More complicated still - he is likely to find himself removed from the actual future to the time before his most painful experiences. In this case he relives the past with a peculiarly disturbing kind of prescience. And the existence of any point in human history of something as monstrous as the Dresden bombing affects all human history; the horror does not disappear into the past as years elapse. Any one of us might visit Dresden-in-1945 (or any similar event and time) at any moment of our lives.

Now, as I've said already, I'm aware that tricks with time have been used by hundreds of s f (and other) writers. But in SLAUGHTERHOUSE-FIVE the well-used device of time travel has such an impact that no sensitive reader would dream of crying "old hat!" Perhaps one reason for this is that Vonnegut doesn't feel obliged to explain how Billy Pilgrim is able to travel back and forth in time. For that matter, he doesn't pretend to explain any of the skills and accomplishments of the Tralfamadorians. The little creatures simply appear one night on Billy's lawn and whirl him off to their impossibly remote planet. Their understanding of time, which influences Billy's own view of the events of his life, is stated simply and almost persuasively.

All moments, past, present, and future, always have existed, always will exist. The Tralfamadorians can look at all the different moments just the way we can look at a stretch of the Rocky Mountains, for instance. They can see how permanent all the moments are, and they can look at any moment that interests them.

Towards the end of his long and fruitful life, C G Jung became very interested in the phenomenon of UFOs. As I understand it, Jung saw UFOs as part of a modern mythology: having rid his spiritual landscape of angels and devils, man was obliged to populate it with new marvels more in keeping with "scientific thinking" but still capable of stretching his imagination. So what has this to do with SLAUGHTERHOUSE-FIVE? I have never tried to explain away the mysteries of the imagination by tossing around debased terms like "unconscious mind". Still, a work of the imagination like Vonnegut's novel seems to show that there are certain facts of life that we can only understand by viewing them in a fantastic setting - a world of gods or giants or fairies or aliens from space.

Billy Pilgrim is bewildered by the holocaust at Dresden and the enormous shadows that this event casts forwards and backwards over his life. The Tralfamadorians passively accept the cosmic permanence of all time. Perhaps we earthlings can only begin to understand the mysteries of time and destruction by reference to cosmologies very different from our own.

Why should an author have to justify his use of the fantastic, anyway? We are all habitual time-travellers. Most of our dreams are the purest s f. Vonnegut knows this, and his little green men require no explanation. What does require an explanation is the monstrous fact of the bombing of Dresden, and if a story about creatures shaped like plumbers' friends can help us to comprehend that, then the story is worth reading and remembering.

- Gerald Murnane 1972

Hill's film:

Barry Gillam discusses

SLAUGHTERHOUSE FIVE

Directed by GEORGE ROY HILL; screenplay STEPHEN GELLER (based on the novel by KURT VONNEGUT Jr); camera (Technicolor): MIROSLAV ONDRICEK; music: GLENN GOULD; editor: DEDE ALLEN; production design: HENRY BUMBSTEAD; art direction: ALEXANDER GOLIZEN, GEORGE WEBB; produced by PAUL MONASH and JENNINGS LANG; distributed by Universal.

With MICHAEL SACKS (Billy Pilgrim), RON LEIBMAN (Paul Lazzaro), EUGENE ROCHE (Derby), SHARON GANS (Valencia), VALERIE PERRINE (Montana Wildhack), ROBERTS BLOSSOM (Wild Bob Cody), SORRELL BROOKE (Lionel Marble).

1972. 104 minutes.

present at the fire-bombing of Dresden and had subsequently built a successful career as an optometrist.

That is the "plot", the narrative of both the Vonnegut and the Hill. And because the works are so similar, I'm going to have to say something about the novel to explain what is wrong with the film. The speaker in the first quote is the narrator of the novel, Kurt Vonnegut:

I think about my education sometimes. I went to the University of Chicago for a while after the Second World War. I was a student in the Department of Anthropology. At that time they were teaching that there was absolutely no difference between anybody. They may be teaching that still.

Another thing they taught was that nobody was ridiculous or bad or disgusting. Shortly before my father died, he said to me, "You know - you never wrote a story with a villain in it."

I told him that was one of the things I learned in college after the war.

and:

There are almost no characters in this story, and almost no dramatic confrontations, because most of the people in it are so sick and so much the listless playthings of enormous forces.

SLAUGHTERHOUSE FIVE is an unusually faithful adaption of Kurt Vonnegut's novel of the same name. Everyone involved with the film has done an excellent job, but their excellence is somehow beside the point. The film is an accurate visual transcription of the novel but it stretches out before one like the arctic tundra: pretty but empty and endless.

Billy Pilgrim has come unstuck in time. He lives all the moments of his life simultaneously. It was on the planet Tralfamadore that he learned how to see things properly. Before being transported to Tralfamadore to be half of the human exhibit in an interplanetary zoo, he had been

Pilgrim alone. The novel, on the other hand, is the story of Kurt Vonnegut BARRY and how he came to terms with the incomprehensible and irresistible forces GILLAM that he became aware of through his involvement in World War Two and particularly his presence at the fire-bombing of Dresden. Thus Vonnegut's introduction explaining his personal stake in the story is chapter one of SLAUGHTERHOUSE-FIVE. The opinions he voices through the narrative of the nine following chapters are not authorial affectation. The relationship between Vonnegut's experience and Billy Pilgrim's is at the centre of the book. The fact of Vonnegut's presence at Dresden balances the fantasy of Tralfamadore.

This is the first thing to realise: Only half of SLAUGHTERHOUSE-FIVE has made it to the screen. Vonnegut's omnipresence in the novel does more to give it unity than anything else. Billy Pilgrim is not in all the scenes and furthermore is often in the dark as to what is happening. Not so Vonnegut and not so the reader. Vonnegut is not joking when he says that there is almost no drama or tension in the book. In fact, what is effective about the book is the narration, droll or glib, depending on your affinity with, or antipathy to, Vonnegut. It is no small loss that there is no one in the film to say, "Listen: Billy Pilgrim has come unstuck in time."

That "Listen:" is the storyteller calling for the reader's attention. It implies a sense of fable that only the excellent photography of the movie succeeds in conveying. Vonnegut tells the reader in his introduction how the tale begins and ends. I am suggesting that a much more interesting film could have been made from the novel. The other film would open in Vonnegut's living room as he says, "All this happened, more or less. The war parts, anyway, are pretty much true..."

Vonnegut can do without drama in the story of Billy Pilgrim. It exists elsewhere in the novel. However the film is quite lost without it. The Tralfamadorian philosophy is a kind of neo-existentialism. It bids one accept everything and then savour the good moments. Billy Pilgrim's story is one of surrender to the entire impinging world. In other words, Vonnegut's work is an explication of what he learned in college: that nobody is ridiculous or bad or disgusting. He explicates so thoroughly that almost everyone in his work is ridiculous or bad or disgusting. Almost every scene contains a ludicrous element and while in the novel this surfeit is sustained, if barely, by Vonnegut's style, personality, and the distancing effect of his narration, in the film it quickly collapses into tedium.

The comedy isn't funny and the tragedy isn't sad. The comedy accompanies no integration into society and the tragedy accompanies no catharsis. The work is nondirectional. Again, the novel can take it; the film can't. If every moment is equal, none is special. (Tautologies are the only possible response to Vonnegut.) A friend of mine mentioned that SLAUGHTERHOUSE FIVE looks like a Penn movie occasionally, because of the editing. Dede Allen, who edited Penn's BONNIE AND CLYDE, ALICE'S RESTAURANT, and LITTLE BIG MAN, has done a fine job in presenting the equal moments. Miroslav Ondricek, who photographed INTIMATE LIGHTING, THE FIREMAN'S BALL, and IF provides rather lovely, non-functional images which I think Vonnegut would appreciate.

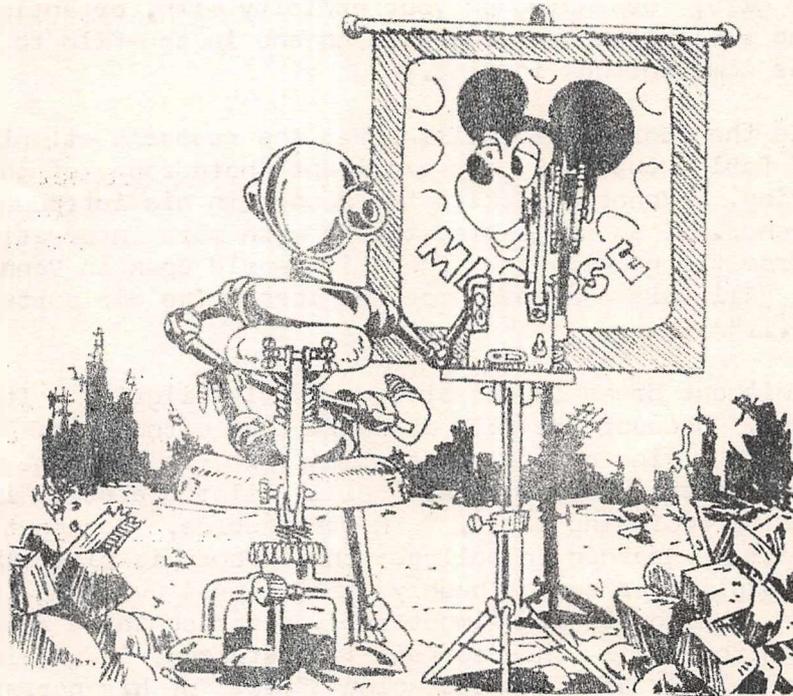
George Roy Hill has a reputation largely from BUTCH CASSIDY AND THE SUNDANCE KID. What he did for that film, in creating a fine comic pacing and a measured sense of the ridiculous, he cannot do here because of the material. Technically, SLAUGHTERHOUSE FIVE is flawless, but in practice, it lacks the very virtues that each of the film-makers possesses. All the scenes are evenly, and dully, paced in comparison with BUTCH CASSIDY and BONNIE AND CLYDE. SFC 35 55

BARRY And the photography doesn't connect with the story, unlike that in the GILLAM luminous INTIMATE LIGHTING.

My favourite scene in the book (featuring Kilgore Trout) isn't in the movie. I assume that Stephen Geller felt it too much even for Vonnegut. My favourite scene in the movie isn't in the book. Billy Pilgrim's wife drives to the hospital upon hearing that Billy is there. In the process, she demolishes everything on the road, including several cars, an incidental half-dozen motorcyclists, her own car, and herself. By god, something is happening! - which I can't say for any other part of the film. The sequence is even funny in a slap-happy way. The acting is all decent but is directed to suit Vonnegut and hence is dramatic.

SLAUGHTERHOUSE FIVE is as flat as stale ginger ale.

- Barry Gillam August 1972



YES, BUT WHO SAID WHAT? - CONTINUED FROM PAGE 45

which s f is only very warily proceeding. It is good to know that more of Lem's work is to become available to us.

My copy closes with a revoltingly sycophantic essay by Darko Suvin, apparently a worshipper at the shrine of St Lem. Lem needs no cult, and like any artist is better off without one. I imagine that he will go his own way, uninfluenced by criticism or fandom.

And rightly so.

DARKO SUVIN

A Survey of Soviet Science Fiction

Soviet s f is little known outside the Warsaw Pact countries, though by now it has grown into a literary phenomenon of global size if not of global spread. It has assembled a nucleus of about 50 habitual, though not full-time, writers, a voracious reading public whose nucleus of all-devouring fans can be estimated at least at several hundreds of thousands (mainly young people, and those engaged in natural science professions). Furthermore, the outer circle of people who read s f alongside other technical non-fiction or adventure fiction has been estimated at twenty-five per cent of all workers, students, and technical intelligentsia - possibly more than twenty million readers.

No accurate statistics exist of the number of s f works which can be found in the many public or semi-public (e.g. scientific) libraries, but there is a claim for 1,624 "titles" published from 1917 to 1969, of which more than 1,000 have appeared since 1958. I would assume that this refers to all the languages of USSR and all bibliographical units (including single stories in magazines, poems, plays, movie scenarios, etc). In the Russian language, there were 285 new s f books released in the years from 1956 to 1970.¹ This yields a net of fifteen to thirty yearly: of that, about half a dozen are new anthologies of short and long stories, with the rest about evenly divided between novels and collections of stories. On the average these books are larger than American s f books, and comprise about 300 to 400 pages, or about 150,000 words, each. Following the admirable Soviet policy of cheap books, they are priced at forty to eighty cents for anthologies, and twenty-five to sixty cents for works by single authors - though they are usually in hard-cover. According to my calculations based on a sample of sixty books, the average first printing is about 150,000 for anthologies and 90,000 for books by single writers. Three million copies of s f books (probably including translations, reprints, and other Soviet languages) are published and snapped up each year. Major publishing and writing centres not only include Moscow and Leningrad, but also in third place Baku, as well as the provinces of European Russia, Siberia, the Far East, and even Central Asia. S f is also published in periodicals such as NAUKA I ZHIZN (circulation 3.5 million); TEKHNIKA MOLODEZHI, ISKATEL, ZNANIE SILA, IUNOST, etc, and there are amusing stories about avid fans who spirit away issues of these magazines, and even read surreptitiously the teen magazine, TONYI TEKNNIK, and don't return them until they have devoured all the s f stories - much to the disgust of other library devotees.

1 See D Suvin, RUSSIAN SCIENCE FICTION LITERATURE AND CRITICISM 1956-1970: A BIBLIOGRAPHY, Toronto, 1971, distributed by the Toronto Public Library, 566 Palmerston Avenue; also in CANADIAN SLAVIC STUDIES 5 (1971), Nos 2 and 4. For a more exhaustive survey of the historical tradition see D Suvin, THE UTOPIAN TRADITION OF RUSSIAN SCIENCE FICTION, in MODERN LANGUAGE REVIEW 66 (1971), No 1.

DARKO The second legitimate reason for taking an interest in Soviet s f pertains not
SUVIN to the sociology but to the aesthetics and ethics of literature, i.e. it is a
matter of value judgments. Modern "Atlantic" s f has found it difficult to
escape the anxieties of its historical experience, as it analyses the Hobbes-
ian war of each against each. As Wells pointed out in THE WAR OF THE WORLDS,
which helped to set this pattern, why should not a technologically superior
civilisation treat the Terrans as the whites treated colonial peoples, i.e.
wipe them out without worrying? Yet the original interest in alien beings and
settings was much richer. From its earliest times s f has been created out of
a sense of fascination with amazing possibilities elsewhere. By precept or by
contrast, these possibilities always exhibit some positive or negative
model. Science fiction is a vision of cognitive possibilities, applying criti-
cal reason by satirical indirection or by utopian direction. Considered
from this perspective, which refused to accept that the transitory and limit-
ing criteria of American publishing success provide universally valid defini-
tions of s f, we can see that this genre does not begin or end with modern
natural sciences. We can claim that s f includes all fiction concerned cen-
trally with the new and hypothetical, i.e. different but cognitively possible
frameworks for intelligent life. S f explores what this could mean in terms
of new cosmological relations and social norms for the characters involved.
Because it is centrally concerned with parables of and parallels to human
relationships, s f is at least as much concerned with ethics as with techni-
calities, and a non-dogmatic utopianism in Ernst Bloch's sense - embracing Don
Quixote and Columbus as well as Hythloday and Gulliver - is its constant
horizon and measure. Utopianism is precisely the major difference between the
Russian (as well as socialist) tradition and Anglo-American empiricism. Such
a difference is particularly palpable in s f, whose business it is to be sub-
versive, to show forth new frameworks for as-yet-unknown human (or quasi-
human) possibilities.

Historically, the Russian s f tradition has never been dominated by either
technology or adventure, but by two competing strands of social-science fic-
tion or utopian s f. The first is basically spiritualistic, centralised, and
authoritarian; the second is basically materialistic, federalist, and liberta-
rian. The two strands are not divided along purely religious lines, for both
Chekhov's democratic humanism and Tolstoy's peasant-Christian anarchism are
within the horizons of the second alternative; and in such characters as old
Luka from LOWER DEPTHS even Gorki shows the elastic borders of that alterna-
tive. In fact the libertarian, utopian tradition in Russian literature flows
out of the vigorous though unclear folk-longings for a land of abundance -
a folk-tale world or a fabulous Persia, India, and China - and for a land of
justice regardless of social station (e.g. the mighty typological theme of the
humble but finally exalted protagonist, from Ivanushka in folk tales to the
humble arrogants in Dostoyevsky or Tolstoy). On the other hand the authorita-
rian tradition accompanies political centralism from the sixteenth century,
when Peresvetov wrote for Ivan the Terrible THE LEGEND OF SULTAN MAHOMET, a
Statist description quoted approvingly by Stalin. It reappeared in several
Rationalist "state novels" of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century,
such as in the pioneering fragment by Odoevsky, YEAR 4338, where it fused with
Romantic anticipation. Both of these traditions confronted and permeated each
other in very interesting ways in the three major periods of Russian s f so
far: the 1860s and its echoes, the 1920s, and after 1958.

In the 1860s the confrontation was clearest, since it centred around two
giants - Chernyshevsky (in his much-undervalued novel, WHAT IS TO BE DONE?)
and Dostoyevsky. There is no doubt as to which is the more powerful writer,

yet the specific weight and pull of their orientations is at least equivalent. DARKO In fact, Chernyshevsky's socialist utopianism was (together with Shchedrin's SUVIN political allegories and HISTORY OF A CITY or FOOLSVILLE) to prove clearly more powerful in the Russian tradition and in the subsequent waves of s f. Dostoevsky was equally messianic and anti-bourgeois, but his deepest hatred was (after youthful dabbling in illegal utopian-socialist circles) directed against the anticipatory symbol of a Crystal Palace (WINTER NOTES, NOTES FROM THE UNDERGROUND), in which he fused an opposition to the capitalist degradation of man with an opposition to Chernyshevskian proposals for a libertarian, socialist rehumanisation. Yet after such venomous polemics, Dostoevsky's fascination with innocence, brotherly love, and non-antagonistic society re-emerged time and again in the image of a Golden Age, most explicitly in his story DREAM OF A RIDICULOUS MAN. In it a pastoral utopia is eventually corrupted by individualism and evolves, much to the dismay of the protagonist, into a full civil society with crimes, science, war, and saints; it is a wistful but significant concession to the Chernyshevskian dream.

Never entirely absent from Russian literature, the anticipatory social s f novel became especially relevant at times when a new heaven seemed to draw close to the Earth, such as during the 1920s (with a little prologue in the 1900s, in the work of Bryusov, Bogdanov, Soloviev, etc.) That was an epoch during which the future actively overpowered the present, and the sluggish flow of time was suddenly channelled into a wild waterfall generating a rainbow on the near horizon as well as opening up immense sources of energy. Wells visited Soviet Russia in the midst of the Volga famine and found Lenin confidently tracing plans for a fully electrified and self-governing Russia. The "utopographer" Wells was stunned by the utopian boldness of the author of STATE AND REVOLUTION, and returned uncomprehending but impressed to write his one major utopian novel, MEN LIKE GODS. In Soviet literature this atmosphere brought about a flurry of anticipations (Itin, Bobrov, Okunev, Zelikovich, Larri), planetary stories, and vaguely s f-like adventure stories. The best young writers wrote "near-future" prose (Ehrenburg, Kataev, Shaginyan, Lavrenev, Bulgakov, Vs. Ivanov, Shklovsky) or utopian plays (Lunts, Bryusov). A whole school of versifiers called themselves the Cosmists, and young poets like Pasternak or Mayakovsky dreamed of a "scientific poetry". In fact Mayakovsky was perhaps the most representative of this activity, even down to the fact that his relevant works were only marginally or partly s f. Yet the mainspring of his creativeness in poetry, movie scenarios, etc, and most clearly in three post-revolutionary plays, was the tension between anticipatory communist utopianism and recalcitrant reality. His first play, MYSTERY BUFFO (1918) envisaged the October Revolution as a second cleansing flood in which the working classes get rid of their masters and finally achieve a terrestrial paradise of reconciliation with things around them. Mayakovsky's revolution is both political and cosmic, an irreversible and eschatological, irreverent and mysterious, earthy and tender return to direct sensuous relations with a no-longer-alien universe. No wonder that his plays THE BEDBUG and THE BATH in the late 1920s became satirical protests against the threatening separation of the future classless heavens from the present earth. In his last play, the Soviet slogan of "Time Forward" materialises into a time machine that leaps into the future with its creators and spewing out the bureaucrats.

Zamyatin's novel WE (1920), the other major s f work of the period, also deals with the relationship between the new heavens and the old earth, but with an interesting use of some Dostoevskian traits to outflank the Crystal Palace utopia. Not that Zamyatin was for the ancien regime: he was an ex-Bolshevik, who certainly shared the Chernyshevskian and Dostoevskian contempt for Western SFC 35 59

DARKO capitalism, which he considered decadent and life-crushing, so that he incor-
SUVIN porated into WE some features of an earlier satirical novel against English
bourgeois respectability, such as sex-rationing and the Taylorite table of
daily occupations. For Zamyatin too the Revolution is the undoubted principle
of life and movement, opposed to the entropy of dogmatism and death. An anti-
entropic science, society, and literature are necessary, he affirmed, "a
utopian literature, absurd as Babeuf in 1797; it will be proved right after
150 years." Zamyatin believed, obviously, that he was a utopian, in fact a
better one than the Bolsheviks, so that it is disingenuous to present him pri-
marily as an anti-Soviet author. Curiously enough this opinion, popular in
the US, agrees with that of the increasingly dogmatic (as Zamyatin would say)
or bureaucratic (as Mayakovsky would say) high priests of Soviet literary
life, who have never allowed his novel to be printed in the USSR.

In fact Zamyatin extrapolated the repressive potentials of any strong state
and technocratic set-up, including the major capitalist and socialist experi-
ences in that direction. Hesitating midway between Dostoevsky and Chernyshev-
sky, his is a useful anti-utopian warning that the new paradise cannot be sta-
tic anymore - even if it is a paradise of mathematics, steel, and interplanet-
ary flights. The warning is inconsistent, since Zamyatin was - parallel to
Tsiolkovsky - the first practising scientist in Russian s f, and he could not
bring himself to blame scientific reason (which even provides him with the
form of his novel - the laboratory notes) for its harmful uses. Therefore he
confronts the anti-utopian collectivist or mass state with an implicitly
utopian-socialist norm. It is interesting to see how many major s f writers
were heretics and dreamers in the margin of their official tradition: Dosto-
evsky in relation to Tsarism, or Mayakovsky and Zamyatin in relation to the
Soviet state appear as heretic believers, that most obnoxious form of suppor-
ters. As Zamyatin wrote in his essay TOMORROW, "We do not turn to those who
reject the present in the name of a return to the past, nor to those hope-
lessly stupefied by the present, but to those who can see the far-off tomorrow
- and in the name of tomorrow, in the name of man, we judge the present."
This point of view differs from Mayakovsky's principally because of its
ascetic concentration on the deformities of the present, without the explicit
presence of the utopian future, which for Mayakovsky too grew rather vague and
far-off in any case. In Zamyatin's own terminology, the defeat in the novel
WE is of the day but not of the epoch; it can be viewed as the judgment on the
"cold" utopia passed by a "warm" one (Bloch).

Inbetween these two strands the 1920s also saw the first Russian s f blend
to approximate the American pragmatic formula, i.e. blending sociological with
natural-science fiction primarily oriented toward interplanetary or futuristic
adventures. From the pioneering writings of Tsiolkovsky which culminated
with OUTSIDE EARTH in 1920, through widespread public enthusiasm manifested in
astronautic study circles, lectures, expositions, and debates in universities,
a form evolved which was codified by Alexei Tolstoy in his novel AELITA, a ro-
mance and adventure story blending with endearing lyricism a Soviet revolution
on Mars with a gloomy Wellsian or Burroughsian lost-soul-mate ending. His
second novel, THE GARIN DEATH RAY also took the post-Vernian adventure and
conspiracy cliches and motivated them with believable natural-scientific in-
ventions and revolutionary virtue. Tolstoy's extrapolating verisimilitude, and
his rich characterisation and language lifted this s f book to the level of
general literary recognition, much as his model Wells had done in England.

Of the numerous follow-ups to such a combination of scientific thriller and
60 SFC 35 political edification, the most successful were those by the fertile Velyaev,

who blended these elements with fairy-tale plots and attentiveness to scientific prospects in the fields of transplants and astronautics. Yet in spite of this, the promise of the revolutionary years, which made it appear probable that the Russian school (or indeed schools) would dominate our times in s f was not fulfilled. Stalin's neo-pragmatism forcibly expunged not only the ostensibly anti-utopian but also the utopian aspect. Anticipation became an uncomfortable pursuit when Stalin was the only one supposed to foresee the future, and in the quarter of the century which begins with Mayakovsky's death and Zamyatin's departure from the Soviet Union, and lasts until Yefremov, no significant work of s f was printed there in book form - though there were unmistakable signs in magazines and through oblique incorporation as one of the layers of mainstream novels (e.g. in Leonov's ROAD TO THE OCEAN) that s f impulses had not subsided. The few printed works were exclusively juvenile, and limited by the Stalinist "theory of near limits" by which s f had to deal only with state-planned technological advances of the nearest future and not meddle with radical changes beyond such limits.

Accordingly the second major age of Soviet s f came about with a repristination of the utopian imagination after Kruschev's speech at the Twentieth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party and the sensational achievements of Soviet natural sciences symbolised by the Sputnik. The new wave found a wide audience among the young and the intelligentsia, impatient of the old cliches and thirsting after knowledge and imaginativeness, whose tastes carried the day in the great "Andromeda debate". Against violent ideological opposition, in 1957-58 Yefremov's THE ANDROMEDA NEBULA consummated the victory of the new wave, and returned to the basic Soviet Russian tradition. The dogmatic critics and "cold stream" writers rebuked ANDROMEDA's heroes as being "too far from our own times", and thus unintelligible to the reader, especially to the juvenile one (!). However, the "warm stream" - critics, writers, and the thousands of readers who wrote to the author, to newspapers, and to periodicals - prevailed, and the novel has since sold millions of snapped-up copies.

Yefremov's novel achieved such an historical significance because it creatively advanced the classical utopian socialist vision of a unified, affluent, humanist, classless, and stateless world. In ANDROMEDA, the Earth is administered - by analogy with the associative centres of the human brain - by an Astronautic Council and an Economic Council which tallies all plans with existing possibilities. Their specialised research academies correspond to man's sense centres. More importantly, the novel's strong narrative sweep, full of adventurous action, is imbued with the romance of cognition, primarily with utopian sociology, modern cosmology, and evolutionist biology. But Yefremov's strong anthropocentric bent places the highest value on the redemption of time by creativity, a simultaneous adventure of deed, thought, and feeling leading to physical and ethical beauty. This utopian pathos of his anthropology is evident even in the symbolic title: Andromeda is not only a far-off nebula but also the chained beauty rescued from the monster of class egotism and violence (personified in the novel as a bull and often bearing the hallmarks of Stalinism) by a flying astronautic hero endowed with superior science and wisdom. Thus astronautics is claimed as a humanist discipline - and this is one of the most significant cross-connections between physical sciences, social sciences, ethics, and art which Yefremov establishes as the norm for his new people. Further, their future is not an end of history, that bane of utopianism from Plato on; creativity is always countered by entropy, and self-realisation paid for in suffering. There in this book can be found very interesting approaches to a Marxist felix culpa or "optimistic tragedy" (Mven Mass' experiment). Finally, the accent on beauty and responsible freedom places, as in Chernyshevsky, female heroines in the focus of attention. All

DARKO this contributes to the emotional motivation of the new moral world, in a well-informed polemical dialogue with American s f.

True, the novel's motivations and pace sometimes flag: one feels in it the presence of a reader unused to fast orientation in new perspectives and still prone to sentimentality and preaching. The characters are statuesque and monolithic, so that the intimate personal relationships, though understandable in the context of an elder-generation Russian scientist, seem curiously old-fashioned for a sweepingly utopian perspective. Yefremov's limitations are clearly manifested in his subsequent long story COR SERPENTIS, an explicit rebuttal of a US s f story - Leinster's FIRST CONTACT - with its acquisitive and bellicose presuppositions. In it, Terrans meeting the spaceship of a lonely fluorine-based mankind solve its problem by hitting on a transmutation of fluorine into oxygen idea (left completely vague). This story might be a legitimate pacifist-socialist parable for changing the Others (American capitalists?) into Us (Soviet Russian socialists?), but its ethnocentric or "genocentric" standpoint - if I may coin a word - precludes a fully imaginative s f. This can be seen most clearly in the failure of his latest novel, THE HOUR OF THE BULL, which has all the verbose humourlessness of his earlier writings without their redeeming features.

Yet ANDROMEDA's polyphonic scope is, I think, aesthetically successful within s f as one of the first utopias in world literature which shows new characters creatively interacting with a new society, i.e. the personal working-out of utopia. Yefremov's basic device of unfolding the narration as if the anticipated future had already become a normative present unites the classic "look backward" of utopian anticipation with the age-old dreams of a just and happy life. This made ANDROMEDA the nodal point of Russian utopian fiction, always concerned with ethical and historical absolutes, and ushered in the new era of Soviet s f.

In the dozen years since ANDROMEDA, a welter of names has emerged. A full survey of Soviet s f (including juvenile literature), would discuss Ancharov, Bakhtov, Dudintsev, Emtsev-Parnov, Gansovsky, Gromova-Nudelman, Gurevich, Larionova, Poleshchuk, Rosokhovatsky, Savchenko, Shafner, Snegov, Voiskunsky-Lukodyanov. In the first five years of this new wave, among the most distinctive authors were Anatoly Dneprov (pseudonym of A Mitskevitch) and Genrikh Altov.

Dneprov introduced cybernetic s f into USSR, and used it to depict variants of Frankenstein's monster - an invention which turns against the inventor. As distinct from the Romantic tradition, however, he implied his mad or imprudent scientists violate human and not divine norms. Responsibility for the destructive or otherwise dehumanising use of the new idea or gadget is moral and political; technological adventure borders on the pamphlet, as in his best story THE ISLAND OF CRABS. The ensuing dystopian horror is usually brought under control, but it is no less real for all that. The cybernetic monster on the loose represents a creation in which knowledge and power have no ethical fail-safe checks, and becomes a warning against aggressive deviations from utopian humanism.

Altov's short stories (sometimes written together with Valentina Zhuravleva, a writer with similar interests) began with lyrical romanticism in the vein of Gorky and Ray Bradbury, and moved on to story-essays unified by tempestuous lyrical symbols. This original form conveyed what one might call "adventures of heuristics" - the romance of some new level of human capacity at the fron-

tiers of cybernetics and biology, often connected with enlarged informational DARKO capacity of the human brain (a favourite image of Soviet anthropological utopianism since Belyaev) SUVIN

From the mid-1960s it would be interesting to analyse the warm psychological lyricism of Tendryakov's CENTURY-LONG VOYAGE, or the psychological and epistemological subtleties masquerading as cybernetic puzzles in Gor's work. Rather than approach all of these authors inadequately, I shall concentrate in the space at my disposal on the undoubtedly leading writers, the Strugatsky brothers. Their opus - followed by that of Varshavsky - seems best to represent the tendencies and dilemmas of Soviet s f, especially since 1964.

Arkady and Boris Strugatsky (who write together) have created without doubt the most significant Soviet s f since 1958. Their early cycle of works is an "interplanetary" trilogy with the same group of protagonists (THE COUNTRY OF CRIMSON CLOUDS, A VOYAGE TO AMALTHEIA, THE APPRENTICES) and the cognate short stories collected in THE SIX MATCHES and THE HOMECOMING (NOON, 22ND CENTURY) - all published from 1959 to 1962 but written from 1956 on. The novels or long stories AN ATTEMPTED ESCAPE, FAR RAINBOW, IT'S HARD TO BE A GOD, and PREDATORY THINGS OF OUR AGE, published from 1962 to 1965, can be taken to constitute a second phase. The third phase contains the novels and long stories, MONDAY BEGINS ON SATURDAY (1965), THE SECOND MARTIAN INVASION (1967), THE SNAIL ON THE SLOPE (1966-1968), THE TALE OF THE TRIUMVIRATE (1968), THE INHABITED ISLAND (1969), HOTEL "TO THE LOST CLIMBER" (1970), and presumably the novel THE UGLY SWANS (just published in a pirated edition in West Germany which the authors have denounced, and which I have not yet seen).

The first phase of the Strugatskys was fairly idyllic. It was an interlocking "future history" cycle - from the end of the twentieth to the twenty-second century - which realistically conveyed human relationships on a predominantly communistic (classless) Earth and in cosmic explorations. The Strugatskys' protagonists, much more lifelike than the cardboard or marble figures in most Soviet s f, the vividly depicted and variegated surroundings, the sure touch of detail, and the adventure-packed action leading to some ethical choice immediately brought the young authors to the forefront of Soviet s f. Since ethics are (except for the occasional egotistic and capitalist survival) absolute and generally accepted, the only fundamental conflict left is the epic adventure of man conquering nature as a "collective Robinson". Yet at the end of the cycle - in THE APPRENTICES and in some stories such as WANDERERS AND TRAVELLERS - an element of open-ended doubt and of darkness enters into these somewhat aseptically bright horizons. Though the future is still envisaged as a golden arrested moment of "noon", historical time with its puzzles, pain, and potentialities for regress begins to seep in as shadows of postmeridian experience lengthen. The dialectics of innocence and experience, of utopian ethics and historical obstacles on the way to their enthronement - the "predatory things of our age" - provides henceforth the mainspring of this opus. The black horizon of an history where slavery and high technology go together appears in ATTEMPTED ESCAPE, though only as an exception (a backward planet) within the utopian universe. This work is sketchy, halfway between the careful realism of the extrapolative cycle and the parable form of the second phase, but it marks the first fully fledged use of that highly effective device: a protagonist caught in a blind alley of history.

The first two masterpieces of the Strugatskys are the long story FAR RAINBOW and the novel IT'S HARD TO BE A GOD. In both of them extrapolation gives way to a clearly focussed analogous or parabolic model of mature s f. In both of them, utopian ethics are put to the test of anti-utopian darkness, of an inhuman and apparently irresistible wave of destruction. On the small planet SFC 35 63

DARKO Far Rainbow this is presented as a physical Black Wave which destroys the
SUVIN whole joyous community of experimenting creators. The utopian heroes all die;
only the children (and the mysterious deathless man-robot Kamill, personifying
a Cassandra-like lonely and powerless Reason) are saved to carry on the un-
quenchable human hope and thirst for knowledge. The elemental force let loose
by cheerful seekers and destroying them from behind is valid as a story in its
own right, and a clear parable for the price of historical knowledge and pro-
gress.

By way of a very successful domestication of the historical novel IT'S HARD
TO BE A GOD presents the conflict between militant philistinism and socio-
psychological entropy with the utopian idea of the Commune without "cosmic"
disguises, directly within history. The hero is one of a handful of emis-
saries from classless Earth's Institute of Experimental History to a feudal
planet. He is perfectly disguised as a native nobleman, and under strict in-
structions to observe without interfering. However, the Institute's futurolo-
gical "party line", the Basic Theory of Feudalism which projects a slow linear
progress for the planet, turns out to be wrong. The protagonist is faced with
a regress into organised obscurantism, leading to death and destruction for
all poets, scientists, doctors, and other bearers of human values and intelli-
gence in the Arkanar kingdom, and culminating in the slaying of his girl-
friend. As in FAR RAINBOW, the problem of meeting an unforeseen calamitous
twist of history is posed, rendered verisimilar (here by vividly recreating
the customs, legends, and ways of life in Arkanar, as well as the psychology
of the troubled hero), and then left realistically open-ended.

IT'S HARD TO BE A GOD amounts to a "Bildungsroman" where the reader is
the hero, learning together with the protagonist the nature of painful con-
flict between utopian human values - always the fixed Polar Star for the
Strugatskys - and the terrible empirical pressures of mass egotism, stupidity,
and slavery to petty passions. Under such pressures the great majority of
people turn to religious fanaticism, mass murder, or apathy. The resulting
situation is reminiscent of the worst traits of Stalinism (a "doctors' plot",
stage-managed confessions, recasting of history to exalt the present ruler)
and Nazism (storm troopers and pogroms, the Night of the Long Knives). The
spirit of revolt - as in the rebel leader Arata - is undying, but it has to
deal with omnipresent historical inertia. Outside interference cannot liber-
ate a people without introducing a new benevolent dictatorship; the Earthling
"gods" are both ethically obliged and historically powerless to act. The true
enemy is within each man: Slavery and Reason, narrow-minded class psychology
and the axiological reality of a classless future, are still fighting it out,
in a variant of Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor confrontation. The Strugatskys'
mature opus retains the utopian abhorrence of "the terrible ghosts" of the
past" and belief in the necessity of a humanised future, but it is also
intensely aware of the defeats humanity has suffered since the heyday of utop-
ianism of the early 1920s. As much of the best s f after Wells and London, it
is an insight into the dangers of social devolution: a warning without pat an-
swers, and a bearing of witness. Even further, it is a significant rendering
of tragic utopian activism, akin in many ways to the ethical and historioso-
phical visions of the best Hemingway and of poets like Brecht (the protagon-
ist's dilemma in this novel is not too dissimilar from that in THE MEASURES
TAKEN), Okudzhava, or Voznesensky. No wonder this novel has become the most
popular s f work in the USSR.

Compared with it, PREDATORY THINGS OF OUR AGE is a half-hearted try at a more
precise Earthly localisation of historical blind alleys. It takes place in a
64 SFC 35 country of the Fools, midway between an updated USA of Hemingway, Raymond

Chandler, or gangster movies, and a folktale-like Never-Never Land. Thus, its focus is blurred: neither sufficiently concrete for precise sociopolitical criticism - as some Soviet critics were quick to point out - nor sufficiently generalised for a parabolic sociophilosophical model of a mass welfare state. IT'S HARD TO BE A GOD, in its historically vivid, yet sufficiently estranged localisation, in its fusion of medieval and late twentieth century, of public and private concerns, remains the paradigm for the Strugatskys' work until 1965. DARKO SUVIN

Since explicit criticism of situations nearer home than its "thousand years and thousand parsecs from Earth" would probably have meant abandoning the s f genre and its readers, the Strugatskys opted for the second possible way - a folktale-like parable form with increasingly satirical overtones. As different from their work so far, marked by growing precision and width of reference within a single model, their third phase is characterised by a variety of probings, formal manoeuvrings, and reading publics - from the juvenile to the most sophisticated. For example the Strugatsky protagonist has by now turned into the privileged point of view. As a rule he is, like Voltaire's Candide, a naive glance at the increasingly estranged and disharmonious world, but burdened by the additional twentieth-century problem of how to make sense of the events in a mass society with monopolised information channels. This makes for anxiety, as in THE SNAIL ON THE SLOPE, or activist response, as in THE INHABITED ISLAND, or a fusion of both, as in THE TALE OF THE TRIUMVIRATÉ.

However in THE SECOND MARTIAN INVASION the protagonist, ignorant as Candide, is also happy in his conformist ignorance. This Martian invasion does not need to use Wellsian heat rays to subdue a nation, but only local traitors, economic corruption, and misinformation. As befits the one-dimensional age, the calamity is muted, and thus more convincing and horrible. The whole story is a tour de force of identifying petit bourgeois language and horizons, the almost unnoticable nuances which lead down the slope of quislingism. A Soviet critic rightly called it "a grotesque which does not reside in the style but in the point of view". In style it is on a par with IT'S HARD TO BE A GOD and the first part of SNAIL ON THE SLOPE as the Strugatskys' most homogeneous achievement.

If THE SECOND MARTIAN INVASION is in the vein of Voltaire or Swift, the anxiety of the two protagonists in THE SNAIL ON THE SLOPE (one of them named Kandid) is rather Kafkaian. The visionary universe is reduced to a fantastic swampy forest - the traditional Russian counterpart of civilisation - seen indistinctly through the protagonists' painful struggles to understand. In the two parts of the book, the Forest is seen through a worm's- and a bird's-eye view; it is a multivalent symbol with a viscous and slowed-down nightmarish time scale, whose half-glimpsed "unpleasant secrets and terrible puzzles" stand for the people, the future in store for it, a power microcosm, and so on. In the Kandid half the hero's stream of consciousness is juxtaposed against his environment's rural speech with its archaic folk images and idioms, infuriatingly repetitive and monotonous as the life whose flavour it conveys. The dearth of information and the impossibility of generalising, the "dreamy, vegetable way of life" of a group unaware of history and subject to unknown destructive forces, is conveyed overwhelmingly. In the second half, a view of the Forest is supplemented by a view of the outside Forest Study and Exploitation Authority, a bureaucratic monster with an invisible director, an Eradication Group, etc. The climaxes of the two parts find the protagonists deciding against the dominant ideal: one rejects an immoral progress which treats people as experimental animals, and the other rejects his own romantic longing for the Forest. Though the second half (published only in the SFC 35 65

DARKO magazine BAIKAL for 1968) seems somewhat overloaded, the whole double story is SUVIN among the most interesting creations of the Strugatskys, and the Kandid half is a self-contained gem of contemporary Russian literature.

Perhaps the "Privalov cycle" takes the central place in their late work - so far the novels MONDAY BEGINS ON SATURDAY (1965) and THE TALE OF THE TRIUMVIRATE (published only in the bimonthly ANGARA in 1968). In an updated folk-tale garb, the Strugatskys embody the underlying atmosphere of this phase - a total invasion of human relationships by a lack of linear logic and sense. Modern sciences and modern social relationships, in their strangeness for and alienation from the uninitiated majority, become equivalent to white and black magic. Conversely, the forms of the magical folktale can be taken as forerunners of, and freely mixed with, contemporary "quantum alchemy". Indeed the old characters - a penny-pinching Baba Yaga, a sclerotic Talking Cat, a parochial Pike Who Grants Three Desires - are small fry, good only for some mild fun, incidental critique, and an atmospheric setting when compared with the estranged horrors of scientific charlatanism and bureaucratic power.

MONDAY BEGINS ON SATURDAY deals primarily with the use and charlatanic abuse of science. This is sketched in the career of Ianus Nevstruev, director of the Scientific Institute for Magic which studies the problems of human happiness and in whose fairy-lands both books take place: Nevstruev has split into S-Ianus the scientist, and A-Ianus the administrator who lives backward in time. But charlatanism is personified in Amvroz Ambruzovich Vybegallo, a semi-literate careerist who is planning the creation of a happy Universal Consumer and who talks in a mixture of bad French and demagogic bureaucratese. His homunculus, the Model of Full Contentedness, has to be destroyed just short of consuming the whole universe. The novel ranges from such a Goyan vision of A Dream of Reason Giving Birth to Monsters to an affectionate return to the roots of Russian and other folktales. The loose picaresque form - the "ideational adventures" of the candid protagonist - can be used to hit out at anything that fits the authors' bill. Thus one section in which Privalov tests out a machine for travelling through "ideal times" is a spoof of s f from the utopias and THE TIME MACHINE, through technological anticipations and Soviet cosmic s f (with considerable self-parody) to western s f behind an "Iron Wall" where violent warfare with robots, aliens, viruses, etc, reigns supreme.

THE TALE OF THE TRIUMVIRATE (or TROIKA) is blacker, concentrating on a bureaucratic triumvirate - originally a commission to check the plumbing system - that has usurped power in a country of unexplained social and natural phenomena which it proceeds to "rationalise" by misusing or explaining them away. Their scientific consultant is Professor Vybegallo, and their main power is the Great Round Seal. A brilliantly detailed picture emerges of their prejudices, militaristic mannerisms, and internecine infighting - in short, of a Stalinist approach turning "scientifico-administrative". Its semiliterate jargon and fossilised pseudodemocratic slogans, its totally incompetent quiprosos and malapropisms, are portrayed with a wildly hilarious black humour which makes this the funniest work of s f I know. It is unfortunate that the Soviet authorities have prevented it from appearing in book form, thus taking it merely as a reflection on Soviet society. As the episode of the Alien shows most clearly, this critique of a degenerated power situation is applicable to all of present-day mankind, psychologically unprepared for contact with a utopian future. In fact, I know of no more sympathetic insight into the true necessities that bring about elite power than that shown in the Troika chairman's speech (under the influence of an apparatus which induces the surfacing of innermost motives) at the Alien's trial. Though somewhat

uneven, this is perhaps the weightiest experiment of the Strugatskys.

DARKO
SUVIN

Their last two novels seem to mark a pause. THE INHABITED ISLAND is an adaptation of the mature Strugatsky model to a "new maps of hell" adventure novel. At that level it is very good, with the usual candid utopian protagonist who lives on a closed world where high technology, especially in new persuasion media, serves a military dictatorship. The environment and atmosphere, the development of the brisk plot, and the hero who passes through the various strata of a people bereft of history, all betray the masterly touch. For example the insights into both Oligarchic and Underground politics and the fanaticism of the rank and file are as convincing as anything else in their opus. However, their next and to date last published work, HOTEL "TO THE LOST CLIMBER" is frankly an entertainment - a detective story with an s f twist (it turns out that all the puzzles are due to alien robots with strange powers). One can only hope that the hotel's name does not represent the Strugatskys' decision - in the wake of the unpublished UGLY SWANS - that at present there is no aesthetic or sociological space left for avant-garde sociophilosophical s f in the USSR.²

This would be a considerable loss, for their work has acted as an icebreaker clearing aesthetic navigation for the whole Soviet flotilla. Their three phases have built up the most coherent literary model at the heart of Soviet s f. From static utopian brightness it moved through a return to the complex dynamics of history to a final stage where the static norm is felt to be immorally anti-utopian. Concomitantly, the protagonist grew from a boy in a golden collective, through the pioneering subject of a painful cognitive education, to a solitary hero, a final repository of utopian ethics who decides to fight back at inhumanity. The time horizons also evolved from an extrapolated future, through a clash of past and future in analogous worlds, to a strongly estranged arrested time (e.g. blending a folktale past with futuristic science) where the future values find refuge in absolute ethics as opposed to backward politics.

There are deficiencies in the Strugatskys' vision. The conjunction of ethics with politics and philosophy has remained unclear, the localisation of events has oscillated somewhat erratically, the sociophilosophical criticism has sometimes fitted only loosely into the s f framework; but such limitations may, to a great extent, be due to the authors' wish to keep in contact with the readers. Their final phase is a legitimate continuation of the Gogol vein and of the great Soviet tradition of Ilf-Petrov or Olesha, at the borders of s f and satire as in Mayakovsky's late plays, Lem, or Kafka's IN THE PENAL COLONY. Furthermore, the predatory bestiary into which people without cognitive ethics are transmuted, the strange countries and monsters that become increasingly horrible as the authors and readers discover that de nobis fabula narratur - all such aspects certify that their final source is in the greatest s f paradigm, GULLIVER'S TRAVELS. The Strugatskys' work has some of Swift's fascination with language - a mimicry of bureaucratese and academese, of philistine and fanatical jargon, irony and parody, colloquialisms and neologisms. Thus, they are polemical at the deepest literary level of verbal craftsmanship and vision, making untenable what they term the "fiery banalities" of the genre.

The best of the final Strugatsky phase reads like an updating of Shchedrin's

2 Since my writing this, two more long stories have appeared in magazines - THE KID in 1971, and PICNIC BY THE BAYSIDE in 1972. They do not change much on my conclusions.

DARKO fables (e.g. THE BEAR GOVERNOR) and his chronicle of Glupovo (Foolsville) and
SUVIN its rulers. However, the hero and ideal reader is no longer Shchedrin's
muzhik; he is the contemporary scientific and cultural intellectual who
bridges the "two cultures" gap, the reader of Voznesensky and Voltaire, Wiener
and Wells. Many Strugatsky passages read as a hymn to such young scientists
who are also citizen-activists, inner-directed by and toward utopia, believing
that the sense of life resides in "constant cognition of the unknown". The
central source of the Strugatskys' pathos is an ethics of cognition, sprung
from a confluence of utopianism and modern philosophy of science. Such an
horizon marks the Strugatskys' rightful place in Soviet, and also world s f.

The short paradoxical stories of Varshavsky (in the books THE MOLECULAR CAFE,
THE MAN WHO SAW THE ANTI-WORLD, THE SUN SETS ON DONOMAGA, DREAM SHOP) are
"second degree" s f - condensed parody and reductio ad absurdum of themes and
conventions from Soviet as well as from Lem's and US s f. However, this light
and humorous approach, very successful with the Soviet reader, has its hidden
stings. The weightier and black side is evident in stories such as ESCAPE
which read like a miniaturisation of the Strugatskys' final phase.

It is impossible to prophesy the future of significant s f in the USSR, inti-
mately connected as it is with the vagaries of cultural politics. Its flower-
ing seemed more probable five years ago than today - witness the cutting in
half of new book publication in that time. All that a foreign observer might
risk to say is that it is at a stage where it cannot go on in the old way. It
will either develop into a new quality of cognitive relevance, or limit itself
again to sub-literature. As far as tradition and individual talents go, the
prospects are bright. If the climate will let many flowers bloom, the seeds
are present. Indeed, some fruits are already in.

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PHILIP DICK

BREAKTHROUGHS & BREAKINS

I. AN OPEN LETTER FROM PHILIP DICK TO JOHN SLADEK

Dear John

April 23 1973

The reason why I've failed until now to answer your good letter of March 1 is that after writing nothing at all during 1971 and 1972 (except my Vancouver Speech) I finished up a novel I began in 1970 and sent it off to Doubleday, and while I was waiting to hear from Doubleday I got a really good idea for a new novel and wrote that, too. So now Doubleday has bought two new novels by me.

As a result of all this writing I am half dead. Also I got married, two days after finishing the new novel.

Also, two days after getting married (so help me) I was at the emergency ward at St Jude Hospital here in Fullerton and the doctor was x-raying me and telling me that my blood pressure was dangerously high and had to be controlled, and a lot more was wrong with me, too, like being very nervous and tense and perspiring and shaking and having dreadfully painful nerve and muscle spasms in my right side. "You'll like this hospital," he said, then, and went off, leaving me to ponder the Protestant work ethic and what you get out of it.

My new wife is sitting with her bare feet up on the coffee table in the living room, drinking Pepsi Cola, and reading INTELLECTUAL DIGEST, which she subscribes to. She is eighteen, very pretty, much smarter than I am - obviously. The baby is due in mid-July. Where did I go wrong?

Anyhow, thank you so much for what you said in your letter. In my second-sale-to-Doubleday-this-month novel, A SCANNER DARKLY, I have gone into new depths of What is reality? that no one ever before imagined could be posed as a question, let alone answered. It is a furiously anti-dope novel, and I spent all of 1971 doing first-hand research for it... although I did not know this at the time. I just thought I was turning on with all my friends. But toward the start of 1972 I woke up one day and noticed that all my friends either were dead, had burned-out brains, were psychotic, or all of the above. Then I fled to Canada, then later on here to Fullerton, which is close to Disneyland. You won't believe how screwed-up reality is actually, John, until you read SCANNER; I had no idea myself. Anyhow, writing the novel almost killed me, and reading it almost killed little Tessa my wife; it is a very sad novel and very sad things happen to very good people. But enough of this, because I am writing to tell you about your writing and not mine. I want to tell you one particular thing that I believe and hope will please you, and here it is.

PHILIP In August 1970 I stopped writing, mid-point through FLOW MY TEARS, THE POLICE-DICK MAN SAID, and almost never wrote again. I had never in my life gone two whole years without being able to work, and I became more and more convinced with each passing month that I would never find my way back to writing - various editors asked me for stuff, I tried to write, I could not; I had to say sorry I have ceased writing, probably forever. Around December of 1972 I got a letter from Ed Ferman requesting a story and I sure wanted to write it; Tessa and I needed the money and I yearned to get back to writing... if I did not, and soon, then we could not marry, I was doomed forever in my sole career... I thought and thought but couldn't get the handle on any idea worth anything - I was going to write Ed and say what I had been saying to everyone else: "Sorry, but I can't do it."

Then a friend came by with a story called THE POETS OF MILLGROVE, IOWA, and I read the first s f story in years that galvanised me into new life - like Kant reading Hume.

That story, by John T Sladek, can stand in the ranks of the all-time great short stories in the English language. Not with s f stories but with all. The masterpieces.

Perhaps the first s f story to do so. Let's face it - could any before that really do that?

THE POETS OF MILLGROVE, IOWA changed in a flash my entire conception of what a good s f story is.

So then I wrote A LITTLE SOMETHING FOR US TEMPUNAUTS for Ed Ferman because I had a new mind, a whole mind again, a writer's mind, and it was set facing the future once more. Not miserably back in the direction of the past.

Well, that is what started Phil Dick writing again, his first new piece of writing since August 1970 when while he was labouring on FLOW MY TEARS for Doubleday his wife left, taking his little daughter with her, and they never came back, and he tried to kill himself in various ways and almost did, and ceased writing, and almost forever. Except that he read a story by John T Sladek early in 1973, and because of that he can write again - not only one more story but a whole new novel, A SCANNER DARKLY, which he has already sold, which he wrote in two months, and now he is married again with a new wife who really does love him, and he can support that wife and the baby coming in July. So I wanted to tell you this because in a certain real sense, John, you saved not only my life but our life here, mine and Tessa's and the baby's, and because of you SCANNER came into being, and I was able to make use of that dreadful period after Nancy and my little daughter left in which I plunged into something farther down than hell ever could be... used it as the substance for a great tragic work of fiction that is in no sense except the strictly literal fiction but actually in point of fact the most non-fiction piece I think I ever got put on paper. And it is authentic s f, as is your story.

And I do admire your story, John. And I always will. And the man who wrote it, as well as much else besides, which I am reading now with the avidity of a lion.

Tessa says I've got to stop writing now, because my heart is beating wearily, from the fatigue of the last few months, but also it is beating with love for a fellow writer and that writer's work. Please don't feel you must answer this letter, John, because I'm sure you are busy, very busy - but I've delayed

answering you so that when I did I could get it right. I hope I have done so; PHILIP I hope I have told you what you've done for me and the others of this little DICK family is so life-giving, that could not have survived without,

With warmest affection

PHILIP K DICK

II. THE INVISIBLE

Dear Bruce

June 7, 1973

This letter deals with a most melancholy subject, but one which is becoming brighter: the Watergate disclosures here in the US. A recent article in NEWS-WEEK let the American public in on what may be the most dismal and horrifying aspect of all this: that in the year 1970 and during 1971 and 1972 a secret national police existed in this country, probably operating out of the Internal Security Division of the Justice Department; it acted against the so-called "radicals", that is, the left, the anti-war people; it struck them again and again in a variety of ugly ways: break-ins, wire-tapping, entrapment ... all with the idea of getting or forging evidence which would send these anti-war radicals to jail. The basic MO was of course the typical Watergate sort: a crude, jackboot night burglary of locked files, carried out with no class and much arrogance, as if they felt they could not be caught. What I myself find personally frightening in all this is that the November 1971 burglary of my house in San Rafael, California, fitted this MO. As I wrote to you, my locked files were blown open and all my business records, documents, all cancelled checks everywhere in the house, correspondence, etc, all were taken. It was a massive commando-type hit, and it seemed to baffle the police (many objects of financial value, for example, were not taken; it seemed obvious to me at the time that money was not the goal of the hit but rather information on me, information supposed to be in my house, in particular in my locked files). I was an anti-war "radical" and quite outspoken against the government. I always have believed that the motivation for this hit was political. But that it might have been carried out by a paramilitary extension of the US government itself - that never really seemed plausible to me. Now I realise how naive I was; how naive we all were. Last night a reporter came to visit me, to discuss this hit on my house, this massive burglary back in November of 1971, with an idea of trying to get the case re-opened in terms of it appearing to be within the nation-wide Watergate strikes going on at the time. I feel very frightened, thinking that my own government might well have done this to me; but as I say, the clouds are clearing at last, and we are seeing these monsters, this nocturnal Gestapo that actually tried to "take out" the domestic left, brought at last to justice.

There had always been many hints that some branch of the authorities was involved in the burglary on my house, at the time and later in indirect ways - for example, a peculiar reluctance by regular legal investigatory agencies to SFC 35 71

PHILIP get involved; they would look into it and then - silence. For months I have written, for example, again and again, to the police up there to ask if any arrests or convictions have been made, if any new evidence has come to light, if any of my possessions has been recovered. No answer. None. As if a black curtain of silence has set down - the day after the burglary, in which at least six policemen came out, there was no record at all at the Marin County Sheriff's Department of a burglary having been reported that night in that area. Even my own phone call was not on the police logbook. And so forth... plus the then-perplexing accusation that I had done the burglary myself. I sensed that they did not want to look into it and were seizing on any pretext not to do what they could. But they seemed to sort of like me; it wasn't based on any real or imaginary hostility toward me. In fact, one police sergeant warned me that I was in extreme danger in staying on there in the house, that much more could happen, that I had "enemies" as he said to me, "who some night might very well shoot me in the back while I slept. Or worse." Then I asked him what the "or worse" might mean, but he said I really would not want to know. He suggested, because of this threat to me, this invisible danger that had culminated in the hit on my house, that I leave Marin County, and so I did; this is why, actually, I did not return to the Bay Area from Canada, and why I was so depressed up there, wanting to come back to the US but fearing to. At last I came down here to Fullerton where I had never been before, 600 miles to the south of the Bay Area, and sort of hid out for a few months, contacting no one. At last, in November of 1972, a year after the hit on my house, I contacted the FBI and consulted with one of their agents who came out to my house. His reassurances caused me to surface at last; he seemed to feel it was now cool for me, and he was right, and I appreciate his help.

But - when I was in Canada I applied for Canadian citizenship. And I think for good reason. I sensed - as I say - that the federal authorities had been behind the hit on my house, and I was disgusted and frightened and did not want to return to my own country. Goran Bengtson of Swedish TV wrote to me asking if I would fly back to San Francisco, at their expense, for an interview with him for part of a documentary on the elections, in which I would describe what happened to me in full; he thought it seemed to be a meaningful experience in terms of what the US political climate was becoming. Being afraid, I refused. Now I wish I had flown back and been interviewed, and told all this. But would anyone have believed me then, back in February or March of 1972, before Watergate? I hardly believed it myself. And yet now - I wonder if the terror here, the invisible police hits and assaults on us, on the "radical" anti-war left, will begin again someday. Are we safe? Is it over at last? I hope so. It has been over two full years of fear for me, Bruce, waiting for the jackboots in the night to come again.

PHILIP K DICK (3028 Quartz Lane, Apt 3, Fullerton, California 92631, USA)

brg Once Nixon wiggles out of Watergate, I'm sure something like that will happen again. Which is the main reason why I cannot understand why you stay in USA. Australia's safe enough; and other countries, like England and Sweden, are really civilised by comparison. I'm getting nervous about visiting your country myself; whatever happens, it will be only a visit. Maybe now is the time to expose as much as you can - if you can ever find any real evidence. One thing though - you never seem to lack primary source material for novels. *

TOM COLLINS

SEIZE THE TIME!

Your magazine is a very personal one in the manner of R E Geis, and comes to me almost as a letter from a friend.

Your article on Illich (SFC 31) made fascinating reading. I have been interested in educational reform as it is known here, since at least 1964 when I was a freshman at Berkeley and was caught up in the Free Speech Movement. Although all but the tumult and shouting have been forgotten now (amid the sneers of "Did they really want free speech or free speech only for those who agreed with them?") is the fact that Brad Cleveland provoked the whole thing at least in part by issuing an inflammatory statement for reform, calling for a lower student/teacher ratio and more alternatives to the lecture system, invoking CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE (his caps) as the final step when the administration refused to concede the necessary reforms.

Nonetheless you did not really get down to the meat of what Illich calls for, since you seem to say it is not merely better schools, but a complete transformation of society. This concept is never adequately dealt with in your paper. ((*brg* Then did you read it carefully at all?*))

Paul (the "Goodman" of whom you speak so casually) was one of the earliest of those critics who insisted that school as it exists is a terrible, wretched, corrupting thing which defeats the human spirit. ("What do we do to them," asked a Berkeley dean, "What do we do to them in four years that kills their sense of wonder?") And, of course, education as it is taught is mostly designed to inculcate and preserve the ongoing political/social/moral structure of society, not to promote freedom of thought, creativity, and inquiry at all. I was sorry to see that you had read only COMPULSORY MISEDUCATION, since that is by no means his best work, although possibly it is the one most directly related to schools. A better background to his thought is GROWING UP ABSURD, a terrible, outrageously funny-sad book.

Paul was one of the last of the literary men with a great vision of the whole of life. His untimely death a few months ago came as a great shock to me, for he is one of the people who most strongly influenced my life and brought me to awareness out of childhood. Now only Rexroth is left of the elder sages of American letters.

After one of Paul's last speeches he was asked, "What's wrong with education?" His response was nothing -- unless by education you meant only that narrow portion of it which is carried on in a classroom by teachers, and not the constant stream of information which is carried in through all our sensory organs from the moment of birth.

TOM COLLINS the great American (now Canadian) sociologist Edgar Z Friedenberg, in a forthcoming issue of my magazine IS, says that he is against bussing as a means to achieve racial integration in the schools. Why should he support the additional expense and hassle of carrying a kid across town to go where he would not want the kid to go if it were next door - a public school. Edgar is in a good position to comment on the matter because he is the author of one of the classic studies of the effect of schools on children, COMING OF AGE IN AMERICA, in which he documents the duplicity and submission to authority, etc, which is induced in schools.

The question of voluntary poverty is an interesting one. In America, aside from the strictly religious adoption of poverty, many have chosen it as a way of life for political reasons. If you don't use Their money, They can't exercise a strong hold over you. The Catholic Worker Movement, founded by Peter Maurin and Dorothy Day (who still presides over it) is a communist-Catholic group which has accepted poverty all along. They pay no taxes and file no returns, even though even religious groups are supposed to file them. They run a soup kitchen in the poor Lower East Side of Manhattan, and work with patience and charity among the bums and the winos and the vomit-covered old men. They are staunch pacifists and one or another of the young men attracted to their work is constantly being hauled off to jail, usually following a trial during which they get their views on the record even if they rarely fail to move the judicial process very far in their favour. The late Ammon Hennacy, who preached their doctrine to the Mormons of Utah sold copies of his autobiography without collecting sales tax, and was always going round with IRS over non-payment of income tax. They were perfectly willing to lock him up. He didn't care - and knowing that, they never did. He always managed to earn so little that he didn't owe taxes, and he worked where his employer did not withhold taxes in advance. And the great, neglected American poet Vachel Lindsay, went tramping through the very dirt-poor sections of the South trading rhymes for bread and lodging, getting in touch with the people through his poverty. I know one young man who goes hiking across Indiana each year in the same way.

But voluntary poverty brings up issues other than that of putting yourself outside the existing structure of society. Kenneth Rexroth pointed out in one of his essays (in EYE AND EAR?) that the hippies had adopted voluntary poverty as one way of being free from much that they detested in materialism. Clearly they would not articulate their choice that way, and yet that is what they did. By choosing to live as poets and outcasts, they were free to pursue a life which in its mixed political/social/religious emphasis utterly denied all the political processes around them. They did not even say, "Vade retro Satanas", but simply turned their backs. As Gary Snyder pointed out, "Smoking dope and going to orgies is the most subversive thing you can do."

Unfortunately, living a marginal existence on the fringe of society does not necessarily isolate you from the desire to own the goodies that society offers to those who cut their hair and kowtow. I have known many who felt very much put upon, very alienated from the goodies of the technological society which alone makes the hippie possible (or necessary), simply because they had not come to a reasonable rapprochement between their hair and their pockets, giving up one agrily in order to keep the other. That is, they wanted the usufructs of wealth, but without accepting the strictures attached to the process of gaining that wealth. Such people were still labelled hippies, although their philosophy was different. These were people who were basically money-oriented, whereas the hippie was basically not. The proof is in where they have since turned up. The leaders of Haight-Ashbury have all moved from

the city to communes, to farms, to alternative-society occupations. Some are TOM
involved heavily (as before, only now without drugs) in the religious search. COLLINS
The poor who had never given up their love of possessions ("The love of pos-
sessions is a disease with them," as an Indian chief warned his tribe about
the white men long ago) are now in factories and offices supporting wives,
possibly kids, and probably selling insurance. Their rage, of course, contin-
ues unabated.

Illich suggests voluntary poverty. I submit that is not enough. It must be
the desire for wealth and material security which is eliminated. ((*brg*Hell,
that's what Illich meant by "voluntary poverty", using, as I thought was quite
clear, the strongest possible meaning of "voluntary".*)) If in fact you are
detached from that desire, then it doesn't matter whether you are rich or
poor. The magnificent desert in which we live has many ways of trapping us in
the gratification of our senses. Gurdjieff suggests we all have an organ, a
kundabuffer, which teaches that fantasy is real, and this transient delight,
eternal. The true hippie eliminated his kundabuffer or was born without one.

I think the whole question is one of deciding what one really wants out of
life. When I see a huge chrome-and-paint Polluter 500 deathtrap on the high-
way - or any American car, since even our "compacts" are conspicuous consump-
tion, overcostly, badly designed, ugly, and unsafe - I loathe all this society
stands for. I used to have waking nightmares in which I would own a wife, a
house, two kids, two cars, and live in suburbia doing a nine-to-five term
every day, the wife in the PTA and going to beauty parlours, etc - and I was
brought up in Beaver Cleaver's neighbourhood, not knowing there was even any
other America until I was twenty-one years old.

I grew up in comparative affluence, but I have also known poverty. As a stu-
dent there was no other way, and in my own apartment or sharing with others we
all made do in the way of students everywhere. After I left school for my
first job, I continued to live like a student, and when I had my second job I
had only a small apartment with shared bath - still very much in the student
manner. In Alaska I had a log cabin with a coleman lantern and often not
enough fuel to light it, a sleeping bag, and a wood stove. There, and during
the weeks I spent at sea last winter, and the months I spent in northern
Georgia, I was subjected to another kind of poverty as well - the absence of
books, movies, records, the latest ideas and topics of the arts, philosophy,
politics, religion. The world moved right along, and I was missing out.

When it was sixty below in Alaska, I hated the cold. When I was editing books
in Georgia, I hated the lack of a library and newsstand. Now that I have a
job which will supposedly pay my bills and allow me to indulge myself in tra-
vel, theatre, etc, I work nights and miss what concerts there are in this
small, dingy, complacent, wet, out-of-the-way city. Thus I am between two
stools. I like travel and dining out and intellectual stimulation. There are
more than a dozen plays on Broadway right now that I want to see, and have no
idea how to get away from work. I like to travel and have adventures. But
for all that I am still living like a student, like a transient who is not
rich enough to provide all the luxuries of permanence for a temporary stay,
and who thus dispenses with a minimally tolerable daily existence in order to
have those high points which make it all worthwhile.

In GROWING UP ABSURD Paul talked about the problem of finding meaningful work.
((*brg* In this issue, Tom Disch also talks of a basic sense of "unemploy-
ment".*)) That problem has increased considerably here during the last few
years. Many are the graduates who are operating bookstores and pushcarts and SFC 35 75

TOM laundromats. I know one who cooks tomato sauce at a cannery three months of
COLLINS the year, and dabbles in journalism. Even so, there is less meaningful work
now than ever. There are even publications designed to tell people about
legit jobs which are worth doing, mostly for subsistence wages, outside the
establishment. But the options are more limited all the time, and the outlook
for a youngster, bleak.

I could talk about journalism at some length. I left Iowa because the paper
was shit and the working conditions intolerable. I left Connecticut to have
an adventure, and because it occurred to me that I was not doing fit work for
a grown man. Interestingly, Sander Vanocur said the same thing in a national
magazine about the same time. Not only is it not possible to edit the copy
which comes in from the wire services because of wonderful new forms of auto-
mation which are destroying journalism, already a dying profession, but most
newspapers are not interested in the news, in the truth, in telling society
how things are and what the meaning is. To work on a daily paper is mostly to
assist in a deception of the masses, allowing them to think that they are get-
ting the truth or the facts which have relevance to their lives. It is not
just an empty effort, a waste of time, but thus actively evil. For example -
we have been running POW torture stories all over the paper, and POW return
stories, and The War Is Over stories. It's all bullshit. The war isn't over,
the soldiers aren't home, the POWs were treated very well indeed, and often
provoked their own torture. They are indeed, as Jane Fonda and Tom Hayden
pointed out, liars and hypocrites, and we are assisting in this deception of
people by running all this garbage, and thus taking the pressure off Nixon to
stop bombing Cambodia, stop pretending there was any honour in this peace. In
fact, he lost the war, and quite properly. But we are not telling people
that, largely because our editors can't see through the smokescreen.

Two nights ago I was wire editor. After the front page was made up we got an
interesting piece of information which I wanted to include in the lead story
in time for the second edition. The answer was no; it was "only a report".
Now that meant that the editor did not have the ability to know what was going
on, and to distinguish between a fact and a mere report. The item was that
the WASHINGTON POST, one of America's two or three best and most reliable
aggressive newspapers, said flatly that Watergate defendant James McCord had
told the Senate that the then Attorney General John Mitchell was deeply in-
volved in the espionage against the Democratic Party. Of course we begin by
knowing that the newspaper utterly fails to see the significance of the Water-
gate case anyway - that the top officials of the people's republic of America
would engage in spying and sabotage against their opponents in a fearful
assault on the entire political system here. But beyond that, when one of our
top papers says flatly that they have learned the head of the national police
is involved, then that is news.

The paper I work for is not really any better than the others, and in the past
I had at least some measure of control over the uses to which my time was put,
but here I have a greatly curtailed initiative and responsibility. But if the
work is shit, why am I here? The problem is one of priorities. We cannot
have everything all ways at once. You must decide between eating the cake,
and preserving it. I decided that the money from here would pay my bills,
allow me to publish my fanzine, which is my first love, and perhaps go travel-
ling later, see shows, etc. Even under the conditions in which I live here,
there is some entertainment unavailable in the idylls of Georgia's hills, and
there is a large library nearby. Perhaps I will even find somebody with which
to discuss ideas, but that is a perennial problem, and fandom is one of my an-
swers to it, even though it involves a distancing of time and space.

Ah, sweet rationalism! Journalism has some advantages, and does give the public some basis for thought and action after all. By being on a large paper I get additional experience and will be more easily able to move to New York, Washington, Boston, San Francisco, or some other civilised place with a good newspaper to work on and the amenities of civilisation for which I long. And frankly, the money is very nice and will enable me to put out IS, earn a credit rating, and maybe even indulge my stamp collection again. In short, I am selling out some of my principles in order to indulge the things which matter to me and to be self-sufficient once again. TOM COLLINS

Now what is this slok that only your ideas have been changed by Illich, and not your actions? Have you not written a lengthy essay on him which you put into a newspaper? And another which you put into a fanzine? Have you thus not contemplated his work, thought about it, brought it to the attention of others? And are you not thus engaged in discussion, debate, clarification, including clarification of the application of all this to your own life? Is not thinking an action?

Yes, your fanzine is a trivial exercise of talent and genius; it has taken over your life, occupies your mind constantly, you are always on the lookout for new material, always counting costs, spending your money on it or about it like Water Rat and Mole puttering about in boats. And is all this effort for a minor genre of fiction, one which is yet to produce a single work of art capable of lasting as long as, say, Faulkner's ABSALOM, ABSALOM or with such sensitivity and depth as that?

Well, doesn't it depend, this frightful waste and perversion of time, money, and strength, on what you get out of it? Heaven knows IS rules my life. I have taken my last two jobs because of the printing/financial problems associated with it. All of my reading and correspondence has IS in mind somewhere deep underneath it all. I spend a ridiculous amount of time on it directly. Instead of working here, I could have joined a circus, gone to India, etc, if not for IS. So?

It is my way of fulfilling myself, my way of satisfying a far-ranging intellect, my way of keeping in contact with people and ideas, even perhaps of producing something of value. Literature, after all, is one of the things which makes life worth living, and if art and criticism are not important, then the battle is lost. I use it to share political ideas, social ideas, and religious philosophy. Like all art it is the statement of the artist (or editor in this case): here is my predicament at the moment, and this is what I am doing about it. Is not SFC doing something similar? Isn't it keeping you moderately sane, moderately active and productive, and in touch with people, sharing ideas? Didn't you preserve the Dick speech, educate via the Illich account, and haven't you passed on other pieces of information and criticism in the past which you think are significant contributions to the field, and which others have shown an interest in sufficiently to make them want to reprint and share those things?

Well then. There is no way to save the world, nor any way to save even a single soul which does not want to be or is not destined to be saved. It is enough if we can save ourselves ((*brg* But that's the point. How?*)) and not be a burden on our friends. I cannot end the bombing of Cambodia, or stop Nixon from calling for a re-establishment of the death penalty. Even if by starving myself I could provide nameless peasants in Asia with enough food to stave off starvation I would not do it and more than the rest of America is doing without for that reason. It is bootless to consider the good we might SFC 35 77

TOM do, or the size of the dragons yet to be slain. I have my private charities,
COLLINS and do a reasonable amount (some might even consider it unreasonable) to support them. I am involved in some religious, some social, some legal activities, and some pacifist organisations. Probably I would do more and give more if I were not in fandom, but then I should have few if any friends, little outlet for personal expression, little intellectual stimulation, and few to share my concerns - intellectual, aesthetic, stfnal, and otherwise.

There are lots of other things I should be doing, but if I did them I would undoubtedly get far less enjoyment out of them and far less personal satisfaction than I get out of IS and the ramifications of its existence. I suspect the same is true with you. Is SFC worth that much? I should think so or you wouldn't be producing it. ((*brg* SFC is the only thing I do well; but there are other things I would like to do well - or do at all.*))

Should I say that life is intrinsically meaningless and that we must impose our own meaning on it? Camus points out that Sisyphus enjoys rolling that rock. The only question is to suicide. If you decide no, then you have a commitment to life, and surely it is more fun to smile and enjoy the sun and to ruthlessly refuse to succumb to the blandishments of Colin Wilson's *Mind Parasites* than to brood in misery over the worthlessness of it all. ((*brg* But one feels a bit foolish without something to smile at.*)) If joy and despair are equally meaningless actions, then choose the one you wish and let the other hand. If literature teaches us nothing it teaches that the man on his way down the road who seems so cheerful may well be about to die, and may be suffering from horrible internal agonies. "You cannot know my friend, nor can I, nor can any man, the appalling strangeness of the mercy of God."

Your concern of which actions to take seems to me a facet of your concern over the meaning of your life, part of a confrontation between you and the universe which you have to come to grips with. It will avail you nothing to escape from the Australian island to the belly of the beast, as Che termed America. No one can run away from the Hound of Heaven.

I was tired of Georgia so I wrote to an Ashram in Arizona and asked if I could go there. The reply I got back from the local guru was, in its entirety, "The reason to come here is not because it is any better than somewhere else. It is a hopeless hope." It won't do you any good to come to Amerika to find peace; you'll only discover you've brought yourself along, and that is where the problem arose in the first place.

The only solution is to get rid of yourself. Get out of your head and leave it alone; find contentment where you are. After all, you are there because that is the place best suited for you to overcome your karma and work out your problems, those things which simultaneously are driving you into the arms of God, and keeping you from him. One way to get rid of yourself is to take dope (pot, qualudin, downers, uppers, junk, alcohol...) and many here do, but this is not a real solution, any more than suicide. Another popular plan is to go away from the hurly-burly and meditate, work hard and become calm. A month at sea or a winter in the Arctic are fine things for one's sense of calm and proportion.

Why not stop dragging yourself along after you? Don Juan says we must abolish our past, so that not only do others not know who we were and what we have done, but we do not know either. You can cease to be BG and become someone else, with whatever history and past you please. Then you can become more

easily, perhaps the most superincredible and fantastic personage you can imagine. ((*brg* Impossible!*)) TOM COLLINS

Now this is religious talk, and you may have rejected that out of some fear that you will be contaminated by idiocy or nonsense or Churchianity or something. But I have just spent some time editing a magazine about metaphysics and altered states of consciousness - in fact, am still the editor of it - and so those concerns are much on my mind and much a part of my world view. Illich says the purpose of talking to people about the issues he raises and you raise is not to do something about them, but to clarify. Your problem is that you don't accept that; don't think that is enough. You want to do something, as if that was the answer - action. "Don't just do something, stand there!" - Alan Watts. ((*brg* But I've spent the first twenty-six years of my life just standing there.*))

The contemporary American radicals have an expression based on the Latin Carpe Diem - "Seize the time". Ronald Laing speaks of having the feeling of being cheated - is this all?; isn't there any more to life than this? The answer is no; "This is It" (Watts wrote a book of that title); "This is Reality" (Roy Davis wrote a book of that title). "If you meditate while you're waiting, you're not waiting any more." - Brautigan.

I saw this yesterday and copied it down because it applied to someone else I knew, but it occurs to me I was meant to share it with you. From Remarque's great book, ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT:

They talk to me too much. They have worries, aims, desires that I cannot comprehend. I often am with one of them in the little beer-garden and try to explain to him that this is really the only thing, just to sit quietly, like this.

Those activities of your internal life, of your intellectual/spiritual nature do not concern the outer man. You can be a saint and work as a shitshoveller. If it takes an ashram, then go to one, or if it takes silence and hard work, do that. Lose yourself in some outrageous and untypical adventure as a gold miner or boathand or communard in a geodesic dome somewhere, if need be. Your subscribers will wait for you. Your family will either understand or not. Your lover(s) will wait for you.

brg At this point it became fairly clear that Tom didn't know what was bugging me, because he hadn't read SFC 30. I skipped a fair bit until Tom caught up and caught on. *

I had to go back and plough all the way through No 30 to come to the thing you found missing in your life - love. Ah, always the way. Not at all unlikely. And why should you alone of all God's creatures not have someone who can love, cherish, and admire you? Hope springs eternal. ((*brg* Now that's exactly the sort of wishy-washy, stupid, obviously untrue cliché which I didn't expect to get in this letter. If anybody tells me again that "there's hope" I'll throw the four hundred copies of this magazine at him or her!*)) Why, even I have someone who seems impressed with me, which is nice and rather to my surprise. I don't know how old you are, but at twenty-six I feel like an old man sometimes, and often when I see children of twenty horsing around. And yet when someone of forty hears me say that he pats me on the head and says, "There, there, little boy" and I find myself feeling terribly jejune and awkward.

TOM I was saying that the way to be content is to be more aware of the glories of
COLLINS the moment. When I was in Alaska I had no radio, and there was no television,
no record player, almost nothing which made a sound. When I walked into the
Community Hall when there were Indians playing guitar and electric fiddle it
was the richest, lushest, most beautiful music I have ever heard in my life.
The end of Beethoven's 9TH when I walked into a friend's cabin and caught it
on his little cassette recorder was ecstasy also - music so sweet I could
hardly stand to listen to its exquisite sounds coming into my overloaded audi-
tory circuits. With such beauty, how could life seem empty? ((*brg* Okay, I
will agree that Beethoven almost makes up for life's other lacks.*))

I have not felt any compunction about being frank in responding to many of the
points you mentioned or raised thoughts of mine on, not because I really think
you are sitting out there in want of just such words as I have to offer, but
because the intimacy of your own writing suggests it will not be offensive for
me to do so.

You did not need to receive a generous gift, perhaps, but to give one. A well
full of water cannot receive water, and a heart full of ungiven love cannot
receive love from another. Unselfishness and generosity have their reward.
Think seriously whether there is anything you love, and then think of another,
and another, and so on until you stop thinking of things to love or to be
grateful for. ((*brg* But you say, things, things, things...*))

You talk of yourself as neurotic and unhappy. I have known people who were
unhappy who made themselves that way, and I would say to friends, "Gee, it's
too bad X doesn't like himself when he's obviously a good-type person." And
my friend would reply, "Yeah", in agreement. And I have seen people destroy
themselves in their own heads while their friends will stand by helplessly un-
able to do anything without making the situation worse. The way out of that
clever circular trap is to just plain halt, starve the Mind Parasites to
death, refuse to be neurotic and self-pitying. ((*brg* It's hardly a condi-
tion one can remove from oneself.*)) Yes I know, easier said than done, but
who's master here, me or my fears? Am I the captain of my fate, the master of
my soul, or am I a mere helpless pawn of circumstance? And Camus would say,
perhaps, since I have not died, have not killed myself, then that option is
always open, and since I have not taken it I have chosen to live, chosen to
accept or reject the situations in which I find myself, and while those situ-
ations are absurd (and none more so than finding myself alive in the first
place) my reaction to them is up to me, my thoughts are my realm of control
and depend largely on what I will them to be, or what I don't bother to will
them not to be. (April 1, 1973)

Sincerely

TOM COLLINS (835 West Washington, Fort Wayne, Indiana 46804, USA)

brg Um. I don't really believe you, but it reads well. I still repeat, "I
have no hope and no expectations". (SFC 31). But maybe sometime I will
be able to echo your words, instead of raising my eyebrows at them.
Thanks most of all, Tom, for your words which can be addressed to all
readers, and for the account you give of your own experience. A marvel-
lous letter. *

I MUST BE TALKING TO MY FRIENDS

What can it be
This curious anxiety
It is as if
I wanted to fly away

But how hard it would be
I have never flown in my life
And I do not know
What flying means

I have all I need
Seed and water and air and light
Why then do I weep
And heave my head and wings
Against these sharp wires

while the children
smile at each other
saying

'Hark! how he sings!'

GHOSTS

* I've taken months trying to delay EDITOR writing this part of the magazine. The trouble is that I'm at a loss for words.

Okay, don't believe me, then. You see, it's like this. Every "normal" issue of SFC (if such a monster still exists) I'm supposed to write a long, long editorial which is supposed to entertain you before you go to sleep reading the rest of the contents. For this issue of SFC, I was going to set out on a super-ramble, a pilgrimage through the infinite halls of my mind that would leave all but the hardiest gasping in exhaustion. Then I looked through my letter file and found that I had at least 95 letters of comment to choose from, and therefore I shouldn't clutter up pages best left to those more articulate than I am. Also I made a checklist of the things I was going to write about, and discovered that I would only be repeating myself. And those who have read the last four issues of SFC will know how dreary that can be.

You see, in SFCs 30-33 I've set all sorts of precedents which I don't want to follow up at the moment. I published Nos 30 and 31 in the way I did because I felt that in them I really had something to say (perhaps for the first time in my career). Since I've said those things, and since I haven't discovered anything new to say, I have, as I've said already, nothing to say. (And have already taken half a page to say it.)

* Okay; firstly some dreary autobiographical details. These were going to take about ten pages, including a long and witty account of the day The Gods Themselves visited... i.e. the day that Leigh and Valma and Michael and I went to see the Rolling Stones perform at Kooyong Stadium. It was 90° in the stands where we were, and on stage it must have been about 110°. It was also the loudest sound in my experience, and suburbanites from five miles away complained about their free Sunday afternoon entertainment. I won't rave about the performance in this Very Serious Journal; friends of mine know that I SFC 35 81

EDITOR regard the Rolling Stones as the epitome of whatever qualities rock 'n' roll has to offer world culture; their live performance is even better than I'd imagined. The best 1½ hours of the year, so far. Afterwards, Valma and I discovered that we were both having our birthdays on the same day and so wandered off to St Kilda to have a very good joint birthday party, and Leigh Edmonds and Michael Creaney tagged along to brighten the conversation.

Now that was February 17, and about the first time in 1973 that I began to feel remotely cheerful. (Yes folks, here's where I start to repeat myself.) In his letter of comment to SFCs 30-33, ALLEN EVANS said, "You were right about SFC 30, 31, 32, and 33 forming a sort of quartet, but are you always so self-pitying, something which began in SFC 30 and continued to date?" I would have thought that most letter-writers would have said the same thing. They didn't, which is nice of them. However, SFC 33 was produced when I was the most depressed that I have ever been, and it took me until April to start smiling again. The Melbourne Eastercon was very cheering indeed, for reasons which I set out in my report for LOCUS. It involved many people who had not been involved with Melbourne conventions before, and presented some new ventures, such as the singing of Donald Swann's songs for LORD OF THE RINGS, by Sue Bell and Peter Waltham, the massed singing of John Bangsund's NOTIONAL ANTHEM and of course, JOSEPH FAUST, the first fan opera produced in Australia. During the last day of the convention Sue Bell organised a meeting to discuss ideas for the 1974 Melbourne Convention (a curtain-raiser for the 1975 Worldcon, we hope). After most of the people at the meeting had bandied around ideas, Leigh Edmonds proposed the names of some people to investigate ways to run the 1974 convention. To my surprise I found myself among these names, which also included Sue Bell, Micheline Tang, and Ken Ford. (Later we co-opted David Grigg to the main committee.) Now, Sue and Micheline had never attended an s f convention before, and the only convention that Ken had attended was the disastrous BYOCon. Why give them so much power? Probably because they had the best ideas to offer about the directions of convention-planning; that is, away from the small world of inner Melbourne fandom, and out to the big world Out There. We're not sure that there is an Out There yet, but we'll do our best to find out. ∴ The curious thing about the committee is that although Sue had been around Melbourne fandom since about October last year, I had not spoken to her, and that I met Micheline for the first time at the convention (a meeting which greatly improved what would otherwise have been a good convention anyway). Ken Ford is studying Film and Drama at Melbourne Teachers College, has helped to collate at least one issue of SFC, and is a sort of SFC protege. (Since most of Australian fandom is the protege of John Bangsund, I'm going to claim that a few people have entered fandom because of SFC.) The Easter Convention and the events of the following week gave me just the burst of short-lived elation I needed.

So, you can keep reading, Allen; this issue I will leave out all that moaning and snivelling. But then what am I going to talk about?

Since I'm making an attempt to get all this honesty-and-wet-handkerchiefs rubbish out of the way, I might as well finish the very short story of my 1973-so-far. Nothing much has happened at all, except Eastercon and moving into my own flat. The female half of the population seems to be treating me with the same disdain as ever, but I did have one stroke of pure once-in-a-lifetime good luck. More than a year ago I visited some friends of mine - a girl from work and her husband. As soon as I saw their flat, I decided that it would be ideal for me. Robyn and John had already bought their own house, but for some devious reason they wanted to rent that out while they stayed in

note on the inside front cover of SFC 32) and by January I still had not heard EDITOR any news of it. In December we elected ourselves the first Labor government in twenty-three years, and during the re-arrangement of the public service that followed, all pending Canberra jobs had to be re-advertised. So my job was re-advertised in January, and I forgot about it. Then, in late April Robyn told me that she and John were moving out of their flat to live in their own house; they would offer the flat to me first. I accepted the offer immediately, even though I knew that if I moved there, I would not move again to Canberra. I took most of the May holidays to move and settle in (which stopped me producing SFC for another few months). The week after I moved in, I received a note from Canberra asking me to present for interview. I didn't go. The Hand of Fate had interviewed, for whatever foul reasons it might have. So, here I am. Here's KEN FORD's account of moving day:

THE DAY THEY MOVED BRUCE GILLESPIE... and lived to tell about it

One fine and bloody freezing Saturday afternoon in May, I sat on the edge of the Exhibition Gardens, on the Carlton Street side. Lo and behold around the corner came a vision of the ultimate fan in the throes of moving... Yes, one poor ordinary Holden sedan weighed down with all the trivia so characteristic of that species we call the fan.

Even rarer was the sight of the fan's father driving the car. These creatures are rarer than chook's teeth.

Of course both Bruce and his dad expected me to do my draught-horse imitations and carry all Bruce's boxes of books and fanzines and records up into his new joint in Carlton Street. Speaking of imitations, how would you, dear reader, do a frog? Most people go croak, and for years my family have been doing rrrekekekek rrrrekekekek. The bloke on the radio goes drebebebobb drrebebobb. I thought my family were the only people who did frogs with a rrrekekekek, but when my drama class was improvising for a haiku about frogs, they also went rrrekekekek. Not to be outdone, I reckon my brothers and I are the only people who can imitate a babbling brook. I did all these imitations for the Gillespie family while Bruce was moving.

Bruce's new domicile is split into two levels, one for revels (hardly likely, considering the company Bruce keeps) and the other for the other stuff. In other words, the bedroom and the living room are above the loo and kitchen.

On the stairwell - at least above the stairwell between these levels - is a cord with a bright idea hanging on the end of it. If Bruce got married and his wife cooked his breakfast in the mornings while he was still asleep, then he could take a running jump at the light bulb and do the Tarzan bit by swinging in on his wife every morning. He could do the Tarzan yell and fly into the kitchen, saying, "Me Tarzan, you insane."

After we lunched at the Gillespie house (after taking the first lot of trivia from Plenty Road, Preston to Carlton Street, Carlton), Mrs G waved a soggy-hanky goodbye to her only son. "I wish he'd done something with his life."

The trailer weighed a bit, and so the nose of the car was poking into the air. "Sit on the bonnet, Mrs Gillespie," I called. Then I realised

KEN
FORD

that I shouldn't go around saying nasty things like that or I'd never get another meal at the Gillespies' place.

"You won't anyway," said Bruce. Come to think of it, probably I won't be having tea with Bruce anyhow. I value my life, and I know what my cooking is like.

Things got a bit dull. Bruce's mate Rick kept talking about his wife all the time - very bad taste - and Mr G... well, you know how it is. So I decided to ask Bruce if I could store his books and fanzines at my place when he went overseas. I only asked once, because I am a man of few words, and I don't like to get pushy.

Then I informed Bruce that his bed would be the wrong way around for admiring his books. "Never have your books behind you, Bruce; you don't know what they're doing."

"The friends I get," he said apologetically to Rick.

When we were all finished, Mr G said that he would give me a ride home. On the way we got stuck in the wrong traffic lane, so I leant over, looked out the window, and asked the bloke in the other lane if he would be a good chap and let us in. He did. Unfortunately Mr G did not see which road we were supposed to turn at. (Probably because I did not tell him.)

Maureen, spouse de Rick, who had joined us before we set off, whispered in my ear. "Mr Gillespie needs reassuring."

I reassured him. "You're doing a great job, Mr Gillespie."

Having thus reassured the leader of our little expedition, soon we turned in the proper direction and emerged from unknown territory. I reached my home (synonymous with "house", not "institution") and all was well.

Some time during that fateful afternoon, I told Bruce that this was the perfect thing to write about in a fanzine. He said that it was too boring (I hadn't started then). I said that he could write about how boring it was. He only laughed and apologised to Rick with these immortal words, "The friends you find through fandom."

So if in the near future you see an interesting article by Bruce, please consider how boring it would have been without me. Actually I wasn't going to write this: I thought it unethical to write about an incident that you yourself had starred in.

- Ken Ford August 1973

* The friends you find through fandom! After Rick and Maureen and my father and I had recovered from being entertained by Ken Ford while we moved, I spent days unpacking books (even though I took only about a third of my library with me) and during the few remaining days of the holidays wrote my edited version of Lem's article in longhand. It took 59 pages. Then I went back to work, until I quit on July 6, mainly to get this issue of SFC published. But since I've talked so much about my flat so far; what is it like?

84 SFC 35 Since I said the magical words, "central heating", in SFC 30, almost everybody

has discussed this topic, which seems to have vast importance only for other EDITOR people. My flat does not have central heating. This weather, it's difficult to heat it at all. But it's still very nearly exactly what I want, and very cheap. I wrote a description of it for my APA-45 magazine, SOLO, in answer to Mike Glicksohn's mailing comment, which was a mailing comment on Leigh Edmonds' 1969, which appeared in SFC 28, which I put through APA-45. All clear?:

You can't get to my flat directly from the street. You wander down Carlton Street, past all the flowers and trees and grass in the Exhibition Gardens on the other side of the street, cross the street, push open a heavy ironwork gate (with one of its decorative iron knobs missing), walk past the rubbish bins up a very short path, and face the single front of a terrace house which looks as if it couldn't possibly have been built before 1600. Since the Poms didn't arrive in Melbourne until 1836, you'd guess more correctly that the flat was built about the turn of the (twentieth) century. Either you pull out your key (as I do) or you obey the instruction on the door and "Ring Twice - Upstairs". If you ring once, you get my downstairs neighbours who are very nice people but have enough problems without answering the door for me. Anyway, after you ring twice, you wait until I clomp downstairs from upstairs, wander along a dark passage, and open the door. Then I exclaim, "Uh?" or something equally intelligent, faint (if you're the Glicksohns, or Brian Aldiss, or Leigh Edmonds), or welcome you in. Then you walk down the long, dark passage. At the end of the passage you come to a set of steps which take off upstairs. They have the dirty remnants of very old brown carpet on them. At the top of the first section of stairs, you face a difficult decision - right or left? I tell you that the kitchen and bathroom and toilet are to your left, and my bedroom and living room are to your right. I'll leave you to ponder that decision while I describe what magnificent sights await you.

The kitchen is pretty dirty, and so is the bathroom/toilet. I cook in the kitchen, have my breakfast there, boil the electric kettle there, and otherwise ignore it. It has a fridge, and a table, and a few chairs, and all of it covered with crumbs, leftover dishes, and any old thing. Occasionally I clean it up. For students of antiques, the bathroom contains an ancient gas bath heater which takes about half an hour and much searching of instruction books to operate. That intellectual exercise finished, you take a shower or bath.

Anyhow, you get out of the kitchen as fast as possible, and presuming you've decided to go up the other side of the stairs, you proceed. In case you're still confused, I would point out that the stairs form a Y-shape, with the right-hand arm of the Y higher than the other. At the top of the top arm, there's a door which doesn't close properly. You go through that and face another dark passage. A door is on your right (the door of my bedroom, which I close as fast as possible so that you won't see the incredible mess in there), and a door at the end of the passage. Go through there and look into a largish room. Very worn carpet lies on the floor, with a couple of newer carpet patches to cover the most worn spots. Two large windows face onto a balcony which faces out onto the Exhibition Gardens. The room itself holds very little except a large wooden table, bought for \$14 from the Brotherhood of St Laurence, two comfortable recliner chairs and one equally comfortable settee bought for quite a bit at Richmond Auctions, a yellow chair, an odd-looking red chair with arms, an open fireplace, unused since I've

EDITOR

been in the flat, a record cabinet on the left-hand side of the fireplace, and dominating one wall, my record-player and speakers, one at either end. The ceiling is about sixteen feet high, a giant-size blowup photo of Faye Dunaway as Bonnie is the only thing on the walls, and this room is not very interesting to look at.

I decide to let you look briefly into my bedroom. Actually everything pertaining to fandom or literature or anything else resides in my room, so I can't describe it all: one single bed, usually unmade, piles of paper behind one end of the bed, at the other end books stuffed into my vast book-case, a pile of fanzines four feet high beside my wardrobe, a chest of drawers piled high with things fannish, and the duplicator and spare ink. Two separate displays are on two different walls. On one wall the two top items are the two pictures that Dimitrii Razuvaev drew for SFC 19. Below them is a display of photos from conventions: two pages of the Easter 69 convention (printed in SFC 8) which show John Foyster without a beard, Leigh Edmonds with short hair, and other monstrosities; then two photo pages from SFC 30, both, coincidentally, showing the features of Lesleigh Luttrell, in one photo accompanied by jolly John Bangsund and in another by the debonair Lee Harding and the suave Bruce Gillespie; on the right of them are photo sheets from the same issue, one from Eastercon 72 and one from Syncon 72. Below them is a beautifully printed certificate which reads, "Ye Golde-Plated Caterpillar Awarde 1973, Awarded to Bruce Gillespie in recognition of his discovery of the birds and the bees. This award is presented by Anti-Fan, Paul J Stevens." No doubt this certificate, drawn by Irene Pagram, has something to do with the photos immediately above it. The other wall features Bruce Gillespie's favourite book covers - those from AN AGE, TO YOUR SCATTERED BODIES GO, UBIK, and NOW WAIT FOR LAST YEAR, accompanied by a reproduction of a poster designed for a production of Kafka's THE TRIAL, plus a photo taken of Carlton Street.

And that is that. Now you've seen all those wonders, I can get you a cup of coffee. Draw up a chair and I'll put on a record.

- Bruce Gillespie, SOLO 2, August 1973

* What's all this stuff doing in a magazine about science fiction? Well, I'm trying to explain why SFC is so late. I'm not apologising for its lateness, but merely explaining. I don't seem to have done much during 1973, yet somehow the year has been inexplicably filled. The Shadow of the August Days of 1972 still blotted out some of my former delight in the world and its peculiarities, but I haven't felt as lonely in this flat as I thought I would, and besides, I'm very good at being a hermit. And when, in SFC 33, I spent a lot of time complaining about not being able to make vital connections, I wasn't planning to live on about \$1500 a year, which will happen when I return to Australia. And I nearly forgot... I'm going to Torcon as well. Travel arrangements for that jaunt have taken much time as well. I suspect that I will have no money when I return to Australia. :: Besides all that (and isn't it great how interesting the year seems when I begin to write about it?) I've rediscovered the cinema for the first time since 1968, and have read more and better books than I did last year. I joined National Film Theatre, which has weekly screenings in the Dental Theatre or the Carlton, and was treated to a season of Orson Welles' films. A season of some of my favourite Italian movies, including $8\frac{1}{2}$ and IL POSTO, followed. Also I joined Melbourne Film Society, and have been treated to some of the best films I've seen since 1965, the year I "discovered" the cinema.

* So I do have something to talk about after all. And I haven't moaned or EDITOR
snivelled too much, have I? Is this still the world's most self-pitying
fanzine? Only Allen Evans can answer that. Travelling a much-too-long path,
I have arrived at one point: that the editorial and the letters that follow
comprise a belated attempt to exorcise all the ghosts that float through the
pages of SFCs 30-33. Firstly: SFC 30. I'm not sure whether I still regard
this as the best issue of the magazine ever. I still like No 24 the best, or
possibly No 28. In No 24 I wrote the article called WHERE WE'RE COMING, which
everybody except Phyrne Bacon thought was "about" Wilson Tucker's THE YEAR OF
THE QUIET SUN. Actually, it was the overture article to a series continued in
No 28 (my "1971"), No 30 (A SENSE OF WONDER), No 31 (IVAN ILLICH IN MEL-
BOURNE), and No 33 (the interlineations between the letters). In a way, that
article in No 24 was the most personal of them all, containing the seeds of
ideas which, miraculously, sprouted and grew in the year after the article was
written. But No 30 is the story of the growing, and the listeners to that
story have sent me some magnificent letters. There are a few matters which
must be settled first. Syncon was a momentous occasion for more people than
Bruce Gillespie. For instance, at Christmas John Bangsund told us a lot about
a young lady he had met at Syncon. And Allen Evans was the mysterious pers-
on seen attending Joy Window during most of the convention. And a week after
the convention, Lee and Carla Harding parted company, and are now divorced.
(This was a part of the story of Lesleigh's DUFF Trip which I couldn't tell in
SFC 30: on the day that we visited Carla's house, we learned that the split
had occurred two days before. It was a very strained visit - see SFC 30, page
32.) In NORSTRILIAN NEWS, February 1973, Lee published the following state-
ment:

Some of you already know that Carla and I separated six months ago.
Those who knew us closely over the years were aware of the constant un-
dercurrent of conflict that wore away our lives. We married young and
inexperienced, and somehow managed to develop completely independent ap-
proaches to life. I think we both did what we could somehow to bring
our mutual antagonisms together: last year, I know, was a nightmare to
us both. But towards the end of 1972 it had grown apparent to Carla and
myself that our attitudes were irreconcilable. We parted - not without
pain - but at least without bitterness, and I am grateful for the warmth
and understanding our friends have bestowed on us in the interim. I was
fortunate enough to find Irene just when things were getting really des-
perate. At that time Irene was still at teachers' college. We decided
to pool our meagre resources and take life by the throat - which we did.
We are poor but happy. I see my children regularly, and look forward to
seeing Carla equally regularly when our divorce is finalised. The rest
is hard work and hope. We could have continued our wasteful war for the
rest of our lives, but we chose to gamble for something better. Only
time and determination will show how it turns out. In the meantime, we
are grateful for the kindness and understanding of our friends, partic-
ularly those who stood close and silent when the going was really tough.
But when the chips are down, you always have to make your own decisions.
And we did.

I know what Lee means when he talks about friends. 1972/1973 was also a year
for me of discovering who my friends really were, and although my problems
hardly matched those of Carla and Lee (except to me, of course), I know what
Lee means when he talks about friends who stand "close and silent", and even
when they offer a bit of advice, too. :: I'm not sure whether I will be
thanked for saying that John and Diane Bangsund obtained a divorce in the
same week as the Hardings. :: Anybody for marriage?

EDITOR * SFC 30 raised more problems than those of the heart, however. That issue contains two pages which I deeply regret writing. I don't mean the last page, which is the most carefully composed in the issue; I'm referring to pages 36 and 37, in which I make what I now think were very unwise comments about the "differences" between Australia and USA. I think I should have made my proposed trip to America before writing any of that. And I regret writing them because most letter-writers have fastened upon those two pages in particular, which I regard as the least important. So I had about two or three letters about the world of s f fans, both here and overseas, and endless letters about central heating. Overseas correspondents showed that they know even less about Australia than we know about USA, and to ensure that people travelling here in 1975 are not completely disillusioned when they reach here (and the problem of disillusionment was the subject of my controversial discussion in SFC 30) I now present the following article which ANGUS TAYLOR sent me from Toronto. James Cameron is Australian, I think, and the following article appeared in THE TORONTO STAR, December 16, 1972:

* James Cameron:

THE NEW AUSTRALIA: CITIES, CARS AND GOLF REPLACE THE OUTBACK

Australia, land of legend, island of illusion! The phrase is agreeably preposterous. It cannot mean this remote wonderland.

Yet if ever there was in truth a land of legend it is Australia.

There is a persistent mythology about Australia, most of which was created by Australians themselves, as part of the national Dreamtime.

First, that Australia is a land of weatherbeaten individualists of the limitless space, gazing with bleached eyes into the speculative but wonderful future, once based on sheep and now on iron, in either case the earth and the elements: basic people. Second, that theirs is a new and vibrant and above all classless society, splendidly freed from the hierarchical inhibitions of the Old World, where Jack is as good as his master and everyone is a Mate who is not a Pommie nor a Commie (nor, to be sure, black or brown or khaki). In a word, unstratified Utopia.

Both concepts are, of course, legendary. Australians are antipodean cockneys, with as much built-in class as everyone else, with a few local variants on the side. In the Australian democracy the classes have been defined as Lower Middle, Upper Middle, and Middle Middle.

The first Australian myth is interesting: that of the taciturn bronzed bushwhacking eccentric of the outback.

He exists, of course, and is indeed constantly being re-invented; but he is now as representative of contemporary Australia as is the rubicund jovial Mine Tavern Host of Old England of the chainstore English countryside.

In fact, the Australians are far and away the most urbanised of all nations; ninety per cent of all Australians live in cities, crouched in ferociously ugly provincial settlements along the coastal rim of the continent.

There is today virtually no white Australian peasantry. Australians are creatures of the concrete jungle, of sidewalks and high-rises and

traffic jams and pollution; above all of suburbs.

JAMES
CAMERON

Australians inhabit a country almost as big as the United States, with as few people as are in Holland, living in dense protective bungalowoid congestion by the sea because they are intimidated by the immense threatening wilderness at their back door, pretending to a man that this magnificently terrifying wealthy void is somewhere else altogether.

The illusion has grown up among Australians that they are the world's most egalitarian society, the least encumbered with shibboleths and lah-di-dah, where the Cult of Mateship is all. In fact, their mosaic of social and political attitudes is even more elaborate and inbred than that of the British, because its range is narrower and its values cruder.

However, the former colony's endowments make an Englishman wince. It has one of the highest per-capita incomes in the world; the highest rate of home ownership; there is one car for every two and a half people, more than anywhere outside North America; minimal unemployment.

It is not a particularly emulative society; Australians enjoy more paid leisure than anyone else on earth, and their diversions cannot be defined in class terms as elsewhere. The average man has access to most things - cars, homes, golf, wine, surfing, oysters, sunshine. Australians rarely explain success by privilege; it is attributed either to good luck or sharp practice.

The generation-gap problem is perhaps something for the future since Australia is a nation of young people governed by the middle-aged. Up to now affluence has turned political questioning into irony or apathy. There is really no coherent underprivileged group symbolising resentment or guilt; there is - willy enough - no race problem.

The 110,000 or so aborigines are neither numerous enough nor articulate enough to make any impact except on the really concerned. Most Australians agree that the aborigines are abominably and callously used, and are resented by authority, mainly for their refusal to die off quietly (since they can no longer be totally slaughtered, as they were in Tasmania), but millions of Australians have never seen an Abo in their lives.

The archetypal Australian city is Melbourne. This at least is what Melbourne people say. Between Melbourne and Sydney exists the sort of relationship that has endured for years between Montreal and Toronto: the alleged conflict between cultivation and commerce.

There is very little to choose between the cities in size (both about 2.5 million; Sydney is slightly larger) and both are almost equally industrialised, suburbanised, and synthesised, but Melbourne thinks of itself as more genteel and urbane. It boasts, incessantly, of its leading art gallery, its symphony concerts, and its origination of most political-intellectual movements.

However, the parallels with Montreal and Toronto are not complete: Melbourne is still the financial centre of Australia, much to the chagrin of Sydney's more aggressive businessmen.

Melbourne, which is the capital of the state of Victoria and therefore

JAMES
CAMERON

Victorian, was described by Billy Graham as "the most moral of the cities I ever saw." Ava Gardner, after the city had been the location for the filming of ON THE BEACH, thought it was "a great place to make a movie about the end of the world."

Melbourne still has streetcars (trams) and claims to have Australia's most exclusive suburb, Toorak, which is a sort of combination Westmount and Forest Hill.

Sydney, the most Americanised city outside North America, has a superior location (on Botany Bay) and, in the best American tradition, has multi-lane freeways sweeping right downtown.

Kentucky Fried Chicken stores are springing up everywhere and King's Cross resembles San Francisco's North Beach, with swinging discotheques and women of dubious morals.

Sydney entertained thousands of US servicemen on rest and recreation leave from South Vietnam. The soldiers have stopped visiting, but their imprint remains on the city.

It is said that the institution of the monarchy has a declining influence in Australia, but this is by no means sure.

The fact remains that the Australians' national anthem is still the same as Britain's (although Gough Whitlam, the new Labor prime minister, wants to change that); their army officers are still commissioned by the Queen; new immigrants from Italy and the Balkans must still swear allegiance to royalty to disinfect them of their republican memories; the Union Jack flies everywhere on high days and holidays.

And in the best British tradition, debutante parties remain an indelible aspect of the Victorian social scene, just as Melbourne newspapers continue indomitably to publish society columns of a kind most prettily reminiscent of a bygone age.

The Australians' dedication to horse-racing, which elsewhere takes the form of straightforward obsessive gambling, has a very decided protocol in Melbourne. The Melbourne Cup, run at Flemington, brings virtually the whole of Australia to a stop. It draws a crowd of more than 100,000 and brings to the track a crop of grey toppers and cutaway coats and boutonnieres unmatched even by Ascot.

The Australian class pattern has become pretty blurred at the edges, but most Australians acknowledge it in one way or another. Defining degrees of middle-classness is a tricky business.

The upper middle class, a very small category, are identified, as everywhere else, by having (a) money, and (b) status - i.e. the old landowners and rich grazing families (the "squattocracy"). Since the Australian economy shifted off the sheep's back and on to the miner's pick these vast farmers have diversified greatly into the mineral boom, and greatly have they prospered therein. These pioneer colonists still carry a lot of social guns, since they represent the nearest Australian equivalent to a landed gentry.

managerial executives, stockbrokers, share consultants, people in the roaring business of real estate development. Big folding money buys a ticket into most groups and the exclusive suburbs. It also means sending the kids to the right school.

Paradoxically, Australia has a most remarkably inegalitarian educational system. It is not, to be sure, as compartmentalised as England's, but it certainly does its best; the quaint straw boaters and uniform blazers of the posh scholars in the streets of Melbourne testify to that. There are three school systems; private, Roman Catholic, and state, and each has strong nuances and polarisation. The ten per cent of Australian boys who go the the elitist fee-paying schools are almost certain to wield a disproportionate influence later on.

The Australian private schools are modelled assiduously on the more simplistic mannerisms of the English public schools and preserve most of their dusty assumptions, with uniforms, prefects, chapel, the cane, ties, and games. And, concomitantly, the old-boy network.

When the royal family sent Prince Charles to school outside England it was not by chance he went to Australia, where he could take a guarded look at the common man without too much of a shock.

For the middle middles life opens up at around \$10,000 a year, the equivalent of about \$15,000 in Toronto. At anything less you can't get a mortgage, and if you can't get a mortgage you can't get a home, and if that happens you're up the creek, cobber. However, that is a fairly easy average for the management man, advertising executive, realtor, or senior university lecturer.

At the other end of the scale is the working man, but he too is extraordinarily difficult to pin down in Australia. He is too well off. Australia has, after New Zealand, the highest rate of trade-union membership of any democracy.

The working man is the backbone of the clubs. These have nothing whatever to do with the leather-chaired Melbourne Club. The Australian clubs are a phenomenon surely to be met with nowhere else on earth.

The clubs are a response to the repulsive awfulness of the old-fashioned Australian urban pub, with its lavatorial dog-slops bars tiled like abattoirs so they can be hosed down after everybody has been sick in them, hostile and fierce and chairless and destined, one hopes, for ultimate oblivion. Compared with these horrendous joints the clubs are paradise.

They are usually run by sporting outfits or social organisations, or frequently by the ubiquitous RSL (Returned Serviceman's League, the Australian equivalent of Canada's Legions, is a tremendously lively part of the Australian scene; the apotheosis of Mateship and the all-men-together-virility-symbol togetherness syndrome, extremely right-wing in character, and politically one of the biggest lobbies in the nation.) Some of the league clubs are the most opulent and expansive places in Australia, and usually they owe it all to the pokies.

The pokies are the poker machines, the one-armed bandits that are infinitely more the Australian coat of arms than the kangaroo or the emu. The clubs may have swimming pools, billiard rooms, cocktail bars, dance

JAMES
CAMERON

floors, and costly American cabarets, and they are all bought and paid for by the pokies, which line the barrooms from wall to wall.

The pokies in a single bar can have a turnover of up to \$2 million a year. A single jackpot can be worth up to \$500 or \$600. In New South Wales, the pre-eminent pokie country, the state government collects some \$10 million a year revenue from the nickels that flow nightly into the machines like monsoon rain. The sight of hundreds of dedicated clubmen facing the walls for hours on end pistoning the pokies is one that lingers in the stranger's mind forever.

Then, there is the great, and so far imponderable, question of the New Australians. Something like twenty per cent of the Australian population is now immigrant, less than half of them from English-speaking countries. It has been roughly calculated that the ancestry of contemporary Australians is fifty per cent English, twenty per cent Irish, ten per cent Scots, and twenty per cent a heterogeneous association of various European peoples.

They have certainly diversified Australian eating habits; the old-style unchangeable menus of steak-and-tea have been given variety by multitudes of rather second-rate tavernas and pizza-houses.

There are parts of Sydney that look like Athens and areas of Melbourne that resemble Rome. You can buy things on the waterfront of Woolloomooloo that would have greatly surprised the Englishmen of the First Fleet.

You can talk to a Bulgarian taxi driver, highly sardonic about Australian democracy, who will nevertheless conform to the rigorous Australian custom and expect you to ride in the front of the cab or reveal yourself as a Pommie snob. But any profound change in the social pattern brought about by the New Australians is hard to detect. Australia accepts them, period. So long as they're white, they'll do.

Perhaps the most remarkable paradox is that free-wheeling, bush-whacking, rule-defying, individualist Australia is just about the most "governed" country in the free world. Of the Australian work force today, one in four is in some way or another in government employ. One quarter of a nation's population busy governing the rest, providing its forms, gathering its taxes, tapping its telephones, censoring its books, scrutinising its immigrants, paying its welfare; twenty-five per cent of a people dependent in some way on patronage.

Even so, it is impossible to say who "runs" Australia. No class of people run it, that's clear. There must be numberless areas of contending power (as there are everywhere), but in Australia they are diffused and fragmented both by their own special interests, and especially by state divisions. For years sceptical Australians have been trying to nail down the great conspiracies, without any real luck.

In any event, the average Australian doesn't care, really care; however things may be today, She'll Be Right tomorrow.

He's more concerned with enjoying the good life that has arrived since World War II - modelled largely on the better features of life in the United States and certainly speeded by millions of dollars of American

investment. (However, Japan is today Australia's main trading partner, taking nearly half her exports.)

JAMES
CAMERON

Since the War the main ally has been the United States and Australians symbolised this by joining the US in Viet Nam; by organising many companies along American lines, by eating their food, and by building and driving their cars (albeit still on the left).

Thus the cities and hotels of white Australia are peopled on the one hand by eternally busy groups of Japanese, to the lowering looks of returned World War II servicemen, and on the other by US businessmen and elderly American package tourists.

This leaves little for the sentimental true-blue British Aussie but the final lifeboat of the monarchy, the flag, and fish-and-chips.

These remain, indomitably and obstinately resisting the classless concept to the end.

- James Cameron 1972

* That article calls for many comments, of course, but I would prefer to let other Australian readers make them. Americans who read this might ask themselves immediately, "Well, if the place is like that, why go there?" Because, I suppose, none of it matters. Australians, including myself, are fond of painting a picture of Australia with the muddiest possible pigments, but we know all the time that the key sentence in Cameron's article is, "In any event, the average Australian doesn't care, really care; however things may be today, She'll Be Right tomorrow." If you'll permit me another story of Lesleigh Luttrell's stay in Australia: I can remember vividly that Elizabeth Foyster indoctrinated Lesleigh into the mystique of She'll-Be-Rightism; in fact so well that when somebody actually said the phrase casually, Lesleigh echoed "She'll be right mate" with exactly the correct twist of Foysterian scorn. Of course, everything is not all right in Australia; for instance, in what is otherwise an admirably complete account of the Australian social scene, why doesn't Cameron mention any of the arts? For the good reason that Australia despises its artists nearly as much as it ignores its aborigines, and most artists leave for overseas, sooner or later. Cameron gives too glowing a picture of life for the very poor, because poor people in Australia suffer most from the bureaucracies - five-year waits for Housing Commission houses, endless harassment for people who really need welfare payments, etc, etc. But I must repeat that while Cameron describes many of the least pleasant aspects of Australia (and the RATS artists satirise them in the issue which accompanies SFC) he also describes those aspects of Australia which are most easily ignored by the majority of the people who "endure" them. Any visitor to Australia who has read this article, or a number of books from which probably he pinched his main ideas (archetypically, THE LUCKY COUNTRY, by Donald Horne), should "know the ropes". If you are a science fiction fan, you haven't begun to discover the place, for most s f fans, just because they do crazy things like reading and writing, are fundamentally outcasts in this society. Therefore, if you meet Australian s f fans, in most cases you meet people who are the opposite of the "dinkum Aussie". (I'm not sure what Ken Ford is; a sort of dinkum Aussie who reads and writes.)

Entwined among all those sentences and brackets and observations and opinions you might find what I'm really driving at. I'm trying to discover what in Australian life would most enrage visiting overseas people. And I think the SFC 35 93

John Bangsund went to Canberra to escape being a Famous Fan and promptly became a Legend. Earlier this year twasty-two Australian fans collectively wrote a publication called JOHN G BANGSUND: AN AUSTRALIAN TRIBUTE. The National Anthem that appears on the next page is just one of the many reasons why John deserved that tribute.

Here's John's introduction, read to a cheering throng at Melbourne Eastercon 1973 by Lee Harding on behalf of the author:

"Leigh Edmonds - he's the tall creep with long hair and glasses - has invited me to add to your misery by composing more verses for my AUSTRALIAN NOTIONAL ANTHEM, which you will sing during the convention. Oh yes, you'll sing all right! If I have spent hours of valuable time which could have been devoted to something constructive, like sleeping, thinking about this Anthem, the least you can bloody-well do is sing it. Actually I haven't finished writing it yet, but another bottle or three of this gruesome 1970 Stonyfell shiraz-grenache should see me through it.

"Let me tell you a tale. When the competition for a new Australian national anthem was first announced, I composed the first verse of the following, and with a suitable covering note, sent it off to the CANBERRA TIMES. There, after a suitable delay, it was published. (An earlier version had been distributed furtively at the BringYourOwn Convention in Melbourne at the New Year.) In the TIMES I mentioned that it could be sung "to the grand old tune of THE INTERNATIONALE by those with a leftward inclination, and O, TANNENBAUM by those without". A few weeks later a keen reader in Sydney pointed out that I had in mind THE RED FLAG - not THE INTERNATIONALE - and she was absolutely right. In a subsequent letter to the editor of the TIMES I admitted my error, but he has not seen fit to publish my apology. Since then a number of illustrious publications - including John Foyster's CHUNDER! and the journal of the Spelling Reform outfit - have published the original version of my notional anthem. But here, for the first time ever, is the final version. I hope you have as much fun singing it as I had/will have writing it.

"It still goes to the tune of THE RED FLAG. If that tune is unfamiliar to you, ask John Foyster to hum it for you."

A massed singing of ORSTRILIA! followed the reading of the above, and many people now whistle nothing else.

ORSTRILIA!

A FAIR-DINKUM NOTIONAL ANTHEM

(Tune: THE RED FLAG - or O, TANNENBAUM
- allegro assai, ma non troppo.)

ALL: Orstrilia! Orstrilia!
Ya know we'll never filia!
We'll fight fer ya and die fer ya
Whene'er yer foes assilia!
Our sunburnt land is green in spots;
There's gold in sand - and we've got lots.
We're big on Truth and Liberty!
Orstrilia is the place for we!

SOLO: The East is Red, the South is not:
This is The Land That Time Forgot.
But Time has caught up with us now
And we're all reading Chairman Mao.

ALL: Yes, Time has caught up with us now
And we're all reading Chairman Mao,
But Chairman Mao is rather bleak
So now and then we read Newsweek.

SOLO: With E G Whitlam at our head
We'll soon be either Red or dead.
Whichever it turns out to be,
It is our Modest Destiny.

ALL: Whichever it turns out to be,
It is our Modest Destiny,
But destinies are born, not made,
So ours will likely be mislaid.

SOLO: We all have homes and cars and jobs:
We're all right, Jack - but we're not snobs.
If everyone was like we are
This world would be Utopia!

ALL: If everyone was like we are
This world would be Utopia;
There'd be a lot less strife and fuss
If everyone was just like us!

ALL: Orstrilia! Orstrilia!
Ya know we'll never filia!
We'll fight fer ya and die fer ya
Whene'er yer foes assilia!

SOLO: Our blokes are beaut, our sheilas grouse -
And we have got an Opera House!

ALL: AND PIES WITH SAUCE, AND B H P!
ORSTRILIA IS THE PLACE FOR WE!

EDITOR quality I'm looking for is casualness - She'll-Be-Rightism, which I've talked about already. One of Cameron's best comments is, "The average man has access to most things - cars, homes, golf, wine, surfing, oysters, sunshine. Australians rarely explain success by privilege; it is attributed either to good luck or sharp practice." With the use of the word "privilege" in this sentence, Cameron compares the Australian attitude with the English; his sentence would need to read differently if he were trying to compare the Australian with the American attitude, i.e. "Australians rarely explain success by hard work..." Indeed, the more I think about it, the more I realise how rarely I meet in Australia the "self-made man", in the American sense. The "self-made man" in Australia is the person who has made the best use of the promotional ladder, people such as top public servants, company executives (but not company owners, as so many companies are owned from overseas), and salesmen of all types. The American-type "self-made man" occupies a different social notch from here, for any I meet in Australia - that is, people who have started businesses for themselves and have made their success by their own efforts - come from the middle-middle or lower-middle groups, and often have no traditional money behind them. Their tastes seem limited, their politics very right-wing, and their concept of the future stops at the fence of a cream-brick-veneer-and-garden in Mount Waverley. The people who make the big money are still the invaluable employees, not the self-made employers. I'm guessing here, but to judge from my reading of all things American, the American belief is that it is possible to become the engineering millionaire, the oil millionaire, or the proprietor of a rapidly growing small business, without isolating oneself in the process. Americans seem to really believe that the race goes to the swift; Australians know it goes to the swiftie. The Australian attitude is more ironical, and I like it better. (And I'm not in the race.)

* I get rottenly carried away, don't I? Now I can start talking about Nixon, one of the ghosts whose shadows darken the pages of SFC 33. As more and more facts about the Watergate Affair appear in local newspapers and overseas magazines, there seems less and less for me to say about him. I'd like to know whether anybody in America will be sufficiently incensed to impeach Nixon and whether such an action would affect the period of the next three years anyway. USA is still dropping bombs on Cambodia, and nobody's editorialised about that for months. Lots of American fans do care about the matter, I'm pleased to say, and they wrote to me on this matter. (In particular, Philip Jose Farmer's attitude is very close to my own.) What happens in 1976? - YEAR OF THE QUIET SUN?

* Later on I don't want to include many interlineations between the letters, so I'd like to summarise my feelings about the marvellous mail that SFCs 30 to 33 brought flooding into my postbox. People wrote long letters of condolence and advice. But that wasn't the idea of publishing those issues; the idea was to goad you into telling me about your deepest concerns. Tom Collins and some others talked back to me; several people sent letters directly to Philip Dick (what about carbon copies to SFC?); but I'd like even more of my friends to talk back to me.

There are some people who talk directly to me, although they do not know of my existence when they speak. They are the fiction writers. This year I rediscovered Hermann Hesse, and especially his book, STEPPENWOLF. While I was reading STEPPENWOLF, I kept saying to myself, "But that's me in there." I marked long passages which, although describing Harry Haller, the Steppenwolf of the story, describe me just as well. Nearly all the concerns that have dominated my life recently are there. While Hesse was alive, one correspondent wrote, "The more I read them (Hesse's books), the more I find myself in

them. And now I am convinced that the person who understands me best is in EDITOR Switzerland and that I am never out of his sight..." Well, Hesse is dead now, but he spent many of his last years answering letters like this one. A few days before I read STEPPENWOLF, a party was planned for Lee Harding's surprise birthday party. Right up to the last moment I was going to it, but when it came to the night, I could not step out of the house. Several days later, while reading STEPPENWOLF, I came upon the following: In the street Haller meets an old friend, a professor who has a family, a good house, and an assured place in a sturdy German community. The professor invites Haller to spend an evening at his place. Haller muses: "And while I, Harry Haller, stood there in the street, flattered and surprised and studiously polite and smiling into the good fellow's kindly, short-sighted face, there stood the other Harry, too, at my elbow and grinned likewise. He stood there and grinned as he thought what a funny, crazy, dishonest fellow I was to show my teeth in rage and curse the whole world one moment and, the next, to be falling all over myself in the eagerness of my response to the first amiable greeting of the first good honest fellow who came my way, to be wallowing like a suckling-pig in the luxury of a little pleasant feeling and friendly esteem. Thus the two Harrys, neither playing a very pretty part, faced the worthy professor, mocking one another, watching one another, and spitting at one another, while as always in such predicaments, the eternal question presented itself whether all this was simple stupidity and human frailty, a common depravity, or whether this sentimental egoism and perversity, this slovenliness and two-facedness of feeling was merely a personal idiosyncrasy of the Steppenwolves. And if this nastiness was common to men in general, I could rebound from it with renewed energy into hatred of all the world, but if it was personal frailty, it was good occasion for an orgy of self-hatred." (Penguin Modern Classics edition, page 91). Harry Haller's "worst" side won as well.

* And the most splendid science fiction novel for some time (if it is a novel rather than a collection of short stories) is 334, by Thomas M Disch. So far the fan press has ignored this book completely, for the good reason that McGibbon and Kee of England published it without an s f label and the Australian distributor imported about two copies, both of which I happened to see one day in a Collins Book Depot. Also, no American edition has appeared yet. When I read 334, I hadn't corresponded with Thomas Disch, who has been one of my favourite writers for years. However, Philip Dick sent me his address and asked me to send SFC 31; this done, Tom Disch wrote back (see later in this issue). Now in communication I was able to tell him exactly how much I admire 334 (the best part of which appeared in NEW WORLDS QUARTERLY 4), and the passages which spoke most eloquently to me. Lotte Hansen, one of 334's main characters, says in one of her dramatic monologues:

"So what I want, what I really do want.. I don't know how to say it. What I really want is to really want something..."

"I know! The movie we saw on teevee the other night when Mom wouldn't shut up, the Japanese movie, remember? Do you remember the fire festival, the song they sang? I forget the exact words, but the idea was that you should let life burn you up. That's what I want. I want life to burn me up.

"So that's what heaven is then. Heaven is the fire that does that, a huge roaring bonfire with lots of little Japanese women dancing around it, and every so often they let out a great shout and one of them rushes into it. Whoof!"

EDITOR "I want life to burn me up." That's really what SFCs 30-33 are all about. Too bad the timber is so soggy. Lotte doesn't even have the satisfaction of burning; she tries to immolate herself on a blazing bedstead after she and all her belongings are evicted from high-rise tenement 334 in the year 2021. In 2026 both Lotte and her mother end up in different institutions; and in the last two chapters of the book Disch writes two contrasting soliloquies which, for me, summarise all the heartbreaking dilemmas of living in next (or, I suppose, this or any) century. From Lotte's last speech:

"And anyhow the world doesn't end. Even though it may try to, even though you wish to hell it would - it can't. There's always some poor jerk who thinks he needs something he hasn't got, and there goes five years, ten years, getting it. And then it'll be something else. It's another day and you're still waiting for the world to end.

"Oh, sometimes, you know, I have to laugh. When I think - Like the first time you're really in love and you say to yourself, Hey! I'm really in love! Now I know what it's about. And then he leaves you and you can't believe it. Or worse than that, you gradually lose sight of it. Just gradually. You're in love, only it isn't as wonderful as it used to be. Maybe you're not even in love, maybe you just want to be. And maybe you don't even want to be. You stop bothering about songs on the radio, and there's nothing you want to do but sleep. Do you know? But you can only sleep for so long and then it's tomorrow. The icebox is empty and you have to think who haven't you borrowed any money from and the room smells and you get up just in time to see the most terrific sunrise. So it wasn't the end of the world after all, it's just another day."

"So it wasn't the end of the world after all, it's just another day." All hail, Mr Disch! And in the same chapter, the final cri de coeur:

"Do you feel that way ever? When you feel something very strongly, you always suppose other people must have felt the same way, but do you know what? I'm thirty-eight years old, tomorrow I'll be thirty-nine, and I still wonder if that's so. Whether anyone ever feels the same way."

Of the two chapters, that's the optimistic one. Disch shows his pessimistic side in the book's last chapter. Mrs Hansen, Lotte's mother, speaks:

"After a certain point you ask yourself why. Why go on? Why bother? For what reason? I guess it's when you stop enjoying things. The day-to-day things. It's not as though there's all that much to enjoy. Not there. The food? Eating is a chore for me now, like putting on my shoes. I do it. That's all. Or the people? Well, I talk to them, they talk to me, but does anyone listen? You - do you listen? Huh? And when you talk, who listens to you? And how much are they paid?

I've really finished all I can say about 334 for now, as any other review seems superfluous. But I must quote my favourite passage of all, which is taken up by Lotte in one of the passages quoted above. I suppose it's the only real s f idea in the book, but it's almost the most pertinent idea. Poul Anderson has asked what's going to happen if there's no Doom, no bomb, no ecology breakdown. Here's Disch's "answer" (Lotte is the speaker):

"They talk about the end of the world, the bombs and all, or if not the bombs then about the oceans dying, and the fish, but have you ever looked at the ocean? I used to worry, I did, but now I say to myself - so what? So what if the world ends? My sister though, she's just the other way - if there's an election she has to stay up and watch it. Or earthquakes. Anything. But what's the use?"

"The end of the world. Let me tell you about the end of the world. It happened fifty years ago. Maybe a hundred. And since then it's been lovely. I mean it. Nobody tries to bother you. You can relax. You know what? I like the end of the world."

Yes, Mr Disch, you're a very tricky guy - and a bit too truthful to be writing science fiction. (334 costs \$A 6.75; McGibbon and Kee; 201 pages.)

* And still talking of (and to) my friends: a number of you were kind enough to nominate S F COMMENTARY for a Hugo Award for the second year running. The battle will be between ENERGUMEN and LOCUS, however, and I have fingers, toes, and everything else crossed that the Glicksohns will get the award that they deserve so much. For Australia's sake, I wish SFC had a chance; for the sake of justice - ENERGUMEN!

* And now, the letters! Firstly, some more fan biographies - my favourite part of SFC: *

MIKE GLYER *
14974 Osceola Street, Sylmar, California 91342, USA

LA you know about. Sylmar is about twenty-five miles north of Civic Centre in the San Fernando Valley. It has one virtue and one vice from the meteorological viewpoint: it's just barely far enough out so that the smog seldom reaches it (though one can sit and view the smog as it filters along the foothills in our direction all afternoon); and, in summer, it's always ten degrees hotter than the LA Basin, or in winter, ten degrees colder. Lately I spend my mornings in my weatherbeaten red Volkswagen bashing through the traffic to work, and spend the evenings doing the same thing in the opposite direction. I'm working full-time at the job I held part-time last spring: typist/secretary/phone-answering flunky/errand boy/bureaucrat in the office of the Dean of Letters, Arts, and Sciences (a school within the University of Southern California). Being nineteen, this fall a Junior majoring in history at the university, and willing to do as little as possible for the maximum amount, this job is ideal.

My fannish history is improbable. I printed my first three fanzines before ever subscribing to or seeing another. They showed it. And then the first one I got was SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW, which deformed my thinking about fandom and things fannish completely. On paper I have been participating in fandom since November 1969. In person, it was another story. I was rather unwilling to face the LASFS alone, and had no transportation to their meetings anyway. But once at USC, living in the dorms, I encountered last year Joe Minne, a LASFS member, who began to drop in on our dorm poker games. He appealed to my love for poker with excellent stories about the weekly game conducted at Larry Niven's house, so finally I was persuaded to come along to a meeting or two right before Christmas 1971. In January I started fanning personally. So far I have attended one day of one convention.

MIKE
GLYER

For what it's worth, my favourite s f writers are Ellison, Bradbury, Heinlein, Laumer, Anderson, and E E Smith. When it comes to music I have no taste, and a passive interest, which means I'll listen to almost anything a person puts on, even though I detest the Stones - supposedly the world's greatest rock group. Favourites include Fifth Dimension, Liszt, America, THE PLANETS, Mason Williams, Ravel, Bach, Isaac Hayes, Henry Mancini, and Don McLean. (July 29, 1972)*

* BRIAN LOMBARD

PO Box 4490, Cape Town, South Africa

I'm a very youthful thirty-two, 5'10" or the metric equivalent, 175-185 lbs, depending on my state of fitness, and rather ugly, I think, with longish hair. By South African standards I'm an out-and-out liberal, but I'm sorry to say that world opinion might not judge me so.

I'm a chartered accountant by profession and, apart from s f, I'm a music-lover, mainly more melodic pop ranging from Baez to Taj Mahal to Santana; but I'm particularly fond of rock 'n' roll - the real thing, that is - and I've an impressive collection of old 78s, the cream of which I've put on tape to preserve the originals. When I'm down in the dumps nothing puts me right more effectively than listening to Little Richard or Jerry Lee.

Most of my spare time is taken up by sport. In winter I play table tennis. I've represented Western Province and I'm about in the top twelve or so in the country. I'm even more active in summer. I play baseball, and have also represented Western Province, and also I coach. I'm presently player-coach of the University of Cape Town. Also I coach Little League (under eleven) which is very satisfying.

Oh yes, my marital status. I enjoyed your description of yourself as "unhappily unmarried". I suppose I could be described in the same way. For the last two years I've been battling to persuade my true love, a tremendous bird who stays in Pietermaritzburg, 1000 miles from Cape Town, to give me the nod - but to no avail. Still hope.

I've been reading (and collecting) s f for a number of years now but only very recently did I find out about South African fandom. We have an s f society with a regular magazine, one fanzine, aFRICAN, and one games-zine. Unfortunately fandom is centred in Johannesburg, also a thousand miles away, leaving me a bit out of active fandom. But I've subscribed to a number of fanzines and I'm catching up fast.

My taste in s f seems to differ from yours to a fair extent. Neither Aldiss, Dick, nor Disch does anything for me, but you can count me as a fellow admirer of Cordwainer Smith. My favourite story is THE DEAD LADY OF CLOWN TOWN.

Poul Anderson is my other favourite author. He's really a master storyteller and I can't put down his stuff once I get started. I've yet to locate OPERATION CHAOS and THREE HEARTS AND THREE LIONS, apart from many others of his works.

Recently I've started to read as much criticism of the genre as I can. I bought MORE ISSUES AT HAND and I've ordered HEINLEIN IN DIMENSION, THE UNIVERSE MAKERS, and OF WORLDS BEYOND, while I take in the critical columns of those prozines which I can get hold of. I subscribe to F&SF and

ANALOG (especially for THE REFERENCE LIBRARY) and buy AMAZING, FANTASTIC, and IF, if the contents look especially good. GALAXY is not distributed here, for some unknown reason. (October 16, 1972)*

BRIAN
LOMBARD

* I presume you've ordered Brian Aldiss' BILLION YEAR SPREE. :: That was the last letter I received from Brian Lombard, and nobody seems to have heard from him for a while. Maybe that girl gave the nod? *

MICHAEL SHOEMAKER *

2123 North Early Street, Alexandria, Virginia 22302, USA

I am eighteen, six feet, 145 lbs, and am majoring in music performance on cello at Catholic University in Washington, DC. Next to music and s f, m other two overpowering interests are (to the exclusion of almost all else) all card games, and distance running. I have run everything from the quarter (51.2) to the supermarathon (4:27 for thirty-six miles). My favourite distance is ten miles, but lately I have come to regard myself as mostly a marathoner. My goals for the next year are to run at least under 2:40 at Boston, and to qualify for the US Junior team in the six-mile, so as to run against the Russians next summer. I think the best non-s f books are LORD JIM, THE TRIAL, THE CASTLE, and THE GRAPES OF WRATH.

(October 31, 1972)*

LEIGH COUCH *

No 1 Cymry Lane, Route 2, Box 889, Arnold, Missouri 63010, USA

My part of the United States is in the grip of an ice storm of monumental proportions. I am having the day off from school and all the schools in St Louis and the surrounding area are closed. Every bird and squirrel in the neighbourhood has been to my feeder today. We live on the side of a hill and there are no other houses here. It is in the foothills of the Ozark Mountains, (which are really nothing but quite high hills) and my hill has typical oak, hickory, and cedar woods covering it. In the summer my home is not visible from the road and we like it that way. We are not recluses, we enjoy company very much, but we don't like people living next door. The Great American Subdivision way of life is not for us.

That fanzine that Railee Bothman and I publish, BC, is lightweight froth. We do it for our own satisfaction and amusement and to keep in touch with our friends in fandom. ((*brg* It is also one of my favourite fanzines.*)) We do read a tremendous amount. I learned to read at the age of about three or four. I used to spend the summers on my grandparents' farm because my parents were divorced and my mother had to work. Out of sheer boredom, I suspect, I pestered my grandfather until he taught me the alphabet and my grandmother until she taught me simple words. What did I read? A magazine called COUNTRY GENTLEMAN and THE BIBLE. I began reading s f when I was eight and could buy all those lurid magazines at the drug store for ten cents each. My mother was too tired most of the time to investigate and she was most likely grateful that I was quiet and not bothering her. Norbert and I read to all three of our children every night from the time they were old enough to listen. That was something we always made time for. Some books we had to read over and over.

Hannibal, Missouri, is about ninety miles from St Louis and it is Mark Twain's home town. When Lesleigh and Chris were about six and seven years old we took a weekend trip there and I read the part of TOM SAWYER about being lost in the cave in the lobby of the Mark Twain hotel. To the

SFC 35 101

LEIGH COUCH amusement of the other guests, I might add. Or maybe you haven't the faintest idea of what I am talking about. (December 11, 1972)*

* It might be easier when and if I should visit either Hannibal or Arnold Missouri. When I was a kid, my parents read to me every night. When my two younger sisters came along, my parents did not have the same amount of time to read to them. I've grown up devoted to books, and my sisters have lost the interest they once had (although they were both better than me at school). The answer to the world's illiteracy problem?: parents to read to their children. :: I should say that Leigh Couch, wife of Norbert Couch, is the mother of Lesleigh Luttrell, Chris Couch, and Mike Couch, and that many correspondents have agreed with my estimation in SFC 30 that "it sounds as if Leigh Couch is one of the greatest women in American fandom". *

* MALCOLM EDWARDS
75A Harrow View, Harrow, Middlesex HA1 1RF, England

Me? I'm a very boring person. Twenty-three; 5'9"; average colour of hair and eyes and things. Librarian. Would like to write but am too lazy. Therefore I edit fanzines instead. Degree in Social Anthropology from Cambridge, where I started off doing Economics, having gained a place on the strength of my maths... I tend not to stick to things. Married a bit over a year ago. Christine is also twenty-three, has a degree in - would you believe? - Theology, is about 5'1", earns more than I do, and is the most desirable lady in British fandom (a possibly biased opinion; I am widely known as the Most Beautiful Person in British fandom). We live in a small, run-down flat, for which we pay an extortionate rent. The wallpaper in the bathroom is covered in mildew, and our bed has been supported on three legs and a pile of books for the last eight months. Our next-door neighbour assures us that when our landlord bought the place it had been condemned as unfit for human habitation. There are damp patches in the living room. We hope to move soon, but house prices are so incredibly inflated that it's going to be a struggle. My current favourite groups/singers are Santana, the Family, Neil Young, and Grateful Dead. Favourite s f authors are Dick, Silverberg, Aldiss, Disch, Lafferty, Tucker, Vance, and Kornbluth. Will not commit myself outside s f. The best films I saw last year were CABARET, A CLOCKWORK ORANGE, DUEL, and THE BOY FRIEND. I would not care to rank them. I think that anyone who liked CARNAL KNOWLEDGE needs his head examined. I can't think of any favourite directors, except possibly Bunuel. Aims in life: to make lots of money, give up work, travel round the world, and win a Hugo. (February 20, 1973)*

* I have accomplished two of those aims (i.e. enough money to quit work, which is "lots" in my book), should set off to accomplish the third in two months time, and neither of us have much hope of accomplishing the last. :: I am widely known as the Least Desirable Person in Australian fandom. *

* AKITSUGU TASHIRO
4-31-17 Yako-cho, Tsurumi-ku, Yokohama-shi, Japan

I am not a member of Japanese fandom (which surely exists, I know) and have no contact at all with any fan or club. In fact I am not a fan but a reader or a minor collector, and I must confess that I am only interested in serious fanzines (I am a subscriber to LOCUS, ALGOL, and VECTOR).

I am twenty-three, short, and a student at Waseda University. Favourite s f writers include Cordwainer Smith, Ballard (especially his Vermilion

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Sands stories), Malzberg, Delany, and many of the young NEW WORLDS writers. But still I love stories by Oliver and Simak. And I make it a rule to buy books Blish hated. I have no ambition.

AKITSUGU
TASHIRO

I hope that Australia wins the bid for the 33rd World SF Convention.

(March 14, 1973)*

* I put in the last statement because many people from all over the world have added similar thoughts to their letters to me. Even most Los Angeles fans are voting for Australia, so I hear, although LA is our adversary.

DONN BRAZIER

1455 Fawnvalley Drive, St Louis, Missouri 63131, USA

*

Your worry that SFC might be too serious leads me to suspect that ole sock Cagle and crazy half-Abner McEvoy have been saying that ole bone Barbecue is a little nuts. Not so; am greatly nuts. In a very serious way. As for becoming a VFP or BNF or PDQ; perish forbid. I am just very eager; this is my third time around in fandom. Had a wonderful spurt when things were fresh and fans were few - 1934-1940. Because of my youth I attained only moderate success in a small puddle. Then came the War. After that I was married and fussing with kids, houses, work, and trying to get something to eat; however I did wet my feet briefly and gingerly from 1947 to 1950, but it didn't take. I still read s f in the intervening years; and when the worldcon came to St Louis in 1969 I got sucked back in - and hard. But in 1970 I nearly gafiated again at the horrible impression the local Osfans made on me. Luckily I kept my head up, bit in my teeth, and all that rot and got in solid with Leigh Couch - uh, not that solid, I must hasten to add. Also with Railee Bothman and Jon and Genie Yaffe. Older people with some real interest in s f and fandom. I am old, Bruce. Too bad, and I have such a good start. I am fifty-six. Seth says I'm a boy neofan. I feel that way.

I direct a science museum which has a big education program for grade-school kids. Three of my kids have left the nest, but I still have two more here. :: I like mostly the clever, plot-gimmicky writers who have a light touch in dealing with highly imaginative ideas. Fredric Brown, Sheckley, some Bradbury, Bloch, Matheson, and Beaumont. Mostly I like non-fiction speculation like FUTURE SHOCK, Aldiss' SHAPE OF FURTHER THINGS, YESTERMORROW, etc. You'll find lots of that type of material in my fanzine TITLE - speculations on real ideas, etc, more than s f critiques, but they are there too. I like jazz - all periods, but mostly big bands like Ellington, Herman, James, Basie, Rich, etc. Politically, I have lost interest. In 1948 I was asked to run for Secretary of State in Wisconsin for the Henry Wallace Progressive Party (left). Then I ran for school board and lost to a truck driver who had union backing. (Independent.) Then I quit. I have noted a gradual acceptance of many things now espoused by the conservative right. Things like getting tough with criminals, stopping the silly bussing of kids from one school to another, and the ecofreaks get under my skin. :: My education was in secondary teaching of general science, biology, physics, and algebra. Except for substitute teaching (and, of course, practice teaching for a year) my only formal teaching was a two-year period when I taught biology to 400 kids on tv - a Ford Foundation experiment in Milwaukee. (March 31, 1973)*

* Donn's fanzine TITLE has the appearance of a very modest effort, but people keep mentioning it for Hugo nomination. It's very well edited, and worth writing for.

* SFC 35 103

SIMON *
JOUKES

SIMON JOUKES
Haantjeslei 14, B-2000 Antwerpen, Belgium

I'm thirty-three years old, 5'4", 165 lbs, have a wealthy beard, spectacles, and always with a cigarette in my mouth. Married to Caroline in 1965, 6'1" (yes, like you), 170 lbs, and I don't think it necessary to give her vital statistics (I hope you'll meet her at least once in your life!). Five children: Idsert (son, six), Aerlant (adopted Korean daughter, six), Deirdre (five, daughter), Welmoed (daughter, three), and Muirgheal (daughter, two), plus two cats: Electra (Angora), and Ramses (Siamese), plus one hamster and one goldfish. I was born in Frisia (a province of The Netherlands with its own language), was very hungry during the War, lived a long time in Brussels afterwards and now live in Antwerp. But we hope to move soon (before the end of the year?) to our rebuilt old farm (I do all the work myself, even the masonry) which is only seventeen miles from Antwerp, in a very nice place called Onza-Lieve-Vrouw Waver.

I took my degree at the University of Ghent, in Romance Philology (the study of all languages deriving from Latin), while Caroline took hers in French-Spanish Translation and Interpretation at the University of Antwerp. I worked for seven years as editor of the Belgian professional paper for printers, and now am a ghostwriter and translator for a Belgian drug industry. I write books for professors who don't have the time and the ability to write, prepare the literature for the physicians, do publicity, etc.

I joined fandom only in 1969, after having been a heavy s f reader for many years. I have published, starting in November 1970, twenty-five issues of our monthly magazine INFO-SFAN (each issue about forty to fifty pages), some Dippy zines, and starting now, MUIRGHEAL, the first trial of a real European LetColzine. My favourite s f writers are the same as yours, except for Cordwainer Smith, but add Zelazny, Spinrad, Lem, Silverberg, and Ballard. Favourite music goes from fifth-century to Bach, with toppers like Flemish fifteenth- and sixteenth-century music; also I like some modern musicians like Webern, Stockhausen, Roussel, etc. Politics: extreme left sometimes (depending on my mood, anarchist), and also sceptical about politicians. (April 6, 1973)*

* Simon is in charge of fan relations for the second European convention, Brussels '74, and adds to his letter, "Most countries in Europe support Australia in '75." MUIRGHEAL is worth getting; it's in several European languages, including English. *

* JERRY KAUFMAN
417 West 118th Street, Apt 63, New York, New York 10027, USA

I was born in Los Angeles, but my parents returned to Cleveland Ohio, their old home, and I grew up there. I was friendless and read huge amounts to make up for it. While I was in high school, my father died, affecting me little but giving me more freedom, which I wasted by getting involved in fandom the following year. I went to college in Cleveland for a year, and then went to Ohio State University in Columbus for the last three. By this time I felt like a human being, got stoned, gave away my virginity, fell in and out of love, and became fascinated by movies. I graduated with a degree in Communications and no ability, moved to New York, and got a job taking sales orders over the phone. Suzanne Tompkins (also a fan - once co-editor of GRANFALLOON) moved in with me and is about to move with me again. (April 29, 1973)*

* And that's the last of a series of people who seem all (in their different EDITOR ways) to have achieved more than I have, and by sending me their mini-biographies, have made this magazine more worthwhile than it would have been otherwise. I hope other readers might feel inclined to send me similar letters.

* As for the rest of the letters.... I'll make a brave attempt to edit the rest of this column. Most people who commented on either No 30 or 31 commented on the both together. This was good, because they were really two parts of the one issue. I was going to start with letters on Issue No 29 - but I still have excellent letters on No 27 (John Foyster's JOE 5) and No 28 (everybody's "1971"). For now, I'm committed to writing as few interlineations as possible between letters, if only because I spent the first part of this column summarising most of my reactions to your reactions to recent issues. But look out, anyway; I'll try to throw in some surprises, just to upset people who skip bits of the magazine.

So, fanfare! loud cheering! firstly its: *

HARRY WARNER Jr *
423 Summit Avenue, Hagerstown, Maryland 21740, USA

In SFC 27, John Foyster has done what I would like to see more critics do: spend a lot of time on the tedious task of comparing magazine and book versions of fiction to determine what has been gained or lost. Astronomers have a mechanism which enables them to compare two photographs of the same section of sky. By pressing buttons they can cause themselves to see the two pictures in rapid alternation, and if a star twinkles or travels while they do this, they've discovered a variable or asteroid or maybe even a new planet. It would be nice if some of the same mechanism could be adapted to literary works, permitting the busy fanzine writer to find more comfortably the changes in two editions of the same story, paragraph by paragraph. I did some of this labour long ago in an effort to learn how many changes FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES was making in the novels it was reprinting, and I hit a bonanza of stupid and inexplicable alterations, big and little.

I'm surprised to find Ballard using certain techniques that are as old as Joyce: the various manifestations of the Second Coming seem to be his way of utilising the same procedure as Joyce's multiple HCE complex, for instance. I have some strong doubts about the accuracy of Ballard's remarks on science fiction as "a prospective form of narrative fiction"; if other elements of his style can be traced back to other stuff written a half-century or so ago on mundane themes, how can the science fiction theme condition the technique of Ballard's stories? (October 24, 1972)

Re SFC 28: It's quite curious to re-read my "1971" piece, and see how many things have changed and how many other matters have continued along the path they were pursuing in late 1971. I still have failed to snap back physically, still haven't had that second operation, have fallen even further behind on loc obligations, and my interest in movies has assumed the proportions of galloping obsession. I've acquired three or four Vernon Dalhart recordings since last December, in the original 78 rpm versions, zoning hasn't reached this county yet because the local authorities discovered that the ordinance that they drafted was contrary to state law and they had to do a lot of revising, the environmentalists won their court fight against the National Park Service's inroads on the canal's natural condition, Play It Again, Sam went out of business, the Odd Ball Shop sold

HARRY
WARNER

off everything in one final week of active business and closed down, the job situation has degenerated even further, and I kept my resolution not to attend this year's worldcon. Unfortunately, my grandmother who was mentioned in my title died this summer, just a few weeks short of her ninety-ninth birthday, and I'm still depressed over it.

Maybe most SFC readers will feel as I do about the contrast between my article and the others in this issue: I come off as a terrible square, one whose corners haven't been eroded perceptibly by all these years of rubbing up against the blithe spirits of fandom. Even though I look unimaginative and obsessed by the trivial, when my pages are compared with those of the other three writers, I still think your theme-issue idea was a good one.

* Then you might be interested to know that most correspondents on SFC 28 said that your "unimaginative and detail-obsessed" article was the best in the issue.

Something curious: the way both you and Leigh Edmonds write in the third person about yourselves, page after page. ((*brg* Barry Gillam analysed this point well in SFC 31.*)) I don't recall many fans using this technique down through the years. The only ones who come to mind offhand are Elmer Perdue and Milt Rothman, so you're in excellent company. Elmer still does it, although he has further refined his technique by referring to himself by number, not name (and I've forgotten whether it's his social security or draft number that he uses) from time to time.

Leigh is so frank that I've begun to wonder if the Richard E Geis influence is being felt already in fandom, after only two issues of his new tell-all fanzine. As long as it's done by a person with maturity, I see nothing wrong with frankness in fanzines... In any event, it was certainly appropriate for Leigh to buy tickets to LA BOHEME, because this article strikes the very same spirit as the Puccini opera.

Your own article embarrasses me in a way, because of how thoroughly it proves the limitations of my reading and viewing in recent years. Hagerstown deserves a share of the blame for the movie situation, because only three of those you include in your top ten for last year have shown here, near the end of 1972. But there's no excuse for my failure to read all this important science fiction and so many of the mundane volumes you tally up. I must go back to 1968 to find a list that I'm half-familiar with and not since 1967 has there been a list that is mostly within my own experience, in your novel-summary catalogue. Incidentally, your contribution also reminds me just a little of the current Geis writing style. Not in actual manner of putting words together, but in the general attitude toward self and in the fireworks of imagination which illuminate matters which most people leave murky and hard to see in autobiographical material.

Bill Wright was just a barely noticed name until I read his article; then a couple of days later he became a real three-dimensional fan in compatible colour and high-fidelity sound. In other words, he included Hagerstown on his post-convention tour of fandom. We had a good evening together, he brought greetings from all of you, and numerous pictures that disillusioned me a trifle because I'd somehow acquired the belief that all fans in Australia look like Ernest Hemingway or at least like Bill Rotsler. I hope he has enough time to spare from his Australia-In-75 mission to do more writing for fanzines from now on.

(September 19, 1972)

* Not a chance. Bill is so valuable to us when worrying about A75 that we EDITOR
won't let him write anything. :: That paragraph is my favourite in
all the letters I've received recently. Bill Wright's visit to Harry Warner
in Hagerstown must be one of the great fannish occasions, especially if one
considers how few Americans get a chance to visit Hagerstown. One of Bill's
better moments during the last few months was when he walked into Degraeves Ta-
vern for our usual Wednesday night gathering, acknowledged the hearty applause
which always accompanies Bill wherever he goes, announced to everybody, "Being
President means never having to say you're sorry," and sat down. Laughter and
more applause. Now, back to Harry's October letter: *

I must ask you to deliver an unimportant message to Bill Wright if you
should see him at one time or another. He turned out to be the last pas-
senger in the auto I was complaining about so constantly while he was in
Hagerstown, and the two round trips to the airport with him in it were the
last journeys of any distance which that car made. A few days after he
was here, I took the car to the service station for anti-freeze, and the
attendants discovered that it was the only Oldsmobile in Hagerstown with
an air-cooled engine, since the radiator refused to hold anti-freeze, wa-
ter, or anything else aside from a few remaining flakes of rust. I traded
it in on a slightly later model with a few sad thoughts about the other
fans who had been in it briefly. (October 24, 1972)*

* Harry also wrote an excellent letter on SFC 30, which I'll include later in
this issue. *

JOANNE BURGER *

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I found SFC 28 most enjoyable. My 1971 was ok, but my 1972 was quite a
year. I started it by going to England for the Eastercon. The weather at
Easter was just about what we have been having here the past week - drizz-
ly and cold. At least my house is warm. The British like their homes
cold - since they wear suits and sweaters in the house, I can see why. We
prefer warmer houses and lighter clothes. Eastercon was quite an experi-
ence. I rode up with Howard Rosenblum; it took us five hours to go 200
miles on England's best highways! I bought some good fanzines there - I
don't know why they were being sold, but I happily bought them and brought
them home.

After I recovered from my trip to England, it was summer, and I was get-
ting ready for the local con - in Oklahoma City, about 800 miles from
here. The convention was held on June 24, and the unions at Dow went on
strike on June 24. So I flew back and went right to work, helping to keep
the plant running, so we wouldn't lose any customers and could keep our
jobs. At first we were working twelve hours a day, seven days a week. Of
course, we were often yelled at us as we went to and from work - we were
usually called Rats by the Women of the Workers. Of course, Dow was paying
us extra for this; for working twelve hours a day we were getting paid for
twenty hours of work. And that really adds up, especially when we were
eating three meals a day at the plant, free, two of them on company time.
After awhile, we didn't have to work such long hours - finally it was ten
hours a day five days a week, and finally, after three months the strike
ended, when Dow started hiring people to replace the strikers. I was
exhausted. (December 15, 1972)*

* Your description of your visit to England is wryly amusing when compared SFC 35 107

EDITOR with the experience of another American young lady who visited a different convention in a certain former British colony - and froze. And as for buying those fanzines: for reasons unconnected with you, British fanzines didn't stop talking about the event for months. (See SPECULATION 30 and VECTOR 62.) :: Australians have a different word for strikebreakers. *

* DARKO SUVIN
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Re. SFC 28: I understand now better why you are a good reviewer - you have been reading Proust and Flaubert whereas Ms Miesel has been reading comparative mythology (a total fakery). Perhaps you are now ready for the next upper step, which is, of course, Stendhal and Balzac (not everything of his - say the Rastignac-Rubempre cycle of PERE GORIOT, LOST ILLUSIONS, et sim.). Maybe we should all forget psychological realism when reviewing s f, but you have known it once - and if you could not have forgotten it, you don't know what there is to forget (am I being academically murky again?). You have even read Musil! ((*brg* But not in the original language!*)) Perhaps you will graduate yet to Hasek and Andric - we will make a good Mitteleuropcan out of you yet, with the help of St Franz and St Stanislaw. A good first definition of that is an "anti-Piper" (SFC 29, page 8). As somebody says to Shylock, "I thank thee (Dave Piper) for teaching me that word": I refer to the classic sentence, "Ideas and opinions, to have any validity to the general reader (...) surely must be of a basic nature and should, by instinct (...) be communicable." Oh sancta simplicitas! or should I say, "Forgive them, for they know not..."? As Marx remarked, had the existence of things and phenomena coincided with their essence, we would, of course, have needed no science or scholarship at all. Or art or philosophy or any kind of cognition - we would just live in an ecstatic daze, like vegetarian mystics, I suppose. Or as technological mystics (Arthur Clarke, anyone?).

Please find enclosed a notice about SCIENCE FICTION STUDIES ((*brg* 6 for \$5, to Elaine Klein, Department of English, Indiana State University, Terre Haute, Indiana 47809, USA; Lum is in the first issue and Rottensteiner in the second - and they didn't even offer to trade for SFC. So I've sent a subscription.)) which I hope you publish in SFC. If ever you wish to write a succinct critique (not just a stylistic review), say, of Aldiss, let me know. We shall be active and demanding but, I hope, fair editors. Since we have so much to cover and so little space, we incline to the paradigmatic type of approach; abstract basic traits from a group of works (say by one writer), characterising its formal and sociological parameters. (The methodology is similar to the one discussed by Thomas Kuhn in his THE STRUCTURE OF SCIENTIFIC REVOLUTIONS, which I recommend highly to you. For instance, you might like to take the element of the "poor little warrior" in the sex war and species war which seems to me, from your own testimony, the basic parameter of Aldiss' HOTHOUSE, GREYBEARD, and THE PRIMAL URGE; in his later books you would have to deal with linguistic inebriation as another parameter. The downfall of the British Empire is something I find decisive for Aldiss, as well as for Orwell and Ballard (they all saw it first-hand in Burma and China). Nobody - not even you - seems to be interested in talking about which great historical events s f takes its models from: a sad epistemological "hole in the zero", I find.

As for Australia in 75 - if you wish to see us academic types, and also just for the hell of it, how about organising an accompanying series of

lectures or round-tables or panels with imposing titles such as Symposium? It might be fun, it might be useful, and it would make it a hell of a lot easier for us to get somebody to foot the bill ("I have been invited to lecture at the S F Symposium in Australia - about XY"). You might even find that some Australian university press would be willing to publish the results in a book - especially if you get somebody from a university to be the official organiser and subsequent editor? Is there no such bird in Australia? We can count about a thousand university-level courses on s f in North America by now. (December 24, 1972)*

* You wouldn't believe how little interest Australian universities generate towards s f. Still, John Bangsund and Robin Johnson (especially John) are doing their best to find out as much as they can about possible university assistance for Australia in 75 efforts. :: I've answered the main part of this letter to you personally, in much the same way as I wrote to Sandra Miesel on a similar matter more than a year ago. I just don't see why or how a literary critic can profitably discuss, say, Aldiss' "experience of the downfall of the British Empire". I've never studied that phenomenon. I don't know how much Aldiss knows about it, apart from his personal experience. The only phenomena I have to study are the words in front of me. I don't feel impelled to find sociological patterns in them; I'm looking for the literary patterns, the aesthetic patterns, if you like (which is a bit presumptuous of me, since I haven't studied aesthetics). For instance, I don't see how one can talk about the "linguistic inebriation" of, say, BAREFOOT IN THE HEAD, as just a "parameter" of the work. It must be the whole question to be decided; for if BIH is merely linguistic inebriation, then it's not worth talking about. If it's worth talking about, then it's not inebriated, or at least no more than tipsy. As far as I remember the stories from NEW WORLDS, BIH is pretty sober stuff indeed, although likely to bring smiles of foolish delight to the casual reader who loves words as much as Aldiss does. For me, to be a literary critic is to concentrate on "style" - not on "manner" - on the way in which each word is included in the whole, and how the whole depends on every word. Anyway, that's the sort of thing I said to Darko Suvin. (I won't pretend that I didn't burst a few coat-buttons to be called a "Mitteleuropean" by one of them - even if I am only an Aussie at heart.) *

I think I disagree with you about what a literary critic is. You are in the pragmatic English, and I'm in the philosophical Continental (mittel-european?) tradition, for which identifying the object is not truly possible without seeing its interactions with the context (which is historical and social, and as such inextricably present inside the text itself, even when this is not immediately apparent). I believe to talk about "pure" literature is an ideological illusion - it means just that the context you put it in is one of "eternal" human qualities and reactions "and we all know what those are". Well, we don't. Perhaps I can recommend to you the classic study of that kind, Lucien Goldmann's THE HIDDEN GOD (on Pascal and Racine), or if you know French his somewhat inferior POUR UNE SOCIOLOGIE DU ROMAN. Arnold Hauser's SOCIAL HISTORY OF ART AND LITERATURE is a good first introduction too. At any rate, even the quasi-"immanent" criticism seems to me useful as a first step, so carry on, and good luck. (March 16, 1973)*

* I could argue about this for the rest of the issue (I'm tempted, believe me, I'm tempted). There are some books I've enjoyed which come from cultures which are alien to me and about which I know little, yet which speak to me and are susceptible to literary analysis. THE TRIAL is a good example. There can be few family backgrounds more different from the average Australian SFC 35 109

EDITOR petit bourgeois background in which I grew up than the middle-European, middle-to-upper-class, Czech-Jewish background in which Franz Kafka grew up. Few countries have had such disparate histories as Czechoslovakia and Australia. I have studied little about Czechoslovakia or even the fall of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (I "did" France instead). I have no idea which scientific or artistic texts Kafka may have borrowed his techniques from. Yet, within my limited scope (not being able to read THE TRIAL in the original language), I think I can do a better job of literary analysis than somebody who spends all his time talking about those factors which I have listed above. Anybody who doesn't look at the work itself is doing a peripheral job. I look into a work to find out what it is like to be the author; I don't collect all the information I can about the author and then check off the novel against my list. In SFC 30 I mentioned that White's VOSS is a marvellous book to reveal what it is/has been like to be an Australian at almost any time since the 1800s. I think an overseas reader, unfamiliar with anything Australian, would get this sense from a careful reading of the book, although he would probably check with some knowledgeable people whether White's lingual pattern happened also to fit sociological conclusions about "Australia's national consciousness". And what could be more fictional than the idea of a "national consciousness"? No recent United States history could tell you more about that history than, say, Stanley Elkin's THE DICK GIBSON SHOW (or even a book compiled of Harry Warner's collected essays from HORIZONS). :: In other words, I can see your point; if both our theories are patchy, I just find that mine works better for me, and I couldn't even begin to think in the way that you advocate. I hope to natter about such things some time at Torcon or after. The final word:

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I saw Darko Suvin on a panel, briefly, at the Lunacon last weekend (I walked out when it turned into a yelling match between J J Pierce and the audience, since each misunderstood the other. Harlan Ellison and Baird Searles, also on the panel, were no help.) He struck me as a very reasonable, quiet man who understood what he, as a critic, was doing. He said that the writer is under no obligation to pay any attention to what critics say; the writer only writes what he wants. The critic then classifies and explores the work for the reader. And why classify? So one knows what one is talking about, and explains to the reader what one is talking about. (April 29, 1973)*

* MALCOLM EDWARDS

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On to Australia's leading non-Hugo-winning fanzine, No 28 to be precise. It was a nice idea, having four people look at their year, and I wish I'd enjoyed it more than I did. Let me start by dismissing Bill Wright and Harry Warner; no doubt they don't deserve to be dismissed in such an arbitrary fashion, but unfortunately their articles failed to engage my feelings in any meaningful way, and though I did read them they are by now just so many disconnected words to me. Sorry, Bill and Harry.

Leigh Edmonds... now Leigh Edmonds is, as they say, another matter. Leigh's article engaged my feelings in any number of ways, and I sense in it any number of resonances with things I've been through in the past, and I can trace in his accounts various steps I've been through, not in quite the same order, not the same steps with the same girls, but the

similarities are there. I relate, in other words; I understand; I sympathise; I rejoice in Leigh's happiness. But - at the same time it embarrasses me. Why is this? I'm not sure; perhaps I'm still uptight in ways I don't know about. Did you once read BEABOHEMA? Gary Hubbard did a column there; he was so honest about himself he made me squirm. I could hardly read him. It's like eavesdropping on a confessional. I feel like making excuses and quietly moving away. So with Leigh Edmonds. What I wonder is: why should he want to tell me all this; me, a complete stranger? And why should I want to watch him unwrap his soul? Maybe he's right and I'm wrong - I'm prepared to believe him. But I don't understand him. And I wish him luck.

* Yes, but as editor of SFC and amigo d'Edmonds, I rather forced him into the confessional. Mainly because of my faith in fandom, I believe that you and Leigh are known to each other just because Leigh wrote for SFC, and you read what he wrote, and quite often appear here too. For me, the added dimension was that the experiences that Leigh relates in his "1971" were also marginal but very valuable parts of the experiences of some of the fans in Melbourne. I suppose I pursued the article partly because I hoped Leigh would reveal The Secret which would enable me somehow to emulate him and pull myself out of the Slough of Despond. That was the only part of the project which did not work very well. :: I enjoy Gary Hubbard's articles greatly, if only for his classic line about waiting until the age of twenty-six to discover his latent heterosexuality. Gary now writes for Lunney's new magazine, SYNDROME, and he's still having no luck. It's nice to read fanzine writers one can identify with. *

Bruce Gillespie is much less open, although it seems he'd like to reveal himself more. ((*brg* The flasher of Carlton Street!*)) Maybe he thinks that's what he's doing, but he isn't - diffidence, I assume, makes him pull his punches: he turns the tour of his psyche into a little intellectual game, amusing but (intentionally?) unrevealing, careful only to show us the cerebral processes at work. I feel more comfortable here; he won't show me more than I wish to see, not, anyway (and this may be part of the cause of my discomfort when reading Leigh Edmonds), when I encounter him, as here, as a member of his touring party - not as a private listener, but as an audience-member.

* I really must splutter, protest, burst blood vessels with indignation, etc. I'll even break my own rule about not writing interlineations. During a party at Lee Harding's at Christmas (during BYOCon; that convention wasn't all disastrous) Bernie Bernhouse offered the same absurd opinion. A few weeks earlier he had sent me a totally incomprehensible letter offering similar comments. At the party he said, "But you didn't tell us anything about yourself in that piece." And I answered, voice rising in triumphant crescendo above amplified SERGEANT PEPPERS, "But that's the point of the whole article - that I revealed everything about myself in that article. And all I could find inside me were books and records and films." Leigh Edmonds, briefly diverted from discussing Shostakovitch, smirked and said, "But wait til you see SFC 30." And SFC 30 is, of course, the story of my discovery of more than books and films and records. I repeat that my "1971" in SFC 28 was a completely accurate and self-revealing picture of me when I wrote it; a Journey Through the Soul of the Damned, or something equally melodramatic. *

It would be easier if I stopped discussing him as if he were a specimen, and started talking to you directly. So I will. I enjoyed your various lists, even though most of their contents are strangers to me, albeit

MALCOLM
EDWARDS

strangers I have seen sometimes passing in the street. I used to be a compulsive lister myself, mainly in the realm of s f novels, back in the days when I read dozens (as I suppose I still might, given the leisure. I remember one weekend in my second year at Cambridge when I read five novels inside two days. That's the way to get through these hundreds of s f books!) I've given it up now, so perhaps I'll never know if John Brunner and Robert Silverberg have overtaken Robert Heinlein as the authors I've read most books by. Thirty-one Heinleins, as I recall! Which is all but about four. That achievement should deserve an S F COMMENTARY award all of its own. ((*brg* The Chunder Award.*))

Looking at your Top Twenty list, I'm ashamed to have read only four of them. But then, I hardly read any new short s f... only the stories in ORBIT by authors I like, such as Lafferty and Wolfe. So the four I have read are the two Lafferty pieces, the Tucker story, and Tom Disch's THE PRESSURE OF TIME. I'm surprised at your high placing of the Disch story, incidentally - I thought it disconnected and unsatisfactory, although it contained some interesting bits. I remember saying something similar to Tom Disch while giving him a guided tour of Cambridge a couple of years ago and, would you believe, he actually agreed. He said something to the effect that it was originally a rather longer story - although even then only a section from a novel-in-progress - but when Damon Knight bought it for ORBIT he would only take it up to a certain, apparently arbitrary point; the end of the story Disch wrote is, in other words, missing. Also, he said that the classroom scene which drops rather surprisingly into the middle of the narrative is by Harlan Ellison - they were collaborating, or something. I seem to remember he said something about spaceships; it all took place on one or they all flew off in one, but I may be making that up. I'm surprised at your inclusion of TIME EXPOSURES - even I, a well-known Tucker fan, wouldn't have rated it. It starts to develop an idea, then cops out on it horribly (not to say literally!).

* Malcolm then talks about his differences of opinion with me about various other items on the lists. He can't understand my enthusiasm for CSN&Y. And yes, I've heard VOLUNTEERS, and no, I don't like it. Malcolm likes (as he said in his mini-biography) the Who, the Family (totally unknown to me), and Pink Floyd. Of my favourite films, Malcolm had seen three: KES, Z, and IT HAPPENED HERE. Malcolm talking about items on favourites lists is more interesting than any ten other fans talking about almost anything else, but I'm going to abbreviate his letter drastically, and hurry...

On to SFC 29, with scarcely a pause for breath. Stanislaw Lem descending from the pedestal you and Franz have built for him rolls up his sleeves and launches himself at Philip Jose Farmer with a relish that suggests to me that he's really a fan at heart. Indeed, his letter elsewhere in the issue suggests much the same, and also, pleasingly, proves him to be a real person with a real sense of humour (even if a little heavy-handed).

I'm glad you've taken his slogan, "There are no attenuating circumstances in literature" to heart. Fly it from the mast-head! I can see you wandering the streets, repeating it to yourself, a bright little light burning in the Gillespie cerebellum. But Bruce, er, one thing, you know, I hate to seem stupid, but: what does it mean? According to my dictionary, "attenuating" means (as I thought) "make slender or thin; reduce in force or value". Applying this to the aforesaid quote the best meaning I can arrive at is something to the effect that nothing can reduce the value of literature, which is as good an excuse for bad s f as you could ever

hope to find. Now if what you meant was extenuating, that would be another matter. But suppose Mr Lem had made a mistake? Well, fair enough, his overall grasp of English is admirable but I don't suppose he'd claim perfection. But why then are you waving around his incorrect usage as if it were Holy Writ? It puts me in mind of a dyslexic deity giving the Ten Commandments to Moses, who carries them down and reads them to the assembled Israelites, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy Dog..."

* Good Dog! What is more horrifying: that Lem made a mistake, that I made a mistake, or that only Malcolm Edwards picked up the mistake? The last one is the worst (reminds me of the time when John Foyster used to write deliberate mistakes in ASFR to see who would pick them up; nobody ever did, and anyway I can't even claim this excuse). Idiot Editor, take a hundred lines, "There are no extenuating circumstances in fanzine editing." *

I can't comment on most of Lem's open letter, because it means very little to me. Actually, my sympathies go to Mr Farmer, who doesn't seem to have done anything to deserve it. And I do notice that Mr Lem doesn't reply to one of Farmer's questions: how, and in what language, he read RIDERS OF THE PURPLE WAGE, and how he could reasonably expect to understand an English edition fully. The only other comment I'd make is to point out that although Mr Lem might transliterate from Polish to English the word as Triobriand, the accepted English spelling is Trobriand. Hah, missed that, didn't you, Gillespie? ((*brg* I feel more like Eccles every minute.*)) Actually, I only say this so I can drag in the totally irrelevant observation that - as Mr Lem may possibly have noticed, although you no doubt didn't - Poland had a competitor in the 3000 metres steeplechase at Munich called Bronislaw Malinowski.

* The precise significance of that statement escapes me (yep, I'm still being stupid), but no doubt it will cause fans all over the world to break out in hysterical laughter. Malcolm then writes lots of stuff about Barry Gillam's view of A CLOCKWORK ORANGE, and lots about various other fanzines I've produced during the last year, and came to the conclusion that he still didn't know much about me, even after reading about five of the most egotistical fanzines ever produced in the medium. I asked Malcolm to supply a list of questions which might have cleared the picture for him, but he's never sent them. (On the other hand, Ed Cagle did ask me a series of questions, for much the same reason, to which I replied too quickly and a bit too honestly, and to not much purpose. That list is in Ed's magazine KWALHIOQUA, No 7, available from Route No 1, Leon, Kansas 67074, USA.) Meantime, in reply to my APA-45 magazine, A SOLITARY MAN, Malcolm supplied the following perceptive analysis of the State of the Editor: *

Your problem, as I understand it, is the old one: you don't go out because you don't know people, and you don't know people because you don't go out. If you're so disenchanting with Australia - and it sounds, basically, as if you are - why not seriously consider taking the Brosnan trail, and trying to get a job here, or in America, for a year or two. Broaden your horizons with travel! Back in time for A in 75. You never know what mightn't happen. (November 14, 1972)*

* And that's just what I plan to do. You never know what mightn't happen. And that's also the last mangled remains of your nine-page letter. I have seen no more because Malcolm devotes most of his "free" time to producing VECTOR which is brilliant, for which I am Aussie agent, and which costs \$5.50 for 10. AN INTERVIEW WITH GENE WOLFE appeared in VECTOR 65, the latest.

POUL
ANDERSON *

POUL ANDERSON
3 Las Palomas, Orinda, California 94563, USA

Oh, dear, oh, dear! I did hope that that hoary old myth about the Trobriand Islanders (Trobriand, Mr Lem, Trobriand) not knowing where babies come from, had finally been laid to rest. May I have a go at it?

There is no reliable account anywhere of any people ignorant of the relationship between copulation and reproduction. As far back as the Magdalenians, whose cave paintings show a lusty awareness of it, and probably much further back than that, "primitive" man has known the basic facts. And after all, why should he be less observant and intelligent than others?

Several different factors have from time to time given rise to confusion about what this or that culture really does think on the subject. They include the following:

(1) The paternity of a child may ordinarily be unknown, or a matter of indifference. (2) Whether in conjunction with that attitude or not, another relative of the father - usually the maternal uncle - may head the household where the child is raised. (3) Belief in alternative methods of impregnation is nearly universal, for example, by supernatural means, by intercourse with animals, or by the wind. Let us not feel too superior; we still have women in our civilisation who fear getting pregnant from a bathtub a man has lately used. (4) Dread of magic, or simple prudery, may inhibit discussion on the subject - again, a phenomenon not unfamiliar to Western man. (5) "Natives" have a sense of humour too, which they have been known to exercise on anthropologists.

To any or all of this, add linguistic and semantic barriers, and occasional misunderstandings are understandable. They soon get corrected, and wouldn't matter were it not that this particular one has gotten so firmly embedded in the folklore of the literati. Probably BRAVE NEW WORLD promulgated it among them, along with the fable about sleep learning.

In this connection (if I may use that phrase in this connection), I wonder how Mr Lem can be as sure as he is about the mating style of the protohominid. Was he there? Since Australopithecus already had a fully human-type body, which must have had a long line of similar ancestors, it seems most reasonable to guess that even two or three million years ago the missionary position was commonest, just as it has been in most societies ever since. One needn't be fanatically exclusive about it to see the reasons for its popularity, especially among women.

Of course, Mr Lem has declared his indifference to the scientific content of science fiction. But then why does he attempt to criticise that of other writers who do care? (October 27, 1972)*

* GEORGE TURNER
87 Westbury Street, East St Kilda, Victoria 3182

SFC 29 is notable for the presentation of a less rarefied, more human Stanislaw Lem; one can like the man who wrote that letter, though Farmer may not. The more relaxed style breathes a little of the man and less of the didact. (Don't bother looking that one up; I just invented it. English is hereby enriched. How long do you think it will take the OXFORD to recognise me?)

I am a little puzzled, however, by Lem's opinion that "it is not the task of an s f critic to consider the scientific content of an s f work in the first place..." (his emphasis). It seems to me that if a work's scientific foundation is crucial to its construction of a story-edifice, then this must be a matter of paramount concern. A statement supported by non-facts is mere nonsense and the critic should say so at full blast.

* George then writes a fair bit about SOLARIS, all of it included in his essay which you can find elsewhere in this issue of SFC. *

I fear I cannot accept Lem's mountain metaphor re. LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS. Personal standpoint must of course have a modifying effect on one's appreciation of a work, but my contention was that Lem confused plot with theme, which is a purely technical matter having little to do with point of view.

Franz Rottensteiner also writes like a real live human being in this issue, even if he writes as one looking down from a height of withering contempt. "...But surely he (Turner) would be out of place in a journal such as, say, THE BRITISH JOURNAL FOR THE PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE." Of course I would be out of place, because the philosophy of science is not one of my special concerns, but I remain completely unwithered by the consideration. I can't quite imagine Franz writing for THE LADIES' HOME JOURNAL, for much the same reasons, but what of it? It's the sort of "crusher" one expects from a mid-teen schoolboy who has just discovered the retort discourteous. And it isn't really to the point.

The point would appear to be that my essay style is really not good enough for an intellectual publication and it does not occur to Mr R that I may be sufficiently practised at my vocation to turn style on or off as I choose. I could duplicate his own without much trouble, but won't weary you with it; Bruce has enough translation troubles as it is. It so happens that I feel that a relaxed style is suitable for the discussion of a hobby - and to me s f is a hobby, not a way of life. You, Bruce, will possibly have seen my recent essay on some aspects of Patrick White in OVERLAND 50 and will appreciate the difference in approach and style - and in intellectuality of expression, since that would seem to be the nub of R's comment. (This implies no denigration of SFC or its readers, merely my appreciation of a place where one can let off occasional steam without having to make a literary occasion of it.)

But where Rottensteiner accuses me of superficiality by comparison with Lem, who am I to deny him? I choose to write mainly technical criticism, which deals with surfaces, because this seems to be s f's crying need; in this I follow in the footsteps of the James Blish of THE ISSUE AT HAND. There is room for deeper criticism, but where is the s f that is worth the effort? A bare handful of books rise above mediocrity in all the millions of words; the best s f, entertaining as it is, rarely rises above the literary ruck. While literature is my life, s f is my relaxation from literature and I mean to keep it that way. I simply couldn't be bothered doing the research for some piece of learned esoterica called, perhaps, THE USIFORM ROBOT AS A SYMBOL OF CULTURAL ATTRITION IN S F, because such articles are a waste of time in a field which has far less literary significance than the pomposities of the Dolanys and Farmers and Ellisons would have us believe. RIVERSIDE QUARTERLY is welcome to them.

GEORGE
TURNER

eral inferiority to Lem, Rottensteiner simply shows himself guilty of not observing the *raison d'être* of the piece. It was an introduction to a fine sf novel, written for the purpose of displaying it to a particular group of people (in this case, teenage schoolchildren). It was meant to tell them why it is worth reading. "Insightful" writing would have been out of place, risking a defeat of the purpose. And as for Sturgeon, why waste insight? The surface is all there is. Really, Mr Rottensteiner!

With reference to taste in styles of essay writing, I repeat my previous point that the use of a verbiage that requires constant checking in order for the reader to be certain of its precise meaning within the context is plain bad English. This type of writing had a spate of popularity in English usage around the turn of the century and was considered a sort of linguistic caste-mark of intellectual superiority. Sanity re-asserted itself with the realisation that multi-syllabic verbiage tended to be more obfuscatory than precise because of the users' tendencies to stretch and adapt definitions to suit a purpose. The implied lofty sneer that "my peers will understand me" received the contempt it deserved and such precious usages earned the name they got - "jargon".

The tendency of most modern "learned" journals is towards greater and greater simplicity of prose. They are forced into this by the adoption of ever-wider terms of reference within all disciplines, requiring an exactness of expression which cannot be attained by the use of words coined, for the most part, to suit special needs. Among technical journals, such as NEW SCIENTIST, NATURE, etc, the trend is even more marked because of the possibility of inter-disciplinary misunderstanding.

The long-word/technical-word syndrome is a trap which can be too easily sprung on the writer industriously winking them out of the dictionary. Bruce's selection of "antinomian" as an example could have been furthered by some discussion of its use in English. It has, in fact, two more-or-less parallel meanings, one concerning an attitude of mind, the other religious. It is the second which most English-speaking people would first apprehend, because of its commoner usage. When it is used in a third manner, apparently deduced from the oppositions implied in the original two, only doubt can arise.

I hope Mr Rottensteiner, looking down from his height of personal preference, will note the advice of a well-meaning practitioner: Opt for simplicity wherever possible; it is safer in a language which is not your own. Also, as I have pointed out before, it is liable to be more accurate.

(early September?, 1972)*

* Since George likes to argue about such topics (and so do I, but I think I've argued about this before in SFC) it is hardly surprising that the recent spate of S F COMMENTARYs brought forth from him the following heartrending cry for mercy:

When is SFC going to publish some SFC again? Or are you going the way of Bangsund, who discovered too late that "special" issues are apt to appeal to special groups of your public while the rest search frantically for CRITICANTO, etc. Creatures of 'abit we are, Mr Gillespie! Creatures of 'abit!
(January 22, 1973)*

* So am I at heart, and now, chastened, have returned to the straight and narrow way. But did somebody mention the name of John Bangsund?:
116 SFC 35

JOHN BANGSUND
PO Box 357, Kingston, ACT 2604

* JOHN
BANGSUND

S F COMMENTARY 30 is probably the finest issue ever, and I am jealous. However, there are far too many references to me in it - most of them blatantly apocryphal - and quite a few errors of fact, which I will now endeavour to correct.

Ahem.

I shall mutilate, humiliate, or otherwise damage Gerd Hoff (or Gary Hoff as he is known in this weird country where no one will even attempt to pronounce foreign names) at the first opportunity. For several years I have managed to conceal from fandom the fact that I have virtually no front teeth, and there I am on your title page, at an unguarded moment, laughing my silly head off, and all unknown young Hoff was taking a photo of me from about floor level which reveals once and for all my ghastly secret.

Nice bloke, Gary, actually. We had a late lunch or breakfast or something together in a place around the corner from the Squire Inn, and he told me how he had collided with a kangaroo on the Nullarbor Plain when he was going back to Perth from the Eastercon. Now I'll admit that I don't know half the people in Australian fandom (and the rest are barely worth talking to), but as far as I know Gary is the first Australian fan to run into a kangaroo. I feel there is something shameful about this. On the one hand you have hundreds of Australian fans, many of them with motor vehicles; on the other you have thousands of kangaroos, most of them pedestrians and therefore vulnerable; but it takes the initiative of a former Big Name Gerfan, lately settled in this country, to associate these factors and actually run into one of the buggers. More likely it was one of them ran into him, but I rest my case.

Of course your taxi-driver knew the Squire Inn. Everyone in Sydney knows the Squire Inn (except the fans, of course). Here the South African football team stayed in July 1971, and in that large carpark which you must have noticed opposite the hotel the demonstrators demonstrated and were clobbered by the wallopers for their interest. The Springbok affair probably accounts to some extent for the frequent change of ownership and general lack of spirit in the Squire Inn. I mean, right there in the (then) Prime Minister's electorate and all. The ignominy of it! But the fans just breezed right in, with never a thought for politics or racist attitudes, and booked the hotel. I have to confess that I was with them when they did it. In November '71 I accompanied some of the Syncon committee on a short tour of hotels, talked them out of some beautiful places (one with mahogany panelling and chandeliers and stuff everywhere: can you imagine movie posters and Kevin Dillon in that kind of setting?), and urged them strongly to book the Squire Inn, since it seemed a nice, home-ly, rough and ready, fannish sort of place. Yes, well.

It was good talking to Bert Chandler in that pub, the first day. He asked after Diane (Bert was always her favourite s f person) and I reported the slow progress of the divorce. He dragged on his pipe a bit, looked as though he might be contemplating the plots of his next three novels - you know that look of Bert's - and after a while mentioned many well-known s f writers who had made a mess of their first marriages. "The trick is," he said, "that you have to find a woman who will put up with your having a

JOHN
BANGSUND

mistress. And there is no more demanding mistress than science fiction. I don't think Captain A Bertram Chandler is the world's greatest science fiction author, and neither does he, but he is a great man. In the seven years or so since we first met I doubt if we have talked seriously for more than two or three hours, but each time we have met I have learnt something or placed in their correct perspective things I already knew. You can't have too many friends like that, and maybe that's why I stay in fandom.

Meanwhile, back at Syncon... You remark that no one seemed to be talking much to Lesleigh, and attribute this to some "traditional Australian virtue of casualness". You proceed to call Lesleigh's presence "one of the best things ever to happen in international fandom", and tell us off for not being nice to Lesleigh. You incurable bloody romantic, you! Lesleigh was shy, and, I think, not a little scared and lonely at Syncon. As she gradually got used to Australia and Australians she opened up, and obviously by the time you and Edmonds ((*brg* Edmonds? One day he got, that's all.*)) were escorting her around Melbourne she had regained her Lesleigh-ness. But at Syncon a lot of people found it hard to talk to her. I did, and I tried. Maybe I tried too hard; I don't know. (Imagine yourself suddenly flung into an American convention. How would you make out?) Perhaps there is a lesson here for us. Perhaps in future when we have overseas guests we should see to it that they meet a few people, see a few places, relax a bit, and establish some points of contact with this alien environment, before we suddenly overrun them.

I do not recall telling Lesleigh that she is beautiful, but thank you for graciously inventing my saying it. Neither did I attempt to abduct her, but I thank you for that generous invention also. The lady deserved no less than these things, and I stand revealed for the inconsiderate, worthless bum I am by admitting to neither. John Alderson, in his fictional Syncon report, had me quoting some sentimental Scots ballad at Lesleigh. I don't mind that, since no one believes what John says, but some people believe what you say. (February 3, 1973)*

* And I hope they'll believe me when I say how honoured I am to have - at last, after thirty-five issues of S F COMMENTARY - a letter of comment from John Bangsund himself! Of course, it might have been a plot to delay production of SFC (since the edition for which John did a cover was delayed for four months), but I prefer to believe in a genuine breakthrough. :: John continues this letter in a more melancholy tone, trying to kill his fan image of the Great Man of Australian Fandom, and summing up his position, in February when he wrote the letter, as a man "who likes a lot of people but loves and is loved by none." This, of course, has become my own theme tune since August last year - but I'm very pleased, happy, etc, to announce that John has met a lady in Canberra who seems to be The One, and the last letter I received from John contains the satisfying line, "I don't think I've so much as frowned (outside working hours) for several weeks. I feel a bit like Harding: everything's wonderful, it could all come to a screaming shattering end tomorrow, but today it's great and that's what matters."

Even more astonishing than the fact that I received one letter of comment from John Bangsund is the fact that I received a second: *

Although SFC 33 was "only" a letter issue, it was quite up to your usual standard and I enjoyed it immensely. You really do have a lot of excellent correspondents. (One of these days I must start publishing regularly

and see if they will write to me, too.) Valdis Augstkalns' letter was fascinating; did it leave you feeling you knew nothing and had experienced nothing worth mentioning? It did me; and it seems we are the same age.

JOHN
BANGSUND

It's good to hear that Gerald Murnane will be writing for you, but I still can't quite get used to the fact that our paths crossed briefly twelve years ago. At that stage he was wildly enthusiastic about James Joyce and Borodin's STEPPES OF CENTRAL ASIA. Is he still? I remember him coming to my slum at Camberwell one night. We listened to Mahler's 2ND. He went through my tiny library and disapproved the strong emphasis on Western history and philosophy and English literature. His outlook, he claimed, was world-wide. I seem to recall he had a passion for Ethippia. We were a lot younger then, of course. (February 24, 1973)*

* The country was Arabia, not Ethiopia, and at the end of a convivial evening Gerald can still be induced to expound on its rare wonders. I'm not sure which of you has changed the least - John or Gerald. Gerald Murnane, now Assistant Editor of Departmental Publications for the Education Department, but two and a half years ago a teacher-on-secondment in Publications Branch, was the person who taught me most of what I needed to know about surviving in the job that I've just left. His attitude to literature is indeed world-encompassing (as readers of Gerald's reviews in this issue of SFC, and listeners to Gerald's brilliant talk at Eastercon, can testify), although his love for the Australian-provincial is no less impressive. Sometimes I stop believing in coincidences: to me it seems just right that two of the people who have had the most influence on my life should have listened together to Mahler in a slum in Camberwell about twelve years ago. Gerald was one of the first people to gain some realisation of the impact made upon me by the events described in SFC 30, and so it is only appropriate that he should contribute the following: *

GERALD MURNANE
22 Falcon Street, Macleod, Victoria 3085 *

As you know well enough, I am not a fan and I've never been to a "con" or whatever you call it. ((*brg* Until Easter.*)) But I have the greatest respect for people who deliberately and systematically modify their behaviour and attitudes as a result of reading large quantities of fiction - which includes you and probably most of the wierdos pictured and described in SFC 30.

What you've written about yourself in past issues has been mostly admirable - a nice blend of wry self-appraisal, honest confessional stuff, and appropriately hesitant resolutions for the future... I was going on to say that some of what you wrote in SFC 30 was overdone. Then I stopped and wondered whether it would be fair to complain about the quality of a man's writing when the condition that prompted him to write was apparent "between the lines". But then I recalled that this was Bruce Gillespie's writing and that Gillespie is a cultured person - one of the few that I know - who would never offer as an excuse for faulty writing that he was overwrought; who would agree with me that writing about things should make them perfectly clear and even refine them.

So, Bruce, at the risk of seeming some kind of a boor I must say that in parts of SFC 30 you seem a bit carried away. Heaven knows, there's nothing wrong with falling in love with gorgeous creatures from alien worlds - there should be more of it, and them. But it's a shame to see a

GERALD
MURNANE

normally clear-sighted fellow overawed by the revelation that aliens from other cultures can actually find something to admire in his own civilisation; and trying to assess the value of what he is and does by comparing these things with stray bits of news from "out there".

Remind me to tell you some time that your life-style and achievements - and even the God-forsaken city that you inhabit - have a distinction and worth that do not need to be measured by the standards of Sioux City or Grand Rapids.

And now I've read the last pages of SFC 30 again and realised that in your parenthetical musings and sotto voce asides you really answer most of my objections. What a devious fellow you are!

Still, I can't help feeling that the last pages of SFC 30 are like the final passage in THE UGLY DUCKLING by Hans Andersen in which the hero waits for the beautiful strangers to tear him to pieces - only to find that he is every bit as admirable as they. (February 10, 1973)*

* And I still feel like the Ugly Duckling - and can get a fairly good idea of what it was like to be Hans Andersen from his stories. :: More seriously, SFC 30 was not itself written in an overwrought state, but among other things showed what it was like for me to be overwrought in that way - a state completely new for me. In other words, the issue contains a considerable amount of self-satire, a point which escaped Buck Coulson, whose letter appears later. *

* LEIGH EDMONDS

PO Box 74, Balaclava, Victoria 3183

I herewith award you the award for having written the funniest thing I have read in the last six months. The prize-winning line is, "Speaking for myself, I consider the introduction of television into Australia is the greatest single cultural disaster to hit us since the birth of Mr B A Santamaria." A worthy winner, to be sure; what a pity that our overseas friends will not get the point of it.

Before I can think up anything serious to say about SFC 30, I would like to thank you for the index at the front of the issue which made it so easy for me to look up each mention of myself. Valma appreciated it too.

I've been reading a bit of "Doc" Smith recently and the last page of SFC reminds me of one of his space battles. Sitting on the other side of the typer from you, separated by time and space as I am, I can still feel the static and the enormous amounts of energy which went into its composition. Just like a Smith space battle we can see some of the defensive shields going down in brilliant pyrotechnic displays and others still staying in place despite the streams of energy directed at them. All in all it is a rather mammoth effort but quite uncommendable; one can't take part in one of Smith's epics and neither can one do more than just look on as you work out your own struggles.

* Thank you, Leigh. That was exactly how it was to compose that last page. But some defences can't go down. The outcome of the battle must have been successful: I looked at that last page about a month ago and realised that it 120 SFC 35 said, then as now, exactly what I wanted to say... and no more. *

LEIGH
EDMONDS

Any comments of mine about the differences between Columbia fandom and Melbourne fandom must also include a reference to Barry Gillam's comments (SFC 31) on my "1971" article in SFC 28. From all that I read and heard about Columbia, I could see that its fandom was a FIAWOL (Fandom Is a Way Of Life) concern in which everything you did (well, just about everything) was in some way fannish. Melbourne fandom is quite decidedly a FIJAGDH (Fandom Is Just A Goddam Hobby) concern, as you pointed out. Maybe if people lived closer together we could get together a group of FIAWOLers. Maybe we need another slanshack. Anyhow, Barry seemed to think that I had not put everything in my article, and indeed I didn't. Even in an article like the one I wrote, I had no intention of writing down the real basis for what I did. That is my concern and not fandom's. Unlike your writings in the last few issues, I have not attempted to break down all the barriers. In most cases I have not even tried to direct energy at them. Valma was a "cipher" in that article, and will remain one in anything else I happen to write - a form of self-protection, perhaps, but a way of separating the fannish Leigh Edmonds from the other aspects of my personality.

As for you: SFC 28, A SOLITARY MAN, SFC 30, and SFC 31 tell me a great deal about Bruce Gillespie, as also does the METREV which includes the Kafka interview. SFC 28 was about you knowing what was going on inside your head and not complaining too much, and from then on the screaming starts, the sort of screaming that comes from a person in solitary (of the sort you and Stuart Laslie discussed in METREV).

I have been getting more or less the same sort of idea about the difference in cultures between Australia and USA. Maybe a few Americans will get the idea that there are different people Out There over the seas, and not just Americans living under different circumstances. Maybe the possession of an empire (of any sort) leads to some form of insularity, the same sort of thing which the British are trying to get out of since they have lost their empire. American fans always strike me as just normal people in print until they get to writing about the stuff they have (five unused multiliths in the basement) and when they talk about "freeways" I visualise the Tullamarine Freeway but maybe they are thinking of something much grander.
(January 16, 1973)*

HARRY WARNER JR (reprise)
423 Summit Avenue, Hagerstown, Maryland 21740, USA

Do you realise that this makes three or four months of uninterrupted and fairly prompt letters of comment on all newly arrived Gillespie fanzines? I feel by now just about as Jack the Ripper must have felt when he'd succeeded in staying home every night for a couple of weeks. Your extravagance in sending air mail the convention issue would automatically prevent me from breaking this stretch of civilised behaviour. Besides, it's an entertaining issue which gave me as comprehensive an idea of the atmosphere of Australian conventions as I'm likely to get without going out of North America.

You won't have anything to worry about when your first grandchild learns to read early in the twenty-first century and happens upon this 30th issue of S F COMMENTARY. This isn't the kind of true confession that I've been trying to warn fans about, and I don't see how what you wrote could do anything more than cause people to think that you've been frank and honest on paper. You're fortunate to have had this experience while you're still young enough to take advantage of this new outlook. Something remotely

SFC 35 121

HARRY
WARNER

similar happened to me (not involving other fans) just a few years ago and all I could do was stiffen up and shrivel a little out of respect to my age and my probable inability to adjust properly to a change in my way of living so late in life. I've never really become acquainted with Lesleigh, and don't even remember having met her at the last Nycon as she claims I did, but I've heard nothing but good about her. One thing to remember: she's undoubtedly superior to the average American girl but she isn't unique, in or out of fandom. And I think that the proportion of good people among kids today must be considerably greater than it was when I was growing up, unless Hagerstown was an exceptionally complete tool of Satan at the time.

There's one more thing to remember before you start comparing Columbia fandom with the situation in Melbourne and feeling too unhappy about the difference. Columbia fandom consisted of people quite similar in age and general interests. As you pointed out, the Melbourne crowd is somewhat older, they've had time to get differing viewpoints on important matters, and I imagine that there are quite a few fans in Melbourne who are noticeably older and younger than the remainder. The Columbia phenomenon isn't duplicated in too many United States cities.

* And when the Luttrells left Columbia for Madison, Columbia fandom collapsed anyway. Nearly all its most prominent members have dispersed: Chris and Mike Couch back home to Arnold, Rick Stoker to Alton, Doug Carroll to Tipton, Creath Thorne to Chicago, and Terry Hughes to everywhere. Well, not quite. The other day I received a little fanzine from "White, Berry, Brown, Brown, and Hughes", all residing in Falls Church, Virginia, home of Ted White, and a place featured prominently in some AMAZING and FANTASTIC editorials. They say that Ted, Terry, plus John Berry and Rich and Colleen Brown, have formed the nucleus of Fabulous Falls Church Fandom - presumably to replace the equally dormant Columbia Fandom and Brooklyn Insurgents. :: But Columbia did depend very much on the Luttrells; I guess that the only person whose loss could bring down Melbourne fandom would be Merv Binns. *

The photo pages are splendid, with some of the best reproduction I've seen outside the German fanzines. It's so seldom that photographs reproduced in a fanzine show any real texture to the skin and middle-tone differentiation in clothing. To achieve something like the clearly visible texture of your shirt on the front cover is almost unprecedented. ((*brg* Also unprecedented was the cost of reproducing those photos.*)) I think I saw most of these photographs when Bill Wright was here, or others very similar, and I'm very happy to have so many for permanent possession in addition to several prints that he kindly left with me.

Your can-opener adventure reminds me of the time I was spending a few days in New York City hunting books and music. I had enough success to want to mail back to Hagerstown the bulk of my purchases, so I bought wrapping paper and strong twine, then discovered that no store I tested had a small knife for less than some absurd price like two or three dollars. That seemed ridiculous when I had knives at home and would never need a newly purchased one except to cut the twine after a package was tied. Finally I resolved to be a slob and commit a vaguely illegal act, that of breaking a drinking glass in my hotel room to get a sharp surface free. I was about to take one last drink from it when I felt a sharp pain on my finger. I'd discovered a chipped spot on the rim which I hadn't noticed earlier in the day, and it was just right for cutting twine. When I told Les Gerber about this, he provided instant deflation to my pride over my resourceful-

ness by asking why I hadn't bought a small package of cheap razor blades.

HARRY
WARNER

I agree fully with Lee Harding's belief that personal acquaintance in fandom means much to Hugo-eager writers. Ursula Le Guin was an exception, of course, but normally the pattern holds good, as people like Vonnegut and Christopher could testify. (January 16, 1973)*

JOHN BRUNNER
53 Nassington Road, London NW3 2TY, England

*

It brought on a powerful sense of nostalgia to read your reports on recent conventions: I was so strongly reminded of the days of Mancon and Supermancon and the 1957 London Worldcon - detail on detail increased the resemblance, what with hotels changing managements and messing up the number of places laid and the rest of it. One managed to have fun despite the cockups, of course - I recall with particular affection a party in a very horrible hotel room in Manchester overlooking the River Irwell which was so well supplied with empty bottles by about 2 am that we decided we ought to send some messages to the outer world... which doubtless never read them as they bobbed downriver with the rest of the garbage.

* Thanks for the story, John. The only genuine source of grievance I have about the response to SFC 30 was that almost none of the so-called "fans" deluged me with their favourite convention stories. Instead they provided me with intercultural information which is nearly as suppositious as the stuff I wrote myself. But on that latter topic, John also provides one of the best letters:

*

But what struck me particularly was your comment about Lesleigh's reaction to an Australian standard of living. I've run across the same kind of thing myself over and over. Without being an economist or having studied the subject more than superficially, I have often been dismayed by the lack of knowledge that exists among s f fans (who ought - let's face it - to be aware of one of the most important man-made forces that affect our lives in somewhat more depth than certain other people) about economic processes, and equally among s f writers, who most of the time disregard them completely! I've been told that I'm among the few s f authors who bother even to refer to them, and if my sketchy and very probably inexact understanding of them is near the top of the table in s f, heaven help the rest of us.

I think the first I really understood, in my guts, just how rich the United States is, was not when I first went to New York (because on three of my visits I stayed in Lower East Side slums with Chip Dalany and saw both facets of the city) nor even when I first went to California... because there are areas of Europe comparably luxurious even though the class-lines divide quite differently; but when I was riding a Greyhound bus from Chicago to Cleveland and had little else to think about except the road I was travelling, and suddenly felt two facts go click in my mind: averaged out between urban and rural, roads of that calibre cost around half a million dollars a mile, and the US has between thirty and forty thousand miles of them. That's rich.

But there are more bankruptcies in the US per annum owing to medical bills than from any other single cause (an unpleasant little fact I acquired from the London SUNDAY TIMES last week). That's not rich, not in any sense I understand!

JOHN
BRUNNER

What you say makes an interesting contrast with a neat little gibe in THE ADVENTURES OF BARRIE MACKENZIE, which we managed to see at the National Film Theatre recently (and which I trust you've seen too?): the point at which the awful aunt, walking through a rather handsome Georgian square in London, pities the people who have to live in these slums.

You know, until relatively recently central heating was as rare in Britain as it seems to be in Australia, because generally speaking British winters are mild (this year we've had a couple of snow-showers, but they were mere flurries and they didn't settle)... yet this was the first country where it was introduced in Western Europe, brought from St Petersburg by the Duke of Wellington. In New York, it was made obligatory on landlords to provide central heating back before the turn of the century, as I recall from looking at the stories of O Henry, because a New York winter is but bitter. So it is, I imagine, in Wisconsin; that's full continental climate they have there, with far wider extremes than an insular climate, especially ours where subtropical plants grow - thanks to the Gulf Stream - as far north as islands off the west coast of Scotland. But our standards are creeping up, and it's no longer (comparatively) very expensive to put a self-contained system like Servowarm into a typical British house. Myself, having become able to afford central heating in our last flat, I now won't be without it, and am happier and healthier in consequence.

What is not becoming cheaper is the actual house to live in. There's been a disastrous rise in housing costs - thanks largely to our incumbent government, who last year managed to build fewer houses than in any year since (?) 1957 or way back when and at the same time are determined to tear down a lot of what we have got to extend motorways and like that. Not, one notices, in the sort of area where cabinet ministers keep house, but through areas where the people are poor, ill-organised, and less capable of fighting back.

Food has also become very much more expensive under our present government. So has health. These are, for me, the things that constitute a "standard of living" - when I hear a government spokesman boast that washing-machines and colour tv sets will be cheaper, I want to spit in his eye. Our washing-machine is one which a friend with a laundrette had dumped on him and gave to us for free; our tv set is rented; our car is second-hand and now nearly seven years old; our house is definitely second-hand and pushing the century mark - built, as near as I can work it out, in 1878. That puzzles Americans!

But they work. They work fine, and that's all I ask of any machine. (One exception: my electric typewriters have to work excellently - but then, that's the tools of the trade, and a rather different matter.)

By contrast: though many of my American friends live in larger and/or better designed and/or better furnished - etcetera - houses than I do, I have been as dismayed by the food they suffer from as (by the sound of it) Lesleigh was by "pine sauce" and the like. This is not to say that one eats well everywhere in Britain, but in London I'm sure one can eat better now than in any other big city I've been to. I broke off, prior to this paragraph, for our evening meal: saie au beurre noir, boeuf chasseur with rice and fresh chicory, washed down with an excellent dry cider. This is what for me makes a standard of living "high": not the machinery, but the excellence of the necessities! Luckily my wife is in agreement; she loves to cook... and my waistline is expanding exponentially as a result, but that's by the way.

We did acquire one luxury recently which I felt Marjorie deserved after fifteen years of washing up behind me: a dishwasher. But I will expect it to serve for the next fifteen years.

JOHN
BRUNNER

I was having a long discussion concerning just this question of comparative standards of living with a couple of Americans who were coming to Britain for a sabbatical from Kansas City, and rather apprehensive about spending a year here because the papers over there were full of stories about how expensive everything is. Well, it depends how you set your criteria, naturally, so I asked what price could be put on - for example - the "least worst television service in the world", which interferes dreadfully with my working time because so much of it is so bloody good? How can you cost the privilege of still being able to stroll down the road and collect a loaf hot from the oven, instead of one sliced and wrapped and apparently baked from chewed cardboard? I didn't realise how significant that is until it grew rare.

And so on, racking up a good few points which aren't normally taken into consideration. Similarly, in certain ways a French peasant farmer whose income may be - oh - a quarter of mine enjoys a higher standard of living: all his food is fresh, and he takes for granted dishes that command vast prices in a luxury restaurant; he drinks wine at every meal, preceded by an aperitif and followed by a liqueur... habits which in Britain are prohibitively costly and in some areas of the US are purely and simply out of the question because they're illegal.

What I'm driving at ultimately, I think (let me go back and make sure... Yes!), is that it's high time we grew out of the obsolete notion that mere expenditure correlates with a high standard of living. It is futile to be surrounded by impressive junk! I'm thinking - on the subject of junk - of the graveyards for cars which render the approach to so many American cities hideous. Amenity, too, is an element of living standards, and that goes all the way down to clean fresh air.

My feeling is that one should own what one can use. If this attitude became widespread it would spell the downfall of the contemporary consumption-gearred economy, and the end of vast national fortunes made by multiplying book-entry money. And I wouldn't mourn. People who own more than they can use wind up being used by what they own. (March 17, 1973)*

* Which is just what Illich (referred to in SFC 31) says, and part of the point I've tried to put over in various places. A friend of mine who came out to Melbourne from England several years ago is still astonished at how cheap food is here compared with London. Whenever I can get down to the Victoria Market I can buy all my vegetables and meat for a week for less than a dollar. Food prices have risen very sharply recently, which means that although I spent no more than \$5 a week on food when I was living in Ararat, now I spend about \$10 a week or slightly more. And that includes eating at restaurants at least once or twice a week. However there are other necessities, such as books and records... and now that I'm unemployed I can't afford those at all. Still, if I work it out, my only hard-core necessities are (a) a comfortable place to sleep, (b) somewhere quiet to work, (c) enough food; and 3 machines: (d) a typewriter, (e) a record-player, and (f) a refrigerator. I won't have tv on the premises (and neither will my neighbours downstairs), won't buy a car while Melbourne still has decent public transport, and will find ways of buying books and records, despite my poverty. Now all I need to do is find a way to publish this wretched fanzine at a profit.

* SFC 35 125

SETH
McEVOY *

SETH McEVOY
PO Box 268, East Lansing, Michigan 48823, USA

Until I read your comments in SFC 30, I'd just lazily assumed that Australia was pretty much the same as the US, but now I find there are all sorts of things I didn't think of... According to a recent book (1971 figures) the average man in Australia makes \$68 weekly, only one in ten makes more than \$7,840 per year, and only three per cent make more than \$11,200. This explains why you and Leigh and David were all astounded to think that I would send you your copies of APA-45 airmail. Cathy and I make \$165 per week at a pretty easy job, and we are not very rich compared with an average adult family. I just read somewhere that the average auto worker's wage just passed \$5 an hour. Both our parents made about \$20,000 a year before they retired, and we are only middle class. What I am trying to say is that we are a little below average, but have lots of money to throw around on fan activities, and I look on being OE of APA-45 as a fan activity. (January 17, 1973)*

* Then I might not accept as an excuse from any American fans that they cannot afford to travel to Australia in 1975 for the Worldcon (except for students on grants, of course - and even then US students get grants, compared with poverty-stricken Australian university students). Um - two return fares for you and Cathy, Seth, would be about eight weeks' wages, and probably about three weeks' wages for your "average auto worker". *

* MEL MERZON
5269 South Pebblecreek Road, West Bloomfield, Michigan 48033, USA

About ten years ago (when I was in teaching, a profession I only left with considerably mixed feelings after fifteen years - but that's another story), infected by wanderlust, I obtained a teaching position in an English grammar school in Birmingham.

The two years that followed were among my most exciting experiences. Yes, I suffered culture shock, but I recovered within the first few months - enough so that I began to adopt the English way of life as my own. I joined community groups, participated in the many activities around, and numbered virtually only the English among my closest friends. I suppose I could neatly sum up my English experience by telling you that I married a Birmingham girl who, when I brought her to the US, experienced culture shock. It did not take her very long, however, to adapt to the so-called American way of life (and that, too, is another story).

So let me make a few specific remarks about your comments in SFC 30.

Virtually all homes - not necessarily only the middle class (whatever "middle class" might mean) which are situated in climates where the temperature goes below freezing and remains there for weeks on end have central heating, and most of the time the heating plant is located in the basement, which, besides being used to store one's out-of-season clothing, his hundreds of volumes of s f (which his wife will not permit to be shelved elsewhere), and other assorted bits and pieces, the existence of a basement serves as insulation. Simply put, a home with a basement will stay warmer in winter, cooler in summer. When I first went to England, I, too, found it difficult to sleep in a cold house at night during the winter weeks. Indeed, when we visited England a few years ago over Christmas, the damp cold was almost insufferable. It all depends upon what one gets

MEL
MERZON

used to - and one can get used to any kind of heating system so long as he is willing to do his share of adjusting (and not expect the country he is visiting to adjust to him - which tells what the basic difference between tourists and alien-residents is, which indicates why American tourists, or any other kind of tourist, for that matter, is not too well-liked abroad. And there's another long story to write about.)

I fail to understand why Lesleigh might have been "rightly horrified by... fish and chips". To me they were one of the grandest treats of the olde sod, analogous to our street vendors of redhots, sausage, knishes, etc. I used to enjoy an almost nightly visit to the chip shop for my chips and a pickled onion (but were those peas ever gawdawful!), all neatly wrapped in yesterday's newspaper (unti the government decided that newsprint was dangerous to one's health). The so-called fish'n'chip shops in the US are downright frauds, regardless of their protestations of genuineness.

One cannot get along without a car in the US unless he lives right within an urban centre, the inner city. Indeed, I could not get to my office in the morning without my car - there is absolutely no public transport of any kind. Ours is a society patterned after the motor car for the most part. If you were to examine the population-shift patterns and building-construction patterns for the last decade, even longer, say, since the War, you would see how completely dependent we are upon our cars. Furthermore, to own and operate a car in the US is extremely inexpensive. I drove a car in England while living on an English salary so I can understand why you say you can't afford one. In England (remember this was ten years ago; I'm sure salaries are considerably higher now), ((*brg* To judge from the advertisements in the TES, they're not.*)) I had to work for thirty minutes to pay for a single gallon of gas (albeit the imperial gallon), a pack of cigarettes, and a copy of an American motoring magazine. In the US, also ten years ago, I had to work but five minutes to acquire this gallon of gas and pack of cigarettes and maybe a few minutes longer for the magazine. (April 30, 1973)*

* This necessarily abbreviated version of Mel's letter is one of the best examples of letters from people who took the trouble to write about inter-cultural differences in a fairly serious way. I have others which I can't print. I would like to print all those "other stories" which Mel keeps mentioning. Meanwhile, manfully restraining myself from launching into a page-long discussion of the Melbourne version of "fish'n'chips", I can't resist including the following comment from: *

ANGUS TAYLOR *
221 Avenue Road, Apt 2, Toronto 5, Ontario, Canada

I am sending you a CONTINENTALISM IS TREASON! sticker for your briefcase, to amaze and mystify your friends and fellow-workers. I would have pasted it on the envelope I'm sending this letter in, but I'm afraid postal authorities might call in a bomb squad and demolish the whole package, fearing some terrorist mail-bomb. (Have you ever heard of a national liberation movement with a P O Box number?) Donald Creighton, the well-known Canadian historian, has said:

The Canadian advocates of internationalism are not really talking about internationalism at all; they are talking about North American continentalism. The international ideal is not the justification, but merely the excuse, of the continental empire dominated by the

SFC 35 127

ANGUS
TAYLOR

United States. Our first task is to expose this pious fraud and to free ourselves from its spurious moral compulsions. Our second and much more difficult need is to gain a clear view of the enormous and varied power of continentalism, and of the tight grasp it has already acquired on our actions and our thoughts.

- You refer to Toronto as "the Yankeeist of Canadian cities" - that may be so (though many would vote for Calgary) and yet despite this, or perhaps because of it, it is also the centre of nationalist sentiment. In the last decade we Canadians exchanged our inferiority complex for a rather self-satisfied smugness, and our envy of the United States has turned into something approaching contempt. But, like the Chinese, we tend to distinguish between the American people, who are often good and kind and admirable, and the evil American government and American Way of Life.

(April 11, 1973)*

- * Angus also sent reams of personal advice, of the type featured in Tom Collins' letter. I'm not going to print it all, having become rather bored by my own problems recently, but cannot resist printing the following: "There is a Secret Key to the Universe. The secret is to wear a moustache and let your hair grow long. I did, and believe me, I'm a changed person. My whole outlook on life has changed. Strong men cringe when I pass them on the street, and gorgeous girls - college girls, models, braless hippie chicks, Hollywood starlets - pound at my door and make blatant passes at me on the street, on the subway, and in restaurants. Scientologists sense my power and let me pass unmolested. The light always turns from red to green the moment before I come to an intersection. Yes, Bruce, more hair is the answer. It's what the Counter-Culture is all about." I will be able to hear from here the shouts of derisory laughter when Toronto fans read the first part of your statement. I don't believe a word of it. :: I'm more inclined to believe your very interesting article about Canadian nationalism, also sent in the same mail, and which will be crowded out of this issue of SFC.

So far the mail on SFC 30 has been uniformly favourable, except for the following renegades. I should point out that this was the sort of response I was expecting from American readers:

- * RICHARD E GEIS
PO Box 11408, Portland, Oregon 97211, USA

SFC 30 was surprising for the contrast - suddenly you're human, suddenly you have that ache of longing and discontent. Sooner or later you'll make moves and take chances and risk things and get a woman to love you.

Unless... unless you are so shaped and so minded that after going through the process society requires, you find you prefer life as it is. It's all individual, unique, special knowledge. To get something you give something; to live one way you cannot live another way - as time goes on your choices and chances narrow and finally disappear in a rathole of self-knowledge.

It's hard to believe that the man on the front cover is the man on the back cover. Like me, you usually (I imagine) photograph like a mongoloid idiot. The back cover is the Gillespie Image of Self at its best. It must have taken guts to use that front cover photo.

shamelessly played to the student audience - telling them what they wanted to hear, stroking their illusions and prejudices...

RICHARD
E GEIS

Effective revolt against the Machine, the Huge System, is possible for only a few as he describes the methods of revolt - technological. Most (eighty per cent?) of youth will accept the System and be content or passive, and will willingly be used to put down the few who fight. Dick knows this. He avoided it. He toyed for an instant with behaviourism and then hastily dropped that line as destructive to his purpose in the speech, which was to pet the kids. What angered me most was his approval of the girl who stole the Cokes from the distributor's truck - and later cashed in the empties. That's an okay tactic for fighting the System? The Coca-Cola Corporation didn't absorb the loss; the driver probably did, a working man who can't afford it. The girl is a common thief, and Dick didn't go on in his thinking to wonder: if she (and the kids who gimmick the phones) can justify that kind of ripoff, where do they stop? Theft and cheating for abstract ideological reasons will always disintegrate to plain everyday crime for personal gain - and the victims will be those most easily and safely stolen from and cheated - the poor, the less intelligent. In that event how do the virtuous fighters for freedom from oppression differ from the System?

The Dick speech was a bunch of sophistic bullshit.

Ivan Illich states the obvious and expects it to make a difference. Inertia is obvious, too, and everyone's small/large stake in the status quo. There are always a few truth-sayers and a few followers, but they can't alter the rate of change, the inevitable, the process. Everyone (well, almost everyone) is a solipsist at heart. It's "After me, the deluge." Why should "I" deny myself now for the benefit of the next generations? Nope, there are too many vested interests, big and little, and too much immaturity and too much selfishness. It all has to run its course! Doing the Cassandra bit is satisfying, but that is part of the process, too! End of sermon. (January 30, 1973)*

SANDRA MIESEL

8744 North Pennsylvania Street, Indianapolis, Indiana 46240, USA

So you look like a bureaucrat. That's what John says. Now we can put a face to the punching bag... You realise that if you visit here you put yourself in peril - the cat might try to suffocate you in your bed. If it is at all possible we do intend to make Australia in '75, even if it means a two-year moratorium on buying art. Your conreports make me almost relieved that I didn't win DUFF. (Andy Porter might feel the same way)... Printing photos of Australian fans was a welcome move, long overdue. We think you people look more like the English fans than like us. This might reflect your unusually WASP-ridden condition. American fandom has disproportionate numbers of Jews and Catholics (but vanishingly few members of racial minorities). More US than Australian fans seem to live in small towns or rural areas. They find fandom a release from their stultifying surroundings. It was not unreasonable for Lesleigh to expect Australia to be like the US: common language, frontier past, and urban present, etc. It doesn't mean she expects the whole of the rest of the world to resemble the US. Different regions of this country have strong individual characteristics, too. When I was in Florida last month I was startled by the unusual appearance of the sky (lower and broader than I'm used to).

SFC 35 129

SANDRA
MIESEL

As you may have noticed in LOCUS, I was at the launch of Apollo 17. It was a spectacular event! I had been reluctant to go for fear of disappointment but Paul Anderson finally convinced me and helped make arrangements. The heroic scale of the Greens' hospitality surpasses description - their parties were like the best con parties I've ever attended. I knew about half the other s f guests previously and it was delightful to meet the friendly reality behind the names in the other cases. Tv and photographs cannot capture the full impact of the launch; the procelain-like sparkle of the poised rocket, webbed in spotlights and reflected full-length in the canal; the dawn-bright sky at liftoff; the earth-shaking thunder and sky-tearing roar of the engines; the serene, euphoric contentment afterwards. If you're going to whine like Judas, "It might have been sold for much money and given to the poor", I'm not going to waste space arguing. Go read THE CASE FOR GOING TO THE MOON or WHERE THE WINDS SLEEP by Neil Ruzic or DIVIDENDS FROM SPACE.

The acclaim accorded Ivan Illich is simply another example of the limitless human capacity for delusion. Your article and the previous one reprinted in COR SERPENTIS are the most recent of the many essays by or about Illich that I've read. They're enough to make one long for the good old days of the Inquisition when error would not have been allowed to exist. (This is doubly nasty in reference to Illich's personal history.) Some people - not your supremely perceptive self, of course - think Illich is attacking rigid degree or licence requirements which keep skilled workers from advancement. Ah no. He advocates a total dictatorship of the mediocre, in which society would prohibit any member from attaining excellence in any special skill by forbidding access to training beyond what is universally available. Rewards for competence would likewise be forbidden. But this is all in the name of a "more human society", so it must be all right, mustn't it? It's hard to see how his vision of a technology-free, undifferentiated society could be met by anything beyond the Early Paleolithic level. Do you suppose the Tasseday of the Philippines live "more humanly" than you? In this connection his crack about the evil inherent in "fast jets" is interesting. Are we to infer that "slow jets" would be more acceptable? Propeller planes? Steamships? Sailing ships? Obviously the whole pseudo-issue of "elitist transportation" could be solved by outlawing transportation. (And may I point out that jumbo jets are causing a restructuring of trans-Atlantic airfares so that a round-trip ticket will cost less than two weeks' wages for an average American factory worker. In other words, travel is more accessible than ever before.) Make people live their "more human" lives within walking distance of their homes. Supposedly Illich's theories stem from his conclusion that Latin America could not educate its burgeoning population with traditional techniques or any foreseeable modification of same. Funny thing though, China has managed a drastic improvement in its literacy rate (as post-Revolution Russia did before it). And they didn't bankrupt themselves doing it either. Am I allowed to comment on the improvement of Chinese literacy despite ignorance of that language? Such outbursts of preciousness as Illich's remark on language impress you, do they? The only consolation is that perennial human greed and conspicuousness will keep Illich's theories from ever being put into effect.

If you'd be bored by the likes of Diehl, Pirenne, Huizinga, et al, you might as well never touch a medieval history book. Or any other sort of history book, for that matter. Self-education is fine in theory, only you can't manage to put it into practice, eh? I am not a little tired of your belittling responses to my locs. ((*brg* Never mind. I'll belittle

everybody else to compensate, if you like. As Buck Coulson says, "End discrimination; hate everybody."*) You try to portray me as a plodding grubber of isolated facts in order to downgrade the value of my opinions in your readers' eyes. But in reality I'm constantly learning new things, fitting each into an ever-expanding orderly network of associations, further enriched by continual discussions with John so that I have the benefit of his reading as well as my own. Are you still smirking at my identification of Taoist elements in Le Guin's work? Have you bothered to investigate? Of course you haven't. It would be too much trouble.

Philip Dick's speech was a most poignant document, to be sure. But I cannot understand why he chose to praise thieves and vandals as the saviours of human values without so much as a mention of constructive people. In his books, his sympathies are always with victims rather than victimisers.

He doesn't give enough data to diagnose the particular cause of the rapid mind-rot in drug users but here are some hypotheses: sub-fatal dose of animal tranquiliser which is often sold as mescaline or other hallucinogens (it's an animal tranquiliser precisely because it isn't safe for humans); some new drug that is a more potent vasoconstrictor than LSD, which causes critical damage to blood vessels in the brain; heavy metal poisoning due to contaminated drugs. This rumour about super-syphilis has to be dismissed along with such counterculture folklore as American cigarette companies have copyrighted the slang terms for marijuana against the day it's legalised. It is well known that strongly virulent strains of both syphilis and gonorrhoea exist abroad and are being brought into the US by returning servicemen. But it is their resistance to standard treatment that is so alarming, not their rate of crippling. The secret-island angle sounds like confusion with the Swedish government's experiment in isolating heroin addicts so they cannot spread their "communicable disease". But my husband's employer, Eli Lilly, makes the drug of choice against super gonorrhoea (which is quite effective) and a vaccine against syphilis appears feasible.

Oh yes, your personalzine has the signal honour of being the first fanzine our newly literate Chirp has attempted to read (as opposed to "look at"). Not that she got much out of it.

PS: Tonight I exclaimed to John that what I really wanted was Rottensteiner's heart in one jar and Gillespie's brain in another. He replied: "It would be hard to tell which would be smaller." (January 23, 1973)*

* Now that sort of letter makes me really glad to be publishing a fanzine.

Where else could one be slandered in such fine style and so enjoyably? :: I've already replied to Sandra in tedious detail (and received no reply) but some points must be made. Firstly, my main point about Illich is that he doesn't advocate anything that I can see; most of his two books are devoted to detailed analyses of certain assumptions which are almost universally accepted by policy planners in "advanced" countries on both sides of the Iron Curtain. These planners say that expenditure of money in certain areas will lead to result x; time and again Illich shows that such policies will lead to the exact opposite of result x. (Incidentally, I think Dick was doing the same thing - i.e. poking holes in assumptions, rather than setting up new assumptions - which is why I think Geis' remarks are completely off-the-beam.) And, for instance, governments believe that increasing amounts of money spent on education will actually improve the educational possibilities of people. Illich shows why increasing amounts of money will never improve anything. He SFC 35 131

EDITOR suggests ways in which very much smaller amounts of money than are being spent now may have a vastly more beneficial effect. Since these ways all involve a complete restructuring of society, he holds out little hope for their implementation. Basically, his "message" to people is to "do it yourself". But I've made all these points in SFC 31. I don't even know whether Sandra has read Illich's books; they are much better than any summary I could give of them. :: As for "total dictatorship of the mediocre": I thought that's what USA had at the moment. Anyone for President Agnew? :: The only one of Sandra's points which really worried me was her ascription of laziness to me. "Have you bothered to investigate?" Gawd! When? I finished my job several weeks ago, and since then have found it a real struggle to read more than the absolutely essential things: BILLION YEAR SPREE, NARZISS AND GOLDMUND, and some other novels. In the meantime I've been working much harder than when I once wasted most of the day yawning behind a desk. I'm struggling to find reading time at night. I asked Buck Coulson how he managed to read as much as he does, and I still couldn't believe the answer. Now I must ask Sandra and John: how do you get to read so much? In this connection, I have never tried to imply that you were a "plodding grubber of isolated facts". I have said several times that I don't understand your approach to talking about novels; you seem to look into matters which are quite different from those which I investigate. And obviously, in the unlikely event that I ever would try to downgrade the value of your opinions in my readers' eyes, I've failed miserably, since you were nominated for a Hugo Award in the Best Fan Writer category, and I wasn't. :: But your last line is quite good. I might change it to say that my heart and mind are as small as Franz Rottensteiner's are large. *

* BUCK COULSON

Route 3, Hartford City, Indiana 47348, USA

SFC 31: Unless one lives in a slum your comment about not needing to know that drugs are around if you aren't interested in them would go anywhere in the world. My doctor happens to be the unofficial drug expert locally, so I happen to know the somewhat startling fact that Hartford City is one of the illegal drug centres of Indiana (rated eighth in the state for number of pushers, I've been told) but on the surface it's a sleepy, slowly decaying rural area with barely enough industry to hold it together. It's also the dirty-movie capital for this corner of the state, a somewhat more obvious, if less harmful, embarrassment.

In his speech, Philip Dick speaks enthusiastically of resisting state tyranny, and then a bit farther on mentions "the tragic shootout" in Marin County - which was a direct result of the resistance to tyranny he's just been endorsing. Either he's guilty of hypocrisy or doublething; take your pick. (Oh, he hasn't specifically endorsed shooting; just lying, stealing, and cheating. Maybe he even believes that resistance can go to a certain point and then stop, or maybe he just hasn't thought about it. If the average human was willing to stop short of violence we wouldn't have any tyranny to resist.)

And if there is anything that differentiates us from animals and/or machines, it isn't emotion. My dog has a far more profound - in Dick's terms - emotional life than I do, and she's welcome to it. The girl he was talking about who had had the abortion reminded me forcibly of one of my landlord's cows; it keeps on giving milk after the young has been removed from it, it is uncomplaining under hardship, is brave, funny, sweet, and appears to have about the same intelligence level. (Which might be considered an insult to the girl, but is really only an insult to Dick's

description of her. The map is not the territory, and all that, and I am insulting only the map.)

BUCK
COULSON

Illich manages to miss the point, too, but he grazes it when he comments on "The state of mind of the modern city-dweller". Schools have nothing to do with it - well, that's not right; I suppose they may contribute. But the problem is cities, and de Camp hits it much closer in one of his recent non-fiction books. The entire technological society was born in cities; a rural population doesn't have the spare time necessary to invent all of it. But nobody wants to give up cities, so they complain about technology, or schooling, or crime in the streets, or some other symptom of the real problem. (I shouldn't say that nobody wants to give them up; I have given them up. I'm living in the country and making half the salary I could in any middle-sized city because if you want to put it that way the country provides more spiritual freedom. I wouldn't put it that way, but you or Dick or Illich probably would. So before you rebut me, remember that I'm one of the good guys.) Do I love people more than products? Depends entirely on the person and the product. Shit on loving somebody just because he/she happens to be human; that's a species of bigotry. Or a bigotry of species, come to think of it... As it happens, I love a few people more than any product, but damned few. My dog would come ahead of most of the world's population, and a good book ahead of a fair-sized segment.

You'll note I've commented on SFC 31 before No 30. That was quite deliberate, because I've been putting off commenting on No 30. However, it has to be said by somebody, and I haven't discovered a ~~tactful~~ tactful (can't even spell the damned word, I use it so seldom) way of saying that I don't think I have ever encountered anyone making such an unmitigated ass of himself as you did in the last two pages of SFC 30. (In fandom, that is; it's a quite common phenomenon outside of fandom.) ((*brg* Actually, Sandra said the same thing, but marked it dnq. Nobody else mentioned the matter, except in the ways Dick or Disch commented.*))

I don't know if it ever occurred to you that public professions of undying love for someone other than her husband might be embarrassing to a married woman, or whether you just didn't give a damn, but I do know from experience that Lesleigh is rather easily embarrassed, and you certainly gave her cause to be. Fortunately, fanzines are ephemeral and the incident will blow over. (I'll leave it up to you whether to publish this part of the letter; I wouldn't publish it in YANDRO, but then I'd never have published the original statement, either. Publicly, I am going to do my damndest to ignore the whole thing.) I was thoroughly amazed when I first read it - or when Sandra Miesel read it to me, to be precise - because while I don't expect fans to be particularly sophisticated (since I'm not myself), I certainly didn't expect you to write like a fourteen-year-old student with a crush on the new teacher. I keep hoping it was an obscure joke of some sort; it would still be in extremely bad taste, but at least would preserve my belief in your basic intelligence. It certainly didn't read like a joke - though perhaps reading ANN LANDERS columns for years has given me an undue cynicism about human thought processes; I always expect the worst possible interpretation to be true.

(April 26, 1973)*

* Well, that's one possible reaction to SFC 30. Quite frankly, it's the one I expected, and as I've said, the reaction I received from only two people. Others might not have written. Philip Dick has quite a different opinion:

SFC 35 133

PHILIP *
DICK

PHILIP DICK
3028 Quartz Lane, Apt 3, Fullerton, California 92631, USA

I keep writing to you but never saying what I want to say, which is to say what you yourself have expressed in both SFCs 30 and 31 as a growing theme. Several people here who have read both issues have remarked on this. You present a picture of yourself unlike anything I've seen before in print: a picture of a man growing into a totality - but not only that, also articulating this growth (especially in 30) in such a way as to clarify for others that this growth must take place in them, too. I tend now to regard these two issues as comprising one of the most astonishing and worthwhile documents of a human being becoming complete ever placed in my hands.

I've read and reread the last section of the Illich article in SFC 31, especially pages 36, 37, 38, and the ending on page 48. If only I could answer what you said, because you speak for all of us in the expression of those powerful feelings - except that the rest of us can't say it as well and if we could we'd be too cowardly to say them out loud. There must be many, many people reading these passages and feeling the way I feel - Tessa read them just now and said the same as I am saying; you spoke for her and to her, too. Tessa and I feel like flying to Australia to visit you and be better friends with you. This is the way to write, as you have written; those are the sentiments and insights that, ideally, should be written about and felt. "But where's the right way?" you say, "for any of us?" To carry the question to such a high degree of articulation, as you've done, contains in it, within that act, a strong possibility of finding the solution. In a total life situation of this kind, the quest is the goal, to quite an extent. The right way may be what you are doing: sensing your own needs, your own growth, being so absolutely honest and expressive as you are, having all that courage and awareness that you show - in a manner of speaking, the rest is up to the universe... as you say yourself, "I can do nothing else but await the gift of happiness for that is not something which I can grab for myself."...

One grad student here at the University said that my speech and your article about Illich - and of course what Illich himself believes - form an extraordinary unity. For this man, the Illich part especially summed up everything he had been striving toward in a sort of hazy way... he felt you had clarified it for him personally, and it meant a lot to him.

I do think, Bruce, that you ought to do a sort of autobiographical book expressing the growth of your own amazing views in the unique way you seem able to convey them. You appear to have, by your own efforts, enlarged your self, your soul, your personality - whatever the proper term is - into something that should stand as a model for us all. I feel that my speech is a springboard for your articulation; that, to me, is thrilling. Ultimately, it is not what I've said (but of course thank you for your comment on it in the Illich part) but what you have seen in it and done with it, specifically how you have reacted and stated that reaction. This is a remarkable collaboration, my speech and the development from it emanating from your own personality. I do believe that you will be regarded sometime as one of the vital spokesmen of our period, saying things of value far beyond what the rest of us have to say. As they used to say here, "Keep telling it like it is!" (March 2, 1973)*

* Blush. Too bad the brg writer is more interesting than the BRG person. It's good to be understood as well as praised. Thanks. *

THOMAS DISCH
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* THOMAS
DISCH

((**brg** Tom was living in Minneapolis when he wrote this.)) A new day, a new page. Depression, and a general sense of what I am talking about. Didn't get enough sleep, and am hungover. But a pleasant evening of talk with my brother in St Paul. On the bus there, and back, and walking to the bus, and walking back, I read SFC - Dick's speech, and your own account of Illich, and the issue of letters from all sides. Having skipped about through all the issues when the mail came. My prevailing impulse, which I check, is to flood you with advice and eldritch wisdom. I recognise your miseries so well. Today, indeed, is one of those rainy, depleted days when they are my miseries too. When I am writing well, or industriously, the weather clears, and over the long haul there has been a tendency for the good weathers to be brighter and clearer, the bad weathers to be not quite so bad. A mellowing or a yellowing? Both, I suppose. Which is fuzzy-headed, but well-meant.

The nicest and strangest thing about SFC is how you have brought the form of fanzine to a kind of perfection. The rambling, infinitely parenthetical prose; the decorum of addressing friends before a public assembly; the leisure to say anything that is at the moment interesting; all of this done with such intelligence. And then your unrelenting consciousness of your dilemma, which can be abrasive at times, or whining, but which finally is unarguable. You are lonely and feel, in some fundamental sense, unemployed; and you resent both deprivations from a sense of your own merit. This, it seems to me, is quintessentially what all fanzines communicate - but SFC most exquisitely, most articulately. (March 31, 1973)*

* How can I reply adequately to these two letters? Philip Dick's understanding of just how SFCs 30 and 31 worked together is uncanny; Tom's use of the word "unemployed" is brilliant to sum up the feelings expressed in SFC 31. Not "unemployed" in the economic sense, because I deliberately chose formal unemployment recently - but unemployment in the emotional sense, of not being a vital necessity to anybody. Again, it is so pleasant to be understood as well as appreciated, and again I'm amazed at the way the Gillespie-in-the-typewriter expresses so much more - is so much more - than the Gillespie-in-the-flesh. But communication achieved; wheeee! *

JOAN DICK
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SFCs 30 and 31 will be collectors' items as far as I am concerned. The pictures alone make No 30 worthwhile. At last I have faces to fit the names. Does Mr Binns always look so formidable?

Philip K Dick: what a remarkable man. He lived through an onrush of emotional experience that would have shattered most of us. But he rose so far above what happened that he could look back on those happenings and write a truthful, no-punches-pulled account of it. The writing of the letter alone must have been very soul-searching and woken too many sleeping memories. The account of X-Kalay is in itself priceless. His speech in Vancouver, written so painfully at a time when he never expected to write again looks forward to a future time when the humanity of mankind reverses the increasing mechanisation of mankind. Even when he was so low he could still manage to think about our possible future. He is very involved with mankind as such, and believes in mankind. His understanding of the young is uncanny.

JOAN
DICK

He is concerned for women. "What is the consolation for women?" He shows again his uniqueness in merely asking the question. A woman's consolation is her children and the hope for the future. No matter how heartbroken she is, she knows someone must pick up the pieces and start things again. She is practical. She knows that no matter what is happening in her own small world the sun still gets up every morning and certain things just must be done. Man must make the grand gesture and pull down the edifice, but it's the woman who cleans up the mess so that we can keep going. But maybe one day a man will be handed a broom and be told to clean up his own mess himself.

* I thought the Womens Libbers had already done that. Seriously though, I found also that one of the most remarkable features of Dick's speech was his concern for women. More remarkable is the fact that you are the only person to comment on this. *

Deschooling for everybody? No. Sheer mayhem. Didn't your short period as a teacher show you the deadly impression that a home atmosphere can have on a child from a very impressionable age? The foundations of bigotry in matters of race, politics, and religion are laid well and truly at home and only the enlightened mind of a dedicated teacher can let some different ideas drift and settle in a child's mind.

"Every adult would have to take responsibility for raising every child." The mere thought is appalling. What chance would have some children have? I grant that some families could rear children unaided and give them a degree of education. Then they could pass on to the next stage. But sadly, the vast majority of parents are quite happy to push their children through the school gate and rush happily away. Their minds never seem to rise above the level of NO 96 and TIL DEATH US DO PART.(January 25, 1973)*

* I can only agree that leaving most children to the care of most parents is a pretty appalling thought, but I also think most schools are appalling, in intention and practice. Also the main lesson I learned from my two years as a teacher is that schools and school teachers do not put any new layers of behaviour over those already set down by the home. In a Victorian country town, the basic influences of extreme provincialism, endless hours of television-viewing alternating with rabbit-shooting, and the utter dullness of school surroundings, makes the job of nearly all teachers impossible. So when I was "teaching", I felt that I was very bad at what I was supposed to be doing and that what I was supposed to be doing was quite worthless. I don't know with what you replace today's schools; I just know of my own deep hatred for them. *

* KEN OZANNE

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Philip Dick's speech: Confusion enters with its first paragraph and does not depart. It is not true that it is a mark of the primitive to animate (give life to) his environment; nor should we say that a man is mature (sane) because he introjects this projection. What we might say is that it is a mark of the primitive to personify his environment, i.e. to treat things which are not persons as if they were. To call a tree a person is to be at variance with what we know of the world, but to depersonalise trees (rocks, stones) is scarcely to run a serious risk of simultaneously depersonalising people. Dick's point seems plausible only if we admit his misuse of words.

Dick makes the point that we must learn to understand our constructions by examining ourselves. Dick does not seem to be after the (perhaps legitimate) point that to understand why these machines and not others which might have been constructed actually exist, we must examine the nature and purposes of the constructors of the machines, ourselves. No, he seems to feel that we need to understand the workings of cybernetic machines by analogy with ourselves. Mention of Grey Walter's "tortoises" to the contrary, the only constructs to which this could actually be directed are computers. And an incredible view it is! A view possible, I should think, only for one with a complete lack of experience of working with computers as they are. I have had a certain amount of experience at teaching students how to program a large computer and the first thing I have to teach them is that a computer is an idiot studying to be a moron. (Even that is just a figure of speech - computers just do not have motivation in any human sense.) I do not wish to claim that robots, a la Asimov, are impossible; only to say that what we have is not even a poor man's version thereof.

However I must fervently agree with Dick's next point - anything that makes men into mere instruments must be the ultimate in immorality. Nevertheless I cannot accept that this has ever been achieved to anything like the extent that he seems to imagine. But, insofar as it has ever occurred, I would think that it has been primarily natural circumstances that have reduced men to a merely animal existence. Surely it is the man in a purely subsistence economy who is deprived of most of the things that make him truly human. There is a frightening tendency abroad to regard technology per se as evil (and Dick seems to have this view). Technology is neither good nor evil; it can only be put to good or evil ends. And the fact that we can achieve greater good because of our technology must forever rule out any claim that we should retreat from technology because of the evil that may be done when using it.

Dick has two major theses: Firstly, he claims that the physical requirements for the society of 1984 have been established and therefore we should have expected to be living in that society now (or live in it in the very near future). Secondly, he claims that the juvenile delinquent, more particularly certain special groups of juvenile delinquents, are a sign of hope that such a totalitarian society will never descend upon us. (One might have expected mention of the stilyagi here.)

I must disagree with both of these views. An "open" society like that of USA does not evolve into a "closed" totalitarian society without prior breakdown of its pluralist form. An open society requires a number of centres of power of which none should be strong enough to overwhelm the others. So long as this condition is met, as it still seems to be in USA, no such automatic devolution to totalitarian forms is to be expected. (I would refer you to THE OPEN SOCIETY AND ITS ENEMIES and THE POVERTY OF HISTORICISM, both by Sir K R Popper. In my opinion these are two of the greatest books of all time and certainly the leading defences of the kind of "democratic" society which currently exists in the West. Popper is Professor of Logic and Scientific Methodology at the London School of Economics, and possibly the brightest man alive.) I could agree that Dick's groups of delinquents were a hopeful factor only if they provided an important new power centre. Since he seems particularly concerned about essentially destructive acts by individuals, I think it right to assume that he had nothing like that in mind.

KEN
OZANNE

For me, the hopeful sights in present "Western" culture include the women's liberation movement, the "underground" press, the various ecological upheavals, and even fandom. The gradual (and spasmodic) reduction of literary censorship is another extremely hopeful sign.

The use of the talents of the "phone freaks" in the counter-productive manner described by Dick, is for me something to be deplored. Not of any great consequence however, unless it is symptomatic of the misuse of the talents of these youngsters throughout their lives. I imagine that the condoning of the petty larceny of the Coke was largely conditioned by Dick's personal regard for the girl (a little hard to square with the feeling he shows about when he was robbed otherwise) so will let that pass. Now, one of the ways in which a totalitarian regime may manifest itself is to call for (more or less legitimate) extra powers to deal with the kind of criminal acts mentioned. (April 5, 1973)*

* For me, the least convincing point in Dick's speech is his general regard for "youth" as a group. However, he pointed out very clearly why he regarded them as a sign of hope: because they cannot be conned. Not "refused to be conned", but "cannot be conned". Maybe a different group of people, such as those who sell counter-culture materials at very high prices, have conned them. The ministrations, warnings, advertising slogans, and cliches of the main technological society wash off them. Kids of this type whom I meet or I hear about are a bit frightening. They just don't know about most of the fears and hangups which have plagued me most of my own life. I can't guess where they are going, or what sort of basis for life they will create. Maybe they're just nice, middle-class kids after all - but there's something more. Both Dick and Illich are concerned with belief - Dick was encouraged by the fact that the kids he meets don't believe in American society anymore, and have found ways to operate independently from it, and make it work against itself. My own view is still that a dropout in USA is richer, more endowed by his environment, than ninety per cent of Australians and ninety-nine point something per cent of the rest of the world's population. *

* FRANK BRYNING
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In THE JOURNAL OF OMPHALISTIC EPISTEMOLOGY (SFC 32) John Foyster's collection of quotations about s f is a splendid job. I read it right through and was unable to avoid marking items here and there for easier reference. It is worth keeping as a reference; indeed, this is its best function - to supply the words Blish used when referring to the science element in s f being of some relevance - and so on. I think it could be built upon and added to, since not everything that is worthy can be there. Gernsback's introductory blurb to the reprinted RALPH 124C41+ in his AMAZING QUARTERLY about 1929, and the anthology introductions of such people as Groff Conklin, Wolheim, Healy and McComas, and Bleiler and Dikty, might also be interesting for the significant things they say when introducing s f to a readership outside fandom. ((*brg* As John progresses through the alphabet he will probably include these people.*))

SFC - with an emphasis on COMMENTARY - could legitimately use filler paragraphs (as if you needed more material to fill space!) under some such running head as EXPLAINING S F, to consist of items of 50 to 150 words quoting pundits of the past or present. Readers could contribute items for MY FAVOURITE (INCOMPLETE) COMMENT ON S F. Collected, they could make a companion to JOE, or lead to a revised edition of JOE 6. Or perhaps not. (March 2, 1973)*

SAM MOSKOWITZ
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* SAM
MOSKOWITZ

I would like to comment on Item 81 of SFC 32, which is quoted from James Blish, particularly his comment, "...the ideas don't matter anyway, it's the way they're handled that matters," referring to science fiction in general.

Any story must be judged by several yardsticks and how strong it rates in total is the measure of its worth. That the value in fiction rests almost entirely on how it is handled - presumably organised and stylistically delineated - and that ideas don't count is an absurdity. Any "critic" who makes such a statement and believes it is not a critic.

Particularly in science fiction a story must be judged on both content and handling. Any author paraphrasing the ideas of another in a technically superb manner is merely a mechanic whose proficiency happens to be words. You may compliment him on his skill but you do not say that the man he borrowed his ideas from is unimportant for that man is his collaborator and the story could not have been written without his ideas.

Now frequently an author is a font of excellent concepts which are inadequately expressed. He deserves to be complimented for those ideas and if he is a professional writer should be faulted for lack of handling, but not scorned because someone took his ideas and wrote them better.

Frequently a true master, a genius, does not fulfill the potential of his concepts. Edgar Allan Poe created the deductive detective story with Arsene Dupin. A Conan Doyle, by his own admission, appropriated Poe's formula lock, stock, and barrel and created a new level of entertainment with Sherlock Holmes. Jules Verne, in his letters, admitted that he got the entire idea for his science fiction from Poe, and with deliberate intent exploited it.

Blish states that it is of absolutely no importance that the critic be aware of the fact that Edgar Allan Poe was not the only man who did the type of detective that Conan Doyle popularised and the type of science fiction that Verne popularised first, but that it is even a waste of time to establish the fact. In his opinion only the artistry of the story counts and nothing else. This may be so as far as the reader is concerned, but how can a man have the effrontery to call himself a "critic" and make that statement?

If the critic is not aware of the history of the field he is literally incapable of making any judgment other than whether he liked the story or did not like it, and comments on the craftsmanship of the tale.

* It all depends on what you do call a "critic". For instance he could be just somebody who reads more perceptively than other people, and can set down in writing, as they cannot, that which his reading revealed. It is possible to make completely legitimate critical opinions about a field without knowing much of its history - one of the most famous examples would be Edmund Wilson's essays, WHY DO PEOPLE READ DETECTIVE STORIES? and WHO CARES WHO KILLED ROGER ACKROYD?, both reprinted in the Vintage volume, CLASSICS AND COMMERICALS. Obviously Wilson did not know the "detective story" medium, but his literary judgments, derived from careful reading of random examples of the medium, are still as legitimate today as when they were written (1944).

* SFC 35 139

SAM
MOSKOWITZ

The impact upon a reader is a combination of content and handling. If he has read the same idea a number of times before, the reader is likely to be less impressed than if he has encountered it for the first time. If he has read it many times before, but never better, the story surely deserves to be cited for that fact. If, however, the idea has not only been done before but done better, but the critic is ignorant of the fact, just what is his criticism worth?

If a man is generally admitted to be a superior writer, it is valuable to know how he became that way. If the function of a critic is solely to hand the reader his opinion about the proficiency of the writing and nothing else, what makes him different from a book reviewer? Blish would have you believe that the difference between a book reviewer and a critic is his ability to explore the syntax and sentence structure of the piece under review.

Let us move into the realm of real critics, for example, a man like the late Edmund Wilson, who, in order to review the DEAD SEA SCROLLS, learned Hebrew so that he could read it in the original. Then he studied the history of the period so that he could have some opinion to offer as their possible value. An extreme example, admittedly, but it underscores the fact that the more a man knows about the subject, the more likely he is to make a correct judgment.

Any critic, from the greatest to the lowest, is circumscribed by the limitations of his knowledge. For example, THE COLD EQUATIONS by Tom Godwin is rightfully considered as one of the classic science fiction stories of the last thirty years. I am sure that most science fiction readers would agree that while the writing was good, it was the concept that made it memorable. No one, in recent years, ever remembered reading about a situation where a sweet young girl and a gallant spaceman were aboard a ship and after the most exhaustive considerations it was determined that the girl would have to die to save the ship and its mission, because otherwise all would be lost and she would die anyway. Usually, in romantic fiction, some way is found to bring her through. If Godwin were the first man in science fiction to ever employ that idea, don't you think it is important? Suppose it is discovered or known that the identical concept, used in the identical fashion, in a popular-selling (relative to the times) science fiction novel was used very effectively fifty years before the appearance of Godwin's story? Godwin's story is still a very good one, but we now know that the concept and the handling are not original with that author. He may never have read the first story, there may never have been the slightest influence, but if the critic knows about it, has it no relevance or place in his final summation of the importance of the story? And suppose John Campbell gave the idea to Tom Godwin, and Campbell had read the novel somewhere in his youth and the idea had lingered until he thought it was his own, wouldn't that possibility enrich the value of what the critic could tell the reader about the story? ((*brg* Only if the critic could prove that such a highly supposititious chain of influence occurred. Evidence?*)) Wouldn't it be at least as valuable to the reader to tell him that a book called A PLUNGE INTO SPACE, by Robert Cromie, from front cover design through to page 240, includes the very same concept as THE COLD EQUATIONS, rather than devote a paragraph to a split infinitive and a clumsy sentence? Wouldn't it be important to tell him that the book remained constantly in print for at least ten years, that it became internationally famous and that Jules Verne wrote an introduction to the Second Edition, so impressed was he? (April 7, 1973)*

* Even as SFC 33 was rather diffuse and "good in spots", so the response to EDITOR it has been diffuse and spotty. I'm saving some letters for next issue; but meanwhile here's a tailpiece to the whole letter column: *

PHILIP JOSE FARMER
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Augstkalns is right about many things but not, I believe, about the Vietnam War being minor. Of course, he means that it is minor compared to an atomic war. And it is minor compared to the traffic casualties suffered all over the Earth. And perhaps fans are indifferent to Vietnam, but many people in the USA are anything but indifferent. It was not world opinion but the people here raising hell about the war that made Nixon pull out the American troops. Of course, there wasn't any "peace with honour"; there still is not peace and there is no "honour"; there never was on either side; the Vietnamese people would have been far better off if the USA had stayed out, the casualties and the devastation would have been far less; the Vietnamese peasant would be as well off, perhaps better off, if the Communists had won. Which they're going to do, anyway. And Nixon is being revealed as what many of us know he was all along: a petty, mean, cruel, and dishonest man. On the other hand, he did go to China. But why? Was it a sincere desire for peace (not to mention commerce)? Or basically was it a desire to be a "great man", to be noted in history as the opener of the gates? Never mind. It's the results, not the motives, that count. Nixon seems to get along well with the Russian and Chinese rulers. This is no surprise; tyrants of a feather flock together, etc. Note that Nixon is anti-education, anti-poor, anti-black, anti-science, and so weiter. He is, most of all, pro-Nixon, pro-rich, pro-military, pro-Nixon, pro-repression, pro-Nixon. It is, however, the middle class, the bourgeoisie, and the powerful trade unions (especially the Teamsters' Mafia-run organisation), which got him in. And the middle class, I regret to say, are, as usual, reactionary and stupid. Here and in every country, including, I'm sure, Australia. (May 9, 1973)*

* Having disposed of Nixon (if only in SFC), can I say that all the ghosts of issues pasts have yet been dissolved? Not quite yet...

* WE ALSO HEARD FROM: a lot of people whose letters I would like to have printed, and even some I had on my "must" list. :: On the day that I received Tom Collins' letter, printed elsewhere in this issue, I received a letter from STANISLAW LEM that not only echoed some of the things that Tom said, but also put me right on a few matters. I don't feel at liberty to print Mr Lem's letter; let's just say that it jolted me back to SFC production. :: GRAY BOAK reports that he is also not part of the counter-culture (like me, avoids faded jeans, but "I'm one up on you. I have at least got a beard."). Gray thinks that most fans are introverts, but he seems to face this situation better than I do. :: HELEN HYDE sent a long letter a long time ago about my SFC 29 report about the proposed Canberra S F Conference. Helen says that it was the idea of the Canberra fans in general, not John Bangsund in particular. And that \$100 for a convention in Canberra is a minimum cost. (No wonder Adelaide won the bid for the 1973 National Convention.) :: PAUL ANDERSON wrote an incredible amount, and I hope that he will forgive me, after he reads the letters I did print, for leaving out a complete letter of his. Of the films I listed in SFC 28, Paul had seen only one of them, SKAMMEN. Paul got SFC 35 141

WAHF the impression that SFCs 30 and 31 would be among the last to see print. Well? On NATION REVIEW: "While I still buy each issue I am getting a little fed up with the all-too-frequent retractions and just plain inaccurate reporting. Ellis is not too bad but is rather idiosyncratic in his attempts at subjective reviewing." Paul is not holding his breath waiting for my list of the best s f in the prozines. That's good; he'd die of asphyxiation otherwise.

:-: ANDY PORTER liked the Valma Brown of the AUSSIEFAN film better than the Valma Brown on the cover of SFC 28. "Valma Brown on your cover was being Arty and Theatrical. The Valma Brown in that movie was being funny and interreacting with Leigh Edmonds." Andy, who lost the '72 DUFF race, sounded wistful about SFC 30. "Unfortunately, from my angle I can only hold the words to mind that 'there but for the grace of fandom, go I...' It was not the best of things to read, for me, this issue. I only skimmed it; knowing all the things I was tentatively looking forward to doing in Australia, the things which Lesleigh obviously didn't do: Tasmania, Ayers Rock, Brisbane. My first introduction to Australia, after all, was more than ten years ago, via the COAST OF CORAL, Clarke's book about the Barrier Reef." And a puzzling final PS: "You don't look at all as I imagined you." :-: JOHN BROSNAN described SFC 28 as "a real fanzine" and gave me some more details about the Brownlow and Rollo of Brownlow and Rollo's IT HAPPENED HERE, which I mentioned in SFC 28. "I recommend their book, HOW IT HAPPENED HERE, which tells how the film was made. Brownlow and Rollo are about to start on another film soon, at long last. This time BFI will provide the finance." About SFC 30: "It created in me an overwhelming desire to attend a convention... immediately. A frightening thing about No 30 was that I couldn't recognise anyone in the photo pages, even people I used to know. For instance, Leigh Edmonds now looks like Malcolm Edwards." John's final greeting to Aussiefandom: "May John Alderson be gang-banged by a herd of his sheep." :-: ED CAGLE hasn't written for awhile, mainly because he found the torrent of Gillespie fanzines just too overwhelming, I suppose. Of SFC 28: "Harry stole the show... by exhibiting a willingness to be Harry Warner Jr, without clever bubble-dancing behind a fan of alibis, rationalisations, and too-literate posings." Of SFC in general: "SFC is something I look forward to receiving, but that quite often I find myself tiring of any number of topics long before you cease to stir and agitate them for obscure points... George Turner could discourse at length upon the proper procedure for cleaning one's ass and I would probably read it carefully. Long live George Turner." :-: SYD BOUNDS sent letters of comment on every recent issue. Some snippets: "In SFC 29, the Lem-Farmer publicity campaign continues unabated, suggesting that 'Lem' is a pen-name for Farmer?"; "SFC 30: The best convention report I've read anywhere... I am left with the feeling that, through your eyes, I met Lesleigh Luttrell myself - and this must be unique in fan writing." And NATION REVIEW was mentioned in SFC 33: "Rather staggered at finding anything like this actually exists. We have 'underground' newspapers here, of course, but a regular newspaper...?" :-: NED BROOKS: SFC 28: "Leigh Edmonds and Bill Wright... give a good picture of the Australian fan scene, which seems as alien as ERB's Mars." :-: In the same issue, MICHAEL SHOEMAKER called Harry Warner's 1971 piece "a classic of sensitive fannish writing. At some points it made me laugh and at others it almost brought tears to my eyes." Michael didn't agree much with my lists in that issue: his own favourite s f books include FURY, ROBOTS HAVE NO TAILS, GATHER DARKNESS, VOYAGE OF THE SPACE BEAGLE, CAVES OF STEEL, and NAKED SUN. He hadn't seen many of my favourite films and I haven't seen many of his: CAINE MUTINY, HAMLET, TREASURE OF THE SIERRA MADRE, GRAPES OF WRATH, MALTESE FALCOLN, ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT, THE INFORMER, etc - mainly because Mike sees few foreign films and I see few American films. Later Michael gave me a complete list of his 1973 Hugo preferences: they include THE OMEGA POINT (Zebrowski) for Novel; THE WORD FOR WORLD IS FOREST (Le Guin) for Novella; THE GOLD AT STAR-

BOW'S END (Pohl) for Novelette; and OZYMANDIAS (Carr) for Short Story. He had WAHF the cheek to pick Donn Brazier's TITLE for top fanzine. Michael was another person to say, talking of SFC 30, that "you do not look at all as I had imagined. I thought I was the only 'straight' fan under fifty. You look like the chief executive for some big corporation." For SFC Corporation? In answer to your question: I'm twenty-six. :: PATRICK MCGUIRE met Franz Rottensteiner while he was in Vienna ("milder in person than on paper... remains mild even on the topic of Sandra") and wrote a very long, very interesting letter about SFC 30 which said much the same things as Mel Merzon, whose letter I printed eventually. "The picture of you waiting to see a representative of the genuine counter-culture is highly amusing... Lesleigh doesn't sound like a good counter-culturalist; like me and thee, too self-disciplined and ambitious for one thing." Patrick was interested to see a picture of Jean Jordan turn up in an Australian fanzine. :: I must apologise to SHERYL BIRKHEAD for not having given her letter about SFC 30 more prominence. Hers was the first letter from anywhere I received on that issue (she has an airmail sub). "Gee, Australian fans look just like American fans even! (yup, one head, two arms, two legs)... I met Lesleigh while I was at LACon, but didn't really have a chance to talk. Now I understand why she was so quiet - she must have been exhausted (and that puts it mildly)." :: BARRY GILLAM spent half of 1973 undergoing an advanced form of torture called being drafted, and so could not write his usual volumes of letters. Of SFC 30: "There's a kind of marvelous tugging between the putting-in-place of a conreport and the indefinable feelings that resist these efforts. And I was very happy to see the latter win on the last page." :: ROB GERRAND, formerly "assistant editor" of ASFR, doesn't write often, and not at all now that he's gone tripping around Europe, but he wrote a very pleasant letter just before he left. "It was an act of genius for John Gibson to ride to Cairns by bicycle, 'feeling the shit of years of penal servitude wash from my mind and body with every passing mile.' What beautiful poetry!" Rob's was the first of those nice, advice-filled letters to begin with "Finally, Bruce, welcome depression and despair!" and which didn't really help me to obtain the heights of eminence of such people as Rob Gerrand. :: JOHN ALDERSON liked the illustrations in SFC 30 "with the exception of the cover. With this Lesleigh should have been a little to the left, those other two ugly bods left out and the two copies of CHAO either side of Lesleigh brought into sharp focus." I think I've mentioned that John's own Syncon report was much more amusing than mine. :: More apologies, this time to DON BOYD, whose letter I should have printed in full. Again, just a few snippets of a letter from an s f reader who just discovered Aussie fandom: "Issue 30 makes me kick myself, since myself and two of said cronies intended to go along to the Squire Inn for a look-in, but we said, 'Aw - they wouldn't like us; they'd probably be all serious and even a little Star-Trekky.'" When I wrote back to Don, I warned him never to speak ill of Star Trekkies; they are very nice young ladies indeed. "Issue 31 made my little beady eyes rattle around in their methacrylate globes like bee-bee shot: a letter from Philip Dick? Not the Philip K Dick?... It seems that he takes an amazing interest in the fate of his fellow Man, and can find time to spare a few words for us way down here in the Antipodes despite the incredibly bad spate of luck he seems to have had lately." Don writes about Lem's letter in No 29 - incredibly interesting - but no room for it. To John Gibson: "The people you meet who've been to Canada and USA either hate them or love them. It has been my experience that the bloke who drives a Holden or Falcon station wagon and thinks Australia is reasonable tends to think North America is great, whereas the bloke who drives some oddball thing like a Renault/Vauxhall and thinks Aussie is the last bastion of British justice and benevolence, seems to abound with weird stories of how every Yank carries a gun, hates Commies, or thinks Australia is the capital of Japan." Now I wonder whether Arnie Katz carries a SFC 35 143

WAHF gun? :: ERIC LINDSAY agrees with most of the points I made about Syncon. On SFC 31 - his views are exactly the opposite from mine: "As for predicting the future; I can't see that s f can do it half as well as the non-fiction writers, like Drucker or Mumford or even Tofler, rather than the no-hope, bo-future writings of Marcuse or Reich with his Consciousness III directed to people who have never considered anything except pulling the world down to their level." Since the world has little hope if people continue to believe the expansionists like Tofler, I think we'll be falling down many levels past any idea we have at the moment. :: FRANZ ROTTENSTEINER tried to continue The Feud with Sandra Miesel, but I didn't let him. I was afraid that Sandra would answer, then Franz would answer, and... You know. Franz says that he has no intention of revealing details of his sex life, or anything else autobiographical, but draws the attention of Sandra (and everybody) to the books he has recently edited for Continuum Books of USA. (More details later). :: ALAN SANDERCOCK sent several interesting letters, including a description of a rock concert he attended which made him feel as if he had temporarily entered the world of Philip Dick. Some bikies gathered at the rock concert, got arrested, kicked up more trouble... "I witnessed, at first hand, a situation in which disruptive violence could probably have been avoided if authoritative figures (police in this case) had not been called in." :: CY CHAUVIN recently sent a long letter which I'll keep for a later issue. Meanwhile, on SFC 29, Cy continues to grumble at Franz Rottensteiner, praises John Foyster's article on THE ISSUE AT HAND, and generally continues to enjoy the magazine. :: TOM COBB writes, in reply to John Gibson (SFC 31) on how the US attitude to "work" is slowly changing. :: ROB MILLER was very impressed by Dick's speech in No 31, but doesn't think anything will hold off technological authoritarianism, but, like Dick, sees some possibility that technology will turn on itself. Rob is no longer optimistic about the counter-culture ("Ten million people can drop out but there are ten million more to gladly take their places so nothing is altered... Westinghouse go on selling their transformers and in their closed meetings they discuss how they can shape the ecological outcry for their benefit.") :: MANFRED KAGE was pleased to get back into contact, for we lost touch after Manfred closed down his European-English-language fanzine HECK MECK. Was pleased to see photos of Australian fans "but it seems that good old Gary Hoff is very good at taking photos but not half as much as fond of writing letters." But Gary is very good at taking photos. :: JACK WILLIAMSON was interested to read how Dick's speech ties in with his own experience as a young man forty years ago. "It strikes me now that that young man, lacking job and money and social status, has more in common with the troubled kids that Dick is concerned about than he has with me. There were differences, of course, that saved me. I did belong to a tightly knit, old-fashioned family. The escape mechanism I found was science fiction, not grass. But still I think the similarity is real. The point I want to make is that the young man's - or woman's despair is nothing new. It was just as real before the shadows of misused technology began to look so alarming. The notion of suicide was once quite familiar to me, but today I'm glad to be alive. Of course not all the troubled young people are going to survive, but some will find enough meaning in the world to be happy that they did." :: JACK WODHAMS wrote a strange letter (on red ribbon) all about sex. I'm not sure how it tied up with SFC 33, but Jack mentions it at the end, so I suppose there's some connection. Very odd. :: DAVE PIPER sent a Dave Piper Letter. You know what that means. "The Syncon report and peripheral material is, to my mind, just about the best material we've had in these hallowed pages for ages. Incidentally it's just about the first conreport I've read which really produced a feeling of envy in my breast (or wherever such a feeling materialises!) and made me wish I'd been there. Which coming from a geezer who's never been to a con, is not a bad endorsement, is it?... This letter is

really a plea for more issues like No 30 with more personal-Gillespie-I-must-WAHF
be-talking-to-my-friends-editorial-chat which I enjoy tremendously. I'm now
going to bed with some hot milk and a fervent prayer that this cold goes."
I hope your cold went, and I hope you appreciate the results of the current,
and probably final, attempt to combine both chatty Gillespie and Serious Gill-
ispie in one issue. :: ROBERT BLOCH sent some nice advice. "I do understand
what you're going through. And all I can tell you - having been there myself
in the past - is that, granted the patience, the perspective, and the sense of
proportion and humour necessary, you will go through it and emerge on the
other side to find yourself on a higher plateau." I'm still waiting for the
plateau. Am still passing big boulders on the rocky slopes. Sometime I'd
appreciate hearing how you made it to your plateau. :: ALEXIS GILLILAND was
pleased to get to know me a lot better after reading SFC 30 than before. He
has some comments on the DUFF trip ("in Australia, far from her native habi-
tat, Lesleigh would be a rare and exotic flower indeed") and Dick's speech.
Alexis describes even "ethical" drugs as a Bad Thing - "They are popular with
doctors because they are easy to use.." "I thank you for your patience in
sending me all those SFCs without response. I expect to vote for Australia in
75, and if you will believe it, I might even make it over." :: DON AYRES
sent two very long letters, including a very long discussion with footnotes of
the matters raised by Lem and Farmer in earlier issues of the magazine. All
very interesting - but just no room here for it. In his second letter, Don
says that he identifies very closely with SFCs 30 and 31. He suggests that I
should read some works of Nikos Kazantzakis. I remember being affected
strongly by the film of ZORBA THE GREEK some years ago, but I still haven't
read any of Kazantzakis' books. Don gives an amusing account of problems si-
milar to mine. Finally he took the step of joining a co-ed dorm at college.
Latest news? "The day approaches when I might even kiss someone if an approp-
riate face comes into the vicinity." More abstractly, "Every dreamer must ul-
timately make the decision of whether he should be humanised or if he should
cling to his dream. For most, the humanisation process is naturally assimila-
tated... a few, though, somehow become ascotic in their youth and thus es-
cape the usual process to become Lovecrafts and other artists. For them, the
decision must ultimately come to a conscious one. They must say, 'I am going
to subjugate my dream to the forces of the reality and biologic and economic
needs.'" Yes, well, Don; I sort of made that decision, and not a single damn
thing happened. I'm going to be an ascotic, whether I like it or not. And
talk about dreams.. I actually have a dream that in a week's time this mag-
azine will exist. Don also identifies with STEPPENWOLF. Don writes an enor-
mous amount about SFC 32, and I'm disappointed that I can't print that. ::
RAILEE BOTHMAN wrote a very interesting letter about Nos 30 and 31 - but she
doesn't want it all quoted. But a few comments: "My fifteen-year-old thinks we
are really cruel because she can't have her own electric typewriter, contact
lenses, and a silver open-hole flute. Next year we will be hearing it about
a car. Her friends are so sorry for her because we think the girls should
have to work to earn what they want. It's not that Americans are 'enamoured'
of physical comfort; we are just accustomed to it. And why should we be con-
demned for wanting to be comfortable if we are willing to work for that com-
fort? My oldest daughter and her husband, starting with nothing when they
were married three years ago, own two houses, a photo studio, and a Jaguar
ZKE. To do this Vince works full-time as a chemical engineer and Vickiputs..
in fulldays in the darkroom. On weekends and nights they take weddings and
portraits. We are so very proud of them that they know what they want and are
willing to work for it, which is more than you can say for most of the coun-
ter-culture." I can say nothing except that it's not the way I'd like to
live. No doubt yours is a legitimate view - it just happens to be the oppos- SFC 35 145

rington, Illinois, re-establishes contact with SFC, and comments that "Your con reports were interesting mostly when they were about Lesleigh Luttrell, who would never be left alone like that at an American con because Tucker and Bloch would sink their filthy talons in her unless Hensley and I arrived to protect her first." :: DOUGLAS WENDT doesn't share my enthusiasm for the Dick speech. :: MIKE BAILEY, who, with Daniel Say, was the bloke chiefly responsible for the fact that I could run the Dick speech in SFC, wrote another one of those long, interesting letters which I would have printed if only... Well you know the story by now. "Do you realise that I'm a master of asides?" writes Mike, and sure enough, his letter is entirely filled with asides. A good one: "When a friend and I went to LACon we used to play a game of looking at a person and guessing whether or not he was a fan. Usually we were right and as a point of interest, I glanced at one person and stated, 'That must be Mike Glicksohn.' He was." Mike is shortly to publish a magazine which features a nineteen-page article by Philip Dick. (His address is Apt 4, 2416 West 3rd Avenue, Vancouver 9, British Columbia, Canada.) :: DAVID LEAVITT explained carefully to me why he didn't like Lem's SOLARIS - a vain enterprise for a magazine editor who publishes two articles about that book in the one issue. As opposed to SOLARIS, "If we are going to proselytise, let's work with the masterpieces we have: CITY, CHILDHOOD'S END, A CANTICLE FOR LEIBOWITZ, and others of that ilk." Don't laugh too loud, Franz. (Okay, CANTICLE is pretty good. SOLARIS is better.) :: Who better to finish this column than DAMIEN BRODERICK who tells me that "Within the pages of WHO'S WHO for 1972-73 I chanced at last upon the testimonial for a British writer named Aldiss, Brian W, and my soul was elevated indeed to learn that from the plentiful array of prizes and awards which doubtless have been heaped upon this notable's head one of the very few to be documented in this famous volume is his receipt of the Ditmar Award, that internationally celebrated tribute. The cause of scholarship was less well served, alas, when I rushed rejoicing from that place without determining whether the other names of Dr Dick Jenksen were to be found in the pages of the work. Perhaps I could leave this patriotic exercise in your capable hands." Perhaps. In answer to your recent, no-doubt-badly-reported question, Damien, the answer is yes. I have gone completely mad. As evidence, take this issue of the magazine.

* I have left myself little to do at this end of the magazine, except to provide this review: :: I should have given a full-scale review to BAD MOON RISING (AN ANTHOLOGY OF POLITICAL FOREBODINGS), edited by Thomas Disch (Harper & Row; 1973; 302 pp; \$6.95), but the CRITICANTO part of SFC seems to have suffered most from the magazine's recent metamorphoses. BAD MOON RISING is an original fiction anthology, and while it is one of the best of the recent batch, it is still not as good as I expected. I can't imagine Tom Disch being a bad editor, so I must assume that even when you ask nearly every major new-generation s f writer to contribute to a collection of this type, you still receive a lot of so-so stories. Or perhaps the doom-and-forebodings theme is worn out, if only by s f writers. At any rate, the best story is WE ARE DAINTY LITTLE PEOPLE, by Charles Naylor, which I liked particularly because I had moved into my flat just a week before I read it. A very nice horror story, if you find city life horrifying. Also impressive: Disch's own EVERYDAY LIFE IN THE LATER ROMAN EMPIRE (included in the 334 volume) and Geo Alec Effinger's RELATIVES. But there's not much else, except perhaps the Sladdek, and I can't help but wonder why. :: Just space enough to mention again the five books of European s f that Continuum Books (Seabury Press) have just published: Lem's THE INVINCIBLE and MEMOIRS FOUND IN A BATHTUB, the Strugatskys' HARD TO BE A GOD (discussed at length by Darke Suvin in this issue), Stefan Wul's TEMPLE OF THE PAST, and Franz Rottensteiner's collection VIEW FROM ANOTHER SHORE. All worth buying. :: B'bye. Last stencil Aug 22 1973.*

