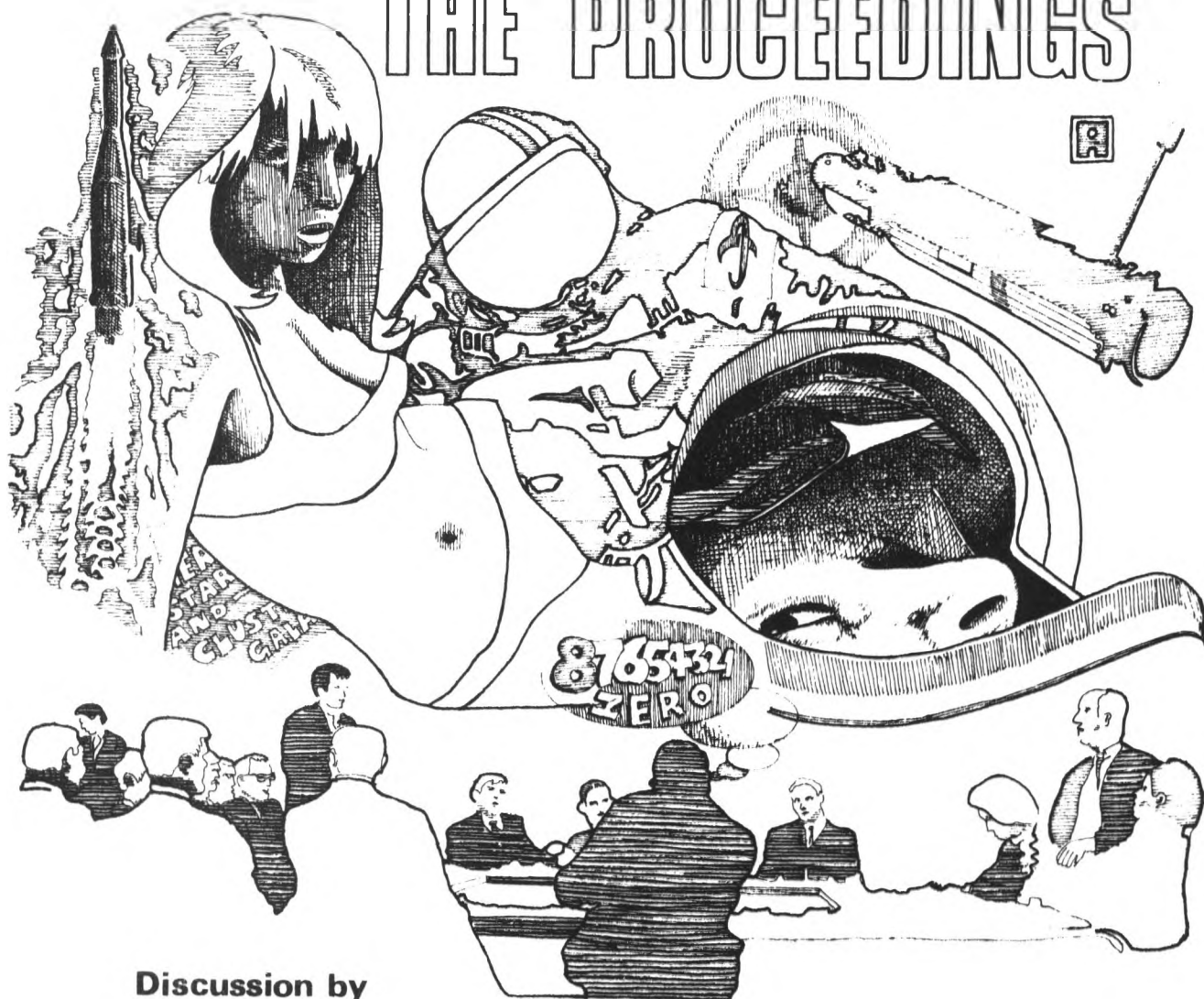


Speculation

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CONVENTION '67

THE PROCEEDINGS



Discussion by

BRUNNER • ALDISS • MERRIL
DISCH • MOORCOCK • WHITE
& OTHER FEATURES

Speculation

AUTUMN 1967

VOL.2 No.4 (ISSUE 16)

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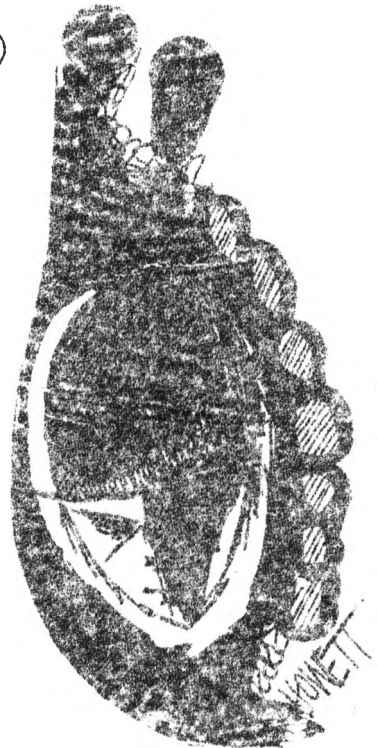
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some sources of ideas for writers.

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HALLO AGAIN, this is that long-delayed Speculation-16, a special Convention issue, but so late that you've probably forgotten which convention we're talking about. There's been a six-month (or so) gap in publication, but a lot has been happening in that time. You can read about it in "Explanations" on Page 6, which continues on Page 34. The Convention Report below was written and stencilled in early May, and is therefore pretty dated. Nonetheless, I hope you will enjoy it.

THE SPECULATOR AT THE CONVENTION

"Excuse me, Mr Walsh," I said politely, "but I've read science fiction all my life and I've just heard there's a sort of conference going on in this hotel, about science fiction, and I wonder if you can tell me something about it?"

Tony Walsh snarled at this innocent question, and went away muttering to himself.

Seriously though, Bristol in '67 was a good convention as they go, at which a fine time was had by very nearly everybody. In retrospect the weekend seems to have been slower, more leisurely-paced than fabulous Yarmouth last year, but in its own way just as enjoyable. Or perhaps the difference was in the observer rather than the events - writing as I am some weeks after returning to comparatively ordinary life, it is hard to be sure.

Possibly one of the funniest moments for me during the whole three days occurred when Michael Moorcock saw Brian Burgess in the hotel lobby, inoffensively reading an Ace paperback called AT THE WORLD'S EDGE, or something like that.

"Oh Brian, will you sell me that book?" were Mike Moorcock's sentiments. "I'd like to have it. Look here, I'll give you 5/- for it. You can go along to Slater's bookshop and get another one, and make a 1/- profit."

Brian Burgess suspiciously looked the proposition over. He could see no danger in the situation, and happily handed the book over in exchange for two bright half-crowns which Moorcock tossed to him.

With a devilish snarl of "I hate this bloody awful book," Mike opened the thing at the centre, split it down the spine, and to the delight of his audience proceeded to tear it time after time into postage stamp-sized pieces. He deposited these in an ashtray and walked away.

Burgess had watched in horror and bewilderment, and then, reasoning that he was up on the deal with his 1/- profit, toddled away to get some more copies of the book in the hope that Moorcock would want to repeat the performance.

Ramble through the Gay Nineties

The hotel itself was pleasant, served cheap and enjoyable food in a variety of restaurants, and was possibly the most rambling structure I have ever visited. It had evidently at one time been converted from half a dozen huge mansions, all built to different plans and elevations, and as a consequence stairs, doors, passages, rooms and floors led off at literally all angles. One corridor on the third floor, between the main block and the "Gay Nineties" wing had no ceiling - it was just a glorified catwalk over the rooftops, open to the stars.

All weekend people were to be seen wandering in search of their rooms. At one party on Saturday night a fan who had better remain nameless clutched my arm and said urgently, "Pete, get me to a bathroom." And then, with mounting horror, "get me to a bathroom quick !" He would never have found one in time by himself - as it was we shot along corridors, up and down stairs, and at that only just made it !

I remember that Ted Tubb (a strangely subdued Ted Tubb this year) was particularly incensed because his room was in a sort of private Ivory Tower, far away from the rest of the convention, with an untrustworthy lift as his only means of escape and communication! And on the Sunday afternoon in a spirit of adventure, I personally discovered three previously unknown bars, two staircases and a restaurant.

No Straight-man

But what of the proceedings, you'll want to know. Who said what to whom, and whatever happened to the BSFA ?

You'll see from the bulk of this issue that a fair amount of time was devoted to mostly serious discussion of science fiction and near-related topics. The formal programme actually opened on the Friday night, when an unusually withdrawn Brian Aldiss (perhaps missing his straight-man Harry Harrison) opened proceedings with the "Brian Aldiss Show". This was intended to introduce notorious fans and professionals to the audience, but somehow never really sparkled.

Saturday morning saw the first discussion on SF, when a panel of six professional authors took part in a 'pro-panel' debate on various topics of interest or otherwise. "I started telling stories at boarding school, after lights out" said John Brunner, "and by the time I left school I had a very good idea of how to tell a story." This anecdote explains how at least one writer began his career. The discussion carried on in entertaining vein until flagged down in its prime by somebody on the convention committee, who wanted to give assorted fan-editors an opportunity to sell their wares. ("Hands up anybody nere who doesn't edit a fanzine!") Your editor declined this invitation by quietly slinking out to the bar; after all, there is a time and a place for everything !

"I hate science fiction," I remember saying with the deepest conviction at 5.30 on Monday morning at a bleary little session in Gerry Webb's room. Then I saw a pile of cruddy British paperbacks which Gerry had accidentally bought at an auction. Against protests from Gerry I managed to get his third-floor window open, and then he reluctantly let me go ahead and happily hurl cruddy paperbacks over the dark rooftops below.

Film programme - for private showing only !

On Saturday afternoon we saw a French film titled "La Jetee", which I found immensely boring. This was followed by "Relativity", a colour film produced by artist Ed Emshwiller. This was really shocking in its choice of sequences; Mondo Cane was never like this, yet the message must have been much the same; 'This is life -.look at it'. It caused so much comment that it was later shown again during the convention, and I know of at least one amusing side-effect resulting from the film;

In some of the scenes, a man wearing what looked like white underwear was seen shifting from one foot to another while humming a catchy little tune. For the rest of the weekend afterwards, the occasional fan would be caught red-faced, humming and swaying as he crossed the road, stood at the bar, or walked through the lobby. For a few days after the con it looked as if this new habit would prove permanent !

John Brunner's Guest-of-Honour speech followed, and in spite of its length it managed to keep its audience, despite the hot afternoon. John was especially enraged at some sub-editor who had played about with his latest novel. "How many unwarranted, unnecessary - actively detrimental - changes do you think Charlie Ignoramus can cram into the opening chapter ?" he asked. And the

answer, as you'll read later in the magazine, was 55. Sufficient here to say that the audience was suitably sympathetic while suitably entertained.

Ordinary inhabitants of Bristol began to arrive in the convention hall after dinner, for the hotel management had organised its customary Saturday evening dance. Some of the braver fannish souls (he says, with considerable pride) ventured out on to the floor for a quick waltz or quickstep or whatever. The rest of the convention party assembled in a private suite for a cider and sherry evening, although almost everybody was drinking beer. It was here that I became mixed up with Tony Walsh, Frank Herbert and Jim Marshall for a rather dirty little session during which my "brown paper parcel" story prompted a very gratifying reaction.

Most of my other special friends were at this party, including Gerry & Anne Webb, Alex & Phyllis Eisenstein (who told me all about those many people in the USA whom I previously knew only through their letters); Dick & Diane Ellingsworth, & many others. In the middle of the evening Tony & Simone Walsh were pleased to be able to announce that convention memberships had passed the 200-mark, making Bristol in '67 perhaps the biggest-ever British annual convention.

New committee for the BSFA

Most people attended the Sunday morning session of the annual general meeting of the British Science Fiction Association. It was here that I very nearly became involved with organising a future convention. I had been talking through the weekend with other local fans about the possibility of holding a convention in the Birmingham area in 1969; then, while eating a quiet breakfast on Sunday morning, Rog Peyton & Darroll Pardoe rushed up and told me I had to go along and make an official bid for the site. Since Cambridge had by then also come forward, we decided there and then to postpone our bid until we had something a little more concrete to offer in the way of hotels and arrangements. Perhaps we'll do something spectacular in '70!

I am told that a new committee was elected at the AGM, to steer the Association away from the troubled waters in which it has drifted of late. Doreen Parker retained the Secretaryship and Ken Slater the Vice-presidency; Roje Gilbert was elected as chairman, Dave Barber as Treasurer, and Darroll Pardoe/ as a two-headed publications officer.

Meanwhile, Speculation had a rather vulgar and pretentious stand in the display room. It was a 7-foot high affair, made from collapsible tubing and panels. While having no intention of huckstering, and hardly selling a copy of the current issue, I nevertheless found the stand useful as a focal point around which to loiter and talk to people. There is no truth behind the various rumours which circulated after I returned, smoking a cigar, from a long talk with the man from Corgi Books.

Mike Moorcock delivered an interesting speech on the Sunday afternoon. Although perhaps "interesting" is hardly an adequate word to use for a speech in which the author threw up his hands halfway through, with the despairing

cry that, "I've missed a page out ! " Not that anybody noticed the omission - because by then no-one knew what Moorcock was talking about. After the first page of what was essentially a serious and critical paper, the author began to parallel that scene from Amis' "Lucky Jim", in which the protagonist finally passes out, drunk to the world. Needless to say, the audience was probably far better entertained by Mike Moorcock's hamming than by a formal and reasoned talk about science fiction. Perhaps Mike was as far gone as he seemed - or perhaps he preferred to have a bit of fun. Certainly he became remarkably lucid when the session began to discuss the future of NEW WORLDS.

St Fanthony prowled Bristol once more, when in the evening this "knightly order" of fandom inducted new members into its ranks. Although sadly lacking its Grand Master Eric Jones, who passed away in January, the St Fanthony ceremony was performed with much ceremony. Phil Rogers conducted proceedings superbly as new members Charles Partington, Wendy Freeman and Jill Adams took the initiation. Afterwards, as demanded by tradition, the rest of the audience packed into Norman Shorrocks room for a punch-up. The Shorrocks home-brewed punch was as potent as ever, and the rest of the night will hence forever remain a mystery.

In conclusion I will mention that Mike Moorcock received a special presentation of the British Fantasy Award for his part in saving NEW WORLDS. Tom Disch carried away the official Award, for delivery to winner Philip K. Dick in the USA. And Doreen Parker won a well-deserved Doc Weir Award for services to fandom. The next convention is to be organised by the Manchester group, and will take place on Easter weekend.

Details and memberships for the 1968 convention are now available from Charles Partington, 2 Matlock Avenue, Lower Kersal, Salford 7, Lancs. Preliminary registration fee is 7/6d.

Explanations and excuses.!

NEVER HAS SO MUCH TIME gone into an editorial ! Originally those 3 pages didn't take very long to write, back in early May, although it was a lot of trouble to bring them up to date in July. And the August re-stencilling took even more time, only to be scrapped in September. Three editorials written without seeing print !

I finally discarded the whole thing because I thought it would be far more interesting to tell you briefly what has been happening during the past six months. A lot can happen in that time. For a start, as you know, very little progress was made in publishing Speculation. This issue, originally intended to be a hot-from-the-presses Special Report on the Easter Convention has become instead a peculiarly dated post mortem.

But life has been very interesting in the meantime. There was a hectic two-day industrial conference to arrange ("Just like a convention !") at London's swank Royal Lancaster Hotel, for instance, at which we entertained over 250 guests and 40 Gentlemen of the Press. A rather noisy little MG Midget has taken a while to tame, and finally, the local branch of the Young Conservatives has this monthly magazine, and.....

(More explanations on Page 34)

CONVENTION '67

THE PROCEEDINGS

This is the text of Michael Moorcock's address at the Easter convention, and is primarily concerned with the then-impending re-publication of New Worlds. It is now dated, since at least four issues of New Worlds Speculative Fiction have appeared.

THE NEW FICTION

BY MICHAEL MOORCOCK

WHEN NEW WORLDS CHANGES ITS FORMAT with issue 173, it will very likely be called not "New Worlds science fiction," but "New Worlds Speculative fiction." This change, among others, reflects the new approach we hope to take.

It is now ten years since the first Sputnik was launched into orbit, and science fiction ceased to be the literature of a messianic minority and became a literature accepted by the public in general.

It is ten years since Alfred Bester published THE STARS MY DESTINATION in book form and brought an era in science fiction to its zenith and its close.

It is ten years since J.G. Ballard's work began to mark the beginning of a new era in science fiction - an era no longer chiefly identified with space and technical progress, but with time and the human mind; and with the philosophy of science.

This change in the emphasis of science fiction's obsessions and subject matter is scarcely the result of any kind of literary evolution. Rather, it is the result of a revolution - the spirit of which is reflected in the changing mood of society at large.

THE NEW FICTION

In science fiction the revolutionary spirit has chiefly been given a voice through the medium of New Worlds.

The writers who have so vociferously rejected the standards and achievements of earlier science fiction, who have attacked the conventions generally accepted as necessary to science fiction if it is to retain its identity, who have produced stories which have been criticised as not being 'proper' science fiction, have all the characteristics of revolutionaries in their fanaticism, their insistence that their path is the only one, their wild dismissal of all that has gone before, and their wild claims for their own achievements.

The strident tone of their proclamations and manifestos - again mainly in New Worlds - is unwelcome to many readers and writers who, while feeling that SF can be 'improved', resent those who, in their opinion, wish to throw the baby out with the bathwater. The revolutionaries say that the baby is dead. They say they've conceived a new one.

The arguments of the 'evolutionaries' are reasonable and fair. They seek a compromise. The arguments of the 'revolutionaries' often seem unreasonable and unfair; perhaps they are. They will have no compromise.

"My hope lies with the
revolutionaries - if anyone
can save SF, it is they. "

While I have sympathy for the 'evolutionary' argument and tend to support it in New Worlds so far as my policy is concerned, my main hope lies with the revolutionaries. I believe that if anyone can save modern science fiction, it is they - because they supply a dynamic and a voice and offer an actual alternative. While this alternative may be, as yet, generally incoherent in shape, it has the advantage of being built on new and possibly stronger foundations. It rejects the conventional novel as much as it rejects conventional science fiction.

The revolutionaries dismiss the possibility of science fiction being able to evolve from pulp magazine standards to the standards of good 'mainstream' fiction - and even if this were possible, they say, it would not be worth having.

It used to be argued - and still is to a great extent - that science fiction should become more sophisticated; should look to the Novel for its yardsticks. I suspect the result of such a marriage - and there are examples currently in print - is to denude science fiction of its essential character and turn it into a bastard form that ceases to be genuinely speculative fiction and at the same time does not fulfill the function of the Novel. An altogether new approach is needed if, at very least, science fiction is to do for the next decade what it did for the decade before last.

It is the belief of many of the adherents of this revolutionary school that not only science fiction but all modern fiction must change its orientation. Until recently all fiction - apart from the healthy science fiction that ended with THE STARS MY DESTINATION - was past-oriented; much science fiction was at very best present-oriented (although it referred to the future - paying lip-service to it, as it were - its messages and subject matter were for and of the present).

Many writers, including a number of the writers who contribute regularly to New Worlds, believe that there has come about a revolutionary shift in society's orientation. Instead of referring itself to the examples of the past, as it once did, it is tending more and more to refer itself to the probabilities of the future.

For example, the increasing emphasis of governments on Planning, of predicting social changes and plumping for the likeliest probability, then basing a national policy on that probability - economics, communications, housing, education, medicine and so on. There are no past examples for reference, the policy must be based on reasonable predictions of what is going to happen. It is no longer worthwhile to study 'similar' situations in history. We have come to an age which, because of the twin dangers of overpopulation on the one hand and total annihilation on the other, is literally without precedent. The examples we make are not with our ancestors but with our descendants.

Most of the possibilities with which earlier science fiction writers were obsessed are no longer the concern of a minority of scientists, writers and readers. They are instead possibilities which have sunk into the general consciousness. Nuclear catastrophe, overpopulation, space exploration, increasing State and Commercial control over the freedom of the individual, and so on, are the possibilities which the man in the street lives with every day, however unconsciously. He may not talk about them, may even deny them, but they are part of his awareness.

"..not chiefly concerned
with predictions, but an
understanding of the future"

Most literature, on the other hand, is still concerned with the past, however immediate, and, because of this, is bit by bit losing much of its previous validity, losing its ability to touch that awareness I mentioned. On the whole the conventional novel is retrospective and must ignore the future. Where it concerns itself with the present it is at best accurate reportage, and not fiction in the fullest sense.

A number of modern writers are beginning to grope for a new approach, a genuinely speculative approach, if you like - which is in tune with the psychology of the times, which is likely to flower when the full impact of this type of orientation is felt.

These writers are not chiefly concerned with predictions, but with trying to find an understanding of the complexities of the future. They are by no means all drawn from the ranks of the magazine science fiction writers; indeed, only a few may consider themselves science fiction authors.

Much of the dynamic supplied to this new approach does, however, come from people identified with the science fiction field - for these people have been almost solely concerned with predictive fiction for a large part of their lives, and have had a long time in which to consider it!

It's possible that the kind of work we prefer to publish in NEW WORLDS should not be referred to as 'The New SF' at all, but as 'The New Fiction', as speculative fiction. This is a fiction that is not simply concerned with social and scientific trends, but with all the possibilities concerning mankind, including mankind's future psychology, social organisation, and metaphysic. And above all, fiction speculating on their nature and implications in the deepest sense.

Where speculative fiction differs from science fiction is not so much, therefore, in its superficial concerns, which obviously are similar, but in the manner of approaching them. Speculative fiction is a fiction of ideas, just as science fiction was a fiction of ideas - but the emphasis of the new fiction is on the quality of the idea and the quality of the method in which it is presented.

Many of the writers of this new school, though by no means all, feel that entirely fresh techniques must be found in order to do justice to the subject matter. Techniques which are as future-oriented as the obsessions themselves; techniques which have no undertones of the past (as has, of necessity, the ordinary linear novel).



They feel that the old instruments are rusty and that the rust comes off on what they make. New, clean instruments must be created. Others feel that the old instruments are good enough if polished and, if necessary, modified.

These concerns are not, I must emphasise, just the concerns of a group of science fiction writers tired of the old school. They are the concerns of many writers and artists who believe that they must learn to live in the future and produce work for the increasing numbers of other people who are living in the future. The concern is an intellectual one, some might say it is even an abstract one. But since abstractions of one kind or another are affecting us every day in this changing society, (as has been pointed out by, among others, Hannah Arendt in 'The Human Condition'), I believe this is not an important criticism.

On the whole our method of warfare is becoming more abstract, our popular entertainment is becoming more abstract, and our relationships with one another are becoming more abstract. Every issue, in this future-oriented world, is of necessity becoming more abstract, including the games people play. It could be argued that this is a dangerous thing, and that we are losing touch with reality, but it seems inevitable. It seems that we must come to grips with a new reality, we must learn to live with the inevitable. Our arts can help us to learn, can help produce an understanding of this world of the future in which we are living already in many of our mental attitudes.

Above all, the new fiction - speculative fiction - can be the chief aid to this understanding. It is this new fiction, particularly that which concerns itself with the sciences, that we intend to publish, whenever possible, in New Worlds.

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PRO-PANEL

DISCUSSION BY PROFESSIONAL AUTHORS PANEL ;-

Brian Aldiss, James White, Judith Merril,
Michael Moorcock; Thomas Disch; John Brunner.

Transcription by Diane Ellingsworth.

QUESTION: WHAT HACK NOVELS DO THE PANEL THINK THEY HAVE WRITTEN ?

BRUNNER : Do you want to count them ? We would be here all day!
Anybody who imagines he is going to make enough out of a handful
of hack novels to live on, and perhaps travel or seduce 19 girls
or do something which is regarded as gathering experience, is
making a big mistake. You do not make that much money out of
hack novels unless you are Harold Robbins. Unfortunately we
cannot all be Harold Robbins.

I have my own solution to this situation. I started telling
stories at school after lights out. By the time I left school
I had a very good idea of how to tell a story. Since I had
been in boarding school, I had no experience of the outside
world, but this did not stop me writing. S.F. is a good way of
writing without showing lack of experience.

By the time I was 24, I was able to bust loose and turn
freelance on the basis of the fact that I had a gift for re-
combining standard fictional elements. For the past 3 or 4
years, I have begun to capitalise on what I have learnt about
human beings.

ALDISS: I endorse that entirely. In brief, if you have done nothing
and know nothing, then write SF. My first novel was actually
written fairly directly from life, and was about book selling.
Since then I have presumably done less and know less, and have
been writing SF ever since.

I really began my career after lights out at boarding school.
There was no talking after lights out, and grilles around our
dormitory. The master on duty would go by and put his ear to
one of these, and hear noises. He would then burst in and ask,

"Who is talking?" Brian Aldiss would then put his hand up and be dragged off and beaten. This was my first form of payment. Anal erotic literature.

DISCH: I was just reading something yesterday, about the whole question of starting to write at an early age. I do not think anyone has experience of any crucial sort at 20. In any case, when you are writing your first novel you are imitating novels you have read.

MOORCOCK: Very few hack writers do start off thinking of themselves as hack writers. I think very few people say "Well here I am. I want to be a writer. I shall write 7 hack novels in the first 7 weeks of my career and then for the next 7 years I will live!" What happens is that people with a natural flair for writing who begin early, as I did, without a great deal of experience, find themselves producing hack novels. They cannot really do anything else. As John says, they can capitalise on this by learning the craft of novel writing, because a good hack novel should be as well constructed, if simpler, as any other novel. I think it is dangerous to begin by conceiving of oneself as a hack. I think one should rather come to the realisation that one is a hack. There are odd writers of talent who have got ~~into the~~ habit of thinking of themselves as hacks, and have rather spoiled themselves, as has one good friend of mine who has made a very considerable amount of money writing hack books and novels for about 10 years and is now finding it extremely difficult to write a serious book because all the bad habits of hacking are there.

Speaking as someone who has written a great many hack novels and has just written one before I came here, I used to be able to do it in three days. It is now taking me much longer. There is greater strain now, I get more depressed. These days, after I have finished a hack novel, I feel that my brain has just gone dead. Every time I begin a new, more serious, novel, it means a new re-learning and re-thinking. Too much hacking is a dangerous thing.

MERRIL: I cannot think of anything more difficult than making money by writing hack science fiction. It is one of the worst paid fields. Anybody who wants to make money out of good SF must have a high enough opinion of his own imagination, literary ability and general knowledge of the world. All these are required in high order in SF.

WHITE: What got me started writing novels of any description was that I was dissatisfied with what I was reading. If anyone feels they want to write a novel, it is good to start to write a story which you would like to read yourself. You find that if you are enthusiastic about an idea, you will write a good novel.

BRUNNER: There are hacks and hacks. I used to work for John Christopher - Sam Youd. I recall him marching into the office saying, "In the next 12 months I shall certainly have two novels published and I may have as many as 10." But you would not really think of Sam Youd as being a hack writer. He was merely writing his mistakes out of his system. He had written so many bad books under his own name, that he could never use it again for anything serious.

QUESTION: IS IT BETTER TO BEGIN WRITING WITH A NOVEL OR A SHORT STORY ?

ALDISS: It is much easier to start off with a short story. I first wrote a story of 8000 words. It seemed so incredibly long, to have actually 8000 words to say. Now I could go on all day.

MERRIL: I think this is an impossible question, and that there are natural short story writers and natural novelists. There are some writers occasionally who are both. It is easier for many people to write a novel than a short story. The important thing is to find out what a novel is and what a short story is.

ALDISS: There are very few natural novelists in the science fiction field. Most people started off as short story writers.

MERRIL: Until recently there was no market. We wrote what could be published.

ALDISS: I hate this idea that the market rules everything.

MOORCOCK: The thing you can do in the SF field, which is one of the few fields where there is a market for the novelette, is to compromise. You can learn a lot about the construction of a novel by writing 15-20,000 words. This is what I did. I have never considered myself as a short story writer. I've probably only written about a half dozen short stories. I used to generally write to a length of about 15-20,000 words, and of course (and this is just a commercial tip) when you connect four of these stories in some way you can develop them one by one and by writing long short-stories you can find yourself with a novel of sorts.

I am not sure that a novel is merely something of 60,000 words. This is a different issue, of course, but I think that publishers are forcing writers to produce, in fact, long short stories because they cannot afford to publish anything more. Things of about 50,000 words are published, which Henry James would have called a "tale". I do not think you can produce a good conventional novel in 60,000 words, I do not think you can do in it everything you should. I would say start off trying to write a novelette. There is a good market for them in the States, particularly lengths between 10-15,000 words.

MOORCOCK: One thing people do with a novelette is to bring in as many characters as in a novel. But with a novelette it is always best to ask, "what is the minimum number of characters I can use to tell this story?" and, if possible, cut that again. I think the best is possibly two or maybe four characters at the most. Preferably one major character and the rest by degrees, but four is, I should imagine, the most you can have.

WHITE: If you are worried about characters when writing a short story, novelette or novel, you might remember that characters are ordinary people. If you can have a book which shows ordinary people reacting to extraordinary situations, can keep that in mind when developing your SF plot, you will find it will contain some very good characters.

QUESTION: IF YOU WERE NOT SF WRITERS, WHAT WOULD YOU ALL LIKE TO BE ?

MERRIL: I think I can answer for all of us. Rich !

ALDISS: I do not think there is anything I would rather be. I would not mind being a travel writer, perhaps, but I would not be anything other than a writer.

BRUNNER: Being lazy and self-indulgent, I have settled on a career where I like the work I am doing. There is nothing else I have wanted to do since I was nine years old.

MERRIL: It is impossible for me to visualise being anything else but a writer. Quite literally and in connection with this, going back to what a young writer should do, my personal answer is; "do not write, in spite of the fact that you have talent. It is a bad field. You do not make money, there are few satisfactions. It takes a long time to break into publishing. Do not write!" My feeling is that anyone who then goes ahead and writes is someone who just has got to write.

WHITE: Why didn't you tell me this 15 years ago ?

But seriously, I think that at one time or another we would all have liked to be jet pilots, astronauts, engine drivers, and things of that sort. You go through this phase when you are very young. Then, when you get old, have children and lose hair, these occupations are dangerous. Yet an SF writer can have all the fun of experiencing these things by using his imagination and doing a bit of research, and in fact, I personally prefer to go to the stars in my spare time.

MOORCOCK: I cannot think of anything that I would rather be in terms of my situation. I would rather be rich and write less, but that is about all. It could even be argued that I do not write SF at all during a lot of the time.

DISCH: I would be terrified if I could not write. If I were blind I would commit suicide, but not to write would be an even worse deprivation as far as I am concerned. I am terrified of jobs. Working at a job was servitude and I wanted to escape. Now I have escaped and I am terribly grateful for that. Not that I would not like certain kinds of jobs, but those have not been the ones open to me.

ALDISS: If you can possibly make it as a writer, you do it because you do not have to work regularly. Man does not work naturally from 9 to 5.

MOORCOCK: Coming back to a point that Judy made, "SF is an underpaid field." I do not think it is a particularly underpaid field, except in the terms of markets like the slick magazines where you can get paid much more. In the mainstream you are lucky if you get paid at all when you start writing. Quarterly reviews, and little magazines are your markets. I do not think detective story writers get paid any more than SF writers, and most non-SF writers that I know, who have not got a best-seller behind them are far less well-paid. The only thing is that in science fiction there is only a very, very slim chance of getting a best-seller, whereas in the detective field and in the middle-brow novel there is a much better chance of the film rights being sold for a large sum, and advances being paid before you start your next novel. As a regular, reliable source of income, I do not think there is a better field than science fiction; particularly if one is living in this country and selling in the States. It is a myth that SF writers are underpaid.

WHITE: The general outlook of science fiction seems to be changing. How does the panel feel about the relative merits of hard and soft SF ?

MERRIL: Could I ask a question ? - What do you mean by "hard and soft" ?

WHITE: "Hard" as in Hal Clement, "soft" as in Ray Bradbury.

BRUNNER: Did you say relative merits or words to that effect ?

WHITE: Relative popularity.

BRUNNER: Well I suppose I had better declare my interest. I cannot write hard science fiction. I do not know any science to write about. This does not prevent me from faking it some times. By far the best SF novels are those which do not limit themselves to one section of the field or another. Look at the most successful novels.

ALDISS: At the present moment, it seems as though if anything is actually happening at all in the science fiction field (which I rather doubt), then what I suppose James would call the softer fringe is getting a better hearing than it once did. I do not think you can talk of science fiction as though it were an entity in itself. A lot of argument that we hear at a convention, for instance, works on the wrong premise. It is not like this. There are writers who are writing material which falls into a category called SF. But the concentration must not be on the material but on what the people are doing. What I am trying to say is that you cannot define the writing itself. The important thing is the author's attitude. How and what you yourself are doing. You can get this feedback, but it is not necessarily a good thing. Really, as a writer you should be a man in a high castle and shut yourself off from your audience.

MERRIL: Most of the best hard SF has been written by non-scientists. It is very easy to research science.

(Audience) Surely hard SF is a very rare thing to find ?

MERRIL: Hard and soft SF refers presumably to hard and soft science, of which there is no longer such a distinction to be made in the scientific world. Ordinarily, when we talk about hard SF we are talking about technological and engineering SF as distinct from the purely speculative SF.

WHITE: Could I please re-phrase my original question ? By hard and soft, I meant on the one hand the engineering SF which Judy has been talking about, and on the other the psychological, sociological type.

MERRIL: All right then, would you consider to be "hard" or "soft" the type of material which contains up-to-date, seriously thought-out speculation about the metaphysics of time ?

WHITE: You're horrible!

MERRIL: I contend that the terms "hard" & "soft" SF no longer mean anything.

At this point the discussion was brought to a close and the question about "hard" and "soft" science fiction will therefore never be fully answered !

WOULD ANYONE who possesses any fanzines containing CHECKLISTS, BIBLIOGRAPHIES, or similar data, who would be willing either to make Xerox copies of them or loan them for Xeroxing, please write giving details to :-

Tim Scott, White Place, River Road, Taplow, Bucks. (All postage refunded)

When introducing Relativity, Tony Walsh warned us that it was not for the squeamish, that it was "bloody, very bloody", and that those who didn't like that sort of thing had better leave. Lily-livered and entirely unashamed of it, I stirred uneasily; but it wasn't long before I relaxed and settled back to enjoy myself. There was nothing in this film to which a civilised person could object - but there was plenty to argue with. Visually enjoyable, emotionally effective, the film is however unconvincing intellectually. It is an argumentative work of art; does rejection of its argument nullify it aesthetically?

Relativity

FILM REVIEW BY TONY SUDBERY

Rock. Hard, abrasive sandstone in caves, corridors, walls and shelves. We move around in this rough unliving world and come across a prone man, curly greying blond hair, sculpted features and golden tan assimilating him to the rock. We move faster, jumping into the nostril of a cave, swooping onto the plateau of a chest, speeding around a shoulder of rock, a rock of shoulder. Now we are hurtling down a narrow gallery which closes massively in upon us; we move across a computer bank and we are in an internal passage of an animal body, redly alive. Could you tell the difference? And was that sound track speleological or pulmonary?

Having placed us against the inanimate world, Emshwiller moves to the animal realm; many scenes, culminating in the slaughtering and gutting of a pig. We see its intestines slip out, and immediately afterwards see packets of sausages in a supermarket. So; if you find this section unpleasant, you ought to be a vegetarian.

But life is not all sausage-eating; similarly in the cave sequence, though man is indeed a physical object, he is not merely a physical object.

The next section is very pleasant, certainly so to the men in the audience, but it is too long for the structure of the film (So who's counting?) A nude female body is caressed by the camera, intimately and at length. For the first time we notice that this is a very American film; she is very much a Playboy-type girl, with highly-developed, gravity-defying breasts, (helped I suspect by various photographic tricks such as running the film upside-down) This is not how a woman is, but how we see her; later on we see her very differently.

The man re-enters in double exposure and we are treated to an amusing stylisation of relations between the sexes (matriarchal, of course).

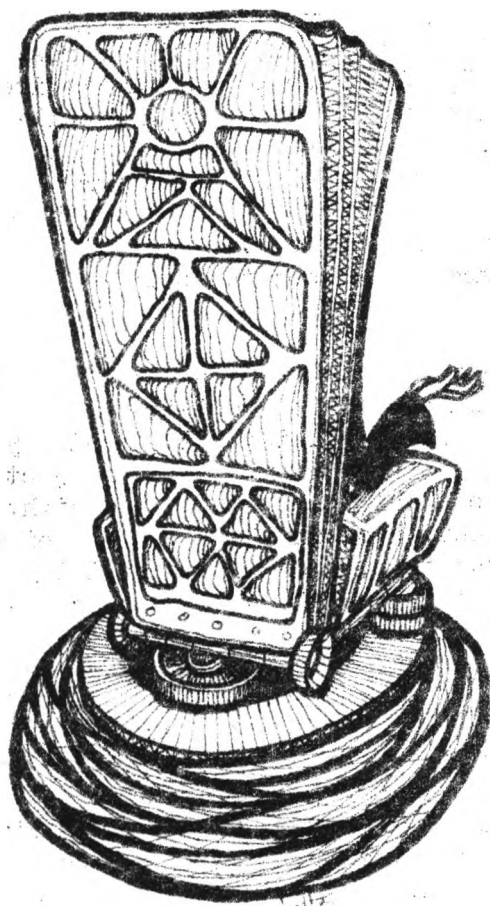
The film is progressing logically; (a rather naive Rousseauesque logic, but it's an adequate schema); society is now introduced. Delimiting words, - personal pronouns, tenses of the verb "to be", dimensions, etc, are recited by separate voices simultaneously, while the man and the photographer collaborate in an abstract representation of them. A claustrophobic effect is achieved by some very crowded crowd scenes. Society is the theme for a little while; Man at work, the noise and dirt and power of industry. A huge piece of machinery, which I take to be a symbol similar to E.M.Forster's "telegrams and anger" is followed by a quiet grocer's shop; the point is like that of the earlier pig-killing.

To a maddeningly banal tune (which must be the mind-block in THE DEMOLISHED MAN), the man soft-dances his way through, in and out of society, and finishes up in a night-club. Emshwiller makes his relativist point again by showing tit-jouncing dancers in startlingly ugly slow-motion. I must reject his argument, but this doesn't diminish the emotional impact of the sight of those jelly-like breasts squelching in and out, back and forth. The point is effectively made, but in the last part of the film, where the relativity of the title is presented in its full form, Emshwiller defeats his own case.

The narrator recites dimensional facts about the natural universe - the size of a man's sperm, the lifetime of the universe, the radius of the proton, the age of the earth, and relates them to the extent and age of a man's body and of human civilisation. Presumably these are meant to make us realise the insignificance of humanity, but their actual effect is to make one switch off and stop hearing anything. We are led to a full realisation of the old saying that numbers on their own are meaningless, for the camerawork too is uninteresting here - computers or something - so that when the film switches to a long still shot of a serene wise old face with the implied question, "In the light of all this, what is he worth?", we can only answer, "Everything!" Or perhaps the sage's face represents specie aeternitas, sub which we are to see the humanity which is now shown behind him in double exposure. Or perhaps he is not a sage but an idiot.

If it is Emshwiller's intention to argue in this way for the insignificance of humanity, there would be plenty with which to quarrel, even if he had argued plausibly. This attitude surely, was exploded long ago by Susan Stebbing's PHILOSOPHY & THE PHYSICISTS. The size of the universe, the vast number of stars and galaxies, do not diminish in the slightest the importance or significance of human life. Importance and significance are not absolute concepts, they cannot live in a vacuum. We must know; important to whom? significant for what? The fact that there are billions of women in the world does not affect my wife's importance to me.

I thought that what Emshwiller tried to do with Relativity was banal, boring and mistaken, and indeed, that he failed, but nevertheless I think that the film is a good one because of its organisation, its irony, the rhythm and interest of its photography - all the things that are ignored in an abstract discussion of its "theme".



JOHN BRUNNER guest of honour speech : bristol 1967

an edited but unabridged version
of the Guest of Honour address,
BSFA Convention, Bristol 1967.

I feel in rather a peculiar position. Some months ago when I was asked to be Guest of Honour here - an invitation at which I was flatterghasted, a word I invented to mean bowled over by flattery - and told in no uncertain terms that I was going to have to, as it were, sing for my supper, I rashly told Archie Mercer that I had a theme in mind for my address. Time passed, and approximately 150,000 words of the novel I was working on, and suddenly I realized three weeks before the Con that I'd clean forgotten what I'd said I was going to talk about.

I turned up the carbon of my letter and discovered to my dismay that I'd pledged myself to discuss themes in SF which had either been unjustly neglected, or been done to death.

Well, I'd just completed and mailed a novel over 200,000 words long into which I'd packed everything but the spaceship galley sink, and the prospect of having to dream up a number of promising but neglected SF themes filled me with dismay. My imagination was by then feeling somewhat tattered around the edges.

However, I was sure that if I'd been fool enough to tell Archie I was going to talk on this subject there must be something I could say about it, and after chewing it over for a while I discovered that yes, there was something to be said - what's more, something that badly needs to be said over and over. So I warn you: this is going to be one of my long ones.

Let me begin by reiterating a thesis which I've made before, but mostly at out-groups like university societies rather than at meetings of people concerned with SF. This thesis states the premise that if science fiction doesn't go where the speculation is fiercest it's moribund.

One might think on the face of it that that was a platitude taken for granted by everyone who knows what SF is about. Curiously, this is not the case. I spent the whole of my allotted time at the Cleveland Worldcon last year talking about reasons why there's so much half-good SF, and on reflection afterwards realised that I'd overlooked more reasons than I'd mentioned. It's one of those omitted reasons I propose to talk about this afternoon: the fact that there's often something vaguely archaic about SF.

Before proceeding, however, I'd like to append a footnote to my Cleveland talk. You see, one of the reasons I did mention for there being so much half-good SF, which doesn't get talked about nearly as much as it deserves, is editorial interference (to use a polite term for it) of the kind where some arrogant nit takes a hatchet to the author's text for some unpardonable reason like his being too thickheaded to see the point the author's driving at.

This has happened to me again, this time with knobs and bells on. The publisher is one who ought to know better - Signet - and the book is THE PRODUCTIONS OF TIME, which was good enough when it appeared as a magazine serial to be nominated for the Nebula award. Now Charlie Ignoramus over there has finished kicking it in the balls I recommend you to use it as toilet paper until the Penguin edition comes out; that one will be printed from my original text. Frankly, I'm dismayed to think my name is on the cover, it's such a travesty.

Unwarranted Changes

You'll hardly credit this, but I swear it's the truth. How many unwarranted, unnecessary - actively detrimental - changes do you think Charlie Ignoramus can cram into an opening chapter when he's firing on all eight? Ten? Twenty? (Bearing in mind that this isn't a first submission from an ambitious adolescent but a good novel from a competent working writer with more than forty books behind him.)

Never mind wasting time on guesses. I'll tell you. Fifty five. I got the MS down and counted them. I hadn't the heart to go any further, but there are certainly hundreds of changes in the book they've put out - hundreds plural - and there only 132 pages of text.

And it's not just meddling for the sake of meddling, either. Having really worked himself up, he mustered the courage to start putting in errors that weren't there to start with, climaxing with errors of story detail. I will give you one example. To deceive the villains the hero pretends to be in bed with a girl after laying her - all very virtuous, but to fool them he's chucked his shirt and trousers over a chair, keeping on his vest and pants. Charlie Ignoramus is prudish: he changed it to keep the guy's shirt on. But he's also bloody stupid - simultaneously he managed to leave that shirt where I'd put it, on the back of a chair.

To achieve this kind of muck-up calls for a degree of idiocy that approaches genius.

If you haven't decided that I've gone over from talking seriously to elaborating a persecution fantasy - which I admit it begins to resemble when you go into detail - you may be wondering how this can happen. Well, there are two clauses in the contract which have a bearing on it. First, there's one which says they can publish the book in the form and manner best calculated to promote its sales, or words to that effect. Which is fair enough, because a reputable American publisher limits his editors to making such changes in a British MS as you'd expect anyhow: "petrol" to "gas", "spanner" to "wrench" and so forth. This is fine provided they stop short at altering the dialogue between British characters: "I must stop off at the service station and have a lube job for the jolly old automobile, what?"

Charlie Ignoramus, though, uses this clause to excuse his trampling across authors' work with big wet muddy boots.

And the second relevant clause says the publisher shall send proofs of the book to the author. The way they got around that one was so simple you might never think of it. I didn't get any proofs.

It would appear that authors are expected to lie down under this sort of treatment; they're expected to pocket their cheque for the advance, wipe the blood of their smiles and say, "Pretty please, Mr. Publisher sir boss, hit me again only in the belly this time!" And let's face it: there are times when a writer, especially one with a hungry family who's not been getting the breaks lately, does have to swallow his pride and shut up. I knuckled under a few times myself when I was trying to get started, but I kept shoving, and the last time one of my books was wrecked like this I did something simple and fairly obvious: I wrote to every SF reviewer I could think of, carbons to the publisher, disowning the mess. On my file at home I have a letter from that publisher stating that the editor in chief will make himself personally responsible from now on for seeing that what I write goes into print, or at least if they want a change they will ask me to do it myself. That's fair; I can always refuse and go elsewhere.

Better Established

Since the last time I've got myself a bit better established. There's no financial reason why I should lie down and shut up and there's every professional reason why I should shout at the top of my voice. I have of course forbidden my agent to submit any more of my work to that firm. I've written, as before, to the reviewers, with carbons not just to the publishers but for the personal attention of the president of the company. This time though I don't want to stop at the reviewers.

Because it doesn't only affect me if someone else foists off his bastardly incompetence under my name. It affects you, too - as readers. It diminishes your reading enjoyment. People who read SF aren't slobs like Charlie Ignoramus. They're likely to know English - English person would say, "I told them to send all the fire companies in the neighbourhood!" - even if it didn't strike them as they saw it, it'd be likely to come to mind when they found, a few pages later, that Charlie Ignoramus with that devotion to inconsistency which marks every step of his career has omitted to alter (in text, not dialogue) a reference to fire brigades.

Of course, they'll assume it was the fault of the author. My name's on the cover isn't it? I must be responsible!

So I'd like to enlist your co-operation in spreading three basic facts as far as wide as possible, through fanzines, through correspondence, through any channel that can be found: first that the text of this edition has been mutilated to the point where people would be better advised to get hold of the magazine version, which is much shorter but at least I did the abridgement myself and can vouch for it; second, that I was not informed of the changes let alone given the opportunity to approve them - not that I would have; and third, that I never saw the proofs which the contract assured me of.

Come to think of it, I'll add a fourth. Buy the Penguin edition.

Overdone & Underdone Themes

Well, that's enough of that wholly inexcusable commercial break. Let me get back to the main thread of my argument. Instead of reviewing, as I originally intended, overdone and underdeveloped themes in SF, I'm going to take a look at some of the accepted but outmoded attitudes of the field, and try to suggest ways in which this paradoxical contrast between the fantastic quality of our subject matter and the mundane quality of our treatment of it can be modified until matter and manner are more appropriately matched.

When I said there's something "vaguely archaic" about SF, I was referring to a great extent to the writer's approach, but you must realise that when one discusses a department of fiction one can't separate the writer from his audience. The two are so interdependent that we must assume continual feedback between them.

I'll specify with a couple of examples. Firstly, one culled from the preferred subject matter of many leading magazines in the field today. Way back in the days of Jules Verne, people adhered to what I've often before called the naïve belief in man's ability to transform the world by the power of steam. This believe me is no exaggeration. Check up sometime on the minor Victorian poets who literally wrote odes to the steam engine! And passages of Tennyson's "Locksley Hall" are virtually Victorian sciencefiction in heroic couplets!

Alas for us, whereas in the field of general fiction this kind of naïveté went out of style with the first World War, it still manages to find its way into the pages of our favourite magazines. Consider, for instance, practically all stories by Rick Raphael. These are fiction controlled, and obsessed, and dominated by machines. The machines may be ingeniously envisaged, but... well, let's face it. There's something, by current standards, which one can only call neurotic about an obsession with machines.

We don't regard someone as perfectly stable and well-adjusted who prefers his car to his girl-friend, do we? No more do we look with approval on people who withdraw into semi-hibernation in front of a TV set to the exclusion of real contacts and real conversation with other people. We think of Lovecraft, whose life was similarly lived at long distance (though in his case it was through the post) and point to his unsuccessful marriage as evidence that we're right in thinking of him as a bit of a crank. (For all its faults in construction, Forster's The Machine Stops was a powerful parable along exactly these lines.)

Yet stories like the ones I've cited and a great many others exhibit in fictional terms a parallel fault. The interest in Rick Raphael's ultra-superhighway stories lies not in the puppets he has set posturing but in the imaginary devices against the background of which they utter their unconvincing dialogue and conduct their juvenile flirtation with the pretty red-haired nurse. (I feel that if they did manage to get into her bed they wouldn't know what to do with her - they'd just be playing "Hospitals".

A Real Story

Contrast a story like FitzPatrick's The Circuit Riders. Now there you have a real story, for all that it's built on Grand Hotel lines, or Stage-coach lines, or Bridge of San Luis Rey lines, according to your generation: taking a cross-section of people affected by a central key event. I say it's a contrast because the interest is in the people and not in the machine that detects their emotions. No attempt is made to describe or analyse its workings, and that's a perfectly right approach. We haven't the slightest idea how such a machine could be made to work; all we can do is wonder about the effect of it, assuming it sprang full-blown into existence, on those objects in our environment which we do know a little about - most importantly, human beings.

The hardware can be left to research scientists. An author's business, the business of all fiction, is concerned with people. Not machines; people.

And a second example of what I mean when I say SF exhibits archaic traits.

This is a good deal more difficult to pin down, because there's a common mistaken assumption that equates realism in fiction with a cynical and downbeat approach. All right: to a great extent this is unavoidable, because we live in an age which has a good many depressing aspects - it doesn't matter what you pick, there's a dark side to it. Shallowness of personal relationships, lack of commercial ethics, the risk of blowing our civilisation to hell, and so forth.

Nonetheless, this is not and cannot be the whole story of human existence, and to pass off pessimism as honesty is rather a cheap trick.

Pass Off Assumptions

Conversely - and here's where we get back to SF - to try and pass off the unspoken assumptions of the romance and the pulp thriller as though they were the foreseeable actualities of future human behaviour is downright stupidity!

Under the general heading "romance", by the way, I should say I intend to subsume such gimmicks as the shrinking heroine introduced purely to have a happy ending, or the noble and misunderstood general who saves the public

from its own cowardice, and all the other familiar arbitrary tricks which doubtless you've noticed but possibly without realising just how meretricious they are as a means of evading the responsibility of the writer. I've done this sort of thing myself, I confess, but I.....Well, I was younger then, and I hope not to do it again.

I think it is absolutely incumbent on the writer of fiction, no matter in what field he happens to be operating, to take advantage of whatever has been discovered about his prime source material, which I reiterate is human beings. And in SF this duty is particularly inescapable, because as I started off by saying SF goes where the speculation is fiercest or it dies the death, and currently the best material for speculation is inside our own heads.

Tamed and Domesticated

What makes us fallible? What prevents us from doing as the Victorians hoped, and bending the universe to our will in accordance with strict rules of logic? We know that we in fact can't. Yet, as I once said at another convention, the chief attribute of the typical SF hero is that he knows what he's doing - he's got the universe tamed and domesticated. This may be fine as wish-fulfilment fantasy, but it's not the stuff of which high quality fiction is made. We get where we want to go by struggling. Someone like Father Ruiz-Sanchez in A Case of Conscience does win out, but he manages it only at the cost of a tremendous battle with his conscience, and at one stage he does the unthinkable for a Jesuit and trespasses on the verge of heresy. Do Poul Anderson's heroes undergo this kind of personal crisis - do Gordon Dickson's? With due respect to them both as capable writers, I'd say they don't, and for that reason if no other fail the prime test of any fiction: are the people acting out the story recognisable as real?

And this failure implies, in a sense, an archaic attitude. Just the other day my wife Marjorie bought a so-called thriller reprinted from a first edition in 1907, I think, though this was not stated in arabic numerals but in Roman letters, which is full of remarks like, "Gad! The gel has spirit!" You might just conceivably get away with that in a historical novel, because people tend to reflect in their actual doings the attitudes publicised by influential members of their society, so that writers, especially those appealing to a mass audience, do have some effect on how people really behave. (I recall once reading in a survey of sexual habits about a girl who had taken to closing her eyes when she was kissed purely because that was what she'd seen on the pictures!) But to transfer it, as indeed it gets transferred, to the year 2000-odd, is simple nonsense.

Many too many SF writers, to be blunt, enshrine in their work not a knowledge of how people are and act in the real world, but a knowledge of how pulp characters were supposed to act in stories from the twenties or even earlier. This is what I mean when I cite example two of an archaic attitude: the gel having spirit, by Gad, when the story concerns a landing on Venus and an encounter with ten-legged polylollipops.

How People Behave

Yet we have a vast fund of information - greater than any previously available through-out history - on how people do really behave, and what's more we

are fortunate in that the climate of ideas is more tolerant than it used to be, so that certain subjects, most notably those concerned with sex, are discussed more freely than they have been for two or three centuries. The material for speculation that is provided by advances in engineering is not exactly played out but wearing pretty thin - we've had TV pictures of the moon and Mars, putting men into orbit is not yet but on the way to becoming a commonplace, and a lot of traditional SF hardware is in the newspapers. What isn't in the papers, and ought by the same token to be in SF, is a whole slew of stuff about the human mind: not the random speculation of the psi story (though psi powers offer a convenient shorthand device for saying some extremely relevant things about human relationships) but speculation disciplined in the unique SF manner by what's known or may reasonably be assumed about the way we interact with each other.

Let me make it absolutely clear that I am not begging for the adoption in SF of that facile false assumption which I referred to earlier: the idea that pessimism equates with honesty, that all human beings are unqualified bastards and life is nothing but a slow descent into the shitpile. SF's primary concern is where we go from here forwards and preferably upwards; it follows that to maintain its appeal it must reflect at least some of our aspirations. Some people's lives are enviably satisfying, and fiction claiming to deal with the human condition must cover all bands of the spectrum of our lives. Indeed, I might cite myself as an example in support of that assertion: I'm doing the job I've wanted to do since I was nine years old, without being exactly rich I'm comparatively prosperous, I'm happily married, I have a comfortable home and so on.

But let me add a counterweight to that. My father knew Glen Kidston, the celebrated American racing-driver of the twenties, who was the son of a millionaire. When he came of age he inherited a fortune, and he once complained to my father that there was nothing in his life to make it worth living - no challenge he could test himself on. He'd always had everything he could imagine; when he was a kid, they simply went out and bought it for him.

So my father said, "Why don't you set a flying record - say, Cairo to the Cape?" Which Glen Kidston proceeded to do, got into his private plane and went and broke the record. And they threw a party for him in Capetown on his arrival, and he walked out in the middle, got back in the plane and flew into the side of Table Mountain. This is what you might call the "dust and ashes" side of human existence, and that too has been with us since we emerged from the caves, so no fiction worth the reading can afford to neglect it.

Some Suggestions

With that as back ground for the climax of my argument, let me now try and set out, as I promised, some suggestions about rectifying this rather depressing state of affairs where SF, dealing with the fascinating prospect of what may be coming, falls down on the job by - among other flaws - retaining what one is justified in calling an obsession with hardware, and similarly avoiding the depiction of convincing people in favour of a set of two-dimensional marionettes.

I'm going to approach this from three separate but closely interlinked angles (can you link angles? I wouldn't know - I was never much cop at geometry): first, I'm going to look at the proper - by which of course I mean what seems right to me, but the whole of this talk is very personalised - the proper way, then, to relate the hardware aspect of SF to its function as fiction per se; then I want to turn briefly to what no doubt everyone has been expecting to hear mentioned, the question of the adoption of literary techniques suited to fulfilment of the task; and finally I want to do what I promised Archie I'd do when I accepted the invitation to talk here - outline a few promising avenues not yet exploited by SF writers to anything like the degree they deserve, because they offer the combination of speculation with self-discipline which is one of science fiction's prime attributes.

So, to commence with: the hardware aspect. It remains true what Lovecraft said way back when, that the true hero of a "marvel tale" is not a person but an event. This is one of SF's underlying constituents, and you throw it away at your peril. Wait, though. Who's going to be affected by your "event" - a bunch of handy stock types who would serve equally in a story about being trapped by Indians, or adrift in a storm at sea? Better not, I think - don't you? If the catastrophe or the new invention or whatever the "event" (in Lovecraft's use of the term) that gives the impetus to the action is going to be definable as a science fiction event, then surely the people on whom it's visited must be a little more - shall we say? - exclusive than those who would serve equally for some more mundane plot.

You see, although it's certainly true what Lovecraft said, this is not uniquely true of SF. Indeed, I'm going to cite example from outside the field to show how one can handle a plot similarly constructed on a conventional basis and do it superbly. A while back I referred to Thornton Wilder's The Bridge of San Luis Rey; in case you don't know it, I'll just say that it's a brilliant short novel which fits Lovecraft's dictum to a T - a flimsy bridge in Mexico under the Spanish occupation gives way, killing a coachload of people who are crossing it, and the book is the story of how a curious priest investigates them to see - perhaps - whether there's a clue to the theological justice of the fate visited on them. But there's nothing routine or ordinary about the result. Indeed, there's even an element of fantasy in the shape of identical twins with para-normal powers of communication.

Plot - Shaped Puppets

Closer still to Lovecraft's definition are novels by George R. Stewart, Fire and Storm. I cordially recommend both these, though you may have to hunt secondhand stalls or pester your library to get them out of the back stacks. In both you can see Stewart struggling to free himself from exactly the trap that too many SF writers are content to stay in: the habit of depicting not people but plot-shaped puppets. I don't think he quite achieved his aim; nonetheless, I recommend both novels not despite but because of the fact that you can see Stewart struggling to develop his characters in depth. And for the most part he manages it.

I'm further going to commend a couple of writers who have handled the other aspect of what you might call the hardware problem in masterly fashion.

The essential question deriving from the traditional SF approach, "What would happen if....?", is what happens to people in their social context. I usually cite the car, aircraft and television as recent examples. On the novel scale at least it's necessary for a writer of SF to deal with the changing society as well as the individuals within it, if he adopts the "event-generated plot."

Who have we in SF - with the borderline exception of Philip K. Dick - who can dramatise a changing society as vividly as did, say, Vance Bourjaily in The Violated? Similarly, for intensity of detail and clarity of argument, we have nobody to match what dos Passos did first in the trilogy, 1919, The Big Money, and 42nd Parallel, more recently in Midcentury. As it happens, in that last big novel of mine I helped myself shamelessly to some of dos Passos's techniques, and Tom Disch, having glanced at the MS, said very perceptively, "Marvellous! Why hasn't someone adapted dos Passos to SF before?"

Frankly, I don't know! Because he's been handling, astonishingly well, one crucial aspect of what SF is all about.

Manner of Presentation

Now this bridges me conveniently into the second line of approach to what can be done to get SF caught up with its own ostensible subject matter: the highly controversial question of the manner of presentation. There's one hell of a lot of smoke (and other things) been generated around the idea of so-called experimental techniques in SF, which generally hides the unfortunate truth that there's nothing much radical about what anyone in SF has been doing lately. For way-out stuff you have to look at writers like Anthony Burgess who respect SF enough to want to handle SF themes occasionally and do so without kowtowing to the aspects of it that I've called archaic for the purposes of this talk.

Were you puzzled by Jimmy Ballard's You Coma Marilyn Monroe or the others in the series like The Assassination Weapon? I think this is - not to be too mealy-mouthed - ridiculous. Here we are talking about a supposedly future-oriented branch of literature, and one of the most fruitful lines of development is a closed book to a lot of its readers. People who don't bother with SF, but keep up with what's going on in other fields, might well recognise Ballard's shorts as a valuable exploitation of lines foreshadowed in things like George MacBeth's "encyclopedia poem" The Ski Murders, perhaps tending to lead it back toward the main line of traditional narrative technique. (Ballard confuses you? You should try that piece of MacBeth's, from which - as far as I can see - he deliberately excluded any possibility of a rational analysis!)

From the writer's point of view, the frustration which is generated by the archaicism of SF readers is incredibly galling - with due respect to you lot out there. I've written fifty-plus books and sold over forty of them, and as I've gone on I've learned more about what words can and cannot do. There's no point in reworking the same old bunch of assumptions; it makes the writer feel tired and the reader senses this lack of freshness, thus eventually reducing the readers pleasure too. After selling forty books you'd expect, wouldn't you, a writer would grow discontented with what he'd learned to do by the time he wrote the tenth?

But I've no wish to get embroiled in a discussion concerned solely with the success or failure of new techniques which match or mismatch with SF's thematic material. Let me therefore confine myself to saying that it's puzzling to writers who have done more than repeat themselves - who have in fact developed as they went along - that so high a proportion of the audience for SF, which one might a priori assume to be open-minded and enterprising, gets hung up when they explore seemingly appropriate variant narrative techniques to develop fully the assumptions they've made in their plots. You'd not for heaven's sake expect a novel about - say - a new psychedelic to be couched in lucid, ornate, mid-Victorian prose; it simply wouldn't work!

Material for Speculation

And now, finally, let me dip into what I regard as the less than fully exploited areas awaiting the attention of SF writers and - hopefully - their readers. I'll re-emphasise my point about choosing the most promising and fruitful material for speculation, just so you don't forget it.

Let's perform two parallel mental exercises, which in fact I had to perform recently when I was working on STAND ON ZANZIBAR in order to give myself a proper notion of what does not change in our environment: first, let's consider what in a given room - like my own study - would seem strange or curious to a visitor from a previous century, and then what about me, subjectively, would be peculiar to him.

Objects are pretty easy aren't they? You look around on entering the room, you see walls, floor, ceiling, a chair, a desk, shelves of books - all familiar except in detail to our time-traveller. Then you put on the light, and this is definitely new. The typewrite might not be, even though it's electric; the first patent for a typewriter was, I believe, taken out in England in Queen Anne's reign. The central heating is a toss-up, but the Duke of Wellington brought the idea back from St Petersburg and installed it in Apsley House, so the chances are that an educated person from 1867 would recognise its function if not its shape.

But of course elsewhere in the house there's a TV set and a couple of radios and a telephone and a record-player and none of these would be understood at first glance by your imaginary caller from the past. You'd have to overset scores of mistaken assumptions about the nature of the physical world before you conveyed their purpose. To take a striking instance: the ideas of sound equating to a pattern of vibrations should be familiar to him, but the idea of turning a physically detectable pattern (the groove around a record) first into electrical currents and then into sound would require hours of explanation chasing probably clear back to irrelevancies like the interchangeability of matter and energy and ultimately I think you'd get bored and refer him to a good library instead.

However, for all that that bit of explaining would take some doing, I think you'd find it a lot easier than making me, or my wife, or my friends, perfectly clear to our visitor! Okay, certain things go without saying: I'm a male member of the species homo sapiens and so is he; my clothes, the glasses I wear for working, and sundry other externals are self-explanatory. But we live in a four room flat plus an attic which in our visitor's day was in single family occupation. This would puzzle him, because he would know about

writers, and I'm a moderately successful one and I perform the equivalent of "keeping my carriage" - in other words, there's a car in the garage - so he'd be amazed to learn that we have no servants. But what drive him out of his skull would be the fact that I actively dislike the idea of having servants. To explain just why, I'd have to review the entire recent history of Europe and America, taking in things like the vacuum cleaner and the invention of nylon, and probably he still wouldn't catch on because the reasons aren't clear enough to me for me to verbalise them.

Let's take it a little further. I'm not a Christian. He'd come from an age where - for instance - to hold a lectureship at university, or sit in the House of Commons, you were expected to be at least a practising member of the Church of England if not actually in Holy Orders. Of course, he'd know about militant atheists and rationalists. But I'm not militant. The question of religion just seems an irrelevance to my daily life. And further still: he'd probably have certain definite political views related to the major parties of his day - he might well be a Liberal. Try explaining to him why the Liberals have become a gadfly-type ginger-group and the Labour Party is in office, and you'd confuse him beyond hope until you changed the subject.

Aspects of Life

And coming closer yet to home: what would our visitor from the past make of certain aspects of our private lives, not just mine but people's in general? Just recently I had over from the States a copy of that extraordinary Victorian sexual autobiography, My Secret Life. The anonymous author of this book, who spent his whole life and two fortunes in a continual chase after sex, could yet do something like marrying a woman - presumably for her money - who physically disgusted him. He subscribed to the view that sex was all right with the servants but one oughtn't to do it with a lady of one's own class. The marriage between Marjorie and me, I'm glad to say, operates as a partnership, on that level as well as all the rest. He, on the other hand, probably gave credit to that astonishing view of William Acton's (the leading theorist and writer on sexual subjects of the last century, whose work I've also lately been reading up on in Marcus's The Other Victorians) - the view that a properly brought up, normal young lady ought not to be troubled by sexual impulses.

We've reverted - don't fall into the common error, by the way, of thinking of modern sexual permissivity as brand-new; it's more a reversion to the habits the human race has preferred throughout history in its most successful societies - we've reverted, as I say, to an open and frank attitude about sex which was out of fashion in our visitor's time. He came from a society where they were getting ready to drape piano-legs and define "stomach" in a popular dictionary by the single word "receptacle".

Because, of course, their prudery extended to virtually all organs of the body. We like to swim and sunbathe with nothing on, and if we happen to have friends along this doesn't stop us. Well, this happened in our visitor's time too, but his society was far more schizophrenic than ours. A French dairist whose name I recall as Wagram (but I may be wrong) reported how he went for a swim at - I think - Weymouth, in the customary garb of nothing and when he came out he found a lady and her two daughters parked on the beach ostentatiously ignoring him because they refused to recognise the existence of the bare human

body... We not only know about it, we rather approve of it and think it ought to be shown off for what it is.

Your upper-crust Victorian lady would show off in the ballroom with an amount of cleavage that would make the Hays Office wince, but that was only for after dark; during the day, she would cover up to the neck and feel rather exposed without sleeves on her dress. In the city she would feel naked if the wind lifted her skirt above her ankles; contrariwise, on the beach she would wear a costume that stopped at the knee. Stranded on a country railway station lacking any form of convenience, she would discreetly employ her all-enveloping skirt to hide the fact that she was answering a call of nature, but on being posted to Paris and discovering a bidet in the bathroom of the British Embassy she would call a plumber to take "that disgusting thing" away! (True...)

Now here in sum, is where I think SF ought to go looking for its unexploited material. Are we not ourselves a paradoxical society, offering an unprecedented standard of living to about one-third of the human race while the other two-thirds exist on the edge of starvation? Is not the richest country in the world, America, compelled to admit that twenty per cent of its own population is effectively poverty-stricken? Do not we, who can orbit men in space and send TV cameras to the moon, run the daily risk of annihilating our achievements in war? Has not the traditionally staid country, Britain, become so far-out that America, once the trend-setter and radical among nations, has begun to appear conservative by contrast? And are not paradox and improbability the very stuff of which science fiction is made.

Stimulate the Readers

I'll take your agreement to that statement for granted because if I don't I shoot my line of argument to hell, and I'll further suggest that any SF writer worth his salt ought constantly to be performing this little exercise about having a visitor from the past, but in reverse, and if he does it conscientiously he'll never be short of plots and background material which will continue to stimulate the reader.

Suppose, then, we envisage the inverted situation: you from 1967 are miraculously transferred to the next century. Are we going to get bogged down in hardware? I don't see why, nor what profit there will be in it. Plenty of people - as was instanced by the recent Weekend Telegraph feature on the Britain of 1990 - are thinking about what we'll live in, wear, ride around in and so on. They're researchers. SF writers are speculators, which is not the same thing.

Consider the relative irrelevance of the hardware aspect as exemplified by your own home and that of a young Chicago executive recently described in Playboy. The latter has a waterfall pouring down from the open-plan living-room to the lower floor where he keeps a sauna bath; he has both an electronic wall, as they call it - hi-fi, TV, and God knows what in the way of electronic gadgets - and an open log-fire, indicating how wide a span from present to past can be covered under a single roof. Yet you, living I imagine as I do in a conventional house or flat with fixed walls and doors on hinges and no waterfalls and perhaps even no log-fire unless you live in the country away from a smokeless zone - you and I, I say, are citizens of the same era as that young man in Chicago and even of the same western culture.

This is not to say that you don't need to think about what will directly affect the lives of your imagined future characters. You couldn't possibly write a book that accurately reflected 20th century Britain without referring to phones, cars, TV and so forth. But what affects your thinking is the use you put these things to, especially the information you get from them, not their mode of operation. It wouldn't make a substantial amount of difference if the laws of nature had turned out marginally differently and your phone could be acoustically powered, or if your radio were gas-operated - speaking of which, I wonder if Walt Willis still maintains his monopoly of gas-operated radios in Northern Ireland...

Shifted Viewpoint

What does make a substantial amount of difference, on the other hand, is the sort of thing William Bade envisaged in his rather fine story Ambition, in an early issue of Galaxy. A man from the fifties gets snatched into the future; excited, he demands how things are at the lunar base, whether man has yet colonised Mars, and so on - to discover that even the educated people around him barely know what Mars is because the focus of interest has shifted completely and no one gives a hoot any longer about space travel. He realises ultimately that he's in the same position as a crusader in the 20th century arguing that the atom-bomb is the perfect weapon to exterminate the infidel.

Just to rub in a little further the irrelevance of hardware: suppose you imagine a society living in mobile homes mass-produced like cars and delivered on-site anywhere you choose - the Australian outback, the Canadian northwoods, anywhere - by airlifting them in. Does it sound original? Probably, but if you'd written that sort of story you'd be chagrined to learn that Buckminster Fuller designed and costed the project in 1927 assuming that the houses were to be delivered by then available dirigible airships!

Far more interesting and promising, to my mind, is the question whether this sort of facility would change our social behaviour, making us more akin spiritually to the nomads of today like the Bedouin, perhaps, or making us rootless despite the pressure of national governments so that eventually nationalism became an obsolete attitude.

Another few similar questions, picked at random. Are we likely to see the apotheosis of current trends towards sexual permissivity in the general acceptance of homosexuality because it doesn't make for children to further over-crowd our crowded world? Burgess touched on this in The Wanting Seed, but didn't exploit it. I believe Anne McCaffrey is working on a novel investigating this approach, and I look forward to it with great interest.

What about the turnover that's taking place in our conception of what's "real"? It used to be that the great events which found their way into the history books took place some time ago and at a distance; in other words, you'd read about Lincoln's assassination or the victory at Waterloo days or weeks afterwards. Now, the grand events which will form history are instantly available via TV and radio. Our idea of "real reality" is turning over towards the notion that what we perceive for ourselves is less imp-

ortant - hence, less "real"- than what we learn through long-distance communication channels. Unless, of course, we get caught up in some newsworthy event like Aberfan, and that's not something to be hoped for, is it? Someone who's experienced the full impact of this shift in attitude is going to think differently from us, just as the characters in Mary Renault's "The-seus" novels thought differently. It would be one hell of a task for an SF writer - but a very rewarding one - to construct a convincing character who had undergone this change

Eighty Year Hitch

Something else which has been bugging me for years (in fact I sold an article about it, "A 21st Century View of Sex", to Bob Lowndes's sexology magazine Real Life Guide): what happens to marriage when getting hitched at twenty implies the daunting prospect of eighty years together? For that you need only assume that in advanced countries the life expectancy goes up to a century, and more than that is implied in certain currant programmes of medical research. Marriage in the contemporary sense - "according to the law of this country marriage is the union of one man with one woman to the exclusion of all others" - will simply be untenable. Yet for the sake of bringing up children against a stable background it's got to be kept going. A lot of my friends seem to have evolved a technique for solving this problem, without apparently realising that that's what they're doing, but it'll be a while before something happens which I included in my last novel: the state of Nevada recognises the legal status of group marriage up to a maximum of ten partners!

Fritz Leiber touched on that in Nice Girl with Five Husbands, you'll recall - but that still stands on its own, years after it was first printed, whereas I think SF writers could well preoccupy themselves with such subjects.

Played Out

To sum up them: what I'm saying in essence is that the single source of much 19th century SF - the implications of advances in engineering or other technology - is vitrually played out as a suitable source for 20th century SF. On the other hand, developments in fields which the last century largely steered clear of offer and for the for the forseeable future will continue to offer a supply of endlessly absorbing speculation. Verne, and even Wells (though his obsession with social change makes him a borderline case), could hardly have exploited the material we are now being offered by such suggestions as the existence of the territorial instinct in man, which I've just got that 200,000-word novel out of, because in the last century Darwinian evolution was still too touchy a subject for the general public. So too was Freudian investigation of human sexuality. Things have turned over; we're less prudish about sex now.

But we're still horribly prudish about violence, in the sense that we feel - thanks, presumably, to conditioning in our society - one should not question bravery, glory and patriotism as an excuse for murder, any more than in the Victorian age one was supposed to question a proper adherence to chastity even if the result was a domineering old bag who proceeded to ruin her sons' lives and turn them into queers and masochists. It's not

for nothing that flagellation was referred to in Parisian brothels of the day as "the English vice". I strongly suspect that obsession with the ability to annihilate citiesful of other nationalities will be condemned in comparable terms a few hundred years from now, if we're still around.

So I would counsel any and every writer who's wondering about the paucity of good fresh material he can generate by following the - ah - traditional SF approach, to catch up on the present day and discover what is new in our knowledge of ourselves. We know a hell of a lot about ourselves now - the trouble is finding out just how much we know.

Further, I'd request - even beg - you the most vociferous and influential section of the SF readership to let writers know whether they got it right or wrong when they tried their new ideas. Pandom has elected itself into the position of a very strong influence on what writers produce. Like it or not, certain responsibilities derive from that position, including a sense of dependence some (not all out many) writers feel on you as a representative - if skewed - cross-section of their audience who are willing to talk back.

What we don't need, of course, is... well, a question like, "Why don't you do it the way Kuttner did it?" - or Heinlin, or L. Ron Hubbard!

As I keep insisting, like all fiction SF is ultimately concerned with people, and I'd simply like you to remember that, after all, the human being is still the most complex mechanism which can be produced by unskilled labour. Vive la différence and thank you for your attention.

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More Explanations (continued from Page 6)

A word or two about this issue might be in order. Although containing full coverage of the Easter convention, it is far from what was originally planned. Purely in the interests of economy, and in a sudden, savage desire to get the thing off my back, I've left out a number of regular features. These include the Melting Pot of readers' letters, and at least one Buz Busby column (the one on stencil now is entitled "The Plow is a Harsh Mistress") Along with some fresh material, and more letters if you write them, this will all be published in the near future as a separate and complete issue of Spec.

I may even be able to salvage that editorial.

In the meantime, there are a few other changes to report. First, Speculation must become "irregular" in schedule. Second, Al Lewis writes from California to resign as U.S. Agent (pressure of other activities). In the light of all this, I don't think I can accept any further subscriptions to the magazine.

Not all is black. Joining me as a co-editor is Bob Rickard, a local man from Birmingham who produced the cover for this issue and also the stencils of John Brunner's long article. A Good Man, Bob, student at B'ham College of Industrial Design by day, S-f artist by night, writer of letters and buyer of drinks, the man who will, one day, revive the Birmingham SF Group....

Finally, I'd like to make a few apologies. These are to John Brunner, Mike Moorcock and Tony Sudbury for holding on to their material for so long. To Ivor Latta, Bob, and Pam Yates for not using their artwork sooner, and to all you subscribers and readers. Thank you, faneditors, for continuing to send your magazines, and also publishers for still sending review copies. All is not lost, - but thank you for your patience.

Peter Weston

REVIEW SECTION

OFF-PLANET ADVENTURES

NON-STOP, by Brian W Aldiss, Faber & Faber 1967 (reissue) 18s.

SENSE OF OBLIGATION by Harry Harrison, Dobson 1967, 16s.

THE KILLING MACHINE, by Jack Vance, Dobson 1967, 16s.

NON-STOP was just about the first full-length novel by Brian Aldiss in the science fiction field, and in some ways might seem on a simpler sort of level than his later works. As a 'lost-starship' story it is well-paced and introduces many imaginative embellishments to the theme. Various peculiar events happen during the story, at first glossed over but later becoming more and more important. We gradually realise that Something Is Going On - and receive a major explanation in the last chapter. It is here that, as the Man from the Observer said, "when you discover what it was all about, you start again at the beginning." Generally a lively and ingenious story.

Harry Harrison began writing about a unique and fascinating culture on his world of Anvhar, and then after the fifteenth page of SENSE OF OBLIGATION he went on to tell a story about something else, not nearly so interesting. That is not an original observation, by the way. Harrison's hero is dropped head first into a hostile situation about which he knows very little, and rather as DEATHWORLD, he finds a solution through luck, determination, and the author's plotting. A sort of Man of Destiny with a rigged deck.

Nevertheless, the world of Dis, with its unpleasant inhabitants, does provide opportunity for a good deal of excitement and some cerebral activity on the whicness of whyfore. As in some of Harry Harrison's other books, I find there is an elusive quality here which gives the story a much greater degree of conviction and authority than it ought really to have any right to. Harry Harrison in his Heinlein-vein, perhaps ?

In contrast, Jack Vance remains a stylist, individual enough to be completely beyond any of the current New Wave/Old School arguments. For fifteen years or more he has been turning out fiction which has by-and-large remained remarkably the same in content. You know what you're getting with any Vance story - a blend of colourful background, unique prose style, fairly simple plotting but a wry sense of humour.

In every case, (apart from a few related stories, such as the Magnus Ridolph series), the author has created a new setting for each tale. Perhaps tiring of this, he began with STAR KING to use the same props twice over - creating not a chronologically-linked Future History, but rather a Future Canvas, wide enough to take a whole set of novels against a common background. Connoisseurs love this sort of thing, and they usually draw maps of write 'histories' of an author's imaginary worlds.

THE KILLING MACHINE is the second in this series, stronger than the first in several ways. All reference to the peculiar origin of the 'Star

Kings' themselves has been dropped with benefit - they are now bandits, odd but completely human. The story-line is identical in motivation but much stronger and more active in execution, while the author seems to have more confidence in his settings even while bringing in a lot more of his extraneous chapter heading "quotations".

From an excellent beginning the book slows down by degrees, until the last few chapters have lost most of their momentum. Worse, as far as I can see, a substantial part of the plot falls apart at this stage. It All Happened because the Villain wanted the girl - but from what it says here, he already has her ! But in spite of these faults, in spite of the not-very-human protagonist, there remains an unusual charm in this novel.

SOME NEW BOOKS FROM BALLANTINE

CHTHON by Pier Anthony; 75¢

"A busy and ingenious combination of the elements of myth, poetry, folk song, symbolism, suspense story - a bursting package, almost too much for one book." That is one comment on Chthon, a very apt one. The word itself relates to a cave prison for incorrigibles, who are forced to mine garnets in the steamy interior of a planet. One of the prisoners does not accept his fate, and starts a trek to the surface - a journey beset by many dangers, such as many-headed monsters, giant jellyfish, hot gale-force winds, and putrefying disease. The story is fascinating and full of suspense.

DOLPHIN BOY by Roy Meyers; 75¢

This is a new Tarzan book under another coat - the story of a boy raised among the dolphins, through a series of remarkable coincidences. There is some good descriptive writing in what is really the first of a series which may go on for ever, just like Big Brother Tarzan.

THORNS by Robert Silverberg; 75¢

Another of these 'big' paperbacks from Ballantine, this one the story of Superman and Ultra-Woman. "Sadists will enjoy the story," says a trade press review, "as will people who like lengthy descriptions of surgery". But this is not altogether fair - there is a lot of feeling behind this story, let down only by a somewhat deus ex machina ending of happiness.

THE ESKIMO INVASION by Hayden Howard; 75¢ ** Recommended highly

The novelettes upon which this novel is based have been appearing in Galaxy during the past year or so. Together they combine to make a gripping and very, very good whole. There is suspense and drama here, and a very vivid description of some of the problems of tomorrow. Of course, we hope that our tomorrow will not be complicated by multitudes of 'Esk's', but I'm sure that Mr Howard must have a long familiarity of life in Baffin Land. No-one could describe these scenes so well from merely a travel book !

MISTRESS OF MISTRESSES by E.R. Eddison; 95¢ "Worm Ouroboros".series.

RESTOREE by Ann McCaffrey; 75¢ A novel from an author new to SF.

AN ALFRED BESTER OMNIBUS, from Sidgwick & Jackson 30s

Quite the most rewarding book on sale today in Gt. Britain. This volume contains the two novels TIGER, TIGER, and DEMOLISHED MAN, plus all the stories from the US PB DARK SIDE OF EARTH. These seven brilliant stories are not available in other editions in the UK, at least to my knowledge. Excellent reading.

A VANVOGT OMNIBUS, from Sidgwick & Jackson, 30s.

Another in this series of "Classics" of SF, among which are omnibus editions of Robert A Heinlein, Arthur C Clarke, & Isaac Asimov. This fifth book contains the novels THE BEAST and THE BOOK OF PTATH, and PLANETS FOR SALE (in collaboration with E. Mayne Hull, the author's wife. Again, stories not otherwise available. 496 pages.

AUTHORS COLLECTIONS

THREE NOVELS

TURNING ON

THE TROUBLE TWISTERS

PLEASANT DREAMS/NIGHTMARES

"The hell with them", says the protagonist of Semper Fi, the first story (story ? no, just an episode!) in Damon Knight's TURNING ON. And I wonder whether that might well be the author's attitude to his readers ?

That's unjust, I know, but here, where there is no story, merely a situation, I'm sure that another author could have contrived a better framework upon which to hang the message. Not Knight - he throws the mess at the reader - "Here, it's yours, you work something out !" And the same with The Big Pat Boom, (although there are clues aplenty) and with The Handler... and...

I must confess that even so, I enjoyed these fragments. They seem not as closely linked to reality, but still akin to some of Budrys' work. However, I don't think a book of nothing but this sort of thing would be well appreciated, and neither did the editor. He has mixed some of Knight's earlier works in among do-it-yourself episodes, plus a couple of Frederic Brown-style vignettes, an in-group spoof on the Hyrda Club, and the oddly warm Mary. Conclusions from this book are that Damon Knight has a sense of humour, a way of writing around off-track ideas, and a multi-purpose style which can do (nearly) anything if he wants it to. Good collection.

THREE NOVELS is a further Damon Knight collection from Gollancz, and a more successful one. Knight does not work well in the novel-length story, is unpredictable in the very short-form. But novelettes are his meat. Look at Natural State, reprinted so many times it is already a classic; Look at "The Dying Man", a beautiful Utopian story of the man who is doomed to the ridiculously short span of a normal lifetime; Look at Rule Golden, the least of the three, about what happens when the Golden Rule is an actuality. Excellent book.

* TURNING ON, by Damon Knight, Gollancz 1967, 18s.

* THREE NOVELS, by Damon Knight, Gollancz 1967, 21s.

AUTHORS COLLECTIONS

AUTHORS COLLECTIONS (contd)

Although each story in THE TROUBLE TWISTERS has its own high level of technical gimmickry and situation-handling, I found them uninspiring as a bunch. The acid test is that I could remember none of them from their appearance in Analog, which wasn't very long ago. Perhaps Poul Anderson has become just a little too good at ringing the changes on what are really a limited number of ideas (in this case, concerning van Rjinn & the Poles-otechnic League). Perhaps the author has written so much that a quality of sameness remains in each story, his characters, descriptions, plots, have all appeared before. But then again, a newcomer to the field might find these among the most satisfying stories being written today.

I think that it would be well for science fiction and for Poul Anderson if he could forget the SF field and went away and wrote about something else for five years. Then when he came back he could write that masterpiece which he has been promising but not delivering for twenty years. In any case, 3-cornered Wheel, A Sun Invisible, and Trader Team are good stories of the Analog kind.

I have in the past made numerous enemies by declaring that I don't like horror or supernatural films and stories. This dislike arises not through distaste, but simply because I consider such material to be absolutely pointless and absurd. It could be said that I have no empathy with anybody who can take such things seriously.

This being the case, it follows that I greatly enjoy the sort of fantasy found in the old Unknown and Beyond and rarely in F&SF, where inexplicable things are treated matter-of-factly and often with some humour. Away with those Things which go Slurp in the Night !

One further exception I will make. This is to the type of material being written by Robert Bloch and a few others. This to my way of thinking is not so much written to horrify as it is to coldly play with vaguely unpleasant ideas to see what will happen. Technically I think this is akin to the 'sick' joke, both sometimes enjoyable in moderate doses.

After that long build-up, there is not a great deal else to be said about PLEASANT DREAMS/NIGHTMARES. Here are fifteen short stories, each written around a different idea but all to a similar pattern. The first one is not too original, and is about a voodoo doll, whereas the last in the book is about a weird kind of demoniac possession. The Hell-Bound Train won a Hugo in 1959, although it is by no means the best story here.

* THE TROUBLE TWISTERS, by Poul Anderson. Gollancz 1967 21s.

* PLEASANT DREAMS/NIGHTMARES, by Robert Bloch, Whiting & Wheaton, 1967, 21s

Some ACE TITLES, 1967

CITY, Clifford D. Simak, 60¢; BORN UNDER MARS, John Brunner 50¢
SOS FROM / WORLDS, Murray Leinster 50¢ ; STARWOLF I, Ed. Hamilton, 50¢
THE GANYMEDE TAKEOVER, by Phillip K Dick. 50¢ (original novel).
THE WANDERING TELLURIAN, Schwartz/ KEY TO IRUNTIUM, Ken Bulmer. 60¢
THE IF READER OF SF, ed. Frederik Pohl, 60¢; EDGE OF TIME, Grinnell, 45¢

SOME ACE TITLES, 1967

THE WORLD SWAPPERS, by John Brunner, 50¢; WORLDS OF IMPERIUM, Laumer, 45¢
THE X FACTOR, Andre Norton, 50¢. BRIGHT NEW UNIVERSE, J. Williamson, 50¢
THE WEIRWOODS, Thos. Burnett Swann, 50¢; COMING OF THE TERRANS, Brackett 50¢
THE ARSENAL OUT OF TIME, by David Grinnell, 50¢
THE LAST CASTLE (Vance)/WORLD OF THE SLEEPER, Tony Russell Wayman; 60¢
ROAD TO THE RIM (Chandler)/ THE LOST MILLENNIUM, Walt & Leigh Richmond 60¢
LORD OF THE GREEN PLANET, (Petaja)/ FIVE AGAINST ARLANE, Tom Purdom, 60¢

THE WANDERER, by Fritz Leiber, Dobson Books, 25s. 350pp

This was the Hugo-winning novel for 1964, published for the first time in this country. The story is unique in the grandness of concept combined with vividness of storytelling from a multitude of viewpoints. What might have been old-style SF space-opera treated in the manner of the 60's. (A review and comment by the author appeared in ZENITH 7,8,9.)

SEEKERS OF TOMORROW, by Sam Moskowitz, Ballantine Books, 95¢

Evaluations of 21 SF authors of the last 25 years. A full appreciation of this book will appear in the next issue of SPECULATION.

TIME FOR A CHANGE, by J.T. McIntosh. Michael Joseph Ltd, 25s.

This story appeared as "Snow White and the Giants" in recent issues of If magazine. It is a most unusual story, told in the first person and getting more and more complicated before the end is resolved through time-travelling machinations. A good story, little sex, much humour.

SPACESHIP TO SATURN by Hugh Walters, Faber & Faber 16s

SPACE WINNERS, by Gordon R Dickson, Faber & Faber 16s.

Two juvenile space-operas, the Dickson far superior but both suited to the below-16 age groups. Benevolent aliens, suspended animation - what new?

NEBULA AWARD STORIES, -2. ed. Brian Aldiss & Harry Harrison, Gollancz 25s.

Here is the second volume of winners of the new Nebula Awards, prizes given by the Science Fiction Writers of America Association, and hence different from the purely-amateur Hugo Awards. This volume contains both the second year winners and the runners up, and is a fine collection. Not all of these stories deserve their company, in my opinion; equally well, others are left out which I would like to have seen included. But for better or worse;-
The Secret Place, by Richard McKenna; Light of Other Days, by Bob Shaw; Who Needs Insurance, by Robin S Scott; Among the Hairy Earthmen, R.A. Lafferty; The Last Castle, by Jack Vance; Day Million, by Frederik Pohl; When I Was Miss Dow, by Sonya Dorman; Call Him Lord, Gordon R Dickson; In the Imagicon, George Henry Smith; We Can Remember it for you Wholesale, Phillip K Dick; Man in His Time, B.W. Aldiss.

VICTORY ON JANUS by Andre Norton, Gollancz 16s, 224pp

THE RUNAWAY ROBOT, by Lester del Rey, Gollancz 15s. 176pp

Two more juveniles, both very well done and accompanying both authors' earlier juveniles for Gollancz. Some of the best value in Books today.

EPP, by Axel Jensen. Chatto & Windus, 15s.

The new novel by Axel Jensen, winner in 1966 of an Abraham Woursell literary prize of £7500. It has been translated from the Norwegian, and is a vision of the future in which progress has dispersed humanity into a mass of unrelated and paltry humans. Very amusing in places. (A longer review will appear in the next issue of SPECULATION).

MASTERPIECES OF SF. ed Sam Moskowitz. World Publishing Co, \$6.50

The stories in this volume are taken from three hundred years of science fiction writing, and the book is a fictional companion to Moskowitz's critical volume, EXPLORERS OF THE INFINITE. With one exception, none of the stories has previously appeared in a science fiction anthology. (See SEEKERS OF TOMORROW, Page 39, and in SPECULATION-17)

THE MOON IS A HARSH MISTRESS by Robert A Heinlein. Dobson 1967, 21s.

One of the finest novels from this author for many years. A full account of the novel and some opinions will be presented in THE PLOUGH, SPEC.-17.

THE HOLE IN THE ZERO by M.K.Joseph. Gollancz 1967, 21s.

Not listed as SF, this book nevertheless contains a number of speculative lines of thought which tend towards metaphysics. It had the honour of receiving a favourable review in the 'General review section' of the Daily Telegraph.

SINISTER BARRIER. by Eric Frank Russell. Dobson 1967, 21s.

Many times has this novel been published overseas, but not in this country; strange since it is the first novel of English-born Eric Frank Russell. Well-known 'Fortean' theme - many virtues despite its 30 years' age.

BEST FROM F&SF 15TH SERIES. ed Edward L Ferman. Gollancz 22s.6d.

NEW NOVELS

THE GENOCIDES, Thomas M Disch.
(Whiting & Wheaton 18s. 1967)
BEYOND APOLLO, Jeff Sutton
(Gollancz 21s. 1967)

A number of other reviewers have written about THE GENOCIDES, and when I approached the book I had heard almost too much about it in advance. Subsequently, many pre-conceived impressions proved incorrect, and I read the novel with much enjoyment.

Briefly, an unknown agency has seeded the Earth with a giant plant, that slowly and surely strangles and chokes every other living thing on the planet. The story concerns a small group of people, faceless for the most part, who struggle and fail to come to terms with the Plant.

Even at crisis-points, the story seems to move slowly, and this is very far from a rugged Man-against-Nature adventure novel, just as it is not a pure 'novel of ideas'. But from the very first page it is surprisingly easy to get into, and holds the interest throughout.

//contd.

There has been some talk of the 'value' of this book, or of its 'message'. I don't really think this has any meaning other than "Did it spark any lines of thought?" - And for me, it did. There is, I will admit, more than some truth in Algis Budrys' comment from Galaxy that the characters are passive, and sit around brooding rather than actually doing anything about the situation.

BEYOND APOLLO is very different. As the title suggests, it is very much a story of the near future. So near, in fact, that (as with the author's previous novel), it is likely to be dated quite soon after its appearance. This is by no means a complaint; for it brings to science fiction a touch of relevance to the world which is more than welcome in some quarters. Back to Earth with a bump, in other words !

This story takes place in Moon orbit, and on the lunar surface. It concerns a series of problems, a la Clarke, and the writing almost has that informed attitude of the popular Sunday colour supplements when reporting on progress in space travel. Happy ending, naturally, for this non-specialist 'popular science fiction', and a bit pedestrian for the real connoisseur, perhaps. But I liked it.

OTHER BOOKS RECEIVED

From Faber & Faber; AN AGE, by Brian W Aldiss, 2ls (to be reviewed in SPECULATION Issue 17).

HOTHOUSE, by Brian W Aldiss, 2ls. (reprint).

BEST SF STORIES OF CLIFFORD D. SIMAK, 2ls. (Some of the stories from other Faber Simak collections).

THE SEEDLING STARS by James Blish 2ls. (The four novelettes on this theme, including the excellent 'Surface Tension', Blish's best story ever ?)

MISTER da V (& OTHER STORIES) by Kit Reed. 2ls.

(13 stories, slight, humorous, but much of a pattern).

A SENSE OF WONDER, edited by Sam Moskowitz. Sidgwick & Jackson 1967, 16s

Three long novelettes by well-known authors; each story having appeared some 2-3 decades ago. They each explore one particular theme or plot-twist, and are readable although somewhat dated. Also published in the USA by Doubleday as "THREE STORIES BY WYNDHAM, LEINSTER & WILLIAMSON".
contents; Exiles on Asperus (Wyndham); "The Mole Pirate" (Leinster);
"The Moon Era" (Williamson).

I HAVE NO MOUTH AND I MUST SCREAM, Harlan Ellison, Pyramid 60¢

LEGION OF SPACE/ LEGION OF TIME, Jack Williamson, each 50¢, Pyramid.

THE FANTASTIC SWORDSMEN, ed L. Sprague deCamp, Pyramid 60¢.

ANALOG ONE: ANALOG TWO: PROLOGUE TO ANALOG, ed John W Campbell, Panther Books, 5/-, 3/6, 5/-.

BEST F&SF 12TH SERIES, Panther 3/6d; TRADER TO THE STARS, Panther, 3/6d

BEST SF FROM 'NEW WORLDS', ed. Moorcock, Panther, 3/6d.

TO OPEN THE SKY, by Robert Silverberg. Ballantine, 75¢ (see SPECULATION-15)