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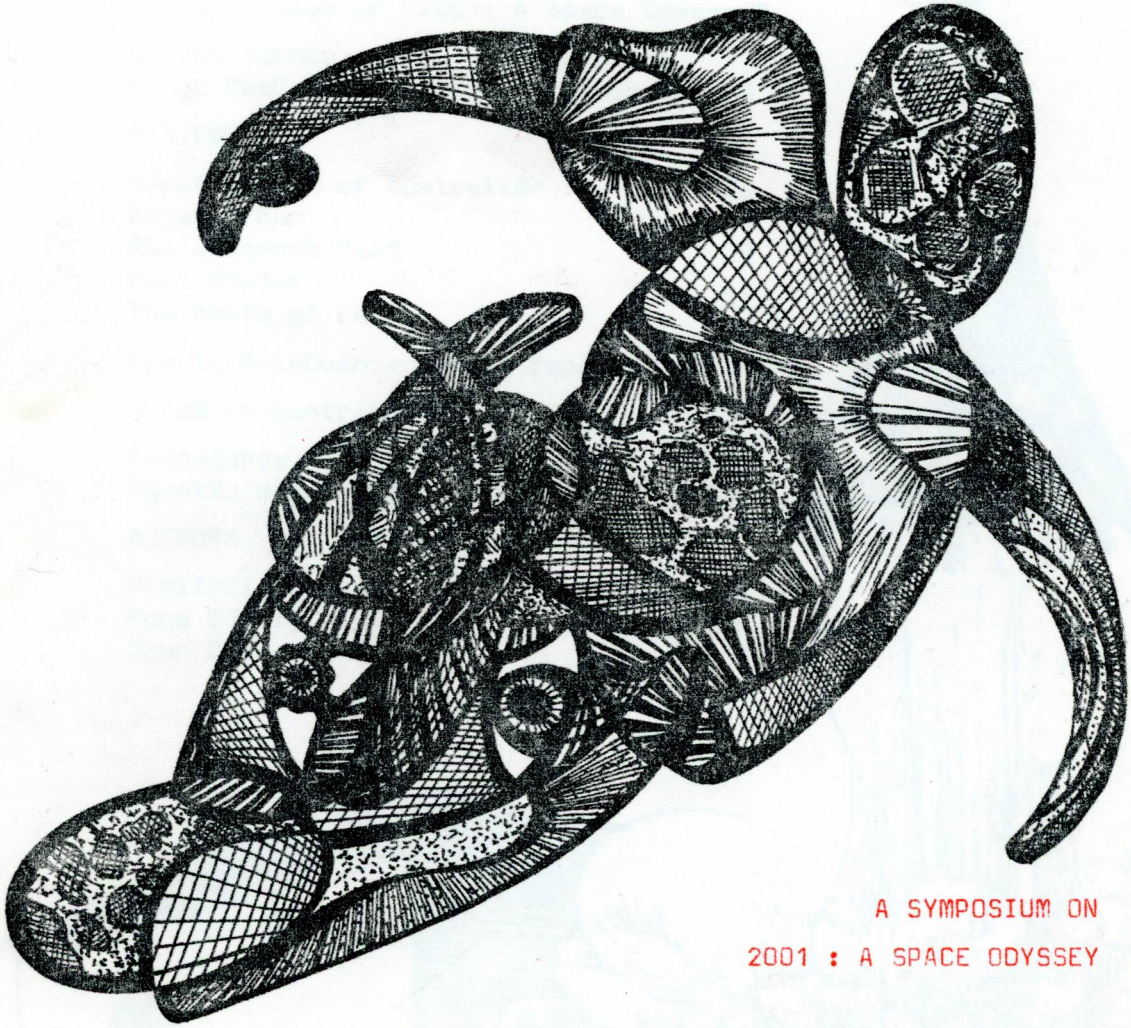

A SYMPOSIUM ON

2001 : A SPACE ODYSSEY

AUSTRALIAN SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW

SEPTEMBER 1968

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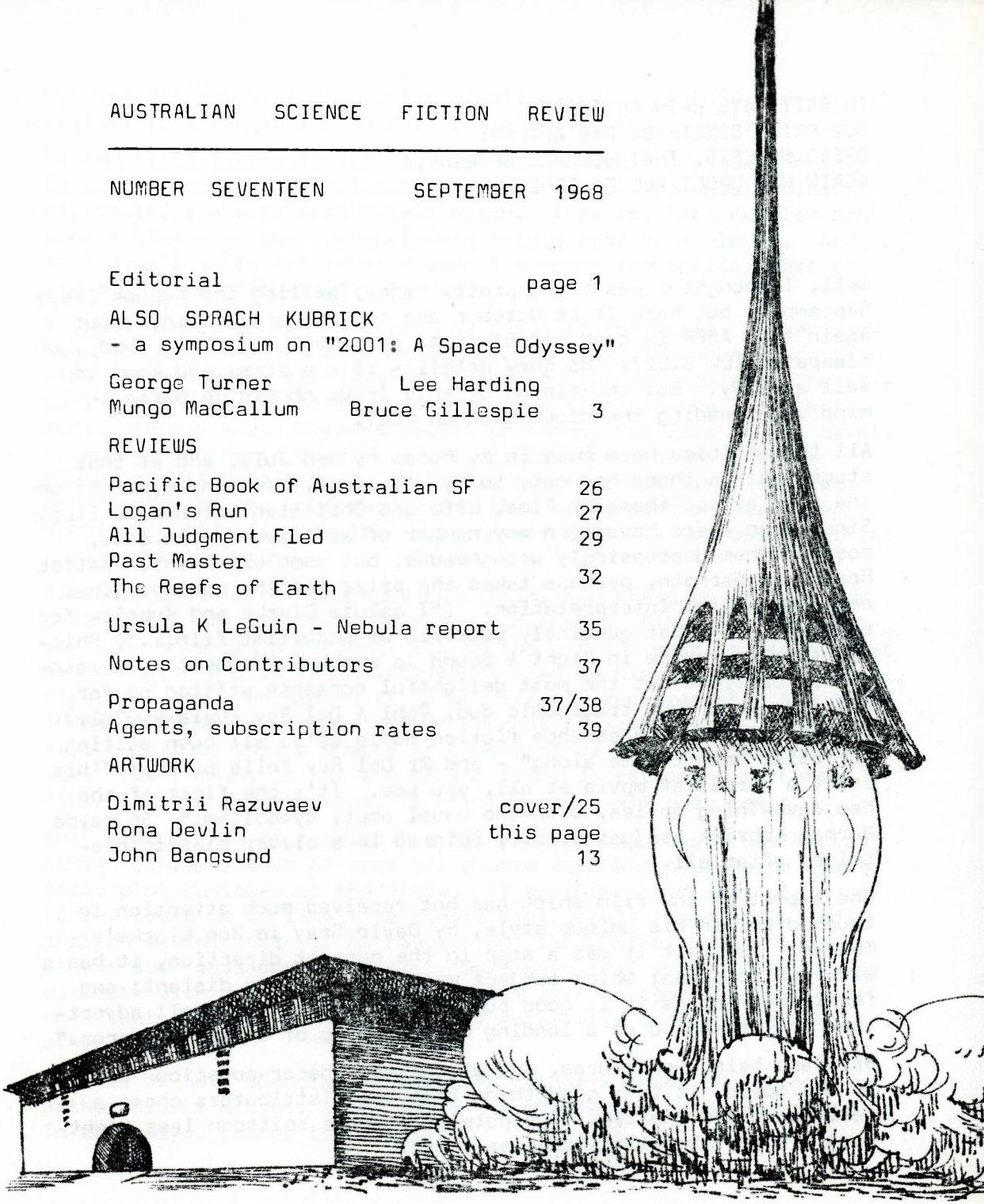

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THIRSTY DAYS HATH OCTEMBER
BUT PRIDE COMETH BEFORE AUTUMN:
DREAD NEMESIS, THAT SCOURGE OF FANS,
AGAIN HAS UPSET ALL MY SCHEDULES

Well, I thought I was being pretty canny, calling the August issue September, but here it is October and rumours are getting about again that ASFR is dead and Bangsund gafiated. No, "not dead, but sleepeth" (Lk 8.52). No gory detail - it's a story you know too well already. But the timing of this issue should be borne in mind when reading the discussion on 2001.

All the articles here were in my hands by 3rd July, and at that stage their authors had not, to my knowledge, seen any comments on the film except those in Time, Life and Christian Science Monitor. Since then there have been any number of articles and reviews, most of them depressingly wrongheaded, but some excellent. Walter Breen, in Warhoon, perhaps takes the prize for the most original and provocative interpretation. ("I salute Clarke and Kubrick for creating the first genuinely esoteric or occultist film...") Philip Strick's review in Sight & Sound is perhaps the best by a mainstream critic. But the most delightful nonsense written so far has come from that tragicomic duo, Pohl & Del Rey (Galaxy, July). Mr Pohl sighs: "The science fiction movie we've all been waiting for still hasn't come along" - and Mr Del Rey tells us why: "This isn't a normal sf movie at all, you see. It's the first of the New Wave-Thing movies, with the usual empty symbolism." So maybe Norman Kubrick is just Stanley Spinrad in a clever plastic disguise, after all.

One aspect of the film which has not received much attention is touched on, in his unique style, by David Gray in Ron Clarke's Mentor: "We felt it was a step in the correct direction, it has a wide public appeal which subject matter is not too distant; and feasible. For us it is good public relations, it is well advertised and presented at a leading city theatre of excellent decor."

Brisbane being, of course, one of the most decor-conscious cities in the world, it is a good thing that the distributors chose a well-appointed theatre. Two potplants and a spittoon less might have wrecked the film's chances there.

But David's sense of the public relations value of 2001 for sf generally, if a marginal consideration, is certainly a valid one.

My own first impression of the film was somewhat confused, mainly because I reached a conclusion which, I gather from his article in Psychotic, I shared with Robert Bloch. That is, that Kubrick had done a Stapledon and turned Bowman into a star or a planet. And that didn't quite fit in with what I thought the earlier part of the story had been about.

I found myself returning again and again to the music. I was convinced that Strauss's Also Sprach Zarathustra, the opening section of which dominates the film's opening and returns again at the climax, had immense significance. But what significance I was not sure. In his music Strauss sought to convey "an idea of the development of the human race from its origin, through the various phases of its development, religious and scientific, up to Nietzsche's idea of the Superman" - and this could perhaps have been Kubrick's attraction to the piece, apart from its obvious qualities as a cosmic overture.

But Strauss's words, and Kubrick's film, are based on the idea of evolution - an idea that Nietzsche denounced. "The goal of humanity", he once wrote, "cannot lie in the end but only in its highest specimens." And in fact Nietzsche's view of history is an odd and difficult one. He summed it up as "eternal recurrence". And THUS SPAKE ZARATHUSTRA goes into this concept at some length. Ah! you say, recalling that a number of commentators have postulated the idea that Bowman, at the end of the film, is returning to Earth (through time or otherwise) to start history all over again.

Ah! indeed. But if Kubrick had meant to convey this truly Nietzschean concept, then he went off course well and truly with that basic plot business of the slabs. If he understood eternal recurrence, would he be likely to ignore Nietzsche's ideas about ends-shaping divinities? If he researched ZARATHUSTRA, would he have missed such passages as this?: "Weariness that wants to reach the ultimate with one leap, with one fatal leap, a poor ignorant weariness that does not want to want any more: this created all gods and other worlds."

But all of this speculation has been rather knocked on the head by Arthur Clarke's book, which makes the story-line quite explicit. In some ways, rather too explicit.

It is very different from the film in many respects - and not least in that it is almost devoid of that mystery, that alien-ness, that characterized so much of the film. And even if it were not different, the kind of speculation that is presented in this issue and in other publications has value as exercises in interpretation.

I enjoyed Clarke's 2001. It cleared up a number of obscure things in the film, though sometimes only by departing from Kubrick's story. For example, Clarke's story involves the planet Saturn and its satellite Japetus - the "star gate" into which Bowman plunges at the beginning of the so-called psychedelic sequence is located on this satellite, and is the mysterious eye which filled the screen at various times during that sequence.

I don't want to be silly about this, but for me Kubrick's film <u>is</u> 2001, and I tend to regard Clarke's novel as an interpretation of it. It may be that Kubrick intended to convey more or less the story that Clarke has now set down, but even if he did, the film transcends the story and admits of many interpretations.

Kubrick and Clarke created the film, and we honour them for it. But - like Beethoven's Ninth (or Frankenstein's equally well-known opus, if you feel that way about it) - their creation has taken on a life of its own. And it increases in stature with every open and active mind that confronts it.

Now, about that music. Could it be that the C-G-C theme relates in a mathematico-musical way to the mystic ratio 1:4:9? Could it be that since, as Mr Blish has pointed out, the C-G-C of Zarathustra is ambiguous, there may be further significance in the C-E-G (or equivalent) of The Blue Danube - perhaps indicating confidence, optimism and so on? Could it be...

Could it be, Mr Bloch, that you and I were right all the time?

JOHN BANGSUND

Professor of Asfragism
University of Ard-Knox

7th October 1968

PS: I wouldn't take too much notice of rumours of monthly publication, if I were you - even if I started them.

GEORGE TURNER LEE HARDING MUNGO MacCALLUM BRUCE GILLESPIE

OOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO

A L S O S P R A C H K U B R I C K

OOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO

a symposium on 2001 : A SPACE ODYSSEY a film for all and none

GEORGE TURNER

Let me say at the outset that this is not a "review" of the Kubrick-Clarke film, but a discussion of it. An attempt, if you like, to observe its intention and meaning by detailed examination of its parts, and to assess its value on the basis of these observations. On this ground it is of no importance whether I liked the film or not (as a matter of fact I loved it).

First, a warning to the viewer - This is in every sense an experimental film, but artistically it breaks no new ground. Its ancestors are such works as LAST YEAR IN MARIENBAD, 8½ and THE TRIAL, but it is not as difficult as any of these and does not require a previous indoctrination in the techniques of symbolism or avant-garde pretensions.

But - it would be unwise to approach it with anything in mind but a willingness to observe and absorb, to be carried with it and to accept what it gives.

Expect traditional sf, and you may or may not get it. The elements are there, but are not traditionally used. Expect fantasy, and you will find it - and in finding it miss out on the real experience offered. Expect brilliant technical effects, and by the lord Harry you'll get them - but they are not an end in themselves; every last one is relevant and important to the theme.

This film was written by a scientist and produced by an artist, and the synthesis is exciting. But excitement is not the desired end, for the total effect is one of brooding calm.

All of which means, go to it without preconceptions. One further note - There are no characters in this film. There are only symbols. There are actors, but they are not characters; except as dramatic devices they are not even important.

THE STORIES

The two stories, one of which we may call the "fable", which is the surface account of a series of actions, and the other, the real story, march hand in hand. The fable, in fact, is beautifully tailored to express the true story with economy and clarity. (Don't deride the newspaper reviewers who found the ending puzzling and inconclusive. How would you, if your diet were nothing but sf, face up to deciding on the meaning of FINNEGANS WAKE? The reviewers were up against something outside their experience.)

The fable is this - In the beginning of human time an artifact descended from somewhere just as the primitive men discovered their first weapon (a club). It did nothing. It "observed", if that is the word. Eons later, in a time thirty-odd years from now, men discovered this artifact, or its counterpart, buried on the moon. It did nothing save discourage investigation by the use of high-frequency sound; its one discoverable property was that it beamed a signal in the direction of Jupiter. An expedition was launched to the Jupiter area to find out what might be there. The ship was run by a computer, which developed error and eventually killed all the crew but one. And in the orbit of Jupiter another of the artifacts was waiting. It took the remaining crew member out of space and time, or at least out of the universe as we know it, and placed him in a place of its own to live out his life. At the moment of his death it reappeared, to translate him into a mutant baby, which floated out alone among the stars, looking on the universe with new, unfettered eyes.

But the story is this - An Intelligence (God, if you like, or the Cosmic All, or even the Arisians, if your taste doesn't run to metaphysics) observed that humanity was struggling out of the caves, and sent an observer. Humanity clawed its way up to a technological civilization, while the observer waited on the moon, where it could be discovered only when a particular level of achievement had been reached and the discoverers would be able to observe it with at least a glimmer of understanding and good sense. But technological progress had gone its blindfolding way, and Man no longer looked <u>at</u> the Universe, only at what he could do with it. So, when he went to the orbit of Jupiter he went under the control of his creation, a computer. He was no longer in control of his destiny, but subservient to it. The Intelligence sabotaged his computer, throwing Man back on his own devices and intelligence. Man asserted his will and "killed" his computer, setting himself free from his technology. The Intelligence then took him to a place apart and waited. Man, at the moment of final extinction, recognized what was required of him and surrendered his in-turned view of the Universe. He was ready to become the next race after Man. And that is what he became, the first being since the dawn able to look out on the cosmos with eyes unchained by the blind spots and prejudices built up over the millennia.

The statement is simple and uncluttered - that if man is to understand the universe he lives in, he must first discard all he thinks he understands about it. That is all that the film is about.

All this is, of course, pure Clarke, an extension of the theme he nibbled at in CHILDHOOD'S END, and is a point of view constantly insisted on by astronomers, who are a very philosophic and often religious lot. And, since the supervision was also by Clarke, the technical detail is well-nigh faultless. It is there in great masses, but nobody ever stops to give a lecture or explain; if you understand it, that's your bonus; if you don't, well, it doesn't matter much, because you simply accept it and concentrate on the meaning. This is a film for people - not only for sf fans (who are people plus an obsession) - and people don't give a damn for scientific accuracy so long as the thing isn't so obviously wrong as to disturb them, and this attitude is aesthetically absolutely right. The one detail I could discover which could be cavilled at (and this is a quibble put in just to show that I had my eyes open) was that the legs of the dawn-men were too long and insufficiently muscular. Since the right effect could only have been produced by the use of freaks, one can scarcely mark it up as a debit.

So Clarke had an idea, and Kubrick had a vision and, since Kubrick is a greater artist than Clarke could ever pretend to being, the visionary took over and translated the idea into comprehensible symbols, and reproduced them on the cinerama screen in as breath-taking a display of virtuosity as has appeared since "Fantasia".

Let's look at the symbols and at how they are used. It may be rewarding, since a couple of them are subtle indeed, and only give up their secrets to afterthought. It is, I think, only by dissecting and appreciating these symbols that the achievement can be recognized. It won't prove nearly as difficult as trying to explain Ballard, or even Brian Aldiss at his naughtiest.

1 THE CHARACTERS They are there only to provide the surface story. What they do and say assists intelligibility, but what they say and do as individuals has no effect on the total drama. This is emphasized by a curious technical device, which at first is irritating and ends by being acceptable as the meaning becomes plain. It is in the sound track. All the scientists and the crew of the space ship have their bit to say (though dialogue is very sparingly used) but much of it can't be heard. You catch a general drift of what they are talking about, and every now and then a pertinent statement comes out loud and clear - the director intends you to hear that one. The rest is merely to give the illusion of everyday life. (This is assisted by the lack of scientific comment on the wonders of the future - they are the everyday way of living for these people.) But the two important people speak very clearly indeed. They are actor Keir Dullea, who eventually becomes the "Man" symbol, and the computer, who is the symbol of his enslavement to a mistaken idea of progress. They are the only true characters; they carry the drama; they are the only ones you need to hear. A daring experiment on Kubrick's part, and it comes off.

2 THE MONOLITH It does nothing, neither moves nor speaks. It is the observer for the Intelligence, and the symbol of the Intelligence, which is never seen. Its function is only to remind us that "there are more things in heaven and earth" etc.

3 THE BONE Dawn man discovers that a large thighbone makes a club, and promptly belts his enemy with it. He has discovered the principle of the lever; he is on his way to a technology. In triumph he tosses it in the air. Behind it heaven darkens, the stars appear, and the bone is a space ship coming in to land on the moon. The symbol of progress and history and the pride of Man's triumph (soon to be rocked and doubted as the monolith reappears).

4 SPACE Space is the symbol of itself alone. It is the universe, dark, immense and mysterious. Throughout the film it broods and threatens, beautiful and indifferent - and waiting. We have seen space on the screen before, and it was always unsatisfactory - just a black background with stars, without depth or visual effect. Here the cinerama screen comes into its own. Despite the fabulous roller-coaster ride in the first cinerama production, it is not a 3D process, but the ingenious camera uses its curving wings to produce an undeniable effect of depth. You look down the wings of the screen and into the void. You could fall a million miles into Kubrick's darkness. You look not at the figures on the wings of the screen, but past them, with the edge of your vision, just as in life. It is, in fact, an ingenious application of the rules of perspective, and it works. A space ship appears on the extreme edge of the screen; it is not in front of you, it is coming past you at an angle, and the lost-lamented sense of wonder is with you in full impact. Incidentally, it is in these scenes that I think the Leinster front-projection system has been used; otherwise the cost would have been prohibitive for a doubtful-return film of this nature.

5 THE COMPUTER HAL 9000, or Hal, is reminiscent of the computer in "Destination Void", but is not sparked by the inclusion of human brains in the circuits. He is Man's final production, a faultless imitation of the logical process, infallible, nearly human, so nearly human that he has been programmed to speak with emotional overtones. He is "he", not "it". He is perfect. Man has, in fact, created himself out of a job; he is not necessary, because Hal can do it all. And Man actually lets him run the show in the microcosm of the space ship (which by now has become the symbol of all civilization, in little). Man has abrogated his title; he has finally caught up with himself, and is prepared to sit back and let Hal do it. Man doesn't feel arrogant, merely satisfied; his arrogance is so much part of him that he cannot observe its presence. The universe is at his feet; he needs only to explore it and select what he wants of it. (At the moment he wants to look at the origins of this monolith and its implication of older intelligences. There is some small talk of cultural shock, but nobody goes so far as to examine the implications.)

6 FALLIBILITY OF THE COMPUTER Hal makes a mistake. Like a good egotist he promptly attributes the mistake to human error. Man, equally egotistical, decides to check on his "infallible" creation, and nobody, but nobody, considers the implications of the paradox involved. Both sides stand on their dignity.

But the break-down is, of course, the symbol of Man's fallibility, of the arrogance of his belief in himself. This theme is attacked from a dozen points in the course of the film, and is central to it.

7 THE DEATH OF THE COMPUTER Hal, under attack, kills in order to preserve himself. Captain Bowman is now Man, alone in the universe with his aberrant creation. He decides to destroy his creation, because only so can he find safety. Without knowing it, he has reached the first stage of self-knowledge, that Man is what is within him, not what he creates. So, one by one, he removes the memory banks. Hal retreats to childhood as his memories are removed, reduced at last to the first thing ever taught him, the singing of "Daisy". This reduction to childhood is another symbol, to be flung full force at the viewer's head at the climax of the film. He is being skilfully prepared for what is to come. Man is alone. He has freed himself of his technology. At last the Intelligence can reach him, because Man has only his own intelligence left. The only obstacle left is Man's ingrained point of view, and only he himself can alter that.

8 THE TRANSITION This is the famous "psychedelic" sequence, and I suppose the description is as good as any. It aims, by direct assault on the senses, to lift the viewer out of the universe and orient him to some other place, where or what is not explicit. The central, recurring figure is a gigantic eye. The transported Man is under very close observation now. (The eye of God? I haven't a clue, but I don't think so. The central statement is about intelligence, not about destiny.) In this sequence the sense of speed and urgency is stunning. At the end of it Man is catapulted on to a world very different from anything in our experience. (The technical effects are here obtained by the simple use of a spectrum filter, but the result is overwhelming. Mere prose can do nothing like it.) He is finally placed in a room decorated in a modified Empire style, and simply left there.

9 THE ROOM This symbol is the most puzzling, and the one most open to variant interpretation. It seems to represent familiarity and creature comfort. In it Man is alone with himself for all the rest of his time in the universe. He has literally nothing to do but think, and grow old among his possessions. He grows old. A wine glass breaks and he is reminded of mortality. But the conviction of immortality is in him. He grows older, takes to his bed to die. It is the end. All he has achieved has come to this, that he dies alone in a little room, with all the cosmos undiscovered because he tried to conquer it with weapons; he has never understood. The monolith appears. At the moment of dissolution Man glimpses truth and surrenders his arrogance. In space a more than human baby awakes to gaze on the universe with young, wonder-filled eyes. He is about to come into his own.

Let's ignore discussion of the technical stuff. It is spectacular, and great fun, but not of crucial importance. The questions to be answered are - Does "2001" contribute

anything to the sf genre, and does it contribute anything to film? These could be matters where one point of view is as good as another. In mine, it contributes something very necessary to the sf genre - the knowledge that intelligent handling can elevate a conventional statement and give it impact, that melodrama is unnecessary and meaning is all, and finally that art can produce more immediate impact than all the space opera ever turned out. SF writers, with all the techniques of millennia of writing at their disposal, settle for second best (for which the readers are mostly to blame). Kubrick, in his first attempt, has looked around him, seen what lies there to be used, and used it with imagination and considerable courage; one false move could have landed a squawking turkey on his hands. He has aimed at intelligence, and hit it.

Filmically, I doubt that the film is important save in the display of some useful techniques. Other directors have proved satisfactorily that thought can be demanded of an audience and obtained of it, and that the product can still make money. ("Zorba", "8½", "Marat-Sade".) It is, however, a forerunner. The crudity of the symbols will evolve with greater sophistication, and deeper intellectual problems will be attempted as the symbolic method is developed (and as the public becomes accustomed to it).

In the long run it is no more than a fabulous visual entertainment and a brilliant first attempt. But it is a very long run that lies ahead, and if "2001" is any indication, then magazine sf will soon appear very small cheese indeed. There is a public for something better than space opera and the arrogant intricacies of Campbellian logic.

LEE HARDING

"2001" is a brilliant, many-faceted jewel which can be studied from many angles with equal reward. I like to consider it as a religious allegory of a simple nature, and while your own view is fascinating enough, in context you seem to have overlooked several important points.

To begin with, the god-child (or whatever) is returning to Earth in the final sequence. This is a hell of a lot different from just gazing stupidly at the universe with new perceptions. He is returning with purpose, and this element of movement towards the waiting globe of the earth, combined with Strauss's music, provides a powerfully triumphant finale.

The slab itself can symbolize God or knowledge - or both - and the film presents on one facet man's search for and discovery of God. Three stages are represented - the primitive fear, the conscious curiosity and inspection, and final acceptance. This is probably the single most successful symbol in the whole film, driving home as never before the power of the implicit.

I find no reason to quibble with the middle sequence. The guys had to be taken out to Jupiter for a reason, and while they're on their way Kubrick takes the opportunity to make some very pertinent observations on Technological Man. Rather than a clumsily-joined series of bits and pieces, "2001" is a very cleverly made film, each segment having a purposeful style removed from the previous one, and each frame of film continues to build up an empirical argument - which I believe to be more Kubrick's than Clarke's.

It seems you are hardly conscious of the fact that Bowman lived out the rest of his life in that little room on an accelerated time scale. This much is explicit. If the purpose of the preceding psychedelic sequence has been to involve the audience in the closest thing to a subjective alien experience they are ever likely to encounter, then it follows that the room sequence should be equally bizarre. Bowman is in the power of super-beings, and we must expect them to act accordingly - in a thoroughly alien manner. If space is malleable to them, then why not time and the human spirit as well? And Bowman's actions throughout this sequence are so very different from before; he watches, he thinks; his mind is busy analysing things for the first time. He has become human and no longer dependent on his marvellous computer. His life has purpose where before there was none - he has ceased to be an automated spaceman and has become a human being engaged in the rapid processes of dying.

Strange that you should not mention the music - Richard Strauss, with the marvellous Nietzschean undertones; the glorious aerial ballet with "The Blue Danube" promoting in the viewer just the right amount of wheeling, free-fall euphoria. And the waltz, remember, is the most militant of civilized dances. The loneliness of the spaceship routine was beautifully reinforced by the brooding cello melodies of - Khatchaturian, I think - I missed the credits second time round.

You slipped up a bit on the "bone" sequence. The cut is to an orbiting solar observatory (or something like that), not a landing moon-ship. And I thought it was rather clever of Kubrick to drive home the bone bit by giving the Jupiter ship a segmented spinal column.

There was much more than a "simple spectrum filter" involved in those incredible penultimate sequences - solarization, for example, and negative printing and colour-changing (this by hand - a delicate and fantastically time-consuming business), and I think I detected a bit of infra-red stock and some double printing and over-dyeing. The whole effect was rather marvellous, and I think we agree on that point.

But it is the religious symbolism that confounds me more than anything else. It was everywhere - most strikingly in the sequence preceding the psychedelic section, when the slab swings up from the bottom of the screen and slides neatly in between - of all

things - the moons of Jupiter, lined up perpendicularly. The similarity with the Cross is overpowering - and immediately we are plunged into what seems to me to be an incredibly subjective non-physical experience.

It's a wonderful film, George - I think we agree on that - but in simplifying I feel that you have only exposed how much more there is to be discovered.

GEORGE TURNER

Since I go part of the way with your views, I'll take your letter point by point and see where we come out.

I don't care much whether the god-child (if he is indeed that) is returning to Earth or not. His existence is the dramatic point of the sequence, and, more importantly, the reason for his existence. If he is returning to Earth to spread the new look, well and good; all that matters is that Clarke's point has been made, that man must get rid of himself before he can achieve anything worth while on the cosmic scale. I realize the religious implication of much of the film, but feel that if this is indeed the intention then the fable is faulty. For instance, the "killing" of the computer was done to perpetuate man's existence; the Captain realized a tremendous point, that he had to be free of dependence on his artifacts in order to give his intellect a chance to work on the problem of survival. There is no evidence of a search for anything but new knowledge, unless one takes the attitude that all endeavour is essentially spiritual - which would lead us into an argument to fill the rest of our lives. My view (as at a single viewing) is that the Man motives were purely material, and that only in the moment of crisis did he see the necessity of doing away with the trappings. I cannot honestly see the proceedings in the light of a quest for God.

Your point about the slab is well taken, but does it indeed bring knowledge? The sequence showing the discovery of the possibility of the bone as a weapon shows it very definitely as a matter of chance with a flash of inspiration to let the brute see that this thing can be put to use - which is very likely what did happen, though probably not in one spasm of activity. The slab does nothing. It is there. It has seen something. It goes away to wait. It could, if one accepts the religious interpretation, represent the birth of a legend which eventually became the conception of God. This, however, I don't like because it cheapens the concept of God. God exists as a necessity (Voltaire's crack about having to invent Him contains terrific truth) and an internal force; the conception of God must spring from within man if it is to have validity, not be imposed, even by God Himself. The emergence of the sun disk over the top of the slab is a rebirth symbol repeated in half a dozen forms throughout the film, always marking a turning point of progress or opportunity for it.

"The guys had to be taken out to Jupiter for a reason..." They surely did, for a variety of reasons, mainly connected with presentation of the fable. First, the epic journey symbol was essential to the theme, and had to be got in in some way or other. (The bit about a "signal from the direction of Jupiter" was one of the few really clumsy elements in the work, and was got over quickly with a single reference, but it did serve to get them moving.) Second, the deep space background was Kubrick's major psychological gimmick, and had to be allowed full play; the effectiveness of the film depended on just how well he could bring off the interpretation of man's smallness in the universe. He brought it off brilliantly. The drama could have been played out on Earth, but the effectiveness would have been bitterly decreased. The trip, to Jupiter or wherever, was mainly a plot gimmick to give the atmospherics a chance. What use Kubrick made of the trip is something else altogether; he used everything but the kitchen sink, probably only because it didn't occur to him.

I don't think I suggested a normal rate of living for the penultimate sequence, but it might have been implicit. In any case, it doesn't affect the outcome or the meaning; the acceleration is, essentially, a cinematic method of covering time by telescoping. I can't agree that Bowman's reactions are no whit different from before. He has no reactions in middle age, except thoughtfulness, and this thoughtfulness gave me the impression that he was aware of a purpose imposed on him but was unable to penetrate the intention. The mortality symbol of the breaking wine glass and his brooding on it reinforced this impression, and unless his dying reaction to the appearance of the slab implies recognition and surrender, then I am altogether at sea. (This will fit the religious interpretation also.) I think the implication that Man can perceive and comprehend the necessity for the final mutation is a required ingredient; otherwise he becomes a plaything, whose existence is pointless. My feeling is that without this recognition the slab would have vanished again, and left him to die and disappear from the universe as something just not good enough. I don't feel that his eventual return to Earth as avatar mattered; it was Man, not a man, who was being reborn. The fable is here completely subjected to the symbolism.

Omitting mention of the music was sheer forgetfulness. Your comment is sufficient, I think. I could add that "The Blue Danube" was probably chosen for the initial space sequence because Strauss imposed on it the rhythm of a barcarolle (which was very clever of him) and the voyager symbol was powerfully enhanced thereby.

Memory tricked me in the "Bone" bit, and your reconstruction is correct. However, the perpetuation of the bone in the space ship was still the point of the cutting. The progress symbol.

Religious symbols, see above. I don't agree that the one you mention is intentional. A foreground crossbar against a background spine is pretty farfetched; I think it was

more a matter of camera composition - an effective shot. I like your equation of the space ship with the spinal column. It had irritated me as a piece of unnecessarily heavy and complex work, and I was wondering what Clarke's justification might be. You settle it nicely.

LEE HARDING

To sidestep the religious symbolism is to do less than justice to "2001". Kubrick and Clarke have given us what is in all essentials a religious film. It is not a theological exercise but an experience. There is not a frame of the film that does not benefit from the application of religious symbolism. A still of the "Cross" sequence is among the handful of significant pictures that Kubrick has released for publication to "Life", together with the information that Bowman is deposited in a "Louis Seize bedroom". Seize, my references tell me, was the Age of Enlightenment. And the lighting of this particular sequence - or more correctly, the illumination - comes from below, suggesting in a Jungian sense illumination from the subconscious.

To accuse Kubrick of employing "cinematic trickery" in the aging sequence not only dodges the main issue but puts a slur on the direction. One could suggest that the entire film is an inspired piece of cinematic trickery, and I suppose it could be approached on this superficial level. I can't see any possible gain from this sort of attitude. Having distorted space it seems to me a logical step to then shuffle time about. Kubrick has been most painstakingly careful throughout this entire sequence and it behoves us to pay attention to what he has done. As an old man Bowman is disturbed at his meal. He thinks he has heard or seen something but when he looks there is nothing there. He looks for significance in a broken wine glass - and perhaps finds it. But already it is too late. He is on his death bed and must die to be reborn, must die before he knows - anything. Must die to come before God. All this is good, sound, Christian thinking. And there is more...

To approach God man must first eliminate reason (Hal's higher functions - disconnect them) and then the physical body (the dead crewmate - dispose of it); thereafter the mind is free to discover deity. It is not by chance that the film moves immediately onwards to the Confrontation.

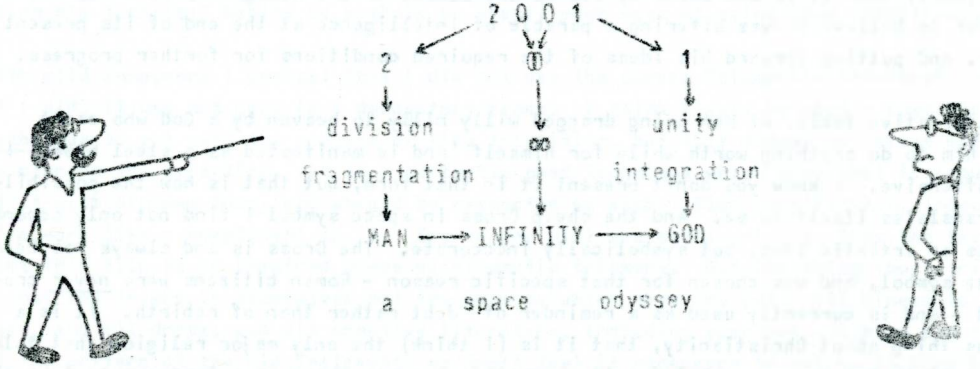
The Cross Sequence - The slab, representing Being, the horizontal plane, moves into position across the upright moons (signifying the psychical experience) and then disappears. The camera moves slowly upwards, the only movement it has made throughout the outer-space sequences of the Voyage. Enter transcendentalism. A logical sequence.

To suggest that the Intelligence, personified (if that is the right word) by the slab, has interfered with the computer is not only absurd but unnecessary. You have stated that the

slab never does anything; it only observes. Well, it does, in one instance, send a message to Jupiter, but that's beside the point. What matters is that Hal has already supplied the clue. Human error is responsible. Human error placed the expedition under the control of a machine. Human error, not Outside Interference, killed the rest of the crew. The alternative is not cinematic trickery but downright hokum.

The film is in three titled segments. Tell me quickly how long the Dawn of Man segment lasts.

And there are Clues. Take a close look at the title. Why "2001"? Consider this -



The apes greet the slab with fear and trembling. "Modern" man approaches it on the Moon with a confidence tinged with awe. Two incidents enhanced by the touch of different hands upon the slab. In the second sequence, man - oops! - Man has moved from downright fear to intelligent curiosity. I am inclined to wonder if, when the men line up to have their photograph taken, the slab actually smites them with the radio signal, perhaps rather annoyed by their reaction. Being photographed with God! - how thoughtless of these arrogant little bipeds!

No, I'm trying to be funny there. Kubrick allows us to laugh when he thinks it necessary. The first laugh is beautifully timed - the toilet episode. The audience is permitted to get rid of its pent-up emotions. They have probably been wanting to laugh all along, and, having got this out of the way, Kubrick gets on with the film. I think it remarkable that when he invites us to laugh again, much later, we find we cannot. We are amused on an intellectual level by Hal's apologies to Bowman about "making some bad judgements lately", and the comic undercurrent reaches Strangelove proportions when Hal breaks into "Daisy" - "I'm half cra-a-a-zy..." - but we cannot laugh. The tragedy has overtaken us.

GEORGE TURNER

When a work of art becomes regarded by the viewer as "an experience", all hope of meaningful exchange of ideas begins to fade. An experience can be communicated only in its own terms, which are purely personal - in other words, it can't be communicated at all save in the most fragmentary manner. For purposes of discussion the "experience" angle must be avoided for the sake of clarity; the absorption of another's ideas can modify one's own reaction to an experience (not the experience itself) but cannot communicate the other's experience. Experience and meaning are separate; only the meaning can be discussed.

I have not sidestepped religious symbolism as you rather wickedly put it, but have said quite clearly why I prefer to refuse it - that if Kubrick has presented us with a religious symbol, then it is one which by its Sunday-school nature denigrates both God and Man. I prefer to believe he was offering a parable of intelligence at the end of its present tether, and putting forward his ideas of the required conditions for further progress.

The alternative fable, of Man being dragged willy nilly to heaven by a God who can't leave him to do anything worth while for himself (and is manifested as a steel block) I find offensive. I know you don't present it in that form, but that is how the possibility translates itself to me. And the cheap Cross in space symbol I find not only second rate as an artistic idea, but symbolically inaccurate. The Cross is and always has been a shame symbol, and was chosen for that specific reason - Roman citizens were <u>never</u> crucified - and is currently used as a reminder of debt rather than of rebirth. It is a curious thing about Christianity, that it is (I think) the only major religion that talks about rebirth but has no symbol for it - possibly because there is a tendency to take the opening of tombs for the Last Judgement in realistic rather than symbolic terms. It begins to appear that I shy off from the religious interpretation of "2001" because such an interpretation, in Kubrick's terms, seems to me cheap and conventional and second rate; it also gives meaning to the symbols at the expense of reducing the fable to nonsense. I am not very actively concerned with religious thought (except insofar as no-one can escape the religious significance of everyday life) but I will not submit to the presentation of a fairy-tale dictatorship, however benevolent, as the end to which creation is directed. Nor can I accept a man with Kubrick's past record as being a crude and utterly unsubtle presenter of complex symbols which amount to "Never mind, dear, Daddy's with you".

I stick to my original feeling that what he means is simply that man must discard his conception of himself and his role if he is to make meaningful progress as an inhabitant of the universe. It is a statement which, if true, cannot be made often enough or plugged hard enough. If you care to equate such a statement with the biblical "give up all that thou hast and follow me", I shall have no valid objection. It may be at that point that we become intelligible to each other.

Still running through your letter in order of words rather than ideas, I come on the gay piece about the "Louis Seize" bedroom. I don't know what Kubrick thought he was doing, and possibly he was having a private laugh at someone, but that bedroom is no more essential Louis Seize than it is early Cro-Magnon (except that both were based on the cave). Or maybe "Life" misquoted. Take a look at any history of furniture and decoration. Late Empire leaps to the eye. And, by the way, the age of Louis XVI was considered the Age of Enlightenment only by those who lived in it; since then the statement has been a polite joke.

Lighting from below may suggest illumination from the sub-conscious to good Jungians, who are looking for Jungian symbols and will inevitably find them, in or out of season, and the same goes for Freudians, Eysenckians or followers of any school. In fact, it is a standard Kubrick lighting technique - see his previous films - and if a man starts using his technical habits as symbols he hasn't much hope of using them effectively.

With mild annoyance I protest that I did not use the phrase "cinematic trickery" - or, if I did, it was not used in a derogatory sense. I think I said he used a specific technique to get over the problem of time transition, but this dodges no issues and puts no slur on the direction. It is a perfectly good technique which does what is required of it with minimum fuss, and should be respected as such. Slur on direction, indeed! It's more like a compliment to it. Try as you will you can't get away from the fact that this film is an inspired piece of cinematic trickery. But the thing about trickery is not the tricks in themselves but the uses to which they are put. All cinema is trickery, and all drama, and all creative literature, including your own and mine and that of the writers of the Old Testament, so don't feel it necessary to get up in arms because someone mentions the tools of the trade. Without them there's no trade. "2001" is more open to this mention than most because it depends so largely upon trickwork to get its effects; but if the effects are convincing and are used for a worthwhile end other than mere entertainment, where's the complaint? It is the director's business to use everything that can conceivably be of use.

I think that as you go on with the discovery of symbols you have fallen into the common error of seeing a confirmatory symbol wherever you look. If you carry this on to its logical conclusion you will then look for opposing symbols and find them also, and so finish nowhere. Neither Kubrick nor Clarke would make the fundamental error of trying to use nothing but symbols; parts of the fable are no more than what they appear to be - devices for getting certain symbols into operation, placing them where they can be operated to make a statement and simple enough to be understood in passing. Don't look for too much complexity. Every dramatist knows the weakness of this in a medium which must be apprehended on the run.

You write - "To suggest that the Intelligence...has interfered with the computer sounds

not only absurd but unnecessary". I quite agree. It is a fault of the film that the whole conception of the slab and its peregrinations is clumsy. Kubrick and Clarke have simply been less than perfect; they needed a symbol and they chose one which wouldn't let them down by interfering with the plot by getting too closely involved with the humans, but it reduces much of the implied transcendentalism to mishmash because it is patently a piece of machinery and behaves as one. This is the weakest of the symbols and obviously one with which they had considerable trouble. God operating through a machine? Well, why not? I quite agree, why not? but at this point the smell of the secondhand idea workshop begins to intrude. The transition from technology to spirituality is most roughly made.

But is such a transition made at all? If the religious version is taken, then the poor thing does limp over a ditch or two to get to the incubator-bedroom, and the good fantasist swallows it all down without noticing.

I retain my original conception, wherein the action takes place in this universe and in this life, and the statement is about this life and its possibilities, not the next.

You make a point about human error, but don't really need to. Of course human error is responsible, because even Hal is a piece of human construction. (Whether the Intelligence interferes directly or not is difficult to say; it has already interfered indirectly on several occasions, and this is one reason why I accept the slab as a clumsy device - its precise significance is never clear, no matter how interpreted.) To call any other way "hokum" lays you wide open, because your way is hokum, too; we are looking at some of the weaknesses of the film now.

Your interpretation is that (I hope I follow correctly) Hal is not as perfect as his makers think. Observe that the matter wherein he is in error is never resolved; we do not know whether he was wrong or not - only that the human observer could find nothing wrong, and lord knows that's a common enough situation in engineering. It does not matter who was right or wrong - what matters is that humanity was faced with a problem needing a right decision. In this case, a decision to do away with its civilization. (It could be argued that it was placed in a heavily loaded situation, unfairly so - there was no real chance of a wrong decision - another clumsiness and difficult to avoid.) What it amounts to is the traditional hokum situation of second rate sf - fearful scientist delivers lecture pointing out that there are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, that there are things man was not meant to know, and that civilization is turning on its master - meanwhile the author, who hasn't a clue how to collapse a civilization, simply announces that it is collapsing. The Kubrick-Clarke presentation is more sophisticated, but is still the same old malarkey under the skin. Don't kick it too hard; it is a legitimate dramatic convention, just getting a bit hoary. If you make it straight-out human error, without outside interference... but you can't, because interference, however

subtle and indirect, has been going on since the dawn of man in your version - and so we are back to another brand of hokum.

Lee, at this point I must let you into a dreadful secret - which you are already perfectly aware of. All plots are hokum. There is no other kind. Artistry lies in disguising the taste of the hokum. Art lies in using it to present new views of reality or possibility. One of the greatnesses of art is the poverty of the materials with which it is forced to work.

Allow Kubrick his hokum - what else is there for him to use? The thing to look at is what he did with it. Neither of us quarrels with that, even if we don't agree on what it was.

I refuse to be overawed by your diagram. What a shocking thing to do with a few harmless symbols. If that's what Kubrick meant by the figures 2 0 0 1, then my interest wanes. Worse than Spinoza proving God's existence by geometry...

If you carry symbolism so far, you must go the rest of the way and ask - Why Odyssey? Is Man the Ulyssean dog patted by the Master on returning home and dying happily at sight of him? Or is he Penelope, whose lovers -- technology and space ships and computers and things - are slain by the returning Odysseus? "Odyssey" looks pretty meaningless if we take it beyond the simple voyager symbol, and I feel that this is the right treatment for the other symbols, too; give the obvious ones their due and leave the rest for recognition if it serves any purpose - most of the time it won't, because the simple necessities of story-telling distort the symbols and strain them too far. This is always the novelist's and dramatist's symbological problem - too much of a good thing.

JB I didn't intend to butt in on this discussion at all, but feeling that Mr MacCallum deserves a new page and Mr Turner a quibble or two (especially since no-one else has seen his letter, that I know of), here I am.

My quibble no.1 is George's biblical quotation on p.14. I can't find it in any version of The Thoughts of Chairman Secretary & Holy Treasurer God in my possession, but there's something similar in Luke 18.22.

Quibble no.2 is over that bit about Christianity having no symbol for rebirth. As an honorary Protestant I have always understood that whereas them there Popish crucifixes represent all the horror of shameful death, just as George says, the empty cross is a symbol of resurrection (= rebirth). As an honorary Catholic I have always regarded this argument as typical heterodox Protestant casuistry. As a card-carrying Agnostic I couldn't care less, actually, but this point must have at least as much bearing on "2001" as, say, Lee's mystic numerology.

MUNGO MacCALLUM

It was bad enough reading the "Christian Science Monitor" on "2001". It is far worse reading your correspondents. I always wince when people start what is going to be a review of a film by saying that it's not a review at all, but rather a discussion, a subjective viewpoint, and so forth; because they always mean they are going to go into the sort of woolly-minded metaphysics which fuck up so many arguments about sf. (eg - "He was no longer in control of his destiny, but subservient to it." What the hell does that mean? If the man had a destiny, obviously he was subservient to it. And if by "destiny" your correspondent means "technology", he shares a strange doublethink with the film, which I shall refer to later.)

However, even this sort of thing, common enough among a minority of the newspaper critics about whom your writers are so patronizing, is tame compared to Mr Harding's ideographic acrostic by which he decides that the title (and therefore presumably the film) means "from multiplicity through infinity to God". I am reminded of the men who spent their lives calculating the date of the end of the world from the interior measurements of the Great Pyramid. The allegedly "psychedelic" sequence (it's not) appears to have left its mark.

What follows does purport to be a review of the film, as a film. This does not mean a series of loosely-drawn comparisons with works such as "Zorba the Greek" and "8½", with which it has nothing at all in common; nor with ring-ins such as FINNEGANS WAKE and the works of Nietzsche, with which it has less. I do not intend to treat the film as something sacred simply because it is about a subject in which I am interested. And as a film, it is a series of pretty pictures and very little else. The acting is appalling, the dialogue lamentable. The construction, such as it is, is woeful. The inconsistencies are frequent, the symbolism, of a particularly puerile kind, is laid on with a steam shovel. It does no good to pretend that because this is a vastly more expensive and more pretentious film than "Creature From Black Lagoon" it is somehow a great artistic experience, heralding the arrival of sf as a serious force in cinema. It isn't and it doesn't.

The film is in three very loosely related parts. The plot, briefly, is this - At about the time man invented his first tool, some extra-terrestrial intelligence planted a large black slab on Earth, presumably as an observer of man's technological progress. Another was buried on the moon. When man reached the moon and dug it up, the rising sun struck it and caused it to send a signal - either as a sign that man was there, or as a pointer to Jupiter (the next stage of development) or both. Man therefore set out to Jupiter in a robot-controlled rocket, apparently without telling the crew what they were meant to do when they got there. On the way the robot made a mistake (or didn't - it's never made clear). The crew decided they might have to disconnect the robot,

which then had some sort of nervous breakdown because -

(a) It knew of the black slab, and thought that perhaps it wasn't the greatest intelligence in the universe; or

(b) Having access to the crew's psych charts it found it couldn't get on with the crew; or

(c) The extra-terrestrial intelligence deliberately sabotaged it; or

(d) By far the most likely explanation, borne out later, it was scared of being turned off.

It therefore killed one man (the wrong one) by manipulating a smaller space vehicle outside the main one. Conveniently, when threatened by the other man, it was suddenly unable to do this. Thus it was turned off, and after this interlude - relevant only on a symbolic level, and lousy construction anyway - the rocket proceeds to Jupiter.

Here, fortunately, there is a black slab to meet it. The slab shows the surviving crew member a mass of colours, which slowly resolve themselves into bits of the universe that he hasn't seen before, and is suddenly transported to an opulent self-contained flat to live out the rest of his life on an accelerated time scale. As he dies, a black slab appears, wraps up his consciousness in a foetus, and takes it out into the wider universe.

Note this is plot. Wrapped up around it is what otherwise quite rational sf fans call portentously, The Real Story, which - in simple terms - is about man discovering the universe. This is based mainly on the long middle section, the interminable voyage to Jupiter, I suspect mainly because no-one can find any possible relevance in it unless they call it a Symbol.

The commonest symbol is the "man freeing himself from the chains of his technology" thesis, most often propounded by people half full of technologically-produced alcohol. According to this, man must learn to do without machines before he can accept the universe, or be accepted by it.

Now the chains of technology idea is an extraordinary one, which seems to have grown from a rather mindless nostalgia common to people who can't really cope with their environment and imagine they could if they were born a hundred years ago. Outside observers would use the word "escapism", but let's not be unkind; a lot of sf fans - and writers - seem to share the misconception that everything would be all right if we were all Zen Buddhists with space travel.

But when these people talk about the chains of technology, they never mean the basic

technology of which all inventions are minor corollaries. They never mean, say, language, or scientific method, the things we saw being discovered at the beginning of the film. They mean the machine, and not any machine - not the machine that makes their clothes or plays their music or turns on the lights or hammers the nails into the wood, but the machine they don't quite understand, don't own themselves, and therefore regard with a mixture of envy and fear. Note that man is not alleged to have escaped from his technology by abandoning the rocket ship, only by switching over to manual flight. There may be a real distinction here, but it totally escapes me; how the hell was Bowman meant to get to Jupiter - on foot?

However, even if this theory is correct, it still doesn't save the film. (Surely I don't have to make the point that profound philosophizing is no justification for bad art/entertainment? Anyway I'm not going to.) The much-vaunted technical effects are dragged in by the balls, and go on for far too long. Example - the clumsy videophone conversation from the space station. A better director would have integrated them into the action of the plot, but I suppose when there is no real plot and absolutely no action for three quarters of the film, one must make allowances.

The dialogue is, if anything, worse than that of "Creature From Black Lagoon", and, inexcusably, the language has not changed at all. (The clothing has changed very little.) The film is jerky and episodic, and not only with regard to the three separate stories (?) included. The symbolism is heavy-handed in the extreme - vide the notorious breaking wine glass. The soundtrack might be meant to be a clever joke; it is in fact a joke on the level of the pun in "2001 - A Strauss Odyssey". Surely with all that money Kubrick could have afforded original music.

I could go on forever, but won't. In all, in spite of the often pretty and occasionally brilliant visual effects, the film is about on the level of most Cinerama films - a vacuous and ill-constructed attempt to fill a very large screen.

ps - Suppose we thought of the black slab as symbolizing the Double Blank Domino, which costs you nothing if you're left with it. And Bowman, of course, is a symbolic pun about the man in the front of the boat and the thing that shoots the phallic arrow. And Hal is the name of my news editor, who is God. Think what fun Lee Harding could have with that.

oOo

JB Mr MacCallum will no doubt be delighted to learn that an American fan has discovered the true significance of the name HAL. One simply transposes those letters one space each down the alphabet and... voila! - IBM!

BRUCE GILLESPIE

After viewing "2001 - A Space Odyssey" but once, I must confess that I shared some of Mr MacCallum's doubts. Armed only with reviews by "Time" magazine and Colin Bennett, I spent most of the second half waiting for the "psychedelic bit" which "Time" had informed me was just after Interval, and this might account for my failure to notice some of Mr Kubrick's most obvious signposts (especially the slab-over-seven-satellites "cross", immediately preceding "takeoff"). First impressions - confused. Like Mungo MacCallum, I thought at first that it was a pretty scattered film. It was brilliant sf all right, and the effects, including the euphoric liberty of Strauss-driven space-ships, had me beaming with purest delight. (Fifty sf fans in a group booking must have been quite some sight.) Pretty pictures, Mr MacCallum? - only about the most beautiful pictures ever put on a Super Panavision, Metrocolor screen! But, then there was that space-ship, and Hal - on the first viewing I became just a bit sick of both of them. Not of the two astronauts, or their "idiotic dialogue", though - I recognized these straight away from the several thousand sf stories I have read. You may be assured, Mr MacCallum, that there is no better characterization in any sf. The problem was, I think, that first time round I was misled just because the film was in Cinerama. If the film had been showing at the Australia Cinema with an Italian's name (or even Welles' or Hitchcock's) on the credits, then I might have been just a little more alert. But to settle back in ease, expecting the sf film to end them all (and, because of the critics, expecting to be puzzled rather than enlightened) is hardly adequate preparation for a symbolic drama. The problem was that I kept recognizing old-hat ideas - there was the slab, representing the aliens who started off Man's evolution (Chad Oliver, "Transfusion", Astounding June 1959) at the beginning of the film; there was the lyricism of space contained in the best of Clarke's own works; and, gee whiz, there was the old chap at the end breaking the loneliness of infinity with the equivalent of "Let there be light!" (E F Russell, "Sole Solution", Fantastic Universe 1956). I am still a little inclined to think of the ending as a dramatization of the last pages of Clarke's CHILDHOOD'S END. An sf fan's mind has an infinity of well-worn grooves to skate, and by the end of the film I felt that I had covered all but the least familiar of them. Time-travel was there (my first interpretation was that Bowman was projected either back into time as the original progenitor of the human race, or forward to a new heaven); space-travel was there for a couple of hours, and also, as George says, great masses of technical stuff. After a second viewing, my mind still boggles (we've never before had a picture that actually fitted that word) when I think of such things as the moon shots, the space photography, and best of all, the space-hostess's 180° turn into the galley.

Then I rang Lee Harding, and was rather surprised at the rapturous sounds that emanated from the phone at the magic words "2001". Half an hour, several thousand words of Hardingesque explanation, and many self-admonishing groans later, I started to see the light. My main problem had been the Journey to Jupiter; Harding's rejoinder - "It's not a space

odyssey; it's not a journey; it's the journey." To "I find it hard to see how the symbols connect", the answer was - "But it's all one big symbol!" And he tricked me with that "How long does the DAWN OF MAN segment last?" Then John sent me the combined correspondence of George, Lee and Mungo, and thus properly prepared I returned, chastened, to the Regent for a second viewing.

To reiterate - The main barrier between the views of George and Lee and those of Mungo (and originally, myself) is the difference between their emotional reactions to the film, rather than their intellectual ability to "read the symbols" or otherwise. The crux of this difficulty is the seemingly overlong and very slow "Jupiter - 18 Months Later" sequence. If, as I did on my first viewing, one sees this voyage as only a plot line, then it seems tedious and hardly a satisfactory bridge between the Strauss and "Beyond the Infinite" sequences. All that flying around in space, heavy breathing, and Hal's antics make marvellous watching, but one either cannot accept the sequence as dramatically important, and therefore must reject the film's claims to seriousness (Mungo's view) or one can enjoy it and recognize its power, but have no definite reason for doing so (myself, after one viewing). It is only after realizing that the whole film is a unity, and that every image has its place in the symbolic framework, that I could see the central voyage as both the intellectual and emotional crux of the whole film, which in its turn must be one of the most important ever made.

None of this is new to those such as George and Lee, who could grapple with the film's power at first viewing. However, there could be many viewers for whom its appreciation will be as much of an odyssey as it was for me. It takes some time to fully realize that what Kubrick attempts is nothing less than a signpost to the whole history and future of mankind! What must one look for in order to follow Kubrick's reasoning? - to think of the film as a unity instead of three seemingly discontinuous segments? The catchword "symbol" must be one's answer, but this word can be extremely misleading. I totally disagree with George's tendency to list "The Symbols" opposite "Their Interpretations". As Mungo rightly points out, this approach can only lead to a uselessness of the Meaning Of The Pyramids variety, or, What Exactly Does The Harpoon Represent In MOBY DICK? We want some view of the film as an active drama, not a set of symbolic building-blocks. Drama consists of conflict, or so the slogan says. The problem with the central segment of "2001" is that, on a superficial level, there seems to be no conflict. However if one links all the imagery of any one part with all the imagery in the other two, certain relationships appear that are not easily explicable within George's framework. Kubrick surely intends that the apes look half-human, and are obviously men dressed up, rather than trained chimpanzees; that the space-suits on the moon (and especially at the second "touching" of the slab) look ape-like; that there is an emphasis on the physicality of the astronauts (eating, running, breathing); and that the dying old figure preceding metamorphosis resembles a shrivelled ape as much as the remnant of a man. The most consistent image in the film is the sun-imagery - the first

scene over the titles, which almost gives away the whole point of the film before it starts, and the sun ubiquitously peeping from behind the slab, earth, moon and Jupiter for the rest of the film. Not only does the sun progressively 'rise' in each successive image, only emerging to full view before the final sequence starts, but harsh space-filling sunlight dominates every frame. The sun imagery is best consummated in the brilliantly-lit Louis Seize room at the end of the film - the metamorphosis seems to take place within the sun itself! Scoff you may, Mr MacCallum, but this is only what any self-respecting Shakespeare critic does with the master's words. Organize the images in the same way, and they work! Take the "bookends" of the film - the first and last images; in the first, the sun dominates the moon which arcs over the earth; in the last, the earth and the embryo, each as large as the other, form two concave arcs on either side of the screen. The physical sustenance of the sun for its subjects (God and man?) has been replaced when man finally achieves a new order of reality in which he may comprehend his home. ("A new heaven and a new earth"?) Whatever particular interpretations you place on these elements in the film's visual geography (and don't be afraid to choose widely), the rivers of meaning run strongly and consistently, and the mountains of visual punctuation form an artistically correct symmetry.

All of which does not entirely clear up worries about the central sequence. As has been said by an American reviewer, Hal the computer emerges as even more "human" than the two astronauts. Bowman is shown both as Everyman and a terribly incomplete and immature human. The two astronauts act like a couple of military-trained morons (surely, Mr MacCallum, this can only have been deliberate; the "secret" discussion about Hal must be one of the funniest things in the film) while Hal fusses over their health, warms their food, seems genuinely troubled by the voyage's ambiguity, and, as Lee has pointed out, "has all the best lines". However the two astronauts are the spiritual descendants of the bone-thwacking ape, and of the same race as the figure who embraces the surface of the slab with the span of his fingers. The bone has become the space-ship and Hal, but the ape's grunt of communication seems to have changed little. After my first viewing I regarded the film as the greatest "put-down" of humanity in film history, showing him in an even more despicable light than does "Dr Strangelove". On second viewing, I could see the dilemma that arises from the conflicts built into the space-ship. In the film, man has come to the stage when he has, through knowledge, virtually total control over his environment (except for Hal's actions, the two astronauts never look like being in physical danger). However man's knowledge has formed a shell over him (the space-ship) whereas man himself has changed little since the ape, whose first civilized act was to kill his enemy with a bone. "2001" is a psalm in praise of knowledge, as represented in its technological effects, and yet Dr Floyd, for instance, sleeps through the magnificent voyage from Earth to Moon (he had a "nice trip, thank you"). Bowman and Poole are equally unawed by the uniqueness of their environment and position. Their only superiority over the computer is that they have enough curiosity to think the voyage worth continuing, whereas Hal has no conception of any knowledge beyond that which he immedi-

ately governs. I think Kubrick wants this difference to be both very slight and crucial. However, even from this situation there are posed against one another - Man's potentiality (Bowman) and Man's actuality (the consciousness of the ship) - an agonizing Split Personality. There must be a conflict - Man represented by Bowman must undergo the last battle, the last task of man - man must (and does, in this film) gain control of all his potentialities, all his knowledge, before he can be "saved" in any way. Therefore the painstakingly described steps of the final struggle must be filmed in such a way that final triumph must be keenly felt by the audience, as a necessary preliminary to the final segment. As the drama of the film is complete, and the rest of the film represents the experience of assimilating Knowledge, then one is quite at liberty to regard the entire sequence as purely symbolical. Perhaps I should say that the psychedelic lights comprise probably the least justifiable feature of the film. If Kubrick had not added them (I suspect at the last minute), the camera would have panned up from the "cross" formed by the slab into empty space, and the next image would have been the exploding Galaxy, the Creation symbol. The logic of the whole second half would then have been much clearer.

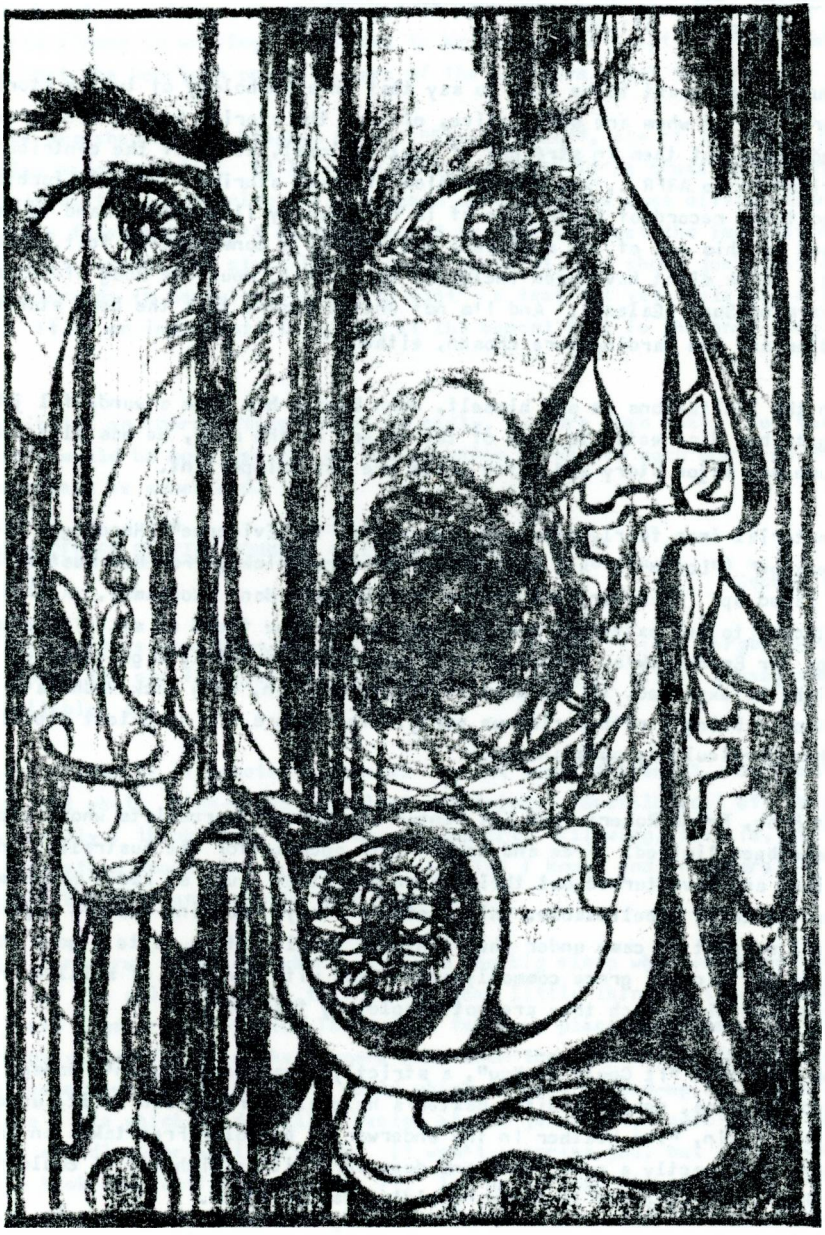
A final point to note - The film hangs together emotionally mainly because of its asceticism (paradox explained below), and I still wonder whether this might not be its main limitation. As Lee points out, the film probably has a strong effect on the subconscious, and yet it makes sense only in intellectual terms - there is an 18th Century faith in the ultimate power of human reason which is both the greatest virtue of the film, and the point most vulnerable to Post-Bomb sceptics, New Wave or otherwise. We still need a "2001" with Falstaff or King Lear in the cockpit (maybe Kubrick will make a film of PAST MASTER for us?). However, the director's zealous aspirations may be best judged by the fact that we are placed snugly in the "Dawn of Man" sequence, and we are nowhere near building the Last Spaceship, let alone taking over its control.

Perhaps I have only accentuated the obvious, but it was not enough to scribble remarks crudely firing Mungo MacCallum's abuse back in his face. Many may be still in his position. If so, have the intellectual courage to go back to the film, look very carefully at every frame of it, and think. The irony of it is that only after such intellectual effort will one gain the emotional impact of Kubrick's devastatingly audacious masterpiece.

---ooOoo---

A truth ceases to be true when more than one person believes in it.

- Obscure Irish Playwright



REVIEWS

JOHN BAXTER (ed) - PACIFIC BOOK OF AUSTRALIAN SF

Angus & Robertson A$1.00

John Foyster

It would be pleasant to be able to say that this anthology of twelve stories by eleven authors, ten of whom are still alive, nine of the stories having been previously published (eight of them in straight sf publications), seven of the contributors also being contributors to ASFR... was a collection of great stories. Honesty forbids. However, the post-war record of Australian sf is not exactly illustrious, and to assemble a book as good as this out of the available material is a considerable feat. The only story which I think might have been included, but wasn't, would be Doug Nicholson's "Far From The Warming Sun" (Galaxy). And I'm not entirely sure that the best stories of Bert Chandler and Lee Harding were chosen, either.

Given the limitations he set himself, John Baxter has done a wonderful job. While managing to bow discreetly to most of the talent in the room, he has also been able to include one major story and a few which are not unimportant.

The material from fairly standard sources is "The Evidence" (Harding), "An Ounce of Dissension" ("Loran"), "All My Yesterdays" (Broderick), "For Men Must Work" (Bryning), "All Laced Up" (Chandler) and "There Is a Crooked Man" (Wodhams). All of these are by practiced (to one extent or another) writers in the field of sf. The stories have, except for Broderick's, appeared in sf magazines of fairly high quality. Chandler's, as might be expected, is the most skilfully written, with Jack Wodhams's first story for Analog being a rather riotous party. The others are competent pieces of sf, none of them particularly outstanding.

Colin Free, Frank Roberts and Kit Denton are Sydney journalists whose excursions into sf have been limited. Free and Denton both operate for the Australian Broadcasting Commission, and have turned out their share of rather crude sf radio programmes, generally so bad as to be unbelievable. Kit Denton's story, "Burning Spear", appeared in F&SF, where I suspect it came under the "fantasy" label. It is quite a good story, but has some of the lack of grace commonly associated with the work of skilled writers working in a medium with which they are not completely familiar.

Frank Roberts's "It Could Be You", a strictly idea story, doesn't manage to get far beyond the idea, despite editor Baxter's helpful introduction to it, underlining the satire. Again, "The Weather In The Underworld" by Colin Free takes an interesting idea (though not exactly a novel one) and does very little with it. I could never understand why this story appeared in Ace's "World's Best SF 1966".

And then there are three entirely new stories. Ron Smith's "Strong Attraction" manages to be unemotional when it was trying to be just the opposite. Like the three previous

stories it relies heavily on idea. By contrast, John Baxter's own "Beach" had very little idea, but was quite strong on writing. It seems to be Baxter's attempt to write new wave sf, and he shows that the American practitioners of the art have a lot to learn.

But John's work is overshadowed by Stephen Cook's "Final Flower", one of the first pieces of sf which is also major writing. It is not a subtle story. It is brutally direct, and consequently rather difficult to bring off. Stephen obviously had some difficulties with parts of it, and his flashbacks don't always succeed in creating just the impression I think he wanted. Yet overall the story is extremely powerful, and shows just what can be done if a writer succeeds in marrying style with plot - a feat not yet emulated in the USA, by the way. It is an important story, and at the moment this is the only place you will find it.

John Baxter contributes an introduction which is, sadly, no more than that. But then I don't suppose there would be much use for an introduction which did much more, so far as an Australian paperback is concerned.

WILLIAM F. NOLAN & GEORGE CLAYTON JOHNSON - LOGAN'S RUN

Gollancz UK A$2.75 George Turner

Gollancz think this book is something special. They have issued it in a larger format than usual and junked the old familiar yellow jacket, replacing it with a glossy and hot, hot red. Very suitable, too.

This reviewer also thinks it is something special - or at least different - but can't make up his mind just what. High-speed thriller? Certainly. Sociological sf? Maybe, but only maybe. Really I think it is a venture in pop art. Allowing, that is, that an old gent of my generation knows what pop art is. I think I know, and in general it bores me stiff, but LOGAN'S RUN is unlikely to bore anyone.

The plot... In a world run by youth, where you take the big sleep when you turn twenty-one, Logan is one of the police who see that you do that little thing on time. Then his own turn comes - and Logan runs for it. There is a fabulous place, perhaps real, perhaps not, called Sanctuary, and for this the runners make when they can't face the idea of death. After a rampageous chase through a world which is pure souped-up Kornbluth & Pohl and described in a style which is distilled Bester at his jauntiest, Logan finds - well, read for yourself and discover what he finds. It won't surprise you, but I'll lay a bet you won't put the book down until you come to it. The hammering, mile-a-minute writing is hypnotic; a laundry bill presented like this would fascinate and the telephone book would hold you for hours. I don't mean that it is good prose, because much of it is vilely bad (and some of it insidiously good) but that it grips and holds by the scruff of the curiosity.

But there's a gimmick, which is this - The book is presented in a manner to indicate that it is a serious work on the one hand, and that it is an uproarious joke on the other. The "serious" aspect is part of the joke, which is on you if you take it seriously - and the joke is, if not black humour, at least dirty grey, for this is one of the sadist utopias.

Logan runs through a vision of senseless brutality, including

legalized murder to limit the population,
a plastic surgery machine run wild,
a murder gang of sub-fourteen-year-olds,
a collapsing city on the seabed,
an insane half-human half-robot artist,
an ostracism gaol in the Arctic,
a computer which runs the world,
a gang of gipsy hoodlums on "broomsticks",
an automated nursery, complete with return-to-the-womb,
a jungle park with carnivores,
a war fought by androids - and much, much more.

Naturally he drags a girl along with him. And, naturally, one mysterious character turns out to be someone else altogether. Naturally he operates throughout most of the book in a beaten-up condition which would leave 99.99% of the population in a coma, and naturally he wins out in the end. And, naturally, there is this bit jammed in at the finish to say that there is a more glorious future for man when they can get rid of all these blasted kids.

Heard it all before? Of course you have. What's more, you are warned before the story begins that this is what you will get. In a rich and glorious dedication occupying two full pages, the authors offer their book to the whole pantheon of pop art/comics/horror films/sadistic thrillers/bad sf/sheer nonsense, beginning with Frankenstein and ending with that supremely silly story, "The Green Hills of Earth", taking in on the way such memories as Fu-Manchu, the All-American Boy, Dr Lao, The Demolished Man, Mickey Spillane, Li'l Abner, The Most Dangerous Game and Scarface. And I'll be damned if they haven't managed to waft a breath of nearly every one of them into the telling of the tale.

Now if you want to be terribly terribly highbrow about it all, you can read into LOGAN'S RUN a bitter parable of the rift between maturity and youth, of the fear of the old and the exuberance of the young. You can allow yourself to be depressed by the carefully mis-stated preambular paragraphs which seek to hammer the menace of population explosion and increasing percentage of teenagers. You can do anything you like to make LOGAN'S RUN a dreadful warning or a glimpse of a real and furious future. But in the end the authors will defeat you. They have written a glorious, wild, sparkling pastiche of all the worst the sf genre has to offer, and turned it into the kind of thriller you put down with the feeling that you have been holding your breath for three hours.

It isn't art, in the sense of permanence or significance.
It is art in the sense of entertainment.
And it's fun. Read it.

JAMES WHITE - ALL JUDGMENT FLED

IF Magazine, Dec 67 - Feb 68 Bruce Gillespie

In ASFR 15 I rashly stated that it was highly unlikely that we should again see a serial of the quality of OCEAN ON TOP within the cliche-ridden, blood-spattered pages of IF. But by the mercies of those gods who sometimes glance furtively in the direction of sf, Mr Pohl has again distinguished himself by gracing the pages of IF with one of the most literate, thought-provoking magazine serials for many years.

During the last few years, sf writers have rarely taken themselves or their craft seriously, and so thirties-style hack writing has returned to all the once-greats. Somehow smuggled in between this clod of callous, thought-and-sense-deadening verbiage we find a brilliant jewel of self-aware, intelligent writing - a product of Anglo-Irish literature, perhaps, but also preserving all the best of the Gold-Boucher-Campbell tradition of the fifties.

Chapters 1 to 8 provide an anchor of perfection for the rest of the book. Earth discovers an alien ship "twelve million miles beyond the orbit of Mars" and two terrestrial space vehicles are sent to examine it. (Yes, just as in "2001". There are relevant comparisons to be made, but not in this review.) White makes it clear that those men in whom he is primarily interested (of the ship P1) represent a microcosm of the anxious Earth they leave behind -

> Instead of six of the world's acknowledged scientific geniuses there had been chosen four experienced astronauts and two under training who were not even known in scientific circles and were respected only by friends. All that could be said for them was that they had a fairly good chance of surviving the trip.

They are "typical" of Earth's population, in that they seem not to be those best fitted to deal with the alien ship or its possible occupants. On the other hand, the story's main character, McCullough, has been especially selected for the ship's most highly regarded specialist position - psychologist. White defines the problem thus -

> During the five and half months it would take them to reach the Ship they would eat, sleep, talk and sweat within a few inches of each other. McCullough wondered if their club's rules of behavior, or esprit de corps or whatever peculiar quality it was that made a group of individuals greater than the sum of its parts, would keep them from

> suiciding out of sheer loneli ness or tearing each other to pieces from utter boredom or disentegrating into madness and death for reasons they could not as yet even imagine.

Very early in the novel we are shown that White proposes to deal with the subject that sf writers most avoid - individual people, acting and reacting upon each other. In the passage quoted above, White has given himself the choice of delineating in depth those elements in the ship's crew that might affect each other during the arduous trip, or leaving them as a collection of unknowable and unknowing ciphers. He can make us know what it would be like to actually make such a trip, or just provide a man-meets-alien potboiler.

It is probably at this point that his resolutely English realistic tradition decides the tone and direction of the story, and provides the literary support to continue it successfully. First, the author provides some of the most beautifully tactile writing I have seen in sf. Few writers have described the departure from Earth as effectively as in the following passage from Chapter 2 -

> Beyond the port Earth was in darkness, with the Moon just about to slip over the sharply curved horizon. Cloud masses and continental outlines were grey and indistinct, with the stars above the horizon and the cities below it shining with the same intensity, so that the whole planet seemed transparent and insubstantial, like a world of ectoplasm.

Conradian lyricism in IF magazine! Regretfully I must admit that the writing in the second half of the book deteriorates, but there are discernible reasons for this which I will discuss below. Secondly, White does his best to treat his characters as individually interesting and worthwhile to the story. This is not just another shipload of square-jawed, dull-eyed super-heroes busily back-slapping or shooting each other. White's characters actually converse in a convincingly rational, human way. As the conditions of the flight become progressively more difficult, inter-personal communication becomes restricted, and the assumptions underlying the expedition are more closely discussed. Remarkably, this talking is organized into an absorbing debate, in which McCullough becomes increasingly separated from the other members of the crew, while at the same time emerging as their leader, and the sounding-board for their troubles. Add to this the most brilliantly depicted single incident in the novel, when McCullough skilfully explores an inter-personal situation between Hollis and the colonel, that could quite credibly occur under such extreme conditions.

However, such refreshing literary expertise would be wasted if the characters, with their debates, faults and problems, were not connected by some underlying literary aim. White refrains from spelling out his major concerns in block capitals - a variety of themes introduced in the first few chapters are interwoven throughout the novel, gathering force

from a context of increasingly important events. The first part of the serial enormously whets the reader's appetite for answers, or a more intense dramatization of the problems offered for consideration.

It is with some dismay, then, that the reader notices an abrupt change of mood when the explorers at last reach their destination. Perhaps due to hasty writing, thoughtful and detached observation gives way to fast-paced adventure fiction which looks suspiciously like the pulp stories that fill the rest of IF. White seems willing to shelve all his deft psychology, philosophy and science fiction, and to embark on a bloody, bowel-gripping Them-against-Us yarn. His descriptions coarsen, his characters nearly become submerged in unimaginative, hackneyed violence, and precise description gives way to hazy corn like -

> Lit by that wildly rotating beam, the scene took on the flickering unreal quality of an old-time silent film.

This is still good writing, but it is indicative of the quality of the earlier chapters that this is far below White's best. By Chapter 9 the direction of the story seems completely changed.

It is at this point that the strength of the first part gives enough meaning to the aridity of the central chapters so that the last chapters may resurrect the important lines of thought and finish the novel magnificently. White's characters represent humanity, and at first sight their single-minded propensity for slaughter seems to reflect the cliche of man's unredeemable xenophobic warp. However White leaves the status of the homicidal beaked "aliens" so ambiguous, and shows us humanity's perplexed goodwill under stress so convincingly, that the whole situation within the ship remains a mystery seemingly without solution. He shows killing on an increasingly horrifying scale (and he seeks a reaction of distaste from the reader, not one of lip-smacking enjoyment), but a perception of the ultimate end of such violence evades the ships' crews. Casualties mount, but communication with intelligent aliens seems as far away as possible.

Meanwhile, dominating every action of the novel, there yammers the admonishing, pleading, lecturing voice from Earth. White's presentation of the crushing effect of a direct radio link with Earth during such an expedition is the best single device in the novel. At the beginning, the intruding, all-knowing link seems merely humorous, and just another side of the debate taking place in the ship. But the role of this voice is apparent from such passages as this -

> "Command pilot here", said Berryman. "Understood. Tell the colonel the last man to touch the alien ship is a ---"
>
> "DON'T YOU THINK YOU ARE ALL WORKING A LITTLE TOO HARD AT PROJECTING THE IMAGE OF FEARLESS, DEDICATED SCIENTISTS? .... WOULD YOU AGREE THAT YOU MAY BE OVER-COMPENSATING FOR A TEMPORARY AND QUITE UNDER-

STANDABLE ANXIETY NEUROSIS? MINUS TWENTY SECONDS AND COUNTING .... EIGHTEEN, SEVENTEEN, SIXTEEN...."

"You're right, Walters," said Berryman. "Everybody wants to be a psychologist."

Wistful and wryly funny at the beginning of the novel, this kind of intimacy with Earth becomes totally claustrophobic. White's essential irony is that, more than any of the crew, Earth Control wants to do the "best thing" under the circumstances, but its attitude, like that of McCullough and his crew, leads merely to more dissension and violence. White describes brilliantly a situation in which the ship's crew-members are killed indiscriminately within the alien vessel while hovering outside it radio-man Walters' only contact is with the ever-jabbering voice from Earth. Several million miles distant, political opinion becomes more hazardous than the worst offered by the interstellar ship.

Throughout the carnage and mental anguish, only one element in the novel remains detached and, despite the title, forever judging. McCullough might be called by some unconvincing, by others smug, and be shrugged off by the rest. But the author centres all the novel's power around him, while taking pains to prevent any of it from actually altering or injuring him. McCullough solves the psychological problems of the other crew members, but with a smug, self-contained correctness that leaves his own role as mysterious as before. He stands alive in the final scenes, acquiring a legendary status as he survives all and thereby becomes a pariah to the rest of humanity. White hints that real people (Earth's population, the colonel, the crew) could never survive such an ordeal, and so deliberately lets McCullough remain a wraith, a blind spot in the middle of a remarkable drama of well-imagined reality.

Both the artistic problems and the most satisfying elements of ALL JUDGMENT FLED (including a full revelation of McCullough's importance) are brilliantly resolved in the final scene, which Reviewers' Ethics prevent me describing. Suffice it to say that White manages to write an agonizingly powerful Parable of Noncommunication and Man's ability to create private Hells, in terms of individual human suffering. The novel's faults and inconsistencies increase the richness of its allusiveness rather than destroy it. In sum, another triumph for James White, and considerable justification for IF's third Hugo running - though I doubt if this novel was the reason.

R A LAFFERTY - PAST MASTER and THE REEFS OF EARTH

Ace US60c Berkley US60c

Robert E Toomey Jr

It is easy to be lenient, even patronizing, with a bad book, to dismiss it with a couple of incisive words or a groan. In fact a really bad book, almost any Tarzan story for instance, can be an absolute joy in itself. But a good book must be taken seriously, and a good book that is deeply and mortally flawed must be counted as a failure. This failure

is doubly painful because the reader is really in there pulling for the author, hoping that he'll deliver on all the promises he's made.

Both PAST MASTER and THE REEFS OF EARTH are good books in the sense that they possess many strong and positive virtues, but both are mortally flawed by Lafferty's lack of discipline and inability to cope with the novel form.

Lafferty's ideal length is the short story, from three to five thousand words that crystallize an experience or an idea and communicate it to the reader. Lafferty is wise, but wisdom, like any good curative medicine, is best taken in small doses. In the novel length (and in fact in any form other than the essay) wisdom must be clothed in the flesh of characters and given impetus by action. The novel-as-social-tract is almost always a victory of form over content, and is ultimately a betrayal of the form as well.

PAST MASTER is the more ambitious of the two books, and predictably, the least successful on its own terms. It tells of the planet Astrobe, a decaying utopia where any threat to the "Golden Dream" (the status quo) is systematically hunted down and liquidated - the only proper word for it - by Programmed Killers. There is more distortion. Although the State provides for all, people pour into the merciless slums of Cathead and the Barrio in their thousands, daily. Golden Astrobe is tottering on the brink of collapse.

To provide a solution, the ruling triumvirate meet to decide who will take over the government as their figurehead - someone who will engender respect and admiration in the people, but who may be manipulated. They decide on Thomas More, and fish him out of Earth's past. But the past master proves to be a surprise to everyone.

While the plot is unwinding, such as it is, Lafferty sprays the reader with puns, epigrams, jokes, enigmas, poetry, unresolved paradoxes, riddles, philosophical meanderings, profundities and foolishness. Some of his effects come off very well - the juxtaposition of broadest farce with stark tragedy, the stylistic eccentricity of alternating the most mundane of prose with unexpected new imagery - but the net result is plenty of brilliance with no direction.

The prose is elusive, elliptical. Example -

> From Golden Astrobe to Blue Earth. Earth is always bluish to one coming from Astrobe. Astrobe always seems gold to one coming from Earth. It is that the whites of their two suns are not the same white. White is not an absolute. It is the composite of the colors where you live.

You seem to grasp his meaning, but it keeps slipping away.

Most basic is the question of direction. Lafferty uses the kitchen-sink technique where more and more is thrown in, new, old, borrowed, blue, and the effect is numbing. It is significant that the writers to whom advance copies were given for blurb-comments were unable to keep from reeling off lists of these things. Samuel R Delany mentions "witches, lazarus-lions, hydras, porche's-panthers, programmed killers that never fail, and a burlesqued black mass". Significant, too, are the commentators - Delany, Zelazny, Ellison and, oddly, Merril. Apparently you are invited to associate PAST MASTER with the first three, and by further association, with the (what the hell) New Wave.

If Lafferty is to be associated with anyone it should be the late Cordwainer Smith. The parallels are myriad. Both started writing sf late in the game (Lafferty is in his 50s), both are stylists in the pure sense of the word, both create universes of real strangeness and wonder, neither can sustain a novel. You will be struck with the similarities of style upon reading.

Lafferty's major fault is that he is no stage manager. There are a few scenes that through a kind of contrived wildness transcend logic and burn in the mind. The opening of the book is fantastic, with the calm meeting between "the three big men" while programmed killers tear down the building around them - but for the most part Lafferty has little idea of what to do with his characters. They wander around through a dreamlike landscape, going up into the mountains for no real reason, ending up in odd places at odd moments. There are too many scenes that are useless, that fail to advance the story. About halfway through the book the law of diminishing returns starts to catch up, and from that point it's something of an effort to get through the rest of the book - although you really want to.

In the final analysis, PAST MASTER is an overkill. There's too much of it, and too little story to buttress the wild inventiveness. Long before the end it flies to pieces. Brilliance and invention, unfortunately, are not enough.

THE REEFS OF EARTH, on the other hand, is quite different. First off, it's a fantasy. PAST MASTER is probably a fantasy, too, but it's hard to tell. THE REEFS OF EARTH couldn't be anything else. The story concerns six children ("seven if you count Bad John") who are Pucas, aliens who live among humans, who decide that the only way to ensure their own survival is to kill off the rest of the world. There is a fleeting reference to Pucas in PAST MASTER, which may mean that Lafferty is building up a coherent (?) universe of his own, as many sf writers have done before. But Puca may derive from the Old English word for a sort of half-benevolent spirit, a kind of munchkin poltergeist.

Adult Pucas succumb to the dread Earth Sickness, and the kids want to wipe out the humans before they catch it.

The story is told with affection, a warm cynicism, a bleary good will, that is pleasant without giving too much pause to think. Lafferty is still playing games with the reader, making the table of contents an irrelevant poem. Trouble is, it's a short story. One hundred and forty-four pages of short story. One gets the feeling that Lafferty composed it as he went along, one event leading into another, and just having a good time with himself until he wrote enough words to fill a book, at which point he stopped.

You'll probably like THE REEFS OF EARTH. You'll probably like both books. Or you'll hate them both. Or you'll be sorry, because as Damon Knight once said of another writer, his talent is a prodigal one, prodigally wasted.

---oOo---

JB - You feel that five reviews make poor fare? Me, too. Next issue (touch wood) there'll be more. Planet Of The Apes doesn't quite call for the consideration we've given 2001, so... Meantime, here's the letter column. And, er, it contains only one letter. To preserve my sanity I'm switching typewriters.

URSULA K LeGUIN
37 Ockenden Road
London N.1 UK

I made notes for this letter three months ago and then filed them and got to writing. Now they are ancient history and I don't know if the subject interests you anyway - or perhaps you had your own secret agent at the West Coast Nebula Awards banquet? If not, here is a worm's eye view. It started with a day-long meeting for SFWA members only, organized by Poul Anderson, with Harry Harrison and Joe Poyer. It was a most effective and good-humoured meeting; nobody got pompous, nobody got mean. I suspect that some of this general magnanimity was a reflection of the character of Mr Anderson, who set up and almost invisibly presided over the whole thing.

One alien, a professor of English, was allowed in because he is teaching a course in sf. Though obviously a man of good will he was received with some xenophobia. I think some of us sf writers feel that our total lack of acceptance by the established and/or academic critics is one of the pleasantest things about being sf writers.

Much of the discussion was to do with things like what the publishers make from a book compared with what the author makes, which is hideously fascinating to authors, of course, but less so to their readers. One panel of more general interest was on sf and the frontiers of real science. My own background perhaps led me to notice

the omission of anything but the "hard" sciences from the discussion; for instance neither anthropology nor psychology were mentioned, though both have provided taking-off places for some of the best recent stories and books, and in fact I should think that some knowledge of both would be as basic in the sf writer's equipment as an acquaintance with the latest theories of genetics or cosmology. Vernor Vinge did talk about linguistics and language theory, from which both BABEL-17 and THE LANGUAGES OF PAO start off.

Norman Spinrad gave a splendidly disgusting description of writing for television, specifically Star Trek. He attacked Mammon without whining and defended artistic ethics without whinnying: a first-rate speaker.

The banquet was large and banquetesque. Anthony Boucher chaired it with infinite amiability. This was the first time I ever saw him; now I know it was the last.

Thomas Scortia showed a handsome movie of some rockets where he works going VOOM. Peter S Beagle, who works in California too, but in another part of the forest, where there are like unicorns, talked very softly and did not go voom. The announcements of the awards were received very quietly, except for Fritz Leiber's.

At the post-prandial party there were so many people in one hotel suite that it was sort of like MAKE ROOM MAKE ROOM, only cheerful. I nearly had the experience of spilling my beer down the back of Mrs Robert Heinlein, but she unwittingly, and I gratefully, escaped. Philip K Dick wasn't there. Some people say he never is. Some say he doesn't actually exist and his books are written by another person of the same name; but some say they have met him. I wish I had.

This was all in Berkeley, which is my home town. Berkeley was a very odd city when I was a kid, and has not changed much; only its publicity has. The Claremont Hotel, up in the Berkeley hills, is like my notion of a British Hill Station in India in 1880 - all high ceilings and roast beef and the natives not allowed; but you go downhill a couple of blocks towards the University of California campus and you begin to smell the grass-smoke blowin' on the wind and hear the tinkle of hippie-bells and the dull mutter of Dissent. It's a great town for sf, but even greater for fantasy.

CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS ISSUE

GEORGE TURNER - Melbourne author (see ASFR 15 p35 for titles published to date), currently sweating over what seems an incredibly complex novel and anxiously awaiting a CLF grant; probably knows more about sf than anyone in Australia, but too modest to admit it.
LEE HARDING - master photographer and gifted sf author ("A name to watch" - IF magazine); man of a thousand ideas, finds it hard to sit still long enough to write them down.
MUNGO MacCALLUM - Sydney author (SON OF MARS &c), critic/columnist (The Australian), tv authority (recently published FIRST TEN YEARS OF AUSTRALIAN TV; appears regularly on tv himself), Australia's only readable newspaper sf critic.
BRUCE GILLESPIE - secondary school teacher (humanities), graduated last year; lives (improbably) at Bacchus Marsh, Vic; has more publishable material in ASFR's files than anyone except G Turner.
JOHN FOYSTER - secondary teacher also (sciences); has formidable memory, incredible reading speed, massive knowledge & other disgusting traits; Secret Master of Australian fandom, master of disguise.
BOB TOOMEY - one of the few young American fan-critics and one of the best; we're delighted to have him write for us.
DIMITRII RAZUVAEV - young Melbourne artist, nuts about sword-&-sorcery art, eager to appear in US fanzines (ASFR doesn't publish that kinda stuff).
RONA DEVLIN - femmefan lately arrived in Godzone from US&A.
JOHN BANGSUND - gifted layabout, currently posing as journalist; probably Australia's best-known John Bangsund.

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Unsolicited Plugs Dept:

A*L*G*O*L - the giant fanzine for discriminating giants. Current issue features Anthony, McCaffrey, Lupoff, Pohl, Bangsund (?), Ashmead, Locke, Bode, Powers, Rotsler, Gilbert - & of course the publisher, ANDREW PORTER, PO Box 367, Gracie Sq Stn, New York 10028. 60¢ from Andy, 5s0d from Ethel Lindsay in UK, A50¢ from J Bangsund.

ARE YOU INTERESTED IN JAMES BRANCH CABELL?
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WHO SAID....?

The modern author, noting that postage stamps keep getting bigger, postulates the obliteration of New York in the year 2000 by a monstrous first day cover delivered from an Eastern dictatorship.

All professional authors of fiction are professional liars, whose business is making their lies plausible and convincing.

Looking back on the teen-age Bob Shaw, I see him reeling back in dismay from the demanding intricacies of the engineering industry in which he found himself, yet deriving the utmost satisfaction from reading about Van Vogt's production line for starships in which it took two hundred years for the first vessel to be produced but in which the subsequent ships came off the line at the rate of one every thirty seconds.

It is the fate of most major works of art neither to yield up their full meaning at first exposure, nor to be understood by the vast run of that breed of journalists known as reviewers.

The trouble with sf short stories is that it is almost impossible to write a good one.

In one of the crucial moments of fan history, both reached simultaneously for the same copy of a British reprint edition of Astounding.

The superman need not be a hero.

The pig is a highly intelligent animal; it keeps itself reasonably clean when not confined to filthy surroundings, and has never been known to engage in persecutions or massacres.

* *

Who said....? Some clues: it could have been James Blish, Walter Breen, John W Campbell, Bob Shaw, Walt Willis, Harry Warner Jr, Robert Lowndes, Ted White, Terry Carr, Wm Atheling Jr, Ray Nelson or Carl Brandon. The quotes are from WARHOON 24. First 500 correct entries received (60¢ with entry, please) will receive a copy of that issue, devoted to "2001", Irish fandom &c &c - all 64 packed pages of it. So will incorrect entries. So will people who just send 60¢. And if you guessed Walt Willis, John W Campbell, Bob Shaw, Walter Breen, Ted White, Harry Warner Jr, Carl Brandon, Robert Lowndes - you already have a copy, bless you. WARHOON - Richard Bergeron, 11 East 68th St, New York 10021, USA.

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The above is a sample of the type which will be used in future issues of ASFR. It is planned to publish the magazine monthly, if possible, in a 48 to 60 page format. Your comments/subscription invited.