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E X T R A P O L A T I O N :
A S C I E N C E - F I C T I O N
N E W S L E T T E R

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THE LAUNCHING PAD

The success of the Christmas meetings at M.L.A. may be measured both by Samuel R. Delany's article derived from the Seminar discussion and by the tape of the Forum, held on the third afternoon of meeting. When one recalls that the controversial business meeting first postponed the Forum for an hour and then continued during the Forum, the response--an audience well over 500--also speaks for itself. I think that the only detail that needs to be added is that on March 15 at the presentation of the Nebula Awards for 1969 by the Science Fiction Writers of America, Chip received an award for his novella, "Lines of Power," published in the May, 1968, issue of The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction.

Professor Richard D. Mullen of Indiana State University, Terre Haute, will chair next year's Seminar at Denver. In his last letter to me Dale said that the British writer, John Brunner, had accepted tentatively an invitation to be the speaker. Brunner's new novel, Stand on Zanzibar, has been published in both England and the U.S. this winter.

Brunner confirmed his desire to come to the States when I had the good luck and pleasure of meeting him at the British Science Fiction Association, Ltd. meeting at Oxford over the Easter weekend. Earlier, through the nicest Russian Christmas present I have ever received, I was given the opportunity to participate in the Scottish Universities Conference in Victorian Studies at Strathclyde University, Glasgow; hearing of this, Brunner, as vice-chairman of the Oxford meeting, kindly invited me to attend that gala affair. Judith Merril flew in from Rochedale College, Toronto, as guest of honor; Professor I.F. Clarke (Voices Prophesying War) and Professor W.H.G. Armytage (Yesterday's Tomorrows) were featured speakers. But I will not try to describe the weekend, nor will I name names of British writers, because I will omit something or someone who contributed greatly to the success of the meeting and to my personal delight. On the whole, they were surprised that science fiction was receiving so much attention on the American academic scene, and they promised full cooperation with the Seminar.

The pleasure of the meeting was not unmarred, however, for as you know, John Wyndham (John Harris) died on March 11. No finer story teller has written science fiction; against the background of the catastrophe motif, he repeatedly affirmed the enduring spirit of modern man. Among many excellent stories, two classics, at least, will make his name unforgettable: Day of the Triffids and The Midwich Cuckoos. His most recent title, Chocky (Ballantine Books, 1968), perhaps best of all his works, exemplifies that praise which Henry James once gave Wilkie Collins: the gift to mix, to introduce, wonder onto the familiar world of our doorstep.

His death brought to my mind another thought: what will happen to his papers--and the papers of all current writers and editors? Obviously they are in the possession of heirs; but where do they go from there? Despite the notable collections at Harvard and Syracuse, for example, so much has been lost that future scholarly work will be seriously hampered. Can someone suggest a way in which the Seminar, perhaps, can help assure that essential documents may be preserved and made available in the future -- with repositories in both the U.S. and Britain--to say nothing of the need for a similar project on the Continent? I think not only of the papers of individual writers, but the records of magazines and publishers. One of the repeatedly frustrating cul-de-sacs re: the Reade biography has been the discovery that the papers of his publishers have been destroyed. A few months ago I wrote to J.B. Lippincott, asking whether or not their records prior to World War One might be made available in order to discover sales figures of their early sf and fantasy titles. Those records have been destroyed in a fire years ago. Too much has been lost; has someone an idea?

For the next issue we are planning to publish a bibliography of secondary materials dealing with sf and fantasy: more accurately, it will be a checklist such as that published in the first volume of Extrapolation. We now have something approaching 300 titles, but I know that this falls far short of being complete. We should like to present as complete a bibliography as possible for the period from World War Two to the present, at least. Between now and September 1, will you please send to us titles of any articles that you have written or that you have found, particularly those from popular or little magazines? You will receive credit, of course, for your contributions, and we would like to make the listing as complete as possible--American, United Kingdom, European, South American; all will be appreciated. So, please HELP!

A final matter: many inquiries and reports have reached us about new courses in science fiction and fantasy that are being planned for next year or are now being offered for a first time. Here we are in the midst of a first seminar. Offered this time under our special topics plan, it has been validated by the department so as to have a regular place in the cycle of seminars under our new curriculum. At the OCEA meeting in Columbus last weekend, I was told that Kent State University and Antioch are planning courses; Western College for Women has a new one; and several high schools are beginning "experimental" courses. If you have a course being offered or now planned, would you please send us at least the syllabus so that we can make a general report --and so interested persons may have the data, should they wish to set up courses and need to persuade someone somewhere.

T.D.C.

ABOUT FIVE THOUSAND ONE HUNDRED AND SEVENTY FIVE WORDS[1]

Samuel R. Delaney

Most of the following ideas are not new. But since I lack the critical apparatus to cite all my sources, I will not cite any -- beyond acknowledging the debt all such semantic analysis must pay to Ludwig Wittgenstein.

Every generation some critic states the frighteningly obvious in the style/content conflict. Most readers are bewildered by it. Most commercial writers (not to say, editors) first become uncomfortable, then blustery; finally, they put the whole business out of their heads and go back to what they were doing all along. And it remains for someone in another generation to repeat:

Put in opposition to "style," there is no such thing as "content."

Now, speculative-fiction is still basically a field of commercial writing. Isn't it obvious that what makes a given story sf is its speculative content? As well, for the last three years there has been much argument about Old Wave and New Wave sf. The argument has occasionally been fruitful, at times vicious, more often just silly. But the critical vocabulary at both ends of the beach includes "...old style...new style...old content...new content..." The questions raised are always: "Is the content meaningful?" and "Is the style compatible with it?" Again, I have to say, "content" does not exist. The two new questions that arise then are: One) How is this possible, and Two) What is gained by atomising content into its stylistic elements?

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[1]This paper expands upon the discussion of "Speculative Fiction" given at the MLA Seminar on Science Fiction by Mr. Delany December 27, 1968.

The words content, meaning, and information are all metaphors for an abstract quality of a word or group of words. The one I would like to concentrate on is: inFORMation.

Is content real?

Another way to ask this question is: Is there such a thing as verbal information apart from the words used to inform?

The entire semantics of criticism is set up to imply there is. Information is carried by/with/in words. People are carried by/with/in cars. It should be as easy to separate the information from the word as it is to open the door of a Ford Mustang: Content means something that is contained.

But let us go back to information, and by a rather devious route. Follow me:

red

As the above letters sit alone on the paper, the reader has no way to know what they mean. Do they indicate political tendencies or the sound made once you pass the b in bread? The word generates no significant information until it is put in formal relation with something else. This formal relation can be with a real object ("Red" written on the label of a sealed tin of paint) or with other words (The breeze through[2] the car window was refreshing. Whoops, red! He hit the brake).

The idea of meaning, information, or content as something contained by words is a misleading visualization. Here is a more apt one:

Consider meaning to be a thread that connects a sound or configuration of letters called a "word" with a given object or group of objects. To know the meaning of a word is to be able to follow this thread from the sound to the proper set of objects, emotions, or situations -- more accurately, to the images of these objects /emotions/situations in your mind. Put more pompously, meanings (content, or information) are the formal relations between sounds and images of the objective world.[3]

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[2] I am purposefully not using the word "symbol" in this discussion. The vocabulary that must accompany it generates too much confusion.

[3] Words also have "phonic presence" as well as meaning. And certainly all writers must work with sound to vary the rhythm of a phrase or sentence, as well as to control the meaning. But this discussion is going to veer close enough to poetry. To consider the musical, as well as the ritual, value of language in sf would make poetry and prose indistinguishable. That is absolutely not my intention.

Any clever geometry student, from this point, can construct a proof for the etymological tautology, "All information is formal," as well as its corollary, "It is impossible to vary the form without varying the information." I will not try and reproduce it in detail. I would like to say in place of it, however, that "content" can be a useful word; but it becomes invalid when it is held up to oppose style. Content is the illusion myriad stylistic factors create when viewed at a certain distance.

When I say it is impossible to vary the form without varying the information, I do not mean any formal change (e.g. the shuffling of a few words in a novel) must completely obviate the entire informational experience of a given work. Some formal changes are minimal; their effect on a particular collection of words may be unimportant simply because it is undetectable. But I am trying to leave open the possibility that the change of a single word in a novel may be all important:

"Tell me, Martha, did you really kill him?"
"Yes."

But in the paperback edition, the second line of type was accidentally dropped. Why should this deletion of a single word hurt the reader's enjoyment of the remaining 44,999 words of the novel...

In a book of mine I recall the key sentence in the opening exposition described the lines of communication between two cities as "...now lost for good." A printer's error rendered the line "...not lost for good," and practically destroyed the rest of the story.

But the simplicity of my examples sabotages my point more than it supports it. Here is another more relevant:

I put some things on the desk.
I put some books on the desk.
I put three books on the desk.
I put Hacker's The Terrible Children, Ebbe Borregaard's Collected Poems, and Wakoski's Inside the Blood Factory on the desk.

The variations here are closer to the type people arguing for the chimera of content call meaningless. The information generated by each sentence is clearly different. But what we know about what was put on the desk is only the most obvious difference.

Let's assume these are the opening sentences of four different stories. Four tones of voice are generated by the varying specificity. The tone will be heard -- if not consciously noted -- by whoever reads. And the different tones give different information about the personality of the speaker as well as his state of mind. That is to say, the I generated in each sentence is different.

As a writer utilizes this information about the individual speaker, his story seems more dense, more real. And he is a better artist than the writer who dismisses the variations in these sentences as minimal. This is what makes Heinlein a better writer than James Blish.

But we have not exhausted the differences in the information in these sentences when we have explored the differences in the "I..." As we know something about the personality of the various speakers, and something about what the speaker is placing down, ranges of possibility are opened up about the desk itself -- four different ranges. This information is much harder to specify, because many other factors will influence it: does the desk belong to the speaker, or someone about whom the speaker feels strongly, or has he only seen the desk for the first time moments before laying the books on it? Indeed, there is no way to say that any subsequent description of the desk is wrong because it contradicts specific information generated by those opening sentences. But once those other factors have been cleared up, one description may certainly seem "righter" than another, because it is reinforced by that admittedly-vague information, different for each of the examples, that has been generated. And the ability to utilize effectively this refinement in generated information is what makes Sturgeon a better writer than Heinlein.

In each of those sentences the only apparent formal variation is the specificity of what I put on the desk. But by this change, the I and the desk change as well. The illusion of reality, the sense of veracity in all fiction, is controlled by the author's sensitivity to these distinctions. A story is not a replacement of one set of words by another -- plot synopsis, detailed recounting, or analysis. The story is what happens in the reader's mind as his eyes move from the first word to the second, the second to the third, and so on to the end of the tale.

Let's look more closely at what happens on this visual journey. How, for example, does the work of reading a narrative differ from watching a film? In a film the illusion of reality comes from a series of pictures each slightly different. The difference represents a fixed chronological relation which the eye and the mind together render as motion.

Words in a narrative generate pictures. But rather than a fixed chronological relation, they sit in numerous semantic relations. The process as we move our eyes from word to word is corrective and revisionary rather than progressive. Each new word revises the complex picture we had a moment before.

Around the meaning of any word is a certain margin in which to correct the image of the object we arrive at (in grammatical terms, to modify).

I say:

dog

and an image jumps in your mind (as it did with "red"), but because I have not put it in a formal relation with anything else, you have no way to know whether the specific image in your mind has anything to do with what I want to communicate. Hence that leeway. I can correct it:

Collie dog, and you will agree. I can correct it into a big dog or a shaggy dog, and you will still concur. But a Chevrolet dog? An oxymoronic dog? A turgidly cardiac dog? For the purposes of ordinary speech, or naturalistic fiction, these corrections are outside acceptable boundaries: they distort some essential quality in all the various objects that we have attached to the sound "dog." On the other hand, there is something to be enjoyed in the distortions, a freshness that may be quite entertaining, even though they lack the inevitability of our big, shaggy collie.

A sixty thousand word novel is one picture corrected fifty-nine thousand, nine hundred and ninety-nine times. The total experience must have the same feeling of freshness as this turgidly cardiac creature as well as the inevitability of Big and Shaggy here.

Now let's atomize the correction process itself. A story begins:

The

What is the image thrown on your mind? Whatever it is, it is going to be changed many, many times before the tale is over. My own, un-modified The is a greyish ellipsoid about four feet high that balances on the floor perhaps a yard away. Yours is no doubt different. But it is there, has a specific size, shape, color, and bears a particular relation to you. My a, for example, differs from my the in that it is about the same shape and color -- a bit paler, perhaps -- but is either much further away, or much smaller and nearer. In either case, I am going to be either much

less, or much more, interested in it than I am in the. Now we come to the second word in the story and the first correction:

The red

My four-foot ellipsoid just changed color. It is still about the same distance away. It has become more interesting. In fact, even at this point I feel vaguely that the increased interest may be outside the leeway I allow for The. I feel a strain here that would be absent if the first two words had been A red... My eye goes on to the third word while my mind prepares for the second correction:

The red sun

My original The has now been replaced by a luminous disk. The color has lightened considerably. The disk is above me. An indistinct landscape has formed about me. And I am even more aware, now that the object has been placed at such a distance, of the tension between my own interest level in red sun and the ordinary attention I accord a the: for the intensity of interest is all that is left with me of the original image.

Less clearly, in terms of future corrections, is a feeling that in this landscape, it is either dawn, sunset, or if it is not another time, smog of some sort must be hazing the air(...red sun...); but I hold all for the next correction:

The red sun is

A sudden sense of intimacy. I am being asked to pay even greater attention (in a way that was would not demand, as it is the form of the traditional historical narrative). But is...? There is a speaker here! That focus in attention I felt between the first two words is not my attention, but the attention of the speaker. It resolves into a tone of voice "The red sun is..." And I listen to this voice, in the midst of this still vague landscape, registering his concern for the red sun. Between the and red information was generated that between sun and is resolved into a meaningful correction in my vision. This is my first aesthetic pleasure from the tale -- a small one, as we have only progressed four words into the story. Nevertheless, it becomes one drop in the total enjoyment to come from the telling. Watching and listening to my speaker, I proceed to the next corrections:

The red sun is high.

Noon and slightly overcast: this is merely a confirmation of something previously suspected, nowhere near as major a correction as the one before. It adds a slight sense of warmth to the landscape, and the light has been fixed at a specific point. I

attempt to visualize the landscape more clearly, but no object, including the speaker, has been cleared enough to resolve. The comma tells me that a thought group is complete. In the pause it occurs to me that the redness of the sun may not be a clue to smog at all, but merely the speaker falling into literary-ism; or, at best, the redness is a projection of his consciousness, which as yet I don't understand. And for a moment I notice that from where I'm standing the sun indeed appears its customary, blind-white gold. Next correction:

The red sun is high, the

In this strange landscape (lit by its somewhat untrustworthily described sun) the speaker has turned his attention to another grey, four-foot ellipsoid, equidistant from himself and me. Again, it is too indistinct to take highlighting. But there have been two corrections with not much tension, and the reality of the speaker himself is beginning to slip. What will this become?

The red sun is high, the blue

The ellipsoid has changed hue. But the repetition in the semantic form of the description momentarily threatens to dissolve all reality, landscape, speaker, and sun, into a mannered listing of bucolica. The whole scene dims. And the final correction?

The red sun is high, the blue low.

Look! We are worlds and worlds away. The first sun is huge; and how accurate the description of its color turns out to have been. The repetition that predicted mannerism now fixes both big and little sun to the sky. The landscape crawls with long red shadows and stubby blue ones, joined by purple triangles. Look at the speaker himself! Can you see him? You have seen his doubled shadow...

Though it ordinarily takes only a quarter of a second and is largely unconscious, this is the process.

When the corrections as we move from word to word produce a muddy picture, when unclear bits of information do not resolve to even greater clarity as we progress, we call the writer a poor stylist. As the story goes on, and the pictures become more complicated as they develop through time, if even greater anomalies appear as we continue correcting, we say he can't plot. But it is the same quality error committed on a grosser level, even though a reader must be a third or three-quarters of the way through the book to spot one, while the first may glare out from the opening sentence.

In any commercial field of writing, like sf, the argument of writers and editors who feel content can be opposed to style runs, at its most articulate:

"Basically we are writing adventure fiction. We are writing it very fast. We do not have time to be concerned about any but the grosser errors. More important, you are talking about subtleties too refined for the vast majority of our readers who are basically neither literary nor sophisticated."

The internal contradictions here could make a book. Let me outline two.

The basis of any adventure novel, sf or otherwise, what gives it its entertainment value -- escape value if you will -- what sets it apart from the psychological novel, what names it an adventure, is the intensity with which the real actions of the story impinge on the protagonist's consciousness. The simplest way to generate that sense of adventure is to increase the intensity with which the real actions impinge on the reader's. And fictional intensity is almost entirely the province of those refinements of which I have been speaking.

The story of an infant's first toddle across the kitchen floor will be an adventure if the writer can generate the infantile wonder at new muscle, new efforts, obstacle, and detours. I would like to read such a story.

We have all read, many too many times, the heroic attempts of John Smith to save the lives of seven orphans in the face of fire, flood, and avalanche.

I am sure it was an adventure for Smith.

For the reader it was dull as dull could be.

The Doors of His Face, the Lamps of His Mouth by Roger Zelazny has been described as "...all speed and adventure..." by Theodore Sturgeon, and indeed it is one of the most exciting adventure tales sf has produced. Let me change one word in every grammatical unit of every sentence, replacing it with a word that "...means more or less the same thing...", and I can diminish the excitement by half and expunge every trace of wit. Let me change one word and add one word, and I can make it so dull as to be practically unreadable. Yet a paragraph by paragraph synopsis of the "content" will be the same.

An experience I find painful (though it happens with increasing frequency) occurs when I must listen to a literate person who has just become enchanted by some hacked-out space-boiler begin to

rhapsodise about the way the blunt, imprecise, leaden language reflects the hairy-chested hero's alienation from reality. He usually goes on to explain how the "...sf content..." itself reflects our whole society's divorce from the real. The experience is painful because he is right as far as he goes. Badly-written adventure fiction is our true anti-literature. Its protagonists are our real anti-heroes. They move through un-real worlds amidst all sorts of noise and manage to perceive nothing meaningful or meaningfully.

Author's intention or no, that is what badly written sf is about. But anyone who reads or writes sf seriously knows that its particular excellence is in another area altogether: in all the brouhaha clinging about these unreal worlds, chords are sounded in total sympathy with the real.

"...You are talking about subtleties too refined for the vast majority of our readers who are basically neither literary nor sophisticated."

This part of the argument always throws me back to an incident from the summer I taught a remedial English class at my Neighborhood Community Center. The voluntary nature automatically restricted enrollment to people who wanted to learn; still, I had sixteen and seventeen-year-olds who had never had any formal education in either Spanish or English continually joining my lessons. Regardless, after a student had been in the class six months, I would throw him a full five hundred and fifty page novel to read: Demetry Merejakowsky's The Romance of Leonardo Da Vinci. The book is full of Renaissance history, as well as sword play, magic, and dissertations on art and science. It is an extremely literary novel with several levels of interpretation. It was a favorite of Sigmund Freud and inspired him to write his own Leonardo da Vinci: a Study in Psychosexuality. My students loved it and, with it, lost a good deal of their fear of Literature and Long Books.

Shortly before I had to leave the class, Leonardo appeared in paperback, translated by Hubert Tench. Till then it had only been available in a Modern Library edition translated by Bernard Gilbert Gurney. To save my latest two students a trip to the Barnes and Noble basement, as well as a dollar fifty, I suggested they buy the paperback. Two days later one had struggled through forty pages and the other had given up after ten. Both thought the book dull, had no idea what it was about, and begged me for something shorter and more exciting.

Bewildered, I bought a copy of the Tench translation myself that afternoon. I do not have either book at hand as I write, so I'm sure this will prove an exaggeration. But I do recall, however, one description of a little house in Florence:

Gurney: "Grey smoke rose and curled from the slate chimney."

Tench: "Billows of smoke, grey and gloomy, elevated and contorted up from the slates of the chimney."

By the same process that differentiated the four examples of putting books on a desk, these two sentences do not refer to the same smoke, chimney, house, time of day; nor do any of the other houses within sight remain the same; nor do any possible inhabitants. One sentence has nine words, the other fifteen. But atomise both as a series of corrected images and you will find the mental energy expended on the latter is greater by a factor of six or seven! And over seven-eights of it leaves that uncomfortable feeling of loose endedness, unutilized and unresolved. Sadly, it is the less skilled, less sophisticated reader who is most injured by bad writing. Bad prose requires more of your mental energy to correct your image from word to word, and the corrections themselves are less rewarding. That is what makes it bad. The sophisticated, literary reader may give the words the benefit of the doubt and question whether a seeming clumsiness is more fruitfully interpreted as an intentional ambiguity.

For what it is worth, when I write I often try to say several things at the same time -- from a regard for economy that sits contiguous with any concern for skillful expression. I have certainly failed to say many of the things I intended. But ambiguity marks the failure, not the intent.

But how does all this relate to those particular series of corrected images we label sf? To answer that, we must first look at what distinguishes these particular word series from other word series that get labeled naturalistic fiction, reportage, fantasy.

A distinct level of subjunctivity informs all the words in an sf story at a level that is different from that which informs naturalistic fiction, fantasy, or reportage.

Subjunctivity is the tension on the thread of meaning that runs between word and object. Suppose a series of words is presented to us as a piece of reportage. A blanket indicative tension informs the whole series: This happened. That is the particular level of subjunctivity at which journalism takes place. Any word, even the metaphorical ones, must go straight back to a real object, or a real thought on the part of the reporter.

The subjunctivity level for a series of words labeled naturalistic fiction is defined by: Could have happened. Note that the level of subjunctivity makes certain dictates and allows certain freedoms as to what word can follow another. Consider this word series: "For one second, as she stood alone on the desert, her world shattered and she watched the fragments bury themselves

in the dunes." This is practically meaningless at the subjunctive level of reportage. But it might be a perfectly adequate, if not brilliant, word series for a piece of naturalistic fiction.

Fantasy takes the subjunctivity of naturalistic fiction and throws it in reverse. At the appearance of elves, witches, or magic in a non-metaphorical position, or at some correction of image too bizarre to be explained by other than the super-natural, the level of subjunctivity becomes: Could not have happened. And immediately it informs all the words in the series. No matter how naturalistic the setting, once the witch has taken off on her broomstick, the most realistic of trees, cats, night clouds, or the moon behind them become infected with this reverse subjunctivity.

But when spaceships, ray guns, or more accurately any correction of images that indicates the future appears in a series of words and marks it as sf, the subjunctivity level is changed once more: These objects, these convocations of objects into situations and events, are blanketly defined by: Have not happened.

Events that have not happened are very different from the fictional events that could have happened, or the fantastic events that could not have happened.

Events that have not happened include several sub-categories. These sub-categories define the sub-categories of sf. Events that have not happened include those events that might happen: these are your technological and sociological predictive tales. Another category includes events that will not happen: these are your science-fantasy stories. They include events that have not happened yet (Can you hear the implied tone of warning?): there are your cautionary dystopias, Brave New World and 1984. Were English a language with a more detailed tense system, it would be easier to see that events that have not happened include past events as well as future ones. Events that have not happened in the past compose that sf specialty, the parallel-world story, whose outstanding example is Phillip K. Dick's Man in the High Castle.

The particular subjunctive level of sf expands the freedom of the choice of words that can follow another group of words meaningfully; but it limits the way we employ the corrective process as we move between them.

At the subjunctive level of naturalistic fiction, "The red sun is high, the blue low," is meaningless. In naturalistic fiction our corrections in our images must be made in accordance with what we know of the personally observable -- this includes our own observations, and observations of others that have been reported to us at the subjunctive level of journalism.

Considered at the subjunctive level of fantasy, "The red sun was high, the blue low," fares a little better. But the corrective process in fantasy is limited, too: when we are given a correction that is not meaningful in terms of the personally observable world, we must accept any pseudo-explanation we are given. If there is no pseudo-explanation, it must remain mysterious. As fantasy, one suspects that the red sun is the "realer" one, but what sorceror, to what purpose, shunted up that second azure globe, we cannot know and must wait for the rest of the table.

As we have seen, that sentence makes very good sf. The subjunctive level of sf says that we must make our correction process in accord with what we know of the physically explainable universe. And the physically explainable has a much wider range than the personally observable.[4] The particular verbal freedom of sf, coupled with the corrective process that allows the whole range of the physically explainable universe, can produce the most violent leaps of imagery. For not only does it throw us words away, it specifies how we get there.

Let us examine what happens between the following two words:

winged dog

As fiction it is meaningless. As fantasy it is merely a visual correction. At the subjunctive level of s-f, however, one must momentarily consider, as one makes that visual correction, an

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[4] I throw out this notion for its worth as intellectual play.-- It is not too difficult to see that as events that have not happened include the sub-group of events that have not happened in the past, they include the sub-sub group of events that could have happened with an implied but didn't. That is to say, the level of subjunctivity of sf includes the level of subjunctivity of naturalistic fiction.

As well, the personally observable world is a sub-category of the physically explainable universe. That is, the laws of the first can all be explained in terms of the laws of the second, while the situation is not necessarily reversable. So much for the two levels of subjunctivity and the limitations on the corrective processes that go with them.

What of the respective freedoms in the choice of word to follow word?

I can think of no series of words that could appear in a piece of naturalistic fiction that could not also appear in the same order in a piece of speculative fiction. I can, however, think of many series of words that, while fine for speculative fiction, would be meaningless as naturalism. Which then is the major and which the sub-category?

Consider: Naturalistic fictions are parallel-world stories in which the divergence from the real is too slight for historical verification.

entire track of evo lution: whether the dog has forelegs or not. The visual correction must include modification of breast-bone and musculature if the wings are to be functional, as well as a whole slew of other factors from hollow bones to heart-rate; or if we subsequently learn as the series of words goes on that grafting was the cause, there are all the implications (to consider) of a technology capable of such operation. All of this information hovers tacitly about and between those two words in the same manner that the information and I and the desk hovered around the statements about placing down the books. The best sf writer will utilize this information just as he utilizes the information generated by any verbal juxtapositioning.

I quote Harlan Ellison describing his own reaction to this verbal process:

"...Heinlein has always managed to indicate the greater strangeness of a culture with the most casually dropped-in reference: the first time in a novel, I believe it was in Beyond This Horizon, that a character came through a door that...dilated. And no discussion. Just: 'The door dilated.' I read across it, and was two lines down before I realized what the image had been, what the words had called forth. A dilating door. It didn't open, it irised! Dear God, now I knew I was in a future world..."

"The door dilated," is meaningless as fiction, and practically meaningless as fantasy. As sf -- as an event that hasn't happened, yet still must be interpreted in terms of the physically explainable -- it is quite as wondrous as Ellison feels it.

As well, the luminosity of Heinlein's particular vision was supported by all sorts of other information, stated and unstated, generated by his words.

Through this discussion, I have tried to keep away from what motivates the construction of these violent nets of wonder called speculative fiction. The more basic the discussion, the greater is our obligation to stay with the reader in front of the page. But at the mention of the author's 'vision' the subject is already broached. The vision (sense of wonder, if you will) that sf tries for seems to me very close to the vision of poetry, particularly poetry as it concerned the nineteenth century Symbolists. No matter how disciplined its creation, to move into an 'unreal' world demands a brush with mysticism.

Virtually all the classics of speculative fiction are mystical.

In Isaac Asimov's Foundation trilogy, one man, dead on page thirty-seven, achieves nothing less than the redemption of mankind from twenty-nine thousand years of suffering simply by his

heightened consciousness of the human condition. (Read 'consciousness of the human condition' for 'science of psycho-history'.)

In Robert Heinlein's Stranger in a Strange Land the appearance of God incarnate creates a world of love and cannibalism.

Clarke's Childhood's End and Sturgeon's More Than Human detail vastly differing processes by which man becomes more than man.

Alfred Bester's The Stars My Destination (or Tiger, Tiger, its original title) is considered by many readers and writers, both in and outside the field, to be the greatest single sf novel. I would like to give it a moment's detailed attention. In this book, man, both intensely human yet more than human, becomes, through greater acceptance of his humanity, something even more. It chronicles a social education, but within a society which, from our point of view, has gone mad. In the climactic scene, the protagonist, burning in the ruins of a collapsing cathedral, has his senses confused by synesthesia. Terrified, he begins to oscillate insanely in time and space. Through this experience, with the help of his worst enemy transformed by time into his savior, he saves himself and attains a state of innocence and rebirth.

This is the stuff of mysticism.

It is also a very powerful dramatization of Rimbaud's theory of the systematic derangement of the senses to achieve a higher awareness. And the Rimbaud reference is as conscious as the book's earlier references to Joyce, Blake, and Swift.

I would like to see the relation between the Symbolists and modern American speculative fiction explored more thoroughly. The French Symbolists' particular problems of vision were never the focus for American poetry. But they have been explored repeatedly not only by writers like Bester and Sturgeon, but also newer writers like Roger Zelazny, who brings both erudition and word magic to strange creations generated from the tension between suicide and immortality.

But to recapitulate: whatever the inspiration or vision, whether it arrives in a flash or has been meticulously worked out over years, the only way a writer can present it is by what he can make happen in the reader's mind between one word and another, by the way he can maneuver the existing tensions between words and objects.

I have read many descriptions of "mystical experiences," not a few in sf stories and novels. Very, very few have generated any feel of the mystical -- which is to say that as the writers went about setting correction after correction, the images were too untrustworthy to call up any personal feelings about such experiences. The Symbolists have a lesson here: The only thing

that we will trust enough to let it generate in us any real sense of the mystical is a resonant aesthetic form.

The sense of mystical horror, for example, in Thomas M. Disch's extraordinary novella The Asian Shore does not come from its study of a particularly insidious type of racism, incisive though the study is; nor does it come from the final incidents set frustratingly between the supernatural and the insane. It generates rather in the formal parallels between the protagonist's concepts of Byzantine architecture and the obvious architecture of his own personality.

Aesthetic form...I am going to leave this discussion at this undefined term. For many people it borders on the meaningless. I hope there is enough tension between the words to proliferate with what has gone before. To summarize, however: any serious discussion of speculative fiction must get away from the distracting concept of sf content and examine precisely what sort of word-beast sits before us. We must explore both the level of subjunctivity at which speculative fiction takes place and the particular intensity and range of images this level affords. Readers must do this if they want to fully understand what has already been written. Writers must do this if the field is to mature to the potential so frequently cited for it.

San Francisco
March 1969

2001: ODYSSEY TO BYZANTIUM

Morris Beja

Most of the commentary on Stanley Kubrick and Arthur C. Clarke's film, 2001: A Space Odyssey, has concentrated on the second half of the title, and consequently on the way in which astronaut Dave Bowman's journey takes him to the infinite--from here to there. But the film presents us, as its full title indicates, with a journey which is temporal as well as spatial. The first half of the title--and the part given most stress by the graphics associated with the film--emphasizes the temporal nature of Bowman's odyssey, and consequently the way it takes him to the eternal--from now to then.

Indeed, the choice of the date strikes me as one of the most intriguing things about the movie. With its connotations of a new start (... 0001) built on past millennia (2000 ...), it recalls many theories of the cyclical nature of universal history. For me, it has been illuminating in particular to consider this element of the film against the background of William Butler Yeats's stress on 2,000 year cycles, at the end of each of which we have a birth and take-over by a new god. Any student of Yeats, certainly, is not going to pass lightly over the crucial significance of the year 2001, of all possible dates. It seems especially enlightening to compare what Kubrick and Clarke are attempting in 2001 with what Yeats is attempting in such a poem as "Sailing to Byzantium."

I need hardly mention that my point is not that Kubrick, say, necessarily knows Yeats's poem, or that Yeats composed it after a vision-preview of the movie in 1926. Rather, the approach and goals of the two visionary and metaphysical works seem to me strikingly similar and mutually illuminating.

In "Sailing to Byzantium," of course, Yeats is concerned with what faces each individual soul as it tries to turn from our sensual and physical world--"that country," as Yeats calls it--to the next world, the world of the spirit and eternity, smybolized by the holy city of Byzantium. In his quest, he beseeches the aid of the "sages" in "God's holy fire," asking them to "come from the holy fire, perne in a gyre"--that is, to leave their condition of eternity for the mid-realm of the gyre, so that they may teach him how to be gathered "into the artifice of eternity."

The key to apprehending 2001 is the initial realization that--in this film about what is past, or passing, or to come--when Dave Bowman goes on his odyssey to outer (and inner) space, he is on precisely the same sort of journey that Yeats is making when he sails to Byzantium; only in Bowman's case it cannot be

called a conscious quest as such, since initially he is not aware of the full significance of his "mission." But we are: we have been clued in by the appearance of the artifice of eternity--the monolith of the opening sections of the film. By the time we see Dave on his unwitting quest for it, we realize that it has awaited him, patiently, three or four million years, a momument of unaging intellect.

Unfortunately, Dave encounters obstacles on his pilgrimage: the most formidable is that monument of its own magnificence, Hal the computer. But our pilgrim triumphs over that obstacle and finally goes through to, as the words on the screen inform us, "Jupiter--and Beyond--the Infinite." Clearly, when you go to the Infinite, what you are doing is, in Yeats's terms, going out of nature. And once out of nature, Dave goes through a prolonged and intense psychedelic experience, in order to be taken out of our world into the other. In Clarke's novel based on the film, we are told that Dave is here going through "some kind of cosmic switching device, routing the traffic of the stars through unimaginable dimensions of space and time."[1] The movie itself exposes us to varied and extreme visual and aural phenomena, designed to make it perfectly clear to any observer that what Dave is doing is perning in a gyre--and finally coming through God's holy fire.

By the time the extraterrestial sages get him through, he is an aged man, and we are presented with the most perplexing sequence in this challenging film. We encounter Dave, in a French Provincial room, considerably aged since we last saw him. Moreover, he is not getting any younger, so pretty soon we see him as a tattered coat upon a stick, a mere paltry thing, a dying animal. But we must realize that that does not matter--that, indeed, his soul should clap its hand and sing, and louder sing for every tatter in his mortal dress. For Dave is to have his bodily form changed--and he is no more likely than Yeats to have it transformed into any natural thing.

He has been gathered into eternity, and that is no country for old men. So his bodily form is changed into that of a child. But a god-child: the new god coming in the magnus annus, the Great Year 2001--the beginning of the new 2,000 year cycle. Or, at least, he is a supernatural, anti-natural child: what the sequel to Yeats's poem "Byzantium," will hail as "the superhuman."

Ohio State University
Columbus, Ohio

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[1] Arthur C. Clarke, 2001: A Space Odyssey (New York: New American Library, 1968), p. 199.

M.L.A. FORUM --

SCIENCE FICTION: THE NEW MYTHOLOGY

Chairman: Bruce Franklin (Stanford University)

Panelists: Darko Suvin (McGill University)

Isaac Asimov

Frederik Pohl

(edited by Thomas D. Clareson)

[Ed. Note: The M.L.A. Forum on sf took place at the Americana Hotel, 29 December 1968, the third and final afternoon of the Association's annual meeting. Professor Franklin is, of course, author of Future Perfect; Professor Suvin, originally from Yugoslavia, is author of a forthcoming study of Eastern European sf. At this point in their distinguished careers, Isaac Asimov is science editor of The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction, while Fred Pohl edits Galaxy Magazine. Miss Judith Merril was scheduled to have been a panelist, but was unavoidably detained. Nor should it be forgotten that Professor Scott Osborn of Mississippi State had the original task of organizing the Forum.

The following article derives from a transcript of the tape of the full 2½ hour Forum. In editing it, I have used a blue pencil as lightly as possible, particularly in the discussion coming after the formal presentation of papers, in order to preserve as much of the flavor of immediate participation as possible. At all times I have sought to eliminate only those hesitations and repetitions which naturally occur during unrehearsed presentation; however, where those repetitions, for example, have seemed necessary to capture some nuance of meaning or opinion, I have retained them. Because I was working from a tape, I must assume all responsibilities for such matters as punctuation and sentence structure, and hope the speakers will forgive me.

There are only two major deviations from the tape. Professor Suvin sent me a copy of his paper, suggesting that I use it because, as both he and Franklin pointed out, his task of introducing a comparatively unfamiliar field--Soviet sf--required more time than he had available as a panelist, though he was given additional time. However, in those instances when he added to, or changed significantly, some passage of the paper at the Forum,

I have included that material, indicating its presence with []'s. Secondly, I have eliminated Franklin's brief introductions of the speakers. Except for these two factors, however, I have tried to reproduce an exact transcription.

To emphasize the historical importance of the Forum to the critical recognition of science fiction is to belabor the obvious. Certainly the divergent approaches to the genre expressed during the course of the Forum indicate both how thoroughly sf is an integral part of modern thought and literature, and not only the wide range for possible future study, but, more important, the wide range possible for future writing of this newest mythology.]

BRUCE FRANKLIN (after preliminary announcements)

Now I think that this Forum is not unconnected with what's going on at the Americana Hotel right now at the business meeting and what has been occurring throughout this Convention. When we first started the science fiction Seminar, that itself was an act which was considered by most people in the profession who knew about it very eccentric, radical, perhaps even lunatic. That I think is a fair statement. And as that Seminar has developed and we have moved toward something like this Forum, it has been necessary to present many arguments about the legitimacy of this area in our field. The issues, I think, some of them, have very closely to do with the issues being debated here: that is, about the relevancy of literature to life, and the whole question of what kind of literature is appropriate to be taught in colleges and universities. The thing, of course, which made science fiction not respectable was that it was a popular art form. It has been from the beginning--certainly of modern science fiction--a literature of the people, in many ways different from some of the other literature that we teach without raising eyebrows in the curricula of colleges and universities.[1]

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[1] I feel that I must modify the implications of Franklin's opening remarks, at least so far as the governing body of the M.L.A. itself is concerned. Never has that body refused one of our petitions for a Conference-Seminar. When we petitioned to become a permanent group, that was not acted upon because the M.L.A. was then shifting its emphasis from Groups to continuing and special Seminars. Except for E.L.T., we are, as a matter of fact, the oldest continuing Seminar of the M.L.A. At the first conference in 1958, which I had the privilege of chairing, the panelists included Professors Charles C. Walcutt (Queens) and J.O. Bailey (North Carolina). Professor Bailey was chairman of the second conference. However, Franklin's remarks are fully accurate in describing the reactions of many of our colleagues in individual departments. Not, however, the M.L.A. as governing body.

Darko Suvin

Soviet sf is largely unknown in the U.S. although by now there are five anthologies and I am myself guilty of a sixth in print. I will then, as it is impossible to reel off names and short resumes of dozens of worthwhile books in the last 10 years, limit myself to indicate reasons why this tradition should be brought to the attention of U.S. readers in general and of this audience in particular. The first reason pertains to the sociology of literature: Soviet sf has by now grown into a literary phenomenon of global size if not yet of global spread (a deficiency due more to cultural politics than anything else, mainly though not exclusively on this side of the Cold War gap). It has assembled a nucleus of about 50 habitual--though, just as in U.S., not full-time--writers, a voracious reading public whose nucleus of all-devouring fans is to be estimated at several hundreds of thousands (mainly young people, and those engaged in natural science professions). Furthermore, the outer circle of readers who occasionally read an sf story alongside with other technical non-fiction or adventurous fiction can be estimated at anywhere between 3 and 15 millions. No accurate statistics exist for the number of sf works which could be found in any of the many public or semi-public libraries carrying all the books of the last decade, but there is a claim for about 700 "works" for 1958-67. I would say this refers probably to all languages of USSR and all bibliographical units (including single stories in magazines, poems, plays, movie scenarios etc.). In Russian language only, I would estimate significant new books of sf run to 15-20 yearly: of that, about half a dozen are anthologies of stories and novels published for the first time, with the rest about evenly divided between novels and collections of short and long stories. These books are on the average larger than the U.S. sf ones, comprising about 300-400 pages, or perhaps about 150,000 words; they are priced at 50-80¢ per anthologies and 25-60¢ for authorial books--though in a great preponderance they are in hard cover--following the admirable Soviet policy of cheap books. The average first printing is, according to my calculations (taken from 22 anthologies and 11 authorial books I happened to have with me in Canada), about 150,000 for anthologies and 90,000 for books by single writers. Major publishers and writer's residence centers are not only Moscow and Leningrad, but also in third place, Baku, and further in the provinces of European Russia, in Siberia, Far East, and even Central Asia. The libraries referred to earlier--including those of scientific institutes--also carry journals such as Nauka i zhizn' (circulation 3.5 millions), Tekhnika molodezhi, Iskatel', Znanie sila, and there are amusing stories of their issues being spirited away by avid sf fans, even down to the surreptitious reading of the teen magazine, Iunyi tekhnik, and not returned until all sf stories had been devoured--much to the disgust of other library devotees.

The second reason legitimizing an interest in Soviet sf here pertains to the aesthetics and ethics of literature; i.e. it is a matter of value judgments once the facts are known. With this in view it would seem useful to point out some misconceptions present in glances across a rift of coldwar ideologies, and not entirely absent from the sidewise looks from the U.S. at sf in socialist countries (practically, since all others have so far been ignored, in Soviet Russia). One of the most interesting of such brief glances was Dr. Asimov's preface to the first anthology of Soviet sf in the USA, Collier's reprint of a Soviet selection. In it, Dr. Asimov cogently described how modern sf in the US developed through three phases dominated respectively by adventure, technology, and sociology. He then proceeded to apply such a scheme to the Soviet stories, much as he had applied Gibbon to interstellar empires. As a result, in his introduction to the second Collier anthology he had to beat a precipitous though witty retreat. He did that in the best scientific manner, modifying and enlarging his original categorical scheme under the pressure of new data; and as his judgments had admittedly been based upon only a dozen stories, there is no question of trying to fault Dr. Asimov. What is significant here is, rather, that some facets of Soviet sf, even in such a small sample, utterly refused to fit the U.S.-derived categories: as Dr. Asimov perspicaciously noted, these facts turned out to be the ethical and philosophical; i.e. the utopian ones. Now this utopianism is precisely the major difference between the Russian (or East European generally) as well as the socialist traditions from the tradition of Anglo-American empiricism. Such a difference is particularly obvious in sf, whose business it is to be subversive, to show further new frameworks for as yet unknown possibilities stemming from cognitive extrapolation, and new human behavior correlative to such frameworks. Allow me to spend some time on the presuppositions of these differences, since their understanding seems to me crucial for a correct scholarly interpretation of Soviet sf, one which will not do violence to the evidence available nor use it primarily as inert material for a priori manipulation.

Modern "Atlantic" sf has found it difficult to escape being dominated by the anxieties of its historical experience, in final analysis of the hobbian war of each against each. As Wells pointed out in The War of the Worlds, which helped to set this pattern, why should not a technologically superior species treat the Terrans as the Whites have treated the colonial peoples; i.e. wipe them tranquilly out?... Yet the original interest in aliens was much richer. Sf has from earliest times been created out of a sense of fascination with amazing possibilities elsewhere--the most amazing phenomenon of them all being, as already Sophocles knew, man. Thus, intelligent beings grappling with a different way of life are central to sf. The hidden valley or island reached by the extraordinary voyage was either the blessed Terrestrial Paradise (Eden or Elysium) containing exemplary races held up for admiration and emulation; or it was the dark place

whose natives showed up the follies and grotesque aspects of human conditions (from Lucian and Cyrano to Wells and Stapledon). Any science fiction worth its name is, then, exemplary by precept or by contrast, by positive or negative experiment, utopian or debunking; it is a vision of cognitive possibilities, applying critical reason by satirical indirection or by utopian direction.

Considered from this perspective, which refuses to accept the transient and limiting criteria of American publishing success as universally valid definitions of sf, this genre does not begin or end with modern natural sciences in the 18-19th centuries. One can claim for sf all fiction concerned centrally with a new and hypothetic--i.e., different but cognitively possible, framework of intelligent life. Sf explores what this could mean in terms of new cosmological relations and social norms for the characters involved. Being centrally concerned with parables of, and parallels to, human relations, it is at least as much concerned with the ethics as with technics, and a non-dogmatic utopianism in the widest sense--embracing Don Quixote and Columbus, as well as Hythloday and Gulliver--in its constant horizon and measure. At least, such a conception of sf can be read out of its history, and it is the one significant for socialist sf.

Historically, Russian sf tradition was never dominated by either pure technology or pure adventure, but by the two competing strands of social-science fiction or utopian sf. The first is basically spiritualistic, Etatist, and authoritarian; the second is basically materialistic, federalistic, and libertarian. They are not divided along purely religious lines, for surely both Chekhov's democratic humanism and Tolstoy's peasant-Christian anarchism are within the horizons of the second alternative, and Gorki himself, the reputed father of Russian socialist literature, shows in his "God-building" period and in such characters as old Luka in Lower Depths, the elastic borders of that alternative. Historically, in fact, the libertarian utopian tradition in Russian literature flows out of the vigorous though unclear folk-longings for a land of abundance--the Cockayne-like strana Muraviya or a fabulous Persia, India, and China--and for a land of justice regardless of social station (for example, the mighty typological theme of the humble but finally exalted protagonist, from Ivanushka in fairy tales to the humble arrogants in Dostoevsky or Tolstoy). The authoritarian tradition, on the other hand, accompanies political centralism from the 16th century, when Peresvetov wrote for Ivan the Terrible The Legend of Sultan Mahomet, an Etatist description quoted approvingly by Stalin; it reappeared in several Rationalist "state novels" of 18th and early 19th century, such as in the pioneering fragment by Odoevsky, Year 4338, where it fused with Romantic anticipation. Both of these traditions confronted and permeated each other in very interesting ways in the three major periods of Russian SF so far: the 1860's and its echoes, the 1920's, and this last decade.

In the 1860's, the confrontation was clearest, since it centered around the two giant names of Chernyshevsky and Dostoevsky. There is no doubt as to which is the more powerful writer, yet the specific weight and pull of their orientations is at least equivalent. In fact, Chernyshevsky's socialist utopianism was to prove clearly more powerful in the Russian tradition and in the subsequent waves of sf. His much undervalued novel, What is To Be Done?, had an immense impact, probably greater than Bellamy's in the U.S., because Chernyshevsky, in a still very modern way, refused to separate the ideal of a cooperative and libertarian socialist future from the intimate present life of his figures and especially his heroines, so that their exemplary personal relations prefigured Russia's utopian future. In the loving happiness his heroine pursues, there is no break between erotics and politics, nor between the conscious and the subconscious, so that the formally utopian part of that novel is a sequence of her dreams--a brilliant innovation soon to be picked up and turned against its originators by Dostoevsky's rebuttal of radicalism in Raskolnikov. Chernyshevsky thus becomes in international proportions the first writer to avoid didactic dryness in presenting a radicalized Fourierist and Owenist literary utopia, by making a politico-ethical dream the supreme emotional interest of his characters in a manner which would have been quite understandable to Dante, Langland or Marvell, though it is remote from 19th century literary and 20th century critical mainstream.

Dostoevsky's equally messianic and equally anti-bourgeois voice turned after youthful dabbling in illegal utopian-socialist circles and his shattering Siberian experience to a deification of the "Russian Christ", conceived as a unio mystica between the Russian lower classes and the Tsarist idea. His deepest hatred was directed against the anticipatory symbol of a Crystal Palace, in which he curiously enough fused (Winter Notes, Notes from the Underground) an opposition to Western, capitalist degradation of man and the radical Chernyshevskian proposals for a rational rehumanization. Yet after the venomous polemics of the 1860's, Dostoevsky's fascination with innocence, brotherly love, and nonantagonistic society reemerged time and again in the image of a Golden Age, most clearly isolated in his story Dream of a Ridiculous Man, a formal pastoral utopia eventually corrupted by individualism, and evolving, much to the dismay of his protagonist, to a full civil society with crimes, science, war, and saints. For all of Dostoevsky's usual fulminations against the abolition of suffering, the spell of an earthly happiness asserted itself in this utopian story--a wistful but significant concession to the Chernyshevskian dream.

Never entirely absent from Russian literature, the anticipatory social sf became especially relevant at times when the new Heavens seemed to draw close to the old Earth, such as the 1920's (with a little prologue in the 1900's, in the work of Bryusov, Bogdanov, etc.). That was an epoch in which the future actively

overpowered the present, and the sluggish flow of time was suddenly channelled to a wild waterfall, generating a rainbow on the near horizon as well as opening up immense sources of energy. Wells visited Soviet Russia in the midst of the Volga famine and found Lenin confidently tracing plans for a fully electrified and self-governing Russia. The utopographer Wells was stunned by the utopian boldness of the author of State and Revolution, and returned uncomprehending but impressed to write his one major utopian novel, Men Like Gods. In Soviet literature this atmosphere brought about a flurry of anticipations (Itin, Bobrov, Okunev, Zelikovich, Larri), planetary stories, and vaguely science adventure stories. The best young writers wrote "near future" prose (Ehrenburg, Kataev, Shaginyan, Lavrenev, Bulgakov, Vs. Ivanov, Shklovsky), or utopian plays (Lunts, Bryusov). A whole school of versifiers called themselves the Cosmists, and young poets like Pasternak or Mayakovsky dreamed of a "scientific poetry". Mayakovsky was, in fact, perhaps most representative for this activity, even down to the fact that his relevant works were only marginally or partly sf. Yet the mainspring of his creativeness in poems, movie scenarios, etc.--most clearly in three post-revolutionary plays--was the tension between anticipatory communist utopianism and a recalcitrant reality. His first play Mystery Buffo (1918) envisaged the October Revolution as a second cleansing Flood in which the working classes get rid of their masters and finally achieve a Terrestrial Paradise of reconciliation with Things around them. Mayakovsky's revolution is both political and cosmic, an irreversible and eschatological, irreverent and mysterious, earthy and tender return to direct sensuous relations with a no longer alien universe. No wonder that his later plays The Bedbug and The Bath in the late 20's became satirical protests against the threatening separation of the future classless heavens from the present earth. In his last play, the Soviet slogan of "Time Forward" materializes into a Time Machine leaping into the future with the creators and spewing out the bureaucrats.

Zamyatin's novel We, the other major sf work of the period, also deals with the relationship of the new heavens and old earth, but with an interesting use of some Dostoevskian traits to outflank the Crystal Palace utopia. Not that Zamyatin was for the ancien regime: he was an ex-Bolshevik, who certainly shared both the Chernyshevskian and Dostoevskian contempt for Western capitalism, which he onsidered decadent and life-crushing, so that he incorporated into We some features of an earlier satirical novel against English bourgeois respectability, such as sex-rationing and the Taylorite table of daily occupations. For Zamyatin, too, the Revolution is the undoubted principle of life and movement, opposed to the Entropy of dogmatism and death. An anti-entropic science, society, and literature are necessary, he affirmed; "a utopian literature, absurd as Babeuf in 1797:

it will be proved right after 150 years." Zamyatin believed, obviously, that he was a utopist, in fact going the Bolsheviks one better, so that it is disingenuous to present him primarily as an anti-Soviet author. This stance, popular in the U.S., agrees curiously enough with that of the increasingly dogmatic (as Zamyatin would say) or bureaucratic (as Mayakovsky would say) high priests of Soviet literary life, who never allowed his novel to be printed in the USSR (though to redress the balance I should mention, I published a shortened version of it in a Yugoslav sf anthology). Zamyatin, in fact, extrapolated the repressive potentials of any strong state and technocractic set-up, including the major capitalist and socialist experiences in that direction. Hesitating midway between Dostoevsky and Chernyshevsky, his is a useful anti-utopian warning that the new paradise cannot be static any more, even if it is a paradise of mathematics, steel, and interplanetary flights. The warning is inconsistent, since Zamyatin was (after Tsiolkovsky) the first practising scientist in Russian sf, and he could not bring himself to blame scientific reason, (which even provides him with the form of his novel - the laboratory notes) for its harmful uses. Thus he confronts the anti-utopian collectivistic or mass state with an implicitly utopian-socialist norm. It is interesting to see how many major sf writers were, in fact, heretics and dreamers in the margin of the official form their utopian tradition took. Dostoevsky in relation to Tsarism, or Mayakovsky and Zamyatin in relation to the Soviet state appear as heretic believers, that most obnoxious form of supporters. As Zamyatin wrote in his essay Tomorrow: "We do not turn to those who reject the present in the name of a return to the past, nor to those hopelessly stupefied by the present, but to those who can see the far-off tomorrow--and in the name of tomorrow, in the name of man, we judge the present." This point of view differs from Mayakovsky's principally by its ascetic concentration on the deformities of the present, without the explicit presence of the utopian future, which for Mayakovsky, too, grew rather vague and far-off in any case. In Zamyatin's own terminology, the defeat in the novel We is of the day but not of the epoch; it can be viewed as a document of a strong clash between the "cold" and the "warm" utopia: a judgment on Campanella or Bacon passed by More or Rabelais.

In between these two strands, the 1920's saw also the first Russian sf blend approximating the American pragmatist formula; i.e. blending sociological with natural-science fiction primarily oriented toward interplanetary or futuristic adventures. From the pioneering writings of Tsiolkovsky, which culminated with Outside Earth in 1920, through widespread public enthusiasm manifested in astronautic study circles, lectures, expositions, and forums in universities, a form evolved codified by Alexey Tolstoy in his Martian novel Aelita, a romance and adventure story blending with endearing lyricism a Soviet Revolution on Mars with a gloomy Wellsian or

Burroughsian lost-soul-mate ending. His second novel, The Garin Death Ray, also took the post-Vernian adventure and conspiracy cliches and motivated them with believable natural-scientific inventions and revolutionary virtue. Tolstoy's extrapolating verisimilitude, his rich characterization,and language lifted this sf mainstream to the level of general literary recognition, much as his example Wells had done in England.

Yet in spite of follow-ups to such a combination of scientific thriller and political edification, the promise of the revolutionary years, which had made it appear probable that the Russian school (or indeed schools) would dominate our times in sf as well as in movies, painting, and theatre, was not fulfilled. Not only the ostensibly anti-utopian but also the utopian aspect was forcibly expunged by Stalin's neo-pragmatism. Anticipation became an uncomfortable pursuit when "Stalin was the only one supposed to foresee the future" (Brandis), and in the quarter of century which begins with Mayakovsky's death and Zamyatin's departure from Soviet Union and lasts until Yefremov's Andromeda, no significant work of sf was printed there in book form, though there were unmistakable signs in magazines and through oblique incorporation as one of the layers of mainstream novels (Leonov) that sf impulses had not subsided. The few printed works were exclusively juvenile, and limited by the Stalinist theory of sf called "the theory of near limits," by which sf had to solve only State-planned technological problems of the nearest future and not meddle with radical changes beyond such limits. The second major age of Soviet sf accordingly came about with a repristination of the utopian imagination in the latter half of the 1950's, after Khrushchev's speech at the 20th Congress of Soviet CP and the sensational achievements of Soviet natural sciences symbolized by the Sputnik. The new wave, rich in tradition and individual talent, found a wide audience among the young and the technical intelligentsia, impatient of the old cliches and thirsting after knowledge and imaginativeness. Its tastes carried the day in the great "Yefremov debate."

Indeed, in the whole history of Russian sf only Chernyshevsky's and Mayakovsky's work had taken by storm the youth and younger professionals and earned the genre such general esteem as Yefremov's novel Andromeda. Against violent ideological opposition, it consummated in 1957-58 the victory of the new wave--if my argument is correct, really the victory of the basic Soviet Russian tradition. The writers and critics of the "cold stream" rebuked Andromeda's heroes as being "too far from our own times," and thus unintelligible to the reader, especially the juvenile one (!). A soviet critic (Sytin) concluded rightly of such pressure that "The demand 'Thus far and no farther' smells of blind dogmatism." However, the "warm stream" critics and writers, and the thousands of readers who wrote to the author, to newspapers, and to periodicals prevailed, and the novel has since sold millions of snapped-up copies.

Yefremov's work achieved such an historical significance because it creatively advanced the classical utopian socialist vision of an unified, affluent, humanist, classless, and stateless world. In Andromeda, the Earth is administered, by analogy with the associative centers of the human brain, by an Astronautic Council and an Economic Council which tallies all plans with existing possibilities; their specialized research Academies correspond to man's sense centers. More important perhaps than such explicit features, the novel's strong narrative sweep, full of adventurous actions, from a fist-fight to an encounter with electrical predators and an alien robot-spaceship, is imbued with the romance of cognition, primarily with utopian sociology, modern cosmology, and evolutionist biology. But Yefremov's strong anthropocentrical bent places the highest value on the redemption of time by creativity, a simultaneous adventure of deed, thought, and feeling leading to physical and ethical beauty. This utopian pathos of his anthropology is evident even in the symbolic title: Andromeda, the Nebula, recalls the chained Greek beauty rescued from the monster of class egotism and violence (personified in the novel as a bull and often bearing the hallmarks of Stalinism) by a flying astronautic hero endowed with superior science and sapience. Astronautics are thus claimed as a humanist discipline and not myth--and this is one of the most significant cross-connections between physical sciences, social sciences, ethics, and art which Yefremov establishes as the norm for his new people. Further, their future is not an end of history, that bane of utopianism from Plato on; creativity is always countered by entropy, and self-realization paid for in suffering. Very interesting approaches to a Marxist "optimistic tragedy" can thus be found in the book (Mven Mass' experiment). Finally, the accent on beauty and responsible freedom places, as in Chernyshevsky, female heroines in the focus of attention. All this contributes to the emotional motivation of the new moral world, in a well-informed polemical dialogue with American sf.

True, the novel's motivations and pace sometimes flag: one feels in it the presence of a reader unused to fast orientation in new perspectives and still prone to sentimentalism and preachings. Some aspects of its ethics and aesthetics, such as the intimate personal relations, though understandable in the context of an elder-generation Soviet Russian scientist, seem curiously old-fashioned for a sweepingly utopian persepctive. Yefremov's limitations are clearly manifested in his subsequent long story, Cor Serpentis, an explicit rebuttal of Leinster's "First Contact," with its acquisitive and bellicose presuppositions. In it, Terrans meeting the spaceship of a lonely fluorine-based mankind solve its problem by hitting on a transmutation of fluorine into oxygen idea (left completely vague). This story might be a legitimate pacifist-socialist parable for changing the Others (American capitalists?) into

Us (Soviet Russian socialists?), but its enthnocentric or "genocentric" standpoint--if I may coin a word in between egocentric and anthropocentric--precludes a fully imaginative sf whose point, surely, is unity in variety. Yet the paramount fact of Andromeda's polyphonic scope is, I think, its overall aesthetic success within sf, as one of the first utopias in world literature (the other would be Lem's Magellan Nebula) which shows new characters creatively interacting with a new society; i.e. the personal working out of utopia. Yefremov's basic device of unfolding the narration as if the anticipated future were already a normative present unites the classic "look backward" of utopian anticipation with the age-old dreams of a just and happy life. This made it the ideal type and nodal point of the Russian and socialist traditions which I'm concerned with clarifying, and enabled it to usher in the new era of Soviet sf. It is also a case study for my contention that sociological and aesthetic criteria cannot be really sundered in such a clarification, after a certain point.

[For the development of Soviet science fiction from this point on, since time limits me, I will concentrate on only two more names: the great Polish writer Lem and the brothers Strugatsky for the best Russian science fiction today.[2] Stanislaus Lem, born in 1921, has earned international recognition, though unfortunately not in the English language--which is bound to stop when my anthology comes out--with a series of seven novels and cycles of stories, essays, and two books on the philosophy of science--in all, about twenty books in the last fifteen years. To my mind he is clearly, perhaps, with Arthur Clarke, the most significant European science fiction writer today, and one of the perhaps dozen significant science fiction writers of the second third of our century. His basic metaphor of the cognitive voyage--"Along the Road of Life," so to speak--conveys a vision of the vicissitudes on the way from our present to a humanized horizon: a vision perhaps especially appropriate to our century. It has also felicitously, in a highly-sophisticated way, fused what I consider to be the strongest sides of the Soviet, or socialist, and American, or pragmatic, science fiction. Lem is akin to the socialist tradition by postulating the necessity of a radically different future society, and to the pragmatic tradition by concentrating on a straight-forward, or satirical, critique of the deviations and defeats or on the tragical tests of moral courage on the road to such a future. It differs from American science fiction--which he obviously

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[2] In the paper he submitted to me, Professor Suvin omitted any discussion of immediately contemporary Soviet writers because he is to do an article on that specific topic for Extrapolation. Since his remarks at the Forum were so brief and more general than the article will be, I have taken the liberty to include them here.

knows very well--by turning its comic inferno approach (I hate to borrow this from Kingsley Amis,) by juxtaposing its black flickers against an outraged sense of brighter horizons so that each angle of the spectrum shows up the other end as only partially relevant: a doubletake which to an outsider seems typically Polish. Lem is a writer in the great tradition of wit--Mark Twain, Rabelais, certainly Voltaire. The possibility of defeat and therefore the necessity for comic warning and ethical choice lies in the very attempt to understand and reach for the moon. But a possible closing of new horizons can be prevented if counterbalanced with scientific wisdom and aesthetic knowledge, of which his writings are exemplar.

Finally, brothers Strugatsky, the leading Soviet authors today, singly or together, with ten books from 1959 on, have advanced from an initial adventurous trilogy of interplanetary experience situated somewhere between Jules Verne and Voltaire's Candide. Their highest peak so far has been the novel, It's Difficult to Be a God (1964). This is a successful fusion of the historical novel with science fiction, but more than just that, it's an account of life on a feudal planet, Arkinar, which is under the hidden trusteeship of Earth's Institute of Experimental History, whose emissaries are disguised as natives and are under strict instruction not to interfere with the historical development of the planet. The theme is obviously very relevant to many processes nearer to us than outer space. Ugatsky's gift for believable characterizations is displayed to the full, especially through the protagonist who is faced with a sudden whirlpool, a sudden change, or trend, in history not foreseen by the Institute's "basic theory of feudalism," yet leading to dire consequences for all his dear ones. Without easy solutions, using the nexus of the historical novel for ethical dilemmas characteristic of the post-Fascist and post-Stalinist politics of Eastern Europe, it is no wonder that in a recent poll of Russian science fiction fans, this novel topped all others in popularity--all other Soviet novels. It had the same percentage as I, Robot, in translation. (I must make up to Isaac Asimov.) Yet this novel, as the other works of the brothers Strugatsky, is clearly within the unshakeable horizons of the utopian confidence in what they call the beautiful and terrible world of the human spirit, led by the lightning of great tasks and deeds.]

Perhaps after all this no special conclusion is needed here, but just one reflection. I have tried to show the presuppositions for approaching valid Soviet sf, and the interest it might hold for the American reader, teacher, and scholar, both sociologically and aesthetically. Basically, such validity in tales by writers who differ considerably according to their personalities, nationalities, generations, etc., flows out of their blending the traditional horizons of socialist hope--first clearly delineated in western Europe, of course--with insights

and moods drawn from victories and failures of intervening into human relations by means of a great social experiment. When transmuted into valid tales of wonder and cognition, such a combination is unique. The loss from ignoring it would be particularly great, I think, for the American reader and scholar, denizens of a country which was itself humanity's great experiment and hope before the socialist one, and whose pieties are still committed to such a hoping.

ISAAC ASIMOV:

Dr. Franklin and Mr. Pohl, everybody, everybody. As is usual I come unprepared, which doesn't matter, because I am always unprepared. No one can tell the difference. Right? My topic, "Science Fiction and Science," can lead me in any of at least three different directions, and if I exercise sufficient ingenuity, many more, I think. But I will list the three different directions that occur to me, eliminate the two instantly, and then talk on the third.

Science fiction can serve science as a recruiting agency: in other words, science fiction can serve to interest youngsters in science, and a certain percentage of them will someday become professional scientists, and in an age which depends upon science for its salvation, and also to a certain extent, for its destruction, why this is desirable, or undesirable, according to whether salvation or destruction wins out. I know this is a proper function of science fiction because it was science fiction that recruited me to science--whether for salvation or destruction, I will leave to my friends and enemies to decide.

More important still from my viewpoint, science fiction serves as a source for science writers. I have maintained in the past that science writing is extremely important these days in order to introduce to laymen the significant advances being made by science at their expense, as taxpayers, and also to explain to one group of scientists what is being done by every other group of scientists, because, alas, in science today everybody is a layman--everybody without exception. Even those people who consider themselves and are considered professional scientists usually know at a professional level only their own small segment of the scientific panorama, and everywhere else they are only slightly better off than the overall layman. Now where are we going to find science writers? A science writer has to pass two almost insuperable barriers. He has to be reasonably competent in science--which is not easy to obtain. He also has to be reasonably competent as a writer--which is even more difficult to obtain. Therefore, to obtain people who are both reasonably competent in science and as writers is extremely difficult, and the one place where I think we can get them without difficulty is in the field of science fiction, which has the same requirements. It is no accident that a great many good science writers of today have served

a certain apprenticeship in science fiction. I won't list them, except to say I am one of them.

But that leaves the third aspect of science fiction and science. Science fiction serves as a vision of the future. Ordinary scientists--I say ordinary scientists not meaning to run them down, but after all, a scientist who is only a scientist is only a scientist. He is not like a science fiction writer, a man dedicated to visioning, if I may use the word. A scientist is too often lost in his own specialty and does well if he can see a little bit ahead of his specialty. A science fiction writer, a good one, not being bound to any specialty, can look at the distant horizon with a panoramic view, of which the average scientist is deprived, sometimes by his own free will, since there is a certain danger in seeing too far in the future and too panoramically. One can easily gain the reputation of being an eccentric, or to use a more professional word, 'a nut.' Now it is all right for me to be a nut; I have been one for many, many years now, and I am used to it. But many scientists are afraid of the phrase, or word. Now in this aspect of sf, this service which it performs for science, the vision of the future, we are frequently assumed these days to have run out of ideas, or at least to be overtaken by science. People are usually pretty pleased by that; at least when they approach me, they seem pleased. Nothing seems to please them more than to see me without anything to write about anymore because science "has caught up with sf." Of course people who think science has caught up with sf have never read very much sf, you understand.

I like to think of the sf writer in metaphoric terms as being bound by strong chains to the front of a locomotive which is speeding across the countryside. No matter how fast the locomotive goes, the person bound to its front sees ahead. The locomotive, no matter how fast it goes, can only catch up to what the person in front has seen in the past. It can never catch up to what he sees in the future. Admittedly, if the locomotive moves particularly quickly, it becomes a little more difficult to see clearly, but it can be done, given sufficient ingenuity. And if there is one thing that good sf writers have, it's sufficient ingenuity.

For instance, I will give you an example of a vision. Right now we are living in great days. The Apollo 8 expedition has proven a complete success. It has fulfilled the fondest dreams of many sf readers. As a matter of fact, back in 1939 I wrote a story which I happen to remember appeared in the July, 1939, issue of Astounding. In it I described the flight around the moon and back. It wasn't anything like the flight that just took place. The ship was built by my one-man inventor in his backyard out of beaten-up tin cans. There was no government participation. There were no officers involved. No huge NASA. No

Russians. There was just my hero and his tin cans. He built his spaceship, flew it around the moon and back. There was no problem about reentry. I'd never heard the word. He made it safely. The thing that bothers me is that it took place according to my description in 1973, and I thought I was being amazingly optimistic. I thought I was being very science-fictionish and daring. Had anyone told me at the time that it would be done by 1968 after a tremendous preparation, of which I had no concept, I would not have believed it. That's all. And yet, here it is.

But what does the future hold for us? You can read in the newspapers all the plans we have for the future. Pretty soon we are actually going to land men on the moon. Pretty soon we are going to investigate the moon, perhaps build observatories on the moon to investigate the rest of the universe. We are going to send flights past Mars and Venus to make better photographs, better experiments, than we have before. We perhaps will actually land ships on Mars and Venus. Maybe even send men towards Mars and Venus. All, all this is in one way nothing. It is still merely an extension of man's stay on Earth.

If we want a real breakthrough--the real, real breakthrough, I'll tell you what it is. It is the establishment of a colony on the moon that is not only permanent, but that is independent of the Earth. I don't mean politically independent. I mean ecologically independent. I want to see a group of people, preferably a fairly large group, living underground. It would have to be underground, I think, on the moon. They have drawn their initial investment from Earth, but now they can obtain everything they need to keep up the investment from the Moon's crust itself. They can get energy from the sun or from hydrogen fusion plants. They can get all the material they need--all the various elements--from the Moon's crust, including water, from which they can obtain air. And, of course, they can establish a thoroughly cyclic ecology.

Why do I consider this the breakthrough? For three reasons: first, it would represent the first time in man's history that a segment of mankind would become independent of the Earth. It would represent the fact that man's bet is not solely dependent upon a single planet. There is a perceptible chance right now that we may ruin Earth as an abode for human life, or at least for respectable human life. There are members of Congress who talk about the possibility that life will be reduced to a single Adam and Eve, and they seem to find pleasure out of the thought that perhaps this Adam and Eve may exist on the North American continent rather than in the Old World. I would consider this criminal if it were not the colossal ignorance of Congressmen speaking. If we are going to wipe out life on Earth, what I want to see is an independent Moon colony still capable of carrying out the human dream.

Secondly, once we can establish an ecologically independent colony on the Moon, this would be the forerunner for further colonies on other planets, or bodies, like Mars--like some of the asteroids. We can then begin to have man on a plurality of worlds, of many worlds, developing cultures in many ways. And even this is only a means to an end. As long as we explore the solar system only, we still have very little. There is no place in the solar system outside Earth where men can live without expensive engineering. But out beyond this solar system are stars by the hundreds of billions, circled by planets in the hundreds of billions, of which many billions may closely resemble the Earth in chemistry and in physical properties. There may be many places where man can colonize planets very much like the Earth.

The problem is how to reach these stars out there. Now I believe that there is no way in which mankind will ever be able to go faster than the speed of light; however, that is in an objective way. We can perhaps cut down the time subjectively by, for instance, freezing the people on board a large ship heading out to the stars, so that passage of time is insignificant to them. Or else, if we obtain speeds very close to that of light, the phenomenon of time dilatation may make the experience of time passage much less, so that it would seem that stars would be reached in a matter of weeks, while on Earth years or centuries might pass. However the stars are reached, with whatever shrinkage in subjective time, time on Earth will pass in the years and centuries. It will be impossible for an astronaut heading for the distant stars to make a round trip and find the planet he has left behind. This raises certain psychological difficulties. A long trip in an enclosed spaceship, to say goodbye forever to the Earth we knew--not only is it going to make it difficult to recruit astronauts; more important, it is going to make it difficult to keep people on Earth interested in the project. To spend a lot of money to send up a spaceship which you will never see again, even if it is successful, is asking a lot of human beings.

Therefore, I don't think that Earthmen will ever successfully colonize the stars, but I think Moonmen may. It will be completely different for people living in an ecologically independent colony on the Moon, or on some other planet similar, because there, you see, they are not leaving the Earth behind. They are leaving a spaceship behind. People living in caverns under the moon's surface are, in essence, living in spaceships--a large spaceship which is mostly wall, and something which isn't going anywhere except circling the Earth and Earth and Earth, and then circling the Sun with the Earth and so on. All you have to do is get into a somewhat smaller spaceship with somewhat thinner walls and head it outward, away from the solar system; but in a sense you are still home. You've taken it with you. Psychologically it would be much easier for a group of Moon colonists to head out for the distant

stars than for Earthmen, and I think for that reason the real breakthrough that is coming is the establishment of an ecologically independent Moon colony. Only in that way do we stand a good chance of eventually colonizing planets of distant stars.

Though none of us in the flesh may see it, we may yet know in the spirit that, perhaps, if other intelligences have not beaten us to the punch too far and too long ago--that perhaps man may yet spread through the entire galaxy and even beyond. I have said this before. As far as I know, nobody else has, which of course means nothing. I try not to read what other people say. I have said this first in a story I published in '52; I have said it in '65 at a scientific gathering in a talk which was later printed. I say it again now; I shall continue saying it. Because I am an sf writer, people pay little attention, and I don't much care about that. People do see it occasionally. It does sink in. Other people will, like my friend, Fred Pohl, eventually quote it, forgetting I said it first. And that's all right, too. I will fulfill my function as an sf writer, as will Fred and all the other sf writers in the audience and elsewhere. In presenting their ideas--spreading it as far as they can--they will someday find fruit. And even if nobody ever says this originated because some sf writer once thought it up, even if no one ever says that, we in our hearts know it and that's enough for us.

FREDERIK POHL:

I think I should explain a rather obscure reference that Isaac Asimov made. In an editorial in one of my magazines a month or two ago, I quoted a remark by someone whom I identified as an unknown great man. Isaac instantly wrote me and said he had written the remark and gave me the original statement so that I could compare it. When I said that the original statement didn't look much like what he had quoted, and I wondered how he had recognized it, he said, 'You said a great man.'

I regret Judith Merril's absence very much for a number of reasons, one of which being that she would probably have been the only voice on this platform to have espoused the cause of that phenomenon in sf called "the new wave," which I regret because I think that it deserves a voice, and also because I enjoy rebutting any remarks that are made in this connection. Perhaps someone in the audience in the discussion period may take it up. Perhaps it has some advantage that she hasn't shown because it must be quite a confusing experience to listen to four people like Isaac and Darko, and Judith, if she had been here, and myself describe sf to you: something like the parable of the four blind men and the elephant. Darko said it's a wall; and Isaac said it's a rope! Judy might have said it was tree; and I would have to say that I don't know what in the hell it is. But it is pretty big, and we should treat it with respect, because there are many forms of sf, none really more valid than the other.

The kind of sf that I write most frequently and the kind that I am talking about today, because that was the topic chosen for me, is that which is a part of the general literature of social comment. For some people, Kingsley Amis, whose name you have heard bandied here, among them at one time, that was the only kind that counted. And certainly it is the kind that has many fans, whether it's the sort of thing that Bellamy was up to in Looking Backward or H. G. Wells in nearly everything he wrote. More recently, in that miserable past decade in American history that we now call the McCarthy period, it was what made many people consider that sf provided the only really free press in this country. For at a time when presidents and newspaper editors were running for shelter, about the only people speaking up openly to tell it like it was were Edward R. Murrow, one or two Senators, and just about every sf writer alive. For then as now, there was literally nothing that could not be said in sf publications, whether in praise of established institutions or in denunciation. I can think of no sacred figure, whether it is Pope or President--I can think of no institution--no form of human behavior--that has not been subjected to an sf scrutiny. To be sure, the discussion is always in an sf framework, frequently allegorical. And it's at least possible that one reason we have been so free in our speech is that those who would suppress free speech haven't known what we were talking about. But the readers got the message, tens of thousands of them, and they are getting it today.

The point that must be remembered is that free speech in sf includes even free speech for the establishment. Among sf writers, for every champion of left wing views, there is an equal champion on the right. Early this year we had an illustration of the pluralistic nature of the sf society when two unusual advertisements came into Galaxy magazine to be printed. One was headed, "We oppose the participation of the United States in the War in Vietnam," and it was signed and paid for by 82 sf writers, including about a dozen ringers. Another was headed, "We the undersigned believe the United States must remain in Vietnam to fulfill its responsibilities to the people of that country," and it was signed and paid for by 72 sf writers, also including about a dozen ringers.

More particularly, what interested me in this is that I know nearly all of these people pretty well--well enough to have some idea of what sort of world they would like to have if they had their "druthers." I think most of them would agree on what kind of world the human race should inhabit a century or two from now. If you were to prepare a consensus of the signataries to one ad, with a concensus of those to the other, I doubt that you would find a nickel's worth of difference between them. Strategies divide them, but I don't think objectives do. For these reasons and others, it is about as hard to generalize about sf writers as it is to generalize about sf itself, but I think that one quality which unites us is that we are questioners. And that quality is, in some measure,

what has led us to our interest in sf and at the same time has been stimulated and reinforced by what we found there.

To be a sf writer is to be a time-binder--It is to try to look ahead to see not only what is likely to fall upon us by way of science and technology, but to see what the side effects and the consequences and the second and third-order derivatives of these things will be. It is to question everything--whether the subject is such basic institutions as church, state, and family, or fads like the miniskirt or the space program--in the light of what Harlow Shepley calls the "View from the Distant Star."

In this god's-eye view of humanity that is given to an sf writer, all human institutions, however hallowed, become merely one special case in an infinity of possible worlds. And the consequences of present practices, no matter how attractive they may look to us now, can be followed with great zest toward inevitable cataclysmic results. One of these practices, with its own built in ultimate cataclysm that Isaac touched on briefly a minute ago, is the state of technology itself. Sf has been pretty good in predicting all these consequences, all three main species of these consequences in the past, and it looks like it is going to go on doing equally well in the future.

The first consequence of technology, the one for which we gladly pay its price, is the increments of grace and leisure that it makes available. The second is anger: the anger of those who see grace and leisure around them but do not have it for themselves. And the third is a progressive and accelerating degradation of our environment. It's been a good many decades since sf writers first began to see these developments looming on the horizon. Wells's Sleeper woke to a world that contained them all. Wells was able to see--and the rest of us have profited from his insight--that the world may indeed get better as time went along, but that while some aspects of it were getting better--such as labor-saving machines, better food, medicine--others would likely be getting quite a lot worse. As indeed they have.

A moment ago I spoke of the degradation of our environment. There really should be no question about this statement because the environment is right out there for anybody to look at, but it is astonishing how few people have raised their eyes to see it. Our rivers are sewers, our lakes are septic tanks--Well, I may be exaggerating, but please don't think I exaggerate very much. This opinion is not so much my own as that of people whose business it is to prevent and, if possible, reverse these trends. I listened to about a dozen such experts at a technical symposium on water management and waste control in Minnesota a couple of months ago. One by one they got up to report on what they had been trying to do in their own areas, and one by one they said they had failed. Our air is despoiled to the point where the big debate is whether our massive discharge of carbon dioxide will

melt the polar ice caps and drown us all, or our equally massive discharge of particulate waste, like soot and flyash, will screen off so much heat that we freeze. There is a third school which says that these two processes will cancel each other out so that the air remains about the same in temperature but is contaminated to the point of being a sort of smoggy, toxic poison gas which will strangle us. These are the optimists.

Had I world enough and time, I would regale you with many amusing stories of the black rain in Boston, a smog so thick and foul that the air pollution ordinances couldn't be enforced. They couldn't see the tops of the chimneys to find out who was polluting it. Or once beautiful rivers where you don't dare now operate a speedboat because the spray coming over the windshield will give you a disease. Noise pollution; thermal pollution; even, God save us, seismic pollution, because it is the works of man, not God, that have produced earthquakes in places like the Indian Plains in Boulder, Colorado. All of these things are scale effects. We are simply overwhelming the vast but not inexhaustible resources of the environment by our own less vast but growing attacks on it. This scale effect is basically due to one other kind of pollution, which is people pollution: the leaping curve in population figures.

Out of every 100 pounds of living matter on the face of this planet--whether it is whales, or porpoises, or redwoods, or bacteria--two pounds are human flesh. This, in turn, has its inevitable consequences in terms of the degradation of the environment, at least as we perceive it. I mean it's goodbye to beef steaks and that sort of thing. It's quite certain that we will have inevitable mass famine affecting hundreds of millions of people in our life time, and by inevitable what I mean to say is inevitable: meaning we can no longer avoid it. But perhaps that is too lengthy a subject to go into. We don't really know enough about the ways in which we are degrading our environment to say just what will happen. We don't know how much DDT we can pour into the system before we kill off the bugs that pollinate the plants that hold the soil that prevent the floods that keep us alive. We don't know how many parts per million of 2-4-D or other herbicides we can keep injecting into our fields before crop yields fail and all of us starve. We don't know these things, and don't feel too badly if you don't, because I don't, and neither does anyone else. But we're pretty surely well launched on a rather expensive way of finding out the answers to questions like these.

If you feel I have painted too black a picure of the future of humanity--what humanity is doing to this one and only present planet we have--I won't argue with you. I'll only ask you to come back in ten years and see if you still disagree with me. I think I may have understated the case.

So much for what we are doing to the world, what about what we are doing to ourselves? Beyond question there has been that increment in grace and leisure that I mentioned as the commodity which we intend to buy when we go shopping for science and technology. It's here and it's very real. It's color in the TV, jet flights to Montego Bay, and all sorts of marvelous stereophonic records of great musical performances--education for all--marvelous things. Marvelous things but not really quite for all--for all of us in this room to be sure, but perhaps not for everyone else. Of course, it might be asked, do those other people really matter? They feel they matter. And they know what we've got, because one of the great accomplishments in modern communications technology is that everybody, everywhere, has almost instant communication with almost everyone else. The Chinese peasants have the Commune's radio set; the Negroes in Bedford-Stuyvesant have their TV's. What they see we have, they want. And perhaps they are not entirely particular about how they get what they want. If they can't earn it, they'd like someone to give it to them. If they can't give it to them, perhaps they'll take it.

Please don't consider that I am passing any moral judgment here. On the other hand, I would ask that no one else pass a moral judgment either. It is not impossible for a human individual to resist social forces--Christ did it and Buddha did it, and maybe quite a few people have done it now and then, part-time, on some issues. But it's not easy and it's not common. By and large, people do what the mores of their society tell them to do. Our society has told us to want certain kinds of things very much. And its no accident that during the looting in America's urban riots, the first things taken are the commodities most heavily advertised on TV. Our society has told us to want good schools and good homes and good jobs--all of us, even the poor, even the black poor. If burning out a few of Charlie's stores looks as if it is going to help obtain them, somebody is going to burn the stores.

What exacerbates these urgencies is what sociologists call the gradient goal effect--what affects children around Christmas Eve, because now the good life is indeed almost obtainable by everyone. The closer one gets to a desired goal, the more urgently one wants it. Right now! Hopeless people have never made revolution. Now there is hope. And here, too, these are cumulative and accelerating effects that will go on and grow. Blacks will riot; poor whites will counter-riot. Garbage men will strike until they are paid as much as policemen; policemen will strike until they are paid more than garbage men. I realize these issues are not relevant to the cloistered halls of academe where no such rumblings ever penetrate. But they are the anger that technology breeds: an anger which is touching all of us, even those who have thought ourselves immune.

And these are the sort of second and third-order derivatives of progress that science fiction is uniquely well qualified to

discuss. I've discussed a few of them myself as best I could in one story or another. Many others have done it more frequently and perhaps better. I apologize if I've again painted a black picture for a nice Sunday afternoon, but I can only say that in some circles--both sf circles and scientific circles--my remarks would not be considered pessimistic. In fact, in some circles I'm considered a Pollyanna.

The reason I am so considered brings us back at last to that special quality in the literature of sf, that special kind of science fiction which is part of the literature of social comments, with which I began this talk. Because I am optimist enough to feel that by knowing what we are getting into, we can help ourselves survive these crises, I am vain enough of my field of endeavor to think that sf provides one of the best and certainly one of the most flexible ways of examining just what it is that we are getting into. I don't feel that we can realistically avoid a single one of the perils and turmoils that are ahead. And, of course, as a natural question, you might say, 'What's the use of knowing they are going to happen if you can't prevent them?'

I think there is a use, and I think it is a quite important one. Consider childbirth. Once a woman becomes pregnant, she knows full well that some nine months later she's going to go through a few hours which no mother I have ever known has described as being great fun; but although there is no way to prevent the pangs of childbirth, there is certainly a great deal that you can do to make them better or worse. And step number one, before you lay on the anesthetics and the surgical gauze, is to diagnose the condition and to get ready to cope with it. It seems to me the human race is at present wrapped by a sort of parturition, a slow and difficult labor, with the end by no means in sight. But it also seems to me that what we are collectively giving birth to will turn out to be a new kind of man in a new kind of world. And that the process is both inevitable and desirable.

I cannot say that my crystal ball has given me a very good picture of what the next few decades will be. I don't expect the next stage of man to be Utopia, in the sense that there will be an end to suffering or fear. I only expect--maybe hope is a better word--that the suffering and fear will be sparked by different causes and operate on a different level from our own. As far removed from our own as ours are from those of the Australopithican. You perhaps gathered that I think highly of H.G. Wells, both as prophet and as pioneer, and here, too, he has said what I have been saying before me when he wrote in one of his novels, "We have suffered like animals long enough. It's time we begin to suffer like men."

BRUCE FRANKLIN:

From the presentations we've had, I think that what I said initially has been somewhat demonstrated, but further, what has been demonstrated is that what is peculiar, perhaps almost peculiar, to science fiction is the extreme sense of relevancy of the concerns both of the authors of science fiction and of the critics of science fiction. That is, we find ourselves when we talk about science fiction getting into the problem: how in the world do we relate this subject matter to the immediate problems--the physical environment and the social environments and so forth built into the material. For that purpose I would like to see if we can start out by having any kind of meeting for these widely disparate points of view, or these confrontations, in these widely different points of view.

FRED POHL:

I don't think our points of view are really disparate at all. I think we are all talking about different aspects of the same thing. What characterizes sf to me is its enormously protean quality.

ISAAC ASIMOV:

That's absolutely so, considering the permissiveness of the stage and literature these days. I once wrote a story in which I managed to denounce mother love as obscene--which I think is a lot more difficult than just presenting naked bodies.

DARKO SUVIN:

I would agree that we do not differ basically. I think this is, as Bruce Franklin said, something which is really built into this genre. If you want to have a good science fiction story, novel, or whatever, I think that it is obviously a work of literature. All right, and the prevailing literary theory in the nineteenth century and what we still have with us in its echoes and in what you so politely called academe, Fred, is that literature is like an Indian reservation. All literature inside and no literature outside, you know. Everything outside is inert material which must be transmuted to a higher level of--I don't know--sentiment, emotion, what not, and then it becomes literature, losing magically in the process somehow--I never understood why or how--its real character, its connections with reality. No science fiction insofar as it has produced valid works of literary art, and I think it obviously has produced them in fairly great quantity and good quality, denies this basic, let us say, academic stance--still basic, I think, in academe.

There is no work of science fiction about which you can say anything aesthetically relevant if you don't discuss the

development--whether you want to call it extrapolation or parable or what not--of what I would call a cognitive theme. There is something for you to understand there, and the aesthetics of science fiction flow out of how you developed a peaceful understanding, a certain framework, a certain idea. You cannot discuss aesthetics without cognition, or, if you want, art without science: things which are an absolute heresy in terms of the nineteenth century theory of literature still with us. Or it is here art, there science, and what C.P. Snow calls the gap between them. We are all committed to a certain valid science fiction, however we might differ in detail. Therefore we also all agree and speak a little differently of aspects of the same thing.

BRUCE FRANKLIN:

It seems to me there is another problem which Darko Suvin brought up: that is the intimate connection between the science fiction and the society which produced it. Here I have a very important quarrel with your analysis of the relationship between Soviet society in the thirties and forties and Soviet science fiction at that time, because it seems to me that what you're doing is this trick--not your trick--It's a very common trick of saying that this is the period of Stalin, rather than looking at the actual historical processes going on there. In fact, it seems it's the kind of science fiction that you talk about as being written then; that is, particularly concerned with particular technological developments, [it] relates directly to what was happening in Soviet society at that time, socialist construction. But an even more interesting phenomenon is the fact that American science fiction at the same time was going through precisely--well, not precisely--but a very similar process, in which the emphasis was on technology, and technology to a certain extent separated from the other kind, which was adventure, with very little raising of large social questions--with a muting of the utopian tradition. Furthermore, it certainly seems to me that in questioning this thing by saying that that is the period of Stalin and therefore we can make such and such generalizations... What will we do with the fact that the first full-scale conference on science fiction is held during this period in 1939-1940 in the Soviet Union, where Yetremov, the most important Soviet writer, is developing as a writer in this period, some major work being written in 1943 and 1944?

DARKO SUVIN:

Well, I never said this was a period of Stalin, Bruce. My pronunciation must be at fault. I said this was a period of Stalinism, which is--I'm not chopping hairs--something quite different. This is a certain social climate and age which is very complex, which has a number of disquieting, brutal, and

degrading features and also a number of uplifting, positive, and, possibly for a society of that kind, unavoidable features. You really wouldn't expect me in thirty minutes to give you a theory of Stalinism on top of everything else. But I do think that if you turn to the evidence--which is what I'm trying to do--you know, this kind of basis for all of us who pretend to any kind of scholarship or knowledge whatsoever--the evidence is that there was a more or less concerted suppression of certain ways of writing of the utopian--not to speak of the anti-utopian, which already happened in the twenties.

The best novel of that period is called The Generator of Miracles, which was printed in 1959. It came out in a magazine in 1939 and 1940. Obviously there would have been some change without much pressure, change which is found not only in the American 30's, but also in the French 1860's, 70's--in the Jules Verne time. But I'm sure that the utopian dimension--we may call it the farseeing dimension--if you want, the projective dimension, the freeplay of imagination over wave lengths not concerned with every day, pragmatic life--was expunged. Yetremov, whom you mentioned, had great trouble during the 40's for writing such exotic things and couldn't print them except in obscure, out-of-the-way geographic magazines and so on. He went on to write tales about atolls in the South Seas and, you know, geographic adventure, but not science fiction. Obviously Andromeda would have been published fifteen years earlier were it not for the social and socio-political situation in Soviet science fiction. He was preparing to do it. He said so in a couple of articles more or less clearly, but clearly enough for anybody who wants to see it. And you have certain recrudescenses,even today.

God knows I'm not a professional mocker of the Soviet Union, I think this is a terribly unintelligent thing to do, but people who are after all fundamentally well disposed toward the Soviet Union cannot afford to close their eyes to such facts, because it was precisely the overcoming of such facts which allowed for the rise of the exciting, modern Soviet science fiction.

There was one example I cited; I really didn't cite the name, but I said that the science fictional imagination had manifested itself by oblique introduction into the mainstream. Leonid Leonov, who is perhaps the major Soviet novelist after M. Sholokhov--but since he is not anti-Soviet, he is not largely translated here--has a very interesting book called The Road Towards the Ocean--the ocean being the future. It has three layers: the past, the present, and the future, the science fiction layer. You have, for example, world wars and all this business, you know, rather interestingly and accurately represented. Obviously, if he could have written a science fiction novel, he would have separated this layer out.

All this just means--I don't think it means much more--than that Soviet society and its literature are a thing of this earth, not of the heavens, and are subject to certain pressures which, for example, American science fiction was--perhaps in a less centralized way but perhaps in a not less effective way--commercially and not politically subjected to in the 20's and early 30's. That's all I implied.

FRED POHL:

I would deny that American science fiction has been subjected to any kind of pressures at any time except economic. It is simply that we are a specialized art form, and hardly one per cent of the population really cares what goes on in science fiction, if that, and we are neglected and thereby freed.

BRUCE FRANKLIN:

Why don't we open it up to questions by the audience now?

ROBERT SILVERBERG (off-mike):

My name is Robert Silverberg, and I have no academic affiliations, but I do write science fiction. I'd like to take issue with every word that has been spoken. I feel that...

BRUCE FRANKLIN:

Why don't you come up here?... For those in the back who could not hear, this is Robert Silverberg, who is not only a writer of science fiction but also an editor of science fiction.[3]

ROBERT SILVERBERG:

I really must deplore the unanimity of opinion that came from this platform, because it seems to me you gentlemen were all expressing a utilitarian and not a literary view of science fiction that is rather dreary to a practicing writer. You were speaking almost entirely of the predictive role of science fiction: that is, how it will portray the coming socialist society of Eastern Europe; or how it will tell us the terrible things that noise pollution has in store for us; or, in the case of Dr. Asimov, how it will describe with accurate detail the first flight to the moon. Now Dr. Asimov, I think, destroyed the case for predictive science fiction in his little anecdote about his backyard, tin-can spaceship--which is to say that prediction,

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[3]At the Science Fiction Writers of America banquet on March 15, Robert Silverberg received two Nebula Awards: one for his novel The Masks of Time (Ballantine, 1968), another for his novella, "Nightwings" (Galaxy, September, 1968). He is presently editing an anthology in which he has asked individuals from the professional and academic fields each to select a story and write a critical introduction for it.

though of course an important part of science fiction, is nevertheless never a very successful part of science fiction, and that to look upon a branch of literature solely as an aspect of what you might find in the back pages of Fortune--for example, the description of how it will be in 1979 or 1983--is degrading to science fiction as literature. We are dealing not only in extrapolations of the veneer and far future--not only in an attempt to express our belief about the terrible things that are coming or the good things that are coming; but we are working in images and visions and dreams and aiming at something more moving, perhaps more literary, than what I must say is near-prediction. Now I heard none of that from the platform, and I wonder if there could be some discussion of that role of science fiction: science fiction as literature.

FRED POHL:

I did say earlier that I regretted the absence of Judy Merril. The reason is that we four were all assigned topics, and that was hers. But what Bob said otherwise is quite right. What attracts people to science fiction is not its ability to help us prepare for the troubles ahead, or because they think that it is going to lead them to a job with IBM. What attracts them is that they like reading it. A great deal of color and beauty and romance and poetry and all sorts of wonderful imagistic, literary, attractive things can be said that can be attributed to science fiction. I would think that this is so obvious that we need not state it. But perhaps it is well to call attention to it at least.

DARKO SUVIN:

I am sorry to say that I must again agree with Fred Pohl. I myself--well, I'm sorry because I wish we were not unanimous. I'm just trying to see whether I said any of these terrible things, and I find that I said that "Science fiction is concerned with new and hypothetic frameworks of intelligent life, and what this means in terms of new cosmological relations and social norms for the characters involved." I don't find anything about predictions in here. I must have been quite unclear in the organization of my matter for Bob Silverberg to misunderstand me in such a way, and I--you know--I cover myself with ash and what not.

I think exactly as Fred says. We all--well, perhaps especially those unfortunate fellows among us who are academically different from you--have had this literature dinned into our ears by our professional--have this professional idiocy about literature.--You know, literature is such and such; so we all know of this. What is interesting to me is (a) how far is science fiction still good literature, as good as any genre, and (b) something different from what I have been taught that

literature is and what, for God's sake, I don't want to teach my students that literature is--which is an ontologically--I'm sorry for these great words--but a completely separated realm from the faraway compensation for the ugliness around you. And science fiction is obviously not only that, but it is also a way for you to reflect--to reflect not discursively and servilely but to reflect through images in all that you say, but nonetheless to reflect with a certain amount of consistency about your place in the universe. What Fred called "God's eye view." I guess we should have started off with talking about the verbal level of science fiction, about the symbolic level of science fiction, the plot level. But I for one just assumed that, and possibly we did need a fourth member of the panel.

ISAAC ASIMOV:

I would like to call the audience's attention to one of the remarks Bob Silverberg made in the privacy of the non-microphone. He said he was without academic affiliation, and therefore, of course, we have to pay no attention to him whatsoever. It means also since I have academic affiliation that I was obviously speaking over his head. Now in my little anecdote about my backyard, tin-can spaceship, I, of course, was wrong in every possible prediction except one: I said it would happen, and that came true. Now, granted that science fiction is literature and that every point Bob Silverberg made is so well taken that I took it for granted. It still remains true that anyone who writes science fiction cannot help but predict--not that something will happen, but that something can happen, that something might happen, that it is at least fun to suppose that this sort of thing might some day happen. And if you take all of science fiction and "smush" it together and stir well, and set it down in the hot sun and wait for something to rise to the top, that top is likely to be pretty accurate prediction. This is what I'm talking about. Granted Robert thinks that this thing that rises to the top is a kind of scum, but nevertheless it can be useful.

FRED POHL:

Before you rebut Isaac, Bob, I would like to add one thing about the merit of literature vis-a-vis science fiction. There has been a great movement in science fiction, small in numbers but loud in noise, for what is called the "new wave" in the last three or four years--which is generally interpreted as an attempt to bring the literary values of the mainstream--not Jacqueline Susann's mainstream, but that nice mainstream that we like to think is really there--to science fiction. I have no objection to this. I think it is marvelous, to a degree, but I think of something perhaps like buying a brand new Thunderbird convertible with power top, power steering, power windows, and a thirty meter whip antenna, tape deck, air conditioning--all sorts of other lovely, attractive features about

it which are beautiful, marvelous, worthwhile, but interfere with its function as a car. And to some extent this imposition of literary values on science fiction interferes with its function as science fiction, as that one kind of writing which can do the thing that only science fiction can do. To this extent I object to it.

ROBERT SILVERBERG:

I am glad you made those ill-timed remarks, Fred, because until you spoke I had been accused of belaboring the obvious. Now you've come into something which is not quite so obvious and to my point. Of course science fiction deals in prediction, and of course the writer wants his prediction to be based on accurate data and to be as prophetic a vision of the future as he can create. But you talk of literary values as interfering with the function of science fiction. That's a strange word, the function of science fiction. Why I leapt to my feet in that anguished way is that...

FRED POHL:

If it's a strange word, it's your word. I didn't...

ROBERT SILVERBERG:

No, you spoke of the function of science fiction. You can't deny it now; the tape is turning now; and it's on it. You gentlemen spoke for more than an hour on, by implication, the function of science fiction, and unfortunately, the people who heard your remarks and walked out before I had a chance to make mine, carried away with them perhaps a distorted view of the function of science fiction. We can't arrive that easily at the function of fiction in general, let alone the function of science fiction. But largely due to your quite detailed and interesting talk, Fred, I think that the people who walked out left with the feeling that science fiction is that branch of prose writing which deals with the perils of pollution, and whose whole function is a warning function, a didactic, hortatory function.

What I meant to say when I rushed up to the front was that I don't want to talk about the function particularly. The achievement of science fiction is something at once broader and deeper and more exciting than prediction alone. We all know this privately, except perhaps Dr. Asimov, who is a former science fiction writer of the earlier era, now given over to science writing entirely and perhaps unaware of present literary currents. The rest of us up here are well aware of the larger issues, but you haven't said anything about it. All you did talk about was the evils that our environment is preparing for us, or, in the case of Darko, about science fiction

in the Soviet Union--in the socialist world--and how it functions as political commentary. There is more to science fiction than that. I regret Miss Merril's absence if only because she might have indicated to the audience that there is more to it than the immediate prediction.

BRUCE FRANKLIN:

I think what is coming out here is something which--well, I talked someplace earlier about--in print--about how science fiction strangely enough brings back to the fore the classical dictum of what art is all about — that it is to teach and to delight—at a time when the prevailing modes of literary criticism--at least in capitalistic society--are exceedingly formalistic. I was brought up as a hard-line New Critic. You know. We were supposed to look at a work that never got written by anybody at anytime. You just had to look at it--try to see the beautiful archetectonic structure inside it. But what happens in discussions of science fiction very often--I guess we've had some very heated arguments whether the primary function--I think we're going to have to use that word--is to teach or to delight, as if somehow these were opposing things. And some people argue that if it has any kind of didactic intention, then it is not sufficiently delightful. Fiction has to provide simply escape. Other people look at what you characterize with a utilitarian approach. I think this is a very real debate, which is not finally resolved by the need-causative formulae.

TOM CLARESON

Two points of history: Eleven years ago when the first Seminar was held at an MLA meeting, this Forum would have been impossible. Secondly, when I finished my dissertation on early American science fiction--bringing it up to 1915--with Dr. Spiller in the mid-fifties, he said to me, "You know of course that ten or twenty years ago this topic would have been unheard of and completely unacceptable." I think we know the general truth of that historically. So in a sense I, too, would like to disagree with the distinguished panel and possibly try to bring things together in another way. First of all, isn't it possible that, as all literature does, fiction or poetry, science fiction has for some time made a metaphorical statement about the condition of man and the dream of man--and that only in recent years, as we have become more polluted, or as we have become more dystopian, or whatever we are becoming, the public--and the academic public--has become aware of the significance of the metaphor possible in science fiction and therefore paid more attention to it?

I wish Judy were here because I could argue with her on a point, but Fred, I believe you brought it up. One thing that concerns me greatly is this matter of science fiction becoming

part of the mainstream of literature. I sometimes think that science fiction writers and editors, for whatever reasons they may have, gather together in their own exclusive, little--well, I could call it ghetto,[4] or perhaps I could call it--Is there room for a Bunny Club in science fiction?--Whichever it is, they lament that they are science fiction writers whom nobody appreciates and ignore the fact that almost every major American writer, for example--and to go only to that country, in the latter half of the nineteenth century wrote what must somehow be called science fiction. Twain, Stockton, Fitzjames O'Brien, Bellamy, who instituted the great wave of utopias and anti-utopias. The forms or the themes that they used were the way in which science and scientific theory had impact upon the literary imagination of the time, and they reflected it. I would like to suggest that science fiction is extremely topical, and that rather than an old grandfather of science fiction, Dr. Asimov remains one of the contemporaries because it's been going on for at least a full century now. But that turns again to my original point: only now, because of the pollution or because of the fears or because of the whole temper of society, is that society--and the academic community--becoming aware of the significance of the metaphor of the human condition possible within that type of narrative fiction known as science fiction.

FRED POHL:

Isaac Asimov had better be a contemporary because he never tires of reminding me that he is six weeks younger than I am. On your first point, Tom, about the respectability of science fiction today. I think that I can explain that in terms which have very little to do with what's being published or what was published. The term science fiction is a term which was invented in and first applied to only the science fiction magazines. That was the only form in which it appeared in this country for many years: the only form that was labelled science fiction. These magazines were pulps. They had garish covers and poor printing and rough edges, and you usually carried them under your coat because you didn't want anybody to know what you were reading. They were called Amazing Stories, and Astonishing Stories, and Thrilling Wonder Stories. Nobody was going to give them a hearing in the MLA or anywhere else just because of the way they looked. Just because of the physical appearance of the way they looked. They were a pulp magazine field. At the same time, however,

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[4] Interestingly, one of the speakers at the New York banquet of the Science Fiction Writers of America also suggested this idea of the self-imposed ghetto. Although I was given his name, I will not use it here since I was told and did not hear the speech. But I hope to publish his article, because he is an editor new to the field.

there were science fiction stories being published which were not labelled science fiction. They were written by people like F. Wright Moxley, Aldous Huxley, and W. Olaf Stapledon, and any number of other people who were considered to be worthy of consideration by bodies like this, or any other, because they were not identified by the opprobrious term 'science fiction.' I think this is all there is to the respectability of the field. The term has expanded beyond the magazines.

JOANNA RUSS:[5]

It seems to me that the--what I might call the simple didacticism theory of any kind of literature always fails of a very simple objection; that is, if you are going to predict, if you're going to prophesy, if you are going to teach, why do you do this by writing a novel? Why do you not teach, prophesy, or predict simply? Unless, I think, you can take the theory of prophesy or didacticism to a much subtler level, this will always kill it off at the very first stage. Certainly it is true we can go back and read a story like Dr. Asimov's tin-can spaceship, and it has not gotten to be a worse story because it did not happen that way. I would suspect the contrary from some of the stories of his that I have read that have been around for some time and are as good as ever, if not better. And not because you put them back in historical context and you say, "Oh, jolly, was that clever to have written that then." But simply because of the story; and the prediction, therefore, is not, cannot be, at all a simple thing.

DARKO SUVIN:

I really feel that some of us must be at fault in the manner of our presentation, because most of what has been said by Miss Russ and Mr. Silverberg seems to me to knock at open doors. I will, for example, say finally that I find something to disagree partly with Frederik Pohl about. I would say--let us say that I have read seven or eight books by Delany--most of which you [Pohl] gave me, remember? A book like Babel 17 I find extremely interesting--perhaps a bit overwritten--that is okay in a young writer--extremely interesting because of its cognitive content. I find it interesting on a verbal level because I happen to like Rimbeau and such like. I find it interesting on the plot level. It has a thriller story which, I think, by the way, he took from you [Pohl]. Somebody flies somewhere to prevent the galaxy; he took it from the Lensmen stories, probably, you know. Then he goes on and he has--he extrapolates and makes parables of a new

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[5]Miss Russ, now in the English Department at Cornell, published her first novel, the very well received Picnic on Paradise last year (Ace Books). Her article, "Dream Literature and Science Fiction," will be published in the next issue of Extrapolation.

area of knowledge which was perhaps not around when Dr. Asimov or you began writing: modern semantics, linguistics, communication theory, and all that kind of thing. I find that my enjoyment of Babel 17 is increased when all the levels of the literary work of art function, well, each in its own way, and contributes to the other. I find the character of Rydra Wong fascinating.

What I do not find so fascinating in some other works is where, I think, they perpetuate what I would conceive of, perhaps unfairly, but after due reflection, as the bane of American sf: its refusal to separate itself quite clearly from fantasy. Now fantasy is in some ways a respectable thing, and people who want to write fantasy are welcome to it, and people who want to read it are welcome to it. And if some writers want to write fantasy one day and sf another day, they are also welcome to it. But I think the refusal to separate what is hypothetical but possible and what is completely--what postulates a set of norms contrary to any experience of ours--this refusal to separate them seems to me pernicious. Sometimes some work of, let us say, what you call the new wave just as some works of the old wave--well, what Fred Pohl calls the new wave, okay--seem to me to get so intoxicated with the verbal level that they really fail to consider what they are talking about on other levels. That is the only way--that is, I think, what Fred meant by the function and so forth. That is the way in which I object. Otherwise I think stylistic changes come about. This is normal, you know. Somebody in 1968 is not going to write like somebody in 1950, okay?

FRED POHL:

You mentioned 'Chip' Delany, who is a very fine writer, one of the most talented new writers around, and one whom I'm personally fond of reading and publishing whenever I can. Delany is perhaps the epitome of the new wave in a sense, though he, like most of the new wavers, denies it, in that he writes a story which is more impressionistic than literal. And this is attractive. But in a way it reminds me of a late Doris Day movie: you know, where they photograph her through cheese cloth, or, as my wife says, through linoleum, to enhance the prettiness of the picture by obscuring the fine detail. But it is the fine detail in the sf story that I really want to see, and I don't see it in most of the new wave.

BOB SILVERBERG:

I would like to say at this point that I hold no brief for incoherence or for ignorance of any kind. But I do feel a distinct impression went forth to the audience here that sf is something that one goes to to find next month's news--not something that one goes to as one goes to any work of literature, and I did take issue with that.

LESTER DEL REY:[6]

I think there is a large area that has been left out completely. I was going to let it go because I think that Ike and Fred were both correct in giving you the skeleton of the creature. And that's what they did. They gave you the articulation of the bones. The thing that holds it up and makes it essentially capable of moving across the land and across the counters--the predictive nature; in other words, the correlation between science and literature. Bob came up and reminded you suddenly with great indignation that the creature has hair that you love to caress and that swings beautifully in the breeze. Depending upon the skill of the wig maker, sometimes it's true, but they're all talking about the body. And as long as Bob is going to correct things and not let it stop there, it is time that we thought about the spirit of the creature, which is the only thing that's worth communicating, the only thing that has any chance of survival long after the wig has fallen off and long after the skeleton has decayed. We hope that some of that will last. Science fiction is the myth-making principal of human nature today. Previously we had back-looking myths. They always looked back to a golden age. They looked back to demons, also. Now science, knowledge, experience have largely destroyed those myths. The new wave in sf is crying busily about the lack of those myths and saying that without those myths man is a degraded and indecent animal, doomed to failure against the utter evils of the cosmos. That is the new wave as it really was meant originally. It is, in other words, naturalism transferred to sf, where it doesn't fit very well.

On the other hand, most of sf, with the exception of this small body known as the new wave, or the new ripple, is nothing in the world but man's need for myths put into written form. We must have myths of some kind or other. Now we have predictive myths, forward-slanting myths. That is the spirit, the soul of sf. We have created a myth which has spread to all kinds of places. It is a totally unprovable one; therefore, it is a myth. The brotherhood and potential dignity--not of man, but of intelligence--of all intelligence: the lands beyond the earth and the desirability of them; the fact that they are different and that there are wonders, after all. That once we have explored and no longer have terra incognita, we really have more terra incognita than ever--both physically and mentally.

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[6]Like Asimov and Pohl, Lester Del Rey is one of the distinguished and veteran editors and writers of American sf. Sam Moskowitz, in Seekers of Tomorrow, devotes a chapter to him (as he does Asimov); there he particularly praises the stories, "Nerves" (1942) and "The Faithful" (1938). He collaborated with Pohl in 1955 on the novel, Preferred Risk.

It is the spirit and soul of sf which had a hell of a lot to do with getting those men up to the moon, because they prepared the people of the country--people who have never read sf directly--it prepared them to pay the tremendous expense--billions of dollars--of putting three men around the moon. They were prepared to pay hundreds of billions of dollars if necessary to place men to the stars. And I disagree mildly with Ike here because I think that whether we build a colony on the moon or not, men are going to the stars because we have already begun to prepare the myth of the desirability of getting to the stars--of giving man more than one home and, as a matter of fact, we've also begun to figure out ways of doing it. The predictive ways; that is, the fact that man will not be out of touch with earth during all this long journey. Radio still works. We will be able to keep in contact with them when they land; we will know about it; and from their description of a land around an alien star, we will learn more about the lands around the home star than we could learn in any other way. We are preparing people to realize that. We are both the myth-makers and the bugle-boys who necessarily yell. We don't lead the charge; we haven't the courage; we haven't the skill or the weapons. But at least we can blow the bugles to demand the charge.

MISS HARRISON HILL:

This is a world where young people are seeking inner earth through drugs. These three men seem hopelessly old-fashioned. I will use just three little criticisms by which to express my statement better. One was Mr. Pohl's statement that--I have to think what they were now. I'm concerned with the word, the logos, and the semantic area. Mr. Pohl used the word black several times in speaking of pessimism. I think that no one concerned with words and linguistics would do this any longer. Mr. Asimov used as an image a locomotive; well, that's hopelessly backward. And Mr. Suvin related the cognitive experience. He stressed this over and over. Well, with aesthetics, art is not cognitive. It is feeling. And this is the difficulty today. There is too much stress on fact; and the fact--for instance, in the old radio programs of the Martian men, with Orson Welles--it was not the fact, it was the emotion in that instance that was important, and it's still important in literature today.

SAMUEL GRAFTON:

I'm not an sf writer, just a plain, ordinary writer. I am very interested, because one of the many things I do is edit a little paper called "Myth Opinion," for which Dr. Asimov has written, and also a paper called "Youth Report," which is very concerned with young people. We've been thinking about sf. We

wonder if what is wrong is the word science: whether that doesn't have to be dropped. Actually, if this is a predictive art, then there is no reason why you shouldn't break it up into disciplines as all of science has done. Why you shouldn't have philoso-fiction, poli-sci-fiction, historo-fiction, physiology-fiction? Science is much too embrasive a term now. It's just too big for this thing. But what's really important is the fiction. And I agree whole heartedly with Mr. Del Rey, who says the myth-creating function is the most important thing that's done. The science aspect of sf has been largely overestimated, and the fiction aspect has been largely underestimated. This is the feeling that I get. Talking to young people during this last week since the moon business, we have felt a powerful impulse of optimism running through young people because this thing has happened. It is like a re-arrangement of perspectives. It is one of those deep unconscious things, very deep, that's happened to young people. Not on a logical level at all, but suddenly they see possibilities of hitching a new kind of ride, going somewhere they've never been before, and looking at the earth from 250,000 miles away. And it is this aspect that seems to us the most important thing. I think the word science in sf is antiquated and about ready to be dropped.

FRED POHL:

Two questions. First on the question of Samuel Grafton. I would like him to know that for three years he was the only reason I read the New York Post; the other three years, it was Pogo. But on the question of the name sf. It is a misnomer. There is no question about it. I have my own interpretation of it, which justifies it, but it doesn't hold water except as a last defense measure. It happens to be the name we use for the field. It's probably a bad name. It possibly could be replaced by a better name, but we're stuck with it. Just as we are stuck with term "American" for us people here, although we are not really the whole continent of America.

PHILIP KLASS:[7]

I'm very grateful to you for calling on me at this point because my notes are about to run around the side of my envelope. Let me say that I had a few things to say here, but Tom Clareson, who edits Extrapolation, shouted at me when I was on my way up here the first time--something which I have heard from many

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[7]Philip Klass is, of course, the well-known William Tenn, seven of whose volumes of stories have been reprinted this winter by Ace Books. He is now on the faculty of Penn State University; also for long, long years he has promised Extrapolation an article on the relationship of sf to the "mainstream."

editors, "Don't say it, write it." I have a few things to comment on. First, I'm going to shock Del Rey, I think, into an early grave by telling him that for the first time in his life and mine I agree with him. I feel that his point about the forward-looking myth of sf is extremely relevant, and I'll come back to this in a moment.

I want to talk first about Ike Asimov's "Trends," which he described as a story about a spaceship inventor who used a bunch of tin cans, which several other people picked up. I think that does this story a tremendous disservice, Ike. I read the story years ago when it first appeared. It was--I don't remember the fact that it was about a man who invented a spaceship and built it out of tin cans. It was probably in the story. What I remember in the story was that its theme lay athwart the themes of sf at the time. It was a different story: that there may come a time when society will feel that progress was unclean, that space travel was unnecessary, and that, as I remember, the inventor of the spaceship in the story--and you can correct me if I'm wrong--was a man who had to invent a spaceship, or develop a spaceship, in secret, because all of society was opposed to him. He had to do this at a time when people felt that the last thing we should do was develop space travel. There was a quality in that story which was not merely social extrapolation. There was a quality in that story which was wistful, which pointed to developments in human society, in human aspiration, which were unexpected at the time. It was the only story up to that time suggesting this backward turning quality of society, a society which, perhaps, had an almost medieval view of science and wanted to keep things very much as they are. That was the excitement in it. The fact that it suggested this about the human condition and the fact, furthermore, that it was a total departure from the kinds of sf being written about space travel up to that point is, I think, the most exciting thing about it.

Now I wanted to refer to that, but I want to go on from there and just talk very briefly about something which discommodes me. This matter of sf and what it is. I've heard, and may I say before I go on, Fred, that I'm very glad that Judy is not here because if she were, I would have to watch my left flank as well as my right. I address my remarks at the moment entirely to you. I don't think I disagree with you in any fundamental way, but I've heard you say before, and I've heard other people in sf say, that anything can be written in sf, and anything could have been written in sf at any time--except for economic reasons. I don't think this is true, and I think it is very important to recognize why it is not true. First, I'm sure you remember as well as I do, and Ike does, and several other people, the line, "It better not be too errant for Tarrant." There was a time when coming across the word orgasm in a sf story was a distinct shock. There was a time when reading an sf story in which there was a Negro character--I say this in deference to Miss Harrison Hill--or

a Black character, if you will--I say this in deference to you--was a distinct shock. There were times when certain stories could not be written. In the great age of Astounding, one could not deal with social problems at all. One today can deal with many things that one couldn't before, but I think, and this is something I noticed, that there is an attempt being made by sf writers to create a definition of sf so very broad that it makes sf non-existent.

Now if you say that anything can be written in sf, anything could have been written at any time, you are saying there is no such thing as sf. You're saying it has no very special qualities--which I think it does. Certain things could never been been written in sf and could not be written now. Just to give three examples: Northanger Abbey could not have been written as sf. Any work by Jane Austen. Any work by P. G. Wodehouse could not have been written. The Fire Next Time by James Baldwin could not have been written in sf. This is not to say that qualities in these works could not have appeared in sf, but these particular works have no particular relevance to sf. Sf has something else to say and something else to do.

That gets back to Miss Harrison Hill once more and to Lester Del Rey's comments. Miss Hill objected to Mr. Suvin's comment about the cognitive aspects of sf. I think, this is, perhaps, the beginning of a definition of what sf is. I think that where art is emotional, not cognitive, basically, sf is cognitive basically and not emotional. I think its essential appeal is in terms of an intellectual play, and I think that the intellectual appeal done in emotional terms, done in artistic terms, is part of the definition of sf and is what makes it a little different from literature, a little different from art. I'm suggesting this as a possibility of examining or creating a definition of sf. That perhaps because of its scientific basis, perhaps because of its mythic basis, I don't know, perhaps because of the time in which it came into being--that this is essentially an intellectual form. It partakes of art. It is literature, but essentially it is something else. It is intellectual and it accents the intellectual rather than the emotional, as art does, and I'm suggesting this as a definition--a beginning of a definition in any case.

DARKO SUVIN:

I would like to go right on from Mr. Klass. I would be very committed to defining sf as having to do with cognition. I would call it cognitive estrangement myself. But not as opposed to emotion. Mr. Klass retracted that the minute after he said it--not as opposed to emotion. I get emotional not only by a flower description, but also when I get a new set of cosmological relationships described. This is the 19th century--this is old fashioned, Miss Hill, and you are old fashioned. This is the 19th century division between reason and emotion.

This is the division which has led us to the state of the world in which we are now. You said that you get high on acid; well, that has got obviously nothing to do with reason. It's just barbarism.

Now I agree I stressed the utopian aspect: first of all, because it's there in Russian sf. I agree that social sf--which is utopian, you know--and pure sf of the Verne-Gernsback type are today impossible. They have to be incorporated in something new, just as Newtonian physics into Einsteinian physics. We have to have this kind of lore in transformation--anthropolitical alternatives, cosmological, whatever you want to call it. I don't believe [sf can exist] without the elements contained in the old-time utopias and dystopias: the elements of human hope and despair, which are centered--whether we like it or not--in our social environment today. Without that--however transposed into whatever kind of parable or parallel--you cannot have valid sf. That is to say, without sf cognition. A work which contains no cognition, you know, like Lovecraft--Okay, you can love Lovecraft, but you cannot love craft. Well, I mean this is just not sf, and it is rather juvenile. It palls. I love Lovecraft, you know. I mean this palls after you are 22 or 25; and therefore, I think there is no possibility of a nihilistic sf. There just is none, because it is not sf. It is not valid sf. It may be published in Ace books, you know, but it is not valid sf. (I have nothing especially against Ace.) This does not mean that it should not be emotional sf. It just means that it must at some point be what I would personally not call a myth. I think a myth is a static thing which assumes that all the relations are fixed: if it thunders, it is because youth does something. But a projection of human hopes and despairs? Now if you want to call it myth, fine--it's your business. I don't see how we can get out of the mess we are in in all fields of human endeavor without cognition--emotional cognition, fine--but cognition, you know. I'll nail my flag to the mast.

FRED POHL:

I want to address myself to a couple of remarks of Phil Klass before we give this gentleman the mike. Phil gave four examples of things which he said could not be written about in sf--having prefaced it by saying he agreed with me. I agree with him in the same way; that is, I think he is wrong. It is what I might call malicious agreement with intent to denigrate, if I may use that term, Miss Hill. The four cases he gave were sex in sf, the novels of Jane Austen, the Wodehouse Jeeves novels, and the James Baldwin book, The Fire Next Time. Apart from the fact that Kathryn Tarrant didn't like anything that sounded smutty to her--She was the assistant editor of one magazine--his case against the employment of sex in sf is wrong. True, most magazines avoided it, but there was also this other area of sf I mentioned before: the books, where it was loaded with sex. I mentioned F. Wright Moxley, whose book Red Snow

is more heavily sexual than any other sf novel I know, including Phil Farmer's recent, which I couldn't get into. You mentioned the Jane Austen novels, and quite possibly they could not be written in sf-- at least not for me because I am not an Austen admirer. But I don't think there was anything thematically in them that was inadmissible as sf. You mentioned Wodehouse's Jeeves stories, and I am reminded of Henry Kuttner's Gallagher stories, which are essentially the Jeeves stories with a robot instead of an English butler. You mentioned the James Baldwin book, which, as Bob Silverberg pointed out to me, is not fiction anyhow--and probably could not be published in any fiction magazine for that reason. I agree there are some kinds of art forms that do not work as sf. I do not believe the New York Telephone Book could be told as an sf story, but there is no thematic subject known to me which cannot form the basis for an sf story, and on that I rest.

JERRY FREEMAN:

I would like to raise a couple of questions based on my observations and studies of the novel of the 'bomb' that I've made over the past ten years. I've noticed that there's never been a great novel written about the 'bomb'. I've noticed that the greatest novel that was written about the 'bomb' was Dr. Strangelove, which was nearly a movie script.[8] It ended the Jonah; I'm no longer in the business. Dr. Strangelove ended the Jonah of the 'bomb' novel. There isn't any Jonah anymore because Dr. Strangelove said what had to be said by them all, and no one wants to say anything more because it won't be worthy of the Jonah. It seems to me that satire puts an end to each Jonah in each age. I don't know; this is a postulate that we could kick around, but when I saw the odyssey 2001 yesterday--I'm glad I saw it yesterday because it's real fresh in my mind. It seems to me when they threw up the bone--when the cave ape threw up the bone, and the bone came down space craft--that the men who conceived 2001--I guess it was Arthur Clarke and Kubrick and those people--I imagine they were labelling the work satire. Now, I'm not enforcing this, or setting it down as dogma that

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[8] Mr. Freeman's remark raises an interesting problem. The title page of Dr. Strangelove (Bantam, 1964) states that the novel by Peter George was "based on the screenplay by Stanley Kubrick, Peter George, and Terry Southern." A page earlier the ad for the Columbia movie asserts, "Based on the book Red Alert by Peter George." I cannot say whether or not the novels are identical. I understand that the novel, 2001, was written after the movie script. This sequence of film-novel in both cases raises still another question regarding sf. Can sf communicate its serious themes graphically, or will those graphic effects confine us to trekking to "Big Eyed Monster" movies? The British film 1984 or the recent Planet of the Apes would suggest some hope, but in those cases the films followed the novels.

my interpretation is the one. There are thousands of interpretations of 2001; I've been listening to them for months. I finally saw it anyway--saw it twice, in fact.

Now what I'd like to postulate to this group is that you can have a myth of optimism: the Soviet myth; let's say, the socialist myth of optimism. But you can have the Western European twentieth century vision of nihilism, too, and I think we have two myths that we are dealing with in terms of myth in the Jungian sense: the Karl Gustav Jung meaning of myth, where myth is the DNA of living; myth is the DNA of fate, of our fate, of our lives. We live out the myth. The myth is the structure of our being and determines what we do and how we wind up. And if that is so, I think we may have two myths. I'll acceed to the authorities here when they say that you have a myth of hope, a myth that is basically optimistic. But I will not accept any theory of contemporary culture, contemporary literature, theology, or anything else that says that we don't have a myth of nihilism. A myth in which the tenets of nihilism actualize themselves and realize themselves in the annihilation of the human species by its own hand. And I think that is largely the myth, for instance, that you could interpret 2001 as an expression of. I admit I don't understand the fetal symbol at the end, and that sort of blew my mind. I'd just like to ask you about your feelings about this. Is it valid to say that there is a myth of the failures--the Jeffers, the Robinson Jeffers myth, that he put out. Is that a valid myth, and mustn't we accept that in our pantheon of mythologies in sf and take it pretty seriously?

BRUCE FRANKLIN:

I would like to give an opportunity to anyone who hasn't spoken, to speak.

DARKO SUVIN:

Just a few sentences of clarification. When I said I don't think nihilistic work can be good sf, I meant this in the Nietzchian sense, if we are going to bandy authorities around. This is a devaluation of all the values; well, Nietzche would go on to a re-evaluation. I didn't mean annihilation--a physical annihilation--just as legitimate--that is what I meant by despair. Just as legitimate as hope. And secondly, I object to the word myth--because of Jung and his people--and because this is their basic connotation, which is something you can't do anything about. You're born with it, you know, and it's your archetypal conscience, and all. So that's why I would not speak of myth.

ANONYMOUS (off mike):

I was just going to ask if you knew of some modern French sf writers.

BOB SILVERBERG:

There's supposed to be a lot of good sf writers. Very little of it has come into English, and very little has been accessible here, but there are two sf magazines in France.

BRUCE FRANKLIN:

The best sampling is a paperback called Thirteen Modern French SF Stories, which has stories by the three, four, five, or so authors who have been doing some. Actually, French sf is very thin, and the French sf magazine Fiction is practically all reprints of American things. But there is a great deal of interest in criticism of sf in France now.

FRED POHL:

There are a great many French sf writers whose work I have seen either in published translations here or in manuscript. I'm sorry to say I don't remember their names, but I think they are quite similar in the kinds of sf they write. It is rather more literary and less technological than most American sf. I do happen to know the name of the most popular sf writer in France. He's not a Frenchman; he's an American: A.E. Van Vogt.

DARKO SUVIN:

I've been reading Fiction for the last ten or fifteen years. Most of it is, I think, in the tradition of the established nineteenth century people like Villiers de l'Isle Adam, and some of it is erotical sf. Also there are two mavericks--mainstream mavericks, who really write very good sf. There is Pierre Boulle, the one who wrote Planet of the Apes, and who also has a very hilarious book of stories--sf stories. And Vercourt, who has also been translated into English--I forget its title--but anyway, it is when they find the missing link between man and ape. I don't think it is anything to write home about: French sf at the moment, really.

JOHN GRIMALDI:

The name of the book by Vercourt in translation is You Shall Know Them. But the main thing I wanted to talk about is the idea of myth, as related to Mr. Pohl's idea of goals. I think the idea of forward-looking myths is the same thing that Mr. Pohl was talking about in a more 'now' context of goals--in that the myths that are being created by sf are the things that will lead us into other possible futures. Rather than just attempting to describe or predict, it does in effect lead the way and help us along the way. At least it can. One example of this is the influence, at least in the East Village, of a book called Stranger in a Strange Land by Robert Heinlein.

SOPHIA MORGAN:

We've spoken about myths--people have--and about utopian societies--about the utilitarian or aesthetic aspects of things in sf. But one thing people haven't touched at all is things only sf can do. Myth is a word that exists which sf explodes, and usually the way this is done is to show that there is some kind of category trespassing. There is one story that I remember and like very much by Isaac Asimov, where he sets up a wonderful machine. The story is really hilarious, and you are completely taken in. I read the story about five times--at different times--going back to see how on earth you put words together to make the reader be so completely taken in. He sets up this machine which triggers off seeds of reaction with some new substance which has been discovered which dissolves in water a fraction of a second before it hits water. It's actually marvelous, you know. It's written up in such a way as to predict the future. Now this has been done before; I mean it is mainly an illustration of the fact that the effect does not precede cause, I think. Have I misinterpreted the story?

ISAAC ASIMOV (off-mike):

No. Actually it wasn't a story. Actually it was a mock article entitled "The Endochronic Properties of Resublimated Thyrathymalene." What I was doing was satirizing science directly.

MISS MORGAN:

Now tell me this, because some friends of mine who know more science than I do have said that such a thing is possible.

ISAAC ASIMOV (off-mike):

Not as far as I know.

MISS MORGAN:

And I said that if that was possible, I would rather not understand anything about science and believe in spiritualism.

ISAAC ASIMOV:

Well, I'll tell you how it happened. I was working for my PhD, and as part of the experiment I was running over and over again, I was dissolving something called Cadacol in water. Cadacol dissolves very quickly in water and consisted of a very fine powder--very fine flaky material anyway. And as soon as it hit the surface of the water, it was gone. Now it is very dull sitting there, doing experiments over and over again, and since I'm more than a scientist--I'm an sf writer--why naturally

I had to do a little thinking. I said to myself how do you know that the material is dissolved in water when it hits the water? Maybe it dissolves a millimeter before it hits the water. Now ordinarly I would have promptly written an sf story based on that, but I was about to start writing my PhD thesis; therefore, I had my mind full of that, and I figured in order to purify and defuse and make it possible for me to write in the naturally cruddy style that was required, why I would first make fun of it. So I did. I wrote a mock-PhD thesis on that, and asked Mr. Campbell to publish it under a pseudonym, because it would come out just about the time I was up there being examined for my PhD, and I didn't want those squares getting the idea that I didn't take chemistry seriously and flunking me on that alone. Well, John Campbell, in his usual wonderful way, ran it under my name. And it came out just as I got up for my PhD examination, and one of the questions asked me was to describe the thermodynamic properties of Resublimated Thyrathymalene. I was unable to do so. Fortunately, there were other questions I couldn't answer either, so it didn't spoil a perfect record.

BRUCE FRANKLIN:

We're forty five minutes--an hour and forty-five minutes--with the postponement--over our alloted time. So I'll give everybody here a chance for a final word. Then I hope that a lot of people here with similar interests who don't often have this opportunity can continue some of these discussions at other quarters.

ISAAC ASIMOV:

Okay. My final word will simply be about my being old-fashioned in respect to locomotives. Yes, of course, but you know these old-fashionednesses are born out of a person's whole personality. I never fly. I never take planes. If I had to be tied to the front of a conveyance, it's got to be a locomotive, because I will not be tied to the front end of a jet plane.

DARKO SUVIN:

My final word is that locomotives are terrible in the United States. In Canada, where I happen to be at the moment, there is a beautiful new turbo train between Montreal and Quebec. There is one in France, one in Japan, on the monorail. So you see all things are relative. That's what I was trying to say in my talk, too.

FRED POHL:

My final word is that all of the things that everyone has said about sf are right.

BOB SILVERBERG:

I'm merely a hitchhiker on this panel, so I probably shouldn't say any final word, but I think I will throw in the fact that the final words of the esteemed panelists do demonstrate, I think, the irrelevance of much that has been said up here today.

BRUCE FRANKLIN:

I would just like to say in closing that, of course what has happened here--of course you have had a very unstructured discussion, where all kinds of ideas have been brought up. And we see that this is a field that you don't deal with in a couple of hours, so I'd like to point out the existence once again of the journal Extrapolation, which really is the journal of criticism of sf and--Is Tom still here--See Tom about--Give him some money and get subscriptions--three bucks for three years, and it comes out semi-annually. And we will be having, of course, the annual seminar in sf. And one of the things we want to talk about is what other form of meeting we would like to be able to have at the MLA. And that in itself is a big subject. So thank you very much.

New York City
29 December 1968

[Ed. note: Having lived rather extensively with this tape for some time--and having had the good fortune to participate in the meeting of the BSFA at Oxford, I've had good chance for reflection, which I hope those who speak only on the tape will not mind my indulging in.

The Forum revealed that double view of literature which we in the academic world so often overlook. Not only is it a creature to fondle and analyze for overview and architectontics in a search for the best expression of--the deepest insight into--a time and a place, it is also, as it has always been, a creature of the market place. As such it is the product of strong editors (and publishers) and competing writers who wish to eat. As such it gears itself to certain conventions best adapted to the means of publication and, supposedly, best adapted to the literacy of the audience. (Need I recall that the modern audience has lost--some time ago--much of the whole body of classical allusion, for all practical purposes? Cf. classes reading Pope's "Rape of the Lock.") As such the story originates in an idea (cognition), and we say that the writer has something to say. But that idea is not an essay or a tract; it is expressed as a story and immediately is ruled by all those conventions and devices that the 'idea' of story contains: action, character, setting, and so forth. In other words, the writer's idea, his

insight, is expressed obliquely through a language of perception, not conception. The result, if we view a body of literature, shows recurrent sensory images, recurrent actions, recurrent characters. (I have had great fun this year particularly, by asking my students whether or not they thought they had learned to protest and revolt in vacuo: not when they have been trained by a literary tradition back through Dreiser and Crane and Dickens: not when they have been trained by the modern novel. The young man in alienation from society? Recurrent character? Throughout modern American literature, until one might say that such a young man has long been a literary convention.)

None of this is a new idea. I may well be barking at an open door. But I do think it needs to be underscored in the context of the discussion at the Forum. The writer gets an idea and states it as well as he can in a story--perhaps if he is avant garde, he will insist upon a new phrasing. (I might be persuaded to argue that the present fad/need for four letter words is the logical outcome of Wordsworth and Amy Lowell, plus the social awareness of the naturalistic novel.) But the critics, the literary historians, the academic community must work with the verbal expression (the effect) of the writer's idea. Any communication between writer and reader is finally achieved only through the verbal expression of the conventions and devices of fiction. There can be no separation of cognition and perception.

Of course sf has a particular function: to present and interpret the impact of scientific thought upon the public and literary imaginations, as it has done since the first balloon hoax, at least. And it will do so in terms of the concerns and interests and language of each generation of writers; and each generation of writers and editors will insist that they have something unique that no one has had before them. And they will be right. Old wave, new wave, future wave--each will have its own ideas and seek its own expression; some will be more devoted to idea, and others more consciously to details of expression. As writers, editors, and the academic community, we must appreciate this double view of literature. In a sense that is what literary history--and critical judgment--is all about.

This brings us to the issue of the mainstream, and the often fierce resistance that many individuals make to faintest suggestion that fantasy and sf are related. Throughout literature there have been two principal manners of expression; let me exemplify them by Chaucer's "The Miller's Tale" and the medieval romances of Arthur. One seeks to reproduce the quality of life as it is every day (realism?); the other, to create a more imaginary world (or speculative world)--let us call it fantasy or myth--in which certain qualities and actions are called upon to represent the visions and ideals of men and of peoples. These are not antipodal; often in expression they blend together. For example, it is not, I think, incorrect to see a correlation between, say, Dreiser's concern for things and, say, Gernsback's

concern for 'gimmicks.') In other words, sf belongs to this more imaginative tradition that is concurrent with naturalism. It is, and long has been, one of the twin currents of the mainstream.

Be it Bleak House, Billy Budd, or Babel 17--all fiction, because it is fiction, in whichever current, seeks somehow to escape the literal and move to the metaphorical--the symbolic--the mystical--perception of the condition of man. Thus, the function of sf becomes the search for the metaphor(s)--the myth(s)--of the condition of man in a technological, secular society. At Oxford one of my most intriguing conversations was with J.G. Ballard. At one point he suggested that 'realism'/'naturalism' was the nineteenth century reaction to the 'new world' of science, and that it has exhausted itself as a manner of literary expression. On the other hand, he suggested that sf might well prove to be the most valid expression of the twentieth century's reaction to science. The accuracy of his insight may well be measured by the fact that the Forum itself took place. TDC.]

Don't forget:

Clarion State College, Clarion, Pa.
Second Summer Workshop in Fantasy & Sf.

Write to Professor Robin Wilson
for further details.

and:

Second "Secondary Universe" Conference
October 30-31, Nov. 1, 1969
University of Wisconsin, Green Bay

Write to Professor Ivor Rogers
for further details.