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#### **Notes From the Editor**

Let's call this issue a breather. I slipped up a bit in my planning and spent too much time working on plans for future issues. It looks now like there will be a lot of first rate material available for January and a backlog thereafter - but there isn't so much this time and even so I've been rushed on the assembly job.

The venerable name of Fantasy Advertiser will be dropped next issue (though the rights to it are, of course, retained). Hereafter this magazine shall be known as Science Fiction Advertiser. I expect to give my reasons for this next issue.

The matter of book reviews is still in the air. A number of readers wish them to be continued - and a couple have written to say they don't give a darn, that they buy all the new books whatever we have to say about them .... I'll know next issue whether or not I think I can afford to continue the reviews.

I expect the next issue to be carried by a lot of booksellers. That means meny new readers to try out your ads on.

Mr Bendig has published another magazine issue index, this time for Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction, and a list of s-f pennames. While the supply lasts they're offered gratis to anyone sending him a stamped, addressed envelope. The address: A.W. Bendig, 7144 Kedron Street, Pittsburgh 8, Pa.

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# **CYBERNETICS**,

# SCIENCE FICTION,

**Clyde Beck** 

# and SURVIVAL

#### Most of those who are concerned in one way or another with science fiction have probably speculated at some time on the question: is there a science fiction type of mind? If we leave out of the discussion for the moment the actual fan, shout whose mentality enough has certainly already been said, the question of whether there is among science fiction readers a generally similar manner of thinking and attitude toward the world may be found to be of somewhat more than theoretical interest.

That this question might concern writers and publishers, and even readers, of science fiction, is obvious. Whether it matters to the rest of us depends, for one thing, upon what such a science fiction type of mind may be like. Of course, the easiest answer is to dismiss the science fiction reader as an escapist. And yet it is not a very good one. There are in the United States probably several dozen million escapists who do not read science fiction, and a good many avenues of escape which are just as cheap, and until recently at least, more accessible. There seems to be a sort of Goethean elective affinity involved.

One of the most easily observed characteristics of science fiction is that it is largely concerned with the future. Not neces-sarily the distant future - it may only be tomorrow or the middle of next week, but most science fiction stories are concerned with things that have not happened yet, and in fact cannot happen until the cultural or technological substratum of the world has been changed in some way not now possible. This future-directed slant is not the only trait that sets this field apart from other literature and perhaps not the most definitive, but it is particularly important in the relation we are now considering. Given that science fiction deals largely with the future, it seems reasonable that the minds of those who read it have a future - directed bias too. It may well even be that the recent great increase of popular interest in science fiction is to a considerable extent due to the fact that the situation which confronts the world today is forcing more and more people to regard the future with a graver concern than was necessary even a few years ago.

This sort of interest in the future is something a little deeper than mere daydreaming or wishing it was payday or that shiparrival time would hurry up and come. It is composed of two parts. First there is the essentially selfish wish for a better ordered world because it would be a pleasanter place for the wisher to live in. But there is also a sort of pride involved; a pride in certain of the achievements of the human mind and human hand. For there are such achievements among the rest, and the science fliction type of mind has the tendency to seek them out and the capacity to appreciate them. And this pride is future-directed too. It may be strange that one can feel a pride in the accomplishment of things that have not been accomplished yet, but it is true. Television has been a real possession of the science fiction sort of mind, even to the name, for at least two dozen years. And then consider the present status of the rocket to the moon.

The science fiction mind is of the type that feels a sense of personal participation in things unknown and unachieved, partly because they are wonderful and strange, but partly also because and in so far as they are things that may be expected some day to come into being.

The matter of expectability is important. A large part of the specific nature and allure of science fiction is that it deals to such a considerable extent with the sort of prophecy which is not merely hortatory but an attempt at extrapolation of present trends into the future; and to make or appreciate predictions of this sort requires a certain understanding of the world as it has been and is. In short, science fiction readers, aside from those who are merely escapists or merely fans, are likely to read serious books.

This is not necessarily a leap to a wild conclusion. Consider for example the book CYBERNETICS (Cybernetics or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine, by Norbert Wiener. N.Y.: John wiley & Sons, 1948). This is no piece of escapist literature, but a technical treatise as demanding as it is compelling. A large part of it is inaccessible without a good grasp of integral calculus, and another part requires a fair knowledge of physiology. In spite of this the book has found such a wide demand that it is a fairly safe guess that if you were to try to borrow a copy from the public library you would have to put your name on the waiting list.

When CYBERNETICS first came off the press, more notice was taken of the fact in science fiction circles than among the public at large. I do not pretend that this accounts for the wide extent to which the book has been and is being read, but I have a strong suspicion that science fiction readers make up more than their per capita share of readers of UBERNETICS. Of course this could not be true unless it were a book which appealed particularly to the science fiction mind, but then that is just the sort of book that it is, if my speculations about the existence and nature of such a mind have any value.

Now Wieser has written a second book (The Human Use of Human Beings. Cybernetics and society. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1950). I do not know what the gross sele of either book has been, but considering that the earlier one was brought out as a book for specialists by a publisher of scientific texts and the later one as a trade book by a general publisher, if the latter had had the same relative acceptance it would be on best seller lists everywhere. Ferhaps part of the relative lag of the popular work in comparison with its technical trecursor is correlated with the fact that the latter received no particular notice in the science fiction field.

why it did not is a little difficult to understand. It is true that the technical implications of CYBERNETICS are such as to have a great appeal to those science fiction readers who are well enough versed in mathematics to follow the discussion, and even to those who are not. Still, if there is any truth to the idea that science fiction readers have an interest in the future that goes deeper than a mere thrill at the idea of the possibility of constructing thinking machines, the implications of THE HUMAN USE OF HUMAN BEINGS are even greater.

According to the preface, the book was written for the purpose of making the cybernetic point of view accessible to non-mathematicians, and of emphasizing the "not inconsiderable social consequences" thereof. These consequences are not only not inconsiderable; they are enormous.

Most of those who read this will already be familiar in at least a general way with the subject matter comprised under the term cybernetics. It is sufficient to note here that Wiener defines it as the entire field of control and communication theory, either in the machine or in the animal. Its range on the mechanical side is all the way from the old fly-ball governor of early steam engines to radar - operated anti - aircraft fire control installations and the latest high - speed computing machines. On the animal side, it is being made to include a large part of the field of psychology, and if we are lucky, we may expect it to be extended far into sociology and politics as well.

One of the most important concepts of the new science is that of feedback. This is the mechanism of control of a device on the basis of actual performance rather than intended performance, as for instance the door of an elevator shaft is prevented from opening until the elevator has actually arrived, or the motion of reachind for an object is continued automatically until it is in fact reached. This involves, in the machine as well as in the man, sense organs which are actuated by motor organs - proprioceptors, in other words, well-known to the physiologist but previously not so familiar to the mechanical engineer.

The application of the feedback principle and other cybernetic concepts to machines, especially to production machines, involves what Wiener calls the second industrial revolution. The first industrial revolution, by replacing man-power with machine-power, devaluated the human hand; the second is in process of devaluating the human brain. The concept of the automatic factory in which raw materials are fed in one end and baby - buggies, bath tubs, or what you will roll out at the other, is no longer a science-fictional idea. Wiener estimates that it is no farther away from us in terms of actual engineering needed to bring it about than radar was at the beginning of World War II. Now the world has managed to survive after a fashion the impact of the first such revolution, largely by an amazing pyramiding of parasitical occupations which serve to absorb the working time and supply paychecks to those who have been driven out of productive activities by the competition of machines. It seems doubtful that such an ecological stop-gap will suffice to tide us over the second. As producers, we are already largely reduced to the status of tenders of the machines that do the actual work. When the machines are tended by machines, what then?

The science fiction type of mind will have no trouble thinking of an answer. It is a dream come true - a world set free. There will be no longer any need of selling our lives for bacon and beans. Turn the whole job over to the machines and let human beings at last have the chance to demonstrate whether they are able to make of their lives what human lives should be.

Elementary. And yet - let us consider that in point of fact this situation has been in effect for some time now. A work week of six or eight hours of efficiently administered mator would suffice for all the material production that we turn out now, and yet most of us have still to work pretty hard for a living and find not nearly as much free time as we are convinced that we could profitably use. Considering how long it has taken us to make even as satisfactory a compromise as we have with the power machine, it is a grave question whether we will be able to command enough sociological common sense to make any at all with the machines of control in time. The possibilities of/quick profit involved in such machines do not allow is to doubt that they will be put into use as soon as it becomes feasible to do so.

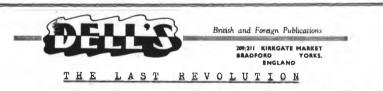
As Wiener says: "Thus the new industrial revolution is a twoedged sword. It may be used for the benefit of humanity, assuming that humanity survives long enough to enter a period in which such a benefit is possible. If, however, we proceed along the clear and obvious lines of our traditional behavior, and follow our traditional worship of progress and the fifth freedom - the freedom to exploit - it is practically certain that we shall have to face a decade or more of ruin and despair."

There is some hope that cybernetics contains the seed of an answer to the problems that cybernetics itself has reised. This is not the hope of constructing machines to control the control machines, but in the feedback principle. Feedback is of prime importance in purposive devices whether they be machines or men. It is quite conceivable that by applying feedback on the level of society, society may be made into a purposive device as well. It is also conceivable that if this application is not made, society will cease to exist. Wiener points out that such an application is not likely to be popular among many of those who hold positions of power in business or government - those who "prefer an organization in which all orders come from above and none return." Whether we are to tolerate continuing this inhuman use of human beings as mere effectors, with no proprioceptive influence upon the nature and direction of the orders given, is a question of equal importance to that of how the energy of nuclear fission is to be applied.

At least, in THE HUMAN USE OF HUMAN BEINGS Wiener has shown that it is possible to discuss such matters as problems in which the approach of the scientist and the engineer may be utilized. We have long ago heard enough and more than enough from congressmen, commissars, and colonels - or rather generals, for one notices the not insignificant fact that - there are a lot more generals around nowadays than not so long ago. We have for some years gone our way in rightful fear of thunder on the left and on the right, but now and again there is a flash of lightning that serves to illuminate the path a little way. THE HUMAN USE OF HUMAN BEINGS is not the least of these.

The book is a flash of lightning rather than a beacon light. It gives no easy answers, for the good reason that in the present situation easy answers are not to be found. But it does present a challenge. Mankind has now at its command forces of unprecedented power for good and for evil; forces whose potentiality is on the upward slope of the curve. The human race, at the midpoint of the twentieth century of the Christian era, is confronted with decisions which amount to a choice between apotheosis and annihilation. It is a challenge which has scarcely been approached in magnitude before.

And, unless I am considerably mistaken in my estimate of what the science fiction type of mind is like, it is of the sort that is stimulated by a challenge. May we not expect that it is among readers of science fiction that ideas and implications like those set forth in THE HUMAN USE OF HUMAN BEINGS will find their most fruitful ground?



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### Between Planets, by Robert A. Heinlein Scribners, 1951, \$3.00

It's difficult to review a book that's self-labeled a "juvenile." That is, it's difficult if you liked it, and I liked "Between Planets", the fifth in Robert A. Heinlein's "juvenile" series. I think I'd place it third in the group with "Farmer in the Sky" and "Space Cadet" taking first and second places.

"Between Planets" is different from these two: It more clearly shows Heinlein's steadily developing flair for suspenseful action, e quality which has come into his work only since the war. In the past, Heinlein's work has been fascinating - always that - but it was also rambling and lacking in real plot structure. The best evidence of this is found in his weak endings: A story with a strong plot as its core looks forward to its climactic conclusion. But Heinlein's most successful stories are those which he has finished without concluding - by that I mean, he simply terminated them at a certain dramatically feasible moment, without resolving the problems put forth in the story. "Logic of Empire", "Universe", and "The Man Who Sold the koon" are good examples. But the final chapters of "If This Goes On--" collapse; "Methuselah's Children" tapers off; the abortive ending of "Beyond This Horizon" is the chief flaw of an otherwise remarkable novel; and "Gulf" changes abruptly in tone and pace two thirds of the way through. I'm told that Heinlein has, on at least one occasion, bewailed the necessity of having a plot.

on at least one occasion, bewailed the necessity of having a plot. The emotional effect of the stronger story line in "Between Planets" is somewhat diluted by the fact that our protagonist's actions seldom grow out of his own desires, but are dictated by the situations in which he finds himself. He's always being moved about by other people. The reason for this, of course, is that he's a minor, largely under the control of his family, relatives, and less friendly adults - but our adolescent hero, Don Harvey, is definitely an aggressive and determined person, as the later portions of the book show. As in "Farmer in the Sky", there's a prospective romance in "Between Planets" - the best Heinlein could do in a book designed for a juvenile audience. Despite what some science-fiction readers seem to feel, most novels suffer in they lack romantic interest. The would background in this novel is less pleasant than that

The world background in this novel is less pleasant than that of most Heinlein stories. As in "The Puppet Masters", the novel is laid in a post atomic war era and (in addition) the Earth government has a totalitarian character. Once again, we see Heinlein's fascination with torture and inquisition, suppression and underground movements. And once again, the author, himself, efficiently tortures his reader with suspense and smoothly angers him against the antagonists, using words and acts as precisely as they use humiliation and pain.

"Between Planets" appeared very recently (September and October) as a two-part serial in Blue Book - not three parts as it says on the flyleaf of the book. This same flyleaf also tells us that the serial version was abridged, but on comparing the two casually I've noticed no differences. One definite change is in the quality of the illustrations. Although the wood- or linoleum-cuts by Geary for the book are sometimes clumsy and crude, I found them more enjoyable than the too prosaic drawings by Bernard Lynch for the Blue Book serial. Arthur J. Cox

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### **Those Critical Standards**

by

### **Stewart Kemble**

"That such things as critical standards serve a useful function has often been demonstrated; that those that exist for literature in general are inadequate to the resolving of the issues science fiction presents is, I think, undeniable."1

Why should science fiction have a special set of rules by which to judge its merit? Within its own particular form, science fiction presents no more problems or "issues" than any other genre of literature such as the detective story, the western, the historical novel, or the gothic tale. Science fiction is merely another type of literature. And as such it should be considered by the same criteria applied to all writing.

The problem is not to find new standards for science fiction, but rather to make science fiction meet the critical tests whereby all other literature is judged. Here is the crux of the problem. The majority of science fiction, fantasy, and supernatural horror stories do not stand up under critical analysis! The answer to this is simple. Readers of imaginative literature do not have the background and reading knowledge of other forms of literature - such as poetry, plays, essays, novels - from which to form a comparison. Consequently they cannot recognize the poor quality of a great deal of our science fiction today.

In all branches of literary activity there are no more ardent readers and collectors than those of science fiction. Certainly such enthusiasts can do much for their favorite literature by making a concentrated effort to raise the general level of science fiction higher than it has yet reached, even with the vast strides it has made in post-war years. It is time to examine science fiction with a critical eye and find out why it does not meet existing literary stendards.

There are five questions every reader should ask himself when reading any piece of literature (or examining any work of art for that matter). These are:

- 1. Is this work intellectually satisfying?
- 2. Is this work emotionally satisfying?
- 3. What is the importance of this work today?
- 4. What was the importance of this work when first offered to the public?
- Does the author know the technique of his craft?
   a. Style.
   b. Plot.
   c. Atmosphere
   d. Characterization.
   e. Description

Questions one and two can be applied by themselves and unless a nice balance of both elements is present it is likely that the work under consideration will be of average, or less merit. It is obvious that a story may be emotionally plausible but intellectually unpalatable and vice versa. Think of this next time you read a Merritt or a Lovecraft. Compare a Heinlein novel with a Burroughs opus; or a Clarke novel with a Smith conglomeration.

The third and fourth questions can be bypassed. But it is always interesting to see if an imaginative story has political or religious overtones motivated by some incident or condition preval-

<sup>1</sup> The editor, Fantasy Advertiser, V (September 1951), 3. -16-

ent at the time it was written. Of course if the story was just published, question four has no significance because it coincides with question three. But if a story is an "oldie" or a so-called science fiction classic, it is worth while to note if it is still readable or if it reeks with stylistic archaisms of the period in which it was written. This is especially true of the work of the nineteen twenties. It is also interesting to know if a story introduced such and such a gimmick, gadget, idea, or concept into science fiction for the first time.

uestion five is closely related to numbers one and two. It is readily understandable how poor characterization or poor plotting can make a story either intellectually or emotionally unsatisfactory, or both. Questions one, two, and five give an excellent framework from which to judge any work of literature, science fiction included.

The problem, as stated before, is not finding a special set of standards for science fiction, but one of making science fiction live up to those already existing. Try these five questions on the next half dozen imaginative novels you read. You will soon see the inadequacy of what is being presented to the reader. Of course each reader can formulate how own set of criteria - a thing which he should eventually do. Agreement with the five stated above is not necessary. But certainly, broad, flexible rules for judging, which can be applied to other forms of writing are needed, rather than special sets of rules for non - existant "issues" in science fiction

\* \* \* \* \*

Editor's note: Mr. Kemble's first question does cover all that I had in mind when writing the passage he has quoted from has issue's editorial, and my personal thanks are due him for this clarification. Has he, therefore, shown my thought to be altogether pointless? Or is there perhaps a reader who thinks, with me, that our existing literary standards, as they are applied by our leading literary critics, are insufficient to bring to the appraisal of a literature of ideas; that what may in a science fiction story be "intellectwally satisfying" to, say, Clifton Fadiman, will probably be to you and me downright unacceptable? Should a reader of such persuasion exist, this magazine urges him to write an article complementary to Mr. Kemble's.

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HERE ARE THE RULES:

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- 2. The deadline will be March 1st.
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