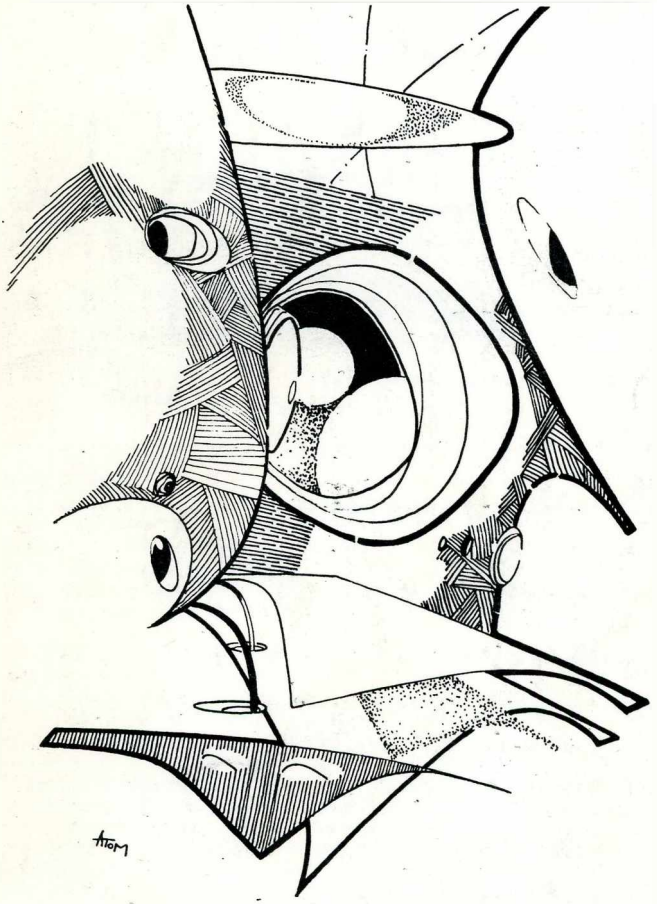
Riverside Quarterly



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First the RQ must acknowledge the many hours spent by Arthur Cox and Jim Harmon in mailing the last issue, and it must also thank Tom Slate, who had to fight his way four times through a diluvial rain to pick up the magazine from the printer's. Finally, the RQ must acknowledge its debt to Ann Germann, and Gretchen Schwenn, each of whom cut short her vacation to work on this issue.

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HEINLEIN IN DIMENSION

Part I: The Period of Influence

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by ALEXEI PANSHIN

Editor's note:

The following article is the first chapter of a yet unpublished book, of which chapter two is to be printed in the September Quark (25¢, editor: Tom Perry, 4018 Laurel Ave., Omaha, Nebraska 68111) and the remainder, chapters three through six, in the RQ.

Although I do not always agree with Alexei Panshin's conclusions about individual works, e.g., "Goldfish Bowl" (which I think is a truly "well wrought" story), I nevertheless consider him to be the most perceptive of our younger critics, and therefore feel that publication of this discussion on Robert Heinlein, possibly the most important living science-fiction writer, is one justification for the existence of a magazine like the RQ.

I must add that Mr. Panshin is not responsible for the British spelling, which is adopted as a protest against the ineptitude of Merriam Webster's Third Dictionary.

1. Heinlein's First Period

Quite recently, Lancer Books published an anthology entitled First Flight, assembled on a very ingenious basis. It contained the first stories of a number of now prominent science fiction writers. Damon Knight, the editor of the anthology and a critic whose opinions I respect and admire, wrote in introduction of Heinlein and "Life-Line," his first story: "few writers have made more brilliant debuts." The story was published in the August 1939 issue of Astounding Science Fiction. John Campbell, the editor who bought and published the story, has described it as a story of "real impact and value."

Heinlein's second story, "Misfit," followed in Astounding in November. In reviewing this story when it appeared in Heinlein's collection Revolt in 2100 in 1954, the editors of The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction called it "quite unfortunate," and other commentators have found it seriously flawed or worse.

My own opinion is that "Life-Line" isn't all that good--Knight's comment is probably more a reflection on the quality of most first stories than anything else--and that "Misfit" isn't all that bad. The two stories have a great deal in common in the way they were constructed. If they had been the only two stories Heinlein ever wrote, he wouldn't be worth discussing at all. However, for all that they are flawed, in these first stories can be seen much of Heinlein's later style, attitude, approach, and materials.

"Life-Line" is still quite a readable story. In essence, this is the plot: Hugo Pinero, the main character, has invented a machine that can predict the date of any man's death. Examples are given within the story: A reporter dies as predicted within minutes after being examined with the machine (a sign falls off a building and kills him as he is going to his office) and later a young couple is killed by a car--although Pinero attempts to detain them from leaving to meet the death he has foreseen--thus demonstrating the inexorable rightness of the machine's predictions. Pinero is rejected by a scientific academy which is unwilling to truly examine his claims. The public, however, uses the machine to institute or cancel life insurance policies, depending on the amount of life the machine sees ahead of them. The insurance companies, suffering great losses, attempt to halt Pinero through the courts, and this failing, have him assassinated and his machine destroyed. It is found at the end that Pinero knew of his own death and apparently was able to accept it quite calmly.

There are many flaws in this story. For one thing, it is not unified. The viewpoint shifts so frequently that none of the characters, with the possible exception of Pinero himself, even begins to come close to being alive. The story rambles along through a number of scenes and then is abruptly brought to an end. A scene more or less would hardly have made any difference at all, and that is a sign of a story that is not strongly built.

The interior logic of the story is shaky, too. Why Pinero would build his machine in the first place is never explained, or how it was built; and Pinero does not seem to realize that it is his own act of marketing his predictions that brings his death upon him. We are given a fixed, immutable future in the story, yet the logic of the story says that Pinero forces his own death by his actions. Would he still have died from some other cause at the same exact moment he predicted if he hadn't made his machine public? Perhaps so, but there is no evidence in the story that he attempts to find out. He states that his motivation in making the machine public is to make money--yet the death he knows is coming is very close as the story opens and he hardly has any time to enjoy the money that he makes. This is not explained. The machine is apparently, in one sense, a time machine--it can measure the future of a life--but nothing is said of the possibilities of a more complete time machine.

This story, so Heinlein has said,[1] was composed in four days. I rather suspect that Heinlein sat down, wrote it scene by scene until an ending occurred to him, and then stopped. This is not a good way of writing a story simply because unplanned stories are likely to ramble, are likely to fail to build smoothly to a climax, and are likely to have holes in them, all as "Life-Line" does. The sort of questions that I've asked above are exactly the sort that the author should ask himself at some time before the story is finished and shipped off.

On the other hand, this story is not a usual first effort. Most first stories are so thoroughly bad that they are never published anywhere. Most "first stories" are in fact the fifteenth or twentieth story the author has written--and it is in these unpublished stories that the author serves his apprenticeship and learns to avoid basic mistakes.

The reason that Heinlein's story was bought, in spite of its flaws, is that it is smoothly told in even, competent prose, rolls on without lag in such a convincing manner that the reader cannot bring himself to stop the onrush and protest about the over-convenience of that falling sign, or to make any other logical objections. If there is such a thing, Heinlein is a born story-teller.

The dialogue in "Life-Line" is competent and convincing, and it shows the beginnings of a Heinlein habit that most usually has been very entertaining. This is the use of the well-turned phrase--folksy, pithy, and clever. Pinero, for instance, says, "Is it necessary to understand the complex miracle of biological reproduction in order to observe that a hen lays eggs?" This is a typical Heinlein line for you. Done with restraint, it can add a touch of vivid life.

In "Life-Line," moreover, Heinlein shows a good grasp of sociological processes. His stories, from first to last, have all been more concerned with process than with any other thing. He has always been the man who likes to know how things work; and

he shows it here, switching from scientific meeting to press conference, to courtroom, to consulting room, all with equal skill and credibility.

"Misfit," Heinlein's second story, is about a member of a future CCC-cum-military that is given the job of converting an asteroid into an emergency rescue station set between Mars and Earth. The boy turns out to be a lightning calculator; and later when a computer fails in the worst possible moment, the boy fills in. As Sam Moskowitz has pointed out, this is the first of Heinlein's juveniles. In subject matter and approach, it presages his whole series of juvenile science-fiction novels.

As with "Life-Line," the story is rambling, clumsily constructed, and rife with coincidence. Its interior logic is stronger, however; and it is smoothly told and filled with convincing detail (using vacuum to dry-clean clothes; the details of a space suit thoroughly thought out). Heinlein's ability to integrate his exposition of strange and wonderful things, even to lecture about them without dropping his story, has been one of his most prominent characteristics; and it is apparent in these first two stories. It is easy to see how closely the three Heinlein hallmarks I have just mentioned--the story of process, the tendency to lecture about details, and the choice of characters able to do--are related. I would call it an engineering outlook.

Heinlein's first period begins with "Life-Line" in the August 1939 Astounding and ends with The Unpleasant Profession of Jonathan Hoag, published under the name John Riverside in the October 1942 issue of Unknown Worlds, the fantasy companion of Astounding that died in the World War II paper shortage. In this time, he published twenty eight science-fiction stories, about a quarter of which were novels. The first of the stories, like "Life-Line" and "Misfit," were not well constructed. The last were considerably better.

There is a bit of information that I have heard enough times in enough different places that I begin to suspect that there is some truth to it. It is that newspapers prefer to hire reporters who haven't been turned out by journalism schools. The reason given is that while journalism schools do a perfectly competent job of teaching what newspapers look like and how hews stories are put together, that is all they teach, and these mechanical things are the least important part of being a reporter. Newspapers, so the story goes, prefer to take people who already know something and teach them how to report.

Similarly, Robert Heinlein's stories had content from the beginning. What he lacked was the formal know-how to tell them in the most effective way. A look at "Life-Line" or If This Goes On, Heinlein's first novel, shows them to be thrown together any which way. They are consistently interesting; but in themselves

they are poorly told stories, no more interesting today than, say, "Bombardment in Reverse" by Norman L. Knight or "The Dwindling Sphere" by Willard E. Hawkins, or any other pulp story of the period. It is Heinlein's later work, particularly from his second period, that gives interest to a story like "Life-Line."

The stories that Robert Heinlein was writing two and three years later--"--We Also Walk Dogs," Beyond This Horizon, and "Waldo"--all show a tremendous gain in this author's ability to use his materials effectively. Heinlein$_{1939}$ could not have written them. That, in simple, is half the story of Heinlein's first period.

The other, and more important, half, I think, is Heinlein's influence. It is regularly taken as a given these days that Robert Heinlein has been a major influence on the science fiction field. Jack Williamson, for instance, says, "the first name in contemporary science fiction"; Willy Ley says, "the standard"; and Judith Merril says, "there are few of us writing today who do not owe much early stimulus to him."

The point I'm discussing is not popularity. Popularity has nothing to do with the influence of a writer, though it may reflect it. Influence is impact on other writers. Heinlein's impact has come directly from the work that he was doing between 1939 and 1942. Since then, Heinlein has refined his techniques, and so, in their own ways, have those touched by him; but I believe that the influence would not have been greatly different if Heinlein had not written another word from 1942 to the present.

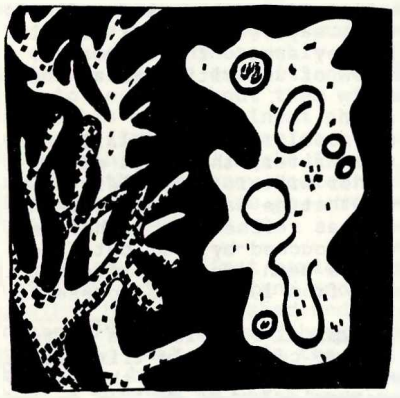
I myself can stand as a fairly typical example of a writer influenced by Heinlein, I think. I have consciously tried to copy his narrative pace, wide range of materials, and thoroughly worked-out backgrounds, and most particularly his ability to inject detail into his stories without making them tedious. This one thing is above all necessary in science fiction--where everything is strange and new, readers have to be given their bearings--and at the same time very difficult.

These things in which I have been influenced by Heinlein are the same ones in which most present-day science fiction writers have been influenced, particularly those with social scientific interests. It is a tribute to Heinlein's ability that there is no obvious person who has gone beyond him in his own line.

The influence and copying I am talking about are not an attempt to duplicate Heinlein's tone, his phrasing, his situations, his plots, or his attitude. They are not an attempt to sound like Heinlein (which could be most easily done, I think, by copying his folksy, metaphorical dialogue). For instance, Heinlein's integrated details are likely to be an explanation of how something works. Another writer, using Heinlein's method of integrating detail, copying if you like, might well use it for an entirely different purpose. Heinlein has introduced a number of ideas into science fiction, but the importance of this is

comparatively minor since only so many changes can be rung on any one idea while the range of use of a narrative technique is a good deal greater.

Heinlein's imitable qualities were evident, I would guess, by the time he had published half-a-dozen stories, and certainly by the time he stopped writing to work during the war. Alva Rogers has a tendency to overstate, but I can't argue with him when he says that Heinlein in his first two years changed the face of science fiction. His narrative technique eliminated a lot of dead wood; and this faster, smoother writing coupled with Heinlein's wide range of interests meant a new sophistication that spread quickly through science fiction writing.



For an analogy, you might imagine a rookie pitcher who has invented the curve ball. He can't throw anything else at first, but he does have that curve. Other pitchers learn it from him, but none of them can throw it quite as well as he can. After a few years, the rookie picks up all the conventional pitches and from then on dominates the league. That was the situation at the end of Heinlein's first period.

2. 1940

Heinlein had seven stories published in 1940, including his first novel. "Requiem," his third story, appeared in the January 1940 issue of Astounding. In common with his first two stories, the central character is a man of more than common strength and ability. The man is D. D. Harriman, the financier who made the first trip to the moon possible and aimed all along to go there himself. He succeeds at last in this story, knowing as he succeeds that the trip will almost certainly kill him. "Requiem" takes on extra interest because ten years later in "The Man Who Sold the Moon" Heinlein wrote an account of the process by which Harriman made that first trip to the moon possible.

In several cases, Starship Troopers and Farnham's Freehold, for instance, the versions of Heinlein's novels that have appeared in serialization have been severely cut. The book versions have been closer to Heinlein's intention. Since it makes no sense to discuss an author in terms of the fragments that an editor is willing to print when we have something more complete, by and large when I talk about Heinlein's novels, I will discuss the book rather than the magazine version.

However, the novels from Heinlein's first period were

handled in a very different manner. In these cases, what was originally published in the magazines was once considered complete in itself. It was only after the war that Heinlein rewrote these stories for book publication, gave his afterthoughts, as it were. With a story like this, it seems to me that both original and revised versions are interesting and worth discussing. I want to make a comparison of this sort with Heinlein's first novel, If This Goes On..., published originally in Astounding in February and March 1940.

In his contribution to the 1947 symposium on science-fiction writing, Of Worlds Beyond, Heinlein said that he knew of three general patterns for stories that were people-centered: 1. Boy-meets-girl; 2. The Little Tailor (that is, the man who succeeds against great odds, or its converse, the great man brought low), and 3. The man who learns better. If This Goes On... manages to be all three of these at once, but it is mainly the story of a man who learns better.

John Lyle, the narrator, is a legate (read "lieutenant") in the U.S. Army of the next century, serving in the personal guard of the Prophet Incarnate, head of a religious-military dictatorship that rules the United States. Lyle falls in love with the wrong woman, one of the Prophet's handmaidens, who are known as Virgins. (In the magazine version they probably deserve the name; in the book they don't. In fact, in the latter it is young Sister Judith's approaching loss of virginity that prompts Lyle's opposition to the Prophet.) Because of the complications arising from this, Lyle joins an underground movement called the Cabal, opposed to the government. He is found out, put to torture, and then helped to escape. Lyle manages to make his way to the Headquarters of the Cabal (located in a gigantic and unknown cave in southern Arizona) and takes part in the revolution that throws the Prophet out.

There are two ways of narrating stories, generally speaking. The first person is natural, easy to write, and convincing. Its disadvantages are that the survival of the narrator to tell the tale is assured, thereby compromising the suspense of the story somewhat; the "I" of one story is very likely to sound like the "I" of another; and, most important, the scope of the story is limited to exactly what the narrator knows or thinks, and that may be a very small range indeed. The third person narrative takes much more skill to handle and is less limited. Its main disadvantage, particularly for the beginning writer, is simply that it does take more skill to handle, exactly what the beginner is lacking.

It seems to be some sort of accepted notion that beginning writers do tend to use the first person, and writing manuals discourage this. However, I suspect that the notion is wrong. I think it is simply more likely that a beginning writer will sell his first person stories and not his third person stories. Heinlein's first three stories were not told in the first person, but he chose to use it when he came to write his first extended story. Damon Knight once drew an analogy for me between learning

to write and learning to ride a bicycle. These days, for beginners to learn on, they have bicycles that are almost impossible to tip over. You might say, to adapt Knight's analogy, that for his first long ride Heinlein used a learner bicycle.

What I've told of the story so far may make it seem very romantic, and it is, particularly in the magazine version. I think this is because in spite of many interesting and well-imagined touches most of the basic situations are both melodramatic and innocent. The book version is nearly twice as long as the original, and most of the additions are simply a matter of fleshing out the story to make it less innocent and to temper some of the melodrama. The matter of the Virgins referred to above is one example.

In the magazine version, John Lyle sees Sister Judith for exactly ten minutes on one single occasion before he decides true love has struck. The next time they meet they fall into each other's arms. (Then, less than halfway through the story, Judith is mislaid until she turns up again in the very last paragraph.)

In the book, this is recognized as romantic. John Lyle sees her twice, not once, before they decide they are in love, thus making the affair a little less sudden. When Lyle in the magazine says, "Tell her I am hers to command!," exclamation point and all, Lyle in the book adds, "It seems flamboyant in recollection." In the book, when Judith is smuggled away to safety, it is in disguise as a load of gum boots; and when she is in safety in Mexico and separated from Lyle, sweet thing that she is--sexual and brainless--she finds another man and sends Lyle the standard letter saying so. The love affair is handled in a far more objective and reasonable manner.

As another example, in the early version of the story, Lyle, a lieutenant taking part in the final battle, sees that the commanding general is wounded and out of action, arbitrarily decides the officer next in command is too rigid to make the proper decisions, and usurps command. He makes what he thinks are the proper moves, and then and only then turns over command. In the book, Lyle is a colonel at the time of the final battle, and the over-rigidity of the next-in-command has been quite amply demonstrated.

In both versions, Lyle is shatteringly naive, but the additional material in the book makes his naivete more believable and puts it to good story use rather than just letting it be there as a great lump of indigestible material.

The story, for all the additions, remains melodramatic since the melodrama is too firmly imbedded in the story to be removed. I suspect this is a result of make-it-up-as-you-go-along plotting. I can't see any other reason for the coincidences and improbabilities of plot that exist all through the story. Both here and in "Misfit," Heinlein has important characters who appear several times in central contexts before having names hung on them--a sure sign of spear carriers who have been promoted to more important

roles and of plotting-while-writing. In other words, until he got there, Heinlein had no clear idea that he was going to use these people for the purposes he did. In the longer version, Heinlein had his plot turns all set out before him before he started, so he could spend his time tying threads left dangling his first time through, something he was only partly successful in doing.

With all the criticism I have made, it is possible to overlook the fact that If This Goes On... is interesting, exciting, and thoroughly entertaining. The story moves, it is about important things--particularly the winning of liberty--and it contains some very interesting notions. It also reflects again Heinlein's continuing interest in how things are made--power structures, revolutions, social situations, and machines.

In May, Heinlein's first story outside Astounding was published. It was entitled "Let There Be Light"--Heinlein has always been reasonably fond of quotations used as titles--and was by "Lyle Monroe," a pseudonym Heinlein used on those five stories he had published outside Astounding and Unknown, the Street and Smith magazines edited by John Campbell, during his first period and on one last story published in 1947.

"Let There Be Light" is the story of the invention of cold light--light that wastes no energy in radiating heat--and the discovery of an efficient way of using solar power. The technical thinking is interesting and the pace of the story is exciting, but again the plotting is not first-rate. This is another case of starting with no more than an end in mind and writing until that end is reached, never mind how. I would say that most probably this story was written in 1939 and kicked around a number of markets before finding a buyer, and this may explain why it is no advance on the stories that were published before it.

On the other hand, "The Roads Must Roll," published in Astounding in June, is a definite improvement. The viewpoint is again diffuse, changing fairly often in a short space; but the problem is a social-technical one--combatting a transportation strike--rather than boy-meets-girl, Little Tailor, or man who learns better, and for this sort of problem a diffuse viewpoint is no real handicap. The same sort of thing can be said for "Blowups Happen" from the September Astounding, which is concerned with psychoses in an atomic plant. This kind of story might even be called the-problem-as-hero, and considering Heinlein's interest in process, he might well have been stuck

doing it exclusively. Fortunately, he moved on.

"The Devil Makes the Law" was the lead novel in Astounding's fantasy companion in September. It was originally entitled "Magic, Inc.," and when it appeared in book form in 1950 was called that. The reason for the title change was that the previous month's lead story in Unknown had had the word "magic" in the title, too, and the editor felt variety was called for.

There are several ways of handling magic in a story. One is to build a complete new world to contain it, as Jack Vance did so brilliantly in The Dying Earth. Another is to treat it as a strange element in our own world, something foreign to be coped with. Heinlein chose a third method, that of integration of magic with our own familiar world. In this treatment, sorcerers become licensed and members of the Rotary Club, and magic becomes just another element of the economy.

"Magic, Inc." is a professional piece of work--high-quality yard goods. Though the characters are well-enough drawn, the process of dealing with magic in business and politics is central here. The story is probably the most entertaining of Heinlein's first year, but it is no deeper than a P. G. Wodehouse story.

"Coventry," in Astounding in July, is probably Heinlein's most important story from his first year of writing. It is directly connected with If This Goes On..., picking up the United States just about twenty-five years after the revolution that concludes the earlier story.

The aim of the revolution was to provide a truly free society. To that end, a society-wide hands-off treaty called "The Covenant" was drawn up. Those people who can't abide a free society are literally sent to Coventry, a great enclosed reservation in this case, to work things out for themselves. "Coventry" tells how a romantic, hyper-libertarian, rugged individualist chooses exile rather than mental treatment and then slowly comes to realize his dependence on society.

The only fault of this individual story is that it is interwoven with a melodramatic bit of counter-revolution which obscures the main point sufficiently that when the counter-revolution is shown to be not quite the threat we were led to believe it was, and when we do see clearly the main point, there is some feeling of let-down. Without the melodrama the story would have been stronger, but even so it remains a good piece of work.

"Coventry" is interesting not just for itself, or because its point is the strongest Heinlein had written on up to this time, but because the issue of liberty and libertarianism is one that Heinlein has returned to again and again through his years of writing.

3. 1941

John W. Campbell, Jr., became editor of Astounding in September 1937 and still edits its present-day version, Analog. Whatever else may be said about this strange, overwhelming man, whenever he has cared to put his considerable energies into his editing--something he has never done consistently--there have been few editors to equal him. Perhaps his most successful period was in his first years as editor. He found new writers--Heinlein, Asimov, de Camp, Sturgeon--guided them, and with their aid presented a new, more scientific, more adult science fiction. Most often, up until then, scientific science fiction had been plain dull and adventure science fiction had been childish. Campbell pushed for a higher standard. How much any editor is responsible for the work of his writers is always open to question. What is unquestionable is that Campbell did offer an opportunity to his writers and did buy good work when he saw it. That in itself is considerable to take credit for.

Astounding developed immensely from the time Campbell became editor until the advent of World War II, which took away most of his best writers. This period is now looked back on by fond science fiction fans as being a Golden Age. You can tell it was a Golden Age--many of the stories of the period are still readable.

This period coincided with Heinlein's finding his own stride. If 1941 was the peak of the Golden Age in Astounding, part of the reason may be that some twenty per cent or more of the words in Astounding that year were written by Robert Heinlein under three names.

I said that the stories were readable, and that is all I meant to say. In terms of the body of science fiction or the body of pulp literature as a whole, perhaps some of these stories have importance. In terms of literature as a whole, many of even the best suffer from bad writing and melodramatic thinking. No matter how good the ideas, no matter how well-presented they are, no matter how well-told the story is, a novel about seven men staging a war that throws out 400,000,000 invaders (who are, of course, Pan-Asians--that old Yellow Peril again) is bound to suffer simply because its issues are over-simplified to an incredible degree. It is easy to read a story like this but very hard to take it seriously.

The example just given is an actual novel, Sixth Column, serialized in the January, February, and March 1941 issues of Astounding. The author was given as "Anson MacDonald," but the name was a pseudonym of Heinlein's. All of Heinlein's stories in Astounding up to this point had been fitted into a common pattern of "Future History." He apparently felt--for the usual wrong reasons--that he ought to reserve the Heinlein name for those stories that could be fitted into this pattern.

Using pen names for their own sake usually makes no particular sense. A writer's name and record are about all that he

owns in the way of credentials, and whatever he publishes under pen names is lost opportunity to add to that name and record. I have used a pen name myself, but would not do it again.

Charting the course of Heinlein's pen names is a confusing business, since he was never very consistent about it. For all of Emerson's "foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds," there is such a thing as unfoolish consistency.

The Heinlein pen names I am aware of are Anson MacDonald, Lyle Monroe, Caleb Saunders, John Riverside, and Simon York. The first name derives from his first wife's maiden name and his own middle name. The "Lyle" of Lyle Monroe was Heinlein's mother's maiden name. Caleb was the first name of a good friend of Heinlein's at Annapolis, Caleb Laning, with whom he collaborated on a 1947 Collier's article and to whom he dedicated Beyond This Horizon. "Riverside" comes from Riverside, California. I have no idea where Simon York comes from--in fact, I have no idea what stories the name was used on except that they were not science fiction.

By and large, Heinlein used his own name on Future History stories in Astounding, and on stories in Unknown. "Anson MacDonald" was used on non-Future History stories in Astounding. "Lyle Monroe" was used on stories that appeared outside Astounding and Unknown.

However, the Heinlein name was used on the story "And He Built a Crooked House," which originally fitted into the Future History but was not included when all the stories of the series were eventually collected. And "--We Also Walk Dogs," by Anson MacDonald, in the end was included in the Future History.

Who Anson MacDonald[2] and Lyle Monroe, Heinlein's two most important pen names, actually were was not kept a very close secret. Anson MacDonald was exposed when the up-coming story "By His Bootstraps" was announced as being by Heinlein one month and then appeared as by MacDonald. Lyle Monroe, that writer for second-rate magazines, was exposed in May 1941 when John Campbell

printed a list of the Future History stories to date and included "Let There Be Light."

Anson MacDonald was Heinlein's pen name for non-Future History stories in Astounding, but in September 1941 John Campbell printed a story there by Caleb Saunders entitled "Elsewhere." Campbell said in a letter to me that this was the name that Heinlein had on the manuscript.

Heinlein also had a novel in Unknown in 1942 (the magazine had been retitled Unknown Worlds by then) under the name of John Riverside, a name that he planned to use on fantasy stories from then on, the war and Unknown's demise interfering. (This was at about the same period that the Green Hornet's butler changed from a Japanese into a Filipino without warning, so perhaps these name changes were just a symptom of the times.)

In the end, then, the Riverside and Saunders names were each used just once. I'm not certain of the Simon York name, but I suspect that it may have been used on the mystery stories[3] Heinlein was writing in the 1940's.

I hope this has been clear. If it has not, take it as further evidence that the use of numerous pen names is a dead end. In any case, Heinlein dropped his pen names after the war, which has made things much simpler since.

"And He Built a Crooked House"--Astounding, February 1941--is a bit of mathematical foolery about the building of a house in the shape of an unfolded tesseract--a super-cube. An earthquake jolts it into its "normal" shape, and it is hide-and-seek in the fourth dimension from then on. This brings me to a point about Heinlein's writing. "And He Built a Crooked House" is good fun, but it is not funny. This is true of most if not all Heinlein stories.

This seems to be the time for minor points, so perhaps I should mention another, a constant minor irritation in early Heinlein stories in particular. It is his habit of achieving "realistic" dialogue by the use of contorted spellings, mental lapses, and slang. Graduate architects who are made to say things like: "Huh? Wha' d'ju say?" make my flesh crawl. This may well be a carry-over from pulp magazine conventions, but even a little of it is an intrusion and a distraction.

"Logic of Empire," in the March Astounding, is, like "Coventry," a pure example of the man who learns better. In this case, the man is a lawyer who doubts that there is slavery on Venus and then has his nose rubbed in the fact.

"Beyond Doubt"--Astonishing, April 1941--was a collaboration between Lyle Monroe and Elma Wentz. It explains the Easter Island monoliths as political caricatures in Mu. The story, Heinlein's only fictional collaboration, is tedious and trivial and of interest only to Atlantis and Lemuria fans. The collaboration, I suspect, was done as a favour.

"Solution Unsatisfactory," in the May Astounding, is, like "Beyond Doubt," one of seven Heinlein science fiction stories that have never appeared in one of his collections, though both of these have been reprinted in at least one anthology. "Solution Unsatisfactory" is about atomic war and is more dramatized essay than story. Heinlein had the benefit of knowing Dr. Robert Cornog, a physicist who was later part of the Manhatten Project and who helped draw Heinlein's attention to some of the possibilities of atomic power. The story was somewhat in advance of its time, but as a work of fiction it isn't at all important.

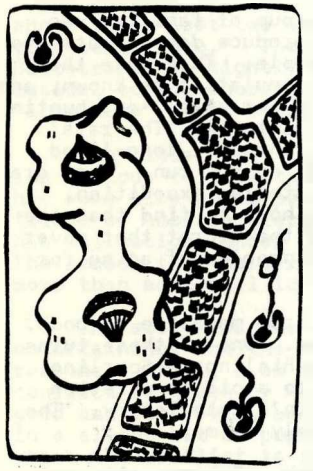
I sometimes think that all writers have something of the solipsist about them, particularly science fiction writers. Certainly it takes a touch of strange for a man to spend his time creating his own worlds. Beyond this, however, Heinlein has always shown an interest in solipsism as a theme.

"They," Heinlein's second story in Unknown, published in April 1941, is about a man in an insane asylum who is either suffering from delusions of persecution or is an immortal being about whom the universe centres, his attention being distracted from this fact by a set of antagonists. The second of these turns out to be the case. This story has been a staple item for horror anthologists, but I am not at all sure why. The situation is an uncomfortable one, but in an odd way it is a reassuring one at the same time. The central character has both purpose and importance, something that most of us are less than certain of, and he is in no danger of suffering physical harm. He suffers only from being distracted.

This story and "--We Also Walk Dogs" (Astounding, July) are the two most important stories in Heinlein's second year of writing. "They" is important because of its theme and because it is a good story; "--We Also Walk Dogs" is important because it is a very successful story. It is a story of a process rather than of people; but it is short, the process is clearly defined, and the story was obviously plotted before it was written. Since it combines intelligent thinking, interest, meaning, and plot, I think it can stand as a demonstration that Heinlein had by this time learned most of the technical skills that he was lacking when he first began to write.

The idea for the story is a good one--a business, "General Services," that will do anything, with an emphasis on an ability to find answers for difficult situations. Heinlein begins the story by showing how the company handles a standard problem--a rich, useless woman torn between a dinner party and being at the bedside of her son who has broken his leg half a continent away playing polo. Then he presents the company with a real problem to solve: arranging physical circumstances so that representatives of every intelligent race in the Solar System can be comfortable at a conference on Earth. If this were all, the story would be trivial; but the solution is given not in terms of licking the physical problem but in terms of getting people to be willing to lick the problem, a different thing altogether.

This may sound obvious, but stories have to be judged in terms of what they are, not in terms of what we wish they might have been. A short story simply cannot be judged on the same terms as a novel. Though "Universe" and "Common Sense" (Astounding, May and October) are about as closely connected as two stories can be, though the second story develops from the first rather than merely ringing changes on it, and though the stories have recently been published together under a common title (Orphans of the Sky; Putnam, 1964), they do not add up to a novel. In fact, they make a book only by courtesy of large type and wide margins. The book runs 187 pages and 45,000 words. By contrast, Heinlein's 1941 novel, Methuselah's Children, published in revised and expanded form by Gnome Press in 1958, runs 188 pages and 70,000 words, a much more normal length. If the two stories together made a novel, it would be an extremely weak one. Instead, what we have is one strong novelette and another interesting but incredible one.



"Universe," the first and stronger story, was reprinted in 1951 as part of an abortive line of ten-cent paperbacks that Dell was trying to establish, the only Heinlein story to appear in softcovers as an "original." The stories are about a ship to the stars that has taken the long way there. Originally the ship was meant to arrive after the people in it had lived for several generations, since at the time it was launched no method had been found for exceeding the speed of light; but the original purposes have been lost sight of and exist now only as allegory.

"Common Sense" has a good bit of melodramatic hugger-mugger culminating in three men and their women leaving the giant ship and landing on a planet, a sun conveniently happening to be close at hand. Heinlein concludes with a catalogue of the bits of luck that enable them to be successful. The catalogue is three pages long. This is not excusable. Life may be full of luck, but literature requires closer causal connexions than life does, and a list of lucky happenings that goes on for three pages is just too much to accept. "Universe" is much better. It is simply the story of one man finding the real nature of the ship, being disbelieved, and then demonstrating that nature to another. It is a real story. The background and even the plot of this story have been used by any number of writers since Heinlein first set it down. It is too bad that "Common Sense" was ever written--its very existence diminishes "Universe."

Methuselah's Children, serialized in Astounding in July,

August, and September, involves a sister ship to the one in Orphans of the Sky. Both books are set against the common background of Heinlein's Future History. However, the crew of this particular ship is less susceptible to forgetting its purposes than the crew in Orphans of the Sky, since all its members are extremely long-lived, are fleeing from persecution, and have the benefit of a far more efficient propulsion system whipped up in a spare moment by Andrew Jackson Libby, the young genius from "Misfit," now grown up.

This story was originally to be called While the Evil Days Come Not. In his discussion of Heinlein's Future History that appeared in the May 1941 Astounding, John Campbell mentioned the novel under this title and said it would probably be changed before the story was published. The tentative title stems from a password on the second page of the story. The final title does seem better.

These children of Methuselah are a group of families who, starting in 1874, have been interbred to produce descendants who live up to three times as long as most people. They make the mistake of letting their presence in the population be known, and the Covenant--remember that?--is suspended for an all-out hunting season on them. The general reaction seems to be, "The rats! They won't tell us their secret. Kill!" The poor long-lived people, who have no secret, see nothing to do but run. They grab a ship that is being readied for an interstellar expedition, spend time among the stars, and then come home to find that the normal people left behind have discovered the secret that never existed and have found a way to solve the problem of aging for everybody.

There are a number of small changes from magazine to book, mostly a matter of detail and name changes. One of these turns an important female character's name from Risling to Sperling. George Price suggests that this was done to avoid association with Rhysling, the blind singer in Heinlein's later story, "The Green Hills of Earth," and this seems likely to me.

In many ways this is an important book. For one, its main theme, the problem of aging, is one that keeps cropping up in Heinlein stories; and for another, an amazing number of brilliant ideas are tossed out along the way. Still, for some reason, as often as I have read the story I cannot feel close to it. I suspect that the reason is that the story belongs to 100,000 people as a group, not to any individual, and I cannot identify with a nation. What happens is interesting but lacks personal meaning.

Heinlein's last three stories of 1941 are all less worthwhile, not because they aren't entertaining, but because they aren't about anything important. Setting forth artificial problems and then inventing artificial solutions to them is not what makes science fiction worth spending time on.

"By His Bootstraps" (Astounding, October) is convincing

evidence that Heinlein had mastered the art of planning his stories. It is an intricate bit of foolery involving a man's meeting himself half a dozen times along the path from Time A to Time B. It is an amusing set piece, logical, and beautifully worked out.

"Elsewhere" (Astounding, September) also involves travelling in time. This is a mystical story in which travelling to any time or any possibility is simply a matter of thinking properly. This is a truly vapid story and I'm surprised that Heinlein wrote it, and even more surprised that John Campbell bought and printed it.

A Heinlein character once said, "Well, philosophy is like that--it looks as if it were really something, and it's awful pretty, and it tastes sweet, but when you go to bite it you can't get your teeth into it, and when you try to swallow, there isn't anything there. Philosophy is word-chasing, as significant as a puppy chasing its tail." She might have been talking, instead, about these last two stories, since neither has anything to "get your teeth into." The difference between them is that "By His Bootstraps" is tightly constructed, as intricate as a bit of musical comedy choreography, and arrives at a destination, while "Elsewhere" slops every which way and simply ends.

The title "Lost Legion" (Super Science, November) has nothing obvious to do with the story to which it is attached, which has some nice young people developing super powers under the tutelage of Ambrose Bierce. Heinlein later included it in one of his collections under the title "Lost Legacy," which is more apt. The reason for the earlier title seems to have been nothing more than editorial idiocy.

The story has much to recommend it. It is interesting and entertaining, and the people in it do things for recognizable reasons. Still, I am not satisfied for two reasons. The story conflict is given by Heinlein as being a struggle between pure good and pure evil, and I can't feel comfortable with that, even in a slight bit of popular fiction. Secondly, this is a story where the conflict is solved by parapsychology. The other side is thinking evil thoughts and doing damage, so we blast them down mentally, as much as to say, "Look, Ma, no hands." A story like this in which parapsychology is everything--meat, dressing, salad, and dessert--is an artificial business artificially resolved, like a snipe hunt in which the hunter comes back with a snipe in his bag.

4. 1942

There is always a lag between the time a story is written and the time it is published--this is a constant uncertainty in a writer's life and a factor I suspect most readers seldom have reason to be aware of. It may take three months for a single magazine to make up its mind about a story, and five or ten magazines may see a story before it is finally bought. After a

story is accepted, it may take another year for it to be published. Probably the usual minimum gap between writing and publishing is six months; the maximum, even for good stories, may be several years. But there is always a lag.

This explains why Heinlein stories were published in 1942 when he was working at the Naval Air Material Center in Philadelphia and not writing, and why no Heinlein stories were published in 1946 when he very definitely was writing. The stories published in 1942 were written earlier. (Incidentally, all of them came out under Heinlein's pen names.) And all the Heinlein stories written in 1946 were published later.

In the case of "My Object All Sublime" (Future, February 1942), I suspect that the lag was a long one. This story reads as though it were one of Heinlein's very earliest tries, and it may well be the story that bounced thirteen times before it was purchased.[5]

The story involves an invisibility device explained in this manner: "The principle is similar to total reflection. I throw a prolate ellipsoid field about my body. Light strikes the screen at any point, runs on the surface of the field for a hundred and eighty degrees, and departs at the antipodal point with its direction and intensity unchanged. In effect, it makes a detour around me."

This is vague enough to allow of varied interpretation, but, as given, it would seem that objects on the other side of the field would appear reversed. A friend of mine, John Myers, believes they would be distorted and upside down as well. But let that go.

What does the inventor do with this fabulous device? He uses it to hide himself while he stands on busy street corners and squirts synthetic skunk juice on drivers whose manners offend him. (The quotation-used-as-title is from The Mikado, and until I looked it up it seemed to have nothing to do with the story. It turns out that the sublime object is "to make the punishment fit the crime." Heinlein must have something against bad drivers: in Starship Troopers, a more recent novel, he has them flogged.) Beyond this, the story is told in a curious mixture of past and present tenses, with changes from one to the other within single sentences. For clear and obvious reasons the story has never been reprinted.

In passing, I might add that the story illustration is also bad, more amateurish than anything else. The artist thereafter

gave up art for other pursuits, turning into an author, critic, and anthologist of note. His name is Damon Knight.

"Goldfish Bowl" appeared in Astounding in March. Two waterspouts capped by a cloud appear near Hawaii--water goes up one spout and down the other. These curiosities, along with ball lightning, mysterious disappearances, and a number of other strange phenomena, all turn out to be the doing of never-seen atmospheric intelligences as superior to us as we are to fish. The story is merely a statement of this situation, with the supposedly ironic comparison of us to fish hammered home at the end. However, no resolution of the situation is offered, and 10,000 words seem a lot to spend on a dead irony. This is more yard goods, the sort of thing that can be turned out by the ream without thinking. It's readable stuff, but no more than that.

"Pied Piper" is another never-reprinted Lyle Monroe story, this time from the March 1942 Astonishing, and is another candidate for the Rejected 13 Times Sweepstakes. The most truly astonishing thing about this issue--after a letter from one Isaac "Azimov" (sic)--was that it cost only ten cents. It seems almost incredible in these days when you can't even buy a comic book for that price.

"Pied Piper" takes place in an undesignated country at an undefined time. As the solution to a war, an elderly scientist kidnaps all the opposing country's children and when the chief general of his own country objects to a settlement of the war, the scientist disposes of him by shooting him off into another dimension. It is all very bland and never-neverish.

These first three stories are all lacking in significance and importance. On the other hand, Heinlein's last three stories of 1942 not only have meanings that extend beyond the solution of a trivial situation but are all thoroughly enjoyable reading. Two of them, "Waldo" and Beyond This Horizon, mark a culmination to Heinlein's first period, being every bit as good as "--We Also Walk Dogs," much longer, more involved, and much more significant.

Unknown, Astounding's fantasy companion, printed something more than forty novels and short novels in the four years it was published, most of them still readable, and some quite excellent. Of the whole lot, The Unpleasant Profession of Jonathan Hoag remains one of my favorites, although I can see it is severely flawed. Not everybody likes it. P. Schuyler Miller (Astounding, July 1960) considers it strictly a pot-boiler. In some ways it is, but it was also written with an amount of personal involvement that offsets most of its deficiencies.

Our world, in The Unpleasant Profession of Jonathan Hoag, is explained as a piece of artwork done by a beginning student. The "canvas" originally focussed on some rather unpleasant creatures known as "the Sons of the Bird," but the teacher of our student found them lacking in appeal. However, instead of painting them out, the student made the mistake of redoing them in the guise of the ordinary humans he peopled the world with. Now this piece of

artwork is being judged by art critics, appreciating it from the inside as men, who will decide whether or not it is worth preserving.

This explanation comes as a denouement to the story. The story proper involves the efforts of a private detective and his wife to find out for Jonathan Hoag exactly how he spends his days. He does not remember. All he knows is that from time to time he finds a disturbing grime under his fingernails, which he is convinced is dried blood.

The Sons of the Bird, who lurk in that mysterious world behind mirrors, do not know the truth about the way the world was made. Instead, they have an elaborate mythology that says they were cast down and made subordinate in some ways to human beings (who are, according to this myth they believe, their own creations) because of pride and insufficient cruelty. They do know the grime under Hoag's fingernails for what it is--their own blood--and know Hoag for their enemy, and consequently attempt to keep Randall, the detective, from finding out for Hoag what he wishes to know.

Hoag is a schizophrenic for fair. He is one of the art critics. Part of his time is spent in dealing with the Sons of the Bird; the rest of his time, unaware that he is anything but a man, unaware of his other activities, he spends in savoring life, in the process gathering the material for his critical other self to make its judgment.

The frame for the story is a beautiful one. The background is very neatly worked out. The only trouble is that the interior logic of the story is full of holes. This does not eliminate my liking for the story, but it does qualify it.

In the scene that opens the book, Man-Hoag has apparently been sent by Critic-Hoag to visit a doctor named Potbury, who is one of the Sons. This is never explicitly said, but can be inferred. The purpose of this visit is to frighten the Sons of the Bird. Why it is necessary to frighten the Sons of the Bird is never explained. The person who is really frightened by the visit is Man-Hoag. He is frightened enough to consult a private detective when the doctor won't tell him what the grime under his nails is and when he cannot remember what he does with himself during the day. Since Critic-Hoag can apparently turn his Man-Hoag self on and off as he pleases, there is no reason for Man-Hoag to be allowed to be frightened except that it suits Heinlein's purposes to bring in Edward Randall and his wife, and he cannot do this unless Hoag is frightened enough to consult a detective.

Why is Potiphar Potbury, a Son of the Bird, also a doctor? This is not explained. More important, why do the Sons of the Bird spend their time persecuting the Randalls, who are doing them no harm, when they really ought to be out persecuting Jonathan Hoag, who is?

If Heinlein had bothered to spend fifty more pages in tying loose ends and developing his story further, it might have been as good as anything he has ever done. As it is, it does have several things to recommend it: the Sons of the Bird; the student, his teacher, and the art critics; a very nicely developed relationship between Randall and his wife--one of the very few comfortable inter-sexual relationships Heinlein has ever described; and a nice appreciation of a number of simple pleasures. As I look back, the story itself has no reason for being--the Sons of the Bird would logically have been eliminated before the story started. The story doesn't make any sense at all from that point of view, but it does mean something.

Damon Knight once wrote: "It's unhappily true that most current science fiction stories neither make sense nor mean anything; but it occurs to me that as long as we're asking, we may as well ask for what we really want--the story, now nearly extinct, which does both."[6] The Unpleasant Profession of Jonathan Hoag does mean something--and, unusually for Heinlein, its meaning is on an emotional rather than an intellectual level--but it does not make any good sense at all. I wish it did.

The distinction between fantasy and science fiction is one that is usually made by saying, "Well, you know what I mean," and usually we do. There are a great number of formulations of the distinction extant, but none of them has ever been generally adopted. More than that, however, we don't even have a generally accepted definition of what science fiction is before we go into comparisons of it and other things. (My favorite definition of science fiction, by the way, is "Science fiction means what we point to when we say it," which, of course, is a sneaky way of saying, "Well, you know what I mean.") What we do have is a great big mess, and the reason we have it is that we insist on slapping labels on things. Not only do we lack a generally accepted distinction between fantasy and science fiction, I think we always will.

The reason for my bringing up the topic in the first place is an Anson MacDonald story entitled "Waldo" from the August 1942 issue of Astounding. Beyond the fact that it was originally published in a science fiction magazine, I am certain that this is a science fiction story rather than a fantasy story, but I am very far from certain that I can satisfactorily explain why.

The basic elements of "Waldo" are four: a Pennsylvania hex doctor who may be well over a hundred years old and whose magic actually works; "deKalb power receptors" that have suddenly ceased to operate properly though nothing seems to be wrong with them; a rising incidence of general myasthenia--abnormal muscular weakness and fatigue--in the population; and Waldo, an engineering genius and paranoid misanthrope afflicted by myasthenia gravis (Britannica: "there is a progressive increase in the fatigability of the muscular system until death results from inability of the heart muscle to continue its work"), who lives in a satellite home popularly known as "Wheelchair." Heinlein has managed to tie this all together into a fascinating whole.

The deKalbs are failing, and their proprietors, North American Power-Air Company, are worried. They can't lick the problem and are convinced that the only man who might is Waldo. However, the company once cut Waldo out of some patents that he is convinced should have been his, and they are far from sure that he will do any further business with them.

Dr. Gus Grimes, Waldo's personal physician since childhood and his only friend, is worried by the rise of myasthenia in the population and is convinced that background radiation has something to do with it. He wants Waldo to take on the problem of the failing deKalbs and not only work out a solution, but find one that will necessitate cutting down the amount of general radiation.

Waldo's own problem is his sickness and his misanthropy, the misanthropy being a direct result of his sickness. His success is a matter of over-compensation; and the more successful he is the more alienated he becomes, thus leaving him with that much more to compensate for.

Gramps Schneider, the Pennsylvania hex doctor, has no problems except that he has no particular love for machines and complicated living. He is, however, the key to the whole situation. Waldo takes on NAPA's problem, but then is unable to solve it let alone solve it as Dr. Grimes would have him. For all that he can tell, the machines ought to be working properly. Gramps Schneider, however, can fix the machines; and he is able to give Waldo the insights by which he solves the problem of the failing deKalbs, the problem of radiation and general myasthemia, and the problem of his own sickness.

Completely aside from the main problem, Heinlein has included some truly lovely conceits. The best-known of these is the machines he calls "waldoes," machines for remote control manipulation. Similar machines are in commercial use today, first developed for use in handling radioactive material, and are generally known as waldoes after those described in the story. But this is not the only lovely idea given. The nature of Waldo's satellite home is very well done, and so, in particular, are Waldo's pets, a canary and a mastiff, raised from birth in free fall. None of these are necessary to the story, but they do add considerable spice.

The reason for my original puzzlement as to what category in which to put "Waldo"--science fiction or fantasy--is the nature of the ultimate solution to the various given problems. It turns out that the deKalbs are failing because their operators are thinking negative thoughts. Gramps Schneider fixes the deKalbs by reaching for power into the "Other World." And Waldo fixes both himself and the failing deKalbs by learning to reach for power into the Other World, too.

More than this, Waldo becomes convinced that the various magical arts are all aborted sciences, abandoned before they had been made clear; that the world has been made what it is by minds thinking it so (the world was flat until geographers decided it was round, and the deKalbs worked because their operators thought they would); that the Other World does exist; and that he, Waldo, can make the Other World what he wants it to be, for all time, by deciding its nature and convincing everybody else of his idea.

Throughout much of his fiction, Heinlein has injected bits of mysticism, just as he did here in "Waldo." What keeps "Waldo" and most of the others from being fantasies, it seems to me, is his approach to the mysticism. "Magic, Inc." is a fantasy because the answers are cut and dried. Magic does work, period. Do thus-and-such and thus-and-thus will result. In "Waldo" we only know one thing for certain: there is something out there, call it the "Other World" for convenience, from which power can be siphoned. All the rest is Waldo's tentative construction of the state of affairs--he may be right or he may be wrong, but we have no certain way of knowing. In part, this is Heinlein's way of saying, "There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy"; and that is a far from illegitimate thing for a science fiction story to say. In part, too, however, I think this derives from Heinlein's background and training. As a writer, he remains very much an engineer. His interest has always been not so much in why things work as in how they work; and as long as he expounds the "how" clearly, he is willing to leave the "why" as a tentative answer.

If the answers Heinlein were to give were not tentative, if the story said, "And this is exactly what those things in heaven and earth you haven't dreamt of are," and these answers fall outside what we think the world to be like, the story would be a fantasy. As long as the answers remain tentative, as in "Waldo," the story remains one that I can point to when I say, "science fiction," even though the answers may again be ones that fall outside the bounds of what we think the world to be like.

I have an affection for unified plots, stories in which everything ties together at the end. I don't mind an intriguing question or two left for the reader to answer, but I do mind questions that arise only because the writer is a sloppy craftsman. Certainly too many science fiction stories written these days take one single mangy idea and stretch and stretch it, remaining unified simply out of ennui. On the other hand, I have almost as much dislike for those old A. E. van Vogt stories that were so full of ideas that they leaked out the sides. Van Vogt

used to have a conscious policy of introducing at least one new idea every 300 words. This gave his stories movement, but it never gave them unity; and it was always possible to fill a wheelbarrow with the ideas proposed and then half used and forgotten.

Many of Robert Heinlein's early stories were like this. For example, here is Alva Rogers on Methuselah's Children: "Full of adventure, conflict, and romance, and enough casually tossed-off ideas to serve as the basis for a half-dozen other stories." This is true, but I'm not quite as pleased with the situation as Rogers is. I wish Heinlein had written those other half-dozen stories and put his ideas to better use. I think this is one of the things he came to better understand during his apprenticeship.

Beyond This Horizon (Astounding, April and May 1942) probably has as much of a Roman candle plot, shooting off in all directions, as Heinlein ever wrote. However, in spite of all that I have said about non-unified plots, it remains one of my two favorite Heinlein stories.

The ostensible central theme of Beyond This Horizon concerns a young man who is the end product of four generations of genetic control concentrating on producing a man of all-around competence. The respects in which he is superior to the majority of men are intended to be eventually conserved in the whole race; the hero, Hamilton Felix, is something of a pilot project. However, he sees no reason to have children. In fact, he refuses to unless he can have it demonstrated to him what, if any, purpose there is to human existence. As one character in the book says when another objects that this is a stupid question: "He did not ask it stupidly." And he does not.

Two things cause him to change his mind. One is a revolution that he sees from the seamy side. A group of social misfits attempt to overturn society and put things the way they ought to be, with "true men--supermen--sitting on top (that's themselves) and the rest of the population bred to fit requirements." The second thing that causes him to change his mind is an agreement by his society that it might be worthwhile to investigate philosophical problems on a scientific basis--including the possibility of survival after death, which Hamilton takes to be the one satisfactory answer to his question (though why exactly is not clear to me. The simple survival of souls--the knowledge that you exist longer than you originally thought you did--does not strike me as a worthwhile purpose for existence). But this agreement to investigate does satisfy Hamilton, and he becomes willing to father the children his society desires him to have.

This action covers two-thirds of the book and several months in time, and was the logical place to stop. However, Heinlein strings his story out for another five years or so, skimmed over in perhaps 20,000 words. This covers Hamilton's marriage, his first two children, and an indication that reincarnation, whether or not the research ever demonstrates it, does exist as a fact.

I said this was the ostensible central theme, because I don't believe that this is what the story is really about. I think it is another case, rather, of a story about process. This society is a fascinating place, and though Hamilton is the central character if anyone is, there is a great deal of switching viewpoints to give us various views of the society in action. The society is a libertarian one: to be a first-class citizen you must wear a gun, and if you aren't careful about your manners, you must be prepared to use it. Social conventions are gone into in detail; but beyond that, Heinlein deals with two love stories, eugenics, finance, and even adds a dash of satire with a young man from 1926 found in a newly-opened "level-entropy field," who makes a living for himself by setting up leagues of professional football teams. The revolution is not the central issue in Beyond This Horizon--revolutions and high level double-dealing have ruined more science fiction novels than I care to count, but this is not one of them. The central issue is day-to-day living in a truly strange society. That this is so is the only reason that Heinlein could get away with writing as long as he does after his main story line has run out. And it is the only reason that Heinlein could get away with writing about so many different things without having his story fall apart. Hamilton Felix is an interesting character, but it is his society that is Heinlein's hero, and Hamilton is only our guide through it.

I still retain my affection for unified plots. Beyond This Horizon doesn't have one, but I find it thoroughly delightful. Call it an exception.

Footnotes

1. Interview in Author and Journalist, January 1963.

2. This name presumably was derived from that of Heinlein's first wife, Leslyn McDonald.

3. In The Fanscient, Fall 1949, Heinlein said that he had published mystery stories under a pen name.

4. Quotation from "Lost Legacy" ("Lost Legion"), p. 40 in the Fantasy Press edition.

5. See the interview in op. cit.

6. In Search of Wonder, p. 89.

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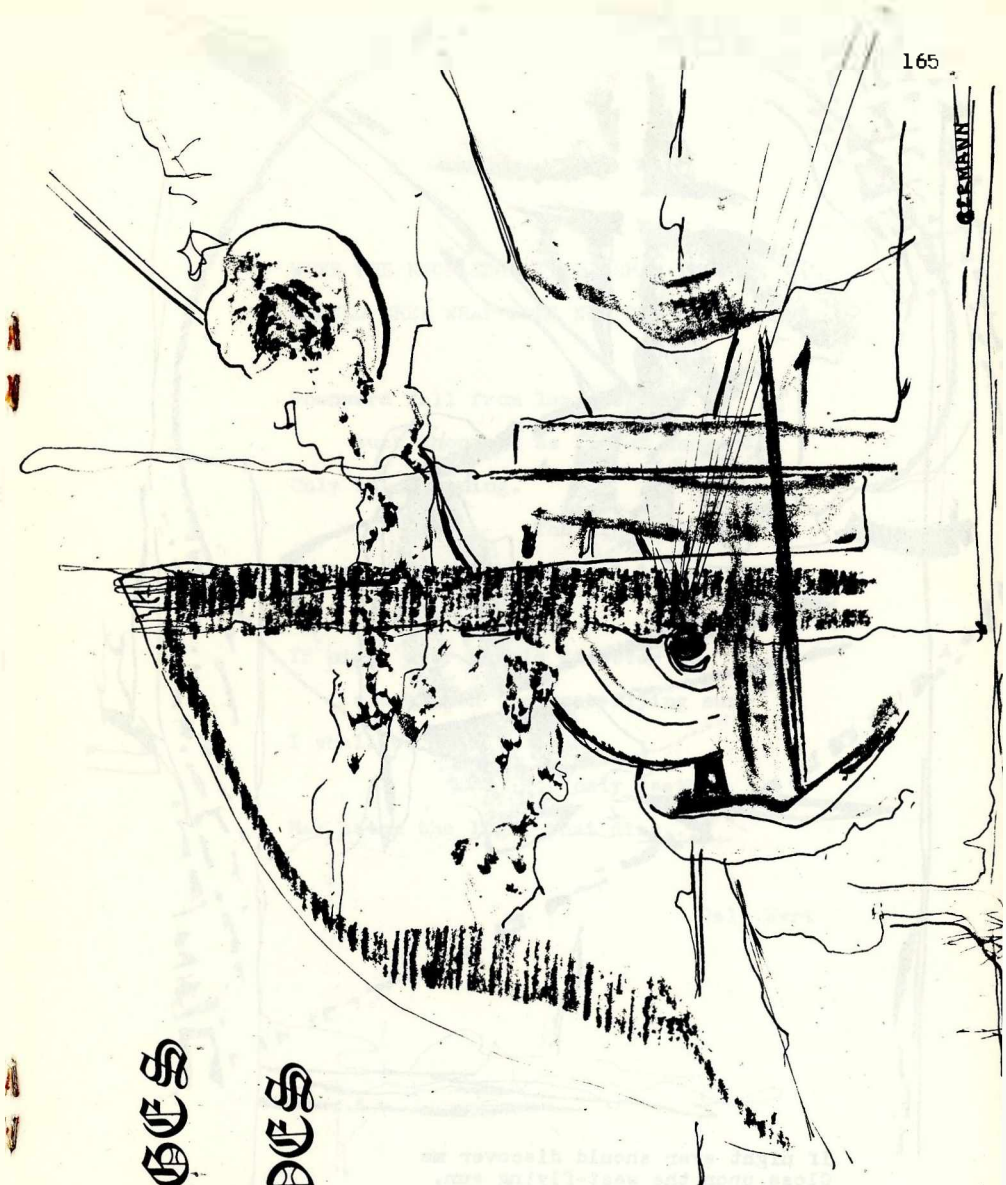
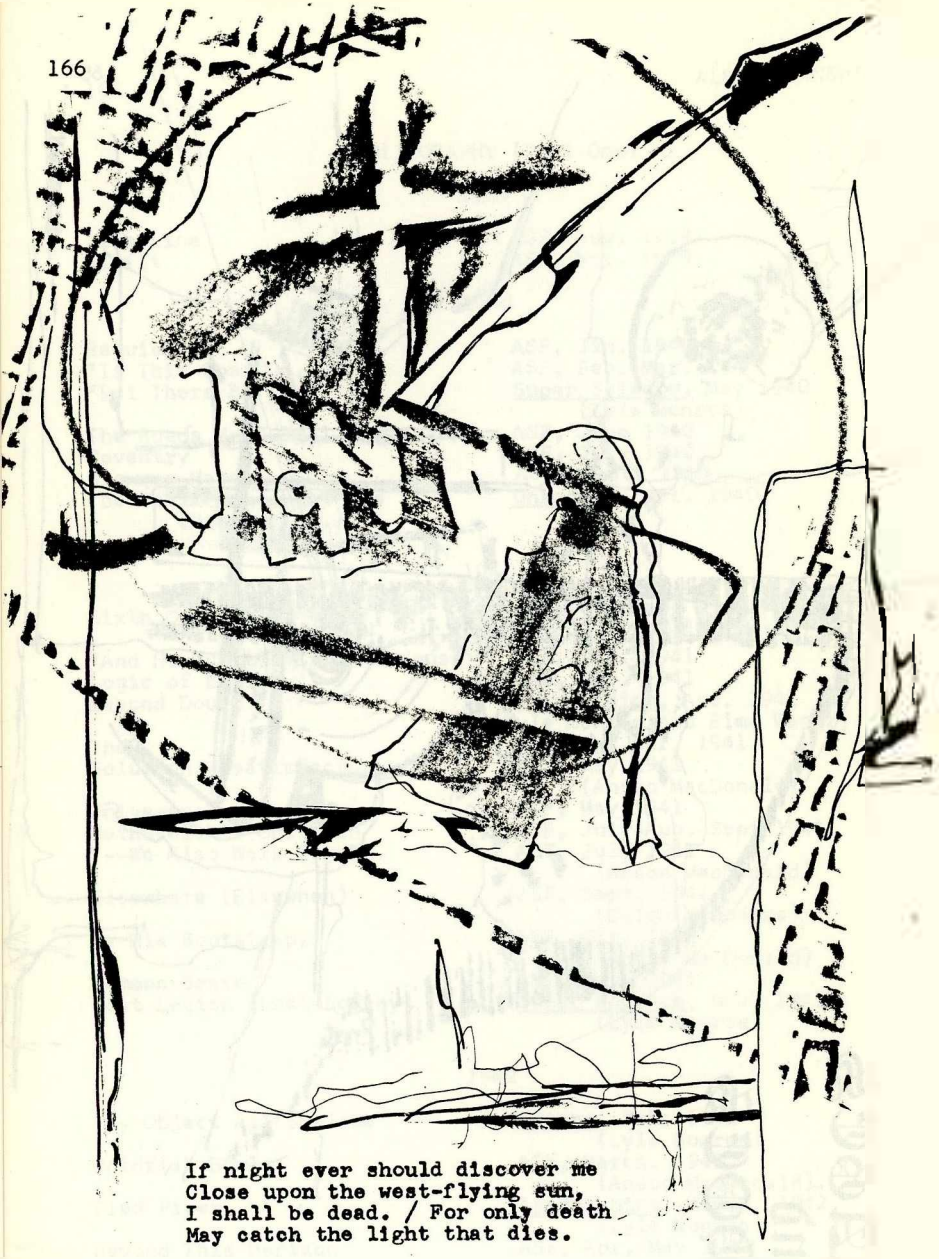
Waldo	ASF, Aug. 1942 (Anson MacDonald)
The Unpleasant Profession of Jonathan Hoag	Unknown Worlds, Oct. 1942 (John Riverside)



IMAGES and ECHOES



If night ever should discover me
Close upon the west-flying sun,
I shall be dead. / For only death
May catch the light that dies.

WITH THE KNOWLEDGE THAT HUMAN THOUGHT
SHOULD SEEK WHAT DOES NOT DIE AT EVENING

Downward fall from lean heights
    such thoughts as I sent sunward
Only this morning.
                The light fled
Faster than the thoughts I loosed.

If night ever should discover me
    close upon the west-flying sun,
I shall be dead.
                For only death
May catch the light that dies...

Dale Hart

...as we sit in our solitary camps
staring dumbly into the blaze of nothingness...

ICH WOLLTE, MEINE LIEDER / DAS WÄREN BLÜMELEIN:

Impossible to be sung in a world of Dacheus.
As we sit in our solitary camps
staring dumbly into the blaze of nothingness,
there are no love sings, my darling,
save those we write ourselves, together,
in the secret music of our separate hearts.

Sanford Sternlicht

Note: The title comprises the opening lines from a Liebesvers by Heinrich Heine.

JUSTICE SHALLOW

The mountains
are upside down.
They have balanced
on their tops.
Thus they are rounded
and soon they will begin to roll.
It is raining on the sky.
Tell me the truth, Falstaff,
did we ever hear the chimes at midnight?

Sanford Sternlicht

The mountains / are upside down.
They have balanced / on their tops.
Thus they are rounded / and soon they will begin to roll.

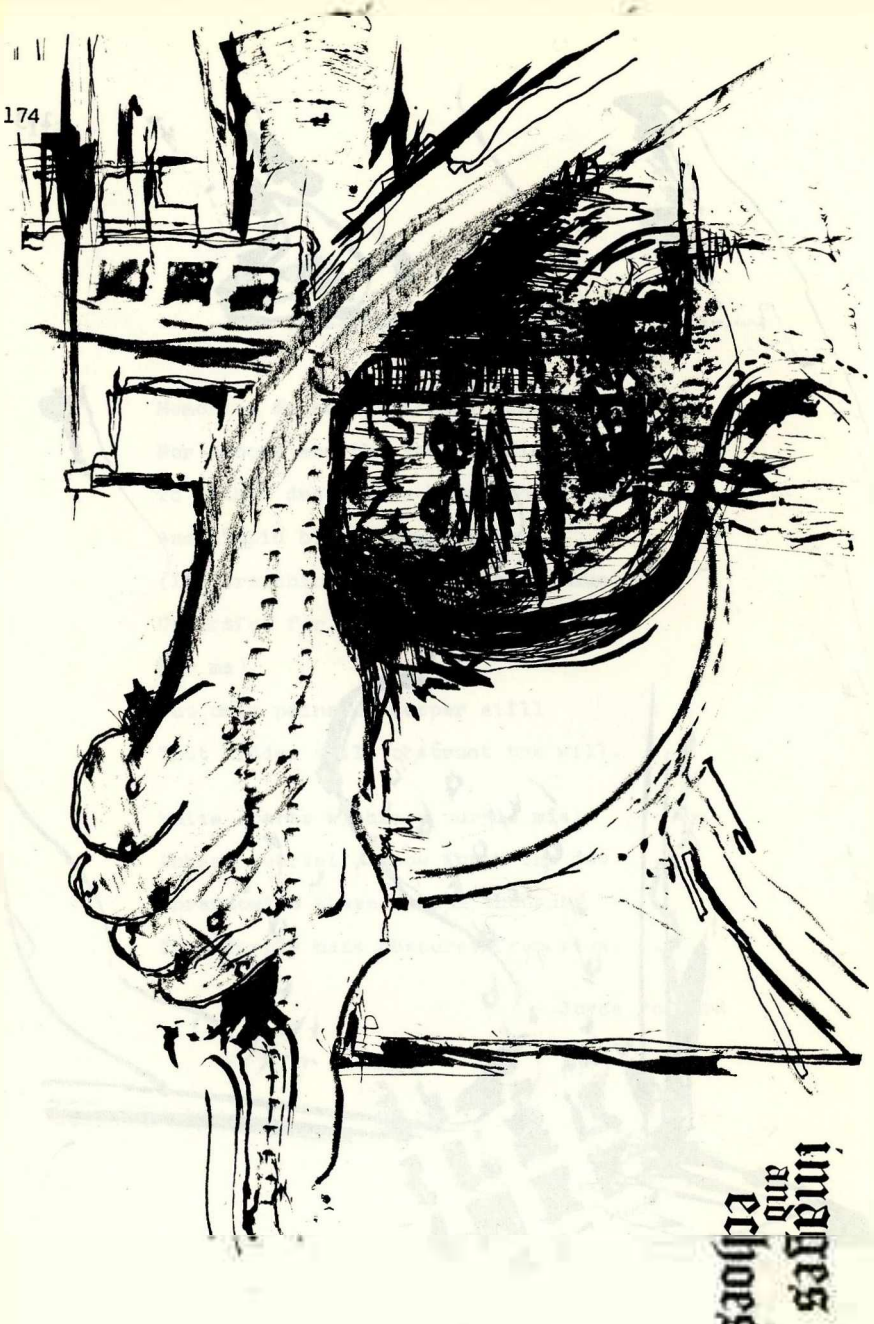
UNREACHABLE MEMORIES

Memories do not still the stir
Nor echoes end the sad refrain
To gather dust-motes binds the branch
And limpid blows the sycamore
(Its branching from this breeze must be
Unhurtful for the world--
For me)
But only pains me deeper still
That hidden veils obstruct the will.

White sparks within a purple mist
Unhaze yourself, show forth the dew
Unrandomize these random thoughts
That purple haze obscures from view.

Joyce Pollard

...But only pains me deeper still
That hidden veils obstruct the will...



Critique of "The Once & Future King" Part I: Not Any Common Earth

by Barbara Floyd

(Illustrations by the author)

AUTHOR'S NOTE:

Arthur, the legendary king of England, was first mentioned by Nennius in his "Historica Brittonum" (c. 800). The Arthur of history was a warrior leader of Roman Briton blood, dated consistently at about 500 A.D. It is generally summed up by John Jay Parry (Journal of English and German Philology, LVIII (July, 1959)) that Arthur, although greatly romanticized by later poets, was a descendant of the customary marriage of Briton women and Roman soldiers from the castris. Generations after Caesar has recalled his soldiers, the influence of Rome still remained in small bands of Roman Britons who formed themselves in troops, after the Roman pattern, to take the place of the departed legions. These troops, at about 500 A.D., were carrying on a successful defence against Saxon invaders. One of the many leaders was Artorius, called by the Welsh word for a war-leader, "pendragon." This word, Parry notes, probably came from the Latin "draco," a term applied to the Roman cohort troops, whose standard was a dragon. The Round Table, he says, was a prevailing custom remaining from the Roman tradition of a "sigma" table around which gathered troops in the field.

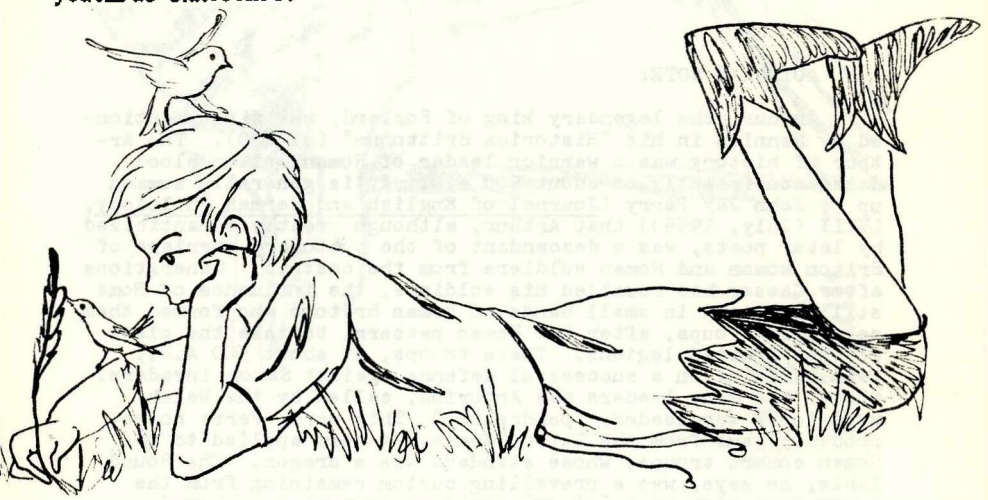
To those who think that any treatment of the King Arthur legend belongs in an elementary school library, may I recommend T.H. White's series of books, collectively titled "The Once and Future King." True, the first of these, The Sword and the Stone, is fit for a child; for the youth of the boy Arthur is the magic youth of all children. But in the second book, The Queen of Air and Darkness, we learn the details of Arthur's incest and his own illegitimacy, and in the third, The Ill-Made Knight, of Launcelot's compulsive affair with Gwenever.

Finally, Candle in the Wind shows the white-bearded King Arthur, his dreams about his sons--and so completes this picture of gloom and despair in which the search for the Holy Grail seems pitifully hopeless. "This is why," White explains, "Sir Thomas Mallory called his very long book the 'Death' of Arthur... it is the tragedy, the Aristotelian and comprehensive tragedy, of sin coming home to roost."

White carefully suited his style of writing to his subject, which is why each book seems unique, almost as though written by a different person. My purpose in these articles, one for each book, will be to analyse the subject-matter and White's approach to it, and to point out why I feel his novel is a classic.

In The Sword in the Stone we find Arthur working as a squire to Sir Kay, the older son of Sir Ector, Arthur's guardian.

Arthur, the boy, lives in a magical world, tinged only with the minor traumas of childhood tragi-comedies and the pure delight of youthful innocence.

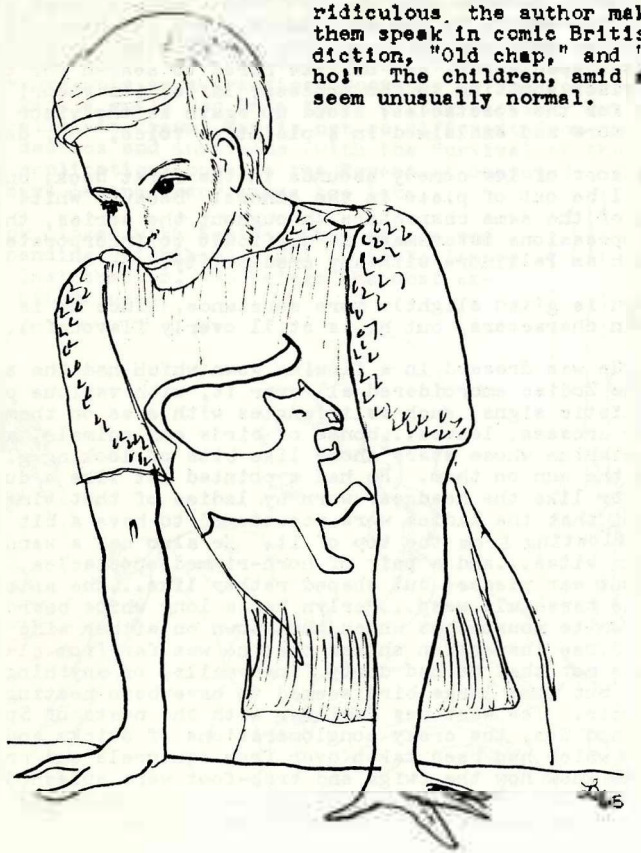


White is careful to depict all adults as the children saw them, and this offers him many opportunities to satirize social attitudes.

He is delighted to drop extraneous "historical" footnotes. "Couldn't we send them to Eton, I suppose?" Sir Grummersome asks Sir Ector in regard to Arthur and Kay. Immediately White explains facetiously, "It was not really Eton he mentioned, for the college of the Blessed Mary was not founded until 1440. Also they were drinking Metheglyn, not port which the drink had been called throughout the book but by mentioning the modern wine it is easier to give you the feel."

Whimsically, Sir Grummersome presently declines to use the term "port" again, as though admonished by the author, but says instead, "Have some more of this drink, whatever it calls itself."

As further to make the adults ridiculous, the author makes them speak in comic British stage diction, "Old chap," and "What ho!" The children, amid all this, seem unusually normal.



Descriptions are of childlike simplicity--"Sir Ector's castle stood in an enormous clearing in a still more enormous forest. It had a courtyard and a mote with a pike in it." But then they dissolve into more sophisticated references--"There were magicians in the forest also in those days, as well as strange animals not known to modern works of natural history.

For a character description written in the child-slanted White style, King Pellinore offers a typical pose. We meet him for the first time in the deeps of the Forest Sauvage, where Arthur (nicknamed Wart) has become lost. At first he thinks Pellinore is a ghost.

> The ghost lifted up its visor, revealing two enormous eyes frosted like ice; exclaimed in an anxious voice "What, what?" took off its eyes...which turned out to be horn-rimmed spectacles, fogged by being inside the helmet; tried to wipe them on the horse's mane...which only made them worse; lifted both hands above its head and tried to wipe them on its plume; dropped its lance; dropped the spectacles, got off its horse to search for them, the visor shutting in the process; lifted its visor; bent down for the spectacles; stood up again as the visor shut once more and exclaimed in a plaintive voice, "Oh, dear!"

This sort of low comedy abounds in the first book, but of course will be out of place in the others. Because White deals with many of the same characters throughout the series, these initial impressions later make it difficult to incorporate characters such as Pellinore with any credibility.

Merlyn is given slightly more substance, since he is one of the main characters, but he is still overly flavourful.

> He was dressed in a flowing gown which had the signs of the Zodiac embroidered all over it, with various other cabalistic signs, such as triangles with eyes on them, queer crosses, leaves...bones of birds and animals, and a planetarium whose stars shone like bits of looking glass with the sun on them. He had a pointed hat like a dunce's cap, or like the headgear worn by ladies of that time, except that the ladies were accustomed to have a bit of veil floating from the top of it. He also had a wand of lignum vitae...and a pair of horn-rimmed spectacles, being without ear pieces, but shaped rather like...the antennae of the tarantula wasp...Merlyn had a long white beard and long white moustaches which hung down on either side of it. Close inspection showed that he was far from clean. It was not that he had dirty fingernails, or anything like that, but some large bird seemed to have been nesting in his hair. The Wart was familiar with the nests of Sparhawk and Gos, the crazy conglomerations of sticks and oddments which had been taken over from squirrels and crows, and he knew how the twigs and tree-foot were splashed with white mutes, old bones, muddy feathers and castings. This was the impression which he got from Merlyn.

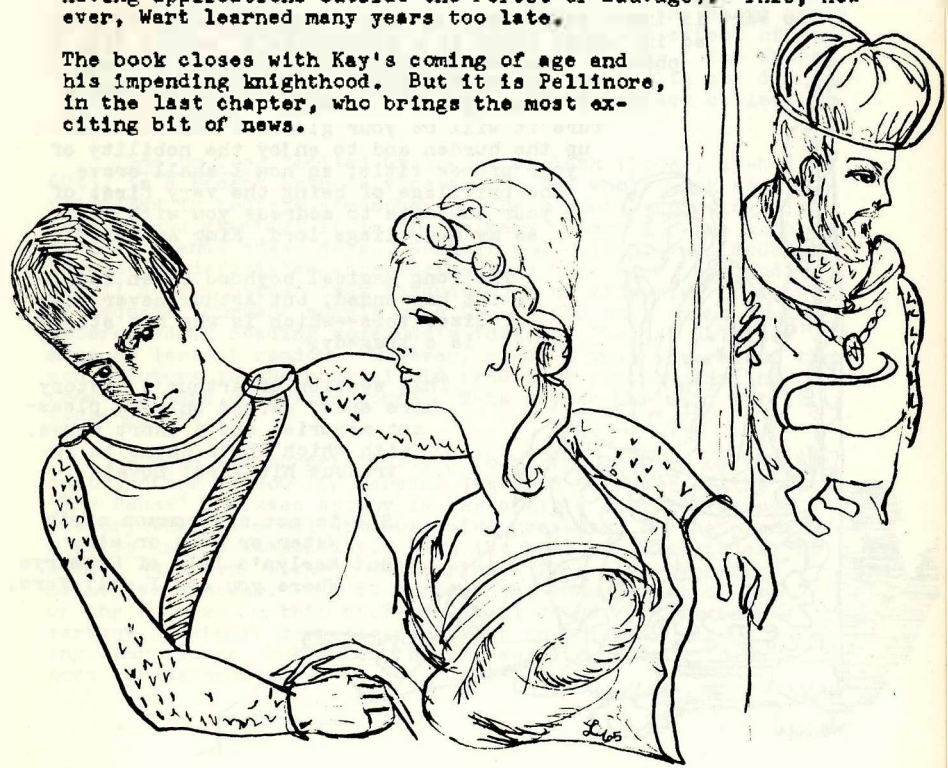
This sample suggests that in his descriptions of people White borders on the Dickenesque; and the inclination includes the places, times, and incidents which comprise their lives, so that to read the book gives you the feeling of not having missed an hour of all the days lived by Wart in the Castle of the Forest Sauvage.

Most amusing of all, perhaps, are the short incidental sentences that are buttered in among the hordes of nonsense and inconsequences. "Ah, a magician," said Sir Ector, putting on his glasses and looking closely at Merlyn. "White Magic, I hope?"

And the little stabs..."Everybody went to Church in those days, and liked it."

With the advent of Merlyn as Wart's tutor, we are led through chapter after chapter of natural history. It is not clear at first why White should include so many chapters in describing through Wart's eyes the lives of fish, hawks, geese, hedgehogs, etc; for these perceptions of nature apparently serve only as a grandiose footnote to the footnote that Arthur kept a small zoo in a tower of the castle. But slowly the parallel is drawn: man is not so different from the animals in his desires and instincts (with the Survival of the Fittest having applications outside the Forest of Sauvage). This, however, Wart learned many years too late.

The book closes with Kay's coming of age and his impending knighthood. But it is Pellinore, in the last chapter, who brings the most exciting bit of news.



"I say," he exclaimed, "Do you know? Have you heard? Is it a secret, what?"

"Is what a secret, what?" they asked him.

"Why the King," cried his majesty, "You know about the King?"

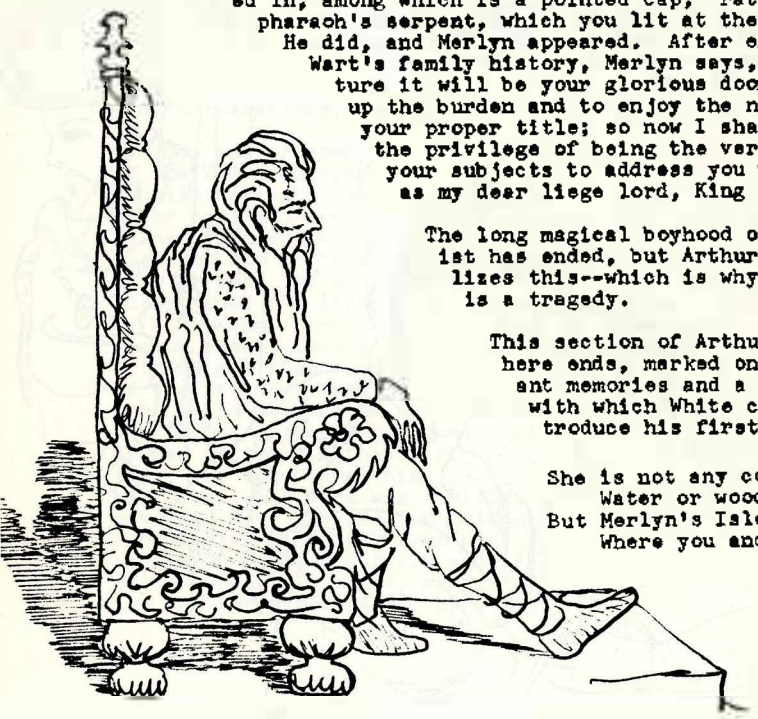
"What's the matter with the King?" inquired Sir Ector. "You don't say he's comin' down to hunt with those demned hounds of his or anythin' like that?"

"He's dead," cried King Pellinore tragically. "He's dead, poor fella, and can't hunt any more...It's solemn isn't it? What? Uther the Conqueror, 1066 to 1266."

(White does not explain where he got these dates and the life-span of two hundred years, which perhaps is intended to add a note of legendary greatness or to cover the author's own hazy idea of the story's temporal location.)

The two hundred year old King Pendragon was the Wart's father, a fact which only Merlyn knew. But shortly, all England knew it, for only the son of Pendragon, it was written, could pull his sword, Excalibur, from the stone. This Arthur did, quite by accident, and set the island to gossip, especially the Scottish clan of Orkney. For now it was certain that the Earl of Cornwall's wife, Ingraine, had bourne a son of her rape by Pendragon, so that another hated Pendragon ruled in London.

So Wart is installed on the throne. Innumerable gifts poured in, among which is a pointed cap, "rather like a pharaoh's serpent, which you lit at the top end." He did, and Merlyn appeared. After explaining Wart's family history, Merlyn says, "..In future it will be your glorious doom to take up the burden and to enjoy the nobility of your proper title; so now I shall crave the privilege of being the very first of your subjects to address you with it.. as my dear liege lord, King Arthur."



The long magical boyhood of an idealist has ended, but Arthur never realizes this--which is why his story is a tragedy.

This section of Arthur's history here ends, marked only by pleasant memories and a short verse, with which White chose to introduce his first novel:

She is not any common earth
Water or wood or air,
But Merlyn's Isle of Gramarye
Where you and I will fare.

Jim Harmon — The SF Story in Paperback

Today's science-fiction magazines are filled almost completely by a new springtide of youthful, prolific people full of silly ideas and an artless craft of writing. There is no doubt a number of psychological reasons why older hands have become idle; primarily the proximity of factual space flight dwarfs the importance of fictional pioneering. Another reason may be that s.f. represents a hideous market to people who make their living from writing. It offers all the rewards of the cold, hard, cynical, and dictatorial editorial contact of the crassly commercial field, and all the pay and report schedule of the college poetry semi-annual. The erotic field --girlie books and sex novels--issued by genuine gangsters offers a more reliable market financially, and one sometimes thinks (erroneously) more opportunities for creativity.

As an s.f. reader (I make this distinction because being an s.f. fan seems to have absolutely nothing to do with reading the stuff anymore) I have always preferred the short story to the novel. To me, most s.f. novels have the effect of somebody labouriously explaining the point of a joke. For short stories I can't read the magazines very often with any degree of satisfaction, so I have turned to the paperback collection and anthology.

Time to Come, edited by August Derleth (Tower, 43-461, 60¢), is a recent anthology reissue. The whole book seems pointless in today's atmosphere. The thematic anthology is more than a gimmick; it is the primary reason for the anthology's existence these days. Conklin and Wollheim and McComas issued the definitive anthologies some time back, and Judith Merril does a better than adequate job of selecting from the inadequate current supply of s.f. I, for one, am no longer interested in reading somebody's ideas of "bests" selected more or less at random. However, since I knew several of the contributors to the book, I did read this random sampling from the bard of Arkham House. This may be Derleth, but it isn't August.

Perhaps not surprisingly, I found the stories by the two contributors I know (in varying degrees) the best of the lot. "The Pause" by Isaac Asimov is certainly a superior story, a story that is moral without being presented on the plane of a fairy tale's simplicity. Like the best of moral tales, it asks a question, without delivering a flat (and therefore pointless) answer. Yet it suffers the same defect of most of the stories in this book--it seems dated. It is only a variant on atomic doomsday, an event to which we may be drawing ever closer, but which in s.f. seems to belong to the noon of yesterday.

Arthur Jean Cox's story, "The Blight," even more has a mildly antique charm. Like virtually everything here it seems like that exceptional good story that did turn up in the Gernsback magazines. "The Blight" owes little in style or plot to any of the s.f. being written by Mr. Cox's contemporaries; it seems born full grown. It is a tale of Robinson Crusoe versus the Ants, meticulously worked, and forgivably flawed by the author's godlike compassion in pulling a Girl Friday out of a rabbit hutch.

The dated quality of the book is hardly helped by the hopeless artifacts of biographical notes, seemingly from the era of the biograph. This, with a lack of proper copyright identification, the elimination of authors' bylines from the contents page, conflicting lists on the flyleaf and back cover, and blurbs which are somewhat incoherent in other ways, reveals that "Tower" is a bit unfamiliar with s.f. anthologies, more at home with their "Midwood" sex novels. (The cover is pretty, though.)

The other stories by Poul Anderson, Philip K. Dick, Charles Beaumont, Clark Ashton Smith, Arthur C. Clarke, and Ross Rocklynne achieve a peak of period-flavoured adequacy, if one accepts the traditional conventions of gimmick science-fiction. (For instance, Mr. Anderson, to make his story work, asks us to accept the proposition that women wouldn't feel fear for a bug-eyed monster if they hadn't been told he was dangerous.)

I saved the worst for last. "Hole in the Sky" by another Cox, Irving Cox, Jr., may well be the worst science-fiction story ever written. It is at least the worst one I have ever read or had described to me. There is nothing quite so embarrassing as watching a man try to think who can't. Irving Cox is wrong about everything in this story except the spelling of some of the words. As I'm sure a few hundred people have pointed out, you can't see a black cat in a black room or a black hole against the blackness of space rushing to engulf a tired old Earth that can only be saved by some Deep Philosophical Thought like: Love is better than hate, because it's nicer.

I am told that when Time to Come came out in hardcover in 1954 none of these stories had appeared in magazines. There seems to be no particular reason for this: they break no taboos; with the single exception noted, they are no worse than the average story of the time. However, with the double exception noted, these stories are no better than the typical stories of that era, or perhaps even this. Unless you are a fan or friend of Isaac Asimov or Arthur Jean Cox, save your sixty cents, an inflated price that can still buy five twelve cent Stan Lee comic books, after all.

Among thematic anthologies I would include collections from one single magazine, particularly if that one had such an established editorial policy as Weird Tales.

Worlds of Weird (Pyramid, R-1125, 50¢) is identified as being "selected by Leo Margulies," with "introduction and notes by Sam Moskowitz." I think there is little doubt that Moskowitz, however, is a rather corporeal ghost. The anthology is about as good as the previous one called simply Weird Tales, perhaps really edited by Margulies, who owns the title and legacy of that magazine. "About as good" is pretty good. This collection from "Weird" can be read with enjoyment by anybody who doesn't think Analog is the greatest magazine of all time.

The illustrations by Virgil Finlay are worth the price of the book. People keep telling me Finlay's work isn't Fine Art, but to me it is fine and beautiful. Unfortunately, one of the best in the book, the first one, is reproduced so tiny that instead of being condensed, it is dissolved. The others are just large enough to be seen, if not fully appreciated.

The notes by Moskowitz are in large type. At times, one wishes they weren't. For a practical reason, it is difficult to tell where notes leave off and story begins. For an idealized reason, Moskowitz, who has never claimed to be the poet of the Age of Automation, seems to be in a stylistic abyss here, the result of sweating over too many cases of frozen orange juice, perhaps. In an introduction full of fact and opinion, Moskowitz sketches the man who is "the soul of Weird Tales." The problem is, it is difficult to tell which of two men he mentions, editor Farnsworth Wright and publisher J.C. Henneberger, is the subject of the piece and holder of the title. After carefully re-reading, I have decided he is writing about the still-living Henneberger, who Moskowitz has discovered almost as triumphantly as Ray Palmer found the living Jesse James. But even after re-reading, I'm not sure which man Moskowitz is writing about in certain places--Henneberger or Wright. The shorter notes are full of incongruous phrases pointing out that Robert E. Howard lived in the Texas of "six gun shoot offs" and that David H. Keller treated "the mentally insane," revealing a truly intimidating ability to choose precisely the mot injuste. All this only points out the sad loss to science-fiction in that one of its greatest scholars lacks a wider ranging curriculum.

The purpose of the anthology is to present a selection of the many types of stories "Weird" published. That it does, but in so doing, the book gives a somewhat inaccurate portrait of the magazine. While "Weird" used all these stories and others like them, they used mostly stories of ghosts, werewolves, vampires, warlocks, et al. Deviants hardly came more than one an issue.

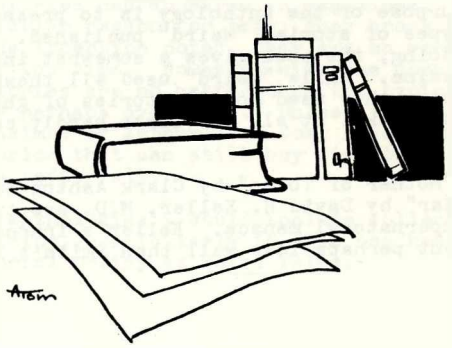
Only "Mother of Toads" by Clark Ashton Smith and "The Thing in the Cellar" by David H. Keller, M.D. are truly typical Weird Tales of supernatural menace. Keller's innocently simple style holds up, but perhaps less well than Smith's intricate, literate prose.

All the other stories are the exceptional, offbeat entries that graced those hallowed and profane pulp pages. The lead story, "Roads" by Seabury Quinn, is a boggling, trapdoor idea carried off nearly as well as humanly possible, impressive on a level of non-involvement. One can hardly turn the Easter Bunny into a ferocious werewolf in the face of the accumulation of cultural heritage; we all know where the Easter Bunny comes from, and it isn't from Transylvania.

"The Sapphire Goddess" by Nictzin Dyalhis and "The Valley of the Worm" by Robert E. Howard are very similar, swashbuckling romantic fantasies, both good of their type. It has occurred to me that one reason Howard and writers like him, including Edgar Rice Burroughs, are popular with a certain segment is that they write for people who read slowly. Something happens, something begins, something ends, within the space of a few pages, within five or six hundred words at times. Unfortunately, these same writers are not popular with another segment, including me, because it is the same thing happening over and over again. Howard, at least, has a genuine emotional involvement with his stories, raising the quality of his work above most sword opera.

"Giants in the Sky" by Frank Belknap Long (there seems to be a Long story in every anthology Margulies has anything to do with) is an adequate, charmingly antique science-fiction story; and "He That Hath Wings" by Edmond Hamilton is actually science-fiction, not fantasy, and a thoughtful, effective, poetic science-fiction story about a winged man. It is worth reading.

Despite the fact that the editor of this book (whoever he may be) did not dig deeply in the files of Weird Tales, selecting two stories from the February 1934 issue and two others from July 1938, the result is good. In contrast with a pointless jumble of new stories that seem dated in Derleth's Time to Come, Margulies and Moskowitz present a patterned, definitive selection of old stories that still seem fresh.



SELECTED LETTERS

2033 N. Vista Del Mar
Hollywood 90028

Dear Lee,

I'm afraid you stand accused--and on the basis of RQ #2 all but convicted--of serious, if not constructive, rumination in the area of science-fiction/fantasy. I should like personally to charge you with Malicious Thought-With-Intent-To-Stimulate--a heinous activity in fan circles... I'm sure the progeny of the Cosmic Circle (who seem always to be with us) will rise to the occasion.

Referring to Harry Warner's letter, I'm afraid that neither Harpers or the current supplement to the Birchites' American Opinion, Analog, affords much freedom to the writer. Let's fact it, until the science fiction writer is free to uncoil his extrapolatory sense in the direction of sex and religion (no holds barred) s.f. must remain a colourful but calcified wart on the body of Literature. Perhaps I'm wrong but I suspect there's a distinct caceotheus scribendi in this direction suppressed in our current phalanx of authors.

Sid Birchby's piece, "Sexual Symbolism in W.H. Hodgson," was fine creative analysis--perhaps more of Hodgson than of either The House on the Borderland or The Night Land, which are pivotal works deserving, I think, a long, hard (albeit sympathetic) look.

Most welcome, also, would be a "Faustian" style paper on the earlier Weird Tales--with the same sober yet sprite-like ebullient scholarship that characterises your effort. Fritz Leiber, I imagine, could handle this excellently, but regretably I suppose he's much too occupied for such labours.

Best Wishes,
Paul Kalin

Mr. Kalin's letter properly belonged in RQ #3, but was omitted through editorial oversight. Efforts by previous s.f. fans to prohibit thinking are discussed elsewhere in this issue.

6901 Strathmore St.
Chevy Chase, Md. 20015

Dear Leland:

Herewith some brief comments on RQ #3...

Arthur Jean Cox just missed using the most appropriate title for his excellent article on Harry Bates: obviously it should have been "A Matter of Identity." Cox's conclusions seem to me to be probably correct, but I find his threads of reasoning to be rather fine-spun; it is almost as if he had reached his results by an intuitive process and then gone back to construct a logical justification, much as he says Bates builds his stories by linking compulsive scenes. Nevertheless, it is an impressive performance.

Your analysis of the early "doomed professor" type of science-fiction story was masterful, but I do think the Faustus Legend was not the one on which to place the most emphasis while looking for correspondences. It is an example of a motif that might be called the "infernal pact," and by choosing it, you slanted your discussion toward those stories which bore the closest resemblance to it. You did mention (in your comment on Harry Warner's letter in RQ #2) the "forbidden knowledge" motif, a close cousin, which is exemplified in things like Pandora, Prometheus, and the Tree in Eden, and which is probably closer to most of those primitive science-fiction stories, but I think you missed the best bet by not including a third variation of the same sort of thing, which can be called the "perilous gift." I'm thinking of myths like that of King Midas, and of the many folk versions of the story of the three wishes, in which an individual receives a great boon, and then by blundering causes disaster or a return to his previous condition. As legend, it is essentially a watered-down version of the other two, but it seems to me to bear the closest relationship to the majority of the simple-minded "discovery and catastrophe" stories of the Gernsback school...

It's interesting to note how old-fashioned, even for its date, was the science in those stories, and how close (as you pointed out) to the uninformed popular conceptions of science the writers were, even those writers who were scientists. After all, at that time classical causality and Newtonian mechanism had long been swept away, and the logical positivists of the Vienna Circle had done their wrecking job--but America was still quite provincial scientifically in the late Twenties. Contemporary science-fiction doesn't lag so far behind science, even though the majority of the writers are scientifically ignorant, but then the popular conception is not quite so distorted either.

Sincerely,

Banks Mebane

Mr. Cox originally had applied the title, "A Question of Identity," only to the first half of his essay; but your editor, in a hurry to print the magazine, assumed its relevance to the entire article. The editor must take responsibility for the inaccurate title, which should have been "Harry Bates" or (a less acceptable choice) "A Matter of Mind."

You must remember that discovery--whether literary or scientific--is nearly always "intuitive" in the sense that a relationship is perceived first and justified later. In the terminology of Hans Reichenbach (of the Vienna Circle) you must distinguish between the Context of Discovery and the Context of Justification.

---

423 Summit Ave.
Hagerstown, Maryland 21740

Dear Leland:

Arthur Jean Cox's essay is a remarkable performance. I usually grow sceptical when someone is as thorough as this with the fiction of a minor master in a minor subdivision of the literary universe. But in this instance, I would say that the critic Goes Too Far only in the fifth section of his study of Harry Bates.

At the same time, there is the danger of putting too much faith in findings of common themes and episodes in the works of one writer, is the critic doesn't make some effort to show that these common factors are not as easily found in other fiction by other men of the same general period. Thus, I believe that it would be just as easy to build a convincing case for the big-headed motif as a tradition in the science-fiction stories of the 1940's and the 1930's and possibly before and after those decades. The concept undoubtedly derived from the evolutionary theory and the assumption that brainier men of the future would need larger containers for their grey matter. There may have been some influence from the movies, where a man with a large cranium usually was given a juicy role as a mighty man of finance, a king, or some other character who might be assumed to have more intelligence than the average fellow. I remember wondering after I had read several stories about these future men with huge heads and withered bodies: how in the world do they get born, when even today the head is the portion of the infant that gives the mother the greatest trouble in childbirth? Even in the good science-fiction, this tradition may have held good; unless I'm misled by memory of an illustration, I believe that Odd John was supposed to have had an unduly large and almost hairless head.

Another special difficulty in analyzing fiction written for low-pay markets is this: common factors in a number of stories by a writer may reveal something about his subconscious, but they may also be nothing more remarkable than the author's system of repeating himself deliberately after finding a sort of story that sold.

In this particular case, I doubt that the difficulty is valid. It looks as if Bates tried to write good science-fiction stories after his long years of hack work on the lowest pulpzine level; it's hard to explain by any other means the rarity with which the Bates stories appeared over those 20 years and more. In any event, Cox makes one unquestionable point when he cites the manner in which a Bates story generally contains a scene or two of particular striking nature. He didn't cite the one that haunted my memory for years after I first read A Matter of Size: the unshaved faces of the thousand-plus duplicates of the hero.

Budrys did something that has long needed doing. There has been some sort of tabu operating against parody of Bradbury, which I'm at a loss to explain: he doesn't react violently when fans say nasty things about his fiction, his style is particularly vulnerable to being turned against itself, and his philosophy is inconsistent enough to be torn to pieces in this manner. Intentionally or not, Algis put a few genuinely effective things into this item. "The rolling-over of a mouse asleep in a loaf of bread" is memorable in a Walt Kelly manner and I felt touched in spite of myself by a woman who recognizes the importance of a pole for a boy to shinny up.

.....

You have performed a tremendous service to me and probably to all fandom and all science-fiction critics. The story in Amazing whose author forgot to change one western term to its space opera equivalent has become legendary. Everyone likes to bring it up in conversation, whenever people reminisce about the awful things that happened after Palmer changed the policy of Amazing Stories. But nobody to my knowledge has ever been able to say just which page in what issue...contained the blooper. To complete the great deed, all that is needed is to determine for certain which author was involved. Guy Archette is a pen-name, I assume.

I liked immensely the little sketches by Murray Kaufman. Several of them give a strange impression of twisting around the two-dimensional surface of the page and impinging on it only in the places where it intersects the three-dimensional locus where the entire drawing exists. I'm sure that I could get nightmares if I spent much more time looking at these pictures.

.....

Yrs., &c.,

Harry Warner, Jr.

I think it was Ray Palmer's successor, Howard Browne (who in a sense out palmered Ray Palmer) that accepted the "Guy Archette" opus. To ensure proper credit I must acknowledge that the incongruity in this s.f. Western was called to my attention by Ben Stark.

---

795 Independence Ave
Trenton, N.J. 08610

Dear Leland,

..."A Question of Identity" shows Cox's excellent ability to practice criticism...The essay was so good in fact, that I dug up some old INSIDES and read about a half dozen of Cox's previous articles. But this one is the best yet, with the possible exception of his essay on van Vogt. We need more serious critics like Cox in the s.f. field...

I hope you will continue to print more criticism; the only other publications that do so are S.F. Horizons and Epilogue. By all means--have Cox do more work. There are many major figures that haven't had anything done on them; how about a piece on some of Philip K. Dick's novels?

.....

I'd say your third issue is the best yet. I'm waiting for the next and I hope there will be many more after it.

Sincerely,

Walker Martin

I agree with this correspondent's remarks about A.J. Cox, and (to continue the Wild-West terminology) am sending a posse down to Los Angeles for the purpose of persuading him to do some more articles for us.

Rumour has it that Fred Whitledge is to edit a new magazine, tentatively titled Satorius, which will contain a revised version of Cox's essay on van Vogt. Further rumours concerning Whitledge's magazine will be printed as I receive them.

---

the evil of banality

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 190)

In the early Thirties the science-fiction fan was also a science-fiction reader, but during the last of this decade, as Sam Moskowitz observed, "...fans in the U.S. were gradually turning away from science-fiction...and becoming interested in fans as personalities." By the early Sixties this transformation was nearly complete: among "fans" the reader of science-fiction now had become the exception instead of the rule, as is verified by the existence of a new word--"sercon": serious and constructive--invented to designate the activities of such a person."Sercon" designates not the usual order of things--for which no special term would be necessary--but an abnormal mode of behavior.

Thus the pronouncement of 1938 still represented the viewpoint of a minority, whereas the corresponding statement in 1963 represented merely the "climate of opinion." This degeneration in the critical context, induced by the science-fiction fan's preoccupation with Self, will be discussed in future editorials.

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The Evil of Banality (part one)

During the past several decades American fan magazines have engaged in a continuous justification of triviality, and in this column I wish to list some of their arguments and to indicate some causes and results.

First, there is what may be called the explicit justification, as comprised, e.g., by the interdict on thinking. For, the argument runs, criticism entails cerebral effort; whereas science-fiction, being for fun, ought to require no work at all.

> There is a place for serious discussion...but I have to be serious eight hours a day at my job, another hour or two while reading the newspapers and listening to newscasts. Allowing eight hours for sleep, that leaves six hours to do as I please, and I'm not about to promote ulcers by being too serious during that period, too.
>
> (Donald Anderson, Cry #148, March 1961, p.44.)

Sometimes the interdict applies only to negative criticism, as when the reader is cautioned not to say anything unfavourable.

> I would suggest that if you do not like Thrilling Wonder Stories, do not knock it, but just don't buy it.
>
> (James Taurasi, Different, 1938, p.11.)

> I like ANALOG, psi and all. If you don't like it, don't buy it.
>
> (Stephen Hodes, Lightbeam #17, January 1963, p.3.)

(The early TWS, one recalls, was written for an audience with juvenile mentalities--as distinct from a merely juvenile audience. Analog, of course, was written for adults; but its emphasis on a particular theme (of whatever kind) also implied a decrease in things to say and in ways of saying them.)

We have, then, two instances of the same retort: if you dislike a magazine, do not buy it and (the implication runs) do not complain about it. In words of a righteously indignant author, "If you want literature, you can always read the Atlantic Monthly."

Here one might object that the interdicts cited above--essentially protests against protests--do not support my argument, since they would not have been issued without previous non-trivial literary evaluations of the magazines in question.

But we must remember that the dogma of Taurasi and Hodes were separated by a quarter century and that during this interval there had been a change in the general critical situation.

(continued on page 189)