



COMMUNITY

SEPTEMBER 1969

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 letters). Prepared with the aid of Stephen Campbell, also
 responsible for the cover, and Page 27. A REMARKABLE production.

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RAISON D'ETRE

S F COMMENTARY 6

oo

This Editorial-cum-lecture-platform emerges very differently from its original proposed format. Somewhere under a pile of letters lies a piece unsubtly titled A TRICKLE OF CONSCIOUSNESS. It contains the Reasons for Being a Fanzine Editor, the untapped sources of psychic pain which make me freak out on a typewriter once a month, the anguish and boredom that drive me away from the Real World, with its reality that increasingly resembles the most paranoid fantasies of Philip K Dick. See - you are yawning already - you've heard it all before - that is the reason why you run a fanzine, or read ANALOG, or take Aspro headache pills.

However, as the ferocious editor of this magazine, I would still inflicted it upon you if (a) the page numbers had not already run to 40, and (b) Leigh Edmonds had not told me that I should write a Leigh-Edmonds-type editorial. This seems a good idea, since the morbid Life-at-the-Gillespie-flat piece would have taken three pages. It's also a good idea, since I can steal one of Leigh Edmonds' ideas, and call this an Invitation to the Issue.

There are some people who still need to be invited. Or rather, there are some still not sending those little cheques or pieces of paper with odd pictures on them. Either the word has not yet gone around, or it has all too efficiently gone around. Charlie and Marsha Brown have reviewed the magazine in LOCUS, and so far there have been two inquiries. Sample copies are sent to new people each issue, to negligible effect.

But let me not complain, or at least not so early in the piece. Wait til you read the rest of the issue. 86 people have sent subscriptions, or sent letters, or arranged to trade magazines, and these friendly people include most of world's s f readers who have shown themselves concerned about the genre, and critical standards within the field. There have also been the only too valuable fans who just enjoy reading the thing.

Which brings me to the point of this part of the RAISON D'ETRE RAMBLE. The only effective method of advertising in this game is word-of-mouth. If you like the magazine, if you think it includes interesting and valuable material, then just mention it to some friends of yours (and tell them the subscription rates at the same time, of course). I don't want the circulation to go much over 200, but I would like far more of those 200 to be paid up subscribers. My wallet has been too empty during the last year -- the magazine will go on, no matter what, but you may not receive it.

Now I'll retrieve my paper smile from behind the book-case, paste it on my face, and... mmmmmumble gloob... ah, that's better. I thought that smile looked unfamiliar on me. Didn't suit the rest of my features. S F COMMENTARY 6, may I say with Fred-Pohl-modesty, is the best yet. (No, don't go and read it; I want

(Continued Page 25)

LETTERS TO A DYING FANZINE Comments on ASFRs 19 & 20

ANDY PORTER
55 Pineapple Street
Brooklyn NY 11201

It was very nice to receive ASFR 20 and confirm my suspicions that you were still alive. Perhaps not well, but as of a few days ago, definitely alive.

You seem to have become a statistic in the great fannish morass - starting out rather unknown, rapidly rising to the top of the fannish scrapheap, and then, in a final fit of (stfnal orgasm?) falling over the side to lay bent and/or broken in the shade of gafia. Anyway you now seem to be in the same position as a number of others I know: your high BNF-dom attained within a few short years and permanently assured by the thought that very few fans would dare go the crooked route that you've travelled, so you must be something special.

I feel a particular affection for your ~~life~~ writing style, which you so forcibly repressed in the old ASFR, and which you display so beautifully in your current publications. Given a bit of overseas postage and the inclination, you have the ability to become known as one of fandom's finest writers (you already are one, but shamefully un-famous) and the successor to Walt Willis that everyone seems to have been looking for during the past few years.

ASFR 20 has a certain quiet air to it, a definite hint that it is the end of the headland, the final point before the tumble into the sea. Any fanzine, I suppose, acquires much of the feeling of its editor. This issue contains somehow an air of finality that I felt even before I read your short note a few pages from the end. The magazine has the air of something which has been created from a simple beginning and built upward and upon itself until in the end it becomes simple and rudimentary again, not out of choice, but out of necessity. The feeling that Benet conveyed in "John Brown's Body": "Hurry, hurry, this is the last, the last of the '12 and the '21..." - and I suppose, in the very last passages of THE GREAT GATSBY, where that dock-light, out across Long Island Sound, grows ever more distant, no matter how fast and how far we travel toward it.

It is the feeling that we are left, suspended in a great void, with the sounds of existence thinned out and gone away from us, leaving ourselves alone, quiet, and somehow completely ended.

It is an altogether weird feeling, and one which is not dispelled by the humorous bit on the back cover. It is very odd. Then again, it may be myself, sitting typing in a quiet house on a Saturday night, and not really having eaten for some twenty hours.

JB: I didn't realize that no.20 would arouse feelings like this. If I had to think of a book to liken to that issue, my first thought would be Stevenson's WEIR OF HERMISTON. ::: With respect, I seriously doubt that I will ever become a second Walt Willis. I am too damned lazy to even become the first John Bangsund.

STUART LESLIE
59 Mary Street
Longueville NSW 2066

In regard to Sten Dahlskog's letter in no.19:
So-called "hard" sf is all very well, but it seems to me that the type of pure extrapolative story which he prefers is rather easy to write - witness

John Campbell's hacks - while truly emotionally stimulating stories are very difficult in any field. My favourite stories and authors (Delany, Zelazny, Ballard etc.) always seem to retain an intangible element - fantasy, to some degree. Even the detailed society and ecology etc of DUNE are overlaid by the shadow of strange paranormal talents and the workings of predestined Fate.

Sf writers have the whole universe to play around in, with imagination their only limit. Why restrict themselves to a narrow view of strictly scientifically (in the broad sense, i.e. including the social sciences) possible situations. Any literature is about man in the end, for that is what we are and we can never look at anything from any but a human point of view; but by using what we know to indicate what we may only partially understand or grasp, the s f author can create strange and wonderful and alien worlds, people and things (oh, who will replace Cordwainer Smith?). With all the as yet unimagined Cosmos to explore, why should an author bind himself too much to the already known? This type of story has its place, but to me ANALOG represents the failings of s f. The only certain thing about the future is that it will be like no one has imagined, and certainly as no one has predicted on projective lines. Man could be or do so much. Why restrict him to what is known?

CRUNDALL

Perth W A

(Telegram) (27th June 1969)

To: Thomas Marker, P O Box 109, Ferntree Gully.

You still cannot spell biased biased with two esses represent biological improbability.

JOHN FOYSTER

12 Glengariff Drive
Mulgrave
Vic 3170

(26th May 1969)

Yes, this is a red-letter day for you, matey - a genuine LoC on ASFR 20. My piece seems pretty bad on rereading it, and I remind you that Plutarch was the bloke who was really missed.

WHO KILLED SCIENCE FICTION? is written in a stilted and artificial language to which I have no objection. But when you slip, accidentally, from that tone, it upsets one's whole feeling. I'm hinting at an example here. One of the most horrific things about the writing of Brian Richards, is his lousy use of the third person. You fall into the same trap in the fifth para on Page 2 commencing 'Mr. Claphammer... - one finds a fusion...' and this is just ugly. Then in the para starting "Chapter four:" on Page 3 you use that ugly and, to me, almost meaningless construction "..... and what it is, he hires..." etc. These two faults seem to me to break up what is otherwise one of the best pieces of writing of this kind I've ever seen (somewhat improved from the earlier draft, too).

I see you print a poem by my old mate Alfie - I'd say that he wrote this just before the metho got him. I didn't know you'd inhabited Dudley Flats much, though. His name wasn't really Alfred Lord Tennyson, though: I remember him telling me once that he'd read it in a book and that it had a nice ring to it.

FRANZ ROTTENSTEINER

(8th June 1969)

A-2762 Ortmann
Felsenstrasse 20
Austria

I was very sorry to hear the news of ASFR's folding; I still can't quite believe it and hope you'll change your mind and throw yourself again into fanzine publishing. My own QUARBER

MERKUR is going on and I hope you've received my QMs - probably even read them?

Main reason for this letter is, of course, Sten Dahlskog's letter which calls for an answer.

I shall not answer all the points raised by Mr Dahlskog (since I doubt that the present editor would print a very long letter), but only those which seem the most important to me.

It may be a weary old complaint that "s f deals with the emotions, if at all, only in a formularized way": but that it is old doesn't make it any the less true. And I certainly do not think that scientists have no emotions, nor did I write anything to this effect. But I may ask, what have the scientists that appear in s f got to do with real scientists? Nor do I think that s f deals only with science, or, as Mr Dahlskog says, "and with the implications and consequences of science." I may indeed be guilty of not defining my terms, but do not believe it either necessary or possible to do it. Somewhere else I said that I do not care whether the substance of s f is called "speculation" or science or whatever, and I'll certainly grant Mr Dahlskog his addition. To be wholly honest, my opinion of most s f is similar to what Voltaire once said of the Holy Roman Empire: "It is called the Holy Roman Empire because it is neither Holy, nor Roman, nor an Empire." Science fiction is called s f because it has nothing to do with science and even less to do with fiction. Are you satisfied now, Mr Dahlskog? But as an ideal his own formulation is as acceptable as those of others.

Now I must admit that with the exception of Asimov's BELIEF I haven't read any of the stories he mentions, but I very much doubt that Raymond F Jones or Randall Garrett have the power to move an educated reader, and Frank Herbert's "emotional" stories strike me as completely lifeless and very dull.

Van Vogt is indeed intellectually interesting; here we have a sometimes ingenious mind, but a mind which sadly lacks the self-discipline it could have acquired by a formal education. He is principally of interest because he has managed to include in his fiction a good many of the pseudo-scientific theories and movements that infest our time. And I sure prefer Van Vogt any time to the "careful craftsman" Robert A Heinlein, whose thinking is just as warped and muddled.

I'd really like to learn what larger meaning Mr Blish has given his antimortalica. Sure, sure, his Okies live a little longer, and long life would be a fine thing. But what do the Okies make of their lives? Have they been able to give them more meaning, to do something useful, to enrich their experiences or whatever? They just live a little longer and that's all. If I did read in a newspaper that antimortalica had indeed been detected, I would be

just as moved as from reading A TRIUMPH OF TIME: nothing at all. That's one of the books where you say: "Yeah, immortality would be fine", but although the book has some content, it has no meaning.

I think Sten Dahlskog is confusing here mere content with treatment. How an author does something is more important than what he does. To give another example: sure, it would be a fine thing to be able to swing around in the jungle as Tarzan did and to speak the fine English that Tarzan's creator couldn't write. But does this appeal to our secret or not so secret wishes make a story meaningful?

Equally surely, some readers get some satisfaction and emotional titillation when Conan cleaves the skulls of his enemies, but nobody, that is, no literate reader, will think those stories either meaningful or emotionally gripping.

If s f, as Dahlskog claims, irritates humanists to the "point of incoherence", I'm quite willing to take apart any work of the anti-humanists and to show their intellectual poverty.

Like John Foyster, I wouldn't depend much on s f for intellectual stimulation. One has just to read some of the current thinking in sociology, psychology, physics, philosophy - name any field - and then compare it with the dull repetitious nonsense that passes for thinking in s f. Mr Dahlskog might ask proof for this; I cannot give it here, but I'll be glad to take apart any work I consider to be bad and which he may consider to be good. In particular, this applies to Mr Heinlein and Mr Blish.

I have nothing to add to what John Foyster said about classification.

As for my statement that in fiction technique is comparatively less important than in some other fields, different opinions are possible. In modern fiction, technique surely has played an increasing role, but I very much doubt the theory of the long training in writing as it is advanced in s f circles: that the writer begins by writing short stories, collecting rejects at first, finally makes the breakthrough into the prozines and then, after he has learned something about the short-story, proceeds to write longer work. I wonder what all the other writers did, who perhaps never wrote for a magazine? And there are people who begin by writing a BUDDENBROOKS. For all their "careful training", most s f writers aren't yet fit to leave the kindergarten of writing.

HAL COLEBATCH

27 Portland St
Nedlands WA

Very sorry to see ASFR seems to have folded. As former editor of a little magazine, let me say I think the wonder was not that it did fold, but that it endured as well as it did.

(I did give it a mention in a rather rambling little survey of s f in WESTERLY recently. I'll send a cutting when I can get one).

Some future historian of Australian s f may ponder on the story of ASFR dying in 1969, the one year when a big slice of the moronic masses might have been captured and led by the nose to having their imaginations brutally forced open, and, who knows, perhaps even enriched. Oh well.

Still interested in getting good stuff on Ballard (vague plans for a biog). Still prepared to pay for it.

RICHARD E GEIS

(31st May 1969)

SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW

P O Box 3116

Santa Monica

California 90403

U S A

ASFR No 20 is a lie, of course.

It isn't that at all. It is

SCYTHROP in a clever plastic disguise.

But it is worth much more than what-
ever you charged for it, if only for
the cover quote. I fall numb at the
beauty of that line. Did you make

it up? I cannot give any kind of actual reality to Gryll Grange
or Thomas Love Peacock. They are beyond credence - but you are
not.

CREATH THORNE

(11th June 1969)

Route 3, Box 80

Savannah Mo 64485

U S A

I eagerly await the further

chronicling of the exploits and

adventures of Cosmo Claphanger.

I particularly like "Konx Ompax"

with its delightful punch line:

"A typical problem in Biblical Accountancy, and not as complex as
some I could mention".

I enjoyed Foyster's article. Actually, I think if he looked into
the subject he would probably find a good deal of proto-fantasy-stf
material in Roman and Hellenistic literature. I am no classical
scholar, but The Golden Ass of Apuleius comes to mind - and there
are many other products of the mystery cults that used fantastic
elements in the same vein as Apuleius that are extant. An inves-
tigation into the neo-Platonists might also prove fruitful, although
this is some kind of a wild guess. And then, of course, there's the
Bible - that has a large number of fantastic elements in it - as
any MBA should be able to total up for you.

Peacock material also enjoyed. "More, more!"

JACK WODHAMS

(24th June 1969)

P O Box 48

Caboolture

Qld 4510

Naturally ANALOG's circulation

figures have risen - what else is

to be expected when its Aussie-

derived content has also

comparably grown? Not that I am

suggesting that this is more than just coincidence, but - psi is
psi, and my Aborigine helper has been taking some fancy steps in his
emu feathers lately.

I don't know about the evils of condensing novels but, alas, I must
confess to being dismayed by your editing additions and subtractions
in ASFR No 19. I did not quite know what you had in mind when you
asked. I thought that I did not care what you did with my pieces,
but find that I do. My fault. Now if what I write is a heap of
crap, I would prefer it to stand, if printed, in unadulterated form,
an abortion maybe, but one alone that I can take responsibility for.
Sorry, lad, but you have made me unhappy, and sadly I must request
you to indulge no like tampering in the future. You have my high
regard, and I am sure you just thought that it was a good idea at
the time.

JAMES BLISH

2 Fisherman's Retreat
St Peter St
Marlow
Bucks.
England

(23rd August 1969)

Glad to see ASFR back, even in its present bellicose mood.

There are some factual errors in Franz Rottensteiner's review of A TORRENT OF FACES. He devotes considerable space to establishing that the asteroid Flavia is not

radioactive, but that we expect a lot of radiation sickness and mutation near its impact point all the same. It seems strange to find an s f critic, writing two and a half decades after Hiroshima, who thinks radioactivity is the only possible source of hard radiation. The fact is that all meteors produce ionization as they burn ("burn" is the wrong word; they vaporize: but "burn" is the word he uses), and that a rock as big as the one described would produce an extensive plasma cloud (we say so in the text) which would emit, among other things, a lot of extremely hard X-rays. The fact that we compare the explosive force of the asteroid to that of a nuclear bomb does not mean that we think it is one.

This accounts in toto for Biond's preference for the impact over turning the asteroid into a gigantic radioactive cloud. At the impact, the lethal effect of the X-rays will be confined to a circle around it two hundred miles in diameter, as is stated in part of the text which Herr Rottensteiner quotes. There will be some induced radioactivity as well, some of which will be dispersed by the fireball, the vaporization and the winds; but the entry of an immense radioactive cloud into the atmosphere would be a far more serious proposition, since it would distribute all over the world heavy radioactive nuclei, most of which would have very long half-lives. Mr Rottensteiner's statement that "the cloud is more harmless the bigger it is" is flatly wrong; perhaps he is thinking of the dilution of a cloud of chemically lethal gas, but no such comparison is possible - there is no amount of radiation, no matter how small, which is "harmless", and the effects of an intense local dose over a world-wide less intense one are clearly to be preferred.

"The problems are all of a technical nature, never psychological, philosophical or political." Irrespective of how well we handled the situations involved, how would Mr Rottensteiner classify Mr Biond's morbid fascination with Marg't Splain? His permitting this fascination to deflect his attention from an urgent official message? Her allowing her romantic view of an interstellar drive to blind her to the fact that emigration is no answer to over-population? Her attempt to wreck the disaster plans by announcing the existence of such a drive on virtually no evidence? The eventual open hostility between the two which results in Biond's expulsion from Prime Center? Dorothy Sumter's unwillingness to have children by Tioru? Her panic in his world of the deeps, and his panic in her world of the massed Drylanders? Kim Wernicke's inability to destroy the life of Starved Rock Preserve, of which she is custodian? Mr Rottensteiner is at liberty to find any and all of these situations - and there are others like them that we could cite - incredible, or loused up by the authors, but we submit that not a one of them can sanely be classified as "technical".

"So we have to conclude that the only reason why there is no birth control is that the rulers didn't think of it." Wrong. Biond and Marg't discuss it in some detail in Chapter Three.

"God, one is inclined to believe, sent a meteor to punish the wicked humanitarians for their sins." There is no mention of God in the book in this context, nor is there any faceless group of humanitarians. Biond blames himself and the administrative group ~~for which he stands. It says so, right there on the page in~~ simple English.

That we depict the masses in this novel as being mostly stupid is a simple facing of the most likely possibility. The masses are stupid right now, though it may not be entirely their fault; and the leaching-out of the gene pool which would be inevitable in producing a population of one thousand billions would drive the intelligence level still farther down - probably farther than we have allowed for.

"...and full of xenophobia (one of the cliches of S F)." Well, so is Copernical astronomy, I suppose. One hates to have to tell Mr Rottensteiner that xenophobia is a major fact of present-day life; and in the novel, the administration has deliberately fostered it, as a matter of official policy, to discourage people from travelling, as is carefully explained in the first chapter. We are sorry such technical details bore Mr Rottensteiner, but it is a little irritating to see him fail to read them and then accuse us of not having faced up to them.

Finally, a piece of mind-reading: "psi-powers...thrown in for no good reason other than, perhaps, being able to sell a portion of the book (THE PIPER OF DIS) to Campbell." THE PIPER OF DIS is the section about the Jones Convention, and is so titled in the book; the section Mr Rottensteiner refers to was called TO LOVE ANOTHER in the magazine version. The extremely limited psi-power in question was introduced to account for the Triton Storm's trick of entering and leaving unseen, which in turn serves a symbolological function in the novel. As for our assumptions about sales GALAXY had previously published two other sections of the book and ~~we naturally thought it likely that it would take this one too.~~ We were surprised when Fred turned it down; that our agent next sent it to Campbell was a mechanical operation based solely on the pay-rates then (and now) prevailing in the field. The notion that either Norman or I needed to push one of John Campbell's buttons to sell a science-fiction story might possibly have been dispelled by a glance at the Day and MIT Indices. Since Mr Rottensteiner didn't take the trouble, I assure him that if I introduce something psionic into a story (which I do very rarely - and in fact in this case the idea was Norman's, though I at once felt that it was both ingenious and useful) I do so solely for literary reasons, whether good or bad.

So much for errors, though there are more. I would like to add here, with perhaps less diffidence than an author is supposed to exhibit in the face of a bad review, a consideration which never seems to occur to dogmatic, polemic moralists like Mr Rottensteiner.

To be accused of bad technique, with demonstration, is good for a writer. But to be attacked ad hominem, and accused of cheating and dishonesty, is not only useless, but painful. Or: not only

painful, but useless. If Norman Knight and I are dishonest writers, Mr Rottensteiner cannot reform us. If we are not dishonest, but only inept, he cannot improve us by accusing us of cheating. All he can do by looking down upon us from his higher moral plane is to make us ask why he considers that he is more honest than we are: and his performance in this review does not appear to be much superior to our own 18-year struggle with our complex and recalcitrant book. A TORRENT OF FACES may be a very bad book - we dislike parts of it ourselves - but there is no conscious dishonesty in it from my hand, and after more than 20 years of close association with Norman L Knight (about which Mr Rottensteiner knows nothing but what appears in our preface) I can testify that Mr Rottensteiner has shown himself unfit to shine his shoes, let alone pass moral judgments upon him, by faking an acquaintanceship with a book half by Norman which Mr Rottensteiner has read so badly that his review quite ignores the text.

I say nothing of what George Turner calls "good manners". This is a lost cause. But if a critic wishes to impugn an author's motives and morals, it is a simple act of self-protection for him to examine, first, his own.

***brg** It's me at last, much good may it do this Letter Column. All of the above letters were addressed to either one of two Johns, Bangsund or Foyster. That neither of them provided witty and/or barbed replies to those letters cannot be helped: SCYTHROP is still coming, with SFC G well in its vanguard. Mr Blish's last two paragraphs are echoed elsewhere in this issue, with even less justice. Franz Rottensteiner may conduct his own defence or otherwise - my own observation is that it is extremely difficult to fully analyse a novel that you actively dislike. I can think of novels I have "reviewed" that were difficult to approach a second time - you might know the old one about a child suppressing the memory of that which it dislikes, and dwelling on the enjoyable. Maybe A TORRENT OF FACES was but one victim of a syndrome.

BRUCE GILLESPIE

(10th August 1969)

P O Box 30
Sacchus Marsh
Vic 3340

The last ASFR - and a fine finale. The SCYTHROP origins tend to show, but never mind. All the better advertisement for SCYTHROP.

There's always the possibility that Cosmo Claphanger may have become bogged down in a small country secondary school in the first chapter of his life story, and, at best, written BUG JACK CHIPS, or maybe ROARING SPINRADS. In either case, the result would have been disastrous for Cosmo, if not for his writing. As it is, we can only wonder at his success in combining within one existence all the jokes overbattered around Halliford House. Presumably he is a frequent visitor to the Bangsunds, where he vainly waves BUG JACK DEMPSEY in the face of the resident genius, and implores him to write a sequel. John Bangsund smiles, and places another stencil in the typewriter. Claphanger's face falls, and wonders whether an article for SCYTHROP would come sooner. Upon reflection, he returns to writing B.J.DEMPSEY.

S F COMMENTARY FEATURE REVIEW No 1

R J N Gibson

[illegible]

Reviewed:

LEVEL 7

from a novel by Mordecai Roshwall

TV script by J B Priestley

BBC series:

OUT OF THE UNKNOWN

X 127: I still can't convince myself we're really at war. It seems like another exercise.

X 117: That's all it is down here. We got sent to the right place, man.

X 127: Didn't you like anything up there?

X 117: Not one damn little thing. Let it fry.

Well, that's war from the viewpoint of Mordecai Roshwall's subterranean

button-pressers. An unreal thing, just a computerized wall map gradually blackening as radiation spreads according to a predetermined mathematical formula.

This videotape play is in my view, as damning a piece of fiction" as Kubrick's DR STRANGELOVE. The one difference is that we are not even given the relief of cold laughter a la Kubrick as events go from sickness to inevitable death.

What makes LEVEL 7 still more horrifying is the fact that most of us have actually seen documentary films on the real LEVEL 7s and their occupants, which and who are spread all across the Northern hemisphere. The missile bunkers exist. So do the button-pushers. We are merely waiting for somebody to say: "Let it fry", or the equivalent of that in military jargon.

J B Priestley made, I think, an excellent conversion of Roshwall's novel, fitting it almost perfectly to the needs of the electronic medium. I say "almost", because there were times when Priestley used unnecessary dialogue to describe what we could see happening on our screens, a fault which many TV writers make. This was completely forgivable, for the overall impact of the play was so powerful that I did not have time to consider even this slip until the story had finished.

A 10, the Commander-in-Charge of Level 7's missile launching equipment, including people, is a more forbidding authoritarian than any of the neurotics of Dr Strangelove in. He is a Montgomery type, one convinced that discipline and personal anonymity are the only answers for a well-run world. You get the feeling that A 10 is a professional eunuch.

But if A 10 is a professional eunuch, the female commandant, A 15, is a dried-up nun, or desexed hospital matron: take your choice. The moment the women arrive for their familiarization lecture she launches into a spiel, all very detached, about the sex problem. It seems that marriages are to be encouraged in order to produce new generations of little button-pressers. The newly-weds, after they have been given their "M for Married" badges, are allowed to use the marriage quarters for one sexual hour of Level 7's roster, this being considered apparently an extreme act of benevolence by the tidy minds who keep order in underground affairs.

Level 7 is the ultimate in militaristic Utopias - everyone obedient, everyone under observation, everyone servile.

However, even in this Utopian setting, human rebels do exist. As an example, X 127 becomes ill after eating a forbidden chocolate. It doesn't go well with the astronaut-like health foods on which everyone is forced to live. X 117, who is probably the most human of all the human troglodytes, suffers paralysis in the arm because of his emotional inability to press the buttons which could destroy mankind. X 117, incidentally, is the first to undergo a frontal lobotomy cure. He is later replaced by a second man to carry his number. Even A 10, the duty-crazy commander, commits suicide, upon hearing of the death of his old military buddy. The death of the entire world is an abstraction to him. Only the death of his friend has reality.

One of the most unattractive characters in LEVEL 7 (leaving aside the replacement for the first X 117) is the doctor, who, one gathers,

operates the lobotomy clinic for those deviating from the rigid norm. He also gives pep talks about the undoubted advantages of living on Level 7 - pure air, no smog, no grimy crowds, and so on. He is particularly enthusiastic about the dietary fare of the place, even though it makes some stomachs too weak to cope with rich foods like chocolate.

The only young woman we get to know, however superficially, is X 127's wife. She believes in the underground life, though she misses flowers, for it makes her feel secure. Security, it appears, is all she wants for herself and her children. This would be natural enough in a really human environment, but it does not seem so in the claustrophobic and depersonalized atmosphere of an endless-corridor missile bunker.

The final demise of all the personnel of Level 7, who die like people with names despite their numbers, is as hopeless a scene as anybody could imagine, as despairing as our age. X 127 comforts his radiation-poisoned wife with the thought that perhaps somebody might survive "in a deep mine-shaft in Australia". Even the pep-talking, propagandist doctor finally confesses that everything he has been doing is wrong.

The horror of LEVEL 7 consists chiefly in its indirect approach to nuclear war. We don't see the detailed torment of bombs annihilating men and women en masse, as in THE WAR GAME. We view the whole affair as an exercise, sterile, streamlined and plastic-wrapped. One of the characters quoted says, if you remember: "An exercise: that's all it is down here." The filth, the pain, the agony of war, particularly nuclear war, we can all understand, or at least imagine. What is more horrible are the unblood-stained book-keepers, the men who press the buttons, who compute the mega-deaths as abstractions. In WAR AND PEACE, you may remember the French officer who calmly signs away the lives of those condemned to firing squads, not even looking up to see the colour of their hair.

My own feeling was that not only is LEVEL 7 superb art - it is propaganda for humanity, for the heart, which is the only propaganda worth listening to. Art need not, cannot, be totally divorced from what is happening in the world. Tolstoy, Dickens, Zola, Shelley, Godwin, Voltaire, even Kubrick, make their own personal statements on issues about which we should all think. Bad propagandistic art is that which concentrates on pushing particular religions and ideologies. Good propaganda art is the art of the human heart.

There can be an overkill in films and stories dealing with particular moral issues like nuclear war, but I don't think we have reached the overkill point just yet. I believe we should be reminded at least once each year that the problem has not evaporated, that the Bombs are still with us. If our memories are jogged and our consciences awakened by such excellent works as LEVEL 7 and DR STRANGELOVE, I don't think we ought to complain about it.

As for OUT OF THE UNKNOWN - the second series promises to be even better than the first, and the first was the best filmed, or videotaped s f to be seen on any kind of screen. The series lacks only the expert special effects of Hollywood blockbusters, but makes up for it with good stories - which is why we like s f anyway.

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L A U G H A L O N G W I T H S I G M U N D A L D I S S

S F COMMENTARY FEATURE REVIEW No 2

Bruce R Gillespie

oo

Reviewed:

INTANGIBLES INC. & OTHER STORIES

by BRIAN W ALDISS

Faber & Faber : 1969

197 pp : \$A.2.95

Brian Aldiss makes it hard for his reviewers. No sooner do we long-suffering gentlemen find out what Aldiss was doing in his last book, than Brian Aldiss goes ahead and writes a completely different type of masterwork. The reviewer must be like the GP who performs tonsillectomies in the mornings and brain surgery in the afternoons.

Brian Aldiss' latest collection of novellas, INTANGIBLES INC & OTHER STORIES, is particularly unsettling. Two of the stories,

INTANGIBLES INC, and the original section of NEANDERTHAL PLANET, come from the late 1950s. Aldiss' first novel had only just been published at that time. The other three stories come from one of the most enterprising periods in Aldiss' career - the era of AN AGE, stories like MAN IN HIS TIME, and the beginnings of the Acid Head stories. Since this current collection was assembled, yet another Brian Aldiss has emerged, but that is another story.

This collection therefore represents an encapsulation of Brian Aldiss' career. It leaves out several highpoints, particularly the period of stylish entertainments that were featured in the collection THE SALIVA TREE. However, these stories form a tenuous unity, despite the decade that separates the two halves of the book. The unity is not one of theme or style - rather it is one of intention. The broad theme of speculative fiction includes such questions as What is Man? and, Where Is Man Headed? Aldiss asks these questions in a similar way in all five stories.

To illustrate, let me take the stories in the order in which they were first published:

1959 : INTANGIBLES INC

On the surface, INTANGIBLES INC is a slight story: it looks the type of wish-fulfilment fantasy that Carnell used to publish and Ed Ferman still does. You may remember that it tells the story of the mysterious salesman who drops in on Arthur and Mabel one day, and offers them some "intangibles". During their first meeting, the salesman manages to challenge Arthur, during the whole of his life-time, to keep two pepper-pots on the table where he places them in a pout of resolution. The salesman's challenge is sly and irresistible:

"Here's a little test for you," he said. "I put these two pots here. How long could you keep them here, without moving them, without touching them at all, in exactly that same place?"

For just a moment, Arthur hesitated as if grappling with the perspectives of time.

"As long as I liked," he said stubbornly.

"No, you couldn't," the visitor contradicted.

"Course I could! ... I'll bet you I can keep those pots untouched on that table for a lifetime - my lifetime!"

The resolution is formed out of stubbornness on Arthur's part and playfulness on the part of the salesman. Arthur does spend his life maintaining those pots on the table. They provide the "intangibles" that provide substitutes for Arthur's worries about his own purposelessness.

This is not a story of triumph, however. For a start, the salesman, apart from his obviously supernatural origin, is an ambiguous figure. He is pictured during the first half of the story as a never-aging sprite who wanders around doing supernatural good. We must have our doubts about the effects of his work, although not about his good intentions, when we read the following exchange. The "crinkled old gentleman" returns many years later to see how Arthur's resolution works out:

"You mean to say you've folks everywhere guarding salt-pots?" Mabel said, fidgeting because she could hear the two-year-old crying out in the yard.

"Oh, they don't only guard salt-pots," the crinkled man said. "Some of them spend their lives collecting match-box tops, or sticking little stamps in albums, or writing words in books, or hoarding coins, or running other people's lives. Sometimes I help them, sometimes they manage on their own. I can see you two are doing fine."

This is not the Chinese genie who offers a cave-full of diamonds and a beautiful princess as well. The genial salesman specializes in perpetuating the bourgeois sins, and produces petty careers based on miniature ambitions. His only offerings comprise thin carrots waved in front of meagre donkeys. The road to Hell may be paved with good intentions, but the process is all the more sinister if the Devil is the most well-intentioned of the lot.

The poverty of the ambition shows up in the very believable poverty of the salesman's results. Aldiss includes a wry twist at the end which demonstrates a point that is almost obscured by the superficial simplicities of the story: that no ambition, no placebo, is an adequate substitute for the comprehension of his own destiny by the individual human being.

1960 : NEANDERTHAL PLANET (originally A TOUCH OF NEANDERTHAL)

The original story, A TOUCH OF NEANDERTHAL forms the nucleus of NEANDERTHAL PLANET. The new "story" is simply padding of several thousand words each on either end of the original story.

Like the original story, and like INTANGIBLES INC, NEANDERTHAL PLANET is a rough-hewn story. Aldiss was not always the master prose-craftsman that he now is. In INTANGIBLES INC, the reader becomes very annoyed with that "crinkled old man": the cliché is too bald to carry the reader's interest.

NEANDERTHAL PLANET, most annoyingly, lurches along like an electric toy train with a short circuit in the rail. The plot transitions are too abrupt; many of the details are half-described. Most of the story is a mixture of flashy whimsy and Campbell-like lecturing. The theory behind all the quare happ'nings is as unlikely as that which pervades AN AGE, but unlike that novel, demonstrates its point with all the subtlety of a Heinlein grok-session. Aldiss was still bound by many of the chains of his genre in 1960. At that time, Aldiss' idea of a gimmick was:

"Don't you begin to see it historically, Keith? Western man with this clashing double heritage in him has always been restless. Freud's theory of the id comes near to labelling the Neanderthal survivor in us. Arthur Koestler also came close. All civilization can be interpreted as a Cro-Magnon attempt to vanquish that survivor, and to escape from the irrational it represents - yet at the same time the alien layer is a rich source for all artists, dreamers, and creators: because it is the very well of magic."

Not the most inspiring Aldiss prose you could read, but the main

theme of the collection is already stated. I doubt whether Aldiss ever really entertained this sham race theory - but he always sees the duality (or, if he is a true Freudian, the triplicity) of man.

Similarly, Aldiss' idea of a moving mystic experience in NEANDERTHAL PLANET is:

He sang and waved his arms, a tall figure that woke in Anderson untraceable memories. The dancers - if their rhythmic shuffle might be called a dance - responded with low cries. The total effect, if not beautiful, was oddly moving. Hypnotized, Anderson watched. He found that his head was nodding in time to the chant.

Phrases like "untraceable memories" and "oddly moving" may not be your idea of communicative language, but there is more than a vague feeling about NEANDERTHAL PLANET that was later greatly amplified in AN AGE's hippie happening at the start/finish of time.

The original section of NEANDERTHAL PLANET tells of the landing of an investigator from Earth, named Anderson. The planet is called Nehru II and was founded by a group of drop-out intellectuals from Earth. Instead of a creative colony, there shuffles only a grubby mob of near-apes. One faction of them has discovered and exploited the "Neanderthal Layer" in Man's brain, and Anderson is also forced to submit to the psychological influence of the planet. The story finishes on a dull note - as if AN AGE had been written by Mack Reynolds.

For this collection of stories, Aldiss slaps on a heterogeneous cake of mildly interesting material that does not alter the direction of the original. Aldiss' only joke in the story is to name his explorer-cum-science fiction writer Anderson.

With INTANGIBLES INC and NEANDERTHAL PLANET, Aldiss fires the first stage in his upward assault on the question "What Is a Man?" (or, as it came out in its negative forms some years ago, WHO CAN REPLACE A MAN?). The two stories are minor sputters, it is true, but Arthur, Mabel and Anderson greatly resemble the Randy Seniors and Jake Byrnes of the more recent stories.

1967 : RANDY'S SYNDROME

To cut from 1960 to 1967, as Aldiss does in this collection, is to ignore the central span that supports the main superstructure of Aldiss' most substantial work. It leaves out the span from NON-STOP to EARTHWORKS, in fact.

One meets the Brian Aldiss of RANDY'S SYNDROME as a writer who has now become complete master of the written word, who has left behind the grosser problems of craftsmanship and seriously turned to the really interesting literary problems. And yet it is the same man - the ill-clad potential artist now flourishing very rich verbal clothes. The three stories, RANDY'S SYNDROME, SEND HER VICTORIOUS and SINCE THE ASSASSINATION, appear like the Aurora Australis after a fireworks display. And if the Aurora seems a melodramatic light-show after the more dangerous fire-crackers, who is complaining? Aldiss has likened himself to a magician of words - now the illusions are complete and the revelations penetrate.

Before discussion of RANDY'S SYNDROME, some generalities. The later three stories share some notable quirks with the earlier two. All five were written for the American market, and concern themselves with specifically American problems and try to see things from an American viewpoint. Because Aldiss' mind is particularly unAmerican, this emphasis does not entirely succeed. There is an international flavour here that is quite different from some of the very British whimsy in the SALIVA TREE stories.

Because Aldiss is not American, and sees USA from a British vantage point, he shows the mechanics of American civilization unflatteringly. As a result of this, a further impression that links all five stories, is the feeling that Aldiss rides in the troughs of experience in these stories, not the more zesty wave-tops. There is much courage in these stories, but it has a blunt, unheroic quality that may daunt the Pollyannas of science fiction. For myself, this quality is the main pointer to the authenticity of feeling in these stories.

For instance, the U S A of RANDY'S SYNDROME is definitely not a place for heroes, not even John Bangsund's "heroic professionals". It is barely a place for human beings: in the first few paragraphs the numbered, tabbed and sorted citizens are likened to parasites on a swallow's leg. The dungeons of underground skyscrapers form the legs for sun-seeking commuters to climb upon. The situation is over-familiar in science fiction stories, but deftly created in the first couple of pages of the story.

Aldiss tells the story of one struggling husband-wife team, who are, among other things, seeking an apartment nearer the Sun, and expecting a baby. The baby in the womb already knows its name - Randy Junior.

RANDY'S SYNDROME concerns the baby that will not be born, and then the universal revolution of all the babies who collectively refuse to enter a world unacceptable to them. There is an adequate conclusion to this worrying situation, but I leave that to you.

The story sounds like THE WANTING SEED in reverse, and it features the same suspect Freudian mysticism that made Burgess' book both a stimulating and an annoying brain-teaser. In their science fiction manifestation, the ideas emerge something like this:

"(Randy, Jr) says that to him and his kind, the foetuses, their life is the only life, the only complete life, the only life without isolation. The birth of a human being is the death of a foetus. In human religions which spoke of an afterlife, it was only a pale memory of the fore-life of the foetus. Hitherto, the human race has only survived by foeticide. Humans are dead foetuses walking. From now on, there will be only foetuses..."

The concepts of birth, death, and resurrection, all the critical boundaries of human existence are summarized in one metaphor in this story.

And that theme from NEANDERTHAL PLANET is picked up and amplified here. Man is a unity, but all our discoveries about the sub-conscious tend away from the central fact. With its acceptance of the dichotomy, and its realization of the power of a complex id, the twentieth-century world becomes, by definition, psychotic.

The twentieth century, from Freud onwards through two world wars, the Bomb, and the acceptance of "the future as a way of life", has been forced to look to its subconscious. But, by definition, the subconscious cannot be scanned intellectually - as soon as this happens, it ceases to be the subconscious and becomes an illogical aberration of the conscious, thinking mind. No wonder twentieth century writers despair of rationality.

In the three main stories in this collection, Aldiss renders this process with a series of very original images that reveal at least a part of the intellectual/emotional crisis that actually faces a person of 1969. In RANDY'S SYNDROME it is the conscious foetus that thumbs its nose at the whole of human achievement. The baby doesn't win, but neither does the "superior" structure of human activity.

1968 : SEND HER VICTORIOUS

In SEND HER VICTORIOUS Aldiss uses as his main image the ever-infuriating figure of Queen Victoria herself, the lady who single-handedly challenged the existence of the id in human knowledge.

But before the reader realizes the completely original preposterousness of the "idea" in SEND HER VICTORIOUS, he realizes more directly the extent of Aldiss' improvement as a prose-artist. If the concern of SEND HER VICTORIOUS is very like that of Philip Dick's (and I can easily show that it is) how much more so does Aldiss write as concisely and luminously as Dick. Aldiss' mock-explanations crackle as neatly and as tantalizingly as the non-explanations in PALMER ELDRITCH or MAN IN THE HIGH CASTLE :

"We have no subconscious. The Nineteenth Century is our subconscious. The Nineteenth Century ended in 1901 with the death of Queen Victoria. And of course it did not really exist, or all the past ages in which we have been made to believe. They are memories grafted on, supported by fake evidence. The world was invented by the Queen in 1901 - as she had us call that moment of time."

You don't believe it - but it stands as an explanation of a state of mind of a whole century. Most of all you don't want to face any of the corollaries of a belief in such a theory, but Aldiss forces you to face just those corollaries. "Queen Victoria", whatever or whoever she/it is, created the entity we choose to call The World at a point of time we have called 1901 - the Queen represents something we do recognize, the Freudian notion of the subconscious - therefore the world is psychotic/was created by a psychotic. And Harlan Ellison mumbles about dangerous visions.

But let's not get morbid about these things. Aldiss wouldn't want the reader to really get upset, so he jokes it all the way (like Philip Dick, remember). Those watchers watching the watchers watching the watchers are back from REPORT ON PROBABILITY A:

Leaning back, Froding could look at a bank of three unblinking screens, each showing various parts of the room in which he sat. One showed a high view of the room from above the autogrill. One showed a view across the length of the room

from behind the door. One showed a view from a corner, with a carpet, the more comfortable armchair, and the back of Froding's head as he sat in the chair, plus the three screens on which he was watching the three views of his room which included a view of him watching the three screens in his room on which he was watching this magnificent microcosm.

And there are signs of parallel lines of thought between Dick (in THE ZAP GUN) and Aldiss in the depiction by the latter of the rats of the Shakespeare-Spelling Society. Surley G Frebbs of THE ZAP GUN finally trapped mankind in his universal Man In The Maze kit. Aldiss' rats (like his characters) are trapped until they spell SHAKESPEARE correctly. Man may be trapped until he - does what? - correctly:

There were reckoned to be between three and four million people already in the Shakespeare-Spelling Society. Supposing the rats were secretly working away down there to make men mad, beaming these crazy messages which men were forced to read and try to make some sort of meaning of? When everyone was mad, the rats would take over. Caspar and Nero had a rat-educator; therefore they believed they were educating rats.

SIMKYSPMNVE
SHAKESPEARE

The Bard's name stayed up in lights when the rodents hit the current jackpot and went on a pleasure binge, squealing with pleasure, rolling on their backs showing little white thighs as the current struck home.

This is surely an accurate analogue of the way in which the better science fiction writers (and you can substitute your own choice for the name of Philip Dick, despite the resemblance between the styles of Aldiss and Dick that can be seen in this story) see the world as it is progressing/regressing.

1969 : SINCE THE ASSASSINATION

SINCE THE ASSASSINATION is the only new story in this collection. Although it is only 50 pages long, this story justifies buying the collection, even if you have read the other stories.

INTANGIBLES INC and NEANDERTHAL PLANET share a quality of maudlin earnestness about the possibilities of human self-awareness. RANDY'S SYNDROME and SEND HER VICTORIOUS are roistering buffooneries that are serious in the way TWELFTH NIGHT is serious: the jokes ricochet around in the mind until they find strike the correct vulnerable spots. However, SINCE THE ASSASSINATION is no laughing matter. This is perhaps the strongest story that Aldiss has yet written (except for the BAREFOOT IN THE HEAD opus, which has yet to appear complete).

In this story, Aldiss clarifies his mass-psychosis proposition as much as he is ever likely to:

(Jake Byrnes says): "Look, all are agreed that right now world affairs have never been more snarled up. Ever since Hitler, nothing but terrible crises: the extermination of

European Jewry, Stalin's purges, the H-bomb, the Cold War, Korea, the population explosion, famines everywhere, Communist China. The pressure is not only from the past but from the future, from mouths unborn. Somehow, we have to make a breakthrough before we bog down into universal psychosis.

You may take this as pop-psychology if you like: the character Jake Byrnes is an intellectual who believes in action before thought, an essayist but an American politician. He is no Eddie Bush -- not the innocent who happens to break through the structures of time and discover the full truth about himself. Jake Byrnes is incapable of penetrating too deeply into his own soul, but may legitimately present himself as a shield against the processes of this century that would destroy the souls of us all. Byrnes makes notes about time-discoveries while his son dissipates into psychosis. His notes "explain" the nature of time (and present Aldiss' current theories at one mind's distance), but it takes the length of the story for him to glimpse the nature of the people who surround him, and who are as ensnared by time as he is.

And even then, SINCE THE ASSASSINATION is not just about Jake Byrnes, or the other characters that share his country estate. At times the atmosphere of the battleground of green trees and palatial rooms recalls TURN OF THE SCREW more than the settings of most other s f "thrillers". The most obvious "idea" in SINCE THE ASSASSINATION is the gimmick that Aldiss used before in MAN IN HIS TIME and now repeats, with no tiredness in the novelty of the original. If time is related to gravity, may it not be that planets of different gravities will possess local time scales, which visiting spacemen may bring back with them to Earth? May not one of these visitors use this time differential to manipulate Earth's time?

But if one manipulates the time experienced by a single man within the whole social environment, then one may then discover much more important things about the whole time-structure of all the people living at any one instant. And if that instant of time occurs in the mid- or late-twentieth-century, the questions involved in this manipulation may help to explain all the psychological crises of the century.

SINCE THE ASSASSINATION, seen in these terms, is the most abstract of Aldiss's stories. It is more than didactic however: Aldiss' emotional concern is with the characters directly involved in the grinding exposition of these abstractions. I've mentioned the ambiguous figure of Jake Byrnes: his stature is as fascinating as that of the questions he tries to unravel. There is Rhoda who tries to escape all the consequences of all these questions in the ultra-simple pastime of sky-diving:

She had no sensation of falling.

In perfection, she rode the thin air down, her body rigidly exultant as she plunged towards the blue American earth, controlling her rate of fall by the slightest movements of neck and head....

So every day she flung herself from his private plane, snatching seconds of a rapture immeasurable on terrestrial time scales. I feel now the future in an instant. Those

seconds were compressed with luminous comprehensions, hard to grasp when the sky-dive was over, when she was confined to earth.

This is a very ambiguous exultation. The escape lasts for a few minutes only. Time is suspended for only an instant. Despite the effort to remain perfect, the twin forces of energy and the consciousness of destruction, as represented in the figure of Jake Byrnes, remain far more real for both the reader and Rhoda.

Where then has Aldiss' five-story quest left him? Perhaps he is no more advanced than he was in INTANGIBLES INC. Perhaps the "crinkled old man", now represented in the universal process of Time, can only solve problems with suspect remedies. Maybe we can join with Aldiss in his optimism that man may isolate and control that part of himself he has always called his "subconscious". Perhaps the twentieth century will not be the most critical in man's history after all - but on that score, Aldiss fully convinces the reader of the immediacy of his questions and the impossibility of answers without new concepts that may be questioned.

To really see the face of the future, buy this book. It is the most important book Aldiss has published so far, and may be the most important s f book of the year.

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RAISON D'ETRE (Continued from Page 5)

your earnest attention for a few more paragraphs. Besides, you have probably already read SEX AND SCIENCE FICTION. Lucky you).

There is some obligation involved in publishing the ASFR Letter Column. I must do something to warrant the "Incorporating ASFR" masthead. However, the letters themselves include some of the best that both Johns received on any of the ASFRs. Andy Porter's letter is most moving - it's always a pity that one must close shop to receive the greatest eulogies. (And that's no swipe at you, Andy - it's only during the last few months that we have all come to feel as strongly about the situation). If I include for consideration the correspondence between John Brunner, Jack Wodhams and myself, as well as the James Blish letter, you may read an object lesson in the Dangers of Reviewing and Speaking Too Loud Near a Microphone. But I hope nobody takes this as an excuse not to do reviews.

And other goodies? As I said, the two articles on SEX AND SCIENCE FICTION justify their presence automatically. The reviews concern oeuvres that deserve special mention. And Stanislaw Lem's short piece is a particularly useful introduction to a writer who will be featured rather more prominently in future issues.

This magazine may not reach 9 issues by December, but then again, it may. The Eastercon photos have arrived, the Con speeches are around somewhere, Peter Darling is transcribing the tape. May I invite you to the next issue?

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F I C T I O N

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

M A C H I N E S

FOR READING THE MAGAZINES

Stanislaw Lem

oo

You shall stop reading a work of s f

1. in which gods, angels, demons, devils and other mythical beings appear, the work nevertheless being called "S F".
2. in which members of "other civilisations" appear, not as seen through the eyes of human observers, but described "quite directly" - from the godlike position of a master strategist.
3. in which the names of the characters (if only some of them) are constructed by a distortion of the paradigm of proper names in the alien language concerned (for instance, "Alexi Andrei" is supposed to serve as the name of a Pole, or "Kohlbenschlagg" as the name of a German; such are the signs with which an author betrays his ignorance which masquerades as arrogance) - any serious author takes the names of his heroes from models of the country where the alien tongue is spoken, and he does so by selecting genuine sources: there are no exceptions to this rule.
4. which is armed with a foreword by the author in which he declares that he writes in such-and-such a way, whereas Swift, Voltaire or Flaubert, Joyce, etc., wrote in such-and-such a way: in general, the length of the foreword is in inverse proportion to the quality of the text.
5. in which it is impossible to determine, after having read the first pages, the time, place and the objects of the plot.
6. in which the names of all the characters are monosyllables.
7. in which there is an "escalation of the fantastic" - i.e. the hero is a telepath, but he is not one of the usual telepaths: he is a telepath who can set fire to objects just by willing it: and it's not only that he can light his cigarettes in such a way - he can also turn the sun into a supernova: but not only can he turn the sun into a supernova, normal telepaths cannot read his thoughts: and not only is it impossible to read his thoughts, but etc....
8. in which the plot moves, in a very short space, from one point of the earth, or the solar system, or the galaxy, to other points.
9. in which the main characteristics of extraterrestrial humanoids are a peculiar number of fingers (4 or 6, say), or a peculiar chemical composition of their bodies.
10. in which the characters admire qualities among themselves (for instance, incisiveness of intellect or humour) which, when presented to the reader, do not so impress him.

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sex in science fiction •

an sfo
special

SEX IN SCIENCE FICTION : PART ONE

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SEX IN SCIENCE FICTION

A UNIQUE SURVEY

Paul Stevens

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One of the most controversial and most discussed topics in this modern world is SEX. People tell jokes about it, write about it, think about it, tell other people about it, try to get it, and more importantly, impress their own views on other people about it. Sex is used in advertising, sermons, films, plays, music and the home. It is generally disapproved of by old maids, the clergy (though not always, i.e. Who was that choir mistress I saw you with last night? That was no choir mistress, that was.....) the Australian Board of Censors, the Department of Customs and Excise, Mr Rylah, Asian governments and those unfortunate enough not to be able to get it. It was good old sex that caused the towers of Troy to topple, brought down the British government of Mr McMillan, made Mark Antony fall on his sword, and otherwise livened up history in general. Sex is what keeps the world going and causes the species to reproduce itself. Sex is the major hang-up for most people but one thing is sure - it sells like crazy!

Take book publishers. Sex can sell an otherwise dull book that would not reach a print run of 6. Wrap up such a book in a strong cover featuring scintillating sex, and it will outsell the Bible. We here in Australia are very lucky for we are "protected" from too much feelthy sex. The Department of Customs and Excise keep a tight control on the literary output of other countries, banning such innocent works as de Sade's 120 DAYS OF SODOM, JUSTINE, and PHILOSOPHY OF THE BEDROOM. Also on the banned list is Cleland's FANNY HILL and works by Burroughs, Miller and... Enid Blyton? Probably.

Strangely enough, the Customs have recently released the long banned LOLITA (Nabokov), Lawrence's LADY CHATTERLY'S LOVER, Baldwin's ANOTHER COUNTRY and McCarthy's THE GROUP. These releases seem mere sops to stifle the critics of censorship.

Film is subject to much banning of a weird and wonderful nature, and I could fill pages upon pages/^{telling} of the iniquities of the film censors. Suffice to say that some sex films do get through, though the emphasis seems to centre upon censoring violence, horror and anything of a political nature. The latest victims to be completely banned are: Sex - THE BIRDS COME TO DIE IN PERU (dealing with nymphomania), and 100 RIFLES (in which coloured Jim Brown makes love to white Raquel Welch); Violence - just about everything including almost all horror films; Politics - THE BOFORS GUN (about the British Army). Even John Wyndham's classic s f tale, THE DAY OF THE TRIFFIDS was refused entry into Australia, though the reasons have not been made clear. However, the focus of attention must be on the written word, and it is to the sub genre of s f that I now turn.

Everyone seems to become as upset and censorial as the censors if you try to link s f with sex. Why this is, nobody can fathom, but perhaps we can trace it back to the earliest days of s f when good old Hugo G was making with the crackpot element in a magazine called, simply, AMAZING STORIES. In those days s f was as pure as the driven snow, and its major penpushers cared not for the sordid side of existence. Besides, Hugo wouldn't have paid for that sort of story anyway. Chief among these new s f writers was a person called Edgar Rice Burroughs, still known to his fans simply as ERB.

ERB wrote reams of material, most of it to do with a guy known as Tarzan, but he produced another character whose main claim to fame was that he lived on Mars. John Carter, for that was his name, is ranked as one of the earlier interplanetary travellers though it must be stated that he never once used a spaceship. He did all of his commuting between planets by mind power alone. In all ERB's writings, John Carter is morally A1 - a clean-living, one-woman man. (In other words, stupid). He meets countless hordes of curvy chicks, all of them just aching to take up house-keeping with him. In ERB's books it is morally o k to slice up hundreds of evil guys with a sword but taboo to shack up with a chick you ain't married to.

Ray Cummings decorated many issues of the early magazines, and his stories always seemed to follow a set pattern:

- (a) THE HERO - tall, handsome, brave and morally upright. He usually thinks twice before kissing the heroine.
- (b) THE HEROINE - usually from the future, small, delicate, incredibly beautiful, more like a Dresden figurine than a girl you want to crawl between the sheets with.
- (c) THE SUB-HEROINE - usually loved (silently) by the narrator who is nearly always the hero's best friend. She is more interesting than THE HEROINE, and although very, very virtuous, sounds more beddable.
- (d) THE VILLAIN - small, squat and nasty with the features of a baboon gone wrong. He is a brilliant scientist gone mad and he either wants to rule the

Future, the Past, Here-and-Now, or blow up the world. He is always distinguished by the nasty urge to lay ther Heroine and/or sub-heroine. Note: he always fails.

Now we come to the great E E "Doc" Smith, author of the LENSMAN series, the SKYLARK series and several other works. He dates from before 1928 through til 1968 when his last "work", SUBSPACE EXPLORER, was released by Ace Books. In an early work, SPACE HOUNDS OF THE IPC, you can see the Puritan element of s f at work. The hero and heroine are space-wrecked on one of Jupiter's satellites for a period of nine months. JUST THE TWO OF THEM. Guess what? He kisses her and she kisses him. ONCE! Yeh - well, it sold and even if Smith had had a bit of blanket crawling the editor would have cut it out.

Later Smith treats sex much more openly. THE GALAXY PRIMES has four of Earth's highest intelligences, two men and two women, flitting about the galaxy in a spaceship as they dig out similar intelligences from the many races encountered. In the course of these travels they pair up and then swap partners when things don't pan out. THE GALAXY PRIMES was written and published in the later 1950s, and indicates the changing attitude in s f.

By way of contrast - Rex Gordon, in FIRST TO THE STARS has his hero and heroine deliberately paired off by computer for a year-long space journey. The theory is that a man and a woman would get along much better than a man plus a man, or a woman plus a woman. As it turns out, this pairing, wrongly calculated by the computer in any case, is just an excuse to place the characters on an alien planet for the purposes of providing one baby girl. This done, the wife is killed off almost straight away and the hero is left to approach the aliens with nothing left of his civilisation but a loin cloth and a ten day old baby. Gordon goes on to say various things that are not of much value to this survey, but what could have been interesting were - the man/woman relationship on the space voyage and on the planet after the ship crashes, and the later problem of Father and Daughter. Which is to say - incest or not incest? There could have been a lode of rich material for a daring novelist to mine here, but Gordon sadly ignored it and only skimmed along the surface of the implications.

Sex in s f received a much needed shot in the arm when a chap named Philip Jose Farmer rose to the halls of s f fame with a novel called THE LOVERS. This really stirred up the fans, and many were the bitter words exchanged by readers of STARTLING STORIES in that magazine's letter column.

THE LOVERS is not great s f by any standards, but it did break strict tabus, in several respects. Sex was treated as a necessary part of the human condition and sex is shown as possible between humanoid peoples. The heroine was very definitely not human, she produced only female children, therefore providing a sub-section of humanoids that were very parisitic.

Farmer produced one other work that said much on the subject. It was a series of four novelettes published under the title STRANGE RELATIONS. There was something else called A WOMAN A DAY (later reprinted as DAY OF TIMESTOP by Lancer) and a bomb called simply.... ..FLESH. Enough said.

From this point (1952) onwards, sex in s f shot forward and achieved some recognition in some circles. J W Campbell would never touch anything labelled "sex", while FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION went for the more well-written type, and AMAZING and FANTASTIC jumped aboard the new bandwagon, boots and all.

Some of the major themes that have emerged in the last twenty years include:

Sex as an integral part of the novel.

I point here to Bernard Wolfe's LIMBO 90, an excellent novel that has much to say. The story deals with the end of The Third World War and a society that seems to revolve about a political movement of ex-servicemen, all of them amputees. The norm is for all men to have one, two, or even all limbs removed and be cared for by the women, a factor that Wolfe carefully explores in one scene where the hero makes love to one of the female characters. When he allows her to take the initiative, the sexual act is satisfactory to her. When the hero takes the initiative, the woman holds back and denies herself any satisfaction. Society has become distorted, says Wolfe, and he points this up in a later scene when the hero flees back to his isolated island and to the arms of his native wife.

Most of the recent s f authors treat sex as a normal part of human existence and not as some lurid bait used to sell their work.

Abnormal sexual relations.

Some authors can be seen to be scared of providing more than a superficial look at a society with different values. Bert Chandler's SPARTAN PLANET was an attempt to show a world without women, a world where homosexuality is the norm. Bert drops down a ship load of heterosexual characters and attempts to show the two societies in collision. Unfortunately Chandler fails, having no faith in the basic instincts of his main male characters. However, it was a fair try.

On the other side of the coin is Charles Eric Maine, that eternally pessimistic doom-bringer who tried to show a purely lesbian society in WORLD WITHOUT WOMEN but fails dismally. Two thirds of the book is taken up with stage setting, or a potted history of why there are no men. The last section deals not with this interesting society but with an underground movement attempting to breed men back into the race once more.

Poul Adderson has his go with a space opera romp called VIRGIN PLANET. The hero crashes on the virgin planet, only to find a civilisation of women apparently thriving and prophesying the return of "the men". The hero is naturally not recognized as a "man" by the local priests and so is called a monster. The fun then begins as the frustrated hero, mentally slobbering about the chaps at the prospect of a whole planet of available women, is bounced from pillar to post, getting caught up in all sorts of local squabbles and never once managing to catch even one virgin during the whole book. The story rollicks to a close as the hero sets forth in his space ship to find and return with "the men" while two of the female characters roll dice in order to see who gets him.

One could mention other interesting examples at random: Paul Charkin, who scored with a minor plotline where the heroine and

minor heroine in love, and then when the heroine is killed the minor heroine goes off with the hero.

H P Lovecraft was very much obsessed with inbreeding and with what he calls "tainted relations" among some of the elder races that inhabit his stories. He hints at much but says little.

Then there was Anthony Burgess' THE WANTING SEED which deals with a future society that practices deliberate perversion. It is a crime to sleep with a member of the opposite sex. Naturally some daring pervert meets and sleeps with a woman and soon this new perversion spreads until, hey presto, revolution. We are all back where we started.

Superman theme

Phillip Wylie's GLADIATOR and Herbert D Kastle's THE RECONSTRUCTED MAN mine this theme fairly well. So does Frank M Robinson's THE POWER. The theme is simple. Man/ordinary becomes man/Superman with greatly increased sexual powers, intelligence, ESP and what have you.. THE RECONSTRUCTED MAN deals particularly with the Superman and sex. It all ends happily with the hero reduced in capacity and strength, finally bedding down with some cute little chick and living (and loving, we assume) happily ever after.

Magazine Covers

The s f magazine covers have been traditionally the illustrations for the magazine's lead story, and a chance to portray some blonde bird in a metal bra and little else as she is ravished by the purple slim monster from the Auregan swamps. Of course front cover illustrations never really have much to do with the contents, but the economics of publishing are such that having a blonde bird in a metal bra and little ^{else} displayed on the front cover means that the magazine will then sell to at least a few low-minded characters.

This cover business stems from the early days when WEIRD TALES and the other pulps burst forth with much bare feminine flesh in order to sell their products. The s f magazines soon galloped up and adopted the same formula. Science fiction developed a nasty stigma that still hasn't disappeared.

Take the cover from the November-December FANTASTIC 1952. It shows a young girl, clad only in a pair of panties and a transparent robe being menaced by a group of purple and green hopgoblin. In the background a young man lies dead, bleeding from several nasty chest wounds. The whole scene is set in a deserted, decrepit house. This cover has absolutely nothing to do with the contents. Inside we have offerings from Chad Oliver, Richard Matheson, Cornell Woolrich, John Jakes, Ivar Jorgensen and Mickey Spillane. The Spillane story is a beauty - it has lots of violence, lust and beautiful, naked women, one of them green. This, we must assume, makes it science fiction. The magazine's editor was Howard Browne. Boy, but he could pick 'em. The Spillane story finishes with the green skinned chick getting shot three times through the left breast while her husband, the story's hero, looks on. The killer is himself killed by the other girl in the story who then rips off her clothes and copulates with the hero. The hero then calmly shoots her twice in the belly. Let's shoot Howard Browne twice in the belly, huh? And, despite all that, it had nothing to do with the cover.

A lot of the Ziff-Davis FANTASTIC and AMAZING publications of the fifties had sexy covers on the outside and lots of sheer crud on the inside. The stories from all the magazines have not improved since, and the covers have become far less interesting.

The Magazines

Well, with the diminished number of s f magazines, there is a limited field for story selling and each magazine has its own policy. ANALOG, piloted by J W Ghod, has a strict no sex rule, while NEW WORLDS, while piloted by Moorcock, had an anything goes rule, which ended up in the BUG JACK BARRON trouble. We don't know what Langdon Jones' rules are. F&SF still publishes the middle-of-the-road material with slight butterings of sex, while GALAXY and IF seem to skate around the subject.

I also doubt whether VISIONS OF TOMORROW will attempt to touch sex in any shape or form, particularly since John Russell Fearn, a writer admired by the editor, had his hero and heroine produce kids by mental telepathy.

Finally, there is the s f film, and although sex is used constantly to advertize these films we have yet to see the heroine being laid by the hero, not to mention the assortment of outer and inner space horrors that carry her off. The true s f film is rare and although the companies mark their products as "science fiction masterpieces" they are generally horror films and not s f (e.g. THEM; IT CAME FROM BENEATH THE SEA). Even a film like THE THING is only half-way s f as is IT CAME FROM OUTER SPACE and THE INCREDIBLE SHRINKING MAN.

BARBARELLA, pleasantly enough, was the exception to the rule and sold s f and sex in the charming form of Jane Fonda, but if this is a signpost to future developments I'll eat my typewriter.

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What will stem from this sex-'n'-science-fiction menage I don't care to prophesy about. Sex is a dangerous subject to tackle because on one hand the author may produce a sex book with science fictional trimmings/^{and} on the other hand the type of s f that ignores the obvious facts of human sexuality. How an author can go about producing a book that is a perfect balance is something I couldn't advise upon. If I could I wouldn't be wasting my time writing articles that don't pay money.

- Paul Stevens 1969

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When he gave me this article, Paul mentioned that it perhaps does not cover the whole scene. You may guess for yourselves the gentle men who will say "Amen" to that. In particular, Paul felt that there were some novels of the last couple of years that do treat the subject with some maturity. He mentioned THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS and BUG JACK BARRON as the best examples, and some day I might get around to covering them. In the meantime, there is always an abyss of room for a sequel to this article. Queue up quietly.

SEX IN SCIENCE FICTION : PART TWO

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THE WORLD OF THEODORE STURGEON

NOTES ON SEX AND SCIENCE FICTION

Peter Ripota

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(Translated from SF-TIMES, German edition, April 1967,
by FRANZ ROTTENSTEINER).

Soviet s f has often been accused - with some justification - of containing too much ideology; an accusation that often is accompanied by the remark that the s f of the West is free of ideological ballast. That this is untrue has already been shown by Brian W Aldiss in an excellent article in S F HORIZONS 1. When we, as a rule, don't notice the ideological aspects of s f it is merely because they have become ingrained in our very blood and bones, so that we take as a matter of course what is only the tradition of chance. We shall use the example of the work of Theodore Sturgeon, one of the outstanding and most acclaimed authors in the field, to take a look at some of the ideological aspects of s f. We shall examine Theodore Sturgeon's view of the world as it becomes apparent in his typical stories. His typical stories are those that describe the relationships between individuals (between two or three). Excluded are stories like MORE THAN HUMAN which deals with a group of human beings; we also do not intend to discuss Sturgeon's style and his other literary qualities, whose value is hardly questioned by anyone. Let's take a look at Sturgeon's typical themes.

In some stories the following situation occurs: a young and somewhat shy young man meets a naked woman on a beach. Deeply disturbed and eyes cast down he gives her her clothes - and at the ending of the story they marry. Examples: in A SAUCER OF LONELINESS a young man meets a naked woman ^{on a beach}. In THE EDUCATION OF DRUSILLA STRANGE a young man/meets a naked woman on a beach. In SCARS a man isn't quite young meets a naked woman at a river. In the story GRANNY WON'T KNIT a young man meets - you won't guess it - no, not a naked woman, but the effect is the same. He lives in a determinedly puritanical world where even the showing of naked hands is considered to be indecent. And she wears a tunic, withbared hands and naked toes! In the story WHEN YOU CARE - WHEN YOU LOVE finally a young woman meets a naked man, and despite this interesting inversion they marry at the end, and how could it be otherwise?

In these stories we find a first indication of the strictly puritan world view of Sturgeon's heroes; an impression that is strengthened by the second group of stories, and confirmed in the third. Let's turn to the second group, those stories in which two lovers (most of the time, though not always, of different sex) are brought together by a non-human or extraterrestrial agency. Again some examples.

In THE SILKEN SWIFT a girl who is in love with a man who doesn't love the girl (because he doesn't know her) is brought together with him by a unicorn. In A TOUCH OF STRANGE a lonely man and an equally lonely girl become acquainted via a mermaid. In A SAUCER OF LONELINESS a young man and a lonely girl are brought together by a flying saucer. By a flying saucer (perhaps the same) a married couple who have grown apart become reunited (in HURRICANE TRIO). In GHOST OF A CHANCE the two people are brought together by a ghost; in MATURITY by a superman, in THE SEX OPPOSITE by a race of supermen, and in THE OTHER MAN we find a double happy ending that can hardly be borne.

Should you believe that all this is incidental, you would be in error. The happy endings are the essence of the stories mentioned here and the - hardly existent and easily interchangeable - s f elements serve only as the good fairy of a Grimm's fairy tale of modern times. We also mustn't forget that it is precisely these stories for which the author is most widely praised. We will return to this at the end.

What Sturgeon has to offer is basically pure tripe of the SATURDAY EVENING POST kind, only slightly improved by an excellent style. And even here - especially in the dialogues - the banality of the plot becomes apparent; and some dialogue reads like Don Martin's crazy stories from MAD. It goes like this:

MATURITY, for instance:

"Oh, Robin!"

A few lines later we find:

"Oh Robin!"

And still a little later:

"Oh Peg!"

In MAKE ROOM FOR ME we find:

"Oh Manuel!"

And somewhat later:

"Oh Dran!"

And some more examples:

"Maria - "

"Oh Eddie!" (BLABBERMOUTH).

For purposes of comparison:

"Oh John!"

"Oh Marsha!" (Don Martin, A JOHN AND MARSHA STORY).

"Oh Gus, you're so cute!"

"Oh Robin, you're such a child!" (MATURITY).

For purposes of comparison:

"Oh Foster, you're such a devil!" (Don Martin, A RIDE WITH THE ROLLER COASTER).

"Oh Bus, I'm so sorry!" (GHOST OF A CHANCE).

"Oh Doctor, I'm sorry!" (THE OTHER MAN).

Again Don Martin:

"I'm terribly sorry, Sir!" (A VISIT TO THE STORE-HOUSE).

And some more examples of the puritanical world view:

"No, Gus, no!" (GHOST OF A CHANCE).

"No, Gus - no!" (GHOST OF A CHANCE).

"Tod, don't..." (A SAUCER OF LONELINESS).

"Don't... don't..." (RULE OF THREE).

"No, Tod, no!" (THE GOLDEN HELIX).

"Don't, please don't!" (THE TOUCH OF YOUR HAND).

And again and again, in so many stories:

"Don't touch me!"

I want to stress the fact that the lines quoted are without exception taken from dialogues between men and women and from situations which describe what is implied in the quotations. After these asides we'll return to our theme.

We will now mention a sub-group of the second group of stories, namely those stories in which a divorced or somehow else broken up couple find their way back to each other with the help of some superhuman or extraterrestrial agency. We shall call them the "trio-group". Most typical example is HURRICANE TRIO, where a man falls in love with a strange woman, but nevertheless returns to his wife. Also a typical example: RULE OF THREE, where a divorced couple are brought together by an extraterrestrial (first trio). The second trio has another structure: there a somewhat self-conscious male who is more inclined towards his own sex than towards the so-called "weak" sex, is converted by the aliens mentioned above to a form of human relationship that is more commonly accepted by human society. (The theme of homosexuality appears again in THE WORLD WELL LOST, a story of which we will say more later.)

Sturgeon's tendency for triangles is apparent again in MAKE ROOM FOR ME, where, however, the problem isn't solved, since there is no problem at all (nobody of the three is married). THE WAGES OF SYNERGY drives a wife, after some science fictionally caused affairs, into the arms of the man she has properly married; much the same happens in THE DARK ROOM; where Sturgeon invents an elegant justification for the extra-marital adventure. But do not fear, dear reader; this story also has a happy ending. And the AFFAIR WITH A GREEN MONKEY fails ab initio, in this case because of an especially original cause: the lover has come from the stars and looks like a normal human being; but as far as his masculinity is concerned, he turns out to be slightly oversized, and the affair therefore does not work out. This is, by the way, as far as I know, the only story of Sturgeon's which treats sex humorously.

But let's now take a look at the third and most important group of stories, in which the puritanical sexual ethic is most apparent: where the heroes try to overcome it; and what becomes of those efforts.

Sturgeon's heroes (and especially his heroines) are desperately afraid of being touched. The passages quoted indicate this already. Sturgeon never fails to find an excuse for the fact that relationships between the sexes must remain Platonic. In THE SEX OPPOSITE both hero and heroine spend a delightful afternoon in a forest with a partner of the opposite sex, and nothing happens save pleasant small talk. The astonishing thing about this isn't that the hero doesn't know what to do with the woman of his dreams (and the same applies for the heroine), for in s f males just don't happen to have time for sex; the astonishing thing is that Sturgeon is making excuses for this.

It's a similar case with a passage in VENUS PLUS X where the hero remembers an experience of his youth. At that time (he was still an adolescent) he was locked in a dark room during a play with boys and girls of his own age, where he was supposed to prove his masculinity, producing unmistakable sounds. But he just chastely kissed her forehead and that was all. Much the same episode is remembered by the hero of BLASSBERMOUTH: when he first dated a girl, he didn't touch bodily, and because that was so nice, the hero decided not to date the girl any further (to keep the memory of the moment and not to "dirty" it with other experiences). It seems to me rather that he lacked the courage for a second date, because he realized that things couldn't continue like this! In SCARS finally, the relationship of a male and a female in a hut comes to an end because the male doesn't dare to touch her, for which he is admired by her as a "gentleman". But Sturgeon is quite able to recognize that it needn't necessarily be due to the soul of a gentleman.

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Most important, however, are those stories and novels where Sturgeon paints a free world of the future. This applies especially to GRANNY WON'T KNIT, THE STARS ARE THE STYX, VENUS PLUS X and TO MARRY MEDUSA.

In GRANNY WON'T KNIT we have a firmly patriarchal society and as a contrast to this the free world of the "happy savages". But this world isn't that very different. True, hands are not covered any more, and dress in general is less formal. Also, fathers do not

have absolute power over the members of their families. But women are again passive, unimportant beings, happy to be embraced by the strong arms of the hero and to weep on his shoulder (we'll return to this).

In THE STARS ARE THE STYX, sex isn't punished any more, and everybody is allowed to do as he or she pleases. But people still marry! They marry before they fly, two by two, into the depths of space, presumably because during such a journey something might happen - despite unfavourable conditions - that would transcend the bounds of purely Platonic relationships. But it's not only that they marry - they remain faithful to each other during their whole lives, and there is no divorce. A truly Utopian society! But it appears to me that the idea isn't as old as it would seem. It goes back, if I'm not mistaken, to the Middle Ages. The human beings of the world of the far future, however, are contemporaries of the middle-class American society of comfort and ease, with their love plays that don't interest anyone save the ones concerned, and even this I doubt.

VENUS PLUS X is, in the words of the author, a book on sex, on sex of the future, I presume. In alternate chapters Sturgeon shows us the world of the present which - naturally - is firmly Puritan. Indicative of this is a passage where a woman says to her little daughter in a bath-tub: "Karen, don't touch yourself down there. It's not nice!"

But what does the world of the future look like? Is it liberal, free, tolerant? But of course. Sex isn't punished, everyone is allowed to do as he or she pleases, and children born out of wedlock aren't discriminated against. The world is peopled only with hermaphrodites (whom Sturgeon describes with some ingenuity and at length). But what do they do? What, I ask you, do they do? They marry. Sturgeon's imagination ends there. These hermaphrodites live exactly as we do, marry, get children and mourn over their "wives". Their habits, patterns of speech, their thinking and philosophy are in no way different from ours: Sturgeon calls them "she", doesn't even find it necessary to invent a new pronoun for them. Is this the utmost Sturgeon has to offer in the way of sex-fantasies?

Who can be surprised after this that the people in the novel TO MARRY MEDUSA (THE COSMIC RAPE) are deeply puritanical? So Caroline, so her friend Dimity Carmichael, the married Charlotte. But they grow out of this attitude, surpass themselves and at the end Salome is bathing naked in a river and a male looks at her and no one of the two sees anything filthy in it. That's really Utopian! At least for Sturgeon.

Let's summarize the case: Sturgeon's weltanschauung is a remnant of the time of Queen Victoria. Naked is synonymous with indecent and it takes his heroes a hell of an effort to overcome this attitude (they succeed, by the way, only in the novel mentioned last). Marriage is holy, eternal faithfulness an ideal, divorces are evil. Adultery is either punished or excused by superhuman powers. Should it happen once that, at the beginning of a story, a male and a female are sharing the same bed, you can bet that they're married. Such is the case in HURRICANE TRIO, WHEN YOU CARE - WHEN YOU LOVE; not so in WAGES OF SYNERGY. This cannot end well, of course, and

consequently the man dies at once, on the first page. Homosexuality isn't rejected a priori or denounced as a perversion, but naturally it doesn't find fulfillment (the utmost is a sort of extraterrestrial justification), and remains Platonic (THE WORLD WELL LOST). Some stories are simply fairy tales, where the hero gets a wife who is a member of a superior race: the princess of a feudalistic fairy tale (THE CLAUSTROPHOBILE, THE EDUCATION OF DRUSILLA STRANGE). Even supermen are puritans, for instance Robin from MATURITY who, although he was firmly resolved at first, doesn't touch his female visitor when he learns that she is a virgin. And the women - oh yes, the women.

In an essay on VENUS PLUS X Sturgeon stresses again and again what little biological differences there are between male and female. One would suppose this to mean that Sturgeon intends to elevate status of women, that he were advocating an emancipation of women. I prefer to think that Sturgeon (as he once suggests for males in VENUS PLUS X) feels inferior to women and tries to get over this feeling of inferiority by making women equal to men in all respects - from above! But that may be as it will; in any case, his opinions about women and their role in society emerge clearly enough in the way his heroines are depicted. With very few exceptions, they are helpless, in need of protection, passive, fragile, chaste and obedient; as wives eager to please their husbands, obedient and not talkative. Examples can be found in almost all typical stories. So at the end of VENUS PLUS X where the hero puts his hands protectively around her shoulders, which is about the only thing he can do without provoking the usual "Don't touch me!"; so in THE TOUCH OF YOUR HAND, where the girl Jibilith asks nothing of her lover than to be allowed to serve him faithfully and motherly, to bear silently and and slavishly his inadequacies;. The same applies for Barbara in THE SILKEN SWIFT, for the girl in TO HERE AND THE EASEL; the physician Margaretta in MATURITY; for the nurse Thomas in THE OTHER MAN, etc etc. If you don't believe it you should read the stories themselves.

Sturgeon's heroines only get active when they have to conquer a husband of their own or fight for him. So in GRANNY WON'T KNIT, so in WHEN YOU CARE - WHEN YOU LOVE, so in THE CLAUSTROPHOBILE etc etc. Twice we meet bad women - Rita in THE SILKEN SWIFT and Flower in THE STARS ARE THE STYX. Their badness consists in taking away the hero from the good (i.e. obedient) girl; they are punished severely. And finally we meet a woman who doesn't fit into the pattern, who feels superior to males, has only contempt for them and doesn't think of serving them slavishly: Drusilla Strange in THE EDUCATION OF DRUSILLA STRANGE. What becomes of her? What indeed, I ask you, becomes of her? She is conversed. She becomes what she should become: a meek, serving woman, a German a wife as anyone would wish to have it. Long live the past! But Sturgeon is writing fiction for the future.

Let's finally ask why Sturgeon became so famous with these stories. I may be permitted to call your attention to the proverb about the one-eyed the blind and the king. In a kind of literature where human relationships are mostly, and relationships between the sexes almost totally, excluded, Sturgeon was the only writer dealing with these topics, if only in a very limited way. He should not have had so much success. The time of puritanism is past. But in so far as he could succeed in this narrow range of discussion about sex - for this we congratulate him.

A M A T T E R O F D E F I N I T I O N

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S F COMMENTARY 3 reached me today from my former address. Thanks for sending it - I'm always pleased to receive fanzines, even though ^{after} my regular day's stint at the typewriter I can seldom look

the machine in the keys long enough to write letters of comment. Letters of any kind, come to that...

In this case, though, I'm making an exception. Do me a small favour, will you? Insert in one of Mr Jack Wodham's ears a large flea bearing a message from yours truly. I live too many thousand miles away to drop by in person and inscribe the following on his epidermis with a tattooing needle, but I think it must be brought to his attention because if he doesn't put a training-leash on that tongue of his sooner or later someone is going to hit him with a libel suit. No kidding. I recognise the symptoms of the situation in embryo.

As you've probably deduced, I'm prompted to this by a longish speech, attributed to Mr Wodhams, on p. 7 of your magazine. Quote and unquote: "Just to sit down and write a novel as a hack job is hard for me. I have to have something to write about. I couldn't be one of these jokers who say, Well, I'll write six novels this year. Who is it - Brunner? - who just churns them out and sort of takes a percentage. I couldn't do that. You've got to put too much into them."

Mr Wodhams, personally, is probably a very nice guy. Most s f writers are nice guys; that's one of ^{the} reasons I like the line of business I'm in. But look at that quote detachedly, will you? I think you'll have to concede that the implication is: Brunner is a hack writer. (A secondary implication, incidentally, is that Wodhams doesn't take a percentage on what he writes. Royalties are calculated on a percentage of the sale price, so it follows that he's selling his work outright, which is professional suicide. But that's his problem, not mine.)

Modesty is not, as they say, a commercial virtue. Moreover a writer's reputation is a very fragile thing - like a prize plant, it takes a lot of trouble to establish it, and then some nitwit can come along and ruin it.

Would you therefore kindly inform Jack Wodhams that he was goddamned bloody rude to me, and I'd like an apology both personally to me in writing and also through the medium of your next issue? Because this "hack" writer, to whom Wodhams feels himself so superior, has inter alia the following to his credit:

Three novels short-listed for the Hugo (TELEPATHIST/THE WHOLE MAN, THE SQUARES OF THE CITY and - currently - STAND ON ZANZIBAR); more Nebula nominations than I can count; the British Fantasy Award; the biggest seller out of 24 science fiction books published by Doubleday in 1967 (QUICKSAND); three American SF Book Club selections (STAND ON ZANZIBAR, QUICKSAND and THE JAGGED

ORBIT); television adaptations (SOME LAPSE OF TIME and THE LAST LONELY MAN); translations into French, German, Italian, Spanish, Dutch, Swedish, Portuguese, Norwegian, Japanese...

And so on. When this self-important prick has a professional record that matches the size of his mouth, I'll start paying attention to him. Meantime - and I expect it to a long wait - I will not stomach being insulted at long range by someone whose professional competence, on his own admission, extends no further than the publication of stories in magazines. I've sold my fiction in lengths from 700 words to nearly a quarter of a million. I'm proud of it, and anyone who puts me down has got to do better than I can. Fair?

***brg** After sending a letter to John which read very much like Page 6 of S F COMMENTARY 5, I received the following letter. Meanwhile, no answer from Jack Wodhams. Tension mounted... ***

(6th September 1969)

Thank you for your very long letter. I'm glad you regard my point as serious enough to answer in such detail, but I'm afraid I think you're still begging the main question. Calling a writer a hack is a considerable insult. The Oxford Illustrated Dictionary comes handy; let's check it out... Here we are: "hack 3, 2 - Common (esp. literary) drudge, mere scribbler." This is a far cry from calling a writer prolific or even over-productive, isn't it?

Your criterion (whether or not the work is sold "according to the emptiness or otherwise of the writer's purse") isn't valid, any more than is sheer volume of output. I was just reading a piece on Firbank in the NEW YORK REVIEW. He never had to depend on writing for a living because he inherited £700 a year, equivalent to about £4-5000 nowadays. Did that make him a better writer than someone who had to earn his entire living from his pen? As to volume: my own output has never hit the level which Anthony Burgess, for instance, achieved several years running - and Burgess is certainly one of the best living authors. Wells published an even hundred books. I forget, if I ever knew, how many Walter Scott published. But volume, as I say, isn't relevant. If it were, you'd have to class Picasso as a hack, van Gogh, Dumas, Lope de Vega, perhaps even Shakespeare.

No, a hack, by convention, is not someone who merely produces a lot of work, but someone who disregards literary quality and makes no attempt to avoid cliché, being solely concerned to fill a given number of pages for a set fee. I've tried that sort of thing, when the wolf was howling at the door, and I find I can't manage it. I get too damned bored.

Look... Well, by this time you've probably heard that STAND ON ZANZIBAR collected the Hugo. It took about two years' thinking time, on and off, and then about five months' actual writing time. And, as you know, it runs around a quarter-million words. Reviewing it in the London SUNDAY TIMES, Edmund Cooper compared it with ULYSSES, and BRAVE NEW WORLD. Hackwork? Well, he didn't think so...

Of course, people's reactions differ. You mention that your friend thought THE SQUARES OF THE CITY was "dreadful". Pity! But it was the first original paperback s f novel ever to get into the NEW YORK TIMES daily book review, and it was shortlisted for the Hugo. And, funnily enough, although you say you thought it was 150 pages too long, someone (I believe it was Judy Merrill) said it was too short to do justice to all the themes I packed into it.

Incidentally, I simply don't understand your reference to the "new" Brunner. I finished SQUARES more than nine years ago; what's new about that?

And I never hit a million words a year. That's the equivalent of ten 100,000-word books. Migawd! In the year I wrote SOZ I must presumably have gone over half that figure, counting revisions and rewrites - but there's nothing so extraordinary about that. Working on an electric typewriter, five or six pages in an hour is a comfortable speed, so five or six hours at the desk gives an excellent day's total. But of course I hit that only when I'm practically drunk with excitement about a book... and if I get really worked up, I can spend ten, twelve, even fourteen hours a day writing, because I'm anxious to learn what happens next. (Once I did 18,000 words between getting up and going to bed - but only once; the next day I was too damned tired to do anything.)

What I get from your letter, above all, is the impression that you (and the various people you quote) have put an imaginary version of John Brunner into a mental pigeonhole, and don't approve of the way I keep bulging out and oozing into adjacent categories. Well, you're not the only ones, of course - I've lost count of the number of publishers who've broken their options to publish my next book because it wasn't what they expected. I hate doing things because they're expected of me! I enjoy a vast variety of reading, from James Joyce via James Bond and James Blish to James - well, Baldwin. Similarly, I like to write a wide range of contrasting material. (I really do love writing, you know; if circumstances conspire to keep me away from the desk, I get actual withdrawal symptoms; I grow tetchy and depressed.) I wouldn't apply the standards I use for Joyce's work to the Bond novels; equally, I'd hate anyone to apply a single yardstick to the whole of my own work. I don't. Something amusing but trivial, like the Society of Time stories which you refer to, or DOUBLE, DOUBLE which is a nice old-fashioned monster story tarted up with some contemporary trimmings, is a different proposition from - say - QUICKSAND, in which I attempted to create a tragic hero (in the formal sense of a man of good will trapped in a web or circumstance which destroys him) against the background of an s f plot.

I'm a working writer, Bruce. Everything I have, everything I've had since I moved away from my parents' home, has come from application of what I know about arranging words on paper to the problem of earning a living - whether as a technical abstractor, or as a publisher's editor, or as a freelance author. I've tried almost literally everything one can write and expect to be paid for, bar technical manuals and advertising copy (and if you count jacket blurbs as ad copy, I've even done that). I've also written, for the pleasure of it, a hell of a lot of stuff I never expected to get paid for. Still don't. But I still do it!

And the one single invariable principle I abide by is that I must enjoy what I'm doing. I get fun out of composing a dirty limerick with a tricky rhyme-scheme; I make up crosswords; I....

Well, so far this year I've done: a major straight novel, commissioned by Norton of New York, called THE DEVIL'S WORK, about the twentieth-century counterpart of a Hell Fire Club; a revision of an old Ace novel, for re-issue; the second of the Max Curfew series (political thrillers), GOOD MEN DO NOTHING - the first, A PLAGUE ON BOTH YOUR CAUSES, came out last month over here, and got a lot of excellent notices in spite of the fact that it's told in the first person by a black man, a real challenge for a white writer and one which I took on precisely because it was a challenge; and an end-to-end rewrite of a murder mystery expanded from an old SCIENCE FANTASY novelette called THE GAUDY SHADOWS which the publishers wanted me to cut. Also this year we've moved house, which cost me a lot of working time.

And in the immediate future I may do a contemporary movie script for a director friend of mine up the road; or I may do both script and novel for a producer I ran across lately with a brilliant idea and no writing talent of his own; or I may do a projection of the kind of society the revolutionary students are demanding, to see if I can make it come alive as s f, or I may do a 10,000-line narrative poem - s f - based on an old Arab legend. I shall certainly continue to do my (unpaid) essays and topical songs for the CND journal SANITY, and my (unpaid) book reviews for NEW WORLDS and VECTOR, and no doubt I shall produce a few poems - I've acquired something of a reputation in that area, having been invited to read before even such an august body as the Poetry Society - and I shall certainly give some talks and lectures, including an address to the Modern Languages Association Convention in Denver, Colorado, after Christmas, where the topic on the agenda for the science fiction conference is "John Brunner's STAND ON ZANZIBAR and the state of the science fiction novel."

I've probably laboured my point enough. But to sum up: I'm terribly sorry if "a large number of people in Australian fandom" can't keep up with me where I'm going now, and prefer slight and amusing items like the Society of Time stories to more substantial recent work which major reviewers aren't afraid to mention in the context of Joyce and Huxley. A lot of people, thank goodness, have kept up with me. And I haven't finished yet, believe me.

...Yes, I know about VISION OF TOMORROW. Phil Harbottle kindly sent me a sample copy of the first issue. I hate to say this, but I have to. For me, it suffers from the worst possible defect for an s f magazine. "It belongs to the past, and not the future. It seems to me to have no relevance to the world of Black Power and Viet Nam, LSD and the Pill, H-Bombs and the Rolling Stones, Chomsky's analysis of fundamental communication-modes and Washoe the talking chimp - indeed, to anything which strikes me as foreshadowing the actual world of tomorrow. Like 2001, it's rooted in a concept of the future rendered obsolete by events. Our future isn't the Space Patrol opening up new planets by blasting the Greenies as though they were hostile Indians obstructing the Great Pacific Railroad. It's a big black man stoned out of his mind on acid getting back at the honkies for what they did to the Indians, and the blacks, and the orientals. And he may very well be doing it with a guitar.

The only short s f piece I'm thinking about at present is an anatomically-detailed account of how an enterprising couple working with the reception team for the first intelligent aliens to visit Earth contrived to seduce their (bisexual) opposite numbers into an orgy. It leads to all kinds of fascinating ideas about how we relate to our own bodies and the data we receive from our sense-organs; the great strength of s f as a field of work in is that it permits re-examination of the most basic assumptions about our own nature.

But somehow I don't think it would score at VISION. Do you?

***brg** Flippantly, I would like to say, Try them and see. You are probably right, but VISION has published two very good yarns so far, and promises more. There seems to be enough scope within the English language to cover most sorts of fiction, however traditional or world-conscious.

But how did we get onto the subject of VISION OF TOMORROW? Oh yes... because I found John's experience of writing s f one of the most refreshing things read in ages - lift high the drooping s f banner and all that. I can just see Messrs Harding and Foyster wondering about "authors advertising themselves again... grumble" and "He couldn't edit the full stop from a line of commas.. grumble..." I still like printing letters that I find interesting. And Jack Wodhams? Nearly forgot him, although his enthusiasm for the game matches Brunner's. Jack was away on the Pacific Ocean, but finally came back.***

JACK WODHAMS

(26th September 1969)

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In my atrocious and diabolically tape-recorded "speech" made at the - Easter '68 Melbourne SF Conference, and printed verbatim in S F COMMENTARY No 3, I made a remark in passing

concerning John Brunner, quoting him as one example. It appears that this comment can be misconstrued and that the word "hack" which occurs in the context might be thought by some to infer curled-lip disparagement on the part of the speaker. Be hereby disabused, for this by no means is my attitude. I admire the work of John Brunner, and would that his proficiency and reputed speed were mine. I class John Brunner with Harlan Ellison, Isaac Asimov, Anne McCaffrey, Ray Bradbury - all top-grade hacks who presently write better than I do. A hack to me is anyone who writes for a living - a person unloved, misunderstood, unappreciated, and constantly subject to criticism. My esoteric use of the term "hack" is strongly imbued with empathy. I know what it means to be one.

***brg** Which all goes to show that we are as severely divided on the meaning of that particular word as we ever were. As John Bangsund might very well say, although hasn't yet - In times of doubt, you look up your dictionary, and I'll look up mine. And even then we'll be confused. ***

YOU BE IN MY FANZINE AND I'LL BE IN YOUR FANZINE

or, a fanzine a day is the surest sign that your circulation figures are too high.

Any and all fanzines are appreciated at this end of the globe. Keep in mind that most of them take two months to reach Australia, and I should be able to make some sort of arrangement with your fanzine. However, the difficult thing is to find room to give publicity to all the magazines that have given publicity to S F COMMENTARY. Let's get somewhere down the list....

SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW 32, August 1969. Editor - Richard E Geis, P O Box 3116, Santa Monica, California 90403. 50c each, or trade.

I'm not sure why this goes at the top of the list, since I haven't had any publicity from Dick yet. However, SFR won the Hugo, and it's a magnificent fanzine, and completely unmissable.

LOCUS (out fortnightly). Editors - Charles and Marsha Brown, 2078 Anthony Ave., Bronx, New York 10457, USA. Per 6 issues: \$1 surface mail and \$1.50 air mail, or trade.

An extremely useful newsmagazine, which arrives with ridiculous regularity. John Bangsund is the local agent

SPECULATION (the last issue I had was No 22, April/May 1969) (?) Editor - Peter R Weston, 31 Pinewall Ave., Masshouse Lane, Kings Norton, Birmingham 30, England. 3 for \$1.00, currency, or trade or contribution.

My own favourite of the International Big League, although only a fraction ahead of SFR, and equal with WARHOON. I haven't seen a copy for some months, but the last one I had was as hard-hitting and crisp as ever. One of the Make-Bruce-Gillespie-Jealous set.

WARHOON (again, I haven't had one for awhile - the last one was No 26, February 1969). Editor - Richard Bergeron of 11 East 68th St., New York City, New York, 10021, USA. Available for contributions, letters of comment, trade, or 60¢ as a last resort.

Richard is the star of his own magazine, and it is a magazine with an all-star cast: columnists such as Terry Carr, Harry Warner Jr, Walt Willis, Bob Shaw, Robert Lowndes, Walter Breen... stop stop.. I cannot go on. Now I think about it, I must say that WARHOON is better than any of the others. Wait a minute while I recover from flicking through the last issue.

THE JOURNAL OF OMPHALISTIC EPISTEMOLOGY No 2, October 1969. Editor - John Foyster, 12 Glengariff Drive, Mulgrave, Victoria 3170, Australia. Strictly for Letters of Comment or contributions only.

Since this has turned into a Big League list, I must include the magazine that was top secret until Richard Geis whispered the news of its presence to his 700 readers. There has not been enough Foyster in recent issues, but there has been plenty of Franz Rottensteiner at his brilliant best, and No 2 (it was called exploding madonna, you may remember) includes a Linebarger Bibliography. The supplement contains some work of Stanislaw Lem, one of which appears here. John Foyster's motto is "Wake Up You Lot!" so don't ask for it if you're not willing to work for it.

Sorry, everybody else. Next time maybe? SCYTHROP is nearly here. *****11.10.1969.